



DAEMONOLOGY

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Introduction



Attested since Homer and used frequently in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, in the writings of Philo Judaeus, and many other ancient sources, the Greek word *daimon* originally meant “divine being.” In fact, in the early texts the distinction between *daimon* ‘divine being’ and *theos* ‘god’ is not always clear. By the later Hellenistic period, however, the distinction between *theos* ‘god’ and *daimon* ‘evil spirit’ had become fairly common. “Evil spirit” is the meaning that *daimon* has in Matthew 8:31, the only passage in the New Testament where it is clearly attested. Sometimes the noun *daimon* is qualified by the adjective *kakos* or *poneros*, both of which mean “bad,” “evil” (e.g., Iambl., *Myst.* 3.31.15), but on the whole there seems to be a kind of dissociation between the terms *theos* and *daimon*, the former being applied to the highest divine beings, the latter to various lower species. Given the nature of Greek mythology or theology, these higher gods could not always be considered uniformly “good” or “kind,” but they also could not be classified as persistently “evil.”

A related word, *daimonion* (which is neuter; *daimon* is masculine or feminine), had a similar history. In classical Greek usage (e.g., Eur., *Bacch.* v. 894) it could simply designate “a divine being,” but the tendency to differentiate it from *theos* is apparent in the charge made against Socrates that he introduced “strange [new] *daimonia*” in Athens (Xen., *Mem.* 1.1.1). Because Socrates himself explained his *daimonion* as an inner voice that warned him whenever he was about to do something wrong, it could not be considered simply an evil power, at least not within the Platonist tradition, for Plato states that “every *daimonion* is something in between a god and a mortal” (*Symp.* 202E). In fact, later Platonists such as Plutarch (*Dio* 2.3), and early Stoics as well (Chrysipp., *SVF* 2.338), felt it necessary to add the adjective *phaulos* ‘bad’ if they wanted to make it clear that they were speaking of an evil influence.

In popular usage such qualifications were apparently not necessary, for in the New Testament, as well as in the pagan texts, we hear of *daimonia*

that entered into persons and caused illness, especially mental illness. If an exorcist was able to drive out the *daimonion*, he was thought to have cured that person. *Daimonia* were supposed to live in deserted places (a ruined city is called a “habitation of daemons” in Revelation 18:2). The following concept seems to be behind this phrase. After a city has been destroyed by an enemy, its inhabitants killed or dragged away as slaves, only the former gods of the community—degraded to the rank of daemons—remain in the ruins. They are organized under the leadership of Beelzebub, or Beelzebul (Luke 11:15, 18–19), whose name is probably derived from Baal, the main god of the Philistines. The name itself could mean either “lord of the flies” or “lord of filth,” but the fact that Beelzebul (or Beelzebub) is the prince of daemons, from the Hebrew point of view, shows clearly that the supreme god of one culture has become the Satan of a hostile culture and that his subordinate gods have been degraded.

Such beings were worshiped by other nations as well (e.g., by the Persians and Babylonians) and were thought to be capable of performing miracles like the pagan deities that were demoted by the Christians. But an ordinary ghost, an apparition without tangible body, also could be called a *daimonion* (Ignatius, *To the Smyrn.* 3.2).

Another term, originally neutral, but later charged with emotion, is *angelos* ‘messenger’. In Homer, as well as in Luke 7:24, *angelos* is a human messenger sent out by a real person. But on Attic curse tablets,¹ “messengers” could be supernatural agents connected with the underworld, and the Neoplatonists associated them with gods and daemons: Porphyry, for example (*Marc.* 21), speaks of “divine angels and good daemons” when he means benign supernatural powers. At the same time, the term *messenger* was colorless enough in itself to allow all sorts of different interpretations. Depending on who it was who sent him, a spirit might be an “angel” or a “daemon.” The complexity was such that Iamblichus had to ask the question how one could distinguish among gods, archangels, angels, daemons, planetary rulers, and mere “souls,”² especially since the lower order of spirits occasionally posed as the higher ones. Iamblichus himself was reputed to have unmasked a bogus Apollo, conjured up as such by an Egyptian magician, but it turned out to be only the ghost of a gladiator.³ Thus, cases of mistaken identity in the world of supernatural beings were possible, and only very advanced theurgists were credited with the ability to distinguish clearly between a true theophany and the appearance of an ordinary ghost boosted temporarily to an exalted status by a fraudulent practitioner or simply as a result of mistaken identity.

The Nature of Daemons and the Early History of the Belief in Spirits

The belief in daemons seems to have originated in Mesopotamia. We are fairly well informed on the daemonology of the Babylonians.⁴ Apparently they organized daemons into armies, or hierarchies, and distinguished between categories—for example, field daemons, graveyard daemons, and so on. Illness was caused by daemonic possession and could be healed by exorcism. There were ways of protecting one's house against evil spirits. Similar theories and practices are attested in Egypt.⁵

Evil spirits, called *daimones*, *alastores*, and *Erinyes*, are well documented in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.⁶ It seems pointless to ask whether the dramatist himself believed in their existence: the story, as he told it, required them. They can be generated by murder itself or by the curse of its victim, as in Horace's fifth epode [see *no. 8*]. But, as in *Macbeth*, a murder that has not yet been committed sends *daimones* backward in time, as it were, to enter the heart of the murderer.

There is a close connection between the belief in fate and the belief in daemons: the daemons know future events long before they happen, because they are fated to happen long before human beings plan them or execute them. Hence, Plutarch associated daemons with oracles [see *nos. 92, 93, 94*]. We are dealing here with very ancient beliefs that the philosophers—Platonists and Stoics alike—tried to interpret “scientifically.”

A wide range of unexplained pathological conditions—epilepsy, insanity, even sleepwalking or the delirium of high fever—were interpreted as the work of evil spirits.⁷ Automatic speech, although perhaps not a “pathological” condition, made a much deeper impression on the observer than did most other paranormal phenomena: “A female automatist will suddenly begin to speak in a deep male voice; her bearing, her gestures, her facial expression are abruptly transformed; she speaks of matters quite outside her normal range of interests, and sometimes in a strange language or in a manner quite foreign to her normal character; and when her normal speech is restored, she frequently has no memory of what she said.”⁸ It is as if a power from above had taken over her body. Indeed, this is how ecstasy is described by Lucan [*no. 90*] and Seneca [*no. 88*].

The world of the ancients was populated by all sorts of spirits. Even if they did not take over a human body in order to express themselves or to work some mischief, contacts and communications could be established with them.⁹ But on the whole, the ancients believed that only the “unquiet dead”—that is, those who had died before their time, met with a violent death (being murdered or killed in battle), or been deprived of proper burial—were earthbound and readily available.¹⁰ Those were the

spirits the magicians used, because they were thought to be angry about their fate and therefore ruthless and violent.

Daemons and the Spirits of the Dead

The ancients' belief in daemons was closely connected with their attitude toward the dead, and something ought to be said about that here.¹¹ The dead were divided into several classes. There were, for instance, the dead of the family. They had a kind of shadowy existence, as the custom of feeding them at certain times shows. A mixture of oil, honey, and water was poured onto the grave, or even through a tube that led into the grave, while the living were having a picnic nearby.

How could the dead be in Hades and in their graves at the same time? The ancients apparently believed that only their shades (two-dimensional images of their former selves) went down to Hades, while their bones or their ashes retained, magically, a particle of the extinguished life force, at least for a time. Hence the theme of the "grateful dead," as expressed, for instance, by the Hellenistic poet Leonidas of Tarentum, in a bucolic epitaph (*Anth. Pal.* 7.657.11–12): "There are ways, yes, there are ways, in which the dead, even though they are gone, can return your favors." And in an anonymous epigram (*Anth. Pal.* 7.330) that cannot be dated, we hear of a man who built a tomb for himself and for his wife, so that "even among the dead he might have her love."

Perhaps the Greeks of the classical age had inherited two different concepts of survival and tried to reconcile them as best they could. In the fifth century B.C. a third concept appeared, that of the soul, the *psyche*, which ascends to heaven, as witnessed in the epitaph for the Athenians who fell in the battle of Potidaea (431 B.C.): "Heaven has received their souls, earth their bodies."¹² But *heaven* in Greek is *either* 'the upper air', as distinguished from *aer* 'the air we breathe'; it is also the divine element in the human soul. Incidentally, the soldiers who had died for their country were treated like the family dead, because the *polis* was an extended family and owed a collective duty to those who had sacrificed their lives for the community. Their names were registered, their deeds honored.

In general, the ancients also believed in a nameless, unidentified multitude of ghosts who had to be taken care of at least once a year, in Athens during the Anthesteria, the festival of flowers in spring, when pots of cooked fruits were offered to them.

Necromancy is defined as the art of predicting the future by means of communicating with the dead.¹³ The forms of communication vary, as the texts from Homer to Heliodorus show. As a technique, necromancy falls within the domain of magic (it is practiced by witches such as

Erichtho), but because it deals with the dead, it can also be discussed as part of daemonology, and because its aim is very often the revelation of future events, it is definitely a form of divination. This difficulty in classification shows once more how closely related the occult sciences were in antiquity. It is more or less an arbitrary decision to treat necromancy in this chapter.

The practice itself seems to be very old. We read in 1 Samuel 28:6ff. how King Saul in disguise consulted the “woman of En-dor,” although he himself had “made away with those who call up ghosts and spirits”—in other words, he had outlawed necromancy in his kingdom. At her visitor’s request the woman conjured up the ghost of Samuel, and as soon as she saw him, she knew the identity of her visitor, who apparently could only hear the ghost’s voice but did not actually see it. The ghost’s gloomy prediction was fulfilled the next day, and that is the dramatic finale of the First Book of Samuel. Manasseh, one of the last kings of Judah, practiced soothsaying and divination and dealt with ghosts and spirits (2 Kings 21:6); this must be an allusion to necromancy, and it is made clear that the Lord, because of these “abominable things,” brought disaster on Jerusalem and Judah. The Second Book of Kings ends soon afterward. From the references to necromancy in the Old Testament, one gains the impression that it was practiced commonly in other Near Eastern cultures, while it was anathema in Israel.

In Book 11 of the *Odyssey* [no. 52] Odysseus himself, instructed by Circe, plays the role of the necromancer, and the ceremony is performed with great dignity and compassion; there seems to be no stigma attached to it. It is perhaps significant, however, that Virgil felt it necessary to transform the theme in the *Aeneid*. Instead of conjuring up the dead, Aeneas descends into the underworld to visit them. His consultation with the Sibyl of Cumae and the rites he must perform contain magical elements,¹⁴ but the Sibyl herself is an ecstatic prophetess, comparable with the Pythia in Delphi; at the same time she acts as Aeneas’ guide through the horrors of the underworld. More than a consultation, Aeneas’ visit is the revelation of a whole philosophy of life; as such, it is comparable with an initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries.¹⁵

In historical times, necromancy was condemned. Plato, both in his *Republic* (364B–E) and in his *Laws* (905D–907D), rejected the idea that gods or daemons could be influenced by spells and rituals, and he prescribed severe penalties for anyone who practiced necromancy; he himself considered it fraudulent, and he was concerned with its harmful results (*Laws* 909B; 933A–E).¹⁶ During the years of Roman imperialism, there were heavy sanctions.¹⁷ In Cicero’s time a few Neo-Pythagoreans seem to have been attracted by necromancy, but in general it was consid-

ered a particularly loathsome form of magic. The dead themselves resented being disturbed, as we see from Lucan [no. 61] and Heliodorus [no. 74], and since necromancers were, almost by necessity, body snatchers, they came in conflict with the laws against desecrating tombs.¹⁸

The great necromantic scene in Aeschylus' *Persians* [no. 54] is quite different from the ritual in the *Odyssey*. Perhaps it reflects Greek notions of a Persian ritual. Here, after the defeat of Salamis, the widow of King Darius, assisted by the Chorus (representing the Persian nobility), conjures up the ghost of her husband to find out what caused the catastrophe and what course of action the Persians ought to take. Thus, necromancy, retrospective as well as divinatory, was practiced at the Persian court, presumably as a religious ritual, but Persia was a foreign country, and we have seen that, for the Greeks, the Persian *magi* were not only priests but also sorcerers.

Both Seneca and his nephew, Lucan, wrote under Nero, who was interested in magic, especially in necromancy.¹⁹ It is difficult to reconstruct from their poetic accounts any historical reality, and it seems doubtful that either Seneca or Lucan ever saw a real necromancer in action. Both poets stress the sinister, shocking, revolting aspects of such ceremonies, Lucan even more than his uncle. In addition to the general atmosphere of horror, Lucan introduces some pseudoscientific speculation on how to revive a corpse. His superwitch, Erichtho, pours boiling blood into the body of a soldier who had recently been killed, but she also injects many other substances. Here we may well have the prototype of Frankenstein, for Mary Shelley probably knew of this passage through her husband, a great admirer of the Roman poet.

Plutarch [no. 66] refers to a regular oracle of the dead (*psychomanteion*), probably near Cumae in southern Italy, but there is no elaborate ceremony: the procedure reminds one of the incubation rites in the temple of Asclepius at Epidauros. The person who wished to get in touch with the dead fell asleep in the sanctuary and had a dream or vision. The element of shock and horror is absent, and yet, in a remote sense, this, too, is necromancy.²⁰

In a necromantic scene from the *Aethiopica*, Heliodorus [no. 74] uses familiar elements but adds several new twists: the Egyptian witch performs the ceremony on the body of her own son, who reproaches her for it; one of the involuntary eyewitnesses is a priest, who should never be exposed to such rites; the witch turns nasty and tries to kill the intruders, but ends up killing herself instead.

In necromantic ceremonies the dead are compelled by the magician to appear, but cases of spontaneous possession of a living person by a dead one are discussed by pagan theurgists and by Jewish and Christian

writers.²¹ The main controversy seems to be whether the “daemonic agents” are really the evil spirits of the dead or are actually independent daemons. Obviously, the distinction is difficult to draw, especially since the “agents” tended to veil their identity or even to lie about it until forced by the exorcist to confess their true name and origin.²²

Heroes and Hero Worship

Heroes form a special class among the dead. Some heroes were the ghosts of kings of old,²³ who were considered powerful even after death, at least for a time, because they had been powerful in life. Others, like Achilles or Odysseus, who had ruled over small kingdoms, were worshiped as heroes because of their glorious deeds. The distinction could easily become blurred. The fact is that there were many heroes’ tombs, *heroa*, all over Greece and parts of Asia Minor. Some of them became objects of a cult that seems to have continued from the end of the heroic age down to classical times, but after a while the worship ceased, and finally even the location of the tombs was forgotten, until they were rediscovered almost in their ancient splendor, like the royal graves of Mycenae.

Historical persons could be heroized; Alexander the Great is an example,²⁴ and worship of the Roman emperors was a form of hero worship. But even philosophers after their death sometimes became cult figures for the members of their schools: Plato and Epicurus might be mentioned.

The hero belongs to the local community that he protects, but his power does not really extend beyond those boundaries. Though usually benevolent to the people of the community, he could turn into a ghost or, like a daemon, cause epilepsy or mental illness.²⁵

Ghosts and Related Phenomena

Tales about haunted houses seem to have been as popular in antiquity as they are today,²⁶ and the belief that spirits dwell at their place of death or burial is no doubt much older than Plato (*Phd.* 81C–D):²⁷

You know the stories about souls that, in their fear of the invisible, which is called “Hades,” roam about tombs and burial grounds in the neighborhood of which, as they say, ghostly phantoms of souls have actually been seen; just the sort of apparition that souls like that might produce, souls that are not pure when they are released [from the body] but still keep some of that visible substance, which explains why they can be seen . . . it is clearly not the souls of the good but those of the wicked that are compelled to wander about such

places, as the penalty for a bad way of life in the past. They must continue to wander until they are once more chained up in a body.

This belief survived throughout antiquity and was accepted by early Christians.

It is not easy to differentiate between ghosts, heroes, and daemons, for they all have something in common. Ghosts, though mostly evil, are associated with their tomb (or the place where they died), just as heroes are. Various Greek ghosts have names (Empusa, Gorgo, Lamia, Mormo) that seem to underline their daemonic character; Ephialtes, for example, is a ghostlike nightmare daemon.

Vampires, a special kind of ghost, are not clearly attested in ancient literature. But it seems that Lamia, who will sooner or later eat her human lover, has vampirelike features, and the theme is common in Greek folklore. Herodotus says that Periander had sexual relations with his wife after he had killed her (accidentally, it seems), and the story is repeated by Nicolaus of Damascus (*FgrH* 90F58 Jacoby), probably following another early source, because Nicolaus adds “from love.” But this may be a case of necrophilia. Phlegon of Tralles (under Hadrian) tells the story of a vampire in a collection entitled *Strange Stories*, which was used by Goethe in his wonderful ballad *The Bride of Corinth* [no. 56].

There is no pre-Christian evidence for the “poltergeist” phenomenon,²⁸ nor do we ever hear of the *âme en peine* ‘the soul in pain’ who is being punished for a crime committed in life and who sometimes can be redeemed by a prayer. The idea is certainly not alien to the Platonic concept of ghosts; in fact, it may be a Christian variation of it.

The greatest collection of ghost stories that has come down to us from antiquity is the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (pope from 590 to 604).²⁹ The persons involved are all contemporaries, known to Gregory or his friends, and the ghosts often announce that they suffer in purgatory or that they have been relieved by prayers or masses.

The Greek word *phasma* is usually translated as “apparition” or “phantom” (see Hdt. 4.15: *phasma anthropou* ‘spectral appearance of a man’, etc.). Such apparitions have been reported over the centuries and they have taken on various forms: in Lucian’s *Ship* one of the characters has seen Hecate at noon; in Philostratus’ *Heroicus* someone has seen Protesilaus and his companions, and someone else has witnessed the Giants on the Phlegrean fields.

The actual substance of such apparitions or phantoms was discussed by the Neoplatonists. To them, as Dodds points out, the “materialization” of immaterial beings presented a difficult problem.³⁰ Among the solu-

tions offered, we may mention that of Proclus (Commentary on Plato's *Rep.* 1.39.1ff.): what we see is not the god himself but an emanation from him, partly mortal, partly divine, and even this we do not see with our physical eyes but with the eyes of our astral body, according to the principle "like is perceived by like."

Some daemons are close to the gods themselves. They might be called "angels" in the Jewish or Christian sense. They can be associated with planets and fixed stars and, like those heavenly bodies, with plants and minerals on earth. Thus, the "sympathy" between stars and earthly organisms or objects that is part of the astrological doctrine could be combined with daemonology. The lower a daemon is placed in the hierarchy, the more malevolent he may be presumed to be, mischievous by nature and at times inclined to play nasty tricks. Some of these daemons like warm places but hate the light; hence, they look for human bodies to enter.

Black magic is essentially the technique of conjuring or summoning up one of these lower, nonincarnated daemons, arousing his or her anger, and channeling that anger in the direction of a victim. In ancient times this could be a risky business for the magician himself, and he usually had to take all sorts of precautions. Unlike the theurgist, the common magician did not attempt to influence the higher gods; he was satisfied with daemons of a lower rank; these may have been fallen deities who once had enjoyed great prestige, but who now were considered barely good enough for the everyday practical requirements of a sorcerer.³¹ We do hear, however, of the invocation of heroes such as Orpheus (*PGM* VII.451) or Homer (Apion of Alexandria, under Tiberius, claimed he had done this in order to ask the great poet about his real parents and birthplace).

Philosophers on Daemons

Daemonology became part of philosophy in the school of Plato, especially with Xenocrates, who succeeded Plato's direct successor, Speusippus, as head of the school (339–314 B.C.). There can be little doubt that the traditions concerning Socrates' *daimonion* had something to do with this great, absorbing interest, whether or not Socrates himself actually thought of that "inner voice" as a kind of being. "I seemed to hear a voice," Socrates is made to say in the *Phaedrus* (242B), but this voice never offered positive advice; it always stopped him from doing something wrong, as if it were an "inward sense of inhibition" (F. W. H. Myers). Nor was it a great flash, a spectacular vision of the kind that great religious

leaders (Moses, Jesus) experienced; it was more like a small light that would manifest itself and then go away.

