THE WITCHES OF THESSALY

Translate blue, green, purple, red, orange in that order.

Words translated in black have no Latin equivalent.

iuvenis ego Mileto profectus ad spectaculum Olympicum,

I, as a young man, having set off from Miletus for the Olympic Games,

cum haec etiam loca provinciae clarae visitare cuperem,

since I also wanted to visit these places of the famous province,

peragrata tota Thessalia Larissam perveni.

reached Larissa, having travelled through the whole of Thessaly.

**iuvenis** - The name of the young man is **Thelyphron**.

**Mileto** – The city of Miletus was in Asia Minor (now Turkey).

**provinciae** - The province is Greece.

ac dum urbem pererrans tenuato viatico paupertati meae fomenta quaero,

And wandering through the city, while I was looking for remedies for my poverty as my travelling allowance had diminished,

medio in foro senem conspicio.

I caught sight of an old man in the middle of the forum.

**conspicio** – This is a present tense form, but is best translated by a past tense in English. This is known as a HISTORIC PRESENT. It makes the verb stand out, just like the man, and it makes his appearance more startling.

insistebat lapidem magnaque voce praedicabat,

He was standing on a stone and proclaiming in a loud voice,

si quis mortuum custodire vellet, magnum praemium accepturum esse.

if anyone wanted to guard a dead body, he would receive a large reward.

**custodire** – The guarding of a tomb after burial was common, but it was very unusual to guard one before burial as here. Something sinister is clearly going on.

et cuidam praetereunti “quid hoc” inquam “audio”? hic mortui solent aufugere?

And I said to someone going by, “What is this I hear? Are the dead accustomed to run away here?”

**quid … aufugere –** This comment by Thelyphron is supposed to be a **joke** and shows his **ignorance** of life in Thessaly.

“tace,” respondit ille. “nam puer et satis peregrinus es, meritoque nescis in Thessalia te esse,

“Be quiet!” he replied. “For you are a boy and a mere foreigner, and naturally you do not know that you are in Thessaly,

ubi sagae ora mortuorum semper demorsicant, quae sunt illis artis magicae supplementa.”

where witches always bite pieces out of the faces of the dead which are extra ingredients in the magic art for them.”

**tace** – By placing the word **on its own**, it has extra force. It creates a **tense atmosphere**.

**puer** – An **exaggeration** used to put Thelyphron down. (If he were a boy, he would not be travelling on his own.)

**Thessalia** – Thessaly was the homeland of the most famous witch in mythology, Medea.

**demorsicant** – This is a **strong** and **rare** word. Such things make the story even more sinister.

contra ego “quali custodela” inquam “opus est?”

In reply I said, “What sort of protection is needed?”

“iam primum” respondit ille “totam noctem eximie vigilandum est

“To begin with,” he replied “you must stay perfectly awake the whole night

**totam** – This stresses the **duration** of the guarding (it would have meant the same thing with the word missed out, but this really brings home you cannot sleep for a moment.

**eximie** – This again stresses the **intensity** of the guarding needed.

apertis et inconivis oculis semper in cadaver intentis,

with eyes open and sleepless and always directed on the corpse,

nec acies usquam devertenda est, cum illae pessimae sagae latenter arrepant,

and your glance must not be diverted anywhere, since those most foul witches may secretly creep up,

**apertis** et **inconivis** – There is really just one idea here (eyes open and sleepless). Having two separate words convey one idea is known as a HENDIADYS. This again helps to stress how **vigilant** the guard needs to be.

**semper** – This again stresses the **duration** of the **careful** guarding needed.

forma in quodvis animal conversa.

with their form changed into any animal.

nam et aves et canes et mures, immo vero etiam muscas induunt.

For they take the form of both birds and dogs and mice and indeed, even flies.

**et** … **et** … **et** – The repetition (known as POLYSNDETON) of “**et**” stresses the range of animals that the witches can assume the identity of.

**immo vero etiam** – The three words really **emphasise** just how far the witches can go to get what they want.

his cognitis animum meum commasculo et statim accedens senem “clamare” inquam “iam desine.” adest custos paratus

After finding out these things, I strengthened my mind and at once approaching the old man, I said “Stop shouting now. There is a guard here ready.”

vix finieram et statim me perducit ad domum quondam, ubi demonstrat matronam flebilem fuscis vestimentis contectam.

