

THE POETICS OF THE MAGICAL CHARM

AN ESSAY IN THE POWER OF WORDS*

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An ideo magus, quia poeta?
APULEIUS

Such a battery of verbal devices
S.J. TAMBIAH

I Introduction

In his *Naturalis Historia* 28, 10, the learned Roman author Pliny the Elder (23/4-79 AD) discusses the cures (*remedia*) that are based on human authority (i.e. in opposition to the natural power inherent in medicinal plants or herbs) and he raises the important and eternal question whether formulas and incantations have any power at all (*polleantne aliquod verba et incantamenta carminum*).¹ His answer is ambiva-

* This paper is a revised and updated English version of “Die Poetik der Zaubersprüche”, in: T. Schabert & R. Brague (eds.), *Die Macht des Wortes* (Erano NF 4, Munich 1996) 233-297. My English manuscript was, for that occasion, translated into German, printed and published without the author being allowed to check the results of any of these processes. The deplorable result was that various passages turned out to be incomprehensible due to misinterpretations, misprints or other disasters. I am grateful to the editors of the present volume for granting me the opportunity of publishing a new version of the paper in English and in particular to Paul Mirecki for patiently correcting my English. The paper was intended for a general readership of non-specialists, and I have not changed its original character.

¹ In the survey of the contents which he added to his book, he had promised to focus on the medical application of these *carmina* (for the various Latin terms for ‘charm’ see: A. Önnerfors, “Zaubersprüche in Texten der römischen und frühmittelalterlichen Medizin”, in: G. Sabbah [ed.], *Études de médecine romaine* [St. Étienne 1988] 113-56, esp. 137 n.7; cf. A.-M. Tupet, “Rites magiques dans l’antiquité romaine”, *ANRW* II.16.3 [1986] 2591-2675), and to inquire “whether in the action of healing there is a certain power in words” (*an sit in medendo verborum aliqua vis*). However, he soon gives up this restriction and sets out to discuss various types of ritual formulas including both ritual prayer and (magical) incantation. On this passage see: Th. Köves-Zulauf, *Reden und Schweigen: römische Religion bei Plinius Maior* (Munich 1972) 24 n.10, and *passim* in his first chapter. In defense of Köves-Zulauf, A. Bäumer, “Die Macht des Wortes in Religion und Magie (Plin. *NH* 28, 4-29)”, *Hermes* 112 (1984) 84-99, argues that Pliny in an *implicit* manner betrays more coherence than scholars tend to grant him, and that his true opinion is that indeed words do have power. On the relationship between beneficial and harmful *carmina*, esp. in Pliny, see: A.M. Addabbo, “*Carmen magico e carmen religioso*”, *Civiltà classica e cristiana* 12 (1991) 11-28; F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge Mass. 1997) 49-56, who notes that Pliny does not call Cato’s cure ‘magical’ as opposed to other artifices collected in book 30, which he does list under the notion magic, being *fraudentissima artium*: “the most fraudulent of all disciplines”.

lent: individually the more educated people reject belief in these practices. On the whole, however, in normal life it pervades everything all the time, though unconsciously (*Sed viritim sapientissimi cuiusque respuit fides, in universum vero omnibus horis credit vita nec sentit*). The ambivalence of this phrase betrays the ambivalence of its author. For on the one hand, time and again he derides these magical formulas as superstitious and ridiculous (*NH* 30, 1ff.; 27, 267: “most people believe that hailstorms can be averted by means of a charm, the words of which I would not for my own part venture seriously to introduce into my book”), on the other hand, throughout his book, he cannot resist mentioning various situations that require the serious and precise application of *precationes*.²

If we wish to have an idea what Pliny had in mind when speaking of these “powerful healing words” no example is more illuminative than a famous passage from Cato the Censor, who lived two centuries before Pliny and whose magical charm is also referred to by Pliny.³ Cato was very good at powerful words, as Carthage was to experience, but he had more strings to his bow. In his almanac for the gentleman farmer *De agri cultura* 160, he explains what to do when a person (or an animal) suffers from a dislocation:

“Take a green reed four or five feet long and split it down in the middle. And let two men hold it to the hips. Begin to chant: *Moetas vaeta daries dardaries asiadarides una petes* (or: *motas vaeta daries dardares astataries dissunapiter*) until they meet. Brandish an iron knife(?) over them, and when the reeds meet so that one touches the other, grasp with the hand and cut right and left. If the pieces are applied to the dislocation or the fracture, it will heal. And nonetheless chant every day, and in the case of dislocation in this manner, if you wish: *Huat, hauat, huat ista pista sista dannabo dannaustra* (or *huat, haut, haut istasis tarsis ardannabou dannaustra*).”

This is one of the most discussed texts in the field of Roman (magical) cures and incantations.⁴ Indeed, the text gives rise to a number of

² See for instance his curiously ambivalent phrasing in *NH* 28, 29: “We certainly still have formulas to charm away hail, various diseases, and burns, some actually tested by experience (*quaedam etiam experta*), but I am very shy of quoting them, because of the widely different feelings they arouse (*in tanta animorum varietate*). Wherefore everyone must form his own opinion about them as he pleases.” About Pliny’s ambivalence see: G. Serbat, “La référence comme indice de distance dans l’énoncé de Plin l’Ancien”, *Revue de Philologie* 47 (1973) 38ff.; A. Önnersfors, “Traumerzählung und Traumtheorie beim älteren Plinius”, *RhM* 119 (1976) 352 ff.

³ *NH* 17, 267: *A Catone proditis contra luxata membra iungendae harundinum fissurae*; 28, 21: *Cato prodidit luxatis membris carmen auxiliare*.

⁴ Already a good discussion in R.L.M. Heim, “Incantamenta magica graeca latina”, *Jahrbuch für Classische Philologie*, Suppl. 19 (1892) 465-575, esp. 533 ff. Further, E. Laughton, “Cato’s Charm for Dislocations”, *CR* 52 (1938) 52-4; W.B. McDaniel, “A Sempiternal Superstition for Dislocated Joint: A split green reed and a Latin

interesting observations. First of all it is a perfect instance of the twin strategies widely applied in this type of medical magic but also, though less commonly, in other types of magical texts, such as curse texts or *defixiones*. These two strategies consist of *ritual action* on the one hand and *ritual words* on the other. In the present paper I will focus my attention on the ritual words, but it would do no harm constantly to keep in mind that words and deeds are often two complementary and inseparable parts of one ritual process.

With respect to the formulaic aspects, the text of Cato gives rise to several fundamental questions. First of all, there are two different versions of the magical formulas, which in our text are twice introduced by the words: *in alio s. f.*, which means: *in alio codice sic fertur* ("in another manuscript it is thus written..."). We find this phrase already in the oldest known manuscript, now lost but copied in the fifteenth century, which means that its author already found different versions of the two *carmina* in his model. It is very well possible that both versions were already juxtaposed in the archetype, as Wessely⁵ suggested.

We are here confronted for the first time with a notorious feature of the (magical) charm: the abundance of variants of one type—parallel but different versions of one model. Instead of taking this symptomatic variation for granted—and hence ignoring it—I will pay ample attention to this phenomenon since in my view it has a certain bearing on the power and efficacy of the terms under discussion. So let us keep this in mind. However, there are other, even more basic questions. The most obvious, also the most controversial, is the following: did these formulas contain any retraceable meaning? From the last century onwards radically opposite answers have been given to this question,⁶ which can be roughly classified into three categories.

The first answer is that these words are "purely magical" expressions: sounds without any intrinsic secular, that is 'normal', meaning.

charm", *CJ* 45 (1950) 171-6. See also the edition of Cato's work by R. Goujard (Paris 1975) 319 f.; A.-M. Tupet, *La magie dans la poésie latine* (Paris 1976) 169f.; Tupet, "Rites magiques", 2596 f.; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 43-47. In his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom* Richard Gordon has another—and novel—interpretation, explaining the action as a case of tautology and parallelization.

⁵ C. Wessely, "Zu Catos Schrift über das Landwesen, cap. CLX", *WS* 20 (1898) 135-140.

⁶ I am restricting myself to modern scholarship here. As a matter of fact, however, all the answers mentioned had already been suggested in antiquity, especially in connection with the *Ephesia grammata* to be discussed below. See: K. Preisendanz, "Ephesia Grammata", *RAC* V (1962) 515-20.

The words belong to the so-called *voces magicae*, a term that we shall discuss later. They are of the type of *abracadabra*,⁷ an expression which certainly *has* a sense (that is: a function, an objective), but which does not *make* sense: it does not carry a comprehensible, lexical meaning. The other two answers both argue that once upon a time the words must have had a concrete meaning but that this meaning is now hidden to us. For this unfortunate situation two different reasons are proposed. One—and this is the second answer referred to above—is that the magical phrase belongs to a language we do not know or understand anymore. When dealing with the ancient world we need not be surprised that Celtic and Etruscan have both been eagerly put forward as promising candidates. The implication of this option is that we are at a loss: though, originally, the words carried a meaning, this meaning cannot now be traced, since the languages they belonged to are not—or not sufficiently—understood by the modern reader, nor were they by the majority of the ancient Romans.

The third answer also assumes that the formulas once did contain a meaningful message. However, this time the reason why we have not detected this meaning so far is because we have not tried hard enough. The words belong to an archaic or a dialectical form of the Latin language and can be isolated and analysed with the help of, for instance, etymological dictionaries, historical linguistics and a generous dash of ingenuity. In this way Paul Thielscher⁸ managed to ‘translate’ most of the terms and phrases of Cato’s charm. Some of them, he argues, were addressed to the displaced bone. *Dissunapiter* is then a corruption of *dis una petes*, which means: “take care that, each from your own side, you will reunite”; *mota sueta* “move yourself to your accustomed place”, *daries dardaries*: “give, give yourself” etc. Other scholars had already explained *ista pista sista* as *istam pestem sistat* “stop that pestilence”.⁹

I feel no temptation whatsoever to take sides in this endless discussion, but I do wish to take the variety of interpretations as a point of departure or rather as a signpost for my own provisional and tenta-

⁷ On the origin of this most celebrated magical word see: A. Dieterich, *Abraxas. Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des späteren Altertums* (Leipzig 1891); A. Nelson, “Abracadabra”, *Eranos* 44 (1946) 326-336; Önnersfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 138 n. 12. Its earliest documentation is ca. 200 AD.

⁸ P. Thielscher, *Des Marcus Cato Belehrung über die Landwirtschaft* (Berlin 1963) 385-92.

⁹ See for instance Tupet, *La magie dans la poésie latine*, 170 ff.; Tupet, “Rites magiques”, 2596 ff. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, warns us not too easily to discard these considerations.

tive explorations into the various types of magical powerful words and more especially into the supposed sources of their power. It will become apparent that the profusion of interpretations concerning the Cato text is in fact characteristic of magical charms in general. Again, I would suggest not to disregard this but rather take it as a serious challenge to inquire if perhaps there is a *meaning* in this poly-interpretability. After all, the following questions force themselves upon us:

- 1 if, in origin, the formulas had been understandable—and of seminal importance to the magical act—why were they allowed to become incomprehensible in the course of time?
- 2 if they were derived from foreign languages, what was the reason for borrowing these enigmatic texts at all?
- 3 if, from the outset, the words lacked a lexical meaning, what was the reason for concocting these meaningless sounds?

In short, I wish to ask the question: what is the meaning of the lack of meaning? What is the sense of nonsense? Whoever might censure this as an anachronistic and modern biased formulation of the problem may be reminded that the third century philosopher Porphyry asked exactly the same question in his attack on the followers of Plotinus, especially Iamblichus, whose practices of *theurgia*, derided as ‘magic’ (γοήτεια) by Porphyry, made ample use of these *onomata barbara*. Porphyry wondered: “What, after all, is the sense of these meaningless words, and why are the foreign ones preferred to our own?” (τί δὲ καὶ τὰ ἄσχημα βούλεται ὀνόματα, καὶ τῶν ἀσήμων τὰ βάρβαρα πρὸ τῶν ἐκάστω οἰκείων).¹⁰

¹⁰ Porphyry, in his letter to Anebo, ed. by A.R. Sodano, *Porfirio, Lettera ad Anebo* (Naples 1958) 22, as discussed by Peter Struck in the present volume. This calls to mind Aristotle’s description of and reservations against γλῶτται, “glosses” (*Rh.* 1404 ff.; *Poet.* 457 ff.). He contrasts γλῶτται to κύρια, “current words”, which are in general use in a given language, while glosses are obsolete and ξενικά, “foreign and anomalous”, though distinctive, since due to their singularity and independence of ordinary language these words have a certain “dignity” (σεμνόν). As their essential characteristic is not its meaning but its form they are not helpful for communication and, consequently, they are “entirely poetical” (πάντως ποιητικόν). Hence Aristotle advised against using them even if he could not foresee such extremes as reached in early Christian γλώσσαις λαλεῖν, “speaking in tongues (i.e. strange words)”. See: J. Whatmough, *Poetic, Scientific and Other Forms of Discourse: A new approach to Greek and Latin literature* (Berkeley 1956) 105-9. On the early history of the concepts ‘foreign words’ and ‘barbarous words’ see: B. Rochette, *Les ξενικά et les βαρβαρικά ὀνόματα dans les théories linguistiques gréco-latines, L’antiquité classique* 65 (1996) 91-105. On the similarities and dissimilarities between glossolalia and *voces magicae*, see for instance: D.E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity”, *ANRW* II.23.2 (1980) 1507-1557, esp. 1549-51: “Glossolalia and *Voces Magicae*.”

Before investigating these questions I shall give a brief survey of the material that forms our primary source of information. Next I shall survey the various types of verbal strategies that were applied to make the charms work.

II *Brief survey of the material*

For the present occasion I have selected as my main source the incantations and charms used in the atmosphere of remedies and recipes: medical or more generally useful prescriptions in the largest sense of the word. They include simple instructions to get rid of a headache, a fever or an ulcer. But they can also contain advice to ward off thieves, wolves, snakes, lightning, hail or the evil eye: in sum any possible form of misfortune. In addition to these medical and evil-averting motifs, they may also include techniques to receive a dream, to attract the love or desire of another person, to harm an enemy, etcetera. In the latter cases we are at the very border of another class of magical texts: the curse texts or *defixiones*, mostly brief texts written on lead tablets.¹¹ Interesting though they may be, I shall not deal with them here, but focus on the magical incantations and more especially the charms.¹²

We have two comprehensive collections of these texts from antiquity: one is the corpus of the Greek magical papyri, published with a German translation in two volumes by Karl Preisendanz and reviewed and republished by Albert Henrichs. An English translation has been published by Hans Dieter Betz and his team.¹³ Besides

¹¹ Two recent discussions: J.G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells* (New York - Oxford 1992), and D. Ogden, "Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds", in: V. Flint, R. Gordon, G. Luck and D. Ogden, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (London 1999) 1-90. Cf. also Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, Ch. V, "Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls" (pp.118-174). The frequent publications of new (or new readings of) curse texts and charms by the greatest expert in the field, David Jordan, deserve special mention.

¹² Gordon, "The Healing Event", 367, draws a distinction between charms (being allusive, pregnant, not meant to be fully understood, orally composed and transmitted and mainly focussed on the act of healing) and incantations (being explicit, elaborated and concrete, often the creation or re-creation of a professional practitioner). But for the present occasion I prefer to use one comprehensive term for the total complex of the verbal magical spell and will as a rule speak of charms or spells.

¹³ K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (1928-1931), second edition by A. Henrichs (Stuttgart 1973-1974); H.-D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago-London 1986). Betz informs me that the announced second volume promising an extensive commentary has been cancelled. A collection of recent finds on papyrus: R.W. Daniel & F. Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum I, II* (Opladen 1990, 1992).

shorter instructions for all sorts of medical or other emergencies, these magical papyri (dating from roughly the second century AD into late antiquity) also include very elaborate texts with extensive formulas that betray an unmistakably intellectualist, if not pedantic and priggish, climate with a penchant to mystery and esoteric theology.

The other body of texts consists of far more simple and modest, mostly brief charms for domestic use, nearly always for healing, as we find them in late antique textbooks on medicine, veterinary art, farming, such as Pliny the Elder, Marcellus Medicus, and the Hippiatric corpus.¹⁴ Though partially influenced by the formulaic material as presented by the magical papyri, they generally betray a more primitive and unsophisticated nature. These texts were collected in a fundamental article in 1892 by Heim,¹⁵ presenting some 250 charms. Recently, Önnersfors¹⁶ has presented a supplement of 60 charms, most of which, however, are early medieval. It does not make much sense, however, to draw too sharp dividing lines here, since there is a remarkably strong tradition leading from late antiquity into medieval magical charms,¹⁷ which can even be traced in spells that were still in use some decades ago in backwards countries such as Bavaria, Austria and Switzerland.¹⁸ For present purposes, then, I shall draw my

¹⁴ A good discussion: K.E. Rothsuh, *Iatromagie. Begriff, Merkmale, Motive, Systematik* (Opladen 1978).

