

The intertextuality in Latin epic poetry

The use of digital resources

Renée Uccellini, Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi, Rome, Italy

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ABSTRACT. This paper analyzes the use of digital resources in the Latin poetry study. The first part will examine the explanation of *intertextuality* applied in the studies of Latin epic poems, with a specific reading of the epic *De Raptu Proserpinae* of Claudius Claudianus (c. 370 - c. 404 AD). In the second section, I propose an example of the use of informatic tools for the research of the intertextual literary links between *De Raptu Proserpinae* and *Achilleid* of Publius Papinius Statius (1st century AD). The conclusions reflect on the new technologies that today can potentially facilitate the process of codification and representation of the sources of the ancient classical literature.

KEYWORDS: *Case study, digital resources, informatics tools, intertextuality, Latin epic poetry*

Intertextuality and Latin epic poetry

The relationship among literary works of the antiquity is very complex and it is structured according to various transformative and imitative methods of the previous literary models effected by later writers. The intertextual and hypertextual analysis of an ancient work focuses on the identification of the derivation of a later text (*hypertext*) by an anterior text (*hypotext*) and on the analysis of ways through which the *hypertext* alludes to its model (Genette, 1997, pp. 3-10). Within the classical literary studies, today the criticism is particularly interested in the process of transformation operated in the *hypertext* and the intertextual searches is a rich and always dynamic subject (Conte, 1985; Bonanno, 1990; Hinds, 1998; Edmunds, 2001). In fact, the classical literature is a system constituted not by single works, but from the relationships that every literary work establishes inside the literary system that it reorganizes; the reworked version of the model is realized through the appropriation and the renewal of other's word (Graham, 2000; Harrison et al., 2018).

The poetic line, in particular, converses with the past, and alive nourishing itself with the dialectics between convention and originality in comparison to the literary system of which it makes part (Polacco, 1998, pp. 7-12). The epos genre has a strong reference to the tradition from a side, but the tendency to hide such bond strategically from the other too. You can think, for example, of the prefaces of the epic works, where the model, not being quoted as well, it is indirectly declared by the author with a programmatic intent (Barchiesi, 1995, 49-50). The author dictates the rules of the literary *lusus* where he involves the reader, in a continuous dialectics that the epic Roman poet does from the origins until the end of the ancient age. After the great epic creation in the Augustan age with the Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the later poets had to compare themselves with this variegated poetic inheritance. This way, typical ingredients of classical epic are included in the later poems according to the past models: prefaces with request of divine inspiration, catalogs, ephrastic descriptions, divine councils, prophecies, etcetera. The style also appears modulated according to previous examples, with recovery of similar expressions, clauses, connections, parts of lines, gradual insertion of erudite references that the reader can identify and contextualize (Wills, 1996). The words of the past compositions become mythical symbols and symbolic images to revisit with new aesthetical rituals and renewed artistic precepts. The *contaminatio* is the heart of this poetry, where the conclusive effect is the search of amplification and expressive condensation: the models are varied with integration of other poetic influences, also drawn by other literary genres.

The poetry of Claudius Claudianus, lived among the end of the IV century and the beginning of the V century AD, is an example of this late production, where the past is regenerated *sub alia specie*: the epic materials enhance and become heterogeneous, coming from the immense patrimony of the classical literatures.

Allusions and literary reminiscences in the epic poetry of Claudian

Inside his poetic creation, Claudian also wrote a mythological poem, *De Raptu Proserpinae*. The Claudian's versification is genially assimilative and allusive, and it governs efficaciously the previous tradition and proposes it again with quotations and continuous references that sometimes invite to remember the model, and sometimes challenge the reader in this assignment. The multiplicity of the evocative images, along with that of the linguistic and stylistic resonances, constitutes a distinctive character of this poetry. Claudian does not only imitate the past, but he converses and confronts continuously himself with it, showing to have thought about the intertextual dynamic of the literary example in the meantime. In this wise receipt of the epic Roman tradition, the fusion among different literary genres, as the elegy and the epithalamic composition, is definitely fulfilled.

