Prudentius' Metamorphoses

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One of the difficulties of studying Prudentius has to do with a gap in the fields of study: he is too ancient to be medieval, too recent to be ancient, too Christian to be classical and too classical to be Christian¹. So, he, alongside with Ausonius, Paulinus of Nola, Juvenius and even Claudian are reunited under the umbrella denomination “Late Antique poets”. Even though such perspective is merely historical and quite imprecise, it allowed many advances in the sense of understanding the aesthetics of Late antiquity and the similarities between its authors. One of the marked features is exactly the authors’ dependency to models that were already well established and considered “canonical”. Such use and remodeling of prior works – especially Augustan and Neronian in the case of Roman authors – is what we can call, so far without much reflection, “intertextuality”. In addition to that, the specific concerns,

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¹ Bardzell (2009, 32) makes a similar case in considering that the lack of scholarship around Prudentius is due to the fact that “Prudentius falls into the cracks between modern disciplines: he is too late (and, according to Macklin Smith, too Christian) for most classicists, and too early (and perhaps too Roman) for most medievalists.”

changes in taste, and about three to four centuries of distance from their literary predecessors will enable to find out that “late antiquity is a period of continuity and change, of transition and transmission. Its literature is the product of a tension between the prestigious pagan masters, the social conditions and aesthetic presuppositions peculiar to late antique culture, and, at least in the case of Christian authors, the new conceptual and ethical world of Christianity” (Roberts 1989, 38).

With all of its peculiarities, often enough late antique authors have not been appreciated. Edward Gibbon, in 1901, said that “the poetical fame of Ausonius condemns the taste of his age”; H. J. Rose, in 1936, mentioned a “senile degeneration” and the “feebleness” of Ausonius’ circle; Moses Hadas, in 1952, was yet less kind: “for writers like Ausonius, who is after all *the* poet of the fourth century, it is too generous to attribute their classicizing emptiness to anything but rampant rhetoric”². One of the reasons that makes such view be on vogue is exactly intertextuality. Prudentius, for instance, referring so frequently to canonical roman authors has been considered a Christian Horace, Vergil, Lucretius and even Juvenal (Marie 1962, 41). The critics, finding difficulties to understand his poetry in its own terms, approximate it to what they already know. However, at the same time that the title of “Christian Vergil” is quite appealing, the reading of Prudentius’ poems turns out to be very disappointing. Hence, the perception that his poetry is nothing but a decadent second hand copy of Vergil that falls short when compared to his classical model. Nowhere Prudentius attempts or claims to write a Christian version of the *Aeneid*, *Odes*, *De rerum natura* or *Satyras*, but it is what his critics expect from him. So, in 1982, Browning (1982, 713) comes to the conclusion that “at his best Prudentius writes with an economy and force equal to those of the classical models he so often imitates. But

² All of the quotations are from Roberts (1989, 1).

his prevailing vice is long-windedness and repetition. [...] His poetry, while not of first quality – how little was in late antiquity – is important in making a new departure in Latin literature [...].” This way, Prudentius is more important for creating a new way of doing Christian poetry (and the legacy he left for medieval authors) than for the works themselves, as Lavarenne (1943, xiv) many times mentions when speaking of an “*intérêt historique certain de son œuvre*”.

Luckily, not all scholarship around late antique poets is so critical: there are plenty of works that try to understand authors in their own terms, and that explore the ways they rework and resignify different traditions through an intertextual framework. Such critics also analyze the novelties brought by their – and their audience’s – interests, besides the narrative possibilities Christianity brought when it was the case. Malamud (1989, 8-9) for instance, perceives that Prudentius’ poetry “[...] is difficult verse – dense, dark, and frequently violent – but the reader who develops some feeling for Prudentius’ allusiveness, his abstract and often punning use of language, and his manipulation of sources, whether literary, mythical or historic, cannot help but find it fascinating.”. Many of these aspects can be found in other poets of the time and also support the criticisms against them. Therefore, when seen as virtues and not as flaws, they can underline the poetic qualities these authors sought after. These dynamics between what modern critics expect out of ancient poets versus what they actually deliver is not new to classical studies and is well known for those who study, for instance, Hellenistic and Imperial Greek literature facing the grand models of archaic and especially classical Greece. It seems that late antique literature will be absorbed by the more “mainstream” classics scholarship, following exactly the example and recovery of Hellenistic poets: “French critics in particular, e.g. J. Fontaine, J.-L. Charlet and J.-M. Poinssotte, are sensitive to this ‘mixing of genres and tones’, this ‘original poetic alchemy’, this ‘colour at

once epical and precious', these 'impressions of polychromatism'" (Bastiaensen 1993, 120-121). Such way, out of those authors, Fontaine perceives Prudentius' work to be influenced by a "[...] classicism tinged by Alexandrian elements, late-Latin neo-Alexandrianism, [and a] Christian orientation" (Bastiaensen 1993, 121). But, while Hellenistic poets find their models in archaic and classic Greece, Prudentius and his contemporaries find their inspiration in the achievements of the Latin poetical tradition, especially, the Augustan, Flavian and Neronian (Bastiaensen 1993, 120).

Based on that, this paper turns to the relationship between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Prudentius. Such choice seems important because it is less ordinary than Vergil or Horace. Moreover, Prudentius' references to Ovid are far from obvious. For instance, the four passages selected here, even though evoking scenes from Ovid's epic, do not, at any point, quote him. This brought to light the question about the necessity of quotations (or "allusions") for there to be intertextuality. That is to say: how decisive are quotations for the perception of intertextuality? On the one hand, they are the most certain and clear guides to the connection between a source and a target text. On the other, can't authors refer to each other without quoting from their models? And, if that is the case, how can one delimit the boundaries between an actual intertext and the expectation of readers? All of that made me turn to the nature of intertextuality and also to think more specifically about different types of intertextuality to be found in late antique texts. Edmunds (2001, 134) defines intertextuality in such terms:

The study of intertextuality is the study of a certain kind of relation between texts: one text quotes another or others. *Quotation* is chosen here, in preference to the more common *reference*, *allusion*, *echo*, *reminiscence* or *transformation*, as a general, inclusive way of describing the phenomenon. To quote means to repeat part of another text in such a way (which would sometimes entail sufficient

quantity) that its status as a quotation and its source may be discernible. Quotation, of whatever length, may be either exact or inexact. At one extreme, the same word or words are repeated in the same case in the same metrical position. At the other extreme, scholars have discussed quotation through content, context, syntax, and also sound (i.e., even without repetition of any of the same words from one poem to another). But none of these means of quotation is possible without the repetition of words (even if it is only the word shape, the word order, and the sound of the words that are perceived as repeated).

