

THE RAINBOW IN CLAUDIAN'S *DE RAPTU PROSERPINAЕ* II, 98–100*

The abduction of maidens picking flowers is a recurring motif of Greek and Roman poetry.¹ Among the most famous stories of the kind one may recall the rape of Europe in Moschus's poem of the same name (1, 63–71).² In the second book of the mythological epic *De raptu Proserpinae* Claudian describes a miraculous abundance of flowers which in a split second grew at the foot of Etna as a part of insidious scheme of Venus. The reader, of course, is aware of the fact that Proserpine will be abducted during her careless walk. In his grandiloquent manner the poet says that vegetation competes with precious jewellery on the shoulder-belts of Parthian kings (94–95), Assyrian dyes (95–96), peacock's feathers (97), and even the rainbow in brightness and diversity of colours (98–100):

Nec sic innumeros arcu mutante colores
Incipiens redimitur hiems, cum tramite flexo
Semita discretis interviret umida³ nimbis.

An unusual cause-effect relation in the passage might strike the modern reader: the rainbow foreruns foul weather (*hiems*). Irrespective of whether we are dealing with a popular attitude or with the particular qualities of the Mediterranean climate, an idea of the rainbow presaging the storm can be successively traced in antiquity. In his tragedy *Oedipus* Seneca calls the rainbow *imbrifer* (315)⁴ and observes that it “announces clouds” (*nuntiat nimbos* – 317). J.-L. Charlet⁵ points out some other examples of a preceding rainbow: Tibullus exhorts a lover not to lose precious time and to take a road in spite of heat and rain which is foreboded by the rainbow (1, 4, 41–44);⁶

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¹ See, for example: *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Ed. by N. J. Richardson (Oxford 1974) 140.

² Some other parallels are: Stratonike (Hes. fr. 26, 18–23 Merkelbach – West), Helen (Eur. *Hel.* 243 ff.), Kreusa (Eur. *Ion* 887 ff.), etc.

³ *Semita ... umida* is a metaphor for the rainbow's curve.

⁴ Cf. also *imbrifer arcus* in Stat. *Theb.* 7, 427 and 9, 405.

⁵ Claudien, *Oeuvres*. Texte ét. et trad. par J.-L. Charlet. I (Paris 1991) 142 *ad loc.*

⁶ *Quamvis* <...> / *venturam anticipet imbrifer arcus aquam* (1, 4, 43–44).

Virgil mentions a rainbow among natural signs which are to assist a farmer in the prediction of bad weather (*Georg.* 1, 351–392). According to Virgil⁷ and some other testimonies,⁸ rainbow “drinks” water from the sea and thus functions as a pump. Seneca infuses rationalistic spirit into his discussion of the topic by stating that not every rainbow threatens a storm: the most dangerous one appears in the southern part of the sky, the one in the west produces a drizzle only, and, finally, the eastern rainbow promises fine weather (*Nat.* 1, 8, 8).

In his rainbow description Claudian makes use of a rather rare verb. In Latin poetry the word *intervirere* is attested in Statius' *Thebais* (IV, 98) and in the passage concerned.⁹ The pattern of the verb is similar to these of *interalbicare* and *internigrare*. The last of the foregoing words is also found in Statius' and Claudian's poetry only (Stat. *Theb.* VI, 336; Claud. *Carm. min.* 9, 14).¹⁰ On the face of it there should not be any problem with the interpretation of *intervirere*: it is likely to have a meaning ‘to green among’. According to *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, it stands for “inter alios colores virere, viridem nitere” (s. v.) – which is perfectly right for Statius' usage. The poet talks about a snake that crawled out to enjoy the spring sun and “laetisque minax interviret herbis” (*Theb.* IV, 98).

We shall attempt to find out whether the meaning ‘to green amid’ suits Claudian's text. M. Platnauer interprets the passage under discussion in such a way, his translation being the following: “Not thus do the many-changing hues of the rainbow span young winter's sky when in curved arch its rainy path *glows green* amid the parting clouds”.¹¹ J. Hall echoes him and remarks that “after mentioning the ‘innumeros ... colores’ of the rainbow (v. 98), the poet singles out the green element in the spectrum to do duty to all”.¹² J.-L. Charlet who is in charge of the latest coming out edition

⁷ <...> *et bibit ingens / arcus* (*Georg.* 1, 380–381).