In Claudian we find the recovery of narrative and lexical *topoi* according to this elaborate combinatorial art that mixes manifold echoes (Hardie, 1989). The poet composes the verses overlapping images and situations, amplifying progressively the sequence scenes in an almost fragmentary narrative structure. Traditional structural elements of the epic genre are catalogs, premonitory dreams, discourses, divine councils, style of the openings and closings books, ephrastic descriptions (Connor, 1993, p. 255). Common places are elaborated again, manipulated wisely, and different narrative sections, often essential, are framed by more consistent passages that reply clichés known to the reader, slowing down the narrative rhythm simultaneously.

The Claudian's descriptive art is emphatically expressed with a frequent raising of *pathos* that

conforms to the atmosphere of poem, a half dimension between idyllic reality and infernal or of fables world. Characters and objects are crystallized in perfect pictorial images described with continuous predilection for preciousity and particularism. The great mastery of the poetic technique ensures an elaborate style, rich of figures, that seeks the most elevated sublimity of epic: it is a non-classical style, where the narrative structure does not introduce an equilibrium, but it is constituted by a complex picture of images and discourses. Therefore, if the epic structure is very traditional, at the same time, the outcome is something never written by someone, an extraordinary 'visual poem' with a refined elaboration of details (Barnes, 2009, 543).

The *rap. Pros.*, despite its incompleteness, is the widest story of Ceres and Proserpina, an ancient myth, already present in Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and taken back more diffusely by Ovid in *Fasti* IV, 417-620 and *Metamorphoses* V, 341-661. The goddess Ceres has hidden her daughter Proserpina in a secret building in Sicily, but the young girl, after going out to pick up flowers for deception of Venus (1, 179-236), she is abducted from Pluto (2, 151-245), the god of the Hades: he prayed Jupiter to grant him a bride to bring in the Afterlife (1, 32-121). In book III, the poet describes the desperation of Ceres: distressed by deadly dreams that make her presage inauspicious events (67-145), she decides to look for her daughter anywhere (260-330) and she begins her peregrinations from Sicily (404-448).

Writing the mythical theme, Claudian knows how to manage wisely the natural creative weakening of the late ancient epic poetry and realizes a different way of poetry. The lines of Ovid, but of Homer, Apollonius Rhodius, Lucretius, Catullus, Virgil, Lucan, Valerius Flaccus, Silius Italicus and Statius are also particularly familiar to the poet (Gruzelier, 1993). Clarke, in a paper (1950-1951) about the relationships among the *rap. Pros.* and the previous poetry, has distinguished in the poem three typologies of allusions: "(1) short direct quotations, with little or no changes, from famous originals, introduced deliberately in order to be recognized, like a tune; (2) sustained passages on some familiar 'lieu commun' like the description of Etna, employing and varying the traditional vocabulary; (3) less deliberate and formal allusions, many of which may be unconscious echoes. These sometimes run through a whole passage, sometimes are only echoes of a word or a phrase". This interpretative line is certainly valid, but it is not always easy to determine if an allusion is deliberate or if it is an unconscious memory (Hall, 1969, p. 109). Remembering continuously Virgil and Statius does not show lack of creative spirit and originality, but it is sign of the wish to work on the intertext. Thus, Claudian keeps on removing and on taking often to pieces of reasons of a text model to replace others of it. The erudite quotation, the declared allusion, the evident reuse represent a prompt call for the reader, a declared invitation, sometimes very thin, to gather the differences in the similarities.

Among the ancient texts, Claudian shows to well know the *Aeneid*, the *Thebaid* and the *Achilleid* of Publius Papinius Statius, author of Flavian age. Here we are interested, above all, in the intertextual links that unite the *rap. Pros.* to the *Achilleid*. The similarities with the *Ach.*, incomplete poem as *rap. Pros.*, are numerous about thematic and linguistic level: Claudian evokes the memory of Statius continually and the modern commentators linger a lot over this dependence (Micozzi, 2012, intr. XX-XXXIII), even if in the past someone suspected about the existence of intertextual connections (Dilke, 1954, intr. p. 19). Instead, over that for the influence of the *Achilleid* about description of Ceres (Hall, 1969, p. 110 nt. 1), numerous images, descriptions and characters echo connections with the poem on Achilles, and they need a constant comparison. In this assignment, the use of digital resources is very useful.

