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ANCIENT LATIN EPICS IN GIROLAMO VIDA’S *CHRISTIAD*

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ABSTRACT

The topic of this thesis is the influence of ancient Latin epics on the *Christiad*, a Neo-Latin epic poem published in 1535 in Cremona and written by an Italian poet and Catholic bishop, Girolamo Vida (circa 1485-1566).

While the impact of Virgil's *Aeneid* on Vida's poem has been studied, it is still in need of further investigation. Likewise, recent scholarship has detected many *loci similes* between the *Christiad* on the one hand, and Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, Silius Italicus' *Punica* and Statius' *Thebaid*, on the other, without systematically studying the nature of such resemblances.

This thesis argues that many of these *loci similes*, including borrowings from Virgil, impinge on the meaning of the *Christiad*. Vida's technique covers a wide range of nuances of literary imitation on a hypothetical spectrum that has at its poles, respectively, the inert refashioning of the words of a previous author and the in-depth engagement with the source on an ideological level. Virgil is undoubtedly his favourite model both qualitatively and quantitatively. However, Vida regarded Lucretius and the post-Virgilian epicists of the first century AD as valuable, though problematic, poets and interlocutors.

The first part of the thesis contextualises the *Christiad* by analysing the role of ancient Latin epics and literary imitation in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries (chapter 1), Vida’s imitative theory and practice in his *De Arte Poetica* (1527) (chapter 2), and the historical, ideological and intertextual framework of the *Christiad* (chapter 3). The second part focuses on four major themes, namely knowledge (chapter 4), marvels and miracles (chapter 5), Good and Evil (chapter 6), and succession (chapter 7), to illustrate the actual presence of ancient epic models in the poem.

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Table of Contents

Introduction **7**

Chapter 1. Latin Epics and Literary Imitation in the Early Italian Renaissance **16**

1.1 Ancient Latin Epics in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Italy 17

1.2 The Role of Ancient Latin Epics in Italian Renaissance Education 27

1.3 *Florilegia* and Centos 32

1.4 Early Renaissance Theories of Literary Imitation 36

Chapter 2. Vida's reflection on imitation: *De Arte Poetica* **49**

2.1 The art of imitation 50

2.2 Virgil 58

2.3 Other poets 60

Chapter 3. The Historical, Ideological and Intertextual Frameworks of the *Christiad* **68**

3.1 The Commissioning 69

3.2 Centrality of the Papacy and of Rome 74

3.3 Translatio Imperii 77

3.4 Pagan at the service of the Christian 80

3.5 Totality and Contingency 85

3.6 Intertextuality in the *Christiad* 91

Chapter 4. Knowledge **101**

4.1 Explanation of Reality 102

4.2 Song, Memory, and Prophecies 109

4.3 Knowledge and Salvation 117

Chapter 5. Miracles and Marvels **124**

5.1 Miracles 126

5.2 Marvels 148

Chapter 6. Good and Evil **166**

6.1 Satan, Hell and Hellish Forces 167

6.2 The Father, Heaven and Heavenly Forces 191

6.3 Demonic Possession 204

6.4 Jesus: Man, God, and Hero 211

6.5 Sacrifice 224

Chapter 7. Succession **230**

7.1 Familial Succession 231

7.2 Historical Succession 242

7.3 Poetic succession 253

Conclusion **257**

Bibliography **267**

Introduction

The reverence that Girolamo Vida (c. 1485-1566) had toward Virgil was a well-known fact in the sixteenth century and has rightly been taken as a given ever since. Expressions such as “Christian Virgil” and “Maronolatry” are self-explanatory in this respect.[1] Vida was explicit in his admiration for the ancient poet. Thus in the *De Arte Poetica*, a guide to writing in Virgilian style, he praised Virgil with an encomium (*DAP* 1.164-77) and a hymn (*DAP* 3.554-92).[2] His *Christiad*, a hexameter poem in six books which retells the contents of the *Gospel*, is an attempt at writing a Christian *Aeneid*.

While the influence of Virgil in the *Christiad* has received scholarly attention so far,[3] Vida’s debt to other poets has only been acknowledged occasionally,[4] and it has never been studied extensively. That the dominion attributed to the Holy Spirit in the first lines of the poem is the same one that Lucretius assigned to Venus in his proem is a point that readers have discussed for a long time.[5] Yet this awareness of influences other than Virgil’s seems more the exception than the rule. This may be due to a lack of a serious *Quellenforschung* which could offer potential *loci similes* with other ancient works. Nowadays, however, the data at our disposal have been increased thanks to the lists of parallel passages from Latin literature contained in more recent editions and commentaries.[6] An in-depth analysis of the relationship between Vida’s poem and its ancient poetic models, including but not limited to Virgil, is now both feasible and a *desideratum*.[7] More specifically, the presence of Lucretius has been discussed but never properly investigated.[8]

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[1] E.g. Lancetti (1831) 8, Saintsbury (1902) II 30, Hardie (1992) 47 and (1993a) 303, Rolfes (2001) 27-8, Sowerby (2006) 14, 20, 59.

[2] Greene (1982) 177.

[3] Among the most important contributions see Pease’s (1935) commentary on *Aeneid* 4, interspersed with references to the *Christiad;* Di Cesare (1964), the most extended and the only systematic study, and Bruère’s (1966) review which adds further similarities with single lines and scenes of the *Aeneid;* Di Cesare (1980).

[4] E.g. O’Neil (1985) 558.

[5] Cicchitelli (1904) 301, Di Cesare (1964) 158, Bruère (1966) 22; even the more sceptical Pigman (1990) 207 concedes this point.

[6] Gardner (2009) and von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013), with new insights on the presence of Virgil. All the quotations of the *Christiad* and almost all the *loci similes* discussed here come from this latter edition, except where noted.

The *Christiad* has been included in the post-Virgilian epic tradition since its dialogue with the *Aeneid* follows the same principles adopted by the epicists of the first century AD.[9] Among the sporadic hypotheses of the relevance of other authors that have been made up until now, indeed, one cannot but mention Di Cesare's remarks on the resemblance of Lucan's invocations to Vida's and the role of poets such as Statius and Silius Italicus as intermediaries for the refashioning of epic features.[10] Along similar lines, Hardie detected the influence of Lucan's Erictho episode in the account of the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniac,[11] and Polleichtner contended that the scene of the encouragement of the disciples by Jesus after his Resurrection, in view of the hardships they will have to face, draws on Jason's request for help from Medea in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*.[12] It might be no coincidence that some of the works with the highest number of parallels in Vida's epic are hexameter poems connected to Virgil either as precursors (Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*),[13] or as successors (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica,* Silius Italicus' *Punica,* Statius' *Thebaid*).[14]

The time is now ripe then to establish to what extent the ancient Latin epic tradition influenced the *Christiad*. This thesis aims to answer this research question. In order to present a clear picture, new colours need to be added to our palette. To begin with, it is necessary to expand upon what previous scholarship has maintained about Vida's debt to the *Aeneid*, for some aspects of this relationship are either understudied or help define the contours of our picture. It is just as imperative that the enquiry be extended to the presence in the *Christiad* of the poems just mentioned, for Vida presupposes an audience that shares in a similar horizon of expectations implied by those works in terms of language, themes, characterisation and even length.[15] As we will see, Lucretius is by far Vida's most significant interlocutor after Virgil. Ovid, Lucan and Statius play a secondary role in the intertextual framework of the poem, while Silius Italicus and Valerius Flaccus rise to the surface more rarely. The notion of "epic" employed here is flexible.[16] It includes Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura,* even though the idea that the latter can be labelled under this tag is not unproblematic, because it is a didactic poem.[17] The *Ilias Latina* and Statius' *Achilleid* are left out on purpose because they present much less and, overall, weaker *loci similes*. The far less conspicuous impact of other hexameter works akin or ascribable to the genre – predominantly, Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics,* Claudian's poems and late antique biblical epics– will be considered only tangentially, in so far as they prove relevant for the discussion.

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[7] Fratantuono (2009) advocated for the necessity of a similar contribution. See also von Albrecht (1967) and Glei (2010a) 118-9. Ottria (2022) 137-44 argued that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* influenced Vida's *Scacchia Ludus*.

[8] According to Vairani (1778) 16-7, a seventeenth-century biography of Vida, the man of letters Giovanni Vincenzo Gravina said that in the *Christiad* "il Vida, più che in ogni altro suo componimento, trasportò delle locuzioni, e numeri lucreziani" [Vida, more than in any other poem, transferred Lucretian locutions and measures]. Hardie (1993a) 303 argues that Lucretius is recurrently used in the poem.

[9] Hardie (1993b) xii.

[10] Di Cesare (1964) 81-91.

[11] Hardie (1993a) 303.

[12] Polleichtner (2007).

[13] Pigman (1990) 204 thinks of Ennius as well.

[14] Critics have long debated the generic make-up of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. For a balanced view see Harrison (2002a) 87-9.

By the time Vida wrote the *Christiad*, the idea of a hexameter poem based on the New Testament had already been realized. The operation had been attempted since late antiquity, as shown, for instance, by Juvencus' *Evangeliorum libri*, Sedulius' *Carmen paschale*, and Arator's *De Actibus Apostolorum.*[18] These texts represent important precedents in that they not only retell the events of Jesus' and the apostles' lives in the manner of epic, but also draw extensively from pagan Latin epic poetry: Virgil above all, followed by Ovid, Lucan, and Statius.[19] Many other works of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance Christian literature were influenced by pagan epics as well, Dante's *Comedy* being the most striking example. In this light, the role played by other Christian works –either in Latin or in vernacular languages– as mediators between Latin pagan epic and Vida should always be considered.[20] Unfortunately, a study of Vida's debt to previous and contemporary Christian authors is still unwritten and would go beyond the scope of this thesis.[21]

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[15] Colie (1973) 1-31 remains valuable on genre-theory in the Renaissance. Kallendorf (2014) is an informative introduction to Neo-Latin epic poetry. On the usefulness of the category of epic as a "genre" and its communicative functions, see Martin (2005). The category "Roman epic tradition" is borrowed from Boyle (1993) and Hardie (1993b). For the expression "horizon of expectations", see Jauss (1982) 22-4.

[16] On this concept in the Renaissance see Czapla (2013) 214-20. If one employs the term "epic" as indicating poems written in hexameters, then other genres such as satire and epistles should count. Nevertheless, previous studies have not concluded that they are particularly relevant in the *Christiad*. This explains why they have been left aside here in favour of other texts.

[17] Lucretius asks Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry (6.92-5), to come to his aid, and when he mentions Homer and Ennius (1.120-6), he is perhaps presenting himself as their poetical successor. On this last point, see Gale (2007) 60-1. On Lucretius and epic poetry, see Murley (1947) and West (2007). Didactic poetry is not seldom assimilated to heroic epic, e.g. Toohey (1992) 2-5 and (1996) 5-7, and Gale (2005) 101-2. *Contra* Volk (2002) 34-43.

As Helander argued, indicating the classical sources of a text in an apparatus cannot be the endpoint in Neo-Latin studies, for too many *loci similes* are fraught with meaning.[22] Since literary echoes are a multifarious phenomenon, an analysis of parallel passages should first of all establish whether and how they impinge on the meaning of the receiving text. Pigman called attention to the fact that a reader should wonder if similarities and differences are allusions or simply coincidences, unconscious reminiscences, commonplaces, even imitations of imitations.[23] He tellingly suggests that the required metrical patterns of poetry may account for coincidences and that, even without a "Parry-like statistical study", the borrowings from ancient poets seem to be more frequent at the beginning and the end of lines.[24] One can never rule out the possibility that any expression that resembles a previous text may not be meaningful, whether because the author did not consciously want it to have an actual connection to the meaning of the imitated text or because the correspondence was merely unintentional.[25] Nevertheless, readers may run the risk of overlooking the fact that commonplaces and imitations of imitations may as well be intentional and have meaning. Not to mention that even unconscious reminiscences may tell us something about the relationship between texts. For example, the later author might unconsciously have thought about a "source" because of a similar linguistic, metrical or narrative feature. The correspondence between passages of two texts can affect the creation of meaning for a reader who detects a source, independent of any authorial intent.[26] This holds true even for those similarities that may have been due to the use of commonplace books:[27] consulting them does not necessarily mean neglecting a later detailed reading or the genuine knowledge of the original. Another controversial point may be the fact that the education received by Neo-Latin poets perhaps provided them with mechanical and mnemonic learning of classical authors.[28] Still, such training does not imply a lack of understanding and, more importantly, should probably not be postulated for every Neo-Latin poet.

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[18] For further works and bibliography see von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) i 11-2.

[19] Green (2006) xiv-xv.

[20] According to Di Cesare (1964) 97-8, for example, the depiction of the regions of hell would owe more to Dante than to Virgil and Statius. Greene (1963) 170-1 held an opposite view. The presence of ancient Christian epics in the *Christiad* has been questioned by Green (2006) 370-1.

[21] Fratantuono (2009) indicates that Vida's relationship with Dante deserves closer study. For some remarks on the topic, see Alberson (1937) 194-5, Di Cesare (1964) 343-4, and Mancini (1970).

[22] Helander (2001) 41-2 warns also against an excessive reliance on databases which leads to overestimating verbatim quotations against broader imitations.

[23] Pigman (1980) 12 and (1990) 199-201.

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[24] *Ibidem*. Statistical analyses would be welcome to evaluate if verbal borrowings could be viewed as part of a formulaic repertoire. Though not focussing on *formulae*, the "quantitative criticism" of studies such as Dexter, Katz, Tripuraneni, Dasgupta, Kannan, Brofos, Bonilla Lopez, Schroeder, Casarez, Rabinovich, Lushkov, Chaudhuri (2017), Chaudhuri-Dexter (2017) and Burns, Brofos, Li, Chaudhuri, Dexter (2021) seems promising for future studies of Neo-Latin literature.

[25] Provided that the reader is interested in the *intentio auctoris.*

[26] See the structuralist reflection on intertextuality and lack of intentionality by Conte (1974), one of the most influential essays on this topic among classicists. Methodological considerations on intertextuality in classical Latin literature can be found in Pasquali (1942), Thomas (1986), Fowler (1997), Hinds (1998), Edmunds (2001), Farrell (2005); for the Renaissance, see Greene (1982) 36-48. Machacek (2007) surveys more recent *vistas* on allusion in the humanities and proposes a perspective that tries to conciliate allusion and intertextuality.

[27] McFarlane (1976) 87-8 raises the question of the impact of such phrasebooks on Neo-Latin poetic production, though his enquiry is limited to France.

[28] Pigman (1990) 201 calls attention to this vexing problem, building his argument on the basis of Grafton & Jardine (1986) 22, who are actually talking about Guarino Veronese's school in particular. An extended inquiry on this topic would be helpful.

What could be inferred from Vida's hints as to his own practice of borrowing from a number of ancient poets is that a wide range of texts was most likely available to him. Accordingly, a review of the medieval reception and of the status of the ancient Latin epics here examined during Vida's age in Italy should accompany any attempts to weigh up their presence in his poem. At the end of the fifteenth century ancient works were being edited and were having substantial cultural repercussions on the lives of some of their readers. One need only think about the philosophical implications of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* in the religious and political circumstances of Counter-Reformation Italy, or about the –sincere or feigned– existential drama of using pagan mythology in Christian poetry. Chapter 1 offers a very brief survey of the editions of, the scholarship on and the reception of ancient epics. The *Aeneid* is left out, for, despite its unquestionable centrality in Vida's intellectual *milieu*, its reception has been much more thoroughly studied recently.[29]

Vida was also a pivotal theorist. Not only did he enrich his poetry with expressions taken from ancient classical authors, but he also discussed the art of imitation at length in a section of his *De Arte Poetica* (3.185-301). Here he advocates the importance of appropriating expressions from ancient poets, and gives instructions on how to borrow their words, distinguishing between covert and overt *furta*. Chapter 2 retraces his theory of literary imitation, while simultaneously paying attention to how he puts his own precepts into practice in this poem. We will see that, along with Virgil, other poets are recommended as models, even though their names are not explicitly mentioned, and Vida himself admits to making use of them.[30] As significant as this may seem, caution is needed when *De Arte*

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[29] Individual papers on the reception of the *Aeneid* can be found in Farrell and Putnam (2010). On Virgil's Renaissance *Nachleben* in general see Wilson-Okamura (2010), Houghton and Sgarbi (2018); Houghton (2019), and the numerous contributions of Kallendorf: (1989) and (1995) for the role of Renaissance Virgilian commentators, (2012a) and (2021), two bibliographies of early printed editions of Virgil's works, (2015) on the material side of his reception, (2020) on early printed editions. For an account of the presence of Virgil in the Middle Ages, Comparetti (1997) is still a reference text.

[30] See La Penna (1985) 644.

Poetica is utilized as an exegetical tool for interpreting the *Christiad*. Implying coherence between two works of the same author without indisputable evidence is a questionable operation, albeit not entirely unreasonable. Di Cesare rightly drew attention to this point and tried to illustrate it through close readings of both poems.[31]

Chapter 3 lays the groundwork for the rest of the thesis by exploring the connection between the *Christiad* and its historical context. Pope Leo X's commission of the poem is the starting point. The role of the papacy and Rome and that of the *translatio imperii* are here touched upon in order to focalise the main ideological concerns identified by previous Vidian scholarship. I then examine the tension entailed by the juxtaposition of pagan and Christian materials, perhaps the kernel of the poem's dialogue with its classical models, and the tendency that Vida shares with his epic predecessors to highlight the importance of the events narrated for the rest of the world and for the future. An overview of the intertextual framework of the poem functions as a theoretical introduction to the analysis of the relationship of the *Christiad* with the epic tradition. The implementation of expressions drawn from classical authors often seems to be due to contextual factors, for they usually offer Vida words to describe analogous situations and actions. The practical nature of many of these borrowings, however, does not prevent them from either shedding light on Vida's *modus operandi* in the passages in question or even adding layers to their meaning.

There is no doubt that Vida's debt to the epic tradition is not limited to a shared expressive code but is deeply rooted in the genre's way of making sense of reality. In this perspective, the *Christiad* reproduced some thematic patterns recurrent in the epic tradition. These themes, of course, were developed in different manners by different authors, each of whom had his own historical/cultural background and his concerns. Springing from the longing for totality typical of the genre, knowledge can be regarded as a central feature of epic even in

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[31] Di Cesare (1964) 140-1, Hardie (1993a) 305.

Greek literature, both functionally –e.g. Havelock's definition of this kind of poetry as "tribal encyclopedia",[32] or the Augustan concept of the poet as *vates*–[33] and thematically, as is demonstrated by the subdivision represented by the didactic tradition. Chapter 4 investigates the role of knowledge in the *Christiad*. It aims to show how the poem draws on classical sources, mainly Lucretius, to provide its own interpretation of the nature of reality, to refashion the role of song, memory and prophecy in epic from a Christian perspective, and to thematise the doctrinal function of knowledge for the salvation of souls.

Miracles and marvellous events are the subject of Chapter 5. The *Christiad* blends these essential components of epic with the numerous miracles performed by Jesus and the other supernatural phenomena in the Gospels. By juxtaposing pagan and Christian *mirabilia,* Vida emphasises the epic character of his operation while asserting the superiority of Christianity by way of contrastive imitation. The classical models often constitute a negative paradigm, be it a specific behaviour, the motivations behind it or its outcome. Jesus always intervenes in human affairs for the good of men, as the results of his deeds demonstrate, and his sphere of action is technically limitless.

Angels and men, however, have the freedom to determine their destiny. In Chapter 6, I analyse the representation of the forces of Hell and Heaven and the influences that they have on earth. The eternal struggle between good and evil or a dichotomy between positive and negative principles is a central feature of the epic tradition. For instance, in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Silius Italicus' *Punica,* chthonic forces fight against the designs of Fate. Even in a didactic poem such as Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura,* philosophical knowledge bestows the power to distinguish what is good from what is not.

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[32] Havelock (1963).

[33] According to Pasco-Pranger (2000) 276, the term is usually associated with epic. See also Dahlman (1948), Newmann (1967a and 1967b), Hardie (1986) 16-22 and Gildenhard (2007) 87.

Chapter 7 delves into how the dimension of succession pervades the interaction of the *Christiad* with its epic models. Vida makes the most of the idea of succession by conceiving it both in terms of family ties, which are inherently appropriate to Christianity –the dogma of the Trinity, Mary's motherhood–, of historical inheritance –ancient Rome and Renaissance Rome–, and of poetical continuation –the *Christiad* itself and the Latin epic tradition.[34]

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[34] The following editions have been used for the main texts quoted. Lucretius: Bailey (1921). Virgil: Mynors (1969). Ovid: Tarrant (2004). Lucan: Shackleton Bailey (1997). Valerius Flaccus: Ehlers (1980) Silius Italicus: Delz (1987). Statius: Shacketlon Bailey (2003).

Chapter 1. Latin Epics and Literary Imitation in the Early Italian Renaissance

The historical and literary background of the poem is an indispensable starting point for contextualising the issues outlined so far. The conditioning readers bring to the texts has an impact on the constitution of the texts themselves and on the readings that follow.[35] Accordingly, this chapter aims to provide an overview of the editorial, scholarly and material reception of classical Latin epic poems other than the *Aeneid*, and of the theory of literary imitation in Vida's historical and geographical *milieu*, namely late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Italy. Here I offer a general and synthetic survey to give an idea of the editorial and intellectual vitality of ancient Latin epics other than the *Aeneid* in that environment. In this respect, the role they played in the school *curricula* is of special interest, mainly because they were the basis of pupils' education, some of whom, as in the case of Vida, ended up writing Latin poetry. During the Renaissance, sections of ancient texts often appeared in commonplace books, i.e. collections of quotations.[36] Not only did these handbooks represent a pivotal pedagogical tool in several European schools of the time, but Neo-Latin poets also utilised them as compositional aids. It is inevitable, then, that we wonder how much Vida availed himself of them. It is entirely possible that he did –although the lack of specific sources hinders a definitive answer– but the extent and the quality of the intertexts in the *Christiad* should hinder us from excluding first-hand knowledge of ancient poems in their entirety.[37] In light of this and since Vida dedicated part of his *De Arte Poetica* to the matter, a concise analysis of early Renaissance theories of literary imitation may prove helpful in placing Vida's views and practice in their historical context.

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[35] This notion is widely accepted nowadays: see, among others, Martindale (1993) 1-10 and Gaisser (2002); Bergemann, Dönike, Schirrmeister, Toepfer, Walter and Weitbrecht (2019) on the recent *Transformation* methodology.

[36] The definition of "commonplace book" is problematic; see Moss (1996) 2-3.

[37] I used the term "intertext" as a synonym for *locus similis* and with a neuter value as far as authorial intention is concerned. This was not the original meaning intended by its inventor, Julia Kristeva, who coined it to signify connections between cultural objects, not necessarily literary texts. See Pucci (1998) 14-5.

1.1 Ancient Latin Epics in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Italy

There is no doubt that the poems which constitute the Latin epic tradition as we know it today were available in Italy when Vida wrote the *Christiad.* By then, each one of them had been published in several printed editions for decades and had been commented on either in print or in public lectures. In some cases, they had already been read in the Middle Ages. The circulation of these texts and their impact on the intellectual life of the time imply that Vida's alleged familiarity with them, in whatever form, is a plausible assumption.[38] However, it does not necessarily mean that the reconstruction of Vida's "personal library" is a viable option. Even if this were the case, we could not exclude the possibility that he consulted directly either some manuscripts or other editions of those texts that were not present in his supposed library. The operation would be further complicated by the fact that it is very difficult to establish which manuscripts could have been available to him, not to mention that accurate catalogues of early modern editions of classical texts, as Kallendorf has indicated, are not usually available.[39] Nevertheless, the importance of taking into consideration early printed editions here is that they are indispensable for recovering how and how widely ancient texts were read during the Renaissance. Among other things, these editions indicate the centres where they were produced, and, in some copies, they contain notes written by their readers.[40] The establishment of texts with the introduction of printing did not rely on a systematic theory. Instead, an *editio princeps,* the first printed edition, was usually based only on the most accessible manuscript and then ended up becoming the commonly accepted one. From then on, it was reproduced in new editions which sometimes contained alterations found in other manuscripts but with no regard to the quality of the latter.[41] Obviously, we are still at the very beginning of the chain of refinements that would lead to the stemmatic “Lachmann method”.[42]

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[38] In some of his letters, Jacopo Sannazaro talks about his poetic compositions and the influence that ancient poets such as Virgil, Ovid and Valerius Flaccus had on him. For a modern edition of these letters, see Fantazzi and Perosa (1988) 87-108.

[39] Kallendorf (2015) 83.

[40] *Ibidem* 107.

Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*

Poggio Bracciolini discovered a copy of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* in a now-lost manuscript in 1417 during the Council of Konstanz.[43] Multiple copies were transcribed and annotated and we now possess fifty-four manuscripts and thirty printed editions from 1417 to 1600.[44] The *editio princeps* was published around 1473 at Brescia by Thomas Ferrandus, and at least seven other editions in Italy followed it before the publication of the *Christiad*,[45] two of them (Verona 1486 and Venice 1495) containing a Lucretian cento.[46] Most manuscripts and several printed editions contain ancient descriptive headings that subdivide the poem into sections.[47] It would not be surprising if Vida used these headings as support for his composition. If he wanted to search for an exemplary discussion of a particular theme, he could look at the margins and find one more easily than by merely relying on his memory. However, the nature of the matter is such that trying to assess this hypothesis based on the sources at our disposal would simply lead to speculation. Different kinds of notes appear in fifteenth and sixteenth century copies, and this holds even for other classics in general.[48] Biographies of Lucretius and proper commentaries on his poem began to appear around the turn of the sixteenth century.[49] *De Rerum Natura* was regarded as acceptable reading for members of the clergy like Vida. The supposedly Catholic-oriented censorship endured by this poem in the Renaissance has been challenged as of late.[50] Two copies were created for Popes Pius II and Sixtus IV, and another two belonged to two bishops of Padua.[51] Even though the ideas Lucretius promoted were in stark contrast with the culture of the time and the Florentine provincial council numbered his work among those *opera lascivia et impia* that should be banned from schools in 1517, it was not added to the Index of Prohibited Books by the Catholic Church.[52] It is against this background of controversial acceptance that some of Lucretius' Renaissance apologists resorted to what has been called a "dissimilatory code", a measure of self-censorship with which they managed to camouflage their sympathy for the poet.[53] Some of the strategies that intellectuals such as Johannes Baptista Pius, the author of the first modern commentary on the *De Rerum Natura* (1511), employed to promote the Epicurean poet in an environment that was mainly Christian included depicting him as a virtuous and eloquent *vates*, comparing him to ancient thinkers, and stressing the influence he exerted on later authors.[54] In a letter published in the 1515 Aldine edition, Aldus Manutius himself justifies the publication of the poem by arguing that Epicurean mistakes only emphasised and did not threaten the truth of Christianity.[55] This edition would represent the standard for the following decades: it would be the last one to be produced in Italy for almost 150 years. This has likely something to do, among other things, with the cultural climate of the Counter-Reformation.[56]

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[41] *Ibidem* 14.

[42] See the seminal book by Timpanaro (2005).

[43] Reeve (2007) 206.

[44] Palmer (2014) 4.

[45] *Ibidem* 258-9 for a list of Early Modern printed editions.

[46] Fleischmann (1971) 351-2.

[47] Palmer (2014) 250.

[48] *Ibidem* 56.

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[49] *Ibidem* chaps. 2, 3, and 4. The present research does not aim to establish if any of the modern commentaries to the poems here referred to were meaningful for the *Christiad*.
[50] Palmer (2020).
[51] *Ibidem* 49.
[52] Davidson (2015) 127-8.
[53] Prosperi (2007) 214.
[54] Although Pius did not spare him ideological counterattacks; he quoted from other authorities to defuse the Epicurean doctrines promoted in the poem. See Kraye (2014).
[55] Palmer (2014) 97-100, 120-4, 140-63, 203-206.
[56] Butterfield (2015) 55.

Christian engagement with Lucretius is not a novelty of Renaissance literature, as corrective imitation of his poem informs several late antique Christian prose and poetic compositions.[57] There is a wealth of Renaissance authors influenced by him who were far from agreeing with an Epicurean agenda. His presence in the Neo-Latin literary production of fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy is wide-ranging. Assimilation and/or polemical imitation of the ancient Epicurean poet characterise works such as Giovanni Pontano's *Urania* (1505),[58] Aonio Paleario's *De animorum immortalitate* (before 1536), Marcello Palingenio Stellato's *Zodiacus Vitae* (1535-6?), and Lodovico Parisetti Junior's *De immortalitate animae* (1541).[59]

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

The place of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the Italian (and non-Italian) Renaissance is a central one; the poem had been read for centuries in Western Europe so it is difficult to distinguish between its "medieval" and "Renaissance" reception.[60] Many manuscripts and commentaries date back to medieval times, with most of the former containing the whole poem from the eleventh century on.[61] Starting from the early ninth century, short anthologies, also known as *florilegia,* of Ovidian passages began to circulate, and from the twelfth century onward, Ovidian lines were singled out for the teaching of literature and even morality.[62] In addition to *florilegia*, other paratextual materials appeared, e.g. introductions, mythographic *compendia*, prose and metrical summaries, which were used as tools to memorise its contents.[63] Because of Ovid's increasing popularity and literary influence on both Latin and vernacular literature, Ludwig Traube defined the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as an *aetas Ovidiana,*[64] though Ovid seems to have been read less than Virgil, Lucan or Statius around that time.[65] The late Medieval reception of the *Metamorphoses* is characterised not only by the impact that it had on poets such as Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Maffeo Vegio[66] in Italy, where the poem was used in the classroom at least since the twelfth century,[67] but also by different types of commentaries and interpretations that frequently attempted to recalibrate its contents morally.[68] A particular variety is the allegorical readings that spread in the later Middle Ages: works like Arnulf of Orléans' *Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosin* (ca. 1175), Giovanni del Virgilio's *Allegoriae* (ca. 1323), the anonymous *Ovide moralisé* (1317-1328) and Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus* (1362) treated the poem as a series of Christian moralising allegories and would have an impact on Renaissance readings.[69] At the end of the fifteenth century, the Christianisation of Ovid was by no means a novelty, as it dates back to at least late antiquity, but it had reached such a scope that several fifteenth century preachers used myths taken from the *Metamorphoses* in their sermons.[70] Paratextual productions and interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* are closely related to the story of the printed tradition of the poem.[71] Two *editiones principes* were published in 1471, the *Bononiensis* and the *Romana*, edited respectively by Franciscus Puteolanus and Johannes Andreas, Bishop of

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[57] Hardie (2019) *passim* and (2020a).

[58] Goddard (1991).

[59] Haskell (2007) and (2015) are insightful overviews of Latin Lucretian poems written in sixteenth century Italy. Prosperi (2004), (2007) and (2020) 147-8 cover a wide range of Italian authors. On Lucretius in Poliziano's poetry see Brown (2010) 94-5, and in Girolamo Fracastoro's, see Maurette (2014) with bibliography.

[60] Burrow (2002) 301-2.

[61] Richmond (2002) 450.

[62] *Ibidem* 452.

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[63] For some overviews of Ovidian medieval exegetical tools, see Knox (2009b), Hays (2014), and Gerber (2015) 11-50. Coulson and Roy (2000) 3 is a catalogue of the manuscripts that contain this kind of material.

[64] Traube (1911) 113.

[65] Richmond (2002) 452.

[66] Putnam (2004) xxx-xxxi.

[67] On Ovid in medieval Italy, Black (2011) is a good introduction. On his presence in XIII and XIV-century Italian literature, see Van Peteghem (2020).

[68] Fumo (2014) 114-6 pinpoints the necessity of research and the lack of scholarly interest in this area of Ovidian reception.

[69] Dimmick (2002) 278-80 and Knox (2009b) 331-4. On the impact of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on the Neo-Latin literature of Italy in the Renaissance see Marsh (2015) 399.

[70] Delcorno (2020).

[71] Schmitzer (2012) 263.

Aleria. The latter had been a student in Vittorino da Feltre's school at Mantua,[72] a town in which the school tradition of Vittorino must have been vital when Vida allegedly studied there in his youth.[73] When it came out in three volumes in 1515-16, the second Aldine edition presented an improved text and became the standard for almost a century and a half.[74] The activity of the commentators continued in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, –e.g. the commentaries of Raphael Regius (1493) and Petrus Berchorius (1509).[75]

Lucan

As is the case with Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* the Renaissance reception of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* was the natural continuation of the medieval one, which generated a significant quantity of manuscripts, glosses (e.g. the so-called *Commenta Bernensia* and the *Adnotationes supra Lucanum*), and collections of quotations. During the Middle Ages the *Bellum Civile* had the status of a classic,[76] was part of school curricula,[77] and had a significant impact not only on Latin epic (e.g. Joseph of Exeter and Petrarch), but also on vernacular literature.[78] Humanists like Pomponius Laetus in the early Renaissance composed many commentaries, most of which are still unedited.[79] The *editio princeps* came out in Rome in 1469.[80] Lucan's relevance for the intellectual life of early Renaissance Italy goes beyond the realm of literature: the painter Luca Signorelli portrayed him in his series of frescoes on the *Last Judgement* in the Duomo at Orvieto at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[81] What is significant for the relationship between Vida and Lucan is that the latter had been easily reconciled with Christianity since late antiquity, quite understandably, if one considers that he did not represent the gods as active participants in the events of his poem and that he depicted the downfall of a Pre-Christian Rome.[82]

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[72] Steiner (1951) 224.

[73] Di Cesare (1964) 2.

[74] Possanza (2009) 321-2.

[75] See Moss' (1998) analysis of eight Renaissance commentaries on the *Metamorphoses.*

[76] Von Albrecht (1997) 926-7.

[77] Bolgar (1954) 192 and 197.

[78] For its presence in Petrarch's *Africa* see Leigh (2007). For the image of Lucan in the "Tre Corone" of Italian literature see Facchini (2020) with bibliography.

[79] Esposito (2011) 460-3 argues that our knowledge of the reception of Lucan is still minimal. *Sic* also D'Angelo (2011), a survey of the bibliography on the Medieval reception of Lucan.

[80] Braund (2011) 509.

Valerius Flaccus

The circulation of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* was minimal during the Middle Ages until the first half of the fourteenth century. Poggio Bracciolini discovered a manuscript containing books 1.1-4.317 in the monastery of St Gall in 1416. A few years later, in 1429, Niccolò Niccoli recovered and transcribed a manuscript that preserved the poem as we know it, namely from 1.1 to 8.467. The *editio princeps* came out in Bologna in 1474. The humanist Bartolomeo della Fonte annotated the text and gave public lectures on it, and Johannes Baptista Pius published a two-book conclusion in hexameters to the poem in 1519.[83]

Silius Italicus

It is a common assumption that Silius Italicus' *Punica* was an unknown poem by the time Poggio Bracciolini discovered it in 1417, together with Lucretius. However, some have pointed out that the poem may have influenced some medieval epics, such as *Waltharius,* Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*, and Petrarch's *Africa*.[84] After Poggio's discovery, manuscripts containing the *Punica*, sometimes with glosses in the margins as in the case of the copy owned by Pomponius Laetus, proliferated, as did biographies. The poem was used for the explanation of metre or of difficult passages in other ancient authors, as demonstrated, for instance, by Nicolaus Perottus in his *Cornu Copia,* and was cited in literary works such as Leon Battista Alberti's *Intercenales* (composed during the 1430s and 1440s). In addition, lectures on the poem were given in Florence and Rome from the 1460s and in Bologna from the 1470s, e.g. by Petrus Odus Montopolitanus and Philippus Beroaldus.[85] The *editio princeps* was published in Rome in 1471 by Johannes Andreas, and that of Pomponius Laetus followed it in the same year. Two editions appeared in Milan and Parma ten years later, and the first one with a commentary by Petrus Marsus came out in Venice in 1483. Moreover, notes on classical authors, including Silius, were composed and published in the following decades, for example, Giacomo dalla Croce's *Adnotationes centum in varios Autores* (Bologna 1503) and Johannes Baptista Pius's *Adnotationes posteriores* (Bologna 1505). Silius even had an impact beyond the area of professional scholarship. Castiglione mentioned him in the *Cortegiano* (1528), and an entire section of a work such as Octavianus Mirandola's *Viridarium illustrium poetarum* (Venice 1507) focuses on him.[86]

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[81] Fraenkel (2009) 16.

[82] Walde (2012) 209.

[83] See Zissos (2006) 173-4 and (2014) for Pius' supplement. Given that Pius' continuation had been published only in some editions, it would be interesting and maybe even useful to verify if there are traces of it in the *Christiad*, in which case the number of the potential editions used by Vida would include the ones that contain it.

[84] Bassett, Delz, and Dunston (1976) 346-50.

Statius' *Thebaid*

Statius' *Thebaid* enjoyed remarkable popularity in the period between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries. During the Middle Ages, multifarious paratextual material was produced, in the form of marginal and interlinear glosses, *florilegia*, collections of *sententiae* and introductions.[87] Of particular importance must have been the commentary written by Lactantius Placidus, arguably dating to the tenth century, still available to this day.[88] Other commentaries postdate the twelfth century, with a few exceptions.[89] The *Thebaid* was deemed a repository of normative Latin; on the basis of the manuscript evidence, the passages that seem to have been marked and extrapolated in *florilegia* the most are those containing laments.[90] As with the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses*, it was Christianised. Through these lenses, the poem was thought to prefigure Christian ideals, as in the figure of Theseus, who was viewed as a clement and merciful redeemer.[91] Commentaries such as the *Super Thebaiden*, which views the poem as a Christian *psychomachia*, prove the existence of allegorical readings.[92] Statius' status in the Middle Ages, in general, was that of a moral authority capable of giving good advice to his readers, especially if these were rulers. According to an interpretation testified by manuscripts of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the *Thebaid* offered a negative *exemplum* of discord applicable either to the historical circumstances in which it was written, namely to the reign of Domitian, or, universally, to the ages to come.[93] The relatively steady circulation of the poem is testified by the high number of manuscripts containing it and by its influence on seminal poets such as Dante (in the *Commedia* Statius is both a source of inspiration and an actual character converted to Christianity), Boccaccio and Chaucer.[94] The most lasting legacies of the *Thebaid* in Medieval literature were prefaces in which the authors addressed their own works and their dedicatees, the figure of the emotionally involved narrator, and the presence of emotional speeches (*lamentationes*).[95] The *editio princeps* was published in 1470 in Rome together with the *Achilleid* and notes dating from the Middle Ages, limited to the first book of the *Thebaid*. The best-known commentary on the poem during the fifteenth century was the late-antique one attributed to “Pseudo-Lactantius”, which was printed for the first time in 1476 and accompanied the *opera omnia* in editions from 1483 onwards.[96] Examples of the impact that the poem had on Italian Renaissance literature are Boiardo’s *Orlando Innamorato* (1495) and Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso,*[97] which came out in its complete form in 1532. Neo-Latin poets such as Pontano and Sannazaro display the influence of Statius.[98] Whether Vida thought that Statius was a Christian can hardly be established based on the *Christiad.* Certainly, by the end of the fourteenth century, at least one *accessus* (Firenze, BNC, II.II.55) to the *Thebaid* testifies that someone questioned Statius’ Christianity. It seems that manuscripts and early printed editions of his works hardly ever mention this idea, while the scholarly tradition only occasionally challenged it (e.g. Angelo Poliziano) or considered it potentially true (e.g. Giglio Gregorio Giraldi).[99]

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[85] *Ibidem,* Schaffenrath (2012) 428-29 and Muecke (2009) 401-5.

[86] Bassett, Delz, and Dunston (1976) 351-6, but the whole contribution is an accurate account with bibliography, lists of editions and biographies, and analyses of modern *scholia*, some of which have been identified with Petrus Odus' and Pomponius Letus' notes.

[87] Clogan (1967) 102-3, Olsen (2004) 232, and Edwards (2015) 497-8.

[88] For a general synthetic introduction to this commentary, see Chance (1994) 168-70.

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[89] *Ibidem* 181-248.

[90] Battles (2004) 2-6.

[91] Scioli (2012) 433-6.

[92] Battles (2004) 10-12.

[93] *Ibidem*, 6.

[94] Anderson (1997) 112 claims that this idea is seldom mentioned in a corpus of manuscripts and early modern editions. For an overview of the influence of the *Thebaid* on Medieval European literature see Anderson (2020) 90-117.

[95] For the role of Statius' *lamentationes* in the *Christiad*, see section 7.1.

To sum up, by the time the *Christiad* was published (1535), several manuscripts of ancient Latin epics were circulating, numerous editions had seen the light of day, commentaries had been and continued to be written, and lectures had been given in some of the main cities of Italy. The relevance of those poems as linguistic models and sources of erudition, wisdom and ideas was so substantial in Italy and Western Europe in general during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, that they were often a crucial part of school education. The Latin epic tradition, after all, had already been revived for decades. One need only think of early Renaissance poetic productions such as Petrarch’s *Africa*. Despite their late “discovery” in 1416-7, works like the *De Rerum Natura*, the *Punica,* and the *Argonautica* rapidly attracted scholarly attention. During the second half of the century they were the subject of lectures. Whether Vida read them at school or after the years of his formation is hard, if not impossible, to tell. But the fact that they would have had some impact on the cultural scene, as, for instance, the ban of Lucretius from Florentine schools in 1517 implies, accounts for their active presence.

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[96] Berlincourt (2015) 543-4.
[97] Chaudhuri (2015).
[98] Fielding (2019).
[99] Kallendorf (2002b) reaches these conclusions in a paper on the *Nachleben* of the interpretation of Statius as a Christian after Dante. He gathers evidence that this supposition was vital in Spain at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

1.2 The Role of Ancient Latin Epics in Italian Renaissance Education

Latin epic played a major role in Italian Renaissance education, and we can reconstruct a general Italian school programme throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance despite temporal, spatial and social variations.[100] Such uniformity was due to several reasons. One of these was the itinerancy of teachers, a practice that had its roots in the Roman world and that continued through the schools of the clergy.[101]

We have already mentioned that the *Aeneid,* the *Metamorphoses,* the *Bellum Civile* and the *Thebaid* were read during the Middle Ages. They were, in fact, part of medieval school *curricula*. Their authors were sometimes referred to as the *auctores* and taught by the so-called *auctorista.*[102] Starting from the twelfth century and until the Renaissance, the canon of Latin authors usually consisted of major ones, the *maiores* (the Roman classics, e.g. Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Statius, to limit ourselves to epic poetry), and minor ones, the *minores* (e.g. *Ilias Latina,* Claudian).[103] The *maiores* had likely enjoyed periods of relative popularity, at least in Italy. Contemporary scholarship has pointed in this direction, for example, Robert Black's survey of Italian twelfth century textbooks surviving in Florentine libraries, according to which Lucan, Ovid and Virgil were by far the most popular authors.[104]

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[100] Mack (2014).

[101] Black (2001) 3-5.

[102] Billanovich (1965) 147.

[103] Black (2001) 173-4, Curtius (2013) 465.

[104] Black (2001) 186-90. From now on, I will take Black's findings in this section as a source for estimating the fluctuation of these texts in late Medieval and early Renaissance Italian education. His data rely only on Florentine libraries, but he uses them as samples for the status of classical texts in the overall Italian schooling

Nevertheless, poetry was generally regarded not as a separate subject but as a subsection of other disciplines like philosophy, theology, grammar and rhetoric in the Middle Ages. It was not until the Renaissance that it obtained an autonomous status.[105] There is ample evidence of the use of the *auctores maiores* in Italian school education in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Virgil, in particular, along with Cicero, came to occupy a prominent position like never before.[106] By that time, the *auctores minores* were less and less adopted, although they were not excluded from the syllabus altogether; by the second half of the fifteenth century, when Vida was young, they had been almost entirely eclipsed.[107] As for other classical authors, paratextual material documents the survival of different school reading practices, in most cases well into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: translations into Italian, word order marks, interlinear grammatical annotations, introductions, metrical analyses, glosses explaining rhetorical figures, prose and verse summaries, biographies, notes on ancient history, geography, religion and mythology, allegories, collections of lines in the form of *sententiae,* and, what is most interesting for this thesis, quotations from other authors.[108]

The choice of which writers should be read depended on aesthetic and moral criteria. One of the central tenets of Renaissance education was imparting morality and not mere knowledge.[109] Epic poetry best suited such moral concern, especially the *Aeneid*, which had already had a long and at that time still vital tradition of Christian appropriation. During the second half of the fifteenth century, it was even read through the lens of Neoplatonism, as is demonstrated by Cristoforo Landino's popular commentary.[110] One can get an idea of this overall aesthetic and moral attentiveness by consulting pedagogical treatises such as the

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tradition. However, it should not be omitted that surveys of other libraries might come to depict a different picture, thus altering the conclusions reached by Black and adopted here.

[105] Grendler (1989) 235-6.

[106] Black (2001) 8, 200-9, 238-60.

[107] *Ibidem* 272.

[108] *Ibidem* 275-324.

[109] Woodward (1897) 182-215.

[110] Kallendorf (1989) ch. 5 and (1995) 49-53.

Tractatus de liberorum educatione (1450), written by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II. Here, the pedagogue explains the reason why Homer's and Virgil's poems represent appropriate subjects for the education of pupils:

> *Veteres instituerunt, ut ab Homero atque Vergilio lectio inciperet, quamvis ad intelligendum eorum virtutes opus esset firmiori iudicio. Sed huic rei superest tempus, neque enim semel leguntur. Interea vero et subtilitate heroici carminis animus puerilis assurget et magnitudine rerum spiritum ducet et optimis imbuetur, quod Augustinus quoque probat in primo qui De civitate dei inscribitur libro.*

(Piccolomini, *de liberorum educatione* 61)[111]

The grandiosity of the *Iliad,* the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*[112] exposes the souls of the youngsters to greatness according to Piccolomini, who harks back to Augustine's *De civitate dei,* and expands upon the matter soon afterwards but from a more strictly literary point of view:

> *In poetis legendis, qui tibi credendi sunt, praeceptoris iudicium adsit. Inter heroicos Vergilium cunctis praeferat, cuius tanta eloquentia est, tanta gloria, ut nullius laudibus crescere, nullius vituperatione minui possit. Apud quem dicendi singula genera, quae quattuor esse putantur: breve, copiosum, siccum, et floridum, studiosus lector inveniet. Lucanus, grandis auctor historiae, et Statius, admodum limatus, praeteriri non debent. Ovidius ubique tersus, ubique dulcis est, in plerisque tamen locis nimius lascivus; praeclarissimum tamen opus eius, cui Metamorphoseos nomen indidit, propter fabularum peritiam, quas noscere non parvi fructus est, nullo pacto postergandum est. Ceteri, qui carmine scribunt heroico, remotissimi ab his sunt versificatorumque magis quam poetarum nomine sunt appellandi. Claudianum et qui Argonauticon scripsit, minime contemnendos iudicaverim.*

(Piccolomini, *de liberorum educatione* 69)

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[111] Kallendorf's (2002a) edition.

[112] I assume that by *heroicum carmen* only the *Aeneid* is meant here among Virgil's works.

That Virgil is the favourite epic poet, followed by Lucan, Statius, and Ovid comes as no surprise. The latter raised some concerns because of the lasciviousness of some of his compositions, but the *Metamorphoses*, in particular, are praised and acknowledged as his most famous work. These four are deemed far better than all other epic poets, among whom, though, Claudian and Valerius Flaccus are not to be despised.

Among the Italian pedagogues of the fifteenth century who taught ancient Latin epic poetry, Vittorino da Feltre (1378-1446) is of exceptional interest here. Vittorino founded and directed the school at Mantua, where Vida presumably would study a few decades later.[113] We can get an idea of Vittorino's teachings from contemporary sources, even though we should bear in mind that during the gap between the years he taught there (1423-1446)[114] and the period in which Vida studied at Mantua (presumably the last decade of the fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth century)[115] some changes might have well occurred. Nevertheless, inspecting the information we have about Vittorino's attitude towards epic poetry sheds some light on the educational function that it had in the decades preceding Vida's formative years. One of our authorities on Vittorino's life is Bartolomeo Sacchi, also known as Platina, a pupil of Vittorino's successor Ognibene da Lonigo. Platina became head of the school in 1453, succeeding his master Ognibene.[116] In his biography of Vittorino, he relates that the famous schoolmaster made his pupils learn Virgilian lines by heart and read Lucan and Ovid:[117]

> *Virgilium, quem cura, et diligentia Smirnaeum vatem superasse dicebat, frequenter pubblice, ac privatim legebat.* [...] *Verecundum poetae ingenium mirum in modum laudabat, quod persaepe turpia non indecore circuitione verborum aperte, et eleganter explicaret* [...]. *Legebat et Lucanum tum propter ardorem, et concitationem, quam mentibus adolescentium addit, tum propter altitudinem rerum, et sententiarum,*

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[113] See note 72.
[114] Woodward (1897) 24.
[115] Cicchitelli (1904) 4-9.
[116] Woodward (1897) xxvii-xviii.
[117] *Ibidem* 46-7.

> *quibus maxime poeta abundat.* [...] *Lascivum, et amabilem appellabat Ovidium, cuius nonnulla frequenter in manibus habebat opera.*
>
> (Platina, *De vita Victorini Feltrensis* p.22)[118]

In this view, Virgil is better than Homer and is admired for his modest character. Lucan's ardour and his impetuous style are commendable. Ovid is, again, lascivious and lovable.

Let us examine a passage from one last educational treatise of that time, *De ordine docendi et discendi* (1459) by Battista Guarino, an eminent teacher and scholar who succeeded his father, Guarino Veronese, as Professor at the University of Ferrara. In this work, Battista illustrates his and his father's teaching methods. In a passage, he briefly talks about the Latin epic poets that should be taught at school:

> *A Vergilio autem inchoandum esse vel Augustini confirmat auctoritas, qui in hunc modum inquit: "Vergilium propterea parvuli legunt, ut videlicet poeta magnus omniumque praeclarissimus atque optimus a teneris ebibitus annis non facile oblivione possit aboleri." Lucanus forte non absurde post rhetoricam relinquetur, cum eum Quintilianus "oratoribus magis quam poetis" dicat "imitandum esse"; in quo tamen ea est utilitas, ut profiteri non dubitem, qui eum poetam probe intelligat iam posse in doctorum hominum numero haberi, in deliberativo praesertim genere; ipsius orationes adeo graves, adeo artificiosae sunt, ut nesciam an ab aliquo rhetoricas praeceptiones clarius colligere valeant. Post Vergilium Statii Thebais ordine subsequetur, nam cum ad illius imitationem composita sit, minor erit in discendo labor. Ex Ovidio Metamorphoseon nihil ferme erit quod praeter fabulas eligant, quibus tamen miro studio incumbent, credentque eas non, ut quidam putant, poetis tantum congruere, nam et Cicero tum orationes, tum reliqua volumina fabulis plerumque quasi quibusdam gemmis distinxit.*
>
> (Guarino, *De ordine docendi et discendi* 24)[119]

The list consists of the same four poems, and the order of the authors discussed is the same one we found in the other treatises. Once again, Virgil is the first to be mentioned, with a quotation of Augustine, *civ.* 1.3, perhaps the same reference used by Piccolomini in the passage quoted above. Readers should study Virgil from childhood so that they will not forget him easily. In assessing Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, Guarino partially follows Quintilian. Both acknowledge that his rhetoric is so effective that he can be regarded as a model of oratory, and this is sufficient, in Guarino's eyes, to render him an author appropriate for school. The similarity of Statius' *Thebaid* to the *Aeneid* explains why it should be read immediately after it. In this account, myths are what makes Ovid's *Metamorphoses* worth reading, a judgment that resembles what Piccolomini had to say about the same work.

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[118] Excerpted from Vairani (1778).

[119] Kallendorf's (2002a) edition.

On the basis of the sources examined here, the four Latin epic poems with a medieval tradition seem to have represented a part of the Italian educational system of the fifteenth century. Vida was likely acquainted with them at a young age. As for works like the *De Rerum Natura,* the *Punica,* and the *Argonautica,* despite their late "discovery" in 1416-7, they rapidly attracted scholarly attention. During the second half of the century they were the subject of lectures, as we have already seen. Whether Vida read them at school or after the years of his formation is hard, if not impossible, to tell. But the fact that they would have had some impact on the cultural scene, as, for instance, the ban of Lucretius from Florentine schools in 1517 implies, accounts for their active presence.

1.3 *Florilegia* and Centos

After having examined the relevance of ancient Latin epics in the literary landscape of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, it is time to turn to their imitation in new works such as the *Christiad*. As has been sketched in the introduction, the student of literary imitation is confronted with the issue of authorial intent. An expression that resembles another one that a previous author used may either be meant to be acknowledged as such or just be an unintended coincidence. Actually, the scenario in which an author stole an expression from another and did not want the theft to be discovered is within the realm of possibilities as well.

When it comes to identifying the character of interactions of this kind between two or more texts, it might be interesting to take into account also how literary imitation is materially accomplished. In other words, considering the actual conditions in which authors compose their writings, from the physical format of the works they consult to the potential use of tools for composition like *florilegia* or commonplace books which listed quotations excerpted from other works. These tools could support the memory of those who wanted to write a new work and tried to legitimate it through the imitation of authoritative literary models. While memory played a significant role in the teaching of poetry during the Renaissance,[120] one cannot deny that the presence of such materials during that age may point to their function as an aid not only for learning but also for composition. Collections of quotations, also known as *florilegia,* proliferated since the Later Middle Ages, and the transcription of verses with a moral attitude was part of Latin school *curricula*.[121] Pupils were sometimes encouraged to transcribe selected passages in notebooks under headings for different themes (e.g. virtues, vices, proverbs, exemplary instances of figures of speech) so as to consult them more easily.[122] Likewise, learned readers sometimes signalled in the margin of the text the expressions that they found interesting. These notes, then, could be printed in a later edition of the text or be part of commonplace books.[123] Some of the oldest compilations of quotations constituted the basis for later works or were augmented by later additions, thus presenting different layers.

A medieval compilation such as the *Florilegium Gallicum* enjoyed widespread popularity, as also attested by its preservation in manuscripts that date up to the sixteenth century. It is the source for sections of the encyclopaedia *Speculum Maius* by Vincent de Beauvais,[124] and contains excerpts of ancient Latin epic poems and, thanks to the additions of later compilers, even of authors not well known in the Middle Ages like Valerius Flaccus.[125] Quotations could be gathered in groups under headings that explicated their *trait d'union*, for instance, an author or a theme. Jacobus Gaudensis' *Aerarium aureum poetarum omnibus latinae linguae cuiuscunque etiam facultatis fuerint professoribus accommodum* (Cologne 1501), a manual for Latin verse composition, well displays this practice.[126] A section of this work is an actual *florilegium*, with verses drawn from ancient Latin poetry, epic for the most part, and arranged by contents. In the following example, periphrases that describe time order transitions are listed and their sources are indicated on the right side of the page:

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[120] Black (2001) 290-2.
[121] Moss (1996) 24-5.
[122] *Ibidem* 53-4. See also Moss (2014).
[123] Kallendorf (2012b) and (2015) 105.

AUTUMNI PERIPHRASIS	
tempus erat q. Libra pares examinat horas	*Lucanus. viii*[127]
non uno plus ęqua die, noctuq. rependit.	
EVI PERIPHRASES	
in freta dū fluvij currēt, dū montibus vmbre	*Virgilius primo*
lustrabunt convexa, polus dū sidera pascet	*eneidos*[128]
dū iuga mōtis aper fluvios dū piscis amabit	*Virg. i. buc.*[129]
dumq. thymo pascent̃ apes. dū rore cicade	
MATUTINI TEMPORIS PERIPHRASIS	
postera lux phaetōtis equos ꝑferre parabat	*Silius in ix.*[130]
iam rapido omni curru splendēte sub undis	

Florilegia including verses excerpted from ancient Latin epic poems circulated during Vida's time in Italy. Dominicus Nanius Mirabellius' *Polyanthea opus suavissimis floribus exornatum* (Savona 1503) is a case in point. This reference book arranges excerpts of poetry by author and expresses concern for their morality from a Christian point of view.[131] It is hard to imagine that Vida never came across this type of production. In the *De Arte Poetica* he openly states that he does not disparage those who gather expressions from other poets in order to use them as tools for composition.[132] Whether they served for the composition of the *Christiad* or not perhaps cannot be consistently evaluated. Nevertheless, Vida's sophisticated manipulation of the ancient Latin epic tradition, as we will see in the following chapters through close readings, implies first-hand knowledge at least of the context of many of the phrases he borrows from ancient poets other than Virgil. In addition to this, it bears repeating that the reliance on tools such as commonplace books as substitutes for the original works does not exclude the possibility of consulting the latter in their entirety either at another time or simultaneously. Vida might have read whole poems, collected phrases from them under thematic headings and re-read the original passages after deciding to implement said phrases in his own poetry.

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[124] Moss (1996) 27-8.

[125] For the presence of classical poets in this *florilegium*, see Burton (1982). Extracts from Valerius Flaccus can actually be found in Medieval florilegia such as the XII-century *Florilegium Gallicum.* See Rouse (1979).

[126] Moss (1996) 86.

[127] Luc. 8.467-8.

[128] Virg. *Aen.* 1.607-8.

[129] Virg. *Ecl.* 5.76-7.

[130] Sil. 11.369-70.

The idea of extrapolating expressions from different authors and implementing them in a new work makes one think of the genre called "cento", poems made up of verse units taken verbatim from other poems, sporadically accommodating them with minimal adjustments where necessary.[133] This literary form had been practised during late antiquity and the middle ages, when Greek centos were usually based on Homer and Latin centos on Virgil – sometimes on Ovid–, and enjoyed a revival from the beginning of the Renaissance.[134] In Neo-Latin centos, poets like Ovid and Lucan were excerpted more consistently and mixed with Virgil.[135] The latter, nevertheless, remained a very popular, if not the most popular source,[136] and late-antique Virgilian centos like Proba's *Cento Virgilianus de laudibus Christi* were in vogue during the Renaissance.[137] Given the popularity of this poetic form at that time, it is very likely that Vida came across it and reflected on it. This hypothesis seems all the more plausible if we consider his interest in the theory of literary imitation and his practice. Most importantly, the genre was suitable for the Christian appropriation of pagan poetry. Christian centos were produced in late antiquity and the Renaissance, thus representing, as it were, both a vital tradition and a current fashion in Vida's time.[138] The *Christiad,* though far from being a proper cento and from making its relationship with the sources its principle of existence,[139] sometimes displays hemistichs or whole lines borrowed from ancient poets with little or no variation in a cento-like manner.[140] Obviously, it cannot be excluded that there may be authorial intent behind the intertexts or that the latter might give a further layer to the meaning of the receiving text. This interpretative strategy proves practicable, whether at the level of the *intentio auctoris* or at that of reader response, in centos too, where some verse units sometimes may relate more strongly than others to their original contexts in terms of narrative.[141] With that said, however, one should not jump to the conclusion that Vida's *modus operandi* in the *Christiad* is that of a centonist, since he seems to have created most of its lines anew.

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[131] Moss (1996) 93-4.
[132] *DAP* 1.71-4: *nec mihi non placeant qui, fundamenta laborum / quum iaciunt, veterum explorant opera inclyta vatum / noctes atque dies, passimque accommoda cogunt / auxilia, intentique aciem per cuncta volutant.*
[133] McGill (2005) xv, 23.
[134] Stevenson (2014) 1137-8. On the use of the cento form in late antique poetry, Hardie (2019) 21 and 235-7.
[135] Deneire (2014) 1139.

1.4 Early Renaissance Theories of Literary Imitation

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[136] Kallendorf (2015) 109-10.

[137] *Ibidem* 76.

[138] As Christian epics do, but they are much more independent from their models than centos.

[139] On the centrality of the sources for the interpretation of actual centos in late antiquity see Pelttari (2014) 98.

[140] Whether the *Christiad* falls under Bažil's (2009) 48-56 definition of "pseudo-cento" might be open to debate. The dilemma is circumvented here because, by Bažil's own admission in those pages, the notion of "pseudo-cento" lacks clear boundaries.

[141] McGill (2005) 25-6.

Vida's *De Arte Poetica* (1527) is one of the earliest theoretical works on poetry written during the sixteenth century.[142] Since literary imitation had been discussed in the preceding decades so much that, at times, it even brought about disputes between humanists, a short round-up of early Renaissance theories might be advantageous for contextualising Vida's contribution. Early Renaissance discussions of literary imitation mainly revolved around prose composition,[143] even though they occasionally took poetry into account. Conversely, in the *De Arte Poetica*, the focus is fundamentally on poetry. Here Vida opted for a synthesis between the persistent imitation of one author and a wholly eclectic approach: he drew from different authors while still privileging Virgil as the primary model.[144] One of the main threads of the Renaissance debate on literary imitation regards the choice of one's own model or models. In this regard, one classical author in particular stood out, Cicero. This controversy is pertinent to a study on Vida, not only because he expressed his view on this question, but also in light of the fact that, while he took Virgil as his ideal both theoretically and practically, he also advocated reliance on other poets.

The Renaissance reflection on literary imitation is too vast to be accounted for here in its totality. It could concern either Latin or the vernacular or both languages and, in the case of the former, embrace the broader problem of what kind of Latin should be considered correct. Therefore, we will only consider some of the most important theoretical statements up to Vida's time without covering each writer and issue. In order to do so, we need to turn to the formulation of Petrarch, one of the authors who propelled the Renaissance. He represents a watershed between two epochs. A previous eminent figure like Dante had advocated using classical authors as models for vernacular compositions.[145] Petrarch's reflection on their imitation, instead, was limited to Latin works. The two central tenets of his theory of literary imitation are the multiplicity of authors to draw from and the idea that an adaptation should be more than mere verbal repetition.[146] Before delving into his arguments, it is worth remarking that he did not conceptualise prose and poetry imitation as two distinct entities, as is testified by his own practice of using passages of prose writers in his poetry (e.g. Livy in the *Africa*) and poets in his prose.[147]

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[142] Moss (1999) 98.

[143] E.g. Barzizza's *De Imitatione*. See the discussion in this section.

[144] Rolfes (2001) 190. Vida recommended that the inexperienced poet should avoid this approach.

[145] Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 2.7.2: *et fortassis utilissimum foret ad illam habituandam regulatos vidisse poetas, Virgilium videlicet, Ovidium Metamorfoseos, Statium atque Lucanum, nec alios qui usi sunt altissimas*

Familiares 22.2, a letter to Boccaccio, is one of the works in which Petrarch lays out his views on the matter.[148] The theme of the epistle is his intention to revise his own collection of eclogues (*Bucolicum Carmen*) and let Boccaccio know the reason behind this plan. The need for a revision is motivated by the desire to circumvent a defect that, in Petrarch's opinion, pervades the *Carmen*, namely literal imitation. According to him, when it comes to writing, the influence of authors with whose works the writer is well acquainted is much more insidious than that of authors he or she knows less well. The poets that the writer is more familiar with are so ingrained in his mind that their words might be borrowed inadvertently, whereas the expressions of lesser-known writers still appear as somewhat unfamiliar and, therefore, it is easier to recognise and treat them as someone else's. In his case, authors like Ennius, Plautus, Martianus Capella and Apuleius represent the second category, and writers such as Virgil, Horace, Boethius and Cicero, the first one:

> *Legi semel apud Ennium, apud Plautum, apud Felicem Capellam, apud Apuleium, et legi raptim, propere, nullam nisi ut alienis in finibus moram trahens. Sic pretereunti, multa contigit ut viderem, pauca decerperem, pauciora reponerem, eaque ut comunia in aperto et in ipso, ut ita dixerim, memorie vestibulo; ita ut quotiens vel audire illa vel proferre contigerit, non mea esse confestim sciam, nec me fallat cuius sint; que ab alio scilicet, et quod vere sunt, ut aliena possideo. Legi apud Vergilium apud Flaccum*

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prosas, ut Titum Livium, Plinium, Frontinum, Paulum Orosium, et multos alios quos amica sollicitudo nos visitare invitat.

[146] McLaughlin (1995) 22.

[147] *Ibidem,* 41.

[148] The other two essential discussions of the topic are *Fam.* 1.8 and 23.19; the latter is shortly touched upon here.

> *apud Severinum apud Tullium; nec semel legi sed milies, nec cucurri sed incubui, et totis ingenii nisibus immoratus sum; mane comedi quod sero digerem, hausi puer quod senior ruminarem. Hec se michi tam familiariter ingessere et non modo memorie sed medullis affixa sunt unumque cum ingenio facta sunt meo, ut etsi per omnem vita amplius non legantur, ipsa quidem hereant, actis in intima animi parte radicibus, sed interdum obliviscar auctorem, quippe qui longo usu et possessione continua quasi illa prescripserim diuque pro meis habuerim, et turba talim obsessus, nec cuius sint certe nec aliena meminerim.*
>
> (Petrarch *Fam.* 22.2.11-3)

As Pigman has pointed out,[149] Petrarch's remarks on unconscious imitation complicate the interpretation of *loci similes*. On this view, reminiscences of famous writers, which one would tend to read as conscious by virtue of those writers' celebrity, are the ones that are less likely to be intentional. In a subsequent section of the letter, Petrarch guarantees that he usually avoids stealing expressions from others, and that he conspicuously changes whatever he has borrowed. This attitude, nevertheless, does not prevent him from unintentionally appropriating words of different authors, as in one of the eclogues that make up the *Bucolicum Carmen*. Here he detected lines unconsciously drawn from Virgil's *Aeneid*[150] and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

> *Quod hodiernum erat, est decima pastorii carminis ecloga, cuius quadam in parte ita scripseram: "solio sublimis acerno"; postmodum vero dum relegeretur, attendi simile nimis esse virgiliano carmini; ille enim ait in septimo divini operis: "solioque invitat acerno".*[151] [...] *In eadem ecloga scriptum erat aliud -mirum vide- quod quia valde noveram, ignorabam, et in eo fallebar, quod si nossem parcius, non fallerer; nec vero erat alieno persimile, quin alienum prorsus; sed sic michi accidebat, ut illi qui apertis oculis amicum coram positum non videt. Erat autem ad hunc modum: "Quid enim non carmina possunt?". Tandem ad me rediens deprehendi non meum esse finem versus; cuius autem esset diuticule hesitavi, non aliam ob causam nisi quia, ut dictum est, iam mea illud in ratione posueram; ad postremum repperi esse Nasonis septimo Metamorphoseos.*[152] *Et hoc ergo similter mutabis, ponesque ita: "quid enim vim carminis equet?" nec verbis, puto, nec sententia versus inferior. Hic igitur nostri sit,*

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[149] Pigman (1980) 13.

[150] On Petrarch's self-fashioning as a second Virgil see Hinds (2004) 170-2.

[151] Virg. *Aen.* 8.178.

[152] Ov. *Met.* 7.167.

> *si tamen hic ipse vel sic etiam noster est; ille alter ad dominum suum redeat et Nasonis sit; quem illi eripere nec si velim possim, nec si possim velim.*

(Petrarch *Fam.* 22.2.22-6)

The theme of literary imitation is resumed in another letter to Boccaccio, *Fam.* 23.19. The focus of the epistle is on Petrarch's personal copyist Giovanni Malpaghini, a young man whose poetic activity earned him the approval of his illustrious employer. However, despite such approval, Petrarch regards Malpaghini's imitation of Virgil as too derivative and attributes this shortcoming to the poet's young age. While he readily acknowledges Virgil's authority, he certainly expresses his concern for the reliance on Virgilian verbal expressions, a typical feature of Malpaghini and one that could potentially debase the latter's poetry in the long run. Literary imitation should tend to similarity and not to sameness:

> *curandum imitatori ut quod scribit simile non idem sit, eamque similitudinem talem esse oportere, non qualis est imaginis ad eum cuius imago est, que quo similior eo maior laus artificis, sed qualis filii ad patrem.* [...] *Utendum igitur ingenio alieno utendumque coloribus, abstinendum verbis; illa enim similitudo latet, hec eminet; illa poetas facit, hec simias. Standum denique Senece consilio, quod ante Senecam Flacci erat, ut scribamus scilicet sicut apes mellificant, non servatis floribus sed in favos versis, ut ex multis et variis unum fiat, idque aliud et melius.*

(Petrarch *Fam.* 23.19.11-3)[153]

Sound imitation should be more like a son who resembles his father than the replica of a painting. Resemblances are to be concealed so as to be perceived and extricated only after cogitation. According to Petrarch, then, it is good to use other authors' ideas but not their actual words, lest anyone identifies the source with certainty. To put it another way, the more the borrowings are hidden, the higher the quality of the receiving text. In order to convey the message as clearly as possible, Petrarch resorts, as he has already done in *Fam.* 1.8, to the classical analogy with bees, an influential *topos* in discourses on literary imitation since Antiquity which would be particularly common during the Renaissance. The image can be found, with variations, in authors such as Lucretius (3.11-2), Horace (*Carm.* 4.2.27-32), Seneca (*Epist.* 84), –as is stated in the passage quoted above– and Macrobius (*Sat.* 1 Praef 5-10).[154] In Petrarch's version, writers should act like bees, which make honey by a blending process and not by a mere collection. The idea implied in the letter is that appropriating somebody else's words without proper adjustments is a shameful act for which the imitator should be reprimanded. Petrarch himself has to admit that he was found guilty of accidentally using the second half of one of Virgil's lines (*Aen.* 6.607) in his *Bucolicum Carmen* by Malpaghini:

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[153] Pigman (1980) 21, Greene (1982) 95.

