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The Reader and the Resurrection in Prudentius*

AARON PELTTARI

ABSTRACT

In Prudentius, the bodily resurrection becomes a figure for poetic immortality. Just as the author believes that his God will one day raise him from the dead, he expects and invokes a Christian reader to authenticate and authorise the fragile verbal records of a poetry that is insistently human and fallen. In other words, Prudentius' metapoetics are perfectly in sync with his theology. After (I) presenting Prudentius' transformation at the end of his Praefatio and setting out the terms and scope of the argument, this article (II) shows how the author puts himself at the mercy of his readers and patrons in the Peristefanon poems and then (III) considers the body and the resurrection in the Liber Cathemerinon. A short section (IV) on fictionality and belief opens up the argument, and a conclusion (V) advances it through a reading of the end of De opusculis suis. This metapoetic reading of Prudentius reveals that the author's hopes for an afterlife are expressed in and through the creative imagining of poetic and fictional scenes.

Keywords: Prudentius; Latin literature; Late Antiquity; Christian poetry; reception; fiction

I THE PRAEFATIO OF PRUDENTIUS

Prudentius wrote his own biography as a preface for an edition of his poems that was published, probably, in 404 C.E.¹ That short poem introduces the two interlocking questions at stake in this article: What will be Prudentius' end? And what expectations does he have for his readers? The author alternates throughout his poetry between expressions of hope for the afterlife and near despair. Insofar as the poet's afterlife stands for the reception of his works, the authorial drama in which Prudentius figures reveals that the writer lacks control of the text and is dependent on the mercy of his reader. Because the poet cannot guarantee how his works will be received, the authorial persona's doubts, his modesty and his concerns about language should be read as a function of the author's poetic strategy and not merely statements of fact or confessions of belief. By paying attention to how this Christian poet presents himself and how he addresses the reader, we can see that Prudentius writes through a fictional persona no

* My thanks to Scott McGill for inviting me to write a paper about the Christian poetry of Late Antiquity, which I presented at a conference he organised in Houston back in 2011. After that earliest draft, this paper was revised in stages and presented at Cornell, Santa Barbara, Edinburgh and Salamanca. In addition to the critical guidance offered at each gathering, I am grateful for feedback from friends including Suzanne Abrams Rebillard and James Uden. Many thanks to the editor and anonymous readers for *JRS* for their direction and criticisms. All mistakes remain my own.

¹ On the *Praefatio*, see Coşkun 2003; O'Daly 2012: 1–5 (with further bibliography); 2016. See Coşkun 2008 for 404 C.E. as the date of publication.

less than many other Latin poets.² As we shall see, Prudentius uses his personal salvation as a figure for poetic immortality, without diminishing either the devotional utility of his writings or the lasting fame he expected. Instead of diminishing either, he combined his Christianity with poetry in such a way as to have a lasting effect upon the Latin literary tradition.

The *Praefatio* begins with two introductory stanzas that suggest the mutability and final vanity of human life (*Praef.* 1–6):

Per quinquennia iam decem,
ni fallor, fuimus; septimus insuper
annum cardo rotat, dum fruimur sole uolubili.
Instat terminus et diem
uicinum senio iam deus adplicat.
quid nos utile tanti spatio temporis egimus?

For five decades now we've existed,
unless I'm deceived; and now a seventh
rotation turns the year, as we enjoy the circling sun.
The end presses on and God now
applies the day that neighbours on old age.
What useful thing have we done in so long a time?³

² On persona theory and Latin poetry, see Volk 2002: 6–24. On focalisation and persona theory in ancient criticism, see Nünlist 2009: 116–34. Fundamental on the 'modern scriptor' and the relation between author and reader is Barthes 1967. Even more than other Latin poets, Christian authors have often been treated as essentially inseparable from their personae. Prudentius, in particular, has been thought to be writing in an intensely personal project of salvation. In an influential study, Isidoro Rodríguez-Herrera (1936) described his poetry as an offering to God. Likewise, Italo Lana (1962) constructed a detailed biography that centred on a supposed searching of conscience that led Prudentius to write Christian poetry. Anne-Marie Palmer contrasted Prudentius with his predecessors precisely in terms of his personal salvation: 'The Roman poets had hoped to gain immortality from the lasting qualities of their poetry (cf. Horace, *Odes* 1.1.35–6 and 3.30; Ovid, *Tristia* 4.10.129–30). The Christian poet also hopes for immortality, but his hopes are not based on the survival of his poetry, but on his own personal salvation, gained as the reward for the very act of writing poetry dedicated to the glorification of God' (Palmer 1989: 15–16). Jill Ross concluded that Prudentius' poetic vocation 'held out the promise of salvation by virtue of his collaboration in the embodiment of God's writing' (Ross 1995: 355). Jennifer Ballengee asserted that Prudentius hopes 'to gain salvation for himself through his poetic composition' (Ballengee 2009: 93). Anders Cullhed denied the possibility of impersonation: 'The demand for the believer's psychosomatic unity, crucial to Prudentius as well as Paulinus, precludes — in theory, at least — all calculated impersonation, hence all designs of fictional scenarios, in early Christian poetry' (Cullhed 2015: 497). The major exception to such interpretations of early Christian poetry was Klaus Thraede's detailed study of Prudentius' use of rhetorical commonplaces. Thraede asserted that with Prudentius, 'zum ersten Male in der christlichen Poesie liegt ein in sich vielfältiges und formal wie sprachlich anspruchsvolles Gesamtwerk rein literarischen Charakters vor' (1965: 9). But Thraede's has been a lonely voice, partly because he seemed to reject the author's religious devotion and originality (on the reception of Thraede's book, see Bastiaensen 1993: 116–18).

³ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. The Latin text of Prudentius follows Cunningham 1966 (CCSL 126) with frequent reference to Bergman 1926 (CSEL 61). The following abbreviations are used for Prudentius' works:

Apoth. = *Apotheosis*
Cath. = *Cathemerimon*
Ham. = *Hamartigenia*
Perist. = *Peristefanon*
Praef. = *Praefatio*
Psych. = *Psychomachia*
Sym. = *Contra Symmachum*.

The poet specifies that he was nearing the end of his fifty-seventh year, the same age (counting inclusively) as Horace when he died.⁴ A comparison was maybe intentional and certainly meaningful.⁵ Prudentius resembles the greatest author of Latin lyric, and his edition is like a death (as will become clear in the following pages). In the second line, Prudentius offers the possibility of deception ('ni fallor')⁶; he draws attention to his own person with the verbs *fuimus*, *fruamur* and *egimus*; he implies that human time is cyclical ('cardo rotat', 'sole uolubili');⁷ he reveals that a god determines his life and gives it a certain finality; and he raises the question of utility. The poet expands on each of these topics in the course of the poem, as he recounts his early life, his career, the year in which he was born (348 C.E., in the consulship of Flavius Salia), his doubts about the usefulness of anything he has done, and his decision to celebrate Christ with his voice, that is to be a Christian poet.⁸

The *Praefatio* ends with the poet expressing his hope in an uncertain release as a book (*Praef.* 43–5):

Haec dum scribo uel eloquor,
uinclis o utinam corporis emicem
liber quo tulerit lingua sono mobilis ultimo!

While I am writing or pronouncing this,
O that I would break from the chains of my body
free, to where my tongue in motion will head at its last sound!

As Prudentius desires freedom from his body, he imagines the final moment at which he will spring forth from the bonds of that body. The pun on the word *liber* equates that end with the completion of his book.⁹ His desired release is uncertain for two reasons: he does not know how or when his earthly end will come, and the fate of his book is entirely dependent on its subsequent reception. Because the poems are changeable in their reception, the poet's tongue retains the potential for movement (*mobilis*) and life up until the very last sound.¹⁰ As he does with this pun on *liber*, Prudentius likewise objectifies himself as a *munus fictile* at the end of *De opusculis suis* (*Epilogus*).¹¹ By objectifying himself, Prudentius indicates the separation that comes between poet and persona in the physical act of writing. Although the author's body still separates the

⁴ Horace was born 8 December 65 and died apparently on 27 November 8 B.C.E.; on his birthday and death day, see Bradshaw 2002.

⁵ It was noted by Witke 1968: 524. On other allusions to Horace in the *Praefatio*, see Lühken 2002 and Pucci 1991: 679–85. To their discussions, I would add that 'si meritis nequit' at the end of line 36 echoes 'quaesitam meritis' in Hor., *Carm.* 3.30.15. Maybe it is also relevant that in *Epist.* 1.20 Horace addressed his book as a slave, discussed its future readership and used the consular year to specify his age at the time of writing.

⁶ The possibility of error expressed in this phrase presumably includes uncertainty about the calculation of the date; see Gnülka 2000–3: 1.140–3.

⁷ On the volubility of the world, cf. Auson., *Ecl.* 14.1.3 (Green 1999) and Pacatus, *De cereo paschali* 2–3 (Turcan-Verkerk 2003). The circular motion of the heavens was the subject of Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.2.

⁸ The exact form of Prudentius' Christian devotion is unclear, although Coşkun is most likely correct that he remained, in the words of Gennadius (*De uiris illustribus* 13) a 'uir secularis' (Coşkun 2008: 296). Paula Hershkowitz has recently aimed to reveal the local context of Prudentius as a 'villa poet' and to show that his poems would have been read both by Christians and non-Christians (2017: 37, 55); regarding the latter point, I am in complete agreement, although Hershkowitz does not provide any evidence that goes beyond what was already known.

⁹ For this pun on *liber*, see Malamud 1989: 77, and note that the quantity of vowels was often ignored by the ancient inventors of puns and etymologies. For similar puns on *liber* and *liber*, see Cic., *Att.* 1.13.5, Ov., *Tr.* 1.1 and Symmachus, *Ep.* 1.31.2 (Callu 1972).

¹⁰ The ultimate sound references the poet's last breath, the reader's voicing of the text and the trumpet to sound at the *parousia* of Christ; on the latter, cf. 1 Thess. 4:16 and *Cath.* 11.105.

¹¹ See below Section V.

poet from his divine audience in the present moment of the poem, his prayer imagines a future point at which he will be freed from the body and united with his God, and he desires that movement to come in the very act of writing. In this way, the poet describes his final release as an act of communication with his reader and God. The reader who follows Prudentius' preface through its narrative of conversion and all the way to his final vision of communication covers the same ground. The reader reaches — through belief in the persona's poetic future — his or her own hermeneutic release. The final sound (*ultimo sono*) is also *their* sounding. So far, so conventional: Prudentius is a Christian poet, and he shall be free.

But Prudentius' prayer is not as simple as it appears. It conceals telling traces of two other passages in the poet's corpus. One passage describes the death of the martyr Agnes, and the other recounts the creation of the devil's tongue. Martha Malamud identified both intratexts in an important discussion of what she diagnosed as Prudentius' enigmatic text.¹² The martyr Agnes is killed and her spirit leaps up free to heaven in the *Liber Peristefanon* (14.91–3):

exutus inde spiritus *emicat*
liberque in auras exilit, angeli
 saepsere euntem tramite candido.

Then her spirit released flashes out,
 and leaps free into the air. Angels
 surrounded her rising on a shining path.

If Prudentius' *Praefatio* is read through Agnes, then his own leap to the skies spells a blessed end. However, the other intratext equates Prudentius with the serpent's deceitful tongue (*Ham.* 201–2):

simplex *lingua* prius uaria *micat* arte *loquendi*
 et discissa dolis resonat sermone trisulco.

What was a simple tongue before flashes with the varied art of speaking,
 and separated with deceptions it sounds in tripled speech.

These lines are no less similar, and the serpent's tongue is far more than an idle description in *Hamartigenia*, a poem entirely devoted to the question of the source of failing in the world. The link with the serpent's varied tongue is even more disconcerting because Prudentius' poetry is full of rhetorical language, and full in particular of *variatio*. How should we read the links between the *Praefatio* and these two other poems? Is the poet damned to deceit or free like the martyr? If we understand the poet in the text as a persona, we can see that this is really a literary question. The author has put himself at the mercy of his reader, who now must decide whether to interpret the poet's shifting and mobile tongue either as a redemptive or a deceptive artefact. Since Prudentius thought that even pagan statues were good or bad according to their use, perhaps it should not be surprising that he saw his own poetry as dependent on its eventual reception.¹³ More broadly, his frequent focus on conversion and belief should not be separated from his desire that his readers would lend him both their ears and their hearts.

¹² Malamud 2011: 194–6.

¹³ On the statues of the gods, see *Sym.* 1.499–505 and *Perist.* 2.481–4. Regarding the broader topic of the Christian appropriation of Classical culture, Christian Gniska first developed his influential ideas about their so-called *usus iustus* in Gniska 1979 and 1984–93.

