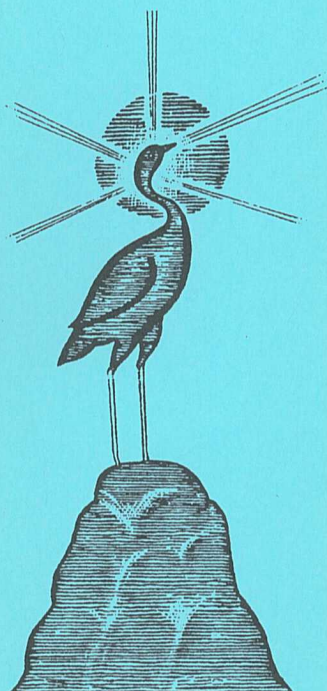


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## ROMAN WOMEN, WISE WOMEN, AND WITCHES

PAULINE RIPAT

AMONG THE BELOVED RELATIVES to whom Ausonius delivers poetic tribute is Aemilia Hilaria, a maiden aunt on his mother's side who died at the age of 63. Ausonius praises her for her boy-like nature and appearance, her commitment to virginity, and her skill in practising medicine "like men do" (*more virum medicis artibus experiens*, *Parentalia* 6.6). Since medical professionals were not exclusively male, Ausonius must mean that his aunt joined the ranks of female health professionals who adhered to the various schools of medical philosophy usually associated with male physicians.<sup>1</sup> But these schools of thought were not the only frameworks within which illness was interpreted and cures were activated, and implicit in Ausonius' compliment to his aunt is the suggestion that the frameworks and practices she had rejected were associated with females: she did not practise medicine "like women do." What constituted a "female" type of healing, and why was it so objectionable? These questions are at the heart of this discussion, which seeks to find coherence among the various representations of women affecting the health of others.

It is difficult to know how to understand in both ancient sources and modern scholarship women who, in contrast to Aemilia Hilaria, practised medicine like women. Unlike the proponents of named schools of medical philosophies, their practices did not have a literary tradition, but instead belonged to a murky, heterogeneous, and poorly documented folk tradition.<sup>2</sup> We do have some descriptive titles, however, which appear to have been considered largely synonymous by sources such as Festus; these range from "singers" or "chanters" (*praecontrices*), "wise women" (*sagae*), "purifiers" (*piatrices* and *expiatrices*), and "imitators" (*simultrices*) to the "number of old women (*γρᾶεζ/aniles*)" whose opinions are generally mentioned in ancient literature as emblematic of foolishness.<sup>3</sup> These

This article is dedicated, with thanks that extend beyond its pages, to Keith Bradley, whose tutelage and publications have long fostered my own research interests. I have benefited from discussions with Fanny Dolansky and Ian Moyer, and am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their guidance. The University of Winnipeg provided financial support for this research. The numbering of the poems of the *Priapeia* follows Bücheler's 1904 edition; the numbering of Martial's *Epigrams* follows Shackleton Bailey (1993). Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>1</sup>Flemming 2000: 33–79; Nutton 2004: 196–198; Laes 2010; Israelowich 2015: 70–86; Parker 2015: 122–123.

<sup>2</sup>See Lloyd 1983: 2 on the problems of dealing with "folklore" and the evidence for it.

<sup>3</sup>Quote from Fleming 2000: 33. For Festus, see Lindsay and 1913: 232–233, 426–427; cf. 302–303, where *anus* and *saga* are associated; see also Lindsay 1903: §494, 22–24. See Fleming 2007: 106 and n. 77 for the possibility that *simulatrix* should be emended to *simpulatrix* (a woman "devoted to divine matters"), which she supports. *Simulatrix* is in my opinion preferable, for reasons I will make clear below.

women often seem to fit more comfortably within the realm of magic than in the medical sciences,<sup>4</sup> but this may be in part a function of the lack of respect they garnered from disdainful authors. Indeed, literary descriptions of female specialists do not aim to document the social location or professional rationale of female healers. Instead, their purpose is to abuse such women as old, foul, drunk, and ridiculous in their claims to superior knowledge,<sup>5</sup> and sometimes even to present them as fantastical witches with the power to shape-shift into animals and turn rivers back in their course.<sup>6</sup> The specialists and witches of Roman literature are now generally accepted as representing reality only insofar as they serve as negative examples and so cautionary tales about proper female behaviour,<sup>7</sup> or as projections of real anxieties, often men's anxieties, about women's economic, social, or religious power.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, Maxwell Teitel Paule observes the elastic nature of these figures in the "muddled confusion of generic terms" that are used to describe them, such as *anus*, *saga*, and *venefica* ("poisoner").<sup>9</sup> The Roman "witch," Teitel Paule concludes, frustrates any possibility of tidy categorization: she is a blank canvas upon which to project the fears of the moment, and no consistency is to be found even in the anxieties that she embodies. In short, current scholarship generally holds that both literature and terminology, being misleading and meaningless respectively, deny us access to the social location and functions of real female specialists.

In contrast, I argue in the following that it is possible to get a sense of the logic and actions of a broad range of female specialists—women who claimed to heal, and perhaps took compensation for their services—by observing coherence among social projections of female physiology and literary descriptions of specialists and witches. Coherence is perceptible when these topics are considered within the context of envy, and in particular, of illness as a function of other people's envy. This approach provides perspective on hostile descriptions of aging women as foul, drunk, sex-crazed, and malevolently magical, and brings new resolution to the paradoxical nature of the female body as a source of harm and healing.<sup>10</sup> It therefore illuminates a basic logic in "folk" healing practices that diverges sharply from the more familiar ancient medical philosophies associated with men and for which, as Rebecca Flemming notes, "woman is not the starting point or standard for anything; she does not give definition, purpose or

<sup>4</sup>For example, Burriss 1936; Dickie 2001: esp. 124–141, 161–201, 273–321; Flemming 2007: 106; Teitel Paule 2014. See Schultz 2006: 28 for a brief discussion of the religious context.

<sup>5</sup>For example, Richlin 2014: 62–80; Parkin 2003: 86; Rosivach 1994; Esler 1989; Gourevitch 1984: 217–220.

<sup>6</sup>See especially Gordon 2009.

<sup>7</sup>Richlin 2014: 202.

<sup>8</sup>See Teitel Paule 2014: 757, n. 38 for references; see also Currie 1998; Stratton 2007: 71–105; Richlin 2014: 73–74; and Spaeth 2014.

<sup>9</sup>Teitel Paule 2014: quote from 751.

<sup>10</sup>See Richlin 2014: 241–266.

meaning.”<sup>11</sup> Central to this logic is homeopathy, the idea that like affects like, a concept well recognized in discussions of sympathetic magic.<sup>12</sup> However, here it has special application not to the persuasive role played by herbs or amulets, but to the critical and magnetic role played by the female body as both health-threat and cure, particularly as a woman aged.

Some orienting caveats about purpose, scope, and terminology are necessary. The following does not seek to delineate tidy categories of real female specialists according to what in particular each kind did. Instead, the purpose is to demonstrate a common rationale that lay beneath the various activities of a variety of female healers. The evidence summoned is necessarily eclectic, both in genre and chronology; but readers will note that the evidence suggests that the ideology that linked illness, emotion, and homeopathic cures was consistent over time.<sup>13</sup> And finally, terminology poses a difficulty: what English words can be used to describe this system of “folk belief” that do not suggest uniformity and conscious intellectualization, a sort of “school of thought”? Such implied meanings are to be avoided since we are dealing with a collection of projections, interpretations, and unconscious assumptions that nonetheless obeyed an observable pattern. This pattern, however, depended upon associations rather than categories; it resembles the overlapping lines of a spirograph rather than the horizontal and vertical lines of an organizational tree. The result is that “envy” will at times be used to suggest not the emotion as we know it, but rather the purported effects of the emotion, or other unidentifiable causes with similar effects.

#### I. THE WEB OF ENVY

Envy (*invidia*) and the threats it posed to health provide the contextual framework for discussion. To envy is to begrudge another a legitimately enjoyed good. Anthropologists identify envy as a universal emotion, but not all societies adopt the same constructs and symbols to describe it or its powers; for example, the evil eye—the envious gaze with the power to blight—is specific to only some societies. Ancient Rome was among them.<sup>14</sup> Anthropologists observe in more recent societies that belief in the evil eye rests upon the fundamental idea that “good things”—in which a “good thing” is anything of material, emotional, social, or health-related value—are limited. The complex

<sup>11</sup> Flemming 2000: 183.

