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# Erichtho's Mouth: Persuasive Speaking, Sexuality and Magic

Lauren E. DeVoe

*University of New Orleans*, [thewitcherichtho@gmail.com](mailto:thewitcherichtho@gmail.com)

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Erichtho's Mouth: Persuasive Speaking, Sexuality and Magic

A Thesis

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University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	v
Abstract .....	vi
Thesis .....	1-55
References .....	56-59
Vita.....	60

List of Figures

Simon Martini's 1333 *Annunciation of Two Saints* .....4

## Abstract

Since classical times, the witch has remained an eerie, powerful and foreboding figure in literature and drama. Often beautiful and alluring, like Circe, and just as often terrifying and aged, like Shakespeare's Wyrld Sisters, the witch lives ever just outside the margins of polite society. In John Marston's *Sophonisba, or The Wonder of Women* the witch's ability to persuade through the use of language is Marston's commentary on the power of poetry, theater and women's speech in early modern Britain. Erichtho is the ultimate example of a terrifying woman who uses linguistic persuasion to change the course of nations. Throughout the play, the use of speech draws reader's attention to the role of the mouth as an orifice of persuasion and to the power of speech. It is through Erichtho's mouth that Marston truly highlights the power of subversive speech and the effects it has on its intended audience.

Keywords: Erichtho; John Marston; *Sophonisba, or The Wonder of Women*; witch; persuasive speaking; women's unruly tongues; magic; witchcraft; Jacobean drama; witchcraft drama

With the witch Erichtho's abrupt appearance in *Sophonisba, The Wonder of Women*, playwright John Marston highlights the use of speech and the power it has to convince and persuade people to act against their will. During only two short scenes, Erichtho impresses upon the audience the power of the declaratives uttered from her mouth. "I do not pray, you gods: my breath's 'You must'," Erichtho declares, showing her speech to be the source of her magic (4.1.138): not even the gods dare to counter Erichtho's wishes. In contrast to Erichtho, while the title character Sophonisba uses speech as a means of exerting power over her body and her situation, Erichtho uses speech to control the bodies of others.

Erichtho is introduced through descriptions of gruesome acts of sensuality, all of which bring focus to her mouth. She bites the lips of corpses, nibbles on the fingernails of the dead and forcefully thrusts her tongue down their throats in order to whisper her terrifying magic. Through these horrifying descriptions, the audience understands that the actual power of the witch can be found in her words and her sexuality. Examining Sophonisba's use of speech and comparing it to Erichtho's demonstrates women using the agency of their mouths and their speech to exert a type of magic that allows control of their bodies and their environment outside of the paradigm of male influence.

*Sophonisba* was written by John Marston between 1604 and 1606 and was the playwright's final work. Centered upon Sophonisba, the play draws on classical sources to recount a history of the fall of Carthage to Rome. The play opens with the villain Syphax having had his pride severely hurt when Sophonisba chose to wed the general Massinissa instead of himself. He vows revenge and promises to regain Sophonisba. Massinissa is torn from Sophonisba's wedding bed before he can consummate the marriage when he is called upon to fight the invading Romans. Syphax sets up an assassination of Massinissa in the midst of battle

and convinces the Carthaginian senate to give him Sophonisba when news of Massinissa's death arrives. Massinissa, who has not died, joins forces with the invading Romans to avenge this betrayal, while Sophonisba, believing herself a widow, marries Syphax for the good of Carthage. After marrying Syphax, Sophonisba continues to fend off Syphax's advances. After Sophonisba tricks Syphax and escapes from his bed, telling Syphax that she must perform a ritual for her dead husband and then drugging a servant, Syphax meets with the dreaded witch Erichtho to gain supernatural aid in bedding Sophonisba. Erichtho promises Syphax magical aid but instead tricks Syphax into sleeping with her. When Syphax wakes up and realizes that he has bedded the witch instead of Sophonisba, Erichtho tells him that she wanted his sperm to bear a race of demons and to steal his vitality to make her youthful again. Syphax is doomed: after the bedding, he is defeated by the Romans who have overthrown Carthage. As his last act of villainy, he convinces the Roman general that Sophonisba had seduced him and would seduce Massinissa away from the Roman cause. Sophonisba is confronted by these accusations when she is reunited with Massinissa, and she willingly commits suicide. The play ends with Sophonisba's suicide and Scipio's triumphant march into Carthage.