In contrast to the interpretation that I have just outlined, Martha Malamud describes the parallel with the serpent's tongue as creating doubt in the poet's project. I quote her analysis at length because it reveals the difficulties that arise from having low expectations of the reader:

The flickering, flashing tongue of the serpent, with its deadly art of speaking, lurks beneath the pious conclusion of the *Praefatio*, which expresses the poet's hope of attaining freedom and salvation through his own skill in speaking. It is the poet's *lingua*, that fallen, fissured instrument, that will determine the fate of his soul ... The poet cannot know whether his elaborately patterned and figured texts are acceptable offerings that have successfully avoided the snares and traps of human language, or are instead, like the viper's vicious brood, the products of Satanic creativity. *Caveat lector*.¹⁴

Although I agree that Prudentius describes his tongue as a fallen instrument and that he cannot know his fate, Malamud does not give the reader enough credit. I emphasise this point because I find every other aspect of her explanation to be entirely convincing. Whereas Malamud ascribes the fate of his soul to Prudentius' own *lingua*, we should see that the poet is actually dependent on the literary reception of his published poetry, which is figured as the ultimate judgement of his divine patron and judge. Although we know that every text is radically unstable, in part because intertexts determine or destabilise its meaning, none of this demonstrates that Prudentius is afraid of the serpent's artistry or that the reader is the only one who must be on guard. Instead of limiting our focus to the complexities of the textual system, we should see that Prudentius purposefully compels his human readers to participate in the text, either to reject or approve it. The finality of the reader's judgement and the impermanence of language are all contained in the closing words of the *Praefatio* ('lingua sono mobilis ultimo'). Because the language of the poem is utterly indeterminate until the moment of interpretation, Prudentius portrays himself as at risk and in need. *Caveat scriptor* is the watchword that acknowledges the reader's standing above and beyond the authorial drama. By inserting himself as a central character in a text whose fate is still uncertain, Prudentius invites us to read him as a Christian poet waiting for redemption. The rest of this article will show what is meant by this formulation.

The redemption that Prudentius awaits is a kind of closure, and it should be viewed in the context of his habitual attention to the materiality of writing. Closure in this sense is provided by the reader and is not a property of the text itself.¹⁵ Individual extratextual readers either substantiate or contravene the author's belief that his textual body will be reunited with its soul and restored limb by limb. In this way, the author's involvement of his readers fits perfectly with everything else we know about the literary world of Late Antiquity. In *The Space that Remains: Reading Latin Poetry in Late Antiquity*, I built upon a great deal of previous scholarship on late antique Latin literature to demonstrate how the involvement of strong and active readers transformed the writing of poetry in the time of Prudentius.¹⁶ As for our author's interest in the instruments of writing and textuality, this has long been noted by scholars: E. R. Curtius, in an important chapter on 'The book as symbol', presented several descriptions of writing in the *Peristefanon* poems;¹⁷ Klaus Thraede devoted a number of pages to Prudentius' metaphors for writing as ploughing and for lines as furrows, metaphors that imply a

¹⁴ Malamud 2011: 96.

¹⁵ On the much discussed topic of closure, the studies of Herrnstein Smith 1968 and Kermode 2000 are fundamental; see also the essays in Fowler 2000 and Grewing *et al.* 2013.

¹⁶ Pelttari 2014.

¹⁷ Curtius 1953: 311–12.

kind of deep meaning for the text;¹⁸ and Cillian O'Hogan has recently treated images of the world as a book in the *Peristefanon* poems.¹⁹ In light of this background, it should not be controversial to suggest that Prudentius was deeply concerned with the precise mechanics of his textual creations. As for the involvement of the reader, Catherine Conybeare has shown that *Hamartigenia* problematises the interpretation of scripture and that Prudentius himself is at the mercy of his reader;²⁰ Marc Mastrangelo studied Prudentius' creation of a Roman self and explained that his works 'are designed to persuade, to engage a reader of faith who is amenable to persuasion';²¹ and Malamud offered a careful interpretive essay on *Hamartigenia* that is largely about the role of language and understanding in that poem.²² In this present article, I will build upon the work of such scholars to show that Prudentius used the resurrection as a means of articulating his desire for a literary salvation that could only be provided by real extratextual readers, because his writing on its own was insufficient to guarantee such survival. After examining a series of passages from the *Peristefanon* and *Cathemerinon* poems, I will address the implications of our understanding of the reader's involvement in creating fictional scenes for the Christian poet. (In a separate article, I discuss the *Apotheosis*, *Hamartigenia* and *Psychomachia* at some length.²³) The author's faith at the end of *Apotheosis* contrasts with his uncertainty at the end of *Hamartigenia*, and his matching prayers at beginning and end of the *Psychomachia* draw attention to his dependence on Christ, his ideal reader. In their staging of an authorial drama, those three didactic poems support our understanding of the reader's involvement in the poetry of Prudentius. For now, we will begin with those passages from the *Peristefanon* poems in which Prudentius addresses his dedicatees and future readers.

II WRITING AND PATRONAGE IN THE *LIBER PERISTEFANON*

We cannot fully understand what Prudentius says about writing, bodies and reading until we realise that he treats human texts as perishing and his own afterlife as provisional. These aspects of the author's understanding of writing and his expectations regarding his future success are clear in his martyr poems, which is why *Peristefanon* will set up what I argue is his metapoetic use of the resurrection in *Cathemerinon*. Whereas sometimes Christ plays the role of his ideal reader, Prudentius often addresses himself to the martyrs directly in the *Peristefanon* poems. Therefore, those passages in which Prudentius foregrounds his dependence on his patrons will serve as a starting point to flesh out the argument that his poetic resurrection only comes about through the assistance of real external readers.

Most aspects of the fourteen *Peristefanon* poems in praise of the martyrs have been treated in some detail by scholars already, including Palmer, Roberts and Fux.²⁴ This study begins in a way from Jill Ross' article, 'Dynamic writing and martyrs' bodies in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*', which described the martyrs' bodies as surrogates for the text of Prudentius.²⁵ In following Ross' observations regarding writing and reading in the text of Prudentius, I will show that the author's textual body constantly stands in need of a reader to give it the final approval desired.

¹⁸ Thraede 1965: 79–140.

¹⁹ O'Hogan 2016: 23–34.

²⁰ Conybeare 2007.

²¹ Mastrangelo 2008: 5.

²² Malamud 2011: 51–196.

²³ Pelttari 2019 (forthcoming).

²⁴ See Palmer 1989; Roberts 1993; Fux 2003; 2013.

²⁵ Ross 1995. Note that much of the same material was treated again in Ross 2008: 50–80.

Peristefanon 10: *The Martyr's Body and the Poet's Salvation*

Prudentius' long poem in praise of Romanus, *Perist.* 10, celebrates a martyr whose tongue was cut out before he died; miraculously, the martyr continued to speak. In the poem, Prudentius insists on his own muteness at the same time as he prays for the ability to speak adequately (10.1–25). The tongue-less loquacity of martyr and poet is mirrored by the official records of the martyrdom. One set of records, the Roman judicial and administrative records, were lost to the ravages of time; the other set of records is indelible, for they were written by an angel and kept in heaven (*Perist.* 10.1116–20):

Illas sed aetas conficit diutina,
fuligo fuscatur, puluis obducitur situ,
carpit senectus aut ruinis obruit.
inscripta Christo pagina immortalis est
nec obsolescit ullus in caelis apex.

But time at last wears them [*chartulae uiuaces*] out,
soot darkens them, dust covers them in neglect,
age tears at them or overwhelms them with ruin.
The page inscribed for Christ is immortal
and not one letter grows old in heaven.

Is the poem of Prudentius more like the corrupted human records or like the page inscribed for Christ? In her influential article on the *Liber Peristefanon*, Ross used this and other similar passages to argue that Prudentius identified his poetry with the immortal bodies of his martyrs.²⁶ She concluded that, 'Prudentius' body of poems about the martyrs' body-texts is also a redemptive text since it embodies the Logos' name inscribed upon the martyrs', and she says that 'the inscription of the martyrs' bodies is a kind of writing in which there is no gap between the immediacy of the spoken Word and the reflective, shadowy quality of the written word'.²⁷ No doubt Prudentius wanted his poems to be redemptive and immortal texts, but how does that happen? The answer is that it is Christ as dedicatee (not author) who guarantees the survival of Prudentius' text.²⁸ Rather than identify his poetry as the spoken word or as immortal in itself, Prudentius depended upon the redemption offered by his ideal reader. We will see this confirmed in the prayers at the end of several *Peristefanon* poems.

The stanza above from *Perist.* 10 is followed by two stanzas describing how an angel in heaven recorded every drop of blood and every wound suffered by the martyr Romanus. Prudentius then explains that his book will be read in heaven by the eternal judge, and he ends the poem by expressing his hope for leniency (*Perist.* 10.1131–40):

Hic in regestis est liber caelestibus
monumenta seruans laudis indelebilis
relegendus olim sempiterno iudici,
libramine aequo qui malorum pondera
et praemiorum comparabit copias.
Vellem sinister inter haedorum greges
ut sum futurus, eminus dinoscerer
atque hoc precante diceret rex optimus:
'Romanus orat, transfer hunc haedum mihi;
sit dexter agnus, induatur uellere.'

²⁶ Ross 1995: 333.

²⁷ Ross 1995: 355.

²⁸ Gnllka (2013) showed that *Christo* in line 1119 refers to Christ as dedicatee rather than as agent.

This book is among the heavenly records
 that keep a memorial of his indelible praise
 and will be read one day by the eternal judge,
 who will consider with a just balance the weight
 of punishments and the copious rewards.

Since I will be among the goats on the left-hand side,
 I want to be recognised from afar
 and when he prays may the highest king say,
 ‘Romanus asks it, transfer this goat for me;
 may he be a right lamb, may he put on a sheepskin.’

‘This book’ (*hic liber*) in heaven is certainly linked to Prudentius’ poem, but the author sublimates his desire for immortality into the glory of the martyr. He hopes to be recognised from afar, so that the martyr will pray for his salvation from the judge. The poetic meaning is clear because the indelible praise of Romanus echoes the *indelebile nomen* that Ovid claims for himself in *Met.* 15.876.²⁹ One might also think that *transfer* suggests the reading of metaphorical and figurative language.³⁰ An allusion to *Metamorphoses* in this passage might seem unlikely, but the adjective *indelebilis* occurs only three times in extant Latin poetry (up to the end of the sixth century);³¹ and the third passage is from Ovid’s *Epistulae ex Ponto*, in a reference to Augustus’ indelible glory (‘decus indelebile’, 2.8.25), a passage that recalls the earlier *Metamorphoses*. Rather than declare his own immortality directly, Prudentius asserts the indelible praise of the martyr to whom he prays. If we see an allusion to *Metamorphoses* here, then the references to the effects of decay and old age in lines 1115–18 also echo Ovid’s assertion in the *Metamorphoses* that his work will not be subject to the decays of time (15.871–2). However, when Prudentius turns to his own case in the final stanza, he prays for the patronage of the martyr and for recognition before the eternal judge. This patronage mirrors the earthly reception desired by Ovid and, certainly, by Prudentius as well. Perhaps the final two words (‘induatur uellere’), a prayer to be clothed in the robe of a lamb, should be read as expressing the poet’s desire to become a book made of parchment or covered in sheepskin.³² The image would then match the end of the *Praefatio*, where Prudentius figuratively becomes a book (*liber*), and also the end of *De opusculis suis*, where he objectifies himself as an ‘obsoletum uasculum’ (26) and a ‘munus fictile’ (29). Whatever we make of the image of the fleece, Prudentius does not directly declare the immortality of his work. Instead, he uses the martyr’s indelible fame to stage a drama in which the author’s hope lies in a final judgement of success to be granted from a judge (reader) existing beyond the text.³³ In other words, we can see a substantial gap between ‘the immediacy of the spoken Word’ represented by Romanus’ judgement and the written text produced by the author.

²⁹ See below, Section III.

³⁰ See *OLD* s.v. *transfero* 6 and Ballengee 2009: 124. Of course, *translatio* is the Latin for ‘metaphor’ (μεταφορά).

³¹ This statement is based on the *TLL* entry for *indelebilis* (7.1.1133,60–8) combined with an electronic search on the website *Musisque Deoque* (www.mqdq.it) and of the Library of Latin Texts published by Brepols.

³² In a reference to spiritual water discovered in the story of Gideon from the Book of Judges, Ambrose describes that fleece and the book as synonymous (‘aqua de uellere et libro Iudicum’, *De spiritu sancto* 1 prol.16 (CSEL 79: 22)).

³³ This scene recalls the end of a poem written for the feast of Felix of Nola on 14 January 396, in which Paulinus prayed to be put among the lambs and not with the goats (*Natalicia* 3.128–32 (Dolveck 2015 = CCL 21: 303) = 14.131–5 (Hartel 1999 = CSEL 30: 50)); but poetic language is not salient in the prayer of Paulinus. It is not clear when exactly *Perist.* 10 was written.

Reading the Martyr's Body in the Liber Peristefanon

Even though the bodies of Prudentius' martyrs are immortal texts, they still need readers. For this reason, the inscribed bodies of the martyrs are often accompanied by readers within the text.

