The Question of the Magician: an Exploration in the Role of the Magician in Ancient Greek and Roman Literature and Material Culture

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The Question of the Magician: an Exploration in the Role of the Magician in Ancient Greek and Roman Literature and Material Culture

Sybil Faris Johnson, May 2011
**Introduction**

In setting out to write this monumental project, I was inspired by a lecture I heard when I was abroad a few summers ago. Through a fellowship program at Vassar, I was given the opportunity to travel to Cencreae, a port city on the bay of Corinth, to dig for the summer. In addition to gaining experience in the field, we as students were fortunate enough to have a variety of distinguished scholars come and speak to us about their work. One of those scholars was Christopher Faraone.

He lectured to us for about an hour and a half one afternoon about the curse tablets and other magical objects, such as talismans and amulets, that were found at the site at Cenchreae. I immediately became enthralled with the idea of magic in the ancient world, and I knew that I wanted to write about it during my senior year. I had so many questions.

My main question, which I have answered for myself over the course of writing this, is the question of the magician in the ancient world, namely, who is she or he? What defines the magician, and what evidence, if any, do we have for these definitions? My thought process started with Apuleius, an author I had heard about from a variety of my peers at different schools. They enjoyed reading his novel *The Golden Ass* so much, and aside from the selfish desire that I myself also wanted to read it, I immediately recognized that this particular work would be relevant to answering my question. As soon as I began to look into Apuleius, I found that he himself had been accused of being a magician. I was presented at that point with two entrypoints into answering my questions: the fictional magician as depicted in
the character of Lucius in *The Golden Ass* and assumptions about the magician in the real world as represented in Apuleius’ *Apologia*.

The character of Lucius, a failed magician, led me to consider the adept magicians also present in the novel: the female witches. From that point my work took off and I was able to draw comparisons with a variety of different authors (Ovid, Euripides and Theocritus are a few). With each passing comparison I was able to better understand what a magician is in the ancient world and also how they are represented in literature and how these representations arise from real fears concerning marginalized figures such as foreigners or women.

In considering the magician as represented in real life and in literature, I was drawn to the possibility of incorporating physical evidence for magical practice in the ancient world: that is remnants of the ritual we can only partially reconstruct. Through my work I have developed a greater understanding about the persona of the magician in the ancient world and supported it with evidence from a variety of spheres: the legal, the literary, and the material.

I: The Magician in the Real World

I.i Introduction

The life of Lucius Apuleius is one characterized by legal troubles, magical exploration and literary genius. Born in Maudaurus, a city on the coast of North Africa, in roughly 125 CE, he spent most of his young life in zealous study, traveling as far as Athens and Rome to study Platonic philosophy and Latin rhetoric, respectively.¹ Yet his passions were not purely in the academic sphere. While

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¹ Augustine *Ep.* 102.32
² Apuleius *Apol.* 55.10
abroad from his native land, and before his eventual return to Carthage, he was involved in the initiations of various cults, including those of the Dionysian mysteries and Isis. Upon his return to Northern Africa he also served briefly as a priest of Asclepius, but did not remain in Carthage for long. While on a planned trip to Alexandria, Apuleius fell ill when he had reached the town of Oea. A friend, in fact one called Pontianus with whom he had studied while in Athens, took him in during his recovery period. Upon the suggestion of Pontianus, Apuleius undertook to marry his aging widowed mother, a woman named Pudentilla who happened to be of considerable wealth. Pontianus himself married the daughter of Herrenius Rufinus and Rufinus, fearing that the wealth of Pudentilla would pass from the hands of his son-in-law to Apuleius, recruited his son-in-laws and their uncle, Sicinius Aemilianus, in bringing charges of alleged witchcraft against Apuleius for ensnaring the affections of Pudentilla.

The charges and ensuing case were heard at Sabratha circa 158 CE in the court of the proconsul of Africa, Claudius Maximus. The verdict of this case was not recorded, but it can be supposed by the absurdity of the charges, along with the free and sarcastic nature of Apuleius’ defense, that no serious consequences resulted. It is clear in his defense that Apuleius regards the charges brought against him as absurd, given that they are pursued by the uneducated and misinformed Aemilianus. As further evidence of this claim, he aligns himself with the educated and more-informed mindset of the judge. The text that has survived is unlikely to be the precise replica of his defense speech; it is the Apologia (also known as A Discourse on

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2 Apuleius Apol. 55.10
3 Walsh, 1994 (xiii)
Magic), and addresses the charges brought against him. In Apuleius’ defense, the reader discovers a variety of rather clever defense tactics ranging from comrade with the judge, to dissolving the arguments of the opposition with his rhetoric. It is this document that is of most interest to the following chapter.

In his Apologia, Apuleius’ defense hinges primarily on the potential confusion between the nature and definition of a magician, and that of a philosopher. Indeed one of his most useful tactics of defense is his ability to take the evidence of his sorcery, which his accusers have brought against him, and to normalize it by attributing this evidence to his behavior as a philosopher. It is through the lens of Apuleius himself that I have come to understand not what a magician is, but rather what a magician is not with respect to the context of the ancient world. It is a fact that philosophers have been mistaken for and accused of being magicians in many instances throughout antiquity (cf. Socrates, Anaxagoras, Xenophanes, and Apuleius himself), and are marginalized by their interests in things that most people find outside the realm of normal inquiry. When I say misinterpreted, I mean misinterpreted by those in their society not concerned with these matters. For example, in the case of Socrates, his interest in the exploration of truth and questioning of divinity set him up for ridicule and claims of corruption of the youth of Athens, because his methods and ideals were examples of thought contrarian to the masses. It is examples such as Socrates and Apuleius that first made me aware of, and ultimately interested in, the question of the philosopher, and how their marginalized presence makes them predisposed to identification as magicians.
Philosophers and magicians both exist on this large spectrum of figures marginalized by the kinds of questions they ask and what they do to pursue answers.

Each of these types engage in the pursuit of knowledge, whether it be in the natural world or in their relationships to the divine world, and each may have an appearance or physical quality that is considered “outside the norm.” However what defines their difference is their ultimate purpose or use for their newfound knowledge. In their pursuit of knowledge philosophers and magicians both deal with what is ultimately “unknown.” Magicians use their knowledge in a way that makes them powerful, because people attribute to them an ability to influence others, or to take knowledge and use it for their own secret means. Philosophers pursue knowledge for its own sake, and in their exploration of knowledge they make no specific claim to power aside from that of belonging to a long philosophical tradition. It is because philosophers explore and acquire knowledge for its own sake that they become marginalized figures and objects of suspicion: this notion would have been completely foreign to the audience of Apuleius, and thus it would be natural for them to confuse the philosopher with the other marginalized figure of the magician. Magicians are marginalized because their knowledge belongs to a select group, which breeds fear among those outside their sphere.

In the following analysis of Apuleius’ *Apologia*, I will isolate three instances, or characteristics, Apuleius perceives to be a source for confusion in the identification of philosophers and magicians: the exploration of the natural world, the relationship to the divine world, and social identification such as physical appearance.
I. ii The Philosopher and the Magician in the Exploration of the Natural World

In this trial Apuleius has largely been charged with using black arts and magic to ensnare his newly wedded wife. One piece of evidence brought by the prosecution, as Apuleius himself quotes in his defense, is the following question brought on behalf of the prosecution, ‘Cur,’ inquit, ‘piscium quaedam genera quaesisti’ (Apol. 27.6). The prosecution has questioned why Apuleius has sought out specific kinds of fish, as if seeking this particular kind of fish would incriminate him for specific black arts, as we shall discuss later. Even in simply introducing this claim Apuleius jumps immediately to the mindset of the philosopher and asks the counter question, Quasi id cognitionis gratia philosopho facere non liceat, quod luxurioso gulae causa liceret (Apol. 27.6). What is important to note in the following analysis is that in his opening arguments Apuleius takes great steps to not define his own identity; he does not align himself either with philosophers or magicians, but sets up hypothetical defenses for both types of figures in an effort to demarginalize and decriminalize them.

As evidenced by the aforementioned excerpts of text, Apuleius from the start makes efforts to decriminalize the behavior of investigating a fish by attributing them to the behaviors of a philosopher. Apuleius’ answer from section 27.6 exemplifies the aim of the natural philosopher: the exploration and acquisition of knowledge for its own sake, to fulfill the desire for knowledge and nothing more. By stating this first and foremost even before refuting the rest of the claim, Apuleius has made clear a possible motive to the audience and has defended his position in
the tradition of natural philosophers. This, however, is not going to be enough for his defense.

At this moment it is important to discuss why this question is not enough of a defense for Apuleius, and why he cannot just leave his argument at that. His reasoning, to a modern audience, seems plausible enough, that he was curious about the makeup and inner workings of this specific kind of fish, and so he sought it out in order to dissect and explore it. I, for instance, would have accepted the exploration of knowledge for its own sake as an adequate defense, probably with limited further questions. But this is not the thought process of those in Apuleius’ audience, necessarily. Apuleius has been put on trial for engaging in the black arts, and it is not unreasonable to assume that the audience in the trial, as well as the judge, would have prejudices against him before he even gave his defense, a sentiment that is exemplified when Apuleius himself calls the crime of magic for evil ends *quae facilius infamatur quam probatur, eam solum sibi delegit ad accusandum* (Apol. 2.2). To our modern eyes, his claim holds weight, but in this instance Apuleius has not encountered a neutral audience.

Instead he has encountered an audience that assumes that he has made this exploration of the fish for malevolent ends, for a specific type of knowledge, and power from that knowledge, that can be used for harm. In this assumption we find evidence for the difference between the philosopher and the magician. The audience assumes that Apuleius is acquiring a type of esoteric knowledge, knowledge that is contained within a specific group of people. Another important aspect of the audience’s assumption is that Apuleius is seeking knowledge that is
already known. As previously stated, the notion of seeking inherently new knowledge for its own sake would have not been understood by Apuleius’ audience. This is precisely the type of knowledge Apuleius claims to have been after: that he has pursued the exploration of the fish to acquire unknown knowledge, and it is the pure curiosity of what is unknown that drives him.

It is precisely this exclusivity of knowledge that makes the magician so terrifying, that a secluded group maintains and passes on knowledge secret from the masses, the purpose of which is inherently opaque, but can only be assumed to exist for some sort of personal gain. And yet both the magician and the philosopher engage in the exploration of the natural world for their own ends, so how are we to truly understand the distinction between the two? Is it that the behavior of one is acceptable, and the other is not? How, then, are we to understand that Apuleius’ behavior can be defended when he claims he acted as a philosopher, but not if he acted as a magician? He himself will show us in his defense how the confusion between the magician and the philosopher has caused him to be wrongly accused.

After all, part of the charge against him specifically involving the fish included the fact that he had tried to obtain this specific kind of fish in order to use part of it as an ingredient in an erotic spell. Indeed, the writing and popularization of love elegy has turned the erotic love spell into something familiar and non-threatening, as in Ovid’s Ars Amatoria. Yet in this instance, when Apuleius has engaged in behaviors attributed to erotic love magic (exploring the anatomy of a specific kind of fish), he is indicted and brought to trial for black magic. There must
be some other quality of Apuleius himself that is threatening to his accusers, but what is it?

It is important to note, first and foremost, that Apuleius is a foreigner in the place in which the trial is taking place. This is important because by virtue of being a foreigner he is already a marginalized figure, as he is an outsider and one that is unfamiliar with the native language and customs of the city. Another way in which he is marginalized is due to his education; many of those in the audience would not have even spoken Latin, and as stated before, Apuleius uses his education as part of his defense, in that he can establish a bond with the highly educated judge of his trial. Thirdly, his accusers disliked Apuleius, primarily because his marriage to Pudentilla threatened the displacement of wealth from a native family of that area to a man that was known as an outsider. Apuleius himself is threatening the order of the society of Oea, and an attempt to further isolate and marginalize him should certainly have been expected, because, even though this would not reduce his power, it is an expected human impulse to want to keep the unfamiliar at arm's length. Indeed, Apuleius holds power as an outsider, and as an educated man, and potential threat to order, and it is their fear that creates his power. It is these qualities in addition to his accusers’ claims that he is a magician that make him so marginalized, and thus powerful. Magicians gain power through increased marginalization, which is constructed through the fear and suspicion of others. The power of the magician is created by people's assumptions and uneasiness, and thus the accusers of Apuleius attribute power to him and marginalize him because of their fear and suspicion.
Why do magicians breed such fear and suspicion and thus acquire such power? In my speculation, it is because people believe that magicians have influence and the ability to affect other people, or to bring about a specific desired result with their own practices or rituals. The instance of the fish is a great example.

Apuleius writes,

Quid enim competit ad amoris ardorem accendendum piscis brutus et frigidus aut omnino res pelago quaesita? Nisi forte hoc uos ad mendacium induxit, quod Venus dicitur pelago exorta. Audi sis, Tannoni Pudens, quam multa nescieris, qui de piscibus argumentum magiae recepisti. (**Apol.** 30.4-5)

In this passage Apuleius writes about the absurdities implicit in the accusation that he was seeking a specific fish as an ingredient for an erotic love spell. He mentions that cold and slimy fish from the sea can and should not be associated with Venus, for they are aesthetically inappropriate.

Let us for a moment forget Apuleius’ claims that fish are not relevant in the making of erotic spells (I shall return to it) and assume that, in the quest for the ingredients for an erotic potion, a magician would seek out a particular kind of fish. He would find this fish and presumably extract the necessary ingredient, and then use it as he saw fit. What is threatening about this action is not the looking for the ingredient itself, or the exploration of the fish itself, but that the magician has the knowledge to seek out what he needs, and use it for his own ends. The power given to magicians also breeds a lot of the fear associated with magicians: it is unclear what he will do with the alleged fish ingredient, whether it will be for good or bad use is irrelevant. He has been given the power to influence other people, and the power itself is what breeds the fear.
Apuleius, in his defense, first refutes the claim that he has explored the fish for the use of magic by a lengthy discussion of the irrelevance of fish in magic. What is interesting about his discussion is that his knowledge of magic, which he needs to make his argument, makes it more likely that in fact he is a magician. It is known that Apuleius, throughout his life, had been initiated into a variety of mystery cults and though he did not claim to be a magician himself, has had interest in the knowledge base of the magician. But, though it may seem at first that having this knowledge would make him a magician, the opposite becomes clear over the course of his discussion. His possession of this knowledge can be compared to a statement that he himself made about the possession of the fish, 'Pisces,' inquit, 'quaeris.' Nolo negare. Sed, oro te, qui pisces quaerit, magus est? (Apol. 30.1). Just as one who purchases a fish is not necessarily a magician, one who possesses the knowledge of spells and potions is not necessarily a magician. It is all about the execution. It is not the possession of knowledge alone that counts, but the execution and use of this knowledge, and ultimately whether or not it is used for power.

Simply having knowledge of magical practice does not mean that he is a magician. In fact, as Apuleius continues on his discussion of the irrelevance of fish in erotic magic, what becomes clear is that his knowledge of magic comes from his knowledge of literature. He states over and over again that the fish, a creature that is slimy and from the depths of the ocean, is not in line with the traditionally accepted sources of ingredients for erotic magic. He says, At si Virgilium legisses, profecto scisses alia quaeri ad hanc rem solere (Apol. 30.6). Indeed, he also quotes Vergil when he is discussing the ingredients for black arts:
Ille enim, quantum scio, enumerat uittas mollis et uerbenas pinguis et tura mascula et licia discolora; praeterea laurum fragilem, limum durabilem, ceram liquabilem, nec minus quae iam in opere serio scripsit:

'Falcibus et messae ad lunam quaeuntur aenis pubentes herbae nigri cum lacte ueneni. Quaeritur et nascentis equi de fronte reuulsus et matri praereptus amor.' (Apol. 30.7-8)

Later on in the next section of his defense, he also mentions a specific instance involving the philosopher Pythagoras and a fish (Apol. 31.2-4). This story gives further evidence to his claim that fish cannot contain valuable magical properties, as Pythagoras himself bought a certain number of fish from a fisherman and threw them back into the sea. What he means by the mention of Pythagoras in this section is to emphasize that Pythagoras, a learned philosopher, would keep the fish if he attributed some value to them, which in this case is magical properties. Certainly Apuleius’ familiarity and ease of quoting and relating stories of authors and philosophers of the past would not have gone unnoticed. His familiarity with their works speaks wonders about his education, and puts him in the class of the educated. Placing himself among the elite of the courtroom is a tactic in itself, and, as I have said before, it creates a kinship between himself and the judge, which makes his defense more likely to succeed. The mentioning of his literary knowledge also serves another very important purpose for Apuleius’ defense: it puts his knowledge in the realm of what is accepted and revered as opposed to what is unknown and questionable.

Perhaps Apuleius’ greatest tactic of defense against the magic claim involving the fish is his assertion of his identity as a philosopher. It is not only his own
identity and behavior as a philosopher that makes his behavior plausible and acceptable, but also the fact that he aligns himself with a long-standing tradition of philosophers who each have completed various similar endeavors in their exploration of the natural world. At the beginning of his discussion of philosophers and the exploration of the natural world, he makes a point to say that, due to the opinions and accusations of the uninformed, many natural philosophers in their time were accused of being both irreligious, in that their interest in the natural world leads them to not worship the gods, or of being too zealous in their worshipping of the gods. Both of these claims that have been brought against philosophers, being irreligious or worshipping over-zealously, are also claims that hold true for magicians. The philosopher Socrates was indicted upon both of these counts. For now, it is relevant to discuss how philosophers exhibiting irreligious behaviors, such as exploring the natural world, can be confused with magicians.

