Lamenta sola conferunt solacium - the sorrows of Eugenius II[1]

Lamenta sola conferunt solacium - las tristezas de Eugenio II

Andrew Thomas FEAR
University of Manchester
andrew,fear@manchester.ac.uk

Abstract

This article examines the theme of sickness in the poetry of Eugenius II of Toledo and demonstrates how Eugenius seeks both to find personal solace in its treatment and also deploys it as a pastoral tool aimed at the edification of aristocracy of Visigothic society. It further argues that Eugenius's work shows that a much more positive attitude to classical pagan poetry could be found in seventh century Iberia than that taken by Isidore of Seville.

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The Visigoths of Iberia were not blessed with a surfeit of poets, however the kingdom's flourishing culture in the seventh century did produce one, Bishop Eugenius II/IIII of Toledo, whose work has survived *in extenso* for us.[2] Eugenius's verse formed part of the so-called "Isidorean Renaissance", a period of cultural flourishing brought about by the labours of the great polymath Isidore of Seville in the previous generation.[3] In it, we can see that, just like their progenitor Isidore, the learned elite of the day wished to situate themselves in the cultural ambience of the classical past, but, at the same time, had important misgivings about the core values of that past and so endeavoured to bend them towards a more Christian purpose.

1. I would like to thank the audiences at the Late Antiquity seminar at the University of Oxford and the Classics Research Seminar at the University of Manchester for their helpful and insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

2. The best edition is that by P.F. Alberto.

3. See J. Fontaine, *Isidore et la Culture classique dans l'Espagne Wisigothique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959) 863-888.

There can be no doubt of the popularity of Eugenius's work. His poetry circulated not only within the peninsula where within a generation it was already being cited in textbooks such as Julian of Toledo's *Ars Grammatica,* but also without; some of his extremely varied output, for example his poetry on the nightingale, became widely diffused across Western Europe in the early middle ages.[4] Those poems however are by no means typical of his work which is in the main didactic (there are many distychs of this nature) and above all admonitory: another widely diffused poem was his *Contra Ebriatatem* or *Against Drunkeness* (poem 6).

We are fortunate enough not to have to read Eugenius's poems in a vacuum. As well as his *libellus*, there are two letters of his letters extant and a short near-contemporary biography written by the successor to his see, Ildefonsus of Toledo, as part of his *De Viris Illustribus*.[5] Through these we learn something of the man himself and can use this information to interpret his poetry. It has become almost an article of faith in literary criticism to avoid seeing an authorial voice in early medieval poetry and, indeed, such an approach can be naive. Nevertheless, it seems equally wrong dogmatically to deny that an authorial voice can ever be present in the poetry of the period and so eschew evidence that is available to us. As will be seen, although Eugenius's poetry can be read without assuming an autobiographical voice, the fit of this external evidence to many of his themes suggests that here this would be unwise, and that the bishop did have a personal concern in what he was writing.

According to his biographer, the young Eugenius left Toledo in a "sage flight", *sagax fuga*, in search of an eremitic life in Zaragoza. Such flights are a common topos of the Holy man and we should treat this one with suspicion.[6] The young Eugenius did indeed go to Zaragoza, however it is likely that he was drawn to the town not because he wished to be a hermit but rather because of its reputation for the arts and in particular ecclesiastic music, something promoted by the town's bishop, John (Ildefonsus, *De Viris Illustribus* 5). While there he became the close friend of John's brother, Braulio, who was to be made bishop of the see in his turn after the death of his sibling.

Eugenius returned to Toledo in AD 647 when he was promoted by King Chindaswinth to become bishop of this, the foremost see of the kingdom, located

4. Y-F. Riou, "Quelques aspects de la tradition manuscrite des Carmina d'Eugène de Tolède : du Liber Catonianus aux Auctores octo morales", Revue d'histoire des textes 2 (1972): 11-44.

5. See V. Yarza Urquiola and C. Codoñer, *Ildefonsus Toletanus:De virginitate Sanctae Mariae, De cognitione baptismi, De itinere deserti, De viris illustribus* = CCSL 114A (Turnhout: Brill, 2007).597-616).

6. The same topos is found, for example, in biographies of Julian of Toledo.

in its *urbs regia*. His poetic and musical accomplishments were at least part of the reason for the king's choice.[7] Ildefonsus (*De Viris Illustribus* 13) speaks of the Chindasvinth's "violence" in making the appointment, but this too is likely to be a variation of the "nolo episcopari" trope rather than to be founded in fact.[8] Although Braulio (*Ep.*31-33) protested that his protegée was being taken from him, only to be put firmly in his place by the king, there is no evidence that Eugenius was unhappy with his promotion. Indeed, in the preface to his edition of Dracontius's poetry, albeit a work written by royal command, he thanks the king for allowing him to put on his "gleaming pallium" and "behold the royal throne gleaming with gold" (*Praef. ad Dracontii Librorum Recognitionem* 3-5).

