

Burning for It: Erotic Spells for Fever and Compulsion in the Ancient Mediterranean World

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THE INTERPLAY between personal emotions and political and social factors is an essential component to the understanding of erotic and sexual relationships in the Greco-Roman world, as many significant and ground-breaking studies in recent years have demonstrated.¹ This perspective has been employed in the interpretation of a broad range of ancient sources: legal texts, literary works, visual representations, and religious literature. Of this last type, religious literature, a particular sub-set, the so-called "magical" erotic spells² for the

¹For basic introduction to the issues, see Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, transl. Felicia Pheasant (London 1988: hereafter ROUSSELLE); David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin, edd., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton 1990); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York 1988); Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton 1995: hereafter GLEASON); Simon Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge 1995).

²This field of study is presently engaged in a re-evaluation of terms such as "magic" and "spell" and their usefulness, or lack of usefulness, as terms and even as categories separate from religion or ritual overall. As no consensus on amended terminology has yet been achieved, I ask the reader's indulgence for my continued use of this problematic term. The arguments and conclusions of this article do not in fact apply broadly for ritual or religion overall, but rather assume a sub-category of religious practice that is known to be, or felt to be, socially problematic in one way or another. Any term we substitute for "magic" must, in my opinion, preserve the distinction between actions per-

attainment of a particular lover, has been a particularly important focus of interest and inquiry, despite the inconvenient uncertainty about the demographic and even cultural context from which these texts emerge.³

The longer preserved handbooks of the *Greek Magical Papyri* are composite anthologies that, although copied for the most part in the third and fourth centuries, may preserve earlier and smaller compilations from a variety of sources.⁴ Scholarly tradition attributes to the majority of these manuscripts a find-spot in Thebes,⁵ and some of the rituals contained in them clearly do reflect the religious life of Upper Egyptian temples. But they also contain much material that is, as Christopher Faraone has recently argued, a part of a wide multicultural tradition that is attested throughout the Mediterranean world, from the Classical period through late antiquity.⁶ Consideration of the ingredients required for the performance of many of the rituals contained in the handbooks also suggests that, while many are simple to perform and use affordable ingredients, a significant

formed with full cultural approval and actions that are frowned upon. Until a better term comes along, "magic" will have to do.

³Specifically, the question whether these materials should be considered "Greco-Roman" at all for any useful purpose, or whether they reflect continuities from Egyptian (or Greco-Egyptian) temple practices; for full discussion of the problem and the latter point of view, see David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton 1998).

⁴For the composite nature of PGM handbooks, see Morton Smith, "P Leid J 395 (PGM XIII) and Its Creation Legend," in A. Caquot, M. Hadas-Lebel, and J. Riaud, edd., *Hellenica et Judaica: Hommage à Valentin Nikiprowetzky* (Leuven/Paris 1986) 491–498; "The Eighth Book of Moses and How It Grew," *Atti del XVII Congresso internazionale di papirologia II* (Naples 1984) 683–693; L. LiDonnici, "The Disappearing Magician: Literary and Practical Questions about the Greek Magical Papyri," in Benjamin G. Wright, ed., *A Multiform Heritage: Studies on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Robert A. Kraft* (Atlanta 1999) 227–243.

⁵For full discussion of the complex problem of the provenance of these texts see William Brashear, "The Greek Magical Papyri," *ANRW II.18.5* (1995) 3398–3412.

⁶Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1999), esp. 1–40.

proportion appear to assume relatively wealthy and leisured individuals who are either living in major market centers (cities) or have easy access to them.⁷ These factors suggest that there is really no single cultural (or temporal) context for every element that is now part of a handbook, and that, however they came to be compiled into their present forms, they preserve the interests and practices of very different groups of people, from very different worlds.

At least one of these "worlds" appears to fit very comfortably with the new discussions of elite and bureaucratic-class males, and the connection between some of the PGM spells to issues of power and prestige in these circles has frequently been explored.⁸ However, in light of the composite nature of PGM formularies, it should be remembered that while some examples may reflect this population, interpretations of these examples do not explain PGM as a whole.

This paper focuses upon the more complicated and deluxe erotic rituals that require lots of time and very expensive ingredients, rituals that may be linked to the higher levels of society, and compares some of the ideas they reflect about passion and health to those found in the otherwise unrelated corpus of medical writing, for which an intended audience of

⁷Many of these ingredients are Arabian, Indian, and Far Eastern import goods that would be equally easy to obtain in any city under Roman rule; see L. LiDonnici, "Single-Stemmed Wormwood, Pinecones and Myrrh: Expense and Availability of Recipe Ingredients in the Greek Magical Papyri" (forthcoming).

⁸John J. Winkler's classic essay "The Constraints of Desire: Erotic Magical Spells," in *Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York 1990) 71–100; fuller version "The Constraints of Eros" in Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink, edd., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York 1991) 214–243; John G. Gager, ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells From the Ancient World* (New York 1992: hereafter GAGER); Christopher A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," *Magika Hiera* 3–32, and "Sex and Power: Male-Targeting Aphrodisiacs in the Greek Magical Tradition," *Helios* 19 (1992) 92–103; for interpretation in terms of misogyny see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago 1996) 73–114.

elite males is more secure. Through this comparison, it may be possible to increase the understanding of the particular motif of fever and inflammation in certain spells, and to understand the social meanings and consequences of fever and passion in the public world of Greco-Roman men.

Overview

The surviving erotic spells can be broken down into unequal sub-groups: those that “work” in a neutral manner (a relatively small number), and those that use harm to the object (or victim) to achieve the ritual’s goal (a much larger proportion of preserved spells).⁹ Of these, the type of harm invoked or sent is overwhelmingly illness, a method of erotic attraction that is hard for us to understand. Although several strands of modern medical and popular-medical thinking are increasingly prepared to admit that our own mental and emotional states may affect the health of our bodies, we reject any idea that the mental or emotional states of others may affect our health, except where their emotional agitation leads them to acts of overt violence.¹⁰ But the effect of another’s emotional state upon the health of a victim appears regularly in the erotic spells, involving every kind of illness as the motivating factor designed to bring about the consummation of an attraction and its transformation into a relationship that has apparently not yet begun at the times the spells were cast. The illnesses are not “payback” or revenge for rejection, but function as modes of attraction.

Not all erotic spells are harmful or involve the sending of illnesses. Many handbooks preserve recipes for substances to be

⁹This grouping relates only to the issues of illness and harm. For an excellent and systematic overview of erotic spells, see Faraone (*supra* n.6) 41–131.

¹⁰Our revulsion toward this immediately causes a category reassignment that divorces these violent acts from the concept “love”; we search for other explanations in the psychology of the aggressor or in the power dynamics of our culture, thereby protecting the idea of “love” (and in modern times, the protected idea of “sexuality” as well).

"delivered" to the woman by the man's putting them on his penis just before sexual intercourse. These recipes should, I think, not be categorized with spells, but rather as aphrodisiacs, designed to increase pleasure in an existing relationship, and I am excluding them from the present study.¹¹ But there are spells for love or sex that are relatively benign in nature. One involved seven consecutive days of murmuring Aphrodite's name over and over to a woman while gazing into her eyes (PGM IV.1265–1274)—whether she was successfully overcome by the spell or not, she certainly "got the message." It should be noted that this spell requires relatively easy, daily access to the "victim," and therefore probably implies an appropriate or licit relationship. The majority, however, of preserved erotic spells do utilize ideas of general or specific harm to the object,¹² and of these, the majority use physical discomfort or illness,¹³ notably fevers, insomnia, and/or anorexia, to assault the victim with pain that, seemingly, will remit only in the presence of the spell-caster, perhaps even only during sexual intercourse.

One extremely dramatic example of a "deluxe" erotic binding spell, probably from the fifth century, survives because it was wrapped around wax models of an embracing couple and

¹¹ Which is not to say that aphrodisiacs are without interest and completely free from the idea of harm; see Faraone, "Sex and Power" (*supra* n.8); also his "Aphrodite's Kestos and Apples for Atalanta: Aphrodisiacs in Early Greek Myth and Ritual," *Phoenix* 44 (1990) 219–243.

