Dying for Love

EULALIA IN PRUDENTIUS, PERI STEPHANON LIBER, 3

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Probably the best known indicator of some of the strains and tensions which characteristically inform the Latin literature of the late fourth and early fifth centuries A.D. is the famous dream of St. Jerome at Epistulae 22.30. Recalling an unhappy experience (meae infelicitatis historiam) from the time when he was taking up the ascetic life, he tells how miserable he was made by attempts to give up the library which represented his classical education at Rome. When his virtuous attempts to read the Old Testament were thwarted by his being tempted (dum ita me antiquus serpens inluderet) to find these texts stylistically uncouth (sermo horrebat incultus), his remorse on top of his mid-Lenten privations caused him to fall into a wasting fever. In this state he dreamed of being before the judgement-seat of God and, on claiming to be a Christian, of hearing the famous reply of ‘Liar; you are a Ciceronian, not a Christian’, with an apposite verse from St. Matthew thrown in for good measure. Thus did one author indicate some of the burden and stress on the creative imagination when the weight of the classical literary, political, military, and religious traditions of Rome bore down on the realities of emergent Christian literature, religion and ethics and of the military and political holdings of the line against the barbarian. The stressed psyche of St. Jerome indicates in his telling of this self-incriminating anecdote the extent to which he was drawn by culture and tradition to run to embrace values which ideologically and doctrinally he felt obliged to shun.

1 This essay is offered with affection and esteem, in grateful appreciation of my long association with Godfrey Tanner.
2 Epistulae, 22.30: ‘mentiris’, ait; ‘Ciceronianus es, non Christianus; “ubi thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum”’.
3 On the weight of the classical literary tradition cf. Ep. 22.29: ‘quid facit cum psalterio Horatius? cum evangelis Maro? cum apostolo Cicero?’ For some of the social, religious and ethical aspects of the impact wrought by the transition from paganism to Christianity see the early sections of Ep. 107. There one finds colourfully illustrated the impact both at the domestic level and worldwide. For Jerome’s reflection of the consternation at the sack of Rome see the Praefatio to his commentary on Ezechiel; also St. Augustine, Ep. 165.2 (a letter of St. Jerome).
St. Jerome’s contemporary, Prudentius, was also heir to the same sort of literary ambivalence. It is the aim of this article to examine the operation of such tension and ambivalence in the work of Prudentius through consideration of one of his hymns, the third poem in his *Peristephanon Liber* which celebrates the martyrdom of Eulalia (vv. 1, 31, 135, 164, 178) of Merida (vv. 3, 186) in Spain. Eulalia is a twelve-year-old girl (vv. 11-12) whose precocious and God-centred seriousness in early childhood (vv. 16-25) is fulfilled by the defiance in speech (vv. 66-95, 136-140) and action (vv. 126-130, 141-2, 159-160) with which she faces her torturers and embraces the death of a Christian martyr. There follow the flight of her soul to heaven (vv.161-70), to the stupefaction of her judge (vv.171-5), and the participation of the very elements of nature in her obsequies, as a fall of snow covers her body in the forum (vv. 176-85). The poem concludes with a description of the church at her tomb and of the ritual there in honour of her remains (vv. 201-15). My intention is to consider the extent to which Prudentius’ reverential tale of martyrdom constituted by this poem has been subverted by the tradition of Latin personal love poetry. It will be seen that his virgin martyr, in running from the maidenly destiny of love and marriage that she has foresworn, is envisaged in terms that evoke a *puella* from erotic poetry running to keep a love-tryst.

One aspect of the portrayal of Eulalia — the peculiar fascination exercised by Prudentius’ fusion in this girl of the new heroism of Christian martyrdom and the old code of classical Roman heroic conduct, especially by means of echoes from Vergil’s *Aeneid* — has been the subject of a recent study. According to that study, the stress laid by these echoes upon the *nobilitas* (p.156), the epic quality (pp. 156-7, 169, 177), and the heroic dimensions (pp.156-7, 161, 164, 169, 171, 177) of Eulalia’s conduct is such that the martyred girl’s exploits can be the more justly assessed and the more highly appreciated against the heroic framework thus built up; such, furthermore, that there is thus established a Prudentius ‘interested in showing

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5 Prudentius’ depiction of Eulalia in this poem thus becomes an excellent example of the working in Latin poetry of the process of ‘poetic memory’ which is persuasively argued by G.B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca and London, 1986). Highly apposite to my purpose here is the statement that ‘by a continual searching of the past in retrospective explorations, and through associative and directed recuperations of this past, memory will strive energetically to uncover material that can be used for its purpose’ (p. 49).

how far Christianity exemplifies the same heroic qualities, and how far the new faith has assimilated them and extended their scope and value'.

