

THE COLORS OF THE SOULS

Israel Muñoz Gallarte
University of Groningen

It is well known how sometimes literature makes strange friends on the road, and this is probably the case we are going to deal with: the references to the colors of the soul in the plutarchean *On the delays of divine vengeance* and in the *Apocryphal Acts of John*. In spite of the fact that several scholars have dedicated important works to analyze extensively the topic in both texts, their interesting similarities have not received proper attention. The present article examines the topic of colors-passions of the souls in both texts and their contemporary documents, in order to understand the origin and development of the simile and its use during the II and III centuries of our era.

A noir, blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes:
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d'ombre; , candeurs des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes;

U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;

O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des [Mondes et des Anges]:
—O l'Oméga, rayon violet de [Ses] Yeux!

A. Rimbaud, *Voyells* (1871)

Could Plutarch be considered a precedent of the so-called “New Age”? Could perhaps the anonymous author of the *Apocryphal Acts of John* (AJ), be it Lucius Carinus or someone else, be considered that way? A simple google search allows us to find hundreds of web sites that, under the title “What color is your soul painted” offer us an allegedly serious and complete study of our soul’s chromaticism for a relatively low prize. The aim of the present article is not to determine the survival of Plutarch in the current New Age, neither to wonder whether Plutarch could make a living by analyzing the souls of his

fellow citizens. Rather it intends to explore the conception regarding the colors of the soul, as it emerges both from the *AJ* (28,6-29,19) and the plutarchean *De sera numinis vindicta* (565 C-E).

Even though previous studies widely analyzed the numerous points of contacts between Middle-Platonism and Early Christianity, not a single mention pays heed to the similarities between both passages¹. Admittedly, as Hans Dieter Betz points out², “because of the quantity and complexity of issues to be taken into account, a complete description of the similarities and dissimilarities between Plutarch’s dialogue and Early Christian Literature is a difficult task”. It is therefore worthwhile to dwell some time upon these similarities.

The *AJ* is an Early Christian text probably composed in the second half of the second century that belongs to the so-called *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*³. Even if there is no certainty regarding the primitive text, scholarly consensus accepts the existence of several textual strata in its current textual form. The passage we will deal with today, however, is included in the *Apocryphal Acts of John* by Pseudo-Prochorus, preserved in manuscripts R and Z⁴, and might belong to the original account⁵.

Our text begins with the apostle’s travel that takes him from Miletus to Ephesus⁶, where John meets Lycomedes and his wife Cleopatra. After some vicissitudes, which include the resurrection of both personages, Lycomedes embraces Christianity and

¹ See H.D. Betz, *Plutarch’s Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden 1975); Id., *Plutarch’s Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden 1978).

² K. Ziegler, *Ploutarchos von Chaironeia* (Stuttgart 1964) 850 (=“Ploutarchos von Chaironeia”, *RE* XXI (1951) cols. 635-962); Ph.H. De Lacy & B. Einarson, *Plutarch’s Moralia*, VII (Cambridge 1984) 170-299; E. Des Places, *La religion grecque dieux, cultes, rites et sentiment religieux dans la Grèce antique* (Paris 1969) 272; H. Almqvist, *Plutarch und das Neue Testament* (Upsala 1946).

³ See Junod-Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis II* (Brepols-Turnhout 1983) 682-687, 689-700; see K. Schäferdiek, “The Acts of John”, in W. Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, II (Cambridge-Louisville 2003) 152-212; see J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford 1993) 306. For a complete bibliography on this topic, and also others, see P.J. Lalleman, “Bibliography of Acts of John”, in J. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen 1995) 231-235.

⁴ Ms. R is preserved in the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian (Patmos) and has been dated to the sixteenth century. In spite of its rather late date it preserves several passages of an older manuscript, maybe proceeding from the tenth century; ms. Z, dated to the same century as R, is preserved in the Library of Santa Maria delle Grazie (Milan); see Junod-Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis I*, 15-17.

⁵ However, the theory has some difficulties, see Junod-Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis I*, 18-25; See J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 304. K. Schäferdiek, “The Apocryphal Acts of John”, in Schneemelcher, *NTA II*, 156-157; H.-J. Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. An Introduction* (Waco 2008) 16.

