

Aelian's peony: the location of magic in Graeco-Roman tradition

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Among hundreds of improving, interesting, amusing stories about animals and their behaviour, called from many sources for his *On the Nature of Animals*, Claudius Aelianus includes one about the peony.¹ During the day, he says, this plant is quite inconspicuous, but at night it has the odd property of being luminous. For this reason, people who want to collect it place some kind of marker near it during the night so as to be able to recognize it during the day. Otherwise they would be unable to remember anything about the plant even if they saw it again. But the plant has yet another odd property: it is quite lethal to anyone who tries to uproot it. Ingenuity comes to the rescue. 'They bring a sturdy dog that has not received food for several days and is ravenous. They tie a rope to it and, from as far away as possible, loop the other end round the base of the plant. Then they offer the dog a great dish of strong-smelling cooked meat. Raging with hunger and tantalized by the aroma, the dog bounds forward towards the food, thus tearing the plant up, roots and all.' The unfortunate dog immediately falls down dead 'once the sun sees the roots', and is secretly buried. The collectors of the peony are free to pick up the now innocuous plant and take it home, where it will be used to cure several kinds of illness.

An idle tale, to be sure; but perhaps not one without interest. We may express one aspect of its value by observing that the simple narrative seems burdened by an excess of possible significances none of which is elucidated. There seems to be a tension between the surface narrative and a plethora of hidden allusions which together might answer the bafflement generated by a first reading. A possible solution to the problem becomes clear only at the very end, when we are told that the plant is to be used for medico-magical purposes. Once we understand

that the story is about magic we read it in an entirely different way. The inconsequential details can now be understood as signs for the presence of another, extraordinary world behind the surface of the ordinary one of everyday experience. And we understand too that this is no tale, no pre-Hoffmannite fantastic fiction, but a para-historical record of past belief.

It has recently been urged that a proper history of Graeco-Roman magic is much to be desired.² Perhaps. More properly desirable, though, is an account of Graeco-Roman attempts to place, define and conceptualize magic. Such an account might be historical in one sense – Greek society no longer exists – but is unlikely to be so in another: there is no series of changes which can be presented in narrative terms. If we are in search of cultural perceptions of magic, we may find that fictions and para-histories are more rewarding sources of insight than the explicit statements or ‘hard’ evidence so beloved of historians. We may treat such material as diagnostic. It functions as a non-committal form of representation, ambiguous between lies and truth, of problematic aspects of experience. In the ancient world, only a few knew what to think of magic – those equipped with less traditional philosophies. For them, the claims of magicians were simply vain: to be a magician was to be a charlatan. But most people were less certain.

One way of expressing the issue is this. Graeco-Roman society both desired and resisted the opportunities offered by magic. Since there was no conceptual clarity about what was magic and what was not, it could not be decisively distinguished from habitual or commonsensical practices on the one hand nor from religion on the other. But magic did offer a permanent temptation, to push back the frontier of the commonsensically impossible, to redress the balance between those with political and social power and those without; to create love where there was none; to enable people to find out what lay in store for them in the future. The temptation of magic lay in its promise to renegotiate the boundaries of human existence. But that possibility was inherently subversive of the politico-religious claims of the dominant groups in ancient society. These groups had committed themselves to a dispersed system of religious authority but one which public bodies – the assembly, the Senate and people or whatever – finally controlled. Magic defied such control as it refused dominant forms of sacrifice and the normal pantheon. Its metaphors for power and its objectives were suspect. It was, in short undesirable.

A solution to this dilemma could however be found. Magic could be

installed as a permanent paradox, the meeting-point between opposites. It could be allowed to be powerful if it were also helpless; it could be learned if it were also inborn; it could be traditional if it were also new; it could be beneficent if it were also nightmarish; most important of all, it could be Graeco-Roman if it were also foreign. The negotiation of these paradoxes was a task primarily not for the law or for official discourse but for fiction, for myth, drama and story. The indecisiveness in these texts over the status of magic should not be understood as muddle, rather as an attempt to accommodate public scepticism – condemnation – of magic with the private opportunities which the art might offer, above all its suggestion of the possibility of virtually unlimited power in the hands of an individual. But perhaps too there was something more at stake, as was clearly recognized in the very different circumstances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, when the formula was overt: if no witches, no devils; if no devils, no Satan; if no Satan, no God. A similar kind of domino theory may have been another motive for the use of a strategy of indeterminacy: magic was simultaneously parasitic upon religion and an empirical means of grounding the really serious claim upon which the entire religious project rested, the hypothesis of the existence of an Other World with which this one is in constant communication.

Before I attempt to examine fictional representations of magic and magicians, however, it may be helpful if I describe as neutrally as possible what seem to be the distinctions implicit in the Greek terms for magical activity of different kinds.³ Many of the most common terms can be found, indeed in the extant sources usually are found, with negative connotations. This is because our non-magical sources are overwhelmingly committed to a philosophical or scientific position explicitly hostile to the claims of magicians. Three verbs in particular are regularly used to undercut claims to such power. All connote 'cheating, beguiling, dissembling' (*kēlēō*, *thelgō*, *manganeuō*).⁴ One important aspect of Graeco-Roman conceptions of magic, that secret power lurks beneath a deceptive surface, is here deployed captiously: behind the surface there is, literally, nothing in the acts of magicians (our own view of prestidigitation is similar). There is only visual illusion. The practitioners of this claimed art are *goētes* and *magoi*, both of which in such contexts mean 'fraudulent showmen who deceive by claiming to perform what cannot be performed'.⁵ They claim to perform 'wonders' (*thaumata*), 'magian spells' (*mageumata*), 'bewitchments' (*kelēseis*), but are in fact incapable of producing any change in the world

except the transfer of money from one pocket to another. The best-known denunciation of such claims to magical power is to be found in a late-fifth-century Hippocratic treatise, *On the Sacred Disease*, which vigorously attacks witch-doctors who profess to explain and cure epilepsy:

It is my opinion that those who first called this disease 'sacred' were the sort of people we now call witch-doctors (*magoi*), faith-healers (*kathartai*: 'purifiers'), quacks (*agurtai*) and charlatans (*alazones*). These are exactly the people who pretend to be very pious and to be particularly wise. By invoking a divine element they were able to screen their own failure to give suitable treatment and so called this a 'sacred' malady to conceal their ignorance of its nature. By picking their phrases carefully, prescribing purifications and incantations along with abstinence from baths and from many foods unsuitable for the sick, they ensured that their therapeutic measures were safe for themselves... If these people claim to know how to draw down the moon, cause an eclipse of the sun, make storms and fine weather, rain and drought, to make the sea too rough for sailing or the land infertile, and all the rest of their nonsense, then, whether they claim to be able to do it by magic or by some other method, they seem to be impious rogues.

(*On the Sacred Disease*, 1.2.4, tr. Chadwick and Mann)

Such views of the claims of magicians predominate in the surviving classical texts, but we certainly should not assume that therefore they were common or usual beyond the public or formal positions adopted by those with competing systems of knowledge to publicize.⁶ If for the present purposes we discard them, what are we left with? Let us divide the field into means, actions and agents.

It seems reasonably clear that there was an implicit distinction between voluntary and involuntary forms of magic. We may here adapt the usual anthropological distinction between witchcraft and sorcery for the wider category of magic. Just as 'witchcraft' is used to mean harm done to another unconsciously, by virtue of a natural baleful force, and 'sorcery' to mean harm done knowingly by whatever means, so we may observe that the Greeks distinguished between unconscious magic and intentional magic. It so happens that the best example of unconscious magic is 'witchcraft', or rather that special form of it which we call the evil eye. Although there were different speculative theories about how this was achieved which assumed intention ('envy'), it is clear from several different kinds of evidence that it was normally conceived as involuntary. For example, friends, relatives and even a child's father were understood to be capable of harming it in this way; and it was believed that people could even bewitch themselves.⁷ The ability to cast the evil eye was associated with a specific anatomical peculiarity, the 'double pupil'.⁸ A number of animals were believed capable of casting

the evil eye, particularly hares, seals and hyenas.⁹ Specific tribes or peoples were understood to be naturally capable of this type of bewitchment, for example the people of Thibais in Pontus and certain North African tribes.¹⁰ But other types of natural or somatic magic did occur. The best-known example is that of the Marsi, the Abruzzi people who lived around the Fucine Lake due east of Rome. These people were supposed to have been ruled by one of Medea's sons – or by one of Circe's, 'and therefore her natural power was to be found in them': all male Marsi were supposed to have a natural ability to kill snakes with their saliva. In the case of the Hirpi, a group of families in the neighbourhood of Falisci (Mount Soracte), natural magical power enabled them to walk on blazing coals; it is relevant that their name meant 'wolf' in Samnite.¹¹

Far more common than natural ability to perform or create magical effects was the voluntary use of specific magical means. The three most important of these were drugs (*pharmaka*), incantation (*epōdē*) and binding by means of a curse (*katadēsis*).¹² The idea that doing magic involved extensive knowledge of secret lore is implicit even in the name of Medea, which is derived from Greek *mēdomai*, 'plan, plot, contrive'.¹³ This notion of secret knowledge was the core around which the dominantly negative representation of magic formed. The most obvious instance is the cluster of words formed from *pharmakon*, which in Homer is a neutral word. This remains true of the noun itself for the most part. But the derivatives of the noun suggest a different story: many of them have a dominant sense, 'having to do with sorcery', such as *pharmassō* and *pharmakeuō* 'cast spells on', *phārmakos* (to be contrasted with *pharmakós*), 'sorcerer' in hellenistic Greek, *pharmakeia*, 'use of drugs for sorcery', *pharmakeus* and its later form *pharmakeutēs*, 'sorcerer', *pharmakis* and *pharmakeutria*, the corresponding forms for women. Later Greek produced more rare compound adjectives which suggest the same point. This indicates that at the level of popular culture 'use of drugs' suggested 'sorcery' more strongly than it suggested 'medicine of a Hippocratic kind'.

