

Magic as a Topos in Augustan Poetry: Discourse, Reality and Distance

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For at least a century, since the pioneering study by Ivo Bruns, it has been recognised that magic in various forms and guises recurs repeatedly in the poetic production in diverse genres of the age of Octavian/Augustus.¹ Less clear is the question of how we should best understand its role there. Why do the Augustans show such relish in Medeas and Canidias, Thessalian women and Sabellian snake-splitters, love-potions, graveyards, *striges*, and pulling down the Moon? What is the agenda here?

One traditional answer has been that the poets were simply reacting to what they saw around them. According to Sam Eitrem: “Les Romains de cette époque n’hésitaient pas à avoir recours à des pratiques magiques, à des incantations et à des charlatanismes mantiques de toutes espèces. La croyance à l’efficacité de la magie d’amour et de la magie destructive étaient répandues depuis les temps les plus anciens”.² Use of documentary background is exemplified by the ‘fact’, passed on by Porphyrio ad Horat., *Epod.* 3.8, that Canidia was a real person, an ointment-seller in Naples named Gratidia.³ The poets of course did not share

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- 1 I. Bruns, “Der Liebeszauber bei den augusteischen Dichtern”, in idem, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Leipzig, 1905) 321–56. Another early effort was J.E.Lowe, *Magic in Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford, 1929). Their point of view was however generally rationalist: “Les philologues du début de ce siècle, héritiers d’une rationalisme intransigeant, ont considéré que les croyances magiques ne renfermaient que stupidités et mensonges et qu’elles étaient le fruit des esprits grossiers et ignorants. Ils ont donc affirmé que ni les poètes latins, ni les Romains cultivés ne croyaient à la magie, et que celle-ci ne s’exerçait que dans les bas-fonds de la société”: A.-M. Tupet, *La magie dans la poésie latine, 1: Des origines à la fin du règne d’Auguste* (Paris 1976) xiv.
 - 2 S. Eitrem, “La magie comme motif littéraire chez les Grecs et les Romains”, *Symbolae Osloenses* 21 (1941) 39–83 at 63. See also F. Villeneuve, *Horace, 1: Odes et Épodes* (Budé) (Paris, 1954) 207 n. 2: “En tout cas, la croyance à la magie était alors fort répandue. Elle avait même pris, sous l’influence du néo-pythagorisme, des formes raffinées qui l’avaient introduite jusque dans des cercles cultivés”.
 - 3 Ibid. 67. Recent commentators have tended to doubt the claim, since it seems so obviously an *autoschediasma*, an inference from *nardo perunctum* (*Epod.* 5.59) and *Neapolis* (5.43), e.g. E. Castorina, *La poesia d’Orazio* (Rome, 1965) 230–31; J.H. D’Arms, “Canidia and Campania”, *Philologus* 111 (1967) 141–45; L.C. Watson, *A Commentary on Horace’s Epodes* (Oxford 2003) 197 f. ad *Epod.* 5.15. P. Fedeli, *Q. Orazio Flacco: Le opere, 1* (Rome, 1991) 2: 961 writes: “Indipendentemente dalla sua precisa

these superstitious beliefs, but appreciated their great interest, especially that of love magic, for readers and audiences. Well over half a century later, we find Georg Luck making exactly the same claim:

Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid give us glimpses of the Roman demi-monde.

The ladies they love consult witches, and the poets, according to their mood, take magic seriously or make it look slightly ludicrous. While the practitioners of the [magical papyri] seem to be mostly male, those we get to know through the elegiac poets of the Augustan age are all female, with the exception of the astrologer, Horus, of Propertius 4.1, who may be an occultist in the style of Nigidius Figulus.⁴

What reason however is there to believe that these Augustan poets were ‘describing’ what they saw around them? What was it they noted down on their field-trips to the Marsi?⁵ First, most ‘descriptions’ of magical practice, say the second part of Vergil, *Eclogue* 8, which is important as the earliest extant such account in Latin, or Ovid’s flamboyant account of Medea’s ritual in Thessaly (*Metam.* 7.179–293), have no relation to any possible empirical experience and cannot be considered documents in the sense that *defixiones* are primary documents. We only have to ask: how many snakes had Alpheisiboeus’ implied speaker seen split by incantation (71); had she really ‘often’ watched Moeris turn into a wolf and slink into the woods, or raise the dead (97 f.); had she actually seen him transferring crops from one field to another (99)?⁶ Who could have watched Medea get into her chariot drawn by winged serpents, or witnessed them sloughing their skins on scenting her herbs (7.235–37)? Who could have checked whether she really used the innards of a werewolf or the head of a crow in her potion to rejuvenate Aeson (7.270–74)?⁷ Once such questions are asked, they answer themselves.⁸ The sources of these alleged

identità storica, Canidia è un personaggio della cui realtà non c’è motivo di dubitare, anche se sconfina nel tipo letterario”, which seems a good case of having one’s cake and eating it.

- 4 G. Luck, “Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature”, in: V. Flint et al., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, 2: Ancient Greece and Rome* = The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe vol. 2, B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (Eds.) (London, 1999) 91–158 at 123; cf. idem, *Hexen und Zauberei in der römischen Dichtung* (Zurich 1962).
- 5 “(Les poètes augustéens) ont ... puisé leurs inspiration dans les coutumes et les croyances de la vie quotidienne, anciennement établies en Italie, que l’on peut deviner à travers les minces témoignages et reconnaître grâce à leurs similitudes avec le folklore d’autres pays”: Tupet, *Magie* (n. 1) xiii.
- 6 A.-M. Tupet, “Rites magiques dans l’Antiquité romaine”, *ANRW* II.16.3 (1986) 2591–675 at 2606 suggested these were hallucinations.
- 7 For Ovid’s allusions here to earlier poetry, see F. Bömer, *Ovid, Metamorphosen*, VI–VII (Heidelberg, 1976) 264–76.
- 8 Even G. Ducourthial, *Flore magique et astrologique de l’Antiquité* (Paris, 2003), a great believer in the value of ancient accounts of herbal magic, is forced to admit here, “Ce texte [Ovid, *Met.* 7.262–84] ... ne suggère aucunement que l’opération ait été accompagnée de formules ou d’actes particuliers”. But he adds: “On ne saurait toutefois

‘documents’ are not empirical experience but other texts, for they draw not on actual or possible real-life experiences but on more remote literary representations, that go back beyond Vergil to the lost translation of Apollonius’ *Argonautica* by Varro Atacinus (c.45–44 BC), Catullus’ lost imitation of Theocritus’ *Idyll* 2, the proto-Neoteric Laevius (see below), Ennius’ *Medea* and so ultimately to a variety of Classical and Hellenistic models.⁹ They are accounts that refer to other accounts, that in turn refer to others in a chamber of echoes.¹⁰ To take the example of literary curses, the genre *Arae*, it has been pointed out that Ovid’s *Ibis* has nothing in common with actual *defixiones* except the mere notion of an *ad hominem* imprecation. “The *defixiones* could have exercised a marginal influence on the *Arae*; but their contribution certainly did not go beyond that”.¹¹ In this connection, Luck’s method in the chapter just cited is instructive, for he moves rapidly between *defixiones*, the magical papyri, Circe, Deianeira, Simon Magus, Apollonius of Tyana, and the Augustan poets, in apparently complete disorder; but his purpose with this sleight of hand is to protect his claim that they are indeed all ‘documents’ – of the same reality, albeit a complex one, namely ‘ancient magic’. The self-reflexivity of the literary texts is simply ignored.