¹⁵ R.L.M. Heim, "Incantamenta magica graeca latina", *Jahrbuch für Classische Philologie*, Suppl. 19 (1892) 465-575.

¹⁶ A. Önnersfors, "Zaubersprüche in Texten der römischen und frühmittelalterlichen Medizin", in: G. Sabbah (ed.), *Études de médecine romaine* (St. Étienne 1988) 113-56. See also: *idem*, "Iatromantische Beschwörungen in der 'Physica Plinii Sangallensis'", *Eranos* 83 (1985) 235-52, a collection for the greater part already used by Heim, but with an important commentary.

¹⁷ R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1989) Ch. 2: "The Classical Inheritance"; V.I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford 1991) Ch. 8, pp. 203-253, esp. 217 ff.

¹⁸ Relevant material can also be found in two collections of translated texts concerning magic which together cover all antiquity: G. Luck, *Arcana mundi: magic and the occult in the Greek and Roman worlds* (Baltimore 1985) and M. Meyer and R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco 1994). For a general interpretation and comprehensive discussions of the place of magic in antiquity besides Graf's *Magic in the Ancient World*, see: A. Bernand, *Sorciers grecs* (Paris 1991) and B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds.), *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, volume 2, *Ancient Greece and Rome*. Of special importance are the chapters by D. Ogden, "Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds", and R. Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic", which gives us a taste of what is in store in his eagerly expected book *Spells of Wisdom: Magical Power in the Graeco-Roman World*. Two very useful collections of papers are Chr. Faraone & D. Obbink (eds.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford 1991) and M. Meyer & P. Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden 1995).

material mainly from the collections of Heim (henceforth H.) and Önnersfors (henceforth Ö.),¹⁹ though not shunning an occasional medieval example.²⁰

III *The main formulaic strategies*

What kind of powerful words or expressions can we expect in these popular charms? Surveying the complete collection, amounting to more than 300 for the ancient Graeco-Roman world only (and many times more for the Middle Ages and Early Modern Europe), the reader will at first sight be bewildered by the variety of formulaic types. Yet, it is very well possible to list a limited and manageable number of recurrent tropes. I shall mention a number of the most popular ones and add a brief discussion of some interesting features.

III.1 *Names, words, and worse*

The most natural, though perhaps not most captivating, instruction is to explicitly mention the name of the patient or more generally the person who has to undergo the treatment.²¹ Sometimes it suffices to *think of* the sick person: H. 33 *de eo cogitato, cui medeberis*.²² As in many other cases that we shall encounter, one may rightly hesitate to call this a ‘magical’ formula. So this may be the right moment to emphasize, once and for all, that the precise nature we may wish to ascribe

¹⁹ For the present purpose I have preferred not to burden the text with extensive source information. The interested reader can easily find the references in the works of Heim and Önnersfors.

²⁰ I am much indebted to Fritz Graf for bibliographical advice and Richard Gordon for having communicated a very early draft of his *Spells of Wisdom*. Gordon has presented several topics of his forthcoming book in recent publications, notably “The Healing Event in Graeco-Roman Folk-medicine”, in: P.H.J. van der Eijk, H.F.J. Horstmanshoff, P.H. Schrijvers (eds.), *Ancient Medicine in Its Socio-Cultural Context: papers read at the congress held at Leiden University, 13-15 April 1992*, II (Amsterdam-Atlanta 1995) 363-376, which is both a summary and an elaboration of precisely those sections of the forthcoming book that are of particular interest to my subject. See also: R. Gordon, “What’s in a List?” Listing in Greek and Graeco-Roman malign magical texts”, in: D.R. Jordan, H. Montgomery and E. Thomassen (eds.), *The World of Ancient Magic. Papers from the first International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens 4-8 May 1997* (Bergen 1999) 239-277.

²¹ H. 1-15. Heim p. 471ff. takes these together with the next category under the name “*incantamenta simplicia*”. We also find the instruction to write down the name of the *owner* of a sick horse: H. 12-14. Of course, the importance of the name in magic is common knowledge: A. Hopfner, “*Mageia*”, *RE* 27 (1928) 301-393, esp. 334ff.; Önnersfors, “*Zaubersprüche*”, 10 n.34.

²² Another instance: Ö. 30. A combination of naming and thinking: Ö. 16.

to the formulas under discussion is *not* my present concern. I am interested in powerful, efficacious—or at the very least necessary—words such as they are *inter alia* applied in what we commonly call magical charms, even when these charms do not essentially differ from plain medical instructions.²³

More often we read the instruction to mention the name of the ailment that must be cured, especially at the occasion of the gathering of medicinal herbs.²⁴ For instance H. 29:

“When you enter a city, collect pebbles that lie on the road in front of the gate, as many as you want, while saying to yourself that you take them as a remedy for your headache. Attach one of them to your head and throw the others behind you without looking back.”

We observe that the *materia medica* (pebbles!) is made effective by a certain action, but when it comes to the utterance it is only its function that is mentioned. This may serve as a first warning not too easily to assume a *natural*, though secret and hidden, efficacy in the numerous plants and herbs that are used in magical treatments.

However, there is a completely different category of words or names that is most characteristic of magical *carmina*, albeit with few exceptions they do not appear in classical Greek or Hellenistic texts but only become current in the Roman period. We have already met with a possible example in the mysterious terms handed down in the formula by Cato and we referred to them as *voces magicae*, strange, uncanny and apparently un-Greek and un-Latin words.²⁵ The oldest known example is a series of six words: ἄσκιον, κατασκιον, λιξ, τετραξ,

²³ That does not mean that attempts at working magic cannot be distinguished, also in connection with the names of patients or illnesses. For instance when the number of letters of the patient's name, while being mentioned, should determine the number of knots that must be made in an unused thread. For the moment, however, I am trying not to get entangled in the vexed question of the relationship of magic, religion, and science. For my position in the discussion see: H.S. Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion”, *Numen* 38: 177-197.

²⁴ H. 18-39, with discussion and more examples at p. 561; Ö. 29.

²⁵ H. 178-242 has collected the *voces magicae* in the charms of late antiquity. The basic work on *voces magicae* is: Th. Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber* (Leipzig 1921-24, dactylographic edition, re-edited in a modernized form: Amsterdam I 1974, II 1983, III 1990). Recent short discussions with more literature: R. Kotansky, in: Faraone & Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, 110-112; F. Graf, “Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual”, in: Faraone & Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, 190-5; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 5-12; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 218-222; D. Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: the power of the word in Egyptian and Greek traditions”, *Helios* 21 (1994) 189-221, esp. 199-205. Henceforth I shall use the term *voces magicae* for all lexically nonsemantic terms, including the *Ephesia grammata* of the next note.

δαμναμενους, αἰσιον/αἰσία (*askion, kataskion, lix, tetrax, damnameneus, aision/aisia*), whose earliest documentation is in a fragment from a comedy of the fourth century BC, where they are referred to as *Ephesia grammata* (Ephesian letters).²⁶ And we find them also in a fifth century inscription and a fourth century curse tablet.²⁷ According to Pausanias they owe their name to the fact that they were originally incised in the cult statue of Artemis of Ephesos. These very words and a great variety of different ones turn up again and again in later magical and theological texts and are supposed to carry strong magical power, especially—but not exclusively—as averters of evil. The oldest of these ‘magical words’ thus originated in Greece, but foreign influences became ever more prevalent and the formulas ever more extensive and complex in the imperial period.²⁸

It is in this period, too, that a most important and curious development took place. The strange *words* (sometimes referred to under the collective name of *Ephesia grammata*) tended to become *names* (the more restricted meaning of *voces magicae*). The powerful sounds acquired an additional function as they were understood to be the secret names of mysterious deities invoked in the spells. In other words, we perceive a new *theogonia*, a process of explosive creativity in which divine powers emerge from powerful words. The names of these new gods and demons easily amalgamated with other existing names that were also characteristic of magical formulas but which, from the beginning, were imagined as names of real gods or demons. Especially names ending on -el and -oth abound, which clearly go back to Hebrew/Jewish models, such as the name of god Sabaoth, or the variety of

²⁶ The *Ephesia grammata* have exercised an enormous fascination from their early appearance until the present day, provoking a large number of works. I mention: K. Wessely, *Ephesia Grammata aus Papyrusrollen, Inschriften, Gemmen etc.* (Vienna 1886); C.C. McCown, “The Ephesia Grammata in Popular Belief”, *TAPA* 54 (1923) 128-40; Preisendanz, “Ephesia Grammata”. For a recent discussion and literature see: Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 6f. D.R. Jordan, “A Love Charm with Verses”, *ZPE* 72 (1988) 256-57, suggests that these Ephesia Grammata originally formed a comprehensible Greek hexameter. Cf. Daniel & Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum* I no. 49. Others had already tried to isolate understandable elements, such as *damnameneus*: “the tamer”. For an extensive bibliography see: R. Kotansky, “Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets”, in: Faraone & Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, 107-137, esp. 111, with nn. 21. ff., also mentioning new findings.

²⁷ Cf. L.H. Jeffrey, “Further Comments on Archaic Greek Inscriptions”, *ABSA* 50 (1955) 75 f.

²⁸ Additionally we find strange signs and figures that do not function as, but sometimes strongly remind us of letters. I shall not discuss these ‘*characteres*’, for which see: Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing”, 205-11.

names of angels such as Michael, Gabriel, etc.²⁹ Here, too, a process of associative creativity produced a profusion of new divine names. Often it is not possible to make a definite distinction between the authentic, 'real' divine names and the non-referential *voces magicae*, with which they are eagerly combined in long strings: *logoî*.

To give one extreme instance of our aporia: the vowels of the Greek alphabet, α - ε - η - ι - ο - υ - ω, are often used as non-referential *voces magicae* or characters, but they may also refer to the seven planets and thus acquire a referential substantiality. Finally, they receive a new function as the Names of the Seven Archangels, as for instance in a famous inscription in the wall of the theater from Miletus, where each of the seven characters is associated with two sets of vowels. Fortunately, in a 4/5th century papyrus we get the precise (that is in this period of time and cultural context) information which vowel order represents which archangel, as it provides a list of the archangels involved: Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Souriel, Zaziel, Badakiel, Suliel.³⁰

But let us return to the *voces magicae* proper, the abracadabra-words, and repeat our question: did they have a 'meaning' or were they just 'nonsense'? The answer cannot be simple, for more than one reason. First, I must call to mind the possibility that at least part of these strange words may have originated as 'normal' words, either in the speakers' own language or in a foreign one. But there are other formulas in which this is obviously not the case, for instance in such a series, very popular in especially African curse tablets from the second century onwards, as: *Alimbeu, colombeu, petalimbeu, cuigeu, censeu, cinbeu, perfleu*; or: *cuigeu, censeu, cinbeu, perfleu, diarunco deasta*. But if, according to some modern scholars, even their origin must be sought in 'normal' words,³¹ then we can always resort to unmistakable neologisms such as H. 189: ψα ψε ψη ψε ψη ψα ψε (*psa pse psê pse psê psa pse*) to be

²⁹ Full, if at present no longer exhaustive, collection in: E. Peterson, "Engel- und Dämonennamen. Nomina barbara", *Rheinisches Museum* 75 (1926) 393-421. See now: S.M. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen 1993); P.W. van der Horst, "Ontwikkelingen in de vroege Joodse angelologie", *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 48 (1994) 141-50. More literature: W. M. Brashear, in: Meyer & Mirecki, *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 220-1.

³⁰ On the use of letters, especially vowels in spells, the fundamental study was and still is: F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig 1925). An excellent recent treatment in: Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing", 199-205. For a discussion and picture of the Milesian inscription (*CIG* II, 2895) see: A. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (Tübingen 19234) 393-99, espec. 396.

³¹ A. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae* (Paris 1904) LXIX ff.

sure that here we have genuinely ‘magical words’. Now, there can be little doubt that *none* of these series of *voces magicae*, whatever their origin, in their historical context carried any lexically semantic meaning usable in human communication. Although they do evoke a certain atmosphere, there is no object or concept which they are supposed to refer to. The only thing they refer to is themselves.³² However, there is another side. Various authors of late antiquity, among whom the Christian Clement of Alexandria, argue that normal human language was not appropriate in addressing higher beings or god(s). Homer already knew that there was a specific language of the gods, and despite centuries of human prayer in normal human language, the idea of a special divine language never completely disappeared from human imagination. In later antiquity it was believed that demons or gods understood the sounds of the *voces magicae*, even if the human producers did not. In other words, now these terms did serve communication but a communication that could only be understood by one of the two partners in the communication.³³

Finally, in the same period, we also see *voces magicae* used in theurgy, ‘the compelling of a god’, for instance to make him appear or act according to the wish of the theurgist.³⁴ Pliny *NH* 28, 19 (a passage which we shall discuss in more detail later), though generally

³² “Die geheimnisvolle Macht jener Wörter (oder Worte) liegt für den Abergläubigen in der Unverständlichkeit. Sie sind mit dem Zaubergehärt vergleichbar, das sonst keinem sinnvollen, alltäglichen Zwecke dient” (Önnerfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 115).

³³ Apart from the general literature mentioned above n.25, see recently, especially on the *voces magicae* as divine names and in theurgy: J. Dillon, “The Magical Power of Names in Origen and Later Platonism”, in: R. Hanson & H. Crouzel (eds.), *Origeniana Tertia. The Third Colloquium for Origen Studies* (Rome 1985) 203-16; N. Janowitz, “Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius”, *History of Religions* 30 (1990) 359-372. On the implications of name giving and the power inherent in knowing the correct names of gods or demons, especially in magical contexts, literature abounds. See: B. Gladigow, “Götternamen und Name Gottes”, in: H. von Stietencron (ed.), *Der Name Gottes* (Düsseldorf 1975) 13-32, esp. 19-23; *idem*, “Gottesnamen”, *RAC* 11 (1981) 1202-38, esp. 1206-8. For a sceptical re-consideration of the general idea that to know the name of a god is to have power over him, see: S. Pulleyn, “The Power of Names in Classical Greek Religion,” *CQ* 44 (1994) 17-25 (= *idem*, *Prayer in Greek Religion* [Oxford 1997] 96-115), which may just be true as far as the title goes. Cf. also Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 218-29.

³⁴ On theurgy see: G. Luck, “Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism”, in: J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs, and P.V.M. Flesher (eds.), *Religion, Science, and Magic in Concert and Conflict* (New York-Oxford 1989) 185-225; B. Nasemann, *Theurgie und Philosophie in Jamblichs “De Mysteriorum”* (Stuttgart 1991).

deriding *voces magicae*, must admit that the “human mind does expect something ‘immense’ (referring to the awe inspired by these strange words), which is adequate to move a god or rather to impose its will on his divinity” (*dignum deo movendo, immo vero quod numini imperet*).

III.1.1 *Complications*

However, we must complicate matters. We have now made acquaintance with what is usually seen as one of the most characteristic features of magic: strange and incomprehensible sounds, words, phrases, originally used as autonomous instruments to add power to the magical act, ‘to make it work’. We saw them developing into acclamations or exhortations to raise (or compel) divine forces to activity, and finally we saw them acquire a referential status as the personal names of the gods invoked. All this, however, does not mean that ‘normal words’ or ‘normal gods’, or ‘normal addresses’ to gods do not occur. Far from it, and one of the most alarming observations is that the two types of expression happily coexist through the centuries, also in combinations of a most unexpected kind.

