

The First Sighting Theme in the Old Testament Poetry of Late Antiquity

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Until recently the biblical poetry of late antiquity has received little attention from scholars.¹ The major reason for this neglect has been

¹ A number of monographs on individual authors appeared around the turn of the century—mostly on the problems of the biblical text forms used or the imitation of pagan poets—but with one exception—a largely descriptive work on the Genesis paraphrases (Stanislas Gamber, *Le livre de la Genèse dans la poésie latine au V^m siècle* [Paris 1899])—no work of synthesis was produced. Only recently have a number of works begun to supply this need. Two German studies deserve special mention, Klaus Thraede's article on the "Epos" in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 5 (Stuttgart 1962), cols. 983–1042, and Reinhart Herzog's *Die Biblepik der lateinischen Spätantike: Formgeschichte einer erbaulichen Gattung*, of which at the time of writing only volume one has appeared (Munich 1975), dealing with Proba, Juvenus, the Heptateuch paraphrase and Paulinus, C. 6. Jacques Fontaine's *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien: esquisse d'une histoire de la poésie chrétienne du III^e au VI^e siècle* (Paris 1981) contains a chapter on Juvenus, pp. 67–80, and a survey of the other biblical poets, pp. 241–64. For the Old Testament paraphrases a pair of articles by Kurt Smolak should be mentioned: "Lateinische Umdichtungen des biblischen Schöpfungsberichtes" in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 12, *Papers Presented to the Sixth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1971*, pt. 1, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 115 (Berlin 1975), pp. 350–60, and "Die Stellung der Hexamerendichtung des Dracontius (laud. dei 1, 118–426) innerhalb der lateinischen Genesispoesie," in *Antidosis: Festschrift für Walther Kraus zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna 1972), pp. 381–97. More summary treatments are contained in J. M. Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford 1968), pp. 107–42; Charles Witke, *Numen Litterarum: The Old and the New in Latin Poetry from Constantine to Gregory the Great*, *Mittellateinische Studien und Texte* 5 (Leiden 1971), pp. 145–232, and Dieter Kartschoke, *Bibeldichtung: Studien zur Geschichte der epischen Bibelparaphrase von Juvenus bis Otfried von Weissenburg* (Munich 1975), pp. 15–123. In addition, a number of more

aesthetic: the perceived opposition between the form of the poems, derived as it is from pagan epic, and their biblical content; form and content have been felt to be in irreconcilable conflict.² But, in fact, this blend of Christian and classical was very much in accordance with contemporary taste. In this respect the biblical poems are typical of much of the literature of late antiquity. To appreciate the poems properly, therefore, they must be seen against the intellectual background of the time, not in the light of aesthetic preconceptions derived from the study of classical literature or the biblical original.³ Such an open-minded approach is likely to be doubly fruitful. Scholarship, by concentrating on the interplay between Christian and classical in the biblical poems, can hope to learn much about the reception of the classical tradition in the Christian West, and at the same time introduce some light and shade into the almost uniformly dark picture of the biblical epic that has hitherto been presented. The present article draws attention to a group of passages in the Old Testament poems which illustrate their twofold inspiration (classical and Christian).

The passages in question are Claudius Marius Victorius, *Alethia* 2.

specialized studies by German, Dutch, and Italian scholars have contributed to the understanding of individual works.

The present article elaborates on remarks made in my Ph.D. dissertation, *The Hexameter Paraphrase in Late Antiquity: Origins and Applications to Biblical Texts* (Urbana 1978), pp. 322-23. In the present article I have preferred the term "first sighting" theme to "distant views" theme, as being more accurate, if less suggestive. A revised version of the dissertation has recently been published; Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity*, ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 16 (Liverpool 1985), but it omits the pages which deal with the "first sighting" theme.

² Cf. the references collected and discussed by Herzog, pp. lx-lxv. Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. F. M. Benecke (2nd ed. 1908; repr. Hamden, Conn. 1966), pp. 158 and 160, expresses with unusual clarity the traditional attitude of scholars to these poems: "Christianity was never at its ease when arrayed in the forms of ancient poetical art, and the ability of its various poets could never do more than slightly diminish the strangeness of its appearance. Not unfrequently indeed the contrast between the matter and the form would have been positively ridiculous to anyone not blinded by the fervour of religious faith," and "To versify the Gospels meant . . . to take away from the simple narrative its own proper poetry by tricking it out in a way repugnant to its nature. . . . Poetry was merely looked upon as versified rhetoric."

³ I am here thinking of criticisms which contrast the fetching simplicity of the biblical narrative with the rhetorical elaboration of the poetic version, interpreted as tasteless mutilation of the original. Cf. the second passage from Comparetti cited in the previous note.

