

Symmachus. Oration III. To Gratian. 25 February 369¹ or 3 January 370²

Introduction

Symmachus' oration in praise of the child-emperor Gratian is more interesting for students of political changes and of encomiastic literature than for historians of the period. Fanny Del Chicca 1985: 99 observes that the orator must have kept in mind Cicero's statement (*De re publica* frg. 5 incertorum librorum (Ziegler): *Fannio causa difficilis laudare puerum; non enim res laudanda sed spes est*. And the expectation is what Symmachus emphasises, especially in evocation of Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, although he also affirms that Gratian's early consulship, appointment as Augustus, and accompaniment of his father on campaign were evidence of accomplishments as well. See McEvoy 2010: 159 (= McEvoy 2013: 51–52) on the precedent of creating a child-emperor with the full status of an Augustus, noting Symmachus' extravagant claim(s) for the extent of his power. Cristiana Sogno's section on this oration is entitled "Great Expectations".³

For an outline noting content as well as topoi usual to panegyric, see Del Chicca 1985: 98–99.

Pabst has a section 2.2 on Gratian beginning p. 218.

1 . . . *pauca* . . . to join with ceremonies, but I must describe the primary cause of devotion: willingly take the small gifts of gold,⁴ since you are responsible for such times.⁵

2 Greetings, longed-for hope of a new age⁶. Grow up in the lap of the state, your nurse, joy of the present, security of the future.⁷ Or should I fear that I will be considered complaisant to a

¹ Callu believes it was 18 April 369. See his n. 1 to *Or.* 2: Gratian's *natalis dies*; he celebrated his tenth birthday in 369. Bruggisser 1987: 139 and Portmann 50 believe that *Orations* 1 and 3 were delivered on the same occasion, Valentinian's *quinquennalia*, 25 February 369. Rees 2002: 167 n. 84, commenting on *P.L.* 7 addressed to both Maximian and Constantine, suggests that Symmachus' fragmentary *Orations* 1 and 3 might be parts of a similar whole.

² Wirth 279 believes that the oration belongs in 369, and McEvoy 2010: 159 and 2013: 51 dates it to 368. Mause (1994: 10 n. 39) says one cannot fix the date; cites Pabst 152f. and 158, Seck xlvii, cxxi says 369. Fanny Del Chicca 1987 argues for 3 January 370, as does Shanzer 1998b: 287. Sogno (2006: n. 107 to p. 18) finds Shanzer persuasive.

³ Sogno 2006: 18–21.

⁴ Either *aurum oblativum*, a gift of the Roman senate to celebrate Valentinian's *quinquennalia*, 25 February 369 (date preferred by Wirth 1986: 279), or *strenae kalendariae* given 3 January 370 (as Fanny del Chicca 1987 argues). Symmachus was one of those delegated to deliver this contribution and offered panegyrics to both Valentinian (*Oration* 1) and the young Gratian (*Oration* 3). He stayed with Valentinian in Trier or touring the border until the following year. See Matthews 1975: 32–33.

⁵ Pabst calls this the equivalent of the golden age (*aureum saeculum*). The phrase appears in §9.

⁶ Translating Cramer's conjecture, which Seck prints. *P.L.* 11.18.3 *de prosperitate saeculi vestri*; 9.18.1 *hac felicitate saeculi*; 5.12.4 *spe futuri temporis*; it's not possible to call *spes sperata* a

youth, whose first service⁸ is the principate? It is with your own auspices that you become acquainted with the empire, the embroidered toga has clothed you as candidate for command.⁹ You could no longer expect anything else, since you began with completed honors.¹⁰ We saw a new light¹¹ in the curule chair, unbloodied axes auspicious of clemency, tokens of virtue in laureled fascēs, an augury of majesty in the eagles of the sceptres. Then for the first time forensic activity, once subjected by law to silence, freely raised its eyes to your tribunal.¹² When in the most distinguished magistracy you ordained what was splendid and formulated sweetly resounding decrees, we understood at once that eloquence, which we observed in the consul, could return to honorable duty.