In Greece, then, the characteristic means of producing magical effects were through drugs or philtres ('natural magic' in later terminology), incantations and curses or 'bindings' (*katadēsis*, *katadeō*). If we turn now to the types of actions which magicians were expected to be able to do, terminology fails: the Greeks did not develop distinctive words to specify such activity. But we find Plato, in the mid-fourth century, distinguishing between attempts to harm the body and the mind. He

envisages influencing the body by material means, potions or philtres, foods or salves; the mind by fortune-telling of all kinds, charms and 'knots'. Professionals in these arts, whether doctors or diviners (*manteis*, *teratoskopoi*) should be condemned to death; amateurs to be punished at the court's discretion.¹⁴ Such a rule may well have been current in his own day in Athens, though we know of only one case of sorcery – and that only in passing in a legal speech – in which a Lemnian woman named Theoris was condemned to death, together with her entire family, probably for bewitching to death.¹⁵ The law was interested, however, only in sorcery, in the voluntary use of magical means to harm another, and we cannot use Plato's distinction further. Rather it seems that there was scarcely any area of life in which magic aid might not be invoked. We may list the most important: protecting human beings at vulnerable points in the life-cycle (*rites de passage*); curing from every conceivable type of affliction – we possess hundreds of such remedies through Pliny the Elder's collection in *Natural History*, Book 30, and later compilations of the same sort; means of favouring one's own gambles or favourites in competitive entertainments largely dependent upon luck or chance, such as chariot-racing; simple forms of divination (but not astrology or physiognomy for example, which are not magical systems of knowledge) and the most ambitious, the use of the dead to provide forecasts of future events; magic concerned with interpersonal relations, essentially love-magic (causing someone to fall in love with the client) and cursing to death (usually in the context of a client's opponents in litigation).¹⁶

In each of these contexts it seems reasonable to maintain that a degree of specialization occurred and that varieties of magical practice became more complex. The least differentiated magical practice, as well as the most widespread, was the activity of 'wise women', whether we call them *rhizotomoi*, *pharmakeutrides* or use the periphrasis (itself expressive of the undifferentiated quality of this kind of magic) 'an old woman who knows how to sing incantations'.¹⁷ Male magic seems to have been more ambitious, although there can be no doubt whatever that male and female practitioners of magic, whether part-time or full-time, shared a great deal of substantive lore and were agreed on the spheres within which magic might properly be used. Throughout antiquity there were numerous 'religious specialists' who claimed some personal, as opposed to institutional, capacity in the perennial negotiation between this world and an Other World: dream-interpreters, oracle-sellers, omen-interpreters, purifiers, itinerant begging 'priests', fortune-tellers, all offered their services to those who would pay. As regards divination what such men

offered was comparable to what magicians claimed to be able to provide. But quite early male magic became focused on three types of figure, *psychagōgoi*, those who evoked the dead; *goētes*, conjurors, those who evoked spirits or *daimones*; and *magoi*, magicians. None of these types is clearly to be distinguished from the others. *Psychagogoi*, though evidently a useful word in the fifth century, fairly soon dropped out of use, being replaced apparently by *nekuomantis*, which seems to have been a hellenistic coinage meaning 'one who tells the future by evoking the spirits of the dead'.¹⁸ It is a reasonable hypothesis that the complex, literate magic known to us from the Athenian and other curse-tablets dating from the fourth to the second century BC, and the still more complex magical traditions of the Graeco-Egyptian papyri and amulets of the later Principate and Dominate (say 100–500 AD) are the work of men who thought of themselves as, and were considered to be, *magoi* and *goētes*. The magic of these men is to be distinguished from that of women, which continued of course to exist throughout antiquity, chiefly by being learned, arcane and literate, and not in its fundamental principles or features. The practice of necromancy seems to be the only major difference.¹⁹

'Real' magic, then, was practised throughout antiquity as part of popular and indeed elite culture, an essential adjunct to the religious forms legitimated by the state and summarized in the notion 'civic religion'. Neither its aims nor its procedures were imported. Yet its representation of the relation between human beings and an Other World was quite different from that enshrined in the rules of civic religion. The features of magic which were decidedly anti-social, witchcraft and sorcery, might certainly be punishable; but the great majority of magical practices, love-magic, medical magic, magic connected with rites of passage, for example, was not considered sorcery. It seems to me that several types of response to this difficulty were possible for the elite, of which I propose to select three for more detailed discussion. They are taken in ascending order of their acceptance of the validity or at least the power of magic.

The first we have already noticed: magic might be represented as charlatanry. This view is characteristic of those who had already made a number of other theoretical commitments, for example, understanding nature as explicable only in terms of natural causation, rejecting the poets as sources of authority concerning the nature of god, and considering civic religion, and above all sacrifice, as inadequate forms of religious worship. Philosophers and doctors were able to condemn all forms of

magical practice as fraudulent precisely because they also rejected important aspects of the dominant religious assumptions of their society and had a more powerful general explanation of the natural phenomena with which magic was concerned. Magicians were uninterested in the moral aspects of divinity; philosophers rejected civic religion precisely because it tolerated myths which represented the gods acting immorally. Magicians exploited traditional categorizations of the natural world, seeking particularly for anomalous natural species; philosophers and doctors attempted to regularize classifications of the natural world in terms of more complex schemata. Magicians claimed a power over the natural world which philosophers and doctors denied was possible, even in theory. Just like the opponents of belief in witchcraft in the early modern period, therefore, who were also generally doctors, philosophers in antiquity rationalized this threat to their own natural-scientific discourse by accusing magicians of fraud. All magical claims were explicable through trickery. Although the most circumstantial text of this kind which we possess happens to be a third-century Christian one, it is plain that it relies on a much older tradition of exposure: one well-known example is Lucian's exposure in the second century AD of the fraud used by Alexander of Abonoteichos to found his new religion of the 'New Asclepios' and establish the authority of his oracle.²⁰

The accusation of fraud is grounded upon the common Greek antithesis between appearance and reality. The implication is that magicians appeared to be able to perform various operations but were in fact unable to do so. The literature of exposure is an attempt to ground this general accusation in empirical evidence. But the suppressed hypothesis is that those who believe such nonsense are gullible or credulous. The social group characteristically accused of such gullibility is that of old women, usually thought of as rural, poor, servile and ignorant. Such women are also represented as themselves familiar with simple incantations and 'old wives' tales', believe in spooks and other groundless fancies and corrupt the imaginations of the young with such stuff.²¹ The opposition to true knowledge is caricatured by being represented as marginal – socially, biologically, intellectually, spatially marginal. The denunciation of superstition is the language of those who claim to be intellectually central, it is a language of power; those who are foolish enough to believe in superstition deserve their peripheral place in the cultural hierarchy. The function of the category 'superstition' was to protect the credentials of those intellectuals – or rather philosophers and doctors – who could see that the traditional religion

was indefensible in rational terms and who were attempting to legitimate a narrower, moralistic conception of divinity which had no possibility of general acceptance.

For the philosophers, then, the true home of magic lay in the rural backwoods, far from 'modern' thinking and the imagery of public, reasoned discourse between males. The second type of response to magic was less forthright: indeed, it is characterized by indeterminacy and uncertainty. The question here is not so much 'Is magic possible?' as 'Does magic work?' This question was a tricky one within the context of emergent specialized systems of knowledge such as the law. Legal proof proceeded on the basis of facts which could be empirically established. But it was of the essence of magic that the question of causation was uncertain. We possess one story, from a Roman context, which suggests that this difficulty caused some concern. The context is that it was forbidden in the oldest Roman law, the XII Tables, to steal a neighbour's crops by using incantations.²² A prosperous freedman, C. Furius Cresimus, was accused of such a crime by his neighbours probably in the mid-second century BC. To answer the charge, for which the penalty was death, he decided to deploy the old Roman cliché of the virtuous peasant. He brought down into the forum his entire farmyard: 'there were splendid iron tools, heavy mattocks, massive ploughshares, and glossy oxen' – to say nothing of all his healthy family and slaves.²³ 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'these are my magic spells; but I cannot show you the long hours I have spent working, day and night, or the sweat that has poured from my brow.' His defence, in other words, consisted in an ironic juxtaposition of one peasant-cliché against another, that uncommon prosperity must be due to magical means. And he was unanimously acquitted. The laughter evoked by Cresimus's earnest revelation of his labour served to elide the real problem: could there indeed be a reasoned legal answer to the question, 'How does one decide whether prosperity is earned by a combination of hard work and luck, or by idleness and magic?'

But the second type of response is best studied in literary representations of what were taken to be typical encounters with sorcerers or magicians. Already in the *Odyssey* we find an indecisive, almost puzzled, representation of an encounter with such a figure, Circe. Although she certainly is able to turn Odysseus's companions into pigs in the twinkling of an eye, her magic is entirely gratuitous: it derives apparently as much from her divine nature as from malevolence. Indeed, once overpowered by Odysseus's superior (and god-given) magic, the *moly* plant, she

becomes wholly compliant, leaps into bed with Odysseus, and even bathes and dresses his deswined men with her own hands.²⁴ Magic seems to have been a frequent subject of satyr-plays at Athenian dramatic festivals; and we possess a fragment of a (comic?) mime by the late-fifth-century Syracusan writer Sophron which appears to be an incantation and purificatory sacrifice to Hekate.²⁵ Theocritus' fine second *Idyll* presents recourse to magic on the part of an abandoned girl more as a cry for help than an effective option; and even adds that consulting wise-women when she first fell for the faithless Delphis was of no avail in saving her from love.²⁶ Three later scenes of fully developed necromantic magic, however, deserve fuller discussion. Each of them appears oddly uncertain as to how to present the necromantic scene. The horrible details of sorcery, long since part of a literary stereotype, rub shoulders uneasily with a tone of droll flippancy. The humour seems out of place, and therefore interesting.

The earliest in date comes from one of Horace's *Satires*, 1. 8, a fifty-line hexameter comic narrative put into the mouth of a statue of the god Priapus. Originally, confesses the wooden statue, the carpenter had been unable to decide whether to make a bench or a statue, but decided finally on the latter. As a Priapus, the old fig-tree stump serves to frighten off thieves and birds, his enormous erect penis standing guard over an area of the Esquiline Hill in Rome which once upon a time had been a cemetery for the poor and unfashionable. What is to come is already thus prepared: the erect phallus in Italy was a usual means of warding off the evil eye, especially when equipped with small bells or subordinate members;²⁷ while cemeteries were the normal haunt of literary necromancers out to raise a corpse. The statue's life is made miserable every time there is a good moon, since sorcerers come out hunting for bones and noxious plants. Two in particular he remembers, Canidia and her friend Sagana, powerful sorcerers both, and all dressed for the part. The comic dénouement comes just as they get to the high point of their horrid rites: the ancient fig-Priapus gives a great fart and the silly old women run back to town, Canidia losing her false teeth, Sagana her false hair.

