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VIII

DENISE REITZENSTEIN

SHOWING ONE'S TRUE COLOURS IN ROMAN HISTORY*

ABSTRACT

The author of a written text decides whether or not to refer to colours and, in doing so, depends on notions of colours in his culture. This paper studies literary texts from Roman history in which colour terms and the changing of colour in the human face are picked out as literary motifs that serve the purpose of guiding the reader's judgement. It raises the question how Romans used colour terms in references to complexion or physical appearance in order to influence moral evaluation. This contribution argues that especially in Roman history authors are concerned about referring to "bad colours" (*color malus*) as the opposite of a "good colour" (*color bonus*) to illustrate the vice of a character or a group of people and to point to disease. Not referring to colour at all can in turn be a sign of virtue and Roman-ness as well as of a healthy body.

1. Introduction

The changing of colour in the human face or on the human skin is an ambiguous sign: Different internal (e.g. emotional, physical) or external (e.g. cosmetics, dirt) factors can provoke changes of colour. When approaching the colour of a face

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through written texts, we have to rely on the account an author has given us of the colouring and other details of the face, especially the skin. For Antiquity, the authors passed down to us are predominantly male, and this can have an impact on their narratives, as descriptions of the body and its colours are gender specific. The author decides on the details to give, if any, e.g. the reasons for the colouring. We are highly dependent on conventions in the author's cultural background and his intentions, as to whether or not he refers to the colour of the skin or of the face, and if so, what kind of information he gives.¹

An author can thus be both biased by colour psychology and influence others through it. By referring to the changing colour of the face, authors can purposely or unconsciously influence the reader's judgement. This effect of colour psychology can make it difficult or easy to understand the (supposed) true colours of a character. The author is also an authority when it comes to interpreting or simply ignoring such signs. An author might also leave information on skin or, especially facial, colour and its interpretation up to the reader and their intellect. The vocabulary used can likewise lead to confusion, especially through ambiguities.

An early Latin example of such ambiguity can be found in Plautus' comedy *Mercator*, presumably written at the end of the 3rd century BC. When father and son meet, both having unknowingly fallen in love with the same *hetaira*, the father, Demipho, asks his son why his colour has changed.² Charinus, having clearly lost his colour and paled, tries to give his reason: he did not sleep well last night and something was on his mind. His father cuts him off, interjecting his own interpretation of his son's pallor: it is obviously due to a sea voyage his son has just returned from.³ While Charinus presents his pallor as an affect, his father sees it as a physical reaction. The potential

¹ Cf. on Old English BIGGAM (1997) 22-26.

² PLAUT. *Merc.* 368: *sed istuc quid est, tibi quod commutatust color?*

³ PLAUT. *Merc.* 373: *ergo edepol palles.*

ambiguity of the sign is striking and underscores a crucial moment of the comedy.

Colour psychology in terms of mentions of skin colour in general or of facial complexion more specifically (or of their absence, as we shall see) can be an implicitly or explicitly applied element in texts aiming to produce a specific reaction and direct their audience. In line with the theme of the *Entretiens*, this contribution addresses the question in what ways Roman authors used colour association for cognitive purposes in symbols and signals. It further combines this question with the problem of colour associations and implications in moral judgments.

The focus on Roman authors also prompts the question if there are other ideals in Roman colour psychology than in Greek. We have to keep in mind that Roman literature faced a long tradition of written Greek. This had an impact on descriptions of the body — think only of Latin medical literature and Heinrich von Staden's question as to how Greek the Latin body was. Already Umberto Capitani pointed out that many terms in Celsus have a Greek origin.⁴ We can approach colours in the Roman world similarly by asking how Greek the Latin world of colours was. This question is hardly ground breaking as it derives from a well-known debate in Aulus Gellius on colour terms:⁵ The philhellene Favorinus challenges the Latin orator M. Cornelius Fronto by claiming that there is more colour vocabulary in Greek than in Latin. Fronto's defence of the Latin colour language reveals the Greek roots of several Latin colour terms and he shows his eloquence by convincing Favorinus that Latin colour language is not as badly off as Favorinus claims it to be.

⁴ VON STADEN (2010). Cf. CAPITANI (1975-1976) on Greek terminology in Celsus even if he had a Latin equivalent; on the preference of common Greek words instead of less common Latin cf. GELL. 2, 26, 18: *neque non potuit Vergilius colorem equi significare uiridem uolens caeruleum magis dicere equum quam 'glaucum', sed maluit uerbo uti notiore Graccho, quam inusitato Latino.*

⁵ GELL. 2, 26.

The dialogue is also a crucial document for the understanding of ancient colour language in the Roman Empire and for the different meanings and associations linked to Greek and Latin colour vocabulary, especially if we compare it to modern colour language and its abstract colour concepts. The dialogue for instance easily refers to ‘golden’ (*aureus*) as a colour term.⁶ This paper follows the understanding of ancient colour semantics presented by David B. Wharton’s paper in this volume.

Taking the phrase “to show one’s true colours” literally, the first part of this contribution looks at examples from Latin literature that discuss the colour of the body and especially of the face and refer to men. The focus on men goes back to a statement in Cicero, who speaks of a goodness of colour in men under certain conditions. By turning to the opposite — slaves and women — the second part addresses the question of normal skin colour in Roman literature and the judgements combined with it. It is argued that the Roman idea of bad colours is especially liable to be adapted to other oppositions, such as good and bad emperors, to illustrate the negative behaviour of the latter. It will emerge that the colour vocabulary serves to support the narrative but also needs a broader context to be understood.

2. Colour psychology and Roman men

In his late philosophical work *De officiis*, Cicero differentiates between two gender specific sorts of beauty, namely grace (*uenustas*) in women and dignity (*dignitas*) in men.⁷ The stature of men depends, according to Cicero, on a goodness of colour (*bonitas*

⁶ GELL. 2, 26, 5: *Quippe qui “rufus” color, a rubore quidem appellatus est, sed cum aliter rubeat ignis, aliter sanguis, aliter ostrum, aliter crocum, aliter aurum, has singulas rufi uarietates Latina oratio singulis propriisque uocabulis non demonstrat omniaque ista significat una “ruboris” appellatione, cum ex ipsis rebus uocabula colorum mutuatur et “igneum” aliquid dicit et “flammeum” et “sanguineum” et “croceum” et “ostrinum” et “aureum”.*

⁷ CIC. *Off.* 1, 130.

coloris) and this colour in turn on physical exercises (*formae autem dignitas coloris bonitate tuenda est, color exercitationibus corporis*). In addition to this, a man must care for hygiene and orderly dress, both to an extent that is neither exaggerated nor objectionable. The goodness of colour is here a male quality closely connected to the virtue of a modest care for the body and of physical fitness.

The connection of good colour and men in Cicero has a long tradition in Greek history. Here the ideal of the male Greek is closely linked to a good complexion and *kalokagathia*, as Maria Michela Sassi has clearly pointed out.⁸ Its counterparts are women and barbarians, who have the opposite qualities of Greek men, including other colours.⁹ In ethnographical descriptions from the Roman Empire, these Greek mechanisms of dichotomy still live on as we can see in Pliny the Elder's descriptions of peoples to the North and the South.¹⁰ According to Pliny, nobody challenges the notion of "Ethiopians" being black from the heat of the close sun and born as burnt people. Even the name "Ethiopians" supports this claim, in Antiquity literally associated with the Greek term αἴθοψ, meaning "burnt". To the North, by contrast, there were peoples with bright (*candidus*) skin and blond (*flauus*) hair.¹¹ According to Pliny, these natural conditions caused the former to be rough (*trux*), the others to be smart (*sapiens*) due to the movement of the air.¹² These characteristics of the environment, visible on the surface of the body, were thought to have an impact on character.

⁸ SASSI (2001) 49-53. On complexion and the colour of the skin in Ancient Greek cf. GRAND-CLÉMENT (2011) 196-201; GRAND-CLÉMENT (2013). On *kalokagathia* cf. BOURRIOT (1995).

⁹ SASSI (2001) 1-33; 82-139. The main claim in EAUVERLY (2013), the contrast of tanned men and pale women in images, is based on the dichotomy of women working indoors and men outdoors, and is already found in SASSI (2001) 25-26, who links the ideal to the depiction of dark men and white women in Egyptian art.

¹⁰ PLIN. *NH* 2, 189-190; cf. BRADLEY (2013) 133-134.

¹¹ Cf. for problems with colour terms in physiognomic literature e.g. in Polemon ELSNER (2007) 218-224.

¹² Cf. CIC. *Nat. D.* 2, 17, 42; VITR. *De arch.* 6, 1, 3-5; VEG. *Mil.* 1, 2; FIRM. *Mat. Math.* 1, 3, 1.

