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S-C Kevin Tsai

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Hellish Love: Genre in Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*

S-C KEVIN TSAI

For Gian-Biagio Conte, genre, rather than being rigidly constituted by formal features, is “a discursive form capable of constructing a coherent model of the world in its own image. It is a language, that is, a lexicon and style, but it is also a system of the imagination and a grammar of things” (1994, 132). Over the past two decades Ovidian scholarship has abandoned seeking the essential generic identity of a literary work and has shifted instead to examining the interaction of genres within a poem—in other words, functionalism, rather than ontology.¹ Innovating upon Richard Heinze’s work on Ovid’s poetry, Stephen Hinds in his *Metamorphosis of Persephone* spearheads some of the most successful studies of Ovid by investigating the generic dynamics of epic and elegy, not as metrical forms, but as the discourses associated with these forms. Inspired by these scholars’ works, I shall consider Claudian’s reception and deployment of classical generic poetics within the changed configurations of literary genres in the fourth century in a few selected passages of the *De raptu Proserpinae*.

Since much of Claudian’s corpus is political poetry or propaganda, scholars have focused more on his historical significance than on his literary achievement.² A subject of recent scholarly interest, the unfinished epic *De raptu* on the abduction and marriage of Proserpina stands out from Claudian’s corpus as an endeavor motivated largely by his literary ambition to treat an important myth that had never been told in a separate epic.³ As such, this poem offers a unique chance for an analysis focused on the literary complexity of a *doctus poeta* who interacts with the tradition of Roman epic poetry in terms of *topoi*, narrative, and genre.⁴ A self-conscious imitator of his epic predecessors, Claudian succeeds in transferring, and transforming, an abundance of literary motifs through which he engages the generic dynamics historically deriving from the fruitful experimentation of the Augustan poets.⁵ But in certain respects, Claudian departs significantly from earlier epicists, for the fourth century in which he wrote was a period of generic instability that saw the

reshaping of classical genres and the emergence of new poetic forms. In this context we must remember a central idea of Hans Robert Jauss: literary genres are not normative (*ante rem*) or classificatory (*post rem*) but historical (*in re*), “in a continuity in which each earlier genre even furthers and supplements itself through the later one.”⁶ Functionalism must be tempered with a diachronically responsive approach that accounts for the evolving horizon of expectation.

If by Claudian’s time a certain amount of force still remained in the classical epic despite its furcation into genres like the panegyric epic, the cento epic, and the biblical epic, the same cannot be said of elegy, the genre of *servitium amoris* that had not been practiced since the first century C.E. Indeed, if the erotic discourse of elegy in *De raptu* intrudes upon the martial discourse of the epic à la Ovid to destabilize the authority built upon the latter, it is mediated at times through the hexameter epithalamium that serves as the generic counterpart to the mediating figure of Proserpina in the narrative. In this paper, I first revisit the opening scene of the Underworld, a passage in which Stephen Wheeler detects borrowings from the epic tradition that mark the poem as a tale about preservation of cosmic order. This scene engages with the epithalamium as well, providing the first clue about how the first two books of *De raptu* are framed generically. In section 2, I offer a reading of the subsequent scene, the Embassy of the Fates, which subverts Pluto’s power by creating an elegiac moment, thereby dissuading Pluto from launching a Gigan-tomachic war. The purpose of the embassy—to bend (*flectere*) Pluto’s will by offering a bride (Proserpina, as Zeus later decides)—leads to section 3, where I consider how Claudian constructs his poetic program from Virgil’s *Aeneid* while imitating the erotic politics of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In section 4, we will see how the simile describing Pluto’s reaction as a dissipated storm, when read through the precedent of the storm episode in *Aen.* 1.34ff., embodies the genre play in *De raptu*. In section 5, I discuss how Claudian contextualizes his literary program within the wider range of literary tools—e.g., the epithalamium and the funerary verse—to cast Proserpina as a unifier of genres.

1. The Epithalamium in Epic

The first scene in which Pluto appears is the *causa* of the poem. Pluto is represented not only as the ruler of the Underworld but as its very metonymic embodiment, with the terrifying monsters of Hades appearing to be his extension (1.37–47). The eruption of his anger is quite sudden (1.32–36):⁷

dux Erebi quondam *tumidas exarsit in iras*
 proelia moturus superis quod solus egeret
 conubiis sterilesque diu consumeret annos
 inpatiens nescire torum nullasque mariti
 inlecebras nec dulce patris cognoscere nomen.

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.⁸

For this reason, Pluto is willing to release all the monsters lurking in the depths of hell to war against the gods (1.37–38). Rushing to battle are the Furies swearing an unholy oath against Jove (1.38–39), along with ghostly armies summoned by Tisiphone (1.39ff.), the rebelling elements (1.42–43), and even Aegeon and the Titans, about to break free from their shackles (1.44ff.). Reading Pluto’s *ira* through the tradition of Roman epic narrative as the poem’s driving force, specifically one modeled upon Statius’s *Theb.* 8.21–83, Wheeler (1995, 114–23) defends the scene against charges that it is awkward, poorly implemented—in short, a disaster.⁹ But we might note that there is something quite “unepic-like” to Pluto’s divine wrath. The lord of the Underworld threatens a second Gigantomachy, and there *is* no greater topic for epic than this—but for what? Erotic fulfillment, marital bliss, and fatherhood. As suddenly as Pluto falls into a fit of rage, so we find ourselves in unexpected generic territory.

This scene bears some resemblances to another poem, namely Claudian’s *Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti* (henceforth, *Epithalamium*), set after Stilicho had already promised his daughter Maria to Honorius. The poem begins with the emperor, who very suddenly finds himself struck by love for his bride: *hauserat insolitos promissae virginis ignes / Augustus primoque rudis flagraverat aestu* (Augustus conceived unaccustomed flames for his promised bride, and he burned, inexperienced, in his first fever of love, *Epith.* 1–2). Honorius then bursts forth with a bachelor’s complaint (20–22), similar to Pluto’s address to Jove (*De raptu* 1.93–116). In these highly rhetorical speeches, they both bemoan their bachelorhood: Honorius citing the injustice he suffers, being kept from deservedly marrying his bride; Pluto citing the inequity of his solitude compared to Jupiter’s licentiousness, and the desolation of his realm made greater by the brilliance of heaven. Cupid sees how Honorius has

fallen prey to love, and hurries to inform his mother of their latest conquest. Their dialogue (*Epith.* 110–22) shares with certain parts of *De raptu* (e.g., 1.20ff. and 2.11–14, to be discussed below in §3) a triumphalism on Venus's part. The remainder of the *Epithalamium* is formulaic: trailed by a retinue of Nereids, Venus embarks on the back of Triton to Italy to persuade Maria to accept her groom.¹⁰ Here the mortal bride fares better than the immortal Proserpina, for whom the only persuasion comes from Pluto in his softer moments (*Rapt.* 2.277–306). After the abrupt inception of desire and Venus's triumphalism, descriptions of wedding preparation (*Epith.* 190–227) constitute the third feature shared between these two poems.¹¹ If *De raptu* follows “the Ovidian plan by Venus bracketed by Zeus' masterplot in the Homeric Hymn” (Barchiesi 1999, 116 n. 16), this structure is framed by the epithalamial, beginning with the sudden affliction of passion in book I and concluding with the wedding preparation in 2.326ff.

This trio of similarities compels us to consider the new genre that the fortunes of literary history seem to have forced into our reading of *De raptu*. Claudian was the first to imitate the genre of wedding songs in hexameter which Statius had created with the *Epithalamium in Stellam et Violentillam* (*Silv.* 1.2). The late antique epithalamialists generally followed these two poets as models: the lovers are predictably brought together by Venus and Cupids, “who waltz through the air in dove-drawn chariots pursued by flocks of Nymphs and Amoretti” (Cameron 1970, 194). Although Claudian helped establish this formula and its attendant tropes for Sidonius, Dracontius, and Ennodius, *De raptu* relates to the *Epithalamium* in a different way: the particular epithalamial narrative and stylistic features that Statius shares with Claudian (as observed by Pavlovskis 1965, 165–68 and Basson 1999, 83–84) do not include our trio of similarities, which is really a peculiarity only of Claudian's *Epithalamium* and *De raptu*. Though one may see seedlings of the trio in Statius, any direct relationship between *De raptu* and the genre of the epithalamium may very well be limited primarily to the poem for Honorius.¹²

But even this delimited form of genre-crossing requires a modification to the epic versus elegy paradigm influential in Ovidian studies, for the *Epithalamium* does make one clear contribution beyond serving as narrative model.¹³ In the next three sections, we will see that *De raptu*'s amatory language and sexual politics, while deriving from elegiac discourse, are pressed by the narrative into the service of marital teleology—hardly a typical focus of elegy. While the presence of the epithalamial does *not* mean the suppression or erasure of the elegiac, it does mean that the

latter is often mediated through the former, a genre of poetry “epica nella forma, privata e personale nell’intento” (Morelli 1910, 328). Indeed, such was Statius’s programmatic declaration in his epithalamium, in which personified Elegy hides her “foot”—that is, the pentameter of the second line of the elegiac couplet—so as to join the nine Muses in a wedding song in hexameter:

procul ecce canoro
 demigrant Helicone deae quatiuntque *novena*
lampade sollemnem thalamis coeuntibus ignem
 et de Pieriis vocalem fontibus undam.
 quas inter *vultu petulans Elegea* propinquat
celsior assueto divasque hortatur et ambit
alternum furata pedem, decimamque videri
se cupit et mediis fallit permixta sorores.