In later Platonism, Socrates' *daimonion* was interpreted as a guardian angel or spiritual guide; according to the modern view, as expressed by Dodds but foreshadowed in Hermias,³² the *daimonion* could be called the suprarational personality that controls the whole of our lives, including involuntary functions such as dreaming. Socrates' accusers certainly chose to interpret the *daimonion* as a strange god—hence the charge of “impiety” made against Socrates. What Plato thought about it is not quite clear. In the myths of the *Phaedo* (107D–E) and the *Republic* (617D, 620D–E) he speaks of guardian daemons who accompany a man through life, know his innermost thoughts, his most secret actions, and, after death, act as his advocates or accusers before the throne of judgment.³³ These guardian daemons are linked by Apuleius (*De Genio Socr.* 154) with Socrates' *daimonion*, but the connection may have been made before Apuleius, and it is not inconceivable that Plato, in his “unwritten doctrine” (i.e., his oral teaching, which was reserved for his most trusted disciples), gave an interpretation along these lines.

Aristotle (who remained a Platonist in some respects) has been called “the father of scientific daemonology.” His theory of the subordinate gods of the planetary spheres seems to anticipate the daemonology of Plutarch and Apuleius and even Iamblichus, but some of it may be part of the doctrine of the Academy to which Aristotle belonged for twenty years. Here, as in other areas, Aristotle may simply have formulated some ideas that had been discussed earlier by Plato and his most intimate disciples.

Guardian Spirits

In the Hellenistic period, the belief in a kind of guardian angel, a “good daemon” (*agathodaimon*), was fairly common. Some also believed in an “evil spirit” (*kakodaimon*), but Menander, in one of his plays (frag. 714 Sandbach [= 550–51 Kock]), rejects this as a poor excuse for one's own shortcomings. “To each human being is assigned at the moment of his birth a good spirit, his guide through the mysteries of life. We should not believe that the spirit is evil and can harm our lives; he is good, and there is no evil in him. Every god must be good. But those who are bad themselves, who have bad characters and make a muddle out of their lives, managing everything badly through their own foolishness [text uncertain] . . . they make a divine being responsible and call it ‘bad,’ while they are actually bad themselves.”

Pagans, Christians, and Skeptics on Daemons

Under the influence of Xenocrates, Plutarch developed a complex daemonology that, in many points, is close to that of Apuleius³⁴ and can be said to represent a kind of Platonic *koine*. According to Plutarch (*De Genio Socr.* 589B), daemons are spiritual beings who think so intensely that they produce vibrations in the air that enable other spiritual beings (i.e., other daemons), as well as highly sensitive men and women, to “receive” their thoughts, as through antennae or vibrations like those coming from a lyre. Thus the phenomena of clairvoyance, prophecy, and the like can be explained.

Plutarch’s tendency, especially in the treatise *On the Ceasing of Oracles*, is to assign to daemons some of the functions traditionally assigned to the gods. Unlike the gods, daemons grow old and, after many centuries, die. Thus he explains the fact that the great oracles of the ancient world have declined: daemons, not gods, were in charge of them, and these daemons are now old and dying. In his essay *On the Ceasing of Oracles* (419B) Plutarch tells the famous story of the death of the great Pan: Thamus, the Egyptian pilot of a ship, had been told by a mysterious voice to make the announcement, when passing a certain spot, that “the great Pan is dead.” He did this, and the most pitiful sounds of mourning were heard at once. The meaning of the story is fairly obvious: now that the great daemon Pan was dead, the lesser daemons realized that their lives would soon come to an end.³⁵

The “pagan theologians” (probably some Neoplatonist theurgists) quoted by Eusebius in *Preparation of the Gospel* 4.5 divide the world into four classes of higher beings: gods, daemons, heroes, and souls. The sublunar sphere is the region of the daemons. The gods generally control them, but there are spells by which an unnamed daemon can be used to threaten the gods themselves. Thus daemons can take the place of gods, and it is essentially up to the magician to decide who is more powerful than whom. In the end, as Eusebius points out, the fourfold division breaks down, and there is evidence of other classifications.

Daemons could become visible, but often they manifested their presence by a sign. Philostratus, in *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6.27, tells the story of the ghost of an Ethiopian satyr who was very amorous and pursued the women of a village. Apollonius set up a trap—a trough full of wine—and though the ghost remained invisible, the wine was seen to disappear from the trough.

For centuries, Christians continued to believe to a certain degree in the reality, the power, of the pagan gods. They were not as powerful as

God the Father and the Son, but they had to be reckoned with as the evil spirits they were now thought to be. Ideally, if you were a good Christian, Christ would protect you, just as pious Jews might feel safe from magicians and the influence of the stars. Still, those powers were there, and under certain circumstances one might be at their mercy.

Wherever we discover the belief in daemons and daemonic possession, we also find the belief in the technique of exorcism. In antiquity, exorcism was practiced by Egyptians,³⁶ Jews,³⁷ and Greeks,³⁸ and the Christians found it useful.³⁹

Not everyone, however, accepted these beliefs. Again, Lucian represents the voice of skepticism. In his *Lovers of Lies* (pars. 29ff.), a Pythagorean philosopher by the name of Arignotus is introduced. He had read a large number of Egyptian books on magic (corresponding to our magical papyri, no doubt), and he apparently was able to liberate a house from a daemon by talking to the daemon in Egyptian; elsewhere in *The Lovers of Lies* (par. 17) a Syrian exorcist drives daemons out of the bodies of “lunatics,” and someone actually witnesses one coming out, all black and sooty. Needless to say, these stories are reported tongue-in-cheek. But the fact that the Church accepted the reality of daemons, of daemonic possession and the efficacy of exorcism, shows how people’s minds were literally in the clutches of fear, and how, in the absence of medical knowledge, a kind of psychotherapy, administered by the Church, had to be developed. Benedict (c. A.D. 480–543) was reputed to be the most successful *effugator daemonum*, and his medal is worn to this day as an amulet against evil spirits.

Ancient Amulets

Amulets were worn not only to protect the person from the powers of evil but also to assure good health, success, and prosperity. Most ancient amulets or talismans are made of stone or metal, but specific charms and spells could also be written on scraps of papyrus, which were rolled or folded to be worn.

In their earliest and simplest form, amulets were probably strings or narrow bands tied around the neck, an arm, an ankle, or across the body. Various additions then were improvised or elaborated by specialists. The wearing of jewelry almost certainly originated in this custom. A precious gem or a beautiful necklace may be viewed as a highly developed, artistic form of a primitive amulet, even though its function is mainly aesthetic, no longer protective or magical. Similarly, scents were worn originally as a protection. Daemons could be extremely sensitive to smells.

Certain precious or semiprecious stones had special powers, and a whole body of precepts developed from this belief. Part of it is preserved in texts entitled *Lithika* (*About Stones*). The amethyst (literally “remedy against drunkenness”) was supposed to protect the wearer against the unpleasant consequences of heavy drinking—perhaps because of its color. Other gems had a more active function: not only did they protect, they could also establish contacts with superior powers. How this was done is not completely clear—perhaps by warming them in the hand, holding them in the mouth, or sniffing them.

The magical papyri offer a great deal of information on the design of amulets and the style of their inscriptions. This seems to have changed very little over the centuries. One section of the Paris papyrus (PGM IV.256ff.) gives precise directions for making an amulet (*phylakterion*): on a thin silver plate (*leptis*) a sacred name containing a hundred letters is to be inscribed with a bronze stylus. The finished amulet is to be worn around the neck on a thong made of donkey leather. It is interesting that the use of a bronze tool is prescribed, at a time when everybody used tools made of iron. This rule, which we see observed in magic and religion throughout antiquity, probably means that we are dealing with rituals that go back to an age when bronze was the most “advanced” metal (as opposed to stone and wood).

By their very nature as a protective device, all amulets would seem to represent “white magic,” and it is hard to imagine a person who would wear a curse tablet around the neck. And yet some Greco-Egyptian amulets clearly express the wish to hurt another person. Were they intended to be used in a ritual, or was the desire to destroy an enemy “so passionately felt that the person [wished] . . . to be constantly reminded of it”?⁴⁰

Once the amulet was crafted, a ritual of consecration (*apotelesma*, *kathierosis*, *telete*) had to be performed over it, in analogy to the consecration of cult objects and holy substances in religion. Apparently, this was not always necessary. The mere carving of a suitable design and the addition of letters or words could be considered an act of “consecration” (magical enhancement through ritual), or the crafting was a ritual in itself, because certain words were spoken during the process. Of course, the very act of writing or carving was, to the ignorant and illiterate, a kind of magic.

Many people probably wore their amulet every day, others perhaps only when they felt the need for extra protection, going to war or embarking on a voyage or feeling sick. A story about Pericles, the Athenian statesman, provides an example of the latter. During his last illness, a friend visited him and asked him how he was. Pericles pointed to the

amulets that had been hung about him, implying that there was not much hope; otherwise he would not have let the women try this ultimate remedy in which he hardly believed himself.

The chariot races in the circus and other public events provide good examples for the use of amulets. Before and during the races, emotions ran high, and both the charioteers and their horses were the target of curse tablets. The teams had their fans and support groups, and large bets were involved. That the charioteers wore amulets can be taken for granted, but their horses, too, were hung with protective devices, such as little bells; they are clearly visible on frescoes and sculptures depicting scenes in the circus.

The original function of the bell was to protect the wearer from evil spirits. This explains not only the cowbells still in use today in the Swiss Alps but also the function of the church bells that summon the faithful: originally, their metallic sound was meant to protect the faithful from the daemons, the demoted deities of paganism. All daemons fear the sound of metal.

A woman who puts on her jewelry and perfume on a Sunday morning to go to church to the sound of the bells does not realize that, in terms of ancient magic, she is protected by three powerful amulets.

Daemonology existed as a “pure” science, without any application to magic, but on the whole, it seems to have been destined for practical use, not for speculation alone. And yet, just like alchemy, daemonology also had its mystic, contemplative side. There must have been a certain fascination in considering the ranks and hierarchies of daemons, in pronouncing their fantastic names. Platonists, such as Plutarch, who spent a great deal of their creative energies in thinking and writing about daemons, were certainly not magicians or exorcists; on the other hand, this part of their metaphysical doctrine was more than just an intellectual exercise; in a sense it helped them understand the forces that were purported to control life.

NOTES

1. E. Ziebarth, in *Nachr. Gesellsch. Wiss. Gött.*, 1899, pp. 105ff.
2. Iambl., *Myst.* 2.3; Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, pp. 209–10.
3. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 210.
4. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, pp. 302ff.
5. G. van der Leeuw, *La Religion dans son essence* (Paris, 1948), pp. 129ff., 236–37.
6. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, pp. 55–56.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 195. Dodds refers to T. G. Oesterreich's important work *Possession, Demoniactal and Other*, trans. D. Ibbetson (New York, 1930).

9. Only the Epicureans and the Skeptics seem to have denied *ex cathedra* the possibility of communicating with the ghosts of the dead.

10. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 206.

11. Dodds discusses the ancient belief that some human souls might after death be promoted to the rank of daemons (ibid., p. 209, n. 1).

12. The epitaph was published by W. Peek in *Griechische Versinschriften* (Berlin, 1955), 1:8–9.

13. Cf. the account given by F. Cumont, *Lux Perpetua* (Paris, 1949), pp. 97ff.; and Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 207.

14. See F. L. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis* (Oxford, 1900), pp. 44–45. Virgil was considered a sorcerer in the Middle Ages; see D. Comparetti, *Virgilio nel medio evo* (Florence, 1872).

15. G. Luck, in *American Journal of Philology* 94 (1973): 147ff. This was Bishop Warburton's theory, rejected by Gibbon but not at all improbable.

16. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 117.

17. T. Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (Leipzig, 1899), p. 642; Barb, in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Momigliano, pp. 102ff.; Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 207.

18. Brown, in Douglas, *Witchcraft: Confessions and Accusations*; Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 207.

19. Suet., *Nero* 34.4.

20. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 111; Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 207, n. 3.

21. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 157, n. 2, quotes Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 2.2.6, and other testimonies.

22. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, pp. 208–9; Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, is a very good treatment.

23. Not all became heroes, as Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 153, suggests; there seems to be a difference between Atreus, who, though not a very admirable character, was once a powerful king, and Heracles, who earned the right to be worshiped.

24. See Luc., *Phars.* 10.20ff.

25. Some heroes may be “faded gods”—that is, powers who were originally divine but who, unlike the immortal gods, had died and were worshiped at their tombs rather than in temples, as the gods were. But the ritual surrounding the worship of these heroes seems to have been different from the normal worship of the dead.

26. Pliny, *Ep.* 7.27; Lucian, *The Lovers of Lies*, pars. 30–31.

27. On the Babylonian belief in ghosts, see Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, pp. 309ff.

28. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 158.

29. E. Bevan, *Sibyls and Seers* (London, 1929), p. 95.

30. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 205.

31. J. Leipoldt and S. Morenz, *Heilige Schriften* (Leipzig, 1953), p. 187.

32. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, p. 192, n. 5, offers testimonies from the later Platonist tradition.
33. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), p. 320.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 216ff., 17ff.
35. See G. A. Gerhard, in *Sitzb. Heidelb. Akad.*, 1915; Gerhard, in *Wiener Studien* 37 (1915): 323ff. and 38 (1916): 343ff.
36. On exorcism in Hellenized Egypt, see Cumont, *L' Egypte des astrologues*, pp. 167ff.
37. See Joseph., *Jewish Antiquities* 8.5.2, on a case of exorcism performed in the presence of the emperor Vespasian.
38. Philostr., *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 3.38, 4.30.
39. See K. Thraede, in *RAC* 7 (1969), cols. 44ff. The *Rituale Romanum* is still the official handbook of the Roman Catholic Church for states of possession and the ritual of exorcism.
40. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, p. 17.

Texts



52

The earliest extant description of a necromantic ceremony is found in Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey*. It is the model for Aeneas' descent to the underworld in Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid* and the magical operation of the witch Erichtho in Book 6 of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. Unlike Erichtho, Odysseus is not a professional, but he follows the instructions of a "witch" (actually a minor goddess), Circe, as Homer makes clear (*Od.* 10.487ff.).

The ditch that Odysseus must dig is apparently not very deep, but it seems to serve as an access to and, afterward, an exit from Hades. Around it the hero pours libations—milk, honey, wine, and later (not specifically mentioned) the blood of a ram. The sacrificial animal must be black in order to alert the heavenly gods that this offering is not intended for them, but rather for the deities of the underworld.

As might be expected, the ghost of the last person to die is the first to appear, presumably because it has not yet found its permanent place in Hades or may not yet have been admitted to Hades, since the body has not been properly buried.

The ghosts are eager to drink from the blood of the ram in the ditch, to regain, at least for a short time, some semblance of life, but Odysseus guards with his sword the precious substance and saves it for the ghost of the great seer Tiresias. As soon as Tiresias appears, Odysseus puts away his sword, and after the seer has delivered his prophecy, the other shades are allowed to drink just a little of the blood, Odysseus' mother, Anticleia, first. What she says helps us understand how Homer and his contemporaries viewed death: as the separation of body and soul.

Both Anticleia and Tiresias speak as if Odysseus has actually descended into Hades. This is strange, for he has been standing all the time right there, near the pit, but perhaps, by magical substitution, the pit symbolizes the underworld. Homer is showing us two "truths" that seem to contra-

dict each other: How can Odysseus at the same time go to the underworld and remain above ground? Because, through magic, he descends symbolically, or because a part of him actually descends while his body remains above?

In the end, Homer's Odysseus, like Dr. Faustus in Goethe's drama, is granted visions of the beautiful heroines of Greek myth whom he could not have known before because they had died long ago. Here we detect Homer's sense of humor: his hero, who was so strongly attracted to living women, is allowed to enjoy, as a special privilege, at least a glimpse of some famous beauties of the past.

Homer, *Odyssey* 11.12–224

The sun went down, and all the paths across the sea were in darkness. Our ship had reached the limits of the deep Ocean; the nation of the Cimmerians lives there, and they have a city, all wrapped in mist and clouds. Never does the Sun shine upon them and look at them with his beams, not [in the morning,] when he climbs up the starry sky, nor [in the evening,] when he turns back from heaven toward the earth. Gloomy night is spread over these poor people.

After we had landed there, we beached the ship and took out our sheep. We walked along the Ocean shore until we came to the spot that Circe had described.

There Perimedes and Eurylochos held the victims while I drew my sharp sword from my hip to dig a ditch about a cubit long and a cubit deep. Around it I poured libations for all the dead, first of milk and honey, then of sweet wine, and finally of water; on top I sprinkled shiny barley. On my knees I then prayed to the dead, those insubstantial beings, and promised them after my return to Ithaca the sacrifice of a heifer, the best to be found on my estate, and a funeral pyre full of precious things. Especially for Tiresias I promised to sacrifice a ram, all black, a choice male from my flocks.

After praying to the nation of the dead and making my vows to them, I took the sheep and cut off their heads over the ditch in such a way that the dark blood dripped into it. From the depths of Erebus flocked the souls of the dead, the deceased: young women and adolescents, old men who had suffered a great deal, delicate maidens who never got over their first sad experience, soldiers who had been wounded by bronze spears and still held their bloodstained weapons. They all crowded around the trench, coming from different directions, and their wailing was weird. The fear that makes one pale overwhelmed me. I ordered my companions to hurry up and skin the sheep that lay there, slaughtered by my merciless sword, and burn them, praying to the gods [of the underworld], great

Hades and terrible Persephone. I myself sat there, holding my sharp sword that I had drawn from the hip, to prevent the dead, those insubstantial beings, from coming any closer to the blood until I had my answer from Tiresias.

The first that came was the soul of my companion Elpenor, for he had not yet been buried deep in the wide earth. We had to leave his body, unlamented and unburied, in the house of Circe, because there was urgent work to be done. When I saw him I felt sorry for him and began to cry and said to him quickly:

“Elpenor, how did you get down into the gloomy darkness? You were faster on foot than I on my dark ship.”

I said this, and he answered in a wailing voice:

“Divine son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus: the harsh verdict of a god and far too much wine were my downfall. I had stretched out on Circe’s roof, and it did not occur to me to step on the long ladder to climb down again. Instead, I fell headlong from the housetop and broke one of the vertebrae in my neck. My soul went down to Hades. But now, on my knees before you, I beg you—in the name of those who are not here, your wife, your father who cared for you when you were a baby, and in the name of Telemachus, whom you had to leave behind in your house all by himself—I beg you, my lord, to remember me. I know that once you leave from here, from the house of Hades, you will steer your well-built ship to the island Aeaëa. Please do not leave me behind, unlamented and unburied, forsaking me, lest I become for you a tool of divine retribution, but cremate me with all the weapons that I still have, and heap over me, at the edge of the foaming sea, a mound, so that future generations may remember an unhappy man. Please do this for me, and fix on my tomb the oar that in life I pulled among my companions.”

Thus he spoke, and I said to him in reply:

“Yes, my poor friend, I shall take care of everything and see that it is done.”

So the two of us sat there, carrying on a sad conversation, I with my sword held away from me, over the blood, while the phantom of my friend, on the other side [of the ditch], had a great deal to say.

Then came the soul of my dead mother, Anticleia, daughter of noble Autolycus; when I had left for sacred Ilion she had been alive. I felt sorry when I saw her and began to cry. Nevertheless, even though it hurt very much, I would not let her come closer to the blood; first I had to consult Tiresias.

And the soul of Tiresias of Thebes came, holding a scepter of gold. He recognized me and said:

“Divine son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus, what made you leave the

sunlight, my poor friend, and come here to visit the dead in their joyless place? Please get up from that pit and turn away your sharp sword so that I may drink the blood and tell the truth.”

