

ΨΥΧΑΓΩΓΙΑ IN PHILODEMUS*

ABSTRACT

This article argues that the word ψυχαγωγία and its cognates which are found in the writings of Philodemus retain a semantic connection to the domain of magic and are best translated in terms of ‘enchantment’ rather than the more generic sense of ‘entertainment’.

Keywords: Philodemus; ψυχαγωγία; magic; enchantment; aesthetics; rhetoric

The term ψυχαγωγία and its cognates show up with some frequency in the fragments of the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus. Like many other Hellenistic authors, Philodemus uses this language to mark out a certain effect produced by forms of rhetoric and especially by poetry.¹ There is a tendency in scholarship to translate this term as ‘entertainment’ and, thereby, to erase its semantic connection with the domain of magic. In this article, I argue that when Philodemus uses language related to ψυχαγωγία it is more accurate to translate these words in terms of ‘enchantment’. This translation maintains the semantic overlap, found in Philodemus and elsewhere, with words such as θέλγειν and ἐπόδειν, and does so without losing the generic sense of entertainment.

The general concept of ‘psychagogic’ speech with which Philodemus works is already familiar to us from the writings of Plato (*Phdr.* 261a8, 271d1; *Ti.* 71a6; *Leg.* 909b2–3), Isocrates (*Nic.* 48–9; *Ev.* 8–11) and Aristotle (*Poet.* 1450a33; cf. 1450b16). It probably goes back to Gorgias of Leontini, who, despite not using the word ψυχαγωγία explicitly, provides the earliest conceptual model for how speech (λόγος) might move the soul (ψυχή, *Hel.* 8–14).² In addition to describing certain rhetorical and aesthetic effects, ψυχαγωγία also has a strictly magical meaning; in its earliest appearances, it denotes the practice of necromancy.³ Plato explicitly plays on this breadth of meaning when he describes how impious citizens ‘persuade many of the living while claiming to raise the dead’ (ψυχαγωγῶσι μὲν πολλοὺς τῶν ζώντων, τοὺς δὲ τεθνεῶτα φάσκοντες ψυχαγωγεῖν, *Leg.* 909b3–4).⁴ Gorgias, too, frames

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¹ The term was especially important to the so-called ‘euphonists’ or κριτικοί: ‘a feature common to all the critics was their detailed theoretical analysis of the means by which poetic language produced ψυχαγωγία’ (K. Gutzwiller, ‘Literary criticism’, in J.J. Clauss and M. Cuypers [edd.], *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature* [Malden, MA, 2010], 337–65, at 340; cf. D.M. Schenkeveld, ‘οἱ κριτικοί in Philodemus’, *Mnemosyne* 21 [1968], 176–214, at 189–90; J. Porter, ‘οἱ κριτικοί: a reassessment’, in I. Sluiter, S.R. Slings and J.G.J. Abbenes [edd.], *Greek Literary Theory after Aristotle: A Collection of Papers in Honour of D.M. Schenkeveld* [Amsterdam, 1995], 83–109, at 88, 102).

² See further W. Süß, *Ethos: Studien zur alteren griechischen Rhetorik* (Leipzig, 1910), 77–9; M. Pohlenz, ‘Die Anfänge der griechischen Poetik’, *NGG* (1920), 142–78 = *Kleine Schriften* (Hildesheim, 1965), 2.436–72; F. Wehrli, ‘Der erhabene und der schlichte Stil in der poetische-rhetorischen Theorie der Antike’, in O. Gigon et al., *Phyllobolia: Für Peter von der Mühl zum 60. Geburtstag am 1. August 1945* (Basel, 1946), 9–34 = *Theoria and Humanitas: Gesammelte Schriften zur antiken Gedankenwelt* (Zurich and Munich, 1975), 97–120.

³ Aesch. *Pers.* 687; Eur. *Alc.* 1128; Soph. *Cerberus* (*TrGF* 4.327a). Aeschylus’ Ψυχαγωγοί seems to have dealt with Homer’s *Nekyia* (*TrGF* 3.370–1).