(*Silh.* 1.2.3–10)

See, the goddesses afar come down from tuneful Helicon and with *ninefold torch* toss ritual fire of marriage union and vocal wave from Pieria’s fount. Among them *pert-faced Elegy* draws near, *taller than her wont*; she urges the goddesses and courts them, *concealing her alternate foot, wanting to be seen as a tenth and mingling among the Sisters unnoticed*.¹⁴

Statius prays for acceptance of the “tenth” genre that he has very self-consciously created (through the *nova plectra*, 1.2.2), hoping to sneak the elegy into hexameter “unnoticed.” The tone of elegy mediated through the epithalamium is a bit loftier (*celsior*) than what one might find in Propertius or in Ovid—how else to join in the “vocal wave” for a wedding?—but fundamentally it remains *petulans*, suggestive of a degree of immodesty. This indeed is a good characterization of the elegiac in *De raptu*; the effect of such an epithalamial refractive lens that stands between epic and elegy, as we shall see, is not always conspicuous, but it does subtly and at times crucially inform our reading of the poem.

2. Pluto’s Blush

Let us return to the beginning of the poem quoted earlier (1.32–36). By threatening a second Gigantomachy, Pluto disrupts cosmic order and forces the Fates, who traditionally possess authority over even the greatest Olympian god, into supplicating him to ease his ire. The destabi-

lization of authority resulting from the threat to return to the beginning of the world is embodied in the Fates' hands. Though they are placed upon Pluto's knees in an act of supplication, they seem to maintain their cosmic function and authority over all the gods, for Claudian affirms that these are the hands that possess *ius* (1.51–52), that have the power to defuse the threat (*vetuere minas*, 1.48). Just exactly how do these marvelously paradoxical hands accomplish this end? The ambiguous presentation of the Fates' authority alerts us to the undercurrents of this intriguing moment in *De raptu*.

Erich Potz (1985, 23) points out that *De raptu* is perhaps the first poem to put Pluto in a favorable light through humanization. It is in the Fates' embassy that we see Pluto as a humanized deity and as an individual separate from his minions (1.65–69):

'cur in pia tollis
signa? quid incestis aperis Titanibus auras?
posce Iovem; dabitur coniunx.' vix ille pepercit
erubuitque preces, animusque relanguit atrox
quamvis *indocilis flecti*.

“Why do you raise these wicked standards? Why do you lay open the heavens for sinful Titans? *Ask Jove: a wife will be given.*” He hesitantly yielded and *blushed* at the prayers, and his grim *spirit*, though *untaught to bending, relented*.

Menacing the destruction of cosmic order and boundaries, the Gigantomachic imageries follow the tradition of Roman epic poetry that views the War of the Giants as the ultimate chaos, describable only by a poem equal to it in greatness.¹⁵ At the same time, in their historical context, these imageries also play upon late antique anxieties about the barbarian threat to peace and civilization, fomented by the regular incursions of the Germanic tribes. However, the brevity and simplicity of Lachesis's solution (*'posce Iovem; dabitur coniunx'* [“Ask Jove: a wife will be given,” 1.67]) anticlimactically deflates Pluto's threats. By rechanneling Pluto's erotic desire from epic violence to sexual diplomacy, the Fates manage to save the world: they defer the threat of Gigantomachy by redirecting Pluto to Jove, and later Jove defers the threat issued for the second time by redirecting him to Proserpina.

If *De raptu's causa* in 1.32–36 already bears resemblances to Claudian's epithalamium for Honorius, Pluto's reaction to the Embassy of the Fates

invites further comparison. After conceiving of love for Maria, Honorius exhibits the symptoms of complete infatuation (*Epith.* 6–10):

. . . mens omnis aberrat
in vultus quos finxit Amor. quam saepe medullis
erupit gemitus! quotiens incanduit ore
confessus secreta *rubor* nomenque beatum
iniussae scripsere manus!

His whole mind is distracted by the face that Love made. How often a groan broke forth from his depths! How often a *blushing* lit up his cheeks, betraying his secret, and how often his unbidden hands would write the blessed name!

The description of Honorius's appearance here would be emasculating if he were a grown man. But in 398, when his marriage took place, he was merely fourteen, and such frivolous behavior would have been acceptable for teenage boys who were thought to have feminine characteristics. If blushing is one of the two physical reactions that betray Honorius's infatuated state, Claudian certainly does not capitalize upon it at all later in the poem, for example to convey the intensity of Honorius's emotions or to portray its effect on his manhood. In *De raptu*, however, Claudian *does* capitalize upon Pluto's blushing to undercut the masculinity of the master of Hades.

More than verbal embellishment, Pluto's reaction (*erubuit*) invokes a cultural psychology and generic code that destabilize Pluto's authority. According to Robert Kaster (1997, 7–8), the Roman blush was an involuntary, exterior reaction outwardly acknowledging *pudor*, a spontaneous, internally produced emotion. The Roman association of the interior emotion with its exterior manifestation was so strong that for Pliny, just as *pudor* causes blushing, so blushing indicates *pudor*.¹⁶ If we accept Aulus Gellius's gloss of *pudor* as "fear of fair criticism" (*timor iustae reprehensionis*, 19.6.3), Pluto reacts with shame because the Fates expose the injustice of his threat of war (metonymically represented by *inopia signa*: 1.65–66), and make him self-conscious about his marital desire.¹⁷ In other words, the driving force behind the narrative thus far—Pluto's anger at his own bachelorhood—is neutralized by the Fates' "fair criticism." But this *iusta reprehensio* is hardly separate from the Fates' strategic displacement of strife, as Pluto's *pudor* evokes elegiac discourses about courtship. For Ovid, blushing is a proof of decency, and on the strength of this perform-

ance the elegiac lover recommends himself to Cytherea in *Am.* 1.3.13–14—though one could skeptically quip that *pudor* is passé, suitable only for simple country folks, not for urbane city slickers (*Ars Am.* 1.607–8). Indeed, in *Am.* 1.8, when informed of an interested suitor, the love interest *erubuit* (blushed, 35), whereupon Dipsas the bawd (*Iena*) offers her cynical brand of *ars amatoria*: ‘*deceat alba quidem pudor ora, sed iste, / si simules, prodest; verus obesse solet*’ (Shame befits a fair face, but it is a benefit, if you feign it; true shame often is a disadvantage, 35–36). Unschooled in love and lacking a “tough face” (*os durum*) that the Romans considered advantageous for government, the lord of the Underworld shows—alas!—true shame and real vulnerability. Here the tone strikes a curious note of incongruity with Pluto’s dreadful function of dispensing hellish justice: a god like him should not suffer from *pudor*, especially if his *animus* is *atrox* (*Rapt.* 1.68).

Another aspect of the physical representation of *pudor* in Pluto’s reaction is his silence, a form of passivity. As Carlin Barton observes (2001, 227), blushing reveals that the blusher feels his will overcome, that he no longer has autonomy. Pluto’s marital wish places him in a vulnerable, weakened position, with a red face and dumbstruck mouth as evidence, eliciting a reaction more suitable for the elegiac suitor. His concession to the Fates is expressed wordlessly—*animusque relanguit* (and his spirit relented, 1.68)—echoing an Ovidian intertext that destabilizes Pluto’s authority by recasting him in the human role of a powerless male lover who cannot tear himself away from his beloved (*Am.* 2.9.25–28):

‘vive’ deus ‘posito’ siquis mihi dicat ‘amore!’
 deprecer: usque adeo dulce puella malum est.
 cum bene pertaesum est, *animoque relanguit* ardor,
 nescioquo miserae turbine mentis agor.

