An intertextual journey in Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 9.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the influence of the *Aeneid* on the ninth poem of Prudentius' *Peristephanon*. In the poem, Prudentius is on his way to Rome when he discovers the tomb of St Cassian, and an account of the saint's passion follows. The framing narrative employs some of the conventions of pilgrimage literature, while the poem as a whole contains allusions to Vergil's *Aeneid*, and I argue that through these allusions Prudentius models his journey to Rome on the travels of Aeneas. This can be seen as part of Prudentius' larger project to map Christian sites of interest onto the Roman empire.

Keywords

Prudentius; Vergil; intertextuality; travel

The ninth poem in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* attracts attention for a number of reasons. It is the first poem in the collection (at least as it is now ordered)¹⁾ to employ a dramatic framing narrative: Prudentius tells that he was on his way to Rome when he stopped in Forum Cornelia (close to modern-day Imola) and found a shrine there to Cassian, a schoolmaster who was

¹⁾ On the order of the poems see Fux 2003, 43–66.

martyred by being stabbed to death by his stylus-wielding pupils.²⁾ The passion is certainly one of the more memorable ones in the collection. Moreover, the emphasis on the personal experience of the narrator has led many to try to infer details about Prudentius' life from the poem.³⁾ Indeed, most previous examinations of the poem have been concerned with the relation of the poem to real life and have attempted to reconstruct, from this poem, along with poems 11 and 12 in the collection, a pilgrimage that Prudentius is imagined as having made to Rome.⁴⁾

That the trip was *not* a pilgrimage is made clear by Prudentius' insistence that he is a reluctant traveller – he notes that he has left his home 'uncertain of fate' (*dubia sub sorte*, 9.103) – and by the fact that he has not come to Forum Corneliai for the express purpose of visiting the tomb of Cassian: whatever his reasons for travel, they were undoubtedly secular in the first instance.⁵⁾ In any case, such a literal reading of the three poems is problematic, not least because of Palmer's observation that a different *persona* is employed in each of the poems.⁶⁾ Nonetheless, the similarity of structure and metre, and the close proximity of the poems in the manuscript tradition, do suggest that they ought to be read together.⁷⁾

In this paper I am less interested in the question of reconstructing Prudentius' journey than I am in the relation of *Pe.* 9 to travel literature. The poem shares a number of features with

²⁾ Prudentius is our earliest source for Cassian, cf. Palmer 1989, 242–3.. The date of his martyrdom is variously attributed to the Diocletianic persecutions and to Julian's campaign against Christian schoolteachers, though the latter appears to be an inference based solely on Cassian's profession, and the phrase *uetusti temporis* in line 20 surely removes the possibility of its being such a recent death, as Fux (2003, 328) notes. On Cassian generally see Bless-Grabher 1978.

³⁾ See especially Lana 1962.

⁴⁾ See Weyman 1923, Lana 1962, Argenio 1970. There are exceptions, of course: Stabryla (2006) and Wilson (1995) briefly discuss the role of *ekphrasis* in the poem, as does Kaesser (2002). Ross (1995) examines the role of the body and metaphors of writing in the work. Prolingheuer (2008, 253–5) suggests that the poem, with its account of prayer resulting in a happy ending, functions as "eine Werbeschrift" (255) for the cult of the saints

⁵⁾ Lana (1962, 27–9) suggests that Prudentius was going to Rome to be tried, though this is doubted by Fux (2003, 55n.67).

⁶⁾ Palmer 1989, 29. Nonetheless, Palmer later (110-1) treats the three poems as 'evidence' of Prudentius' journey to Rome.

⁷⁾ See Roberts (1993, 132).

fourth-century pilgrimage literature (e.g. the *Itinerarium Egeriae*), and I will touch on these in passing, but the focus of my paper will be on Prudentius' imitation of Vergil's *Aeneid*. I suggest that by giving this poem a prominent position in his own poem Prudentius invites the reader to draw parallels between his own journey and that of Aeneas, while also reflecting on the role the divine plays in human life.

First, however, it is worth reviewing some of the major features of travel literature and pilgrimage narratives in the imperial era. The Second Sophistic was the boom time for such writings, the most famous of which is Pausanias' account of his travels around Greece.⁸⁾ The large volume of these texts, both factual and fictional makes it clear that under the empire travelling was more popular and safer than ever before.⁹⁾ In particular, there is evidence of a sort of literary tourism emerging in the second century, in which people would travel with a copy of Homer by their side to track down sites mentioned in the *Iliad*.¹⁰⁾ The motivation for such literary pilgrimages can be summed up in the word *ιστορία*, which is associated with the pursuit of knowledge through travel from Herodotus on. Travellers journeyed with an open mind in the hope of finding something 'interesting', and would frequently be so taken by their discoveries that they would record them in writing. Hunt details the quasi-religious effect such discoveries had upon the travellers, commenting on "the element of piety and devotion which might be aroused in the traveller when he arrived at places highly charged with the legacy of the past. *The tourist, in other words, might easily become the pilgrim.*"¹¹⁾ Hunt notes that precursors of this motif can be seen even in earlier authors, such as Lucan's description of Caesar at Troy: *circumit*

⁸⁾ See generally Hunt 1984.