Throughout the play Marston focuses on ritual, including elements of dramatic music in each scene. In the general introduction for their book on the three well known Jacobean witch plays, Corbin and Sedge write: "Indeed, the subtle orchestration of music and ritual is one of the most striking features of the play and Marston's earlier work shows that the exploiting of musical effects, both as regards musical theory and its practice, was a particular concern of the dramatist" (Corbin and Sedge 5). Unlike other Marston plays, *Sophonisba* is a tragedy, and Marston was concerned with ensuring the seriousness of the work. Marston does not differentiate between the cultures of Carthage and Rome, using Roman culture and mythology for both

countries throughout the play. Drawing on Appian's *History*, Montaigne, Machiavelli, and Lucan to fill out the originally straightforward plot of Sophonisba's downfall, Marston's most notable change is the addition of the witch Erichtho. Corbin and Sedge state, "She is thus a witch of the severely classical kind and the only fully fledged example of her kind in Elizabethan drama" (Corbin and Sedge 7). By using a classical story, inserting a classical witch, and including ritual with a focus on the importance of speaking, Marston has created a drama that questions the role of the stage and of the poet in the Jacobean world. By dramatically integrating stage action and dialogue, Marston asserts his thematic purpose, and the audience cannot help but to be drawn into the moral scheme of distorted appetites of the body and the power of words on those who hear them.

The power of speech slipping into someone's ear and penetrating their body was a serious concern in the Jacobean time period. Throughout the medieval period, the image of the Holy Spirit slipping into Mary's ear as a ray of light, as a dove, or as a line of spoken words from the mouth of the Holy Spirit to impregnate her with Christ during the Annunciation was a popular and well known icon. The visual culture of the middle ages insisted on the power of spirit penetrating the ear through sound and words. Ann van Dijk explains the evolution of the angelic salutation through paintings of the Annunciation in her article about Simone Martini's 1333 painting *Annunciation of Two Saints*: "The emphasis on vocalizing the words of the angelic salutation that is a result of their particular placement with the image thus serves two purposes; not only does it give the image a sense of immediacy, but it also encourages viewers themselves to say the words aloud" (van Dijk 421). In Luke, when Mary tells Elizabeth that she will be the mother of Christ, Elizabeth cries, "For, lo, as soon as the voice of the salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44). The tradition of Mary's ears being

penetrated is reinforced by Elizabeth's reaction. The painting of Mary's ear being penetrated by the Holy Spirit became an important medieval idea of the conception of Christ, the son of God, and also in the evolution of the prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



(Simone Martini's 1333 *Annunciation of Two Saints*)

The idea that divine power can penetrate the ear through sound had long been established by the time Marston was writing the play *Sophonisba*. Erichtho plants words in Syphax's ear, bringing about her own impregnation. Instead of the power being angelic, the sound of speech penetrating the ear is inverted and becomes demonic. Audiences of Marston's work would have been aware of this image, and it certainly would have influenced their own reception to both Erichtho's and Sophonisba's words.

Throughout the play, the female characters' speech draws the audience's attention to the role of the mouth as an orifice of persuasion, to the power of the poetic word, and to the feminine ability to persuade others to perform significant actions. While the heroine Sophonisba's

sexuality conforms to traditional female roles, her speech challenges those same roles as she fights to maintain her virtue. In contrast, Erichtho's unabashed sexuality is emphasized by the recurring theme of the naked body. Like other classical witches, Erichtho has her orifices bound up in her expression of domination and perverse acts. Through Erichtho's trickery, Marston's subversion of traditional feminine speech is confirmed. Erichtho's sexuality overthrows the traditional sexual role of the female that is seen in Sophonisba. But unlike many traditional witch figures, Erichtho suffers no consequences. She has sex with Syphax and the audience can assume that she lives happily ever after, bearing the hoard of demons she conceives with Syphax's sperm. The threat that Erichtho's overt sexuality represents is that of the uncontrolled woman, unfettered by society's conventions.

Erichtho's ability to use nothing but persuasion to convince Syphax to bed her is significant. While the audience expects her to use magic to trick him into her bed, which she herself implies is what will happen, all she actually does is convince Syphax through the use of her spoken instruction not to light a candle, obscuring the figure who actually awaits him in bed. Through this action, Erichtho becomes a significant example of a monstrous woman who has dominion over her own body. Not only does she use language to persuade, but the passages used to describe Erichtho also exhibit her mastery of language and magic. Richard William Grinnell discusses her mastery of language in his dissertation on English demonology and Renaissance drama, writing "Set against the powerless, virginal Sophonisba, Erichtho is striking in the power, sexuality, and sensationalism of the language that describes her" (Grinnell 65). Erichtho inverts the role of Sophonisba throughout the play, turning male sexuality into a commodity that exists for her own use.

*The Tragedy of Sophonisba* begins with the author's note "To the General Reader," in which Marston states, "Know that I have not labored in this poem to tie myself to relate anything as a historian, but to enlarge everything as a poet" (Marston 34). This beginning ensures that the play cannot be read simply as historical drama; indeed Marston doesn't care about historical fact. The poet is someone who speaks greater truths and Marston suggests that this is the role he is playing. By using the non-historical character of Erichtho, a precedent set by Lucan in the *Pharsalia*, Marston is able to state his version of poetic truth through a character that receives no reprimand.