My object in this article is to speculate upon the fascination of some further effects that this poem’s portrait of Eulalia might have had on readers of Prudentius’ time who were heirs to the same Latin poetic tradition as he. This speculation will bear in mind that two areas of such readers’ associative processes will have been quickened by their having read early in the poem that

\[
\text{iam dederat prius indicium} \\
\text{tendere se Patris ad solium} \\
\text{nec sua membra dicata toro} \quad (16-18).
\]

This echo in \textit{Patris ad solium} of \textit{lovis ad solium} from \textit{Aeneid} 12.849 is such as ‘to emphasize the extent of Eulalia’s heroic aspirations by drawing on the grandeur of Virgilian epic language’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 177. Echoes from Vergil and other Roman poets had also been briefly noted by M.Lavarenne, \textit{Prudence}, vol. 4 (Paris, 1963), pp. 54-61, and Sr.M.Clement Eagan, \textit{The Poems of Prudentius}, vol.1 (Washington, 1962), pp. 128-37.} But at v.18 (\textit{nec sua membra dicata toro}) Prudentius intrudes into this heroic picture an image more at home in the world of Catullus or the love elegists, as may be seen by cross-references to Catullus 50.14-15:

\[
\text{at defessa labore membra postquam} \\
\text{semimortua lectulo iacebant},
\]

or to Catullus 68.28-29:

\[
\text{hic quisquis de meliore nota} \\
\text{frigida deserto tepefactet membra cubili},
\]

or to the erotic connotations of Tibullus 1.1.43-46:

\[
\text{satis est requiescere lecto} \\
\text{si licet et solito membra levare toro.} \\
\text{quam iuvat immites ventos audire cubantem} \\
\text{et dominam tenero continuissim sinu!}
\]

Association of this poem with the world of love elegy has already been facilitated by the metre in which it is composed; the dactylic trimeter hypercatalectic rhythm imparts to every line a suggestion of the ending of the pentameter of an elegiac couplet. So, already underlying Prudentius’ picture of Eulalia, as a girl with heroic aspirations to be called to God’s throne via

\footnote{Palmer, op. cit. (above n.6), pp. 156-7. The echo here is the more deliberate in that, whereas Prudentius twice has \textit{ad solium Patris} (\textit{Per.} 7.55, 10.639), only here is the word-order altered into exact imitation of Vergil’s.}

\footnote{Occurrences of \textit{torus} signifying love-couch and of \textit{membra} to betoken desirable physical attributes of the beloved are frequent also in Propertius and Ovid.}
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martyrdom, is another image — of Eulalia as a young girl ripe for marriage and the pleasures of the love-couch that she has foresworn.10

The argument of this article can best be advanced by my offering, at this stage, the text of *Per.* 3. 41-47:

illa, perosa quietis opem
degeneri tolerare mora,
nocte fores sine teste movet,
saeptaque claustra fugax aperit,
inde per invia capit iter.
ingreditur pedibus laceris
per loca senta situ et vepribus . . . .

Palmer has well drawn a parallel between *perosa quietis opem* .... *tolerare* (vv.41-2) and the conception of the night-exploits of Nisus and Euryalus at Aeneid 9. 176 ff.11 In particular she has aptly drawn attention to

aut pugnam aut aliquid iamdudum invadere magnum
mens agitat mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est.

