



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



PETRONIUS
A spooky story

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 follow:

- 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

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184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ, UK

<http://www.CambridgeSCP.com>

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First published 2019

version date: 20/12/2019

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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**.

PETRONIUS *A spooky story* (*Satyricon* 61-62)

An encounter with a werewolf

Gaius Petronius Arbiter (c. AD 27-66) was a courtier who lived during the reign of the emperor Nero and is widely agreed by scholars to have been the court 'judge of good taste' (akin to a modern stylist or fashion adviser). Although initially a favourite of the fickle emperor, his influence gained him many enemies at court, including the powerful Tigellinus, commander of the imperial Guard. These enemies convinced Nero that Petronius was involved in treasonous plotting, and he was immediately arrested. Petronius chose to take his own life, theatrically dining and socialising whilst he did so in order that he should end his life as he had lived it.

The *Satyricon* is, as the name implies, a satirical piece. It takes the form of a novel narrated by the main character Encolpius, a retired gladiator, who tells of a series of adventures and encounters (usually bizarre and often sexual). This section is from the famous *cena Trimalchionis* (Trimalchio's feast). During the dinner party, one of the guests (Niceros) is invited to tell his tale. It is set in Magna Graecia (the areas of southern Italy settled by Greeks), emphasising that this is a Roman parody of the Greek novel form and also playing on the stereotype of the gullible Greeks who will believe any old nonsense. Niceros describes what happened when he took a nocturnal journey to visit a girlfriend and his travelling companion suddenly transformed into a werewolf.

The text here is slightly abridged and adapted for content and language.

Notes

1 **servirem:** the speaker is now a freedman, but this tale took place whilst he was still a slave. There was a Roman stereotype that the lower classes were more prone to superstition.

Melissam: she is the wife of an inn-keeper. **Melissa** is the Greek for 'honey' and was also the name of several famously attractive figures from history and legend.

1-2 **uxor Terentii cauponis... contubernalis:** this is a little confusing. One reading is that Melissa is the **uxor** of Terentius - he is a freedman (running the inn on behalf of his former master). She also had a **contubernalis** - this is the word used for 'partner' when traditional marriage could not take place because both parties were slaves and therefore could not marry. This would suggest that Melissa has a husband who was a freedman **and** a partner who was a slave and ran his master's farm (**ad villam**), where he has now died, clearing the way for Niceros. An alternative reading is that Niceros is simply using the wrong vocabulary – Melissa only has one partner, Terentius, an innkeeper who just happened to be at the farm when he died.

- 2 **pulcherrimum bacciballum: bacciballum** is a compound of **bacca** ('berry') and **ballum** ('something round'). The context shows us that it is a term of affection, and the tone is suggestive. The speaker uses the superlative **pulcherrimum** to show just how appreciative he is of her beauty.
- 3 **per scutum per ocream egi:** an *asyndetic* (lack of conjunctions) proverb implying much the same as 'by hook or by crook'. It has been suggested that it originated with gladiators putting every effort into arming themselves for combat in the arena. Again this continues the colloquial tone of this account.
- 4 **aginavi** the *asyndeton* and half-rhyme of this verb and the preceding **egi** gives this whole clause the sound of an everyday phrase.
- 4-5 **in angustiis amici apparent:** the alliterative sound suggests this might be another proverb: 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'.
- 6 **dominus:** a reminder that the speaker is a slave. His master's convenient absence gives him the opportunity for his adventure.
His master has gone to **Capua**, a town to the north of Naples which was connected to Rome by the *Via Appia*. The town was associated with trading and business, particularly bronzes.
- 8 **quintum miliarium:** every Roman mile (roughly 1.5 km or 0.95 of a modern mile) was marked along the principal roads by a stone.
- 8-9 **fortis tamquam Orcus** foreshadows the immense magical strength of the werewolf. By using the word **Orcus** the scene is also set for the supernatural: **Orcus** was the personification of the punishment aspect of the Underworld.
- 9 **apoculamus** a compound of *apo* (Greek: 'away') and the obscenity *culus* (Latin 'arse'), suggesting a meaning of "arsed off" similar to the colloquial American 'hailed ass'.
gallicinia: 'cock-crow' was about two hours after midnight.
luna lucebat: the soft *l* alliteration draws attention to the night time setting and adds to the relaxed tone at the start of the journey.
- 9-10 **tamquam meridie:** the full moon has made the night into day (nature has been reversed) suggesting magical forces at work. The full moon was not explicitly linked to werewolves in Roman times, but the moon in general was linked to magic and supernatural happenings.
- 10 **inter monimenta:** they are just outside the city, the streets lined with tombs (see note on picture 1). This is a suitable place for a supernatural encounter.
homo meus: this creates a friendly tone.
- 10-11 **coepit ad stelas facere:** the phrase **ad...facere** is translated as 'go towards'. This is a shortened form of the late Latin phrase **se facere** meaning 'to take oneself to a place'.