6–26 and 2. 528–39;⁴ Avitus, *De spiritalis historiae gestis* 3. 197–208;⁵ and Dracontius, *Laudes Dei* 1. 417–26.⁶ (The poem of the African poet Dracontius, though primarily non-biblical, contains in the first book a lengthy version of Genesis 1–3, as an illustration of God's mercy towards the human race.) All four passages have in common that they describe reactions to a strange, new environment. *Alethia* 2. 6–26 and Avitus 3. 197–208 describe the first parents' reaction to their expulsion from Paradise; *Alethia* 2. 528–39 Noah's reaction to the new world after the Flood; and *Laudes Dei* 1. 417–26 the first parents' fearful response to the onset of night. Each passage may be described as paraphrastic amplification of the biblical text. In accordance with the principles of the paraphrase the sense of the original is retained; its elaboration is rather a matter of *elocutio* than *inventio*⁷—the poet takes his point of departure from the biblical text and seeks to give more forceful expression to the spiritual content of the text. Since the discussion will initially center on the two passages from the *Alethia*, I quote them here.⁸

⁴ The *Alethia* was most probably written in the third decade of the fifth century; cf. Pieter Frans Hovingh, *Claudius Marius Victorius, Alethia, la prière et les vers 1–170 du livre I*, (diss. Groningen 1955), pp. 22–23 and 45. For the form of the name (Victorius rather than Victor) see Hovingh, pp. 15–16. Hovingh's arguments are accepted by Helge Hanns Homey, *Studien zur Alethia des Claudius Marius Victorius*, (diss., Bonn 1972), p. 7, and Herzog, *Die Biblepik*, p. xxiii.

⁵ The date of composition of the *De spiritalis historiae gestis* is not definitely known. The last decade of the fifth century is the period most commonly given. For the title see Avitus, *Ep.* 51 (80. 21–22 Peiper) "*De spiritalis historiae gestis etiam lege poematis lusi.*"

⁶ Dracontius was a contemporary of Avitus. The *Laudes Dei* is generally thought to have been written in the first half of the last decade of the fifth century (see P. Langlois, "Dracontius," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 4 [Stuttgart 1959], cols. 253–54, who nevertheless believes a later date is possible).

⁷ On the need to retain the sense of the original see Quintilian I. 9. 2 "paraphrasi audacius vertere, qua et brevare quaedam et exornare *salvo modo poetae sensu* permittitur," speaking of a prose paraphrase of verse. Provided that an expansion of the original text introduced no material alteration therein and could be classified as stylistic enhancement rather than fresh invention, no contravention of paraphrastic principles was involved. Stylistic amplification might be broadly interpreted to include, for instance, lengthy digressions, which were viewed as an ornament of style. The *progymnasmata* were largely exercises in such rhetorical amplification. Among them figured the ethopoeia, which, we shall see, influenced the paraphrastic amplifications here discussed. On the theory of the paraphrase see further Roberts, *Biblical Epic*, pp. 5–36.

⁸ The text followed is that of Hovingh, *Claudii Marii Victorii Alethia, Corpus Christianorum Latinorum* 128 (Turnhout 1960), pp. 148 and 165–66, who follows Arie Staat, *De Cultuurbeschouwing van Claudius Marius Victor: Commentaar op Alethia II 1–202* (diss., Amsterdam 1952). Hovingh's *plana* for *plana* (2. 14) is clearly a misprint though adopted without comment by Homey (above, note 4), p. 34.

Alethia 2. 6–26

Postquam sacratis decedere iussus uterque
 sedibus ac regnis genitalia contigit arva
 et propria stetit exul humo, miserabile, quali
 ore rudes stupeant tam barbara rura coloni,
 quae non frugifero distincta stipite vernant. 10
 Nec species iuvat ulla soli, sed bruta coacto
 pondere congeries nec lecta mole locata est.
 Ardua caute rigent, silvis depressa laborant,
 plana latent herbis, horrescunt edita dumis.
 Heu quibus haec spectant oculis, quo pectore cernunt, 15
 quorum animis paradisos inest! Neque causa doloris
 una subest, quod cunctorum iam plena malorum
 se pandit facies, sed, quod meminere bonorum.
 Nunc honor ille sacri nemoris maiore sereno
 inradiat, nunc divitias cumulatius edit 20
 silva beata suas, nunc pomis dulcior usus
 nectareusque sapor, vivis nunc floribus halat
 tellus⁹ et absenti tristis perstringit odore.
 O quam non eadem meritis, paradise, rependis!
 Te magis extollit conlatio deteriorum 25
 et peiora facis, miseris quae sola supersunt.

Alethia 2. 528–39

At dominus, mundi sortitus regna secundi,
 cuncta Noë gaudens oculis ac mente capaci
 accipit atque animum nequit exsaturare replendo 530
 et cupido raptim perlustrans omnia visu
 ut nova miratur. Noto fulgentior ortu
 et mage sol rutilus, ridet maiore sereno
 laeta poli facies et desperata virescunt
 fetibus arva novis. Sed adhuc versatur imago 535
 ante oculos tantae semper memoranda ruinae,
 inter aquas quid pertulerint, quid munere sacro
 et non pertulerint, fremeret cum verbere saevo
 pontus et inlisis contemneret arca procellas.

Homey,¹⁰ in his dissertation on the *Alethia*, has noted the thematic similarity between these passages. He sees them as inspired by two philosophical *topoi*, later taken over by Christian exegesis. The first is that of man as the *contemplator mundi/caeli*; the notion that by visual contemplation of the universe, and especially the heavens, man

⁹ For the *correptio* of the final syllable of *tellus* see also *Alethia* 3. 561.

¹⁰ Homey, pp. 34–55, where the evidence for these philosophical *topoi* will be found.

may ascend to the spiritual contemplation of God. This idea, as Homey shows, goes back to Hellenistic philosophy, but was adapted by Christian writers to their own concept of the divine. The second philosophical *topos* derives from attempts to explain the existence of evil in the world; evil, it is said, exists so that man may have a yardstick of comparison the better to appreciate what is good. Here Homey quotes *Alethia* 2. 25–26:¹¹

Te magis extollit conlatio deteriorum
et peiora facis, miseris quae sola supersunt.