⁴ I see no reason to claim, as Wigodsky does, that the second use of ψυχαγωγεῖν, here, should be

his model of ‘psychagogic’ speech with a collection of magical terms (ἐπαδῆ, θέλγειν, γοητεία, ἐκγοητεύειν, μαγεία), as well as with terms closely allied with magic (φάρμακον, φαρμακεύειν, ἐπαγωγοί, ἀπαγωγοί). For this reason, ψυχαγωγία is often translated by the English word ‘enchantment’, which covers the same semantic range between rhetorical effect and magical effect.

In scholarship on Philodemus, there is some dispute over how best to translate ψυχαγωγία and its cognates. Wigodsky, for instance, argues that, by the time Philodemus wrote, ψυχαγωγία had lost all magical connotations and had, as early as Aristotle, come simply to mean ‘entertainment’.⁵ Although many follow suit and translate ψυχαγωγία as ‘entertainment’,⁶ some express doubt.⁷ Janko has taken a middle path and translated the word as ‘enthralment’.⁸ I suggest that ‘enchantment’ is the superior rendering as long as we understand it not as referring to the actual performance of magic rituals (such as those found in the *Greek Magical Papyri*) but to certain sensory/psychological experiences felt to be analogous with the experience of being affected by a spell or incantation. Philodemus’ usage is more in line with the way in which modern authors such as Felski or Bennett might speak of the way in which a text or an aesthetic experience ‘enchants’ and they do so without committing to the notion of ritualized spells, curses and the like.⁹

There are a number of reasons to question Wigodsky’s argument. The first reason is that ψυχαγωγία never entirely sheds its strictly magical or supernatural sense, but rather continues to denote a form of necromancy or divine soul-guidance in the writings of such

‘felt as metaphorical’ or that Plato ‘was using the language of his opponents’ when he speaks of ψυχαγωγία in his dialogues (M. Wigodsky, ‘The alleged impossibility of philosophical poetry’, in D. Obbink [ed.], *Philodemus and Poetry: Poetic Theory and Practice in Lucretius, Philodemus, and Horace* [Oxford, 1995], 58–68, at 66). Aristophanes seems also to play with both meanings (Av. 1553–5; cf. N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes Birds* [Oxford, 1995], ad loc.). Taylor rightly stresses that Plato’s use of the language of ψυχαγωγία would have retained its ‘magical’ connotations (A.E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* [Oxford, 1928], on 71a6).

⁵ Wigodsky (n. 4), 65–8; M. Wigodsky, ‘Horace and (not necessarily) Neoptolemus: the *Ars Poetica* and Hellenistic controversies’, *CronErc* 39 (2009), 7–27, at 12 n. 67. Halliwell is right to stress that Aristotle’s use of the language of ψυχαγωγία would have retained its ‘magical’ connotations (S. Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* [Oxford and New York, 2011], 223–6, 259).

⁶ D. Armstrong, ‘Appendix 1: Philodemus, *On Poems Book 5*’, in D. Obbink (ed.), *Philodemus and Poetry: Poetic Theory and Practice in Lucretius, Philodemus, and Horace* (Oxford, 1995), 255–69, at 260; D. Blank, ‘*Philosophia and technē*: Epicureans on the arts’, in J. Warren (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge, 2009), 216–33, at 224; D. Blank, ‘Philodemus on the impossibility of a “philosophical rhetoric”’, in F. Woerther (ed.), *Literary and Philosophical Rhetoric in the Greek, Roman, Syriac and Arabic Worlds* (Hildesheim, 2009), 73–93, at 74–5, 88.

⁷ K. Gutzwiller, ‘The bucolic problem’, *CPh* 101 (2006), 380–404, at 396 n. 54; C. Chandler, *Philodemus’ On Rhetoric, Books 1 and 2: Translation and Exegetical Essays* (New York and London, 2006), 206 n. 5; Gutzwiller (n. 1), 340; Halliwell (n. 5), 324 n. 155. See also P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* [Oxford, 1972], 1.759: “‘psychagogy’—the adoption of the Greek word may be permitted as conveying more of the sense than the colourless “‘pleasure” or “entertainment””.