So he spoke. I drew back and pushed my sword with the silver hilt into its scabbard.

The great seer drank the dark blood and then said to me:

“You have come, glorious Odysseus, in order to be told about a pleasant way home, but a god will make it hard for you. I do not think that you will escape the attention of the Earth-Shaker, who still holds a grudge against you and hates you because you blinded his son. Yet in spite of this, though suffering great hardship, you may get there, if you and your companions choose to control yourselves when your well-made ship first comes to the island Thrinacia, finding a refuge from the dark-blue sea. You will find there at pasture the oxen and the fat sheep of Helios, who sees everything and hears everything. Now, if you think of your safe return and leave those alone, you may very well get back to Ithaca, though under great hardships, but if you harm them, I would predict ruin to your ship and your companions. And even if you escape, you will come home after a delay and in sad shape, in someone else’s ship, having lost all your companions. You will find trouble in your house, arrogant men who eat up your livelihood, suitors of your godlike wife who try to win her with gifts. You will surely punish them for their violence when you come home, but once you have killed these pretenders in your house, either by deceit or openly with your sharp sword of bronze, you must take up your well-made oar and go away until you come to men who know nothing of the sea, who eat food that is not spiced with salt, who know nothing of ships whose cheeks are painted red and nothing of well-made oars that act as wings for ships. I shall give you an obvious clue that you cannot possibly miss: when you meet another traveler who says that you carry a winnow fan on your handsome shoulder, then you must stick your well-made oar into the ground and offer a splendid sacrifice to the lord Poseidon: a ram, a bull, and a boar who covers sows. And then you can go home again and offer splendid hecatombs to the immortal gods who rule over the wide heaven, to all of them in order. Death will come to you from the sea, and it will not be violent at all, but it will end your life when comfortable old age has worn you out. You will be surrounded by your prosperous people. I am telling you the truth.”

This he said, and I spoke to him in reply:

“Tiresias, clearly the gods themselves have spun this [destiny of mine]. But come now, tell me something, and give me a true answer: I see here the soul of my dead mother, but she sits in silence near the blood, and she

has not yet deigned to look at her son or to speak to him. Tell me, sir, what will make her recognize my presence?"

This I said, and he quickly gave me this reply:

"It is easy for me to tell you this and make you understand: If you allow any of the dead, the deceased, to come near the blood, he will give you a true answer; but if you begrudge it to him, he will go back to the place where he came from."

Having said this and delivered his prophecy, the soul of the lord Tiresias went back into the palace of Hades. I waited patiently right there until my mother had come and drunk the dark-colored blood. At once she recognized me, and lamenting she quickly said to me:

"My child, how did you get here, under the fog and the darkness, still alive? This is a hard experience for the living. Large rivers and frightful waters lie in between: first of all the Ocean, which cannot be crossed on foot; one needs a well-made ship. Have you come here from Troy, with your companions and your ship, after wandering for a long time? Have you not yet been in Ithaca and seen your wife in your palace?"

[Odysseus then asks his mother how she died; she answers that it was her longing for him that shortened her life.]

So she spoke, but I debated within myself and wanted to take the soul of my dead mother in my arms. Three times I started out because I had this urge to take her in my arms, and three times she slipped out of my hands like a shadow or a dream, and the pain in my heart grew even sharper. I said to her quickly:

"Mother, why do you not wait for me when I want to embrace you, so that even in Hades we can hold each other and share the sad pleasure of mourning? Or has noble Persephone sent me a shadow to make me grieve and lament even more?"

So I spoke. My queenly mother answered at once:

"No, no, my child, unfortunate beyond all other mortals! Persephone, the daughter of Zeus, is not deceiving you; this is the law for all mortals when they die: the sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones together, but the force, the violence, of the fire consumes all that as soon as the spirit has left the white bones, and like a dream the soul flutters and flies away. You must work your way back to the light as soon as possible and find out all of this, so that you can tell it afterward to your wife."

[Before he leaves, Odysseus is allowed to see the ghosts of many beautiful heroines of Greek myth.]

In his survey of myths explaining the early history of the world, Hesiod (c. 800 B.C.) describes five successive generations or races: the golden, the silver, the bronze, the heroic, and the iron. He knows that he lives in the last of these, and that the one before, the heroic age, is but a distant memory. The golden race did not completely disappear but lived on in the form of “kind spirits” or “benevolent daemons,” a privilege granted to it by Zeus, who also assigned to them certain functions and areas; thus they act as his invisible agents or ambassadors.

Zeus in his wrath wiped out the silver race because it refused to worship the Olympian gods. If we may judge from Near Eastern parallels, it would appear that these people, like the people of Israel at times, worshiped foreign gods, perhaps those of the Egyptians, and neglected their own. Yet, for some obscure reason, the “spirits” of the people of the silver age were worshiped by subsequent generations of Greeks, although they occupied a lower level than did the “kind spirits” mentioned above.

Thus Hesiod seems to establish a hierarchy: (1) the Olympian gods; (2) the spirits of the upper order, who are good; and (3) the spirits of a lower order, who are basically bad. The fact that the Greeks worshiped the spirits of the lower order, too, should not surprise us. They could blame these spirits for all the bad things that happened in the world and so exonerate the gods and the daemons of the upper order. Thus, even at this early stage of Greek religion and folklore, a simple system of theodicy was in place. It is also clear that the phrase “blessed spirits of the second rank” is something of a euphemism. People were afraid of calling them by their real name, that is, “evil spirits,” just as they were afraid of calling the Furies by their real name, substituting the term *Eumenides* (“the kind ones”) instead and paying them due tribute in order to appease them.

At any rate, these are the two classes of daemons that Hesiod reckons with in the following text, and his authority was such that the distinction was accepted by subsequent generations and even became the basis of philosophical systems. Hesiod is quite firm when he declares that the heroes of the age of myth did not survive into his own time as “spirits.” Some of them, he claims, did not survive at all; others were removed to the isles of the blessed, somewhere at the end of the world. These isles (or one of them, at least) are ruled by Kronos, who once headed a pre-Olympian dynasty of gods.

This passage is an important example of early Greek theology. Whatever daemons you honor, good ones or bad, Hesiod seems to say, do not believe that they are the spirits of the heroes of old (i.e., the men and women of the heroic age). Yet we know that in classical and postclassical

times hero worship was very common in Greece. Since hero worship is not attested in Homer, and Hesiod is close in time, we may speculate that the practice began to become popular in this period. Hesiod's version influenced later philosophical thought, but hero worship flourished as well.

Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 109–93

First the immortal gods who live on Olympus created a golden race of mortal men. This was in the time of Kronos, when he was king in heaven. They lived like gods, without any sorrow in their hearts, free of cares and pain, and they were not subject to wretched old age, but, always youthful of limbs, they enjoyed festive days, far from all evil. When they died it was as if they were overcome by sleep. All good things were theirs. The bountiful earth produced willingly all kinds of food, and plenty of it. In peace and quiet they gladly lived on their land, blessed with all the goods. After the earth hid this race of men in darkness, they became venerable daemons on earth, guardians of mortal men [watching over retribution and crimes, clothed in mist, walking over the whole earth,] giving wealth. This was one of their royal privileges.

Next, the Olympian gods created a far inferior race, the silver race, quite unlike the golden one in body and mind. For a hundred years a child grew up by his loving mother's side and played in a completely childlike state in his home. But when these people were fully grown and had reached maturity, they lived only for a very short while, and they were unhappy because of their foolishness. They could not refrain from hurting each other badly, nor did they want to honor the immortal gods and offer sacrifice at the holy altars of the blessed ones, as it was right for men, according to their own rites. Zeus, the son of Kronos, in anger put them away because they would not offer honor to the blessed gods who live on Olympus. After this race of men, too, was hidden in the earth, they were called "blessed mortals of the second rank," but they certainly had their honor, too.

Then Zeus the father made a third race of mortal men, the bronze race, totally unlike the silver race. They came from ash trees and were terrible and violent and constantly engaged in the deplorable works of Ares and crimes. They never ate bread, and their stubborn souls were as hard as steel [; they were unapproachable. Terrible arms of great strength grew out of the shoulders on their solid frames]. Their armor was of bronze, of bronze were their houses, and they worked with bronze tools. Black iron did not yet exist. They killed each other with their own hands and went down, nameless, into the moldy house of cold Hades. Formidable as they were, black death took them away, and they left the sun's shiny light.

When this race also was hidden in the earth, Zeus, the son of Kronos, made another one, the fourth, on the bountiful earth. It was more just and better, a godlike race of heroes who are called demigods, the one just before us in the wide world. Terrible wars and savage battles destroyed them, some before Thebes, the city of Cadmus with the seven gates, fighting over the flocks of the descendants of Oedipus; others before Troy, where ships had taken them across the great gulf of the sea, for the sake of Helen with the lovely hair. [For some of them this was the end of their lives, and death covered them.] Others were given by Zeus, the son of Kronos, an existence, a way of life far from men, at the end of the world, far from the immortal gods; and Kronos is their king. There they live, their hearts free of sorrow, on the Islands of the Blessed, near the Ocean with the deep whirlpools, happy heroes for whom the bountiful earth bears ripe honey-sweet fruit three times a year.

I wish I did not have to live among the men of the fifth race; if only I had died before or could have been born later! For this now is truly a race of iron. Neither by day nor by night will toil and misery ever cease for them. The gods will always send them painful sorrows. Zeus will destroy this race of mortal men, too, when their babies are born with gray hair. The father will not resemble his own children, nor the children their father; the guest will not be welcomed by his host, the friend by his friend, the brother by his brother, the way it used to be. Soon they will not honor their aging parents but will blame them and hurt them with poisonous words, sinful men who have no respect for the gods! They might even refuse to give their old parents the payment for their nurture, putting might before right.

54

In his tragedy *The Persians*, Aeschylus presents a necromantic ceremony in the Persian capital, after the news of the defeat at Salamis (480 B.C.) has arrived. The Queen Mother, Atossa, comes out of the royal palace in black robes, carrying the gifts of milk, honey, holy water, wine, and olive oil, along with a wreath. At the tomb of her husband, Darius I, she deposits the wreath and pours out libations.

While she performs this ritual, the chorus sings hymns of praise to the dead, and some of these may have been sung in Persian or what sounded like Persian to a Greek audience, for the chorus says in Greek, at one point: “Does our blessed, godlike king hear me, as I utter, in my unintelligible foreign language mournful laments of all sorts?” Since Persian was not a foreign language for a Persian audience, it would appear that the

poet, at least for the first performance of his play, added laments in Persian or what could have passed for Persian. If these songs ever existed in the written text of the play, they must have been deleted soon thereafter, for the Greek scribes were reluctant to copy what seemed to them to be sheer nonsense. But on stage the effect may have been tremendous, and the use of foreign words or phrases in magical ceremonies is well attested in the magical papyri.

Darius is deified in death, like the Egyptian Pharaohs, the rulers of Mycenae, Alexander the Great, and later the Roman emperors. Even in Hades he has certain powers and privileges (unlike, e.g., Homer's Achilles). He is willing to appear and is granted a brief leave of absence from Hades in order to give advice to his people in an emergency. Darius wears the crown, the robes, and the saffron-colored sandals in which he was buried.

The scene has certain comical undertones—the reference to Persian as an unintelligible language (in Persia!), and the royal ghost's complaint that it is much easier to go down to Hades than to come back.

The ceremony itself is best described as a poetic and dramatic rendering of an authentic ceremony, although it was probably more Greek than Persian.

Aeschylus, *Persians* vv. 607–99

ATOSSA (*Queen Mother of Persia*): So I have come out of the palace once more, without my chariot, without my splendid robes, bringing to the father of my son propitiatory libations, gifts that soothe the dead: white milk, sweet to drink, from an unblemished cow; honey, the essence of light, the distillation of the bees that work on blossoms; holy water from a pure spring; this refreshing, unmixed drink from an ancient vine, its mother in the fields; and here is the fragrant fruit of the pale green olive that lives its abundant life among the leaves; there are flowers woven into a garland, the children of the generous earth.

But come, my friends; sing hymns of praise to the dead, while I offer them these libations, and conjure up the spirit of Darius; I shall pour these offerings, for the earth to drink, to the gods of the underworld.

CHORUS: Royal lady, venerable to the Persians! Let the libations flow down into the chambers of the earth, and we, in our hymns, will pray to the guides of the dead beneath the earth to be gracious to us.

Yes, holy gods of the underworld, Earth and Hermes and you, king of the dead, send up to the light a soul from below, for if he knows any new remedy for our distress, he alone among mortals might tell us what to do.

Does our blessed, godlike king hear me, as I utter, in my unintelli-

gible foreign language, doleful laments of all sorts? Or must I shout my wretched misery? Does he hear me down below?

Earth and all you other rulers of the shades, allow the glorious spirit, the god of the Persians who was born in Susa, to leave your palace. No one like him was ever buried in Persian earth; please let him come.

Dear is that man, dear is his tomb; dear are the qualities that are buried there. Aidoneus, you guide the shades to the upper world, let him come, Aidoneus, the divine lord Darius! Ah!

He has never sent his people into death by waging ruinous, senseless wars; so the Persians called him “divine counselor,” and he was a divine counselor indeed, for he led his armies well.

Our king, our ancient king, come here, come back! Rise to the top of your tomb! Lift the saffron-colored sandals on your feet! Show us the crest of your royal crown! Approach, merciful father Darian! Oh!

Lord of our lord, appear and listen to our pitiful, unheard-of sorrows! The darkness of Styx is hovering in the air; the whole youth of your nation has perished. Approach, merciful father Darius! Oh!

Alas! Alas! Your friends wept many tears when you died . . . [The text of the following two verses is uncertain.] Our country has lost all its triremes; we have no more ships, no more ships!

GHOST OF DARIUS (*rising from the tomb*): Faithful of the faithful, companions of my youth, old men of Persia! What is this pain that afflicts our nation? The earth groans: it is beaten and torn. As I look at my wife standing near my tomb, I am alarmed, though I have accepted her libations gladly. But you, standing close to my tomb, are chanting laments, and in shrill songs that bring back souls you call on me most pitifully. There is no easy exit from the underworld, you know—mainly because the gods down there are better at seizing than at letting go! But since I have certain powers even among them, here I am. Go ahead; I must account for my time. What is this sudden tragedy that has hit the Persians so hard?

CHORUS: I am afraid to look at you; I am afraid to speak to you; I still feel that ancient awe of you.

DARIUS: I know, but since I have listened to your laments and have come back from the world below, put aside your awe of me, make a long story short, and tell me everything in brief from the beginning to the end.

[*The Chorus is still afraid to speak; so the ghost now addresses Atossa, who tells him the news of the Persian defeat. Darius puts the blame on his son Xerxes alone, while Atossa also holds his counselors responsible. The Chorus then asks the ghost for a word of advice, and he gives it to them: never attack Greece again. After having urged Atossa to be kind and compassionate to her defeated son, he “departs to the darkness beneath the earth” (v. 839).*]

What Socrates himself said about his *daimonion*, the “inner voice” that gave him advice, we do not know; but in the *Apology*, which his disciple Plato wrote, there is a memorable passage. Socrates was sentenced to death by his fellow citizens because two accusations made against him were considered proven: (1) that he had corrupted the youth; (2) that he had introduced new gods.

History shows that unpopular figures have often been attacked on moral and religious grounds. In a sense, the campaign against Socrates may be called a witch-hunt. In the speech that Plato makes him deliver in court, he explains how his *daimonion* worked, but he does not actually say what he thought it was. The experience, to him, was very real; he is not using poetic language to describe something fairly trivial that might happen to any of us. According to Xenophon, another disciple who also wrote an *Apology* for his master, Socrates used to call his *daimonion* “the voice of god” (Xen., *Apol.* 12). Because the great oracles of the ancient world were considered the mouthpieces of gods, Socrates’ *daimonion* might be called his “private oracle.”

The true nature of Socrates’ experience has often been discussed by Platonists—for example, by Apuleius in *On Socrates’ Genius* and by Plutarch in *On Socrates’ Sign*. Modern psychologists have written about it. Obviously, even his contemporaries did not understand the phenomenon, and some chose to misunderstand it. To call it *daimonion* would, indeed, arouse the suspicion that Socrates was worshipping a secret, nameless deity. If this deity (or daemon or spirit) worked for him, it gave him special powers that were inaccessible to others—hence the accusation of atheism and the implication of witchcraft. Only sorcerers paid tribute to nameless deities in private. But Socrates was no sorcerer. Neither was he a pure rationalist, although Plato stresses this aspect of his personality. One could call him a mystic, a Greek kind of yogi, who is at the same time a brilliant thinker.

Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 33B8–E8, 39C1–40C3

Now why is it that some people enjoy spending a good deal of time in my company? Citizens of Athens, you have heard the reason; I have told you the whole truth. The reason is this: people enjoy hearing me cross-examine those who think they are wise but are not. This, of course, is not unpleasant. I maintain that I have been told by the god to do this—in oracles, in dreams, and in any other way in which any divine power has ever told a human being to do anything. This is true, citizens of Athens, and it can easily be proved. For if I really have corrupted some of the

young and am now corrupting some, surely when they were grown up and realized that I gave them some bad advice when they were young they would come forward by themselves and accuse me and wish to see me punished. Or else, if they were unwilling to do anything about it themselves, some of their relatives—their fathers, their brothers, or anyone else close to them—would now remember and demand punishment. At any rate, I see many of them right here in court—first of all Crito, who is about my age and belongs to the same tribe, father of Critobulus over there; then Lysanias of Sphettus, father of Aeschines over there; also Antiphon of Cephissus, father of Epigenes. And there are others whose brothers have been my companions in that pursuit: Nicostratus, son of Theozotides, brother of Theodotus—Theodotus, by the way, is dead, so he could not be invited—and Paralios there, son of Demodocus, whose brother was Theages.

[Socrates maintains his innocence, and he knows that his defense is strong, but he is willing to accept the death sentence, though the charges against him are malicious and unfair.]

Now I wish to make a prophecy to you, my fellow citizens who have sentenced me to death, for I have now reached the point where human beings are particularly apt to deliver prophecies—shortly before they die. I tell you, my friends, my murderers, that very soon after my execution a punishment much worse than the sentence of death that you passed on me will catch up with you, God knows! Now you think you have accomplished something by removing the danger of having to give an account of your lives, but I tell you, the very opposite will happen to you. For you will run into many more critics than before; I have tried to restrain them until now—you did not notice it—and they will be even more obnoxious, because they are so much younger, and you will be even more annoyed. If you think that by executing people you can prevent others from criticizing your unnatural way of life, you are mistaken, for this kind of deliverance cannot possibly come true and is not attractive; but the other one, which consists in becoming a better person instead of interfering with others, is very easy and most attractive. You have condemned me, and this is my parting prediction.

To me, my judges—for I am sure it is right for me to call you “judges”—a wonderful thing has happened. The familiar prophetic voice of my “spiritual guide” has manifested itself very frequently all my life and has opposed me, even in trivial matters, whenever I was about to do something wrong. What has happened to me now, as you can see for yourselves, might well be thought and is generally held to be the ultimate evil. And yet, when I left my house early this morning, the sign of the god did not oppose me, nor [did it manifest itself] on my way here to the court,

nor at any moment during my speech when I was about to say something. On many other occasions it made me stop short in the middle of a speech, but in this matter it opposed nothing I did or said. What should I assume to be the reason for this? I will tell you: what is happening to me must be good, and those of us who consider death an evil must be wrong.

56

Phlegon of Tralles (Asia Minor) was a freedman of the emperor Hadrian, served on his staff, and wrote several books, among them *Mirabilia* (*Marvelous Facts*) from which this amazing tale is taken. It seems to have been fairly well known in antiquity, for Proclus, the Neoplatonist (fifth century A.D.) refers to it in his Commentary on Plato's *Republic* (pp. 115–16 Kroll). He gives an outline that supplies the missing beginning, and he tells us that this happened in Amphipolis, during the reign of Philip. This must be Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, who ruled from 356 to 336 B.C. Phlegon's tale is cast in the form of a report from the governor of Amphipolis to a friend close to the king, who may eventually have been informed of all this.