To give an example: names of great gods, demons, or generally holy persons are widely used in typical formulas of expulsion or protection. There are a few recurrent types. In one the illness is exorcised

³⁵ An illustrative series in Ö. 38-44, with discussion at pp. 120-22; cf. *idem*, *In medicinam Plinii studia philologica* (Lund 1956) 222 f. This type of text is commonly found on amulets and rings. Kotansky, “Incantations and Prayers for Salvation”, has a full discussion with bibliography; see esp. 113 and 119 for the ‘flee’ formula. I do not find it helpful to make a rigorous distinction between them and magical charms. Both categories originated as oral enunciations, now fixed in written words, that are meant to carry the incantations beyond the ritual, the primary performance, of an invariably *verbal* rite (Kotansky, *o.c.* 108-110. Cf. Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing”, 195). The flee curses provoke a specific problem: if you chase away the illness, where does it remain? Of course, you can ignore the problem and just focus on getting rid of the sickness: *apopompê*. But you can also specify where it must go: to a deserted place, where no mortal lives, or—more rewardingly—to the enemy country: *epipompê*. The classical work on the mentality involved is: O. Weinreich, “Primitiver Gebetsegoismus”, in: *Gebet und Wunder. Zwei Abhandlungen zur Religions- und Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart 1929); *idem*, “Religiös-ethische Formen der Epipompe”, *Ausgewählte Schriften* III (Amsterdam 1979) 291-308. Cf. H. S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, Hope and Worship* (Leiden 1981) 17-21, with further literature. Significantly, this becomes one of the central tests for the distinction between magical spell and Christian ‘Segen’ in the later Middle Ages. Most explicitly in the *Malleus Maleficarum* or ‘Hexenhammer’, written in 1486 by the inquisitors Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Krämer (German translation by J.W.R. Schmidt, Berlin 1906; English: M. Summers, London 1928).

and sent away, sometimes with a simple command: “be gone” (*exi*), but very often in the name of a demon or god, who has the power to chase the sickness.³⁵ Often the illness receives the order: “flee for a god chases you.” The name of the persecuting demon, god or hero³⁶ may vary, and both pagan, Jewish and Christian gods and saints freely intermingle, although pride of place should be given to Solomon. *Solomon te sequitur* or its Greek pendant is a top remedy against illness, misfortune or particularly against the evil eye, as it is standard in amulets, gems and rings.³⁷ Yet, Solomon was by no means the only persecutor and, most curiously, the process of associative engineering has even managed conversely to invoke the evil eye against an illness: Ö. 14, *Ignis sacer, fuge, Livor pater te sequitur*, in which *ignis sacer* probably is *erysipilas*, a reddish eruption on the skin, while *Livor pater* can only be ‘the evil eye’. The formula of protection, on the other hand, could be seen on many houses. Its scheme is: “sickness keep away, for here lives (or: “you are ward off by”) NN” (god, hero or saint). The most popular Greek defenders are Apollo and Herakles and in Christian times Christ took their place.³⁸

So we have ‘normal’ prayers requesting that the illness must be gone together with ‘abnormal’ *voces magicae* with the same objective. We have ‘normal’ gods that are invoked or compelled, side by side with ‘abnormal’, foreign, strange divine beings who do the same thing. As I said before, the alarming thing is not that they replace each other in the course of time, but that they are and remain interchangeable. Indeed, this trait of exchangeability appears to be perhaps one of the most characteristic, albeit hardly noticed, features of magical charms. Let me clarify what I have in mind with the aid of a

³⁶ Exceptionally the persecutor belongs to the natural world: H. 68, “Flee away, a wild wolf is chasing after your blood”.

³⁷ See the discussion and literature in Önnerfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 120 ff. The Jewish author Flavius Josephus, *Ant. Iud.* 8, 2, 5, explains that Solomon owes his popularity as a magician to his lauded wisdom (Cf. Kings 4: 29-34). Hence, God granted him also the qualities to heal or ward off illness. Another great Jewish magician (though not prominent in spells) is Moses: J.G. Gager, *Moses in Graeco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville-New York 1972); cf. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 6-7. Spells may also contain the—often sorely corrupted—names of four great Greek philosophers: Pythagoras, Demokritos, Sokrates, and Plato (H. 121), three of whom were believed to have been deeply interested in magic (Plin. *NH.* 30, 8-10).

³⁸ Fundamentally: O. Weinreich, “Unheilbannung im Volkstümlichen Gebet, Segen und Zauberspruch”, in: *Ausgewählte Schriften III* (Amsterdam 1979) 199-223.

few examples. First, two spells to get information on the chastity of a woman,³⁹ H. 216:

“If you wish to know whether a woman is still chaste (literally: a virgin) or if she has been adulterous..... Another trick: cut the tongue of a live frog and let the frog go. Write on that tongue, which you have cut from the frog, as follows: χουνεχω δημινσοφ (*chounechô dêminoôph*) and while the woman is asleep lay the tongue on her breast. She will tell you everything she has done.”

Now, immediately following this charm we read in the same text:

“Another one: cut out the tongue of a live frog and let the frog go and on the tongue write *the name of the woman* and while she is asleep place the tongue on her breast and thus question her, and if she has indeed been abused, she will tell you the name of the adulterer”.

A second example. In a chapter on deficiencies and illnesses of the head we read, H. p. 556:

“Against a headache of one half of the head (a kind of migraine) shut off your breath with the right hand, spread it over your cerebrum and say: *hoerbae et hooras erbaebo abraxat boetitae.*”

This charm again is immediately followed by another in the same text:

“Headaches you will enchant: take some earth, touch your breast three

³⁹ This precarious question, by the way, seems to have been a constant concern for ancient men. We have it in an oracular question from Dodona: H.W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* (Oxford 1967) 266 no. 11; also in Theocr. 3, 31-3. In *PGM VII*, 411-6, which seems to be distantly related to our charm, the heart of a hoopoe is used for the same purpose, whereas Plin. *NH* 32, 49, comes quite close to it with the tongue of a frog placed on the woman's chest. Cf. also *NH* 29, 81, where it is an owl's heart that does the trick; in his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom*, Gordon analyses these texts and notes that the frog, an amphibious animal, is the ideal ambivalent vehicle between two different worlds. See also: W. Brashear, “Zauberformular”, *APF* 36 (1990), 49-74, esp. 55-6. M.W. Dickie, “The Learned Magician and the Collection and Transmission of Magical Lore” in: D.R. Jordan *et alii*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, 163-193, esp. 183 ff., traces this type of spell back to Bolus of Mendes (3d century BC, Egypt), as a transmitter of ancient Babylonian spells concerning “the recovery of alienated affection”. He also sketches their continued existence into the 15th century AD. For Jewish parallels see: P. Schäfer and Sh. Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza I* (Tübingen 1994), 17-28, and elsewhere: “Beschreibung von Praktiken zur Prüfung einer des Ehebruchs verdächtigten Frau, die einen Ersatz für den in Num. 5,11-31 beschriebenen Brauch bilden sollen”. As to the male side, there are Greek oaths to establish fatherhood: Herodotus 6.68; Andocides 1.126.

times and say: My head hurts, why does it hurt? It does not hurt” (*caput dolet, quare dolet? Non dolet*).⁴⁰

Which of the two will be more efficacious? The one with the ‘normal’ names and words? Or the one with the ‘abnormal’ *voces magicae*? Here Pliny *NH* 28, 20, finds himself in serious trouble. For on the one hand he had already categorically rejected the abracadabra nonsense, on the other hand he cannot but wonder:

“It is not easy to say which of the two detracts more from the credibility of a formula: foreign and unpronounceable words or Latin words which however are unexpected,⁴¹ and which must appear ridiculous to our mind, since our mind expects something immense, something adequate

⁴⁰ Of course, there may be very good reasons for changing the formula. For instance we have two groups of codices from the 6th century giving parallel instructions to extract the teeth of a badger for some magical trick (Ö. 32). One group instructs the patient to say: *In nomine Omnipotentis decollo te* (“In the name of the Almighty I decapitate you”), another: *Butabar torthon hydran cermalis metonbor loro namdison tha saniorden*. Here, it is most probable that a Christian author has ‘corrected’ the text, since one of the official distinctions between magic and religion according to the Medieval *Malleus Maleficarum* (above n. 35) was whether the name of God, Christ or the Saints was invoked or, on the other hand, odd names of demons. *Malleus* II, 239: A spell may contain nothing “what comes to an explicit or implicit invocation of Demons”; “no unknown names”. The only words permitted are “the holy words themselves” (*ibid.* 240, cf. M. Siller, “Zauberspruch und Hexenprozess. Die Rolle des Zauberspruchs in den Zauber- und Hexenprozessen Tirols”, in: W.M. Bauer, A. Masser, G.A. Plangg [eds.], *Tradition und Entwicklung. Festschrift Eugen Thurner zum 60. Geburtstag* [Innsbruck 1982] 127-153). Very much the same can be deduced from the spells and exorcisms as collected for instance in: Ch. Stewart, *Demons and the Devil* (Princeton 1991) Ch.9: “Spells: On the Boundary between Church Practice and Sorcery”, 222-43. Heim 469f. lists three reasons why *voces magicae* in spells may be eliminated or replaced by other formulas: 1) an ancient author may refuse to quote them as e.g. Pliny *NH* 17, 267; 28, 29; 2) Christian monks may do the same for obvious reasons (Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 5, notes that sometimes pages have been excised from compilations for this reason); 3) sometimes *voces magicae* are lacking although they have been announced earlier in the same text, and as a reason is given that this is expressly done in order not to reveal the secret text. In magical papyri we find the instruction not to divulge the text, e.g. *PGM* XII, 321-4: “For this is the true rite, and the others such as are widely circulated, are falsified and made up of vain verbosity. So keep this in a secret place as a great mystery. Hide it, hide it!”. Comparably, a medieval text warns the person who wants to use a charm to keep the words of the incantation secret by folding it tightly in parchment, lest some lay person acquires it (L. Olsan, “Latin Charms of Medieval England: verbal healing in a Christian oral tradition”, *Oral tradition* 7 [1992] 116-142, esp. 136). For a general treatment of Christian interventions in pagan magic, see: V. Flint, “The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christians redefinitions of pagan religions”, in: Ankarloo and Clark (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe 2, Ancient Greece and Rome*, 277-348.

⁴¹ I agree with Önnersfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 139 n.26, that the interpretation ‘les étranges mots latins’ (A. Ernout in the Budé edition) cannot be correct. The context unequivocally requires: “Latin words and for that very reason unexpected in magical contexts.”

to move a god or rather to impose its will on his divinity" (*Neque est facile dictu externa verba atque ineffabilia abrogent fidem validius an Latina et inopinata, quae inridicula videre cogit animus semper aliquid immensum exspectans ac dignum deo movendo, immo vero quod numini imperet*).

This hesitation reveals at least as much about the nature of magic as it does about the weakness of Pliny's character. He finds 'normal' words—though meaningful—insignificant, whereas 'abnormal' words—though meaningless—can be 'immense', that is sublime, majestic, hence highly significant!

Is it for this reason that instead of making it optional (as in our last two texts), numerous other charms simply unite the 'meaningless' and the 'meaningful'? For instance Ö. 27⁴², where a spell against cancer in the breast confronts us with a combination of abnormal *voces magicae*, followed by a magical formula in normal language, which again is followed by a prayerlike invocation of the Christian god:

"asca, basca, rastaiä, serc, cercer, recercel. Nothing is it, nothing is it, nothing it will do. What I, son or daughter of NN, have in my breast, I pray you, God, take care of it." (asca, basca, rastaiä, serc, cercer, recercel; nihil est, nihil est, nihil facturum erit. Quod ego ille aut illa filius Gaiae Seiae mamillis si pectus habeo a te, deus, peto, praestes.)

So we observe that in the magical charms comprehensible and incomprehensible 'magical' words and phrases are both exchangeable and cumulative.⁴³ Accordingly, lists of alternative instructions for one

⁴² Cf. Ö. 20.

⁴³ Here is another splendid example: a medieval spell for advancing childbirth in which three different strategies are intertwined. I adopt the format used by Olsan, "Zaubersprüche", 121, in which capitals distinguish the words containing power (the mistakes in the orthography are neither hers nor mine):

In nomine patris LAZARUS. Et filij VENI FORAS
et spiritus scantus CHRISTUS TE VOCAT
+ CHRISTUS + STONAT +
IESUS PREDICAT + CHRISTUS REGNAT + EREX + AREX +
RYMEX + CHRISTI ELEYZON + EEEEEEEEEE +

Here we have first a frame of liturgical expressions to set the ceremonious atmosphere: "In the name of the Father etc", larded with intelligible, 'normal' powerwords taken from Christian mythology, which have a bearing on the situation of childbirth: LAZARUS, because of his resurrection compared with childbirth here, COME FORTH and CHRIST CALLS YOU. Thirdly, there is a series of nonsense words, which, however, may betray a wordplay on REX = king, triggered by the spell CHRISTUS REGNAT: "Christ rules". Like late antique charms medieval Latin charms display a variety of linguistic forms 1) nonsensical sounds, 2) Latin verse, 3) strings of powerful names, 4) narrative themes, 5) performatives of adjuration and conjuration and prescriptives. See the analysis by Olsan, o.c. 124-139 (and another very complex example on p. 137) and B.K. Halpern & J.M. Foley, "The Power of the Word: Healing Charms as an Oral Genre", *Journal of American Folklore* 91 (1978) 903-24.

and the same illness strongly suggest that it was a common practice, if one device did not work, to resort to another. Contrary to the usual notion of magic with its assumed automatic and mechanic effects, this optionality, in terms of both repetition and alternation, is indeed widely attested: if a trick did not work one must try it another time or try another, and again and again until it works.⁴⁴

In the meantime one question forces itself on the observer. If you do *not* use exotic *voces magicae*, and yet—like Pliny—feel that normal Latin words (*caput non dolet*) are perhaps not sufficiently ‘immense’ or majestic to be taken seriously as genuine magical instruments, are there any means to add ‘immensity’ to *verba latina*—means, in other words, that can add what we might call ‘magical quality’ to the formula? Indeed, there are, and we are now going to pay attention to the two most specific strategies. One of them concerns the content, the other more formal aspects of the formula.

III.2 *The appeal to analogy: comparison, similes, historiologiae*

One of the great strategies to add efficacy to words is to appeal to exemplary models, which for some reason or other are powerful in themselves, and if incorporated into the formula impart their power, in other words persuasive force. This is the strategy of analogy, which includes a great number of different techniques, such as comparison, simile, metaphor, historiologiae.⁴⁵ I shall give a few examples.

⁴⁴ E.g., H. 181: first the plant millefolium must be dug out. Then it must be planted again. “If the plant does not revive, *repeat* the performance *with another*.” In magical papyri repetition of magical words often with slight variations is a common phenomenon: e.g. PGM II, 52-60. It is a well-known practice in religious ritual as well, especially in ritual of an oracular type: Plut. *Aem. Paul.* 17, 6 (20 times); Xen. *Anab.* 6, 4, 12 (23 times). It could also be prescribed in advance to repeat a formula, as Cato did in connection with the spell discussed above or e.g. H. 112 (discussed by Önnersfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 126): *remediasti, si frequentius (frequenter) incantaveris* (“you will recover if you will sing this frequently”); also in PGM IV, 3089 f. In Mark 8:22-26, the repetition of the healing gesture increases its success. On different optional wordings for the same recipes: D.G. Martinez, *P. Michigan XVI: A Greek Love Charm from Egypt (P.Mich 757)* (American Studies in Papyrology 30, 1991) 6 f.

⁴⁵ These typical elements of magical charms have been discussed time and again. Heim, “Incantamenta magica graeca latina”, 495 ff. already has a good discussion and Önnersfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 123-129, another. In his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom*, Gordon has a fascinating section on it. For *historiologiae* see: D. Frankfurter, “Narrating Power: the theory and practice of the magical *historiola* in ritual spells”, in: M. Meyer & P. Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden 1995) 457-476. On mythical themes as applied in Egyptian magic in general: J. Podemann Sørensen, “The Argument in Ancient Egyptian Magical Formulae”, *Acta Orientalia* 45 (1984) 5-19; in German spells: K.A. Wipf, “Die Zaubersprüche im Althochdeutschen”, *Numen* 22 (1975) 42-69. For a general theory on the nature of “parallelization” see: T. Todorov, *Les genres du discours* (Paris 1978).

1 You can compare the *illness* with an analogon taken from nature:
H. 54 addresses the disease called *strophus*:

“Why do you fulminate, why do you stir like a dog, why do you jump up like a hare? Be quiet, intestines, stand still crocodile” (*quid irascere? quid sicut canis iactas te? quid sicut lepus resilis? quiesce intestinum et sta crocodile*).⁴⁶

More often the *act of healing* is compared or identified with natural occurrences. For instance H. 84, a spell for good digestion:

“a wolf went along road, along track. Raw food he devoured, liquids he drank” (*lupus ibat per viam, per semitam, cruda vorabat, liquida bibebat*).

or H. 51, a spell against swollen glands (tonsils):

“white glands do not hurt, do not harm, do not swell into a tumor, but become liquid like salt in water” (*albula glandula, nec doleas, nec noceas, nec paniculas facias, sed liquescas tamquam salis in aqua*).

or H. 111, a spell against damage of the veins:

“mountains dry up, valleys dry up, veins dry up, especially those which are full of blood” (*siccant montes, siccant valles, siccant venae, vel quae de sanguine sunt plenae*).

2 But you can also create yourself the (natural) circumstances that must serve as analogon. For instance H. p. 561 against quartan fever:

“You must collect three pebbles from a quadrivium (crossroads) and hide them in a concealed cooking pot and say: just as the sun cannot see these pebbles so let not the quartan fever see them” (*de quadrivio collecti lapilli tres, subiectos in cacabo abscondito et dicis: quomodo hos sol videre non potest, sic et illos quartanae non videant*).

or H. p. 563: in order to stimulate his libido a man must perform various manipulations with a stick and then say:

“just as this stick is erect, let also my ‘natura’ be erect and strong” (*quemadmodum hic palus erectus est, sic et natura mea erigatur et fortis sit*).

We have met this construction of a ‘natural’ parallel before, namely in the text of Cato. It is one of the common devices of the magical act: what used to be called ‘sympathetic’ magic, but which modern scholarship prefers to see as an act of performative persuasion through analogy.

⁴⁶ Though, of course, there are Egyptian spells against crocodiles (“It is Isis, who recites: there is no crocodile”, P. mag. Harris, spell P) the word ‘crocodile’ cannot very well have been intended here, and Heim, “Incantamenta magica graeca latina”, 479, has the ingenious suggestion that it is a corruption of *corcus*, meaning ‘rumbling of the bowels’. If he is right, as I think he is, this is a splendid instance of the ‘drive towards alienation’ discussed below.