> "*Siquid unquam, fili, tale meis in carminibus invenis, scito id non iudicii mei esse sed erroris. Etsi enim mille passim talia in poetis sint, ubi scilicet alter alterius verbis usus est, michi tamen nichil operosius in scribendo nichilque difficilius se offert, quam et mei ipsius et multo maxime precedentium vitare vestigia. Sed ubinam, queso, est unde hanc tibi licentiam ex me sumis?" "Sexta" inquit, "tui Bucolici carminis egloga est, ubi, haud procul a fine, versus unus ita desinit <atque intonat ore>. Obstipui; sensi enim, illo loquente, quod me scribente non senseram, finem esse virgiliani versus sexto divini operis.*
>
> (Petrarch *Familiares* 23.19.14-15)

Even though prose writers are not mentioned in these passages, the same principles displayed so far inform Petrarch's theoretical attitude toward prose imitation. Arguing that Petrarch held Cicero in high esteem would probably be an understatement. Both his assertions and his scholarly activity testify to this appreciation. Yet, he never regarded him as the only model of Latin prose as the champions of Ciceronianism would do in the fifteenth century, and even went so far as to criticise some details of his letters.[155]

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[154] For a discussion on the *topos* and bibliography, see Pigman (1980).

Even Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), a central figure of Italian humanism who took part in the debate on literary imitation, acknowledged the value of Cicero as a model of Latin prose. Salutati's epistolary dispute with a representative of a younger generation of humanists, Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444), deals with the imitation of ancient Latin.[156] Bruni disparaged Salutati's Latin style for its hybrid nature, which amounted to contaminating classical and medieval traits. Unlike Bruni's conception of correct Latin as slavish reproduction of the language of classical authors –Cicero above all–, Salutati's attitude was to reconcile classical antiquity with the contemporary Christian age. Salutati was of the opinion that one should not merely replicate antiquity, but mix it with modernity and find a balance between these components, as can be seen in one of his letters to Bruni:

> *sed antiquitatem sic semper censui imitandam, quod pura non prodeat, sed aliquid semper afferat novitatis. scis me non ignorarem morem nostri celeberrimi Ciceronis, meque libenter verbis uti suis. sed aliud est referre, aliud imitari. habet aliquid imitantis proprium imitatio, nec totum est eius quem imitamur; relatio vero totum solet exprimere quem referimus.*
>
> (Salutati, *Ep.* 14.21.5-10)[157]

Bruni, for his part, preached a pure copy of classical Latin based on several sources. He argues that only the best ancient authors are to be imitated: Cicero, who is undoubtedly the greatest especially in rhetoric and philosophy, historiographers –e.g. Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus–, and late antique writers such as Boethius. Bruni's theory of pluralism is summed up in the introduction to one of his translations of Demosthenes into Latin (*Utilissima*

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[155] McLaughlin (1995) 32-3.
[156] *Ibidem* 72.
[157] Novati's (1905) edition.

quidem imitatio est sed non nisi perfectorum).[158] His predilection for Cicero coexists with a learned eclecticism that allows for the imitation of other chief classical authors.

In his treatise *De Imitatione* whose circumstances of publication are unclear, the humanist educator Gasparino Barzizza (1360-1430) regards Cicero as the standard author. But despite his reverence for the Roman orator, demonstrated by his philological and didactic work, he does not recommend him as the sole model worth imitating. Even though letter writing is the actual dimension that he seems to have in mind here, references are made to speeches[159] and to poetry as well.[160] More important, however, is the fact that, rather than focusing on the relation between the reconstruction of a "pure" classical style or the equilibrium of ancient and modern forms, Barzizza, like Petrarch, seems more concerned with the avoidance of verbatim duplication. The resemblance to Petrarch extends to the use of images traditionally associated with the theory of imitation at least since Seneca's *Epistle* 84, e.g. the bee metaphor:

> *Sicut enim apes in prato florenti et floribus pleno vadunt, flores candidiores et electiores sugunt, et extrahunt mel, ita et nos volentes imitari, quando libros oratorum et poetarum et imprimis Ciceronis nostri legimus, electiora dieta imitari debemus, et sicut ipsae apes non auferunt ipsos flores secum sed tantum id quod potest a floribus accipi, scilicet mel, ita et nos non accipiamus dieta oratorum et poetarum quos imitari volumus recte secundum litteram, sed imitemur ita ut non videamur ipsa furari.*
>
> (Barzizza, *De Imitatione* 52-7)[161]

In this passage the bees are said to collect honey rather than entire flowers, but not to turn that honey into something new, whereas in Seneca and Petrarch, the creation of a different substance is what the metaphor is all about. Likewise, imitators should merely hinder the identification of their borrowings. In order to circumvent it, they are here provided with several devices such as substitutions, transpositions, additions and omissions of single words or grammatical units. This kind of adaptation involves changing the case or the number of a noun, inverting the order of words, and matching the register with the contents of one's writing to make the whole sound congruent. Barzizza's main concern, to put it another way, is not improving on the model but only to disguise the thefts.[162] One of his pupils, Antonio da Rho, composed another treatise on literary imitation entitled *De Imitationibus Eloquentiae* (1430-3) on another humanist's suggestion, Cosma Raimondi.[163] The project was based on the need to collect several words and expressions gathered from the best authors, which could help prevent verbatim imitations. Here Antonio makes a clear distinction between imitation and emulation. The former attempts to replicate models without entailing any kind of competition with them; the latter consists in imitating them while at the same time trying to create something better. Compared to his master's treatise, Antonio's work is less theoretical and more practical and resembles a thesaurus with entry words coupled with their respective synonyms and *exempla* of their usage in classical texts. Some of these entries are names of authors and are made up of quotations from their works and comments that other writers expressed about them. In this regard, Antonio da Rho is highly indebted to the medieval tradition of anthologies and lexica, but the influence of his age is evident in the reverence for Cicero as the primary –but not the unique– model.

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[158] McLaughlin (1995) 88.

[159] Moss (1996) 56.

[160] As for poetry, he has a high opinion of Terence; see McLaughlin (1995) 106.

[161] Pigman (1982) 342.

Although he did not compose a treatise on imitation as such, Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494), a central figure of the Italian Renaissance, contributed to this debate. Not only was he an excellent scholar, but he also composed several literary works in Latin, starting with a verse translation of Homer's *Iliad* 2-5; the language here is based mainly on Virgil with several echoes of Ovid, *Iliad Latina*, and Statius in books 2 and 3, but is reminiscent of rarer authors such as Valerius Flaccus in books 4 and 5.[164] The rest of his production –e.g. the *Oratio super Fabio Quintiliano et Statii Sylvis*, a lecture in defence of Quintilian and Statius's *Silvae*–, and his statements on literary imitation reflected this eclecticism. The *locus classicus* on this subject is his letter to Paolo Cortesi, who, in turn, would present his divergent perspective in his reply. The dispute between the two scholars took place around the middle of 1480's –the exact date is unknown–[165] when Cortesi sent Poliziano some letters selected on account of their close resemblance to Cicero. Poliziano criticises this criterion and contrasts it with the praise of self-expression based on eclecticism, that is, absorption of good models and the ensuing achievement of a personal style.[166] On top of that, an appeal to the authority of eminent ancient theorists, viz. Horace, Seneca, and Quintilian, backs up the disapproval of slavish imitations:

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[162] *Ibidem* 343.

[163] For a more in-depth analysis of the treatise, see McLaughlin's (1995) 106-15, to which I am highly indebted here.

> *Non enim probare soles, ut accepi, nisi qui lineamenta Ciceronis effingat. Mihi vero longe honestior tauri facies aut item leonis quam simiae videtur, quae tamen homini similior est. Nec ii, qui principatum tenuisse creduntur eloquentiae, similes inter se, quod Seneca prodidit. Ridentur a Quintiliano qui se germanos Ciceronis putabant esse, quod his verbis periodum clauderent: "esse videatur". Inclamat Horatius imitatores, ac nihil aliud quam imitatores. Mihi certe quicumque tantum componunt ex imitatione, similes esse vel psittaco vel picae videntur, proferentibus quae nec intellegunt. Carent enim que scribunt isti viribus et vita; carent actu, carent affectu, carent indole, iacent, dormiunt, stertunt. Nihil ibi verum, nihil solidum, nihil efficax. Non exprimis, inquit aliquis, Ciceronem. Quid tum? Non enim sum Cicero; me tamen, ut opinor, exprimo.*
>
> (Poliziano, *ad Paulo Cortesio*)[167]

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[164] Rubinstein (1983) 52-66.

[165] McLaughlin (1995) 202 proposes 1485.

[166] Greene (1982) 150-1.

[167] Garin (1952) 902.

In his reply, Cortesi denies that he is an advocate of Ciceronianism and states that he sees in Cicero the model of oratory to be preferred to all the others, but not the only one. In order to dispel the charges of excessive dependence on one writer, he resorts to images adopted by previous authors, such as the similarity between father and son, which we already found in Petrarch. At the same time, his questioning of the very idea of self-expression justifies his preference for the Roman orator. According to him, those who refuse to imitate someone else end up purloining other authors' expressions all the same and transferring them into their writings without coherence. These thefts are compared to different types of food that a stomach struggles to digest, and to seeds of disparate plants sown in the same field, an analogy that Vida will use in the *De Arte Poetica* for the same topic.[168] The appeal to one model in particular can better be understood if one considers that the dispute between Poliziano and Cortesi is also a quarrel between two notions of historicism, as Greene explains.[169] While Poliziano highlighted the freedom of the imitator and the historical contingencies and uniqueness of a text, Cortesi conceived every artistic expression, including writing, as an attempt, albeit historically determined, to reproduce an ideal "nature", an approximation to an antecedent form, as it were. From this perspective, it makes sense to get closer to the ultimate form as much as possible.

The adoption of an abstract idea of style can be found in the works of another protagonist of the Renaissance reflection on literary imitation, Giovan Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1470-1533), especially in his epistolary dispute with Pietro Bembo (1470-1547).[170] The views he displayed on that occasion had already been partially expressed in the introductory letter to his correspondence, the epistle to Ludovico Ricchieri of Rovigo (1496-1525). Here Pico advocated for a pluralist approach and coupled it with a belief in the natural attitude of the individuals, an intellectual inclination, which the imitation of any writer should not twist.[171] These two tenets appear again in his letters to Bembo (1512-13), where the notion of an Idea of style implanted in the individual's mind replaces the concept of the innate attitude and the criticism is directed not towards the general preference of one model, but Ciceronianism in particular. The individualistic nature of Pico's Idea distinguishes it from Cortesi's abstract form, in that the former is strictly personal and cannot be attained through the emulation of an author. Pico allows for a number of models, provided that they are blended so as to bring forth a new unity. Bembo's reply criticises both of Pico's principles, namely eclectic imitation, though only in the realm of style, and the concept of the pre-existing Idea. He recommends in their stead the preference for one author –Cicero for prose and Virgil for poetry– for the imitation of style (*imitare*) but not for that of contents (*sumere*), and stresses the empirical nature of literary taste, by claiming that one can conceive what an ideal style is only by exposure to the best authors.[172] The authority of Bembo as a man of letters had so much influence on the Italian intellectual landscape of the early sixteenth century that eclecticism started to fade away.[173] His appointment as Papal secretary to Pope Leo X together with another Ciceronian, Jacopo Sadoleto, had a strong impact on the environment in which Vida would write the *De Arte Poetica* and the *Christiad.*[174]

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[168] *Ibidem* 904-11.

[169] Greene (1982) 154.

[170] Their correspondence is now available in a new edition, with a German translation and comment, in Arnold-Reitz (2021).

However, before moving on to Vida, we should mention one more work dealing with literary imitation, the *De Poetice* of Bartolomeo Della Fonte, the same man who lectured on Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica.*[175] This dialogue is the oldest poetics so far known composed during the Renaissance (between 1490 and 1492), thus preceding Vida's poetics (1527), which was deemed the first Renaissance product on the subject for a long time.[176] Della

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[171] DellaNeva (2015) 360-2.
[172] McLaughlin's (1995) 262-5.
[173] *Ibidem* 278.
[174] Vida and Bembo knew each other, and we have the letters that they exchanged; see Dionisotti (2002) 99.
[175] See section 1.1.
[176] Trinkaus (1966) 43; for the relationship between Della Scala's and Vida's works, see Lew (2011) 103-11.

Fonte very fleetingly discusses imitation in the second of the three books of the *De Poetice*. The stress is on the attempt to outdo the authors imitated and on sound judgment. Not even the best writers are flawless, and given the fact that defects are noticed more easily than qualities, one needs to detect both in order to appropriately use other models. Some caveats are given to those who want to accomplish this task: knowing what deserves to be imitated and why, and then trying to excel it (*quare quod imitetur quisque plane intelligat, et cur imitabile sit cognoscat, et im melius vertere id contendat*).[177]

Before Vida, then, many intellectuals had already faced the intricacies of literary imitation, and divergent stances had been taken, though mostly in connection with prose composition. Despite these discussions and theories, a work on how to write poetry in the style of the most recommended poet, Virgil, was in all likelihood something new. Vida filled such a gap with his three-book long *De Arte Poetica*. He expounded his ideas on poetry composition and delved into the issue of imitation, a practice of which he would prove to be a champion.

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[177] F 32^{v} in Trinkaus' (1966) edition.

Chapter 2. Vida’s reflection on imitation: *De Arte Poetica*

Vida's *De Arte Poetica* is a hexameter treatise in three books on the education of young aspiring poets.[178] The work went through so many revisions that we now possess different versions of it. The earliest edition (1517)[179] diverges substantially from the following ones, which differ slightly from each other, namely the unauthorised Parisian (1527) and two official editions, the Roman (1527) and the Cremonese (1550). Both were printed together with other literary works written by Vida. The Cremonese represents the last stage in the composition of the poem and was revised by the author himself, thus coinciding with his last will.[180] Like the *Christiad,*[181] the *De Arte Poetica* has a didactic scope. An extratextual source confirms this aspect of the poem, as the author explicitly declares in a letter to the town elders of Cremona, which dates to 7th February 1520.[182] The influence of modern treatises like the *De educatione liberorum* of Piccolomini has been detected as well.[183]

Within this educational programme, literary imitation represents a fundamental aspect. Vida here describes, prescribes, and puts into practice his own precepts on the matter. His preference goes to Virgil as the main model that an aspiring poet should follow and from whom one can gather instructions on how to write an epic poem. Such a predilection is critically contextualised in a brief history of literature. In this account, observations on a few epic authors accompany evaluations of the different stages of literature. In what follows, I will analyse the issue of literary imitation as prescribed and practised in the poem. I will then take into account Vida's assessment of Homer, Virgil and other poets. These issues provide a background to an enquiry on the debt of the *Christiad* to the ancient Latin epic tradition. We will see that Vida is a fervent supporter of literary imitation and that he displays how to practice it by drawing expressions from Virgil and other epicists. Whether he followed the tenets of his *De Arte Poetica* or not in the *Christiad* is a question that Mario Di Cesare has raised[184] and which this thesis does not want to answer. Indeed, the aesthetical coherence between different works of the same writer should not be taken for granted as an *a priori* but verified through extended analysis, a task that would go beyond the scope of this enquiry.

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[178] Williams (1976) xxxiv.

[179] It was edited and dated by Williams (1976) 199-273. Girardi (1982) 11-3 pondered over the vicissitudes of this version. Di Cesare (1973) is a brief but insightful description.

[180] For the *constitutio textus,* see Lew (2011) 11-40 with bibliography. Her critical edition takes the Cremonese as its basis and will be followed here as the standard text. I could not consult “Marco Girolamo Vida, *Arte poetica*” ed. Arnaldo M. Espírito Santo, Biblioteca Euphrosyne, Lisboa 1990.

[181] See ch. 4.

[182] “*Numquam, Patres optimi, visus sum mihi ex meis vigiliis uberiorem fructum cepisse, quam nuperrime ex literis vestris, quas ad me publice misistis, iure vestro postulantes, ut Libros, quos de Arte Poetica hexametris conscripsissem, ad vos transmitterem, quo liberi vestri his lectis aut doctiores fierent, aut exemplo domestico promoti ad ea studia magis inflammarentur.*” The text is taken from Arisi (1706) 114. For the didactic aim of the poem see Hardie (1992) 52.

[183] Di Cesare (1964) 40

2.1 The art of imitation

While advocating the emulation of ancient writers, the *De Arte Poetica* gleans from many ancient sources, mainly Homer,[185] Plato, Cicero, Virgil –one of the main models of the poem is the *Georgics*–[186] Horace,[187] Quintilian,[188] and Plutarch.[189] The vast majority of phrases and precepts hark back to an ancient source,[190] so much so that the poem resembles a cento.[191] Some sources were re-elaborated in the new text or just implemented in such a way as to have a different meaning,[192] two procedures described by Vida himself (*DAP* 3.223-30). As Rolfes pointed out, the very recognisability of ancient material in the framework of a new composition is usually a positive quality in the aesthetics of humanistic literary culture, though we have seen that intellectuals like Petrarch had different views.[193] From the former perspective, self-reflexivity, which is a prominent feature of the *De Arte Poetica*, is a virtue.

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[184] *Ibidem* 24, 114, 140-1.

[185] Lew (2011) 71-6.

[186] Williams (1976) xli, Sowerby (2006) 10-11.

[187] Lew (2011) 79-87.

[188] Williams (1976) *passim,* Rolfes (2001) 61-6, Lew (2011) 89-98.

[189] For all these authors, see William's (1976) commentary.

[190] Hardie (1992) 47 observes that Virgil's presence can be perceived in nearly every line.

[191] Scaliger (1561) 310: *In hoc autem libro tanta est talium frequentia locorum: ut cento quasi quidam indicari possit.* See also Williams (1976) xxxvi.

[192] Rolfes (2001) 58-9.

The topic of imitation makes its first appearance at the beginning of the first book, where Vida recommends the young poet to prepare a set of words and arguments before initiating his poem (*DAP* 1.62-6), and makes an explicit reference to those who pore over the works of the ancients at a preliminary stage of composition (*DAP* 1.71-4). The actual treatment of imitation, however, comes later and stems from the discussion of word choice in book 3. Words should match the literary genre, a principle that was at the basis of the ancient division of styles. Old poets, as usual, lead the way (*DAP* 3.186-92). The assumption of one favourite poet as the primary model is to be encouraged, but it does not have to preclude drawing from others as well (*DAP* 3.193-5).[194] Vida goes on to say that he personally reads the writings of those he calls “rude poets” (*hirsuti poetae*) in search of expressions to borrow and to make his own with some adjustments.[195] Previous scholarship has already touched on Vida’s self-reflexivity in matters of literary imitation. It has illustrated, for instance, how the imagery of transplanting as presented by Virgil in *Georgics* 2.47-82 permeates Vida’s discussion of the art of lifting words and expressions from others.[196] Poetic thefts that manage to improve the original material are compared to plants and fruits:

> *Ceu sata mutatoque solo felicius olim*
> *Cernimus ad coelum translatas surgere plantas.*
> *Poma quique utilius succos oblita priores*

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[193] *Ibidem.*

[194] The very recommendation to read other authors along with the privileged one can be traced back to antiquity. Quintilian, an eager supporter of eclectic imitation, synthesises the point thus, *Inst.* 10.2.24-5*: Itaque ne hoc quidem suaserim, uni se alicui proprie quem per omnia sequatur addicere* [...] *Sed non qui maxime imitandus, et solus imitandus est.* Cf. Rolfes (2001) 190-1.

[195] *DAP* 3.196-201: *Nec dubitem versus hirsuti saepe poetae / Suspensus lustrare et vestigare legendo, / Sicubi se quaedam forte inter commoda versu / Dicta meo ostendant, quae mox melioribus ipse / Auspiciis proprios possim mihi vertere in usus, / Detersa prorsus prisca rubigine scabra.*

[196] La Penna (1985) 646, Hardie (1992) 48-50, Sowerby (2006) 48-9.

Proveniunt.

(*DAP* 3.231-4)

Virgil discusses two types of plant growth, human plantation on the one hand and spontaneous maturation on the other. While the former usually brings in crops, though to varying extents depending on the nature of the plants, the latter may not bring the same results. In this case, fruits run the risk of losing their former sap (*Georg.* 2.59: *pomaque degenerant sucos oblita priores*). When a tree is transplanted, it soon raises its branches skywards (*Georg.* 2.80-1: *et ingens, / exiit ad caelum ramis felicibus arbos*). Vida, on his part, claims that words transferred into another text improve their previous flavour and are like transplanted trees that stretch up into the air. The concept is immediately reiterated through another longer simile. This time the refinement of stolen expressions is compared to the favourable signs under which Aeneas left Troy and Carthage to bring his people and his gods into Latium. This comparison turns out to be a learned and highly allusive digression:

Sic regna Asiae Troiaeque penates
Transtulit auspiciis Phrygius melioribus heros
In Latium, quanvis (nam divum fata vocabant)
Invitus, Phoenissa, tuo de litore cessit,
Nec connubia laeta, nec incepti Hymenaei
Flexerunt immitem animum. Tu victa dolore
Occidis et curae vix ipsa in morte relinquunt.
Numquam o Dardaniae tetigissent vestra carinae
Littora, fors nulli poteras succumbere culpae.

(*DAP* 3.234-42)

The passage is full of quotations from the *Aeneid*, especially the Dido episode. In the *De Arte Poetica,* Aeneas' auspices are expressed through the same phrase that Virgil put in the hero's mouth in his farewell speech at Buthrotum (*Aen.* 3.497-9: *effigiem Xanthi Troiamque videtis / quam vestrae fecere manus, melioribus, opto, / auspiciis*). *DAP* 3.237, an almost verbatim quotation of a Virgilian line, which, in turn, was borrowed from Catullus' translation of a Greek text, Callimachus' *Coma Berenices,* introduces the departure from Carthage (Cat. 66.39: *Invita, o regina, tuo de vertice cessi* – *Aen.* 6.460: *invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi*).[197] By the same token, the interruption of Aeneas' and Dido's relationship is mentioned through the same words pronounced by the queen in her attempt to convince her lover to stay with her (*Aen.* 4.316: *per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos*).[198] Her decision to kill herself and her condition in the afterlife are enunciated with the same words in both poems (*Aen.* 4.474-5: *Ergo ubi concepit furias evicta dolore / decrevitque mori*; 6.444: *curae non ipsa in morte relinquunt;* –Virgil is here describing the souls of the victims of love in the Underworld). Even the unreal conditional clause with which Vida wishes Aeneas never went to Carthage in the first place is an overt allusion to the same wish expressed by Dido in the *Aeneid* and to her initial doubts about her passion for the Trojan hero (*Aen*. 4.657-8: *si litora tantum / numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae*; 4.19: *huic uni forsan potui succumbere culpae*). As a result of these associations, the work of the poet and that of the epic hero are set side by side. Such a procedure has been acknowledged as a prefiguration of a modern reading of ancient epic, according to which the epicist's efforts in writing his poem are glossed indirectly by the struggles of his characters.[199]

The author's self-reflexivity comes to the fore for the most part through Virgilian material, but it is not limited to it. A detailed illustration of his *modus operandi* leads to this conclusion. The works of the ancient poets represent virtuous examples to follow. Their arguments, the order and even the very words with which those are expressed are available for anyone who wants to appropriate them for their compositions:

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[197] La Penna (1985) 648, Pigman (1990) 208-10, and Hardie (1992) 52.

[198] Again, the Virgilian line echoes Catullus, but this time carmen 64.141: *sed conubia nostra, sed optatos hymenaeos*. See La Penna (1985) 648.

[199] Williams (1976) 179, La Penna (1985) 647, Hardie (1992) 51-3, Sowerby (2006) 49.

> *Atque ideo ex priscis semper, quo more loquamur,*
> *Discendum, quorum depascimur aurea dicta*
> *Praecipuumque avidi rerum populamus honorem.*
> *Aspice, ut exuvias veterumque insignia nobis*
> *Aptemus: rerum accipimus nunc clara reperta,*
> *Nunc seriem atque animum verborum, verba quoque ipsa,*
> *Nec pudet interdum alterius nos ore loquutos.*

(*DAP* 3.210-6)

The ancient poets are masters that the aspiring poet should follow with reverence and whose *aurea dicta* are like food. The type of bond that Vida imagines between them and contemporary learners is not an agonistic one, but it bears a resemblance to a master-disciple relationship and is prefigured by that between Epicurus and Lucretius, who eats up the precepts of the master, his *aurea dicta*:[200]

> *tu pater es, rerum inventor, tu patria nobis*
> *suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute chartis,*
> *floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant,*
> *omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,*
> *aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.*

(Lucr. 3.9-13)

Vida's description of his imitative habit and his prescriptions remind one of the Epicurean treatment of language in the *De rerum natura,* where words are conceived as counterparts of the *primordia rerum,* the first beginnings of things.[201] Letters and *primordia rerum* are of different kinds and are held in union in a specific order, so that, when one of them or their order is changed, they produce different words and compounds, respectively:

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[200] The intertexts in the *De Arte Poetica* mentioned in the rest of the chapter are listed either in Williams (1976) or Lew (2011), who do not usually discuss and analyse them. The same Lucretian passage inspired Poliziano in the *Silvae*; see McLaughlin (1995) 195-6.

> *iamnes vides igitur, paulo quod diximus ante,*
> *permagni referre eadem primordia saepe*
> *cum quibus et quali positura contineantur*
> *et quos inter se dent motus accipiantque,*
> *atque eadem paulo inter se mutata creare*
> *ignis et lignum? quo pacto verba quoque ipsa*[202]
> *inter se paulo mutatis sunt elementis,*
> *cum ligna atque ignis distincta voce notemus.*

(Lucr. 1.907-14)

According to Vida, there is no shame in borrowing other people's words, provided they are well rearranged. Authors who commit their thefts (*furta*) so blatantly that they are even proud of being caught by everyone are intrepid. Modern poets should adjust their thefts in keeping with a line of thought that has its roots in ancient literary criticism and that, as we have seen, characterised part of the Renaissance reflection of literary imitation. The forms of the words and their order should be changed to such an extent that the author himself should barely recognise them (*DAP* 3.217-22). Plundering other people's works is a fundamental step in this didactic programme, and the disciples should heed the master, who sets an example with his borrowings. A negative paradigm, the presumptuous poet that, relying only on his abilities, does not follow the ancients[203] and whose concern for avoiding thefts is not even sanctioned by Phoebus, supplements this prescription:

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[201] Hardie (1992) 51 suggested that the *De Rerum Natura* is perhaps the second most important model in the *DAP* from the point of view of verbal expression. See also Pappe (2013) 193 and Haskell (2017) 20-1.

[202] The same expression recurs in Lucretius' explanation of the acoustic dimension of words (Lucr. 4.553-5: *hoc ubi non longum spatiumst unde una profecta / perveniat vox quaeque, necessest verba quoque ipsa / plane exaudiri discernique articulatim*).

Ergo agite o mecum securi accingite furtis
Una omnes, pueri, passimque avertite praedam.
Infelix autem (quidam nam saepe reperti),
Viribus ipse suis temere qui fisus et arti,
Externae quasi opis nihil indigus, abnegat audax
Fida sequi veterum vestigia, dum sibi praeda
Temperat heu nimium atque alienis parcere crevit
Vana superstitio, Phoebi sine numine cura.
(*DAP* 3.243-50)[204]

Counting on one's own powers ultimately leads to early oblivion and is a useless effort in the end. For this reason, Vida is transparent about his imitative practice of alluding to expressions employed by ancient authors[205] and of using them with a different meaning. The operation is supposed to be noticed and appreciated. Unlike unconcealed thefts, Vida re-elaborates his borrowings or artfully adapts them to a new context:

Saepe mihi placet antiquis alludere dictis
Atque aliud longe verbis proferre sub iisdem.
Nec mea tam sapiens per sese prodita quisquam
Furta redarguerit, quae mox manifesta probabunt
Et nati natorum, et qui nascentur ab illis.
Tantum absit, poenae metuens infamis ut ipse
Furta velim tegere atque meas celare rapinas.

(*DAP* 3.257-63)

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[203] Does Vida mean here the ancients' imitative practice, or is this just an exhortation to the imitation of the old poets?

[204] Two lines that lay between ll. 244 and 245 in the 1517 version would be omitted in the later editions: *It nigrum campis agmen, ceu cum populantur / Certatim ingentem formicae farris acervum*. The resemblance to *Aen.* 4.402-5 is hardly causal: *ac velut ingentem formicae farris acervum / cum populant hiemis memores tectoque reponunt, / it nigrum campis agmen praedamque per hebras / convectant calle angusto.* Again, Virgil is alluding, in turn, to Ennius' *Annales* according to Servius *ad Aen.* 4.404: *et est hemistichium Ennii de elephantis dictum, quod ante Accius est usus de Indis.* Cf. La Penna (1985) 648-9. In the same version, after line 250, the author adds: *Iustitiae memor. Ignota regione viarum / Tum male per deserta vagus huc erret et illuc / Absque gubernaculo in tenebris sine sydere amico.*

[205] As Williams (1976) 180 observes, the verb *alludere* can mean either "play with" or "allude to".

The acknowledgement of Vida's *furta* is bound to happen in the future, as Apollo foretold the supremacy of the Romans in the world to Aeneas (*Aen.* 3.98: *et nati natorum et qui nascentur ab illis*). As previous scholars have noted, this line is stolen from Virgil but accommodated to a new meaning:[206] the prophetic words pronounced in the original context by the god of poetry predict here the poetic glory that will be bestowed on Vida. This honour he will have while still alive, even though, just like Virgil in antiquity, he will not be spared criticism for his thefts.[207]

Vida's praxis and didactics of literary imitation coincide. While prescribing the use of ancient material to produce new literature, the master puts into practice his precepts in the first place by appropriating expressions from the ancients. Consequently, the realisation of the prescribed procedure is in front of the pupils' and the readers' eyes. Generally, this holds for the rest of the teachings imparted in the poem and is not peculiar to this section.[208] What is significant for this enquiry is that Vida explicitly admitted to have been inspired by more than one author. All through the discussion, a non-clearly specified range of writers is identified as the source of the plunderings, not just one.[209] Certainly, this eclectic approach is moderate, as Virgil stands out from the rest and remains the paramount representative of the best type of poetry. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of other authors as valuable models is not entirely precluded, though to a lesser degree. In order to evaluate the different contributions of these models to Vida's concept of imitation, therefore, let us examine his appraisals of Virgil and other poets.

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[206] E.g. Hardie (2020b) 165.

[207] Giraldi (1551) pp.29-30: *Admirari ego soleo, id quod vos minime fugit, Marcum Hieronymum VIdam Cremonensem, unum ex sodalibus, quos a vitae regula canonicos appellamus. Quem unum hac tempestate meo iudicio eo pervenisse videmus, quo sine Graecis duce cum primis Vergilio pervenire poeta potest, adeo ut a malevolis surripere necdum sumere dicatur. In nullo certe Maro magis deprehenditur; hanc ille incudem die nocteque tundit, uni insistit*. Note that Giraldi refers to Vida's imitation of Virgil only.

[208] Sowerby (2006) 8.

[209] We will see that, apart from Virgil, the only other poets mentioned by name in the *DAP* are Homer and Ennius. Cicero is named as well (*DAP* 1.385), though not as a poet but as a prose writer.

2.2 Virgil

A lot has been said about the place of Virgil in the *De Arte Poetica,* so I will briefly dwell on this point only to offer a term of comparison for Vida's treatment of other poets. It is a matter of fact that Virgil personifies Vida's poetic ideal, the most authoritative prototype for the multifarious aspects of poetry composition, e.g. invention and disposition of the material, diction, decorum, verisimilitude, figures of speech, and imitative technique.

One of the first concerns that Vida displays in his didactic programme is introducing pupils to the art of the ancient poets in their childhood. Early exposure to poetry, both Greek and Latin, would facilitate the learning process in the future. From the moment the discussion properly touches upon the issue of the education of the young poet, one cannot help but notice the author's predilection for Virgil. This proclivity materialises not only in verbal expressions but even in unequivocal references, as he recommends reverence of the Augustan poet from an early age (*DAP* 1.111-2: *Iamque sacrum teneris vatem veneretur ab annis, / Quem Musae Minci herbosis alere sub antris*). Overt allusions like the one to the Dido episode mentioned above presuppose at least a superficial knowledge of the *Aeneid.* The pupil is soon assimilated to the prominent youths of the Virgilian epic (Ascanius, Lausus, Pallas, Euryalus) and encouraged to contrast its characters with those of the Homeric poems.[210] The comparison between Virgil and Homer is one of the main strategies of Vida's didactic programme in the *De Arte Poetica,* with the former mostly serving as the positive paradigm and the latter as the negative one, although homage is paid to him as well. This is evident in the succinct history of literature that follows these initial recommendations. Here Homer is praised as the supreme Greek author. Nevertheless, it is with Virgil that literature reached its actual peak:

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[210] *DAP* 1.115-28.

Atque deinde rudes paulatin sumere versus
Coeperunt formam insignem penitusque Latini
Agrestem exuerunt morem, liquidissima donec
Tempestas veluti coeli post nubila et imbres
Extulit os sacrum soboles certissima Phoebi
Virgilius, qui mox, veterum squalore situque
Deterso, in melius mira omnia rettulit arte,
Vocem animumque Deo similis. Date lilia plenis,
Pierides, calathis tantoque assurgite alumno.
Unus hic ingenio praestanti gentis Achivae
Divinos vates longe superavit et arte,
Aureus, immortale sonans. Stupet ipsa pavetque,
Quamvis ingentem miretur Graecia Homerum.
Haud alio Latium tantum se tempore iactat.
Tunc linguae Ausoniae potuit quae maxima virtus
Esse, fuit coeloque ingens se gloria vexit
Italiae. Sperare nefas sit vatibus ultra.

(*DAP* 1.161-77)

This long commendation of Virgil is full of allusions to his works. He is compared through his words to some of the positive characters of the *Aeneid* like Pallas (and the star Lucifer *Aen.* 8.591: *extulit os sacrum*), Aeneas (*Aen.* 1.589-90: *restitit Aeneas claraque in luce refulsit / os umerosque deo similis*), and Marcellus (*Aen.* 6.883: *tu Marcellus eris. manibus date lilia plenis*; 6.877: *ullo se tantum tellus iactabit alumno*). Vida combines the tribute to that young man with Corydon's admiration for Alexis (*Ecl.* 2.45-6: *tibi lilia plenis / ecce ferunt Nymphae calathis*). Latium has not known a more prosperous age in terms of literature than Virgil's time, and was then fertile like Asia during the right season (*Georg.* 1.102-3: *nullo tantum se Mysia cultu / iactat*). Virgil is even indirectly equated to Augustus because a prayer addressed to the latter is echoed here in relation to the former (*Georg.* 1.37-8: *nec tibi regnandi veniat tam dira cupido, / quamvis Elysios miretur Graecia campos*).

Virgil's works, especially the *Aeneid*, represent the highest realisation of a poetic ideal. Everything that came before them, even if illustrious, as in the case of Homer, is inferior. And so are all the subsequent literary productions, including any future ones. This idolatry is a structural component of Vida's discourse and is reiterated multiple times, especially in the three hymns to Virgil at the end of each of the three books (*DAP* 1.1.547-63; 2.549-52; 3.554-92). The appraisal of other poets does not contradict Vida's preference, but it reveals a slightly more flexible attitude toward imitative eclecticism than has usually been assumed.

2.3 Other poets

In the short history of literature in *De Arte Poetica* 1, the only two traditions taken into consideration are the ancient Greek and the Latin ones. The account draws from Horace’s *Epistles* 1 and the *Ars poetica* and Quintilian 10.1, but it reflects Vida’s cultural *milieu*, in that the literary production of V and IV-century BC Athens in particular, which was still not well known in Western Europe at the time, is entirely neglected.[211] The account is divided up into different phases, from the beginning of Greek literature to the author’s contemporary age. The summit of Greek literature coincides with its onset, namely Homer:[212]

> *Haud multus labor auctores tibi prodere Graios,*
> *Quos inter potitur sceptris insignis Homerus.*
> *Hunc omnes alii observant, hinc pectore numen*
> *Concipiunt vates blandumque Heliconis amorem.*

(*DAP* 1.134-7)

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[211] Williams (1976) 133.
[212] See section 2.2

At least two ancient Latin texts in hexameters that mentioned Homer make up the texture of this passage. Vida found a base for his treatment of the poet in Lucretius' invitation to put death into perspective by thinking of those who died before us (Lucr. 3.1037-8: *adde Heliconiadum comites; quorum unus Homerus / sceptra potitus*), and in Horace's short account of early literature (Hor. *AP* 401-3: *post hos insignis Homerus / Tyrtauesque mares animos in martia bella / versibus exacuit*). For the inspiration that poets receive from Homer, he resorted to the priestess of the oracle of Delphi possessed by Apollo in Lucan (Luc. 5.97: *hoc ubi virgineo conceptum est pectore numen*; 5.163: *insueto concepit pectore numen*).

As time went by, the quality of Greek literature declined progressively together with the political prestige of Greece, to the point where its citizens were scattered around the Mediterranean, and Rome took charge of the area. Meanwhile, Latin poetry was still at an initial and unpolished stage:

> *Nostri autem ut sanctum divas Helicona colentes*
> *Coeperunt primum in Latium transferre, fluebant*
> *Versu incomposito informes artisque Pelasgae*
> *Indociles Musa fundebant carmine agresti*
> *Silvicolas inter Faunos. Tunc omne sonabat*
> *Arbustum fremitu silvai frondosai.*
> *Nondum acies, nondum arma rudi pater Ennius ore*
> *Tentarat, qui mox Graio de vertice primus*
> *Est ausus viridem in Latio sperare coronam.*
> *Tum rerum causas, naturae arcana latentis*
> *Explorare ausi cecinerunt carmine dulci,*
> *Omnia Pierio spargentes nectare, vates.*

(*DAP* 1.149-60)

Vida's comments upon early Latin literature here encompass almost all the Republican period and focus on two poets in particular, Ennius and Lucretius. The latter is only hinted at, but his poetry, as well as Ennius', pervades the multifaceted intertextual framework of the passage.[213] Verbatim quotations and references to texts that deal either with the art of narration or with the same authors discussed are not casual. The periphrasis that indicates the Muses in the moment of their importation into Latium is the same one with which they were described in the episode of their competition with the Pierides in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ov. *Met.* 5.663-4: *at Nymphae vicisse deas Helicona colentes / concordi dixere sono*). The Romans' early lack of skill in poetry echoes the Virgilian digression on the origin of that art (*Georg.* 2.385-6: *nec non Ausonii, Troia gens missa, coloni / versibus incomptis ludunt risuque soluto*). Vida does not seem to consider the potentially ominous implications of some of his intertexts, as in the case of the phrase *artisque Pelasgae* (1.151), which referred to the treacherous nature of the Greeks in its original context (*Aen.* 2.105-6: *Tum vero ardemus scitari et quaerere causas, / ignari scelerum tantorum artisque Pelasgae*). A verbatim quotation of one and a half of Ennius' lines anticipates his entrance (1.154-5: *omne sonabat / Arbustum fremitu silvai frondosai*= Enn. *Ann.* 178-9 Skutsch)[214] but with no real thematic connection owing to the fragmentary status of the text.[215] Ennius is addressed as *pater Ennius* (1.156), the same appellative that we find in Propertius (3.3.5-6: *parvaque iam magnis admoram fontibus ora / unde pater sitiens Ennius ante bibit*)[216] and Horace (*Ep.* 1.19.7-8: *Ennius ipse pater numquam nisi potus ad arma / prosiliut dicenda*), and his poetry is described as unrefined, the same adjective with which Ovid had already labelled it (*Tr.* 2.424: *utque suo Martem cecinit gravis Ennius ore / Ennius ingenio maximus, arte rudis*).[217] The celebration of his poetic achievements echoes Lucretius' tribute to him (Lucr. 1.117-8: *Ennius ut noster cecinit qui primus amoeno / detulit ex Helicone perenni fronde coronam*). There is no doubt that in the following lines Vida is talking about

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[213] See Hardie (2020b).
[214] Sowerby (2006) 12-3.
[215] Macr. *Sat.* 6.2.27 quotes the lines.
[216] This *locus similis* is missing in the two previous *Quellenforschungen* –Williams (1976) and Lew (2011)– at my disposal.
[217] See Girardi (1982) 83 for this parallel.

Lucretius: among the pre-Virgilian Latin poets, he is the one who explained the principles and the nature of the universe (1.158 *rerum causas, naturae arcana*), exploring a new poetic path (Lucr. 4.21-2: *carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram / et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle*).

Latin literature reached its peak with Virgil and then deteriorated quickly. Art was lost. Authors trusted too much in their capability or adopted a magniloquent style or employed useless words. Soon the Muses abandoned Italy because of the persistent irruption of foreign peoples. As a result, the inhabitants of Italy ended up adopting the languages of their conquerors, in a process that has a lot in common with the earlier fate of Greece:

> *Nulla mora, ex illo in peius ruere omnia visa,*
> *Degenerare animi atque retro res lapsa referri.*
> *Hic nanque ingenio confisus posthabet artem:*
> *Ille furit strepitu tenditque aequare tubarum*
> *Voce sonos versusque tonat sine more per omnes.*
> *Dant alii cantus vacuos et inania verba*
> *Incassum, sola capti dulcedine vocis,*
> *Pierides donec Romam et Tyberina fluenta*
> *Deseruere Italis expulsae protinus oris.*
> *Tanti causa mali Latio gens aspera aperto*
> *Saepius irrumpens. Sunt iussi vertere morem*
> *Ausoniae victi, victoribus vocibus usi.*
> *Cessit amor Musarum. Artes subiere repente*
> *Indignae atque opibus cuncti incubuere parandis.*

(*DAP* 1.178-91)

The introduction of the decadence is shot through with Virgilian material. The deterioration of literary products has a parallel in the natural degeneration of neglected seeds in the absence of human intervention (*Georg.* 1.199-200*: sic omnia fatis / in peius ruere ac retro sublapsa referri*). The desertion of the Roman site echoes the image of defeat evoked by Latinus in his attempt to reason with Turnus and avert him from carrying on with the war against the Trojans (*Aen.* 12.35-6: *recalent nostro Thybrina fluenta / sanguine adhuc campique ingentes ossibus albent*). The adoption of foreign habits is comparable with the wish expressed by the narrator at the end of *Punica* 10 that the *metus hostilis* determined by the threat of Carthage had never abandoned Rome and that the subsequent moral breakdown had never occurred (Sil. 10.657-8: *haec tum Roma fuit; post te cui vertere mores / si stabat fatis, potius, Carthago, maneres*). Lucretius again supplies additional material, as he reflected on linguistic differences among human beings (Lucr. 5.1046: *praeterea si non alii quoque vocibus usi / inter se fuerant*) and on the pleasure of poetry (Lucr. 1.924-5: *et simul incussit suavem mi in pectus amorem / Musarum*).

It is hard, if not impossible, to tell what specific authors Vida means here, but they are post-Virgilian. It is not absurd, therefore, to think of Ovid, Lucan, and the Flavian epicists.[218] Vida recommends reading other Augustan poets in addition to Virgil.[219] If he considered Ovid one of them, this would contradict the account of decadence.[220] Be that as it may, his preference for Virgil does not preclude appreciation for other authors like Lucretius. Not only does non-Virgilian poetry represent a vital component of the intertextual framework of the poem, but the pupil should avoid it only at a first stage. There will come a time when the would-be poet will be able to approach authors other than Virgil and when their flaws will not affect him.[221] This advice is put into practice by Vida himself, as the presence of

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[218] Cf. Williams (1976) 135, Sowerby (2006) 19. Another passage that has been read as a critical allusion to Lucan and Statius –even to Lucretius– is *DAP* 2.191-219, but, as Lew (2011) 101-2 indicated, there is not enough textual evidence in those lines to support this hypothesis.

[219] *DAP* 1.208-11 : *Ergo ipsum ante alios animo venerare Maronem / Atque unum sequere, utque potes, vestigia serva, / Qui si forte tibi non omnia sufficit unus, / Adde illi natos eodem quoque tempore vates.*

[220] The 1517 edition stressed the centrality of the Augustan age, with these further lines situated between 211 and 212: *At meus ille puer, Phoebi iustissima cura, / Virgilii magni haud longe discedat ab aevo / Felici, si forte Maro non sufficit unus. / Quid dicam, amisso qui dictu obscoena pudore / Obliti divum ac divini muneris, ore / Immundo cecinere inhonestaque carmina vulgo / Spargentes Musis tenerum incussere ruborem? / Sancte puer, sancti <tibi> si qua est cura pudoris*. Even in this case a specific author cannot be identified, since the *obscoena* words and *inhonesta* poems may indicate more than one writer. Perhaps he is referring to his potential sources, e.g. Catullus (64.95 *Sancte puer*, an apostrophe to Eros), Tibullus (1.3.83: *at tu casta, precor, maneas sanctique pudoris*), and Ovid (*A.A.* 3.756: *ora nec immunda tota perunge manu; Her.* 7.104: *sum tamen admisso tarda pudore meo*). For the presence of Ovid here, see Lew (2011) 76.

[221] *DAP* 1.212-5: *Parce dehinc, puer, atque alios ne quaeri doceri, / Nec te discendi capiat tam dira cupido. / Tempus erit, tibi mox cum firma advenerit aetas, / Spectatum ut cunctos impune accedere detur.*

Lucretius, Ovid and Statius, for instance, can be perceived in the passage devoted to the mixture of fictional and true topics:

> *Nam ficta potes multa addere veris,*
> *Et petere hinc illinc variarum semina rerum.*
> *Nonne vides, ut nostra deos in praelia ducant,*
> *Hos Teucris, alios Danais socia arma ferentes*
> *Certantesque inter se odiis, donec pater ipse*
> *Concilium vocet atque ingentes molliat iras?*
> *Cum secura tamen penitus natura deorum*
> *Degat et aspectu nostro summota quiescat.*

(*DAP* 2.345-52)

Semina rerum and *nonne vides* are typical Lucretian expressions, and Vida will use them even in the *Christiad*.[222] The image of the gods living in a peaceful state far removed from our gaze may evoke the Lucretian -and Epicurean- conception expressed in Lucr. 3.18-27.[223] Vida is here talking about interactions between gods such as theomachies and councils, and resorts to two phrases used, respectively, by Ovid and Statius. The first one is Ajax's reference to Hector and the gods supporting him in the *Metamorphoses* (Ov. *Met.* 13.82: *Hector adest secumque deos in proelia ducit*). The other one describes the gesture with which Jupiter permits the gods to sit down at the council he invoked at the beginning of the *Thebaid* (*Theb.* 1.204-5: *veniam donec pater ipse sedendi / tranquilla iubet esse manu*).[224]

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[222] See section 4.1. The expression occurs also at Vida *Bomb.* 2.258 in a highly Lucretian passage (e.g. 2.293: *una dies dabit exitio, multosque per annos / sustentata ruet perituri machina mundi,* two lines borrowed almost verbatim from Lucr. 5.95-6).

[223] Cf. Williams (1976) 161 and Lew (2011) 415-6.

[224] Another significant reference to Statius' *Thebaid,* as has noted by Williams (1976) 162, can be found in the description of the foundations of rites devoted to the gods (*DAP* 2.359-63): *Nunc ludos celebrant magnorum ad busta virorum, / Annua nunc patriis peragunt diis sacra periclo / Servati quondam laudesque ad sidera tollunt / Aut Phoebi, monstro ingenti Pythone perempto, / Aut magni Alcidae, Cacum ut videre iacentem.* The slaying of the serpent Python by Apollo is at the basis of the long aetiology of the Argive rites narrated by Adrastus to his hosts and followed by the praises of the same god (*Theb.* 1.557-720). The myth occurs in at least two other ancient Latin epics, Ov. *Met.* 1.445-51 and Luc. 5.71-85, where it is connected to the aetiologies of the Pythian Games and the oracle of Delphi, respectively. However, Vida is more likely hinting at Statius' account than to these *loci*, because they do not entail a hymn to the god.

Vida's acquaintance with other Latin authors appears less striking in the light of the identification of the literature of the ancient Romans with that of the Italian Renaissance. Not only does Vida oppose Greek poets to the Latin by calling the latter “ours”,[225] but he also skips the entire history of vernacular literature. There is no mention of Italian medieval and early Renaissance literary production.[226] Vida's perspective seems exclusively classicist.[227] In his literary history, it is only through the largesse of the De’ Medici family that the Muses are encouraged to return to Italy. A new thriving era of renewed interest in classical languages and cultures is launched: thanks to the De' Medici, manuscripts containing ancient works are now collected, and Greek preceptors are invited to teach in the Italian peninsula (*DAP* 1.192-207). This praise of the Tuscan family is to be connected to the author's hope for the rebirth of antiquity, which would entail the revival of Italy’s religious, cultural and political centrality.[228]

On the whole, Vida’s primary model for writing epic poetry is Virgil; other epic poets are secondary sources of inspiration. This conclusion is confirmed both by the prescriptions and by the practice of the *De Arte Poetica* itself. In the Renaissance debate on literary imitation with its common binary opposition of preference for one author on the one hand and eclecticism on the other, Vida opted for the first position. However, a closer inspection reveals an overall moderate attitude, one that allows and recommends the use of subsidiary writers as supplements. In the following chapters, we will ascertain that the presence of Virgil in the *Christiad* is preeminent, but that other representatives of the ancient Latin epic tradition still play a rather significant role. By doing so, I am indirectly arguing that there is chiefly continuity, but not necessarily identity, between the *De Arte Poetica* and the *Christiad* from the standpoint of literary imitation.

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[225] Ancient Greek language and literature were coming back to the West in those decades. Many Greek texts were available in translation, an area that has recently attracted some attention; see the collection of essays edited by Abbamonte and Harrison (2019).

[226] Some have hypothesised that Vida criticises Dante in the *DAP*. See Lew (2011) 99-102 with bibliography. See also Toffanin (1954) 46 and Bonora (1954) 174-5.

[227] Girardi (1982) 53.

[228] Di Cesare (1964) 42-3 and Williams (1976) xxxviii-xl.

Chapter 3. The Historical, Ideological and Intertextual Frameworks of the *Christiad*

A study of the influence of ancient Latin epics on the *Christiad* cannot ignore the historical circumstances in which the poem was written. Scholars have detected allusions to contemporary circumstances in the poem. Some passages may refer to the traumatic events of the War of the League of Cognac, which took place during the composition of the poem. The Holy Roman Empire of Charles V and Habsburg Spain fought against the so-called "League of Cognac", which included France, the Papacy, the Republic of Florence, the Republic of Venice, the Duchy of Milan and the Kingdom of England.[229] Two military events have been suggested as points of reference in Vida's poem: the Sack of Rome in 1527, when the mercenary armies of the Holy Roman Empire plundered the city and forced Clement VII to surrender, and the Siege of Florence in 1529-30, a city that had been left alone in the war up to that time.[230] Moreover, the text has been thought to contain references to contemporary or recent cultural projects: the episode of the temple of Jerusalem might allude to two projects commissioned by Pope Julius II (1503-23). In this scene, Jesus announces its destruction and the future role that Rome will play in the history of Christianity (*Chr*. 1.579-85). Similarly, a long description of the wall decorations of the temple (*Chr*. 1.582-724) depicts the story of the world like the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel ceiling commissioned by Julius II a few years before the composition of the poem.[231]

Although the content of a text should be primarily judged on the basis of close readings, it is worth trying to examine some extratextual information. In this chapter, I will review the main sources that inform us about the commissioning of the poem. The focus will then shift toward two ideological concerns identified by previous scholars of Vida, namely the role of the papacy and the theme of *translatio imperii*. I will then go on to consider the coexistence of pagan and Christian material in the *Christiad* and how his poem shares in the epic penchant for presenting the contingency of the events recounted as crucial for a broader spatio-temporal horizon. The last section, an analysis of the intertextual framework of the poem, will establish the ground for the second part of the thesis.

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[229] Rodríguez-Salgado (2005) 54.

[230] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 52,100-1, 297, which point, respectively, to *Chr*. 1.459, 917-28, 4.844-53

[231] *Ibidem* ii 60.

3.1 The Commissioning

By the sixteenth century, biblical epic had crystallised as a genre with an established canon. Its main representatives were Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator, and Avitus, with the occasional addition of Prudentius.[232] The period between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century saw the publication of several Neo-Latin biblical epics with disparate subjects.[233] The *Parthenice Mariana* (1488) of Battista Spagnoli's (also known as Mantuan), Mark Marulić's *Davidias* (1517), Simone Capece's *De Vate Maximo* (1533) and Girolamo Fracastoro's unfinished *Ioseph* focus, respectively, on the Virgin Mary, David, John the Baptist and the patriarch Joseph.[234] But the project of an epic poem on the Saviour in particular had been anticipated at least from the fourteenth century, as Petrarch testifies in a passage of his *Contra medicum*.[235] Jesus Christ is at the centre of other epics such as

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[232] On the history of biblical versifications from late antiquity to late middle ages, see Dinkova-Bruun (2007), especially 336-7 on the lack of versified renditions entirely devoted to the life of Christ in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Czapla (2013) is a rich contribution to our knowledge of the reception of the genre in what is modern-day Germany during the early modern era.

[233] Faini (2007) investigated some theoretical and evaluative remarks on the history of fifteenth century biblical epic. In a later contribution, Faini (2008-10) offered a synopsis of Christian poems in sixteenth century Italy and shed light on the cultural background within which the genre flourished. A comparative study of this literary production is still missing, and searching for points of contact, similarities and differences between all these poems might be a path worth pursuing in the future.

[234] Mantuan would go on to write six further *Parthenicai* on female saints in the years to follow. See Coroleu (2014) 25. On Capece see the bibliography in Valerio (2018) 752.

[235] Petrarch, *Contra Medicum* 126 - Marsh's (2003) edition-: *si quis ergo talis, pio instigatus affectu, ad ipsius veritatis ornatum musarum presidio niteretur, et vel stilo clarissimo Cristi vitam vel sacrum aliud vel prophanum etiam, modo non vetitum, celebraret...quis putas id melius posset implere?* See also Di Cesare (1964) 102.

Girolamo della Valle's *De Passione Christi* (1473)[236] and Giacomo Bona's *De vita et gestis Christi* (1526). Despite making the Nativity its core, Jacopo Sannazaro's *De Partu Virginis* (1526) includes prolepses and digressions on other episodes of Jesus' life that we find also in Vida's epic. In like manner, some of the elements of Muzio's *De Triumpho Christi* (1499) are the same ones to which Vida would devote a considerable part of his narrative: Christ's triumph, his descent into Hell, the gathering and the getaway of the demons, the joy of the righteous at His coming, the apostles, and the Ascension.[237]

We are fortunate enough to have a work written by Vida, the *De Reipublicae Dignitate*, in which he hints at how he versified the Gospel in the *Christiad*. In this political treatise, published in 1556 and fashioned after the dialogues of Plato and Cicero, the author portrays himself as one of the interlocutors partaking in a discussion about the principles on which society should hinge. Toward the end of the first of the two books that make up the dialogue, Vida, as a character, goes back in his memory to the days when Pope Leo X commissioned the *Christiad* from him. He mentions in passing that this task involved conferring poetic form on the divine contents of Christianity:[238]

> *Nescio quommodo a Leone Decimo, tunc pontefice maximo, interpellatus fui, ut relicta, rejectaque omni alia cura, ac studio, periclitarer, quid efficere, quantumve progredi valerem in exprimendis, et versu explicandis rebus divinis, quae pertinent ad Christi instituta, totamque tam augustae religionis, ac sanctitatis rationem optimorum poetarum figuris, atque virtutibus latine, quoad possem, ornarem.*
>
> (Vida, *De Reip.* 1.66.3)[239]

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[236] Dates of publication are taken from Gunzenhauser (2020) 11 and Faini (2008-10) 149.

[237] On Muzio see Springer (1991) and Czapla (2013) 136-63.

[238] In one of his *Odes*, he refers to his days under Leo X as a happy period of his life (Vida, *Carmina* 5.16-21: *Leo iam carmina nostra / ipse libens relegebat. ego illi carus, et auctus / muneribusque, opibusque, et honoribus insignitus. / omnia erant mihi laeta. animo nihil amplius ultra / optabam. cunctis sat erat factum undique votis, / et digito caeli contingere summa videbar*).

[239] The division into paragraphs follows Hibst's (2004) text.

One needs to have a solid grasp on the meaning of *figura, virtus* and *ornare* at the beginning of the sixteenth century to accurately gauge their implications. However, assuming that the ancients figure among the *optimi poetae* should not be a stretch of the imagination, given their role in Vida's theory and practice of literary imitation and their presence in the *Christiad*.[240] Soon afterwards, Vida maintains that he felt forced to write and that the poem could be regarded as belonging more to the pope than to him:[241]

> *Negavi me esse poetam, quod poetae quae canunt, scribuntve, ea suapte sponte, atque animi libera quadam oblectatione faciunt. ego vero ista, qualiacumque, iussus, ne dicam coactus, scripsi rectiusque fere Leonis decimi poemata, quam mea dici possunt.*
>
> (Vida, *De Reip* 1.68.1.)

According to a common assumption, Leo X (1513-21), and later Clement VII (1523-34), commissioned the *Christiad* as a reaffirmation of the preeminence of Rome both in matters of faith and of literature,[242] in the face of the religious and political challenges posed by the Reformation.[243] Leo X assigned this task in 1518, a year after the publication of Martin Luther's *Ninety-five theses*. Leo X and Rome were expecting a new *Aeneid,* and the *Christiad* represented the answer to that request.[244] Rumours had it that Leo greeted the publication of the poem with a distich inspired by Propertius' announcement of the *Aeneid* and of its superiority over Homer, which is here converted into the proclamation of Vida's superiority over Virgil (*Cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Graii* / *nescio quid maius nascitur Aeneide*).[245] At the end of the *Christiad*, Vida himself tries to ward off any charge of vainglory by highlighting that two popes, Leo X and his successor Clement VII, both belonging to the De' Medici family, commissioned the poem. To them their age owes the rebirth of literature:

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[240] See also *De Reip.* 1.67.1-2: *Non potui sane tanti pontificis tamque de communi hominum societate bene meriti piae voluntati non obtemperare, scripsique poetarum more de ipsius Christi rebus et institutis libros VI, qui fortasse in aliquorum vestrum manus venere. Conatus fui in illis id, quod apprime Leo expetebat, verbis Latinis explocare quaedam sensa recondita, expressu difficilia, Hebraeorum linguae propria et a sermonis tum Romani tum Graeci maiestate admodum aliena, gravissimas, inquam, sententias parum verbis adhuc ornatas, quae videbantur nulla umquam seromins Latini luce posse satis splendescere*. Something similar can be found in the second letter with which Macario Muzio introduces his *De Triumpho Christi*. Speaking of the time when he conceived the project that would turn out to be the poem he is introducing, Macario declares: *Praelusi igitur his quos utinam excitare et exhortari oratione mea possem, ut sacris ornamenta poetarum adiungerent.*

[241] See Di Cesare (1964) 28-9, Meier-Staubach (1994) 608.

[242] D'Amico (1983) 125.

[243] Zumbini (1931) 80, Toffanin (1954) 14-7, Di Cesare (1964) 25-7, von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) i 10. However, Peter Mack suggested to me that the actual impact of the Reformation might not have been adequately perceived in Rome by then.

[244] Toffanin (1954) 38-46

> *QUISQUIS ES, AUTOR TE ADMONITUM VULT SE NON LAUDIS ERGO OPUS ADEO PERICULOSUM CUPIDE AGGRESSUM, VERUM EI HONESTIS PROPOSITIS PRAEMIS A DUOBUS SUMMIS PONTIFICIBUS DEMANDATUM SCITO, LEONE X PRIUS, MOX CLEMENTE VII, AMBOBUS EX ETRUSCORUM MEDYCUM CLARISSIMA FAMILIA, CUIUS LIBERALITATI ATQUE INDUSTRIAE HAEC AETAS LITTERAS AC BONAS ARTIS, QUAE PLANE EXTINCTAE ERANT, EXCITATAS ATQUE REVIVESCENTES DEBET.*
>
> (Vida, *Chr.* epilogue)[246]

He would once again exorcise the spiritual risks entailed by that operation in a letter to Bartolomeo Botta, one of his admirers, written in June 1540:

> *Ego certe opus tam arduum, atque adeo periculosum non spe immortalitatis, aut gloriae adortus sum; non oblitus, me scribere res illius qui pro humani generis salute, humilis, et abiectus, ac plane inglorius, animi certo judicio, esse voluit; quum nihilominus esset et DEUS, et DEI Filius, regum omnium Rex, ac rerum non tantum dominus, verum etiam auctor, et fabricator. id tamen oneris (quod etiam in Operis ipsius calce testatum esse volui) passus sum mihi imponi, ut Leonis X Pontificis Maximi mandatis satisfacerem.*
>
> (Vida, *Epist. ad Bottam*)

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[245] Prop. 2.24.65-6: *cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Grai! / nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade.* See Hardie (1993a) 304 and Glei (2010a) 109.

[246] Quotation taken from Gardner's (2009) text.

Despite the external input of the popes, Vida must have conceived his poem as a vehicle for serious religious content. In the letter mentioned above, he praises Botta, who went on to produce an extended commentary on the *Christiad* (1569), for reading the poem publicly and promoting it in schools:

> *Quod vero apud istos quibus adulescentulorum mentes bonis artibus finguntur ad humanitatem, et virtutem, poematis mei quod de JESU CHRISTI, Dei simul et hominis, rebus, proximis annis edidi, publice enarrandi, atque in scholis interpretandi auctor fueris, mihi gratissimum fuit, non tantum quod ad meam laudem permultum interesse videam (id enim homini Christiano, idest gravi, frugi, haud equidem magnopere curandum esse arbitror) verum etiam quod magni refert, qua religione, quibusve moribus rudes puerorum animi prius imbuantur.*

(Vida, *Epist. ad Bottam*)

This pedagogical concern gives us an idea as to what the poem probably meant to the author. In his commentary, Botta links the commission of the poem with concerns about exposing schoolboys to the lasciviousness of ancient authors. According to his account, the pope mandated him to take the primacy of literature away from the pagans, chiefly Virgil, in the school curriculum and to appropriate it for Christianity through the realisation of a pious work, whose aim was to rescue Christians from the passion of lust caused by the reading of the classics.[247] Regardless of this pedagogical concern and of the nature of the commission, it can be argued that replacing the *Aeneid* with a new epos is, *mutatis mutandis*, a way to mirror what Virgil tried to do by rewriting the Homeric poems for a new society.[248]

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[247] Botta, *ad Christ.*: *Intentio haec est. retrahere christianos a poeticorum lectione figmentorum. quia per oblectationes fabularum, mentes legentium excitantur ad incentiva libidinum.* [...] *Vergilius semper in manibus habebatur. et quod in pueris videbatur permitti causa necessitatis, crimen in se faciebant voluptatis. ne igitur sub eruditione figmento* [...] *ad impietatem idolorum, et perniciosam voluptatem libidinum, pueris et cuiusvis aetatis homines deducantur: mandatum fuit a Leone X. et Clemente VII. summis pontificibus ut quaecumque ad litteraria eruditione virgiliana lectio continebat, ea noster divinus vates colligeret. et in hoc piissimum opus transferret.* The passage is discussed also by Warner (2005) 110-11, 229-30, and Kallendorf (2007) 47-8. This kind of anxiety was typical of sixteenth century Catholic authors -see Harris (2015)-, although the rejection of classical literature for Christian purposes had already become commonplace in late antiquity. See de Nie (2011) 370-1.

3.2 Centrality of the Papacy and of Rome

The centrality of Rome and the Papacy for Christianity is a feature of the poem's ideology, as the Father declares:

> *Atque adeo gravida imperiis Roma illa superba,*
> *Apenninivagi quae propter Tybridis undam*
> *ingentes populos frenat pulcherrima rerum,*
> *summittet fasces et, quas regit, orbis habenas.*
> *Illic religio, centum illic maxima templa,*
> *centum arae tibi fumantes, centumque ministri,*
> *quique viris late atque ipsis det iura sacerdos*
> *regibus et summo te in terris reddat honore.*

(Vida *Chr.* 1.911-18)

Whether this insistence on the preeminence of Rome and the Papacy is one pole of a polemic with the Reformation or not is open to debate. This seems to have been the case with another Neo-Latin biblical epic poem of the time written for Leo X, Sannazaro's *De Partu Virginis,* at least from the perspective of cardinal and man of letter Pietro Bembo.[249] Nevertheless, the moral breakdown attributed by Vida to some of the generations which came after that of the apostles could be read as a subtle reference to the divisions that affected Western Christianity during those years:

> *Si qua tamen paulatim annis labentibus aetas*
> *decolor inficiet mores, versisque nepotes*

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[248] On Virgil's operation see Conte (2007) 40.
[249] Toffanin (1954) and Greene (1963) 161.

degeneres surgent studiis, per dura laboresque
exercens lapsam revocabo in pristina gentem.

(Vida *Chr.* 1.919-23)

The *degeneres nepotes* mentioned here by the Father have been identified with the Protestant Reformers.[250] In truth, however, we know little about Vida's attitude towards the Reformation. He truly believed the Church needed a sort of renewal, but he never aligned himself with the Protestants, as is demonstrated by his participation in the Council of Trent and his ecclesiastic conduct.[251]

If one must read any charge against the degeneration of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the *Christiad* as a critical allusion to Protestantism, then more than one passage could contribute to such an interpretation. Jesus' invective against the demons (*Chr*. 1.865-7: *Quas non mentiti simulato corpore formas, / ut capiant genus innocuum vertantque venenis / pestiferis?*) or the innuendo that one of Jesus' prosecutors makes about the absurdity of a change of mind on the part of the Father as to how sacred rites should be celebrated (*Chr*. 5.145-6: *Scilicet omnipotens placitos tot secula ritus / retractet pater et mentem sententia vertat*).[252] Even the depiction of the Last Supper in book 2 has been taken as a programmatic statement on Vida's part in favour of the Catholic belief that the Eucharist celebration involves a real Transubstantiation rather than being a mere rite.[253] Martin Luther openly attacked the dogma of Transubstantiation in his *De captivitate babilonia ecclesiae*, published in 1520, 15 years before the *Christiad*, and it was an extremely controversial theme for the unity of the Church at the time.[254] Therefore, an explanation of the mystery of Communion such as the one that follows (*Chr.* 2.663-70), directly coming from the mouth of the narrator, must have been highly significant. The same may be claimed about Vida's merging of two passages of the Gospels (Mt. 16:16-18 and Jn. 21:15-17) that were crucial for the heated debate between Catholicism and Protestantism. In Mt. 16:16-18 Jesus names Simon "Peter", which means "rock". He goes on to say that he founds his Church on that "rock", and gives Peter the keys of Heaven. In Jn. 21:15-17 Jesus delegates to the same apostle his "sheep" and "lambs" during one of his appearances after his Resurrection. A point at issue here was the identification of the primacy of Peter with that of the Papacy, with Catholics arguing that Peter's preeminence accounts for the Pope's supremacy and Reformers questioning this connection.[255] Once again, it has been supposed that critical allusions against Protestantism and a not so veiled endorsement of the Papacy are at play in the rearrangement of the two passages in the *Christiad*.[256] Jesus has just appeared to his disciples and now addresses Peter:

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[250] *Ibidem* ii 100. Neoptolemus uses the same adjective to describe himself in the *Aeneid*, right when he is about to kill Priam (*Aen.* 2.549: *degeneremque Neoptolemum narrare memento*). The expression *aetas decolor* occurs in *Aen.* 8.326, namely Evander's reference to a past degenerating age in the history of Latium. This *tessera* is a good illustration of the interplay between the poem's ideological concerns and its dialogue with classical antiquity. Schaffenrath (2015) 66-7 too sees an allusion to the Reformation in these lines. On the *degeneres* in the epic tradition, see Hardie (1993b) 89-90, 97 and 113.

[251] Di Cesare (1964) 31-2, Hibst (2004) 31.

[252] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 93 and 315.

[253] Schaffenrath (2020) 322-3.

> *Tu regere et populis parcens dare iura memento.*
> *Summa tibi in gentes iam nunc concessa potestas.*
> *Iamque pios tege pace. Voca sub signa rebelles.*
> *Quemcumque in terris scelus exitiale perosus*
> *admonitum frustra iusta devoveris ira*
> *colloquio absterrens hominum coetumque piorum,*
> *idem erit invisus coelo. Non ille beatis*
> *sedibus aspiret, nisi tu placabilis idem*
> *dignatus venia meliorem in pristina reddas.*
> *Iamque adeo tibi concessum mortalibus aegris*
> *claudere siderei portas ac pandere coeli."*

(Vida *Chr.* 6.666-76)

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[254] Kolb (2009) 83-4 and Daniel (2014) 339.
[255] Smolinsky (2014) 505.
[256] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 393-4.

The focus of the speech is on the temporal and spiritual power bestowed on Peter. Those who rebel and persist despite warnings are to be excommunicated unless they repent and Peter's divinely established authority forgives them. The statement with which this power is given echoes Anchises' injunction to his son Aeneas to rule over the world in the *Aeneid* (*Aen* .6. 851: *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento*).[257] Actually, the two texts are even more closely intertwined than has been previously noticed (*Chr.* 6.666 *parcens* - *Aen.* 6.853 *parcere subiectis*; *Chr.* 6.668 *pace* - *Aen.* 6.852 *pacique imponere morem*): the future supremacy of Peter in Jesus' words corresponds to the future supremacy of Rome in Anchises' words. This is a good illustration of Vida's engagement with ancient Latin epic literature –at least with the *Aeneid*– in both verbal and ideological terms. Here we find a parallel between Aeneas' and Peter's missions, in other words, between the Rome of Augustus and the Rome of the Papacy, almost as if the former were a prefiguration of the latter. Of course, the city is at the beginning of its Imperial period in the narrative frameworks of the Gospels and the *Christiad*, i.e. Tiberius' principate, as is well known, even though Vida never mentions the emperor's name.

3.3 Translatio Imperii

Unresolved tension between the representation of ancient Rome and its assimilation to Renaissance Rome pervades the *Christiad*.[258] If the advocacy of the city was a cornerstone of the poem, then the terror exuded by ancient Romans, the violent foreign policy with which they subdued a vast part of the known world, and, above all, their involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus could jeopardise the coherence of the message. Examples of this tension can be perceived in some brief references to ancient Roman expansionism,[259] or in the attribution of the responsibility for Jesus’ death to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and his wife. The only passage of a Gospel that mentions her is Mt. 27:19, where she tries to dissuade her husband from condemning a righteous man like Jesus, for she had a dream about him.[260] Vida expands this model, devoting 18 lines to her (*Chr.* 5.282-99). The dream is here dramatised, with God the Father himself threatening:

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[257] *Ibidem*, where the ominous implications of the number of the line (6.666) are suggested and discussed.

