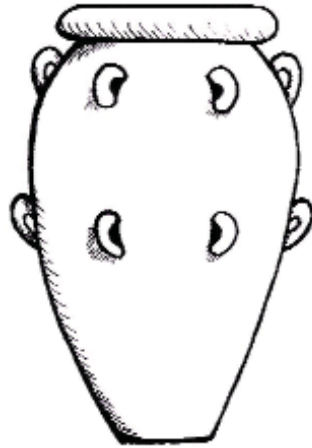


The Journal of the Classics Students Association

ΠΙΘΟΣ

PITHOS



VOLUME 16
SPRING 2017

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEFS

William Chadwick

Sarah Mabie

READERS

Emily Hollocks

Nereyda Montecino

Hatibe Karacuban

Victoria Hodges

Carolyn Cataraja Arches

FACULTY ADVISOR

Professor Michael Anderson

SPECIAL THANKS

Seth Chabay

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4.** Three-Headed Hound of the Moon: A Comparative Look at the Roles of Hecate in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

BY ALEXANDRA CONRAD

- 17.** More Savage than Domitian, More Foul than Nero: A Brief Analysis of the Reputed Character of Emperor Commodus

BY DAVID HLUSAK

- 31.** The Sun Became Obscured and the Stars Came Forth: The Agency of Thales' Eclipse in Ending an Ancient Near Eastern War

BY DAVID HLUSAK

- 43.** Rebirth and Resurrection

BY EMILY HOLLOCKS

- 50.** The Intersection of Ancient Literary Themes with the Lyrics of Today's Music: Catullus' Carmen 16 and Childish Gambino's "Backpackers"

BY NICHOLAS MAGGIO

Three-Headed Hound of the Moon: A Comparative Look at the Roles of Hecate in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

Introduction

She has been described as the “holy daughter of great-bosomed Nyx” by Bacchylides¹ and the goddess “who surpassed her father in boldness and lawlessness” by Diodorus Siculus². Hecate, goddess of witchcraft and magic, and often associated with crossroads and the underworld, was a widely worshipped mythological figure in the ancient Greek world. Her popularity even carried over to the Roman pantheon, where she was given the name Trivia, which literally translates to “the place where three roads meet”³. Although she was not at the center of Greek polytheism, she was worshipped all over by cults from places in Anatolia to even Sicily⁴. However, admiration for this moon goddess is not only evident in ancient times. With the rise of Neopaganism and Wicca, Hecate has become a fixed symbol of power in the modern world of witchcraft. Her role has changed from that of only a protective goddess to one of the Mother Goddess, who is prevalent in all traditions of Wicca⁵. I will examine the differences in these roles and look at how the ways in which she is worshipped have changed and adapted to her new position in the religion of Wicca.

¹ Bacchylides, Fragment 1B (trans. Campbell, Vol. Greek Lyric IV) <http://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hecate.html> (accessed November 3, 2016)

² Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 4. 45. 1 (trans. Oldfather) <http://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hecate.html> (accessed November 3, 2016)

³ trivia. Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/trivia> (accessed November 3, 2016).

⁴ Theoi.com. “Hecate Cult.” *Greek Gods Cult*. <http://www.theoi.com/Cult/HecateCult.html> (accessed November 3, 2016)

⁵ Erin Dragonsong, “Hecate: Goddess of the Witches.” *Wicca Spirituality*. <http://www.wicca-spirituality.com/hecate.html> (accessed November 3, 2016)

A Changing Image

Although the exact location and period of the emergence of the Cult of Hecate is unknown, it is believed that worship of the goddess might have originated in Caria, Anatolia⁶. However, this deity may not share the same characteristics as the Greek goddess of the same name, as suggested by William Berg. Taking into consideration the presence of different variations of Hecate's name among the Carians in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, Berg suggests that the Anatolian goddess was "a major deity free from the dark and unsavoury ties to the underworld and to witchcraft associated with the Hecate of classical Athens", since "children are not called after spooks"⁷. It wasn't until the archaic period that the goddess was introduced to mainland Greece by Asia Minor⁸. The earliest written mention of her Anatolian depiction is presumed to be in *Theogony* by Hesiod, in which he describes her as being "honored above all" by Zeus.⁹ This great description of the goddess seems far from the dark and haunting Hecate that was later worshipped in Greek religion. She receives much praise from Hesiod, who even goes as far to say that Zeus favored her above any other Titan¹⁰. Over time, her association with witchcraft and the underworld molded the deity into her most memorable form.

What exactly is this form? Hecate's image went through many remodels during antiquity. Since there is not much known about her origins, depictions of her from Caria are lacking. However, there is much known about the Greek deity. Her name is taken from the Greek word ἑκατος, meaning "worker from afar", often an epithet of Apollo¹¹. It was said that her parents

⁶ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 171.

⁷ William Berg, "Hecate: Greek or "Anatolian"?" *Numen* 21.2 (August 1974): 129-40

⁸ *Ibid.*, 129-40

⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony*. (trans. Evelyn-White), 411-52. <http://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hekate.html> (accessed November 3, 2016)

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 411-52

¹¹ Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed. rev., s.v. "ἑκάτη."

were Perses and Asteria¹², the god of destruction¹³ and goddess of falling stars and nighttime divination, respectively¹⁴. It is believed to be in Thessaly that the association between her and the underworld developed¹⁵. The association is also told through myth; Hecate accompanied Demeter on her search for Persephone after the kidnapping. She guided Demeter “through the night with flaming torches” and subsequently became a companion to Persephone in the underworld¹⁶.

As with many gods in the Greek pantheon, Hecate has certain animals associated with her; in modern witchcraft, these animals have been dubbed her familiars. A familiar is an “animal-shaped spirit or minor demon believed to serve a witch or magician as domestic servant, spy and companion”¹⁷. Often connected with Hecate are dogs, especially black ones, and polecats¹⁸. According to Greek myth, her dog familiar was actually Queen Hecuba, transformed after leaping into the sea after the fall of Troy¹⁹. The identities of the polecat vary. Because of her canine companion, it was said that howling dogs signaled her approach²⁰.

Much like her divine attributes changed over time, so did her depictions in art. The earliest known representation of Hecate in Greek art comes in the form of a terracotta statue from Athens that has a dedication written on it, dating from the 6th century BCE²¹. Her figure portrayed in the small statue is not very elaborate, and appears to be quite simple, with not much

¹² J. E. Zimmerman, *Dictionary of Classical Myth*. (Bantam Books 1977)

¹³ Theoi.com, “Perses.” *Greek Titan Gods*. <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanPerses.html> (accessed November 4, 2016)

¹⁴ Theoi.com, “Asteria.” *Greek Titan Gods*. <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanisAsteria.html> (accessed November 4, 2016)

¹⁵ William Berg, “Hecate: Greek or “Anatolian”?”. *Numen* 21.2 (August 1974), 129-40

¹⁶ Theoi.com, “Hecate.” *Underworld Gods*. www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hekate.html (accessed November 4, 2016)

¹⁷ Luke Mastin, “Witchcraft Terms and Tools: Familiar”. *WitchcraftandWitches.com*. http://www.witchcraftandwitches.com/terms_familiar.html (accessed November 4, 2016)

¹⁸ Theoi.com, “Hecate.” *Underworld Gods*. www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hekate.html (accessed November 4, 2016)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Alberta Mildred Franklin, *The Lupercalia*. (Columbia University, 1921) , 67

²¹ Lewis Richard Farnell, “Hecate in Art”. *The Cults of the Greek States*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1896).

to distinguish her as Hecate, apart from the dedication. She appears to be seated on a throne and wears a chaplet around her head²²; it is a typical representation of the divine. In vase paintings, she was depicted much like Artemis: wearing a knee-length maiden's skirt and hunting boots²³. Coincidentally, her name was also often an epithet for Artemis; having been derived from ἑκατος as well, but more so an association with Apollo²⁴. She is also usually shown carrying two torches and accompanied by a dog.²⁵ Much later, however, in the 2nd century BCE, Hecate finally took the form that she is still portrayed as today. This was her triple-bodied form that sculptor Alcamenes created, according to Pausanias²⁶. Her three figures each represented something different; what these things were exactly has been contested. Pausanias claimed that the triple nature of the statue represented Hecate's rule over "earth, sea, and sky", while Lucius Annaeus Cornutus stated the three bodies represented three moon phases. Modern scholars have related her depiction to the three crossroads she was claimed to guard²⁷.

Her three-formed depictions have carried over into modern witchcraft, but have been given a new meaning. In Neopaganism and Wicca, the Triple Goddess is considered to be one of two important major god-heads. She is a conglomeration of the Maiden, Mother, and Crone figures, with each representing a different part of life: the Maiden represents the youth that has not yet been awakened, while the Mother depicts fertility, and the Old Crone symbolizes wisdom and endings²⁸. In many sects and traditions of Paganism and Wicca, Hecate has been inserted

²² Lewis Richard Farnell, "Hecate in Art". *The Cults of the Greek States*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1896).

²³ Theoi.com, "Hecate." Underworld Gods. www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hekate.html (accessed November 4, 2016)

²⁴ Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed. rev., s.v. "ἑκατος."

²⁵ Theoi.com, "Hecate." Underworld Gods. www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hekate.html (accessed November 4, 2016)

²⁶ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2. 30. 2 (trans. Jones)

²⁷ William Berg, "Hecate: Greek or "Anatolian"?. *Numen* 21.2 (August 1974), 129-40.

