

*HOSTES DEUM: MAGIC IN THE LITERATURE OF THE NERONIAN PERIOD*

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines magical discourse in the Neronian literature and, more specifically, its role in the works of the three major authors of the period, namely, Petronius, Seneca, and Lucan. It endeavors to trace possible echoes of popular beliefs about magic and real witchcraft practices of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. in the text of the *Satyrica*, the *Medea*, and the *Bellum Ciuile*. This is done through a close reading of the relevant passages, and their thorough comparison with the magical texts of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* and the *defixionum tabellae* as well as Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*; such collation with other texts allows us to underline structural as well as verbal similarities. A large part of the study is dedicated to each author's treatment of magic according to their personal views and the work's generic context.

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*Parentibus meis, Georgio et Ioannae,  
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## INTRODUCTION

### Magic: Some Preliminary Thoughts

Forming an accurate definition of magic which could apply *in toto* to any given historical period and culture is an impossible task. A brief discussion of the various ideas put forward over the years for what constitutes magic is enough to illustrate how problematic such efforts might turn out to be. Tylor perceived magic as a form of pseudo-science which intended to explain human experiences as well as predict future events.<sup>1</sup> Frazer, following Tylor, defined magic as a form of primitive science whose purpose was to bend the forces of nature by means of spells and enchantments.<sup>2</sup> Although Tylor separated magic from religion implicitly, it was Frazer who first made a sharp distinction between these two concepts as different modes of human thought and ritual performance.<sup>3</sup> Both were subsequently criticized because their interpretation of the evidence was made outside of its social and cultural milieu, while their conclusions were predicated on the false premise that early humans were irrational.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the clear-cut distinction between religion and magic was considered controversial, and raised early opposition, most notably by Marett.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tylor (1871) 104, and 121-22.

<sup>2</sup> Frazer (1922) 11.

<sup>3</sup> Frazer (1922) 50-53.

<sup>4</sup> Tylor (1871) 104-5; Frazer (1922) 55.

<sup>5</sup> Marett (1909) 36.

The separation of magic from religion remained an issue in later studies which presented belief in magic in a more favorable light. Malinowski argued that magic was not a substitute of science, but a distinctive social and psychological phenomenon like religion, though different from it.<sup>1</sup> It was the early man's effort to achieve certainty by controlling unpredictable and possibly threatening events through "a body of purely practical acts, performed as a means to an end."<sup>2</sup> Evans-Pritchard underlined the importance of social context in the formation of magical beliefs, claiming that magic should be examined as an indispensable part of a "ritual complex," thus suggesting a close link with religion.<sup>3</sup> Even though further developments took place with the formation of the sociological school, the question of how magic relates to religion remained central. Durkheim and Mauss stressed the significance of the social element in the creation of magic. For them, magic, like religion, is brought into existence by collective actions, but is gradually detached, and becomes an individual affair.<sup>4</sup> Mauss, whose work focused specifically on the topic of magic, claimed that the concept includes any secret and mysterious ritual which is not part of an organized cult, and which sometimes is viewed as liminal and prohibited.<sup>5</sup> The idea that magic presupposes the existence of religion, with both complementing each other, is also central in the work of Lévi-Strauss, who argued that magic should be regarded as the "naturalization of human actions," whereas religious rituals are a means of humanizing natural laws.<sup>6</sup>

Despite efforts from experts, be they anthropologists, sociologists or theologians, it is impossible to come up with a universal definition of magic because, as a form of human thought,

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<sup>1</sup> Malinowski (1948) 5.

<sup>2</sup> Malinowski (1948) 70.

<sup>3</sup> Evans Pritchard (1976) 26 and 176.

<sup>4</sup> Durkheim (1912) 61-62; Mauss (2001) 23.

<sup>5</sup> Mauss (2001) 30.

<sup>6</sup> Lévi-Strauss (1962) 292-93.

it is not independent of the social and cultural context. Beliefs and behaviors included under the term can, and often do, change based on the religious reality of the period under study. This conclusion essentially comes down to the observation that one man's magic is another man's religion. Therefore, one cannot study magic independently of the social, historical and cultural environment. For the purposes of this study, I briefly discuss every action that fell under this term during the Roman period.

### Magic as a Unique Category in Roman Religious Thought

Before addressing the issue of terminology, however, it is necessary to mention the proposed theories for the development of magic as a distinct concept in Roman thought. According to Graf, the formulation of the idea took place in two different stages: in the first phase, under the Republic, Roman religious rituals were divided between those intended to cause harm and those meant to benefit people; a collective concept was unavailable, and terms such as *ueneficia* and *mala carmina* were not categorized under a broader term nor were they denoting anything exotic. In the second phase, during the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the term *magia* appeared in Latin as a result of the Hellenized Roman elite's appropriation of the Greek notion of μαγεία; this elite applied the term to the traditional practices of *ueneficium* and healing as well as to the divinatory technique of astrology, thus forming an amalgam which was viewed both as new and foreign.<sup>7</sup> A different suggestion was put forward by Dickie, who argued that the Roman concept of magic was formed as a result of Greek conceptions flowing into Rome through the practitioners themselves, and not as a consequence of the elite's effort to collectively classify activities they considered immoral and illicit. In other words, the concept was formed as a response to contemporary religious developments as it can be inferred from several literary

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<sup>7</sup> For the evolution of the concept of magic in Rome, see Graf (1997) 56-60.



sources and archaeological evidence.<sup>8</sup> Dickie maintains that at least as early as the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E., if not before, the Romans had recognized certain activities which allegedly intended to upset the natural order as deviations from the orthopraxis. But it was during the early Augustan period that such practices began to be categorized collectively under the term ‘magic’ and were viewed as wicked and an aberration.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the change in Roman religious thought was the result of multiple factors, including the impact of Greek ideas on Roman culture.

Early Roman law prohibited certain practices such as the enchantment of crops and the utterance of evil incantations, as we infer from the text of the *Twelve Tables*. It is also clear that incantations were not illegal, unless they intended to cause harm or deprive someone of their agricultural production.<sup>10</sup> Even the republican *lex Cornelia de sicariis et ueneficiis* passed by Sulla in 81 B.C.E. was not originally used to prosecute magic-related activities, except for the case of administering a love potion which resulted in a person’s death.<sup>11</sup> Such activities fell under the legal sphere, and there is no evidence that the Romans would classify them as *superstitio*, a term initially used to denote 1) the public worship of deities not recognized by the state (Festus *Gloss. Lat.* 389; Cic. *Leg.* 2.19), and 2) the private worship of gods which did not belong to one’s traditional ancestral deities (Cic. *Leg.* 2.19). But as soon as Rome was filled with supporters of exotic religions who proclaimed they possessed supernatural powers, including the ability to utter *mala carmina* and concoct potions with strange properties, the definition of *superstitio* expanded. In the time of Cicero, any religion could be considered superstitious if it was contaminated with new and strange rituals (Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.5), if it aroused excessive and irrational fear (1.117), if its beliefs and rituals were viewed as immoral (Cic. *Clu.* 194), or if its

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<sup>8</sup> See the discussion in Dickie (2001) 124-36.

<sup>9</sup> Dickie (2001) 136.

<sup>10</sup> *Tabula VIII* 8a; Plin. *HN* 28.18: *non et legum ipsarum in duodecim tabulis uerba sunt: qui fruges excantass<i>t, et alibi: “qui malum carmen incantassit?”*

<sup>11</sup> Dickie (2001) 140.

principles contradicted those of science (Cic. *Diu.* 2.148).<sup>12</sup> Of course, the definition was subject to further modifications by subsequent authors, and especially philosophers.<sup>13</sup>

In Roman religious thought, *magia* is closely connected with *superstitio*. The two terms, although sometimes treated as synonymous, are in fact distinct.<sup>14</sup> *Superstitio* is a broader term, often (but not always) denoting a passive belief in strange supernatural powers, while *magia* is the active expression of this belief by means of rituals and incantations. Therefore, it is accurate to view superstition as an umbrella term under which magic is included as its most representative aspect. This schema is adopted throughout the present study while ‘witchcraft’ and ‘magic’ are used interchangeably to denote the same concept.

### The Terminology of Magic

For reasons of brevity and relevance, I do not discuss the terminology of magic employed by the Greek authors.<sup>15</sup> Rather, I gather and analyze only the Latin terms and the Latinized forms of Greek words which were used most frequently by the Romans to denote any practice considered magical as well as those who engaged in such practices.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the application of the term is anachronistic, i.e., it also includes activities which were classified as magic after the term was introduced in the Roman vernacular. By doing so, I intend to provide a discussion of what was perceived as ‘magic’ during the Neronian period.

*Ars magica* (Verg. *Aen.* 4.493; Ov. *Rem. am.* 250), *ars maga* (Ov. *Am.* 2.7.35) or simply *ars* (Ov. *Met.* 7.195, *Med.* 36) are the earliest terms employed to describe collectively a number

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<sup>12</sup> Mayor (1883) 2.183-84 raises exactly these points in his discussion of the old and new definition of *superstitio*.

<sup>13</sup> For the ancient meaning of the term *superstitio* and its subsequent evolution, see Mayor (1883) 2.183-86, and Gordon (1990) 237-38, and 253-54.

<sup>14</sup> Grodzynski (1974) 39 and 53.

<sup>15</sup> Both Greek and Latin terminology are adequately discussed in Graf (1997) 20-60 and Dickie (2001) 12-17. An exhaustive discussion on the Greek terminology of magic is provided in Graf (1997) 20-35.

<sup>16</sup> For an exhaustive list of the terms occurring in Latin literature and their meanings, see Burriss (1936) 137-45, Dickie (2001) 12-17 and Graf (1997) 41-46.

of activities, including, but not limited to, incantations, potion and poison concoctions, maledictions, healing rituals, as well as any form of illicit divination such as necromancy. Strangely, neither *magia* nor its equivalents were ever used to denote the religious and philosophical system of the Persian priesthood, although *magus* was consistently used by certain authors, especially in philosophical works, with its original meaning of “Persian priest.”<sup>17</sup>

In the Republican and early Imperial periods, multiple terms existed to describe the individuals who engaged in magic practices. Even though Dickie claims that it is impossible to identify specific activities corresponding to each term, it is not wrong to assume that, at least before the introduction of the term *magia*, different words were used to distinguish between different activities.<sup>18</sup> *Magus* is the generic term denoting a wizard or sorcerer.<sup>19</sup> However, other terms which likely emphasized the *magus*' specific set of skills did exist. In Plautus (*Amph.* 830), *Amphitryon* calls a disguised Jupiter *praestigiator*, a word ordinarily used for a person performing hand or illusion tricks.<sup>20</sup> He later characterizes him as a *Thessalus ueneficus* who possesses the power to upset the mind of his *familia* (1043), perhaps by means of potions.<sup>21</sup>

Women are over-represented in both real-life accusations and literary descriptions of witchcraft. Some early nouns for “witch” include *praestigiatrix* (Plaut. *Amph.* 782) and *praecantrix* (Plaut. *Mil.* 693), both used in the sense of “fortuneteller.”<sup>22</sup> More common terms

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<sup>17</sup> Burriss (1936) 137 and 141; for the original meaning of *magus* versus the popular conception of the word, see Apul. *Apol.* 25-26. The word is used to denote members of the Persian priesthood in Cic. *Diu.* 1.46 and 90-91, *Fin.* 5.87, *Leg.* 2.26, *Tusc.* 1.108, *Nat. D.* 1.43; Luc.3.223-24 and 8.220; August. *De ciu. D.* 7.35 (commenting on Varro).

<sup>18</sup> Dickie (2001) 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Magus* is used with its popular meaning in Cic. *Diu.* 1.23.46; Hor. *Carm.* 1.27.22; Ov. *Met.* 7.195, *Med.* 36; Luc. 6.431, 440, 450, 577, 767; Plin. *HN* (*passim*).

<sup>20</sup> *OLD* s.v. *praestigiator* a.

<sup>21</sup> *Veneficus* also occurs in Plaut. *Pseudol.* 872, *Pers.* 278, *Rud.* 987 and 1112; Cic. *Cat.* 2.4.7, *Inv. rhet.* 2.19.58; Plin. *HN* 28.30.

<sup>22</sup> Burriss (1936) 141.

include the generic *saga* and the *uenefica*.<sup>23</sup> The former could be associated with a number of activities, ranging from nullifying the effects of a bad dream to summoning up the souls of the dead, while the latter was probably a specialist in concocting potions and poisons.<sup>24</sup> Due to the connection of Thessaly with magic in popular Graeco-Roman thought, the toponymic adjectives *Thessala* (Prop. 4.24. 10; Luc. 6.519, 628, 651, 762), *Thessalis* (Hor. *Carm.* 1.27.21; Luc. 6.451, 564, 605, 699), *Haemonia* (Ov. *Ars am.* 2.99; Luc. 6.486.) and *Haemonis* (Luc. 6.436, 480, 589) were also used as synonyms for “witch.” In their capacity to transform into screech-owls, female witches are also called *strigae* (Ov. *Fast.* 6.139; Petron. *Sat.* 63.8).

The terms describing the activities of sorcerers and witches, although subject to the same limitations as those denoting the people engaging in them, might provide us with an overall picture of what comprised magic. The word *ueneficium* initially signified any poison (*malum*) or healing drug (*bonum*), but as soon as magicians and witches were credited with strange concoctions, the term obtained a broader meaning, and began to denote magical substances, spells, and perhaps magical formulas. *Amatorium* had also the same range of meanings as *ueneficium* in the context of erotic magic since it denoted any potion, spell, ointment or item which promised to incite sexual desire or lust.<sup>25</sup> The spell uttered by a witch or magician is most often called *carmen*,<sup>26</sup> *cantus*,<sup>27</sup> and less frequently *cantio*,<sup>28</sup> *incantamentum*,<sup>29</sup> and *arcanum*.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, special attention should be given in a particular category of spells which intended to bind

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<sup>23</sup> *Saga* occurs, for example, in Cic. *Diu.* 1.31.65, 2.63.129; Tib. 1.2.42, 1.5.59; Prop. 4.24.10; Hor. *Carm.* 1.27.21, *Epist.* 2.2.208; Ov. *Am.* 3.7.29. *Venefica* is found in Plaut. *Epid.* 221, *Mostell.* 218, *Truc.* 762; Ov. *Her.* 6.19, *Met.* 6.316, *Am.* 3.7.79; Hor. *Epod.* 5.71; Sen. *De ira* 1.161, *Ben.* 5.13.14, *Ep.* 9.6; Luc. 6.581.

<sup>24</sup> Dickie (2001) 14-15.

<sup>25</sup> For the range of meanings of *ueneficium* and *amatorium*, see Dickie (2001) 16.

<sup>26</sup> Prop. 1.1.24, 3.25.1; Ov. *Fast.* 2.426, 3.323, 6.141, *Met.* 7.208, 253, 424, 11.317, 12.157, 14.20, 34, 44, 357, 369; *Ars am.* 2.104, *Am.* 1.8.5; Hor. *Sat.* 1.8.19; *Epod.* 5.72; 17.4.28; Tib. 1.2.44, 1.5.12, 1.8.17, 6.1.63; Verg. *Aen.* 4.487, *Ecl.* 8.69; Tac. *Ann.* 2.69; Petron. *Sat.* 131.5, 134.12; Luc. 6.444, 452, 463, 480, 497, 528, 577, 647, 682, 707, 728, 766, 775, 822.

<sup>27</sup> Tib. 1.2.45, 53, 60, 1.8.19, 20, 21; Ov. *Met.* 7.195, 330; *Med.* 39; Luc. 6.492, 505, 523, 580, 693.

<sup>28</sup> Cic. *Brut.* 60.217

<sup>29</sup> Plin. *HN* 28.2.10, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Luc. 6.440.

the targeted individual to the powers of the Underworld, i.e., what scholars of ancient Greek and Roman magic call ‘curses’. Such spells were most often written on thin lead leaves (*defixiones*), rolled up and pierced by a nail before they were deposited in tombs.<sup>31</sup> The Latin verbs employed to describe this magical process are *defigere* and *deuouere*. As Dickie argues, the former denotes the act of piercing the curse tablet by a nail to symbolize the fixing or binding down of the victim, while the latter refers to the delivering of the person/subject to the infernal gods.<sup>32</sup> This brief discussion of the terminology of magic employed by Latin authors, although not exhaustive, allows us to form a general picture of how magic was probably regarded, discussed and conceived of by Romans, at least up to the time of Nero.

### Nero and Magic

Since the concept of magic as a separate category in Roman thought began to be formulated in the early Augustan years, it should not strike us as odd that it continued to fascinate the Roman mind throughout the Imperial period, either as a mysterious and exotic practice for the curious, or as a means to achieve anything for the naïve. Archaeological evidence suggests that the use of magical materials, and by extension the practice of magic, increased during the years of the Empire.<sup>33</sup> This development is also reflected not only in the literature of the Neronian period, which is largely preoccupied with the topic of magic, but also in subsequent authors of the Flavian and Trajanic/Hadrianic periods, who recognized this trend and projected it onto their portrayals of Nero.

Passages dealing with Nero’s attitude toward magic are part of larger works which are notably hostile to him, and therefore, most of them are also marked by a distinctively negative

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<sup>31</sup> Dickie (2001) 16 mentions the various places where the curse tablets were buried to effectuate their purpose.

<sup>32</sup> Dickie (2001) 17.

<sup>33</sup> See the comprehensive study of the various magical artifacts in Parker and McKie (2018).

tone. The observation that there is little substance to Pliny's as well as Suetonius' depiction of the emperor as a "godless tyrant" is probably accurate since the evidence from official sources clearly contradict these authors' descriptions of Nero.<sup>34</sup> Such depictions appeared soon after the emperor's death as, for example, in the anonymous play *Octavia* where he is characterized as a *hostis deum* (240), and as someone who scorns divine power and law (*spernit superos*, 89).<sup>35</sup> Of course, in the general context of tragedy the presence of such characterizations is somewhat guaranteed, since they tend to enhance the feelings of sympathy toward the protagonist, in this case Octavia, who suffers at the hands of a most cruel enemy.

But how can we explain such portrayals of Nero in encyclopedic or historical works? In his discussion on the history of magic, Pliny narrates an anecdotal story about Nero with the aim of illustrating the vanity and the ineffectiveness of the *ars magica*. He claims that even the emperor, who initially was a fervent supporter and a great enthusiast of the occult (his pursuit of magic rivaled even his notorious obsession with music and acting), eventually lost interest after he realized the falsity of such practices when he was unable to make magic work, even though the *magus* Tiridates along with his followers initiated Nero in the mysteries of the Persian *magi* during the former's visit in Rome for his coronation as king of Armenia (*NH* 30.14-17). This passage represents the views of Pliny, and most probably those of the other members of the senatorial elite, on the value and potency of magic as well as its perceived connection with the practices of the Persian priesthood.<sup>36</sup> And if we accept Champlin's conclusion that Nero had a

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<sup>34</sup> Šterbenc Erker (2013); Champlin (2003) 132 claims that Nero "did not actually identify himself with gods; he did not think himself divine; nor did he wish others to deify him. That is made clear in his decisive rejection of the divine honors which were offered to him not only at the beginning of his reign, but even a decade later. Indeed, while Nero participated conscientiously in all the many ceremonies in which he had to take part as a priest of the state, and while he was naturally curious and tended to superstition, Suetonius was probably not wrong in claiming that he held all cults, *religiones*, in contempt." However, Champlin seems to contradict himself in 305 n. 65.

<sup>35</sup> For the dating issue of the *Octavia*, see the discussion in Ferri (2003) 5-30, and Boyle (2008) xiii-xvi.

<sup>36</sup> Andrikopoulos (2009) 56.

tendency toward superstition, then it is possible that Pliny's description also reflects the relatively recent changes in the traditional concept of *superstitio* to include magic.<sup>37</sup>

Suetonius' portrayal of Nero as an emperor indifferent to religious observances, sacrilegious as well as extremely superstitious on the grounds of his personal safety, also serves as a discourse on magic in the Neronian period (*Ner.* 56):

Religionum usque quaque contemptor, praeter unius Deae Syriae, hanc mox ita spreuit ut urina contaminaret, alia superstitione captus, in qua sola pertinacissime haesit, siquidem <im>agunculam puellarem, cum quasi remedium insidiarum a plebeio quodam et ignoto muneri accepisset, detecta confestim coniuratione pro summo numine trinisque in die sacrificiis colere perseueravit uolebatque credi monitione eius futura praenosceret.

He utterly despised all cults, with the sole exception of that of the Syrian Goddess, and even acquired such a contempt for her that he made water on her image, after he was enamored of another superstition, which was the only one to which he constantly clung. For he had received as a gift from some unknown man of the commons, as a protection against plots, a little image of a girl; and since a conspiracy at once came to light, he continued to venerate it as a powerful divinity and to offer three sacrifices to it every day, encouraging the belief that through its communication he had knowledge of the future. (trans. Rolfe)

Nero showed his contempt for any type of *religio* except for the cult of the *Dea Syria*, which Suetonius indirectly characterizes as superstitious by referring to the emperor's subsequent religious interest as *alia superstitio*. Through the reference to the *Dea Syria*, Suetonius alludes to the un-Roman and exotic rituals of her worship, thus underlining another important aspect of magic: its foreign and exotic character.

However, this attitude changed as soon as the emperor became acquainted with another form of *superstitio*, that is, the use of magical objects. According to the passage, an unknown plebeian donated a little figure or image of a girl (*imagunculam puellarem*) to him as a protective device against assassination plots. Nero became obsessed with the item when a conspiracy was

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<sup>37</sup> For Champlin's view, see note 36; for the changes in the concept of *superstitio*, see pages 4-5 with relevant notes.

subsequently revealed, and started venerating the statuette as the supreme deity, offering daily prayers and sacrifices. Although the origin of such figurines for purposes of bewitchment can be traced back to native religious ideas of Egypt, private manufacture and use of such artifacts became widespread throughout the Mediterranean in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E., as we can infer from the existence of magical papyri which give instructions on how to produce these objects.<sup>38</sup> Nero's belief in the magical powers of amulets is the subject of another excerpt from his biography (*Ner.* 6):

quas tamen aureae armillae ex uoluntate matris inclusas dextro brachio gestauit aliquamdiu ac taedio tandem maternae memoriae abiecit rursusque extremis suis rebus frustra requisit.

but nevertheless, at his mother's desire he had the skin enclosed in a golden bracelet, and wore it for a long time on his right arm. But when at last the memory of his mother grew hateful to him, he threw it away, and afterwards in the time of his extremity sought it again in vain. (trans. Rolfe)

When Messalina sent assassins to kill Nero, a snake darted out of his pillow scaring them away, thus saving his life. Soon it was noticed that the snake was nothing but a serpent's skin, and the emperor, following Agrippina's advice, placed the skin in a bracelet which functioned as a protective amulet. After he had his own mother murdered, he threw it away, but sought it again when he felt that his life was coming to an end. In this excerpt, Suetonius seems to be projecting on his portrayal of Nero the popular belief that certain artifacts possessed magical powers and afforded their owners control over the future.

These depictions of Nero are only a small part of the larger puzzle of the discourse on magic in the Imperial period. The present study aims to supplement existing scholarship on the topic by elucidating the connections between the literature of the Neronian period, and more

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<sup>38</sup> See the discussion in Wilburn (2012) 132-33 with the relevant bibliography.



specifically, Petronius' *Satyrical*, Seneca's *Medea*, and Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*, and real magic practices. I closely examine several excerpts from these authors which focus on magic and compare them with the text of the Greek magical papyri, the *defixiones*, as well as certain passages from other authors, most notably the encyclopedic work of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*.

In the first chapter, I examine Petronius' *Satyrical* through the prism of the author's 'realism'. After briefly discussing the meaning of the term in literature, I proceed with an analysis of relevant texts. I trace possible elements of real magic in the inset narratives of Niceros and Trimalchio as well as in Encolpius' narrative of the healing rituals of Proselenos and Oenothea. I argue that Petronius incorporated in these narratives specific details from contemporary knowledge about magic in order to draw his account closer to the religious reality of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. This reality is primarily presented through the eyes of the lower classes, mainly the freedmen, but at times switches to the perspective of the elite. To enhance further the realism of these stories, the author also inserted comments by certain characters which could reflect the attitude of the low classes toward magic, characterized by their ingenuity.

In the second chapter, the discussion shifts from the amusing and entertaining novel of Petronius to the more serious genre of tragedy, Seneca's *Medea*. At the beginning of my exposition, I argue that Seneca intended for his drama as a tool for teaching philosophy to people who were not as advanced to understand the ideas expressed in his treatises. The *Medea*, among other topics of Stoic philosophy, focuses on the negative effects of magic as the most representative aspect of *superstitio*, and the possible dangers it poses for the community. In my analysis I compare various passages, most notably the text of Medea's angered soliloquy in the opening scene, the nurse's description of the preparatory ritual, and the Colchian's concoction of the poison with various spells from the *PGM* and the text of the *defixiones*. By doing so I show

how Seneca exploits contemporary reality to sketch the character of Medea closer to real witches in order to advise his readers against pursuing such activities.

In the third chapter, I focus on Lucan and his historical epic, the *Bellum Ciuile*. However, as I argue at the opening sections of the chapter, Lucan's work is more than merely an epic poem like those written by his predecessors. His Stoic education and family background influenced to a great extent his work. The *Bellum Ciuile* is a didactic poem which deals with the importance of human action, independently of any external influences. Lucan provides his readers with both positive and negative examples of human action in a world lacking divine providence. One of the examples to be avoided is Sextus Pompey, the son of Magnus who, motivated by a primary Stoic passion (irrational fear), seeks answers through magic, and eventually succumbs to *superstitio*. He consults with Erichtho, the iconic superwitch of Latin literature. With the aim of creating a more credible figure for his witch, Lucan modeled Erichtho after earlier literary depictions of the *saga*, but also furnished his account with elements of contemporary witchcraft. I trace these connections by comparing the text of book 6.413-830 with the rituals described in the *PGM*, and other sources on real magic practices.

## CHAPTER 1:

### Petronius: Magic and Realism

#### A Controversial Author, a Controversial Work

The *Satyrica* is a fascinating work which has been often considered both controversial and puzzling, thus stirring many scholarly debates. Questions regarding its authorship, date of composition, intended audience, the narrator's voice as well as genre classification have been at the center of academic discussions for years. Given the limited information about the author, and the extremely fragmentary condition of the text, it is quite certain, unless of course an unexpected discovery occurs, that these issues will remain at least contestable.<sup>1</sup> Yet, some conclusions have been fairly established as "more likely than not," especially those on the possible identity of the author and the date of its composition. The evidence, though scarce, strongly favors a Neronian rather than an earlier or even Flavian date, and intratextual references point specifically to the last years of Nero's reign.<sup>2</sup> It is also a consensus among scholars that the author of the *Satyrica* is probably to be identified with Nero's *arbiter elegantiae*, who committed suicide in 66 C.E. in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is generally agreed that the preserved text of the *Satyrica* covers parts of books 14 and 16, and almost all of book 15 (see Sullivan [1968] 35, Conte [1994] 453, Courtney [2001] 12-13). The following information is certainly true: 1) the work consisted of at least 16 books, 2) the content of book 15 can be safely identified with the *Cena Trimalchionis*, 3) the phrase *quicquid satyrei fuit, Encolpius ebibat* belongs to book 14, and 4) the expression *sed video te totum in illa haerere tabula, quae Troiae halosin ostendit* comes from book 15 (Schmeling and Setaioli [2011] xxii-xxiii). Scholars usually estimate the length of the *Satyrica* to have been between 16 and 24 books; Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) xxii accept the hypothesis of 24 books; Sullivan (1968) 36 approximates the length at 20 books while Bürger (1892) had argued for at least 17 books; Smith (1975) xiv-xv remained skeptical, although he also assumed that the work consisted of at least 16 books.

<sup>2</sup> Most scholars accept a Neronian date for the *Satyrica*. The authority on the dating issue remains Rose (1971) 20-37. Marmorale (1948) 315-29 favored a 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. date, while Martin (1975), and Ripoll (2002) argue for a Flavian date.

<sup>3</sup> An obscure figure in the history of the period and the life of the court, our information for Petronius comes mainly from three sources: a brief reference in Plin. *HN* 37.20, two extensive passages in Tac. *Ann.* 16.17-20, and a reference in Plut. *Mor.* 60 d-e. For the identification of the author of the *Satyrica* with the Tacitean Petronius, see Sullivan (1968) 32-33, Walsh (1970) 67-70, Rose (1971) 38-59, Schmeling (1996) 457-59, Courtney (2001) 5-11,

Even if these questions can be deemed somewhat settled, the issue of the *Satyrিকা*'s generic classification still incites discussions which lead to divergent and often contradictory conclusions. Of course, the problem exists due to specific interwoven causes, namely, Petronius' style of mixing elements from almost every known literary genre as well as the lacunose nature of the text, which does not allow us for a complete picture of the plot.<sup>4</sup> The first attempt to categorize the *Satyrিকা* in a genre was made by Macrobius who recognized certain common characteristics between the works of Petronius and Apuleius, and placed both under the same *fabularum genus* which he termed *argumenta*.<sup>5</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Casaubon and Dryden listed Petronius among the authors who wrote Menippean satire, thus shaping an interpretative trend which survived, though much changed, in modern scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, most critics use the term only to refer to the 'outer form' of the *Satyrিকা* which is a combination of prose and verse.<sup>7</sup> However, the *prosimetrum* cannot be used as a conclusive criterion for the work's generic classification since the mixing of poetry and prose was certainly not alien to the ancient novel as the discovery of the *Iolaus* papyrus showed.<sup>8</sup> Other suggestions for the description of the 'outer

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and Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) xiii-xvii; Rankin (1971) 88-99 makes some important observations on the biography of Petronius found in Tacitus.

<sup>4</sup> Oratory, historiography, epic, epistolography, erotic elegy, satire, romance, tragedy and comedy are only some of them. For an exhaustive list, see Collignon (1892) 227-326.

<sup>5</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) xxxi. Macrobius. *In Somn.* 1.2.8: *Auditum mulcent uel comoediae, quales Menander eiusue imitatores agendas dederunt, uel argumenta fictis casibus amatorum referta, quibus uel multum se Arbitrarius exercuit uel Apuleium non numquam luisse miramur. Hoc totum fabularum genus, quod solas aurium delicias profitetur, e sacratio suo in nutricum cunas sapientiae tractatus eliminat.*

<sup>6</sup> Casaubon (1605) 268-69; Dryden (1926) 66: "Which is also manifest from antiquity, by those authors who are acknowledged to have written Varronian satires, in imitation of his; of whom the chief is Petronius Arbitrarius, whose satire, they say, is now printed in Holland, wholly recovered, and made complete: when 'tis made public, it will easily be seen by any one sentence, whether it be supposititious, or genuine." Conte (1996) 140-70 considers the influence of Menippean satire on Petronius less significant than previously thought. Astbury (1977) 22-31 argued that the only connection between the *Satyrিকা* and Menippean satire is their prosimetric form.

<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin (1984) 113: "The Satyricon of Petronius is nothing other than a Menippean satire extended to the limits of a novel," (trans. Emerson); Relihan (1993) 95 reads the *Satyrিকা* as a "picaresque novel on which the Menippean genre has been imposed"; Frye (1950) 309-10 and Adamietz (1987) and (1995) also consider the *Satyrিকা* to be Menippean satire. Other scholars, each one giving a slightly different definition of the genre of Menippean satire, use the term only to describe the *Satyrিকা*'s 'outer form'. See, for example, Sullivan (1968) 89-91, Walsh (1970) 89-91, and Courtney (1962) 92-100.

<sup>8</sup> For the full argument with relevant examples, see Schmeling (1999) 30-32.

form' of the *Satyrice* include, but are not limited to, "epic in prose, theater (mime) in prose, a novel (including an extended prose parody of the Greek novel, or a pornographic novel, or a kind of picaresque novel), and satire in prose."<sup>9</sup>

The scholarly disagreement that exists about the 'outer form' of the *Satyrice* is unquestionably an obstacle to the pursuit of its generic classification. However, the problem becomes even more complex because of the lack of a consistent 'inner form' which could be described with accuracy. Karl Bürger argued that the *Satyrice* should be read as a Milesian tale, that is, a first-person narrative of the hero's travels, infused with smaller stories of comic or erotic nature.<sup>10</sup> Some scholars took a more moderate position, rejecting the *Satyrice*'s classification as a Milesian tale, but accepting its affinity with the genre.<sup>11</sup> Others interpret its content as satire, entertainment, parody, and disintegration of reality as well as an amalgamation of all genres.<sup>12</sup> The existence of several different views about the 'inner form' of the *Satyrice* shows that the content is so rich and disparate to the point that it is impossible to argue for a specific genre based solely on that.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) xxxiii. Heinze (1899) was the first to read the *Satyrice* as a parody of the Greek novel, and his theory was accepted by Walsh (1970) 7–9 and 78–80 as well as Holzberg (1995) 46, and 48–54; for parts of the *Satyrice* as the prose-equivalent of theater and mime, see Panayotakis (1995); Sandy (1974) 342 and Walsh (1970) 24 also recognize the influence of the mime tradition on Petronius; for epic parody as a framework of the *Satyrice*, see Sullivan (1968) 91–93.

<sup>10</sup> Bürger (1892) 345–48.

<sup>11</sup> Perry (1967) traced the origins of the *Satyrice* partially to the genre of Milesian tales, which can be exemplified in certain stories such as the story of the Widow of Ephesus; Morgan (2009) 46 succinctly describes the relationship between the *Satyrice* and Milesian tales: "The generic affiliation of the *Satyrice* to Milesian Tales goes a long way to accounting for both the subject matter and the tone of those episodes which are often taken for parodies of the idealistic novel." See also the discussion in Schmeling (1996) 480. Recently, Jensson (2004) 191–301 argued that the extended first-person narrative of the *Satyrice* is a distinctive characteristic which points to its generic classification as Milesian tale.

<sup>12</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) xxxiii. Parody of literary genres is a crucial element of the *Satyrice*'s: Klebs (1899) 623–55 suggested that the *Satyrice* is a parody of an epic of wandering such as the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*; for the wrath of Priapus essentially being the parallel to the wrath of Poseidon in the *Odyssey*, see Connors (1998) 26–27, and Sullivan (1968) 92–93; the relationship with the *Odyssey* is also discussed in Morgan (2009) 32–38.

<sup>13</sup> Zeitlin (1971) 635 suggests that the Protean form of the *Satyrice* reveals a deliberate attempt to resist any generic classification; Slater (1990) 233–34 reads the *Satyrice* as a novel but adopts Bakhtin's idea that 'novel' is not a literary genre despite the expectations it creates.

For diagnostic reasons, many scholars now accept the categorization of the *Satyrica* under the wide-embracing term ‘novel’, despite the apparent anachronism, due to the many similarities with the canonical novels, both Greek and Latin: it is a long fictional narrative in which erotic themes are prominent; there is a hero who wanders in various locations of the real world, and during the course of his journey he faces difficulties and dangers, including sea-storms and shipwrecks; the wrath of a deity looms in the background, and moves the plot forward; there are certain common motifs such as threats of suicide, love at first sight, and the *Scheintod* motif; sometimes the narrative involves legal proceedings, rhetorical outbursts, and pathetic monologues; finally, the author makes digressions in the form of inset narratives with the purpose of entertaining (and perhaps instructing?) the audience.<sup>14</sup> Even though these characteristics are not unique to the ancient novel if considered separately, together they comprise an important part of its generic identity.

Despite the existing similarities, the *Satyrica* is also quite different from the other novels. This should be attributed to the rich background of the formative genres of the novel in general, and the *Satyrica* in particular. It is probably better to view the work as a pastiche of various literary genres and novelistic sub-genres as well as the result of multiple literary influences on its content.<sup>15</sup> That said, Petronius adopted the existing tradition and the available literary genres to compose his work and adapted the content in order to create a unique and original hybrid.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a definition of the novel and its characteristics, see Holzberg (1995) 7-8, and 19-20. A different approach is taken by Futre Pinheiro (2014) 199-216 who discusses the issue in detail and concludes that the fundamental elements of the novel are (209) “a narrative structure, the verisimilitude of the story, and the erotic motif.”

<sup>15</sup> For the three types of the Greek novel, namely, the erotic romance, the comic travelogue, and the comic romance as a generic background to the *Satyrica*, see Walsh (1970) 7-11. Another important article discussing the influence of Greek novels on Petronius is Barchiesi (1999) 124-41. For a general overview of the affinities of the *Satyrica* with other genres, see Morgan and Harrison (2008) 228-30, Harrison (1999) xviii-xxiii, Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) xxx-xxxviii (with rich bibliographical references), Vannini (2010) 8-16, Morgan (2009) 32-47, and Panayotakis (2009) 48-64. For the possible influence of individual genres on the *Satyrica*, see: Rimell (2005) [satire]; Harrison (1998) and Jensson (2004) [Sisenna’s Milesian tales]; Schmeling (1971), Currie (1989), and

### The *Satyrica*: Moralization or Entertainment?

One of the most interesting and, at the same time, difficult questions to answer is whether Petronius wrote his novel with any didactic intention. In other words, was the *Satyrica* meant to be a form of cultural and social criticism or just a work of entertainment? So far, very few studies deal with the topic directly, and critics have gone either way on the issue.

On the one side, there are those who prefer to read the *Satyrica* as a vivid depiction of a decadent Roman society with moralizing overtones. Highet offered probably the most clear and elaborate view of Petronius as a moralist, recognizing the satiric elements of the work, and suggesting that he drew inspiration from the adventures and escapades of Nero and his friends who would often disguise themselves, and go out at night to commit various mischiefs.<sup>17</sup> The *Satyrica*, he concludes, is the product of Petronius' attempt to show his repulsion of contemporary lifestyle and the dangers it entails, which go against the Epicurean principles of tranquility, freedom from desire, and fear as well as physical pain.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the characters represent negative behaviors which, through the lens of Epicureanism, should be avoided. Bacon also considered the moralizing character of the novel in her 1958 article, which examines in parallel T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the *Satyrica*. She argues that the characters of both works lack the "feeling of being alive, the sense of good and evil," and

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Hallett (2003) [elegy]; Kennedy (1978), and Panayotakis (2006) [rhetoric]; Sandy (1974), and Panayotakis (1995) [comic theatre].

<sup>16</sup> Despite Petronius' debt to the existing tradition, the uniqueness and originality of his work was recognized from early on; see Sullivan (1968) 81-83, Walsh (1970) 7, Perry (1967) 186-90, 202-10, and Zeitlin (1971) 634. For the *Satyrica* as an imitation of a Greek, now lost, novel (a Greek *Satyrica*), see Leo (1912) 459, Wilamowitz (1912) 190, Gercke and Norden (1910) 520; Parsons (1971) also supports the idea based on his interpretation of *P. Oxy.* 3010 (*Iolaus* fragment). More recently, Jensson (2002) and (2004) argued that Petronius based his novel on a lost Greek work.

<sup>17</sup> Highet (1941) 189-92.

<sup>18</sup> Highet (1941) 192-94.

maintains that a moralizing tone underlies their seriousness.<sup>19</sup> This fundamental *gravitas* was also recognized by Arrowsmith who considered the *Satyrica* to be a clear and conscious description of the corrupt Roman society of 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. However, contrary to Bacon, he finds a characteristic jauntiness setting Petronius and Eliot apart.<sup>20</sup> For him, the *Satyrica* is a narrative example of the death of Classical *Romanitas*, and Petronius is “the last great witness to the pagan sense of life, the last classical author in whom we can feel the firmness of moral control that underlies the Greek tragedians ... squarely in the Latin moralist and satirical tradition, and the greatest moralist of them all.”<sup>21</sup> Like Highet, Arrowsmith believed that Petronius criticized the luxurious way of life through the eyes of an Epicurean.<sup>22</sup> These three scholars arguably represent the view which regards Petronius as a moral authority who depicts the declining society of the Roman Empire because of luxury and greed. More recently, Courtney argued that the narrative technique of Petronius, that is, a first-person narration from a low-life character (Encolpius), impedes our view of the author as a strict moralist. That said, he still maintained that a moralistic interpretation of contemporary life and society underlies the novel’s narrative.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Rimell theorizes that the reading of the *Satyrica* as entertainment or comedy is the result of the fragmentary condition of the text as well as an “implication of not reading the *Satyricon* from a distance”, which implicitly suggests that she traces didactic overtones in her analysis of various episodes.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bacon (1958) 267: “The *Satyricon*, like *The Waste Land*, contains a series of rapes, seductions, intrigues, and esoteric sexual adventures in high and low life. And here too is sensuality without joy, satiety without fulfilment, degradation without grief and horror. The traditional comparison with Aristophanes, Rabelais and Sterne is as inappropriate for Trimalchio and Encolpius as it is for Sweeney and Doris. Real laughter is rare in Petronius. There is little joy. The characters lack just what Eliot’s characters lack—the feeling of being alive, the sense of good and evil.”

<sup>20</sup> Arrowsmith (1966) 325-26.

<sup>21</sup> Arrowsmith (1966) 330.

<sup>22</sup> Arrowsmith (1966) 309.

<sup>23</sup> Courtney (2001) 124.

<sup>24</sup> Rimell (2002) 5 reads the *Satyrica* as a work which has “...the power to move, upset or change its readers”.



On the other side stand those who consider the *Satyrice* to be pure entertainment. Perry noted the novel's lack of serious tone, and rejected the idea of Petronius writing a work of moral didacticism, maintaining instead that the episodes in the plot are presented from an objective perspective, and that there is no hint at the writer's attitude toward the narrated events and situations, that is, whether he approves or disapproves them.<sup>25</sup> The view of Petronius as a moralist was also rejected by Sullivan who went against the interpretation of Highet, Bacon, and Arrowsmith by arguing that the *Satyrice* was written only as a piece of entertainment for Nero's literary circle.<sup>26</sup> The interpretation of the poem in §132.15 as Petronius' defense of his work *in toto* is vital for Sullivan's position since he considers the expression *opus nouae simplicitatis* to be indicative of the author's lack of intention for serious philosophical exposition.<sup>27</sup> Some years later, Walsh also addressed the points raised by Highet, Bacon, and Arrowsmith, and vehemently refuted the *Satyrice*'s moralizing character. He supported his argument with specific details which prove to be a serious obstacle to the triad's claims : 1) the alleged character of the author, whom Tacitus presents as an individual who lived a life of "celebrated sloth and fastidious luxury,"<sup>28</sup> 2) his prominence in the court of Nero as the replacement of Seneca in 63-66 C.E. which coincided with the worst excesses of the emperor, 3) the title of the work itself (*Satyrice*) which suggests a comic rather than serious intent on behalf of the author, 4) the lack of a moral point of reference throughout the narrative,<sup>29</sup> and 5) the elements of mime in the narrative which further impose a less serious and entertaining character on the plot.<sup>30</sup> Lawall also shares the view

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<sup>25</sup> Perry (1925) 34-36.

<sup>26</sup> Sullivan (1971) 107-24.

<sup>27</sup> See Sullivan (1968) 70 for the poem at §132.15 as Petronius' defense of his whole work, and 106-11 for the arguments against the work's moralizing character.

<sup>28</sup> Walsh (1974) 184-85: Given his sketching by Tacitus, Walsh claims that it is hard, if not impossible, for Petronius to have written a work of Epicurean morality.

<sup>29</sup> According to Walsh (1974) 185 *Encolpius* does not seem to have a moral compass which the reader can use as a point of reference.

<sup>30</sup> For these points, see Walsh (1974) 185.

that the character of the *Satyricon* is purely comic, claiming “that one reads [it] simply for pleasure.”<sup>31</sup> A more refined version of the ‘anti-moralist school’ was put forward by Slater who shows that Petronius’ work is by definition a comedy, and that the author intentionally renders the text “critically unreadable.”<sup>32</sup> The entertaining effect of the *Satyricon* was also accepted by both Schmeling and Panayotakis. The former considers the narrative to be Encolpius’ confession as he contemplates past events of his life while the latter connects Petronius’ text with the content of comic and mimic plays whose aim was “bawdy entertainment.”<sup>33</sup>

A third view which can be regarded as the middle road in this debate was put forward by Zeitlin who argued that “it is idle to look in the *Satyricon* for a conventional moralist. Petronius is surely no neo-Epicurean, no neo-satirist in the old tradition . . .”<sup>34</sup> The central argument of her essay is that the anarchy of the plot and the indecisiveness of the characters is the result of Petronius’ deliberate attempt to illustrate how irrational and confused the real world is.<sup>35</sup> She further maintained that the mixing of various literary genres, styles, prose and verse, is part of the author’s plan to create the impression of a disorganized and anarchical text which also corresponds to the anarchy of the real world.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the readers need not share Petronius’ view. They only have to recognize and understand the situation without necessarily making a judgment.<sup>37</sup>

### The *Satyricon* and the Real World

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<sup>31</sup> Lawall (1995) iv.

<sup>32</sup> Slater (1990) 3.

<sup>33</sup> Schmeling (1994b) and (1994c); Panayotakis (1995) 195.

<sup>34</sup> Zeitlin (1971) 676.

<sup>35</sup> Zeitlin (1971) 633.

<sup>36</sup> Zeitlin (1971) 635.

<sup>37</sup> Zeitlin (1971) 633; see also Currie’s 1994 article, in which the author argues that Petronius does not reveal his moral standing.

Regardless of how we frame the character of the novel, the relationship that we posit between the real world and its representation in Petronius is significant for interpreting his engagement with magic and superstition. The question of realism has been a topic of focused debate in Petronian literature since Auerbach's 1953 seminal work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, although Frost Abbott had recognized Petronius' intensely realistic depiction of incidents, portrayal of Roman society and character sketching fifty years earlier.<sup>38</sup> In his study, Auerbach argued that the author intended for a truthful imitation of everyday life in its sociocultural context by shaping his characters as close to reality as possible.<sup>39</sup> This is most evident in his portrayal of the freedmen *personae* in the *Cena* who appear to express themselves in their low-class jargon without the artificial, stylized language of higher literary genres.<sup>40</sup> The realistic portrayal of Trimalchio was also noted by Veyne who asserted that the biography of the freedman should be viewed as a historical document of the economic life in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E.<sup>41</sup> A slightly different view was put forward by Sullivan who, although accepting the strong strain of realism throughout Petronius' narrative, nonetheless argues that the *Satyrical* lacks the element of verisimilitude which he considers an essential characteristic of the realistic novel.<sup>42</sup> More recently, Panayotakis recognized realism as Petronius' motive to exploit the theatrical tradition. For him the *Satyrical*'s realism is the result of the author's adoption of elements of mime rather than a conscious attempt to imitate contemporary everyday life.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Abbott (1899) 440.