[258] de Beer (2020) is a groundbreaking study of Renaissance images of Rome.

> *At pater altitonans manifesta percitus ira*
> *desuper auctores caedis saevibat in ipos.*
> *Turbatum extemplo visum ruere undique coelum,*
> *et campos late ac silvas quatere horrida grando.*
> *Tum subito audita ex alto voxque acta per auras:*
> *‘Parce Deo, Romane, hominum compesce furorem.’*
> *Credo equidem hunc (non te fallit) genus esse deorum.*
> *Parce manus scelerare, pio, vir, parce cruori.*
> *Ipsi haec coelicolae placidi portenta refutent*
> *Iudaeosque petant solos generique minentur.”*
> *Talibus auditis Solymos animo acrior urget*
> *Romulides certus vesano obstare furori.*
>
> (Vida *Chr.* 5.290-301)

The epithets (*Romane; Romulides*) stress the identity of the governor. The concern for Pontius Pilate’s responsibility in the process propels the description of how he makes his decision (*Chr.* 5.300-368). At first, he tries to stop the mob from condemning Jesus and seems resolute in his will to release the prisoner. Satan soon senses this and has Pilate change his mind by sending him the personification of Fear. The governor’s responsibility is thus mitigated:[261] a parenthetical element (*Chr.* 5.344-5: *praecordia ad intima saevit / subdita*

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[259] *Chr.* 2.302-2: *Tantum autem imperio adiectam, ceu cetera passim / contuderat bello et victricibus hauserat armis, / hanc quoque servitio partem Roma alta premebat*

[260] Dreams are a recurrent theme in ancient epic; see Khoo (2020).

[261] This position is also held by von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 230. Di Cesare (1964) 176-80, 266-70 and Warner (2005) 118-123 offer insightful thoughts about Vida’s characterisation of Pilate.

pestis enim), the curse he puts on the Jews (*Chr.* 5.359-61: *Vos triste manet, speroque, propinquum / supplicium. Vos sacrilego serique nepotes, / o miseri, meritas pendetis sanguine poenas*), and his attempts to justify himself to Joseph of Arimathea after Jesus' death (*Chr.* 6.24-6: *Vos, veri conscia testor / numina, tentavi versans mecum omnia, siqua / insontem morti excipere ac dimittere possem*) serve this purpose. The part played by Pontius Pilate is a delicate question even in New Testament scholarship,[262] but it is plain to see that Vida bestows on it more importance than it has in the Gospels.[263]

No matter how controversial the position of ancient Rome may be in the poem, its name is and will be bound to the history of Christianity. It is within this framework that the association of Roman images with celestial settings is to be read. Towards the end of the last book, angels bursting with joy and singing in celebration of Jesus' ascension to Heaven are compared with the triumph of a victorious consul coming back from war:

non aliter sunt ingressi volucri agmine contra
concentu vario et multisono modulatu,
quam, prolapsa Remi cum nondum urbs alta iaceret
Tarpeiaeque arces starent lateque subactis
iura daret populis rerum pulcherrima Roma,
consul victor ovans pugnatis undique bellis
intrabat rediens Capitoliaque alta subibat.

(Vida *Chr.* 6.701-7)

The association of the Ascension with a Roman triumph was common in Renaissance epideictic sermons produced at the papal court in the period 1450-1521.[264] Here the depiction of the triumph as an institution of the past (*cum nondum, intrabat, subibat*) implies that the City the reader is supposed to call to mind is not the Imperial one, as one would expect in keeping with the diegetic level, but that of the Renaissance, a real *translatio imperii.*[265] The pivotal role of the *Urbs* is once again asserted by way of juxtaposition with Heaven.[266] In the end, the world's eventual submission to Rome, the most beautiful of all things (*Chr.* 6.605 *rerum pulcherrima Roma* - *Chr.* 1.913: *pulcherrima rerum)*[267], is established by divine will (*Chr.* 1.929-30: *Nec nisi subiecto passim sibi desinet orbe. / Sic placitum. Nostri sedes ea numinis esto*).

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[262] See Schwarz (1992) 399-400.
[263] Cf. Mt. 27, Mk 15, Lk 23, and Jn 18-19.
[264] O'Malley (1979) 66. On the Catholic Church and the Renaissance *renovatio* of the Roman Empire see Stinger (1985) 2, 5, 59-76, 235-92.

3.4 Pagan at the service of the Christian

There is one necessary, albeit self-evident, consideration to be made for evaluating the dialogue of the *Christiad* with classical antiquity on the ideological level. As conspicuous as it appears, it is still worth calling to mind that the religious content of the poem diverges radically from ancient Latin epics. Despite the fact that the Christian appropriation of the Greco-Roman culture had been going on for centuries, Vida's contemporaries could react with scepticism to the blending –which at times almost bordered on syncretism– of classical heritage and Judaeo-Christian material in poetry, as demonstrated by Erasmus' disapproval of this union in his *Ciceronianus* (1528) and the attempts of Battista Spagnoli or Jacopo Sannazaro to defend it.[268] There is no reason to deny that the *Aeneid* contributes to the construction of the religious meaning of Vida's poem. He presupposes a reader who can distinguish allusions to Virgil[269] and recognise their new meaning and values.[270] Thanks to this strategy, pagan content is transfigured into Christian truth, a goal set by a long exegetical tradition that starts with the *Kontrastimitation* of ancient Christian poetry and is represented at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance by the allegorical epic and the biblical epic. The former presents an allegory of man's path from a sinful life to a peaceful existence of contemplation, as Petrarch does in his *Africa,* whereas the latter, of which the *Christiad* is an example, aims to persuade the readers to escape sin and deepen their faith by narrating biblical episodes.[271]

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[265] On this notion see Nederman (2009) 177-89, Houghton (2019) 27.

[266] Di Cesare (1964) 266.

[267] Cf. Verg. *Georg.* 2.534: *scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma*.

[268] Faini (2007) 254-6. On the use of classical mythology in Mantuan's and Sannazaro's Neo-Latin biblical poetry see Marsico (2015).

[269] Hardie (1993a) 305.

[270] Warner (2005) 133.

One should not forget that the practice of reading Virgil through Christian allegory was still common at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, as is demonstrated by commentaries on the *Aeneid* like those composed by Christophorus Landinus, Giovanni Fabrini, and Lucas Antonius Iunta.[272] Such a commentary tradition reveals that Christian readers of that age were worried about the moral consequences of the exposure to pagan content, in keeping with an apprehension that has characterised Christianity since its first stages and that found some of its most brilliant interpreters in St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and Petrarch.[273] Moved by the intention to justify classical literature, Christian intellectuals resorted to allegorical readings, in the belief that ancient works contained hidden traces of truth behind their literal meaning (*theologia poetica*) as opposed to Christian writings (*theologia nostra*).[274] Vida's poem seems to resolve the moral concerns of the Christian readers of Virgil by proposing not a mere combination of pagan poetry and biblical material, but a Christian poem influenced by pagan literature in both form and content. The aim of this union of *theologia poetica* and *theologia nostra* is likely the conversion and the eternal Salvation of the reader.[275] If this programme was sustained by the consultation of commentaries that associated pagan poetry with Christian theology, perhaps, cannot be determined.[276]

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[271] *Ibidem* 2.

[272] Kallendorf (1995).

[273] For some insights, with bibliography, on Augustine's and Jerome's relationships with the classics see, respectively, Shanzer (2012), and Williams (2006) 26-8. Tkacz (1997) supposed that Jerome used Ovid for his *vulgata* translation of the Gospels and proposed the analysis of the presence of verbal borrowings from classical authors in the text as a new line of research. Zak (2015) summed up the role of the ancients in Petrarch. On the religious concerns raised by the "pagan" apparatus of humanistic poetry in Italy in the sixteenth century see Corsaro (2005).

[274] Kallendorf (1995) 50.

The Christian view of reality and the destiny of the individual substantially differs from those proposed by the pagan classical world.[277] Hence, the eschatological dimension of ancient Latin epic poems seems to play a less meaningful role than it does in the *Christiad*, where, instead, it represents a crucial concern.[278] Remarking this difference, however, should not imply an underestimation of their religious frameworks. The horizon of meaning of the *Aeneid* can not be identified solely with the contingent dimension of Augustus' political restoration. A similar reading risks trivialising the significance of the existential and religious implications of that historical circumstance, at least for part of the public that the author could conceive, namely his contemporaries. While twentieth century criticism appreciated the poem's concern for the individual sphere,[279] evaluating the religious implications of its message is a more problematic undertaking.[280] On the contrary, this element seems to be more comprehensible in the case of the *Christiad*.[281] This poem is based on a well known sacred text and framed within a religious tradition, Catholicism, which is still living nowadays, despite the historical differences with its status during the sixteenth century. Although some essential discrepancies between pagan cults and Christianity can be fathomed by way of comparison *in absentia* –an absence that is due to the fact that pagan sacred texts and institutions are not accessible in the twenty-first century–, there is a disproportion between our comprehension of the religious dimension of Vida's poems on the one hand and of that of ancient Latin epics on the other. Especially when it comes to discussing the interactions of Greek and Latin literature with religion, one should always be aware of the risk of applying anachronistic categories that do not belong to the societies that produced them.

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[275] *Ibidem* 59-62. For the concepts of *theologia poetica* and *theologia nostra* see Trinkaus (1970) ii 683-9.
[276] *Ibidem*. See also Di Cesare (1964) 279.
[277] Moeller (1948) is a brief overview of the matter. Lane Fox (1986) 326, 412 offers a historical outline.
[278] For a comparison with Virgil see von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) i 22.
[279] See the whole strand of Virgilian criticism known as "Harvard school". For some appraisals of this approach, see Jonhnson (1976), Harrison (1990) 1-20, Hardie (1998) 94-101, and the contributions in Hedjuk (2017).
[280] Feeney (1991) 177-80. To name but one problem: what do we mean by "contemporary readers"? The entire Roman society or some specific groups of people?
[281] And of Christian epics more in general, even those that do not re-elaborate the Gospels directly.

Concepts such as salvation, morality and belief have affected European post-Christian readers like Vida and those of us in the current time who come from cultures imbued with the Judaeo-Christian tradition.[282] The dream of Pontius Pilate's wife quoted above (*Chr.* 5.290-301) is an instance of how Vida's appropriation of pagan literature aims at enhancing the moral implications of the characters' actions. He draws extensively from the ancient Latin epic tradition to highlight the foreboding that something terrible is going to happen, in his case the crucifixion of Jesus and the possibility that divine wrath might result as a consequence. This passage contains echoes of Dido's sleepless nights at the beginning of *Aeneid* 4 (*Aen.* 4.12: *credo equidem, nec vana fides, genus esse deorum*). The following line resembles Polydorus' lament (*Aen.* 3.41-2: *iam parce sepulto, / parce pias scelerare manus*). His spirit entrapped in a bush of myrtle is involuntarily tormented by Aeneas, who tries to understand why its branches pour out blood when they are uprooted –the blood will turn out to be Polydorus', whose corpse had been left unburied in that place.[283] It might be no coincidence that this dream is shot through with classical *tesserae*. Dreams have a self-reflexive dimension in Latin epics and can function as intertextual windows.[284] The apparition of the ghost of Hector to the sleeping Aeneas of *Aeneid* 2 betrays the influence of both Homer and Ennius, who, in turn, in a scene of the *Annales* had recounted that the ghost of Homer himself visited him in a dream. In this scene, Vida revives Virgil and presents his poem as one of the successors of the ancient genealogical and poetical line that starts with Homer.

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[282] Feeney (1998) 2-3 and 12-13, where these three concepts are mentioned as Christian paradigms. See also Momigliano (1987) 75-9 for the concept of faith and hope in I-century BC Rome and Athens.

[283] Warner (2005) 123.

[284] Barchiesi (2001) 132-3.

It has not been properly noted that, in addition to these Virgilian parallels, other sinister episodes of ancient Latin epics lurk in the passage. Their presence comes as no surprise since the theme of divine wrath is common in that genre. Even an Epicurean like Lucretius resorts to it when he explains the strife of the elements (water, fire, wind, earth). Sometimes one of them seems to overcome the others, as is illustrated in the myth of Phaethon, where the young boy accidentally sets the world on fire and is punished by Jupiter with his thunder (Lucr. 5.399-401: *at pater omnipotens ira tum percitus acri / magnanimum Phaetonta repenti fulminis ictu / deturbavit equis in terram*). Ovid also seems to be present here, though not his account of the same myth.[285] It is a well-known fact that divine punishments are recurrent in the *Metamorphoses.* Leto's acts of revenge upon Niobe and the Lycians is imitated in this same verse (Ov. *Met.* 6.313-4: *Tum vero cuncti manifesta numinis ira / femina virque timent*). The introduction of the Father's order echoes the mysterious voice warning Cadmus that he will eventually turn into a serpent (Ov. *Met.* 3.96: *vox subito audita est*),[286] and of Cornix's metamorphosis (2.587: *mox alta per auras*).[287] Pagan episodes where the divine wrath is foreshadowed or staged are here interpreted and adapted by Vida for the sake of a narrative delivered from a Christian point of view. Dido's violation of her vow to Sychaeus, Phaethon's disregard for his father's advice, or Niobe's disdain for Leto are now turned into an indirect rejection of the Son of Man, an act of disbelief that might have repercussions on the destiny of the individual in lack of a moral emendation.

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[285] As Schiesaro (2014) argued, Ovid had already criticised Lucretius' *Weltsansschaung* in his rendition of the Phaethon episode in *Metamorphoses* 2.

[286] Barchiesi (2007) 138-9 tellingly indicates that there is no mention of Cadmus' responsibility for his destiny in the *Metamorphoses*. The hero has just killed the serpent on the soil where he will soon found Thebes. Not only does he not boast for his victory, but also, if he has blood on his hand, it is because he wanted to avenge his companions.

[287] All the oldest textual witnesses of the *Metamorphoses* -fragments and excerpts- read *acta* instead of *alta*. See Tarrant's (2004) apparatus. This *lectio* is even closer to Vida's expression. Here Cornix's prayer is answered, whereas the punishment will come later on in her new life.

3.5 Totality and Contingency

The discrepancy in terms of eschatological goals does not permeate every aspect of Vida's dialogue with ancient epics. His poem strives for totality not only because it is motivated by its Christian content, which purports to be valid for every human being of every time,[288] but also because it places itself in the context of a literary tradition characterised by a tendency to totality or maximization.[289] Such a tendency is strictly connected to the teleological nature of the epic genre,[290] –this is valid even for those interpretations that deny the presence of a *telos*, like the so-called "pessimistic" readings of the *Aeneid*–, and is carried out in different manners in the Virgilian epic tradition.[291]

Ancient Latin epic poems and the *Christiad* –and the Gospels too, for that matter–, share a central feature, namely, the relevance that the contingency of the events narrated has for humanity as a whole, both temporally and spatially. Some of these poems are concerned with a universal message that aims to affect humans beyond the circumstances that generated it. With the *De Rerum Natura* Lucretius wanted to promulgate a doctrine that explains the true nature of the universe and tries to go even beyond the boundaries of time and space.[292] The discoveries of his founder, Epicurus, are going to release humankind from the terror of superstition.[293] While an entire book, the fifth, is devoted to the history of the whole human race and of the entire world, overall, the concept of infinity[294] and the goal of offering a universal ethic[295] pervade the poem.

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[288] At least for those born after Christ.

[289] Hardie (1993b) 1-2.

[290] Quint (1993) 45-6 traces back this characteristic to the tight connection between epic and power.

[291] As thoroughly explained by Hardie (1986) 377-86.

[292] Schiesaro (2007) 52. On the universalising theories of the poem, see Kennedy (2000).

[293] 1.62-79: *humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret / in terris oppressa gravi sub religione* [...] *primum ante oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra* / [...] *effringere ut arta / naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret.*

[294] Morenval (2015) 180. See also Schrijvers (1970) 78-82.

[295] Boyancé (1963) 9 sees a similarity between the universality of the Epicurean message and that of Christianity; see also Hardie (1986) 76.

In the *Aeneid,* the central role of Rome in universal history is suggested by Jupiter in his speech to Venus, when he reassures her that he is going to provide her descendants with a limitless and everlasting empire.[296] This cosmic dimension represents a critical factor in the poem.[297] The cosmos is depicted as closely bound up with the destiny of the Roman Empire, as is shown by the Speech of Anchises, where Rome is said to equal its territory to the earth and its spirit to Olympus,[298] or by the depiction of the Battle of Actium on the Shield of Aeneas as a celestial conflict.[299] The time of the narrative has a paradigmatic function, but it is strictly bound to the present age of Virgil: the vicissitudes of Aeneas and his Trojans are the mythical origins of a historical and divine design that culminates with the principate of Augustus.

The *De Rerum Natura* and the *Aeneid* are concerned with the description of the universe and of man's right place in it.[300] The subsequent tradition usually displays a less solid teleological sense but still maintains an impulse to maximization. In the fictional world of the *Metamorphoses,* Ovid covers a period that spans from the creation of the universe to his own age. This sort of "universal history", however, does not proceed in any rigid chronological order.[301] At the same time, the settings of the myriad of stories that make up the narrative broadly describe a trajectory that goes from East to West.[302] Ovid distances himself from Virgil in that, for example, none of the myths recounted can account for the totality of life, and the plot does not have a focal point as in the *Aeneid*.[303] Whether this implies that he casts off his teleological responsibility as an epic writer[304] and that his staging of a *Weltgeschichte* does not lead up to a climax,[305] the contingent events of the plot retain the form of a history of the world,[306] at least on an impressionistic level.[307] The narrative is maximised with regard to both its spatial and temporal limits.

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[296] Speaking of a concept such as "universal history" in the ancient Graeco-Roman world does not violate an emic perspective, even though it actually belongs to historiography.

[297] Many scholars have investigated this area. To name but a few, Pöschl (1950) reads the *Aeneid* as a symbolic representation of both Roman history and human life in general. Boyancé (1954) is a concise and general examination of the 'cosmic sense' that informs each Virgilian poem. The idea according to which the Virgilian cosmos displays "sympathy" for men permeates Otis' essay (1963). Thornton (1976) interprets the image of the world in the *Aeneid* as a coherent cosmic reality under the control of Jupiter. For an extensive analysis of the sources and the use of cosmological themes in the poem, see Hardie (1986). Braund (1997) provides a synopsis of Virgil's philosophical and religious ideas concerning the cosmic dimension.

[298] *Aen.* 6.781-2: *en huius, nate, auspiciis illa incluta Roma / imperium terris, animos aequabit Olympo*.

[299] *Aen.* 8.698-706. See Hardie (1986) 69-83, 98-110, 364-66.

[300] *Ibidem* 171-2.

[301] Ov. *Met.* 1.2-4: *di, coeptis (nam vos mutatis et illa) / aspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi / ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen*. See Ludwig (1965) 74, Rosati (1994) 14, Barchiesi (1989) 91 and (1991) 6. The temporal sequence of the poem has been both denied, e.g. Schmidt (1991) 37-47, and defended, e.g. Wheeler (2002). On the criteria. or lack thereof, of the configuration of time in the *Metamorphoses,* see Feeney (1999).

The civil war narrated by Lucan in the *Bellum Civile* is an event of cosmic proportions that affects the whole world,[308] and offers the chance for the poet to question the role of Rome in it.[309] Caesar's victory over Pompey has repercussions for an undefined span of time in the future.[310] Likewise, Flavian epics thematise the genre's vocation to totality and resort to cosmological imagery to suggest the paradigmatic stance of their narratives and their role as new poetical "archetypes".[311] In Statius' *Thebaid,* for example, the destiny of Thebes is assimilated to that of humanity,[312] and the power of the emperor to that of Jupiter.[313] The Second Punic War narrated by Silius Italicus in the *Punica* can be interpreted as a manifestation of the cosmic struggle between chaos and order.[314] Valerius Flaccus, with his *Argonautica*, depicts the expedition of the Argonauts as the inauguration of a new world order, thus placing it within the framework of universal history.[315]

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[302] Rosati (2002) 281. For the role of geography in the *Metamorphoses* and bibliography on the topic, see Lindheim (2010), who analyses the story of Vertumnus and Pomona in book 14 as a paradigm for the Augustan desire to order space, and Ziogas (2014) on toponomastic wordplay.
[303] Segal (1985) 59-60.
[304] Barchiesi (1999) 113-4.
[305] Rosati (2002) 281.
[306] Rosati (2006) 344.
[307] Galinsky (1975) 98.
[308] Marti (1945) discusses how the historical setting of the plot has a universal meaning. Lapidge (1979) is a significant analysis of Lucan's debt to Stoic cosmology. Further considerations in Feeney (1991) 278, Narducci (2002) 42-50, McIntyre (2008) 40-86, with a focus on the cosmic afflatus of the landscape, and Myers (2011) 402-8.
[309] Geography in Lucan has been discussed extensively, and even by looking at the most recent contributions, each containing long bibliographies, one can get a sense of the different, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, *vistas* on the topic. Pogorselski (2011), for example, argues that Rome is depicted as the centre of the world up until the battle of Pharsalus in book 7, while in the following books the city represents only the centre of the Western world. Myers (2011) stresses the obliteration of the boundaries of the Roman world in the poem. Rimell (2015) 241-52 sheds light on the poet's inclination to mesh closure and openness of space.
[310] Luc. 7.638-40: *maius ab hac acie quam quod sua saecula ferrent / vulnus habent populi; plus est quam vita salusque / quod perit: in totum mundi prosternimus aevum*. See Bartsch (2011) 311-13.
[311] Fucecchi (2013) 107-8.
[312] Vessey (1973) 91.
[313] Rebeggiani (2018) 167-76.

The *Christiad* displays a similar impulse towards maximisation. Its religious content pushes this tendency to the extreme. The Word became flesh, the Father sent his Son to take away the sins of humankind and to redeem it through His death and Resurrection.[316] Thus, a New Covenant is instituted between God and human beings, who now have the possibility of knowing the true nature of their Creator and of aspiring to eternal life. Vida voices this totalizing drive from the very beginning of the poem, where he resorts to one of the expressions by which ancient Latin epic writers gave voice to their aspiration to totality:

> *Qui mare, qui terras, qui coelum numine comples,*
> *spiritus alme, tuo liceat mihi munere regem*
> *bis genitum canere, e superi qui sede parentis*
> *virginis intactae gravidam descendit in alvum*
> *mortalesque auras hausit puer, ut genus ultus*
> *humanum eriperet tenebris et carcere iniquo*
> *morte sua manesque pios inferret Olympo.*

(Vida, *Chr.* 1.1-7)

The poem's opening line presents the tripartite division of the world into the realms of sky, sea, and earth, a commonplace of ancient epic poetry.[317] The incipit of the *De Rerum Natura* is a famous example. Lucretius opens his poem with a hymn to Venus, highlighting her power over these three spheres (Lucr. 1.2-4: *alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa / quae*

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[314] von Albrecht (1964) 143, Vessey (1974).

[315] Hershkowitz (1998b) 37, 49, Zissos (2005) 504, Clauss (2014) 104.

[316] Some remarks on the cosmic significance of the theme narrated in the poem can be found in Di Cesare (1964) 222-3 and 253-4 and (1980) 154-6.

[317] Cf. Lucr. 1.278-9: *quae mare, quae terras, quae denique nubila caeli / verrunt*; Lucr. 5.594-5: *quod maria ac terras omnes caelumque rigando / compleat.* Hardie (1986) 293- 325 examined Virgil's debt to and use of this imagery.

mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis / concelebras).[318] Both passages are invocations to propitious divine entities, one to Venus, the other to the Holy Spirit (Lucr. 1.2: *alma Venus*). The deity who represents the vital power of procreation is substituted by the Holy Spirit, the "Giver of Life" according to the Nicene Creed.[319] Previous scholarship has already stressed this similarity, but it has not pointed out that addressing the Holy Spirit with the adjective *almus* had become somewhat common by that time.[320] But it is hard to deny that Vida's passage has a classicising epic flavour. The mentioning of the trifold division of the world at the outset of the poem is a feature that the *De Rerum Natura* and the *Christiad* share with other epics, first and foremost Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ov. *Met.* 1.5: *Ante mare et terras et, quod tegit omnia caelum*).[321] Late antique poets too made use of it: Juvencus, for instance, placed it at the beginning of his work (Iuvenc. *praef.* 9-11: *Immortale nihil mundi compage tenetur, / non orbis, non regna hominum, non aurea Roma, / non mare, non tellus, non ignea sidera coeli*).[322]

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[318] The discussion over this intertext has already been mentioned in the introduction. The Lucretian hymn was a widespread poetic model in early sixteenth century Neo-Latin poetry. See Prosperi (2004) 139–158; Haskell (2007) 200.

[319] The Nicene Creed defines the Holy Spirit with these words at least since the First Council of Constantinople (381): Καὶ ἐς τὸ Πνεύμα τὸ Ἄγιον, τὸ Κύριον, τὸ ζῳοποιόν.

[320] E.g. Castellano da Bassano, *poema Venetiane pacis* 1.19: *O pater omnipotens, o fili, o spiritus alme*; Convenevole da Prato, *regia carmina ad Robertum Andecauensem* 92.1: *Spiritus alme veni, tu sancte Paraclite*; Ugolino Verino, *Paradisus* 81: *Spiritus alme, precor, nostro succurre labori.*

[321] Frivoli (2016) 14-5 compares the Lucretian and the Ovidian passages. A similar expression, with a different third member, would indicate the totality of the territory under the control of Rome by Lucan, who identifies the latter with the whole world in this instance (Luc. 1.109-11: *dividitur ferro regnum, populisque potentis, / quae mare, quae terras, quae totum possidet orbem, / non cepit fortuna duos*). Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 7-8 argue that there is no structural correspondence between Lucretius' and Vida's incipit and that the hints at ancient literature are only formal and do not pertain to the content, even because none of them is taken from a proemium. In their argumentation, the fifth line of the *Metamorphoses* does not seem to count as part of a proemium, perhaps because the first four lines may be read as constituting a unit. They penetratingly observe that the three spheres of influence were distributed to three gods in classical mythology, with Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades controlling, respectively, the sky, the sea, and the Underworld, while in Vida the entire universe is the dominion of one single God.

[322] Cf. the following Christian writers, though they did not locate the tripartition at the incipit. Prud. *Apoth.* 153-4: *qui mare qui terras qui lucida sidera fecit / ignibus et mediis sucros texit alumnos*; Paul Nol. *Carm. App.* 3.75-6: *qui mare qui caelum terrasque et quidquid in his est / omnibus immistis extra vel intra regis?* The totality of the world is referred to in the same terms also in a non-epic text such as *Anthologia Latina* 718.12-4: *si mare, si terras caelum mundumque gubernas, / me quoque cunctorum patrem, venerabilis, audi. / Alme parens rerum, supplex precor.* . This manner of addressing the totality of the world in a hexameter would have an extensive reception. It figures, for example, in an inscription in the Bargello at Florence: "Florence, which is the master of the sea, the earth and the whole globe" (*Florentia…/ quae mare quae terram, quae totum possidet orbem*); the quotation is taken from Boyde (1981) 20.

The main interlocutor, indeed, is Virgil as usual: it comes as no surprise that Vida recounts Christ's birth by hinting at the myth of the Golden Age, the goal of that "immobilization of history" pursued by Augustus, to which Virgil referred in *Eclogue* 4 and which was identified with the era of Christianity by later Christian readers.[323] The coming of that new era is due to the birth of a divine child who descends from the sky (*Ecl.* 4.7-8: *iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto. / tu modo nascenti puero*) and is welcomed by the entire cosmos (*Ecl.* 4.50-1: *aspice convexo nutantem pondere mundum, / terrasque tractusque maris caelumque profundum*).[324] The reach of Jesus' mission embraces the destiny of the world and of the pious souls of the just who were born before him, thus resembling Aeneas' task (*Aen.* 1.6: *inferretque deos Latio*). The beginning of the vicissitudes of the *Christiad,* which start from a point that is close to its last events from a chronological point of view, has a parallel in the end of the narrative of the *Aeneid.* Here Jupiter and Juno come to terms with one another and reach a compromise that will have long-time repercussions for the world (*Chr.* 1.38: *ventum ad supremum* – *Aen.* 12.803: *ventum ad supremum est*). At that point, Jesus is ready to enter Jerusalem and to suffer the Passion, events that are necessary for the salvation of humanity. Similarly, the darkness and the slavery from which Christ delivers humankind is akin to the condition of the souls who need purification in the Underworld of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 6.733-4: *neque auras / dispiciunt clausae tenebris et carcere caeco*).[325] The context of the source is cosmological and presents the same tripartite division mentioned above (*Aen.* 6.724: *Principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis / lucentemque globum lunae Titaniaque astra / spiritus intus alit*).

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[323] Hardie (1993b) 2-3. For a discussion of and bibliography on the Christian interpretation of *Eclogue* 4 see Benko (1980).

[324] See also Di Cesare (1964) 157-9, Glodzik (2014) 85 and Houghton (2019) 229-30. One of these lines is repeated in *Georgics* 4, where Virgil describes the belief in a divinity that goes through earth, sea and sky (*Georg.* 4.221-2: *dixere; deum namque ire per omnis / terrasque tractusque maris caelumque profundum*).

[325] The metaphor of darkness and slavery was a common one in ancient literature –see Horsfall (2013) 494-5 with bibliography– and in Christian thought (e.g. the beginning of the Gospel of John 1:4-5: *in ipso vita erat et vita erat lux hominum et lux in tenebris lucet et tenebrae eam non conprehenderunt*).

The universal consequences of Christ's Resurrection are mentioned several times, but it is through contingent human actions that they affect the rest of the world. The resonance of the Apostles' testimony and preaching interests all lands, and the foundation of the Church gives life to the most beautiful of all ages (Vida *Chr.* 6.976: *illorum*[326] *vox fines exit in omnes*; 6.985-6: *Toto surgit gens aurea mundo / seclorumque oritur longe pulcherrimus ordo*[327] - *Ecl.* 4.5: *magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo*; 4.9: *toto surget gens aurea mundo*).[328] The Apostles' evangelism will reach even the most remote places on earth, where the power of the sun is at its peak or where the Ocean circles back, just like the news of the Trojan war according to Ilioneus' speech to king Latinus (*Aen.* 7.225-7: *audiit et si quem tellus extrema refuso / summovet Oceano et si quem extenta plagarum / quattuor in medio dirimit plaga solis iniqui* - *Chr.* 6.977-9: *Audiit, et siquem medio ardens aethere iniquo / sidere desertis plaga dividit invia terris, / quique orbem extremo circumsonat aequore pontus*).[329] The spatial dimension of their mission is indirectly associated with Aeneas' journey (*Aen.* 3.381-3: *principio Italiam, quam tu iam rere propinquam / vicinosque, ignare, paras invadere portus, / longa procul longis via dividit invia terris*).

3.6 Intertextuality in the *Christiad*

This analysis of the tendency toward totality and contingency has given us a preview of the richness of the intertextual framework of the *Christiad*. An analysis of Vida's practice of literary imitation in this latter poem will lay the groundwork for the ensuing part of the thesis. But before delving into it, a preliminary remark needs to be made. The conclusions reached by this study should be deemed as provisional, not definitive. Wide-ranging scrutiny of the intertextual techniques of other Neo-Latin poets would enable us to better contextualise Vida's by way of comparison and to get as close as possible to an emic perspective. Unfortunately, it would require an entire separate treatment because of the number of issues and texts to take into account. The very concept of authorship in the Renaissance, to mention just one of the central questions, differs from that of a twenty-first century reader, and one wonders to what extent it does from that of a Roman of the first century BC or the first century AD. Borrowing entire phrases or, in the case of prose writing, even paragraphs, from authoritative texts without necessarily signalling the source was common practice for centuries and in many countries. The reliance on ancient writers in particular is, as it were, inscribed in the DNA of Neo-Latin literature as we saw in chapter 1. This feature crosses national boundaries and literary genres. It is a truism that Greco-Roman classical culture, far from being completely forgotten in the middle ages, became almost ubiquitous in the intellectual *milieu* of Europe during the Renaissance, for all the spatio-temporal differences that one can find in different parts of the continent. Consequently, it is sometimes possible to come across an ancient source that has been utilised by more than one post-classical writer. One cannot certainly exclude *a priori* the possibility that Neo-Latin authors could also draw ancient expressions directly from medieval or Neo-Latin texts, while being unaware of the original context of said expressions, or from ancient texts that had been cited by previous medieval or Neo-Latin authors unknown to them.[330]

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[326] The Apostles.

[327] See also *Chr.* 1.905-10. On the Virgilian colouring of this passage see Hardie (2012) 419.

[328] Cf. *Chr.* 3.312 (e*t toto surgens aurea mundo*). See Kallendorf (1995) 61 and (1999) 123, Glodzik (2014) 87-8 and Houghton (2019) 231-5.

[329] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 411.

In the *Christiad* there are phrases that appear also in both classical and post-classical sources. They are signalled in the following chapters, though not thoroughly analysed, another endeavour that would be too ambitious for this research.[331] All things considered, direct contacts between an ancient text and a Neo-Latin one are at least as plausible, given the diffusion of the former and the authoritative status they enjoyed in the early modern era. As we will see, in his epic Vida precisely dialogues with his ancient predecessors, although the interpreter should keep the door open for potential connections with post-classical authors that extracted words from the same classical passages.

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[330] Since many verbal echoes that had previously gone unnoticed in Medieval and Neo-Latin works, not only in Italy, have now been brought to light, perhaps the time for such an overview has come. Moreover, the confessional nature of many of said works begs the question that Hardie (2019) ch. 8 raised for late antique Latin literature: how does intertextuality between Christian texts differ from intertextuality between Christian and Pagan texts?

In keeping with the Alexandrian convention that informed Latin poetry from its very beginnings, Vida simultaneously embodies the figure of the poet and that of the critic.[332] His attitude towards his forerunners seems to reproduce the ancient dialectic of literary *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, because it assumes the imitation of a model and the independence of the receiving work. It is also multifaceted, in that it blends admiration and criticism at the same time. Just as, for instance, Virgil adapted Lucretian themes and language to his ends, or Lucan conceived his *Bellum Civile* as an anti-*Aeneid* indirectly acknowledging the relevance of the Virgilian poem, so Vida engages in a dialogue with his models by appropriating their *modus operandi*. Yet, whether his imitative strategy reaches the same level of complexity as that of the ancients consistently, sporadically or ever at all is debatable.[333] The substantial dependence of a poem like the *Aeneid* on the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and Apollonius' *Argonautica*,[334] which works not only at the macrotextual level but also at the microtextual one to the point of transliteration (e.g. *Aen.* 9.767: *Alcandrumque Haliumque Noemonaque Prytanimque* – *Il.* 5.678: Ἄλκανδρόν θ' Ἅλιόν τε Νοήμονά τε Πρύτανίν τε) or appropriation of entire lines or hemistichs (e.g. *Aen.* 4.584-5=9.459-60: *Et iam prima novo spargebat*

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[331] More on this problem in the "Conclusion".

[332] Hardie (1993b) xi.

[333] E.g. Virgil's imitation of Lucretius, as Hardie (1986) 233-7 illustrated, largely relies on the latter's revisionist practice of unmasking arguments held by previous philosophers and poets. This pattern of criticism, in turn, has its roots in the Epicurean procedure of contentious contrast. One might look in vain for something analogous in Vida, though, as we have observed in chapter 2, a self-reflexive appropriation of imitative patterns emerges in *DAP* 3.237.

[334] For the first two, see Knauer (1964), for the latter, Nelis (2001).

lumine terras / Tithoni croceum linquens Aurora cubile - Lucr. 2.144: *primum aurora novo cum spargit lumine terras*; Furius Bibaculus fr. 7 Büchner: *interea Oceani linquens Aurora cubile*),[335] is arguably more complicated than the reliance of the *Christiad* on classical texts. The fluidity of the intertextual frameworks of Ovid, Lucan and the Flavian epicists is foreign to Vida's poem. However, such a gap seems more comprehensible, at least from the point of view of linguistic imagination. We are dealing with a poem written during the sixteenth century; no matter how vital the Latin language was during the Renaissance, it was nonetheless an artificial medium in a world where people spoke vernacular idioms as their first languages. It would not be fair to demand from Vida the same linguistic control and creative force of his predecessors. Despite this, his outstanding competence in Latin enabled him to draw expressions from his models as if they were repertoires of a formulaic language and to mould them in a much less rigid way than the adaptations of the cento literary form.

This observation brings us to the conundrum pinpointed by Pigman and mentioned in the introduction. Does the presence of poetic models affect the meaning of the receiving text, and, if so, to what extent?[336] The question may be diffracted into a series of problems so subtle –and conventional in studies of allusion– that it is usually hard to reach definitive conclusions. First of all, one should establish whether parallel expressions are simply phrasing common to the Latin language, especially in the hexameter, or are taken from one text in particular. Sometimes, both these possibilities might be true. When an author can be identified as the model, it is difficult to determine if these expressions are borrowed because they simply convey the same message, and Vida resorted to them as elements of a poetic repertoire, or because they are an allusion to the passage of the author imitated.[337] Vida openly admitted that he alluded to ancient authors (*DAP* 3.257-8: *Saepe mihi placet antiquis alludere dictis, / Atque aliud longe verbis proferre sub iisdem*), but did not classify his borrowing.[338] That is what Di Cesare did, although he only considered the Virgilian model. He identified three types of categories: the commonplace phrase, the echo, and the evocative allusion.[339] The commonplace phrase is a ready-made conventional expression that makes composition easier, is not attached to any particular passage of the source(s), and does not add any connotation to the receiving text. Its function is to weave the stylistic texture of the poem. The echo derives from specific but not crucial lines of a source and is used in a non-crucial passage of the receiving text, thus serving the general purpose of reminding the reader of the former. Lastly, evocative allusion is a linguistic correspondence that evokes the same emotions and meanings of the model either by analogy or by contrast. In general, both passages involved are relevant in their respective contexts. For an allusion to work, it needs to be neither obscure, in which case it has no impact, nor incongruent, for instance the connection between a critical passage and a trivial one. As sound as it seems, this classification cannot always be employed effectively. The fact that even Di Cesare sometimes finds it hard to distinguish between these categories –e.g. echoes from proper allusions–[340] indicates that it is not convenient to follow this schema assiduously.

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[335] Even if only for the language gap between Virgil and his Greek predecessors. I owe the distinction between "microtextual" and "macrotextual allusion" to McGill (2005) 24-30 and Pelttari (2014) 98-103.

[336] Pucci (1998) 87 does not seem to be far from Pigman when he states that in the Renaissance parallels were gathered together and that the question was never one of engagement between an imitating and an imitated text, but on how a particular imitating passage "would seem to fare verbally, rhetorically, and in terms of effect against its…model".

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[337] Greene (1982) 48-53 argues that the reader of Renaissance imitation -but the problem could be extended at least to readers of classical imitation as well- is faced with the arduous task of making such distinctions as the one between “allusions”, which are to be recognised in order to read the text properly, and “repetitions”, whose provenience is irrelevant for the creation of meaning.

[338] *DAP* 3.213-16 (*Aspice, ut exuvias veterumque insigna nobis / Aptemus: rerum accipimus nunc clara reperta, / Nunc seriem atque animum verborum, verba quoque ipsa, / Nec pudet interdum alterius nos ore loquutos*) is the closest description by the poet himself to a categorization.

[339] Di Cesare (1964) 141-50.

[340] *Ibidem* 146.

Along with these scenarios, one could contemplate the possibility that non-intentional echoes could affect or clarify the meaning of the text all the same.[341] In this light, what Di Cesare called commonplace phrases might be viewed as linguistic clues of the epic code.[342] Moreover, even such apparently irrelevant points of contact as literary *topoi*, which connect multiple texts simultaneously, might shed light on the meaning of the text analysed.[343] Studying the relationship of the *Christiad* with ancient Latin epics entails reconstructing the creative process behind the former, considering that the construction of its contents and its language is so dependent on those poems as to determine how the act of its production must have been carried out. The identification of these models makes the legibility of Vida's poem less superficial, given that they are genetically related and, as it were, share the same matrix. When it comes to interpreting points of contact between two or more texts, the procedure that seems to get closer to verifiability stems from an empirical analysis of single passages, of their relation to the whole framework of the text, and, ultimately, to the literary tradition to which the work in question belongs.[344]

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[341] See Conte (1974), who challenged the notion of intentional allusion described by Pasquali (1942) by resorting to the structuralist concept of 'literary system'. Conte (2014) chapter 2, translated into English (2017), dismissed the further steps taken by subsequent readers of imitation. Ironically, he discusses the same Virgilian borrowing of Catullus 66, which was resumed by Vida in the *DAP*, though he does not consider the latter. See also *ibidem,* 50-1 for a discussion of Carducci's reflection on an unconscious line of his in which he echoes a line by Petrarch. In turn, Petrarch himself (*Familiares* 22.2 and 23.19), as we have seen, had pondered on some unconscious reminiscence of Virgilian and Ovidian lines in his *Bucolicum Carmen* (6.193).

[342] See Conte's (1974), (1978) analysis of the "epic code" in the *Aeneid* and the further distinction between the role of Homer in that poem as "exemplary model", *i.e.* a meaningful interlocutor in specific passages, and as "code model", a source for markers signalling the literary system of the text with its set of rules and conventions. Barchiesi (1984) 91-122 proposed an opposition between the "example model" and the "genre model". A similar use of the epic code in biblical epic is Nonnus' *Paraphrase;* see Matzner (2008) 127-8.

[343] Hinds (1998) 34-41 offers a valuable treatment of the topic.

[344] If readers want to adopt a deconstructionist standpoint, they could maintain that the idea of a broader framework and a literary tradition is circular, since it depends ultimately on the reader's bias regarding what they are supposed to be. In this respect, even the stopping point in the creation of meaning is ideologically determined, as has been pointed out by Fowler (1997) 25. From a hermeneutic perspective, it could be added that interpretation takes place at the moment of reception and is the result of a dialogue. See Martindale (1993) 29-34.

Some correspondences may raise concerns about their poetic congruency or intentionality.[345] This is the case with various points of contact with Lucretius, whose presence in a Christian poem might seem problematic, especially in passages sensitive from a moral point of view. An example of formulaic usage[346] of Lucretian language occurs in Jesus' speech to his disciples about Judas' upcoming betrayal at *Chr.* 2.684-6: *Unus erit vestrum (vix, o vix credere tantum / fas scelus) insidiis prodet qui me hostibus ultro / Haud me animi fallit*. This declaration of awareness resembles Lucretius' recognition of the novelty of Epicurean doctrine for Latin literature and for a Roman audience (1.136-7: *Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta / difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse*; 1.921-2: *Nunc age quod superest cognosce et clarius audi. nec me animi fallit quam sint obscura*; 5.97-8: *nec me animi fallit quam res nova miraque menti / accidat exitium caeli terraeque futurum*). Since the contexts of these passages are extremely different but the meaning they convey is similar, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the point of contact may be a coincidence. However, it could also be due to the mere fact that the expression emerged from Vida's memory as a fragment of poetic language. It cannot be excluded either that Vida was so well acquainted with ancient authors that he intentionally resorted to them as to poetic repertoires, from which he could borrow the words that he needed on a specific occasion. In these cases, the words in the later text might not function as references to the old text and their relationship is undetermined.[347] Sometimes, this operation verges on the cento technique, as we have already suggested. Mary Magdalene's reaction to the sight of the empty tomb and the thought that the corpse of Jesus has been removed by his enemies (*Chr.*

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[345] The distinction between the lexicon of allusivity/intentionality and intertextuality/lack of intention in classical studies is not as sharp as it was during the second half of the twentieth century; see Farrell (2005) 98-9.

[346] By "formulaic usage" I mean an expression in the style of the author imitated. Schiesaro (1990) made a case for a distinction between "repetitions" and proper *formulae* in Lucretius.

[347] What Pelttari (2014) 131 calls "non-referential allusions" in late antique Latin poetry. He excludes from that category fortuitous coincidences.

6.335: *et nemora et montes gemitu silvasque replebat*) is a verbatim replica of Lucretius' description of a primitive man devoured by wild beasts in the account of the history of humanity (Lucr. 5.992: *et nemora ac montis gemitu silvasque replebat*).

Besides these echoes, the presence of an author like Lucretius in the *Christiad* seems to have a thematic function. The *De Rerum Natura* is a recurrent model for the description of physical and psychological phenomena, as we will see in chapter 4. When Jesus teaches from a boat addressing the multitude of people who eagerly gathered on the shore to lend an ear to what he has to say, nature reacts to his presence. The sea agitated by the wind suddenly becomes calm and the fronds of the nearby trees become quiet and still (Vida, *Chr.* 4.870-3: *Ipse loquebatur, circum sedata silebant / aequora ubique modo spirantibus incita flabris, / frondiferaeque, domus avium,*[348] *sine murmure*[349] *circum / stabant immotae procurvo in littore silvae.*) The calming effect of Jesus' presence mirrors the vital impulse of Venus at the beginning of the *De Rerum Natura* (Lucr. 1.17-8: *denique per maria ac montis fluviosque rapaces / frondiferasque domos avium camposque virentis*),[350] and the opposite movement caused by gusts (6.426-8: *nam fit ut interdum tamquam demissa columna / in mare de caelo descendat, qua freta circum / fervescunt graviter spirantibus incita flabris*). During the flight to Egypt, Nature bows down at the sight of the Child and its reaction is described largely in Lucretian terms. The murmuring trees are laurels, *lauricomae,* a word whose only ancient occurrence is in a simile in Lucretius' discussion of thunderbolts (*Chr.* 3.830-1: *At puero blandiri murmure silvae / lauricomae* - Lucr. 6.152: *lauricomos ut si per montis flamma vagetur*). Similarly, the breezes whispering to the Child and the wet rocks covered with moss are adaptations of the lines in the *De Rerum Natura* in which, respectively, breezes are mentioned as signs of the mortality of the world (*Chr.* 3.831-2: *et ramis capita accurvare reflexis / aurarumque leves animae indulgere susurro* - Lucr. 5.236: *aurarumque leves animae calidique vapores*), and primitive men are said to live close to rivulets (*Chr.* 3.838: *umida saxa super nitido viridantia musco* - Lucr. 5.951: *umida saxa super viridi stillantia musco*).

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[348] This Lucretian intertext was not mentioned by Gardner (2009) and von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013).

[349] The line seems to echo also Luc. 1.260: *rura silent, mediusque tacet sine murmure pontus,* a similes that compares the terror of the inhabitants of Ariminum at Caesar's arrival to the calming of the sea during wintertime.

[350] See also, on the contrary, the wood resounding with bird sounds among the consequences of raindrops (Lucr. 1.255-6: *hinc laetas urbes pueris florere videmus / frondiferasque novis avibus canere undique silvas*).

Many of the emotions felt by the characters are grounded in Lucretian images, e.g. the fear of the woman taken in adultery, here renamed Susanna, after being sentenced to death by the priests (*Chr.* 1.775-7: *Stabat conspectu in medio tremebunda puella / iam suffusa oculos mortis nigrore propinquae / et positis terram genibus submissa petebat*). The similarities with some Lucretian passages on fear is striking: the terror of Acheron, which Epicureanism purports to banish, turns everything to black (Lucr. 3.37-9: *et metus ille foras praeceps Acheruntis agendus, / funditus humanam qui vitam turbat ab imo, / omnia suffundens mortis nigrore*). Even more important is the representation of Susanna as a counterpart of Lucretius' Iphigenia, who is about to be sacrificed by the leaders of the Achaeans (Lucr. 1.92: *muta metu terram genibus summissa petebat*), an act presented as proof of the impiety of traditional religion.

These last instances reveal that at least some of the *loci similes* engage with both form and content. So it can reasonably be inferred that these are a feature of Vida's epic technique. What is more, they may reflect different allusive strategies. We should read some of the echoes of ancient authors in the *Christiad* from this perspective. Keeping our focus on Lucretius, two different -but traditional- patterns of imitation emerge, viz. appropriation and *oppositio in imitando* (or opposition).[351] Peter's wallowing in pain for his denial (Vida, *Chr.*

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[351] On the latter notion see, for instance, Kuiper (1896) 114, Giangrande (1967) 85, Thomas (1986), 185–9. Nonnus is a classic example of a Christian author simultaneously "guided by" and "rivalling" with an eminent pagan model, Homer. On their relationship, see Bannert and Kröll (2016) 504 with bibliography.

2.958-60: *Eum aethera pandens / saepe oriens, solis saepe ater vesper in antris / invenit luctu indulgentem eademque querentem*) echoes Nature's reproach of those who indulge in self-pity for their death (Lucr. 3.933-4: *"quid tibi tanto operest, mortalis, quod nimis aegris / luctibus indulges?*), in what seems to be an appropriation of Lucretian content. Both Peter and those who refuse to accept their death are to be rebuked but from different standpoints. Lucretius' Nature reprimands those who lament their own demise, while Peter mourns for his cowardice. A case of opposition is represented by the accusation of Jesus made by Annas, one of the priests of Jerusalem, that lead to the arrest and Crucifixion of Christ. According to him Jesus will restrain the sun and remove the stars from a subdued sky (5.128-9: *Et iam iam volet ipsum restinguere solem, / sideraque obsesso verbis deducere coelo*), deeds that parallel the Giants' attempt at extinguishing the light of the sun (Lucr. 5.117-20: *putes ritu par esse Gigantum / pendere eos poenas immani pro scelere omnis / qui ratione sua disturbent moenia mundi / praeclarumque velint caeli restringuere solem*). The thematic link between the two passages is also signalled by the fact that Annas is questioning Jesus' divine nature and presenting him as an impostor trying to impose a new false religion (*Chr.* 5.113-4: *Nonne vides haec religio quo se nova vertat / orgia quo, coetusque et nocturni comitatus?*). Lucretius is trying to label as false superstition the belief in the divine nature of the world. Vida makes an enemy of the truth (Jesus' divinity) resort to an argument similar to the one that his predecessor used to support his views (the world is not divine). These two procedures should be read in the light of an ultimate opposition to Epicureanism, whereby both the inert or "neutral" and the more ideologically controversial intertexts represent different ways to confute a dangerous doctrine in need of correction.

Chapter 4. Knowledge

It is reasonable to assume that the *Christiad* has a didactic dimension since it is based on sacred texts, the Gospels. Their function is to record the events that to their perspective led to the redemption of humankind through Christ's death and Resurrection and to shape people's lives in light of his teachings. In the extratextual sources mentioned in chapter 3, Vida himself seems to be aware of the pedagogical aspect of his poem. His official commentator, named Botta, a sort of new Servius, dwelled on it extensively.[352] This educational aspiration shares with ancient didactic poetry the goal of passing knowledge on to the audience/readers.[353] It goes without saying that the *Christiad* is an epic poem *stricto sensu* and not a didactic one, despite this dimension.[354] In this respect, Vida's operation could be compared to that of other writers like Dante,[355] Sannazaro, and Milton, who are said to have written Christian "epics of knowledge".[356] The centrality of knowledge in the poem calls for in-depth soundings, and it is for this reason that the present chapter is dedicated to it and its relationship with ancient Latin epics.

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[352] See section 3.1.

[353] A similar concern was at the basis of another fundamental aspect of Renaissance epic, epideictic rhetoric. See Vickers (1983).

[354] On the didactic aspect of ancient Latin epics, see Hutchinson (2013). Generic contamination is not alien to the tradition both in ancient times –Harrison (2007c) 207-40– and in the Renaissance –Hardie (2013a).

[355] See the analysis of the differences and analogies between Lucretius and Dante in Boyde (1981) 1-40.

[356] Hardie (1993b) 75; in his (1995) paper, Hardie suggested that Milton's didactic strategy in *Paradise Lost* is indebted to Lucretius, even though, at the time, the latter had been popular in the Italian literary culture, with which Milton was acquainted. Vida's use of Lucretius in the *Christiad* and Milton's respect for it constitute examples of all this. For an overview of Vida's influence on Milton's Latin poetry, see Haan (1995). For the bond between poetry and knowledge in the *Georgics* and in Ovid see Schiesaro (1997) and (2002). The *Thebaid* too can be read through the lens of a didactic programme that aims to admonish the ruler and the readers and point out the degeneration of autocracy. See, for instance, Bessone (2011) 34-5 and Rebeggiani (2018) *passim.*

4.1 Explanation of Reality

One of the ways in which knowledge is framed as a theme is the description of physical and historical reality, namely, the actual constitution of the universe and its history. Inspired by the book of Genesis, Vida gives two accounts of the early stages of the universe, the world and humanity. Similar reports are deep-rooted in the epic aspiration to totality and can be found, for example, in *De Rerum Natura* 5 and *Metamorphoses* 1, where they occupy significant portions of the text. It is not surprising, then, that Vida's two accounts display a more intense presence of Lucretian and Ovidian intertexts compared to other sections of the poem, even though the Virgilian model, as always, remains the most important one.

The first passage contains the ekphrasis of the marble "signs" in the Temple of Jerusalem (*Chr.* 1.582-724). These signs portray the most important phases in the history of the world, from its conception and the development of the first life forms, including human beings, to some episodes of the Old Testament such as the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden and the testing of Abraham. For the most part, the description is put in the mouth of Jesus. He is able to decipher such signs, a task never before accomplished by anyone. A clue to the conspicuous Lucretian inspiration in the passage[357] is the expression which denotes the world at the moment of its conception in Jesus' words (*Chr.* 1.584 *machina mundi*) and its destruction in the *De Rerum Natura* (5.95-6: *multosque per annos / sustentata ruet moles et machina mundi*).[358] Both passages concern the nature and the beginning of the world. The absence of men and gods among the images on the Temple of Jerusalem (*Chr.* 1.587: *Non illic hominum effigies simulacrave divum*) is the counterpart, with adjustments, of the emergence of religious cults in the Epicurean reconstruction of world history (Lucr. 5.73-5: *et quibus ille modis divom metus insinuarit / pectora, terrarum qui in orbi sancta tuetur / fana lacus lucos aras simulacraque divum*). The proper act of creation is pictured thus:

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[357] The preceding lines display a Lucretian influence, as illustrated in section 4.2. The presence of Lucretius here is only briefly hinted at but not analysed by Cicchitelli (1904) 301-2 and Di Cesare (1964) 112, and the same holds for that of Ovid in Bruère (1966) 28.

[358] See Hardie (2016) 188. The expression had been used by Lucan (Luc. 1.79-80: *totaque discors / machina divulsi turbabit foedera mundi*) and had enjoyed vogue in late-antique Latin poetry, e.g. Avienus *Arat.* 562; Dracontius *Rom.* 10.497–499. Vida resorted to it also in *Bombyx* 294 and *Hymn* 28.77, texts that still need modern editions and proper *Quellenforschungen*.

> *Hic superum sator informem speculatus acervum*
> *aeternam noctemque indigestumque profundum*
> *prima videbatur moliri exordia rerum*
> *ipse micans radiis ac multa luce coruscus.*
>
> (*Chr.* 1.591-4)

The image evoked here resembles the primordial status of the universe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ov. *Met.* 1.7-9: *rudis indigestaque moles / nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem / non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum*). The Lucretian matrix is visible in the marked expressions *exordia rerum,* which in one of its occurrences is deployed to sustain the opposite idea that the world was formed randomly (Lucr. 2.1061-2: *tandem coluerunt ea quae coniecta repente / magnarum rerum fierent exordia semper*),[359] and, a few lines later, *semina rerum* (*Chr.* 1.602-4: *Necdum tamen aethera ab imis / flammiferum terris, terras discreverat undis, / sed tantum confusa iacebant semina rerum*). The universe is a shapeless mass made of seeds and is visualised in its tripartite components, sky, earth and sea, (Lucr. 5.92: *principio maria ac terras caelumque tuere;* Ov. *Met.* 1.15: *utque erat et tellus illic et pontus et aer*). In both the *Christiad* and the *Metamorphoses* it is only by a divine act that this undefined mass is disentangled and assumes its proper configuration (Ov. *Met.* 1.21-3: *Hanc deus et melior litem natura diremit / nam caelo terras et terris abscidit undas / et liquidum spisso secrevit ab aere caelum*). This Christian rendering of Ovidian cosmogony is not an isolated case. Late antique Christian authors had already resorted to it,[360] and a twelfth century commentary on the *Metamorphoses* glosses the words *melior natura* as a reference to Christ.[361]

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[359] E.g. Lucr. 2.333, 3.31, 4.45, 4.114, 5.430. The expression does not occur anywhere else in Classical poetry, but has come back in vogue in Neo-Latin poetry by Vida's time and he employs it also in *Hymn* 3.344.

A similar creation story appears in *Eclogue* 6 as well, in a highly Lucretian passage that must have been in the author's mind (*Chr.* 1.607-8: *et iam cuncta novam incipiebant sumere formam / paulatim, coelumque sua compage teneri*[362] - *Ecl.* 6.36: *coeperit et rerum paulatim sumere formas*).[363] The components of nature take their shape. Dry land is separated from water, which now surrounds it, mountains rise to the sky, the earth brings flowers as it does at the coming of spring in the *incipit* of the *De Rerum Natura* and in the praises of that season in the *Georgics* (*Chr.* 1.617-9: *Continuo tellus summittens daedala germen / flore renidescit, et frondis explicat arbos. / Iam videas viridi vestiri gramine campos* - Lucr. 1.7-8: *tibi suavis daedala tellus / summittit flores* - *Georg.* 2.335: *sed trudit gemmas et frondes explicat omnis;* the description of the appropriate terrain for vine plantation is echoed too, 2.219: *quaeque suo semper viridi se gramine vestit*).[364] Likewise, Lucretius is the matrix for the appearance of the sun and the moon with their continual and fixed succession (*Chr.* 1. 622-5: *Caeruleo flammis duo lumina coelo / incipiunt teneris primum lucescere rebus / et sibi ceu mundi vigiles statione vicissim / succedunt certoque suum dant foedere lumen* - Lucr. 5.1436-9: *At vigiles mundi magnum versatile templum / sol et luna suo lustrantes lumine circum / prodocuere homines annorum tempora verti / et certa regione geri rem atque ordine certo*), and of animals (*Chr* 1.632-4: *Tum bifidis passim verrebant marmora caudis / squamigerum mutae pecudes pelagoque natabant. / At pictae volucres librare per aera pennis / corpora* - Lucr. 2.342-4: *mutaeque natantes / squamigerum pecudes et laeta armenta feraeque / et variae volucres; Chr.* 1.637: *lanigerique greges persultant pabula laeta* - Lucr. 1.14: *inde ferae pecudes persultant pabula laeta*). The Father addresses his creatures, urging them to propagate their species, with words that echo the language and the physics of the *De Rerum Natura* (*Chr.* 1.642-3: *"Crescite, propagate genus, mea semina, vestrum / saeclaque perpetuis generatim iungite saeclis"* - Lucr. 1.194-5: *natura animantum / propagare genus possit* 1.20: *efficis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent*). Overall, it is clear that Lucretius represents the main point of reference for the physical dimension of the world in the *Christiad.* The contribution of the models is on the level of both thematic structure and verbal expression.

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[360] See Roberts (2002) and Fielding (2017) 4-5, 105-6.

[361] Böckerman (2020) 90. Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses*, together with Book 15, was the most influential in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. See Bynum (1998) 993.

[362] The presence of Juvencus cannot be ruled out (*praef.* 9: *immortale nihil mundi compage tenetur*), especially in such a marked passage.

[363] As usual, there are some traces of Virgil too, but they do not seem to contribute to the meaning for the most part. *Aeternam noctem* signals the eclipse that follows Caesar's murder in *Geo.* 1.468 and the deaths of minor characters in *Aen.* 10.746 and 12.310. *Luce coruscus* (1.594) is referred to Neoptolemus (*Aen.* 2.470). *Coniferi cyparissis* (1.621) is part of a simile that describes the Cyclopes (*Aen.* 3.680), *et dicere leges* (1.645) belongs to Aeneas' message to Latinus (*Aen.* 12.112), and *terras...dicione teneret* (1.647) seems like a mere borrowing from *Aen.* 1.236. A concentration of material from the *Georgics* may be due to the didactic content of this passage. See the apparatus in von Contzen, Glei Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) i 112-3.

[364] Other contemporary Neo-Latin poets such as Andrea Ammonio (*Carmina* 1.24-33), employed some of these Lucretian expressions.

In the other chronicle of the beginning of the universe narrated by John (*Chr.* 4.20-154), ancient epic writers seem to chiefly function as ideological opponents. Compared to the ekphrasis of the Temple, this time, the focus is much more on theological matters, because John has just been asked to elucidate the main tenets of what amounts to Christian theology and narrate Jesus' miracles. Vida cleverly justifies his digression into the contents of Genesis by having the pagan Pilate request a clarification. Chronologically, this account precedes the first one, in that the narrative is concerned firstly with the nature of the Trinity. It also fulfils the function of a theodicy by recapitulating Satan's and his followers' insurrection, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve. While in the previous account, the source of knowledge was Jesus himself, here a disciple who will write one of the four canonical gospels is the instructor. Not coincidentally, the incipit of this account hints at the opening of the Gospel of John.[365] Joseph's reference to Christ's deeds in Lucretian language (*Chr.* 3.1003-4: *Ne cetera deinde requiras, / hanc omnem erexit factis florentibus oram* – Lucr. 3.897: *non poteris factis florentibus esse*) anticipates the polemic against Epicureanism that characterises the first part of John's speech, his description of the nature of the Trinity and the beginning of the universe. The contrast between the Christian and the Epicurean views of death is suggested by the juxtaposition of Jesus and the dead man of *De Rerum Natura* 3, who will no longer breathe and thus experience the anguish brought about by life even if others mourn his death.[366]

John starts by describing the metaphysical nature of the Son, drawing from the theory of souls expounded by Virgil's Anchises in the Underworld (*Chr.* 4.31: *Haud olli terreni artus moribundave membra / sed sine corpore erat* - *Aen.* 6.731-2: *non noxia corpora tardant / terrenique hebetant artus moribundaque membra*). The Word of which sea, earth and sky are ultimately made, having not been sent forth yet, resembles Jupiter's foreshadowing of the future destruction of the world because of Phaethon in Ovid (*Chr.* 4.33-5: *quod nondum in volucres vox edita protulit auras / omnipotens, verbumque finisque et originis expers, / quo mare, quo tellus, quo constat maximus aether* - Ov. *Met.* 1.256-7: *esse quoque in fatis reminiscitur, adfore tempus, / quo mare, quo tellus correptaque regia caeli*). A Christian rationale exploits a pagan explanation of the intrinsic nature of things. Lucretius, perhaps the most dangerous of pagan Latin poets for a Christian, is extensively referred to in the description of the Trinity:

At geminos tu proinde Deos fuge credere porro,

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[365] Jh. 1.1: *in principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum* – *Chr.* 4.20*: Principio pater omnipotens rerum sator et fons.*

[366] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 255 rightly noted that when Joseph lets John speak, the change of narrator evokes two similar passages of the *Aeneid.* At the beginning of *Aeneid* 2 everyone is eager to listen (*Chr.* 3.1019: *Cuncti intenti simul ora tenebant* – *Aen.* 2.1: *Conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant*), and the end of *Aeneid* 3 Aeneas' long report of his wanderings comes to an end (*Chr.* 3.1010: *Dixit et hic facto defessus fine quievit* – *Aen.* 3.718: *conticuit tandem factoque hic fine quievit*).

numen idem simul ambobus, Deus unus uterque est.
Quin etiam, quo inter se ambo iunguntur, amorem
(namque ab utroque venit conspirans mutuus ardor)
omnipotens aeque numenque Deumque vocamus
afflantem maria ac terras[367] *coelique profunda,*
afflatu quo cuncta vigent, quo cuncta moventur,
trisque unum esse Deum, ter numen dicimus unum.
Quove magis mirere, Deus, quem cernimus ipsi
factum hominem atque hominum mortali corpore cretum,
non minus ac prius aetherea nunc regnat in aula
cum genitore, pari simul omnia numine torquens.
Nempe locis nullis, spatiis non clauditur ullis,
omnibus inque locis idem omni tempore praesens
suffugiens nostras acies sensuque remotus
cuncta replet Deus ac molem se fundit in omnem.
(*Chr.* 4.38-53)[368]

The argumentative style indicates the didactic character of these lines: from a diegetic point of view, John is addressing Pilate, and he does so by borrowing an expression from the *De Rerum Natura* (*Chr.* Lucr. 1.1052 *illud in his rebus longe fuge credere, Memmi*), a signal of the intertextual significance of that poem in the economy of the passage. Both texts try to prevent an addressee from embracing a false thought, namely that the Father and the Son are not the same divinity in Vida and that all things tend to the middle of the earth in Lucretius. That the Lucretian material is evoked in a polemical way can be inferred from the borrowing of the hemistich *conspirans mutuus ardor*, which here indicates the Holy Spirit, the mutual love between the Father and the Son, whereas in its original context it described the reciprocal passion of two lovers whose physical features are evenly mixed in their offspring (Lucr. 4.1215-6: *semina cum Veneris stimulis excita per artus / obvia conflixit conspirans mutuus ardor*).[369] This is also an example of the procedure through which human or erotic love is transfigured in Christian terms in the *Christiad* and which explains the presence of erotic expressions from the end of *De Rerum Natura* 4.[370] The use of a Lucretian phrase highlights the human and bodily nature of the Son (Lucr. 3.365: *neque enim, qua cernimus ipsi*).[371] Although the expression is unremarkable, the connection may not be casual, if one considers that the hypertext is a discussion of the unity of body and soul. The former contains the latter (Lucr. 3.323-49), which can not grow by itself and last after death. This is the exact opposite of what John is stating, namely that Jesus' nature cannot be contained by any space or time (*Chr.* 4.50-3). Both author and readers know that in the Christian vision of the world souls not only survive once the body dies, but that they will eventually be reunited with their bodies as a consequence of Jesus' death and resurrection. Christ has a body, but, as the Second Person of the Trinity, is also Omnipresent. He incarnates the very attribute that according to Lucretius gods cannot have (Lucr. 2.1099: *omnibus inve locis esse omni tempore praesto*). The limits of the senses regarding the perception of divinity are here explicitly mentioned (Lucr. 4.360: *hoc ubi suffugit sensum simul angulus omnis,* a consideration about an optical effect). The immortal nature of the Son, instead, is stressed through the adaptation of Lucretian material, which counts as such the atoms (Lucr. 2.904-6: *nam sensus iungitur omnis / visceribus nervis venis, quaecumque videmus / mollia mortali consistere corpore creta*). On the whole, John's account seems to be a response to the views of the *De Rerum Natura*, a poem to which, nonetheless, Vida pays homage indirectly through linguistic similarity and theological opposition. In its typically epic attempt to account for the totality of reality, the *Christiad* relies on a Lucretian framework to explain the ultimate nature of physics and metaphysics.

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[367] A common expression, especially in Lucretius (e.g. 1.30, 1.340, 5.92, 5.594, 6.491, 6.612).

[368] Christian literature might have offered models for this theological excursus. See Paul. Nol. *c.* 21.278: *tres etenim numero sumus idem mentibus unum;* 22.83: *divinoque tuam perfundet lumine mentem* (*Chr.* 4.54: *perfundens lumine terras*).

[369] Pontano too employs this phrase (*Ecl.* 1.6.2; *Eridanus*, 2.22) but not in a theological context.

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[370] Hardie (1993a) 306 briefly mentioned this inconvenient "shadow".

[371] See also Petrarch *Africa* 3.408: *Nunc stat quem cernimus ipsi*, where the object, though, is Mount Atlas.

4.2 Song, Memory, and Prophecies

The centrality that the arts of narrating, singing and prophesying have for the perpetuation of knowledge is an emblematic feature of the epic tradition. It can assume the form of a poetic performance (e.g. Demodocus and Phemius in the *Odyssey,* Orpheus in Apollonius' and Valerius' *Argonautica,* Iopas in the *Aeneid,* Teuthras in the *Punica*), or of an erudite exposition (Acoreus in the *Bellum Civile*). Sometimes, sections of the narrative or entire stories are reported by a character, for instance, Odysseus at the court of the Phaeacians, Aeneas at the court of Dido, or the recurrent technique of the intradiegetic secondary narrative in the *Metamorphoses.* All this points to the tradition's concern for the preservation, access and disclosure of knowledge. In this regard, memory and foresight play a pivotal role.[372] The need to record and transmit the deeds of extraordinary men is at the root of epic after all. It follows that those who retain some kind of specific knowledge, like bards and prophets, have an essential function. One may think of characters such as the Cumaean Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6, Erichtho in *Bellum Civile* 6, Tiresias and Manto in *Thebaid* 4, Autonoe in *Punica* 13. The *Christiad* follows in its predecessors' footsteps when it also gives voice to the bard Simon (*Chr.* 2.563-643). This non-biblical figure[373] is introduced during the Jewish feast of Passover, when all the tribes from Israel converge on Jerusalem. On this occasion, Jesus sends John and Peter to look for someone who would invite their group into his house. Following the instructions of their master, the two disciples eventually find Simon, a wealthy man. Because of his love for the countryside and poetry and his contempt for civil affairs, he can be easily associated with the stereotype of the bucolic singer:[374]

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[372] Barchiesi (2001) well highlighted the importance of memory and prophecy for the self-reflexivity of the genre.

[373] Von Contzen, Glei Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 160 think of an Epicurean connection. Maybe this is the only thematic connection with a Lucretian line that seems linguistically echoed at *Chr.* 2.564 (Lucr. 4.1024: *flumen item sitiens aut fontem propter amoenum*).