Pliny classifies the appearance of human beings, who, from his perspective, live at the edges of the ancient world, as deviations from a norm. The categorization becomes evident from the definition of his own environment: it is the centre of the earth, contributes to health (*salubris*) and makes humans appear in a proper or modest colour (*in colore temperie*).¹³ What colour *temperies* relates to, Pliny does not answer, nor does he explain whether this colour term applies to the whole, including hair, skin and eyes, or just the complexion. From the extremes of human bodies, we can only conclude that “black” and “white” skin as well as other physical characteristics of peoples from the North and the South are deviations from the norm. The only divergence from Greek patterns of thought here is the shift of the norm from Greece to the Roman Empire,¹⁴ which in Pliny’s lifetime was defined by its centre Rome and Italy.

An example for a different approach towards colour and emotions in Greek and Latin authors can be found in the narratives on C. Mucius Scaevola in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy with an impact on what could be defined as Roman virtuousness and manliness. In the era of transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, Dionysius of Halicarnassus presents a narrative that refers to a possibility of colour change that does not occur. In his *Antiquitates Romanae*, he attributes this non-occurrence of a change in complexion (μεταβολή χρώματος) to the mythical C. Mucius Scaevola. According to Dionysius, this non-event is Mucius’s most outstanding characteristic, marking his fearlessness, his virtuousness and his Roman-ness.¹⁵ He had been arrested in a camp of enemies and was threatened with death by fire, because he

¹³ PLIN. *NH* 2, 190: *medio uero terrae salubri utrimque mixtura fertiles ad omnia tractus, modicos corporum habitus magna et in colore temperie.*

¹⁴ Cf. SASSI (2001) 127.

¹⁵ DION. HAL. *Ant. Rom.* 5, 29: Καὶ ὁ Μούκιος οὔτε μεταβολῆ χρώματος οὔτε συννοία προσώπου τὸν ὀρρωδοῦντα διασημήνας οὔτ’ ἄλλο παθῶν οὐδέν, ὧν φιλοῦσι πάσχειν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποθνήσκειν, λέγει πρὸς αὐτόν· Ἐγὼ Ῥωμαῖος μὲν εἶμι, (...). Cf. LIV. 2, 12, 1-2; 2, 13, 5.

rejected treason. The explicit absence of a changing complexion occurs before a speech given by Mucius as he is awaiting his imminent punishment. According to the legend told, Mucius himself burnt his right hand without flinching and without any change in colour.

Unlike Dionysius, Livy does not refer to Mucius' controlled facial complexion, although he tells the legend in quite a similar fashion.¹⁶ Livy reports the same beginning of a speech Mucius is said to have given. He characterises Mucius as a most fearsome and stalwart man, without any colourful or colour-relating illustration of these characteristics. When the legendary Mucius finally burns his hand as if he does not feel anything, Livy does not mention any visible or invisible signs. The audience thus has to imagine such an attitude. The ideal of the myth conveyed to the audience is Stoic self-control of affects and Roman virtuousness. Read with an eye for colour psychology, the narrative of Dionysius is striking because this extreme form of self-destruction of a body part in fire and the motionlessness can only be told for an outstanding figure.

Colour references, including colourlessness and the absence of changes in complexion, do not occur without meaning anything and this includes its limitations. Taking into consideration the Latin account of Alexander the Great — imitation of Alexander was widespread among Roman nobles and emperors¹⁷ — Curtius Rufus offers an interesting narrative on the legendary Macedonian king being struck by an arrow.¹⁸ Alexander remained unaffected by this hit, even when his doctor removed the missile and the blood surged out of the wound. Without change of colour in his face (*ne oris quidem colore mutato*), he ordered the wound to be treated. A reason for this lack of a reaction was, according to Curtius Rufus, Alexander's self-control or suppression of pain. Later on, during the fight,

¹⁶ LIV. 2, 12, 9: *tum quoque inter tantas fortunae minas metuendus magis quam metuens "Romanus sum" inquit "ciuis"; C. Mucium uocant. (...)*

¹⁷ Cf. KÜHNEN (2005).

¹⁸ CURT. 4, 6, 17-20.

the Macedonian commander nevertheless broke down when the wound swelled. But even this temporary defeat Alexander suffered by his own body takes a positive turn, as his breakdown has a significant impact on the process of events. While the Persian commander Batis returned to his city triumphantly, believing, according to Curtius Rufus, that Alexander had been killed in action, the Macedonian was soon to prove him wrong by defeating him.

In a different context, Livy chooses another form of colour psychology to serve the opposite purpose. In a fight against the Gauls, he depicts naked and injured Gaulish bodies and their colour changes.¹⁹ Livy shows their brightness of bodies (*candor corporum*) stained with deep black blood (*sanguine atro*). The Gauls believed, according to Livy, they were fighting all the more gloriously if injuries covered their skin — but only if they were not too bad. In his view, the Gauls tended towards fury and shame if hit by arrows and missiles and would fall to the ground even though they inflicted but small injuries.

Here, Livy connects a narrative of changing colour through war wounds with the incapability to control affects. Furthermore, this characterisation is attributed to Non-Romans. The Gauls thus stand in terms of colour and emotions for a dichotomy to Roman virtuousness like the legendary Mucius. Making colour and appearance of the Gauls at war an issue, is the authors psychological strategy to discredit the enemy. It perfectly contrasts with colourless narratives on outstanding Romans such as Mucius.

Such a strategy is not limited to foreign enemies. A remarkable example is L. Munatius Plancus in the account of Velleius Paterculus. The historical work of Velleius Paterculus from the reign of Tiberius was not passed down to us completely, but it is nevertheless striking that the only colour term in the whole known work occurs in the narrative on L. Munatius Plancus.²⁰

¹⁹ LIV. 38, 21, 9-12.

²⁰ VELL. PAT. 2, 83, 1-2.

Before referring to a defining moment in the transition from the Roman Republic to Imperial Rome — that is the Battle of Actium between the young C. Iulius Caesar (Octavian) and the forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra —, Velleius speaks of the war preparations and the Roman senator L. Munatius Plancus. Right before the decisive battle, Plancus changed his allegiance from Mark Antony to Caesar. Velleius appraises neither the change nor the person in good words: From his perspective Plancus is a most objectionable traitor who had neither Republican interests nor loyalty towards Caesar (Octavian) in mind. To Velleius he is an adulator of most inferior standing, who behaves like a slave (*humillimus adsentator reginae et infra seruos cliens*). He underlines his deep resentment through this anecdote: Plancus had danced *caeruleatus et nudus* on his knees with a crown made from reeds and a fishtail in the role of Glaucus at a banquet at the Ptolemaic royal court.

The colour term *caeruleatus* (from *caeruleus*)²¹ here forms part of an outstanding violation of proper behaviour. A Roman senator is said to have performed as Glaucus — the role is itself a colour term — in front of a Hellenistic queen, naked and with his skin unnaturally coloured. The costume does in no way suit Plancus's role as a Roman senator and contrasts with the expectations of how a senator should behave: not subordinating himself to the will of a foreign female potentate, but wearing the toga and making his status clear through the purple *latus clauus* visible on his proper Roman dress.

The colour word is one among several clues used to demonstrate an extreme form of deviant behaviour to the Latin audience. Another clue lies in the role itself and in the myth of Glaucus, who transformed into a sea god and changed his skin and hair colour. The quality of the colour, i.e. the question what colour Glaucus-Plancus actually had, is, on the one hand, less

²¹ On *caerul(e)us* WIDNMANN (1921), distinguishing it from “grün” (*uiridis*), cf. 21-23; ANDRÉ (1949) 162-171; HEIJN (1951) 62-69; 73-75; BARAN (1983) 366-367; GARCEA (2003) 189-190; EULER (2004) 84-88; BRADLEY (2009) 9-12.

relevant, as long as it appears as an extreme deviation from the expected. *Caeruleus*, on the other hand, makes complete sense in the narrative as it is a well-spread epithet of the sea and thus suitable for the sea god Glaucus, supported by evidence from poetic and non-poetic texts.²² How blue or dark Plancus presumably looked is thus not crucial for the understanding of the anecdote. The role in itself makes sense but not the behaviour of its actor. The fact that the Glaucus role is so closely connected to the sea might also allude to the following naval battle.

Dionysios's Mucius and Velleius's Plancus are utterly different: virtuous colourlessness contrasts with unacceptable colourfulness, no colour change due to inner self-possession with colour change due to outer masquerade; the latter would make it hard to read any inner motions anyway. When looking at colour change (or non-change) as a change of a person's emotional state, Seneca the Younger deals with the incapability of controlling such a change (*non color constare*) in one of his letters.²³ A human being attains wisdom, according to Seneca, if he or she departs from this life as carefree as he or she came into it. Scared by the end, most of the people lose their bravery, the complexion is not constant (*non color constat*), and tears are shed in vain. Seneca does not refer to any specific emotions or to the specifics of the change in colour. The phrase *non color constat* probably links to a variety of affects one might experience in contemplation of one's own death. At the same time, this inconstancy could be a physical sign, and that is probably why a reference to tears occurs to make it more clearly.