(Aen. 9. 186-7)

The aura of heroic motivation that is cast upon Eulalia here by Prudentius’ reminiscence of Nisus’ statement about what motivates him is such that ‘Euryalus’ participation in the night-raid represents the courage of the young, acted out in spite of parental opposition’.12

All this is well observed. But there needs to be remembered that another dimension to the motivation of Euryalus resides in Vergil’s text. This has to do with the love between him and Nisus which is referred to earlier in the passage cited by Palmer.13 That love had been underlined earlier still in Vergil’s epic, at Aen. 5. 295-6:

Euryalus forma insignis viridique iuventa,  
Nisus amore pio pucri,

and 5.334:*non ille oblitus amorum*, and will be stressed again in Nisus’ final words before the dreadful denouement of the tale where the two die together: *tantum infelicem nimium dilexit amicum* (Aen. 9. 430). Not only the erotic

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10 Even the echo of Vergilian language here tends in this direction (in *membra dicata*, v.18). Vergil uses parts of *dicare* three times (Aen. 1.73, 4.126, 5.60) and the first two both involve allusion to joining in love: Juno giving Deiopea to Aeolus at Aen. 1.73, and promising to unite Dido and Aeneas at Aen. 4.126.
12 Ibid.
undertones of the episode involving Nisus and Euryalus in Aeneid 9, but also the tragic irony and futility of their heroism in its pathetic outcome, have been emphasised by Vergil. This emphasis is achieved by the device of echoes from the field of Latin love poetry with their evocation of the fickle world of love. Thus, for example, by describing Nisus as *portae custos* at 9.176, Vergil already subtly suggests the parallel later to be exploited, with characteristic point, by Ovid, *Amores* 1.9.19-20:

> ille graves urbes, hic durae limen amicæ
> obsidet; hic portas frangit, at ille fores.

Likewise at 9.222 the action of Euryalus which is described in the phrase *statione relicta* carries with it the suggestion of dereliction of a lover’s duty; cf., e.g., Tib. 1.2.95: *stare nec ante fores puduit caraeæ puellæ*. This device culminates in the description of the departure of Nisus and Euryalus from the Trojan camp (9.308ff.). As Ascanius seeks to commit to the pair *mandata* for Aeneas (9.312) on the sort of mission that had been expressly forbidden by Aeneas’ own *praecipita* (9.40,45), Vergil marks the irony of this fact by closing the passage with language strangely reminiscent of that used by the love poets to signify the inanity of lovers’ promises:

> sed auræ
> omnia discerpunt et nubibus inrita donant.

In precisely the same way, I would argue, this passage from Prudentius, which describes a Eulalia sallying forth to her *aristeia* and martyrdom, portrays her in a light which suggests a young person keeping an erotic assignation.

Eulalia’s refusal to countenance *degener mora* (v. 42) gives her affinity with those characters from love poetry for whom hesitation is an impediment to the exercise of love. Eulalia thus recalls the *sed moraris* addressed to the young bride at Catullus 61.90, or the admonition addressed to Delia by Tibullus at 1.2.23-24:

> nec docet [sc. Venus] hoc omnes sed quos nec inertia tardat

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15 *Aen.* 9.312-13 — an echo of Cat. 64.142: *quae cuncta aerii discerpunt irrita venti*.


17 For *mora* as an enemy to love’s proper fulfilment cf. also Prop. 1.3.44, Tib. 1.8.74. It can scarcely be doubted that, in celebrating in a poem of five-line stanza form the almost-bride Eulalia (cf. vv.104 ff.) in her triumph of renunciation, Prudentius will have taken as a model the five-line stanza form of Catullus 61 with its celebration of marriage and consummation.
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nec vetat obscura surgere nocte timor.

In this elegiac couplet *inertia* and *timor* represent the same areas of association as are evoked by Prudentius in having Eulalia detest *quietis opem* and *degenererem moram*. And upon Eulalia’s silent flight in the dark from the safety of her parents’ house and yard (vv. 43-5) a very apt commentary is provided by the preceding lines of the same Tibullan elegy.\(^{18}\) The motif of fearless enterprise informs these verses as well (*ne timide... falle*, v. 15; *audendum est* and *fortes adiuvat... Venus*, v. 16); and Eulalia’s actions in vv. 43-44 exactly parallel those suggested to Delia by Tibullus. Again, the latent impression left by Prudentius’ Eulalia upon the reader’s mind is of a purposeful *puella* from the world of Latin love poetry who is bent upon a tryst with her lover.

