The Roman Self in Late Antiquity

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As his appropriation of Vergil’s Aeneid shows, Prudentius does not hesitate to embrace his pagan literary heritage. In this chapter, I explore further the pagan intellectual inheritance that is present—and underrepresented in the scholarly literature—in Prudentius’ poetry with a focus on the Psychomachia. By “pagan intellectual inheritance” I mean the rich philosophical tradition that Prudentius imbibed, directly or indirectly, beginning with Plato and extending to the Epicurean and neo-Platonic traditions. The Psychomachia contains imagery and ideas from these intellectual traditions that help form the poem’s allegorical effects. I have argued that particular biblical interpretations are crucial to the poem’s typologies and therefore to the signifiers of the Psychomachia’s allegorical universe: the personifications, the battle narrative, and the temple. I argue that the poem’s Christian reception of pagan philosophical content also contributes to the construction of these markers of allegory. This combination of pagan and Christian elements lie behind the Psychomachia’s sustained allegory. Any explanation of Prudentian allegory must include a reckoning of pagan philosophical ideas in his poetry.

Prudentius’ relationship to pagan philosophy and its Christian reception is
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fertile terrain to examine his poetry and allegorical practice. In particular, Prudentius integrates several philosophical doctrines of the soul that contribute to the Psychomachia's allegory of the soul. The following ideas, which have their roots in pagan philosophy, find expression in Prudentius' poetry: The Platonist metaphysical and political analogy of city and soul, the Platonist doctrine of ascent and descent of the soul, the Epicurean idea of the mortal soul, and, finally, the late-fourth-century idea of the soul as a Platonist reflection of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). These philosophical resonances furnish a significant portion of the allegorical language of the Psychomachia. Specifically, they help to portray vices and virtues, which are typologically related to both historical figures and the reader.²

Prudentius and the Pagan Philosophical Past

The ties between late fourth-century Christian intellectuals in the West were close, and they were bound together in part by training in the pagan philosophical tradition and its transmission through Jewish and Christian apologetics. Ambrose, whose influence on Augustine is documented in the Confessions (6.3.3), knew well the works of Plotinus and philosophically aware writers such as Philo, Origen, the Cappadocians, Tertullian, and Cyprian.³ In his exegetical works Ambrose borrows freely from Plotinus and Porphyry; in particular, the images of the soul's ascent to God and death as a release from prison.⁴ Ambrose was tutored by Simplicianus, a bishop of Milan, who also was instrumental in the conversions of two main figures regarding the reception of Greek philosophy in the West, Augustine and Marius Victorinus.⁵ Ambrose, Victorinus, Jerome, and Augustine followed the Origenist view that Greek philosophy must be subordinated to scripture through a form of allegorical interpretation.⁶ As a result they did not enforce a strict separation between pagan philosophy and Christian theology in their own literary and exegetical practice, though sometimes from their severe rhetoric, a reader might conclude otherwise.⁷ Rather, their approach to the pagan philosophical inheritance was to privilege scripture over the classics, to challenge the ancient philosophers and, in so doing, construct an alternative Christian paideia.⁸

Although Prudentius is not known to have had contact with this circle, he shares their intellectual background. His corpus represents a complex example of the pagan philosophical tradition filtered through his patristic forebears. He received a similar education and, from his doctrinal and apologetic poetry, we
can detect a familiarity with patristic Platonist writings, as well as with other philosophical doctrines from pagan Latin poets. Prudentius has provocative things to say about pagan philosophers. Yet it will become clear that certain philosophical doctrines, especially those of Platonism, are determinative of Prudentius’ allegorical program in the Psychomachia.

Apoth. 200–11 reflects the ambivalence that Prudentius had toward pagan philosophy. On the one hand, the poet pejoratively mentions Plato, the Cynics, and Aristotle (e.g., deliramenta Platonis, Apoth. 200). Their acceptance of pagan sacrifice is inscrutable (Apoth. 204–206), and their ravings are labyrinthine and meandering (hos omnes . . . labirinthus et error / circumflexus agat, Apoth. 203–204). The writings of the great pagan philosophers distract humans from the meaning of scripture. On the other hand, according to Prudentius, these thinkers are rational and logical (Apoth. 206–207). The conclusion of their arguments—that there is one divine force in the universe (numen in unum, Apoth. 209)—is consistent with the Christian story. Prudentius even cites the classic pagan argument from design for the existence of God. Prudentius’ treatment of the pagan philosophers parallels, for example, Augustine’s ambivalent attitude toward Cicero’s Hortensius (Conf. 3.4.7–3.6.10).

In the only other direct reference to Plato and his work, Prudentius refers to the common Platonic idea of the Philosopher king at Symm. 1.30–32 (Rep. 473c11–d3). He does so without vilification in order to argue that Theodosius is an example of a Platonic philosopher-king (dux sapiens, Symm. 1. 36).

Nimirum pulchre quidam doctissimus: “Esset publica res” inquit “tunc fortunata satis, si vel reges saperent vel regnarent sapientes.”

To be sure a most learned man says finely,

“the state would then be prosperous enough,

if either kings were wise or wise men kings.”

Even if Prudentius’ praise of Theodosius amounts to no more than a panegyrical topos, the poet’s intellectual assumptions inherited from the pagan philosophical tradition help to legitimize “truths” about theology and politics. In other passages, Prudentius may call pagan philosophers “followers of Hercules” (Ham. 402–403) and “bearded sophists” (2 Sym. 890–91), yet he deploys their ideas without hesitation to strengthen Christian ideology. In this way, his use of the pagan philosophical past parallels the use of late-fourth-century Christian intellectuals such as Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Victorinus.
Julian’s decree of 361/62, which barred Christians from teaching in the schools, compelled Christian intellectuals to carry on this seemingly duplicitous relationship with the pagan literary inheritance. From the last quarter of the fourth-century western churchmen and pagan aristocrats squared off in opposing rhetorical camps. As R. A. Markus puts it, “Jerome, Augustine, Prudentius, and Orosius belong to the world of Praetextatus, the Symmachis, and the Flaviani: a world in which the age-old tensions between paganism and Christianity were as sharply crystallized as they were never again to be.” This polarization, however, did not prevent Christian intellectuals from appropriating pagan ideas. Jerome, for example, made extensive, though unacknowledged, use of pagan philosophical texts. Similarly, Augustine owes much to the prominent contemporary neo-Platonist Manlius Theodorus, though he never explicitly mentions him.

Some scholars believe that Manlius Theodorus introduced Augustine to Platonic texts, which he could have read in Greek. For the Greekless reader, four translated Platonic dialogues were well known in Late Antiquity. Cicero is responsible for two of them: the *Protagoras* and the *Timaeus*, both mentioned by Jerome. Apuleius’ *Phaedo* is cited by Sidonius Apollinaris (c.423–c.480 AD). Calcidius’ rendering of the *Timaeus*, which became the most influential translation of the Middle Ages and, though incomplete, was accompanied by his commentary on the text. If indeed he spent his time in Spain during the first half of the fourth century, his output could be seen as evidence for the availability of Plato in the original in Spain in the first half of the fourth century. This is because it is likely that Calcidius read Plato in Greek. In addition, several strong examples of doctrinal and linguistic parallels have been discovered between Calcidius and Porphyry, especially Porphyry’s *Sententia*.

Caution is best regarding questions of transmission and influence, but in the past few decades scholars have been able to improve our understanding of the spread and influence of Platonist texts and ideas. R. Klibansky and S. Gersh, for instance, have distinguished between the indirect and the direct traditions of Platonism. The former consists of Latin and Greek writers (available in translation) of late antiquity who were read extensively in the Middle Ages. In the work of these writers, Platonist doctrine undergoes modification according to each author’s religious and philosophical assumptions; examples include the traditional list of Latin church fathers (Tertullian, Lactantius, Ambrose, Augustine). The direct tradition is defined as earlier translations of Platonist
dialogues such as those of Cicero, Apuleius, and Calcidius. Indeed, it is difficult to keep separate the influence each one of these authors had on fourth-century Christian writers. It is necessary to have a complete understanding of the points of thought and language at which these sources would most likely be used. There are two clear examples of this concept. Augustine employs Platonist terminology and ideas concerning the Incarnation. He also cites various Platonic and neo-Platonic texts and authors to show that their theories are insufficient concerning the knowledge needed to know God.

Pierre Hadot, in agreement with Courcelle, has referred to Porphyry (c.232–c.303 AD) as the major figure of neo-Platonism in the fourth-century West. For this conclusion, scholars rely primarily on Augustine, who, during his time in Milan (386–391 AD), came into close contact with neo-Platonic philosophy through Manlius Theodorus and the platonicorum libri, Latin translations of Greek Platonist texts. Much has been written concerning the nature and contents of these books. Augustine’s demonstrated knowledge of Plotinus and Porphyry and his statement that Marius Victorinus (281/291–post 362 AD) translated Platonist works, however, makes it probable that these books were translations of a set of texts by Plotinus and Porphyry. We may cautiously conclude that these Greek neo-Platonists owe their dissemination in the Latin West at this time to two of the most prominent Western neo-Platonists of the fourth century, Manlius Theodorus and Marius Victorinus. Victorinus appears to have been influenced primarily by Porphyry. Of the seventy-seven titles we have of Porphyry’s works, only thirteen (most of them minor and specialized) survive. This was not an accident of history but was caused by his work Against the Christians, which offended Christians to the extent that Constantine condemned his writings. It is no surprise that Against the Christians was not well known in the West in the second half of the fourth century. Jerome is one of the only writers who seems to have had an idea of its contents though not through direct reading, but rather through published Christian rebuttals of Porphyry’s arguments. Augustine knew the anti-Christian polemic by the time he wrote De Consensu Evangelistarum, which can be dated anywhere from 399–415. Whatever the depth of Augustine and Jerome’s knowledge of the anti-Christian side of Porphyry, it did not prevent both of these Christian bishops from being significantly influenced by him. There can be no doubt that Porphyrian texts were indeed available in the Latin West; although Porphyry may have had an anti-Christian reputation, committed Christians of the late fourth century still permitted themselves to read him and
employ his metaphysics and psychology, which had much in common with Christian belief. Prudentius was no exception. He was familiar with neo-Platonic, Platonist, and other pagan philosophical approaches through translations and handbooks. Further on, I show the crossover in the *Psychomachia* in which the Porphyrian imagery of ascent, for example, infuses the poem’s narrative and description of the soul.32

City and Soul

At the end of the *Psychomachia*, Prudentius transforms the literal building of the temple within the walls of a city into an allegory of the soul.33 Rather than focusing on the typical metaphor of the temple as the body that houses the soul, Prudentius develops the idea of the temple as the seat of monarchical authority in the soul (*Praef. Psych.* 799–822 and 823–87).34 This monarchy within the soul comes to life through a manipulation of the metaphorical relationship between city and soul. By shifting deftly from the perspective of the city to that of the soul and back again, *Fides’* announcement of the building of the temple in the city of virtues (*Praef. Psych.* 814–15) becomes a metaphor of the temple as the soul, with *Sapientia*, the emanation of Christ, as king. In the last twenty-seven lines of the poem, the temple represents the nature of an individual soul and the political structure of a monarchy. *Psych.* 816–19 reflect this combination by indicating that peace (defined as a lack of vices) is a necessary—though insufficient—condition for a healthy soul and that the other necessary condition, the new temple inhabited by Christ, has become the allegory of the dominant governing entity of the human soul.