It is not difficult to see how magicians could be accused of being irreligious. When they explore aspects of the natural world, dissecting a fish for instance, they are using knowledge that is previously known among their exclusive community, esoteric knowledge, as stated before. Their use of this knowledge, in the context of the fish, will lead them to an ingredient that will be used in a ritual to bring about a desired event, an event that will come to be at some point in the future. The tendencies of magicians to take matters into their own hands and to have influence over future events is inherently hubristic, and if these tendencies occur because of a lack of belief in the gods, then they can also be viewed as irreligious. When
philosophers explore the natural world, it is for quite different purposes, but, since their behaviors are not understood, they are also viewed as irreligious.

Apuleius writes of such charges brought against philosophers,

Verum haec ferme communi quodam errore imperatorum philosophis obiectantur, ut partim eorum qui corporum causas meras et simplicis rimantur irreligiosos putent eoque aiant deos abnuere, ut Anaxagoram et Leucippum et Democritum et Epicurum ceterosque rerum naturae patronos. (Apol. 27.1)

He even gives the audience a few examples, which include Anaxagoras, Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus. By “name-dropping” in such a way, Apuleius puts himself in a tradition of natural philosophers and thus defends his claim to the profession. But it is rather important to understand why Apuleius chose these specific philosophers as a part of his defense.

Each of these philosophers was influential in the field of natural philosophy. First let us take Anaxagoras; he was essentially the father of cosmological theory. He was the first to bring philosophy to Athens, and focused much of his attention on providing scientific reasons for cosmological phenomena (eclipses, rainbows and the sun are all examples). During his life, though, he was met with much resistance because of his theories and quest for understanding. At one point he may have been accused of forsaking the religion of the state and put on trial.4 Leucippus was also a very marginalized figure, due to his advanced and different way of thinking. He was concerned with the order of the universe, and had one of the earliest understandings of atomic theory.5 Democritus was one of Leucippus’ most famous

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4 Waterfield, 2000 (116)
5 Taylor, 1990 (181)
pupils, and in many ways expanded on his conceptions of atomic theory. Both were ridiculed at one time or another for being irreligious for their exploration of the “real way” of things. Epicurus himself was also a distant follower of Leucippus, believing to a large extent that the motions of atoms cause all of the events in the world and the universe, even feelings and death. He advocated a life of detachment from the social world, and thus appeared to be living in secrecy, and though he was not directly prosecuted for his beliefs, he would have been a shadowy figure characterized by isolation.

What is interesting about Apuleius’ choice of philosophers in this section is that they all lived in different times, with little or no overlap, and show collectively the progression in one of the leading questions of natural philosophy: what is the makeup of the universe? We first have Anaxagoras, a man concerned with the movement of the cosmos and what makes up a rainbow. Then we have Leucippus, first attributed with discovering atomic theory and Democritus, a pupil, who expands on the work of his master. Finally we finish with Epicurus, a post-Socratic philosopher certain of the presence of atoms in physical matter, and looking to see if they are the cause of emotional phenomena as well. Through this catalogue of natural philosophers, Apuleius gives the audience and reader a history lesson in the steps of natural philosophy through the ages, leaving himself as the final link. What better way to assert his own identity as a philosopher than to give an account of his knowledge, let alone inserting himself into the tradition itself? By giving an account of those famous philosophers who came before him, Apuleius normalizes his own

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6 Taylor, 1990 (181)
behavior of exploring the anatomy of a fish by juxtaposing it with other philosophers who have been revered for their exploration of the makeup of things.

It is important to mention the humor in Apuleius’ tactics at the moment. It is an absurd gesture on his part to expect the judge, as well as the opposition, to consider him in the realm of Anaxagoras or Epicurus, when he has been accused of exploring or wanting to know the makeup of a fish. His argument throughout the speech takes a joking and sometimes snarky tone, but it does not devalue the arguments and points he himself makes. Instead it devalues the legitimacy of the opposition, as he seems to make light of it and not take it entirely seriously.

I. iii The Philosopher and the Magician and their Relationship to the Divine World

Another way in which Apuleius defines the distinction and confusion between the philosopher and the magician is the way in which each of these types relates to the divine world. What is first most interesting in this distinction is the way in which Apuleius introduces the discussion of their differences, which is indeed a tactic of his defense. Apuleius at length defends his position as a philosopher throughout the Apologia and refutes any and all claims to his possible employment as a magician, but in the process he raises a fascinating point. He begins his discussion by asking what Aemilianus’ definition of a magician actually is, and proceeds to give a definition of a magician that does not seem particularly horrible after all. In his defense against being a magician, he actually defends the worth, merits, and holiness of the magician himself. What is also interesting is that Apuleius gives only one example of a real-world magician, of a magician that actually exists and serves a function in the world. The rest of his defense hinges on his own accounts and
opinions, which may not be the most appealing or reliable evidence; so why is it that he only gives one example of an actual magician? Let us first explore his definition and discussion of the magos in ancient Persia.

Apuleius begins by discussing what he understands is the definition of a Persian magician-priest. He writes,

Nam si, quod ego apud plurimos lego, Persarum lingua magus est qui nostra sacerdos, quod tandem est crimen, sacerdotem esse et rite nosse atque scire atque callere leges cerimoniarum, fas sacrorum, ius religionum? Si quidem magia id est quod Plato interpretatur, cum commemorat, quibusnam disciplinis puerum regno adulescentem Persae imbuant _uerba ipsa diuini uiri memini, quae tu mecum, Maxime, recognosce:

There are a few points of note in this explanation. First of all, he makes it clear that he is just recounting what he has read about the definition of these priests, not actually what he knows from experience. Furthermore, immediately he goes on to quote Plato, and so the very information we get about magicians, really the only definitive example, is given through the words of a philosopher. He explains that he understands that magician is the Persian word for priest, and questions why there should be anything criminal about one who is considered a priest. Furthermore, how can there be anything criminal about someone who knows and practices leges cerimoniarum, fas sacrorum, ius religionum? All of these qualities are those which Apuleius sets forth as Plato’s definiton of what is considered the magician, and how the Persians educate their young princes. Unfortunately we do not have the excerpt from Plato Apuleius quotes, but for the most part we can infer what it says from Apuleius’ explanation of it.

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7 *Apol.* 25.9
Apuleius then goes on to truly emphasize the religious aspects and merits of the magician. From Plato, Apuleius concludes the following about the nature of the Persian magician, and by extension, gives it as a definition of magic in and of itself:

Auditisne magiam, qui eam temere accusatis, artem esse dis immortalibus acceptam, colendi eos ac uenerandi pergnaram, piam scilicet et diuini scientem, iam inde a Zoroastre et Oromaze auctoribus suis nobilem, caelitum antistitam, quippe qui inter prima regalia docetur nec ulli temere inter Persas concessum est magum esse, haud magis quam regnare? Idem Plato in alia sermocinatione de Zalmoxi quodam Thraci generis, sed eiusdem artis uiro ita scriptum reliquit: Quod si ita est, cur mihi nosse non liceat uel Zalmoxi bona uerba uel Zoroastri sacerdotia?

Magic is an art in this case, but definitely not a black art. It is an art that is accepted by the gods, full of prayer and piety and knowledge of the divine, and also full of other virtues such as nobility and honor. Apuleius elaborates that to be a magician, one must be of a very special sort of person. It is not just for anyone to become a magician, because along with the profession comes privileged knowledge.

Apuleius uses these definitions of the magician and magic, and these definitions alone, for a very calculated reason. He first of all has chosen an example of a magician that is among the most respected positions in the ancient world: the magos, someone who is a magician but also a priest. His devotion and adherence to the gods are clear. This idea about the Persian magician-priests brings to mind one of the main defense tactics for Socrates during his trial. He, after all, based much of his defense on his acting in accordance with the wishes of the gods. Even though Socrates was not accused of being a magician, he certainly was accused of being a similarly marginalized type of figure. It is an appropriate comparison to make, as
Apuleius will shortly thereafter mention the *daemon* of Socrates\(^8\) in his discussion of some of the misconceptions surrounding the reputations of magicians.

By choosing an example of a magician that has such favor with the highest authority, Apuleius manipulates his argument. He makes it seem that *all* magicians are in such close connection with the gods, and makes no mention of the possibility of black magic. He uses the reference of the *magoi* for a very specific reason: they are magicians that have authority. They are magicians who are not only respected within their respective community, but are also revered as channels to the divine. Hence, by giving this example as his only “real-world” example of the magician, he gains respect himself (only if he were a magician, of course) by the comparison.

This is an extremely well thought out addition to his argument: even if he hypothetically were a magician, he is of an authoritative and respected class.

Another point Apuleius makes us understand through his discussion of the Persian priests is that the influence and devotion of magicians can be on a spectrum. He acknowledges that those in the audience have thought him guilty of black magic, so clearly there exists a type of magician on the spectrum that will use their acquired power for bad. Yet there are the magician-priests, those that fall on the other end of the spectrum. These are magicians who use their powers to please and worship the gods.

Now let us consider Apuleius’ definitions of a magician based on Persian priests. He has knowledge, science, and skill in the laws of ceremonies, how to make sacrifices, and the laws of religion. They know an art that is acceptable to the gods,

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\(^8\) *Apol.* 27.3
with knowledge of prayer and worship, full and piety and knowledge of the divine, and glory and honor, and *caelitum astistatam*. Apuleius has given this definition on purpose to prime the audience for his next discussion: common misconceptions about the atheistic tendencies or over-zealous worship of the gods. It is important to understand in this context why Apuleius is using the respected example of the magician as a part of his defense. In fact, this is quite a smart tactic to use, because in a sense he covers all his bases. If for some reason he is convicted of being a magician even after his defense, he has successfully proved the magician to be honorable and not worthy of suspicion.

In his next discussion, Apuleius explores two common charges brought against philosophers who are accused of being magicians. He begins by saying that these charges have been brought against him by those who are unlearned or uninitiated (*imperitorum*), and thus we are meant to understand his following explanation as one that describes the thought process of those in error. The common misconception, according to Apuleius, one that he assumes most of his listeners are under, is that magicians perform rites according to their knowledge in order to have influence over people. This influence is what many consider the negative potential for their power.

The precise error, that is in the conceptions of the audience, that he speaks of is that philosophers are accused of being irreligious because of their interest in the natural world, or that they are accused of being magicians because of their rather zealous interest and worship in the divine world. As I have already engaged in a

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9 *Apol. 26.2*
10 *Apol. 27.1*
discussion of their respective relationships to the natural world, I will focus only on
the latter part of this section of Apuleius. He writes,

...partim autem, qui providentiam mundi curiosius uestigant et
impensius deos celebrant, eos uero uulgo magos nominent, quasi
facere etiam sciant quae sciant fieri, ut olim fuere Epimenides et
Orpheus et Pythagoras et Ostanes, ac dein similiter suspectata
Empedocli catharmoe, Socrati daemonion, Platonis __ _____ Gratulor
igitur mihi, cum et ego tot ac tantis uiris adnumeror.11

Apuleius here explains the other category of philosopher, termed in error by
those who know no better as magicians. The first way he describes them is as
people who diligently investigate the providence of the world (qui providentiam
mundi curiosius vestigant), but his word choice here is important to note. Translated
literally providentia means a “seeing forward,” or looking in to the future. Therefore
we are to understand certain assumptions that the “audience” has, at least according
to Apuleius, namely that philosophers diligently investigate not only the present
state of the world, as in the case of natural philosophers, but also what potentially
will happen to the world.

And in the investigation of the future, philosophers, magicians and prophets
all have something in common. These three groups fall on different parts of the
spectrum, as they exhibit the same sort of behavior, but they differ in their reason
and methods of execution. As stated before, the philosopher seeks to learn the
future of the earth according to the laws of the universe, the prophet is given the
ability to know the future from divine will, and the magician seeks to alter the
events of the future by their direct influence to bring about a desired event.

11 Apol. 27. 2-3
Apuleius also describes this second category of philosophers as people who rather zealously celebrate the gods (*impensius deos celebrant*). The use of the comparative adverb in this phrase casts a definition of excess upon their method of worship, because it carries a connotation of persistency and eagerness with it. In the Oxford Latin Dictionary, the word *impensius* is defined as “exceedingly or greatly,”\(^{12}\) which to our modern ears does not necessarily sound like an insult. The use of the comparative seems to imply that a philosopher who worships *impensius* perhaps is more attentive to the gods than most other people or than what is considered normal. Thus philosophers, who are known to worship the gods more than is *normal*, become marginalized. Theological philosophers are also vulnerable to this accusation because they devote their study to the divine world.

The philosopher may be confused with the magician regarding this issue, Apuleius implies, because magicians in many cases appeal to divinities for help in carrying out their ritual practices. Although the nature of carrying out some aspects of magical practice can be viewed as hubristic, because magicians take the future into their own hands, parts of their ritual can also be viewed as *celebrare impensius*. It could be their faithful servitude to a specific deity that would give them reason to believe that the deity favors them, and thus gives them aid in carrying out their magical spells, an idea that will be discussed in a later chapter with regard to the work of Theocritus.

Apuleius then writes that another misconception of the ill-informed is that philosophers are often called magicians because they actually know how to make

\(^{12}\) OLD, 842
what they know is *(facere etiam sciant quae sciant fieri)*. Much attention should be
given to the aforementioned line, for within it lies the key to how Apuleius imagines
philosophers are most misunderstood, that whether or not someone believes in the
gods has no bearing on whether or not someone is a philosopher.

Let us begin with the structure of this phrase. It is arranged in a very tight
chiasmus, the order of which is ABBA, and what makes the chiasmus even more
locked is the repetition of the same verbs, along with the repetition of the “q” sound.
*Sciant* is repeated twice in this line, and the infinitive of *facio* is repeated as well,
one in the active, *facere*, and another in the passive, *fieri*. The word order here
reflects Apuleius’ opinion of those who are in the room listening to his defense, that
their logic is circular and closed minded, because they assume that philosophers
simply try to imitate what is made already. The word *quasi* in this sentence is also
worth noting, as it truly shows his sarcasm and skepticism of the validity of this
assertion: that these philosophers are called magicians, *as if* they know actually to
make what they know is made already. With this statement Apuleius asserts what
he thinks philosophers actually do: the do not know to make what they know is
made already, but rather they know to discover what they do not know already.

The concept of discovering what has been previously unknown would have
been a very scary one to those in the audience, particularly with regards to a
philosopher gaining unknown knowledge for his own sake. *Ipsa scientia potestas est,*
after all, and it was probably inconceivable to those not in the world of the
philosopher to understand that knowledge can be searched for and achieved, but
not abused. The aforementioned phrase shows Apuleius’ incredible insight that
humans have the tendency to normalize the unfamiliar, and that being a philosopher has nothing at all do with belief in the gods or not, but rather the pursuit of knowledge for one’s own sake. This concept would also be foreign to Apuleius’ audience because the exploration of knowledge for its own sake is inherently uninteresting; they instead want to know what he will do with the knowledge once he has it, and demand a better reason for him wanting to acquire it in the first place. It is a more normal impulse to think of the acquisition of knowledge for a specific gain.

He remarks, once again, that philosophers such as Epimenides, Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Ostanes have been accused of too zealously worshipping the gods, and are threatening because they are perhaps perceived as trying to imitate them. Once again, it is necessary to pay attention to the identities of these philosophers, and why Apuleius felt it was important to mention each of them by name, as well as why he chose to name them is succession with each other. Epimenides, for instance, is a Greek seer and philosopher poet from the 6th century BCE. He is most known for his 57-year slumber in a cave sacred to Zeus, from which he woke having been granted the gift of foresight. Epimenides would certainly have been a marginalized figure, even though he did use his abilities for good. It is simply the fact that he was granted the gift of foresight that would have made him venerable, and also probably feared.

Orpheus himself was venerated among the best in poetry and song. His semi-divine mother, along with his trip to the underworld, rank him among the heroes,

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13 Yonge, Laertius Li. II
and he was renowned as a theological philosopher.\textsuperscript{14} Apuleius also mentions Pythagoras, who is known for his assertion that numbers make up everything.\textsuperscript{15} He is also known for his work \textit{Harmony of the Spheres}, in which he describes that the planets and stars move according to mathematical equations which correspond to the spacing of musical notes. Ostanes, the final name Apuleius mentions in this list, is an ancient \textit{magos} associated with Zoroastrian religion.\textsuperscript{16}

And yet, what do these philosophers really have in common? Each of them pays extreme attention to the favor and worship of the gods. Epimenides was granted his gift by special favor of Zeus, Orpheus raises his song to the glory of the gods, and was granted his gift by the connection to his divine mother, Calliope, muse of epic poetry, and likewise Pythagoras and Ostanes have direct connections to the gods as figure heads of their respective religions. It is the gifts they have been given and their excessive and strange ways of venerating the gods that have made them marginalized figures, accused of being magicians.