<sup>12</sup> Or “persuasive analogy” in magical formulae, see, for example, Faraone 1991: 4–10. Cf. Von Staden 1992 and Totelin 2009: 197–224 on treatments that share a similar logic in the gynaeceological writings of the Hippocratic Corpus.

<sup>13</sup> Change over time to be perceived is in the nature of the philosophical and religious objections to this ideology, however; see especially Kalleres 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts (1972) attempts a survey of contemporary and historical societies (including Roman society) to determine the factors that seem to foster belief in the evil eye.

is activated by the fact that “good things” are unevenly distributed, and is perpetuated by the observation or experience of misfortune in the form of loss—of health, wealth, esteem.<sup>15</sup> These “dry up” in the face of envy. In human health contexts, it is generally vital fluids (blood, milk, semen) whose presence is felt to be threatened by the envy of others. Indeed, Alan Dundes identifies envy’s purported power to dry in a literal sense as the primal concern in societies that acknowledge the evil eye; in his words, “liquids are living; drying is dying.”<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that for the Romans, too, concerns over the evaporating powers of envy were present, but the emotion posed further threats to healthy fluids and flows, real and metaphorical: envy could not only evaporate, it could drain; it could also block, and so cause unhealthy stagnation. Either way, wherever envy landed, it laid waste by withering, consuming, or bringing death-like immobility or decay.<sup>17</sup> Katherine Dunbabin and Matthew Dickie describe the envious physique represented in ancient art as a body that was bloodlessly pale, emaciated, and choking or suffocating.<sup>18</sup> So pestilential and difficult to control was envy that philosophy undertook to instruct elite men in its avoidance.<sup>19</sup> Though envy threatened to waste the envious,<sup>20</sup> it was also a transitive emotion that was credited with the ability to harm the envied in a similar manner. The dangerously unconfined nature of *invidia* was reflected in the number of vehicles granted to it to convey its harmful effects from one body to another. These included not only vision, but all bodily emanations, including voice, breath, and as we shall see, even odour.<sup>21</sup> As primary “goods” with vulnerable bodies, children were felt to be in the greatest danger of suffering the harmful effects of others’ envy, and so were commonly fortified by rituals, amulets, and sometimes even apotropaic naming practices.<sup>22</sup> But wasting consumption through fever, diarrhea, pulmonary problems wrought by tuberculosis, malaria, and other diseases was hardly an unusual experience at any age in antiquity.<sup>23</sup> Envy must surely have presented itself as one possible cause for such illnesses.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The bibliography is vast. See Dundes 1992, with bibliography, and especially Foster 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Dundes 1992: 160; see *passim* for the centrality of moisture in concepts of envy.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Catull. 7.11–12, cf. 5.12–13; Cic. *Tusc.* 3.20; Verg. *Ecl.* 3.102–103; Ov. *Met.* 2.791–794; Pers. 2.34.

<sup>18</sup> Dunbabin and Dickie: 1983.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Cic. *Tusc.* 3.20–21; Val. Max. 4.4 *praef.*; Hor. *Ep.* 1.1.33–40; Plut. *Mor.* 681e–f.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Dickie 1975; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983; Pollard 2008: 145.

<sup>21</sup> For philosophical explanations of the mechanics of the harmful gaze, see Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 10–11; Dickie 1990: 272–275; Bartsch 2006: 57–114.

<sup>22</sup> On rituals, see, for example, Richlin 2014: 264–265; on amulets, see most recently Dasen 2015: 181–184; on naming, see Hobson 1989 and Masson 1996.

<sup>23</sup> See Sallares 2002 in general, with bibliography.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Baba Metzia* 107b, where one percent of a graveyard’s inhabitants are said to have died of natural causes, the other ninety-nine percent from the evil eye. See Bohak 2008: 392.

Although ancient philosophers attempted to place definitional parameters around the concept of envy,<sup>25</sup> it belonged primarily to the realm of experience, not theory, and it was neither experienced nor understood as an isolated emotion.<sup>26</sup> Envy is best located within a nexus of other, associated emotions such as anger, lust, and greed, as these were comparable in terms of the physiological experiences of those suffering them. Fever, emaciation, pallor, suffocation—these were the overlapping symptoms of these overlapping emotions.<sup>27</sup> Envy is also connected to other emotions by the actions they inspire, such as thieving, consuming, slandering, poisoning, and cursing, all which tend towards the diminishment of their objects in physical, economic, or social capacities—which, as Martial (9.97) observes, are the same contexts that give rise to envy in the first place.<sup>28</sup> Vocabulary and symbolism were therefore often shared among the various elements of the nexus of associated emotions, actions, and effects. For example, galactite, the “milky stone,” was said in an imperial lapidary to soothe anger and protect against envy.<sup>29</sup> Pliny the Elder labels as *veneficia* (“poisonings”) both the entwining of one’s fingers (i.e., an action that mimics knotting or blocking) in the presence of a pregnant woman (*HN* 28.59) and stealing crops (18.41–43). The erect phallus, called the *fascinum* in apotropaic deployment, served as a defence against the diminishing effects of the envious and the rapacity of thieves. In gardens the figure of Priapus therefore ensured not only the continued presence of produce and animals but also their succulence: goats had milk, lambs stayed fat, calves were plump with blood.<sup>30</sup> Terms and concepts that work on many related levels prioritize intent or result over action, and any ambiguity summons not a vacuum of meaning, but the whole collection of associated emotions, actions, and sufferings.

The importance of associations in comprehending “folk” systems of illness and health is demonstrated by considering the example of menstrual blood, which also points to the central situation of the female body in popular concepts of illness and healing. Wendy Doniger has observed the tendency of Greek

<sup>25</sup>For example, Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.8.17; see Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 11 and n. 19 for definitions in other ancient works of philosophy. Dickie (1990: 272–275) discusses philosophic explanations of the effects of envy.

<sup>26</sup>On the problems posed by classical categorization to describe human experience, see Lakoff 1987: 12–57.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.20. On anger, lust, and envy, see, for example, Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 10–17; Dickie 1990: 269–270; Lakoff 1987: 38–39; for anger and envy, see, for example, Verg. *Aen.* 12.845–847; for lust and envy as doppelgangers of each other, cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.394–399 and Plut. *Mor.* 682f. On anger and laboured breathing, see Sen. *De ira* 1.3–4.

<sup>28</sup>See especially Currie 1998 on the associations among women, poison, wasting, and petrification. Cf. Teitel Paule 2014: 746 for the elision of a “range of subtle, potentially supernatural, aggressive behaviours” under the term *veneficia*.

<sup>29</sup>See the Damigeron-Evax lapidary no. 34, in Abel 1881: 188–190.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. *Priap.* 87. See Doniger 1995 on the association between genitalia and eyes, and Foster 1972 on the usualness of these associations (and by extension, the envious gaze) in many cultures.

mythology to cut women in half: in figures such as Scylla and the harpies, human upper bodies with life-giving breasts are countered by bestial and rapacious lower regions.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the beneficial powers Roman folklore granted to women's breast milk (for example, Plin. *HN* 28.123) was countered by the corrosive nature of their menses. Although menstruation was universally recognized as a necessary prerequisite for conception,<sup>32</sup> it was characterized by Pliny as "a monstrous thing" (*monstrificum*, *HN* 7.64) and "a great evil" (*tale tantumque . . . malum*, 7.66). These are well-chosen descriptions, for menstrual blood was considered a substance that, like portents (*monstra*), signified disruption in the safe and healthy course of things, as we shall see in the next paragraph.<sup>33</sup> Yet it was a common bodily fluid that most women produced for one week of every month. In the absence of modern feminine hygiene products, menstrual blood must have been a very familiar presence in the ancient domestic landscape as a substance that was near impossible to corral completely and difficult to dispose of discretely. It is significant that, although menstrual blood does not receive much attention in literary sources, clothing stained with menses does, at least in Pliny's account of natural wonders: he details the purported power of cloth maculated with blots so tenacious that they could only be removed by the same woman's urine and so powerful that even burning infected cloth did not annul their potency.<sup>34</sup>

Menstrual blood polluted.<sup>35</sup> Debbie Felton has recently presented the compelling argument that Vergil's harpies' polluting "most foul discharge of the belly" (*foedissima ventris / proluvies*, *Aen.* 3.216–217) refers to menstrual blood.<sup>36</sup> Jack Lennon similarly points to the concept of menstrual blood as a polluting substance that, interestingly, for the Romans posed dangers not to the menstruating woman so much as to others: according to Macrobius (*Sat.* 7.7), menses carried "harmful" (*vitiosus*) material out of a woman's body.<sup>37</sup> Although "pollution" is well recognized in antiquity as a generally contagious ill, a "breach of the natural order,"<sup>38</sup> it is worth being specific about the problems that pollution in the form of menstrual blood was thought to bring. Columella (*Rust.* 11.3.38, 50) reports that a menstruating girl will cause the rue plant and fruits

<sup>31</sup> Doniger 1995: 27–28; cf. Richlin 2014: 252. See now also Lowe 2015: 70–163 on monstrous female figures.