Nam quid terrigenas ferro pepulisse falangas (Psych. 816–19)
culparum prodest, hominis si filius arce
aetheris inlapsus purgati corporis urbem
intret inornatam templi splendentis egenus?
For what is the advantage to have driven out the earthborn
phalanx of the sins, if the son of man, having descended from high
heaven, enters the unadorned city of the cleansed body,
and he is lacking a shining temple?

The phrase *purgati corporis urbem* ("the city of the cleansed body," *Psych.* 818) is an image of purity and cleansing (*sanguine . . . terso, Psych.* 809; and *toga candida, Psych.* 821). The meaning of the parallel phrase *purgata . . . corpora of
Psych. 97 focuses on the cleansing of worldly sin from a person’s body, an appropriate point of view that emphasizes the battle posture between the virtues and the vices. By broadening the phrase to mean the cleansing of a city, Psych. 818 triggers a version of the binary city and soul, which furnishes the dominant metaphor of the final hundred lines of the Psychomachia.

The phrase purgati corporis urbem explicitly links the city and soul into a mutually descriptive relationship; the city and the soul are to be adorned with a temple, its most important artifice, giving it a sense of order, purpose, and divine presence. In addition, when Sapientia is enthroned within the temple, she proceeds to establish government and laws to protect humankind.

Hoc residet solio pollens Sapientia et omne (Psych. 875–77)
consilium regni celsa disponit ab aula
tutandique hominis leges sub corde retractat.
On this throne powerful Wisdom sits and
from her high court she arranges every plan of
her government and she considers again in
her heart laws for protecting humankind.

This Platonist, civic language confirms the idea that the new temple stands for the rational governing center of the soul. Prudentius introduces the earthly notions of government and laws, which originate as worldly expressions of Sapientia. The city and citizen language, foregrounded in the allusions here to Rev. 21 and Eph. 2:18–22 and emphasized in much of patristic literature, is initially ignored by Prudentius. At Psych. 875–877, however, Prudentius explicitly establishes this level of meaning, confirming that the city/soul binary helps fix the allegorical meaning of the temple as the governing center of the human soul. In this way, the poem signals the transition to the new temple, the constituents of which express the nature and structure of a healthy human soul that is prepared to meet the godhead.

The city/soul binary is also implied in Prudentius’ treatment of biblical texts and of their exegeses by previous Christian thinkers. At Psych. 823–54 and essentially to the end of the poem, Prudentius mines Rev. 21 for the description of his poetic temple. Although the allusion to Eph. 2:18–22 is not specific, several of the passage’s fundamental themes are contained at Psych. 823–54: approaching the Father in one spirit, humans as citizens based upon the teachings of the apostles and prophets (cf. Rev. 21:14), Christ as cornerstone that connects all as parts of a temple, and the individual as a
dwelling for God through the Holy Spirit. Paul makes the distinction between the temple as a holy place and the temple/body as a dwelling (1 Cor. 6:19) for God. Unlike Paul, Prudentius describes the Holy Spirit, which “goes around” or “surrounds” (ambit, Psych. 841) the hidden recesses of the mind (mentis, Psych. 840). These hidden places are where the vices can grow (Psych. 900–907). As a result, the Holy Spirit surrounding and being infused into the mind is the best way to fight against vices. In both the Pauline and Prudentian passages, the political dimension is emphasized and citizens and the building of a city are foregrounded; however, for Prudentius, the temple is a powerful allegory not for the body, as in Paul, but for the soul and its relationship to the divine. The prominence of Sapientia, combined with Platonist language of monarchy, civil discord, and bondage (e.g., discordibus armis, inter vincla spiritibus pugnant, praeidio, regnaverat, and regent; Psych. 902–15) gives a picture of the soul’s relationship to God and thus constitutes a development of the city/soul analogy, a vital allegorical expression of the characteristics of the soul.39

Even with the biblical precedents, it is still possible to recognize the Platonist origins of the Psychomachia’s temple and its occupation by Sapientia. The allegorical character of the temple fits within the history of Platonist ideas from Plato’s Republic to the Judeo-Christian response in Philo and the church fathers, examples of which include Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. The Psychomachia’s allegory of the soul, culminating with the establishment of the temple depends on the Platonist isomorphism of city and soul, which begins from a psychological isomorphism of internalization and externalization. The soul internalizes norms that enter it from its connections to the polis, and, in turn, the polis is a product of each soul’s externalizations of norms.40

Two passages in the Republic show the essence of the relationship between city and soul. The first occurs at 435b1–2: “So the just man will not differ at all from the just city, so far as the character of justice is concerned, but will be like it.”41 The structure and character of the just, good, and harmonious soul, resembles the social arrangements of the just, good and harmonious city. Plato converts external virtue, traditional Greek morality, into an internal calm state of mind: “It seems then that real justice is not concerned with external behavior, but with what goes on inside, concerning the individual himself and his own affairs” (Rep. 443c9–d1).42 Groups of souls constitute the source of a city’s justice and injustice. The slippage in these two passages between the concepts of resemblance and membership appear in the Psychomachia as
well. Prudentius exploits the simultaneous presence of the virtues as individuals and the landscape of a single soul that the gates of city walls (Psych. 665–66) and the temple represent. Thus, the reader confronts a single soul, which is constructed in the likeness of a city, and simultaneously a city with many members—as implied by the army of virtues—that determine its character. The expulsion of Discordia-Heresis from inside of the walls, indicated by the scattering of her body parts over land, sea, and air (Psych. 720–25), reinforces this double meaning by making both the soul and the city pure, peaceful, and just: . . . extincta est multo certamine saeva / barbaries, sanctae quae circumsaep-serat urbis / indigenas (“with a great struggle cruel savagery, which had surrounded the inhabitants of the holy city, has been wiped out,” Psych. 752–54).

Both the early and late writings of Augustine employ the concept of Christian imperium, not as a phase of salvation history but rather as “a recognition of orthodox Catholic Christianity by Christians who hold office in the state, a summons to them to serve the church.” For Augustine, Roman power, in the form of state officeholders, is a tool to root out heresies. In chapter 2 we saw that Prudentius understands Rome’s political and military success as integral to the history of salvation. What is more, like Augustine, the poet connects earthly Rome’s power with the task of eliminating heresies. In the Psychomachia, Fides and Concordia expel from the city Discordia-Heresis who blasphemes God as discolor . . . / nunc minor, aut maior, modo duplex et modo simplex (variable . . . now lesser, now greater, now double and now single; Psych. 710–11). The two virtues are associated with the monarchical and powerful state of Rome by their epithets (Concordia princeps, Psych. 747; regina Fides, Psych 716), by their equal share of legal and political clout (aequo iure potestas), and by their status as law-givers: . . . quidnam / victores post bella vocet Concordia princeps, / quam velit atque Fides Virtutibus addere legem ([“They await] why Concordia, their leader, summons the victors after the war and what law Fides wants to put to the Virtues,” Psych. 746–47). Prudentius appears to agree with Augustine that Roman Christian imperium should be an instrument that purifies Christian cities of heretical elements.

In addition, a specific aspect of the idea of the “two cities,” which appears in the exegetical literature of the second-century writer Philo of Alexandria and reaches full expression in Augustine’s City of God, animates the ideological architecture of the Psychomachia’s temple. Prudentius appears to share with Philo a version of the two cities motif. For both writers, two cities, one pure and other beset with vice, exist within the soul. Prudentius’ poetry does not
fully reflect the Augustinian large scale and externalized conception of the two cities, one heavenly and the other earthly—with the latter to be rejected. He is writing at the high water mark of Roman Christian triumphalism and thus sees Rome as a direct reflection of the heavenly city, and understands the ideal soul as a reflection of heaven’s order as well. Writing after the sack of Rome by Alaric, a period in which triumphalist Christianity, typified by Eusebius’ writings (and Prudentius’ work), was on the wane, Augustine distinguishes between Rome as the earthly city populated by those who live in the present moment according to the flesh and the heavenly city whose inhabitants, though pilgrims on earth, live according to Christian teachings and hope for the afterlife.

Philo figures the troubled soul as a city undergoing civil strife (stasis). Philo begins with an antithesis between the cities of Cain and Abel-Seth. The contrasting themes include peace versus war, unity versus multiplicity, and goodness versus vice. Elsewhere, he summarizes the two city idea: “The Lawgiver thinks that besides those cities which are built by men’s hands upon the earth, of which the materials are stone and timber, there are others which men carry about established in their souls.” Philo takes his cue from the image and function of the demiurge in Plato’s Timaeus. Philo’s analogy between the mind of the architect and the earthly city, on the one hand, and the mind of God and the cosmic city, on the other, reflects a later Stoic view, also influenced by the Timaeus, of the divine craftsman as a supreme deity who oversees a rationally organized cosmos. But note that Philo glosses the metaphor of the divine craftsman with the image of the architect and king. Monarchy, which parallels the political structure of the Roman Empire, becomes Philo’s dominant metaphor for the workings of the soul. A ruler exercising control over the city represents the dominance of the rational soul over the desires and weaknesses of the body.

In the Psychomachia, Prudentius adopts this relationship between the Roman Empire and the soul. He employs Hellenistic language of monarchy and the language of the restored Republic under the Principate in order to illustrate the soul as a city (like Rome) in conflict between virtues and vices. Both Sapientia and Christ are monarchs within the soul: Christ is rex (Psych. 850) and Sapientia rules as king (regent, Psych. 915). The top virtues—Concordia and Fides—represent authority under the Principate of a restored Republic. Concordia is Princeps (Psych. 747) and both virtues, which possess qualities of Roman generals and magistrates (or even perhaps consuls: aequo iure pot-
estatis, Psych. 737–38) mount a platform (tribunal, Psych. 730 and 736) to speak to the rest of the virtues. The word tribunal refers to the platform that a Roman general mounted to address his troops; however, the word also refers to a platform for magistrates to pronounce judgments in a political context. Tribunal represents the poem’s transition from the military to the political. Prudentius effects a transition from Roman military discourse of the battle between the virtues and the vices, which takes up the first two-thirds of the poem, to the image of an orderly, Roman, governing structure within the soul, indicated in the last third of the poem by the contemporary roles of Fides and Concordia as symbols of unity, the construction of the temple and the monarchical roles of Sapientia and Christ. The term tribunal and words referring to the restored Republic consequently coexist with monarchical language, thereby reflecting directly the contemporary political, and ideological, structure of the Christian Roman Empire, which in turn contributes to Prudentius’ allegorical representation of the soul.