The piece depends for its point upon building up a detailed and circumstantial image of the two sorcerers' ritual magic. Whatever his sources, literary and folkloric, Horace has done his homework well. Canidia wears a black dress; her feet are bare, her hair dishevelled. They utter the scream of the *strix*, the owl always associated at Rome with the demonic, necromantic world. Their faces whitened, they score the

earth with their nails and tear a black lamb to pieces with their teeth, pouring its blood into a ditch so as to arouse the spirits of the dead. Poppets, one of wool, the other of wax, stand ready for use, one to threaten the dead spirit, the other to be melted over a fire. They invoke the powers of the underworld...and there would have been still more horrors if the statue's wooden easing had not sent them packing. Many of these details of magic rituals are also to be found in other extant literary accounts, and are part of a collective representation of the manner in which illicit power was to be gained.²⁸

The sly, apologetic tone of the first few lines, however, with the disconcerting reminder that the god is really 'just' an old fig-tree, and does excellent duty as a scarecrow, hardly encourages the reader to take all the details of magical preparation very seriously. Indeed, just as they reach the crescendo, with Hades open, the reader's assumption that it is 'serious' is challenged: 'And if I'm lying even one bit may the crows cover my head in white birdshit, and may Iulius,²⁹ little Miss Pediatius and Voranus the kleptomaniac come to piss and crap on me'. The undercutting of the horror of the magical details proceeds almost step by step with its evocation. But for the joke to be effective, real fear must be aroused. The laughter is partly of relief: this time at least the powers of good have prevailed.

Lucan's description in book VI of his epic *Bellum civile* presents us with another oddly-paced necromantic scene. The son of Pompey the Great, Sextus Pompeius, decides to consult a famous Thessalian necromancer, Erichtho, who lives not far off since the scene is set before the battle of Pharsalus, at which Julius Caesar defeated the senatorial forces in 49 BC. Here the parodic, the bombastic, rubs shoulders uneasily with a determination to evoke an authentic shudder at the horror of necromancy. Lucan begins with a contrast between the powers of ordinary Thessalian witches, which take up seventy-six lines, and the powers of this Erichtho. If they are horrid, she is ghastly. She scorns to live in human habitation, but like a scavenging animal skulks in abandoned cemeteries (510-13); she has learned to overhear the 'speechless converse of the dead'; the house she knows is the house of Hades. Pale, ancient and dishevelled, she leaves the tombs only during storms; if she treads on growing corn it shrivels; if she exhales, the air is poisoned (515-22). She subverts the rules of ordinary sacrifice, intimidating the gods into granting her every whim. She can bury the living, stealing their allotted years from them. She can reverse time, causing the funeral procession to unwind backwards, from tomb to

death-bed, by restoring the corpse to life (531-2). She will snatch the hot ashes of dead babies from the pyre, scratching for bits of the bier and winding-sheets 'as they crumble to cinders' (533-7). At length, and by no means finally, Lucan arrives at the moment of necrophagy, when the sorcerer finds a corpse ready stiffened in a sarcophagus: 'then the witch eagerly vents her rage on all the limbs, thrusting her fingers in the eyes, scooping out gleefully the stiffened eyeballs, and gnawing the yellow nails on the withered hand' (540-3).

The verbal skill displayed by Lucan, and the sheer mass of exactly imagined details, lend his account of Erichtho a baleful force. If one begins by feeling scornful or amused, one ends by feeling sickened. Despite acknowledging the literary ancestry, one is forced into a response which is no longer sure of itself. But this achievement on Lucan's part is promptly undercut. After sixty lines of energetic horror, Erichtho settles down to business and actually chooses a corpse to raise from the dead. This evocation takes a further hundred lines. We, like Sextus and Erichtho herself, wait in anticipation. But simply nothing happens: the necromancy fails. 'Erichtho was astonished' - as well she might be (725); 'enraged with death, she flogged the limp corpse with a living snake, and through the fissures into which she had ripped the earth with her incantations barked like a dog at the Dead, bursting the silence of their kingdom' (726-9). And when finally she does force the corpse to speak, for a mere forty-four lines, it warns Sextus that he ought not to inquire from a corpse his destiny. Sextus says nothing, and returns to his father's camp with an oddly subdued necromancer. The validity of the scene as a whole is suddenly doubtful; the moment of success appears utterly hollow; the power of magic simultaneously unlimited and null.³⁰

At the risk of labouring the point, I take one further example, the necromancy scene in Heliodorus' fourth-century AD novel *Aithiopika* (6, 14-15). Calasiris and the heroine Charicleia pass by chance the site of a recent battle near the Egyptian village of Bessa, and see an old woman lamenting over the body of her son. She tells them what has happened, and suggests that they stay overnight so that she can conduct them onwards in the morning. But first she has to make the offerings to the dead. This turns out to be a euphemism for necromancy: the old lady wants to know whether her other son will return to her safely. The dead boy 'spoke no word in reply, but only gave a nod which yielded his mother doubtful hope of contentment; then he suddenly sank down and lay prone on his face'. His mother, now desperate, turns him on his back and pours more incantations into his ear, till she has once more

roused him. Finally he does revive, but only to deliver a sermon on the wickedness of necromancy; 'Since you compel my dead body, not merely to stand erect and nod, but also to speak; since you are neglecting my burial and so preventing me from mingling with the other souls of the departed, and are bent only upon your own concerns; hear now what hitherto I have scrupled to declare to you. Your son will not return to you in safety, nor will you yourself escape violent death.' Completely deranged, the old woman rushes off to begin searching again among the dead bodies. 'At length, as she pursued her search among the corpses with the unwary haste of rage, she failed to avoid an upright fragment of a spear-shaft which transfixed her to the groin.' Calasiris and Charicleia continue towards the town of Memphis, leaving her stone dead. Here a moralizing tone predominates, since we are lectured on the wickedness of necromancy, but does not conceal an anxious humour: though it does not profit her, the old woman does get what she wants out of her magical skills.³¹

The second type of elite response to magic was thus to evade the problem by renegotiating the literary stereotype of the magician. This was achieved in two ways. The conventionality of the stereotype could be highlighted, thus implicitly raising a question concerning its relation to the actual practice of magic. Alternatively, the stereotype could be ironically juxtaposed against common sense, in guarded acknowledgement of the philosophical or intellectual ridicule of magical claims. The validity of magic could thus be questioned in a double sense, by reference to the reader's own awareness of intellectual positions on the one hand, and to the traditional basis of the stereotype on the other. The more strongly perceptible the critique of magic, however, the more pointedly the resources of the stereotyped motifs had to be deployed. It is Lucan's epic, in the mid-first century AD, which most clearly displays these tensions and whose consequent unevenness of tone – or rather indeterminacy – most clearly reveals the ideological work being performed.³²

It is, however, the third type of response to magic which is of most interest in the present context. This was the earliest, most widespread and most productive representation of the ambiguous status of magic. It was based on a type of argument or assumption very widespread in human societies, that cultural distance correlates with spatial distance. This argument is no respecter of persons: the American anthropologist Gary Gossen relates how he was asked by the Chamulas in Southern Mexico whether they still ate babies in New York or whether they had

now learned to become more civilized like the Chamulas (who, of course, themselves never eat human flesh).³³ Since Lévi-Strauss introduced the theme, a good deal of work has been done, especially in Paris, on the uses by the Greeks of such representations of the relation between values and geography. If the most obvious instance is the mythical development of the Amazons, especially by the Athenians, for whom they represented, at the edge of the world, the antithesis of proper female roles, which by implication were to be found at Athens, the most interesting is Herodotus' use of several gradations of the argument, whereby subtle criticisms even of other Greeks' values and customs, as well as those of civilized peoples such as the Persians or Egyptians, and those of primitive peoples, such as the Outer Scythians and Libyans, could be made.³⁴ It has also been shown that beneath the apparently innocent or 'folkloric' tales told by Odysseus in the *Odyssey* to the Phaeacians about his adventures after leaving Troy can be deciphered a complex representation of the values which constitute Greek civilization.³⁵

The significance of such representation is twofold. In the first place, they permit a kind of auto-anthropology, a framework within which a people may 'think itself' in a complex manner. The elements of a culture can be singled out from their natural embeddedness, their habit of being taken for granted, by being compared with similar, or apparently similar, institutions beyond. Where the comparative institution is itself imaginary or fictional, we have even better evidence for the significance attached to the original. The Chamulas' question tells us nothing about New York but a good deal about Mexico. Second, such habits of mind tend to be linked with the assumption that 'we' live at the centre of the world. The differing values of others are thus represented as literally 'eccentric'. This is a sovereign means of achieving what most societies hope to achieve, passing off their conventions as natural. What is 'natural' cannot be other than it is: its rightness scarcely needs any other justification. And in a society surrounded by others and where cultural borrowing is a constant reality it is exceptionally difficult to show exactly why one's current rules are indeed right. It helps if one can show that doing different leads to some undesirable state of affairs.

A more subtle use of this scheme is found when an institution is represented as having been brought in, whether openly or in secret, from the world outside. Here the spatial image is fused with an image of violation. Generally, representations of this kind function as explanations of historical change within the society in question. But sometimes, as in the case of Graeco-Roman representations of magic, they function to

account for the existence of subversive or undesirable practices or tendencies which nevertheless have always been present. That is, they are inherently political representations, claiming that 'we' ideally have no part in such things, the 'we' standing for an alleged community. In the Greek case, we can find excellent examples of such representations in 'Orphism' and the cult of Dionysus, both of which were considered to have been brought into Greece from the North (Thrace, the nearest non-Greek people) or from across the Aegean, from Anatolia. In neither case do we have any objective reason to suppose that these claims are true. But both Orphism and the Dionysiac cult deviated from the ideological goals of civic religion, since both were fundamentally concerned with the cultivation of personal experience. The pseudo-histories registered the fact of their differences.³⁶

Both Orphism and the cult of Dionysus could be domesticated. But it was difficult to do the same with magic. This was partly because it lacked institutional identity: magicians were by definition conceived as acting in isolation. Moreover, whatever benefits it claimed to be able to bestow, there was always the recognition that it was double-edged. To have the power to do good by magical means implied also the power to do harm.³⁷ And sorcery was the embodiment of anti-social behaviour, the type of selfish act in despite of one's neighbour. But most important of all, I think, was the fact that the contradiction between its formal or public status and its real desirability could not be resolved directly. Whereas other forms of invasive disorder ceased to be a threat, the imagery which presented magic as deriving from a world beyond grew more insistent and more satisfying.³⁸

This third response to the existence of magic thus conceded far more to it than the first two. Here the point is that it is dangerous and powerful, capable of untold harm. But it also concedes that part of the responsibility for the invasion of magic lies with 'us', thus acknowledging in a sense the duality to which I have pointed. The otherness of magic turns out not to be quite as thoroughgoing as it appeared. But although this point is in effect conceded, the real weight of the representation lies in its political implications.

Although one can find plenty of outsider magicians in Graeco-Roman literature, the two of most importance are mythical: one is Medea, the other the Persian magus of whom the type is Zoroaster. All other representations (apart from the very earliest, such as Circe) are dependent upon these two stereotypes of magic-worker. Medea stands for an unstable fusion between the 'real' female herbalist and the fantastic

subverter of the social order termed by Lucy Mair the 'night-witch'. The Persian magus stands for male-dominated, literate, professional ritual magic. The ideological value of these representations is reasonably plain. In their different ways, both make necessary the existence of the 'legitimate' socio-religious power which controls and confines them. This motif is explicit in the case of the magus, implicit in that of Medea. The male-dominated communal state is alone capable of maintaining social existence.

