
Claudian was the last poet in the classical tradition that Rome produced; his De Raptu Proserpinae has long been his most popular poem. Gruzelier's edition of the De Raptu, developed from a thesis accepted for a D.Phil. at Oxford, reflects a growing interest among scholars of the late antique period in Claudian and his poetry. In addition to the commentary, there is an introduction that covers the historical context of the poet, the myth of the rape of Proserpina, the literary qualities of the De Raptu, its metre and grammar, and the manuscripts. An apparatus criticus, prose translation, bibliography and indices round out the work.

This edition is intended to complement J. B. Hall's 1969 Cambridge commentary on the De Raptu, which focuses primarily on the transmission of the text, including the numerous manuscripts and editions, provides a comprehensive apparatus criticus, and treats matters mainly of textual interest. Gruzelier is dependent upon Hall for her text and apparatus criticus, although she is not afraid to take issue with some of his readings. She adopts a simplified codicological system in her apparatus, using = to indicate any reading that appears in enough manuscripts to give it the likelihood of dating from antiquity, and employing " for any reading that appears in only a few manuscripts or so late as to probably to be erroneous. Since there is not always a clear division between a particular reading being labelled as ≈ or ", some degree of subjectivity is inevitable. Although this system seems appropriate for an edition whose aim is not primarily textual, readers will still need to refer to Hall in order to decide for themselves on the merits of a particular reading.
The translation, which faces the text, is fluent and readable (as indeed is the entire volume). It reflects faithfully some of Claudian’s stylistic idiosyncrasies and imaginative qualities, but it is unfortunate that Gruzelier has chosen to render Claudian’s hexameters in prose. What we need is a verse translation of the *De Raptu* that brings out its syntactic and metrical qualities, since a prose translation inevitably expands the original text and cannot purport to represent the varied syllabic length and stress of the Claudianic hexameter. The commentary deals impressively with matters mainly of a literary nature in over two hundred well-wrought pages, which *inter alia* examine the *De Raptu*’s similes, language, grammar, diction, metre, rhetorical structure, style, imagery, descriptions (ekphrastic topoi), minutiae of psychological detail, motifs and speeches. It is replete with valuable observations on the literary tradition and helpful references to Claudian’s borrowings. Along with the introduction and translation, the commentary will prove an indispensable resource for all scholars working on the *De Raptu*.

In the introduction to his Loeb translation, Maurice Platnauer (*Claudian*, vol. 1, London 1922, xvii), describes Claudian as a poet who ‘is not always despicable’, even though his ‘faults are easy to find’. Alan Cameron (‘Claudian’, in J. W. Binns, ed., *Latin Literature of the fourth Century*, London 1974, 157) refers to the *De Raptu* as a ‘pretty but irrelevant torso of a traditional mythological epic’. Thankfully these harsh judgements are pretty much a thing of the past, although prejudice against Claudian still lingers. Even Gruzelier can only bring herself to describe Claudian as a ‘poet with a sharp mind, not a great one’ (xxi) and contends that the reader will ‘more easily find entertainment and amusement within his pages than profound thoughts or loftiness of vision’ (xxi). It would have been better if she had described the poetic qualities of *De Raptu* without making these types of subjective value judgements, since they add nothing of value to our understanding of the poet and merely suggest his inferiority. Besides asserting that plot may not ‘be considered one of Claudian’s stronger points’ and that some of his speeches ‘are overdone to the point of hysteria’ (xxiv), Gruzelier maintains that Claudian ‘is not particularly original in his
technical knowledge' (xxv) and describes what she deems to be compositional 'inconsistencies' in areas such as 'character portrayal' (xxvi). Her view in these and other matters is generally traditional. Unfortunately she concludes her introduction by citing Gibbon's assessment of Claudian instead of making her own, which she is well qualified to do based on her own understanding of the poet's literary qualities as revealed in her commentary and other publications, notably her excellent article 'Claudian: Court Poet as Artist', in *Ramus* 19.1 (1990), 89-108.

Indeed one gets the feeling that here is a poet really not capable of exploiting the epic potential of the Proserpina myth; perhaps this is due partly to the difficulty of making sense of a poem that is in such an incomplete state. Critics have generally viewed the *De Raptu* as a literary aside to the wider political concerns that Claudian shows in his other poems, in which he is obsessed with glorifying Rome's friends and condemning those he represents as Rome's enemies. But the composition of the *De Raptu* may have been occasioned by the corn shortage of the late 390s or even by Alaric's destruction of Ceres' temple at Eleusis in 396. The poem reflects the heart of Claudian's cosmic vision, revolving around an antithetical structure and opposition between opposing characters, principles and orders, which manifests itself in scenes of conflict, violence and disorder. There are interesting parallels between the *De Raptu* and Claudian's other works, in which the poet habitually hurls the underworld's full range of horrors against an individual such as Rufinus, portrayed as a perpetrator of iniquity, and invokes the Roman pantheon as witnesses to the moral rectitude of Stilicho, represented as the staunch defender of the empire's interests. Jupiter's champion role against figures subverting cosmic stability, particularly Dis and Ceres, recalls Stilicho's conduct as the resolute defender of a beleaguered Rome withstanding the barbarian onslaught, as exemplified in Rufinus, Eutropius, Alaric and Gildo. Is there more than meets the eye in Claudian's treatment of the myth?

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