> *Iam gravis argutasque fides et carmina amabat*
> *fluminis in ripis aut fontem propter amoenum.*
> *Norat enim coeli numeros mensusque viasque.*
> *Saepe Deo plenus porro ventura canebat*
> *agricolis, quid Sol, quid menstrua Luna pararet*
> *sudique pluviaeque docens praenuntia signa.*
> [...]
> *Dumque alia famuli mensas et dona pararent*
> *parte domus, veterum facta ipse canebat avorum*
> *nunc citharae levibus digitis, nunc pectine eburno*
> *percurrens molli attactu vocalia fila.*

(*Chr.* 2.563-8, 71-4)

Vida has in mind a wealth of Virgilian models: Silenus' song in *Eclogue* 6 (*Ecl.* 6.79: *quas illi Philomela dapes, quae dona pararit*),[375] the opening of the Areatean section of *Georgics* 1 (*Georg.* 1.351-5: *atque haec ut certis possemus discere signis / aestusque pluviasque et agentis frigora ventos / ipse pater stauit quid menstrua luna moneret, / ... quid saepe videntes / agricolae*), Iopas (*Aen.* 1.742-4: *Hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores; / unde hominum genus et pecudes; unde imber et ignes; / Arcturum pluvias*),[376] Orpheus (*Chr.* 2.607-8: *Sic ait ac nervis socians concordibus ora / obloquitur numeris* – *Aen.* 6.646-7: *obloquitur numeris septem discrimina vocum / iamque eadem digitis, iam pectine pulsat eburno*; compare also Ov. *Met.* 11.5: *Orphea percussis sociantem carmina nervis*). Simon's song, whose erudition is reflected in Lucretian language (*Chr.* 2.606: *dum nigra roriferis*

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[374] *Ibidem* 161.

[375] *Ibidem*.

[376] Di Cesare (1964) 94-5, 152-3, and 320. The parallelism between Simon and Dido might reinforce the evocation of Iopas. Both characters house a group of hosts and interact with a legation. As we will see in section 6.4, Peter addresses him with words that resemble those utilised by Ilioneus at Carthage in his encounter with Dido in *Aeneid* 1. Simon replies that he knows Jesus' reputation, as Dido says she knows Aeneas by fame before meeting him in that scene.

nox terras obruat umbris - Lucr. 6.864: *hoc ubi roriferis terram nox obruit undis*), includes episodes of the Exodus from Egypt, like the opening of the waters (*Chr.* 2.614-5: *Namque indurit umor / aridus, et liquidas late est via secta per undas* - Lucr. 5.272=6.638 *qua via secta semel liquido pede detuilt undas*, a description of water evaporation) and the manna from heaven. Memory is preserved through the reiteration of men's songs, just like in the Graeco-Roman world, and through the Scriptures.

The fact that two narrative digressions almost entirely take over books 3 and 4, a third of the poem, suggests the value of narrating in the *Christiad*. The account of John previously analysed is only the first part of a long excursus on Jesus' nature, ministry and miracles, which takes up nearly all the rest of Book 4. John appears as a prophet induced into a state of trance by a divine power at the beginning of his speech (*Chr.* 4.1-18). His figure brings to mind also the idealised Epicurus of the *De Rerum Natura*, who traversed the universe with the power of his thought (*Chr.* 4.5-6: *penetralia divum / mente subit coelum peragrans* – Lucr. 1.74: *atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque*).[377] John marks himself as a prophet when he uses the *topos* of the hundred mouths *vis-à-vis* the hardships he had to endure as a disciple of Jesus (*Chr.* 4.836-9: *Non mihi perpetuam si centum pectore aeno / sufficiant vocem linguae, percurrere possem, / quantas quoque modo aerumnas quantosque labores / hoc ducente animis durantes hausimus aequis* – *Georg.* 2.43-4 and *Aen.* 6.625-7: *non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum, / ferrea vox, omnis scelerum comprendere formas, / omnia poenarum percurrere nomina possim*). The *topos*[378] can be found in Homer (*Il.* 2.488-90: πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω / οὐδ εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν, / φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη) and Ennius' *Annales* (*Ann.* 469-70 Skutsch: *non si lingua loqui saperet quibus, ora decem sint /*

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[377] The Apostles will be able to do the same. See section 5.2.

[378] Cf. Gowers (2005).

in me, tum ferro cor sit pectusque revinctum).[379] However, it is not usually mentioned[380] that here Vida conflates the Virgilian model with, arguably, the Homeric one,[381] because John speaks of a heart of bronze (*pectore aeno*), in contrast to the Virgilian voice of iron (*ferrea vox*), but in keeping with Homer (χάλκεον...ἦτορ). The fact that in *Iliad* 2 the narrator invokes the Muses at the beginning of the catalogue of the Achaean ships confirms the pertinence of the hypertext. Likewise, the context of *Georgics* 2 is an apostrophe to Maecenas made directly by the author, whereas in *Aeneid* 6 the voice is that of the Sibyl, a prophetess, to whom John represents here a Christian counterpart.

The figure of the prophet is evoked several times throughout the poem –St. Paul is presented as a *vates* who will fill the earth with his teachings (*Chr.* 2.515-29)–, or included directly in the narrative itself, as in the cases of John the Baptist, Anna, and Simeon.[382] John the Baptist is a central prophetic figure in the Gospels, for his life is dedicated to the announcement of the coming of the Lord. Even the scanty details provided about his gestation revolve around the theme of prophecy, for the Angel reveals his birth to Mary together with the Annunciation of Christ's incarnation (*Chr.* 3.361-66).[383] The narrative focuses briefly on Mary's visit to John's mother Elizabeth, pregnant with him at that time (*Chr.* 3.471-97). In this circumstance, he rejoices in the womb of his mother at the appearance of Mary, who, in turn, carries Jesus. Here, the appellative *vates* is attributed to the Baptist's father, Zachariah (*Chr.* 3.476). The main intertext in John's (the Evangelist's) account of John the Baptist's preaching activity (*Chr.* 4.155-235), *Aeneid* 6, assimilates the biblical prophet to the Cumaean Sibyl. The Baptist's announcement of Christ is a quotation of the sibyl's cry as she is possessed by the god (*Chr.* 4.190: *Iam iam aderit Deus, ecce Deus mortalibus oris / ceu mortalis adest* – 4.232-4: *Deus, ecce Deus, qui crimina nostra / thuricremas agnus veluti mactatus ad aras / morte luet* – *Aen.* 6.45-6: *ventum erat ad limen, cum virgo 'poscere fata / tempus' ait; 'deus, ecce deus!'*).[384]

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[379] The *topos* recurs even in Hostius (cf. Marc. *Sat.* 6.3.6), Persius 5.1-2, and is echoed in Ov. *Tr.* 53-6 and Sil. 4.525-6. For its fortune in ancient literature, see Hinds (1998) 34-43. An exemplary Christian use of it is Sed. *Carmen Pas.* 1.99-100, for which see Springer (2013) 29.

[380] The passage of the *Georgics* has been overlooked here as well.

[381] Or, less likely, with a lost verse of Lucretius, of which we know and he might have known thanks to a note of Servius (*ad Georg.* 2.44: *Lucretii versus; sed ille aerea vox ait, non ferrea*).

[382] The prophets' saying are referred to frequently, e.g. *Chr.* 1.201-2, 1.886-9, 3.6-7, 3.238-9, 3.301-12, 3.436-7, 3.452-64, 3.471-4, 3.887, 6.150-90, 6.512-4.

[383] Reitz (2020) is an overview of apparitions in ancient epic. See also Finkmann, Reitz and Walter (2020) for prophecies.

The prophetic function of the Baptist is even more conspicuous when he hails the Christian era as a new Age of Gold by alluding to the prophecy of *Eclogue* 4 (*Chr.* 4.198: *saeclaque mutato succedent aurea mundo* – *Ecl.* 4.8-9: *tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum / desinet ac toto surget aurea mundo*), a source that had been imitated time and again before Vida.[385] His admonition to behave righteously echoes Phlegyas' injunction to respect the gods (*Chr.* 4.194: *Discite iustitiam interea atque assuescite recto* – *Aen.* 6.620: *"discite iustitiam moniti et non temnere divos"*). As if this were not enough, other Virgilian examples of piety confirm the devotion with which he follows his purpose.[386] He baptises people in the stream of the Jordan river (*Chr.* 4.202-3: *quos vates puro nudos lustrabat in amne / rite cavis capiti invergens sacra flumina palmis*) as Aeneas purifies himself in the waters of the river Tiber (*Aen.* 8.68-70: *aetherii spectans orientia solis / lumina rite cavis undam de flumine palmis / sustinet*). The baptism administered by him has the same purifying effect of the floods and the fires of the Underworld (*Chr.* 4.195: *et duce me scelus infectum lavite amne liquenti* – *Aen.* 6.741-2: *aliis sub gurgite vasto / infectum eluitur scelus aut exuritur igni*).[387] Right after having recognised Jesus' true identity, the Baptist holds his hands out

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[384] Von Contzen, Glei Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 266. The expression *deus, ecce, deus* occurs also in Lucr -see section 6.4.- and Pontano *De Amore Coniugali* 1.2.27.

[385] On the reception of Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue* in the Italian Renaissance see Houghton (2019). There are many occurrences of the word string *aurea mundo* in Neo-Latin poetry that still deserve critical attention.

[386] As for the character's life in the wild, Vida may have thought of Metabus, Camilla's father, (*Chr.* 4.164-5: *Ille hominum primis vitans vestigia ab annis / horridus in solis agitavit montibus aevum* – *Aen.* 11.569: *pastorum et solis exegit montibus aevum*), and the ploughman at the end of *Georgics* 3 (*Chr.* 4.169: *Liquidi praebant pocula fontes* – *Georg.* 3.529: *pocula sunt fontes liquidi*), as mere prototypes of a simple life.

[387] See Battista Mantovano, *Parthenice prima sive Mariana* 2.305-6: *Alter habet sontes animas, quibus igneus ardor / eximit infectum scelus et telluris odorem.*

(*Chr.* 4.210: *agnoscensque Deum palmas utrasque tetendit*), the same gesture made by Anchises to welcome Aeneas at the beginning of their reunion in the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.684-5: *isque ubi tendentem adversum per gramina vidit / Aenean, alacris palmas utrasque tetendit*). His initial unwillingness to baptise Jesus out of reverence (*Chr.* 4.209: *Abstinuit primum vates tactusque refugit*)[388] has a counterpart in Latinus' refusal to open the gates of the temple of Janus as a declaration of war against the Trojans, which would imply going against the gods' order to marry his daughter to Aeneas (*Aen.* 7.618-9: *abstinuit tactu pater aversusque refugit / foeda ministeria*).

Vida must have drawn the character of Anna, Mary's old mother (*Chr.* 3.146-52, 3.189-92),[389] from New Testament Apocrypha, given the fact that her name never occurs in the Canonical Gospels.[390] Her figure resembles that of a seer, for she foresaw that her grand-child would be destined for greatness. This prophetic knowledge resembles Jupiter's promise to his daughter Venus regarding the future supremacy of the Roman people in Virgil (*Chr.* 3.147-50: *e gnata praeviderat olim / egregiam factis sobolem regemque futurum, / qui populos magnos magna dicione teneret* – *Aen.* 1.235-7: *hinc fore ductores, revocato a sanguine Teucri, / qui mare, qui terras omnis dicione tenerent, / pollicitus*). Like the oracle that foretold the coming of a future and foreign son-in-law to king Latinus, a voice from heaven addressed Anna during her sleep, ordering her to give her daughter in marriage.[391] She procrastinated until one day, another voice solicited her, adding that she would find her son-in-law among her family stock.[392] When she reveals to Joseph that the husband chosen by Providence is him, she is inspired by a divine force and falls prey to mantic fury (*Chr.* 3.191-2: *plena Deo*[393] *tota -visu venerabile-*[394] *in aede / bacchatur tollitque ingentem coelo ululatum*), the same demeanour of the Cumaean Sibyl during her rapture (*Aen.* 6.77-80; 98-101).[395] Like Anna, old Simeon, too, the man to whom the Father has granted that he would meet the Saviour before his death, can predict the future (*Chr.* 3.684-730). An expression commonly used for seers and soothsayers in ancient Latin epics here signals his affinity with this category of characters (*Chr.* 3.687: *venturi praescius*).[396] At the end of his life, he finally has the chance to see Jesus, who is still an infant at the time. He hails the child with an echo of Apollo's praise of Ascanius for having killed Numanus Remulus and his prediction of the future victory of the Trojans (*Chr.* 3.705: *'Macte, infans, virtute'* – *Aen.* 9.641: '*macte nova virtute, puer, sic itur ad astra*'), an expression that is quite common in Renaissance Neo-Latin poetry.[397] As the stock of Aeneas will ascend to the stars through Ascanius and his descendants, so humankind will reach heaven thanks to Christ.[398]

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[388] Christ's desire to experience all the duties of man seems a Christian adaptation of Dido's will to leave nothing untried to procrastinate Aeneas' departure (*Chr.* 4.206: *nil ut inexpertum moribundo in corpore linquat* – *Aen.* 4.415: *ne quid inexpertum frustra moritura relinquat*).

[389] Her advanced age is signalled by an adjective, *grandaeva*, which is used almost exclusively by Flavian epic poets (e.g. Val. Fl. 1.736, 796, 2.36, 5.356, 7.348, 8.150, Sil. 16.124, 16.603, 16.652).

[390] Von Contzen, Glei Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 199.

[391] Cicchitelli (1904) 314.

[392] Orders such as this one are frequent in epic, though the words used present a notable similarity with Pentheus' instruction to bring Baccus before him (*Chr.* 3.158: *Omnis mora segnis abesto* – Ov. *Met.* 3.563-4: *'ite ducemque / attrahite huc vinctum! Iussis mora segnis abesto'*). On the one hand, this intertext casts an ominous shadow on the scene, on the other, inconsistencies are not rare in the poem.

The master of knowledge *par excellence*, however, is Jesus himself. His omniscience reveals to men what is to come, especially to his disciples, to whom he announces that all but one of them will die violently (*Chr.* 4.817-25),[399] that a Last Judgment will take place

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[393] According to Seneca the Elder (*Suas.* 3.7), the expression had been used by Virgil and then imitated by Ovid in his *Medea*. See Horsfall (2013) 627-30. It is undoubtedly common in late antique Christian poetry (e.g. Prud. *Apoth.* 790, Paul. Nol. *Carm.* 6.220), and is employed for seers, as in *Bellum Civile* 9, where Cato is inspired by a god and is said to speak as an oracle (Luc. 9.564-5: *Ille deo plenus tacita quem mente gerebat / effudit dignas adytis e pectore voces*).

[394] *Venerabilis,-e* and *visus,-us* occur together only in Sil. 7.746, but there is no real thematic connection between the two passages.

[395] For the combination Anna-Sibyl see also Cicchitelli (1904) 314-6, Di Cesare (1964) 95 and Bruère (1966) 27.

[396] The connection has been overlooked. See, for instance, the Cumaean Sibyl (*Aen.* 6.65-6: *tuque, o sanctissima vates, / praescia venturi*), Manto, Tiresias' daughter (Ov. *Met.* 6.157: *Nam sata Tiresias venturi praescia Manto*), Themis (Ov. *Met.* 9.418-9: *Haec ubi faticano venturi praescia dixit / ore Themis*), and Idmon (Val. Fl. 5.53: *adsis umbra, precor, venturi praescia caeli*).

[397] E.g. Petrarch, *Africa* 1.387, *Carmina* 36.74; Naldi, *Elegiae* 1.21.21.

[398] This prediction, however, rearranges a Lucretian hemistich describing what, according to Epicurean physics, is a false assumption about the movement of fish (*Chr.* 3.708: *et liquidas aperire vias ad sidera coeli* – Lucr. 1.372-3: *cedere squamigeris latices nitentibus aiunt / et liquidas aperire vias*). The physical aspect of men's ascension to the sky is visualised through a Lucretian lens.

[399] Ironically, the only survivor will be John himself, who is reporting the prophecy at that point and is unaware of his fate.

(*Chr.* 4.981-1024) and that in the future the temple of Jerusalem will be destroyed (*Chr.* 1.564-81). Vida signals the didactic tone of this message with *nonne vides* (*Chr.* 1.577: *Nonne vides, iam ut nunc res procubet inclinata*),[400] a Lucretian formula we have already come across.[401] His words rely heavily on an epic language, and seem to appropriate or overturn the original contexts of some Lucretian intertexts.[402] Praying for the preservation of the temple is as useless as vows to the gods in an Epicurean perspective (*Chr.* 1.578: *et tibi iam votis non prosit nectere vota?* - Lucr. 5.1198, 1202: *nec pietas ullast… / …, nec votis nectere vota*). Its end is indirectly equated to the end of the parts of the world in Lucretius (*Chr.* 1.581: *Atque adeo hic alte depactus terminus esto* - Lucr. 2.1087-8: *quandoquidem vitae depactus terminus alte / tam manet haec*).[403] It has been observed that the course of the events leading to Salvation is thus paralleled to a natural plan.[404]

Vida must have found it easy to endow his poem with a common feature of ancient epic like prophecy. The Judaeo-Christian background, indeed, was fertile ground in this regard, given the critical position occupied by prophecy in that cultural and religious tradition. A more typical epic trait, in contrast, one that underlines the distance between the *Christiad* and the *Gospel*, is the authority that the former bestows on the act of narrating. In order to put his poem across as a new representative of its genre, Vida highlighted the relevance of narrative itself for the propagation of knowledge. The classical apparatus provided him here with means with which he could legitimate the status of his work.

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[400] Schiesaro (1984) is a study of the function of this expression in the *De Rerum Natura*.

[401] Other occurrences are limited to later hexametric poetry, e.g. Virg. *Georg.* 1.56, 3.103, 3.250, Hor. *Serm.* 1.4.109, 2.2.5.42, Ov. *Met.* 15.382, 15.382. That this passage of the poem has a Lucretian flavour has been conjectured by Cicchitelli (1904) 304 with no analysis.

[402] See also the comparison of the destruction of the temple to the end of the world discussed in section 7.2.

[403] Even the moral aspect of his teaching relies on Lucretius, as in *Chr.* 4.744-6: *Prius aequore salso / esse queant nubes aut pisces vivere in arvis / arboris aut stirpes frondescere in aetheris oris* – Lucr. 5.128-9: *sicut in aethere non arbor, non aequore salso / nubes esse queunt, neque pisces vivere in arvis.*

[404] Von Contzen, Glei Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013), ii 62 acknowledge the presence of Lucretius and reach this conclusion.

4.3 Knowledge and Salvation

The main goal of knowledge in the *Christiad* is to facilitate the salvation of the soul in the afterlife, a substantial divergence from the earlier epic tradition since naturally there is no such thing as the Christian concept of “salvation” in non-Christian Latin epics. As we have already suggested, Vida filters the contents of his main poetic models through the lens of his Christian creed, where salvation is of the utmost importance.[405] We shall shortly see how the positive effects of different types of pagan erudition and wisdom are here transfigured in a Christian sense. Given such a salvific function, it becomes clear why acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures and the sayings of the prophets represents a fundamental part of the Christian spiritual path. Even more important, though, is each man’s personal relationship with Jesus himself, who is the source of all knowledge. Thanks to the memory of his teachings, the disciples manage to defend themselves from the attack of the demons (*Chr*. 2.68-70: *Illi autem pleni monitis ducis -ante futura / praescius ista suis praedixerat omnia- servant / invictos animos inapertaque pectora fraudi*).[406] This scene has a parallel in Silius’ *Punica* 15, where Virtue and Pleasure visit Publius Cornelius Scipio (Sil. *Pun.* 15.129 *At iuvenis plenus monitis ingentia corde / molitur iussaeque calet virtutis amore*). The very reason behind Jesus’ mission is to re-establish a positive relationship between all humankind and its Creator, a task expressed with words that echo Mercury’s appearance to Aeneas at Carthage: (*Chr*. 4.688-9: *Id superis, superum id magno cordi esse parenti, / seque ideo claro missum memorabat Olympo* – *Aen.* 4.268-9: *ipse deum tibi me claro demittit Olympo / regnator, caelum et terras qui numine torquet*). Fate’s plan is transferred to a Christian dimension. While in the grand scheme of things the foundation of Rome is what really counts in the *Aeneid*, the ultimate goal in the *Christiad* is the redemption and salvation of humanity through Christ.

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[405] See section 3.4.

[406] The fortitude of the disciples echoes the wisdom of another Roman general in the *Punica*, Fabius (Sil. *Pun.* 7.25-6: *fervore carentes / angebant anni fraudique inaperta senectus*).

On the one hand, Jesus is characterised as an epic hero who has to endure trials and tribulations to accomplish his mission. On the other, he differs from that archetype, because his position is that of an omniscient god. His perspective can often be assimilated to that of the representatives of the classical divine apparatus.[407] During his ministry, he showed many people how to live (*Chr.* 4.858-980) and reproached them when they displayed sinful attitudes like pride (*Chr.* 4.656-756). He reprimanded his disciples multiple times, as when they discussed who was the best one in their group. Some people reacted positively to his presence, as is demonstrated by the many pious mothers who used to bring their children to him to educate them. He revealed the true meaning of the Scriptures and Jewish rites, thus indicating the path that leads to heaven (*Chr.* 4.791-805), and continues to teach even after his Resurrection disguised as somebody else (*Chr.* 6.510-47). Since his childhood, he exceeded even the most learned of the ministers, as Joseph recounts:

Vix ingressus eram limen, cum protinus ambo
ecce sacerdotum in medio conspeximus illum
(prima rudimenta et virtutis signa futurae)
alta recensentem vatum monimenta, patrumque
primores ultro scitantem obscura docentemque.
Illum omnes admirari haud vulgata canentem
supra aciem captumque hominis mentemque vigentem,
humana non vi edoctum, non arte magistra,
maturumque animi nimium puerilibus annis.

(*Chr.* 3.945-53)

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[407] See section 6.4.

Here Jesus is only a child, but his unrivalled knowledge already reveals his divine nature. Vida may have in mind another instance where young age and excellence are seen as a sign of future glory: Scaurus, a young Rutilian leader in Silius' *Punica* (Sil. 8.370-1: *hic Scaurus monitor, tenero nunc Scaurus in aevo, / sed iam signa dabat nascens in saecula virtus*).[408] These first exploits by Jesus imitate the *recusatio* of the author of the epyllion *Ciris*, who refers to his poem as the product of his youth (App. Virg. *Cir.* 44-6: *haec tamen interea, quae possumus, in quibus aevi / prima rudimenta et iuvenes exegimus annos / accipe dona*). His ability is outstanding, like that of Vulcan in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 8.441-2: *nunc viribus usus, / nunc manibus rapidis, omni nunc arte magistra*). No one taught Jesus, unlike the Virgilian doctor Iapyx when he manages to cure Aeneas with the help of Venus (*Aen.* 12.427-9: *'non haec humanis opibus, non arte magistra / proveniunt, neque te, Aenea, mea dextera servat: / maior agit deus atque opera ad maiora remittit'*). Different types of expertise –the arts of war, poetry, craftsmanship, and medicine– blend in Jesus' knowledge, which concerns the mysteries of religion and the salvation of humankind. Sometimes Vida could find parallels that already dealt with religious or mythological matters in their sources. The passage in which Jesus teaches the prayer "Our Father" to his disciples is a case in point:

Talia dicta dabat, coeli super omnia regem
placandum non visceribus, non sanguine caeso,
sed votis precibusque iubens exposcere pacem.
Et modus orandi quisnam foret ipse canebat:

(*Chr*. 4.968-71)

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[408] The similarity has not been detected by previous *Quellenforschungen.* The young age is also highlighted by a parallel with the old Aletes, who takes part in a council of the Trojans (*Chr.* 3.953: *maturumque animi...annis* – *Aen.* 9.246: *hic annis gravis atque animi maturus Aletes*).

The instructions he gives are expressed with the same terms that describe the reaction of the Trojans to the prophecy of the Harpy Celaeno in *Aeneid* 3 (*Aen.* 3.261: sed votis precibusque iubent exposcere pacem). The Father gave the information to Jesus, Apollo to Celaeno (*Chr.* 4.966: *Haec mihi* praedixit *genitor, quae voce monerem / veridica* – *Aen.* 3.250-2: *haec mea figite dicta, / quae Phoebo pater omnipotens, mihi Phoebus Apollo /* praedixit). Moreover, the prayer is introduced by a line closely modelled on the one in which the nymph Cyrene instructs her son Aristaeus in *Georgics* 4 to help him get his bees back (*Georg.* 4.537: *sed modus orandi qui sit prius ordine dicam*). Both these models have a didactic dimension. In the former several supernatural sources provide the Trojans with directions during their voyage throughout the Mediterranean. The latter amounts to a crucial moment for the restoration of a lost equilibrium through a religious type of knowledge.[409]

Vida substantiated the meaning of salvation in the *Christiad* by having Jesus foretell the end of the world and the Last Judgment (*Chr.* 4.981-1024), thus conflating the explanation of reality in a prophecy about the salvation of humankind. The eschatological theme is a frequent one in ancient Latin epics. Lucretius claims that the world will eventually come to an end and refers to this future event more than once in the *De Rerum Natura*.[410] Anchises briefly hints at the end of time in *Aeneid* 6.[411] Ovid narrates two different destructions of the world in *Metamorphoses* 1 and 2, namely the Great Flood and the Conflagration (1.262-323, 2.1-400). The idea of the dissolution of the world suffuses Lucan's *Bellum Civile* in its entirety.[412] The apocalyptic imagery draws extensively from classical models:

Addidit et ventura canens, fore, cum vagus olim

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[409] There is a vast bibliography on this topic. For a positive reading of the episode as key for the interpretation of the poem see, e.g. Morgan (1999).

[410] E.g. 2.1084-9, 2.1139-52, 5.91-109, 6.577-607. Schiesaro (2020) examines Lucretius' apocalyptic imagination. For the end of the world in the *DRN*, see Galzerano (2019).

[411] *Aen.* 6.745-7: *donec longa dies perfecto temporis orbe / concretam exemit labem, purumque relinquit / aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem.* On eschatology in the *Aeneid* see Norden (1903).

[412] See Narducci's (2004) synthesis.

sol claram speciem concreto lumine tectus
exuat, et subito stellanti nocte perempta
sufficiat nullam Luna orbi argentea lucem
sanguineis faciem maculis perfusa nigrantem,
praecipitentque polo passim turbata labanti
sidera, quae lapsu certo spatiove feruntur.

(*Chr.* 4.981-7)

The prophetic aspect of the opening lines of this account is modelled on the premonitory signs that are said to have accompanied the beginning of Cicero's mandate as consul in 63 BC, the year of Catiline's conspiracy, in his epic poem *De Consulatu* (Cic. in *De Div.* 1.18: *cum claram speciem concreto lumine luna / abdidit et subito stellanti nocte perempta est*). The explanation of celestial bodies contained in the same poem is echoed a few lines later (Cic. in *De Div.* 1.17: *quae verbo et falsis Graiorum vocibus errant, / re vera certo lapsu spatioque feruntur*). Cicero's Stoic depiction of Jupiter at the beginning of that fragment must have had an impact on Vida. The image of a God who permeates and has power over the entire universe must have represented a logical prefiguration of the Christian deity for the author.

Another source of this passage postulates such an entity: Lucan and his digression about Thessalian witchcraft (Luc. 6.499-502: *illis et sidera primum / praecipiti deducta polo, Phoebeque serena / non aliter diris verborum obsessa venenis / palluit et nigris terrenisque ignibus arsit*). An imitative appropriation of Stoic poetic images characterises the passage. The world without rules evoked in Manilius' and Lucan's poems might have been adapted in the *Christiad* to depict the end of its vital force (*Chr.* 4.988-89: *Visque ea, quae coeli irrequietos conciet orbes, / desinat, incerto rapiantur ut omnia motu* - Man. 3.83: *nec tamen incerto confunderet omnia motu;* Luc. 1.641-2: *'aut hic errat' ait 'nulla cum lege per aevum / mundus, et incerto discurrunt sidera motu*). The use of Epicurean material creates a similar effect. The pious reincarnated will inhabit Heaven and Earth after the Last Judgment (*Chr.* 4.996-8: *continuo tellure nova coeloque recenti / defunctas animas vita in sua corpora rursus / evocet*), a view similar to the one opposed by Lucretius and according to which the young earth was full of marvellous men (Lucr. 5.907-8: *Quare etiam tellure nova caeloque recenti / talia qui fingit potuisse animalia gigni*). The destiny of the blessed, whose bodies the Father will render immune to chance, is a Christian reconfiguration of Aeneas' apotheosis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Both have been in the Underworld, and thanks to their behaviour have obtained divine favour. For this reason they will be preserved from eternal corruption (*Chr.* 4.1016-17: *corpora clara hominum, quibus atrae obnoxia morti / abluet omnipotens pater* – Ov. *Met.* 14.600-1: *hunc iubet Aeneae quaecumque obnoxia morti / abluere et tacito deferre sub aequora cursu*).[413] The presence of these intertexts, however, does not rule out their coexistence with Virgilian material. Minos, indeed, is a model for Jesus as a judge (*Chr.* 4.993: *adveniens hominum vitas et crimina quaerat* – *Aen.* 6.433: *consiliumque vocat vitasque et crimina discit*),[414] and the souls reincarnated in their bodies after the Final Judgment are a foil for the souls that wait to cross the river on Charon's boat (*Chr.* 4.997-8: *defunctas animas vita in sua corpora rursus / evocet ad blandum lumen* – *Aen.* 6.306-7: *matres atque viri defunctaque corpora vita / magnanimum heroum*).[415]

The end of the world was a fitting theme for a Christian poem, even though for this scene Vida referred to passages of the Gospels rather than the book of Revelation itself.[416] As has already been observed, more than one Latin epic poem embraced eschatological imagery for at least a section of the text; the points of contact analysed engage with the meaning of the hypotext, but they are true also to what the genre had to offer in the way of such material. Vida happened to find this subject as a critical component of the role of knowledge in both his religious tradition and the poetic heritage to which he wanted to assimilate his work.

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[413] On the connection of this line with Jesus' Resurrection at *Chr.* 6.347 see Glei (2010a) 110. The conversion of Ovid's "poetics of the bodies" into a "poetics of the Christian soul" is not a novelty in the Renaissance, but characterises the works of a late antique author as Paulinus of Nola. See Fielding (2017) 40.

[414] This function is depicted through a line adapted from Juvencus (*Chr.* 4.1006-8: *Ipse alte effultus montisque in vertice summo / arbiter effulgens circumferet ora tremenda / secernetque pios dextraque in parte locabit* – Juv. 4.263: *secernet dextraque libens in parte locabit*).

[415] Ferreto de' Ferreti (1294-1337) adopted the same words to talk about the deceased poet Benvenuto Campesani (*Carmina minora* 6.25-7: *Quis tamen exangues animos defunctaque vita / corpora post cineres iterum se velle referri / crederet…?*)

[416] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 302-3.

Chapter 5. Miracles and Marvels

The preservation and the transmission of great men's deeds are at the heart of ancient epic poetry.[417] Phenomenal accomplishments may be the subject of *aristeiai,* conventional and typical scenes which depict heroes at the peak of their martial capacities and performing at their finest (Achilles in *Iliad* 21, Camilla in *Aeneid* 11 or Tydeus in *Thebaid* 2), or they can take the form of dangerous encounters and adventures (Odysseus', the Argonauts', and Aeneas' journeys).[418] Another aspect of the genre's predilection for what is extraordinary is that heroes are usually endowed with "larger-than-life" or exceptional powers and are capable of doing what ordinary men fail to do. Achilles, for instance, is almost invincible in battle, Odysseus is outstandingly clever, the Argonauts are characterised by peculiar skills (Hercules' strength, Orpheus' beguiling music, Jason's leadership and charm). The myths narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* abound with characters who have superhuman or phenomenal abilities (Tiresias predicts the future, Glaucus becomes immortal, Aesculapius can cure terrible illnesses). Gods too usually intervene in the action of most epic poems and manifest their supernatural powers.

In addition to extraordinary deeds, ancient epics also abound with marvellous events that go beyond the boundaries of everyday reality. To name only a few, the flame appearing over Ascanius' head at the moment of the departure of the Trojans from their city or the descent of the Shield of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 2 and 8, respectively, the myriad of metamorphoses in Ovid's eponymous poem, or the springing up of the soldiers from the dragon teeth sowed by Jason in Colchis in *Argonautica* 7. Even Lucan's and Silius Italicus' poems, ostensibly based as they are on historical facts, give space to marvels such as the resurrection of a dead body at the hands of the witch Erichtho in *Bellum Civile* 6 and the personification of Italy warning the consul C. Claudius Nero in *Punica* 15.

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[417] McGill (2016) 6 and 28 with bibliography.

[418] On ancient epic poetry and journeys see Biggs and Blum (2019) 1-2 and Reitz and Finkman (2020).

The contrast between pagan and Christian *mirabilia* was by no means new when Vida composed the *Christiad*.[419] In a passage of the *De Civitate Dei* (10.16), for example, Augustine had already declared that the miracles performed by the people of God cannot be compared with the marvels and the supposedly supernatural practices that appear, among others, in Ovid and Lucan. In addition, the tendency of epic poetry to accommodate fantastic features like the ones mentioned so far and the ubiquitousness of supernatural phenomena in the Gospels presented themselves to the biblical epicist as a potential point of contact between the pagan and the Christian worlds.[420] Numerous are the miracles Jesus performs throughout the three years of his ministry. Similarly, marvels that are not strictly related to his superhuman powers but transcend the laws of nature occur in both the canonical and the apocryphal Gospels, and Vida, on his part, assimilates them to pagan marvels by adjusting his scriptural sources to his own poetic goals.[421] The episodic nature of these phenomena both in the scriptures and in the *Christiad* recommends treating them as isolated scenes. As we shall see in the following pages, contrast is not the only pattern of imitation to inform the vast majority of these events: sometimes convergence of circumstances and action seems to constitute the basis for a point of contact.

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[419] On the question of whether early Christian terminology distinguished these two phenomena see Remus (1982). Non-Christian texts sometimes betray the fluidity of this jargon. See Serv. *ad Aen.* 3.366.

[420] Miracles in biblical epic should not be viewed only as generic markers, for they can serve different purposes. See de Nie's (2011) 367-430 discussion of their function in Sedulius' *Carmen Pascale*.

[421] Even though the latter have been associated with "Silver epic" for a long time, they do not belong exclusively to the literary taste of one age. In fact, they are rather common in other periods. The essays edited by Hardie (2009) have provided extensive evidence of this, and Hardie (2019) 165 himself reiterated the point for late antique and Christian poetry.

5.1 Miracles

The Gospels offer numerous instances of Jesus' superhuman nature and power. This characterisation makes his figure compatible with the horizon of expectations of epic.[422] No wonder, then, if the process of assimilating him to gods and heroes dates back to Antiquity. Christian apologists like Justin Martyr (*First Apology,* AD 155-7) found similarities between the New Testament, on the one hand, and Greek heroes and gods on the other. Centos with Christian content were composed with lines and expressions ripped out of classical epics in the Greek and the Latin world (e.g. Eudocia's centos and Proba's *Cento Virgilianus De Laudibus Christi*). Christian poems such as Juvencus' *Evangeliorum libri* openly attempted the operation of adapting the Gospels to the epic form.[423]

Miracles are a pivotal component of Christianity and Christian narratives. In the Gospels, Jesus frequently performs supernatural deeds such as curing sick people, resurrecting the dead, exercising power over Nature, casting out demons, and forgiving sins. Christian miracles share in the pagan repertoire of portents and antitheses. They often consist in a metamorphosis of status or change of condition that involves a reversal. The very foundation of Christianity, Christ's Resurrection, is a subversion of the natural order.[424] Since the association between pagan *mirabilia* and revelatory Christian *miracula* is a feature of the dialogue between Christian and pagan literature at least since late antiquity, it is not surprising that miraculous deeds present themselves as a natural subject matter for the *Christiad* in its interaction with its classical models.

This section will examine how Vida filled his poem with miracles and how these constitute pivotal moments in the narrative. A typical pattern emerges from the analysis of the numerous miracles considered here. More often than not they presuppose a marvel depicted in an ancient Latin epic poem. The model is evoked and contrasted simultaneously: an ancient wonder often depends on the power of some "pagan" divinity who does not possess the same qualities of Christ, the true God. The interventions of "evil" divine entities are sometimes exploited to highlight by contrast the outcome of Jesus' miracles, which always lead to the good of humans, at least from a Christian standpoint. Occasionally, the classical model represents a negative paradigm, and the action of Christ stands as a counterexample of Christian virtue, thus adding a further layer to the inversions of status inherent to these events in the Gospels. In other words, the intervention of Jesus brings about a change in the intradiegetic world of the narrative, while also signalling the reversal of the behaviour of pagan deities and characters.

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[422] MacDonald (2015) went so far as to argue that the Homeric epics influenced the Gospels of Mark and Luke and the *Acts of the Apostles*.

[423] Juvencus himself refers to Jesus' deeds and even teachings as *gesta*. See McGill (2016) 7.

[424] Hardie (2019) 166-7.

The Raising of Lazarus

The raising of Lazarus, one of the most iconic miracles performed by Jesus, well exemplifies how the theological-philosophical *Kontrastimitation* we have already encountered animates the depiction of these phenomena in the *Christiad*. This episode constitutes also a prefiguration of both Christ's Resurrection and the awakening of the just at the end of time. It is reported only by the Gospel of John (11:1-44), where it is the last portent before the Passion. In Vida's account, it is one of the final miracles in the timeline of events, but, owing to the non-linear arrangement of his narrative, it is one of the first to be reported (*Chr.* 1.100-20; 1.236-99).[425]

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[425] There is a tendency in the *Christiad* to arrange sections of the narrative on the basis of stichometry: the beginnings and ends of several episodes coincide with a line whose number is a multiple of 100 (e.g. 200, 300, etc.). For line numbering in ancient texts, especially Virgil, see Morgan (1999) 26-7 and 222-5.

As usual, the *Aeneid* represents the primary archetype: here the majority of the Virgilian *tesserae* comes from the Dido and the Underworld episodes. Initially, a messenger brings to Jesus and his followers the bad news of Zacchaeus' death (*Chr.* 1.100-1: *Hic subito non laeta ferens gravis impulit aures / nuntius atque animum rumore momordit amaro*), as bitter a report as the news of Aeneas' and Dido's union was for Iarbas (*Aen.* 4.203: *isque amens animi et rumore accensus amaro*, same metrical position).[426] Both Jesus (*Chr.* 1.115-7) and Iarbas (*Aen.* 4.206-18) react by praying to the Father and Jupiter, respectively, and request divine intervention. While Iarbas is filled with rage and wants the destruction of his love rival, Jesus is moved by the death of his friend Lazarus and addresses his companions as Aeneas did with the shade of Dido in the Underworld (*Chr.* 1.114: *demisit lacrimas sociisque haec edidit ore* – *Aen.* 6.455: *demisit lacrimas dulcique adfatus amore est*). Martha and Maria beg Jesus to resurrect their brother Lazarus like Anna begs Aeneas not to leave Carthage for the sake of her sister Dido (*Aen.* 4.438-49). Jesus reassures them with friendly words (*Chr.* 1.256: *Ast heros tristes dictis solatus amicis*), as does Aeneas with his companions (*Aen.* 5.770: *quos bonus Aeneas dictis solatur amicis*).[427] Both heroes set aside a cloud that covers them as they approach their interlocutors (*Chr.* 1.108-10– *Aen.* 1.586-7).[428] The noble status of Lazarus is also reminiscent of Aeneas' nobility as it is touched upon in Jupiter's order to Mercury in *Aeneid* 4. The latter, in turn, is a response to Iarbas' prayer (*Chr.* 1.102-3: *Lazarus haud procul hinc Bethanes regna tenebat, / dives opum, clarus genus alto a sanguine regum* – *Aen.* 4.230: *genus alto a sanguine Teucri /*

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[426] The Florentine poet Naldo Naldi (1439-1513) appropriated the same expression in a funerary elegy (*Elegiae ad Laurentium Medicen* 1.27.65). Whether both poets drew from a commonplace book, or directly from Virgil cannot be established here. Vida might have also been aware of Naldi's work.

[427] See also Sil. 8.210: *cui dea sic dictis curas solatur amicis*, where the deified Anna encourages Hannibal. The line belongs to the *additamentum* which has repaired a lacuna between 8.144 and 8.225 since the 1523 Aldine edition of the *Punica.* On the history of the lacuna, see Heitland (1896) 191. The expression occurs in one of Naldo Naldi's elegies (*Elegiae ad Laurentium Medicen* 3.11.385: *Ille sinu accipiens dictis solatur amicis*)

[428] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 20.

proderet).[429] Lazarus was rich, noble and hospitable like the Carthaginian queen because he used to host Jesus in his house.[430] These similarities delineate a reversal of circumstances: Aeneas and Dido were lovers, his departure indirectly causes her death, and the two will never reconcile. Jesus, in contrast, is returning to his friend's house, will bring him back to life and will be reunited with him.

That there are patterns of imitation is confirmed by the convergence between the witness of Lazarus' resurrection and the Trojans. The way people wait for Jesus' miracle to happen (*Chr.* 1.268-9: *Orantem observant taciti intentique tuentur, / quid iubeat, quae signa ferat, quo deinde cadat res*) resembles how Aeneas behaves in front of the twin doves sent by Venus in response to his request to find the golden bough (*Aen.* 6.197-8: *Sic effatus vestigia pressit / observans quae signa ferant, quo tendere pergant*). As the latter allows him to enter the Underworld while he is still living and to encounter the dead, so those who observe the resurrection of Lazarus will be able to meet a man who returned from death. People from the surrounding area come to see what is about to happen (*Chr.* 1.262-4: *Vicinis populi passim de montibus omnes / concurrunt studio visendi atque omnia complent. / Ventum erat ad tumulum. Stat circumfusa iuventus*),[431] as the Trojan youths do to catch sight of Sinon (*Aen.* 2.63-4: *undique visendi studio Troiana iuventus / circumfusa ruit*).[432] When the doors of the tomb tremble and Lazarus walks out of it, these spectators are struck with fear (*Chr.* 1.273-4: *Omnibus extemplo subita formidine sanguis / diriguit*), the same reaction that the Trojans manifested when they heard the prophecy of the harpy Celaeno (*Aen.* 3.259-60: *At*

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[429] The expression occurs at *Aen.* 5.45 and 6.500, where Aeneas uses it to address his companions and Deiphobus, and had been imitated multiple times in fourteenth century Neo-Latin poetry.

[430] On reception scenes in epics from Homer to Silius, see Ripoll (2020).

[431] The news that Jesus is going to perform this miracle quickly spreads throughout the town of Bethany, where the episode takes place (*Chr.* 1.260: *Diditur haec totam confestim fama per urbem*), resembling the Virgilian *fama* (*Aen.* 4.666: *concussam bacchatur Fama per urbem; Aen.* 12.608: *hinc totam infelix vulgatur fama per urbem*). Here *fama* is never represented in her Personified version; see Hardie's (2012) 418-29 treatment of this concept in the *Christiad*.

[432] Despite being a negative figure, this character will prefigure Jesus in the scene of the Trial before the Sanhedrin, as Hardie (1993b) 28 n.21 observed.

sociis subita gelidus formidine sanguis / deriguit). People rush toward the sepulchre (*Chr.* 1.283: *Concursu accedunt magno attonitique pavore*), like the Trojans when they reunite with Aeneas at Carthage (*Aen.* 1.509-11: *cum subito Aeneas concursu accedere magno*). Astounded as they are,[433] the witnesses gather to see Lazarus and hear what he has to say about the Afterlife (*Chr.* 1.288-9: *Nec sat vidisse loquentem / aut audisse semel*) as the souls of the dead warriors do when they meet Aeneas and ask him the reasons for his visit (*Aen.* 6.487: *nec vidisse semel satis est*).

It would be a mistake, though, to consider Virgil the only poetic source at work. Not only does Vida employ traditional formulas,[434] but he also engages with other poets by way of contrastive imitation, though less extensively and at times more vaguely. Jesus' journey toward Lazarus' house (*Chr.* 1.236: *Iamque emensus iter multis comitantibus heros*), for instance, mirrors that of Tydeus towards Thebes and back as ambassador to remind Eteocles that it is Polynices' turn to rule over the city in Statius' *Thebaid* (*Theb.* 2.375: *Iamque emensus iter silvis ac litore durum* and 3.324-5: *Iamque remensus iter fesso Danaeia Tydeus / arva gradu viridisque legit devexa Prosymnae*). Tydeus is travelling on behalf of his friend Polynices, but his attempt to bring peace fails. He will bring death to a multitude of warriors (*Theb.* 2.527-743), and the consequence of his embassy will be the outbreak of war between the Argives and the Thebans and between the brothers Polynices and Eteocles. On the contrary, Jesus' journey for the sake of a friend will eventually lead to the latter's coming back to life and his reunion with his sisters Maria and Martha. Another Statian expression, though apparently without meaningful resonances, appears when Jesus orders to open the sepulchre so that Lazarus could come out of it (*Chr.* 1.282: *Nec mora praeceptis, patuerunt claustra sepulcri*). He is immediately obeyed, as king Adrastus after bidding the nurse Acaste to summon his daughters from their private chamber (*Theb.* 1.533: *Nec mora praeceptis, cum protinus utraque virgo / arcano egressae thalamo*).[435]

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[433] *Chr.* 1.288: *Obstupuere omnes* occurs at the beginning of the hexameter three times, all of them in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in the form *obstipuere omnes*, as a reaction to a marvel or as a sign of indignation. 8.616 (Pirithous accuses the god Achelous to lie and everyone feels disdain for him), 8.765 (the giant tree sacred to Demeter bleeds as Erysichthon hits it, a phenomenon that shocks his companion), 12.18 (the omen of the snake eating eight fledglings with their mother strikes the Achaeans).

[434] E.g. *ad sidera palmas* (*Chr.* 1.265-7). Cf. Virg. *Aen.* 1.93, 2.153, 9.16, Ov. *Met.* 6.368, 9.175, *Il. Lat*. 1027, Stat. *Theb.* 1.497, 10.336, Val. Fl. 1.80, 4.473, Sil. 15.561, 17.635.

Sometimes the phrasing that Vida shares with his models is made of more common expressions and the interpreter has to consider more than ever whether there is a meaningful connection. This is the case of Maria and Martha's plea to Jesus to bring back Lazarus. They observe that the Father has never denied him anything and will not make an exception now (*Chr.* 1.252-3: *nil quando clari tibi rector Olympi / abnuit*). The formula *rector Olympi* preceded by the pronoun *tu* in the dative is not particularly marked. However, in Lucan, the author that, among those who use this expression, was perhaps the best known to Vida,[436] the context has a thematic connection with and is in antithesis to Vida's passage (Luc. 2.4-5 *cur hanc tibi, rector Olympi , / sollicitis visum mortalibus addere curam*). At the beginning of *Bellum Civile* 2 monstruous phenomena foreshadow the outbreak of the Civil War and the ensuing tyranny of Caesar. The narrator wonders why Jupiter is reverting the laws of nature and making men aware of their horrible destiny. In both passages supernatural events take place on earth by divine will. But in Lucan this will is questioned and a conceptual inconsistency between two opposite views of the world runs through the lines, namely a deterministic Stoic conception of the cosmos, where an omnipotent divinity –cruel, given the circumstances– controls everything, and an absolute indeterministic theory, according to which chance ultimately regulates the universe.[437] That the connection between Lucan's and Vida's passages is hardly casual is suggested by the circumstances of the two narratives.

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[435] The same Statian source is utilised at *Chr.* 6.608. Here Jesus indicates his disciples where to steer their boat and they immediately obey.

[436] Prisc. *in laud. Anast*. 162; Arator *De act. apost*. 1117; Filelfo *satyrae* 2.50; Giacomo Della Croce, *carmen ad Odoricum* 19. Only an enquiry about the circulation of these authors in Vida's place and time can confirm this supposition, though.

[437] On this exegetical problem see Narducci (2002) 152-66.

While Lucan wishes that men should not know the future, those who witness the resurrection of Lazarus are not only informed about what happens after death (*Chr.* 1.289-99), but have in front of them Jesus, the God who reveals to them the truths of Christianity. The impotence of man and the cruelty of reality depicted by Lucan are replaced in Vida by the actual possibility of a divine intervention and by the certainty of a positive design for men. As Jesus asks the Father to give him the power to give life to Lazarus' dead body (*Chr.* 1.276-7: *summe parens, quamvis precibus nil abnuis unquam / ipse meis quaecumque petam*) he employs the same words with which the narrator of the *Bellum Civile* requests the miraculous intervention of Jupiter and Neptune to put an end to the Civil War (Luc. 4.110: *sic, o summe parens mundi, sic, sorte secunda*), a prayer left unanswered.[438] In Lucan, the course of the events, be it predetermined by a cruel god or at the mercy of pure chance, cannot be changed. The world of the *Christiad*, instead, is in the hands of a benevolent God who listens to the prayers of the afflicted.

The Healing of Jethro

The raising of Lazarus is not the only miracle to be shot through with classical intertexts. The depiction of sick and suffering people was frequent in the ancient epic tradition and in the Gospels. Vida exploited this further similarity more than once. For instance, the disabled crowds that approach Jesus in the *Christiad* act like the tired Carthaginians crossing the Alps in the words of Scipio (*Chr.* 1.370-2: *Multi ibant oculis clausis, multi auribus orti / indociles, fandi ignari, quique aegra trahebant / membra* – Sil. 4.68-9: *hostem, miles, habes fractum ambustumque nivosis / cautibus atque aegre torpentia membra trahentem*). The presence of the *Punica* seems to resurface in an episode that revolves around a paralytic named Jethro (*Chr.* 1.436-510). The scene is based on John 5 and is set at the gates of Jerusalem, more specifically near the Sheep Pool (Bethesda), whose waters have healing powers for the first that manage to jump into them at a signal sent from heaven.[439] Sick people gather around them and promptly wait for such a signal (*Chr.* 1.463-4: *laticesque quietos / servabant oculis atque omnes auribus auras*), as the crowd of the Romans is eager to watch the funeral games in honour of Scipio's father and uncle in the *Punica* (Sil. 16.315-6: *mobile vulgus / atque fores oculis et limina servat equorum*).[440] The competition they are watching is a horse race, a contest that is evoked in Vida by these sick people ready to jump and by the following simile that likens them to runners (*Chr.* 1.468-9).[441]

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[438] *Summe parens* occurs in other presumably lesser-known texts: *Il. Lat*. 89; and Coripp. *Ioh*. 4.270; Bonifacio Veronese, *Annayde* 2.78; Petrarch, *Africa* 1.14 and 7.622; *epitaphio Johannis de Lignano* 55; Angela Nogarola *epist.* 2.1; Strozzi, *carmina* 1.248; Scaligero, *Elys.* 1.335. By "lesser-known" I do not mean that Vida could not have read and engaged with them as well.

As we have already observed, convergence accompanies divergence. The Sheep Pool has a model in the valley and the fountain where Diana bathes with her nymphs and is accidentally beheld by Actaeon (*Chr.* 1.439-40: *Vallis erat circum frondosis undique saepta / collibus* – Ov. *Met.* 3.155: *Vallis erat piceis et acuta densa cupressu*).[442] The goddess has him devoured by his dogs and turns him into a stag, whereas Jesus restores Jethro's ability to walk. He is an old man afflicted by ailments, who cannot reach the pool without being overtaken by someone faster than him. His illness finds a parallel in the treatment of diseases in *Georgics* 3 (*Chr.* 1.480-1: *pauperiem morbo adiecit miserandus iniquam, / ossibus ad vivum qui iam persederat imis* – *Georg.* 3.441-2: *turpis ovis temptat scabies, ubi frigidus*

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[439] The sign consists of a wave reaching the sky (*Chr.* 1.449-50: *et perculsa repente / sublato ad coelum spumabant coerula fluctu*) and is clearly modelled on the depiction of Ocean on the Shield of Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.671-2: *haec inter tumidi late maris ibat imago / aurea, sed fluctu spumabant caerula cano*).

[440] Vida seems to have had in mind this episode even in the version of the of the feeding of the 5000.

[441] The echo of the ship contest in *Aeneid* 5 further highlights the agonistic connotation of this scene (*Chr.* 1.462-3: *Ergo expectabant denso miseri agmine circum / e coelo signum intenti;* 1.472-3: *Pulsat pavor intus pectora anhelus / omnibus atque locum spondet sibi quisque priorem* – *Aen.* 5.137-8: *intenti exspectant signum, exsultantiaque haurit / corda pavor pulsans laudumque arrecta cupido*).

[442] The physical description of this pool of water (*Chr.* 1.440-1: *In medio rivis atque imbribus umor / collectus semper stabat laticesque perennes*) is based on Lucretius (Lucr. 5.261-3: *umore novo mare flumina fontes / semper abundare et latices manare perennis / nil opus est verbis*), in accordance with the pattern expounded in sections 3.6 and 4.1.

imber / altius ad vivum persedit).[443] The snake with a three forked tongue to which Jethro is compared (*Chr.* 1.510: *perque domum serpens micat arduus ore trilingui*) resembles the Calabrian snake described by Virgil in the same poem (*Georg.* 3.439: *arduus ad solem et linguis micat ore trisulcis*).[444] Jethro himself brings to mind Aristaeus, another man who approaches a body of water in order to solve his problem, the loss of his bees, and receives help from a divinity (*Chr.* 1.482-3: *Iamque fere denum in luctu quater egerat annum / innumeris circumventus morbisque fameque* – *Georg.* 4.317-8: *pastor Aristaeus fugiens Peneia Tempe, / amissis, ut fama, apibus morboque fameque*).[445] Both manage to get back to a previous status. Aristaeus will have his bees back thanks to the miracle of *bugonia*, namely the generation of bees from the carcass of a cow. Jethro will be able to walk on his own and put his mat on his shoulders. In his case, however, there is no need to dive into the fountain. He does not have to search for Jesus. Rather, it is Jesus that takes the initiative to approach the old man and to use his miraculous power to restore him.

Nicodemus’ Account of Jesus’ Miracles

Silius’ *Punica* and the *Georgics* seem to be the sources for the representation of the sick in the speech that Nicodemus, one of the leaders of Jerusalem and a former opponent of Jesus, delivers during the council of the high priests possessed by demons. His secret acknowledgement of Jesus' divine nature allows him to be the only one among the participants to the council to resist the bewitchment of the forces of evil. He has hidden his conversion since then and now has decided to declare which side he is on, by reminding his companions of some of the miracles attributed to the Nazarene (*Chr.* 2.173-85). He first brings up the countless sick people who, before being healed by Christ, dragged their limbs around (*Chr.* 2.176-8: *Aegris quot reddita venit / insperata salus, qui lenta aut membra trahebant / victa lue aut subito correpti corpora morbo*?), like the tired Carthaginians on the Alps in the *Punica* (Sil. 4.69: *aegre torpentia membra trahentem*), and suffered as the flocks in the grips of the plague in *Georgics* 3 (*Georg.* 3.471-2: *nec singula morbi / corpora corripiunt*).[446]

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[443] The presence of the *Georgics* (*Georg.* 1.272: *balantumque gregem fluvio mersare salubri*) is visible also in the image of the shepherds watering their flocks (*Chr.* 1.443-4: *et potum pariter pecudes compellere prisci / pastores lymphaeque gregem curare salubri*) and in Jethro’s words (*Chr.* 1.497-8: *nec me tunc opis externae dignatur egentem / in stagno quisquam ante alios mersare salubri*.)

[444] The line reoccurs in *Aen.* 2.473-5, in the simile that likens Neoptolemus to a snake. Even in this case the model is overturned.

[445] The clause is employed also in the portrayal of a further sick and lonely man, Philoctetes, (Ov. *Met.* 13.51-2: *pars una ducum, quo successore sagittae / Herculis utuntur, fractus morboque fameque*). Occurrences with additional members can be found in Lucretius’ description of the spirits of the worms that infest corpses (Lur. 3.731-2: *neque enim, sine corpore cum sunt, / sollicitae volitant morbis alguque fameque*), a pertinent theme for the *bugonia* that propels the episode of Aristaeus, and in Statius’ Tisiphone (*Theb.* 1.107-9: *igneus atro / ore vapor, quo longa sitis morbique famesque / et populis mors una venit*).

The indignation at the incredulity of the members of the council expressed by Nicodemus echoes Lucretius' disdain for men's anxieties (*Chr.* 2. 182: *Pro laevas hominum mentis, pro pectore caeca!* – Lucr. 2.14: *o miseras hominum mentis, o pectora caeca!*).[447] The Christian worldview replaces Epicureanism and its claims to release humanity from its pain and limited views, though appropriating its criticism of the "unenlightened". Nicodemus is thus indirectly compared to the Epicurean sage who walks on the path of truth and has absorbed the message of the master, since he understood the profound implications of Jesus' incarnation and ministry. By the same token, the other leaders of the city appear as the counterparts of the unwise people tormented by mundane toils in the *De Rerum Natura*.[448] Nicodemus' speech is a forceful exhortation to acknowledge one's sins, repent and believe in God. As in the case of the Jethro episode,[449] scepticism is exhibited, if at all, not for Jesus' miraculous powers but for the healing effects of herbs (*Chr.* 2.183-4: *Non haec Paeoniis succis, non artibus ullis / confieri possunt*) which in Virgil bring back to life Hippolytus (*Aen.* 7.767-9: *ad sidera rursus / aetheria et superas caeli venisse sub auras, / Paeoniis revocatum herbis et amore Dianae*).[450] Previous *Quellenforschungen* have overlooked that the declaration of Jesus' divinity here (*Chr* 2.184-5: *Maior Deus intus agit rem, / maius numen inest*) has a parallel in Iapyx's admission that the cure for Aeneas' wound does not come from his own medical skills (*Aen.* 12.400-2), but from a higher power (*Aen.* 12.429: *Maior agit deus atque opera ad maiora remittit*).

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[446] Another similar passage is Manilius' mentioning of the illnesses announced by comets (Man. 1.880-1: *aut gravibus morbis et lenta corpora tabe / corripit exustis letalis flamma medullis*). The convergence of pagan and Christian material also emerges through the verbal nexus that associates the recovery from deafness and mutism at the hands of Jesus (*Chr.* 2.175-6: *Multi etiam voces obstructis auribus orti / accipiunt redduntque*) with the work of the Cyclops as they are compared to the bees (*Georg.* 4.171-2= *Aen.* 8.449-50: *follibus auras / accipiunt redduntque*).

[447] Vida was not the first Renaissance author to echo this Lucretian passage. E.g. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *Epigramata* 27.9: *Proh vanas hominum mentes! Proh pectora ceca!*

[448] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 119. See also section 6.3.

The intervention of supernatural beings on the human realm has tangible effects. These can substantially diverge if their agents are demonic entities or benevolent gods, be they pagan or Christian. Nicodemus, for instance, recalls how the raising of Lazarus threw a town into confusion (*Chr.* 2.180-1: *Modo Lazarus omnem / perculit et monstro ingenti permiscuit urbem*), which is a reversal of the attack of the fury Allecto on Amata (*Aen.* 7.346-8: *Huic dea caeruleis unum de crinibus anguem / conicit inque sinum precordia ad intuma subdit, / quo furibunda domum monstro permisceat omnem* – 7.376-7: *tum vero infelix ingentibus excita monstris / immensam sine more furit lymphata per urbem*). Allecto is a chthonic entity sent by Juno to stop the Trojans' progress toward the completion of Fate, a bringer of conflict and death. The resurrection of Lazarus, on the other hand, expresses that reversal of order brought about by Christ, the overturning of death into life. While the former stands for a return to a previous state, or at least for conserving the actual status and a delay of change, the latter manifests the renewal generated by Christianity and prefigures the accomplishment of Fate, Christ's Resurrection.

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[449] At *Chr.* 1.477-9 the narrator explains that Jethro had been a wealthy man who wasted all his money to find a cure for his disease. Medicine is opposed to divine powers once again at *Chr.* 4.534-4, John's ascertainment that he and the other disciples could raise the dead by repeating Jesus' name three times.

[450] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 119.

The Marriage at Cana

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, changes of condition and metamorphoses of status are essential components of pagan and Christian *mirabilia*. The contexts in which they take place in the *Christiad* often involve an opposition between the behavioural paradigm embodied by their respective actors. The conversion of water into wine at Cana reported by Joseph at the end of his long account of Jesus' birth and infancy well illustrates this point. The episode is reported only by the Gospel of John (2:1-11), and here it is adapted (*Chr.* 3.979-1001).[451] The story is that the Holy Family has been invited to a wedding. Jesus, following the request of his mother Mary, has six casks filled with water, which he then converts into wine. Along with the miracle, which in and of itself instantiates a reversal, the nuptial banquet functions as a positive inversion of the marriage of Pirithous and Hippodamia in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Chr.* 3.986: *Iamque omnes circum positis discumbere mensis* – Ov. *Met.* 12.210-12: *Duxerat Hippodamen audaci Ixione natus / nubigenasque feros positis ex ordine mensis / arboribus tecto discumbere iusserat antro*).[452] Old men recall these stories, Nestor in Ovid and Joseph in Vida. In both scenes an obstacle disturbs the celebration: some of Pirithous' and Hippodamia's guests, the Centaurs, get drunk and try to abduct the women (Ov. *Met.* 12.219-22: *nam tibi, saevorum saevissime Centaurorum, / Euryte, quam vino pectus tam virgine visa / ardet, et ebrietas geminata libidine regnat. / protinus eversae turbant convivia mensae*). At Cana, they run out of wine (*Chr.* 3.990-1: *laetitiae causam exhaustis liquentia vina / defecisse cadis, turbarique omnia visa*). In both cases the halls resound with laments (*Chr.* 3.988-9 – Ov. *Met.* 12.226), but the outcome is reversed: the Centaurs provoke a fight, friends of the spouse intervene (e.g. Theseus), and the party is ruined in the end. The guests at Cana, instead, contribute to the success of the ceremony, because Mary asks Jesus to help their friends who are getting married. In Ovid, cups are used to fight and wine gets mixed with blood, as when, for instance, the Centaurs Eurytus and Aphidas are mortally wounded, respectively, by Theseus (Ov. *Met.* 12.238-40) and Phorbas (Ov. *Met.* 12.316-26). In Vida, empty casks are filled with water, and this is turned into wine by Jesus (*Chr.* 3.997-1001). In the model, an excess of wine causes degeneracy, whereas in the *Christiad* its lack constitutes an occasion for the divinity to intervene with his supernatural powers and manifest his benevolence.

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[451] Joseph is not mentioned in the Gospel, for instance. For more details see von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 253.

[452] Glei (2003) 150 briefly hinted at the similarity with the battle between Lapiths and Centaurs.

John's Account of Jesus' Miracles

The remaining miracles that we will discuss in this part of the chapter belong to John's account in *Christiad* 4, which must first be contextualised.[453] This report is an answer to Pilate's request to learn more about Jesus' identity and deeds at the end of the previous book.[454] In these cases too, pagan and Christian *mirabilia* are often either very close to one another or in meaningful antithesis. The raising of the young man in Nain (*Chr.* 4.315-42), whose Biblical source is Luke 7:11-17, exemplifies how pagan and Christian *mirabilia* can almost coincide. The episode starts with a reference to the raising of Hippolytus by Jupiter in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 7.770-1: *tum pater omnipotens aliquem indignatus ad umbris / mortalem*

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[453] Paradoxically, most of the miracles Vida has John recount occur exclusively in the Synoptic Gospels and not in the Gospel of John.

[454] The latter are so so numerous that it would not be possible for him to list them all (*Chr.* 4.280-2: *Pauca sed e multis, et ea haud mihi mollia fatu, / ingrediar tamen et breviter tua iussa capessens / expediam*). The hardship of this task is the same one that Latinus has to face when he tells Turnus that Lavinia should be given in marriage to a stranger (*Aen.* 12.25-6: *sine me haec haud mollia fatu / sublatis aperire dolis*). See also *Georg.* 3.41 (*interea Dryadum silvas saltusque sequamur / intactos, tua, Maecenas, haud mollia iussa*). Virgil addresses Maecenas, as John does with Pilate, who thus represents an ideal patron since he asked both Joseph and John to talk in the first place. Another *locus similis* is *Aen.* 3.377-9 (*pauca tibi e multis, quo tutior hospita lustres / aequaora et Ausonio possis considere portu, / expediam dictis*), where Helenus responds to Aeneas' request to reveal the obstacles he will find along the way.

infernis ad lumina surgere vitae), which is alluded to in Nicodemus' account of Christ's miracles as well (*Chr.* 4.315-6: *Nondum aliquem tamen infernis revocaverat umbris / morte obita*). As Jesus touches him, the dead boy rises up and goes embrace his mother.[455] The astonishment of the bystanders once the miracle is performed (*Chr.* 4.339-41: *Ecce / erigitur puer et -cunctis mirabile visum- / prosiluit raptim in medios*) is phrased as the amazement of the Greeks in *Metamorphoses* 12, as they ascertain that Achilles has an invulnerable body (Ov. *Met.* 12.165-7: *visum mirabile cunctis, / quod iuvenis corpus nullo penetrabile telo / invictumque a vulnere erat ferrumque ferebat*).

John's description of the physical conditions of the sick people who approach Jesus returns to the *De Rerum Natura* as a model for the representation of physical and psychological realities:

> *Tum quibus assiduis concussa tremoribus usque*
> *nutabant tremuloque lababant corpore membra,*
> *ignea quos febris aut corrupti corporis umor,*
> *et quos praeterea vis caeci incognita morbi*
> *versabat lecto totos distracta per artus,*
> *quosve animis captos agitans male habebat Erinnys.*

(*Chr.* 4.303-8)

Here the healing of the physically and mentally ill relies on Lucretius' illustration of epilepsy, which he uses as an argument to demonstrate the inextricable connection between mind and body (Lucr. 3.489-93: *tremit artus / desipit, extentat nervos, torquetur, anhelat / inconstanter, et in iactando membra fatigat; / nimirum quia vi morbi distracta per artus / turbat agens animam spumas* – 3.502-3: *reditque / in latebras acer corrupti corporis umor*).[456]

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[455] We will investigate the relationship between the two in section 7.1.

[456] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 273.

We have already seen also how the *Punica* seems to inform the characterisation of the sick in Vida and this passage might corroborate that hypothesis. The outbreak of the plague in the Roman camp at Syracuse has an affinity with the lines mentioned above (Sil. 14.598-9: *arebat lingua, et gelidus per viscera sudor / corpore manabat tremulo*). An Erinys is said to drive mad both the demoniacs in Vida and the inhabitants of Saguntum in Silius (Sil. 2.594-5: *sperare saluti / pertaesum, damnantque cibos, agit addita Erinys*). Unlike the sick cured by Jesus, the Saguntines long to put an end to their life because they perceive it as a burden (Sil. 2.596-8) after the intervention of an evil entity sent by Juno to eradicate *Fides* (Sil. 2.542).[457] Jesus, instead, is the Good and is sent by his Father to restore faith. His interaction with the people he meets leads to joy and happiness (*Chr.* 4.293: *validos laetosque remisit*). Just as the madness of the Saguntines is an obstacle through which they can prove their irresistible attachment to *Fides* –they immolate themselves on a communal pyre rather than surrendering to Hannibal and betraying Rome–,[458] the possession of the men who meet Jesus is an instrument God uses to display his power and benevolence.

Feeding the Multitude

Silius is arguably a source also in the multiplication of the loaves and fish (*Chr.* 4.351-88 – Mt 14:31, Mk 6:31-44, Lk 9:12-17 and Jhn. 6:1-15).[459] One day, Jesus stops on the top of a mountain to look at the vast crowd which has followed him through the desert, and that has gone three days without eating. He takes pity on these people, and since there was no food available, he decides to multiply the meagre supply of a boy, two loaves and two fishes. The games of *Punica* 16 and those of *Aeneid* 5 inspire this scene. The absence of food (*Chr.* 4.356-7: *Eos iam tertia namque / muneris expertes Cereris lux acta videbat*) inverts the presence of prizes that Scipio guarantees during the announcement of the celebration (Sil. 16. 300-1: *praemia digna dabo, e Tyria spolia incluta praeda / nec quisquam nostri discedet muneris expers*).[460] Jesus summons his disciples and addresses them (*Chr.* 4.368: *in coetum vocat ac paucis ita deinde profatur*) like Scipio does with his men (Sil. 16.286-7: *et Latios simul et vulgum Baetisque Tagique / convocat ac medio in coetu sic deinde profatur*). The disciples are reassured that no one would go away hungry from that place (*Chr.* 4.369: *Nemo hodie numero e tanto non laetus abibit*), in a phrase indebted to Aeneas' pledge to leave no participant to the foot race without a prize (*Aen.* 5.304-5: *accipite haec animis laetasque advertite mentes. / nemo ex hoc numero mihi non donatus abibit*).

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[457] The importance of *fides* in Silius' poem has been illustrated by Von Albrecht (1964) 55.

[458] Vessey (1974) 32-4 highlighted this point.

[459] It should not be confused with the feeding of the 4000, which occurs only in Mt. 15:32-9 and Mk. 8:1-9 and presents some differences, e.g. the number of people (4000 as opposed to the 5000 with the episode reworked by Vida) and the baskets necessary to collect the food left over at the end of the meal, 12 rather than 7.