Likewise he mentions the purifications of Empedocles, the genius of Socrates, and even the merits of Plato, men who have gone down in history as legitimate and respected philosophers. At the end of this section he remarks that he is glad to be named among such prestigious men (\textit{Gratulor igitur mihi, cum et ego tot ac tantis viris adnumeror}), and this final sarcastic quip illustrates the mood of his point. In this section of the text, Apuleius mocks the misconception that accusers have about

\textsuperscript{14} Sewell, 1960 (3,5)
\textsuperscript{15} Waterfield, 2000 (90)
\textsuperscript{16} Smith, 2003 (1)
philosophers when assuming they are magicians and carefully chooses both his
dwords and the order of them to illustrate his point.

I. iv The Philosopher and the Magician and their Relationship to the Material
World

Yet another way to in which Apuleius elaborates on the confusion between the
philosopher and the magician is the way in which each relates to the material world.
In this category also is the way in which each of these figures relates to their own
physical appearance. In his discussion he raises a few rather important questions:
what defines the appearance of the magician? Can a philosopher hold the same
regard for his appearance? What kind of objects are associated with the magician?
Can they be confused with those belonging to a philosopher? Apuleius answers all
of these questions and makes convincing arguments as to how the philosopher and
the magician can be easily confused on these issues.

In section 4 Apuleius defends himself against Pudens, responding to
something he said as if it were an indictment for being good looking, as he writes,

Audisti ergo paulo prius in principio accusationis ita dici: 'accusamus
apud te philosophum formonsum et tam Graece quam Latine' _ pro
nfas! _ 'disertissimum.' (Apol. 4.1)

The important word to note in Apuleius’ summary of the charge is accusatio. He is
claiming that his elegance in appearance is the basis of a malevolent charge against
him, one that he has to defend himself against. It is true that on the one hand this
exercise could be a rhetorical tactic, a warm-up maneuver that would make the
audience accustomed to his finesse in persuasion and defense. On the other hand,
the previous statement is an introduction to the deeper issue of how the
philosopher vs. the magician regards his appearance.

The degree to which Apuleius refutes the possibility that his appearance is
elegant implies that the magician must be associated with an elegant appearance.
There is further evidence in his later discussion of the mirror, which I will revisit, to
support this claim. Indeed, throughout the rest of section 4 he disproves any claim
that he is anything but decrepit and unkempt in physical appearance. In my opinion,
he would not have gone to such great lengths to disprove the previous charge, had it
not been crucial to his argument. He even writes, *Praeterea: licere etiam philosophis
esse uoltu liberali* (*Apol. 4.6*), which is a statement that further distances Apuleius
from any serious charge based on his appearance. By stating that even philosophers
might be permitted to have a pleasing appearance, he makes it clear that the
philosopher and the magician can be confused in this respect. In sum, he is not at all
elegant in appearance, and could thus not be accused of being a magician on these
grounds, but even if he did have a pleasing appearance, it is permitted for
philosophers, just as much as the magician, to do so as well. In defense of this claim,
he cites the examples of Pythagoras and Zeno, two philosophers who were said to
have been very good looking.\(^\text{17}\)

The next instance in which a charge about his appearance is brought against
him is in section 13 when Apuleius recounts Pudens’ claim that he owns a mirror
and adorns himself before it. He recounts the charge:

\(^{17}\) *Apol. 7-9*
Sequitur enim de speculo longa illa et censoria oratio, de quo pro rei atrocitate paene diruptus est Pudens clamitans: 'Habet speculum philosophus! Possidet speculum philosophus!' Vt igitur habere concedam _ ne aliquid obieciesse te credas, si negaro _, non tamen ex eo accipi me necesse est exornari quoque ad speculum solere. Quid enim? Si choragium thymelicum possiderem, num ex eo argumentare etiam uti me consuesse tragoedi[i] syrmate, histrionis crocota, _ orgia, mimi centunculo? Non opinor. Nam et contra plurimis rebus possessu careo, usu fruor. (Apol. 13.5-7)

The charge made against him in this section is that he, as a philosopher, actually owns a mirror. This claim is presented as evidence for the side of the accusers, and thus we can conclude that the mirror must be a common tool for the magician. After this claim is made against him, Apuleius states that just because he has a mirror, it does not mean he uses it the way magicians do, just as, if he were to wear the clothes of a tragedian, it would not mean that he were an actor.

The first point of interest in his recounting of the indictment is his repetition of Pudens' words 'Habet speculum philosophus! Possidet speculum philosophus!' The verb habeo, a very common word, is defined in the Oxford Latin Dictionary as: have, hold, think, or reason. The following verb possideo, similar in meaning to habeo but used for emphasis with a slightly different connotation, is defined as: seize, possess, occupy. As mentioned before, these verbs have similar meanings with lightly different connotations, the latter possideo provides nuances that reveal deeper meaning in this charge.

At this moment it is important to discuss the importance of the mirror in Roman superstition. Initially, without even speculating as to the

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18 OLD, 780
19 OLD, 1410
significance of the mirror, my mind is drawn to the mirror in mythology. It is important to discuss the mirror in mythology because mythology was the engrained basis for much moral and superstitious code, as it defined the cultural foundation of ancient society to a certain extent. What was so interesting to the Romans about the mirror was not the object of the mirror itself, but the ability it has to produce a perfect copy, or reflection, of whatever is shown in it. So, by extension, the following discussion of the mirror in mythology should include the discussion of the reflection in Roman mythology.

First of all, we have the tale of Narcissus. Due to his pride and his scorn for those who loved him for his beauty, he was punished severely by the gods. He was condemned to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, and died there, unable to wrench himself away from his own reflection. The tragedy in this story is not only that Narcissus fell in love with his own beauty, but that he fell in love with something inherently insubstantial. The reflection could not love him back, and it is significant that the reflection was such an integral part of his punishment. From this story in mythology, the mirror or reflection becomes a symbol for vanity and self-obsession.

Another rather significant presence of the mirror in ancient mythology is the instance of Perseus and his reflective shield. Without his mirror-like shield, he would not have been able to slay Medusa. Since he could not look on Medusa herself without being turned to stone, he instead
looked upon her reflection in his shield and thus was able to cut off her head.

He was not in danger because the reflection was a perfect copy, but not the
gorgon herself. It is from this myth that we get the idea that the mirror is not
a reflection of the actual being reflected in it, but instead a reflection of the
soul. The mirror as an agent for self-absorption and vanity as well as being a
reflection of the soul are both relevant points to Apuleius’ argument, as the
former quality is associated with adorning oneself and with elegant
appearance as in the case of the magician, and the latter is associated with
the pursuit of knowledge, as in the case of the philosopher.

The basis of the claims against Apuleius in this moment is that he is in
possession of a mirror. Clearly, as we have discovered, there are certain negative
connotations associated with the mirror, including vanity and self-indulgence. It is
implied in his previous account of the indictment that the audience assumes that,
since he owns a mirror, he is in the habit of adorning himself before it (*non tamen ex
eo accipi me necesse est exornari quoque ad speculum solere*), which is a vain action.
Since he makes a point to refute this assumption, it can be inferred that the habit of
adorning oneself before a mirror is a characteristic of the magician. Thus far we
have learned of the magician that not only is he concerned with his elegant
appearance, but that the possession of the mirror would aid in his ability to decorate
and adorn himself. We are to understand that a magician can therefore be spotted
in part by the way in which he dresses as well as his general quality of elegant
appearance.
The point of confusion between the philosopher and the magician is this: both can possess mirrors but have them for completely different purposes. He says himself in the previously quoted passage, *Nam et contra plurimis rebus possessu careo, usu*; his first point is to negate the possibility that he has to use it at all. To summarize another one of his statements: owning the objects of a magician does not mean one is a magician. Simply because he possesses it does not mean that he uses it at all, and it also does not mean that he uses it in the way Aemilianus assumes he does: to maintain the lavish appearance of a magician.

In fact, Apuleius goes even further to diffuse the confusion between philosopher and the magician in terms of the possession of the mirror. He begins with a summary of the qualities of a mirror, summarizing thus: *Tantum praestat imaginis artibus ad similitudinem referandum leuitas illa speculi fabra et splendor opifex* (Apol. 14.8). The emphasis in this line is on the words *ad similitudinem referendum*, which shows that Apuleius regards the mirror as the most truthful way to see one's own likeness as it is used, literally, toward a “reflected back likeness.”

According to Apuleius, many other philosophers such as Socrates, Demosthenes, and Plato as well as the *rhetor* Eubulides have used mirrors because of their perfect ability to reflect a truthful image, for *cur existimes imaginem suam cuique uisendam potius in lapide quam in argento, magis in tabula quam in speculo?* (Apol. 15.2) The reason philosophers, and Apuleius includes himself in this category, are so appreciative of the reflective qualities of the mirror is because of their motivation for using the mirror, for desiring a perfect reflection. He summarizes the reason as follows: *Nam saepe oportet non modo similitudinem suam, uerum etiam ipsius*
similitudinis rationem considerare (Apol. 15.12). And truly this is yet not the only reason: philosophers are genuinely intoxicated with not what causes the different aspects of their own appearances, but also how the mirrors themselves work (Apol. 15.12-15). What Apuleius has done in his discussion of the mirror is to acknowledge that magicians and philosophers both possess mirrors, and that a philosopher could be confused with being a magician for this reason. He then explains in detail why a philosopher would possess and use a mirror, dissipating all confusion and again defeating the opposition.

I.v Conclusion

While Apuleius was formulating his defense, he perceived three characteristics that may cause a philosopher to be confused with a magician: relationship to the natural world, relationship to the divine world, and physical appearance. As a result of these distinctions, I have a clear idea of what Apuleius feels a philosopher is, and what he feels a magician is. Philosophers and magicians are both marginalized figures, but for different reasons.

Philosophers and magicians each explore and take apart aspects of the natural world to better understand the future potential for objects and people, but philosophers seek knowledge for its own sake, and magicians use a type of esoteric knowledge to bring about a desired event. Philosophers and magicians each relate similarly to the divine world: philosophers can seem irreligious in their interest in the material makeup of the universe, and not the divine, just as magicians can seem irreligious for enacting influence over future events. Likewise, philosophers can seem over zealous in their worship of the gods if their behavior at all resembles that
of a magician who appeals excessively to divinities, or if they are a theological philosopher, wholly engrossed in the happenings of the divine. Finally, philosophers may be confused with magicians if they possess an elegant appearance, or if they possess a mirror, because these are symbols of vanity and lavishness that are implied to be characteristics of the magician. Apuleius remarks that he is not elegant in appearance at all, and yet philosophers of the past have been without being magicians. Also, the possession of a mirror does not have to be a symbol of vanity, but a puzzle to solve in and of itself, as well as a way to ponder one’s appearance and the causes of it on the greater path to self-knowledge. It is clear that Apuleius made a successful defense not only with his skills of persuasion, but by proving the confusion between the philosopher and the magician is real.

II: The Magician in Literature

II.i Introduction

The intention of the previous chapter was to explore the role and identity of the magician in a real-world and historical context, as well as to understand the difference between the magician and the philosopher. Having grasped a general understanding as to the identity of the magician from Apuleius’ Apologia, I find it of interest to explore the role of the protagonist Lucius in Apuleius’ novel The Golden Ass or Metamorphoses. Lucius is a well-educated upper class young man, not unlike Apuleius himself was at a young age. Also like Apuleius, Lucius, throughout the first few books of the novel, seems to have an insatiable curiositas. He is a philosopher in his own right, yet his curiosity lies in the realm of magic.
In the novel, the reader follows the wanderings of the protagonist, Lucius, and the incredible aftermath of his unfortunate transformation. Lucius, having come from a family in Corinth, goes on business in the region of Thessaly, and this is where his wanderings take place. Lucius himself in the novel describes Thessaly as follows:

...reputansque me media Thessaliae loca tenere qua artis magicae nativa cantamina totius orbis consono orbe celebrentur fabulumque illam optimi comitis Aristomenis de situ civitatis huius exortam, suspensus alioquin et voto simul et studio, curiose singula considerabam. (Met. 2.1)

In fact having traveled to the heart of Thessaly under the pretense of business he has come to a place renowned throughout the world for the magic its inhabitants practice. Additionally, given Lucius’ immediate interest in and affinity for magic from the first few pages of the novel (he is immediately interested in the tales of magic he hears from travelers even at the beginning of his journey) it would not be a stretch to conclude that part of Lucius’ journey was for the purpose of magical exploration.

Having been prompted to do so by a long time friend of his, Lucius arrives in the town of Hypata and stays with Milo, a man known as a miser in the town, and his wife and servant girl Photis. After a lust-ridden affair with Photis and public humiliation at the Festival of Laughter, Lucius finds out a secret about Milo’s wife: that she is a very known and powerful witch in the area. She is famous for ensnaring and causing the destruction of young men by drawing them to her with magic spells. Photis confesses to Lucius that she was the cause of his presence at the Festival of Laughter, and he says that the only way he will forgive her is if she lets
him observe her mistress cum aliquid huius divinae disciplinae molitur (Met. 3.19). Lucius’ trouble begins when he witnesses Photis’ mistress performing a magical transformation, and decides to use whatever means necessary to try it himself. Lucius then undergoes a transformation that will change not only his physical body and appearance, but also the way in which he views the world, and ultimately how he lives in it.

The following chapter is an exploration of the role of Lucius as a failed magician in the novel, and the nature of his transformation. I will also investigate the nature of Lucius’ final transformations and compare them to the circumstances of his first. Finally I will confront the unique role of the female magician in the novel and her presence in other genres of ancient literature.

II.i Lucius the Failed Magician

As said before, Lucius is a highly educated young man from a wealthy family. He works in business, and travels through Thessaly, stopping along the way to satisfy his curiosity about the magical arts. He is a philosopher in that he seems to be on an endless quest for knowledge, but unfortunately his over zealous and foolhardy desires introduce him to a world for which he is desperately unprepared. As we will see, Lucius approaches the magical arts through the view of a philosopher, driven by his curiositas and quest for knowledge, and not with the knowledge of a magician. Additionally, simply because he observes a magical act does not mean he can perform it: a lesson he learns soon enough. After observing Photis’ mistress transform herself into an owl after an elaborate ritual, he asks Photis to retrieve a pot of oil from her magic stores that will allow him to experience transformation
into an owl as well.

It is at this point that it would be prudent to examine Lucius’ motivations for wanting to turn into a bird, and more specifically an owl. The first reason is Lucius’ unflinching *curiositas*, a Latin word defined in the OLD as follows: inquisitiveness, or an excessive eagerness for knowledge. Indeed, at the end of the novel, when Lucius encounters the cult of Isis in Corinth, the priest there says to him

...et lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus voluptates curiositatis inprosperae sinistrum praemium reportasti (Met. 11.15).

By why is Lucius so plagued by and loyal to his *curiositas*? It is important to remember that Lucius’ life has been fairly predictable so far. We know that he has been to Rome to study rhetoric, and we know that he comes from Corinth, a very busy and prosperous port city at the time. It would be natural for someone such as Lucius, directed by expectations and driven by the wishes of others, to want to experience something utterly fantastic and out of the ordinary to break the pattern of his mundane life. Transforming himself into an owl would certainly have that effect.

Yet why does Lucius wish to transform into an owl particularly? What is interesting about the use of myth in *the Golden Ass*, is that the novel is written by a Roman author, who therefore carries knowledge of Roman customs and associations, but he sets his story in Greece, and therefore must have knowledge of their customs and traditions as well. Let us begin with Greece. The obvious association of the owl and Greece is its association with Athena, and therefore the city of Athens. Through its association with Athena, the owl came to represent protection, foresight, and inspiration to the Greek people. Also, through the printing
of the owl on one of the sides of the *tetradrachma* around the fifth century BCE, the owl became associated with commerce, trade and prosperity. In the Roman tradition, though, the owl became associated with slightly morbid circumstances. There is even a Roman superstition that nailing an owl to the front door of a home would ward off bad luck and keep the family safe. Lucius himself mentions this superstition:

> Quid quod istas nocturnas aves, cum penetraverint larem quempiam, solliciter prehensas foribus videmus adfigi, ut, quod infaustis volatibus familiae minantur exitium, suis luant cruciatibus? (*Met.* 3.23)

Through all of these associations, it is clear that Lucius must not have wanted to transform into an owl only to satisfy his curiosity. Between the traditions of the Greek and Roman cultures, the owl acquires an immense amount of power. It is not only a bringer of victory, a holder of wisdom, but also wards off evil and has the power to announce death, and stir up mortals to worry. Lucius’ goal, then, seems to be to alter his life and station within it completely, to be *outside* of the realm of what is mundane and human, and yet to have an untouchable influence over it. He can only attain this goal through magical transformation, since there is no other way he knows of aside from magic to begin this new life. And Lucius, having seen the transformation occur once in front of his eyes, knows that it will work.

Equally as important as what the owl signifies culturally is what it signifies to Lucius himself. It is clear in the text that Lucius has a very romanticized view of what transforming himself into an owl will entail. He does not think of the physical restraints of being within an animal body, but instead describes it as an avenue for previously unreachable possibility. As he must convince his lover Photis to help him
obtain the oil for his transformation, he uses the imagery of love to describe his future experience as an owl:

\[\text{Patere, oro te, inquam, dum dictat occasio, magno et singulari me adfectionis tuae fructu perfrui et impertire nobis unctulum indidem per istas tuas pupillas, mea mellitula, tuumque mancipium inremunerabili beneficio sic tibi perpetuo pignera ac iam perfice ut meae Veneri Cupido pinnatus adsistam tibi. (Met. 3.22)}\]

He even remarks in the next paragraph that even if he were a messenger of Jove, he would find time to come back to his beloved (Met. 3.23). He not only wants to have untouchable influence through the exclusive avenue of magic, but he also wants to have the freedom to fly and create a new romantically and mythologically rich life as he soars with the divine.