Prudentius develops the city/soul binary from merely an inherited Platonist idea to a trope that reflects contemporary Roman political ideology. The presence in the Psychomachia of both the language of monarchy and post-Republican politics merges into the idea of monarchy as Hellenistic kingship. Although patristic literature viewed the emperor as not subject to human law, it nevertheless does not consider him divine—this being the only major difference between a Roman, Christian emperor and a Hellenistic king. The pagan emperor Julian in the early 360s emphasized Platonic and Aristotelian political principles and not Hellenistic ideas of kingship. For Julian, a ruler’s power comes from the people’s consent, not from God, and the ruler himself is indeed subject to human law in the form of the laws of the Roman Senate.52

Yet, for most of the fourth century, the emperor was seen to be the only source of law on earth as it conformed to God’s law. Ambrose expresses this idea and goes further, asserting that the empire is the guarantor of peace53 and that one god implies both one empire and one emperor: “No Roman Christian of Ambrose’s time could have failed to identify the interests of the church with those of the empire.”54 Monotheism’s implications for human government culminated in theological monarchism. Gregory of Nazienzus reflects well the age’s affinity for monarchy and dislike for Greek and Roman ideas of democratic and representative government: “We are not impressed by a crowd of gods, each ruling in his own way. For to me it is all the same to be ruled by none as to be ruled by many . . . strife means division, and division means
dissolution . . . so I find nothing divine in the government of many.” Prudentius favors one ruler as well, but he is loath to call that ruler on earth rex. Divine beings such as Christ and Sapientia may be referred to as rex and enact regal rule (regent, Psych. 915), but the emperor is styled “Father of the country,” “director of the people and the senate,” “leader of the military,” “dictator,” and a host of other formal and informal titles. The legacy of Rome’s aversion to the idea of a king may have still resonated with Prudentius who, through this careful distinction, expresses the hierarchy between God, emperor, and Roman citizen.

Prudentius’ Psychomachia is an allegory of the soul in which a monarch, Christ/Sapientia, rules over evil desires and misguided ideas. Prudentius represents this allegory through a fourth-century version of Plato’s city/soul analogy. By the fourth century, the “city” had become the Roman state, ruled over by an emperor who, though not divine, maintained a close connection to the divine as the siphon through which God’s laws came to earth. The Roman state was also an empire, which was synonymous with peace. The properly ordered soul imitates the structure and success of the Roman state with its own emperor and its own borders to protect. Christ/Sapientia projects its direct connection to God through virtues that operate within a freely chosen struggle against vices. Concordia results from a successful struggle and represents inner peace. Prudentius’ poetry reflects the development of Plato’s analogy seen in Philo and Ambrose’s idea of the soul as a monarchy that must resolve the constant threat of civil war. The last third of the Psychomachia, which includes the expulsion of Discordia-Heresis and the transition from army camp to city with a temple, shows how deeply “one-god one-ruler” was to define both the personal and political identities of Christians for centuries to come, and this concept, received by Prudentius via the twists and turns of a Christianized, and Romanized, intellectual history, nourishes the Psychomachia’s allegory of the soul as a city (and vice versa).

The Descent of the Soul and Other Platonist Doctrines

In the work of Plato, the ascent of the soul to the realm of ideal forms, to perfect knowledge, and, finally, to divinity in the guise of the Good proved to be an idea of extraordinary influence and reach. A major current in Augustine’s work between the years 386–97 (just before the composition of the Confessions) is the language of ascent. From fifth-century Athens to fourth-
century Rome, and beyond, intellectuals adapted this concept to fit their views on the immortality and salvation of the soul. The idea of ascent and descent plays a significant role in the *Psychomachia*’s construction of its allegory of the soul. The portrayal of the soul’s interior and its exterior relations with other souls is made vivid through the manipulation of the theme of ascent and descent. Moreover, the *Psychomachia* reflects the development of the Platonist idea in the third and fourth centuries and takes its place in the spectrum of neo-Platonic and Christian deployments of the theme. A survey of the theme in the *Psychomachia* not only confirms this intellectual historical argument but also illustrates the importance of pagan ideas in Prudentius’ literary program.

The myth of the charioteer in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the structure of the soul implied by it, as well as the doctrine of the soul with its attendant imagery in the *Phaedo*, have resonances in the *Psychomachia*. Prudentius adapts the language of chains, bondage, and the soul as a prison, which have long histories beginning with the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Cratylus*. The charioteer myth of the *Phaedrus* implies the soul’s “fall” because of some kind of failing. The implication of the *Phaedo*’s view of the soul is that the soul should flee the body to be polluted as little as possible by the body. We have already seen how Prudentius exploits the Platonic parallel between the structure of the city and the structure of the soul throughout the second half of the poem—especially from Psych. 606 (the beginning of Operatio’s speech) to the end. This results in a particular vision in the *Psychomachia* of the soul’s nature and relationship to God. Platonist motifs of the soul’s fall and bondage help to animate the *Psychomachia*’s vices as vivid, pagan typologies that represent wrong choices for the Christian soul.

In the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato foregrounds the language of descent, one half of a binary pair (ascent of the soul/descent of the soul) that the neo-Platonists under Plotinus and Porphyry further developed. Neo-Platonists explained how the human soul comes to inhabit the human body through the concept of descent. In his metaphysics Plotinus creates a cosmic structure of four main hypostases in which the One and the Mind (\(\text{No} \, \text{w}_{2}\)) occupy the first and the second hypostases. The third hypostasis is the Soul, an image of the realm of the Mind; and the fourth, and in a sense “the lowest,” hypostasis is matter (\(\text{\ddot{o}l} \, \text{n} \)). For Plotinus descent is the first principle of coming to be. The human soul descends from the third hypostasis, the world soul, which imposes form onto matter and thereby gives life to matter.

Although in his own works Porphyry developed and modified Plotinus’
specific doctrines, he maintained the same basic general approach to hypo-
stases while adding to the notion of the soul’s descent. Porphyry employs
several interesting images and motifs in his various descriptions of the soul’s
descent. The fall happens because of the soul’s weight. The soul is sent away
naked by God on a sojourn abroad. Its way down the soul grows wet,
imbibes forgetfulness, experiences estrangement, and is sleepy. Porphyry
sees honey as the pleasure associated with descent. Pleasure is part of the neo-
Platonist picture of descent because the soul is vulnerable to the desire for
corporeal form, the driving force of which is pleasure. Poetry itself represents
the temptation of pleasure both in Plato and Plotinus. The neo-Platonist view
of poetry as symbolic rather than mimetic is a response to mimesis’ associa-
tion of poetry with the pleasures of emotions. Once making contact with the
human body, the soul is diffused through a person’s parts. When the soul is
embodied, it exists in ignorance and is blinded, holds false opinions, is forget-
ful of the past and desires pleasure, and, finally, is under tyranny and enslaved
by the passions, which are compared to fetters and chains.

Other pertinent metaphorical and doctrinal features of Porphyry’s views on
the soul, its structure, and nature are to be found in his Ad Marcellam. In this
work, he carefully creates a relationship between reason and its temple, the
soul. The soul can be a dwelling place for evil as well. Vices can prevent the
soul from reaching or seeing God, which can result in a battle within the soul.
It is at this point that human choice and responsibility appear, because hu-
mans, not God, are the causes of evil. Reason is food for the soul, but hope,
as well, can nourish the soul. Indirectly related to this language is Porphyry’s
understanding of three types of law that humans must acknowledge: divine
law, the law of mortal nature, and the law of cities. The law of cities for
Porphyry is an arbitrary agreement between citizens governing social interac-
tion. The law of mortal nature sets the limits concerning the body’s needs, and
divine law is rooted in the Stoic conception of divine law as the law of the
 cosmos. An underlying principle to the discussion of the soul’s capability of
reaching God is the apophatic nature of both God and divine law:
and expressing differently in Latin, animae liberandae. Also Porphyry often uses
language such as “the way which leads to the gods” (the way which leads to the gods)
Finally, through Platonic reminiscences, Porphyry uses tyrant/despot and slave language to stress the view that reason and not the passions must guide the soul.87

The Greek pagan tradition is the source of the language and imagery of the soul’s incarceration: Plato’s *Phaedo* 59e–60a, 62b, 67d; *Republic* 514a–17c; and *Cratylus* 400b9ff; as well as the neo-Platonist Porphyry adopted the motif (e.g., *Ad Marc.* 7.17–122). Socrates says at *Phaedo* 62b3: ὡς ἐν τινι φρουρᾷ ἐσμεν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οὐ δεῖ δὴ ἐκεῖνον ἐκ ταύτης λύειν οὐδ’ ἀποδιδράσκειν . . . (“that we men are in a prison and it is not necessary indeed to free oneself from it nor to run from it”). The body as prison and the notion of release appear in the *Republic*’s cave allegory and in the *Republic* and *Phaedo*’s language of incarceration and release: δεσμώτας (prisoners; *Rep.* 515a4); δεσμωτήριον (prison; *Rep.* 515b7); λύσιν τε καὶ ύσιν τῶν δεσμῶν καὶ τῆς ἁφοροσύνης . . . (“release and healing from bonds and folly”; *Rep.* 515c2); λύσις καὶ χωρισμός ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος (“release and separation of the soul from the body”; *Phaedo* 67d4–5, repeated verbatim at 67d9–10).88

Release (λύσις) became a technical term in neo-Platonic philosophy.89 The Latin translation, liber and its cognates, appear four times in the *Praefatio* to the *Psychomachia*,90 much of which is occupied with describing the freeing of Lot from his bondage. Prudentius makes it clear that Lot’s bondage is analogous to the bondage of the soul. Images of slavery, capture, and chains,91 which occur in the main body of the poem, litter the preface: cordis servientis (the enslaved heart; line 14), servire duris . . . vinculis (“[Lot] enslaved under harch shackles”; line 21), captis tenebant inpeditum copiis (“[the enemy] hindered by captured abundance”; line 25), ruptis expeditus nexibus (“[Lot] released by the rupturing of his chains”; line 32), quae capta foedae serviat libidini (“[the body] which is captured and enslaved to disgusting desire”; line 54). This language has a long Platonist tradition.92

The *Praefatio* skillfully brings the reader into the interior realm of the soul93 and its struggle to achieve a state that is “full of God,” as Prudentius says of the great example of pity, Abraham (plenus deo, line 26; cf. inplebit, line 68). In this condition Abraham strikes down the enemy, who is described twice as weighed down by his material wealth garnered from military victories (tenebant inpeditum, line 25; and graves, line 27). On the one hand, there is Abraham, full of God, as a liberated and ascended soul should be, and, on the other, there is the enemy, weighed down and representing the state of a corrupted soul. This recalls Porphyry’s description of the soul in its descent as heavy and weighed
down (τὸ βαρὺ πνεῦμα; Sent. 29.18.14). In the allegorical story of the Praefatio, Prudentius employs neo-Platonic imagery and language of the soul to establish the opposition within the soul, which will be played out in the rest of the poem.