The influence of such concepts, especially the former, certainly cannot be ruled out. As Homey effectively shows in his dissertation, the influence of philosophical doctrines, as filtered through Christian exegesis, is all-pervasive in the *Alethia*. Indeed, it is clear from elsewhere in the poem that Claudius Marius Victorius was familiar with the notion of man as *contemplator mundi/caeli* (1. 153–58 and 423–31). But neither philosophical *topos* accounts for the feature that the two *Alethia* passages, and the passages in Avitus and Dracontius, have in common: that is, that each describes the reactions of a spectator (or spectators) when confronted for the first time with a strange environment. Nor does the function of the passages correspond to that of the philosophical *topoi*. Claudius Marius Victorius is not concerned to stress the relationship between the contemplation of nature and the contemplation of God; still less does he seek to justify the existence of evil. As Homey recognizes,¹² the passages serve a literary function: to amplify the changes experienced by the first parents and Noah and thereby lend emotional force to the narrative.

The passages serve the purpose of rhetorical amplification. It is in rhetorical rather than philosophical *topoi*, therefore, that their inspiration should be sought. A parallel may be found in a group of ethopoeiae of the form “what would ‘someone’ say on first seeing ‘something’.” Hermogenes¹³ recommends the subject “what would a farmer say on first seeing a ship?” (21. 12–13 Rabe; cf. Priscian’s translation of Hermogenes, 558. 17–18 Halm).¹⁴ Perhaps the closest

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 53, and 55.

¹³ The authenticity of Hermogenes’ *Progymnasmata*, which I here cite, is doubtful; cf. Hugo Rabe, *Hermogenis Opera, Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 6 (Leipzig 1913), pp. iv–vi. There is no reason to deny, however, that the work accurately reflects educational practice of late antiquity.

¹⁴ Accius’ *Medea* (381–96 Warmington = Cicero, *N.D.* II. 35. 89) contained a speech on this subject, which in turn appears to derive from a narrative motif in Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* IV. 316–22.

parallel, however, is a subject referred to by Aphthonius (fourth century), "what would an inlander say on first seeing the sea?" (35. 5-6 Rabe); an exercise on this subject is preserved among sample exercises attributed to Nicolaus of Myra (1.389.5-24 Walz).¹⁵ Like the passages in the biblical epic, such ethopoeiae concern the first sight of an unfamiliar object or environment. The speaker of the ethopoeia may be expected to feel a sense of alienation, or psychological distance, from his new environment, just as the first parents and Noah do in the passages under discussion. Such subjects undoubtedly appealed to the student and rhetor because of the imaginative effort required to put oneself in the situation of the speaker and because of the opportunity offered to invent striking new turns of thought in describing the observer's reaction to the strange environment.

It seems probable, then, that the first sighting theme was suggested to the biblical poets by this class of ethopoeiae, with which they would be familiar from the schools. Claudius Marius Victorius was, as we know, a rhetor in Marseilles (Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 61). The biblical poets' choice of narrative rather than direct speech to convey their characters' reaction to the new environment can be attributed to two factors. The first is a probable reluctance to introduce speeches not sanctioned by the biblical original; Claudius Marius Victorius certainly avoids such non-biblical speeches (only two examples), although Avitus is freer in this respect. More importantly, the use of narrative rather than direct speech permitted greater visual immediacy (*ἐνάργεια*). Ancient theory recognized that such visual immediacy worked particularly strongly on the emotions, and that it could be achieved by the description not only of visual detail, but also of the effect a sight had on an observer.¹⁶ Both Claudius Marius Victorius and Avitus often use such psychological description as an affective technique.¹⁷

¹⁵ For these sample exercises and their relation to Nicolaus (a fifth-century rhetorician) see Joseph Felten, *Nicolai Progymnasmata, Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 11 (Leipzig 1913), p. xxvii, and Willy Stegemann, "Nikolaos," *RE*, 17. 1 (Stuttgart 1936), cols. 451-57, who attributes the exercises to Aphthonius.

¹⁶ For the affective force of *ἐνάργεια*, the vivid description of visual detail, see Quintilian VI. 2. 32: "*ἐνάργεια*, quae a Cicerone inlustratio et evidentia nominatur, quae non tam dicere quam ostendere, et adfectus non aliter quam si rebus ipsis intersimus sequitur"; for the description of a spectator's reaction as achieving the same purpose see Quintilian VIII. 3. 70 "contingit eadem claritas (sc. *ἐνάργεια*) etiam ex accidentibus: 'mihi frigidus horror/membra quatit gelidusque coit formidine sanguis' [*Aen.* III. 29-30] et 'trepidae matres pressere ad pectora natos'" [*Aen.* VII. 518].