⁹⁾ Cf. Casson 1974, 229–329, Hunt 1984.

¹⁰⁾ See e.g. Pausanias 9.19.6, where he identifies a tree at Aulis as being the same as that mentioned in *Iliad* 2.307. On Pausanias and Homer see further Elsner 1995, 316–7n.30.

¹¹⁾ Hunt 1984, 408, my italics.

exustae nomen memorabile Troiae | magnaue Phoebei quaerit uestigia muri (9.965-6).¹²⁾ A similar curiosity characterises the prologue to Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, which has some striking similarities with the opening of *Pe.* 9.¹³⁾

And indeed, Hunt's comments come in the course of a paper arguing that it is Second Sophistic travel literature, and not pagan religious travel literature, that should be seen as the major predecessor of fourth-century pilgrimage literature. He notes that Jerome was emphatic about the importance of supplementing biblical exegesis with topographical observation and discusses the sudden burst of Holy Land pilgrimage in the post-Constantinian period.¹⁴⁾ The Holy Land had not been well studied by Christians before this because of Roman restrictions arising out of a fear of further Jewish revolts.¹⁵⁾ It was as a result unfamiliar territory, and it was very common for pilgrims to travel without any real awareness of the specific locations of religious sites. Hunt likens them to Pausanias, since their curiosity led them to find religious sites, and a deep sense of religious awe followed the discovery of these sites.¹⁶⁾

Hunt's interest is primarily in Holy Land pilgrimage, while Prudentius' journey is to Rome. It has been noted that pilgrimage to Rome increased towards the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries, after almost a century of Holy Land pilgrimage.¹⁷⁾ Prudentius' journey should be put in this context, and in the context of other imperial and ideological geographical narratives. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of the problematic tenth poem

¹²⁾ Hunt 1984, 401, cf. Luc. 9.950-99.

¹³⁾ In both cases a traveller comes across a shrine containing a painting, and asks for help interpreting it. See further Tac. *Ann.* 2.53f (Germanicus in Greece and Troy) and 60-1 (Germanicus in Egypt).

¹⁴⁾ Hunt 1984, 412.

¹⁵⁾ Hunt 1984, 409-10.

¹⁶⁾ Egeria refers to herself as *curiosa* (16.3), while a similar literary and mythological curiosity can be seen in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, cf. Elsner 2000.

¹⁷⁾ Bardy 1949.

in the collection,¹⁸⁾ all of the poems in the *Peristephanon* discuss martyrs based in the western half of the empire. Constantinople, the major city of the empire at the end of the fourth century, is never mentioned in Prudentius' poetry.¹⁹⁾ This downplaying of the Eastern empire is paralleled in some geographical texts of the earlier fourth century: as Roy Gibson has shown, Avienus' *Descriptio Orbis Terrae* makes some notable changes to the Greek original, Dionysius' *Periegesis*, resulting in a greater emphasis on the Western parts of the empire and a tendency to minimise the importance of the East.²⁰⁾ Like Avienus, Ausonius, in his *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, shows an interest reserved almost exclusively to the northern and western parts of the empire – though he mentions Constantinople and Antioch, his focus for the bulk of the poem is on Gallic and Spanish cities. This can, of course, be attributed to Ausonius' own provincial pride. But it is clearly also part of a more general trend in mid-fourth-century literature, in which the western half of the empire is being praised at the expense of the eastern half.²¹⁾

It is in this context that the 'pilgrimage poems' of Prudentius, and indeed the *Peristephanon* as a whole, should be placed – in the context of a Western-centric worldview, in which the Western provinces and Italy in particular are praised at the expense of the Eastern empire. Like Ausonius, Prudentius shows clear local pride (witness the sheer number of Spanish martyrs discussed in the *Peristephanon*), and in particular an interest in mapping out poetic geographies. So in *Peristephanon* 4, there can be seen a "re-mapping" of the territory of southern Gaul and northern Spain.²²⁾ Though the bulk of the poem is devoted to the eighteen

¹⁸⁾ To Romanus of Antioch, whose name in any case claims him for the westerners.

¹⁹⁾ See Fux (2003, 58n.78), who suggests however that mentions of Trojan paganism are meant to cast aspersions on the 'new Troy'.

²⁰⁾ Gibson 2004.

²¹⁾ A notable counter-example is the political output of Claudian.

²²⁾ Fontaine (1974, 249) sees this poem as reflecting "les étapes circumpyrénéennes" of Prudentius' voyage to Italy, though I think this goes too far in the direction of biographical speculation. However, the idea of viewing the *Peristephanon* as a pilgrimage undertaken by the reader (along the lines of Höschele 2007) is a tempting one.

martyrs of Caesaraugusta, the opening (1-48) works as a run-through of other major cities. Aside from Carthage and Tangier, all the cities are clustered around northern Spain and southern Gaul – Corduba, Tarraco, Boctinan, Narbo, Emerita, and others: the list is bookended by two African cities, but the rest are ‘local’ to the Pyrenees.