¹² Sometimes, the spell is a slander of the victim, and informs various divine powers that the intended victim has blasphemed or dishonored them; in their outrage, these powers will supposedly punish the victim with desperate love for their new friend, the spell-caster.

¹³ Using Betz's PGM translation (*Greek Magical Papyri* [Chicago 1986]) as a closed corpus for statistical purposes, we find the following: 31 erotic spells that send harm (of these, 19 use specific language of flaming, burning, etc.) compared with 24 that do not (excluding 2 to be said "while kissing passionately" [PGM VII.405–406, 661–663] and 14 "penis lotions," both of which types I exclude from this study as they involve increase of pleasure in ongoing relationships). It should be noted that, of the few spells cast by women, all but two are in the non-harmful category. Of the two women's spells in Betz that are harmful, both are of the slander type, neither invokes fever, and both are designed to reclaim errant husbands.

placed, along with them, into a pottery vessel before being buried.¹⁴ Although the figures might suggest a loving relationship of a modern, egalitarian kind, the language of the spell is quite different:¹⁵

Fetch Euphemia, whom Dorothea bore, for Theion, whom his mother Proechia bore, to love me with love and longing and affection and intercourse, with mad love. Burn her members, her liver, her female parts, until she comes to me, longing for me and not disobeying me...

In another long and complicated spell, the language is even more powerful:¹⁶

... [let her] be unable either to drink or eat, that she not be contented, not be strong, not have peace of mind, that she, NN, not find sleep without me ... Drag her, NN, by the hair, by her heart, by her soul, to me, NN, at every hour of life, day and night, until she comes to me ... and join[s] head to head and fasten[s] lip to lip and join[s] belly to belly and draw[s] thigh close to thigh and fit[s] black (pubic hair) together with black, and let her, NN, carry out her own sex acts with me, NN, for all eternity.

This recipe also calls for a wax or clay image of a bound woman, kneeling, hands tied behind her back, threatened by the sword of Ares; this image is to be pierced by thirteen copper nails, through the brain and twelve other important body centers. A figurine of almost exactly this description has been found.¹⁷

¹⁴Discussion in Gager 101–106.

¹⁵Transl. Betz, *GMP* 307–309.

¹⁶This one is an erotic binding spell, but does not involve the use of fever or inflammatory language; *PGM* IV.296–466, transl. E. N. O’Neil, in Betz, *GMP* 44–47.

¹⁷Discussion in Winkler, “Constraints of Eros” (*supra* n.8) 230–234. It was found with a lead tablet, the text of which is clearly related to *PGM* IV.296–466, important evidence that material in magical handbooks actually reflects real practice, even in elaborate and expensive spells like this one. Other examples of the text have been found: Gager 97–100. For full discussion see David G. Martinez, *P.Michigan XVI: A Greek Love Charm from Egypt* (*P.Mich.* 757) (Atlanta 1991).

The use of fever or inflammation in these harmful erotic spells is not designed to make the victim feel "warm" in the presence of the would-be lover, but rather to make her feel hot or inflamed, like a person coming down with fever, in his absence. By what pattern of thought did so many men of the later Greco-Roman world understand these measures as a reasonable form of courtship?¹⁸ I address this question by first tracing four trajectories through ancient ideology, whose convergence suggests a basic connection between power, health, and esteem.

Body Heat: Illness and Emotion in Popular Medicine

And not a few men, however many years they were ill through the disposition of their souls, we have made healthy by correcting the disproportion of their emotions. No slight witness of the statement is also our ancestral god Asclepius who ordered not few to have odes written as well as to compose comical mimes and certain songs (for the motions of their passions, having become more vehement, have made the temperature of the body warmer than it should be); and for others, these not few either, he ordered hunting and horse riding and exercising in arms.... For he not only desired to awake the passion of these men because it was weak but also defined the measure by the form of the exercises.¹⁹

¹⁸I say "men," because although popular literature and plays often depicted women, especially old and ugly women, as using erotic magic to gain strapping youths as lovers, the overwhelming majority of both "used" erotic spells and versions in magical handbooks indicate that they were cast by men in pursuit of women. The disparity has been explained in a variety of ways. Winkler argued that men dealt with eros by denial and transference or projection, therefore the lustful, magic-practicing women in literature by men. To account for the dearth of evidence for erotic spells used by women, he suggested that women (or girls) were in general watched so strictly that when they were experiencing eros, they were unable to go to the marketplace to buy a spell and its ingredients; he also hypothesizes a "women's magic" that leaves no archaeological trace, mostly on the basis of Theocritus ("Constraints of Eros" [*supra* n.8] 227–228). Gager (80) notes several examples of spells cast by women, and correctly remarks that these spells bear out the literary portrait, without comment on why then the literary portrait fails to note the overwhelming amount of magical activity performed by men.

¹⁹Gal. *De san.tuend.* 1.8 (VI 41–42 Kühn); transl. Ludwig and Emma Edelstein, edd., *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies I* (Baltimore 1945) 208–209 (T 413).

Galen's boast makes explicit a strong connection between the emotional and physical health of ancient men. Although this connection bears a great superficial resemblance to one that is growing in popularity in modern Western medicine,²⁰ for Galen there is nothing mysterious or arcane in the relationship between physical health and the emotional life. It simply was a function of the interplay and proportions within the body of the various substances (sometimes called humors) and qualities of which the body and its appetites²¹ were composed. Although this general view (with variations) would have been shared by a broad section of Greco-Roman people, it is developed by Galen in many works that are addressed to the educated layman or the practicing physician, most of whose patients would have been drawn from bureaucratic or elite circles.²²

1. Rationality and Immortality

The ease and naturalness of the connection reflect ancient assumptions about the constitution of the human person,²³ and

²⁰In the idea that the mental attitude of the patient is an important contributor to his or her response to treatment. Significantly, this view is invoked most often today in cases of diseases that, in Susan Sontag's words, are "mysterious and intractable," such as cancer or collagen disease, and which therefore challenge both the patient's and society's overall concepts of health and the body (and of reward and punishment): Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York 1990) 5, 58, 104. A similar observation was made by Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford 1937) 194–199.

²¹The material nature of desires and appetites for non-rational things is implicit throughout Galen's work; some specific articulations are *Mixt.* 2.1, 6 (42–43, 73–75 Helmreich); *Anim.mor.corp.* 1, 3, 4, 5 (II 32, 41, 43–45, 48–49 Mueller).

²²That this is not simply an academic medical view is clearly demonstrated by Galen's use of the treatments offered at Asklepiian shrines as an example of the same kind of method. Galen's accuracy as a witness to contemporary practices at Asklepiian shrines needs to be investigated. But the Asklepiian games certainly did always include rhapsodic and other such competitions from the earliest times; Galen may have this in mind.

²³And the difficulty of the connection, for twentieth-century medical science, is likewise related to such assumptions, but of a radically different nature. Modern medicine is not as free of paradigms in need of "shift" (Thomas Kuhn's term) as its blithe invocations seem to suggest.

the place and relative merit of its different elements, the body, the soul/spirit/personality, and the self. Many of the important elements of what we think of as personality or the self, which simply uses the body for locomotion, were regarded in antiquity as themselves physical properties, generated by and part of the body.²⁴ These elements, which included strong emotions and personal tastes, could be discussed under the title "psyche," and so are sometimes read today as reflective of a trans-physical psychological self. But in many sources from antiquity, we see that psyche was part of the body and died with the body; it was not the self or the soul in the usual modern senses of those terms.²⁵ The non-physical part of a person, the "soul," could be called psyche, but was also called the pneuma, or spirit.²⁶ Where both terms are discussed together, pneuma is

²⁴The identification is implicit but pervasive. It is most clearly to be seen in inverted fashion, through discussions of illnesses or manipulations of the body having direct effect on appetites, desires, and thoughts; see Galen references *supra* n.21. For full discussion see Rousselle.

²⁵Galen uses a tripartite model for the self or soul, in which each of the three parts is associated with a particular organ or location in the body: heart, liver, and brain. Though he remarks that Plato saw the third part, the "rational" soul resident in the brain, as immortal, Galen himself remains unconvinced: *Anim.mor.corp.* 3 (II 36–37 M.); see also Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven 1995: hereafter MARTIN) 117–120, though Martin argues that pneuma also is still somehow physical.