3 However, next to these examples taken from nature, there is another, quite different source of powerful analoga. It consists of models that are stored in the cultural legacy of a civilization. For the later Roman period three great literary works were the most favourite sources of powerful *exempla*: Homer, Vergil and the Bible.⁴⁷ It need not be the power of the divine or heroic protagonists that was referred or resorted to: the works themselves, so it was believed, contained a deep, hidden wisdom and force, as witness also the endless allegorizations of the Homeric epics in the Hellenistic period, and the evolution of Vergil from a pagan poet to a wise magician and even a prophet of the Christian faith.⁴⁸ These are exemplary instances of ‘traditional referentiality’, to quote John Miles Foley, for one line evokes “a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself”.⁴⁹ So if you suffer from bad eyesight you quote the Homeric verse (H. 104)

“Take this mist from my eyes, that was there before” (ἀχλὺν δ’ αὖ τοι ἄπ’ ὀφθαλμῶν ἔλον, ἢ πρὶν ἑπῆεν, *Il.* 5,127),

⁴⁷ For biblical quotations in a magical context see: J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: a study in folk religion* (New York 1939=1982), esp. 104-13; E. A. Judge, “The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri”, in: E.W. Conrad and E.G. Newing (eds.), *Perspectives on Language and Text* (Winona Lake 1987) 339-49. Psalm 90 is *facile princeps*. See: Daniel-Malomini, *Supplementum Magicum* I, p. 73, with literature. Cf. also: Frankfurter, “Narrating Power”, 465 n.25. Coptic magic for a considerable part consists of scripture quotations written as amulets, appeals to Christian gods and angels for practical concerns, applied versions of church liturgy and formulae, as noticed by D. Frankfurter, in: Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, 259-62; *idem*, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton 1998) 257-64; S.G. Ritner, “Bemerkungen zu magischen Elementen koptischer Zaubertexte”, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, Beiheft 3 (1997) 835-46. For Homer see: Kotansky, “Incantations”, 132 n. 61.

⁴⁸ Divination and magic being closely associated, especially in the magical papyri (F. Graf, “Magic and Divination”, in: D.R. Jordan *et alii*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, 283-98), it does not surprise that the very same powerful ‘sacred’ texts were equally popular as materials for oracular practice, especially in the divination through *sortes*, (lot-oracles): P.W. van der Horst, “Sortes: het gebruik van heilige boeken als lotsorakels in de oudheid”, *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde* 62 (1999). The Homer-oracles (*Homeromanteia*) formed a special category consisting of a list of 216 disconnected Homeric verses, each of which was preceded by three figures, representing numbers from 1.1.1 to 6.6.6. The inquirer cast a single dice three times, and the result indicated the verse to be consulted. See for the most complete example: *PGM* VII, 1-148; cf. F. Maltomini, “P.Lond. 121 (= *PGM* VII) 1-221: Homeromanteion”, *ΣΠΕ* 106 (1995) 107-122. Generally: F. Heinevetter, *Würfel- und Buchstabenorakel in Griechenland und Kleinasien* (Breslau 1912).

⁴⁹ J.M. Foley, *Immanent Art* (Bloomington 1991) 7. See also his interesting work on the oral tradition of charms, *i.a.* in: “Epic and Charm in Old English and Serbo-Croatian Oral tradition”, *Comparative Criticism* 2 (1980) 71-92.

or H. 105 (a fixed Homeric formula):

“The Sun who sees and hears everything” (ἥέλιος ὃς πάντ’ ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντ’ ἐπακούει).

And if you wish to advance parturition you quote from Vergil’s *Aeneid* 4, 129 (H. 121):

“in the meantime the dawn rose from Oceanus” (*Oceanum interea surgens Aurora reliquit*).

Or, in a reverse comparison, if you suffer from podagra you must quote the Homeric line (H. p. 519):

“the meeting was in uproar, the earth below groaned” (τετρήχει δ’ ἄγορή, ὑπὸ δ’ ἔστοναχίζετο γαῖα).⁵⁰

4 Finally, the mighty feats of gods and heroes as they are described in these great literary works or are handed down by tradition, have a special attraction.⁵¹ For the same problem for which Aurora must rise from the Ocean, namely difficult parturition, you can also quote a famous line from Verg. *Ecl.* 4,10 (Ö. 23):

“Hail chaste Lucina (goddess of birth), your Apollo already reigns” (*Casta fave Lucina, tuus iam regnat Apollo*),

or Ö. 24:

“Elisabeth gave birth to John the Baptist. Open yourself mother (here perhaps the name of the woman in labour must be mentioned) and send out from you the lamb born from man” (*Helisabet peperit Iohannem baptistam, aperi te, mater illa eius, quia nomen facit quae parturit et emitte ex te pecudem de homine creatum*).

But, of course, if a bone sticks in your throat another ‘delivery’ is required, which, too, can be advanced by the spell (Ö. 59):

“Christ is born from the Virgin Maria” (*Christus de Maria virgine natus est*)

And if you suffer from worms you say Ö. 60:

“Job had worms and through the vision of God they died and his ulcers were healed. Christ, let thus die the worms and ulcers of the servant of the Lord, that they cannot do him harm evermore. *Agyos, aios, ayos, sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, fiat, fiat, fiat AMEN*” (*Job vermes habuerit et per visionem domini mortui sunt et sanata fuit ulcera eius. Christe, sic moriatur vermes et ulcera*

⁵⁰ This verse is also the only Homeric verse found engraved on a magic lamella: Kotansky, “Incantations”, 118.

⁵¹ The repertoire of themes is limited, especially in the Christian charms. Olsan, “Latin Charms of Medieval England”, 130, gives a list of purposes and the commonly connected narrative motifs.

quae habet famulus domini ut numquam ei amplius nocere possit. agyos, aios, ayos, sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, fiat, fiat, fiat AMEN).

Gods or heroes may also serve as models in that various plants and herbs are specially recommended since their medicinal force had been discovered or imparted by great gods such as Minerva, Apollo, Asclepius or the centaur Chiron.⁵² But just as in the ‘natural’ analogies above there is ample room for creative inventions. If you suffer from your tonsils sing (H. p. 557):

“Neptunus had (sick) tonsils standing on (lit. over) a stone, here he stood and had nobody to cure him. So he healed himself with his triple ‘sickle’”
(*Neptunus tusellas habebat supra petram, hic stabat, neminem habuit, qui curaret, ipse se curavit falce sua triplice*).

Unnecessary to say that though sitting or standing on or above something (stone, sea), whatever may be intended, is a recurrent theme in this type of mythological charm,⁵³ Neptune had nothing to do with tonsils. The mighty name Neptunus itself is the effective analogon, as variants show.

So we may conclude for the moment that in formulas that resort to comparison and simile, which often are expanded into small histories (*historiolae*), the analoga could be sought in exemplary natural situations, situations that could also be imitated or created, on the one hand, and on the other in examples handed down by tradition (literary or not), which refer to a supranatural reality. In the latter case, there may be a shift: the supernatural model can also be invoked as supernatural actor.

III.2.1 *Complications*

We must, however, complicate matters. For I wish now to focus the attention on the extreme arbitrariness and inconsistencies in the choice and application of analogy. There appears to be an astonishing freedom both in the models that are selected and in the variety of applications of one model to different diseases and cures. Finally there is an abundance of alterations and transformations.

⁵² Examples in H.108, 109, 124-126, and Ö. 40-45. An early instance in Plin. *NH* 2, 176.

⁵³ L. Robert, “Amulettes grecques”, *Journal des Savants* (1981) 9-16, presents many instances and traces its Jewish origin. It perseveres into medieval charms: *Iesus Christus super mare sedebat* or *Petrus iacebat super petram mormoriam*: Olsan, “Latin Charms of Medieval England”, 131 f. It seems to be conversely related with mythical figures coming out of the sea, who bring illnesses: A.A. Barb, “Antaura: The mermaid and the devil’s grandmother”, *Journal of the Wardburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966) 1-23.

Let us consider a very instructive charm: H. 167. A certain plant is applied in order to stop podagra, which was believed to be caused by a flux of blood, and then the plant is conjured by the name of great Iaoth Sabaoth,

“the God who has fixed the earth and fastened the sea out of streaming, overflowing rivers, the One who dried up the wife of Lot and turned her into salt”.

We observe various interesting features. First, we see that completely different and mutually incoherent acts of the great God are united in one search for analoga. There seems to be only one condition: that they have something to do with ‘drying up’. Secondly, the analoga are not particularly self-evident or compelling. I mean: in case of a flux it seems quite appropriate to write on a paper the story of the bleeding woman who touched the garment of Jesus and was healed (as it was done), but the connection of streams of blood with the salted wife of Lot demands a lot of our imagination and the creator really invested some effort in this creation. And thirdly, to our logical mind, he did not even succeed in every respect. Admittedly, the wife of Lot, being of salt was dry at least, but turning rivers into sea cannot very well be characterized as drying up, whatever way you look at it. Here is a first hint that there may have been a taint of non-committal, if not relaxed, playfulness in the search for or invention of analoga.

A striking illustration of this is provided by a series of variations of a very popular medieval spell.⁵⁴ One is intended to cast a spell on a snake with the words:

“stand still as the water of the Jordan stood still when John baptized our Lord Jesus”.

The same effect is intended by a variant charm:

“stand still just as Christus Jesus stood at the Jordan”,

and this same text is repeated in another spell, which however is not directed against snakes but against fire. And there is a host of variants both in form and in application. It appears that people have (or claim) a considerable liberty in adapting or changing standing similes into sometimes essentially different ones without apparently detracting from their supposed effectiveness. Sometimes there is no obvious reason for the variation, on other occasions these “variations depend

⁵⁴ Siller, “Zauberspruch und Hexenprozess”, 127-153, esp. 134 f., with many variants. The Jordan may yield its place to the Euphrates: F. Maltomini, “Cristo all’ Eufrate”, *ŽPE* 48 (1982) 149-170 = Daniel-Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum* I, no 32.

upon the identity of the frame, the immediate textual environment, and the performance situation”.⁵⁵

This ‘arbitrariness’⁵⁶ becomes manifest in various other manners as well: for instance in the application of colour analogy: white anemones must *prevent* the white complexion that is caused by heavy drinking, just as yellow flowers are good to prevent or heal jaundice.⁵⁷ Contrarily, using a red cloth is recommended in order to *produce* a healthy red complexion. Whereas in different cases the red colour of a plant can again be employed *against* red ulcers and the like. So there is a wild variety, a multi-applicability of practically any object or example according to the free associations of the user. In the process of association anything goes, as long as there is the tiniest shred of similarity.⁵⁸ If you cannot immediately think of a positive analogon you create a negative one. The following simile (H. 101) is documented in a number of variations:

“A mule cannot propagate, a stone cannot make wool” (*Nec mula parit, nec lapis lanam fert*),

which is then followed by the wish that in the same way the illness must not exist (anymore). Now, the first *adunaton*, *nec mula parit*, is a topos:⁵⁹ it is obvious, it is curious, everybody knew it and wondered why this was. So you can use it as an exemplary *adunaton* if you need one. The second, however, is neither curious nor relevant, it is an *ad hoc* invention, just a sudden idea, as there are many others in these *adunata* stories. Here is a variant in H. 101:

⁵⁵ Halpern & Foley, “Zauberspruch und Hexenprozess”, 909; splendid examples in Olsan, “Latin Charms of Medieval England”, 127-8, and 131-32.

⁵⁶ I must emphasize that the term ‘arbitrary’, which I shall use some more times, according to the dictionaries denotes two notions: “depending on or fixed through an exercise of *will*, or by *caprice*”. Although, especially in the more formal variations of rhyme-words and *voces magicae* the latter meaning may prevail, one can often discern an at least subjective meaning and an immanent structure of differences, as Gordon, “The Healing Event”, has shown. Cf. also the remark by Halpern and Foley above n.55.

⁵⁷ Önnersfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 123.

⁵⁸ And I know why. I have a green watering can, which I used for spreading pesticides to eradicate the weeds in my grass. My reason to use a *green* can was based on the association: poison is green, because the Dutch language has an expression “gifgroen” (green as poison). The next year I used that same can but, the original association having vanished from my memory, I took it that it referred to green as the symbol of unspoilt nature (cf. die Grünen) and used it for the opposite goal (with deplorable results). One can either regret the multireferentiality of analogy (as I did) or one can welcome it since it provides abundant opportunity for creative association (for which see below).

⁵⁹ Even to the extent that *mulae partus* was a prodigium and that the expression *cum mula pepererit* (“at the time that a mule will bear”) meant “never”. See: Heim, “Incantamenta magica graeca latina”, 493 n.1.

“because a mule does not propagate, a drinking-vessel does not drink, a pigeon has no teeth, so may my teeth not hurt” (*quod mula non parit, nec cantharus aquam bibit, nec palumba dentes habet, sic mihi dentes non doleant*),

where, again, there is a decrease in obviousness of the analoga, this time going hand in hand with an increase of relevancy. Particularly in these *adunata* we descry an emphatic drive towards variation.

So we conclude for the moment that the choice of models in comparative formulas is liable to a liberty that often verges on arbitrariness. Although there are fixed and recurrent models, either taken from nature or from cultural tradition, which have an authority in themselves, the users are apparently free to vary, associate, recreate, make additions, and all this practically without restriction. In other words, there seems to be a remarkable tolerance or rather openness to improvisation. In this process we often observe that the *logical relevance* of a particular comparison is *not* the decisive consideration.⁶⁰ Obviously, one of the seminal intentions is to cancel the cure’s isolation, to insert it into a recognizable series of comparable events or phenomena, some of which ended well. It is the *mise en série* that counts, and—so it seems—counts most. Different from, or in addition to, what is normally associated with magic and its supposed and sometimes explicitly prescribed stern tradition of fixed and inviolable formulas (“you shall not alter a jot or tittle of this formula”),⁶¹ it seems that this proliferation of new and often singular formulas is a marked trait of the magical charm.⁶² So we may well wonder if this profusion of new similes, this process of creativity, might not have

⁶⁰ Consequently, the reverse is also true: one formula could be applied for several completely different purposes as the *PGM* (esp. IV, 2145-76) and such instructions as ὥς θέλετε (whatever you wish to achieve) illustrate.

⁶¹ Just as it was common practice to attribute charms or rituals to great authorities of a primeval age and to give the illusion that they had been handed down without alterations.

⁶² Siller, “Zauberspruch und Hexenprozess”, 140: “Der Zauberspruch ist bei gleichbleibender Intention einem dauernden Wandel unterworfen. Obwohl man an dem bewährten Wortlaut (“probatum est”, fügt die schriftliche Tradition oft dazu), wie an einem technischen Mittel festhält, obwohl also gerade für diese literarische Gattung die Ehrfurcht vor dem einmal geformten Wort typisch ist und das festhalten daran verbindlich ist, befindet sich der einzelne Spruch in einem dauernden Umformungsprozess”; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 8: “such texts were transmitted from one magician to another without ever being corrected or improved by scholars, and each user was free to modify the text as he or she saw fit...”; M.W. Dickie, “The Learned Magician”, in: D.R. Jordan *et alii*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, 184: “Magicians do make a pretence of observing with scrupulous care what they like to maintain are ancient rituals. In reality, magic is innovative and dynamic.”

something to do with the very nature of magic, or at least of the magical charm.

III.3 *From analoga to anaphora: formal applications of analogy*

There is one curious application of analogy which may now lead us to our last issue, the one that was announced above as the formal peculiarities of the formula. To stop a stream of blood you can write the following words, H. 97: *sicycuma, cucuma, ucuma, cuma, uma, ma, a*. A *cucuma* is a cooking kettle. Perhaps the extension of this term in the preceding *sicycuma* refers to *siccus* dry, which may be meaningful. But that is not my point now. What interests us here is the formal technique. One word is repeated but in line after line is robbed of one letter until nothing remains. This is a very popular device. We have several of these formulas in which the gradual decrease in the length of the word itself is the analogon for the desired decline of the illness.⁶³ The initial term can have a meaning, for instance as a reference to the illness itself: H. 96 *novem glandulae sorores* (“nine tonsils sisters”, note that *glandulae* has nine letters). Others, especially often in *gemmae*, just start from *voces magicae*, for instance the abracadabra-formula. Inherent in this technique is the principle of repetition⁶⁴ and this is one of several formal strategies to impart effectiveness to a word or a phrase. We shall now turn to these formal strategies.

III.3.1 *Formal techniques: (asyndetic) cumulation, repetition, variation, rhyme, alliteration*

Even before reading the contents of a spell, a first glance often suggests that we have to do with an incantation. This is due to certain stereotyped and recurrent *formal* characteristics. The most common are repetition, variation, various forms of rhyme or alliteration, parallelization by opposites etc. I give an example: the famous charm handed down by Varro *RR* 55:⁶⁵

terra pestem teneto, salus hic maneto in meis pedibus (“the earth must keep the pestilence, health must remain here in my feet”).