3 Chosen for rule with these auspices, you transferred the omen¹³ of the consulate to the assembly for the purple.¹⁴ Whoever reckons years for that reason¹⁵ is mistaken: as a boy you fight for old men, as a coeval you sweat for our children. You are the one, to be sure, whom we thought was chosen almost unseasonably!¹⁶

cognate accusative because Symmachus has employed the passive. Callu conjectures *spes parta* (in sense of *parata*), which appeals to Kelly 2013: 277 n. 49. The mints of Lugdunum and Arelate issued *solidi* with the legend *gloria novi saeculi*; Pearce 1951: 36 believes that this was a suggestion of Ausonius. See *RIC* IX 45 No. 15, 64 No. 10 (a) and (b) et 64, and (bronze) 66 No. 15 (and n. 38 below). In January 376, Symmachus (*Ep.* 1.13.2) wrote *novi saeculi fata leguntur* (the news of Valentinian's demise): see discussion in Bruggisser 1987.

⁷ Similarly, Pacatus *P.L.* 2.45.1 *securitatem omnium saeculorum*.

⁸ *stipendium*, as in military service.

⁹ Gratian was consul in 366. Compare Cicero's well known rehearsal of Pompey's early military experience and success at *Manil.* 28, including the phrase *suis imperiis*, and Plutarch *Pompey* 22.8 (ὁπ' ἐμαυτῷ αὐτοκράτορι). Symmachus will use this very *exemplum* in §8 below. Pompey also began his military service serving under his father.

¹⁰ Cf. what Symmachus says of Valens' initial appointment as Augustus in *Or.* 1.11–13. Pabst, commenting on *a perfectis honoribus inchoabas*, compares Themistius *Or.* 9.120c, the beginning of the address to Valentinianus Galates on his first consulship.

¹¹ Imperial light, *lumen* or *lux*. Cf. *Or.* 1.5 fin with note, 1.7 with nn. 27–28, *Or.* 6.1 with note.

¹² Cf. the similar topic at *Or.* 2.29.

¹³ *praerogativa*; cf. *P.L.* 6.2.4. During the time of the Republic, one of the first eighteen centuries was chosen by lot to vote first: the *centuria praerogativa*. The choice of the first voters strongly influenced the outcome of the election, and came to be regarded as an omen. Thus Gratian's previous consulship was a kind of announcement of his eventual assumption of the purple.

¹⁴ In the next section, Symmachus avers that this *comitia* is the military assembly, as, indeed, the *comitia centuriata* of the Republic, gathered to elect consuls and praetors, had originally been.

¹⁵ The manuscript reading is *ideo censet*, which Seeck had emended to *in deo recenset aetatem*; the latter sentiment accords well with various passages in the *Panegyrici Latini* (8.2.2, 7.3.2, 7.8.1, 12.26, 2.7.6), although in none of those is the extreme youth of a ruler the point.

¹⁶ While this appears to be close to criticism, or an admission that people had wondered about the wisdom of naming a child Augustus, it is a variety of feigned boldness in truth-telling.

4 O uncorrupted votes of the soldiers! Allegiance¹⁷ knows how to pass judgment! It was an indication of public good fortune that he who begot you made more cautious promises, those who did not yet know you made a happier judgment. Who would ever dispute with a parent over a child's talents? And yet the army is not amiss in its confidence: you were chosen in hope, proven in deed.