This impression is further strengthened by the opening lines of the following stanza (vv. 46-47). The first of these lines evokes that preoccupation with the feet of the beloved that is a characteristic element of Latin love poetry.\(^{19}\) In particular, *pedibus laceris* echoes the love poets’ concern, which goes back to Vergil’s tenth Eclogue,\(^{20}\) about the harm done by hostile environmental conditions to the feet of a girl keeping a love-tryst elsewhere. With Verg. *Ecl.* 10.48-49:

\[
\text{a, te ne frigora laedant!}
\]
\[
\text{a, tibi ne teneras glacies secet aspera plantas!}
\]

cf. *Prop.* 1.8.7-8:

\[
\text{tu pedibus teneris positas fulcire ruinas,}
\]
\[
\text{tu potes insolitas, Cynthia, ferre nives ?}
\]

And in the last verse (v.47) of the quoted passage from Prudentius *Per.* 3, a Vergilian context is again laid under contribution for the echo, in *per loca senta situ*, from the *Aeneid*:

\[
\text{sed me iussa deum, quae nunc has ire per umbras,}
\]

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\(^{18}\) Tib. 1.2.15-20:

\[
\text{tu quoque ne timide custodes, Delia, falle;}
\]
\[
\text{audendum est: fortres adiuvat ipsa Venus.}
\]
\[
\text{illa favet seu quis iuvenis nova limina temptat}
\]
\[
\text{seu reserat fixo dente puella fores.}
\]
\[
\text{illa docet furtim molli decoedere lecto,}
\]
\[
\text{illa pedem nullo ponere posse sono...}
\]

Cf. also Tib. 1.6.9-12, 2.1.75-8.


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per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam, imperiis egere suis (Aen. 6.461-3).21

As before, however, the resonance from this Vergilian context is not simply heroic.22 Here too the undertones are those of love. The phrase in Vergil is part of a passage spoken by Aeneas to the shade of Dido in the underworld, when he finds her among quos durus amor crudeli tabe peredit (6.442) — those whom the curae of love affect even in death (6.444). The speech itself which Aeneas addresses to Dido is born of his love for her (dulcique adfatus amore est, Aen. 6.455), recalls the love which, in Book 4, had caused his duty-bound departure from her to be so reluctantly undertaken,23 and explains his presence in the loca senta situ where she now is, in terms of the same duty (iussa deum, 6.461). And it is to the rival love of Sychaeus that Dido withdraws24 as she coldly spurns the lover’s solicitude of Aeneas at this their last encounter. These are the powerfully pathetic and erotic associations of the Vergilian passage into which Prudentius has tapped by his use of the per loca senta situ echo.

Considered in this light the lines of the preceding stanza of Prudentius’ poem can also be seen to suggest the same associations:

sed pia cura parentis agit 36
virgo animosa domi ut lateat, abdita rure et ab urbe procul, ne fera sanguinis in pretium mortis amore puella ruat. 40

By echoing in cura parentis (v.36) the same phrase from Aeneid 1.646 (omnis in Ascanio cari stat cura parentis) Prudentius sheds on Eulalia the same light of optimistic hope in nascent heroism as is cast by Vergil on Ascanius at several moments in his epic.25 But once again, elements in the Vergilian

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21 See Palmer, op. cit. (above, n.6), pp. 160-61.
22 Pace Palmer, op.cit. (above, n.6), p. 161: ‘By transferring the descriptive phrase “per loca senta situ” to Eulalia’s situation in Per. 3, Prudentius emphasizes the roughness and danger of the girl’s journey and puts it on the same level of heroism as that of Aeneas’.
23 See Aen. 6. 458-60:

per sidera iuro,
per superos, et si qua fides tellure sub ima est, invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi.

Cf. Aen. 4.395-6, and the heart-wrenching Italiam non sponte sequor of 4.361.

24 Aen. 6.472-4:

tandem corripuit sese atque inimica refugit
in nemus umbriferum, coniunx ubi pristinus illi respondet curis acquatque Sychaeus amorem.

25 Cf. Palmer, op. cit. (above, n.6), pp. 159-60.
context which Prudentius has borrowed subvert the heroic element in his own. Ascanius, the object of Aeneas’ cura, is also the maxima cura of Venus (1.678) and on the point of being ‘vicariously implicated in the fate of Dido’ \(^{26}\) and in the central role played by his father, Aeneas, in that fate’s realisation.\(^ {27}\)

