

How different are Claudian's 'In Eutropium' Books 1 and 2 in content and style?

Claudian's *In Eutropium* is an invective panegyric about Eutropius, a eunuch who became consul for the emperor Arcadius in 399CE¹. The first book is an aggressive attack by Claudian on Eutropius' past and upbringing, as well as his rise to power. The second book discusses the events that resulted in his eventual downfall after his year as consul and contains a more fantastical version of events. Both books express a much more positive attitude towards Stilicho, presenting him as the hero that may fix the issues in the eastern empire because of Eutropius' years of ministry and year of consulship. Claudian consistently makes remarks regarding Eutropius' status as a eunuch. Common in Anatolian cults of female deities, suggesting an eastern origin, they were castrated for a variety of reasons such as religious purity of servitude for a master or mistress that either holds no risk of sexual intimacy or of pregnancy². Whilst respected in some aspects of pagan religion, attitudes towards eunuchs tended to be negative due to their association with eastern courts³. Claudian accuses Eutropius of working his way into government because of his status as a eunuch and using it to his advantage, and that he is not capable of anything else.

Book 1 begins with an omen. Claudian describes "the birth of creatures half human"⁴ and hopes that Eutropius' death would prevent such terrible events from happening. Eutropius being a eunuch is addressed early and frequently, being called a woman in line 10 and the sentiment repeated in line 29. Claudian discusses Eutropius' upbringing, saying he is "destined" for "bloody torture."⁵ He expresses that Eutropius can never be a father or a husband, a topic brought up in his other works such as *De Raptu Proserpinae*, where Pluto longs for a wife and misses the opportunity to "know the sweet name of father."⁶ Eutropius, having been castrated as part of a eunuch slave trade, is then imagined having been passed around in a market until finding a master, who passes him off to another man further into Eutropius' adulthood. A significant number of lines are dedicated to describing

¹ (Long, 1996)

² (Gordon, 2003)

³ (Hunt, 2003)

⁴ (Claudian, 1.1)

⁵ (Claudian 1.44-45)

⁶ (Claudian, *DRP*, 1.36)

Eutropius' old age, concluding he looks like an "ill-omened ghost."⁷ Claudian talks more on the status of eunuch, stating that other eunuchs do not like him and implying that even his own 'people' do not like him, and says Eutropius' "passion for gold"⁸ is indulged due to his inability to indulge in other passions. Claudians' depiction of Eutropius' supposed greed continues into a comparison with other Roman figures, one being Augustus, under the guise of asking if all they conquered was enough for Eutropius' greed. Claudian acknowledges that Eutropius won a battle, but it is downplayed, stating his army was full of "creatures."⁹ He is then described as an "old dame"¹⁰ recounting the story who should dedicate himself to the mother goddess, not Mars. Claudian continues to downplay any achievements Eutropius might have, stating that Eutropius "demands"¹¹ the position of consul. He makes a brief comparison to myths featuring unusual rulers and pairings but states that even then a eunuch held no such position comparable to Eutropius'. Claudian describes Eutropius using masculine, feminine, and non-descript language, but in the next lines implies he is lesser than a woman, who are capable of child rearing. Next, Claudian states that the consulship at first seemed fake and imagines a discussion between two people finding out. Book 1 ends with a speech from the personification of Rome, who questions the consulship and calls upon Roman heroes to ask if they fought for such a thing to occur, before asking Stilicho why he has not acted.

Book 2 contains a preface regarding Eutropius' exile, and a reminder to the reader that he is a eunuch and is an "unsexed tyrant."¹² An allusion to a previous comment he made about abandoning war and becoming the servant of a female deity is made, with Claudian suggesting Eutropius should return to Cytherea. Book 2 begins with a comparison from Claudian between negative events and their outcomes. He gives the examples of a sailor hauling in his sails before a storm and amputation to save a healthy body, among others. He contrasts these with Eutropius' exile, questioning if the exile will 'cleanse' the court of Eutropius. Claudian makes more comparisons, but this time to emperors that had committed "crime"¹³ before Eutropius, and implies it could be worse, for "what can Nero's theatre offer like to this?"¹⁴ Then, he compares to more praised emperors, such as Constantine, and wonders how such an emperor would feel if he were second to Eutropius. The style of book 2 changes with line 95 into an epic tale of the events leading

⁷ (Claudian, 1.131)

⁸ (Claudian, 1.191)

⁹ (Claudian, 1.258)

¹⁰ (Claudian, 1.269)

¹¹ (Claudian, 1.284)

¹² (Claudian, Preface2.21)

¹³ (Claudian, 2.8)