5 If some Zeuxis would depict this assembly for me to be seen with varicolored waxes, if some Apellean copyist would bring life to that celestial judgment with a realistic breath of art, later generations would behold wonders scarcely to be believed.¹⁸ On this side Augustus, on that the legions and midway between them the youthful candidate for rule; for a long while the strife is undecided on both sides, and while everyone cheers in eager favor the father gives way at a late hour. Suppliant squadrons, troops soliciting votes painting worthy of the ages, picture worthy of the times on which we see men more useful than willing elected!¹⁹

6 It was fitting that unanimous opinion favored the flower of youth: exercise of office is better practice for everyone. Thus Syria was voluntarily subject to Antiochus before he attained the vigor of age,²⁰ premature fortune chose a Pellaeian commander,²¹ Rome restored his kingdom

¹⁷ *devotio* is the soldiers' fealty, sworn to each ruler in turn. Symmachus continues the description as of an actual election, although the choice lay with Valentinian and it was up to the army to show approval at the announcement.

¹⁸ The author of *P.L.* 7 names Apelles and Parrhasius (7.6.3); the passage is especially worth imitating because that orator had said that the painting he describes showed Fausta and Constantine, described as *etiam tum puer*. Eumenius (*P.L.* 9.20.2) had long before included a more extensive ephrasis of an image which probably existed, and said that comprehension is easier visually than aurally. *viserent posteri vix credenda miracula* is an obvious echo of the oration to Julian that Claudius Mamertinus delivered in Constantinople in 362 (*P.L.* 3.30.1 *in posteros venturis saeculis vix credenda miracula*); as Rees 2012: 212 n. 40 has observed, the oration was available to Symmachus in Gaul not many years later.

¹⁹ Cf. Symmachus' own letter on the principle, *Rel.* 17.2 (*melius urbi vestrae consuletis, si legatis invites*). and *Or.* 1.10, with note. This is a curious sort of *recusatio*, when Valentinian is said to be reluctant on his son's behalf; cf. Callu n. 1 to p. 25. Sogno 2006: 19 discusses the difference of Symmachus' emphasis from the account in Ammianus 27.6.4–10.

²⁰ Antiochus V Eupator (Pabst, Callu) or Antiochus III Magnus (Sogno 2006: 19). Antiochus V was 9 when he became king but did not rule, nor live, very many years afterward, and seems an unhappy *exemplum*. Portmann 236 n. 4 to *Oration* 3 suggests Antiochus VI, but again, that young Seleucid did not live to adulthood. Antiochus III was about 18 when he became king in 222. Whatever the specific identity he had in mind, Symmachus chose examples from the Greek east because, with the possible exception of Alexander Severus, Roman experience of very young emperors (Gaius and Nero were under twenty, and Elagabalus even younger) was not happy: see interesting discussion in Portmann 50–51.

²¹ Alexander III Magnus, probably (Pabst, Callu, Sogno), the default young ruler of handbooks, who was 20 when Philip II was assassinated. Yet, especially if Symmachus means Antiochus III, he may also indicate Philip V, who was 17 when he became king of Macedon: Symmachus seems to be in that era. Still, Polybius' starting point in the 140th Olympiad (1.3.1) includes

to Ptolemy in the earliest stages of his suckling infancy.²² And by Hercules youthful and tender age more firmly grasps the science of empire; valor abides longer when it commences early. To be sure, a master of husbandry inserts a foreign bud into green branches, that the new shoots grow in by a bond of bark.²³ I hear that in taming horses one ignorant of age, as the poet²⁴ says, more readily bring their necks under the chariots²⁵ . . . 5 folia

7 . . . you will overcome tyrants²⁶ with services. Let some valiant performance be reserved for you for the future, as nothing remains unknown to you any longer. What respite from labor do you have?²⁷ Busied with trophies and letters²⁸ you have united the affairs of peace and of war. I recognize in you not the traced sketchings but the distinct marks of ancient virtues:²⁹ surely his teacher Accius often visited Fulvius, noble in praise as much as in name, among the standards and sounds of clarions;³⁰ Panaetius, who shared in his reading and in his labor, did not leave the side of Africanus,³¹ victor on land and at sea; an escort of philosophers spent time in what was

Ptolemy IV Philopator, who was very young but over 20 when his reign began in 222 BCE, not his son Ptolemy V.

