



Eduqas GCSE Latin

Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources

(Themes) Superstition and Magic



OVID

Dipsas the sorceress

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.

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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**.

OVID *Dipsas the sorceress* (*Amores* 1.8.1-18)

Ovid describes a 'witch' he has encountered.

Publius Ovidius Naso (43BC – AD17) was born in Sulmo, inland from Rome, to a wealthy equestrian family. He is famous for his love poems which he wrote whilst living in Rome. The *Amores* were begun around 26BC when he was 18 years old, and are composed around episodes from relationships. In 8BC, Ovid was banished from Rome by the emperor Augustus. Ovid writes that it was because of *carmen et error* ('a poem and a mistake'). The poem was the *Ars Amatoria* (the Art of Love), but scholars still debate what the mistake may have been. Ovid spent the rest of his days in exile at Tomis on the Black Sea (modern Romania). He never returned to Rome.

This poem (*Amores* 1.8) is the longest in the *Amores*. The section here is taken from the very beginning of the poem, introducing the context and the characters. Ovid, it transpires later, is lurking in his mistress' doorway. He is eavesdropping on Dipsas, who is explaining to his girlfriend why she should abandon Ovid (he's too poor).

This text is unadapted.

Notes

metre: elegiac couplets

1-2 est quaedam...est quaedam: the repetition creates an accusatory tone from the outset: he is pointing out to us the source of all his trouble.

In Latin love poetry the **lena** ('procuress' / 'brothel-keeper') represents one form of the opposition to the poet's love: he desires his girl, the procuress wants payment! This one also happens, according to Ovid, to be a witch.

2 audiat: jussive subjunctive "let him hear". This sets up a gossipy tone to the poem: Ovid will be writing as though he is recounting an incident to an avid audience.

Dipsas: her name is from Greek and translates as 'thirsty', implying that she is an alcoholic. Overindulgence, especially in alcohol, was seen as a very 'female' vice. Her age is pointed out (**anus**) specifically to create that contrast between the desirable *puella* and this aged *lena*. This ageism is frequent in depictions of witches: when they have lost their sexual power, they turn to magical power.

3 ex re nomen habet: her nature is that of an alcoholic and so she was named appropriately.

3-4 the translation here is **illa** (she) **non vidit** (has not seen) **parentem** (the parent) **nigri Memnonis** (of black Memnon) **in roseis equis** (on her rosy horses) **sobria** ([whilst] sober).

nigri... Memnonis: Memnon was a legendary Ethiopian king and the son of Eos, goddess of the Dawn (**parentem Memnonis**). The implication is that Dipsas has never been awake at daybreak apart from as the result of a heavy night of

drinking. Note the alliteration of 'n' in **nigri non** to emphasise the negative. She has *never* seen the dawn whilst sober.

4 **roseis...equis:** in epic, Eos is often referred to as 'rosy'. The 'horses' are a reference to the mythological chariot which drove the sun across the sky. Notice how the word **sobria** been delayed for impact.

5 **magas:** the usual word for 'magical' is *magicus*. This is a rarer form and therefore adds to the epic tone as well as adding mystery.

Aeaea was the legendary island home of Circe, the famous witch from Homer's *Odyssey* who transformed Odysseus' men into pigs. Circe's brother Aeetes (who ruled over Aea in Cochis) was also a witch, as was his daughter Medea. Aeaeian as an adjective can refer to all of them. The **carmina** here are therefore spells rather than songs or poems.

6 the hyperbaton (inverted or discontinuous word order) of **liquidas...aquas** with **arte** in-between mimics the disruption which her 'skill' has on the 'flowing rivers'.

7 **quid...quid...quid valeat:** "what power...has". The anaphora (repetition of word at beginning of successive clauses or phrases) of **quid** emphasises this tricolon (list of three) and helps to create an increasing impression of varied terrifying powers. Whilst each item in the list is connected with magic, they get progressively more unnatural as the list progresses.

gramen: herbs for use in spells. The collecting of these was carried out in a ritualistic manner (see the prescribed passage from Virgil).

rhombo: the *rhombus* was a magical tool used to tap into magical power and attract it to the user. Scholars differ on the exact definition in Latin texts: Romans may have used the word to refer to a wheel-like device with threads to cause it to spin like or to a tool similar to a 'bull-roarer' which was swung through the air in a circle to create a roaring sound.

8 **virus amantis equae:** the fluid from a mare in heat was used in love charms. It is not necessary to go into detail on this, beyond perhaps noting that this is a normal by-product from a mare and not something mystical invented by Ovid! The alliteration of **valeat virus** draws attention to these words.

9-10 **cum voluit:** **cum** here is being used as an indefinite relative ('whenever'), introducing a conditional relative clause. The condition is translated as if it were present tense: it is a generality. The repeated phrase stresses the power of the witch's will.