<sup>39</sup> Auerbach (2013) 30.

<sup>40</sup> For a study on the language of freedmen in the *Cena*, see Boyce (1991) 76-102; Nelson's (1947) dissertation also dealt with vulgar language in Petronius.

<sup>41</sup> The realism of Petronius was also accepted by Arrowsmith (1966) 304.

<sup>42</sup> Sullivan (1968) 23 claims that Petronius destroys the 'veil of verisimilitude' by expressing his own taste and views (the poem at §132.15), furnishing the narrative with large elements of fiction and using the literary framework of the Menippean satire, that is, the mixing of prose and verse.

<sup>43</sup> Panayotakis (1995) 193-94.

Some scholars went against this view and refuted Petronius' realism on different grounds. Jones studied the diction of verisimilitude in the works of ancient literary critics and theorists such as Cicero and Quintilian to determine the notion of 'realism' in antiquity. He maintained that when viewed in accordance with the ancient terms, Petronius' realism is undermined by the self-dramatization and the pretense of his own characters.<sup>44</sup> Conte took a different stance, arguing that reality does not exist *per se* in the *Satyrical*. Instead, it is created by the reader as a concept against which the novel's *cosmos* is compared.<sup>45</sup> Martin also supported the view that Petronius' contemporary reader would have been able to discern their own everyday milieu with its accompanying problems, but at the same time they would likely feel alienated because this milieu was depicted through the prism of a powerful imagination.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Freudenburg makes some important observations on Petronius' realism in the novel's satirical context. Although the *Satyrical* arguably recalls life in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E., there are certain elements which prevent the reader from assimilating the events and descriptions of the narrative with real ones. The excessive and ridiculous element of the characters as well as their behavior and habits do not correspond to reality, even though some of them were commonly taken as true in the Neronian period.<sup>47</sup>

Granted, realism in literature does not signify that a work in its entirety necessarily corresponds to reality. In the *Satyrical*, the overall picture of the narrative, with its exaggerations and comic elements, should restrain us from considering the novel as an accurate representation of the real world. That said, it is still possible to trace many elements of reality both in individual scenes and in certain details, including those pertaining to Roman superstitions. When it comes

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<sup>44</sup> Jones (1991) 118-19.

<sup>45</sup> Conte (1996) 178-80.

<sup>46</sup> See Martin (1988) 232-42, especially the conclusions on 241.

<sup>47</sup> Freudenburg (2017) 116-17.

to superstitious beliefs and magic practices in the *Satyrica*, it is also right to consider realistic not only the details in their descriptions, but also the characters' trust in their truth and effectiveness.

### *Superstitio* and Magic in the *Satyrica*

The concept of *superstitio* permeates most of the extant text of the *Satyrica*. It manifests itself primarily in the beliefs and rituals of the lower social strata which are either referred to or extensively described in the novel: entering the *triclinium* with the right foot (*dextro pede*) because the opposite will bring misfortunes upon the host (§30); snatching the cap of an *incubo* compels the creature to reveal the location of the hidden treasure it guards (§38); the connection of the cock's crow with the imminent death of someone close by (§74); the spitting on one's own bosom to avert bad luck (§74); the power of witches to draw down the moon (§129), excite desire (§131) and control the forces of nature (§134).<sup>48</sup> These are only some of the superstitions mentioned throughout the narrative.<sup>49</sup>

It is worth noting that Petronius presents the reader not only with the religious practices and beliefs of the lower classes, but also with the misconceptions of the elite about them.<sup>50</sup> This can be exemplified in the description of the rituals performed by Quartilla who claims that they are secret nocturnal rites prohibited to the uninitiated (§17.4-8). However, the alleged *nocturnae religiones* are proven to be sexual orgies. And given that warnings against nocturnal rituals are a *locus communis* in Latin literature due to the danger they posed for the chastity of both men and women, it is quite safe to assume that the connection of the priapic rituals with illicit sexual activities is a stereotype promulgating upper-class morality.<sup>51</sup> It is through the comparison with

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<sup>48</sup> Rini (1929) discusses these superstitions and finds evidence of their existence in modern-day Italy.

<sup>49</sup> It is worth reading the two important studies on religion and superstition in the *Satyrica* by Codoñer (1989) and Grondona (1980), which address several issues that come up in the scene of the *Cena*.

<sup>50</sup> Šterbenc Erker (2013) 130.

<sup>51</sup> For this analysis of the Quartilla episode, see Šterbenc Erker (2013) 130.

the religious beliefs and practices of the elite that the rituals of the common people were viewed as superstitious and as examples of false religion.<sup>52</sup>

But how close to the religious reality of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. is Petronius' representation of *superstitio*? In the following sections I discuss four passages, which in my view are the showcase for the author's art. More specifically, the stories narrated by Niceros and Trimalchio as well as the narrative of the rituals conducted by Proselenos and Oenothea to cure Encolpius' impotence are representative of the *Satyrical*'s realism. I argue that with the intention of shaping an account as realistic as possible, Petronius adapted the folktale of the werewolf and the witch by furnishing them with various elements from magic spells which circulated widely among his contemporaries. His familiarity with witchcraft is illustrated more evidently in the healing spell of Proselenos. The aforementioned excerpts, although not realistic in their entirety, still possess certain characteristics suggesting a strong verisimilitude which is further enhanced by the comments of the characters about the truthfulness of the inset narratives, Proselenos' statement on the effectiveness of her spell as well as Encolpius' rational explanation of certain aspects of the ritual performed by Oenothea.

### The Graeco-Roman Werewolf Traditions

Compared to other supernatural stories, those involving werewolves are relatively rare in both Greek and Roman literature. However, this should not be taken as evidence for the complete absence of a tradition which is centered around the transformation of men to wolves or human-wolf hybrids. On the contrary, lycanthropy has a very long, but still sparse presence in ancient literature.<sup>53</sup> For reasons of brevity and relevance, I discuss only the passages which refer to the

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<sup>52</sup> Šterbenc Erker (2013b).

<sup>53</sup> The word "lycanthropy" has two distinct meanings: in the vernacular it denotes the supernatural transformation of a human into wolf as recounted in folk tales and myths while in medical language it describes a rare psychiatric

actual transformation of a person into a wolf, excluding instances of symbolic transformation such as those enacted in cultic rituals or suggested by the use of wolf skin.<sup>54</sup>

The earliest reference is found in an ethnographic description of the Nervians in Herodotus (4.105), in which the historian claims that once a year the members of this nomad tribe of northern Europe would turn into wolves (λύκος γίνεταί), and after spending some days in animal form, they would become humans again. The characterization of the Nervians as magicians (κινδυνεύουσι δὲ οἱ ἄνθρωποι οὗτοι γόητες εἶναι) reveals an implicit connection between magic and shapeshifting in ancient thought.<sup>55</sup> Pomponius Mela also discusses certain details about the life of this tribe (*De situ orbis* 2.14). His account, which probably relies heavily on that of Herodotus, further emphasizes the magical aspect of the Nervians' transformation by stating that the process of changing to and from the form of a wolf (*in lupos ... mutantur*) happens on their own will (*si uelint*).<sup>56</sup> The passage also provides details on their religious life: the main deity worshiped among them is Mars (*Mars omnium deus*), whom they honor with regular offerings such as swords and sword belts (*enses et cinctoria dedicant*), but also with human sacrifices (*hominesque pro uictumis feriant*). Although Pomponius does not clearly state that the Nervians were considered sorcerers, the practice of human sacrifice, which would have been considered both barbaric and foreign to Roman customs as well as their alleged

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disease during which the affected person suffers from the delusion of having transformed into an animal, often a canine (see *OED* s.v. *Lycanthropy*). In this chapter I use the word with either meaning, indicating clearly, however, whenever the word denotes the disease.

<sup>54</sup> As symbolic transformations one might count the depictions of a human-wolf hybrid in several funerary urns of Etruscan origin which according to Brunn and Körte represent the reenactment of the exorcism of the monster Olta by the Etruscan king Porsena; the depiction of the monster Lycas wearing a wolf skin on a fresco described by Pausanias (6.5-11); the use of wolf skin in the rituals of the Hirpi Sorani attested by Servius (ad *Aen.* 11.785). For an exhaustive discussion on the depiction of the werewolf in art, and the symbolic transformation as part of rituals, see Elliot (1995).

<sup>55</sup> Gordon (2015) 40 claims that the element of magic is introduced in the account of the Nervians' transformation by Herodotus to suggest how these stories might be explained.

<sup>56</sup> The distinction between voluntary transformation ('real'), and metamorphosis as a result of the intervention of an external agent ('illusory') has been discussed in earlier scholarship. For the distinction between the two, and its implications, see Veenstra (2002) 134 n. 2 who cites the main studies on this issue.

shapeshifting skills would probably lead the Romans to view them as such.<sup>57</sup> Even if someone were tempted to regard the Nervians as an assimilated population of the Roman Empire, especially in light of their early subjugation by the forces of Caesar in 57 B.C.E., but also due to possible similarities in religion (e.g., the worship of Mars), they should proceed with caution. The case of the Arcadians could be a useful parallel, illustrating how even among ethnic groups with close cultural and religious ties, there was still room for one (or more of them) to be regarded as significantly different or, as Gordon calls it, the “internal other.”<sup>58</sup>

The Greeks’ view of the Arcadians as an “internal other” might be the reason for the persistent connection of this area of the Peloponnese and its inhabitants with werewolf myths and legends.<sup>59</sup> Of course, the only surviving myth is the one narrating king Lycaon’s transformation as a punishment for his sacrilege against Jupiter, which is found in multiple authors and in different versions. In the most popular variation attested in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (1.199-239), Jupiter recounts to the other gods how he assumed the form of a human and went down to earth to test people’s morals. After wandering in Arcadia, he arrived at the house of Lycaon. The latter, although aware of the divine identity of his guest, decided to test him by serving him human flesh. He cut the throat of a Molossian hostage, chopped him up and after cooking the pieces, he offered the impious meal to Jupiter. The enraged god destroyed Lycaon’s house and his *Penates*, and the king fled to the fields howling, attacking the local herds, driven by his bloodlust. The time of his transformation is described vividly by Jupiter himself in lines 236-239: the clothes turned into hair, and his limbs became legs; even though he had assumed the form of a wolf (*fit lupus*), he still retained traces of his former appearance and nature (*ueteris*

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<sup>57</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Nervians, see Fichtl (1994) 97-104.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon (2015) 39 drawing upon the conclusions of Bonnechere (1994) 86.

<sup>59</sup> See the exhaustive discussion in Bonnechere (1994) 85-96 who analyses all the Arcadian myths and legends which pertain to wolf transformations and connects their formation with the practice of human sacrifice in honor of Zeus Lycaeus which existed in ancient thought.



*seruat uestigia formae*), namely his grey hair, a ferociously violent countenance, and the same glittering eyes. Lycophron (*Alex.* 481) seems to allude to a different version of the myth, in which the king slaughtered one of his sons, Nyctimus, and offered his flesh to Zeus. According to Hyginus (*Poet. Astr.* 2.4), Lycaon served at the banquet the flesh of Arcas, the son of Callisto and Jupiter. When the latter realized the deception, he overturned the table, burnt the house with his thunderbolt, and punished his host by turning him into a wolf (*in lupi figuram conuertit*). The account is different in Hyginus' *Fabulae* 176 which narrates how it was Lycaon's sons who, willing to test the divine nature of Jove, mixed human flesh with that of animals and offered him a meal. Becoming aware of their attempt to trick him, the god enraged killed all of them with his thunderbolt but transformed their father into a wolf (*in lupi figuram mutauit*).<sup>60</sup> Significantly distinct is the version attested in Pausanias 8.2.3, who claims that the Arcadian king changed into a wolf (γενέσθαι λύκον) because he sacrificed a baby on the altar of Zeus Lycaeus. Despite its diversity, every iteration of the Lycaon myth underlines the murder and the cannibalistic feast, probably reflecting a perceived cultural discrepancy between the Arcadians and the rest of the Greeks at the time when the myth was initially conceived.

The extant Greek legends about werewolves are also associated with the region of Arcadia. In the *Republic*, Socrates mentions a circulating tale (μῦθος) about men inescapably being turned into wolves (λύκῳ γενέσθαι), if they consume human viscera mixed with those of animals in the temple of Zeus Lycaeus in Arcadia (565d5-e1). In what should probably be regarded as a particularized account of the same legend, Pliny (*HN* 8.82) and St. Augustine (*De Ciu. D.* 18.17), citing information from a catalogue of Olympic victors and Varro, respectively, narrate how a certain Demaenetus from Parrhasia accidentally tried the entrails of a boy which

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<sup>60</sup> It should be also noted that the element of the transformation is completely absent from Apollodorus' account which is identical to that of Hyginus, with the exception of Zeus killing both the children and the father with his thunderbolt. Only the youngest, Nyktimos, survived and later became king of Arcadia.

was sacrificed to Jove Lycaeus. He transformed into a wolf (*HN* 8.82, *in lupum se conuertisse; De Ciu. D.* 18.17, *fuisse mutatum*) and spent nine years in the wild without tasting human flesh before changing back to his previous form. He later participated in the Olympics and won the boxing game. An almost identical account of this legend, but with a different protagonist (the Parrhasian Damarchus, son of Dinytas) and without specifying any reason for the transformation is attested in Pausanias (6.8.2). Closely tied with these narratives is the legend of the Anthidai family. Pliny (*HN* 8.81), ascribing the story to a certain Evanthes, describes how a male member of this Arcadian family chosen by lot would be led to a lake in the area. There he would remove his clothes and hang them on an oak and after reaching the desert, having swum across the lake, he would change into a wolf. The individual had to live with the wolf pack for nine years before turning into his previous form, provided that he had not tasted human flesh during the time he was living in the wild. By swimming back across the same lake, he would become human again, and then pick up the clothes he had left hanging on the tree. St. Augustine (*De Ciu. D.* 18.17) seems to be aware of this legend, mediated through the works of Varro, but his account does not name a specific family to which the person undergoing the transformation should belong. As scholars have argued, these stories are essentially adaptations of the Lycaon motif, which were probably formed and circulating at least as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.<sup>61</sup>

The connection between ‘the other,’ witchcraft, and lycanthropy, to which Herodotus’ account of the Nervians alludes, is illustrated more overtly in two brief references in Augustan literature. In *Eclogue* 8, Vergil includes a character named Moeris who can change his shape into that of a wolf by means of potions (*uenena*). Although not explicitly stated, Moeris is apparently a magician, as we infer from the description of his powers to summon the dead and charm the

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<sup>61</sup> Bonnechere (1994) 87.

crops (95-99);<sup>62</sup> his name indicates that he is probably Egyptian.<sup>63</sup> The other figure is Propertius infamous *lena* Acanthis who possesses multiple supernatural powers (4.5.5-18), including the ability to transform into a nocturnal wolf (*sua nocturno fallere terga lupo*). And it might be safe to assume that she also is non-Roman, as her name strongly suggests. It is equally important to note that both Vergil and Propertius, contrary to the myth of Lycaon and the other Arcadian legends, do not present the wolf transformation as the result of a curse or a form of punishment, but a magical process undertaken willingly by the subjects. In any case, the excerpts illustrate the existence of a link between ‘the other,’ witchcraft, and lycanthropy in ancient thought.

A relevant question that needs to be addressed in the context of this introductory discussion is whether stories about werewolves were believed to hold any truth or not. Herodotus completely rejected the rumors about the Nervians’ transformation as falsehoods (ἐμὲ μὲν νυν ταῦτα λέγοντες οὐ πείθουσι), despite people who were spreading the story swearing the opposite (ὀμνύουσι δὲ [ταῦτα] λέγοντες). Pliny also showed the same disbelief, arguing that not only should all werewolf tales be regarded as untrue (*falsum esse confidenter existimare debemus*, *HN* 8.80) and shameless lies (*nullum tam impudens mendacium est*, 8.82), but also that anyone who believed in them should be considered gullible. More specifically, he directs his criticism toward the naïveté of the Greeks (*mirum est quo procedat Graeca credulitas!* 8.82) and the masses (*unde tamen ista uulgo infixa s<i>t fama in tantum*, 8.81).<sup>64</sup> Pausanias also passes a judgment on the credibility of the Lycaon myth in a lengthy argument (8.2.4-8.2.5). He claims

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<sup>62</sup> The enchantment of crops was considered one of the powers of magicians, and early Roman laws prohibited the use of incantation with the purpose of stealing someone’s agricultural production (*Tabula VIII* 8a: *Qui fruges excantassit . . .*).

<sup>63</sup> The name “Moeris” is the Greek adaptation of the Egyptian name *Mu-ur* which means “great water” or *Mer-ur* which means “great canal.” See Wallis Budge (1902) 48.

<sup>64</sup> The credulity of the Greeks was proverbial even during the time of the Republic as we infer from Cic. *Flac.* 4. Gordon (2015) 40 raises an interesting point, noting that “for the educated elite, the point of recounting such stories was to illustrate the credulousness of others – for Pausanias, as a Greek, that of the Arcadians; for Pliny, as a Roman *eques*, that of ‘the Greeks’.”

that the transformation of the Arcadian king seems plausible to him (ἐμέ γ' ὁ λόγος οὔτως πείθει) due to the myth's antiquity (ἐκ παλαιοῦ) and probability (τὸ εἰκὸς). To explain the latter, he resorts to a comparison between the time of Lycaon and his own, i.e., the Imperial era. He argues that back then, the pious and just would be often visited by the gods and rewarded for their personal qualities by being elevated to divine or semi-divine status while the sinners would be instantly punished, citing as an example Niobe who was punished by being turned into a rock. In his time, however, when sin and injustice had reached their peak, only tyrants and despots became gods or demi-gods in the people's mind, and divine punishment was reserved for the afterlife. Strangely, despite his eagerness to believe the truthfulness of Lycaon's transformation, Pausanias rejects the legend of Damarchus as a tale spread by charlatans (οὗ μοι πιστὰ ἦν πέρα γε τῆς ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ νίκης, 6.8.2) arguing that neither the Arcadians nor the dedicatory inscription in Olympia recount the transformation. If the story were true, he concludes, it would have been recorded there along with his victory.<sup>65</sup> These references may allow for the assumption that, with some exceptions which can be justified on the grounds of personal beliefs, much of the educated elite considered werewolf tales purely fictional.

### The Werewolf in Petronius

After the company has finished enjoying the delicacies at Trimalchio's villa, the host asks Niceros, one of his frequent guests and friend, to tell a story. The tale which functions intranarratively as a form of entertainment for the banqueters is a personal recollection of the freedman's experience from the time he was a slave in Capua (§62):

erat autem miles, fortis tamquam Orcus. apoculamus nos circa gallicinia, luna lucebat tamquam meridie. uenimus inter monimenta: homo meus coepit ad stelas facere, sed ego <pergo> cantabundus et stelas numero. deinde ut respexi ad comitem, ille exiit

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<sup>65</sup> For an analysis of this passage and Pausanias' syllogism, see Veenstra (2002) 140.

se et omnia uestimenta secundum uiam posuit. mihi [in] anima in naso esse, stabam tamquam mortuus. at ille circumminxit uestimenta sua, et subito lupo factus est. nolite me iocari putare; ut mentiar, nullius patrimonium tanti facio. sed, quod coeperam dicere, postquam lupo factus est, ululare coepit et in siluas fugit. ego primitus nesciebam ubi essem, deinde accessi, ut uestimenta eius tollerem: illa autem lapidea facta sunt. qui mori timore nisi ego? gladium tamen strinxi et †matauitatau† umbras cecidi, donec ad uillam amicae meae peruenirem. [...] “lupo enim uillam intrauit et omnia pecora...: tamquam lanius sanguinem illis misit. nec tamen derisit, etiam si fugit; seruus enim noster lancea collum eius traiecit.” haec ut audiui, operire oculos amplius non potui, sed luce clara †hac nostri† domum fugi tamquam copo compilatus, et postquam ueni in illum locum in quo lapidea uestimenta erant facta, nihil inueni nisi sanguinem. [...] intellexi illum uersipellem esse, nec postea cum illo panem gustare potui, non si me occidisses. uiderint alii quid de hoc exopinissent; ego si mentior, genios uestros iratos habeam.

He was a soldier as it happened, and as brave as hell. About cock-crow we shag off, and the moon was shining like noontime. We get to where the tombs are and my chap starts making for the grave-stones, while I, singing away, keep going and start counting the stars. Then just as I looked back at my mate, he stripped off and laid all his clothes by the side of the road. My heart was in my mouth, I stood there like a corpse. Anyway, he pissed a ring round his clothes and suddenly turned into a wolf. Don't think I'm joking, I wouldn't tell a lie about this for a fortune. However, as I began to say, after he turned into a wolf, he started howling and rushed off into the woods. [...] “A wolf got into the grounds and tore into all the livestock – it was like a bloody shambles. But he didn't have the last laugh, even though he got away. Our slave here put a spear right through his neck.” I couldn't close my eyes again after I heard this. But when it was broad daylight I rushed off home like the innkeeper after the robbery. And when I came to the spot where his clothes had turned to stone, I found nothing but bloodstains. [...] I realized he was a werewolf and afterwards I couldn't have taken a bite of bread in his company, not if you killed me for it. If some people think differently about this, that's up to them. But me – if I'm telling a lie may all your guardian spirits damn me! (trans.Sullivan)

Petronius' narrative is considered one of the most iconic werewolf tales of Western literature, and scholars have argued that it essentially functioned as the model on which all subsequent representations of the beast in literature and art were based.<sup>66</sup> Although relying on existing myths and legends, his account is unique in its mixing of the Arcadian traditions with elements of magic and medicine. In other words, Petronius creates a pastiche by crystallizing the mythological stories and legends into a generic tale and infusing it with *quasi*-religious and

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<sup>66</sup> Frost (2003) 50-105.

medical details. By doing so, he fabricates an account of the werewolf transformation which is detached from the tradition and closer to popular superstitions of his time.

Petronius' story seems to have certain connections with both the myth of Lycaon in Ovid and the legend of the Anthidai found in Pliny. The soldier, after he undergoes the metamorphosis, vanishes from the scene (*fugit*), attacks the cattle in a nearby farm, and slaughters all the animals (*omnia pecora*), spilling their blood (*sanguinem illis misit*) like a butcher. These actions echo Ovid's account of a transformed Lycaon fleeing his house (*ipse fugit*), attacking neighboring cattle (*uertitur in pecudes*) driven by his bloodlust, and rejoicing in the blood of the dead animals (*sanguine gaudet*). Neither possesses anymore the ability to articulate themselves, and their effort to speak results in howling (Lycaon *exululat* and the soldier *ululare coepit*). The influence of the Anthidai legend may be traced to the soldier's divesting and recovery of his clothes, before and after the transformation, respectively.<sup>67</sup> Just as the members of this Arcadian family must strip themselves (*uestituque...suspense*) before swimming across the lake and being transformed into werewolves, so the Petronian character also needs to remove his garments (*exiit se ... uestimenta secundum uiam posuit*). And just as they must pick up those same clothes (*eandem recipere uestem*) after they assume their previous form, he also needs to get back his own garments as soon as he becomes human again; this explains why the clothes turned into stone while the soldier was in wolf form, but when Niceros went back to check the area where they were previously located, they had disappeared. In both cases, the emphasis placed on the recovery of the clothes which had been left behind probably harbors a symbolic meaning, but Petronius, as I will argue later, furnishes it with ritualistic importance by having the soldier urinate around them as a form of protection.

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<sup>67</sup> Baldwin (1986) 9 thinks of the urination around the clothes as a comic version of the story in Plin. *HN* 8.80-81; Schuster (1930) also recognizes the parody in Petronius' choice of selecting the specific ritual.

The place and time of the metamorphosis are important elements peculiar to Petronius' account. It is possible that, by situating the event in a cemetery in the middle of the night, he sought to establish a link with either medicine, and thus the human world, or with magic, and therefore the supernatural. Or again, he might have intended for both connections simultaneously, allowing the choice individually to his readers.

The transformation takes place while Niceros and the soldier are walking around in a graveyard (*intra monimenta*). The topography of the scene might have been inspired by medical descriptions of lycanthropy (λυκανθρωπία), a mental disease which would cause the afflicted person to wander around cemeteries until dawn (Orib. *Syn.* 8.9):

Οἱ τῆ λυκανθρωπία κατεχόμενοι νυκτὸς ἐξίασι τὰ πάντα λύκους μιμούμενοι καὶ μέχρις ἡμέρας περὶ τὰ μνήματα διατρίβουσι.

Those afflicted by lycanthropy go out at night imitating wolves and they spend their time in cemeteries until dawn.

The extant medical works which describe the onset of the disease, its symptoms, and possible cures are dated to late antiquity and the early Byzantine times. However, this does not mean that lycanthropy was unknown to earlier physicians. According to the *Suda* (μ 205), Marcellus of Side, the doctor who flourished under the emperors Hadrian and Antonius Pius, had composed a didactic epic on lycanthropy. Although the poem does not survive, a prose form of his account was included in the entries of medical encyclopedias on the disease, and Aëtius (6.11) explicitly attributes the information he provides to Marcellus (Περὶ λυκανθρωπίας ἤτοι κυνανθρωπίας Μαρκέλλου).<sup>68</sup> It is safe to assume that, even if lycanthropy and its symptoms were not medically described until some decades after Nero's reign, they at least would have been known through practical observation. The alternative which could justify the choice of a graveyard is the

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<sup>68</sup> Gordon (2015) 52 n. 44; for the extant fragments of Marcellus of Side, see Roscher (1896).

strong connection between burial grounds and witchcraft in both literature and real life. Ancient Greeks and Romans considered cemeteries a favorite place for witches to perform their debased rituals mainly for two reasons: first, they were regarded as liminal spaces between the Underworld and the world of the living, thus providing easier access to demons and evil spirits (*paredroi*) summoned in magic rites; second, they were the ideal place to collect many of the necessary objects and ingredients used in witchcraft. In *Sat.* 1.8, Horace narrates through the eyes of an effigy of Priapus the rituals of two witches that take place in a garden planted on top of an old burial ground (*hoc miserae plebi stabat commune sepulcrum*), and in the *Bellum Ciuile* Lucan describes how Erichtho makes her home near deserted tombs (*desertaque busta / incolit et tumulos expulsis obtinet umbris*, 6.511-12), allowing her to gather in copious amounts what she needs for her rituals (6.533-69). Of course, the literary accounts reflect popular views about witches, but their origins can be traced in real life practices as well. More specifically, many lead tablets containing curses have been excavated in cemeteries, inside or around tombs, and as scholars have argued, this was standard practice for binding spells which invoked the assistance of underworld spirits to put the curse into effect.<sup>69</sup> This also becomes clear from the instructions included in some of the spells of the *PGM* which ask the performer to bury a particular item inside a tomb: III 25-26 the body of a dead cat in a grave or burial place (ἐν μνή[μ]ατι [ἢ ἐν ἰ<sup>α</sup>τ]ῶ τόπω [τοῦ<sup>β</sup> τά[φου]); III 285 ἐν τύμβ[ω.....]; IV 2220 a seashell in the tomb of a *biaiothanatos* (εἰς ἄωρου μνήμα); XII 211 a ring in a sanctified grave in order to consecrate it (ἐν σήματι); IV 2215 an inscribed tablet in the tomb of a *biaiothanatos* (ἐπὶ ἄωρου θήκη). As for the importance of graveyards as a place supplying materials for magic rituals, this can be inferred also from the text of the *PGM*. For instance, *PDM* xiv 429 lists “seven grains of barley

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<sup>69</sup> The practice of depositing binding spells in graves had been common at least since the classical period as we infer from Plat. *Leg.* 11.933d; Gager (1992) 250 offers a brief, but insightful discussion of the passage.



from a dead man's tomb" as an ingredient for a potion; *PGM* IV 2879 requires the use of "ousia of a virgin untimely dead" as an offering during the spell; necromantic spells such as IV 1996 almost always necessitate the use of a human skull (σκύφος) or a whole body (e.g., *PDM* xiv 1070 [a mummy]).<sup>70</sup> The only place where someone could have free access to unlimited supplies of this nature was most certainly a cemetery.<sup>71</sup>

The time of the metamorphosis might also to be an addition inspired either from medical writings or popular views about witchcraft. More specifically, the phrase *circa gallicinia* sets the time about two hours after midnight, thus recalling the descriptions of the disease of lycanthropy which place its onset at night (νυκτός).<sup>72</sup> However, I am more inclined to believe that this detail intended to enhance the magical aspect of Petronius' tale rather than its plausibility as can be inferred by the emphasis further placed on time by the use of *luna lucebat tamquam meridie*. Strikingly this phrase does not narrow further the hour defined by *circa gallicinia* and, therefore, seems redundant. One plausible explanation for this pleonasm would be Petronius' intention to point his readers toward the connection between the soldier's transformation and magic through the moon's association with the latter. Its light turns night into day, thus putting magical forces at work.<sup>73</sup> Another alternative is that he deliberately included the word *luna* in setting the transformation's timeframe in an effort to use planetary phases to define the exact hour as in

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<sup>70</sup> Jordan (1985) 251 discusses the five surviving examples of *ousia* discovered rolled up in *defixiones*. For a detailed discussion on *ousia* which usually comprised parts of the human body such as hair, nails, bones as well as clothing and personal items, see Hopfner (1921) 401-8.

<sup>71</sup> For the social disapproval of the exploitation of corpses, see Versnel (1991) 63, and Faraone (1991) 17; Bernard (1991) 364-69 argues that the punishment for desecrating a tomb was meant to stop the eviction of one corpse from the grave and inserting another rather than its exploitation in magic rituals. However, digging out bodies for magical purposes was not a literary invention since Ammianus Marcellinus wrote that the capital punishment was enforced in cases where someone would desecrate a tomb for such purposes (19.12.14).

<sup>72</sup> For the time of the soldier's transformation, see Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 256.

<sup>73</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 256.

spells (see, for example, *PGM* II 43 ἀπὸ ζ' τῆς σελήνης; III 338 εἰς τὴν ἀνατολὴν τῆς σελήνης τριακονθήμερον; III 455 τῆς σελήνης οὔσης δευτέρας; IV 57 σελήνης δὲ πληρωθε[ίσης]).<sup>74</sup>

The last addition of a magical element in Petronius' account is the reference to urine as a confining agent protecting the clothes of the soldier while in wolf form.<sup>75</sup> In general, this liquid by-product of human metabolism had many uses, of which some could be characterized as practical medicine at best, while others as superstition.<sup>76</sup> The second case, which is the one that this study is concerned with, is clearly exhibited through certain examples found in the magical papyri. In *PDM* xiv 956-60 urine functions as an indicator of female fertility: a woman must urinate on the 'Great Nile' plant at night. If the plant is scorched the next day, she cannot conceive, if it does not, she can become pregnant). *PDM* xii 76-107 and xiv 636-69 both list urine as an ingredient of spells to be used for two completely opposite purposes: the former is a spell of separation while the latter is one of attraction. Although there is no extant spell attesting to the confining powers of urine, Pliny offers some important information that might confirm its restraining powers: Osthanes, the Persian Magus who followed Xerxes throughout his military campaign, and whose work survived up to Pliny's time, maintained that drops of urine on someone's foot in the morning functioned as protection against evil enchantments (*Osthanes contra mala medicamenta omnia auxiliari promisit matutinis suam cuique instillatam in pedem, HN* 28.69). Although to ward off evil, and to confine something or someone are opposite actions, their essence is basically the same: there are boundaries which one cannot cross in order to enter

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<sup>74</sup> For the conventional way of timekeeping in Imperial Rome, see Aldrete (2004) 241-44.

<sup>75</sup> Smith (1975) 173: "Before changing into a wolf the werewolf must first take off all his clothes, and his resumption of human form depends on safeguarding them. Hence the circle of urine is probably to be seen as a magic device for protecting them rather than for effecting his transformation into a wolf."

<sup>76</sup> Galen (*De simpl. med. fac.* 10.2.15) discusses the various medical uses of urine; for the magical aspect of ancient medicine; see Edelstein (1937) 201-46.

or leave. And perhaps this is the purpose of the witches' urinating on Aristomenes in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 1.13.8.<sup>77</sup>

The analysis of Niceros' tale strongly suggests that Petronius combined the Arcadian werewolf tradition with elements of magic and medicine, intending to create an account closer to the reality of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. But realism lies not only in these details with which he furnishes the legend, but also in the intranarrative comments of characters, illustrating their belief in the truthfulness of the werewolf story. Niceros first affirms this belief by stating that he is not joking and that he would not lie about his experience even for all the money in the world (*nolite me iocari putare; ut mentiar, nullius patrimonium tanti facio*). Given that freedmen based their social status on their fortune and not on their ancestry, the claim is quite compelling for his audience which mostly consists of members of this social class.<sup>78</sup> Finally, when he concludes the story, he utters a conditional self-imprecation asking to suffer the wrath of the audience's *genii* if he is lying (*ego si mentior, genios uestros iratos habeam*). Even though swearing to one's own honesty is a common rhetorical trope to avoid objections from the audience, the latter's social status in this case (being freedmen and low-class individuals) might allow us to assume that Niceros would not have expected any negative reactions.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, Trimalchio's comments immediately after the end of the werewolf tale prove that there was no hint of disbelief in its veracity among the other freedmen (*Saluo [...] tuo sermone [...] si qua fides est, ut mihi pili inhorruerunt, quia scio Niceronem nihil nugarum narrare: immo certus est et minime linguosus, §63*).<sup>80</sup> Thus, the comments are meant to enhance the story's realism by illustrating that there

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<sup>77</sup> Scobie (1975) 109 s.v. *uesicam exonerant* claims that urinating on a person intends to hinder them from leaving a specific place. Perhaps it was the bad odor that lead people to assume that urine had such powers.

<sup>78</sup> For the power and status of the freedmen relating to their wealth, see Mouritsen (2011) 109-19.

<sup>79</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 259 interpret Niceros' statement as a rhetorical device.

<sup>80</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 260.

were parts of Roman society who would not hesitate to believe in supernatural stories as it was the case in real life.

### Trimalchio's Witches

As soon as Niceros finishes his tale, Trimalchio embarks on narrating his own story which he presents as a recollection of a personal experience from the time he was a young slave. The incident, which involves the snatching of a dead body by two witches as well as the sudden, unexplained death of an otherwise healthy Cappadocian slave after encountering them is also meant to entertain Trimalchio's guests. The character of the story is supernatural (*rem horribilem*), and the narrated events difficult to believe (*asinus in tegulis*, §63).<sup>81</sup>

Cum ergo illum mater misella plangeret et nos tum plures in tristimonio essemus, subito strigae stridere coeperunt; putares canem leporem persequi. Habebamus tunc hominem Cappadocem, longum, ualde audaculum et qui ualebat: poterat bouem iratum tollere. Hic audacter stricto gladio extra ostium procucurrit, inuoluta sinistra manu curiose, et mulierem tanquam hoc loco —saluum sit, quod tango—mediam traiecit. Audimus gemitum, et—plane non mentiar—ipsas non uidimus. Baro autem noster introuersus se proiecit in lectum, et corpus totum liuidum habebat quasi flagellis caesus, quia scilicet illum tetigerat mala manus. Nos cluso ostio redimus iterum ad officium, sed dum mater amplexaret corpus filii sui, tangit et uidet manuciolum de stramentis factum. Non cor habebat, non intestina, non quicquam: scilicet iam puerum strigae inuolauerant et supposuerant stramenticium uauatonem. Rogo uos, oportet credatis, sunt mulieres plussciae, sunt nocturnae, et quod sursum est, deorsum faciunt. Ceterum baro ille longus post hoc factum nunquam coloris sui fuit, immo post paucos dies phreneticus perit.

Well, his poor mother was crying over him and the rest of us were deep in depression, when the witches suddenly started howling – you'd think it was a dog after a hare. 'At that time we had a Cappadocian chap, tall and a very brave old thing, quite the strong man – he could lift an angry ox. This fellow rushed outside with a drawn sword, first wrapping his left hand up very carefully, and he stabbed one of the women right through the middle, just about here – may no harm come to where I'm touching! We heard a groan but – naturally I'm not lying – we didn't see the things themselves. Our big fellow, however, once he was back inside, threw himself on his bed. His whole body was black and blue, as though he'd been whipped. The evil hand, you see, had been put on him. 'We closed the door and went back to what we

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<sup>81</sup> Trimalchio achieves *captatio beneuolentiae* by predisposing his audience about the content of his tale.

had to do, but as the mother puts her arms round her son's body, she touches it and finds it's only a handful of straw. It had no heart, no inside, no anything. Of course the witches had already stolen the boy and put a straw baby in its place. 'I put it to you, you can't get away from it – there are such things as women with special powers and midnight hags that can turn everything upside down. But that great tall fellow of ours never got his colour back after what happened. In fact, not many days later, he went crazy and died.' (trans. Sullivan)

The passage is an account of the popular tale about the metamorphic witch. Even though the ability of magicians and sorcerers to shape-shift had already been established in popular thought long before Petronius' time, the idea of the transformation into screech-owl was probably developed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E.<sup>82</sup> Using linguistic evidence from multiple authors, Constantini argues that the loanword *striga* (<στρίγγα [στρίξ, -γγός=owl]) “transcends its Greek literary origins and becomes a word to label not a monstrous and bloodthirsty bird, but a fearsome metamorphic witch.”<sup>83</sup> In both Republican and Augustan literature, *strix* is consistently used to denote only the ominous bird.<sup>84</sup> The connection with the shape-shifting witch first occurs in the *Fasti* (6.141-42), where Ovid expresses the possibility of the *strix* being in fact an old hag who assumed this form by means of incantation (*siue igitur nascuntur aues, seu carmine fiunt / neniaque in uolucres Marsa figurat anus*).<sup>85</sup> Even if we accept that the idea of a woman being able to transform into a screech-owl had been circulating for a while among the common people, it is Ovid's literary attestation that solidifies it, creating a universal model for subsequent

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<sup>82</sup> Constantini (2016) 6.

<sup>83</sup> Constantini (2016) 7; his linguistic analysis on pages 7-8 is quite compelling.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Plaut. *Pseud.* 820; Plin. *HN* 11.232; Tib. 1.5.52; Ov. *Met.* 7.269; Prop. 3.6.29, 4.5.17; Petr. 134.1. The oldest occurrence of the word *strix* in Latin is found in Plautus' *Pseudolus* in a passage where the cook disparages his rivals by claiming that they put in their dishes *striges* which rip the intestines of those who eat their food. The vile nature of this bird is also underlined in Serenus Sammonicus' *Liber Medicinalis* 1035, in which the poet, citing Titinius, mentions that the *strix* would make a baby suckle her breast milk which was in fact poison. In the realm of witchcraft, parts of this bird were used as ingredients for magic charms and potions such as the one Canidia prepares in Hor. *Sat.* 5.19-20. As a bird of ill-omen, and a veritable bird of Hell (Sen. *Herc. Fur.* 686-88; Hyg. *Fab.* 28), it figured prominently also in curses. For a detailed discussion on the nature of the *strix*, an analysis of the passages which refer to it as well as the transformation of the legend, see Oliphant (1913) 133-49, and (1914) 49-63.

<sup>85</sup> In *Am.* 1.8.13-14, Ovid suspects that the old hag Dipsas can change into a bird (*hanc ego nocturnas uersam uolitare per umbras / suspicor, et plumis corpus anile tegi*) without though mentioning specifically the *strix*.

authors. Petronius confirms the assumption of Ovid by creating a story about this type of witch, and by adopting a distinctive linguistic term for her description (*striga*).

As one would expect, the *striga* bears many of the bird's qualities such as its characteristic shriek (*stridere*), its appearance during the night (*nocturnas*), and a preference to prey on children (*puerum*). But Petronius also furnishes her portrayal with elements of the stereotypical image of the Roman witch: she is wise (*plussciae*), and she has the power to upset the natural order (*quod sursum est, deorsum faciunt*) like Seneca's Medea, and Lucan's Erichtho.<sup>86</sup> But there is more than that. In his discussion of the various Greek and Roman texts dealing with the screech-owl, Oliphant described in detail "the essential characteristics of the uncontaminated legend of the *strix*" and noted three important differences with Petronius' account:<sup>87</sup> The *striges* are often depicted as birds consuming the viscera or sucking the blood of their victims who were usually babies. However, Petronius' *strigae* snatch the corpse of someone already diseased, probably not with the intention to feast on it as Oliphant surmised, but to obtain the necessary ingredients for their magic rituals. Besides, this seems to be the reason for the *anus cantatrices*' attempt to steal the corpse which ends up with Thelyphron's mutilation in Apuleius (*Met.* 2.30). And we are aware of the Graeco-Roman belief that witches killed men, and especially young boys for their rituals because their livers were used as ingredients in love potions, their entrails in divination, and their bodies, just as that of any other human being, in necromancy rituals.<sup>88</sup> That Petronius' *strigae* stole the body for similar purposes seems to be further supported by the second significant difference which is the replacement of the dead body with a mummy-doll. The description of the *uauato* lays emphasis on the absence of the heart and

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<sup>86</sup> See the discussion in Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 263.

<sup>87</sup> Oliphant (1913) 134-35.

<sup>88</sup> This is exactly the accusation that Cicero brought against Vatinius, trying to convince the audience that his opponent consulted the spirits of young boys who had been ritually sacrificed (Cic. *Vat.* 14), and the implication behind the descriptions of Sextus Pompey practicing black magic (*Anth. Lat.* 402 Shackleton Bailey).

the intestines, which might be an allusion to the use of human organs in witchcraft, and specifically the heart of an untimely dead (*PGM* IV 2573 καρδίαν ἄωρου) or a young boy (*PGM* IV 2642 καρδίαν παιδὸς νέου). Finally, Petronius' elaborate description of the fate of the Cappadocian is also a novelty which is meant to draw his sketching of the *striga* closer to the popular image of the witch in Rome. The brave slave falls ill immediately after his encounter with the witches, and within some days he dies of an unknown illness in delirium (*phreneticus periit*). Causing harm, either with a single touch or by means of poison, or incantation was the quintessential power of witches.

Like Niceros, Trimalchio also hints at the veracity of his story in a warning to his guests: *Rogo uos, oportet credatis, sunt mulieres plussciae, sunt nocturnae, et quod sursum est, deorsum faciunt* ("I put it to you, you can't get away from it – there are such things as women with special powers and midnight hags that can turn everything upside down"). It is worth noting, however, that these comments concern more the existence of witches in general rather than the specifics of his tale. This broad statement urges the audience to consider real all stories involving witches, including his, implying by extension that magic is also real.

Indeed, the impact of his words on the audience is illustrated at the beginning of §64. Encolpius, echoing Trimalchio's exhortation (*rogo uos, oportet credatis*), describes how the banqueters were astonished, but at the same time they showed no disbelief of what they just heard (*miramur nos et pariter credimus*). His claim is further affirmed by the subsequent performance of a quick ritual to ward off the witches, which involves the kissing of the table while uttering a wish that the *strigae* stay away from them (*osculatique mensam rogamus Nocturnas ut suis se teneant, dum redimus a cena*).<sup>89</sup> It is possible that Encolpius essentially refers to some form of domestic ritual, which took place regularly at banquets, like the one

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<sup>89</sup> Smith (1975) 178; Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 264.

detailed in §60.<sup>90</sup> As we learn from *Seru. Dan.*, there was a time of repose between the first two courses of a dinner, followed by a libation to the hearth and a boy proclaiming *Dii propitii*:

apud Romanos etiam cena edita sublatisque mensis primis silentium fieri solebat, quoad ea quae de cena libata fuerant ad focum ferrentur et in ignem darentur, ac puer deos propitios nuntiasset... (ad Verg. *Aen.* 1.730)

Even among Romans, after the dinner was served and the first course was cleared, there used to be a time of repose, until the offerings from the dinner were brought to the hearth and burned, and a boy had proclaimed the gods propitious...

In the *Satyrica*, the ritual occurs after the banqueters finished the main course, and just before the servants brought out the dessert (*secundae mensae*) in §68-69.<sup>91</sup> Due to the ubiquity and legitimacy of table rituals, whose function was based on the assimilation of the table with altars and the former's role as the *ara* of the *genius domus*, most Romans would regard the kissing of the table along with the wish against witches as a religious rather than a magical rite.<sup>92</sup> In any case, the performance of the ritual immediately after the inset narratives shows that the banqueters felt both threatened by the possibility of accidentally invoking the presence of witches and obliged to resort to this traditional ritual to avoid such development.<sup>93</sup>

### Witchcraft in Practice: The Rituals of Proselenos and Oenothea

When Encolpius arrives in Croton after the shipwreck, he meets Circe, a sexually promiscuous *matrona* who seduces him and makes him her lover. However, at a certain point in the narrative he becomes impotent. This negative development leads a desperate Circe to seek help in the local temple of Priapus. The first who attempts to heal him is Proselenos, an old lady (*aniculam*) who

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<sup>90</sup> For the ritual in §60, see Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 250.

<sup>91</sup> For the arrival of the *secundae mensae* in §68-69, see Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 250.

<sup>92</sup> Dölger (1930) 214; Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 264.

<sup>93</sup> The belief in the power of ritual-like actions and special artifacts to protect against evil spirits was neither strange nor uncommon among Petronius' contemporaries. For the wide use of the *fascinum*, and other protective amulets in Imperial Rome. See Ogden (1999) 51-54, Faraone (2018).



serves as the assistant of the main priestess, Oenothea.<sup>94</sup> Since Encolpius claimed that his condition is the result of magic (*ueneficio contactus sum*, §128) what treatment could work better than a magical one? And we know for a fact that there were spells such as *PGM VII 185* and *PDM lxi 58-62* which promised to cure erection problems. Proselenos' ritual is most indicative of Petronius' familiarity with contemporary magic and *superstitio* (§131):

illa de sinu licium protulit uarii coloris filis intortum ceruicemque uinxit meam. mox turbatum sputo puluerem medio sustulit digito frontemque repugnantis signauit . . . hoc peracto carmine ter me iussit expuere terque lapillos conicere in sinum, quos ipsa praecantatos purpura inuoluerat, admotisque manibus temptare coepit inguinum uires. dicto citius nerui paruerunt imperio manusque aniculae ingenti motu repleuerunt. at illa gaudio exultans "uides" inquit "Chrysis mea, uides, quod aliis leporem excitauit?"