From Proclus we learn that Philinnion died shortly after her wedding. This does not place her among the *agamoí*—the restless ghosts of those who had died unmarried—but it suggests that she clung to life on this earth and was ready to return, because her desire for love had just been aroused and was, in a way, stronger than death.

There is a similar story in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (4.25). A handsome young athlete, and aspiring philosopher, falls in love with what he thinks is a beautiful and affectionate woman who also seems to be wealthy. Apollonius, however, unmasks her at once as a dangerous kind of ghost, an *empousa* who would eventually devour her lover. At a reception just before the planned wedding, Apollonius denounces her and makes all her fine possessions disappear, whereupon she admits her true identity as a vampire and then, one assumes, disappears before she has a chance to feed on the young philosopher-athlete. This possibility is not implied in Phlegon's tale, although the man dies tragically and, perhaps, is united in another world with Philinnion.

In his ballad "The Bride of Corinth," Goethe added a brilliant new twist to the tale he found in Phlegon. It is a haunting poem in the deepest sense of the word, and it stirs up all sorts of emotions. According to Goethe, the young man who comes to spend the night in Corinth (not in Amphipolis) is the fiancé of the dead girl. The wedding was postponed, because her parents (not herself) have converted to Christianity, and he has remained faithful to the ancient gods. The girl's death was hastened, or

so it seems, by her fear that marriage was no longer possible, and her frustration brings her back from the grave. That first night she spends with the guest-friend—her fiancé—is to be their wedding night. Her desire for love and sex—denied by her parents, denied by the Church—is stronger than death. Her lover never quite understands what is happening. He enjoys the bliss that is offered to him, but he is doomed to die, and his bride fears that she is doomed to go, as a vampire, after other young men. Still, as the last stanza tells us, the lovers will be cremated together, joined in death and joined to the ancient gods and ultimately happier than if they had been married in the Church by “priests with their humming songs.”

Phlegon of Tralles, *Mirabilia* 1

[*The beginning of the story is missing, but we can guess the following: Philinnion, the daughter of Demonstratus and Charito, has died. Her ghost comes back and visits young Machatas, a guest-friend, in his room. The old nurse discovers this by coincidence.*]

She [the nurse] came to the door of the guest room and by the light of the lamp saw the girl close to Machates. The sight was so astonishing that she could not stay there any longer but ran to the girl's mother and shouted at the top of her voice: “Charito! Demonstratus!” telling them to get up and come to see their daughter by themselves. For—so she said—the girl had appeared alive and was there, by some divine will, with the guest, in the guest room. As she heard this strange tale, Charito's soul was filled with panic. She felt faint because the news was so amazing and the excitement of the nurse so obvious. Thinking of her daughter, she began to cry. Finally, she accused the old woman of being out of her mind and told her to go away at once. But now the old woman reproached her and, speaking openly, said that she was perfectly sane and normal, and that it was not she who was afraid to see her own daughter. At long last Charito, partly because the nurse told her so, partly because she wanted to know what was going on, came to the door of the guest room. But by now, some time had elapsed, since the nurse had brought the news two hours ago, and they came too late; the couple was already asleep. The mother, peering into the room, thought she recognized her daughter's clothes and general appearance, but she was unable to find out the truth that night and thought that she should keep quiet. She hoped to catch the girl by getting up early or, if she was too late, ask Machates about everything; for she knew that he would never lie about such a serious matter. So she said nothing and left. At dawn they realized that the girl had slipped away unnoticed, either by the will of the gods or by chance. When Charito came to the room, she was angry with Machates because the girl had disappeared, but she told him the whole story from the beginning, as it

had happened, hiding nothing, embracing his knees and asking him to tell her the whole truth. He felt very uncomfortable at first and was upset, but finally he told her the girl's name: Philinnion. He also told her how she had first visited him and how great her desire for him was. She had said that she was coming to him without her parents' knowledge. To convince the mother, he opened his trunk and took out the things the girl had left behind: the golden ring she had given to him and the girdle she had left the night before. When Charito saw this clear evidence, she cried aloud and tore her clothes and her cloak, threw the hairnet from her head, fell to the ground, clutched the tokens to her breast, and started to grieve all over again.

When the guest saw what was happening—everyone lamenting, overcome by emotion, as if they were just now preparing the girl's burial—he became troubled and begged them to stop. He promised Charito to show the girl to her if she came to him again. She accepted this, urged him to keep his word and left. Night came, and it was that hour when Philinnion was accustomed to visit him. Everybody was awake, anxious to see her arrive and kept a lookout. She came, entered the room at her usual time and sat down on the bed. Machates pretended that nothing had changed, but he wanted to find out what was going on, even though he could hardly believe what he had been told. He wanted to find out whether the woman he was making love with—the woman who so faithfully visited him at the same time every night and who ate and drank with him—was actually dead. He was very doubtful of what they had told him and preferred to believe that some grave-robbers had opened her tomb and sold her clothes and her gold jewelry to her father. At any rate, he had to know the truth; so he sent the slaves in secret to call the parents.

Demostratus and Charito arrived at once. When they saw her, they were at first speechless and terrified by the unexpected sight, but then they cried out and hugged their daughter. But Philinnion said: "Mother! Father! It is not fair of you to begrudge me those three days with the guest in my father's house. I was not causing any trouble for anyone. Now, because of your meddling, you will have to grieve all over again, and I have to return to my appointed place. I came here not without the will of the gods." She said this and was dead. Her body was stretched out on the bed, for all to see. Her mother and her father threw themselves upon it, and the house was filled with shouting and laments because of this calamity. What had happened was unbearable, incredible.

The rumor of these events quickly spread through the city, and I was notified. During the following night I kept back the crowds that were flocking to the house, taking precautions that there should be no disturbance, because a story of this kind was going from mouth to mouth. By

early dawn the theater was already full. The whole affair was presented. A decision was made that we should first go the tomb, open it up and find out whether the body was on its bier or whether her place was empty. It was not yet six months since the girl had died. When we had opened the vault, which was the resting place for all her deceased family members, we saw bodies or bones—in the case of those who had died a long time ago—lying on the other biers, but on the bier on which Philinnion had been laid and put to rest, we found only the iron ring that had belonged to the guest and the gold-plated cup that Machates had given to her on the first of their days together.

We were amazed and terrified and went at once to the guest room in Demostratus' house to find out whether the dead girl was really there. We saw her lying on the ground and gathered at the place of the assembly. What had happened was shocking and hard to believe. There was excitement in the assembly, and practically no one knew what to think about all this.

Hyllus was the first to stand up. He is not only considered the best prophet in the city, but he also has the reputation of being a very good augur, and he has practiced his craft with exceptional skill. He told us to cremate the girl outside the city limits—no good could come out of her being buried within the city limits once more—and to propitiate chthonic Hermes and the Eumenides. Everybody should then be purified. We should cleanse the temples and perform the customary rites for the chthonic deities. To me he spoke privately about the king and what had happened. He told me to offer sacrifices to Hermes, to Zeus as patron of guests, and to Ares, and to be scrupulous with my offerings. He gave these instructions, and we carried them out.

Machates, the guest whom the ghost had visited, fell into a depression and committed suicide.

If you decide to write to the king about this, let me know, so that I can send you one of my men who knows all the details.

Farewell.

57

Ancient ghost stories attest the popular belief in some form of survival of the person after death. Ghosts are, in fact, visible daemons, as Pausanias' description of "Cemetery Hill," near Marathon, shows. Just as invisible daemons were worshiped throughout Greece, visible ones also might have their cult, although they were usually considered a nuisance and people shunned haunted places then as now because they often indi-

cated the presence of evil—murder, for instance, or violent death in general.

It is obvious that an ancient battlefield on which thousands of men had been killed in the prime of their lives would yield a certain number of permanent ghosts (even ghost horses!), apparitions that were still reported in the time of Pausanias, who wrote a travel guide to Greece circa A.D. 150.

The English word *ghost* itself shows how ancient beliefs sometimes survive. It can mean “soul” or “spirit,” as opposed to the body, but it can also mean “a spectral apparition,” and the third person of the Trinity is called either “the Holy Spirit” or “the Holy Ghost.” Similarly, the German word *Geist* has a fairly wide range of meaning, with “spirit” in one sense or another fitting most of them.

Pausanias traveled all over Greece in the second century A.D. and visited the famous sites. He listened to the stories of the tourist guides as he looked at the monuments, but he also did some research on his own.

In the battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) many men lost their lives, and their bodies were buried there. Such an ancient battlefield—ancient even in the days of Pausanias—is no ordinary place. Every now and then the battle is reenacted at night, but it is dangerous to go there and wait for it to happen. The ghosts do not like idle curiosity.

All of the fallen soldiers are considered “heroes,” but three divine or semidivine beings are singled out for special worship: Marathon, the eponymous hero of the site; Heracles, who was believed to have helped the Greeks; and a mysterious apparition called Echetlaeus, who used his plowshare as a weapon.

Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.32.3–5

Before turning to the description of the islands, I will deal once more with the counties. There is a county called Marathon, halfway between Athens and Carystus in Euboea. It was in this part of Attica that the foreign army [i.e., the Persians] landed, was defeated in battle, and lost some of its ships as it took off again. In the plain there is a grave for the Athenians, and on it there are slabs with the names of the fallen, arranged according to their tribes. There is another grave for the Boeotians of Plataea, and one for the slaves, because slaves had fought there for the first time [along with the free].

There is also a separate monument for one man, Miltiades, the son of Cimon, though his end came later, after he had failed to take Parus and had been brought to trial by the Athenians because of this.

At Marathon you can hear all night horses whinnying and men fight-

ing. No one who stays there just to have this experience gets any good out of it, but the daemons do not get angry with anyone who happens to be there against his will.

The people of Marathon worship both those who died in the fighting, calling them “heroes” and [a semidivine being called] “Marathon,” from whom the county derives its name, but also Heracles, saying that they were the first among the Greeks to acknowledge him as a god.

They say also that a man took part in the battle who looked and was dressed like a farmer. He slaughtered many of the Persians with his plowshare, and when everything was over he disappeared. But when the Athenians consulted the oracle, the god would not tell them anything except to honor “Echetlaeus” [i.e., the man with the plowshare] as a hero.

58

Pausanias’ description of a famous painting that could be seen in Delphi in ancient times gives us the common Greek view of Hades. Part of it served as an illustration of Odysseus’ consultation of the seer Tiresias [no. 52]. It was clearly represented as a real *katabasis* ‘descent’, either because the painter, Polygnotus, understood the text in this way, or perhaps because he could not represent the seeming contradiction between descent and nondescent that we have noticed above.

The way in which he made visible the topography of the underworld, with all its inhabitants known from myth, literature, and earlier works of art, was much admired in antiquity. In a sense, the painting was monumental and encyclopedic, and the wealth of detail must have been astonishing. In another sense it worked on the emotions of those who still believed that this was life after death, at least for those who had sinned or committed a crime on earth. The mystery religions and the characteristic ethical doctrine preached at Delphi, where the painting stood, held out hope for those who put themselves under the gods and began a new life.

The artist included some characters that seem to belong to the realm of folklore rather than literature—for example, the daemon Eurynomus, who eats the flesh of corpses (i.e., causes their decaying). Pausanias tried to look him up in the *Odyssey* as well as in other early epics that are no longer extant, but he could not find this particular daemon. Guides were no doubt available to explain the details, and thus, perhaps, they created a new mythology for the benefit of the tourists.

Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10.28.1–29.1

[One part of the large painting of Polygnotus in the Lounge at Delphi shows the fall of Troy and the departure of the Greeks.]

The other part of the painting, the one on the left, shows Odysseus, who has descended into the so-called Hades to consult the soul of Tiresias about his safe return home. The details of the painting are as follows: There is water that looks like a river, obviously the Acheron, with reeds growing in it and fish swimming in it whose forms appear so dim that one would take them to be shadows rather than fish. There is a boat on the river, with the ferryman [Charon] at the oars. Polygnotus has followed, it seems to me, the poem *Minyad*, for there is a passage in the *Minyad* that refers to Theseus and Pirithoos: “But then they could not find within its anchoring-place the boat upon which the dead embark, the one that Charon, the old ferryman, steered.”

In addition, Polygnotus painted Charon as a man well advanced in years. The passengers in the boat are not altogether clearly visible [or: are not very well known]. Tellis seems to be a young adolescent, Cleobaea still a young woman; she holds on her knees a chest of the kind they usually make for Demeter. As far as Tellis is concerned, I have only heard that the poet Archilochus was his grandson, and of Cleobaea it is said that she brought the mysteries of Demeter from Parus to Thasus.

On the bank of the Acheron, just under Charon’s boat, there is a remarkable group. There is a man who treated his father unjustly, and he is now being strangled by his father. In those days people honored their parents above anything else. [A digression follows.] Next to the man who abused his father, and who for this suffers his full share of punishment in Hades, there is a man who pays the penalty for sacrilege. The woman punishing him is skilled in drugs, especially harmful ones. Clearly in those days people were very religious. [A digression follows.]

Higher up than the figures just mentioned is Eurynomus. The guides at Delphi say that he is one of the daemons in Hades and that he eats the flesh off the corpses, leaving them only their bones. Homer’s *Odyssey* and the epic entitled *Minyad* and the *Nostoi*—they do refer to Hades and its horrors—know nothing of a daemon called Eurynomus. But let me describe at least what he is like and how he is represented in the painting. His color is black-blue, like flies that buzz around meat, and he is showing his teeth, and he sits on the skin of a vulture. Immediately after Eurynomus there are Auge of Arcadia and Iphimedeia. Auge went to the court of Teuthras in Mysia, and of all the women who had shared Heracles’ bed, according to myth, Auge was the one who gave birth to a son just like his father. Iphimedeia was greatly honored by the Carians of Mylasa.

Even higher up than the figures just mentioned are two companions of Odysseus, Perimedes and Eurylochus, carrying victims for sacrifice; the victims are black rams.

This exorcist's ritual from the Great Magical Papyrus in Paris is far more complicated than any of the exorcisms described in the Bible. Certain substances have to be cooked in olive oil, certain words written on a tin tablet, certain formulas recited. In the main formula the daemon possessing the patient is threatened by divine names from different cultures: Egypt, Israel, Greco-Roman paganism, Christianity, and some others that cannot be clearly identified. The whole adds up to a massive attack on the daemon. If the god of one culture is powerless, the combination of many gods will certainly help. In some cases the powers of the gods to whom the daemon must eventually yield are emphasized by striking examples (sometimes called *historiolae*).

The food taboo prescribed at the end is interesting. It does not necessarily mean that the magician who designed this ritual was Jewish. He may simply have used Hebrew words (or what he thought were Hebrew words) and assumed that ritual purity, according to the Jewish custom, made the words more effective. An exorcist of this type probably did not belong to any of the great religions of the time, one would assume; but this did not prevent him from borrowing from them in order to reinforce his magic.

Great Magical Papyrus in Paris (PGM IV.3007–86)

A well-tested formula by Pibeches for those possessed by daemons. Take oil from unripened olives together with the “mastigia” plant and lotus pith, and cook it with colorless marjoram, saying: “IOEL. OS SARTHIMI. EMORI. THEOCHIPSOITH. SITHEMOCH. SOTHE. IOE. MIMIPSOTHIOOPH. PHER-SOTHI AEEIOUO IOE. EO CHARIPHTHA.” Go out of NN! Common formula. Write the protective charm on a tin tablet: “IAEO. ABRAOTHIOCH. PHTHA MESENPSINIAO. PHEOCH. IAEO. CHARSAK” and attach it to the patient. This is an object of horror for every daemon, and it frightens him. Stand facing [the patient] and begin the exorcism.

The formula of the exorcism is the following: I adjure you in the name of the god of the Hebrews, Jesus. “IABA. IAE. ABRAOTH. AIA. THOTTH. ELE. ELO. AEO. EOY. I I IBAECH. ABARMAS. IABARAOY. ABELBEL. LONA. ABRA. MAROIA. BRAKION.” You who appear in fire, you who are in the midst of land, of snow and of fog: Tannetis, let your pitiless angel descend, and let him arrest the daemon that flies around this creature shaped by God in his holy paradise. For I pray to the holy god through Ammon: “IPSEN-TANCHO” [formula]. I adjure you “LABRIA IACOUTH. ABLANATHANALBA. AKRAMM. [formula]. AOTH. IATHRBATHRA. CHACHTHABRATHA. CHAMYN CHEL. ABROOTH. OUABRASIOLOTH.” Otherwise “IELOSAI IAEI.”

I adjure you by him who appeared to Israel in a pillar of light and a cloud by day, who has saved his people from Pharaoh and has brought upon Pharaoh the ten plagues, because he would not listen. And I adjure you, every daemonic spirit, to speak, no matter who you are, in the name of the seal that Solomon placed on the tongue of Jeremiah, and he spoke. So you must speak, too, whoever you are, whether daemon of heaven or air, or earth or under the earth or of the underworld, Ebusaeon or Chersaeon or Pharisaean. Speak, whoever you are, for I adjure you in the name of the light-bearing, invincible god, the one who knows what is in the heart of every living being, who has created the human race from dust, who has brought [it] out of uncertainty, who gathers the clouds, sends rain upon the earth, who blessed its fruits, whom every heavenly power of angels and archangels blesses.

I adjure you in the name of the great god Sabaoth who made the river Jordan flow backward and made impassable the Red Sea through which Israel had passed.

I adjure you in the name of him who revealed the hundred forty languages and distributed them according to his own command. I adjure you in the name of him who, with his beams of fire, has burned down the stiff-necked giants, to whom the wings of the Cherubim sing praises. I adjure you in the name of him who has built the mountains around the sea [or] a wall of sand, and who ordered it not to overflow. And the deep obeyed. You must obey, too, every daemonic spirit, for I adjure you in the name of him who shakes up the four winds from the holy eternities, who looks like the sky, like the sea, like the clouds, who carries the light, the invincible one.

I adjure you in the name of him who dwells in Jerusalem, the pure [city], for whom and near whom the inextinguishable fire burns for all eternity, through his holy name “IAEOBAPHRENEMOUN” [formula], before whom the hellfire trembles and flames leap all around, and iron explodes, and every mountain is seized by fear from the depth of its foundations. I adjure you, daemonic spirit, whoever you are, in the name of him who looks down on the earth and makes its foundations tremble, who has brought the universe from nonbeing into being.

But I urge you who make use of this exorcism not to eat any pork, and every spirit, every daemon, no matter of what kind, will be subject to you. As you perform the exorcism, blow once [at the patient], beginning at the toes, blowing all the way up to the face, and the daemon will be arrested. Stay pure! For the formula is in Hebrew and is kept [pure] among pure men.

Whether Seneca's tragedies were actually performed on stage or were merely recited is still the subject of controversy. This necromantic scene from one of his dramas (written during the first half of the first century A.D.) was narrated, perhaps because it would have been difficult to show the action on stage. As a Stoic philosopher, Seneca was interested in contemporary science (he wrote a scientific work, *Quaestiones Naturales* [Scientific Problems] in prose); he also condemned superstitions and wrote a work (now lost) on that subject. In one of his *Moral Essays* (*De Beneficiis* [On Good Deeds]) he writes: "No normal human being is afraid of a god. It is insane to fear what is good for you, and no one can love what he fears" (4.19.1).