²² Cf. Livy 1.3. More to the point, Ptolemy V Epiphanes (Pabst, Callu, Sogno), who was still a child when his father died and is clearly indicated here.

²³ There is a textual problem; the manuscript has *libri ubidiovis*. Pabst and Callu print *libri uuidioris*, Kiessling's emendation, one that makes excellent sense in the context of grafting. C. Sogno 2006: 19 says that Symmachus may be echoing the *Georgics* here but one cannot tell because of the lacuna. In addition a clear echo of two lines of the third *Georgic* on training horses, Virgil describes grafting in *G.* 2.73 ff., beginning *nec modus inserere atque oculos* (buds) *imponere simplex*. Callu notes the rhetorical reach of the agricultural analogies ("nouveaux expédients rhétoriques").

²⁴ Virgil *G.* 3.189, of a foal *etiam inscius aevi*.

²⁵ One possibility mentioned by the poet: *vel molli melius feret esseda collo* (*G.* 3.204).

²⁶ Usurpers. Claudius Mamertinus said that any former person who had desired *imperium* would be frightened off if, suddenly restored to life, he were to see Julian hard at work (*P.L.* 3.13).

²⁷ Cf. *Or.* 1.16 (*tibi nullae sunt feriae proeliorum. tibi nullas necessitas remittit indutias maximeque hoc in Galliis delegisti, quod hic non licet otiari*).

²⁸ Military activity and schooling; even mature rulers liked to be thought of as devoting their nights to learning.

²⁹ Cf. Cicero of Catiline in *Cacl.* 12: *habuit enim ille . . . permulta maximarum non expressa signa sed adumbrata virtutum*. More to Symmachus' point are *Rosc. Am.* 27 *vestigia antiqui officii*, *Tusc.* 3.3 *est enim gloria solida quaedam res et expressa, non adumbrata*.

³⁰ Symmachus has been reading the *Pro Archia*, as did Eumenius: see Nixon and Saylor Rodgers 1994: 149 and 159. Here he wrote Accius instead of Ennius; both appear in Cicero *Arch.* 27 but Ennius was the friend of Marcus Fulvius Nobilior and Accius of Decimus Brutus. Pabst, citing Kroll, says that Symmachus does know the right name (*Ep.* 1.20) but noted and wrote the wrong name from §27 of the *pro Archia*.

³¹ The Younger; Scipio Aemilianus and Panaetius. Cf. Cicero *Pro Murena* 66 *huiusce modi Scipio ille fuit quem non paenitebat facere idem quod tu, habere eruditissimum hominem Panaetium domi*; *De Re Publica* 1.15, *Tusc.* 1.81

almost world-wide military service with Alexander the Great.³² Now we believe in antiquity,³³ since books and weapons are handled in your same tent. And there is no lack of something for you to peruse for the nature of actions and occasions: you enjoy history for the battles, suasoriae for the exhortations, judicial suits for the discourse, poetry for the triumphs.³⁴

8 I feel that I have passed³⁵ at a timely point to the examples of the ancients; thus I shall fairly employ Pompey's responses from the annals' account. He was leading his horse, as was the custom, in the equestrian census when he chanced to be addressed by the censor's voice asking under what commander he had earned it. He replied, "I did my service under my own command."³⁶ I do not wish to examine the possibly fictitious boast of so great a commander; yet one would more worthily claim that glory for himself who began to rule others at an age when he himself was not yet able to obey. If someone should ask me when renowned Gratian³⁷ offered his name for the levy, I shall respond without hesitation: "when he received the name of emperor."