If some god were to say to me, “Live and discard love!” I would turn him away. For all times a sweet evil is a girl. When I have grown weary and the flames *in my spirit have relented*, I am seized by a whirlwind—I know not what—of a sad heart.

Just as Pluto’s blushing is assimilated to the literary archetype, not of the public voice of an autocratic tyrant, but of the private voice of a powerless lover feeling *pudor*, here his concession is cast in the language and framework of elegy to expose his sexual inexperience and the injustice of his militant posturing. This generic play creates an awkward moment for

his dictatorial persona, as Claudian assimilates Pluto, even if briefly, to the male lover's position in elegy: Pluto represents the weaker pole in the erotic dialectic. Following Foucault, Ellen Greene (1998, xiii) argues that in elegies, as elsewhere, ancient masculinity was unstable and at risk especially "in the presence of the sexually wanton female" since her "erotic impulses are imagined to be inexhaustible." In this scene Pluto's attempt to assert his patriarchal autocracy backfires and ironically results in the destabilization of his masculinity. The prospect of a wife in the abstract—the question of her sexual impulses aside—is already enough to produce an unambiguous, though momentary, glimpse of Pluto's vulnerable sexuality.¹⁸

Interestingly, though the Fates' speech remains very much within the confines of epic poetry, it manages to expose Pluto's vulnerability through generic play, precisely because Claudian inserts into the myth in 1.32ff. the epithalamial motive for Pluto's threat of Gigantomachy. Contrary to expectation, the addition of another martial theme, rather than resulting in a "grander" epic, gives a glimpse of an incongruent elegiac moment in the Fates' embassy. Without this threat of Gigantomachy the Fates cannot expose Pluto's vulnerability, whether in his action or in his sexuality. If Pluto as an amatory figure is ripe for parody, Claudian's addition of certain narrative details to the Proserpina myth—a bachelor complaint that leads to a threat of war, which in turn leads to the embassy—represents a skillful, though understated, interweaving of epithalamial motivation, epic threat, and elegiac power play. In a particularly humorous moment during the abduction, Pluto, with a speech (2.277–306) partly based on Polyphemus's address to Galatea in Ovid's *Met.* 8.810–20, assures the wailing Proserpina that he is a good match from a good family.¹⁹ As noted earlier, Venus would be doing this job if the poem were a proper epithalamium, but—poor Pluto!—he finds himself in the wrong genre and has to recommend himself. Since any attempt to sketch out the amorous interiority of Pluto would result in outright comedy, Claudian keeps his portrayal of Pluto's awkward sexuality subtle, with hints cloistered behind intertexts. Indeed, from within the epic, whether in diction or in theme (e.g., Gigantomachy), Claudian manages by a few choice words to highlight the issue of cosmic order in terms of not only sexuality but also the literary genres connected with gender.

Before we continue our reading of 1.65ff., let us explore further the function of blushing through a comparison with another gender/genre bender, namely Statius's *Achilleis* 1.283–337. As a symptom of the partic-

ular emotion of *pudor*, blushing here reveals to Thetis the interior that shame has made more pliant, and offers her a venue by which to overcome Achilles' reluctance to cross-dress to avoid the expedition to Troy. Anxious to disguise her son, Thetis assures Achilles that cross-dressing will not diminish his manhood, for he has mythological precedents to look to: Hercules spun wool for Omphale, and Jove disguised himself as Diana to win Callisto (1.260–65); moreover, Thetis promises to keep quiet and not to tell his tutor Chiron (1.272). Although her words are to no avail, love succeeds where reason fails. At a festival Achilles sees Deidamia, who stirs up romantic feelings in this “savage boy” (*trux puer*), softening him and causing him alternately to blush and turn pale (*palletque rubetque*, 1.299). It is *pudor* like this, caused by a love interest, that creates an opening from within, a vulnerable point for Thetis to foist her plan on him. Using love as bait, Thetis tells her formerly “unteachable” (*indocilis*, 1.284) son that donning women's clothing would offer him an opportunity to approach Deidamia. Achilles turns red (*mulcetur laetumque rubet*, 1.323), though pleased by the worldly suggestion—rather like the maiden in *Am.* 1.8 blushing at the old bawd's love advice—and his resistance to feminization begins to crumble from the inside.²⁰ With reddened cheeks, he is marked by silent passivity (also observable in Pluto), as he lowers his eyes to steal sidelong glances at the robe (1.323–24). We have, then, the three classic symptoms in the physical representation of *pudor* in Roman sources: a blush, silence, and downcast eyes, the first two of which are explicit in Pluto's reaction.²¹ Achilles becomes, of all the things a hero is not supposed to be, “willing to be compelled” (*cogique volentem*, 1.325)—a result of losing autonomy through shame—at which point his mother casts a girl's raiment over him. His downcast glances return us to *Am.* 1.8.35–36: how is feigned shame advantageous, while true shame is disadvantageous? The bawd explains her sinfully delicious scam: as the pursued woman fakes the symptoms of *pudor* with downcast eyes, she gets a chance to examine closely the suitor's gifts to determine how much to reward him by directly gazing back in amorous reciprocation (*Am.* 1.8.37–38). Achilles seems to assume unconsciously the tactics of such a wily opportunist, and for him the feminine garment is no longer repulsive, but desirable. At last, through a series of verbs of subjugation (“softens” [*mollit*]; “makes humble” [*submittit*]; “loosens” [*laxat*]; “tames” [*domat*]: *Ach.* 1.326–28), Thetis gradually transforms him, even to the point of teaching him the gait and “the *pudor* of speech” (*fandique pudor*, 1.331) befitting a woman.²² This total feminization of a terrible warrior begins, indeed, with little more than a blush. The desire for the fairer sex,

one would think, would in itself be a marker of masculinity. But in the *Achilleis* and in *De raptu*—where in the form of marital longing it threatens the grandiose Gigantomachy—desire results in self-conscious *pudor* and the concomitant passivity.

3. Claudian's Invocation and the Art of Bending

If the Achilles prior to feminization is called *indocilis* and is compared to a heated young bullock that must be restrained by the herdsman (*Ach.* 1.313ff.), Pluto in *De raptu* is described as *indocilis flecti* and as one who, being likened to a raging wind checked by Aeolus (1.69–75), must be brought under control.²³ The concession to Pluto's severity (*quamvis indocilis flecti*, 1.69) specifically responds to the framework of generic play that Claudian sets up, for the characterization of *indocilis flecti* resonates with the invocation in 1.20ff. by repeating the programmatic word *flectere*:

*di, quibus innumerum vacui famulatur Averno
vulgus iners . . .
vos mihi sacrarum penetralia pandite rerum
et vestri secreta poli: qua lampade Ditem
flexit Amor.*

O gods, for whom the countless crowd of empty Avernus serves as mere slaves . . . Reveal to me the innermost mysteries of the holy rites and the secrets of your world: by what lamp did Love bend Dis.

Through its syntactic structure, this passage combines two invocations in Virgil's *Aeneid*. The first comes from the well-known beginning of the epic: *Musa, mihi causas memora: quo numine laeso . . .* (Muse, call to my memory the causes: *by what divinity* wounded . . . , *Aen.* 1.8). Virgil appeals to the Muse to pinpoint the driving force of the epic—Juno—and Claudian absorbs this formula (relative pronoun and its antecedent in the instrumental ablative) in his own invocation.

But to signal that his tale takes place in a world fearful to and hidden from men, Claudian adapts another Virgilian invocation, this one in the catabasis of book 6 (*Aen.* 6.264–67):

*di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,*

sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro
pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.

O you gods who rule over the spirits, you silent shades, Chaos, Phlegethon, and those wide groves without a voice in the night, grant me leave to tell what I have heard, to reveal by your divinity the secrets buried in deep earth and darkness.

Sacrarum penetralia . . . rerum—Claudian’s adaptation of the Virgilian *res alta terra et caligine mersas*—is what he, like Virgil, wishes to reveal (*pandite/pandere*).²⁴ The imperative *pandite*, parallel to *memora* in the invocation from *Aeneid* 1, signals Claudian’s transposition of Virgil’s model of book 6 with the model of book 1. Whereas the Augustan poet asks for permission from the horrible deities of hell to reveal secrets—his real invocation comes from the heavenly daughters of Mnemosyne—Claudian explicitly and self-consciously declares that through this programmatic imitation his poem is driven by the energy of hell, that it is a mimesis of Virgil’s “economy of energies” (Hardie 1993, 60–65). Claudian of course is not unique in conceiving of hell, in contrast to the tranquility of heaven, as a place of “ceaseless movement, war, emotional turmoil” that often serves as “a starting-point for a new movement” in an epic, a narrative *topos* that pervades all post-Virgilian epics (Hardie 1993, 60). And so we may ask, where does Claudian’s contribution lie? Consider the structure of the proemium, as illustrated below:

Figure 1. The Structure of *De raptu* 1.20ff.

