

## Love Magic: Performance Text and Notes, by Michael Ewans.

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### Performance Text

SIMAITHA

#### *Introduction*

Where are my bay leaves? Bring them, Thestylis. Where are the love-charms?  
Adorn the cup with fine red wool,  
So I can bind the lover who is hurting me.

It's eleven days since the swine has been here:  
He doesn't know if I'm dead or alive; 5  
The bastard hasn't even knocked on my door.  
Eros and Aphrodite have taken his fickle heart to another woman.  
I shall go tomorrow to Timagētos' gym to see him,  
And I'll have a go at him for what he's doing to me.  
But right now I will bind him with magic! 10

Moon, shine bright; for I will sing quietly to you, goddess,  
And to Hekatē from the underworld – even dogs tremble,  
When she comes among the tombs of the dead and the dark blood.  
I greet you, awesome Hekatē: help me achieve my goal;  
Make this magic as strong as that of Circe 15  
And Medea and blonde Perimēdē!

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

1 First the barley grains melt in the fire.  
Come on, scatter them, Thestylis.  
Worthless girl, have you lost your wits?  
Horrible creature, are you laughing at me? 20  
Scatter them, and as you do say this:  
'I am scattering the bones of Delphis'.

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

2 Delphis has caused me grief,  
So I burn the bay leaves for Delphis.  
Just as they crackle loudly when they burn,  
Then suddenly vanish and we don't even see the ash, 25  
So too may Delphis' flesh shrivel in the flames.

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

**3** As I melt this wax with the help of the god,  
So may Delphis the Myndian melt with desire right now.  
And as Aphrodite makes this bronze wheel turn, 30  
So may he turn back to me here.

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

**4** Now I'll offer up the cornhusks. And you, Artemis,  
You can move the gates of Hell and anything else that resists –  
Thestylis! The dogs are howling for us in the town! 35  
The goddess is at the crossroads! Clash the bronze at once!

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

**5** Now the sea is calm, the winds are silent,  
But the pain inside my heart is not.  
My whole body burns for the man who's made me suffer; 40  
I'm no longer a virgin, I'm not a wife; I'm a whore.

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

**6** I pour out three libations, goddess, and I say this three times:  
Whether he is sleeping with a woman or a man,  
May he forget them as much as Theseus, so they say, forgot 45  
Ariadne of the lovely hair when he abandoned her on Dia.

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

**7** The Arcadians have a plant called coltsfoot – to find it  
All the fillies and swift mares run maddened through the mountains;  
I want to see Delphis like that, rushing here like a madman 50  
From the wrestling-school where bodies gleam.

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

**8** Delphis lost this bit of cloth from his cloak;  
I'm pulling it to pieces and casting it into the savage flames.  
*Aiai!* Cruel Eros, why have you drained all the dark blood 55  
From my skin like a clinging leech from the swamp?

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

**9** Tomorrow I shall grind a lizard into a potion and give it to him.  
Thestylis, you must now take these magic herbs and smear them secretly  
Onto his doorposts while it is still night, and as you do it 60  
Say quietly: 'I am grinding the bones of Delphis'.

*Magic wheel, drag that man to my door.*

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**10** Now I am alone, I will lament my love.  
Where shall I begin? Who brought this pain upon me? 65  
My friend Anaxo, the daughter of Euboulos,  
Went as the basket-bearer to the grove of Artemis;  
Lots of animals took part in the procession around her –  
Among them a lioness.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**11** And my neighbour, Theumaridas' Thracian nurse, 70  
Who has now passed away,  
Begged and entreated me to go and see the spectacle;  
I, doomed fool, went with her, wearing a fine long linen dress  
And over it the wrap that Klearista lent me.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.* 75

**12** When I was half way along the main road, by Lykōn's place,  
I saw Delphis and Eudamippos coming near.  
Their beards were more golden than ivy flowers,  
Their chests shone more brightly than you, Moon –  
They'd just enjoyed a workout at the gym. 80

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**13** When I saw him I went mad, and fire consumed my soul.  
I was miserable – and my beauty wilted.  
I forgot about the parade, and I don't know how I got back home,  
But a parching fever shook me violently 85  
And I lay in bed for ten days and ten nights.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**14** Some of my skin turned yellow,  
All the hair was falling out of my head,  
And what was left of me was just skin and bones.  
I went to see everyone, 90  
Any old woman who could sing a spell;  
But nothing eased my pain, and time went rushing by.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**15** So then I told my slave the truth:  
'Thestylis, you must cure my terrible disease. 95  
I am ill because Delphis possesses me completely.  
Go and find him at Timagētos' gym;  
That's where he often goes, that's where he likes to hang out.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**16** And if you find him alone, beckon him silently, 100  
Tell him: "Simaitha wants you", and bring him here!  
That's what I said.  
She went there and brought Delphis back to my house –  
The man with the gleaming skin. As soon as I realized  
That he had just stepped lightly through my doorway...