²⁶Both terms derive from words for "breath," and in early Greek literature are in fact used interchangeably for that part of a person which carries "the self" and which is going to survive death (if anything will). It is in the later Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods that we begin to see the separation of emotions and memories away from the potentially immortal "spirit" and the differentiation between the terms "psyche" and "pneuma." For discussion of the period before 400 B.C., see Jan Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton 1983). Bremmer uses a dual soul model, but opposite terminology; i.e., "psyche" (the "free soul") can live after death, etc. But note that Bremmer is discussing a very different time period and a very different set of sources. My differentiation is based upon the uses in Greco-Roman philosophical and medical writers, and the "psychic" conditions that the latter will and will not treat. Bremmer's prime focus is Homeric epic. See also K. V. Wilkes, "Psychê Versus the Mind," in Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie O. Rorty, edd., *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (Oxford 1992) 109–128.

privileged over psyche²⁷ which is associated with passion, confusion, and death (in the sense that it is mortal).²⁸ Many of the elements that today are part of how we construct our identities, elements such as favorite foods, colors, ideas, our emotional responses, level of commitment or perfectionism, preferred temperature ranges, degree or nature of sexual impulses, and even our ability to actually live by whatever moral code we hold, were regarded as either wholly parts of, or greatly influenced by, the physical makeup of our bodies, and their conditions of health at any given time.

In the popular forms of Stoic philosophy of the Greco-Roman period the ideas of pneuma, psyche, desire, rationality, nature, and health came together in an all-encompassing world-view that associated the personal appetites of the psyche with illness, destructive disorder, and death,²⁹ and the non-affective pneuma with rationality and the highest good,³⁰ and even with personal immortality.³¹ In Cicero's treatise *On the State*, the famous and very popular Dream of Scipio section clearly presents the idea that the pneuma could live on forever and ascend through the seven heavenly spheres after death, if the

²⁷ As in 1 Cor. 1–4. See valuable discussions of this distinction in Birger A. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians* (Missoula 1973), and in Martin *passim*.

²⁸ Outside of Stoicism opinions varied widely on what would become of the pneuma after death; see Martin 6–15, 104–123; Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton 1994).

²⁹ E.g. Soranus *Gyn.* 1.7.30, 32: "... the body is made ill by desire. Indeed, they say, we see the bodies of lovers pale, weak and thin ... men who remain chaste are stronger and bigger than others and pass their lives in better health"; Owsei Temkin, transl., *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore 1956) 27, 29; discussion of ideas in Martin, esp. 139–228.

³⁰ For full discussion see Nussbaum (*supra* n.28).

³¹ For the Classical Epicurean position from which later Stoic and popular ideas may derive, see Bartel Poortman, "Death and Immortality in Greek Philosophy From the Pre-Socratics to the Hellenistic Era," in J. M. Bremer, Th. P. J. van den Hout, and R. Peters, edd., *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World* (Amsterdam 1994) 197–220, esp. 202–206. Later transformations are also discussed by Martin 104–136.

living person had worked sufficiently hard during life to allow it the strength to reach the "escape velocity" required to do so.³² The strength of the *pneuma* was related to the weakness of the hold of psyche, and the practices for creating the necessary balance were carried out on two fronts. The positive steps, actions that gave energy or force to *pneuma*, consisted of such things as spending time in the study of philosophy, and especially, maximizing one's service to one of the great divine forces of nature, primary among which was duty, ideally duty to the Roman Empire and its structured society.³³ This duty could be defined broadly: heroic self-sacrifice, certainly, but even the apparently mundane tasks of a mid-level imperial bureaucrat could, by promoting the harmony and rationality of the great system, have for that individual a redemptive, salvific value, in the possibility of life after death.³⁴

On the opposite front, the appetites and desires would be weakened through manipulation of the body (of which they were part) through diet and exercise as well as mental or emotional disciplines.³⁵ Strong emotions, happy or painful memories, and unsatisfied or even satisfied desires, all distracted the attention of the person away from the timeless, or left him too exhausted to perform his duties to the state; exhaustion (or "stress") was in fact one of the main reasons educated professional men consulted their physicians, and a

³²Scipio's Dream was originally a portion of Book VI of *On the State*, but circulated separately and widely, a testament to its popularity beyond those who revered and studied Cicero, or those who were interested in the construction of the ideal state. Although this may have not been Cicero's original intention, this section presents a scenario for life after death that was both comforting and rational; its popularity independent of its parent text is not surprising.

³³Discussion of the various practices and techniques throughout Nussbaum (*supra* n.28); Rousselle, esp. 107–193. *Pneuma* could also be strengthened through physical regimen (of which the study of philosophy was a part): Gal. *Anim.pass.* 2.5 (I 68–69 Marquardt).

³⁴Again, suggested by the great independent popularity of Scipio's Dream.

³⁵Gal. *Anim.pass.* 1.6 (I 24–25 M.); Rousselle 19, 76–77.

common prescription was the blunting of desire. Desire in almost all forms was dangerous and negative, to be mastered or controlled at all costs.³⁶ To form a strong attachment to an inappropriate person (because of class, age, gender, or marital status), and to give in to that attachment, was in one sense a world-disrupting act: if Rome is identified with Nature, and life in accordance with its values the definition of rationality, then any illegitimate act or desire is, by definition, irrational and contrary to nature. But even to feel strong emotions for one's legitimate spouse might ultimately prove disruptive of duty, in any way from an eagerness to get home at night to unwillingness to order the politically necessary execution of a wife's relatives, out of emotional considerations. At the very least, excessive indulgence in even legitimate happiness or sexual activity might harm the state by creating exhaustion in key people, or by overstimulating their appetites, thus making them less trustworthy and more prone to corruption.³⁷ Whether the goal was social stability, personal success, or immortal salvation, it was clear to many that mastery of the emotions and the appetites increased power, by eliminating the vulnerability that each need created.

2. Desire and Popular Values

The word ἔρως is used for many widely divergent things, but the note shared by all is desire—desire for a person, for a thing, for peace, war, or even for excellence. Although the latter few references present ἔρως as a good motivator, in the case of personal desires such as the psyche might generate, it was generally regarded as a powerfully destructive force acting

³⁶ Again, the literature is voluminous; see the basic references *supra* n.1.

³⁷ In actuality or in perception; either possibility was dangerous to stability and to personal success. This last connection is most clear in the physiognomic treatises, where interior states are deduced from physical condition with no hesitation whatsoever; see esp. Gleason 55–130; Rousselle 5–23; Tamsyn S. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor 1994), esp. 95–132.

against health, virtue, and even the stability of the state. Whether or not an individual adopted the version of Stoicism discussed above as a personal philosophy, the self-mastering behaviors and attributes of Stoic great men in public life became examples for the general stream of elite and bureaucratic-class men, who both wanted to control their desires in actuality, and to seem to have done so in appearance, when this control was not possible.³⁸ Control of ἔπος could therefore form a sort of social "scale" on which people judged each other and themselves, and which provided terms and possibilities for social mobility—in both directions, up and down.³⁹ This was applied on both individual and cultural levels, and used to create identity and "place" in many different ways. For example, at least one aristocratic Roman source regards Jews in general as weak and lacking in self-control, on the evidence of their having many children; it was clear that these men could not stay away from their wives.⁴⁰ On an individual level, those with great self-control were admired, and admiration created success in the influence-based political and oratorical world of Greco-Roman men, in which trust, connections, but most of all reputation, were the primary means by which advancement and power were obtained.⁴¹

While an extreme degree of self-mastery was a high ideal

³⁸Gal. *Mixt.* 2.4, 6 (61–62, 72–75 H.); *Anim.mor.corp.* 7–10 (II 55–73 M.). The relationship between unregulated desire and social untrustworthiness is a consistent feature of the physiognomic tradition; Gleason *passim*; Barton (*supra* n.37) 95–132, 169–178.