As Edmunds himself admits in a note on that same page, the spectrum of intertextuality is much more complex, but I would like to focus on three different patterns I could perceive in late-antique poems. Two are derived from Edmund's ordering and one is not. The first is the direct quotation in which segments from the source text is to be found in the target text, usually bringing new layers of meaning to the target text. This is the easiest form of intertextuality to find and so it is the "ideal" for scholars. Two different and significant examples can be mentioned from Prudentius' work: in his *Praefatio*, for instance, the poet briefly describes his life up to the moment of (at least fictionally) writing his œuvre. When referring to his youth, he is subtle, but mentions the *topos* of a wretched life changed later by faith³: Tum lasciva proteruitas⁴/ et luxus petulans (heu pudet ac piget!) / foedauit iuvenem nequitiae sordibus ac luto ["then lewd sauciness and wanton indulgence, to my shame and sorrow now, marred my youth with the filthy dirt of wickedness.", vv. 10-12]⁵. In this strophe, the poetic persona regrets having been taken by impudence and excess. A single verse quotes two

³ Eagan (1962, xi) comments on the similarity between such biographical narrative to Cyprian and Augustine who, earlier, confessed their youth "wew stained with wanton indulgence".

⁴ Horace, *Carmina* I. 19, 3: *et lasciuia Licentia*; ibidem, 7: *urit grata proteruitas*.

⁵ Text of Prudentius established and translated by Thomson (1949 ; 1953), unless indicated otherwise.

different verses from the same poem by Horace (*Odes* I, 19), about the splendor (*nitor*) of Glýcera. According to Kaimowitz (2008, 31), the name Glýcera “means ‘sweet woman’ and was often used by courtesans”. Moreover, the ode is about sexual desire and it is a praise of the female beauty⁶. Hence, it adds a new layer to Prudentius text by demonstrating that the *nequitia* (“bad moral quality”) referred to in very general terms and with a lot of guilt by the Christian author can actually be related to debauchery. A second example to be mentioned is the opening verse of the *Psychomachia*, which quotes the *Aeneid* (VI, 56): “Christe, graues hominum semper miserate labores”; “Phoebe, grauis Troiae semper miserate labores”⁷. The *Psychomachia* is an epic text that “has *arma*, but no *uirumque*” (Cunningham 1976, 59): it describes the battles that true Christian virtues have to fight against vices. Hence, the *Aeneid* (especially its second, Iliadic, part – books 7-12) is quite significant. And, by using this passage of book VI, Prudentius is able to foreshadow the end of his own work: while Aeneas starts his descent to the Underworld in Apollo’s temple, to find a turning point in his narrative (from the journey to Italy, to the wars fought there), Prudentius’ poem will end with the construction of another temple, the temple of Wisdom (vv. 823-887). After the wars in the soul have been finished, there is space for men to journey as virtuous Christians. Thus, the *Psychomachia* can be read in a similar manner to the second part of the *Aeneid*, but through an inversion.

⁶ In Kaimowitz’s translation: “The ruthless Mother of Desires/ with the Theban son of Semele/ and lustful Wantonness demand/ I yield again, though I’ve forsaken love. // The gleam of Glýcera, who shines/ more brightly than the whitest marble, scorches/ me, her pleasing brazenness/ and face too ravishing to look upon. // Rushing against me, Venus has/ deserted Cyprus nor permits me speak/ of Scythians or Parthians attacking/ in retreat and things that matter not. // Here put for me an altar of/ fresh turf, here put green sprigs and incense with/ a cup of unmixed wine: for with/ a sacrifice, more gently she will come.”

⁷ Vergil’s text by Mynors (1969).

A second type of intertextual relationship, following Edmunds' formulation, is the quotation through content, devoid of a proper repetition of words or verses. This is the case of all the passages selected from Prudentius to be soon analyzed. It should be mentioned that in the excerpt from his text, Edmunds considers intertextuality without the repetition of words (through word shape, order and sounds) impossible. Reading Prudentius, it is possible to try to challenge his view and show how only through synonyms, narrative patterns, adaptation of myths and the use of similar themes, intertextuality can be achieved. One example to be provided right away is Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae* and its relationship to the passage of same theme in the *Metamorphoses* (V, 341-571). As noted by Eaton⁸, "Claudian's verbal imitations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* do not come from the Proserpine episode but from elsewhere in the work". Moreover, following comments of the same sort made by Bernert, there is a theoretical line defending that Claudian used Alexandrian texts (now lost) as his sources as well as Homeric and Orphic hymns. Hall (1969, 108), on the other hand, will consider that, albeit the quotations are missing, "the thematic reminiscences are unmistakable". Therefore, the lack of quotations shouldn't be taken as a token of lack of intertextuality, especially at this context where poets expect to have a learned audience.

Besides the quotation and the content-based intertextuality, one more type can be perceived in late-antique poetics. It is not mentioned by Edmunds (and it shouldn't even be, since his range of authors goes up to the Augustan) and it is represented by only direct quotations of different verses creating a new story that is not related to the source verses: the *cento*. These texts, made up only with verses by Homer or Vergil, for example, tell Christian tales. There is no intent to import the content or context from the source verses into the target verses

⁸ Eaton (1943, 118) *apud* Hall (1969, 108).

of the *centones*, only their form: “[...] *cento*, meaning a patchwork garment. The genre is an extreme form of paraphrase whereby the composition brings forth a new story consisting of familiar building-blocks” (Sandnes 2011, 107). These collages of hemistiches and entire verses of classical texts become “a pastiche of lines or quotes from a classical text” and a “classical paraphrase of biblical texts” (Sandnes 2011, 2; 3). The greatest exponents of this genre were Eudocia, Proba and Ausonius. The former one thus defines the genre of the *cento* in his prologue to the *Cento nuptialis*: “a little work that is continuous, although made out of disconnected verses; bearing unity, although made out of different; playful, although made out of serious; our, although made out of foreign⁹”. Therefore, it is possible to perceive that the *cento* is not to be considered a serious matter and that it reutilizes the literary past as a living present, in a very unique and extreme intertextual genre. Moreover, in its exaggeration of quotations, it highlights exactly how intertextuality works, that is, by leaving “[...] the reader caught between texts, made fully aware of the unfixed nature of language, whose elements [...] can be reassembled, at will or at random” (Malamud 1989, 37-38). The “original”, source, text is always present and the reader is forced to take an active role in reading intertextuality, finding the limits of the quotations and understanding the layers of meaning they bear.

Having briefly discussed three different ways late-antique authors refer to canonical authors and transport them into their literary craft (*i.e.* by using direct quotations and adding layers of meaning through the intertext; by referring to the content of a work without quoting it; by only quoting, regardless of the source content or context), it is possible now to turn to the passages by Prudentius, and analyze how, even without any quotations from Ovid, he will still be able to create intertextuality.

⁹ “[...] opusculum de inconexis continuum, de diversis unum, de seriis ludicrum, de alieno nostrum [...]” (White 1919, 372).