Address to the gods			Information requested (i.e., agenda of the epic)
Invocation	Request		
Referent 1	Attribute	“Revelation”	→ Rel. pronoun antecedent Abl. of instrument
Vocative 6	Rel. clause	<i>pandere/ite</i>	

This yields the following scheme, which may serve to summarize the discussion above:

Figure 2. Proemia compared

	Address to the Gods		Information requested
	Invocation	Request	
<i>Aeneid</i> 1	<i>Musa</i>	<i>memora</i>	<i>quo numine</i>
<i>Aeneid</i> 6	<i>Di</i>	<i>pandere</i>	n/a
<i>De raptu</i> 1	<i>Di</i>	<i>pandite</i>	<i>qua lampade</i>

Far from an incoherent potpourri of common epic, Claudian's proemium should be viewed as an example of very sophisticated, systematic reception of the Roman epic tradition. His thoughtful imitation of the Virgilian structure (*pandite* instead of *pandere* to parallel the imperative *memora*) highlights awareness of the generic interaction in *De raptu* (*lampas* for *numen*). The lamp is a trope of erotic Alexandrian poetry which persists in Latin elegy,²⁵ and in *De raptu* this is surely derived from Statius's epithalamial *novena lampas* (*Silv.* 1.2.4–5). The structure of the passage declares its allegiance with the tradition of epic poetry, while the vocabulary asserts the centrality of the elegiac paradigm in *De raptu*. In light of this comparison with Virgil, the proemium displaces divine agency with the object of the lamp, one that represents (as we will see in §4) the nexus of the erotic, the funerary, and the martial. In other words, while *De raptu* follows the *Aeneid* along the syntagmatic axis (i.e., combination of different proemia), the paradigmatic axis (i.e., substitution of terms) inflects generically to declare alignment with the elegiac. Claudian continues the tradition of post-Virgilian epicists who perform on the *Aeneid* what Hardie calls "combinatorial imitation," which reflects Virgil's own practice of combining imitations of different scenes from his literary predecessors to comment on them and to enrich his own poetry.²⁶

Therese Fuhrer (1998) observes that Valerius Flaccus organized the *Argonautica* through "Bildsfolge," a compositional technique whereby compact, self-contained scenes either look forward, or backward, through allusions to each other. Claudian seems to have used something akin to this technique, as he reiterates certain conceptually important words in different passages to deepen their meaning through comparison. An example in the *De raptu* is the word *flectere*, which, as we have already seen, expresses Pluto's indocility in the embassy in 1.65ff. and declares his programmatic submission to Love (or Venus) in the proemium at 1.20ff. The third time *flectere* occurs, however, is in an extended military metaphor that foreshadows the abduction of Proserpina (2.11–15):

prima dolo gaudens et tanto concita voto
 it Venus et *raptus* metitur corde *futuros*,
 iam durum *flexura* Chaos, iam Dite *subacto*
 ingenti *famulos* Manes *ductura triumpho*.

First is Venus, rejoicing in her trickery and excited by her vow, and in her heart she reckons of *the coming rape*; soon she will *bend* dreadful Chaos, soon she will *conquer* Dis, leading the ghosts as *slaves* in a magnificent *triumph*.

While “love as war” is hardly new—we only need to consider the famous *militat omnis amans* (Every lover is a soldier, *Am.* 1.9.1) to be reminded that such is a regular feature of elegiac poetry—Claudian obviously draws from the specific model of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. But his own *Epithalamium* also provides a useful comparandum. Upon seeing a smug Cupid, Venus asks (*Epith.* 110–17):

*‘quae proelia sudas,
inprobe? quis iacuit tellis? iterumne Tonantem
inter Sidonias cogis mugire iuencas?
an Titana domas? an pastoralia Lunam
rursus in antra vocas? durum magnumque videris
debellasse deum.’* suspensus in oscula matris
ille refert: ‘laetare, parens; *inmane tropaeum*
rettulimus, nostrum iam sensit Honorius arcum.’

“*What battles have you fought, wicked child? Who has fallen to your weapons? Have you again driven the Thunderer to bellow among the Sidonian heifers? Or have you conquered Apollo? Or again summoned Diana to a herdsman’s cave? You seem to have warred down a fierce great god.*” Hanging upon his mother’s kiss, he replies, “Rejoice, Mother. We have gained a *great trophy*, just now Honorius felt our bow [i.e., arrow].”

This Venus seems to “talk the talk” of the warlike goddess of love we know from Ovid, but does she “walk the walk”? In truth, her deeds in the poem cannot be characterized as those of the aggressive Venus behind the military metaphors. Because the poem’s subject is a wedding, Claudian, taking his cue from Statius (*Silv.* 1.2.65–139), has to make the goddess uncharacteristically wholesome, even as she speaks of conquest and trophies. Such euphemisms in Ovid can often mean rape, but in the *Epithalamium* the deities of love are eager mostly to bring people under the yoke of marriage. Thus Cupid urges his mother:

*‘scis Mariam patremque ducem, qui cuspidem Gallos
Italiamque fovet, nec te praeclara Serenae
fama latet. propera; regalibus adnue votis,
iunge toros.’*

(*Epith.* 119–22)

“You know Maria and her father, the general who favors the Gauls and Italy with his spear; the great fame of the Serena is not hidden

from you. Go forth; assent to their regal prayers, and unite them in marriage.”

And Venus does so, dutifully. Though blushing and Venus’s triumphalism are both found in the *Epithalamium* and in *De raptu*, the latter poem engages with the erotic discourses of elegy much more substantially than does the former, in which these features appear to be suave flourishes with only limited impact on the interpretation of the narrative.

As a model for both of Claudian’s poems, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is crucial for reading *De raptu*’s Venus. Patricia Johnson, in her study (1996) of *Metamorphoses* 5, points out that Ovid departs from more traditional depictions of the deities of love in elegiac poetry by conflating Roman political aggression with mythical sexual aggression, and by constructing Venus’s role in the rape through allusions to poetic as well as political works, primarily the *Aeneid*, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and Cicero’s *Verrius*. Venus’s is a boundless *imperium sexuelle*, the flipside of what Leslie Cahoon (1988) calls the Roman *libido dominandi*, the drive to conquer.²⁷ As the head of an empire of sexuality, the goddess of love ruthlessly conquers, via Cupid’s agency, mortals and immortals resistant to sexuality. Ovid’s telling of the rape of Proserpina begins with Venus ordering Cupid to use his arrows of love to conquer the third lot of the universe (the Underworld), which remains stubbornly resistant even as the other two, governed by Jupiter and by Neptune, have already fallen to the power of love. Addressing Cupid with ‘*arma manusque meae, mea, nate, potentia*’ (“My arms, my hands, my power, my son,” *Met.* 5.365), Venus demands like a general, ‘*Tartara quid cessant? cur non matrisque tuumque imperium profers?*’ (“Why does Tartarus hold back [from love]? Why do you not extend your mother’s and your empire?,” 5.370–71). For this Venus, love—or, more precisely, sex and rape—is an instrument of war and domination.

De raptu’s Venus reflects Ovid’s Venus more closely than the *Epithalamium*’s. Through juxtaposition the elegiac is quickly supplanted by the epic because the goddess of love is not merely *Venus Amatoris*, but also *Venus Imperatoris*. She desires to become the ruler of Hades by assuming one of his attributes described in the invocation, lord of those dead who are mere slaves to him (compare *famulos* [of Venus] in 2.13 with *famulatur* [to Pluto] in 1.20). The precise moment when she establishes her domination over Pluto is the moment of abduction, as shown by the series of future participles: *raptus* . . . *futuros*, *flexura*, *ductura*. Venus also appropriates the language of war, e.g., *subagere* and *ducere triumpho*—an Ovidian maneuver, whereby a typical elegiac technique that draws from the epic tradition is transplanted back with an imperialist flavor into the epic.