Throughout the main body of the Psychomachia, ascent and descent are dominant metaphors. Psych. 86, nosmet dona ad caelestia vexit (“[God] has lifted us to heavenly gifts”), forms a the climax of ascent language and looks back to Psych. 68, vera . . . virtus terrena in corpore fluxit (“true power has flowed into an earthly body”), and 80–81, maiestate . . . non degenerante . . . / . . . . miser ad nobiliora trahente (“[The Word’s] majesty is not lowered by the experience of the flesh, but raises wretched men to nobler things”). Platonist language of ascent/descent binds these lines together. Earlier, Psych. 68 had foregrounded virtus as the “force” or “power” that “flows” into the human body. For Prudentius, this takes place in the context of salvation history as when Judith defeated Holofernes, indicating typologically the Incarnation. Prudentius combines salvation history’s Incarnation and language of descent into a Christian Platonism representative of the age. Psych. 80–81 provides the comparison between humans and the divine with respect to ascent/descent. The phrase non degenerante indicates that the Word “does not depart from its kind,” when it undergoes incarnation. There is no directional language of ascent/descent used here. Just a line below, however, the directional language is used of human beings (miseros) whom the power of the Word “draws toward nobler things.” This brings the reader to the parallel ad caelestia vexit of Psych. 86, which explicitly gathers the ascent/descent language of Psych. 68 and 80–81 to form a climax of the section full of the Platonist language of being. Thus, Psych. 68–86 contains Platonist language of being and ascent/descent to create a complex Christian Platonist point of view.

Perhaps the most striking example of Platonist descent in the Psychomachia occurs at Psych. 190–93, which describes Superbia’s horse within an extended description of Superbia’s entrance into the battle:

Nec minus instabili sonipes feritate superbit (Psych. 190–93)
inpatiens madidis frenarier ora lupatis,
huc illuc fren dent obvertit terga negata
libertate fugae pressisque tumescit habenis.
Her horse is no less insolent with its unpredictable savageness
unable to bear her mouth bridled by the wet bit,
gnashing its teeth this way and that it turns its back, since its liberty of flight has been denied, and swells with anger because of the pressure of the reigns.

Parallels to *Psych.* 191 are found both in Ovid and in Horace. The portrayal of the horse, however, is reminiscent of the evil stallion of Plato’s *Phaedrus* 254e2–5:

*etí múllión toú ύβριστοῦ ὑποῦ ἐκ τῶν ὀδόντων
Βία ὀπίσω σπάσας τὸν χαλινόν τὴν τε κακηγόρον
gλώτταν καὶ γνάθους καθήμαζεν...*

[The charioteer], pulling the bit backward even more violently than before from the teeth of the insolent horse covers his scurrilous tongue and jaws with blood.

The two passages are similar in thought and language. Both horses are connected directly or indirectly to arrogance. Both the rider in the *Psychomachia* passage and the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* passage have to apply great pressure to the reins, which causes the bridle bit to draw blood in Plato and to expose moistened (with blood?) teeth in Prudentius. Moreover, *Psych.* 305–309 has much in common with *Phaedrus* 256d3–e2:

*Dixit et auratis praestringens aëra pinnis (Psych. 305–309)
in caelum se virgo rapit. Mirantur euntem virtutes tolluntque animos in vota volentes ire simul, ni bella duces terrena retardent.
Confligunt vitiis seque ad sua praemia servant.
She [Hope] spoke, and striking the air with her golden wings the maiden takes herself to heaven. The virtues marvel at her as she goes, and they raise their spirits in longing, desiring to go at the same time, if earthly wars were not delaying their leaders. They join the battle with the vices and preserve themselves for their own rewards.

*ἀπτεροὶ μὲν, ὀρμηκότες δὲ πτεροῦσθαι ἐκβαίνουσι τοῦ σώματος, ὅστε οὐ σμικρὸν ἄθλον τῆς ἐρωτικῆς μανίας φέρονται· εἰς γὰρ σκότον καὶ τὴν ὑπὸ γῆς πορείαν οὐ νόμος ἔστιν ἄτι ἐλθεῖν τοῖς κατηγριμένοις ἥδη τῆς ὑπουρανίου πορείας... (Phaedrus 256d4–8)
When they [souls] depart from the body, they are...*
not winged, but their wings have begun to grow, so that the madness of love brings no small reward; for it is the law that those who have once begun their upward progress shall not pass into darkness and the journey under the earth . . .

Prudentius depicts Spes as winged\textsuperscript{101} and flying \textit{in caelum} while the rest of the virtues want to go with her. Danuta Shanzer notices that aside from this passage, Spes is never winged in Latin literature but it is in Greek literature.\textsuperscript{102} She goes on to argue that Prudentius is making a historical reference to the restoration of the Altar of (winged) Victory in the Senate house after 405, attested to by Claudian at \textit{6 Cons. Hon. 597}. However this may be, Prudentius is primarily displaying his familiarity with the \textit{Phaedrus} myth and certain neo-Platonic images of the soul.\textsuperscript{103} The phrase \textit{animos . . . volentes} stands for the desiderative part, which houses the desire to go immediately (\textit{ire simul}) with winged Spes (\textit{auratis pinnis}) but cannot be indulged since there are earthly battles (\textit{bella . . . terrena}) to be fought in order to secure future rewards (\textit{sua praemia}).

The \textit{Phaedrus} passage concerns the lover’s soul within which Plato continues the charioteer metaphor. The main issue is desire, which, if properly understood, becomes transformed into a life of continence,\textsuperscript{104} something with which Prudentius surely sympathized. The soul’s structure aside, these two passages have much in common, including the language of “wings,” “reward,” “earthly/heavenly,” “rising,” and “journey.”\textsuperscript{105}

Taken in light of the two preceding passages, \textit{Psych. 253–54, . . . rapidum . . . urget / cornipedem laxisque volat temeraria frenis} (“she spurs on her swift horse and flies wildly with loose reins”), which portrays the charioteer (\textit{Superbia}) disastrously giving free rein to the reckless and impetuous horse, recalls Socrates’ admonition that allowing too much slack in the reins of the desirous horse will cause the lover to fail in his approach to the beloved (\textit{Phaedrus 254a–e}). \textit{Psych. 255} furthers this thought by associating \textit{Superbia} and the horse with unrestrained desire (\textit{hostem . . . cupiens . . . / sternere} [“desiring to lay low her enemy”]), which results in a fall, \textit{cadit in foveam praeceps} (“She falls headlong into a pit,” \textit{Psych. 257}), eventually causing the deaths of the horse (\textit{eques}) and the charioteer (\textit{equi}).\textsuperscript{106} The fall of \textit{Superbia} and her horses strikingly recalls the Platonic myth of the charioteer and evil horse. But, more important, the image of descent, Platonist in its origins, is an integral part of the portrayal of the vice, \textit{Superbia}.

Three more instances of the wing and chariot language occur in the next
section of the *Psychomachia*: *Psych.* 321, *curru inventa venusto* (“carried along in a magnificent chariot”), places another vice, *Luxuria*, in the role of charioteer; *Psych.* 323, *ales*, is an adjective modifying the noun “arrow”; and *Psych.* 334–35, *currum varia gemmarum luce micantem / mirantur* (“they wondered at the chariot gleaming with the darting light of gems”), presents a description of the chariot which will later be applied to the description of the temple. The soul’s be-jeweled appearance is a reckless chariot that will later become a harmonious temple. Elements of the *Phaedrus* myth reappear as a superficial temptation that the virtues must resist—*Sobrietas* will later encourage such. *Psych.* 335–39 specifies further this temptation but includes the telling addition of heaviness (*ponderis, Psych.* 336) regarding the gold and silver. In addition, *crepitantia* (rattling, crashing), which is said of the chariot as it rolls along, conjures up the reckless nature of the machine and its pilot. *Luxuria*, like *Superbia*, is heading for a fall. Again, not only are aspects of the Platonic myth applied to the portrayal of a vice, but the corrupt soul itself is implied through the Platonist language of falling and heaviness.

*Spes* is a concept with which Porphyry is familiar. To engage in ascent, the soul has to nourish its “good hopes” (ἐλπίς ὁγοθοίζ). The phrase *futuri / spem boni* (*Psych.* 232–33) echoes the same idea. Prudentius recalls the pagan philosophical context further by portraying *Spes* as ascending. At *Psych.* 300–301, *me tunc ille puer . . . secutus . . . / . . . sursum in mea regna tetendit* (“at that time that boy followed me and he rose upwards to my kingdom”), *Spes* herself employs the language of ascent, which is clearly distinct from the allusion to *Matth.* 23:12 at *Psych.* 290 that those who are low shall be high and *vice versa*. At *Psych.* 302–304 she again uses language of ascent in the process of describing her home underneath the feet of the omnipotent God: *certa . . . domus . . . / . . . sub pedibus Domini . . . ad sublime . . . / . . . capessunt* (“there is a certain home at the feet of the Lord . . . they reach towards the highest region”). The pagan intellectual tradition, which portrays *Spes* in terms of ascent, is integral to Prudentius’ understanding of the virtue.

Virtues such as *Fides* and *Spes* live in a higher realm but one that subsists below that of God. Humans, who are represented by the constituents of the army of the virtues, occupy another level below the higher virtues and God. These beings reach up or stretch out toward the upper realms by destroying vices. This section of the poem establishes a metaphysical hierarchy for the universe: from God, to Virtue (Hope), and finally to mortal. If one includes the netherworld, which Prudentius mentions at *Psych.* 89–90, there are four
distinct levels of reality that furnish the levels of ascent for the human soul. The metaphorical structure of ascent brings with it an exteriority in which the soul moves outside of the body toward an external goal. In this way the Psychomachia maintains a simultaneously internal and external view of the soul. In addition, the metaphor of ascent can be integrated into the typological schemes of the poem. The three-part typology assumes a connection between humans, virtue, and God.