At least in the case of the three Italian pilgrimage poems, this Christianization of Roman geography goes hand in hand with a rewriting of earlier literary depictions of that geography, and in particular of earlier travel narratives set in Italy. The most famous Latin account of a journey to Italy is, of course, that of Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and it is this poem that Prudentius engages in a sustained manner in *Peristephanon* 9, 11, and 12.²³⁾

It is clear from the first few lines of *Pe.* 9 that Prudentius does not actively seek out the shrine of Cassian, though it is quite possible that, on arriving in Forum Cornelii, he decided to look for local sites of religious interest. Prudentius exhibits a curiosity that leads him, on discovering the shrine, to want to learn more about it and so he consults the sacristan. This blend of curiosity and devotion is palpable even at the very beginning of the poem:

Sylla Forum statuit Cornelius; hoc Itali urbem
uocant ab ipso conditoris nomine.
hic mihi, cum peterem te, rerum maxima Roma,
spes est oborta prosperum Christum fore.
stratus humi tumulo aduoluebar, quem sacer ornat
martyr dicato Cassianus corpore.
(*Pe.* 9.1-6)

²³⁾ On *Pe.* 11 and the *Aeneid*, see Witke 2004. Though *Pe.* 12 has traditionally been seen as containing fewer direct allusions to the *Aeneid* than most poems in the *Peristephanon* (Palmer 1989, 178), I would argue that the few that have been identified, combined with the expectations set up by *Pe.* 9 and 11, are significant enough to warrant a re-examination, though there is not room to do so in this paper.

Soler sees in these lines a shift to the personal in the latter two couplets from the formulaic and formal opening couplet.²⁴⁾ It is certainly clear that in this poem, more than in any other in the collection, the personal feelings of the narrator are placed to the forefront. The verb *oborior* suggests that Prudentius is almost startled by his discovery. It is unusual to see *oborior* used of emotions rather than of the physical manifestations of emotions.²⁵⁾ In fact, in poetry the verb is most frequently employed in the context of tears (so in the *Aeneid* it occurs four times, always in the phrase *lacrimis obortis*, and a further dozen times in first-century epic).²⁶⁾ Prudentius' own tears are not slow in following this sudden outburst of hope (7, *lacrimans*). Clearly evident in these two lines is the combination of 'curiosity and credulity', to paraphrase Palmer's term.²⁷⁾ It is not the tomb itself that 'surprises' Prudentius, but a feeling of deep religious emotion – the hope that Christ will be favourable (*spes prosperum Christum fore*). The transformation from tourist to pilgrim is instantaneous, and it is worth noting that Prudentius speaks of his *internal* reaction (*spes oborta*) before the *external* stimulus (the painting of Cassian).

The parallelism of the latter two couplets should also be noted, an indication of Prudentius' debt to Horace as a lyric model.²⁸⁾

hic mihi, cum peterem te, rerum maxima Roma,
 spes est oborta prosperum Christum fore.
 stratus humi tumulo aduoluebar, quem sacer ornat
 martyr dicato Cassianus corpore.
 (Pe. 9.3-6)

Opening the first and third lines are *hic mihi* and *stratus humi* – each combining a locative and a first-person reference, both emphasising the personal importance of the space for the

²⁴⁾ Soler 2005, 313.

²⁵⁾ I have been able to find only three examples in Latin poetry before Prudentius: Ter. *Hau.* 680 *laetitia obortast*, Inc. *Trag.* 211 *gaudium obiri*, and Stat. *Theb.* 1.462-3 *oborto...luctu*. In prose, see [Quint.] *Decl.* 12.25 *odia oboriuntur*, Liv. 2.37.9 *indignatio oborta*, and Liv. 26.20.5 *timoris oborti*.

²⁶⁾ See e.g. Verg. *A.* 3.492, 4.30, 6.867, 11.41; Stat. *Theb.* 6.44, V. Fl. 7.258, Ov. *Met.* 1.350 (all *lacrimis obortis*).

²⁷⁾ See the title of Palmer 1989, ch. 2.

²⁸⁾ On Horatian word order and patterning see now Nisbet 1999.

narrator,²⁹⁾ then *peterem* and *aduoluebar*, two first-person verbs. In the second and fourth lines, *spes* and *martyr* are paralleled, appropriately given that Prudentius' *spes* springs from the discovery of this *martyr*, while *Christum* and *Cassianus* are paralleled, Cassian being an intermediary to Christ for Prudentius. The hope for Christ's favour springs from Cassian's martyrdom. The rhyme of *fore/corpore* indicates that the two distichs should be read together.³⁰⁾ Moreover, in each distich there is a strong sense of physical movement – the hope that 'springs up', *oborta*, within Prudentius causes him to hurl himself to the ground before the shrine, *tumulo aduoluebar*. The physical manifestation of an emotional feeling again may cause the reader to think of the more frequent use of the verb *oborior*, and also of the transition from *curiositas* to devotion in pilgrimage narratives.