<sup>32</sup> Flemming 2000: 163.

<sup>33</sup> On the religious and social connotations of *monstra*, see Lowe 2015: 8–14; on menstrual blood, see 131–136.

<sup>34</sup> Plin. *HN* 28.77–86, esp. 80 and 85. Lennon 2014: 81.

<sup>35</sup> I raise pollution as a valid framework within which to understand issues of envy and physical integrity even though the subject is too vast to deal with adequately here. See Bradley 2012: 18–28 with references for an encapsulation of the approaches to pollution in antiquity.

<sup>36</sup> Felton 2013. Cf. Richlin 2014: 174.

<sup>37</sup> Lennon 2014: 81–88. Menopause might intensify a wasting illness (*tabes*): see Flemming 2000: 160, with references.

<sup>38</sup> Bradley 2012: 20, summarizing Robert Parker's 1983 work; cf. also Mullin 1996: 515.

to shrivel up (if the fruits are very young, her gaze alone is sufficient to waste the crop). According to Pliny (*HN* 7.64, 28.78–80), menstrual blood made crops barren, shriveled seedlings, caused fruit to drop from trees, killed bees, made knives, mirrors, and shiny ivory dull, leached the colour from purple cloth, rusted iron and bronze, and could even cause another woman to miscarry should she walk over it. Put otherwise, menstrual blood polluted by causing a collapse of physical integrity through rotting, stagnation, evaporation, or draining of light or life force, effects that mirror those believed to be wrought by envy.<sup>39</sup>

Menstruation is a biological function and envy is an emotion: they are clearly not the same thing. But when seen from the perspective of health, menstrual blood was a concrete form of envy. The logic that connected menstrual blood with the power to blight seems to lie in concern over the stagnation of bodily fluids. Those no longer in circulation are coagulating or slimy, that is, drying up, and hence decomposing. Described as *tabum* by Lucan (for example, *Phars.* 6.88–90; cf. 6.668–669), congealing blood in corpses comprises part of the general decay that results in the disintegration of the body. *Tabum/tabes* (“putrefaction”) threatens intactness and so health. Menstrual blood, blood so lifeless that it is purged from the body, is already quite commonly viscous and clotted, and appears to have been interpreted as decaying, and so polluting in its contagious corrosiveness in much the same way as envy. Statius’ envious child-killing serpent-girl is therefore appropriately smeared in uterine blood, with breasts coated in putrid gore.<sup>40</sup>

But, according to Pliny (*HN* 28.77, 82–85), menstrual blood was also counted among the cures for crop, animal, and human illnesses. Caterpillars, worms, and beetles that attack crops drop right off the stalk when exposed to a naked menstruating woman, he says; in the form of ash, menses cured draught animals’ running sores; and it was useful for humans suffering from a variety of ailments including gout, tumours, or fever. It furthermore had the power to stop hailstorms, whirlwinds, and storms at sea. To make sense of the apparently paradoxical nature of menstrual blood as both contagiously corrosive and healing, it is necessary to appreciate three interdependent ideas. First is the explanation of illness or harm coming from an excessive degree of flow or stagnation, both of which resulted in decay, withering, or wasting; this logic connects seemingly unrelated ills, such as whirlwinds, miscarriage, and running sores as examples of excessive flow; tumours, on the other hand, suggest excessive stagnation. Similarly, this approach demonstrates common ground between fever and crop-eating beetles: both are agents of withering death. Next, folk-healing appears to have depended upon the idea of transference of illness- and health-bringing

<sup>39</sup>For an explicit connection between pollution and envy, see *Ov. Met.* 2.794.

<sup>40</sup>*Stat. Theb.* 1.617–618: *uterique nefandum/prolurviem et crasso squalentia pectora tabo* . . . Cf. the purported use of decomposed snakes and decomposing human blood as a poison for arrows by the Scythians; see Cilliers and Retief 2000: 94.



factors between bodies. This has already been raised with regard to the idea that envy's ill effects could move from one body to another, but we can also compare Varro's prescription for a charm that would transfer pain away from a foot to the ground, for example, and the concern for keeping curative items from touching the ground, presumably lest their strength migrate out in an unintended direction.<sup>41</sup> In the context of curing an illness caused by inappropriate stagnation or wasting, it would be necessary to move the stagnation or corrosion out of the body: health was an absence of illness, and so by removing the impediments to health, health remained.<sup>42</sup> Third, homeopathy offered means of removal. If stagnation and morbid corrosion—emaciation and decay—were the agents of illness, the cure was something also decaying, corroding, or otherwise morbid: the thing that could threaten health could equally draw pernicious threats out of the ailing body to itself. Hence menstrual blood threatened the integrity of healthy crops, but it provided a cure for crops ailing from a force like itself—gnawing beetles and caterpillars that threatened the plants' integrity, for instance. As a form of putrefaction, it could help running sores; as a coagulating, desiccating fluid, it could cure evaporating fever.<sup>43</sup>

## II. GENDERED ENVY: LOOSE WOMEN

According to Pliny (*HN* 28.70), despite menstrual blood's ability to waste crops and weaken knife blades, the woman who was merely menstruating threatened healthy humans only if she had sex during a solar or lunar eclipse (when she would kill her partner). It was a woman's sexual habits on eclipse-less days and nights and, eventually, her ageing that would make not just her bodily effluences but her body itself an instantiation of wasting envy. Greek and Roman attempts to externalize the dangerous, socially awkward, and uncomfortable presence of envy through the creation of envious demons or the attachment of the emotion to distant tribes are well documented,<sup>44</sup> but these creations merely masked the justified concern that the emotion and the threats it posed bred in close quarters.<sup>45</sup> While envy might arise as a function of social location and interaction, ideas about the emotion also intersected with stereotypes of gender and physiology to identify women, particularly lustful women and old women, as

<sup>41</sup>Varro *Rust.* 1.2.27: "*ego tui memini, medere meis pedibus, terra pestem teneto, salus hic maneto in meis pedibus*" ("I am thinking of you, cure my feet. The pain go in the ground, and may my feet be sound," tr. Hooper and Ash 1935). See also Plin. *HN* 20.6 and 28.41.

<sup>42</sup>Gourevitch 1984: 37–38.

<sup>43</sup>Von Staden (1992: 14) discusses the harming and healing, or polluting and purifying effects of menses in the Hippocratic Corpus. Cf. especially Richlin 2014: 166–196 on the intrinsic "foulness" of the female body and the use of foul products to render it clean and orderly.

<sup>44</sup>For example, Plin. *HN* 7.16–17; cf. Gell. *NA* 9.4.7–8 and Plut. *Mor.* 680d; Johnston 1999: 164–199; Teitel Paule 2014: 753, with references; Scobie (1983: 29) observes that the baby-eating owl-witch, the *strix*, "is peculiarly Roman in its form and name."

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Plut. *Mor.* 515d; cf. 516f and 519d.

common perpetrators in the crime of envy—seeking to take for themselves the health-sustaining elements of the young and, more generally, of men.<sup>46</sup>

Let us begin with lust. It is important at the outset to observe two things: first, the binary association between envy and diminished health dictated that the presence of one side of the equation could suggest the presence of the other; and second, it was in the female body in particular that envy and lust were not clearly differentiated, since both had the capacity and the intention to waste the strength of males. Concepts of hysteria enshrined the female body as greedy for the vital fluids of males: Greek philosophy, for example, taught that the womb might thirstily seek moisture from other organs, and that sex was necessary to prevent hysteria through the provision of semen.<sup>47</sup> Martial (11.71) demonstrates the continued popular currency of this idea in Roman society in his suggestion that women might use hysteria as an excuse for demanding medicinal adultery, and it is surely the key to understanding the threat made by Priapus against an apple-stealing woman to the effect that she would never find another lover: if she should feed her body by stealing one of the apples he guards, may she never be “fed” again.<sup>48</sup> It is also clear why the cult of Fascinus, the phallic divinity that protected triumphing generals and babies against envy, was entrusted to the sexually abstinent Vestals, as they posed no conceptual threat to his continued potency.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, although men could be said to “devour” their male lovers’ genitals with their mouths or eyes, sex with women was exhausting in ways that sex with boys was not.<sup>50</sup> Martial (9.67.3), for example, asked his lover for “the boy routine” (*illud puerile poposci*) once already exhausted (*fessus*) from sex with her as a female, something which Apuleius has Photis “generously” offer to Lucius once she had similarly first depleted his energy with typically heterosexual sex.<sup>51</sup> For his part, Priapus claims that the lusty neighbourhood women have drained him with their nightly sexual demands, such that he now is merely pale, weak, and suffering from a consumptive cough.<sup>52</sup> Similar is Martial’s mockery of a man who has performed cunnilingus and whose tongue is now flaccidly

<sup>46</sup> See Carson 1990; Currie 1998; Richlin 2014: esp. 62–80. See also Stratton 2014 for literary representations of Roman witches as fundamentally threatening to physical and social integrity. Lowe (2015: 114–163) provides a discussion of female monster figures whose characteristics resonate with those ascribed to women in this section.