What Lucius wants and what he gets are of course very different, since the potion he acquires is not the right one. Instead of transforming himself into an owl, he transforms himself into an ass. With this transformation comes a life of burden. Almost immediately after his transformation he is stolen away by robbers and essentially sold into a life of slavery; I say slavery and not servitude because he still maintains his human awareness and mind. He is reduced to a life that is devoid of intellect, and instead serves the basic purposes of labor and later on sex. In his search to transcend the trivial nature of the human world, and have a certain amount of influence over it with newfound knowledge and wisdom, Lucius instead subjugated to the basic life of animal instinct and animal wants and needs: food, labor and sex.

Before the robbers break into the house and take Lucius in animal form away from Photis, she tells him that the only thing he needs to do to transform back into a
human is to eat rose petals. Throughout his travels as an ass there are many circumstances in which Lucius encounters roses, but cannot eat them, or thinks he has found roses, and is disappointed when he discovers them to be something else. His search for roses, for the antidote to his transformation, becomes a metaphor for the greater spiritual and moral antidote he gradually acquires over the course of his novel. He cannot eat the roses he sees the day after he is snatched away from the house of Milo because he has not yet learned a lesson for his transgression into the black arts, or for giving into his curiositas and carnal pleasures. It takes until he is offered sanctified rose petals from a religious official of Isis for him to transform back into his human form.

The ass itself carries specific connotations in Apuleius’ time. Indeed, the goddess identified as Isis even says to Lucius that the ass is the most hateful to her of all the animals. Robert Graves writes of the ass at this time,

    In Apuleius’ day the ass typified lust, cruelty and wickedness, and Plutarch – from whom he claimed descent – had recorded an Egyptian festival in which asses and men with Typhonic coloring (i.e. sandy-red like a wild ass’s coat) were triumphantly pushed over cliffs in vengeance of Osiris’ murder.20

It is appropriate, then, that Lucius should undergo this punishment. He has meddled in a realm of which he knows next to nothing. Lucius has assumed that his experience watching the transformation of the witch would be enough for him to replicate it, but he was mistaken. He has aimed high, and he fell far because of his ambition and curiositas. It would not be too much to say that Lucius has suffered this fate because of his tendency toward hubris, which is bred from his

20 Graves, xiv
overconfidence. Indeed it is natural that Lucius, having the qualities of curiosity and ambition, would be attracted to the magical arts. Magic is a subject that is shrouded in mystery, the knowledge of which is often times difficult to acquire and the possibilities of which seem endless. If Lucius could successfully complete a magical transformation, he thinks he would thus be a magician, an action that would satisfy both his ambition and his curiosity. What Lucius will discover as a result of his mis-transformation is that magic becomes dangerous when not properly executed, and one can only execute it properly with the esoteric knowledge of a practitioner.

In the end magic does not give Lucius exactly what he was looking for, and through the unexpected avenue of being transformed into an ass, Lucius attains something even greater than that which he set out to accomplish. At the beginning of the novel, Lucius was a slave to the pleasures of life and in a way was a devotee of the maiden Photis, and the carnal pleasures of wine, food and sex. Even all of the learning he acquired over the course of his life associated with his high birth could not take his focus away from the bestial pleasures of life, and more importantly could not teach him the lessons that he learns by the end of the novel.

What is important to understand now is that Lucius was transformed into an ass in order that he refocus his passions and energies toward something that is better than the bestial pleasures of life. Indeed, though his ambition and curiositas get him into trouble when magic is involved, they are also admirable qualities when directed toward goals that are more pure. In the end Lucius acquires a type of knowledge through the cult of Isis that could not have been acquired if he had not first, through magic, experienced his previous flaws in such an exaggerated way.
II.iii Lucius' Final Transformations: Magic vs. Religion

At the resolution of Apuleius' novel *The Golden Ass* Lucius is transformed from a donkey back into his human form. What he gains from this transformation is not only physical, because he also goes through a series of initiations into the cults of Isis and Osiris, making him a new devotee and religious man. The physical and spiritual changes he encounters serve not only to bring him back to the way he was, but to fully change his moral fiber, his thoughts and desires, and the way he interacts and functions within the world. What he initially sought to find in transformation was influence, knowledge, and wisdom, but he went about acquiring them with over-zealousness and pride, living a life of secrecy and seducing Photis in order to gain the knowledge he desires. Eventually he finds that the only way to acquire these qualities is through quiet diligence and patient devotion.

For most of the novel Lucius is trapped in the body of a donkey, forced to continually be thought of as property, and to submit to the whims and expectations of his different masters. At the end of Book 10, Lucius finds himself to be the lead attraction in a variety of sideshows, having been taught various tricks by his master. One day a rich and very reputable woman sees him performing tricks in one of these shows, and falls in love with him. She then pays his owner in order to take him back to her home and spend an amorous and lustful night with him. His owner finds this to be very entertaining and arranges that at a coming show Lucius will have to copulate with a woman known as a criminal for the murder of her husband.

When the day of the show comes, Lucius is left to graze while his master sets up the public bed. Instead of staying and enduring another form of public
humiliation (he was the subject of public ridicule in Book 3 at the Festival of Laughter) he decides to flee, and he ends up at the town of Cenchreae. He, exhausted, falls asleep on the beech. At the beginning of Book 11, Lucius awakens in the night to find the full moon rising above the waves of the ocean. This is when his transformation begins. Apuleius describes the realization Lucius has, having escaped the life of bondage:

...nactusque opacae noctis silentiosa secreta, certus etiam summatem deam praecipua maiestate pollere resque prorsus humanas ipsius regi providentia, nec tantum pecuina et ferina, verum inanima etiam divino eius luminis numinisque nutu vegetari, ipsa etiam corpora terra caelo marique nunc incrementis consequenter augeri, nunc detrimentis obsequenter imminui, fato scilicet iam meis tot tantisque cladibus satiato et spem salutis, licet tardam, subministrante, augustum specimen deae praesentis statui deprecari...(Met. 11.1)

Though still caught in the form of an ass, Lucius has a realization that allows him to begin down the path of transformation. In this section of text Lucius learns why he has had to undergo so many hardships and for the first time acknowledges the presence of the goddess in the full moon. He comes to learn that she (the goddess) determines the fates of everything in the universe, human, animal or inanimate. He sees the hope in the shining light of the moon that his troubles are now at an end, that Fortune will no longer be cruel to him.

In this section we also see a direct contrast to the events leading up to his first transformation at Hypata. What characterizes Lucius’ awareness of the goddess is the rising moon, which is a grand source of light. Light has been a symbol in many cultures and superstitions, found in literature and prose alike, for awakening and newfound purity. The beginning of Lucius’ story is characterized by darkness. He is
constantly reminded of the powers of witches to take the light away from the world, and conceals his pleasures with Photis in the darkness of his own rooms. On the way back from the banquet at the house of Byrrhea, Lucius and his servant are walking back to Milo's house when their lantern suddenly goes out. In the darkness Lucius mistakes the possessed goatskins for robbers and thus gives the townsfolk fuel for embarrassing him at the Festival of Laughter. It is during the nighttime, wishing to be turned into an owl (a bird of the night that awakes in darkness), that Lucius undergoes his first transformation into an ass.

What breaks the darkness of his experiences is the moonlight. It inspires him to speak a prayer to the goddess, asking her to end his suffering, whether that means changing him back into his previous human form, or putting him to death. The goddess, who identifies herself as Isis (Met. 11.5), emerges and tells Lucius she will grant his wish, but only if he follows her instructions precisely. She instructs him that in a throng of people will be a procession in her honor and he is to take the garland of roses from the hand of a priest, who will expect Lucius because she has instructed him in a dream:

Nam meo monitu sacerdos in ipso procinctu pompae roseam manu dextera sistro cohaerentem gestabit coronam. Incunctanter ergo dimotis turbulis alacer continuare pompam mea volentia fretus et de proximo clementer velut manum sacerdotis osculabundus rosis deceptis pessimae mihiique iam dudum detestabilis belvae istius corio te protinus exue. (Met. 11.6)

Again, this acquisition of the roses is an important point of contrast to Lucius' earlier life. After he is first changed into an ass, Photis tells Lucius that the antidote to his plight will be to eat roses. She tells him that she usually plaits roses in a garland, but

21 Frangoulidis 2008, 177
did not on that night, so he could not be changed back immediately (Met. 1.25). He was not changed back that night not only because Photis forgot to plait the garland, but also because he could not receive the antidote from someone as impure as Photis or from any vestige of his former life. His release from the form of a donkey can only be from roses given at the hand of a priest of Isis, a person who is a symbol of his future life.

Indeed, in her speech to Lucius, Isis remarks that after he is transformed back into a human he must pledge his devotion and allegiance to her for the rest of his days:

Plane memineris et penita mente conditum semper tenebis mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula adusque terminos ultimi spiritus vadata. (Met. 11.6)

For this service, she continues, she will offer him protection and promises him fame. Even after he dies he will be in her favor, for he is promised residence in the Elysian Fields. Lucius does just as she says and waits for the time of his transformation on the beach. Finally, cum noctis atrae fugato nubilo sol exsurgit aureus (Met. 11.7), the procession of the goddess begins to form before Lucius’ eyes. When he spies the priest with the rattle and the garland, he carefully walks up to him and takes the roses just as Isis instructed him to do. At that moment, before the whole crowd, he is transformed back into his human self.

Lucius, in the form of an ass, was not clothed, and thus he is left standing naked before the whole crowd. He is also speechless, or defixus (Met. 11.14). These characteristics both support the notion that this transformation is a total rebirth for Lucius, as he is naked and speechless much like a newborn. Again this is a contrast
to the former Lucius. Once he valued wealth and talked almost incessantly, fueled by his insatiable *curiositas*. Now he is a new person, and indeed the clothes he will wear for the rest of his days are simple and humble due to his devotion to the cult.

The priest that bestows the roses upon Lucius defines the difference between the Lucius now and his former self:

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Nec tibi natales ac ne dignitas quidem, vel ipsa, qua flores, usquam
doctrina profuit, sed lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus
voluptates curiositatis inprosperae sinistrum praemium reportasti.
Sed utcumque Fortunae caecitas, dum te pessimis periculis discruciat,
ad religiosam istam beatitudinem inprovida produxit malitia. (Met.
11.15)
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The priest says that even with noble birth and education, Lucius was not able to stifle his curiosity, which led him into the trouble he experienced. He has been led to this final transformation because it is *religia ista beatitudo* that will be his savior, which will continue to teach him the lessons to live a fulfilling life.

There are elements of Lucius’ transformation back into human form that are similar to those of magical practice. Lucius has his realization beneath the moon during the nighttime on an open beach and by himself. This setting, aside from the ocean, is not remarkably different from the setting Pamphile chose to perform her magic earlier in the novel. Additionally, the idea of rose petals being his antidote is closely associated with magic, as plants and other herbs are common ingredients for magical ritual and spells. What makes this transformation different from the magical transformation he had earlier is that it not only takes place in the presence of a priest, but also in the middle of a crowded religious celebration.

Before the end of the novel Lucius undergoes three more important transformations, each religious, which are called initiations. The first is his
initiation into the cult of Isis. It is through this example that we are sure that Lucius has learned the value of patience. Let us remember the eagerness of Lucius at the beginning of the novel. He would stop at nothing, no matter what potential risk or danger was involved, in order to witness or experience the magic of Thessaly. He merely observed the witch undergo her transformation and thought he could do the same thing. What he failed to realize is that there is a ritual aspect even in magic.

The witch did not take a short amount of time to transform. It is written in the novel that *cum lucerna secreto conlocuta membra tremulo succussu quatit* (*Met.* 3.21), which Lucius completely ignores when he attempts his transformation. His impatience proves to be part of his undoing.

This is very different from the Lucius we see at the end of the novel who is willing to restrict his diet and wait any amount of time for the circumstances to be correct for his initiation. Indeed, he waits and restricts himself for each of the three initiations, and resolves to show no sign of impatience. Each time he gives up more of his material life: the first time he has to borrow money from his friends to pay for the preparations (*Met.* 11.23), the second time he sells his nice clothes (*Met.* 11.28), and the third time he does not even have to worry about money because the gods have made it so that he has a steady income in legal fees (*Met.* 11.30). Just as Lucius is brought low as an ass in order to reach the height of religious freedom, he is made to give up all that he has in the process of initiation in order to be given wealth and standing in the end. Osiris even bestows upon him rank and prestige when he appoints him to the college of the *pastophori* at the end of the novel and allows him to become one of the *decurionum quinquennales* (*Met.* 11.30). In the end Lucius has
attained knowledge and wisdom and additionally wealth and honor without the vices of his previous life.

II.iv The Unique Role of the Witch

In completing a full discussion of Lucius’ transformation over the course of the *Golden Ass*, I would be remiss if I did not mention specifically the role of the witch in the novel in addition to her qualities and behaviors as a magician. As stated before, the most prominent witch in *The Golden Ass* is Milo’s wife, Pamphile, who is also the mistress of Photis. In the town of Hypata, Pamphile seems to have a reputation for being a particularly powerful and ruthless witch. In Book II Lucius travels into the town center and describes that he is *anxius alioquin et nimis cupidus cognoscendi quae rara miraeque sunt* (*Met.* 2.1). When he gets there he is stopped by a woman on the street who reveals herself to be his aunt Byrrhea. As soon as he mentions to her that he is staying with a man called Milo, Byrrhea tells him some cautionary words about Pamphile. In her warning she gives a detailed and quite lengthy description of the powers Pamphile allegedly has, and thus why she fears so much for Lucius’ safety:

> ...cave tibi, sed cave fortiter a malis artibus et facinorosis illecebris Pamphiles illius, quae cum Milone isto, quem dicas hospitem, nupta est. Maga primi nominis et omnis carminis seculcralis magistra creditur, quae surculis et lapillis et id genus frivolis inhalatis omnem istam lucem mundi sideralis imis Tartari et in vetustum chaos submergere novit. (*Met.* 2.5)

Take care, she says, against the *malae artes* and *facinorosae illecebrae* of Pamphile.

The word choice at the beginning of this cautionary statement is carefully chosen. *Ars* is a word that can have many different definitions. Defined in the OLD, it can mean skill, craft, or art, but it can also mean trick, or wile. Further still it can mean
knowledge or science, or even method or character. I posit that in this instance, *ars* can mean all of the above. Byrrhea is telling Lucius to beware of not only of Pamphile’s deceptive character, but also that the knowledge and methods she possesses are inherently wicked, *malae*. She drives the point home with her second description of the deeds of Pamphile when she tells him to watch out for her *facinorosae illecebrae*. This is a far less subtle or general description. In the OLD *facinorosus* is defined as wicked, criminal or vicious and *illecebra* is defined as allurement, or a means of attraction. It can also have the more specific meaning of enticement by magic. This is the first moment in the novel when Lucius learns that the magical reputation of the area holds weight, and that Pamphile herself is capable of these magical acts.

In the following sentences Byrrhea describes the identity of Pamphile as a witch. She describes her as a *maga primi nominis*, a witch foremost in name, and one that *omnis carminis sepulcralis magistra creditur*, in other words, she is known to be an instructor in the spells of necromancy. Her further powers include being able to breath on any rock or common object and remove the light from the world, and make all darkness and chaos. As we can see from this description, she has the absolute power to disturb the natural progression of night and day, and bring the darkness and chaos of the underworld to the earth. If we recall a part of our definition for the magician from the first chapter, we remember that she understands how to make what she knows to be (*quasi facere sciat quae sciat fieri*). Yet her powers can also be remarkably subtle. As Byrrhea describes, she is also able to entice any youth she finds appealing:
Nam simul quemque conspexerit speciosae formae iuvenem, venustate eius sumitur et ilio in eum et oculum et animum detorquet. Serit blanditias, invadit spiritum, amoris profundi pedicis aeternis alligat. Tunc minus morigeros et vilis fastidio in saxa et in pecuia et quodvis animal puncto reformat, alios vero prorsus extinguit. (Met. 2.5)

And as soon as she finds a speciosae formae iuvenem, she dominates his will and immediately detorquet both his sight and soul. If she finds him disagreeable, she will turn him into a rock, a sheep, or any other kind of animal; or she will destroy him entirely.

The use of the verb detorquere is also of interest. In the OLD it can simply mean to bend or twist, but it can also carry the connotation of misrepresenting or perverting. This is an important specific characteristic of her power and also the extent of her magic. Pamphile is not able to actually make these young men fall in love with her, but she is able to distort their perceptions so that they think they have fallen in love with her. She deals exclusively in perception, and not in reality. This gives some weight to the claim found in the Apologia that Apuleius is a magician because he possesses and makes use of a mirror. Since Pamphile deals solely in perception, it reasonably follows that a mirror could be one of her tools, even though it is not specifically mentioned in The Golden Ass.

The idea of the witch as an agent to distort perception is one that makes her unique. In the Apologia, we did not encounter the distinction between perception and reality with regards to Apuleius’ crimes: he was simply indicted for using black magic to make his wife fall in love with him. Indeed, it is the ability to distort the perception of reality that makes the female magician that much more powerful, and
also ultimately more terrifying because it adds an element of doubt. To experience a terrifying magical act and then not be certain that it even happened is altogether scarier because it makes one doubt one’s own sanity and perception of reality. It becomes a sort of psychological terror. The story Aristomenes tells Lucius at the beginning of the novel is an example of this sort of psychological terror that female magicians seem to be capable of.