⁶ See *AJ* 18.

becomes a fervent follower of the apostle⁷. His veneration is so strong that Lycomedes pays a painter to make a portrait of John in order that he may be able to constantly behold the apostle and revere him⁸. When the apostle John sees the finished portrait, gets disappointed about the result. In his view, whereas it pretends to represent himself, in fact it only depicts an external appearance. In this context, John pronounces the following words⁹:

But do you be a good painter for me, Lycomedes. You have colors, which he gives you through me, that is, Jesus, who paints us all for himself, who knows the shapes and forms and figures and dispositions and types of our souls. And these are the colors which I tell you to paint with: faith in God, knowledge, reverence, kindness, fellowship, mildness, goodness, brotherly love, purity, sincerity, tranquility, fearlessness, cheerfulness, dignity and the whole band of colors which portray your soul and already raise up (...) which cure your bruises (πληγὰς) and heal your wounds (τραύματα) and arrange your tangled hair and wash your face and instruct your eyes and cleanse your heart and purge your belly and cut off that which is below it; in brief, when a full blend and mixture of such colors has come together into your soul it will present it to our Lord Jesus Christ indelible (ἀνέκπλυτον), well-polished (εὔξεστον) and firmly shaped (στερεόμορφον).

At first sight, the apostle's objection points to the obvious difference between both the material and spiritual realities, by stressing the higher value of the latter over the former. A closer reading, however, shows that this section of the *AJ* also offers a whole description of the origin, present condition and destiny of soul, in which we may distinguish the following steps:

1. God or Jesus provides human beings with a range of colors whereby they should paint their souls during their earthy existence.
2. These colors represent the virtues by means of which the human soul may recover its original balance, presumably lost due to the influence of external reality, namely by the passions arising from it¹⁰.

⁷ See *AJ* 19-26.

⁸ In the same way that Lycomedes requires a portrait from his revered master, Plotinus' followers Amelius pretended to possess a portrait of his teacher, but Plotinus refused to sit for a portrait, see Porphy., *VP* 1.5-2; also H.J. Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 21.

⁹ See *AJ* 28,6-29,19. English translation by K. Schäferdiek, in Schneemelcher, *NTA* II, 176.

¹⁰ See P.G. Schneider, *The Mystery of The Acts of John. An Interpretation of the Hymn and the Dance in Light of the Acts' Theology* (San Francisco 1991) 35.

3. The restitution of the soul's pristine balance is metaphorically described as a healing of wounds (πληγὰς and τραύματα)¹¹, and as a cleaning and washing of the soul.
4. This in turn opens the possibility for the soul to supersede the influence of the material world¹².
5. Eventually, the individual should return his soul intact to its creator, that is, pure and stainless as he originally received it.

As far as the list of virtues included in our section is concerned, the text includes a total of fourteen and when compared to other lists of virtues in Early Christian texts, they do not present remarkable differences. Previous scholars have thoroughly analyzed them and pointed to parallel lists of virtues proceeding from the Stoa, from the Cynics, from Jewish “wisdom”, or from “apocalypticism” and the question regarding their origin is probably unanswerable¹³. It is however interesting to note that even though our section of the *AJ* mentions both colors and virtues, it does not attempt to relate the former to the latter. Also interesting is the lack of any reference whatsoever to the opposite of these virtues, namely the vices or passions of the soul and their correspondent chromatic equivalences.

Let us now analyze other interesting aspects of John's argument.

1. God as Painter of Souls

As far as the simile of God-painter of souls is concerned, Junod-Kaestli¹⁴ –following Festugière¹⁵– consider it a common place in Early Christian Literature. The following review of parallels will help us to contextualize the meaning of the *AJ*'s passage.

¹¹ This description is very common in *AAA*; for example, see *ATh*, c. 34 and 67.

¹² The brief mention of the castration of the young boy has been traditionally interpreted as an encratite defense of castration. However, given that other sections of *AJ* rather denounce than endorse castration (see John's criticism, in c. 54, of the parricide's castration), it seems more reasonable to interpret these lines not physically, but spiritually. In fact, they oppose physical and spiritual realities and defend the necessity of “cutting off” sensible reality. See Junod-Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis* II, 455 and n. 2, who refer to Origen, *Com. In Cant.*, prol. GCS 33, p. 65,15-66,8 and *Dial.* 15,11-22,9 for a parallel view.

¹³ Junod-Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis* II, 454 highlighted, however, the couple πίστις-γνώσις with parallels in *AJ* (26,11; 113,18-19), and the group ἀταραξία-ἀφοβία-ἀλυπία-σεμνότης that, according to A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, IV (Paris ²1983) 232, n. 3, it belongs to “Hellenistic lists”.

¹⁴ See Junod-Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis* II, 453 and n. 2.

¹⁵ See Festugière, *La Révélation* IV, 232-233.