<sup>47</sup> Carson 1990: 139; Johnston 1999: 185, citing Pl. *Ti.* 91b7–c6 and Hippoc. *De Morb. Mul.* 1; Parker (2015: 113) puts it well: the womb “is hungry; it needs sperm. It sucks in seed, absorbs it.”

<sup>48</sup> *Priap.* 58: *quaeque hic proterva carperit manu poma / puella nullum reperiat futuorem.*

<sup>49</sup> Plin. *HN* 28.39. See Lennon 2014: 69–72, with references, for the significance of the Vestals’ sexual intactness.

<sup>50</sup> For example, Mart. 11.72; cf. 11.77. Richlin 1983: 42: “the *cunnius* is said to devour the penis” in contrast to boys’ buttocks, which are merely fed; Richlin compares the latter to contented animals.

<sup>51</sup> *Met.* 3.20: *cum quidem mihi iam fatigato de propria liberalitate Photis puerile obtulit corollarium.*

<sup>52</sup> *Priap.* 25: *effututus ut sim/confectusque macerque pallidusque, / . . . Defecit latus et periculosam / cum tussi miser expuo saliva.* Cf. 47 for a male similarly sapped.

unable to get an erection any longer (11.61.11–13). Ubiquitously implicit is the idea that women, especially lustful women, live at the expense of men's health.<sup>53</sup>

Equally present was the idea that physique ought to reflect moral interior, a tendency familiar from the stereotype of slave bodies as ugly, bestial, and base.<sup>54</sup> Punishments for acting on harmful impulses, therefore, sought to render the body of the perpetrator the physical manifestation of the impulse, which for envy and its associations was, as we shall see, "loose." It is fitting that the instrument of this metamorphosis is often asserted to be the phallus, the "weapon" most commonly used to counteract aggressive emotions; given the phallus's role as delivery mechanism of vital fluids, the logic of its use is surely similar to the logic the Parthians legendarily adopted to kill the notoriously greedy Crassus, that is, by pouring molten gold down his throat (Cass. Dio 40.27.3): punishment takes the form of an excess of the sort of thing excessively desired. In Apuleius' tale (*Met.* 10.24–29), therefore, sex with a donkey is considered a symbolically suitable form of execution for a woman so consumed by envy, anger, and greed that she contrived to poison her husband, daughter, and two others to death. But the phallus did not simply provide a literal or metaphorical deluge of fluids to the overly greedy; it also "loosened" them up to make them physically consistent with their moral interior: the visual image is reminiscent of an inelastic wool sock whose initial tautness gives way to laxity with the repeated insertion of the foot. Many of the Priapic poems, for example, assert that Priapus' enormous phallus will misshape and loosen the insides of the thieves whom it penetrates, even once threatening that "my belly's weapons will loosen you up so that you could slip through your own asshole" (*haec mei te ventris arma laxabunt, exire ut ipse de tuo queas culo, Priap.* 31.3–4).<sup>55</sup> But it was not just criminal thief that might be "loosened" up; the body of the lustful woman—a slight shift in grade along the envy-thieving spectrum—was also no stranger to the misshaping thrusts of the phallus. What a lustful female desired while young and elastic, she would require as her body became a cavernous, insatiable vacuum with a yawning entrance. Perhaps this is what the youthfully indefatigable Photis means when she tells Lucius that he is sampling a bittersweet snack (*dulce et amarum gustulum carpis, Apul. Met.* 2.10): today she is a pleasure, but one day she will be a danger.

The logic of the *invidia* complex further dictated that more withered and saggy one became, the greater the envy, lust, or desire to steal the sap of younger, suppler bodies, the greater the need for literal rejuvenation at the expense of those who enjoyed justified succulence. Prodigiously juicy Priapus, for example, complains that a deathly pale girl (*puella*) who is entirely sapless, like crumbling, holey pumice (*quae suco caret ut putrisque pumex, Priap.* 32.7), keeps showing up to

<sup>53</sup>In addition, of course, to living at the expense of their economic health; see, for example, Plaut. *Truc.* 568–574 for fiscally exhausting prostitutes.

<sup>54</sup>Bradley 1994: 142–143; see also Stratton 2014: 155–157.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. *Priap.* 16, 51, 79.

grate herself on him (*lanternae videor fricare cornu*, 32.14). If not promiscuous sex, then age would eventually corrupt the female body, rendering it dry, saggy, loose, and gaping, profoundly negative adjectives that are associated with putrefaction and envy.<sup>56</sup> In another Priapic poem (*Priap.* 11), it is a wrinkly hag older than Hecuba who requests a sustaining phallus, and yet elsewhere it is a woman so decayed by age (*turba putida facta saeculorum*, *Priap.* 57.2) that she could have been Nestor's nurse who returns time and again to make the same petition. Well, Priapus concedes, if the hag (*anus*) has money, he is willing to think that she is a girl again (*si nummos tamen haec habet, puella est*, 52.8). This willful blindness-for-money sentiment is echoed elsewhere, but the dubious wit that sometimes adorns expressions of male disgust at having sex with women described as dry, wrinkly, decaying, or simply old,<sup>57</sup> should not distract from the implication that the men are conceding, even selling, from their own bodies what putrefying women require. This logic surely lurks beneath the common literary portrayal of aged women as greedy—especially for fluids, both sexual and alcoholic<sup>58</sup>—an idea that is further predicated on the idea that they, now useless, should be dead and have no right to the resources that could sustain others invested with greater social value. In this way, the abuse shouted by a bandit at the old woman who cooks for him (“you last corpse on the funeral pyre, life's foremost disgrace and Orcus' sole reject! . . . Day and night all you do is greedily pour strong drink into your insatiable belly!,” *Apul. Met.* 4.7)<sup>59</sup> shares a common root with Horace's extended description in his fifth Epode of decrepit old women planning to starve a young boy to death in order to make a love potion from his withered marrows with which to sap other males.

In short, if the envious (and lustful, and greedily thieving) body was “loose,” then the aged female body was a prototypical image of envy. As mentioned above, better known is the description of the envious body as pale, emaciated, unable to breathe, and generally male, as reflected in material culture by figurines of emaciated male grotesques in the contorted pose of choking themselves.<sup>60</sup> This image is also familiar in literature—Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 13.584), for example, imagines *Livor* with her hands around her neck. But literature and material culture both suggest that the aged female body was also considered a physical representation of menacing *invidia*.<sup>61</sup> Horace, for instance, capitalizes on this in his eighth Epode: his *fascinum* simply cannot stand up to the sight of *Canidia*'s

<sup>56</sup> Richlin 2014: 73, 176–177, 231–232; Parkin 2003: 86; Esler 1989. See, for example, *Ov. Met.* 2.760–761 where *Invidia*'s abode is said to be “filthy with black decay” (*nigro squalentia tabo / tecta*); *Aglauros*' innards will be liquified by *Invidia*'s “most wretched putrefaction” (*miserrima tabe*) at 2.805–808.

<sup>57</sup> For example, *Mart.* 9.80. See Rosivach 1994: 110–111; Richlin 2014: 62–80.

<sup>58</sup> Stratton 2007: 83; Richlin 2014: 70–73.

<sup>59</sup> *etiame tu, busti cadaver extremum et vitae dedecus primum et Orci fastidium solum . . . quae diebus ac noctibus nil quicquam rei quam merum saevienti ventri tuo soles aviditer ingurgitare* (tr. Hanson 1996).