But recognizing the intervening medium of elegy is necessary for appreciating this warlike Venus. Deployed in Ovid's elegy, the metaphor of love as war can achieve such power because of the inherent ontological irony (though opposites, love and war describe each other) and the generic tension (the epic in the elegiac).²⁸ Genre as literary institution normalizes certain uses of language as "proper" or "natural" (that is, naturalizing them as literal) and marks other uses as metaphorical. For example, "besieging" an enemy in an epic is literal, while "besieging" an unrequited love in an elegy is metaphorical. Moreover, the direction of signification in a particular metaphor is determined by genre as well.²⁹ In elegiac poetry, which describes love in terms of war, the direction is from war to love, with martial signs "carried over" (*metaphora*) into the amorous realm. In Ovid's and Claudian's descriptions of Venus, however, the metaphor loses its existence as metaphor explicitly, for the determining institution of genre has been reversed: "love as war" now becomes "war as 'love as war.'" In other words, in the tautology of "war as war," a second-order metaphor (i.e., metaphor of a metaphor) masquerades as a literal expression that negates the intervening term of love. This maneuver teases the reader with the elusive direction of the metaphor—if there is even one—asking him to recognize the epic in the epic-in-elegy.

At a crucial point Claudian departs from Ovid to account for the complication that the myth's plot might mean for a key epic narrative technique. Scholars have read the energy of hell in classical Roman epic as an inexhaustible force that, rising from its chthonic origin, drives the narrative forward by creating discord and adversities.³⁰ Indeed, such energy supplies the narrative in the first three books of the *De raptu* with impetus. Plotting conquest of the Underworld, this warlike Venus threatens to alter radically, if not outright remove, this energy of hell so essential to the Roman epic tradition. Her success means transformation of Hades, as well as elegiac domination of the epic. What *gravis ira deum* remains then? Since the poem tells us it is not supposed to end until we learn "whence grain was given to the nations" (*unde datae populis fruges*, l.30), involving Venus threatens to cut the poem short by depriving it of epic narrative drive. Claudian's solution is ingenious. As Michael von Albrecht (1989, 386) and Stephen Wheeler (1995, 121) have independently observed, Ceres exchanges position with the Underworld figures to become a Fury at the conclusion of book 3, which is the point where Claudian stopped writing. By making her into a hellish creature, Claudian avoids breaking with the institution of this narrative technique and readies a new energy of hell for the unwritten book 4 as its driving force.

In the same swoop Claudian pays homage to the epic tradition and adapts it to the myth.

3. The Storm Simile

Another example of Claudian's adaptation of epic tradition, one that offers a glimpse into his poetic program, is the storm simile following Pluto's concession (1.69–75). Since Claudian draws upon Virgil as a model in this simile, Philip Hardie's structural scheme for understanding the storm episode in Virgil's *Aeneid* may be adduced to highlight those elements that Claudian recasts in *De raptu*. Hardie's scheme is as follows:

1. Supplication of a male deity by a goddess, with sexual bribery.
2. Resort by the male deity to a cave of elemental activity.
3. Release of elemental (Gigantomachic) forces in the upper world.
4. Resolution of conflict by the intervention of a third god.³¹

In *De raptu*, these key motifs appear in a different arrangement:

- A. Threat of releasing Gigantomachic forces in the upper world (1.32–47); analogous to 3 above. While Virgil relies on the Hesiodic metaphor of wind for Titans (as observed by Buchheit 1963, 66 n. 252), Claudian's subject matter allows him to be literal and to bring what the metaphor signifies to the foreground.
- B. Supplication of a male deity by the Fates, with sexual offering (1.48–69); analogous to 1 above.
- C. A storm simile (1.69–75) which, alluding to the Virgilian model described above, prevents the release of elemental forces by visualizing their imprisonment, that is, by reenacting A–B in terms of the Virgilian model; encapsulates 1–4 above, with its locale the same as in 2.
- D. Resolution of conflict by the intervention of a third god, Jupiter (1.214–28), whereby the Gigantomachy is averted; analogous to 4 above.

While in Virgil the potential of a sexual union results in an actual release of Gigantomachic forces, in Claudian the potential of these forces' release results in an actual sexual union. That is, A–B above reverses 1–3, with C acknowledging this reversal. The third god in Claudian is Jupiter, who, instead of stopping the destructive elemental forces directly, effects the sexual offering to prevent war indirectly. In both models, the erotic

has the face of Janus: it plays the opposite, double, and intimately related roles of initiating and preventing Gigantomachy.³²

Instead of a storm, Claudian gives us a simile that revises Virgil's paradigm in *Aeneid* 1. Representing the altercation between Lachesis and Pluto, the simile acts out 3 and 4 in Hardie's scheme as follows:

ceu turbine rauco
cum gravis armatur Boreas, glacieque nivali
hispidus et Getica concretus grandine pinnas
flare cupit pelagus silvas camposque sonoro
flamine rapturus; si forte adversus aenos
Aeolus obiecit postes, vanescit inanis
impetus et fractae reduct in claustra procellae.

(*De raptu* 1.69–75)

Just as the mighty Boreas, when armed with harsh whirlwind, hoary with snowy ice—his wings frozen with Getic hail—desires to blow forth to ravage the woods and fields with a roaring tempest; but if by chance a hostile Aeolus throws against him brazen doors, the assault disappears into the void and the broken gales return to their prison.

This passage contains vague resonances echoing the restraining of Furor in *Aen.* 1.293–96 (*aenos* in 1.73 above for *aenis* in *Aen.* 1.295; *postes* in 1.68 perhaps for *portae* in *Aen.* 1.294). This mixture of images and allusions emphasizes control over Gigantomachic forces, just as the Virgilian passages of the storm (*Aen.* 1.81–82) and Furor do. Though this simile dwells within the epic discourse, it describes the process by which the narrative introduces the elegiac so as to undermine the lord of a region that provides the driving force for Roman epics. As a simile for Pluto, the passage also serves as a metaphor of his passivity resulting from shame, and as a metaphor of his erotic domination in the language of epic poetry. Indeed, Claudian's prophylaxis against the Gigantomachy is sexual. In generic terms, whereas the invasion of the elegiac threatens to produce the ultimate epic in Virgil's model, in Claudian's model the threat to produce the ultimate epic is deferred only by introducing the elegiac.

4. Bifurcated Furies; or, Everyone Flip-Flops

If Claudian's plot complicates issues of genre and metaphor in the Venus passages, his very project of narrating the rape of Proserpina in an epi-

thalamial framework results in the normalization of other epic *topoi* and figures typically associated with perversion of norms. An exemplary passage is the dangerous moment in *De raptu* when Pluto “blaze[s] into rage” (*exarsit in iras*, 1.32) and prepares to launch a Gigantomachy:

... contraque Tonantem
coniurant Furiae, crinitaque sontibus hydrys
Tisiphone quatiens infausto lumine pinum
armatos ad castra vocat pallentia Manes.

(*De raptu* 1.37–40)

... 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.³³

Here are the bloodthirsty Furies, long familiar to epic tradition, now attempting to perpetrate perhaps the ultimate wickedness. The wedding preparations in book 2, however, yield a vastly different picture of these pictures:

oblitae scelerum formidatique furoris
Eumenides cratera parant et vina feroci
crine bibunt flexisque minis iam lene canentes
extendunt socios ad pocula plena cerastas
et *festas alio* succendunt *lumine taedas*.

(*De raptu* 2.343–47)

Forgetful of their crimes and of frightening madness, the Furies prepare the mixing bowl and drink the wine with their terrible hair; their threats laid aside, now singing softly, they extend their companion serpents towards the filled cups and kindle *the festive torches with a different light*.

Here the Furies are peaceful. Even the horrid snakes that serve as their hair are characterized as “companions” (*socios*), who, no different from the average wedding guest, enjoy nuptial wine. What should we make of these Furies with bifurcated orientation? How can we see them in this “different light”?

Furies ordinarily do not attend weddings; rather they wreak havoc on

the battlefield. Inauspicious heralds of death whether at funerals or on the battlefields, torches are virtually an extension of their persons. The passage *De raptu* 1.37–40 quoted above exhibits these more familiar epic Furies of destruction (see, e.g., *Aen.* 2.336ff.), while Furies as marriage torchbearers almost always signal impending destruction for a couple. For example, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Tereus and Procne had such unpalatable guests:³⁴

. . . non pronuba Iuno,
non Hymenaeus adest, non illi Gratia lecto:
Eumenides tenuere faces de funere raptas,
Eumenides stravere torum, tectoque profanus
incubuit bubo thalamique in culmine sedit.

(*Met.* 6.428–32)

Neither Juno as the bride’s woman, nor Hymenaeus, nor the Graces . . . Eumenides held the torches snatched from a funeral; Eumenides spread out on the couch, and the impious owl weighed down on the roof and settled on the peak of the marital chamber.