The old woman brought out of her dress a string of variously coloured threads twisted together and bound it round my neck. Then mixing some dust with spittle, she took it on her middle finger and ignoring my repugnance, marked my forehead with it. After completing this spell, she instructed me to spit three times and drop down my chest, again three times, some pebbles which she had charmed and wrapped in purple. Then she began to test my virility with her hands. Faster than you could speak, the nerves obeyed the command, and the little old woman's hands were filled with a mighty throbbing. Leaping with joy, she said: 'Do you see, my dear Chrysis, do you see how I've started a hare for others to hunt?' (trans. Sullivan)

Unfortunately, the fragmentary condition of the text poses a challenge to our full understanding of Petronius' knowledge about magic. It is quite probable that the scene also included a spell uttered by Proselenos, and thus the phrase *hoc peracto carmine* refers to some lost verses which could have been modeled after real spells.<sup>95</sup> In any case, the ritual is described as consisting of both *logos* and *praxis*, thus conforming to the two-tiered structure of many spells in the *PGM*.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 23: The word *anus* and its diminutive are used in the *Satyrice* for female characters who display some of the following negative qualities: drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, ugliness and filthiness, practicing of witchcraft. In the cases of Proselenos and Oenothea the word denotes a priestess or a temple warden of bad reputation.

<sup>95</sup> The insertion of verses 9-10 of poem 81 of the *Anthologiae Burmanniannae*, although clever, seems a little arbitrary.

<sup>96</sup> See p. 110 n. 149.

Apart from this general observation, we can also distinguish between three different stages: 1) the preparation, 2) the magic utterance, and 3) the ritual proper.<sup>97</sup> During the first phase, Proselenos takes a thread made of multiple sewing fibers of different color and binds it around the neck of Encolpius. The thread functions as magical material (*ousia*) necessary for the effectiveness of sympathetic magic, and Schmeling assumes that it must have had some connection to Circe.<sup>98</sup> Without doubt, it is meant to tie Encolpius to his mistress, but since this is primarily a healing spell and the protagonist alleges that his impotence was inflicted by means of magic, we can assume that it might also function as an amulet which intends to counteract the effects of a negative spell.<sup>99</sup> Amulets (in Greek *periamma* or *periapton*, literally meaning “object tied around”) in their simplest form consisted of a bunch of fibers twisted together.<sup>100</sup> More elaborate phylacteries comprise inscribed tablets, stones or voodoo dolls which are tied around various body parts, most notably the neck, with a magical thread.<sup>101</sup> This practice is attested in both the text of the *PGM* (I 69, I 147, IV 1084-86, VII 210) and literary passages (Plin. *HN* 28.48; Verg. *Ecl.* 8.73-74; Ov. *Fast.* 2.572). The most notable example is *PGM* VII 260-71, which is a spell for the ascent of the uterus. According to the instructions, the spell caster needs to engrave the magic formula on a tin leaf, and then hang it around their neck with a thread made of fibers of seven different colors. Although Petronius’ description appears to be generic, and it could have been based on earlier literary accounts, we cannot exclude the possibility that the author might have been familiar with such practices through hearsay or personal experience.

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<sup>97</sup> For the three different phases of the ritual, see Setaioli (2000).

<sup>98</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 499.

<sup>99</sup> Since Encolpius and Circe cannot be bound to each other by marriage or the power of true love, Proselenos ties them with magical threads which reminds us of Lucan’s reference to the *iunx* in 6.458-60. Weinrich (1909) 97 views the process as a healing ritual while Panayotakis (1995) 173 wonders if it is destined to fail.

<sup>100</sup> A *periamma* could consist of only threads which would then be tied around any body parts as *PG* 36.907 B-C suggests.

<sup>101</sup> For an overview of the different forms and functions of amulets, see Ogden (2002) 261-74, and Faraone (2018).

The preparation continues with Proselenos spitting on the ground to form mud, and then using her middle finger to mark Encolpius' forehead with it. The properties of saliva were noted in ancient literature, and Pliny discusses several medical applications in *HN* 28.35-39. Among them, however, there are some which can be better described as superstitions rather than medical treatments such as someone spitting into their urine while they urinate or in their right shoe before wearing it as well as spitting while passing from a place where they had been in any type of danger in the past. These practices are separated from medical ones by Pliny himself who calls them *amuleta* (28.38):

inter amuleta est editae quemque urinae inspuere, similiter in calciamentum dextri pedis, priusquam induatur, item cum quis transeat locum, in quo aliquod periculum adierit.

It is considered a charm to spit while one relieves themselves, and likewise on the right foot's shoe before putting it on, and while one crosses a place in which he has incurred some danger.

Even though the mixing of saliva and mud to create a magical ointment is attested only in Petronius' *Satyrical* and in John 9:6, spitting as an apotropaic act against the Evil Eye was very common.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, the middle finger (*digitus medius, infamis* or *impudicus*) as a symbolic representation of the *membrum uirile* also figured prominently in apotropaic acts as we surmise from Juvenal (*cum Fortunae ipse minaci/ mandaret laqueum mediumque ostenderet unguem,* 10.52-53), the *Carmina Priapea* (*derides quoque, fur, et impudicum/ ostendis digitum mihi minanti?* 56.1-2), and Martial (*rideto multum qui te, Sextille, cinaedum/ dixerit et digitum*

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<sup>102</sup> For the similarities between the ritual of Proselenos and the specific *locus* in the New Testament, see the studies by Ramelli (1996) 75-80, and Setaioli (2000) 159-72.

*porrigito medium*, 2.28.1-2).<sup>103</sup> The closest parallel of Proselenos' ritual is found in Persius' *Satire 2*, in which the poet criticizes various aspects of the religious life of his contemporaries, most notably their *superstitio*. In lines 31-34 he mocks older women who resort to apotropaic acts to protect their grandchildren, and his description appears almost identical with the ritual performed by Proselenos: *Ecce auia aut metuens diuum matertera cunis/ exemit puerum frontemque atque uda labella/ infami digito et lustralibus ante saliuus/ expiat* (Look, a grandmother or an aunt fearing the gods took the boy from the cradle and first protects his forehead and wet lips with the infamous finger and magical saliva"). This excerpt supports further the idea that Petronius modeled the ritual of Proselenos based on everyday religious habits of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

The preparatory actions were followed by a spell which is now lost. As soon as Proselenos finished her utterance she proceeded with the third phase, i.e. the ritual proper. She instructed Encolpius to spit in his breast thrice and throw three enchanted stones wrapped in purple clothing on his lap.<sup>104</sup> The apotropaic function of spitting is found *passim* in Graeco-Roman literature: for example, Theocritus' refers to spitting as a means to avert bad luck (*Id.* 6.39–40 and 7.126–27), and connects it with rituals performed by an old woman (γραιά). In *Idyll 6*, Polyphemus admits that when he noticed his reflection on the sea, he spat three times into his bosom as the old woman Cottytaris had taught him so that he will not be affected by the Evil Eye. In *Idyll 7*, a singer concludes his song with the wish for peace between himself and his singer-opponent, asking also for the presence of an old woman who can avert evil by spitting on

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<sup>103</sup> The power of phallus to avert the Evil Eye is well-documented through texts and archaeological findings. For a brief discussion and some ancient passages referring to this matter, see Francese (2007) 194-95; Bernand (1991) 102 claims that the act of spitting and the *membrum virile* are employed together in a Roman mosaic portraying a phallus ejaculating into a disembodied eye (the Evil Eye). For a detailed discussion on the phallus and its connection to the Evil Eye, see Johns (1982) 61-76, and Clarke (2003) 94-113.

<sup>104</sup> For the significance of number "three" in magic, see p. 116 n. 158.; for the purple color and its relation to magic, see Weinreich (1909) 97-99; for the healing properties of stones and their use in magic rites, see McMahon (1998) 157-73, Burriss (1933) 47, and *RE* s.v. Λιθικά.

both. The *scholia* on Theocritus attest that the action of spitting on an object or person for the purpose of protecting them from the Evil Eye was often preceded by an incantation, thus suggesting a possible connection between the rites of Proselenos and real ones.<sup>105</sup> This is further affirmed by Pliny's account of the popular superstition involving an infant's nurse spitting three times on the child if a stranger arrives or a sleeping infant is looked upon (*HN* 28.39). The ritual ends with the priestess testing Encolpius' *membrum uirile* through touching. Upon first reading, this act seems to be more of an aftermath of the ritual with the purpose of checking the effectiveness of the spell rather than part of it. Besides, this is exactly what the protagonist claims it to be. But the act of rubbing the penis by prolonged touching (*temptare coepit*), is part of the magic rite against impotence in *PGM* VII 185-86 (Στ[ύ]ειν, ὅτε θέλεις· πέπερι μετὰ μέλιτος τρίψας χριῖ σου τὸ πρᾶγμα) as well as *PDM* lxi 58-62. A ritual for the same purpose, very similar to that of Proselenos, is detailed in Hipponax (fr. 78 West) and which calls the patient to redden the tip of his penis with mulberry juice, and then spit on it thrice.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps the very last part of the ritual in the *Satyrica* might owe more to Hipponax than scholarship has recognized, but in any case, the ritual in §131 should be viewed as an amalgam of literary tradition and magical *realia* of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E.

As he does with the inset narratives in the *Cena*, Petronius maximizes the realism of this scene by emphasizing the characters' belief in the success of the ritual, which probably reflected the attitude of a part of contemporary Roman society toward such practices. Encolpius describes with naïveté how the old priestess was testing his penis, and how he started having an erection, probably attributing his cure to the ritual. Proselenos' comments also enhance the scene's realism from two different aspects: on the one hand, she expresses a firm belief in the effectiveness of

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<sup>105</sup> Dickie (2001) 325 n. 59: "What has moved the singer to utter the prayer for an old woman is the danger created by his public expression of a wish Sch. (a & b) in Theocr. 7.127."

<sup>106</sup> For the reconstruction and the commentary on this fragment, see West (1974) 142-43.

her magic powers as every superstitious Roman probably would have done; on the other hand, it is she who performs the ritual, and perhaps Petronius intended to show how charlatans in real life attempted to convince a naïve individual for the effectiveness of their art.

The spell proves only temporarily successful, and Encolpius' illness recurs after his sexual encounter with Circe, leading Proselenos to openly wonder what evil has befallen him (§134: *quae striges comederunt neruos tuos, aut quod purgamentum [in] nocte calcasti in triuio aut cadauer?*, "What screech-owls have eaten your nerve away or what filth or corpse have you stepped on at a crossroad at night?"). She attributes the protagonist's recurring impotence to two possible causes: either he is the victim of screech-owls who took away his sexual power, or he has been inflicted by some form of magic while roaming close to a crossroad. The first explanation is based on the popular superstition that screech-owls consume the *viscera* and the marrow of living beings while the second relates to the common belief that crossroads were favorite spots for witches to perform their activities.<sup>107</sup> Proselenos' rhetorical question, although it hints at the failure of her own spell, does not cast any doubt on the power of magic. On the contrary, it enforces its value by implying that Encolpius is bound by greater charms which need to be dealt with by a witch more powerful than herself.

For this reason, she leads the protagonist into Oenothea's room (*in cellam sacerdotis*) and presents the situation: *Oenothea, hunc adolescentem quem uides, malo astro natus est* ("Oh, Oenothea,' she said, 'it's this young man you see here. He was born under an evil star"). The phrase provides a third explanation for Encolpius' impotence through astrology, a form of pseudo-science which in and of itself was not considered magic since it was widely accepted as a legitimate art and practiced by reputable Romans such as Octavius and Nigidius Figulus.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 518; for a discussion on the strigae, see pp. 40-42.

<sup>108</sup> Barton (1994) 39-49.

However, it is beyond question that a conceptual link was established between these two arts at least since the time of Pliny who considers astrology, along with medicine, one of the source-disciplines of magic (*HN* 30.2).<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the connection was not made based solely on theoretical grounds, but also on the practical application of astrology. More specifically, Romans included astrology among other forms of magical divination, if the former was used illegally such as in the attempt to predict the date of an emperor's death.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, astrology was not assimilated with magic, unless through its association with other witchcraft practices or if its practitioner was reputedly a witch or sorcerer as it is the case in Petronius.<sup>111</sup>

Oenothea claims that she is the only one who can cure Encolpius' impotence, which she admits is a trivial task compared to what she is capable of. Her magical powers are detailed in the hexametric poem at the end of §134:

quicquid in orbe uides, paret mihi. florida tellus, cum uolo, siccatis arescit languida sucis, cum uolo, fundit opes, scopulique atque horrida saxa Niliacas iaculantur aquas. mihi pontus inertes submittit fluctus, zephyrique tacentia ponunt	5
ante meos sua flabra pedes. mihi flumina parent Hyrcaenaeque tigres et iussi stare dracones. quid leuiores loquor? lunae descendit imago carminibus deducta meis, trepidusque furentes flectere Phoebus equos reuoluto cogitur orbe.'	10
[tantum dicta ualent. taurorum flamma quiescit uirgineis extincta sacris, Phoebeia Circe carminibus magicis socios mutauit Ulixes, Proteus esse solet quicquid libet. his ego callens artibus Idaeos frutices in gurgite sistam et rursus fluuios in summo uertice ponam.]	15

'All things on earth obey me. At my wish

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<sup>109</sup> See also Graf (1999) 294.

<sup>110</sup> Garosi (1976) 76.

<sup>111</sup> For example, astral divination is recounted among the powers of witches in Philostr. *V.A* 7.39, and in the story of Thessalus of Thralles in *De uirtutibus herbarum* 1-28 we read that magical potions are more effective if the herbs are collected when the stars are appropriately aligned.

The flowering earth grows arid, the sap dry.  
 At my wish its benisons spill forth.  
 Rocks and jagged cliffs gush out Nile waters;  
 For me the ocean flattens its white tops;  
 The zephyrs lay their blasts hushed before my feet.  
 The rivers obey me,  
 Hyrcanian tigers, and dragon sentinels.  
 Small things to boast of! —  
 The orbed image of the moon descends  
 At the pull of my spells.  
 The Sun-god  
 Turns round his foaming horses  
 And fear-driven retraces his orbit.  
 Such power have words.  
 The hot breath of bulls is quenched  
 By the rites of virgins;  
 Sun-child Circe transformed Ulysses' crew  
 With magic spells.  
 Proteus turns into whatever shape he likes.  
 Expert in magical experience,  
 I will root Idaean trees in the sea.  
 Plant rivers on the topmost height.' (trans. Sullivan)

Such catalogues of the witch's powers are a *locus communis* in narratives of magic, and Oenothea's description has many similarities with earlier passages, most notably the list of Dipsas' powers in *Ov. Am.* 1.8.<sup>112</sup> The excerpt also bears close resemblance with *PGM XXXIV* 1-24, which Dodds considers a possible novel fragment.<sup>113</sup> In any case, the text refers to some of the most generic magical abilities of witches, including: control over nature and its elements (1-6); charming of animals, specifically tigers and snakes (7); drawing down the moon (8-9); manipulating planetary movement (9-10); and upsetting the natural order (14-16). To further showcase her powers, she indirectly compares them with those of Circe (12-13), one of the archetypal witches of ancient literature, as well as with Proteus' shape-shifting skills (14). By

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<sup>112</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 520.

<sup>113</sup> Dodds (1952) 133-37.



exaggerating her magical abilities, she intends to convince Encolpius to fully trust her so that she can take advantage of him sexually in the guise of healing his impotence.

In the following paragraphs, the protagonist accidentally commits a sacrilege against Priapus by killing the god's favorite goose, and after bribing Oenothea to spare him from punishment, she performs a magic ritual (§137):

infra manus meas camellam uini posuit, et cum digitos pariter extensos porris apioque lustrasset, auellanas nuces cum precatone mersit in uinum. et siue in summum redierant siue subsederant, ex hoc coniecturam ducebat. nec me fallebat inanes scilicet ac sine medulla [uentosas] nuces in summo umore consistere, graues autem et [plenas] integro fructu ad ima deferri \*

She put a cup of wine under my hands and after rubbing my outstretched fingers clean with onions and garlic, she threw some filberts into the wine, murmuring a prayer. She made various deductions from whether they came to the top or settled, but I didn't fail to notice that the empty nuts filled with air naturally stayed on the surface of the liquid, while the heavy, full nuts were carried to the bottom. (trans. Sullivan)

The purpose of this ritual is not clear. However, scholars assume that it is some type of fortunetelling, and various elements throughout the text point to a specific category of spells, namely bowl divination.<sup>114</sup> Oenothea first cleanses Encolpius by rubbing his hands with garlic and onion, both materials used in magic recipes: *PGM IV* 2581, 2687 list garlic as one of the materials of a spell and offering of coercion, respectively, while *IV 936* instructs the sorcerer to tie a garlic on a crown made of olive tree twig during a spell for direct vision; the use of onion is attested in *PGM IV* 1341, 2459, 2581, and 2646 as well as in *IV 85*, the last spell suggesting the existence of a specific ritual in which this vegetable had a central position; finally, wine was widely used in magic as we infer from *PGM XIII* 356-57 (preparatory ritual), *PDM xiv* 917-19 (a potion of 'evil sleep'), and *xiv* 722-804 (love potion). Oenothea then puts some nuts in the cup while uttering a prayer, perhaps

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<sup>114</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 534.

addressing the deity whose presence is necessary for the success of the spell. She then proceeds with her predictions based on whether the nuts floated or sank in the cup.

Despite his naïveté, Encolpius is able to recognize the trick behind Oenothea's rite (the empty shells would float, and the rest would sink in the bottom of the cup). By having his protagonist exhibit two different attitudes toward magic (a positive toward Proselenos' spell and a negative toward Oenothea's), Petronius offers a realistic depiction of human behavior. Encolpius' skepticism not only reflects that of some of the author's contemporaries, but also the doubts a superstitious person could cast on magic practices based on practical observation.

The healing ritual follows immediately after in §138:

profert Oenothea scorteum fascinum, quod ut oleo et minuto pipere atque urticae trito  
circumdedit semine, paulatim coepit inserere ano meo . . .  
hoc crudelissima anus spargit subinde umore femina mea \*  
nasturcii sucum cum habrotono miscet perfusisque inguinibus meis uiridis urticae  
fascem comprehendit omniaque infra umbilicum coepit lenta manu caedere \*

Oenothea brought out a leather dildo: this she rubbed with oil and ground pepper and crushed nettle seed, and began inserting it gradually up my anus ...  
The vicious old woman then sprinkled my thighs with this liquid.  
She mixed the juice of cress with some southern-wood, and after soaking my genitals in it, she took a green nettle-stalk and began whipping me steadily everywhere below the navel. (trans. Sullivan)

The passage seems to echo certain magic recipes as well as the failed ritual of Proselenos. The old woman covers a leather dildo with oil, ground pepper and nettle seeds, which brings to mind the process of manufacturing magic ointments such as those described in *PDM* xiv 1155-62 (“hawk’s dung; salt, reed, bele plant. Pound together. Anoint your phallus with it...”), and *PDM* lxi 58-62 (spell for erection: “Woad plant [or corn flag?] grows in the oasis in abundance; it's both female and [male]. Boil these in a pot and grind them up [in wine with] pepper;/ smear it on [your] genitals”). The use of pepper as a remedy for impotence is also attested in *PGM* VII 185-

86 (Στ[ύ]ειν, ὅτε θέλεις· πέπερι μετὰ μέλιτος τρίψας χριέ σου τὸ πρᾶγμα). She then soaks Encolpius' genitals in a mixture of cress juice and southern-wood and starts hitting them with the stem of a nettle.<sup>115</sup> The abuse of genitals is also part of the ritual detailed in Hipponax (fr. 78 West), which calls the patient to redden the tip of his penis with mulberry juice, and then spit on it thrice.<sup>116</sup> The ritual of Oenothea, like that of Proselenos, was possibly modeled after real magic spells which Petronius might have heard of or seen.

### Conclusions

As we have seen in this chapter, Petronius draws on reality to depict his fantastic and entertaining characters' encounters with magic. Rituals associated with magic inform the scenes we have examined, bringing the world of the narrative close to the real world. The portrayal of magic in the *Satyrica* is meant to underscore the ridiculous and ludicrous elements of the narrative in line with the generic tone of the work, but most importantly with a great deal of verisimilitude. In the next chapter, magic and its practitioners, namely Seneca's Medea, are exploited as moralizing models, incompatible with Stoic principles.

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<sup>115</sup> Schmeling and Setaioli (2011) 535.

<sup>116</sup> For the reconstruction and the commentary on this fragment, see West (1974) 142-43.

## CHAPTER 2:

### Seneca the Moralist

#### Senecan Drama as a Philosophical Teaching Tool

The purpose of Senecan drama has been studied extensively since the 1920's when Regenbogen wrote his seminal work *Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien Senecas*. The book which focuses on the plays' preoccupation with death and suffering to prove their philosophical inclinations inspired a long series of publications dealing with the philosophical value of Seneca's tragedies.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it gave rise to opposite voices which downplayed such tendencies, thus creating a lasting debate.<sup>2</sup> A major proponent of the philosophical orientation of Senecan drama is Marti who considered the tragedies a form of *prima philosophia*, that is, Stoic parables dealing with certain philosophical issues in a simpler and less advanced form than the prose works.<sup>3</sup> A more elaborate view was put forward by Egermann who claimed that in his plays Seneca subordinates poetry to the Stoic doctrines by using mythological *exempla* for educational purposes. More specifically, the tragedies are preoccupied with the evaluation of the "indifferents," things which according to Stoicism contribute nothing to happiness, and thus are morally insignificant.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to these scholars who accepted the in-depth philosophical value of the plays, Hadas assumed that Seneca wrote his plays with the sole purpose of entertaining his

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<sup>1</sup> Regenbogen (1927-28) was the first who considered Seneca's tragedies as varying "portraits of passion", paving the way for any subsequent philosophical interpretation. For a survey of the connections between Senecan drama and Stoicism, see Rosenmeyer (1989) 3-11.

<sup>2</sup> Ker (2009) 128 offers a brief presentation of the major philosophical interpretations of Senecan drama with related bibliography. For a discussion of the prose passages of Seneca's corpus which deal with the value of poetry, and the various theories for the interpretation of the plays derived from the philosopher's own comments, see Staley (2010) 24-41.

<sup>3</sup> Marti (1945a) 216-45. The term *prima philosophia*, Staley's translation of the Greek phrase used by Strabo, describes in a nutshell the character of Senecan drama as it was viewed by Marti.

<sup>4</sup> Egermann (1940) 41.

audience like his Roman predecessors did.<sup>5</sup> Recently, Staley argued that any moralizing tendencies in Senecan drama are to be found in the *sententiae*, and that the whole experience of the theater does not add to the beneficial effect of individual lines.<sup>6</sup> But as Nussbaum succinctly points out, onstage performances tend to have a greater impact on the audience than speeches in prose, arguing that the whole theatrical experience would have allowed the audience to identify with the characters of the play who speak, act, and react like them, thus facilitating the process of inner exploration, and self-recognition.<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum's claim is corroborated by *Ep.* 108.7-9 in which Seneca argues that for those who are not professed in philosophy, but innately bear the seed of virtue in them (*omnibus enim natura fundamenta dedit semenque uirtutum*), theater can instigate the feeling of righteousness and allow them to chastise their own sins (*uitiis suis fieri conuicium gaudet*), though not necessarily change their attitude afterwards (*pauci illam quam conceperant mentem domum perferre potuerunt*). The excerpt not only advocates for the apotropaic, but also –apparently to a lesser extent– the parenetic function of tragedy.

The power of tragedy to restrain the passions was marked also by earlier Stoics, most notably Chrysippus, the second founder of the Stoa. According to Diogenes Laertius 7.180, Chrysippus was said to have copied Euripides' *Medea*, and when somebody who was reading the text asked him what he was reading, he replied "The *Medea* of Chrysippus." As Chaumartin points out, this anecdotal story illustrates that the play represented so aptly the philosopher's doctrines on passion to the point that he felt as if it were composed by him. Through its depiction of woes and afflictions which arise as a result of passion, tragedy becomes a tool in the philosopher's effort to prevent the spectator from conceding to vice.<sup>8</sup> Strabo also confirmed the

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<sup>5</sup> Hadas (1939) 220-31.

<sup>6</sup> Staley (2010) 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum (1993) 127.

<sup>8</sup> Chaumartin (2014) 654.

apotropaic function of drama in Stoic philosophy, arguing that tragedy is among the literary genres that can teach ethics, not only through its content, but also through its very plot (Str. 1.2). Like epic poetry, it has the power to stir fear in the mind of the audience, thus acting as a deterrence against vice. Furthermore, it can provide models of imitation by depicting characters of exemplary virtue. It thus becomes clear that the Stoics valued highly the role of tragedy in philosophical teaching, and Seneca's dramatic compositions can be regarded as part of a longstanding tradition. Even though his prose works seem to generally advocate for a limited role of theater in philosophical teaching, this should not be taken as a total rejection of the former's pedagogical value.<sup>9</sup> Besides, why bother composing tragedies, instead of writing a book filled with his precious *sententiae*?

Whether the tragedies were meant to serve purposes of philosophical education is a question closely linked with another topic of Senecan scholarship, that is, the identity of Seneca. And I am not referring to Sidonius Apollinaris' ingenuous interpretation of Martial 1.61.7-8, who argued for the existence of two different individuals with the same name, a philosopher, and a tragic poet, but the double literary identity of the same person.<sup>10</sup> Modern scholarship concluded that Seneca *tragicus* and Seneca *philosophus* are the same person, and this concession has certain implications on how scholars should examine the author's corpus.<sup>11</sup> Even if the plays are not the simplest form of philosophy which Marti claimed them to be, they at least function as the springboard to an individual's philosophical pursuits. More specifically, the plays articulate a world with conspicuous ideological drawbacks to which the consolatory discourse of Stoic moral

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on Seneca's prose passages dealing with theater as a tool for philosophical teaching, see Staley (2010) 29-31.

<sup>10</sup> Sid. Apoll. *Carm.* 9.230-34 probably misinterpreting Mart. 1.61.7-8 (*duosque Senecas unicumque Lucanum / facunda loquitur Corduba*). Martial obviously refers to Seneca the Elder, and his son, Seneca the philosopher and dramatist.

<sup>11</sup> For a summary of the theories on the authorship of the Senecan corpus circulating in the renaissance, see Fischer (2014) 745-46.

philosophy is the answer.<sup>12</sup> Practically, the issues put forward in the plays such as the fragility of social and religious norms, civilization as moral contradiction, the terror of experienced evil, the triumph of evil and so on, are some of the central themes treated in detail in Seneca's prose works. In other words, the tragedies and the philosophical treatises form an organic unity, and the former remain somewhat meaningless, unless they are read in conjunction with the latter.<sup>13</sup>

But for any literary work serving educational purposes there should exist a target audience. In the case of Senecan drama, the question of spectatorship presents some serious problems because it is impossible to prove whether the tragedies were in fact put on stage. A long debate began in 1861 when Boissier first claimed that Seneca never intended for his plays to be performed.<sup>14</sup> The view was quickly disseminated among scholarly circles, and it dominated the field until 1924, when Herrmann refuted the arguments against stage production, and argued in its favor.<sup>15</sup> Herrmann's idea gained momentum with Bieber's 1954 article which provides archaeological and literary evidence for the staging of Seneca's plays during the poet's time. Indeed, as she argued, the tragedies have such dramatic force that it is at least uncritical to think that they were not on the repertoire of 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. actors.<sup>16</sup> Almost a decade later, Zwierlein brought Boissier's idea in the center again, claiming that Seneca's plays are unstageable. His case rests mostly on the lack of realism of certain scenes, but the standards he uses to reach this conclusion are modern ones, and thus his argument is flawed.<sup>17</sup> I am more inclined to side with Fortey and Glucker's as well as Calder's studies on the topic. The former analyzes several passages from the *Phaedra* which provide instructions to the director, to illustrate that Seneca

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<sup>12</sup> Boyle (1997) 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Tarrant (2006) 1-18 examines some pervasive aspects of Seneca's thought and writing style in both his tragedies and prose works.

<sup>14</sup> Boissier (1861) believed that the plays were not meant to be staged, but to be read during public lectures.

<sup>15</sup> Herrmann (1924) 152-232 based on both internal and external textual evidence, argues in favor of stage production.

<sup>16</sup> Bieber (1954) 100-6.

<sup>17</sup> Zwierlein (1966).

wrote his plays with the possibility of stage production in mind while the latter further suggests that the tragedies were performed in private theaters, in front of a small number of people.<sup>18</sup> More recently, Fitch argued that Seneca probably wrote his plays having in mind that only some parts rather than the whole plays would be performed on stage. Of course, he does not claim that Seneca had no expectation of performance, but his idea explains the high theatricality of the plays' climactic scenes.<sup>19</sup> Whether the tragedies of Seneca were performed or not is a question that cannot be answered conclusively. What matters more is whether he wrote his plays having in mind the possibility of performance. Since authors and poets adhere to certain rules which are innate to the genre they choose to write, they are always compelled to envisage their respective audience. That said, when writing his tragedies, Seneca probably imagined his future spectators listening to and watching the characters' speeches and actions, and tried to foresee how they would perceive the underlying messages. But who were these people meant to be? Was it every contemporary Roman? Was it only those who were interested in Stoicism? Or was it the members of the Neronian court and the emperor himself? Indisputably, both the name and the works of Seneca were widely known during his lifetime as multiple literary sources indicate, and as we can infer from the following archaeological evidence: *CIL IV Suppl.* 4418 is an inscription of the name of Seneca from a graffito in Pompeii while *CIL IV Suppl.* 6698 is a line from his play *Agamemnon*. But since we lack concrete evidence for public performances of Senecan plays, we can speculate that his tragedies were at least read among the people, and perhaps some of their parts were staged in private performances which at the beginning would have been confined to the members of the Neronian court, including the emperor himself. And if Suetonius' attestation that Agrippina had averted Nero from studying philosophy on the grounds that it was

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<sup>18</sup> Fortey and Glucker (1975); Calder (1976) 1-11.

<sup>19</sup> Fitch (2000) 7.



unsuited for someone who was going to be an emperor is true (Suet. *Ner.* 52: *a philosophia eum mater auertit monens imperaturo contrariam esse*), it is very likely that Seneca composed his tragedies as an effort to attract Nero's interest on philosophical issues through the latter's love for the theater.<sup>20</sup>

This idea can be further supported by the probable dates of Seneca's tragedies, all of which were written after he returned from exile, and assumed his position as Nero's tutor in 49 C.E. Admittedly, the dating of the plays is another thorny question of Senecan scholarship since none of them can be dated with precision, and the only factual possibility so far is to establish a relative chronology.<sup>21</sup> In his seminal 1981 article, Fitch divided the eight surviving plays in three chronological groupings based on certain stylistic features. The early group consists of the *Agamemnon*, *Phaedra* and *Oedipus*; the middle plays are *Medea*, *Troades*, and *Hercules Furens*; *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* form the late group. Since the *Hercules Furens* is parodied in the *Apocolocyntosis*, 54 C.E. is the *terminus ante quem* for the play, and therefore, the early and late plays should be dated before and after that date, respectively.<sup>22</sup> An attempt to narrow the dates was made by Nisbet who divided the chronological framework of Seneca's literary activities in four phases: 1) the period of exile (41-48 C.E.), the years of Nero's tutoring (49-54 C.E.), the era of his prominence in the Imperial court (54-62 C.E.), and the years after his retirement (62-65 C.E.).<sup>23</sup> Using both intratextual and extratextual evidence, he reaches the following conclusions: the *Troades* and *Hercules Furens* were composed before 54; the *Medea* can be dated around 51-52 while *Phaedra* could have been written as early as 49; for the

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<sup>20</sup> Literary sources attest unanimously to Nero's love for poetry and theater: Tac. *Ann.* 14.15-16; 15.33; 16.4; Suet. *Ner.* 10.2; Plin. *HN* 30.14. For a discussion of Nero's love for the arts, and his obsession with performance, see Champlin (2003) 53-83, Fantham (2013) 17-28, and more recently Leigh (2017) 21-33.

<sup>21</sup> Pratt (1983) 13-15 briefly mentions some of the major obstacles in dating the plays conclusively. Fitch (1981) 289-307, and Nisbet (2008) 348-71 offer a relative chronology. For other suggestions on the dating issue, see Zwierlein (1983) 233-48.

<sup>22</sup> Fitch (1981) 307.

<sup>23</sup> Nisbet (2008) 348-49.

*Agamemnon* and *Oedipus*, he proposes a date before the death of Agrippina in 59; finally, the *Thyestes* and the *Phoenissae* which are to be grouped together, were probably composed around 62. More recently, Marshall, who adopts Fitch's categorization, argued that the early plays were composed during Seneca's exile in Corsica. To prove his thesis, he relies on a reference in Quintilian in which the rhetor recalls an exchange he witnessed in his youth between Pomponius Secundus and Seneca about a tragedy (Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.31). This conversation, Marshall claims, should have taken place soon after the return of Pomponius to Rome at the end of 51 C.E., thus suggesting "a public presentation of a play in some form in the early 50s". However, he continues, the time of its composition could have been much earlier.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Seneca could have composed the play years before. Or not. Given that the writing of plays was presumably a metropolitan activity as Nisbet points out, and that it makes more sense if the plays were written with the intention of providing Nero some form of moral education, I find the dating of all plays after 49 C.E. the most plausible scenario.<sup>25</sup>

### Religion and Superstition in the Works of Seneca

One of the topics which Seneca treats *passim* in his prose works is that of religion, and like the other prominent authors of the Neronian period, namely Lucan and Petronius, he also engages in the discussion which represented the most important religious debate of Neronian literature: the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*.<sup>26</sup> Of course, as a philosopher Seneca would have quite different and more elaborate views on what constitutes the essence of each item of the dichotomy, compared to both his contemporaries, and certainly, the Roman "ancestors."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For the dating of the early plays in the period of Seneca's exile, see Marshall (2014) 37-39.

<sup>25</sup> Nisbet (2008) 351.

<sup>26</sup> Šterbenc Erker (2013) 126-30.

<sup>27</sup> For the evolution of the term *superstitio* from the Republican period to late antiquity, see Mayor (1883) 2.183-86. A detailed discussion of the meaning of these antithetical concepts can be found in Beard, North, and Price (1998) 211-44.

Stoicism viewed *superstitio* as a passion and more specifically a subcategory of fear, which stood opposite to *religio* as we infer from Seneca's short statements in *Clem.* 2.5 (*ergo quemadmodum religio deos colit, superstitio uiolat*) as well as *Ep.* 123.16 (*superstitio error insanus est: amandos timet, quos colit uiolat*), and which could lead people to vice.<sup>28</sup> But to better understand how he defined these concepts, it is necessary to briefly touch upon his views on the nature of god, the proper attitude of men toward the divine as well as specific aspects of worship.<sup>29</sup>

Seneca accepted the existence of an ultimate divine being who created the world, and functions as its ruler and guardian (*QNat.* 2.45).<sup>30</sup> Although the nature of his god is a complex matter, one description stands out as the closest to the orthodox Stoic tenet (*Cons. Helv.* 8.3): ... *quisquis formator universi fuit ... siue diuinus spiritus per omnia maxima ac minima aequali intentione diffusus*. In this passage, Seneca identifies the *spiritus* with the divine entity responsible for shaping the universe, but also as the force which permeates the whole world and everything that exists within.<sup>31</sup> But the *spiritus* is not just a passive substance. On the contrary, it is an active force which animates everything, thus functioning as the soul of the world (*QNat.* 6.16.1-4). Elsewhere, he assimilates nature with the *spiritus* and the god (*Ben.* 4.8). This passage indicates that for Seneca the *spiritus* has a twofold nature and function: in its active form, it is a rational, unseen force (*ratio*) which regulates everything (*Ben.* 4.7), but in its passive form as a substance present in natural objects (*animus*), it also possesses some materiality since only

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<sup>28</sup> Vottero (1998) 50 claims that for Seneca, two of the roots of superstition are fear of the hereafter (*Thyest.* 677–79) and excessive fears and desires in general (*ep.* 121.4; 22.15). See also F 68 Vottero, and Vottero (1998) 307.

<sup>29</sup> Studies dealing collectively with these issues include Burton (1909); Setaioli (2007) and (2014b).

<sup>30</sup> For God in Stoicism, see Long and Sedley (1987) 1.277–79. For Seneca's idea of god, see Gentile (1932) 19–27, and Burton (1909) 350–69.

<sup>31</sup> For the identification of the Stoic god with the *spiritus* and the cosmos, see Setaioli (2014b) 381–83, and Setaioli (2007) 336–38.

material bodies can act upon each other (*Ep.* 106.4; *Ep.* 117.2).<sup>32</sup> In other words, the universe is called matter when viewed as something visible and tangible, while it is called God with reference to its order, rationality, and moral purpose.<sup>33</sup> Matter and divine power are thus interfused. Despite the ontologically dualistic nature of the God, Seneca did not advocate for its distinct status from the physical world (*Ben.* 4.8.2).<sup>34</sup> That said, his view of religion is monotheistic, and although from time to time he speaks, like most Stoics, about “gods” in the plural, scholars must bear in mind that such seemingly polytheistic traits are easily reconcilable within the scope of Stoicism.<sup>35</sup> Seneca does not regard these deities as equal, but as subordinates to the supreme god who created them (F 86a Vottero), and gave them certain powers.<sup>36</sup> Contrary to the one true god, they are not eternal as they will die with the conflagration, and their powers will be re-absorbed by him (*Ep.* 9.16).

Seneca’s monotheism has certain implications for Graeco-Roman polytheism.<sup>37</sup> As it can be logically inferred, the Stoic theory of a universal god was hard to reconcile with the polytheistic Roman religion, but given that religion was an integral part of the imperial life serving various political and social purposes, and that Seneca was a state official under Nero, he could not blatantly reject the official state gods. Instead, like earlier Stoics, he considered them individual manifestations of the supreme God’s powers, whom he frequently calls by the name of Jupiter (*Ep.* 9.16; 73.12; 73.14; *QNat.* 2.45.1). He often explains the latter’s appellative epithets (*Optimus Maximus*, *Tonans*, etc.) through Stoicizing allegories or assimilates him with

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<sup>32</sup> Setaioli (2014b) 381-82.

<sup>33</sup> Setaioli (2007) 357.

<sup>34</sup> For Seneca’s god as an entity inseparable from its “phenomenalization” in nature and the cosmos, see Rozelaar (1976) 459; Ortega Muñoz (1983) 313; Wildberger (2006) 1.11 and 16.

<sup>35</sup> For the idea that Seneca is essentially a monotheist, see Riesco Terrero (1966) 57; André (1983) 63; Mazzoli (1984) 959-62; Wildberger (2006) 1.21.

<sup>36</sup> In Senecan theology, the celestial bodies are often identified with the deities which function as the ministers of the God in the world. See, for example, *Ben.* 4.23.2, and the several texts quoted in Wildberger (2006) 1.23.

<sup>37</sup> For Seneca’s monotheism and its implications, see Setaioli (2007) 347-49.

other deities based on his different roles (*Ben.* 4.8.1.).<sup>38</sup> A passage from *Ep.* 90.28 seems to argue that Seneca accepted the existence of certain gods of state religion, and tried to reconcile them with his theory on the nature of the divine (*quid sint di qualesque declarat, quid inferi, quid lares et genii*). This categorization of divine entities in chthonic divinities (*inferi*), deities functioning as intermediaries between gods and men (*lares* and *genii*) as well as human souls which have attained some form of divine status after death (*animae*) closely corresponds to earlier Stoic doctrines which recognized the existence of a triple division: θεοί, δαίμονες, and ἥρωες.<sup>39</sup> Of course, Seneca does not assign them the same position or powers as the supreme God, and the only way for someone to understand this difference is by becoming wise through the study of philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

Another important question is what constitutes appropriate worship in the philosopher's eyes.<sup>41</sup> Since the Stoic god is identified with the universe, and in the form of the *spiritus* permeates everything that exists within, "contemplation of nature is the only real and appropriate cult."<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, since the *spiritus* is also found in every living being, a man's heart is equally appropriate place for the worship of the divine. The implications of this belief for the official state religion of Rome are quite evident: temples, images and statues of gods, their priests as well as sacrifices are worthless for the purpose of pleasing the god as Zeno had already pointed out.<sup>43</sup> The god does not need lavish offerings or extravagant items and is satisfied even with simple things. Furthermore, since Seneca's supreme deity is inherently capable of no evil (*Ep.* 75.19; 95.49; *Dial.* 4.27 [= *De Ira* 2.27]), then the man's inner attitude toward the divine

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<sup>38</sup> Gersh (1986) 1.174-76; Manning (1996) 313; Wildberger (2006) 1.24 and 36.

<sup>39</sup> *SVF* II 1101-105.

<sup>40</sup> Seneca, like earlier Stoics, defined philosophy as *diuinorum et humanorum scientiam* (*Ep.* 89.5; 90.3).

<sup>41</sup> For the appropriate cult and worship of the Stoic god, see Setaioli (2007) 355-58, and Setaioli (2014b) 394-96.

<sup>42</sup> Setaioli (2014b) 394.

<sup>43</sup> *SVF* I 146. This idea was adopted by other Stoics too. See, for example, *SVF* III 4 and 606, and the discussion in Wildberger (2006) 1.221-23.

should be similar. This essentially means that one must show faith, “purity of mind” (F 88 Vottero) as well as “pious and righteous will” (*Ep.* 115.5; *Ben.* 1.6.3) in their interaction with the god. Contrary to the views of early Romans who focused strictly on the *orthopraxis*, that is, the proper attending of rituals, Seneca considered the people’s inner thoughts essential in their interaction with the divine. He believed that not only foreign, but also national religion could become superstitious if the rituals were devoid of piety and rectitude of the worshippers.<sup>44</sup> However, due to the political implications of the state religion and its cults, Seneca had to accept some compromises. From time to time, he preserves some beliefs of the traditional religion, and injects them with Stoic tenets about religious practice and behavior. As two fragments of his *De superstitione* point out (F 71 & 72 Vottero), state cults and their rituals have more to do with tradition than with truth, and the wise man will attend these prescriptions because they were established by law, not because he believes that they will please the gods.<sup>45</sup>

A more complicated topic of Senecan, but also Stoic theology in general, is the significance of prayer as an external manifestation of religious practice.<sup>46</sup> Scholars have already argued that for Seneca, any form of unphilosophical prayer is worthless. Like Persius (*Sat.* 2), he criticizes his contemporaries because they often pray for things which, if uttered loudly, would make them blush (*Ep.* 10.5). Such prayers usually ask for trivial things or, even worse, for somebody’s harm (*Ben.* 4. 27.7). Seneca’s belief that prayer should be free of any evil thought is further emphasized in *QNat.* 3 praef. 14, where he claims that people should communicate with gods with pure soul, and not ask anything that would result into deprivation for another individual. It becomes evident that the *bona mens*, which Seneca considered vital in every aspect of the human worship of the divine, also applied in the case of prayers (*Ep.* 10. 4). Another point

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<sup>44</sup> Setaioli (2014b) 395.

<sup>45</sup> Mazzoli (1984) 986.

<sup>46</sup> For the significance of prayer in Seneca, see Setaioli (2007) 358-61, and Setaioli (2014b) 396-97.

which is appropriate to discuss in the context of prayer is the controversy that arises because of the Stoic belief in a pre-determined divine plan (*fata*).<sup>47</sup> According to *Prov.* 5.8 fate is a creation of god, and even though one might be quick to assume that he has the power to alter it, Seneca clearly states that god always adheres to these “original orders”: *ille omnium conditor et rector scripsit quidem fata, sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit*. But if god has made up its mind beforehand, what is the point of praying in hope of something better? Seneca was aware of this discrepancy, and tried to explain it by considering prayer part of god’s divine plan. To better illustrate how prayer can be combined with the concept of fate, he assimilates the former’s purpose with the role of the physician in the course of healing (*QNat.* 2.38.4). For Seneca, therefore, prayer is an action foreseen and provided for by fate, functioning as the means to reach a predetermined end.<sup>48</sup>

If viewed through a strict filter of Stoicism, any deviation from these principles would be considered *superstitio*: the creation and worship of multiple deities, the excessive practices such as bloody sacrifices and extravagant offerings or even attending the rituals without the appropriate religious feeling. That *superstitio* as a philosophical topic drew the attention of Seneca can be inferred from the fact that he wrote a treatise entitled *De superstitione*, several fragments of which have been preserved in Augustine’s *De Ciuitate Dei*.<sup>49</sup> In F 67 Seneca criticizes the grotesque images of the gods of Roman civil religion as well as the diversity of divine entities ranging from gods protecting the sewer system (*Cloacina*) to those who presided over human emotions or appearance (*Pauor* and *Pallor*). He also chastises the excessive acts of

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed discussion on Stoic *fatum*, see Bobzien (1998); Fischer (2008) 179-204; Wildberger (2006) 42-45; Jedan (2004); Frede (2003); Algra et al. (1999); Steinmetz (1994); Pötscher 1978; On fate and free will in Seneca, see Setaioli (2014a) 277-99.

<sup>48</sup> Setaioli (2007) 360.

<sup>49</sup> For the fragments of Seneca’s *De superstitione*, see De Biasi et al. (2009) 776-87. All the fragments come from Augustine’s *De Ciuitate Dei* Book 6, except for F 75 which is from Book 1 of *the Ars Grammatica* of Diomedes, and T 64 which is found in Tertullian’s *Apologeticum* 12.6.

worship which he witnessed during his lifetime such as the self-castration of Cybele's priests, the Galli (F 68), as well as the re-enactment of Isis' search for her lost husband, Osiris (F 69). Of course, the cults and rituals of Cybele and Isis had become part of the official state religion long time ago, but still for most Romans remained exotic because of their origin as well as the strange practices.<sup>50</sup> The connection between foreign religions and *superstitio* is further affirmed by his critique on Jewish religious customs, and especially the sabbaths (F 73). The passages confirm with specific examples what one would suspect based on Seneca's views on god and religion, that is, his criticism of various experiences and behaviors of contemporary religion as superstitious.

