



Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources
(Themes)
Superstition and Magic



Martial
Cures for bad dreams

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate.

The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

The Teacher's Notes contain the following:

- An **Introduction** to the author and the text, although students will only be asked questions on the content of the source itself.
- **Notes** on the text to assist the teacher.
- **Suggested Questions for Comprehension, Content and Style** to be used with students.
- **Discussion** suggestions and questions for students, and overarching **Themes** which appear across more than one source.
- **Further Information and Reading** for teachers who wish to explore the topic and texts further.

PUBLISHED BY THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL CLASSICS PROJECT

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge,

184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ, UK

<http://www.CambridgeSCP.com>

© University of Cambridge School Classics Project, 2019

Copyright

In the case of this publication, the CSCP is waiving normal copyright provisions in that copies of this material may be made free of charge and without specific permission so long as they are for educational or personal use within the school or institution which downloads the publication. All other forms of copying (for example, for inclusion in another publication) are subject to specific permission from the Project.

First published 2019

version date: 20/12/2019

This document refers to the official examination images and texts for the Eduqas Latin GCSE (2021 - 2023). It should be used in conjunction with the information, images and texts provided by Eduqas on their website: [Eduqas Latin GCSE \(2021-2023\)](#)

Information about several of the pictures in this booklet, together with useful additional material for the Theme, may be found in the support available online for **Cambridge Latin Course, Book I, Stage 7** and **Book III, Stages 22-23**.

MARTIAL Cures for bad dreams (Epigrams 7.54)

A series of bad dreams is plaguing Martial's life

Marcus Valerius Martialis (c.AD 40 – c.AD 103) was born in Spain and moved to Rome in his mid-twenties. He wrote twelve books of epigrams (short poems) on a variety of themes, often writing with biting humour and critical observations.

This particular poem was published around AD 92. In this work, Martial addresses his friend, Nasidianus, who has been having portentous dreams about the poet (although Martial does not go into the content of these dreams). Martial satirises common Roman superstitions by claiming to be ruining himself financially in his futile and expensive attempts to dispel the bad luck. In the end he concludes that there is nothing for it but for Nasidianus to either avoid sleeping or to keep his dreams to himself.

The entire poem is only 8 lines, and is organised into three distinct sections: lines 1-2 are an introduction to the scenario; lines 3-7 detail Martial's reaction; line 8 is a punchy, witty, apotropaic (warding off evil) conclusion.

This text is unadapted.

Notes

metre: elegiac couplet

- 1 The translation here is **semper** (always) **mane** (in the morning) **narras mihi** (you tell to me) **mera somnia** (entire dreams) **de me** (about myself).

semper is emphatically placed at the beginning of the line and poem to stress Nasidianus' persistence in reporting these dreams to Martial

mane mihi de me mera somnia: the repetition of the alliterated 'm' recalls the repetitive daily dream reports which Martial is receiving. These reports are also coming to him 'in the morning': Nasidianus cannot wait to pass on the bad news which is also all about 'me', as emphasised by the juxtaposition (placing beside) of **mihi de me**.

mera: meaning 'undiluted' or 'unadulterated', often used to describe wine. The common Roman practice was to dilute their strong wine with water. This is a rare usage here specifically with **somnia**, but there are other instances of it meaning 'complete' or 'entire'.

narras: at this point students will become aware that this poem is addressed to a specific person ('you describe').

- 2 **moveant animum...meum**: the phrase 'move the soul' is fairly common in Latin and means 'creates fear'. The verbs **moveant** and **sollicitent** are both in the subjunctive here because the clause is describing general characteristics of all the dreams, rather than talking about a single specific dream. This makes it apparent that *all* Nasidianus' dreams induce panic in our poet. The splitting of

meum from **animum** and moving it to the end of the line help to emphasise it and in turn to emphasise the fear which Martial is moved to.

3 iam prior...sed et haec vindemia: both **prior** and **haec** describe **vindemia**.

The **faex** were dregs of the wine, the liquid at the very bottom of the amphora and the stalks and grape-skins which may have been left in. Martial has used up all his wine and this is all that is left.

vindemia venit: emphatic alliteration. There is *nothing* left of his wine at all.

4 The translation here is **dum** (while) **saga** (the soothsayer) **exorat** (tries to soothe) **tuas noctes** (your nights) **mihi** (for me).

exorat: this verb is common in entreaties and prayers.

noctes...tuas: the delay of **tuas** ('your') until the end of the line emphasises how Martial is the one enduring all this trouble due to the dreams of his friend – they are not even *his own* dreams.

saga: as usual, magic is the domain of women. Expiatory (making amends for something) sacrifices were either carried out by the person having the dreams or by a practitioner of magic on their behalf. The **saga** was a wise-woman who often appears in literature, and Martial in particular (see also Martial 11.50), as a figure who can purify bad omens, especially dreams. Like other women engaged in magical arts, they are frequently characterised as drunken (c.f. Ovid's description of Dipsas). This particular wise-woman has consumed all of Martial's wine whilst cleansing him of the pollution of Nasidianus' dreams!