<sup>60</sup> Wace 1903/4; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983 (see 15–17 for literary descriptions); Mitchell 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Richlin (1983: 113) tentatively notes that the potential that invective against old women had an apotropaic quality; see also Stratton 2007: 96.

foul and flaccid body, he says.<sup>62</sup> For Ovid (*Met.* 2.775–777), *Invidia* is a woman with a pale face, an emaciated body, and a poisonous tongue, her teeth black with mold and her breasts green with bile. A janiform figurine now in Leiden shows a self-suffocating male on one side and a female with pendulous breasts opening a gaping wound in her chest on the other;<sup>63</sup> similar figurines of aged females exist, sometimes without the gaping chest wound but rather with legs splayed to show off gaping genitals.<sup>64</sup> The Leiden figure seems to depict the dangers envy posed, that is, to self and to others, using social constructions of male and female physiology as explanatory tools. It is “trapped” or “contained” in the comparatively integral male body, where it eats from the inside out and blocks the passage of breath, and it is “on the loose” from the aged female body.<sup>65</sup> This should not suggest that only envious females posed dangers to others and that envious males did not, but the use of an old woman’s body to represent the transitive dangers of envy does underscore the dubious strength of the aged female body’s borders (witnessed further in literature by its inability to corral even speech: old women are endlessly talking or muttering).<sup>66</sup> This exuding quality reinforces the nature of the aged female physique as sponge-like, and complements the idea that the aged female body had the ability (and the need) to soak up the life-sustaining fluids of others.

### III. PERFORATED SPECIALISTS AND LITERARY WITCHES

As discussed in section II above, health could be understood as an absence of illness-causing elements related to flow and stagnation in the body. In this ca-

<sup>62</sup>Note also Porphyrio *ap.* Hor. *Epod.* 8.18: “he has put *fascinum* for the male member, since its appearance is normally deployed next to enviable things” (*fascinum pro virile parte posuit, quoniam praefascinandis rebus haec membri difformitas apponi solet*).

<sup>63</sup>National Museum of Antiquities LKA 1176. See Mitchell 2013: 290; Dunbabin and Dickie (1983: 21–22), who provide photos and discussion of this and comparanda. Note that this and comparable figures tend to come from the Greek east; however, their appearance resonates with Roman literary descriptions including those discussed here; see Dunbabin and Dickie 1983: 27.

<sup>64</sup>An example is a figure in the Louvre (CA 768) showing a nude old woman’s torso and legs splayed to show her vulva; traces of gold leaf and red paint, an apotropaic colour, remain. Mitchell (2013: 282–283) provides a photograph and discussion. For other examples, see Grmek and Gourevitch 1998: 158–159. Pollard (2008: 143–145, 149–153) argues that representations of old women are representations of witches, and that they might have had an apotropaic function against women’s envy in particular.

<sup>65</sup>Contrast Dunbabin and Dickie (1983: 22), who understand the figure to protect against “the *phthonos* of either sex.”

<sup>66</sup>For example, Apul. *Met.* 9.22; Mart. 11.50, 49. For *Invidia* herself muttering, see Ov. *Met.* 2.788. On the stereotype of old women and talkativeness, see Rosivach 1994: 113; Parkin 2003: 63. Deities’ decision to channel themselves through the bodies of old women further underscores their permeable quality; consider, for example, Ov. *Met.* 3.273–278, 4.219; Verg. *Aen.* 7.415–418. Mullin (1996: 513) and Stratton (2014: 157) observe the threats posed to the community by the permeable female body; Levin-Richardson (2015: 230, 235–237) notes the threats posed by bodily effluence and corporeal laxity. Richlin (2014: 231–232) identifies the value placed on the “closed body” in religious ritual.

capacity, the “folk” ideas shared a good deal with medical philosophies; differences circled around cause and cure.<sup>67</sup> When impediments to health were the wasting or blocking effects of elements of the envy complex, there could be few healers better suited to the task of removal than desiccated, loose, female bodies which could, by homeopathic means, soak them up like a sponge or sift them out like a sieve. Some women appear to have capitalized on the homeopathic healing potential latent in their own bodies more than others, and to have claimed to be able to control the physical effects their physiology for the betterment—and perhaps sometimes to the detriment—of others. These women, it seems, participated in some sort of economy of exchange for these services, in which they expected to accrue goods, respect, or both: they were specialists. Latin terms to describe what English generally translates as “witch” are various and confusing (see above, 104); they range from *anus* to *saga* to *venefica* to *cantatrix* to *piatrix* to *simulatrix* to the more fanciful *strix* (“owl-witch”) and *lamia* (“child-devourer”).<sup>68</sup> However, sensitivity to the purported powers of envy to drain and to cause stagnation, and attention to the social construction of the aged female body as its physical representation, together lend coherence to these seemingly disjointed descriptions and suggest correspondences between the claims and activities of real specialists and the witches of Roman literature.

Initial consistencies are perceptible when specialists are approached with sensitivity to the practicalities of healing and the responses that female specialists received. To begin, healers must also have been diagnosticians: while others’ envy might always be one possible cause for ill health, it was still just one possible cause.<sup>69</sup> Diagnosis and divination, the determination of the reason why things are as they are in the present, are closely related concepts.<sup>70</sup> Among the many terms describing female diviners (for example, *haruspicae*, *hariolae*) we should also include *saga* (“wise woman”). In addition to the possibility that this term suggests knowledge of what to do next, Cicero suggests a divinatory quality latent in the term too. “To be wise is to perceive keenly,” he says (*sagire enim sentire acute est*, *Div.* 1.31.65), and so the claims of old women are to be conflated with the hyper-perception of dogs (*ex quo sagae anus, quia multa scire volunt, et sagaces dicti canes*, *Div.* 1.31.65). Festus agrees, commenting that the latter are *sagaces* because they can sense the location of wild animals’ dens:

<sup>67</sup> Cf., for example, “methodist” ideas of bodily constriction, laxity, and sympathy; Flemming 2000: 89, 228–246; Lloyd 1983: 177–183. Even cures as discussed below might share points of contact with medical philosophies; although Hanson (1998: 72) remarks of Hippocratic theory, “[t]he precept that opposites cure opposites (*alia aliis*) was a deliberate intellectual stance, at odds with the like-to-like principles of cure (*similia similibus*) that prevailed in the older systems of sympathetic magic and ritual,” Totelin (2009: 197–224) identifies a number of *similia similibus* elements in the gynaecological writings of the Hippocratic Corpus.

<sup>68</sup> For example, Lindsay 1913: 232–233, 426–427; Burriss 1936; Teitel Paule (2014) argues instead for inconsistencies of label and meaning.

<sup>69</sup> Accounts of the evil eye in recent times regularly include the need for diagnosis through divination; see Maloney 1976.

<sup>70</sup> See Parker 1985.

the implication is that both *sagae* and *canes* perceive where ravening, wasting presences lie.<sup>71</sup> The means of “perceiving keenly” in diagnostic divination are presumably unlimited, but some evidence suggests that metaphorically significant items might be wielded. So we hear from Philostratus of old women who travelled from farm to farm with sieves, claiming to diagnose the illnesses of animals and cure them.<sup>72</sup>

Next, consistency in the negative responses of our sources to female specialists implies some coherence among the specialists’ methods. Cicero, for example, speaks contemptuously of the “superstition of wise women” (*sagarum superstitio*, *Div.* 2.63.129), and it may be presumed that this scorn stems from elite males’ general dismissiveness of any claim to extraordinary knowledge or ability by those with low social value. But Columella’s instructions to the estate-manager (*vilicus*) to prohibit *sagae* from the farm suggest something further: not only will these women convince the foolish and dupe them out of money, he says, they will also “make them do disgraceful things” (*ad flagitia compellunt*, *Rust.* 1.8.5–6).<sup>73</sup> This warning must point to clients’ involvement in the specialists’ rituals, which appear to have employed repugnant substances. Although a late source, Athanasius provides some clues about what these might be. Invite an old woman to cure you and you will find yourself “yawning like a donkey carrying the filth of a four-footed animal around your neck”;<sup>74</sup> excrement too was associated with putrefaction.<sup>75</sup> Pliny the Elder’s (*HN* 28.70) shuddering reference to the *mensum piacula* (“purifications of menstrual blood”) perhaps provides further oblique clues for the kinds of things used as cures, particularly when taken with the evidence of Festus; the latter includes in his list of synonymous terms for female specialists (*sacerdos*, *simulatrix*, *saga*, and *expiatrix*) the notice that *purgamenta* (“filth”) was synonymous with *piamenta*, the things used in purifications of polluted bodies.<sup>76</sup> Considering the horror with which Roman authors elsewhere view the ingestion of, or besmearing with, menstrual blood—recall that it “pollutes” one—we might suspect that “wise women” advised such practices as a form of homeopathy.<sup>77</sup> It seems that the presence of female specialists

<sup>71</sup>For Festus, see Lindsay 1913: 302: *praesagire est acute sentire; unde et sagae anus dictae, quae multa sciunt, et sagaces canes, qui ferarum cubilia praesentiunt.*

<sup>72</sup>*Apoll.* 6.11.17: γράες ἀνημμένοι κόσκινα φοιτῶσιν ἐπὶ ποιμένας, ὅτε δὲ καὶ βουκόλους, ἰώμενοι τὰ νοσοῦντα τῶν θρεμμάτων μαντικῇ . . . . For animals ill from the evil eye, see Verg. *Ecl.* 3.102–103. Compare also Panthia’s use of a sponge to mediate Socrates’ continued existence after she has drained his blood in Apul. *Met.* 1.13, 19.