Much the same holds true in the case of more plausible ritual details. To take *Eclogue* 8 again, we can find the following: laying *verbena*, woollen fillets and incense on the altar, the three different-coloured threads the speaker of *Eclog.* 8 ties round her image of Daphnis; circling the altar three times; the scattering of *mola*; the burning of bay-leaves.¹² Incense, fillets and *mola salsa* simply connote ‘ritual performance’; *verbena*, as Servius points out here, is not a specific plant but refers generically to the custom of using aromatic twigs or branches in ritual contexts, as crowns, as decoration: *verbenae sunt omnes herbae*

tirer argument de silence d’Ovide et des textes de la littérature magique pour exclure totalement l’hypothèse que la confection de certains philtres ou de certains préparations ait obéi à un rituel spéciale” (p.195).

- 9 On the translation, see G.B. Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (Baltimore 1994) 141; R.L. Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic”, in: V. Flint et al., *Witchcraft and Magic* (n. 4), 159–275 at 165; Catullus: Pliny, *HN* 28.19: *incantamentorum amatoria imitatio*; Laevius: F. Graf, *Gottesnähe und Schadenzauber: Die magie in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Munich 1996) 38–39; Ennius: Tupet, *Magie* (n. 1) 210.
- 10 “There are enough similarities and apparently deliberate variation both in matter and diction to make it arguable that [Ovid, *Amor.* 1.8 is] using [Tibullus and Propertius] as a starting-point”: J. Barsby, *Ovid, Amores* (Oxford, 1973) 93.
- 11 L.C. Watson, *Arae: the curse poetry of Antiquity*. ARCA 26 (Liverpool 1991) 216.
- 12 *Eclogue* 7, 64–5, 73–8, 82. Tupet, *Magie* (n. 1) 229 observes here: “Si les rites sont plus nombreux (than the incantations), ils sont aussi décrits avec précision et vérité ... Virgile a donc renoncé à tout effet littéraire et à une imitation facile, pour se conformer à la vérité, démarche de tous les passages où il traite de magie”.

frondesque festae;¹³ triplication is likewise a non-specific ritual formula;¹⁴ ‘bitumen’ is again non-specific, being simply a word for ‘dried resin’, and, being intensely flammable, was widely used to manufacture torches.¹⁵ The incineration both of the poppet and of the bay-leaves certainly might be situation-specific (though the second has to be routed through the Greek *daphnê*, bay), but even more clearly alludes to a literary predecessor, Theocritus’ *Pharmakeutriai*.¹⁶

Another telling example is the *epithuma* prepared by the nurse Carme at *Ciris* 369–70:

*at nutrix patula componens sulphura testa
narcissum casiamque herbas contundit olentes.*

- 13 Elsewhere (ad *Aen.* 12.120) he identifies it as rosemary (*herba sacra, ros marinus, ut multi volunt*) alternatively as myrtle; citation from Donatus ad Terent., *Andr.* 726. For various ritual uses, see e.g. Cicero, 2*Verr.* 4.110; Horace, *Carm.* 1.19.14; Propertius 4.3.57; Suetonius, *Caius* 27.2; cf. W. Clausen, *A Commentary on Virgil's Eclogues* (Oxford, 1994) 257. Under her outer clothes, a newly-wedded woman might wear a garland made, among other things, of verbena-twigs: Festus p.56.1–2 L. M. Schuster, “Verbena”, *RE* 8A1 (1955) 973–76 over-emphasizes the idea that it was supposed to ward off ‘daemones’.
- 14 As indicated by the material assembled by R. Mehrlein, s.v. “Drei”, *RfAC* 4 (1959) cols. 269–310; unwittingly E. Tavenner, “Three as a Magic Number in Latin Literature”, *TAPhA* 47 (1916) 117–43 makes the same point. According to Servius, the threads were white, pink-red and black. The three threads re-appear at *Ciris* 371–72, but are there, for good measure, tied 27 times.
- 15 E.g. Pliny, *HN* 16.75; on the methods of winning and preparing pitch, see *ibid.* 52–61; J. Schramm, s.v. “Pech”, *RE* 19.1 (1937) 1–5 esp. 5; J. André, “La resine et la poix”, *AntCl* 33 (1964) 86–97.
- 16 The poppet in Theocritus is just of wax (*Idyll* 2.28); Vergil’s deliberately opaque allusion to one made of clay and wax (80) is vaguely in keeping with e.g. the three poppets (c. 80–130 AD) recently found in the area of the joint temple of Mater Magna and Isis in Mainz, which are made of clay; and those found in the cistern of the Fons Annae Perennae in the northern Campus Martius (fourth cent. AD), which apparently consist of organic materials, wax, sugars and herbs: M. Witteyer, “Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls from Mainz. The Archaeological Evidence for Magical Practices in the Sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna”, *MHNH* 5 (2005) 105–24 at 109–15; M. Piranomonte (ed.), *Il Santuario della musica e il bosco sacro di Anna Perenna* (Milan, 2002) 23; 41–44. Vergil however adds a specific interpretation: the fire is to bake the clay hard, and melt the wax. Laurel: *Idyll* 2.1 opens with Simaetha’s request to Thesytis to pass the laurel (cf. 23–27); the scholion (p.270 Wendel) sagely remarks that laurel was fitting for magical ceremonies – another *autoschediasma*; cf. P. Henkel, “Zu Theokrit. Id. II vv.38–42 (28–32)”, *Serta Philologica Aenipontana* 7–8 (1962) 191–214 at 196. On its value in rituals of purification, Pliny, *HN* 15.130. Vergil makes the routing clear in l.83: *Daphnis me malus urit, ego hanc in Daphnide laurum*.

Richard Wünsch argued that this text provides a plausible account of binding magic;¹⁷ others have rightly objected that, whatever the case with sulphur and cinnamon, *narcissus*, as a flower, does not fit the context – its presence is all too plausibly explained as a recollection of two other Virgilian passages, *Eclog.* 2.11, *alia serpyllumque herbas contundit olentis* and 2.48–49, where *narcissus*, *olens*, *casia* and *herba* all occur in the space of two lines.¹⁸ The remainder of the passage (371–79) is likewise to be understood as a fairly clumsy cento of other poetic descriptions of rituals, including Cinna's lost *Zmyrna*, which was quite inappropriate, since it dealt with a scene of magical healing, not binding-magic, as required by the context here.¹⁹ Although this case is particularly clumsy, the general point can be widely extended: 'magical' rituals in poetry, far from referring to empirical experience, are modelled on earlier literary texts and are functions of a) local literary requirements²⁰ and b) generalised conceptions of what magic is or ought to be, and thereby receive readerly recognition as 'appropriate' or 'plausible'. I return to this latter claim in a moment.

