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**An Epic Successor? Prudentius, *Aeneid 6*, and Roman Epic Tradition**

This paper argues that from the first line of the *Psychomachia* to its epilogue, Prudentius programmatically engages *Aeneid 6*, in an effort to transform the political, ethical, and metaphysical landscape of Vergil's master narrative. The descent of the epic hero, Aeneas, to the underworld, an exercise in self-definition and a harbinger of national and spiritual identity, provides the basis for the *Psychomachia's* narrative, as well as for the rite of passage which its poet and reader must complete to reach their individual, and national, Christian identity. This allusive bond between the *Psychomachia* and *Aeneid 6* reveals a literary purpose. From the first line of the *Psychomachia*, Prudentius places his poem squarely in the Roman epic tradition which Vergil anchors. Specifically, Prudentius' manipulation of the notion of *katabasis* as a trial, permits the Christian poet to appropriate several epic categories, such as the source of poetic inspiration, theology, the hero, and national identity. The invocation of the *Psychomachia*, the centrally placed battle between *Avaritia* and *Operatio*, the epilogue and other passages, allude systematically to *Aeneid 6* reinforcing the picture of the soul's journey from mortality and death, to life and immortality. The journey turns on a moral and spiritual choice between virtue and vice. To choose virtue and Christianity represents a radical conversion, which, if replicated in enough individuals, engenders a Christian community, that is, a Christian Rome.