Perist. 11 has been much discussed for what it says about writing and reading.³⁴ The poem recounts the death of the Roman presbyter Hippolytus, who was (like his classical namesake) dragged to death by a team of horses. The most relevant passage for us is the central scene of the martyr's fragmentation. When Prudentius comes to this part of the narrative, he distances himself from the story by setting it within an ecphrasis of a painting depicting the bloody limbs of the martyr dragged over the ground ('effigians tracti membra cruenta uiri', 11.126). The scene of dismemberment is painted in extravagant detail and includes a description of the saint's followers who are gathering together the fragments of his broken body (*Perist.* 11.131–40):

cernere erat ruptis conpagibus ordine nullo
 membra per incertos sparsa iacere situs.
 addiderat caros gressu lacrimisque sequentes,
 deuia quo fractum semita monstrat iter.
 maerore attoniti atque oculis rimantibus ibant
 implebantque sinus uisceribus laceris.
 ille caput niueum complectitur ac reuerendam
 canitiem molli confouet in gremio;
 hic umeros truncasque manus et brachia et ulnas
 et genua et crurum fragmina nuda legit.

You could see his broken joints in no order,
 his limbs lying scattered in uncertain positions.
 He added the dear followers walking with tears,
 where the remote path shows the broken way.
 They went astonished in grief and with searching eyes,
 and they filled their pockets with his torn flesh.
 One embraces his snowy head and enfolds
 his reverend white hair in their soft lap;
 another chooses out (reads) his shoulders and maimed hands
 and arms and elbows and knees and the naked fragments of his legs.

The followers who piece together the disjointed limbs of the hero are like the readers of the poem.³⁵ Most importantly, the word *legere* (between 'choose' and 'read') suggests that the scattered limbs are emblematic of the lines of poetry that are gathered into a whole body ('corporis integri', 148) by readers who, in encountering a text that is purposefully complex, follow their author by (as a very first step) grouping his syllables into *cola* and *commata*. In including such a scene within a poem that is disjointed on its surface, Prudentius uses the theme of dismemberment to reflect on the production of unity and togetherness through literature as it is read and made present by a community or even

³⁴ Fielding 2014 offers bibliography and provides a full and convincing reading of *Perist.* 11 as a poem of togetherness rather than separation.

³⁵ The followers have also been compared to Prudentius himself by Fielding (2014: 815) and Roberts (1993: 155–7). For the parallel passages from Seneca's description of the other Hippolytus' death, see Fux 2003: 368 and Palmer 1989: 189–91.

by a single individual. The larger point can be helpfully summarised by adapting (only slightly) the well-known conclusions of Glenn Most on ‘the rhetoric of dismemberment in Neronian poetry’. I would say that in the possibility of reconstructing Hippolytus’ disseminated body may be expressed, at the most fundamental level, our capacity, once that construct has been recognised as such, to imagine it again as a present and living object.³⁶ The reader restores and pieces together the fragmented remains of the text so that its body will not remain disjointed.

A similar dynamic is at work elsewhere in the *Peristefanon* poems, in places where the immortal writing remains in need of reading. In *Perist.* 3 in honour of Eulalia, the martyrress declares that she herself will be a written text (‘scriberis ecce mihi’, 3.136); then she immediately exclaims, ‘How pleasing it is to read these lines!’ (‘quam iuuat hos apices legere’, 3.137). Likewise, the torturer inscribes Romanus with a holy text,³⁷ but the martyr still has to interpret the signs for the audience (10.562–70). Even in *Perist.* 13, where Prudentius sings of the incredible immortal tongue of Cyprian that does not know how to die (‘sola obire nescit’, 13.5), the outcome of this fact is the guarantee that the saint will be read throughout the world (‘te leget omnis amans Christum’, 8). While the saints’ bodies are remarkable texts, Prudentius does not describe them as truly autonomous or sufficient on their own.

The Martyr as a Patron and Reader

As we have just seen, Prudentius says that there is a book written in heaven in the indelible ink of the martyr’s blood (Romanus’) and that there is a voice (Cyprian’s) that echoes round the world without end. The question was how Prudentius could get his words into that book, and whether *his* voice would resound. Like *Perist.* 10, a number of other *Peristefanon* poems end, or almost end, with a prayer for patronage from the martyr, or from Christ directly. These spiritual patrons are also ideal readers whose judgements stand in for the poem’s earthly reception.

Perist. 2 ends with a prayer first to the martyr Lawrence and then to Christ to hear and attend to the rustic poet (‘audi poetam rusticum’, 2.574). The point is even clearer at the end of *Perist.* 3: as Prudentius celebrates Eulalia through poetry, she favours him and his crowd because of the song she has heard (‘populosque suos / carmine propitiata fouet’, 3.214–15); the poet is accompanied here by a chorus of devoted followers, and Eulalia cherishes them. In *Perist.* 4, Prudentius calls on the community of Caesaraugusta to celebrate their martyrs so that they may rise together soon in the resurrection: ‘mox resurgentes animas et artus / tota sequeris’ (4.199–200); we will see that the poet’s use of the resurrection elsewhere suggests that in this passage he is predicting his poetic survival. In *Perist.* 5, the poet includes himself within a community pleading for mercy, redemption and eternal life (5.545–76). And in *Perist.* 6, for the martyrs of Tarragona, Prudentius neatly equates his own redemption with the future reading of the poem. By invoking his ideal reader (the bishop Fructuosus in this case), he expresses hope that his poem will be successful and that he will be remembered for it (6.160–2):

Fors dignabitur et meis medellam
tormentis dare prosperante Christo
dulces hendecasyllabos reuoluens.

³⁶ Compare the original: ‘In the impossibility of reconstructing Hippolytus’ disseminated body may be expressed, then, at the most fundamental level, our incapacity, once that construct has been recognised as such, to reimagine it any longer as a pristine, organic unity’ (Most 1992: 410). The contrast with Most’s conclusion points to the rather surprising set of assumptions that underlie the Christian poetry of Prudentius.

³⁷ For the marks on his body as a holy text, see Ross 1995: 332–3.

Perhaps, he will also deign to give help
to my torments (if Christ so wills),
as he unrolls my sweet hendecasyllables.

In placing himself at the mercy of this final reader, Prudentius accepts his ultimate lack of control as author and embraces the reader's involvement. Likewise, the penultimate couplet of *Perist.* 11 prays to Valerianus, Bishop of Calahorra (11.243–4); *Perist.* 13 ends with a reference to Cyprian's gifts as patron ('pia dona dat patronus', 13.106); and *Perist.* 14 ends with a prayer for Agnes to touch the poet with her kind foot ('dignaris almo uel pede tangere', 14.133). Throughout the *Peristefanon* poems the poet as suppliant prays for salvation.

A model for Prudentius and a confirmation of the link between his spiritual patrons and future earthly readers can be found in a preface of Ausonius which turned that author's anonymous reader into a patron.³⁸ The preface ends with a playful reference to Ausonius' attempt to secure patronage (*Praefationes* 1.39–40):

hic ego³⁹ Ausonius: sed tu ne temne, quod ultro
patronum nostris te paro carminibus.

Here I am Ausonius: but do not despise me for already
producing you as a patron for my poems.

Just as Ausonius' patrons are his anonymous readers, the heavenly patrons of Prudentius should be read as surrogates for the future readers who will determine the earthly success of his poems. By calling Cyprian a patron and by addressing other saints in similar terms, Prudentius reveals that he is seeking the support and patronage of receptive readers. Like Ausonius, he finds a clever way to include such appeals to his real, future, anonymous readers. Most importantly for our argument, Prudentius does not represent the saints and their bodies as guarantees of his own immortality; instead, he portrays himself as dependent on these ideal readers' subsequent response. As a result, these patrons demonstrate that Prudentius wrote his poetry in the hope that it would be judged and accepted by future readers. His expectation that the reader will play a strong and active role fits perfectly, therefore, within everything else that we know about his contemporary literary culture.

III THE RESURRECTION IN *LIBER CATHEMERINON*

At several important moments in which death and resurrection are in play, Prudentius interweaves his religion with his poetics in the *Liber Cathemerinon*. At the end of *Cath.* 3, an apostrophe to the author's own limbs connects body to text and resurrection to reception. *Cath.* 10 is a funeral poem full of textual imagery; it ends with a commemoration of a body (the poet's body?) at a tomb. The endings of *Cath.* 4, 6, 11 and 12 are relevant in their references to death, dreaming and eventual renewal. In contrast to these poems, *Cath.* 1 and 2 end with an evocation of Christ's immediate presence. The former, a hymn for the cock-crow, ends with a call for Christ to dispel

³⁸ For a study of the anonymous reader in Latin poetry, see Citroni 1995.

³⁹ Green 1999: 4 prints the conjecture *hic ergo*. It does not matter for the argument, but there is a good reason to prefer the transmitted *hic ego*: the pronoun fits the preface's highly developed evocation of the author. Accordingly, this emphasis on the author's identity justifies a hiatus before his name. Note that Ausonius scans the second syllable of *ego* short in lines 1 and 7 of this poem but long in line 35 and that he admits prosodic hiatus in *Ecl.* 22.8 (Green 1999: 108), although the metrical licence is Greek in that case ('Nymphae Hamadryades').

sleep ('somnum disside', 1.97) and bring a new light ('nouumque lumen ingere', 1.100); those imperatives suggest the addressee's immediate presence. Likewise, the last stanza of *Cath.* 2 (109–12) releases a profusion of deictic pronouns that proclaim that *this* Christ is here *now*. In both cases, the end of the poem coincides with the coming of Christ, and the saviour's presence replaces any reference to the eventual salvation afforded by the reader. Exceptions like *Cath.* 1 and 2 throw into relief Prudentius' other poems that end with his own death or in expectation of a salvation to come in the future.

Mea Membra: Cathemerinon 3 and the Poetic Afterlife

Cath. 3 (*Hymnus ante cibum*) has long been seen as central to any full discussion of the poetics of Prudentius.⁴⁰ At the beginning of the poem (16–20), the author expresses his desire to be ruled by the divinity in every action; he addresses his Muse (26–30); and he describes the kind of poetry that he will sing (81–95), namely everything in praise of God. The ending of the poem enacts and completes the poet's earlier declarations that his learned poetry will be subsumed within praise of God. In a series of stanzas, the poet prays for moderation and explains the resurrection as a reintegration of the soul with its physical body (171–95).⁴¹ Then, the final two stanzas turn to the poet's own body, and they present Christ's harrowing of hell through an allusion to Aeneas' return from the underworld (196–205):

Credo equidem (neque uana fides)
 corpora uiuere more animae;
 nam modo corporeum memini
 de Flegetonte gradu facili
 ad superos remeasse deum.
 Spes eadem mea membra manet,
 quae redolentia funereo
 iussa quiescere sarcofago
 dux parili rediuius humo
 ignea Christus ad astra uocat.

I believe (and my confidence is not in vain)
 that our bodies live like the soul:
 for just now, I recall, it was in bodily form
 and out from Phlegethon, walking easily,
 that God returned to those above.

The same hope awaits my limbs
 that have been ordered to rest,
 odorous in a funereal tomb.
 Their leader reborn from equivalent dust,
 Christ calls them to the fiery stars.

Prudentius borrowed his statement of belief from Dido's confession of love for Aeneas in *Aen.* 4.12 ('Credo equidem, nec uana fides, genus esse deorum'). Like the word *memini* in line 198, this borrowed line signposts the allusion in lines 199–200, where Prudentius recalls the Sibyl's advice to Aeneas from Book 6 of the *Aeneid*. In that passage, the Sibyl warned Aeneas that returning from Hades was the real difficulty (*Aen.* 6.126–9):

⁴⁰ Among recent discussions, see Heinz 2007: 143–68; O'Daly 2012: 81–117; 2016.

⁴¹ On Prudentius' unexceptional (i.e. orthodox) teaching on the resurrection, see Buchheit 1986.

... *facilis* descensus Auerno:
 noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;
 sed *reuocare gradum superasque* euadere ad auras,
 hoc opus, hic labor est.

... easy is the descent to Averno:
 night and day the dread gate of Dis lies open;
 but to call back your step and escape to the upper air,
 this is the task, this is the labour.