³⁹John J. Winkler, "Laying Down the Law: The Oversight of Men's Sexual Behavior in Classical Athens," in *Constraints* (*supra* n.8) 45–70. Though the article concerns an earlier period, it is relevant for the later period as well, for comparative purposes.

⁴⁰Aline Rousselle, "Body Politics in Ancient Rome," in Pauline Schmitt Pantel, ed., *A History of Women in the West: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1992) 307 with n.57, 322, on Tac. *Hist.* 5.5.

⁴¹For full discussion of this issue, see Gleason, also her "The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century CE," in *Before Sexuality* (*supra* n.1) 389–416, in which Gleason describes the world of elite men in the Greco-Roman city as a "forest of eyes."

usually associated with philosophical teachers and great leaders, we should not think that many people were truly able to dismiss and ignore their emotions and desires. People were tortured or delighted by their feelings even if they did not think they should be, though the social conditions discussed so far make it unlikely that they would discuss them openly. Galen and others devote lengthy discussion to levels of wisdom and rationality (and control of emotion), levels that range from the passionate man who acts in public in a disgusting manner, to the man who still feels great anger but manages to control his behavior, to the man who successfully controls the anger itself.⁴² While the occasional exceptional person (among whom Galen happily includes himself) did in fact live a rigidly controlled life, an even greater number would settle for the second level, wanting the benefits in admiration and prestige that came from being thought to truly control their desires, while at the same time being able to satisfy the body's physical and emotional appetites. We see therefore a great interest in appearing to conform to the ideal, while still living as one pleased.⁴³ Few people would want to be seen to be indulging in personal ἔρως, because of the social value attached to self-denial and self-mastery. In addition, admission of desire was admission of weakness, which in turn raised all whom you told up above yourself on the imaginary scale of control of ἔρως. Even desire mastered, a staple of modern confessional autobiography, was probably not bandied about among bureaucratic-class men as a potential source of praise, since only the poorly-regulated psyche would generate strong desires in the first place.

⁴² *Anim.pass.* 1.4 (I 12–16 M.); discussion in James Hankinson, "Actions and Passions: Affection, Emotion, and Moral Self-Management in Galen's Philosophical Psychology," in Jacques Brunschwig and Martha C. Nussbaum, edd., *Passions and Perceptions: Studies in Hellenistic Philosophies of Mind* (Cambridge 1993) 184–222.

⁴³ Rousselle 7–23.

In the erotic context with which this essay is concerned, the experience of "love," whether frustrated or returned, could have been a great handicap in terms of the daily language of power and prestige spoken by men in the Greco-Roman city. Wise men, philosophers, and, by extension, trustworthy men with well-regulated selves should be largely beyond the effects of strong emotions, particularly desire. If it is a popular assumption that wisdom and rationality protect one from love and desire, who would be willing to admit to feeling these things? The admission is the equivalent of an announcement that one's mind and soul are not totally under one's control, an admission with the potential for much more serious consequences than a period of good-natured teasing. Suspicion of one's judgment and honesty, unwillingness of others to enter into political, legal, or economic arrangements, and many other such problems might await the lover who confided in the wrong friend, and the danger became greater, the more he had to lose, or the higher he hoped to rise.

3. Popular Values and Illness

Just as openly sighing over a particular object of love could lay one open to suspicion and mistrust, certain illnesses or physical features were similarly associated with unregulated desire or other moral failings.⁴⁴ Such conditions were widely "read" as legitimate markers of the interior state,⁴⁵ and people both desired to be able to read the illnesses of others and to keep any messages their own bodies might be sending rigidly within their own control. One reason many professional men

⁴⁴Barton (*supra* n.37: 97-98, 133-168) argues that in fact the origins of the physiognomic tradition are in Hippocratic medicine, and clearly demonstrates how Galen provides a "scientific" basis for it in humoral physiology.

⁴⁵Illnesses are transitory (it is to be hoped), and as such mark transitory emotional states. The bulk of physiognomic writing concerns permanent features, such as head-shape or the distance between the eyes, seen as diagnostic of permanent personality elements. The proportion of physiognomic writing on transitory features and illness is therefore small, but can be amplified with many examples from medical discussions of diagnosis.

went to doctors was to find ways to appear healthy and controlled—and therefore moral and trustworthy—even if they indulged their appetites. They sought many kinds of emetics so that they could eat whatever they wanted but not suffer the physical effects of actually digesting the food;⁴⁶ men asked doctors how they could still have a lot of sex without suffering exhaustion.⁴⁷ Though the doctors might offer sober advice about continence and the mastery of desire,⁴⁸ they also provided strategies and substances to help with these problems. The connection worked in both directions, as physicians used recent thoughts, opinions, appetites, and emotions of their patients to arrive at conclusions about their physical health.⁴⁹

Disease was felt to be a symptom of a general imbalance in the four major substances or humors⁵⁰ that made up the body: blood, bile, phlegm, and black bile or melancholy. Improper proportions of these materials could result in all sorts of complaints, both physical and emotional.⁵¹ For example, too much blood could be associated with fever and stroke or anger;⁵² too much black bile could result in coldness and lethargy, or de-

⁴⁶Gleason 82–102.

⁴⁷Rousselle 15.

⁴⁸Gal. *Anim.pass.* 1.6 (I 22, 24–25 M.); Rousselle 5–23.

⁴⁹Gal. *Ars med.* 21–25 (I 358–376 K.).

⁵⁰Or, more properly, unbalanced relationship between the humors and the conditions of heat, coldness, moisture, and dryness which also govern the body's health.

⁵¹Gal. *Anim.mor.corp.* 4–7 (II 45–54 M.); *Mixt.* 2.6 (78 H.), where “emotional” factors clearly affect bodily functioning.

⁵²The association between blood and fever in men is pervasive. For the association specifically in women see e.g. the Hippocratic *Nat.Puer.* 4.3; discussion in A. E. Hanson, “Hippocrates: Diseases of Women I,” *Signs* 1 (1975) 567–584. Excessive blood interferes with rationality: Lesley Dean-Jones, “The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science,” in Sarah B. Pomeroy, ed., *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill 1991) 111–137. If women were specifically associated with blood and moisture, it becomes all the more important for the status-oriented male to appear “bloodless” and “dry.” But if a man loses or burns up too much blood, he risks becoming melancholic: Gal. *Mixt.* 2.6 (82–85 H.).

pression.⁵³ An imbalance in the humors might first be detected as depression, but might easily progress if left untreated either to suicidal depression, or to cold lethargy and natural death. As a result, doctors took careful note not only of physical symptoms and the minute details of all bodily discharges, but of the types of thoughts and feelings the patient was experiencing.⁵⁴ This "holistic" approach to diagnosis and treatment was based on the assumption that both emotions and bodily organs are composed of the same substances and are part of a single system of balances. It is for this reason that certain procedures, for example bloodletting, could be used for an extremely broad range of conditions that to the modern way of thinking have little or nothing to do with each other.

While sometimes the appetites were regarded as helpful indicators of the substances the body had too much of or lacked, the physical and emotional appetites (and the behaviors that they generated) themselves could lead to further, more severe imbalances, and therefore to increasingly serious problems with health. For this reason, certain appetites had to be rigidly controlled, no matter what the presenting illness was. In the specific case of fever, a patient could be judged to be suffering a "burning of the blood"; for this the patient would be given fluids, lest the burning reduce the blood too much, creating an imbalance in

⁵³ Gal. *Anim.mor.corp.* 3 (II 39–41 M.).