In Toledo Eugenius was to write a book on the theology of the Trinity, but the majority of his work was more cultural than theological: the reform of church music and liturgy. He also edited and supplemented Chindaswinth's favourite poetry, that of the African Dracontius, purging it of verses which he judged as "tepid in expression, awkward in style and supported by no reasoning. In them could be found nothing which would please the mind of an educated, or teach that of an uneducated, man". This "cloud of errors", as Eugenius terms it, was probably composed of theological as well as literary infelicities.[9] In the verse preface to his edition, Eugenius likens himself to the Homeric scholar Aristarchus of Samos, Virgil's literary editors Plotius Tucca and Lucius Varius, and the Virgilian critic Valerius Probus. These choices show well that he prided himself on his literary skill and saw himself as a continuator and conserver of the Classical tradition. Given that he was working under a royal commission, we should assume that King Chindaswinth, a bibliophile who had amassed a library of his own, saw his court in similar terms (Braulio, *Ep*. 26).

As well as his treatise on the Trinity, Eugenius also published two *libelli*, one of prose works, the other of poetry. The prose *libellus* with its "varied subjects" sounds very much like a compilation and this is how we should also see its still surviving brother which contains over one hundred poems. It is an anthology of all Eugenius's poetical endeavours rather than a solitary venture into the world of verse. While the dating of any of Eugenius's poetry is uncertain, a

7. M. L. Tizzoni, T*he Poems of Dracontius in their Vandalic and Visigothic Contexts* (Leeds: unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2012), 183-185.

8. Eugenius's epitaph for the king is often taken as evidence as his dislike for his monarch, but this is badly to misread the piece, see Fear, "Moaning to some purpose: the laments of Eugenius II", in A. Deyermond and M. J. Ryan (ed.s) *Early Medieval Spain: a Symposium* (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College, 2010): 55-78.

9. See Tizzoni, *op. cit.,* 173-228.

small clutch of poems (8-12) which deal with themes around Zaragoza are likely to have been composed when Eugenius was a cleric there, long before king Chinadaswinth gave him, willing or no, his promotion. The first of these (poem 8) celebrates the library, albeit Eugenius speaks only of the books of the Bible, amassed in Zaragoza by bishop John, (*fl.* 619-631). Two more refer to specific churches within the town. One (poem 9) takes as its subject the Church of the Eighteen Martyrs of Zaragoza and pays tribute to the earlier Spanish Christian poet, Prudentius, using clear overtones of his poem on the same subject (*Peristephanon Martyrorum* 4) The other (poem 10) describes the miracle of liquefying blood which took place in the Church of St Vincent. A further poem (12) commemorates the foundation of a Church of St Felix at a monastery in nearby Tatanesium by Aetherius and his wife Teudesvintha. In this group we can see a useful synergy between Eugenius's poetry and his biography. Ildefonsus's *Life* tells us that Eugenius dedicated himself to the tombs of the martyrs in Zaragoza, while cultivating (as was proper) the study of wisdom and the life of a monk. The poem on the Eighteen Martyrs shows us the site of Eugenius's devotions and that on St Felix where he pursued his monastic lifestyle. There are no parallel occasional pieces in the corpus of Eugenius's work that celebrate Toledo and it is best to see the poems as part of Eugenius's early oeuvre rather than a simple expression of nostalgia.

However it is the final of these early poems - that in praise of the Church of San Millán de la Cogolla which is of most interest here. Despite of the caution expressed by Alberto,[10] it would be perverse not to see Eugenius's poem on San Millán as making a direct reference to this specific site. The Church was the burial-place and cult centre of Saint Aemilian (now the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla), a highly unorthodox eremtic saint who had been active in La Rioja some 200 miles to the North West of Zaragoza. After the holy man's death, his cult flourished and Eugenius's friend and patron Braulio, was commissioned to write his *Life.*[11] In its preface Braulio says that he had asked Eugenius to compose the order of a Low Mass to be held in honour of Aemilian (*Vita Scti Aemiliani* 3). Thus we see that Eugenius had an early direct connection with the saint and the site.

Braulio's *Life* is a cleverly contrived piece which praises Aemillian while warning the faithful against any attempts to imitate his lifestyle. It is wide-ranging in content. The vast majority of the work is dedicated to the saint's activities

10. *op.cit.,* 141.

11. Edited by L. Vázquez de Parga, *Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopi. Vita S. Emiliani,* (Madrid: CSIC,1943).

during his long life, but there is also an account of some of the healing miracles that had subsequently occurred at his shrine. To these Eugenius adds a further miracle that occurred there: that of a lamp whose oil replenished itself.[12]

Thus Eugenius had many themes to choose from when he composed his short poem. However, he focuses firmly on the healing power of the deceased saint. The poem begins with an ascending tricolon of sorrow:

> *Whom sorrow, whom guilt, whom decline from disease oppresses or vexing sickness makes shiver, let him, with devout breast, hasten his path here and, setting his cares aside, in everything fare well.*[13]

This stress on physical illness is played out in the rest of the poem, Aemelian is first portrayed as an exorcist and then given the ability to cure all kinds of diseases, even to raise the dead. Eugenius uses references from his old friend's *Life* of the saint as a quarry for his own work. For example, line nine – *Here to the lame are given footsteps and light to the blind* – looks back to Braulio's story of a blind and lame woman who Braulio (*Vita Scti Aemiliani* 37) tells us was healed at the shrine and his striking assertion of the resurrection of the dead at the shrine – *life returns to the departed* – is drawn from Braulio's account of a four year old girl from Pratum (perhaps modern Pradilla) being resurrected there and his declaration that Aemillian was the Elisha of his age (cf *2 Kings* 13.21) . However, other miracles Eugenius lists such as the saint's curing of lepers and his ability to banish *languor omnis*, all weariness – a particularly Eugenian theme, are not to be found in Braulio's *Life* and may show that Eugenius was drawing on a miracle list kept at the church of a type that we know existed in Merovingian Gaul and Christian North Africa[14]. The poem ends by urging pilgrims to the shrine to add his name to their prayers. These prayers are assumed to be groanings of misery (*gemitum… querellis*). While he does not explicitly say so, the plea implies that Eugenius himself had been or was in need of the saint's powers.