The metamorphosis into a weeping statue

The *Hamartigenia* is an hexametric poem that in general terms discusses the origin of sin. At a certain point, Prudentius mentions that God can send signs to prevent good people from being touched by sin. To exemplify, he uses a passage about Lot in *Genesis* 19: two angels arrive at Sodom, ready to destroy the city. There they find Lot, who offers them a place to spend the night, because the city was quite dangerous. The inhabitants of the city try to attack Lot's house, in order to rape the angels. Lot protects them and therefore they tell him about their plan to destroy the city, absolutely wicked. They advise Lot to escape early in the morning and not to look back. He tells his family and arranges everything following the angels' commands. As soon as they flee, a blazing fire reaches the city. Lot's wife, however, looks back and becomes a pillar of salt. This metamorphosis is quite simple: "but his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt"¹⁰. This is how Prudentius renders the passage:

Loth monitis sapiens obtemperat, at levis uxor
mobilitate animi torsit muliebre retrorsus
ingenium Sodomisque suis revocabilis haesit.
traxerat Eva virum dirae ad consortia culpae:
haec **peccans** sibi **sola perit**; solidata metallo
dirigit fragili [...]

740

Lot, being wise, obeyed the [angels'] warning, but his light-minded wife with unsteady purpose, like a woman, turned her thoughts backwards, and hearing the call of her dear Sodom, cleaved to it. Eve had drawn her husband into partnership in an accursed fault, but this woman by her sin brought death on herself alone. She stiffened in a solid mass of wasting stone; [...]

Prudentius' scene starts towards the end of the biblical passage, focusing more on the escape than in the events that lead to it. Many of the details present in the *Hamartigenia* are missing in the text of the *Genesis*, as the general description of the setting and the comparison between Lot's wife and Eve (who is barely mentioned in Prudentius' work but is of seminal

¹⁰ *Genesis* 19, 26, in the 1975 translation of the *New King James Version* (Thomas Nelson Publishers).

importance as the text discusses also the original sin¹¹). The differences do not stop there, as Prudentius will take one verse from the bible and transform it into a larger description about Lot's wife as a statue made out of salt:

[...]saxumque liquabile facta
stat mulier, sicut steterat prius, omnia servans
 caute sigillati longum **salis effigiata**, 745
 et **decus** et **cultum frontemque oculosque comamque**
 et flexam in tergum faciem paulumque relata
 menta retro, antiquae monumenta rigentia noxae.
liquitur ilia quidem salsis sudoribus uda,
 sed nulla ex fluido plenae dispendia formae 750
 sentit deliquio, quantumque armenta saporum
 attenuant saxum, tantum lambentibus umor
 sufficit attritamque cutem per damna reformat,
 hoc meruit titulo peccatrix femina sisti,
 infirmum fluidumque animum per lubrica solvens 755
 consilia et fragilis iussa ad caelestia. [...].

[...] turned into soluble rock she stands there a woman
 still, as she had stood before, preserving every detail
 modelled in a pillar of salt that has long borne her image,
 her graceful form, her dress, brow and eyes and hair, her
 face turned to look behind, the chin carried slightly
 backwards, a stiff memorial of an ancient sin. Her wet
 figure dissolves, indeed, in salt sweats, but she suffers no
 loss to her full form from the waste that drips away; and
 however much the cattle wear away the savoury rock,
 there is always as much moisture for them to lick, and
 she grows again the skin that is rubbed off and lost.
 Such is the memorial statue earned by a woman who
 sinned, for she let her weak, unstable resolution melt
 away in slippery courses and had no firm constancy to
 keep heaven's commands.

The treatment of the biblical text as proposed by Prudentius makes the passage resemble a different metamorphosis, that of Niobe (*Metamorphoses*, Book VI, 267-312)¹². Both characters meet the same destiny, for similar reasons. Niobe is punished for her impiety, and Lot's wife, always nameless, for her sin. The first detail to be noticed is that Niobe is the only one who survives Latona's fury, to then be transformed into a marble statue. Lot's wife, on the contrary, is the only who perishes, becoming a salt statue. No comment about this is made in Prudentius' texts, however, the comparison (only to be noticed when the inter-

¹¹ From the prologue of the *Hamartigenia*, Prudentius sets the killing of Abel by the hands of his brother Cain as the original sin, to approximate it to an attack to the dualist heretics.

¹² Important resonances appear in: "Nioben unam", v. 287; "[...] **nullos movet aura capillos,** in **vultu** color est **sine sanguine, lumina** maestis/ **stant** in mota genis, **nihil est in imagine vivum**", vv. 303-305; "flet tamen", v. 310; "liquitur, et lacrimas etiam nunc marmora manant", v. 312.

textual game is perceived) can lead Christian readers to realize how their god is more merciful than the heathen pantheon¹³.

While Ovid will focus on the living elements that leave Niobe, turning *exsanguinis*, Prudentius will focus on the ones that remain, as Lot's wife's *decus* and *cultus*. As for the first, these are the *capilli*, *uultus*, and *lumina*; as for the latter, the *frons*, *oculi* and *comae*. The synonyms mark the relation between the texts. Both statues cry and *liquitur*, a detail absolutely absent from the biblical account, and that will mark exactly the intertextuality, even though there are no quotations from Ovid in Prudentius' text. The wife's tears, however, somehow differ from Niobe's weeping: "Prudentius describes her as a sort of liquid stone, eternally dissolving but never losing her form" (Malamud 2002, 355). The suffering of both is eternal, but not without a shift. Ovid's narrative seems more etiological, describing the birth of a fountain in a mountain, whereas Prudentius', more mythical, with a liquid never-dissolving statue made out of salt. Such shift represents well the movement suggested by intertextuality in general terms, because it makes the same thing be at the same time itself and something different and new. The intertext is alone significant to the target text, but it also proposes new readings to the source text: "when the reader activates allusion, reading becomes a struggle between a 'linear', forward moving impulse and the retrograde or distracting pull of other texts. Intertextuality demands the interpretation of at least two texts" (Edmunds 2001, xviii). Moreover, no matter how an author includes a source text in his own target text, the elements of the original cannot be the same, as the radical experience of the *centones* shows. This way, Prudentius is able to transform a biblical narrative into an amalgam of sources, twisting selected elements to bring forth a new text that is neither completely Christian nor Classical, but that heavily depends on both.

¹³ A similar point is made in the *Contra Symmachum I*, especially in verses 1-21.

The creation of the universe.

The famous ovidian passage about the creation of the universe is also recreated by Prudentius and, in turn, the scene of the organization of the chaos, by Claudian. Both scenes are brief, but, once again, with no direct quotations, manage to refer to Ovid's text. The *Peristephanon* 13 narrates the *passio* of Cyprian, an African martyr from Carthage, home of the Donatist movement that wished to separate the church from the "world" by excluding sinners, unworthy bishops and opposing the alliance between church and Empire (Malamud 1989, 127-128). In that setting, Cyprian is known for his rhetoric: before his conversion, this beautiful lad used spells to seduce married women. After, he used his *lingua* to inspire followers with his preaching¹⁴. He is able to convince one group of followers, known as the "candida massa" to deny paganism even if it meant to die as a Christian. The whole group accepts obediently Cyprian's teachings (*Peristephanon* 13, vv. 76-87; this poem is in Archiloquian verses):

Fama refert foueam **campi** in medio patere iussam,
calce uaporifera summos prope **margines** refertam;
saxa recocta uomunt **ignem niueusque puluis ardet**,
 urere tacta potens et mortifer ex **odore** flatus.
 Adpositam memorant aram fouea stetisse summa 80
 lege sub hac: salis aut micam iecur aut suis litarent
 christicolae aut mediae sponte inruerent in ima fossae.
 Prosiluere alacres **curso rapido** simul trecenti,
 gurgite puluereo mersos **liquor aridus** uorauit
 praecipitemque globum fundo tenus implicauit imo. 85
Corpora candor habet, candor uehit ad superna **mentes**,
 'candida **massa**' dehinc dici meruit per omne saeculum.