⁵⁴ The discussion of these issues in Rousselle 24–46 and 63–77 deals specifically with diseases of women, but her observations there extend in practice and principle to men as well; specific discussion of men's health issues in 3–23. A great deal of the recent work on views of women in medical writers and popular medical imagination relates to this issue, because that material specifically addresses traits and conditions that render a man "feminine," which is a category that includes dishonesty, weakness, untrustworthiness, etc. Excellent discussions in A. E. Hanson, "The Medical Writers' Woman," in *Before Sexuality* (*supra* n.1) 309–338, and "Continuity and Change: Three Case Studies in Hippocratic Gynecological Therapy and Theory," in Pomeroy (*supra* n.52) 73–110; Giulia Sissa, *Greek Virginity*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge [Mass.] 1990). See also Owsei Temkin, *Hippocrates in a World of Pagans and Christians* (Baltimore 1991).

which black bile, the residue, would predominate.⁵⁵ But this treatment would depend on the gender, age, and appearance of the patient. Gender and age would suggest a "recommended moisture content" for human beings, which was much lower for men than for women and children;⁵⁶ therefore a man's fever might be regarded as a beneficial drying out of an unhealthy—or effeminate⁵⁷—condition. On the other hand, Galen advises a consideration of many aspects of body appearance, to determine the underlying mixtures that predominate for a specific patient, and which are indicators of illnesses of the past as well as those that are still to come. In this way, he will judge, *e.g.*, a hairy man to be in general on the colder and wetter side,⁵⁸ presumably adjusting his treatments accordingly. These considerations might lead to counter-intuitive, but socially meaningful treatments; some fever patients who cried for water might not be given it, if they were judged to be suffering ultimately from a surfeit of moisture.⁵⁹

Like moisture or heat, the emotions were valuable diagnostic indicators, providing useful diagnostic information about the overall health of a patient.⁶⁰ Emotional patterns could be symptomatic of imbalances in humors that might go on to cause other, more severe physical problems; for example, emotional upset might be the presenting sign of a condition that could later progress to fever, jaundice, or coma. Perception of this relationship could be used in the other direction as well, using bodily

⁵⁵Gal. *Mixt.* 2.6 (84–85 H.). Galen disagrees with this idea, but reports it as an example of a mistake made by "a majority of doctors."

⁵⁶Rousselle 59.

⁵⁷For full discussion of the relationship between moisture and categories of masculinity, see Gleason, esp. 58–70; Dean-Jones (*supra* n.52).

⁵⁸Especially if he seems to have suddenly become hairy or to have lost hair: *Mixt.* 2.4 (60–61 H.).

⁵⁹Galen (*Mixt.* 3.5 [111–113 H.]) seems to be trying to argue against this, by presenting an elaborate discussion, the main point of which appears to be that cold water cannot cause heating.

⁶⁰Gal. *Ars med.* 6–23 (I 319–370 K.).

symptoms to predict future emotional states. For example, the cold and damp condition known as the "plethora" could lead to emotional imbalances.⁶¹ In women the disease hysteria, a physical malady with physical symptoms, could rapidly progress into an extreme emotional derangement.⁶² Such strong emotional symptoms could lead the patient into behavior that could in turn throw off the health and balance of completely different body systems, just as a person with a blister, by favoring the afflicted foot, may cause muscular problems in the back at some future time. In the same way, says Galen in the passage quoted, disproportionate emotions can cause illnesses of a variety of types, not always easy to predict (or to diagnose).

While it is easy to be amazed that any patient in antiquity ever lived to tell the tale of his treatment, it is important to remember that these treatments "worked" quite often. From the perspective of cultural ideology and patterns of thought, even medical failures support prevailing attitudes, by transferring the blame for the most part onto the patient, who can frequently be assumed to have lacked the will or other intrinsic capacity that would have enabled him either to bear down mentally to help throw off the disease, to follow the stringent and difficult prescriptions properly, or to have lived by the appropriate regimen of diet, emotion, work, and exercise beforehand for the prevention of the imbalance in the first place. Such "infelicities"⁶³ in the performance of ritual also sustain belief in divine cures, even in the face of apparent disconfirmation. In this sense, medical practices and/or theories can sometimes function as much (or

⁶¹Because plethora is a disease of moisture, it occurred most frequently in women and children, but could afflict men as well—men who were too "moist," perhaps therefore effeminate. Rousselle 8–9, 35–36, 42; see James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine: Philosophy and Medicine From Alcmaeon to the Alexandrians* (New York 1993) 216–217.

⁶²Rousselle 63–77.

⁶³Terminology from J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1962); see further discussion n.93 *infra*.

more) to comfort the well, and to maintain their conceptual stability, as to actually cure the patient.⁶⁴

On the other hand, the kinds of treatments prescribed by ancient physicians are not unlike some still used today, in essence if not in substance. We might not think that bathing in itself was a particularly effective cure for depression, but, if the patient believed he or she was actively taking control of the illness, this sense of power and mastery might indeed help him or her to feel better, as would the time focusing upon the self that would be spent in the cure,⁶⁵ and the solicitous attentions of friends and family. Overwhelming anger might well be "helped" by bloodletting, both from the perspective of the general if temporary weakening the patient felt as a result of treatment, and from a behavior-modification "avoidance therapy" perspective. It is therefore possible to interpret Galen's claim in modern, clinical psychological terms—he cures people "ill through disposition of their souls" by "correcting the disproportion of their emotions"—their illnesses are emotional and coming from inside themselves, and it is the head that cures them. But this interpretation is undercut by Galen's corroborating example, in which Asklepios clearly is healing tangible and measurable physical conditions, specifically body temperatures that are excessively high or low. The connection of poorly disposed souls made here is not with fatigue, pain, or increased vulnerability to disease,⁶⁶ but with high temperatures, caused by

⁶⁴ As continues to be true in modern medicine, in cases of conditions that are both highly feared and poorly understood: see Sontag (*supra* n.20) 5, 58.

⁶⁵ This is one of the main benefits to the casters of erotic spells suggested by Winkler (*supra* n.8) 82–93. I would like to make clear that while I agree with Winkler, and with Gager (82), about the importance of this psychological-therapeutic benefit to the spell-caster, this benefit partly derives from his satisfaction in contemplating the literal, objective harm to the victim which is, in my opinion, a major component of the spell-caster's hopes and beliefs about the ritual he is performing.

⁶⁶ I refer here to the modern constellation of complaints most usually attributed to emotional factors.

the very literal friction resulting from "motions of ... [vehement] passions." This attitude may begin to explain why, of all conditions, fever is the one considered most useful for the practitioner of erotic magic. If the friction of vehement passions may raise body temperature, then, if we approach from the opposite direction, by raising the temperature independently, the passions may similarly become strong, possibly strong enough to overwhelm the victim's rationality. Further, if fever is associated with unregulated desire, it could pose a social threat for ancient men in search of trust and prestige, or be used by them in attempts to right their position on the imagined scale of ἔρως.

4. Burning with Shame

Societies (and subgroups within them) often attach very specific cultural meanings to different ailments,⁶⁷ meanings with both negative and positive associations. The negative or positive valence of a given condition has, strangely, far less to do with the threat it poses to survival and well-being, than with the aesthetic effect it has upon the patient, and the events or behaviors that are its presumed cause. In the United States in the 1950s, before the current health craze, there was a certain cachet surrounding the "sudden-death" heart attack, the disease that proved a man really was as driven and hard-working as the stereotypical businessman was supposed to be. People today wear their knee braces as badges of honor, and despite their very real pain, can proudly discuss the various athletic feats that resulted in the destruction of their joints. In the academic world, slipped disks and carpal tunnel syndrome carry the positive resonance of long hours sitting in a chair,

⁶⁷Sontag (*supra* n.20) focuses upon the cultural resonances of tuberculosis and cancer, with interesting side discussions of syphilis and madness. The history of syphilis is fascinating in this regard; at one time, the French called it "the Neapolitan disease" at the same time the Neapolitans were calling it "the French disease"; Claude Quétel, *The History of Syphilis*, transl. Judith Braddock and Brian Pike (Baltimore 1990) 10.

typing away, with the occasional break to carry heavy loads of huge books from one workspace to another. I do not mean to suggest that people seek out these conditions and that they do not cause them suffering. But when they occur, their sufferers can expect sympathy and support, and evince little embarrassment or shame about the specifics of their conditions.⁶⁸ On the other hand, some conditions subject their sufferers to a great deal of humor and teasing, or even to the risk of social ostracism. In young teenage populations, those unfortunate enough to contract mononucleosis, known to this group as "the kissing disease," can expect a good deal of teasing and rampant speculation about the source of the condition—and the kiss. Much more serious suspicions and reactions to, for example, HIV are part of the same pattern of thought, but have far less lighthearted effects.