²⁸ Patti Wigington, "Maiden, Mother, Old Crone- The Triple Goddess". *About.com*.

<http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/wiccanpaganhistory/a/MaidenMotherCrone.htm> (accessed November 4, 2016)

into the place of the Old Crone and is considered to be the protector goddess of all witches²⁹. Because the Old Crone is also associated with death and guiding souls to the afterlife, the insertion of Hecate does not seem too out of place. Other sects of Wicca consider her to be not just the Crone but the entire Triple Goddess, herself³⁰. Although it seems that many ancient aspects of Hecate have been carried over into the modern era of magick, the Hecate that is popular among Wiccans and Neopagans holds some questionable characteristics that do not line up with the goddess from antiquity. The way in which she is worshipped reflects this.

Worship and Altars

After her move from Anatolia to Greece, Hecate was worshipped by cults scattered throughout the Aegean; she had cults in Sicily, the Greek mainland and its islands, and in her homeland of Anatolia³¹. Her most important sanctuary was at Lagina in Asia Minor, however, where great festivities took place every year³². The Athenians had their own way of worshipping the moon goddess, as well. The Deipnon, which was a large feast dedicated to Hecate, held the purpose of honoring the goddess in order to placate any angry souls, or Hecate herself, who were offended by the members of the household³³. According to Aristophanes, the dinner took place on the night of the new moon³⁴. Her worship was not only limited to mass celebrations. Many Athenians had altars dedicated to the goddess in their home for protection, as evident in the

²⁹ Erin Dragonsong, "Hecate: Goddess of the Witches." *Wicca Spirituality*. <http://www.wicca-spirituality.com/hecate.html> (accessed November 4, 2016)

³⁰ DragonOak.com, "Hecate, Titan Goddess of Crossroads: Queen of Witches". <http://www.dragonoak.com/Hecate.html> (accessed November 4, 2016)

³¹ Theoi.com. "Hekate Cult." *Greek Gods Cult*. <http://www.theoi.com/Cult/HekateCult.html> (accessed: November 4, 2016)

³² Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 171.

³³ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 709 A

³⁴ Aristophanes, *Plutus*, 594

writings of Aristophanes³⁵. The altars were placed in the doorways of the homes³⁶ and she was thought to bring prosperity and blessings to the members of the household³⁷. Other altars and offerings were left at crossroads in hopes for protection and guidance in return³⁸. Not all cults of Hecate were as widely accepted. In Thessaly, her association with “moon-conjuring witches”, especially Medea, led to rituals being conducted in secret³⁹. This is where it is believed that Hecate’s once great nature became tainted by the evils connected to witchcraft⁴⁰.

In the witchcraft of today’s world, Hecate is feared a lot less. She is worshipped widely by a variety of practitioners of magick. Some witches consider her to be their queen⁴¹ while others think of her as the Goddess of Heaven⁴²; this is a stark comparison to her ancient dwelling of the underworld. Across the internet, invocations and conjuring spells are often shared in hopes to call upon Hecate; many of these spells do warn of her “difficult” nature and state that she should not be called upon “frivolously”⁴³. Not all Pagans and Wiccans gloss over her archaic roots, though, and many incorporate them into their modes of worship. Some contemporary witches honor her as a “dark goddess” and respect her connection to the spirit realm. Others suggest adopting or rescuing a dog because of the dog’s meaning in association with Hecate⁴⁴.

³⁵ Aristophanes, *The Wasps*, 804

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 804

³⁷ Aristophanes, *Plutus*, 410

³⁸ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 171.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 171

⁴⁰ William Berg, "Hecate: Greek or "Anatolian"?". *Numen* 21.2 (August 1974): 129-40.

⁴¹ DragonOak.com, “Hecate, Titan Goddess of Crossroads: Queen of Witches”.

<http://www.dragonoak.com/Hecate.html> (accessed November 4, 2016)

⁴² Erin Dragonsong, “Hecate: Goddess of the Witches.” *Wicca Spirituality*. <http://www.wicca-spirituality.com/hecate.html> (accessed: November 4, 2016)

⁴³ Patti Wigington, “The Greek Goddess Hecate”. *About.com*.

<http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/godsandgoddesses/p/HecateProfile.htm> (accessed: November 4, 2016)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

This does, however, contradict the way that dogs were sacrificed for Hecate in ancient times⁴⁵, but it has become much less acceptable to slaughter dogs in modern society.

For many contemporary practicing witches, altars are at the center of their craft. The altar is where spells are cast and prayers are spoke. Therefore, each witch tailors their own altar to fit their personality, practice, and path. With this modern personalization, no two altars that have been dedicated to Hecate look exactly the same. Other elements of Neopaganism and Wicca can be incorporated into the set, creating a hybrid offering that reflects that witch. These altars no longer reside solely in the doorway, but instead can be situated anywhere in the house, as long as there is enough room around the altar to cast a circle; generally the space can be as big as you need it, but mostly wide enough for one to comfortably sit or stand⁴⁶. From what I have gathered, it appears that certain altars to Hecate reflect some of her epithets. For example, she has been referred to as “κλειδοῦχος”, or “the one holding the keys”, in the *Lithica Orphica*⁴⁷. Thus, altars are created that include key iconography. Although ancient Greek art lacks evidence of what the household offerings to Hecate looked like, based on the different interpretations of the goddess in modern witchcraft, I assume that contemporary offerings differ wildly from their ancient counterparts.

Conclusion

Starting with her origins in Anatolia and leading up to modern day, I found that there has been some divergence in the depictions of the goddess Hecate and a discrepancy in the true definition of her roles in religion, whether in the Greek pantheon or newer witchcraft. I did find

⁴⁵ Alberta Mildred Franklin, *The Lupercalia*. (Columbia University, 1921): 67

⁴⁶ “How to Cast a Circle of Protection”. *Wiccan Spells*. <http://wiccanspells.info/learn-wicca-basics/casting-a-circle-protection/> (accessed November 4, 2016)

⁴⁷ Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed. rev., s.v. “κλειδοῦχος”.

that themes of darkness and death were prevalent throughout, but interpretations of the goddess' power shifted as years went on. The many perspectives present in the blogs and websites of contemporary witches reflects the multifaceted nature of the reimagined goddess. One thing that is for certain amongst all the differing views is that Hecate's role as a goddess has become modernized to fit the ever-changing world of witchcraft and religion.

Appendices:

Bibliography

Aristophanes. *Plutus*.

Aristophanes. *The Wasps*.

Bacchylides. "Fragment 1B". (trans. Campbell, *Vol. Greek Lyric IV*)

Berg, William. "Hecate: Greek or "Anatolian"?". *Numen* 21.2 (August 1974).

Burket, Walter. *Greek Religion*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc., s.v. "trivia".

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/trivia>. Accessed November 3, 2016.

DragonOak.com. "Hecate, Titan Goddess of Crossroads: Queen of Witches".

<http://www.dragonoak.com/Hecate.html>. Accessed November 4, 2016

Dragonsong, Erin. "Hecate: Goddess of the Witches." *Wicca Spirituality*. <http://www.wicca-spirituality.com/hecate.html>. Accessed November 3, 2016

Franklin, Alberta Mildred. *The Lupercalia*. Columbia University, 1921.

Hesiod. *Theogony*. (trans. Evelyn-White).

Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon. 9th ed. rev., s.v. “Ἐκάτη”.

Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon. 9th ed. rev., s.v. “κλειδοῦχος”.

Mastin, Luke. “Witchcraft Terms and Tools: Familiar”. *WitchcraftandWitches.com*.

http://www.witchcraftandwitches.com/terms_familiar.html. Accessed November 4, 2016

Pausanias. *Description of Greece*. (trans. Jones).

Plutarch. *Moralia*.

Richard Farnell, Lewis. "Hecate in Art". *The Cults of the Greek States*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1896.

Siculus, Diodorus. *Library of History*. (trans. Oldfather).

Theoi.com, “Asteria.” *Greek Titan Gods*. <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanisAsteria.html>.

Accessed November 4, 2016

Theoi.com. “Hekate Cult.” *Greek Gods Cult*. <http://www.theoi.com/Cult/HekateCult.html>.

Accessed November 3, 2016

Theoi.com, “Perses.” *Greek Titan Gods*. <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanPerses.html>. Accessed November 4, 2016

Theoi.com, “Hecate.” *Underworld Gods*. www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Hekate.html. Accessed November 4, 2016

“How to Cast a Circle of Protection”. *Wicca Spells*. <http://wiccanspells.info/learn-wicca-basics/casting-a-circle-protection/>. Accessed November 4, 2016

Wigington, Patti. “Maiden, Mother, Old Crone- The Triple Goddess”. *About.com*. <http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/wiccanpaganhistory/a/MaidenMotherCrone.htm>. Accessed November 4, 2016

Zimmerman, J. E. *Dictionary of Classical Myth*. Bantam Books, 1977

Photographs



Fig. 1: The Hecate Chiaramonti, Roman sculpture of triple Hecate, after a Hellenistic original (Museo Chiaramonti, Vatican Museums).



Fig. 2: Triple Hecate and the Charites, Attic, 3rd century BCE (Glyptothek, Munich)



Fig. 3: Modern depiction of Hecate available for purchase on goddessgift.net.



Fig. 4: An outdoor shrine to Hecate. Photo by [soritadeste](#) on Flickr.