Tradition tells that there was a pit which had been opened by command in the midst of a piece of level ground and filled nearly to the brim with smoking lime, the heated stones pouring out fire, the snow white dust hot, capable of burning anything it touched and killing with the smell of its breath. They say an altar was set up by the top of the pit and the order was that the Christians must either offer in sacrifice a grain of salt or a sow's liver, or else throw themselves into the depths in the midst of the pit. Three hundred together sprang forward eagerly with a quick rush and sank in the powdery gulf, where the dry sea swallowed them, enveloping the plunging mass in its lowest depths. Whiteness possesses their bodies, and whiteness carries their souls to heaven. "The White Throng" justly gained its name from that day forth for ever more.

The passage in fact shows Ovid's scene in reverse. While Ovid starts the universe in an indistinct mass (chaos) to then demonstrate Nature separating and ordering all elements, Prudentius will have an ordained world being transformed

¹⁴ *Peristephanon* 13, vv. 21-28.

into a *massa*: “the fiery pit that swallows up the *candida massa* re-creates this primeval chaos: its rocks produce fire, its dust is like snow, and its liquid is dry” (Malamud 1989, 144). Life is transformed into raw material, in opposition to Ovid’s description (*Metamorphoses*, I, 05-75) which begins with mass (“rudis indigestaque moles”, v. 07) and has it organized by Nature. First with the major elements (“nam caelo **terras** et terris abscidit **undas**/ et **liquidum** spisso secrevit ab **aere** caelum”, vv. 22-23), and then smaller, that reaper in Prudentius (“rapidisque... ventis”, v. 36; “litora”, vv. 37/ 42; “flumina”, v. 39; “campo”, v. 41; “lapidosos... montes”, v. 44). In verses 52-56, the power of thunder and wind to take over the body and mind of men, is similar to the power of whiteness that transforms the “candida massa”¹⁵:

Inminet his aer, qui, quanto est pondere terrae
pondus aquae levius, tanto est onerosior igni.
illic et nebulas, illic consistere nubes
iussit et humanas motura tonitrua **mentes**
et cum fulminibus facientes fulgura ventos.

55

The air hung over all, which is as much heavier than fire
as the weight of water is lighter than the weight of earth.
There did the creator bid the mists and clouds to take their
place, and thunder, that should shake the hearts of men,
and winds which with the thunderbolts make chilling cold.

Prudentius uses intertextuality and inversion to deconstruct Ovid’s cosmos. What is seen as creation in the *Metamorphoses*, becomes destruction, and death alone, in the name of god, is capable of promoting the ascension to heavens, as martyrdom literature defends. Hence, “intertextuality is yet another defamiliarizing device, by which a poem uses the existence of other poems, often in very precise aspects, as a means of signaling its own poetic status” (Edmunds, 2001, 99).

¹⁵ Ovid translated by Miller.

The dismembered tongue.

Cyprian's rhetoric was indeed remarkable. He used his tongue to convert pagans and so was willingly transformed into a martyr¹⁶. His tongue, then, was turned into a relic. Hence, even after death, he can continue with his teachings (*Peristephanon* 13, vv. 1-15; 96-106):

Punica terra tulit, quo splendeat omne, quidquid
usquam est,
inde domo Cyprianum, sed decus orbis et magistrum.
Est proprius patriae martyr, sed amore et ore noster,
incubat in Libya sanguis, sed ubique lingua pollet,
sola superstes agit de corpore, sola obire nescit, 05
dum genus esse hominum Christus sinet et uigere
mundum.
Dum liber ullus erit, dum scrinia sacra litterarum,
te leget omnis amans Christum, tua, Cypriane, discet.
Spiritus ille dei, qui fluxerat auctor in profetas,
fontibus eloquii te caelitus actus inrigauit. 10
O niue candidius linguae genus, o nouum saporem!

[...]

Fleuit abire uirum maesta Africa, quo docente facta est
cultior, eloquio cuius sibi docta gloriatur:
mox tumulum lacrimans struxit cineresque consecrauit.
Desine flere bonum tantum, tenet ille regna caeli
nec minus inuolitat terris nec ab hoc recedit orbe: 100
disserit, eloquitur, tractat, docet, instruit, profetat.
Nec Libyae populos tantum regit, exit usque in ortum
solis et usque obitum, Gallos fouet, inbuit Britannos,
praesidet Hesperiae, Christum serit ultimis Hiberis,
denique doctor humi est, idem quoque martyr in
supernis, 105
instruit hic homines, illinc pia dona dat patronus.

The Punic land bore Cyprian to give lustre to the whole earth everywhere; that was the home he came from, but he was to be the glory and the teacher of the world. As martyr he belongs to his native country, but by his love and speech he is ours. His blood rests in Africa, but his tongue is potent everywhere; it alone of all his body still survives in life, it alone cannot die, as long as Christ shall suffer the race of men to exist and the world to function. As long as there shall be any book, any collections of sacred writings, every lover of Christ will read thee, Cyprian, and learn thy teachings. The Spirit of God, which formerly flowed into the prophets to inspire them, was sent from heaven and flooded thee with streams of eloquence. What speech is thine! It is purer than snow, and of a new savour! [...]

Africa wept in sorrow at the departure of the man whose teaching advanced her in cultivation, and of whose eloquence she boasts of having been the pupil. Afterwards with tears she raised a tomb and consecrated his ashes. Weep no more for this great blessing! He has attained to the realms of heaven, yet none the less he moves over the earth and does not leave this world. He still discourses, still holds forth, expounding, teaching, instructing, prophesying; and not only does he direct the peoples of Libya, but goes forth to the east and the west, nurturing the Gauls, training the Britons, keeping guard over Italy, spreading the knowledge of Christ in farthest Spain. Indeed he is both teacher on earth and martyr too in heaven; here he instructs men, from there as their patron gives them gifts in love.