To begin with, the *Gospel of Philip*¹⁶ (c. II), a Gnostic-Valentinian writing preserved in the corpus of Nag-Hammadi¹⁷, includes a description of God as ‘dyer’¹⁸, who paints human beings with his divine colors. The metaphor can also be found in several tracts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*¹⁹ (c. II-III) that describe God as an artist, either as sculptor of statues of humans (ἄνδράντα) or as a painter of the whole creation. Also, in a Gnostic context, the Valentinians of Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-211/216) seem to have used the image of God as a ‘Painter’²⁰. The simile, besides, is also frequent in orthodox Christian writers of the second and third centuries of our era. Thus, Hippolytus²¹ (ca. 170-236) uses the metaphor of the Son as painter in order to explain how sensible reality was marked by his divine essence, and Origen²² (ca. 185-254) describes the Son of God as “the painter”. Finally, Methodius²³ († ca. 311) alludes to God as creator and painter of whole physical world, made in likeness of the eternal and intelligible realm.

Given the frequent use of the simile in Christian context, it is baffling not to find parallels in pagan contemporary literature.

2. The Colors of the Soul and their Ethical Values

But let us focus now on the main theme of our enquiry, namely the colors of the soul. In point of fact, Plutarch provides a very interesting parallel to the *AJ* that will be of help in understanding the background of this view. Indeed in his *De sera numinis vindicta* (565 C-E) Thespesius describes his vision of the other world:

“(scil. I [Thespesius] Observed,” he said, “in the souls that mixture (ποικίλα) and variety (παντοδαπὰ) of colors: one is drab brown (ὄρφινον), the stain that comes of meanness (ἀνελευθερία) and greed (πλεονεξία); another a fiery blood-red (αἰμωπόν), which comes of cruelty (ἠμότητος) and savagery (πικρίας); where you see the blue grey (γλαύκινόν), some form of incontinence (ἄκρασία) in pleasure (ἡδονή) has barely been rubbed out; while if spite (κακόνοια) and envy (φθόνου) are present they give out this livid green (ἰώδες καὶ ὕπουλον), as ink is

¹⁶ See Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* I, 182-183.

¹⁷ *EvPh* = NHC II,3. 51,29-86,19. Nag Hammadi papyri preserved in Coptic Museum, Department of Manuscripts, inv. 10544 (Cairo); see H.-M. Schenke, “The Gospel of Philip”, in Schneemelcher, *NTA* I, 181-182.

¹⁸ See *EvPh* 43 Schenke = NHC II,3. 61,12-20.

¹⁹ See *Corpus Hermeticum*, V 8; XIV 8.

²⁰ See Clem.Al., *Strom.*, 4.13.90. For the Valentinians, see also E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: the Church of the ‘Valentinians’* (Leiden 2006).

²¹ See Hipp., *Haer.* V 17.

²² See Or., *hom. in Gen.* XIII; *hom. in Lc.* VIII, 2.

²³ See Meth., *Symp.* 1.4; 2.1; 6.2; 8.13.

ejected by the squid. For in the world below, viciousness puts forth the colors, as the soul is altered by the passions and alters the body in turn, while here the end of purgation and punishment is reached when the passions are quite smoothed away and the soul becomes luminous (αὐγοειδή) in consequence and uniform in color (σύνχρουν)”²⁴.

Thespisius’ last words show that, in Plutarch’s view, souls acquire a distinctive chromatic range depending on the affections to which they are prone. As a result of its life in the world of nature, the soul is under the continuous pressure of externals and the subsequent passions. After the death of the material body and during the soul’s ascent to the region between the earth and moon, these colors become visible, revealing in this way faults, which must be cleansed in order for the soul to recover its pristine brightness and chromatic homogeneity.

Differently from the text of the *AJ* analyzed above, Plutarch does provide a list of equivalences between colors and passions:

Meanness and greed → Drab brown
Cruelty and savagery → Fiery blood-red
Incontinence in pleasure → Blue grey
Spite and envy → Livid green²⁵

²⁴ English translation by P.H. De Lacy, *Plutarch’s Moralia*, VII (Cambridge 1984) 281-283.