¹⁷ For instance *Alethia* 1. 382-84, 2. 93-94, 108-15, 134-35, 3. 173-81, 374-76;

Let us turn now to the procedures used in such “first sighting” themes. The only example available is the exercise attributed to Nicolaus of Myra on the subject “what would an inlander say on first seeing the sea?”, a subject which Aphthonius (35. 4–6 Rabe) classes among ἠθικαὶ ἠθοποιΐαι, that is ethopoeiae designed to reveal the ἦθος (the characteristic frame of mind) of the speaker. Thus, in the exercise of “Nicolaus,” the landlubber reveals his naiveté when confronted with an unfamiliar element, the sea: “I was at a loss to understand the marvel (τὸ θαυμάσιον κρίνειν ἠπόρηκα, 1.389.10 Walz). The biblical poets, on the other hand, employ the “first sighting” theme for purposes of πάθος; to reveal the emotions of the observer in a particular situation. But one technique is common to “Nicolaus” and the poets: the use of comparison. As might be expected, the landlubber, confronted by the sea, compares it to elements that are familiar to him, the air and land: “it does not maintain the character of air, for it is not elevated overhead: it cannot remain motionless like the earth” (ἀέρος φύσιν οὐ διασέσωκεν, οὐ γὰρ ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς φερόμενον αἴρεται· μένειν οὐκ οἶδεν ὥσπερ ἡ γῆ, 1.389.11–13 Walz). In a similar fashion the observers in the biblical poems compare their strange, new environment with the familiar one it has replaced. Such a comparison naturally engenders the “Kontrast von äußerer Wirklichkeit und innerer Vorstellung, die aus der Erinnerung schöpft” noted by Homey.¹⁸ The objective reality of the new situation contrasts with subjective reminiscence of the former state. The biblical poets exploit the emotive possibilities of such a contrast, although, as we shall see, the subjectivity of the observers’ reaction is stressed more by Avitus than by Claudius Marius Victorius. It should be remembered, however, that in instituting this comparison they are conforming to standard rhetorical procedure for the first sighting theme.

As already noted, Homey explains *Alethia* 2. 25–26,

Te magis extollit conlatio deteriorum
et peiora facis, miseris quae sola supersunt,

as a reference to a philosophical argument justifying the existence of evil: by comparison with evil man appreciates the good. I have already suggested that I find this explanation implausible, if only because the

in *De spiritalis historiae gestis* especially to characterize the villains of the narrative, 2. 35–86 (the Devil), 4. 11–85 (the generation before the flood), 5. 75–80, 98–101, 497–500 (the Pharaoh).

¹⁸ Homey (above, note 4), p. 53.

present context shows no concern with the justification of evil.¹⁹ If we are to judge by Avitus 3. 203 "utque hominum mos est, plus, quod cessavit, amatur," the notion that "absence (or rather loss) makes the heart grow fonder" was a proverbial one.²⁰ The phrase *conlatio deteriorum*, which Homey cites in support of his argument, is susceptible of another, and I believe a better, interpretation. *Conlatio* (*collatio*) is a technical term of rhetoric (cf. the passages cited in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 3: 1579. 14–33).²¹ *Collatio* involves the comparison of one thing with another on the basis of similarity (Cicero, *Inv.* I. 30. 49 "collatio est oratio rem cum re ex similitudine conferens") or, in later theory (Quintilian V. 11. 30–31), dissimilarity. Such comparisons may be viewed as argument and thus included in *inventio* or as stylistic adornment and included in *elocutio* (Quintilian VIII. 3. 77). Thus in late antiquity, Cassiodorus, in his Psalm Commentary, commenting on Ps. 11:7, says "quod schema graece syndesmos dicitur, latine collatio, quando sibi aut personae aut causae sive ex contrario sive ex simili comparantur" (CCL 97: 120. 144–146). Comparison was also a recognized means of rhetorical amplification, one of the four *genera amplificationis* (Quintilian VIII. 4. 3 and 9–14). That Claudius Marius Victorius consciously uses comparison in the passage quoted as a means of rhetorical amplification is clear from a second rhetorical *terminus technicus* in *Alethia* 2. 25, the verb *extollit*. The *Thesaurus* quotes ample evidence for this technical usage (*ThLL* 5.2: 2038. 55–75). It is especially common in the context of rhetorical

¹⁹ Homey (p. 53) does not suggest this is the case, but speaks of the literary exploitation of the philosophical *topos*: "Die 'conlatio' macht es technisch möglich, zwei kontrastierende Landschaftsbilder ohne Überleitung dicht nebeneinander zu stellen. . . ." Economy of explanation favors my interpretation of *conlatio deteriorum*; a literary procedure is explained by literary considerations.

²⁰ The closest parallel I have noted is A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Leipzig 1890), p. 113, no. 533: Publilius Syrus 103 "Cotidie est deterior posterior dies"; Seneca, *Phaedra* 775–76 "horaque/semper praeterita deterior subit," reminiscences, according to Otto, of the Greek proverb ἀὐτὰ πέρουσι βελτίω (Diogenian. 2. 54; Macarius 1. 31). Cf. also Hans Walther, *Proverbia sententiaeque latinitatis mediæ ævi: lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters in alphabetischer Anordnung, Carmina mediæ ævi posterioris latina*, 2, 6 vols. (Göttingen 1963–69), 3: pp. 114–15, no. 16558b "nescit habens, quod habet, donec desinat habere" and 16565 "nescit homo vere, quid habet, nisi cessat habere." The notion of *conlatio* is, it is true, missing from the Avitus passage (cf. Homey, *Studien zur Alethia*, p. 54, note 17), but note the grammatical comparatives in the proverbs cited by Otto.

²¹ *Alethia* 2. 25 is listed in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 3: 1578. 81–82, as an instance of the non-technical use of *collatio* in the sense of "comparison." I hope my argument will demonstrate that the technical, rhetorical sense of the term was uppermost in Claudius Marius Victorius' mind when he composed the passage in question.

elaboration, and is indeed found twice in Quintilian's discussion just quoted (VIII. 4. 9 and 15). The first passage concerns the use of comparison as a means of amplification:

Quae [amplificatio] fit per comparationem incrementum ex minoribus petit. Augendo enim quod est infra necesse est extollat id quod superpositum est.