I had hardly finished when he lead me at once to a certain house, where he showed me a weeping lady, wrapped in dark clothes.

**commasculo** – This is a **pun**. Thelyphron’s name literally means “with a woman’s mind”, but here the word means to become male (masculine).

This verb (and **perducit** and **demonstrat**) are HISTORIC PRESENT verbs (see earlier). Here it speeds the story on as it moves towards an exciting moment (the guarding).

**flebilem** **fuscis** – The ALLITERATION (repeated first letter) perhaps reflects the sound of weeping of the lady.

**matronam** **flebilem** **fuscis** **vestimentis** – This is a CHIASMUS (ABBA order – noun, adjective, noun, adjective). This twisted word order might reflect the woman being wrapped up in mourning clothes.

**statim** – The fact that Thelyphron volunteers so readily shows he is **naive**.

**clamare** … **paratus** – The shortness of the phrases from Thelyphron shows his **confidence**.

**vix** – The speed of the old man in leading Thelyphron to the woman and the corpse shows his **desperation** and the fact he is only too glad to find someone to guard the body.

illa surrexit et ad cubiculum me induxit.

she stood up and led me to a bedroom.

ibi corpus splendentibus linteis coopertum manu relevait.

there she uncovered a body, wrapped by hand in shining white sheets.

ubi singula anxie demonstravit, exiit.

When she anxiously showed me the individual features, she left.

**illa** – there is something **sinister** in the behaviour of the old woman in these lines as she does not utter a single word (or perhaps it is the effect of the grief). Whichever, it certainly adds to the **tension**.

**singula anxie**– She is keen to show him every feature, showing her **desperation**, as she knows the danger that might follow. This also creates **tension**.

sic desolatus ad cadaveris solacium, perfrictis oculis et paratis ad vigiliam,

Left alone in this way to the comforting of the corpse, with eyes rubbed and ready for the guard duty,

dum animum meum permulcebam cantationibus, usque ad mediam noctem pervigilibam.

while I was soothing my mind with songs, I was staying awake right up to the middle of the night.

**perfrictis** … **paratis** – This is ALLITERATION (and similar sounds with p, r and t).

**permulcebam** **cantationibus** – This shows that Thelyphron, despite his earlier confidence, might be **afraid** at this point.

**usque** … **mediam** – This emphasises how late in the night it was (and hence creates more **atmosphere**).

tum autem mihi formido cumulatior cum repente introrepens mustela contra me constitit oculosque in me fixit.

But then my fear was further increased when suddenly a weasel, creeping in, stood facing me and fixed its eyes on me.

tanta fiducia in tantulo animali mihi turbavit animum.

Such great self-confidence in so small an animal disturbed my mind.

denique sic illi “abi” inquam “scelesta bestia, antequam meam vim celeriter experiaris! abi!”

Finally I spoke to it as follows, “go away, wicked beast, before you quickly experience my strength! Go away!”

**cumulatior** – This shows Thelyphron was already **afraid**.

**mustela** – The naming of the animal slightly delayed in its phrase to create **tension** (what is the animal going to be?). Weasels were particularly ominous to the Romans.

**tanta** … **tantulo** – The similarity in the two words helps **contrast** the different feelings of the weasel and Thelyphon.

**tantulo** – This is a DIMINUTIVE form (–ulo = a little). This helps the above contrast.

**denique** – Thelyphron was clearly **disturbed** as he takes a while to gain his composure.

**abi** – By putting this already short word on its own shows Thelyphron’s **determination**, as does the repetition of the word later.

mustela terga vertit et e cubiculo protinus exit.

The weasel turned its back and immediately left the bedroom.

sine mora somnus tam profundus me repente demergit, ut ne deus quidem Delphicus ipse Without delay such a deep sleep suddenly overwhelmed me that not even the god of Delphi himself

facile discernere posset ex duobus nobis iacentibus, quis esset magis mortuus.

could easily decide from the two of us lying there, which was the more dead.

**vertit** … **exit** … **demergit** – All these verbs are HISTORIC PRESENT tense forms to highlight the increase in **tension**.