²⁵ The bibliography on the issue is scarce and mostly focused on one or more colors: L. Pelletier-Michaud, *Coleurs, lumière et contrastes chez les lyriques grecs et les élégiaques latins* (Québec 2007), affirms that fiery blood-red, “rouge écarlate, ou rouge sang”, symbolize whether the noble death in combat, or in a pejorative sense a kind of horrible death. In fact, it is associated commonly with sorcery, a feminine domain tintured by mystery; see 154-155, 160. In both cases, death and violence are common elements, what could explain its relationship with cruelty and savagery in our text. See furthermore A. Pociña, “Κόκκινος *coccinus*: vaivenes de un adjetivo de color, I”, in F. Lambert (ed.), *Mélanges V. Bejarano* (Barcelona 1991) 111-120; J.R., Vieillefond, “Note sur πορφύρα, πορφύρεος, πορφύρω”, *REG* 51 (1938) 403-413; R.J. Edgeworth, “‘Saffron-colored’ terms in Aeschylus”, *Glotta* 66 (1988) 179-182; A. Grand-Clement, “Histoire du passage sensible des Grecs à l’époque archaïque: Homère, les couleurs et l’exemple de πορφύρεος”, *Pallas* 65 (2004) 123-143. Regarding blue, it is misleading that, as Pelletier-Michaud asserts, the color is used almost exclusively by Latin authors, in whose works it symbolizes “l’infidélité et le sentiment de jalousie” (156); see also P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Studies in Greek Colour Terminology* (v. I: γλαυκός; v. II: χαροπός) (Leiden 1981); A. Perotti, “Sur les adjectifs γλαυκός, γλαυκώπις”, *LÉC* 57 (1989) 97-109; H. de Ley, “Beware of Blue Eyes! A Note on Hippocratic Pangenesis (*AER.*, ch. 14)”, *AC* 50 (1981) 192-197. Green in turn is associated with *locus amoenus* and in this sense it is related to vigor, freshness and youth, which contrast both with the views in our text and, as we will see below, with most of ancient conceptions out of Greek archaic lyric. However, it is noteworthy that the pale color, sometimes in relation with green (χλωρός), is the color of “l’amant qui souffre, car la passion que le consume est perçue comme une véritable maladie”, which could explain the relationship between spite and envy with green; see R.J. Edgeworth, “Sappho fr. 31.14 L-P: ΧΛΩΡΟΤΕΡΑ ΠΟΙΙΑΣ”, *AClass* 27 (1984) 121-124. About the color brown, see R.J. Edgeworth, “Terms for Brown in Ancient Greek”, *Glotta* 61 (1983) 31-40. I would like to thank prof. D.F. Leão for providing me information and comments on this interesting point.

In spite of the seeming differences between the *AJ* and Plutarch, a closer reading reveals similar conceptions of the human soul. It is true that whereas *AJ* focuses on virtues, given by Jesus through John as colors, Plutarch instead refers to the soul's contact with vices and the marks that they produce on the souls. Nevertheless, given the relationship between virtues and vices and that they both are related to colors, the similarity appears to be obvious. In this way both texts similarly conceive of the soul like a canvas on which its owner paints colors derived either from virtues or from passions. Most importantly, *AJ* and *De sera* present a very similar view of the human soul and its sojourn in the world of nature. In both passages the soul is conceived of as presenting a state of original pureness, homogeneity and brightness that is likely to be distorted by its contact with the world.

As far as the soul's interaction with the world and the means to counteract it is concerned, they also present clear similarities. According to *AJ*, the color-virtues neutralize the influence of passions. According to Plutarch, passions confer upon the soul their characteristic color, in this way coloring the soul with impurity. In this juncture, *AJ* advises man, firstly, to achieve the balance of virtues-colors in the soul; and, secondly, to maintain its stability in order to return it pure to God, such as he received it. Plutarch, in turn, says that human beings must achieve a balance in order to avoid the subsequent purifications by the moon. Therefore, they may avoid further reincarnations in order to definitely ascend as pure nous to their destiny in the sun²⁶.

It is interesting that in both texts the soul's exchange with the material world produces either colors or impressions, in this manner allowing an external spectator to reconstruct the steps it followed during its life. The remote inspiration of these passages seems to come from Plato's *Gorgias*²⁷, in which souls are said to preserve signs both of their physical and ethical shortcomings²⁸. According to Plato "when a man's soul is stripped bare of the body, all its natural gifts, and experiences added to that soul as the result of his various pursuits, are manifest in it". Besides, Plato's *Republic* also described souls coming from their earthly life as "full of squalors (αὐχμοῦ) and dust (κόνηος)",

²⁶ In Plato's opinion, however, only philosopher who has spent his life in an absolute pureness achieves the ideal state in order to supersede the process of reincarnations; see F.E. Brenk, "The Origin and the Return of the Soul in Plutarch", in Id., *Relighting the Souls* (Stuttgart 1998) 25-42, at 30, and n. 11.

²⁷ See Plato, *Gr.g* 524B-525B.