12. Such miracles of replenishment were a feature of Visigothic worship. Gregory of Tours, *Gloria Martyrorum* 23-24 records that the font in the church at San Juan de Azanalfarache (ancient Osset) just outside Seville, was said to behave in this fashion at Easter.

13. *quem maeror, quem culpa pressit quem denique morbi*
tabida, convexans aut valetudo quatit
huc festinus agat devoto pectore cursum
anxia deponens prospera cuncta geret.

14. I. Moreira, Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul (Ithaca & London: Cornell U.P., 2000), 125-131.

This early poem contains many of the themes which run through the bulk of the *libellus*: sickness, death, and the efficacy of repentance expressed through violent sorrow. Eugenius went on to write on personal illness, the arrival of old age, the subject of his longest extant poem (14), and composed no fewer than four autoepitaphs. Not content with his own dirges, he also composed epitaphs for others, strikingly for both King Chindaswinth (poem 25) and his queen, Recciberga (poem 26). While it could be argued that such topics are the concerns of every clergyman, Ildefonsus's biography of Eugenius shows us that these themes were not clichés for the bishop, but touched him personally and almost constantly. We are told there that Eugenius was slight and of little physical strength, though this was compensated for by his devotion. (*De Viris Illustribus* 13) He is specifically said here to have been "weak in body", *parvus robure,* and this natural lack of strength may, were, as seems likely, he to have pursued an ascetic lifestyle, have been exacerbated by his devotion. Ildefonsus's account is corroborated by one of only two surviving letters written by Eugenius. This was written while Eugenius occupied the see of Toledo to his friend Braulio, bishop of Zaragoza (Braulio *Ep.*35). In it Eugenius speaks of his growing sickness and of the storm of diverse troubles which surrounded him. This is the ill health that no doubt resulted in the weariness, *languor*, which is a constant feature of his poetic complaints. The "storm of diverse troubles" may well be in part a reference to sickness, but it is found in the context of asking Braulio for advice about the validity of a deacon's ordination into holy orders. The problem is that at the height of the ceremony the candidate was maliciously cursed rather than blessed. As the senior cleric of the realm we would expect Eugenius to rule on such matters rather than look for advice. Combined the letter, biography, and poetry suggest a sickly individual who was deeply devout but disliked the confrontation which was part of a bishop's pastoral duties. Two poems that deal with the joys of peace (poem 4) and a quarrel which befell him (poem 35) point in the same direction.

Unsurprisingly for Eugenius physical suffering came with sorrow. The introductory poem to the *libellus* is a prayer which concludes with a plea that God give the poet "rain flowing with tears", *undosum fletibus imbrem,* which will allow him to wash away his sins with his lamentation and win pardon on the day of his death. This *undosus imber* and prayers presented in sorrow are again themes present throughout the *libellus*.

At some point in his life, Eugenius was seriously ill. His poem on the subject (poem13) describes his symptoms in graphic detail for his readers and there is no good reason to doubt their reality. There is both mental and physical fatigue "broken in spirit, I drag along my weary limbs" (*fractus animo languida membra traho*) accompanied by physical and mental anguish "while pain bores

into my bones, my heart quakes with terror" (*dolor ossa terit, cor pavor inde quatit*). Eugenius complains that he is always "weary", *fessus,* a complaint he returns to in many of his other poems and is again borne out by Ildefonsus's biography. His bowels seem to be the main cause of the problem: "Everything I enjoyed in health is noxious to me now. Delicate, my stomach bears its afflicted entrails (*omnia quae prosunt validis sunt noxia nobis*)". The poem ends with a prayer for Christ's mercy and for a cure as the poet cannot endure such a concatenation of suffering, "it wearies the spirit to bear so many ills all at once" *(Nam taedet animum tot mala ferre simul*). The obvious Biblical comparandum for this poem is the *Book of Job*, especially chapters 14 and 30: "his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn"; "My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest" (14.22; 14.30; cf 30.27). It comes as no surprise that *Job* appears to be Eugenius's favourite book of the Bible and produces the largest number of *loci similes* in his poetry. Though a miserable tale, *Job* has a happy ending as we are told that after testing his servant, *the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first* (42.12). This is a theme taken up in the New Testament too: "We consider happy those who have endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome God gave, that God is very tender in his affection and merciful" (*James* 5.11). But remarkably this message is not echoed in Eugenius's poem, there is no hope to be found at its end, we are left simply with despair.