With dismal results.³⁵

The striking image of “[marriage] torches snatched from a funeral” stems from a larger traditional *topos* that juxtaposes contrasting elements of marriage and funeral. Ovid employs this theme to dramatize Hypsipyle’s complaint of Jason’s faithlessness: ‘*at mihi nec Iuno, nec Hymen, sed tristis Erinys / praetulit infaustas sanguinolenta faces*’ (“But for me neither Juno nor Hymen, but savage Fury, smeared with blood, carried the unlucky torches,” *Ep.* 6.45–46).³⁶ Though regularly seen, the torch, strictly speaking, is not a necessary feature of the *topos*, but merely a convenient expression. Some ancient poets are content to contrast joyous marriage with somber death without reference to torches. But what suits Ovid particularly about the torches is that the apparent opposites of marriage and funeral are paradoxically united in *and* by the ambiguous signification of the *faces*. In Ovid, *Ep.* 6.45–46, the torches are poignantly detached, utterly indifferent to the potentially clashing meaning they could assume from the context. The word *faces* is suddenly and brutally set free, severed from its context, and the world within the text is destabilized not only because an occasion for fertility has turned into an occasion for death, but also because for a moment *faces* has lost touch with generic convention necessary for interpreting it. In a way, then, Propertius says more

than he would have imagined, when he observes: *viximus insignes inter utramque facem* (We lived in renown between either torch, 4.11.46). While he refers, of course, to the lifespan delimited by the thalamial and the funerary torches, it is tempting to see in this space the ambiguity of these unmoored words.

What is Proserpina's role in this misfired contextualization? For clues let us turn to Stephen Wheeler, who draws from René Girard's seminal *Violence and the Sacred* to read the *De raptu*. Girard theorizes that a community, by ritually sacrificing a surrogate victim, purges itself of the energy for internecine strife and thereby maintains order. By directing violence against this scapegoat, which it marks as external, the community conceals the internal origin of strife. This collective act of "good" violence creates a social order based on the distinction between sacrificial and nonsacrificial violence; but if the distinction breaks down, the community reaches what Girard calls a sacrificial crisis, whereupon it devours itself as brothers turn on brothers in an orgy of violence. As for Claudian, Wheeler argues that far from being literary self-indulgence, the narrative details Claudian invents purposefully reshape the ancient myth in the tradition of preserving cosmic order by displacing communal strife to a scapegoat—Proserpina—in order to avoid a sacrificial crisis in the form of fraternal war. For Wheeler (1995, 123–33), the world is spared the violence of Chaos, precisely because by Jupiter's decree the violence is limited to Proserpina's body. For this interpretation Wheeler draws upon an important observation made by Walter Burkert: "To be raped by Hades, to enter into a marriage with him, means simply to die" (Burkert 1983, 260–61). In other words, the displacement of strife to Proserpina has the form of a wedding-as-death, a recurrent theme in Greek tragedy absorbed by the Latin poetic tradition. But Claudian not only equates wedding and death but also juxtaposes them, by invoking the conceptually overlapping theme of *mors immatura*, which as Gian-Biagio Conte (1986) demonstrates, aligns the genus of the *adroi*, youths who die before maturity, with the species of the *agamoi*, those who die before marriage. A most eloquent expression of this motif is perhaps the couplet in *Anth. Pal.* 7.188.7–8: ἤματι δ' ᾧ νυμφεῖος ἀνήπτετο λαμπάδι παστάς, / τούτῳ πυροκαῖης οὐ θαλάμων ἔτυχεσ (On the day when the bridal chamber was lighted by the torch [*lampas*], you entered the funeral pyre [*purkaia*], not the marriage chamber [*thalamos*]).³⁷ Stemming from such Greek verses, this poignant theme found particular favor among Roman epicists, in whose *tristia bella* boys in the full bloom of youth fall prey to steel.

The ambiguous torches persist in the Furies' wedding preparations in

De raptu: though these torches are inauspicious, being carried by hellish creatures, at the same time they are the ritually proper torches of a wedding—appropriately here, a wedding in hell. By presenting this in a gentle light as a normal activity à la epithalamium, Claudian brackets the conventional poignancy that previous poets drew from the imagery of Furies holding funereal/epithalamial torches. The coincidence of the *ādōi* and the *aqamoi* is concretized in Proserpina, whose marriage *is* a form of death. Whereas other poets (e.g., Ovid in *Heroides* 6 above) offer the mutually exclusive choice of either the erotic or the funerary, Claudian's *De raptu* offers both the erotic and the funerary in a single unfortunate maiden.

We can now begin to solve the riddle of the bifurcated Furies. Because of the sort of polysemy witnessed in the torches, in his speech to Venus Jupiter observes in the language of love poetry: *iam tristis Erinys / sentiat ardores* (Even savage Fury feels love's flames, 1.226–27). In a poem where unlikely Underworld creatures are amatory figures, the juxtaposition of these divergent capacities of the Furies united in the signifier of the torch offers another perspective on the question of metaphor, which we explored above in §2. Though the Furies appear more frequently in epic, Claudian's epithalamial framework enables their appearance in this traditional *topos*—a genre that, we may note, is suitably elegiac, closer in sense to the origin of elegy, “the genre of *querimonia*, especially of the *querimonia* for the dead” (Hinds 1987, 199). The wedding Furies, then, can carry their marital and their martial torches, and serve their dual capacity in Claudian without so much of the poignant irony associated with *mors immatura*—the actual death exists only behind the veil of a metaphorical abduction and rape. Claudian's “domestic” Furies are partly defanged: they are neither the vengeful warmongers in their epic capacity nor presiders of weddings-as-funerals in their elegiac capacity. Rather, at Proserpina's wedding their torchbearing is normalized in a marriage of cosmic significance; witness the worldwide (temporary) reprieve from death (2.351–60). Like the metaphor of love as war, the reversal of the naturalizing institution diminishes the ironic poignancy of *mors immatura*; to use Heinze's terms, “das *deinon*,” the defining quality of epic, and “das *eleciron*,” its counterpart in elegy, are moderated and subdued by this wedding of semiotic codes in hell.³⁸ By contrast, in the normalcy of the upper-world, Ceres laments (3.407–10):

‘non tales gestare tibi, Proserpina, taedas
sperabam, sed vota mihi communia matrum,

et thalami festaeque faces *caeloque canendus*
*ante oculos hymenaeus erat.*⁷

“It was not such torches that I had hoped to carry for you, Proserpina, but I had the wishes common to mothers: of marriage-bed and festal torches *and a wedding-song to be sung in heaven before my eyes.*”³⁹

These lines offer the typical irony of *mors immatura*, complete with ambiguous torches. They are also a metapoetic comment, highlighting the poem’s epithalamiality that had gone in an unexpected direction: the thalamial torches that Ceres is supposed to carry as a mother soon begin to signify her transformation into a Fury, one who *is* supposed to carry funereal torches.⁴⁰

In Roman epic, the tragic conceit of wedding-as-funeral, apart from its use in *querimonia*, plays an important role in the “epic obsession with images of acceptable and unacceptable dynastic weddings” for the proper continuation of the male line (Hardie 1993, 90).⁴¹ From Juno’s invocation of Allecto to give Lavinia a dowry of Trojan and Italian blood (*Aen.* 7.313–22), to Cato’s marriage to Marcia who wears to the wedding the funeral clothes in which she had mourned her recently deceased husband (Lucan 2.326–91), epicists capitalized on the unique capacity of the wedding as ritual that transforms, successfully or unsuccessfully, biological sexual bodies into reproductive bodies for the social order. Perverting the dynastic wedding is tantamount to perverting society itself, yet Claudian’s reception of the theme of wedding-as-funeral perverts, so to speak, this conventional perversion. By displacing the hot issue of patriarchal perpetuation in epic poetry to an ancient myth that normalizes our *topos* of abnormality when recast in terms of an epithalamium, Claudian circumvents the problematics of succession—in the epic narrative *and* in the epic tradition—to organize his anxiety of influence.⁴²

Proserpina’s mythic status as a liminal mediator is what unites the divergent Furies. She mediates between heaven and hell (e.g., in structuralist interpretations of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*) but also, symptomatic of Claudian’s literary self-consciousness, between the epithalamial and the funerary in the *topos* of *mors immatura*. In her body not only are cosmic order and boundaries preserved, but contradictory Furies, torn between marriage and death, are united and made whole. *Tristis Erinys* carries the same object to war as well as to funerals and weddings, the symbols of love and life slipping easily into symbols of war and death. Thus, “Love bent Hell” (1.23–24) not “by what divinity wounded,” but “by

what lamp”—one weaponized, surely. The *lampas* is, of course, a metonym for Proserpina, who is not merely the colonial victim of Venus’s sexual imperialism, but also the tool whereby to subjugate Pluto. Rape is Venus’s weapon against any who reject her empire of sexuality by holding onto their virginity; indeed, in Claudian’s text her empire expands through what Patricia Johnson (1996, 139) calls “compulsory sexuality.”⁴³