This traditional view depends upon the convenient, but unargued and undemonstrable, assumption that, although we have virtually no direct information about popular beliefs and magical practices in Antiquity, literary texts such as those of the Augustan poets provide us more or less with just that. The texts are so many diaphanous screens through which, with only slight distortions, we can view a past reality. By extraordinary good fortune, the interests of ancient poets converge with those of modern Latinists. This is the position of Anne-Marie Tupet, author of the most exhaustive study of magic in Republican and Augustan poetry, which so consistently foregrounds the praxis of ancient magic that there is scarcely space to consider the question of why it figures there at all.²¹ 'La magie dans la poésie latine' turns out to be an all too accurate description of the contents – the book is in fact largely 'un travail de folkloriste d'Italie ancienne'. From this point of view, the poetry is merely an irritation; it receives absolution from the sin of being literary only insofar as it tells us about 'facts'.²²

17 R. Wünsch, "Zur *Ciris* v.369–77", *RhM* 57 (1902) 468–73.

18 R.O.A.M. Lyne (Ed., comm.), *Ciris: A Poem attributed to Vergil*. Cambridge Classical Texts 20 (Cambridge, 1978, repr. 2004) 259. *Patula ... testa* is also odd.

19 Tupet, *Magie* (n. 1, 7) calls it an "imitation maladroite".

20 Cf. F. Graf, *Gottesnähe* (n. 9) 158: "Literarische Werke haben ihre eigenen Gesetze, die man nicht ungestraft mißachten darf ...".

21 Tupet, *Magie* (n. 1); see the comments of C. MacLeod, *CR* 28 (1978) 358; H.S. Versnel, *Mnesmosyne* 35 (1982) 441–44.

22 These remarks are not intended to disparage Tupet, who was working in the 'fifties and 'sixties under the eye of Henri Ernout, a Latinist of unimpeachably conservative views; her philological discussions are still of considerable value. W. Fauth, *Carmen magicum : das Thema der Magie in der Dichtung der römischen Kaiserzeit*. Studien zur klassischen Philologie 114 (Frankfurt a.M., 1999) is in part a well-informed continuation of her

It is however not easy to go beyond the thought that the Augustan poets in some sense took magic seriously.²³ To my mind, the issue of the role or value of magic in Caesarian and Augustan poetry is a special case of the wider problem of the relation between Roman religion and Roman literature. It is notorious that here too poetry is plundered as a documentary source whereas the wider issue of meaning is neglected. One major reason is that the meaning is often baffling or indeterminate to us. Jörg Rüpke has aptly illustrated the point by analysing Horace, *Odes* 1. 30, a short poem that purports to be an invocatory *hymnus* addressed to the goddess Venus.²⁴ What exactly is the resonance of the name Glycera, which occurs elsewhere in the same Book (*Odes* 1.19; cf. 1.33)?²⁵ What is the force of the last, and clearly key, line: *Mercuriusque*? If one central difficulty in relating Roman religion to Roman poetry is the uncertainty arising from our not being able to pick up hints and allusions with sufficient certainty, there are others, as Denis Feeney has pointed out.²⁶ Among these he emphasizes 1) Paul Veyne's phrase 'balkanisation des cerveaux', that is the degree to which, in life, as in literature, behaviour and imagination at Rome was delimited and context-specific, the slogan being 'croire à moitié', just as today complete worlds exist, such as football, computer-games and detective-stories, each involving

work up to the Flavian poets, but also includes considerable discussion of the Augustans. In view of the recent date of this book, and the generally high standard of his analyses, I feel myself excused from citing here numerous passages in extenso. My intention is not so much literary as socio-historical. K.B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York, 2007) is a useful discussion of the ideological, especially gender, implications of literary magic.

- 23 With few exceptions, e.g. J.J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of "The Golden As"* (Berkeley, 1985); idem, "The Constraints of Desire: Erotic Magical Spells," in idem, *The Constraints of Desire* (New York, 1990) 71–98; and S. Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice* (Cambridge, 1991) 261–72 (on Theocritus, *Idyll* 2) post-modern classicists seem to have been reluctant to tackle the theme.
- 24 J. Rüpke, "Merkur am Ende: Horaz: *carm.* 1.30", *Hermes* 126 (1998) 435–53; idem, *Die Religion der Römer* (Munich, 2001) 9.
- 25 'Glykera/Glycera means 'Sweetie', and has a literary pedigree, having been used by Menander in his comedy *Perikeiromene* (*The Girl with Cropped Hair*) for the mistress of an 'impetuous lover', a soldier named Polemon, who cut off her hair under the mistaken impression that she had been unfaithful in his absence. However for a Roman audience the most famous – and beautiful – Glykera was the girl depicted in an encaustic painting, *The Wreath-maker* or *Florist selling wreaths*, by Pausias of Sicyon (ca. 360 BC), which was bought in 88/7 BC by Lucullus in Athens for the prodigious sum of two talents: Pliny, *HN* 21.4; 35.124 f. The model was allegedly Pausias' mistress.
- 26 D. Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts and Beliefs* (Cambridge, 1998); idem, "Interpreting Sacrificial Ritual in Roman Poetry: Disciplines and their Models", in A. Barchiesi, J. Rüpke and S. Stephens (Eds.), *Rituals in Ink* (Stuttgart, 2004) 1–21; idem, "On Not Forgetting Literature", in A. Bierl (Ed.), *Literatur und Religion*, 2. *MythosEikonPoiesis* 1 (Berlin, 2007) 173–202; cf. J. Rüpke, "Literature als Medium und als Spiegel der Verbreitung von Religion im römischen Reich", in: idem (Ed.), *Antike Religion in räumlicher Perspektive* (Tübingen, 2007) 125–34.

total albeit temporary commitment, albeit without any reference to one another;²⁷ and 2) Foucault's conception of a discursive formation, a system of rules for any given praxis elaborated by theory, and so by extension for any context of speech or action. From this point of view, truth is produced by, and only discussible in terms of, the discourse dominant within a given cultural praxis.²⁸ Not only are our own cultural balkanisations quite different from those of ancient Romans, we cannot share any of their discursive formations but only reconstruct, as it were, their archaeology.

Nevertheless Veyne and Foucault do offer two important lessons. First, there is no sense in asking, as modern scholars have continually done, whether a given belief or claim in this area is 'sincere'. In the same text we can usually find several different attitudes expressed by the same speaker; modes of belief are mobile, unfixed. Indeed, the entire issue of belief, *unless it is explicitly or implicitly on the speaker's agenda*, is best bracketed. Second, we need to think of religion, and so magic, as a complex, or as Feeney again has it, a 'mobile', system of knowledge and praxis, endlessly ramified with other cultural systems and in competition with them, among them the no less complex discourse or discourses of literature.²⁹

Heuristically, we need to distinguish relatively sharply between the discourse of magic and its practice.³⁰ As a 'mobile system' magic is constructed in innumerable specific situations, in 'strange' events and experiences, in disappearances, in misfortunes, suffering and death, in dreams, conflicts, in court-cases – and in literature. In each of these, it acquires a face that is both familiar and strange, an ambivalence wholly appropriate to mystical action. This duality between familiarity and strangeness is often expressed in terms of shape-shifting and excess of desire: the neighbour secretly becomes a night-bird, a *strix*, a wolf; the witch is ravenous, filled with hate and envy, jealous of others' success, one who ignores the self-imposed limits that alone make social life tolerable. Although the figure of the witch is only the most extreme mode of the

27 P. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* (Paris, 1983) 52–68.

28 In relation to magic, I think it is preferable to employ the term *dispositif*, which includes objects and non-discursive practices, cf. S. Jäger, "Dispositiv", in: M.S. Kleiner (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Eine Einführung in sein Denken* (Frankfurt a-M., 2001) 72–89.