Albeit on a primitive level, there is parallelism in metrum, there is

⁶³ Discussed among others by Önnarfors, “Zaubersprüche”, 116 f.

⁶⁴ Often, especially in magical papyri, in combination with certain geometric graphic arrangements in so-called *carmina figurata*. See Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing”, 199 ff.; Gordon, in his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom*, offers a detailed analysis.

⁶⁵ See: Tupet, *La magie dans la poésie latine*, 172-4.

rhyme, there is also contrast in meaning. Now, as we all know some of the formal principles applied in these charms are ubiquitous in other areas of especially folk expressions, as for instance nursery rhymes. "Iene miene mutte, tien pond grutte, tien pond kaas, iene miene mutte, ik ben de baas",⁶⁶ is a dipping rhyme in my own (Dutch) language. Repetition, for instance, is a fixed technique in both religious and magical expressions, and the instruction to repeat a word or formula two or especially three times is rife. No doubt, repetition or extension of a formula by variation (*albula glandula*)—in more general terms: pleonasm or redundancy—confers emphasis, that is power, to the expression.⁶⁷ One says *hagios*, *hagios*, *hagios* because *trishagios* is thrice as much as once *hagios*. But, of course, not all has been said with this truism. For even if it would explain one type of these formal devices it does not nearly explain all of them.

Though it is not my intention to go into the formal and prosodic niceties of the formulas I give here a few examples of three very specific devices in both comprehensible and nonsense formulas, all taken from the collections of Heim and Önnersfors (I have latinized the Greek):

- 1 gemination or trigemination by sheer repetition: *lego soi lego soi—socnon, socnon—sirmio sirmio*,
- 2 repetition including variation: *vigaria gasaria—lolismus lolistus*,
- 3 gradual variation from rather simple, mono- or bisyllabic forms to more complicated terms, a particularly popular device, especially in that the iteration or slight variation of the first two terms is followed by one or more words with a sudden radical change and/or extension: *rica rica soro—kuria kuria kassaria sourorbi—argidam margidam sturgidam*⁶⁸—*crissi crasi concrasi—adam bedam alam betur alam*

⁶⁶ We also have here an instance of the happy alliance between lexically semantic and nonsense words in the formula. For this process in nursery rhymes etc. see: H.A. Winkler, "Die Aleph-Beth-Regel: Eine Beobachtung an sinnlosen Wörtern in Kinderversen, Zaubersprüchen und Verwandtem", in: R. Paret (ed.), *Orientalische Studien Enno Littmann* (Leiden 1935) 1-24.

⁶⁷ See Winkler, o.c. preceding note. On gemination or trigemination in ritual see: A.M. di Nola, "La ripetizione mitico-rituale", in: *idem*, *Antropologia religiosa* (Firenze 1974) 91-144; D. Baudy, *Römische Umgangsriten: Eine ethologische Untersuchung der Funktion von Wiederholung für religiöses Verhalten* (Berlin-New York 1998) esp. 21-66. In religious or magical formulas: O. Weinreich, "Trigemination als sakrale Stilform", *SMSR* 4 (1928) 198-206; R. Mehrlein, "Drei", *RAC* 4 (1959) 269 ff.; Maltomini, "Cristo all' Eufrate", 167-8. As a general linguistic phenomenon: F. Skoda, *Le redoublement expressif: un universal linguistique* (Paris 1982).

⁶⁸ An attempt to make sense of this spell by means of etymological engineering: J. Knobloch, "Ein lateinischer Zauberspruch bei Marcellus Empiricus", *Rh.M.* 132 (1989) 408-9.

*botum—alabanda, alabandi, alambo—saos draos danonos danabios—sarra marra kametrix—baren zaren zartaren sara sarasen—fres refres perfres serperis—asca basca rastaiā serc cercer recercel—copiusus coprius coprius coprius copriola—nera nela neria nerella—fix fix fixon.*⁶⁹

I shall be silent on all other sorts of formal devices, for instance anaphora, and now only try to clarify my argument—the basic importance and specific nature of these creative processes—by returning to our observations concerning the text of Cato and the desperate reactions of modern commentators to formulas of this type. H. 75 gives a charm that must be said to a bruise or contusion:

ἀπολιθώθητι, ἀποξύλῳθητι, ἀποκορδύλῳθητι (*apolithôthêti, apoxulôthêti, apokordulôthêti*: “turn to stone (petrify), turn to wood, turn to WHAT?”)

For here we have a problem. The first of these three words occurs regularly, the second does occur, but only rarely, the third cannot be found in any dictionary: lexically it does not ‘exist’. And this is not the only problem; κορδύλη (*kordule*), the Greek word from which this verb apparently has been derived, has several meanings, two of which are relevant to our problem. One is ‘cudgel, stick’. The second is ‘swelling’. In other words, the term *apokordulôthêti* has an ideal double meaning, or at least a double reference, which on the one hand connects it with the first two words of the formula and helps to extend the sequence: “turn to stone, turn to wood, turn to cudgel”, on the other with the ailment under discussion, the swelling. There is only one problem for us, but apparently *not* a problem of the author of the formula. If taken in the latter sense *apokordulôthêti* would literally mean: “turn into swelling” = “become a swelling”, not: “get rid of the swelling”. But apparently the *mise en série* as such is far more important than lexically correct meanings. “A word... functions within an ongoing context in which rhythm, sound, framework and associations are more important than the word itself”.⁷⁰ Indeed *if* a word does so far not exist and a person takes the trouble of creating one, he may mean by it anything he may mean by it, he may even mean nothing at all. It is *his* word, he made it in an associative act which can now be clearly recognized as a process of poetics.

For what I am really talking about here appears to be a genuine

⁶⁹ A host of other instances of this trope could be collected from the *defixiones* and magical papyri.

⁷⁰ J.H. Blok, *The Early Amazons: modern and ancient perspectives on a persistent myth* (Leiden 1995) 35, following J. Goody, on words in an originally oral context.

instance of poetical freedom⁷¹ and it would do no harm to wonder if this freedom again should not be of some relevance to the magical act. Strangely enough, it has escaped Heim that the very same scheme of this productive process, including the problem of its semantical coherence, returns in another charm quoted by him (H. 106), a charm to prevent inflammation. The great sorceresses Circe and Medea are introduced sitting and facing the orient while searching for the medicine against inflammation εἴτε ἀπὸ λίθου (*eite apo lithou*, “either from stone”), εἴτε ἀπὸ ξύλου (*eite apo xulou*, “or from wood”), εἴτε ἀπὸ κυνοδήκτου (*eite apo kunodéktou*, “or from the dogbitten”). The former two elements refer to the same materials as in the previous charm: they are the material from which the sorceresses hope to extract the healing power. The third word, however, appears to be a free addition, again not equivalent to the other two, and as a matter of fact in this sequence quite out of order. Perhaps not, however, in the logic of the medical act: like *kordulos* of the charm just mentioned it seems rather to refer to the (cause of the) disease itself.⁷² The procedure in these two spells displays a marked structural similarity with the so popular, purely formal sequences like *argidam*, *margidam*, *sturgidam* mentioned above.

As it is, our texts bristle with neologisms, new, strange and unknown terms, irrelevancies, and even plain contradictions. All this is partly due to processes of prolific cumulation, variation, rhyme, more generally in the creation of lists.⁷³ Let us inspect a few striking examples. H. 112: If your horse is in the following condition:

⁷¹ A comparable swiftness between different categories in an Attic *defixio* (Wünsch, *DTA* no. 55) cursing various persons including a soldier: “These persons I do bind in the lead (i.e. on this tablet), in the wax, in the potion, in inactivity, in invisibility, in disgrace, in defeat, in grave monuments....” The materials that must implement the curse are followed by the intended effects, which are again followed by the place where the *defixio* is deposited (in view of the context the latter is more likely than the wish that the cursed person will end up in a grave). Interestingly, Gordon, in his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom*, shows that, conversely, ancient poetry, when imitating or evoking incantations, may make use of the very same technique that we are here discussing.

⁷² Note that the Greek term can indeed refer to an illness or a wound caused by a dogbite: Arist. *HA* 630 a 8. Among the many curses against a potential grave robber in a funerary inscription from Salamis at Cyprus (*SEG* 6 [1932] 802) we read: πρὸς ΚΥΝΑΔΑΚΝΩΝ καὶ ἐχίδνης φουσήματος.

⁷³ See on listing in different magical contexts: R. Gordon, “What’s in a List?” Listing in Greek and Graeco-Roman Malign Magical Texts”, in: D.R. Jordan *et alii*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, 239-277. How very conscious people were of this specifically magical procedure is exemplarily illustrated by the ironic allusion made by Apuleius *Apol.* 64.2, introducing three neologisms in the rhyme words *occursacula ... formidamina ... terriculamenta* in an undisguised parody of a magical malediction. See: V. Hunink, *Apuleius of Madauros Pro se de magia* II (Amsterdam 1997) 169-70.

si tortionatus, si hordiatuſ, ſi laſſatuſ, ſi calcatuſ, ſi vermigeratuſ, ſi vulneratuſ, ſi marmoratuſ, ſi roboratuſ, ſi equuſ non poterit eſſe, (“if ſuffering from wringing, if pregnant, if deprived of vigour, if trampled upon, if ſuffering from worms, if wounded, if covered with plaſter(?), if made ſtrong (!), if the horſe cannot eat”),

one muſt ſay the following *carmen* in his right ear:

“once you were born, once you are healed” (*ſemel natuſ, ſemel remediatuſ*).

We ſhould not be too ſurpriſed if we find only a few of the rhyme-words of the firſt part of this charm in our dictionaries, muſt re-conſtruct others from (hopefully) related terms, can only gueſſe at the meaning of others, and ſimply find one completely out of order.⁷⁴ Again and again this proceſſ of poetics involves a creation of new words.

A moſt illuſtrative example in this reſpect iſ a charm againſt ſwollen glands (H. 40):

Exi, <ſi>⁷⁵ hodie nata, ſi ante nata,
ſi hodie creata, ſi ante creata,
hanc peſtem, hanc peſtilentiam,
hunc doloreſ, hunc tumoreſ, hunc ruboreſ,
haſ toleſ, haſ toſillaſ,
hunc panuſ, haſ panuclaſ,
hanc ſtrumam, hanc ſtrumellaſ
hac religione
evoco, educo, excanto
de iſtiſ membruſ medullaſ

Here we have a perfect ſample of the creative production of previously non-exiſtent rhyme words, according to the technique illuſtrated above in the caſe of *voces magicae*. This time, however, although ſome of the words (*toleſ, ſtrumellaſ*) are *hapax legomena*, the meaning can eaſily be gueſſed ſince they are nothing but variations of related, well-known terms (*to[n]ſilla, ſtruma*). Focuſſing on the diminutive forms in theſe pairſ of related words Önnerrforſ commentſ: “Wie die deminutiva *toſillaſ, panuclaſ* und *ſtrumellaſ* zu beurteilen ſind, iſt nicht

⁷⁴ Of courſe, ſome gueſſeſ are more obvious than others. For inſtance, my gueſſe iſ that *marmoratuſ* muſt have ſomething to do with *marmor* in its ſenſe of ‘whitened ſurface’ and *roboratuſ* with *rubor* in its ſenſe of ‘red complexion cauſed by inflammation’. However, apart from the fact that this would imply a tranſpoſition of human ſymptomſ to the domain of hippiatrics, my intereſt now iſ not ſo much in originſ as in the textual conſtitution as it haſ come down to uſ, including its logical incoſiſtencies.

⁷⁵ Heim p. 476, n.1 ſupplemented *ſi*. Cf. the diſcuſſion in Önnerrforſ, “Zauberſprüche”, 119

mit völliger Sicherheit zu entscheiden Wie *pestilentia* im Verhältnis zu *pestis*, heben sie durch den erweiterten Wortumfang den Krankheitsbegriff intensiver vor.”

All in all, it appears that we must not expect easy interpretations or explanations of many an unexpected word in our charms. In other words: once more the case is not simple but complicated. Let us complicate matters a bit further.

III.3.2 *Complications: the complexity of alienation*

Right in the beginning of our enquiry we saw ourselves confronted with three different, at first sight mutually exclusive interpretations of the enigmatic words in the magical formula in Cato: either they consisted of non-semantic *voces magicae*, or they were derived from a foreign language, or they were corruptions of originally good Latin words and phrases. One problem was that we are rarely able to decide which of the three is correct, another, even more alarming problem is that one gets the impression that the three options may intermingle and coincide in a sheer inextricable way. Moreover, we cannot always decide whether the corruption is the effect of a process of wear, naturally inherent in oral tradition, as an effect of deficient memory for instance, or on the other hand is the result of *conscious or unconscious* strategies of the transmitter. Let us have a closer look at these complications. H. 45 is a Greek spell against the evil eye, which I give in translation except for the word which I am now interested in:

“Go, νεμεσῶθ (*nemesôth*), go out, stay off from the amulet-protected horse, who was born from his own mother, o you evil eye, as far as the earth is separated from heaven”.

There are two interesting ‘mistakes’. One is a very strange corruption of a normal formula. “Who was born from his own mother” must be a corruption of—perhaps rather a free variation on—the (originally Egyptian) habit, very common in magical texts, of identifying a person by the name of his mother.⁷⁶ But what I am now interested in is

⁷⁶ While Graf, in the first version of his book (*La magie dans l'antiquité gréco-romaine* [Paris 1994] 149) still interpreted this strange habit as an *exclusively* magical inversion, he now argues that the *origin* is Egyptian, but that the *application* in magical texts is inspired by the general penchant to magical reversal. (*Magic in the Ancient World*, 128). With reference to the French edition of Graf's book, J.B. Curbera, in an exhaustive paper, “Maternal Lineage in Greek Magical Texts” in: D.R. Jordan *et alii*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, 195–203, esp. 199, once more argues that the habit is derived from Egypt but was adopted in Graeco-Roman magic for reasons of inversion. He also notes that “the magical tendency towards inversion normally does not create new elements, but selects from pre-existing elements.” By way of illustration he refers to

the term *nemesoth*. On the basis of parallel evidence, Heim assumed that we should read νεμεσῶ σ' (*nemeso se*), which means "I feel resentment against you". In a letter, Chris Faraone suggests that the original word rather should be *Nemesis*, since most flee formulas follow the pattern of an imperative followed by the name of the affliction.⁷⁷ *Nemesis* is an *alias* of the Evil Eye. However this may be, we are back at the vexed question: is it an error of a late scribe as there are so many? Or was the corruption already fixed in an earlier model? If so, how did it slip into the text, and why was not it unmasked? The question is justified as words ending on *th* do not occur in the Greek language. So the word must have caused at least some uneasiness to a Greek user who knew perfectly well that such a word 'could not exist'. On the other hand, words ending on *th*, especially on *-oth*: (representing a female plural in Hebrew), are very common in, indeed characteristic of, *voces magicae* and the names of gods and demons such as Sabaoth in magical texts. In other words there may have been some temptation if not to wilfully produce, then at least to tolerate the corruption *nemesoth* and perhaps to take it as a divine name.⁷⁸

I do, of course, not deny that variation or corruption is a matter of course in the tradition of *voces magicae*, devoid as they are of a lexical meaning that could succour the preservation of their original morphology. Far more interesting, however, is the process by which a normal meaningful word is turned into a *vox magica*, as we saw it in

R. Münsterberg, "Zu den attischen Fluchtafeln, *JÖAI* 7 (1904) 141-5, who argues that the magical use of retrograde writing did not originate as an inversion of the normal writing, but was a relic of older Greek writing habits only preserved in magic as a sign of otherness. Using the mother's name, for that matter, is also well attested in early Greek inscriptions. The curse text, that was brilliantly explained by D.R. Jordan, "*CIL* VIII 19525 (B) 2 *QPVVLVA* = *q(uem) p(eperit) vulva*", *Philologus* 120 (1976) 127-32, (cf. *idem*, "Notes from Carthago", *ΣPE* 111 [1996] 121, and *ΣPE* 74 [1988] 240, where he mentions two unpublished curse tablets from the Athenian agora with the text: ὄν ἔτεκε μήτρα τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ) demonstrates the common use of the expression as well as its applicability for puns as in our text. Cf. Daniel-Malomini, *Supplementum Magicum* I p. 155.

⁷⁷ Cf. Daniel-Malomini, *Supplementum Magicum* I p.71.