9 The witch is able to interfere in events which ought to be well beyond the remit of mortals. Her power is highlighted by the hyperbaton of **toto...caelo**, her actions split the sky apart with clouds in the text as well as in 'reality'.

10 **dies:** being used to mean 'sun' i.e. 'daylight'.

As before, the hyperbaton **puro...orbe** shows how the witch has the ability to pull apart the natural world – although here Ovid surprises us by ending the line emphatically with **dies**. He is making the point that even when the day appears to be normal, it is only because the witch is allowing it to be so.

- 11 **sanguine...sanguine (line 12):** the emphatic position of **sanguine** at the start of the line sets the tone for these lines, the repetition emphasising the horror. Ovid is, of course, describing a normal (albeit extraordinary) lunar phenomenon. A Blood Moon happens when the Earth's Moon undergoes a lunar eclipse. Depending on the amount of dust in the Earth's atmosphere, the Moon will appear different shades of red. The next Blood Moon visible from Europe is on the 16th May 2022. Throughout history the distinctive Blood Moon was seen by different civilisations across the world as ominous and magical.

si qua fides: supply **est** 'if [there is] any trustworthiness [in me]'.

sanguine...si...stillantia sidera: the malevolent hissing of this sibilant line adds to the tone of horror.

vidi: placed emphatically at the end of the line, the verb stresses Ovid's claims of truthfulness. In line with his deployment of elegiac tropes in the rest of the *Amores*, he of course intends his educated audience to view these protestations as entertaining: they all know this witch is not real but a stereotype.

- 12 **purpureus:** although the root of the English word 'purple', the colour should be imagined as more of a dark scarlet.

- 13 the translation here is **ego suspicor** (I think) **hanc** (she) **versam** (having changed shape) **volitare** (flies) **per nocturnas umbras** (through the nocturnal shades). This is an indirect statement (accusative and infinitive construction), which is also why we have **tegi** in the infinitive in line 12.

nocturnas...umbras: the Romans believed that magical events tended to take place at night: cf. the prescribed material on Martial, Petronius, Pliny and Suetonius.

versam volitare: **volitare** is the frequentative form of the verb (formed by the addition of -it- after the stem) and means 'to flit about repeatedly'. The vivid vocabulary choice helps the scene to come alive. The alliteration here perhaps also suggests the sound of a wing beating, as well as drawing attention to the key words in the line. Transformation was a typical part of an ancient witch's skill set.

- 14 **susplicor et...susplicor et (lines 15):** continuing the gossipy tone established at the outset.

- 15 **fama est:** by creating imagined support for his point of view, Ovid again protests that he is telling the truth.

oculis: locative usage 'in her eyes'.

pupula duplex: the 'double pupil' was an indication that a person could cast the 'evil eye' (a harmful curse caused by a malevolent glare). It is difficult to work out exactly what a 'double pupil' was, as it is not a real eye condition. It has been suggested that perhaps it refers to people who have different coloured irises in each eye, or have an eye condition which makes it look as though the iris is split. Whatever the truth, supernumerary features have a long history of being connected with evil.

16 fulminat: ‘flashes lightning’, dramatic vocabulary emphatically positioned at the start of the line to create excitement.

lumen: Roman writers talk of light being emitted from the eyes, rather than it being seen by them. Here Ovid takes this to the extreme and has the light emitting from the witch’s eyes in sinister beams (Roman laser-vision!).

17 evocat...proavos atavosque: necromancy (causing the dead to live by magical means) was another proverbial power of ancient witches. By choosing specific revered members of a family (‘great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers’) Ovid is again highlighting the witch’s power to disrupt Roman institutions and the familial customs of ensuring peaceful rest for the dead.

antiquis...sepulcris: the hyperbaton of these words mimics the witch splitting the tombs apart with her magic, with the **proavos atavosque** inside. This is mirrored in the hyperbaton in line 18 **solidam...humum**, the witch positioned with her spells in the middle (**longo carmine findit**) mimicking the meaning of the line.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each line or couplet, 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 the name of the person Ovid is talking about? How old is she?
- Who does he say should listen to him? What is a **lena**? Do you think that Ovid will be writing positively about Dipsas?

lines 3-4:

- What does she have from her nature? (*this link between her name and nature will need explaining*)
- Who has she never seen? Who is this person the parent of? What detail are we given about Memnon? What animal does this parent own? What unusual colour are these? (*this would be a good point to explain who Eos is*) She has actually seen the dawn, but she has never seen it **sobria**. What does this mean?

lines 5-6:

- What two things does Dipsas know, according to Ovid?
- What are **liquidus aquas**? What can Dipsas do to them?