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.* 105

**17**...I became colder than snow all over,  
And sweat poured from my forehead like a heavy dew,  
And I couldn't make a sound, not even a whimper  
Like children make in sleep to their mothers;  
All my beautiful skin grew stiff and waxy like a doll. 110

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**18** When he saw me, that heartless man fixed his eyes on the floor  
And sat on the bed and said:  
'Simaitha, you were only just as far ahead of me,  
As I was of graceful Philinos when I beat him in the race; 115  
You called me just before I came myself.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**19** 'For I would have come, in the name of sweet Eros I would have come  
With two or three friends at nightfall,  
With the apples of Dionysos tucked in my clothes 120  
And a crown of white poplar, Herakles' sacred plant, on my head -  
Twined with crimson ribbons.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**20** 'If you had let me in, that would have been pleasing for us both –  
For all the young men say that I'm handsome and agile – 125  
And I would have slept if I could have just kissed your beautiful mouth.  
But if you sent me away and the door was locked,  
Then I would have come back with axes and torches!

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.*

**21** 'As it is I realize how much I owe to Aphrodite, 130  
And after her to you who released me from the fire, Lady,  
By summoning me to your house, half-consumed as I was.  
Eros kindles a fiercer flame  
Than any of Vulcan's fiery mountains.

*Learn where my love came from, Lady Moon.* 135

## Conclusion

'With his evil madness Eros could tempt a maiden from her chamber,  
Or scare a bride into leaving the still-warm bed of her husband.'

So he spoke. I was all too quick to be persuaded;  
I took his hand and lay down on the soft bed.  
Quickly skin softened against skin, and our faces 140  
Were warmer than before, and we whispered sweetly.  
I won't go into detail, dear Moon;  
We climaxed together, and realized our desires.

He did not find fault with me till yesterday, nor I with him.  
But the mother of Melixo and of Philista our flute-girl 145  
Came to me today,  
When the horses had led rosy Dawn  
From the ocean into the heavens.  
She told me a lot of gossip – and that Delphis is in love.  
She said she didn't know clearly whether his love 150  
Was for a woman or for a man –  
Only that he kept calling for unmixed wine and toasting Eros.  
In the end he left suddenly, saying  
He would cover his lover's house with garlands.  
That's what the woman told me, and she's truthful.  
He used to come to me three or four times each day, 155  
And often left his oil-flask here;  
But now it's eleven days since I've seen him.  
Has he got a new delight, and forgotten me?

Anyway, I *shall* bind him with these spells; and if he still hurts me,  
By the powers of Destiny he will knock on the gates of Hell! 160  
I tell you, Mistress, I keep in a box some lethal drugs for him,  
Poisons I learnt of from a Syrian stranger.

Now you, Lady, should say farewell to me, and drive your horses down  
Towards the ocean. I will tolerate my longing, since I have submitted to it.

Farewell, Moon on your gleaming throne, and farewell you other stars, 165  
Attendants on the chariot of the silent Night.

## Notes on the translation

9 'I'll have a go at him...' is a reasonable Australian colloquialism for μέμψομαι.

17 **etc** The refrain literally means 'drag that man to my home'. But the alliteration of 'drag that man to my door' gives something of the ritual feel of the original. This causes problems with 31, where Simaitha actually says 'so he may turn back to my door', just before a repeat

of the refrain; to avoid an undesirable repetition I have changed that to 'So he may turn back to me here'.

**30** 'makes this bronze wheel turn'. The scholiast states that *ρόμβος* here refers to the *lynx*, the magic wheel; however Gow (1952; II, 44) argues that it was a separate metal item, a bullroarer.

**44** A *κακάν* ('bad') woman was the opposite of one possessing the cardinal Greek female virtue of being *σώφρων*, self-controlled and chaste. Simaitha is certainly not a literal whore (she was a virgin before her affair with Delphis), and here she does not use one of the specific Greek words which denoted a prostitute. But 'a whore' gets the force of the word over to the modern audience. They need to realize that there was no legitimate intermediate status between being a virgin and becoming a wife.

**51** literally 'the gleaming wrestling-school'; but this slight expansion - 'the wrestling-school where bodies gleam' - brings out the meaning.

**59, 61** *μάσσω* literally 'knead', but a little freedom is needed to bring out the full meaning of the ritual. In rehearsal we changed 59 to 'smear' and 61 to 'grinding'.

**73** *μεγάλοιτος* is difficult. I experimented with 'doomed wretch' and other wordings, and ended up with 'doomed fool'.

**98** *τηνεὶ δέ οἱ ἀδὸ καθήσθαι*. The idiomatic contemporary English 'that's where he likes to hang out' conveys the sense perfectly.

**110** *ἐπάγγην δαγύδι ἴσα* needed a bit of expansion from my first attempt - 'grew stiff, doll-like' – which is too brief to convey the full sense. The final version is 'grew stiff and waxy like a doll'.

**134** Vulcan rather than Hephaistos, although all other names are kept in their Greek form; the Greek name would cause puzzlement to a modern audience, and of course volcanoes take their name from Vulcan.

**143** *ἐπράχθη τὰ μέγιστα*; the *μέγιστα* of sexual intercourse is simultaneous orgasm, so the translation 'we climaxed together' reflects this.

**162** Literally 'an Assyrian stranger'. But a little geographical freedom makes for a much easier line to speak, as well as naming a country which is well known to modern audiences.