But where does magic fit in the context of Seneca's discussion on *superstitio*? Quite strikingly, he does not mention anything about the practice of witchcraft and the activities of magicians in his philosophical essays, except for few passages which mention the word *ueneficus/a*.<sup>51</sup> More specifically, *ueneficus/a* occurs four times (*Dial.* 3.16 [= *De Ira* 2.16]; *Ben.* 3.6; 5.13; *Ep.* 9.6), but only three of these instances provide us with relevant information. Both *Ben.* 3.6 and *Dial.* 3.16 indicate that the activities of the *uenefici/ae* were considered a crime since in the first passage Seneca explicitly categorizes poisoning as a *maleficum* along with parricide, sacrilege, and homicide while in the second excerpt he makes a comparison between robbers and poisoners. We can assume that these views on poisoners, and by proximity magicians, were in agreement with the official views of the state which long before had outlawed the practice of magic with the intent to cause harm.<sup>52</sup> But Seneca was also aware of other uses of

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<sup>50</sup> For the introduction of the cult of Isis in Rome, see Takács (2015); for that of Cybele, see Catena Valastro (2004).

<sup>51</sup> Although the word literally means "poisoner," its meaning is quite ambiguous since magicians were those who would normally concoct a poison. In Latin literature the word is frequently used to denote the witch or the sorcerer (see pp. 6-7 with relevant notes).

<sup>52</sup> For Roman laws which could be construed to punish the practice of magic, and the actions against magicians in the Roman world, see Dickie (2001) 137-55.



magic such as the concoction of love potions as we can infer from *Ep.* 9.6 where he cites a proverb by the Stoic philosopher Hecaton of Rhodes: *Ego tibi monstrabo amatorium sine medicamento, sine herba, sine ullius ueneficae carmine: si uis amari, ama.* We can be certain that even if Seneca had never come across any *ueneficus/a* during his lifetime, which is something very unlikely, he knew -at least indirectly- their alleged powers. Despite being an old practice in Roman religious life, magic was definitely regarded as the major representation of *superstitio* by Seneca because it incorporated all those characteristics he criticized in conventional religion: 1) it bore many foreign elements, and like any exotic belief or ritual it was considered superstitious, 2) magical rites usually intended to inflict some form of harm to the targeted individual, 3) in their spells, sorcerers usually invoke multiple evil deities, and 4) magic rites often include strange and abominable offerings as well as farfetched acts of worship.

Even though the dichotomy between *religio* and *superstitio* was a topic most appropriate for philosophical discussions, certain aspects of the debate can be traced in Seneca's dramatic works, most notably the *Medea*. The play deals with magic as the main form of *superstitio* and an opposing force to religion, and illustrates how it can lay waste on the political and social order. And if we accept that Nero had shown a genuine interest in exotic religions, magic and the occult because of an excessive fear for his wellbeing as certain sources attest, perhaps Seneca tried to advise him by showing the threat posed by such practices to both his position as emperor and the Roman society in general.<sup>53</sup>

## THE MEDEA

### Medea in Rome: Seneca's Predecessors

Medea was seen by many as the major archetypal witch in antiquity, and this might explain why she was almost always referred to or figured prominently in every literary work dealing with

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<sup>53</sup> See pp. 10-12, and 62 n. 28.

magic.<sup>54</sup> A favorite character of ancient literature, she occupies a central position in the works of many poets and authors, ranging from epic and lyric poetry to tragedy and elegy.<sup>55</sup> The Greeks were the first to create, shape, adapt, and tell stories about her, which were later transmitted to Rome through cultural contacts. The first known adaptation in Latin was written by Ennius, the Messapian immigrant who arrived at the city in 203 B.C.E., although we cannot exclude the possibility that the Romans were acquainted with her myth even earlier through performances staged in Greek by travelling Dionysiac guilds. The story of Medea offered a variety of topics suitable for literary treatment such as the issue of alterity as well as cultural and personal isolation in a foreign city, which would have been popular among the increasingly diverse population of the capital during the Republican period. Ennius' *Medea*, but especially his *Medea Exul* quickly became part of the tragic repertoire while other plays also appeared. Pacuvius' *Medus* was essentially a sequel of the entire Medea myth, focusing on issues of identity and recognition as well as the motif of mother-son separation and reunion. As a response to the works by Ennius and Pacuvius, Accius composed his *Medea siue Argonautae* which probably functioned as a prequel, and dealt with the entrapment and death of Absyrtus. The few surviving fragments suggest that the play focused heavily on the collapse of the opposition between the 'civilized self' and the 'barbaric other'.<sup>56</sup> The Medea-themed tragedies of the republican poets enjoyed wide popularity also in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. as we can infer from multiple quotations in

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<sup>54</sup> For the literary and artistic depictions of Medea, see Clauss and Johnston (1997); for the different myths surrounding Medea, see Stratton (2007) 49-54; for the evolution of the figure of Medea as a witch, see Stanley Spaeth (2014) 41-70.

<sup>55</sup> For a brief overview of Medea's depictions in ancient art and literature, see Griffiths (2006) 14-26.

<sup>56</sup> For my discussion of Medea's representations in republican drama, I draw heavily, both general information and individual points, from Boyle (2014) lix-lxxi.

the philosophical and forensic works of Cicero who had read the plays, and probably attended restaged performances.<sup>57</sup>

The last decades of the Republic and the beginning of the Principate also witnessed a renewed interest in literary treatments of the myth with Varro Atacinus' lost epic *Argonautae* as well as Ovid's lost tragedy *Medea*, the *Heroides*, and the *Metamorphoses*. That Ovid was particularly fond of the story of Medea can be inferred from the poems where the Colchian occupies a central position, but also the multiple allusions and references in the whole Ovidian corpus. In *Heroides* 12 Ovid offers an exposition of Medea's inner thoughts and emotions when she learns the news of Jason and Creusa's wedding. The narrative reveals her psychological confusion as she contemplates her passion for Jason, and recounts all her past services and crimes. Her wrath and desire for revenge are fueled by her guilt for betraying her father and country, the murder of her brother as well as her abandonment by Jason. In *Metamorphoses* 7 Ovid presents two different aspects of Medea's character which he had conjoined in *Heroides* 12: at the beginning he describes the vulnerable maiden in love (1-73), thus focusing more on her motives, thoughts and emotions, but as the narrative progresses he drops the psychological focus, and describes the performance of magic rituals (179-349), sketching Medea as a murderous witch whose passion for Jason has corrupted her moral values. The negative traits of her character and her past deeds are also referred to in *Heroides* 6 where her love-rival, Hypsipyle, focuses her harsh criticism on Medea's identity (*barbara paelex*), her magical skills (*barbara uenefica*), and her betrayal of family relations (*saeua nouerca, lacerata corpora fratris, prodidit patrem, deseruit Colchos*).<sup>58</sup> Scholars have argued extensively about the impact of Ovid's

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<sup>57</sup> For Cicero's knowledge of these plays, and the references in his works, see the discussion in Boyle (2014) lxxi-lxxii, and note 139.

<sup>58</sup> For this brief analysis of the character of Medea in Ovid, I draw heavily from Boyle (2014) lxxiii-lxxvi.

depiction of Medea as an evil sorceress on Seneca's literary representation, but the reasons for this choice, and the way Seneca reshapes the Ovidian model can be examined further.<sup>59</sup>

### Why Medea? Seneca's Magic and Ritual in Performance

As I mentioned earlier, the figure of Medea fitted prominently in most ancient works dealing with magic. Strangely enough, the presence and interference of the divine in literary representations of Medea's story are usually minimal or even non-existent, thus emphasis is put on the human factor.<sup>60</sup> And since for the Stoics Medea was also the embodiment of various negative emotions they tried to cure, most notably anger, Seneca's choice can be explained on two grounds: 1) the myth offered all necessary requirements for the re-enactment of the dichotomy between *religio/superstitio* through Medea's identity as a foreigner and witch, and 2) it also allowed Seneca to show, in accordance with the Stoic doctrine, that it is not god, but human actions that produce evil in the world. Since Seneca did not believe in the power of magical rituals (in *Ep.* 94.53 he claims that curses harm people, not because the gods listen to the utterer's request, but because they instill fear in the mind of the recipient), it was important that Medea had few similarities with the other witches of Latin literature, most notably the monstrous Erichtho, thus the multiple human aspects of her character would have allowed the audience to identify with her.

The play is unavoidably placed in comparison with Euripides' tragedy due to genre affiliation, and scholarship has early on marked the latter's influence on Seneca's *Medea*.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For the intertextual relationship between Ovid and Seneca, see Trinacty (2014) *passim*; for Ovid's depiction of Medea, and how Seneca uses it to shape the literary character of the Colchian witch in his tragedy, see especially 93-126.

<sup>60</sup> The gods are totally absent as literary characters from both Euripides' *Medea*, and Ovid's *Heroides* 12 as well as *Metamorphoses* 7. In the *Argonautica*, although several deities are depicted throughout the narrative, they remain somewhat passive, compared to the gods in Homeric epics.

<sup>61</sup> Wilamowitz's famous phrase (Diese Medea hat offenbar die Medea des Euripides gelesen), which refers to the character of Seneca's Medea, accurately summarizes this view.

However, there are conspicuous differences which can be attributed to the cultural background of the period, the impact of earlier works on Seneca, most notably Ovid's, and the different purposes of each author.<sup>62</sup> Contrary to Euripides' tragedy, and similarly to Ovid's accounts, Seneca's *Medea* lays great emphasis on the topic of magic through its focus on the protagonist's depiction as a witch, and its intense preoccupation with the various aspects of her magical skills. Of course, Seneca owes a lot to his Augustan predecessor whose portrait of the heroine as a sorceress threatening the natural order is fully exploited, and advanced for the purposes of philosophical teaching. That said, his tragedy is not a simple imitation of Ovid, but a creative adaptation to suit the purposes of philosophical drama as well as the cultural and social reality of his time. Throughout the narrative, Medea is sketched as a powerful and cunning sorceress who has the ability to reverse the natural order, and even challenge the gods. Less prominent, but still equally important for the play's interpretation is the struggle between Roman and 'the other.' A stranger in a foreign land, Medea represents the exotic and the unknown in a society which shares common social and religious values (Corinth). From the very beginning the chorus stresses her barbaric identity, thus revealing her position as a "foreign body" and a possible threat to the community.<sup>63</sup> By combining the elements of alterity and magic, and placing them in opposition with the Roman conventional religion represented by the chorus, Seneca intends to criticize contemporary religious reality as a threat against the political and social stability of the Empire. The constant struggle of the traditional and Roman against the exotic and superstitious permeates the narrative of the play. On the one hand, Medea represents the unacceptable practices of foreign religion, and on the other hand, the chorus stands for the beliefs of traditional religion. At the end of the play, conventional religion proves at best ineffective in protecting

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<sup>62</sup> For an extensive discussion of Ovid's influence on Medea's depiction in Seneca, and a comparison with Euripides' play, see Corrigan (2013) 100-90.

<sup>63</sup> Boyle (2014) cvii.

anyone while magic becomes the destructive force that leads Corinth to its demise. Reversing Lieberman's point, the major question of the play is not who wins, but who loses, and as I argue, it is no one else than society and the city itself.<sup>64</sup> The family and the household, which are the core of society and the city, respectively, lie in ruins. Social continuity is disrupted because of the death of the children, both Medea's and Creon's. The latter's death and the destruction of the palace symbolize the destabilization of political order since the state is now headless. All these circumstances eventually lead to the city's total annihilation.

The most significant and at the same time different aspect of Seneca's *Medea* is the graphic and vivid depiction of magical rituals. Instead of describing the spells and incantations like Ovid does, tragedy gave him the chance to show such action on stage, thus creating a greater impact on the audience which can see and hear Medea performing her magic acts. These scenes instill fear in the mind of the audience, and have a better effect in deterring them from succumbing to *superstitio*. In his effort to facilitate the identification of the audience with Medea, he incorporates in his narrative various magical *realia* which would have been known both to the average Roman as well as Nero himself, alludes to certain aspects of contemporary religious life, and connects myth with reality. Seneca presents us with a complete picture of magic, from the reasons and motives which would have led a Roman to seek the help of a sorcerer to the ritual itself, which is the concoction of the poison and Medea's incantation.

### Medea's Vindictive Prayer

In the opening scene, the protagonist, abandoned by her husband for the sake of a new wife, utters a spirited soliloquy (lines 1-55) in the form of a vindictive prayer. Her monologue begins with a long invocation to various deities, both celestial and infernal, and climaxes into a vicious

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<sup>64</sup> Lieberman (2014) 464.

curse against her self-perceived enemies, namely, Creusa, Creon, and ultimately Jason himself.<sup>65</sup> Of course, Medea's speech is a literary prayer, but Seneca has borrowed elements from real prayers and curses for its composition. The existence of discrepancies, however, between religious reality and literary representations is not only possible, but more than certain. Just like any other depiction of social, political or religious life, prayers in literature are usually the result of a poet's or author's interplay between traditional formulas dictated by religion, and the purpose of their specific work.<sup>66</sup> According to Watson, the same approach should be applied to the study of literary curses which cannot and should not be examined separately from the religious and social life of antiquity because it is quite improbable that literature was not influenced by the popular usage of curses.<sup>67</sup>

Prayers in general, but more specifically vindictive prayers, bear many similarities with curses to the point that certain scholars do not clearly distinguish between the two.<sup>68</sup> Both intended to cause personal harm, but for different reasons: a vindictive prayer intends, by definition, only to punish an individual for their perceived misdeeds or injustices toward another person while binding curses could be used provisionally, and just for personal gain.<sup>69</sup> This difference also explains why curses were banned under Roman law, and their practice fell under the sphere of witchcraft. In vindictive prayers, the name of the devotee was sometimes mentioned, and it was a rule that the invocation could include not only infernal, but also celestial gods (e.g. Helios was often invoked in the context of such prayers). Finally, since vindictive prayers were, in their essence, petitionary prayers, they were uttered in a submissive way to

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<sup>65</sup> Boyle (2014) 98-99.

<sup>66</sup> Hickson (1993) 2. For the stylistic elements of prayer language, see Fyntikoglou (2005) 160-62.

<sup>67</sup> Watson (1991) 18-19.

<sup>68</sup> For the similarities between curses and prayers, see Watson (1991) 3-4. Audollent (1904) includes in his *defixiones* some texts which can be better perceived as vindictive prayers rather than curses.

<sup>69</sup> Watson (1991) 6-12 recognizes the following sub-categories of curses with specific examples: revenge curses, provisional curses, self-imprecating curses, and unprovoked curses.

punish the perpetrator and rectify the injustice, their structure would have been quite similar to that of petitionary prayers.<sup>70</sup> The latter always began with the invocation to the deity (or deities) by name, often accompanied by honorific and descriptive epithets to further identify and exalt the divinity. The opening address was usually followed by a reference to the offered sacrifice, and a general appeal to divine favor. Next came the verbs of petition which revealed the general objective of the prayer, i.e. to make a request. The specific favors asked were specified immediately after. The prayer usually concluded with an exhaustive list of the beneficiaries as well as the reasons for responding favorably through a reference to present or future offerings. This last part which presents the reasons why the prayer merited a favorable response has been termed the “argument”, and in real-life prayers it was mostly limited to the present offering or to a pledge for a future sacrifice. However, in literary prayers the argument might also consist of a list of past deeds of piety toward the deity as well as previous positive responses to the devotee’s prayer by the same god as a means to assert that they would respond favorably also to the current request.<sup>71</sup> Of course, in the case of vindictive prayers, the names of the beneficiaries would have been replaced by a list of people to be targeted by the negative effects of the prayer.

Curses were (and are still today) defined as verbal utterances which call on supernatural powers to send evil or inflict personal harm, ranging from death and illness to loss of family and house as well as public humiliation.<sup>72</sup> Since curses are concerned with relations of power, they were usually uttered by someone whose power was diminished by the actions of another person, with the intent to reassert dominance and social position.<sup>73</sup> Our evidence comes mainly from the *defixiones*, binding curses inscribed on lead tablets found throughout the Roman world. Although

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<sup>70</sup> For the characteristics of vindictive prayers, see Graf (2005) 254-55, and Versnel (1991) 60-106.

<sup>71</sup> For the structural elements of prayers, see Fyntikoglou (2005) 158-60, and Hickson (1993) 1-11.

<sup>72</sup> For the various injuries which could befall on the recipient of a curse, see Kagarow (1929) 55-58.

<sup>73</sup> Magic in general offered access to illicit power to those who were excluded from the socio-political order. See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 221.



the structure and much of the language was identical with that of vindictive prayers, curses differed on certain aspects: 1) they often included words or phrases considered magical, 2) they were usually addressed to gods and spirits of the Underworld, 3) as a result of religious syncretism, various oriental, and especially Egyptian gods were often invoked, 4) they bound the infernal powers to do the person's bidding, and 4) the respectful petition of the prayer was replaced with direct commands, thus conferring authority on both the utterer and the text of the curse itself.<sup>74</sup> Although prayers could be uttered by any individual with or without authority, in both public and private occasions, a curse had to be written by a professional (either a sorcerer, magician or witch) in order to maximize its effects.<sup>75</sup> Despite scholars questioning their real outcome, Pliny attests that the Roman popular opinion held that curses were to be taken seriously (*HN* 28.10-21). This idea is further emphasized by Tacitus' account of the death of Germanicus. When the latter succumbed to a mysterious illness, the people close to him suspected that his death could have been the result of a curse. Upon inspection of his bed, they uncovered lead tablets containing curses intended to inflict harm on Germanicus (*Tac. Ann.* 2.69).

These are important observations one should keep in mind while trying to interpret Medea's soliloquy which bears many structural and content similarities with curses and vindictive prayers. In terms of its layout, her utterance can be roughly divided into four parts, each one loosely corresponding to a specific structural element of vindictive prayers: lines 1-16 constitute the invocation, including verbs of praying, and formulas used in traditional prayers while 17-36 further clarify her requests, and specify the people to be affected by the curse. Finally, lines 37-55 can be designated as the argument in which the heroine offers the pledge for

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<sup>74</sup> For these characteristics of curses as they can be adduced from the text of the *defixiones*, see Johnston (2004) 367.

<sup>75</sup> Dickie (2001) 124 claims that it is impossible to conclude that there were specialized practitioners in the Roman world who would write out the spells for their clients, as it used to be the practice in 4<sup>th</sup> century Athens. However, given the highly formulaic language of the curses, I believe that the assumption should be allowed.

a future sacrifice (37-39), a general account of her past deeds (44-49), and a promise for future crimes (50-55). To emphasize the magical character of Medea's utterance, Seneca uses formulas and verbal elements of real prayers and curses, which make the assimilation more profound. But it is also the correlation with the prayer of the chorus, and the theatrical conventions which allow the audience to perceive the magical aspect of her speech.

### The Setting of the Curse

When she utters her soliloquy in the opening scene, the heroine is alone on stage, and this has certain implications on how the audience would have perceived her prayer. In general, prayers in antiquity were uttered loudly in order to be heard by the gods whose ears functioned pretty much as those of humans, given their anthropomorphic characteristics.<sup>76</sup> Any silent prayer was viewed with great suspicion, and was considered an effort to engage in magical practice or conceal crimes and criminal plans. There was also a fear among the people that their prayers could be counteracted with more powerful ones, and they would not be aware of them if someone prayed silently. The concept of silent prayer was part of the religious reality, but it is also a *locus communis* in literature for evil prayers which are described in such way so that the reader understands that they were inaudible by other people.<sup>77</sup> In drama, this can be achieved by the use of words illustrating that a prayer is silent or by presenting a character on stage alone like Seneca does with Medea. Of course, the image of Medea mumbling her prayers is already found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*precibusque et murmure longo ... carmine*, 7.251-53). Seneca enlivens and expands the scene in front of the eyes of his audience.

The time of day during which the curse takes place, is also significant for perceiving the utterance as a magical one. Even though at the beginning the audience is unaware if the prologue

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<sup>76</sup> van der Horst (1994) 1, and notes 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>77</sup> van der Horst (1994) 1-12 discusses specific examples of silent prayer from both Greek and Latin literature.

is set in the evening or morning, they would be able to infer that Medea utters her prayer later in the day because it comes immediately before the processional ode of the chorus (56-115).<sup>78</sup> According to Servius (*Ecl.* 8.29), it was an old practice for the groom to lead the bride to his house at night, but this custom had changed long before the time of Varro. The usual time of the wedding procession was evening, and therefore, the opening scene should be set around the same time.<sup>79</sup> But evening was also the proper time for the performance of magical rituals as the instructions in some papyri indicate (e.g. *PGM* I 69 ὀψίαις, VII 226 ὀψέ).

The invocation, descriptive and honorific epithets:

Scholars have already noticed that the invocation follows a downward direction, beginning with celestial gods, then proceeding with the liminal goddess Hecate, and finally concludes with the deities of the Underworld. Most of the gods and goddesses are addressed through periphrastic descriptions as it is usually the case in Seneca, except for Lucina and Hecate:

Di coniugales tuque genialis tori,	
Lucina, custos quaeque domituram freta	
Tiphyn nouam frenare docuisti ratem,	
et tu, profundi saeue dominator maris,	
clarumque Titan diuidens orbi diem,	5
tacitisque praebens conscium sacris iubar	
Hecate triformis, quosque iuravit mihi	
deos Iason, quosque Medae magis	
fas est precari: noctis aeternae chaos,	
auersa superis regna manesque impios	10
dominumque regni tristis et dominam fide	
meliore raptam, uoce non fausta precor.	
nunc, nunc adeste sceleris ultrices deae,	
crinem solutis squalidae serpentibus,	
atram cruentis manibus amplexae facem,	15
adeste, thalamis horridae quondam meis	
quales stetit:	

<sup>78</sup> Boyle (2014) 100 and 140.

<sup>79</sup> For the time of Roman wedding processions, see the discussion in Hersch (2010) 138-39.

O gods of marriage! Juno, childbirth goddess,  
and you, Athena, who taught Tiphys how  
to harness the first ship that would subdue the waves,  
and Neptune, cruel master of the ocean deep,  
and Titan, portioning the world's bright day,  
and you, whose moonlight sees all secret rites,  
Hecate triple-formed — all gods Jason invoked  
when he swore to me; and gods who better suit  
Medea's prayers: Chaos of endless night,  
kingdoms that hate the gods of heaven, blaspheming powers,  
master of the melancholy realm, and queen —  
abducted, but he kept his word to you. Now let me curse:  
Come to me now, O vengeful Furies, punishers of sinners,  
wild in your hair with serpents running free,  
holding black torches in your bloody hands,  
come to me, scowling as you did of old  
when you stood round my marriage bed. (trans. Wilson)

The choice of specific deities is not accidental as the references create an irony through intratextual and intertextual connections, and link Medea's utterance with actual curses inscribed on the *defixiones*.

The collective *di conjugales* is used to denote the gods and goddesses who were responsible for the protection of marriage and family in general, most notably Jupiter, Hymenaeus, Juno, and Venus.<sup>80</sup> In the context of a vindictive prayer, these deities serve as witnesses to her husband's misdeeds as well as appropriate agents of punishment for the issue at hand. Since Jason has decided to desert Medea, and therefore, their marriage will be annulled and their family split, an address to these gods is both expected and justified. The other deity mentioned is Lucina, more correctly Juno Lucina, an epithet of Diana worshipped in her capacity as the protector of childbirth and women in labor.<sup>81</sup> Since Lucina is identified with Diana, by extension she could be associated with Hecate, and Medea addresses her with the proper invocation formula because Hecate is the central deity of the play's theology. The reference to

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<sup>80</sup> Boyle (2014) 102.

<sup>81</sup> Boyle (2014) 102-3.

Lucina also adds an ironic tone to the prayer because the audience is aware that Medea will eventually kill her children.

The irony is emphasized even more through the subsequent invocation of Minerva and Neptune. Both gods were instrumental to the success of the Argonautic expedition and Jason's safe return: the former made the voyage possible in the first place by teaching Tiphys the art of navigation while the latter, in his capacity as the lord of sea, was the one who allowed Argo to sail safely across his realm.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps Medea considers these gods somehow responsible for her current problems because if it was not for their favor, the voyage of the Argo would have never been completed, and she would have never met Jason. Therefore, she might appeal to them to witness the injustice she has suffered, and punish Jason. What is more important for the interpretation of the invocations is that the references to Minerva and Neptune have a strong irony through intra and inter textual implications.<sup>83</sup> Although she addresses Neptune for help, at the end of the play she will put Corinth on fire, the city whose protector deity was Poseidon. Furthermore, in some versions of the myth such those in Callimachus' *Hecale* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, after fleeing Corinth, Medea finds shelter in the city of Athens at the invitation of Aegeus. But despite the benefits and the safety she enjoys there, she attempts unsuccessfully to poison Theseus, the future king of Athens. Finally, the irony and Medea's audacity in invoking all these celestial deities becomes even more outrageous in the last scene of the play when she mounts the chariot of the Sun and ascends to the sky, thus assuming a divine position and overshadowing the two gods whose assistance she sought at the beginning.

The Sun god occupies a special place in her prayer since he is addressed twice, as *Titan* in line 5, and with his proper name, *Sol*, in line 29. He is her divine ancestor through Aeetes

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<sup>82</sup> Boyle (2014) 103-5.

<sup>83</sup> Boyle (2014) 104 has already noted the audacity in Medea's invocation of Neptune.

(*sator generis*), who proves instrumental to the fulfilment of her plan because Medea uses his chariot to both burn and flee the city. The reference to the relationship between her and the god also points to her association with Circe, the other major archetype of witch in Greek literature who was the sister of Aeetes (Hes. *Theog.* 1011), thus facilitating Medea's depiction as a sorceress. Furthermore, Helios/Sol was often invoked in vindictive prayers because of his ability to oversee everything that happens in the world, and thus he was considered the ideal witness of any injustice suffered by an individual (see, for example, Dido's address to Sol in her curse in *Aeneid* 4). A less clear, but still quite important implication for the interpretation of the opening scene is the connection of the Sun/Helios with magic. Many of the surviving magical papyri are either spells which intend to establish a relationship between the Sun-god and the utterer (e.g. *PGM* III 494-611, VI 1-47, XXXVI 211-30) or are supposed to be addressed to him when performed (e.g. *PGM* I 222-31, III 1-164, III 187-262, III 263-75).

Medea places the focus of her invocation on Hecate by addressing her with the appropriate formula, thus alluding to their association in mythology which often presents the heroine as the goddess' favorite or priestess (Eur. *Med.* 395-97; Ov. *Her.* 12.168, *Met.* 7.74, 194-95; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.252) as well as signaling her central position in the play's theology. She is first addressed with her proper name, followed by the characteristic epithet *triformis* which was used to denote the goddess' manifestation in all three realms of the world, in three different forms: in her celestial form, she is identified with Luna, in her earthly form she is Diana, and in her chthonic form she is Hecate.<sup>84</sup> Medea also clarifies which aspect of Hecate she invokes by calling her *tacitisque praebens conscium sacris iubar*. It is in her capacity as the goddess of witchcraft that Medea addresses her to guarantee the efficiency of her spells and the poison she will concoct to kill Creon and Creusa. The audience would have been able to perceive these

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<sup>84</sup> Boyle (2014) 106.

implications, but also the allusion to actual curses. A liminal deity of Roman religion, Hecate was worshipped at crossroads in Italy, and as Diana through religious syncretism.<sup>85</sup> Her presence, however, was more prominent in unofficial religious practices, especially binding curses, in which she is frequently addressed. Although the archaeological evidence for the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. is scarce (for example, only DT 41 from the whole corpus of the *defixiones* included in Audollent is dated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century), there are many tablets from the 4<sup>th</sup> B.C.E. to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. mentioning her by name or with her descriptive epithets: Ἐκάτη χθονία (DT 22, 24, 26, 29-33, 35), Κούρα τριώνυμος (DT 22-24, 26, 29-32) ῥηξιχθων (DT 38), Ἐινοδία (DT 41), ἀκρουροβόρη (DT 41), and Ἐκάτη τρίμορφος (DT 242). The frequent addresses to Hecate in the *defixiones* prove the connection between the goddess and real curses, and further allow us to assume that Seneca's audience would have been aware of this practice. The excerpt's affiliation with real curses can be further supported by the expression used in DT 242 which is the Greek translation of the formula Medea uses in line 7 (*Hecate triformis*).

The invocation to Hecate marks the beginning of the curse *proper*, and it is followed by that of the Underworld gods who are introduced with a powerful remark: *quosque Medeae magis fas est precari*. By mentioning her own name, Medea steers the audience to think of her speech as a vindictive prayer because the name of the devotee was normally included in them.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the use of the term *fas* would have struck the audience as odd since it was a technical term with considerable religious force, used for anything that is right or permitted. But in its strict sense *fas* means “that which is in accordance with divine law and social order”, the latter being a continuation of natural order.<sup>87</sup> Medea's use of the word to describe the invocation

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<sup>85</sup> For further information on Hecate, her cults and rituals, see Lautwein (2009), and Fauth (2006).

<sup>86</sup> See the discussion on pp. 67-69 and the relevant footnotes.

<sup>87</sup> For the various meanings of *fas* and *nefas*, see Cipriano (1978), and page 40 on the meaning of *fas* in the context of the *ius diuinum*.

of evil spirits and infernal gods is both ironic and outrageous, especially since she is uttering a curse, and curses were out of the sphere of religious and legal order.<sup>88</sup> The phrase also helps the audience to perceive the religious abnormalities of the play, and extend this understanding to the *superstitio* in real life. For this is what magic does, it threatens every aspect of the established order.

At this point, the audience becomes fully aware of what they had just suspected so far, i.e. that Medea's speech is actually a curse since in lines 9-13 she invokes multiple deities of the Underworld, a common characteristic of curse tablets. She begins with an address to the *noctis aeternae Chaos* which Costa reads as an invocation to the region of the Underworld.<sup>89</sup> But given that she calls upon the kingdom of Hades in the next line, it is more probable that she invokes the deified spirit of Chaos which figured prominently in spells and incantations. Although the name occurs only once in the *defixiones* in a 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. curse against seven *uenatores* (*DT* 251), it is frequently invoked in the magical papyri (*PGM* I 316, IV 444, 1459, 2531, 2855) while the genitive *noctis* might be Seneca's allusion to specific invocations such as Νύξ, Ἑρεβος, Χάος εὐρύ (*PGM* IV 2854) or "μέλαν Χάος" (*PGM* IV 1248).

Next, she addresses the region of the Underworld (*auersa superis regna*), the spirits of the dead (*manes*), and its ruling couple (*dominumque regni tristis et dominam*). The kingdom of the dead is often invoked under the name of Hades in spells (*PGM* IV 1462, XXIII 5, LXII 29) because it was considered the abode of demons and evil spirits, which could inflict harm on people. The *manes*, who were the spirits of the deceased, were regarded by the Romans as good

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<sup>88</sup> Curses usually intended to inflict harm on a person, and as such they would have been outlawed under the provisions of the *Twelve Tables*. See also the extensive discussion in Dickie (2001) 140-47.

<sup>89</sup> Costa (1973) 63.



ghosts protecting individuals (*boni*).<sup>90</sup> However, as inhabitants of the Underworld, they were also addressed as agents of punishment or binding forces for the recipient in the *defixiones* under various names: *Dii Manes* (DT 97, 101), *infern* (DT 95-98, 100), πνεύματα (DT 196, 198), *Dii parentes* (DT 190), οί κείμενοι (DT 22, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35), καταχθόνιοι (DT 51), and *manes* (DT 222). Finally, Pluto and Persephone were invoked in both spells and curses, either together or separately, with multiple names or periphrastic expressions: Πλούτων/*Pluto* (DT 1, 22, 24, 26, 29, 38, 111), χθονιθαρχωθ (DT 18), πασιάνναξ (DT 43, 44, 74, 75), φθίμενων θεός (DT 198), Ὀρκος (DT 161, 163), *Dis* (DT 191, 139), *deus infernorum* (DT 155), and *dominus* (DT 231). Persephone is addressed either as Περσεφόνη (DT 74, 75), Φερσεφόνη (DT 50; 81), *Persefina* (DT 268), or Κόρη (DT 3, 9, 10, 13), *regina tenebrarum* (DT 288, 289), and *domina* (DT 269).

Medea's invocation closes with her address to the *ultrices deae* (Furiae, Erinyes or Eumenides), the underworld demons who avenged bloodshed, inflicted terror, and carried out curses. The ancients believed that even mentioning their name was enough to summon them and hunt the recipient. Usually three in number (Tisiphone, Allecto, and Megaera), they functioned as curses themselves, thus also identified collectively as *Dirae*, and *Arae*.<sup>91</sup> This explains why they fitted prominently in curses (DT 22, 24, 26, 29-31, 33, 35), and why Medea calls them last, before she actually submits her request.

### Medea's Requests and the Targets of the Curse

Just like in real prayers where the specific requests of the devotee followed the *uerba precandi*, Medea's petitions follow the verb *precor* in line 12, and *precer* in line 20. In real prayers, the

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<sup>90</sup> For the oxymoron of the phrase *manesque impios*, see Boyle (2014) 108; for the original meaning of the *manes* being “*boni*”, see Maltby (1991) 364. For the role of the *di manes* in Roman religious life, see Wissowa (1902) 238-40, and Weinstock (1971) 291-96.

<sup>91</sup> Boyle (2014) 111-12.

request was expressed often in a dependent clause in the subjunctive or the imperative, but in literature, especially in poetry, the *uerba precandi* and *preces* are sometimes arranged paratactically as it is the case in Medea's speech.<sup>92</sup> The requests are made in *non fausta voce*, thus illustrating the inversion of the conventions of prayer and religious order.<sup>93</sup> First, Medea uses the imperative *adeste* twice, in lines 13 and 16, when she invokes the Furies. A typical verb of prayers, *adesse* was used to ensure the presence of a deity (see, for example, the Salian hymn to Hercules where the priests invoke the deified hero to join the ceremonial feast in his honor in *Aeneid* 8.285-305) or divine assistance (e.g. the prayer to Cybele, where Aeneas asks for the goddess' help in battle in *Aeneid* 10.252-55). The *geminatio* in line 13 (*nunc, nunc*) underscores Medea as a witch through the allusion to Canidia's invocation in Horace's *Epode* 5:

o rebus meis  
 non infideles arbitrae, 50  
 Nox et Diana, quae silentium regis  
 arcana cum fiunt sacra,  
 nunc, nunc adeste, nunc in hostilis domos  
 iram atque numen uertite.

Oh, faithful witnesses  
 Of my actions, you, Night,  
 And you, Diana, who are the queen of silence,  
 Where our secret rites are performed,  
 Now, aid me now, now, turn your anger and power  
 Against the houses of my foes! (trans. Kline)

It is also interesting that Medea asks the Furies to appear now as they had done in her wedding bed (*thalamis horridae quondam meis quales stetistis*), thus creating an expectation of their presence in the imminent wedding of Jason and Creusa. One might see here an allusion to Catullus' epithalamium 62 when the poet calls for Hymenaeus (*Hymen o Hymenaeae, Hymen*

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<sup>92</sup> Hickson (1993) 51.

<sup>93</sup> Boyle (2014) 110.

*ades o Hymenaeae!*), and hence an inversion of nuptial prayers as well as an opposite force to the chorus' wedding song which follows immediately after.<sup>94</sup>

Let us now turn to Medea's specific requests (17-36) and the curse she casts:

... coniugi letum nouae  
letumque socero et regiae stirpi date.  
Num peius aliquid? quod precer sponso malum?  
uiuat; per urbes erret ignotas egens 20  
exul pauens inuisus incerti laris,  
iam notus hospes limen alienum expetat;  
me coniugem optet, quoque non aliud queam  
peius precari, liberos similes patri  
similesque matri – parta iam, parta ultio est: 25  
peperi ...

Kill his new wife,  
kill her father, and all the royal family.  
What is worse than death? What can I ask for Jason?  
That he may live! — in poverty and fear.  
Let him wander through strange towns, in exile,  
hated and homeless, an infamous guest, begging a bed.  
Let him want me as wife, and want — the worst I could pray for —  
children who resemble both their parents.  
Now it is born, my vengeance is delivered:  
I mothered it ... (trans. Wilson)

Medea directs her wrath toward Creusa, Creon, and Jason. Although this can be explained through the mythological background of the play, the underlying reasons can be linked with contemporary Roman reality. The inscriptions on lead tablets, amulets, and voodoo dolls suggest that a person could put a curse on another virtually for any reason at all, but as scholars have argued, some of the most common motives to resort to such spells are “love matters,” revenge for theft and other misdeeds, upcoming court battles as well as athletic events.<sup>95</sup> Medea curses Jason because he has -broadly speaking- rejected her love, and he is preparing to get married

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<sup>94</sup> The presence of Furies at ill-omened weddings is a motif found in both Greek and Roman literature. Guastella (2001) 199 n. 8 mentions two relevant instances in *Ov. Her.* 6.45-46 and *Met.* 6.428-34.

<sup>95</sup> For the various reasons leading to the utterance of a curse, see the index in Audollent (1904) 471-73.

with another woman while Creusa becomes the target of her curse because she is her love rival, and removed Jason from his wife and kids. Both are reasons found or implied in certain *defixiones*: in *DT* 5, 50, and 10 a wife curses the woman who made her husband abandon her and their kids; *DT* 135, 190, 198 are curses binding a man and a woman, probably written by a love rival. But the motive of Medea's curse against Creon is less clear. In their encounter in lines 176-300, he warns her that she must leave the city immediately and go on exile, and the heroine tries to change his mind. The ensuing dialogue is modeled like a court case, and scholars have already underlined the use of rhetorical and legal vocabulary.<sup>96</sup> Medea asks Creon who acts as the judge (*si iudicas*, 194) why she is punished with exile (*quod crimen aut quae culpa multatur fuga?* 192) only to get a sarcastic response (*quae causa pellat, innocens mulier rogat*) before the king agrees to allow her to plead her case (*sed fare, causae detur egregiae locus*, 202). As Boyle has noticed, lines 203-51 form her apologia which is structurally modeled on real forensic speeches: *exordium*: 203-6, *narratio*: 207-20, *confirmatio*: 221-35, *confutatio*: 236-43, and *conclusio*: 244-51. Furthermore, the whole scene of the stichomythia (179-300) is permeated by legal imagery and vocabulary: 192-202, 236-37, 242, 244-48, 256, 262-63, 275-76, 280, and 283.<sup>97</sup> There are several *defixiones* written in the context of a court case such as *DT* 60, 93, 96, 101, 133, 217, 221 (against the accusers), and *DT* 87 (against an accuser and his witnesses). The way Seneca models the stichomythia between Creon and Medea would have allowed the audience to make connections with real life instances in which an individual facing charges would curse their opponents.

In her request which is communicated as a command through the use of the imperative (*date*), Medea first asks for the death of Creusa (*coniugi letum*) and Creon (*letum socero*) as well

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<sup>96</sup> Boyle (2014) lxxxvii.

<sup>97</sup> Boyle (2014) 213.

as the destruction of the whole royal bloodline (*regiae stirpi*). The use of the imperative or an infinitive in the position of the imperative is found throughout the whole corpus of the *defixiones*, thus confirming the formulaic affiliation.<sup>98</sup> Even though the devotee of a curse would petition usually for the binding or the injury of the target, there are cases such as *DT* 187 (ἀποκτείνατε, ὀλέσατε), *DT* 140 (*peroccide*), *DT* 129 (*interemates, interficiates*), *DT* 243 (*occidite*), *DT* 247 (*occidite, exterminate*), and *DT* 250 (*perducas ad domus tartareas*) where the curse intends for the death of the recipient. Medea's wish for the destruction of Creon's bloodline also corresponds to certain curse formulas which extended the punishment to the family of the transgressor, a *locus communis* in both literature (e.g. the curse against the *Pelopidae* or the house of Laius) and real curses.<sup>99</sup> In *DT* 22, the devotee includes in his curse the son of the recipient (τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος κε τὸν υἱόν); in *DT* 52 the daughters of the recipient also become targets of the curse (καὶ τὰς παιδίσκας αὐτοῦ); in *DT* 13 the utterer binds his descendants to the effects of the curse if he breaks a vow (τοὺς ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἐλθόντας); *DT* 141 and *DT* 199 are curses against a husband and wife as well as their children; *DT* 92 wishes for the death of both the recipients and their children (ἀπολλύοιντο καὶ παῖδες αὐτοῖς).

But for Jason, Medea wishes something even worse (*peius aliquid...malum*). She curses him to live, and wander around the world (*per urbes erret ignotas*), poor (*egens*), a scared and hated exile (*exul pauens inuisus*), homeless (*incerti laris*), begging for a bed (*limen alienum expetat*). The curse of exile as well as hunger, thirst and beggary were recurrent topics in Greek and Roman imprecation, but only the former is attested in real curses.<sup>100</sup> The oath of allegiance of the people of Arimium to Caligula includes what is essentially a self-imprecation for those who violate its terms (*CIL* II 172):

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<sup>98</sup> Audollent (1904) 482.

<sup>99</sup> Watson (1991) 33-35.

<sup>100</sup> Watson (1991) 35-36.

tum me Jiberosq(ue) meos Iuppiter Optimus Maximus  
ac Divus Augustus ceteriq(ue) omnes di immortales expertem  
patria incolumitate fortunisque omnibus faxint

(If I swear falsely) may Jupiter the Greatest and the deified Augustus and all the other immortal gods punish me and my offspring with loss of our homeland, security, and fortune.

Another notable example is that of the traditional oath to Jupiter. Even though the text of this oath does not survive, there are several sources which clearly state that the punishment of exile would be imposed to those who break the oath. Both Polybius (3.25) and Plutarch (*Vit. Sull.* 10.4) talk about this oath, but more important is the reference in Paulus Festus (102 L) which is probably a direct quotation from the self-imprecation: *si sciens fallo, tum me Dispiter salua urbe arceque bonis eiciat. ut ego hunc lapidem*. These examples illustrate an important point, i.e. that the concluding self-curse was conditional upon non-fulfillment of the oath. Therefore, we can assume that Medea curses Jason with exile because he has broken his oath as lines 7-8 imply (*quosque iuravit mihi deos Iason*). Interestingly, her requests regarding Jason's fate are expressed with the jussive/hortatory subjunctive (*uiuat, erret, expetat, optet*) instead of the imperative. Although the use of the subjunctive is quite prevalent in the *defixiones*, and thus it can be considered part of the traditional formula, we can assume that Medea uses it only when referring to Jason because she feels that his punishment is guaranteed because of the violation of his oath, and she does not have to express it as a command.

After the curse *proper*, Medea addresses her grandfather, the Sun-god, in an apostrophe (*spectat hoc nostri sator Sol generis*) and asks for his assistance, and more specifically, to borrow his chariot (*da, da per auras curribus patriis uehi*), with which she intends to lay waste on the city. This line also hints at the end of the play where Medea mounts the chariot, and orders the twin serpents to fly away, leaving Jason behind exclaiming (1026-27):

Per alta uade spatia sublime aetheris,  
testare nullos esse, qua ueheris, deos.

Go, travel on up high through the deep expanse of  
the heavens,  
prove that there are no gods wherever you go.  
(trans. Wilson)

As scholars have argued, Medea assumes a divine position through her ascent to the sky.<sup>101</sup> Although her escape on the chariot is part of the tradition, Seneca probably used it to indirectly criticize the practice of deifying people, especially the members of the Imperial family. In the introduction to the commentary on the *Apocolocyntosis*, Eden claims that “the deification of emperors as an institutionalized practice could be attacked from a number of standpoints: orthodox conservatism, which resisted any new cults; philosophical skepticism, which rejected the imperial cult because it was a cult; and republicanism, which disapproved of it because it was imperial. All three attitudes can be read into individual passages: the debasement of the gods by multiplication (9.3); Claudius’ ineligibility for godhead as conceived by Stoics or Epicureans (8.1).”<sup>102</sup> Of course, Seneca, even though his views on the subject were skeptical, had to compromise with the politics of his time, but this does not mean that he did not still have his reservations.<sup>103</sup> He believed that the deification of individuals was warranted for the creation of models of imitation for others, but only that of virtuous people (*Cons. Polyb.* 17, and *Cons. Marc.* 15). Therefore, the elevation of Medea to the divine sphere is something he would have regarded as an aberration, and perhaps it alludes to the numerous depictions of Agrippina, a person he despised for her unvirtuous life, as the goddess *Ceres*.<sup>104</sup> Nero’s mother could be

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<sup>101</sup> Hine (2000) 24; see also the discussion in Boyle (2014) cxv.

<sup>102</sup> Eden (1984) 9.

<sup>103</sup> For Seneca’s skepticism on the Imperial cult, see Manning (1996) 315, and Ramelli (2000) 139-49. For the reasons why, and how he compromised his views with the reality of his time, see Mazzoli (1984) 986-94.

<sup>104</sup> For the depictions of Agrippina, see Wood (1999) 305-14. The famous Cameo depicting Claudius and Agrippina as Triptolemus and Ceres on a serpent chariot is indicative of the general trend. The earliest example of the direct

easily assimilated with the Colchian witch since she was implicated in the poisoning of many people with whom she was associated with or were considered a potential threat to her and Nero: Passienus, her second husband was poisoned (Suet. *Vita Passieni*); Claudius was also poisoned (*Apoc.* 1–6; *Jos. Ant.* 20.148, 151; *Oct.* 31, 44, 64, 102, 164–65; *Plin. HN* 22.92; *Juv.* 5.146–48, 6.620–23 [along with scholiast]; *Tac. Ann.* 12.66–67; *Mart.* 1.20; *Suet. Claud.* 44.2–46, *Ner.* 33.1, 39.3; *Cass. Dio* 60.34.2–6, 35) Marcus Junius Silanus, Nero’s rival was poisoned (*Plin. HN* 7.58; *Tac. Ann.* 13.1.1–2; *Cass. Dio* 61.6.4); and finally, Britannicus, her stepson, died of poisoning (*Schol. Juv.* 6.124).

### The Offering

It was common for devotees to utter the prayer after the sacrifices or offerings had been made to the gods because in authentic Roman petitions there were only so many arguments one could make to persuade the deity to respond favorably to their requests. Sometimes, as a means of persuasion, the prayer mentioned an accompanying sacrifice or offered the pledge for a future one, provided that the deity shows favor toward the devotee’s requests.<sup>105</sup> Lines 37-39 include Medea’s vow for a sacrifice:

hoc restat unum, pronubam thalamo feram  
ut ipsa pinum postque sacrificas preces  
caedam dicatis uictimas altaribus.