There are some conditions, ailments which we know from advertising and from statistics to be extremely common, to which our culture has attached very negative associations. People do not want to admit having these conditions, certainly not in a public setting, and sometimes not even to themselves or their most intimate associates. I am speaking here not only of objectively terrifying conditions such as AIDS.⁶⁹ This category also includes such things as prostate and colon cancer which, though life threatening, have high rates of cure if detected early. But the reluctance of male patients to discuss any sort of anomalies in the genital area presents a formidable obstacle to early detection in many cases; indeed, a recent television documentary on the subject was entitled, sadly, "Embarrassed to Death." In addition to such potentially life-threatening conditions, popular culture has coopted a whole variety of ailments, such as en-

⁶⁸ This depends, however, upon the patient's comfort level with the issue of aging.

⁶⁹ Fully examined by Sontag (*supra* n.20).

croaching baldness, hemorrhoids, incontinence, impotence, every type of bowel irregularity, and injuries that occur not during sports but during shameful or illegal activities, for use as coded ways to express ideas about the ideal and the unacceptable person. Few people would be comfortable if widely known to suffer from one of these conditions; this social freight greatly increases the burden of suffering that these patients experience. Such conditions are staple elements of teasing, putdowns, and jokes. Comedians and entertainers make fun of them; and except for medical literature, entertainment is really the only public setting in which they are discussed.

One of the great "entertainers" of the second century, the orator Favorinus, had as one of his most popular performance pieces a satirical Praise of Quartan Fever, which unfortunately does not survive.⁷⁰ The choice of subject was particularly clever for Favorinus, who in his own person clearly challenged the definitions both of masculinity and of health,⁷¹ and it is only at the intersection of these categories that there is much potential for amusement in the discussion of fever.

In our modern medical tradition, informed by the germ theory of disease and by microscopic observation of anomalies in the blood, fever is seen not as a disease in itself but as a symptom of infection or breakdown in one or another bodily system. Ancient medicine, however, relying upon external observation, made its distinctions of types of fevers based only their progression. The major distinction was between periodic fevers (tertian, quartan) and fevers which were either constant or randomly intermittent. Each type had several different causes, almost all

⁷⁰Its existence is attested by Aulus Gellius (NA 17.12.1).

⁷¹Favorinus was a major category-destroyer. Born without testicles, he was a "natural eunuch" who not only was able to achieve success as an orator, but also became known as a passionate lover: Philostr. VS 489–490. For discussion of all aspects of Favorinus' biography and intersection with categories of health and masculinity, see Gleason *passim*, and Barton (*supra* n.37) 95–132, 183–185.

of which involved the patient's behavior and constitution; bad behavior or unwise diet could alter the progress of the fever,⁷² just as good care could reduce or cure it.

Fever could be a value-neutral condition, but it was frequently regarded as a secondary heating that resulted from passion or desire, as in the example from Galen discussed above. It is specifically associated with a hot liver or with bile,⁷³ in themselves associated with the passions of anger and erotic desire. The frequent mentions of periodic fevers, those that peak and break with regularity on the second, third, or fourth days, probably indicate both the rhythm of exhaustion and a high proportion of cases of malaria⁷⁴ among ancient fever patients, although the parasitic nature of periodic fevers was never noted in ancient medicine. According to modern findings, the malarial parasite never disappears from the blood of the infected person, but rather, after the initial onset, lies dormant until circumstances are right for it to begin its tertian or quartan life cycle again. In certain strains of malaria recurrence can be triggered by physical (or emotional) exertion. Because of this, the connection between fever and the passions might seem, frequently, to be reinforced when extremes of emotional agitation, or the physical exertions of sexual intercourse, triggered a flare-up of a dormant periodic fever.⁷⁵ But this perception also

⁷²Barton (*supra* n.37) 145.

⁷³Gal. *Ars med.* 12 (I 337–339 K.); *Nat.fac.* 2.8 (II 122 K.).

⁷⁴Mirko D. Grmek, *Diseases in the Ancient Greek World*, transl. Mireille and Leonard Muellner (Baltimore 1989), with mention of malaria in tertian and quartan types, esp. 277–278. Modern medicine identifies four parasites of the same genus as causes of malaria; of these, *Plasmodium malariae* causes quartan malaria, while *Pl. vivax*, *ovale*, and *falciparum* cause tertian fevers of varying intensity; all four parasites date back to at least the Pleistocene Age. See also W. H. S. Jones, *Malaria and Greek History* (Manchester 1909).

⁷⁵Malaria provides a case in contrast to the usual absence of socially-accepted ways to address fever. The city of Rome had several Temples of Fever; one, on the Palatine, was constructed at state expense (Plin. *HN* 2.16), and this may indicate that it and the others were erected in response to particularly bad fever years. In other words, these temples may have related to fever on a plague level, to which no personal embarrassment would attach. The temples are not extant.

works in both directions, and a patient who suddenly fell into a bout of fever might reasonably be asked by his physician whether or not he was in the grip of an unmanageable desire, or in what other health-weakening practices he had been indulging. To competitive men in the public eye, these questions could have severe consequences in the loss of respect, power, or opportunities that might come with the questionable reputation of being someone who might secretly be a slave to appetite, and therefore untrustworthy. For them, fever, especially recurrent fever, might be regarded as a social disease, an illness that was feared not only for itself, but for its social consequences as well. If the well-regulated person need never fear disease,⁷⁶ both illness and its treatment are shameful; for men who lived and worked in a "forest of Eyes," in Gleason's wonderful phrase,⁷⁷ it could be shameful and dangerous. In such an environment, even to be the object of good-natured teasing was to be avoided.

The Gaulish eunuch Favorinus, of course, succeeded wildly despite assuredly enormous teasing,⁷⁸ but in his speeches mentioned his physical condition openly, sometimes deliberately challenging the assumptions and attitudes of the dominant culture of oratory.⁷⁹ The Praise of Quartan Fever may even have been part of this program of ridicule.⁸⁰ But though famous, Favorinus was no role model, and few could have felt their

⁷⁶ "If [it] is true, if disease is an individual phenomenon due to an error of judgment, to wrong living, then it follows naturally that a truly educated man does not need a doctor and is, if nothing worse, a fool if he has to call upon one": Ludwig Edelstein, "The Distinctive Hellenism of Greek Medicine," in *Ancient Medicine* (Baltimore 1967) 391. As with illness, so with the harmful effects of magic, as Plotinus suggests at *Enn.* 4.4.40–41: the wise man or philosopher is immune.

⁷⁷ Gleason (*supra* n.41) 389.

⁷⁸ In youth. In adulthood, his nature combined with his popularity to inspire not teasing but intense hatred on the part of at least one other orator; Gleason 7, 21–54.

⁷⁹ Gleason xxvii–xxviii, 3–20.

⁸⁰ As is the defense of Fortuna discussed in Gleason 12.

natural rhetorical genius equal to the task of obtaining success, pushing against the uphill weight of a bad, or even ridiculous, reputation.

Fever and "Inflammation" to Get a Lover

The connections that can be drawn between these four interrelated complexes of ideas may help us understand the persistent presence of language of fever, burning, and illness in a large number of harmful erotic spells from the ancient Mediterranean. Fever or generalized heating could effect the other bodily systems that might in turn weaken control and rationality to an extent sufficient to lead the object or victim to respond favorably to the spell-caster's advances or even to seek him out, appearing to do so independently. The great majority of erotic spells that function through harm of the victim clearly employ illnesses for this purpose, utilizing either specifically named febrile conditions or a generalized "inflammation" of the soul and vital organs. In fact, in almost every case where a man is using a love spell that contains harmful elements, fever and burning are prominently featured.⁸¹ If these illnesses are caused by desire (at least in some cases), and indeed are believed to promote desire in their turn, then the spell-caster is aiming to create in his victim a level of desire that is great enough to create this side-effect. As I will argue below, this level of desire is, presumably, greater than his own.