²⁸ This concept appears similarly in a long list of ancient authors: Plu., *Facie* 945A, [*vit. Hom.*] 123; Porph., 79F,18, 297F,21, 301F,8 Smith; Lucian, *Vera Hist.* II, 12; D.L. VIII, 31 (ascribing this theory to Pythagoras' school) and 33 (to Antisthenes).

which makes indispensable their purgation before the next reincarnation, in order that they might descend in processional order from heaven clean and pure²⁹. Regarding the simile between colors as marks of earthly nature, Plato also refers, in the famous discourse of Diotima³⁰, that there exist some “colors of humanity”, which are in a clear opposition with the pure and unmixed nature of the Beautiful. Therefore, he who desires to achieve knowledge of the Beautiful should try to get rid of them: “if someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not infected with the flesh and colors or any other great nonsense of mortality”.

But turning now back to Christian context –the setting in which, as we saw above, the simile of God as a soul painter should be placed– we have an interesting parallel from Origen that presents contacts both with the approaches of the *AJ* and of Plutarch, as Junod–Kaestli point out³¹. In his *Homily on Genesis* Origen includes the following passage:

You yourself paint that picture in yourself. For when lust has darkened you, you have brought in one earthly color. But if you also burn with covetousness you have blended in also another color. And also when rage makes your blood red you add no less also a third color. Another shade of red is added also of pride and another of impiety. And so by each individual kind of malice, like various colors, which have been brought together, you yourself paint in yourself this “image of the earthly” which God did not make in you. For that reason, therefore, we should entreat him who says through the prophet: “Behold I blot out your iniquities as a cloud, and your sins as a mist” (Is 44,22). And when he has blotted out all those colors in you, which have been taken up from the reddish hues of malice, then that image which was created by God shines brightly in you. You see, therefore, how the divine scriptures bring in forms and figures by which the soul may be instructed to the knowledge or cleansing of itself³².

Once again Origen presents the chromatic range humans must avoid, which means that he presents the colors as passions or affections. God as painter did not create this palette. They simply proceed from the individual and more specifically from the

²⁹ See Plato, *R.* 614D-E. The mistakes that provoke this state in the soul are exposed in *R.* 615B-C.

³⁰ See Plato, *Smp.* 211E. During the discussion that followed this communication some colleagues highlighted the importance of colors in Plato’s conception of soul as a chariot (*Phdr.* 246D-248D) with two horses, one of them black and white, representing the irrational and rational parts of the soul, respectively.

³¹ See Junod–Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis* II, 453-454.

³² See Origen, *hom. in Gen.* XIII. English translation by P. Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 04. *Fathers of the third century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second* (Grand Rapids 2006).

passions his or her soul may adopt during its present life³³. The text does not provide more information as to God's role or as to the colors and their eventual relationship with the virtues, but it is plausible to think that there is an 'image of the heavenly' opposed to the "image of the earthly" referred to in the text. As for the ways of purifying the soul of the chromatic accretions related to passions, Scripture is the most important way during this life, but God may also intervene to restore the original image the soul had, namely its bright and pure pristine nature³⁴.

According to Origen, the colors produced by passions are the following:

Lust → brown

Greedy → darker brown as result of being burned (maybe close to black)³⁵

Rage → blood red "third color"

Pride and impiety → another shade of red

Origen -roughly contemporary of the *AJ's* author and born sixty years after Plutarch's death- presents interesting common issues with the texts we have dealt with. To begin with, we refer to visible parallels in the conceptions both of the soul and of the colors. Also the description of the soul's original condition and the purification it must achieve appear to be equivalent. When comparing Origen to Plutarch similarities are even more conspicuous. We can see indeed the predominance of exactly the same colors, namely brown and red, which in both authors are related to the same affections, to wit greed and rage or cruelty, respectively. At the same time, the list of passions included in both is rather similar. With the exception of impiety, appearing in Origen, and envy, mentioned by Plutarch the lists are equivalent.

In any case, all three texts defend an ideal of human life, in which virtue plays a central role in rinsing the souls from the signs caused by passions, in order to recover the pristine state of purity. All passages also describe the soul's state previous to incarnation

³³ For a similar conception, see Philo, *De opif. mund.*, XXV, 78: "In all these one might rightly say that there was the real music, the original and model of all other, from which the men of subsequent ages, when they had painted the images in their own souls". Similarly, Ps.-Philo, *The Rebellion of Kora*, 16.5, presents the simile of human being-painter of his own soul and of God as the painters' teacher: "just as a painter does not produce a work of art unless he has been instructed beforehand, so we have received the Law of most Powerful that teaches us his way".