<sup>73</sup>Cf. Cato *Agr.* 5.4. Seneca (fr. 52 Haase) advised husbands to keep their wives from *anus et aruspices et hariolos*; see Rosivach 1994: 112–113.

<sup>74</sup>*Fr. de Amul.* = PG 26.1320: καὶ σὺ ὡς ὄνος χασμώμενος, φορῶν δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν αὐχένα τὴν ῥοπαρίαν τῶν τετραπόδων; see Dickie 2001: 284; Kalleres 2014: 223.

<sup>75</sup>Von Staden 1992.

<sup>76</sup>Lindsay 1913: 234. Cf. also Richlin 2014: 241–266 for the use of female body products in medical contexts.

<sup>77</sup>On drinking, see, for example, Sen. *Ben.* 4.31.3. On being besmeared, see Lennon 2014: 83 for discussion and references; he notes that the verb used to describe the polluting power of menses

could be concerning for reasons that stretch far beyond intellectual differences and considerations of status: objections could stem from visceral objection to rites which might purposefully employ dangerous, disgusting things to remove dangerous, disgusting presences, and consequently, from anxiety over whether the specialists might bring more harm than help.

Indeed, the mirroring logic that health-supporting and illness-causing elements could be transferred between bodies rendered the homeopathic specialist a morally ambiguous presence: in order to be able to “help,” she must also have the power to “harm.” Porphyryon, for example, comments that “wise women are charm-singers”—the very specialists an early source indicates were preferred over doctors by mothers of sick children<sup>78</sup>—“who have the ability to summon ills for men or to cast them out with their incantations” (*sagae sunt praecantatrices, quae vel arcessere carminibus mala hominibus possunt vel expellere*, In *Hor. Carm.* 1.27.21). A concrete logic underlay this assertion, one that was related to a phenomenon recorded by Pliny the Elder. He notes (*HN* 28.31–32) that the victims of snake- or dog-bite addle eggs and make cattle miscarry, since the venom received remains to such an extent that the poisoned become poisonous. Unsurprisingly, then, Ovid (*Met.* 2.768–770) makes venomous snakes the standard dinner fare for his personified *Invidia*. In the example of the spongy female specialist who mediated the health-effects of malevolent emotions, concern was surely that the body that could soak up the causes of ill-health could equally squeeze them out in different directions in return for payment or as retribution for perceived insult. Thus does Plautus (*MG* 692–694) refer to women’s anxiousness to offer various ritual specialists and diviners (*praecantrices, coniectrices, hariolae, haruspicae*) a gift of cash at the annual *Quinquatribus*, the March festival in honour of *Minerva Medica*, lest these women cast the evil eye upon them.<sup>79</sup> In short, the female specialist was not only the instantiation of envy by means of her gender and her age, but also because she was a walking repository of other people’s envy, and her absorbency and leakiness were controlled by rituals known to herself. We can therefore perceive coherence in the array of terms used to describe female specialists that suggest that she was variously old, wise, a diviner, a singer of charms, a purifier, or a malevolent poisoner.

Identifying the purview of female specialists as controlling the presence or absence of wasting heat and the flow or stagnation of physical bodies allows connections to be drawn between female specialists and literary witches too, although the latter are cast only in the negative light of the ambivalence surround-

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is *inquinare*. Lowe (2013: 348–349) contemplates the medicinal ingestion of menses in Roman antiquity. Cf. also Plin. *HN* 28.87.

<sup>78</sup> Nonius Marcellus includes the following reference: *Varro Cato vel de liberis educandis* (15): “ut faciunt pleraque, ut adhibeant praecantrices nec medico ostendant” (Lindsay 1903: §494, 22–24). Cf. Gourevitch 1984: 217–218 on women’s preference for female medical practitioners.

<sup>79</sup> *flagitiumst si nihil mittetur quae supercilio spicit*. Dunbabin and Dickie (1983: 17, n. 76) note the scrunched eyebrow as indicative of the envious person.



ing their professional counterparts. We can consider the stereotypical attributes of the fictional witch by taking Apuleius's Meroe as an example (*Met.* 1.7–8). The reader first discovers that she is an old (*anus*) and lusty woman who has a day job as an inn-keeper. The reader is next told that she is a *saga*. The implied meanings of all of these descriptions for the reader are only in doubt in terms of the degree of power they suggest to block or drain health,<sup>80</sup> and so they are supplemented with a list of her capabilities announced by *et*: she is a wise woman and can bring down the sky, raise the earth, freeze fountains, dissolve mountains, raise the dead, weaken the gods, dim the stars, and light up Tartarus.<sup>81</sup> Meroe has also managed to block a birth for eight years, to restrict a whole urban population's movement by locking everyone indoors, and to deprive one of her major detractors of water by moving his whole house to a dry mountaintop (*Met.* 1.9–10). Similarly, Dido's witch can purportedly stop rivers from flowing and turn the stars backward (*Verg. Aen.* 4.489–491). Ovid's Medea (*Met.* 7.199–209) is endowed with comparable talents in her ability to draw off the light of the moon and the sun and to make dawn pale. These fictionalized talents may be interpreted to suggest that witches had the power to reverse the course of nature. They are more specifically, however, the draining and blocking effects of envy and female physiology expanded to larger-than-life proportions, and the claims of fictional witches are exponential versions of the claims of female specialists to mediate flow and stagnation, health and sickness, life and death;<sup>82</sup> Dido's witch surely shared much with real specialists in her proclaimed talents for "dissolving" intentions (*soluere mentes*, *Verg. Aen.* 4.487) and imposing "hard" or "stubborn" worries (*duras . . . curas*, 4.488).

#### IV. MAGNETIC HOMEOPATHY

Just as coagulating menstrual blood might wither young crops, old women might "sap" their previously healthy lovers; yet menstrual blood might also draw wasting presences away from blighted crops. How did female specialists draw the problem out of the bodies of those ailing from wasting presences? Controlled mediation appears to have depended upon the ritual establishment of magnetic homeopathic bonds between specialist and patient, and the identification of literary representations of old women and witches as hyperbolic descriptions of the claims made by real specialists allows for the possibility that literature might lend some insight into the kinds of rituals the latter used. These appear to have included actions, smells, and sounds.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Hor. *Epod.* 5.71–72 for the graded ability of witches.

<sup>81</sup> "*saga*" inquit "et divini potens caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fontes durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infimare, sidera extinguere, Tartarum ipsum illuminare . . ." Cf. 1.2, where a similar list is invoked in a different context, which nonetheless indicates the triteness of the hyperbole. See also 2.5 for similar description of Pamphile's abilities.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Kalleres 2014: 220, 223–224, where old female healers are the source of (amplified) literary descriptions of witches.