29 Feeney, "On Not Forgetting" (n. 26) urges that we can easily overdo historicist criticism: literary texts do not just mimic, exemplify or reinforce what we know from other sources (p.173).

30 It goes without saying that the discourse/*dispositif* of magic, vast as it was, was itself simply an aspect of the much larger discourse/*dispositif* of religion. "There was no one Roman religious system existing essentially, inherently meaningful, waiting to be participated in. Rather, what we call 'Roman religion' or the 'Roman religious system' was compounded of all kinds of different forms of religious knowledge, from the performative to the philosophical, literary or antiquarian": Feeney, *Literature and Religion* (n. 26) 140.

magical imagination, it is essential to the system as a whole, since it guarantees the transcendent quality of selfish desire and so of evil – magical beliefs always have cosmological implications.³¹ As an explanatory system, however, magic is keyed to historical context: there are after all plenty of other ways of representing misfortune; it is a contingent matter whether at any given time personalised explanations come to be favoured over more abstract ones such as ‘the gods’, ‘the ancestors’, ‘fate’, ‘chance’. There is no ‘always’ here.

Seen as a mobile system, magic has no theory. As a social reality, it exists fundamentally in patterns of expectations, labels, rumours. Its ‘essence’ is constituted by an unlimited, disparate, even mutually contradictory, set of narratives, which are deployed as appropriate in specific situations; the totality of the set is ungrasped and ungraspable – no individual knows more than a small selection of the totality. ‘Knowledge’ of magic is thus discontinuous and fragmentary; it is indeed the ‘holes’ between the narratives that helps to sustain the transcendence of the system and thus its immunity to doubt and discredit. For the sake of illustration, I here offer just a couple of modern narratives, both, as it happens, relating to witchcraft.

The first is taken from the Rio Grande area of the SW United States, and is a personal narrative by a young Hispanic woman in the 1960 s.³² An old neighbour, Doña Refugio, lived on the outskirts of the village and was reputed to be a witch. One day, when she was due to visit, the girl’s father decided to test whether she was indeed a witch, by placing a pair of crossed needles beneath the sheepskin that served as a curtain between living-room and kitchen; after Doña Refugio had entered the house, the father crept round and placed another cross beneath the front door. He then pretended that her house was on fire and that she should should urgently come outside; but as soon as she put her foot on the threshold she stopped dead and “drew back as though it had burned her”. She then ran distractedly around the house, peering out of the doors and windows, but not daring to step over the crossed needles. Having proved his point, the father finally removed the needles, and Doña Refugio was able to leave the house. “Now we have proved she is a witch.” The meaningfulness of such a story is supplied by a mass of contextual matter to which it implicitly alludes: the cosmological reality of the Devil, the pact as the source of a witch’s power, the Roman Catholic construction of the Cross as an autonomous ‘power’, the trope of the empirical test, ‘seeing is believing’, the assimilation of ‘strange behaviour’

31 I. Niehaus, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld* (London and Sterling VA, 2001) 16–44.

32 M. Simmons, *Witchcraft in the Southwest: Spanish and Indian Supernaturalism on the Rio Grande* (Flagstaff, 1974) 45–46.

to negativity, of social/gender marginality to illicit power.³³ But the story also plays its part narratologically: it obtains coherence by leaving out the fact that Doña Refugio clearly had normal neighbourly relations with the mother, whom she was visiting on this occasion; by interpreting her behaviour solely in terms of the test; by highlighting the themes of fear, anxiety, and escape; by recourse to the trope of male peasant cunning.

The second narrative, or rather narratives, concerns the so-called 'night-train' in the Transvaal.³⁴ Already before 1900 a train-line existed between Pretoria and Pietersburg, which took the first migrant labourers to the Witswatersrand mines. But alongside this actual railway, there was supposed to exist a 'night train', owned by a consortium of witches, which did not travel on rails but on dried watercourses and was manned by zombies (witches' familiars). The passengers too were zombies, who travelled to work their shifts in modern places of work. People who wandered about at night were picked up by the train, and asked whether they wanted a single or return ticket. If 'single', they were killed, turned into zombies and forced to work for the witches; if 'return', they were beaten up and thrown out of the train at a distant point. These 'night-train' narratives illustrate how magical systems accommodate themselves to new realities: the train is a sophisticated kind of familiar (traditionally understood as baboons or snakes), which assimilates the economic necessity of mass-migration to misfortunes caused by witchcraft, and creates a mythical but indigenous correlative to the business-organisation and technological superiority of the colonial power. Magical narratives are not necessarily old nor is any particular item necessarily wide-spread: they obtain their conviction mainly through being 'personal' and through their inflection with contemporary allusions.

The hypothetical totality of such constantly-shifting narratives constitutes the major element in a society's historically-differentiated discourse about magic.³⁵ Necessarily fragmented and lacunate, but endlessly recycled, adapted

33 C. Daxelmüller, *Zauberpraktiken: Eine Ideengeschichte der Magie* (Zurich 1993) 109–95; S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997).

34 Niehaus, *Witchcraft* (n. 31) 72 f. The stories relate to the 1950 s and 1960 s.

35 Others include legal measures, accusations, actual trials – the trope of spiriting away crops from a neighbour's fields is a case in point: *XII Tab.* VIII.4 (Crawford) = VIII.8 (*FIRA*): *qui fruges excantassit ... ?quive? alienam segetem pellegeri*<τ>. *Excantare* means to remove or destroy by incantation, i. e. by means of incantation or a malign curse; cf. J.B. Rives, "Magic in the XII Tables Revisited", *CQ* 52.1 (2002) 270–79. On the evidence of Vergil, *Ecl.* 8.99 : *atque satas alio vidi traducere messis*, M. Crawford argues that *pellere* must here mean not 'bash down' but 'entice away by magic': *Roman Statutes* (London, 1996) 682 f. In literate societies, or segments of societies, particularly in sacerdotal systems, there may be a more or less extensive magical and herbalist literature. I deliberately avoid talking about 'popular beliefs' here, since the discourse is universal, and universally known, in any given society that engages with magic.