Quintilian is here speaking of a comparison based on similarity rather than contrast, as in the *Alethia* passages, but it is clear that a subject can be "elevated" either by comparison with something that is similar, but inferior, to it or with something that is opposite to it. In the latter case the comparison serves not only to amplify the superior but also to diminish the inferior. This is the rhetorical principle that underlies *Alethia* 2. 25–26.

We are now in a position to analyze the function and development of the first sighting theme in Claudius Marius Victorius and his successors in the biblical epic. *Alethia* 2. 6–26 describes the first parents' reaction to their expulsion from Paradise. It proceeds by means of a comparison based on the contrast between their barbarous new environment and the luxuriant vegetation of Paradise, thereby diminishing the former and amplifying the latter (as indicated by the use of the comparatives *maiore*, *cumulatius* and *dulcior*, 19–21). Each description is filled out with ecphrastic detail in accordance with Quintilian's precept (VIII. 4. 14) "quae si quis dilatare velit, plenos singula locos habent"—in Butler's translation "all comparisons afford ample opportunity for further individual expansion, if anyone should desire so to do." But, as we have seen, the comparison is not introduced merely to amplify the description of Paradise. It is here used, in a fashion typical of the first sighting theme, for affective purposes: to indicate the emotional state of the observers. The whole passage is designed as an ἠθοποιία παθητική, albeit narrative in form. The poet frequently refers to the emotions of the first parents (*stupeant*, 9; *iuvat*, 11; *doloris*, 16; *tristes*, 23; *miseris*, 26—cf. *miserabile*, 8, which sets the tone for the passage). The arrangement of the passage follows the sequence of the first parents' emotions: initial shock at their new environment (8–14), which calls to mind the splendor of Paradise (15–18), described in ecphrastic detail (19–23). The final three lines act as a summarizing conclusion (24–26). Homey has rightly noted that the element of subjective remembrance lends particular affective force to the description of Paradise. The ecphrastic detail contained in both descriptions serves a similar purpose (note especially the many words with strong emotive connotations: *bruta*, *rigent*, *laborant*, *horrescunt*, *beata*, *vivis*).

Two sections in this passage deserve further comment. The first is 2. 6–8:

Postquam sacratis decedere iussus uterque
sedibus ac regnis genitalia contigit arva
et propria stetit exul humo . . .

The phrase “genitalia contigit arva” presents some problems. The compilers of the *Thesaurus* (*ThLL* 6.2: 1813. 51–53) hesitate over the correct interpretation: “homo e paradiso pulsus. arva quae ei fruges procreant? an: quibus ipse procreatus erat?” As Staat rightly emphasizes,²² if *genitalia* anticipates the future fertility of the land, it is out of place in a passage that stresses the barrenness of the first parents’ surroundings. The second alternative must be the correct one. Staat further draws attention to the tradition that Adam was created outside Paradise, into which he was introduced by God after his creation (cf. Gen. 2:8 and 15).²³ The phrase is naturally used, then, by Claudius Marius Victorius of the land outside Paradise, into which the first parents are now driven. It is all the more surprising therefore that Staat misunderstands the phrase “propria stetit exul humo.” He translates “van het eigen erf verbannen,” and in the notes specifically takes *propria humo* to refer to Paradise. But the phrase *propria . . . humo* is an evident reference to man’s creation *de humo terrae* (cf. Gen. 2:7, quoted by Isidore, *Etym.* 11. 1. 4, in the form “Et creavit Deus hominem *de humo terrae*”). Claudius Marius Victorius was undoubtedly familiar with the frequently repeated etymology of *homo* from *humo natus*, an etymology already known to pagan antiquity, although dismissed by Quintilian (I. 6. 34) as false.²⁴ By Staat’s own argument, the phrase *propria . . . humo* can only refer to the land outside Paradise. The translation of the phrase in question must be “he was an exile in his own land.” The land is his own (*propria*) because he was born from it. Such a paradox (*propria : exul*) is very much in the manner of Claudius Marius Victorius. The interpretation is further confirmed by the parallelism with the phrase “genitalia

²² Staat (above, note 8), pp. 31–35.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁴ For this etymology see *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 6.3: 2871. 50–63 and 3122. 48–55. F. H. Colson remarks in his note on the Quintilian passage, *M. Fabii Quintiliani Institutionis Oratoriae Liber I* (Cambridge 1924), p. 87, that “this derivation appears to be found (apart from later and Christian sources) only in Hyginus, *Fables* 220, the date of which is very uncertain.” Cf. also Servius *ad G.* 2. 340.

contigit arva." I suspect that the poet intended the phrase *propria . . . humo* to explain the otherwise rather opaque *genitalia . . . arva*.²⁵

The second section worth attention is 2. 13–14.

Ardua caute rigent, silvis depressa laborant,
plana latent herbis, horrescunt edita dumis.

