

Passages for comment from Claudian

On the rape of Proserpina 1.20-66:

“O gods, who are served by the numberless and sluggish crowd of empty Avernus, to whose greedy coffer is granted whatever perishes in the world, whom the barrier of Styx flows round with livid-grey shallows, and past whom Phlegethon proceeds with panting eddies, whirling his smoking waters: disclose to me the mysteries of sacred matters and the secrets of your world: with what torch Love made Pluto bend; how high-spirited Proserpina was stolen away and came to possess Chaos as her dowry, and over how many shores her anxious mother wandered on her troubled course; whence grain was given to the nations and, with the abandonment of acorns, the oak of Dodona gave way to the discovery of corn.

The leader of Erebus once upon a time blazed forth into swelling anger, intending to stir up war against the gods above because he alone was unmarried and had long been wasting away barren years, unable to bear his ignorance of the marriage-bed and the fact that he knew not the allurements of a bridegroom and the sweet name of father. Now all the monsters that lurked in the abyss of the dead rushed to form squadrons and a battle-line, and the Furies swore a joint oath against the Thunderer, and Tisiphone with hair of evil-doing snakes, brandishing a pine-torch of inauspicious gleam, summoned the spirits of the dead in arms to the ghostly camp. The elements, once again fighting with resisting matter, would have almost broken their bond, and the young Titans, their prison torn open within the depths and their chains unloosed, would have seen the light of heaven, and again bloody Aegaeon would have thrown off the knotted ropes from his enlarged body and battered at the thunderbolts hurled at him with the blows of his hundred hands.

But the Fates forbade these threats and, fearing for the world, spread before the feet and throne of the leader the streams of their grim grey hair, and with tears of entreaty put out their hands towards his knees: those hands under whose law all things are held, which draw out the succession of destiny with their thumb, and unwind the long ages from their iron spindles.

First Lachesis, with hair unkempt and dishevelled, cried out these words to the fierce king: 'O mightiest ruler of night and master over the shades, for whom our threads toil, who appoint the end and seeds of all things and balance the alternation of birth in turn with death, who govern life and destruction (for whatever matter brings forth anywhere is created at your gift and is owed to you, and after the fixed detours of time souls are despatched once more into the confines of flesh): do not seek to dissolve the established laws of peace which we have given and our distaff has spun, nor overturn the bonds of brothers with the trumpet-blast of civil war. Why do you raise the standards of unrighteousness? Why do you give the sinful Titans access to the airs of heaven?' (tr. Gruzelier)

[20 di, quibus innumerum vacui famulatur Avernī
vulgus iners, opibus quorum donatur avaris
quidquid in orbe perit, quos Styx liventibus ambit
interfusa vadis et quos fumantia torquens
aequora gurgitibus Phlegethon perlustrat anhelis:
25vos mihi sacrarum penetralia pandite rerum
et vestri secreta poli: qua lampade Ditem
flexit Amor; quo ducta ferox Proserpina raptu
possedit dotale Chaos quantasque per oras
sollicito genetrix erraverit anxia cursu;
30unde datae populis fruges et glande relictā
cesserit inventis Dodonia quercus aristas.]

dux Erebi quondam tumidas exarsit in iras
 proelia moturus superis quod solus egeret
 conubiis sterilesque diu consumeret annos
 35inpatiens nescire torum nullasque mariti
 inlecebras nec dulce patris cognoscere nomen.
 iam quaecumque latent ferali monstra barathro
 in turmas aciemque ruunt contraque Tonantem
 coniurant Furiae, crinitaque sontibus hydrys
 40Tisiphone quatiens infausto lumine pinum
 armatos ad castra vocat pallentia Manes.
 paene reluctatis iterum pugnantia rebus
 rupissent elementa fidem penitusque revulso
 carcere laxatis pubes Titania vinclis
 45vidisset caeleste iubar rursusque cruentus
 Aegaeon positis aucto de corpore nodis
 obvia centeno vexasset fulmina motu.
 sed Parcae vetuere minas orbique timentes
 ante pedes soliumque ducis fudere severam
 50canitiem genibusque suas cum supplice fletu
 admove manu: quarum sub iure tenentur
 omnia, quae seriem fatorum pollice ducunt
 longaue ferratis evolvunt saecula fuis.
 prima fero Lachesis clamabat talia regi
 55incultas dispersa comas: 'o maxime noctis
 arbiter umbrarumque potens, cui nostra laborant
 stamina, qui finem cunctis et semina praebes
 nascendique vices alterna morte rependis,
 qui vitam letumque regis (nam quidquid ubique
 60gignit materies, hoc te donante creatur
 debeturque tibi, certisque ambagibus aevi
 rursus corporeos animae mittuntur in artus):
 ne pete firmatas pacis dissolvere leges
 quas dedimus nevitque colus, neu foedera fratrum
 65civili converte tuba, cur in pia tollis
 signa? quid incestis aperis Titanibus auras?