²² CIC. *Acad.* 2, 105; OV. *Ars am.* 3, 126; OV. *Pont.* 7, 50; *Met.* 1, 333; VAL. FL. 1, 188-192; SUET. *Aug.* 25, 3; GELL. 2, 26, 22; 2, 30, 11 (the two epithets *caeruleus* and *glaucus* describe the windy sea); on *caeruleus* as an epithet of the sea that is reliably documented from the time of Cicero cf. WIDNMANN (1921) 11-17; 53-56; on *glaucus*/γλαυκός MAXWELL-STUART (1981); PÖTSCHER (1998). Other associations are possible, such as a reference to the naked, *caeruleus*-coloured skin of remote peoples like the Britons, cf. CAES. *B Gall.* 5, 14, 2; MART. 11, 53.

²³ SEN. *Ep.* 22, 16.

Like Seneca, Livy once uses the phrase *non color constare*. In fact, it is one of the few mentions of the Latin term *color* in Livy's entire oeuvre,²⁴ as was the case with the colour term in Velleius, further documenting the rarity of colour mentions in early Latin historiography. In this instance, Livy vilifies an external opponent. In 184 BC, Roman envoys confronted the Macedonian king Philipp V with the violent actions of his troops in Maroneia.²⁵ Philipp V denied the events, but the ambassadors insisted on an investigation and referred to their sources Cassander and Onomastus. This perspective alarmed Philipp and neither his colour nor his facial expression remained unchanging (*ut non color, non uultus ei constaret*).

It is hardly surprising that the loss of face in terms of a changing complexion is a significant motive in Roman rhetoric to discredit a political opponent. According to Livy, colour is not the only quality that matters, but rather the facial expression in general. Cicero counts the *permutatio coloris* of a presumed criminal in the same category of evidence as a weapon or shed blood. Everything serves as evidence that can be perceived of a crime in terms of signs or hints.²⁶

Cicero uses observations on the *permutatio coloris* in his texts. In his defence *Pro Cluentio* he attacks his opponent Oppianicus by linking to him a visualisation of an affect. In another trial, according to Cicero, the judges noticed the fear and confusion visible in Oppianicus's face even though he was not even the accused.²⁷ His unsteady and unconfident facial expression and

²⁴ LIV. 27, 47, 1-3 (here, tanned skin is a sign for military considerations but refers to an outer condition of complexion). Cf. in addition the use of the term *uersicolor* connected with clothing: LIV. 7, 10, 7; 9, 40, 3; 34, 1, 3.

²⁵ LIV. 39, 34, 7-8.

²⁶ CIC. *Part. or.* 39: *Est etiam genus argumentorum aliud quod ex facti uestigiis sumitur, ut telum, cruor, clamor editus, titubatio, permutatio coloris, oratio inconstans, tremor, ceterorum aliquid quod sensu percipi possit.*

²⁷ CIC. *Clu.* 54: *suspensus incertusque uultus, crebra coloris mutatio, quae erant antea suspiciosa, haec aperta et manifesta faciebant.* See CIC. *Brut.* 22, 87: Sulpicius Galba appears with such a complexion and eyes as if he had not prepared but conducted the lawsuit.

his repeated changes of complexion publicly and manifestly confirmed earlier assumptions.²⁸ In one of his speeches against Catiline, Cicero used colour, glance, facial expression and the silence of the accused as evidence for a crime.²⁹ Even though Cicero does not explicitly mention a *mutatio*, he presents himself a distinct observer of body language. He describes the consternation of the accused, their glances to the floor and their stealthy exchange of views.

In one of his dialogues, Aulus Gellius also points to a *mutatio coloris*. He relates it to affects as a matter of ancient philosophy. Starting point of the dialogue is Gellius's question, addressed to the philosopher Taurus, as to whether a wise man may be angry with someone. After a long excursus, Gellius's protagonist Taurus tells an anecdote on his teacher Plutarchus.³⁰ While being beaten, Plutarchus's slave reproached the philosopher by saying that such an expression of anger is unworthy of a philosopher. Plutarchus pointed to the missing signs of anger and continued the punishment. Evidence of anger, according to Gellius's Plutarchus, are furious glances and a high voice but also redness (*rubor*), all signs of affects that were not visible on him.³¹

When looking at such evidence, it is hardly surprising that similar narratives can be found. Tacitus in his *Histories*, for instance, records the designation of Calpurnius Piso as a successor of Galba. Piso in public showed neither positive nor a negative reaction. Nothing changed in his face or manners.³² Tacitus portrays Piso as a Roman senator acting modestly and

²⁸ Cf. CELS. *Med.* 4, 3, 1 (*crebra coloris in facie totoque in corpore mutatio*) in terms of a medical symptom.

²⁹ CIC. *Cat.* 3, 13.

³⁰ GELL. 1, 26, 1-4.

³¹ GELL. 1, 26, 8: "*quid autem*", inquit, "*uerbero, nunc ego tibi irasci uideor? ex uultu meo an ex uoce an ex colore an etiam ex uerbis correptum esse me ira intellegis? mihi quidem neque oculi, opinor, truces sunt neque os turbidum, neque inmaniter clamo neque in spumam ruboremue efferuesco neque pudenda dico aut paenitenda neque omnino trepido ira et gestio. (...)*".

³² TAC. *Hist.* 1, 17, 1: *nihil in uultu habituque mutatum*.

in a self-controlled manner, not enigmatic, but colourless in a positive sense of *romanitas*.

These patterns — colourlessness as a symbol of Roman men and virtues — can also be identified in the *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius. He narrates his admiration for his adoptive father Antoninus Pius for declining exquisite food, selected textiles and colours of dresses and for serving as a role model for his adoptive son to live a life without bodyguards, flamboyant clothing, candleholders, statues and such things.³³ From this account, Antoninus Pius avoided a form of imperial representation that could give political opponents the opportunity to depict the emperor's habits as a deviation from Roman virtues and norms, and so did Marcus Aurelius. The less colour terms could be brought to bear on the reign of an emperor, the better he appears to have been.

From these examples, we can also see the intention behind the use or rejection of colour terms in written texts. Livy and Velleius use them quite reluctantly, but if they do occur, there is an enormous emphasis on their significance due to the rarity of colour references and colour vocabulary in their works. Colour language acts as an enormous spotlight and usually serves to highlight deviant behaviour in men, in foreigners, in enemies. Colourlessness in terms of the absence of epithets of colour in the description of characters can therefore have a positive meaning.

3. The true colours of slaves and women and the search for a normal human colour

From Velleius' characterization of L. Munatius Plancus we have seen that the author connects him to the behaviour of a slave, and the episode on his coloured performance as the sea god Glaucus seems to perfectly match this judgement. Dichotomies familiar from Ancient Greek culture underlie the narrative of the

³³ M. AUR. *Med.* 1, 16, 26; 1, 17, 5.

authors mentioned:³⁴ free man/slave, citizen/foreigner, man/woman. Differences between these groups of human beings were more or less visible in reality, but in the tradition, they were further emphasized in terms of oppositions, which the texts constructed also through references to colour.

From a passage in Apuleius, we can see how authors use the changing of colour in the human face as a literary motive to characterize figures — a woman and a slave — negatively. Apuleius reveals the communication with the reader in a short story in his *Metamorphoses* (also known as *The Golden Ass*). In this digression, he directly addresses the reader and uses the changing of facial colour to mark the perfidious attitude of the antagonists.³⁵ The story deals with a woman losing her heart to her stepson. After the rejection of her love, she wants to poison him with the help of a slave, but accidentally kills her own son. In court she and her slave accuse the stepson of having murdered his half-brother. But the physician who sold the presumed poison to the slave exculpates the stepson and convicts the stepmother and the slave. The drug turns out to be sleep inducing instead of poisoning, the younger son thus has not been murdered but buried alive, survives and the elder son is not a fratricide sentenced to death. Their father is thankful for both of their lives. The true criminals receive their rightful punishment.

The woman's deceit is thematised already at the beginning in how she overrides her affections for her stepson, information the reader learns immediately after the already mentioned address:³⁶ At first, she suppresses her blushing and pretends with increasing

³⁴ VIDAL-NAQUET (1981) 151-175 on the complexity of these binaries; SASSI (2001) 1-8; 25-26 on the dichotomy men/women and their setting outdoor/indoor connected to a black/white contrast in Greek and Egyptian art, cf. also EAVERLY (2013). Further classifications cf. SASSI (2001) 82-139.

³⁵ APUL. *Met.* 10, 2-12.