Eugenius's poem on Aemilian suggests that his illness came early in his life and the certainty and horror of death and its nearness are constant features of his poetry. Gerald Brenan saw him as "a man who suffered from bad health and was obsessed with the fear of death, and this and the nature of his times gives most of his poetry a deeply pessimistic tone."[15] Poem 2 of the corpus is entitled in our manuscripts "A Warning of Man's Mortality". Here too Biblical texts, especially *Job*, are in Eugenius's mind. The poem is a warning against the folly of coveting the things of this world and the need to live a Christian life. Out of the many troubles to be found in *Job*, Eugenius choses to lay stress on how quickly earthly felicity can change. The things of this world, like a fleeting shadow, *umbra tenuis,* will vanish in a rapid end, *veloci fine*. In *Job* (14.1-2) man's life itself passes as such a shadow. Similarly we are told that the unwitting will be destroyed by a sudden storm, *praecipti turbine,* recalling *Job*'s (27.20) *tempest that stealeth* [man] *away by night*. The reader is also reminded that he can take nothing from this world, "poor, in poverty and naked you will go to

15. G. Brenan, *The Literature of the Spanish People* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1976), 14.

the shades," Again the reference to *Job* (1.21) is clear: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Between these warnings Eugenius also alludes to Christ's homily on the sheep and the goats and the need to help the poor, as good deeds are the only thing that one can take with one after death *(Matthew* 25.31-46). His own failure to live up to these ideals, like the shortness of life, is something which seems to sit heavily on the bishop's mind.

In poem five, *On the Shortness of Life*, Eugenius combines these themes with that of violent sorrow. We are told that our poet strives to sound forth his song in plaintiff wails (*carmen insonare nitor luctuosis questibus*). We are painted a bleak picture: the world itself is sick and near its end (*Mundus ecce nutat aeger et ruinam nuntiat*) all that it is ill is coming and all that was good flying away. The senescence of the world was one of the favourite themes of Gregory the Great, a Church Father much valued in Visigothic Spain, and so it could be assumed that Eugenius has simply drawn on what he has found in one of his favourite authors.[16] However, while at first sight this is simply a poem about the end of the world, it is in fact one about the end of Eugenius's world. When apostrophising himself, "Weep wretch Eugenius", we find that it is personal sickness that lies at the core of his concerns – "hateful weakness (*languor*) falls on *you*" (*plora Eugeni miselli, languor instat improbus*). Life passes, the end is nigh, wrath from heaven hangs over the poet, while the "messenger of death" knocks at the door. Eugenius stresses his weakness of will which has led him to abandon the eternal for the sake of the temporal and, as a result of this, the desolation of death when it comes. Then he will be alone, shorn not only of material goods but also of the company of those he loves – parents, relatives, his best companions will these all be gone. His only hope is that God will recognise how his tears show the sincerity of his repentance and thus give him rest: "behold the grief welling up from my very marrow" (*cerne fletum profluentem de medullis intimis*). The poem ends with a plea for believers both to seek the solace of their own distress by fostering the poor and also to "pour out your tears with me", *mecum lacrimas effundite*. The efficacy of weeping is central to Eugenius's message. In a fragmentary hymn (poem 5b) he complains to God "why do you reject our prayers and tears, why have you rushed away to avoid hearing us as we groan (*gementes*), save the weary *(lassis*) with your accustomed grace."

16.See Gregory, *Dial.* 3.38, *Hom in Ev.*1.1.1; and especially 1.1.5. John the Deacon's life of Gregory underlines the importance of the idea in his thought (*Vit. Greg.* 4.65). The notion of the world's senescence is also found in Augustine, *Ep.* 81 and ultimately draws on stoic thought.

The theme that sickness is a warning to turn to God and despise earthly life has been a constant of Christian teaching. In Eugenius's case it is particularly important that it is found in the *Regula Pastoralis* of Gregory the Great. This work was dedicated to Gregory's friend Leander of Seville and, like the rest of Gregory's work, much prized by the Church in Iberia. In the *Regula* Gregory tells us that the healthy are to be warned not to take their health for granted and to use it to advance God's work. Citing *Hebrews "*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (12.5-6) as a Biblical exemplum, he advises his reader that the sick are to be admonished precisely by telling them that their illness is a divine corrective which will, by warning them of the frailty of the flesh, prepare them for the heavenly life (*Regula Pastoralis* 3.12). Eugenius's poetry follows some of this advice, but the positive outcome of suffering is not present. The despondency of poem thirteen (and perhaps that of the fragmentary 5b) and its failure to make a link between earthly suffering and heavenly reward must lead the reader to wonder if although the bishop's own sufferings had led him to a theoretical acceptance of this doctrine, it was one which at times still left him overwhelmed by his own experience of pain.

It would be eccentric not to conclude that sickness had had a powerful effect on Eugenius's outlook on life. But even in the seventh century there were many who did not fall severely ill. Eugenius, like Gregory, also wants to confront these individuals, who perhaps saw their good health as a sign of God's approval of their lives, with his message of repentance. To do this another theme was clearly needed. This technique of varying the subject of one's preaching is again recommended by Gregory, who notes that a good pastor must address the differing groups of his flock "according to the quality of the hearers, in order to suit each class according to their own case". The result is that the effective preacher speaks "with the same doctrine, but not on the same topic" (*Moralia* 30.3.12).