Intertextual strategies about the *De Raptu Proserpinae* and use of the digital resources

For the textual analysis, numerous softwares and web-based tools support us nowadays. The art combinatory of Claudian can be studied with the aid of the digital resources, as, for instance, *Tesserae* (tesserae.caset.buffalo.edu/), a search engine that allows us to compare the texts by individualizing literary affiliations. *Tesserae* can individualize a great number of parallels, simplifying greatly the assignment to find possible intertextual links between epic poems (Coffee et al., 2012). For our research, we insert in the web interface the name of the authors and of works that we want to compare, in our case study the *Achilleid* by Statius (source) and the *De Raptu Proserpinae* by Claudian (target). The result will be a list of parallels that you can download as an XML document or as a comma separated list. The web-based interface is particularly easy and underlines the concordances and quotes in full the lines. *Tesserae* draws from the texts of *Latin Library* (<http://thelatinlibrary.com>) and to the digital library of *Perseus Project* (perseus.tufts.edu). *Tesserae* finds out 612 allusions: they must be examined separately. It is clear that, in comparison to a commentary of Claudian's *rap. Pros.*, where the *paralleli loci* have manually been individualized and commented, the list of concordances of *Tesserae* is certainly superior because it also quotes meaningless coincidences, irrelevant with respect to linguistic form and content, but they need a specific analysis and a further check. Examining all the voices, also in comparison with modern commentaries, we must compile a review and formulate a sort of classification of correspondences. It is useful to attribute a criterion of judgment to the classification of these coincidences: they have different typology and they can presumably propose various intertextual levels. The research form where it is opportune to put such parallels depends on the value that we can assign to words or to sentences recovered by Claudian by the *Ach.* and used again in the *rap. Pros.* The recoveries of very common terms inserted in common phrases are not particularly remarkable, with respect to the meaning (A); the coincidences of isolated words must be appraised inside a period (B): here we speak about linguistic reuse of Claudian and the verse of Statius constitutes the "code model" (Conte, 1986, p. 31) for linguistic standard (Statius is a previous author). The similarities with formal tone need greater attention, but inserted in common phrases or in a not analogous context to the model (C): the comparison is delicate and needs a careful reading of the context. The elevated formally concordances inside analogous interpretative context are significant (D): Statius is an "exemplary model" (Conte, 1986, p. 31), and Claudian wants intentionally to refer to him.

In this case study, we consider a specimen with the first 100 allusions by *Tesserae* and we proceed with the analysis of every listed line, eventually using other digital resources. The reading of the first parallel appears interesting: Claud. *rap. Pros.* 1.130: *iam matura toro plenis adoleverat annis* and Stat. *Ach.* 1, 292 *virginitas matura toris annique tumentes*. The formal similarity of the words corresponds to an analogous context: Proserpina and Deidamia, both isolated on an island, are likewise characterized in their single woman virginity: Proserpina, hidden in Sicily from Ceres, is described in 1, 130-132 as ready to the marriage and to the pregnancy: *lam vicina toro plenis adoleverat annis/ virginitas, tenerum iam pronuba flamma pudorem/ sollicitat mixtaque tremet formidine votum* ("As the years were fulfilled she had grown a maiden ripe for marriage, the flame that inspires the love already starts to upset her delicate modesty, and mixed to the fear the desire trembles"), and equally Deidamia, that is alive on the island of Scyros with her sisters in *Ach.* 1, 290-292: *Omnibus eximium formae decus, omnibus idem/ cultus et expleto teneri iam fine pudoris/ virginitas matura toris annique tumentes* ("They are all splendid of unusual beauty, all equally adorned and, by now passed the border of

the juvenile chastity, mature young girls to the wedding and in the fire of the years”). Afterward, using other digital resources always, we can complete the analysis of every word of *rap. Pros.* 1, 130 in *Classical Latin Text* (<http://latin.packhum.org/>), and we will track as parallel for the clause *adoleverat annis*, *Ov. Fast.* 3.59 *adoleverat annos*, about a group of young people. Using *Musisque Deoque* (<http://www.mqdq.it/public/9>), we can individualize as intertext Verg. *Aen.* 7.53: *iam matura viro, iam plenis nubilis annis*, of Lavinia, “already mature for the wedding, single woman from years”.