Staat comments on the "artistic construction" of these verses.²⁶ The combination of formal regularity with inconcinnity in detail is very much to the taste of the period. We need only compare a line from another Gallic poet of the early fifth century, the pagan Rutilius Namatianus (*De reditu suo* 1. 38): "plana madent fluviis, *cautibus alta rigent*."²⁷ The two passages are similar in language (the words italicized) and construction (note especially the artfully varied word order in the individual cola). The sentence in the *Alethia* reads like an attempt to imitate and outdo the pagan poet. This is not impossible since the two poets were contemporaries and both probably from Gaul.²⁸ It is more likely, however, in the light of the opposite religious convictions of the poets, that the similarity is attributable to the common literary taste of late antiquity, as it was transmitted to both pagan and Christian by the schools of grammar and rhetoric.²⁹ The description of landscape

²⁵ *Arva*, "fields," is a bold metonymy for the earth from which Adam was created. I suspect the poet was influenced by the desire to incorporate a Virgilian reminiscence (*Geo.* III. 136, *genitali arvo*), a reminiscence that was all the more attractive because it was capable of a specifically Christian interpretation. The incorporation of such pagan poetic locutions into a new context not infrequently occasions some awkwardness of expression. Examples are given by A. Hudson-Williams, "Virgil and the Christian Latin Poets," *Papers of the Virgil Society* 6 (1966–67), pp. 19–20, and Thraede, *Studien zu Sprache und Stil des Prudentius*, Hypomnemata 13 (Göttingen 1965), p. 15, note 34. The phrase *genitali arvo* is used figuratively by Virgil of the mating of horses and by Ausonius (*Ecl.* 7. 11) of childbirth; in Juvenecus (4. 65) *genitalibus arvis* means "native land" (parallels cited by Hovingh *ad loc.*).

²⁶ Staat (above, note 8), p. 40.

²⁷ The parallel has escaped the attention of previous commentators. Hovingh, *ad loc.*, following Heinrich Maurer, *De exemplis quae Claudius Marius Victor in Alethia secutus sit* (diss. Marburg 1896), p. 117, notes only the parallel with Valerius Flaccus 4. 671, *ardua cautes* (to which should be added Seneca, *Ag.* 539, *ardua ut cautes*).

²⁸ The *De reditu suo* is thought to have been written in the second decade of the fifth century. According to Alan Cameron, "Rutilius Namatianus, St. Augustine and the Date of the *De Reditu*," *Journal of Roman Studies* 57 (1967), pp. 31–39, Rutilius set out from Rome on the journey described in his poem in October 417. Vollmer, "Rutilius Claudius Namatianus," *RE*, ser. 2, 1.1 (Stuttgart 1914), col. 1253, remarks of Rutilius' *Nachleben*: "Des R. Gedicht hat keine weite Verbreitung gefunden; nicht einmal bei einem Landsmann wie Venantius Fortunatus findet man seinen Namen oder Spuren seiner Verse."

²⁹ Rhetorical influence on the *De reditu suo* is widespread; cf. Vollmer, cols. 1250–51.

in each case has all the appearance of being stylized and conventional; it is a part of the poetic *lingua franca* of the period.

The second passage in the *Alethia* (2. 528–39) follows a pattern similar to the first.³⁰ Again it exploits a comparison based on contrast; the account begins with a description of the new environment, which calls to mind the old (535–36); the superior environment is described with grammatical comparatives (*fulgentior, mage rutilus, maiore*) and ephrastic detail. Only in one respect does the passage differ. It is now the new environment, the world after the Flood, that is amplified by comparison with the previous state of things. The relationship is the reverse of that in the earlier passage, where it was the first parents' previous existence that was amplified. There is a corresponding change in the emotional tone of the passage. In the description of the first parents' reaction to their expulsion from Paradise the word *miserabile* (2. 8) was the key word; here it is *gaudens* (2. 529, cf. also *cupido . . . visu*, 531; for emotive language *miratur, ridet, laeta, desperata, ruinae, saevo*).

Avitus, like Claudius Marius Victorius, uses the first sighting theme of the first parents' expulsion from Paradise (3. 197–208).³¹

Tum terris cecidere simul mundumque vacantem
 intrant et celeri perlustrant omnia cursu.
 Germinibus quamquam variis et gramine picta
 et virides campos fontesque ac flumina monstrans, 200
 illis foeda tamen species mundana putatur
 post paradise tuam; totum cernentibus horret
 utque hominum mos est, plus, quod cessavit, amatur.
 Angustatur humus strictumque gementibus orbem
 terrarum finis non cernitur et tamen instat. 205
 Squalet et ipse dies, causantur sole sub ipso
 subductam lucem, caelo suspensa remoto
 astra gemunt tactusque prius vix cernitur axis.

The passage was evidently written with the corresponding passages in the *Alethia* in mind. The phrase "celeri perlustrant omnia cursu"

³⁰ In addition to the parallels in construction discussed in this paragraph, note also the verbal reminiscence *maiore sereno* (2. 533 = 2. 19; cf. Homey, [above, note 4], p. 50, note 3).