Since fear—mostly fear of unknown powers—is such an important element in magic, it is puzzling that Seneca paid any attention to magic at all, and yet he did, not only here, but also in his *Medea*. Perhaps, like authors before him, he looked upon magic as a literary theme that offered great possibilities. Descriptions of magical ceremonies were apt to shock the reader and the audience, and ever since Aristotle, the "shock effect" had been considered one of the functions of drama. As a philosopher, Seneca wanted to help his readers overcome fear; as a playwright, he thought it necessary to terrify them, in order to achieve a *katharsis*, a kind of purification of the nervous system. The magical scene is not necessary for the plot of the play; Sophocles and other dramatists did not use it. One suspects, then, that Seneca threw it in for the sake of its "shock effect."

Did Seneca or his nephew, Lucan [see *no.* 61], ever witness a necromantic ceremony? We do not know, but since Nero himself was interested in this sort of thing, it is quite possible. We know from the magical papyri that such rituals were performed, but to reconstruct them from this dramatic text would be a mistake. On the other hand, the theme already had a long history, and Seneca may have borrowed from literature rather than from life—for example, from the "daemoniac personifications" in Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid*—adding some touches of his own.

Seneca, *Oedipus*, vv. 530–626

CREON: Far from the city, near the valley through which the Dirce flows, there is a grove, dark with oak trees. Cypresses, lifting up their heads from the deep woods, dominate the forest with their evergreen masses. Ancient oak trees stretch out their twisted branches, rotting from decay. The ravages of age have broken the side of this tree; that one, about to fall because its roots have grown weak, leans precariously against another trunk. There are laurel trees with bitter berries, basswood trees with light

leaves, myrtle from Paphus, elms that will someday move oars through the wide sea, the fir tree that grows toward the sun and exposes its knotless sides to the Zephyrs. In the middle of the woods there is an enormous tree whose heavy shade weighs on the smaller plants and which guards the grove all by itself, spreading out its branches in a wide perimeter. At its foot there is a sinister pool which never sees the sunlight, still and stagnant in eternal frost. A brackish swamp surrounds the sluggish spring.

When the old priest had entered this place he acted quickly. The place itself offered night. The earth was dug up, and a fire, snatched from a pyre, was thrown on top. The seer drapes himself in a funereal robe and waves a branch. The black garment reaches down to his feet. The old man in his sinister apparel draws nearer, gloomily. Yew, the plant of death, crowns his head. Black sheep and black oxen are dragged to the ditch. The flame consumes the sacrificial meal, and the cattle, still alive, struggle in the deadly fire. The priest now calls the shades and him who rules over the shades and him who guards the entrance to the pool of death. He lets the magic spells roll and sings in ecstasy threatening words that either appease or force the frail shades. He pours an offering of blood on the altar and lets the animals burn whole. He floods the ditch with blood and pours the white milky liquid on top; with his left hand he sprinkles wine. Once more he sings, looks down on the ground, and calls the shades with an even louder, more ecstatic voice.

The pack of Hecate barks. Three times the hollow valley echoes with a mournful sound. The ground trembles, the earth quakes.

"They have heard me!" cries the seer. "The spells that I have poured out are working! The dark chaos is breaking open, and the peoples of Dis are allowed to come to the world above!"

The whole forest sinks into the ground, its leaves bristling. The oaks split open. The whole grove quivers in horror. The Earth gives way and groans deep inside. (Is it because she resents the fact that Acheron's hidden depths are opened up? Or is it because the Earth herself has thunderously ripped her structure to let the dead pass through? Or is it because three-headed Cerberus, mad with rage, has pulled on his heavy chain?) Suddenly the Earth yawns and opens up an enormous chasm.

I saw with my own eyes the stagnant pools among the shades; with my own eyes I saw the bloodless gods and the night that is truly night. My blood turned cold, stopped, and froze in my veins.

A wild cohort jumped forth. The whole offspring of the dragon stood there in arms, the armies of the two brothers born from the teeth sown near Dirce, the merciless destruction of the people of Thebes! There was a yell coming from the black Furies, blind Madness and Horror, and all the other creatures that eternal Darkness produces and hides. There was

Bereavement tearing at her hair, Disease barely holding up her weary head, Old Age, a burden to herself, and halting Fear. My courage fell. Even the old priest's daughter, who was familiar with his sacred rites and magic arts, was shocked. But he, fearless and bold, conjured up the bloodless folk of savage Dis.

At once they appeared, flying through the air like delicate mist, breathing the air under the open sky. The crowds attracted by the seer's voice were more numerous than the leaves that grow on Mount Eryx, more numerous than the flowers that come out on Mount Hybla in the middle of spring when swarming bees form a tight ball in the air, more numerous than the waves that break on the Ionian Sea, more numerous than the birds that escape from the winter and from the threats of icy Strymon and cut through the sky to exchange arctic snow for the mild climate of the Nile. Nervously the trembling souls seek hiding places in the shady grove.

First, Zethus emerged from the ground, his right hand holding on to a bull with fierce horns. Then, with a lyre in his left hand, came Amphion who moved rocks with his sweet sounds. Finally, Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus, came, among her children, lifting her proud head safely, counting the shades. Delirious Agave, worse as a mother [than Niobe] appeared, followed by the whole crowd that tore the king in pieces, and behind the Bacchants, Pentheus, mutilated, but still savage and threatening.

Often was Laius conjured up, and finally he lifted his disgraceful head, but he sat down at a distance from the crowd, hiding his face. The priest insisted and doubled his incantations until Laius showed the features he had concealed so far. I shudder as I describe him: there he stood, his body horribly covered with gore, his hair dirty, disgusting, and covered with filth. In ecstasy he yelled.

[Laius' ghost now reveals that his son Oedipus, king of Thebes, is responsible for the plague that has befallen the city; Oedipus has killed him and married his own mother; Oedipus must be punished.]

6I

From this text it would appear that Lucan tried to surpass his uncle Seneca in the description of horror. He created in this unfinished epic on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey a kind of superwitch, Erichtho, who is consulted by the "worthless" son of Pompey on the eve of the decisive battle of Pharsalus (48 B.C.). Since Lucan wished to compete with Virgil as an epic poet, it is safe to say that this necromantic scene in Book 6 of his work was designed to invite comparison with Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, the hero's visit to the underworld.

Lucan first enumerates various methods of divination, but adds that for Pompey's son necromancy is the only reliable way of exploring the future. The rites involved are presented as monstrous and disgusting, but the poet goes on and on, as if he enjoyed all the gruesome details. It is a neat literary trick: Lucan professes to be shocked by the magical practices he describes, and yet they seem to give him a certain thrill.

Erichtho has enormous power and no scruples whatsoever about using it. The central idea of the whole passage—the revival of a corpse—may have been discussed as a scientific problem at the time. Shelley, who admired Lucan and placed him above Virgil as a poet, must have read this passage with his wife, Mary, for it is almost certainly the nucleus of Frankenstein's experiment.

Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.415–830

When the leaders had pitched their camps in the doomed part of the world, everyone was disturbed by a feeling that the battle was near. Obviously the grim hour of decision was approaching, and destiny was moving in. Worthless characters trembled and feared the worst, but a few, anticipating an uncertain outcome, built up morale and coped with hope and fear alike.

Among the idle crowd was Sextus, the unworthy son of the great Pompey. Later, in exile, he was to become a pirate, haunting the sea around Sicily, disgracing the glory that his father had won in naval battles. Goaded by fear, he wanted to know ahead of time the course of fate. He could stand no delay and was tormented by all the events that the future held; so he did not consult the tripods of Delos or the Pythian caverns, and he cared not to find out what the sound made by the bronze cauldron of Jupiter at Dodona means—Dodona, which produced the first human food—nor did he ask for someone to read the future in the entrails, to interpret the signs of birds, watch the lightnings of heaven, investigate the stars by means of the Assyrian science, or practice any other science that is secret but not unlawful.

He was familiar with the occult knowledge of the cruel sorcerers that are an abomination to the gods, the gloomy altars where funeral rites are performed; he knew that Pluto and the shades below can be relied upon, and he was perverse enough to believe that the gods above have little knowledge. The very region [of Thessaly] supported his vicious, insane delusions: the camp was close to the habitation of Thessalian witches, whose bold criminal acts surpass our imagination and whose specialty is the impossible.

Moreover, the earth of Thessaly produces poisonous herbs in the mountains, and the rocks feel it when magicians sing their deadly spells.

Many plants grow there that may compel the gods, and the woman who came from Colchis [Medea] picked in Thessalian country many herbs that she did not bring along. The impious incantations of a horrible race attract the attention of the gods, who turn a deaf ear to so many nations, so many peoples. The witch's voice alone reaches through the remote regions of heaven and conveys compelling words even to a reluctant deity, a deity not distracted by care for the sky and the revolving firmament. When her unspeakable mumbo-jumbo has reached the stars, a Thessalian witch can call away the gods from every altar except her own, even though Persian Babylon and Memphis, full of mysteries, may open every shrine of their ancient magicians.

Through the song of a Thessalian witch, a love that is not willed by destiny enters an insensible heart, and respectable old men burn with forbidden passions. Not only are their poisonous potions or the tumor full of juice that they snatch from the forehead of a foal—the indication that its mother will love it—so powerful: no, men's minds are destroyed by magic spells, even if they have not been poisoned by any dangerous drug. Men and women who are not joined in marriage and not attracted to each other by charm or beauty can be drawn together by the magic power of a thread that is being twirled.

The decrees of nature cease to operate; nights grow longer and delay the days; the heavenly sphere does not obey the law; the swift firmament slows down, as soon as it has heard a magic spell; and Jupiter is amazed that heaven does not rotate on its swift axis, although he keeps pushing it hard. At one time [the witches] fill everything with rain and hide the warm sun behind a veil of clouds; there is thunder in the sky, and Jupiter knows nothing about it; by the same kind of spell they disperse the large expanses of wet mist and the disheveled locks of the clouds. There are no winds, but the sea swells, and then again it is forbidden to feel the power of a storm and lies silent, even though the south wind tries to stir it up and the sails that carry a ship against the wind belly out. The waterfall on the face of a steep cliff hangs suspended in midair, and rivers do not run in their natural directions.

The Nile does not rise in the summer; the Maeander straightens out its course, and the Arar rushes the sluggish Rhone. The mountains lower their peaks and flatten out their ridges; Olympus looks up at the clouds, and the snows of Scythia thaw without any sun, even in the midst of a harsh winter. When the tide is moved by the moon, Thessalian charms defend the shore and drive back the tide. The earth, too, shakes off the axis of her solid mass, and her gravity stumbles and tends toward the center of the universe. Struck by the voice [of a witch] the mass of this enormous structure splits and offers a view of the sky that rotates around

it. Every animal that has the ability to kill and is equipped by nature to do harm fears the Thessalian witches and provides them with murderous techniques. The greedy tiger and the lion, noble in his wrath, show their best manners and lick their hands; the snake unfolds his frosty coils just to please them and stretches at full length on ground that is covered with dew; the bodies of knotted vipers break apart and get joined together again, and serpents collapse, because human poison is blown at them.

Why do the gods trouble to obey these spells? Why are they afraid of ignoring them? What mutual agreement puts pressure on the gods? Must they obey, or does it give them pleasure to do so? Is this allegiance caused by some obscure religion, or do the witches enforce it with silent threats? Do witches have power over all the gods, or are their incantations effective against only one particular god, who can inflict the compulsion inflicted upon him on the whole world?

These witches first brought down the stars from the fast-moving sky, and by their techniques the clear Moon, attacked by dreadful, poisonous incantations, grew dim and burned with a dark and earthly light, just as if the Earth had cut off the Moon from the reflections of her brother, the Sun, and projected its own shadows into the light from heaven. The Moon is so strongly affected by magic spells and pulled down so hard that she finally drops her foam from a close distance on the plants below.

These criminal rites, these wicked practices of a horrible race, were scorned by savage Erictho as being too pious, and she degraded a science that was already tainted with rites unknown. To her, it was a sacrilege to seek shelter for her abominable person in a city or in a normal house; she lived in deserted tombs and inhabited graves from which the ghosts had been driven, and the deities of hell loved her. Neither the heavenly gods nor the fact that she was still living prevented her from visiting [reading *ambire* for *audire*] the assemblies of the dead or from knowing the dwellings beyond the Styx and the mysteries of Dis in hell. The face of the loathsome witch is haggard, hideous, and decomposed; her features inspire fear because of their hellish pallor; they are covered with disheveled hair and are never seen when the sky is bright: only if rain and black clouds conceal the stars does the witch emerge from the tombs she has stripped and try to catch the lightning of the night. As she stomps over a fertile cornfield, she burns the seeds, and her breath poisons air that was wholesome before.

She never prays to the heavenly gods, never invokes divine aid by a suppliant hymn, knows nothing about the entrails of a sacrificial victim. She only enjoys placing upon an altar the burning logs and the incense that she has stolen from a kindled pyre.

As soon as they hear her voice uttering a magic prayer, the gods grant

her every kind of horror; they are afraid to hear the second spell. She buries alive those whose souls are still in control of their bodies, and Death catches up with them against his own will, because years of life were still due them. Or else she brings back dead bodies from the grave, by turning around the funeral procession; corpses actually escape death. This witch snatches the smoking ashes, the burning bones of the young, from the midst of the pyre and grabs the very torch the parents were holding, and collects the pieces of the bier that are fluttering in black smoke, the burial garments that crumble into ashes and the cinders that smell of the corpse. But when the bodies have been put into stone sarcophagi, which drain off the body fluids and absorb the liquid marrow, drying out the corpse, she feasts greedily, savagely, on all the limbs, thrusts her fingers into the eye sockets, scoops out gleefully the frozen eyeballs, and gnaws the yellow nails on the withered hand. With her teeth she bites through the fatal noose on the rope and plucks the corpse dangling from the gallows; she scrapes criminals off the cross, tearing away the rain-beaten flesh and the bones baked in the glaring sun. She takes off the nails that pierce the hands, the black juices of corruption that drip all over the corpse, and the clotted fluids, and when a tendon resists her bite, she pulls it down with her weight. Wherever any corpse lies unburied on the ground, she sits near it, before any birds or beasts arrive, but she has no intention of dissecting the body with a knife or with her nails; she waits for the wolves to tear it apart and then snatches the prey from their hungry throats.

She is ready to commit a murder whenever she needs the fresh blood that gushes forth when a throat is slit and whenever her ghoulish repasts require flesh that still throbs. She also slits open women's wombs and delivers babies by an unnatural method, in order to offer them on a burning altar. And whenever she needs evil spirits as her henchmen, she creates them herself [by killing someone]. Every human casualty serves her in some way. She rips off the bloom on the face of a child's body, and when an adolescent dies, her left hand cuts off a lock of his hair. Quite often, when a dear relative dies, the horrible witch bends over his body, and as she kisses him, she mutilates his face and opens his closed mouth with her teeth; then she bites the tip of the tongue that lies in the dry throat, pours whispered sounds between the cold lips, and sends a secret message of horror down to the shades of Styx.

Her reputation in the country made her known to Pompey [the son], and he picked his way across deserted fields, when night occupied the high heaven, and the sun beneath our earth marked the hour of noon. Faithful, trusted creatures who assisted her in her crimes went to and fro

among the ruined tombs and burial places till they saw her far away, sitting on a steep rock where the Balkan mountains slope down and extend their ridges toward Pharsalia.

She was experimenting with a spell unknown to other sorcerers and to the gods of witchcraft, and she composed an incantation for an unheard-of purpose. She was worried that the civil war might wander off to some other part of the world and that Thessaly might miss this tremendous slaughter, and so the witch poisoned the countryside near Philippi [i.e., Pharsalus] with her spells and sprinkled it with her horrible drugs, to stop it from letting the war move elsewhere, because she wanted to have all those dead to herself and make use of the blood of the whole world. She was hoping to mutilate the bodies of slaughtered kings, to sweep off [reading *auerrere* for *auertere*] the ashes of the whole Roman people, and to get hold of the bones of the aristocracy, in order to control its shades. She had only one passionate concern: what part of Pompey's stretched-out corpse she might snatch, or on what limb of Caesar's she might pounce.

The worthless son of Pompey spoke first and said to her: "You are the pride of Thessalian witches. You have the power to reveal to mankind its future, the power to change the course of events. Please tell me exactly what turn the hazard of war is going to take. I am not just a Roman plebeian—I am the son of Pompey, and everyone knows me—and I shall either rule the world or inherit disaster. I am worried because my heart is struck with doubts; on the other hand, I can deal with dangers that are spelled out to me. Chance hits us unexpectedly and unforeseen—take this power away from it! Torture the gods—or leave them alone and extort the truth from the dead! Open up the seat of Elysium, summon Death himself, and force him to tell us which one of us will be his prey. It is a difficult task, I know, but it might be of interest, even to you, to find out which way the hazard of this enormous issue is going to go."

The ruthless witch is glad that her reputation is so widespread and answers: "Young man, if you wanted to change a minor decree of fate, it would be easy to steer the gods into any course of action, even against their will. When the planets with their beams commit one single soul to death, witchcraft has the power to delay the event. Even if all the stars promise to people a ripe old age, we can cut short their lives by our magic herbs. But if the chain of causes goes back to the origin of the world and universal fate suffers if you want to make a minor change, then the whole of mankind must expect one single blow, and Fortuna has more power than the Thessalian witches—we admit it ourselves. If you just want to know what will happen to you, there are many easy ways that lead to the truth: earth and sky, the seas, the plains, and the rocks of Rhodope will

Speak to us. But the obvious method—since there is such an abundance of men who were recently killed—would be to pick one body from the Thessalian fields; then the mouth of a corpse that is still warm because death occurred only a short time ago will speak clearly [to us], and it will not be a dismal shade, with limbs dried in the sun, hissing sounds that our ears cannot make out.”

Thus the witch spoke, and by her magic she made the night twice as dark as before. She wrapped her sinister head in a veil of smog and moved among the bodies of the slain that had been cast out and denied burial. At once the wolves fled and the vultures pulled out their talons and flew away, still hungry; meanwhile, the witch picked out her “prophet”; she inspected the innermost organs, cold in death, and found that the tissue of the hardened lung was undamaged, and she looked for the power of speech in the dead body. Now the destiny of many men killed in battle is hanging in the balance: who is the one she might want to call back to the upper world? Had she attempted to raise a whole army of dead from the plain and make them fight again, the laws of the underworld would have yielded to her, and an entire host, brought up from Stygian Avernus by the power of a monstrous witch, would have joined the ranks.

At last she chose a corpse, inserted a hook into its throat, and attached the hook to a rope taken from the gallows [text and translation uncertain]; with this contraption she dragged the wretched corpse over rocks and stones, to bring it back to life, and placed it beneath a high rock of a hollow mountain that savage Erichtho had condemned to witness her rites.

The ground there descended abruptly and led down almost as far as the dark caverns of the underworld. A gloomy wood with drooping leaves borders it, and it is shaded by yew trees that the sun cannot penetrate and that never turn their tops toward the sky. Inside the caves there is darkness and gray mold caused by eternal night; only magic can produce light. Even in the gorge of Taenarus the air is less sluggish and stagnant—it is the gloomy zone between the hidden world and our own, and the rulers of Tartarus are not afraid of letting the shades go that far. Although the Thessalian witch imposes her will on destiny, it is doubtful whether she actually sees the shades of the underworld because she has dragged them there [i.e., to her cave] or because she has descended [into the underworld] herself.

She wrapped herself in a dark, hellish robe of various shades, threw back her hair, revealed her face, and tied her shaggy locks with vipers serving as ribbons.

When she saw that young Pompey’s companions grew pale and he

himself trembled and stared at the ground, she turned her lifeless face toward him and said:

“Drop your fears! Let not your hearts flutter any more! Right now a new life, a true life, from its looks, will be given to him, so that you can hear him speak, no matter how much you are afraid. And even if I were to show you the pools of Styx, the shore that consists of hissing flames, and you could see, by my magic, the Furies, Cerberus shaking his mane of snakes, and the chained bodies of the Giants, you would have no reason to fear the shades that are afraid of me, cowards!”