³⁴ The color white (Pelletier-Michaud, *Coleurs*, 153-154) has been always related to good feelings, such as purity, virginity, peace, quietness, etc. In fact it was traditionally the color of God and his manifestations; see D. Tarrant, "Greek Metaphors on Light", *CQ* 10 (1960) 181-187.

³⁵ See Pelletier-Michaud, *Coleurs*, 154 n. 24, where he concludes that black is obviously the opposite of white, and therefore symbolizes both the human existence and death.

in a rather similar way, paying special attention to visual issues: “indelible, well-polished and firmly shaped” (*AJ*), “luminous (...) and uniform in color” (Plutarch), and, finally, bright and “cleansed” (Origen)³⁶.

Within a strictly Christian context, scholars explain the conception of the colors-virtues of the *AJ* by means of God’s “true” or “good colors” –ἀληθινοί or ἀγαθοί– of the *Gospel of Philip* referred to above³⁷:

As the good dyes, which are called “genuine”, “dye” (only) with the (materials) which were dyed with them, so it is with those whom God has dyed: since his dyes are immortal, they (also) become immortal through his medicines.

According to Festugière, through these colors God transfers his divine essence to human beings in order to create a “homme nouveau”³⁸. Junod-Kaestli think these colors are the same as those in the *AJ*³⁹.

As to the origin of the motif, Junod-Kaestli propose that the inspiration of the simile of colors-virtues comes from Gen 1,26: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness”. In their opinion *AJ* share “la théologie de l’image” that we also find in the

³⁶ In Plato the souls are conceived as a ray of light, and “their ‘thinners and diffuseness’ becomes ‘firm and translucent’”, see see Brenk, “The Origin”, 40.

³⁷ *EvPh* 61,12-20. J.E. Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Philippe* (Paris 1967) 159-160, editor and translator of *EvPh*, also points out the Platonic background of this passage, but without mentioning any text. E. Segelberg, “The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel according to Philip and its Sacramental System”, *Numen* 7 (1960) 189-200 at 192, establishes a relationship between the act of dying and baptism, based on the above mentioned *EvPh* 61,12-20. However, J.E. Ménard (see above) rightly remarks that water is transparent.

³⁸ See Festugière, *La Révélation* IV, 232.

³⁹ See Junod-Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis* II, 453, n. 1. Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Philippe*, 159-160, highlights as the clearest formulation of this conception preserved in work of Zosimos of Panopolis (c. III-IV) – referred to by Festugière, *La Révélation* I, 277-279. In his work Zosimos explains that God creates two kinds of “genuine dyes” and then brings them into two kinds of demons, who distribute them among men, depending on their moral conduct. The former group of dyes, coming from wood –in fact they are called “sandy” and linked with the color brown of wood, and also of earth–, should be under control of those demons whose activity is voluntary, and consequently they can stop keeping free will on their decisions. The latter corresponds to those demons whose activity cannot cease and that are under the direct control of God. About their tints, namely ‘genuine dyes’, Zosimos affirms that Hermes supposedly wrote in a stele: “melt only one that is green and yellow, red, the color of the sun, pale green, ochre-yellow, green or black and the rest of them”. This conception of Zosimos, in Ménard’s opinion, might be traced back to the Peratae; see Hippolytus, *Ref.* V 17.4: “and the difference of colors, and the dissimilarity which flowed from the rods through the waters upon the sheep, is, he says, the difference of corruptible and incorruptible generation”. Finally, in Ménard’s view, the inspiration of the simile colors-passions would come originally from Plato’s *Phaedrus* 110B-E, where the author supposedly stress the differences between earthly colors and the colors of intelligible world, the latter being ‘authentic’, and the former, mere copies of them (See *EvPh* 10 Schenke = NHC II,3. 53,14-23; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1,6,1; *Exc. Theod.* 51-52.).

Moreover, even if Plutarch mentions this passage in several points of his *Moralia* -see Plutarch, *Gen. Socr.* 590C-F, *Facie* 934D-F; see Brenk, “The Origin”, 37-38-, attesting the survival of these concepts in the first and second centuries, in none of Plato’s passages arises the simile of colors-passions, as appears, instead, in the mentioned texts of *AJ*, *De sera*, and Origen.

passages referred to above (pp. 3-4) by Origen, Hippolytus and Methodius⁴⁰. As we already mentioned, they refer approximately in the same terms either to the Son or to God as a painter.