The opening couplet of the poem describes the town of Forum Corneli:

Sylla Forum statuit Cornelius; hoc Itali urbem
uocant³¹⁾ ab ipso conditoris nomine.

The couplet recalls the enumerative aspect of the prose *itinerarium*, with its designation of the next stop on the journey.³²⁾ In addition, there is the figure of the helpful local priest, who expounds at length on Cassian's martyrdom, in a manner reminiscent of Egeria's local interlocutors – see, for example, *It. Eg.* 3.7:

hac sic ergo posteaquam communicaueramus et dederant nobis eulogias sancti illi
et egressi sumus foras hostium ecclesiae, tunc cepi eos rogare, ut ostenderent
nobis singula loca. tunc statim illi sancti dignati sunt singula ostendere.

It must, however, be kept in mind that Prudentius' journey is *not* initially undertaken as a pilgrimage. Prudentius' journey to Rome as it is described in the three 'personal' hymns (9, 11,

²⁹⁾ Cf. Brown 1981.

³⁰⁾ Cf. Wilkinson 1963, 32–34.

³¹⁾ For *uocant* see Fux 2003, ad loc. Bergman and Cunningham both print *uocitant*, the reading of the earliest manuscript.

³²⁾ Roberts (1993, 133) sees it instead as reflecting *verse itineraria*, citing *inter alia* Rut. Nam. 1.249: *nosse iuuat tauri dictas de nomine thermas*.

and 12) only gradually takes on the overtones of a pilgrimage. If *Pe.* 9 describes a religious awakening and reassurance in the course of a secular journey, by *Pe.* 11 and 12 we are fully within the realm of religious fervour.

But the opening couplet should also be seen as a Vergilian gesture on the part of the poet, introducing a series of allusions to the *Aeneid* designed to portray Prudentius' trip to the shrine of Cassian as an episode on his journey to Rome, analogous to one of Aeneas' adventures in the *Aeneid*. The phrasing of *hoc Itali urbem | uocant ab ipso conditoris nomine* suggests Vergilian interest in etymology,³³⁾ while *Itali...uocant* may recall in particular the description of the Syrtes at the opening of the *Aeneid*, a passage to which Prudentius alludes again in line 13 (see below):

saxa uocant Itali mediis quae in fluctibus Aras,
dorsum immane mari summo.
(Verg. *A.* 1.109-10)

This is followed by Prudentius' description of Rome as *rerum maxima Roma* (3), an unmistakable echo of *Aeneid* 7.602-3, *maxima rerum | Roma*.³⁴⁾ This phrase, or variants on it, becomes relatively common after Vergil, though I would nonetheless argue that Prudentius is imitating the *Aeneid* passage here.³⁵⁾ Not only does this passage recall one of the most famous sections of a poem Prudentius undoubtedly knew by heart,³⁶⁾ reminding the reader of Rome's glory and (in particular) Rome's military triumph, but it also invokes a certain ambiguity that runs throughout Prudentius' Vergilian allusions in this poem. For while the immediate context

³³⁾ Compare also Verg. *A.* 6.234-235: *monte sub aereo, qui nunc Misenus ab illo | dicitur aeternumque tenet per saecula nomen*. On Vergil's interest in etymology see O'Hara 1996.

³⁴⁾ Noted by Lühken (2002, 309) and Cunningham (1966, ad loc).

³⁵⁾ Indeed, there is a strong case to be made for *all* later versions of the phrase occurring at line-ending being references to the Vergilian passage: Prop. 4.1.1 *maxima Roma est* (ending a line); Luc. 2.227-8 *bellorum maxima merces | Roma* (repeated at 2.655-6); Man. 4.694 *rerum maxima Roma* (ending a line); Sil. 3.584-5 *quo maxima rerum | nobilior sit Roma*; Claud., *Olyb. Prob.* 130 *maxima rerum* (ending a line and referring to Roma). Mart. 7.96.2 and 10.58.6 *maxima Roma* (the antepenultimate and penultimate words of a pentameter in both cases) are less convincing as parallels. On the phrase see now O'Rourke 2010, esp. 474-478.

³⁶⁾ As did Augustine: cf. *Conf.* 1.13.

(601-15) of the Vergilian passage is the relatively positive depiction of Roman foreign policy, Fowler points out that the broader context is of epic renewal and the outbreak of war, forced on by Juno's opening of the gates of war at Verg. *A.* 7.616-25:³⁷⁾

hoc et tum Aeneadis indicere bella Latinus
more iubebatur tristisque recludere portas.
abstinuit tactu pater auersusque refugit
foeda ministeria, et caecis se condidit umbris.
tum regina deum caelo delapsa morantis
impulit ipsa manu portas, et cardine uerso
belli ferratos rumpit Saturnia postis.
ardet inexcita Ausonia atque immobilis ante;
pars pedes ire parat campis, pars arduus altis
puluerulentus equis furit; omnes arma requirunt.