Fig. 5: Altar using key iconography, worshipping Hecate as “κλειδοῦχος”, or “the one holding keys”. Photo by Yeshe Rabbit.

More Savage than Domitian, More Foul than Nero:
A Brief Analysis of the Reputed Character of Emperor Commodus

In the year 180 CE, a man assumed the sole rule of the Roman Empire, a man “more savage than Domitian, more foul than Nero.”¹ Carrying with him a club and wearing the garb of Hercules, he struck distress into the heart of the Senate and slew man and beast by the hundreds.² He is said to have plunged Rome “from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust.”³ The reputation of Emperor Commodus is among the worst of all emperors who have ever ruled Rome, and his reign has traditionally been used to mark the beginning of Roman decline. But Commodus “was not naturally wicked;” perhaps his reputation precedes him.⁴ It would be difficult to argue that Commodus was a great emperor; however, he certainly could not have been the villain that the sources make him out to be. Like any of the Five Good Emperors, who preceded him⁵, Commodus had his strengths and his weaknesses. Aspects of his reign demonstrate his ability to use the skills he possessed efficiently, but unlike each of the Good Emperors, Commodus did not have anyone to rely upon to balance his deficiencies.

To provide context in determining how scandalous Commodus’ decisions and behavior may have been, comparisons will be drawn between his reign and the accomplishments of the Five Good Emperors. Commodus’ father, Marcus Aurelius, had doubts when placing Commodus as his successor. Upon his rise to the throne, Commodus made the decision to end Marcus’ efforts in his campaigns against the Marcomanni and Quadi tribes along the northern borders of

1. "Historia Augusta: Life of Commodus." Lacus Curtius: Into the Roman World.

2. Cassius Dio, "Cassius Dio: Epitome of Book LXXII." Lacus Curtius: Into the Roman World.

3. Cassius Dio, Book LXXIII.

4. Cassius Dio, Book LXXIII.

5. The five emperors preceding Commodus, who would receive the nomenclature of ‘The Five Good Emperors’ included Nerva (r. 96-98 CE), Trajan (r. 98-117 CE), Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE), Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161 CE), and Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-180 CE).

the Roman Empire. This resolve was largely scrutinized by the Senate and people of Rome and thus, many lost respect for Commodus early in his reign. To reacquire popularity among the Roman people, Commodus invested heavily, and personally participated, in gladiatorial games and beast hunts. The Senate, however, saw such participation in public games as a disgrace to his title as Emperor. As Commodus became increasingly preoccupied and strayed from governmental administration, the position of Praetorian Prefecture consolidated considerably more power, and unscrupulous men began vying for this increasingly dominant title at the expense of the Emperor.

The denomination of the ‘Five Good Emperors’ is attributed to the success of those who ruled between the turbulent reign of Domitian and the controversial rule of Commodus. Domitian’s reign was characterized by his autocratic style of ruling, disrespectful treatment of the Senate, intrigue, and paranoia. His own wife is thought to have been part of the conspiracy to assassinate him. The Senate likened him to the young Nero, who was accused of having “despoiled the entire Roman world.”⁶ After his death, the Senate dissolved Domitian’s memory by striking his name from inscriptions throughout the Empire.⁷ Domitian had no heir, so the Senate quickly appointed an elderly ex-consul, known to history as Nerva. His successful two-year reign positioned him as the first of the Five Good Emperors. He made reforms that focused on equality, liberty, safety, and justice within the Empire and had also allotted money for land distribution and child support efforts.⁸ Among the most important aspects of his short reign was

5. Duncan B. Campbell, *The Rise of Imperial Rome AD 14-193* (Long Island City: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2013), 44.

6. Campbell, *The Rise of Imperial Rome AD 14-193*, 56.

7. Boatwright, et al. *The Romans: From Village to Empire*. Second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 360.

the stabilization he afforded the Empire by ensuring a smooth succession to a qualified adopted heir.

Nerva's successor, Trajan, was governor of Germania Superior and was an experienced military commander.⁹ Upon ascending to the position of Emperor, Trajan spent nearly two years inspecting his troops along the Rhine and Danube borders of the Empire before returning Rome. He extended the Roman borders into Dacia, Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and into Parthia.¹⁰ The Roman Empire was expanded to its greatest territorial extent under Trajan, and his military ambitions bolstered the treasury. During his long reign, Trajan had adopted a man known as Hadrian who had gained much experience by spending time alongside Trajan on his campaigns. After Trajan's death, Hadrian had some difficulty in his succession; nevertheless, his status as adopted heir ultimately qualified his position as Emperor. Hadrian spent much of his reign consolidating the Empire after Trajan's conquests. He retained territory in Arabia but relinquished land beyond the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and permitted a client king to rule in Armenia.¹¹ He also separated and reorganized the provinces of Cappadocia, Galatia, and Dacia. Upon inspecting garrisons and fortifications along the Empire's borders, Hadrian ordered a frontier barrier of massive wooden palisades along the German provinces and a great stone wall built in Britain to protect Roman borders.¹²

During Hadrian's final years, he adopted a senator as his successor, familiar to modernity as Antoninus Pius. Additionally, Hadrian required Antoninus to adopt two sons to continue the smooth transition of successions. Antoninus worked vigorously to maintain Hadrian's

8. Campbell, *The Rise of Imperial Rome AD 14-193*, 56.

9. Campbell, *The Rise of Imperial Rome AD 14-193*, 59-65.

10. Campbell, *The Rise of Imperial Rome AD 14-193*, 66.

11. Campbell, *The Rise of Imperial Rome AD 14-193*, 66-67.

reorganization of the imperial administration, made his own contributions to Roman law, and allotted generous shares of money for public works and welfare.¹³ Before his death, despite large expenditures on charity and public works, Antoninus left the largest surplus in the Roman treasury since Emperor Tiberius, over a century prior.¹⁴ Marcus Aurelius succeeded Antoninus to the emperorship as his adopted son. His first two years as Emperor were filled with crises such as floods, earthquakes, and famine. There had also been a revolt in Britain and invasions along the Rhine River and into Armenia.¹⁵ Later in his reign, he would have to deal with an invasion along the Danube River that pushed as far south as Italy, as well as invasions in the Spanish and Greek provinces whilst a plague debilitated the Roman military.¹⁶ Despite these challenges, Marcus Aurelius proved an able emperor. To manage the Empire effectively under such pressures, he delegated responsibility among his administrators, and he appointed his adoptive brother as his colleague, equal in power, to assist against the threat of the Parthians in the East.¹⁷

When rumors spread of Marcus' death, the presiding governor of Syria proclaimed himself Emperor. Before heading east to deal with this issue, Marcus needed to address the question of succession because his adoptive brother had previously succumbed to plague. Marcus proclaimed his natural son, Commodus, to succeed him. Breaking from the adoptive system that had come to define the reigns of the Five Good Emperors, is among the largest criticisms of Marcus' reign.¹⁸ However, the practice of adoption was not a theoretical alternative

12. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*, 335-336.

13. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*, 339.

14. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*, 337.

15. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*, 338.

16. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*, 337.

17. *Rome: The Rise and Fall of an Empire - Episode 7: Rebellion and Betrayal*. Directed by Rex Piano. History Channel, 2008. DVD.

to dynastic succession because it was not a system based on principles of choosing the worthiest individual.¹⁹ Adoption was simply a reaffirmation of the dynastic principle for those who did not have a natural heir.

Marcus Aurelius died in 180 CE, leaving Rome to his nineteen-year-old son, Commodus. It is not clear if Commodus had participated in any battles or military decisions before his father's death. But, his father always surrounded him with the best tutors and most capable advisors.²⁰ Although he was afforded worthy tutors, Commodus was too young to have obtained any qualified administrative experience, nor did he know how to work with the Senate. The ancient historian, Herodian, suggests that Marcus was aware of this deficiency by recording him stating, "If you give my son proper advice in such matters... you will make him the best emperor."²¹ Commodus' age is telling of how impressionable others believe him to be. It should be noted that he was the second youngest emperor of Rome to date. The average age of Roman Emperors at the beginning of their reign was forty-three years old, the youngest being Nero who was not quite seventeen. Domitian, nearly thirty, had also begun his rule at a comparatively young age. Neither of these emperors had been old enough to have gained any military or administrative experience. Additionally, Nero, and more so Domitian, were not intended to become emperor and thus not groomed for the task. Commodus, on the other hand, was expected to become the ruler of Rome, but how could Marcus ensure this aspect of education for his son if he was occupied with crises and wars almost his entire reign?²²

18. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*. 339.

19. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*. 339.

21. Herodian, "Herodian of Antioch, History of the Roman Empire," Book 1, 4.6.

20. Cassius Dio, Book LXXII.

Upon his ascension to the emperorship, Commodus ceased the enduring work of his father and abandoned the northern border campaign. Because this decision was perceived as cowardice by the Roman citizens and troops alike, it immediately affected his popularity. Furthermore, Roman merchants prospered from such campaigning by selling military supplies to the state and obtained conquered peoples for Rome's thriving slave market.²³ Moreover, soldiers could profit from the extension of Roman territory by seizing booty, and new land could be distributed among the Roman populous and retired soldiers. For such reasons, Commodus' decision was obviously met with unpopularity. These perceived benefits of expansion, however, can only outweigh the expense of war if conquest is successful.