Just one more thing: I have to take the torch  
to the marriage room myself; after the prayers,  
I will be the one to kill the victims on the altar.

(trans. Wilson)

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and official assimilation of a living woman with Ceres is that of Agrippina in a coin issued by Claudius (See Stanley Spaeth [1996] 120).

<sup>105</sup> Hickson (1993) 10-11.



This pledge is primarily related to Jason and Creusa's wedding, for the sake of which Medea sees herself as a Fury-like *pronuba*.<sup>106</sup> However, because of its position in the context of the vindictive prayer, the vow also functions in its traditional way, that is, as a pledge for future offering (*caedam uictimas altaribus*) if the gods respond favorably to Medea's requests. But what does she promise to offer? As Boyle notes, animal sacrifice was part of the Roman wedding rituals, but here "Medea perverts the wedding sacrifice to one which features other 'beasts/victims', presumably the bride and her father."<sup>107</sup> I am more inclined to believe that Medea refers to her children rather than Creon and Creusa, or all three characters as Hine argues, due to the technical meaning the verb *caedo* has in the context of a sacrifice, and because Medea refers to her children as *uictima* later on, in line 970.<sup>108</sup> Although we possess no evidence that human sacrifices were performed in Roman rituals of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E., the sacrifice of children, and especially young boys is a *locus communis* in literary descriptions of magic rituals (e.g. Hor. *Epod.* 5; Cic. *Vat.* 14).<sup>109</sup> Romans believed that the livers of children were an important ingredient in the concoction of love potions, their entrails could be used in predicting the future, and their sacrifice was a necessary action in necromancy rituals.<sup>110</sup> Since human sacrifice was associated with magic, Medea's pledge is a perversion of true religious practice. The audience can thus perceive that someone who practices magic is prepared to upset the proper religious customs of the Roman State since they have no reservations engaging in even more heinous practices.

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<sup>106</sup> Boyle (2014) 122.

<sup>107</sup> Boyle (2014) 123.

<sup>108</sup> For the possible meanings of the *uictima* in the context of Medea's speech, see Hine (2000) 118, and Costa (1973) 67-68.

<sup>109</sup> For a brief discussion on human sacrifice in Rome, see Kyle (1998) 36-42. Sacrifices of adults for magical purposes are attested in Plin. *HN* 30.12, Theodoret. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.26, and Socrat. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.2.

<sup>110</sup> See Dickie (2001) 133, and 329 n. 62, citing a list of primary sources: Philostr. *VA* 7.11, 8.7; Cass. Dio 74.16.5, 79.11.3; Justin. Mart. *Apol.* 18.3; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 7.10.4; *PG* 35.624; Luc. 6.710; Juv. 6.550-2; *SHA* 17.8.2; *CIL* VI 3.19747.



The *nefas* which Medea refers to is the murder of her brother Absyrtus, but the word also points to the future murder of her children. She then proceeds to describe her plans as *ignota mala*. The phrase can be translated as “unknown evils” in the sense that they are crimes with no precedent, but it might also be perceived as a reference to magical rites, unknown to the average individual (see, for example, *Ov. Met.* 3.530: *ignota sacra*), especially since she claims that what her mind revolves now (*vulnera, caedem, funus per artus*) she has already done as a girl, and it can “shake the heavens and earth”. This view is further supported by the use of *mala* in lines 691 and 706 to denote the ingredients of the poison. The end of Medea’s prayer makes clear to the audience that what they are going to witness during the play should be attributed to the human factor, and not divine agents.

### The Chorus’ Prayer

Lines 56-115 comprise the processional ode for Jason and Creusa’s marriage.<sup>113</sup> The passage is a literary representation of a wedding song, and as such it can be regarded as a ritual of conventional religion, opposing the magical utterance of the heroine:

Ad regum thalamos numine prospero qui caelum superi quique regunt fretum adsint cum populis rite fauentibus. Primum sceptriferis colla Tonantibus taurus celsa ferat tergore candido;	60
Lucinam niuei femina corporis intemptata iugo placet, et asperi Martis sanguineas quae cohibet manus, quae dat belligeris foedera gentibus et cornu retinet diuite copiam,	65
donetur tenera mitior hostia. Et tu, qui facibus legitimis ades, noctem discutiens auspice dextera huc incede gradu marcidus ebrio, praecingens roseo tempora uinculo.	70

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<sup>113</sup> Boyle (2014) 131-36.

Et tu, quae, gemini praeuia temporis,  
tarde, stella, redis semper amantibus:  
te matres, auide te cupiunt nurus  
quamprimum radios spargere lucidos.

Come to the royal wedding, all you gods,  
lords of the sky, lords of the sea, and bless them,  
while the people stand in respectful silence.  
First a white bull must hold high his neck  
for sacrifice to the royal Thunderer.  
Then a snowy cow that never felt the yoke  
should satisfy Juno with her death; and give  
the goddess who restrains the bloody hands of Mars,  
who brings to warring peoples peace  
and holds rich plenty in her horn,  
give her a soft lamb and melt her heart.  
And you, who bless all legal weddings,  
dispel the night and bring them luck,  
come here with slow and drunken steps  
a wreath of roses on your head.  
And you the messenger of double times,  
star whose return seems always slow to lovers:  
mothers long for you, as do their daughters,  
wanting your shining rays to shine for them right away.  
(trans. Wilson)

The prayer of the Corinthian men comes immediately after the opening scene, thus creating a stark contrast with Medea's vindictive prayer, mostly through some notable antitheses which the audience would perceive at hand: first, the chorus invokes the celestial gods (*superi qui caelum regunt*) while Medea had asked for the presence of infernal deities (*auersa superis regna*); second, they call everyone to attend the wedding procession *rite fauentibus* while Medea uttered her prayer *non fausta uoce*; and third, whereas the former is unaware of the latter's prayer, Medea is able to hear theirs (*aures pepulit hymenaeus meas*, 116) because they utter it in public, according to religious custom.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The contrast between Medea's speech and the chorus' prayer as well as its effects on the audience are examined in detail by Hine (1989) 413-19.

Other than that, the prayer of the chorus bears close verbal and content resemblance with Medea's soliloquy which stretches further the absurdity of *superstitio* represented by the heroine's curse. Through the striking similarities, Seneca is also able to enhance the irony toward the practice of prayer since the audience can see two characters, with completely different motives, praying to the same gods, for completely opposite results. Among the deities addressed separately by the chorus are Jupiter and Juno (60), Hymen (68-71), and Venus (63-64) who were invoked by Medea under the collective *di conjugales*; Neptune (58) was called upon as the god who allowed Argo to complete her voyage; Lucina (63) was invoked because she was the protector of women in labor and childbirth.<sup>115</sup> But since the goddess was identified with Diana, and consequently with Hecate, the chorus ironically addresses the deity whose favorite is Medea, thus creating a conflict in the play's theology; finally, a less clear, but still important similarity can be found in the invocation to Hymenaeus who is addressed as the god who carries the "lawful torch" (*qui facibus legitimis ades*). The phrase echoes Medea's description and function of the Furies in lines 15-16 (*atram cruentis manibus amplexae facem, adeste*). The Corinthian men's request for the presence of the deities in the wedding (*adsint, incede, ades*) recalls the heroine's petitions (*adeste*, 13 and 16).<sup>116</sup> To make the correspondence between the two prayers even more profound, Seneca combines the usually earlier wedding sacrifice with the procession itself. Just as Medea referred to the sacrifice she will perform after her prayer, the chorus mentions the proper victims in the context of the wedding ceremony (a bull, 59; a cow, 61; and a lamb 66).<sup>117</sup> All these similarities help Seneca to shape the two prayers as equal in terms of their potential, and therefore, the audience can assume that it is not divine power which leads to the

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<sup>115</sup> For the correspondence between the gods invoked by Medea and those by the chorus, see Hine (1989) 413, and Boyle (2014) 137-40 *passim*.

<sup>116</sup> Boyle (2014) 137.

<sup>117</sup> On the sacrifices in Roman weddings, see Hersch (2010) 119-123. For the sacrifice of specific animals, see: 122, 276-77 (bulls); 122, 122 n. 241, 179, 179 n. 192, 180, 274 n. 157, 275, 276 n. 165, 277 (pigs); 122, 276-77 (sheep).

final destruction, but something else. This, of course, is Medea's further actions toward the completion of her plan, and more specifically the spells and the concoction of the poison, which the audience witness in the following acts. Just like the heroine is responsible for the evils in the play's universe, humans are responsible for anything negative occurring in real life.

### Magic Behind the Scene: the Nurse's Speech

At the beginning of Act IV, Medea leaves the stage, and withdraws to the *penetrata funestum* (676) where she will perform the magic ritual. This phrase has puzzled scholars who have tried to figure out where exactly the subsequent scene of the incantation (740-848) takes place. The adjective (it functions as a noun here) usually denotes an interior or secret space, and metonymically a sanctuary, especially that of the *Penates*.<sup>118</sup> Thus, Medea is somewhere within the boundaries of the *domus*, and not outside as the use of *evasit* (676) might lead someone to assume.<sup>119</sup> This is further supported by the heroine's exclamation in 578 when she announces the building of an altar for the ritual, the flames of which will pour forth from the house (*statuantur arae, flamma iam tectis sonet*). The most plausible explanation is that Medea builds the altar in the courtyard, a space within the limits of the house, away from indiscreet looks. This corresponds to real practices attested in the magical papyri. Although most magic rituals usually took place in public space (e.g. cemeteries, bathhouses), there were instances in which the spell was performed on the roof (*PGM I 56, IV 170, 2465, 2709, LXI 5, LXXII 6*) or within the walls of the house as we can infer from several papyri which do not mention a special setting for the spell as well as *PGM IV 52-85* which instructs the individual to perform the rites at the "eastern section of the city, village, or house," and *PGM XIII 8* which instructs the person to build an

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<sup>118</sup> *TLL* 10.1.1061.44-51

<sup>119</sup> Costa (1973) 129 believes that the altar is located indoors, and that *evasit* indicates that Medea left the scene, and not the house. Boyle (2014) 299 also argues for an interior location for the altar.

earthy altar in the middle of the house (βωμὸν γέϊνον).<sup>120</sup> The similarities between the directions in this last papyrus and Medea's actions become even more striking when it is revealed that the altar where she performs the ritual is made of turf (*caespite*, 798). The scene of the incantation just like the utterance of the curse at the beginning takes place in the evening since the choral ode in which the chorus prays for the sun to set and night to bury the day (874-78) indicates.<sup>121</sup>

The nurse's monologue, shaped in the style of a messenger's speech, describes Medea's preparations for the ritual (*parat...monstrum*, 675), consisting of her summons of supernatural powers (690-704) and the gathering of all necessary ingredients (705-37). Scholars have noticed the affiliation between this scene and Ovid's account in *Metamorphoses* 7.179-233 which includes a lengthy, direct-speech quotation of Medea's invocation to the dark forces, and a brief narrative of her search for the herbs to be used to rejuvenate Aeson.<sup>122</sup> Seneca expands Ovid's narrative in an effort to dramatize the instructions commonly preceding almost every spell in the corpus of the magical papyri. He also alludes to the practice of snake-handling which was viewed as magical, by having Medea lure snakes from every corner of the world to concoct the poison. The scene shows to the audience that the results of magic are nothing more than the repercussions of human actions since Seneca has Medea going at great lengths to achieve her purpose, and despite any magical invocations, the deaths of Creusa and Creon are attributed to poison which essentially is a human creation made of earthy ingredients. What people regard as magical is nothing more than materials and acts veiled in secrecy (*arcana secreta abdita*, 679) by those who practice magic.

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<sup>120</sup> For bathhouses as places where people performed magic, see Betz (1986) 14 n. 16.

<sup>121</sup> Boyle (2014) 297.

<sup>122</sup> Trinacty (2014) 111-14; Cleasby (1907) 58-59.

The preparations begin with Medea performing a gesture with her left hand in 680 (*et triste laeua comprecans sacrum manu*). The meaning of *sacrum* is unclear, and it can refer to 1) the sinister sacrifice and ritual or 2) the shrine of Hecate where they take place or 3) the poison that the heroine will concoct.<sup>123</sup> The use of the left hand in spells was common practice as certain passages in the *PGM* attest: in I 262-347 the person must hold an ebony staff on their left hand while performing the rite; in XXXVI 256-64 the individual is instructed to pick up with the left hand a three-cornered sherd to be used in the ritual; in XII 179-81 the devotee must hold in their left hand a piece of linen while uttering a spell against another person's anger; VII 300 includes a spell formula which the individual must write on their left hand. But *comprekans* implies that Medea is using her left hand during a prayer, and since only prayers to the gods of the Underworld were performed using the left hand, we can assume that the gesture intended to engage the forces of *Dis* in the ritual.<sup>124</sup> It seems quite certain that Seneca alludes to the practice of clenching the thumb(s) while praying, which is attested in *PGM* XXXVI 163, LXIX 3, LXX 6, and IV 2328 (κρατεῖν τὸν ἀντίχειρα). A more complete view of the gesture is found in some votive reliefs where the supplicant is depicted "standing with his right hand raised in worship and his left hand clenched with the thumb closed inwards," which Van Straten interprets as an effort to give the prayer a magical, coercive power.<sup>125</sup>

Medea then proceeds with calling various types of snakes:

pestes uocat quascumque feruentis creat  
 harena Libyae quasque perpetua niue  
 Taurus coeracet frigore Arctoo rigens,  
 et omne monstrum. tracta magicis cantibus  
 squamifera latebris turba desertis adest. 685  
 hic saeua serpens corpus immensum trahit

<sup>123</sup> Costa (1973) 129.

<sup>124</sup> Markus (2000) 149-50.

<sup>125</sup> van Straten (1981) 83; Deubner (1943) 88-92.



trifidamque linguam exertat et quaerit quibus  
mortifera ueniat: carmine audito stupet  
tumidumque nodis corpus aggestis plicat  
cogitque in orbes ... 690

she summons the powers of destruction: scorching heat  
from the sands  
of the Libyan desert, and the force of cold, which the mountains  
of Taurus freeze with Arctic ice, perpetual snow.  
She calls up every horror. Drawn by her magic spells  
the scaly ones slip from their holes. They are here.  
Here a savage serpent slithers its massive bulk,  
its forked tongue darting to and fro; it looks for victims  
whom it may kill. But hearing her voice, it stops,  
plaits its swollen body into a heap of knots,  
and piles them up in coils. (trans. Wilson)

In general, *pestis* denotes anything that brings destruction such as disease, poisonous herbs, and snakes, but here the word clearly refers to the latter.<sup>126</sup> The connection between serpents and magic was very strong throughout antiquity as we can infer from multiple sources. More specifically, they were often invoked in spells as the primordial manifestation of gods (e.g. *PGM* III 670, IV 939, 1636, 2614, VIII 11, XII 89, XVIII 20) while other times their figure was carved on amulets and tablets in the course of a magical ritual (e.g. *PGM* VII 579-90, XII 201-69, XII 1-343, XXXVI 178-87).<sup>127</sup> Their skin and innards were used as ingredients for potions and remedies as Pliny attests (e.g. *HN* 30.8, 29.20, 29.22), and as we can infer from *PGM* III 703, IV 2205, and XII 160 (γῆρας ὄφεως). And although such recipes were known to and used by the Romans of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the practice was still considered exotic and part of the art of the Magi.<sup>128</sup> Finally, certain body parts or the skin of a snake could be used as amulets against

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<sup>126</sup> Boyle (2014) 300. In *Georgics* 3.418, Vergil describes a snake as *pestis acerba boum*, but the most obvious correlation is with Lucan's book 9 and the Libyan snakes (e.g. 619, 630, 734, 787).

<sup>127</sup> The figure of a snake biting its tail (*ouroboros*) was frequently depicted in magical apparatus. See Betz (1986) 337 with cited bibliography.

<sup>128</sup> We should note here that Pliny's discussion on natural remedies begins with a general discussion on the beginnings of magic (*HN* 30.2), thus emphasizing the connection.

various medical conditions as well as protective talismans for the evil eye (*HN* 29.38, 30.8, 30.30).<sup>129</sup>

The most important connection between this passage and real-life magical practices is Medea's depiction as a snake-handler. The nurse vividly describes how the heroine uses her abilities to lure (*tracta magicis cantibus*) and charm the serpents (*carmine stupet*) with her magical incantations, which would have brought in the mind of the audience the performances of the *circulatores*. The latter were traveling performers, astrologers and salesmen, who were stationed at street-corners, in marketplaces, and around the theatres, amphitheatres, hippodromes and temples of cities, where they used to sell their merchandise and advertise their skills and abilities for the usual purpose of entertainment. There is no doubt that among them one could find also itinerant magicians as well as individuals adept in handling snakes.<sup>130</sup> Their popularity throughout the ancient world allows us to assume that Seneca and his contemporaries would have been familiar with their practices. This can be also inferred from a passage by the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. medical author Celsus who explains in detail how the *circulatores* were able to place the heads of poisonous snakes in their mouths without experiencing any harm (Cels. 5.27.3c). But the existence of such reasonable explanations for the practice of snake charming indicates that only the low classes would still regard it as something magical. The educated elite such as Nero and the members of the court would have been aware of the trick, and that nothing supernatural was involved in the process.

It is also worth noting that the text draws Medea's depiction as a witch closer to contemporary reality through its allusion to the three snake-master races of antiquity, namely the Psylli of the Libyan Syrtes, the Ophiogeneis of Parium, Cyprus and Phrygia as well as the Marsi

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<sup>129</sup> For the popularity of snake-shaped amulets as protection against evil, see Faraone (2018) 51, 313 n. 133 and 134.

<sup>130</sup> For the popularity of the *circulatores* as well as their performances, see Dickie (2001) 216-34, and especially 218-19 for the snake-handlers.

of Marruvium. These peoples were believed to possess special powers of snake-handling, and as Ogden argues, such reputation can probably be traced back to the activities of real snake-charmers around the ancient word.<sup>131</sup> Medea's luring of snakes from Libya and Mt. Taurus is an indirect reference to the Psylli and the Ophiogeneis of Phrygia, respectively, while herself functions as a representative of the Marsi because of her alleged links with this specific ethnic minority. The tradition presenting the latter as snake charmers goes back at least to Lucilius who mentions that their incantations caused snakes to explode (fr. 575–76 Marx), and it is their magical skills that Gnaeus Gellius attempts to explain by making the son of Medea their ruler (Cornell F 18).<sup>132</sup> Their powers were still proverbial in the age of Augustus as we can infer from Ovid's reference to their magical songs (*Ars Am.* 2.102), and Vergil's description of a Marsic priest who knew how to make poisonous snakes sleep, how to calm their wrath and to alleviate their bite with his incantations and touch (*Aen.* 7.750-60). The latter might also hint at the Romans' view of the Marsi as foreigners since the priest joins the Latin alliance against Aeneas. Finally, in *Epode* 17.29 Horace claims that Canidia has afflicted him with headache using a Marsian spell (*nenia*). By connecting Medea with the Marsi, Seneca underscores her as a sorceress like those the audience knew through literary references and real-life spectacles.

The narrative breaks at this point, and the nurse recites Medea's own speech in 690-704. The heroine admits that earthy poisons are not sufficient for her purpose, and therefore, she calls upon five mythological serpents to offer theirs:

huc ille uasti more torrentis patens  
descendat anguis, cuius immensos duae,                     695  
maior minorque, sentiunt nodos ferae  
(maior Pelasgis apta, Sidoniis minor),

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<sup>131</sup> Ogden (2013) 209-14.

<sup>132</sup> This version of the myth is also found in Sil. 8.498–501; for the tradition that the Marsi were the descendants of a son of Circe, see Plin. *HN* 7.15, 25.11; Aul. Gell. 16.11.1.

pressasque tandem soluat Ophiuchus manus  
 uirusque fundat; adsit ad cantus meos  
 lacessere ausus gemina Python numina, 700  
 et Hydra et omnis redeat Herculea manu  
 succisa serpens caede se reparans sua.  
 tu quoque relictis peruigil Colchis ades,  
 sopite primum cantibus, serpens, meis.

Let the Dragon descend, which lies like a rushing stream,  
 here let him come, whose massive coils touch the Bears,  
 those two wild beasts, the Great Bear and the Small,  
 (Greek sailors use the Great Bear, Tyrians use the Small)  
 and let the Serpent Holder at last release his grip,  
 and pour out venom. Let Python come at my call,  
 who dared provoke Diana and Apollo, the twin gods.  
 And let the Hydra come; let every snake, mown down  
 by Hercules, return, and heal its own death wound.  
 And you, abandon Colchis, my always-wakeful Dragon,  
 come to me; you were the first serpent I charmed to sleep.

(trans. Wilson)

The invocation to supernatural serpents and constellations was not unusual in spells as we can infer from several texts in the *PGM* corpus. The most notable cases are Chnouph, the lion-headed serpent whose name occurs usually in *uoces magicae*, especially in the Harpon-Knouphi formula (e.g. *PGM* I 27, II 157, III 435-36, 560-63, IV 2433, VII 1023-25, XXXVI 219-20), the “unseen serpent” Apophis (*PGM* III 87, IV 190-91, VII 558, XIII 262) who is slain daily by the god Seth, and finally the Ouroboros, the widely used figure of a snake swallowing its own tail.<sup>133</sup> Constellations most commonly addressed in spells include the Bear (*PGM* IV 1275-322, IV 1331-389), and Sirius (*PGM* XXIII 1-70, *PDM Suppl.* 162-68), although Egyptian and Eastern names of zodiacal constellations also occur.<sup>134</sup> Perhaps Seneca intended for an allusion to real spells through Medea’s invocation to the constellations of Draco and Ophiuchus as well as the legendary serpents Python, Hydra, and that of Colchis. The position of the quote between the

<sup>133</sup> For general info on these three supernatural serpents, see the entries in the glossary of Betz (1986) 332-39.

<sup>134</sup> This is probably the result of oriental influence. See also the discussion on a Babylonian astral spell which invokes ten constellations, among which one might find Draco and Hydra, in Reiner (1995) 66-68.

early preparations of the ritual (677-90) and the concoction of the poison (705-36) also favors this view because it resembles that of a hymnic section in the *PGM*.<sup>135</sup> Although not very common, such preliminary utterances intended to establish the primary line of communication with the deities invoked in the main spell or ask for the presence of a divine assistant, a *πάρεδρος*.<sup>136</sup> To better illustrate this function of the excerpt within the context of the incantation scene, let us briefly examine the structure of *PGM IV* 3086-124 which is an oracle spell for revelation. Lines 3089-97 describe the offering to be made to Cronos while the individual is uttering the formula which summons the god (3098-110). As soon as the god makes his appearance in response to the first utterance, the person must utter another formula to compel him to answer his questions (3111-14). Finally, lines 3120-13 include a spell for the deity's dismissal. A comparison between *PGM IV* 3086-124 and Medea's quote indicates that the latter fits in the whole context of the spell as a formula asking for the presence of the mythological serpents as supernatural assistants. Besides, the heroine herself claims that her utterance is an incantation (*cantus*), and specific verbal elements (*descendat, adsit, ades*) illustrate that its purpose is to summon the serpents towards the spell's completion.

The end of the quote marks the turnback to the nurse's report on Medea's preparations. Lines 707-30 comprise a geographical catalogue, the most common type of catalogue in Senecan drama, functioning as a list of the necessary herbs for the concoction of the poison.<sup>137</sup> The recipe includes several deadly plants (*gramen mortifero flore uiret, 717*) from every corner of the world, and their juices (*dirusue tortis sucus in radicibus, 718*). The nurse provides further details regarding the time and the means of collecting the herbs. Some are gathered in the dead of the

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<sup>135</sup> Hine (2000) 179 notes that the invocation is modeled in the form "of a traditional cletic hymn, with the snakes as the deities."

<sup>136</sup> For the definition of *paredros* and its various forms in the *PGM*, see Pachoumi (2011) 155-65.

<sup>137</sup> Boyle (2014) 305.

night (*alta nocte*, 729) while others at dawn (*dum parat Phoebus diem*, 729). In literary representations of witchcraft, the collection of herbs usually occurs by moonlight, presumably to secure the assistance of Hecate (see, for example, Hor. *Sat.* 1.8.20-22; Verg. *Aen.* 4.513; Plin. *HN* 24.12). However, the instructions on the *PGM* show that dawn was also an appropriate time to pluck a plant for magical purposes (*PGM* IV 286-95). The method of collection also corresponds to practices described on the papyri. Medea cuts some of the plants with iron (*ferrum*, 728), and although the specific metal was less preferred than bronze, silver, lead, and gold in the performance of magic rituals, there is no need to adopt Costa's interpretation that the word is a synecdoche for "blade."<sup>138</sup> There are several instances in the *PGM* where objects made of iron are used in the process such as rings (e.g. *PGM* LXI 1-38), vessels (e.g. *PGM* LXI 39-71), and *lamellae* (e.g. *PGM* IV 2145-240). The allusion to the instructions of certain papyri is clearer in the heroine's ripping off other plants with her hand while uttering some magical words (*ungue cantato*, 730).<sup>139</sup> This description bears close resemblance with the beginning of *PGM* IV 2967-3006 which details how the Egyptians acquire the plants for a magical ritual:

Παρ' Αἰγυπτίοις αἰεὶ βοτάναι λαμβάνονται οὕτως· [...] μετ' εὐχῶν ἀνασπᾶ τὸ φυτὸν ἐξ ὀνόματος ἐπικαλούμενος τὸν δαίμονα, ᾧ ἡ βοτάνη ἀνιέρωται, πρὸς ἣν λαμβάνεται χρεῖαν, παρακαλῶν ἐνεργεστέραν γενέσθαι πρὸς αὐτήν.

Among the Egyptians, herbs are always collected in this manner; [...] they tear up the plant while praying by invoking the deity to whom the herb is dedicated and asking for it to have greater power in the use for which it is intended.

After purifying himself as well as the area around, the herbalist pulls up the plant while he prays, and invokes the deity to whom it is dedicated so that it might be more effective for the use it has

<sup>138</sup> Costa (1973) 134; Boyle (2014) 310 is also skeptical about Costa's interpretation.

<sup>139</sup> Costa (1973) 135 observes that the adjective *cantato* modifies *ungue*, thus "used rather oddly of part of the enchantress's own body," but this does not need to be taken literally.

been acquired. This is essentially what Medea does, which, along with the difference in time and method of collecting each herb, is meant to maximize the deadly powers of the potion.

Having gathered everything, the heroine proceeds with the concoction of the poison:

Mortifera carpit gramina ac serpentium  
saniem exprimit miscetque et obscenas aues  
maestique cor bubonis et raucae strigis  
exsecta uiuae uiscera. haec scelerum artifex  
discreta ponit: his rapax uis ignium, 735  
his gelida pigri frigoris glacies inest.

She gathers the poisonous plants and squeezes the venom of the snakes, and mixes it with birds of ill omen, the heart of a melancholy eagle-owl, and the innards cut from a living screech-owl. These, the great criminal mastermind laid out separately. Some contain the devouring power of fire; others hold the icy cold of bitter frost. (trans. Wilson)

The excerpt offers some further details on the ingredients and places the subsequent scene of the incantation (740-839) in the context of the ritual. What is more important though is the reference to some very strange materials she uses to concoct the poison, namely the ill-omened birds, the heart of an eagle-owl, and the innards of a screech-owl. Various bodily parts and fluids of ill-omened birds, especially owls, were widely used in magic. In *PGM I* 222-31 the eye of a night-owl is a necessary ingredient for the crafting of an invisibility anointment; *PGM IV* 26-51 mentions the rubbing of the eyes with owl bile as part of an initiation ceremony; *PGM XXXVI* 264-74 lists the blood of a night-owl among the ingredients; finally, *PGM XCVII* 7-9 instructs the individual performing the spell to grind up the heart of a night-owl, and anoint themselves with the substance. Both Seneca and his audience were probably familiar with such strange ingredients brandished by itinerant charlatans during their performances in the market place

(Orig. *Cels.* 1.68).<sup>140</sup> However, the educated Romans would have regarded them with suspicion just as Pliny does when he says in his comments on a recipe which made use of the parts of the *bubo* that nobody has ever seen the bird, let alone to have found its egg (*HN* 29.82). By inserting such spurious substances in Medea's recipe, Seneca attempts to undermine the supernatural element in the eyes of the audience. In other words, if the audience knew that *bubo* was a bird existing only in the imagination of those practicing magic, then the effects of the poison would be essentially perceived as the result of snake venom and poisonous herbs, both earthy materials.

At the very end of her speech, the nurse makes a crucial statement which can be construed to undermine the supernatural element in the scene of the incantation which follows immediately after (737-39):

addit uenenis uerba non illis minus  
metuenda. – Sonuit ecce uesano gradu  
canitque. mundus uocibus primis tremit.

She added to the poisons certain words — themselves  
equally dangerous. Listen! You can hear her crazy feet.  
She is chanting and the world is shaking at her spell.

(trans. Wilson)

After mixing the ingredients, Medea adds to her concoction some words which are described as *uerba non illis minus metuenda*. This phrase alludes to a passage in the *Letters* which reflects Seneca's belief that curses, as magical utterances, harm people only because they instill false fears in those who hear them (*Ep.* 94.53):

Nulla ad aures nostras uox inpune perfertur: nocent qui  
optant, nocent qui execrantur. Nam et horum inprecatio  
falsos nobis metus inserit...

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<sup>140</sup> Dickie (2001) 227-28.



There is no word which reaches our ears without doing us harm; we are injured both by good wishes and by curses. The angry prayers of our enemies instil false fears in us. (trans. Gummere)

The excerpt clearly downplays the supernatural power of magic utterances, highlighting, instead, their impact on human psychology. When applied to the incantation scene, the implications of this doctrine are quite profound. Seneca attempts to minimize the supernatural aspect in Medea's magic ritual while putting the emphasis on the human factor. The main spell (lines 740-849) is full of hatred, torture, destruction, and death. And just as what the nurse witnesses in the intratextual level causes her great distress and fear (*pavet animus, horret*, 670), the grim images of the incantation scene extend the psychological effects to the audience in the extratextual level.

#### Magic on Stage: Medea's Mumbo Jumbo!

As soon as the nurse ends her monologue, Medea appears on stage presumably with the help of a moveable platform which represents the interior courtyard of the house, thus providing the audience with the opportunity to witness the last part of the ritual.<sup>141</sup> Although there are certain similarities between the speech of the nurse and that of the heroine, they need not be considered duplicates as Zanobi claims.<sup>142</sup> Instead, the latter should be viewed as the final phase of the ritual, the dramatization of which serves specific purposes. According to Boyle, Medea's appearance on stage would have shocked the spectators who probably were left with the impression that lines 670-740 offered a complete account of the event.<sup>143</sup> Scholars have argued that Seneca essentially creates a dramatization of Ovid's witchcraft scene, which includes magic numbers, herbs as well as prayers and rituals dedicated to Hecate, to underline the heroine's

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<sup>141</sup> Boyle (2014) 312.

<sup>142</sup> Zanobi (2014) 123-25.

<sup>143</sup> Boyle (2014) 313; Hine (2000) 175 also comments on the effect of Medea's appearance on stage.

powers and her effort to control nature.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, this view is supported by Medea's "proclamation" in lines 754-769, but it is also superficial because it does not take into consideration Seneca's disbelief in the power of witchcraft.<sup>145</sup> Since the philosopher rejected the supernatural aspect of magic, and accepted the significance of the human factor in doing harm, he presumably considered spells nothing else than some mumbo jumbo nonsense. Therefore, the nurse's narrative, but especially the incantation scene must be significant for other reasons. Through Medea's appearance on stage Seneca aims to induce fear in the audience and produce an ominous atmosphere of tragedy. The scene also functions as a catalyst in transforming the heroine from *coniux* and *mater* into a murderer who will not hesitate to kill her own children.<sup>146</sup> More important though, it concludes Seneca's argument which gradually shows how uncontrolled passions such as *superstitio*, exemplified in the practice of magic, can be used to furnish the criminal actions of humans with supernatural tones.

To illustrate this point, Seneca limits the role of supernatural powers in the incantation scene, and instead emphasizes the actions of Medea. His choice is not surprising since any divine signs during the ritual could potentially be interpreted as the gods' consent to the heroine's plan, which in turn would essentially oppose one of the basic principles of Stoic theology, i.e. that god is capable of no evil. Even when Medea alleges the presence of Hecate, this need not be taken at face value. As the verbs *agnosco* (785) and *video* (787) indicate, the divine signs she describes, i.e. the trembling of the tripod, and the appearance of Hecate's chariot in the sky, are the result of her own perception.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, any supernatural events such as the barking of Hecate (840-41), and the ignition of the torch (841-42) which, if staged, would lead the spectators to infer

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<sup>144</sup> Trinacty (2014) 111-18.

<sup>145</sup> For Seneca's view on magic, see pp. 67-68.

<sup>146</sup> Guastella (2001) 197-220.

<sup>147</sup> In the *PGM*, there are several references to the expected divine signs that affirm both divine consent and presence.

divine consent, were probably omitted from the scene's dramatization. And even if the spectators were supposed to visualize them due to theatrical conventions as Kohn argues, they would still be able to understand that such visualizations had been verbally imposed on them just like magical utterances impose certain feelings and emotions on people in real life.<sup>148</sup> In conclusion, what the audience can really witness is Medea going at great lengths to complete her treacherous plan.

### The Spell

Medea's incantation is essentially a continuation of the quote in lines 690-704, and since the latter is to be read as the preliminary utterance, lines 740-842 constitute the main ritual. The passage, which is modeled like a prayer, can be divided into the following parts: lines 740-51 constitute the invocation; 752-70 detail Medea's past accomplishments, and 771-811 list the rites and offerings to Hecate (together they comprise the *argumentum*); finally, 812-48 include the heroine's requests.<sup>149</sup> Like most spells in the *PGM*, Medea's magical chant also has a two-tiered structure consisting of *logos* (magical utterances addressed to divine entities and spiritual powers, urging them to fulfill the requests of the subject), and *praxis* (the acts and rituals accompanying the *logos*).<sup>150</sup> Of course, the *praxis* is usually detailed in the instructions of the *PGM*, but in the case of literary representations of spells, it is incorporated in the narrative or in the speech of the characters. Medea, in like manner, describes her actions to the audience while the ritual of Hecate unfolds in front of their eyes. This combination of speech and action creates a powerful image which underlines the heroine's conduct, and consequently, her personal responsibility.

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<sup>148</sup> Kohn (2013) 87.

<sup>149</sup> Boyle (2014) 313 adopts a slightly different division based on the meter used in each section.

<sup>150</sup> For this general observation on the structure of the spells in the *PGM*, see Martinez (1991) 8.

In general, the passage has many similarities with the text of the *PGM*, thus illustrating its affiliation with magic. At the beginning of the incantation scene, Medea stands in front of a turf altar (798) while invoking the gods of the Underworld:

Comprecor uulgu silentum uosque ferales deos	740
et Chaos caecum atque opacam Ditis umbrosi domum,	
Tartari ripis ligatos squalidae Mortis specus.	
supplicis, animae, remissis currite ad thalamos nouos:	
rota resistat membra torquens, tangat Ixion humum,	
Tantalus securus undas hauriat Pirenidas,	745
[grauior uni poena sedeat coniugis socero mei]	
lubricus per saxa retro Sisyphum soluat lapis.	
uos quoque, urnis quas foratis inritus ludit labor,	
Danaides, coite: uestras hic dies quaerit manus. –	
nunc meis uocata sacris, noctium sidus, ueni	750
pessimos induta uultus, fronte non una minax.	

Pray you, silent hordes, and ghostly gods,  
 Chaos obscure, dark home of shady Dis,  
 caverns of ugly Death, bound by Tartarus,  
 Spirits, be free from your torments, hurry to this new wedding.  
 Let stop the wheel which wrenches his body, may Ixion touch  
 the ground,  
 may Tantalus freely drink the waters of Pirene.  
 Only for his in-laws should punishment increase:  
 let the slippery stone send Sisyphus tumbling down the rocks.  
 You too, who vainly work to fill the leaky urns,  
 Danaids, gather here: this day requires your hands.  
 Now, summoned by my rituals, come to me, moon of the night,  
 put on your fiercest faces, scowling with all three. (trans. Wilson)

The very first word (*comprecor*) connects the excerpt with the nurse's speech through its allusion to line 680 (*comprecans*).<sup>151</sup> Medea asks the following deities, some of which are the same as those addressed in the opening scene, to run to her aid (*currite*):<sup>152</sup> the *ferales deos* (= *manes inpios*), *Chaos* (cf. line 9), the *sidus noctium* (= Luna, a form of *Hecate triformis*), and the *domus*

<sup>151</sup> Boyle (2014) 315 observes that the use of *comprecor* "picks up the Nurse's *comprecans* ... contributing towards the near seamlessness of this magic act."

<sup>152</sup> See pp. 67-68.

*Ditis* and *specus Mortis* (= *auersa superis regna*). However, she makes an important addition to the list by also invoking the spirits of the deceased (*uulgus silentium, animae*). The purpose of addressing the souls of the dead is clarified in the immediately following lines (744-49) when Medea asks for the presence of the great sinners of the Underworld, namely Ixion, Tantalus, and the Danaids, in the upcoming wedding of Jason and Creusa. In the context of the spell, these mythological figures probably occupy the position of *daimones*, i.e. supernatural entities whose influential assistance was often sought in the *PGM*.<sup>153</sup> The pointed exception is Sisyphus, whose punishment Medea wishes to increase, because he is regarded as the ancestor of Creon, and therefore a probable opponent to her plan.<sup>154</sup>

But there is something more important to notice here. The crimes of these mythological characters are essentially identical to those which will be perpetrated by Medea: Ixion disrespected the rules of *xenia* by trying to seduce his host's wife, the goddess Hera (Pind. *Pyth* 2.21-48); Tantalus sacrificed his son Pelops, and tried to feed him to the gods (Pind. *Ol.* 1.35-55);<sup>155</sup> Sisyphus tricked Death, and avoided the initial punishment imposed on him by Zeus (*Schol. Il.* 6.153); finally, the Danaids killed their husbands (or in some versions of the myth castrated them), thus ending their bloodline (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.1.5). These stories were known to the audience who, upon reflection, would be able to connect them with Medea's crimes: like Ixion, the heroine violates the rules of *xenia* by murdering her host, king Creon; at the end of the play she kills her children like Tantalus did, thus putting an end to Jason's bloodline just as the Danaids ended that of their husbands; and like Sisyphus, she avoids a possible punishment by fleeing Corinth on the Sun's chariot. Even though Medea invokes the archetypal sinners as divine assistants towards her plan's completion, she unintentionally assimilates herself with them

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<sup>153</sup> For the concept of *daimon* in the *PGM*, see Betz (1986) 334.

<sup>154</sup> Boyle (2014) 317, and Costa (1973) 138-39.

<sup>155</sup> For a detailed analysis of the treatment of Tantalus' myth in Pindar's *Pythian Ode 2*, see Gantz (1978) 24-39.

in the audience's mind. This indirect comparison allows the latter to perceive the criminal nature of the heroine's conduct as well as her personal responsibility since the gods had already deemed such crimes worthy of eternal punishment, and therefore would never have offered either their assistance or consent.

In her effort to secure the presence specifically of Hecate (*adesse sacris tempus est, Phoebe, tuis, 770*), the heroine enumerates her past services to the goddess:

Tibi more gentis uinculo soluens comam Secreta nudo nemora lustrari pede et euocari nubibus siccis aquas egique ad imum maria, et Oceanus graues	755
interius undas aestibus uictis dedit, pariterque mundus lege confusa aetheris et solem et astra uidit et uetitum mare tetigistis, ursae. temporum flexi uices: aestiua tellus horruit cantu meo,	760
coacta messem uidit hibernam Ceres; uiolenta Phasis uertit in fontem uada et Hister, in tot ora diuisus, truces compressit undas omnibus ripis piger; sonuere fluctus, tumuit insanum mare	765
tacente uento; nemoris antiqui domus amisit umbras uocis imperio meae. – die relicto Phoebus in medio stetit, Hyadesque nostris cantibus motae labant: adesse sacris tempus est, Phoebe, tuis.	770

For you I have loosened my hair and bared my foot  
to sway as my people do through the secret parts of the wood.  
I have called down gushing water from dry clouds,  
driven the ocean to its bed; the swelling tides,  
defeated, have withdrawn inside the sea.  
I have confounded the law of the sky: the world has seen  
both sun and stars together, and you, Bears, have touched  
the forbidden sea. I have bent the course of the seasons,  
the summery earth has shuddered at my spell,  
Ceres has been compelled to see harvest in winter.  
Phasis' wild waters turn to their source again,  
and Hister, with its many mouths, restrains  
its waters, sullen in all their separate banks.  
The waves have roared, the frenzied sea rose high

without the sound of wind. The home of the ancient wood  
has lost its shadows when it heard my voice.  
Phoebus, abandoning day, has stopped in the middle sky,  
the Hyades are shaken by my spells and totter.  
Now, Diana, is the time to come to your own rites.

(trans. Wilson)

The excerpt presents Medea's alleged control over nature, a major feature in literary representations of witches (e.g. *Ov. Met.* 7.199-209, *Am.* 1.8.5-10; *Tib.* 1.2.41-52; *Ap. Rhod. Argon.* 3.528-33), but also a regular point of reference in the spells of the *PGM* (I 120-25, IV 192, IV 1364-71, XII 248-50, XIII 871-76, XXIX 1-2). These reversals of the natural order are the heroine's tribute to Hecate (*tibi*), which also serve as a means to convince the goddess why the current prayer merits a favorable response.<sup>156</sup> Medea's proclamation, however, is significant for another reason. The use of first person singular verbs and pronouns, and the omission of any possible interference of divine entities in her past accomplishments emphasizes the heroine's actions: she is the one who called down (*euocauit*) storms from dry clouds, drove back (*egi*) the sea to its bed, bent (*flexi*) the course of seasons as well as caused the earth to tremble with her spell (*cantu meo*), the ancient grove to lose its shadows when it heard her voice (*uocis imperio meae*), and the Hyades to roll back with her chants (*nostris cantibus*). By extending these claims to the current situation, the audience can infer the heroine's personal responsibility for the evil in the play's *cosmos*. Moreover, since in real spells the power to reverse the natural order is usually a characteristic of divine assistants (*daimones*) and gods such as those addressed in *PGM* I 96-132 (πάρεδρος), IV 1345-76 (παρέδρους), XII 238-67 (θεός), and XIII 843-87 (Ἥλιος), the proclamation also assimilates Medea with such entities, and helps the audience realize that the plan is eventually completed solely by her own actions without need of divine aid or assent.

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<sup>156</sup> Boyle (2014) 320.

At this point, the scene becomes highly dramatized as the heroine first makes material offerings to Hecate, and then proceeds with the ritual acts, and the casting of the spell. Lines 771-84 are the only instance in Senecan drama where iambic trimeters and dimeters are used alternatively. As Boyle has observed, this choice is probably based on the meter's association with magic and incantation.<sup>157</sup>

Tibi haec cruenta sarta texuntur manu,  
nouena quae serpens ligat,  
tibi haec Typhoeus membra quae discors tulit,  
qui regna concussit Iouis.  
uectoris istic perfidi sanguis inest,                   775  
quem Nessus expirans dedit.  
Oetaeus isto cinere defecit rogas,  
qui uirus Herculeum bibit.  
piaae sororis, impiaae matris, facem  
ultricis Althaeae uides.                                   780  
reliquit istas inuio plumas specu  
Harpyia, dum Zeten fugit.  
his adice pinnas sauciaae Stymphalidos  
Lernaea passae spicula.

For you I weave these wreaths with bloody hand,  
wreaths bound up with serpents nine,  
To you I give these limbs which rebel Typhon bore,  
who shook the realms of Jove.  
Here is the blood of that treacherous ferryman,  
which dying Nessus gave.  
Here is the ash from the fading pyre of Oeta,  
which drank the poison of Hercules.  
Here you see the torch of a good sister, a wicked mother,  
Althaea the avenger.  
These are the feathers left in a far remote cave  
by the Harpy, fleeing Zetes.  
Add to these the wings of a wounded Stymphalian bird,  
struck by Lernaean arrows. (trans. Wilson)

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<sup>157</sup> Boyle (2014) 323-24 marks the meter's association with magic, and discusses some of its occurrences in Latin literature.



Contrary to Kohn who argues that these items did not physically appear on stage, I would assume that there were props on the movable platform, which the actor would place on the altar individually as he named them.<sup>158</sup> The list of offerings begins with the garlands weaved by the heroine, and which are bound up with nine serpents. Wreaths fitted prominently in magic rituals (see, for example, *PGM* II 27, II 70, IV 1059, 1990, VII 874, and CXXIV 35) while the number nine, as a multiple of three, was thought to possess magical powers.<sup>159</sup> The catalogue continues with several grisly items whose magical significance is established through their names: the heroine places on the altar the limbs of Typhoeus, the blood of Nessus, the ash from the fading pyre of Oeta, the torch of Althaea, the feathers of the Harpy, and the wings of Stymphalian birds.<sup>160</sup> These names were probably coined by Seneca in an effort to imitate the codified names given to certain materials used in contemporary magic rituals. As we can infer from *PGM* XII 401-404, temple scribes often obscured the names of ingredients used in magic to protect what was considered secret knowledge, and to deter the ignorant masses from engaging in the practice.<sup>161</sup> We can assume that the props used by the actor were distinctively earthy materials, and that the audience would be able to perceive the discrepancy between their true nature and their name, thus allowing Seneca to reveal the deceptive tactics of magicians.

It is also worth noting that the heroine performs the ritual without having undergone purification (*cruenta manu*). But since the cleansing of the spell operator appears to have been necessary in magic rituals (e.g. *PGM* I 55, III 306, IV 26, 1099, VII 981, XXIIb 27, XXXVIII 1), Medea clearly violates the rules of religious conduct.<sup>162</sup> And given that purification of the subject

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<sup>158</sup> Kohn (2013) 87.

<sup>159</sup> For the association of number “three” with magic, see Lease (1919), and Laroche (1995) 570; for this connection as it appears in Latin literature, see Tavenner (1916) 117-43.