Now first of all she pierced the breast of the corpse, opening new wounds in it, which she filled with boiling blood. The inner organs she washed clean of gore and poured in a generous portion of moonjuice. With this she mixed everything that nature conceives and brings forth under evil stars: foam from the mouth of dogs that have rabies; the inner organs of a lynx; the vertebra of a frightful hyena; the marrow of a stag that had lived on a diet of snakes; the Echeneis, which holds a ship motionless in the middle of the ocean, even though the south wind stretches her ropes; eyes of dragons; stones that produce a sound when warmed under a breeding eagle; the flying serpent of Arabia; the viper born from the Red Sea, which guards the precious shell; the skin that the Libyan horn snake peels off when it is still alive; the ashes of the Phoenix, which places its body on an altar in the East. All this was there in abundance.

After she had thrown in ordinary poisons that are known by their names, she added leaves soaked in unutterable spells and herbs on which her own disgusting mouth had spat when they first appeared and all the poisons that she herself had given to the world.

Finally her voice, more capable than any herb of invoking the powers of hell, first uttered inarticulate sounds that seemed completely different from human speech. You could hear the barking of dogs in that voice, the howling of wolves, the moaning of the restless owl and of the screech owl that flies by night, the shrieking and roaring of a wild beast, the hiss of a serpent, the sound of waves beating against rocks and of forests in the wind, the thunder that detonates from a cloud—all these noises were in her voice. Then she utters the rest in a Thessalian spell, and her voice reached as far as the Tartarus:

“Furies! Horrors of hell! Tortured sinners! Chaos, eager to destroy countless worlds! Ruler of the underworld, who suffers for endless centuries because the death of the [heavenly] gods does not come soon enough for him! Styx! Elysium, where no Thessalian witch is allowed to enter! Persephone, who hates her mother in heaven! Hecate, third per-

sonification of my own goddess, Hecate, who enables me to communicate with the dead in a secret language! Custodian of the vast domain, who feeds the savage Dog with bits of human flesh! Sisters who must now spin a second thread of life! Ancient Ferryman of the burning waves, who is exhausted from rowing back the shades to me! Listen to my prayer!

“If these lips of mine that call you have been tainted sufficiently with crime, if I have always eaten human flesh before chanting such spells, if I have often cut open human breasts still full of life divine and washed them out with warm brains, if any baby could have lived once his head and inner organs were placed on your dishes—grant me my prayer!

“I am not asking for a shade lurking in the depths of Tartarus, a shade that has become accustomed to darkness long ago; no, I am asking for one that has just left the light and was on his way down; he still lingers at the very entrance of the chasm that leads down to gloomy Orcus, and even though he obeys my spell, he will join the Manes just once. Let a shade who was just recently one of Pompey’s soldiers tell his son the whole future; and remember that you ought to be grateful for the civil war!”

When she had spoken these words, she raised her head, her mouth foaming, and saw standing beside her the ghost of the unburied corpse. It was afraid of the lifeless body, the hated confinement of its former prison, and it shrank from entering the wound in the breast, the inner organs, and the tissue split open by the fatal wound. Poor wretch! You are cruelly deprived of death’s last gift: the inability to die [a second time].

Erictho is surprised that the Fates have the power to cause this delay. Angry at Death, she whips the motionless corpse with a live snake, and through the chinks in the ground which she had opened up with her spells, she barks at the shades and breaks the silence of their realm:

“Tisiphone and Megara! Are you listening to me? Will you not use your savage whips to drive his wretched soul through the wasteland of Erebus? Just wait, I shall conjure you up by your real names and abandon you, hounds of hell, in the light of the upper world. Over graves and burial grounds I shall follow you and watch you and drive you away from every tomb and every urn! And you, Hecate, with your pale and morbid aspect, whose face is usually different, made-up, when you visit the gods [above], I shall show you to them as you really are and forbid you to change your hellish face! Shall I tell what kind of food it is that keeps you there, Persephone, under the huge mass of earth, what bond of love unites you with the gloomy king of night, what defilement you suffered to make your mother not want to call you back? On you, lowest of the rulers of the world, I shall focus the sun breaking open your caves, and suddenly daylight will hit you. Will you obey? Or must I recruit him who

always makes the earth tremble when his name is invoked, who can look at the Gorgon's head unveiled, who lashes a frightened Fury with her own whip, who dwells in the part of Tartarus that is hidden from your view, for whom you are the 'gods above,' who commits perjury in the name of Styx?"

At once the clotted blood began to boil, heated the blackish wounds, circulated in the body, and reached the extremities of the limbs. Struck by it, the vital tissues in the cold breast began to vibrate, new life stole into organs unaccustomed to it and struggled with death. Every limb began to shake, the sinews stretched, and the corpse, far from rising slowly, limb by limb, from the ground, jumped up as if rebounding from the earth and stood at once erect. His eyelids were wide open, his eyeballs bare. His face was not yet that of a living person; it looked as if he were already dead. He remained pale and stiff and in a daze, thrust upon the world as he was. His lips were locked and produced no sound; voice and utterance were only given to him in order that he might deliver an oracle.

The witch said: "Tell me what I command and your reward will be great, for if you speak the truth, I shall make you safe from witchcraft as long as the world lasts. On such a pyre, with such fuel, shall I cremate your corpse, chanting at the same time a Stygian spell, so that your shade will never have to respond to the incantations of any witch. This privilege should make it worth your while to have lived twice: neither spells nor herbs will venture to interrupt your long sleep of oblivion, once I have given you death. From the tripod [of Delphi] and the prophets of the gods one expects an ambiguous answer, but whoever seeks the truth from the shades and has the nerve to approach the oracles of grim death must leave with clear information. Please do not hold back anything: tell me what will happen and where; provide the voice through which Fate may speak to me."

She added a spell that furnished to the ghost the knowledge of all she was asking.

The corpse, looking sad and shedding many tears, spoke: "You have called me back from the high shore of the silent river. There I did not see the Fates spinning their gloomy threads, but I learned from all the dead that a terrible strife divides the Roman shades and that the civil war has shattered the peace of the underworld. Some great Romans have left the Elysian fields; others have come from gloomy Tartarus [reading *Elysias alii sedes, at Tartara maesta / diuersi liquere duces*]. They revealed [to me] what the Fates have in store. The blessed shades looked sad; I saw the Decii, father and son, who had devoted their lives to the gods in battle; Camillus and the Curii were crying; and Sulla complained about Rome's

fortune. Scipio was mourning because an unlucky descendant of his was destined to perish on Libyan soil; and Cato, an even fiercer enemy of Carthage [than Scipio], lamented the death that his descendant prefers to slavery. Only one of the blessed shades did I see rejoicing: the first consul after the expulsion of the kings, Brutus.

“But dangerous Catiline has torn and broken his fetters and is exulting, and so are fierce Marius and Cethegus with the naked arm. I saw the delight of the Drusi, those infamous demagogues who had proposed unreasonable laws; I saw the delight of the Gracchi, who had tried the impossible. Their hands were chained by everlasting links of steel, and they themselves were locked in the prison of Hades, but they applauded, and the whole bunch of criminals demanded the fields of the blessed. The king of the stagnant realm opened wide his gloomy residence; he sharpened steep rocks and hard steel for fetters and prepared tortures for the victor.

“But take this consolation with you, son of Pompey: the dead are looking forward to welcoming your father and his family in a quiet retreat, and they are reserving a place for the house of Pompey in the brighter region of their kingdom. Let not the glory of a short life trouble you; the hour will come that wipes out the distinction between the leaders. Hurry up and die, be proud of your great soul when you descend from graves, however small, and trample on the shades of the gods of Rome. Whose grave will be near the Nile, and whose near the Tiber? That is the question, and [in the end] the [whole] battle between the two rivals is merely about their place of burial. Do not ask about your own destiny: the Fates will reveal it to you, and I shall be silent; your father himself, a more reliable prophet, will tell you everything [when he appears to you] on Sicilian soil, and even he will not know where to summon you and whence to keep you away. . . . [A spurious line follows in the text.] Beware of Europe, Africa, and Asia Minor, poor wretches; Fortune will divide [reading *distribuet*] your tombs among the lands over which you once triumphed, and in all the world you will find no safer place than Pharsalus.”

Having delivered his prophecy he stood there in silence and sorrow and pleaded to die once more. Magic spells and herbs were needed before the corpse could die, and death, having used up its powers already, could not claim his life again. The witch now built an enormous pyre of wood. The dead man walked to the fire, and Erictho left him there, stretched out on the lighted pile, and allowed him finally to die. She then walked back with Sextus to his father's camp. The sky was now taking on the color of dawn, but she ordered night to hold back the day and give them thick darkness, until they set foot safely within the encampment.

When the great oracles of the ancient world—Delphi, for example—began to lose their prestige, a good deal of concern arose among pagan theologians and philosophers. Plutarch, the Platonist, who had held a priesthood for life at Delphi since A.D. 95, devoted one of his treatises to the problem. The theory he seemed to favor is this: not the gods themselves—the Apollo of Delphi, for instance—but some minor deities are responsible for the maintenance, the continuity, of the oracular spirits at the famous shrines. Unlike the Olympian gods, these daemons grow old and finally, after many centuries, die. It is an interesting theory, for it implies the belief in a cosmic force that is more concentrated or more intense at certain points on the globe than at others. When this force is detected at a certain place, that place becomes “holy.” But if the force gradually vanishes, the holy place will be deserted.

To illustrate his point, Plutarch tells the famous story of the death of “the Great Pan,” who was clearly a powerful daemon; the lesser daemons knew at once their time had come when they heard of his death.

Substituting mere daemons for the Olympians helped uphold the prestige of the ancient gods against the skepticism of some philosophical schools and the attacks of the Christians. In the end, the Christians claimed that no valid distinction could be drawn between such gods and daemons.

Plutarch, *On the Ceasing of Oracles* 14–15, pp. 418E–419E

[Cleombrotus, one of the participants in the dialogue, has just proposed a theory that daemons or minor gods, not any of the major divinities, are responsible for the oracles. This theory does not appeal to Heracleon, another participant in the dialogue.]

“To say that it is not the gods,” said Heracleon, “who are in charge of the oracles, since the gods ought to be free of earthly concerns, but that daemons, the servants of the gods, are in charge does not seem such a bad idea to me, but to take, by the handful, so to speak, lines from Empedocles and impose on these daemons sins and delusions and errors sent by the gods, and to assume that they finally die, as if they were human beings—this seems to me a little too rash and rather uncouth.”

At this point Cleombrotus asked Philip who this young man [i.e., Heracleon] was and whence he came, and after learning his name and his city, he said: “Heracleon, we have become involved in strange discussions, but we know what we are doing. When you discuss basic ideas, you need basic principles if you want to come anywhere near the truth. But you are inconsistent, because you take back something that you just granted: you agree that daemons exist, but by denying that they can be

bad and mortal, you no longer admit that they are daemons. For in what respect are they different from the gods if, as regards their substance, they possess immortality and, as regards their qualities, freedom from emotion and sin?"

As Heracleon was silently thinking about this, Philip said: "No, Heraclleon, we have inherited evil daemons not only from Empedocles but also from Plato, Xenocrates, and Chrysippus, and Democritus, too, who by his prayer to meet 'propitious daemons' clearly acknowledged the existence of another class—tricky and full of evil intentions and urges.

"As to the question whether daemons can die, I have heard a story from a man who was neither a fool nor an impostor. The father of Aemilianus, the professor of rhetoric whose students some of you have been, was called Epiterses; he was a schoolteacher and lived in the same town I did. He told me that he once made a trip to Italy and embarked on a ship that carried commercial goods and a large number of passengers. It was already evening; they were near the Echinades Islands. The wind dropped, and the ship drifted near Paxi.

"Most of the passengers were awake, and some were still drinking after having finished their dinner. Suddenly a voice was heard from Paxi loudly calling 'Thamus! Thamus!' Everybody was astonished. Thamus happened to be our pilot, an Egyptian, but he was not known by name even to many of us on board. The voice called twice, and he remained silent, but the third time, he answered. The caller, raising his voice, now said: 'When you get across to Palodes, announce that the Great Pan is dead.'

"On hearing this, Epiterses said, everybody was amazed, and they argued among themselves whether it might be better to do what they were told or not to get involved in something and let the matter go. So Thamus decided that if there should be a breeze he would sail past and say nothing, but with no wind and a smooth sea all around he would announce what he had been told. When he came near Palodes, and there was no wind, no wave, Thamus looked from the stern toward the land and said the words as he had heard them: 'The Great Pan is dead.' He had not yet finished when there was much wailing, not just from one person, but from many, mingled with shouts of amazement.

"Since there were so many persons on board, the story soon spread in all of Rome, and Thamus was sent for by the emperor Tiberius. Tiberius became so convinced that the story was true that he ordered a thorough investigation concerning Pan; the scholars at his court—and there were many of them—guessed that he was the son of Hermes and Penelope."

But Philip also had several witnesses among those present; they had heard the story from Aemilianus when he was an old man.

Demetrius said that among the islands near the coast of Britain many

were isolated and deserted, and some had the names of daemons and heroes. He himself, by order of the emperor, had made a voyage of exploration and observation to the nearest of these islands. It had only a few inhabitants: holy men who are all considered inviolate by the Britons. Soon after his arrival there was great tumult in the air and many portents were observed: thunder exploded and lightning hit the earth. When things had quieted down, the people on the island said that one of the more powerful spirits had passed away.

63

In the dialogue *On the Ceasing of Oracles* Plutarch also discusses daemons in general. He tends to dissociate the gods from any direct contact with human beings and to introduce daemons as intermediaries. In referring to Hesiod [no. 53], he interprets—correctly, it would seem—Hesiod’s distinction between good and bad daemons. His attempt to compute the average life expectancy of a daemon seems a little farfetched, but his description of the transformation of bodies and souls is beautiful, for it asserts eloquently the reality of a higher, spiritual order of existence.

Plutarch, *On the Ceasing of Oracles* 9–11, pp. 414E–415D

[*Lamprias says:*] It is really naïve and childish to believe that the god himself enters the body of the prophet and speaks forth, using his lips and his voice as an instrument as in the case of the ventriloquists who were once called “Eurycleis” but now are known as “Pythones.” For if you mix a god with human functions, you violate his majesty and you disregard his dignity and the excellence of his nature.

[*Cleombrotus answers:*] You are right, but since it is difficult to grasp and define how Providence acts and to what point one should let it enter, some maintain that the god has absolutely nothing to do with it, while others see in him the cause of everything. Both positions are equally far from a balanced and responsible view. I agree with those who say that Plato, when he discovered the element that underlies all created qualities—the element that is now called “matter” and “nature”—relieved philosophers of many serious problems. But there are those who have discovered that the race of daemons, halfway between gods and men, communicates between the gods and mankind and establishes a relationship between them and us, and they have created, in my opinion, more problems of an even more serious nature. It is irrelevant whether this theory goes back to the *magi* who followed Zoroaster or is Thracian and belongs to Orpheus, or is Egyptian or Phrygian, as we may guess from seeing how the ritual of both [of the latter] countries includes many

themes relating to death and mourning, and that these form part of their ceremonies and liturgies.

Among the Greeks, Homer seems to use both terms indifferently. He sometimes calls the gods “daemons.” Hesiod was the first to distinguish clearly and explicitly between four different classes of rational beings: the gods, the daemons, the heroes, and mankind. This means that he believed in a transformation by which the men of the Golden Age became good daemons in great numbers, and by which some of the demigods were admitted to the ranks of the heroes.

Others assume a transformation of bodies as well as souls. Just as one sees water generated from earth, air from water, fire from air, as matter moves upward, thus the superior souls undergo a transformation from men to heroes and from heroes to daemons, but from the rank of daemons only a few are purified over a long period of time because of their excellence and come to partake altogether in divine nature. But it also happens that some of them cannot gain control over themselves and are degraded and clothed once more in mortal bodies and have a dark, dim life, like mist.

Hesiod thinks that at the end of certain periods of time death comes to daemons, too. For in the speech of the Naiad he says, alluding to their life-span:

The raucous crow lives as long as nine generations of men in their
prime;
the deer lives four times as long as the crow,
the raven three times as long as the deer,
the Phoenix nine times as long as the raven,
but we Nymphs with our beautiful locks, the daughters of Zeus,
who holds the Aegis,
live ten times as long as the Phoenix.

Those who misinterpret the term *generation* come up with a very high number. In fact, it means only “one year.” Thus, daemons reach an age of nine thousand seven hundred twenty years, which is less than most mathematicians calculate but more than Pindar gives to the Nymphs when he says that “their life-span is equal to that of a tree” and that is why they are called “Hamadryads.”

64

In this passage from his dialogue *On the Ceasing of Oracles*, Plutarch makes the point that the gods do not operate directly; rather, they communicate

through daemons, their servants, messengers, assistants, or secretaries. Daemons, for example, supervise sacrifices and mystery rites; they punish the guilty and sustain the oracles.

Plutarch, *On the Ceasing of Oracles* 15, p. 418C–D

Allow me to bring this preliminary discussion to a suitable conclusion, for we now have reached that point. Let us venture to say, too, after so many others have said it, that when daemons in charge of divination vanish, the oracles vanish along with them and are gone. When daemons go into exile or emigrate, the oracles lose their power, but when the daemons come back, even after a long time, the oracles speak again, like musical instruments when there are players who know how to use them.

65

In his treatise *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch offers further speculations on the nature of daemons. He quotes from Hesiod, Empedocles, Plato, and Plato's disciple Xenocrates, who has been called "the father of scientific daemonology." The emphasis here is on evil daemons. Some of them are what we would call the "fallen angels" of pagan antiquity. Others seem to be evil by nature—for example, Typhon, who, in the myth and ritual of Isis and Osiris, represents the eternal villain, the permanent antagonist in a kind of cosmic drama between benevolent and malevolent deities.

To Plutarch, who witnessed the rapid growth of the Isis cult during his lifetime, these Egyptian deities, even the good ones, looked like daemons that had been promoted to higher ranks in return for exceptionally good behavior. In other words, Plutarch was pragmatic enough to recognize a measure of success even in the religious sphere. Isis and Osiris were definitely not part of the Greek Pantheon, but the appeal of their cult in the late Hellenistic and early imperial periods is a fact. According to Plutarch, their success as deities was based on a kind of advancement within a divine hierarchy, which, of course, required the approval of all the highest authorities and was, therefore, acceptable. This spiritual advancement reflects an upward mobility within the hierarchies that we already know on earth, and thus our search for the supreme power must go on.

Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 26–27, p. 361A–E

It would seem that daemons have a complex and abnormal nature and purpose; hence Plato assigns to the Olympian gods that which is on the right side and the odd numbers, and to the daemons the opposite of these. Xenocrates believes that unlucky days and all holidays that are characterized by beatings or lamentations or fasting or bad language or obscene

jokes are not proper occasions for honoring gods and good daemons. He believes that there are in the atmosphere great, powerful presences that are also ill-tempered and unpleasant and enjoy the sort of thing just mentioned and, if they get it, cause no further trouble.

Hesiod calls the good, kindly daemons “holy daemons” and “guardian of mankind,” and he says that “they give wealth, which is their royal privilege.”

Plato calls this category “interpreting” and “ministering,” halfway between gods and men, carrying upward the prayers and wishes of men and bringing to us from the realm of the gods oracles and welcome gifts.

Empedocles says that daemons get punished for the bad things they do and the duties they neglect:

The power of the aether drives them into the sea;
the sea spits them out onto the soil of the earth;
the earth sends them to the rays of the tireless sun;
and the sun throws them into the whirlpool of aether:
one region receives them from another, and they all hate them.

The daemons are punished and purified up to the point when they take back the place and rank that are naturally theirs.