Thus Eugenius moves from sickness which afflicts a few to old age which comes to all, sick and healthy alike. In doing so Eugenius heeds Gregory's general advice, but this new theme is very much his own as although Gregory is much exercised by the fact that, as he sees it, the world is in its dotage, he never discusses or complains about individual old age. In contrast, Eugenius wrote three poems on this subject. Two are short. In one of twenty lines (poem 14b) Eugenius keeps to his theme of the speed with which the end could come. "The reasons for my troubles", we learn, have arrived all too soon, as though he is but forty-nine and thus a *iuvenis,* albeit only by a year, according to Isidore of Seville's reckoning (*Etmologies* 11.2.5), he has been sought out by "slothful old age". The epithet here refers to the lassitude, *languor*, that old age brings, and Eugenius with his

love of contrast and wishing to make a point describes its arrival as coming in a "nimble rush", *praepete cursu*. The effects of old age's onset were stark: a grave illness brought Eugenius to death's door, bringing pain to all his body and while fever bored through his limbs, his flesh fell away. Neither food nor drink was of any help. The result of this suffering was to induce a terror of "death which is to be feared", *mortis horrendae trepidus pavore*. His second poem on the subject is but a quatrain (poem 15). This begins by telling the reader that old age brings nothing good or pleasing, but in line four concedes that at least its onset means that tired flesh is wary of the pleasures of the flesh.

Eugenius's masterpiece of misery however is his longest extent poem (14). Given in our manuscripts the title "A lament on the arrival of his old age", the poet casts his net far wider net than this implies and the poem artfully encompasses all of the themes previously discussed: the speed with which the end of life comes, the horrors of old age, sickness, death, and fear of the final judgement.

After an introduction of six lines in elegiac couplets where Eugenius informs us that he will now sing his dirges inspired by a new sorrow, "*dolore novo carmina maesta cano*", the metre is changed to iambic trimeters and six five line stanzas follow, graphically describing the onset of old age. In them Old Age is reified and addressed directly, *crudelis aetas, o senectus improba*, and described as devouring all that is fair: *cuncta pulchra ...devoras*. Eugenius reproaches his foe for behaving like a step-mother or one who cruelly runs through the wounded on the field of battle. There then follows a long list of woes that old age brings: health gives way to sickness, the senses become dull, beauty fades, bones begin to break, baldness and grey hairs set in, teeth break, mucus runs from the nose, the whole body trembles, feet spawn hard protuberances (perhaps a reference to gout), flem starts to be coughed up, liverspots and sores appear all over the body. Eugenius's list is made all the more graphic by his technique of apostophe, it is Old Age that does these things directly, "*you* break bones…" and his choice of violent verbs… "you *cut back* (*recidis*) hair and *shove in* (*inseris*) grey locks."[17]

17. This can be contrasted with the more gentle verbs and imaginary used by Ovid in his *Tristia* (4.8.1-4):

Iam mea cycneas imitantur tempora plumas,
inficit et nigras alba senecta comas.
iam subeunt anni fragiles et inertior aetas,
iamque parum firmo me mihi ferre grave est.

"Now my temples look like swans' feathers and white old age has dyed my black locks. Now come the years of frailty and a less active age, and now too it is an effort for me, all too weak, to carry myself around". If Eugenius knew this piece, he has deliberately chosen to present old age in a far more unpleasant fashion.

Once again Eugenius tells us that food and drink lose their appeal: – there is no consolation save lamentation, *lamenta sola conferunt solacia*. There then follows a short admonition about the vanity of the world.

After this Eugenius, draws breath, changes his metre back into elegiacs and changes his addressee, to the result of Old Age, Death. Like Old Age, Death's universality is immediately emphasised – it is *omnivorax*, the "devourer of all", it seeks out its victims actively, *sequeris,* and Eugenius's choice of vocabulary underlines the rapidity of its onset – *properata… rapido… adcelerent*…. Its looming presence deprives life of its joys – "the shadow to be feared arrives, radiant light takes flight", *umbra pavenda venit, lux radiata fugit.*

The consequences of death are then spelled out in a long list which parallels that cataloguing the tribulations of old age. Despite addressing Death directly as he had Old Age, these troubles are in contrast described in the third person, perhaps to emphasise the impersonal inevitability of the end. Bowel movements cease, sight and speech end, along with the sense of hearing and smell. Breathing too comes to an end, rigor mortis sets in and the blood grows cold. Finally the flesh decays, worms eat all and thus: "what seemed a man becomes decayed ash"*,* (*species hominis fit putrefacta cinis*).

This is bad enough, "I have sung of many fearful, many terrifying, things" (*multa pavenda quidem cecini multaque tremenda*) affirms Eugenius, but there is worse to come: "I fear still more that of which now weeping, I shall speak." (*sed mage quid verear nunc lacrimando loquar*). This fear is revealed to be that of the final judgement, made all the worse by the recognition of how vile and worthless a life he has led: "I have oppressed, stolen, despoiled, devised crimes", a confession that culminates in the admission that: "I have raged in bitterness, and nor have I been without killing" *(oppressi, rapui, nudavi, crimina finxi…. Nec sine felle furens, nec sine caede fui*). This striking statement is probably a reference to *Matthew* 5.22 and also *I John* 3.15 where we are told that "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" and the despair at its corollary "and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" evoked in him. The poem ends with the hope that Christ will be merciful to the poet, but even then this hope is not for complete forgiveness, but rather a diminution of his just deserts. "Let wretched Eugenius's punishment, I beg You, be slight" (*Eugenii miseri sit, rogo, poena levis*).