Therefore, Claudian’s Proserpina condenses two opposite and conflicting female models: from one side Lavinia, the unmarried virgin for excellence of the epic myth, from the other Deidamia, a young girl, described with the ambiguous aspect, comparable to the beauty of Venus, but also of Diana and Minerva, the masculine divinities of the myth (*Ach.* 1, 293-300). From the analysis of these lines it comes out that, for the female characters realization, Claudian recovers some specific images from Statius; they are “intertextual windows”: the descriptive images of the characters are traditional figures of the intertextuality in the epic Roman and they constitute an epic productive formality that communicates traditionally ideas in the narrative action. In the *rap. Pros.*, the description of the main female characters, Ceres and Proserpina, is strongly connected to the intertextual conscience of Claudian. He rewrites the myth manipulating the statian models (*Thebaid Achilleid*) and he realizes new heroins for his narrative needs, varying them with virgilian integrations. In particular, the manifold description of Proserpina frames the intertextual program of the *rap. Pros.*: Claudian is heir of Virgil (Lavinia in *Aeneid*) and Statius (Deidamia in *Achilleid*), but in the accumulation of conflicting references, the poet also shows his wish to insert himself in the track of an ‘elegiac epic’, according to the line effectively undertaken by the *Achilleid* of Statius (Rosati, 2002, 10-11). Therefore, the first concordance by *Tesserae* is very important for the exegesis of the *rap. Pros.* After the examination of the relevance of every single allusions by *Tesserae* (a cross-section of the first 100 concordances), with aid of other digital resources too, we put in the plan coincidences. The data can be so collected: A) 57 parallels are common words used in common phrases, potentially irrelevant to a comparison of the two authors; B) 16 allusions of isolated words inside line and perhaps referable to Claudian’s unconscious poetic memory; C) 18 parallels are formal similarities in common phrases or in a different context of the source; D) 9 coincidences, traceables for the highly formal aspect (often in clause) and present in interpretative analogous context to the source. The last two data are undoubtedly very important, considering that the finished analysis concerns a minimum sample of the total (100/612). The great number of C coincidences invites to consider evidently Statius as “code linguistic model”: Claudian remembers continually the *Achilleid*, as a lexical model text. The certain similarities, for formal level and content (D), are meaningful (always for the partial sampling):

2) Claud. *rap. Pros.* 3, 297 *quam miseros decuit. Supplex miserandaque vestris*
Stat. *Ach.* 1, 50 *grandaevumque patrem supplex miseranda rogabo.*

Identical terminology in the same position and very similar context: apprehensive mothers, (Ceres and Thetis), for the destiny of their children, beg suppliant other divinities.

10) Claud. *rap. Pros.* 2, 119 *Hortatur Cytherea legant.* “Nunci te, sorores
Stat. *Ach.* 1, 845 *hortaturque legant, nec rex placidissimus arcet.*

Formal similarity in comparable context: flowers and gifts that must attract young girls and get them out of their hiding places (Proserpina and cross-dressed Achilles).

20) Claud. *rap. Pros. 2, 29 esse putes, solusque dabat discrimina sexus.*
Stat. *Ach. 1, 337 ambiguus tenuique latens discrimine sexus.*

Similar formal clause in analogous context: it insists respectively on the ambiguous aspect of the masculine goddess Minerva and of Achilles, young effeminate man among female Scyros court.

31) Claud. *rap. Pros. 1, 272 deserit et niveos infecit purpura vultus*
Stat. *Ach. 1, 297 illius et roseo flammatur purpura vultu.*

Identical clause: Proserpina, seeing the goddess Venus, blushes; Deidamia, among her sisters, has the reddened face in elegiac way.

46) Claud. *rap. Pros. 2, 186 Postquam victa manu duros Trinacria nexus*
Stat. *Ach. 1, 209 audierat, duros laxantem Aegaena nexus.*

Formal similarity in similar context: Sicily is described as a creature that “loosens its firm constraints” and it surrenders to the violence of Pluto, making him to emerge from Hades; Aegaeon in *Ach. 1, 209* is a monster that tries to free himself “from his hard holds”.