Cyprian's *lingua* is able to produce revelations even long after oblivion. Another tongue with super-human powers to be mentioned is Philomela's. Her *lingua*, after being cut

¹⁶ *Peristephanon* 13, v. 95 (*canit triunfans*).

with brutal violence, is still able to move and search for her owner¹⁷:

A Talibus ira feri postquam commota **tyranni**
 nec minor hac metus est, causa stimulatus utraque, 550
 quo fuit accinctus, vagina liberat ensem
 arreptamque coma fixis post terga lacertis
 vincla pati cogit; iugulum Philomela parabat
spemque suae mortis viso conceperat ense:
 ille indignantem et nomen patris usque vocantem 555
 luctantemque loqui comprehensam forcipe linguam
 abstulit ense fero. **radix micat ultima linguae**,
 ipsa iacet terraeque **tremens innummurat** atrae,
 utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae,
palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia **quaerit**. 560
 hoc quoque post facinus (vix ausim credere) fertur
 saepe sua lacerum repetisse libidine corpus.
 [...]
 Signa deus bis sex acto lustraverat anno; 571
 quid faciat Philomela? fugam custodia claudit,
 structa rigent solido stabulorum moenia saxo,
 os mutum facti caret indice. grande doloris
 ingenium est, miserisque venit sollertia rebus: 575
 stamina barbarica suspendit callida tela
 purpureasque notas filis intexuit albis,
 indicium sceloris; perfectaque tradidit uni,
 utque ferat dominae, gestu rogat; illa rogata
 pertulit ad Procnem nec scit, quid tradat in illis. 580
 evolvit vestes saevi matrona tyranni
 germanaeque suae fatum miserabile **legit**
 et (mirum potuisse) **silet**: dolor **ora** repressit,
 verbaque **quaerenti** satis indignantia **linguae**
 defuerunt, nec flere vacat, sed fasque **nefasque** 585
 confusura ruit poenaeque in imagine tota est.

The savage tyrant's wrath was aroused by these words, and his fear no less. Pricked on by both these spurs, he drew his sword which was hanging by his side in its sheath, caught her by the hair, and twisting her arms behind her back, he bound them fast. At sight of the sword Philomela gladly offered her throat to the stroke, filled with the eager hope of death. But he seized her tongue with pincers, as it protested against the outrage, calling ever on the name of her father and struggling to speak, and cut it off with his merciless blade. The mangled root quivers, while the severed tongue lies palpitating on the dark earth, faintly murmuring; and, as the severed tail of a mangled snake is wont to writhe, it twitches convulsively, and with its last dying movement it seeks its mistress's feet. Even after this horrid deed – one would scarce believe it – the monarch is said to have worked his lustful will again and again upon the poor mangled form. [...]

Now through the twelve signs, a whole a whole year's journey, has the sun-god passed. And what shall Philomela do? A guard prevents her flight; stout walls of solid stone fence in the hut; speechless lips can give no token of her wrongs. But grief has sharp wits, and in trouble cunning comes. She hangs a Thracian web on her loom, and skillfully weaving purple signs on a white background, she thus tells the story of her wrongs. This web, when completed, she gives to her one attendant and begs her with gestures to carry it to the queen. The old woman, as she was bid, takes the web to Procnem, not knowing what she bears in it. The savage tyrant's wife unrolls the cloth, reads the pitiable tale of her misfortune, and (a miracle that she could!) says not a word. Grief chokes the words that rise to her lips, and her questing tongue can find no words strong enough to express her outraged feelings. Here is no room for tears, but she hurries on to confound right and wrong, her whole soul bent on the thought of vengeance.

As Cyprian, Philomela is willing to die. Both of their tongues are powerful. Cyprian's *lingua* alone expresses the martyr's mind. Philomela, however, has to take a different direction: tongueless, she must find a way to express the *nefas* she suffered. Moreover, it is exactly a voiceless utterance that

¹⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 326-329, book VI, vv. 549-586. Worth quoting in full because it is referenced by the two passages by Prudentius here analyzed.

will allow the sisters to find revenge: to kill Thereu's son and feed the flesh to his father, keeping the beheaded head as a proof of the deed¹⁸. The two narratives, however, are quite different and the presence of the living tongue alone will approximate them. The lack of quotations also makes it harder to decide on the presence of intertextuality and the comparison between the passages will point out to the issue of the boundaries of intertextuality. The feebleness of textual evidence points to the fact that intertextuality depends on the reader to spot it. The uncertainties are only to be accepted by the one who reads intertextuality and, hence, different readings will present different understandings of the texts¹⁹. Especially because "the perception of intertextuality is not absolutely necessary to the meaningfulness of the poem" (Edmunds 2001, 46). This way, a reader who, in any case, is incapable of perceiving the references and quotations an author makes, will still understand the text. His reading will be, nonetheless, much less deep.

Returning to the structure of Philomela's narrative, then, it is possible to see that it starts with a quarrel between her and her brother-in-law, followed by the removal of her tongue that culminates, in a revengeful manner, in the murdering of a child. The same elements, in a different order, will be reworked in a part of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 10, a long poem describing the torture and martyrdom of Romanus (vv. 766-775; 821-845; 853-858; 868-880; 886-960):

¹⁸ *Metamorphoses*, book VI, vv. 636-660.

¹⁹ "[...] the reader will have to make a decision or decisions, at least pro tempore, at least for the sake of his own reading, in face of the text's undecidability" (Edmunds 2001, 153).

linguam **tyrannus** amputari iusserat
uni ex ephybis; mater aiebat: "satis
iam parta nobis gloria est; pars optima
Deo inmolatur ecce nostri corporis;
digna est **fidelis lingua**, quae sit hostia. 770
interpres animi, enuntiatrix sensuum,²⁰
cordis ministra, praeco operi pectoris,
prima offeratur in sacramentum necis
et sit redemptrix prima membrorum omnium,
ducem dicatam mox sequentur cetera." 775
[...]
"quid differo", inquit ille, "utrosque perdere,
puerum ac magistrum, complices sectae inopiae?
gladius recidat uile uix hominis caput
infantis, istum flamma uindex concremet,
sit his sub uno fine dispar exitus." 821
peruentum ad ipsum caedis implendae locum.
natum gerebat mater amplexu et sinu,
[...]
puerum poposcit carnifex, mater dedit,
nec inmorata est fletibus, tantum osculum
inpressit unum: "uale", ait, "dulcissime,
et, cum beatus regna Christi intraueris,
memento matris, iam patrone ex filio!" 835
dixit. deinde, dum ferit ceruiculam
percussor ense, docta mulier psallere
hymnum canebat carminis Dauitici:
[...]
manusque tendebat sub ictu et sanguine,
uenarum ut undam profluam manantium
et palpitantis oris exciperet globum:
excepit et caro adplicauit pectori. 845
[...]
"quousque tandem summus hic nobis magus
inludet", inquit, "Thessalorum carmine
poenam peritus uertere in ludibrium? 870
fortasse ceruix, si secandam iussero,
flecti sub ense non patebit uulneri,
uel amputatum plaga collum diuidens
rursus coibit ac reglutinabitur
umerisque uertex eminebit additus. 875
temptemus igitur ante partem quampiam
truncare ferro corporis superstitis,
ne morte simpla criminosus multiplex
cadat uel una perfidus caede oppetat:

The oppressor commanded the tongue of one of the young
lads to be cut out, and his mother said: "now we have won
glory enough, for lo, the best part of our body is being sacri-
ficed to God. The faithful tongue is worthy to be an offering.
The mind's spokesman, which declares our sentiments, the
heart's servant, which proclaims the silent thoughts of our
breast, let it be offered first for the celebration of the mystery
of death, and be the first to redeem all the members, and
then the rest will follow their dedicated leader."