³⁶ APUL. *Met.* 10, 2, 4: *Iam ergo, lector optime, scito te tragoediam, non fabulam legere.*

infatuation a disease.³⁷ Everyone knows, according to the narrator in Apuleius, how the signs of illness and love can match, including a strong pallor (*pallor deformis*) and an inconstancy of colour (*coloris intemperantia*).³⁸ Not a physician's senses would be capable of deciphering these signs of love.³⁹

During the trial scene, however, it is a physician who opens the eyes of the judges to important evidence previously overlooked, which in turn includes signs of colour.⁴⁰ In the case of the pretended poisoning of the younger son, for instance, the physician, suspecting the slave of involvement in a crime, undertook measures to prevent a possible crime when giving him the drug. Instead of a poison, he delivers a narcotic effective enough to cause a sleep in the younger son similar to death. Apparently, nobody ever questioned his death and checked bodily signs of the presumed dead person, which would also have included marks of colour, to discern sleep and death by poison. Apuleius does not address the issue at all, allowing him to surprise his audience by the turn of events.⁴¹

The inability of physicians to differentiate indications of love from those of illness, Apuleius contrasts with the ability of a physician to definitely distinguish other signals and even influence them. While on the one hand Apuleius's narrator is suggestive of clearness in signals when someone falls in love, on the other hand the reasons for turns in other scenes cannot always be identified without doubt. In the case of the son, who was presumed dead, the signs seemed to be unambiguous, just as the whole case in

³⁷ APUL. *Met.* 10, 2, 5-6; cf. for blushing in Roman History BRADLEY (2004); (2009) 150-159.

³⁸ APUL. *Met.* 10, 2, 6-7.

³⁹ Cf. for psychological and neurological research on emotions Richard A. Shweder, "You're not sick. You're just in love': Emotion as an Interpretive System", in EKMAN / DAVIDSON (1994) 32-44.

⁴⁰ APUL. *Met.* 10, 8-11.

⁴¹ APUL. *Met.* 10, 5, 2 relates to the younger son's supposed death by telling that he falls lifeless to the ground. This description gives an ambiguous account of the event with an interpretation (probably death) that is represented by most people engaged in the lawsuit.

court seemed to be unambiguous before a physician proved a completely different view and interpretation of signs. Thus, the irony in Apuleius's digression is that signs are not as clear as they seem.

Apuleius also arranges the blushing of the stepmother in the beginning as a counterpart to the blanching of the convicted slave. After the first statements of the doctor, the slave's human colour (*humanus color*) turns into an infernal pallor (*pallor infernus*). Though the slave denies the deed in the beginning, he can be found guilty by the evidence of the physician and is finally crucified: The transition of a human colour to an infernal pallor is in the end emblemized in the execution of the death penalty for the slave.

But what does it mean here when a slave shows his true colours? Considering that Romans legally regarded slaves as things, the use of *humanus color* seems somewhat ironic. But the doctor in Apuleius' text combines skills of medicine and rhetoric in his presentation, remembering of Cicero's view on the *permutatio coloris* in a trial scene mentioned above: Cicero treats the changing colour in the human face as evidence, and so does Apuleius in his narrative on the doctor and the slave.

Besides the difficulties raised by the status of slaves, the term *humanus color* also raises the question what human colour meant at that time. We know nothing about the ethnic origin of the slave in Apuleius' story, but keeping in mind that rule and society had gone through fundamental changes during the first centuries AD, we might ask about the notion Apuleius had of human colour in the 2nd century AD. If we remember what Pliny the Elder took over Greek thought in referring to peoples from the North and the South and their colouring in the 1st century AD, the experience of provincials advancing to the Roman senate and even becoming Roman emperors like the *optimus princeps* Trajan who was of Hispanic origin must have modified the notion of Roman-ness and led to more diversity in terms of colouring. In the case of Trajan, this origin meant that his family was not truly indigenous but were Italics. But during the 2nd century AD more

and more families with a former peregrine background even from remoter parts of the Empire climbed the social ladder up to the Roman elite.

From a medical point of view, the image of the Roman body was still under the influence of Greek medical thought as we can see in Celsus, though in a certain Roman way he unifies the diversity of different Greek traditions.⁴² It is thus interesting to see what terms a Latin medical text uses to describe the human colour of the body to find out about the notion of human colour. But first we need to have a look at a character in an epigram by Martial who bears the same name as the one in Plautus's comedy, Charinus. The name Charinus, "the charming" or "the graceful", is meaningful, since the character in Martial's epigram pales in every circumstance, including those which should bring blood or a tan to his face as a sign of health.⁴³ Charinus is hence an instance of a norm being expressed by deviation.

From this, several characteristics for a skin or facial colour viewed as normal can be determined, a mix of inner and outer influences: health, a modest consumption of alcohol and a good digestion on the one hand, sunbeams, cosmetics and sexual activity on the other hand. Influences from emotions and affects are missing, such as a blush caused by the affections like those that betrayed the malicious stepmother in Apuleius. Whether Charinus' motionlessness is due to a lack of emotions in him, remains an unanswered question. In the end, Charinus' complexion is simply abnormal.

⁴² VON STADEN (2010) 20: "Rather, he [Celsus] made his own 'Roman-ness' central to his account, drawing attention to differences between Roman and Greek sociolinguistic and aesthetic sensibilities, valorizing Roman folk traditions, and presenting himself as a sensible Roman voice that steers his audience on a calm, reasonable, centrist course through a vast chorus of dissonant Greek voices".

⁴³ MART. 1, 77: *Pulchre ualet Charinus et tamen pallet. parce bibit Charinus et tamen pallet. bene concoquit Charinus et tamen pallet. sole utitur Charinus et tamen pallet. tingit cutem Charinus et tamen pallet. cunnum Charinus lingit et tamen pallet.* Cf. IUV. 2, 50. Cf. for a connection of good digestion and a healthy complexion SEN. *Controv.* Praef. 1, 17: After dinner Porcius Latro does not take his time for digestion — *itaque et oculorum aciem contuderat et colorem mutauerat.*

Celsus employs terms such as *color suus* or *color naturalis* when referring to the colour of a healthy body or of parts of the body.⁴⁴ For instance, Celsus is quite reluctant about the prognosis when treating open abdominal injuries. In their anamnesis, physicians have to check if intestines still possess their own colour (*color suus*). All medical help is in vain, if the intestines are pale or dark (*intestinum liuidum aut pallidum aut nigrum*).⁴⁵

Celsus gives no information what the *color suus* of the internal organs looks like and marks only the deviation in colour terms: they should not be pale (*pallidus*), “black/dark” (*niger*) or “bluish/grey” (*liuidus*).⁴⁶ This example illustrates the challenge ancient physicians faced in analysing the innards of the living, healthy body. Colour terms again characterize only the deviation from the norm.

Similarly, Celsus mentions a *color naturalis*. He describes pustules on the skin, varying in colour, but in any case different from the “natural complexion” (*pusulae liuidae aut pallidae aut nigrae, aut aliter naturali colore mutato*).⁴⁷ Connected to injuries or pathological changes, Celsus repeatedly refers to a “natural skin colour” or a “healthy colour”.⁴⁸ Such an instance is the development of colours in wounds: When changing the dressing of a wound on the 5th day after injury, characteristics of

⁴⁴ Cf. on colour terms in Celsus VILLARD (2002).

⁴⁵ CELS. *Med.* 6(7), 16, 1-2.

⁴⁶ Mentioning two different terms for dark may be due to different causes, e.g. lacking blood circulation (*liuidus*) or necrotic tissues (*niger*): For the three terms characterizing ichor, cf. CELS. *Med.* 5, 26, 20d; *pusulae* (“pustule”) cf. CELS. *Med.* 5, 28, 15b; *uulnus* (“wound”) cf. CELS. *Med.* 5, 26, 29 (including *albidus*, here arranged in an order from brightness to darkness with *pallidus*, *liuidus* and *niger*). Cf. for distinguishing tissue by *liuidus* or *niger* or neighboring skin by *pallidus* oder *liuidus* cf. CELS. *Med.* 5, 26, 31c. For *liuidus* and *niger* also CELS. *Med.* 5, 26, 20c; 5, 28, 3a; 8, 4, 21; for *pallidus* and *liuidus* CELS. *Med.* 2, 6, 5; 2, 8, 23; 5, 26, 20e; 5, 26, 27a; 6, 6, 1d. Cf. ANDRÉ (1949) 139-147 s.v. *pallidus*; 171-175 s.v. *liuidus*.

⁴⁷ CELS. *Med.* 5, 28, 15b.