The preliminary question that must be asked about these elements of ancient spells is whether they intend to create real, physical illnesses, or rather are metaphoric descriptions of

⁸¹ This is so whether the male spell-caster is trying to gain a woman or a man. Interestingly, spells cast by women, though occasionally involving harm elements, generally do *not* include this particular element of heat or fever. I am aware of only one example, *Suppl. Mag.* I 42, a spell cast by one woman to gain another. Brooten (*supra* n.8: 88–89) discusses evidence that this particular spell was copied from some handbook by a scribe. This may explain the presence of "burning," though I cannot see, in that case, why more women would not have been sold this kind of spell.

desire itself, in which case the spell-caster is doing nothing more than attaining relief through verbalizing, in a ritually formalized manner, the wish that the one he loves will feel the same towards him, though in a more powerless and degrading way.⁸² A brief survey of metaphors associated with love or strong desire in ancient literary sources does suggest a connection⁸³ between desire and heating. However, when fever, burning, or inflammation are used as tropes expressive of love or desire, this is a negative representation, the inflammation definitely suggesting fever and illness and a condition to be avoided or ameliorated, rather than benign warmth.

Love or desire as fever or burning is also a commonplace of our own cultural repertoire of metaphors, as in "have the hot," "red-hot," and "heat of passion"; but in these metaphors the heating is neutral or beneficial, and individuals seek to prolong this "heat" or to rekindle it in long-term relationships. We recognize that strong emotions can have the physical effect of blood-vessel dilation, with the concomitant reddening of the skin and experience of warmth in flushing or blushing; people in popular literature or television, when experiencing desire, may innocently ask, "Is it hot in here?" to general laughter. But we do not take aspirin in response to these heatings, nor do we expect them to be followed by chills, coughing, runny noses—or liver failure. They are regarded as completely separate from the temperature shifts of illness, and are not expected (with the exception of the possibility of massive coronary suffered in *flagrante delicto*) to affect overall health in any way. But the neutral or positive resonance of desire's inflammation is foreign to literary usage of ancient writers on romantic love,⁸⁴ where, as in the medical writing already surveyed, these heatings are

⁸² This is the conclusion ultimately reached by Winkler (*supra* n.8) 82–93, and Gager 82.

⁸³ As well as the "scientific," medical connection discussed above.

⁸⁴ For a brief survey of examples, see Martin 213.

unpleasant and dangerous, leading potentially to shameful and evil behavior, as for example in Theocritus. Moreover, even if it could be demonstrated that the use of heating in literature on love was exclusively metaphoric, there is little reason to group our surviving spells with poetry or fiction; in function and form, they most resemble technical literature,⁸⁵ such as medical writing, and should therefore be interpreted first in that context.

The strongest argument for interpreting the erotic inflammation spells as designed to send real illnesses lies in comparing them to spells relating to illness overall. Many spells, whether erotic in nature or not, are designed to send illnesses of several kinds, and even death, to the practitioners' victims. In most of these it is clear that the illnesses are understood literally, and that there is a real desire to cause them. This is no metaphor.⁸⁶

... Take gallows wood and carve a hammer. With the hammer strike the eye [of Horus, drawn on papyrus] while saying the formula: "I conjure you by the holy names; hand over the thief ... Hand over the thief who stole it. As long as I strike the eye with this hammer, let the eye of the thief be struck, and let it swell up until it betrays him ..."

Examples of spells that send explicitly literal illnesses could be multiplied, and include both chronic and critical conditions, up to and including death. In such cases of non-erotic spells, there is little likelihood that the object is a metaphor for the effects of desire. This conclusion is not as firm as I would like, however, since these non-erotic illness-sending spells do not in fact utilize fever or inflammation, except for a single example.⁸⁷ All the "burning-type" spells are in fact erotic. In the absence of significant non-erotic comparanda, it is extremely difficult to

⁸⁵This is not to say that poetical prayer does not form an important part of many of the lengthier spells. But these poetical sections are hymns to the gods or powers being invoked; they are not descriptions of the results of the spells or the interior states of their casters.

⁸⁶PGM V.70–95, transl. W. C. Grese, in Betz, *GMP* 102.

⁸⁷PGM XIV.16–27, an invocation of Typhon.

determine whether the terms are being used literally or metaphorically. A decision in either direction involves assumption and extension, assumption that ancient metaphors for love parallel our own, or extension from the literal illnesses of non-erotic spells to the burnings of erotic spells.

Obviously, the position of this study favors the latter. If the spells are using heat and inflammation in a metaphoric sense to stand for warm and acceptable emotional responses in both himself and his object, it is difficult to understand why the spell-caster would choose one of the more difficult, cumbersome, and potentially dangerous ritual modes to address and express these feelings. In such a case, the desiring person could simply have talked to friends, read poems, sung sad songs, etc.: the usual activities of the brokenhearted. As an ancient man, he might also have tried a course of baths or a change in diet; or even prayer to Aphrodite or Isis or any one of dozens of perfectly acceptable religious loci easily available to anyone in an ancient community, which was filled with religious avenues and therapeutic techniques of every kind.⁸⁸ The people reflected in or assumed by these spell texts are going to some risk, expense, and bother in the purchase of the spell⁸⁹ and all of the many substances that are usually required for its performance,⁹⁰ as well as in staying up all night to perform the rituals the texts describe. But as the previous discussions have suggested, for some individuals a desire so strong that it must be addressed might in itself be a problematic condition, beyond its own un-

⁸⁸It should be noted that while some of the preserved texts of neutral or beneficial erotic spells and aphrodisiacs sometimes suggest other means being brought to bear simultaneously, there are no such suggestions in the harmful spells.

⁸⁹From whatever source—Egyptian temple priest, or bookseller, etc.

⁹⁰Whether the required substances really are strange and exotic, such as "the hairs of a hamadryas baboon," or these exotic requirements are code for simple substances as suggested by PGM XII.401–444, is still an open question. However, even if the substances are simple, their preparations are elaborate; and the purchase of the spell itself was an expense.

pleasantness and frustration. To be seen arriving at, e.g., the Temple of Aphrodite with fillets in hand, to air feelings to the wrong person (remembering the multiple senses of both ξένοϛ and *amicus*) and other such acts could be potentially dangerous, the equivalent of a modern executive asking, in a job interview, about the company's policy toward drug addiction. Personal desires and wishes were not neutral, which is possibly why ancient medicine never developed a "talking cure" in the modern sense. The creation and success of the modern methods of confessional venting depends, in my opinion, on centuries of Christian conditioning to ideas of confession, humility, and salvation; the cure comes not only from expression, but also from the transference of the pain, onto Christ, or onto the analyst. Confessional ideas were present in Greco-Roman antiquity, but they were not mainstream; even today, when they are more mainstream, their employment in public varies greatly with social location.

The casters of harmful erotic spells may have felt their tension ease through the performance of their rituals, through unconscious projection of unpleasant feelings onto another person, as both Winkler and Gager point out.⁹¹ I find it significant that the mode of projection chosen, magic, is a private and secret one; this accords with the dangers of projection or indeed any expression of certain feelings for men in public life in the Greco-Roman city. In addition to this, the erotic spells may provide further psychological benefits, by providing a regimen, however counter-cultural, by which the spell-caster may in fact be able to gain control of his desire, or by providing a mirror for self-perception.

The longer and more complicated harmful erotic spells describe lengthy rituals with elaborate preparations requiring

⁹¹Winkler (*supra* n.8) 87–98; Gager 81–82. Neither Winkler nor Gager suggests that the spell-casting men were aware that they were engaged in therapeutic articulation, *contra* Brooten (*supra* n.8) 100.

careful attention to detail. To complete such ritual requirements, the caster would need self-control for a period of purification of several days,⁹² and concentration for the careful preparation of the materials. It is more than just ironic that a spell designed to satisfy an out-of-control man depends for its success on the degree of control he can muster. It is possible that with the motivation of finally getting the woman he desires, he will be able to do for an illicit reason that which he could not do simply for his own good. But this paradoxical requirement may also in itself be of enormous benefit to the frustrated lover,⁹³ through the effect of self-centering, concentration, and purification required before the performance of a ritual or a spell. The focus on the preparations might of itself create or restore an embattled sense of control; in this way, the preparations themselves may have obviated the need to go through with the incantation at all—equilibrium restored, mission accomplished. Additionally, purchase of a spell and the materials for casting it might in some cases represent a psychological threshold some may have been unwilling to cross, presenting his own irrationality to him in a sharp light.