"Why not at once destroy them both," said the judge,
"the boy and his teacher, since they are confederates in their
impious doctrine? Let the sword cut off the trumpety head of
the child, scarce man, and avenging fire consume this other;
let them have different ends but die together."

They reached the place where sentence of death was to
be executed, the mother carrying her son in her arms on
her bosom [...]. The executioner called for the boy and his
mother gave him up. Wasting no time on tears, she pressed
but one kiss on him, saying: "Farewell, my sweetest, and
when in blessedness you enter Christ's kingdom, remember
your mother, changing from son to patron." So she spoke,
and while the headsman struck the little neck with the sword
the woman (for she was trained in music) sang a hymn, a
song of David [...] While repeating the words, she spread
out her robe and stretched forth her hands beneath the
stroke and the blood to catch the stream that ran from the
flowing veins, and the round head as the mouth breathed its
last; and catching it she pressed it to her fond breast. [...]

"How long," he [the *tyrannus*] asked, "is this great sorcerer
to make game of us through his skill in turning punishment
to mockery with a Thessalian spell? Perhaps his neck, if I
order that it bend to receive the sword-stroke, will prove
impervious to the blow, or the wound that cuts it in two will
heal and join again, and his head be set on his shoulders and
stand erect. Let us first try, therefore, cutting off some part
of his body with the steel and leaving the rest alive, so that
this man of many crimes may not fall by one single death,
this traitor perish by one act of bloodshed. I will have him
die as many deaths as he has members. [...]"

²⁰ Compare with Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, VI, 1149: "*atque animi interpres manabat lingua cruore*".

quot membra gestat, tot modis pereat uolo. [...]	880	“[...] This moment let a skilled master of the knife attend, one who knows how to take apart all the contiguities of the flesh, all the fast attachments of the tendons. Produce the man who heals dislocated bones or ties them together and mends them when they are broken. First let him remove the tongue by its roots, for it is the very wickedest organ in the whole body; with its impudent wagging it has both violated our long established divine law by a most foul attack upon our gods, and been so presumptuous as not even to spare the emperor.” One Aristo, a doctor, is sent for and comes. He bids Romanus put out his tongue, and at once the martyr puts it out from cover, exposing his throat to its depths; and the doctor feels the palate, exploring the voice’s outlet with his finger and seeking for the place to make the wound, then drawing the tongue far out from the mouth he puts his lancet inside, right down to the gullet. While he was gradually cutting the filaments one by one, the martyr never bit nor let his teeth meet to close his mouth, nor swallowed blood [...]. The prefect then, thinking that a tongueless man could be forced to offer sacrifice, since for lack of speech he could not prate against the honour of the gods, ordered him to be brought back, silent now and disabled, whereas before his great blast of speech had scared him. He set up the altar again by his judgment-seat, with incense, and fire glowing on the coals, bull’s entrails and swine’s paunch, but Romanus on coming in and seeing these preparations, blew on them as if he were seeing very devils. Asclepiades, his spirits raised, laughed in scorn at this, and then said: “Are you ready with your rough speech, as you used to be? [...] Romanus, heaving a long, deep sigh, a long-drawn groan of protest, thus began: “Tongue never failed him who spoke of Christ, and you need not ask what organ controls the speech when it is the giver of speech himself who is proclaimed. [...]”.
iam nunc secandi doctus adsit artifex, qui cuncta norit uiscerum confinia uel nexa neruis disparare uincula: date hunc, reuulsis qui medetur ossibus aut fracta nodis sarcienis compaginat.	890	
linguam priorem detrahat radicitus , quae corpore omni sola uiuit nequior; illa et procaci pessima in nostros deos inuecta motu fas profanauit uetus audax et ipsi non pepercit principi.”	895	
Aristo quidam medicus accitus uenit, proferre linguam praecipit. profert statim martyr resectam, pandit ima et faucium ille et palatum tractat et digito exitum uocis pererrans uulneri explorat locum.	900	
linguam deinde longe ab ore protrahens scalpellum in usque guttur insertans agit. illo secante fila sensim singula numquam momordit martyr aut os dentibus compressit artis nec cruorem sorbuit. [...]	905	
praefectus ergo ratus elinguem uirum cogi ad sacrandum posse, cum uerbis carens nil in deorum blateraret dedecus, iubet reduci iam tacentem ac debilem multo loquentis turbine olim territus.	915	
reponit aras ad tribunal denuo et tus et ignem uiuidum in carbonibus taurina et exta uel suilla abdomina; ingressus ille, ut hos paratus perspicit, insufflat, ipsos ceu uideret daemones.	920	
inridet hoc Asclepiades laetior, addit deinde: “numquid inclementius, sicut solebas, es paratus dicere ? [...]		
Romanus alto corde suspirans diu gemitu querellam traxit et sic orsus est: “Christum loquenti lingua numquam defuit , nec uerba quaeras quo regantur organo, cum praedicatur ipse uerborum dator.	930	

The narratological elements of this scene are the same as Philomela’s, but in a different order. First, there is a long quarrel with the executioner, Asclepiades (also identified as *tyrannus*). In the middle of this, so to say, contest²¹ – to decide whether the

²¹ “Prudentius [himself, also] engages in a contest with the predominantly pagan texts and traditions from which he derives his skill and authority, but whose beliefs he as a Christian poet must oppose” (Levine 1991, 19).

pagan or Christian faith is superior –, Romanus asks for a child to be brought in order to prove that Christianity was inherent to good people. The child confirms Romanus' claims and the executioner decides to cut off his tongue. His mother is quite glad with how the events turn out, since the child will become a martyr and she explains and interprets the situation to her child, who accepts such destiny willingly (as Romanus later and Philomela). The executioner changes his mind, commanding the child to be beheaded. Then, he is embraced by the now blissful mother. As it happens with Procne, the child is handed in to die to fulfil a revengeful agenda, and in both cases the mother rejoices with the action. The executioner then, irritated by the martyr, decides to burn Romanus alive (vv. 853-858). The saint replies that such is not how his ending will be and, by miracle, extinguishes the fire that would consume him. The executioner is fed up: "quousque tandem summus hic nobis magus inludet". The solution is to remove Romanus' tongue by the root, as it happened to Philomela. Here the saint's highest miracle takes place: he is able to speak even without a tongue. The reference to Cicero is important because it shows Romanus' superiority as an orator. Some traditions have that Cicero had his tongue removed before being assassinated. After losing his tongue, he is obviously unable to speak. That is not the martyr's case (Levine, 1991: 33). Philomela has to find means to express her last words. Romanus, in turn, also superior to her, can just do so with the help of God. In addition, as Thereus, Asclepiades loses the contest²². The *tyranni*, however, will have it their way. Thereus tries to kill Philomela and Procne before the three are transformed into birds²³. Asclepiades demands for Romanus to be strangled to death and that is done until his neck is broken²⁴. Here, the similarities between the scenes are hard to grasp at first,

²² *Peristephanon* 10, 1100: "[...] est victus [...]".

²³ *Metamorphoses*, book VI, vv. 665-674.