⁷⁸ A splendid parallel of this process, which is unmistakably intended, is the 'magical' name that Hermes adopts in one of the so-called Sethianic curse tablets: *χθονιθαρχωθ* (*chthonitharchôth*) in a *defixio*: (Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, no. 18; comparable terms *ibid.* nos. 27, 29-38, all from Cyprus), in which the terms 'ruler' of the 'underworld' can be easily recognized, both, however, augmented with a 'magical' *th*. W. Burkert, "ΘΕΩΝ ΟΠΙΝ ΟΥΚ ΑΛΕΓΟΝΤΕΣ: Götterfurcht und Leumanisches Missverständniss", *MH* 38 (1981) 195-204, esp.204, presents striking examples of perfectly normal modern prayer formulas transformed into sometimes rather weird names of God.

the charm just discussed. Once we are prepared for this possibility, it strikes us that there is an astonishing potential of strategies, either conscious or unconscious, to *create* 'strange words', that are all applied in the magical texts. The instruction to use Greek words or letters in a Latin text or *vice versa* belongs to the most common strategies,⁷⁹ as is the use of words from other languages in general.⁸⁰ H. 47, a Greek charm, gives the instruction to write a formula against mice: "write ἐξήφορε". Another codex has ἐξίφορε. We can be sure that the user had no idea what it meant and took it to be a *vox magica*. It is however nothing but the Latin expression: *exi foras* ("go away", lit. "go outside"), but written in Greek letters. These words from other languages or words written in foreign letters in the midst of a normal text do come as a surprise and are of course particularly prone to corruption. Here it becomes practically impossible to distinguish between *voces magicae* and corruptions of relatively normal texts, especially if borrowed from another language. There are several instances of heavily corrupted Greek words in Latin texts, which after careful analysis and reconstruction turn out to be perfectly understandable metrical phrases, *inter alia* from Homer. Likewise, H. 528, a spell against worms, very popular in the Middle Ages, revealed its secret only in the 19th century. It appeared to be latinized Hebrew, namely Solomon's Song 6:8:

Sisim hemma mulahos usmonim pilagrim velamos einmisspar ("There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and virgins without number")

I do not know whom to admire more, the scholar who made this discovery or the one⁸¹ who detected in the *verba magica* of an 8th century Latin spell AMICO CAPDINOPO OIOPON ΔPACASIMO the *palindrome* of a *Greek hexameter*: ἀμήσας ἄρδην ὀροφήφορον ἥδρασα σῆμα, ("having reaped I established a lofty-roofed monument"),

⁷⁹ Instances of a variation of *voces magicae* written in Greek and Italic letters in Ö. 21, 22, 26.

⁸⁰ Not only in charms from late antiquity, but also, and especially, in medieval spells, where often the instruction is phrased in the vernacular, but the powerful words themselves in the holy language of the church: Olsan, "Latin Charms of Medieval England", 118; G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague 1948) counts 86 Anglo-Saxon manuscripts out of which 68 contain Latin formulas. In seventeenth century England this could even result in the insinuation that a prayer in the Latin language actually is a magical charm: K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England* (London 1971) 179.

⁸¹ L.W. Daly, "A Greek Palindrome in Eighth-century England", *AJPh* 103 (1982) 95-97.

clearly derived from a Homeric line (Il. 24.451) but with no transparent connection with the purpose of the spell, namely to stop a bleeding. Indeed, many are the corruptions due to misunderstanding, the original being so concealed that, as Heim sighed, “we need another Oedipus to explain them”. However, at the same time he rightly warns us not to think that all these strange formulas *can* be explained. For instance, for the reason—and here I return to a suggestion cautiously introduced above—that there is more to it than mere corruption. For, first, as we already noted before, we often descry a conscious play with a word, and, second, it is not only *foreign* words that tend to be corrupted. Take for instance Ö. 60, quoted above, where we read at the end of a carmen:

agyos, aios, ayos, sanctus sanctus sanctus fiat fiat amen.

It is clear that in the first three words things went wrong because they are taken from another language: Greek ἅγιος. But this hardly explains why *three different words* emerged. Clearly, the distortions are, at least partly, caused by a process of purposive variation. A remarkable example of this process is H. 122, apparently a spell against contusion:

si vir est in collo, si mulier in invilico, sicut terra non tangat, ita sanguen viventale tantale vives sanguine tantale.

I do not translate this, because it is untranslatable: although separate words can be distinguished, the text as a whole presents nonsense. What we do see, however, is a marked drive to repetition, rhyme, alliteration, variation. Perhaps the original was something like:

si vir est in collo, si mulier in umbilico, sicut terram non tangunt, ita sanguinem bibunt talem (?) Tantale bibes sanguinem, Tantale,

in which Tantalus is asked to drink the blood (of the contusion), which, for that matter, is in sheer contradiction to his mythical inability to drink⁸² (or eat). But my point is that a meaningful Latin text has been corrupted and rendered unintelligible by a process which cannot be attributed solely to the wear inherent in oral tradition but should rather be viewed as a (poetic) desire—if not compulsiveness—to produce rhyme, repetition and variation.

⁸² In fact we have a spell with the words *Tantale pie, pie Tantale, Tantale pie*, a transcription from Greek: “Drink Tantalus”.

In all these cases—and there are many more⁸³—we descry the temptation to change a formula in order to make it more ‘magical’, as we also noticed in the cumulation of *voces magicae*. This is, for instance, obviously the case in H. 66, a not completely comprehensible spell against a disease of the chest. In it we find the formula *ut os ut os ut os*. This must be a corruption and trigemination of *ut hos*, which no doubt was intended to indicate the place where names of other sufferers should be inserted: “just like the following ...”, but which obviously developed into a magical formula.⁸⁴ Similar processes lie at the root of such corruptions as that of the liturgical formula *hoc est corpus meum* into *hocus pocus* and its extensions in a host of further formulas, in Dutch for instance: *hocus pocus holle bolle bocus* or *hocus pocus pilatus pas/platneus*, etc. etc. What we observe here is that the joy, (or the need), of constructing “poetical” formulas takes its toll over the normal requirements concerning meaning in everyday communication.

A most interesting type, finally, is that a normal and meaningful term is followed by a variant form that does *not* have a lexical meaning but which forms the *trait d’union* with the world of magical terms. A good instance is H. 41:

absi absa phereos (and after some manipulation): *tollo te hinc totam, haemorhoida, absis papphar*.

Absis means “be gone” and in the second formula a magical word *paphar* is added. But in the sequence *absi absa phereos*, *absis* is first deconstructed into the lexically non-existent *absi*, the next step towards ‘magicalisation’ is the construction of a variant of this word: *absa*, which is followed by a completely different *vox magica*. A medieval spell to induce erotic desire in a woman⁸⁵ has: *amet lamet te misael*, in which *amet .. te* means: “may she love you”, which however is interrupted by a nonsense rhymeword *lamet*. Comparably, H. 184 has: *κυρια κυρια κασσαρια σουρωρβι* (*kuria kuria kassaria sourorbi*), in which the word *kuria*—if intended as a ‘normal’ word—means “mis-

⁸³ Even if we take full account of simple mistakes. In the magical papyri we find many different versions of one formula and sometimes they are quoted one after the other: A. D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Z. Stewart, Oxford 1972) I, 179 f. On different kinds of adaptations in magical papyri see also: Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 175.

⁸⁴ Comparable is that meaningful *osia*, *osia*, *osia* in one medieval spell, reappears in others as senseless *voces magicae* + *o sy* + *o sy* + *o sya*: Siller, “Zauberspruch und Hexenprozess”, 134-5.

⁸⁵ R. Kieckhefer, “Erotic Magic in Medieval Europe”, in: J.E. Salisbury (ed.), *Sex in the Middle Ages: A book of essays* (New York-London) 30-55, esp. 32.

truss”, but the other words are nonsense words.⁸⁶ And our texts bristle with such curious mixtures of normal words and their ‘deconstructed’ variants obviously deployed as magical words.⁸⁷ Let me just finish by quoting two most interesting ones belonging to a whole series, taken from an ancient textbook on horse breeding, H. 210 and 211:

αμιλι χαμουρουατο σακμαδαν εὐπρεπέστατε δαπνουνη, βαθυαρουεζε μαν-
τεστιν εὐπρεπε, καὶ σεμναλευθ

Ὁ υἱοῦ ατιουρουανα καὶ τῶν ευπρεταβενε μαλχα πιουνιβα καὶ αχιματατια

For the major part, both spells consist of *voces magicae* but they also contain lexically correct Greek words: καί (*kai*, “and”) and εὐπρεπέστατε (*euprepestate*, “o most becoming one”). Heim grants these two words an accent, therewith acknowledging their lexical existence. He does not do the same⁸⁸ with the words εὐπρεπε (*euprepe*) and υἱοῦ (*[h]uiou*), although they closely resemble normal words: *euprepe* misses only one letter to make it the vocative of the word of which *euprepestate* is the superlative. In the second formula we have in the word ευπρεταβενε (*eupretabene*) an even worse ‘corruption’ of the same term. Hence, these two texts illustrate how abnormal and normal words may intermingle, and in such a way that a form of address taken from normal communication—here and elsewhere in *logoi* of *voces magices* vocative forms abound—continually lingers on the brink of normal and abnormal language, leaving the reader or user with the problem where exactly the world of the addressed person, demon or god must be sought. They also provide an additional illustration of how normal words under the influence of their ‘magical’ context may gradually change into ‘abnormal’ words. Our texts betray various different

⁸⁶ Of course also in other types of magical texts, e.g. Daniel-Maltomini, I, no. 45, p.165: βαλεω (at least suggesting ‘normal’ Greek) βολβεω (not an existing Greek word, but not impossible in Greek) βολβεωχ (impossible in Greek) βολβεσρω υυφθω.

⁸⁷ Note that it is not necessary to add *incomprehensible* words to ‘magicalize’ a text. This can also be done by lexically existing, but (to quote Pliny) “unexpected words” such as for instance *crocodile* in a text mentioned earlier or the interesting case in H. 48, ἐκτείνει περικεφαλαία βύρσα, ἐκτός, ἐκτός, νόσ[ος], συγχεῖ πάγων ἡίθεος ἡμίθεος, which perhaps means: “(the patient?) stretches out the skin of his head, (and says): out, out, illness, the beard of a young men, of a demigod, demolishes you”. I guess that ἡμίθεος is just a free addition to and variation of the foregoing ἡίθεος in order to make the spell more persuasive.

⁸⁸ As he had not done in the case of *kuria* in the preceding spell. Quite correctly, in his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom* Gordon, while discussing the *Ephesia grammata* quoted above pp. 113-14, wonders whence these accents (“those satisfying marks of phonetic orthodoxy”) were derived.

stages of this process.⁸⁹ For both these reasons these texts will be of immediate relevance to our final section.

IV *Some inferences and suggestions*

We have discussed three different strategies most typical of the magical charm. Two famous lines of *voces magicae* in Cato served as an overture to a survey of strange 'magical' words and names, and in the end our discussion of one of the central features of the charm, namely the formal techniques, led us back again to these *voces magicae*. In this respect our most important conclusion concerns the relevance of the search for origins. The question whether the *voces* were meaningless sounds right from the beginning, or were either relics from foreign languages or corruptions from perfectly normal language, has lost most of its interest for our present issue.⁹⁰ Not only have we seen that all three processes regularly did occur, but—far more important—our texts display a propensity verging on obsession to create abnormal words (*voces magicae*), *irrespective of the point of departure*.⁹¹ Even if a

⁸⁹ Here are a few more: Ö. 33: *Has preces dices: Horner laxi abcol fecesitias et ior dodienlaecaon utus celi libera*, in which at least *et* and *celi* (if identical to classical Latin *caeli*) and especially *libera* ("make free")—while another codex adds *virtus* instead of *utus*—can be recognized as normal words in the midst of the mass of nonsense words, which however *at first sight* would give the impression of orthodox language. Ö. 47, *alotamentum sedraoton terfice isfinias nereta despone permofinet ment, hec mihi et Platoni in usum erat*, of which the final part is perfectly understandable: "this was of help to both me and Plato", but in the spell itself one continually doubts whether we have normal words or not. Cf. also: J. Stannard, "Greco-Roman materia medica in medieval Germany", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 46 (1972) 467. In such formulas the formal similarity of the magical formula and Jabberwocky becomes apparent.

⁹⁰ In other words, the question as posed by K-Th. Zaurich, "Abrakadabra oder Ägyptisch? Versuch über einen Zauberspruch", *Enchorion* 13 (1985) 119-32, is interesting from the perspective of origins (here: Egyptian) but not with respect to its meaning for later users, who had no inkling about origins or original meaning. The same is still true when it can be demonstrated that a seemingly 'senseless' string of untransparent *voces magicae* actually consists of originally Egyptian names or epithets of gods, while, in addition, the total number of letters of that string is 24, as in a magical papyrus published by R.W. Daniel: "P.Mich.inv. 6666 Magic", *ΣPE* 50 (1983) 147-154, and also in the latinized versions of Hebrew and Greek expressions. L.W. Daly, "A Greek Palindrome", 95, asks just the right question: "When a scribe copies Greek in an England that understands no Greek, is there any comprehension?" and gives just the right answer, namely that in this case "there would be only the scribe's comprehension that he is copying magic and spells."

⁹¹ Moreover, it is not necessary at all to assume that one single charm must have been the standard and that all variations from that text were somehow corruptions of one kind or another. Olsan, "Latin Charms of Medieval England", 125 n.21, makes a productive use of Lord's concept of 'multiformity' (A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* [Cambridge 1960] 119-20) for the understanding of so-called 'variants' of charms.

formula originated in normal and comprehensible language, a sometimes demonstrably deliberate process of deconstruction soon took its toll. What we see, in other words, is a *marked drive to alienation*. In quite a different way from what philologists usually understand by it, we conclude that in the magical formula often the *lectio difficilior* is indeed *melior*: the more difficult, aberrant, the less ‘normal’ a reading, the better it seemed in the eyes of the author, transmitter or user of the charm. This means that the focus of our interest has now definitely shifted from problems of origin towards problems of meaning. We are back at our initial question: what is the meaning of the lack of meaning?

If we ask Pliny, we learn from a passage quoted above that *externa verba atque ineffabilia* (foreign and inexpressible words) carry the expectation of something ‘immense’. Why? Various different but not mutually exclusive answers are conceivable. Inspired by the literary theorist Todorov,⁹² R. Gordon⁹³ emphasizes the narrative aspects of charms, comparing them with cooking recipes. To this end they must establish rôles, actions and predicates. The basic rôles or participants are the practitioner/magician, the patient/client and the object (the disease). A mediator (spiritual power) may be the fourth rôle. The relations between these rôles are of an authoritative nature. Through the act of addressing the disease the practitioner actually addresses the patient, likewise convincing him of his authority, which is established by his command of specific, effective knowledge, among other things his knowledge of effective words: the peculiar words called *voces magicae*.⁹⁴ Depending on the intended addressee, the utterances serve two different goals: “The address operates on two levels. As a locution to an inanimate object (the disease), it marks a non-standard social event requiring special interpretation. As an address in the second person with the deployment of a specific name (the client) it acts as a sign of the inclusion of the named within a quasi social context”.

Accordingly, Gordon pays much attention to the specifically rhetorical and persuasive functions of words, expressions and formulas. The creation of foreign or new words, including the *voces magicae*, is

⁹² Especially T. Todorov, “Le discours de la magie”, *L’Homme* 13 (1973) 38-65 = *idem*, *Les genres du discours* (Paris 1978) 246-82.

⁹³ Gordon, “The Healing Event”.

⁹⁴ F. Graf, “Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual”, in: Faraone & Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, 188-213, esp. 190-5, in some respects, concurs with this, but he focuses his interpretation rather on the relationship between magician and deity. One function of the *voces magicae* is that of normal prayer: to express all potential names (= the sphere of the god’s activities), to ‘please’ the god. The other, more specific one, is to “claim a special relationship with the god, based on revealed knowledge” (192).

explained as a strategy that enables the practitioner to play his rôle and demonstrate his superior command of esoteric knowledge. It is "one among several means of marking the special status of the utterance, designating the power relation which the charm sets up between practitioner and object". By their very secrecy these words give access to a wide applicability. "As utterances, in which the *signifiant* has almost completely if not entirely overwhelmed the *signifié* they are semantic holes which can be filled by the practitioner by means of any of a number of recuperative theories". I must resist the temptation to quote these revealing interpretations more extensively. What I am going to suggest, then, is by no means an alternative interpretation, since I generally accept Gordon's ideas, but an additional view of the strategies of magical formulas. In order to do so I make a few preliminary remarks.

The theory just mentioned may be called functionalistic in so far as it focusses on the function(s) of the ritual use of *voces magicae* in order to establish specific forms of social relationship including a position of authority for one of the participants. There are however other approaches conceivable that may add their own value to the spectrum of possible interpretations. To my mind one of the real dangers that challenge our study is the categorical rejection and denunciation of all former (or other) paradigms in defence of a monolithical glorification of one's own.⁹⁵ In short, our study is polyparadigmatic.

Moreover, there is a more specific complication. The charms that constitute our primary material do not satisfy the social conditions that require an authoritative magician (as do for instance the incantations of the extensive and very complicated magical papyri) and hence seem to resist at least this type of functionalistic interpretation. Generally, our charms do *not* presuppose a magician's help. They are instructions for domestic use "Hausmittel",⁹⁶ but nonetheless display

⁹⁵ I have argued this *in extenso* in the Introduction of my *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual (Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion II, Leiden)*, 1-14, and tried to substantiate this argument throughout the book. In his magisterial "Aelian's Peony: the location of magic in Graeco-Roman tradition", *Comparative Criticism* 9 (1987) 59-95, though again arguing from a predominantly social point of view, Gordon has much that points in the direction of my argument.