Let me begin with the pseudo-history of magic recounted by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*. This is our sole source for a narrative which must go back to some point in the hellenistic world: the latest date in the Greek section is the expedition of Alexander the Great (334–323 BC). But as we shall see, this learned history must itself be based upon widespread beliefs about the origin of magic.³⁹

The essential feature of this history is its hesitancy. Facts are constantly asserted, then undercut, deferred or doubled. But Pliny makes the best of it he can. 'Without doubt', he begins, 'magic grew up in Persia from Zoroaster' (30. 3). But in fact doubts there are. To begin with, how many Zoroasters were there, one or two? At what date(s) did he/they live? Fourth-century writers, including Aristotle, could be cited to prove that Zoroaster had lived 6,000 years before Plato. But the hellenistic writer Hermippus, who edited or wrote a collection of Zoroaster's works two million lines in length, followed a different tradition (though it may amount to roughly the same date), calculating 5,000 years before the Trojan War.⁴⁰ Moreover, although magic may have been invented by Zoroaster, there turns out to be considerable doubt about whether he wrote anything at all. Hermippus indeed could wave his 2,000,000 verses. But Pliny remarks that it is extremely odd, in view of the antiquity of magic, that there is such a gap in the tradition: no author, no writings, between Zoroaster and the Osthane who lived in the fifth century BC (30. 5).⁴¹ It was this Osthane who wrote the first treatise on magic to have come down to us (30. 8). What then of Hermippus? Moreover, other, 'very particular', writers held that another Zoroaster had lived immediately before this Osthane, in the Greek city of Proconnesus while under the domination of the Persians. Faced with this intractable muddle, Pliny begins to lose his nerve: why does Homer, especially in the *Odyssey*, know nothing of Zoroaster and 'proper' magic, given that he tells us about Circe and the evocation of the dead? How did the Carian city of Telmessus become so famous for its different forms of divination? Why does the orthodox history of magic

include no account of how Thessalians became so famous for the art (which they cannot have been in Homer's day)?

Things look better once we get to the fifth century BC. We have not only the name Osthanes but a date, and a book: he accompanied King Xerxes on his expedition against the Greeks in 480–479 BC, and we possess a book on magic written by him (30. 8). These 'facts' serve the essential purpose, which is to convey a Persian practice into Greece. But it turns out that this circumstantial narrative is quite beside the point: for some Greeks prior to Xerxes' expedition had travelled to the East, 'exiled themselves abroad', in order to learn for themselves this terrible error. The name at any rate of Pythagoras of Samos is quoted in this connection – Empedocles of Akragas too (though he was only three when Xerxes arrived) (30. 9). But the most important Greek 'traitor' is the fifth-century atomist Democritus, who, it was claimed, wrote commentaries on two oriental magical treatises, those by the Egyptian Apollonios and by Dardanus the Phoenician. He even went so far as to enter Dardanus's tomb to get his books.⁴² After Plato, who also journeyed abroad to find magic learning, this 'Persian history' culminates in a second Osthanes who accompanied Alexander on his expedition against the Persian Empire, 'and travelled quite certainly all over the world' (30. 11).

It is easy to scold Pliny for making a hash of his sources and botching the job of reconciling different accounts of the history of magic. But in truth this is a case of evidence crying out for a paradigm-shift: when Pliny wrote in the first century AD there was far too much evidence for local systems of magic – he mentions Jewish magic, and Cypriot – and for localities famed regionally for the magical abilities of their inhabitants for them convincingly to be connected with the *a priori* thesis that Persia was the origin of the art. The expedient of reduplicating both founder and first author seems to be an attempt to reconcile conflicting traditions, the dates assigned to pseudonymous treatises, and reports of historians. The enlistment of different philosophers into the story can be explained (none of them were in fact magicians, so far as we can judge) as the result of hellenistic attempts to find an intellectual pedigree for a self-consciously elevated type of ritual magic, complete with a pseudophysics, associated with the name 'Democritus' and Bolos of Mendes.⁴³

One way of understanding Pliny's account would thus be to stand outside it and present it as muddle. But there may be more to it than that. The most obvious point is that the character of this magic remains entirely elusive in Pliny's account (the more so when we come on to the

medical/magical remedies for illness which is his subject in Book 30: he denounces them as magian impostures when he remembers, but to our eyes they seem indistinguishable from the remedies in Books 28–29 and 31–32, which he does not distinguish as magical). If we look specifically at the language Pliny uses, the art of magic is sometimes described as madness, *rabies*, as in 30. 8, sometimes as devoid of all credibility and right (30. 10), sometimes as a contagious disease, *velut semina artis portentosae* (30. 8). But the most insistent image is that of emptiness or vanity, of specious show, ‘Let us be convinced that magic is detestable, vain and idle, *intestabilis, inrita, inanis*; it may have as it were shadows of truth, *quasdam veritatis umbras*, but their power derives from chemistry (the art of the poisoner literally) not from magic’ (30. 17). The most powerful evidence of this emptiness is the fact that the Emperor Nero, who had every opportunity of testing it, including meeting with real Persian Magi, the overweening pride of office, the viciousness of mind necessary to the calling, an unblemished body (called for in ritual magic), the wealth to obtain the blackest of sheep for necromantic purposes, found nothing in it and was forced to give it up (30. 14–17). Yet it is clear that Pliny felt that there was still something left unexplained by this notion of vacancy. In his introduction to Book 30, he tries to explain what it is. Magic is there presented as a shadowy reality which masks itself behind three fair faces: medicine, religion and astrology. It is this masking metaphor which justifies his description of it as *fraudentissima artium*, the most deceptive of the sciences. The first mask, medicine, enabled it to worm its way forward by claiming to give health, *specie salutari*; religion is itself a kind of fog in which human beings blindly wander (Pliny regularly adopts a scathing attitude, when on parade, towards civic religion); and astrology is a matter of universal credence (30. 2). Magic is presented as a kind of virus, which counterfeits a cell’s own genetic coding and cheats it into allowing it to reproduce.

Elsewhere, however, Pliny gives the impression that magic, far from being vain, is actively destructive. In the context of some traditional remedies against epilepsy, which involved the patient drinking the blood of wounded or dead gladiators or eating the marrow and brains of small children, Pliny exclaims: ‘Who was the first, Osthanes, to think of such things? For he will with you bear the guilt of overturning the laws of humanity and inventing hideous things; for you I think first laid down such practices lest your memory should ever die’ (28. 6). The drinking of warm human blood runs perilously close to the worst sort of cannibalism, eating uncooked human flesh, which at a stroke nullifies

one of the major boundaries between animals and human beings. The implication is that magic induces human beings to become beasts under the pretext of offering a cure for illness. The world has the Romans to thank for the abolition of human sacrifice – taken to be an essential aspect of magic – both in Italy, by decree of the Senate in 97 BC, and in Gaul, thanks to the suppression of the Druids, ‘this tribe of seers and magical healers’ (30. 13).⁴⁴ Even so the craft flourishes: at the other end of the world from Persia, across the ocean, Britain practices magic with such enthusiasm that she might be thought to have given it to Persia and not the other way round (30. 13). The periphery of the Empire conspires against the centre to overturn its commitment to the rules of human sociability. Magic is the enemy of the Roman order.⁴⁵

Pliny's account leaves us with the central question concerning the nature and character of magic curiously unresolved. History proves inadequate to the task of definition. It produces an object detestable but indefinable, criminal but vain, absurd yet monstrous. His theoretical scheme swells and strains to accommodate indigestible facts. We might almost say that his historical scheme acquires the character of the reality it purports to represent, a superficial clarity concealing contradictions, dualities, vacancy. What nevertheless endures is the point of origin, Zoroaster the magus and his subsequent tribe, the priests of Persia. Their physical reality at least could be vouched for; they had even been seen in Rome when Tiridates was invited by Nero to be crowned king of Armenia in 63 AD. Although it is obvious to us, and was known by a few classical writers, that the true Persian priestly class (Old Persian *maguš*) had no connection with the *magoi* of the Graeco-Roman world, their continued existence was in a sense critical for the representation of magic in the ancient world.⁴⁶ For the undoubted fact of their objective reality provided the underpinning necessary for a series of claims. First, magic, despite its evident incoherence as a category, could be represented as a single entity by showing that it had only one origin. The different manifestations of magic were really the same, and equally pernicious, because they shared the same essence. The biological metaphor of descent served to avoid the implication of empirical evidence. Second, the theory of Persian origin provided a stereotype for what magicians actually did. It offered an ‘empirical’ pattern for an activity otherwise necessarily shrouded in mystery. In practice, this meant that an incoherent jumble of motifs, sacrifices to Hekate, drawing down the moon, herbalism, incantation, ritual magic, necromancy, various sorts of divination and much else could be loosely amalgamated into a variable

collective representation of 'foreign' and therefore illicit practices. The incompatibility between the elements of the stereotype could be ignored by believing that they were all Persian. But the core belief was in necromancy, as the necromantic scene in Aeschylus's *Persians* (472 BC) shows: the spirit of the late King of Persia, Darius, is evoked from his tomb to answer the questions of Xerxes' Queen, Atossa.⁴⁷ Third, although in fact the great majority of magical acts were performed by women – whose magic was relatively undifferentiated, non-professional and non-literate – the theme of the Persian *magoi* legitimated the belief that real magic was performed by men. It was only if it were literate and learned that it could be a serious threat to Graeco-Roman civilization.

But how did the theory of Persian origin arise in the first place? Since it is wholly fanciful, how could the Greeks have persuaded themselves of its truth? Part of the answer must lie simply in the word *magos* itself, which entered Greek in the late sixth or early fifth century, partly replacing an older word *goēs*.⁴⁸ Almost nothing is known of the circumstances in which it did so. It is probably wholly fortuitous that its earliest extant occurrence is in a fragment of Heracleitus, the sage who was a member of the highest aristocracy of Ephesus in Ionia and had some personal relationship with the Persian court of Darius I (reigned 522–486 BC). The fragment is interesting, though hopelessly brief, in that it couples *magoi* with (male) Bacchants, both *nuktipoloi*, active at night. This strongly suggests a negative connotation already.⁴⁹ Apart from this case, the evidence is quite contradictory. Of fifth- and early fourth-century texts, in some *magos* has its proper meaning, a member of the Persian priestly caste (Aeschylus's *Persians* and Herodotus's *Histories*); in all others, in tragedy, Gorgias's *Helen* and in Plato's earlier dialogues, it connotes charlatanism.⁵⁰ There must be a strong presumption in favour of the view that it was Ionian Greeks who, after the Persian conquest of the Lydian Empire and then the Aegean coast from 547 BC, first became familiar with the Persian priests. Not only were these of course strange, they took elaborate precautions to maintain purity and, on the supposition that they were already in some sense Zoroastrian, did not practice burial of the dead.⁵¹ Insofar as the Greek claim has any perceptible empirical motivation, it is perhaps here that we should look.