Claudian *On the rape of Proserpina* 2.186-233:

"After Sicily, subdued by his hand, loosened its hard bonds and separated wide with an
 immense gaping cleft, the terror suddenly became visible to the sky: the stars abandoned
 allegiance to their courses; the Bear bathed himself in the forbidden ocean; terror hastened
 lazy Bootes to his setting. Orion shuddered; Atlas grew pale when he heard the neighing
 steeds; their cloudy panting darkened the bright heavens and the sun's orb terrified the horses,
 who had been accustomed to graze in the long darkness: they came to a standstill, champing
 their bits, astonished by the better world, and struggled to return again to fearful Chaos with
 downward-tilting yoke-pole. Presently, when they felt the lash on their beaten backs and
 learnt to endure the sunlight, they galloped on, rushing quicker than a winter torrent and
 swifter than a hurtling spear: not so fast speeds the Parthian javelin or the onset of Auster or
 the nimble keenness of a troubled mind. Their bits were warm with blood; their death-
 bringing breath infected the breezes; the sand was poisoned, polluted by their foam.
 The nymphs scattered; Proserpina was snatched away in the chariot and appealed to the

goddesses. Now Pallas uncovered the Gorgon's face, and the goddess of Delos hastened up with her bow drawn, and they did not yield to their uncle: their common maidenhood spurred them on to fight and aggravated the crime of the fierce abductor. He was like a lion who, when it has gained hold of a heifer which is the glory of the stall and herd, and dug at the bared entrails with his claws and exhausted his savagery on all its limbs, stands foul with clotted gore, shakes out the tangles of his mane, and disdains the insignificant rage of the shepherds.

'Conqueror of a cowardly rabble, lowest of the brothers,' Pallas said, 'to what point have your Furies stirred you with their goads and impious torches? Why have you left your abode and dare to defile heaven with your Tartarean chariot? You have the ugly Dirae, the other spirits of Lethe, the grim Furies, worthy to have you as husband. Leave your brother's dwelling, forsake the territory allotted to another, be gone and rest content with your own darkness. Why do you mingle the living with the buried? Why do you trample over our world, when you belong elsewhere?'

Shouting out these words, she struck the steeds which were eager to pass by with her threatening shield-boss and slowed them down with the obstacle of her buckler, pressing upon them with the hissing of the Gorgon's snakes and overshadowing them with her spreading plumes; her ashen spear was poised to strike, illumining the black chariot before it, and had almost been launched when Jupiter from the height of heaven hurled the peace-imposing wings of his bright-red thunderbolt, admitting himself to be the father-in-law: a wedding-song thundered in the gaping clouds and flames confirmed the marriage as witnesses.

Reluctantly the goddesses gave way. Latona's daughter checked her bow with a moan and uttered these words:" (tr. Gruzelier)

[postquam victa manu duros Trinacria nexus
solvit et inmenso late discessit hiatu,
apparet subitus caelo timor: astra viarum
mutavere fidem; vetito se proluit Arctos
190aequore; praecipitat pigrum formido Booten.
horruit Orion; audito palluit Atlans
hinnitu; rutilos obscurat anhelitus axes
discolor et longa solitos caligine pasci
terrui orbis equos: pressis haesere lupatis
195attoniti meliore polo rursusque verendum
in Chaos obliquo certant temone reverti.
mox, ubi pulsato senserunt verbera tergo
et solem didicere pati, torrentius amne
hiberno tortaue ruunt pernicious hasta:
200quantum non iaculum Parthi, non impetus Austri,
non leve sollicitae mentis discurrit acumen.
sanguine frena calent; corrumpit spiritus auras
letifer; infectae spumis vitiantur harenae.
diffugiunt Nymphae; rapitur Proserpina curru
205inploratque deas. iam Gorgonis ora revelat
Pallas et intento festinat Delia telo
nec patruo cedunt: stimulat communis in arma
virginitas crimenque feri raptoris acerbatur.
ille velut stabuli decus armentique iuencam
210cum leo possedit nudataque viscera fodit

unguibus et rabiem totos exegit in armos,
 stat crassa turpis sanie nodosque iubarum
 excutit et viles pastorum despicit iras.
 'ignavi domitor vulgi, deterrime fratrum,'
 215 Pallas ait, 'quo te stimulis facibusque profanis
 Eumenides movere tuae? cur sede relictā
 audes Tartareis caelum incestare quadrigis?
 sunt tibi deformes Dirae, sunt altera Lethes
 numina, sunt tristes Furiae te coniuge dignae.
 220 fratris linque domos, alienam desere sortem,
 nocte tua contentus abi. quid viva sepultis
 admisces? nostrum quid proteris advena mundum?'
 talia vociferans avidos transire minaci
 cornipedes umbone ferit clipeique retardat
 225 obice Gorgoneisque premens adsibilat hydrys
 praetentaque operit crista; libratur in ictum
 fraxinus et nigros illuminat obvia currus
 missaque paene foret, ni Iuppiter aethere summo
 pacificas rubri torsisset fulminis alas
 230 confessus socerum: nimbis hymenaeus hiulcis
 intonat et testes firmant conubia flammae.
 invitae cessere deae. conpescuit arcum
 cum gemitu talesque dedit Latonia voces:]