There would not be a point in copying the entirety of his story here, as it would take up pages, so I will instead give a summary and then quote the relevant points. On his way to Thessaly, Lucius encounters a man named Aristomenes telling another traveler about this unbelievable experience he had with one of his friends. He describes that he found his friend Socrates in dire straights, disheveled and stripped of all his money and belongings because he became involved in a lusty relationship with this inn-keeper, Meroe. After Aristomenes scolds him for being so irresponsible as to get himself into such a mess, Socrates describes the nature of the woman he has been dealing with as follows:

Saga, inquit, et divina, potens caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fontes durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infimare, sidera extinguere, Tartarum ipsum inluminare. (Met. 1.8)

It seems that Meroe, like Pamphile, has an uncanny control over the natural world, and that it largely works in turning order upside down, or establishing chaos. She can make the sky fall, and raise the earth; she can darken the stars, and light up Tartarus. Her powers are even more realized later on when Aristomenes and Socrates have fled and are staying the night in an inn. During the night after they have fallen asleep, Aristomenes has an experience that he later discovers was only a
dream. Meroe and another witch broke down the doors to their room, violently slit the throat of Socrates, and then urinated on Aristomenes (this is a gross simplification of the story, but we are concerned with not the content, but the circumstance). Later on he wakes up having fallen on top of Socrates in his sleep, and discovers that he has only dreamt the violence of the night before, as even the doors have been restored to their hinges. Socrates confirms that he had the same dream during the night.

After Aristomenes and Socrates leave the inn, they stop along the way as Socrates suddenly falls ill. Aristomenes suggests that he drink from a nearby spring to quench his thirst and restore his health. The following is Aristomenes’ account of what happens to Socrates when he goes to drink from the stream:

Necdum satis extremis labiis summum aquae rorem attigerat, et iugulo eius vulnus dehiscit in profundum patorem…(*Met. 1.19*)

After that, Socrates dies and Aristomenes buries him nearby the stream. He then flees and encounters Lucius, to whom he tells the story. One of the qualities of the story that is most notable is the ability of Meroe and the other witch to distort reality. The violence that occurred that night in the inn was made to seem to the victims like a dream, and indeed they would have always thought of it as a dream if it had not been for Socrates’ unfortunate death. This is just another example of how the female witch is most terrifying: she not only has an extreme capacity for violence, but also for manipulating the psyche and reality.

There are two additional parts from the statement made by Byrrhea that are of interest. First of all, Pamphile’s method of punishment is either to transform her
prey into some other object or being, or to obliterate them. This is a trope for the female magician or witch that we find not only throughout the novel on multiple occasions, but also in the Greek tradition. When I first read this passage, immediately the story of the sorceress Circe comes to mind. She is described not only in Homer, but also in Vergil and Ovid for her ruthless method of punishment. As we shall also see, Pamphile and Circe also share a common motivation for transforming their objects of affection. Homer describes how Circe transforms Odysseus’ men into swine as follows:

εἷσεν δ᾽ εἰσαγαγοῦσα κατὰ κλισμοὺς τε θρόνους τε, ἐν δὲ σφιν τυρόν τε καὶ ἄλφιτα καὶ μέλι χλωρὸν οἴνῳ Πραμνείω ἐκύκα: ἀνέμισγε δὲ σίτῳ φάρμακα λύγρ᾽, ἵνα πάγχυ λαθοίτο πατρίδος αἰής. αὐτὰρ ἔπει δῶκέν τε καὶ ἔκπιον, αὐτίκ᾽ ἐπεὶ Ῥάβδῳ πεπληγυῖα κατὰ συφεοῖσιν ἔέργνυ. οἱ δὲ συῶν μὲν ἔχον κεφαλὰς φωνήν τε καὶ δέμας, αὐτὰρ νοῦς ἦν ἔμπεδος, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ. (Homer Od. 10.233-240)

The similarities Circe bares to Pamphile are striking. First she invites them into her home under the pretense of hospitality, inviting them to sit upon various kinds of seats, and to feast upon ἐν δὲ σφιν τυρόν τε καὶ ἄλφιτα καὶ μέλι χλωρὸν οἴνῳ Πραμνείω ἐκύκα. Within this mixture of cheese, barley, honey and wine, she has mixed φάρμακα λύγρʹ, which is the agent for their transformation. Immediately after eating Odysseus’ men transform into boars and are penned up. What is most interesting about the nature of the transformation of the men is when Homer specifies that even though their bodies have changed form, αὐτὰρ νοῦς ἦν ἔμπεδος. They have the bodies of boars, but still the minds of humans. Additionally, just as in

22 Perseus
*The Golden Ass* Lucius is transformed into an ass as an emphasis on his bestial nature, the men in the case of Circe are transformed into pigs as an intensification of their piggish nature.

Both the method of Circe’s transforming as well as the quality of transformation she inflicts is echoed in *The Golden Ass*. As we have seen in the instance of Lucius’ transformation, the effect is achieved by a potion he rubs on himself, and the antidote is achieved by something he ingests. It is therefore a safe assumption that the method by which Pamphile transforms her lovers is also through some sort of potion, or poison, which will either transform them or punish them. Furthermore, the idea that after a human is transformed, he or she still keeps the same mind is also found in *The Golden Ass*. The fact that Lucius still thinks like a human through most of the novel after his transformation into an ass is evidence enough.

Pamphile and Circe also share the reason for which they transform their lovers into animals and other objects: revenge. They also share another power in common: to take the light from the world, and shroud it in darkness. In the passage from the *Metamorphoses* that was quoted earlier, Byrrhea gives the reason for Pamphile’s wicked deeds. She remarks that Pamphile changes the young men into rocks or whatever kind of animal because of a *punctus*. This word in the OLD literally is defined as meaning a prick, or puncture, as from a sting. Yet, metaphorically this word carries the connotation of an *emotional* prick or stick, and can also be translated as *scorn*.

This trope is also present in one of Ovid’s accounts of Circe: the story of Pecus.
The brief overview is that Pecus, the king of Ausonia, attracted the attention of the Titaness and sorceress Circe. One day Pecus is out hunting in the forest, and Circe wants an opportunity to approach him. In order to get his guards away from him so she may speak to him, she shrouds the forest in darkness. Ovid’s account of this is as follows:

Concipit illa preces et verba precantia dicit
ignotosque deos ignoto carmine adorat,
quo solet et niveae vultum confundere Lunae
et patrio capiti bibulas subtexere nubes.
Tum quoque cantato densetur carmine caelum,
et nebulas exhalat humus, caecisque vagantur
limitibus comites, et abest custodia regis. (Met. 14.365-371)

This is not unlike Apuleius’ writing of Pamphile’s power to darken the world, and as we have seen, also quite similar to Meroe’s. Indeed, when writing about the power of Meroe, Socrates mentions that she can *sidera exstinguere*, which is similar to the description we see above where Circe *cantato densetur carmine caelum*, or is able to make the sky dense and dark with her incantations. This power, namely the one to conjure darkness to occur in nature, seems to be a known and accepted one for the female magician.

As stated before, Pamphile and Circe share a common motivation for transforming objects of their affection: in the case of Pamphile it is specifically the word *punctus*, but for both of them it is for revenge against a man that has scorned or insulted them. After Circe darkens the forest and sends Picus chasing after an apparition of a boar, she has him alone and away from all of his guards. At that point she approaches him and confesses her affection for him. He replies that he does not love her because another woman has his heart and nothing that Circe can
do will cause him to be unfaithful to her. As a response to this rejection of her advances, Circe proclaims that she will not allow him to slight her in such a way, and transforms him into a woodpecker. Ovid writes this section as follows:

Saepe retemptatis precibus Titania frustra,
non impune feres, neque, ait, reddere Canenti,
laesaque quid faciat, quid amans, quid femina discès
rebus, ait, sed amans et laesa et femina Circe! (Met. 382-385)

The most important word in this passage for our purposes is *laesa*, and it is repeated twice in these four short lines. She says Picus will not return to his beloved Canens, but that instead he will learn because of his actions what can be done by a woman who is *laesa*, and that woman is Circe herself. In the OLD *laesus* is defined as struck, injured, or wounded. I think that in this instance it also means that she has been scorned and Ovid has used the specific word *laesus* to keep consistent with the hunting imagery of the previous paragraphs.

What is important to note about the method of transformation for revenge purposes is that in itself it is a form of mutilation. The act of mutilating or changing the appearance or shape of victims seems to be a common trope of the female magician in literature, paired with the extreme tendency towards violence. Additionally, as we have seen in Pamphile and Circe thus far, the agent of potion or poison plays an important role in the wares and methods of the female magician. Thus far we have only explored two genres of ancient literature: epic poetry and the prose novel. In the story of *Medea* we find these tropes for the female magician in the world of drama.

*Medea* is perhaps one of the best known female magicians of the Greek mythic world. Grandaughter of the sun god Helios, and neice to the aforementioned
sorceress Circe, Medea embodies what is most terrifying about the female magician. The story of Medea is told by Seneca as well as Euripides, but for our purposes, we shall focus on the latter. The play opens with Medea in panic and wailing over the betrayal of her husband Jason, who has decided to place her in exile so that he can marry Glauce, the daughter of King Creon. Due to this slight and betrayal, Medea embarks on a path to utter madness, and resolves to not only kill her own children, but to brutally murder Glauce with poisonous gifts. These intentions are clear in the following speech of hers:

\[\text{παίδας δὲ μεῖναι τοὺς ἐμοὺς αἰτήσομαι,} \\
\text{oὐχ ὡς λιποῦσ᾽ ἀν πολεμίας ἐπὶ χθονός} \\
\text{ἐχθροῖσι παίδας τοὺς ἐμοὺς καθυβρίσαι,} \\
\text{ἄλλῳ ὡς δόλιοι παίδα βασιλέως κτάνω.} \\
\text{πέμψω γὰρ αὐτοῦς δῶρ᾽ ἐχοντας ἐν χερῶι,} \\
\text{λεπτὸν τε πέπλον καὶ πλόκον χρυσῆλατον:} \\
\text{κἄνπερ λαβοῦσα κόσμον ἀμφιθῇ χροῖ,} \\
\text{κακῶς ὀλεῖται πᾶς ὃς ἂν θίγῃ κόρης:} \\
\text{τοιοῖσδε χρίσω φαρμάκοις δωρήματα. (Med. 780-789)}\]

The word of most interest in this section is \text{φαρμάκος}, which is defined in Liddell and Scott’s Greek Lexicon in the case of Euripides as a drug or poison. This is the same word we saw when Homer described the drugs of Circe. This example of Medea’s magic also supports the previously mentioned notion the female magicians in ancient literature engage in a certain amount of psychological taunting and trickery in their magical spells. Medea, instead of directly killing Glauce herself in person, has her children bear her gifts, and thus lulls her into a false sense of security. It is only when she dons the gifts that the effects of the poison take effect, and it not only melts her flesh away, but also the flesh of Creon who tries to save her. What is also interesting about this particular scene is the physical location of the
princess when she adorns herself with the poison garments. Euripides writes:

χρυσοῦν τε θείσα στέφανον ἀμφὶ βοστρύχοις
λαμπρῷ κατόπτρῳ σχηματίζεται κόμην,
ἄψυχον εἰκὼ προσγελῶσα σώματος. (Med. 1160-1162)

The princess, we know from this section of text, after placing the diadem on her head, admires herself in front of a mirror. We have seen the mirror come up various times now with reference to the magician, or situations in which the magician is influential or important in some way. Even though Medea is not present at the moment the princess puts on her poison robes, the mirror is present as a harbinger of the evil to come. The mirror is the symbolic presence of Medea watching the horror she has created, and also of Medea creating a new reality. The terrible scene itself is told to us through a messenger, and here is an excerpt of some of the worst effects:

πίνει δ᾽ ἐς οὖδας συμφορᾷ νικωμένη,
πλὴν τῷ τεκόντι κάρτα δυσμαθὴς ἰδεῖν:
οὕτ᾽ ὁμμάτων γὰρ δήλος ἦν κατάστασις
οὕτ᾽ εὔφυὲς πρόσωπον, αἷμα δ᾽ ἐξ ἀκρου
ἐσταξε κρατός συμπεφυμένον πυρί,
σάρκες δ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ὀστέων ὡστε πεύκιον δάκρυ
γνάθοις ἁδήλως φαρμάκων ἀπέρρεον,
δεινὸν θέαμα…(Med. 1195-1202)

The image is a terrifying one. Glauce falls to the floor and is no longer recognizable she has been so mutilated by the poison. Fire mingles with blood as it drips from her head, and the flesh peels from her bones as if it were resin from a torch. The violence of this death is what is of most interest. Medea has the elements of a witch we have established so far: the use of poison, a motivation of revenge, and also the tendency towards violent mutilation as punishment for wrongs committed against her.
Another aspect of Medea that plays into people’s fear of her is that she is a barbarian. Euripides’ play takes place in Corinth, but Medea is from Colchis. She is a character that is marginalized on four counts: she is a foreigner, a woman, of divine descent and she is a witch. In every aspect of her identity Medea signifies what is other, and that is what is most terrifying. Throughout the play, Medea is shown to embrace her barbarian nature: she is loud, violent, spontaneous, and cannot control her emotions. Medea is perhaps the most extreme example of the marginalized female magician for these reasons, but the female magician in literature in general seems to repel the possibility of being normalized. Indeed we see the trope of the female magician being a barbarian occurring in our other examples of text. In *Metamorphoses* Lucius must travel abroad to satisfy his curiosity for magic, and thus it is a given that he encounters people foreign to him once he reaches Thessaly. Pamphile and Meroe are both from Thessaly and are thus foreign and barbarian to our protagonist and point of reference.

For, indeed, there is no way to normalize the female witch or her characteristics! As we have seen in each of the cases of the female magician in literature, they are extremely marginalized. Each witch is operating with a type of esoteric knowledge, and the secrecy that surrounds the acquisition of this knowledge adds to the veil of mystery that surrounds them. Furthermore, their behaviors as magicians cannot be attributed to any other purpose aside from magic. As we saw in Apuleius’ *Apologia*, he was able to attribute the charges against him as a magician by explaining why his behaviors were also applicable to the philosopher. Women do not have that option for defense. In the ancient Greek and Roman world,
even if women took their education into their own hands, they could never call themselves philosophers, for that was a profession attributed solely to males. There is no way to normalize their behavior.

Additionally, the female magician is terrifying in these patriarchal societies because of her power. Female magicians are continually threatening because they stay under the radar. For a woman to be a magician, it means that a being who has previously been given no power by society suddenly has an immense amount of power. Women who are magicians go from people who are frequently over-looked, to people who can cause immense amounts of destruction and reverse the laws of nature.

It is clear that the role of the female magician in literature is a unique one. Though they appear in different contexts and in different genres of literature, there are a few main tropes that remain the same. Each is motivated by some sort of insult, injury, or scorn. Each has a certain control over the natural world, and use their powers not in a straightforward manner, but play with the psychology of their victims. Their tool of choice to carry out their magic is more often than not involved with a sort of potion or poison, which they use to exact their preferred method of punishment: transformation, whether it be into another being or object, or flat out mutilation. Finally, the female magician is used as a catalyst in literature because she is so dramatic and unexpected: the powerless woman acquires the power to devastate lives, and there is no way one can normalize her behavior.

II.v Conclusion

The study of the magician in the aforementioned literature has helped me glean
much about the ancients’ thoughts concerning them. The structure of my analysis has also been greatly helpful, as I have been able to deconstruct precisely what makes a failed magician (in the context of Apuleius) and what makes a successful magician. Furthermore I have been able to parse out precisely what female magicians in literature have in common, and what ultimately makes them so terrifying.

Lucius, a young man and student of philosophy and the protagonist of The Golden Ass, has a strong *curiositas* for the magical arts at the beginning of the novel. He pursues his impulse by taking a trip to Thessaly in order to discover more about the magical arts, but does not complete his quest with either the right tactics or with the appropriate goals. For example, Lucius asks Photis for her help in completing a transformation into an owl. In his analytical approach, he assumes that if he carries out the same actions as Pamphile, then an identical transformation will occur. In this assumption he leaves out the possibility that Pamphile has special knowledge or qualities that will influence the nature of her transformation.

Pamphile has completed her transformation into an owl because that transformation is an extention and accentuation of who she is (we have discussed previously the connotations of the owl), a creature that exists at night, one that is inherently associated with bad omens (just as Pamphile does not use her magic for “good” ends). Lucius, by comparison, is transformed into a being that correctly suits his lifestyle and his own desires. Having been fully immersed in the carnal pleasures of life, Apuleius has him change into a beast of burden who is ultimately used for sex and the labors of his body. It is only through this transformation that Lucius can have this key realization about his nature, and refocus his passions and
energies into something more pure.

Lucius, when on the shores of Cenchreae, finally acknowledges the goddess, her light in the moon, and living in her service to be the most important way to live his life. What concerns were once taken up by sex and lack of restraint in his pursuit of knowledge and power now are taken up by a desire to give up the carnal pleasures of his existence. Lucius could only have come to this realization through living for a time in the body of an ass, and that is what makes his final transformation back to a human all the more triumphant and meaningful.