Latinus is unwilling to open the gates and declare war on Aeneas, so Juno opens them herself, and in the process recalls the actions of Discordia in Ennius' *Annales*:

postquam Discordia taetra
belli ferratos postes portasque refregit.
(Enn. *Ann.* 225-226 Skutsch)

As Fowler notes, the Vergilian passage clearly recalls the unleashing of the storm in the first book of the *Aeneid*: quite aside from the structural symmetry (the opening of the gates of war at the beginning of the second half of the poem matching the release of the winds from the prison of Aeolus at the beginning of the first half), there is the fact that the winds are likened to an army as they leave the cave of Aeolus:

haec ubi dicta, cauum conuersa cuspide montem
impulit in latus; ac uenti, uelut agmine facto,
qua data porta, ruunt et terras turbine perflant.
(Verg. *A.* 1.81-83)

The winds unleashed by Aeolus at the prompting of Juno thus anticipate the actual armies released by her opening of the gates of war six books later. Given this connection, it is not a

³⁷⁾ Fowler 2000a, 181 and *passim*.

surprise to find an allusion to that storm only a few lines later in the *Peristephanon*, in line 13's *miserabile uisu* (see below).

Prudentius proceeds to say that, as he fell to worship at the tomb, he raised his eyes to heaven only to see a painting of Cassian's passion (5-16). Here the reader is surely intended to think of the two parallel *ekphraseis* following landfalls in the *Aeneid* – first, the depiction of the fall of Troy on the temple of Juno in Carthage (1.446-493), and second, the sculptures of Daedalus on the door of the temple of Apollo at Cumae (6.14-33). In both cases, the pictures have a profound emotional effect on the observers (particularly Aeneas) and in the first case, the *ekphrasis* anticipates a lengthier retelling of the same subject-matter later in the poem.³⁸⁾ Similarly, Prudentius' description of the picture is followed by the sacristan's account of Cassian's passion, which takes up the bulk of the poem.³⁹⁾ Both Prudentius and Aeneas see their own lives reflected in the paintings: Aeneas literally sees himself on Dido's temple, as well as seeing intimations of his coming war with the Italians,⁴⁰⁾ while the sculptures of Icarus and Daedalus at Cumae anticipate Aeneas' reunion with his father later in Book Six. Prudentius, meanwhile, sees a clear link between himself and Cassian, as Roberts notes.⁴¹⁾

The next Vergilian echo is at lines 9-11:

erexi ad caelum faciem, stetit obuia contra
fucis colorum picta imago martyris
plagas mille gerens, totos lacerata per artus.

³⁸⁾ On *ekphrasis* in the *Aeneid* see generally Putnam 1998. On Prudentian *ekphrasis* see the remarks of Grig 2004, 114–116.

³⁹⁾ On Prudentian exegesis see Mastrangelo 2008, 7 and *passim*.

⁴⁰⁾ Williams 1983, 93–94. Fowler (2000b, 77–81) emphasises that the pictures are focalized through Aeneas, though he rightly challenges the interpretation of Horsfall (1973) that Aeneas completely misreads what he sees as going too far.

⁴¹⁾ Roberts 1993, 136–137

The word *imago* here clearly has the primary sense of ‘picture’ or ‘painting’. However, also present is the secondary sense of *imago*, ‘ghost’ or ‘vision’, and in that light it is worth comparing the appearance of Hector’s ghost in the second book of the *Aeneid*:

squalentem barbam et concretos sanguine crinis
uulneraque illa **gerens**, quae circum **plurima** muros
 accepit patrios.
 (Verg. *A.* 2.277-9)

Like Cassian, Hector has received countless wounds (*uulnera plurima*). Servius, *ad loc.*, comments: ‘*GERENS uelut insignia praeferens et ostentans, quae a diuersis pugnans pro patria suscepit*’. Like Hector, the *imago* of Cassian proffers his wounds and displays them. The hypallage of *imago gerens* – it is the *painting* that displays the wounds, not the martyr who bears them – is, of course, a perfectly normal rhetorical figure.⁴²⁾ But I would like to suggest that Prudentius goes beyond simple hypallage here and is instead playing on the double meanings of *imago* and *gerens*.⁴³⁾ As the picture displays the martyr’s wounds, the martyr’s spirit comes alive momentarily⁴⁴⁾ and shows off the wounds he has suffered, like Hector’s ghost encouraging the spectator to pursue his goal. In other words, Prudentius is playing with the very idea and theory of *ekphrasis* itself, as Lucy Grig has noted: “Prudentius’ *ekphrasis* here plays a double game: stressing the verisimilitude of the representation, while simultaneously reminding us that it is, after all, just a representation.”⁴⁵⁾ The vividness of the description of Cassian has also been noted by Laurence Gosserez, who comments: “le tableau...semble s'animer.”⁴⁶⁾ Peter Brown has discussed in detail the importance of the tombs of the saints as places in which the martyrs are

⁴²⁾ To give just two examples: Hor. *Carm.* 1.3.40, *iracunda Iouem ponere fulmina*; 3.21.19f *iratos...regum apices*.

⁴³⁾ On wordplay in Prudentius see Malamud 1989, *passim*, esp. 27–46, although I do not agree with her conclusion that Prudentius’ use of allusion and wordplay indicates a fundamental uneasiness about his Christianity. *Pace* Cameron 1995, I do not think that religious devotion is irreconcilable with ludic writing.