- 11 **sedeo ego:** the singsong rhyme suggests what Niceros is doing and continues the light-hearted nature of the scene.
cantabundus stelas numero: the implication is that the soldier is taking his time and Niceros has to amuse himself. This jovial mood is suddenly changed with the verb **respexi**.
- 12 **ille exuit se:** the removal of clothing is seen in ancient werewolf tales as a step in shedding humanity. It is also used in this text as a halfway point in the transformation: our narrator knows that something unusual is happening but does not yet fully understand what.
- 13 **mihi anima in naso esse:** the Romans believed that on the point of death a person's soul left through either the nose or the mouth. The speaker's soul is on the point of departing! Students may need some help with the dative of possession here, especially as it is also found here with a historic infinitive **esse** – this is a colloquial usage of the infinitive found in narrative (it stands in for the imperfect tense) and again helps to add to the tone of a *fabula* being told.
- 14 **tamquam mortuus:** the sudden change from the previous light-heartedness to horror is emphasised with the simile.
circumminxit vestimenta sua: a humorous detail, linked to the Roman belief that werewolves needed access to their old clothes to turn back to their human form again. Here the man marks his territory (like a wolf!) with a protective circle before he turns into a werewolf.
- 15 **subito lupo factus est:** the brief statement, coupled with the use of **subito**, marks a dramatic moment in the text.
nolite me iocari putare: an acknowledgement of the fantastical nature of his story, and again a reminder that our narrator is addressing an audience at a dinner party.
ululare: a vividly onomatopoeic word ('to howl') which brings the scene to life.
- 16 **in silvas:** the woods are, like the necropolis, places where magical events take place. This is no doubt rooted in genuine fears of wild animals and ambushes, and can be observed in a wide range of folk tales from across the world.
- 17 **lapidea:** building on the concept that the clothes need to be protected, this is a detail unique to Petronius' werewolf account.
- 19 **gladium...strinxi:** iron was believed to dispel magic and to drive away magical beings – in contrast to bronze (mentioned in our Virgil text), which encouraged magic. Here, his attempts are presented as comically futile.
- 20-22 **ut larva...refectus sum:** a vivid description and suitable for the supernatural situation.
- 22-23 **Melissa mea mirari:** the soft alliteration mirrors the calming effect of Melissa's presence upon the speaker and also mimics her sense of wonder. At this point in the story Niceros gets a moment of calm: this allows for greater impact when it is shattered moments later when Melissa tells her tale.

- 25 tamquam lanius:** the simile is very effective: it is simple and clear yet manages to convey both the professionalism of the kill and its savagery (the **lanius** is no surgeon, the root of this word is in verbs meaning 'tear, shred' and it is cognate with **lacer** 'mangled').
- 28 luce clara:** we can see here the continuation of a common theme - supernatural threat is more likely at night and so our speaker will not venture out until day. It will become apparent that the werewolf has also changed back to human form now that it is daytime.
- 30 nihil inveni nisi sanguinem:** the placing of **nihil** at the beginning of the sentence shows us the speaker's wonder and relief as soon as he came upon the location of his previous adventure, whilst the delay of **sanguinem** demonstrates how he slowly realised what he was looking at as he surveyed the scene. Petronius is also using this word order, mimicking the order of the actual events being described, as it is common in spoken language.
- 31 tamquam bos:** another brief and effective simile. With one word the speaker conveys the strength and size of the soldier, whilst reminding us that he is also an animal - even when he outwardly appears human! The word order here is also reversed in a similar way to line 30, showing us the order in which the speaker took in the scene he saw.
- intellexi:** the emphatic word position at the start of the sentence shows the sudden, dramatic realisation of the complete truth. Students may question how it took so long for Niceros to reach this conclusion, but he has been characterised as slightly dim-witted throughout the text.
- 32 versipellem:** literally a 'skin-changer'. It is not always linked to werewolves: Apuleius (*Metamorphosis* 2.22) uses this term when describing how witches in Thessaly can change their appearance (in a similar way to Dipsas in the Ovid text).