However, in spite of the interest of Festugière's and Junod-Kaestli's emphasis on the theology of the image, it does not completely explain the use of the simile as we find it in *AJ* and in Plutarch. Admittedly, man is created according to God's image and likeness and he is consequently endowed with God's virtues. Herewith he should be able to cope with earthy reality without being altered and to preserve his divine values untouched. However, do Gen 30,37-39 (Hippolytus) and Gen 1,26 (Origen and Methodius) really offer a plausible explanation regarding the origin of the simile of the colors-virtues? I think they do not.

To begin with, the theology of the image cannot explain why colors may reflect the soul's bad condition as due its contact with the world. Nor does it explain why the colors-virtues should work as an antidote against the work of passions. In order to explain this aspect we must take into account a view of virtues and passions as opposing and counteracting one another, a view that perhaps should be related to conceptions of the soul that distinguished rational and irrational parts within it. Therefore, it seems more plausible to understand the passages of the Church fathers' and of the *AJ* as an echo of the platonic conception that we find in Plutarch, which they adapt to a Christian context by providing it with a Scriptural foundation. In this conception, the soul was seen as painted by his creator with true and pure colors; due to its life in a hostile environment, however, the soul tends to acquire alien colors as results of affections or passions arising within it. By means of virtues or rational control the soul is able to counteract the influence of the external world, by neutralizing first its noxious action and by preserving, secondly, the recovered balance.

The chromatic equivalents of passions have a long tradition in Greek culture. Homer, for example, can describe Agamemnon's heart "black with rage"⁴¹; Sappho became "paler than summer grass" out of jealousy⁴² and Suda defines envy as "A human sickness of the soul and [one] eating whatever soul it seizes" and describes its activity "just as rust [eats] iron"⁴³. Note in addition that the theory of the four bodily humors of

⁴⁰ This topic may also be rooted in a philosophical environment; see Porph., *Ad Marc.* 33.

⁴¹ See Homer, *Il.* I, 103-104: μένος δὲ μέγα φρένες ἀμφιμέλαινοι / πίμπλαντ'.

⁴² See Sapph., fr. 31, vv. 14-15 Voigt: χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας / ἔμιμι.

⁴³ See Suda, φθόνος s.v.

the *Corpus Hippocraticum* also establishes a clear relationship between psychology and physiognomy. According to these views, even the color of bile could explain the affective qualities of the individual, as follows:

Black bile → despondent, sleepless, irritable
Blood → courageous, hopeful, amorous
Yellow bile → easily angered, bad tempered
Phlegm → calm, unemotional⁴⁴

Plutarch himself also provides enough testimony to this relationship between colors and passions in another passage, but now focusing on physiology and physiognomy rather than on theology:

Pain, greed for gold, or jealousy will cause a man to change color, and wear away his health. Envy, which naturally roots itself more deeply in the mind than any other passion, contaminates the body too with evil. This is the morbid condition that artists well attempt to render when painting the face of envy⁴⁵.

It is time to draw some conclusions. It seems that both pagan and Christian authors of the second and third centuries widely attest the use of the simile of the colors of the soul in a theological-eschatological context. In both contexts, the simile intended to reach the same goals. On the one hand, it illustrated God's creative activity and shaping of the human soul; on the other, it provided the parameters by means of which the soul's ethical behavior might be established since the colors that the soul acquired during this life determined reward or punishment in the afterlife. Within this purpose, authors resorted to physiological and psychological conceptions widespread in the Greco-Roman worldview⁴⁶, in which Platonism exerted a special influence.

Christian uses of the simile, however, do present some development, since authors

⁴⁴ About the colors black and red, see above in n. 24 and 32.

⁴⁵ Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 681E. English translation by P.A. Clement & H.B. Hoffleit, *Plutarch's Moralia*, VIII (London 1969). S.T. Teodorsson, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Table Talks*, II (Gothenburg 1990) 206-207, points out that "no paintings of this kind are extant. They may perhaps be compared with a kind of caricatured terracotta figurines dated 4th and 3th c. B.C." which are preserved in numerous European museums.

⁴⁶ Even though we restricted our focus to Greek milieu, there are numerous parallels in other cultural environment. Thus, for example, in Indian Jainism, according to which the moral value of the human activity –and correspondingly also the kind of karma which they bind–, each soul or *lesya* presents a different color, as follows: black, dark, grey, fiery-red, lotus-pink or white; see D.V. Glasenapp, *Doctrine of Karman in Jain Philosophy* (Varanasi ²1991) 47-48; K.L. Wiley, "Colors of the Soul: by-Products of Activity or Passions?", *E & W* 50 (2000) 348-366. Thanks to my colleague Raul Concha Grau for turning my attention to this interesting point.

give the metaphor a new framework. In their search for an ‘authoritative foundation’, they resort to the Scriptures, and more specifically to the verses of Genesis that refer to God’s creation. By focusing excessively on this ‘authoritative foundation’, previous studies on the issue have failed to place the simile in its proper context, as a result of which, neither its origin nor its goal could be properly determined.