Erotic associations similarly intrude upon Prudentius’ portrait of Eulalia in the phrase virgo animosa at v.37. Prudentius uses the adjective animosus, each time in the feminine singular form, only twice — at Psychomachia 874, where it is applied to the abstraction Fides, and here, where it is an obvious echo of feros animosae virginis arcus at Ovid, Her. 20.115 (the feros influencing also Prudentius’ fera... puella in vv. 39-40). Ovid’s animosa virgo is Diana, aptly to be compared with the virginal temper of Eulalia. But Diana’s role in the Ovidian context is ambiguous. The context is the story of Acontius’ love for Cydippe; the role of Diana in it is to keep Cydippe virginal until the fulfilment of her oath to be united with Acontius. So too the sequestration of Eulalia in the country (vv. 37-8) evokes images of elegiac mistresses living in the country. Such girls are kept safe from the attentions of rival lovers,\(^ {28}\) as well as being kept available to be wooed exclusively by the elegiac lover himself.\(^ {29}\) And, besides the fact that the word amor itself makes its appearance here (mortis amore, v. 40),\(^ {30}\) in ne ... puella ruat (vv. 39-40) Prudentius’ Eulalia suggests a girl who is being checked from running off under the spur of love.\(^ {31}\)

When Eulalia does run away from home (vv. 45 ff.), it is once again girls from the world of love poetry that Prudentius’ picture of her very much evokes. For, in the picture of Eulalia’s journey in vv. 49ff. there is more to

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27 Cf. the effect of pathos in the occurrence of the same phrase in the mouth of Andromache, referring to Creusa, at Aen. 3.341:
ecqua tamen pucro est amissae cura parentis?
28 See Prop. 2.19.1-4:
etsi me invito discedes, Cynthia, Roma,  
laetor quod sine me devia rura coles.  
nullus erit castis iuvenis corruptor in agris,  
qui te blanditiis non sinat esse probam;  
also, ironically, Cynthia ‘secluded’ at Baiae (1.11.9-14)
29 As in Tib. 2.3.1-4:
rura meam, Cornute, tenent villaque puellam:  
ferreus est, cheu, quisquis in urbe manet.  
ipsa Venus latos iam nunc migravit in agros,  
verbaque aratoris rustica discit Amor.
Cf. the Arcadian counterpart of this ‘alone in the country’ motif at Verg. Ecl. 10.42-3.
30 In an echo of insanus amor.... Maris at Verg. Ecl. 10.44.
be seen than the accompanying band of angels (v. 48); more than the miraculous light (v. 50), for which the Old Testament parallel of the pillar of fire from Exodus 14.20 is explicitly drawn by Prudentius at vv. 51-5:

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et, licet horrida nox sileat,
lucis habet tamen illa ducem.  50

sic habuit generousa patrum
 turba columniferum radium,
scindere qui tenebrosa potens
nocte viam face perspicua
praestitit intereunte chao.  55
non aliter pia virgo viam
nocte secuta diem meruit
nec tenebris adoperta fuit...
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The depiction of Eulalia in these verses is informed also by the echoes which they evoke of the flight of Apollonius’ Medea, from home through the moonlit night to join her lover Jason. The element in Eulalia’s night-journey which most evokes impressions of Medea is precisely that unearthly angelic light that turns night into day. This vividly recalls the newly-risen moon which, in the passage from Apollonius, shines on, and speaks to, Medea as she runs through the night:

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τήν δὲ νέου Τιτηνίας ἀνερχομένη περάτηθεν
 φωταλέην ἐσίδοσα θεά ἐπεχήρατο Μήνη
 ἀρπαλέως, καὶ τοία μετὰ φρεθίν ἑσίν ἐξειπέν’
 ὦ μήν ἡ δὴ καὶ σείο κόθων δολίσαυν ἀοδαίς
 μήσαμενεν φιλότης οὐδ' ὦη καλαὶ ψερδεὶβατα
 ἀρειφέρως, καὶ τοῖς ἐργα τετυκται
νῖν δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ δῆθεν ὁμοίης ἐμμορφησάτης
δώκε δ' αὐτήν τοι ἤσεσα τήνυμα γενέσθαι
δαίμων ἀγιώτεις. ἀλλ' ἐρχεο, τετλαθ δ' ἐμματις,
καὶ πινυτή περ ἕουσα, πολυστοφον ἀγίων ἄειρειν;’
 penetration of
νυν δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ δῆθεν ὁμοίης ἐμμορφησάτης
δώκε δ' αὐτήν τοι ἤσεσα τήνυμα γενέσθαι
δαίμων ἀγιώτεις. ἀλλ' ἐρχεο, τετλαθ δ' ἐμματις,
καὶ πινυτή περ ἕουσα, πολυστοφον ἀγίων ἄειρειν;’
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The moon draws on the experience of her own love for Endymion to interpret the motivation for Medea’s flight as passion for Jason. In much the same way, the reader of Prudentius draws on poet’s and reader’s shared experience of