**protinus** … **sine** **mora** … **repente** – This suggests an increase in the pace of the story.

**deus** **Delphicus** – Apollo was the god of Delphi. He was the god of prophecy and magic, so would be an appropriate god to tell them apart.

**magis mortuus** – To be more lifeless than a corpse is a PARADOX (impossible action). It stresses just how asleep Thelyphron was. Is the statement also comical?

tandem prima luce expergitus et magno pavore perterritus cadaver accurro,

Finally awoken at first light, I ran over to the corpse in terror and with great panic,

et admoto lumine revelatoque eius vultu, omnia diligenter inspicio: nihil deest.

and when a light had been brought near and its face uncovered, I carefully inspected everything. Nothing was missing.

ecce uxor misera flens introrumpit: cadaver inspecto reddit sine mora praemium.

Look, his poor wife burst in, weeping. After inspecting the corpse, she paid the reward without delay.

**pavore** **perterritus** – The placing next to each other (known as JUXTAPOSITION) of two similarly meaning words (a HENDIADYS) stresses the complete **panic** of Thelyphron.

**accurro** … **inspicio** … **deest** - All these verbs are HISTORIC PRESENT tense forms to highlight the speed Thelyphron checks the situation, which shows his **panic**.

**accurro** … **deest** – The shortness of the first phrase also shows the speed with which Thelyphron checks the situation, which shows his **panic**. The shortness of the second phrase shows his sudden **relief**.

**introrumpit** … **reddit** – These verbs are HISTORIC PRESENT tense forms to highlight the **speed** the woman wants to be rid of Thelyphron.

**ecce** – This focuses the reader’s attention and creates **drama**.

**introrumpit** – This is a strong word to which adds to the **tension**.

**sine mora** – The immediate payment also shows the woman is keen for him to go.

“per fidem vestram” inquit “cives, per pietatem publicam, perempto civi subsistite

“Citizens,” he said “for the sake of your honour, for the sake of public duty, help a murdered citizen

et extremum facinus istius feminae nefariae scelestae severiter vindicate.

and punish severely the vilest crime of that wicked and villainous woman.

haec enim nec ullus alius miserum iuvenem, sororis meae filium, in adulteri gratiam et ob praedam hereditariam exstinxit veneno.”

For this woman, not any other person, killed this poor young man with poison, the son of my sister, to please her lover and for the sake of the profit of an inheritance.”

**per pietatem publicam perempto** – The ALLITERATION is very forceful and shows the **passion** of the speaker.

**istius** – This is a much stronger word than “**hic**”. This shows the **anger** of the speaker

**scelestae nefariae** – These two words mean the same thing (a HENDIADYS). This emphasises the character of the alleged murderess. This is further helped by their being no word for “and” in the middle (the lack of a connecting word is called ASYNDETON).

**sceleste severiter** - The ALLITERATION here indicates a harsh hissing sound to show the **anger** of the speaker.

**exstinxit veneno** – This is delayed until the very end to create **tension**. We want to know what the man is alleged to have done.

**in** **gratiam** … **ob** – Both these words mean the same thing here. The author uses two different phrases to create variety.

illa, lacrimis effusis quamque sanctissime poterat adiurans cunctos deos, tantum scelus abnuebat.

She, with tears streaming, swearing by all the gods as piously as she could, denied so great a crime.

ergo senex ille: “veritatis arbitrium in divinam providentiam ponamus.

Therefore that old man said, “let us put the judgement of the truth into divine providence.

**lacrimis** … **adiurans** - The strength of her denial is shown by her tears and calling on the gods.

**ille** – There is no main verb here (we have to understand “said”). This speeds up the action to create **excitement**.

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Zatchlas adest Aegyptius propheta notissimus, qui mihi promisit se pro magno praemio

Zatchlas is here, a very famous Egyptian prophet, who promised me that for a great reward

spiritum istius cadaveris paulisper ab inferis reducturum esse corpusque animaturum.”

he would bring back the spirit of that corpse from the dead for a short while and bring the body back to life.”

**animaturum** – understand **“esse”** as part of the indirect statement. This omission helps speed up the story.

immitto me turbae et pone ipsum lectulum lapidem insistens omnia curiosis oculis. spectabam.