and mythologised, they negotiate the space between the cosmology and theodicy notionally subtended by the institutions of public religion and the micro-problems, misfortunes, adversities and sufferings of every-day living. Cognitively, their function is to substantiate and generalise a particular cultural representation, thus guaranteeing its objective existence and possibilities. As such, aspects of the discourse may feed more or less directly into the practice of magic, mainly non-professional, thus creating a dynamic or dialectical movement, which constitutes a further layer of objectification. The major division lies between narratives mainly focused on imagining the face of evil, the 'universal' or 'night witch', and those related to the major areas of day-to-day interest and concern, illness/healing, personal (marital, erotic) relationships, protection against mystical danger.³⁶ Although the functionality of the discourse as a whole requires the 'universal' witch, it is in these latter areas that it acquires its greatest fertility and intensity. At the same time, the non-systematic and interest-driven nature of the discourse meant that it also included scepticism, doubts and jokes about magic, for example that stories about it are simply *fabulae aniles*, typical of ignorant old women, or superstitious country bumpkins, or that those who claim to work magic are frauds out only for the money they can make from the gullible;³⁷ and, on the other hand, included the learned reinforcement of reworked materials translated or transposed from Babylonian priestly magic, which attracted the attention of members of the late-Republican elite such as Nigidius Figulus – a type of interest that explicitly excluded old ladies and country bumpkins.³⁸

The partial reliance of Augustan poetry upon narratives within the Roman/Italic discourse seems clear – indeed, Ovid indicates as much by using the phrase *suspitor, et fama est* in the course of a stock list of the *lena's* powers (*Amor.* 1.8.15). The situation in Horace, *Sat.* 1.8 presupposes narratives about

36 T.O. Beidelman, "Witchcraft in Ukaguru", in: J. Middleton and E.H. Winter (Eds.), *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa* (London, 1963) 57–98 at 61–67; L. Mair, *Witchcraft* (London, 1969) 33–52; Gordon, "Imagining" (n. 9) 204–10.

37 Good examples from Rome are Ennius, *Telamo* frg.CXXXIVb Jocelyn; Cicero, *ND* 2.5, 3.12 with Pease ad loc.; and Pliny's notion of *vanitas*: *HN* 30.17; cf. M. Massaro, "*Aniles fabellae*", *SIFC* 49 (1977) 104–35. Cynic exposure of Magian tricks of the type known from Hippolytus, *Ref. haer.* 4.28–42 = M. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion*. Subsidia Epigraphica 12 (Hildesheim, 1985) 184–92 no. 78 and the fragments of Oenomaus' *Exposure of the Swindlers* (J. Hammerstaedt, *Die orakelkritik des Kynikers Oenomaus*. Athenäum Monografien: Altertumswissenschaft 188 [Frankfurt a.M., 1988]) thus simply elaborated claims easily available in the discourse, notably in the ambivalence of the very word *goês*.

38 M. Dickie, "The Learned Magician: and the Collection and Transmission of Magical Lore", in: D.R. Jordan, H. Montgomery and E. Thomassen (Eds.), *The World of Ancient Magic: Papers from the First Sam Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens 4–8 May 1997*. Papers from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 4 (Bergen, 1999) 163–93.

the 'universal' witch-figure, emblematised here by Canidia and Sagana, obtaining magical power by infringing rules relating to the disposal of the dead. The roughly contemporary *Epod.* 5 starts from narratives concerning a related, but more horrible, possibility, the abduction and murder of children for their parts, narratives whose existence is confirmed by the well-known inscription by the parents of Lucundus, the child-*verna* of Livia Iulia, the sister of Germanicus.³⁹ The continuously-repeated inventory of witches' powers, from reversing the flow of rivers to cleaving the earth to bursting snakes, derive likewise from narratives that image the 'universal' witch as a world reversed.⁴⁰ Others again, such as the presentations of Medea, Circe, Perimede and other witches as herbalists, collecting powerful drugs for nameless ends, evoke, while massively exaggerating and depreciating, a perfectly familiar everyday figure, the (female) rhizotomist, many of whom sold herbs at markets and whose lore formed the basis of the ancient herbalist tradition.⁴¹

The dominant context in which Augustan poetry evokes magical practice is personal relations, more specifically erotic relations. The figure of the withered, drunken, malevolent *lena*, deployed by Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid, provides a perfect foil to the nominal addressees of the poems.⁴² We can distinguish three significantly different discursive sub-sets here, pre-marital, marital and brothel/courtesan magic.⁴³ The pre-marital discourse is largely a matter of the selection of sexual partners, temporary or permanent, through a variety of divinatory modes. Its incidence is uneven, since it plays a significant role only in those (extensive) social groups where lack of property meant that such choices were relatively free, since the provision of dowries played no part in the formation of

39 *CIL* VI 19747 = *ILS* 8522. In this case, however, since the epitaph is literary, and the child is made to speak to the reader *in propria voce*, like the boy in *Epod.* 5, there may be an allusion to Horace's poem, or later imitations. Cicero, *in Vat.* 14 and Pliny, *HN* 28.70 are equally aware of such stories.

40 The main passages are: Vergil, *Eclog.* 8.69–71, 95–99; *Aen.* 4.486–91; Horace, *Epod.* 17.74–80; Tibullus 1.2.45–54; 8.19–22; Propertius 3.6.25–30, 4.5.9–18; Ovid, *Amor.* 1.8.5–18; *Heroid.* 6.83–94; *Met.* 7.192–208; *Remed.* 249–66 (negative ekphrasis).

41 C. Singer, "The Herbal in Antiquity and its Transmission to Later Ages", *JHS* 47 (1927) 1–52; J. Stannard, Medicinal Plants and Folk Remedies in Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, *History and Philosophy of the Life-Sciences* 4 (1986) 3–23; J. Scarborough, "Adaptation of Folk-medicines in the Formal *materia medica* of Classical Antiquity", in: idem (Ed.), *Folklore and Folk-medicine* (Wisconsin WI, 1987) 21–32.

42 Tibullus 1.2.41–66, 5.49–60, 8.17–26; Propertius 4.5; Ovid, *Amor.* 1.8; cf. E. Wallinger, *Hekates Töchter: Hexen in der römischen Antike*. Reihe Frauenforschung 28 (Vienna, 1994) 103–31; M.W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London, 2001) 181–91; Stratton, *Naming* (n. 22) 71–105.

43 My account is rather different from that of Wallinger, *Hekates Töchter* (preceding n.) 22–65 and C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love-Magic* (Cambridge MA, 1999), though we are recognisably discussing the same topic.

marriage-alliances. Most conduct is a function of the norms that apply to specific age- and status-groups. That said, such divination provided a forum for the articulation and external legitimation of desires and created a sort of market for sexual and matrimonial projects on the part of young people of either gender. It also provided scripts for using sexual favours as an entry to marriage (e.g. rituals to bind a first-time lover),⁴⁴ for 'improper' or 'excessive' passion, and for disciplining young men against sexual infatuation (the *Phaedra*-type; the *lamia* figure).