The relationship between Jesus and the crowd reflects the bond between Aeneas and his men.[461] There is a pattern of convergence between the connection of these dejected people (*Chr.* 4.353-5: *ingentem vidit numerum affluxisse sequentum / matres atque viros*) and the disciples to Jesus on one hand (*Chr.* 4.366-7: *Et iam diffisi socii mussare querentes, / quos bonus affatu Christus solatus amico*) and Aeneas' authority over the survivors of the fall of Troy (*Aen.* 2.796-7: *Atque hic ingentem comitum adfluxisse novorum / invenio admirans numerum, matresque virosque*[462] – *Aen.* 5.770-1: *quos bonus Aeneas dictis solatur amicis / et consaguineo lacrimans commendat Acestae*).[463] In the prayer to the Father, the hunger of the crowd (*Chr.* 4.377: *adsis obscenamque famem tot millibus arce*) is like that of the Trojans in the prophecy of the harpy Celaeno (*Aen.* 3.366-7: *tristis denuntiat iras / obscenamque famem*). Jesus provides and divides food for his followers (*Chr.* 4.380-1: *Inde in frustra secat laeto cerealia vultu / liba minutatim et populos partitur in omnis*). The Trojan hero brings stags to his companions for them to divide and eat (*Aen.* 1.194: *hinc portum petit et socios partitur in omnis*) There is also a subtle difference between the two texts, though. Jesus has a sincerely happy face, whereas Aeneas has to simulate hope in his facial expression (1.209: *spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem*).[464]

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[460] The expression *muneris expertes* is utilised by Juvencus too in his *Evangeliorum Libri* to indicate those who lack heaven's gifts (Juv. 2.763-4: *qui vero expertes caelestis muneris errant / amittent etiam, proprium quodcumque retentant*). His presence re-emerges in this scene of the *Christiad* where Jesus begins his prayer (*Chr.* 4.370: *Hinc supplex tali genitorem voce precatur*), a line that is an almost verbatim quotation of the introduction of his prayer to bring Lazarus back to life in Juvencus' poem (Juv. 4.386: *Suscipit et tali genitorem voce precatur*).

[461] On Jesus and his disciples see section 6.4.

[462] The same Virgilian scene functions as a model for the huge group of people that follows Jesus at *Chr.* 1.18-20 see Hardie (2012) 424. We have already come across *solatur amicis* in the Lazarus episode.

[463] The combination of *solatur* and *amicis* had already been referred to Acestes as he received the Trojans at *Aen.* 5.41. The weary are now handed down to him. It is almost as if a narrative ring is closed, as Fratantuono and Smith (2015) 664 observed.

The multiplying of scanty food by a divine being had a more specific non-Christian parallel in the story of Philemon and Baucis, the old couple who offer a meal to Jupiter and Mercury disguised as peasants in *Metamorphoses* 8. Everyone except Philemon and Baucis rejected the two gods. As Jupiter and Mercury are hosted and served, they manifest their true identities and reciprocate the hospitality of the couple by multiplying the wine and by saving them from the destruction of their town (Ov. *Met.* 8.679-80: *Interea totiens haustum cratera repleri / sponte sua per seque vident succrescere vina*). The miracle may have influenced this scene (*Chr.* 4.384: *omnibus in manibus visae succrescere partes*). In both stories, poor people offer the little food they have and receive much more from the god(s). In Ovid, two poor human beings prepare a meal for Jupiter and Mercury. In the *Christiad,* Jesus is the one who offers food, and the needy masses of men are the receivers.[465]

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[464] The material details are indebted to Lucretius: the satisfaction of hunger and thirst (*Chr.* 4.386: *Et frugum pariter laticumque expleta cupido est* - Lucr. 4.1093: *hoc facile expletur laticum frugumque cupido*) or the fact that the creation of the Father can exist without seeds (*Chr.* 4.375-6: *semine si nullo constant, quaecumque creasti, / et nihil omnino fuerant coelum, aequora, tellus*), which is impossible according to Epicurean physics. Lucretius frequently couples *semina* and *consto* (e.g. Lucr. 1.221: *quod nunc, aeterno quia constant semine quaeque*).

[465] It might be worth investigating if Vida's use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is indebted to some commentary traditions. Although it is impossible to prove a connection with this passage of the *Christiad,* it should be noted that the episode of Philemon and Baucis was interpreted in more than one medieval commentary as an example of Christian charity work for the poor. Two case studies can be found in Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus* and Giovanni del Virgilio's *Allegorie* (*sic.*) *librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos*. The former presents this as the first of two potential interpretations of the myth (*ad loc.*): *Istud exemplum expone, quomodo hospitalitas placet*

Furthermore, he wants to save as many humans as possible and shows compassion for their misery. The two pagan deities, instead, punish severely those who rejected them by granting them no possibility to realise they have sinned and to repent.

Calming the Storm

The calming of the storm (*Chr.* 4.399-427 – Mt 8:23-7, Mk 4:35-41, Lk 8:22-5) displays the same association between the disciples and the Trojans. The former are caught by a tempest while fishing in the dead of night. As panic takes hold of them, they spot Jesus walking on water among the waves. He reproaches them for their lack of faith and then quells the storm with a nod. The correspondence John-Aeneas as internal narrators is re-established here. John attests the miracle first-hand (*Chr.* 4.401-3: *Vidi, vidi ipse furentes / illius hibernos ad vocem ponere coros / vimque omnem, motas quae flabris asperat undas*), just as Aeneas witnesses the slaughter of the Trojans by Neoptolemus during the sack of Troy (*Aen.* 2.499-500: *vidi ipse furentem / caede Neoptolemum*). The disciples' reaction to the calming of the storm (*Chr.* 4.410: *Nos trepidare metu leti discrimine parvo*) mirrors both the astonishment of the Trojans at the marvellous appearance of a flame on Ascanius' head (*Aen.* 2.685-6: *nos pavidi trepidare metu crinemque flagrantem / excutere*) and Aeneas' comment on the sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis (*Aen.* 3.685-6: *utrimque viam leti discrimine parvo, / ni*

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deo et inhospitalitas displicet et quomodo hospites a deo premiantur et avari subvertuntur. Dii, id est Christus et angeli, comperti sunt sub specie peregrinorum hospitari, ut sic probarent affectiones hominum, sicut patet de Loth et duobus angelis in Sodoma Gen. 19: Sodoma submersa est et Loth liberatus est. Ideo dicit Apostolus ad Hebr. 13: "Caritas fraternitatis maneat in vobis". Adverte tamen, quod cibus diis positus non dicitur minui, sed augeri, quia cibus et bona bonorum virorum, qui amore dei recipiunt pauperes et reficiunt indigentes et maxime deos, id est viros religiosos et devotos, ex hoc non minuuntur, sed, ut communiter videmus, sibi potius sufficiunt et augentur, Prov. 3: "Da pauperibus et implebuntur horrea tua". Similarly, Giovanni del Virgilio opts for an analogous reading (*ad loc.*): *Nam Philemon et Baucis fuerunt iustissimi et caritativi homines unde omnes pauperes suscipiebant in domo sua. Unde per Jovem et Mercurium intellige pauperes Dei. Nam qui recipit unum pauperem in nomine Dei recipit Deum.* These excerpts are quoted from the respective texts edited by Dieter, Meier-Staubach, Stenmans, Smout (2021) and Ghisalberti (1933).

teneam cursus).[466] The stillness of the water (*Chr.* 4.405: *cum subito in lento deprensis marmore nobis*) brings into play the Trojan ships becalmed before the Italian coast (*Aen.* 7.26-7: *cum venti posuere omnisque repente resedit / flatus, et in lento luctantur marmore tonsae*).

Storm scenes are a commonplace of epic poetry,[467] and Vida's rendition of this biblical episode is close not only to the *Aeneid* but also to late antique Christian epics. Future studies might try to determine if this co-presence of Virgilian and late antique Christian intertexts is due to the fact that the *Aeneid* is a common source. Suffice it to say that Vida borrowed from Virgil the same expressions that Juvencus and Sedulius borrowed for the same scene. Jesus reproaches and exhorts his disciples (*Chr.* 4.419-20: *Quonam fiducia vobis / iam nunc pulsa mei cessit? Timor omnis abesto*) with the words he employs in Juvencus' version of the calming of the storm (Iuv. 3.107: *Tum pavidis Christus loquitur: "Timor omnis abesto*),[468] and which, in turn, is a quotation of a phrase pronounced by Aeneas to encourage his companions after his victory over Mezentius (*Aen.* 11.14: *maxima res effecta, viri: timor omnis abesto*). [469] Likewise, Jesus puts a stop to the storm in Vida (*Chr.* 4.422-4: *Sic ait atque ratem, quae iam superantibus undis / cesserat, insiliens solo tumida aequora nutu / placavit*) and Sedulius' account of this episode (*Carm pasch.* 3.62-3: *exsurgens Dominus validis mitescere ventis / imperat et dicto citius tumida aequora placat*), [470] just like Neptune in *Aeneid* 1 (*Aen.* 1.142: *Sic ait, et dicto citius tumida aequora placat*).[471] Both Jesus and

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[466] The sea adventures of *Aeneid* 3 are also evoked by clauses such as *asperat undas* at *Chr.* 4.402, which Vida could have found in *Aen.* 3.285, Luc. 8.195, and Val Fl. 2.435, and *tellure potitus* (*Chr.* 4.427).

[467] E.g. Hom. *Od.* 5.262-381 Virg. *Aen.* 1.81-156 -see below-, Ov. *Met.* 11.474-572, Luc. 5.504-702, Sil. 17.236-91, Val. Fl. 1.574-692 and Stat. *Theb.* 5.361-430. See Friedrich (1956) and Ratkowitsch (1986) 41.

[468] Christian poetry and centos reutilised these words, for instance, Hos. Get. *Med.* 181, Prudent. *C. Symm.* 2.737, Proba *cento* 665.

[469] For this kind of "window references" in Vida's '*De Arte Poetica',* see Hardie (2020b).

[470] The similarity between Virgil's and Sedulius' lines has already been detected. See, for instance, Springer (2013) 99. For the Virgilian influence on Juvencus' and Sedulius' storm scenes and their differences, see Ratkowitsch (1986) with further bibliography.

[471] The description of reality relies on Lucretian language (*Chr.* 4.424: *posuitque minacia murmura pontis* – Lucr. 1.275-6: *ita perfurit acri / cum fremitu saevitque minaci murmure ventus*).

Neptune calm the storm, reproach someone (the winds – the disciples) and, on the whole, act in support of the realisation of a greater design, the fulfilment of the *fata* ratified by Jupiter in Neptune's case, and the salvation of humanity, foretold by the prophets and ultimately desired by the Father in Jesus' case.

The Exorcism of the Gadarene Demoniac

The most extended miracle in John's report is the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniac (*Chr.* 4.439-532 – Mt. 8:28-34, Mk 5:1-20, Lk. 8:26-39).[472] John recalls that a man possessed by demons was brought to Jesus one day, and that his master drove them out of him. During the exorcism, the demons revealed their identity and begged Jesus to send them into a herd of swine. When their request is granted, the herd rushes down from a hill into a lake and drowns. One of Vida's innovations is the introduction of the family background of the man: his parents begot him at a time of year in which intercourse is forbidden. Their illicit union is phrased through the same phrase with which Virgil connotes Paris' and Helen's extramarital love affair (*Chr.* 4.443-4: *Hunc olim -ut perhibent- vetito genuere parentes / concubitu iucti atque inconcessis hymenaeis* - *Aen.* 1.650-2: *ornatus Argivae Helenae, quos illa Mycenis, / Pergama cum peteret inconcessosque hymenaeos, / extulerat*).

Numerous pagan characters are conflated in the Gadarene demoniac. His story has a parallel in that of Dionysus reported, among others, by Ovid. While his father died during the very night of the conception, his mother passed away at the moment of the delivery (*Chr.* 4.454-6: *eademque duos leto hora dedisset, / infans ni foret exsectae genitricis ab alvo / exemptus*). His aunts then raised the infant. Dionysus too was born from illicit intercourse, that between Jupiter and Semele, who died during his conception. He too was extracted from the womb of his dead mother (Ov. *Met.* 3.310-1: *imperfectus adhuc infans genetricis ab alvo / eripitur*), and was raised by an aunt, Ino, Semele’s sister.

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[472] Vida mixes these sources with Mt. 9:32 and 12:22, where Jesus cures a deaf and a blind.

The monster Cacus offered another suitable model for a man breaking free of his chains in the grip of fury (*Chr.* 4.469-70: *siquando nodis ruptisque immane catenis / incautis liber custodibus evasisset* – *Aen.* 8.225-6: *ut sese inclusit ruptisque immane catenis / deiecit saxum*). Both live apart from civilisation[473] and people fear them. Furthermore, the heroes that subdue them, Jesus and Hercules, are divine or will be.[474] When the Gadarene is dragged before Christ, he shouts (*Chr.* 4.479-80: *Ille autem obniti contra, dum rumpere nodos / tendit, et horrendos clamores tollere ad astra*) as does Lacoon during the fatal attack of the sea-snakes that kill him and his sons (*Aen.* 2.220-2: *ille simul manibus tendit divellere nodos / perfusus sanie vittas atroque veneno, / clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit*). The similarity is strengthened by the following simile of the bull in both texts (*Chr.* 4.481-3: *qualis ubi longis pugnator taurus ad aras / funibus arripitur, saevo fremit ore per urbem / et spumas agit et cornu ferit aera adunco* – *Aen.* 2.223-4: *qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram / taurus et incertam excussit cervice securim*).[475] The power of the evil forces taking hold of him since his adolescence (*Chr.* 4.461-2: *Quin etiam simul aque adolevit, protinus aegrum / arripuit furor, infernae vis effera gentis*) is like the attitude of Mezentius, the *contemptor divum* (*Aen.* 10.898: *ubi nunc Mezentius acer et illa / effera vis animi?*). Even though the parallel is between the demons and Mezentius, it indirectly highlights the drama of the father-son relationship that features in both texts. The father of the Gadarene dies and makes his son pay for his sin indirectly. The tyrant causes the death of his son Lausus by waging war against the Trojans. Both will ask their winning adversary, Jesus and Aeneas, to grant them one favour: the demons demand to be driven into the herd of swine, and the tyrant to be buried with his dead son.

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[473] The man has no clothes and does not live in a house, a detail reported only in Luke. Vida does not miss the opportunity to refashion the Biblical element with a marked expression such as *more ferae* (*Chr.* 4.473), occurring in Lucretius’ description of primitive cultures (Lucr. 5.932) and Dido’s reaction to the Trojans’ departure from Carthage (*Aen.* 4.556).

[474] On Jesus and Hercules, see section 6.4.

[475] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 281.

Although Virgil is the indisputable principal model,[476] Lucan's Erichtho episode informs the passage as well.[477] The provenance of the demons afflicting the Gadarene is Erebus (*Chr.* 4.464), the same name used by Lucan to identify the Underworld ruled by the deities with which Erictho has a special affinity (Luc. 6.513).[478] Both characters abide among tombs (*Chr.* 4.474 – Luc. 6.519-20). Their inhuman sounds are similar to those emitted by wolves and dogs (*Chr.* 4.495: *auditi exululare lupi, latrare canes ceu* – Luc. 6.688: *latratus habet illa canum gemitusque luporum*) and are compared to the noise of rushing waters (*Chr.* 4.497-502 – Luc. 6.691-2). In this episode too someone asks for a favour: Sextus Pompeius consults the witch to know more about the outcome of the civil war. Moreover, in both contexts, a body is used as a mediator between the earth and the forces of the Underworld. The demons speak through the Gadarene man and Erichtho reanimates a corpse to reveal the future. The numinous parallel with the witch is handled with discretion, for variation accommodates the model to the receiving text. The Gadarene breaths deeply after the exorcism, Jesus opens his eyes and restores him completely; the cadaver opens his eyes by himself and is granted that his eternal rest will no longer be disrupted by magic. Jesus has the power to give a new and full life, while the witch can only promise not to disturb the dead again.

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[476] Some hexameter expressions that occur here are used mainly by Virgil and his predecessors: *mirabile monstrum* (*Chr.* 4.494), which usually accompanies marvels, describes the portent of the snake in Cicero's translation of *Iliad* 2.299-322 (*De Div.* 2.64), or the metamorphoses of the Trojan ships into nymphs (*Aen.* 9.120). *Nec mora nec requires* (*Chr.* 4.519) is a Lucretian hemistich (Lucr. 4.227, the swiftness of the senses) reused by Virgil (for instance *Aen.* 12.553, the frenetic battle between Trojans and Rutilians). The demons plead with Jesus to not send them again to Hell, a request formulated through the words of Sibyl regarding the golden bough as a requirement to enter the Underworld (*Chr.* 4.514-5: *Nos ne horrifero sic merge barathro / neve iube terrae inferioris operta subire* – *Aen.* 6.140: *sed non ante datur telluris operta subire*). The almost verbatim repetition of a Lucilian line (*Chr.* 4.526: *exspiransque animam pulmonibus aeger ingens* – Lucil. *Sat.* 3.106 M.: *exspirans, animam, pulmonibus aeger, agebat*), does not seem to have substantial affinity from the standpoint of the contents. Vida's use of fragmentary ancient texts –we have seen that he knew lines of Ennius' *Annales* and Cicero's *De Consulato Suo*– deserves a separate enquiry.

[477] Hardie (1993a) 303, mentioned also in the Introduction.

[478] For the expression in Lucan, see Tesoriero (2000) 113.

5.2 Marvels

The same effects of convergence and opposition emerging from the miracle scenes characterise also the depiction of other supernatural phenomena not directly occasioned by Jesus. We have already said that the *Christiad* tends to embellish the biblical narrative with fantastical elements that are alien to the canonical sources. The vast majority of these marvels take place during the events of the Nativity of Christ and are narrated in chronological order by Joseph to Pontius Pilate. The instability and precariousness of the early part of Jesus' life account for the consistent assimilation between the Holy Family and the Trojans during their hectic departures in *Aeneid* 2-4. Mary and Joseph are often modelled on pagan epic pairs such as Dido and Aeneas, sometimes with inverted roles (e.g. Mary plays the role of Aeneas and Joseph that of Dido). As we have already seen in the episode of the Gadarene demoniac, Vida blends multiple characters into one. The technique was far from being new at the time, as the practice of merging more than one model in one person can be found already in the *Aeneid*, where a figure like Dido embodies traits of multiple Homeric (Nausicaa, Calypso, Circe, Alcinous and Arete) and non-Homeric characters (Euripides' and Apollonius' Medea, Catullus' Ariadne). This practice affects another common thread throughout these episodes, the interventions of the angels on earth, which draw on the interactions between human beings and divine entities in pagan epics. These kinds of events assume the form of apparitions in a dream, a type of human-divine interaction with a conspicuous intertextual function both in the epic tradition and in the *Christiad*.[479]

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[479] See section 3.4.

Annunciation

The Annunciation is a case in point. Here more than one marvellous revelation from pagan texts furnishes words to the description of a Christian apparition. On the second day of his marriage, Joseph wakes up after having a vision (*Chr.* 3.256: *Corripio e stratis artus sponsamque reviso*), like Aeneas during his staying in Crete, when Apollo visits him in his sleep and reveals that the ultimate destination of the Trojans is Italy (*Aen.* 3.176: *corripio e stratis corpus*).[480] Similarly, the blast of light that blinds Joseph as he opens the door of Mary's room after the Annunciation (*Chr.* 3.259: *collucent summi radiis laquearia tecti*) is likely inspired by a similar image that accompanies the appearance of the river Tiber to Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.24-5: *iamque sub auras / erigitur summique ferit laquearia tecti*) and that of the ghost of Phryxus to Aeetes (Vl Fl. 5.242-3: *tum falso fusus ab auro / currere per summi fulgor laquearia tecti*).

The relationship between Mary and Joseph and the marvel they experience allude to the encounter of Aeneas and the ghost of Creusa, and the metamorphoses of Cadmus and Harmonia at the end of their human lives. Joseph's exclamation at the sight of his wife in a state of trance echoes the words of Harmonia and Creusa (*Chr.* 3.278-9: *'Pater his o me exue monstris / omnipotens. Non haec, superi, sine numine vestro* – *Aen.* 2.777-8: '*non haec sine numine divum / eveniunt'* – Ov. *Met.* 4.591: *'Cadme, mane, teque, infelix, his exue monstris'*). Mary's main model here, however, is Dido.[481] When Joseph enters the room, he finds her in a state of trance, unwilling to utter a word (*Chr.* 3.263-4: *Nihil illa meo sermone*

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[480] The coming of dawn, a conventional image, is rendered by blending Lucretian, Virgilian and Ovidian images of daybreak (*Chr.* 3.254-5: *Iamque dies pulsis tenebris invecta ruebat, / et face Sol rosea nigras disiecerat umbras* – Lucr. 5.976: *dum rosea face sol inferret lumina caelo* – *Aen.* 12.76-7: *cum primum crastina caelo / puniceis invecta rotis Aurora rubebit* – Ov. *Met.* 7.703: *lutea mane videt pulsis Aurora tenebris*).

[481] At *Chr.* 3.179-80 Coffee (2019) 195-6 detected the simile that compares Lavinia's blush to a flower at *Aen.* 12.67-9. Mary is indirectly likened to Latinus' daughter.

movetur. / Tantum fixa oculos coelo palmasque tenebat), resembling the queen during her encounter with Aeneas in the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.469-70: *illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat / nec magis incepto vultum sermone movetur*). Dido will not talk to Aeneas, but Mary will acquiesce in Joseph's requests and reveal what she saw during her vision. The bond between the latter, indeed, should be construed as a reversal of that between Dido and Aeneas. As Mary gets back to a normal state, she bursts into tears out of joy (*Chr.* 3.285: *suspirans lacrimisque sinus umectat obortis*), whereas Dido did the same because of her lovesickness (*Aen.* 4.30: *sic effata sinum lacrimis implevit obortis*). Joseph approaches Mary as Dido imagines she would approach her previous suitors (*Chr.* 3.286: *Accedo atque rogo nova per conubia supplex* – *Aen.* 4.535: *Nomadumque petam conubia supplex*). Mary's indecision over how to start reporting to her spouse the good news of the Annunciation (*Chr.* 3.295: '*Sed quae nunc aut unde exordia sumam?*) inverts Aeneas' hesitation when he has to tell her lover that the gods ordered him to leave her (*Aen.* 4.284: *quae prima exordia sumat?*). Moreover, the words with which Mary asks Joseph not to divulge her mystical experience (*Chr.* 3.296-7: *Per ego has lacrimas*) are a quotation of Dido's plea to Aeneas to stay at Carthage (*Aen.* 4.314: *per ego has lacrimas*). The erotic passion of the Virgilian heroine is contrasted with the chastity of Mary. During the early stage of her love, Dido is struggling to hold on to her loyalty to her dead husband, a proposal doomed to failure. On the other hand, Mary is resolved to remain a virgin and always remembers the prophecy of the maiden who would bring the Messiah to light without losing her virginity. However, she does not even imagine that it is going to be her (*Chr.* 3.304-6: *Sed prae tunc omnibus unum / forte mihi ante oculos* […] / *immotum fixumque manebat* – *Aen.* 4.15: *si mihi non animo fixum immotumque sederet*).[482]

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[482] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Roberg (2013) ii 213.

Two divine interventions in the realm of humans are hinted at through the gleaming cloud and the stars that graze Mary's temple (*Chr.* 3.273-4: *Immotam penitus circumdat lucida nubes / Solis inardescens radiis* – 3.274-5: *stellaeque videntur / lucentes capiti circum aurea tempora pasci*). The first one is the Shield of Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.622-3: *qualis cum caerula nubes / solis inardescit radiis longeque refulget*). In both situations, a divine entity has provided humans with a means to win over the enemy, weapons to get the better of the Rutilians in the *Aeneid*, and the Immaculate Conception, through which humanity is delivered from sin, in the *Christiad.* The second one is represented by the flames around Ascanius' head, the divine sign of approval for the Trojans' departure from their city (*Aen.* 2.682-4: *ecce levis summo de vertice visus Iuli / fundere lumen apex, tactuque innoxia mollis / lambere flamma comas et circum tempora pasci*). Similarly, the angel's arrival in Mary's account of the Annunciation (*Chr.* 3.320-1: *Video medium discedere coelum / pennatasque acies*) is modelled on the appearances of Iris and of the ghost of Hector to, respectively, Turnus and Aeneas (*Aen.* 9.20-1: *medium video discedere caelum / palantisque polo stellas* – *Chr.* 3.330: *me sic adfari laetasque expromere voces* – *Aen.* 2.279-80: *ultro flens ipse videbar / compellare virum et maestas expromere voces*).[483] The departures of the angel and of Iris corroborate their assimilation (*Chr.* 3.369-70: *Haec ait et paribus se in coelum proripit alis, / quem supera aspiciens tali sum voce secuta* – *Aen.* 9.14, 16-7: *dixit , et in caelum paribus se sustulit alis* / […] *agnovit iuvenis duplicisque ad sidera palmas / sustulit ac tali fugientem est voce secutus*).[484] Once Mary has finished talking to the angel, she is enveloped by a golden cloud whose shining rays (*Chr.* 3.377-8: *squamaeque stellaeque auri fulgore micantes / adverso quales imitantur sole colores*) rework the description of the snake that appears during the rites before the beginning of the funerary games in *Aeneid* 5 (*Aen.*

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[483] There is a sharp contrast between the words of Hector and those of the angels: the former are *maestae*, the latter *laetae*.

[484] See also another of her departures at *Aen.* 5.657.

5.87-8: *caerulae cui terga notae maculosus et auro / squamam incendebat fulgor, ceu nubibus arcus / mille iacit varios adverso sole colores*).[485]

Jesus’ Birth

A series of supernatural phenomena around the world (*Chr.* 3.505-10) precede Jesus’ birth. Occurrences of this type were often held as true in ancient Greco-Roman literature[486] and are common in the Bible, (e.g. the marvels that take place as soon as Jesus dies in the synoptic Gospels).[487] While in the Scriptures paranormal events follow his death, his birth is accompanied only by the Christmas star that leads the Magi to him (Mt. 2:7-11). Vida, on his part, adds marvels even to the period of gestation. A connection between the circumstances in which Jesus was born and the Virgilian Carthage runs through the episode.[488] During Mary’s pregnancy and while she is still at Nazareth, an angel frequently brings her food and enters her room. He passes through the wall (*Chr.* 3.519-20: *Illum ego saepe / intrantem thalamum manifesto in lumine vidi*), like Mercury does when he communicates to Aeneas the necessity of leaving Carthage and Dido (*Aen.* 4.358-9: *ipse deum manifesto in lumine vidi / intrantem muros vocemque his auribus hausi*).[489] In both cases, a divine messenger appears to a human being whose mission would have everlasting repercussions for humanity. The departure from the Libyan coasts will end up with the suicide of a woman, Dido, living in luxury and wishing to be left with a child by her lover. The content of Vida’s narrative is the actual birth of a child from a woman, Mary, who has not been abandoned and lives in poverty. The poor material condition of the Holy Family is conspicuous when they move to Bethlehem and settle in a stable (*Chr.* 3.575: *magalia*). One of the most famous occurrences of this word, which was widespread in Neo-Latin literature, appears in the passage of the *Aeneid* where it indicates the ancient huts built on Carthage's site before the foundation of the city by Dido and her followers (*Aen.* 1.421: *miratur molem Aeneas, magalia quondam* 4.259: *ut primum alatis tetigit magalia plantis*).

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[485] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 216 mention also Iris at *Aen.* 4.701.

[486] Historiography is a genre that at times made room for them, e.g. Herod. 2.35 or Livy 41.13.1-2.

[487] See the sub-section “Death and Resurrection of Jesus”.

[488] Sannazaro had already exploited it in the *De Partu Virginis.* See Greene (1963) 151.

[489] The angel, who in the Gospels is identified with Gabriel, had echoed Mercury’s appearing to Aeneas in his apparition to Zacharias in Juvencus’ first book of his *Evangeliorum libri quattuor* and Paulinus of Nola’s *Carmen* 6*;* see Springer (2003) 118-25, who includes in his discussion also the visit of this angel to Joseph in *Christiad* 3, and McGill (2016) 115.

The Dido episode influences even the representation of the shepherds visiting the Holy Family. They come to pay homage to Jesus, and, at their arrival, they cover the entrance of the stable with garlands (*Chr.* 3.596-7: *iam conferto aderant pastores agmine et antri / floribus ac variis auxerunt limina sertis*) as Iarbas, Dido's suitor, does in the temple of Jupiter Hammon (*Aen.* 4.200-2: *centum aras posuit vigilemque sacraverat ignem, / excubias divum aeternas, pecudumque cruore / pingue solum et variis florentia limina sertis*). The way they worship the Child (*Chr.* 3.625-7: *nec sese explere corusci / infantis facie poterant fixique manebant / haerentes oculis, haerentes pectore toto*) has a parallel in Dido's falling in love with Aeneas through Cupid (*Aen.* 1.717-8: *haec oculis, haec pectore toto / haeret et interdum gremio fovet*), and is another example of how ancient treatments of love are transfigured in the *Christiad* and converted to a religious setting.[490] A voice from above, accompanied by a great light, notifies them that the Messiah mentioned by the prophets has just seen the light of day in a nearby town (*Chr.* 3.610: "*Ne trepidate, viri, vobis nova gaudia porto*"). The same expression occurs in the description of another Virgilian marvel: it is pronounced by the divine voice that precedes the transformation of the Trojans' ships (*Aen.*

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[490] Sometimes observations about someone's physical appearance are simply transposed from the models. The beauty of the handsome men to whom the sinful woman is attracted before meeting Jesus (*Chr.* 1.336-7: *si quis spectabilis ore / egregio formaque alios supereminet omnes*) resembles Jason's at the arrival in Colchis in the *Argonautica* (Val. Fl. 5.366-6: *iam Talaum iamque Ampyciden astroque comantes / Tyndaridas ipse egregio supereminet ore*).

9.117: "*Ne trepidate meas, Teucri, defendere navis*"), and is followed by the appearance of a host of cherubs who orbit the sky three times dancing and singing.[491]

Flight into Egypt

The portents of the *Aeneid* inform the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt as well. This biblical episode shares a narrative pattern that occurs more than once in Virgil's poem, namely the escape of a few people led by one person, who has been woken up and instructed by a non-human entity in the dead of night. Joseph is woken up by the angel while sleeping and is told that the king of Judea Herod has sent assassins to kill all the infants of the region (*Chr.* 3.806-7: *Ipse sed in somnis visus sum voce moneri / praecipitem celerare fugam, loca linquere nota* – 3.829: *Aurae omnes terrent*). The situation resembles those of Dido and Aeneas. The former is visited in her sleep by the ghost of her husband Sychaeus, who reveals to her that he has been murdered by her brother Pygmalion and then bids her take flight (*Aen.* 1.357: *Tum celerare fugam patriaque excedere suadet*).[492] The ghost of Hector appeared in a dream to Aeneas, who subsequently gathers a group of people, including his wife and son, and escapes from the city, frightened as he is by every breeze (*Aen.* 2.728: *nunc omnes terrent aurae*). The customary assimilation of the angel to divine entities of pagan epic is reaffirmed through the resemblance with the messages delivered by such entities to mortals. For instance, the second visit of Mercury to Aeneas (*Chr.* 3.808: *Surge age, rumpe moras, puerum tecum arripe matremque* – *Aen.* 4.569: *Heia age, rumpe moras*), Iris' encouragement of Turnus (*Aen.* 9.13: *rumpe moras omnis et turbata arripe castra*"), the guardian spirit of Argo prompting Jason to set sail (Val. Fl. 1.305: *tempus adest. Age rumpe moras*!), and the deified Anna urging Hannibal (Sil. 8.215: *rumpe moras, rape Marmaricas in proelia vires*).[493]

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[491] Late antique and Neo-Latin Christian poets resorted to the expression *ne trepidate*, but for circumstances that broadly differ from the visit of the shepherds (e.g. Pruden. *Psych.* 624, Cypr. Gal. *Gen.* 66, Alcimus Avitus, *carm.* 6.258; Giacomo Boni *De Vita et Gestis Christi* 18.21). However, Iuvencus' treatment of the same episode is echoed in this line (Iuvenc. 1.163-5: *talis et attonitis caelo vox missa cucurrit: / "ponite terrorem mentis, mea sumite dicta, / pastores, quibus haec ingentia gaudia porto*").

[492] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Roberg (2013) ii, 240.

After the death of Herod, Joseph, while he sleeps, is urged by an angel to leave Egypt and he retraces his steps on his journey back to Galilee (*Chr.* 3.894-5: *in patriam redeo atque memor vestigia retro / observata legens pignus cum matre reduce*). Aeneas too is said to go back over the same places during his escape from Troy (*Aen.* 2.753-4: *et vestigia retro / observata sequor per noctem et lumine lustro*).[494] The re-working of the Trojans’ arrival at the mouth of the Tiber in Latium (*Aen.* 7.33-4: *adsuetae ripis volcures et fluminis alveo / aethera mulcebant cantu*) indirectly likens Aeneas’ wanderings to those of the Holy Family, which is now entering into Egypt (*Chr.* 3.839-40: *Praecipue ripis volucres et fluminis alveo / assuetae liquidis mulcebant vocibus auras*). This land welcomes Jesus (*Chr.* 3.843-4: *Flant gramine odorem / cuncta suum, et mollem praetexit amaracus umbram*) as the groves of Idalia give shelter to Ascanius while he is substituted with Cupid at Carthage by Venus (*Aen.* 1.693-4: *ubi mollis amaracus illum / floribus et dulci aspirans complectitur umbra*).[495]

Jesus’ Infancy

Towards the end of his account to Pontius Pilate, Joseph gives a concise report of Jesus’ infancy. The numerous supernatural phenomena connected to the Child, which Joseph and Mary witnessed during those years, are not biblical and Vida must have found them in New Testament Apocrypha.[496] The Child can deliver speeches that go beyond human comprehension, and flames often surround his temples (*Chr.* 3.904-5: *Aut quoties sanctos expavimus ignes / flammarumque globos et terrificos fulgores*). The model verbally echoed is the fire of the Cyclops and Aetna in three Virgilian passages: the eruptions of Aetna that accompanied Caesar's murder (*Georg.* 1.473: *flammarumque globos liquefactaque volvere saxa*), the Trojans' arrival at Sicily (*Aen.* 3.574: *attollitque globos flammarum et sidera lambit*), and the forging of Aeneas' shield in the same volcano (*Aen.* 8.431-2: *fulgores nunc terrificos sonitumque metumque / miscebant operi*).[497]

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[493] The expression *rumpe moras* had a rich *Nachleben*, but it does not always occur in circumstances like these, e.g. Ov. *Met.* 15.583 and Luc. 2.525.

[494] See also *Aen.* 9.391-3: *rursus perplexum iter omne revolvens / fallacis sylvae simul et vestigia retro / observata legit*. The presence of this latter episode, Nisus’ and Euryalus’ death, pervades the scene. See section 7.1.

[495] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 243.

[496] *Ibidem* 248.

At that time, Jesus was frequently visited and entertained by angels who had assumed human form, a common pattern in classical literature. And yet, even though Vida had several examples of divine entities disguising themselves as human beings at his disposal, he seems to have had one particular instance in mind: Jupiter's visit to king Lycaon in Ovid (*Chr.* 3.911-2: *humana sub imagine coetus / coelituum tectum intrantes exterrita vidit*[498] – Ov. *Met.* 1.212-3: *summo delabor Olympo / et deus humana lustro sub imagine terras*). Here the Ovidian episode is reversed. Lycaon, the first man on whom the narrative focuses in the chronological order of the *Metamorphoses*, turns into a wolf after being visited by a god, who punishes him and the whole human race with a universal flood.[499] The angels of the *Christiad*, on the contrary, pay homage to the saviour of the world, who will redeem the sin of Adam and Eve, the original ancestors of humanity. The pagan god visits a paradigmatic impious man[500] who indirectly dooms the whole human race, the angels the Man who will redeem humanity. Both the flood that follows Lycaon's transformation and the coming of Christ will establish a new order on earth. This cataclysmic event in the *Metamorphoses* can be interpreted as disrupting the view of the world proposed in the cosmogony at the beginning of the poem.[501] The birth of Christ, in contrast, while encouraging a re-reading of the Old Covenant and the Law, fulfils their value system. The two passages are connected also by the rhetorical commonplace of the shortage of time, here used by the respective internal narrators, Joseph (*Chr.* 3.901: *enumerare vacet*) and Jupiter (Ov. *Met.* 1.214-5: *longa mora est quantum noxae sit ubique repertum / enumerare*). Joseph states that he has not enough voice to recount the spectacular deeds performed by Jesus during his infancy.[502] Jupiter refuses to report to the council of the gods the impieties committed in every land. The virtue of one is opposed to the vices of the many.[503] As in the case of Lycaon's tale,[504] Joseph's narratorial audience (although here this observation should be extended to his internal audience too, Pilate) faces the dilemma of believing his words. These allude to a story of disbelief where scepticism leads to an unhappy outcome.[505]

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[497] *Ibidem.*

[498] The subject is Mary, who is working at the loom like the Virgilian Circe (*Chr.* 3.910-1: *Alma parens tenues arguto pectine telas / percurrens* – *Aen.* 7.14: *urit odoratam nocturna in lumina cedrum / arguto tenuis percurrens pectine telas*).

[499] Readers should be careful to interpret metamorphoses themselves as punishments. On this problem in Lycaon's story see Solodow (1988) 168-9, 175-6 and Anderson (1989) 97.

[500] At least from the point of view of Jupiter.

Death and Resurrection of Jesus

According to the versions in the synoptic Gospels (Mt. 27:51-3, Mk. 15:38 and Lk. 23:45), marvels accompany the moment in which Jesus passes away: the veil of the temple is torn, the earth quakes, rocks crack, the dead are resurrected, and the sun is eclipsed.[506] Faced with the choice between these marvellous accounts and the more sober report of John, not only did Vida opt for the former, which are certainly more in tune with the epic genre, but he also amplified them (*Chr.* 5.959-91). The eclipse takes place in the *Christiad* too, where the focus is on the Father’s reaction to the death of his Son. Many elements betray the epicised character of Vida’s version. First of all, references to the course of the sun introduce the eclipse (*Chr.* 5.959-61: *Iamque fere medium cursu traiecerat orbem,*[507] */ cum subito ecce polo tenebris caput occulit ortis / sol pallens*). The passage bears a resemblance to the coming of night during Aeneas’ visit to the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.535-6: *Hac vice sermonum roseis Aurora quadrigis / iam medium aetherio cursu traiecerat axem*), and to the conflagration of the world at the hands of Phaethon, when the sun hides its head (Ov. *Met.* 2.254-5: *Nilus in extremum fugit perterritus orbem / occuluitque caput*). The connection with this myth can be read through the lens of Christian morality: Phaethon’s disobedience to his father leads to his own definitive demise. Jesus dies because he obeys his Father, but he will be resurrected eventually. A situational commonality also accounts for the use of another myth involving the death of a divine being. Clouds cover the sky (*Chr.* 5.963: *et clausus latuit densis in nubibus aether*) as they do after the death of Memnon, the son of Aurora (Ov. *Met.* 13.581-2: *vidit, et ille color, quo matutina rubescunt / tempora, palluerat, latuitue in nubibus aether*). The eclipse caused by the impiety of Jesus’ brutal murder (*Chr.* 5.978: *et populi aeternas mundo timuere tenebras*) echoes the one occurring after the assassination of Julius Caesar in *Georgics* 1, a passage alluded to multiple times in the *Christiad* (*Georg.* 1.467-8: *cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine texit / impiaque aeternam timuerunt saecula noctem*).[508]

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[501] Wheeler (1999) 32-3.

[502] Metanarrative comments are not unusual in the *Metamorphoses*; see Nikolopoulos (2004) 225-56.

[503] Hardie (1993b) 3-10 gives an insightful outline of the theme "the one and the many" in the Virgilian tradition. I will analyse its role in the *Christiad* in section 6.5.

[504] Wheeler (1999) 164-5.

[505] Battista Mantuano employed the same words in Mary's addressing of Christ (*Parthenice prima sive Mariana* 3.559-60: *perit humana sub imagine mundi / conditor ipse cavum caeli qui sustinet axem*.) Future research could establish whether Vida followed only one of these sources.

[506] Not all of them occur together in each of the three synoptic Gospels.

As soon as the citizens of Jerusalem realise what they have done, their moans reach the sky, in keeping with a hyperbole recurrent in epic.[509] Matrons along with their daughters and sons run to the temple in long lines to pray for peace and offer incense (*Chr.* 5.983-5: *Templa adeunt subito castae longo ordine matres. / Incendunt mixti pueri intactaeque puellae / perque aras pacem exquirunt, quas thure vaporant*). This image is borrowed from analogous Virgilian situations: the Trojan boys and matrons ready to depart from their city (*Aen.* 2.766-7: *pueri et pavidae longo ordine matres / stant circum*),[510] the offerings of Dido and Anna (*Aen.* 4.56-7: *principio delubra adeunt pacemque per aras / exquirunt*), and the procession of the Rutulian women who bring gifts to the temple of Pallas Athene (*Aen.* 11.481: *succedunt matres et templum ture vaporant*). The ritual also adapts Lucretius' scorning of infertile men making offerings at the altars to receive fertility from the gods (*Chr.* 5.986: *suppliciter, sacrisque adolent altaria donis* – Lucr. 4.1236-7: *et multo sanguine mesti / conspergunt aras adolentque altaria donis*). The futility of such a desire is compared to the horror of those who acknowledge the atrocity they committed and seek redemption. Their change of mind is a reversal of the decision of the Laurentines and Latins who go from wanting a truce with the Trojans to eagerly desiring to wage war on them. Both scenes, indeed, are followed by a celestial sign (*Chr.* 5.987-8: *Ecce aliud coelo signum praesentius alto / dat pater altitonans* – *Aen.* 12.244-6: *his aliud maius Iuturna adiungit et alto / dat signum caelo, quo non praesentius ullum / turbavit mentes Italas*).

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[507] This line is extremely close Naldo Naldi *Ad Laurentium Medicen virum clarissimum* 1: *Ipse dies medium cursu traiecerat orbem.* These two poets tend to share their classical sources; new research is needed to shed light on these similarities and their nature.

[508] More general similarities associate the death of Jesus with Virgilian hemistichs or expressions here reutilised, for instance Cacus’ fight with Hercules (*Chr.* 5.964: *prospectum eripiens oculis mortalibus omnem* – *Aen.* 8.252-3: *involvitque domum caligine caeca / prospectum eripiens oculis*) or the storm that follows the union of Aeneas and Dido (*Chr.* 5.969: *Emicuere ignes. Diffulsit conscius aether* – *Aen.* 4.167: *fulsere ignes et conscius aether*).

[509] Cf. Enn. *Ann.* Fr. 442 Sk., Virg. *Aen.* 11.745 and 12.462, Sil. 16.319.

The cosmic dimension of what would be a natural event had the subject been a person other than Jesus is an opportunity for Vida to polemically use Lucretian material. Loud thunder, signs of the Father's mourning for the loss of his Son, precede Christ's impending death (*Chr.* 5.970-1: *concussuque tonat vasto domus ardua Olympi,*[511] */ et caeca immensum percurrunt murmura coelum*). This causal link contradicts Lucretius' dismissal of the belief that celestial phenomena depend on divine forces, which was extremely common among primitive men (Lucr. 5.1218-21: *cui non animus formidine divum / contrahitur, cui non correpunt membra pavore, / fulminis horribili cum plaga torrida tellus / contremit et magnum percurrunt murmura caelum?*). The same words that Lucretius uses in his explanation of the origin of thunder (Lucr. 6.121-3: *Hoc etiam pacto tonitru concussa videntur / omnia saepe gravi tremere et divulsa repente / maxima dissiluisse capacis moenia mundi*) and with which Lucan foreshadows the conflagration of the world (Luc. 1.79-80: *totaque discors / machina divulsi turbabit foedera mundi*), mark Jesus' passing (*Chr.* 5.972: *Dissiluisse putes divulsi moenia mundi*). Nature and Heaven empathize with Christ, for the actual palace of "Olympus" roars. Heaven does care about the events that take place on earth, as demonstrated also by the attempt of the angels to intervene and save Jesus from his death (*Chr.* 5.504–702). Even though the Father permits the death of his Son, He is interested in the actions of men and wants to deliver them from Sin, unlike the gods in the *De Rerum Natura* and in the *Bellum Civile*, whose indifference to human affairs and absence from them render their existence insignificant for those who live on earth. The divine apparatus that Lucretius disparages as pure superstition and Lucan removes from his narrative is here supplanted by the contents of Christian belief.

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[510] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 351.

[511] The pagan word *Olympus* highlights the classicising tone.

The use of Lucretian material in the scene of Jesus' Resurrection (*Chr.* 6.294-312) points to a paradoxical juxtaposition of Epicurean and Christian doctrines. The spirituality of the latter transcends the materialism of the former. For example, the comparison of the Body of Christ coming back to life to a dim flame covered by ashes (*Chr.* 6.301-2: *ceu qui per noctem imposito cinere obrutus ignis / delitet et nusquam tecto se lumine prodit*), a traditional simile in ancient epic,[512] echoes Lucretius' description of sleep. In that section, Lucretius argues that, while sleeping, part of our spirit goes out of the body, but the other part remains within it, otherwise the limbs could not be reanimated and would die (Lucr. 4.925-6: *quippe ubi*

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[512] E.g. Hom. *Od.* 5.488-90, Ap. R. 3.291-5, Virg. *Aen.* 8.407-13.

nulla latens animai pars remaneret / in membris, cinere ut multa latet obrutus ignis). The moment in which the Father fills the body of his Son with life (*Chr.* 6.296-7: *et pater omnipotens nato immortalia membra / illustrans*) reverses one of Lucretius' Epicurean tenets: souls do not wait for a body to get into, but they are inexplicably intertwined throughout the whole lifespan (Lucr. 3.778: *exspectare immortalis mortalia membra*), an idea challenged by the Christian division between these two components. The passage from the spiritual dimension of the liberation of the souls from Hell, the previous episode in the poem, to the earthily one, where Christ comes back to life, is articulated through the use of a materialistic source.[513] The victory of Christ over death also seems to overturn the triumph of death in the *Bellum Civile*. The surface of his burial tomb displays a depiction of the prophet Jonah emerging from the mouth of the whale. It is a good omen:[514] just as Jonah stayed for three days in the belly of the creature, so Christ hid in the grave for three days and was resurrected. Mary Magdalen, who has just received the news of the Resurrection, rejoices (*Chr.* 6.360: *Tum secum: "Superi nunc, o nunc visa secundent*). Her words are similar to those that Lucan puts in the mouth of the Etruscan seer Arruns. This latter character sacrifices a bull to understand the portents that are taking place over the earth. However, the sacrifice turns out to be an ill-omen foreshadowing the terrible future, i.e. Caesar's tyranny (Luc. 1.635: *sed venient maiora metu. di visa secundent*).[515] What in Lucan looms as an impending disaster and the inevitable catastrophic end-point of the narrative is turned into the ultimate joyous event, the accomplishment of Jesus' mission on Earth. The

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[513] The Resurrection of Christ is also compared to the Phoenix, the bird that comes back from the ashes and here depicted as the dangerous Calabrian snake of *Georgics* 3 and the snake to which Neoptolemus is compared (*Chr.* 6.309-10: *continuo novus exoritur nitidusque iuventa / effulget cristis et versicoloribus alis – Georg.* 3.437-8: *cum positis novus exuviis nitidusque iuventa / volvitur – Aen.* 2.473: *nunc, positis novus exuviis nitidusque iuventa*). See also Cicchitelli (1904) 380, who adduces the influence of Claud. *Cons. Stil.* 2.414-20.

[514] Almost a proleptic ekphrasis, a technique known to ancient authors too. See Harrison (2020).

[515] See also Sil. 8.124 *quae dum abigo menti et, sub lucem ut visa secundent*, Here Anna dreams of Sychaeus claiming Dido as his own, perceives this dream as a bad omen and prays the gods to change the events for the better.

"cruel providence" of the *Bellum Civile* gives way to the good news of the resurrection of Christ.[516]

Descent of the Holy Spirit

An engagement with Lucretius reoccurs in the last marvel of the *Christiad*, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, an episode contained in the Acts of the Apostles (2.1-13). The source is another book of the New Testament, one that chronologically follows the events reported in the Gospels. At this point in the narrative, the Apostles pray that the Lord send them the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus. Their request is immediately answered, and they are provided with a series of supernatural powers that allow them, among other things, to traverse Heaven (*Chr.* 6.953-4: *Namque hominem velut exuti moribundaque membra / mente domos coeli peragrant*). In the *De Rerum Natura* we are told that Epicurus has obtained an overarching understanding of reality by traversing the universe with his mind (Lucr. 1.74: *atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque*).[517] Now that they have received the Holy Spirit, they fear no more (*Chr.* 6.938: *Diffugiunt animi terrores*) just like Lucretius, once his master instructs him (Lucr. 3.14-6: *nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari / naturam rerum, divina mente coorta, / diffugiunt animi terrores*).

The descent of the Holy Spirit as a gift from Heaven to the Apostles (*Chr.* 6.914: *Ecce autem coeli ruere ardua visa repente*) evokes the sending of the armour from the sky to Aeneas devised by his mother (*Aen.* 8.524-5: *namque improviso vibratus ab aethere fulgor*

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[516] A similar Christian appropriation of the *Bellum Civile* is in Dante. He too twists the meaning of Lucanian passages, bending the pessimistic worldview of the ancient writer into a Christian teleological explanation of the story of the Roman Empire. See Facchini (2019).

[517] Vida uses the image for Thomas Aquinas too in *Hymn* 31.55-58: *Atque ideo in terris tibi saepe affulsit ab alto / caelicolum pater, ac pleno se Numine fudit; / quo praesente datum tibi saepe micantia divum / templa animo peragrare, polisque arcana referre.* The flight of the mind is a topos of the early modern reception of Lucretius: for Neo-Latin poetry see Haskell (2007) 200 and Haskell (2015). For modern European literature see Hardie (2016) 196-200, who illustrates how the role of Epicurus would be taken by a scientist as Newton in James Thomson's *To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton*.

/ cum sonitu venit et ruere omnia visa repente). The Holy Spirit will enable the Apostles to evangelise the world with wisdom and courage, like the arms that sustain Aeneas in his battle against the indigenous peoples of Latium. As Venus provides Aeneas with the means through which he can eventually bring about the conditions for the foundation of Rome, so does the Father endow the Apostles with the wisdom, passion and faith on which the Catholic Church will be founded. For this extraordinary event, Vida resorted to a further Virgilian marvel: the coming of the Holy Spirit (*Chr.* 6.916-8: *Nova lux oculis diffulsit, et ingens / visus ab aethereo descendere vertice nimbus / lucis inardescens maculis*) is a Christian rendition of the voice from the sky that encourages the Trojans before the metamorphosis of their ships into nymphs (*Aen.* 9.110-2: *hic primum nova lux oculis offulsit et ingens / visus ab Aurora caelum transcurrere nimbus / Idaeique chori*).[518]

All these miracles and marvels, relying as they do on analogous phenomena in the pagan models, enhance the epic character of Vida's retelling of the Gospels. When it comes to weighing up their role in Vida's relationship with the ancient epic tradition, their essential import is that they depict a world governed by a benevolent Providence. This omnipotent power manifests itself on earth and helps the sick, the poor, and especially those who go through ordeals to do its will. In this respect, Vida is fairly close to Virgil. An all-pervasive divinity permeates the cosmos of the *Aeneid* as well and ultimately supports the mission of the Trojans. Like Virgil, Vida opposes his metaphysics to Lucretius, a predecessor that attributes the causes of all events to the laws of nature and that dismisses the existence of a benign design. Lucan's *Bellum Civile* questions the presence of such divine superintendence, though from different assumptions compared to Lucretius, and seems to be challenged in the *Christiad*.

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[518] Virgilian language permeates the scene: the light of the Holy Spirit evokes the dawn of *Georgics* 1 (*Chr.* 6.918-9: *tectumque per omne / diversi rumpunt radii* – *Georg.* 1.445-6: *aut ubi sub lucem densa inter nubile sese / diversi rumpent radii*).

Proximity to Virgil, nevertheless, does not entail total identity. In Vida's poem, Providence is literally incarnated in Jesus, who is depicted as a hero in total control of the natural elements, rather than at their mercy like his predecessor Aeneas (and Odysseus, for that matter).[519] Like Aeneas, Jesus has to wander from place to place, sometimes under the constraint of an antagonistic power (e.g. Herod) and his journeys too teem with supernatural phenomena. But while ancient Latin epics often afford comparable situations, more often than not they present negative paradigms of behaviour such as Virgil's Dido or impious thinking that the Christian *Weltanschauung* consistently overturns. Throughout some of the episodes analysed above, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for instance, functions as a negative foil because of the nature of several of its characters and the fundamentally unserious nature of many of its stories. Indeed, Ovid arguably puts into question the potential that those classical myths have for making sense of the world,[520] whereas in Vida the *mirabilia* of Jesus' life are a key to understanding the true nature of the universe. By way of adaptation and *Kontrastimitaton*, Vida puts a moralising spin on the significance that Lucretius' doctrine and the stories recounted by Virgil and his successors can have for his readers.

Most of the wonders in the *Christiad* take place through or for Jesus, while in the classical epic tradition they are often in the hands of hostile entities. Admittedly, freedom of action is offered to non-benevolent forces in Vida's poem, although its efficacy has only limited scope, both in temporal and spatial terms. It cannot find any sort of compromise comparable to Jupiter's and Juno's deal over the future of the Trojans and the Latins at the end of the *Aeneid*. Although God is omnipotent, as One and Triune, he also undergoes hardships caused by opposing powers, and so do his human supporters. It is now time to assess the nature and the spheres of action of the two main forces at play in the poem, Good and Evil.

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[519] These can only indirectly get the better of the elements. See Hardie (1986) 333.

[520] Solodow 1988 3-4 and 64-5, 68-73.

Chapter 6. Good and Evil

The focus of this chapter is the conflict between Good and Evil, namely between the forces of God and those of Satan. As a central element of the Gospels and biblical epics,[521] this unambiguous antagonism categorically separates Christian epic poets from their pagan predecessors. The classical epic tradition does not present such a clear-cut moral dichotomy: although poems like the *Aeneid* portray the conflicts between a "good" faction and an "evil" one, the line between the two is often blurred.[522] While Aeneas' mission brings to pass the will of the *fata*, the author at times sympathises with the point of view of characters such as Dido and Turnus, who oppose the project of those *fata*. In the case of the *Aeneid,* at least, even the conflict between deities is not black-and-white. The presence of these nuances is exemplified by the fact that the reconciliation of Jupiter and Juno in book 12, the ceasing of the latter's anger against the Trojans/Romans, seems to be contradicted by Virgil's complying with the account of Ennius' *Annales*. In that poem, Juno would take the side of the Carthaginians against them later on during the Punic Wars.[523]

As far as the *Christiad* is concerned, one would fail to find sympathy for the cause of Evil. God's side and the devil's side have nothing to do with one another. Paradoxically, a dualism of such a kind is closer to the philosophical set-up of the *De Rerum Natura*, where religion and superstition are opposed to the material reality of Epicurean enquiry with its morally charged connotations.[524] The analogy is to be explained by Lucretius' and Vida's embracing of two doctrines with more or less fixed and standardised, albeit mutually exclusive, worldviews. Within the context of Vida's poem, the only field for any moral ambiguity is man's heart. This does not mean, however, that the conflict takes place only on earth, for the forces of Good and Evil fight in the Underworld and, in keeping with the ancient epic tradition, include human and non-human beings alike.[525] The actions and interactions of supernatural beings and humans are central features of epic.[526] As a Christian poet, Vida had to face what Tobias Gregory has defined as "the problem of counterbalance": constructing an epic world inhabited by spiritual beings and characterised by the presence of evil but under the control of an Infinite, Unique, Omnipotent, Omniscient and Benevolent God.[527] Like most epics, and even more so in its case, the *Christiad* is a journey from Hell to Heaven.[528] A gloomy aura of death permeates the opening of the poem, but the course of events eventually leads to the triumph of life with the Resurrection and the spreading of Christianity over space and time.

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[521] On this dualism in Juvencus' *Evangeliorum libri IV* and its dependence on the biblical source, see Šubrt (1993) 13.

[522] According to Hardie (1993b) xi, epic is characterised by the "difficulty of distinguishing between good and evil". The complexity of the issue of moral dichotomies in the tradition makes it difficult to account for all the relevant bibliography because of the relevance that the issue usually has for the overall interpretation of a given work, so only titles that synthesise the problem will be mentioned here. The division between two factions does not apply well to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, although this does not imply that the poem bypasses moral issues or ambiguity. See, for instance, Feldherr's (2002) discussion of the uncertainty of appearances and the political and moral implications of the metamorphoses. Whether Lucan's *Bellum Civile* presents a clear-cut moral distinction between the "good" Republicans and the "evil" Caesareans or not has been the subject of controversy. Caterine (2014) 8-10 offers a reconstruction of the critical debate. On the moral nuances of the *Thebaid*, see Rebeggiani (2018) 2-7, 12-18. Cowan (2015) illustrates the problematisation of moral dichotomies in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. Silius sets out a more strongly marked division; see Marks (2009).

[523] Feeney (1984) 179-85 and Lyne (1987) 94-9.

6.1 Satan, Hell and Hellish Forces

Hell usually triggers the epic action in the Virgilian tradition.[529] The plot of the *Aeneid* would have been different, had Juno not convinced Aeolus to stir up the winds, forces of a Titanic or Gigantic type, thus causing the shipwreck of the Trojans on the Libyan coasts, or, had she not sent a chthonic entity like Allecto to ignite Amata, Turnus and the indigenous peoples of Latium against the Trojans. The ghost of Hector visiting Aeneas during the sack of Troy sets Aeneas' journey off from a chronological standpoint. On the same note, at the beginning of the action of the *Bellum Civile,* the personification of Rome appears to Caesar during the night, a horrifying vision that has the general tremble for a moment. The *Thebaid* opens with the prayer of Oedipus, whose blindness anticipates the darkness of hell in his life on earth, to the gods of the Underworld, that they may punish his sons Eteocles and Polynices. The intervention of the Fury Tisiphone grants this request, and strife is caused between the two brothers. Likewise, Hannibal's assumption of Juno's wrath and his long-standing connection to the temple sacred to Dido, where the cult of Hades and Proserpina was practised, are the premises for the unfolding of the *Punica*.[530] The *Argonautica* opens a window on the infernal regions at the end of book 1, at the entrance of Jason's parents into Elysium, along with a glance at Tartarus.

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[524] Hardie (1993b) 72.

[525] Huss, König and Winkler (2016) 167-211 gave a penetrating analysis of the interactions between the realms of heaven, hell and earth in the *Christiad*.

[526] According to Servius, the very definition of *heroicum carmen* encompasses the co-presence of human and divine characters (*ad Aen.* 1 intr.: *est autem heroicum quod constat ex divinis humanisque personis*). The canonicity of the supernatural machinery in the *Christiad* has already been noted, for instance, by Di Cesare (1964) 87-8.

[527] Gregory (2006) 1-29 addresses the main problems entailed by the representation of the Christian divinity in Renaissance Christian epics. In the decades following the publication of the *Christiad* several theoretical problems inherent in the genre were a matter of debate. See Faini (2015).

[528] Hardie (1993b) 59.

[529] *Ibidem* 60-5 on the function of Hell as starting-point of epics.

The *Christiad* is no exception. Not only do the first scenes depict Jesus announcing his impending death and the demise of many of his companions (*Chr.* 1.32-120), but more importantly, they are followed by the council of the demons chaired by Satan in Hell (*Chr.* 1.121-235). This episode offers an overview of the antagonistic forces in the poem. It introduces Satan and his demons, describes their monstrous bodies and the environment in which they live, explains the origin of their current status and gives voice to their cause. Vida expands the narrative framework of the Gospels by enhancing one element, the devil's opposition to Jesus' mission, which is already present in that primary source but does not constitute a structural component of the plot as it does in the *Christiad*. Thus, the devil, the demons and the physical description of Hell assume a much more critical function in terms of narrative dynamic, providing the poem with that disposition of opposing forces that propels numerous epic plots.

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[530] *Ibidem*.

Given these conditions, it is reasonable to view Satan as a Junonian character,[531] mindful of an old offence (*Chr.* 5.306-7: *Sensit atrox Erebo umbrarum regnator in imo, / aeternam servans memori sub pectore curam* – *Aen.* 1.36: *cum Iuno aeternum servans sub pectore vulnus*). He clearly instantiates the "antagonists' side" of the contrasting faction, the one that in the Virgilian tradition is usually described with attributes such as "feminine", "Eastern", "private", "chaotic", "multiple", "irrational", "other", "chthonic".[532] But something that has not been adequately observed is that he shares features with Statius' Oedipus as well: like Juno and Oedipus, Satan is obsessed, violent and subversive.[533] He feels deprived of his prestige and lays claim to the honour that he thinks should be due to him. He also reminds readers acquainted with these ancient models of the reasons for his resentment. His hostility has its roots in an outrage that he had to suffer in the past and, at the same time, in fear of a future threat. As a former angel, he was cast down from Heaven to Hell along with his companions and confined in that place with the duty of punishing the souls of the dead. Now, the thought that the coming of Christ will deprive him even of Hell and of the control over the souls abiding there haunts him obsessively.[534] In order to prevent the success of his enemy, Satan resorts to the help of the demons he marshals to stir up the priests and leaders of Jerusalem by means of possession.

By following in the footsteps of Statius' Oedipus, Satan might remind the readers at the beginning of the *Christiad* of an epic, the *Thebaid*, in which the providence of the gods is missing. Satan evokes both the ultimately, but only partially, defeated Virgilian Juno and the scenario of the first narrative unit of Statius' epic, where not everything is under the control of Providence and evil is celebrated.[535] This way, biblical events are put on the same level as the facts behind Juno's and Oedipus' hatred of the Trojans and the two brothers Polynices and Eteocles, respectively. To these, one should add the judgment of Paris and the future destruction of Carthage by the Trojans' successors, as well as the disregard that the sons of Oedipus have for him. Likewise, the demons are Christian counterparts of chthonic forces like the winds of Aeolus, the Furies or Tisiphone, with which Juno and Oedipus try to impede the fulfilment of the Trojans' mission and to incite fraternal war. While Statius directly imitates Juno's second attempt –the sending of a Fury–, Vida combines her two efforts, as this first scene in Hell presents features of both.[536]

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[531] The parallelism between the two already has been suggested. See, for instance, Hofmann (2001) 166 and Gregory (2006) 68-77. It is not rare for Satan to play the part of Juno in Christian Neo-Latin epic. For a good synthesis see Braun (2010-11) 483.

[532] Quint (1993) ch. 1.

[533] On the Junonian nature of Oedipus in the *Thebaid* and these three attributes, see Ganiban (2007) 30 with bibliography. Christian medieval legends compared Oedipus to Judas actually; see Edmunds (1976) 149-50.

[534] In this respect, he is like a new Pelias, for they both fear and try to kill a young man (Jesus/Jason).

The depiction of Satan, the demons and Hell conflates a number of sources, both ancient and medieval.[537] To begin with, Dante's *Comedy* represents an illustrious predecessor: in both Dante and Vida, Hell is populated by demons that torture the damned and Satan is a monster-like figure. However, Dante's Satan is a giant, stuck mid-breast in ice at the centre of Hell, who cries with six eyes, has bat wings and three heads in whose mouths he chews three famous traitors, Marcus Iunius Brutus, Gaius Cassius Longinus –Caesar's murderers– and Judas Iscariot. In the *Christiad*, he is a much more dynamic character.[538] When he enters the scene, he tries to cope with the anxiety caused by the thought of the liberation of the righteous by Christ:

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[535] On the absence of a positive perspective and a divine Providence in the *Thebaid* see Feeney (1991) 337-91 and Bessone (2011) 17-20, 53-8. For a pessimistic reading of this absence see Dominik (1994) 1-4.

[536] The whole episode seems to have another model in the Allecto of Claudian's *Against Rufinus.* The parallelism has been analysed by Cicchitelli (1904) 341-7, 409, Moore (1918) 179-81, who thinks of Boccaccio's *Filocolo* as a further influence, and briefly touched upon by Di Cesare (1964) 321. Döpp (1989) 47-8 argued that Vida is here contaminating the beginning of that work (1.27-8: *protinus infernas ad limina taetra sorores / concilium deforme vocat*) with Pluto's revolt at the beginning of *De Raptu Prosperpinae*. For the influence of *Against Rufinus* on Renaissance epics, see Hardie (2014) 28.

[537] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 21 hypothesise that New Testament Apocrypha such as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the *Gospel of Bartholomew* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, might have influenced the Hell of Vida.

[538] Dante *Inferno* 34.28-81; Gatta (1900) 50-1, Di Cesare (1964) 99, and Gregory (2006) 68 discussed this comparison.

Interea longe mundi regnator opaci,
infelix monstrum, penitus non inscius illam
iam prope adesse diem, superi qua maximus ultor
imperio patris infernis succederet oris
manibus auxilio ac sedes vastaret opertas,
sollicitus partis animum versabat in omnes,
si qua forte potis regno hanc avertere cladem,
molirique Deo letum meditatur.

(*Chr.* 1.121-28)

Satan's attempt to cause the death of God is an oxymoron in the long run. Christ temporarily dies, but, being God, he cannot be killed. Satan's perverse point of view does not let him realise the inconsistency of his desire. His wretched plan mirrors the assassination of the 50 sons of Aegyptus by the Danaids mentioned in the Ovidian account of Juno's revenge on Ino in *Metamorphoses* 4 (Ov. *Met.* 4.462-3: *molirique suis letum patruelibus ausae / adsiduae repetunt, quas perdant, Belides undas*). The reason for Juno's anger lies in the fact that Ino raised Dionysus, who was born from the "illicit" union of Jupiter, Juno's husband, and Semele, Ino's sister and Juno's rival in love. Even on that occasion, the goddess resorts to the help of a Fury, Tisiphone, ordering her to drive Ino and her husband Athamas mad, so that the latter would attack his wife and children in a frenzy. Ovid offers also a topography of Hell and, within this context, makes mention of the Danaids. The narrative pattern is the same as in Juno's stirring up of Amata and Turnus through the Fury Allecto in the *Aeneid*,[539] which would be reused by Statius with Oedipus in the *Thebaid*,[540] and here by Vida.

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[539] The Virgilian framework of the episode has been thoroughly analysed, e.g. Hardie (1990) with bibliography.
[540] For the Ovidian intertext in Statius' scene, see Keith (2002).

Therefore, the Ovidian model corroborates the assimilation Juno-Satan already suggested by the Virgilian intertext. By punishing Ino, Juno is indirectly hostile to her adoptive son Dionysus. This design resonates with Satan's opposition to Christ, the Son of his enemy.[541] The influence of Ovid, furthermore, is not restricted to the Ino episode, for the expression *mundus opacus* with which Hell is here referred to occurs in the account of the rape of Proserpine by Arethusa in *Metamorphoses* 5, where it denotes the Underworld (Ov. *Met.* 5.506-7: *illa quidem tristis neque adhuc interrita vultu, / sed regina tamen, sed opaci maxima mundi*). Again, the inspiration comes from a female figure, Proserpine, the girl abducted by Hades and made queen of the infernal regions.

The mimicry of Dido's distress when she senses that Aeneas has left Carthage (*Aen.* 4.630: *Haec ait, et partis animum versabat in omnis*) further stresses Satan's "negative feminine" side. While Dido suffers with her lover's departure and then wishes that a future avenger will punish that lover, Satan is afraid of the coming of an enemy –Christ– who is described as *maximus ultor* (*Chr.* 1.123). Their reaction to the news, at least for a while, is very similar, though. Both impel their subordinates to prepare for a conflict. Even their respective enemies, Christ and Aeneas, are connected, in that they both descend into the Underworld. Christ is indirectly compared to another character who made a *katabasis*, Tiresias. The description of Hell reiterates the words with which the ancient seer recalls his visit to Hades in his necromancy in *Thebaid* 4 (*Theb.* 4 540-1: *ipse etiam, melior cum sanguis, opertas / inspexi sedes*). Finally, the insidious nature of Satan is highlighted by the expression that in the *Aeneid* indicates the Wooden Horse, a means of treachery, a fake and mechanical replica of a true being hiding in its womb a mortal cohort (*Aen.* 2.244-5: *monstrum infelix sacrata*

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[541] For the parallelism between Jesus and Dionysus in the *Christiad*, see section 6.4.

sistimus arce). Satan and Evil in general are but a trivialised and foolish version[542] or a treacherous image of Good according to the Catholic orthodoxy embraced by Vida.

On the other hand, masculine figures inspire the appearance of the prince of Hell. He is a monster with one hundred arms and one hundred fire-breathing maws, holds a flaming trident in his black hand and addresses the demons from a summit:

> *At centumgeminus flammanti vertice supra est*
> *arbiter ipse Erebi centenaque bracchia iactat*
> *centimanus totidemque eructat faucibus aestus.*
> […]
> *Fremitu vario sonat intus opaca*
> *regia, rex donec nigram igne tricuspide dextram*
> *armatus coetu in medio sic farier orsus*
> (*Chr.* 1.147-9; 1.164-6)

The one hundred arms assimilate him to the giant Briareus/Aegaeon, the Gigantic monster that in pagan myth rebelled against Jupiter (*Aen.* 6.286: *et centumgeminus Briareus* – 10.565-7: *Aegaeon qualis, centum cui bracchia dicunt / centenasque*[543] *manus, quinquaginta oribus ignem / pectoribus arsisse*).[544] Thus, he re-embodies the forces that in the *Aeneid* attempted to overthrow Zeus from Olympus and establish a new order, the same project that he once attempted and he plans on attempting again.[545] Like the Giants, Satan rebelled against the ruling divinity and was punished with confinement in Hell after a battle that can be assimilated to a Christian Gigantomachy.[546] The quotation of the Lucretian hemistich devoted to the primordial deity Tartarus (Lucr. 3.1012: *Tartarus horriferos eructans*

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[542] At *Chr.* 1.130, Satan is called *demens.*

[543] Vida might have though also of Stat. *Theb*. 4.535: *centeni Aegaeonis*. See Lew (2011) 275 and417.

[544] Butler (2007) has already analysed the resemblance between Satan and Briareus in Vida. The adjective *centumgeminus* occurs also in Val. Fl. 6.118 (*et centumgeminae Lagea novalia Thebes*) and Claud. *Rapt. Pros.* 3.345 (*Haec centumgemini strictos Aegaeonis enses*), where it denotes Thebes and Aegaeon.

[545] Though the simile illustrates Aeneas himself probably through the eyes of his opponents. See Harrison (1991) 215.