A passage in Plautus' *Curculio* (110–162) which presents an extended mockery of a healing ritual provides an instructive example with which to consider actions. It features as the “specialist” a door-keeper who is supposed to open up the doors of a brothel to disgorge the prostitute who is said to have been draining her lover's blood (*quae mihi misero amanti ebibit sanguinem*, 152). The specialist is a coughing, dried up, and sleepy old woman (*screans, sicca, semisomna*, 115) with a heightened, canine-like sense of smell: she has a “wise nose” (*canem esse hanc quidem magis par fuit: sagax nasum habet*, 110) that is particularly good at sniffing out wine to swill. She is nonetheless potentially dangerous: “do not insult her!” (*noli huic male dici*, 124) one character anxiously warns the other amidst a litany of descriptions of her repulsive appearance and greed for drink. In due course (161–162), after drinking a good deal of wine, the old woman, trembling, “medicates” the hinges of the door of a brothel with water to make it open up and expel the bloodsucker.<sup>83</sup>

The hilarity of the brothel as an ailing body is surely heightened by the various details about the actions of the old woman who mediates the exit of the blood-sucking prostitute; these must have been familiar to the audience from the context of illness. The sleepiness of the old woman, for example, is significant. Heliodorus (*Aeth.* 3.11.1) suggests that old women yawned as a means of curing illness caused by the evil eye, an action that mimicked a symptom of weakening strength.<sup>84</sup> The old woman's trembling ought also to catch our attention. A sign of age<sup>85</sup> (and so, of crumbling putrefaction), shaking was a threat to physical integrity: one can note in one of Apuleius' bawdy tales that a storage vessel, described as “really old and with gaping cracks from being shaken” (*dolium nimis vestutum est et multifariam rimis hiantibus quassum*, *Met.* 9.7), appears to function as a metaphor for the insides of the woman who owns it—an adulteress whose insides would have been “shaken” a lot.<sup>86</sup> Shaking or trembling therefore appears to have been an intentional comportment in rituals of purification, that is, removal of threats to physical integrity. Compare the old woman whom Ovid (*Ars* 3.329–330) imagines purifying a sick lover's bedroom with sulphur, eggs, and a trembling hand,<sup>87</sup> and the hens who, according to Pliny, have “religion” (*villaribus gallinis et religio inest*): they purify (*lustrant*) their freshly-laid eggs by trembling and shaking (*inhorrescunt edito ovo excutiuntque sese*, *HN* 10.116). Further support is perhaps lent by the notice that laughter, which causes one to shake, served a recognized apotropaic function; the first forty days of a newborn

<sup>83</sup> *Viden ut anus tremula medicinam facit? / eapse merum condidicit bibere, foribus dat aquam quam / bibant.* Note that the door's health is mockingly inquired after at lines 17–18: *caruitne febris te heri vel nudustertius/et heri cenavistine?*

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Athanasias *Fr. de Amul.*=PG 26.1320, note 74. See Dickie 2001: 246–247; Pollard 2008: 143–145; Kalleres 2014: 223.

<sup>85</sup> Parkin 2003: 82.

<sup>86</sup> On the image of the upturned jug as visual metaphor for the womb, see Pollard 2008: 146, with references.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Enn. Ann.* 32.

baby's life was carefully marked as the period when it was as yet unable to smile, a condition that was explicitly connected with their defenceless vulnerability by both Pliny the Elder and Censorinus.<sup>88</sup>

The old woman's drunkenness deserves special discussion lest it be dismissed as merely stereotypical disparagement: it is true that old age and alcoholism were connected in popular thought, and the foolishness of old women who claimed ritual power is often compounded by drunkenness in the writings of disdainful men. Greed for wine on the part of the old "bawd" witch of Roman literature is often implicit in their names, for example, Ovid's Dipsas ("Thirsty"), who has never seen dawn sober, or Petronius' Oenothea ("Wine-Divine").<sup>89</sup> The drunk old woman was even a focus of artistic representation, and Elizabeth Pollard has argued that the strong association between alcoholism and magical claims might have led viewers to see not an old woman but a witch in such statues.<sup>90</sup> As Roman legend fixed the "good" woman of old as strictly abstinent, the charge of drunkenness in invective against contemporary women is unsurprising, and its stereotypical quality has led Vincent Rosivach to doubt its connection to reality at all.<sup>91</sup> Yet it is difficult to understand drunkenness as disparagement in the example of "Petreia" ("Stony"), the mime of a drunk old woman who regularly featured in processions in the *coloniae* and *municipia*. According to Festus, she was so named after the "blight of the field, the stones" (*ab agri vitio, scilicet petris appellata*).<sup>92</sup> This would suggest that drunkenness here has more to do with drawing off the annual crop of hard, stagnant stones from the fields that would otherwise compromise new crop growth than with invective against old women.<sup>93</sup> By the same token, wine sometimes explicitly figured as part of ritual paraphernalia. Lucian's Syrian specialist (*Dial. meret.* 4.4), for example, requires sulphur, a torch, salt, seven obols, and a bowl of mixed wine that she will drink alone in order to bring a lover back to the bosom of her client—but the wine is not her fee; this is a drachma and a loaf of bread.<sup>94</sup>

Liquids including wine appear as a common element of rituals to control flow and stagnation, opening and closing, access and restriction in both the body and other physical spaces. In Ovid's *Fasti* (6.133–168), for example, water is used

<sup>88</sup> On laughter, note Lucr. *DRN* 1.919–920, 2.976–977; on infants, see Plin. *HN* 7 *praef.* 3; Censorinus *DN* 11.7: *parvuli ferme per hos morbidis sine risu nec sine periculo sunt* ("Little children are very sickly during these days, when they are without laughter and not without danger"). Cf. Stratton 2014: 158–159 on laughter as defensive in the face of threats to corporeal integrity.

<sup>89</sup> Ov. *Am.* 1.8.4; Petron. *Sat.* 134–138; Rosivach 1994: 113–114; Parkin 2003: 86–87, with additional references; Kalleres 2014: 227; Teitel Paule 2014: 748.

<sup>90</sup> Pollard 2008: especially 146–147.

<sup>91</sup> Rosivach 1994: 114: "the Romans' stereotypical view of the *anus* was not based on observation of Roman women, but was rather something which our Roman authors had absorbed . . . from their reading of Greek literature." Flemming (2007: 92–97) provides discussion of the Roman women's legendary relationship with wine and its presence in ritual.

<sup>92</sup> Lindsay 1913: 281.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Columella *Rust.* 2.2.12, 2.10.26, 2.17.2.

<sup>94</sup> See also Dickie 2001: 284.

to seal an opening, as Cranaë sprinkles it on the threshold of the door to keep health-sucking witches away from a baby. But to open the body to allow for the transference of illness-causing elements, wine was surely more suitable. It presumably offered homeopathic potential in its visual likeness to blood and the literally “exhausting” (*exhauriens*) action by which it was consumed. Even greater suitability, however, was doubtlessly found in its notorious ability to “loosen,” to make the body permeable, a ready sponge. Petronius, for example, describes Oenothera and her sidekick Proselenus as “little old women dissolved by wine and lust” (*aniculae . . . solutae mero ac libidine*, *Sat.* 138). Homeopathic potential was also offered in that, by loosening bodily integrity, drunkenness converged to the same point as being poisoned, as seen in Servius’ tale of unhappy Icarus, who was killed on suspicion of poisoning after introducing shepherds to the delights of wine.<sup>95</sup>

Caution should therefore be exercised when interpreting descriptions of drunken old women which subordinate the ritual quality of wine to jokes about alcoholism—Plautus’ joke about the old woman “medicating” the door hinges with water in order to keep all the wine for herself, for example, appears to depend upon the expectation that ritual wine would normally be shared between healer and patient. Similarly, when Martial (7.54) reports that a *saga* had drained his whole reserve of wine while purifying his friend’s troubled sleep,<sup>96</sup> we should understand this *saga* not as “a drunken purifier,”<sup>97</sup> but as “a purifier because she is drunk,” although the joke depends upon the suggestion that she had more to drink than was strictly necessary. It is, however, reasonable to suppose that a quantity of wine ritually manipulated must be consumed in its entirety, and that the leader of the ritual would, and indeed should, drink the lion’s share.<sup>98</sup>

To turn now to smells, like attracted like in the world of odour no less than in the world of actions, and the homeopathic manipulation of smells surely also had a place in real female specialists’ healing rituals. Envy had a smell—Psyche’s sisters, for example, smelled of envy<sup>99</sup>—and not only was it a bad smell, it was a smell with agency. For Ovid (*Met.* 2.798), *Invidia* infects others by forcing her breath into people’s noses, while Horace claims that the aging Canidia’s *odores* have left even his hair pale and him gasping for breath (*tuis capillus albus est*

<sup>95</sup> Serv. *ap.* Verg. *G.* 2.385–89: *cum . . . praeciperet ignorantibus adhuc usus huius, ut parce biberent, illi sapore delectati contumaces fuerunt praecepto. Itaque cum corpus eorum solveretur ebrietate et somno, arbitrati se venenum accepisse, interfecerunt Icarum* (“Although he advised those who were up until then unfamiliar with the habit to drink it sparingly, they, delighted by its flavour, disdained his advice. Therefore, when their bodies became loosened with drunkenness and sleep, thinking that they had taken poison, they killed Icarus”).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. 11.50, 49 and Plut. *Mor.* 165f–166a.

<sup>97</sup> For example, Teitel Paule 2014: 748.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Ov. *Fast.* 2.671–682. One might compare the use of sacramental wine in Christian service, whose remainders are drunk by the officiating priest or pastor.