⁴⁴⁾ See Brown 1981 and Soler 2005, 314: “L’hypallage...suggère une équivalence entre le martyr et sa représentation.”

⁴⁵⁾ Grig 2004, 115–116, on the *ekphrasis* in *Pe.* 11.

⁴⁶⁾ Gosserez 2001, 183.

still very much ‘present’.⁴⁷⁾ It is this, I would argue, that lies behind this double play on *imago* as simultaneously signifier and signified. It is also worth comparing here the Polydorus episode of *Aeneid* 3. There too, a *tumulus* startles the traveller, and turns out to contain a "living" shade.⁴⁸⁾

The ‘shade’ of Cassian is followed by additional otherworldly allusions to the *Aeneid* shortly thereafter, in line 13. Here Prudentius combines two Vergilian tags:

innumeri circum pueri (miserabile uisu).

The first, *innumeri circum pueri*, recalls the *innumerae gentes* of Verg. *A.* 6.706, who flit around Lethe like bees:

hunc **circum innumerae gentes** populi que uolabant:
ac **ueluti** in pratis ubi **apes** aestate serena
floribus insidunt uariis et candida circum
lilia funduntur, strepit omnis **murmure** campus.
horrescit uisu subito causasque requirit
inscius Aeneas, quae sint ea flumina porro,
quiue uiri tanto compleverint agmine ripas.
(Verg. *A.* 6.706-12)

Though for Vergil the bees are harmless, Aeneas is at first appalled by the sight (*horrescit uisu*, 710),⁴⁹⁾ and appeals to his father Anchises for an explanation – the same pattern of viewing and enquiry that is to be found in Prudentius’ poem. It would be going too far to identify the rebellious pupils with the souls of the future leaders of Rome, but nonetheless there is method in Prudentius’ borrowing here. First, the context of Lethe is noteworthy, given that the speaker in *Pe.* 9 has just mentioned (8-9) that he is pondering his sorry lot and the pain of life – *dum lacrimans mecum reputo mea uulnera et omnes | uitae labores ac dolorum acumina* – the sort of sufferings which the souls, about to drink from Lethe, can forget. That the reader is expected to think here of bees is supported by *murmur* in line 16, recalling *murmure* at Verg. *A.* 6.709, and

⁴⁷⁾ Brown 1981, 3, 88, and chapter 5 *passim*.

⁴⁸⁾ I thank the anonymous reader for *Mnemosyne* for drawing this parallel to my attention.

⁴⁹⁾ A phrase which may also be alluded to by Prudentius’ *miserabile uisu*.

by the image of the boys writing on wax tablets in line 15, *pugillares soliti percurrere ceras*, which suggests bees flitting over the wax cells of a hive.⁵⁰⁾ Moreover, the very image of a swarm of pupils (*agmen*, 35 and 44) subjecting their teacher to thousands of tiny pricks suggests the attack of a swarm of bees.⁵¹⁾ While it is true that bees are generally depicted in positive terms in Latin literature, this changes sharply when a *swarm* of bees is in question: as Hünemörder notes,⁵²⁾ a swarm (of anything) is rarely seen as a good omen in Latin literature. And even if the Vergilian passage imitated ultimately presents bees as something positive, Prudentius' Biblical sources do just the opposite: two of the three mentions of swarms of bees in the Old Testament depict them as hostile, specifically likened to an attack by Gentiles:⁵³⁾

omnes gentes circumdederunt me et in nomine Domini ultus sum eas
circumdederunt me et obsederunt me sed in nomine Domini ultus sum eas.
circumdederunt me **quasi apes** extinctae sunt quasi ignis spinarum in nomine
Domini quia ultus sum eas. (Psalm 117.10-2)

ait mihi [i.e. Moysi] Dominus "dic ad eos nolite ascendere neque pugnetis non
enim sum uobiscum ne cadatis coram inimicis uestris."
locutus sum et non audistis [i.e. the Israelites] sed aduersantes imperio Domini et
tumentes superbia ascendistis in montem.
itaque egressus Amorreus qui habitabat in montibus et obuiam ueniens persecutus
est uos **sicut solent apes persequi** et cecidit de Seir usque Horma
cumque reuersi ploraretis coram Domino non audiuit uos nec uoci uestrae uoluit
adquiescere. sedistis ergo in Cadesbarne multo tempore. (Deuteronomy 1.42-6)

The first passage, from Psalm 117,⁵⁴⁾ is particularly relevant to my discussion of Cassian. The version quoted is from the Vulgate; Augustine, however, in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, makes use of the Septuagint version, in which the line reads:

ἐκύκλωσάν με ὥσει **μέλισσαι κηρίον** καὶ ἐξεκαύθησαν ὥσει πῦρ ἐν ἀκάνθαις καὶ
τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου ἡμυνάμην αὐτοῦς.

⁵⁰⁾ *Percurrere* suggests rapid movement, while *cerae* (in the plural) is used of beehives at Verg. *G.* 4.57, 162, and 241.