¹⁴ (Claudian, 2.61-62)

up to Eutropius' exile. Mars discusses with Bellona the "effeminacy"¹⁵ of the east and wonders if they may cure it and convinces Bellona to help. She finds a "barbarian"¹⁶ leader in the northeast of the empire and convinces him to not surrender to the Romans and instead challenge them. Claudian states that under the allowance of the gods a Roman city was "ravaged,"¹⁷ to which Eutropius' supposedly turns a blind eye. Eventually, an assembly is called, and a man named Leo, whom Claudian describes as "Eutropius' Ajax,"¹⁸ volunteers to deal with the barbarians. He fails, and threats of surrounding empires stir the assembly into choosing to side with Stilicho instead. The assembly "admit they deserve punishment and death for deserting Stilicho,"¹⁹ despite the eastern court's branding of him as a public enemy. After Stilicho's success he is visited by Aurora who gives him a speech on the crimes of Eutropius and states that Stilicho is her "only hope."²⁰

Both books feature criticisms as well as insults of Eutropius. A reoccurring point Claudian chooses to bring up is Eutropius' status as a eunuch, despite the fact that several other eunuchs had been in positions of power previously, though not as consul, and that they were common within the imperial court. Claudian's focus on the fact that Eutropius is a eunuch could relate to the fact that they were brought into Rome as slaves, and as such were not free men and so should not hold positions commonly held by free men and citizens of the empire. Additionally, Claudian uses the personification of Rome to compare Eutropius to Pothinus, a eunuch responsible for "stirring up the Egyptians"²¹ in Caesar's conquest of Egypt, drawing attention to how both were eunuchs and potentially problematic. Both contain praise for Stilicho in some capacity, the first asking why Stilicho had not intervened when he is more than capable of doing so, and that it would be simple, implying that Eutropius is organising his own fall "with the rods he once proudly carried."²² Claudian compliments Stilicho's abilities whilst also playing down Eutropius' abilities and his connections. In book two, Claudian states that the court of the east turn to Stilicho for help as their "one hope of salvation."²³ Both books function as an invective against Eutropius and as praise for Stilicho. Additionally, the books contain similar allusions, such as Eutropius being a slave for a female deity rather than a warrior or soldier, to "leave arms

¹⁵ (Claudian, 2.112)

¹⁶ (Claudian, 2.159)

¹⁷ (Claudian, 2.274)

¹⁸ (Claudian, 2.386)

¹⁹ (Claudian, 2.516-517)

²⁰ (Claudian, 2.591)

²¹ (Cassius Dio, 42.36)

²² (Claudian, Preface 2.8)

²³ (Claudian, 2.503)

to men,”²⁴ and that “Cytherea will right gladly take back her slave.”²⁵ Both start with ill-fated omens for the empire under Eutropius’ rule, with the “howling of wolves”²⁶ and “men’s homes were burned, there flooded.”²⁷ The inclusion of these omens is reminiscent of the writings of Lucan, whose Civil War begins with a similar series of events.

Book 1, however, reads more as a list of insults towards Eutropius, where specific themes of his character are chosen and picked apart; his upbringing as a slave, his capacity as a eunuch, his age, and his eventual consulship. It is much more stereotypical of the panegyric format, being a written speech to be given. Book 2 reads more as a recollection of events through a fantastical lens, with Claudian using the will of the gods as the reasoning behind why Eutropius was eventually exiled. Book 1 uses a personification of Rome to express disdain for Eutropius’ actions, who talks to no one in particular, whereas book 2 makes use of Aurora to express concern, who talks directly to Stilicho.

Eutropius is not the only member of the eastern court to have received an invective from Claudian. Previously, he had written one about Rufinus, Eutropius’s predecessor, in the ongoing “war of words”²⁸ between the east and west. The minister Stilicho attempted to claim regency over both Arcadius and Honorius after the death of their father Theodosius I, but was unsuccessful, resulting in the need for such panegyrics from the likes of Claudian to sway the courts and people. The positive panegyrics written by Claudian for the eastern emperor, as Ware states in *Learning from Pliny: Claudian’s advice to the emperor Honorius*, are framed as a lesson for the young emperor, possibly to encourage him to remain a student and under guidance, which in this instance would be under Stilicho, Claudian’s patron²⁹. The speeches and poems that Claudian writes, regardless of the subject or person they are discussing, contain praise for his patron and present forward the idea that he should be overseeing both empires.

Books 1 and 2 of Claudian’s ‘In Eutropium’ share similarities, such as the topics covered throughout. Eutropius’ status as a eunuch, his incapacity to lead, and the negative effect he has on Rome are contained within both books. However, Claudian employs different narrative methods of expressing these topics. The first is an invective panegyric, used in opposition to praise panegyrics written for Eutropius in the east, and the second a fantastical tale of his downfall.

²⁴ (Claudian, 1.281)

²⁵ (Claudian, Preface 2.62)

²⁶ (Claudian, 1.2)

²⁷ (Claudian, 2.35)

²⁸ (Tougher, 2015)

²⁹ (Ware, 2013)

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