<sup>99</sup> Apul. *Met.* 5.9: *gliscentis invidiae felle fraglantes* (manuscript F).

*odoribus . . . neque est / levare tenta spiritu praecordia, Epod. 17.23–27).*<sup>100</sup> Not coincidentally considering their purported abilities to lay waste, menstrual blood and female genitalia were considered especially foul smelling.<sup>101</sup> Following the logic of homeopathy, bad smells therefore presented a good deal of healing potential for those suffering from withering and stiffening illness. One of Psyche's sisters, for example, complains that she must serve as a *medica*, applying stinking compresses to her husband's stiff and swollen joints (Apul. *Met.* 5.10). The magnetic qualities of terrible smells surely explains the prominent place given to sulphur, a notoriously stinky substance burned by fullers to whiten cloth and by old women to purify the ill, that is, by those seeking to remove detrimental presences.<sup>102</sup> From one of the bawdier tales told by Apuleius (*Met.* 9.24) in which a fuller's adulterous wife sought to hide her lover beneath a whitening frame, we learn that burnt sulphur caused sneezing and suffocation, pointing to further homeopathic potential: suffocation, it will be recalled, was one of the symptoms suffered by victims of envy. It is fitting, therefore, that apotropaic figurines might be filled with sulphur.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to smells, sound surely figured in the management of envy, and it is here that we might be able to observe some of the strongest connections between real specialists and literary witches, particularly in the capacity of the latter to shape-shift into animals.<sup>104</sup> This is particularly interesting, since it is these same abilities that have been invoked to demonstrate literary witches' complete lack of connection with real counterparts.<sup>105</sup> Although Horace immortalized the apotropaic function of the sound (or smell?) of the violent fart,<sup>106</sup> if we seek a homeopathic function of sound, we must ask what noises envy made. The sounds of envy, of poisoning, of wasting appear to have been the sounds made by animals who were venomous, rapacious, blood-thirsty, and thieving: the hiss of snakes, the barking of dogs, the screech of owls, the howling of wolves—the noises of the very animals whose images or body parts figured large

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Plin. *HN* 32.67, where a concoction of blood-sucking leeches can return blackness to whitened hair, a detail that provides further demonstration of the need for blood to maintain youthful appearances.

<sup>101</sup> Richlin 2014: 175; Totelin 2014: 22–23.

<sup>102</sup> For example, Ov. *Ars am.* 2.329–339; Tib. 1.5.11–12: *ipseque te circum lustravi sulphure puro, / carmine cum magico praecinuisset anus* (“I myself have have purified you with pure sulphur, once the old woman had chanted her magical incantation”); cf. Cynthia's use of the substance to purify Propertius of the stains of other lovers in 4.8.83–86. Von Staden (1992: 17) discusses sulphur as a vaginal fumigant and suppository in the Hippocratic Corpus.

<sup>103</sup> Dunbabin and Dickie (1983: 23 and n. 118) describe and discuss one such figure now in the British Museum; see Marshall 1911: 360, no. 3011 and pl. LXIX.

<sup>104</sup> See Stratton 2014: 161 most recently on the literary elision of witches and animals.

<sup>105</sup> For example, Gordon 2009.

<sup>106</sup> Hor. *Sat.* 1.8. Cf. Plaut. *Curc.* 314–315, where the joke about “breaking wind” (*ventum*) perhaps has an apotropaic resonance in light of the previous description of Curculio as pale and hungry. See Johnston 1999: 178 for farting as characteristic of child-killing demons of Greek thought.

in amulets to ward off envy.<sup>107</sup> Beyond the notice that *simulatrix* (“imitator”) was another name for *saga*, *piatrix*, and *praecantrix*, evidence for real specialists imitating the sounds of these animals is indirect but suggestive.<sup>108</sup> It seems significant, for example, that Lucan’s witch Erictho sounds like these animals (*Pbars.* 6.688–690),<sup>109</sup> and that *stridor* and its cognates are words that are used to describe the sound of snakes, owls, the Furies (of which Envy was one), and old women.<sup>110</sup> According to Ovid (*Fast.* 6.139–140), the word *strix*, the owl-witch who eats babies from the inside out, comes from the fact that they are shrill (*stridere . . . solent*), and he opines that *striges* are old women who have been made birds by means of their incantations (*carmina*, 6.141); they then suck the innards out of infants with their greedy tongues (*pectoraque exsorbent avidis infantia linguis*, 6.145), a detail that resonates with literary descriptions of envy as a disemboweling bird-of-prey.<sup>111</sup> It is tempting to think that folklore here has made literal the animal-mimicking of specialists, who, incidentally, were also said to lick babies.<sup>112</sup> Something similar, it seems, is going on in other Roman literary fantasies that describe witches shape-shifting into metaphorically appropriate animals.<sup>113</sup>

#### V. CONCLUSION

When approached within the fluidly contiguous contexts of envy and its associations, health concerns, and ideas about gender and aging, it is possible to perceive coherence among the practitioners of “female” medicine in Roman society and to gain a sense of the logic that lay beneath their methods. Ideas about emotions’ ability to waste the health of others complemented social projections of the aging female form as corrosive. While the latter has generally been studied as a basis upon which to denigrate women, it appears that women

<sup>107</sup>For example, wolves’ teeth (Damigeron-Evax no. 18; Plin. *HN* 28.257); salted eye of wolf and claw of owl (Plin. *HN* 28.228); see Dunbabin and Dickie 1983 for discussion of snakes and other animals in apotropaic iconography.

<sup>108</sup>Lindsay 1913: 232–233, 302–303, 426–427; Porph. *In Hor. Carm.* 1.27.21. Teitel Paule (2014: 748) notes that *simulatrix* in literature appears to have suggested the ability to turn others into animals, based on the use of the term by Statius (*Theb.* 4.551) to describe Circe.

<sup>109</sup>*Latratu habet illa canum gemitusque luporum, / quod trepidus bubo, quod strix nocturna queruntur, / quod strident ululantque ferae, quod sibilat anguis* (“[Her voice] had the barking of dogs and the baying of wolves, the laments of the anxious owl and the screech owl, the shrieks and howls of wild animals, the hiss of a snake”).

<sup>110</sup>For snakes, see, for example, Tib. 1.3.72; for owls, see Ov. *Fast.* 6.140–5; on the Furies, note Verg. *Aen.* 12.869; for Megaera as one of the Dirae, see *Aen.* 12.846–847; for old women, see Apul. *Met.* 4.7. Cf. also Petron. *Sat.* 63.4 and Isaiah 8:19.

<sup>111</sup>Dunbabin and Dickie (1983: 14) provide references and discussion.

<sup>112</sup>See Bradley 2005: 88–89 for references. Folklore encouraged the idea that behaviour appropriate to a particular animal could cause one to change into that animal; see, for example, Plin. *HN* 8.82 for a tale in which tasting a boy’s entrails (*pueri exta*) changes a person into a wolf. Note also Pl. *Phd.* 81c–d.

<sup>113</sup>For example, Prop. 4.5.13–14; Ov. *Am.* 1.8.13–14.

themselves, as specialists, might use these associations to their advantage, to mediate the removal of wasting forces that threatened health, and so to perform services recognized as valuable. In so doing, they invested the despised aged female physique with a paradoxical degree of social and economic worth. These observations are invisible if the same individuals are approached with a desire to place them in neat categories based on their “job description” alone. Caution must be exercised lest we dismiss as irrational systems that depend not on the approach which feels the most intellectually familiar to us—that is, the impulse to categorize—but instead upon the logic of associating emotions, experiences, and actions. Minimizing such thought processes risks blinding us to perceived imperatives that provided a meaningful framework for the interpretation of sickness and health, informed interpersonal projections and behaviours, and offered some means of social insurance for old women, who were surely among Roman society’s most vulnerable members.<sup>114</sup> Western intellectualism’s admiration for ancient philosophies whose explanations ran counter to this system should not lead us to underestimate its influence on ancient life. Indeed, in the context of envy, its perceived effects, its agents, and its management, we are well advised to consider the conclusions drawn by Howard Stein in his study of the evil eye in a Slovak-American community in the 1970s: “Many laughingly dismiss it [the evil eye] as superstition, ideologically disowning it, though living as though it were devastatingly true.”<sup>115</sup>

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS  
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG  
515 PORTAGE AVENUE  
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA  
R3B 2E9

p.ripat@uwinnipeg.ca

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<sup>114</sup> Parkin 2011: 287–288; Evans-Grubbs 2011: 383, with references.

<sup>115</sup> Stein 1976: 201.

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