Prudentius' *gradu facili, ad superos* and *remeasse* allude together to the Sibyl's speech. The allusion allows Aeneas to be read as a type of Christ, with Aeneas' journey to the underworld as a prefiguration for Christ's harrowing of hell. This allusion was discussed in detail by Maria Lühken, but she (like others) reads it primarily as a *Kontrastimitation* — that is, an allusion by which the poet draws attention to the difference between himself and his source — rather than as an integral expression of Prudentius' own poetics.⁴² Before considering what these lines mean for the expected reception of *Cath.* 3, we should notice what they reveal about Prudentius' reception of Virgil. By repeating Virgil's exact words, Prudentius demonstrates that he can reincorporate his source; when he says that bodies live just like souls, he means that the very text of Virgil will continue to be revived through its ongoing reception. Similar metaphors of bodily reintegration appear in Ausonius' preface to his *Cento nuptialis* and in the introductory lines of Proba's Virgilian cento.⁴³ There is no need to understand that the conceptual line between supposedly normal intertextuality and a cento is vanishingly thin to see that Prudentius and his contemporaries could understand any deeply imitative poetry as a kind of bodily reintegration.⁴⁴ In this passage, Prudentius' use of Virgilian fragments suggests that his own poetic *membra* will be pieced back together as they are read. Indeed, in a perfectly literal manner, several of the *Cathemerinon* poems were reintegrated, as they were excerpted and rearranged for liturgical use in the early Middle Ages.⁴⁵ More generally, the placement of these Virgilian fragments suggests that the relations between author/source and reader/text are basically isomorphic; every competent reader of Prudentius would be expected to play a comparable role in reviving the poet who incorporated Virgil even as he believed that his own body would be revived.

The poet's use of Virgil brings us to his direct address to his limbs ('*mea membra*') in line 201. This is the phrase that most clearly invites a metapoetic reading of the poet's body. Such an interpretation may seem strange at first, but we have already seen a similar passage from *Perist.* 11, and it would be unexceptionable for almost any other classical poet. We know that bodily metaphors for the poetic text were common throughout Greek and Latin poetry.⁴⁶ Likewise, in technical discussions of rhetoric and metre, *membrum* was often used as a translation of κῶλον.⁴⁷ A well-known parallel is

⁴² Lühken 2002: 148–9, with further references.

⁴³ On Ausonius, see Peltari 2014: 105–6. Proba says that she will sing of Christ as much as her body and joints and dying limbs allow: 'quantum non noxia corpora tardant / terrenique hebetant artus moribundaque membra' (ll. 27–8) (Fassina and Lucarini 2015). Her words are from *Aen.* 6.731–2, in which the souls of the dead tend to heaven; that original context supports an ironic reading of her concern that Virgil's limbs (*membra*) will weigh her down.

⁴⁴ McGill 2005 stands out amidst the recent outpouring of scholarship on late antique centos, and he focuses on the intertextual dynamics involved in writing and reading a cento.

⁴⁵ For editions of eleven of these hymns, see Walpole 1922: 115–48.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Svenbro 1984; Most 1992; Keith 1999.

⁴⁷ See Cic., *De or.* 3.185; Marius Victorinus, *Ars grammatica* 1.13 (Keil 1855–80: 6.53); August., *De musica* 5.3.4 (CSEL 102: 171–2); and especially Atilius Fortunatianus, *Ars* 7.1 (Keil 1855–80: 6.282–3)). For further examples, see *TLL*, s.v. *membrum*, II.B.2.b.β = 8.0.645.19–30 (Hofmann).

Horace's reference to rearranged bits of Ennius as 'disiecti membra poetae' (*Sat.* 1.4.62). The exact phrase *mea membra* arguably has metapoetic resonance both in Prop. 3.16.4 and in Ov., *Am.* 3.7.13.⁴⁸ Further afield, the recently rediscovered *Alcestis Barcinonensis* ends with Alcestis announcing that her limbs are being closed in sleep.⁴⁹ Even more relevant for *Cath.* 3 is the fact that Prudentius ends *Apotheosis* with a similar address to his own limbs ('*mea membra*', 1080). The resurrection is the theme in that passage as well, and the entire passage has metapoetic resonance.⁵⁰ With such parallels, it is easy to read *mea membra* as a reference to the verses of the poet. More importantly, such a reading accords perfectly with the metapoetic stanzas at the beginning of *Cath.* 3, with the incorporation of Virgil in the preceding verses, with the position of this line at the end of the poem (where closure and poetic survival are expected themes), and with the poet's practice elsewhere of expressing his hope for his poetry together with his hope for personal redemption.

In summary, it is Christ as the ideal reader who stands in for individual future readers and who calls the poet's limbs to astral immortality ('*ad astra*'); the omnipotence of this divine reader lends substance to Prudentius' hope for literary immortality. By turning the Christian afterlife into a trope for literary survival, Prudentius gives a new turn to an old theme.⁵¹ One important difference is that whereas previous Latin poets proclaimed their own ability to make themselves immortal, Prudentius expresses only his belief and dependence on his addressee. Horace, for example, ended his third book of *Odes* by describing his poems as a monument to their maker ('*Exegi monumentum aere perennius*', *Carm.* 3.30.1). Because he will continue to be read and because the Muse Melpomene will crown his head with laurel, he is confident that he will survive the fire, storm and time that could destroy his work; and he is confident that he will not die completely ('*non omnis moriar*', 3.30.6). Ovid alludes to Horace's poem both in *Am.* 1.15 and again at the end of the *Metamorphoses*. In the latter passage, Ovid assures his audience that he will be read for the rest of time. He will be transferred to the stars, and his name will never be forgotten (*Met.* 15.871–9):

Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere uetustas.
cum uolet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aeu;
parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum;
quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris
ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama
(si quid habent ueri uatum praesagia) uiuam.

Now I have finished the work that neither Jove's anger nor fire
nor sword nor wasting old age will be able to destroy.
When it wills, let that day, which has rights over nothing

⁴⁸ On the latter passage, see Keith 1999: 60–1.

⁴⁹ '*infernusque deus claudit mea membra sopore*' (124). I quote Marcovich's edition of this corrupt text (Marcovich 1988), and I take the references to closure and sleep as allusions to the end of the poem.

⁵⁰ Most important are the threats to the body and the final imperative *ite* which echoes Virg., *Ecl.* 10.77 and Hor., *Sat.* 1.10.92.

⁵¹ Maria Becker cites parallel passages for *ignea ad astra* (*Aen.* 4.352, Lucan 1.75–6 and Val. Flac. 3.210–11), but she does not consider the possibility of metapoetics (2006: 256). The exact phrase *ad astra* was used by Prudentius also in *Cath.* 10.32 and 10.92 (see below in the following sub-section) and in *Ham.* 845; Virgil has *ad astra* at *Ecl.* 5.51 and 5.52, *Aen.* 9.76 and 9.641. Perhaps the phrase had a vaguely classical sound for Prudentius, rather than being a precise allusion to any single source.

except this body, end the span of my uncertain life.
 Nevertheless, as for my better part, I will be borne forever
 over the lofty stars, and my name will be indelible;
 wherever Roman power extends over the conquered lands
 I will be read in the people's mouth. Through every age in renown
 (if the premonitions of prophets have any truth) I will live.

The final word makes emphatic the poet's declaration that he will live on through the fame of his poetry; indeed, his personal, egoistic assurance sounds already in the first phrase, 'iamque opus exegi'. Like so many of his characters in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid imagines his own survival as a final and direct transfer to the stars. In that way, Ovid claims complete responsibility for his success, even though his earthly survival will depend on a kind of metempsychosis as he is re-embodied in the mouths of those by whom he is read.⁵² Like Horace, he does not need anyone else to predict or guarantee that success.⁵³ Ancient poets used monuments, metamorphosis and metempsychosis as some of the ways in which to conceptualise literary survival; those metaphors were effective in communicating a certain range of authorial practices. Because Prudentius believed that the afterlife included a bodily resurrection, he turned the new teaching into a metaphor by which to describe his own hopes for literary immortality.

Contemporary authors confirm what is different about the afterlife of Prudentius. Ausonius, for example, commemorates himself as an absent subject in his *Parentalia*.⁵⁴ Separately, an epigram about a fading tombstone contrasts with the monumental assuredness of Ovid and Horace. Because the monument described by Ausonius was broken, it was impossible even to read whether the buried man was called Marius or Marcius or Metellus; Ausonius' conclusion is that death comes even to stones and inscribed names.⁵⁵ Death functions here as a metapoetic reflection on the inherent failures of language and of human communication, and Ausonius is more circumspect about the survival of language than either Horace or Ovid.⁵⁶ For Prudentius, faith is the answer to the intractable problems posed by the dissolution of monuments and words.

Poets who wrote on Christian topics earlier than Prudentius did not use the resurrection as a figure for poetic immortality. This includes Commodian (most likely before Prudentius), whose *Instructiones* 1.28 is on the resurrection but does not draw attention to the poet himself.⁵⁷ Juvencus is closer; in the preface to his *Euangeliorum*, he engaged directly with Homer and Virgil and claimed that his work could provide salvation:

nam mihi carmen erit Christi uitalia gesta,
 diuinum populis falsi sine crimine donum.
 nec metus, ut mundi rapiant incendia secum
 hoc opus; hoc etenim forsan me subtrahet igni
 tunc, cum flammiuoma discendet nube coruscans
 iudex, altithroni genitoris gloria, Christus.

⁵² On the epilogue to the *Metamorphoses* and Ovid's survival as a kind of metempsychosis, see Hardie 2002: 91–7.

⁵³ On poetic autonomy in Rome, see Roman 2014.

⁵⁴ See Abrams Rebillard 2015. On Prudentius' reading of Ausonius, see Charlet 1980.

⁵⁵ *Epigr.* 37.10 (Green 1999), 'mors etiam saxis nominibusque uenit'.

⁵⁶ The resemblance between Ausonius and his predecessors was, I think, overstated by Don Fowler (2000: 193–9). Language and communication are neatly suggested in *nomen*, the uses of which include both 'word' and 'renown'; see *OLD* s.v. *nomen* 5–6 and 11–12.

⁵⁷ In the sphragis of his collection (*Instructiones* 2.35 [39] (Poinsette 2009)), Commodian includes an acrostic for his name, which is subject to the curiosity of the learned reader: 'curiositas docti inueniet nomen in isto' (2.35.26). Unlike Prudentius, who is a faithful suppliant waiting in belief for a future resurrection, Commodian presents himself as a designer of learned curiosities.

For I will sing of Christ's life-giving deeds –
 a gift to nations, cleared of lies, divine.
 Nor do I fear world-wasting flames will seize
 my work: this might, in fact, deliver me
 when Christ the gleaming judge, his high-throned Father's
 glory, descends with a blazing cloud.⁵⁸

Juvenius distinguishes between the poem and the poet, and Christ is the one who will provide salvation because of the work. His preface, therefore, offers the closest parallel for how Prudentius uses the bodily resurrection. But rather than express confidence in an eternal poem that will save him, Prudentius offers his personal salvation as a figure for the survival and reception of his work. Damasus momentarily brought his own resurrection into view in his own epitaph, which he ends with confidence that Christ will make him rise again: 'post cineres Damasum faciet quia surgere credo' ('After the ashes, I believe, he will make Damasus rise again') (12.6).⁵⁹ Although the author's belief and resurrection are now clearly in focus, the verses do not seem to be charged metapoetically. Instead, they suggest how another poet, one more interested in how language and literature work, might turn the resurrection into a figure for poetic immortality.

Unlike Horace and Ovid, Prudentius did not expect that this survival would be direct or immediate. Although he recognised like Ausonius the fallenness and frailty of his poetic *membra*, he still hoped to survive. Unlike his Christian predecessors, Prudentius directly linked his poetic immortality to his expectation of a bodily resurrection. The poetic immortality that Prudentius expects comes in the form of a resurrection dependent upon Christ's intervention and not brought about by the poet's input or effort alone. The reader (Christ) determines whether Prudentius survives, and by invoking him Prudentius sublimates every direct expression of authorial self-sufficiency into a statement of faith and hope for the future. In this way, he perfectly turns his religious beliefs into a poetry whose devotion is inseparable from its literary and linguistic expression.

Cathemerinon 10: Hymnus circa exequias defuncti

In *Cathemerinon* 10, Prudentius reflects at length on the meaning of Christian burial practices and on his hope in the resurrection.⁶⁰ In doing so, he addresses God as the creator of spirit and flesh, and he employs a set of images and allusions that link texts and bodies. My strong claim in this section is that Prudentius' language and imagery present this specific poem as a body to be restored whole and complete after the author's death, that is after the poem is released into the world. In this case, the poetic meaning of the text mirrors Prudentius' literal and theological teaching on the resurrection.⁶¹ A more cautious view would be that Prudentius colours his portrayal of a Christian funeral with images and metaphors that link soul and body with authors and texts. Even this more cautious position supports my broader argument, that Prudentius saw a connection between his afterlife and his eventual reception. The mysteries involved in the resurrection (how exactly does the body come back together?) produce some difficulty in thinking through such connections, but those complications

⁵⁸ *Euang.* praef. 15–24 (CSEL 24: 2); trans. McGill 2016: 34. On the preface of Juvenius, see McGill 2016: 5–11; Pollmann 2013: 317–19; Green 2006: 15–23; Vélez Latorre 2001; Witke 1971: 199–202.

⁵⁹ On this epigram, see Trout 2015: 105–6.

⁶⁰ For a good overview of the entire poem, see O'Daly 2012: 291–319. For a detailed commentary, see Lardelli 2015. For a new translation and notes, see Richardson 2016.