³¹ I quote from the edition of Rudolf Peiper, *Alcimi Ecdicii Aviti Viennensis episcopi Opera quae supersunt, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, 6. 2 (Berlin 1883).

recalls *Alethia* 2. 531 “cupido raptim perlustrans omnia visu”³² and the apostrophe of Paradise (3. 202) is paralleled by *Alethia* 2. 24–26 in an identical context. But, unlike the earlier poet, Avitus describes the new environment in favorable terms (199–200).³³ It is only by contrast with Paradise that it seems ugly. The comparison Avitus introduces is based on similarity not opposition. In a manner analogous to the *argumentum a minore* the beauty of Paradise is amplified by comparison with an ideal landscape (199–200), which yet seems mean after the first parents’ former existence (201–203).³⁴

The comparison then shifts ground to one based on opposition (204–208). The new and old environments are now compared, not as in the *Alethia*, by means of successive descriptions, but in a single description of the new environment, which yet refers allusively to the former (*angustatur . . . strictum . . . subductam . . . remoto . . . tactusque prius*). We have seen that it is characteristic of first sighting themes in the *Alethia* for an element of subjective reminiscence to be present in the description of the former environment. This subjectivity extends in Avitus to the description of the new world outside Paradise. The reader is already alerted to the fact that the spectators’ impression of their new environment does not correspond to objective reality by the contrast between vv. 199–200 and “*Illis foeda tamen . . . putatur*” (201). This theme is picked up and developed in the second

³² Salvatore Costanza, *Avitiana I: I modelli epici del “De spiritalis historiae gestis”* (Messina 1968), p. 81, compares Silius Italicus 2. 248–49 “*cursum raptim . . . membra/et celeri fugiens perlustrat moenia planta.*” Hovingh on *Alethia* 2. 531 cites Virgil, *Aen.* IV. 607, *omnia lustras*, VI. 887, *omnia lustrant*; Avienus, *Arat.* 27, *omnia lustrans*; Claudian, *VI Cons. Hon.* 412, *omnia lustrat*; *In Rufin.* 2. 496–97, *visu . . . /lustrat*; Ovid, *Met.* VII. 336, *omnia visu*; and Statius, *Theb.* V. 546–47, *omnia visu /lustrat*. Two further passages from the *Achilleis* of Statius may be compared: I. 126, “*lustrat Thetis omnia visu,*” and I. 742, “*interea visu perlustrat Ulixes.*” In the light of these many parallels it may seem rash to suppose a reminiscence of the *Alethia* in the passage of the *De spiritalis historiae gestis*. The thematic similarity between the two passages, however, lends some credibility to this suggestion. I have argued elsewhere (*Biblical Epic*, pp. 102–104, 123 and 218) that Avitus was influenced in the choice and treatment of his subject by the *Alethia*.

³³ The description is perhaps somewhat in conflict with that contained in God’s malediction of Adam (3. 157–66)—in spirit if not in letter. The former passage, however, concerns the earth’s suitability for cultivation, the latter its immediate appearance.

³⁴ For this form of amplification by comparison see Quintilian VIII. 4. 9, quoted above. Quintilian maintains a distinction between this and the *argumentum a minore*, although the distinction seems to lie in function rather than thought (VIII. 4. 12, “*Illic enim probatio petitur, hic amplificatio*”). For the comparison *a minore* used to arouse *pathos* see Macrobius, *Sat.* IV. 6. 1, “*nempe cum aliquid proponitur quod per se magnum sit, deinde minus esse ostenditur quam illud quod volumus augeri, sine dubio infinita miseratio movetur.*”

half of the passage. On the one hand, the limit of the earth is not seen, yet seems to press in on the first parents (204–205); on the other hand, the heavens are hardly visible (206–208), although the world here being described is that of everyday human existence in which, as the reader knows, the heavens are clearly visible. Avitus emphasizes that the picture of the new environment contained in lines 204–208 is not based on visual observation but on the psychological reaction of the first parents. Their mental state is mirrored in their sense of oppression at the shrinking of earth's confines (204–205) and their sense of alienation at the removal of the heavens (206–208). As in the *Alethia*, the narrative ethopoeia reflects the emotions of the first parents (cf. *gementibus . . . causantur . . . gemunt*).³⁵ But Avitus is not simply content to use objective description of the new environment as a counterpoint to the first parents' emotions. Rather the description itself is distorted by and thereby subjectively embodies the emotions. Here, still more than in the *Alethia*, we might invoke the notion of man as the *contemplator mundi/dei*; man's sin has led to his expulsion from Paradise and consequent alienation from the universe. He no longer sees the world correctly. But the theme of man's relationship to nature is an important one throughout the *De spiritalis historiae gestis* and goes beyond the single idea of man as the *contemplator mundi*.³⁶

The last passage to be discussed is Dracontius, *Laudes Dei* 1. 417–26.³⁷

Mirata diem, discedere solem
nec lucem remeare putat terrena propago
solanturque graves lunari luce tenebras,
sidera cuncta notant caelo radiare sereno. 420
Ast ubi purpureo surgentem ex aequore cernunt
luciferum vibrare iubar flammisque ciere
et reducem super astra diem de sole rubente,
mox revocata foveat hesterna in gaudia mentes;

³⁵ Avitus makes little attempt to avoid verbal repetitions of the form *gementibus* (204) . . . *gemunt* (208); cf. in the present passage *cernentibus* (202), *cernitur* (205), *cernitur* (208). The verb *causor* in the sense of *conqueror* is confined to late Latin.

³⁶ Man's relationship to nature is at the center of Books 4 and 5, as it is of 1–3. In each of the last two books human sinfulness precipitates a natural catastrophe, the Flood and the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.

³⁷ I follow the text of Friedrich Vollmer, *Dracontii De Laudibus Dei . . .*, *Poetae Latini Minores* 5 (Leipzig 1914), which differs from his earlier text in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, 14 (Berlin 1905), only in the spelling *luciferum* for *Luciferum*. The edition of Francesco Corsaro, *De laudibus dei libri tres* (Catania 1962), has not been available to me.

temporis esse vices noscentes luce diurna
coeperunt sperare dies, ridere tenebras.