⁹⁶ Of course, there are exceptions. The magical treatment of the luxation described by Cato was evidently a collective ritual. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 45: "The ritual has a theatrical and also a collective aspect; it unfolds, I think, in front of three categories of persons, the ailing person, the healers, and the (family) community." However, generally "charms are unique in that performance is typically private; the audience is often only one person—someone sick, injured, anxious ..." (Olsan, "Latin Charms of Medieval England", 134). Accordingly, "we need to ask why so many of the charms reported by Marcellus, for example, are for self-help by the patient." (Gordon, "The Healing Event", 365)

a broad range of *voces magicae*.⁹⁷ And finally, even if we restrict ourselves to the *voces magicae* as markers of a special status of the utterance—expressing the specificity of the situation—, this approach, though explaining the social *function* of meaningless sounds, does not explain the *meaning* of meaninglessness. Confronted with this problem scholars of an earlier generation used to refer to the mysteries hidden in nonsense words, references to the uncanny, as required for evoking a magical atmosphere. Again, I am not denying this when I yet make an attempt to advance our understanding in a slightly different direction.

By way of aperture I would like to draw attention to a feature that I have not mentioned so far: the very frequent instruction to write a magical spell with the left hand, or to write it reversely from right to left, or with letters turned upside down etc.⁹⁸ Though far more current in curse texts, similar devices are not lacking in other magical texts either. Many a spell seemed to consist of meaningless *voces* until someone got the idea to read them from right to left and discovered a perfectly transparent text. How to explain this? Once more, various suggestions have been proposed: a desire for secrecy, for instance, or the wish that the words or works of an opponent may end up as reversely as the letters of a curse. Indeed, this is sometimes explicitly expressed in *defixiones*. However, this may be true enough for curse texts, but there is not really much need for using your left hand for writing or acting in the context of the magical charm. So, again, what may be true for one type of magical text, need not be equally helpful for another. If we now start by simply noting what we see, the most obvious observation is that we have here an act that is exactly the reverse of normal behaviour. It is ‘abnormal’ and belongs to a reversed world.

And let us now also consider the *voces magicae* from this angle. What sense is there in their employment? Here the ancients themselves can

⁹⁷ They occur in about 16% of the charms collected by Heim, but there are many more if one includes ‘unintelligible’ texts which do not give the impression of having been *intended* as *voces magicae*. In the collection of Önnertfors, I count 25 incomprehensible texts in 60 charms, and in medieval charms *voces magicae* or nonsense words are *very* common.

⁹⁸ The prescription that a name should be written with inverted letters, e.g. Heim p. 556: *scribe... nomen ipsius inversis literis*, or from right to left or with the left hand or alternatively with right or left hand (H. 221, 222). Cf. also the *very* common instruction to handle the *materia medica* with the left hand. The latter instructions prove that the practices of writing from right to left or giving the mother’s name as an indication of lineage, may be relics of older normal practice (see below), but should certainly no less be considered as expressions of the inversed world of magic.

put us on the right track. It appears that Pliny's predicates *externa* (foreign) and *ineffabilia* (inexpressible) represent a common ancient typology: the *voces magicae* are referred to with the following predicates: they are ἄσημα (*asema*),⁹⁹ ἄτοπα (*atopa*)¹⁰⁰ and βάρβαρα (*barbara*).¹⁰¹ And here at last we are in the centre of things. *Asema* means "without meaning, unintelligible", *atopa* literally means "out of place" and acquires the meaning "strange, paradoxical", and further: "unnatural". *Barbara* means *barbara*, that is barbarous, referring to a foreign world. So, according to ancient interpreters the *voces magicae* have no meaning of their own, they do not refer to particular objects or concepts, but they do refer to a world. This, however, is not our own world but a radically different one. There are many different ways to express this notion inherent in the *voces magicae*. Patricia Cox Miller¹⁰² suggests that the use of vowels and *voces magicae* was intended to transcend not only writing but speech itself. Now the idea of *transcending* language is perhaps the most eloquent way of expressing the departure from our normality to another, 'transcendent', reality. With respect to the aspect of reversal, Jonathan Z. Smith has analysed the late antique cultural tendency, essential to Gnosticism, to transcend this world through inverting its categories.¹⁰³ Gordon explains the distinctive function of using reversed script and other devices as an indication of the difference between communicative models in the two worlds, dominant and heteromorphous.¹⁰⁴ But the

⁹⁹ Lucian. *Menip.* 9; Iamblich. *De myst. Aeg.* 7,4.

¹⁰⁰ Plut. *De superst.* 3.

¹⁰¹ In the texts mentioned in the foregoing notes and numerous other ones. Discussion of the term: Martinez, *A Greek Love Charm from Egypt*, 35 f.

¹⁰² P. Cox Miller, "In Praise of Nonsense", in: A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (New York 1986) 481-505.

¹⁰³ J.Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory* (Leiden 1978) 147-71; cf. Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing", 217 n.85.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon, "Aelian's Peony", and also in a magnificent chapter on the 'Subversion of Script' in his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom*. However, he does so primarily, it seems, in order to underline the special position of the magician or the special status of the magical act ("If normal orthography was the instrument of dominant, legitimate authority, pseudo-paragraphia signified the character of the discourse of magic in the eyes of those who employed it: outsider, outcast, outlandish."), rather than the specificity of the potential of the other world as a source of power. Cf. his views on new formal devices as being necessary for magical practice: "to affirm itself as a distinctive set of procedures in relation to the real world. It was thus ever on the look out for new ways of representing and imagining its own distinctiveness." In sum, Gordon sees these strategies of exploiting anomalies as principally intended to construct the self-representation of magic/magician to "represent its heteromorphous character". Cf. also Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, in the section "Magic and Reversal", 229-233. For the concept of the liminal as the stage for magical activity see also: S.I. Johnston, "Crossroads", *JP* 88 (1991) 217-24.

following view deserves some consideration as well. *Voces magicae*, being semantically vacant, can be applied (or interpreted) on more than one level and in different functions. One is, I would suggest, that of ‘open-ended’ performative utterances. Normally, performative enunciations are expressions that are equivalent to action:¹⁰⁵ the verb itself is the accomplishment of the action which it signifies. Since the *voces* have *no communicable* meaning, however, they cannot denote one explicit—and consequently restricted—course of action, but give voice to a choice of imaginable (or perhaps rather *unimaginable*) avenues towards the desired effect.¹⁰⁶

In whatever way you phrase it, the conclusion is that the specificity of *voces magicae* and other anomalous expressions conveys them a special function of passwords that take us literally “out of our place” into a different world, where paradox reigns, where you write with your left hand or from right to left, where you do not identify yourself with the name of your father but with that of your mother: in short a reversed reality, the world of abnormality, the world of otherness.¹⁰⁷ This world can be identified with foreign countries, especially those marked by ancient wisdom, or the land of barbarians, who even derive their name from talking a language that sounds like *rabarabar*. As we saw, the *voces magicae* are marked by combinations of vowels and consonants foreign to Greek or Latin languages and the word

¹⁰⁵ “Jesus heals you now”, “be gone”, “I conjure you”, “I swear it”. The notion of performative expression was developed by J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (2nd ed. edited by J.O. Urmson & M. Sbisà, Cambridge Mass. 1975), and exploited for anthropological issues, especially magic, by: S.J. Tambiah: “The Magical Power of Words”, *Man* 3 (1968) 175-208. Cf. *idem*, “Form and Meaning of Magical Acts: a point of view”, in: R. Horton & R. Finnegan (eds.), *Modes of Thought: essays on thinking in Western and Eastern societies* (London 1973) 199-229. Both in: *idem*, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action* (Cambridge Mass.-London 1985) 17-59; 60-86, where see also: “A Performative Approach to Ritual” 123-166. For the discussion of this notion and further literature see: Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion”, 196 n.32; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 206 ff. Cf. Gordon, “‘What’s in a List?’”, 239 f.

¹⁰⁶ This suggestion of ‘open-ended’ performative utterance seems to be exactly the reverse of poetry imitating the magical incantation. Analysing Sappho’s celebrated prayer to Aphrodite, Ch. Segal, “Eros and Incantation: Sappho and oral poetry”, *Arethusa* 7 (1974) 154, concluded: “the incantatory element is already a latent metaphor”. More recently Th. Greene, *Poésie et magie* (Paris 1991), 50-2, qualifies Sappho’s incantatory poem as “pseudo-performatif: c’est un acte de langage imaginaire, où la voix de la locutrice a priorité sur le prétendu but téléologique”.

¹⁰⁷ For this interpretation *vide supra* nn. 76 and 98. After the completion of the present paper I saw that S. Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld* (Oxford 2000), argues exactly the same for modern magic as practised by contemporary Pagans in Britain. They consider communication with an otherworldly reality to be the essence of magic, and the author argues that the otherworld forms a central defining characteristic of magical practice.

barbara in a number of variations is very popular in the magical formulas.

Now, what do we *know* of the Greek and Roman concepts and connotations of this imaginary world of 'otherness', be it a distant barbarian country, or a utopian/dystopian never-never-land, or a precultural mythical abode in the beginning, or an eschatological one in the end of time? Several things but one most of all: it is essentially ambiguous—threatening or ridiculous on one hand, promising and imbued with abnormal power on the other. To use Pliny's words, it is *both* meaningless and immense. The flood of recent studies in 'otherness' have greatly advanced our understanding of these often paradoxical traits. Otherness exists in gradations, from a complete opposition to normality in a radically reversed world to a mixture of normal and abnormal signs as we find them for instance in Herodotus' largely imaginary descriptions of foreign barbarous countries. Whatever their form, their lack of normal contours and their ambiguous nature make them the very places of creation.¹⁰⁸ And—so I now suggest—it is this extraordinary creative potential to which the magical charm appeals. Though it is no doubt true that uttering sounds like *borroborrobor* does help to isolate the magical performance from normality, to emphasize its specificity, it is also true that locking off one side here involves an opening to another. If the magical formula helps to give access to the special creative potential embedded in the world of otherness, then the magical act itself is an act of creation,¹⁰⁹ evoking means that make what is normally impossible magically (that is abnormally) possible. Hence I propose to interpret the drive to alienation, one of the central marks of magic, as such an appeal to creative forces not available in the normal world.

So far we have been considering the first main theme, introduced in the first section of chapter III and to which we returned in the third section, the *voces magicae*. However, side by side with alienation we have also discussed another strategy. The second section of chap-

¹⁰⁸ As for instance Mircea Eliade and Victor Turner have argued for the different worlds *in illo tempore* and of the interstitial periods, respectively. I have investigated the ambiguity of 'otherness', especially in its 'pre-cultural' and 'interstitial' aspects in *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual (Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion II*, Leiden), esp. in Ch. 2, on the myth and ritual of the god Kronos. In the same chapter the interested reader will find references to the literature of 'otherness' (pp. 106-9).

¹⁰⁹ In the first version of this paper I was not aware that B. Malinowski, *The Language of Magic and Gardening* (London 1966) 238, already spoke of the "creative metaphor of magic". Thanks to a suggestion of Chris Faraone, I have learned this from M.Z. Rosaldo, "It's All Uphill: The creative metaphors of Ilongot magical spells", in: M. Sanches and B.G. Blount (eds.), *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Use* (New York etc. 1975) 177-203.

ter III concerned the deployment of ‘normal’—by which I mean at least lexically transparent—words and expressions that refer to analogies in the realm of nature or in the cultural, including the mythical, heritage. Does this, then, not contradict our earlier supposition? This question can be answered on different levels. First, magic is not a monolithic or mono-strategical art. It may appeal to a number of different instruments and resources. One of them is the general corpus of knowledge stored in the world of nature, culture and religion. The technique involved, especially comparison, simile, metaphor, is called parallelization by Todorov.¹¹⁰ One of its major objectives is, in the words of Gordon,¹¹¹ to serve “the insertion of a present contingency (the ailment or its healing) into the context of natural law or regularity (.....) The lesion or illness has destroyed an aspect of that order, which the healing event seeks to re-establish partly by the use of naturally powerful similes, partly by the construction of a special kind of social situation”. Comparably, references to traditional similes from the great literary works or religious tradition “establish the (imputed) past as a normative parallel to a present instance”. Together, these strategies also “assert the practitioner’s familiarity with a world enrul’d”.

In the context of medical prescription, this is an obvious and convincing explanation of the use of a certain type of simile or metaphor. The model serves as an authoritative instruction to the illness ‘how to behave’. It is the ‘just so’ relationship between model and imitator.¹¹² And we may expect that ‘just so’ comparisons by their very nature refer to ‘normal’, natural, or at least comprehensible models.¹¹³ Just as the wolf devours and drinks, so let my indigestion be healed. Just as the woman with bleedings was healed by Jesus, so let my bleeding stop. However, once more, we must note that things are just a bit more complicated. For how ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ *are* these references?

¹¹⁰ T. Todorov, *Les genres du discours* (Paris 1978).

¹¹¹ Gordon, “The Healing Event”, 370.

¹¹² On this analogical function of the simile as a ‘declarative utterance’ see: Frankfurter, “Narrating Power”.

¹¹³ This is the kind of “creativeness” meant by Malinowski and Rosaldo in the works mentioned *supra* n.109. The magical spells of the peoples they study generally do refer to attributes of the experienced world, which serve as models for the spell’s desired outcome. “But the ‘power’ of the spell as a whole depends less on the originality or uniqueness of these expressions than on the way in which they work together.” Differences in types of metaphor or similes are of course culturally determined: Coptic curses excel in animal analogies of a distinctly everyday nature, which has been explained as a relic of the common use of animals in Egyptian folklore to articulate human character (Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, 149).

Once having asked this question it immediately strikes the eye that even within this category the majority of the references do *not* belong to the cultural centre of everyday experience, but to the realm of the extraordinary, the marginal and the exterior. This is obvious for the animals included in the special category of the *adunata*, but apart from that category we find the following animals in the collection of Heim: spider, crocodile, sea-animals, bear, lion, dolphin, lizard, viper, and an occasional hare. For the rest (dead) dogs and (wild) wolves have pride of place. Apart from the dogs (generally associated with magic)¹¹⁴ all these species belong to the world of the wild, the domain outside the centre of culture as, of course, do the majority of the medicinal or magical plants or roots, which, as a rule are not to be collected in one's backyard either. What I mean is this: while it is true that some magical vehicles in our charms (especially the *voces magicae*) refer to the marvelous potential of a radically different 'other world', and others refer to nature,¹¹⁵ even the ones belonging to the latter

¹¹⁴ Cf. the dog sacrifice to Hekate. On the ambivalent status of the dog both inside and outside human culture, see: J.M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: the tragedy of Hector* (Chicago-London 1975) 193-202. Wolves, on the other hand, though of course belonging to the world of outer nature, have a share in men's world as well since it is the animal par excellence into which men may change for a short period, especially during initiation. See: R. Buxton, "Wolves and Werewolves in Greek Thought", in: J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations in Greek Mythology* (London 1987) 60-79; H.S. Versnel, *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual (Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion II*, Leiden 1993) 315 n.89; 330-2. On wolves as cultural models for human social processes in Longus, see: St.J. Epstein, "Longus' Werewolves", *Classical Philology* 90 (1995) 58-73. On the lizard, no less popular in magic, see: A.D. Nock, "The Lizard in Magic and Religion", in: *Essays on Religion and the Classical World* (ed. Z. Stewart, Oxford 1972) I, 271-6.

¹¹⁵ Of course, these two domains cannot be strictly distinguished or separated: they are like extremes on a continuous scale. For that matter, I do not deny the existence nor underrate the importance of 'natural' or 'folk' medicine as for instance deployed by root-cutters, discussed by G.E.R. Lloyd, *Science, Folklore and Ideology* (Cambridge 1983) 119-49. In the words of P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago 1982) 114: "We must accept the medical pluralism of an ancient society", illustrating this with an instance of modern Morocco where people make a distinction between illnesses for the hospital and illnesses for the *fqih* and the Saint", thus suggesting a differentiation between horizontal and vertical models of healing. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 1 ff. and "Erotic Magic in Medieval Europe", 36, makes a distinction within the boundaries of medieval magic between 'natural' and 'demonic' magic. This medical pluralism opens the possibility, if one does not work, to try another. The argument that a patient was given up by the doctors is standard in the records of ancient (and modern) miracle cures: O. Weinreich, *Antike Heilungswunder* (Giessen 1909=Berlin 1969). But if the appeal to divine help does not yield effect you can try magic: John Chrysostom preached against women who use magic when their children are sick rather than using the one true Christian remedy, the sign of the cross: "Christ is cast out, and a drunken and silly old woman is brought in" (*Hom.* 8 on Colossians, quoted by Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 39).

category are not always so naturally natural either. The magical or medical ingredients are not self-evident, should be collected in marginal places (on the top of a hill), with the help of abnormal means (while uttering a spell, or using the left hand), at abnormal times (in the middle of the night, at dawn or sunset) and often through the intermediary of eccentric persons (wise women). Even here, then, though not in the same sense as in the *voces magicae*, we are in (another) world ‘out there’,¹¹⁶ in the fringes of the known world, belonging to the category of *spatial liminality*.