Historians have only been able to speculate on Commodus' motives to abandon his father's campaign. It is suggested that he had no taste for war and wanted to return to Rome to enjoy the vices of civilized society; others argue that he was concerned about contracting the plague.²⁴ It has also been suggested that Marcus had already been planning a withdrawal, or even that Commodus' advisors disagreed on the subject and attempted to sway his decision for their own gains.²⁵ Regardless of a precise pretext, Commodus' decision to withdrawal is largely parallel to Hadrian's administrative foresight in that he curtailed the continued expansion of his predecessor in favor of consolidating stability of the Empire. Although Trajan's conquests were extremely popular and brought profit and glory, he had overextended the logistical limits of Rome.

22. Arthur M. Echstein, "Commodus and the Limits of the Roman Empire," in *Gladiator: Film and History* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 55.

23. Campbell, *The Rise of Imperial Rome*, 86.

24. Boatwright, et al. *The Romans: From Village to Empire*, 401.

With this in consideration, it is Trajan and Marcus who stand out as the exceptions from the norm of Roman emperors with regards to expansionistic policies.²⁶ Commodus, on the other hand, followed the precept of the father of the Empire, Caesar Augustus. After he had expanded the Empire, Augustus foresaw Rome's limitations. And, on his deathbed, he instructed his successor to maintain the Empire within its natural borders of the Rhine, Danube, and Euphrates rivers.²⁷ Even the historian Herodian, who disapproved of Commodus' decision to withdrawal from the northern campaign, admits that Commodus acted responsibly when he departed for Rome and appointed experienced commanders to maintain the Danube tribes.²⁸ Furthermore, the Danube frontier remained largely quiet throughout Commodus' twelve-year reign and continued to remain so for nearly two decades after his assassination.²⁹ Commodus' choice to end the campaign was not an ill-informed decision, but a calculated one.

Upon his return to Rome, Commodus sought to cultivate popularity among the masses. He established a fleet to carry grain supplies from Africa to Rome on a regular schedule.³⁰ This ensured that there would be plenty of food for the common people and that it would be available at a low, stable price. He also issued eight *congiaria*, or money donations, to the citizens over the course of his reign.³¹ With these deeds, Commodus had paralleled the welfare and public works efforts that Nerva and Antoninus had so admirably focused on during their reigns. Commodus also lavished the Roman people with frequent shows of chariot races, gladiatorial combats, and beast hunts in the arena.

25. Echstein, "Commodus and the Limits of the Roman Empire," 59.

26. Echstein, "Commodus and the Limits of the Roman Empire," 56.

27. Herodian. "Herodian of Antioch, History of the Roman Empire," Book 1, 1-8.

28. Echstein, "Commodus and the Limits of the Roman Empire," 67.

29. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*, 369.

30. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*, 369.

Commodus understood the importance of keeping the populace happy by making sure they were well fed and soundly entertained. The Flavian Emperors, who built the Colosseum, envisioned it as a political tool to command the allegiance of the Roman people by indulging them with amusement.³² But, the arena was also a place in which the Emperor's authority over life and death was emphasized with the execution of criminals.³³ "Here, even gladiators could symbolically challenge death itself, and acquire a sort of hero-status."³⁴ If utilized properly, the arena could produce and propagate a specific and powerful image in which an Emperor may wish to be viewed by his subjects.

Commodus, not being a strong military commander, like his father or Trajan, used the arena to establish himself as such by fighting as a gladiator. Keeping in the Augustan tradition, Commodus did not seek to conquer more territory, rather he satisfied the importance of military dominance through the Roman warrior ethos in gladiatorial games. The ancient historians, Cassius Dio and Herodian, had a perception of Commodus' appearance in the arena that showed how closely related the concepts of military courage and ability was to the games. Dio states that Commodus "put himself on an equal footing with other gladiators," and Herodian recognizes his "courage and marksmanship," although he did believe this behavior to be "unfit for an Emperor."³⁵

Commodus' performances in the arena, however, did not gain much respect from the Senate. Not having experience working with them, Commodus failed to realize the importance of

31. Erik Gunderson, "The Flavian Amphitheatre: All the World as Stage," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, and Text* (Boston: Koninklijke, 2003).

32. Olivier Joram Hekster, *Commodus: An Emperor at the Crossroads*, (Gieben, 2002), 142.

33. Hekster, *Commodus: An Emperor at the Crossroads*, 143-144.

34. Cassius Dio, Book LXXIII; and Herodian, Book 1, 15.7.

keeping in their good will. He had styled himself as Hercules and, much to their dismay, had the Senate declare him a living god. He even went as far as to rename Rome, *Colonia Commodiana*, after himself and likewise had the Roman Legions re-designated as *Commodiana*.³⁶ The Senate, being very much of the conservative tradition, was obviously distressed by these actions.

However, “emperor-worship was a well-trying feature of the exchange between subject and ruler in Rome and attributions of divinity to the emperor always allowed experimentation and reform.”³⁷ Commodus’ styling himself as Hercules and the renaming of the Empire and Legions was simply a new variation of an emperor favored by the Gods. Deducting from monument inscriptions, Commodus’ titles “were actually widely known and acknowledged within the Empire.”³⁸ Although the Senate felt slighted and disrespected by his unashamed use of power, the Roman populace would have been much more receptive to such modifications.

While Commodus was preoccupied with creating an image of himself as a popular and powerful being, he left the routine running of the Empire to others, much like his father had done while on campaign.³⁹ Marcus Aurelius intended to leave his son in capable hands; however, the joint praetorian prefects and a freedman viewed Commodus’ administrative inexperience as weakness and conspired to appropriate his power as Emperor. The freedman, Cleander, replaced Commodus’ chamberlain to gain a close position of trust, and the prefecture was then reduced to a single position.⁴⁰ Perennis, now the sole Prefect, exploited the full powers that had been gradually accruing to his position. He was able to gain control of all administrative affairs,

35. M.P. Speidel, “Commodus the God-emperor and the Army.” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83, 109.

36. Speidel, “Commodus the God-emperor and the Army,” 109.

37. Speidel, “Commodus the God-emperor and the Army,” 109.

38. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*, 368.

39. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*, 368.

making him a *de facto* vice-emperor.⁴¹ With this amount of power, anyone in the imperial circle would have been vying for the favor of Perennis. Accordingly, Cleander disposed of Perennis and created a series of puppet prefects to conceal himself from any direct lines of accusation.⁴² However, a now paranoid and suspicious Commodus quickly did away with each one, and Cleander assumed the title for himself.⁴³

The struggle to control the praetorian prefecture demonstrates the paramount importance of the office now that it had consolidated a great deal of influence. It was specifically the position of the Prefect that ambitious administrators sought to obtain as a means to greater power and imperial influence.⁴⁴ The consolidation of power to this position effectively reduced Commodus to a figurehead and left him with little bureaucratic support. Because he was unable to forge strong relationships with those in the administrative positions before he became Emperor, his imperium was vulnerable to be taken advantage of by those in positions to do so. Without any genuine power or allies to support his legitimacy, it was only a matter of time before Commodus was assassinated, despite the popularity he established among the masses.

In many ways, Commodus likened himself the Five Good Emperors by proving to be very capable in numerous aspects of his rule. Although he may not have been a great emperor, it is insufficient to speak of Commodus as a bad emperor. His principle faults lie within his inexperience in managing his administration. Similarly, the faults of the Five Good Emperors were much out of their own control, but they were fortunate enough to have had others they

40. Laurence Lee Howe, *The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian: A.D. 180-305*, (University of Chicago Press), 12.

41. Howe, *The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian*, 12.

42. Howe, *The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian*, 13.

43. Howe, *The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian*, 13.

could rely upon to make up for their deficiencies. Nerva, for example, was appointed Emperor at an old age, which threatened Rome's stability upon his anticipated death. He, however, adopted an heir who, fortunately, proved to be a strong and capable ruler. Trajan's faults lie in his expansionistic policy. While popular, this policy overextended the logistical limitation of the Mediterranean Empire.⁴⁵ Fortunately for him, Hadrian successfully consolidated security for the Empire, even if it meant relinquishing some of the farther reaching new territories. For Hadrian, Antoninus cleared his poor reputation with the Senate, and thus in history, by reorganizing many of his unpopular administrative reforms. For example, Antoninus abolished Hadrian's detested division of the Italian peninsula into four judicial districts.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding, Antoninus neglected the border defenses, allowing them to become susceptible to invasion.⁴⁷ Marcus Aurelius was fortunate enough to have a similarly aged adoptive brother to rely upon and was provided valuable conditioning and opportunity before his reign to develop strong bureaucratic relationships that allowed him to appoint and depend upon loyal administrators while he defended the enfeebled borders of the Empire.

With relation to the achievements of the Five Good Emperors, Commodus demonstrated qualities of a capable emperor, however, his youth proved to be his largest fault. If Commodus had had the additional twenty-one years of experience that his father had enjoyed before becoming Emperor, he would have had the opportunity to develop administrative relationships within the governing body. Perhaps Commodus would have still ignored the sensibilities of the Senate, but he would have had stronger backing of more trustworthy

44. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*, 329.

45. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*, 335.

46. Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*, 335.

administrators to help him address his oversights so that his power would not have so treacherously diffused into the hands of the unscrupulous.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Dio, Cassius. "Cassius Dio: Epitome of Book LXXII." *Lacus Curtius: Into the Roman World*. Accessed November 10, 2015.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/72*.html.
- . "Cassius Dio: Epitome of Book LXXIII." *Lacus Curtius: Into the Roman World*. Accessed November 10, 2015.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/73*.html.
- Herodian. "Herodian of Antioch, *History of the Roman Empire* (1961) Pp.11-42. Book 1." *The Tertullian Project*. Accessed November 20, 2015.
http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/herodian_01_book1.htm#C2.
- "*Historia Augusta: Life of Commodus*." *Lacus Curtius: Into the Roman World*. Accessed November 19, 2015.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Historia_Augusta/Commodus*.htm
 l.

Secondary Sources

- Campbell, Duncan B. *The Rise of Imperial Rome AD 14-193*. Long Island City, NY: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2013.
- "Commodus and the Limits of the Roman Empire." In *Gladiator: Film and History*, by Arthur M. Eckstein, edited by Martin M. Winkler, 53-72. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004.
- "The Flavian Amphitheatre: All the World as Stage." In *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, and Text*, by Erik Gunderson, edited by A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik, 637-658. Boston, MA: Koninklijke, 2003.
- Hekster, Olivier Joram. *Commodus: An Emperor at the Crossroads*. Gieben, Amsterdam: Te Leiden, 2002.
- Howe, Laurence Lee. *The Pretorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian: (A.D. 180-305)*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1942.

Rome: The Rise and Fall of an Empire - Episode 7: Rebellion and Betrayal. Directed by Rex Piano. History Channel, 2008. DVD.

Speidel, M. P. 1993. "Commodus the God-emperor and the Army." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies: 109–14. doi:10.2307/300981.

Boatwright, Mary T., et al. *The Romans: From Village to Empire*. Second ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Ward, Allen M., Fritz M. Heichelheim, and Cedric A. Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*. Fifth ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010.

The Sun Became Obscured and the Stars Came Forth:
The Agency of Thales' Eclipse in Ending an Ancient Near Eastern War

On the 28th of May, 585BCE, along the Halys River, the Lydians and the Medes faced their forces against one another for what would become the last battle of a grueling and perpetuate struggle for supremacy. Now, in the sixth year, the outcome of the entire conflict would be decided; yet neither side would have fathomed just how their war would so abruptly end. As the melee raged ferociously, men on both sides were ruthlessly slaughtered. Then suddenly, in pitched battle, “the sun became obscured, and the stars came forth.”¹ Thousands of Lydians and Medes alike instantaneously ceased their bout with spear tips moments from their next mark and dropped their weapons. Trembling in fear, they fell prostrate beneath the awesome fury of the gods. Then and there, the feuding empires sued for peace, vigorously swore oaths to one another, and exchanged marriage ties, ending their protracted war that very moment.²

This remarkable event became known as the Eclipse of Thales, named for the pre-Socratic philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer from Miletus who had little to nothing to do with the conflict between Lydia and Media. Herodotus, who credits Thales with the prediction, been called the “father of lies.”³ So, is his account of the eclipse simply just an example of riveting storytelling, or can it be trusted? After all, there has been much debate over whether Thales was capable of such a prediction, or if the eclipse occurred during the day, if at all. If Herodotus' peculiar history is read with a critical eye, truth can be be extracted; a solar

¹ Erica Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” in *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 24.

² Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, ed. by Robert B. Strassler, trans. by Andrea L. Purvis (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 44: 1.73-74.

³ Rosalind Thomas, “Introduction,” in *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, ed. by Robert B. Strassler, trans. by Andrea L. Purvis (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), xxv.

eclipse certainly could have halted a fierce battle between powerful Near Eastern empires, even if Herodotus' account is believed to have not occurred.

Arguments regarding Herodotus and the Eclipse of Thales will first be assessed in order to determine Herodotus' reliability. Context will then be provided about Ancient Near Eastern understandings of celestial phenomena and divination to evaluate the acceptability of a celestial phenomenon as a plausible explanation for pervasive diplomatic decisions. And finally, the interpretations of eclipses and how Near Eastern kings gauged their portents will be examined to conclude if an eclipse could justifiably provoke an armistice.

Herodotus becomes an initial focus because the clearest evidence of the Eclipse of Thales is found exclusively in his work. Furthermore, there is little additional information to be found of the specific Medio-Lyidian war that was affected by this celestial event.⁴ If Herodotus is to be consulted as a chief primary source, the full body of his work must be considered for credibility. Other reports found within *The Histories*, however, include fantastical accounts of birds that carry giant eggs made of myrrh which contain the corpses of their fathers. Likewise, descriptions of hippopotami are found that resemble less of how the animal appears physically but more as the animal would seem if its name were taken literally as a *river-horse*.⁵ Such tall tales have led many to question Herodotus' historical accuracy against his "love of a good story."⁶ Why then would anyone believe his account of the Eclipse of Thales, especially if the event is said to have taken place over a century before Herodotus recounted it? Rosalind Thomas, in her "Introduction" to *The Landmark Herodotus*, argues that Herodotus "was contending with the

⁴ Thomas Worthen, "Herodotus's Report on Thales' Eclipse." *Electronic Antiquity: Communicating the Classics*, May 1997, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V3N7/worthen.html>.

⁵ Hippopotamus, from Greek *hippos*: horse, and *potamos*: river. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 149: 2.71, 2.73

⁶ Thomas, *The Landmark Herodotus*, xxiv.

frayed edges of the world as it was known to the Greeks, and the ends of Greek knowledge.”⁷

Thus, it would be difficult for him to fully understand or appreciate unfamiliar eastern culture or metaphors. This argument can further be applied to modern scholars attempting to understand the works of a two-millennium-old Greek. Perhaps there are allegories and idioms in *The Histories* that modern scholarship simply does not understand. Furthermore, Thomas suggests that Herodotus may not have been specifically seeking the truth more than he may have been recording the testimonies of which he encountered, allowing for his readers to decide if they wished to be convinced or otherwise.⁸ Thomas’ argument is only convincing because it shifts any capriciousness from Herodotus’ work onto his informants. However, this does not lend any credibility to the ancient historian or the plausibility of his eclipse story. Consequently, evidence within Herodotus’ details must also be scrutinized.

Herodotus does not offer a date for the battle, but rather the eclipse. However, later historians from antiquity have dated the eclipse circa 585 to 577 BCE, and nineteenth-century astronomers have affirmed that there was a full solar eclipse over Anatolia on May 28th, 585, providing the date that is commonly acknowledged as the event.⁹ Thomas Worthen, in his article “Herodotos's Report on Thales' Eclipse,” makes a strong case that there is roughly a ten-year discrepancy between the acknowledged date of the eclipse and the regnal years of the Median ruler said to be present by Herodotus.¹⁰ Moreover, another description of a solar eclipse found in *The Histories* is during Xerxes’ march into Europe in 480.¹¹ Worthen uses this description to

⁷ Thomas, *The Landmark Herodotus*, xxvii.

⁸ Thomas, *The Landmark Herodotus*, xxxi-xxxii.

⁹ Worthen, "Herodotos's Report on Thales' Eclipse."

¹⁰ Worthen, "Herodotos's Report on Thales' Eclipse."

¹¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 514: 7.37.

maintain that Herodotus knew very little of the event and was simply using “stock language” to describe what he understood eclipses to be. This argument holds weight because modern calculations have shown that the eclipse that occurred in 480 was not a solar eclipse, as Herodotus describes, but rather that it was a lunar eclipse.¹² Thus, Worthen suggests that the night battle and the eclipse battle present in Herodotus’ account of Thales’ Eclipse may have been the same event but misinterpreted as being separate actions. He proposes that Herodotus’ account of “the day suddenly turned into night” may refer to a battle at dusk, and what had occurred was a lunar eclipse.¹³ The absence of the moon would then explain the astonishment if the armies anticipated doing battle under the moonlight. A lunar eclipse, rather than solar eclipse, would have been much more likely to have been predicted by Thales as well. This is because the Neo-Assyrians had been capable of predicting lunar eclipses with relative accuracy for some time, and that technology could have made its way to Thales.¹⁴ Furthermore, Worthen suggested alternative dates for the battle that experienced lunar eclipses. These alternative dates fall more reasonably within the regnal years proposed by Herodotus.

At this point, it would be sensible to suggest that quite a bit of determination and manipulation needs to go into Herodotus’ work to conclude that his account is even plausible, let alone factual. The Battle of Thales Eclipse’, of which he describes, is unlikely to have occurred, the date that has been assigned to the event is also doubtful, and Thales’ ability to calculate a solar eclipse has indeed been written off as only a familiarity to the phenomenon, not a

¹² Worthen, "Herodotus's Report on Thales' Eclipse."

¹³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 42: 1.73.

¹⁴ Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 138.

prediction of it.¹⁵ Herodotus' reliability is certainly questionable, but perhaps the details of the account were corrupted before they reached him, as suggested earlier by Thomas. Although this is a likely possibility, the prospect of Near Eastern armies having an overwhelmed reaction to a solar eclipse during a battle should not yet be discounted. Before the story is reduced to pure myth, the battling empires, who believed "that the phenomena in the heavens occur, not by chance, but by the immutable decree of the gods," must be examined.¹⁶ Ancient Near Eastern celestial understanding, however, fits into a broader context in that "eclipses were not the only phenomena that... signaled the will of the gods."¹⁷ In fact, all celestial bodies became fundamentally linked to deities.