Self-pity is one of the least attractive of human emotions, what therefore provokes these outpourings from Eugenius? There is, as in the smaller poems, an engagement with *Job*, as the poem which contains two *loci similes* to the Biblical text. However the bulk of the intertextual references in the poem, and even its metrical virtuosity, point not to an engagement primarily with the Biblical, but

rather the Classical, world. When we look at the intellectual landscape of the Visigothic kingdom, perhaps the first potential precursor to Eugenius's lament that comes to mind is Horace who comments on Old Age in his *Ars Poetica*. Horace was certainly known in Visigothic Spain,[18] but his cantankerous *laudator temporis acti* – nervous, indecisive, and irritating, but not at all suffering or guilt-ridden – is more an inspiration to W.S. Gilbert than Eugenius. A much closer poetic ancestor is Juvenal whose tenth satire contains a graphic description of the onset of old age rivalling that of Eugenius. His piece was intended a counter-blast to those foolish enough to wish for a long life (188-288). Juvenal too was known and read in Visigothic Spain and parts of Eugenius's poem, for example his description of breaking teeth and the onset of wrinkles, does contain echoes of the Roman poet.[19] However, the two differ violently in their conclusions. Eugenius was probably happy with many of the sentiments expressed by Juvenal, but he sees no virtue, in fact quite the reverse, in shortening life nor is there any of the earlier author's stoicism in his poems. Indeed, he is at odds with the entire classical tradition of philosophical resignation that Juvenal espouses here. This tradition is also seen clearly in Cicero who tells his readers that the wisest man is he who dies with most equanimity, while the most foolish he who dies with the least (*De Senectute* 23.83). Eugenius would simple reverse this order.

More contemporary echoes are also to be found. The beginning of the poem carries resonances of the first poem of Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae* (1, met.1) whereas Boethius weeps and laments his fall from grace, he also bewails the rapid onset of old age which has whitened his hair and made him weak. He is then led from this state of self-pity and from the poetic muses (*poeticae Musae*) who inspire and nourish it to a true understanding of the world by Philosophy. This is the only time we find echoes of Boethius in Eugenius's work and we are meant to note the parallel. But again, Eugenius does not simply borrow the theme, he adopts it for his own purposes. In Boethius's poem the sufferings of old age are seen as a consequence of a change in worldly fortune which in his delusion the poet sees as an ill and thus death as the way to escape his plight (*Consolatio* 1 met.1.13-16). Philosophy in a somewhat panglossian fashion educates him to see worldly fortune as inconsequential and thus restores his mental balance. However for Eugenius suffering can not be so easily dismissed. Rather than being a marker of disequilibrium which can be overcome by the learning process, the suffering of old age is an integral part of the learning process. Philosophy will bring no consolation.

18. See, for example, Isidore, *Etym.* 8.11.104; Braulio, *Ep.*11.
19. cf. line 17 with Juv. 10.193 (wrinkles) and line 18 with Juv. 10.200.

Also present, and much more strongly, in Eugenius's lament are echoes of Maximianus Etruscus. Described by Raby as "the last of the Roman poets",[20] Maximianus was active in the sixth century and, though now little appreciated, his work was popular and widely diffused in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.[21] His poetry is normally divided into six elegies, though it has been argued that in reality the whole forms one long poem. The first "elegy" is a lengthy discourse on the toils of old age which is presented as a "prison" and "living death". The thrust of Maximianus's plaint is a restatement, albeit in a rather different idiom, of Boethius's view that Old Age deprives its victim of all that is pleasurable in life and so makes death welcome (*Elegy* 1.3-4). The best that can be said for it is that it engenders a form of *saudade* for pleasures once enjoyed and which Maximianus is all too happy to describe in graphic detail. Eugenius's list of the woes of old age are heavily influenced by that of Maximianus's first elegy.[22] His reference to the garrulous tongue falling silent, *garrula lingua tacet* (poem 14, 44), for example, echoes and perhaps challenges Maximanus's "Old men stout alone in their talk", *sola fortes garrulitate sense* (*Elegy* 1, 204). But again, as with Juvenal, while Eugenius shares Maximianus's diagnosis of the plight of man, he is very far from sympathising with his proposed treatment and his wistful remembrance of the pleasures of the flesh. Indeed, as has been seen, he wrote a small poem asserting precisely the reverse of Maximianus's view and arguing that the ebbing of these pleasures was in fact the only positive feature of ageing. His tears are not those of nostalgic regret, but rather painful and heart-rendering. Moreover, while for Maximianus death cannot come quickly enough, "why old age do you hold back from bringing the end", for Eugenius it comes all too soon, "why do you come in haste", as for him far from bringing the *requies* which Maximianus believes is its bounty, it leads only something which, as we have seen, is *magis tremendum*, more fearful still: the day of Final Judgement.