51) Claud. *rap. Pros. 2, 258: quod conata nefas aut cuius conscia culpae*
Stat. *Ach. 1, 562 Deidamia virum; sed opertae conscia culpae.*

Clause in similar context but by contrast: Proserpina regrets her own destiny and questions herself about guilt (sexual one) she has been able to complete. In fact, while she wonders what she had done for being punished by the gods with the abduction, Deidamia is aware of her guilt (furtive love with Achilles) and she is afraid to be discovered from her sisters and father.

61) Claud. *rap. Pros. 3, 202 Florebat tranquilla domus; nec limina virgo*
Stat. *Ach. 1, 391 Nereidum tranquilla domus iurandaque nautis.*

Formal similarity and analogous context: Claudian speaks about the building in Sicily that was a quiet dwelling for Proserpina; in Statius, Thetis promises to Skyros to be a calm home for the Nereids, over that for Achilles, that she is hiding him there.

87) Claud. *rap. Pros. 2, 324 et sparsos religant crines et vultibus addunt*
Stat. *Ach. 1, 348 deducit sparsosque tumet componere crines.*

Equal epithet and noun in the same form in analogous allusive context: by now Proserpina has to submit to male subjugation and the matrons dress her and fix her disheved hair for the nuptial thalamus; Thetis dresses “her masculine daughter” that refuses the wedding (1. 351-3) and she dress “her” ruffled hair.

The analysis of these parallels, also finished with the aid of the modern commentaries of *rap. Pros.* and of *Achilleid*, suggests that the recovery of the statian lines happens not by chance, but, on the contrary, where Claudian seems to insist on some rather remarkable literary themes in the

epic structure poem. Statius is a model for lines where the attention of the author is focused on the sexuality of the characters and on *gender* thematics. Therefore, Claudian refers to the *Achilleid* by Statius and not to other epic models, for the characterization of female figures with *gender* complications and for the treatment of topical subjects as the *militia amoris*, focused on the conflict among sexes. And what remains of the *Achilleid*, it is perfectly appropriated for this purpose, being an excellent example of poetry assembled persistently on the sexuality of the characters, a constant reference for the reflection on the masculine and female *gender* and literary limits (Parkes, 2015). In fact, the analysis of the characters provides a great reflection on the way according to how Roman culture reflects about its literary conscience. In fact, Claudian has the poetic propensity, consolidated in Flavian age by now, for compositions characterized by the instability of the literary genre, according to a poetic canon started already by Ovid and continued by the later epic poets with alternation of epic-martial and elegiac-erotic themes. Fluidity of the character genre and fluidity of the literary genre correspond. By now, in the IV century AD the recovery of the classical genres is crystallized in new poetic forms where we can also definitely put the *rap. Pros.* (Tsai, 2007; Wasyl, 2011). After 300 years from its literary models, the poem of Claudian represents the perfect conclusion of the epic Roman, when, not only is completing the downfall of the classical literary production, but the Roman civilization and culture lived theirs slow but inexorable decline (Charlet, 2000, p. 18).

Conclusions

This case study shows that the literary analysis is a field where the digital methodologies can potentially improve the systems of exploration and explanation texts. The information that can be extracted from a text has a quantitative nature and it picks up all the concordances of a word inside a text. As when they were in print, the concordances can serve to understand better the use of specific terms by an author in their syntactic context and in comparison to other forms in their respective contexts. The concordances is also useful for a philological purpose. If, in the past, it was necessary to file the text word for word as well as to create a card for every word in its context, in order to elaborate a concordance of an integral text, today we can use specialized softwares as *Tesseræ*. They allow us to compare the texts in a few seconds and they offer themselves as instruments that can potentially simplify the process of coding and representation of the literary sources in the studies of the antiquity scholar (Perilli, 1995; Fiormonte, 2003; Büchler et al., 2013). Nevertheless, great part of the identified intuitions by the digital resources must be analyzed, because it is often useful for a full and general understanding of a poetic work. Consequently, today the use of the digital is necessary to widen our understanding of the text. Yet we have to be very cautious, because the speed of investigation, offered by the technologies for collecting and comparing the texts, is changing the same intertextuality concept that nowadays is way more flexible, pliable and accessible than it was in the past.

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