⁴⁸ Further instances of *color naturalis*: CELS. *Med.* 5, 26, 27b; *color sanus*: CELS. *Med.* 5, 28, 19b, s.a. 5, 26, 36a. Cf. also *naturalis positus*: CELS. *Med.* 7, 26, 1c; *ordo naturalis*: CELS. *Med.* 7, 7, 8a; *naturalis figura*: CELS. *Med.* 7, 7, 14a.

colour such as *lividus*, *pallidus*, *uarius* or *niger* are bad signs.⁴⁹ If wounds are not healing, it is considered a sign of progress, if the wound at least partly regains its “natural colour” (*color naturalis*) when treated with warm water.⁵⁰ What kind of natural colour specifically, Celsus omits and leaves it to the reader and his experience, just like he does with the *color suus*.

The question arises, if *color suus* and *color naturalis* or *sanus* are synonymous. When comparing the evidence, *color suus* seems to be a quality of internal organs whilst *color naturalis* or *sanus* refer to the appearance, respectively the skin as the outer organ or surface of the body. This differentiation makes sense, as even individuals or members of the same people vary in skin colour.⁵¹ The variety of skin colours requires the physicians' capability to relate certain physical phenomena to non-diseased skin. The “natural colour” can also be meant to be a counterpart to artificially changed skin colour, e.g. by cosmetics.⁵²

The characterisation *suus color* also appears in texts that are not to be classed as medical literature. Two instances refer to pigments and the application of colours in visual arts: Lucretius mentions painted images of deities, whose colour is changeable by paint.⁵³ Vitruvius, on the other hand, observes the special quality of vermilion that loses its saturated colour when exposed to the sun.⁵⁴ He describes its characteristic colour as *suus color* and recommends ways in which vermilion paint keeps its colour. Seneca the Younger and Pliny the Elder describe cosmic phenomena with *suus color*.⁵⁵ For Pliny, every planet or significant celestial body has its own colour. Differences in colour are

⁴⁹ CELS. *Med.* 5, 26, 27a.

⁵⁰ CELS. *Med.* 5, 26, 27b.

⁵¹ Cf. CELS. *Med.* 5, 28, 14a.

⁵² Cf. BRADLEY (2009) 161-188.

⁵³ LUCR. 4, 79-80.

⁵⁴ VITR. *De arch.* 7, 9, 2-3.

⁵⁵ SEN. *Q Nat.* 7, 12, 7; PLIN. *NH* 2, 79: *suus quidem cuique color est: Saturno candidus, Ioui clarus, Marti igneus, Lucifero candens, Vesperi refulgens, Mercurio radians, lunae blandus, soli, cum oritur, ardens, postea radians, his causis conexo uisu et earum quae caelo continentur.*

due to different altitudes of the objects, according to Pliny. In poetry, Silius Italicus expresses the appearance of the Earth in daylight by means of *suus color*.⁵⁶

But what do these expressions of healthy human colour have to do with Cicero's *bonitas coloris* in men mentioned in the beginning? In Cicero, we can find thoughts rooted in Greek traditions: According to the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, attributed to Xenophon, Lycurgus appreciated the benefit of labour. Unlike idle men, hard-working people have a good colour, good flesh and good strength (εὐχροί τε καὶ εὐσαρκοὶ καὶ εὐρωστοί).⁵⁷ Together with other qualities, the good colour here symbolizes the alternative to a life of distraction and makes a person's attitude visible to others — the only out of the three qualities meant to be perceivable (good flesh and good power are invisible). We probably find here an idealisation of Sparta's society opposed to Athens' that fits the contemporary opposition of these two *poleis*.

The human body and good colour are also a motive in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. He uses it in opposition to an artificially induced complexion.⁵⁸ In this dialogue, a husband and his wife discuss the handling of their own bodies and tackle the question, if there lies more dignity in aiming at a healthy and strong body in terms of an appearance of "good colour" (εὐχρωσ) or in the application of cosmetics such as red earths (μίλτος). The woman appreciates the natural colour of his body, and the man assures his wife of his appreciation of her own colour, not that of pigments. Cosmetics in his view serve the purpose of fraud towards others, but people living together would realise the deception every morning.

These Greek thoughts had an influence on Celsus, too, who refers to health and good colour:⁵⁹ Heat for instance endows the body with a good colour (*color bonus*) and serves passing water. Celsus here refers to the benefit of dunking one's body in cold

⁵⁶ SIL. *Pun.* 10, 541.

⁵⁷ XEN. *Lac.* 5, 8.

⁵⁸ XEN. *Oec.* 10, 5-8.

⁵⁹ CELS. *Med.* 1, 9, 5.

water or heat. According to Celsus, the dunking also helps those suffering from reddened complexion (*rubicundi nimis homines*). A “good colour” thus does not include *rubicundus*, although Jacques André assumes that *rubicundus* refers to a “teint normal”.⁶⁰

A clear conceptual separation of *color bonus* from *color naturalis* is hardly possible. But there is an undertone in *color bonus* that aims not only at naturalness, but at the ideal of a modest lifestyle. The ideal of labour challenges idleness and intertwines with the question of how to distinguish a visible good colour from a likewise perceivable bad colour (*color malus*).

In the following, the main thrust of the argument is to show that a notion of bad colour or bad complexion was more significant in Roman thought than to Greek. This can be related to an earlier observation by Mark Bradley that blushing as a literary motive is not as widespread in Greek as in Latin literature.⁶¹ He argues that the interest in physiognomy in the Hellenistic era had an impact for the increase of cases for blushing. The same explanation can be adducted to explain the increasing references to bad colour, to which we now turn.

The *Aphorisms* in the Hippocratic Corpus connect good colour not with labour, but with environmental conditions: The weather from the North is meant to have benefits for the body, including a good colour.⁶² The weather from the South is, according to the aphorism, quite the opposite, though no explicitly named opposition appears in the text. Such a counterpart, however, arises in another Hippocratic aphorism that finally mentions *δύσχροος*, the opposite of *εὐχροος*. A pregnant woman, it says, has got a good complexion (*εὐχροος*), if pregnant with a boy, but a bad complexion (*δύσχροος*), if pregnant with a girl.⁶³

⁶⁰ ANDRÉ (1949) 78-79 *s.v.* *rubicundus*.

⁶¹ BRADLEY (2009) 152.

⁶² HIPPOC. *Aph.* 3, 17: καὶ εὐτονα καὶ εὐκίνητα καὶ εὐχροα καὶ εὐηχοώτερα ποιέουσι.

⁶³ HIPPOC. *Aph.* 5, 42; to this GAL. *Hipp. Aph.* 17b, 834; also SOR. *Gyn.* 1, 45, 2 (*εὐχροια/δύσχροια*). Cf. PLIN. *NH* 7, 41 (*melior color marem ferenti et facilior partus*).

This aphorism is again committed to a Greek tradition of contrasts and of juxtaposing the idea of the good/male with the bad/female. This instance also shows that no proof existed in Antiquity to predict the sex of an unborn baby and reminds us, to what extent ancient medicine is mired in ideology.

Despite the Hippocratic *Aphorisms*, it is striking that *δύσχροος* or *δύσχροια* and thus an antonym of “good colour” does not emerge in Greek texts prior to the late Hellenistic era or the early Roman Empire respectively.⁶⁴ The *Aphorisms* are the singular exception and raise the question, as to whether this part of the Hippocratic Corpus, or at least single passages such as the one on the complexion of pregnant women, should be dated to the 5th century BC.⁶⁵ A comparison with Aristotle is revealing: He refers to the same information regarding how the complexion of the mother-to-be sheds light on her bearing a boy or a girl.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, he omits a clear dichotomy of good and bad colour but underlines the well-being of a mother-to-be depending on the sex of the foetus.

Ovid, a Latin author of Augustan age, employs the contrast of *color bonus* and *color malus* in his *Amores*. He links a bad colour to a negative sense of longing for attention from others.⁶⁷ Such an impression of bad complexion certainly led to regular — not only medical — attention, maybe a phenomenon commonly encountered in the wealthier classes of society who could afford frequent visits of doctors. A unique piece of evidence of a *color malus* in *De Medicina* might stress a similar

⁶⁴ Except from the *Aphorisms* the earliest records are the fragment PS.-ARCHYTAS, p. 7, 6 Thesleff, not accurately datable but Late Hellenistic or Roman era; SOR. *Gyn.* 1, 45, 2; PS.-DIOSC. *Theor.* 6; GAL. *Feb. diff.* 7, p. 345, 5 Kühn.

⁶⁵ On the *Aphorisms* GOSSEN, s.v. Hippokrates (16), in *RE* 8, 2, 1913, Sp. 1801-1852, esp. 1844-1846; GOLDBER (2007) 45-46 dates the *Aphorisms* to the late 5th century BC.