⁸ R. Janko, *Philodemus, On Poems Book 1* (Oxford and New York, 2000). He is followed by R. Gaines, ‘Rhetorical arts in the Epicurean school’, in A.H. Groton (ed.), *Ab omni parte beatus: Classical Essays in Honor of James M. May* (Mundelein, IL, 2017), 51–74, at 54 n. 4; M. Broggiato, ‘Eratosthenes, Icaria and the origins of tragedy’, *Mnemosyne* 67 (2014), 885–99, at 895–7. See n. 12 below.

⁹ [‘A] condition of aesthetic absorption’: R. Felski, *The Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA, 2008), 51–76; J. Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, 2001), 5–6, *passim*.

authors as Cornutus (*Theol. Graec.* 22.9), Plutarch (*De sera* 560F1), Lucian (*Dial. D.* 7.4, 24.1), Polystratus (*Her.* 43.13.1; *VA* 4.16.3) and other post-Philodemean authors.¹⁰ Thus by the time Philodemus uses the term, the magical flavour would not have been lost.

A second reason is that, even when ψυχαγωγία and its cognates are not used strictly to refer to necromancy, they are still quite often used synonymously with other words—such as those related to κήλησις, θέλιξις, ἐπφδή, γοητεία—which tend to mark out experiences of ‘enchantment’. These experiences range from the effect produced by actual ritualized spells to the analogous effects triggered by powerful speech acts.¹¹ Even within Philodemus’ own writings, ψυχαγωγία is closely allied with these other terms for enchantment. In *On Poems*, for instance, Philodemus describes the desired effect of poetry as ψυχαγωγία and links this effect with the capacity to enchant (θέλγειν/ἐπάδειν, 1.166.1–3 Janko):

τὰς ψυχὰς θέλγοι[ν] τῶν ἐ- <
 παιδομένων. καὶ καθό- <
 [λου] δὲ τὴν ψυχαγωγίαν ἀ-
 [κοῖν τι]νὰ ψυχῆς ἀγωγ[γόν]ν
 [καλοῦσιν]

(poetry would succeed if) it enchants the souls of those who are being spellbound. In general, people call ψυχαγωγία ‘a kind of hearing that moves the soul’.¹²

Here, Philodemus acknowledges not only the Gorgianic psychological model which underpins the word ψυχαγωγία (≈ τινα ψυχῆς ἀγωγόν) but also the magical flavour which the word still retains (≈ θέλγειν/ἐπαιδεῖσθαι).¹³

Philodemus’ opponents in *On Poems* similarly use the term ψυχαγωγία to describe the goal of poetry.¹⁴ Also like Philodemus, they draw on other words for enchantment to label this same goal—such as θέλγειν (1.37.11, 1.164.7–8, 2.76.26 Janko), ἐπφδή

¹⁰ Paus. 3.17.8; Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 8.2.10; Porph. *De antr. nymph.* 28; *Etym. Magn.* 819.25 Gaisford.

¹¹ On this larger semantic family, see P. Lain Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity* (transl. L.J. Rather and J.M. Sharp) (New Haven, 1970); J. de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), especially 15; R.J. Barnes, ‘Speech and enchantment in early Greek thought from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period’ (Diss., Bryn Mawr College, in progress).

¹² My translation is adapted from Janko (n. 8), who generally differentiates between ψυχαγωγεῖν ‘to enthrall’ and θέλγειν, ἐπάδειν and κηλεῖν ‘to enchant’. The line between the two, however, is not strictly upheld. Here, he translates θέλγοι as ‘it enthralled’. In the index of his newest edition he has ‘enchantment see enthrallment’ (R. Janko, *Philodemus On Poems Book 2 with the Fragments of Heraclodorus and Pausimachus* [Oxford and New York, 2020], 706).