I believe this idea finds support too in the popularity of two types of *adunata* in the magical charm. One refers to things that *cannot* happen in nature: “just as a mule does not propagate, a cock drinks but does not urinate, an ant has no blood, so let my sickness disappear”. The other represents them as (for once) *having* happened: “Shepherds found you, collected you without hands, cooked you without fire, ate you without teeth”. Both, however, unequivocally refer to the *non-normal*, to the striking exception, i.e. to the ‘otherness’ of the model, even if *e contrario* they set an example of how the illness should behave.¹¹⁷

Now, very much the same can be said of the *historiolae* that are based on mythical models, for two reasons. First, they display an (understandable) preference for the marvelous: miracle stories have pride of place in the similes used in charms. But this is just another way of saying that once again there is an emphasis on the exceptional: the narrative opens perspectives to a different world—or a

¹¹⁶ Gordon, “Aelian’s Peony”, one of the best—but strangely ignored—studies on the position of ancient magic, has already pointed out the basic ambiguity of magic, being the vehicle between the normal world and the other. So he does in his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom*, with an emphasis on the magical *substance*, for instance a plant, which by the ‘magical’ manipulation “enters a new register: it ceases to be what it actually is, a constituent of the natural world. It acquires a charged and dangerous status, entering a different system of rules, meanings and expectations.” That is exactly what I have in mind.

¹¹⁷ In Egyptian magic lists of *adunata* may serve to disqualify a demon or an illness as being “not part of the ordered world and according to its principles shall not exist at all”: J. Podeman Sørensen, “The Argument in Ancient Egyptian Magical Formulae”, 14, citing as an example: “who runs without a neck, who dances without hair, who hastens without any business, who comes to copulate without a phallus, who comes to bite without teeth...”. (P.Geneva Rto. col. III,7-IV,1), very comparable with the *adunaton* in our text. These instances and many more just contradict Gordon’s argument (“The Healing Event”, 368) that the implied purpose is to evoke the *natural* rule, since anomalous behaviour or qualities in *some species of animals* (mules who do not propagate etc.), albeit exceptions, still belong to the order of nature. Moreover, if so, why all the efforts of seeking or inventing striking *adunata* or anomalies and not directly refer to the obviously natural?

different section of our world—, where just as in the other areas mentioned things can happen that normally are not possible. The second (closely related) reason is that this mythical world is different in another sense as well: it is the world of *temporal liminality*, the world for which Mircea Eliade coined the term *in illo tempore*, to which magical spells of many different cultures have recourse.¹¹⁸ Thus, we see that, on the axes of both space and time the similes and *historiolae* converge to the same domain of liminality that was most explicitly evoked by the *voces magicae*.

However, not only the specific *contents* of the similes in our texts, but also their general *function* may be of relevance here. We have met many types of similes, metaphors and comparisons in the magical charms, for instance parallelisms created by the patients or practitioners themselves or analogies which have *some* relationship with the issue of the cure but in such vague terms of synecdoche or metonymy or even so paradoxical and illogical that in these cases at least the notion of 'authoritative model' is not the first that comes to mind. Last but not least we have detected a most astonishing freedom if not arbitrariness in choice, adaptation, exchange and new creation of analogies and comparisons. Moreover, we observed that the *logical relevance* of a particular comparison is *not* always the most important consideration. What is seminal is the desire to insert the illness or the cure into a series, the *mise en série*. All in all it has become evident that the proliferation of new and often singular formulas is an essential trait of the magical charm. This gave us occasion to wonder if this proliferation of new similes, being a process of creativity, might not have something to do with the very nature of the magical charm.

Recently, magical formulas have often been analysed for their linguistic and stylistic techniques and it was especially the anthropologist Tambiah who has investigated the rhetoric of persuasion of the magical act. I now suggest that besides rhetoric another concept (or an important sub-division of rhetoric) is at least as relevant. I mean the *poetics* of magical formulas. For, in fact, what we have seen is poetics

¹¹⁸ See above all: M. Eliade, "Magic and the Prestige of Origins", in: *idem, Myth and Reality* (New York 1963) 21-38. Important in this respect, especially on Egyptian and Coptic *historiolae* and their meaning: Frankfurter, "Narrating Power", who summarizes Van der Leeuw's and Eliade's interpretations as "the performative transmission of power from a mythic realm articulated in narrative to the human present Mythic episodes are *continually* powerful." However, he qualifies their functions, partly in Malinowski's track, as that of 'precedence' or 'paradigm', qualifying its goal as 'active analogizing', partly in the wake of Tambiah and others, viewing the *historiola* as a performative utterance.

in action. Free association, the use of similes, metaphors, analogies, metonymy, synecdoche, they are all basic poetical strategies, in fact, they are the stuff poetry is made of.¹¹⁹ If this is so, it may be relevant to ask what functions are performed by such tropes as metaphor and simile in poetry. Here we need, of course, the help of specialists in literary theory, rhetoric and stylistic, which I am not. But I do feel that when Hector, on his appearance in the battlefield, is compared with “a raving forest fire in the mountains”, let alone “a snowy mountaintop”, this analogon is not primarily intended as an authoritative model “to put a present contingency into the context of natural law or regularity”. Many are the functions of simile, metaphor and metonymy but one of the most obvious is *not* to *include* Hector in a natural regularity, but—exactly the reverse—to *exclude* him from his natural (social) world, to stage him in the spotlight and to say something about him in a plastic, expressive and evocative way which raises him from the ordinary to the extraordinary.¹²⁰

Furthermore, metaphors and similes offer the attraction of polysemy:¹²¹ Hector may be as raving as the fire, but also as threatening, as tempestuous or everything together.¹²² So one of the simile’s

¹¹⁹ On the functions of these tropes (often referred to as “the play of tropes” or “polytrophy”) as providers of imaginative potentialities in poetic language, see for instance: P. Friedrich, *Language, Context, and the Imagination: Essays by Paul Friedman* (edited by A. S. Dil, Stanford 1979). Metaphor and simile are of course closely related. N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis 1968) 77-8: “Instead of metaphor reducing to simile, simile reduces to metaphor, or rather the difference between simile and metaphor is negligible”, quoted by L. Muellner, “The Simile of the Cranes and Pygmies: A study of Homeric metaphor”, *HSCP* 93 (1990) 59-101. A. Seppili, *Poesia e magia* (Turin 1971) 316, in a discussion of “la metafora e la similitudine” calls them the “più importanti figure poetiche.”

¹²⁰ Which, of course, does not imply that the similes themselves need to refer to unnatural or irregular events. G.E.R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge 1966) 189, stresses the constancy of the world in the similes (as for instance in the consistency of animal behaviour) as against its accessibility to experience. Long before him, H. Fränkel, *Die homerischen Gleichnisse* (Göttingen 1921) 72-3, had argued the same. Nor does it deny that similes are often traditional. Like *historiolae* in magical spells they may have a long history. See for both: L. Muellner, o.c. preceding note.

¹²¹ I. L. Pfeijfer, *Three Aeginetan Odes of Pindar* (Diss. Leiden 1996), 23-4, singles out metaphor as one special instance of the notion of ‘implicitness’, which “grants the hearer the pleasure of finding out himself how things cohere”, but may also “result in polyinterpretability (...) leaving the door open for multiple relevance.” A.B. Weiner, “From Words to Objects to Magic: hard words and the boundaries of social interaction”, *Man* 18 (1983) 690-709, esp. 698: “the use of metaphors widens the range of possible associations”. Cf. Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words”.

¹²² Olsan, “Latin Charms of Medieval England”, 131, makes just this point in connection with the polyreferentiability of Christian charms, speaking of a “constellation of associations such as: Job [who is always invoked against worms], suffered this way, loved God, was loved of God; Job, as a Holy Man, has power from God and as a Holy Man dispenses that power to those in need....”

contributions to the locution is polysemy, its wealth of potential references. It opens perspectives which had not been available before the comparison, and by revealing a choice of different new aspects it entails a change in the quality of the subject, in the context of charms either that of the patient or that of the illness. The comparison makes the patient's perspective different from what it was before because it invests it with a new potential of unexpected qualities. Recent theories even claim that metaphors mould a radically new entity from the combination of the two components in the comparison.¹²³

This, then, is by and large what I had in mind when speaking of the creative potential of the magical charm. It is as if the inventive-ness of each user and transmitter, his personal capacity to add, transform, adapt and create similes and their applications, is a reflection of the small margins of—and the desire to expand—his power to influence things. His personal manipulation of expressive language has a resonance in the expected effects of the healing event. Both are creational processes, one within the power of man—of each individual man provided he is in possession of the necessary instruments—and one beyond his power, but perhaps liable to influences through magical charms. Seen in this light, both frames of reference that we discussed: the world of abnormality—to which the *voces magicae* refer—and the domain of nature, culture and religion, are put into action in such a way that *new qualities* become available.¹²⁴ These qualities lie in the domain of and are produced by genuine acts of creation. And one

¹²³ C. Bicchieri, "Should a Scientist Abstain from Metaphor?", in: A. Klammer *et alii* (eds.), *The Consequences of Economic Rhetoric* (Cambridge 1988), developing ideas introduced by I.A. Richards and Max Black. Cf. T. Turner, "We are Parrots", "Twins are Birds": Play of Tropes as Operational Structure", in: J.W. Fernandez (ed.), *Beyond Metaphor: The theory of tropes in anthropology* (Stanford 1991) 121-58, esp. 123-130. In the field of Egyptology similar views of the function of simile and metaphor have been explored with remarkable success. P. Sørensen, "The Argument in Ancient Egyptian Magical Formulae", *Acta Orientalia* 45 (1984) 9-13, discusses five links between the Egyptian *historiolae* and the ritual contexts. Several of them imply a collapse of the boundaries between the human situation and the mythical dimension even to the extent that the affliction itself may acquire a mythical status or parts of the body may be 'mythically re-defined'. This is precisely what I had in mind, when speaking of the simile's function as "raising the subject from the ordinary to the extraordinary".

¹²⁴ In a different context (the re-interpretation and novel combination of existing rituals in *defixiones*), Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 134, expresses the same idea: "This permanent search for new combinations of meaning seems characteristic of the sorcerer's world. (...) What is at stake is not a mystical, "sympathetic" harmony between objects and people, but rather the construction of a universe in which things and acts carry a new and completely unusual meaning, entirely different from everyday life."

of their main vehicles is the word. “Words, both tropes and ‘hard words’, are the formal elements that *create the potential power to enable speech to shift or recreate perceived realities*”, as Annette B. Weiner says in a fascinating article¹²⁵ on the magical application of ‘hard words’.

Finally, it is not difficult to see that this is also the very implication of our observations concerning the third theme we have discussed: the use of formal techniques such as repetition, variation, anaphora, rhyme etcetera. There, too, we observed an extreme individual freedom to devise new creations, by way of gradual or abrupt transformation. While forming the technical *trait d’union* between the two worlds explored in the magical charm, these formal strategies are also expressions of the same creational process¹²⁶ and they pre-eminently belong to the realm of poetics. Surely, many of these devices also belong in the domain of rhetoric. Yet, although certainly being a rhetorical art, magic is both more than and, in many respects, different from ‘normal rhetoric’. For, as we have seen time and again, in the magical spell rhetoric often runs wild in explosions of repetition, variation and transformation of such hyperbolic dimensions as could never be tolerated in normal communication, since they would entail its ruin. Cato, as we already noted, was very good in powerful words. He was an expert in both the formulas which belong to normal communication and those that refer to another world. His famous dictum *Ceterum censeo Carthaginem delendam esse* is an instance of pure rhetoric, deriving its power from its reiteration as a peroration attached to any speech he gave. Now, precisely this fact, the *aprosdoketon* effect, lends it a certain circumstantial magical quality as well. Being pronounced after every speech on whatever topic, it more often than not was completely out of (logical) order, which is at least one of the characteristics of certain components of the magical charm. It was the combination of reiteration and unexpectedness that made it ‘work’. *Huat, hauat, huat ista pista sista dannabo dannaustra*, on the other hand, though being rhetorical too, is intrinsically ‘magical’ *by nature* in that it is a perversion of normal language and does not communicate a semantic message.

¹²⁵ A.B. Weiner, “From Words to Objects to Magic: hard words and the boundaries of social interaction”, *Man* 18 (1983) 690-709, esp.705. The italics in the quotation are mine.

¹²⁶ This is even more conspicuous in the case of the *characteres*, which form a large structure of creations out of nothing, though created on the model of orthodox script, and which gave every magician ample opportunity to give rein to his own creative imagination.

Summarizing we can say that the magical charm, from the perspective taken in this essay, is the product of a (happy?) alliance: one of its constituents is the expectancy of a marvelous potential in another world outside the cultural centre of everyday life, be it in the spatial fringes of the natural world or in the margins of time, or, on the other hand, in a completely 'other world' *beyond* the boundaries of place and time. The other is language or at least oral utterance, which can either belong to common communication and take its resort to a hyperbolic deployment of rhetorics, or transcend speech and more directly refer to—or, as I would tend to say now, help create—the world of 'otherness'.

In both these functions, and especially in the combination of both, the language of the magical formula forms a *trait d'union* between the normal and the other world. Apart from the direct and explicit references to different marginal worlds that we have amply discussed, we discovered the following strategies to achieve this:

- the alternation and above all the combination of expressions in normal language and *voces magicae* (“*asca, basca, rastaiia, serc, cercer, recer cel*. Nothing is it, nothing is it, nothing it will do”),
- references to various kinds of *adunata* (“*mula non parit*”),
- the very characteristic technique to repeat a *vox magica* once or twice, either without or with slight alterations, after which there is a sudden radical change in the following element(s) (“*argidam margidam sturgidam*”),
- the sudden ‘alienation’ in the third term of a series of three ‘normal’ words (“*apolithôthêti, apoxulôthêti, apokordulôthêti*”),
- the ‘corruption’ of words belonging to normal formulas into uncommon or illogical words (“*sta crocodile*”),
- the corruption (‘magicalization’) of normal words into *voces magicae* (“Go, *nemesoth*, go out ...”).
- the gradual ‘magicalization’ in formulas such as: “*absi absa phereos*” and “*kuria kuria kassaria*”,
- the interjection of normal words, especially, in the vocative form, into series of *voces magicae* (“*sakmadan euprepestate dapnounê*”),

All of these strategies, each in its own way, are most eloquent illustrations of our previous inferences. They are miniatures, as it were, partial but minutely detailed representations of magic’s references to another reality, thus once more demonstrating that the relationship of text and reality is one of synecdoche. But they are more than representations, they function as keys that open the door, or sometimes rather crowbars that raze the walls, between two worlds, either through amalgamating their two languages or by the (gradual or

abrupt) alienation of orthodox language into a heteromorphous one. Nor is this all: by these very techniques they *contribute to the creation of that other world* with its marvelous potential.¹²⁷ They do so by an act of poetics. Poetics in the double sense implied in my argument: the art of making poetry and the art of creation. For the word poetics comes from Greek ποίησις (*poiesis*), which has a double meaning: 'creation' and 'poetical composition'.¹²⁸ Hence the title of this essay: the poetics of the magical charm.

¹²⁷ Hence, in its own specific way magical language satisfies one (though certainly not all) of the characteristics of ritual language as expounded by W.T. Wheelock, "The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation", *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982) 49-71, esp.58: "In general, then, ritual utterances serve both to engender a particular state of affairs, and at the same time express recognition of its reality. Text and context become manifest simultaneously."

¹²⁸ The ancients themselves were convinced of and much reflected on the enchanting effects of language in general and rhetorics and poetry in particular. The term θέλγειν and cognates are central to this issue. In a wider context, too, the connection between incantation and poetry has been often and profitably studied. I mention only a few important titles. For the enchanting effects of rhetorics see: J. de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge Mass.-London 1975); for poetry as incantation: Ch. Segal, "Eros and Incantation: Sappho and Oral Poetry", *Arethusa* 7 (1974) 139-60; H. Parry, *Thelxis: Magic and Imagination in Greek Myth and Poetry* (Lanham MD 1992). Gordon has an excellent discussion in his forthcoming *Spells of Wisdom*. In the early phases of many languages song/poetry and charm/incantation were covered by one word: A. Seppili, *Poesia e magia*, 188 ff.; Th. Greene, *Poésie et magie* (Paris 1991) 14-6. While Parry, 198, emphasizes the difference between magic and poetry: "Magic remains a conservative, formulaic, rote-bound exercise, while poetry is by its very nature inventive, free to choose its meter, content, tone and intention", I prefer Greene's view that magic shares with poetry the element of creativity: "ce *fiat* (...) est la source de son énergie créatrice," but that they differ in their capacities to realise that *fiat*. Comparably, Seppili 347: "La poesia come *poiesis*—come azione magica che esprime ed evoca alla presenza una (super)realità creativa."

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