

Prudentius' *Psychomachia* and the Influence of Cicero's Second *In Catilinam* Oration

Sitting at the crossroads of the late classical and early medieval worlds, Prudentius' *Psychomachia* describes a battle within the human soul between *virtutes* (virtues) and *vitia* (vices). As one of the poem's most distinguishing and novel features, the use of these *virtutes* and *vitia* as the primary characters within the poem has been the focus of many scholars. In particular, the question of where Prudentius drew literary inspiration for this idea has resulted in a range of interpretations, which focus mainly on poetic antecedents. These include studies ranging from Smith (1976) and Robert (1985) and their concentration on a Vergilian antecedent, to Pollmann's (1971) claim that Prudentius drew primarily upon later poets such as Claudian. In this paper I propose a fundamentally different origin, one which focuses upon Cicero's second *In Catilinam* oration.

In beginning my study, I first demonstrate that Prudentius possessed a thorough familiarity with the works of Cicero. Past studies by Haworth (1980), and more recently, Mastrangelo (2008), detail direct linguistic parallels between the works of Cicero and Prudentius. Moreover, both authors argue that Cicero's works maintained wide circulation and stature in late antiquity, particularly among the educated elite. From this information, I turn to Cicero's second *In Catilinam* oration and a prolonged metaphor which appears in its latter portion. Here, Cicero presents a hypothetical battle between the *vitia* which embody Catiline and the *virtutes* of the Roman republic. Virtues such as *pudor* (modesty), *fides* (religious devotion), and *mens sana* (sound mind) battle (*certare*) opposing vices, including *petulantia* (petulance), *fraudatio* (deceptiveness), and *amentia* (madness). The existence of such an antecedent to Prudentius' personifications is significant in and of itself, but the remarkable parallel between this list of virtues and vices and those in the *Psychomachia* points to the poet's engagement with the

Ciceronian text. For example, modifications such as Cicero's *lubido* (sexual desire) gaining the epithet *Sodomita* (Sodomite) and *mens sana* appearing as *mens humilis* point to a conscious effort by Prudentius to adapt Cicero's *virtutes and vitia* to a Christian context. Additionally, Prudentius' use of Cicero's verbs *certare* and *confligere* (to combat), along with his direct recycling of phrases such as *iacere prostratus* (to lie prostrate), further points to the poet's adaptation of Ciceronian language.

On the basis of this textual exegesis, I offer a more nuanced view of Prudentius and the source material from which he constructed his *Psychomachia*. In keeping with the claim of Malamud (1989) that "the Roman literary tradition extends beyond his (Prudentius') metrics into the conceptual work of his poetry," I argue that Prudentius' use of *virtutes* and *vitia* demonstrates his desire to engage with both the realms of poetry and prose. While it has been noted that Prudentius clearly references prose in works such as his *Contra Symmachum*, the presence of such Ciceronian material in his poetry suggests that the *Psychomachia* concerns itself not only with spiritual matters, but also in "recontextualizing" the Roman intellectual tradition as proposed by examinations from Thraede (1965) and Rapisarda (1962) to the more recent analysis by Mastrangelo (2008). As a result of this study, further examination of the *Psychomachia* as a response to works of Latin prose could help to shed light upon Prudentius' poetic objectives and his identity as both a Christian and Roman.

Bibliography

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