²⁴ *Peristephanon* 10, 1102-1110.

as Prudentius' text is very long and has many speeches amongst the actions. Notwithstanding, when the element of the tongue is highlighted, the narrative elements of each story become clear and it is hard not to notice the intertextuality.

The rivalry with Minerva.

The last scene to analyze is the beginning of the *Peristephanon* 14²⁵, not so clearly connected to the Ovidian source text in narrative terms, but showing a strong proximity regarding the characters. Arachne and Agnes are depicted as audacious women, notable for their art (weaving and the Christian virtue, respectively) who dare to fight against Minerva. Ovid's passage (*Metamorphoses*, VI, 05-53; 129-145) follows as such: Arachne was known for her artistry in weaving ("lanifcae... artis", v. 06) and, even though came from a humble abode, was famous for her work ("[...] studio nomen memorabile, quamvis/ orta domo parva [...]", vv 12-13). Her talent was so incredible ("opus admirabile", v. 14) that even the nymphs went to see ("spectare", v. 17) both she working and her works. People could see that such was the gift of Pallas, but Arachne refused to admit (vv. 23-25). Pallas, then, disguised as an old woman advised the girl to recognize the goddess' power and eminence in weaving ("cede deae veniamque tuis, temeraria, dictis/ suplice voce roga: veniam dabit illa roganti", vv. 32-33). Pallas reveals herself and challenges Arachne to a competition ("certamina", v. 45). The girl is not taken by fear, but blushes for a second ("[...] non territa virgo,/ sed tamen erubuit, subitusque invita notavit/ ora rubor rursusque evanuit [...]", vv. 45-47). Both weave tapestries and the work of both is perfect. Athena's tapestry represents the olympian gods in a reverent fashion, as well as several mortals

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²⁵ In alcaic verses.

that were punished by rivaling such gods²⁶. Arachne's represents various gods taking animal and human forms in order to trick mortals into having erotic encounters²⁷. Despite being extremely different, both works show the exact same quality. The goddess (identified as a *virago*, v. 130) cannot find any flaws in Arachne's weaving and, filled with rage, decides to spoil the web. Upon such sight, Arachne decides to kill herself. Pallas, however, commands the girl to live ("*vive*", v. 136) and transforms her into a spider, concluding that her story would be told among generations to come ("*dicta tuo generi serisque nepotibus esto*", v. 138). Prudentius' scene is quite different, but the characters present similar qualities (*Peristephanon* 14, vv. 01-60):

Agnes sepulcrum est Romulea in domo,
fortis puellae, martyris inclytae.
 conspectu in ipso condita turrium
 servat salutem **virgo** Quiritium,
 nec non et ipsos protegit advenas
 puro ac fideli pectore supplices.
 duplex corona est praestita martyri:
 intactum ab omni crimine virginal,
 mortis deinde **gloria** liberae.

aiunt iugali vix habilem tore
 primis in annis forte puellulam
 Christo calentem fortiter inpiis
 iussis renisam, quo minus idolis
 addicta sacram desereret fidem.
 temptata multis nam prius **artibus**,
 nunc ore blandi iudicis inlice,
 nunc saevientis carnificis minis,
 stabat feroci robore pertinax
 corpusque duris excruciatibus
 ultro offerebat non renuens mori.
 urn trux tyrannus: "si facile est," ait,
 "poenam subactis ferre doloribus
 et vita vilis spernitur, at **pudor**
 carus dicatae virginitatis est.

The grave of Agnes is in the home of Romulus; a brave
 lass she, and a glorious martyr. Laid within sight of their
 palaces, this maiden watches over the well-being of Rome's
 citizens, and she protects strangers too when they pray with
 pure and faithful heart. A double crown of martyrdom was
 vouchsafed to her, the keeping of her virginity untouched
 by any sin, and then the glory of her dying by her own will.

They say it happened that as a young girl in her earliest
 years, scarce yet marriageable, but warm with the love of
 Christ, she bravely withstood godless commands, refusing
 to make herself over to idols and desert her holy faith. For
 though she was first assailed with many arts, now with
 seductive words from a smooth-tongued judge, and again
 with threats of cruel torture, she stood firm with strength
 indomitable, and even offered her body for the sore torment,
 not refusing to die. Then said the savage persecutor: "If it
 is easy for her to overcome the pains and bear the suffering
 and she scorns life as of little worth, still the purity of her
 dedicated maidenhood is dear to her. I am resolved to thrust
 her into a public brothel unless she lays her head on the altar
 and now asks pardon of Minerva, the virgin whom she, a
 virgin too, persists in slighting. All the young men will rush
 in to seek the new slave of their sport." "Nay,"

²⁶ *Metamorphoses*, book VI, vv. 70-102.

²⁷ *Metamorphoses*, book VI, vv. 103-128.

hanc **in lupanar** trudere **publicum**
certum est, ad aram ni caput applicat
ac **de Minerva iam veniam rogat**,
quam virgo pergit temnere virginem.
omnis inventus inruet et novum
ludibriorum mancipium petet.”
“haud,” inquit Agnes, “inmemor est ita
Christus suorum, perdat ut aureum
nobis pudorem, nos quoque deserat.
praesto est pudicis nec patitur sacrae
integritatis munera pollui.
ferrum inpiabis sanguine, si voles,
non inquinabis membra libidine.”
sic elocutam publicitus iubet
flexu in plateae sistere virginem.
stantem refugit maesta frequentia,
aversa vultus, ne petulantius
quisquam verendum conspiceret locum.
intendit unus forte procaciter
os in puellam nec trepidat sacram
spectare formam **lumine lubrico**.
en ales ignis fulminis in modum
vibratur ardens atque **oculos ferit**.
caecus corusco lumine corrui
atque in plateae pulvere palpitat.
tollunt sodales seminecem solo
verbisque deflent exequialibus.
ibat triumphans virgo Deum Patrem
Christumque **sacro carmine** concinens,
quod sub profani labe periculi
castum lupanar nec violabile
experta **victrix virginitas** foret.
sunt qui rogatam rettulerint preces
fudisse Christo, redderet ut reo
lucem iacenti: tunc iuveni halitum
vitae innovatum visibus integris.

25 | says Agnes, “Christ is not so forgetful of his own as to let
our precious chastity be lost and abandon us. He stands by
the chaste and does not suffer the gift of holy purity to be
defiled. You may stain your sword with my blood if you will,
but you will not pollute my body with lust.” When she had
30 | thus spoken he gave order to place the maid publicly at a
corner of the square; but while she stood there the crowd
avoided her in sorrow, turning their faces away lest any look
too rudely on her modesty. One, as it chanced, did aim an
impudent gaze at the girl, not fearing to look on her sacred
35 | figure with a lustful eye; when behold, a fire came flying like
a thunderbolt and with its quivering blaze struck his eyes,
and he fell blinded by the gleaming flash and lay convulsed
in the dust of the square. His companions lifted him from
the ground between life and death and bewailed him with
40 | words of lamentation for the departed. But the maiden
passed in triumph, singing of God the Father and Christ
in holy song because, when an unholy peril fell on her, her
virginity won the day, finding the brothel chaste and pure.
Some have told that being asked she poured forth prayers
to Christ that He would restore sight to the prostrate sinner,
and that then the breath of life was renewed in the young
man and his vision made perfect.