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each sentence, clause or phrase, 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.

cum adhuc...bacciballum (lines 1-2):

- What was the status of the person speaking when this story took place? What did he begin to do? What two things do we learn about this Melissa?

huius...obiit (lines 2-3):

- What do you think 'met his last day' means? Where did this happen?

itaque...apparent (lines 3-5):

- What did the speaker try to do? There is an idiom here, what does **per scutum per ocream** mean? Do you think it means he tried very hard or not at all? Can you think of a way to translate this phrase to show the meaning?
- In what kind of circumstances does he say friends appear? Do you agree?

forte...veniat (lines 6-8):

- Who does he start talking about now and where has he gone? Why has he gone there?
- What does **occasionem nactus** mean? Where is the speaker planning on going? Who does he persuade? How far does he persuade him to go?

erat...Orcus (lines 8-9):

- What was this person's job? What quality do we learn about him?
- Why do you think the speaker wants a companion like him on the journey?

apoculamus...meridie (lines 9-10):

- What time did they leave?
- What was shining in the sky? How bright was it? How do you know?

venimus...numero (lines 10-11):

- Where did they arrive?
- Who is the person described as **meus homo**? Where did he go?
- What two things did the speaker do to entertain himself?

deinde...posuit (lines 11-13):

- What did our speaker happen to do next? What surprising thing did his companion do? Where did he place his clothes?

mihi...mortuus (lines 13-14):

- Where does he say his soul was? This is another idiom. Do you think it means he was very afraid or not afraid at all? Why?
- How does he say that he was standing?

at ille...factus est (lines 14-15):

- What strange thing did the soldier do next?
- What suddenly happened?

nolite...fugit (lines 15-16):

- What does he ask the listeners not to do? Why do you think he says this?
- What two things did the wolf do?

ego primo...facta sunt (lines 16-18):

- The speaker says he didn't know something: what was it? What do you think he means by this phrase?
- What did he do next? Why couldn't he pick up the clothes?

paene...pervenirem (lines 19-20):

- What did he almost do? What caused this?
- What did he draw? What did he slash at? Where were these shadows?
- Where was he heading?

ut larva...refectus sum (lines 20-22):

- What did he do when he got there? How did he enter?
- What does he claim he had almost poured out? What do you think this means?
- What feature does he mention next? Where was it pouring?
- What body part does he now mention? What are they described as being? What do you think this means?
- What did he hardly do?

Melissa...ambularem (lines 22-23):

- He calls her **mea Melissa**. What does this mean? How does she feel? Why is she surprised?

si ante...traiecit (lines 23-27):

- Who is speaking?
- What does **si ante venisses** mean? What does she say he could have done if he had come sooner?
- What animal is mentioned? What did this animal do first? What did it attack?
- What is it described as being like? What did it drain like a butcher?
- What did it not do? What did it manage to do?
- Whilst it was fleeing, who appeared? What did the slave have with him? What did he do with the spear?

haec ut...sanguinem (lines 27-30):

- What does **haec ut audivi** mean? What was he not able to do any longer when he heard this? Why do you think he was no longer able to close his eyes?
- What did he do? Where did he flee? When did he flee home? Why do you think he waited for **luce clara**?
- Where does he reach as he rushes home? What is in that place? What material had the clothes been made into? What does he find there instead of the clothes?

ut vero...curabat (lines 30-31):

- Where does he arrive next? Who does he find there? What is he doing? What is he like?
- Which part of him does the speaker mention? Who else is there? What is this person doing? Can you work out an explanation for this scene?

intellexi...occidisses (lines 31-33):

- What did the speaker now understand about the soldier?
- What does he say he was not able to do after that? Why does he add “not if you killed me?”