⁶¹ For what I am calling the 'poetic meaning', compare such statements as 'poetice apertus est sensus' by Serv., *Ad Aen.* 6.893.

are no reason to ignore the resurrection as a metaphor for literary survival. I will take all of *Cath.* 10 into consideration but focus on the crucial passages from the beginning and end of the poem.

This poem on a funeral procession begins with an invocation of God as the one who joins elements together (1–4):

Deus, ignee fons animarum,
duo qui socians elementa,
uiuum simul ac moribundum,
hominem, pater, effigiasti.

God, fiery source of souls,
you who join two elements,
a live one and also a dying one,
you, father, fashioned humans.

The first stanza subtly introduces three themes that run through the entire poem: (artistic) creation, the (textual) body, and the living soul as a hermeneutic figure. The author as a father and God as a craftsman (*pater, effigiasti*) are both recurrent images in the literary tradition beginning with Plato.⁶² As for Prudentius' two elements, the word *elementa* can suggest a rudimentary first principle or an atom, and also a letter of the alphabet; most famously, Lucretius linked his own poetics to the atomism of *De rerum natura*.⁶³ In a Christian context, the living and moribund *elementa* recall the Apostle Paul's pronouncement that 'the letter kills, but the spirit gives life' ('Littera enim occidit, Spiritus autem uiuificat', 2 Cor. 3:6). Early Christian exegetes explained corporeal interpretations as directed to the literal meaning of a text, whereas spiritual interpretations revealed the deeper, figurative meaning of the scriptures;⁶⁴ this may be why spirit and flesh (*spiritus et caro*) appear as the subject in *Cath.* 10.8. Also widespread was the idea of flawed language as 'dead' (*sermo mortuus*).⁶⁵ Although this language of death, and 2 Cor. 3:6 in particular, might seem like infertile ground for poetry, Christian teachers never dispensed entirely with the literal meaning of the text, in part because the materiality of Christ's body could be read as offering hope for the renewal of everything moribund.

The third and fourth stanzas appear in two different versions in the manuscripts. In both versions, the poet explains that all things (body and soul) are divided in death, which comes to all. The oldest manuscript (A), the Puteanus, and some others present the two stanzas as beginning and ending 'Resoluta ... resorbens'; but a number of the Carolingian manuscripts present stanzas that begin and end 'Rescissa ... retexi'. A minority of scholars have read the latter lines as the author's own revision of his text.⁶⁶ Emilio Pianezzola argued forcefully for the reading of MS A, by showing that the text was consonant with Prudentius' theology elsewhere; he surmised that the later version was

⁶² See especially *Phdr.* 275e and *Ti.* 28a.

⁶³ See Snyder 1980: 31–51.

⁶⁴ See, for example, August., *De spiritu et littera* (CSEL 60); *Conf.* 6.4.6 (O'Donnell 1992); *Gen. ad litt.* 12.6 (CSEL 28: 386–7).

⁶⁵ See Tert., *Adu. Prax.* 27 (CSEL 47: 282); Ambr., *In Lucam* 5.55 (CCSL 14: 154); Jerome, *In Esaiam* 1.2.16 (CCSL 73: 37).

⁶⁶ On the controversy surrounding this passage, see Bastiaensen 1993: 104–6. In summary, Winstedt 1903 developed the idea of authorial revision; Jachmann 1941 led the charge against reading manuscript variants as authorial revisions; and, since the publication of Cunningham's imperfect and very conservative edition (1966), Christian Gnilka (2000–3) has championed the search for interpolations in Prudentius' manuscript tradition. For a balanced assessment of possible authorial revisions in the comparable tradition of Ausonius, see Green 1999: xv–xxii; Dolveck 2015: 151–78.

an awkward attempt to make the description of the soul's fate accord with the orthodoxies of a later period.⁶⁷ But who might have made that change or when is no clearer than it was from Antonio Salvatore's speculative description of Prudentius' internal development.⁶⁸ No one, so far as I can tell, has taken the poetics of either version into account. One reason that the later version (not in MS A) deserves consideration is that the poetic language is completely appropriate (*Cath.* 10.13b–16b):

Quia cuncta creata necesse est
labefacta senescere tandem,
compactaque dissociari,
et dissona texta retexi.

Because all created things
must be shaken and grow old at last,
and those joined together be disjoined,
and dissonant weavings be unbound.

Line 16b suggests a resemblance between humans (composed of body and soul) and written texts. *Dissonus* was used by Optatian and Paulinus of Nola in passages important for the poetics of each author, where a dissonant text yields final harmony.⁶⁹ As for *texta*, the link between weaving and verbal composition was constant in the ancient world, and a reference to written texts is easily understood.⁷⁰ As for *retexi*, although its primary meaning is clear from the context, the prefix allows another meaning to be heard, namely 'to weave again' or 'recount'; in that case, the relation between the composition and re-composition of texts is once again isomorphic. If we accept that this stanza was written by Prudentius, then the passage supports a metapoetic reading of the entire poem.

In the following stanzas, Prudentius specifies that the individual's limbs either rise again or are pulled down depending on the virtue and purity of the mind: 'perdita membra resurgant' (10.20) or 'sequitur sua membra deorsum' (10.28). The word *membra* is emphatically repeated at the same point in stanzas 5 and 7 (it is the only word repeated in those stanzas). The poet goes on to describe the body of the blessed being raised up in the traditional language of immortality: 'pariterque reportat ad astra' (10.32). Given what we have already seen in *Cath.* 3, these descriptions sustain a poetic interpretation of the body.

The following stanza describes the body's mind and sense with hermeneutic terminology. While we currently see the body as empty and without intention ('corpus / uacuum sine mente', 10.33–4), it will soon 'seek again the companionship of its deep sense' ('alti / repetat collegia sensus', 10.35–6). The lines can be read of a text and its meaning. Servius, for example, often referred to the sense of a passage; in his note on *Aen.* 4.58, he explains that the deeper meaning (*altior sensus*) of Dido's sacrifice refers to marriage.⁷¹ Prudentius' *alti* is also more understandable if we see this *sensus* as referencing an alternate, deep meaning for the body as text.⁷² Such 'deep meanings'

⁶⁷ Pianezzola 1965.

⁶⁸ Salvatore 1958.

⁶⁹ Optatianus Porfyrius, *Carm.* 6.7, 6.i and 16.1 (Polaria 1973); Paulinus, *Natalicia* 9.73 (Dolveck 2015 = CCSL 21: 385) = *Carm.* 27 (Hartel 1999 = CSEL 30: 266), *Natalicia* 9.99 (CCSL 21: 385) = 27.99 (CSEL 30: 167) and *Natalicia* 13.275 (CCSL 21: 473) = *Carm.* 21.275 (CSEL 30: 167). On Paulinus of Nola and harmony, see Fontaine 1973 and Roberts 1989: 144–7.

⁷⁰ On weaving and writing in antiquity, see Scheidegger Lämmle 2015 and Scheid and Svenbro 1996.

⁷¹ For earlier such uses of the word, see *OLD* s.v. *sensus* 9.d.

⁷² O'Daly 2012: 295 translates *alti* as predicative, 'the mind on high', which works as the literal meaning of this phrase.

were often sought by contemporary exegetes.⁷³ As for *mens*, Tiberius Claudius Donatus says that if you pay attention to the poems of Virgil and understand their meaning (*mens*), you will find in him a great rhetor.⁷⁴ Through such uses of *sensus* and *mens*, we see that in Prudentius the meaning of the text is to be restored to its dead letter in just the same way that body and mind are to be reunited in the resurrection.

After a few stanzas on the nearness of the resurrection and the care lavished on tombs, Prudentius reflects on monuments and what they contain. He says that we entrust material (*res*) to tombs only because the body will be renewed (*Cath.* 10.53–6):

Quidnam sibi saxa cauata,
quid pulchra uolunt monumenta,
nisi quod res creditur⁷⁵ illis
non mortua sed data somno?

What is the aim of the hollowed stones,
what do the pretty monuments want,
except that a substance is entrusted to them,
not dead but only asleep?

These lines conceal a dense semiotic play on the death and life of words. Prudentius puns on the two meanings of *monumenta*, as tombs and other built memorials or written documents and the literary record.⁷⁶ Tombs and books are both pretty (*pulchra*) on the outside and conceal their contents within. The simple description of material entrusted to tombs ('res creditur illis') conceals a reference to the semiotic distinction between *res* and *signa*. Most relevant is Augustine's division of knowable objects into precisely these two groups.⁷⁷ Augustine goes on to explain that things (*res*) are communicated through signs (*signa*) and that signs are always also things in themselves. In Prudentius, the tombs are the signs, with material (*res*) entrusted to them. Going even further, a bilingual pun may be relevant, since *saxa* and *monumenta* could both translate the Greek σῆμα.⁷⁸ As is well known, *sēma* means both 'sign' and 'tomb', and it was normally translated into Latin as *signum* when used in reference to semiotics.⁷⁹ On this poetic interpretation, Prudentius entrusts his material (*res*) to poetic tombs (*saxa / monumenta* ≈ *sēmeia / signa*) because he hopes for a resurrection; in other words, he writes (encodes meaning in signs) in hopes of being read. He suggests that this body of language is not dead but only asleep until it can be restored by a reader who reunites the text with its meaning in the same way that Christ reunites mind and body.

⁷³ See Pelttari 2014: 12–44, with, for example, Serv., *Ad Aen.* 6.532, 'alii altius intellegunt'; Ambr., *Noe* 11.38, 'altior sensus' (CSEL 32.1: 436); August., *Doctr. christ.* 2.13.47, 'sensus aliquem altioem' (CSEL 80: 47).

⁷⁴ *Interpretationes Vergilianae, proem. ad Aen.* 1 (Georgii 1905–6: 1.4 ll. 24–6). On this use of *mens*, see TLL s.v. 8.0.725.23–43 (Hofmann); similar in Greek were δῖάνοια and νοῦς.

⁷⁵ O'Daly 2012: 308 noted the link between line 55 and *creditum* in Hor., *Carm.* 1.24.11, on which see the following paragraph.

⁷⁶ See OLD s.v. *monumentum*.

⁷⁷ *Doctr. christ.* 1.2.4 (CSEL 80: 9), 'omnis doctrina uel rerum est uel signorum' ('every teaching concerns either objects or signs'). On Augustine's semiotics, see Markus 1996. Prudentius could have learned about Augustine's work during his travels in Italy. It seems that the first books of *De doctrina Christiana* were written in the late 390s, and the distinction between 'use' (*uti*) and 'enjoyment' (*fruenti*) at *Ham.* 330–1 may recall the same distinction from *Doctr. christ.* 1.3.7 (CSEL 80: 9–10).

⁷⁸ For example, Aratus' σῆμα was translated by *monumentum* at *Aratea* 197 (Soubiran 1981); for *saxum* used of tombs, see OLD s.v. *saxum* 3.f.

⁷⁹ On the etymology and early use of σῆμα, see Nagy 1990: 202–22.

In the next stanza, Prudentius rewrites and revives Horace. He does so while explaining that pious Christians are engaged (*studet*) in caring for the body because they believe that everything will come alive (*Cath.* 10.57–60):

Hoc prouida christicolarum
 pietas studet utpote credens
 fore protinus omnia uiua
 quae nunc *gelidus sopor urget*.

The provident piety of Christians
 studies this since they believe
 that all things will soon be alive
 which now *a cold sleep weighs down*.

Prudentius reverses a line from Horace's consolatory *Carm.* 1.24 in a way that dramatises his (implicit) belief that readers ultimately control the afterlife of the poem and that everything will come alive. Horace had addressed Virgil and counselled him not to grieve excessively for one Quintilius, for these plaints are in vain and a perpetual sleep lies on him (*Carm.* 1.24.5–6): 'ergo Quintilium perpetuus sopor / urget'. Indeed, the gods had not entrusted Quintilius to them as a lasting possession (*Carm.* 1.24.11–12): 'tu frustra pius, heu, non ita creditum / poscis Quintilium deos'. For Prudentius, a temporary (*nunc*) sleep replaces a perpetual (*perpetuus*) night in a kind of *Kontrastimitation*; even more than a contrast, Prudentius brings a form of renewal to the text of Horace.⁸⁰ By transforming Horace's exact words, Prudentius creates a new and (he thinks) even more appropriate meaning for them.

The following stanzas of *Cath.* 10 concern care for the dead and the story of Tobit as an example of piety. In lines 89–100, three allusions to Virgil address the corruption of the physical body and the blessedness of the resurrection. In their own small way, they support my understanding that literary reception was used by Prudentius as a trope for the resurrection (and vice versa). In an allusion to Apollo's address to Ascanius in *Aen.* 9.641, Prudentius notes that the path to the stars is travelled in grief: 'et ad astra doloribus itur' (92). Likewise, he probably alludes to *Aen.* 6.649 with the phrase 'melioribus annis' in line 94,⁸¹ and in line 97, Prudentius says that soon there will be restoration for the faces now dark with decay ('pallida tabo'), an allusion to *Aen.* 8.196. Such borrowing is subtle, and it offers only circumstantial corroboration for my interpretation of *Cath.* 10.