However, these ideas of unconscious benefit explain neither what the spell's casters believed they were going to achieve through them that could justify the risk and bother, nor the choice of heating illnesses in the victim as the preferred method of bringing about the connection. As was suggested through the four trajectories followed earlier, illness can represent an advanced stage of development of a "harm" that is intrinsic to all

⁹² As in PGM VII.981–983, and many others as well.

⁹³ It is also of practical benefit to the spell-seller (if any) and to the general social belief in efficacious magic or ritual. Through the provision of elaborate preliminary procedures, an explanation is provided for the instances in which a ritual or a spell does not achieve its result, through the "infelicities" in the performance of the procedure; see Austin (*supra* n.63); Evans-Pritchard (*supra* n.20) 146–199; Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Form and Meaning of Magical Acts: A Point of View," in Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, edd., *Modes of Thought* (London 1973) 199–229.

forms of desire, in all its manifestations. The illnesses that desire can generate weaken the body, making it more vulnerable, both to other diseases and to more desires, because the focus of attention of the mind upon the body's suffering can distract whatever resistance the patient might otherwise bring to bear against the invasion of illness, emotion, or the effects of a spell. Even if the frustrated lovers reflected in the spell texts did not become physically ill, widespread knowledge of their unmanageable passion could result in a damaging loss of respect that could be every bit as harmful to reputation and career as an illness of several months' duration. The strength of the passions was the result of indulging the appetites of the body, each appetite strengthening the others and combining with them to delude the person into accepting the emotions as important and real; such a failure of judgment could be considered a reasonable predictor of other personal or moral failures to come. In a competitive world based on trust and reputation, such failures, if known, will be remembered and taken into account.

From this perspective, there was little effective difference between erotic desire and the craving for chocolate that we may feel despite knowing well that we are allergic to it. Romantic love was neither beneficial to or desired by the state; marriages were much better if arranged for reasons of inheritance or political connections.⁹⁴ Although the popular literature of this period betrays a wish that it could be otherwise, even these romance novels eventually end in marriages that, despite appearances at the beginning, are age- and class-appropriate, thereby creating a benefit to the state in the provision of the next generation of the elite.

That desire might create insomnia, anorexia, and irritability

⁹⁴ Ambivalence toward romantic love is also a feature of our own society, despite its rhetoric. Extreme and passionate feelings are regarded as dangerous and uncontrollable, and are associated with teen pregnancy, stalking, violence, suicide, and murder in the popular imagination, as has been the case at least since Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

seems obvious. But in addition, this survey of the cultural resonance attached to fever has suggested that a connection between fever or inflammation and these other "illnesses of desire" was also clear. If one measure of self-worth was the degree to which desire and its effects were eliminated, controlled, or concealed, then there can have been few legitimate, socially-sanctioned practical or religious ways (other than self-mastery, diet, and exercise) to eliminate ἔρως, and none to satisfy it. But when basic needs cannot be addressed by legitimate social and religious complexes, they usually do not simply disappear but rather go underground, and are addressed by religious forms that are hidden—in other words, magic.

These observations suggest two explanations for inflicting fever upon an object of affection, as a means of restoring lost self-esteem to the frustrated lover. First, by creating in his object an even higher degree of desire than he is experiencing, he effectively raises himself higher on the scale of mastery of ἔρως, by rendering someone else lower. Second, on a more practical level, the inflicting of illness, especially of this kind, may create a sufficient imbalance in the victim's humors to afflict her reason, to the point that she will accept him as a lover. This is probably not an either/or situation, but rather a case of two related ideas working together for the spell-caster in a particularly satisfying way.

Raising oneself by lowering someone else may strike us as petty and shameful, but in antiquity covert self-praise at the expense of others was an acceptable practice even among those who were celebrated for their wisdom and goodness. Such behavior was well represented in the large stock of jokes and stories used as examples:⁹⁵

This might be a good time to mention the story of Phryne. This woman was at a drinking party once; and they started playing

⁹⁵Gal. *Adhort.* 10 (I 120 M.), transl. P. N. Singer, *Galen: Selected Works* (New York 1997) 46.

one of those games where everyone takes it in turn to give a command to his drinking companions. Phryne had noticed that there were women present who had made themselves up with alkanet, white lead and seaweed. She ordered water to be brought; the women had to take some in their hands and dip their faces in it once, then immediately wipe them with a napkin. Phryne herself went first. The other women's faces were of course covered with slime, and they looked perfectly monstrous. But Phryne looked better than before: she alone had used no makeup, but relied on her natural beauty, without recourse to cosmetic tricks.

The background of this story, which Galen overlooks, is of course the obnoxious Phryne's pale and washed-out appearance relative to that of the blooming decorated women. Phryne starts out "low," and raises herself in two ways, correcting the deficits in her "natural beauty" by leveling the playing field, and concealing her own vanity with the same stroke by which she criticizes—and spotlights—theirs.

John J. Winkler argued that the erotic spells are aimed at creating in the victim the same symptoms that the spell-caster already feels;⁹⁶ in this sense the spells are reflexive and aimed at creating a reciprocal relationship. Although no extant spell makes any mention of the symptoms or condition of the spell-caster, our look at popular and medical ideas about the physical effects of unregulated desire does provide some support for the view that the symptoms wished upon the victim are related to his own. But I doubt that the goal is a strict reciprocity of emotion, unless we assume that the casters of these fever spells actually experienced their passions as a rise in body temperature. Much more likely, in the context of the scale of power and ἔργος, is that the spell-caster desires to create an even greater degree of ἔργος, and therefore of weakness and vulnerability, in the victim of the spell. This enables the lover to regain his place on the social (and internal) scale of prestigious self-control by

⁹⁶Winkler (*supra* n.8) 88–90.

effectively lowering someone else, the victim, and lowering her in a way that will be visible to others: illness. By weakening his "opponent," he strengthens himself. The actuality is that the victim has a greater control of ἔργος than the spell-caster, because she has resisted his charms. He is lower, she is "better." The goal of the spell is that the caster, like Phryne, not only gets his desire, but also is raised higher than his victim, by sending her not to his own level of desire, but beyond it, to the level of physical illness (or even death). It is an effective social remedy, as well as a personal one, however repellent to modern sensibilities.⁹⁷ It "works," because the context of love or ἔργος is not affectionate and egalitarian and well-wishing, but self-esteem, shame, identity, and power.

These concepts themselves have a context: in the public, reputation-based life of elite and bureaucratic-class men. The four linked discussions of the nature of desire and its relationship to divinity, wisdom, illness, and reputation reflect the concerns, pressures, and prejudices of elite males, who must depend almost exclusively upon reputation and relationships to survive in the only world they value. These considerations might have somewhat less impact on the livelihoods of farmers or even artisans, for whom the censure of family and friends for unacceptable thoughts and behavior would have less direct effect on their businesses⁹⁸ than a reputation for productivity or skill.⁹⁹

This study provides an inferential support for the intuitive connection of harmful erotic spells to elite or near-elite males. The medical and philosophical discussions of heating and de-

⁹⁷In ideology, if not in actuality. The strong power component of modern relationships is masked by our rhetoric, but revealed in the same way as in antiquity: by self-help manuals and by popular entertainment.

⁹⁸Though any farmer hoping to secure a loan or other form of patronage would certainly strive to appear thrifty, honest, and controlled.

⁹⁹Indeed, many of the philosophical and medical attitudes reflected in Galen, Cicero, and others are "popular" in the very limited sphere of elite males; but that is a subject for another paper.

sire clearly reflect and assume this audience and its needs, and application of these discussions to the diseases invoked in the harmful erotic spells has suggested similar patterns of thought. It should be said that this connection is not meant to extend to all preserved ritual types in the magical corpora; this literature is too various to be explained by any one thing. What is explained by this connection is the use of heating, fever, and inflammation in the lengthy and complicated erotic spells that cause harm. One would naturally prefer an inscription or two over a network of inferences; perhaps new discoveries will one day allow this connection to rest on a more concrete footing. But given the present state of sources, it is only by inference and echo that we can get a sense of the secret inner lives of Greco-Roman men. This is, in itself, a function of their shame.

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