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Right from the start, Agnes’ qualities as a *virgo* and a *virago* are highlighted. Both Arachne and Athenas are “manly” women and the goddess is known in the pantheon for her chastity. As a Christian under the dome of Christianity, it suits Agnes to be a docile virgin. When she has to fight paganism, she must take on the form of *virago* and use bravery to stick up for her beliefs, “exploring how female audacity was both entertained and firmly restrained through [...] the tale of the virgin martyr Agnes” (Burrus 1995, 26). As Arachne, this young maid is known due to her art, as an exemplar Christian. In addition, as Arachne,

she is unwilling to cherish Athena (here, Minerva). In Ovid's passage, Athena herself confronts Arachne. In Prudentius, the goddess is represented in the form of the torturer, who demands the goddess to be recognized. When confronted, Agnes' *pudor* becomes clear, similar to Arachne's blushing. Alike, both are challenged and accept to fight. In Ovid's version, the characters weave. In Prudentius, Agnes is to be put on display, naked to everyone's eyes in a public brothel. People would gather to see Arachne working and, the same, people will gather to see Agnes' nudity. Her modesty, however, makes the viewers turn their sight from the virgin. Except for one, who dares to violate the virgin with his sight, as if raping her with the gaze, and is punished by a lightning²⁸. Irritated, the torturer orders a soldier to kill her by the sword. She wants to be perforated in the bosom, in a quite erotic manner, but has her head cut off instead²⁹.

Malamud (1989, 161-162) sees similarities between Agnes and Medusa too, as Ovid tells her myth in the *Metamorphoses* (book IV, vv. 793-803). "Both are virgins, both are sexually threatened at the altar of Minerva. Agnes is sent to a brothel, while Medusa is raped. As a result of the violation and exposure, both are endowed with a paralyzing power" (Malamud 1989, 162). Besides, both die through decapitation. Burrus (1995, 39-42), in turn, analyzes Agnes' death – regarding especially gender and how a cut in the breast would represent a more masculine death, and decapitation, a feminine one, making Agnes once again a *virgo* instead of *virago* – as a collage of sources (Euripides,

²⁸ "Roman elite texts refer to the gaze repeatedly, making it clear that its complex manifestations – threatening, sexual, regulatory, penetrating, shaming, controlling, admiring, imitative – shaped civic and personal identity as they fueled ethical, gendered, and hierarchical forms of the characterization of self and other in the Roman state." S. BARTSCH, *The Mirror of the Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 119.

²⁹ *Peristephanon* 14, 61-93.

Vergil and Ovid) to see Agnes as an intertextual Polyxena³⁰. Such readings are also convincing and demonstrate that there are as many intertextual readings as there are readers to spot them. The approximation between Arachne and Agnes, nonetheless, can bring to light yet one more aspect of intertextuality that is perhaps closer to how ancients perceived it. That is, the idea of emulation. “Intertextuality” is, after all, a modern term to explain how two or more texts depend of and respond to others. The idea of *aemulatio*, however, can hint at the literary effects expected by the authors:

For if a person is annoyed at the good fortune of someone because it is injurious to himself – for instance, if Agamemnon is aggrieved at Hector – what he feels is not properly called envy [*invidentiam*]. The person who truly envies [*invidere*] is the one who is annoyed at another’s gains even though they do no harm to himself at all. Rivalry [*aemulatio*] is used in two senses, as a term of praise [*in laude*] or as a term of blame [*in vitio*]. For the imitation of excellence is termed “rivalry” [*nam et imitatio virtutis aemulatio dicitur*] (although that is not what we are referring to here, since it is a term of praise), and rivalry may also be “distress [*aegritudo*] that another has obtained what one desired for oneself but does not have. [*si eo quod concupierit alius potiatur, ipse careat*]”³¹

In fact, the comparison between the scenes of Arachne versus Athena and Agnes versus Minerva (imposing herself

³⁰ “It is to Virgil’s treatment of Polyxena that Prudentius most directly alludes, addressing Agnes as ‘O virgo felix’ [...]” “[...] his [Ovid’s] Polyxena, like Prudentius’ Agnes, breaks out in impassioned speech upon seeing her sacrifice standing and gazing upon her with sword in hand.”; “Prudentius provides Agnes with the place of death which for him, as for ancient Greek tragedy, reestablishes her essential femininity in sexualized subjugation. [...] Euripedes’ Polyxena offers both breast and throat only to die by the more feminine death of the throat. But Prudentius’ still more virile Agnes offers *only her breast*, so that it is in complete and chilling disregard of her words that her *neck* is served” (Burrus 1995, 39; 39; 41).

³¹ *Tusculanae disputationes*, IV, 17. Translated by Graver (2002, 45).

through the tyranny of a persecutor) depicts exactly both types of *aemulatio*. The goddess, imbued by *aegritudo* (clearly expressed by the perception of impiety and how well the strong female mortal characters can succeed without her participation), uses this rivalry in the worst possible manner (*in vitio*), destroying her opponents. The issue has a completely different interpretation when the stratum of the characters is left aside to reach the stratum of the authors. The tapestries weaved by Athena and Arachne point to two different types of epic texts: one is grand and well divided, representing the most common types of epic, following Homeric conventions. The other one, blurring the lines between the episodes – that are clearly the same already told by Ovid – bears the freshness of novelty. Both are absolutely distinct, but equally enjoyable and beautiful. This *aemulatio in laude* that Ovid pursues in relation to his epic predecessors is the same Prudentius pursues in relation to – especially – the Augustan poets and, as here defended, Ovid. Intertextuality resides mostly in the reader. *Aemulatio*, in turn, rests in the author, that makes use of the approximations and connections between texts in order to surpass or, at least equal his predecessors. Hence, through intertextuality, the sense of novelty arises from a comparison of source and the target texts, making “originals” that seemed perfect (also in the vernacular sense of “finished”) challenged. The dynamic between the texts then, makes them come to life, what highlights how authority, creativity, memory, and literary competition worked in antiquity³².

³² This paper, produced first as a talk, intended to tease out some key aesthetic features of late antique style, specially with regards to the weight of the Augustan tradition in the late 4th, early 5th centuries, for an audience that, although very specialized in Roman poetics, might have been somewhat unaware of the later fashions. Therefore, a lot the more specific and even recent scholarship had to be left out, and the long quotations from Prudentius figure copiously. Nonetheless, this talk, as well as the other ones presented at the conference “Augustan Poetry: New Trends and Revaluations” has produced instigating and clever discussions, in an extremely multicultural and rich environment. For that reason, professors Paulo Martins, João Angelo Oliva Neto, and Alexandre Hasegawa (all of whom

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I was fortunate enough to come across during my undergraduate degree) have to be much acknowledged for the organization of the event. All the speakers too, sharp as ever in their articulations, and the audience, who came with an open mind to learn how classicists from different areas of the globe and of different generations approach their primary sources, must be thanked for their insight and passion.

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