After several stanzas on the folly of death and the coming end of decay and disease, Prudentius addresses the earth (*terra*) in an apostrophe and declares his intention to entrust these human limbs to the ground (*Cath.* 10.127–8): 'hominis tibi membra sequestro, / generosa et fragmina credo' ('I commit the man's members to you, and I entrust his noble fragments'). Like *membra*, the word *fragmina* was used in *Perist.* 11 in reference to the fragments of Hippolytus' body.⁸² If the limbs and fragments are understood of the poetry, then the author believes both that his body will be redeemed and that his text will be restored. Just as the exact mechanics of the resurrection are a mystery, the restoration of the text might take various forms; these could include preservation in a de luxe codex, transcription into a new book, imitation in subsequent authors and comprehension by a reader of the author's original intended meaning.

⁸⁰ See Pucci 1991: 686.

⁸¹ The same phrase appears without apparent relevance in *Ov., Tr.* 4.10.93 and Damasus, *Carm.* 11.8 (Trout 2015).

⁸² See above Section II.

Fragmentation, that is, can be found on a variety of levels; and scribes, correctors and readers (they are often not distinct) are involved in effecting the text's integration as they restore and recuperate it in a variety of ways.

The following stanzas continue to support a metapoetic reading of the body, with reference to its maker and to its mystery and figure. The manuscripts offer two versions of line 130, which credits God as the creator of the soul:

Animae fuit haec domus olim	129
cui nobilis ex patre fons est	130a (A)
factoris ab ore creatae	130b (TES)

This was once the home of the soul	129
whose noble source is from the father	130a (A)
created from the maker's mouth	130b (TES)

This is one of the passages for which it has been suggested that MS A offers Prudentius' first version, and the other branches of the tradition (represented by TES) present a version revised by the author.⁸³ Without trying to resolve that question, I would point out a similarity with lines 9–16: the variant line in TES introduces language more directly applicable to texts. The word *factor* is even more relevant to artistic creation than *pater*; *ab ore* suggests speech; and *creatae* replaces the reference to a source with a direct reference to the act of creation. The idea of God as an author is developed in the following stanzas (*Cath.* 10.133–40).⁸⁴

Tu depositum tege corpus,
non inmemor ille requiret
sua munera fitor et auctor
propriique enigmata uultus.
Veniant modo tempora iusta
cum spem deus inpleat omnem,
reddas patefacta necesse est
qualem tibi trado figuram.

Cover the entrusted body;
that maker and author, not unmindful,
will seek out his own works
and the mystery of his own face.
Just let the right time come
when God fulfils every hope,
you will be opened and have to return
the kind of figure I entrust to you.

The image of the body as a deposit (*depositum*) recalls Ausonius' comparison of a poem to the loan of a greedy money-lender;⁸⁵ the similarity is striking because Ausonius went on to explain that the recipient of his poem could either bring it back to life like Aesculapius or

⁸³ See Winstedt 1903: 205; Cunningham 1966: 53.

⁸⁴ Since Prudentius is fond of repetition, such redundancies are not in themselves grounds for emendation. On Prudentius' repetitions, see Rivero García 1996: 218–20.

⁸⁵ In his epistolary preface to the *Griphus ternarii numeri* addressed to Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, Ausonius explained that he was sending the poem like a greedy money-lender who preferred to loan out rather than suppress his inferior coin.

consign it to the flames like Plato.⁸⁶ The difference for Prudentius is that he expresses complete confidence in the survival and resurrection of his body. As here in line 135, Prudentius also described his own work as a *munus* in *De opusculis suis* 29.⁸⁷ Furthermore, by calling God an author in line 135, he draws out the comparison that has been implicit since the first stanza.⁸⁸ Although such a comparison could have come from scripture (e.g. Isa. 64:8 or Heb. 12:2), there are also poetic associations. At the beginning of his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid linked poetry and creation;⁸⁹ in the 430s C.E. (probably), Macrobius compared Virgil to the demiurge (*opifex deus*, *Sat.* 5.1.18–2.1). However, the word *factor* stands out in this context because of its negative connotations. It was often used of deceitful feigning, and it recalls the common slander of poetry as lies. For example, when Ascanius rallies the troops in the *Aeneid*, he uses the word *factor* to call Odysseus a liar ('fandi factor Ulixes', *Aen.* 9.602); Cephalus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* describes himself as a *factor* after deceiving Procris (*Met.* 7.741); and in his commentary ad loc. Servius glosses 'fandi factor Ulixes' as meaning either 'deceitful' or 'crafty with words' ('aut fallax, aut λογοδαίδαλος, id est qui dolum celat sermonis ornatu'). It is true that the word *factor* was used elsewhere of the Christian creator God and broadly of craftsmen and sculptors, but it should not be domesticated here; nor is there reason to think that Prudentius offers anything but a positive view of God as author and creator. Rather than describe God in a negative way or loosely, Prudentius acknowledges the fact that poets habitually create feigned and fictional scenes. This point deserves special emphasis because of the loud denunciations of fiction from some of Prudentius' contemporaries.

In the following lines, the body is described in rhetorical terms, as an enigma and then as a figure. In line 136, Prudentius adapts Gen. 1:27, where God created man in his own image ('ad imaginem suam'). Just as the creator God looks for the image that he has concealed in humanity, the author will require the mysteries (*enigmata*) concealed within the text: an *aenigma* was a kind of allegory characterised by a hidden secondary meaning; it was a category regularly invoked by interpreters of the Christian scriptures and earlier allegorists as well as by rhetoricians and grammarians.⁹⁰ Similar imagery recurs when Prudentius says that the earth must return the figure entrusted to it (140). Like the body that is a deposit, the 'figure' entrusted to 'you' stands for the poetic language entrusted to the reader. In this case, the reader's role in understanding a figure of speech is obvious. The cumulative effect of so many words that are appropriate both to texts and to bodies is striking and should not be construed as mere coincidence.

The following stanzas explain the resurrection as a complete renewal of the entire body (141–8). *Cath.* 10 concludes with several stanzas on the place of the soul as it awaits reunification with the body (149–68). In particular, Prudentius explains that the faithful soul will rest in paradise (161–4) and prays that his exiled and wandering soul will find the home that it left (165–8).⁹¹ However, that homecoming is delayed beyond the end of the poem, and the final stanza returns to the monument and its commemoration (169–72).

⁸⁶ *Griphus*, *Ausonius Symmacho*, 'Quem tu aut ut Aesculapius redintegrabis ad uitam aut ut Plato iuuante Vulcano liberabis infamia, si peruenire non debet ad famam' (Green 1999). Asclepius raised Hippolytus from the dead, but Plato burned his poetry after hearing Socrates (Diog. Laert. 3.5).

⁸⁷ See below, Section V.

⁸⁸ Prudentius also refers to God as an *auctor* at *Apoth.* 289, *Ham.* 299, *Psych.* 623, *Sym.* 2.213, *Perist.* 5.363 and 13.9.

⁸⁹ See Wheeler 1995. Regarding Ovid's influence on Prudentius' contemporaries Ausonius and Paulinus, see Fielding 2017: 22–51.

⁹⁰ See Donatus, *Ars maior* 3.6 (Holtz 1981: 672); Struck 2004: 142–61; and *TLL* s.v. *aenigma* I = 1.0.986.29–62 (von Mess). Prudentius spoke elsewhere of Christ being written under the law *per enigmata* (*Apoth.* 331); and he used the word in a figurative and novel sense at *Perist.* 2.118, where 'argenteorum enigmatum' refers to the emperor's image on silver coins.

⁹¹ On the idea of interpretation as a homecoming, see Eden 1997.

Since the last stanza centres on a grave, we finally have to consider the title of the poem, *Hymnus circa exequias defuncti*.⁹² Who has died? The emotional apostrophe to the earth in lines 125–40 and the address to Christ in lines 149–68 suggest that the poet writes for someone close, despite the fact that this poem does not exhibit the sense of loss normal in a consolation, including those written by Ambrose and Paulinus. The singular *hominis* in line 127 and similar references in the singular throughout the poem could, of course, indicate that the poem is about humanity in general. But if the poem is like a body and if Prudentius writes in hope of its redemption and renewal, then we might conclude that the author commemorates himself and that he is the one to be cherished in these funeral rites; he waits for his intention (*mens* in line 166) and spirit to be reunited with the text (the body). To be sure, the title is not in any way required either to confirm this interpretation of *Cath.* 10 or to support my overall argument about the connection between reading and resurrection. While this idea can only be speculative, it does explain the singular *defuncti*. There is no reference to an individual object in any of the other titles transmitted for the *Cathemerinon* poems, and the generalising plural could have been used here as it is for *Cath.* 7 (*Hymnus ieiunantium*).

The final stanza places the poet and reader at the grave, and this is a site of commemoration and hope (*Cath.* 10.169–72):

Nos tecta fouebimus ossa
uiolis et fronde frequenti
titulumque et *frigida saxa*
liquido spargemus *odore*.

We will cherish the covered bones
with violets and thick leaves
and sprinkle the inscription and the cold
stones with liquid scent.

In these lines, the covered body is cherished along with the physical tomb and its inscription; in the same way that these remains are honoured, Prudentius hopes that his physical text will be cherished and brought back to life as it is read.⁹³ More specifically, the two first-person plural verbs allow the reader to share in the activities described; in this way, the reader's expected involvement again creates a sense of closure. Indeed, from the other side of this equation, we know that Prudentius and his contemporaries conspicuously turned relics and holy bodies into aesthetic objects.⁹⁴

Two allusions in the final stanza point to the poetic meaning of the lines. The phrase 'liquido ... odore' recalls the ambrosia that Virgil has Cyrene pour over Aristaeus when he is being prepared to meet Proteus: 'liquidum ambrosiae diffundit odorem' (*G.* 4.415).⁹⁵ Since Aristaeus seeks a way to restore his bees to life and since Proteus will go on to tell him the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, the context is relevant for *Cath.* 10; furthermore, Prudentius alludes to the Aristaeus episode at the end of the

⁹² A minority of the manuscripts give *defunctorum* in the plural, but that variant should be ignored as an easy simplification and generalisation of *defuncti*. Of course, titles are very unstable textual elements, and there is no guarantee that this one goes all the way back to Prudentius. On ancient titles, see Schröder 1999.

⁹³ For *fouere* of the arts and literature see, for example, Quint., *Decl.* 260.31 (Williams 1986), 'qui studia fouistis' and Nemesianus, *Ecl.* 1.41–2, 'nostros ... modos ... benigno pectore fouisti'.

⁹⁴ See Miller 2000; 2009.

⁹⁵ 'Liquidis ... odoribus' appears in Hor., *Carm.* 1.5.2, but the context is not relevant. I do not know of any other collocation of these two words in Latin poetry. To be sure, Lardelli does not think that either passage is relevant to Prudentius (2015: 292).

Apotheosis, another passage where he expresses confidence in the resurrection.⁹⁶ We could say that the ambrosial liquid of Virgilian poetry preserves Prudentius' textual body.

The phrase *frigida saxa* seems to allude to Propertius 4.7; and, even without that precise echo, there are good reasons to think that Propertius' poem is relevant as a whole for *Cath.* 10.⁹⁷ Prop. 4.7 begins, 'Sunt aliquid manes', a reference to *Il.* 23.103–4 and to further speculation on the fate of the body and soul after death.⁹⁸ Unlike Homer and Propertius, Prudentius had emphatically addressed his God as the one who brings body and soul together ('duo qui socios elementa'). This assurance of a lasting link between body and soul underlies the Christian author's hope that the poem can be revived even after its end. As one might expect, Prop. 4.7 is on a different trajectory. In that poem, Cynthia appears to the poet from Elysium in a dream; she criticises his lack of devotion (13–16); swears on the irreversible song of the fates that she has been faithful (51–3); asks the poet to burn whatever verses he made in her name (77–8); writes her own epitaph (83–6); says that her bones will lie with the poet's (93–4); and fades away as he tries to embrace her (95–6). Although only two brief verbal parallels connect the poems, they suggest that Prudentius meant to recall Propertius' whole poem as he expressed his faith in the Christian afterlife. At *Carm.* 4.7.66, Cynthia mentions that Andromede's hands did not deserve the cold stone ('frigida saxa') they received. Besides *Cath.* 10.171, I have found this exact phrase elsewhere in Latin poetry only at Prop. 1.20.13, which describes the harsh locales visited by Gallus and does not seem relevant here. Whereas Cynthia looks forward only to her bones being joined in death with those of the poet (*Carm.* 4.7.94 'mixtis ossibus ossa teram') and whereas Propertius is accused of neglecting her tomb, Prudentius cherishes his covered bones. This is indeed a *Kontrastimitation* because Prudentius is demonstrating his difference from Propertius. Furthermore, the word *titulus* in line 171 recalls the epitaph that Cynthia offers for herself in lines 85–6, whether or not it also alludes to the title of *Cathemerinon* 10.