<sup>160</sup> For the choice of the specific items, and their association with Jason and the Argonauts, see Boyle (2014) 325-26.

<sup>161</sup> Betz (1986) 136 n. 114: the “blood of Typhon” was the codified name for the blood of an ass; 150 n. 1: “Typhon’s skull” is the semantic equivalent of an ass’ skull.

<sup>162</sup> Boyle (2014) 324.

was generally considered a major factor for the spell's success (e.g. *PDM* xiv 515), the spectators would normally expect that the current ritual will fail solely on religious grounds.<sup>163</sup> Surprisingly though, not only is the ritual completed, but also the plan proves eventually successful, thus affirming the absence of divine forces from the process.

The scene continues with Medea's ritualistic acts in her capacity as Hecate's priestess. The emphasis is laid on the description of her arm's slashing (807-11), probably as an effort to bring in the mind of the audience certain much-despised cult rituals, and to cause them the same emotion for magic:

Tibi sanguineo caespite sacrum sollemne damus, tibi de medio rapta sepulcro fax nocturnos sustulit ignes,	800
tibi mota caput flexa uoces ceruice dedi, tibi funereo de more iacens passos cingit uitta capillos, tibi iactatur tristis Stygia ramus ab unda,	805
tibi nudato pectore maenas sacro feriam bracchia cultro. manet noster sanguis ad aras: assuesce, manus, stringere ferrum carosque pati posse cruores – sacrum laticem percussa dedi.	810

For you we offer the holy rite  
on the bloody turf,  
for you the torch is seized from the midst of a pyre,  
to burn for you with fires in the night-time,  
for you I toss my head and twist my neck  
and chant my spells,  
for you I have tied up my flowing hair  
in a headband like corpses wear,  
for you I shake the gloomy branch from the waters of Styx.  
For you, bare-breasted, like a Maenad,

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<sup>163</sup> For the importance of purification in religious rituals, and the implications behind someone's failure to purify themselves, see Lennon (2014) 29-54.

I slash my arms with a holy knife.  
My own blood drips on the altar:  
hands, get used to unsheathing the blade,  
and submit to shed your own dear blood.  
I have struck myself! The sacred fluid flows.

(trans. Wilson)

The *sollemne sacrum* probably refers collectively to the items mentioned in lines 771-84 as customary offerings for Hecate. The audience now witnesses the heroine raising a torch while dancing ecstatically, moving her head and bending her neck. Her disheveled hair is encircled with a headband, the characteristic *uitta* of the priestess.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, she is shaking a tree branch, probably yew, as part of the ritual, and having exposed her breast, she strikes her arm with a knife to let her blood drip on the altar.<sup>165</sup> As Kohn argues, it is quite doubtful that the actor would have mutilated himself on stage.<sup>166</sup> However, it is probable that he would have drawn a fake knife, and pantomimed the act with the intention of shocking the spectators. That Seneca probably modeled this scene after real spells he had heard about, is further supported by several texts in the *PGM*. Human blood was never involved in indigenous Roman rituals, but there are certain references of its use in magic: *PGM* IV 79 and IV 2202 require the blood of a pregnant woman and that of a *biaiothanatos* respectively, to be used as ink; *PDM Suppl.* 89 instructs the spell operator to use blood from their thigh during the ritual; finally, *PGM* XCIII 1-6 details a ritual in honor of Hecate, which requires to pour blood in a vessel, and besprinkle it on the outside (with blood?) in order to acquire the goddess' favor. The scene of self-mutilation would have reminded the audience of the rituals of Bellona, Ashtaroth, and Isis, whose priests

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<sup>164</sup> Costa (1973) 145.

<sup>165</sup> Boyle (2014) 329: yew or cypress; Costa (1973) 145: yew.

<sup>166</sup> Kohn (2013) 87-88: "Although we are told that the blood is about to flow over the altar (*manet noster sanguis ad aras*, 808), it is doubtful that the actor is really about to cut himself. More likely, just telling the audience that the self-mutilation is about to happen is enough. Nevertheless, Medea draws the pantomimed knife (*assuesce, manus, stringere ferrum*, 809)."

and priestesses were despised by the Romans for castrating and cutting themselves.<sup>167</sup> Seneca was critical of such excessive forms of worship as it is clear in a fragment from *De Superstitione* which refers to the *Galli*, and the *Bellonarii*: *Ille -inquit- uiriles sibi partes amputat, ille lacertos secat ... Dii autem nullo debent coli genere, si hoc uolunt* (F 68 Vottero). Therefore, by dramatizing an act which was despised by Romans even during official cult rites, he manages to ignite the disgust and indignation of his audience towards the heroine's practices.

The spell concludes with Medea's specific requests as well as information about the nature of her poison. As I argue, there are certain implications in this excerpt, which also serve Seneca's purpose of downplaying the power of magic, and emphasizing the significance of human actions:

Tu nunc uestes tinge Creusae, quas cum primum sumpserit, imas urat serpens flamma medullas.	
Ignis fuluo clusus in auro	820
latet obscurus, quem mihi caeli qui furta luit uiscere feto dedit et docuit condere uires arte, Prometheus; dedit et tenui sulphure tectos Mulciber ignes,	825
et uiuacis fulgura flammae de cognato Phaethonte tuli. habeo mediae dona Chimaerae, habeo flammam usto tauri guttore raptas,	830
quas permixto felle Medusae tacitum iussi seruare malum. Adde uenenis stimulos, Hecate, donisque meis semina flammae condita serua:	835
fallant uisus tactusque ferant, meet in pectus uenasque calor, stillent artus ossaque fument	

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<sup>167</sup> For the priests of Isis and Bellona, see Beard, North, and Price (1998) 209-12, with notes and related bibliography.

uincatque suas flagrante coma  
noua nupta faces.

840

Now anoint Creusa's clothes,  
and as soon as she puts them on, let a snaky flame  
burn up very marrow of her bones.  
Let the fire lie hid in yellow gold,  
in darkness. He who robbed heaven for fire,  
and paid with ever-growing liver for his theft,  
gave me this flame, and taught me how to hide  
power by art: Prometheus. Mulciber gave  
flames hidden in delicate sulphur,  
and I got from my cousin Phaethon  
the thunder of living flame.  
I have the gifts of the middle of Chimaera,  
I have the flames stolen from the scorched throats  
of the bulls,  
which mixed with the gall of Medusa,  
I have ordered to create a secret venom.  
Hecate, whip up my poisons,  
and keep secret the seeds of flame in my gifts:  
may they deceive the eyes, submit to touch,  
but may the heat swim to the heart and veins,  
make melt the limbs and smoke the bones  
and may that newly wedded bride outdo her marriage torch  
with her own smoking hair. (trans. Wilson)

First, Medea asks Hecate to anoint Creusa's garment with poison. This seems quite a strange request to address to a deity since the task is both trivial and easy to perform. Besides, in Euripides' *Medea*, it is the heroine herself who infuses the gown with poison (789). However, during the dramatization of the act, the line allows for the creation of a discrepancy between the speech and the actions of the heroine. The audience merely witnesses Medea smearing the clothes with poison, despite her requests for divine assistance, thus emphasizing her own responsibility in the murder of Creon and Creusa. More appropriate requests in the context of a prayer are the ones that follow, and which one might say are subject to external circumstances. Hecate is asked to allow the poison to remain undetected on the golden artifacts, i.e. the headband and necklace which Medea intends to donate to the bride, and to boost its destructive

power by affecting the victim's heart and veins, and melting her limbs and bones. Yet, these requests are probably uttered while the actor pantomimes the same act of smearing, which leads them to pass somewhat unnoticed by the spectators.

Human responsibility is also underlined through the reference to Prometheus. According to the myth, the Titan deified Zeus by stealing the fire from the Olympians, and offering it to humans (Hes. *Theog.* 565-66, *Op.* 50; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.7.1). Although his actions were meant to help the mankind improve their lives, in this instance, his gift is used for a reason that it was never intended, that is, to cause harm. But since Prometheus' intentions were pure, and the audience who were acquainted with the tradition would assume that he would oppose such use of his gift, then who is responsible in this case? Seneca points the finger to Medea, and by proxy, to humans who possess free will to choose their conduct.<sup>168</sup>

Finally, the audience would probably be able to recognize, through the poison's self-incendiary properties, that it was a substance very similar -if not identical- to those used by Romans in warfare, and therefore a completely human invention. The heroine claims that the mixture consists of Prometheus' fire, the Vulcan's flame hidden in sulphur, the thunder of the living flame of Phaethon, the fires of Chimaera and the Colchian bull, and the gal of Medusa. We can certainly assume that all these are codified names for real materials like those used in magic rituals, but there is one ingredient that stands out, i.e. sulphur, whose fire-causing properties were well known in antiquity (Mart. 1.41.4-5, 10.3.3-4, 12.57.14, Stat. *Silu.* 1.6.74; Juv. 5.48). And by the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E., Roman authors had already begun to speculate on the specific formula used by Medea, with Pliny concluding that naphtha must have been one of its secret ingredients (*HN* 2.235-36). It has been also suggested that the heroine might refer to an automatic incendiary weapon like the one described by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. author Julius Africanus who wrote several

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<sup>168</sup> For a discussion on free will and human autonomy in the works of Seneca, see Setaioli (2014a) 277-99.

treatises on magic and military tactics. The recipe lists sulphur, salt, resin, charcoal, asphalt, and quicklime to be carefully mixed into a paste during the day, and then, because of its highly unstable nature, to be sealed in a bronze box to avoid accidental ignition. The mixture was secretly infused on enemy siege weapons, and at sunrise, the paste would combust, ignited by heavy dew or light mist, rendering the siege engines useless.<sup>169</sup> Seneca's mentioning of sulphur as an ingredient of the poison might point to circulating theories about Medea's formula, but more important, it leads the audience to conclude that there is nothing supernatural in the way Creon and Creusa meet their doom.

### Conclusions

As we saw in this chapter, magic as a form of *superstitio* forcefully opposes religion with the catastrophic results on the political and social order, as manifested in the *Medea*. The narrative of the play incorporates a variety of magical *realia* which reveal Seneca's acquaintance with the culture and religious practices of the *populus*. Medea's use of magic makes it clear that it can be used to inflict harm and as such cannot coexist with religion perceived in its Stoic sense. In the next chapter, I show how magic manifests itself in the figure of the monstrous Erichtho, in a world where humans conduct themselves without the safety barriers of divine providence.

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<sup>169</sup> For the information on Julius Africanus paste, and the possible ingredients of Medea's poison, see Mayor (2009) 227-28, and 289 n. 14.

## CHAPTER 3:

### Lucan, the Didactic Poet

#### Stoicism and the *Bellum Ciuile*

Marcus Annaeus Lucanus, the son of Acilia and the *eques* M. Annaeus Mela, was born in Cordoba in the Roman province of Spain in 39 C.E. (*Vacca* 1-16). The distinguished name of the family of the Annaei, mostly due to the active interference of his uncle with the Roman public life, secured for the young Lucan wide recognition and wealth, especially after Seneca was recalled from exile to become Nero's tutor in 49 C.E. While in Rome, he studied with some prominent grammarians (*Vacca* 25-27) and became the pupil of M. Annaeus Cornutus, an important expounder of Stoic Philosophy (Val. Prob. *Vita Persii* 5).<sup>1</sup> Stoicism, therefore, was an essential part of both his education and family heritage, and for this reason, its impact on the *Bellum Ciuile* dominated academic discussions for years.<sup>2</sup>

The ensuing debate largely revolved around the importance of Stoic ideology as the force that shaped the poem, and the central question was whether Lucan had been merely influenced by its doctrine or was a committed Stoic himself. In the introduction to his 1887 commentary Haskins traced the connections between several passages in the *Bellum Ciuile* and Stoic tenets as they were crystallized by Zeller, and which pertained to the ideas of universal law, virtue, the

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<sup>1</sup>For the main sources of Lucan's life see Heitland (1887) xiii-xx. The bulk of the information comes from Suetonius' 2<sup>nd</sup> century *Vita Lucani*, the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century *Vita Vaccae*, and the anonymous biography in the *Codex Vossianus II* which probably draws heavily from that of Suetonius (Asso [2010] 2). However, scholars have already underlined the value of Stat. *Silu.* 2.7, the so-called *genethliacon Lucani*, as a source for the events of the poet's life (Newlands [2011]). Stories about Lucan's interaction with Nero are also found *passim* in Tacitus' *Annales* 15. A discussion on these texts and a reconstruction of Lucan's life can be found in Ahl (1976) 17-46, 333-53, and more recently, Masters (1992) 216-34, and Fantham (2011) 3-21.

<sup>2</sup> The influence of Cornutus' theory on Lucan has been discussed in detail by Most (1989); on the poet's education see Morford (1967), Due (1970) 201-24, and Lapidge (1989).



divine, death and suicide as well as the concept of the wise man (*sage*).<sup>3</sup> Decades later, Sikes pointed out the significance of Stoic philosophy in the composition of the *Bellum Ciuile*, and in Lucan's break with the epic tradition. He argued that both the lack of a mythological background in the poem, and the poet's efforts to reveal the motives behind the characters' actions should be attributed to his Stoic upbringing.<sup>4</sup> However, his greatest contribution was the discussion of the absence of divine machinery from the narrative, which he also recognized as the result of Lucan's philosophical inclinations.<sup>5</sup>

A more complete overview of Stoicism in the *Bellum Ciuile* was given by Marti, who advocated for a didactic reading of the poem. In her 1945 essay "The meaning of the Pharsalia," she argued that Lucan offers us a universal example of Stoic values by presenting the reader with models of exemplary virtue and wickedness. More specifically, Cato and Caesar symbolize respectively the positive and negative ends of the Stoic ethical system while Pompey is the ordinary man who, despite his vices, strives toward good.<sup>6</sup> Thus, through the protagonists' depictions and the proffered advice on how one should conduct themselves to achieve the status of the Stoic *sage*, the *Bellum Ciuile* becomes an epic about people's character and their position in the *cosmos*. It is under this light that Pompey is considered the representation of the *proficiens*, the person who does their best to adhere to the ideals of Stoicism.<sup>7</sup>

Marti's article set the scene for many subsequent studies which address several aspects of Lucan's Stoicism, and examine how closely he sticks to its doctrine. In his 1959 dissertation Morris explored the connections between Seneca's works and the *Bellum Ciuile*, concluding that

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<sup>3</sup> Heitland (1887) xlii-xlix.

<sup>4</sup> Sikes (1923) 204.

<sup>5</sup> Sikes (1923) 202-3.

<sup>6</sup> Marti (1945b) 358-74.

<sup>7</sup> Marti (1945b) 367; for the definition of the Stoic *proficiens*, and the various steps of progress toward the goal of becoming a *sage* see Arnold (1911) 294-95, and 327-29 respectively.

although Lucan was greatly influenced by his uncle, nonetheless he exercised an independent thought whenever the elements of the story dictated him to do so.<sup>8</sup> His departure from Orthodox Stoicism was further discussed by Schotes who systematically collected all the statements on physics, psychology, and theology in the poem, and compared them with Stoic tenets. He concluded that while Lucan asserts himself as an Orthodox Stoic, especially in the first two philosophical realms, there are several ideas in the *Bellum Ciuile* which deviate from the Orthodox Stoic tradition such as, for example, the marked pessimism in the poem's cosmology as well as the substitution of the unfair and capricious fate for the supreme deity in the divine realm.<sup>9</sup> The influence of Seneca on Lucan's work was also the central theme of Due's 1970 essay "Lucain et la philosophie," in which the scholar favors an approach of Roman eclecticism, thus refuting the claim that the poet was an unconditional follower of Stoicism.<sup>10</sup> He discusses and compares several passages from the *Bellum Ciuile* with excerpts from Seneca, which not only show the latter's impact on the poem, but also illustrate how Lucan modifies and transforms the Stoic dogma to fit his beliefs and purposes. The conclusion, in his own words, is that "Lucain est un stoïcien qui a perdu la foi."<sup>11</sup>

Although scholars dealt with Lucan's Stoicism quite extensively, it was not until 1979 that they attempted to explore in detail the connections between Stoic cosmology and the *Bellum Ciuile*. Lapidge examined several passages from Seneca, Cornutus, and Manilius, which treated the subject of cosmic dissolution, and by comparing them to relevant excerpts from Lucan proved that the image of cosmic dissolution is the unifying theme of the first seven books.<sup>12</sup> This image, much anticipated and referred to in the first six books culminates in the description of the

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<sup>8</sup> Morris (1959).

<sup>9</sup> Schotes (1969) 174.

<sup>10</sup> Due (1970) 201-24

<sup>11</sup> Due (1970) 225.

<sup>12</sup> Lapidge (1979) 362-63.

destruction after the battle of Pharsalus at book 7.<sup>13</sup> Lapidge's study remained influential as the image of the world collapsing in chaos became central in subsequent studies on the *Bellum Ciuile*, especially those of the deconstructionism school.

In the 80's a completely new line of interpretation appeared, rejecting the commonly accepted notion of Lucan as a Stoic poet. Notable scholars, including Johnson, Henderson, and Masters argued for a gloomy, sinister, at times grimly parodic poet who depicts the chaos of a shattered and ultimately meaningless *cosmos*. Following the Harvard School of Pessimism, Johnson claims that Lucan shows his disappointment at the republican tradition and Stoic philosophy by the "delusion of virtue" in his sketching of Cato.<sup>14</sup> His intention is to illustrate the terrors and dreads of Rome under Nero, a period characterized by the loss of freedom and hope.<sup>15</sup> His monograph presents a novel and provocative reading of the *Bellum Ciuile* as black comedy, with its four hilarious and cartoonish *quasi*-heroes, i.e. Caesar, Pompey, Cato, and Erichtho.<sup>16</sup> Johnson was the first who challenged the traditional Stoic readings of Lucan's protagonists, thus opening new trends in scholarship.

Soon after Johnson, Henderson published his seminal article "Lucan: The Word at War," which paved the way for post-modern studies on Lucan. His article examines the inconsistencies in the poem as they are echoed in Lucan's poetic language, arguing that the *Bellum Ciuile* is a work about the triumph of despotism, and the demise of the Republic. Henderson recognizes the poet's attempt to expose the rise of Caesar and the superimposition of the Caesar *nomen* upon the entire world.<sup>17</sup> Lucan is not singing of the creation of the *gens Romana*, the divine plans for the

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<sup>13</sup> Lapidge (1979) 370.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson (1987) 38-66.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson (1987) 65: in an age where political freedom and hope has been lost, Lucan tries to rescue the memory of Cato as the personification of virtue.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson (1987) 56 recognizes the "comic-ugly" as part of Lucan's narrative technique.

<sup>17</sup> Henderson (1988) 141-42.

Roman race or foreign wars full of Roman triumphs as Vergil did. Instead, he narrates the destruction of *Aeneid*'s universe, the collapse of the Republic, and the *nefas* of civil war.<sup>18</sup> Mutilation and disfigurement, all prominent throughout the poem, mirror Lucan's contemporary reality, a world laid in waste.

Jamie Masters' 1992 *Poetry and Civil War* follows closely the conclusions drawn by Henderson arguing that Lucan as a narrator loves delay, obstruction, and diversion because of his reluctance to proceed with the events which led to Caesar's victory.<sup>19</sup> Not only does he delay the appearance of the poem's "villain" with a lengthy introduction in book 1, but also describes the rivers and boundaries that the latter must cross throughout the narrative as hurdles to his progress, thus rendering *mora* itself a limit that he must pass.<sup>20</sup> Masters goes on to assert that Lucan models his narrator after the characters of his poem. Of course, the idea that a poet can describe his own actions with vocabulary relevant to the subject of his work is not new, but Masters further advances the concept by arguing that Lucan is allowing the reenactment of the civil war by writing the *Bellum Ciuile*.<sup>21</sup> In this effort, he identifies himself with both characters of Caesar and Pompey, thus creating a dual personality: on the one hand, his persona is Caesarian since he narrates and, therefore, recreates the horrors and dreads of the civil war, but on the other hand, it is also Pompeian because he provides some form of resistance to the reenactment of such evils just as Pompey tries to resist his opponent.<sup>22</sup> The book's most important

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<sup>18</sup> The view of Lucan as an anti-Vergil is first found in Hardie (1986) 381; for a more detailed justification on the *Bellum Ciuile* as anti-*Aeneid* see Henderson (1988) 141-51.

<sup>19</sup> Henderson (1988) 133-34; Masters (1992) 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Masters (1992) 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> The convention whereby a poet parallels his work with the subject about which he is writing was noted by Cairns (1972) 163 and n. 6, and fully explored in Lieberg's (1982) book *Poeta Creator. Studien zu einer Figur der antiken Dichtung*.

<sup>22</sup> Masters (1992) 8-10.

contribution, however, remains the detailed discussion of the internal and external evidence which argue for the completeness of the *Bellum Ciuile*.<sup>23</sup>

An attempt to combine the two opposing tendencies in scholarship, namely the view that the epic reflects Lucan's ideological agenda and the deconstructionists' approach, was undertaken by Shadi Bartsch. In her 1997 book *Ideology in Cold Blood* she maintains that the inconsistencies in the *Bellum Ciuile* should be attributed to Lucan's aim to present the readers with two incompatible options for their relation to political ideology and hope. At the same time, the poet leads the reader to create a third reading out of their juxtaposition.<sup>24</sup> In other words, Bartsch asserts that Lucan intended for two different interpretations simultaneously: reading the *Bellum Ciuile* as both an example of ideological poetry criticizing the empire, and a work which proclaims the vanity of ideology, belief, and hope in the era after the collapse of the Roman Republic.<sup>25</sup> We, as readers, should look for a more comprehensive reading of the *Bellum Ciuile* somewhere between these two approaches, and the two distinctive characters of Pompey which Lucan puts forward are pivotal toward this goal. One is Caesar's opponent, a man equally greedy for power, a tyrant just like his father-in-law; the other is Pompey the hero, a Stoic *proficiens*, and the last champion of the Republic. One depiction is the creation of the narrator while the other emerges naturally from the text itself.<sup>26</sup> And since the narrator frequently praises the general's achievements and qualities, we can assume that Lucan's intention was to render Pompey more favorable to the readers at the end of the poem.<sup>27</sup>

Robert Sklenár also based his argument on the deconstructionists' approach, but he reached a different conclusion than his predecessors in his 2003 study *The Taste for Nothingness*.

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<sup>23</sup> Masters (1992) 217-59.

<sup>24</sup> Bartsch (1997) 3.

<sup>25</sup> Bartsch (1997) 5-7.

<sup>26</sup> Bartsch (1997) 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed analysis of the character of Pompey, and his decisive role in the poem, see Bartsch (1997) 73-100.

*A Study of Virtus and Related Themes in Lucan's Bellum Ciuile.* Contrary to the views of Johnson, Henderson, and Masters, who regard Lucan's disorderly style as an intended result of his effort to portray the disruptive character of his theme, Sklenár argues that the poet shapes his *cosmos* following certain rules even though he acknowledges that his poem's universe lacks such set of principles. In Sklenár's own words, "it is possible to describe chaos without being chaotic, to document with clinical precision the absence of precision in language, to make a logical case for the absence of logic."<sup>28</sup> Lucan wants to undermine Stoic values and ideas both in individual scenes as well as in the broad picture of the poem's cosmology. And to achieve this goal, he transforms the Stoic *ekpyrosis* into "a terrifying vision of the fire at the end of time."<sup>29</sup> The failure to restore the cosmos into its previous form after the process is completed shows clearly that the Stoic imagery is used to serve a completely unstoic position.

In 2007 scholarship took a turn away from the deconstructionists' approach which dominated Lucanian studies for almost 20 years. D' Allesandro Behr's *Feeling History: Lucan, Stoicism, and the Poetics of Passion* studies the various uses of the *apostrophe* in the poem as the means to express the narrator's views and shape his voice. She claims that Lucan's adoption of the specific rhetorical trope allows him to guide the audience's moral interpretations, assuming that his motives are both sincere and didactic.<sup>30</sup> In her analysis of the character of Cato as the representation of the *sage*, Behr maintains that Lucan reconciles Cato's sublimity to his humanity. More specifically, he is not portrayed as the Stoic *sage* who is indifferent to the suffering of people for whom he cares; he does not abandon his companions in their misfortunes; he mourns, and above all he does not reject emotions, only the passions.<sup>31</sup> Although this

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<sup>28</sup> Sklenár (2003) 2.

<sup>29</sup> Sklenár (2003) 6-10.

<sup>30</sup> D' Allesandro Behr (2007) 33-75.

<sup>31</sup> D' Allesandro Behr (2007) 104-7.

depiction deviates from the orthodox conception of the *sage*, Behr insists that not only is such behavior praiseworthy, but also in accordance with Stoic ideology.<sup>32</sup> She sees in Lucan's Cato an attempt to put forward an example of the *sage* as the perfect miles who is the narrator's counterpart, a personification of both Stoic and republican conscience.<sup>33</sup>

Wiener's 2010 essay also goes against the widespread view that the *Bellum Ciuile* expresses Lucan's disappointment at the failure of the Stoic doctrine to be a convincing philosophical path in the face of evil in human action or unavoidable blows of fate.<sup>34</sup> Wiener expands the philosophical perspective of the plot, the aesthetic place of which is contrary to the epic tradition, and imposed by the Stoic background of the work. Without the presence of divine machinery, the narrative is modeled on and subject to Stoic teleology.<sup>35</sup> Individual characters are able to resist by refusing to abide by the eternal laws of nature, thus creating an atmosphere of tension, which is part of the crisis and the destruction of the *cosmos*.<sup>36</sup> From this perspective, the poem purposely deals with the Stoic questions on the field of tension between human agency and determinism, and is akin to a form of *praemeditatio malorum*.<sup>37</sup>

Unique among the philosophical interpretations of the *Bellum Ciuile* is the one proposed in Fratantuono's 2012 *Madness Triumphant: A Reading of Lucan's Pharsalia*. The study which concludes a trilogy on Latin epic lacks a central argument tying together the individual chapters. The author mainly deals with *furor* as a concept permeating the narrative, and other various aspects of the *Bellum Ciuile*, but his most important contribution is the extensive discussion on

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<sup>32</sup> D' Allessandro Behr (2007) 128-34.

<sup>33</sup> D' Allessandro Behr (2007) 128.

<sup>34</sup> This idea is central in the deconstructionists' approach as well as Sklenár's (2003) monograph. Marti (1945b) 356-357 regards Lucan's criticism of Stoicism a rhetorical *tropos*, claiming that his pessimism is momentary. Narducci (1979) and (2002) 152-67 argues that Lucan's attack against divine providence is an effort to emphasize the self-sufficiency of the sage.

<sup>35</sup> Wiener (2010) 161.

<sup>36</sup> Wiener (2010) 167-73.

<sup>37</sup> Wiener (2010) 164-67.

the poem's intertextual links with Lucretius, Manilius, and Vergil throughout the text.<sup>38</sup> Contrary to the majority of scholars who regard Lucan as a Stoic, Fratantuono argues that not only does Lucan seem more sympathetic to Epicurean values, but from time to time he expresses hostility to some Orthodox Stoic tenets such as the relationship of the *sage* to the would be king.<sup>39</sup>

Although scholarship has been, and will remain, divided on the impact of Stoicism on the *Bellum Ciuile*, I believe that it is impossible to disentangle the poem from Lucan's philosophical heritage. Like most Stoics of the early Roman Empire, Lucan is an eclectic whose views were shaped and heavily influenced by his teachers, but especially his uncle Seneca.<sup>40</sup> In the next sections I argue that one of the purposes of the epic is to underline the importance of human action in Stoicism by putting forward various opposing examples of human conduct. As Marti argued, Caesar and Cato function respectively as the negative and positive ends of the Stoic ethical system while Pompey represents the person who strives to reach the status of the *sage* (*proficiens*).<sup>41</sup> However, the examples of human behavior are not limited to the protagonists of the *Bellum Ciuile* since secondary characters also exhibit conduct either unbecoming or befitting to the Stoic *sage*.<sup>42</sup> In other words, individual episodes such as those involving Appius, Domitius Ahenobarbus, Scaeva, Vulteius, and Sextus Pompey fit prominently in the poem's Stoic mentality, serving as examples of human conduct in the face of evil. To illustrate better the significance of human action, Lucan creates a world insulated from divine intervention, in which

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<sup>38</sup> Fratantuono (2012) xviii-xxv.

<sup>39</sup> Fratantuono (2012) xix.

<sup>40</sup> Walde (2012) 59-60 rejects a solely Stoic interpretation of the poem, and recognizes the influence of multiple philosophical schools on Lucan.

<sup>41</sup> D'Alessandro Behr (2014) 224-44 examines Pompey's final meeting with Cornelia (8.1-108) and his death (10.536-636), arguing that Lucan portrays the Roman general as an individual determined to become an example for his family and future generations, while he is also at odds with divine providence. This depiction is close to the idea of the Stoic *sage* who rebels against the irrationality imposed by fate.

<sup>42</sup> The themes of *uirtus* and *pietas* permeate the episodes involving Scaeva and Vulteius, Appius, and Sextus; for a general discussion on the minor characters of the *Bellum Ciuile*, and their function in the narrative see Ahl (1976) 116-49.



everything, as Wiener proposed, is subject to Stoic teleology. More specifically, the traditional gods of the epic yield their powers to *fata* and *fortuna*, and the characters are free to either resist or comply with the eternal laws of nature. But if they choose the latter, they must also triumph over the negative aspects of *fortuna* and the “evils” of this world. This is the only way for the Stoic *sage* to become equal to god or, even more important, his collaborator by “re-establishing the rationality of the divine plan.”<sup>43</sup>

### Divine World in the *Bellum Ciuile*

One of the most notable features of the *Bellum Ciuile*, which places the poem against the earlier epic tradition, is the abandonment of the divine machinery. Although gods are still mentioned in the narrative, both collectively and individually, with their names or characteristic epithets, the references to divine plans and deeds are scarce compared to the Augustan epics. Even more striking is the gods’ passive role in the plot: long gone are their appearances in front of mortals, their engagement in battles and conflicts as well as the divine councils and arguments, all well attested in epic poetry from Homer to Ovid.

The gods’ absence from the narrative is not a pre-existing reality in the universe of the poem, but a significant development which takes place at the end of book 1. Lucan’s statement characterizing the omens which flooded land, air, and sea as godsend implies that divine machinery is still functional at that time: ... *superique minaces / prodigiis terras inplerunt, aethera, pontum* (“...and the menacing gods fill the earth, the sky, and the sea with prodigies,” 1.524-25).<sup>44</sup> However, this is the only instance of the gods’ active interference with human affairs throughout the *Bellum Ciuile*. For the rest of the poem, both before and during the course

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<sup>43</sup> For this role of the Stoic *sage* see Setaioli (2014) 399. Walde (2012) 68-69 argues that Lucan deals with *fortuna* in order to address the question of which of the two generals not only has a personal *Fortuna*, but also *Fortuna* of Rome on his side.

<sup>44</sup> Feeney (1991) 270-72 notes that the supernatural element fits prominently in the first book.

of the armed conflict between Caesar and Pompey, they remain passive because, in the narrator's view, the destruction and the immorality of civil war (brother pitched against brother, son against father, and so on) cannot be the product of divine will.<sup>45</sup> Of course, Lucan's choice to present the gods distancing themselves from the atrocities of the civil war is the result of the poet's Stoic inclinations. More specifically, one of the most important principles of Stoic theology is that god is capable of no evil (DL 7.147: Θεὸν δ' εἶναι ζῆλον... κακοῦ παντὸς ἀνεπίδεκτον), and as such he cannot consent to evil or give it assistance.<sup>46</sup> This is further affirmed by Lucan's careful omission of the divine element from the various causes of the civil war (1.67-182) which is also his first step in shaping a universe where traditional gods have no authority over the events of the plot.<sup>47</sup>

The narrator's obsession with the status of the gods and his efforts to address the matter throughout the *Bellum Ciuile* has been marked by Bartsch who further noticed that almost all attempts to explore the situation in the divine realm fail, and such "Unsicherheit" characterizes the poem in general.<sup>48</sup> Except for his assertion that the gods' wrath is the motive behind the omens (1.524-25, and 2.1-4), the narrator is left in the dark regarding any other aspect of the divine as we can infer from 2.7-13:

Sive parens rerum, cum primum informia regna  
materiamque rudem flamma cedente recepit,  
fixit in aeternum causas, qua cuncta coercet  
se quoque lege tenens, et saecula iussa ferentem     10  
fatorum in moto diuisit limite mundum,

<sup>45</sup> This is further affirmed by the negative signs for Caesar's marching to Rome. Le Bonniec (1970) 174-78 argues that for Lucan Caesar's victory was not compatible with the belief in divine providence.

<sup>46</sup> Although Stoic philosophers put forward slightly different definitions for the nature of god, the passage in Diogenes Laertius is considered the one summarizing best their views. Seneca too, discusses the beneficial nature of the god (*Ben.* 4.3.3-4.9.1), and his incompatibility with evil (*Sen. Ep.* 75.19 and 95.49; *Dial.* 4.27 [=De Ira 2.27]). Of course, this imposes no restriction or limitation on god's freedom (*Ben.* 6.23 and 6.21.3).

<sup>47</sup> For example, in *Iliad* 1.5 Homer refers to Zeus' will as the cause of the Trojan war; Aeneas' adventures were the result of Juno's wrath *Aen.* 1.4; the goddess' hatred is also listed among the causes of the war in *Sil.* 1.38).

<sup>48</sup> Erler (2012) discusses extensively the narrator's 'Unsicherheit' (uncertainty).

siue nihil positum est, sed fors incerta uagatur  
fertque refertque uices et habet mortalia casus ...

Perhaps when the Creator first took up his shapeless realm  
of raw matter after the conflagration had died down,  
he fixed causes for all eternity, binding himself too by his  
all-controlling law, and with the immovable boundary of destiny  
arranged the universe to introduce prescribed ages.  
Or perhaps nothing is ordained, but Chance at random wanders  
bringing change after change, and accident is master of mortal  
affairs. (trans. Braund)

The passage presents the reader with two opposite and mutually exclusive explanations (*siue...siue*) for the situation in the divine world, thus creating a form of disjunction with the *manifesta signa*.<sup>49</sup> Equally puzzled as Nigidius Figulus in 1.639-71, the narrator expresses the same alternative views regarding the origin of the omens: either anything that happens in the world is the consequence of pre-determined causation set by Jupiter within the limits of fate (*fatorum immoto limite*) which also binds the father of gods to the same rules (*se quoque lege tenens*) or everything in the universe is run by a non-teleological randomness (*fors incerta*). The verbal similarities with Nigidius' interpretation are striking: either fate as a pre-ordained force (*si fata mouent*, 1.644) or pure chance (*nulla cum lege ... / ... incerto... motu*, 1.642-43) rule the universe.<sup>50</sup> Each alternative represents the doctrine of a major philosophical school since the belief in a deterministic world is central in Stoic theology while the randomness of events is an important concept of Epicurean thought.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For an analysis of the passage, see Fantham (1992) 80-81.

<sup>50</sup> On the connections between Nigidius' views and the Epicurean and Stoic traditions, see Roche (2009) 365-66; on Nigidius on the antipodes of Virgilian Jove, see Casali (2011) 92-95.

<sup>51</sup> See note 49.

The perceived confusion around the status of the divine world persists for the most part of the *Bellum Ciuile*, until the narrator comes to a ground-shaking realization in book 7.445-48, and 454-55:<sup>52</sup>

Sunt nobis nulla profecto	445
numina: cum caeco rapiantur saecula casu, mentimur regnare Iouem. spectabit ab alto aethere Thessalicas, teneat cum fulmina, caedes? ... mortalia nulli	
sunt curata deo.	455
... Without a doubt, we have no deities: since human life is swept along by blind chance, we lie that Jupiter is king. Will he watch Thessalian bloodshed from the lofty ether even though he holds his thunderbolts? ... Human	
Affairs are cared for by no deity. (trans. Braund)	

Upon a first reading, the ideas expressed in the passage look very similar to those of Nigidius in 1.642-44 as well as the narrator's in 2.7-13, describing a situation where either luck regulates everything, and thus the gods are powerless, or even worse, they exist, but they do not care about human affairs. Both views are in harmony with the Epicurean doctrine, but they need not be taken as Lucan's final word on the matter of "who runs the affairs of the universe."<sup>53</sup> The accumulating references to gods in subsequent lines seem to contradict such conclusion: for example, in 7.690, the narrator addresses Pompey, urging him to summon the gods as witnesses (*ac testare deos*); in 7.705, he asks the general to trust both the gods and fate (*crede deis, longo fatorum crede fauori*). Such discrepancies underline the narrator's fractured voice, and most

<sup>52</sup> On the passage, see Lanzarone (2016) 366-71.

<sup>53</sup> Chaudhuri (2014) 173-75: "a powerful battery of attacks on traditional epic theology, as if the narrator at last offers an explanation for the strange character of the poem thus far".

importantly help the reader realize that the *Bellum Ciuile* is not meant to address questions of theological nature.<sup>54</sup>

### Fortuna, Fata, and the Gods in the Bellum Ciuile

Instead of attributing the events of the civil war to the traditional gods of epic poetry, Lucan suggests *fata* and *fortuna* (and their synonyms) as possible replacements of the divine machinery.<sup>55</sup> Their role in both individual episodes and the outcome of the war between Caesar and Pompey is first emphasized in the same passages which make the case for the gods' withdrawal from the narrative.<sup>56</sup> Although in 1.642-45, 2.1-10 and 7.445-55 they are presented as mutually exclusive, several excerpts suggest that Lucan uses *fortuna* and *fata* interchangeably.<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere, especially when related to Caesar, they appear to be identical (1.262-65, 227, 393-94).<sup>58</sup> What matters more, however, is that together, as an inseparable entity, they have assumed control of the divine realm, and since they seem to overlap frequently (e.g. 5.500-2), it does not really make a difference whether Lucan uses the binaries *di/superi* or *fortuna/fata*.<sup>59</sup> As scholars have already observed, fate, fortune, and the gods are often mentioned in pairs within the *Bellum Ciuile*, and this is consistent with the Stoic theological view which argues that god, fate, fortune, chance, providence, nature and reason are merely different words used to describe the same

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<sup>54</sup> Feeney (1991) 282-83. Many scholars assume that the narrator's confusion is the result of Lucan's youthfulness, and poetic immaturity (see, for example, Dilke [1960] 40-41 and Le Bonniec [1970] 178). For an opposite view, suggesting that this confusion is an important element of Lucan's narrative technique, see Syndikus (1958).

<sup>55</sup> The word *fatum* occurs 254 times, while *fortuna* 144, but they are not always used as replacements of the divine agent.

<sup>56</sup> From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, Lucanian scholarship has focused on the problem of their function in the poem. See Friedrich (1938), Dick (1967), Long (2007), Eigler (2012) 50-52, and Walde (2012) as well as the brief discussion by Barratt (1979) 95-96 and Dinter (2012) 132.

<sup>57</sup> Liebeschuetz (1979) 142-43, 148; Pratt (1983) 51; Feeney (1991) 280.

<sup>58</sup> Getty (1940) 58 and 80; Friedrich (1938) 407 n. 2: in Manilius' *Astronomica* 4.14-21, *fata* is represented as having the same power as *fortuna*. Thus, they do not seem to be two clearly distinctive forces, but rather a multivalent one. On Caesar and *fortuna*, see Walde (2012) 68-69.

<sup>59</sup> For an elaborate explanation of this idea, see Friedrich (1938) 405-6. Pichon (1912) 175 concludes that the words fate, fortune, and gods are just different names for the unalterable destiny; see also Friedrich (1938) 408-9.

idea.<sup>60</sup> Especially the relation between *fortuna* and *fata* in Stoicism has been accurately explained by Frede who notes that “since there are no uncoordinated trains of events in the universe, there are no irregular occurrences that do not ‘belong’ in a given context. Though the Stoics do not deny the difference between what happens regularly and rare occurrences, the latter are as much part of nature as the regular events. Chance and luck are therefore merely a matter of human ignorance: what seem to us like freak accidents are part of the overall order of nature.”<sup>61</sup>

The assimilation between *fata* and *fortuna* also occurs, though rarely, in the *Aeneid*.<sup>62</sup> The essential difference, however, is that Lucan renders these same powers that function in harmony with the gods and their decisions in Vergil as the only active supernatural forces in his poem. As I argue elsewhere, “*Fortuna* is described as the sole divine agent responsible for the orchestration of the civil wars, both between Marius and Sulla, and Caesar and Pompey (2.230, 3.96-97). Conventional deities have withdrawn from the narrative, powerless to resist her capricious choices (3.448-49, 5.1); powers which were reserved for the gods have now been transferred to *Fortuna*: in 1.524-25 it is they who sent the omens to warn the Romans for the upcoming destruction, but in 7.151-52, Lucan reveals *Fortuna* as the harbinger of negative signs before the battle of Pharsalus.”<sup>63</sup> Its importance for the imminent battle in Thessaly is supported further by the statistical analysis of book 7 in which the word *fortuna* occurs sixteen times, most than any other book.<sup>64</sup> Its central position in the *Bellum Ciuile* should be attributed to Lucan’s refusal to accept that the greatness of Rome which was the longtime result of divine providence and plan in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, is now led to destruction by the same forces.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Motto (1970) 92-96 s.v. *GOD*.

<sup>61</sup> Frede (2003) 183-184.

<sup>62</sup> For the assimilation of *fortuna* and *fata* in the *Aeneid*, see Bailey (1935) 235-37.

<sup>63</sup> Arampapaspis and Augoustakis (forthcoming).

<sup>64</sup> See the statistics in Walde (2012) 74.

<sup>65</sup> See note 18.

For years the choice to replace the divine machinery with *fortuna* and *fata* troubled scholars who examined their role in the poem, trying to find the cause for Lucan's deviation from the epic tradition. Nisard argued that the traditional gods of epic poetry had become obsolete, and contemporary readers were not interested in their deeds and exploits anymore.<sup>66</sup> For this reason, Lucan replaced the Olympian deities of Homer, Vergil, and Ovid with *Fortuna* which, not only is responsible for the advancement of the plot, but also vies with the gods in the poem.<sup>67</sup> A few years later Souriau concluded that divine powers in the *Bellum Ciuile* are purely conceptual in nature and lack the anthropomorphic characteristics of the divinities of earlier epics.<sup>68</sup> The poem's divine machinery, he claimed, essentially consists of various philosophical elements of Epicureanism and Stoicism, combined with Lucan's belief in the power of fate.<sup>69</sup> *Fortuna* has a central position in the poem's divine world, but her exact role remains elusive since it is hard to assimilate it only with either fate or blind chance.<sup>70</sup> A combination of Nisard's and Souriau's views was proposed by Girard who posited that Lucan linked ideas of different philosophical schools, and that the personified *Fortuna* was meant to function as the replacement of Olympian gods due to contemporary developments in Roman religious views.<sup>71</sup> Pichon argued that Lucan's belief in the concept of destiny was the main reason that led him to treat *fata*, *fortuna*, and *superi* as synonyms, regardless of the differences in their definition.<sup>72</sup> The adoption of fate as the ultimate supernatural force in the poem, and its subsequent assimilation with luck and the gods allowed Lucan to distinguish himself, respectively, from the Epicurean school, and the views of

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<sup>66</sup> Nisard (1849) 79.

<sup>67</sup> Nisard (1849) 80.

<sup>68</sup> Souriau (1886) 210.

<sup>69</sup> Souriau (1886) 205-11.

<sup>70</sup> Souriau (1886) 210.

<sup>71</sup> Girard (1888) 194-201. During Lucan's own time, the Romans began to view the gods as having abandoned the state and private individuals. Due to this development, *Fortuna* became a popular deity among the people, and Tacitus attests that Nero had ordered golden statues of *Fortuna* to be placed on the throne of Jupiter on the Capitolium in 62 C.E. at the event of his daughter's birth (*Ann.* 15.23.1).

<sup>72</sup> Pichon (1912) 172-73.

traditional paganism.<sup>73</sup> The most detailed treatment of the problem remains Friedrich's study, who maintained that Lucan depicts the traditional gods as a passive force in the background of the narrative because he questions their power and sense of justice.<sup>74</sup> Even though *fortuna* and *fata* are closely linked from the beginning of the poem, and thus they should not be considered independent entities, the former assumes the position of the supreme deity whose power overshadows that of the traditional gods who are compelled to yield to her favorites.<sup>75</sup>

Although these studies offer very significant insights about the status of the divine world in the *Bellum Ciuile*, they do not address extensively the relation between *fortuna/fata* and the role of human factor in the narrative. This point is raised by Feeney who proposed that the abandonment of divine machinery and its replacement with *fortuna* is justified also on thematic grounds. More specifically, the poem is preoccupied with the *nefas* of man (1.5-6) and, therefore, the presence of the gods in its narrative is not necessary.<sup>76</sup> Closer to my own view, however, is Ahl's argument, which asserts that Lucan's intention is to focus on moral issues, and question the lawfulness and appropriateness of individual actions.<sup>77</sup> To achieve this goal, he shapes a universe in which characters are not manipulated by any deities, and even though *fortuna* offers her patronage, they remain free to choose whether to follow or resist her commands. This allows the reader to evaluate human conduct on moral and legal grounds, independently from any supernatural influence.

### Human Action in the *Bellum Ciuile*

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<sup>73</sup> Pichon (1912) 175-76.

<sup>74</sup> Friedrich (1938) 391-92.

<sup>75</sup> Friedrich (1938) 405.

<sup>76</sup> Feeney (1991) 272.

<sup>77</sup> Ahl (1976) 295.