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32 Apollonius Rhodius, Arg. 4.34-91. My colleague, Dr P.G. Toohey, has drawn my attention to this passage. Cf. J.M. Bremer, ‘Full Moon and Marriage in Apollonius’ Argonautica’, CQ 27 (1987), 423-26 (on Arg. 4.166-71).
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this passage from Apollonius to superimpose upon the flight of Eulalia an erotic reading.33 The passage from Apollonius also offers a precedent for preoccupation with the vulnerable feet of the girl (γυμνοίσι εδε πόδεσιν, v.43) and the lonely desolation of the paths traversed (αίδηλοι ανά στίβους έκτοτη πύργων/άστεος εὐρυχώροιο, vv. 47-48). The motif of fear and hesitancy purposefully overcome, which has been seen to characterise the nocturnal escapades of both the girls of love-elegy and Prudentius’ Eulalia, has its counterpart in Medea too; fear is a prominent motif in her flight.34 To the motif of the unlocking of the door, which is common to both Latin love poetry and Per. 3, is given a special prominence in terms especially appropriate to Medea as a sorceress.35 But it and the other love-poetry motifs common to both Apollonius and Prudentius further promote an erotic reading of Eulalia’s flight.

Such a reading sharpens the effect of Eulalia’s arrival and speech before the praetor’s tribunal (vv. 61-95), and of the praetor’s speech in reply (vv. 96-125). Having already been described as fe ra puella (vv, 39-40) and virgo animosa (v.37), Eulalia arrives on the scene superba (v.64). It is true that the application to the girl of these epithets contributes to ‘cette sorte de “dénaturation” de l’héroïne chrétienne, pour laquelle ne semblent plus exister ni les servitudes de la féminité, ni celles de l’âge même’.36 But the foregoing

33 Cf. Conte, op.cit. (above, n.5), pp. 56-57, on the reader as the ‘poet’s accomplice’, on ‘the complicity between poet and reader in allusion’, and on the need for the reader to be ‘poetically knowledgeable.’ See also p. 57: ‘At some points in its development, poetry, once it is sure of its survival and status, seems to start joking and playing with its readers, offering them participation “in enigma” (in mystery). But readers can attain to that source of pleasure only if they have acquired sufficient poetic “doctrine.”’ On Prudentius’ fondness for the enigmatic (‘His verse demands scrutiny — it begs to be decoded’), see the Ramus article by Malamud (above, n.4), especially pp. 66-70.

34 See the following from Argonautica Book 4: ἄλεγενότατον φόβου (v.11), ἐφόβησεν (v.13), πτερόεις θυμός (v.23), φόβῳ (v.48), τρομερῷ δείματι (v.53). Cf.vv.2-5:

η γὰρ ἐμοίγε 
ἀμφασίη νίκος ἐνδοὺς ἐλίσσεται ὀρμαίνοντι 
ἡ μὲν ἄτης πήμα δυσίμερον, ἡ τόγ’ ἐνώπιον 
φύσαν ἀεικελίνη ...


35 Arg. 4. 41-2:

τῇ δὲ καὶ αὐτόματοι θυρέων ὑπόκεισθαι ὀχημα, 
ωκεαίας ἄφορροι ανακρύσκοντες ὀσοδαίς.

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examination of the way in which Eulalia has been depicted suggests which literary paradigm of femininity Prudentius is following still. The *puella superba* who faces the tribunal at v.64 once more recalls the *puella* of Latin love elegy.\(^{37}\) This is a paradigm of femininity whose very characteristics are *saevitia*,\(^{38}\) *duritia*,\(^{39}\) *ira*\(^{40}\) and the ready tendency to scold.\(^{41}\) So we are the less surprised at the forthrightness and challenging tone of Eulalia’s address to the praetor.\(^{42}\) This continuing context of love-poetry associations also lends point to the praetor’s reply. When he refers to Eulalia’s *nequitia* (v.103), he is responding in terms which are highly apposite both to that context\(^{43}\) and to the present ‘naughtiness’ of a twelve-year-old *torva puellula* (v.103). In her headstrong rush to martyrdom (*tem eraria*, v. 113), she just as effectively turns her back on the *gaudia* (v. 104) of honourable marriage for herself, and on her family’s expectations of that state for her (vv.105-113), as if she were the amorous runaway of Latin erotic poetry whom the poetic memory prompted by Prudentius’ text has evoked.