⁶⁶ ARIST. *Hist. an.* 584a13-18: ὡς μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ῥᾶρον ἀπαλλάττουσιν αἱ τὰ ἄρρενα κύουσαι καὶ μᾶλλον μετ’ εὐχροίας διατελοῦσιν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν θηλειῶν τούναντίον· ἀχρύτεραι γὰρ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ καὶ βαρύτερον διάγουσι, καὶ πολλαῖς περὶ τὰ σκέλη οἰδήματα καὶ ἐπάρσεις γίνονται τῆς σαρκός· οὐ μὴν ἀλλ’ ἐνίαις γίνεται καὶ τάναντία τούτων.

⁶⁷ OV. *Am.* 2, 7, 9-10.

point of view:⁶⁸ Celsus reports that most of the people did not care for sun freckles (*ephelis*/ἔφηλις), which were considered a *color malus*. Earlier, he criticizes the therapy of warts, spots and freckles, but women could hardly be dissuaded from these treatments. Nevertheless, Celsus offers recipes for more cosmetic than medical treatments of such skin characteristics, which were considered a deficiency though not a disease.⁶⁹ Both Ovid and Celsus connect vanity with a *color malus*. Celsus also links it to women and their care for looks, a prejudice borrowed from Greek thought as we saw e.g. in Xenophons *Oeconomicus* and the above-mentioned dialogue between husband and wife on good colours versus unnatural colours.

But a bad colour could also be a symptom for an acute life-threatening situation: Scribonius Largus, physician in the 1st century AD, refers to it in an instance of poisoning by sea hare (*lepus marinus*),⁷⁰ and also makes a reference to lead when writing about a bad colour (*color malus et uelut plumbeus*⁷¹). Lead, of course, is also a poisonous substance. This reference could provide a first explicit definition of *color malus* as a leaden colour but could also be a mere deviation from a “normal bad colour”. Another link between bad colour and lead brings us back to the question how someone might even end up being poisoned by a sea hare. Scribonius records a recipe that used the toxic sea hare as a remedy for outer medical treatment.⁷² For this treatment, the Dead Sea hare needed to be stored in old oil in a lead can for 40 days. After this period, the content could be applied through a feather for medical treatment. Scribonius finishes his recipe with a warning to use the agent

⁶⁸ CELS. *Med.* 6, 5, 1.

⁶⁹ CELS. *Med.* 6, 5, 2-3. Cf. also PLIN. *NH* 20, 164.

⁷⁰ SCRIB. LARG. 186.

⁷¹ On the rare colour term cf. ANDRÉ (1949) 74 *s.v.* *plumbeus*.

⁷² SCRIB. LARG. 80. Cf. PHILOSTR. *VA* 6, 32, 2 on the poisoning of enemies by Nero and of Titus by Domitianus, who are both said to have used sea hare: Considering this recipe of medical treatment with sea hare, we can imagine how often medical treatment in Antiquity that went wrong can be interpreted as poisoning someone.

carefully, not to let it have contact with the hands, and if so, not to let it touch the mouth. An improper handling of the drug could easily cause sea hare poisoning — and maybe even lead poisoning as well, since a leaden can was used for storage.

For Celsus and Scribonius, a *color malus* is a symptom of a disease too, though Celsus makes an exception if it is caused by icterus (*color sine morbo regio malus est*).⁷³ The characteristic of this so-called “royal disease” (*morbis regius*) is a yellowish complexion. In case of a leaden or jaundiced skin colour, there are colour changes in the face or skin that differ markedly from redness or pallor. A confusion of the symptom with an affect in terms of blushing or blanching can thus be excluded. If we remember here the story in Apuleius and the narrator’s initial disparagement of physicians and their incapability to separate affections from serious symptoms of illness, we are reminded of the ambiguity of these complexions. Finally, leaden and jaundiced complexions are not ambiguous.

The pathology of a *color malus* could have been transferred from a medical usage in rhetorical texts such as those of Seneca the Elder.⁷⁴ In rhetoric *color* refers to the overall linguistic impression of a text, and it is striking that rhetoric would employ a visual quality to characterise texts as a whole.⁷⁵ In poetry, Seneca the Younger alludes to a negative image of the night as a *color malus*.⁷⁶

Looking at the relatively late emergence of evidence on “bad colour” in the late Hellenistic and early imperial era, the question arises if specific Roman ideas intermingle with “good” and “bad colour”. The earliest recorded Latin evidence for *color bonus* is in Cato the Elder, living in the late 3rd and first half of the 2nd century BC, in his book *On Agriculture*.⁷⁷ He explains how a bitter

⁷³ CELS. *Med.* 2, 7, 3; seefavinia SCRIB. LARG. 125 (with a commentary on the recipe: *nam colorem corporis restituit*); 144.

⁷⁴ SEN. *Controv.* 7, 1, 20.

⁷⁵ For *color* in rhetorics, cf. BRADLEY (2009) 111-127.

⁷⁶ SEN. *Herc.* f. 862.

⁷⁷ CATO *Agr.* 109: *Id uinum erit lene et suaue et bono colore et bene odoratum.*

wine becomes mild, that is which ingredients have to be added and how much time will be needed for the treatment. In the end, this procedure generates a wine of good colour and good odour. Similar things can be observed for ancient medicine: Celsus, himself the author of a now lost written piece on agriculture,⁷⁸ records that Cato implements ideas of diagnosis and therapy in an effort to bring about a positive change. His “good colour” also refers to aesthetics, moderation and virtuousness.

Another reference to a *color bonus* from agriculture is recorded in Varro⁷⁹ from the 1st century BC. It too is linked to an aesthetic category. Varro talks about pigeon breeding and put on record that a single pair of pigeons of good looks and good colour could bring in earnings of 200 sesterces or even up to 1000 sesterces (the value of approximately 10 to up to 50 pigs). Other than Cato, who was focussed on improving a wine, Varro uses the term to support a money-making motive and to explain the high costs of single pigeons.

If we go further, one might detect in a good colour a potential for negative consequences and a seeking of *luxuria*. This moment in a *color bonus* and *color malus* of later times could be contrasted with the earlier Greek notion of good colour as an undisputed ideal. In Roman times, a bad colour could be linked to women and vanity — and thereby also be opposed to natural colours —,⁸⁰ to intoxication and disease. Again, it is a literary construct used by authors as a strategy to impose ideology onto certain phenomena and probably reflects the way of thinking in

⁷⁸ COLUM. *Rust.* 2, 2, 14-17 refers to Celsus' experience in agriculture and criticizes his interpretation of colours of soils: *de colore satis admirari non possum cum alios tum etiam Cornelium Celsum, non solum agricolationis, sed uniuersae naturae prudentem uirum, sic et sententia et uisu deerrasse, ut oculis eius tot paludes, tot etiam campi salinarum non occurrerent, quibus fere contribuuntur praedicti colores.* On the oeuvre of Celsus see KRENKEL (1959).

⁷⁹ VARR. *Rust.* 3, 7, 10: *Romae, si sunt formosi, bono colore, integri, boni seminis, paria singula uolgo ueneunt ducentis nummis nec non eximia singulis milibus nummum.*

⁸⁰ In his chapter on “The unnatural body”, BRADLEY (2009) 161-188 particularly focuses on a discourse of the imperial elite on cosmetics and the colours women applied to their face, hair and body in terms of colourful dressing.

the male elite of the Empire. Colour references here serve the purpose of stressing alterity in a negative sense. Linking it to simple oppositions of good and bad, natural and unnatural or even harmful creates a notion of true colour.

4. The colours of bad emperors and a conclusion

The notion of missing colour change or colourlessness and of an opposition of good and bad colours can be linked to comparable binary pairs, such as that of good and bad emperors. Marcus Aurelius as a representative of so-called good emperors presents himself as rejecting luxury, including colourful clothing, and by doing so takes the wind out of the sails of hostile authors and minimizes the risk of incurring negative judgement on his reign. His self-control in this area resembles narrative patterns apparent for instance for C. Mucius Scaevola, though the latter is an exemplum of the highest degree of inner self-control in a situation of utmost external threat to body and life.

Considering the case of L. Munatius Plancus in Velleius we gain an impression of the ways in which authors could attach negative associations to nonconforming figures by referring to colours. It also showed that colour vocabulary is not the only marker of such views but a means of putting additional emphasis on compromising scenes, especially if the author is generally quite reluctant to use colour language in his work, as was the case with Velleius. Similarly, narratives on bad emperors contain colour references in a negative sense and one could even read these colour references as symptoms of an emperor's reign being regarded as a disease or at least as a deviation from the norm,⁸¹ because medical literature usually relates colour terms to qualities of the unsound body. A prominent example is Nero

⁸¹ "Bad" emperors are regarded — in ancient sources, but also in modern research — as a serious illness, even madness, of the Roman Empire: On the general phenomenon of supposed mad emperors and the different views in literary and numismatic sources, epigraphy and papyri see WITSCHERL (2006); on

and his connection to gold, which was considered a colour term in Antiquity, as we saw above. Pliny the Elder treats this metal as a disease, calling it a *pestis uitae* while regarding the earth as a suffering body penetrated by human beings ravenously hunting for luxury and avarice.⁸² He skilfully and repeatedly connects Nero with this colour/metal and in doing so associates him with illness and a threat to life.