The other likely allusion to Propertius 4.7 is even more significant. In resignation at her irreversible death, Cynthia had sworn that she kept the poet's faith (*Carm.* 4.7.50–2):

iuro ego Fatorum nulli *reuolubile carmen*,
tergeminusque canis sic mihi molle sonet,
me seruasse fidem.

I swear by the song of the fates, which no one can unbind,
– and may the triple dog sound soft for me –
that I kept your trust.

Cynthia refers with *carmen* to the song of the Fates and not to Propertius' poetry, but Prudentius seems to have made that connection. He echoes the phrase *reuolubile carmen* in his invocation of a God who calls back fragmented bodies (*Cath.* 10.149–50):

Sed dum *resolubile corpus*
reuocas, deus, atque reformas ...

While *reuolubilis* is not common, *resolubilis* does not appear in poetry before Prudentius, and the word appears here in a metrical position analogous to that in Propertius. Because

⁹⁶ *Apoth.* 1062–3, 'Nosco meum in Christo corpus consurgere. *Quid me / desperare iubes?*' recalls Aristaeus' question from *G.* 4.325, '*Quid me caelum sperare iubebas?*'

⁹⁷ From a parallel in *Apotheosis*, we know with some certainty that Prudentius had read at least parts of Propertius: *Apoth.* 195–6, 'Quaeue superstitio tam sordida, quae caniformem / latrantemque throno caeli praeponat Anubem?' recalls Prop. 3.11.41, 'ausa Ioui nostro latrantem opponere Anubim'. For some other suggestive parallels, see Shackleton Bailey 1952: 321–2.

⁹⁸ See Dué 2001.

corpus replaces the metrically equivalent *carmen*, the link between body and poem is inscribed just below the surface of the text. Whereas Propertius leaves the reader with a plaintive cry and a sense of finality as Cynthia fades — either a vision or a waking dream — Prudentius leaves with steady hope that his reader will fulfil his devotion and call the body of his poetry back again. Prudentius is hopeful because he believes that his addressee (God) will renew his body; God, both as creator and as reader, is responsible for renewal as writing and for renewal as reading. These Propertian intertexts only enrich the poetic meaning that exists in dialogue with the theological meaning of *Cath.* 10.

Throughout this poem Prudentius uses the resurrection and the care of the dead to explore the various ways in which the text is renewed through reading; although acknowledging the inevitability of death, the author hopes to live again. In this way, he overcomes Plato's fear that writing was like a child torn from its father.⁹⁹ In place of such anxiety, Prudentius finds hope that he will live again through his reader. This formulation may strike modern readers as unlikely, accustomed as we now are to associate the birth of the reader with the death of the author. But this is the reason that Prudentius was able to create a tradition of Christian poetry, because he succeeded in turning his readers into faithful collaborators in his own resurrection. *Cath.* 10 shows that Prudentius' success should not be separated from the poetic figures that he creates and in which his literary readers are complicit.

Death and Renewal in the Other Cathemerinon Poems

Several of the other *Cathemerinon* poems confirm that the author's death at the end of the poem figuratively prepares the way for the reader to enact his resurrection. In the last line of *Cath.* 4, Prudentius declares that he will bear Christ's cross (4.102): 'constanterque tuam crucem feremus'. He recalls Christ teaching his disciples to take up their cross and Christ's promise of life for anyone who would die.¹⁰⁰ Metapoetics are in view two stanzas before;¹⁰¹ therefore, when the author speaks of laying down his life, we can understand that the promise of poetic immortality is implicit. In a similar way, *Cath.* 11 ends with a reference to death and resurrection. At the end of times, Prudentius says, Judea will finally recognise the one who died and quickly returned (*Cath.* 11.115–6): 'quem ... mors hausit et mox reddidit'. Because Christ is the subject here, Prudentius makes explicit the return that is only implied elsewhere. Lastly, *Cath.* 12 ends with eternal life. The final two stanzas offer a triumphal list of all those who are urged to rejoice and praise Christ now. These include the living, the weak and the dead, because death shall be no more (*Cath.* 12.208): 'iam nemo posthac mortuus'. The reference to death is gratuitous here, except that *mortuus* effects a sense of closure in the expectation of new life beyond the end of the poem.

Prudentius varies the theme in the last stanza of *Cath.* 6 (*Hymnus ante somnum*); in that poem, death is replaced with sleep, an image for the dreams of poetry (149–52):

⁹⁹ *Phdr.* 275e.

¹⁰⁰ Matt. 16:24–5: 'Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"' (RSV). Mark 8:34–5 and Luke 9:23–4 are very similar. O'Daly 2012: 141 reads 'tuam crucem' as a reference to Simon of Cyrene, but an allusion to Jesus' teaching is more appropriate to mark the poet's obedience.

¹⁰¹ *Cath.* 4.94–6, 'Nil est dulcius ac magis saporum, / nil quod plus hominem iuuare possit / quam uatis pia praecinentis orsa'. The phrase 'uatis ... praecinentis' references the Old Testament prophets Daniel and Habakkuk, but the songs of poets are surely also relevant. The pleasure (*iuuare*) of poetry is significant (cf. *Cath.* 3.12; *De opusculis suis* 34; Hor., *Ars P.* 377), but even more important is the allusion to Lucr. 2.7 ('sed nil dulcius est'), a famous and programmatic passage in which Lucretius describes the pleasure of watching shipwrecked mortals from the heights of intellectual security.

Corpus licet fatiscens
iaceat recline paulum,
Christum tamen sub ipso
meditabimur sopore.

Though this drooping body
lie down a while, still
we will meditate on Christ
in our very sleep.

Although the speaker's waking is not mentioned, the final word *sopore* implies that there is a moment beyond the end at which the text will come awake and be made alive through the reader. Indeed, Christ's direct presence is invoked in the previous stanza.¹⁰² Therefore, Prudentius uses the theme of sleep, like death, to evoke a sense of presence. Rather than a 'negative capability', Prudentius creates a positive expectation that meaning will come through the dreams of poetry. Unlike a Romantic genius like John Keats ('Fled is that music: – Do I wake or sleep?') or a ludic poet like Ausonius (who equated waking with the end of *Cupido cruciatus*), the dreams and fictions of Prudentius create an effect of presence. Because the dreams of poetry can never wake (or interpret) themselves, the poet's hope for life comes through the mercy of his divine addressee. Put differently, when Prudentius turns poetry into meditation, he creates fictional scenes that the reader can inhabit and in which the author can live again.

IV CHRISTIAN POETRY AND THE LIMITS OF FICTION

This article has brought into focus a number of important topics including Prudentius' openness to interpretation and the reader's involvement in closure. The central idea is that Prudentius used the resurrection to express his hope for meaningful communication beyond the death of the author. While he fully acknowledged the failings and gaps that produce confusion, Prudentius also turned his religious and ideological commitment into an expression of confidence that his words and his meanings might live beyond the separation always involved in literary publication. His belief, consonant with his religious belief, is that he will live beyond the death so often associated with the end of writing. In recent decades, analogous ideas about belief, reception and communication have been developed in the secular sphere. In *Redeeming the Text*, Charles Martindale suggested the possibility of reading as a kind of relationship:

If ... reading can be construed as (potentially) dialogic ... then, perhaps, the word is not frozen, not dead, but capable of being redeemed and of redeeming, whenever a reader, accepting her own historicity, makes an act of trust, and commits herself to a text in all its alterity, takes, in other words, the risks — and they would be risks — of being read, of relationship.¹⁰³

Seamus Heaney sounded a similar note in 'Crediting poetry'. He said that poetry's power is, 'the power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values, that our very solitudes and distresses are creditable, in so far as they, too, are an earnest of our veritable human being'.¹⁰⁴ In other words, poetry is a

¹⁰² *Cath.* 6.145–6, 'discede, Christus hic est. / Hic Christus est, liquesce'. In the preceding lines, the poet banishes the serpent and his portents, but not all dreams. Therefore, one scholar's recent conclusions about this poem do not hold; it is not the case that 'all fictional activity is demonized by Prudentius' (Cullhed 2015: 543).

¹⁰³ Martindale 1993: 106.

¹⁰⁴ Heaney 1998: 430.

constructive art that depends on a belief oriented to the future, a belief that our words will be read and that we as humans are capable of productive communication. Likewise, Julia Kristeva has highlighted the centrality of belief in the creativity of language, with the simple idea that, 'l'être parlant est un être croyant'.¹⁰⁵ If we approach Prudentius as a poet of belief, then he deserves credit for a poetry that embodies the paradoxes and mysteries of the veritable human word. Indeed, the poet's calls to belief and his own hope in a future resurrection turn out to be central elements in his very human writing of successful and lasting poetry.

Another important idea relates to the status of poetry in Late Antiquity, which was often censured for its fictions. Paulinus famously singled out the Muses for criticism;¹⁰⁶ Augustine and other Christians and Platonists criticised fiction as lies.¹⁰⁷ Because of such disapproval, many scholars have pointed to a decline for poetry around the fourth century. Notable recent examples include Mastrangelo's 'The decline of poetry in the fourth-century West' and Cullhed's *The Shadow of Creusa: Negotiating Fictionality in Late Antique Latin Literature*.¹⁰⁸ The work of Prudentius offers a counter narrative in which poetry is seen to serve ideological ends precisely because it is a human and fictional product. Indeed, Augustine in *Soliloquia* and Macrobius in the preface to his commentary on the *Dream of Scipio* already leave considerable room for the positive valuation of fictional writing.¹⁰⁹ As for Prudentius, he writes himself into his devotional and hymnic poetry as a literary persona. He stages for this persona an authorial drama in which his ideal audience holds out the hope of patronage and salvation. And he describes the reception of his poetic text through its figuration as a body to be resurrected whole and complete as a result of the intervention of his reader and God. In this regard, Prudentius' claims for poetic immortality reveal that the reader's participation is essential to enliven his dreams. Their participation is essential insofar as the survival predicted in his poetry is literary. Because his readers are complicit in the authorial drama that grants the author the desired resurrection, Prudentius and his readers are creating together a fictional world.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the poetry of Prudentius functions in most of the same ways as did the various classical models that he invokes, whether elegiac, lyric, didactic, satiric or epic. Because he writes as a character in the text, Prudentius invites a literary reception from those of every confession and none. Although he declares that he is writing poetry as an act of devotion and although he may desire for his readers to become as devout as he surely was, Prudentius' desire for literary immortality reveals that his pronouncements are inseparable from the literary framework in and through which they are devised.

The fact that Prudentius rejected pagan practices does not invalidate our point about his adoption of fictional or literary devices. We have already seen that Prudentius did not reject pagan statuary as long as it was symbolically washed and set apart from any cult associations.¹¹¹ Likewise, Prudentius does not reject the poets as such;¹¹² what he did

¹⁰⁵ Kristeva 2007: 23. Her short book (*Cet incroyable besoin de croire*) is a psychoanalyst's meditation on Augustine's interpretation of Psalm 115:1, 'Credidi propter quod locutus sum' ('I believed and that is why I spoke').

¹⁰⁶ Paulinus, *Ultimarum prima* 115 (Dolveck 2015 = CCL 21: 534) = 10.115 (Hartel 1999 = CSEL 30: 29).

¹⁰⁷ August., *Serm.* 105.7.10 (*PL* 38: 622–3), cited with discussion of the wider ideological context at Mastrangelo 2017: 394. In the same chapter, Mastrangelo points to some important defences of poetry in Prudentius and Boethius, but he does so in terms of their truth claims.

¹⁰⁸ Mastrangelo 2009; Cullhed 2015.

¹⁰⁹ August., *Soliloquia* 2.10.18 (*CSEL* 89: 67–70); Macrobi., *In Somn.* 1.2 (Armisen-Marchetti 2001–3).

¹¹⁰ cf. Raymond Kania's *Virgil's Eclogues and the Art of Fiction* (2016), which argues that those poems require the participation of their readers in imagining a fictional world. Kania shows that fictionality is not restricted to mythological poetry, and I would emphasise the structural similarity between Virgil's pastoral world and Prudentius' scenes, which are populated now not with singing herdsmen but with Christian martyrs and believers.

¹¹¹ See above n. 13.

¹¹² Even Cullhed allows that Prudentius 'felt no need, as Paulinus did, to reject the old Muse' (2015: 520).

criticise was their supposed real-world devotion to anthropomorphic gods and their cult. Thus, the martyr Romanus scolds his persecutor on the grounds that the poets were devoted to the figures they invented (*Perist.* 10.216–20):

‘Dicis licenter haec poetas fingere;
sed sunt et ipsi talibus mysteriis
tecum dicati quodque describunt colunt.
Tu cur piaclum tam libenter lectitas,
cur in theatris te uidente id plauditur?’

‘You say that the poets invented these things with licence,
but they are even themselves devoted with you
to such rites, and they worship what they describe.
Why do you read over their wrong so happily,
why is this applauded in the theatres as you watch?’