Lucius’ initial desire for transformation came from the model of Pamphile and the stories he had heard about Meroe, and thus it is important to consider them as catalysts in the story. Through an analysis of *The Golden Ass* as well as other pieces of ancient literature that include the female magician, I have been able to isolate a few characteristics that are common throughout. The first is the seemingly ultimate power of the female magician over nature, and her ability to even darken the sky. The second characteristic I see is the tendency toward psychological terror and mutilation. The third characteristic seems to be a common motivation for their desire to exact punishment: revenge. Each of the female magicians we have explores exhibit the attitude of a woman scorned, and thus their revenge is swift, but also incredibly cruel. The final characteristic I see as common through many of our examples is the notion of the female magician as foreign, or barbaric in some way, whether that means she is from a foreign location, or divine in nature. All of these characteristics make it difficult for the female magician to be normalized, and thus she is seemingly untouchable and terrifying, and in possession of knowledge.
the rest of us are not privy to. The following chapter will discuss the knowledge of
the magician and how that knowledge gives rise to practices and objects that are
specific and necessary for the work of a magician, and what still remains with us
from their material culture today.

III: Evidence for Magical Ritual and the Magician in Ancient Material Culture

III.i Introduction

My first and second chapters have discussed the question of the magician with
regard to two different spheres. The first focused on a real-world example of the
confusion and misinterpretations surrounding the identity of the magician, and
Apuleius’ own encounter with drawing the distinction between the philosopher and
the magician for the purpose of his defense. In the second chapter I explored the
character of Lucius in Apuleius’ The Golden Ass, and his adventure into an
unintentional transformation due to his ignorance as a practitioner. Additionally I
discussed the role and characteristics of the female magician in various examples of
Ancient Greek and Latin literature. This chapter will have quite a different focus.

In this chapter I aim to put forward evidence for the rituals and physical
objects used in rituals associated with magic, as I have found them in literature or
physical artifacts. For example there is evidence for the preparations and ritual
actions associated with magical pursuits in The Golden Ass, but a startling absence of
ritual language associated with magic. Evidence for the actions and language
associated with magical practice is present, however, in Theocritus’ Idyll 2, as well
as evidence for the required supplies. And yet, evidence in literature can only be so
concrete, and so for any physical manifestation of these rituals, we must look
elsewhere, to what physical evidence remains from these ancient practices. This chapter will include a brief exploration of some of the physical evidence I have found for the ancient practice and language of magic, mainly found in the Greek Magical Papyrii and curse tablets. Let us begin where we left off, in the midst of The Golden Ass.

III.ii Literary Evidence for Magical Ritual

During the beginning part of his journey, Lucius becomes well acquainted with aspects of the magical world he has never confronted before. Through his affair with the maid Photis, Lucius comes to learn that Milo’s wife, Pamphile, is a prominent witch in the town. Lucius learns about the rituals performed by this witch not only from the accounts from Photis, but he is also given the opportunity to watch them first hand.

The first account of magical ritual we have in the novel is from the maid Photis. At this point in the story, Lucius has been the subject of the festival of laughter, and Photis, riddled with guilt, confesses to Lucius that she was the reason that they chose him to be the focus of entertainment for the festivities. She tells him that Lucius’ unfortunate circumstance was the result of an errand she did for her mistress, an errand that would aid in the practice of a magical ritual, but one that eventually went wrong. She says to him:

Verum cum tristis inde discедерem ne prorsus vacuis manibus redirem, conspicor quendam forficulis attondentem caprinos utres; quos cum probe constrictos inflatosque et iam pendentis cernerem, capillos eorum humi iacentes flavos ac per hoc illi Boeotio iuveni consimiles plusculos aufero eosque domimae meae dissimulata veritate trado. (Ap. Met. 3.17)
Photis had been sent to the barber to gather locks of hair from her mistress’ most recent object of affection, but they were taken from her from a man suspecting her of magic. Not wanting to anger her mistress, Photis cut the locks from the hides of some goats that were drying in the sun. Since the goats had the same color hair as the man she was meant to take the hair from, she was able to pass it off to her mistress without her suspecting anything. As we will find out the goat’s hair cannot be a direct substitute, as the spell Pamphile casts does not attract her lover, but instead the skins of the goats.

The gathering of ingredients is a good place to begin in the process of discussing magical ritual. Though the ingredients themselves will not be discussed in depth in this chapter, the actual act of acquiring, collecting and consolidating all the necessary ingredients is a ritual in itself. And with the collection of such objects comes the inherent knowledge of the precise “recipes” for any particular ritual. The ritual of collecting these objects is only possible if the practitioner has access to this esoteric knowledge, and the agency and determination to go through whatever it takes to acquire them. Photis expands on her mistress’ ritual after she gives the goats’ hair to her. She explains to Lucius what she beheld Pamphile do the night before the Festival of Laughter:

Sic noctis initio, priusquam cena te reciperes, Pamphile mea iam vecors animi tectum scandulare conscendit, quod altrinsecus aedium patore perflabili nudatum, ad omnes orientales ceterosque <plerosque> aspectus pervium, maxime his artibus suis commodatum secreto colit. (Ap. Met. 3.17)

In this passage from Photis’ account the reader receives valuable information about the proper conditions and location for Pamphile’s magical ritual. First of all we see
that Photis begins her story with *sic noctis initio*, which makes us understand that the ritual began when it was already night. The time of day in this case is very important to note, as the nighttime and darkness are associated with Pamphile specifically (the transformation into an owl, a nocturnal bird). Earlier in the story, as I have already discussed, the characters Aristomenes and Socrates have encounters with witches. I need not cite the passages again, but the magic that was done to them, the magic that ultimately resulted in Socrates’ death, happened at night in the confusion between reality and the dream state. Similarly, we have discovered a theme of not necessarily nighttime, but indeed darkness, amongst the previously mentioned witches in literature. Meroe, Pamphile, and even Circe have the power to cloud over the sky and make it as dark as night. The condition of nighttime or darkness seems to be an important one for the practice of magic, as it is associated with secrecy. The night is a time when most people are asleep, and thus the conditions for privacy are more likely to present themselves. Additionally, the importance of magic in darkness also seems to do with sight. Pamphile practices her magic in darkness, Circe clouds over the forest in order to obscure her prey’s vision, and Meroe exacts her revenge at night within the context of a dream.

The next clue there is as to the appropriate conditions for the ritual is not in reference to the surroundings, but instead in reference to Pamphile herself. Photis describes that at night Pamphile ascended the roof *vecors animi* (*Ap. Met.* 3.17), or frenzied of spirit. What this description precisely means is unclear, but what is extremely clear is that Pamphile, in preparation for this ritual, has taken herself out of what is a normal and resting state of being. Various translations take liberties
with this description, and make it out to be something such as “in a fit of ecstatic madness,”23 and some avoid it altogether, reducing it to “according to her accustomed practise,”24 but we must take this description for what it is. The use of the word *animus* must be noted here. In the OLD, *animus* seems to have endless definitions, listing anything from mind to heart, intellect to spirit. But it is the ambiguity of this word that is the main point of interest. In this description it does not matter what the precise definition of *animus* is. It can be any and all of them, and she is *vecors* with respect to it. She is in an altered state of some kind, and that is precisely all that we need to know for now.

What Photis next describes is the actual qualities of the place of the magical ritual. We know already that Pamphile is on a roof, but we are to find out valuable information on the precise location on the roof. Photis mentions that Pamphile has chosen an area that is *altrinsecus aedium*, or on the other side of the house. Though we do not know precisely who is in the house at this moment, it is safe to conclude that Photis’ emphasis on it being the other side of the house means that Pamphile has chosen a location that is away from the inhabitants, and presumably out of hearing range. Furthermore the described location is *patore perflabili nudatum*, or in other words a location that has been laid bare in an open space susceptible to winds. It is clear by this description that Pamphile needs a clear space. In fact, I quite like the words of P. G. Walsh, who wrote the translation I have been working with most closely. He translates the text that describes the location of Pamphile’s ritual as follows:

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23 Walsh 1994, 49
24 Adlington, 1566
On the far side of the house there is an area which is uncovered and exposed to the elements. It commands every view on the eastern side, as well as those in other directions.\textsuperscript{25}

The idea of being exposed to the elements is an important one here. Up on the bare roof in a windswept clearing Pamphile is free from all influence but the influence of nature. She completes her magical rituals in an empty clearing, and yet she is able to remain in secret by the cover of darkness. She has the elements at her disposal, and the image of this truly adds to the wildness of Pamphile’s image. Walsh’s translation is so attractive to me because he not only captures Pamphile as a witch with a wild spirit, but also one that is deeply connected to the presence of nature and the elements, as is true for all of the witch’s we have encountered thus far.

According to the text Pamphile’s location is also \textit{ad omnes orientales ceterosque <plerosque> aspectus pervium}. She can see all of the eastern views, and all of the many others as well that are able to be seen. This specific aspect of her location gives us a sense of her immense power in this moment, in addition to the practicality of her location. Being able to see in all directions, and yet be seen by no one, is an immensely powerful tool to have. The image of her is of a wild sorceress, with immeasurable influence over her domain and limitless possibilities.

Additionally, from a practical standpoint, she will be able to view any activity, as well as view the sky and presumably surrounding hills from every direction. This is an important quality to mention about her location because it emphasizes that fact that even though she can see in all directions around her, very few people can see

\textsuperscript{25} Walsh 1994, 49
her. This is a greater metaphor for the far-reaching scope of her influence created by rituals carried out in an exceedingly private sphere.

Finally, all of these qualities of Pamphile’s location are proven to be advantageous through Photis’ statement: *maxime his artibus suis commodatum secreto colit*. She remarks that the roof is *maxime...commodatum* or chiefly adapted for her to perform her magical arts. But what is of special interest in this last word of Photis’ is the use of the verb *colo*. Once again citing the OLD, *colo* has a rather extensive list of meanings, but all carry the same connotation. It can carry the sense of living or occupying a place, or it can mean something more akin to adorn, tend, care for, or even worship. The choice of this word reflects Pamphile’s view about her own magical ritual. It is not only something she performs, but also something she occupies and lives in, worships and cherishes.

At this moment in Photis’ story, she recounts a catalogue of sorts of all of the plants and other ingredients (once again they will be explored more in depth later) that Pamphile has collected in order to carry out this magical ritual to ensnare her lover. After listing all of the ingredients pertaining to what Photis refers to as her *feralem officiam* (Ap. *Met.* 3.17), the connotations of which we will also explore in a later section, she recounts precisely what Pamphile does in the ritual itself. She describes:


What first comes to my attention about this passage is the placement of the word *decantatis* in the phrase *tunc decantatis spirantibus fibris*, which is meant to describe
to us that Pamphile is chanting while carrying out these rituals over the breathing entrails. And yet, though language (as we shall see) plays a central part in magical ritual, Apuleius leaves any trace of her chanting or spell completely out. Such a silence will be echoed in Pamphile’s second magical ritual, and it seems that Apuleius has done this as a deliberate choice. First of all, the reader is placed more in Lucius’ point of view if we get no sample of the magical language, as neither Lucius nor the reader would be likely to understand the magical words of Pamphile, even if Apuleius had given it to us. Secondly, Apuleius may have left out magical language either because he knows none, or conversely is so familiar with it that he does not dare reveal the secret nature of that esoteric knowledge. For whatever reason Apuleius neglected language, the result is that the emphasis is on the body and the actions of the body, which is only too appropriate in a play about transformation.

The first action that Photis describes is when Pamphile first sprinkles over the entrails what she describes as a latex, which here seems to mean some sort of liquid or fluid or even sap. The use of the word spirantes here is also indicative of the freshness of her ingredients, and also the close association this ritual (in terms of the performed action) has in common with that of religious sacrifice. The priest or priestess would also prepare the entrails before the official sacrifice, and certainly this preparation is an essential part of the ritual. Photis goes on to say that she continues to sprinkle other liquids upon the entrails, a sprinkle of water from a fountain (ros fontanus), cow’s milk (lactus vaccinus), honey from the mountain (mel montanus), and also mead (mulsa). I pay close attention to the nature of the objects
in this section once again for the express purpose of showing that the ritual Pamphile is performing is quite similar to that of a religious sacrifice. The pure spring water, cow’s milk, honey and mead are all found in religious rituals in some way or another, whether they are mixed to make sweet honey-cakes for sacrifice, or poured libations to the chthonic deities.

And yet, it is also important to recognize that, while there are similarities between Pamphile’s magical ritual and what is considered traditional for religious ritual, they are not the same at all. First of all, the absence of wine in Pamphile’s ritual is notable, which is present in most religious rituals of the ancient world, but not all, and certainly no ancient religious rituals included the mixing of wine and milk. Secondly, although both of these rituals use many of the same ingredients, they are used in completely different ways. Pamphile, instead of kneading honey cakes or using the entrails for the sake of sacrifice, is putting all the ingredients together over a small fire, when in religious ritual the animal sacrifices, grain sacrifices and liquid libations would not be mingled in such a way. The emphasis on the difference between the two practices is on the ritual itself and the way in which ingredients are used differently for different purposes.

The final part of Pamphile’s ritual includes the treatment of the hair, which, if all went according to her plan, would be from the head of her paramour. What is striking about this section of text is the specificity with which Photis describes what Pamphile is doing with the hair: they have been knotted in mutual bonds and she places them with fragrant herbs upon burning coals. Once again Pamphile’s actions are reminiscent of the religious: when one makes a sacrifice to the ouranic deities,
one burns the entrails so that they may reach the gods above. Once again, though the action itself is reminiscent of a religious ritual, it is important to remember that the materials being burned, entrails versus hair, are very different. Again, though hair is present in some ancient religious rituals, it would not be mixed with other ingredients. Additionally, burning or cooking is not present for the same reason in Pamphile’s ritual as it is in religious ritual. It seems that because all of her ingredients are placed over a fire, the point may be to have all of the ingredients become one material being burned together, over which she can chant the appropriate language. This is relevant to a broader theme I have discovered thus far about ancient magic: all of the factors present in a ritual (language, location, materials) must be together in order for the magic to be effective and this is echoed in Pamphile’s practice of combining and mixing her ingredients.

It is also important to mention the overtly destructive nature of her ritual. She will burn the hair, utterly destroy it, but only when it has already gone through one stage of mutilation (the hairs are *nodatos*). Additionally, the very way in which one obtains the hair is a violent action and a form of mutilation, cutting it from its roots, altering the appearance of the body from which it came. As we discovered in the previous chapter, violent acts and mutilation are more often than not associated with the female magician in ancient literature. Though her goal here is to not mutilate the person from which the hair has come, the violence and tendency towards mutilation is still very present in her ritual.

After Photis finishes her account of witnessing the most recent magical ritual of her mistress, Lucius tells her that the only way she can makes amends for the
humiliation she put him through will be to help Lucius witness a magical ritual himself. He explains to her that he must see her perform magic because: *sum namque coram magicae noscendae ardentissimus cupitor* (Ap. *Met*. 3.19), or in other words, he is a most desirous desirer of knowing the experience of magic. Once again, the notion of Lucius being driven purely by his *curiositas* and quest for *scientia* comes into play. Photis gives in to his request, and promises to arrange for Lucius to be a witness to her mistress’ next magical ritual, but it will be difficult to arrange as we have learned that it is necessary for Pamphile to perform her rituals in secret, whether that means she is under the cover of darkness, or locked within the confines of her own private room.

One night soon after that Photis brings Lucius to the door of her mistress’ room. He peers through a hole in the door and witnesses what Apuleius writes as the following:


It is difficult to ignore the very specific sequence of events in this second ritual of Pamphile’s. The first action she performs in her ritual is removing all of her clothes. Nakedness is an image that has been consistent so far with her ritual: she needed to perform in a space (*pator*) that was *nudus*, and now she herself is a blank slate on
which to perform a transformation. She has removed all but the natural self, unadorned and simple, nothing weighing upon or influencing the body to be anything but a biological apparatus at rest.

Pamphile then begins to take pyxides or little boxes from a casket, and from one of them begins to rub oil on herself. It seems clear that she is not only using the appropriate φάρμακος, but that she is using the action of anointing herself as a preparatory ritual. As no transformation takes place immediately after she rubs the oil on herself, it is difficult to isolate the precise importance of the oil, but as we shall see it is not each ingredient that makes a spell, but the correct administering and treatment of all ingredients within the guidelines of strict ritual.

After she finishes rubbing the oil on herself herself, Apuleius writes that Pamphile cum lucerna secreto conlocuta, but makes no further mention of any of her magical language. We know she is having a private conversation with the lamp, and it is unclear what exactly she is saying to it. In conjunction with this ritual comes another question: what is the significance of the lamp? There is certainly no right answer to this question. From what I know about ancient oil lamps, having removed them from the ground at Cenchræa myself is that they are small and adorned. They provide a very small and personal source for light, and it is the light in my opinion that is of interest here. The witch, as we have discovered, has associations with the darkness, but clearly the presence of a light is needed to carry out the ritual. Furthermore, in this case we see a common thread between both of Pamphile’s rituals: the use of fire. In the first ritual, Pamphile burns the ingredients together and says her incantations over the fire. In the second ritual, Pamphile speaks her
private magical language to the lamp. Though the definite purpose of the fire is not known, it can be assumed from what we know so far that fire is the activating agent in her ritual. The hair of the object of her affection is burned last of all in ritual number one, and in ritual number two it is the speech over the lamp that triggers her transformation.