The marital or quasi-marital discourse is socially in many ways the most important type, though uninteresting for Augustan poets. Its narratives tend to reflect the fundamental division between the interior, domestic sphere (married women) and the external world of labour and political-legal life (married men). It is essentially a matter of the wife's efforts to control the husband's sexual fidelity to her *as a wife* (whatever other sexual liaisons he may have) and commitment to the maintenance of the marriage and the welfare of the family. But its range includes scripts relating to the wife's failure *as a wife*, and the tensions between her and her mother-in-law. The marital discourse was thus the focus of a wide range of gossip and accusation, with quite different, indeed incompatible, gender-specific narratives.⁴⁵

The discourse of (erotic) personal relationships achieved its fullest, most intense development in the brothel and in the closely-related world of relatively-accomplished high-class courtesans and 'mistresses' (for want of evidence about specific statuses).⁴⁶ The poetic fixation on this context, though a distortion for literary ends, thus has a certain legitimacy. These worlds, especially the latter, were characterised by competition between women for the relatively enduring attentions of men, married or as yet unmarried, wealthy enough to be generous on a substantial scale.⁴⁷ The lore of potions, magic rituals and erotic spells formed a medium shared by both genders to account for successes and rejections, sexual triumphs and failures and to create the semblance of agency

44 In my view, this is the situation represented by Theocritus, *Idyll* 2 and Vergil, *Eclg.* 8.64–109, cf. M.B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Grek and Roman Culture* (Malden MA and Oxford, 2005) 179–81. Neither Simaetha nor Alpheisiboeus' unnamed (female) speaker has rights amounting to marital ones. The latter's use of *coniunx* (l.66) I take to be calculated to justify to herself what she is doing.

45 Gordon, "Imagining" (n. 9) 196–8, 199–202.

46 Gordon, *ibid.* 194–96, 198–99; M.W. Dickie, "Who practised Love-Magic in Classical Antiquity and in the Late-Roman World?", *CQ* 50.2 (2000) 563–83. I omit discussion of homoerotic magic, which was probably also connected to brothels.

47 T.A.J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York, 1996); *idem*, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor, 2004). For the great majority of common prostitutes, slaves and obliged to service the urban male poor, this hope must always have remained illusory.

and control in highly volatile and unpredictable social circumstances.⁴⁸ In other words, the discourse of brothel/courtesan-magic was a medium of pragmatic rationalisation.

The example of brothel/courtesan magic makes clear that, although it so clearly draws upon the wider discourse of magic, Augustan poetry is in no sense 'ethnographic'; it does not simply report the magical discourse but constantly mediates, selects, and reformulates the materials available to it. Although to my mind there can be little doubt that the discourse of magic came to acquire a special intensity and relevance because of the failure of the rhetoric of divine beneficence and stable statehood in the closing years of the Republic, and particularly in the 40 s and 30 s BC, and the policing activity associated with that failure, the Augustan poets did not seek to exacerbate contemporary anxieties.⁴⁹ There are far too many distancing, even comic, devices at work to think otherwise. An obvious example is the role of the statue of Priapus on the Esquiline in frightening Canidia and Sagana in Horace, *Sat.* 1.8.⁵⁰ Again, Augustan poetry obtains many of its effects by raising the question of whether magic counts as a serious form of knowledge. This is achieved by asserting that the claims and powers of magic are unlimited, and then asserting that they are insignificant by comparison with love. The handling of Horace, *Epode* 5 provides another example. The discourse suggested that the 'universal' witch might be sent out into the world to wreak havoc by killing children. This is the starting premise of the poem: Canidia, Sagana, Veia and Folia, have captured a little boy and are proposing to use his *medulla*, bone marrow, and his dried liver as the main ingredients in a love-potion intended to recapture the affections of a man named Varus for Canidia. The fear and bewilderment elicited in auditors by so many stories in the magical discourse are cleverly evoked through the absence of an explicit narrative frame and the reader's direct confrontation (*At, o deorum*

48 Thus Propertius, for example, makes his narrator assume he will be the object of magical attacks administered by other women, even done to death, if he falls for a particular *puella*: 2.1.51–56 with J. Rüpke, "Magic as Individual Option", in: Anders Klostergaard Petersen, Jesper Sørensen (ed.), *Magic in comparative perspective* (forthcoming). Caius was rumoured (*creditur*) to have been administered such a potion by his fourth wife Milonia Caesonia, which explained his craziness: Suetonius, *Caius* 50.2.

49 On the gendered nature of the late-Republican discussion of state instability, cf. J. Connolly, *The State of Speech: Rhetorical and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, 2007).

50 W.S. Anderson, "The Form, Purpose and Position of Horace, *Satire* i.8, *AJPh* 93 (1972) 6–13; S.S. Ingallina, *Orazio e la magia*. *Hermes* 10 (Palermo, 1974) 75–79; Tupet, *Magie* (n. 1) 286–87; R.L. Gordon, "Aelian's Peony: The Location of Magic in Graeco-Roman tradition", in: E.S. Schaffer (Ed.), *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook* (Cambridge, 1987) 59–95 at 68–69; for the extensive recent criticism on the poem, which understands it as self-referential, see L. Edmunds, "Horace's Priapus: A Life on the Esquiline", *CQ* 59.1 (2009) 125–31.

quidquid in caelo regit ..., 1) with what turns out to be the boy's terrified questions to the witches; pity is elicited by the removal of his *bullā* and *toga praetexta* (*insignibus raptis*, 12), and the exposure of his *impube corpus* (13).⁵¹ So far so threatening. But this initial premiss is continually undercut: the descriptions of the witches, Canidia's hair tied with 'short snakes' (*brevibus illigata viperis*, 15), Saganā's sticking up like a sea-urchin's (27–28), Veia grunting with the effort of digging the hole with her mattock (29–31); the comparison of the little boy, buried up to his neck in the earth to someone swimming in a river (*quantum exstant aqua | suspensio mente corpora*, 35–36); his implicit turning of the tables by threatening to haunt them after his death if they kill him (87–102); Canidia's admission that her first attempt to 'catch' Varus must have been undone by a more accomplished witch ([Varus] *solutus ambulat veneficae scientioris carmine*, 71–72) – all these touches render the status of the initial premise quite uncertain.⁵² What is left is the poet's skill in evoking such contradictory response. A provisional conclusion might be that what really interested the Augustan poets about magic was the opportunity it offered to test the sophistication with which their audience could navigate the temptations offered by the discourse. To take a modern analogy, though it is in obvious ways inadequate, we might think of the horror film. For, as S.S. Prawer long ago suggested, the classic horror-film derives its power through *Angstlust*, through thrills that delight by playing on fear.⁵³ It is of the essence of poetic magic that it is held at arm's length, literary language fulfilling the same distancing role as the film-screen.

If the underlying attraction of literary magic may have been its safe articulation of collective anxieties, its contingent roles for the poets were more varied. As Feeney observes: "Each medium has its own priorities and interests, and its own semiotics".⁵⁴ I conclude by briefly suggesting three kinds of poetic appropriations of magic, starting from the idea that "meaning is generated in the interaction between the various genres of belief".⁵⁵

The most obvious and trivial is the local energy derived from satisfying incongruity, as when Horace compares his host's gourmandic boasting with Canidia's poisoned breath 'more deadly than an African snake's', that makes the

51 On the *insignia*, see Ingallina, *Orazio* (preceding n.) 109–15; both he (p. 199 ad loc.) and Watson, *Commentary* (n. 3) 196 ad loc., rightly note that the word *corpus* itself suggests nakedness and so defencelessness.