It was, however, Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480–479 BC which turned an initial response of curiosity into a belief which identified Persian religion with an activity deemed hostile to the *polis* conceived

as a politico-religious entity. Or rather perhaps it was the Persian wars which created a context within which the activity of these barbarian priests might come to be understood as a proper metaphor for improper religious activity. For everyone knew that the Persians had destroyed numerous temples in Greece on their way south towards Athens, and had in particular devastated the temple of Athena on the Acropolis of Athens. Athens' excuse for using the income from the anti-Persian alliance she dominated after 478 BC for rebuilding this temple (that is, the Parthenon) was precisely that it was the Persians who had destroyed it in the first place.⁵² Moreover, since the Greeks had beaten off the Persian attack, it must be that Greek religion was superior to Persian; the elaborate rituals of the *magi* were mere form, with no ability to produce effects claimed. Certainly the dominant explanation in the fifth century for the Greeks' surprising success against the Persians was religious: the Persians had been punished for excess and pride.⁵³

Thanks to a process of catachresis, the term *magos* had by the hellenistic period become the basis of an historical account of the origin of magic instead of a contemptuous word for failed religion. But it may also be that the fifth century saw a gradual hardening of the boundaries between licit and illicit forms of religious activity. The otherness of the religion of the Greeks' arch-enemy became a suitable metaphor for the supposed relationship between a highly schematic representation of 'our' religion, summarized as the festivals recognized by the city's calendar of public ceremonies together with a vague assortment of poetic representations in Homer and Hesiod especially, and the claims to religious power of innumerable do-it-yourself merchants, male and female. We have already seen how the category 'superstition' helped to create a distance between elite and ordinary people (p. 66). The category 'Persian magic' enabled the elite to represent the most widespread forms of popular religion, medico-magical healing, charms and amulets against illness, informal kinds of divination, assistance in love and crisis, gambling magic and the rest, as somehow inferior to, or alien to, the civic rituals. Their genuine roots in popular tradition could be derided and ignored. The redefinition of true religion – moralized gods and scepticism towards traditional representations of divinity – could be legitimated by redefining impiety to include the bulk of popular religion. It was not only the Sophists who were adept at persuasive redefinitions.

The value to the emergent intellectual class, and so to the elite as a whole, of 'Persian' magic is neatly demonstrated by the gratuitous

invention by Euripides in his lost play *Aegeus* of a novel detail. When Medea came to Athens from Corinth, she had a son by King Aegeus called Medos; and when she was forced to flee from Athens, she escaped with the child to Asia, where he became the ancestor of the Medes – assimilated by the Greeks with the Persians.⁵⁴ The new evaluation of magic quite early came to be linked with earlier conceptions, to which we now turn. Structurally, the themes of the magian thesis are prefigured in older accounts of magic, whose central character is Medea. In effect, the Persian history can be understood as a reworking, in the mode of historical discourse, of much older themes in the Greek representation of magic. The decisive advantage of the new mode of representation is that it concerned men and not women.

It is well known that there existed in the Archaic and Classical periods two quite sharply distinct myths concerning Medea. They cannot, however, be shown to have been developed at different periods on the basis of available evidence. One centred upon Medea as a Colchian princess, an inhabitant of an enigmatic land far east of the Hellespont, who falls in love with the Greek hero Jason, the leader of the Argonauts, and helps him to gain the golden fleece by magical means.⁵⁵ The second focuses upon Corinth, and concerns Medea's relations with her husband Jason, and the fate of her children. Although Medea is not mentioned in the Homeric epics, she certainly figured in several early non-Homeric epics: the number of variants testifies to the interest excited by this mythical woman.

Without going into the complex and frequently hypothetical character of these variants in any detail, I think it is rewarding to examine the motifs associated with both major versions (which are first brought together by Euripides in his *Medea*, performed in 431 BC). First of all, in every case Medea is a stranger: she may come from Colchis on the Black Sea to Iolkos in Thessaly (modern Volos); she may be invited to come from Iolkos to Corinth because of an ancestral link between the two places; she may be on the run from Corinth to Athens; she may go to Corcyra (Corfu) to marry Jason after the death of Pelias in Thessaly. The theme of the outsider magician, which is simplified in the Persian history, appears in myth in numerous different, but consistent, ways. Medea never belongs; she is always in transit. But she is also quite clearly, like Pliny's magicians, an invasive outsider who cannot keep to her subordinate position as a non-citizen.⁵⁶ At the same time, there is frequently the suggestion that perhaps she does indeed belong: she was invited by the Corinthians, according to Eumelos's version (c. 750 BC),

because Helios, her grandfather, had originally given it to her father Aiethes. Euripides suggests that Medea, though a foreigner, has learned the lessons of Greece only too well in proving herself to be treacherous and unscrupulous.⁵⁷ Moreover, the place with which she is most consistently associated, Iolkos, was near one of the most famous magical centres of the Greek world, the slopes of Mount Pelion; and it was here that Jason and Medea entrusted their son Medeios to the care of the centaur Chiron. If there was anywhere that Medea belonged it was in Thessaly, home of witchcraft; and it was in Thessaly that she performed one of her most famous feats of magic, the rejuvenation of a ram and the consequent murder of King Pelias through the ingenuous stupidity of his daughters.⁵⁸ But it is hardly necessary to point out that Thessaly bears a relationship to the southern Greek city-states very similar to that which magic was supposed to bear to civic religion: foreign yet intestine, a stranger but close. And we may also suggest that the apparently diverse motifs of Medea in Colchis, at the ends of the world, but also in Corinth, at the heart of the Greek world, are structurally related to the Thessalian theme. Colchis transposes the motif of Thessaly as non-Greek; Corinth the motif that it truly is part of the Greek world.

A third shared motif is Medea's transgression of the rules of social life. Her crimes are of the most terrible kind. In Sophocles' tragedy *The Women of Colchis* she killed her little brother Apsyrtos in her father's house before escaping with Jason; in his second play on the theme, *The Scythians*, the death of a now much older brother took place on the other side of the Black Sea (the west, not the east, coast). She disposes of Pelias, the King of Thessaly. In Kreophylos' epic she poisoned King Creon before fleeing to Athens; in another version, her children were murdered by the people of Corinth for taking poisoned gifts to Creon's daughter Glauke; in yet a third, the people of Corinth rose against her rule because she was a poisoner, that is, a sorcerer. In Euripides' *Aegeus* she plots to kill Theseus when he arrives in Athens, having divined his true identity; in his *Medea* she murders not only Apsyrtus, Pelias, Creon and his daughter (not named by Euripides) but also her own two children; and there was a version, probably known to Euripides, in which she killed Jason too.⁵⁹ The destructive aspects of magic could hardly be more forcefully underlined. But it is also important to add that there is a countervailing thread in the evidence, emphasizing Medea's beneficent powers: she rejuvenated the nymphs and satyrs who looked after the infant Dionysus (in Aeschylus's satyr play *The Nurses of Dionysus*); she cured Herakles' madness; saved the Corinthians from famine; and

attempted to give her children the gift of immortality by concealing them in the temple of Hera Akraia at Corinth.⁶⁰ In other words, the ambiguity of magic is represented in this divergent set of themes: on the one hand it may be sorcery, murderous and dangerous; but it may on the other bestow blessing – we are reminded that Agamede, the daughter of Augeias in the *Iliad* who knows all about the drugs that grow on the surface of the earth, is semantically related to Medea; and genetically too, for her grandfather, like Medea's, was Helios, the sun.⁶¹

Two themes remain to be discussed. The first is the theme of magical cooking. Everyone knows how Pelias was killed: his daughters mistakenly boiled him in a cauldron, hoping thereby to rejuvenate him. They did so because Medea had tricked them into believing that she could help them with her magical knowledge, and proved it by turning an old ram into a frisky lamb by the same method. This same motif, of using the boiling cauldron to perform magic, is found in another story concerning Medea, the rejuvenation of Jason's father Aeson; and in the story of the nurses of Dionysus mentioned above.⁶² In general terms, this motif must be related to the decoction of medicinal plants necessary to any leechcraft; but there is a more particular detail to be noted. Cooking is evidently primarily in Greece a woman's task. Its function is to alter the status of the raw so as to enable it to be assimilated by human beings; that is, cooking is concerned with changing the status of things, theoretically from the status of 'wild' to the 'tame'. Medea's perverted cooking marks her failure to fulfil the role ascribed to her as a woman; and is a transposed version of the more authentic perverted cooking involved in the preparation of magical remedies, itself a female occupation, belonging to the *rhizotomoi*, the cutters of roots. It is too a metaphor for the reversal of nature implicit in sorcery, a reversal which emerges elsewhere, for example in the motif of the Thessalian women who bring the moon down from heaven.⁶³

The second motif also raises the question of the affinity between magic and women which seems to be central to the myths about Medea. Almost all the versions allude to Medea's violent emotion. Her passion is prominent in most fifth-century versions in serious poetry. Pindar makes her the victim of Aphrodite's magic: Aphrodite charms her with 'the bird of madness', the device known as *iunx*, and teaches her the prayers and incantations that will cause Jason to fall in love with her in turn. Medea's outrageous passion was, it seems, the basic motif of Sophocles' *Women of Colchis*. At the beginning of Euripides' *Medea* it is the intensity of her love for Jason which grounds the audience's initial commitment

to her case. All that she has done, she did for him. Eumelos's variant is also relevant here: for the attempt to make her children immortal, which led inadvertently to their deaths, might well be understood as the fruit of excessive maternal love. This passion has a double function. On the one hand, as in the example from Pindar, it evokes the role of love magic in the repertoire of magical acts; and, at least in the literary sources, love magic is identified with female sorcerers – Theocritus's second Idyll is the best example. But passion also evokes the idea, apparent in Greek tragedy as well as in the cult of Dionysus, that women were particularly vulnerable to strong, invasive, feelings which they were less well able to control than men. Moreover, being morally weaker, they were less capable of resistance to temptation.⁶⁴ Medea's loss of self-control was thus motivated by a priori assumptions about her sex, which are then sharpened by representing her as to all intents and purposes a 'night-witch' figure, comparable to the Lamia and other grotesque female enemies of civilization.⁶⁵