An imbalance between emperors and especially senators, the latter being the main source for negative narratives on emperors, lay behind colour references in negative contexts. A relevant source here is Tacitus's portrayal of Domitian:⁸³ On the one hand, the pathological redness of the emperors' face made it impossible for other human beings to read his emotions. On the other hand, Domitian did not miss any pale face of another person.⁸⁴ Not showing one's true colours while having the ability to read the truth in other individuals' faces forms part of this imbalance. The colour of the face is not mentioned by the by, but always carries meaning: In this context, the colour reference is employed to signify a threat to individuals and in consequence to the system of the Roman Empire.

To sum up, this article has studied the psychological significance of changes of colour or complexion in the face or on the body. If such a change explicitly does not occur in a Roman, it can be a sign for virtuousness. The evidence also suggests that a *color bonus* more generally is likewise linked to virtue and goodness. It denotes health and physical fitness, but more precisely signifies an ideal of a normal skin colour, which shifts from a Greek to a Roman interpretation and undergoes a significant change in reality when the diversity of social composition increases. This attribute of good colour seems only to characterise

Caligula and Nero and their image in modern research cf. RONNING (2011); WINTERLING (2012); cf. WINTERLING (2004).

⁸² PLIN. *NH* 33, 4; cf. BRADLEY (2002); REITZENSTEIN (2016).

⁸³ BRADLEY (2009) 156-157. Cf. again PHILOSTR. *VA* 6, 32, 2 on the difference between Domitian and his "good" brother Titus.

⁸⁴ TAC. *Agr.* 45, 2.

men or was at least ascribed to men by male authors. It can be inserted into a scheme of oppositions that becomes particularly stressed as soon as colour terms are involved. Specific colour terms in medical texts, for instance, are primarily connected to disease, while a perceivable *color naturalis*, *color sanus* or *color suus* of a healthy body or sound parts of skin remains undefined.

Since the late Hellenistic period and the early Roman Empire, the opposition of a clearly labelled bad colour appeared more frequently, suggesting that bad colour as a motif was more specific to Hellenistic or Roman history. Records that depict Romans either without colour attributes or without changing colour support this assumption, while colour terms are attributed to Non-Romans or non-conforming Romans as deviations similar to those described on diseased body. Through this, references to colour and their absence become value judgements and describe virtuousness or its opposite respectively. Such references can even be applied to good and bad emperors, thereby further underlining their classification as one or the other. The moment of colour psychology finally lies in the authors' intentional use of colour terms referring to certain positive or negative notions.

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DISCUSSION

D.B. Wharton: In medical contexts, I noticed the use of “color” to mean “healthy color” or “normal color”, which appears several times in Pliny the Elder’s remedies, especially for discolored scars (e.g. 20, 42; 20, 55; 27, 106). Pliny (11, 224) also discusses the role of blood in the coloration of animals and of humans in displaying emotion. Pliny seems to be saying that various modes of paleness or redness are distinct signs of different emotions.

Perhaps the most famous blush in Latin literature is that of Lavinia in the *Aeneid*, which appears when her future marriage to Turnus is discussed (*Aen.* 12, 64-70). There is little agreement on what her blush means, although feelings of pudor or desire are often mentioned. Mark Bradley in *Colour and Meaning* (2009) discusses the passage at length, and there is a good summary of interpretations in R.O.A.M. Lyne (1983), “Lavinia’s Blush: Vergil, ‘Aeneid’ 12. 64-70”, in *Greece & Rome* 30, 1, 55-64. I discuss the passage as well in *Color in Literature and the Performing Arts*, in D. Wharton (ed.) (forthcoming 2020), *A Cultural History of Color in Antiquity* (Bloomsbury). Ovid also notes the change of color in the faces of the Sabine women raped by the Romans in *Ars amatoria* (1, 119-124).

In Greek and Roman drama, the masks for actors and actresses also were carefully colored to indicate not only emotions but dispositions and social status, and Julius Pollux (4, 133-154) catalogs variations in skin, beard, and hair color that were used to identify various stock characters in both comedy and tragedy (see discussion in my *Literature and Performing Arts* chapter above).

D. Reitzenstein: Diese Auswahl einschlägiger Beispiele aus der lateinischen Literatur unterstreicht noch einmal, was mir in meinem Beitrag wichtig ist, dass nämlich Autoren der römischen

Zeit Verweise auf fehlende oder existierende Farbe oder auch Farbwörter gezielt einsetzen, um nicht nur auf einen emotionalen Zustand hinzuweisen, sondern auch um mit diesen Verweisen und Farbwörtern klare Wertungen vorzunehmen und selbst eine emotionale Reaktion beim Publikum zu erzielen. Diese Verweise auf Farbänderungen im Gesicht oder auf eine bestimmte Farbigkeit und auch Farbwörter selbst können zur Idealisierung oder zum genauen Gegenteil beitragen. Diese Form der Verunglimpfung zeigt sich etwa im Falle des Munatius Plancus und auch Domitians: Die farbigen Anekdoten dienen dazu, negatives Verhalten oder negative Eigenschaften zu betonen, die wiederum Gefühle der Ablehnung oder Abschreckung beim Publikum hervorrufen sollten. Verweise auf Farbe oder Farbwörter sind ein Zeichen, dass etwas anders ist — und zwar meistens im negativen Sinne, ähnlich wie bei dem kranken Körper. Sein ‘normales’ farbiges Erscheinungsbild benennen schon griechische Medizinautoren und später auch lateinische nicht klar, hingegen die Abweichung des Körpers von der Norm schon. Farbbegriffe sind üblicherweise mit Symptomen für Krankheit, Verwundung oder gar den nahenden Tod verbunden.

Allerdings sind solche farbigen Zeichen, die zur Diagnose herangezogen und insbesondere isoliert, d.h. unabhängig von anderen Symptomen, betrachtet werden, nicht immer eindeutig, und dasselbe gilt auch für die Erwähnung farbiger Zeichen als emotionale Ausdrücke des Gesichts oder den emotional bedingten Wechsel der Hautfarbe — Lavinias Erröten ist hier ein treffendes Beispiel. Bedauerlicherweise fand der Vortrag von Mark Bradley zum Thema “The Colour Blush: A Model for Ancient Psychology?” nicht wie geplant statt. Er hätte sicherlich ebenfalls einiges dazu sagen können.

Der Hinweis auf Plin. *NH* 11, 224 ist sehr interessant, denn der ältere Plinius lässt ähnlich wie später Apuleius den Eindruck entstehen, unterschiedliche Arten der Blässe oder Röte ließen sich eindeutig bestimmten Emotionen zuweisen. Ähnlich findet schon in Plin. *NH* 11, 157 eine klare Gleichsetzung zwischen dem Gefühl des *pudor* und dem *rubor* der Wangen statt. In Plin. *NH* 11, 225

ist die Ursache der Farbänderung ein Phänomen, das Menschen von den Tieren unterscheidet. Gleichzeitig ist das Aufzehren des Blutes für Plinius ein Zeichen von Krankheit und Tod. Farbänderungen mit emotionaler Ursache stehen hier neben solchen mit einem medizinischen Hintergrund, so dass auch Plinius Mehrdeutigkeit bei Farbänderungen des Gesichts implizit thematisiert. Diese Darstellung erinnert an die Episode bei Plautus: Emotional bedingte farbige Veränderungen sind nicht eindeutig von anderen farbigen Reaktionen der Haut zu unterscheiden.

Julius Pollux und die detaillierte Beschreibung von farbigen Theatermasken im *Onomasticon* mit einer breiten Differenzierung antiker Farbbegriffe mittels Prä- und Suffixe würde ich zunächst einmal auch als Reflex verstehen, wie differenziert im Bereich des tatsächlichen antiken Theaters gespielt wurde oder gespielt werden konnte. Ähnlich wie bei antiken medizinischen Texten und den unterschiedlichen Symptomen des Körpers gibt es einen realen Hintergrund. Gleichzeitig setzt die Vielfalt der Theatermasken in der Wirklichkeit voraus, dass die Zuschauenden dekodieren konnten, wofür ihre Farben und Formen standen, d.h. was die farbig gestalteten Masken bedeuteten, ob und welche Emotionen und/oder andere Charakteristika zum Ausdruck kommen sollten. Das Phänomen lässt sich heute mit Emoticons vergleichen, wie sie in der Kommunikation in sozialen Medien und hier in einer großen Bandbreite an Farben und Formen eingesetzt werden. Die Emoticons sind mehr oder weniger eindeutig. Die Betrachtenden müssen aber wissen, was sie bedeuten können und in welchem Register kommuniziert wird. Dadurch sind sie paradoxerweise wieder eindeutig.