Of the eroticism which is latent in the description of the slim girl, of just-marriageable age,\(^{44}\) subjected to savage physical torture and death, there is no need to go into detail here.\(^{45}\) Suffice it to remark that this element in

\(^{37}\) See, e.g., Prop. 1.18.25; Tib. 1.8.77.

\(^{38}\) E.g., Prop.1.3.18; cf. 1.1.10 (Atalanta, mythical paradigm of the *saeva puella*); Tib. 1.8.62; cf.1.2.90 (Amor). 1.5.58 (Venus).

\(^{39}\) So, e.g., Prop. 1.7.6; cf 1.1.10 (Atalanta), 1.17.16, 2.1.78, 2.22.43; Tib. 1.8.50. 2.6.28.

\(^{40}\) E.g., Prop. 1.5.8, 1.9.22, 3.8.28; Tib. 2.1.74.

\(^{41}\) See, e.g., Prop. 1.6.9, 1.7.12, 1.10.26.

\(^{42}\) Thus, she opens her speech (with *furor*, v.66) and closes it (with *dolor*, v.95) on words that are too much in-trade of the erotic vocabulary of Latin poetry to need documentation here.


\(^{45}\) Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the sensuous quality of the lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{membraque picta cruore novo} \\
\text{fonte cutem recalentem lavant (vv. 144-5),} \\
\end{align*}
\]

and the appeal to the reader’s sense of youthful female beauty in the stanza:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{crinis odorus ut in iugulos} \\
\text{fluxerat involitans umeris,} \\
\text{quo pudibunda pudicitia} \\
\end{align*}
\]
Prudentius' depiction of Eulalia has been noted by at least one scholar, notwithstanding that scholar's reluctance, more than once expressed, to see such a coloration as appropriate to the context of *Per. 3*. From the facts that Prudentius does apply to the departing soul of Eulalia (vv. 164-5) the epithet *lacteolus* drawn from an erotic context at Catullus 55.17, that he goes on to liken the fall of snow which pathetically covers the *membra* of dead Eulalia to a *palliolum*, that he closes the whole passage devoted to Eulalia's giving up the ghost (vv. 161-180) with a stanza beginning *cedat amor* ... (vv. 181-185), one may argue that the erotic reminiscences aroused by Eulalia's martyrdom are sustained into the poem's concluding passages.

Reluctance of the kind evinced by Palmer to accept any erotic coloration of the context of *Per. 3*, suggests that we are in the presence of an anomaly here. Prudentius is nothing, if not a Christian poet; and it does seem not unreasonable to wonder at the propriety of a Christian poet's writing about the suffering and death of a virgin martyr in erotic language and allusion, in the way that the foregoing paragraphs have revealed. This study has shown a depiction of Eulalia which owes much to imagery and language that seem far more at home in the erotic contexts of Apollonius and, especially, of Catullus and the writers of Latin love elegy. We have seen how Prudentius' *nec sua membrea dicata toro* (v. 18), for example, calls up the erotic associations of *membra* in Catullus and the elegists and of *dicare* in Vergil. In the same way we have seen how heavily laden with motifs from Catullan lyric and the elegists are Prudentius' vv. 36 ff. — the *virgo animosa* (v. 37), kept safe in the country like a *domina* from elegy (vv. 37-38), who runs off under the spur of love (v. 40); also his vv. 41-47 — Eulalia's impatience with hesitation (vv. 41-2), her flight in the dark from the custody of her parents (vv. 43 ff.), and the emphasis on her vulnerably girlish feet...
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(vv. 46-7). We have also seen how closely the picture of Eulalia’s passage through the moonlit night (vv. 49-58) evokes Apollonius’ Medea; how closely too the nequuitia of the torva puellula (v. 103) before the praetor’s tribunal (vv. 61 ff.) and the terms in which her torture and death are described (vv. 141 ff.) pursue reminiscences of Latin erotic poetry to this poem’s concluding stanzas. Even the echoes from Vergil’s Aeneid for which Prudentius has in the past been especially noticed have been shown to evoke connotations of love as much as of heroism.