The concept of free will has been one of the most controversial topics in Stoicism, both for ancient thinkers and modern interpreters of its dogma. The problem arises from the difficulty of reconciling the idea of human volition with that of destiny. If everything is already pre-ordained as the Stoics asserted, then human beings have no other option but to adhere to fate's commands. However, this hypothesis holds no truth whatsoever since the Stoics considered free will compatible with determinism.<sup>78</sup>

Seneca briefly raises this point in his *Naturales Quaestiones* 2.38.3, where he vouches to discuss how something may still be left to human choice without infringing the power of fate (*cum de ista re agetur, dicam quemadmodum manente fato aliquid sit in hominis arbitrio*). He never fulfills his promise to treat the topic extensively, but the issue comes up again in *Ep.* 16.6 (*si prouidentia in imperio est aut si factorum series inligatos trahit aut si repentina ac subita dominantur*). Although short, these references offer some important information about Seneca's views on human volition. The word *arbitrium* denotes the concept of free choice or decision while *ius* describes anything that is allowed by law, rules or regulations. For Seneca, therefore, freedom of choice does exist, but it is subject to certain restrictions set by a supreme force, no matter if this is fate, divine providence, or pure chance. And what the second passage stresses even more is not so much the idea of human volition, but Seneca's belief in the significance of human effort and action despite any external factors. *Ep.* 16.6 is part of a broader discussion on the role of philosophy in human life, arguing for its value as a means of moral progress and self-

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<sup>78</sup> For an exhaustive treatment of the topic of free will in Stoicism see Bobzien (1998). For a discussion focusing on the Stoic concept of free will in ancient authors see Colish (1990) 35, 123-26, 292, and 335; Inwood (2005) 302-21 (in Seneca). For the problem of its compatibility with fate, and possible solutions see Arnold (1911) 200-1, 210-15; Bobzien (1998) (esp. 396-412); Brennan (2001) 259-86.

transformation, to which one can turn regardless of their beliefs in fate, providence, or mere chance.<sup>79</sup>

The combination of these seemingly exclusive concepts, i.e. destiny and free will, allows Seneca to solve a major problem of Stoicism, namely the existence of evil under an all-beneficent supreme deity.<sup>80</sup> To reconcile evil with divine providence, he recognized a positive effect in its existence, namely that evil functions as a test for the man to prove his virtue (*marcet sine aduersario uirtus*, *Dial.* 1.2.3 [=Prou. 2.4]; *calamitas uirtutis occasio est*, *Dial.* 1.4.6 [=Prov. 4.6]; *auida est periculi uirtus*, *Dial.* 1.4.4 [=Prou. 4.4]). Seneca asserts that no one can be deemed virtuous without overcoming the challenges (evils) which appear in their path. The role of *fortuna* in the process of proving oneself virtuous is vital. If personified, it bears certain characteristics which make her the ideal opponent: she can be malignant, reckless, unreliable, and above all unjust, and unfavorable to the worthy ones.<sup>81</sup> Due to these traits, it creates impediments which one needs to deal with, following the most rational course, even if there is no guarantee of success. This is exactly what Seneca implies when he states that people are subject to the power of fortune which plays games with them (*Ep.* 74.7-9).

Lucan, like Seneca, was also interested in the importance of human action, independently of any external influences. This is essentially the central theme of the *Bellum Ciuile* as Feeney and Ahl noted. The narrator deliberately avoids reaching a conclusion about the status of the divine world in the poem because it does not make any difference for his didactic purposes. Lucan's intention is not to give answers to issues of theological nature, but to discuss matters of human ethics, and offer useful lessons to the readers by providing positive and negative

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<sup>79</sup> My discussion on free will in Seneca draws heavily from Setaioli (2014) 277-80.

<sup>80</sup> For the treatment of the problem of theodicy in Seneca see Fischer (2008) 11–56.

<sup>81</sup> These points are summarized in Fischer (2014) 760-61 as an introduction to the connections on physics between Senecan philosophy and drama.

examples of human conduct. To achieve this goal, he replaces traditional gods with *Fortuna*, a semi-divine figure which, although embodies a supernatural force, her existence does not deny the characters free will and choice. It is she who favors the unworthy Caesar, and places obstacles to Pompey. The latter faces difficult situations which are meant to function as tests in the process of his transformation. As a Stoic *proficiens*, Pompey tries to take the most rational course of action. Sometimes he succeeds, but even when he fails, he does not abandon his efforts.

Secondary characters also face challenges which test their moral standing, and one of the most notable examples is the witchcraft scene in book 6. From the beginning of this episode, Lucan portrays Sextus in an unfavorable light, having many unstoic qualities which place him and his choices under the reader's scrutiny. Motivated by a primary Stoic passion (irrational fear), Pompey's son seeks answers through magic. By doing so, he proves himself corrupt in the Stoic sense, thus allowing Lucan to provide his reader with a negative example of human conduct.

#### THE ERICHTHO SCENE

After his defeat at Dyrrachium Caesar, pursued by the forces of Pompey, heads to Thessaly where eventually both generals set their camps before the fateful battle of Pharsalus (6.413-14). Sextus, anxious about not only the outcome of the war, but also his own future, embarks on his attempt to consult the witch Erichtho (6.430-34). After finding her performing a novel spell on a crag, a dialogue ensues between the two, and Erichtho begins the ritual of the necromancy (6.667-749). The scene ends with the animated corpse of a soldier prophesying the death of Pompey and the destruction of his house (6.777-819).



The excerpt opens with a clever pun on the name *Magnus* in order to underscore the son's inferiority compared to the father.<sup>86</sup> In subsequent lines Lucan's criticism becomes more specific by referring to Sextus' alleged exploits during the time of the second triumvirate: he was an *exul* who scourged the seas as a pirate. This information which is confirmed by various historical narratives (e.g. Cass. Dio 48.17.3-5, 48.18-19; Vell. Pat. 2.73) has certain implications for Sextus' depiction as the 'other'. More specifically, piracy was traditionally associated with Rome's past enemies, and especially Phoenicians (Cic. *Rep.* 2.9), while Romans generally considered pirates dishonorable and barbarous people.<sup>87</sup> By referring to his activities as a pirate, not only does Lucan attribute these negative characteristics to Sextus, but also sketches him as a foreigner. This implicitly directs the reader to regard his conduct, including the decision to resort to necromancy, as inappropriate for a Roman and incompatible with the *mos maiorum*.

The use of the term *exul* to describe Sextus' future situation is equally important for his depiction as the 'other'. The punishment of exile had severe consequences for the individual, including deprivation of their wealth and political rights.<sup>88</sup> But since Sextus was not exiled by Octavian, this characterization is not to be taken literally. Perhaps Lucan tries to assimilate him with magicians by alluding to the events of 16 or 17 C.E. when, in the aftermath of the conspiracy of Scribonius Libo Drusus – he was the grand-nephew of Sextus –, Tiberius ordered the execution of every foreigner who was a *goes* or engaged in any other form of divination, and the exile of all the citizens who kept pursuing these arts after the decree's passage (Tac. *Ann.* 2.32; Cass. Dio 57.15.8-9). Or again it might be an attempt to generally link Sextus' status with

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<sup>86</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 57.

<sup>87</sup> de Souza (1999) 150; The idea of piracy as a dishonorable and barbarous practice contrary to the civilized and honorable image of the Roman is prevalent in Latin literature since the time of Cicero (see de Souza [1999] 149-78).

<sup>88</sup> For the punishment of exile, its various forms, and their consequences see Kelly (2006).

that of people who were banished. Just as they *de iure* ceased to be Roman citizens, Sextus will *de facto* cease to be Roman by conducting himself in a non-Roman way.

In the same passage, Lucan also underlines Sextus' unstoic character by referring to his motivation (423-24):<sup>89</sup>

qui stimulante metu fati praenosceret cursus,  
impatiensque morae uenturisque omnibus aeger,

Fear goaded him to know ahead of time Fate's course:  
impatient of delay and sick at heart at all to come,  
(trans. Braund)

Fear and impulse, both particularly unstoic incentives for action, are what leads Sextus to resort to witchcraft. In Stoicism, *metus* and *timor* are harmful emotions because they can cause the loss of the *animi tranquillitas*, and subsequently interfere with our ability to deal as reasonably as possible with the existing conditions (Sen. *Ep.* 5.7-9, 13.13-15; *Dial.* 2.9.2 [*Constant.* 2.9.2]; Cic. *Off.* 1.69, 2.25-26). *Impatientia* is also a quality not appropriate for a Stoic since it naturally pushes people to act irrationally based on their emotions. Seneca defines *animus impatiens* as someone who is unable to bear the present misfortunes (*Ep.* 13.2-3). But since the Stoics considered the ability to deal with the blows of fate more significant than foreknowledge of the future, Sextus' opposition to this idea in 596-98 also sketches him as an unstoic character:<sup>90</sup>

mens dubiis percussa pavet rursusque parata est  
certos ferre metus: hoc casibus eripe iuris,  
ne subiti caecique ruant.

Struck by doubts, my mind is frightened, but again is ready  
to endure inevitable terrors. Take from events the power  
To swoop down suddenly unseen. (trans. Braund)

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<sup>89</sup> For a detailed discussion of several passages which highlight Sextus' unstoic character see Martindale (1977) 375-79.

<sup>90</sup> For lines 423-24 and their connection to Stoicism see Tesoriero (2000) 59-60.

What is reprehensible for the Stoics becomes the motivating force behind Sextus' decision to summon Erichtho. Contrary to the attitude of the *sage* who is indifferent to the changes of fortune because he is secure in the knowledge of his own *uirtus* (Sen. *Vit. Beat.* 8.3), Sextus' uncertainty causes him anxiety and fear, and subsequently pushes him to seek answers through illicit means.<sup>91</sup> It is against this background that Lucan underlines the futility of Sextus' actions, which becomes more evident to the reader through the character's request from Erichtho to undermine the power of fortune in 597-98.

### Sources and Functions

Even though the whole episode is the poet's ingenious creation, scholars traced many elements to earlier literary depictions of witches. More specifically, Erichtho's portrayal is influenced by those of Ovid's Dipsas (*Am.* 1.8), Propertius' Acanthis (*Prop.* 4.5), and especially Horace's Canidia (*Epod.* 5.17, *Sat.* 1.8).<sup>92</sup> These literary characters were closer to popular conceptions of the witch in the Imperial times than their mythological counterparts, namely Medea and Circe, and thus Lucan's modeling of Erichtho after them should be perceived as an attempt to provide his readers with a more credible figure of the *saga*.<sup>93</sup>

Scholars have also traced influences of other literary characters on Erichtho. Baldini Moscadi and Martindale independently argued that the description of her appearance, residence, and actions recalls that of Ovid's Invidia.<sup>94</sup> As it is the case with almost all the witches of Roman literature, Erichtho also resembles the physical characteristics of the Furies, and particularly Allecto. Apart from stressing even more the link between the Thessalian witch and civil war, the

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<sup>91</sup> For the discussion on this passage see Martindale (1977) 377-78.

<sup>92</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 7 and n. 32; for the similarities between Canidia and Erichtho see also Walde (2015) 122.

<sup>93</sup> Gordon (1987a) 67-71.

<sup>94</sup> Baldini Moscadi (1976) 159; Martindale (1977) 380.

connection with the Virgilian Fury suggests that Erichtho eventually possesses Sextus when she escorts him back to the camp, inflicting him with the destructive madness of civil war just like Allecto possessed Turnus, infecting him with an immense rage against the Trojans and Aeneas.<sup>95</sup> But there is probably more behind Lucan's choice to borrow characteristics specifically of Allecto and not the other two Furies in his sketching of Erichtho. In her spell's invocation, the witch addresses Tisiphone and Megaera, omitting the third sister. We can thus suppose that she has assumed the position of Allecto, and it is because of this development that she avoids naming her in the incantation. Of course, the assimilation of Erichtho with Allecto –her name literary means “implacable anger”- whose traditional role was to castigate moral crimes, is not irrelevant for the didactic purposes of the *Bellum Ciuile*. As Tesoriero points out, Lucan also imbued his witch with both physical and behavioral characteristics of Seneca's *homo iratus* (compare lines 725-29 with *Dial.* 4.35 [=*De Ira* 2.35.3-6]), thus suggesting a “philosophical element in her depiction: she is the personification of *ira*, a key motivating force behind the civil war.”<sup>96</sup>

Another, less obvious, but still very significant influence on the depiction of Erichtho is that of folkloric figures. As Gordon argued, the abominable practices of cannibalism (540-43), child murder (554-560), and the desecration of graves and corpses (564-67) described in the scene resemble those of Lamia, who is the traditional night-witch figure of the Hellenistic world. Like Erichtho, she lives in caves and ruins, completely isolated from human contact; a vampiric monster, she feeds by sucking the blood out of both the living and the dead; she never maintains a single form, but constantly changes her shape; finally, not only does she kill and eat children,

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<sup>95</sup> Hardie (1993) 76-77, and 108; Fratantuono (2012) 242 also discusses some similarities.

<sup>96</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 8. And since the civil war leads the universe of Vergil to destruction, Erichtho is correctly regarded as an anti-Sibyl (see Tesoriero [2000] 3, 9 and n. 50; Masters [1992] 179-205).



but also rejoices with their murders.<sup>97</sup> The shape-shifting skills she possesses as well as the habit of scavenging corpses in search for food are abilities attributed to the figure of witch in folk legends.<sup>98</sup>

Of particular interest for the purposes of the current project are Lucan's models for the rites and spells of Erichtho. A great number of literary accounts of magic rituals were available to the poet, and scholars have already discussed in detail Lucan's use of various elements from witchcraft scenes found in both Greek and Latin poets.<sup>99</sup> In general, one might trace many similarities between the spell of Erichtho and Seneca's incantation scene in the *Medea* as well as the description of the spell in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (7.179-293).<sup>100</sup> That said, not every detail of the scene is the result of literary influence. Lucan shows great familiarity and knowledge of genuine material and real magic practices which can be found in the *PGM*, the *defixiones*, and encyclopedic authors and, more specifically, Pliny.<sup>101</sup>

The function of the necromancy scene, including its prelude (6.413-666), has puzzled scholars for years, drawing criticism both for its structure and content. And even though the short-lived, un-nuanced views of Lucan as unworthy heir of the long epic tradition because of his love for ghastly horrors and the macabre have no place in modern studies, structural issues still raise academic discussions.<sup>102</sup> Tesoriero pointed out that the witch scene not only does add nothing to the plot, but also delays the progress from Pompey's victorious battle in Dyrrachium to his final defeat in Pharsalus, and the demise of the republican cause. Furthermore, Erichtho's

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<sup>97</sup> For the similarities between Erichtho and Lamia see Gordon (1987b) 240-41; for further discussion see Johnston (1995) 361-87.

<sup>98</sup> Danese (1995) 431-34.

<sup>99</sup> Most notable sources include: Theoc. *Id.* 2; Hor. *Epod.* 5.17, *Sat.* 1.8; Prop. 4.5; Tib. 1.2, 5, 8; Ov. *Am.* 1.8. For a discussion of their influence on the Erichtho scene see Fahz (1904) 55-60; Pichon (1912) 249; Morford (1967) 70-71; Baldini Moscadi (1976) 145 n. 3. For the literary motif of magic in Greek and Roman literature see Eitrem (1941).

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter two, pp. 101-15.

<sup>101</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 10.

<sup>102</sup> Heitland (1887) lxxiv-lxxv and Fauth (1975) are critical of the length and foulness of the scene.

prophecy is irrelevant to the rest of the epic, having no impact on the subsequent actions of characters or in changing their motives.<sup>103</sup> The episode, unhistorical in nature, is the creation of Lucan's imagination since no other sources attest to either such prophecy before the battle or the presence of Sextus in Thessaly at that time.<sup>104</sup>

However, the importance of the Erichtho scene can be better understood if we examine its relation to the overall theme of the poem. Lucan makes several connections between magic and civil war to underline the futility and wickedness of both, but especially the latter. Magic, like civil war, is described as *scelus* (6.507); both represent a reversal of the natural law, and consequently, are hateful to gods (6.430-31, 441, 443-48); those who participate in the war as well as those who practice magic are characterized as impious (6.508); finally, civil war and magic are the result of selfish motives, and end in the destruction of, respectively, the state and natural order.<sup>105</sup> Having this comparison in mind, scholars have also interpreted the list of the magical feats in 6.461-84 as a parallel for the cosmological confusion and the destruction of the *cosmos* as a result of the civil war.<sup>106</sup>

The apparent influence of Stoicism on the scene is also another characteristic which reveals its important position in the narrative. Elements of Stoic thought can be found throughout the corpse's prophecy, especially lines 802-11 which suggest death as the appropriate form of resistance to tyranny.<sup>107</sup> The Stoic belief in the immutability of fate is central in lines 605-15

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<sup>103</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 1.

<sup>104</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 1 and n. 2; during the battle of Pharsalus Sextus was hiding in Lesbos. Grenade (1950) 37-40 traced certain connections between the necromancy scene and the story of the Octavianic soldier Gabienus who, while laying almost decapitated, falsely prophesized victory for Sextus in the battle of Naulochus (Plin. *HN* 7.178-79). Paoletti (1963) 14 n. 8, Ahl (1976) 133-37, Gordon (1987b) 232-33, and Masters (1992) 197 n. 41 also see Gabienus as a major influence on Lucan's choice of Sextus.

<sup>105</sup> These similarities are noted in Tesoriero (2000) 1.

<sup>106</sup> For the power of magic to overthrow natural laws, and the parallels between magic and civil war see Fauth (1975) 338; Lugli (1987-88) 96-97; Lapidge (1979) 368-69; Loupiac (1991) 258-59.

<sup>107</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 2; for the Stoics' view of suicide as a form of opposition to tyranny and political oppression see Belliotti (2009) 70-71, Edwards (2007) 102-5.

where Erichtho admits that she is incapable of changing the chain of causes which exists from the beginning of the *cosmos*, and that fortune is more powerful than the race of Thessalian witches. The concept of fate also appears in the last part of the prophecy when the corpse forbids Sextus to ask about his own death, claiming that he can learn about it only through experience, and not by any means of divination. The impact of Stoic philosophy is also evident in the passage detailing the feats of Thessalian witches (461-84), where Lucan uses philosophical terminology to describe the effects of magic on nature. This excerpt also alludes to the concept of the *ekpyrosis* which is used as a metaphor for the destruction caused by the civil war, and which permeates the whole narrative.<sup>108</sup>

I believe that it is impossible to fully understand the purpose of the scene without taking into consideration the general Stoic mentality of the poem. As scholars have noted, Sextus exhibits many unstoic characteristics which establish him as a quasi-Caesar, thus allowing the reader to castigate and condemn him as a character. Faced with the imminent battle in Pharsalus, and the idea of a possible defeat, he is overcome with fear about his future. To learn the outcome of the battle and the war in general, he resorts to divination. However, he does not consult with conventional oracles which were widely accepted by both the people and the Stoics.<sup>109</sup> Instead, he summons the witch Erichtho, a dark and hellish creature. By doing so, he yields to *superstitio*, thus proving himself unworthy and corrupt in the Stoic sense. And it is solely his actions that render witchcraft, despite Erichtho's grotesque appearance, a danger as real and terrifying as ever.

In order to sketch his account of witchcraft closer to reality, which allows him to further enhance the didactic overtones of the scene for the reader, Lucan alludes to certain aspects of

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<sup>108</sup> Lapidge (1979).

<sup>109</sup> For a brief, but informed discussion on the Stoics' position on divination, see Sambursky (1987) 65-71. Bobzien (1998) 87-96 discusses the concept of divination in the deterministic Stoic world.

Imperial Roman life. In the following sections, I show how he facilitates Erichtho's assimilation with real witches by using Roman stereotypical views about Thessaly and magic. I also discuss how certain excerpts might reveal an attempt to detach his account of magic from mythology. But most importantly, I trace the similarities between Lucan's account of magic and the real practices which are attested in the text of the *PGM* and the *DT*.

### (Stereo)typical Thessaly: The Land of Magic

Before the necromancy scene, Lucan makes a long digression (6.434-506) which functions as a prequel to the appearance of Erichtho. Its main purpose is to draw Lucan's account of magic closer to contemporary views of witchcraft by incorporating in the narrative certain stereotypes about Thessaly. At the beginning of the digression, he underlines the importance of the specific geographical area in Sextus' decision to resort to magic:

...uanum saeuumque furorem  
adiuuat ipse locus uicinaque moenia castris 435  
Haemonidum, ficti quas nulla licentia monstri  
transierit, quarum quidquid non creditur ars est.

...His foolish, cruel frenzy  
is fostered by the place itself with cities of Thessalian witches  
near the camp: they can be surpassed by no invented horror  
of a free imagination; their art is the unbelievable. (trans. Braund)

Originally Haemonia denoted only the homonymous region of Thessaly, but later on it came to be applied to the whole area which stretched from Mount Olympus to the north to the Spercheios Valley to the south.<sup>110</sup> In Greek literature the province of Thessaly was known for its strong connections to witchcraft at least since the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. as we infer from Ar. *Nub.* 749-52 where Strepsiades claims that he could hire a Thessalian witch who can make the moon disappear in order to avoid paying interest to his lenders. Apparently these connections had

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<sup>110</sup> *RE* s.v. Haimonia.

become proverbial in the 4<sup>th</sup> century when Menander wrote the play *Thettale* which dealt with the magical skills and devices of a Thessalian woman (Plin. *HN* 30.6-7). The stereotypical view of Thessaly as the birth place of magic and its inhabitants as adept sorcerers and magicians probably passed on to Latin comic poets through the influence of Greek literature.<sup>111</sup> However, it became more prevalent during the years of the Empire as it is evident from the increasing references in the literature of the period. By that time the ethnic names *Thessala* and *Haemonides* had become synonyms for the witch, sorceress or enchantress.<sup>112</sup>

Quite interesting is the reference to a witch-city in Thessaly (*uicina moenia Haemonidum*). Tesoriero notes that the idea of towns inhabited solely or mostly by magicians is an exaggeration intended to create a horrifying and chilling effect.<sup>113</sup> Although liminal figures of the Roman society, witches did live in cities. However, it is more accurate to view them as vagabonds who travelled from place to place where they would stay as long as their credit was not exhausted.<sup>114</sup> Lucan plays with this reality of Roman urban life and the stereotype about Thessaly to further enhance the negative depiction of Erichtho who, contrary to the other Thessalian witches, is not even allowed to dwell in a city (6.510-12).

Even though the reputation of Thessaly as the capital *par excellence* of magic was mostly part of the literary tradition, scholars tried to explain the circumstances which led to this development, as they trace its origins to real life. Mili recently argued that the crossing from

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<sup>111</sup> The oldest reference in Latin literature connecting Thessalian people with magic is found in Plautus' *Amphitruo* 1043-44:

*ego pol illum ulciscar hodie Thessalum ueneficum,  
qui peruorse perturbauit familiae mentem meae.*

The Greek source of this adaptation remains unknown, but the reference to a male Thessalian sorcerer is probably Plautus' novelty.

<sup>112</sup> References illustrating the link between Thessaly and magic in Imperial literature include: Hor. *Epod.* 5.45, *Carm.* 1.27.21-22, *Ep.* 2.2.208-9; Ov. *Am.* 1.14.39-40, 3.7.27-28, *Ars Am.* 2.99-100, *Rem. Am.* 299; Sen. *Phaed.* 420-22, 791, *Med.* 790-92, *Herc. Oet.* 465-66, 525; Val. Flacc. 1.736-38, 6.448, 7.198-99, 7.325-26; Stat. *Theb.* 3.140-46, 3.557-59, 4.504; Mart. 9.29.9; Juv. 6.610-12; Apul. *Met.* 2.1.

<sup>113</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 68.

<sup>114</sup> For wandering magicians in antiquity, and their activities see Dickie (2001) 216-34.

reality to literary representations of Thessaly as the land of witchcraft should be attributed to the ideological clash between certain religious practices in the area and the advent of Hippocratic medicine.<sup>115</sup> More specifically, Mount Pelion was known for its great variety of medicinal herbs, and the region surrounding it was dwelled by people who were very skillful in concocting healing potions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> century travel author Herakleides mentions a specific family who claimed descent from Chiron (fr. II 12), and had exclusive knowledge on the collection, processing, and application of a particular plant which could heal some conditions such as gout, inflammation of the eyes, and bowel syndromes (fr. II 11). He further adds that this knowledge was passed from father to son as a family secret (fr. II 12). Even though this is the only extensive and specific reference to such practitioners in Thessaly, Mili correctly maintains that it is not wrong to assume that there were other families who possessed this type of knowledge, given that Thessaly was famous for its herbs. These traditional healing practices were the target of attacks by the Hippocratic doctors who had lived and worked in the area, and who considered these local practitioners charlatans (τοιοῦτοι εἶναι ἄνθρωποι οἳ οἱ καὶ νῦν εἰσι μάγοι τε καὶ καθάρται καὶ ἀγύρται καὶ ἀλαζόνες, ὁκόσοι δὴ προσποιέονται σφόδρα θεοσεβέες εἶναι καὶ πλέον τι εἰδέναι, *Morb. Sacr.* 2).<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, the secrecy surrounding such practices could only make people more suspicious. Besides, one of the important aspects of what people termed “magic” was, and still is, its presentation as forbidden knowledge for the uninitiated.<sup>117</sup>

The digression continues with the two different aspects of Thessalian witchcraft, namely materials (438-42) and incantations (443-51). The first part briefly underlines the prominent position of Thessalian herbs and rocks in magic:

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<sup>115</sup> Mili (2015) 293.

<sup>116</sup> See the discussion in Mili (2015) 290-95.

<sup>117</sup> For secrecy as a defining characteristic of magic see Dickie (2001) 38-40.

Thessala quin etiam tellus herbasque nocentes  
rupibus ingenuit sensuraque saxa canentes  
arcanum feral magos. ibi plurima surgunt  
uim factura deis, et terris hospita Colchis  
legit in Haemoniis quas non aduexerat herbas. 440

And on its crags the land of Thessaly produced  
both harmful herbs and stones which hear magicians  
chanting dreadful secrets. There arises many a substance  
which puts constraint upon the gods and in Haemonian lands  
the Colchian stranger gathered herbs she had not brought with her.  
(trans. Braund)

Throughout Greek literature, Thessaly is described as a land rich in herbs (πολυφάρμακος).<sup>118</sup> This idea, of course, was not a mere intellectual creation, but more of a reflection of reality as we infer from Theophrastus' *Historia Plantarum* (9.15.4) as well as Pliny the Elder (*HN* 25.94) where Mount Pelion is described as one of the Greek areas most productive of herbs. But contrary to the medicinal herbs mentioned by these authors, those of Lucan are characterized as harmful (*nocentes*). Given that plants used in witchcraft were not necessarily poisonous, we might assume that Lucan's intention here is to indirectly criticize the misuse of healing herbs in the concoction of potions and poisons, one skill that magicians claimed to possess.<sup>119</sup> In any case, the importance of various plants in magic potions is well attested in the *PGM*, and contemporary Romans would have probably seen or heard of people selling Thessalian herbs as ingredients for magic recipes. Lucan's attempt to disassociate his account of witchcraft from myth, and place it closer to reality becomes more evident in lines 6.441-42 where he reverses the etiological myth explaining the abundance and variety of herbs in Thessaly. Like Ovid (*Met.* 7.219-33), he rejects the myth which claimed that they sprang from Medea's box (Σ Arist. *Nub.*

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<sup>118</sup> For a discussion on literary representations of Thessaly, including its characterization as a land rich in herbs see Mili (2015) 259-68.

<sup>119</sup> For a brief summary of the assimilation of *magus* with *ueneficus* see Dickie (2001) 14-16.

748), and instead considers their production a natural quality of the area (*Thessala ... tellus herbasque ... ingenuit*).<sup>120</sup>

Another stereotype might be well-hidden behind the reference to the rocks (*saxa*) of Thessalian land. Even though the use of metals and minerals in magic is mentioned or alluded to in earlier authors (e.g. Prop. 4.5.78; Ov. *Met.* 7.266;), it is certainly based on reality as the text of the *PGM* indicates. Several minerals and metals are listed as ingredients for magic recipes or materials on which words were inscribed during rituals: III 502 (clear quartz); III 510 (opal); XII 193-201 (rock alum, chalcopyrite, salt, massicot, Cappadocian salt, melanterite, and cupric sulfate); XII 204 (jasper); *PGM* XII 274 (heliotrope stone, i.e. green chalcedony with small spots of red jasper); *PGM* XII 408 (soapstone); *PGM* XII 409 (hematite); *PGM* XII 425 (sandstone); *PGM* V 446 (agate). But since the comments in 439-440 are made in connection to Thessaly, we can assume that Lucan has in mind specific minerals that were commonly found in this area of Greece such as magnesium and magnetite.<sup>121</sup> Both were used in magic rituals as *PGM* III 188, 512, IV 1721, 2627, 3139, *PDM* xiv 909 (magnetite), and *PDM* xiv 905 (magnesium) attest. If we assume that Lucan's intention is to make a cryptic reference to these two minerals, and his readers would grasp this allusion (neither of which is unlikely), one might suggest that the excerpt intends to create an implicit link between the name of the magnet and the ancient region of Magnesia in Thessaly. By doing so, Lucan rejects another common myth, that of the shepherd Magnes as the discoverer of the magnet (Plin. *HN* 36.25), and puts forward a more plausible version of the naming tradition.

The second part which focuses on spells is significantly longer than the one dealing with the products of the Thessalian land because incantations were a more distinctive and essential

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<sup>120</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 72-73.

<sup>121</sup> For the rich deposits of minerals in Thessaly from prehistoric times to the Roman period see Reinders (2004).



element of magic than anything tangible. And contrary to the material aspect of witchcraft, the mechanisms of which were to a certain extent understood by people, the power of words in magic was still a mystery instilling fear in their minds. Lucan maintains that the incantations (*carmina*) of Thessalian witches have unprecedented power which surpasses even that of the Babylonians and the Egyptians, the alleged inventors of the *ars magica*:

*inpia tot populis, tot surdas gentibus aures*  
*caelicolum dirae conuertunt carmina gentis.*  
*una per aetherios exit uox illa recessus* 445  
*uerbaque ad inuitum perfert cogentia numen,*  
*quod non cura poli caelique uolubilis umquam*  
*auocat. infandum tetigit cum sidera murmur,*  
*tum, Babylon Persea licet secretaque Memphis*  
*omne uetustorum soluat penetrare magorum,* 450  
*abducat superos alienis Thessalis aris.*

That hideous race's wicked spells affect the ears  
of heaven-dwellers deaf to all the peoples, all the races.  
Alone that utterance passes through the ether's far-off parts  
and delivers words which can compel the reluctant deity  
who can never be distracted by care of sky and spinning  
heaven. When her monstrous muttering has touched the stars,  
then the Thessalian witch will force the gods from  
others' altars, though Babylon of Perseus and secret Memphis  
open up every shrine of their magicians of old. (trans. Braund)

At the beginning of this excerpt, Lucan characterizes spells “evil” (*inpia*), thus revealing his negative view of magic. Subsequent lines offer a justification for this attitude by describing the compulsive power of incantations which reverse the proper relationship between gods and humans.<sup>122</sup> Tesoriero noted that the passage excludes any possibility that the gods help witches willingly (*inuitum numen*), contrary to the evidence found in *PGM* III 187-262 and IV 1928-

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<sup>122</sup> For the coercive power of magic against the gods as a distinctive characteristic of magic see Graf (1991) 194-95, and (1997) 222-29.

2005.<sup>123</sup> Lucan probably chooses to omit such cases because he adheres to the Stoic doctrine which considered god a benevolent deity capable of no evil, and wants to emphasize solely the responsibility of humans for the harmful results of magic.<sup>124</sup> There is, of course, an element of hyperbole in lines 448-51 where the poet claims that the power of incantations is so great that allows Thessalian witches to snatch a deity already summoned by the spells of the Babylonian and Egyptian sorcerers. By declaring the former's supremacy over the inventors of the *ars magica*, he implies that Sextus has chosen the most powerful form of magic, i.e. Thessalian witchcraft.<sup>125</sup>

In this excerpt Lucan also shows a remarkable knowledge of real magic, which he uses in order to draw his account of witchcraft closer to reality. Lines 449-51 refer to a typical part of several spells in the *PGM*, which aimed to summon a divine assistant, namely the invocation to the πάρεδρος. This prayer which usually preceded the main incantation, allowed the spell caster to address a supernatural entity, and ask for its presence and assistance toward the successful completion of the main spell (see, for example, *PGM* I 96-132, IV 1345-76, XII 238-67, and XIII 843-87).<sup>126</sup> More important though are the details in lines 446-48 which indicate Lucan's familiarity with the different types of *logos* in incantations. More specifically, the word *carmina* (444) collectively denotes any spell which usually consists of two different parts: *uerba* (446) refers to articulate speech while *murmur* (448) describes inarticulate sounds which imitated natural noises. Such sounds were very common in spells as the text of the *PGM* attests (e.g. IV 561: ἔπειτα σύρισον μακρὸν συριγμόν, ἔπειτα πόππυσον; XIII 88, 292, and 601-2). Although *murmur* could be used metonymically to denote any spell in general (e.g. *Ov. Met.* 7.251), its

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<sup>123</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 74.

<sup>124</sup> See also note 213.

<sup>125</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 76.

<sup>126</sup> For the role of the *paredros* in the *PGM* see Pachoumi (2011) 155-65.

distinction from *uerba* in our passage suggests that Lucan uses it with its technical meaning, thus establishing stronger connections with real spells.

### The Power and Spectrum of Thessalian Incantations

Immediately after the brief description of the two aspects of magic, Lucan further elaborates on the alleged powers of Thessalian incantations. Not only does this long exposition (452-506) show the broad range of their purposes, but also indicates an essential difference between magical materials and *logos* in Lucan's thought. More specifically, the phrase *mens hausti nulla sanie polluta ueneni / excantata perit* (even though in our passage it refers only to cases of love magic, it could easily apply to any type of magic) illustrates Lucan's belief that potions and poisons are not as harmful as the incantations themselves. Perhaps this view can be explained partially based on Stoic premises: if somebody was poisoned by potions, they could still be saved by administering the right antidote. And we know for a fact that doctors of the Imperial times were really skillful in such concoctions.<sup>127</sup> On the contrary, if someone was targeted with incantations, their recovery would be harder since, as Seneca claims, curses harm people because they instill fear in the mind of the recipient (*Ep.* 94.53). Therefore, there was no specific cure for charms as there was for poisons.

The passage comprises a catalogue of the various categories of spells which range from love charms (452-60), spells which reverse the natural order (461-91) and manipulate the gods (492-99) as well as the famous Thessalian trick (500-6). It is worth noting that in this part of the digression Lucan combines elements from both literary and real accounts of magic. As Tesoriero argued, the section on erotic magic (452-60) has more parallels with the *PGM* than the one detailing the effects of witchcraft on nature (461-91), and this discrepancy can be explained on

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<sup>127</sup> For a brief, but enlightening discussion on poisons and antidotes in Rome see Cilliers and Retief (2000) 88-100.

the requirement of the *PGM* to have spells with realistic aims, which is not necessary in literature.<sup>128</sup> On the other hand, the reversal of natural order as an effect of magic is central in literary depictions of witchcraft (e.g. *Ov. Met.* 7.199-209, *Am.* 1.8.5-10; *Tib.* 1.2.41-52; *Ap. Rhod. Argon.* 3.528-33; *Sen. Med.* 752). However, Lucan does not follow the existing tradition merely for the sake of doing so. Each section is meant to serve a different purpose: the description of erotic spells draws Lucan's account of magic closer to the reader's experience through its numerous similarities with the text of the *PGM* and the *DT* while the description of the effects of spells on nature, further stresses the destructive power of magic in the *cosmos*. Together they serve the scene's overall didactic purpose.

The first part focuses on love magic, a form of magic which was closer to reality and most frequently practiced than any other type of witchcraft. The passage is filled with negative overtones in accordance with the poet's general view of magic:

carmine Thessalidum dura in praecordia fluxit non fatis adductus amor, flammisque seueri inlicitis arsere senes. nec noxia tantum pocula proficiunt aut cum turgentia suco	455
frontis amaturae subducunt pignora fetae: mens hausti nulla sanie polluta ueneni excantata perit. quos non concordia mixti alligat ulla tori blandaeque potentia formae traxerunt torti magica uertigine fili.	460

By the witches' spells love not brought by Fate  
glides into hardened hearts: austere old men  
blaze with illicit flames. And there is power not only  
in their harmful cups or when they steal the promise,  
swelling with the forehead's juice, of mother's love:  
minds polluted by no decay of drawn-off poison  
are destroyed, charmed out by spells. Those not bound by union  
of marriage-bed or by alluring beauty's power  
are drawn by magic whirling of the twisted thread. (trans. Braund)

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<sup>128</sup> See Graf (1997) 200.

Lucan claims that the sole purpose of love magic is to induce lust (*amor*) to the victim. However, this view is only partially confirmed by the evidence. Although many love spells (e.g. *PGM* IV 94-153, 1390-495, 1496-595, 2441-621, 2708-84, 2891-942, 2943-66, VII 467-77, 973-80, VII 981-93, *PDM* xii 135-46, 147-64) and binding curses (e.g. *DT* 5, 51, 227-31, 264, 266-71, 299, 304, 265, 296) intended to induce uncontrollable passion in the victim, there were spells which simply aimed to maintain or increase the already existing affection (*philia*) between lovers or married couples.<sup>129</sup> Faraone uses this distinction to form the basic taxonomy of ancient Greek love spells: one category includes *philtr*a and *charitesia* while the other consists of *iugges*, *agogai*, *empura*, *agrupnetika*, and *philtrokatadesmoi*. The former are usually incantations inscribed on amulets, knotted cords, rings, love potions, or ointments while the latter are incantations written on bound images, tortured animals, burning materials, or apples.<sup>130</sup> Lucan either ignores the first category or places these spells along with the more violent types of love magic. In any case, the excerpt focuses only on the second category through direct references and allusions to specific subtypes: the *noxia pocula* is a type of *philtrokatadesmos*, a hybrid spell combining a love spell (*philtr*on) with a binding spell (*katadesmos*) such as *PGM* IV 296–466 and VIII 1-63 as well as *DT* 111-112, 222, 241, and 271; the *uertigine torti fili* refers to the *iunx*, a type of *agoge* spell which, in Roman times, was performed with the use of a spinning top (*PGM* IV 2336);<sup>131</sup> the *turgentia suco frontis* refers to the *hippomanes*, a common ingredient in aphrodisiacs;<sup>132</sup> finally, the use of *flammis inlicitis* and *arsere* might be an allusion to the *empura*, “a type of *agoge* that requires the burning of herbs or *ousia* in a fire to force the victim

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<sup>129</sup> In his monograph on ancient love magic, Faraone considers “spells which induce uncontrollable passion” and “spells which induce affection” as two separate categories.

<sup>130</sup> For this taxonomy and the characteristics of each spell type see Faraone (1999) 28.

<sup>131</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 82.

<sup>132</sup> There are three different definitions for the *hippomanes*: 1) a black, fleshy substance on the forehead of a newborn foal, 2) a secretion from a mare, and 3) the apple-thorn plant. The *hippomanes* was considered a powerful aphrodisiac; cf. Aristotle *HA* 572a30–b4 and 577a10–15; Theophrastus fr. 175; Aelian *NA* 3.17 and 14.18.

(usually female) out by means of sympathetic or persuasive analogy” (see, for example, *PGM* XXXVI 340-41, IV 1525-35, LXI 39-71).<sup>133</sup>

This negative depiction of love spells and the rejection of magic-induced *amor* can be explained from a Stoic perspective. Love magic has the power to upset the social order by creating unnatural bonds (*inlicitis flammis arsere senes*) between people, which are considered a violation of the natural order (*non fatis adductus amor*). Furthermore, the productive and binding force which holds society together is love between husband and wife (Sen. *Dial.* 4.31.7 [= *De Ira* 2.31.7]), and magic destroys that bond by creating unlawful relationships outside the family.<sup>134</sup> The choice of *alligo* in 459 to describe the union of marriage is quite interesting since the verb is also used in the *DT* to denote the act of binding someone through magic (see *DT* 217, 218, 277, 279, 283, 284, 303). Perhaps Lucan intended to use this ambiguity to further underline the reversing powers of love spells.

We also should not forget that the Stoics considered uncontrollable emotions such as lust or love induced by magic a passion and, therefore, were to be avoided.<sup>135</sup> Lucan also criticizes passionate love as we infer from 10.70 (*uaesani...amoris*) and 10.363 (*obscaenum...amorem*) where he refers, respectively, to Antony’s and Caesar’s love for Cleopatra.<sup>136</sup> The reader would have been familiar with the tradition created by the Octavian propaganda which claimed that the two Romans were seduced by the Egyptian queen by means of magic.<sup>137</sup> The central point of the excerpt, however, is love magic’s influence on the human *mens*. And just like love magic inflicts

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<sup>133</sup> For the definition of the *empura* see Faraone (1999) 175.

<sup>134</sup> For the points raised in this paragraph I rely heavily on the comments in Tesoriero (2000) 77-78.

<sup>135</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Stoic views on love (*Eros*) see Gill (2013) 143-57.

<sup>136</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 77.

<sup>137</sup> Aelian fr. 57 and Suda s.v. *iunx* report that Cleopatra attempted to seduce all three Roman leaders (Antony, Caesar, Octavian) by means of magic, but eventually failed.



It is not wrong to regard these lines as a general allusion to the serpents' prominent role in magic.<sup>140</sup> What matters more, however, is that Lucan presents the reader with a peculiar feat of Thessalian witchcraft by reversing the well-known magic trick of the Marsi, which caused snakes to explode (see, for example, Lucil. fr. 575-76 Marx; Verg. *Ecl.* 8.71; Plin. *HN* 7.13-15; *PGM* XIII 261-264 is a spell which can cause a snake to break open). The powers of these indigenous Italian peoples were proverbial in the age of Augustus as we can infer from Ovid's reference to their magical songs (*Ars Am.* 2.102), and Vergil's description of a Marsic priest who knew how to make poisonous snakes sleep, calm their wrath, and alleviate their bite with his incantations and touch (*Aen.* 7.750-60). As Tesoriero notes, Lucan creates a negative image of the Thessalian witch who has the power to reverse the beneficial spells of the Marsi by reanimating dead snakes.<sup>141</sup>

Lucan concludes his digression with the description of another famous spell, the so-called "Thessalian trick:"

... illis et sidera primum	
praecipiti deducta polo, Phoebique serena	500
non aliter diris uerborum obsessa uenenis	
palluit et nigris terrenisque ignibus arsit,	
quam si fraterna prohiberet imagine tellus	
insereretque suas flammis caelestibus umbras;	
et patitur tantos cantu depressa labors	505
donec suppositas propior despumet in herbas.	

... By them the stars  
were first drawn down from the racing sky and Phoebe clear,  
assailed by dreadful poisonous words, grew dim  
and burnt with black and earthy fires, just as if  
the Earth kept her from her brother's image  
and intruded its shadows between the flames of heaven,  
and, forced down by incantation, she suffers these great hardships  
till she discharges foam on to the grasses close below.

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<sup>140</sup> For a detailed discussion on snakes and magic, see pp. 103-4.

<sup>141</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 100.



(trans. Braund)

One of the most famous skills of Thessalian witches was their alleged ability to draw down the moon and the stars. Scholars have tried to explain what exactly the expressions *lunam (de)ducere*, *lunam (de)trahere*, καθαιρεῖν or κατάργειν τὴν σελήνην might mean. Mugler and Dodds argue that they actually describe the astronomical phenomenon of lunar eclipse.<sup>142</sup> Hill rejects this idea by pointing out that eclipses do occur for the moon and the sun, but not the stars. Furthermore, it would have been really impossible for anyone to predict the exact date of a lunar eclipse so as to choose to perform the trick on that specific day. Therefore, he concludes, the “Thessalian trick” should be some form of optical illusion performed by the witches at their will. To further support this view, he cites an interesting passage from Hippolytus (*Ref. Haer.* 4.37) which describes in detail how those who wished to perform the trick used candles, mirrors and pulleys to project the moon’s image above their audience and then drew it down.<sup>143</sup> Lucan also seems to regard the process of drawing down the moon as something completely different from the eclipse which he uses as a simile to describe the effects of the “Thessalian trick” in 503-4.<sup>144</sup> In any case, it would not be wrong to assume that the educated readers of the *Bellum Ciuile* would have been aware of the mechanism behind the trick, and that nothing supernatural was involved in the process.

After the long digression on Thessalian witchcraft, Lucan moves on with the description of Erichtho and her powers (507-69) as well as the dialogue between the witch and Sextus (570-666). This part of the narrative owes a lot to earlier accounts of magic which Lucan used so as to create one of the most iconic and terrifying witch images in Latin literature. Several connections

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<sup>142</sup> For references to scholars who consider the “Thessalian trick” to be identical with lunar eclipse, see the discussion in Hill (1973) 227-29 with the relevant notes.

<sup>143</sup> Hill (1973) 225.

<sup>144</sup> Hill (1973) 236.

with the text of the *PGM* can be traced *passim* in these lines, but the importance of this part of the narrative lies mostly in its depiction of Erichtho as a marginal figure, a creature which lives outside the limits of civilization, between the upper world and the realm of the dead.<sup>145</sup> This grim sketching of Erichtho also prepares the reader for the necromancy scene which is the central part of the whole episode.

### Erichtho's Necromancy

Rituals of necromancy have sparked controversy among scholars of ancient religion. One of the biggest problems when dealing with this topic is the scarcity of archaeological evidence corroborating literary descriptions of the practice. In his 2001 monograph Ogden gathers all the evidence pertaining to such rites (mostly literary accounts) and explores the ancients' attitudes on necromancy. However, as Graf noted, Ogden walks a dangerous path when he presses the evidence to reach conclusions about the real aspects of necromantic rites.<sup>146</sup> That said, one can at least argue that some of these literary accounts do have strong connections with real magic practices, and the Erichtho scene is the most conspicuous example.<sup>147</sup> In the following sections I discuss Lucan's allusions and references to the magical papyri and the *defixiones*, which help him sketch the necromancy closer to what his readers would regard as authentic. In general, the structure of Erichtho's ritual corresponds to the various steps described in several texts of the *PGM*: it begins with the material preparation necessary for her spell (667-84); it continues with the recitation of the *uoces magicae* (685-93), followed by the spell proper (693-718); when the first spell fails, she utters another one (730-49), the content of which is abusive and threatening so as to compel the invoked deities to comply with her requests; after the successful reanimation

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<sup>145</sup> Graf (1997) 190-91.

<sup>146</sup> Graf (2006) 459-60.

<sup>147</sup> Graf (1997) 190-204 discusses the multiple links between Erichtho's necromancy and the text of the *PGM*.

of the corpse, she gives him proper instructions for the prophecy (762-74); finally, after the ritual has been completed she has to utter a last spell to dismiss the spirit of the dead soldier (822).<sup>148</sup> Apart from the obvious structural similarities, there are also further links in terms of content which I discuss separately in the following paragraphs.