M.M. Sassi: You did quite right in focusing on the issues of changing skin colors vs. maintaining *suus color* (*suum colorem*) in Roman literature and esp. Roman oratory and historiography. However, it seems to me that some peculiar features of the Roman approach to the relation emotion/complexion would emerge more clearly if they were more systematically put against the Greek background of physiognomic observations which

developed from Homer onwards passing through ethnographical and medical observations, and then were systematized in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *On physiognomonics*. This complex of notions influenced Roman physiognomical gaze much before the Latin *Physiognomony* was written by Polemon.

I cannot enter details, but I want at least to mention that three criteria of inference of moral qualities from physical appearance end up being defined in the Peripatetic treatise, based on comparison with 1. animals; 2. barbarians; 3. emotions. According to the last (but not at all least) criterion, an individual's character may be inferred by the skin color that goes usually along with a certain emotion. For instance, if one has a stable reddish complexion he must be inclined to anger, if he is pale, he must be inclined to coward; the general assumption is that emotions use to go along with skin color changes.

Considering this background would allow to catch better what is more or less original in the Roman attitude: for example, I am not much impressed by Pliny or by Celsus, as both of them take their categories from Greek ethnography and medicine, respectively. I am more impressed by the emphasis you noted on impassibility of leaders in the historical narrative, or by the frequency of physiognomical descriptions in oratory, because these are features peculiar to the construction of the Roman *persona*.

D. Reitzenstein: Tatsächlich ging es mir darum zu zeigen, wie Farbwörter in römischen Erzählungen — und das schließt die Historiographie dezidiert ein — eingesetzt werden, um vor allem Missstände oder das, was als Missstand wahrgenommen wurde, anzuprangern. In meinem Beitrag konzentriere ich mich auf innenpolitische Gegner, und das lässt sich in der römischen Kaiserzeit auch auf das Handeln von Kaiserpersönlichkeiten beziehen.

Ich stimme zu, dass dieses Phänomen als Entwicklung im Verhältnis zur griechischen Geschichte betrachtet werden muss. Wenn die Römer in der Literatur viel häufiger als die Griechen

erröten, hat das natürlich etwas zu bedeuten — die Frage ist nur: Was? Für dieses Phänomen und andere Farbänderungen des Gesichts, welche der Autor mit einer emotionalen Ursache in Verbindung bringt, ist das hellenistische Interesse für Physiognomie sicherlich ein Katalysator. Oft bemüht sich die physiognomische Literatur um eine eindeutige Interpretation farbiger Zeichen als Hinweis auf bestimmte Charaktereigenschaften. Gerade die Berichterstattung über römische Kaiser — insbesondere die sogenannten 'schlechten' oder 'verrückten' Kaiser — zeigt, wie bestimmte Verhaltensweisen unberechenbar schienen — und so dargestellt wurden. Aber: Antike physiognomische Literatur konnte nicht garantieren, dass Zeichen richtig gedeutet wurden.

Die Vielfalt der Farben in der römischen Kaiserzeit, die Plinius für die Bildende Kunst seiner Zeit anprangert (*NH* 35, 49) oder Gellius' Favorinus in dem berühmten Farbdialog für einen einzelnen Farbbegriff, nämlich *flauus*, beobachtet (2, 26, 21), kann ein Hinweis sein, warum Eindeutigkeit farbiger Zeichen in der römischen Zeit insgesamt schwerer zu erzielen ist. Über die Jahrhunderte griechisch-römischer Geschichte hat es unterschiedliche Farbcodes und Stile in der Kunst gegeben, sind Farbbezeichnungen mit unterschiedlichen Bezugsworten und variierenden Bedeutungen aufgetreten. Wenn man bedenkt, dass auch Ursachen und Zeichen für Emotionen vielfältig sind und kulturell variieren — Ekel ist hier ein gutes Beispiel —, ist natürlich keine konstante diachrone Interpretation von Farbänderungen der Haut als emotionale Reaktion möglich.

K. Ierodiakonou: Is there an absolute identification of the good (= virtuous) colours with the natural ones? And if this is the case, do the Latin authors take it for granted, or do they explain it in some way? Is there any connection with philosophical doctrines (e.g. Stoicism)?

D. Reitzenstein: Eine absolute Gleichsetzung von guten Farben und natürlichen Farben gibt es meines Wissens in den überlieferten lateinischen Texten nicht; sie lässt sich nur

implizit erschließen. In den medizinischen Texten ist das Ideal des Körpers immer ein männliches, und das gilt auch für die Güte der Farbe (*bonitas coloris*), wie Cicero sie auf Männer und ihren angemessenen Umgang mit dem Körper — Training, Hygiene und moderate Bekleidung — bezieht. Der gesunde Körper ist daher ein Körper, der diesen Ansprüchen genügt und somit ein natürliches Bild abgibt.

Im Falle des jüngeren Seneca, der sich zum Problem des *non color constare* äußert, würde ich sagen, dass es hier einen klaren Konnex von Farbänderung als Zeichen des Gesichtsverlusts zu stoischer Philosophie gibt. Es geht um die Selbstbeherrschung im Angesicht des Todes, über den Seneca selbst (*Epist.* 65, 24) sagt, er fürchte ihn nicht und in einem anderen Brief (*Epist.* 22, 16) thematisiert, welche Probleme andere damit hätten, ihre Gesichtsfarbe und somit ihre Selbstbeherrschung zu bewahren. In diesem Sinne lässt sich die Darstellung des C. Mucius Scaevola ebenfalls als stoisches Verhalten lesen. Die Verbindung zwischen Farblosigkeit als Mäßigung und Stoa ergibt sich bei Mark Aurel und seiner Zurückweisung von Luxusgegenständen, die in der Darstellung oft mit Farbattributen verbunden sind, wie sich insbesondere an Kaiserpersönlichkeiten wie Nero verfolgen lässt. Farbattribute in den Darstellungen solch negativ konnotierter Kaiser sind häufiger als in Kaiserbiographien, die sich aus Sicht der Darstellenden konform verhalten haben.

A. Grand-Clément: Ton étude menée sur les Romains rejoint bien ce qui ressort des textes grecs, comme l'a montré Maria Michela Sassi dans son livre *The Science of Man in Ancient Greece* (2001) : la norme, incarnée par le citoyen mâle d'âge adulte est non marquée du point de vue de la couleur.

À Rome, l'absence de couleur caractérise donc — soit les Romains à titre collectif, comme groupe ethnique différencié des Barbares (ceux du sud à la peau noire, ceux du nord à la peau claire, et même des Grecs qui, selon Manilius dans ses *Astronomica*, ont une subtile coloration de peau due à leur entraînement athlétique à la palestres) — soit le Romain vertueux, à titre

individuel, qui ne se laisse pas envahir par les émotions : dans ce deuxième cas, l'absence de changement de couleur est l'indice d'un contrôle des émotions. À moins que ce ne soit dû au fait qu'il n'éprouve même pas ces émotions ?

Qu'est-ce exactement que la "bonne couleur" ? L'adjectif *eukhrôs* a pu être employé pour les victimes sacrificielles, ce qui me donne à penser qu'il s'agit peut-être de signaler que la bonne coloration est aussi ce qui satisfait les dieux. On sait que les Romains étaient soucieux de maintenir la *pax deorum*...

D. Reitzenstein: Die Frage, ob sich die unterschiedliche Wahrnehmung von Emotionen und der unterschiedliche Begriff von Emotionen mit dem fehlenden Verweis auf Farbänderungen bei Livius zusammenbringen lassen, ist berechtigt. Die Perspektive des Dionysios von Halikarnassos auf die Legende um C. Mucius Scaevola ist natürlich eine griechische, und eine Übersetzbarkeit von römischen in griechische Emotionen — oder genauer: von Erwartungen an emotionale Reaktionen — ist eine Prämisse, die man hinterfragen kann. Dass Dionysios die fehlende Reaktion des C. Mucius Scaevola thematisiert, könnte genau diesen Unterschied zwischen römischem und griechischem Verständnis derselben Episode aufscheinen lassen. Offenbar muss Dionysios die Besonderheit der fehlenden Reaktion des Scaevola seinem griechischen Publikum zusätzlich erklären, während Livius davon ausgeht, dass seine lateinischen Leser das Verhalten richtig einzuschätzen wissen.

So wie ich die Texte verstehe, ist die "gute Farbe" wie bei der Güte der Farbe (*bonitas coloris*) zunächst einmal eine positiv verstandene, männliche Qualität. Die Verbindung dieser Eigenschaft mit Kultpraktiken und die Zuschreibung einer religionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung erscheinen mir schlüssig, sind mir aber bislang in den römischen Texten nicht begegnet. Deine aktuellen Forschungen zu Farben im Kult führen hier aber sicherlich weiter.