I pushed myself into the crowd and standing on a stone behind the bier itself, I began to watch everything with curious eyes.

iam tumore pectus cadaveris extolli, iam spiritu corpus impleri.

Now the chest of the corpse was being lifted with swellling, and now the body was being filled with breath.

**immitto** – This is another HISTORIC PRESENT to denote dramatic action to come, as does the repetition of **iam**.

et surgit cadaver et profatur:

And the corpse rose and spoke out:

“cur, oro, me post Lethaea pocula iam Stygiis paludibus innatantem ad momentariae vitae officia reducitis?

“why, I beg you, do you now bring me back after drinking from the waters of Lethe and sailing on the Stygian swamps to the duties of a short-lived life?

”desine iam, precor, desine, ac me in meam quietam permitte.”

Stop now, I pray, stop, and release me into my rest.

**surgit** – This is another HISTORIC PRESENT tense form and placed before the noun to stress the key action.

**Lethaea** **pocula** – Lethe was a river in the Underworld. When spirits drank from its waters, they would forget about their previous life.

The corpse speaks very formally which adds to the solemnity and grandeur of the scene.

**desine** – The repetition of the word (known as ANAPHORA) shows a strong and demanding request.

haec vox de corpore audita est, sed propheta aliquanto commotior

This voice was heard from the body, but the prophet somewhat more forcefully

“quin narras” inquit “populo omnia de morte tua?”

said, “why don’t you tell the people all about your death?”

respondet ille de lectulo et imo cum gemitu populum sic adloquitur:

“He replied from the bier and addressed the people as follows with a deep groan:

malis novae nuptae artibus peremptus et addictus noxio poculo, torum tepentem adultero reddidi.

“Murdered by the evil arts of my new bride, a victim of a poisoned wine-cup, I gave back a warm bed to her lover.

**malis** – **artibus** – This is a CHIASMUS (ABBA order). It draws emphasis to the idea within it by its unusual word order.

The corpse confirms the earlier speech of the speaker at line 48 that he was killed for money, while adding an extra exciting detail that the bride had a lover at the time.

**tepentem** – This extra detail implies the bed was hardly cold (i.e. the bed was still warm) before the widow slept with her lover.

dabo vobis documenta veritatis perlucida, et quod prorsus alius nemo cognoverit vel ominaverit indicabo.”

I will give you very clear proof of the truth, and I will reveal what absolutely no-one else could find out or predict.”

**perlucida** – The prefix “per” means “very”, and suggests that his evidence is totally convincing.

**prorsus aliud nemo** – This is very emphatic.

(Oddly, the corpse does not give any proof at all in what is to follow. Perhaps what comes next distracts him!)

tunc digito me demonstrans:

Then, pointing at me with his finger, he said:

“nam cum corporis mei custos hic sagacissimus exsertam vigiliam mihi teneret,

“For when this very keen-witted guard of my body was keeping an intensive vigil for me,

sagae quaedam exuviis meis imminentes forma mutate apparuerunt.

some witches appeared, having changed their form, eager for my remains.

**tunc** – There is no verb in this line to speed up the action and create **excitement**.

**sagacissimus exsertam** – By placing these words next to each other (JUXTAPOSITION), it stresses the **care** of Thelyphron’s guarding. The SUPERLATIVE (**sagacissimus**) also highlights this.

cum industriam sedulam eius fallere non potuissent,

When they had been unable to deceive his determined diligence,

postremo iniecta somni nebula eum in profundam quietem sepeliverunt.

after finally casting a cloud of sleep on him, they buried him in a deep calm.

tum me nomine excitare coeperunt neque prius desierunt quam

Then they began to arouse me by name and they did not stop

dum hebetes artus mei et membra frigida ad artis magicae obsequiem segniter nituntur.

until my heavy joints and cold limbs struggled sluggishly to the obedience of their magic skill.

**industriam sedulam** – This adjective really stresses the **diligence** of Thelyphron.

**sepeliverunt** – This a very appropriate verb as earlier, when Thelyphron was asleep, we are told even Apollo could not tell who was more dead. He is so asleep, it is as if he has been buried in sleep.