Prior to the elaboration of the image of the Persian *magos* therefore, and parallel to it (especially in the form of the Thessalian women), the figure of Medea served to represent the simultaneously alien and domestic quality of magical activity. But it is a more primitive representation. Medea's magic is not literate or professional: it is something which is never accounted for, a natural faculty evoked not by the cash nexus but by purely private feelings, of hatred or love. Indeed, some aspects of her powers seem to be due to her divine ancestry (her grandfather the Sun sent her dragon-chariot to save her at the end of Euripides' *Medea*), just as the magic of Circe is divine rather than witch-like. Medea certainly represents one aspect of the reality of Greek magic, the fact that it was performed largely by women, and that this activity was feared and resented by men. But since she is an ideological representation, there is more to be said. For there is an obvious parallel between the notion of magic as the invasive domestic and the common representation of women in the Greek world, particularly in Hesiod's Prometheus myth.⁶⁶ There Pandora, and the nameless female creature of the *Theogony*, are represented as a curse sent by Zeus as a result of the treachery of Prometheus, and as essentially false or specious. The key image is that of bitch, the domestic creature which is nevertheless not human. Medea is an exaggerated version of this representation of women, dominated by nature, false, scheming and dangerous: and magic is part of the armoury which gives this sex its power. The Persian magus replaced this natural image of magic with an essentially politico-religious

one: magic became the enemy of the state rather than the enemy of men.⁶⁷

All three of the characteristic types of representation of magic by the elite in the Graeco-Roman world share a basic idea: that magic is an ambiguous and problematical form of social activity. The no-nonsense position explains it away as mere appearance; and then is forced to say that only those marginal in terms of class, sex and education can possibly be taken in by such appearances, while those who perform the acts are imposters. An intermediate position represents it as indecipherable: every claim that magic makes can be undercut; yet something remains beyond scepticism, so that irony provides the only safe position. Thirdly, a spatial metaphor provides a means simultaneously of accepting the claims of magic, or at least some of them, while rejecting its right to exist. Three versions of the problem, three forms of accommodation to the underlying dilemma.

But there was also a fourth accommodation: to accept the reality of the magicians' power. That could not be done openly. But it could be done through exploitation of the theme of the miraculous in nature, a theme central to civic religion. It is nature itself which provides the basis of magic: men's knowledge merely makes use of what exists apart from their intervention. Nature is full of signs whose oddity or inconsequence have value for those who can read them. The ordinary is bland, the powerful in nature speaks through signs. We may, finally, return to Aelian's peony.

The story represents a version of the nature of magical power. On the surface there is nothing except occasional signs, visible only to those who know, of a reality that lurks beneath. The nature of that reality cannot be reconstructed without having been initiated into the rules of magic. Let us take first the signs which signify the presence of the magical at the level of the syntagmatic surface. First, the peony is represented as a naturally anomalous plant, a point most easily represented by means of a table:

Normal:	visible	invisible	Peony:	visible	invisible
	day	night		night	day
	remembered	forgotten		remembered	forgotten

Perceptual anomaly is followed by another. The peony is deadly but useful. Again, a table will make the point clear:

Domestic plants:	useful for food, dyes etc.
Wild plants:	left alone, probably dangerous, useless etc.
Peony:	wild but not left alone; dangerous but useful.

Moreover, the story sets out elaborately, by means of a ponderous joke, to show how the plant is plucked without being plucked: the *dénouement* is a *paraprosdokian* in the manner of many folktales. Finally, the dog is treated in a manner impossible for any ordinary dog, since it is buried (treated as a human being) and even given a funeral service 'since it has died for their sake' – a kind of sacrificial substitute.⁶⁸

These 'signs' are tokens of the presence of magical powers. These can only themselves be recovered by means of a kind of paradigmatic analysis of the story. Let us look first at the names of the peony. Aelian offers two here, *aglaophotis* and *kunospastos*. The first is common enough. It is calqued upon two Greek words, *aglaos*, 'bright, splendid, beautiful'; and *phōs*, stem *phōt-*, 'light, day, illumination'. The motif of luminousness evidently derives from a procedure of etymologization, on the 'Cratylean' principle that essence and name replicate each other.⁶⁹ The same principle has presumably been applied to the second name, since *kunospastos* could be derived from Gk. *kuōn*, stem *kun-*, 'dog', and *spasteos*, the passive adjective of *spaō*, 'pluck'.⁷⁰ We may properly conclude that a 'midrashic' narrative, in Professor Kermode's sense, has been developed in order to explain the curious name.⁷¹ A more remote context can be supplied from a suppressed fact: the plant's most usual name, *paionia*, was associated with Apollo in his healing aspect, Paian, or perhaps with the Homeric physician of the gods.⁷²

But why did the 'midrashic' narrative take this form? There is another context to be evoked. As we have seen, 'root-cutting' was in Greece associated with herbal magic, and *Rhizotomoi* was the title of Sophocles' tragedy on the theme of Medea's destruction of Pelias. Just as the word for a remedy, *pharmakon*, was ambiguous between cure and poison, so the idea of root-cutting was ambiguous between medicine and sorcery. But an additional oddity is here created by the motif of *not* cutting but tearing up whole. The underlying thought must be that to break the rule enshrined in the notion of cutting was to ensure the creation of special magical virtue. Rule-breakage creates anomaly, which is the conceptual source of power of all kinds.⁷³ Such an idea is certainly implicit in the earliest literary reference to a specific magical remedy, the herb *moly* given to Odysseus by Hermes in the *Odyssey* Book 10:

So spoke Argeiphontes, and he gave me the medicine,
 which he picked out of the ground, and he explained the nature
 of it to me. It was black at the root, but with a milky
 flower. The gods call it moly. It is hard for mortal
 men to dig up, but the gods have power to do all things.

(10. 302-6, tr. Lattimore)

Two key features of the story are present in this passage of the *Odyssey*: the motif of plucking whole, and the motif of difficulty in picking.

But there is another level too. The odd detail of the death and burial of the dog evokes an important fact about the cult of Hekate in the Greek world, the goddess to whom many magical ceremonies were directed (herself an import from Anatolia).⁷⁴ In ordinary civic rituals dogs were hardly ever sacrificed in the Greek world; but they were regularly offered to Hekate, presumably to mark her anomalous status. The story's allusion to *teletai*, mysterious, secret rituals, suggests an organized and possibly dangerous religious cult of the kind regularly persecuted, and feared, by the Greek city-state. By emphasizing the dog's corpse, the story evokes another feature of magic, the desecration of graves in order to obtain parts of dead bodies, as we have seen in Lucan's account of the night-witch Erichtho (pp. 69-70). Moreover, the dog acts in the story as a mediator between this ordinary world and the dark realm of magical forces; such a position of mediation must recall the place of the *nekudaimon*, the spirit of a human being, killed by some kind of violence, used as a go-between in necromantic magic.

But it is clear that such a presentation of magic is not really a fourth type. It too is based upon a contrast between inside and outside: the strangeness operates as a sign of the reality of magic beneath the textual surface. Once again magic is both present and absent, domestic but foreign: the natural occurrence of magical plants is contrasted with the elaborate precautions which have to be taken in order to 'domesticate' them, to harness their power to beneficent ends. But the category 'foreign domestic' is anomalous, it should not exist. The threat is plain. 'Oppositions such as outside-inside, transcendental-empirical, worldly-non-worldly depend upon a point of differentiation, a line of division, where, for example, the inside is separated from the outside. It is only in relation to that point of differentiation, which can control the distinction between inside and outside, that the opposition can exist.'⁷⁵ Magic so characterized represented a threat to the distinctions which grounded the public languages of politics, philosophy, medicine, law. And the magicians themselves took the point. What is the language of

magic? How is the domestic other expressed? Of course, in Greek that is not Greek; in writing that is no writing; in order that is disorder.

Let us take as an example a magical diagram, taken from a spell, as shown in the figure. It takes the form of a lozenge-shaped inset in



a Graeco-Egyptian love spell addressed to the dog-headed Egyptian god Anubis.⁷⁶ As a shape, it is unique among known magical papyri. The words yield no sense in common Greek. But two comments may be made, both of which have a bearing on the way that magical power can be generated through rejection of the dichotomies which ground public discourse.

First, we may take the semantic implications of the 'words'. The fullest form, readable at the widest point of the figure, is *ablanathanalba akrammachamari*. This pair is found in many contexts in magical papyri, sometimes in amulets to ward off ill, sometimes in spells to achieve some object. One text (*PGM* 5. 475–6) claims that a similar but different expression *ablanathanalba abrasiloa* is 'Hebrew'. We may conclude that the expression, which is of course not 'real' Hebrew, was a loan from Jewish magical practice and operated as a non-referential sign in Greek

magic. Once free from ordinary grammatical rules (the endings, -a, -i, recall Greek vocatives without being firmly identifiable as such; and are probably Aramaic in origin), the pair could be assigned several different semantic functions. They can be treated as a name (as in *PGM* 12. 183-4); as an 'invocation token' (as in *PGM* 5. 63); or as a 'word of power' granting effect to an amulet (*P. Berol.* 21165; *PGM* 43; 71). In a group of Cypriot magical curses, *ablanathanalba* appears as one of the Titans, with the epithet *sisopetron*, 'rock-shaker'(?); and *akrammachamari* is found by itself in a list of magical words ('Ephesia grammata') on a curse-tablet from Hadrumetum in North Africa.⁷⁷

It is however obvious that the real source of power is not the grammatical and semantic openness of the expression but the refusal to permit the signifié to dominate over the signifiant. This device is familiar from even the most trivial peasant invocation, which foregrounds formal features – assonance, rhythm, rhyme, letter/syllable sequence. But formal features are developed to a much higher degree in Graeco-Roman literate ritual magic. *Ablan-* is of course a simple palindrome, though on occasion individual letters are placed out of strict sequence (*PGM* 17c) so that it ends *-abla* not *-alba*; and the fragment includes a double acrostic formed from initial and final letters. In effect, just as in modern concrete poetry, the signifiant becomes virtually autonomous, resisting recuperation in referential terms. But this autonomy produces also in this case a direct semantic reference. One of the magical papyri (*PGM* 2. 1-2) offers a similar shaped spell, which we can represent thus:

akrakanarba
kanarba
anarba
narba
arba
rba
ba
[a]

This is followed by an injunction: 'Utter the entire name thus *pterugoeidōs* – in the shape of a wing.' One editor leaped to the conclusion that *lege*, 'utter' was a mistake for *graphe*, 'write'. But this is quite mistaken. The spell is to be uttered 'wing-like', which refers simultaneously to the graphic form and to the Homeric cliché for effective speaking, 'winged words'. Unlike concrete poetry, these shapes are not

clever linguistic games but attempts to change the world. Dismemberment of language produces enigma; but at the same time a performative act is being brought about. Language is simultaneously ruined and employed.