In the early stages of civilization, humankind began to dominate and triumph over nature, as is argued for the function of walls of Jericho, or as depicted in images found on Sumerian cylinder seals. Nevertheless, what remained in the skies was something unreachable, something that could not be manipulated or domesticated by humans. Yet, the sun was essential for life, the moon kept track of time, and the presence of specific constellations indicated when to plant or harvest crops. Because the shifting celestial bodies represented life, specific cosmic objects were thus personified by and connected to gods.¹⁸ In "Personifications and Metaphors in Babylonian Celestial *Omina*," Francesca Rochberg explains that deities were addressed and spoken about as though they were celestial entities. In scribal texts, the moon is sometimes described specifically

¹⁵ Worthen, "Herodotos's Report on Thales' Eclipse."

¹⁶ N. M. Swerdlow, *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999), 2.

¹⁷ Swerdlow, *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*, 21.

¹⁸ Francesca Rochberg, "Personifications and Metaphors in Babylonian Celestial *Omina*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (3): 476, accessed March 16, 2016, doi:10.2307/605149.

as “the god” and experiencing anthropomorphic emotions such as anxiety and grief.¹⁹

Additionally, among the stars, the greatest influence was attributed to “the five wanderers.” This, of course, refers to the observable planets and, as divinities, their movement was believed to mark the will of the gods, signify weather patterns, and even indicate the future, essentially anything that humankind was relegated to the mercy of.²⁰ All firmament objects were thus viewed as divine, holding valuable messages from the heavens.

If the stars held a message, they also must have had the capacity to be read or interpreted, forming an analog to writing, like a celestial script of the gods. Rochberg, in *The Heavenly Writing*, builds upon this ancient metaphor by equating the constellations with the importance of cuneiform writing in Ancient Near Eastern civilization. She suggests that the heavens were thought to be used by the gods in a similar manner as a scribe would use a clay tablet. Both of which could derive meaning by being read, “expressing the idea that written messages were encoded in celestial phenomena.”²¹ The skies, therefore, became meticulously surveyed in the Near East, and observations would soon be collected to form large compendia of records that were used in attempts to decipher the heavenly script.

Among these star catalogs is the *Three Stars Each* text which divides the heavens into northern, southern, and equatorial denominations. Also included is the MUL.APIN: a thorough recording of sixty-six stars and constellations that plot the Babylonian star map. Furthermore, this collection chronicles the rising and settings of celestial bodies, containing dates of which

¹⁹ Rochberg, “Personifications and Metaphors,” 478.

²⁰ Swerdlow, *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*, 2.

²¹ Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing*, 1-2.

they exit the observable hemisphere, shaping the Babylonian calendar.²² Alternatively, the *Enuma Anu Enlil* is a series of about seventy tablets that deal directly with celestial phenomena and divination. Essentially, it records the conduct of the moon and lunar halos, the color of the sun, weather activities and their relation to earthquakes and thunder, and the motion of various planets and stars.²³ Many omens concern specifically with Venus, its color, and its position to other celestial bodies, such as the moon.²⁴ Jupiter also occurs commonly in the text, but less frequently than the latter. In the same way, Jupiter is discussed in relation to its proximity to constellations.²⁵ Because these two planets are the brightest cosmic objects, subordinate to the sun and the moon, of course, they are exceedingly evident to anyone looking up at the night sky and thus became of central importance.

It was believed that celestial bodies were significantly correlated with terrestrial occurrences; it was just a matter of decrypting what the “astroglyphs” meant and how they related to the telluric realm.²⁶ The *Enuma Anu Enlil* labors to do exactly this, as there are premonitions associated with the different observed omens. For example, if Jupiter was witnessed to reach the middle of the constellation Scorpio, “the market [price] of one kor of barley will be reduced to one bushel” in the land of Akkad while another sign was interpreted as a “favorable portent for the rebuilding of Babylon.”²⁷ Obviously, great significance was placed

²² Rita Watson, and Horowitz, Wayne, *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*, Volume 48: Writing Science before the Greeks: A Naturalistic Analysis of the Babylonian Astronomical Treatise MUL.APIN. Leiden, NLD: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011, accessed March 28, 2016, ProQuest ebrary.

²³ Erlend Gehlken, *Cuneiform Monographs*, Volume 43 : Weather Omens of Enama Anu Enlil: Thunderstorms, Wind and Rain (Tablets 44–49). Leiden, NLD: BRILL, 2012, accessed March 28, 2016, ProQuest ebrary.

²⁴ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 24.

²⁵ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 24.

²⁶ Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing*, 2.

²⁷ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 27, 30.

on deciphering the heavens as it had far-reaching outcomes that could affect all the people within the kingdom, potentially even the known world. Not just anyone, however, was literate, and even fewer were considered qualified to read the script of the gods, let alone to convey such lofty prophecies.

In “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” Erica Reiner explains that celestial forecasts were specific to the king and the country, not affecting individuals.²⁸ Prophecies were always much broader in scope, dealing with the conditions of the four countries of which the Ancient Near Eastern world was divided, the death of kings, and the success or failure of crops. Since the king’s power was derived from the gods, it became vital that he understand the gods. For the express purpose of informing the king of their translations of the heavens, the palace employed a repertoire of diviners and scribes. Namburbi rituals were even developed to avoid unfavorable consequences of omens when celestial phenomenon predicted them.²⁹ For example, if the portents foretold that the king would soon die, a substitute king ritual was employed by placing a royally insignificant person on the throne while the actual king temporarily stepped down. The concept was that the standing king would fall victim to the forecasted premonition to save the life of the actual king. Accordingly, considering the dangers, such omens became such an imperative part of politics for the state that the practice of celestial divination quickly spread outside of the Babylonian scribal centers.

Near Eastern Kings now realized that if these heavenly messages could be accurately decoded, they could know exactly what the gods coveted, how to placate them, and would even be able to obtain knowledge of future events. The divination texts “presupposed the belief that, if

²⁸ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 22.

²⁹ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 31.

one could read the celestial signs in the sky, written by the gods, and interpret their meaning, events concerning the welfare of the king, state, and its people as a whole could be divined.”³⁰ If a king could discern the fate of his kingdom and people, as well as those of bordering kingdoms, he would be very powerful indeed. Subsequently, by the second millennium BCE, the reading and interpretation of celestial signs had become a major feature of the learned culture of Mesopotamia, and these approaches to the heavens rapidly spread from Babylon to powerful neighboring states including Hatti and Elam.³¹ Celestial divination and close observance of the night skies became an integral part of Ancient Near Eastern religion, government, administration, and civic development. Thus, the celestial portents, such as eclipses, specifically affected kings and their rule. Premonitions were therefore written exclusively for their use and to their caution.³²

An Old Babylonian poem, *The King of Battle*, tells of Sargon, the king of Akkad, and his encounters with eclipses. It accounts, “The sun became obscured, and the stars came out for the enemy,” while another premonition regarding the king suggests that he “made an incursion during darkness and saw light.”³³ Both events imply eclipse events and are placed into an affirmative context that demonstrates Sargon’s divine authority as king and conqueror. These accounts were almost certainly written after the fact, as eclipses were mysterious events throughout ancient times, and remained enigmatic until the premodern era.³⁴ Sargon II of Assyria, while his army was en route to conquer Urartu, experienced a lunar eclipse. Although

³⁰ Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing*, 2.

³¹ Francesca Rochberg, “Babylonian Horoscopy: The Texts and Their Relations,” in *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999), 39.

³² Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 30.

³³ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 24.

³⁴ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 23.

lunar eclipses could mean fortune for the king, they did not always preordain success.³⁵ They could alternatively be understood as omens of defeat or the demise of the king. Sargon II halted his army and sent for his haruspex to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon, and only when he received a prosperous reading did he continue his march.³⁶ Fashioning a nearly two-thousand-year practice, Near Eastern kings such as Sargon of Akkad, Nabonidus of Neo-Babylonia, and the aforementioned Xerxes of Persia are all likewise said to have “heeded portents taken from eclipses” before proceeding with their conquests.³⁷

Near Eastern kings regarded eclipse divinations with the utmost importance, expressly in the setting of battle. Furthermore, these practices were maintained throughout the Near Eastern kingdoms as a decisive contrivance for governing and keeping in the good graces of the gods. Celestial omens grew into an underpinning motivation, ubiquitous in considerations for warfare, administrative decisions, religious procedures, farming practices, and even infiltrating society so deep as to affect prices on goods in the marketplaces. Additionally, any person was able to observe the heavens and, although the majority may not have been capable of interpreting the stars, all understood that the celestial bodies were manifestations of the gods. If a phenomenon befell, even the simplest person could recognize that awesome repercussions imminently teetered on the impulse of a powerful and capricious god. Eclipses were thus “terrifying events, inexplicable as long as the conditions for their occurrence were not recognized.”³⁸ Entire armies would have been petrified at such a display, and anxieties would have been paramount until the omens were interpreted and forlorn action taken to placate an infuriated deity. Surely, Thales’

³⁵ Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing*, 139.

³⁶ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 24.

³⁷ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 30.; and Herodotus, *The Histories*, 514: 7.37.

³⁸ Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 23.

Eclipse did not happen as Herodotus recounts it, but it is positively reasonable to accept that such an event could have transpired, albeit corruption in specific facts. Since celestial omens had become such a dominant part of Near Eastern religion, society, and government, an eclipse could certainly induce panic among observers and would have absolutely lead to pervasive diplomatic undertakings, including an armistice if the diviners perceived that the portent resulted from a conflict between warring empires. Insomuch that Herodotus carries the epithet, the Father of Lies, his credibility can undoubtedly be found, not in his details, but in the context.