[546] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 25.

faucibus aestus) makes even more evident the assimilation of Satan to a chthonic entity. Tartarus too breathes fire, but, beyond this feature, his identification with a place in the Underworld makes him especially suitable as a counterpart of Satan. The Lucretian passage reprimands the superstition of punishments after death: it is inscribed within a paradoxical description of the damned and of infernal monsters. Tartarus is also the region of the Virgilian Underworld where sinners are punished, including the Titans, another category of entities who fought against the Olympian gods.[547]

As mentioned above, Satan's speech follows the pattern of Juno's first monologue in the *Aeneid*. His hurt pride for a past event –his fall from grace– leads him to long for revenge and for the re-establishment of the reverence that, in his opinion, is due to him.[548] With a rhetorical device he implies that all the demons share his outrage since they suffered the same fate, which makes him a less solitary character than Juno or Oedipus. His wrongful equalling of himself to the Father and the orders he gives to the demons confirm, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he is the uncontested leader of the hellish forces. The arrangement of the speech well expresses all these ideas. After greeting his companions and underlining the communal aspect of their story and current status, he accuses the Father of having fled from him and proclaims himself his equal. Then he recalls their past defeat, laments the lack of honour they are enduring at present, and forecasts with horror the threat of Christ, to which he responds with the mobilisation of his troops. The classical intertexts underlying his words connect him to the role of a victim, thus anticipating the new defeat that awaits him and his followers:

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[547] Bruère (1966) 23, who also mentions Aegeon, adds that Satan resembles Turnus too, the main antagonist of the *Aeneid*. Both characters are a head taller than their own followers (*Aen.* 7.783-4: *ipse inter primos praestanti corpore Turnus / vertitur arma tenens et toto vertice supra est*).

[548] As he begins to speak, he holds in his hand a three-pointed fire described with an adjective, *tricuspis* (*Chr.* 1.165), of which the only occurrence in classical Latin is Ov. *Met.* 1.330, where it is referred to Neptune's trident (*nec maris ira manet positoque tricuspide telo*). The adjective also occurs in Poliziano *Iliad* 5.452 *Quin etiam Iuno regina tricuspide telo*.

> *Quae proelia toto*
> *egerimus coelo, quibus olim denique utrimque*
> *sit certatum odiis, notum et meminisse necesse est.*
> *Ille astris potitur parte et plus occupat aequa*
> *aetheris ac poenas inimica e gente recepit*
> *crudeles. Pro sideribus, pro luce serena*
> *nobis senta situ loca, sole carentia tecta*
> *reddidit*
> […]
> *Ingens ingenti claudit nos obice tellus*
> *in partemque homini nostri data regia coeli est.*
> *Nec satis. Arma iterum molitur et altera nobis*
> *bella ciet regnisque etiam nos pellit ab imis.*

(*Chr.* 1.171-8, 1.181-84)

Satan’s wrecked destiny resembles that of some “victims” of the *Aeneid,* starting from Deiphobus, one of the sons of Priam slaughtered during the sack of Troy. When Aeneas meets him in the Underworld, he says that it is worth remembering that fatal night. Satan does something similar while speaking of his fall from Heaven to Hell (*Aen.* 6.514: *et nimium meminisse necesse est*). Both denounce the deeds of one person in particular whom they held directly responsible for their death or demise, Helen and the Father respectively, and cry for vengeance. Satan’s complaint about the former victory of the Father also reuses Dido’s words in her last moment before her suicide (*Aen.* 4.655-6: *urbem praeclaram statui, mea moenia vidi, / ulta virum poenas inimico a fratre recepi*). This further echo of Dido is particularly meaningful. She embodies both the figure of the avenger, because she argues that she has taken revenge on her brother Pygmalion by depriving him of the riches for which he killed her husband Sychaeus, and that of the victim who looks for vengeance, in her case the invocation of a future leader who will conquer the Romans. In Satan’s plan, which is ultimately the Father’s, Jesus is to be ambushed by the priests, as Sychaeus is stabbed in the back by Pygmalion in Dido's story (*Chr.* 1.209: *ut ferro incautum superent et funere mulctent* – *Aen.* 1.350: *clam ferro incautum superat, securus amorum / germanae*). Along with Deiphobus and Dido, another illustrious victim of the *Aeneid* is here alluded to, Pallas. His words of encouragement to his soldiers as they find themselves at a dead-end during the battle are here mirrored by Satan, who protests at his imprisonment in Hell (*Aen.* 10.377: *ecce maris magna claudit nos obice pontus*). Again, the portrayal of this place is informed by Virgilian intertexts, such as the Underworld as Aeneas defines it during his encounter with the shade of Dido (*Aen.* 6.462: *per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam*) and in the simile that compares it to the caves of Cacus (*Chr.* 1.187-9: *Iamque aderit fretusque armis coelestibus ille / sedibus exitium vehet his et regna recludet / infera* – *Aen.* 8.243-4: *non secus ac si qua penitus vi terra dehiscens / infernas reseret sedes et regna recludat*).

The war between Heaven and Hell is also a re-enactment of the fraternal and civil war of the *Thebaid* (*Theb.* 1.1-2: *Fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas*), as the parallelism with Oedipus mentioned earlier implies. The news that the Father is sending someone to the infernal regions to make a change of some sort that will entail war –Satan does not know what Jesus' mission is ultimately all about– echoes the war between the two brothers in the words of their mother Jocasta. As Satan perceives that Christ is bringing disaster, Jocasta hears that her sons are going to fight each other and tries to stop Eteocles, acknowledging that Polynices is ready for the duel (*Theb.* 11.348-9: *sed pulsat muros germanus et impia contra / bella ciet*). The expression also signals the threat of another war brought about by Theseus[549] to Creon and communicated through the messenger Phegeus toward the end of the poem (*Theb.* 12.682-3: *ille quidem ramis insontis olivae / pacificus, sed bella ciet bellumque minantur*). This phrase is not used exclusively by Statius, but the presence of other Statian *loci* corroborates the connection. Tydeus' journey from Thebes informs even Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in Satan's speech (*Chr.* 1.204: *Ille iter antiquas Solymorum instaurat ad arces* – *Theb.* 2.743: *et dulces iter instaurabat ad Argos*), and his embassy to Thebes underlies Jesus' visit to Lazarus' house.[550] The assimilation of the demons who are asked to stir up the priests to the enraged Tydeus as he inflames several cities on his way back to Argos after the embassy has an analogous effect (*Chr.* 1.213-5: *In eum cuncti maioribus illos / inflammate odiis et vera et prava canenetes / pestiferumque animis furtim inspirate venenum* – *Theb.* 3.336-8: *medias etiam non destitit urbes, / quidquid et Asopon veteresque interiacet Argos, / inflammare odiis*). A change takes place in this character during his expedition to Thebes. At the moment of his arrival, he tries to solve the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles in a peaceful manner as an ambassador. However, during his interaction with Eteocles the tension scales up quickly, his initially nonviolent intent fails, and a cohort of Thebans ambushes him as he sets out for Argos. When the narrator of the *Christiad* speaks, as in the Lazarus episode, Jesus is compared to Tydeus when he is on a diplomatic mission. From Satan's point of view, Jesus is similar to the infuriated Tydeus ambushed by the Thebans.

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[549] The twelfth century pseudo-Fulgentian allegorical commentary on the *Thebaid* assimilated Theseus to God. See Hays (2002) 200. Unfortunately, I have not had the chance yet to investigate whether there are points of contact between the *Christiad* and this commentary.

If we momentarily move forward to Jesus' account of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, we can see that even the serpent that tempts the woman to eat the forbidden fruit is a Junonian character. In *Argonautica* 6, Juno, having beguiled Medea into falling for Jason with help of Venus, disguises herself as the girl's sister and takes her to the city walls to let her witness the hero's exploits in the war against Perses and eventually assist him in his mission. The goddess then leaves, taking pride in the achievement of her goal

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[550] See section 5.1 "The raising of Lazarus". In that passage, the reader can get another glimpse of Hell. Once he comes back to life, indeed, Lazarus starts recounting what he saw and experienced in the nether realm: the pain he felt in the moment of his death, Furies with terrible forms, sinners punished, eternal fires, but also rewards for the righteous. All this is described as the ekphrasis of the Underworld on the Shield of Aeneas (*Chr.* 1.297-8: *His addit scelerum poenas ac laeta piorum / praemia* - *Aen.* 8.666-7: *hinc procul addit / Tartareas etiam sedes, alta ostia Ditis, / et scelerum poenas*).

(Val. Fl. 6.679-80: *haec fantem medio in sermone reliquit / incepti iam Iuno potens securaque fraudis*), as the cunning beast does for having deceived Eve (*Chr.* 1.669: *at victor factus potens iam fraudis*). Both entities deceptively lead a rather inexperienced woman to overcome her moral scruples and to commit an act that will ruin her life and alienate her from her father.

Vida's demonology is another point of contact with the classical world, even though later sources such as Dante and Sannazaro cannot be ruled out.[551] His demons are creatures that not only display traits typical of classical monsters but are actual monsters of classical mythology. Two-fold demons that are half-humans and half-serpents with long and coiling tails inhabit the Hell of the *Christiad*.[552] Their ability to metamorphose into Gorgons, Sphinxes, Centaurs, Hydras, Chimaeras, Scyllas and Harpies only enhances their monstrosity:

> *Gorgonas hi Sphingasque obscoeno corpore reddunt,*
> *Centaurosque Hydrasque illi ignivomasque Chimaeras.*
> *Centum alii Scyllas ac foedificas Harpyias,*
> *Et quae multa homines simulacra horrentia fingunt.*
>
> (*Chr.* 1.143-5)

The list proves to be conventional when one looks at the monsters of the Virgilian Underworld (*Aen.* 6.286-9: *Centauri in foribus stabulant Scyllaeque biformes / et centumgeminus Briareus ac belua Lernae / horrendum stridens, flammisque armata*

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[551] Di Cesare (1965) 97-8 argued that for the rendering of Hell Vida relied much more on Dante than on Virgil and Statius, and that he was following the Christian tradition, which identified mythological deities and creatures with the demons. The identification had been proposed since antiquity, e.g. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei.* Green (2006) 95 maintains that Virgil and Statius inspired Iuvencus' references to Hell.

[552] Again, classical authors might not be the only sources because demons had been conceived as theriomorphic creatures for a long time, even in ancient Christian literature. See Grypeou (2020). Renaissance biblical epics such as Jacobus Bonus' *Sub figura Herculis Christi praeludium* (1526) depicted a Christian hell inhabited by classical monsters; see Springer (2003) 116.

Chimaera, / Gorgones Harpyiaeque et forma tricorporis umbrae). Even Statius' Underworld is populated by the same creatures, as stated by Tiresias in the same passage quoted above (*Theb.* 4.533-5: *quid tibi monstra Erebi, Scyllas et inane furentes / Centauros solidoque intorta adamante Gigantum / vincula et angustam centeni Aegaeonis umbram?*). In both cases the catalogue includes the Giants, including Briareus/Aegaeon, whom Vida evoked in the figure of Satan. A catalogue of demons is part of the Claudian model as well (Claud. *In Ruf.* 1.296: *vis hydrae Scyllaeque fames et flamma Chimaerae*). While it is certain that this representation of the demons has a classical model, it is harder to evaluate the potential influences of later intermediaries. Dante's *Inferno* teems with classical monsters, including some of those mentioned by Vida such as the Centaurs and the Harpies. Similarly, Sannazaro, in his account of the Crucifixion in the *De Partu Virginis* (1526), gives a list of the infernal beasts that has a lot in common with Vida, even though it resembles Virgil's even more.[553] There is no doubt that these poets had already adapted classical mythology for the literary representation of demonic forces in a Christian context and Vida likely kept them in mind. Be that as it may, other intertexts suggest what seems to be the direct influence of Virgil and Statius:

> *Protinus acciri diros ad regia fratres*
> *limina, concilium horrendum, et genus omne suorum*
> *imperat. Ecce igitur dedit ingens buccina*[554] *signum.*
> *Quo subito intonuit caecis domus alta cavernis*
> *undique opaca, ingens.*

(*Chr.* 1.133-6)

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[553] *De Partu Virginis* 1.393-97: *tum variae pestes et monstra horrentia Ditis / ima petant! trepident Briareia turba, Cerestae / semiferumque genus Centauri et Gorgones Atrae / Scillaeque Sphingesque ardentis ora Chimerae / atque Hydrae atque Canes et terribiles Harpyiae*. Bruère (1966) 23 reports some *loci similes*. Sannazaro owed a debt to Statius as well, as Gärtner (2004) suggested.

[554] Cicchitelli (1904) 341, Di Cesare (1964) 328-9, and Bruère (1966) 33 illustrated the sources of this word.

The wickedness of the demons is immediately conveyed by the expression *diri fratres,* whose only occurrence in classical Latin connotes the dead Polynices and Eteocles in Creon's speech during the funeral of his son Menoeceus in *Thebaid* 12 (*Theb.* 12.84-5: *eademne dies, eadem impia bella / te, puer, et diros misere in Tartara fratres?*). These creatures are like the monstrous beings that the Trojans encounter during their wanderings across the Mediterranean in *Aeneid* 3. Their assembly is called *concilium horrendum,* like that of the Cyclopes (*Aen.* 3.678-9: *Aetnaeos fratres caelo capita alta ferentis, / concilium horrendum*).[555] It must be no coincidence, then, that the infernal caves are a replica of Polyphemus' cave (*Aen.* 3.618-9: *domus sanie dapibusque cruentis, / intus opaca, ingens*).[556] Their two-fold shape is inspired by the Virgilian harpies (*Aen.* 3.426-8: *prima hominis facies et pulchro pectore virgo / pube tenus, postrema immani corpore pistrix / delphinum caudas utero commissa luporum*). However, the rest of their description owes a lot to the wider epic tradition:

> *Et adsunt*
> *lucifugi coetus varia atque bicorpora monstra,*
> *pube tenus hominum facies, verum hispida in anguem*
> *desinit ingenti sinuata volumine cauda.*
> […]
> *Omnibus intorti pendent pro crinibus angues*
> *nexantes nodis sese ac per colla plicantes.*[557]
> *In manibus rutilaeque faces uncique tridentes,*
> *quis sontes animas subigunt atque ignibus urgent.*

(*Chr.* 1.139-42; 1.152-5)

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[555] Cicchitelli (1904) 341, von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 23.

[556] They also bear a resemblance to the elm tree in the Virgilian Underworld under which dreams gather (*Aen.* 6.282-4: *in medio ramos annosaque bracchia pandit / ulmus opaca, ingens, quam sedem Somnia vulgo / vana tenere ferunt, foliisque sub omnibus haerent*).

[557] The detail resembles the crushed snake to which Sergestus' ship is compared at *Aen.* 5.278-9: *pars vulnere clauda retentat / nexantem nodis seque in sua membra plicantem.*

Their heads are covered by snakes squirming around their necks, a feature shared with the ancient monster Medusa (Ov. *Met.* 4.791-2: *sola sororum / gesserit alternis immixtos crinibus angues*) and the Furies (Ov. *Met.* 4.453-4: *carceris ante fores clausas adamante sedebant / deque suis atros pectebant crinibus angues*), including Virgil's Allecto (*Aen.* 7.346-7: *huic dea caeruleis unum de crinibus anguem / conicit*).[558] The narrator specifies that some of these creatures deceive humans by assuming seductive forms and that others control winds and storms, another trait in common with the chthonic apparatus of the Virgilian tradition –e.g. the winds of Aeolus in *Aeneid* 1. They hold in their hands pitchforks with which they punish the souls of the damned, the *sontes animae,* a widespread designation for the departed in Renaissance Neo-Latin poetry.[559] The source here is arguably the scene of the *Thebaid* in which Oedipus addresses the infernal gods who reign over the souls of the guilty ones, especially Tisiphone, to arouse hatred between his two sons at the beginning of the poem (*Theb.* 1.56-7: *di, sontes animas, angustaque Tartara poenis / qui regitis*). Similarly, Satan summons the demons torturing the guilty souls and delivers a speech in front of them regarding the coming of Christ and the necessity of a counterattack. He orders them to inflame the hearts of the priests and the leaders of Jerusalem with hatred for Christ as a means of vengeance for their exile from Heaven.[560]

Another short account of the angels' rebellion and fall in John's chronicle of the creation of the world contributes to the characterisation of the demons (*Chr.* 4.59-79). After explaining the nature of the Trinity, John's monologue shifts to the reasons that led the Father to send His Son to Earth. At the root of it all lie the rebellion of some of the angels and the original sin committed by Adam. First, God gave birth to the angels to share Heaven with them:

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[558] These traits had become commonplace by then E.g. Naldi *Volterrais* 1.92; Mantovano *Sylvae* 1.11.49; Girolamo Balbi *carmina* 4.199.

[559] Tommaso Chaula *Bellum Parthicum* 3.31; Mantovano *Parthenice prima sive Mariana* 2.305; Poliziano *Iliad* 3.281.

[560] Exile is a key component of classical epic plots, where it usually concerns the main characters. See Harrison (2007a). In Vida, it touches both Jesus, in that he has to go through trials before returning to Heaven, and the demons.

> *Quid vero impulerit tantos adiisse labores,*
> *atque haec ferre Deum, dum morti obnoxius errat,*
> *dicam equidem et repetens altas ab origine causas*
> *expediam. Coelum et coeli, quos suspicis, orbes*
> *vix opifex rerum extuderat, terrasque iacentis*
>
> (*Chr.* 4.59-63)

John plays the role of narrator, as I have already pointed out, and this is here signalled by an echo of the direct statement of the narrator of the *Georgics* at the beginning of the aetiology of the bugonia and the epyllion of Aristaeus (*Georg.* 4.285-6: *altius omnem / expediam prima repetens ab origine famam*). Such a function is reaffirmed through an allusion to the opening of the *Aeneid*. John starts to report the remote causes behind Jesus' incarnation as Virgil asks the Muse to remind him of the basis of Juno's anger (*Aen.* 1.8-11: *Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso / quidve dolens regina deum tot volvere casus / insignem pietate virum, tot adire labores / impulerit*).[561] This brief account of the rebellion introduces into the discussion the figure of the Father as well, who is assimilated to Virgil's Jupiter (*Aen.* 1.223-5: *Et iam finis erat, cum Iuppiter aethere summo / despiciens mare velivolum terrasque iacentis / litoraque*). Even in his case, the sources are not limited to the Virgilian *corpus* alone, for the attribute *rerum opifex* designates in classical Latin the demiurge that at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* is held responsible for the creation of man according to a hypothesis suggested by the narrator (Ov. *Met.* 1.78-9: *natus homo est, sive hunc divino semine fecit / ille opifex rerum*),[562] and the Creator of the universe mentioned by Acoreus in his digression on the river Nile in *Bellum Civile* 10 (Luc. 10.266-7: *quas ille creator / atque opifex rerum certo sub iure coercet*); it also has a long past as the denomination of the Father in Neo-Latin poetry.[563] While initially everyone praised the Creator, some angels soon decided to rebel against Him, blinded as they were by madness like the Trojans when they drive the Wooden Horse into Troy (*Chr.* 4.74-5: *ut cuperent summo sese praeferre parenti / immemores animis victi caecique furore* – *Aen.* 2.244-5: *instamus tamen immemores caecique furore*). Soon the Father armed his faithful angels and hurled the unruly ones into Hell.

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[561] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 261
[562] *Ibidem.*

The action of the poem properly comes back to Hell when Jesus drives the souls of the pious and the old prophets from there to Heaven during the three days of his death (*Chr.* 6.121-39; 200-35; 276-83). This episode, also known as the Harrowing of Hell, is not reported in the Gospels, but many other sources talk about it, in the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 24:21-2) and the New Testament (e.g. i Peter 3:19-20), apocryphal writings (e.g. *Acts of Pilate* 17-27), and Dante (e.g. *Inferno* 4.51-63).[564] Hell and Limbo lend themselves particularly easily to classical treatment,[565] as the assimilation of the infernal realm to the Cave of Cacus demonstrates (*Chr.* 6.125-6: *per caecos aditus et praecipites anfractus / solis inaccessos radiis* - *Aen.* 8.193-5: *hic spelunca fuit vasto summota recessu, / semihominis Caci facies quam dira tenebat / solis inaccessam radiis*).[566] Another ancient model is added here, the Underworld of the *Punica* (*Chr.* 6.126-7: *loca nocte perenni / obsita, terrificam caecae formidinis aulam* - Sil. 13.521-2: *paulisper gressum et nobis manisque silentum / enumera Stygiaeque aperi formidinis aulam*). The illicit and foolish desire of the demons confined in the Tartarean caves to equate themselves to God is a reminiscence of the wish expressed at the beginning of the *Georgics* that Augustus may refrain from wanting to be the ruler of the nether world for the moment (*Chr.* 6.132: *quando illos tenuit regnandi tanta cupido* – *Georg.* 1.36-7: *nam te nec spirant Tartara regem, / nec tibi regnandi veniat tam dira cupido*). The actual action takes place when Jesus pushes open the portal of the palace where the souls of the pious wait for him:

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[563] E.g. Strozzi *Borsias* 4.223; Mantovano *Parthenice sexta sive Diva Apollonia* 142.

[564] Gardner (2009) 433 mentions many of these sources. Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 361-3 add to them late medieval paintings such as Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Christ in Limbo* (1308-11). The opening scene of Muzio's *De Trimpho Christi* should be mentioned too. On infernal scenes in Neo-Latin biblical epics, see Springer's (1991) introduction.

[565] Gardner (2009) 433 maintains that the phrases that describe the punishments in Hell belong to a well-established Christian tradition and also suggests the influence of *Aeneid* 6. The passage is practically a patchwork of Virgilian expressions, for instance, *dum vita manebat* (*Chr.* 6.136 – *Aen.* 5.724; 6.608; 6.661).

[566] See above on *Chr.* 1.187-9.

> *Porta ingens adversa manet centum aerea vastis*
> *vectibus, aeterni postes. Hanc nulla neque igni*
> *vincere vis valeat neque duri robore ferri.*
> *Constitit hic Deus ac dextra stridentia claustra*
> *impulit. Intremuit quo late exterrita tellus*
> *impulsu, vaga contremuerunt sidera mundi,*
> *regiaque umbrosis immugiit atra cavernis.*

(*Chr.* 6.200-6)

This colossal door resists the forces of fire and iron and, in this respect, resembles the gate in front of the river Phlegethon in the Virgilian Underworld that not even the pagan gods manage to open (*Aen.* 6.552: *porta adversa ingens solidoque adamante columnae, / vis ut nulla virum, non ipsi exscindere bello / caelicolae valeant*). However, the power of Christ, who for the occasion is called *Deus,* succeeds where the pagan deities failed, for he opens the portal with only his right hand. As a result, the ground, the stars and the entire infernal palace tremble like the sea and the caverns of Aetna at the roar of the Cyclops during the escape of the Trojans (*Aen.* 3.672-4: *clamorem immensum tollit, quo pontus et omnes / intremuere undae, penitusque exterrita tellus / Italiae curvisque immugiit Aetna cavernis*) and like, again, the Cave of Cacus (*Aen.* 8.241-2: *at specus et Caci detecta apparuit ingens / regia, et umbrosae penitus patuere cavernae*). Once the door is opened, the glare emanated by Jesus enlightens the interior:

Apparet confusa intus domus altaque circum
atria, rarescunt tenebrae, et nox caeca recessit.
Nam Deus haud secus obscuris conspectus in antris
perstringens oculos divina luce refulgent,
quam cum gemma ignes splendore imitata corusco
in noctem thalamis lucet regalibus atrasque
exsuperat tenebras, largo et loca lumine vestit
purpurea circum perfundens omnia luce.

(*Chr*. 6.214-21)

For the diffusion of the light, Vida borrowed a hemistich from the Lucretian representation of dawn in the discussion of the atoms (Lucr. 2.147-8: *quam subito soleat sol ortus tempore tali / convestire sua perfundens omnia luce*). This debt might seem paradoxical given the immaterial dimension of the scene, but we have already seen that the Lucretian intertext is adapted to the spiritual aspect of reality elsewhere in the *Christiad*. Statius' presence too resurfaces once again here, because of the number of details that he provides for the depiction of infernal creatures and places and for the role that the infernal apparatus plays in the *Thebaid*. Thus, the palace in Hell has a counterpart in the wretched household of Oedipus in the introduction to that poem (*Theb.* 1.16-7: *limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus*). Similarly, the darkness of the hall recedes, making room for Jesus' light. Likewise, when Tisiphone summons the Fury Megaera, she lets the light of the sun into the Underworld by breaching the soil above and makes the dead rejoice because of it (*Theb.* 11.72-4: *protinus abrupta terrarum mole sub astris / constitit; exultant manes, quantumque profundae / rarescunt tenebrae, tantum de luce recessit*). In Vida's poem, Christ dissipates darkness, and the pious souls exult. This action has a reconciliatory goal, leading the just back to God, whereas the reason for Megaera's intervention has the ultimate aim of letting Polynices and Eteocles kill each other.

Upon seeing Jesus, the demons are struck with terror and retreat into the innermost parts of their caves, where they lie on the floor and bellow:

> *Ut vero in mediis Divuum penetralibus hostes*
> *videre et faciem invisam agnovere per umbras*
> *ardentem radiis ac mira luce coruscam,*
> *protinus aspectu subito terrentur et imas*
> *coniciunt sese in latebras linguaque remulcent*
> *commissas utero caudas stratique tremendum*
> *nequicquam umbrosis in spaleis ulularunt*

(*Chr*. 6.222-7)

The numerous Virgilian intertexts in this passage bring out the threat posed by Jesus to the demons. First of all, Christ is seen as the enemy, be it the Greeks bursting into Priam's palace during the sack of Troy (*Aen.* 2.507-8: *urbis uti captae casum convulsaque vidit / limina tectorum et medium in penetralibus hostem*), or the indigenous people of Latium. His eyes shine like those of Turnus during the siege of the Trojan camp (*Aen.* 9.731-5: *continuo nova lux oculis effulsit et arma / horrendum sonuere, tremunt in vertice cristae / sanguineae clipeoque micantia fulmina mittit. / agnoscunt faciem invisam atque immania membra / turbati subito Aeneadae*), and he chases the demons as Turnus does with the phantom of Aeneas (*Aen.* 10.656-7: *huc sese trepida Aeneae fugientis imago / conicit in latebras*). Similarly, the demons themselves resemble the Trojan warriors that fight against Camilla (*Aen.* 11.699-700: *incidit huic subitoque aspectu territus haesit / Appenninicolae Bellator filius Auni*; 11.810-13: *continuo in montis sese avius abditdit altos / occiso pastore lupus magnove iuvenco, / conscius audacis facti, caudamque remulcens / subiecit pavitantem utero silvasque petivit*). This apparent reversal of roles, with Jesus embodying an antagonist of the *Aeneid*, does not imply that the author is empathising with the evil faction. This conclusion is substantiated by the fact that when the narrator gives voice to the point of view of the antagonists, he carefully attributes to them a distorted perception of reality, as in the case of Satan's speech. One should also consider that the demons retain their negative connotation here, in that they are compared to the wild inhabitants of the Alps in antiquity, who scattered along the crests of the mountains at the arrival of the Roman phalanxes, and are modelled on Scylla (*Chr.* 6.231-2: *Romanas si forte procul fulgentibus armis / ora exsertantes antris videre phalangas* – *Aen.* 3.424-5: *at Scyllam caecis cohibet spelunca latebris / ora exsertantem et navis in saxa trahentem*).[567] This monster corresponds to one of the creatures that populate Hell in the first infernal scene analysed earlier and is evoked a few lines later. Once Jesus has brought all the righteous souls to Heaven, the torments of the damned do not finish. The fire in a pit that has a monstrous counterpart in the narrow channel dividing Scylla and Charybdis consumes them (*Chr.* 6.276-7: *Ingemuere illi, quos ob commissa cremandos / sorbet in abruptum fundoque exercet in imo* – *Aen.* 3.420-2: *dextrum Scylla latus, laevum implacata Charybdis / obsidet, atque imo barathri ter gurgite vastos / sorbet in abruptum fluctus*).[568] Finally, Satan and his demons remain stuck in Hell and the parallelism with the household of Oedipus is reaffirmed once more since they are all filled with madness, fallen angels and sons of Oedipus alike (*Chr.* 6.282-3: *fortunatis sedem, quam liquerat ipse, / invidet aetheream furiis immanibus actus* – *Theb.* 1.162-4: *loca dira arcesque nefandae / suffecere odio, furiisque inmanibus emptum / Oedipodae sedisse loco*).

The description of the conditions of the human souls that inhabit Hell relies on a Lucretian matrix. The events taking place in the Underworld are said to be far off in the air with an expression that calls to mind Epicurean physics (*Chr.* 6.294: *Atque ea dum longe vastum per inane geruntur* – Lucr. 3.27: *sub pedibus quaecumque infra per inane geruntur*). Likewise, the furnace where the damned are tormented is inspired by the Lucretian explanation of the eruptions of Aetna (*Chr*. 6.137-8: *Nunc merita expendunt vasta furnace sepultae / supplicia, undantemque ferunt caligine fumum* – Lucr. 6.680-2: *Nunc tamen illa modis quibus irritate repente / flamma foras vastis Aetnae fornacibus efflet, / expediam* – 6.691: *crassa volvit caligine fumum*). For the representation of Limbo, Vida relied on the *De Rerum Natura,* along with the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid*:

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[567] The similarity is noted also by von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 369.

[568] The Tartarean furnace is another rendition of Lucretius' Tartarus (*Chr.* 6.278: *Tartarus eructansque incendia dira caminus*), a passage already imitated at *Chr.* 1.147-9.

Hic incendia nulla
nulli obsunt penitus flammis ultricibus ignes.
Umbrarum sed iners requies, penitusque silentis
mundi temperies. Secretae his sedibus aevum
insontes degunt animae, quibus haud sua damno
admissa. At primi scelus exitiale[569] *parentis*
detinet hic clausas, nostrae nil lucis egentes,
poenarum prorsum expertes, nisi luce carerent
iucunda, qua gens gaudet stellantis Olympi.

(*Chr*. 6.141-9)

The peace and quiet of the *intermundia*, where the gods lead an imperturbable life according to Epicurean doctrine, resembles the condition of Limbo (Lucr. 2.1093-4: *nam pro sancta deum tranquilla pectora pace / quae placidum degunt aevum vitamque serenam*).[570] Here dwell the souls of the just and of those who die on the threshold of life and have no other sin but the original one, waiting for their Saviour to release them. Among them are the prophets who revealed the word of God. They polemically take over the role of Epicurus, the man who earned a place in heaven for having disclosed the real nature of the universe and divulged it in the past (*Chr.* 6.155-7: *Hic vatesque pii, qui quondam numine pleni / ventura intrepide magnas cecinere per urbes, / quique dedere orbi leges, divina reperta*- Lucr. 6.7-8: *cuius et extincti propter divina reperta / divulgata vetus iam ad caelum gloria fertur* – 5.13: *confer enim divina aliorum antiqua reperta*).[571] The history of humanity in the Lucretian account of *De Rerum Natura* 5 has a Christian counterpart in the count of the centuries that these pious souls make to measure the time that still separates them from the coming of their Saviour: the ancient Patriarchs are in a position partially comparable to that of primitive men. (*Chr.* 1.161-2: *Et iam promissi memores tum forte per umbras / saecla recensebant tacitis volventia lustris* - Lucr. 5.931-2: *multaque per caelum solis volventia lustra / vulgivago vitam tractabant more ferarum*). Unlike the Epicurean sage, the Patriarchs have an accurate perception of reality that does not rest on a materialistic basis. Paradoxically, this knowledge makes them more similar to the primitive men who, according to Lucretius, tend to attribute the causes of unknown phenomena to the gods. Materialism gives way to faith through a process of re-mythologisation similar to the one operated by Virgil on the Lucretian model,[572] though from the point of view of Christianity. The rationalistic reconstruction of the history of humankind has been replaced by the story of the Covenant between men and God. According to the Epicurean doctrine, the world will eventually come to an end because of the laws of physics that regulate the universe, and there will be no room for man.[573] The Christian worldview embraced by Vida, instead, conceives the history of humanity as that of its relationship with God and is indelibly marked by the Redemption, through which men can aspire to eternal life. The contraposition to the

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[569] Adam's sin is the Vidian counterpart of Helen's infidelity in Virgil (*Aen.* 6.511: *sed me fata mea et scelus exitiale Lacaenae / his mersere malis*).

[570] See also the hypothesis of the existence of beings forever fulfilled that Lucretius mentions in the argument against the idea that the gods created the world for humanity (Lucr. 5.171-3: *sed cui nil accidit aegri / tempore in anteacto, cum pulchre degeret aevum, / quid potuit novitatis amorem accendere tali?*) and the account of ancient times (Lucr. 5.1440: *Iam validis saepti degebant turribus aevum*). The parallelism with the *intermundia* of Lucr. 2.1094 is resumed during the ascensions of these souls to Heaven (*Chr.* 6.269-71: *sedibus ut placidum degant stellantibus aevum / felices animae gens iam defuncta periclis / humanis*).

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[571] Vida marks the theological achievements of Thomas Aquinas with the same expression (*Hymn* 31.49: *Aurea adhuc monimenta manent divina reperta*).

[572] Hardie (1986) 176-93.

[573] E.g. Lucr. 5.235-379.

Lucretian model presented here is highly appropriate to the theme of the wait of the just in Limbo.[574]

The Statian intertext is a constant feature of Vida's Hell and is central to the depiction of these souls as well. The flames from which the souls of the just are distant punish the damned like the fire accompanying the punitive thunder hurled by Jupiter against Capaneus (*Theb.* 11.3-4: *et ad terras longe comitata cadentem / signavit muros ultricis semita flammae*). They are not entirely deprived of light, unlike the dead of Statius' Underworld (*Theb.* 4.486-7: *nec lucis egentes / Cerberus occursu capitum detorqueat umbras*), whom Tiresias counterposes to the blessed ones in his prayer to the infernal deities. However, they do not share in the light of Heaven, a light that in Statius is pleasant for the living but not for Pluto, the god of Erebus (*Theb.* 8.33: *iucundaque offensus luce profatur*).[575] At that moment, the earth cracks open to house in the infernal realm the seer Amphiaraus, who is still breathing, provoking Pluto's anger. Conversely, in Vida, Jesus descends into Hell while dead to release the pious from their current condition and bring them to Heaven once and for all. What is not overturned, though, is Pluto's subsequent irritation and complaint against his brothers for having relegated him to Erebus (*Theb.* 8.34-42), here mirrored in Satan's eventual distress (*Chr.* 6.280-3) and in his initial grievance against the Father. Both Satan and Pluto believe the Father and the Olympian gods, respectively, deprived them of their kingdoms. Symmetrically, a series of features associates Jesus and Amphiaraus: they are both pious and the favourites of a divinity –Apollo in the case of Amphiaraus. They have a special connection with solar imagery, as is demonstrated, for instance, by the fact that their deaths are followed by an eclipse (*Chr.* 5.978-9 - *Theb.* 9.647-9) and with the prototypical hero Hercules.[576] Here the truth of Christianity transfigures pagan piety.

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[574] It is picked up again for their Ascension, as I illustrate in the next section.

[575] Augoustakis (2016) 58 claims that there is an affinity between the two Statian passages, namely between the prophecy/katabasis in book 4 and the opening up of the Underworld in book 8. Commenting line 33, he also indicates that a similar expression, *caeli iucundum lumen*, is used by the shade of Palinurus during his encounter with Aeneas at *Aen.* 6.363.

The non-Virgilian epic models work in connection with the Virgilian one, especially *Aeneid* 6, as far as depictions of Hell are concerned. The souls of the infants are relegated to Limbo in the *Christiad* (*Chr.* 6.159: *matronae atque viri vitaeque in limine rapti*) and in a specific place in the Underworld in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 6.427-9: *infantumque animae flentes, in limine primo / quos dulcis vitae exsortis et ab ubere raptos / abstulit atra dies*).[577] The discussion of the pious souls about the promise that the Father has made about their future liberation reverses the conversation of the Trojans as to who the dead companion mentioned by the Sibyl is (*Chr.* 6.164: *Atque haec inter se laeti sermone serebant* – *Aen.* 6.160: *multa inter sese vario sermone serebant*).[578] Again, death, albeit spiritual, eventually turns to life in the *Christiad*, as the pious are driven from Hell to Heaven, whereas the opposite takes place in the *Aeneid*, where the dead man turns out to be Misenus.

6.2 The Father, Heaven and Heavenly Forces

The depiction of the Father, the angels and Heaven is much less defined than that of Satan, the demons and Hell. Most of the scenes in which the Father appears offer only a few physical details. Unlike the prince of Hell, He is not properly depicted in a single passage, but the reader finds some sporadic clues scattered across the *Christiad.* Representing God was a much more complex challenge for a Christian poet than for a pagan one. Classical poetry, especially epic, had portrayed the actions of the gods since the Homeric poems and concerns had been raised at least since the sixth century BC. Thinkers like Xenophon and

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[576] For the association of light with Jesus, see Di Cesare (1964) 226-9. On Amphiaraus, see Rebeggiani (2018) 110-1 and 124-6.

[577] The more centonian-like use of the boat race resurfaces here (*Chr.* 6.160: *Omnibus unus amor coelique arrecta cupido* – *Aen.* 5.137-8: *exsultantia haurit / corda pavor pulsans laudumque arrecta cupido*).

[578] The expression occurs also in Sil. 15.283, with no apparent connection with the Vidian line.

Theagenes of Rhegium either attacked Homer for attributing anthropomorphic traits to the gods or defended him by proposing allegorical readings that justified their unseemly behaviour.[579]

Divine action was such a key component of epic poetry that giving up on the attempt to adapt it to an epic versification of the Gospels would have resulted in a significant gap in the framework of the operation. In other words, it would have represented too significant a departure from the tradition. Vida took pains to depict the Father without being blasphemous, even though, as we shall see, the analysis reveals some controversial juxtapositions. The most striking feature of the representation of the Father in the *Christiad* is the almost absolute absence of physical details. An anthropomorphic form comparable to that of the pagan gods is implied only sporadically. But such vagueness in his actual appearance is overall in tune with the Christian doctrine. The lack of a precise portrayal of the first Person of the Trinity is not casual. The very concept of the "Image of God" had been, was and still is an extremely controversial concept in the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic thought given its theological and moral significance.[580] As far as the angels are concerned, their physical representation was not as problematic. It was part of a long tradition that went back to at least the Bible[581] and had not the same moral implications brought about by the Image of God, even though Christian Angelology had been a matter of debate as well.[582] In addition to the biblical sources and religious texts, angels had been portrayed countless times in the history of art since Antiquity.[583] Hence, Vida depicted them with a wealth of details as he did with demons.

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[579] There is a vast bibliography on the topic. To limit the spectrum to only the implications on Latin epics, see Hardie (1986) 22-28, Feeney (1991) ch. 1.

[580] For a survey of the development of the concept, see Gurmin (2010).

[581] E.g. Isaiah 6:2, Ezekiel 1:3-26, Daniel 10:5-6, and Matthew 28:2.

[582] See von Heijne (2015) for bibliography.

[583] Jones (2011) ch. 2 is an introduction to the subject.

Beyond the accounts of the origin of the cosmos and the appearances of the angels in *Christiad* 3,[584] the main passages that include the actions of the Father and the angels or descriptions of Heaven are the Transfiguration of Christ (*Chr.* 1.830-963), the failed attempt of the angels to intervene during the Crucifixion (*Chr.* 5.448-80; 5.504-702), the Harrowing of Hell and the subsequent Ascension to Heaven (*Chr.* 6.140-294; 684-731; 813-43). While the primary model for Satan was the Virgilian Juno, it is no surprise that the Father primarily hinges upon the Virgilian Jupiter, though not exclusively.[585] This correspondence is in keeping with an overall symmetry between Evil and Good that runs through the poem and that this section intends to point out. According to such symmetry, the heavenly forces can be identified with the "protagonists' side", which in the Virgilian tradition can be associated with adjectives such as "masculine", "Western", "public", "ordered", "singular", "rational", "similar", "official". The Father's Jovian essence is generally consistent throughout the different scenes that involve Him, and serves as the main reference point for the scanty representations of his persona in the poem. This is not an innovation, as Christian authors had already made use of similar modes of representation.[586] His manifestation in a cloud of light during Jesus' Transfiguration is exemplary. The phrasing reworks the scene of the

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[584] See section 5.2.

[585] Sometimes not just Virgil's Jupiter, but other poets' as well like Ovid and Claudian: for instance, the Father is called *superum rex* (3.196; 3.659; 4.503; 5.67; 5.488; 5.525), the expression that defines Jupiter in Ov. *Met.* 1.251 and 10.155 and in Claud. *Bell. Gild.* 419. He is addressed with a number of names, adjectives or phrases, some of which occur already in classical poetry, especially post-Virgilian, or have an overt pagan facade such as *pater omnipotens* (1.393; 1.530; 1.579; 1.934; 2.524; 2.749; 2.852; 2.907; 3.132; 3.278-9; 3.314; 3.346; 4.20; 4.916; 4.1017; 5.145-6; 5.469; 5.613; 5.110; 6.167; 6.296; 6.529; 6.815; 6.926), *pater altitonans* (2.369; 5.290; 5.621; 5.987), *rector Olympi* (1.252; 3.62; 3.555), *regnator Olympi* (3.333; 3.442), *auctor Olympi* (3.368), *Olympus* (3.235), *pater superum* (1.458; 2.308; 3.356), *rerum sator* (2.628; 4.20; 4.935), *maximus auctor* (1.80), *superi* (3.243), *rerum opifex* (4.63). The attribution of pagan names to the Father and the Son has been called "Usurpation"; see, e.g., Agosti (2009) 324-5. It frequently occurs in Renaissance Neo-Latin poetry.

[586] E.g. Arator *apost.* 1.37 (*caelestes in laude chori cum rector Olympi*). More recently, Petrarch resorted to the same repertoire for a pre-Christian setting (*Africa* 2.505: *placidus rex cuncta tegentis Olympi*); see Schaffenrath (2015) 63. Vida might have been aware of this tradition, for he resorts to the same intertext (*Chr.* 1.68: *nec tibi nequiquam pater est, qui sidera torquet* – *Aen.* 9.93: *filius huic contra, torquet qui sidera mundi*) that Iuvencus used for his depiction of the Father at 4.164 (*Ni soli rerum Domino, qui sidera torquet*). See McGill (2016) 244. In some cases it is hard to distinguish which Person of the Trinity the author means or to establish whether he addresses the Trinity itself.

Aeneid where Jupiter sends a storm cloud to the Trojans at their arrival in Latium (*Chr.* 1.934-5: *Nam pater omnipotens manifestus ab aethere nubem / ostendit radiis illustrem lucis et igni* – *Aen.* 7.141-3: *hic pater omnipotens ter caelo clarus ab alto / intonuit, radiisque ardentem lucis et auro / ipse manu quatiens ostendit ab aethere nubem*). Accordingly, the Father's hall in Heaven is assimilated to the palace on Mount Olympus (*Chr.* 1.953-4: *Necnon coelicolum proprius tum maxima pandi / visa domus* - *Aen.* 10.1: *Panditur interea domus omnipotentis Olympi*).[587] The dialogue between the Father and the Son preceding the actual transfiguration revolves around the birth of a new religion, Christianity, as a consequence of the sacrifice of Christ. The conversation between Jupiter and his daughter Venus in *Aeneid* 1 is a pivotal model.[588] Both interactions take place in book 1 in their respective poems.[589] Here Jupiter is foreshadowing the foundation of the Roman Empire, which will take place thanks to the mission of Aeneas, Jupiter's grandson and Venus' son.[590] Christ is afraid that Satan and the devils might corrupt his disciples by seducing them and leading them to forget his teachings. Correspondingly, Venus' apprehension is determined by the uncertainty of the fate of the Trojans, especially of Aeneas and Ascanius, for whom a new empire has been promised. In both scenes a divine father consoles and kisses a worried divine child, one of the few physical details attributed to gods in both poems (*Chr.* 1.955-6:

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[587] See also, for instance, *Chr.* 5.621, where He is literally juxtaposed to the Jupiter of Cicero's *De Divinatione*: *ni pater altitonans stellanti nixus Olympo – Cic. De Div. 1.19: nam pater altitonans stellanti nixus Olympo*. The term *Olympus* indicates also the sky. Vida reworks a phrase that Virgil used as a transition between two episodes: *Chr.* 1.830-1: *His actis iam devexum cum vesper Olympo / clauderet* – *Aen.* 8.280: *devexo interea proprior fit Vesper Olympo*.

[588] Points of contact with other texts are less systematic, as demonstrated by the similarity between the Father's encouragement of his Son (*Chr.* 1.899: *Tu modo, tu perge et coeptum decurre laborem*) and Virgil's request to Maecenas (*Georg.* 2.39: *tuque ades inceptumque una decurre laborem*).

[589] Pontiggia (2020) 51 n.139.

[590] Cicchitelli (1904) 319-22, Di Cesare (1964) 103-5, Bruère (1966) 33, Gregory (2006) 85. Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 94 bring up also the analogous scene in Sil. 3.557-629, Venus' complaint about the destiny of the Romans during the Second Punic War and Jupiter's subsequent reassurance that a bright future lies ahead for them.

Tum genitor nubis fulgens candentis amictu / oscula libavit nato – *Aen.* 1.256: *oscula libavit natae*).[591]

The relationship between Aeneas and Venus too is mirrored in that between Jesus and the Father, even though Venus' words are attributed to the Son (*Chr.* 1.854-5: *tu genitor, tantoque finemque impone labori, / sit tantae est genus humanum coelo addere molis / saeclaque mutatis in pristina reddere rebus* – *Aen.* 2.619: *eripe, nate, fugam finemque impone labori*).[592] Unlike the mortal Aeneas, who tries in vain to grasp the hand of his immortal mother once he recognises her at the end of their encounter on the coast of Libya (*Aen.* 1.408-9: *cur dextrae iungere dextram / non datur ac veras audire et reddere voces?*), touching is allowed between the first two Persons of the Trinity, as Christ is not only a human being, but partakes in both human and divine nature (*Chr.* 1.931: *Haec ait et natum dextra complexus inhaesit*). The frustrated desire to touch a loved one, especially in the form of an embrace, reoccurs elsewhere in the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas tries to embrace the shade of Creusa (*Aen.* 2.792) and Anchises (*Aen.* 6.698-702).[593] The contrast with the predecessor highlights that the love between the Father and the Son succeeds where the love of a human for a pagan god proved delusional, notwithstanding the substantial help that humans received from above, e.g. the sending of the divine arms from the sky to Aeneas, here echoed in the divine embrace (*Chr.* 1.932: *Ecce autem subito rubra vibratus ab aethra / cum sonitu fulgor micat, et polus intonat ingens* – *Aen.* 8.524-5: *namque improviso vibratus ab aethere fulgor / cum sonitu venit et ruere omnia visa repente*).[594]

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[591] The physical representation of the gods in Virgil, in turn, is attenuated in comparison with his models; see Cianciosi (2018) ch. 4.

[592] It would be interesting to verify if the ontological and social status of the characters have repercussions on the way they speak and, if so, what kind of differences there might be, given the relatively classicising Latin of the *Christiad*. See, for instance, the work done by Harrison (2010) on the colloquial features of the language of the gods in the *Aeneid*.

[593] This gesture was already present in the *Odyssey*, in the encounter of Odysseus with the shade of his mother Anticlea (*Od.* 11.205-10).

[594] This parallelism emerges also in the Resurrection scene. As Venus sheds beauty upon her son Aeneas before his encounter with Dido and the subsequent reunion with his men (*Aen.* 1.589-91: *namque ipsa decoram /*

The paternal and filial affection and the gestures that characterise it have another, more tragic, ancient counterpart in the death of the soldier Argus and his father at the end of *Bellum Civile* 3 (*Chr.* 1.871: *Hanc veniam concede. Id gnati cedat amori* – Luc. 3.744-5: *veniam misero concede parenti / Arge, quod amplexus, extrema quod oscula fugit*). Argus is mortally wounded and, as soon as he is reached by his father, he tries to hug him. The father, on his part, asks Argus to forgive him for refusing the affection his son is looking for and kills himself in order to die before him. This event is reversed here. Jesus, the Son, requests of his Father that the sins of humanity be forgiven and the Father reassures him with a long speech and an embrace. The topsy-turvy world of Lucan, where the natural sequence of death in the family is threatened by the civil war, where people are identified with their bodies (Luc. 3.732: *spirantisque invenit artus*)[595] and the gods are deemed cruel (Luc. 3.743-4: *a saevis permissa deis, iugulum senilem / confodiam*), is in sharp contrast with the order occasioned by the death and Resurrection of Christ. Transcending flesh with his sacrifice, Jesus makes eternal life accessible to humanity as a whole, and, even though it causes pain to the Father, who decreed it in the first place, he makes the reconciliation between men and their Creator possible.[596] Vida's Christianity transfigures the emphasis that non-Christian poets like Lucan put on the physical aspect of reality.

Some sort of physicality is still perceptible in the reunion of the Father and the Son after the Ascension, an otherwise ethereal episode. A brief sketch of the setting of the scene provides some spatial coordinates, for the two characters interact in the palace of Heaven,[597]

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caesariem nato genetrix lumenque iuventae / purpureum et laetos oculis adflarat honorem), so the Father brings his Son back to life and renders his body immortal (*Chr.* 6.296-7: *et pater omnipotens nato immortalia membra / illustrans penitus divinum afflavit honorem*).

[595] Instead of Argus, the father finds the breathing limbs of his son, as Bartsch (1997) 28 observed.

[596] And a reunion of the Father and the Son in Heaven as well.

[597] At *Chr.* 5.453-80 the palace is briefly described, with a potential allusion to Latinus' (*Chr.* 5.455: *tectum immane, ingens* – *Aen.* 7.170: *tectum augustum ingens*). See von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 327. From here, the Father gazes at the earth holding his sceptre.

which is located in a specific region of the sky.[598] In order to prove his sacrifice, Jesus shows his Father the stigmata on his hands and feet, the wound in his chest and the crown of thorns. The Father responds by kissing him as he did before the Transfiguration. The adaptation of Jupiter’s kiss of his daughter Venus in *Aeneid* 1 (*Chr.* 6.845: *Annuit oranti delibansque oscula nato* – *Aen.* 1.256: *oscula libavit natae*) is repeated once again, and the parallelism with that dialogue is corroborated. Even the way Jesus requests the Father to help his disciples calls to mind the same scene. Christ has promised the apostles that Heaven will help them and Jupiter has promised that the Trojans would dominate over an endless empire (*Chr.* 6.834: *pollicitus, genitor, tibi nec sententia nutat* – *Aen.* 1.237: *pollicitus -quae te, genitor, sententia vertit?*).[599] The affectionate interaction between the Father and the Son instantiates the transfiguration of erotic love in the *Christiad*, an operation whose results are at times disturbing, at least from a Christian perspective.

The loving manner in which Christ addresses his Father resembles Aeneas’ greeting of the shade of Dido during their encounter in the Underworld (*Chr.* 6.821: *magno genitorem afflatus amore est* – *Aen.* 6.455: *demisit lacrimas dulcique adfatus amore est*). A more disconcerting point of contact is that with the aroused Vulcan in the love scene of *Aeneid* 8 (*Chr.* 6.846: *reddidit haec pater aeterno devinctus amore* - *Aen.* 8.394: *tum pater aeterno fatur devinctus amore*). These *loci similes* are not to be read as a disruption of the overall intertextual framework that runs through the poem, no matter how infelicitous they may seem on a purely aesthetic level. The encounter with the shade of Dido emerges as an intertext elsewhere and usually with a contrastive sense.[600] That the Father is a paternal figure is suggested multiple times, even in this very circumstance, through the parallelism with Jupiter or Venus, and the evocation of paternal figures like Latinus. His concession of the Holy Spirit, which the Son is asking for his disciples, is phrased with the same expression used by Latinus to grant the Trojans the right to settle in Latium (*Chr.* 6.847: *Dabitur tibi, nate, quod optas* – *Aen.* 7.260: *dabitur, Troiane, quod optas*).

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[598] The wording is the same one with which Virgil described the celestial provenance of the divine arms of Aeneas (*Chr.* 6.815-7: *cum pater omnipotens coeli regione serena, / sidera purpureo reficit qua purior aether / lumine, coelicolum in medio media arce sederet* - *Aen.* 8.528-9: *arma inter nubem caeli in regione serena / per sudum rutilare vident et pulsa tonare*), and the light that illuminates the *sedes beatae* in the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.640-1: *largior hic campos aether et lumine vestit / purpureo*).

[599] The intratextual link with the Transfiguration is further implied by the light emanated by Jesus from his body and by the fact that a long prophecy of the Father on the future of Christianity closes both scenes.

[600] See, for instance, the sub-sections “The Raising of Lazarus” and “Annunciation” for her presence in Jesus’ and Mary’s interactions with Lazarus and Joseph.

Furthermore, Vida's anti-materialistic stance is supported by the treatment of Lucretian material, which is often contrastive, especially when it comes to the opposition between matter and spirit, as happens here in Jesus' prayer:

> *"O pater, et sociis tandem succurrere nostris*
> *tempus" ait, "quos amisso duce protinus omnes*
> *acer agit timor huc illuc atque omnia terrent*
> *imbelles, quoniam mortali corpore creti.*
> *Discute terrorem hunc animis et pectora firma,*
> *ne casus nequeant alacres procurrere in omnes.*

(*Chr.* 6.822-7)

The physical dimension in which the disciples live and which is structured according to a Lucretian model is opposed to the spiritual dimension (Lucr. 2.904-6: *nam sensus iungitur omnis / visceribus nervis venis, quaecumque videmus / mollia mortali consistere corpore creta* – 5.6: *nemo, ut opinior, erit mortali corpore cretus*) and so is the fear of death caused by their negligence of the spirit (Lucr. 1.146-8:[601] *hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest / non radii solis neque lucida tela diei / discutiant*). The fear of death that Jesus wants to dispel from the hearts of his disciples with the help of the Holy Spirit calls to mind the superstitions and irrational concerns that, according to Lucretius, make people fearful like children and that he proposes to wipe out with the teachings of Epicurus.

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[601] These lines are repeated at Lucr. 2.59-61, 3.91-3, and 6.39-41.

Lucretian overtones also characterise the depiction of Heaven in the episode of the Crucifixion in book 5. The tumult following the speech and the nod of the Father is based on Jupiter's thunder in the discussion on the origins of that natural phenomenon in *De Rerum Natura* 6 (*Chr.* 5.689-90: *Sic ait, et moto tremefecit vertice mundum / terrifico quatiens tonitru caelestia templa* – Lucr. 6.387-8: *quod si Iuppiter atque alii fulgentia divi / terrifico quatiunt sonitu caelestia templa*).[602] Again, what Lucretius disparages as pure superstition is here re-evaluated as part of reality, be it the matter of which the earth is made or the ethereal dimension of the Afterlife. The Lucretian influence goes so far as to include even the angels. Their non-corporeal essence has the same consistency as the gods in the Epicurean worldview (*Chr.* 5.540-1: *cum tenues animae, cum sint sine corpora vitae, / sensibus a nostris quibus est natura remota* – Lucr. 5.148-9: *tenuis enim natura deum longeque remota / sensibus ab nostris animi vix mente videtur*).[603] When they have to appear to mortals, they assume a body to be perceived by them. Their very existence contradicts the theory presented in the *De Rerum Natura*, according to which there is no third nature beyond body and void (*Chr.* 5.547-8: *Ergo illi rapido circumdant turbine densa / corpora sub nostros etiam venientia sensus* – Lucr. 1.445-7: *ergo praeter inane et corpora tertia per se / nulla potest rerum in numero natura relinqui, / nec quae sub sensus cadat ullo tempore nostros*).

Despite their immaterial constitution, angels receive detailed descriptions throughout the poem, just like demons. Once again, the episode of the Crucifixion offers one of the most vivid examples. Outraged by the Passion of Christ, the angels decide to take up arms and intervene to save him.[604] However, what might seem like an impending theomachy is hinted at but never takes place.[605] The subsequent reprimand that they receive from the Father has a precedent in that of the Homeric Zeus, who keeps his subordinates from taking part in the action on earth (e.g. *Il.* 8.1-40),[606] and at the same time has led scholars to compare the episode to ancient Gigantomachies.[607] The textual analysis confirms, at least partially, their assumption, as is indicated, for instance, by the lines that copy Neptune's scolding of the winds for having caused the storm at the beginning of the *Aeneid* (*Chr.* 5.634-5: *omne ausint miscere meo sine numine coelum / terramque et tantos animis accendere motus* – *Aen.* 1.133-4: *iam caelum terramque meo sine numine, venti, / miscere et tantas audetis tollere moles?*), a scene with the traits of a Gigantomachy.[608] This parallelism does not put the angels on the same level as Satan and the demons. The latter rebelled against God, whereas the angels obey immediately, like the winds in *Aeneid* 1, and only after a short, impulsive decision driven by their empathy for Christ.[609] The resumption of the same Virgilian episode in the following speech addressed to them by the Father strengthens the hypothesis of a correspondence between the two scenes:

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[602] Christian authors had already deployed the assimilation of Lucretian thunder with the Father, e.g. Paulinus of Nola *Carmen* 10.120: *qui tonitru summi quatit ignea lumina caeli* and Lucr. 6.96: *principio tonitru quatiuntur caerula caeli.* See Hardie (2020a) 129-30.

[603] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 331.

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[604] The boat race of *Aeneid* 5 is once again employed. The Father hears Christ's cry and the angels (*Chr.* 5.504-5: *Audiit has summus voces pater, audit omnis / coelestum chorus*) as Cloanthus' prayer is perceived by the Nymphs (*Aen.* 5.239-42: *eumque imis sub fluctibus audit omnis / Nereidum Phorcique chorus Panopeaeque virgo, / et pater ipse manu magna Portunus euntem / impulit*). The frustration of the angels is a clear rendition of Menoetes' (*Chr.* 5.510-1: *Omnibus exarsit subito dolor, omnibus ingens / aestuat ira* – *Aen.* 5.172: *tum vero exarsit iuveni dolor ossibus ingens*), and their desire to intervene and keep the Romans from killing Jesus adapts Mnestheus' wish to avoid the last position in the race (*Chr.* 5.511-2: *Volunt nato succurrere erili / et prohibere nefas duroque resistere ferro* - *Aen.* 5.196-7: *hoc vincite, cives, / et prohibete nefas*). The most solemn topic, Jesus' death, is made of *tesserae* of what can be considered one of the lightest episodes of the *Aeneid.*

[605] The lack of proper theomachies in Renaissance Christian epics is a well-known fact. Yet, an overview of the relation between ancient and Renaissance theomachies is needed. See Chaudhuri (2014) 323-8.

[606] Cicchitelli (1904) 359-6; *contra* Di Cesare (1964) 100-1.

[607] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii, 329-335, who also consider the Virgilian intertext in the portrait of the archangel Michael.

[608] See Hardie (1986) 90-7 for this kind of imagery in the Virgilian scene.

[609] They take up arms as other positive characters like Bellona (*Chr.* 5.553-4: *Hic bonus armatur iaculis hastamque trabalem / crispat agens* – *Theb.* 4.5-7: *prima manu rutilam de vertice Larisaeo / ostendit Bellona facem dextraque trabalem / hastam intorsit agens*), Venus (*Chr.* 5.555: *suspenditque humeris lunatum ardentbus arcum* – *Aen.* 1.318: *namque umeris de more habilem suspenderat arcum*) and Priam (*Chr.* 5.549: *Circumdantque umeris desueta micantibus arma* – *Aen.* 2.509-10: *arma diu senor desueta trementibus aevo / circumdat nequiquam umeris*).

> *Non ita me experta est Babylon, ubi ad astra gigantes*
> *tentauere vias educta turre sub auras.*
> *Et poterant magnos manibus divellere montes.*
> *Nunc etiam fumant praefractae fulmine turres,*
> *ut nimborum acies tempestatumque quiescant,*
> *quae vastum rapiant convulsum a cardine mundum.*
> *Ipse manu terras quaterem, coelum omne cierem*
> *diluvio cuncta involvens.*
>
> (*Chr.* 5.675-82)

Forces of nature such as the winds which Aeolus employs to execute Juno's order and which Neptune scolds (*Aen.* 1.79-80: *tu das epulis accumbere divum / nimborumque facis tempestatumque potentem*) are here counterposed to the Father's might. In contrast, his all-powerful essence dovetails with that of Juno, for if only He would, He could stir all the elements (*Aen.* 4.122: *desuper infandam et tonitru caelum omne ciebo*). Whilst the comparison with the Giants was only indirect and implicit in the case of the angels and could be analysed through the thematic analogies and intertexts that assimilated them to the winds of *Aeneid* 1, it is explicit in the case of the Babylonians. For they too dared defy heaven and were punished from on high because of their *hybris*. Rather than piling up mountains as the Giants did, though, they built the infamous tower. The fact that they were endowed with the ability to destroy great mountains like the imaginary giants of the *De Rerum Natura* (Lucr. 1.199-201: *denique cur homines tantos natura parare / non potuit, pedibus qui pontum per vada possent / transire et magnos manibus divellere montis*) is but another telltale sign that what is a mere absurdity in the Epicurean worldview can be adapted to historical factuality in the *Christiad*. A moralisation of the classical models is at work simultaneously. The impiety of the Babylonians is recalled as a warning to the angels not to meddle with the divine plans, no matter how hard to bear they are.

It is noteworthy that Vida’s reference to the Gigantomachy bears a resemblance to an analogous admonition of the Massilian ambassadors to Caesar, with which they exhort him not to engage in a civil war, an impiety that, in their opinion, equates to interfering with the battles of the gods (Luc. 3.316: *aut si terrigenae temptarent astra gigantes*). The docility of the angels in response to the Father’s order exemplifies the goodness of Christian obedience, especially if compared with the wrath with which Caesar reacts to the ambassadors’ entreaty for peace (Luc. 3.356-72).[610] In the *Bellum Civile* he embodies human passions, some of which (*ira*, *rabies*, *furor*) are the exact opposite of the virtues personified in this scene: Clemency, Piety, Peace, Hope, Faith and Charity.[611]

The first virtue, Clementia, is sent by the Father to stop the angels (*Chr.* 5.629-30: *cui talia mandet:/ “Vade” ait “et volucri per coelum labere curru”*) and has a counterpart in Virgil’s Mercury (*Aen.* 4.222-3: *ac talia mandat:/ ‘vade age, nate, voca Zephyros et labere pennis’*).[612] Like the Ovidian personifications in the *Metamorphoses*,[613] these entities are affected by the same virtues that they represent and that they instil in others. But even more than them, the depiction of the prophets displays an extensive, and by now predictable, use of Virgilian expressions: for instance, they are assimilated to the blessed of *Aeneid* 6 (*Chr.* 6.270 and 6.286: *felices animae* – *Aen.* 6.669: *dicite, felices animae*; *Chr.* 6.275: *quis nivea velantur tempora vitta* – *Aen.* 6.665: *omnibus his nivea cinguntur tempora vitta*) and are prone to yield to the divine will like Anchises, but unlike him, desire to leave the place they are in (*Chr.* 6.190: *Talia perstabant memorantes* – *Aen.* 2.650: *Talia perstabat memorans fixusque manebat*). The victory of Christ over death, sin and Satan is hailed by them like the victory of Ascanius over Numanus Remulus with the traditional gesture of raising their hands to the sky (*Chr.* 6.237-8: *tendunt ad sidera palmas / laetitiaque fremunt subita*

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[610] On the relationship between Lucan’s Caesar and passions see Pontiggia (2020) 153-8.

[611] On these personifications see Dalla Pietà (2020) 49-50.

[612] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 334.

[613] Hardie (2002a) 231-8.

lacrimasque dedere – *Aen.* 9.636-7: *Teucri clamore sequuntur / laetitiaque fremunt animosque ad sidera tollunt*). All these parallels confirm that the pagan material is transfigured through a Christian lens.

The Lucretian model is exploited again for their ascension: the immortal condition of the blessed is in contrast with the mortality of the world professed by the Epicurean doctrine (*Chr.* 6.287-8: *quibus est in saecula vitae / iam nunc parta quies praeclusaque ianua leti* – Lucr. 5.373: *haud igitur leti praeclusa est ianua caelo*),[614] and their passage to Heaven, which takes place in an incorporeal dimension, relies on the same language with which Lucretius expounds pertinent topics such as the theory of images[615] and the void.[616] The reprimand of the world put in the mouths of the prophets during their encounter with Christ offers another insight into Vida's debt to the epic tradition. They reproach the waters of the earth for having permitted the death of Jesus (*Chr.* 6.257-8: *Vos tum diluvio mortalia cuncta decebat / obtruere et terras penitus delere nocentes*) as the narrator of the *Bellum Civile* does with Thessaly, the region of Pharsalus, where Caesar's army crushed the Pompeians (Luc. 7.869: *o superi, liceat terras odisse nocentes*).[617] Even though the indignation is attributed to the characters themselves, the similarity suggests that Vida must have thought of Lucan as a poetic model for severe chastisement like this. [618]

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[614] The analogy with Inachus' lament about the fact that his immortal condition impedes him from putting an end to his sufferings can be regarded as a window allusion (Ov. *Met.* 1.662-3: *sed nocet esse deum, praeclusaque ianua leti / aeternum nostros luctus extendit in aevum*).

[615] These are membranes that detach from bodies. *Chr.* 6.288: *Applaudunt volucres purum tranantibus aurae* – Lucr. 4.176-8: *quam celeri motu simulacra ferantur / et quae mobilitas ollis tranantibus auras / reddita sit; Chr.* 6.290-1: *arridetque procul clari liquidissima mundi / tempestas* – Lucr. 4.168-9: *cum fuerit liquidissima caeli / tempestas*

[616] *Chr.* 6.294: *Atque ea dum longe vastum per inane geruntur* – Lucr. 3.27: *sub pedibus quaecumque infra per inane geruntur*.

[617] The expression also occurs in Marius Victor's *Aletheia*, a fifth century epic poem based on Genesis. Even though the *editio princeps* was printed in 1536, a year after the publication of the *Christiad*, this work might be a potential predecessor for Vida's operation. The fact that the passage displays other expressions occurring otherwise only in the *Bellum Civile* (e.g. *Chr.* 6.255-6: *Quibus abdita claustris, / leto opifex tam crudeli cum vester obiret?* – Luc. 10.445: *sic fremit in parvis fera nobilis abdita claustris*) makes it harder to dismiss Lucan's presence here. For the influence of the *Bellum Civile* on the *Aletheia* see Abosso (2015) 9 and 54.

[618] Intrusions of the narrator and apostrophes are not missing in the *Christiad*. The indignant nature that they sometimes exhibit with respect to blameable targets (Judas: 2.119-32; Jerusalem: 5.721-42) has a precedent in

6.3 Demonic Possession

The battle between Good and Evil takes place not only in the spiritual dimension of Heaven and Hell but also on earth, where human beings are faced with the decision of siding with one of the two parties. The Gospels elaborate on this theme and, accordingly, so does the *Christiad.* There is nothing like a Christian conception of free will in the ancient pagan epic tradition, nor are the respective conceptions of the relationship with the divine the same. However, attention to the inner struggles of humans was not alien to the genre. Interactions between mortals and immortals are a key feature of classical epic poems since Homer, although to different extents. Vida's subject hinges upon the interplay between humans and non-humans, more specifically men's encounter with the Word made flesh and their constant conflict with the forces that try to estrange them and keep others away from it. This section focuses on the influence of Evil on men, the next one on Jesus himself, who is the way to the Word.

Unlike many of his ancient predecessors and in consonance with an orthodox Catholic viewpoint, Vida purges potential ambiguities that could muddy the boundaries between the domains of Good and Evil.[619] The routes to the human heart taken by the two sides differ substantially. Demonic possession, a primary means of influence that hellish forces exploit to manipulate mortals in the epic tradition, was well-suited for the depiction of the impact of Evil on human beings in a Christian framework.[620] As we have already seen, the enhanced involvement of Satan and his devils in the *Christiad* compared to the Gospels determines

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Lucan's narratorial interventions. On the latter see Narducci (2002) 88-106. What Martindale (1986) 203-7 said about the relationship between Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* can be extended to that between the latter and Vida's *Christiad*: both epic poems report a story that is held to be true and both poets make their viewpoints plain with this type of interventions.

[619] See the introduction to this chapter. This obsequiousness to the doctrine of the Catholic Church did not prevent the poem from being added to the 1559 and 1583 Spanish *Indices Librorum Prohibitorum*.

[620] In general, a demonic figure is responsible for mental and spiritual maladies and is named with the classical moniker *Erinnys*. It maddens, for instance, Maria the sinner (*Chr.* 1.351) and some of the sick that gather around Jesus (*Chr.* 1.372).

the development of the plot and intensifies the debt of the poem to the ancient epic tradition. The assault they plan to launch on Jerusalem during the infernal assembly in book 1 is executed at the beginning of book 2 and will have long-term repercussions.[621] This incursion of Hell into the world represents a fundamental link in the chain of events leading up to the Crucifixion and is carried out by chthonic monster-like creatures similar to Virgil's Allecto or Statius' Tisiphone, whose interventions in the narrative often set in motion or propel the action. In Vida's poem, the mobilisation of the antagonists against Christ is overtly hellish[622] and resembles some comparable situations in Roman epic where supernatural beings arouse humans against each other. As the Fury Allecto stirs both Amata (*Aen.* 7.350-1: *fallitque furentem / vipeream inspirans animam* – *Aen.* 7.374-5: *penitusque in viscera lapsum / serpentis furiale malum totamque pererrat*) and Turnus (*Aen.* 12.665-6: *obstipuit varia confusus imagine rerum / Turnus*), so a group of demons, including Satan, instils hate and madness (*furor*) in the hearts of the chief priests and the leaders of Jerusalem during the sleepless night that these men pass after Jesus' entrance into the city (*Chr.* 2.34-6: *Principio spargunt occultum in pectora virus / vipereamque viris animam caecumque furorem / inspirant* – 2.40: *somnia dira ferunt varia sub imagine rerum* – 2.63-4: *Furor omnibus intus / eripuit mentem lapsumque in viscera virus*). Such a nocturnal possession (*Chr.* 2.22-3: *Tempus erat, per membra quies cum grata soporem / irrigat ac positis affert oblivia curis*) resembles the obliviousness of the Lemnian women caused by Juno in Statius (*Theb.* 5.450: *et infandis venere oblivia curis*) and the sleep that precedes her kindling of Hannibal in Silius (Sil. 4.723-4: *omnia somni / condiderant aegrisque dabant oblivia curis*) as well, but in a manner that seems to tend more towards a centonian refashioning.[623] The attack is compared to the siege of a town through a simile that combines two sources, the ill-omened figures of the gods destroying Troy in the Virgilian *Ilioupersis* and a simile with which Statius likens the assault of the tigers spurred by Tisiphone to a human raid (*Chr.* 2.60-1: *Praecedunt dirae facies facibusque nefandis / sufficiunt lucem* – *Aen.* 2.622: *apparent dirae facies inimicaque Troiae* – *Theb.* 7.599-600: *templa putes urbemque rapi facibusque nefandis / Sidonios ardere lares*).