In Austin's model of speech acts, locutionary and illocutionary acts may have perlocutionary (performative) consequences. Similarly, perlocutionary acts (magical language constantly demands new categories for its description) – here, a supposed vocative, or word of power – is deemed to have performative consequences, but of a kind not available in the ordinary world. Ordinary linguistic rules are played with to produce impossible effects. So we have in the case of *ablanathanalba akrammachamari* Greek that is no Greek, but transliterated 'Hebrew', written in a form which is linear and proceeding left to right but nevertheless empty of syntagmatic significance, following an order which corresponds in a quite unexpected manner to a familiar way of thinking about the effects of words. These paradoxes generate a final one, that this utterance/diagram has no evident addressee but hangs in the air on the papyrus: it is a kind of marginal note to the spell, a commentary which is nevertheless central to the effectiveness of the spell, without which the spell 'proper' would be merely a series of empty, ineffectual words. The ordinary relation between text and commentary is replaced by one in which commentary empowers text.

The ritual magic of the Roman Empire thus turned to its own advantage the refusal of the dominant intellectual and public order to grant it status. Picking up the promise contained within its ambiguous categorization, ritual magicians proceeded to produce ever-new and ingenious means to power. They may have been scorned by philosophers as charlatans; but such scorn they could afford to shrug off. For socially they were much more useful; and they made much more money.

NOTES

- 1 Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* (hereafter *NA*), 14.27. Aelian wrote in the late second or early third century AD, a pupil of the Sophist Pausanias. Any given story in his collection on animals may go back to hellenistic sources or even to Theophrastus and Aristotle. The source and original date of this one are unknown.
- 2 Morton Smith, 'On the lack of a history of Greco-Roman magic', *Festschrift H. Bengtson* (*Historia Einzelschrift* 40) (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 251–7.
- 3 Although in what follows I occasionally cite Republican Roman or Italian material, I am principally concerned with the Greek tradition and its continuation into the

- Roman Empire: the term 'Graeco-Roman' conveys this sense. For other accounts of the terminology, see Peter Green, *Prolegomena to the study of magic and superstition in the Natural History of Pliny the Elder*, unpublished PhD. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1952, pp. 38ff; the principal points can be rather tediously extracted from Th. Hopfner, s.v. 'Mageia', *Real-Encyclopaedie (RE)*, 14. 27 (1928), cols. 301-93.
- 4 *Manganeuō* and *manganeuma* were perhaps felt to have some punning relationship with words derived from *magos*, magician: *mageuō*, *mageuma*, *mageutikē*.
 - 5 Cf. Walter Burkert, 'Goēs: zum griechischen Schamanismus', *Rheinisches Museum*, 105 (1962), 36-55. *Magos* and *goēs* are coupled with the sense 'deceivers' by Gorgias, *Helen*, 10 (though Gorgias did not disapprove of deception); Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos* 387-8 couples *magos* with *agurtēs*, 'mendicant priest'; cf. Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, 1110; *Orestes*, 1497; Plato, *Republic* 572 e4.
 - 6 Geoffrey Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 10-58, 226-67; Giuliana Lanata, *Medicina magica e religione popolare in Grecia* (Rome, 1967), pp. 38ff.
 - 7 The most interesting ancient discussion is Plutarch, *Quaestiones conviviales*, 5, 7.
 - 8 Pliny, *Natural History* (hereafter *NH*), 7. 16; Ovid, *Amores*, 1. 8. 15; cf. W. B. McDaniel, 'The *pupula duplex* and other tokens of the evil eye in the light of ophthalmology', *Classical Philology* 9 (1918), 335-46.
 - 9 Hares: Pherecrates (late-fifth-century comic poet), fragment 174 Kock; seal: Aelian, *NA* 3. 19; hyena: Pliny, *NH* 8. 106.
 - 10 Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 9. 4. 7-9; Pliny, *NH* 7. 16.
 - 11 Marsi: Pliny, *NH* 7. 15; 28. 35; Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 16. 11. 1-2 etc.; Hirpi: Pliny, *NH* 7. 19; Servius on Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11. 785; cf. also, Giulia Piccaluga, 'I Marsi e gli Hirpi', in P. Xella (ed.) *Magia: studi in memoria R. Garosi* (Rome, 1976), pp. 207-31; Anne-Marie Tupet, 'Rites magiques dans l'antiquité romaine', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (H. Temporini and W. Haase, eds.) Part II (Principat) 16. 3 (1986), pp. 2591-2675, section 5.
 - 12 In 'binding' I include the use of poppets made of wax, wool, lead etc., of which several ancient examples are now known: see Th. Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber* (Leipzig 1921-2), 2, section 345ff; J. Trumpf, 'Fluchtafel und Rachepuppe', *Mittheilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts (Abteilung Athen)* (hereafter *MDAI(A)*) 73 (1958), 94-102.
 - 13 Her name is thus etymologically linked with that of other magical and mythical figures, such as Agamede, Perimede, Polymede, Megamede; in one tradition her mother's name is Iduia, 'Knower'. Cf. A. Carnoy, 'Les noms grecs des devins et magiciens', *Etudes Classiques*, 24 (1956), 97-106, 99.
 - 14 Plato, *Laws* 933c-d; cf. 909a with E. A. Wyller, 'Platons Gesetz gegen die Gottesleugner', *Hermes*, 85 (1957), 292-314.
 - 15 [Dem.] 25. 79-80; Philochorus, *Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker* (ed. F. Jacoby) (*FGH*) 328 F 60: note that that she was a resident foreigner. There is one another possible case, Dem. 19. 281 with the Scholiast, but see D. M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (London, 1978), p. 197.
 - 16 Such a range of magic is evidently common in complex traditions: see, for example, K. M. Endicott, *An Analysis of Malay Magic* (Kuala Lumpur, 1970).
 - 17 Theocritus 2. 91. The relation between herbalism and women was already well

- observed by F. G. Welcker, 'Medea oder die Kräuterkunde bei den Frauen. Ephyra', *Kleine Schriften* (Bonn, 1859), 3, pp. 20-6; more recently, Geoffrey Lloyd, *Science, Folklore and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 119-35. A massive collection of folk-incantations in Richard Heim, *Incantamenta magica graeca latina*, *Jahrbücher für klass. Philologie*, Suppl. 19 (1893).
- 18 *Psychagōgoi* is the title of a lost tragedy by Aeschylus; and cf. W. Headlam, 'Ghost raising, magic and the underworld', *CR*, 16 (1902), 52-61; J. de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass./London, 1975) pp. 15-17. *Nekuomantis* occurs first in Strabo 16. 2.29; for its significance, see K. Preisendanz, s.v. 'Nekudaimon', *RE* 16. 32 (1935), 2240-66; Th. Hopfner, s.v. 'Nekromantie', *RE* 16. 32 (1935), 2218-33.
- 19 The poetic and more widely the literary representation of magicians fuses indiscriminately elements derived from male and female magical traditions. H-D. Betz has recently published the first volume of a projected two-volume English translation of the major collection of Graeco-Egyptian papyri made by K. Preisendanz, 1928-31 and re-edited by Albert Henrichs in 1974 (which already has a German translation): *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago, 1986-).
- 20 Hippolytus, *Refutatio haeresium*, 4. 28-42; Lucian, *Alexander or Pseudomantis*.
- 21 See e.g. Plato, *Republic*, 381e; and Hans Herter, 'Böse Dämonen im frühgriechischen Volksglauben' (1950), *Kleine Schriften*, edited by E. Vogt (Munich, 1975), pp. 43-75.
- 22 The most recent discussion of the rule is A.-M. Tupet, 'Rites magiques', sections 1 and 4.
- 23 Pliny, *NH* 18. 41-3, quoting from the *Annals* of L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi; the episode perhaps to be dated from shortly before 148 BC.
- 24 *Odyssey*. 10. 274-454. It is worth pointing out that a comic representation of Circe and Odysseus was created for the Kabeirion vases from Thebes: P. Wolter, 'Kirke', *MDAI(A)*, 55 (1930), 209-36; O. Touchefeu-Meynier, *Thèmes odysseïens dans l'art antique* (Paris, 1968), nos. 192-7.
- 25 K. Latte, 'Zu dem neuen Sophron Fragment', *Philologus*, 88 (1933), 259-64; Sam Eitrem, 'La Magie comme motif littéraire chez les Grecs et les Romains', *Symbolae Osloenses (SO)* 21 (1941), 39-83, 48-51. Menander wrote a comedy entitled *The Thessalian Woman*, Alexis one called *Circe*, Diphilos and Nikostratos each one entitled *Hekate*.
- 26 2. 82-92; see Gow's remark, 'Her suspicions that [Delphis] is unfaithful have been confirmed by a report received this morning, and, torn between hope and despair, she resorts to magic': *Theocritus* (Cambridge, 1950), 2, p. 35.
- 27 See for example Catherine Johns, *Sex or Symbol* (London, 1982), pp. 61-75.
- 28 Fully documented in, for example, L. Müller (ed.), *Horaz: Satiren und Epistlen* (Prague-Vienna, 1891), *ad loc.*; A.-M. Tupet, *La Magie dans la poésie latine, I: Des origines à la fin du règne d'Auguste* (Paris 1976), pp. 284-329.
- 29 The text is corrupt: the nomen Iulius seems implausible by itself.
- 30 A. Bourgery, 'Lucain et la magie', *Revue des Etudes Latines* (hereafter *REL*) 6 (1928), 299-313; M. Morford, *The Poet Lucan* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 66-80; J. Volpilhac, 'Lucain et l'Égypte...', *REL*, 56 (1978), 272-88 all stress the 'realism' of Lucan's details.