⁸ *Purpureus pluvias cur bibit arcus aquas* (*Prop.* 3, 5, 32). *Aurae nubesque bibunt atque imbrifer arcus / pascitur* (Stat. *Theb.* 9, 405–406). Seneca cites Virgil and comments on *Georg.* 380–381: *Ut ait Vergilius noster: “et bibit ingens arcus”, cum adventat imber* (*Nat.* 1, 8, 8).

⁹ In Latin prose the word occurs only once in Solinus (52, 61). A poetic usage of *intervirere* after Claudian can be seen in Apollinaris Sidonius (*Carm.* 5, 39).

¹⁰ Claudian uses it in the form of *participium praesentis activi*.

¹¹ Claudian. With an English Transl. by M. Platnauer. I (London 1922 [1968]) *ad loc.*

¹² Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae*. Ed. with an Intr. and Comm. by J. B. Hall (Cambridge 1969) 219.

of Claudian cites Hall's conception¹³ and translates *intervirere* as 'verdoyer entre'.¹⁴

In most cases when the rainbow is described it is referred to as multi-coloured. Virgil, for example, says that the goddess Iris comes down *per mille coloribus arcum* (*Aen.* 5, 609).¹⁵ If we look at some of the later texts, we can not lose sight of the cycle *Carmina duodecim sapientum* traditionally included into *Anthologia Latina*¹⁶ under different authors' names.¹⁷ According to A. Friedrich,¹⁸ *Carmina duodecim sapientum* date from the end of 3rd century. One of the twelve parts of this collection of poems is subtitled *De arcu caeli* and it deals with variations of rainbow theme. What kind of epithets are given to the rainbow? It is called *multicolor* (*Anthologia Latina* [Riese] 543, 2),¹⁹ *discolor* (*AL* 546, 1), its colours are determined as *varii* (*AL* 544, 3; 546, 3; 547 etc.) or *multi* (*AL* 552, 3), its splendour is called *colorificus* (*AL* 544, 2): so, as one can see, in all instances polychromy is stressed.

At the same time, there are some examples when one or several colours of the rainbow are picked out. Obviously, that was Hall's inclination towards the possibility of "a green rainbow". He gives several instances of a one-colour rainbow.²⁰ At the same time, as will readily be observed, all his examples have to do with so-called warm colours. In compliance with *ThLG* and *ThLL*, green colour can be used to depict the rainbow along with the others²¹ but it is never found by itself. Besides one more argument against a "green" rainbow can be given: when Claudian makes his compari-

¹³ Claudien (n. 4) 142.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁵ Compare another passage where Virgil also talks about the multicoloured rainbow goddess (*mille trahens varios <...> colores / devolat [sc. Iris] – Aen.* 4, 701–702).

¹⁶ *Anthologia Latina: Carmina in codicibus scripta*. Rec. A. Riese. II (Lipsiae 1870) 59–104. See also the latest separate edition of the text and abundant commentary in: A. Friedrich *Das Symposium der XII sapientes: Kommentar und Verfasserfrage*. (Texte und Kommentare. Hrsg. von S. Döpp, A. Köhnken, R. Scodel 22, Berlin – New York 2002).

¹⁷ Palladius, Asclepiadius, Eusthenius, Pompilianus, Maximinus, Vitalis, Basilius, Asmenius, Vomanus, Euphorbius, Iulianus, Hilasius.

¹⁸ Friedrich (n. 16) 507–508.

¹⁹ Numeration follows: A. Riese (Ed.). *Anthologia Latina* (n. 16).

²⁰ Verg. *Aen.* 4, 700 (*croceus*). Strictly speaking, those are the wings of Iris that are called 'saffron'; Prop. 3, 5, 32 (*purpureus*); Claud. *Carm. min.* 28, 4 (*rubens*).

²¹ Xenophan mentions green as one of the colours of the rainbow along with πορφύρεος and φοινίκεος (fr. 33, 2 Gentili – Prato). Seneca points out green together with sky blue and purple (*Nat.* 1, 3, 12).

son he has in view the polychromy of flowers – that of roses, irises and violets. Therefore green is hardly appropriate.