As well as challenging these authors, Eugenius has in mind a further classical author who was read in Visigothic Spain and seen as both an inspiration, but also seen as a threat, by its religious elite: Lucretius. Church fathers were happy to use Lucretius as a weapon against classical paganism, something which must have been a strawman by the seventh century, but were all

20. F. J. E. Raby, A History of Secular Latin Poetry (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1934), 125.

21. The best edition of Maximianus is that edited by Agozzino, There is a dated English translation by Webster. For a verse translation, see Zerbi. Despite the poems' subject matter, copies often appear in ecclesiastical collections, eg Lincoln Cathedral M 2132 (C58).

22. cf Maximianus, *Elegies* 1.119-122, 133-138.

too aware that the underlying doctrines of the *De Rerum Natura* were deeply at odds with their own beliefs. Isidore of Seville was to write a Christian *De Natura Rerum* as an explicit riposte to Lucretius's Epicureanism, and in the same way Eugenius's poems which stress the horrors of the final judgement challenge Lucretius's assertion made in book three of the *De Rerum Natura* (3.830-1094) that death is nothing to fear.[23] According to the bishop quite the reverse is the case.

To quarrel with pagans was one thing, but Eugenius's grim pessimism at first sight also seems at odds with the picture of Old Age presented in the Bible. Here the grey hairs which so trouble Eugenius are described a crown of glory (*Proverbs* 16.31) , old age is seen as a reward from God (*Proverbs* 10.27), and the old are regarded as wise (*Job* 12.12). Nor apparently does Eugenius march in step with the spirit of his age. Isidore of Seville, for example, seemingly contrary to Eugenius argues that Old Age brings good as well as ill. Isidore's thoughts on the subject are to be found at the beginning of the eleventh book of his *Etymologies* (11.2). There *senectus* is defined as the last of six stages of life and begins at the surprisingly late age of 70. It is preceded by *gravitas* which begins at fifty. Though he touches on many of the themes that Eugenius dwells on, for Isidore old age is certainly not an unalloyed time of wretchedness. On the contrary *Senectus* increases wisdom and old mens' advice is sounder than that of their younger companions because of their experience.

However, a Biblical parallel for Eugenius's pessimism can be found in *Ecclesiastes:* "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth", says the preacher, "Before the days of adversity come, and the years approach when you will say," I have no delight in them" (*Ecclesiastes* 12.1). This warning is illustrated at length in the *Book of Samuel*. Here when David attempts to reward Barzillai the Gileadite, his old friend refuses, saying 'How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? Today I am eighty years old; can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? … Please let your servant return, so that I may die in my own town, near the graves of my father and my mother" (2 *Samuel* 19:34-35, 37).When he says this, Barzillai is close to death and this is the key to understanding Eugenius. Isidore too in his treatment of old age divides it into two parts – *senectus* which begins at seventy and *senium* which is the final part of old age entered into just

23. B. Price Wallach, *Lucretius and the diatribe against the fear of death: 'De rerum natura III, 830-1094* (Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca classica Batava, supplementum 40, 1976).

before death. It is this latter brief phase of life, which, unlike *senectus,* holds no joy that corresponds precisely to Barzillai's state: he is not in the last phase of life but at its end.

For Eugenius, old age brings illness which in turn brings death in its wake. Eugenius fears death and wants his readers to fear it. This is because death does not end in nothingness as Maximianus and Lucretius tell us, but rather ushers in the final judgement: something which for those who have fallen short of living the Christian good life is most certainly be feared and lamented. Lamentation is an important part of Eugenius's message. He stresses the need to bewail one's sins. In this he is a champion of the doctrine of compunction. This notion was developed in the church during the sixth century. In the west its champions were Benedict and Gregory the Great whose works were in great demand in Visigothic Spain. Compunction put down deep roots in the Iberian church and arguably it is definition of the dogma found in Isidore's *Sententiae* (2.12) which was the one most commonly diffused across Europe. The origins of the dogma lay in scriptural texts such as *Psalm* 6.6. "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears." Such weeping was interpreted as a product of the believer realising the true vileness of the life he had led, the danger he was in as a consequence of this when facing the final judgment, and turning to God in contrition. This in turn would hopefully lead to the higher compunction the sense of pain caused by being separated from God. Weeping was seen as a guarantee of sincerity of these emotions, as St Benedict (*Rule* 20) put it: "we know that we are heard not through the abundance of our prayers but that our prayers are acceptable by purity of heart and tears of compunction"[24]

Compunction was produced by a "healthy anxiety", *taedium salubre,* when reflecting on one's life. Eugenius when lamenting his ills tells us how these troubled his mind, *taedet animum.* For Isidore (*Sententiae* 2.12.4) such *taedium* included "reflection on one's journey through the length of this life". The idea of Life as a hard pilgrimage would have been a notion deeply felt by Eugenius whose journey had been one full of physical suffering. It was this suffering that had led him to compunction through the realisation of how far he had fallen short of what his God demanded of him. Although he is unlikely to have known his contemporary, John Climacus's, Κλῖμαξ /*Scala Paradisi*, he would have assented whole-heartedly to John's belief (1.8) that "those who aim to ascend to heaven with their bodies need violence and constant suffering… until our pleasure-loving dispositions and unfeeling hearts attain to the love of God and chastity by visible

24. For an Eastern counterpart, see Isaac of Ninevah, *Mystic Treatises*, Homily 14.

sorrow". Illness and death thus, rather being merely than a punishment for sin, become blessings enabling us to see our true state, repent, and purify our souls. That Eugenius had felt that state of repentance can be seen in his autoepitaphs , written in the first person, where he upbraids himself for his sins: "Great is the sin within me" (poem 16), "Gravely burdened with a mass of sins" (poem 17), "I have never lived without committing crime." (poem 19). His poetic misery therefore is, in a curious way, a celebration. It is replicated in his epitaph for Chindaswinth (poem 25). This, also written in the first person, presents the king as a devout Christian driven to the tears of compunction. It is in no-way an attack upon him. These autoepitaphs differ sharply from other Eugenius's other memorial pieces, for example those written for Recciburga (poem 26) and Bishop John of Zaragoza (poem 21), which describe the virtues of the deceased, but are written in the third and not the first person. They therefore legitimately assert the goodness and list the virtues of their subjects from the point of view of an observer.