- 31 All translations from F. A. Wright's version of Underdowne (London, n.d.). Despite Hopfner's disinclination to take the passage seriously ('*Nekromantie*' [n. 18], col. 2225), there are several other equally odd necromancers and magi, such as Zatschlas in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2. 28-9 (Thelyphron) and Mithrobarzanes in Lucian, *Menippus*, 6-10.
- 32 The best literary discussion is Fred Ahl, *Lucan* (Ithaca, 1976), pp. 130-49.
- 33 G. H. Gossen, *Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 29 with p. 362, n. 12. He calls this the space-time principle.
- 34 Lévi-Strauss showed that 'totemic' beliefs are 'allied to other beliefs and practices, directly or indirectly linked to classificatory schemes which allow the natural and social universe to be grasped as an organised whole', *The Savage Mind* (1962) (London, 1966), p. 135. For the Greek case, see especially M. Rosellini and S. Said, 'Usages des femmes et autres *nomoi* chez les "sauvages" d'Hérodote', *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa (ASNP)*, Ser. 3, 8.3 (1978), 949-1006; cf. F. Hartog, 'Salmoxis: le Pythagore des Gètes ou l'autre de Pythagore?', *ASNP*, Ser. 3, 8.1 (1978), 15-42.
- 35 P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Land and sacrifice in the Odyssey: a study of religious and mythical meanings', in R. L. Gordon (ed.), *Myth, Religion and Society* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 80-94 (first pub. 1970).
- 36 The point was first made by D. Sabbatucci, *Saggi sul misticismo greco* (Rome, 1965), 69-83; cf. Marcel Detienne, 'Dionysos orphique et le bouilli rôti, in *Dionysos mis à mort* (Paris, 1977), pp. 163-217, translated by M. and L. Muellner as *Dionysus slain* (Baltimore, 1981).
- 37 *On the sacred disease*, 3: 'The man who can get rid of a disease by his magic can equally well bring it on.'
- 38 After Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire this a priori belief became in a sense true. Native Greek magical traditions fused with ritual magic traditions of Egypt, Babylonia and Palestine. Much of this fusion is superficial, a matter of words and techniques with letters and characters, but some more profound changes have been claimed. A simple introduction to the question is J. M. Hill, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London, 1974), pp. 20-44. A. D. Nock, 'Greek Magical Papyri', *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, edited by Z. Stewart (Oxford, 1972), 1, pp. 76-94 (first pub. 1929) is still worth consulting. The most ambitious work, Th. Hopfner's *Offenbarungszauber* (see n. 12), is unfortunately more or less unusable in its existing form.
- 39 Pliny, *NH* 30. 1-18; see further the fragments of 'Zoroaster' and 'Osthanes' collected by J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1938).
- 40 On these and other estimates, see Bidez-Cumont, 1, pp. 3-31: Xanthos of Lydia, for example, seems to have believed that Zoroaster lived 6,000 years before the invasion of Xerxes (*FGrH* [n. 15] 90 F 68, p. 372, 19ff).
- 41 Pliny (30. 5) here lists several pompous names: Apusorus, Zaratus of Media, Marmarus and Arabantiphocus of Babylonia; Tarmoendas of Assyria. It is unknown how these names entered the tradition, except that Zaratus seems likely to be a doublet of Zoroaster, formed from the Old Persian form, *Zarathuštra*, by a different route.
- 42 On Dardanus, see R. Wünsch, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft (ARW)* 14 (1911),

- 319–20; Apollonius introduces the important theme of Egyptian magic, cf. Pliny, *NH* 7. 160 (Nechepso and Petosiris); Green, *Prolegomena* (n. 3), pp. 61–7.
- 43 See M. Wellmann, 'Die *Phusika* des Bolos Demokritos und der Magier Anaxilaos aus Larissa', *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* (1928); also A. J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris, 1950), pp. 196ff, 222ff. Whether or not Bolos was responsible for the innovations with which Wellmann credits him, a theory of magic did appear in the hellenistic world, though it had very little influence on actual ritual magic, to judge from the papyri.
- 44 On Roman views of the Druids, E. Bachelier, 'Les Druides en Gaule romaine', *Ogam*, 11 (1959), 46–55, 173–84.
- 45 The most important recent discussion of Pliny's views on magic is R. Garosi, 'Indagini sulla formazione del concetto di magia nella cultura Romana', in P. Xella, *Magia* (see n. 11), pp. 13–93.
- 46 For this distinction, see C. Clemen, *Die griechische und lateinische Nachrichten über der persischen Religion*, *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 16 (Giessen, 1920).
- 47 See esp. Sam Eitrem, 'The necromancy in the Persians of Aeschylus', *SO* [n. 25], 6 (1928), 1–16, at p. 6: 'Aeschylus's knowledge of necromancy is chiefly based on his reading of Homer'.
- 48 Burkert, 'Goēs' (see n. 5), pp. 50–1; Green *Prolegomena* (n. 3), pp. 47–51; but there really is no satisfactory treatment of these two words.
- 49 M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford, 1971), generally keen to stress connections between Archaic Greece and the East, especially in the case of Heraclitus, does not apparently cite this fragment (B 14). Heraclitus's Persian connections were slight, if not entirely fanciful.
- 50 See n. 5 above. Plato's other uses, all negative, are: *Theaetetus*, 178 d8; 191 c9; 194 d6, e6; 196a3; 196 b5; *Timaeus*, 50 c2; 72 e5; *Laws* 800b6–7; 8e; 801 d7; the word *mageutikē* occurs in *Politicus*, 280 e1; *mageia* in *Alcibiades*, 1, 122 a1; cf. *Axiarchus* 371 a2 (the magician Gobryes). The Hippocratic use of *mag-* words, as in *On the Sacred Disease* 1, 3 and 21 is thus rather unusual, since it highlights the curative claims of magicians. Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 1337–8 uses the verb *mageuō* apparently to refer to an outlandish, but not 'magical', ceremony.
- 51 On Persian religion at this period (a fraught subject), see Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 2 (*Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 1.8.1.2: 2b) (Leiden-Köln, 1981), who believes in a very early date for Zoroaster. See still E. Benveniste, *The Persian Religion according to the Chief Greek Texts* (Paris, 1929), chaps. 2–3.
- 52 Russell Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 154–6; 289.
- 53 Aeschylus' *Persians* and Herodotus share such an account.
- 54 Strabo, 11, 526C (Medos), cf. A. Lesky, s.v. 'Medeia', *RE* 15.29 (1938), cols. 29–64, 47. In art, Medea adopts 'Persian dress' in the late fifth century: H. Meyer, *Medea und die Peliaden* (Bonn, 1980), p. 26.
- 55 On this theme, see Meyer, *Medea*, pp. 105–21; I. Séchan, 'La Légende de Médée', *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 40 (1927), 234–310, remains useful.
- 56 I here ignore the possibility that Medea was really a Corinthian divinity, defended by E. Will, *Korinthiaka* (Paris, 1957), pp. 85–129.
- 57 The irony of Jason's words at 536–41 combined with Medea's successful use of

- suppliancy (which enables her to remain in Corinth for the crucial day she needs) leads me to this conclusion; cf. W. Arrowsmith, 'Euripides' theatre of ideas' in J. Gassner (ed.), *Ideas in the Drama* (New York, 1965), 1-42, 27-30.
- 58 'Pelethronios' evoked some of the natural magic associated with Thessaly: see L. Krishan, *RE* (1931) cols. 270-1; J. Cazeaux, 'La Thessalie des magiciennes', in *La Thessalie* (Colloque Lyon 1975), Collection Maison de l'Orient 6 (Lyons, 1979), pp. 265-75, has some brief but interesting remarks.
- 59 Sechan (n. 55), pp. 248-52; Lesky (n. 54), cols. 40-5.
- 60 It is difficult to know how to classify Medea's helpful destruction of the bronze giant Talos: Martin Robertson, 'The death of Talos', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 97 (1977), 158-60.
- 61 *Iliad* 11. 740-1; 2. 329; in Theocritus *Idylls*, 2. 216 and Propertius 2.4.8 there appears in association with Medea another person, Perimede, who seems very similar.
- 62 Meyer, *Medea* (n. 54), pp. 105-9, argues that in Eumelos's epic Jason was also rejuvenated.
- 63 There is no satisfactory treatment of the motif of the Thessalian women bringing down the moon; but see Cazeaux, 'La Thessalie' (n. 58), p. 268.
- 64 See Ruth Padel's suggestive remarks in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London, 1983), pp. 3-19. Juliet du Boulay's study of modern rural villages is also relevant *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village* (Oxford, 1978), chaps. 2-3.
- 65 On the Lamia, F. Schwenn, s.v., *RE* (1931), cols. 364-84; and on the Empousa, a similar creature of the night, Waser, *RE* (1910), cols. 2540-3. The Empousa appears in Aristophanes *Frogs*, 288ff, with one leg made of bronze, the other of cow-dung; the word is used as an epithet for old women. On the night witch, see Lucy Mair, *Witchcraft* (London, 1969), chap. 2.
- 66 J.-P. Vernant, 'The myth of Prometheus in Hesiod', in Gordon, *Myth, Religion and Society* (n. 35), pp. 43-56, at 50-3, 55.
- 67 Garosi, 'Indagini' (n. 45), pp. 17, 30, 87-8, is the only scholar to stress the political implications of magic.
- 68 It is perhaps worth pointing out that in Greek a sacrificial substitute is *pharmakos*, so that there may be a semantic switch from *phármakon*.
- 69 Cf. Gérard Genette, *Mimologiques: voyage en Cratylie* (Paris, 1976), pp. 11-37.
- 70 *Spasteos* occurs in a botanical context in Theophrastus, *History of Plants*, 6.5.4. (of weeds). Pliny, *NH* 30. 18, mentions that when he was a young man he met the grammarian Apion, who was a great believer in magic, and who told him about a plant called *cynocephalia* (= *kunokephalia* = 'dog's brain'), called in Egypt *osiritis*. This plant had the same dangerous qualities as Aelian's peony: 'if it were uprooted altogether, the person who dug it up would immediately die'. The same motif appears in Egyptian, Armenian and German folk-magic, H. A. Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der Muhammedanischen Zauberei*, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients, Heft VII (Berlin-Leipzig, 1930), p. 3, n. 6.
- 71 F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: on the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass./London, 1979).
- 72 Paian: *Iliad* 5.401, 899; Pindar, *Pythian*, 4. 270; cf. *Odyssey* 4. 232. Dioscorides, *Materia Medica* 3. 140, provides several indications of the medical uses of *paionia*,

mostly connected with afflictions of the womb and difficulties over childbirth. That reminds us that *kuōn*, stem *kun-*, 'dog, bitch', might evoke *kuō*, 'conceive, become pregnant'.

- 73 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966); *eadem*, 'Self-evidence' in *Implicit Meanings* (London, 1975), pp. 276-318.
- 74 The fullest discussion of Hekate is Th. Krause, *Hekate* (Heidelberg, 1969), but, on the Archaic period, see also M. L. West, *Commentary on Hesiod's Theogony* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 276-80.
- 75 Jonathan Culler, 'Derrida', in John Sturrock (ed.), *Structuralism and After* (Oxford, 1979), p. 169.
- 76 A magical formula taken from an actual spell (the name is written in) from the fourth century AD now in Strasbourg (P. gr. 1167): K. Preisendanz, 'Ein Strasburger Liebeszauber', *ARW* (n. 42) 16 (1913), pp. 547-54, reprinted (with a misprint) in K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs (eds.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, second edition, 2, no. xviii; translated by Campbell Bonner as *Studies in Magical Amulets* (Ann Arbor, 1950), p. 116 (part only), and now in H.-D. Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri* (n. 19), no. 17a.
- 77 See A. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae* (Paris, 1904), nos. 22. 50-1; 23. 10-11; 26. 37; 29. 34; 31. 34; 32. 37; 33. 39; 35. 34 (Cyprus); 267. 4-14 (Hadrumetum).