An inquiry into the manuscript tradition of *De raptu Proserpinae* reveals such variants as *internitet*²² and *intermicat*:²³ the rainbow shines amidst the clouds. The reading *internitet* was even accepted by L. Jeep in his edition of Claudian's poems.²⁴ In the present state of affairs, *interviret* should be undoubtedly given preference since it is *lectio difficilior*, being a borrowing from Statius' *Thebais*. At the same time, alternative versions found in the manuscripts might, possibly, contribute to the understanding of Claudian's text: the copyists put a stress on the rainbow's lustre rather than any specific colour.

As we have seen, the combinatory power of *intervirere* is rather weak, which makes it not an easy task to discuss the meaning of the word and to arrive at a reliable conclusion. At the same time I believe that one should take into consideration the quite customary usage of the words *viridis* and *virere* in order to designate freshness and brightness (in particular of colour). On this point one may compare *viridis* with *purpureus* that can be used to denote not so much a definite colour as its vitality and liveliness.²⁵ In much the same way the Russian adjective *румяный* is not a colour rendering only ('rudy-faced') but it points also to bloom and freshness.²⁶ Pliny the Elder e. g. uses the adjective *viridis* to describe the serenity of the sky after the rain (*NH* 17, 74). Another significant example of the figurative meaning of this word is illustrated by a newly found inscription from Colle Maiorana, adversed to Ianus in Latium dated to Hadrian's time:²⁷ settled peace is called *viridis*:

[I]ane Pater, qui templa deum caelesti cl[audis]
[cl]ausa tua reseras et reserata ser[as]
[accipe] vota novis haec quae tibi mando l[ibis]
[et fa]ciles aditus da Iovis ad s[...]

²² Cod. Antverpiensis XIV saec.; cod. Leidensis XIV saec.; cod. Cantabrigiensis Coll. Pet. XIII / XIV saec.

²³ Cod. Vaticanus Reginensis XV saec.; cod. Erlangensis XV saec.

²⁴ *Claudii Claudiani carmina*. Rec. L. Jeep. I–II (Lipsiae 1876–1879) *ad loc.*

²⁵ Consider, for example, *ver purpureum* (Verg. *Ecl.* 9, 10) or *purpureum* <...> *iubar* – of a “shining” appearance of the ruler (Mart. 8, 65, 4).

²⁶ Н. Б. Бахилина, *История цветообозначений в русском языке* [N. Bachilina, *The History of Colour Designation in Russian*] (Moscow 1975) 118.

²⁷ W. D. Lebeck, “Das neue Lateinische Ianus-Gedicht aus Colle Maiorana in Latium”, *ZPE* 150 (2004) 69–83.

[gente]m Romanam Latiumq[ue] ay[...]
[ad] **pacem** stabilitam et **viride[m]...**²⁸

To sum up, it seems to me that Claudian did not set himself the task of creating an uncommon and striking image of a green rainbow. We might conjecture that what Claudian had in mind was not the colour itself but its brightness and strength. As to the use of a rare word, it might be explained by the poet's wish to imitate Statius – a poet from whom Claudian borrows as often as from Vergil.²⁹

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В поэме “Похищение Прозерпины” (II, 98–100) Клавдий Клавдиан сравнивает яркость и пестроту оттенков цветов, в числе прочего, с радугой, которая, как пишет поэт, *interviret* среди облаков. Этот редкий глагол засвидетельствован в латинской литературе до Клавдиана дважды: у Стация в “Фиваиде” (IV, 98) и у Солина (52, 61). Подходит ли значение ‘зеленеть среди других цветов; блеснуть зеленым’, предлагаемое *ThLL* к данному месту? В латинской и древнегреческой поэзии радуга никогда не определяется зеленым цветом, взятым отдельно от других. С опорой на альтернативные рукописные чтения *internitet* и *intermicat* делается вывод о том, что в употреблении Клавдианом глагола *intervirere* важна не столько цветовая составляющая, сколько приставка глагола: радуга видна среди облаков. Поскольку *viridis* и *virere* часто используются для обозначения сильного свежего цвета, для Клавдиана, по-видимому, был важен не столько конкретный цветовой оттенок, сколько его яркость и интенсивность.

²⁸ Lebeck proposes to restore *revocet* or *faciat* (*Ibid.*, 80).

²⁹ Reminiscences from Virgil and Statius in Claudian take second place after adoptions from Ovid (for statistics see: C. Muellner, *De imaginibus similitudinibusque, quae in Claudiani carminibus inveniuntur* [Dissertationes philologicae Vindobonenses 4, Vindobonae 1893] 99–203).