Stories like these and similar ones are told, they say, about Typhon. His jealousy and vicious temper made him do terrible things: he stirred up everything and flooded the whole earth and the sea with evils. Later, he had to pay the penalty. The avenger was Isis, the sister-wife of Osiris: she quenched the insane fury of Typhon and put an end to it. But then she did not simply forget the struggles and trials that she had been through, or her wanderings and the many brave and wise things that she had done. She would not accept silence and oblivion, but into the holiest ritual [the initiation rites of the Isis mysteries?] she introduced symbols and representations of her former sufferings. She sanctified these as a lesson in piety and an encouragement for men and women who are the victims of similar predicaments. She and Osiris were promoted to the rank of gods from that of benevolent daemons because of their admirable conduct. This happened later to Heracles and Dionysus. It seems appropriate that they receive joint honors as gods and daemons. Their power is everywhere, but especially in the regions above the earth and beneath the earth.

66

Many ancient philosophers wrote “Consolations” for their friends and patrons and even for themselves to give help and comfort in times of

bereavement. Two essays or addresses of this kind are attributed to Plutarch: one to his wife on the death of their daughter, Timoxena; the other to Apollonius, a friend. The second essay was probably not written by Plutarch, but it represents the genre quite well.

The sophist Antiphon (fifth century B.C.) is said to be the “inventor” of this genre. He had an office in or near the marketplace of Corinth where he comforted people who mourned the death of a family member or a dear friend, combining the roles of priest and psychiatrist, presumably for a fee. Antiphon also conceived a method or technique to achieve *Freedom from Distress*. It is lost, but some of his advice may live on in Platonism (Crantor, *On Mourning*, a famous work, also lost) and Stoicism (Panaetius, *Consolation Addressed to Quintus Tubero*). Cicero wrote a celebrated *Consolatio* for himself, to get over the death of his beloved daughter, Tullia; again, the work is lost, but its main ideas can be reconstructed on the basis of his *Tusculanae Disputationes*.

According to one of the arguments used in this kind of literature, death is not the evil that most people consider it to be; it is, in fact, a blessing. A few stories are then told to illustrate this truth. In the present text the third story is particularly important in our context, for it documents the existence, in antiquity, of “oracles of the dead” (*psychomanteia* ‘soul oracles’). In this case the oracle is consulted not about the future but about the past. A father has suddenly lost his only child and suspects foul play. He visits a *psychomanteion*, probably the one at Cumae, near Naples, which is associated with the famous sibyl located in the region (see Virg., *Aen.* 6). There he offers a sacrifice, falls asleep, and has a vision. The procedure is a form of incubation, although in this case the vision is sought not for the sake of finding a cure for a disease but in order to establish a fact in the past. It might be said, however, that the father’s anxieties and suspicions about his son’s death could easily have become an obsession and manifested itself in a nervous disorder. At the same time, he simply wants to know the truth, and the truth is revealed to him by two *psychai* ‘souls’, that of his father and that of his son. The message that the “soul,” or “daemon,” of his son delivers to Elysium (the name sounds as if it had been invented for the occasion) is simply that we do not know what death really is and that people die because their natural time has come, even if we do not understand it.

The story may be unhistorical, but it shows that the Greeks and Romans believed in various means of communicating with the dead. Dreams were one of them. The special function of the *psychomanteion* was to set up the conditions under which such dreams would occur. The technique or techniques used were probably similar to those employed for incubations.

Plutarch, *Consolation Addressed to Apollonius* 14, p. 109A–D

Pindar tells us that Agamedes and Trophonius, after having built the temple of Delphi, demanded their pay from Apollo. The god answered that he would pay them seven days later and urged them, in the meantime, to enjoy themselves. They did as they were told, and on the seventh night they died in their sleep.

The delegates of the Boeotians went to Delphi to consult the god, and Pindar is supposed to have urged them to ask [on his behalf] the question, “What is best for man?” The priestess answered that he ought to know the answer, if he really was the author of the story about Trophonius and Agamedes. On the other hand, if he wanted to find out by himself, it would become clear to him in the very near future. From this response Pindar concluded that he should prepare himself for death, and in fact he died shortly thereafter.

And here is the story about the Italian [i.e., South Italian Greek] Euthynous. He was the son of Elysus of Terina, a prominent man in that community because of his qualities, his wealth, and his reputation. Euthynous died suddenly, and no one knew why. It occurred to Elysus—as it might have occurred to anyone—that perhaps his son had died of poisoning, for he was his only child, destined to inherit a substantial fortune. Because he did not know how to verify this suspicion, he went to an oracle of the dead [*psychomanteion*]. After he had offered the prescribed sacrifices, he fell asleep and had a vision. His father appeared to him, coming toward him. When Elysus saw his father, he told him in detail everything that had happened to his son and urged and implored him to find the cause of death. His father answered: “This is exactly why I came. Take from this person here the object that he brings to you. From this you will find out everything that distresses you.” The person he pointed out was a young man who followed him and resembled Euthynous [the son], both in age and in stature. When he asked him who he was, the young man replied: “I am the soul [literally, the daemon] of your son.” And as he said this, he gave the father a little scroll. Elysus unrolled it and saw written on it three lines:

Truly, the minds of men are lost in ignorance.

Euthynous died in accordance with fate.

It was not right for him to live, nor for his parents.

This is what you can read in the accounts of ancient writers.

Here we have a piece of folklore that was not included in the *Odyssey*, although it may be quite old. One of Odysseus' companions keeps plaguing as a ghost the inhabitants of a Sicilian town who had stoned him to death for raping a local girl. The Delphic oracle is consulted and supports the daemon, because he was a hero, after all, and a cult is established in his honor. Every year the most beautiful girl in the whole community must be given to the daemon-hero as his wife. What is meant by the word *given* is not quite clear, but the context seems to suggest a human sacrifice, not just a *hieros gamos*, a "sacred wedding" or a ritual rape. The girls always either died or disappeared, it would seem. The real hero of the story, a famous boxer, Euthymus, falls in love with the intended victim and wrestles with the daemon, just as Heracles wrestled with Death in Euripides' *Alcestris*, driving him "out of the land." Euthymus then marries the girl, and they live happily ever after: in fact, he never dies, but becomes a daemon (a good one, no doubt) himself. Pausanias saw a painting, a copy of a much older original, that illustrated this quaint story. In it the evil daemon, Lycas by name, appears as an "awfully black" figure, terrifying in appearance, dressed in a wolf's skin (*lykos* means "wolf" in Greek). Perhaps this is the origin of the story of Dracula and the wolf-man. It should be noted that throughout the story the terms *hero* and *daemon* are used interchangeably.

Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 6.6

[*Euthymus was a famous boxer; he was born in southern Italy and returned there after one of his Olympic victories.*]

When Euthymus had returned to Italy, he fought the Hero. This is the story. During Odysseus' wanderings after the fall of Troy, they say that he was carried by winds to various cities of Italy and Sicily. He landed with his ships at Temesa. One of the sailors got drunk and raped a young woman, and for this crime he was stoned to death by the villagers.

Odysseus paid no attention whatsoever to the death of this man and sailed away, but the daemon of the man who had been stoned to death by the people never missed an opportunity to murder someone in Temesa, attacking all age groups. Finally the whole population was ready to leave Temesa and Italy altogether, but the Pythia would not let them. She told them to appease the Hero by measuring out for him a holy precinct, building him a temple, and giving him as his wife every year the most beautiful young woman to be found in Temesa. They did, of course, what the god had ordered, and the daemon did not terrorize them any further.

Euthymus happened to come to Temesa at the time when the customary tribute was paid to the daemon. When he found out about their problem, he expressed the wish to enter the temple and have a look at the girl. When he saw her, his first reaction was to feel sorry for her, but his second was to fall in love. The girl swore to marry him if he saved her. Euthymus prepared himself and waited for the entrance of the daemon. He fought him and won, and the Hero—since he had been driven out of the land—dived into the sea and disappeared. Euthymus had a splendid wedding, and the people there were free forever from the daemon.

I also heard another story about Euthymus: he reached a ripe old age and managed to escape death, leaving human life in some different way. From a merchant who has sailed there I have learned that Temesa is still inhabited.

This is what I have heard, but I also know the following from a painting that I happened to see. It was a copy of an older painting. There is young Sybaris and the river Calabrus and the spring Lyca, and a hero's sanctuary nearby and the city of Temesa. Among these figures there is also the daemon whom Euthymus drove out: his color is terribly dark, and he is really terrifying to look at; a wolf's skin serves as his dress, and according to an inscription on the painting his name was "Wolf-Man."

68

The story of Thelyphron is a tragicomic episode in Apuleius' novel, *Metamorphoses*. Apuleius was interested in witchcraft himself, and the novel undoubtedly has autobiographical elements. This particular episode reflects the popular belief that witches needed corpses or parts of them for their magical operations; therefore, corpses had to be guarded carefully until they were cremated. People who could afford it hired a guard. Here, a young man who desperately needs money takes on a job that turns out not to be as easy as it appeared. In the course of the story the corpse is called back to life twice, once in secret by the witches and once in front of a crowd by a famous Egyptian "prophet"—that is, a necromancer—dressed in linen robes, with palm-leaf sandals on his feet and a shaven head. The circumstances of his death are cleared up by the dead man himself [as in *no.* 66].

Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, or *The Golden Ass* 2.21–30

When I was still a minor under the care of a ward, I traveled from Miletus to the games in Olympia, and since I also wanted to visit this famous province, I wandered through all of Thessaly and arrived in Larissa under an unlucky star. My travel funds were quite low, and I felt so poor that I

walked all over the place looking for means of support. In the middle of the marketplace I saw a tall, elderly man. He was standing on a stone and announced in a loud voice that he was hiring someone to guard a corpse. I said to a passerby: "What is this I hear? Are the corpses in this country in the habit of running away?" He answered: "Hush! You are obviously very young and very much a stranger, and so of course you don't know that you are in Thessaly, where the witches generally gnaw the flesh off dead men's faces and use it as an ingredient in their magic." I said: "Could you please tell me what it involves to stand guard over a corpse?" He replied: "Well, first one has to remain completely awake all night, the eyes wide open, never closed for a second, and always concentrated on the corpse; one must never take them off [it], not even glance sideways, because the evil witches can transform themselves into any animal they like and approach so stealthily that they can even deceive the eyes of the Sun and of Justice with the greatest ease. They take on the shape of birds or dogs or mice or even that of flies. By their horrible spells they manage to put the guards to sleep. No one can say for sure what tricks these vicious women invent to satisfy their lust. And yet for this wretched job the pay is usually not higher than four or six ducats. Oh—I almost forgot to tell you: if the corpse is not delivered intact in the morning, the guard must furnish from his own face that part that has been eaten off the corpse and is missing."

When I heard this I mustered up my courage, approached the crier at once, and said to him: "You need not shout any more. Here is your guard, ready. Let me know the pay." He answered: "A thousand drachmas will be deposited in your name. But listen, young man: you must be very careful if you want to watch this corpse and guard it properly against those awful harpies; he is the son of one of the chief men in the city." I said: "Don't be ridiculous. Save your worry. You see before you a man of iron who never sleeps and has sharper eyesight than Lynceus or Argus—who is, in fact, all eyes." I had hardly finished speaking when he quickly led me to a house whose main entrance was locked. He took me through a small back door and opened a dark room with closed windows. Then he showed me a weeping lady all in black, walked up to her, and said to her: "Here is the man I hired; he has taken the responsibility of guarding your husband." She pushed back the hair that hung into her face on both sides, showed a face that was impressive even in mourning, and said, looking at me: "I beg you, make sure you do a really good job." I said: "Don't worry, just add a good tip."

She agreed, got up, and led me into another room. There she showed me a body covered with a shiny linen shroud which she herself removed in the presence of seven witnesses. She wept over him for a long time and

then appealed to the conscience of all those present as she pointed out the parts of the body while someone carefully took an inventory in legal language: “Look,” she said, “the nose is there, the eyes are unhurt, the ears in good shape, the lips not damaged, the chin in one piece. You are witnesses to this, fellow citizens.” When the inventory was signed and sealed, and she was about to leave, I said to her: “Madam, will you arrange for me to have everything I need?” She asked: “Well, what do you need?” I answered: “A fairly large lamp and enough oil to last till daybreak, warm water with a few flasks of wine, a cup, and a plate full of leftovers.” But she shook her head and said: “Leave me alone, you fool. You want to dine and have a good time in a house of mourning in which for days and days not even smoke was seen? Do you think you have come here for a party? Don’t you think it would be more appropriate to the occasion to mourn and weep?” As she said this, she looked at a maid and said: “Quick, Myrrhine, give him a lamp and oil, lock him in the room to do his job, and leave at once.”

Thus left alone, I rubbed my eyes to comfort the corpse and to keep myself awake during the vigil, and I sang to amuse myself. Twilight fell and turned into night, and night grew deeper, and it was really time to go to sleep, and it was probably past midnight. I was scared to death, especially when all of a sudden a weasel slipped in and stood there looking at me intently. The nerve of the tiny animal annoyed me. I said: “Move on, you filthy creature, and get back to the likes of you in the garden before I let you have it. What are you waiting for?” It turned around and disappeared from the room at once. Almost immediately I fell into a deep sleep—it was like sinking into a bottomless pit—and even the Delphic oracle could not have determined which of the two of us lying there was more dead than the other. I was practically lifeless, nonexistent, and needed a guard myself.

The truce of the night was broken by the crowing of the “crested cohort.” I finally woke up in a state of terror and ran over to the corpse. I held the lamp close to see his face clearly and checked all the details. Everything seemed to be in order. At this moment the poor widow, still weeping, burst into the room, accompanied by the witnesses of the evening before. She threw herself on the body, kissed it again and again for a long time, and then, guided by the lamp, registered everything. She turned around and called for her steward Philodespotus and told him: “Give this fine guard his pay at once.” It was handed out to me and she said: “I thank you very much, young man. You have done me a tremendous service, and you will be a friend of the family from now on.” I was absolutely overjoyed at this unexpected benefit and at the bright gold coins I was tossing up in my hand, and I said to her: “But madam, please

consider me one of your servants, and whenever you need my help be sure to call on me.” I had hardly said this when all her people jumped on me, called me a scoundrel, cursed me, and attacked me with all kinds of improvised weapons: one of them boxed me in the face, another dug his elbows into my back, a third hit me in the ribs very hard; they kicked me, pulled my hair, ripped my clothes. I was almost torn to pieces, just like Adonis [text uncertain], that arrogant youth, or Musaeus or Orpheus [?], and kicked out of the house in terrible shape.

I stopped in the next street and recovered somewhat, and as I remembered my tactless and ill-omened remark, I had to admit to myself that I deserved even more beatings than I had received. Meanwhile, the dead body had been mourned and saluted for the last time and was now being carried according to ancient tradition (he belonged, after all, to the aristocracy) in a solemn funeral procession across the marketplace.

An older man in black, looking sad and crying as he tore his fine white hair, approached the bier, clutched it with both hands, and cried, his voice tense and choking with sobs: “Fellow citizens! I appeal to your sense of honor and your love for our city! This man has been murdered! Help! A shocking deed has been done, and you must punish this evil, wicked woman drastically. She and no one else has poisoned this poor young man, my nephew, to oblige her lover and to inherit her husband’s estate!” Thus the old man continued to appeal to one person after another with pitiful complaints. The crowd went wild, and since such a crime seemed plausible, they were ready to believe it. People shouted for fire, demanded stones, and incited a bunch of young men to kill the woman. She produced well-rehearsed tears and, calling on all the gods, swore in the language of true religion that she could never have committed such a horrible crime.

The old man said: “Let us leave the judgment of truth to divine providence. Here is Zatchlas, an outstanding Egyptian necromancer who has made an agreement with me some time ago to bring back briefly, for a considerable fee, the spirit of the young man from the underworld and to revive his body by restoring it back to life from death.” As he said this he brought forward a young man dressed in linen robes, with palm-leaf sandals on his feet, his head completely shaven. The old man kissed his hands repeatedly and touched his knees; then he said: “Reverend sir, have mercy, have mercy! I implore you by the stars of heaven, by the gods of the underworld, by the elements of nature, by the silence of the night and the hidden sanctuary of Coptus and the flooding of the Nile and the mysteries of Memphis and the sacred rattles of Pharus! Grant him the brief enjoyment of sunshine! Pour a little light into eyes that are shut forever! I am not quarreling with fate, nor am I denying the earth what

belongs to it: I only ask for a few spare moments of life to have at least the consolation of revenge.” The necromancer, favorably impressed by these words, placed a magic herb on the lips of the dead man and another on his breast. Then he turned to the east and prayed in silence to the glorious Sun for success. The whole scenario looked so impressive that all those present could hardly wait to see a tremendous miracle happen.

I managed to push my way into the crowd and to climb on a slightly raised stone directly behind the bier, and I watched everything with great interest. Soon the breast of the corpse began to heave as breath returned to it; the vein of life began to pulsate; the whole body was filled with spirit. The corpse sat up, and it was the young man who spoke: “Why on earth did you have to call me back briefly to the business of life when I had already my drink of Lethe and was floating on the Stygian swamp? Leave me alone, I beg you, leave me alone, and allow me to have my peace.” This was the voice we heard coming from the body. The prophet sounded a little more excited as he cried: “Why don’t you reveal and relate to the people all the hidden details of your death? Don’t you realize that I am able to invoke the Furies with my incantations and have your weary limbs tormented?” The one on the bier understood this and with a deep sigh addressed the people: “I have been finished off by the evil practices of my young bride; she sentenced me to drink poison; the bed that I had to vacate for her adulterous lover was still warm.” That fine wife of his showed great presence of mind and without any regard for the gods argued stubbornly with her husband, who argued back. The crowd got all heated up, but people disagreed violently: some wanted to see that wicked woman buried alive at once with the body of her husband; others insisted that the false testimony of a corpse ought not to be accepted.

The whole disagreement was settled by the following words of the young husband. With another deep sigh, he said: “I will give you clear proof of the truth and nothing but the truth, and I will tell you something that absolutely no one else can know.” He pointed his finger at me and continued: “This is the man who guarded my corpse throughout the whole night most conscientiously and carefully while the witches were waiting to attack my remains. To this purpose they had taken on various shapes, but in vain, for they were unable to fool his vigilance and dedication. Finally they enveloped him in a cloud of sleep, and when he was buried in deep slumber they kept calling my name again and again, until my lifeless limbs and my cold body clumsily and reluctantly obeyed their magic commands. Now this man was alive, of course, but he slept like a corpse, and since he had no idea that his name was the same as mine, he stood up and walked around without resisting, exactly like a ghost. Even though the doors of the room had been carefully locked, through a tiny

hole in the wall they cut off first his nose and then his ears. So he suffered mutilation in my place. To improve on their deceit, they glued on his head a pair of wax ears shaped exactly like the ones they had cut off, and they also gave him a fake nose. And now, there he is, poor fellow. He thinks he was rewarded for his dedication, but he was rewarded for his own mutilation!”

I was horrified as he said this, and tried to touch my face. I grabbed my nose: it came off. I felt my ears: they just dropped. Everyone pointed at me and wagged their heads, and there was thunderous laughter. Bursting into a cold sweat, I tried to escape between the legs of the people standing there. And I was never able to go home again, mutilated and ridiculous as I was, but I let my hair grow on both sides to cover the place where my ears had been, and for cosmetic reasons I glued a compact bandage on my face to make up for the lack of my nose.

69

According to his biographer, Philostratus, Apollonius of Tyana, the philosopher and miracle-worker, was successful as an exorcist. The young man he healed is described as a “playboy” who belonged to a prominent family and whose problem had not been recognized until Apollonius came to town. The reference to “singers on wheels” is curious; apparently these were ambulant satirists who used their carriages as platforms. The practice seems to have survived in the context of the carnival along the Rhine, from Basel to Cologne.

The exorcism worked by Apollonius is different from Jesus’ miracles. The way this daemon responds to the philosopher, and the feat he performs for the benefit of the crowd—to prove that he really is a daemon—seem unique. After he is healed, the young man naturally becomes a disciple of Apollonius.

The act of exorcism is quite simple: an angry look and a stern admonition from the master are enough to drive the daemon out.

Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.20

Apollonius was discussing the problem of libations, and a young playboy happened to be present at his lecture. The young man had such a terrible reputation that he had once been the target of songs from “cabarets-on-wheels.” He was from Corcyra and traced his pedigree back to Alcinous the Phaeacian, the host of Odysseus. Apollonius went on about libations and urged his audience not to drink from one particular cup but to keep it for the gods without touching it or drinking from it. At one point he urged them to have handles attached to the cup and to pour the liba-

tion over the handle, this being the part from which men practically never drink. The young man burst into loud, vulgar laughter. Apollonius looked at him and said: "It is not you who behave in an insulting manner, but the daemon who drives you to do this, and you don't know it." The young man actually had no idea that he was possessed. He used to laugh at things that made no one else laugh, and then fall to weeping without any reason, and he often talked and sang to himself. Now, most people thought it was the exuberance of youth that led him into these moods, but actually he was the mouthpiece of the daemon, and when he seemed to be drunk, he was not [text uncertain]. When Apollonius looked at him, the ghost [in him] began to cry in fear and anger—it sounded like people being burned and racked—and swore to leave the young man alone and never possess any person again. Apollonius spoke angrily to him, the way a master speaks to a shifty, scheming, shameless slave, and ordered him to leave the young man alone and show by a sign that he had done so. The daemon said: "Yes, I will throw down that statue over there," and he pointed at one of the statues in the King's Portico, for this is where all this took place. Now, it would be impossible to describe the commotion of those in the crowd and the way they clapped their hands in wonder when the statue first began to sway gently and then crashed down! The young man rubbed his eyes, as if he had just woken up, and looked toward the radiant sun. He was very embarrassed when he saw everyone staring at him. He no longer seemed dissolute, nor did he have that crazy look: he had returned to his own true self, just as if he had been cured by a drug. He gave up his fancy clothes and elegant apparel and all the other requisites of his Sybaritic way of life and fell in love with [philosophical] austerity, put on the [philosopher's] cloak, and modeled his character after that of Apollonius.

70

Plotinus (c. A.D. 205–270) was the last great creative thinker of pagan antiquity. He thought of himself as a Platonist, but in fact he transformed Platonism into a new synthesis that also contained Pythagorean and Stoic elements. This new philosophical school—Neoplatonism—appealed to the educated classes because it seemed to explain in rational or near-rational terms some of the mysteries of life while at the same time salvaging traditions cherished by pagan culture.

Because Plotinus was born in Egypt, a theurgic ceremony performed by an Egyptian priest in a temple of Isis may have had special meaning for him. The priest offers to grant Plotinus a vision of his own "familiar spirit." This is a Greek interpretation of the Latin word *genius*, for which

the Greeks had no exact equivalent. There were many spirits or daemons in the universe, but according to ancient Roman belief, only one “belonged” to an individual.

The priest, who has expected an ordinary “familiar spirit,” is amazed that Plotinus’ *genius* belongs to a different species of powers altogether. We learn that at these ceremonies an attendant is needed to hold a couple of chickens. The chickens will be strangled at once if the spirit that appears turns out to be threatening. This sacrifice was probably conceived as an instant peace offering, after which the spirit would leave without harming any of the participants. In this case the attendant panics, strangles the chickens, and the daemon leaves, but before he leaves, Plotinus gets a good look at him.

A monograph entitled *On the Spirit That Allotted Us to Himself* is preserved among Plotinus’ writings (*Enn.* 3.4 [= tract 15 Harder]), but no mention is made of this incident there; it may be an anecdote that Plotinus told some of his students. In fact, the tract is little more than an interpretation of some Platonic passages (from the *Phaedo*, the *Timaeus*, the *Republic*, etc.) dealing with daemons.

The belief in the existence of daemons seems to have been an essential part of Neoplatonism, but the ability actually to see one’s own guardian spirit was a privilege granted to only a few. Those who, like Plotinus, were granted the gift, apparently encouraged their disciples to study hard, to work on themselves, and to achieve the spiritual progress that would lead them to a higher level of awareness.

Porphry, *Life of Plotinus* 10, pars. 56–60

From the time of his birth Plotinus had some very special gifts. An Egyptian priest came to Rome and became acquainted with him through a friend. This priest wanted to give Plotinus a demonstration of his [occult] science and invited him to be present at an appearance of his familiar spirit. Plotinus accepted willingly. The conjuring took place in the temple of Isis because this was, as the Egyptian said, the only “pure place” that he could find in all of Rome. But when the spirit was conjured and was asked to show himself, a god appeared that did not belong to that category of spirits. At this point the Egyptian cried: “Blessed are you who have a god as a familiar and not a spirit of the lower class!” But there was no opportunity to ask the apparition any questions or even to look at it any longer, because the friend who shared the experience strangled the chickens that he held as a safeguard, either because he was jealous or because he was afraid of something. Because Plotinus had a higher divine being as a familiar, he concentrated his divine eye for a while on that being. This experience prompted him to write an essay, *On*

the Spirit That Allotted Us to Himself, wherein he tried to give reasons for the difference between familiars.

71

Iamblichus (c. A.D. 250–325), a student of Plotinus’ disciple Porphyry, discusses daemonology from a Neoplatonist point of view, probably using *Enn.* 3.4 (= tract 15 Harder) as a starting point. The text is difficult and no doubt corrupt in several places, but the message seems clear: the true philosopher must be able to distinguish the different classes of daemons from each other as well as from the higher gods.

Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of Egypt* 1.20.61–63

You formulate the problem of “what distinguishes the daemons from the visible and the invisible gods”—the ones that are invisible but connected with the visible ones. Taking this as a starting point, I will show what the difference is. The visible gods are joined to the intelligible gods and have the same form as far as they are concerned. The daemons on the other hand are quite different as far as their substance is concerned, and they barely look like them. This is how the daemons are different from the visible gods. They differ from the invisible gods in regard to their invisibility, for the daemons are invisible and cannot be perceived in any way by the senses. But the gods even transcend rational knowledge and perception tied to matter [or: reading *anylou* for *enylou* in the Greek, “immaterial perception”]. Because the gods are unknown and invisible they are called “invisible,” but they are invisible in a completely different manner than are the daemons. Well now, being invisible, are the daemons superior to the visible gods in respect of their being invisible? Not at all. The divine, no matter where it is and how far it extends, has the same power and domination over everything that is subordinate. Therefore, even if it is visible, it rules over the daemons of the air, even if it dwells in the terrestrial region, for neither the environment nor the part of the universe affects in any way the authority of the gods; their total substance remains the same everywhere, indivisible, unchangeable, and all the lower orders worship it in the same way, according to the law of nature.

72

Iamblichus continues to discuss disembodied spirits here. It may seem strange that a distinguished theologian and philosopher would spend so much time and ingenuity on the subject of daemonology, but once the existence of such beings was admitted—and we have the testimony of

Plotinus as well as the long Platonist tradition to document this belief—they had to be defined, distinguished, classified. Daemonology had become a science, and it was developed according to scientific principles. It was important to recognize the true character of a vision [as in *no. 70*]. It could be dangerous, or at least embarrassing, to mistake a god for a mere guardian spirit, or vice versa. Hence the subject also had a practical value.

Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of Egypt* 2.1.67–2.69

I must also explain to you first how a daemon is different from a hero and from a soul, and whether the difference is in the substance, the potential, or the activity.

I maintain that daemons are produced according to the generative and creative powers of the gods in the most remote [or: the lowest] termination of the progression and its ultimate division. Heroes are produced according to the vital principles in divine beings. The first and perfect measures of the souls are their final product, and they begin their division at this point.

Because their substance is generated in this way from different causes, the substance itself must be different. That of the daemons is productive: it fashions the cosmic organisms and completes the perfection of every single creature. The substance of the heroes is life-giving, rational, and consists in control over the souls. To the daemons one must attribute the generative powers that control the organism and the connection of soul and body. It seems right to assign to the heroes the life-producing powers that rule over men and are detached from creation.

Following this we must also define their activities. We must assume that those of the daemons are cosmic in a higher sense and have a wider extension as far as their effects are concerned, whereas those of the heroes are not as far-reaching and are oriented toward the disposition of the souls.

After these classes have been defined we come to the next one [the soul]. It descends to the end of the divine orders and has been allotted from these two [upper] orders certain shares of powers. It also grows from other, special, additions that come from itself. At different times it projects different images and principles and ever-different lives. It uses a variety of lives and ideas, according to the individual regions of the universe. It joins whatever organism it wants to join and withdraws from it whenever it wants to. It presents thoughts that are related to things that exist and will exist. It attaches itself to the gods in virtue of essential or potential harmonies other than those which associate daemons and heroes with them [the gods]. It has less of the eternity of the similar life and energy, but because of the goodwill of the gods and the radiation of light

given out by them, it often rises to the higher order of the angels. This happens when it no longer remains within the boundaries of the soul but perfects itself completely into an angelic soul and an immaculate life. Hence the soul seems to present in itself all sorts of substances and activities and a variety of thoughts and all kinds of ideas. If the truth must be told, the soul is always defined according to one specific criterion, but when it associates itself with leading causes, it joins different causes at different times.

73

In his work *The Preparation of the Gospel*, Eusebius of Caesarea (c. A.D. 260–340) wanted to show that pagan history and pagan civilization played a role in God's plan to save the world. In the course of the work he gives a summary of that part of pagan theology which dealt with daemons and their relationship with gods and heroes. That evil daemons had been worshiped from time immemorial has been noted already [no. 53]. The main edge of Eusebius' polemic against the pagan theologians (mostly the Neoplatonists) is what he sees as their exclusive worship of evil powers; he accuses them of offering only a kind of lip service to their benign deities.

The oversimplification may have been made in the interests of Christian propaganda. Moreover, from a strict Christian point of view, all pagan deities were evil, and to worship any of them was a sin. To a pagan believer it may have seemed safe to honor, above all, the evil powers, since the benevolent ones were good anyway, although this reasoning does not seem to be sound theology.

Eusebius points to an important aspect of ancient religion: ever since heroic times, certain powers had been worshiped because they were powerful and fearsome, not because they were considered loving or good. Hence the world was ready to embrace the new religion, with its message of divine love.

Eusebius, *The Preparation of the Gospel* 4.5.1–3

The Various Parts of Pagan Theology

Those who have a thorough knowledge of pagan theology apply a classification that is different from the one proposed above and divide the whole doctrine into four parts: first of all they distinguish the supreme god; they say they know that he rules over everything and that he is the father and the king of all the gods. After him there is a second category of gods; then comes the category of daemons; and as number four they list the heroes. All these, they say, share in the idea of the Good, and thus in a sense lead and in another sense are led, and every substance of this kind,

they say, can be called light because it participates in light. But they also say that Evil is in control of what is inferior; this is the category of the evil daemons; there is no friendship between them and the Good; they certainly have an enormous power in the sphere that is totally opposed to the Good; and everything of this kind they call “darkness.”

Having distinguished these categories, they say that heaven and the ether as far as the moon are assigned to the gods; to the daemons, the region around the moon and the atmosphere; to the souls [of the dead], the terrestrial regions and the subterranean spaces. Having established these distinctions, they say that one must first of all worship the gods of heaven and of the ether; then the good daemons; in the third place the souls of the heroes; and in the fourth place one must soothe the evil and malevolent daemons. After they have made these distinctions in theory, they confuse everything in practice, and instead of worshipping all the powers mentioned, they worship only the evil powers and serve them exclusively, as I will show in a later part of my discussion.

74

Heliodorus, author of the novel *Ethiopian Tales*, or *The Story of Theagenes and Charicleia*, probably lived in the third or fourth century A.D. Like Apollonius of Tyana, whose biography by Philostratus apparently made some impression on him, he seems to have been, at least for part of his life, a Neo-Pythagorean. Later, according to tradition, he converted to Christianity and became bishop of Tricca in Thessaly.

In this episode of his novel the heroine, Charicleia, accompanied by Calasiris, an elderly Egyptian priest, witnesses—much against her will—a necromantic scene. An old woman, obviously a witch, revives the dead body of her son. The ditch she digs, the libation she pours, and the sword she manipulates remind us of the Homeric *Nekyia* in the *Odyssey* [no. 52], but there is also a doll made of dough mixed with fennel and laurel. The whole operation is successful up to a point, but we are told by the dead man himself that it is a sinful endeavor because it violates the will of the Fates, and that death (actually provided by law) would be an appropriate punishment for her. Moreover [see no. 61], the dead resent being called back to life.

All this is made even worse by the fact that a priest, a holy man beloved by the gods, is forced to be a witness to the horrible scene “that can be performed only at night,” as the witch says. We learn from this that certain pagan priests were not even allowed to watch magical rites, much less perform them. Nevertheless, Calasiris is able to gather some helpful information from the dead man.

Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, or *Ethiopian Tales* 6.14–15

[Calasiris, an elderly priest of Isis, and Charicleia, the beautiful young heroine of the novel, are traveling together through Egypt and come across a large number of dead bodies. It looks as though, not long ago, Persians and Egyptians had fought a fierce battle. The only living being in sight is an old Egyptian woman who is mourning the loss of her son. She tells the two travelers to spend the night there and promises to escort them to the next village in the morning.]

Calasiris told Charicleia everything the old woman had said to him [in Egyptian] by translating it faithfully. They walked away from the slain bodies for a short distance and came to a little hill. There Calasiris stretched himself out, using his quiver as a pillow, while Charicleia sat down, using her purse as a cushion.

The moon rose and illuminated everything with her bright light; it happened to be the second night after the full moon. Calasiris felt his age and was tired from the journey, so he fell asleep. Charicleia, however, kept awake by her worries, became the eyewitness to a gruesome spectacle, but one that is not unfamiliar to Egyptian women.

The old woman, feeling undisturbed and unobserved, first dug a ditch and then lit a pyre that had been built on either side of it. After placing the body of her son in between, she lifted from a tripod that was standing there an earthenware jug of honey, one of milk, and another one of wine, and poured their contents into the ditch, one after another. Then she took a male figure made of dough, crowned with laurel and fennel, and threw it into the ditch. Finally she grabbed a sword, began to shake, as if in a trance, addressed the moon in many prayers that sounded wild and exotic, cut herself in the arm, wiped off the blood with a laurel branch, and sprinkled it over the pyre.

After performing more bizarre magic of this kind, she bent down to the body of her son, chanted something into his ear, and forced him, by her spells, to stand up straight.

Charicleia had already observed the first part of the ceremony with growing fear, but now she really began to shudder, and because of the horror she felt at this appalling spectacle, she woke up Calasiris and made him, too, watch what was going on.

Thus the two sat in the dark without being seen, but they could easily observe what was happening in the light coming from the pyre. Since they were not too far away, they could also hear what the old woman said, for she now began to ask the dead man questions in a fairly loud voice.

She wanted to know whether his brother, her surviving son, would return home safe and sound.

The dead man did not say anything in reply; he just nodded, without

giving a clear indication to the old woman whether she might expect to see her wish fulfilled or not. Suddenly he collapsed and lay with his face on the ground. She turned the body on its back, continued relentlessly with her questions, and whispered, or so it seemed, even stronger incantations into his ears. Holding the sword in her hand, she jumped back and forth between the ditch and the pyre, aroused him once more, and as he stood up, renewed her questions and forced him to make his prediction not just by nodding but in clear language.

While the old woman was occupied with this, Charicleia kept urging Calasiris to move closer to the action and to ask questions about Theagenes. He refused, saying that it was a sin even to watch this spectacle, and they were excused only by the fact that they had no choice. He added that priests were not allowed to take part in such rites or even to be present; their own predictions were the result of the correct kind of sacrifice and a prayer coming from a pure heart, whereas impure outsiders were operating, in fact, with earth and bodies, just like the Egyptian woman whom, by chance, they were able to observe.

Before he could finish his sentence, the dead man began to mumble in a dull, deep voice that sounded as if it came from a closed vault or a cavern:

“Mother, so far I have been very patient with you, and I have tolerated the fact that you are sinning against human nature, that you violate the law of the Fates, and that you try to move by your magic what may never be moved. For even the dead respect their parents, at least up to a certain point. But by your behavior you undermine and destroy this respect, for you have not only applied ruthless methods to begin with, but you have now pushed your ruthlessness to the extreme by forcing a dead body not only to get up but also to nod and talk, without taking care of my burial, but preventing me from joining the other souls, only thinking of your own concerns. Listen to what I wanted to tell you before but did not, out of respect for you: Neither will your [other] son return alive, nor will you yourself escape death by the sword. Since you have always devoted your life to sinful practices such as these, you shall very soon meet the violent end that is destined for all people like you. In addition, not only have you had the nerve to perform such mysteries, mysteries veiled in silence and darkness, all by yourself, but you have just now betrayed the fates of the dead in front of witnesses. One of them happens to be a priest, but that is not the worst, for he is wise enough to keep such things under the seal of secrecy and never to mention them; he is also, by the way, beloved by the gods. This is why he will be able to stop his two sons from fighting each other and reconcile them instead—they are getting ready for a duel to the death with swords—if only he will hurry up. What is more serious is this:

a girl sees and hears everything that is happening to me; a young woman overwhelmed by love, she has wandered through the whole world for the sake of her beloved, but after a thousand troubles, a thousand dangers that will lead her to the limits of the earth, she will live happily and in royal style with him ever after.”

Having said this, he collapsed and lay still.

The old woman understood at once that the two strangers were the spectators. She grabbed the sword and, mad with fury—you could tell from her expression—she wanted to attack them and looked for them everywhere, suspecting that they were hiding somewhere among the bodies. She was determined to kill them, if only she could find them, because they had maliciously, or so she thought, disturbed her magic by watching her. As she was searching in blind rage among the corpses, she did not see the end of a spear sticking up. It pierced her body, and she fell to the ground, dead.

Thus, she at once fulfilled her son’s prediction, as she deserved.

75

The name Abrasax (or Abraxas) appears frequently in magical texts as a powerful daemon who can protect the wearer of the amulet against other daemons, as the text of this amulet shows. The wearer of the amulet cannot know what dangerous force is attacking her; therefore, different possibilities are considered: a daemon, a ghost, and “something that is shivering,” which could mean “something that makes you shiver,” perhaps a spirit of sickness. The amulet was probably commissioned by the parents of a little girl; they may have been Christians, as the names suggest, but they are still in awe of the daemons of pagan witchcraft. The Church condemned such amulets, but they were still worn for a long time. Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Ancient Amulets* (Ann Arbor, 1956) is still a very valuable study.

Abrasax Amulet (*Suppl. Mag. 13* = *PGM LXXXIX*)

SO SO ABRASAX [character] ABRASAX. I am ABRASAX ABRASI CHO OU. Come to the aid of little Sophia also known as Priscilla. Restrain and render harmless the attacker of little Sophia also known as Priscilla. If it is shivering, restrain it; if it is a ghost, restrain it; if it is a daemon, restrain it. SO SO ABRASAX ABRASAX. I am ABRASAX ABRASI CHO OU. Restrain and render harmless the things that attack little Sophia also known as Priscilla, on this very day. If it is shivering, restrain it; if it is a daemon, render it harmless.

The text is written on a lamella found in a stone sarcophagus (third century A.D.) discovered in Althenburg, Austria, the Roman Carnuntum. The Greek term for “migraine,” *hemikranion*, literally “half of the head,” is the root of our modern word. Antaura, the daemon that causes migraine, is represented as a wind that comes from the ocean and is on the way to someone’s head. Artemis, the great goddess of Ephesus, stops the daemon and sends it somewhere else, possibly into the head of an animal (a deer or an ox). A little story, a mini-myth, sometimes called *historiola*, is attached to certify the potency of the charm.

Amulet against Migraine (R. Kotansky, 1994, no.13)

For migraine. Antaura came out of the sea. She shouted like a deer. She roared like an ox. Artemis of Ephesus meets her: “Antaura, where are you headed?” “Into the half of the head.” “You surely will not go into . . .”

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