While weeping lies at the core of *compunction* and was an essential part of it, it was not to be paraded. The doctrine was originally devised for the monastic life. Benedict's *Rule* (52) urges monks to pray with tears every day, but also to do so privately. So even if we can rescue Eugenius from the charge of self-pity, can he equally be saved from that of exhibitionism? Here we must remember Eugenius's pastoral role. As a bishop he was as concerned, or at least as responsible, for the spiritual well-being of his flock as for that of his own soul. His own life had shown him how illness and the fear of death could bring about a contrite soul, but other, and popular, voices of his day were sending out messages about death and sickness which were quite wrong-headed (indeed much worse than that) in his opinion. Rather than let the devil have all the best tunes, Eugenius was prepared to take him on at his own game. Isidore of Seville had been deeply suspicious of pagan poetry (*Sententiae* 3.13.1), but did concede that the church had begun to sing psalms in order that its message would reach those unmoved by words alone (*De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* 6.1). Eugenius did not share Isidore's reservations, but rather saw himself as part of the Classical tradition and was determined to put what he saw as a good instrument to good use. For him poetry is not a divine emollient, but rather an effective protreptic for the good life. Among his powerful, secular contemporaries, it was not only king Chindaswinth who was a bibliophile, some of his courtiers too, for example, Count Laurentius also possessed libraries (Braulio, *Ep.* 25). Eugenius's poetry which mixes biblical references with metrical virtuosity, poetic tropes, and echoes of past classical authors, was aimed to appeal to this sophisticated elite who would have known their Bible, but also have been readers of the likes

of Maximianus and Lucretius.[25] Given the description of Chinaswinth's son, Recceswinth as dissolute, *flagitiosus* (*Chronicle of 754,* 15), the archbishop may well have thought admonishment of court life necessary, but decided that the most efficacious way of doing so was not simply to denounce secular tastes, but rather to produce an equally attractive, but wholesome counterblast to them. Eugenius here shows himself again an attentive reader of Gregory the Great's treaching that the Christian message should be tailored for its intended audience. His learned and complex poetry with its allusions to the classical past would have demanded attention from this sophisticated courtly audience and could not be dismissed as the rantings of a boorish philistine which would, certainly, have been the fate of a tract written in the *sermo humilis*. Eugenius no doubt took pride in his poetic ability, but also deployed it in a focussed manner to maximise its pastoral effect.

The vigorous way Eugenius deploys his chosen medium is also designed to arouse compunction. Gregory recommended the use of *condescensio* in which the pastor should create an imaginative sympathy with his audience allowing the two to unite in feeling (*Moralia* 6.35; 6.54). Few cannot feel Isidore's *taedium salubre* when faced with Eugenius's graphic writing: its physicality is there forcibly to make his point – here is death and suffering, here is their message. Its power can be seen from the way that Eugenius's 9th century admirer and imitator, Alvarus of Cordoba, who used many of Eugenius's topics as templates for his own work, when writing poems on his own sickness (and he appears to have suffered at least as severely as Eugenius) recoiled from following his master in this respect. Instead after noting his sickness, he moves almost immediately onto praise of God and His power to save..[26]

Eugenius's method and message are clear, even if we assume that he writes only in a poetic persona with no reference to his own life. But it is as well to remember Ildefonsus's *Life* of the bishop. Over a half a millennium before Eugenius wrote, the line *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangent* was coined. The *Aeneid* was well known in Eugenius's circles and his poetry contains references to all three of Virgil's works, but curiously there is no allusion to this particular line. However, for him its sentiments would have been all too true. The bishop was a sickly man, much troubled by his physical state and, it seems, overwhelmed by the world. It is this sad reality which is likely to have given Eugenius's poetry its theme and its powerful immediacy. His belief that

26. See G. del Cerro Calderon & J. Palacios Royan, *Lirica Mozarabe* (Malaga, 1998).

lamenta sola conferunt solacium is a cri du coeur and we can see how Eugenius has managed to engineer his solace in the face of his sufferings. But sometimes even the strongest faith fails. In contrast to the message of *Job*, there is no consolation to be found in the lamentation of poem 13 with its plea for pardon and a cure for Eugenius's physical, not spiritual, ills. Here we could see an artful poet carefully wishing to induce compunction is his readers. But could we not also see a less philosophical writer: a man struggling with illness and pain and while finding an intellectual answer to the questions their existence inevitably raises, also discovering that such answers do not always convince? Perhaps we can forgive Eugenius, and even warm to him, when we find a less than perfect consistency in his work.

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