Additionally, when Pamphile is speaking to lamp, is the lamp saying anything back, or does she imagine it does? The verb *conloquor* certainly implies that there is a give and take. What is clear from the absence of language with respect to describing magical ritual is that the reader is deprived completely of hearing any words from the magician herself. Apuleius uses this tool to further distance Lucius and the reader from the witch, as we have no expression of hers from which to draw any sort of conclusion about magical speech in action. It is clear that, since Apuleius keeps the magical language from us, that it is something that is meant to be secret.

Apuleius make a point to mention that Pamphile, directly after her conversation with the lamp, starts to flap her arms up and down and begins her transformation into an owl. Almost immediately after her transformation, Pamphile in her new form flies out of her bedroom window. Perhaps Pamphile’s choice of animal should have been a warning sign to Lucius of bad things to come. Indeed, Lucius himself acknowledges that owls are bad omens, as they are occasionally caught and nailed to the front door of a home in order to ward off evil (Ap. *Met.* 3.23). But he is ever infatuated with what he has just witnessed and is continually driven by his insatiable *curiositas*, so he expresses his happiness to Photis and requests that she retrieve a small chest of oil for him in order that he might also be
transformed into an owl. Against her better judgement Photis complies, and Lucius begins his own ritual that is described by Apuleius as follows:


Once Photis brings the small box of oil to Lucius, he fawns over it as if it is his most prized possession, as in that moment it may be. We also get the small tidbit that Lucius is praying (prosperis...volatibus) that he will gain great joy from flying after this, but we do not get his precise language in this instance. The parallel structures of the witch's ritual, and Lucius' ritual are evident here, as Lucius prayers, unheard to us, serve as his own connection to this ritual, and also his new ownership of it. We shall see, however, that it is the differences between Pamphile's ritual and Lucius' imitation of it that will cause him problems.

After he prays, he begins the ritual as he saw the witch begin it, and continues it in the manner that mimics the behavior of the witch to the best of his ability. It is Lucius' impatience that eventually causes him trouble, as he misses essential parts of the ritual. Firstly, Lucius removes all of his clothing propere, and as we saw before, haste was not an element in the witch’s ritual. He then dips his hands in the box avide, which carries connotations of overzealousness and greed, which is a direct comparison to the way in which the witch applied the oil to her body: carefully, paying attention to spreading it from her feet to the crown of her head. We then find out that Lucius skips right to flapping his arms up and down like
wings, and misses the conversation with the lamp altogether. It is easy to see where Lucius went wrong with replicating the ritual, and yet the text seems to imply that Photis is the one to blame for his transformation going horribly wrong. She remarks after Lucius has been transformed into an ass:


And yet it seems implausible to me that the wrong oil was the sole cause for Lucius's transformation. He attacks the ritual with haste and greed for an end that will satisfy his long-burning questions, but leaves out presumably one of the most important parts: the conversation with the lamp. It is this instance with Lucius that shows us how important the presence of language is in the magical ritual. Even though we as readers are not permitted to be privy to the magical language or chanting of the witch in either of her rituals, we still understand that the description of it is a place-holder for something central and important. It is not the words themselves that hold the power, but the performance of them within the ritual along with other key elements.

Indeed, just as important emphasis is placed on the ritual and objects in The Golden Ass, Theocritus places extreme emphasis on the relationship between language and ritual in his second Idyll. The title of the his second Idyll in Greek is Φαρμακεύτριαι, which as far as I can find means something akin to “the poisoners” or conversely “the curers,” whichever connotation is most appropriate. The work is set from the point of view of one Simaetha, a woman who has not seen her lover for quite some time and fears he may have found another love. It is constructed as a
monologue of self-reflection, but also as a list of step-by-step instructions for her servant Thestyris, who is the one actually carrying out the ritual. At the very beginning of the *Idyll* Simaetha makes the following statement of purpose:

> βασεῦμαι ποτὶ τὰν Τιμαγήτοιο παλαίστραν
> αὖριον, ὡς νῦν ἰδὼ, καὶ μέμψομαι ὑμᾶς με ποιεῖ.
> νῦν δὲ νῦν ἐκ θυέων καταθύσομαι. ἀλλὰ Σελάνα,
> φαίνε καλόν: τὸν γὰρ ποταείσομαι ἁσυχα, δαίμον,
> τὰ χθονία θ᾽ Ἐκάτα, τὰν καὶ σκύλακες τρομέοντι
> ἐρχομέναν νεκύων ἀνὰ τ᾽ ἡρία καὶ μέλαν αἷμα.
> χαίρ᾽ Ἐκάτα δασπλῆτι, καὶ ἐς τέλος ἀμώιν ὀπάδει.
> φάρμακα ταῦτ᾽ ἔρδοισα χερείονα μήτε τι Κίρκης
> μήτε τι Μηδείας μήτε ξανθᾶς Περιμήδας. (Theoc. *Id.* 2.8-16)

This passage gives us insight into the psychology of the magician that was very much absent in *The Golden Ass*. Simaetha tells us everything we would like to know about her thought process and her intentions, to which deities she is speaking, and her method of magic. She remarks initially that tomorrow she will go to find her lover Delphis at the wrestling school and reproach him (μέμψομαι) for the wrongs he has done her, but for now she will use magic to entice him. The verb choice of καταθύω is a specific one. This word, as it is a compound, has a few very specific meanings. One, according to the Middle Lidell, is to sacrifice or to venerate something, but another, which is specific to Theocritus, is to compel someone by magic sacrifices. That meaning makes much more sense here, as Simaetha is trying to compel her lover to come back to her.

We then get a catalogue of the deities that she will invoke over the course of the ritual: the Moon and Hecate are mentioned initially, and so is Aphrodite, though she is blamed instead of exalted, for it was she who led Delphis’ heart astray. The dichotomy of these two deities is striking. Simaetha is directing her spell upward...
towards the heavens as well as downwards to τὰ χθόνια, which is an epithet for the goddess Hecate, and by that we can understand her intent to have her spell appeal to the ouranic gods in general as well as to the chthonic. The final part of this speech is particularly applicable to the subject of the female magician in literature, as in lines 15-16 she tells the gods to take care that (the verb is in the imperative) her φάρμακα are as potent as those of Circe or Medea. The word φάρμακα has already been discussed at length, and that this word is common to the stories of both of these witches cannot be a coincidence. Theocritus was aware of the characteristics of Circe and Medea, and their fame in literature for their poisons and incredible power. Through Simaetha, Theocritus creates his own terrible witch to add to the ranks.

Her statement of purpose in itself is an important part of the ritual. The lines that begin the Idyll, which I have not quoted for they are not truly relevant to the discussion of ritual, show Simaetha in a scattered state, searching for ingredients and emotionally distraught. It is only when she begins to say what she will do that her speech becomes more regular, and the structure of the piece actually begins to take shape. It is a moment for her to collect herself, but more importantly to commit to the choice of witchcraft. She addresses the deities not only for their help, but also to make her commitment to this choice known to even the immortal realms. Descending into that committed mindset is necessary for carrying out this ritual, or for obtaining the change with regard to the animus we saw with Pamphile, she focuses on the work at hand and the potential potency of her drugs.
At this point in the text we encounter a line that does not belong to the main body of text, and is repeated nine more times throughout the rest of the *Idyll*. The line comes in a form of a command, and is indented in the Greek text, although in the original manuscript there would have been no indentation or line breaks at all. It is as follows:

Textarea

The odd word at the beginning of this address has a specific meaning to Theocritus, which is that it means “wryneck.” The Middle Lidell has an addendum to this definition: “…so called from its cry. The ancient witches used to bind it to a wheel, believing that, as it turned, it drew men’s hearts along with it.” Simaetha is asking the wryneck to draw her lover back to her house. The presence of this line tells us a great deal about the ritual she and her servant are performing, though it is certainly not a precise example of magical language, but a literary interpretation of magical language. Simaetha has her servant carry out parts of the ritual because she is occupied with the wryneck. One can imagine her giving instructions to her servant, turning the wheel one more time with the accompanying words, and giving more orders. She is multi-tasking, and quite effectively.

Simaetha gives her servant orders to add different objects and ingredients to the fire, the specifics of which I will address later, and also to melt libations and melt wax. Each object has a specific purpose, and seems to accomplish a different goal. After the repetitive adding of objects to the fire, or other related actions, Simaetha changes her focus. She harkens back to the beginnings of her love for Delphis:
νῦν δὴ μόνα ἐοῖσα πόθεν τὸν ἔρωτα δακρύσω;
ἐκ τίνος ἄφεσμαι; τίς μοι κακὸν ἀγαγέ τούτο; (Theoc. Id. 2.64-65)

The lamentation she speaks of here seems to be a part of the ritual, almost as if her emotions will add a personal element to the prescribed formula of her ritual. The emotional aspect of her speech is present because the nature of magic is self-driven, which is a contrast to the motivation for religious worship and the lack of emotion present in religious ritual. At this point she no longer seems to be spinning the wryneck, she has picked up a new phrase to repeat, or at least a new central thought to ponder and wish for:

φράζεό μευ τὸν ἔρωθ᾽ ὅθεν ἴκετο, πότνα Σελάνα. (Theoc. Id. 2.69)

She asks the moon to point out from whence came her love. Truly she already knows the story she is about to tell, the story when she first ensnared Delphis and they shared a period of intense love for each other, and she tells the moon to be advised from whence came her love. That this recollection is a part of the ritual is a strange enigma, and one can only speculate as to what purpose it serves. It is important to remember in considering this recollection that we are dealing with a literary text that incorporates far more exposition and context than, for instance, a curse tablet would. The way I have come to understand the presence of the aforementioned line in the midst of the recollection of this story is that it is powerful insofar as it is intensely emotional.

The knowledge of how to carry out such a ritual as this must be esoteric, which means that it is shared amongst a very small and exclusive group of people, and it is a prescribed recipe and predetermined. The latter half of the Idyll shows the very poignant and important way Simaetha personalizes the ritual for herself.
She attaches her own personal memory to the ritual, reminding the moon to pay attention to her activities and spells, as if to gain justification for the spells she has just cast. She tells the moon the whole story, emphasizing the sweet and seductive words that Delphis at one time spoke to her (Theoc. Id. 2.114-138), in order to make clear how great of a turn around he made, and how great of a betrayal he has actually committed, and that he is deserving of whatever spells she casts on him. She is searching desperately for any way to get him back. Once again, in this case it is important to note that we are dealing with a literary text that is an interpretation of a magical one. The presence of narrative makes this magic an expression of her emotion and lets us see the that Simaetha is a human with needs and feelings, and not a cold, cruel witch as we have previously seen.

The motive she has is also relevant to the previous discussion of the female magician, and her characteristics. Indeed, much of the descriptive language she uses with regard to herself is alike to that of Medea (we have already identified the allusion in the word φάρμακα). It is clear from the onset that Simaetha is upset about the absence of her lover, and yet within the text the key to understanding her true feelings, and the reason for her frenzied spirit:

εἴτε γυνὰ τήνῳ παρακέκλιται εἴτε καί άνήρ,
tόσσον ἔχοι λάθας, ὀς σὸν ποκα Θησέα φαντί
ἐν Δίᾳ λασθήμεν ἐυπλοκάμω Ἀριάδνας. (Theoc. Id. 2.43-46)

In this passage it is clear that the main reason for her anger toward Delphis, and her need for revenge against him, stems from a place of jealousy. She makes libations three times and cries out three times that he should forget whoever is his present
lover. The repetition of the action associated with this plea is significant, as this is the only time (apart from the spinning of the wryneck) that an action is repeated in this piece. It seems then that repetition may be an important part of magical ritual and we will see more evidence of this in the repetitive language of the curse tablets. This particular motivation of jealousy is not unfamiliar to us at this point: the common theme among the witches that have been discussed so far is that they have been scorned in some way by men, and their resulting emotions are typically anger and jealousy. Medea and Circe are both excellent examples.

In line 40, Simaetha describes herself as τάλαινα, or wretched, a term that is also a favorite of Medea. In the line before she uses the verb καταίθω, which means to burned down to ashes, resulting in complete destruction. She uses this word not only to describe how she is feeling in his absence, but also how she burns with simultaneous desire and passionate anger for him. The image of burning is also one that is present in the Medea, and indeed in Ovid’s account of Circe and Picus. The idea of burning with desire and anger extends to the women elsewhere in ancient literature. Dido, though she is not a sorceress, is described at the end of Book IV to be burning in her chest with madness, and indeed she ends that fire by committing suicide on a pyre that will soon burn her body to ashes. Dido is important to mention because although she cannot be placed in the same category as Medea and Circe insofar as they are witches, she can be placed in the category of slighted and maddened women that go to extreme ends in order to cope with their emotions. Indeed, if Dido were a witch her story would have certainly ended differently: she commits suicide because she has absolutely no power to bring him back. Indeed,
imagery of burning, whether it is emotional or physically present in ritual, is common among all of the witches we have discussed and it seems to be an important aspect of both their motivation for magic, as well as their power to carry it out.

Simaetha is also similar to these other female magicians in that her spell includes a tendency towards violence and mutilation. Simaetha tells Thestyris near the beginning of the piece, as she is throwing the barley on the fire, to say the words: τὰ Δέλφιδος ὀστία πάσσω (Theoc. Id. 2.21), or “I sprinkle the bones of Delphis.” Later on this image is repeated as Simaetha tells Thestyris to knead the bones of Delphis (line 62). Perhaps an even more violent image that strikes another similarity to Medea is in line 26 when Simaetha commands: οὕτω τοι καὶ Δέλφις ἐνὶ φλογὶ σάρκ᾽ ἀμαθύνοι. The use of the optative in ἀμαθύνοι is a clear indication that we have a clause of wishing and her wish seems to be to have the flesh of her lover melt away in the flames. Driven by jealousy just as was Medea, Simaetha seeks revenge for the loss of her lover. She imagines his bones and his skin melting away from the other object of his affection, and back into her arms.

As we have seen in these various examples, ritual is extremely important to magical practice. In The Golden Ass, a work that works primarily with the concept of transformation, the focus is on the physical body and thus the actions associated with magical ritual. Though the actions of the ritual are described in great detail, the language associated with any magical practice is absent, and the reader is not granted access to the psychology of the magician. In Theocritus’ Φαρμακεύτριαι, the focus is much more on the language associated with ritual, and also the psychology of the practitioner. It is
clear that Simaetha, the “protagonist” of this story, is driven by hurt and jealousy for her lover. She casts this spell to bring him back to her, and yet the erotic spell-poem is punctuated by moments that reach back to the witches of epic, such as Circe and Medea, and their violent associations. What is intriguing about Simaetha and her spell is the presence of her very specific magical spinning object, and equally important to the ritual for any practitioner is the nature of their magical objects, as they are the tools to carry out the ritual.

**III.iii Literary Evidence for Magical Objects**

In addition to describing in great detail the ritual actions of Pamphile, Apuleius also pays particular attention to the specific objects she needs to carry out each of her rituals. Let us return to Pamphile’s first ritual upon the rooftop. Photis tells Lucius that in addition to the hair that she acquired for her that day, Pamphile has prepared in the following way:

> Priusque apparaatu solito instruit feralem officinam, omne genus aromatis et ignorabliter lamminis litteratis et infelicium navium durantibus damnis <repletam>, defletorum, sepultorum etiam, cadaverum expositis multis admodum membris; hic nares et digitii, illic carnosi clavii pendentium, alibi truncatorum servatus cruor et extorta dentibus ferarum trunca calvaria. (Ap. Met. 3.17)

First of all, Photis describes that Pamphile has collected everything that is appropriate to her *feralem officinam*, or literally, her workshop of the dead, as she eventually does away with the objects of her affection. This is also a comment on the nature of her ingredients, which are sometimes body parts. The objects that are present are plants with every type of fragrance, scraps with unknown lettering on them, the remains of unhappy birds, corpse’ limbs, ears and noses, nails with flesh
hanging off, and the skulls of maimed and killed men, in addition to all of the liquids that have already been mentioned.

I will not engage in a discussion of the plants as I have little knowledge of ancient botany, but what I can glean is that the presence of natural plants and of fragrance in particular is an important one. The locks of her beloved are an expected entry on this list, for we also see the possessions of Delphis playing a role in the spell of Simaetha. The scraps with unknown lettering, at my first inclination, seem to be like curse tablets. It is unclear from the text what precisely they are, but it also could be that these scraps provide Pamphile with a visual aid for her ritual, or even a written spell in an unintelligible language. The final objects present are the body parts of various deceased men, but it is important to note that none of the body parts she has from them are necessary for survival. This is significant because, although she has robbed men of their body parts, they are alive to suffer the ridicule of what it means to not have them. Conversely, she could be taking these body parts from men she has previously done away with. Another possibility is that she took these body parts from those who had already died.