⁵¹⁾ Cf. *agmen* in reference to bees at Verg. *G.* 4.59 and 167.

⁵²⁾ Hünemörder 1996.

⁵³⁾ The third example, Judges 14:8, is in the context of the quasi-*bugonia* discovered by Samson.

⁵⁴⁾ Psalm 118 according to the Hebrew numbering.

Augustine then interprets the hive, κηρίον (=fauum), as referring to Christ, and comments:

mel quippe apes operantur in **fauis**: nescientes autem persecutores Domini, fecerunt eum nobis ipsa passione dulciorem; ut gustemus et uideamus quam suavis est Dominus, qui mortuus est propter delicta nostra, et resurrexit propter iustificationem nostram. (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 117.7)

The interpretation can well be brought to bear on *Pe.* 9, for although Cassian does not exact such a forceful victory over his students as does the speaker in *Psalm* 117, he nonetheless does ultimately succeed despite their attacks, through his triumphant (or sweet) martyrdom.⁵⁵⁾ Here, then, pagan and Christian imagery are set in opposition by a double intertext which rests on the reader's Aeneas-like ambivalence about the scene.⁵⁶⁾ As noted above, Aeneas is initially shocked by the sight of the crowds of souls flocking around Lethe, before Anchises explains their significance. A similar uneasiness on the part of the learned reader will cause him to recall the Biblical parallels of swarms of bees. This can be taken even further: the Biblical undertones of the passage forces a new interpretation of the Vergilian passage. In the *Aeneid*, it is ultimately a positive passage, leading as it does into a description of the future heroes of Rome. But no early Christian would have taken such a positive view of the transmigration of souls. That Prudentius is, in effect, rewriting and challenging the Vergilian passage is supported by the fact that in this same phrase, *innumeri pueri*, Prudentius is almost certainly alluding to another famous passage in *Aeneid* 6:

huc omnis turba ad ripas effuse ruebat,
matres atque uiri defunctaque corpora uita
magnanimum heroum, pueri innuptaeque puellae,
impositique rogis iuuenes ante ora parentum :
quam multa in siluis autumnus frigore primo

⁵⁵⁾ Prudentius uses *dulcis* of martyrdom repeatedly in the *Peristephanon*, while in *Pe.* 9 reference is made to a 'bitter teacher' (*doctor amarus*, 27) and 'training that is not sweet' (*nec dulcis...disciplina*, 28). Prudentius may also be thinking of *1Cor.* 15 :55, *ubi est, Mors, uictoria tua?* | *ubi est, Mors, stimulus tuus?* – note *stimulos* at *Pe.* 9.51, and cf. *Hosea* 13 :14 : ποῦ ἡ δίκη σου θάνατε | ποῦ τὸ κέντρον σου ἔδῃ, though the Vulgate (following the Hebrew) gives the lines as *ero mors tua o mors* | *ero morsus tuus inferne*. κέντρον could mean the sting of a bee or wasp, cf. e.g. Ar. *Vesp.* 225.

⁵⁶⁾ An example of the sort of *mehrfache Intertextualität* discussed by Heinz 2007.

lapsa cadunt folia, aut ad terram gurgite ab alto
quam multae glomerantur aues, ubi frigidus annus
trans pontum fugat et terris immittit apricis. (Verg. *A.* 6.305-12)

Here, the multitude of souls waiting to cross the Styx are likened to leaves falling in the autumn or birds migrating. Unburied, they must wait for a century before they are permitted to enter the underworld proper. I would suggest, then, that by alluding to these two passages, Prudentius is arguing that the young boys are damned – pagans who will never gain access to the (Christian) afterlife because they have placed their hopes in false beliefs such as the transmigration of souls. By contrast, Cassian is like the singer of Psalm 117 – though assailed by a vicious mob of gentiles, he will ultimately be victorious, as he is martyred and freed from the shackles of his body (*retinacula uitae*, 9.87). In both cases, it is only through the Lord's intervention that the assault can be overcome.

I return to *Pe.* 9.13. The second half of the line is also an allusion to the *Aeneid*: *miserabile uisu* recalls Verg. *A.* 1.110-1:

tris Euris ab alto
in breuia et Syrtis urget, **miserabile uisu**.⁵⁷⁾

The Vergilian context is the storm that drives Aeneas and his companions to the shores of Africa, and in this regard it is noteworthy that the sacristan calls Cassian's sufferings a 'cruel storm' (*tempestas saeua*, 29). Cassian is depicted as being overwhelmed by an uncontrollable force, as is Aeneas,⁵⁸⁾ and it is only because of Christ's pity that he is released from his sufferings later in the poem. Similarly, Aeneas is only released from the storm through Neptune's intervention (1.124-56). But it is worth remembering that this uncontrollable force has

⁵⁷⁾ See among others Lühken 2002, 309 and Cunningham 1966, ad loc. In both Vergil and Prudentius the phrase concludes a hexameter line.