If it seems extraordinary for the Furies to possess contradictory personalities in the *De raptu*, perhaps it is to remind us that Venus exhibits similar duality in Roman epics. Valerius Flaccus, for example, drawing on resemblances of Venus to Allecto in the *Aeneid*, characterizes Venus’s revenge in the Lemnian episode as *exitium furiale* (Furylike destruction) and suggests that the deity has two faces, one as the goddess of love, the other “very similar to the maidens from hell” (*virginibus Stygiis . . . simillima*, 2.102–6).⁴⁴ Claudian’s bifurcated Furies are the inverse of this Venus. In *Aeneid* 7, Allecto is ordered by Juno to turn Queen Amata into Turnus’s partisan and so flies to Latium, where *tacitumque obsedit limen Amatae* (She besieged the silent threshold of Amata, *Aen.* 7.343). As R. O. A. M. Lyne (1987, 14) notes, this Fury undergoes some degree of eroticization: “With a certain *frisson* we must realize that there is a touch of *erotic* military metaphor here. It was not traditional for Furies to beset ‘limina’ . . . We must remember that the ‘limen’ is a key feature of Latin erotic poetry: it was the central stage-prop in that very popular scene, the ‘excluded lover,’ ‘*exclusus amator*.” The metaphor is made stronger if we recognize the punning on Amata (Beloved) as name and as participle. Of course, the opposite direction in signification, that is, from eros to war, is also possible in reading *limen*. Citing Joplin (1984, 36–37) on the body of the king’s daughter as “the body politic . . . whose hymen serves as the physical and sexual sign for the *limen* or wall defining the city’s limits,” Wheeler (1995, 125) concludes that Proserpina’s “virginity is symbolically associated with the boundary between the upper- and lower-worlds and hence the differentiated order of the world.” Like *lampas*, then, *limen* represents another site of multiple signification. The trope of love as war, and its inverse of war as love, suitably embody (or perhaps are embodied by?) the symmetrical dyads of Venus as Fury and the Furies as attendants to Love. Yet if the metaphor of love as war can be troped, so Pluto’s and Proserpina’s sexuality depend on each other, in a reversal of the sexual initiator/initiand dyad. Convention holds Pluto to be the rapist and Proserpina the victim. Claudian’s programmatic declaration hints at another perspective: they are both victims and agents of Venus, compelled to take each other’s virginity. Pluto is the active rapist whose act paradoxically

constitutes an instance of passivity as he performs under Venus's compulsion. Proserpina is somewhat the converse: she is the passive victim of rape, but through her victimization she becomes a tool of Venus's empire of eros that forces sexuality upon another.⁴⁵ Codependent is their sexuality in this mutual victimization.

Framing the rape by epithalamial displacement of epic strife, *De raptu's* artful presentation of the myth revises and unifies generic discourses through the mediation of Proserpina, who serves both as a character in a timeless story and as a symbol of Claudian's poetic program. The meaningful synthesis from prior literary treatments of what seem tangentially related themes is indebted to Claudian's skillful manipulation of literary genres within such an amalgam. It should not surprise, then, that Pluto's smallest facial expression offers room for studying a metaphor, and that figurative language itself correlates with figures such as Venus and the Furies in their "tropability." From the perspective of emplotment, the multiple signification in Claudian, whether as it applies to military metaphors, to ambiguous torches, or to the Furies/Venus dyad, has at its root erotic politics. This example of compulsory sexuality, which makes manifest the generic tension in Claudian's rendition of the old myth, finds representation in the ambivalent image of the lamp as weapon and also as erotic tool. What allows Pluto to blush, what destabilizes his authority, is as much the doing of generic play via the introduction of elegiac diction, as the mediating property of Proserpina, the lamp.⁴⁶

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Notes

¹ Gildenhard and Zissos (1999, 163) seem to be the first to use the apt descriptive term "functionalism."

² Another contributing factor is certainly the literary prejudice against a "poet for hire" like Claudian; see Cameron 2000.

³ Some recent works on *De raptu* include Duc 1994; Ahlschweig 1997; Kellner 1997. For Claudian's motivation behind writing this epic, see Cameron 1970, 211. *De raptu* is the best example of Claudian's literary experimentation, being much more substantial than any of the *carmina minora*, and better preserved than the other mythological poems that could be considered examples of his literary ambition, namely the *Gigantomachia* in Greek (fragmentary) and the one in Latin (unfinished). A convenient summary of the major approaches to *De raptu* is provided in Charlet 2000.

⁴ For the intertexts with Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius, see Charlet 1991; Gruzelier 1993.

⁵ Prior to modern generic criticism, Kroll (1924, 202–24) coined the phrase "Kreuzung der Gattungen" to describe the phenomenon of genre-crossing in Augustan poetry.

⁶ Jauss 1982, 80, paraphrasing and quoting Droysen 1967, 9ff.

⁷ I use the following texts: Gruzelier 1993 (*De raptu*); Hall 1985 (Claudian's other poems); Mynors 1969 (Virgil's *Aeneid*); Kenney 1994 (Ovid's *Amores*); Knox 1995 (Ovid's *Heroides*); Anderson 1996 (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*); Marastoni 1974 (Stattius's *Achilleis*); Shackleton Bailey 2003 (Stattius's *Silvae*); and Ferri 2003 (pseudo-Seneca's *Octavia*). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

⁸ Translation in Gruzelier 1993, 7.

⁹ Detractors on this point include Glover 1901, 244; Fargues 1933, 282–83; Cameron 1970, 265.

¹⁰ Though the court was Christian, epithalamia featuring intervention by Venus and Cupid were accepted and indeed conventional; see Cameron 1970, 194.

¹¹ Wedding preparation, it is true, can be found throughout the Latin epic tradition and is not unique to the epithalamium. However, the presence of the two other tropes makes it a meaningful gesture towards the epithalamium.

¹² Which epithalamia would have been available to Claudian when he wrote *De raptu*? Statius's *Epithalamium in Stellam et Violentillam* certainly, though Ausonius's *Cento nuptialis* was an experimental piece that did not belong to the genre. What about Claudian's own *Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti* and *Epithalamium dictum Palladio v. c. tribuno et notario et Celerinae* (*Carm.* 25)? The problem is that the dates of their composition are not certain; we only know their *termini ante quem*: Honorius's marriage to Maria in 398 (possibly in February), and Palladius's marriage to Celerina in 399, respectively. On the composition date of *De raptu*, much ink has been spilled, with no consensus in sight insofar as evidence is scant. Romano (1958) has dated it prior to all of Claudian's datable poems (before 395), and Fabbri (1927) after them (after 404). Two recent scholars have placed *De raptu* between these two dates: Cameron (1970, 452–66, esp. 464–65) puts the composition of book 1 in 397 and the remainder in

402; Gruzelier (1993, xvii–xx) book 1 in 395 and the rest in 397. Any of these four suggestions, however, would complicate the relationship between *De raptu* and the Honorius epithalamium, especially in terms of model and imitation. All in all, it seems futile to speculate on such implications, especially for generic analysis within a literary system. The “only certain point . . . is that Book 1 was written sufficiently far ahead of Books 2 and 3 for Claudian . . . to describe the interval . . . as a *longus somnus*” (Gruzelier 1993, xviii), and all these virtuoso deductions to locate a date rest upon assumptions of what the poem is. Ultimately the compositional chronology may not matter: because of the myth it tells, *De raptu* already contains the epithalamial, whether as deployment of existing models or in anticipation of this inchoative genre (represented by the one poem from Statius). Even if the entirety of *De raptu* was written before the *Epithalamium*, a fact that would make the latter an imitation of the former in some passages, the epic already had the epithalamial in mind.

¹³ My introduction of a third genre, of course, is not new. Goldenhard and Zissos (1999), for example, have attempted in their reading of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to extend beyond the epic and the elegiac to include the tragic.

¹⁴ Shackleton Bailey’s translation (2003).

¹⁵ On the Gigantomachy, see Hardie 1986, 33–156 and 1993, 57–87.

¹⁶ Pliny, *Pan.* 73.5. For other examples see Kaster 1997, 7 n. 14.

¹⁷ Here we may compare Claudian’s usage of *erubuit* with Virgil. *Aen.* 2.541–43, where Priam, about to be slaughtered by Neoptolemus during the sack of Troy, jabs back by contrasting his conduct against his father’s:

‘sed iura fidemque
supplicis *erubuit* corpusque exsangue sepulcro
reddidit Hectoreum meque in mea regna remisit.’