I think Plutarch’s testimony, with its similar conception and parallel views, provides the proof both of the previous existence of the motif in Platonic milieus and of the fact that, when blending it with Genesis, Christian authors were resorting to the same cultural heritage⁴⁷.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Almqvist, H., *Plutarch und das Neue Testament* (Upsala 1946).
- Brenk, F.E., “The Origin and the Return of the Soul in Plutarch”, in Idem, *Relighting the Souls* (Stuttgart 1998) 170-181.
- Clement, P.A. & Hoffleit, H.B., *Plutarch’s Moralia*, VIII (London 1969).
- Dieter Betz, H., *Plutarch’s Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature Plutarch’s Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden 1975).
- Dieter Betz, H., *Plutarch’s Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden 1978).
- Edgeworth, R.J., “‘Saffron-colored’ Terms in Aeschylus”, *Glotta* 66 (1988) 179-182
- Edgeworth, R.J., “Sappho fr. 31.14 L-P: ΧΛΩΡΟΤΕΡΑ ΠΟΙΑΣ”, *AClass* 27 (1984) 121-124.
- Edgeworth, R.J., “Terms for Brown in Ancient Greek”, *Glotta* 61 (1983) 31-40.
- Elliott, J.K., *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford 1993).
- Festugière, A.-J., *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, 4 vols. (Paris ²1983).
- Glaser, D.V., *Doctrine of Karman in Jain Philosophy* (Varanasi ²1991)
- Grand-Clement, A., “Histoire du paysage sensible des Grecs à l’époque archaïque: Homère, les couleurs et l’exemple de πορφύρεος”, *Pallas* 65 (2004) 123-143.
- Junod, E.-Kaestli, J.-D., *Acta Iohannis*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1983).
- Lacy, Ph.H. de – Einarson, B., *Plutarch’s Moralia*, VII (Cambridge 1984).
- Lalleman, P.J., “Bibliography of Acts of John”, in J. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen 1995) 231-235.
- Ley, H. De, “Beware of Blue Eyes! A Note on Hippocratic Pangenesis (*AER.*, ch. 14)”, *AC* 50 (1981) 192-197.
- Maxwell-Stuart, P.-G., *Studies in Greek Colour Terminology* (v. I: γλαυκός; v. II: χαροπός) (Leiden 1981).
- Ménard, J.E., *L’Évangile selon Philippe. Introduction, texte, traduction, commentaire* (Paris 1967).

⁴⁷ I would like to thank Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta and Jan Bremmer of the University of Groningen for their useful references and for their kind correction of this paper.

- Pelletier-Michaud, L., *Coleurs, lumière et contrastes chez les lyriques grecs et les élégiaques latins* (Québec 2007),
- Perotti, A., “Sur les adjectifs γλαυκός, γλαυκώπις”, *LÉC* 57 (1989) 97-109.
- Places, E.Des, *La religion grecque dieux, cultes, rites et sentiment religieux dans la Grèce antique* (Paris 1969).
- Pociña, A., “Κόκκινος *coccinus*: vaivenes de un adjetivo de color, I”, in F. Lambert (ed.), *Mélanges V. Bejarano* (Barcelona 1991) 111-120
- Schäferdiek, K., “The Acts of John”, in W. Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, II (Cambridge-Louisville³2003) 152-212.
- Schaff, P., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 04. *Fathers of the third century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second* (Grand Rapids, MI 2006).
- Schneemelcher, W. (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Cambridge–Louisville³2003).
- Segelberg, E., “The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel according to Philip and its Sacramental System”, *Numen* 7 (1960) 189-200.
- Tarrant, D., “Greek Metaphors on Light”, *CQ* 10 (1960) 181-187.
- Teodorsson, S.T., *A Commentary on Plutarch's Table Talks*, 2 vols (Göteborg 1990).
- Thomassen, E., *The Spiritual Seed: the Church of the 'Valentinians'* (Leiden 2006).
- Vieillefond, J.-R., “Note sur πορφύρα, πορφύρεος, πορφύρω”, *REG* 51 (1938) 403-413.
- Wiley, K.L., “Colors of the Soul: by-Products of Activity or Passions?”, *E&W* 50 (2000) 348-366.
- Ziegler, K., *Plutarchos von Chaironeia* (Stuttgart²1964) 850 (= Idem, “Plutarchos”, *RE*, XXI [1951] 635-962).