Bibliography

- Gehlken, Erlend. *Cuneiform Monographs*, Volume 43: Weather Omens of Enama Anu Enlil: Thunderstorms, Wind and Rain (Tablets 44–49). Leiden, NLD: BRILL, 2012. Accessed March 28, 2016. ProQuest ebrary.
- Herodotus. *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, edited by Robert B. Strassler, translated by Andrea L. Purvis. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2007.
- Reiner, Erica. "Babylonian Celestial Divination." In *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*, edited by N. M. Swerdlow, 21-37. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999.
- Rochberg, Francesca. "Babylonian Horoscopy: The Texts and Their Relations." In *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*, edited by N. M. Swerdlow, 39-59. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999.
- . *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . 1996. "Personifications and Metaphors in Babylonian Celestial Omina." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (3). American Oriental Society: 475–85. Accessed March 16, 2016. doi:10.2307/605149.
- Swerdlow, N. M., ed. *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999.
- Thomas, Rosalind. "Introduction," in *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, edited by Robert B. Strassler, translated by Andrea L. Purvis. ix-xxxvi. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2007.
- Watson, Rita, and Horowitz, Wayne. *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*, Volume 48: Writing Science before the Greeks: A Naturalistic Analysis of the Babylonian Astronomical Treatise MUL.APIN. Leiden, NLD: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011. Accessed March 28, 2016. ProQuest ebrary.
- Worthen, Thomas. "Herodotus's Report on Thales' Eclipse." *Electronic Antiquity: Communicating the Classics*. May 1997. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V3N7/worthen.html>.

Rebirth and Resurrection

In *The World's Wife*, Carol Ann Duffy embarks on a feminist revision of popular myths and tales by framing them from the perspective of the usually silent women of the stories. She transforms these myths and folktales in a way that makes the women within them have their own agency, and twists the tales in such a way that they retain their former storylines while conveying new ideas about the characters within them. "Demeter", the final poem from the collection, celebrates the maternal bond between mother and daughter. While a majority of the poems within *The World's Wife* focus on the voice of the unheard wife, "Demeter" instead chooses to focus on the voice of Demeter herself who has lost all happiness with the loss of her daughter. Duffy chooses to emphasize this love between a mother and daughter by deliberately excluding a masculine voice from the story. She erases the "romantic" subtext of the original myth by erasing the involvement of Hades; instead, she is celebrating women and the bond between them, particularly the bond between a mother and daughter. By ending *The World's Wife* with the poem "Demeter", Duffy is emphasizing the purity of maternal love over that of romantic love; in telling the story from the perspective of the usually silent mother within the romantic tale, Duffy is giving a voice to the maternal role and highlighting the importance of such a love.

The original myth of Persephone and Hades demonstrates Demeter's grief over having her daughter stolen from her by Hades. Demeter, plagued by the disappearance of her daughter, seeks Persephone "without rest for nine days and nights, neither eating nor drinking, and calling fruitlessly all the while" (Graves 92). Engulfed by her grief, she interrogates Helios, who sees everything, and he informs her that it was Hades who had abducted her daughter. Enraged, she "continued to wander the earth, forbidding the trees to yield fruit and the herbs to grow, until the race of men stood in danger of extinction" (Graves 93) before eventually striking a deal with

both Zeus and Hades to allow her daughter to spend six months on earth with her and three months in the underworld as the queen of Tartarus. Despite this vexed characterization, Demeter is known as the goddess of the harvest; she continuously brings life to the earth and makes it fertile, and due to this she tends to have a matronly, kind disposition throughout classical literature. Duffy's version of this goddess is wildly different to most classical portrayals; the poem depicts Demeter as a more three-dimensional character and expands on her love for Persephone as well as her grief.

One of the primary ways Duffy explores this concept is through her use of language. Duffy introduces the audience to the grief that Demeter possesses over the loss of her daughter with the first line of the poem, "Where I lived – winter and hard earth" (Duffy 1). Duffy is already introducing the audience to the idea of a colder Demeter. She relates her to earthly properties, as she is the goddess of the harvest, but instead of warmth and growth, all these properties are hard and cold to emphasize her heartbreak over the loss of Persephone. Demeter is despondent; her sadness has literally made the world cold to reflect her own grief. She continues with this characterization in the next lines,

"I sat in my cold stone room
choosing tough words, granite, flint,
to break the ice" (Duffy 2-4).

The world that Duffy has already created in her poem is barren – Demeter, as the goddess of the harvest, represents rebirth and fertility, and Duffy contrasts this by introducing the world as infertile in the first stanza. This infertility relates directly to Demeter; without her child, the world is barren and she is barely living in it. All of her word choices are as harsh and as dead as

the world that surrounds her and they explain her isolation – her grief as a mother is insurmountable.

But this coldness is thawed and forgotten as Persephone finally returns to her mother. Demeter expresses this by saying, “She came from a long, long way, [...] my daughter, my girl, across the fields” (Duffy 7-9). The audience can already sense the palpable joy and relief that Demeter feels. Demeter doesn’t even call her daughter by her name; the use of the pronoun “she” keeps the stanza in a dream-like state, reinforcing the idea that Demeter is awakening from a prolonged slumber or death that was caused by the loss of her daughter. Like Persephone, who is returning to her mother from a place that embodies death, Demeter is returning from the dead as well and her maternal love allows her to be reborn once again. Duffy even uses repetition to solidify Demeter’s possession over Persephone when saying, “my daughter, my girl”. The tone of the poem automatically shifts during these lines; instead of the isolated grief the audience has been presented with in the first two stanzas, the last four stanzas are monumentally warmer in word choice. It also seems that Demeter’s grief is automatically cured by the presence of her daughter. This is apparent in the fourth stanza, when the poem says,

“across the fields,

in bare feet, bringing all of spring’s flowers

to her mother’s house” (Duffy 9-11).

As Persephone returns to her mother, the audience is presented with another visual image of rebirth. Her bare feet, suggesting Persephone’s own free-spiritedness but also her vulnerability as a young woman stolen away from her home, bring life to the Earth once again after a long time of the barrenness that is apparent in the first stanza. Demeter even refers to herself in third

person, keeping the dream-like state of the poem surreal; she is so overcome with her happiness at the return of her daughter that it seems unbelievable. The Underworld and Persephone's absence is now completely forgotten as Demeter springs herself and the Earth back to life through her maternal bond to her daughter.

The poem closes with the line, "with the small shy mouth of a new moon" (Duffy 14), which evokes another image of rebirth or renewal. In this line the new moon is personified, as most elements in classical literature are; traits and pieces of earth are personified into beings, such as the goddess Metis, who is a personification of the trait of being cunning. But Duffy also chooses to employ the word "shy", which seems peculiar in the passage. Overcome with joy at the return of her daughter, the reader might assume that Demeter would receive Persephone without any hesitation, but the use of the word "shy" implies that perhaps Demeter is hesitant to welcome her daughter home. This is because Demeter seems to fear the future; she yearns for her daughter's return so eagerly that she is already anticipating her absence again, and the bond between them, though strong, is slightly vulnerable after her daughter's continuous departure. The new-moon also suggests that this is another rebirth; Demeter has started a new part of her life which includes the presence of her daughter.

Though the original myth clearly describes Demeter's grief over losing her daughter, Duffy's transformation of the myth brings an empathetic and human aspect to the immortal goddess and allows Demeter to describe her anguish and suffering without the interruption of a masculine voice. This is a theme of the *The World's Wife*, which transcends the simplicity of the myths and folktales it is describing by giving the woman a definitive and descriptive voice. "Demeter" is also particularly significant within the work because it is one of the few poems that does not describe a romantic bond; it instead focuses on the maternal. The audience reads stories

that liberate the women within them; they test their husbands, exclaim their independence and push the boundaries their predecessors have set for them. But among this liberation, Duffy decides to conclude her book of poems with “Demeter”; a grieving mother who is brought a simple and inexorable joy by the return of her daughter. In her book, *Literature After Feminism*, Felski even argues “The love between the mothers and daughters is the unwritten story: unwritten in part because it diminishes men’s importance by relegating them to the sidelines” (117). Duffy instead chooses to honor this intimate and unique bond while maintaining the poem as a feminist revision of earlier myths and stories.

To conclude a book of poems that celebrates the liberated woman in respect to her male counterpart with a poem that completely ignores the masculine voice and the romantic bond associated with most of the poems is an embodiment of the message the entire collection is trying to assert. In this sense, Demeter is “the world’s wife”. Classically, she is the mother to the earth; she brings fertility and life to what would otherwise be a barren land. She is also never commonly associated with a male counterpart. Unlike the other gods, “Demeter [...] has no husband” (Graves 91). She is independent and free from the chains that have commonly been created by men, and she only cares to celebrate her own children and the earth itself. But her poem also encompasses the message of the entire collection and is offered to the audience as an intimate gift declaring the everlasting bond between mothers and daughters. “Demeter” asserts that maternal love is strong enough to withstand separation, but is also stronger than that of a romantic bond.

Works Cited

Duffy, Carol Ann. *The World's Wife*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2001. Print.

Felski, Rita. *Literature After Feminism*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2003. Print.

Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1955. Print.