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The episode has no sanction in the biblical text. Dracontius alone of the biblical poets thinks to describe Adam and Eve's reaction to the first nightfall. Here there are not one, but two comparisons involved, both between contrasting environments. The first is between the daylight and night (417–20), the second between night, as described in lines 417–20, and the new dawn (421–23). Dracontius thus introduces temporal progression into the first sighting theme, which had been treated statically by Claudius Marius Victorius and Avitus. The progression is a cyclical one (from light to darkness to light) which is reflected in the emotions of the first parents (424–26).

More detailed analysis will illustrate how Dracontius manipulates a standard rhetorical theme to serve his Christian purpose. By transposing the creation of Eve to the sixth day (360–401), the poet has legitimized the assumption that a day passed between the creation of the first parents and the temptation and Fall. Rather than simply using a formula of time to indicate the passing of the day, Dracontius employs poetic idiom and reminiscence to describe nightfall and the coming of a new dawn. Line 420, as Vollmer notes, is a conflation of two lines of Virgil: *Aen.* III. 515 "sidera cuncta notat tacito labentia caelo" and III. 518 "cuncta videt caelo constare sereno." The description of dawn is a typical poetic periphrasis, with its reference to the morning star (*luciferum*), synonymic amplification (*vibrare iubar flammisque ciere*) and imperfect tricolon (422–23; the construction is varied in the final member).³⁸ The successive verbs of emotion and perception (*putat* [sc. *propago*], 418; *solantur*, 419; *notant*, 420; *cernunt*, 421; *fovent*, 424) emphasize, however, that the sequence of events is seen through the eyes of the first parents. There are, in fact, two parallel sequences described in this passage: in the natural world from light to darkness to light again; and in the emotions of the first parents from wonder to despair (relieved, it is true, by the light of the moon and stars, but note the emotive word *graves*) to confident rejoicing. The interconnection between the two processes is made clear in the final line (426, "sperare dies, ridere tenebras"), which not only ends the passage in epigrammatic form (isocolon with antithesis), but also recalls the beginning of the section ("mirata diem,

³⁸ For references to the rising and setting of stars and other heavenly bodies in such poetic periphrases of time see Quintilian 1. 4. 4, "qui (sc. poetae) . . . totiens ortu occasuque signorum in declarandis temporibus utuntur." The association of *iubar* with the morning star is traditional, going back to Ennius, *Ann.* 559 (Warmington; cf. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 7.2: 571. 80–84 and 572. 18–30).

discedere solem") in rhythm and vocabulary.³⁹ The return of daylight can now be confidently expected when night falls; darkness is no longer an object of dread (*graves . . . tenebras*, 419), but of scorn (*ridere tenebras*, 426). Smolak, in an article on the hexaemeron paraphrase in Dracontius' *Laudes Dei*,⁴⁰ rightly detects Christian light symbolism in this passage. The dispelling of darkness by light always had soteriological connotations for a Christian reader. Dracontius shapes the whole episode round the antithesis between light and darkness. By emphasizing the first parents' reaction to the alternation of light and dark, and the eventual triumph of light, he elaborates the passage into a vignette of Christian edification.

The passages cited from the Old Testament paraphrase illustrate the interplay in the biblical epic between Christian patterns of thought and traditional rhetorical modes of expression. The first sighting theme, derived from the school exercise of ethopoeia, is employed by three Old Testament poets to give expression to Christian emotion. Each passage proceeds by comparison, a technique that, as we have seen, is characteristic of this theme. But, if the procedures are traditional, the passages depend for their unity on characteristically Christian thought and feeling. The contrasts between Paradise and the world outside Paradise, between the world before and after the Flood or between night and day already carry a strong emotional connotation for the reader, which each poet tries to direct and enhance by means of modes of expression derived from the pagan schools. Such a complex relationship between Christianity and the classical tradition is characteristic of much of the biblical poetry of late antiquity. To dismiss the poems on the grounds of the irreconcilable conflict between Christian content and classical form is to dismiss from the very start what the biblical poets have attempted to achieve. As I hope will be clear, an appreciation of the contributions made to these poems by the two cultural traditions is likely to lead to a more nuanced view of the biblical epic as a whole and a readiness to admit the possibility of something other than conflict between the

³⁹ Both lines contain a weak third-foot caesura preceding the word *dies/diem*. In both the penultimate word is an infinitive, though of different metrical pattern.

⁴⁰ Smolak, "Die Stellung" (above, note 1), p. 393. For light symbolism in Christian Latin poetry, see Herzog, *Die allegorische Dichtkunst des Prudentius*, Zetemata 42 (Munich 1966), pp. 52-84, and *Die Biblepik* (above, note 1), pp. 139-40. For the symbolic value of the dispelling of night by the light of day see Tertullian, *Res. Carn.* 12, with the comments of Christian Gnilka, "Die Natursymbolik in den Tagesliedern des Prudentius," in *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Kötling* (Münster Westfalen 1980), pp. 414-15. Lucretius V. 973-81 presupposes a theory that primitive men feared day might not return when night fell (cf. Manilius, 169, Statius, *Theb.* IV. 282-83).

two traditions. No one should expect an aesthetic equivalent of the biblical text; that, given the methods used, would be impossible. But neither should the biblical poems be dismissed simply as rhetorical exercises whose subject happens to be biblical; that would be radically to underestimate the contribution to the poetry of Christian thought and feeling aroused by the biblical text to be paraphrased.

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