The motif of the horses (with the addition of the chariot and charioteer) continues through the battle between Luxuria and Sobrietas (up to Psych. 416). This pagan philosophical motif is vital to the creation of these personifications. The Phaedrus’ horse-and-charioteer picture of the impetuous and reckless soul descending and falling is developed further by Prudentius through neo-Platonic imagery and concepts. We have already touched upon a couple of these important images above. It is possible to expand upon what has already been said. When she enters the battle, Luxuria is drunk (ebria, Psych. 320). Sobrietas, in her speech of exhortation, describes Luxuria’s drunken feasts with language of wetness and alcohol: conbibat infusum croceo religione nardum (“a turban] with its yellow band to drink up the spikenard poured on”; Psych. 359); inde ad nocturnas epulas ubi cantharus ingens / despuit effusi spumantia damna Falerni / in mensam cyathis stillantibus, uda ubi multo / fulcra mero veterique toreumata rore rigantur (“and so to feasts that last into the night, where the huge tankard spills out wasted floods of foaming wine, while the ladies drip on the table, the couches are soaked with neat liquor,” Psych. 367–70); His vos inbutos dapibus iam crapula turpis / Luxuriae ad madidum rapit inportuna lupanar (“and now after you have been steeped in these feasts savage drunkenness takes you to the drunken brothel of Luxuria,” Psych. 377–78). Neo-Platonic language of drunkenness contributes to the personification of this vice.

The feast provided by Christ (his dapibus) is set off against Luxuria’s “nightly feasts” (nocturnas epulas, Psych. 367). The opposition can be seen again in the infusum nardum (Psych. 359) of Luxuria and the unguentum regale . . . et chrisma perenne (Psych. 361) of Christ. Luxuria represents the side of neo-Platonicism that images the soul as falling, drunk, wet, and descending. None of this language is applied to Christ’s feasts. Instead, they are referred to as angelicus cibus (“food of the angels,” Psych. 374), which is de corpore Christi (Psych. 376). At Psych. 380 Sobrietas repeats the neo-Platonic adjective of descent from Psych. 320, ebria. At Psych 371, right in the midst of a flood of this language and at a climax of her speech, Sobrietas, nearly exasperated, asks
whether the virtues have forgotten very important Old Testament stories, the memories of which would protect them from the influence of Luxuria: excidit ergo animis eremi sitis (“so has [the memory] of thirst in the desert fallen from your souls”) and just ten lines later at Psych. 381: State, precor, vestri memores, memores quoque Christi (“stand! I pray, remember who you are and Christ as well”). This appeal to memory (and thus the avoidance of forgetfulness) immediately follows some of the densest language of intoxication and wetness. As mentioned above, Porphyry commonly represents the descending soul as heavy with wetness and forgetfulness.

Luxuria’s death at Psych. 407–53 combines Platonist images of the charioteer and wetness, for instance, Fertur resupina reductis / nequiqam loris auriga comamque madentem / pulvere foedatur (“the charioteer, leaning back, is carried along helplessly though she pulls back on the reigns and her dripping hair is soiled with dust”; Psych. 412–14). Luxuria’s hair is “soaked” just as neo-Platonic souls which are in the process of descent. Prudentius carefully frames these lines with detailed description of the chariot.

et solido ex auro pretiosi ponderis axem
defixis inhiant obtubibus et radiorum
argento albentem seriem quam summa rotarum
flexura electri pallentis continet orbe.
And [they look longingly at] the axle of a costly weight made from solid gold, and the spokes of white silver, one after another, the rim of the wheel holding them in place with a circle of pale amber.

This description suggests the model of the concentric circles, which may represent hypostases. There is a progression of value from the axle of gold to the spokes of silver to the rim of amber. The center contains the most precious metal while the outer edge of the wheel consists of a more commonplace material. In addition, the rim is described as “pale” (pallentis), which is also a possible expression of the neo-Platonic “pale emanation.” These same wheels at Psych. 414–16 “entangle” Luxuria as she “falls” under the axle: tunc et vertigo rotarum / implicat excussam dominam, nam prona sub axem / labitur et lacero tardat sufflamine currum (“then the whirling of the wheels entangles their mistress who has been knocked out; for she falls forward under the axle and her mangled body is the brake that slows the chariot down”). The outer
edge of the wheels “mangles” her and begins the process of destruction and dispersion of a vice’s body, and therefore the bad soul it represents.

*Psych.* 432–46 re-describe *Luxuria’s* death as a scattering of the abstract qualities that define her. The expression *caede ducis dispersa . . . / nugatrix acies* (“at the slaughter of their leader her trifling followers scatter”; *Psych.* 432–33) commences an abstract dissipation, parallel to the physical mangling of *Luxuria’s* body, of those things which represent her essence: *Iocus, Petulantia, Amor, Pompa, Venustas, Discordia,* and *Voluptas.* This movement from the physical to the abstract is an allegorical strategy of Prudentius in which the death of a vice represents the deconstruction of its fictional character into a set of abstract qualities that inhabit the soul. This scenario aids in the militaristic setting of the poem as a civil war, but also finishes off the section of the poem in which the poet vividly portrays the soul’s descent into sinful materiality. Descent (and ascent) figured according to Platonist language and imagery is central to the poem’s purpose of presenting to the reader positive and negative typological choices that employ both figures from history and ethical-spiritual concepts.

**Descent and the Philosopher King**

The end of the *Psychomachia* recalls the neo-Platonist-inspired idea that a philosopher-king’s political activities should be understood as a descent from the intelligible realm of knowledge into the earthly realm of politics, a descent undertaken to facilitate a union of human souls on earth with God in heaven. For pagan Platonist thinkers of the third and early fourth centuries, the descent of the philosopher king to earthly political life for the sake of the salvation of his fellow citizens, as first suggested by Plato’s myth of the cave, represents for the citizens the possibility of ascent to the Good, the One, or the divine intellect, which functions as the monarch of the universe. D. J. O’Meara captures the essence of the neo-Platonist idea of politics as a descent into the world of appearances:

Political life, a life in which a soul, as living in relation to the body, is confronted with problems of order both within itself and in relation to others, is thus a school of virtue, an extended version, so to speak, of the philosophical school, the ruler being consequently a kind of mentor or guide who brings order to political life, inspired by a privileged access to the divine.
This neo-Platonic idea penetrates the end of the *Psychomachia*, on the one hand, through Prudentius’ substitution of *Sapientia* and Christ as the highest entities of the soul on the other hand, through their political activities of ruling and teaching. They are the guides who descend to earth to save humans who require aid in their earthly struggle to vanquish desire and vice to attain virtue and a connection to the divine (Christ is described as *inlapsus*, *Psych*. 818). Prudentius here participates in what began with third-century Christian intellectuals—namely, “the displacement of culturally authoritative Greek texts by the Christian Bible.” But a difference between Prudentius and other Christian intellectuals is that this “displacement” did not entail “a radical criticism of some of Platonism’s most central affirmations.”

While Prudentius’ allegory evokes the interior of the soul through its struggle against vice and union with *Sapientia* and Christ, it simultaneously operates at the level of exterior relations between individual souls. When the final third of the poem describes the securing of the city and the constructing of the temple, a slippage from inner to the outer world occurs because the personified virtues, as I have already argued, are portrayed as individuals under a monarchy tinged with characteristics of the Roman Principate. According to O’Meara, Iamblichus “links humanity to the divine through the virtue of wisdom. Wisdom derives from a transcendent divine intellect, and, inspired by this model, divinizes human institutions through the order she brings.” In the *Psychomachia*, Christ as the ruler of the cosmos sits above the city and temple while his regent, *Sapientia*, governs the virtues/citizens through the rule of law. In the neo-Platonic model, law is derived from reason, which originates in the divine intellect. Law comes down from on high as a transcendent good to be communicated to humans on earth through the wisdom of the monarch.

The Emperor Julian, whom Prudentius admired as an excellent earthly ruler, adopted this neo-Platonic political model, seeing his mission as a descent to imperial rule following a vision of the gods. What we might call the divinization of the political present at the end of the *Psychomachia* recalls this neo-Platonic thought world, which Julian attempted to put into practice in order to revive Hellenism. Julian’s program of a return to state paganism caused anxiety and consternation that persisted in Christian politicians and intellectuals into the fifth century. Prudentius reveals this anxiety when he tells a story (*Apoth.* 449–502) in which Julian attends a sacrifice to the god Hecate (later in the passage named as Persephone). It all goes wrong—the pagan
priest cannot read the entrails—because of the presence of a Christian in Julian’s retinue. The sacrifice is ineffectual, the rest of Julian’s retinue is converted to Christianity, and Julian himself scurries off alone, his pagan rites and gods shown to be feeble. Immediately following the story Prudentius launches into a description of the new (Christian) temple made from the “Logos of the Lord” (verbo domini, Apoth. 524). This “everlasting” temple stands upon the ashes of pagan rites and replaces the temple of Solomon, which lies in ruins.

Prudentius’ keen awareness of Julian’s program to revive paganism through the restoration of temples, cults, altars, and sacrifices, and his admiration of the pagan emperor for his military achievements, law giving, learning, and oratorical skill are reflected in the Psychomachia’s transformation of the neo-Platonic story of the ruler’s descent into the world. Julian preferred not to disturb ancient religions such as Judaism—in fact, he had decreed that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt (a point conveniently ignored by Prudentius)—but he did not tolerate religious innovations, especially Christianity. O’Meara has argued that Julian’s program was a direct result of his neo-Platonic ideology, influenced by Iamblichus, who held that the practice of rituals and praying helped to elevate a soul fallen from the perfection of the divine intellect. Julian also fostered local and regional pagan clergy whose involvement with the people in villages, towns, and cities, he believed, paralleled Platonic philosopher kings by imparting their wisdom to citizens.

In the Apotheosis, Prudentius turns the tables on Julian’s neo-Platonic political legacy by offering a vision of a new temple with Jesus as monarch, a temple that finds full allegorical form in the Psychomachia as both the hierarchical structure of the interior soul and of the exterior body politic. Both the Roman Christian soul and the Roman Christian Empire are evoked through Prudentius’ allegorical city and temple, both of which spring from a neo-Platonic intellectual blueprint. Julian intrigued Prudentius because he envisioned a model of politics that Christians could appropriate by applying Jesus’ story and identity as savior to the neo-Platonic idea of the leader who descends to earth.