lines 7-8:

- She also **scit bene** –what does this mean?
- She knows well what power **gramen** has –what is this?
- She also knows the power of **licia** - what are these? They are described as **concita** –what are they part of?
- She also knows the power of some fluid. Where has this fluid come from? (*This may require a brief explanation*)

lines 9-10:

- What can she gather and where? When can she do this?
- What can she cause to shine and where? When can she do this?

lines 11-12:

- What did Ovid claim to have seen? What were they dripping with?
- What else did he see? What colour was it? What caused it to be this colour?

lines 13-14:

- He suspects she does some other things. At what time of day? What has she done to herself? So that she can do what?
- What exactly has she done to her old woman's body?

lines 15-16:

- As well as Ovid's suspicion, what else does he say this is?
- What body part is he now focusing on? What is strange to see about it?
- What does he think comes out of them? Where exactly does the light come from?

lines 17-18:

- Who can she summon? Where can she summon them from?
- What can she split open? How is the ground described? How does she do this?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-2) How does Ovid draw the reader in through his style of writing?
2. (lines 2-3) Explain why Dipsas' name is appropriate for her.
3. (lines 3-4) What does Ovid mean that Dipsas has never done, and how does he emphasise this through his style of writing?
4. (line 5) What are *Aeaea carmina*?
5. (line 6) How does Ovid use the arrangement of his words to show the witch's ability to change the natural order of the world?
6. (lines 7-8) Explain how a witch would have used each of these items, according to the Romans.
7. (lines 9-10) How does Ovid, through his arrangement of the words in these lines, emphasise the witch's ability to change the natural order of the world?
8. (lines 11-12) How does Ovid make these lines particularly vivid?
9. (lines 13-14) How does Ovid, through the content and style of his writing, make these lines particularly grotesque?
10. (lines 15) Explain why pointing out '**suspikor, et fama est**' might help Ovid to convince the audience that he is being truthful.
11. (lines 15-16) Explain what Ovid is accusing Dipsas of here.
12. (lines 17-18) How does Ovid use word order to make the meaning vivid in these lines?

Discussion

Themes: witches, witchcraft, magical places, magical artefacts

This poem provides us with a vivid description of a witch-type figure. Ovid also lists some of the main proverbial powers of Roman witches: she can make rivers flow backwards; she can use herbs, magical devices, and charms; she can compel the clouds, the stars, and the moon; she can transform her shape; she can cast the evil eye; she has the power of necromancy. His list also makes it very clear that the witch is interested in reversing nature: she makes night into day; she makes rivers flow the wrong way; she make the dead alive once more.

In his description, Ovid makes use not only of stereotypical features of witches and witchcraft in the ancient world but also plays with misogynistic depictions of elderly women, especially those with power or influence who are not under the control of a male figure. These attitudes and imagery were at work in much later depictions of witches, and of course can be found in the literature surrounding witch hunts. This is an interesting area to explore and topics for discussion could include:

- the extent to which the description of a witch has stayed the same or changed throughout history
- the fact that most witches are women
- the type of language used to describe the elderly, especially elderly women, in a range of media

(02:55) Video clip on seventeenth century witch trials:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/clips/z9stfrd>

Your History Department may well be teaching this material at A-level and be able to assist with resources if you wish to take the discussion further.

General questions on the passage and theme

1. Describe Dipsas' physical appearance in as much detail as you can.
 2. What objects would she have owned, according to this passage?
 3. What powers did she allegedly possess?
 4. How much of her power involves interfering with and changing the natural order of things?
 5. To what extent does Dipsas come across as a terrifying figure?
 6. Do you think that this is supposed to be a serious description, or is it supposed to be comical?
 7. Consider the witch as she is depicted in the different sources. What seem to be the most common features of a Roman witch?
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Further Information and Reading

The *lena* was a figure in Roman Comedy as well as a figure in elegiac poetry and is a stereotypical depiction of a woman working outside the social norms of Roman society and challenging masculine desires. She overindulges (here it is alcohol - this was seen as typical feminine excess) and her appearance is not attractive to the male viewing her (she is old, she has a 'double pupil', she could conceivably become covered in feathers!). She interferes with and subverts the natural order of the world (here through spells which cause the world to function against normal rules, but often Roman men level this charge against women who transgress in less mystical ways - a useful source for this is Cato's speech on women Livy *History of Rome* 34.2-4).

The *lena* also represents what his *puella* will become in the future as she grows old: to Ovid the *puella*'s worth is in her beauty and youth, the *lena* has neither.

Guy Lee, *Ovid's Amores* (London: John Murray, 1968)

A.D. Melville, *Ovid: the Love Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

W Turpin, *Ovid Amores Book 1*

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