9 If it were permitted me now to digress in lofty poetic eloquence,³⁸ like a poet I would write out an entire excursus on the new age of Virgil³⁹ in your name; I would say that Justice has

³² Alexander had a large following of technical experts (engineers, road builders, geographers who mapped the new territories), writers (especially Callisthenes), and others. Here Callu observes that in 378 Symmachus wrote to Ausonius (*Ep.* 1.20.2) numerous examples of powerful men who had not rewarded their teachers, as Gratian had rewarded Ausonius with the consulship. There Symmachus' first three examples were the same (switching in Ennius for Accius) as those he uses here.

³³ A commonplace of praise; cf. *Or.* 1.5, Nazarius *P.L.* 4.15.1 and 6.

³⁴ One may discern the influence of Ausonius; indeed, Cicero himself would be happy to corroborate the importance of a thorough grounding in all areas of learning. Pabst cites Eunapius frg. 46 (*FHG* 4 S. 34) and Julian *Or.* 3.124b–125d. This is a kind of special pleading for the practical value of education, here restricted to martial endeavors.

³⁵ *dilabor* TLL

³⁶ See n. 9 above.

³⁷ The adjective *inclutus* (*inclutus*) is found also at *Or.* 1.3 (*meruisti quondam, inclute Gratiane*), of Valentinian's father and *Or.* 2.2 (*inclutis . . . nominibus*) and 2.18 (*auctores inclutos*).

³⁸ Cf. *Or.* 2.26, and discussion in Doignon 1966: 1700, 1703. Bruggisser 1989: 190ff supports Doignon's conclusion and adds evidence from Themistius *Or.* 13 to demonstrate the understanding among Roman senators of the mythical founder and potential refounders.

³⁹ *Eclogue* 4. Marié 1984: 253 n. 233, commenting on Ammianus 27.6.8 (part of Valentinian's speech naming Gratian Augustus), citing Doignon 1966 and this passage in Symmachus, wrote, "Une monnaie à l'effigie de Gratien résume enfin cette idée. Elle porte en effet à son revers 'Gloria noui saeculi'; voir J. W. E. Pearce, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, t. 9, 1951, p. 36, 45 et 64; il s'agit d'une émission des ateliers d'Arles et de Lyon, datée de 367". On the bronze issue at Arelate, Pearce 1951: 54 wrote, "a new Æ 3 type with legend *Gloria noui saeculi* was struck for Gratian, on a larger scale than at any other mint. This presented him to his father's subjects as the boy destined to fulfil the Messianic prophecy of the Sibylline books and to usher in a Golden Age of justice and plenty."

By early in the fourth century Christians had interpreted *Eclogue* 4 as a prediction of the new religious dispensation. Bruggisser 1987: 147–148 observes how Symmachus takes up here

returned from heaven⁴⁰ and that pregnant nature spontaneously promises abundant offspring; now ripe wheat would grow golden by itself in open fields for me, grapes would swell on the brambles, trickling honey would drip from oaken boughs.⁴¹ Who would deny that these things are credible in your reign, when your talents have already performed many things and your expectation still promises more! And truly, if it is right to divine the future by presentiment, the spindles of the Fates have been running the golden age for a long time now.⁴² Nor shall I employ poetic proofs: behold the Rhine does not now disdain commands but divides Roman *castella*⁴³; from our Alps it empties into our ocean. Captive, whose neck was free hitherto, he is weighted down by the bars of bridges. Come, our two-horned river, beware of thinking yourself the Tiber's equal, because you both carry the princes' monuments: the Tiber has been crowned, you subjugated.⁴⁴ Each bridge is assessed not by one (the same?) value (valuation?): the conquered has received a compulsory bridge, the conqueror an eternal one; the more valuable has been given to honor, the cheaper to servitude.