As we saw earlier in Book II of *The Golden Ass*, Thelyphron tells the story of how he was mutilated by a witch and deprived of his ears and nose. It must be that Pamphile is somehow connected to that story, and that other stories of mutilation are present throughout the town of Hypata. As with Simaetha, the goal of Pamphile is to ensnare a lover that is not nearby, and as they each perform magical rituals similar in intent, it is natural that their ingredients should also be similar.
Like Pamphile, Simaetha use plants in her ritual. She mentions the use of barley, bay leaves, bran, coltsfoot, and ambiguous magic herbs, all of which we can assume are very fragrant when burned. She also tells her servant to melt some wax and pour libations, the latter of which is found also in Pamphile's ritual. Finally, in line 53, Simaetha tells us that she is shredding a piece of Delphis’ cloak, and throwing it into the flames. In addition to her recounting the memory in the second half of the poem, adding a possession of Delphis to the mix further personalizes the spell to her individual wishes. It is the idea that, like in Pamphile’s ritual, a possession or lock of hair of the receiver of the spell is necessary in order to make the spell effective and to enact influence over the right person.

What is most specific about the objects listed in Theocritus’ poem is that they are added individually and each serves a very specific purpose. Sometimes certain objects are even associated with individual deities, or Simaetha will make an allusion to a famous event that has unfolded in a way that she would emulate in her own circumstance. For instance, she says:

νῦν θυσῶ τὰ πίτυρα. τῷ δ’ Ἀρτεμὶ καὶ τὸν ἐν Ἰδα
κινῆσαις ἀδάμαντα καὶ εἴ τι περ ἀσφαλὲς ἄλλο. (Theoc. Id. 2.33-34)

In the name of the goddess Artemis, she adds the ingredient bran. It is easy to see how bran might be associated with Artemis, as it is a common food for animals of all kinds and an epithet for Artemis is Potnia Thera. Giving bran in the name of Artemis would only give her more favor in the eyes of the goddess, and thus help her cause. Similarly, in lines 43-47, she says that she hopes Delphis will abandon his new love like Theseus abandoned Ariadne. Comparing her situation to this famous precedent
not only adds to the dramatic and highly emotionally personal aspect of her performance, but gives her actions justification in this historical standard.

Now would be an appropriate time to revisit the potentially magical objects mentioned in Apuleius' *Apologia*. First of all, as I have previously discussed, one of the pieces of evidence against Apuleius is that he possesses a mirror. I have already mentioned the connotations of the mirror with respect to both the magician and the philosopher, so I will not go into it again, but suffice it to say that the mirror was an object of controversy due to its unique qualities. The mirror provides an exact reflection, a complete and untainted copy of reality. Aside from viewing one's reflection in the water, a mirror was one of the only ways of actually seeing oneself in the ancient world. One can imagine how they became associated with magic, as they not only reflect the person gazing into it, but all of the surroundings of that person. Mirrors would have seemed like portals to another world, as they are precise reflections of reality, or at the very least, a potential location unable to be reached. It is not a far-fetched idea that magicians could use mirrors in order to try to influence the receiver in another location.

Perhaps of more interest than the mirror at this precise moment is the mysterious magical object that Apuleius is accused of having placed in Pontianus' home. Apuleius recounts the charge in his own words:

Quin etiam _quod praeterii _sunt quae fatearis nescire, et eadem rursus, quasi scias, criminaris<>. Ais enim me habuisse quaedam sudariolo inuoluta apud lares Pontiani. Ea inuoluta quae et cuius modi fuerint, nescisse te confiteris, neque praeterea quemquam esse qui uiderit; tamen illa contendis instrumenta magiae fuisses. (Ap. Apol. 53.2-3)
Apuleius’ argument is right on the nose. Even if he were to place an object wrapped in a handkerchief in the house of Pontianus that does not mean that the object in itself is magical. It simply means that the object is shielded from sight, and thus cannot be known. Since this object is kept hidded and the secret nature of it not known, it can easily be misinterpreted. Conversely, if Apuleius had admitted that the mysterious object was magical, then the object would be magical. Apuleius’ defense against this point not only draws attention to the potentially magical object, but raises an important question about the nature of magical objects and of magic itself: it is entirely based upon belief. Mocking Aemilianus in the latter quotation, Apuleius mimicks him by saying that if he does not understand what the object is, it must be magical. Here Apuleius is drawing attention to the tendency of people to demonize and classify something they do not understand without fully knowing what it is. As I have learned from the objects associated with the rituals of the aforementioned works, objects do not become magical until they are in a ritualized context, backed by the full belief and commitment of the practitioner.

Aside from literary accounts of magical rituals and associated objects from antiquity, we only have very few physical manifestations and remnants from the process of ancient magical practice. It is through the study of some of these objects that I hope to gain validation and physical evidence for the practices and objects I have identified thus far in literary study.

III.iv Physical Evidence for Magical Ritual in the Ancient World
It is unfortunate that many of the tools and objects I have found associated with the magical rituals of the ancient Greco-Roman world are plants, body parts and other materials that are able to decompose. Given that circumstance, there are only a few places we can turn to for surviving evidence of these rituals and practices. The first place we can turn to are the physical artifacts that survive. In the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston there is a votive offering of a lynx-wheel on display, which is the type of magical wheel that Simaetha used in *Idyll 2*. The object is described as follows:

A four-spoked terracotta iynx-wheel (fig. 1), finely preserved, of Attic geometric style from the close of the eighth century B.C., found at Phaleron, was acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts in 1928. So far as I know, the object is unique. It scarcely can fail to charm and intrigue the layman, although it is of particular interest to the archaeologist and student of Greek literature, religion and magic.\(^26\)

As one can see in the picture below, the wheel is adorned with many different kinds of birds seated around the outer rim. It is difficult at first, without other archaeological evidence, to understand the purpose of this object or how it would even be used. We know that it is the same type of wheel that Theocritus mentions because it does have the *tungenes*, which are types of birds, depicted on it. One can imagine, based on the text in *Idyll 2* that describes the use of the wheel, that the string would be wound around the wheel horizontally, and the wheel would twist and then wind the string back in a symbolic gesture of bringing back the lover who has been lost, similar to the motion of a yoyo.

It is also helps our understanding of the purpose of the wheel to know that it is also depicted many times in vase painting within the context of a wedding, or a love story. For instance, in the British Museum there is a pyxis by the Eretria Painter,

\(^{26}\) Nelson, p.443
catalogue number (E 774), which depicts Himeros, the god of sexual desire, spinning the wheel before Aphrodite and Adonis. In this case the object is clearly being used to symbolize Aphrodite’s desire to keep Adonis near her and to never have him stray. Unfortunately, a picture of this painting is not readily available. What is important to consider about this votive wheel is that it represents a tradition of magical ritual that did very much exist, and we see this idea confirmed across three types of media: poetry, painting, and votive offering.

Another class of magical objects from the ancient world that are of use to us is curse tablets. Instead of showing what a ritual or a magical object might look like, they instead are surviving primary sources from ancient practitioners of magic.

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27 Nelson, p. 454
28 Nelson, p. 444
There are two tablets, one in each language, that deal with the problem of a lover gone astray. And yet how precisely does inscribing a lead tablet with a magic spell enact any sort of result whatsoever?

First let us establish a few characteristics about curse tablets. First of all, more often than not they are used for the purpose of a binding spell. Whether the writer is trying to disable an adversary in an upcoming athletic competition, or is a love-sick young woman trying to keep all others away from her love, the general goal is to enact power and influence over the physical mobility and wellbeing of the receiver. In order to make the curse tablet effective, it seems that very specific and clear language must be used, and all the parts desired to be bound must be mentioned individually. Curse tablets are usually dedicated to divinities, and either buried beneath the ground or hidden in some way so that they may do their work. This reminds us of the witches we encountered earlier: they perform their rituals in darkness so as to remain in secret.

The first tablet I would like to discuss is the Pella curse tablet, which is published in 1993 in the *Hellenic Dialectology Journal*. It dates back to the 4th or 3rd century BCE, and it is written in the Ancient Macedonian dialect of Greek upon a thin lead scroll. The published Greek is as follows:

1. [Θετί]μας και Διονυσοφώντος το τέλος και τον γάμον καταγράφω και ταν αλλάν πασάν γυναίκα.
2. [ναικ]ών και χηράν και παρθένων, μάλιστα δε Θετίμας και παρκατίθεμαι Μάκρωνι και
3. [τοις]δαίμοσι, και οπόκα εγώ ταύτα διελ<ί>ξαμι και αναγνοίην πάλ<υ>ν ανορ<ύ>ξασα
4. [τόκα]γάμαι Διονυσοφώντα, πρότερον δε μη μη γαρ λάβοι άλλαν γυναικά αλλ' εμέ,
5. [εμέ δ]έ συνκαταγηράσαι Διονυσοφώντα και μηδεμίαν άλλαν, ικέτις
Though the surviving text is rather fragmentary, we can still decipher its meaning.

The numbers listed above next to the lines signify the orientation of the text where it lies on the tablet. The first line gives a statement of intent, very similar to that of Simaetha in the poem by Theocritus. The speaker writes that she hereby writes a curse concerning the wedding of Thetima and Dionysophon. She then continues with a specification that she also writes a curse on his (potential) wedding with any other woman but herself. She beseeches Makron and other daemons to help her in her plea to not let anyone wed Dionysophon but her. After expressing her potential happiness at being with him, she calls on the mercy of the gods to help make her happy, and at the same time bring evil Thetima to wretchedly perish.

The language that is constructed on this tablet is also of interest, for I am certain that what is inscribed here is not colloquial speech. Instead, through the language on the tablet, once can detect the ritual behind the writing of it. It is overtly formal in style, and leaves nothing to the imagination. The structure of the language is very clear and straightforward and verbs are almost always in either the present indicative, future indicative or the imperative. It is clear that a convention of writing these tablets is both clarity of thought and clarity of expression. Our writer mentions all the types of women she wants away from her love, as well as the precise conditions under which her orders can be carried out (ie, another woman
may marry her love if she ever removes this tablet from the ground). The language is uncomplicated and uses very simple vocabulary. These are all necessary elements for curse tablet writing, in addition to lists, which we shall visit shortly.

There are more similarities here with Theocritus than simply the first line. Just as Simaetha asks for Delphis to forget all of his other lovers, so our love-sick maid wishes that all of her competition would be destroyed. It is the “if I can't have him no one can” mentality that seems to be pervasive in both. This mentality also tells us something very important about the motivation behind the making of a curse tablet. It seems that the maker must be desperate in some way, that the creation of a curse tablet is a last result. The maker must also be inherently selfish, to wish ill upon another person for personal gain, and the desperation involved with making a curse tablet must mean that the maker is also emotionally unrestrained. Simaetha’s plea to the gods is also quite similar to that of our writer here. They both humble themselves before their deities of choice and beg through their words for help. The element of jealousy is also a common theme between this tablet and the poem by Theocritus.

Yet, more important than the notion that both the poem and the curse tablet feature the desires of a scorned lover is that both depict the scorned female lover. It would not be an unfounded generalization to attribute curse tablets of an amorous nature predominantly to women. As we have seen in the cases of the aforementioned witches and even Dido, women who have been scorned by their lovers will take drastic measures in order to come to terms with it in some way. In the case of Medea, Jason answers for his crimes against her in suffering the loss of
his children and new wife. Circe, when spurned by a love, transforms them into another shape. Dido, despairing over the absence of Aeneas and powerless to stop it, commits suicide. In the case of the aforementioned curse tablet, the woman is desperate to a degree that she will create a curse tablet in order to assert her power.

Conversely, different types of curse tablets are typically attributed to men. Binding spells can occur in a variety of different contexts, and they, much like the previously mentioned curse tablet of an amorous nature, are made to assert power or influence in a desperate situation. The following text is from a curse tablet found in a well at the Athenian Agora. The tablet itself is in the Agora inventory, and it is thought to have been from the 4th Century BC:

It is clear from the first word of the tablet that the curse is a binding one. It describes someone wanting to bind the smith Aristaichmos, and three others Pyrrhias, Sosia and Hagesis of Beotia. What is important to notice about the nature of the binding spell is what, in any given spell, the author chooses to bind. In this case it is the soul (ψυχα), their deeds (ργασία), what they say (λγοσι) and what they do (δρωσι). Once again we have evidence of very straightforward and unmuddled language. All verbs are in the present indicative, and there can be no

29 Curbera and Jordan, 216
mistaking what the intention of the author is. What is also present in this tablet that the previous one lacked is a list of what the author intends to bind. The list is a common trope in curse tablets, for truly it is the most straightforward way in which to get the point across. The language of the tablet is not ornate like the spell we encountered previously in Theocritus, which is an overtly emotional and literary interpretation of a magical ritual, but has one point and one point only: to have language, without mistake, directly manifest itself in the real world.

**III.v Conclusion**

Evidence for the presence of magical ritual and objects in the ancient world is sparse, but not as sparse as one might initially think. After a careful examination of the ritual magic and objects in *The Golden Ass* as well as in Theocritus’ *Idyll 2* and Apuleius’ *Apologia*, I can safely say that not only is there evidence for involved magical ritual in the ancient world, but there are in fact trends to be found. Each of the rituals I have worked with, with the exception of Lucius’ botched attempt at transformation, have included women with the boldness to take matters into their own hands for the sake of their own happiness, and of course to exact revenge upon their erring lover. Beyond the literary evidence are votive offerings and vase paintings depicting magical ritual, as well as curse tablets, which offer the unique perspective of the practitioner herself or himself, as well as clues to the conventions of constructing magical speech in antiquity.

**Conclusion**

The question of the magician in the ancient world is a difficult one to tackle in many respects. Many of the sources we could have for evidence are fragmentary, and
without careful analysis of literary texts the ancient magician lingers as an untouchable figure that resists understanding. It is impossible, for these reasons, to construct a complete picture of the ancient magician at any one point in antiquity, either Greek or Roman. The way I thought it best to tackle a subject about which almost nothing is definite is to explore the magician in the context of different spheres.

I began in chapter one with a discussion about the differences between the magician and the philosopher with regards to Apuleius’ *Apologia*. He was accused of engaging in the black arts, or magic, to ensnare his wealthy, older wife Pudentilla, and it is very comical the way he has constructed his defense. When Aemilianus has brought a charge against him that supports the claim that he is a magician, he switches the evidence around and shows how it can support the claim that he is a philosopher. I explored the differences between the philosopher and the magician in their relationships to the physical, divine and material worlds in hopes to leave the text with some sense of who the magician is.

It is clear to me now that many prejudices existed surrounding the magician, and that this largely has to do with the magician as a powerful marginalized figure. People give the magician power because they believe that he or she has the power. Furthermore, the type of knowledge that the magician has is intimidating to say the least. It is an esoteric knowledge that cannot be known by anyone outside of their sphere. This comes into play in the aforementioned comparison with regard to the exploration of the natural world: the philosopher acquires knowledge for its own sake, the magician employs secret knowledge to obtain the means to enact their
influence. I reached similar conclusions about the magician’s relationships to the
divine world: he is either accused of being irreligious, or far too zealously
worshipping the gods. Finally, with regard to the material world, from the Apologia
I have gleaned that magicians have a very definite appearance that is usually
characterized by elegance and care for appearance, as we saw in Apuleius’
discussion of the mirror.

With these understandings in place I began my work on The Golden Ass. I
was fascinated with the role of Apuleius as a failed magician, and what caused his
transformation to go so terribly wrong. A philosopher by nature, Lucius is driven by
his curiositas, and his foolhardy approach to magic, in addition to his own carnal
desires, caused him to be turned into an ass for an extended period of time. This
transformation is an accentuation of his nature, and the transformation necessarily
takes place in order for him to make a lighter and purer transformation into a
virtuous man at the end of the novel.

In considering Apuleius, I thought it was also appropriate to consider his
model for magic and who it was that enthralled him and made him want to try
magical transformation in the first place. Pamphile, the famous witch of Thessaly, is
a powerful woman with far-reaching influence. In comparing her to other witch’s in
ancient literature, such as Meroe from the same novel, Medea from the play of the
same name, or Circe in both Homer and Ovid, I was able to draw a few conclusions
about the tropes that exist for the female magician in literature. Not only are they
are extremely powerful, no-nonsense women, but they also have an uncanny control
over the laws of nature, and can bring about darkness and chaos at any time.
Another characteristic that each of these women have in common is the use of some sort of *pharmakos* in their magical practices. Finally, these women are all in common in that they typically use their magical powers to enact revenge for a lover who has scorned them.

The final chapter deals with the evidence that remains for ritual practice, magical language, and magical objects themselves. The presence of magical ritual is very present in *The Golden Ass*, but from it we cannot glean any idea about magical language. In Theocritus' *Idyll 2* we gain an understanding of the language and sequence of magical ritual, but it is "polluted" in some ways because it is a literary work and does not give us a clean example of a magical spell written by an actual person. The votive iynx wheel that survives lacks context that can be filled in to a certain extent by depictions in vase paintings, as well as the mention of it in *Idyll 2*, but we have no first-person accounts telling us how to use it. This is why I felt it was so important to mention curse tablets as the final piece of evidence: it is a surviving artifact from ancient times that includes concrete evidence for magical language. We can understand from the curse tablets that the magician understands a certain way to write curses, that they must be clear and straightforward, including their wishes and desires and nothing more.

Having summarized my work, I will not try to consolidate it into one specific picture. The nature of the beast is that the evidence exists in different spheres, and it is detrimental to the integrity of the subject matter to try and conflate them. Now at the end of this work, I can admit that the pictures of the magician I have glimpsed exist in different times and different places, and I cannot put my finger
definitively on any one definition or answer to my “question of the magician,” but I hope that this work can yield and continue to encourage further conversation on the topic.

**Bibliography: Works Consulted and Cited**


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