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-5) How does Petronius create the impression that this is going to be a less than serious tale?
2. (lines 6-9) Why do you think that Niceros has asked this man to accompany him?
3. (lines 9-10) Why do you think that we are given details about the time of day and the moon?
4. (line 10) Why is this an appropriate location for a supernatural event?
5. (lines 10-11) How does Petronius, through his style of writing and vocabulary choices, make this scene seem relaxed and light-hearted?
6. (lines 11-14) How does Petronius emphasise the sudden dramatic turn of events?
7. (lines 14-18) How does Petronius use a variety of techniques to make the transformation vivid and dramatic?
8. (lines 19 -22) Describe the narrator in detail as he enters Melissa’s house.

9. (lines 22-27) Describe in detail what had happened earlier at the house.
 10. (lines 27-30) How does Petronius convey the panic which Niceros felt?
 11. (lines 28-30) Describe what Niceros found when he reached the tombs once more.
 12. (lines 30-31) How effective do you find Petronius' description of what Niceros found once he arrived home?
 13. (lines 31-32) Describe all the evidence which has led to Niceros' conclusion.
 14. (lines 32-33) How do Niceros' closing remarks show his shock at what has happened?
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Discussion

Themes: werewolves, magical places

The Roman werewolf was not entirely different from the werewolf of modern fantasy and horror stories (more information for teachers can be found in Further Information and Reading). Students could be asked to create a brief guide to spotting werewolves, or to compare Petronius' account to a modern depiction. There are many fictional accounts of werewolves, and students may have encountered them in Young Adult fiction: familiar examples might include Remus Lupin in the Harry Potter series, Jacob Black in the Twilight series, and various depictions in The Mortal Instruments series.

General questions on the passage and theme

1. What seem to be the features of a Roman werewolf?
 2. What is the tone of this piece of writing? Does it change throughout the text?
 3. How does the speaker attempt to convince his imaginary audience that he is truthful? Do you find his attempts persuasive?
 4. How do you think that his audience would react at different points in this story?
 5. How is Niceros characterised throughout this story?
 6. Do you think that this piece of writing is meant to be taken seriously?
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Further Information and Reading

The *Satyricon* is a satirical novel (written in verse and in prose) which attacks the attitudes and ideas of the Romans in Petronius' time. It takes the form of a *fabula Milesiae*, a Milesian Tale. This was a popular genre of episodic writing which usually incorporated adventures whilst travelling, erotic and comedic elements, and unusual characters.

There are plenty of stories from the ancient world of individuals being transformed into animals. The wolf is specifically mentioned in many of these tales, as is the idea of the wolf-man, where features of a man are retained or the ability to change between the two states is mentioned. The wolf was, of course, a creature long associated with the Romans, playing a central role in the foundation myth of Romulus and Remus. The most famous Roman accounts of the *versipellis*, along with our text, are from Ovid and Pliny.

The story of Lycaon is told by Ovid in *The Metamorphoses* 1.199-243. Lycaon of Arcadia attempted to trick the king of the gods by offering up human flesh at a banquet, believing that his guest was merely impersonating a divinity. Jupiter transformed Lycaon into a wolf-man, so that his barbarity would be mirrored in his shape.

Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 8.34) discusses werewolves and states that they are a common tale but ought not to be taken for fact. He mentions several Greek authors who describe individuals being transformed into wolves for long periods of time (around nine or ten years), before reverting to their original shape. One of the tales is again linked to the eating of human flesh.

Both authors point to the Greek tradition and indeed there are more Greek accounts on werewolves, including Herodotus (*Histories* 4.105) and medical texts describing how to treat lycanthropy. The Greek tradition varies a little from Petronius: there is a link with cannibalism, and the transformation is either permanent or long-lasting. It seems that Petronius is working with a more 'folk' tradition: the transformation is temporary, there is no link with food, the clothes must be protected (they may act as a catalyst for the werewolf to regain human form). Although there is a full moon in this text, there is no clear link until later in history between this and the werewolf's transformation. The ancient texts unsurprisingly make no mention of silver bullets!

Modern depictions of werewolves are often metaphorical depictions of change (especially adolescence) and marginalisation. Famously, J.K. Rowling has said that Remus Lupin's lycanthropy in the Harry Potter series is a metaphor for living with AIDS / HIV (the depiction is not unproblematic and any discussion should take account of this). Whilst this is not true of ancient depictions, the story of Romulus and Remus reminds us that the Romans were also interested in the duality of the wolf-man and of the tension between human and animal.

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