Like Eusebius, the great church historian of the early fourth century, Prudentius substitutes Christian terms into a neo-Platonic metaphysical structure. Eusebius was the first to perform this intellectual maneuver by replacing the neo-Platonic first principle, the intelligible logos, which rules over the universe and its imperfect material component (earth), with the Christian god and
Eusebius establishes a relationship of imitation between the actions of Constantine and the Christian logos. Analogously, the *Psychomachia* employs a metaphor of the individual soul and Roman imperial state, which retains Christ as the logos that rules over the universe through the laws and administration of *Sapientia*. Whereas Prudentius still thinks in neo-Platonic terms of stages of ascent, later, the Augustine of the *City of God*, through the deployment of the “two-cities” concept, not only eliminates the neo-Platonic notion of the city and its political order as a stage of ascent to the divine but also discards the Christian substitution of a Christian Roman Empire as a means of ascent. For Prudentius, by contrast, these ideas remain central to his poetic project.

The Vices as Epicurean Souls

The intensity and frequency of violence in the *Psychomachia* has elicited various explanations from critics, who, until recently, have pronounced judgments based more on an impulse of revulsion toward violence than on an analysis of the work’s poetic conventions and philosophical program. Michael Roberts has helped to clarify the issue with regard to the *Peristephanon*, in which excessive and graphic images of violence dominate the poetic discourse. He has pointed out that the torture and suffering of a martyr is directly proportional to the glory that martyr is to receive as a saint. In addition, Roberts uncovers a series of dialectics between “freedom and restraint,” and “the liberation of the soul” and “the enchainment of the body.”

The *Psychomachia*, by contrast, presents different hermeneutic problems, for, unlike the violence displayed in the *Peristephanon*, it is not apparent what poetic purpose is served by having the virtues inflict extreme bodily harm on the vices. Scholars have handled the issue of violence in the *Psychomachia* in various ways. Some trace the violent language to the *Aeneid*. Others see the violence done to the vices and by the virtues as a part of the epic battle conventions that Prudentius employed. Macklin Smith views the use of the conventions as purposely ironic, for otherwise the hyperbole of such violent descriptions would appear absurd. Martha Malamud establishes language of dismemberment as a topos, since it also occurs in Claudian’s *In Rufinum*. C. S. Lewis, Gay Clifford, and Maurice Lavarenne are justifiably vexed by the apparent ethical contradiction of virtues wielding excessive force.

James Paxson has offered a fuller treatment and a noteworthy interpreta-
tion. He studied four death scenes in which the destruction of the eyes, mouth, and throat are described: those of *Veterum Cultura Deorum* (*Psych.* 30–35), *Libido* (*Psych.* 49–52), *Luxuria* (*Psych.* 421–26), and *Discordia Heresia* (*Psych.* 715–18). These death scenes represent the symbolic dismantling of the trope of *prosopopoeia* (the technical term in Latin is *conformatio*, frequently translated as “personification”). The root of the term suggests “putting on a face” or “dramatizing,” and this is the relevant meaning in Prudentius. Thus, according to Paxson, to destroy the face by destroying its parts—i.e., the lips, teeth, and tongue (which produce speech), and the mouth and the eyes (which signify the face)—is to dismantle the trope, *prosopopoeia*.

This explanation is persuasive for the first three cases, and accounts for the stabbing of *Discordia*’s tongue. There is, however, more to say about *Discordia*’s dismemberment. Bodily dismemberment is the physical version of *Discordia*’s abstract meaning. Furthermore, Paxson’s explanation does not apply to the other occurrences of graphic violence in the *Psychomachia*, such as *Ira*’s death at *Psych.* 153–54 and *Avaritia*’s death at 589–97. And there are many others.

A more comprehensive approach is to understand these deaths according to the Epicurean doctrine of the dissipation of the soul. According to this doctrine, the soul is mortal and dies with the body. In fact, at the moment of death, the body, which is figured as a hollow vessel, gives up its cargo, the soul. The soul’s atoms flit away, dispersed amongst the atoms of the universe. In the *Psychomachia*, the descriptions of the vices’ deaths employ the language and imagery of this doctrine. Conversely, the impenetrability of the virtues, imaged as failed penetrations and breakings of vessels, represents the contrary of this doctrine, that is, Christian doctrine. Such an approach has two chief merits. First, it explains all cases of violence in the poem but, more important, it reveals again the poet’s manipulation of philosophical doctrine in order to construct important features of the poem’s personified virtues and vices that represent terms in typological pairs or triads.

In fact, the gore of the *Psychomachia* suggests a conscious awareness of the Epicurean doctrine of the soul’s mortality. This awareness is seen in Prudentius’ language of dissipation, penetration, and breaking, which can be traced within the tradition of Epicurean thought from Epicurus himself to the explanations by Lucretius and Cicero. Significantly, this language is applied by Prudentius only to the souls of vices, which are mortal and pagan. As the vices, or
souls replete with vices, die, so the virtues, or the souls constituted of virtues, live forever. Prudentius indicates this opposition by depicting the virtues as never being subject to or narrowly escaping penetration, dissipation, and breaking. Immortality and mortality are part of the very make-up of the poem’s virtues and vices. In this way the poet uses an Epicurean idea to express the Christian conviction that with the birth of Christ, salvation history has reached the stage in which souls can attain eternal life.139

In the case of each death of a vice, with the possible exception of one, Prudentius applies language and ideas found in Epicurus himself as well as in Cicero’s and Lucretius’ version of Epicurean philosophy of mind.140 I am referring specifically to the idea of the soul being diffused and dissipated at the moment of the body’s destruction, a notion that prevails throughout the battle scenes in the Psychomachia. Piercing and penetration language, as well as a focus on the description of breathing and the organs of breathing, recall philosophical language and doctrine derived from the Epicurean view that the soul dissipates into nothing once the body is penetrated or destroyed.

In his extant writings, Epicurus141 represents the death of the soul through the metaphor of the corporeal soul being contained within a vessel, the body, which once harmed or broken, dissipates into nothing: καὶ μὴν καὶ λυομένου τοῦ ὅλου ἀθροίσματος ἡ νυχή διασπέρεται καὶ οὐκέτι ἔχει τὰς αὐτὰς δυνάμεις οὐδὲ κινεῖται, ὡστε οὐδ’ αἰσθησίαν κέκτηται (“Moreover, when the whole aggregate disintegrates, the soul is dispersed and no longer has the same powers, or its motions, hence it does not possess sensation either,” Letter To Herodotus 65);142 and ὁ θάνατος οὔδέν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ· τὸ δ’ ἀναισθητοῖν οὔδέν πρὸς ἡμᾶς (“Death is nothing to us. For what has been dissolved has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us,” Principle Doctrines 2).143

In Latin literature this doctrine is clearly stated, for example, by Cicero, who gives the Epicureans credit for the doctrine he mentions earlier in the Tusculan Disputations at 1.9.18: alii (sc. censent) statim dissipari . . . (“Others [the Epicureans] (think) that it (the soul) is immediately dissipated”; see also Tusc. 1.34.82). Moreover, Lucretius (DRN 3.425–44) presents the Epicurean argument for the soul’s mortality—namely, that at death, the soul leaves its vessel and is scattered in the winds. The most striking example of a linguistic parallel between Prudentius and Lucretius is spargat in auras (Psych. 720) and polluit auras (Psych. 52) and discedit in auras (DRN 3. 436). Lucretius is even more specific:
ergo dissolvi quoque convenit omnem animam (DRN 3.455–58) naturam, ceu fumus, in altas aeris auras, quandoquidem gigni pariter pariterque videmus crescere et, ut docui, simul aevo fessa fatisci. Therefore, it is fitting that the whole nature of the soul dissolves too, like smoke, into the high winds of the air, since we see that it is born at the same time and grows at the same time [as the body]; and, as I have instructed, that simultaneously exhausted by age it becomes weak.

At DRN 3.456 we again encounter the line-ending auras imitated by Prudentius. Lucretius is at pains here to establish the interdependence of the body and the soul. Thus, whatever happens to the body directly impinges on the health and welfare of the soul. And this phenomenon establishes the mortality of the soul for Lucretius. Furthermore, if the soul were immortal, it would be impervious to any sort of harmful penetration. As Lucretius argues later:

Praeterea quaecumque manent aeterna necessest (DRN 3.806–15) aut, quia sunt solido cum corpore, respuere ictus nec penetrare pati sibi quicquam quod queat artas dissociare intus partis, ut materiæ corpora sunt quorum naturam ostendimus ante; aut ideo durare aetatem posse per omnem, plagarum quia sunt expertia, sicut inanest, quod manet intactum neque ab ictu fungitur hilum; aut etiam quia nulla loci sit copia circum, quo quasi res possint discedere dissolvique, Besides, all things that endure forever must either, through having a solid body, repel impacts and allow nothing to penetrate them which might separate their tight-fitting parts from within, for example the particles of matter whose nature we proved earlier; or be able to endure through all time because they are free from blows, like void, which remains untouched and is quite unaffected by impact; or again because there is no place available around them such that they might be able to disperse and disintegrate,
Lucretius’ language of penetration and of the rejection of blows is replicated at Psych. 672, 676–77 (ictu . . . nec . . . / . . . sinerent penetrare—the whole passage is quoted below). Lucretius presents twenty-eight separate arguments (3.417–829) in order to defend the Epicurean doctrine that the soul does not survive the death of the body.\textsuperscript{145} The issue of the soul’s mortality and immortality is framed by Lucretius, just as in the texts of Epicurus and Cicero, in a discourse which images the soul as possessing a solid body for protection (DRN 3.807, 820). This vessel experiences either an impact or a penetration from the outside (DRN 3.809, 814) and, finally, disperses at the moment of physical destruction (DRN 3.815, 817–18). For the Epicureans this is the model that unequivocally proves the mortality of the soul. The Psychomachia shows awareness of this model and manipulates it to associate its features with virtues and vices. The soul is incorporeal, immortal, and invulnerable when it possesses virtues and accepts Christ and his teachings. On the other hand, the soul is mortal and vulnerable when vices dominate it and it rejects Christian dogma.