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[621] On the representation of the Jews in general in the *Christiad*, see Glei (2010b).

[622] The doors of the houses of the victims screeching upon their jambs when Satan pushes them open are like the infernal gates of the Underworld visited by Aeneas (*Chr.* 2.50-1: *Nigri dux agminis ipse / impulit aerisono stridentes cardine portas* – *Aen.* 6.573-4: *tum demum horrisono stridentes cardine sacrae / panduntur portae*), bespeak the infernal connotation of the scene.

The lies of the demons indirectly associate them with the Virgilian *Fama*, as they all disseminate falsehood in two cities bound to future destruction, Jerusalem and Carthage (*Chr.* 2.44 *facta atque infecta canentes* – *Aen.* 4.190: *et pariter facta atque infecta canebat*).[624] Such a deception raises the question of men's responsibility since it may seem that the latter's hostility toward Jesus should be attributed to this influence. The Allecto and Amata scene (*Aen.* 7.343-405) has engendered a similar controversy. Readers have disagreed whether the intervention of the Fury provokes the queen's opposition to the Trojans or is a figurative representation of Amata's enmity toward them. Amata was hostile even before the possession, but her previous condition does not invalidate the effects of Allecto's attack. In fact, the Fury capitalises on the woman's pre-existing anger. As a result, it is hard, if not impossible, to determine the extent to which each of these two reasons dictates the queen's actions.[625]

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[623] The presence of intertexts such as the lulling of Ascanius (*Aen.* 1.691-2: *at Venus Ascanio placidam per membra quietem / inrigat*), which in turn, is inspired by Lucretius' discussion of dreams (Lucr. 4.907-8: *Nunc quibus ille modis somnus per membra quietem / irriget atque animi curas e pectore solvas*), or the appearance of Hector's ghost to Aeneas (*Aen.* 2.268-9: *Tempus erat quo prima quies mortalibus aegris / incipit et dono divum gratissima serpit*), makes it hard to take these similarities as other than patchworks unless one wants to find a way to solve the seeming opposition between positive and negative models. Von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 105-9 hypothesis' of a nuanced characterisation of the elders of Jerusalem as both oppressors and victims does not seem to apply to these analogies in particular, because Aeneas and Ascanius could hardly be considered "victims".

[624] Hardie (2012) 426-8.

[625] E.g. Feeney (1991) 162-76, Hershkowitz (1998a) 48-9, Gregory (2006) 69-76, who illustrates how *Aeneid* 7 inspires the action of the devils in *Christiad* 2, and Clément-Tarentino (2016).

Likewise, it is difficult to draw a line between supernatural causality and psychological naturalism in the *Christiad*.[626] The circumstances in which Amata on the one hand and the chief priests and the leaders of Jerusalem on the other find themselves are analogous. These men are worried about Christ during their very first appearance (*Chr.* 1.426-30), and their hatred is palpable in their reaction to the cleansing of the Temple. On that occasion, Jesus reproaches them for their debauchery and his words cut close to the bone. The irritation that these men consequently feel (*Chr.* 1.538-9: *Iamque sacerdotum primis exarserat ingens / tristi in corde dolor, flammaque iraeque coquebant*) is expressed through a matchup of Virgilian phrases conveying similar feelings, such as Gyas' frustration during the regatta (*Aen.* 5.172: *tum vero exarsit iuveni dolor ossibus ingens*), Palinurus' self-pity at the thought of not receiving a proper burial (*Aen.* 6.382-3: *his dictis curae emotae pulsusque parumper / corde dolor tristi*), and Amata's anxiety for the coming of the Trojans (*Aen.* 7.343-5: *limen Amatae / quam super adventu Teucrum Turnique hymenaeis / femineae ardentem curaeque iraeque coquebant*). Their concern for the coming of Jesus and his surging popularity equates them to the leaders of Latium, whom the arrival of Aeneas and the fame that attends him deeply disturb (*Chr.* 2.7: *illiusque vident late increbrescere nomen* – *Aen.* 8.13-4: *multasque viro se adiungere gentis / Dardanio et late Latio increbrescere nomen*). Their loathing of the Father's plan makes manifest how Junonian they conceptually are, since hate has consumed them for a long time and is rooted in the past (*Chr.* 1.540-2: *Nec novus hic primum furor, haec odia aspera surgunt: / Antiquae irarum causae antiquique dolores / haudquaquam exciderant animis, fixique manebant*), like Juno's long-term ill-will in Virgil (*Aen.* 1.25-6: *necdum etiam causae irarum saevique dolores / exciderant animo*).[627] The causes of the wrath that propels the narrative are a staple element even for Silius (Sil. 1.17:

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[626] It would be interesting to establish whether the Catholic doctrine of free will clashes with the imitation of pagan epic interactions between men and demons in the *Christiad*.

[627] Their archaic hatred is a reversal of the newfound hostility between Castor and Amycus (Val. Fl. 4.254: *odia aspera surgunt*).

tantarum causas irarum odiumque perenni) and Statius (*Theb.* 1.302: *hinc causae irarum*).[628]

The opposition of the priests and the leaders of Jerusalem to the divine plan has the same function as the remote causes behind the actions of Virgil's epic and his successors'.[629] As victim of demonic possession and predisposed opponents,[630] they almost assume the role of Turnus (*Chr.* 2.196-7: *Violentia cunctis / gliscit* – *Aen.* 12.9: *haud secus accenso gliscit violentia Turnus*)[631] as tools of someone else's machination and active "sinners" all at the same time. A certain interest in the inner life of these characters is inherent in the tradition. Vida meets this expectation by resorting to Lucretian language, which, as usual, is the best suited for these issues. The analogy between mental and physical processes is a crucial feature of both Lucretian and Virgilian poetry.[632] The frenzy taking a hold on their limbs rests on the description of the nexus between body and soul in Epicurean physics (*Chr.* 2.197: *et accensus semper per viscera sensus* – Lucr. 3.336: *motibus accensus nobis per viscera sensus*).[633] A similar connection is the subject of the passage of the *Tusculanae Disputationes* from which Vida borrows words used by Cicero for his translation of *Iliad* 9.646 (*Chr.* 2.199: *paulatimque animi turgescunt tristibus iris* – Cic. *Tusc.* 3.9.18: *corque*

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[628] Silius is harking back to the *causae* of the *Aeneid* and its plot, i.e. Dido's desire for revenge. See Feeney (1982) 22-3. In these two cases, Vida uses the same Virgilian expression as Silius and Statius, but no other element suggests direct contact with them. The fact that Jupiter pronounces these vengeful words in the *Thebaid* need not surprise, because he displays some of the traits of Virgil's Juno and an exaggerated menacing attitude altogether. On this aspect of Statius' Jupiter, see Feeney (1991) 350-5 and 371, and on his *secondarietà,* see Pontiggia (2018).

[629] Even the raging crowd elicited by the demons at the trial of Jesus in book 5 exhibit a Junonian attitude. Their frenzy replicates the goddess' (*Chr.* 5.273-4: *Sed magis atque magis crudescunt corda precando, / quae non ullae artes, quae vis non mitigat ulla* – *Aen.* 5.783-4: *quam nec longa dies pietas nec mitigat ulla*) and the Latins' (*Chr.* 5.277: *Certatim se cuncti hortantur in iras* – *Aen.* 7.472: *certatim sese Rutuli exhortantur in arma*). The correspondence between the end of *Chr.* 1.540 –see above– and of Val Fl. 4.254 (*dat famulis; dat et inde Lacon. odia aspera surgunt*), which is due to a phrase that has just one occurrence in classical literature, seems more like a *tessera* or a simple coincidence.

[630] The centonian nature of the poem affects this characterisation too. These men discuss as the Trojans do before Aeneas goes to the Underworld (*Chr.* 2.142: *Multa illi inter se vario sermone serebant* - *Aen.* 6.160: *multa inter sese vario sermone serebant*).

[631] Von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 120-1. See also *Chr.* 5.175: *At magis atque magis violentia gliscit.*

[632] Hardie (1986) 229.

[633] Von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 120-1.

meum penitus turgescit tristibus iris).[634] At this point in the treatise, before comparing the condition of a swollen part of the body to a swollen soul, Cicero is quoting and translating into Latin two lines pronounced by Achilles where the hero touches upon his anger and hate for Agamemnon.[635]

Psychological motivations inform the scene of the possession of Judas as well, for we are told that he started to regard as vain all the sacrifices he had made to be a Christian. The influence of Virgil's empathy for his characters and the motives of the defeated might have inspired the inclusion of these details.[636] The intertexts underlie the connection between Judas (*Chr.* 2.113-4: *Hinc miserum invadens praecordia ad intima sese / ingerit atque imis dirum implicat ossibus ignem*) and other characters inflamed by supernatural entities such as Dido (*Aen.* 1.660: *incendat reginam atque ossibus implicat ignem*) and Amata (*Aen.* 7.347: *inque sinum praecordia ad intima subdit;* 7.354-5: *ac dum prima lues udo sublapsa veneno / pertemptat sensus atque ossibus implicat ignem*).[637] Here Satan disguises himself as another human being, a device employed by pagan gods, and then invades Judas' heart.[638] His speech echoes other scenes with characters who are trying to persuade someone[639] and has a diatribic tone. The discipleship is phrased in the same terms as the romantic affection from which Lucretius tries to divert the reader/learner (*Chr.* 2.98: *atque tibi alterius sub nutu degitur aetas* – Lucr. 4.1122: *adde quod alterius sub nutu degitur aetas*). Similarly, the assimilation of Judas' internal turmoil to Dido's passion for Aeneas (*Chr.* 2.74: *Iscarius pesti infandae devotus Iudas – Aen.* 1.714: *praecipue infelix, pesti devota futurae*)[640] is consistent with this Lucretian reminiscence.[641] Love is an intrinsically violent malady in the *De Rerum Natura,* and Roman ancient literature exploited this conception.[642] Lucretius is addressing a male audience at least in a rhetorical manner, so the love he is discussing is mainly the one directed at women. It is arguably not by chance, then, that Satan goes on to call Jesus and his disciples "effeminate", a type of mockery that was common already in antiquity (*Chr.* 2.102: *feminei coetus et semiviri comitatus? – Aen.* 4.215: *et nunc ille Paris cum semiviro comitatu*).[643] He also likens them to the women in the funeral parade for Opheltes (*Theb.* 5.651-2: *contra subit obvia mater / femineos coetus plangentiaque agmina ducens*), a connection corroborated by the fact that Jesus' supposed madness is addressed like that of Opheltes' father in the same circumstance (*Chr.* 2.104-5: *Iamque ille furorem / vesanum expendet, cedet fiducia tanta – Theb.* 5.663: *siste hunc, vesane, furorem*). What

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[634] *Ibidem*. See also Gardner (2009) 403.

[635] The use of such a fragment suggests that Vida might have taken it from a commonplace book, maybe in a section devoted to anger. Alternatively, he might have purposely looked for lines that could convey the image of an angry man in a theoretical discussion of this type of human passion, such as Cicero's treatise. These hypotheses do not exclude other scenarios. For instance, he could have imitated an intermediate source or just memorised the line.

[636] On Virgilian empathy see Heinze (1915) 361-370 and Otis (1964) 49-52, 61-92. The narrator momentarily seems to assume Judas' point of view when the latter repents for his misdeed and contemplates suicide by bravely (*Chr.* 5.73: *fortiter*) falling on his sword. The reproachful tone comes back very soon when the aside *ut meritus* (*Chr.* 5.79) glosses his hanging.

[637] See also Atamas and Ino (Ov. *Met.* 4.506-7: *vergit furiale venenum / pectus in amborum, praecordiaque intima movit*), another case of the reuse of the same expressions in the tradition that does not necessarily suggest an actual engagement with a post-Virgilian poet.

[638] He has the semblance of a relative of Judas, but, like Turnus, he is compared to a lion (*Chr.* 2.91-2: *leo, quem siccis exercet hiantem / faucibus ex longo collecta insania edendi* – *Aen.* 9.63-4: *collecta fatigat edendi / ex longo rabies et siccae sanguine fauces*).

[639] E.g. Mercury's arousing Aeneas in the Carthage episode. (*Chr.* 2.106-9: *Non illi auxilio magnarum gloria rerum, / quas mentitur, erit. Nil contra obtendere densa / nubila, nil solitas accingi proderit artis. / Rumpe moras! Eia instanti te surripe claudi;* 2.112: *et subito nocti ablatus se immiscuit atrae* – *Aen.* 4.272: *si te nulla movet tantarum gloria rerum;* 4.569-70: '*heia age, rumpe moras. Varium et mutabile semper / femina!'sic fatus nocti se immiscuit atrae*).

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[640] Von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 113-4. A connection between Dido and Judas is also established when Jesus asks the Father to prevent the devils from corrupting his disciples, a fate that will eventually befall Judas (*Chr.* 1.859-60: *Non infando praevertat amore / insidiis captos nec corda improvida fallat*; 1.880-1: *unus erit tantum, cui mentem insania vertet / infelix; iam nunc devoto pectore versat – Aen.* 1.721: *vivo temptat praevertere amore;* 4.85: *infandum si fallere possit amore;* 4. 563: *illa dolos dirumque nefas in pectore versat*; 4.595: *quid loquor? aut ubi sum? quae mentem insania mutat?*). The anger of the people that Pilate tries to soothe is phrased as Juno's attempt to help Dido (*Chr.* 5.300-1: *Talibus auditis Solymos animo acrior urget / Romulides certus vesano obstare furori – Aen*. 4.90-1: *Quam simul ac tali persensit peste teneri / cara Iovis coniunx nec famam obstare furori*).

[641] Even the initial hatred for Jesus that people manifest is a passion terrible as erotic love in the Epicurean perspective (*Chr.* 3.972: *Inque dies gliscens furor atque insania crevit* – Lucr. 4.1069: *inque dies gliscit furor atque aerumna gravescit*). On that occasion, Jesus reesembles both Ascanius (*Chr.* 3.955-6: *Neque enim poterant se explere tuendo / flagrantesque Dei vultus – Aen.* 1.709-10: *mirantur Iulum, / flagrantisque dei voltus simulataque verba*) and the woman for whom someone lusts in the Lucretian tirade against love (*Chr.* 3.962: *et toto dulcem iactabat corpore amorem* - Lucr. 4.1054: *seu mulier toto iactans e corpore amorem*). The same Lucretian intertext emerges in the following simile of the emerald as well, which is based on the jewels of the lover (*Chr.* 3.966-7: *aut qualis nitidi species micat alma smaragdi, / cum tenui argento tenuive includitur auro* – Lucr. 4.1125-6: *viridi cum luce zmagardi / auro includuntur*).

[642] Virgil is not the only ancient author to leverage this concept (e.g. the bulls of *Georgics* 3 and Dido herself). Rosati (2005) illustrated how Statius played around with the Lucretian tie between love and madness, especially with the Lemnan episode.

[643] Von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 113-4.

Satan says about Jesus' intentions and the temperament of his followers could not be further from the truth when compared to their actual behaviour at the end of the story. Details such as this distorted image of Christ in the words of a liar give a sense of how Vida went to great lengths to depict the former as a courageous hero. The Junonian forces of Evil resort to violence and falsehood to convince humans to take their side. Their intervention on earth leads to the destruction of their supporters. Nevertheless, a significant departure from the ancient epic tradition distinguishes the *Christiad* in this regard: God can ultimately make use of Evil as he pleases and guarantee an unambiguously positive conclusion to the narrative. The main channel of communication with men and their vicissitudes is the second Person of the Trinity, the Son, Jesus Christ.

6.4 Jesus: Man, God, and Hero

In a poem based on the Gospels, Christ, true God and true man, is the centre of attention. As the main character of an epic he cannot but be the hero whose ordeals constitute the matter of the narrative, given the centrality of heroism for the genre.[644] This is how earlier biblical epics depicted him, not only in the Latin tradition of Juvencus and Sedulius, but even in other languages and cultures, as is exemplified by the ninth century Old Saxon biblical paraphrase and epic poem *Heliand*.[645] In the *Christiad,* Jesus is named *heros* multiple times,[646] and presents traits of both classical heroes and gods. We have already looked at his miracles, so the focus here will be on his figure in general and its relationship with several ancient models. Previous scholarship has already clarified what associates Jesus with classical heroes and what makes him completely different from them. Christ and characters such as Odysseus and Aeneas have in common trials, suffering, divine aid, human followers, descents to Hell and final victories.[647] But the fact that Jesus is the very God of the religion of the poem, and, as such, the object of worship, distinguishes him significantly from those characters.

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[644] On the hero in epic poetry, see Toohey (1992) 7. Gregory (2006) 80-9 discusses the difficulties that Vida had to face in portraying Jesus both as an epic hero doomed to self-sacrifice and as an omniscient God. Even Proba's Virgilian cento offers a similar characterisation of Christ, as Clark-Hatch (1981) illustrated.

[645] Springer (2003) 107. For the representation of Jesus as a hero in the *Heliand* and Nonnus' *Paraphrase,* see Matzner (2008) 129-32.

[646] E.g. 1.74; 1.236; 1.256; 1.266; 1.399; 1.516; 1.563; 1.726; 1.947; 1.961; 2.651; 2.671; 2.703; 2.739; 2.776; 2.950; 2.998; 3.529; 4.392; 4.492; 4.608; 4.667; 4.856; 5.443; 5.481; 5.703; 5.917; 6.322; 6.365; 6.438; 6.471; 6.489.

Jesus is also God, and some of the lines with which Vida describes his actions are modelled on ancient passages involving gods.[648] While the gods of the classical tradition carried out every sort of act in the human world, both in support of and against human beings, and heroes could be represented as committing horrendous atrocities (e.g. Tydeus eating Melanippus' head in *Thebaid* 8), Jesus is morally perfect and cannot be deceived.[649] To begin with, he is the Messiah, as the traditional Christian assimilation of Virgil's *Eclogue 4* reaffirms more than once (e.g. *Chr.* 1.237: *vera Dei soboles*[650] – *Ecl.* 4.49: *cara deum suboles*).[651] Houghton has correctly noted that Jesus is the one and only God, unlike the pagan ones mentioned in Virgil.[652] His divinity is certain,[653] and is not to be questioned with a "rationalistic" approach like the theories discussed in the *De Rerum Natura*. Nicodemus, the only member of the council of the high priests of Jerusalem to be on Jesus' side, acknowledges the latter's divinity with Lucretian words in front of the hostile and sceptical assembly (*Chr.* 2.172: *Hoc liquet, hoc ultra non in discrimen agendum* – Lucr. 3.725-6: *hoc tamen est ut / quaerendum videatur et in discrimen agendum*). The engagement with the Epicurean source proves to be consistently at the service of the theological content. During the Transfiguration, a scene where the superhuman aspect of Christ is revealed visually, the glow surrounding his body is compared to the light of Dawn in a simile reminiscent of Lucretian descriptions of daybreak and the sun:

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[647] Green (2006) 65-7, 226, 242, 248-9, 382-3 lists some of these features in his study of Juvencus' and Sedulius' Christ.

[648] Even in this case, ancient Christian authors paved the way for later poetry; see Glei (2003) 143.

[649] He is omniscient: e.g. *Chr.* 1.16-7 (*Christo aderat, Solymumque ideo haud ignarus ad urbem /... ibat*); 1.44-5 (*ut non inscius ipse / praedixi toties ac vobis cuncta retexi*); 1.886 (*omnia quae mecum mundi ante exordia nosti*); 2.644 (*haud rerum ignarus Christus*); 4.674 (*Saepe etiam auctores scelerum haud ignarus adibat*) Note that in at least two of these instances the attribute *Christus* stresses Jesus' divine nature.

[650] See also *Chr.* 2.168; 2.419; 2.893; 3.57; 6.171; 6.709.

[651] Gardner (2009) 395 quotes Mart. 6.3.2 (*vera deum suboles*) as well. On *Eclogue 4* in Vida, see Houghton (2019) *index* "Vida, Girolamo Marco". For an anthology of texts that can be considered central in the reception of *Eclogue* 4, see Ziolkowski-Putnam (2008) 487-503.

[652] Houghton (2019) 229-30.

[653] Many of his appellatives in the poem stress his divine nature and/or origin: *Deo natus* (1.64), *Deo satus* (3.21; 3.26; 2.127; 4.527), *Dei propago* (3.705; 4.510; 5.201; 5.221; 5.920), *Dei progenies* (4.158; 5.25-6), *Dei proles* (5.99), *Dei Primitia* (3.1003), *Rege satus* (2.446), *Numen* (3.600: 3.634; 3.694; 4.45; 4.238; 6.557), *Auctor rerum* (5.398), *Auctor Olympi* (5.202), *Lux coeli* (5.212; 6.240), *Divus* (1.63; 1.431; 1.551; 1.687; 2.76; 3.1016; 4.542; 4.623; 5.932; 6.222), and most of all *Deus* (to limit the scope to book 1 only: 1.64; 1.110; 1.275; 1.300; 1.339; 1.350; 1.357; 1.366; 1.373; 1.420; 1.498; 1.761; 1.789; 1.938).

Nec secus emicuit roseo pulcherrimus ore
insolita circum perfundens omnia luce,
quam cum mane recens lucis fons aureus ingens
lumine, sol, coelum exoriens rigat omne profuso,
Oceani in speculo longe resplendet imago,
et croceae effulgent aurata cacumina silvae.

(*Chr.* 1.941-6)

The physical unveiling of Jesus' divine nature draws from materialistic discussions of physics (Lucr. 2.147-8: *quam subito soleat sol ortus tempore tali / convestire sua perfundens omnia luce*; 5.570-1: *calor quoniam solis lumenque profusum*). The very senses that allow the perception of natural phenomena and are the subjects of the passages imitated here by Vida constitute the channels through which the apostles witnessing the Transfiguration, John, James and Peter, can have a glimpse of Heaven. An ordinary element of the natural world -the sun's light- is transfigured here in the extraordinary nature of the Son. Sensory perceptions are at the basis of the parallel between Christ and Venus mentioned above. We have already seen that during the Transfiguration Christ's relationship with the Father mirrors both that of Venus and Jupiter and that between the same goddess and Aeneas. We have also observed that Jesus plays the part of Venus in both cases. The manifestation of the true aspect of the Son is a replay of the unveiling of Venus to her son on the shores of Libya:

Turbine Christus
Corripitur rapido mediaque in nube refulsit
verus et aspectu patuit Deus atque per auras
divinum toto spiravit vertice odorem,
luminis etherei specimen, genitoris imago.

(*Chr.* 1.936-40)

Just as the goddess does with her son, Jesus appears in his divine form to the three disciples and breathes a celestial fragrance (*Aen.* 1.402-5: *avertens rosea cervice refulsit, / ambrosiaeque comae divinum vertice odorem / spiravere; pedes vestis defluxit ad imos, / et vera incessu patuit dea*).[654] Since these details are missing from the biblical source, we can conclude that they depend on the epic precedent. Therefore, Christ is not just the hero, but he has at least the same status as an epic divinity such as Virgil's Venus, one of the gods for whom the *Aeneid* provides a physical description. Even though he is the Son, Jesus is more similar to the goddess than to her son in the Transfiguration scene. Unlike Aeneas, who feels deceived by his divine mother, Jesus' trust in his Father is unconditional.

Sometimes the intertexts may occasion comparisons which -it can reasonably be assumed- might be perceived as inappropriate for Christian readers. The Cleansing of the Temple scene is a case in point. Here, Jesus drives moneychangers and merchants out of the Temple of Jerusalem with a whip and overturns their tables for having dared to make the holy place a market. The indignation that he displays in the Gospels is highlighted in the *Christiad,* and one cannot help but feel that the classical models enhance it even further. Jesus' reaction (*Chr.* 1.518-9: *et verbis graviter commotus acerbis / reppulit intortum vibrans per terga flagellum / verberaque insonuit sacroque a limine abegit*) is very similar to those of the

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[654] Gardner (2009) 401. The intertextual link resurfaces in the account of Jesus' infancy when people recognised that his maturity and knowledge could not be human (*Chr.* 3.952: *humana non vi edoctum, non arte magistra*).

Virgilian Neptune (*Aen.* 1.125-6: *Neptunus et imis / stagna refusa vadis, graviter commotus*) and, oddly enough, Allecto (*Aen.* 7.448-51: *tum flammea torquens / lumina cunctantem et quaerentem dicere plura / reppulit, et geminos erexit crinibus anguis, / verberaque insonuit*). The former is appalled by the confusion that the winds dared to bring about without his assent.[655] As for Allecto, she shows her irrational violence after being mocked by Turnus and brandishes a whip as Jesus does in the passage quoted above. This seemingly unbecoming association might leave readers bewildered given the chthonian nature of the Fury and her role as model for hellish powers in Vida's poem. The consequences of Jesus' and Allecto's interventions are similar, for their wrath arouses antagonists –the Jews and the Latins. Nevertheless, Jesus reports the Father's orders that no animal blood be split on the altars thenceforth and to worship him with pious prayers. The Fury, instead, urges Turnus to wage war under the instruction of Juno. Judging whether this juxtaposition is out of place on an aesthetic level would go beyond the aim of this analysis. In this circumstance, the emphasis is on Christ's justice, a matter of the utmost importance. His words evoke the line pronounced by Phlegyas in the Virgilian Underworld and with which he warns the damned not to despise the gods (*Chr.* 1.533: *Discite iustitiam tantum puraque litate* – *Aen.* 6.620: *discite iustitiam moniti et non temnere divos*),[656] and the instructions of the Sibyl on how to give a proper burial to Misenus, a man who challenged the god Triton (*Chr.* 1.535: *Hi vestri ritus, ea deinde piacula sunto* – *Aen.* 6.153: *ea prima piacula sunto*). While the Sibyl is indicating the way to enter the realm of the dead, Jesus is illustrating the importance of prayer, a fundamental means to gain access to Heaven.

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[655] Di Cesare (1964) 134-5 underlined Vida's emphasis on this restoration, although he argued that the simile is indebted to *Aen.* 12.365-7, where Turnus is compared to Boreas. It should be added that it contains a Lucretian *tessera* (*Chr.* 1.521-2: *Boreas erupit ab antris / aereos rapido perverrens turbine campos* – Lucr. 1.273: *interdum rapido percurrens turbine campos*) already reported by Gardner (2009) 398 and drawn from a passage, that, in turn, informs the storm of *Aeneid* 1 and the rebuke of the winds. On the Lucretian framework of the Virgilian scene, see Hardie (1986) 90-4.

[656] John the Baptist makes use of the same expression to admonish sinners. See section 4.2.

As previously intimated, Vida's imitative technique does not always refrain from theologically questionable juxtapositions, including that between Jesus and Bacchus.[657] This association certainly dates back to Antiquity and appears in both pagan and Christian texts.[658] Several points of intersection between the two have been identified, though very broad and debated. Both Bacchus and Jesus were born of a divine father and a mortal mother, in the former's case Jupiter and Semele. They are refugees in their infancy, perform miracles, are persecuted even in their adulthood by people they try to convert, are killed and eventually come back to life. Their divine status is challenged, and their message purports to be universal.[659] Furthermore, Bacchus is the god of wine, which the Greco-Roman culture often regarded as a cure for men's sufferings.[660] Through the Transubstantiation the Eucharistic offering turns bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ that are given up for the forgiveness of men's sins. A work such as the cento *Christus patiens,* a literary elaboration of this association, extensively draws on Euripides' *Bacchae*.[661] Many correspondences between the worlds of Bacchus and Christ have been detected in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* and *Paraphrase of St. John's Gospel*.[662] After often being associated with hedonism in the Middle Ages,[663] Bacchus enjoyed newfound popularity during the Renaissance in figurative arts and literature.[664] The iconography that depicted him as the god of fertility and fruit, especially wine, blossomed in Italy when several treatises on ancient gods were composed between 1532 and 1558.[665] Furthermore, the comparison between the cult of Bacchus and Christianity was not alien to humanism,[666] and Italian literary texts occasionally present the syncretism that assimilates the two figures.[667]

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[657] I take for granted the identification of Dionysus, Liber and Bacchus.

[658] Scholars have proposed first century texts such as the Acts of the Apostles. For ancient sources and extensive bibliographies on Dionysus and early Christianity, see Moles (2006), Friesen 207-35 (2015), Massa (2020), and Perris-Mac Góráin (2020) 60-6. Points of intersection have been suggested even with the figurative arts. For instance, the Nea Paphos mosaic in Cyprus presents a baby Dionysus seated in the lap of Hermes, an image arguably indebted to Christian iconography. See Bowersock (2006) 41 and Massa (2014) 259-61.

[659] Shorrock (2011) 55.

[660] E.g. Non. *Dion.* 17.74: ὅλης ἄμπαυμα μερίμνης.

[661] The *communis opinio* nowadays attributes this cento to an eleventh or twelfth century author. Among the most recent studies see Massa (2014) 263-77, Friesen (2015) 251-60, Pollmann (2017) and Perris-Mac Góráin (2020) 63-65.

[662] See, among others, Matzner (2008) 135-6, and Shorrock (2011) 54-115 and the articles in Spanoudakis (2014).

[663] Seaford (2006) 134.

[664] One only think of pieces of art such as Michelangelo's sculpture *Bacchus* and Titian's oil painting *Bacchus and Ariadne,* of pivotal literary texts such as Petrarch's *Rime e triumphi* and Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili,* and of mythographic literature (e.g. Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*).

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Vida exploits this juxtaposition. At the beginning of the *Christiad*, Jesus is addressed as *bis genitus* (*Chr.* 1.2-3: *tuo liceat mihi munere regem / bis genitum canere*), an expression that in ancient Greek and Latin literature often indicated Bacchus. Such a denomination occurs both in pagan authors (Ov. *Met.* 3.317: *tutaque bis geniti sunt incunabula Bacchi*)[668] and in Christian writers as the third century poet Commodianus (*Instructiones* 1.12.1: *Liberum patrem certe bis genitum dicitis ipsi*)[669] at least until the sixteenth century.[670] Other passages in Vida's poem confirm the hypothesis of an assimilation of Christ and Dionysus. In the episode of the marriage at Cana, everything that meets Jesus' eyes is said to laugh with delight (*Chr.* 3.959: *Nam quocumque caput circum torsisset honestum*). A similar statement is made about Bacchus in the digression on his worship in *Georgics* 2, where the author states that every place toward which the god sets his eyes flourishes (*Georg.* 2.392: *et quocumque deus circum caput egit honestum*). Here we have an association with Bacchus in his generative power and, curiously enough,

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Boardman (2014) 50-65 offers a series of Renaissance depictions of processions that include the god or are inspired by Dionysiac imagery.

[665] Emmerling-Skala (1994) 141-213.

[666] E.g. Benvenuto da Imola's commentary on Dante's *Purg.* 18.92.

[667] E.g. Marullo's *Hymni naturales.* See Picchio (2007) 181-6.

[668] See also Ov. *Tristia* 5.3.26.

[669] E.g. *Anth. Lat.* 494a.19: *bis genitus, sine matre opifex, sine patre redemptor.* Nonnus too had called Dionysus 'twice born' in the incipit of the *Dionysiaca* 1.3-4: εἰπὲ δὲ φύτλην / Βάκχου δισσοτόκοιο. Agosti (1999) 100 n.52 argued that Nonnus' *Paraphrase* might have influence Vida in the episode of the paralytic (*Chr.* 1.450 – Non. *Par.* 5.28; *Chr.* 1.493-5 – Non. *Par.* 5.26-7).

[670] The fact that this expression is referred to Jesus at the beginning of Giacomo Boni's *De vita et gesti Christi,* published in Rome in 1526 (1.1: *Bis genitum Regem, Divina, humanaque pandam*) only goes to show how crucial the need for modern editions and studies of obscure Neo-Latin texts is for a more accurate understanding of the more famous ones such as the *Christiad.* It cannot be taken for granted that Vida knew Bona's work, but it cannot be discounted either, given that the latter shares a similar subject-matter with the *Christiad* and was published during the same years and in the same city in which Vida composed his poem.

the same expression is referred to Jesus in the moment when he is about to bring Lazarus back to life (*Chr.* 1.271*: infremuit nutuque caput concussit honestum*).[671]

The *Christiad* displays a further association between Christ and an ancient mythical figure, Hercules. Both of them share in the human and divine natures (Christ simultaneously, Hercules in chronological sequence), are born from a divinity (the Father/Holy Spirit-Zeus) and a mortal woman (Mary-Alcmena), go through tribulations, visit Hell-the Underworld, and are granted a special place in Heaven-Olympus. Even in this case, however, the correlation is imperfect, for Hercules is the product of an illicit union. He is deified at the moment of his death because of his virtue, whereas Jesus, as a man, is conceived without a carnal union, is a God incarnate and opens the gate of Heaven to humankind through his grace. It is little wonder that ancient Christian apologists and the Church fathers criticised Hercules and generally regarded him as a devilish being. A reconciliation of Christianity with this pagan figure took place only around the end of the middle ages and the beginning of the Renaissance.[672] Hercules' identification with Christ can be found in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries[673] and continues during the early modern era.[674] The prevailing view of the hero in Italy during the sixteenth century is as an exemplar of physical and moral virtue. At that time, the allegorical interpretations of the myth of Hercules *in bivio* were particularly popular, even though the '*Hercules furens* tradition' highlighting the hero's madness was also in vogue during the Renaissance.[675] Vida lived in an age that also expressed positive assessments of the ancient hero and even conceived a *Hercules Christianus*. Furthermore, his poem is part of a tradition, the post-Virgilian one, that has been defined as "Herculean epic” owing to the role of this figure as an actor in the narrative or model for other characters.[676]

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[671] Elsewhere Vida names Bacchus to indicate wine and grapevine: *Bomb.* 1.257; *DAP* 2.246; *Chr.* 3.981; 5.946; *Hymn* 9.166.

[672] For an account of the Hercules-Jesus association throughout the centuries, see Galinsky (1972) 188-206.

[673] E.g. Chrétien le Gouays *Ovide moralisé* 9.989-95 and Dante *Inferno* 8.109 and 9.97.

[674] Berchorius had to say on this matter. See Ludwig (1999) 935.

[675] E.g. Ronsard's *Hymne de l'Hercule chrestien* and Milton's *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*. See Riley (2008) 92-115.

Jesus is that great Avenger whose coming Satan is so afraid of at the beginning of the poem (*Chr.* 1.123-4: *maximus ultor / imperio patris infernis succederet oris*). His descent to Hell in aid of the souls of the just is a repetition of Hercules’ penetration of the dark cave of Cacus and the subsequent liberation of the people living nearby from the threat of the monster (*Aen.* 8.200-3: *attulit et nobis aliquando optantibus aetas / auxilium adventumque dei. nam maximus ultor / tergemini nece Geryonae spoliisque superbus / Alcides erat*). By comparing the two, Satan is indirectly paired with the monstrous Cacus in keeping with the traditional imagery that associates wild beasts with the Underworld.[677] The actual event foreshadowed at the outset of the story, namely the Harrowing of Hell, is modelled on the Cacus episode (*Chr.* 6.198: *Ecce autem foribus succedens maximus ultor*). [678] When Jesus opens the gates of Hell, the demons flee from their caverns, roar, breathe fire and fill the palace with smoke fire (*Chr.* 6.210-1: *Tum rudere insuetum dirumque e faucibus ignem / efflare atque domum piceo omnem involvere fumo*). Cacus, too, lives in a cave full of smoke, bellows terribly and breathes fire (*Aen.* 8.247-9: *ergo insperata deprensum luce repente / inclusumque cavo saxo atque insueta rudentem / desuper Alcides telis premit*). Of the two outcomes offered by the Herculean myth –virtuous or savage– Vida seems closer to the former in his association of Hercules and Jesus. While the ancient deified hero incorporates features of beast, man and God, Christ is “only” human and divine.

There is another figure between human and divine to be indirectly paired with Jesus in the *Christiad*, Lucretius’ Epicurus.[679] This parallelism had already been employed in late antiquity by Christian writers.[680] Both bring messages of salvation requiring a change of belief and perspective through which humanity is finally released from its constraints.[681] The obscure matters Jesus unfolds to the priests (*Chr.* 3.949: *alta recensentem vatum monimenta, patrumque / primores ultro scitantem obscura docentemque*), are similar to the Epicurean message and its revelation of the secrets of nature (Lucr. 1.922: *nec me animi fallit quam sint obscura*).[682] However, while Epicurus is a man that Lucretius addresses as a god only metaphorically (Lucr. 5.6: *nemo, ut opinor, erit mortali corpore cretus*), Jesus is a true divinity (*Chr.* 4.47 *mortali corpore cretum*). Epicurus releases humankind from the fear instilled by religion, whereas Jesus releases it from sin and death by establishing a new religion.[683] John the Baptist hails the coming of Christ (*Chr.* 4.190: *iam iam aderit Deus, ecce Deus mortalibus oris / ceu mortalis adest*) in the way Lucretius acclaims Epicurus as a god (Lucr. 5.8: *deus, ille fuit, deus*).[684] It has rightly been observed that Lucretius looks back to the past, for Epicurus is dead at the time of the composition of the *De Rerum Natura*, but John is referring to a future event that will have everlasting consequences.[685]

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[676] Hardie (1993b) 65-71. The Herculean imagery has deep implications in an epic like the *Thebaid*, as Rebeggiani (2018) 123-153 pointed out.

[677] Hardie (1993b) 66.

[678] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 367.

[679] On Epicurus’ heroism in the *DRN*, see Hardie (1995) 14-5 and 17-9.

One of the most important models for Jesus, if not the most important, is Aeneas.[686] The importance of the *Aeneid* for the history of Western literature and the Trojan leader's higher potential for adaptability to Christian purposes compared to other classical heroes are usually adduced as reasons for this association. His total devotion to a mission whose outcome is the beginning of a new unlimited dominion and on which the fate of the entire world depends, his *pietas* and submission made him the most appropriate classical model.[687] Christ assumes human form and is thus subject to death, even though he will eventually get the better of the latter through the Resurrection. Aeneas is the son of a goddess, but he is nonetheless a mortal that rises to the status of divinity, at least in a variant of the myth, and is released from his mortality after the toil he endured on earth. Moreover, assimilating a human being, be it fictitious or real, to Jesus is blasphemy for a believer. Christian poets like Juvencus and Sedulius did not model their Jesus on Aeneas in an overarching manner, and even the occasional connections that one could find in their works are usually to be read in terms of *Kontrastimitation*.[688] While there is no evidence for positive evaluations of Aeneas in late antique Christianity,[689] the same cannot be said for sixteenth century Italy. At that time, a revaluation of the Trojan hero had already taken place, even if the Christians that regarded him as a virtuous man did not purport to put him on the same level as their Lord.[690] Vida followed in their footsteps. Having taken inspiration from Virgil for his epic, he could hardly prevent readers aware of his poetic debt from contemplating this association. Not only did he not shy away from this, but he seems to have encouraged it, for there are both verbal and structural points of contact between his Jesus and Aeneas.

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[680] Prudentius for instance. See Hardie (2020a) 135-7.

[681] Jesus is called *servator* at *Chr.* 1.422.

[682] See sections 3.6 and 4.3.

[683] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 299.

[684] *Deus, ille fuit, deus* can also be found in Stat. *Silv.* 4.6.36 and in Sannazaro *De Partu Virginis* 1.192, where it indicates Christ. See Gärtner (2004) 193.

[685] *Ibidem* 266. See also section 4.2.

[686] For further connections between the two, see Di Cesare (1964) 226 and 338 n.23 and sections 5.1.1, 5.1.7, 5.1.8, 5.2.2, 5.2.6.

[687] Clark-Hatch (1981) 31 and Šubrt (1993) 10-7. On this parallelism in ancient Christian epics see, among many, Fontaine (1981) 73.

The Incarnation of Christ is the Father's reaction to the damage provoked by the rebellion of his creatures and a Christian rendering of Aeneas' mission, just like the wrath of the rebellious angels is a re-enactment of Juno's. Thus, Jesus' liberation of the souls of the pious from Hell and consequent introduction to Heaven corresponds to Aeneas' bringing of the

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[688] Green (2006) 383, Springer (2013) 170-1 and McGill (2016) 13, 156-7, 176, 185, 204, 239, 241, 243, 250.

[689] Green (2006) 382.

[690] Christian poets like Dante (e.g. *Inferno* 2.32: "Io non Enea, non Paulo sono") and Petrarch (*Familiares* 10.4: *perfecti viri habitus moresque*) had already spoken of the Trojan leader as a glorious hero. See Warner (2005) 34 and Houghton (2019) 226-7. For an overview of Aeneas in the Christian reception of Virgil see Hardie (2014) 127-47. Virgilian commentators between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries such as Cristoforo Landino and Jodocus Badius took Aeneas as an ideal man, an interpretation discussed at length by, among others, Kallendorf (1989), (1995) and (1999a) 37-44, Wilson-Okamura (2010) 206-12, 219-20, 225 and White (2013) 248. In general, this reading was common in the early modern reception of the poem and printed editions of the time reflect it; see Kallendorf (2020) 120-5. However, isolated traces of negative assessments of Aeneas can be detected in the Renaissance as well. See Kallendorf (1999b) and (2007).

Penates into Latium.[691] His salvific mission is comparable to Aeneas' activities in the *Aeneid* (*Chr.* 1.855: *si tantae est genus humanum coelo addere molis* – *Aen.* 1.33: *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*). But the Incarnation is at the same time a reversal of the deification of the Trojan leader in the river Numicius desired and granted by his mother Venus in keeping with the account of *Metamorphoses* 14 (*Chr.* 4.60: *dum morti obnoxius errat* – Ov. *Met.* 14.600-1: *hunc iubet Aeneae quaecumque obnoxia morti / abluere et tacito deferre sub aequora cursu*).[692] Even the appellative that declares their divine lineage suggests a connection between them. Thus, for example, Pontius Pilate describes Jesus with an expression that slightly modifies the one with which the Sibyl addresses Aeneas (*Chr.* 5.99: *Aut certe deus ille, dei aut certissima proles* – *Aen.* 6.322: *deum certissima proles*).[693]

An episode in the *Christiad* –the *ekphrasis* of the temple of Jerusalem– and one in the *Aeneid* –the adventures of the Trojans at Carthage, which includes the *ekphrasis* of the temple of Juno– offer the material for an extended correspondence between Jesus and Aeneas. While explaining the meaning of the biblical episodes depicted in the temple of Jerusalem, Christ sighs and expounds the purpose of his mission (*Chr.* 1.687: *substitit hic imo suspirans pectore Divus*). Likewise, Aeneas does the same when his mother Venus asks him to recount his story during their encounter in Libya right before the *ekphrasis* of the temple of Juno (*Aen.* 1.371: *suspirans imoque trahens a pectore vocem*). The pity that Jesus feels at the sight of the picture of the prophets who dwell in Hell (*Chr.* 1.725-6: *His animadversis portis bipatentibus ibat / multa putans*) has a counterpart in the thoughts that overwhelm Aeneas' mind after his encounter with the souls waiting to cross the Styx on Charon's boat (*Aen.* 6.331-2: *constitit Anchisa satus et vestigia pressit / multa putans*).[694]

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[691] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 10 and section 3.5.

[692] See section 4.3.

[693] Juvencus too had adapted this Virgilian line to Christ (2.55: *Domini certissima proles*). See McGill (2016) 158.

[694] Even phrases referred to Aeneas when he is furious are adapted to Jesus; e.g. *Aen.* 12.494 *insidiis subactus* and *Chr.* 5.761 *insidiis subactum*, where Christ is said to be the victim of treachery.

The bond between Jesus and his followers, especially his disciples, is at times built upon that between Aeneas and his men. Peter's presenting himself to Simon as a disciple of Jesus, the justest and most pious king, and his request for hospitality (*Chr.* 2.579-80: *"Rex" ait "est nobis, quo nusquam iustior alter / aut pietate prior*), summon up the figure of Ilioneus introducing himself and the Trojans to Dido as followers of Aeneas, followed by a similar entreaty (*Aen.* 1.544-5: *rex erat Aeneas nobis, quo iustior alter / nec pietate fuit*).[695] Furthermore, as Aeneas steps out from the cloud that was concealing him on the same occasion (*Aen.* 1.595: *"coram, quem quaeritis, adsum"*), a forthright Jesus volunteers to go with his enemies when they come upon him (*Chr.* 2.777: *"Heus", inquit, "Iam state viri! Quem quaeritis, adsum"*).[696] His impassivity resembles Aeneas' in the face of Dido's pleas (*Chr.* 2.746: *mens immota tamen virtusque invicta manebat* – *Aen.* 4.449: *mens immota manet*).[697] They both obey the will of someone else, the Father and the *fata*, and subordinate their desires to their mission. Jesus wonders for a moment if he must indeed die for the forgiveness of sins, but, after this momentary hesitation, he suppresses his sadness (*Chr.* 2.756: *Dixerat, atque graves curas sub corde premebat*) in the same way as Aeneas represses the pain that leaving Dido causes him (*Aen.* 4.331-2: *Dixerat. Ille Iovis monitis immota tenebat / lumina et obnixus curam sub corde premebat*).[698]

As we have just seen, Jesus shares with Aeneas the appellative *rex* in the Gospels,[699] in Christianity, and, accordingly, in the *Christiad*. Although this noun might seem to bring them closer, it actually marks a divergence between them and amounts to one of the reasons for misunderstanding Christ's nature and mission. He is not an earthly king but God himself. His kingship is not of this world. An at first sight difficult comparison with Turnus should be read in light of this consideration. Jesus' resolution to wash away original sin seems to highlight his impending death (*Chr.* 2.756: *Crimen generis commune refellam*;[700] 1.689: *In me nulla mora est*), by recalling Turnus' desire to put an end to the conflict in Latium, which will lead to his demise (*Aen.* 12.16: *et solus ferro crimen commune refellam;* 12.11: *nulla mora in Turno*). Jesus is compared to the loser, but his humiliation paradoxically signifies his victory from a Christian perspective.[701] As surprising as the connection with Turnus might seem in a character that is simultaneously compared to Aeneas, one should keep in mind that the two warriors, as it were, merge into one figure towards the end of the *Aeneid,* especially during their final duel where the Rutulian general plays the role of the sacrificial victim,[702] and that this conflation would prove fruitful in the post-Virgilian tradition,[703] including Vida.

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[695] Di Cesare (1964) 152-3. It arguably mixes it with Diomedes' description of Aeneas (*Aen.* 11.292: *hic pietate prior*). See also the crowd of Jesus' followers and the Trojans survivors led by their leader (*Chr.* 1.400: *Iamque viis plenis multis cum millibus ibant* – *Aen.* 5.75: *ille e concilio multis cum milibus ibant*).

[696] The deaths of Nisus and Euryalus constitues another intertext for this nocturnal assault. The words of the victim, Jesus, partly replicate those pronounced in Virgil by Volcens, the leader of the band of Latin warriors who kill the two Trojans (*Aen.* 9.376: *"state, viri! quae causa viae?"*).

[697] Warner (2005) 128 avers that Vida is here alluding also to August. *Civ. D.* 9.4.98-104.

[698] Juvencus had proposed a similar point of contact between Jesus and Aeneas at 1.410: *tristi pressit corde dolorem,* which imitates *Aen.* 1.209: *premit altum corde dolorem.* See Herzog (1975) 148-9 and McGill (2016) 137.

[699] E.g. Mt. 2:2.

6.5 Sacrifice

Human sacrifice is a common feature of ancient Latin epics, where some characters usually have to die (e.g. Virgil's Palinurus) or are willing to (e.g. Lucan's Cato) for the benefit of something greater than themselves. Sacrifice is also a central tenet of Christianity. Christ dies to atone for the sins of the world, and many of his followers testify to the Good News with their own life. Vida thus worked with two different traditions that ascribed high value to a similar concept. No wonder that in the *Christiad* sacrifice is brought up at the beginning and the end of the narrative, two focal places for Virgil and his successors. The *Aeneid* opens with Juno's desire to kill the Trojan survivors to take her revenge for the Judgement of Paris and to protect Carthage from the future destruction brought about by the Romans, and with the recollection of the death of Oilean Ajax. It closes with Turnus' death at the hands of a vengeful Aeneas. Similarly, at the outset of the *Punica*, Juno foretells the major military defeats of the Romans in the upcoming Second Punic War, which she sees as redemption for her past setbacks. The triumph of Scipio with prisoners of war and the emblems of the defeated people rounds off Silius' poem. Oedipus' wishing that his two sons slay each other as compensation for their disregard for him, and the lament of the women for their relatives who died in the fraternal war respectively open and close the *Thebaid*. Vida follows suit in that the *Christiad* starts out with the mention of Christ's sacrifice (*Chr.* 1.7) not long before the unfolding of that event (*Chr.* 1.15-6) and ends with the foreshadowing of the deaths of the martyrs (*Chr.* 6.966-7). Vida's Jesus embodies both the scapegoat and humanity as a whole, the *unus pro cunctis*[704] and the *unus pro multis*[705] of the epic tradition.

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[700] See also *Chr.* 5.656: *ut moriens crimen commune refellat*. The Father is here declaring that the passing away of his Son will redeem humankind.

[701] Hardie (2014) 139 reached this conclusion and offered an extensive example: the simile comparing the rising companions of a defeated young warrior to the angels longing to save Christ from the Crucifixion (*Chr.* 5.694-702) alludes to the duel between Turnus and Aeneas where the former is brought down by the latter's spear and makes his Italian supporters rise. See also von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schluze Roberg (2013) ii 341 on *Chr.* 5.787-8 and *Aen.* 12.131-3.

[702] Bandera (1981).

[703] Hardie (1993b) 19-56.

In the scenes of the arrest and the Crucifixion Christ is modelled on Sinon, the alleged sacrificial victim of the Greeks.[706] The parallelism is to be read through the lens of *Kontrastimitation*, for Jesus and Sinon are put on the same level only so far as they are both defenceless and surrounded (*Chr.* 2.899-90: *Ille autem in medio defessus, inermis / conspectu* – *Aen.* 2.67: *namque ut conspectu in medio turbatus, inermis*). Both of them have their hands tied, and a huge crowd follows them (*Chr.* 2.966: *Iamque Deum vinctis manibus post terga trahebant*; 5.424: *vinctumque manus clamore trahebant* – *Aen.* 2.57-8: *manus*

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[704] *Chr.* 2.657; 6.344.

[705] *Chr.* 2.249; 6.174; 6.516.

[706] Hardie (1993b) 28 n.21 and McGill (2016) 262 acknowledged the similarity with Vida's passage.

iuvenem interea post terga revinctum / pastores magno ad regem clamore trahebant).[707] People from all over Jerusalem come to see Jesus crucified and mock him just as the youth of Troy gather around Sinon (*Chr.* 5.370-1: *famuli ducis aedibus intus / armati illudunt capto*; 5.420-1: *cum iam undique tota / urbe ruit studio visendi accita iuventus* – *Aen.* 2.63-4*: undique visendi studio Troiana iuventus / circumfusa ruit certantque inludere capto*). While both offered themselves to their enemies, Sinon deceives them, begs to have his life spared, and ultimately pretends to have been a victim.[708] Instead, Jesus tells the truth, accepts the subsequent conviction and, after his Resurrection, testifies that he has been a real sacrificial victim by showing the signs of the Crucifixion (*Chr.* 6.842-6: *palmas ferro ostentabat acuto* […] / *hamatos vepres quos hostia gessit* – *Aen.* 2.155-6: *vos arae ensesque nefandi, / quos fugi, vittaeque deum, quas hostia gessi*). The opposition between the two is further enhanced by the fact that people trust Sinon and, as a reward, meet their end, whereas the crowd in Jerusalem does not believe in the One that will bring Salvation.[709] But Christ's death is a necessary step for the fulfilment of destiny just like the entrance of the Wooden Horse into Troy in the worldview of the *Aeneid* (*Chr.* 2.810-1: *hi stupea vincula collo / inicere* – *Aen.* 2.236-7: *stuppea vincula collo / intendunt*).

The sacrifice of the Son, the means through which the forces of Good prevail over the forces of Evil, has a universal scope and matches the importance of Aeneas' mission, as can be deduced from the Calvary episode, especially when the Father looks down on earth from on high:

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[707] Cf. also Juv. 4.589-90: *iamque e concilio Christum post terga revinctum / praesidis ad gremium magno clamore trahebant*. See Green (2006) 63-4.

[708] In John's speech at the beginning of book 3, the leaders of Jerusalem who condemned Jesus are like the Trojans whom Sinon thinks want to kill him (*Chr.* 3.27-8: *invidia primores urbis in illum / conspirant poenasque graves cum sanguine poscunt* – *Aen.* 2.72: *Dardanidae infensi poenas cum sanguine poscunt*).

[709] Those who welcome are deceived in both cases. After the Last Supper, the disciples fall asleep and are caught off guard at the moment of the capture in a manner that brings to mind the siege of Troy (*Chr.* 2.791: *Consurgunt tandem somno vinoque gravatis* – *Aen.* 2.265: *invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam*). Accordingly, Judas, as the deviser of the arrest, inherits the treacherous function that Odysseus and Epeus have in Virgil's *Ilioupersis* (*Chr.* 2.765: *scelerisque inventor Iudas* – *Aen.* 2.164: *scelerumque inventor Ulixes* – *Chr.* 4.274: *et ipse mali fabricator Iudas* – *Aen.* 2.264: *et ipse doli fabricator Epeos*).

> *Interea superum rex tanto in cardine rerum*
> *verticis aetherei sublimen evasit ad arcem,*
> *mortalis nati letum ut crudele videret*
> *ipse sui spectator.*

(*Chr.* 5.448-51)

Several phrases taken from the *Aeneid* betray the universal relevance of this event, first and foremost the words with which Venus exposes the possibility that Juno's idea of keeping Aeneas at Carthage might materialise (*Aen.* 1.672: *haud tanto cessabit cardine rerum*). During the Crucifixion, the antagonist forces seem to have the upper hand. What Juno wishes for has a structural counterpart in the desires of Satan, who at this point is certainly accomplishing his goal, namely getting rid of Christ. As we have hinted at previously, Jesus epitomises the defeated, though he is the victorious hero in the end. The narrator matter-of-factly turns the reference that Turnus, a "defeated" character, makes to his death in the speech to his sister Juturna (*Aen.* 12.636: *an fratris miseri letum ut crudele videres?*), into the death of the Son.[710] In both circumstances a divinity witnesses the demise of someone close to them. But Turnus' death is part of the design of the *fata*, whereas the Father's divine plan provides for the Son's death. Moreover, while Juturna does not have the power to change destiny, the Father is both the inactive witness and the very same force that has the last word on everything.[711]

The intertextual framework supports the idea that the Father has granted ultimate victory to his Son. The Father casts his eyes on Judaea as Jupiter watches over Libya right before reassuring Venus that he will bestow an endless empire on the Trojans (*Chr.* 5.473-5: *Mox autem infaustis Iudaeae lumine tantum / defixit terris* – *Aen.* 1.225-6: *sic vertice caeli / constitit et Libyae defixit lumina regnis*). When the angels cannot stand the sight of the crucified Christ and decide to take up arms to release him, the Father stops them, declaring that what is happening is according to his will and that, if only he wanted to, he could save his Son:

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[710] Priam is another "defeated" model for Jesus (*Chr.* 5.816: *affixumque trabi media iam in morte teneri* – *Aen.* 2.533: *quamquam in media iam morte tenetur*).

[711] The indirect comparison between Jesus and Hippolytus (*Chr.* 5.272: *Non tamen hostiles explevit sanguine poenas* – *Aen.* 7.765-6: *postquam arte novercae / occiderit patriasque explerit sanguine poenas*) evokes the image of a father who has his loyal son killed unjustly.

> *Illum ideo duros volui exercere labores*
> *atque agere in terris extrema per omnia vitam,*
> *finibus exactum cunctis, inopem, omnium egentem.*
> *Iamque ad supremum ventum. Manet exitus illum*
> *hic hodie gravis insontem, irrevocabile letum,*
> *et morti caput ipse sua sponte obvius offert.*
>
> (*Chr.* 5.658-63)

The plan that the Father has for his Son echoes the poor conditions and the hardships that the Trojans have endured (*Aen.* 3.315: *vivo equidem vitamque extrema per omnia duco* – 1.599: *omnibus exhaustos iam casibus, omnium egenos*), and that another goddess with a son involved in them, Venus, had to tolerate (*Aen.* 8.378: *incassumve tuos volui exercere labores*). Christ must go through the Crucifixion and has no chance of escaping from his destiny like Turnus in the words that her divine supporter Juno addresses to Jupiter (*Aen.* 10.630: *nunc manet insontem gravis exitus*). The sacrifice of the Son amounts to a Christian counterpart of the day of the ultimate battle between the Trojans and the Latins mentioned in the last interaction between Jupiter and Juno at the end of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 12.803: *ventum ad supremum est*).[712] The gods of Virgil's poem negotiate and, despite their affection for their protégés, are willing to sacrifice them to reach an agreement and open a new era. The Father offers the life of his Son, but by no means does he come to terms with the forces of Evil. Rather, through the Resurrection, He establishes a new religion. The sacrifice of the One is the Event that will allow humans to be saved at the Last Judgement and guarantees the inevitable and eternally incontrovertible triumph of Good.

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[712] In the other episode in which Vida utilises this phrase (*Chr.* 1.38), Peter tries to dissuade Jesus from escaping the Passion and is later rebuked as if he was Satan (*Chr.* 1.64-6: *Nate Deo, quae tanta Deum te denique coeli / vis agit, ut libeat letum crudele pacisci / pro quoquam aut certis ultro te offerre periclis?*), embodying Allecto as she stirs Turnus to fight (*Aen.* 7.425: *i, nunc, ingratis offer te, inrise, periclis*).

Chapter 7. Succession

Numerous issues lying at the heart of the epic tradition and falling under the umbrella of "succession" resurface in the *Christiad*. These anxieties revolve around the relationship between the individual and his predecessors, whether within a family line, an imperial dynasty, or a poetic tradition.[713] Vida inherited and reworked them from a Christian perspective: the Resurrection transfigures the anxiety of the genre regarding the generational continuity of social, political and poetic structures. He expands upon the Gospels on topics related to the notion of succession. For instance, he devotes the entire third book to the vicissitudes of the Divine Family, recounting non-Biblical episodes such as the wedding between Mary and Joseph. This attention to Mary and Joseph and their connection to Christ does not have direct political repercussions in the way that familial bonds usually have in various ancient epics, but its significance resides in the role that it plays for the salvation of humanity. Vida's primary concern is fundamentally religious, and the way he tackles themes with inherent social and/or political dimensions reflects this attitude.

The anxiety caused by dynastic progression in ancient Roman epics does not play out within the holy family because it is here transplanted into the context of religious orthodoxy. The distance between the events of the narrative and the author's time in Vida's case is that between Jesus' disciples and the Christians of the sixteenth century. Even though the stories told in ancient Roman epic often have a religious significance for their potential ideal readers, and despite the fact that the authority of the Catholic Church was as much political as it was religious in Vida's age, the concern expressed in the *Christiad* for the stability of

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[713] Hardie (1993b) 88.

Christianity is inherently spiritual. Vida's assertion of his generic affiliation through the adaptation of the programmatic statements of ancient epicists is at the service of the religious message of the poem as well. The following chapter illustrates how engagement with the Virgilian tradition permeates the topic of succession in the poem. It will take into account the familial relationship that binds Jesus to Mary and Joseph, the nexus between the disciples and the Popes of the early sixteenth century, and the poet's self-reflection on his impact on future generations.

7.1 Familial Succession

Interest in the relationships between parents and their sons and daughters fuels many Roman epics. The Homeric poems had already reflected on this theme. From the misery of watching a son die (Hector's fatal duel in front of Priam and Hecuba) to the mutual search of father and son (Odysseus and Telemachus), to mention only a few examples, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* elaborate extensively on these relations.[714] Filial bonds lie at the core of the *Aeneid,* as exemplified not only by the traditional image of the *pius* Aeneas carrying his father Anchises on his back and with his son Ascanius on his side but also by the relevance of several generational ties (e.g. Venus and Aeneas, Jupiter and Venus, Evander and Pallas, Mezentius and Lausus).[715] Numerous also are the stories told in the *Metamorphoses* centred on parents and sons/daughters (e.g. the Sun and Phaethon, Ceres and Proserpina, Daedalus and Icarus, Cinyras and Myrrha). This kind of relationship has a place also in the *Bellum Civile* (e.g. the visit of Pompey's son, Sextus, to Thessaly) and in Flavian epic.[716] Far from being on the sidelines, these blood relations represent central themes in the *Argonautica* (e.g. Aeson and Jason, Aeetes and Medea) and the *Punica* (e.g. Scipio Africanus and his father). Both the *Thebaid* and the *Achilleid* make the most of the dramas that these bonds entail and that stem, for example, from a desire for revenge (e.g. Oedipus and Polynices/Eteocles) or protection (e.g. Thetis and Achilles).

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[714] With this statement, I by no means intend to undermine the political significance that these relationships have in Homer: Hector's survival and Odysseus' reunion with his son are certainly also a matter of political succession. By the same token, I do not mean to reduce this type of relations in the Roman epic tradition to mere reflections on their significance for the private sphere. I only want to focus on the latter as part of a bigger picture.

[715] On fathers and sons in the *Aeneid* see Lee (1979) and Hardie (1998) 67-8.

[716] See the articles in Manioti (2016).

One striking image is that of a mother mourning her dead son/daughter (e.g. Euryalus' mother and Hecuba).[717] Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the archetypical figure of *mater dolorosa* in Christianity and enjoys a unique degree of veneration in the Catholic Church in particular. Before dwelling on her relationship with her son, we should examine one of the episodes that best illustrates how the theme of the premature death of young people, a staple of the Virgilian and post-Virgilian epic, found fertile ground in Vida's poem, namely the raising of the young man at Nain.[718] His corpse is carried on a bier, and his widowed mother runs through the city in the grip of grief, an image that, as previous scholarship has noted, resembles Dido's struggle with her passion for Aeneas (*Chr.* 4.329-31: *Urbe furens tota genitrix miseranda capillos / scissa genasque ambas manibus foedata cruentis / ibat* – *Aen.* 4.67-8: *uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur / urbe furens*).[719] Her desperation is also akin to the discomfort of Imilce, Hannibal's wife, at the thought of her son's death. A Carthaginian ritual prescribed that a child should be sacrificed each year to the gods, and at that time Imilce's son had been selected as the sacrificial victim (Sil. 4.774: *Asperat haec foedata genas lacerataque crines / atque urbem complet maesti clamoris Imilce*). The news that the son of the widow of Nain died reaches his people in a passage full of classical expressions, most of which come from the funeral of Pallas, the dead young man *par excellence*:

Ecce autem ingentem longo procedere pompam

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[717] On motherhood in Roman epic see Fantham (2004-2005), Augoustakis (2010), and McAuley (2015) ch. 1.

[718] For the miracle see section 5.1.

[719] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 274

ordine flammarum aspicimus maestamque per urbem
audimus luctum, causam tum denique luctus
cernimus egregii iuvenis miserabile corpus
impositum molli pheretro, quem mersit acerba
morte dies, dulci cum vix pubesceret aevo,
atque omnem vultu florenti dempsit honorem:
qualis, quem pede pressit agro bos signa relinquens,
paulatim lassa languet cervice hyacinthus
aut rosa, quam molli decerpens pollice virgo
vepribus in densis lapsam sub sole reliquit.

(*Chr.* 4.318-28)

The first item in common between the two scenes is the funeral procession (*Aen.* 11.143-4: *lucet via longo / ordine flammarum*). The whole town is defined as *maesta*, the same adjective Aeneas utilises in relation to Evander's city, as he orders his legates to bring Pallas' corpse to his father (*Aen.* 11.26-7: *maestamque Evandri primus ad urbem / mittatur Pallas*). The corpses of the two young men are *miserabilia* (*Aen.* 11.59-60: *tolli miserabile corpus / imperat*).[720] The death of the youngster has another Virgilian referent in the infants collected in a specific place in the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.426-9: *auditae voces vagitus et ingens / infantumque animae flentes, in limine primo / quos dulcis vitae exsortis et ab ubere raptos / abstulit atra dies et funere mersit acerbo*).[721] The beauty of the young man is highlighted through a Lucretian intertext, a line where the author traces the passage from strength and beauty to gold as the criterion of social value (Lucr. 5.1113-4: *posterius res inventast aurumque repertum, / quod facile et validis et pulchris dempsit honorem*),[722] and through a simile that is inspired by the one that describes Pallas' dead body (*Aen.* 11.68-71: *qualem virgineo demessum pollicem florem / seu mollis violae seu languentis hyacinthi, / cui neque*

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[720] Di Cesare (1964) 134 also cites the simile for the death of Eurialus (*Aen.* 9.435-7).

[721] The passage is connected to Pallas' funeral, as both *Aen.* 6.429 and 11.28 begin with *abstulit atra dies*. For this intratextual link, see Horsfall (2003) 65 with bibliography and (2013) 325.

[722] Vida would discuss this Lucretian passage in his *De rei publicae dignitate* (pp. 21-2 vol. 2 of the Cominiana edition).

fulgor adhuc nec dum sua forma recessit, / non iam mater alit tellus virisque ministrat).[723] The list of premature deaths alluded to includes other youngsters and infants like Astyanax, the son of Hector and Andromache killed during the Sack of Troy. His mother's words, which compare him to Ascanius, are indeed echoed here by John (*Aen.* 3.491: *et nunc aequali tecum pubesceret aevo*). Even Linus, the son of Apollo and Psamathe, torn apart by dogs according to Adrastus' tale in *Thebaid* 1, is here evoked because his mother raises lamentation for her dead son like the other mothers in Nain who empathise with the widow (*Chr.* 4.331-2: *Eam circum pariter per densa viarum / pulsabant saevis matres plangoribus astra – Theb.* 1.592-3: *ipsa ultro saevis plangoribus amens / tecta replet*). The cheeks of the dead young man are covered with down (*Chr.* 4.335-6: *Ut Deus exanimis iuvenili in corpore vidit / pallorem et molli pictas lanugine malas*). Such a trait is a token of youth in Lucretius' analysis of the rates of growth in humans in comparison to horses (Lucr. 5.886-9: *post ubi equum validate vires aetate senecta / membraque deficient fugienti languida vita, / tum demum puerile aevo florente iuventas / occipit et molli vestit lanugine malas*), and traditionally associated with young men in ancient epic.[724]

The flight to Egypt too, an episode we have already analysed, thematises the demise of young people. Herod's decision to kill all the infants in the vicinity of Jerusalem forces the Holy Family to take refuge elsewhere. The nocturnal setting of the scene echoes verbally and thematically the episode of Nisus' and Euryalus' deaths. The escape of the Holy Family from Bethlehem and the encounter with an angel holding a shield and a gleaming sword (*Chr.* 3.814-5: *Vidisses visu exsanguem exanimemque puellam / huc illuc trepidare fuga et vix fidere nocti*; 3.850-2: *increpitans clipeo fulgentique ense per auras / ocius usque aderat coelo pulcherrimus ales / et monstrabat iter sibi per divortia nota*) evokes the Virgilian episode.[725] A group of Rutulians glimpse the shining light of Euryalus' helmet and end up killing them as they try to escape in the dark (*Aen.* 9.378-9: *sed celerare fugam in silvas et fidere nocti. / obiciunt equites sese ad divortia nota*). Unlike the tragic encounter of the two young Trojans with their enemies, the flight of the Holy Family prevents Jesus from dying in the massacre of the infants. The angels play their role by sustaining that flight. The waters of Egypt are exhausted by their wanderings like the rivers that visit Peneus in the *Metamorphoses* (*Chr.* 3.836-7: *Audires blandum fessas erroribus undas / perstrepere* - Ov. *Met.* 1.582: *in mare deducunt fessas erroribus undas*). In Ovid, nature consoles a father, Peneus, who lost his daughter, Daphne, after her metamorphosis into the laurel tree, the plant that will mark the Roman generals and the palace of Augustus, the *telos* of the poem.[726] In Vida, nature hails a son accompanied by his family and destined to redeem humanity.

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[723] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 273-4 call into play both this simile and the one that portraits Euryalus' death, another man who dies prematurely, at *Aen.* 9.435-7.

[724] See Virg. *Aen.* 10.324-7, Ov. *Met.* 9.398, 12.291, 13.754, Sil. 2.319, 7.691, 16.468, Stat. *Theb.* 7.655 and 9.703.

Given the importance of Mary for the religious framework of the *Christiad*, it is hardly surprising that her representation has a lot in common with these mourning mothers of epic,[727] especially since Vida was not the only poet to exploit this point of contact between the Roman epic tradition and Catholicism.[728] Previous scholarship has displayed how Mary's lamentation in front of the Cross (*Chr.* 5.758-893) draws on Dido's frenzy[729] and the lament of Euryalus' mother,[730] and how Aeneas' vision of Hector's ghost inspires her reaction at the sight of her dying son.[731] But the full wealth of intertexts underlying this scene and the depiction of Mary, in general, have not yet been discussed. The vast majority of them involve someone grieving over the loss of a loved one, more often than not a dead son.[732] A similarity of context in narrative terms determines, at least partially, this pattern of allusion.[733]

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[725] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 241 and 244 observe that the angel presents also a gleaming back as the serpent that appears to Aeneas before the funerary games (*Chr.* 3.854: *Coeruleis huic terga notis suffuse rubebant – Aen.* 5.87: *caeruleae cui terga notae maculosus*). The other angels that come along resemble the Ovidian Cycnus (*Chr.* 3.857-8: *Supra nos alii pendentes aere pennis / ibant* - Ov. *Met.* 7.379: *factus olor niveis pendebat in aere pennis*).