5 salsas molas: ('salted grain') these were ritual flour cakes used in sacrifices.

que...et: an archaic form of **et...et** which creates an elevated tone here, sounding sombre and serious.

turis: this is incense from resin of the *Boswellia sacra* bush, commonly known as frankincense. This was grown in the south of Arabia and the east of Africa and imported to Rome through Syria. It was costly and the **acervos** ('heaps') of this adds to the impression of Martial's impoverishment.

6 frequens: ('constantly') the emphatic position at the end of the line and the hyperbole (obvious exaggeration) add to the humorous effect in this line.

7 non...non...non: the anaphora (repetition of word at beginning of successive clauses or phrases) in this asyndetic (lacking conjunctions) list is a rousing and emphatic conclusion to the description of Martial's repetitive attempts. There is absolutely nothing left at all.

8 aut...aut: the pair of adversative conjunctions serve to reduce Nasidianus' options down to two. This creates a conclusion to Martial's anguish, and also attacks Nasidianus for being the source of his problems.

vigila...dormi...tibi: the imperatives (direct commands) continue this attack. Martial has done all he can, now it's up to Nasidianus. The first option, 'stay awake', is obviously ludicrous and therefore the second is the only real option for him, 'keep your sleeping to yourself', or rather 'don't tell Martial what you've been

dreaming about'. The dative **tibi** is used here to express that he should 'sleep for himself'. Delaying the **tibi** until the end of the line emphasises it, as the only real solution, and has a real 'mind your own business' tone to it. Martial has therefore solved his problem in a typically witty manner!

Nasidiane: the spelling of this name varies in the surviving manuscripts and it is often seen as Nasidienus. However this man's name is spelled, his identity is otherwise unknown. The name does not appear elsewhere in Martial's poems.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each line, asking leading questions so that the class comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

lines 1-2:

- What is his friend describing to him? How often does he do this? When does he do this? What are these dreams about?
- What do these dreams do?

lines 3-7:

- What is **vindemia**? There are two types mentioned in this line, **prior** and **haec**. When are these vintages from? All this wine has come **ad faecem**. What does this mean?
- What is a **saga**? What is she trying to do?
- What things has Martial used up?
- What has decreased? What has been happening to his lambs? How many lambs has this happened to?
- What animals are mentioned in this line? What has happened to them all?

line 8:

- Who is Martial talking to? What two commands does he give to him?
-

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-2) How does Martial, through his style of writing, emphasise how common Nasidianus' reports of dreams are?
2. (lines 3-7) Explain how Martial has been trying to ward off the evil from these bad dreams.
3. (lines 3-4) Explain why all of Martial's wine has been used up.
4. (lines 5-7) How does Martial, through his choice and arrangement of words, emphasise how much of his resources he has used up?
5. (line 8) How can we tell from the style of this line that Martial is fed up with hearing about Nasidianus' dreams?

Discussion

Themes: dreams, witches, warding off evil

Martial is approaching dream interpretation with his usual comic twist: he is taking things to the extreme. It must, however, be based on reality otherwise it would not be effective satire. Everything he does is an actual Roman response designed to ward off evil omens: it is just that Martial is ruining himself in the process.

Throughout history there have been lots of things which people have done to dispel evil or protect themselves from magical harm – such as walling up cats in doorframes and fireplaces to prevent witches getting in. Students may be able to suggest other examples. Martial's poem could then be used to create a 'guide' for Romans on how to do this.

General questions on the passage and theme

1. What can we learn from this poem about the seriousness of dream interpretation in Roman society?
2. What can we learn about the Roman methods of warding off evil?
3. How does the **saga** described here compare with the **sacerdos** in Virgil and the witch in Ovid?
4. Do you think that Martial himself is taking these superstitions seriously? How can you tell from the text?

Further Information and Reading

Dreams offered the opportunity for everyone to have direct contact with the divine or supernatural. Even Cicero, who scoffed at the art of the *haruspex*, took dreams seriously. There were specialists who could tell you the meaning of your dreams and also handbooks which could be consulted.

Artemidorus of Daldi produced a famous manual to dream-interpretation, the *Oneirocritica*, in the 2nd century AD. It contains descriptions of dreams which he collected from those who consulted him, his interpretations, and, in some cases, an account of what happened next in the patient's life based around their response to his interpretation. This was far from the only volume available to ancient Romans, although it does seem to have been particularly thorough.

Meaningful dreams could be induced in certain circumstances in order to achieve a specific goal. The Sanctuary of Asclepius (a god of medicine) at Epidaurus in Greece is one place where this happened and there was a dedicated area for sleeping within the temple precinct, the invalid covering himself with the skin of his sacrificial victim in order to prompt a divine cure for whatever ailed him.

Guillermo Galan Vioque (trans. J.J. Zoltowsky) *Martial Book VII A Commentary* (Brill 2017)