¹³ Similarly, in his *History of the Academy*, Philodemus speaks in one place of how Arcesilaus’ audiences were enchanted (κη]λουμένους, 19.37–41 Kalligas–Tsouna) and in another of how a certain Phanostratus of Tralles was ‘well-known for his enchantment of the masses’ (εὖ πρὸς ὄχ[λ]ον ψυχαγωγίαν ἤκο[ρ]σιμένος, 36.3–5 Kalligas–Tsouna). This habit of swapping out a word like ψυχαγωγεῖν for γοητεύειν, κηλεῖν, θέλγειν, *vel sim.* is not at all uncommon in authors writing both before and after Philodemus.

¹⁴ Wigodsky ([n. 4], 67–8) claims that Philodemus is only using the language of his opponents when he speaks of ψυχαγωγία, but Epicurus himself used the language of ψυχαγωγία in a way similar to both Philodemus and Philodemus’ opponents when he speaks of the ‘enchanting’ effect of sophistic rhetoric (*De rhet.* 3; *P.Herc.* 1426, 3 a, 7–5 a, 4 [= *P.Herc.* 1506, 50, 22–52, 6], in J. Hammerstaedt, ‘Der Schlussteil von Philodems drittem Buch über Rhetorik’, *CronErc* 22 [1992], 9–117, at 27–9).

(1.12.18 Janko), ἐκγοητεύειν (1.111.25 Janko), κατακληθεῖν (2.191.2 Janko).¹⁵ Thus for both Philodemus and his predecessors ψυχαγωγία fits comfortably within the larger conceptual domain of enchantment and need not be watered down through the translation ‘entertainment’.

One final reason for preferring the translation of ‘enchantment’ over ‘entertainment’ is that the former already entails the latter and we lose nothing by sticking with the more traditional sense. Janko’s ‘enthralment’ is certainly closer to the mark; however, in the end, there is no precise reason to divorce the language of ψυχαγωγία from the semantical family of ‘enchantment’ of which it is clearly a part both in Philodemus and elsewhere.

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT AND INTERPRETATION OF CICERO, *DE FATO* 35

ABSTRACT

De fato 35 is part of Cicero’s argument against the Stoic theory of causation. He claims in general that the Stoic chain of causes consists of antecedent but not efficient causes. To the examples cited in the previous chapter he adds verses from the opening of Ennius’ *Medea exul* (lines 208–11 Jocelyn = FRL 2 and TRF 89.1–4) containing the Nurse’s lamentation over the origins of the Argonautic expedition that led, ultimately, to Medea’s current mental distress. Then follows the question *quorsum haec praeterita?* and the answer *quia sequitur illud*, ‘nam numquam era errans mea domo efferret pedem | Medea, animo aegro, amore saeuo saucia’, non ut eae res causam adferrent amoris, citing Ennius, *Medea exul* 215–16 Jocelyn = FRL 2 and TRF 89.8–9. Editors and commentators have struggled to explain the relation of the answer to the question. Here it is argued that the relation becomes clear if one adopts non<ne> for non and punctuates with a query after amoris. The sense will be: ‘Why have these past events been cited? In view of the sequel ... was it not so that they bring on the cause of love?’ In other words, the Nurse, like the Stoics in Cicero’s view, cites antecedent events as if they were efficient causes.

Keywords: Cicero; *De fato*; Stoicism; antecedent cause; efficient cause; Ennius; *Medea exul*

Cicero’s *De fato* 35 forms part of Cicero’s argument against the Stoic doctrine of causality. There is, however, no consensus as to how the passage should be interpreted or, if necessary, emended. It may therefore be worth renewed examination. In Ax’s edition it reads as follows:

ex hoc genere illud est Enni,
 utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus
 caesae accidissent abiegnae ad terram trabes!

¹⁵ Philodemus quotes Megaclides’ claim that ‘poetry produces enchantment and that enchantment is the subjection of the soul’ (τὴν πόησιν κήλησι[ν φέρειν, τὴν]δὲ κήλησιν ψ[υχῆς εἶναι κα[τ]άστασιν, *De poem.* 1.130.20–3 Janko).