[726] The Ovidian passage also serves as a transition to another tale of a father bereft of his daughter, the river Inachus and Io.

[727] Comparisons between this Marian image and the one depicted in Vida's *Hymns* are needed.

[728] An obvious example is Sannazaro's *De Partu Virginis.* See Schulze Roberg (2011).

[729] Warner (2005) 129-30.

[730] Di Cesare (1964) 169-70, 190-1, Hardie (1993b) 53, Warner (2005) 231 n.24, Schulze Roberg (2011) 184-5 who remark that Euryalus' mother informs also Mary in Sannazaro's poem, and von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 346-7. Some passages that have not been recalled (*Chr.* 5.884-5: *Addite me me / huic etiam, siqua est pietas, et figite trunco – Aen.* 9.493: *figite me, si qua est pietas, in me omnia tela*) should be added to those usually quoted (*Chr.* 5.851: *nate, refers? – Aen.* 9.491-2: *hoc mihi de te, / nate, refers?*; *Chr.* 5.855: *Heu quem te, nate, aspicio? – Aen.* 9.481: *hunc ego te, Euryale, aspicio?*).

Rumours about Jesus' Crucifixion draw Mary into Jerusalem. As soon as an indisputable report reaches her ears, she panics and wanders through the city in search of her son, while unidentified women take pity on her. Joined now by a group of companions, including the disciple John, she eventually spots the Crucifixion and interacts with Jesus for one last time. A bitter lament ensues, in which Mary deplores the fate of her divine son and, among other wishes, yearns for her death. Many phrases are reworked from the *Aeneid*, in particular from highly pathetic contexts. Jesus pronounces some of the words with which Creusa entrusts Ascanius to Aeneas (*Chr.* 5.842-3: *Oro, tutare relictam / tu saltem et matris serva communis amorem* - Aen. 2.789: *et nati serva communis amorem*). The laments of the women empathising with Mary's pain are based on those that fill Amata's house right after her suicide (*Chr.* 5.766: *resonant plangoribus aedes* – *Aen.* 12.607: *resonant late plangoribus aedes*) and on Aeneas' last encounter with Dido in the Underworld (*Chr.* 5.788: *effusae matres longe et miserantur euntem* – *Aen.* 6.476: *longe et miseratur euntem*). Mary's lament reproduces the bitterness behind Juno's (*Chr.* 5.868: *incedo regina* – *Aen.* 1.46: *divum*

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[731] Di Cesare (1964) 150-1 and 190-1; von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 346-7, Gwynne (2017) 215. *Chr.* 5.820: *squalentem ut barbam, turpatum ut sanguine crinem* – *Aen.* 2.277: *squalentem barbam et concretos sanguine crinis*; *Chr.* 5.858: *Heu quam nato mutatus ab illo* – *Aen.* 2.274: *ei mihi, qualis erat, quantum mutatus ab illo*. Tellingly, the same *locus* (*Aen.* 2.268-83) appears along with other passages of lament excerpted from Latin poetry in the *Cambridge Songs.* See Battles (2004) 183 n.21 and below.

[732] Tellingly, *Chr.* 5.815-92 had an autonomous diffusion, which, according to Fantazzi-Perosa (1988) xii. predates the publication of the poem. It is contained in a manuscript, Bologna, Bilbioteca Universitaria, Cod. 400 (254), together with other excerpts such as Sannazaro *DAP* 1.333-67.

[733] Juvencus followed an analogous strategy; see Green (2006) 57.

incedo regina)[734] and Andromache’s speeches (*Chr.* 5.867: *Sic una ante alias felix ego* – *Aen.* 3.321: *o felix una ante alias Priameia virgo*). She shares with the former the title of *regina*, although, as we have seen, Juno provides the main model for Satan on a macrotextual level,[735] and, like Andromache, loses a son at the hands of a hostile people, but, unlike her, is destined to rejoice at his Resurrection. Her remark about the hostility of those surrounding her seems to draw on a similar statement put in the mouth of the dying Mezentius (*Chr.* 5.801-2: *Gentis scio acerba furentis / circumfusa odia* – *Aen.* 10.904-5: *scio acerba meorum / circumstare odia*), another parent crushed by the premature death of a son (*Chr.* 5.880: *Nunc alte mucro, nunc alte vulnus adactum* – *Aen.* 10.850: *exitium infelix, nunc alte vulnus adactum*). The perspective is that of the “defeated”. In the original context, Mezentius’ enemies are the winners, the Trojans and Aeneas, who will ultimately get the better of Turnus, one of the main models for Jesus during his Passion. Accordingly, Mary’s gestures mimic those of Juturna as she mourns the upcoming demise of her brother (*Chr.* 5.798-9: *pectus honestum / terque quaterque manu tundens* – *Aen.* 12.155: *terque quaterque manu pectus percussit honestum*).[736]

Other epic poems featuring mothers in pain seem to have inspired the representation of Mary both in the Passion scene and throughout the *Christiad*.[737] The image of a son mourned by his mother at the outbreak of the civil war in the *Bellum Civile* (Luc. 2.26: *vultusque exanimes oculosque in morte natantes*) probably provided Vida with a model for the Crucified Christ in front of Mary (*Chr.* 5.821: *deiectosque oculos dura iam in morte*

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[734] This similarity could be interpreted in different ways. It can be read as a microtextual point of contact with no particular significance, as a breach of decorum or both.

[735] Von Albrecht (1967) 334 observes that here Vida reworked phrases pronounced by Dido as well.

[736] See von Contzen, Polleichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 343.

[737] There might be the presence of Ovid too here, if one accepts the similarity between Althea’s temporary piety for her son Meleager and Mary (*Chr.* 5.800: *Hei mihi, nescio, quid moles atque illa minatur* – Ov. *Met.* 8.467-8: *et modo nescio quid similis crudele minanti / vultus erat*).

natantes). But the *Thebaid* in particular offered several relationships of this type.[738] When Mary comes to know that Jesus has been crucified, she rushes through the streets to find him (*Chr.* 5.758-60: *Interea matris, quam magna nuper ad urbem / traxerat incertus rumor, certissimus aures / nuntius implevit natum extra moenia duci*) and resembles Atalanta as she goes to stop her son Parthenopaeus, as soon as the news that he is going to war reaches her (*Theb.* 4.309-10: *Iamque Atalantaeas implerat nuntius aures / ire ducem bello totamque impellere natum*).[739] Despite taking an oath of virginity, each woman ends up giving birth to a child, does not conceal her pregnancy and rears the baby. Mary, nevertheless, retains her virginity, whereas Atalanta loses it (*Theb.* 9.612-21). Both come to know that they will survive their children, for Simeon forewarns Mary of Jesus' Crucifixion (*Chr.* 3.720-8) and Atalanta is informed in a dream of the impending demise of Parthenopaeus (*Theb.* 9.570-601). When the deaths of their children come, they both wish to die (*Chr.* 5.881-91 – *Theb.* 9.631-5). However, the outcome of the two narratives is different: unlike Parthenopaeus, Jesus will be resurrected.[740] Another young man participating in the war at Thebes dies for the benefit of a community, Menoeceus. Like Christ, he voluntarily offers himself up as a sacrifice in accordance with instructions, goes to "Heaven", and leaves his mother behind.[741] While her companions manage to lead Menoeceus' mother away (*Theb.* 10.816: *abducunt comites famulaeque perosam*), the same cannot be said of Mary (*Chr.* 5.893: *nec comites possunt flentem illa abducere fidae*).[742] Both mothers give voice to a series of questions, with which they bewail the death of their sons and come close to reproaching them for their decision to immolate themselves and leave their parents to survive them (*Chr.* 5.850-91 – *Theb.* 10.793-814).

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[738] Not necessarily between mother and son, though. In a passage akin to the ones just mentioned a man dies with his brother (*Theb.* 2.638-9: *ille oculos etiamnum in luce natantes / sistit et aspecta germani morte resoluit*).

[739] Atalanta and Parthenopaeus, too are, in turn, modelled on Euryalus and his mother. See Parkes (2012) on *Theb.* 4.246.

[740] If we consider Atalanta's story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10.560-704), more similarities and differences emerge. Both women wed two of their suitors, a reluctant Joseph in Mary's case and an eager Hippomenes in Atalanta's. While Mary does so in compliance with the decision of their parents, a lost bet and eros lead Atalanta to unite with Hippomenes, and Venus will eventually punish the couple for their impiety.

[741] At *Theb.* 10.758 Monoeceus' appearance is said to be so divine that he seems to have a celestial origin.

[742] The death of Menoeceus is like a weapon that pierces the heart for his father Creon (*Theb.* 10. 619), as that of Jesus is for Mary (*Chr.* 3.722; 5.879).

Mary's lamentation continues after the removal of Jesus' body from the cross in book 6, and her lamentation over his entombment is equally multilayered (*Chr.* 6.77-98).[743] Now that grief has left her speechless and with unkempt hair,[744] her companions cry and fill the surrounding wood (*Chr.* 6.78: *Responsant flebile saltus*) just as Thebes resounds with Leucothea's laments for her son Melicertes (*Theb.* 6.14: *Echioniae responsant flebile Thebae*). Again, a mother who will be worshipped, who is prematurely bereft of a son, and who ascends to the sky, is the inspiration for Vida's Mary. In Statius, Melicertes is a point of comparison for Opheltes, another son who passes away long before his mother. When Mary recalls the prophecy of the virgin mother in book 3, without realising that it referred to her (*Chr.* 3.304-6: *sed prae tunc omnibus unum / forte mihi ante oculos* […] / *immotum fixumve manebat*), she uses the same words that Statius employs to indicate Opheltes and his mother Euridyce (*Theb.* 6.160: *fixum matri immotumque manebat*). Both mothers are compared to an animal whose offspring have been devoured by a predator (*Chr.* 5.773-81 *Theb.* 6.186-92).[745] Here too the deceased son stands in contrast to Jesus, who will live forever.[746] Lastly, Mary has a predecessor in Ovid's Hecuba. The Trojan queen has just mourned over the body of her daughter Polyxena, a sacrificial victim who has willingly died to placate the wrath of Achilles' shade. After having lamented her loss, wishing for her own death (Ov. *Met.* 13.516-22), and kissing the dead body just as Mary does (*Chr.* 6.83: *atque oculos fovet ore patens in pectore vulnus* – Ov. *Met.* 13.490-1: *lacrimas in vulnera fundit / osculaque ore tegit consuetaque pectora plangit*), Hecuba spots the corpse of her son Polydorus on the shore. Pain makes her appearance like a stone (Ov. *Met*. 13.540: *devorat ipse dolor, duroque simillima saxo*); Vida uses the same simile to depict the lifeless and silent Mary (*Chr*. 6.86: *frigida, muta silet, gelidoque simillima saxo*). In both circumstances, water is involved for the washing of the corpses (*Chr*. 6.88: *Pars calidis corpusque lavant et vulnera lymphis* – Ov. *Met*. 13.531-2: *quid moror interea crudelia vulnera lymphis / abluere*),[747] and while the mothers keep quiet the women around them are vocal (*Chr.* 6.77-8 – Ov. *Met.* 13.538). The typical contrast drawn between "pagan" and Christian might be at work here, judging from Hecuba's violent reaction following her initial shock. She immediately retaliates by gouging out the eyes of the murderer of her son, Polymestor, in a frenzy that could not be more different from Mary's behaviour.

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[743] The *Aeneid* provides material for this scene as well. The image of Mary holding Jesus' dead body (*Chr.* 6.82-3: *heu, natum complexa sinu, miserabile corpus. / Atque oculos fovet ore patensque in pectore vulnus*) is highly reminiscent of Aeneas' reaction to the sight of Pallas' corpse (*Aen.* 11.40: *ut vidit levique patens in pectore vulnus* – 11.59: *tolli miserabile corpus*).

[744] Von Contzen, Poleeichtner, Glei, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 359 pinpoint that a reworking of an Ennian line is at work here: *Chr.* 6.81: *aegro corde comis passis totoque cruentum* – Enn. Fr. 10.349 Sk.: *aegro corde comis passis*.

[745] The simile has a famous precedent in Lucr. 2.352-63.

[746] It is worth noticing that a group of late medieval manuscripts of the *Thebaid* marks passages of laments (*Theb.* 5.608 Hypsipyle over Opheltes; 8.736 Tydeus after receiving the fatal blow; 9.49 Polynices over Oenicles; 12.321ff. Argia over Polynices). Even extracts from the poem contained in *florilegia* sometimes focused on laments. A perfect example is the XI-century collection of Latin poetry called *Cambridge Songs,* where Argia's lament appears twice (*CC* 29=*Theb.* 12.325-48; *CC* 31=*Theb.* 12.325-35) along with Hypsipilye's (*CC* 30=*Theb.* 5.608-16). See Olsen (1985) 521-7, Battles (2004) 4-6, Newlands (2012) 122-7 and (2013), Wetherbee (2016) 230. On Statian *lamentationes* in the Middle Ages see Anderson (2020) 81.

The points of contact with these passages from the *Metamorphoses* and the *Thebaid* suggest that Vida was aware of the prominence of the female perspective in those poems, perhaps under the influence of late medieval or early Renaissance interpretations.[748] Hence, the echoes of epics such as Ovid's and Statius' that extensively engage with female characters seem especially suitable for the representation of Mary, who epitomises femininity in Catholicism. Being the mother of the Saviour, her contribution to the *telos* of the narrative is giving birth to her offspring.[749] Along with this task, though, she also embodies the figure of a lamenting mother, a type of character that has a prominent role in the *Thebaid.*[750] It has been argued that female lamentations in Statius' poem function as a catalyst for the creation of pathos. If this is true, then the reminiscence of the pain of the mythical mothers mentioned above may have the effect of enhancing Mary's agony in the eyes of a reader who can detect that model.

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[747] The expression occurs also at *Theb*. 1.527: *parte alia iuvenes siccati vulnera lymphis,* where Polynices and Tydeus wash their wounds at the banquet organised by Adrastus.

[748] The criteria behind the selection of excerpts in *florilegia* might reflect the tastes of readers of those ages, e.g. privileging certain themes or scenes.

The teleological structure of the *Aeneid* was a more appropriate prototype for a foundation story based on the fulfilment of prophecy.[751] The *Christiad,* after all, retells the story of the foundation of Christianity: the coming of Christ is a counterpart of Rome. In the Annunciation scene, Vida refashioned some expressions that in Virgil's epic belong to passages where one god makes a promise to another. The angel foretells to Mary the greatness of her Child in two lines that resemble the ones in which Jupiter prefigures the future glory of the Romans (*Chr.* 3.344: *Supra homines, supra aspicies se tollere et ipsos / coelicolas* – *Aen.* 12.839: *supra homines, supra ire deos pietate videbis*).[752] Since Jupiter is talking to Juno, Mary finds herself in the position of the goddess, a patterning that occurs also in her speech in front of the Cross, as we have just seen, although in the *Christiad* the angel delivers the information, not the Father himself. During the Annunciation Mary consistently mirrors another goddess, Venus. The kingdom of her future Child has no limits in space or time (*Chr.* 3.346-9: *Nam pater omnipotens atavorum in sceptra reponet / pristina regnantem late, regumque sedebit / in solio neque enim metas neque tempora regni / accipiet. Toto aeternum dominabitur orbe*), just like the Empire granted by Jupiter to Venus' descendants (*Aen.* 1.253: *sic nos in sceptra reponis?* – 1.278-9: *his ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono: / imperium sine fine dedi*).[753] The link between Venus and Mary is corroborated by those between Aeneas and Jesus and between Anchises and Joseph, whose role in the narrative Vida dramatically emphasised in comparison to the Gospels. Joseph is the internal narrator of most of Book 3, where he reports the story of Jesus' birth and infancy from his point of view, and partakes in some events of Jesus' adulthood. John the evangelist and prophet in the *Christiad* addresses him by evoking the latter's marriage bond with Mary (*Chr.* 3.101-102: *nymphae dignate superbo / coniugio*), just as the seer Helenus addresses Anchises by mentioning the latter's union with Venus (*Aen.* 3.475: *coniugio, Anchisa, Veneris dignate superbo*).[754]

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[749] I highlight the role of femininity in this chapter in particular because of the relevance of Mary as a mother and her literary models, but I do not mean to reduce the part that women play in Vida's poem to matters of succession.

[750] On the role of femal lamentation in the *Thebaid* see Micozzi (1998) and Voigt (2016).

[751] Not that the poems of the post-Virgilian tradition were lacking in that respect. Von Albrecht (1967) 334 pinpointed the relevance that Virgil's conception of history had on a Christian thinker such as Augustine. On the latter's reception of Virgil, see MacCormack (1998).

[752] Hardie (2012) 419.

7.2 Historical Succession

Epic has an intrinsically historical function: it *is* history, as it were, in as much as it aims to transmit the memory of a past time, whether real or not.[755] This historical aspect of epic is usually intertwined with its panegyrical dimension, generally related to connections claimed between the people or institutions that patronise the poets and the events narrated in their works. Ancient Roman epics usually have an overt, albeit much-debated, panegyrical function. Numerous passages of the *Aeneid* are closely connected to Augustus and his family, from Jupiter's prophecy in Book 1 through the appearance of the soul of Marcellus in the Underworld to the depiction of the Battle of Actium on the Shield of Aeneas.[756] The narrative itself is the foundational story of a political institution, Rome, and those who facilitated the creation of the poem claimed to represent that institution. Similarly, the ending of the *Metamorphoses* dwells on the dawning of Roman history and pays homage to Augustus. Lucan's panegyric of Nero at the beginning of the *Bellum Civile,* be it sincere or not, presents that emperor's reign as worth all the troubles of the Civil War. In *Punica* 3 Jupiter prophesies the radiant Flavian age and its three emperors. Valerius Flaccus addresses Vespasian at the outset of the *Argonautica,* and Statius celebrates Domitian in the opening passage of the *Thebaid.* Claudian conceived the panegyrics that he wrote for his patrons as epic poetry.[757]

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[753] *Ibidem*. Readers should also keep in mind the presence of the Christian interpretation of *Eclogue* 4. See section 3.5.

[754] See also Di Cesare (1964) 120 and Schulze Roberg (2011) 174. The way Joseph addresses Pilate (*Chr.* 3.106 *Dicam equidem. Nec, dux, tibi magna arcana silebo*) parallels, *inter alia*, Anchises' words to his son (*Aen.* 6.722: *dicam equidem nec te suspensum, nate, tenebo*).

[755] Auerbach (1946); Battles (2004) xv.

[756] On the paradigmatic significance of each scene of the Shield for the history of Rome see Harrison (1997).

The connection these poems have with the contingent political structures within which they were produced has typically been perceived as an intrinsic feature of the genre by modern scholarship.[758] The panegyrical dimension of the genre was perpetuated in the Renaissance when epic poetry still functioned as a means of praising rulers and institutions.[759] Vida himself wrote a *Felsinais* and a now lost *Julias* to celebrate the exploits of Pope Julius II. The *Felsinais,* never published, recounted the liberation of the city of Bologna in 1506 from the tyrant Giovanni Bentivoglio by the troops of Julius II.[760] Even the *Christiad* reveals traces of a panegyrical dimension, as is demonstrated by the author's claims about the papal commission of the poem in the note at the end of the last book and in his letters.[761] Many High Renaissance popes fashioned themselves as legitimate heirs of ancient Rome, particularly the Augustan age. Allusions to passages of the *Aeneid* had been exploited for political purposes from late antiquity, even in genres other than epic.[762] The sources available nowadays attest that sermons delivered for the popes during the fifteenth century and the first two decades of the sixteenth habitually resorted to ancient history and literature to convey a Christian message.[763] In an oration composed for the dedication of a statue of Pope Leo X, who commissioned the *Christiad,* the humanist Blosio Palladio explicitly compared the Catholic Church to the Roman Empire, Pope Julius II to Aeneas, and the latter's successor, Leo himself, to Numa.[764] By the time Vida finished his poem, the 1527 Sack of Rome had seriously compromised the dream of a new Roman Empire led by the Papacy.[765] Whether that event impacted Vida's plan to celebrate the Holy See in his epic cannot be established on the basis of the text. But be that as it may, it does not seem to have prevented him from endorsing the legitimacy of the Catholic Church. In general, that endorsement was projected into a remote past since the story recounted in the *Christiad* played out around 1500 years before its composition.[766] Given the aforementioned self-perception of the Catholic Church in the Renaissance as heir of the Roman Empire, the panegyrical dimension of the poem is thus conceived in terms of historical succession, an operation somewhat akin though not identical to that of the *Aeneid*.

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[757] Ware (2012) ch. 1.

[758] Quint (1993) 3-10 identifies two rival traditions in the epics of the Latin Western World, "epics of the imperial victors" and "epics of the defeated", the first one epitomised by the *Aeneid,* the other by the *Bellum Civile*. In his view, the *Aeneid* brought to completion the politicisation of the genre that had been put in place in the past, e.g. Alexander the Great's appropriation of the figure of Achilles as his epic model. Alexander's funerary tribute to Achilles at the site of Troy would be re-enacted by Lucan's Caesar during his station at the same site in *Bellum Civile* 9, an attack to the foundational myth recounted by Virgil.

[759] Hardison (1962) 71 and Hardie (1993a) 302. For an overview of some panegyrical Neo-Latin epics produced in Northern Italy during the fifteenth century, see Lippincott (1989). See Gwynne (2017) 200-1 on epic's vicarious survival through panegyrics after the fall of the Western Empire.

[760] Haye (2011).

[761] Schaffenrath (2015) 66-7.

The presentation of Christianity as a *renovatio* of the Roman Empire dates at least to late antiquity and is still present in the *Christiad.* For instance, in Joseph's account of Christ's birth, the incarnation of the Word in Jesus (*Chr.* 3.508-10: *Iam tunc Caspia regna / responsis vatum horrebant, iam Nilus et omnis / Aegyptus trepidare*) is assimilated to the revelation of the coming of Augustus (*Aen.* 6.798-800: *huius in adventum iam nunc et Caspia regna /*

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[762] Laureys (2015) 347 352, 355 also mentions Enea Silvio Piccolomini's self-identification with Virgil's eponymous hero in his *Commentarii*.

[763] O'Malley (1979) 31 and 57.

[764] See Hankins (2003) 469-510, an introduction to the history of the alliance of the Catholic Church with the humanist revival of Greco-Roman culture. He includes Vida in a literary movement whose goal was the replacement of pagan authors with a new canon of Christian literature.

[765] *Ibidem.*

[766] The assimilation of the Church and the Pope to an *imperium* and a *princeps* dates back at least to Pope Gregory VII's *Dictatus papae* (1075). See Stinger (1985) 243.

responsis horrent divum et Maeotia tellus, / et septemgemini turbant trepida ostia Nili). Likewise, the coming of the Child (*Chr.* 3.527-9: *Purpureos flores metite et candentia plena / lilia ferte manu, venienti ad limina lucis / dona parate Deo*) resembles that of Marcellus (*Aen.* 6.883-5: *manibus date lilia plenis / purpureos spargam flores animamque nepotis / his saltem accumulem donis*), and the arrival of Aeneas to Latium (*Chr.* 3.511-13, 514-15: *Vestri etiam audierant -si vera est fama- per oras / Ausonias iam iam venturum lucis ad auras / invictum regem* […] *qui se patria virtute potentem / seque suumque genus sublimi inferret Olympo* - *Aen.* 1.6: *inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum*). Just like Marcellus, Jesus is the hope of a bright future, and, as Aeneas will bring his people and his Penates to Latium, he will raise himself and his people to Heaven.[767] On the intradiegetic level, Joseph is addressing Pilate. The *vestri* of line 3.511 are the Romans of the beginning of the I century BC, who have just heard the prophecy of the advent of a new universal king, Virgil's *Eclogue* 4. Jesus' incarnation will bring an era of justice, religion and peace. Swords will be turned into ploughshares, the opposite of what the civil war occasioned at the death of Julius Caesar according to *Georgics* 1 (*Chr.* 3.537: *Tum ferus in falces curvas conflabitur ensis* – *Georg.* 1.508: *et curvae rigidum falces conflantur in ensem*).

We have already seen that a certain tension pervades the theme of *translatio imperii* in the poem, for the Romans subdued the world and crucified Jesus.[768] While their violent foreign policy could be and had been justified from a Christian standpoint,[769] their involvement in the Crucifixion was a more delicate subject. Complacency regarding the expansionism of the ancient Romans emerges from the explicit comparison between the parade of the angels at Jesus' Ascension and the triumph of a Roman consul back when the city ruled over the nations it had conquered (*Chr.* 6.704-5: *lateque subactis / iura daret populis rerum pulcherrima Roma*). Vida also seems to embrace the notion of a divinely ordained *translatio*: right before the *ekphrasis* of the Temple of Jerusalem, Jesus delivers an invective against the temple itself and the town, foreshadowing their destruction and the relocation of religious power to another city (*Chr.* 1.564-81). This transposition has been regarded as a Christian re-enactment of Aeneas' mission: just as the gods had the hero transfer the Penates from Troy to Rome, so will the Father make Rome the new religious world centre.[770] A Lucretian component in the language of this passage emphasises that this transfer was bound to happen.[771] In Jesus' words the temple will fall (*Chr.* 1.566: *versa repente dabunt labem ingentemque ruinam*), like the walls of the world in the *De Rerum Natura* (Lucr. 2.1144-5: *sic igitur magni quoque circum moenia mundi / expugnata dabunt labem putrisque ruinas*).

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[767] The parallelism Aeneas-Jesus is evoked again in the passage where Joseph exposes his wish to see Jesus' deeds and imitates Evander's desire to make his son Pallas assist to Aeneas' accomplishments (*Chr.* 3.530-1: *O mihi si quoque tam longe suprema senectae / pars maneat, quantum valeam tua cernere facta* – *Aen.* 8.516-7: *tua cernere facta / adsuescat*).

[768] See section 3.3.

[769] For instance, the *De Monarchia* Dante had claimed that the Roman Empire was founded and ruled by right. See Kallendorf (1988) 49-50.

The Transfiguration scene at the end of Book 1 strengthens the notion of a divinely established transfer of power. Here the Father himself assures Jesus that Rome will yield to Christianity and will welcome the Papal See (*Chr.* 1.911: *Atque adeo gravida imperiis Roma illa superba*). The words he pronounces are the same ones with which Jupiter in his speech to Mercury envisions Rome as the *telos* of Aeneas' journey (*Aen.* 4.229-30: *sed fore qui gravidam imperiis belloque frementem / Italiam regeret*). The *renovatio* of Troy through Rome is reenacted: the Resurrection and the ensuing rise of Christianity will enable the *renovatio* of the City. The latter's fate is sealed by the Father in the *Christiad* and by Jupiter in the *Aeneid* in two speeches addressed to their children, Jesus and Venus (*Chr.* 1.930: *Sic placitum* – *Aen.* 1.283: *sic placitum*).[772] But this historical sequence is conveyed also by the reworking of a line of Pythagoras' speech in *Metamorphoses* 15. In that passage, the Greek philosopher, a central figure for the theme of succession in Ovid's poem, illustrates how eras and civilisations succeed one another and predicts that Rome will one day rule the world. His message includes the prophecy of Helenus to Aeneas about the continuity between Troy and Rome (Ov. *Met.* 15.432: *Appeninigenae quae proxima Thybridis undis*). That the Father describes the same city in an extremely similar line on an analogous topic is hardly a coincidence (*Chr.* 1.912: *Apenninivagi quae propter Tybridis undam*). At the time of Jesus, Rome had already risen to the status of the hegemonic political entity in Europe and the Mediterranean, and so the Father is here talking about a later phase in Roman history, on an imaginary line that connects Troy, Ancient Rome and the Papacy.

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[770] Glei (2010b) 238.

[771] See section 4.2.

[772] Another expression that occurs in connection to the rise of the Roman Empire in ancient literature figures in this episode *vis-à-vis* Rome: *Chr.* 1.923: *Illa malis semper melior se tollet ad astra*. The Penates tell something similar to Aeneas when they address him during his wanderings throughout the Mediterranean sea

Given this overt link, it is easy to see why Vida took pains to portray the Romans, and Pontius Pilate in particular, in quite a positive light, although only as far as this portrayal kept within the boundaries of the Gospels, the Catholic tradition and the internal coherence of the poem. After all, the Prefect and his soldiers were the perpetrators of Jesus' death, and, for all the notion of *translatio,* a complete denial of their responsibility would have been too much. In the worldview of the poem, the Papacy presents itself as an improvement on ancient Rome and not as a mere heir or a surrogate. The representation of Pontius Pilate, the most prominent Roman in the narrative and the one who has to take a decision in the trial, betrays the author's sympathy for him.[773] From his very first appearance, Pilate displays sincere interest and compassion for Jesus (*Chr.* 2.982: *et secum sortem capti miseratur iniquam*). He resembles Aeneas as he watches the souls of the dead on the shores of the Styx waiting to be carried to the other side of the river (*Aen.* 6.332: *multa putans sortemque animo*

(*Aen.* 3.158: *idem venturos tollemus in astra nepotes*). Silius resorted to it to describe the discipline taught by Quintus Fabius Maximus (Sil. 7.93-5: *discedere signis / haud licitum, summumque decus, quo tollis ad astra / imperii, Romane, caput parere docebat*).

[773] Di Cesare (1964) 176-80, 236-42 and 266-70 pinpoints the positive characterisation of Pilate and tellingly observes that his empathy for Christ is a symbol of the future Roman acceptance of the latter.

miseratus iniquam), and the Latins pitying their leader Turnus (*Aen.* 12.243: *Turni sortem miseratus iniquam*).

As a representative of a culture different from that of the main character, he plays the role not only of the Latins (*Aen.* 11.121: *conversique oculos inter se atque ora tenebant*), but also of the Carthaginians and Dido (*Aen.* 2.1: *conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant* – 4.469: *illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat*), when he consults Joseph and John to inquire into Jesus' life (*Chr.* 2.976-7: *Ille autem iuvenis procero in corpore fixos / intentusque oculos intentusque ora tenebat*). The parallelism with the queen of Carthage is structural. As she invites Aeneas to talk about his adventures since Troy fell, so does the Roman governor have Joseph and John reveal Jesus' past and nature. Joseph and John parallel Aeneas as internal narrators, for the next two books are mainly devoted to two long digressions similar to the long flashback in Books 2 and 3 of the *Aeneid*. Both Dido and Pilate marvels at the heroes' appearance, sense their divine nature (*Chr.* 5.4: *nec iam obscurum genus esse deorum* – *Aen.* 4.12: *credo equidem nec vana fides genus esse deorum*) and take care of them. As leaders, they appear before crowds (*Chr.* 5.87-8: *Tandem Romulides iuvenum stipante caterva / fascibus egreditur patriis ostroque superbo* – *Aen.* 1.496-7: *forma pulcherrima Dido, / incessit magna iuvenum stipante caterva*).[774] Supernatural beings deceive both of them with the help of an ancillary entity and cause them to have an ultimately inaccurate perception of reality. Through the action of Cupid, Venus makes Dido fall in love with Aeneas and perceive her union with him as a legitimate marriage, whereas Satan, through the personification of Fear, eventually persuades Pilate into condemning Jesus.[775] Even when he is on the wrong side, Pilate has an affinity with Aeneas. At the sight of Fear he reacts (*Chr.* 5.327-8: *surrectaeque comae steterunt*,

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[774] For this point of contact see von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 312.

[775] This hellish creature is a counterpart of Juturna (*Chr.* 5.323: *fertque refertque volans circum importuna sonansque* – *Aen.* 12.866: *fertque refertque sonans clipeumque everberat alis*).

gelidusque per ossa / horror iit, genua aegra labant, vox faucibus haesit) as Aeneas does in front of ghosts and gods (*Aen.* 2.774=3.48: *obstipui, steteruntque comae et vox faucibus haesit;* 4.280: *arrectaeque horrore comae et vox faucibus haesit*).[776] Conversely, the mob interrupting the governor (*Chr.* 5.243: *Non tulit et medium sermonem abrupit acerbans*) re-enacts one of Dido's angry outbursts (*Aen.* 4.388: *his medium dictis sermonem abrumpit*). Pilate does not entirely lose his mind, despite the diabolic influence that drives him at the end of the trial. He still defines the old habit of the Jews of releasing a prisoner as mere superstition (*Chr.* 5.234-5: *vestrorum antiqua parentum / vana superstitio*), a commonplace of Neo-Latin poetry, whose ancient source is most likely the false belief that Evander excludes as a foundation for the rites performed by his people (*Aen.* 8.185-8: *non haec sollemnia nobis, / has ex more dapes, hanc tanti numinis aram / vana supersitio veterumque ignara deorum / imposuit*).[777]

This positive representation of Pilate could not exceed the boundaries of Catholic orthodoxy, as already suggested, so even the sympathy generated by the association with these models cannot neutralise the impression that his final compliance with the Jews' and Satan's will betray his character.[778] What connects the Catholic Church of Vida's time with the life of Jesus on a historical and religious level is the experience of the disciples. They are the forerunners of the men who run the very institution that commissioned the poem. In spite of the human shortcomings that they display in the Gospels and that Vida keeps in his version of the story, the disciples ultimately constitute the means by which Christianity spreads throughout the world. At times their weakness surfaces, as in the case of Peter's betrayal. The scene is shot through with Lucretian language:[779] the similarity with the *prosopopeia* of Nature underlines the disparaging tone with which Peter is described:[780] the narrator addresses the disciple's cowardice (*Chr.* 2.928: *quae vitae tanta cupido?*) with an echo of Lucretius' scorning of men who, not content with reaching old age, are afraid to die (Lucr. 3.1077: *quae mala nos subigit vitai tanta cupido?*).

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[776] See also Zaccaria Ferreri *Lugdunense somnium* 134: *vividus abscessit color, et vox faucibus haesit.*

[777] E.g. Mantovano *Blasius Cappadox* 2.594; Bonomo *Carmina* 1.13.

[778] The Roman soldiers that obey his orders and torture, humiliate and kill Jesus are depicted as the main adversaries of the *Aeneid*. When they eventually surround him during the Passion episode, they are joined by the infantry and the cavalry (*Chr.* 5.432-7: *Armati circumsistunt clypeataque iuxta / agmina densentur, collucent spicula longe, / spiculaque et rubris capitum cava tegmina cristis, / aereaque alterno conspirant cornua cantu./ Pars pedes insequitur, pars sese lucidus altis / fert in equis*). The passage is highly reminiscent of the section in book 7 in which the Latins gird themselves for the upcoming war against the Trojans. Some of them advance as infantrymen, others mount on horses (*Aen.* 7.624-5: *pars pedes ire parat campis, pars arduus altis / pulverulentus equis furit*; 7.793-4: *insequitur nimbus peditum clipeataque totis / agmina densentur campis*) and wear helmets (*Aen.* 7.632: *tegmina tuta cavant capitum*). Vida's Romans play the horn as the Romans to whom the Latins are compared in the Virgilian original context (*Aen.* 7.615: *aereaque adsensu conspirant cornua rauco*). They also resemble the citizens that rebelled against their tyrant Mezentius (*Aen.* 8.490: *armati circumsistunt*).

On several occasions, Vida recalls the authority Jesus confers on his disciples, their selfless sacrifices, the accomplishment of the evangelical mission and the divine guidance that accompanies them and their successors.[781] Piety is one of their defining features. In the Transfiguration scene, John, James and Peter pray raising their hands and eyes to the sky (*Chr.* 1.839-40: *Stabant orantes taciti pariterque supinas / tendebant sine voce manus ac lumina coelo*). While the gesture is a common one, the words utilised are inspired by Aeneas' prayer to the Penates after their appearance in *Aeneid* 3 (*Aen.* 3.176-7: *tendoque supinas / ad caelum cum voce manus*). All these characters are about to or have just witnessed a marvellous event which corresponds to a divine revelation (the true nature of the Son/Italy as the final destination of the Trojan survivors) and takes place after dusk (*Chr.* 1.830-1 – *Aen.* 3.147). In Vida, the Father has sent the Son and says that he will make the disciples worthy of Heaven. In Virgil, the Penates claim that Apollo has sent them and that they will raise the descendants of the Trojans to the stars (*Chr.* 1.895-6 – *Aen.* 3.158).

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[779] Bruère (1971) 33 argued that Peter is equated to Drances more than once in the *Christiad.*

[780] The crowning rooster signalling the betrayal (*Chr.* 2.949: *Auroram in tectis solitae acri voce vocare*), for instance, recalls the rooster mentioned by Lucretius in his analysis of the various forms of the *semina* (Lucr. 4.710-1: *gallum, noctem explaudentibus alis / auroram clara consuetum voce vocare*). See section 3.6.

[781] Polleichtner (2007) detected a potential point of contact between *Chr.* 6.639-40, on one hand, *Aen.* 4.291-4 and Val. Fl. 5-387-8, on the other. In the biblical sources Jesus assures his disciples that they will not have to think about what to say in front of tyrants because they will have divine assistance. Vida seems to have drawn from the lines of the *Aeneid* and the *Argonautica* just mentioned the idea that the disciples will not have to wonder about the right timing in which to address said tyrants either. This is what Aeneas does in Virgil at the prospect of telling Dido he has to leave Carthage. Jason asks Medea to tell him not only how but also when to address Aeetes.

As companions of the main character, however, the disciples are mainly assimilated to Aeneas' followers. When Jesus asks the Father to protect their souls, he mentions the hardships they have to endure (*Chr.* 1.846-7: *Hos saltem, qui me patriaque suisque relictis / per varios casus lectissima corda sequuntur*), as Aeneas in his *O socii* speech during the storm refers to the adversities that he and his men suffered (*Aen.* 1.204: *per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum*).[782] The appearance of Anchises to Aeneas stresses this parallelism between the disciples and the Trojans: the old father appears to his son in a dream to encourage him to lead his people to Italy (*Aen.* 5.729-30: *lectos iuvenes, fortissima corda, / defer in Italiam*).[783] Furthermore, the Father's promise of future generations of stout Christians who will intone the sacred law and instruct the world (*Chr.* 1.897-8: *Quos tu olim aspicies hac religione nepotes / surgere, nate, tibi!*) reflects the recommendation of the seer Helenus that the ancient rites be kept intact by Aeneas, his companions and their descendants (*Aen.* 3.409: *hac casti maneant in religione nepotes*).[784]

Thanks to their love of Christ and the eternal perspective that it brings, the disciples will be able to face death without fear and increase the number of Christians through their example.[785] They will be instruments of a cause greater than themsleves, like the Caesarians in the *Bellum Civile,* who prefer to kill themselves than be prisoners of Pompey (*Chr.* 1.892-4: *haud mortem horrescent pergentque in funera laeti / innumeramque suo parient tibi sanguine gentem / proiectu vitae et mortis amore superbi* - Luc. 4.516: *proieci vitam, comites, totusque futurae, / mortis agor stimulis*), or like Maeon in the *Thebaid,* who, after reporting the slaughter of the Thebans by Tydeus, refuses to live under Eteocles' control and takes his own life (*Theb.* 3.69-71: *iamque ut mihi prodiga vitae / pectora et extremam nihil horrescentia mortem / aspicias*).[786] Their courageous stubbornness is also indirectly placed on the same level as Antigone's and Argia's when Creon decides to kill them (*Theb.* 12.679-80: *ambae hilares et mortis amore superbae / ensibus intentant iugulos*).

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[782] Associations between this speech and religious piety can be found even in Renaissance Virgilian commentaries. An annotated copy of the 1514 Aldine Virgil highlights this passage of the *Aeneid* as one that can arouse *pietas* in the reader. See Kallendorf (2013) 216.

[783] Even random people who add themselves to the throng of Jesus' followers (*Chr.* 4.844-6: *Nec minus ingentem huc comitum adventare novorum / cernere semper erat numerum, matresque virosque / omnibus idem animus*) are indirectly compared to those who leave Troy with Aeneas (*Aen.* 2.796-7: *Atque hic ingentem comitum adfluxisse novorum / invenio admirans numerum, matresque virosque*; 3.60: *omnibus idem animus*).

[784] Sedulius, too, refashioned this line in *carmina ad Sedulium spectantia* 3.69*: hac vestri maneant in religione nepotes.*

[785] John, the Beloved disciple, for instance, describes his affection for Jesus with several rearranged sentences: the erotic love of *DRN* 4 (*Chr.* 4.809: *et dulcem toto iactantem corpore amorem* – Lucr. 4.1054: *seu mulier toto iactans e corpore amorem*), a source that, as we have seen, emerges also in the description of Jesus during his childhood at *Chr.* 3.392; Virgil's friendship with Gallus (*Chr.* 4.814: *huius amor tantum visus mihi crescere in horas* – *Ecl.* 10.73: *Gallo cuius amor tantum mihi crescit in horas*); Dido's attraction for Aeneas (*Chr.* 4.821: *Promissis nec vana fides* – *Aen.* 4.12: *nec vana fides*). In his words, the love of Christ is unbreakable

The prospect of the Christian afterlife sets the disciples apart from all these models: their mission purports to go beyond the scope of the events of ancient "pagan" epics. The spread of Christianity, notwithstanding its connection with the city of Rome as an earthly point of reference, is ultimately a matter of spirituality. This insurmountable gap is almost nowhere more evident than in the first episode of the poem. Upon his arrival at Jerusalem, Jesus selects his twelve disciples from the throng that follows him and let them know that the hour of his death is getting closer. He presages that a gruesome death awaits both him and his disciples but adds that their goal is reaching Heaven, a place where they will find peace:

Audete, et lucis amori
istius aeternum vitae immortalis honorem
mecum omnes praeferte. Domus non haec, non hae

(*Chr.* 4.816: *Quique adiere semel, validis compagibus haerent*); this image is the opposite of the bonds of nature that do not last for eternity according to Manilius (4.828: *concutitur tellus validis compagibus haerens*).

[786] The expression used by Vida to indicate the disciples' abnegation for life (*Chr.* 1.891: *contempto lucis amore*) is common in Flavian and Late Antique epics. In the *Thebaid* it occurs when Mars effaces from the mind of the warriors their feelings and their desire to live (*Theb.* 8.385-7: *arma ciens aboletque domos, conubia, natos. / Pellitur et patriae et, qui mente novissimum exit, / lucis amor*). In the *Punica,* it is a symptom of Paulus' courage (Sil. 10.42-3: *per medios agitur, proiecto lucis amore / Hannibalem lustrans Paulus*). Jason in the *Argonautica* reassures Medea of his gratitude for her (Val. Fl. 7.490-3: *'tune' ait 'Aesoniden quicquam te velle relicta / credis et ulla peti sine te loca? redde tyranno / me potius, recipe ingratos atque exue cantus! / quis mihi lucis amor?*). In Claudian the expression is associated with Roman leaders (*VI Hon*. 451-2: *ducum, quibus haud umquam vel morte parata / foedus lucis amor pepigit dispendia famae*), whereas in Prudentius is referred to victims that are about to be slaughtered (*Perist*. 6.71:*ferventes animas amore lucis*).

sunt vobis propriae sedes. Vos aetheris alti
lucida templa vocant, stellis florentia regna,
pax ubi secura ac requies optata laborum:
hic domus, hic patria. Huc omnes contendite laeti
angustum per iter; vestras hic figite sedes.

(*Chr.* 1.52-9)

Previous scholars have illustrated how Heaven in this passage corresponds to Italy in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 3.167: *hae nobis propriae sedes*; 3.393: *is locus urbis erit, requies ea certa laborum*; 4.347: *hic amor, haec patria*; 7.122: *hic domus, haec patria est*), and that the path to it recommended by Jesus coincides with the road toward political success criticised by Lucretius (Lucr. 5.1132: *angustum per iter luctantes ambitionis*).[787] It should also be added, however, that the Lucretian phrase *lucida templa* as well, which indicates Heaven here and the sky in the *De Rerum Natura*, highlights the contrast between the materialistic source and the spiritual destination of the disciples (Lucr. 1.1014: *nec mare nec tellus neque caeli lucida templa* - 2.1038-9: *Quam tibi iam nemo, fessus satiate videndi, / suspicere in caeli dignatur lucida templa*).[788] This opposition is also active in the evocation of another source, a line of the *Georgics*: Jesus invites his friends to pursue the honour of eternal life, an honour that in its original context, Aristaeus' lament to his mother Cyrene, pertains to worldly accomplishments (*Georg*. 4.326: *en etiam hunc ipsum vitae mortalis honorem*).

7.3 Poetic succession

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[787] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 15 remarked that Jesus here is filling the role of Aeneas in books 4 and 7. In support of their argument, it is worth noting also that Peter tries to dissuade him, thus embodying Dido (*Chr.* 1.71: *Hos animos, hanc confestim precor exue mentem* – *Aen.* 4.319: *oro, si quis adhuc precibus locus, exue mentem*).

[788] The phrase made an appearance in other Neo-Latin poems, even Christian ones; see Giovanni Francesco Pico *Mysteria Crucis* 105-6: *dicite foelices animae, quae lucida templa / incolitis.*

Ancient Roman epicists often display concern over their role within the history of the genre. This self-awareness finds expression mainly through two procedures: explicit programmatic statements and intertextual engagement with the poet's predecessors.[789] With the report of his dream in the proem of the *Annales* Ennius presents himself as Homer's legitimate successor, an influential declaration of intent, in turn, indebted to the Hesiodic vision of the Muses in the *Theogony* and its Alexandrian afterlife. Lucretius hints at this dream at the beginning of the *De Rerum Natura*, when he acknowledges his debt to Ennius.[790] In the *Aeneid* Virgil goes out of his way to mark himself as the new Homer and the new Ennius. Ovid's self-consciousness is manifest in numerous passages of his *oeuvre*, including the end of the *Metamorphoses*. Lucan's anti-Virgilian intertextual strategy permeates his *Bellum Civile.* The relationship of Flavian epics with the rest of the tradition is no less elaborate. To narrow down the scope to only a famous example of an explicit programmatic statement, it is difficult not to mention Statius' overt homage to the *Aeneid* in the epilogue to the *Thebaid.*[791]

Vida does not explicitly express concern for his self-positioning in the genre but sets his poem against "the lies of the Greeks" (*Chr.* 6.882: *Graium…mendacia*), and, most importantly, takes pain to re-elaborate some of the programmatic statements of his predecessors in his direct interventions. At the opening of the *Christiad* the narrator's prayer to the Holy Spirit (*Chr.* 1.11-14: *Fas mihi te duce mortali immortalia digno / ore loqui interdumque oculos attollere coelo / et lucem accipere aetheream summique parentis / consilia atque necis tam dirae evolvere causas*) emulates the invocation in the proem of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.8-9: *Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso / quidve dolens regina*

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[789] Hardie (2003) 356.

[790] On Lucretius' extensive use of Ennius in his prologue see Harrison (2002b).

[791] On poetic succession in Roman epic Hardie (1993b) ch. 4 and Hinds (1998) ch. 3 are the best starting points, although scholarship in this area is constantly growing, e.g. the volume on Flavian intertextuality edited by Coffee, Forstall, Galli Milic and Nelis (2019).

deum tot volvere casus).[792] Likewise, the prayer to the angels that precedes the catalogue of the tribes of Israel is a Christian adaptation of Ennius' invocation to the Muses in the *Annales* (*Chr.* 2.317: *qui levibus magnum pedibus pulsatis Olympum* – Enn. *Ann.* 1 Sk: *Musae quae pedibus magnum pulsatis Olympum*).[793] Here the poet asks the angels to help him reach the hidden recesses of Heaven previously untrodden (*Chr.* 2.326-7: *vos me sublimi sistetis tramite vectum / avia per superum loca*) and a crown no one has claimed before (*Chr.* 2.327; 330: *Me iuvet alite* […] /*et petere insolitam coeli alta e rupe coronam*). These images bring to mind Lucretius' poetic manifesto, the trackless places (Lucr. 1.926-7=4.1-2: *avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante / trita solo*)[794] and the crown with which the poet asserts he will gird his temples (Lucr. 1.927; 1.929=4.2; 4.4: *iuvat /* […] *insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam*).[795] The narrator's shudder at the thought of recounting the Passion of the Lord, whose immensity the sky can not contain (*Chr.* 5.201-4: *horresco meminisse, Dei quae vera propago / pertulerit mala factus homo Deus, auctor Olympi, / quem mare, quem tellus vacuique patentia tractus / atria nec capit immensi plaga lucida coeli*), mirrors the reticence of the narrator of the *Thebaid,* who does not dare to sing of Domitian's deeds and wishes him a long life even if the sky were to reclaim him (*Theb.* 1.24-31: *licet artior omnis / limes agat stellas et te plaga lucida caeli. / [...] / sollicitet [...] / maneas hominum contentus habenis, / undarumque terraeque potens, et sidera dones*). Mario Di Cesare argued that at the end of the *Christiad* (6.880-96) Vida follows a post-Virgilian practice probably suggested by the closure of the *Thebaid*.[796] The Father promises his Son that fifteen centuries down the line people throughout the world, and especially in Northern Italian towns such as Cremona, will recount his story and youths and maidens sing his praise. The underlying assumption in this speech seems to be that the *Christiad* and its reception constitute a solace for the death that Christ had to endure. Such a forward-looking, self-reflexive consideration about the impact of the poem, indeed, emerges also from *Theb*. 12.810-5, where Statius recognises that the *Thebaid* is already well-received and that pupils in Italy are studying it at school. Di Cesare's argument can be expanded if one considers that other ancient authors reflected on their posthumous fame at the -sometimes supposed- end of their works (e.g. Horace's *Ode* 3.30 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15),[797] and that this gesture of Statius had been especially influential during the middle ages, as exemplified by works such as Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria*, Boccaccio's *Teseida* and Chaucer's *Troilus*.[798] And yet, Vida does not seem to have inherited Statius' sense of belatedness, at least in this passage. There is no yielding to the *Aeneid*, no mention of the Gospels or of any other source in the Father's speech. While the absence of any patent allusion to a pagan author is understandable given the identity of the speaker, the same can hardly be said about the Sacred Scriptures. This ostensible lack of deference, nonetheless, does not necessarily equal unbridled arrogance, for Vida overturns a selfish and bold stance like the one Ovid assumes at the end of the *Metamorphoses* about the immortality of his poetic fame (Ov. *Met*. 15.875-6: *parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis / astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum*). During his last speech Jesus recalls the Father's promise that people will sing of him (*Chr*. 6.830-1: *tu tamen hos olim fore, qui praestantibus ausis / per gentes canerent nostrum indelebile nomen*).[799] The focus is not ultimately on the poet's achievements and renown: what will last forever is God's name.

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[792] According to Von Albrecht (1967) 334 n.10 and Hardie (1993a) 312 n.39, Vida is also reworking the ending of Petrarch's *Africa.*

[793] The body of sources for this type of statements mixes at least one non-epic text: the narrator argues that if his poem will stand the test of time, it will prevent future generations from blotting out the renown of Israel (*Chr.* 2.312: *ne penitus saeclis obliviscentibus aetas*), a remark fashioned after Catullus' request to the Muse to preserve the name of his benefactor Allius (Cat. 68.43: *ne fugiens saeclis obliviscentibus aetas*).

[794] The expression occurs also in Ausonius *epist.* 21.72: *avia perlustrasse vagus loca Bellerephontes,* another self-aware passage. Whether Vida drew from it or not is hard to establish. A supposed engagement with Ausonius has not been seriously considered as of today.

[795] Von Contzen, Glei, Polleichtner, Schulze Roberg (2013) ii 131.

[796] Di Cesare (1964) 105-6.

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[797] *Ibidem*, he quotes a similar passage from Petrarch's *Africa* (9.229-38).

[798] On the ending of these poems see Battles (2004) 13-6; Kytzler (2007); Edwards (2015) 509; Anderson (2020) 79-81.

[799] See Hardie (2012) 421.

Conclusion

Although it might have become a *topos* by now,[800] it is worth remembering, to paraphrase Charles Martindale, that our current readings of classical authors are informed by the chains of interpretations that separate their texts from our times.[801] Given its publishing success and its impact on authors such as Torquato Tasso and John Milton, the highly classicising style of Vida's *Christiad* constitutes a milestone in the history of epic poetry and has indirectly contributed to the modern interpretations of the genre.[802] While this poem has traditionally been considered highly Virgilian, this thesis has tried to demonstrate how extensively Vida borrowed from and engaged with a larger body of ancient Latin epics. These works had been printed, studied and imitated in Italy between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Even as dangerous a poem for Christianity such as the *De Rerum Natura* was tolerated, if not appreciated aesthetically, in religious circles, although it was not part of school *curricula* in the same way as the *Aeneid,* the *Metamorphoses,* the *Bellum Civile* and the *Thebaid,* which had been read during the Middle Ages. They were appreciated for their contents, which were often suited to the moral expectations of many educators, and because of their exemplary Latin, as testified, for instance, by pedagogical treatises like Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's *Tractatus de liberorum educatione* (1450) and Battista Guarino's *De ordine docendi et discendi* (1459). The paratextual material at our disposal gives us some clues as to how these texts were studied. A common practice was the excerption of sentences and the compilation of *florilegia*. The existence of tools such as commonplace books containing phrases of ancient Latin writers is a key consideration in understanding Renaissance Neo-Latin poetic productions. The intertextual framework of the *Christiad* does not exclude their use and, in many cases, resembles the art of centos. However, it is very likely that Vida engaged directly with the contents of ancient poems. The similarities between the hypotexts and the hypertext sometimes go beyond the repetition of the same words and involve the wider context of the passages. A concise review of the debate on literary imitation puts Vida's technique in its literary context: many humanists (e.g. Petrarch, Salutati, Barzizza) practised and advocated for the imitation of ancient Latin writers, especially, but not only, Virgil and Cicero.

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[800] As Hardie (2013b) 192 said.

[801] Martindale (1993) 7.

[802] Lists of editions and translations of Vida's works can be found in Di Cesare (1974).

Vida himself reflected on literary imitation in his *De Arte Poetica* (1527), a hexameter poem in 3 books on how to write in the style of Virgil. Here he openly recommends and claims to practice the art of drawing Latin expressions from the ancients. He even goes so far as to define his borrowings as overt and covert *furta*. His favourite model is Virgil, whom he reveres almost as a divine being, but in a short account of ancient Greek and Latin literature he displays his appreciation for pre-Virgilian poets as well as a distaste for post-Virgilian poetry, which he regards as the start of a long literary decline. This point of view does not seem to be totally backed by his practice even in the *De Arte Poetica* itself, judging from the refashioning of phrases excerpted from many sources, including first century AD epic authors.

On more than one occasion, Vida informs us that the popes Leo X and Clement VII commissioned the *Christiad*, an ideological input reflected in potential allusions to the then-contemporary Rome and the centrality of the Papacy. The political, cultural and religious role of the contemporary city is arguably foreshadowed in the representation of ancient Rome in the poem. This juxtaposition entails the use of "pagan" material for Christian purposes and was certainly not a novelty in the sixteenth century. Vida assumes a Christian attitude towards classical culture, filtering “pagan” material, often working by way of *Kontrastimitation*. In keeping with the teleological nature of the Latin epic tradition and with the message of the Gospels, Vida’s poem strives for totality, because the contingency of the events it narrates, namely the life, death and Resurrection of Christ, have cosmic overtones and repercussions on humanity as a whole.

Mario Di Cesare’s attempts at classifying Vida’s borrowings through an *a priori* and dogmatic hierarchy might seem too mechanical a procedure nowadays. A more flexible, pragmatic approach is better able to identify and account for nuance. The engagement with the ancients is a crucial component of the *Christiad,* as the analysis of many of its themes demonstrates. While the Scriptures are the basis for the description of the nature of the universe in the poem, Lucretius endows Vida with a poetic model for his cosmological subject. Virgil remythologised that Epicurean source in an ultimately religious view of the world, and Vida followed suit but from a Christian perspective. Memory and the transmission of knowledge through song play a central role here as in the epic tradition. Figures such as John the evangelist and the bard Simon resemble Lucretius’ Epicurus, Aeneas as the internal narrator in books 2 and 3 of the *Aeneid,* and the Virgilian Sibyl. Jesus, instead, is the ultimate master: the more men know him, the closer they get to Salvation. The information that he divulges and that is necessary to get to Heaven is often expressed through phrases used by Lucretius, whose materialistic doctrine is thus overturned by application to an opposite message.

Larger-than-life characters and events are a typical feature of epic and the Gospels brim with this type of material. Vida recounts Jesus’ miracles while drawing extensively on the Roman epic tradition. The turning of water into wine during the wedding feast at Cana, for example, polemically alludes to the banquet at Pirithous’ and Hippodamia’s wedding as narrated by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. Here Vida implicitly compares the calm behaviour of the Scriptural characters with the degeneracy of the Centaurs in the mythological account. Likewise, the episode of the Gadarene demoniac released by Jesus inverts Erichtho's reanimation of a dead body in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. This *oppositio in imitando* also characterises marvels such as the Resurrection, which utilises phrases taken from Lucretius' discussion of the unity of body and mind, or the angel visiting Jesus during the latter's infancy, a Christian and positive rendering of Jupiter's visit to and subsequent punishment of Lycaon in the *Metamorphoses*.

The fight between the forces of Satan and those of God is another opportunity to epicise the Biblical source**.** As usually happens in the Virgilian tradition, Hell triggers the narrative. Satan embodies traits associated with the antagonist party and represents the Junonian impulse that tries to stop the accomplishment of the hero's mission. He is both mindful of the past setbacks he had to suffer and afraid of a new potential defeat. His demons are similar to some monstrous figures of classical mythology. The depiction of Hell, indeed, relies on the *Thebaid* and the Virgilian Underworld for the most part. The portrayal of the Father, Heaven and the angels, on the other hand, is much less straightforwardly defined. These heavenly forces in symmetrical fashion exhibit the same characteristics that the epic tradition attributes to the side of the protagonists. The Father plays the part of Virgil's Jupiter and his relationship with the Son mirrors that of his pagan counterpart with his daughter Venus in the *Aeneid*. Ancient Gigantomachies inspire his chastisement of those who disobey Him. Moreover, the non-corporeal essence of the angels calls to mind the same consistency of the gods in the *De Rerum Natura*. Possession, a common means through which chthonic entities exert control over humans in epic, occurs here as well. The demons inflame the leaders and the chief priests of Jerusalem against Jesus, assuming the role of monsters such as Virgil's Allecto, Ovid's and Statius' Tisiphone. Satan himself leads Judas to betray his master and arouses in him a folly resembling the love passion condemned by Lucretius and experienced by Dido. The hero of the story is Jesus, but, as a true God and a true Man, his models are divine, human and at times deified humans. Among the most significant associations between Jesus and some pagan figures that had been made before his time, Vida resorts to Dionysus, Hercules, Epicurus, and Aeneas. However, since the rationale of Christianity is completely different from that of non-Christian cultures, Christ's victory paradoxically comes about through his death. He is compared to the "defeated" hero of the *Aeneid*, Turnus. His Crucifixion represents the necessary sacrifice of the scapegoat, which is central in the Virgilian tradition, where usually a man, the *unus pro cunctis/multis*, has to or is willing to die for the common good.

The survival of a community is usually at stake in the narratives of these poems. It is no wonder if a particular concern is expressed for the youngsters and the hardship they go through. Sometimes they die, and Jesus shares this destiny as well. His relationship with his parents and the characterisation of the latter mirrors other filial relationships in epic. But the preservation of a stock is not the only matter of interest for the genre: the record of pivotal events with all-encompassing consequences is just as essential, especially for their connection to present times. The representation of the Romans in the *Christiad* is not neutral, as demonstrated by the attempts to mitigate Pontius Pilate's responsibility in the trial, perhaps because of the ideological identification of ancient and Renaissance Rome. The beginnings of Christianity in the Gospels represent a fundamental foundation of the authority of the Catholic Church. The *Christiad* reports the vicissitudes of the disciples and compares them to those of followers such as Aeneas' men and Lucan's Caesarian soldiers. Even when it comes to the epicist's self-awareness, Vida does not seem to be an exception, as demonstrated by the appropriation of several programmatic statements of his forerunners.

There is now a much stronger basis for arguing that Vida deliberately imitated the ancient Latin epic poems of the Virgilian tradition. There is no doubt that Virgil is by far his favourite model both qualitatively and quantitatively. The borrowings from the *Aeneid* are more numerous and usually involve a higher number of and more marked words than those from other literary works. However, Vida regarded Lucretius and the post-Virgilian epicists of the first century AD as valuable, albeit problematic, poets and interlocutors, as testified by the extra layers that their presence in the *Christiad* adds to its meaning. With this methodology, Vida offered Christianity a classicising epic poem that could represent a counterpart to the epics of the Roman tradition, above all the *Aeneid.* This highly learned *opus* retells a foundational history with cosmic overtones while relying on an elaborate literary façade and an intricate poetic programme.

After Virgil, Lucretius seems to be the poet Vida engages with the most. The *De Rerum Natura* represents an inescapable ideological and poetical term of reference for him. If by following in the footsteps of the *Aeneid*, the *Christiad* declares its ambition to equal in the modern world the ambition and success of the most important Latin epic, its engagement with the *De Rerum Natura* aims to show that even the most radically different of ancient philosophical systems can be reshaped and surpassed by the revealed truth of Christianity. This strategy of appropriation is not without risk, for at every step Vida's intertexts remind readers of an alternative, and deeply erroneous, world-view, and while he must be assumed to rely on the readers' powers of interpretation and doctrinal steadfastness, these cannot be taken for granted. Polemic through allusion opens a potentially wide space between authorial intention and the reader's interpretation, and this holds in the *Christiad* even for the adoption of Lucretian expressions that do not directly contradict its creed and morals. Vida's audience is thus presented at almost every turn with intertexts that provoke deep cognitive dissonances.[803] Their presence cannot simply be explained on the basis of Lucretius' poetic excellence (other, less controversial models were widely available), nor can they be taken as covert signs of repressed heresy on the author's part, a mechanic and ultimately unsatisfactory approach. Rather, they must be seen as part and parcel of Vida's didactic strategy: he invites readers to recognize the model, savour the daring contrast between Lucretian form and Christian content, and reaffirm their faith by way of comparison with a dangerous and opposite worldview. Readers, however, are not left alone as they grapple with the risk of heresy stemming from a misguided assessment of the role of Lucretius in the poem, for the programmatic symmetry with which those intertexts are adapted points toward a resolution of the cognitive dissonance through a systematic transfiguration of that foreign material within the terms of Catholic doctrine.

A similar strategy seems to be at the basis of Vida's use of expressions drawn from the post-Virgilian tradition. On one hand, they usually present a lesser degree of certainty to a scholarly analysis compared to the borrowings from Virgil and Lucretius, for they are either made of a smaller number of or more common words. On the other, the ideologies, the attitudes and the materials they contain are often in sharp contrast to the religious contents of the *Christiad.* In this regard, Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and Statius' *Thebaid* are more significant interlocutors than Silius' *Punica* and Valerius' *Argonautica,* whose presence emerges in fewer and more widely scattered passages. By engaging with works to which he assigns a secondary role, Vida is once again following in the footsteps of Virgil. The *Aeneid* too primarily imitates the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* but other poems such as Apollonius' *Argonautica* or Ennius' *Annales* impinge on it, though to a lesser extent.

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[803] Although with some differences, the readers of *Paradise Lost* face a similar challenge according to Fish (1967). Confronted as they are with an apparently persuasive and captivating temptation to take a stand against God, they are led to evaluate their reaction to the vicissitudes narrated and to acknowledge their fallen state as sinners in need of Redemption, an introspective didactic operation that in Milton's time and cultural environment was further encouraged by religious and philosophical practices of self-analysis.

Today's readers, with lists of *loci similes* and databases at their disposal, can be made aware that many expressions occur in one or more ancient poets. They are confronted every single time with an interpretative conundrum posed especially by texts such as centos or with significant centonian components. Are these verbal echoes to be interpreted as relevant for the creation of meaning or are they just *tesserae* that facilitated the poet's work of composition? The question does not usually have a straightforward answer and ultimately rests with the reader's agenda.[804] Recent scholarship on centonian intertextuality tends to exclude the possibility that there is such a thing as transplanting an expression from one text to another with no allusive potential.[805] In light of this consideration, Vida's technique appears to cover a wide range of nuances on a hypothetical spectrum of literary imitation that has at its poles, respectively, a minimalistic refashioning of the words of a previous author and an in-depth engagement with the source on an ideological level. This thesis argues that many though not all of these similarities take on a deeper meaning when read against their original contexts, for they often seem to extend beyond a mere verbal level and superficial circumstantial commonalities. This does not mean to suggest that the parallel passages were always supposed to be acknowledged as part of the intention of the author. However, the fact that Vida himself in the *De Arte Poetica* (3.257-63) wishes that his readers be able to identify his *furta* to appreciate his mastery, while not necessarily guaranteeing that a meaningful engagement with the sources is always at play, at least offers a basis for taking a cautiously optimistic stand about the meaningful intent of Vida's borrowings in the *Christiad*.

To state the obvious, future research on the rest of Vida's literary production and his historical and literary environment will probably allow us to refine our understanding of the poem and its engagement with ancient Roman epic tradition. Several disciplines such as textual criticism, linguistics, comparative literature, literary theory, theology, figurative arts, as well as cultural, military, and book history have the potential to offer more foundations for balanced and more historically accurate *vistas* not only in Vidian criticism but also in the fields of Neo-Latin literature and reception studies on the whole, where much work still needs to be done.[806] Unfortunately, the relative scarcity of tools with reliable amounts of data such as thesauri that encompass the entire history of Latin might hamper research like this and may create distortions of perspective.[807] A phrase that occurs only in one classical author according to the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* might have been used in centuries not covered by that project, and an author like Vida might have taken it from a post-classical source.[808] This latter scenario is probably unlikely,[809] but not to be excluded entirely when it comes to the *loci similes* analysed here, considering the cultural centrality of ancient Roman epics in sixteenth Italy and the intertextual framework discussed in the previous chapters. Still, glossing over the problem runs the risk of trivialising the text, depriving it of further layers or even compromising its very readability. Therefore, one of the structural limitations of this research is attributable to the objective limitations of the current research tools.[810]

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[804] The reader constitutes an inescapable receiving pole; see Martindale (2013) 171.
[805] McGill (2005) 25.

Notwithstanding these types of impediments, this thesis can also be seen as a case study, an example of Neo-Latin literature scholarship as classical reception with a special focus on epic and intertextuality.[811] The relationship between the *Christiad* and the epic tradition can be analysed from other perspectives such as metre and style that I could not cover here. Exploring Vida's dialogues with classical texts in his other works beyond the *De Arte Poetica* and the *Christiad* and trying to have a clearer image of the reading community or communities implied by early sixteenth century Neo-Latin poetry could also help better contextualise the findings presented here.

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[806] Jensen's (2020) application of the dichotomy etic/emic approach to Neo-Latin literature exemplifies how new methodologies can enrich the field.

[807] Admittedly, a lot of improvements have been made since Spitzer (1955) 118 bemoaned this lacuna.

[808] The website Italian Poetry in Latin 13th-16th centuries (http://mizar.unive.it/poetiditalia/public/) was available only at the very last stages of the development of this thesis. It covers an impressive number of Neo-Latin texts written in Italy during the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and will hopefully include many others in the years to come. Other national Neo-Latin literary *corpora* would benefit from the creation of similar databases.

[809] On this point see Skafte Jenssen (2012) 1010-1.

[810] Toolkits such as www.qcrit.org can prove valuable for intertextuality and stylometry in Neo-Latin studies; see Bolt, Flynt, Chaudhuri and Dexter (2019) 206.

I believe we are now in a stronger position to answer two overlooked questions: is there any irreducibly Renaissance aspect or component in the *Christiad* other than some linguistic features, the hypothetic engagement with Dante and the references to contemporary events or *realia*? What is unique to this poem even within its literary landscape? If originality is that which cannot be reduced to the resemblances to something else,[812] now that we have substantially weighed up the presence of ancient Latin epics in Vida's poem, it might be useful to investigate its relationship with biblical epics from late antiquity to the sixteenth century.

Moreover, many other Neo-Latin poems have received even less scholarly attention than the *Christiad.* Studying them should not be of interest only for Vidian scholars, but it might provide further insights into the reception of classical authors,[813] if one wants to limit the scope only to the interests of classicists. Hundreds of hexameter poems written in Neo-Latin have not received attention at all,[814] and, while it is perhaps unreasonable to expect in every case the same richness as Vida's work, recent editions, commentaries and essays[815] suggest that this relatively unknown continent has still a lot to offer to the contemporary reader.

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[811] Recent scholarship on the reception of ancient epic has paid attention to performances (music, theatre, opera, dance, and film). See the collection edited by Macintosh, McConnell, Harrison and Kenward (2018). Harrison (2007b) and (2008) are overviews on, respectively, the reception of ancient epic in Victorian poetry and of Virgil in nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first-century literature in English. On the scholarly interest for Neo-Latin intertextuality in general, see Kallendorf (2016).

[812] Conte (2007) 24.

[813] Whether someone will pursue this path or not is open to debate. The openness of the canon in the field of Classics raises problems and enriches the field at the same time. On the polarity between hyperinclusivity (unbounded expansion of what deserves the attention of classicists) and hypercanonicity (maximal focus on the traditional canon), and on the search for a third way see Güthenke-Holmes (2018). On the different attitudes toward the value of the classical canon for Reception Studies see the provocative Wood (2012).

[814] Schaffenrath (2015) 61.

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[815] See, for instance, Gwynne (2018) on Francesco Benci's *Quinque Martyres,* an epic poem influenced, among others, by the *Christiad.*

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