Romanus seems to allow that poets have licence to invent such figures as long as their own lives are different; likewise, he mentions the frequent reading of his contemporaries and their applause in the theatre because these are taken as obvious signs of devotion to the gods invented by the poets. We would be unwise to make the same mistake as Romanus by assuming that the author must worship the things he describes. While Prudentius’ emphasis on these poets’ personal connection to their material is of a piece with his own persona as a devoted Christian poet, both mythological poetry and the poetry of Prudentius would be good or bad according to the use to which it was put. With expectations such as these, poetic immortality would have to depend on ensuring that the ultimate reader (the author’s final arbiter and judge) would be pleased with his words. Rather than rejecting fiction or restricting poetic licence, Prudentius suggests that there is a proper use for pure invention.

A remarkable passage from *Apotheosis* demonstrates the limits of Christian fiction. Indeed, his passionate appeal for privacy is one high point in an authorial drama that recurs throughout Prudentius’ longer didactic poems. In these lines, the reader must decide whether to see the devious instructions of Venus or the orthodox passions of a devoted poet. Prudentius describes his own intense emotion at the end of a passage extolling the Virgin Mary’s belief in the angel’s incredible message; he calls for the holy book to be brought forth and for the audience to leave so that he can take a moment alone with the scripture (*Apoth.* 594–600):

promite secretos fatus, date, pandite librum,
euomuit spirante deo quem sanctus Eseias.
percensere libet calamique reuoluere sulcos,
sidereis quos illa notis manus aurea duxit.
ite hinc, dum rutilos apices submissus adoro,
dum lacrimans ueneror, dumque *oscula dulcia figo*.
gaudia concipiunt lacrimas, dant gaudia fletum.

Bring out the secret words, come, spread out the book,
which holy Isaiah poured out at God’s inspiration.
I want to survey and unwind the furrows of the pen,
which that golden hand produced of heavenly signs.
Go hence, while I bow down and adore those ruddy letters,
while I cry and venerate, while I put on it sweet kisses.
My joy conceives tears, my joy produces weeping.

Since the poet was able to pull himself together enough to craft such impassioned hexameters, his tears should not be taken at face value; indeed, the very medium and language in which they are expressed prevents any simplistic reading. Similar weeping and tears factor in the *Peristefanon* poems, where they are also a function of the authorial drama crafted by Prudentius.¹¹³ Although the author's private tears at reading Isaiah's book might be interpreted as an example intended to spur devotion in the reader, that Christian response is entirely dependent on the reader's charity and attention; for Prudentius' 'sweet kisses' in line 599 are drawn from the first book of the *Aeneid*, when Venus instructs Cupid to deceive Dido (*Aen.* 1.687–8):

cum dabit amplexus atque *oscula dulcia figet*,
occultum inspires ignem fallasque ueneno.

When she gives hugs and fixes sweet kisses on you,
stir up a hidden flame, and deceive her with your poison.

With this intertext in mind, Prudentius could be read as a trickster like Cupid, or his words could inspire love in his audience, just as Cupid's kisses inspired love in Dido. And so the Christian poet has exposed himself to accusations that he feigned his love,¹¹⁴ although he would presumably prefer that the borrowing be read as a *Kontrastimitation* so as to corroborate his devotion. Rather than be tempted ourselves with biographical interpretations, we should observe that the problem exists because Prudentius has created a fictional scene in which he and his passions are utterly dependent on the charity of his reader. As long as the reader plays along (by believing in the poet), the author stays safe within the confines of Christian fiction; if ever we doubt his devotion, then it becomes obvious that his poetry remains separate and distinct from the real world. By writing poetry in the mould of Horace and Ovid, Prudentius leaves open the possibility of a purely literary use of his texts (whatever their intention). Ironically, perhaps, the Christian appropriation of poetry was only another stage in the long development of a separate literary sphere whose beginnings are so often traced to some pivotal moment in Modernity. More work, of course, would be required to tease out each of these points and to reconsider the fictional elements in writers contemporary with or influenced by Prudentius. What is clear by now is that Prudentius' authorial persona is a literary construct in form and function, and so the author's poetic expression of religious devotion is inseparable from his pursuit of literary immortality.

V DE OPUSCULIS SUI: THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR

In the previous section, I made the simple point that in the case of poetry fictional worlds are not limited to mythology; throughout, I have been insisting that Prudentius' Christian poetry is something other than simple devotion. The result is an understanding of his poetry as an aesthetic body of work separable from any individual reader's ethical or religious commitments. When the author offers his poetry to God, he does so in literary language and within a literary frame that he inhabits with a reader complicit in his or her enjoyment of imagined devotion. Because readers of all beliefs and none can share in that literary fiction, his poetry does not depend in any way on what we take (reasonably, but without external evidence) to have been the historical author's real devotion.

¹¹³ Note Simon Goldhill's insightful and unanswered question regarding the expected response to the author's grief in *Perist.* 9: 'How tearfully is Prudentius to be read?' (1999: 83).

¹¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the scribe of MS S wrote *fingo* in place of *figo* here, although the same scribe apparently corrected his mistake with a medial line through the letter *n* marking it for deletion.

Prudentius' *De opusculis suis* brings together the questions at the heart of this article. While the thirty-four-line poem confirms the author's methods, a single interpolation at the end demonstrates the most direct and material of ways in which individual readers brought the poet back to life. Like the *Praefatio*, this poem must have accompanied an edition in some form, but the details are now unrecoverable.¹¹⁵ While the title *De opusculis suis* has more authority,¹¹⁶ it is usually known as Prudentius' *Epilogus*. In the first parts of the poem (1–12), Prudentius explains with conventional modesty that he has nothing to offer God except his poor poems. He then says that he will survive only as a vessel of clay, that is as the least valuable of objects in the court of heaven (13–24). The poem ends with the poet's objectification, as his voice fades into the subject of the poem (*De opusculis suis* 25–34):

me paterno in atrio
 ut obsoletum uasculum caducis
 Christus aptat usibus
 sinitque parte in anguli manere.
 munus ecce fictile
 inimus intra regiam salutis.
 at tamen uel infimam
 deo obsequellam praestitisse prodest.
 quidquid illud accidit,
 iuuabit ore personasse Christum.

In my father's house,
 like an old vessel, Christ fits me out
 for transitory uses,
 and he lets me stay in a part of the corner.
 An earthen work here
 we enter into the palace of salvation.
 But it is beneficial
 to have given even the smallest offering to God.
 Whatever comes of that,
 I'll be glad to have spoken Christ with my mouth.

In lines 25–8, Prudentius recalls the transitory impermanence of his writing, for *obsoletus* and *obsolesco* were used in *Perist.* 1.73 and 10.1120 in the context of the ruin of earthly records on the one hand and the permanence of heavenly writing on the other; likewise, he describes the human body as a 'caducum uasculum' in *Perist.* 5.301. We should also note that Prudentius describes his poetry as something useful and not an end in itself; the ideal reader is seen as turning this poem to its proper use. The corner ('parte in anguli') in which he remains may recall the girl's sweet laughter in a corner in Hor., *Carm.* 1.9.22 ('gratus puellae risus ab angulo'), a poem to which Prudentius had clearly alluded in his *Praefatio*, even if the significance of the allusion there is not clear.¹¹⁷ If we hear a Horatian voice in this corner, then perhaps Prudentius also means for the classical poet to remain as a frail

¹¹⁵ For the links between this poem and Prudentius' *Praefatio*, see Coşkun 2003. Vélez Latorre 2001 is a short but suggestive reading of the *Praefatio* and *De opusculis suis* in relation to Juvenius. From everything written here, it will be clear that I cannot agree with Smolak (2002) or Gnlika (2007), who each think that the end of *De opusculis suis* is inconsistent but at the same time different lines.

¹¹⁶ See Bergman 1908: 39.

¹¹⁷ *Praef.* 10–15; for one reading of that intertext, see Pucci 1991: 679–83. On Prudentius' separate use of Hor., *Carm.* 2.18 in this poem, see Lühken 2002: 262–5.

and useful vessel. As he links his poem to the classical tradition, Prudentius describes himself and his poetry as something temporary, flawed and human.

In lines 29–30, Prudentius declares that he does indeed enter the palace of salvation, but only as a *munus fictile*. By describing himself as an offering, Prudentius identifies the authorial persona with the material poetic text.¹¹⁸ More importantly, he implies that his poetic text is a feigned and even fictional product. Although the phrase *munus fictile* recalls the *olla fictilis*, an earthenware pot, from line 17 (where it is a clear reference to 2 Tim. 2:20 and perhaps also 2 Cor. 4:7), it is hard not to hear the secondary meaning of *finco* ('to invent').¹¹⁹ Admittedly, I have found only one clear example of *fictilis* with this secondary meaning of *finco*, but its context is relevant to my entire argument: the fifth-century grammarian Priscian mentions in his *Praeexercitamina* that narration is divided into four kinds, namely *fabularis*, *fictilis*, *historica* and *ciuilis*. Priscian was working from earlier divisions; Quintilian, for example, had said that the three kinds of narration were the *fabula*, *argumentum* and *historia*.¹²⁰ Priscian's new category for the second kind of narrative was 'invented for tragedy and comedy' ('*fictilis ad tragoedias siue comoedias facta*').¹²¹ Since Priscian used *fictilis* to describe the fictional narratives of tragedy and comedy, I find it almost impossible not to read poetic meaning into the word when Prudentius uses it as a summative description of his own poetry in a thoroughly metapoetic poem. Rather than write mythological stories (*fabulae*) or historical accounts, Prudentius creates scenes and circumstances for verisimilar action. Therefore, when Prudentius refers in the next line to his own salvation ('*inimus intra regiam salutis*'), we should understand that this salvation is set within a literary framework.

As the author describes his obedience in the final two couplets, he achieves the complete fusion of poetry and devotion. Indeed, the poet even impersonates Christ, and his service becomes completely inseparable from his literary fiction. The word *iuuabit* indicates the importance of pleasure in the poetics of Prudentius; the future tense points to some other time at which the poem will be read; the word *ore* emphasises the verbal nature of this creation. In one way, the words *personasse Christum* are self-effacing and performative: as the reader voices them, he or she literally sounds the name of Christ and thus guarantees the praise that Prudentius predicts. More audaciously, by writing *personasse Christum*, the poet reveals his control over Christ as a character within his text. There are three reasons to read the verb as a reference to literary personae: the verb *persono* does not normally take an accusative object of the thing sounded; the Greek *χαράκτηριζω* was glossed as *personare*,¹²² and Augustine uses the verb as though it was derived from *persona*: 'ecce personat in hoc psalmo quemdam exultantem felici exultatione' ('Look, he portrays in this Psalm an individual exulting in blessed exultation').¹²³ Augustine's use of *personare* shows that it could take a direct object of the character portrayed, and so that meaning cannot be removed from Prudentius. As he personifies and even impersonates Christ, his work becomes a literary act of self-effacement that seeks to guarantee the poem's immortal life through its enacted dependence on the divinity invoked. Although Prudentius serves the Christian God, he desires immortality just as much as any other classical poet. Because Prudentius desired for his poetry to be immortal, he wrote within a fictional framework that turned individual experiences and sentiments into linguistic masterpieces whose depths are in no way limited to their theological content or their rhetorical effectiveness.

¹¹⁸ For the occasional use of *munus* in reference to a literary work, see *OLD* s.v. *munus* 7.

¹¹⁹ See Heinz 2007 for an insightful study of overdetermination and double references (poetic and scriptural) in Prudentius.

¹²⁰ *Inst.* 2.4.2.

¹²¹ *Praeexercitamina* 2 (Keil 1855–80: 3.430 = Passalacqua 1987: 34).

¹²² *TLL* cites two such glosses under an unnecessary separate entry for *persōno*, 10.1.1735.70–3 (Dubielzig).

¹²³ August., *In Psalm.* 110.1 (*CCSL* 40: 1621).

An early medieval reader illustrated the poet's vitality and dependence by adding an extra line at the end of *De opusculis suis*.¹²⁴ This individual's response, as an interpolation, is the perfect confirmation of the author's resurrection, for the poet is said to live as long as Christ rules: 'quo regente uiuimus'. As we have seen again and again in Prudentius, the author's life sounds the last note and stands in final position in the poem. The difference is that in *De opusculis suis* Prudentius obscured his own voice behind praise of Christ, so that it was entirely up to the reader to give life to the poet's textual body. Since a scribe was the one to add *uiuimus* at the end of this text, the passage offers confirmation that the resurrection is key for understanding how Prudentius expected and enabled the reader's interaction. The author lays down his life, and he displaces his authority onto a future reader. Because he succeeded in this case, an individual reader proclaimed that he was still alive. In this way, the reader provided a kind of closure for an author who was thoroughly human and fallen (*caducus*), and yet hoped to survive. When the reader becomes involved in the textual world created by Prudentius, his poetic expression of devotion finally finds its desired resurrection.

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¹²⁴ The spurious line was added in many manuscripts, apparently after the first line of the poem was displaced; for the attestations of this line, see Cunningham 1966: 402 and Bergman 1908: 30–4.

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