The question which poses itself at this stage of our investigation of Per. 3 is whether Prudentius’ resort thus to the anomalously erotic field of Latin love poetry for his portrait of Eulalia was a deliberate stroke of artistry. Or is such a resort rather an example of the weight of the long literary tradition of Latin poetry exerting itself? An answer to this question is suggested by the ease with which one can envisage Prudentius’ conscience echoing that of Jerome in the face of such a challenge. It is not at all difficult to imagine Prudentius adapting Jerome’s wording in a defensive reply along the lines ‘quid facit cum martyribus Catullus (vel Propertius, vel Tibullus, vel Ovidius)?’. That is to say, the likelier conclusion is that Prudentius’ presentation of his youthful virgin and martyr, Eulalia, under the colour of a puella from Latin love poetry is not a deliberate choice. It should rather be seen as an example of the tail of the tradition of Latin poetry wagging the dog of poetic composition, to such effect that it is upon the motive force thus imparted to the dog that our attention becomes fixed.

We have an instructive contrast in what Prudentius does in a polemical spirit at Contra Symmachum 2. 1064 ff. There the virginity of the Vestals of pagan Rome is impugned by being deliberately undermined. The spirit of Horace’s epodes and of Juvenal’s satire is consciously summoned up in a sort of parody of the ideals of love elegy to damn the Vestal’s pudor as merely passion frustrated and delayed (vv. 1070-4), gratified at last by the grotesquerie of marriage in old age (vv. 1076-85), and inflamed in the meantime by the Vestal’s attendance at the gruesome spectacles of the gladiatorial contests (vv. 1091 ff.). More to be compared with the picture of Eulalia in Per. 3 in the lack of deliberate subversion on Prudentius’ part is that of Agnes in the companion-piece, Per. 14. In that poem too a youthful virgin of just-marriageable age (vv. 10-11), who is described as ‘hot for

52 Cf. Witke, ibid., p. 110: ‘The conventions adhere in the language’s resources, in the world of the poems written before Prudentius and in Prudentius’ own practice. He is a Christian poet because he is not trying to be anything except a Latin poet …’

53 Cf. Jerome at n.3 above.

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Christ’ (*Christo calentem*, v. 12), has her trial and martyrdom — which included an actual sentence to a period in a brothel — described in strikingly erotic terms, including Agnes’ own description of her executioner as her lover (*hic, hic amator, iam fateor, placet*, v. 74).⁵⁵ An even earlier example of the subversive infiltration into Christian contexts of concepts of love which are derived from the tradition of classical erotic literature is the story of Paul and Thecla in the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*. The trials of Thecla foreshadow some of the erotic sensationalism that we have seen subverting the stories of Eulalia and (in less detail here) Agnes, while also rather anomalously — in view of the canonical *Acts* — taking much of their colour from the ancient prose Romances; ‘... the erotic element lies all the while beneath the surface: Paul and Thecla do not get married, but eyes, gestures, and speech indicate that their relationship is not of an exclusively spiritual kind’.⁵⁶ Similarly the burden of Prudentius’ cultural baggage as a Latin poet, the very weight of the tradition of Latin poetry in which he operates, subverts the meaning of what the poet writes, forcing our gaze as readers more towards the process of poetic composition than towards the message of the poem itself.⁵⁷

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⁵⁵ On this see Malamud, art. cit. (above, n. 4), pp. 78-82.

⁵⁶ T. Hagg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford, 1983), p. 160; cf. ‘Thecla’s first reaction when she hears Paul preaching in the neighbouring house — she does not touch food or drink, she worries her family by her distracted behaviour — is reminiscent of the purely physical manifestations of love in, for instance, the *Ephesiaca*’ (ibid.).

⁵⁷ So, e.g., Conte, op. cit. (above, n.5), p. 49: ‘Seen from below, from the perspective of culture, the text is no longer the neat, checkered chess board of horizontal coherence on which words are locked in meter but is now instead a profoundly contextualized network of association, echoes, imitations, allusions — a rich root system reaching down and entwined with the fibres of the culture in its historical dimension’.

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