The Intersection of Ancient Literary Themes with the Lyrics of Today's Music:

Catullus' *Carmen 16* and Childish Gambino's "Backpackers"

To many people the literature of the ancient past seems distant, outdated, and inaccessible. However, in my experience, the literature that comes to us from the ancient world is not unlike the music enjoyed by those living in the present. The use of aggressive and invective language to illicit a humorous reaction from the audience is common in many examples of both ancient literature, particularly invective poetry, and modern music, namely the genres of hip-hop and rap. For this paper I have chosen to focus primarily on the lyrics of the rapper Childish Gambino's (AKA Donald Glover) song "Backpackers" and the Roman poet Gaius Valerius Catullus' *Carmen 16*, pointing out the notable thematic parallels between the two. It is my belief that by drawing comparisons such as those presented here, ancient texts that would otherwise be viewed as arduous and esoteric can be better understood by a larger audience, thus opening up the study of the Classics to a wider audience.

Gaius Valerius Catullus wrote his poems during during the late Roman Republic. Though originally born in the city of Verona in Cisalpine Gaul (today's Northern Italy), he travelled to Rome at an early age and this is where he wrote his poetry. The poetic style varies poem to poem and Catullus utilizes a variety of meters and styles, but he is most famous for his love and hate elegies, the former being what I have chosen to focus on in this paper, namely *Carmen 16*, as it is these elegies that most closely resemble music in the hip-hop and rap genres today.

Many of Catullus' elegies reference his lover, who he calls Lesbia, both praising her and admonishing her. This is not unlike the trend in modern music to write songs centered on more personal subjects. In Catullus' time, this trend was known as the neoteric style of poetry and it is

classified by a shift from writing about traditional Homeric themes such as gods and heroes to those of more superficial subjects such as moments from daily life and personal relationships. This new style pioneered by the *poetae novi* seems to have been rejected by the more traditionalist members of Roman society.¹ This disdain for new styles of art is not unlike the response from older generations today, whose nostalgia for the music of their youth and their inability to let the past go has led many of them to view hip-hop and rap as disgraceful and detrimental to society, not unlike the opinions held by the older generations of Romans regarding the neoteric poets. However, it is pointed out by both the neoteric poets and today's musicians that the lyrics in their poetry and songs are not necessarily a reflection of their own habits and lifestyles. Take *Carmen 16* for example:

“I’ll fuck your ass and rape your face
 Cock-gobbling, power-bottom poets²
 Who say my fancy, fluffy measures
 Make me a flaccid, fluffing fag.
 A pious poet should be pure
 But his poems don’t have to
 be. Poetry should taste like sex.
 Its meaty words can lick and flit
 Their tongues to scratch the itch that lifts
 Not just young boys but wrinkled men
 Whose cocks are as curdled as their lines.
 Because you’ve read my kissing poems
 You think you can make my mouth your
 cunt? I’ll fuck your ass and rape your face!³”

¹Cicero mentions the neoteric poets in his letters to Atticus (*Att.* 7.2), parodying their style. Lyne makes a case for including Catullus in this group of poets Cicero parodies (Lyne, 1978, p. 167)

²Aurelius and Furius, contemporaries of Catullus, are named by Catullus in the original Latin text.

³I have chosen this translation, albeit a looser one, of *Carmen 16* from the poet G.M. Palmer for stylistic reasons and because, in my opinion, it conveys the spirit of the poem rather well.

Here Catullus responds to his contemporaries, Aurelius and Furius, who have presumably insulted him by suggesting that he is impotent because of his love elegy to Lesbia, *Carmen 5*, which makes use of passionate and romantic language and in which he describes a multitude of kisses between him and Lesbia in lines 7-9 (hence his “kissing poems”):

“Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
Then another thousand, then a second hundred,
Then still another thousand, then a hundred”

Catullus admonishes Aurelius and Furius in *Carmen 16* for thinking that this poem is a literal reflection of his sexual prowess, stating that each of his poems is meant to illicit a specific response from his audience, and in the case of *Carmen 5* it is meant to romance Lesbia. This belief that a poem must reflect the poet’s own life can also be seen in Martial’s *Epigrams*. Martial was a poet who wrote his *Epigrams* during the period of the Roman Empire in the first century CE, about a hundred years after Catullus. In *Epigram 15* of book eleven of his *Epigrams*, Martial reminds Apollinaris, the addressee of the poem, that poetry does not necessarily describe the life of a poet accurately:

“Remember, however, Apollinaris, that these verses are for the Saturnalia⁴, and not to be taken as a picture of my morals.⁵”

⁴Martial insists that his epigrams, namely those with sexual content, are meant to be read as *ioci*, or jokes, to provoke laughter. There is much evidence to support that the Romans enjoyed outrageous sexual language during festivals such as the Saturnalia, and it can be inferred that Martial may have been expecting to amuse his audience with his outrageousness. (Adams, 1990, p. 7)

⁵Translation taken from from Martialis, Valerius. "*Martial, Epigrams. Book 11*. Mainly from Bohn's Classical Library (1897)." N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

Martial was no doubt inspired by Catullus' own poetry⁶ and as we see here, they shared a similar view of the relationship between a poet and his works. The same view held by Catullus can also be seen in Childish Gambino's song "Backpackers," where he references criticism of his lyrics which suggests that his song perpetuates and encourages sexual violence:

"Fuck the cool kids, not Chuck English,
 But people who think that hatin' on me makes them distinguished
 ...
 'I wrote on rape culture my junior year at Brown
 So I'm allowed to say what all his raps are about'
 You better shut your mouth
 before I fuck it.
 You really hate my
 lyrics, or Kid Cudi's?"

Gambino questions the authority of his critics, calling their opinions and critiques of his lyrics into question just as Catullus does in *Carmen 16* when he berates Aurelius and Furius for thinking less of him because of the content of a few of his poems. Gambino quotes his haters, stating that writing a paper on rape culture one time for a class they took years ago neither makes them experts on the subject, nor does it give them the authority to declare the intent of his lyrics,

⁶ Preston, Keith. "Martial and Formal Literary Criticism." *Classical Philology*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1920, p. 345.

and forcefully tells them that they should “shut up” about his lyrics before threatening them with sexual violence should they not heed his warning, mirroring Catullus’ use of *pedicare* and *irrumare* in *Carmen 16*. Additionally, Gambino references fellow rapper Kid Cudi, from whose song “Cudi Zone” he’s taken the lyric “shut your mouth before I fuck it,” possibly to both shift blame to Kid Cudi and to excuse himself. Childish Gambino and Catullus would certainly have seen eye-to-eye on the relationship between a poet and their poetry, or in Childish Gambino’s case, a rapper and their lyrics.

Furthermore, the use of sexual language in poetry would have had a humorous function as well, just as it does in today’s music. As I have already discussed, this violent sexual language is deliberately outrageous and various sexual terminology was used without any intention of carrying out the acts of violence they describe. Catullus’ *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo* carries no indication of any real intention to rape Aurelius and Furius, but acts solely as a way to vent frustrations through means of verbal aggression.⁷ This notion can further be seen in graffiti from the Roman world, particularly those found in the site of Pompeii, where there is a joke that is often repeated wherein the reader of the inscription is said to “be *X*” or “do *X*,” with *X* representing a sexual term.⁸ For example, *CIL* IV. 4008 reads: *pedicatur qui leget* which translates as “whoever reads this suffers *pedicatio*.” The only act carried out in this case is that whoever passes by and reads the inscription metaphorically submits to the act. Likewise, when Childish Gambino says he will fuck his critics in the mouth in “Backpackers,” he carries no such intention to do so in reality, but rather his critics metaphorically have this act carried out on them by listening to the song.

⁷ Often times, the use of hyperbolic language acts as a substitute for actual sexual violence. Adams, 1990, 124

⁸ Adams describes many such inscriptions. 1990, 124, 131

In my experience many people view the study of the Classics as an exclusive club that only the most elite and well-educated can join, but this is simply not the case. The people living in the past would certainly have had to navigate many of the same social situations that we do today, and they would have done so by using the tools available to them. One such way would have been through poetry, not unlike how we use song lyrics to respond to our peers and the world around us today. I hope that I have made a good case for the parallels between Catullus' *Carmen 16* and Childish Gambino's "Backpackers" in this paper. It is my belief that by making comparisons such as the ones presented here, we can help to bridge the gap between our culture today and the culture of the historical past which we study, thus opening the Classics to a new audience who would otherwise find it daunting and restricted.

Bibliography

Lyne, R.O.A.M. "The Neoteric Poets." *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1978, pp. 167–187.

Adams, J.N. *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

Bonne Bouche Books. *Poems by GM Palmer*. Burlesque Press. N.P., 06 Apr. 2012. Web. 02 Mar. 2017.

Martialis, Valerius. "*Martial, Epigrams. Book 11.*" Mainly from Bohn's Classical Library (1897). N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

Preston, Keith. "Martial and Formal Literary Criticism." *Classical Philology*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1920, pp. 340–352.

For More Information About *Pithos*

You can find information about submitting to *Pithos* and digital copies of our past volumes online at:

<http://classics.sfsu.edu/classics-students-association>

For further inquiries, please e-mail us at: pithos.sfsu@gmail.com

To be added to the Classics Students Association Mailing List forward the following information: name, address, telephone (optional) and e-mail to the e-mail address:

csa.sfstate@gmail.com,

All inquiries may also be sent via post to:

Classics Students Association

Care of the Department of Classics

San Francisco State University

1600 Holloway Avenue

San Francisco, CA 94132