### The Preparatory Ritual

Erichtho searches among the dead soldiers to find the main ingredient for her spell, i.e. a well-preserved cadaver. Lucan clearly adheres to the typical idea that the dead used in ancient magic should belong to one of the following categories: those who suffered an untimely death (ἄωροι), those who died a violent death (βίαιοθάνατοι), and those who remained unburied (ἄταφοι or ἀτέλεστοι).<sup>149</sup> It was a common belief among ancient Greeks and Romans that these souls could not enter the Underworld, and lingered as evil spirits prone to magical compulsion.<sup>150</sup> And since the dead were thought to always speak the truth, certain divinatory spells involve the summoning of the soul of the restless dead (*PGM* IV 1928–2005 and IV 2006–125) or even the resurrection of their body (*PGM* IV 2140-44 and XIII 277-83). The ritual performed by Erichtho which belongs to the second category, begins with the preparation of the body:

pectora tum primum feruenti sanguine supplet	
uolneribus laxata nouis taboque medullas	
abluit et uirus large lunare ministrat.	
huc quidquid fetu genuit natura sinistro	670
miscetur: non spuma canum quibus unda timori est,	
uiscera non lyncis, non durae nodus hyaenae	
defuit et cerui pastae serpente medullae,	
non puppem retinens Euro tendente rudentis	
in mediis echenais aquis oculique draconum	675

<sup>148</sup> Although this structure is not found in every single spell, there are several examples in the *PGM* which confirm this general conclusion.

<sup>149</sup> For the categories of the dead exploited in magic see Audollent (1904) cxii-cxv, Massoneau (1934) 39-46, Tupet (1976) 82-91, Bremmer (1983) 101-8, and Ogden (1999) 15-23.

<sup>150</sup> Waszink (1954) 391-92.

quaeque sonant feta tepefacta sub alite saxa,  
 non Arabum uolucer serpens innataque rubris  
 aequoribus custos pretiosae uipera conchae  
 aut uiuentis adhuc Libyci membrana cerastae  
 aut cinis Eoa positi phoenicis in ara. 680  
 quo postquam uiles et habentis nomina pestis  
 contulit, infando saturatas carmine frondis  
 et, quibus os dirum nascentibus inspuit, herbas  
 addidit et quidquid mundo dedit ipsa ueneni.

The first she opens up the corpse's chest with fresh wounds,  
 and with boiling blood she fills it, from the innards washes off  
 the gore and applies generous doses of lunar poison.  
 With this is mixed whatever nature spawns  
 misbegotten. Here is the froth of rapid dogs,  
 here entrails of the lynx, here the hump of dire hyena  
 and the marrow of the snake-fed stag;  
 here is the remora, detainer of the ship mid-sea  
 though Eurus strain the rigging, and dragons' eyes,  
 and stones which sound when warmed beneath a breeding bird:  
 here is the Arabs' flying serpent and the viper born  
 in the Red Sea, the guardian of the precious oyster-shell,  
 the cast skin of still-living horned snake of Libya  
 and ashes of the phoenix burnt upon the eastern altar.  
 To this she added common poisons with names,  
 Then put in leaves drenched in spells unspeakable,  
 And herbs her foul mouth spat on  
 at their birth, and venoms of her own creation. (trans. Braund)

Erichtho first cleans the corpse internally, and applies fresh blood as well as lunar poison through  
 the new holes she opens (see also *pectus apertum* in 722, which in a medical context can mean  
 “to make an incision”).<sup>151</sup> Volpilhac claims that the process seems to allude to the Egyptian  
 practice of mummification, and argues that many of the mentioned substances are coded names  
 for simple ingredients used in embalment.<sup>152</sup> But given the very brief and generalized

<sup>151</sup> For the technical meaning of *aperire* in a medical context see *TLL* 2.0.214.78-215.19.

<sup>152</sup> Volpilhac (1978) 278-79.

description of her treatment of the corpse, this idea should be regarded as a clever assumption at most.<sup>153</sup>

The rest of the excerpt does not offer any other information about the process itself. Instead, it provides details about the substances which Erichtho uses on the body. Contrary to Tesoriero, I believe that lines 671-84 reveal the recipe for the concoction (*huc miscetur*) of the *uirus lunare* which probably is not a potion, but a slimy liquid with a texture closer to that of an ointment (see *PGM VII 875* which mentions the *σεληνιακὸν χρῆσμα*).<sup>154</sup> And even though we can only guess of what substances it might have consisted, it is not wrong to assume that Lucan comes up with a recipe which would be close to the magical recipes his readers would have heard of. Several ingredients are identical or very similar to those mentioned in the *PGM* or medico-magical texts. More specifically, the foam of the saliva of rabid dogs is used as a preventive medicine for rabies in humans (Plin. *HN 29.99*) while materials from dogs in general were often used in magic (*PGM IV 2574, IV 2686, 2872: οὐσία [νεκροῦ] κυνός; PGM XIa 2 αἶμα κυνός; XIII 241 ἀνφώδευμα κυνός*); the reference to the guts of a lynx might be a general allusion to the use of animal organs in magic (e.g. *PGM VII 411* heart of hoopoe; *XII 437* a hawk's heart; *PDM xiv 1066* heart of a baboon; *XIV 83-84* heart of hyena or hare; *PGM II 45* brain of a black ram; *II 46-47* brain of an ibis) or to the specific feline's medico-magical powers known to people (Plin. *HN 28.122*);<sup>155</sup> the *nodus hyaenae* is the first cervical vertebra of the animal which, as Pliny informs us, was considered one of the remedies for epilepsy (*HN 28.99*), while the Magi had attributed to hyenas magical skills (*HN 28.90*), and the text of the *PGM* attests to the use of certain body parts in magic (*PGM VII 204 and 207* skin; *CXXIII a-f 70*

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<sup>153</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 191.

<sup>154</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 192 claims that all these ingredients are placed separately in the chest cavity.

<sup>155</sup> Some scholars argue that the *viscera lyncis* is a cryptic reference to lyncourion, a stone created by the urine of the lynx with various medical and magical uses; for further details see Tesoriero (2000) 193.

tooth; *PDM* xiv 83-84 heart; xiv 1194-1195 excrement); Pliny (*HN* 28.145) attests to the potency of various marrows, and especially that of the stag, in medical magic; the *echenais* was a small fish which could delay birth by stopping the fluxes of a woman's womb, but also function as a love-charm and a spell to hinder litigation in court (Plin. *HN* 9.79);<sup>156</sup> the eyes of a snake might point to the use of other animal eyes in spells (see, for example, *PGM* I 223 eyes of a night-owl; 285 of a wolf; IV 2945 of a bat); the ἀετίτης λίθος or *gagites*, a hollow rock filled with smaller ones which caused it to rattle, was said to have various medical properties (Plin. *HN* 10.12), especially in the area of obstetrics (Ael. *NA* 1.35);<sup>157</sup> different parts of snakes, and mostly their slough, were frequently used in magic recipes (e.g. *PGM* III 703, XII 160 skin; IV 1999-2000 blood); the last specifically named ingredient is the ashes of a phoenix which was a sacred bird with profound connections to magic (see the references in *PGM* XII 231, XIII 883).<sup>158</sup> Even though all these substances are linked with various magic practices one way or another, the *echenais*, the snake slough and the ashes of the phoenix seem more appropriate for necromancy. As Tesoriero notes, the specific fish may have been included because of its binding powers (just as it can halt the movements of ships, it can also hold the soul of the dead back to its body) while the snake's skin as well as the phoenix are powerful symbols of death and rebirth.<sup>159</sup>

### The Spell Proper

After the preparation of the body, Erichtho begins her spell which, even though it has no parallel in the *PGM*, is still modeled after real incantations with great precision. Lines 685-93 describe the various inarticulate sounds (*murmura*) she utters such as dog barking, the howling of wolves,

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<sup>156</sup> For a discussion on the various sources about the *echenais* as well as the reason for its use in the context of necromancy rituals see Tesoriero (2000) 194-95.

<sup>157</sup> For the identification of the *saxa* with the *gagites*, see Tesoriero (2000) 195.

<sup>158</sup> For further information about the importance and role of some of these animals in Graeco-Roman religion, see the relevant chapters in Johnston, Mastrocinque, and Papaioannou (2016). Especially the chapter on the Phoenix (393-418) offers many useful insights.

<sup>159</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 194, 196, and 197.

the cries of owls, the shriek and wail of wild beasts, the serpents' hiss as well as the noises of waves, forests, and thunders. Inarticulate sounds preceding the formal prayer of the witch are a *locus communis* in literary accounts of magic (see Hor. *Sat.* 1.8.24-25; Ov. *Met.* 7.190-91), but animal noises in particular are only found in real spells (e.g. *PGM* IV 561 hissing; 929 and 1006 barking; VII 767-76: popping sound, hissing, groaning; XIII 81-85, 593-96: birdglyphic, baboonic, and falconic). Sounds of natural phenomena are not attested anywhere in the *PGM*, and perhaps are part of Lucan's effort to underline even more the powers of Erichtho whom he associates with the nocturnal animals and the destructive forces of nature, both permanent threats for humans.<sup>160</sup> In any case, the list of these strange sounds allude clearly to the *uoces magicae* of the *PGM*, which were usually transliterations of the names of Egyptian and Near Eastern deities –this can be said with certainty only in instances where the magical words are understandable.<sup>161</sup> By including this section in the narrative, Lucan alludes to real incantations, thus adding authenticity to Erichtho's spell.

Erichtho continues with the articulate part of her spell, which is a prayer to the deities of the Underworld adhering, as Graf points out, to the common tripartite structure of Graeco-Roman prayers. Lines 695-706 constitute the *inuocatio*, 707-11 the *narratio*, and 712-18 are the *preces*:<sup>162</sup>

Eumenides Stygiumque nefas Poenaeque nocentum et Chaos innumeros audium confundere mundos	695
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<sup>160</sup> For a discussion on the *uoces magicae* in Erichtho's spell, and their function see Graf (1997) 200-1, and Nock (1929) 226.

<sup>161</sup> Graf (1991) 191-94, and 210 n. 27; for a list of *uoces magicae* that occur in *PGM*, and their possible interpretations see Brashear (1995) 3429-38 and 3576-603 as well as Gager (1992) 265-69. Suggested origins include the *ephesia grammata* as well as similar untranslatable words and phrases in pharaonic magical spells (Brashear [1995] 3429 n. 235). See also the exhaustive discussion in Versnel (2002) 105-58.

<sup>162</sup> Graf (1997) 192-93. The same structure also appears in prayers in the *PGM*, although differences on the order of the three sections, repetitions of the invocation, and the *uoces magicae* included in the text do exist: Graf (1991) 188-213. Bremmer (1981) 196 uses the terms invocation, argument, and petition for the three structural parts of prayers.

et rector terrae, quem longa in saecula torquet  
 mors dilata deum; Styx et quos nulla meretur  
 Thessalis Elysios; caelum matremque perosa  
 Persephone, nostraeque Hecates pars ultima, per quam 700  
 manibus et mihi sunt tacitae commercia linguae,  
 ianitor et sedis laxae, qui uiscera saeuo  
 spargis nostra cani, repetitaque fila sorores  
 tracturae, tuque o flagrantis portitor undae,  
 iam lassate senex ad me redeuntibus umbris, 705  
 exaudite preces ...

I invoke the Eumenides, Hell's horror, and the Avengers;  
 I invoke Chaos, eager to disorder countless worlds;  
 I invoke the ruler of the earth, tormented for long future ages  
 by the drawn-out death of the gods; I invoke the Styx, and the  
 Elysian fields  
 no witch of Thessaly may reach; I invoke Persephone, loathing sky  
 and mother; and the lowest form of our Hecate, through whom  
 the shades and I in silent utterance may commune;  
 I invoke the porter of the wide abode, who tosses human entrails  
 to the savage hound; I invoke the Sisters soon to spin a second thread  
 of life, and you, O ferryman of the blazing water,  
 old man already tired out by shades returning to me:  
 heed my prayers ... (trans. Braund)

A very common characteristic of the prayers included in the spells of the *PGM* and the *DT* is the invocation to a list of deities whose favor the magician seeks for the success of the spell. Chthonic gods hold a central position in magical utterances due to the ancients' belief that the best way to success and worldly pleasures is through these powers.<sup>163</sup> They are especially prevalent in curses and vindictive prayers given their binding powers and role as agents of punishment for a perceived injustice or injury. However, their role in the context of Erichtho's necromancy is more profound. Since the purpose of her spell is to bring a dead person back to

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<sup>163</sup> As Versnel (1991) 64 states Chthonic deities "carry out tasks not as representatives of right or morality but on the strength of their dark nature."



life, the favor of the deities who are guardians of souls and the Underworld or intermediaries between the netherworld and the living is necessary for the success of the ritual.<sup>164</sup>

Erichtho begins her invocation by addressing collectively the Eumenides (also identified as *Dirae* and *Arae*), Underworld demons whose role was to avenge bloodshed, inflict terror, and carry out curses. The ancients believed that even mentioning their name was enough to summon them and hunt the recipient. Usually three in number (Tisiphone, Allecto, and Megaera), they functioned as curses themselves.<sup>165</sup> This explains why they are frequently addressed in the *PGM* (e.g. IV 1418, 2334, 2857, 2795), but most importantly the *defixiones* (*DT* 22, 24, 26, 29-33, 35), in their capacity to punish sinners, and especially those who had broken their oaths. Erichtho clearly refers to this role when she further describes them as *poenae nocentum* and *Stygium nefas* in an effort to gain their attention.<sup>166</sup> The invocation to Chaos is quite frequent in spells (*PGM* I 316, IV 444, 1459, 2531, 2855), but occurs only once in a curse (*DT* 251). In our excerpt, this region of the Underworld is appropriately invoked because Erichtho's resurrection of the dead body is an action leading evidently to the mixing of the two worlds, which is also the innate quality of chaos, i.e. the confused, formless, primitive mass out of which the universe was made.<sup>167</sup> Without naming him, the witch calls upon Pluto as the *rector terrae*, a prominent deity in magical utterances as we infer mostly from the text of the *defixiones* where he is addressed with various names and titles, which underline his sovereignty over the dead (*Πλούτων/Pluto*: *DT* 1, 22, 24, 26, 29, 38, 111, and *PGM* IV 1462; *χθονιθαρχωθ*: 185; *πασιάνναξ*: 43, 44, 74, 75; *φθίμενων θεός*: 198; *Ὅρκος*: 161, 163; *Dis*: 191, 139; *deus infernorum*: 155; *dominus*: 231). His consort, Persephone, is almost always invoked either along with Pluto or separately as

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<sup>164</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 204; for a discussion of the deities involved in necromancies see Fahz (1904) 10-15.

<sup>165</sup> Boyle (2014) 111-12.

<sup>166</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 205.

<sup>167</sup> For this connection between Chaos and the ritual of Erichtho see Tesoriero (2000) 205-6.

Περσεφόνη (DT 74, 75), Φερσεφόνη (DT 50, 81), *Persefina* (DT 268), or Κόρη (DT 3, 9, 10, 13), *regina tenebrarum* (DT 288, 289), and *domina* (DT 269). Her powers allowing the souls of the dead to return to life (see Verg. *G.* 4.486-87 where she sends Eurydice back to the upper world) render her an important goddess in the context of the necromancy. The invocations to the Styx (698) and the Elysian fields (699) have almost no parallel in real spells. The only exception is *PGM* IV 1459-64 where the spell caster asks from various infernal deities, including Styx, to send up the ghosts of the dead to perform a service. Functioning as the traditional boundary between the two worlds, Erichtho needs its permission for the soul to cross back to the realm of the living.<sup>168</sup> Hecate is another goddess called upon in magic rituals, either in her triple or chthonic form: Ἐκάτη χθονία (DT 22, 24, 26, 29-33, 35, and *PGM* III 57, IV 1443), Κούρα τριώνυμος (DT 22-24, 26, 29-32) ῥησίχθων (DT 38), Ἴεινοδία (DT 41), Σελήνη ἀκρουβόρος (DT 41), and Ἐκάτη τρίμορφος (DT 242). In Lucan's excerpt, she is invoked as the patroness of witchcraft and the ἄωροι (*pars ultima*) to not only guarantee the success of Erichtho's spell, but also to assent to the reanimation of the dead corpse.<sup>169</sup> Less clear is the reference to the *ianitor sedis laxae*, and scholars have proposed various alternatives for the identity of this figure. The ancient comments suggest either Charon or Cerberus, but this unlikely since the former is invoked separately in lines 704-705 while the latter is fed by the *ianitor*, and therefore it cannot be the same character. Other possibilities include Aeacus (he is addressed only once as the gatekeeper of the Underworld in *PGM* IV 1464-65), Hermes, the obscure deities *Mathureuphramenos* (DT 45), Σισοχωρ, and Στερξερξ (both are mentioned in DT 22, 24, 26, 28-35, 37) or the more well-known Anubis.<sup>170</sup> Perhaps Lucan intended for multiple allusions at

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<sup>168</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 207.

<sup>169</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 208; for her required assent and co-operation in magic rituals see Johnston (1990) 144-47.

<sup>170</sup> For these possible identities of the *ianitor*, and the reasons for the rejection of these alternatives see Tesoriero (2000) 208-9.

the same time or, if there is a need to choose only one of the aforementioned demons, we could assume that he refers to Anubis through religious syncretism with Hermes (see also the invocation to Hermanubis in *PGM* IV 3137).<sup>171</sup> This Egyptian deity with the dog-shaped head is often depicted as holding the keys to the entrance of the netherworld, and references to him in the text of the *PGM* abound (e.g. IV 340, 1467, VII 333, XXIII 1, *PDM* xiv 427).<sup>172</sup> His importance in the context of Erichtho's necromancy lies in his control over the access point between the two worlds. Next, the witch addresses collectively the Fates (*sorores tracturae fila*) who were responsible for spinning, measuring, and cutting the thread of a person's life.<sup>173</sup> They were probably more prominent in spells than Tesoriero claimed (see, for example, *PGM* II 100, IV 1455, IV 1463, 2856), and although they are invoked only once in a necromantic incantation (*PGM* IV 1455 and 1463) we can assume that their powers would have been considered ideal for such rituals. Besides, it is probably on these grounds that Erichtho calls for their assistance since she attempts to bring a dead back to life, which essentially means that the Fates need to re-spin the thread for her spell to succeed.<sup>174</sup> The last supernatural entity on the list is Charon (*portitor undae*) who was responsible for transporting the souls of those who had been properly buried to the Underworld. Although his name occurs only once in the *PGM* (IV 1452), he seems to occupy an important position in Erichtho's spell which is emphasized by the use of *tu* in the address as well as the remark which points to a *da quia dedisti* relationship between the witch and Charon.<sup>175</sup> He is the one who brings souls back from the Underworld so that Erichtho can perform her abominable spells. The opening part of the prayer closes with the witch's command

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<sup>171</sup> For the growing religious syncretism in spells and curses of the Imperial period see Ogden (1999) 44-45 with rich references on the topic.

<sup>172</sup> On depictions of Anubis holding the keys to the Underworld see Wortmann (1968) 70, and Morenz (1975) 510-20.

<sup>173</sup> On this popular image of Fates see Dietrich (1965) 61, 64-66, 72-74, and 289-94.

<sup>174</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 209.

<sup>175</sup> For these points about Charon see Tesoriero (2000) 210-11.

to the gods to pay heed to her requests (*exaudite*).<sup>176</sup> As Tesoriero notes, the use of the imperative of the forceful compound *exaudire*, instead of the milder *audire*, reflects Erichtho's "imperious power over the gods."<sup>177</sup> But this was a common practice in magic spells, in which the respectful petition of the prayer was replaced with direct commands, thus conferring authority on both the utterer and the text itself.<sup>178</sup>

The prayer continues with the *narratio/argumentum* which served the purpose of convincing the deities why the current prayer merited a favorable response:

... si uos satis ore nefando  
pollutoque uoco, si numquam haec carmina fibris  
humanis ieiuna cano, si pectora plena  
saepe deo laui calido prosecta cerebro,  
si quisquis uestris caput extaque lancibus infans  
inposuit uicturus erat, parete precanti.

710

... Do I summon you with mouth sufficiently  
Abominable and polluted? Do I ever chant these spells  
without consuming human entrails? How many times have I cut out  
breasts filled by deity and washed them with warm brains?  
Are there no babes, about to enter life, who laid  
their head and heart upon your dishes? Then obey my prayer.  
(trans. Braund)

In authentic prayers, this part would mostly consist of the devotee's promise for a future offering or sacrifice (*do ut des* formula), but in literary prayers it could also recount past deeds of piety to elicit divine aid (*da quia dedi* formula).<sup>179</sup> Using the literary device of anaphora, Erichtho lists a number of her past devotions in consecutive conditional clauses (*si uoco...si cano...si laui... si inposuit*), which was a regular way of expression in the *narratio* of literary prayers, especially poetic ones. The impious and abominable acts of blasphemy (706-7),

<sup>176</sup> For parallels with other literary prayers see Hickson (1993) 115-17.

<sup>177</sup> Tesoriero 2000 211.

<sup>178</sup> This characteristic is evident mostly in the text of the *defixiones*. See Johnston (2004) 367.

<sup>179</sup> Hickson (1993) 11. See n. 15 on the same page for the view considering the *da quia dedi* formula part of real prayers.

cannibalism (707-8), human sacrifice (708-9), and child murder (710-11) have no precedent in either authentic prayers or magical utterances. They were considered grave sins in antiquity, and therefore completely offensive acts toward the gods. Furthermore, these practices are totally absent from magic rituals which more than often required the magician's purity through abstinence from spilling blood, eating flesh, and having sexual intercourse (e.g. *PGM* I 41-42, 55-56, IV 54, 736-37). The only instances where acts like those of Erichtho are referred to can be found in the διαβολαὶ, which intended to cause divine wrath against a person by attributing to them various sacrilegious actions (see, for example, *PGM* IV 2471-82, 2570-94, 2650-57, VII 605-9, XXXVI 138-44, *DT* 155, 188, 295).<sup>180</sup>

The question that arises is why Lucan chose to include such, not only unrealistic, but also incompatible with the section of the *argumentum*, practices in Erichtho's prayer. The image of the witch/magician as a malicious marginal figure, child killer, and practitioner of impious activities reflects contemporary stereotypes, and as Tesoriero argued, the poet relied heavily on societal prejudice for the composition of these lines.<sup>181</sup> Of course such negative views had their origins in the Greek world, but they became deeply rooted in the peoples' conscience during Roman times.<sup>182</sup> In *Vatinius* 14, Cicero accuses his opponent of summoning the spirits of the dead, and making sacrifices with the entrails of boys; in *Epode* 5, Horace narrates how the witches Canidia, Sagana, Veia, and Folia murder a boy to make a love potion; Pliny (*HN* 8.80-82) tells a story which illustrates a connection between cannibalism and shape-shifting: according to Scopas, the recorder of Olympic victors, when the Arcadians were still making human sacrifices to Zeus Lycaeus, Demaenetus of Parrhasia tasted the entrails of the slaughtered boy and turned himself into a wolf. The most important evidence that confirms the Romans'

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<sup>180</sup> For this analysis of the *argumentum* see Tesoriero (2000) 211-12. On διαβολαὶ rituals see Eitrem (1924) 43-61.

<sup>181</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 212; for the image of the witch in ancient popular thought see Graf (1997) 61-88.

<sup>182</sup> For the formation of the concept of magic in Greece see the discussion in Dickie (2001) 32-45.

prejudicial views against magicians comes from a funerary inscription dated in the 20's AD, purporting to record the death of a child at the hands of a witch (*CIL VI 19747*). By incorporating in his narrative contemporary popular views about the danger witches posed to society, Lucan places Erichtho closer to the readers' conception of the *saga*, and further condemns her practices as well as the figure of Sextus for whom the necromancy is performed.<sup>183</sup>

The last part details Erichtho's requests to the gods of the Underworld:

non in Tartareo latitantem poscimus antro  
adsuetamque diu tenebris, modo luce fugata  
descendentem animam; primo pallentis hiatu  
haeret adhuc Orci, licet has exaudiat herbas, 715  
ad manes uentura semel. ducis omnia nato  
Pompeiana canat nostri modo militis umbra,  
si bene de uobis ciuilia bella merentur.

A soul I ask for, not one lying hid in the cave of Tartarus  
and long accustomed to the darkness, but a soul on its way down,  
life's light just fled, a soul still hesitating at the door  
to pallid Orcus' chasm, a soul which, though he drain these drugs,  
will join the dead once only. Let the ghost of a soldier with us  
recently foretell all Pompey's future to the leader's son,  
if civil wars have earned your gratitude. (trans. Braund)

It is worth noting that the section begins immediately after another command the witch utters (*parete precandi*, 712), which underlines even more the coercive power of witchcraft as well as the reversal of the relationship between gods and the witch.<sup>184</sup> Adhering to the rules of necromancy discussed on page 45, she asks for a single soul (*animam*) of a person who has not yet entered the Underworld (*non in Tartareo latitantem*) to foretell the future to Pompey's son (*omnia ... Pompeiana canat*). Even though the instances of future prediction by means of necromancy are few in Graeco-Roman literature, the power of witches and magicians to do so is

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<sup>183</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 212.

<sup>184</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 216.

well attested in the *PGM* (see, for example, IV 232, 250, 1944-49, 2001-32, 2133-37).<sup>185</sup> It is very interesting to note that in making the request, Erichtho switches to first person plural (*poscimus*) which is a very unusual change, especially in prayers offered by one devotee. I agree with Tesoriero's idea who claims that Erichtho is speaking also on behalf of Sextus, and thus the switch is warranted.<sup>186</sup> Perhaps Lucan intended to suggest Sextus' complicity in the necromancy, which would have been in complete accord with the didactic purposes of the *Bellum Ciuile*. By pointing to his role in the witchcraft scene, the poet indirectly shows to the reader that those who resort to magic are equally guilty as the person who performs the spells.

### The Second Spell

The first spell ends only with partial success since the spirit has been summoned, but refuses to enter the "embalmed" body. This enrages Erichtho who immediately utters a second, more powerful incantation (730-49). Repeating a spell until it succeeds or casting a different one after the initial had failed seems to have been standard practice in witchcraft as we infer from the magical papyri (e.g. *PGM* II 45, 52-64, 144, IV 917, 1037-46, 1434, 1903, 2097-98, 2312-30, 2902-7, 3089, 3228, V 256-88, LXII 32-36, *PDM* vi 21, and viii 1). The purpose of these incantations which are termed *logoi epanankoi* was to compel divine assistants to comply with the requests of the spell caster in those cases where they were either unwilling to obey or delaying the spell's completion. Although all the *logoi epanankoi* aimed essentially at the same result, it is possible to distinguish between two subcategories: some have a more friendly tone (e.g. *PGM* IV 1035-47, IV 1037-46, LXII 32-36.) while others include abusive language, and various threats against the *paredros* such as revelations of a secret, physical violence and torture (e.g. *PGM* II 53-55) as well as disturbances of the natural order (e.g. *PGM* IV 2312-30, V 284-

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<sup>185</sup> For literary accounts of necromantic rituals as a method of foretelling the future see Ogden (2001) 237-42.

<sup>186</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 217.

85, CXXII 51-55).<sup>187</sup> Perhaps it was Lucan's intention to bring to his readers' mind exactly this practice by having Erichtho utter the second spell:

Tisiphone uocisque meae secura Megaera,	730
non agitis saeuis Erebi per inane flagellis	
infelicem animam? iam uos ego nomine uero	
eliciam Stygiasque canes in luce superna	
destituam; per busta sequar per funera custos,	
expellam tumulis, abigam uos omnibus urnis.	735
teque deis, ad quos alio procedere uoltu	
ficta soles, Hecate pallenti tabida forma,	
ostendam faciemque Erebi mutare uetabo.	
eloquar inmenso terrae sub pondere quae te	
contineant, Henna, dapes, quo foedere maestum	740
regem noctis ames, quae te contagia passam	
noluerit reuocare Ceres. tibi, pessime mundi	
arbiter, inmittam ruptis Titana cauernis,	
et subito feriere die. paretis, an ille	
compellendus erit, quo numquam terra uocato	745
non concussa tremit, qui Gorgona cernit apertam	
uerberibusque suis trepidam castigat Erinyn,	
indespecta tenet uobis qui Tartara, cuius	
uos estis superi, Stygias qui perierat undas?	

Tisiphone and Megaera, untroubled by my voice,  
do you not drive with your cruel lashes this unlucky soul  
through Erebus' void? Now by your real names I will call you,  
you Stygian she-dogs, and in this upper light  
maroon you; through pyres, through burials I will chase you vigilant;  
I will banish you from graves and drive you off from funeral urns.  
And Hecate, wan and wasted, I will show you to the gods as you are,  
not as you usually visit them, false with different face,  
and I will forbid you change your look of Erebus.  
And girl of Henna, I will disclose the feast which holds you  
underneath the earth's enormous weight, your lovers' bond  
with night's gloomy king and the pollution you have suffered,  
so foul that Ceres will not call you back. And you, the lowest  
ruler of the world, your caverns I will burst and unleash Titan  
and you will be struck by sudden daylight. Do you obey? Or  
to Him must I appeal, at whose name the shaken earth  
never fails to tremble, Him who can look upon uncovered Gorgon,  
who can chastise the cringing Erinys with her own lashes,

<sup>187</sup> For these characteristics of *logoi epanankoi* see Graf (1997) 202; for the relation of these threats with the ancient Egyptian belief that the gods depend on daily rituals see Wortmann (1968) 92-93.



Him who occupies Tartarus to you unfathomable, Him in whose  
power  
are you upper gods, Him who by the waters of the Styx can falsely swear?  
(trans. Braund)

As Tesoriero observed, this spell lacks both the tripartite structure and the linguistic features of formal prayers. It is also worth noting that Erichtho does not repeat her request as one should expect in such incantations, which is probably the result of Lucan's effort to avoid repetition.<sup>188</sup> However, there are certain elements that correspond to the characteristics of *logoi epanankoi*.<sup>189</sup> The deities threatened in this spell are also among those invoked in the first spell. More specifically, Erichtho addresses Tisiphone and Megaera, two of the three most frequently named Erinyes (the third is Allecto who is assimilated with Lucan's witch and, therefore, there is no need to be mentioned), thus recalling her earlier invocation of the Eumenides (695). She then proceeds with threats against Hecate and Persephone who were both called upon in line 700. The last god to be threatened if he does not obey her commands is Pluto (*pessime mundi arbiter*) who appeared in 697. In line with the general concept of this type of incantations in the *PGM*, Erichtho's threats are directed toward the same deities who were invoked in the first spell to assist her with the necromancy ritual.

The specific threats she utters against these deities also have parallels in real spells. She first claims that she will summon forth Tisiphone and Megaera by calling them with their real names (732-33), then abandon them in the sun light (733-34), and make them starve by not letting them scavenge among tombs (734-35). The knowledge of a god's true name gave the magician power over him, a principle which is implied in several spells (e.g. *PGM* I 36, 161, 217, III 159-160, IV 278, 885, 1665, 2340-41, XII 119-21, and *PDM* xiv 685-90). In the case of

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<sup>188</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 223.

<sup>189</sup> For the relationship between Lucan's text and these spells see Bourgery (1928) 310-11, Nock (1929) 226-27, and Baldini Moscardi (1976) 179-84.

Hecate, she threatens to reveal her true form, i.e. her infernal face, to the gods of the upper world (736-38). Like that of revealing the gods' true name, the threat to make their real form known is supposed to have the same effects (see, for example, *PGM* III 496-500, VIII 9-11). The next target is Persephone whom Erichtho threatens with revealing shameful information about why she stays in the Underworld and is hated by her mother. This threat resembles references to the shameful practices of a deity as a means of coercion, which are well attested in the PGM corpus, mainly in the *διαβολαὶ* (e.g. IV 2471-82, 2570-94, 2650-57, VII 605-9, XXXVI 138-44, *DT* 155, 188, 295).<sup>190</sup> The reference to some form of contact which makes Persephone despised by her own mother might allude to the union with Pluto, especially since the terms *contagia* and *passam* have strong sexual connotations.<sup>191</sup> Again, abominable sexual practices are found in the *διαβολαὶ* where the spell caster accuses someone of spreading rumors that the goddess (Selene) has put a man's skin in her vagina (*PGM* IV 2593, 2655). The final and most serious threat is made against Pluto himself. If he refuses to obey Erichtho, she promises to expose the Underworld to daylight (*Titana*), and summon a super-powerful entity, who will compel him, she implies, to do her bidding. The threat of having a more powerful god coerce the *paredros* to assist the magician is quite common in magical texts (e.g. *PGM* IV 1035-40, XII 140-43 and 236-38). Erichtho does not explicitly name who this deity might be, and scholars have made various assumptions: Haskins and Pichon argued that this mysterious figure is Demiurgus/Demogorgon;<sup>192</sup> Bourgery identified him with Hermes Trismegistus, and Rose with the Semitic Ahriman;<sup>193</sup> Baldini Moscadi maintains that Lucan refers to another Semitic deity,

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<sup>190</sup> See the discussion in Bourgery (1928) 311, Baldini Moscadi (1976) 180, and Nock (1929) 227.

<sup>191</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 229; see also Adams (1982) 185-87.

<sup>192</sup> Haskins (1887) 223; Pichon (1912) 192 n. 3.

<sup>193</sup> Bourgery (1928) 312; Rose (1913) li-lii.

*Iao/Iahweh* whose name frequently comes up in the *PGM*.<sup>194</sup> However, both Demiurgus and Hermes Trismegistos should be ruled out because they were considered benevolent deities, and therefore Lucan's description contradicts their true nature. The Semitic alternatives might fit better to the profile of an evil, omnipotent god, but their use as models is probably a more distant possibility than that of another, more popular figure, namely Typhon/Seth.<sup>195</sup> Although most of the powers described in lines 745-49 are probably the poet's invention to underline the superiority of this deity to all the other gods, they closely resemble the powers attributed to Typhon in the *PGM* (see IV 179-84, 244-48, and 261-78). The deity's depiction as an inhabitant of Tartarus (*indespecta tenet Tartara*) further supports his identification with Typhon who was incarcerated there after his defeat by Zeus (Hes. *Theog.* 868; Pind. *Pyth.* 1.15-28). In the magical papyri, he is often assimilated with the Egyptian god Seth (e.g. VII 964, XII 138, 374-75, XIV 20, XXXVI 315-20, CXVI 1-17), a development that has its origins probably back to the Classical period, but became standard during Roman times as we infer from Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* 2. 351 F.<sup>196</sup>

The second spell is effective, and eventually the corpse is reanimated. Then Erichtho utters a brief speech commanding the dead soldier to speak the truth (*uera locutum*, 763), and to include the names of people and places in his prophecy (*da nomina rebus, da loca*, 773-74). The position of this excerpt immediately after the coercive spell as well as its instructive content alludes to certain spell formulas found in the *PGM*. More specifically, it recalls the instructions given by the magician to the summoned *paredros* such as those in III 626-32, and IV 1847-52.<sup>197</sup> The former spell, in particular, is as follows: "Having said this, [utter] the formula given above,

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<sup>194</sup> Baldini Moscadi (1976) 180-84.

<sup>195</sup> For the rejection of these alternatives and the identification of this entity with Typhon/Seth see Tesoriero (2000) 231-32.

<sup>196</sup> For the identification of Typhon with Seth from the Classical times see Velde (1977) II n. 1.

<sup>197</sup> Tesoriero (2000) 239.

and in case he does not [hearken, say]: ‘I have uttered your sacred names and [your signs] and your symbols, wherefore, O lord, cause / my [shadow] to serve me.’ [And] at the seventh [hour] it will come to you before [your] face and you address it [and say]: ‘Follow me everywhere!’” (trans. Betz). It is quite clear that its structure is identical with the one Lucan employs in the scene, where a second spell needs to be uttered as soon as the spirit does not fully comply with Erichtho’s initial requests, and upon its success the witch proceeds with giving specific instructions to her supernatural assistant.

The last allusion to the magical papyri is found at the end of the ritual. Lines 822-24 stating that the body cannot be sent back without the use of magic (*carminibus magicis...herbisque*), reflect another standard practice found in spells, namely the process of *apopompe*. Several texts in the *PGM* mention a ritual or formula of dismissal of the divine assistants after they have fulfilled their mission (I 334-47, II 176-83, IV 1058-70, VII 334, XIa 28-33). These structural and content similarities collectively place Erichtho’s utterance closer to real spells with which Lucan’s readers would have been familiar either through personal experience or hearsay.

### Conclusions

Just like his uncle, Lucan also dealt with the matter of *superstitio* and tried to illustrate its vanity and negative effects in human life. Both wrote about it through the prism of Stoicism, which regarded magic as something against social norms, and harmful to societal values. But as we saw in this chapter, unlike Medea who is a human character with many flaws, Erichtho is a literary monstrous construct. At the same time, however, her rituals are modeled after contemporary magical practices.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the literature of the Neronian period, examined in this thesis, magic occupies a central position. Its prominence seems to reflect the important developments that took place in Imperial times. This project shed light to a variety of questions regarding magic in both the contemporary religious life of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. and its literary representations. From the sources we have studied here, we can infer that the portrayal of rituals and the expression of superstitious beliefs are based on popular views about magic.

The *Satyrica* is one of the most puzzling works of Roman literature. Its fragmentary condition does not allow us to draw conclusions with great certainty on several issues, including central ones such as its generic classification and the author's intentions. In the first chapter, we decided to focus on aspects of the novel which do not depend so much on its structure or literary background. Although it is not wrong to claim that there are certain parts of the narrative with a moralizing tone, one should not rush into judgement about the overall character of the work. It is preferable to consider the *Satyrica* as a piece of entertainment, with some elements of moralization.

The hilariously entertaining and ridiculous character of the novel does not automatically exclude the element of realism from the narrative. As earlier scholars have argued, for a literary work to be realistic it does not need to correspond to everyday life in its entirety. This is probably the work of a journalist or historian. A poet or author is allowed greater freedom to change the depiction of the real world to any extent it suits their purposes. Even in the most fictional writings, however, reality finds ways to manifest itself. In other words, although a work might initially seem completely detached from reality, upon further consideration it might be possible to find connections between the real world and its narrative.

In the case of the *Satyrical* this is evident in Petronius' portrayal of Roman superstitions, especially the inset narratives of the werewolf and the *strigae* as well as the healing rituals of Proselenos and Oenothea to cure Encolpius' impotence. One might say that these excerpts have no realism since they deal with magic and the supernatural. As I argued, Petronius adopted existing myths and legends but furnished them with various elements of contemporary religious life precisely to draw his account closer to reality. It is true that in their entirety the stories of Niceros and Trimalchio still remained a folktale, but much of the specifics reflect beliefs, ideas, and practices of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. This is further confirmed in Proselenos' magic ritual which illustrates that Petronius was aware of popular superstitions about the Evil Eye as well as the various counteracts.

The realism of these excerpts is also enhanced by the comments of the characters. In the case of the inset narratives, both Niceros and Trimalchio maintain that their experiences are true, and both are believed by their respective audience. The freedmen's vouching for the veracity of their stories as well as the reaction of those who listen to them probably reflects the behavior of these groups of people in real life. Encolpius' comments after his treatment by Proselenos, and the priestess' joyful exclamation on the effectiveness of her spell could also be modeled after the reactions of Petronius' contemporaries in real life.

In the second chapter, we moved to examine Seneca's *Medea*. In his capacity as a philosopher Seneca dealt extensively with one of the most important debates of the Neronian period, i.e. the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*. In his prose works, he drew the line between what was and what was not acceptable in contemporary religious life and thought by addressing several questions pertaining to the nature of god, the proper attitude of man toward the divine as well as specific aspects of worship.

His position in the Imperial court, however, placed certain restrictions on his views on religion. Seneca could not openly reject the official state gods, even though, he was, strictly speaking, a monotheist. More specifically, he accepted the existence of a supreme god whom he identified with nature and the *cosmos*. This belief ran against the traditional Roman religion which abounded in major and minor divinities, each one having different roles and characteristics. To reconcile this discrepancy, Seneca claimed that these deities were manifestations of the true god's powers. The assimilation of god with the *cosmos* also had important ramifications for daily religious practices. If god is nature, and thus permeates everything around us, then the whole world, including a man's heart, is an appropriate place for his worship. Therefore, temples, images and statues of gods, their priests as well as sacrifices are worthless for the purpose of pleasing the god. Instead, they should be regarded solely as part of a longstanding tradition. Furthermore, if god is capable of no evil, as Seneca argued, the man's inner attitude toward the divine should be similar. This essentially means that a devotee's interaction with the gods should be conducted with purity of mind (e.g. one cannot pray for someone else's harm or deprivation). Indeed, Seneca believed that both national and foreign religion could become superstitious if the worshippers did not attend the rituals with piety and rectitude.

As far as we know, Seneca did not write any philosophical treatise on magic, although we can assume that he dealt with several aspects of it in the lost parts of *De Superstitione*. However, he attempted to illustrate how magic, as the main form of *superstitio* and an opposing force to religion, could lay waste on the political and social order in the *Medea*. A very popular and widely known myth, the Colchian's story provided Seneca with all the necessary requirements for the re-enactment of the dichotomy between *religio/superstitio* through the protagonists'

identity as a foreigner and witch. Furthermore, the genre of tragedy was presumably more appropriate for attracting Nero's attention, whom his tutor wanted to avert from *superstitio* for which the young emperor had showed a strong interest.

In his play, Seneca exploits the previous literary representations of Medea, most notably those of Euripides, and Ovid. However, this is not a simple imitation, but a creative adaptation to suit the didactic purposes of philosophical drama as well as the cultural and social reality of his time. His *Medea* lays great emphasis on the topic of magic through its focus on the protagonist's depiction as a witch, and its intense preoccupation with the various aspects of her *ars*. In his effort to facilitate the identification of the audience with Medea, he incorporates in his narrative various magical *realia* which were known both to the average Roman as well as Nero himself.

The play is full of magic utterances and rituals which take place on stage, in front of the eyes of the audience, thus maximizing their impact. Certain scenes stand out as central in the narrative: Medea's curse against her enemies in the opening scene, the nurse's description of the preparations of the magic ritual, and the incantation scene. All of them were certainly modeled after real-life practices as we can infer from their content and verbal similarities with the text of the *defixiones* and the *PGM*. At the same time, the evident absence of supernatural powers allows Seneca to raise his main point: witchcraft has no real power, and its consequences are solely the result of human actions. As the audience can witness, Medea goes at great lengths to murder Creusa and Creon, and the *corpus sceleris*, the poison, is actually a human invention, despite her claiming the opposite. At the end, Seneca has proved Medea's own responsibility for the evil in the play's *cosmos*, and how magic can be used as a means to veil the criminal conduct of humans with supernatural tones.



If Seneca's treatment of Medea's story produces a specific moral, it is that magic and religion cannot co-exist. Besides, this is exactly what Jason exclaims to his wife at the very last line of the play: *testare nullos esse, qua ueheris, deos* (1027). This statement is addressed to Medea who serves as the personalization of evil and magic. The latter inverts the religious order and drives the gods away.

Stoic, but especially Senecan influence is evident throughout the narrative of the *Bellum Ciuile*, as we saw in the final chapter. The poet's views on the issues of universal law, virtue, the divine, death and suicide were probably shaped by his Stoic upbringing as we gather from the multiple links between the relevant passages and some of the works of Seneca. However, Stoicism is not just a passive background in the poem, but an active force which is significant for the formation of Lucan's ideological agenda.

Lucan wants to underline the importance of human action in Stoicism by putting forward various opposing examples of human conduct. To illustrate better this point, he creates a world without gods, a place where anything that happens is essentially subject to Stoic teleology. This explains why at the beginning of book 2 traditional gods yield their powers to *fata* and *fortuna*, and the characters are free to either resist or comply with the eternal laws of nature.

The didactic aim of the poem becomes evident through the examination of the protagonists. Caesar and Cato function respectively as the negative and positive ends of the Stoic ethical system while Pompey represents the man who strives to reach the status of the *sage* (*proficiens*). In other words, the former two characters are universal models of Stoic virtue and wickedness, and Pompey is the average person who, despite his vices, tends toward good. These three characters set the compass which is supposed to guide the readers in various matters of ethics and avert them from unstoic actions.

The episodes involving minor characters also serve this purpose. Like the main characters, they also exhibit conduct either unbecoming or befitting to the Stoic *sage*, thus functioning as moral examples for the reader on specific philosophical issues. The most conspicuous example is that of Sextus Pompey who exhibits many unstoic characteristics which establish him as a quasi-Caesar, and allow the reader to condemn him as a character. On the eve of the battle in Pharsalus, he is overcome by fear, and attempts to learn the future by resorting to divination. But for him the conventional oracles of Delos, Dodona, and Delphi are not powerful enough. Instead, he decides to consult the witch Erichtho, a dark and hellish creature. By doing so he proves himself unworthy and corrupt in the Stoic sense, succumbing to *superstitio*. Thus, in the eyes of the reader he becomes an example to be avoided.

To enhance further the didactic overtones of the witchcraft scene, Lucan forms an account of magic as close to contemporary reality as he can. He facilitates Erichtho's assimilation with real witches by employing various techniques. By borrowing elements from earlier literary depictions of witches (e.g. Horace's Canidia), Lucan manages to shape a witch figure identical to the one that his contemporaries had in mind. He also incorporates in the narrative various stereotypical views about Thessaly and its inhabitants as magicians which would have allowed the reader to place the figure of Erichtho in the real world, and not in some distant mythological stories. However, the aspect of the scene which allows us to consider it as one of the most truthful accounts of magic is the structural, content, and verbal similarities of the necromancy ritual with real magic spells.

The necromancy ritual of Erichtho consists of several steps which have parallels in the magic rituals of the *PGM*: the preparation of the corpse, the *voces magicae* and the first spell, followed by a second coercive spell as well as the formula of dismissal can be found *passim* in

the papyri. The assimilation becomes even more profound through Erichtho's invocation to the infernal deities who are frequently called upon in the text of the *PGM* and the *DT*. These elements are essential in the process of the readers' recognition of the Erichtho ritual as an authentic magical rite, similar to those which they would have probably witnessed or heard.

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