⁵⁸⁾ On the storm as a symbol of chaos see above all Hardie 1986, 90–7, 103–10: Aeneas "is as yet powerless to act towards the preservation of order." (103).

been set upon Aeneas by *Juno*, who has already been encountered in the allusion in line 3 to the Gates of War.

Juno also lies behind the last allusion in the poem. Christ finally takes pity on Cassian's sufferings and allows him to die:

tandem luctantis miseratus ab aethere Christus
iubet **resolui** pectoris ligamina
difficilesque moras animae ac retinacula uitae
relaxat artas et latebras expedit. (*Pe.* 9.85-8)

This is modelled on the close of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*.⁵⁹⁾

tum Iuno omnipotens **longum miserata** dolorem
difficilisque obitus Irim demisit Olympo
quae **luctantem animam** nexosque **resolueret** artus. (*Verg. A.* 4.693-5)

Christ, looking down from heaven, takes pity on Cassian, and allows his soul to flee the shackles of the body. In similar fashion, Juno, on Olympus, sends Iris to hasten Dido's death. In both cases, the suffering has been lengthy (*tandem / longum dolorem*), and the language of the soul escaping from the chains of the body is employed (*retinacula uitae relaxat artas et latebras expedit / nexos resolverat artus*). Dido's soul is struggling (*luctantem*), as is Cassian (*luctantis*) – in both cases, the death is a difficult one (*difficilisque obitus / difficilesque moras*). Both deaths coincide with the poems' protagonists' continuation of their journeys to Rome – Aeneas has already departed when Dido dies, but the passage is the true conclusion of the 'Dido episode' in the poem, and marks the beginning of the final leg of Aeneas' voyage to Italy. Similarly, it is only once the verger has told Prudentius the story of Cassian that the poet can pray to the martyr for help. Prudentius makes it clear in the final couplet of the poem that his safe passage to Rome and home again depended on the intervention of the saint (*audior, urbem adeo* 105).

⁵⁹⁾ Noted by Lühken (2002, 309) and Fux (2003, 340).

Moreover, as is made clear in the conclusion to the poem, there are further similarities between our narrator and Aeneas. Prudentius has left his home *dubia sub sorte* (103), not quite as traumatic, perhaps, as the circumstances in which Aeneas left Troy *fato profugus* (Verg. *A.* 1.2), but in both cases the traveller is clearly a reluctant one. Both men are heading for Rome (though Aeneas does not know it, and will only pass through the ‘actual’ site of Rome), and both are uncertain about what the future may hold (*spem futuri forte nutantem boni*, *Pe.* 9.104, perhaps recalling the sentiments of Aeneas at *Aeneid* 1.208-209, *talia uoce refert curisque ingentibus aeger | spem uultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem*). In both cases their visits to Rome have successful outcomes (*dextris successibus*, *Pe.* 9.105).

The *Aeneid*, then, is imitated in a sustained manner in this poem. What is Prudentius’ purpose in alluding to this work? It may simply be a desire to place the narrator's journey in the context of the epic travels of Aeneas, and an effort to present Cassian as a Christian counterpart to the heroes of the *Aeneid*.⁶⁰ But I suspect a deeper significance in Prudentius’ allusions. It is no coincidence that most of the Vergilian passages imitated have to do with Juno (the sole exception is the allusion to Book Six). It is the wrath of Juno that drives the narrative of the *Aeneid*, and it is the awesome power of that goddess that subjects Aeneas to torment after torment: beginning with the storm in Book One and following him all the way to Italy, where she opens the Gates of War and causes more difficulty for the hero. It is clear that Prudentius is concerned about God’s plan for him as he undertakes this journey (*dubia sub sorte*, 103, and *spem future...nutantem boni*, 104), while Cassian’s suffering comes at the hands of a cruel tempest (*tempestas saeua*, 29). Nor should there be any doubt about the awfulness of Cassian’s death: the martyr displays

⁶⁰ Prudentius' use of imitation to present the martyrs of the *Peristephanon* as new heroes, analogous to those of earlier literature, is discussed by Palmer (1989, 147-77), Roberts (1993, 31-2, 92-99), and Richard (1969), amongst others.

none of the defiance of a Lawrence (*Pe.* 2) or an Agnes (*Pe.* 14) – he begs for death not because he longs for it but because it will put him out of his misery (*plus dat medellae dum necem prope applicat*, 64).

But there is a happy ending for Cassian, when Christ finally takes pity on him and releases his soul from his body. As I have shown, the lines describing this episode recall the death of Dido at the end of Book Four of the *Aeneid*, where Juno sends Iris down to earth to bring the Carthaginian queen's sufferings to an end. The same goddess in the *Aeneid* can cause great suffering and bring an end to suffering. I suggest, then, that *Peristephanon* 9 is a meditation on the lack of control humans have over their lives, since they are at the mercy of the Lord, but that religious devotion and faith in the Lord will result in a positive outcome, as is the case for Cassian, and for Prudentius himself.⁶¹⁾

⁶¹ I should like to thank Michael Dewar and the anonymous reader for *Mnemosyne* for their comments on this paper. Earlier versions were presented at the University of Toronto and at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, and I am grateful to audiences on both occasions for their suggestions.

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