Claudian *On the rape of Proserpina* 3.19-65:

“The matters of mortal beings have once again diverted my attention—matters that I had long neglected after I found out about the idleness of Saturn's rule and the decline of that slothful age, and I decided to urge on with the spurs of an anxious life peoples long rendered lethargic by the inactivity of my father's reign, so that their crops should not grow high of their own accord in untilled fields, nor the woods flow with honey, nor wine well up from the springs and all the rivers roar into wine-cups. It is not indeed that I begrudge it—for it is not right for gods to feel jealousy or cause injury—but, because extravagance is a dissuasion from a virtuous life and abundance muddies the minds of human beings, I acted so that poverty, becoming ingenious, should challenge men's sluggish spirits and gradually investigate the hidden ways of nature, and so that cleverness should give birth to skills and practice nourish them.

'Now Nature nags at me with interminable complaints to relieve the human race, calls me a harsh and pitiless tyrant, mentions the ages under my father's rule, and cries that Jupiter is miserly while she is rich, alleging that I want the plains rough with decay and the countryside full of thorn-bushes, and that I do not deck the year with any fruits; she complains that she, who had previously been the mother of mortal creatures, has now suddenly transformed her habits into those of a terrible stepmother: “What benefit has it been that men have drawn their mind from the heavens, that they have held up their heads on high, if they range over pathless regions in the manner of beasts, if they crack acorns like them for fodder? Does this kind of life please them, hidden away in woodland morasses, an existence indistinguishable from that of wild animals?” Seeing that I have often endured such complaints from Mother Nature, at last, feeling more kindly disposed towards the world, I have decided to divert nations from the nourishment of Chaonian oaks; and for that reason it is decreed that Ceres, who now, ignorant of her ills, is lashing the lions of Mount Ida in company with her grim mother, should hasten to and fro over sea and land with avid grief until, gladdened by the evidence of

her daughter's discovery, she should bestow the gift of grain, and her chariot be carried through the clouds to scatter amongst the peoples corn-ears previously unknown, and her sky-blue serpents submit to an Attic yoke. But if any of the gods dares to reveal the identity of the abductor to Ceres, I swear by the greatness of my empire and the profound peace of nature, be it my son or my sister or my wife or one of my train of daughters, be it even she who boasts that she was conceived within my head, that one will feel from afar the anger of my aegis and the blow of my thunderbolt, will regret that he was born to a divine destiny, and pray for death; then, stricken by a wound, he will be delivered over to my son-in-law Pluto himself, to endure the realms he has betrayed, and he will know whether Tartarus is united behind its own cause. Thus it is ordained: let destiny flow on unchangeably in this course.' He spoke and convulsed the stars with his awful nod." (tr. Gruzelier)

[*'abduxere meas iterum mortalia curas*
20*iam pridem neglecta mihi, Saturnia postquam*
otia et ignavi senium cognovimus aevi,
sopitosque diu populos torpore paterno
sollicitae placuit stimulis inpellere vitae,
incultis ne sponte seges grandesceret arvis,
25*undaret neu silva favis neu vina tumerent*
fontibus et totae fremerent in pocula ripae.
haud equidem invideo—neque enim livescere fas est
vel nocuisse deos—sed, quod dissuasor honesti
luxus et humanas oblimat copia mentes,
30*provocet ut segnes animos rerumque remotas*
ingeniosa vias paulatim exploret egestas
utque artes pariat sollertia, nutriat usus.
'nunc mihi cum magnis instat Natura querellis
humanum relevare genus, durumque tyrannum
35*inmitemque vocat regnataque saecula patri*
commemorat parcumque Iovem se divite clamat,
qui campos horrere situ dumisque repleri
rura velim nullisque exornem fructibus annum;
se iam, quae genetrix mortalibus ante fuisset,
40*in dirae subito mores transisse novercae:*
“quid mentem traxisse polo, quid profuit altum
erexisse caput, pecudum si more pererrant
avia, si frangunt communia pabula glandes?
haecine vita iuvat silvestribus abdita lustris,
45*indiscreta feris?” tales cum saepe parentis*
pertulerim questus, tandem clementior orbi
Chaonio statui gentes avertere victu;
atque ideo Cererem, quae nunc ignara malorum
verberat Idaeos torva cum matre leones,
50*per mare, per terras avido discurrere luctu*
decretum, natae donec laetata repertae
indicio tribuat fruges, currusque feratur
nubibus ignotas populis sparsurus aristas
et iuga caerulei subeant Actaea dracones.
55*quod si quis Cereri raptorem prodere divum*
audeat, imperii molem pacemque profundam

obtestor rerum, natus licet ille sororve
vel coniunx fuerit natarumve agminis una,
se licet illa meo conceptam vertice iactet,
60sentiet iratam procul aegida, sentiet ictum
fulminis et genitum divina sorte pigebit
optabitque mori; tum vulnere saucius ipsi
tradetur genero, passurus prodita regna,
et sciet an propriae conspirent Tartara causae.
65hoc sanctum: mansura fluant hoc ordine fata.'
dixit et horrendo concussit sidera nutu.]