The text of the Psychomachia portrays the vices as subject to language of violent penetration and breaking. The untouched virtues, however, behave according to an inversion of the doctrine (i.e., the soul’s immortality); thus, the poem systematically represents virtues and vices according to the language of violence that accompanies their brutal interaction for a specific purpose—namely, to express the view that the soul is indeed immortal in the age of Christ. The language of violence is the instrument through which the discourse of Epicurean soul behavior at the moment of death is activated. In addition, Epicurean discourse of the soul does not merely stand in opposition to the Christian view of the soul; it also furnishes the semantic field within which the Christian view is constructed. The representation of vice-death is so consistent regarding language, imagery, and idea, that the poet in effect creates a topos of vice-death. This topos of vice-death becomes clear from the examination of the deaths of individual vices and several “near misses” of the virtues:

\textit{Veterum Cultura Deorum:}
\begin{quote}
... animamque malignam (Psych. 33–35)
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
fracta intercepti commercia gutturis artant
difficilémque obitum suspiria longa fatigant.
\end{quote}
and the shattered windpipe chokes off
the scanty breath of the broken throat, and long
gasps drag out a difficult death.
Libido:
Tunc exarmatae iugulum meretricis adacto (Psych. 49–52) transfigit gladio. Calidos vomit illa vapore. sanguine concretos caenoso, spiritus inde sordidus exhalans vicinas polluit auras.
Then she [Pudicitia] pierces the throat of the disarmed harlot with her sword having been plunged into it. She vomits forth warm vapors clotted with filthy blood, and from there her foul breath, belching out, pollutes the air nearby.

Ira:
Rasile figit humi lignum ac se cuspide versa (Psych. 153–54) perfodit et calido pulmonem vulnere transit.
She plants the smooth shaft in the ground and with the point turned up, she stabs herself and punctures her lung with a warm wound.

Superbia:
Tunc caput orantis flexa cervix resectum (Psych. 282–83) eripit ac madido suspendit colla capillo.
Then, although she [Superbia] begs her, she [Mens Humilis] bends her neck and tears out her head, having severed it, and raises the head by the dripping hair.

Luxuria:
Casus agit saxum, medii spiramen ut oris. (Psych. 421–26) frangeret et recavo misceret labra palato.
Dentibus introrsum resolutis lingua resectam dilaniata gulam frustis cum sanguinis inplet.
insolitis dapibus crudescit guttur etossa conliquefacta vorans revomit quas hauserat offas.
Chance directs the rock so that the breath-passage in the middle of her face breaks and mashes together her lips with her hollow palate. As her teeth are loosened inside, her tongue, which has been torn to pieces, fills her severed throat with bloody chunks. Her throat gags because of the unusual meal, and gulping down mashed bones, she vomits up again the morsels which she had swallowed.
sacerdotes Domini:

. . . vix in cute summa

praestringens paucos tenui de vulnera laedit
cuspis Avaritiae. Stupit Luis inproba castis
heroum iugulis longe sua tela repelli.

. . . the spear point of Greed barely injures a few, grazing
them on the surface of the skin with an insignificant wound.
The wicked plague is stunned that her weapons are repelled
at a distance from the heroes’ pure throats.

Avaritia:

Invadit trepidam Virtus fortissima duris
ulnarum nodis obliso et guttle frangit
exsanguem siccamque gulam; compressa ligantur
vincla lacertorum sub mentum et faucibus artis
extorquet animam, nullo quae vulnera rapta
palpitat atque aditu spiraminis intercepto
inclusam patitur venarum carcere mortem.
Illa reluctanti genibusque et calcibus instans
perfodit et costas atque ilia rumpit anhela.
The bravest virtue [Operatio] attacks the alarmed
[Avaritia] by strangling her with the harsh clench of her
arms and crushes her gullet, bloodless and dry, in her throat;
the fetters of her arms pressed together are tightened under
her chin and they twist out the breath from her narrow
throat which writhes, ravaged without a sign of a wound;
since the opening of the breath-passage has been blocked,
it suffers death shut up in the prison of her inmost parts.
She [Operatio], pressing on her with her knees and heels,
stabs her and breaks her ribs and breathless flanks.

Concordia:

excipit occultum vitii latitantis ab ictu
mucronem laeo in latere. Squalentia quamvis
texta catenato ferri subtegmine corpus
ambirent satis et acumen vulneris hamis
respuerent rigidis nec fila tenacia nodis
impactum sinerent penetrare in viscera telum.
She receives a concealed sword in her left side from the blow of a hidden vice. However, a stiff fabric of interwoven iron-thread surrounds her body and because of the stitched hooks, it spits out the sharp point from the wound, and the firm threads with their rigid knots do not allow the thrusting weapon to penetrate into her innards.

Concordia:

. . . Sed non vitalia rumpere sacri (Psych. 691–93)
corporis est licitum, summo tenus extima tactu
laesa cutis tenuem signavit sanguine rivum.

. . . But it was not permitted that she [Discordia] break through to the vital organs of the holy body; just on the surface, the outermost layer of skin, having been wounded by contact, displayed a thin stream of blood.

Discordia:

. . . Sed verba loquentis (Psych. 716–25)
inpedit et vocis claudit spiramina pilo
pollutam rigida transfigens cuspide linguam.

Carpitur innumeris feralis bestia dextris.

Frustratim sibi quisque rapit, quod spargat in auras,
quod canibus donet, corvis quod edacibus ultro
offerat, inmundis caeno exhalante cloacis
quod trudat, monstris quod mandet habere marinis.

Discissum foedis animalibus omne cadaver
dividitur, ruptis Heresis perit horrida membris.

. . . But she [Fides] stops her [Discordia] speaking, and she [Fides] closes shut the breath-passage of her voice piercing her filthy tongue with the stiff point of a javelin. The funereal monster is torn to pieces by innumerable right hands. Each one grabs for herself [bits] piece by piece, so that each scatters them to the winds, gives them to the dogs, offers them freely to voracious ravens, shoves them into the squalid sewers as filth fumes out, or entrusts them to the monsters of the sea to have. The whole corpse, having been torn apart, is distributed to foul animals; after her limbs have been torn, terrible Heresies perishes.
I should preface the analysis of these passages by first calling attention to Praef. Psych. 34, where Abraham, the most important typological figure of the Psychomachia, is called triumfi dissipator hostici. The noun dissipator is used of Abraham after he has driven away the fleeing kings who hold his kinsman, Lot, prisoner: reges superbos . . . / pellit fugatos . . . (Praef. Psych. 27–28). Such scattering will take place both on the concrete human level and the abstract level of the soul. As we have already seen, the analogy between the world of human beings and the soul is part of the allegorical strategy of the Psychomachia. After the virtues finally defeat the vices, they enter a walled camp, which is still vulnerable to the incursion of vice (Psych. 665–84 and 726–29), just as an individual soul is. As already argued, throughout the poem Prudentius plays upon the analogy between city and soul, or as in the case of Abraham, between the combatants’ activities and the soul. Lot’s evil enemies are scattered as the combatant vices are scattered and as the soul of a vice is scattered. The language of dissipation thus makes an early appearance in the poem.

Two categories of language from the preceding list of passages compellingly illustrate the doctrine of dissipation: soul/breath words and penetration or breaking words. In each death scene of a vice, words specifically referring to breathing or the life force occur—this includes the breath passage and organs such as the lungs: animam (Psych. 33), suspira (Psych. 35), calidos . . . vapores (Psych. 50), exhalans . . . auras (Psych. 52), pulmonem (Psych. 154), spiramen, animam (Psych. 593), spiraminis (Psych. 594), ilia anhela (Psych. 597), spiramina (Psych. 717), aeros (Psych. 720), and exhalente (Psych. 722).

These words are joined by verbs of penetration and breaking: fracta (Psych. 34), transfigit (Psych. 50), figit (Psych. 153), perfodit (Psych. 154 and 597), fraggeret (Psych. 422), frangit (Psych. 590), rumpit (Psych. 597), transfigens (Psych. 718), and trudat (Psych. 723). The consistency is striking, especially when set against the absence of this language in passages depicting the attacks on the virtues. In these scenes either verbs of repelling are employed—e.g., repelli (Psych. 509) and respuerent (Psych. 676)—or verbs of penetration are negated—e.g., non rumpere (Psych. 691) and nec . . . penetrare (Psych. 677). The fate of the breath, life force, or soul forms the dramatic focus of these scenes. When the vessel of the soul is violated through penetration or other damage, as with the deaths of the vices, it escapes the vessel or is trapped in a defective vessel in which it is no longer able to live. Death is the final result. Vices and those who live the life of vice (to extend the analogy to the reader) die, but for the virtues or one who lives according to virtue, immortality is guaranteed, because
nothing can penetrate the structure that houses the soul of the virtuous person.

The consistent use of language denoting soul/breath and penetration/breaking points to the overall doctrine that at death the souls of the vices dissipate or are destroyed in some way. As for the virtues, the opposite is the case. They are well protected behind armor, and when they are attacked by a vice, either the blows are repelled or their flesh is merely grazed. Examples of this phenomenon abound: Patientia’s armor repels the spear throw of Ira (Psych. 121–29); Mens Humilis is scantily clad (Psych. 204–205), but Superbia never reaches her; Avaritia’s javelin grazes the flesh of a few priests (Psych. 506–509); the spear thrust of Discordia results in a flesh wound and fails to harm Concordia’s vital organs (Psych. 672–77 and 691–93). On the literary level, the Epicurean features of each vice, and their negation in each virtue, contribute to their identity as personifications, and often these personifications function as terms in a series of opposed typologies from which the reader is invited to choose: for instance, Superbia/Goliath and Mens Humilis/David (Psych. 291–304).

When a soul is dominated by vice, it behaves in a more Epicurean way. Its vessel is penetrated, breaks, and dissipates, never to be reconstituted again. When the poet is concerned with virtues or good souls, the vessel never undergoes violence. Each virtue remains intact, impervious to bodily harm, an indication that the soul inside is safe and unharmed. This interpretative strategy reflects the poet’s normative views on the soul, its structure, and behavior. A Christian soul is immortal because it is replete with or practices virtue. Further, Prudentius is, in effect, assigning pagan doctrine to a past history, to the sinners, and to a violent world in which the soul died. This is why there is a change in tone after the final battle of the poem and the victory of the virtues—indicated by a transparent preoccupation with peace. Those older views, with their history and their adherents, are gone. It is not merely the case that a soul has been purified and renewed; a whole new world with a new future has been born.

The use of violence in the Psychomachia serves a wider and deeper poetic purpose than hitherto acknowledged. The view of the human soul and the behavior of the virtues and vices in the poem are traceable in part to a particular aspect of Epicureanism, a pagan philosophical doctrine, the history of which proceeds from the founder himself and finds an easily recognizable voice in Cicero and Lucretius. Prudentius again mobilizes a pagan intellectual
tradition to portray the characters of his allegory. This time he exploits images and concepts traceable to the Epicurean doctrine of the mortal soul.