“But [Achilles] *respected* the rights and assurance due to a suppliant, and returned Hector’s lifeless body to the tomb and sent me back to my kingdom.”

Erubesco in the sense of “to respect” is not some bizarre, unaccountable deviation from the root meaning “to turn red” or “to blush,” but rather derivative of this root. Barton (2001, 224) notes that *pudor* and *rubor* are almost interchangeable, and highlights this fact by translating *erubuit* in this passage as “grew red” so as to indicate Achilles’ *pudor*. To respect something is to feel a sense of shame in its presence—in the case of the *Aeneid* passage, what is justly due to Priam, although the shame aspect is more subdued.

¹⁸ Although the usual emphasis on Proserpina’s sexual innocence and powerlessness highlights this point, there may be an exception. In a version of the myth preserved in Lucan 6.739–42, Proserpina voluntarily suffers “contacts” or “pollution” (*contagia*, 741). We may assume that these *contagia* are somehow sexual.

¹⁹ Clarke 1950/1, 6.

²⁰ Intuitively Thetis recognizes that beneath Achilles’ manly appearance, his *interior* is “uncertain” (*ambiguus*, 1.325) about cross-dressing. *Ambiguus* is a word Statius uses a few lines later when Achilles is completely transformed to describe his *exterior* (*ambiguus . . . sexus*, 1.337). While the allusion in 1.336–37 to Horace’s *Carm.* 2.5.21–24 (see Hinds 1998, 135–42; Rosati 1994a, and 1994b, 14–16) highlights the

sexual ambiguity of boys, Statius's word choice also suggests a progression from interior to exterior in Achilles' makeover. Blushing as an exterior sign of the interior appears to act as some sort of bridge to enable Achilles' transformation.

²¹ For these criteria see Kaster 1997, 7.

²² As Kaster (*ibid.*, 9–10) asserts, women in Roman literature feel shame as a matter of course, though largely they feel a subset of it, *puclitia*, which “reduces *puclor* to the appropriate gender roles of both sexes, emphasizing especially the control of reproduction within the patriarchal social structure.”

²³ In the *Epithalamium*, Venus includes in her court the deity *Irae*, who is described as “easy to bend” (*flecti faciles Irae*, 79). Long (1996, 143), following Ernout (1965), translates *Irae* as “Passions.” Is this the programmatically important *ira* in *De raptu* (e.g., 1.32) that has to be wrath? Probably not, but perhaps the conceptual contiguity points to the sometimes weakening effect of strong emotions on one's will.

²⁴ See also Gruzelier 1989, 16, who points to *Theb.* 1.56ff. and 4.473ff. as other sources for Claudian's imitation, though they seem much less important than Virgil.

²⁵ Gruzelier 1993, 90 n. ad 1.26; and Cairns 1999, citing, inter alia, *Anth. Pal.* 5.7 and 7.345.1–2, where the presence of a lamp serves as an essential element in the formula of sexual intercourse. Latin elegies, e.g., Tibullus 3.8.5–6, incorporate a similar erotic association of *lampas* with *amor*.

²⁶ Hardie (1989) points out that combinatorial imitation, common in Hellenistic poetry, is a special case of imitation as commentary.

²⁷ Indeed, the wily Dipsas we encountered earlier in matters of blushing “accomplishes a graceful union of Venus' roles as the mother of Aeneas, the antithesis (yet the companion) of war, the emblem of the reign (*regnat*) of the Julii in Rome, and the patron of girls on the make” (Johnson 1996, 132); cf. *nunc Mars externis animos exercet in armis / at Venus Aeneae regnat in urbe sui* (Now Mars exerts his spirit against foreign armies, while Venus rules in her Aeneas's city, *Am.* 1.8.41–42).

²⁸ See the discussion of this elegiac metaphor in Kennedy 1993, 46–63.

²⁹ Where Kennedy uses the term *tenor*, I substitute *direction* in order to avoid confusion with I. A. Richards's critical vocabulary for allusive practice.

³⁰ See, e.g., Hardie 1993, 60.

³¹ *Ibid.* 1986, 104.

³² *Flecto* is used of Pluto and Jupiter in significantly different ways. As Pluto seizes her and speeds away, Proserpina reproaches Jupiter, “*nullane te flectit pietas?*” (“Does piety not bend you?,” 2.253). Jupiter preserves cosmic order precisely because he does not bend and Pluto does.

³³ Translation in Gruzelier 1993, 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 227 note ad 2.347; Bömer 1969, note ad *Met.* 6.430.

³⁵ Another example is from pseudo-Seneca's *Octavia*. Octavia recollects that at the mock-wedding between Gaius Silius and Messalina (at the time the [notorious] wife of Claudius), the Fury Erinys attended with a torch that she had snatched from the marital chamber and was to quench in the blood of the bride and groom (257–69). Later in the play, the ghost of Agrippina arrives from hell, bringing Stygian torches to celebrate her son Nero's wedding (595–98):

nubat his flammis meo
Poppaea nato iuncta, quas vindex manus

dolorque matris vertet ad tristes rogos.

May Poppaea wed my son by these flames, which the avenging hand of an aggrieved mother shall turn to a miserable funeral pile.

My gratitude to the anonymous referee who pointed out *Octavia's* relevance.

³⁶ Ovid, of course, did not create this *topos*, so frequent in Greek and Latin literature. Other examples in Ovid include *Ep.* 21.172 and *Fast.* 2.561–62. A study of this theme in Greek inscription is Griessmair 1966; see also Conte 1986, 190–92.

³⁷ The translation is based on Segal's in Conte 1986, 192.

³⁸ We can apply the metaphors of love and war to the *Epithalamium* for the same reason, though the result would hardly command the same force or significance as it would for an epic.

³⁹ Translation slightly modified from Gruzelier 1993, 75.

⁴⁰ Ferri (2003, note ad 595–96) remarks that it was a Greek custom for mothers to carry a torch at their children's weddings, but not so in the case of Roman mothers.

⁴¹ See Rehm 1994 for a survey of examples from Greek tragedy.

⁴² We know, of course, that in most versions of the myth the union of Pluto and Proserpina remained fruitless. See Zimmermann 1882, 25.

⁴³ The phrase seems based on Adrienne Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality." By complicating the binary opposition between eros and virginity with issues of internal audience, Zissos (1999) further refines Johnson's approach. He rightly observes that in the storytelling contest between the Muses and the nymphs in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 5, Calliope's narration aims less to address Venus's empire of love and more to please the nymph judges by distorting traditional versions of the story to give their kind a more prominent role. Moreover, "Cyane's mention of her own happy courtship and marriage . . . suggests that the 'expansion of the empire of Eros' is not necessarily a concern of the nymphs *per se*. Cyane's objection is to Dis's method rather than to the underlying erotic impulse ('*roganda / non rapienda fuit*,' ['she should have been asked, not seized'] 5.415–16) . . ." (Zissos 1999, 98 n. 6). For our purposes, however, the point remains that Venus views her brand of eros in imperialist terms in her speech (*Met.* 5.365–79), a text from which Johnson draws her reading. The immediate focus is on Proserpina's chastity, rather than on chastity in general:

Pallada nonne vides iaculatricemque Dianam
abscessisse mihi? Cereris quoque filia virgo,
si patiemur, erit: nam spes adfectat easdem.

(*Met.* 5.375–77)

Don't you see that Pallas and the lance-throwing Diana have withdrawn from my realm? The virgin daughter of Ceres will, too, if we allow it: for she has the same hopes.

⁴⁴ See Hardie 1989, 5–10 for a discussion of this scene as an example of combinatory imitation.

⁴⁵ Indeed, it is in Claudian that Pluto's virginity is highlighted and noted, however *en passant*. In the *Metamorphoses*, although Pluto is Venus's target according to her

speech, he appears more as an emotionless instrument; the most personality Ovid grants him is *paene simul visa est dilectaque rapta Diti: / usque adeo est properatus amor* (Nearly at the same time she [Proserpina] was seen, loved, and seized by Dis: so swift is love, 5.394–95). Even here the emphasis stays fixed on Proserpina, with Pluto a mere tool in an oblique case.

⁴⁶ This paper had its origins in a graduate seminar taught by Andrew Zissos. I would like to thank him, the anonymous referees of *Helios*, and Leah Kronenberg, Eugenia Lao, and Ruth Webb for their feedback. An earlier draft was delivered in 2000 at the Yale Graduate Colloquium, which I was able to attend through the hospitality of Helen Cullyer.