52 Although Watson's argument that the mime-like features of *Epode* 5 confirm its lack of seriousness, he is right to note the deliberate touches of humour: *Commentary* (n. 3) 182–91.

53 S.S. Prawer, *Caligari's Children: the film as tale of terror* (Oxford 1980) 191.

54 Feeney, *Literature and Religion* (n. 26) 24.

55 Ibid. 141.

fine food suddenly unbearable,⁵⁶ or the mock curse on garlic in the *Epode* 3, hyperbolically likened to being poisoned by raw snake's blood or by some vile witch's brew.⁵⁷ Or again when Propertius, his head stuffed with literary allusions, imagines dying some gruesome death out of a tragedy, at the hands of Circe or Medea.⁵⁸ The local energy here is generated by the audience's awareness that the high seriousness normally guaranteed by such allusions is being undercut by the context in which they are being invoked. Such incongruity achieves a double distance from the dominant tone of the discourse-narratives.

The second mode of appropriation is gain from deliberately playing on the question of origins and so meanings. Feeney has pointed out how the issue of Rome's cultural interaction with Greece permeates the literary representation of religion.⁵⁹ Magic offered itself admirably for this purpose. Almost the earliest literary allusion to magical practice is a brief fragment from one of Laevius' *Erotopaegnia*, probably dating from around 100 BC, preserved only because it is cited by Apuleius, *Apol.* 30.⁶⁰ Typically for Laevius it offers a list of "precious lexical oddities", consisting of a list of items associated with (love-)magic. Here however it is not their meaning but the origin of the words that is at issue. The first five, in my view, are all intentionally Greek: *philtr*, *antipathes*, *trochisci*, *taeniae* are all direct transliterations from Greek, a fact that provides a strong argument, I think, for arguing, with Baehrens, Paul Vallette and Tupet, against the traditional amendment of the ms. *unges* (i.e. Greek *iunges*), the fifth item, as *ungues*, merely because nail-clippings could be in magic.⁶¹ But nail-clippings are quite out of place here, since they were used only in malign magic. More telling, though, is the point that use of a Latin word here breaks the sequence: part of the effect Laevius intends is to re-assure the reader that all this love-magic business belongs Over There, namely in Greece. Having made the suggestion, he promptly undercuts it with the following line: *radiculi, herbae, surculi*, all impeccably Latin, two of them ending in *-culu* the ending for 'instrument of action'.⁶² Is magic Greek or Latin, then, foreign or domestic? Having created his confusion, he compounds it with his two final lines: *saura* is a Greek word but

56 ...quem nos sic fugimus ultri, |ut nihil omnino gustaremus, velut illis |Canidia adflasset peior serpentibus Afris: Sat. 2.8.93–95.

57 Quid hoc veneni saevit in praecordiis? |num viperinus his cruor |incoctus herbis me fefellit, an malas | Canidia tractavit dapes?: Epod. 3.5–8, cf. Ingallina, Orazio (n. 50) 258.

58 Seu mihi Circaeο pereundum est gramine, sive |Colchis iolciacis urat aena focus ...: 2.1.53–54.

59 Feeney, *Literature and Religion* (n. 26) 26–28.

60 Frg. 27 Courtney: *Philtr* omnia undique eruunt, | *antipathes* illud quaeritur, | *trochiscili*, ung<u>es, *taeniae*, | *radiculae*, *herbae*, *surculi*, | *saurae* inlices *bicodulae*, hin|nientium *dulcedines*.

61 Tupet, *Magie* (n. 1) 217–18.

62 E.g. *gubernaculum*, *vinculum*, *iuculum*, *baculum*.

inlices and *bicodulae* are Latin, but what they denote is a monster paradox, a 'come-hithery two-tail'. *Hinnientium dulcedines* is pure Latin, but likewise nonsense, unless one knows that 'charms or delights of whinnying ones' is a preposterous periphrasis for *hippomanes*.⁶³ Both expressions evoke the alterity and indeterminacy of the world of magic, its treacherous promises, its unlimited ambitions.

Laevius stands for us at the head of a specific feature of Roman poetry on magical themes, namely the invocation of mythical Greek exemplars, such as Medea, Circe or Perimede, of typical Greek magical sites, such as Thessaly/Haemonia or its minuter subdivisions Pelasgiotis, Tempe, Pelion and Ossa, Othrys, Pindus, Olympus, or the rivers Amphrysus and Enipineus, and apparently Greek themes such as weather magic.⁶⁴ Such allusions have three main functions: they deny the specificity of the local discourses by adding a bookish, often *recherché*, level of reference; they deny their historicity by claiming that the temporally remote magic of Circe and Medea is just the same as that of Italy and Rome;⁶⁵ and they claim a privileged distance from the local discourse through appeal to purely literary values. The same point is made by references to the use of plants collected in still more outlandish places such as Pontus, Persis, Aea, Phasis, Colchis or Hiberia, to foreign experts such as Vergil's Massylian priestess. All such references play on the issue, which much exercised Pliny the Elder, of where magic truly belongs. The absence of a determinate origin implies an uncertainty about its identity as a practice, an uncertainty heightened by the conscious cross-referentiality of so many of these passages.

The doubt cast upon identity through the issue of origin provides a suitable transition to the third type of appropriation, the opportunity magic provides of testing the power of poetic language as it rubs against the claims being made.⁶⁶ The power of cliché or stereotype normally lies in its sheer familiarity, its evocation of an acknowledged truth or collective judgement. Since its elements were all derived from the discourse, magic offered a perfect opportunity for

63 OLD has to invent a special sense for the word here: "(concr.) an object exciting agreeable sensations vel sim.", which is an explanation but not a definition. The word means 'pleasantness, sweetness, charm', as usual.

64 In Seneca's *Medea* she is made to travel still farther afield, to Arabia, Parthia, Mesopotamia, the Danube, Germania, Baetica (705–30) – a sort of mythical instantiation of Pliny's History of magic.

65 Having suggested that *Folia* is well known in the Greek city of Neapolis in Campania, a city of idle curiosity (cf. Ingallina, *Orazio* [n. 50] 207–08 ad loc), Horace at once provides her with a *vox Thessala* with which the call down the stars and moon (*Epod.* 5.41–46).

66 On poetry and magic the world over, see still A. Seppilli, *Poesia e magia*.² Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi (Turin, 1971).

probing the gap between the force claimed to inhere in incantation and what is ordinarily credible in the common-sense world.

By way of illustration we may take an absolutely standard inventory of the powers of magical language, such as this passage of Tibullus, one of many such lists, tiresome in their frantic enumeration of the startling:

- hanc ego de caelo ducentem sidera vidi,
fluminis haec rapidi carmine vertit iter,
45 haec cantu finditque solum manesque sepulchris
elicit et tepido devocat ossa rogo:
iam tenet infernas magico stridore catervas,
iam iubet aspersas lacte referre pedem.
cum libet, haec tristi depellit nubila caelo:
cum libet, aestino convocat orbe nives.*

I have myself witnessed her drawing the stars from heaven – she has reversed a river’s flow with her swift-running chant, and by incantation fissured the earth, hauled the dead from their graves and summoned bones from the unextinguished pyre: at one moment she draws the pullulating dead with a magical noise, at another she sprinkles them with milk and bids them return. At will, she drives the clouds from overcast sky; at will, she commands snow while summer reigns.