10 The king of Macedon⁴⁵ used to complain of his father's glory, because with provinces subjected far and wide he had left nothing for his heir's valor to conquer. May that complaint be lacking to my young man! All praise belongs to both; you show yourself a son in reverence, a colleague in valor. One campaign belongs to each, and united felicity: you rejoice in your father's instruction, he in the companionship of his junior.⁴⁶ By an established rule of nature he who is in harmony never envies.⁴⁷

11 But if, venerable Gratian, we were to weigh your fortune, which is the first thing to be measured in leaders, in careful examination, what is more felicitous than a prince in command under his parents? The whole orb embraces you in its peaceful bosom, and although the state has

the imperial equation of Gratian with the child of destiny, and returns vehemently to the same theme in his fourth *Oration*, after Valentinian's death.

⁴⁰ Virgil *Eclogue* 4.6 (*iam redit et Virgo*), and as Ammianus 25.4.19 wrote of Julian (22.10.6 is somewhat qualified). The panegyrist of Maximian in 289 had linked *iustitia* with prosperity (*P.L.* 10.11.3) *si non frustra Graeci poetae hominibus iustitiam colentibus repromittunt binos gregum fetus et duplices arborum fructus*.

⁴¹ Virgil *Eclogue* 4.28–30, little changed: *molli paulatim flavescet campus arista / incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva / et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella*.

⁴² Virgil *Eclogue* 4.6 (*redeunt Saturnia regna*).

⁴³ Roman fortifications, built along both sides of the Rhine. Symmachus devotes most of the later *Oration* 2 to Valentinian's building of these fortifications.

⁴⁴ Tiber: pons Gratiani. See Shanzer 1998b: 287 n. 18, who finds in this allusion evidence that this oration was delivered in 370. Pabst notes that other evidence in the oration for an earlier dating accords ill with a reference to this bridge, finished only at the end of 369. *ILS* 771 and 772. Callu, however, supports a date for the bridge of late summer 369.

⁴⁵ Alexander; see Plutarch *Alex.* 5.4.

⁴⁶ Like the praises of the Tetrarchic period, although the age difference was between adults. The theme is prominent in *P.L.* 11 (Diocletian and Maximian) and 7 (Maximian and Constantine).

⁴⁷ Claudius Mamertinus had observed that envy can alienate an imperial partner (*imperatoris fratris*): *P.L.* 3.3.1.

apparently been divided between your father and uncle, yet it is common to you alone with each of them.⁴⁸ From the couch of the rising dawn to the turning-point of the setting sun you see nothing which is not yours.⁴⁹ Between the kindred spheres of heaven⁵⁰ you are as much greater in single things from each of them as you are still smaller than either.

12 I have long since heard the prophetic bards of the peoples murmuring that the barbarian name has stood only this long, that now he has been born⁵¹ and now he grows whom it must, with the whole world, obey.⁵² Some complain of their old age and gray hairs preserved to the time of captivity; others are disgusted with their tender age, for after they have drawn a breath of liberty, they are driven by fear of servitude. They have justly vied to send supplicant ambassadors from everywhere: one who is the first to rush to make peace is like a captive. I believe in the enemies' replies, I believe in their forebodings: how much glory will you attain one day when you lead the army in your father's lifetime; wherever you will be led, you are already invited!

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⁴⁸ Valens had a very young son, Valentinianus Galates, born in 366. This child died when he was about six years old: see Lenski 91–92. Tetrarchic propaganda also stressed the celestial unity of what was shared, e.g., *P.L.* 11.6.6, 8.4.2–3 (Sun, Moon, Vesper, and Lucifer), 7.7.6.

⁴⁹ A commonplace description of the Roman empire, with a personal emphasis; cf. *P.L.* 11.21.3, 9.21.3.

⁵⁰ Sun and Moon; the Sun often indicates a power greater than the Moon (see Callu ad loc.) but not necessarily. Cf. *P.L.* 11.13.2, and throughout that panegyric, where the orator stresses the equality of Maximian and Diocletian. See also n. 55 to *Oration* 1.

⁵¹ Callu cites this as a discreet recognition of Gratian's birthday.

⁵² So, later, Pacatus to Theodosius: *P.L.* 2.22.2.

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