Prudentius and the Neo-Platonic Soul

The doctrine that human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) had important implications for fourth-century views of the human soul. Christian intellectuals enthusiastically took up the pagan challenge that Trinitarian terms amounted to meaningless nonsense. Augustine developed a series of three-termed analogies (ternaries) between the soul and the Trinity on the premise that the soul possesses “traces” or “images” of the three-part Trinity. The study and explication of these “ternaries” of the human soul represent self-knowledge, a way toward God figured as an ascent. Augustine, especially in *De Trinitate* and the *Confessions*, extends these ideas, influenced by Plotinus who, by seeking essences through self-contemplation, anticipated Descartes. The conceptual trio of being, life, and reason is where Plotinus began in order to describe the essence of the soul. Augustine’s version begins with *esse-nolle-velle* (Conf. 12.11); that is, the essence of a human being is “to exist, to know, and to will.” Having established human existence based on cognition, Augustine further reduces the ternary to its foundation, *esse-vivere-intellegere* (to exist, to live, to understand; De Trin. 10.3.5; 10.8.11), which provides an accurate “trace” of the Trinity in humans. Moreover, as a human reflects even further, more ternaries become apparent, the most important of which is *memoria-intelligentia-voluntas*, which “expresses self-reflection: what is in my consciousness (memoria) is the object of my understanding (intelligencia) by virtue of my will (voluntas).”

Augustine was influenced by the neo-Platonic language of ternaries found in the trinitarian psychology of Marius Victorinus. Victorinus sees the structure of the soul not as a direct reflection of Logos, but λογικῶς, that which participates in the nature of the logos. It is the image of the Trinity indirectly or an image of an image. Therefore, the nature of the soul reflects *esse, vivere,* and *intellegere*. In book 3 of the *Adversus Arium* (chapters 4 and 5) Victorinus discusses this triad in order to focus on the identity and difference between the Son and the Holy Spirit and to explain that life and knowledge are indicative of the movement of being. As a reflection of the Trinity, the human soul is defined by its life and intelligence. Even though these two characteristics are consubstantial with being at the level of the Trinity, being can either be lost or
gained through vision or union with νοῦς. This consubstantiality allows the soul, if it chooses, to return to its higher state (Adv. Ar. 1.61.21–24).\(^{157}\) Depending on the soul’s choices, a direction of the soul’s activity is created and thus determines the likeness of the soul to the logos. If the soul subjects itself to passion, change, and corruption, it will lose its likeness.\(^{158}\)

The first 320 lines of the *Apotheosis*, in which Prudentius criticizes heretical doctrines is an excursus on the orthodox view of the Trinity and employs the ternary esse—vivere—intellegere:

Haec *fore* cum veterum cecinissent organa vatum, \((Apoth. 234–42)\)
nos oculis manibus congressu voce loquella
experti heroum tandem *intelleximus* orsa
priscorum et viso patefacta oracula Christo.
Haec est nostra salus, hinc *vivimus*, hinc animamur,
hoc sequimur: numquam detracto nomine nati
appellare patrem, patris et sine nomine numquam
natum *nosse* deum, numquam nisi sanctus et unus
spiritus intersit natumque patremque vocare;
After the lyres of the old prophets had sung that these things would come to be, we, with our eyes and
hands, having come to know him through a union, through
his voice and speech, we have *understood* at last the words of the ancient heroes and the prophecies that were laid bare by the appearance of Christ. This is our salvation, from this *we live* and from this we are given life. We follow this rule: never address the father without the name of the son, never *to know* God the son without the name of the father, never to call on the son and the father unless the one and holy spirit is present.

The context of this passage is a discussion of the ontological status of Christ, who holds sway in the three possible realms of creation: *carnis* . . . *medium*, *summum patris*, et *Stygis imum* (“the middle domain of the flesh, the highest domain of the Father, and the lowest domain of hell,” *Apoth. 228*). Christ may have functioned as a mortal, but he maintains his identity as God (*Apoth. 230*). Just following these orthodox assertions concerning the Son’s status within the Trinity, Prudentius explains how humans receive and understand this lesson in divine being. When humans *understand* the true identity of Christ and his role in the Trinity—i.e., that he *is*, then humans begin to *live* the true life. Reality
(fore/esse), the existence and being of the Trinity in the universe, becomes understood (intellegere), engendering eternal life (vivere). The ternary is revisited at the end of the Apotheosis in the form of esse-nosco-vivere (Apoth. 1055/1061, 1062, 1067). In the passage surrounding this triad, Prudentius asserts what Christ is (esse) and consequently his (the poet’s) personal knowledge (nosco) that he (the poet) will rise after death and live on (vivit). Again, the triads are traces of the Trinity, residues in the world and in the human soul of the godhead. Although Prudentius does not explicate them systematically, as do Augustine and Victorinus, his poetry displays an awareness of the idea that the Trinity is reflected imperfectly in triads concerning human nature and the soul.

Mention of the old prophets (Apoth. 234–42) indicates that Prudentius ties the ternary esse-vivere-intellegere to salvation history as expressed in scripture. A little further in the poem Prudentius says that if one doubts the mystica Christi, all one need do is read scripture, which are dei signacula (Apoth. 290–94). The letters and words of scripture are “signs” or traces of divinity, a concept that Augustine develops in detail. Prudentius associates scripture with the notion of Moses as the chronicler of creation (Apoth. 219, 234–35, and 302). Similarly, Augustine at Conf. 12.26 argues that Moses wrote words (signa) for those who understand the hidden meaning of scripture, but Prudentius adds a literary twist to the idea that salvation history as present in scripture expresses esse-vivere-intellegere. The lyres (organa) of the prophets (veterum . . . vatum), such as Moses, sang (cecinissent) the truth of the Trinity. The word organum can also mean the “tongue” of a man as Prudentius indicates in his poetic invocation at the beginning of the hymn to Saint Romanus (Pe. 2). The phrase organa vatum is a nod to traditional Roman poetics in which the poet as prophet expresses truth and knowledge. Not only can esse-vivere-intellegere be found in scripture as the dei signaculi, but also in Prudentius’ s new Christian poetry. Poetry is no longer the ignored stepbrother of patristic prose.

In the Psychomachia, three-fold traces of the Trinity help to structure and guide the poem’s meaning. The first term of such a ternary, purification, occurs at Psych. 97–108, which describes the purification of Pudicitia’s sword after she kills Libido. The passage’s two main concerns of the sacrament of baptism and the idea of purification occupy center stage. The almost unbearable attention (at least to a particular sensibility) Prudentius pays to descriptions of gore inevitably leads to language of purification (e.g., purgata corpora, Psych. 97; and abluit infectum, Psych. 100). Both the person and the bloody
sword must be purified to enter the Catholic temple (Psych. 107). Thus, before any ascent is attempted, purification must be secured. Pudicitia is described as docta, which expresses her “deft” cleaning of the sword. One must know how to approach purification, the temple and, therefore, God.

The invocation of the concepts of purification and knowledge permit Prudentius to shift to more theurgic concerns and also to close the narrative of Pudicitia and Libido. But, more important, the passage stands as the first term in a Christian neo-Platonist ternary of ascent to God: purification-illumination-perfection. Gregory of Nazienzus had linked together purification, illumination, and perfection as stages of ascent to God and as stages of humanity’s development from paganism to Judaism to Christianity. In the Psychomachia there is a similar progression of concepts and religions. After the death of the vice, paganism, there is a rite of purification, followed by the illumination of the other six battle set pieces—including the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and concluded by the achievement of a perfect Christian soul seen in the metaphor of the temple at the end of the poem.

Prudentius writes that this new temple is the replacement for the Jewish temple (Psych. 811–19). The Christian temple represents the transformation of the Jewish temple in concrete ways. For example, Jewish sacrifice gives way to the idea of Christ’s sacrifice and, most important, Jewish rules of daily behavior become an inner pattern of behavior based on the body of Christ. The end of the Psychomachia reflects this innerness. In addition, the individual has become the temple (1 Cor. 3:16). The Trinity itself is within the soul: Christus deus (Psych. 910) and Spiritus (Psych. 840). Prudentius focuses on one of the traces of a ternary, “understanding” (agnoscere, Psych. 892; novimus, Psych. 893), which infuses the human soul in the guise of Sapientia. The poet retreats into a set of binaries in which two kinds of feelings (ancipites . . . sensus, Psych. 893) represent virtues or vices that continually battle. The addition of feelings to the description of the soul leads the reader into a more Aristotelian direction, where emotions play an important role in determining both good and bad actions. The Psychomachia, however, exploits the Christian neo-Platonist thought that the soul is a reflection of the Trinity in the guise of ternaries and, accordingly, that union with God is possible through a three-step process.

Conclusion

The Psychomachia lays bare the allegorical meaning of scripture through its own allegory of the soul. In the Praefatio to his corpus, Prudentius gives a
program for his poetry—to honor and praise god, explain the Catholic faith, argue against heresy and vanquish the nonbelievers, praise martyrs and apostles, and save himself (Praef. 36–45). This list of goals is no small challenge for poetry and forms part of the poet’s claim that his Roman Christian poetry surpasses its pagan counterpart and rivals the cultural gravitas of patristic prose. The individual works of the corpus do appear to follow this program, though the Psychomachia does not fit neatly into any of the categories mentioned in Prudentius’ preface to the whole corpus, except, perhaps, in that category that expounds the Catholic faith. It is with this in mind that I have laid out the Psychomachia’s use of pagan philosophy and its Christian reception. The poem expresses the divine truth of scripture through its allegory, much of which is constructed from Greco-Roman intellectual history. Philosophy plays its part in the formation of the new Christian poetry, according to which, poetry, like scripture, is a vehicle of divine truth.

Philosophical ideas and imagery from the Platonist and Epicurean traditions figure directly into the construction of the Psychomachia’s personifications and typologies. In fact, a pattern of the use of the pagan intellectual inheritance in Prudentius’ work has emerged. On the one hand, Prudentius associates ideas and images that derive directly from pagan philosophical tradition with the personifications of vice and their attendant typological partners from biblical history. The ideas of descent and mortality prevalent in the Platonist and Epicurean traditions help to form the very essences of Superbia, Luxuria, and other Prudentian vices. On the other hand, the Psychomachia makes use of a series of ideas and images of a pagan intellectual heritage that was appropriated by the patristic tradition whose bulwarks were Philo, the Cappadocians, Ambrose, Jerome, as well as figures such as Marius Victorinus. Prudentius associates this Christianized version of pagan philosophical ideas with the portrayal of the virtues. Thus, he applies a patristic version of the ascent of the soul directly to Spes and to Pudicitia and her historical counterpart, Judith. The patristic ternary of purification-illumination-perfection accompanies the very structure of the poem; and the ternary of esse-nosse-vivere permeates Prudentius’ assertions concerning the ontology of Christ and the human soul. Just as the allegorical qualities of the Psychomachia that purport to represent the inexpressible mysteries of God and the soul are not possible without the imaginative use of typologies, so the poem’s use of the pagan intellectual inheritance contributes to the formation of its allegorical characters and vision.