1.2.43–50.

Here the speaker defends his claims for the power of the magical word by vouching himself for them (*hanc ego ... vidi*, cf. *verax ... saga*, 41–42), just like the unnamed speaker in Vergil, *Eclog.* 8. The sole concession to the question ‘How?’ is a reference to the witch’s wilfulness: she does such things because it pleases her. Such apparent vacancy is a device for enhancing the quality of the marvellous. The poetic tradition of magical description “aime le spectacle et la mis en scène expressive, cérémonielle et appuyée”.⁶⁷ The overt claim of such accumulation is to suggest that the efficacy of incantation has no limits, and is therefore fully congruent with the marvellous power of the gods instantly to transmute, invert, disturb, disorder, destroy.⁶⁸ But the form of the list has other rhetorical effects too: after each cleverly-worked, highly expressive item, the poet as it were looks at his audience, and asks: You believe that? And that? And that? – each item of the list is in effect a test of the stereotype’s ability to ensure assent or credence. This implicit challenge to assent often becomes explicit in the wider context, for example when the enumeration of the witch’s powers is

67 S. Viarre, *L’image et la pensée dans les Métamorphoses d’Ovide* (Paris, 1964) 206.

68 Cf. A.M. Addabbo, “‘Carmen’ magico e ‘carmen’ religioso”, *Civiltà Classica e Cristiana* 12 (1991) 11–27.

undercut by the explicit denial that magic achieves anything in matters of love.⁶⁹ The indeterminacies that suffuse Theocritus' *Idyll* 2, and the simultaneous suggestion and withholding of a master narrative that might comprehend them, was a hint enthusiastically picked up by the Augustans.

Such a list by no means exhausts the local appropriations open to the Augustan poets – another example might be the value of magic in relation to the question of the effect of ritual action. In this context Feeney stresses the fictive nature of the rite as described, the gap the poetry seeks to open up between symbolic action and the real world.⁷⁰ Elaborate accounts of magical ritual, such as, once again, Medea in Ovid, *Met.* 7.179–293 or in Seneca's tragedy (670–848), stress precisely this gap between the symbolic and the real, a gap which, as the proper realm of the marvellous, intimates the sheer otherness of magical power. Such scenes correlate in a sense with poetic accounts of grand public rituals, such as the Secular Games. But context is all: we can gain another kind of insight by taking the opposite extreme, Ovid's account in *Fasti* 6.133–68 of an attempt by the nymph Cranaë/Carna to protect an baby or small child from witchcraft. The infant Procas has been attacked by *striges* (night-witches), and well-nigh killed. To protect him from further attack, Cranaë symbolically bars doors and windows, and then sacrifices a piglet, whose offal she sets outside the house as a substitute gift to the blood-sucking creatures. She bargains with the *striges*, addressing them as follows:

*Parcite: pro parvo victima parva cadit.
Cor pro corde, precor, pro fibris sumite fibras:
hanc animam vobis pro meliore damus.*

Have pity: a small victim is slain in place of a small (boy). I implore you, take a heart for a heart, liver for liver: this life we give you in place of a better one.

Fasti 6.160–62 = Heim, *Incantamenta* no. 146

Here, in the context of the *Fasti*, Ovid chooses to pick up the Vergilian, Horatian and Tibullan theme of nostalgia for the supposedly authentic simplicity of rural life and in particular religion. Such compensatory offers to the powers of the Other World are heavily stereotyped,⁷¹ and Ovid underlines

69 Ovid, *Ars* 2.99–108; *Remed.* 249–90; also Propertius 1.1.19–24 (esp. *fallacia*); 2.28b.35–38, cf. Watson, *Commentary* (n. 3) 189. As I have already suggested, this is merely a special form of a common thought.

70 Feeney, *Literature and Religion* (n. 26) 121: "In literary representations of ritual we have yet another cultural process meditating upon the way in which another cultural process meditates on another. And the kinds of meditations these cultural processes perform is very different". Feeney himself refers here to J.Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jamestown* (Chicago and London, 1982) 119.

71 O. Weinreich, "Unheilbannung im volkstümlichen Gebet, Segen und Zauberspruch", *Universitas* 1 (1946) 275–99 = *Ausgewählte Schriften*, G. Wille (Ed.) (Amsterdam,

the point by imitating a 'typical' Italian charm through insistent use of alliteration and anaphora, the figures which seem to be the favoured forms of intensification there.⁷² Whereas in Augustan poetry magic is normally Other, epitomised by Circe, Medea, Thessaly and Colchis, or the realm of foolish old women or malignant bawds, it is here evoked as something authentically Italic, and hence truly effective (*et rediit puero qui fuit ante color*, 168).

The 'mobile system' of magic in the Roman world produced a complex, fragmented discourse of magic constantly subject to change, capable of doubt, self-contradiction and self-irony as well as affirmation and suggestion. This discourse had little or nothing to do with the practice of those who worked professionally in the numerous sub-departments of magic, from rhizotomists to charismatics; it served rather as a cultural reservoir, consisting primarily of oral narratives but also (to a far smaller extent) of learned texts and performances, that explored the temptations, possibilities and moral ambiguities of religious practices prescriptively 'other'. As such, it also underlies the engagement with magic of the Augustan poets. In picking up strands of the discourse connected with the magic of personal relations, they reflect some of the intense social vitality of the theme, above all in the world of the brothel and the courtesan. To that degree their representations are 'documents'. At the same time, the meanings the texts generate in this area, the concern with incongruities, problematic identities, the limits of language, continued by their successors into the Flavian period, derive from the assumed poetic personae and so the poetic consciousness of difference from competing discourses. That attempt at distance did not, however, prevent their work from being itself absorbed into, and so expanding, the grander social discourse of magic: by a nice irony, several citations from or allusions to Vergil's *Eclog.* 8, including the line *carminibus Circe socios mutavit Ulixi* (70), have been found on the walls of Pompeii.⁷³

1979) 3: 1937–70; H.S. Versnel, "Self-sacrifice, Compensation and the Anonymous Gods", in J. Rudhardt and O. Reverdin (eds.), *Le sacrifice dans l'Antiquité*. Entretiens Fondation Hardt 27 (Vandoeuvres, 1981) 135–85 at 168–70.

72 . Compare e.g. Varro, *RR* 1. 2. 27 = Heim, *Incantamenta* no.55; Pliny, *HN* 37. 131 = Heim no.49; Marcellus Empiricus, *Med.* 8. 191 = Heim no.50 = 101; 15. 11 = Heim no.40; 101 = Heim no.51; 28. 30 = Heim no.52; 74 = Heim no.107.

73 *CIL* IV 1982; cf. D. Joly, "Présence des Bucoliques à Pompeii", in R. Chevallier (ed.), *Présence de Virgile* (Paris, 1978) 93–104 at 95 with fig. 6.