**hebetes artus** … **membra frigida** – This is another CHIASMUS (ABBA) to draw attention to the **slowness** of his movements. The limbs and joints are cold and stiff as they are reluctant to move, but also it indicates what happens to the body in death.

**segniter** **nituntur** – This is a very effective PARADOX, as **nituntur** normally indicates keenness (= they strove sluggishly). It very much indicates the struggle between the power of the limbs and the corpse’s reluctance.

**nituntur** – This (and the verbs in the next section) is in the HISTORIC PRESENT tense form as the action gets very dramatic.

hic autem, qui vivus erat, et tantum sopore mortuus, idem mecum nomen forte habet.

But this man, who was alive, and only dead in a deep sleep, by chance had the same name as me.

ad suum nomen igitur ignarus exsurgit, et, in exanimis umbrae modum ultro gradiens, ianuam adit.

Therefore he unwittingly got up at the sound of his own name, and proceeding mechanically in the manner of a lifeless corpse, approached the door.

**sopore** **mortuus** – This continues the image in the previous lines of Thelyphron being “dead to the world” (i.e. buried in a deep sleep). This is further shown by the comparison of Thelyphron to a ghost (**umbrae**), and the description of the ghost being lifeless (**exanimis**).

**habet** … **exsurgit** … **adit** – These verbs are in the HISTORIC PRESENT tense form as the action gets very dramatic.

quamquam fores cubiculi diligenter occlusae erant,

Although the door of the bedroom had been carefully locked,

per quoddam foramen prosectis naso prius ac mox auribus lanienam pro me passus est. after the witches came in through a certain hole, after first his nose and soon his ears had been cut off, he suffered mutilation instead of me.

**per foramen** – the witches had entered through a hole in the door. They then assumed Thelyphron was the dead corpse (he did share its name, got up at the mention of his name and was dead to the world), and mutilated his body as they intended to do to the corpse.

tum sagae ceram in modum prosectarum formatam aurium ei applicant nasumque simile prosecto comparant.

Then the witches attached to him wax shaped in the manner of the cut off ears and they fitted on a nose like the one which had been cut off.

et nunc stat miser hic, praemium non industriae sed lanianae consecutus.”

And now the poor man stands here, having earned a reward not for industry, but of mutilation.

**prosectarum** **formatam** – these two words are JUXTAPOSED to show the striking contrast between the pretend features and the real ones that have been removed.

**applicant** – All the verbs in this sections are again in the HISTORIC PRESENT tense form to emphasise the key moment in the story and bring it to life.

**miser** – This creates **sympathy** for Thelyphron.

his dictis perterritus temptare formam incipio.

Terrified by these words, I began to examine my form.

manu nasum prehendo: sequitur; aures pertracto: deruunt.

I grasped my nose with my hand. It came off. I touched my ears. They fell off.

ac dum turba directis digitis et nutibus me denotat,

And while the crowd identified me with pointed fingers and nods,

inter pedes circumstantium frigido sudore defluens effugio.

I fled dripping with cold sweat among the feet of the bystanders.

**incipio** – All the verbs in this sections are again in the HISTORIC PRESENT tense form to emphasise the key moment in the story and bring it to life.

**manu** … **deruunt** – The sentences at this point are extremely short. This shows the **anxiety** of Thelyphron as he quickly touches his face to see if the corpse’s words are true. It also shows the speed at which his features fall off at the merest touch.

**dum** … **directis digitis** … **denotat** – The ALLITERATION here may well represent the **muttering** of the crowd.

**defluens** – This indicates total **panic** as it means he is literally “flowing” with sweat.

nec postea sic debilis ac sic ridiculus ad patriam redire potui,

And I could not return to my homeland afterwards maimed like this and ridiculous in this way,

sed capillis hinc inde deiectis aurium vulnera celavi,

but with my hair grown long on both sides I hid the wounds of my ears,

nasi vero dedecus linteolo isto decenter obtexi.

and what is more, I concealed the disgrace of my nose for decency’s sake with this small cloth.

Clearly Thelyphron feels **shame** in these final lines at having to mask his features, and we feel **pity** knowing that he is the victim of chance (having the same name as the corpse) and that he tried his best.