Just as in her first appearance in the *Pharsalia*, the non-historical character of Erichtho is jarringly introduced into an otherwise historic narrative. Erichtho's inclusion in this historic plot raises questions about the normative behavior of the other the characters of the play. For instance, Syphax's knowledge and ability to call to Erichtho is strange and supernatural in an otherwise straightforward, non-magical drama. Speech calls Erichtho to Syphax, it is also Erichtho's speech that tricks Syphax into her bed and enables Sophonisba to remain virtuous. Erichtho's actions save Sophonisba from certain defilement, though Erichtho never has any intent to save her.

Marston focuses a great deal on both Sophonisba's and Erichtho's mouths. Those who are speaking are asking those listening to deeply consider their meaning. As in the religious iconography of the era, there is a physical penetration in this act of words entering ears that the audience will see enacted throughout the rest of the play on the bodies of the women involved.

As the play begins, a messenger comes to announce Rome's invasion, pulling Massinissa from the nuptial bed before he and Sophonisba are able to consummate their marriage. Sophonisba entreats Massinissa: "That you'll collect from our loosed form speech/ This firm

resolve: that no low appetite/ Of my sex' weakness can or shall o'ercome/ Due grateful service unto you or virtue" (1.2.174-177). Even though she is willing to speak, she believes her speech is weaker than that of the men, but she pledges that her resolve is just as strong as theirs. She will overcome the weakness of women to do whatever is necessary to maintain her virtue in service of the empire. The weakness of women is seen as their being sexually tempted, but Sophonisba is promising that she will only sleep with Massinissa and thus overcome what she sees as the flaw of women's wanton sexuality. Sophonisba's moral virtue is tied into this feminine behavior. She continues to wish that she was a man and could let her arms speak for her, but "in vain; my tongue/ Swears I am woman still. I talk too long" (1.2.181-182). Even Sophonisba understands that her words are keeping Massinissa from action. Men are able to speak in various physical ways, such as by waging war. She, as a woman, can use her mouth and her sexual openings. As she speaks her lines, she is still lying in her unconsummated marriage bed, which implies that the orifice that is speaking words is not the only mouth available to her; women have two mouths, and both can be used in a sexual manner. Sophonisba's ability to speak is inextricably tied to her physical sexuality. Sophonisba's power has therefore been stunted since Massinissa has denied her the expression of her other mouth, which still tempts him from taking martial action.

Massinissa forces himself from the marriage bed stating to Sophonisba, "Peace, my ears are steel./ I must not hear thy much enticing voice" (1.2.208-209). Sophonisba's speech to Massinissa in this moment sets up a precedent of women using their mouths and sexuality to persuade men to actions that are deemed unvirtuous and therefore weak. Sophonisba has the ability to use her mouth to change the actions of men, and while Massinissa is aware of this ability, others are not as guarded. Sophonisba's power through her voice has been established.

This question of bodily control can be compared to control of the state. Massinissa is in extreme control. He does not stay to consummate his marriage, even though he is sorely tempted and the time it would have taken would have made no difference in stopping Scipio's invasion. Massinissa's ability to resist the pleasures of the bedchamber, which should be his to enjoy because of the marriage, shows him to be of a high moral class. Marston is also playing on Galenic theories about sex. According to these theories, when a man has sex his vitality and his brain are depleted by the physical act of ejaculation. The brain is the site where the refinement of semen into blood occurs. Thus, Massinissa is preparing himself to fight by not losing any physical or mental powers that would be lost if he were to have sex. As Koepke-Nelson points out in her dissertation on science and the making of modern bodies in seventeenth century literature, "Sex is an underanalyzed aspect of the making of the modern body, and an aspect that affords crucial analytic purchase on the meanings that motivate the production of certain kinds of bodies and the effects these have" (Koepke-Nelson 21). Later on in the play, the audience will see that Syphax does not have this control and willingly loses power through his ejaculation with Erichtho. Massinissa pays attention to his body and the power he has within it. Syphax does not and Erichtho's control over his body shows how unworthy a ruler he truly is. The worthiness of these two rulers is defined by their responses to the orifices of women, in one case by a woman's staunch virtue, and in the other case by a woman's barefaced sexuality. Both women use speech to try to persuade these men to action.

Gail Kern Paster examines the Jacobean power dynamic between the sexes in her article on incontinent women in city comedy: "laws which employ gender norms in order to compel restraint, and more important[ly], to distinguish between the norms of restraint for men and women" lowered the shame threshold, allowing social rules to have greater control over what

men may or may not do in front of women (Paster 45). By having to acknowledge the bodily actions of the bedchamber, both Massinissa and Sophonisba need to work around their shame over the physical body. Erichtho has no shame and therefore has a power over the physical body that it is impossible for Sophonisba to employ.

The witch as someone who persuades through the language of sexuality is hardly a new idea. This motif ran throughout Renaissance and Jacobean drama: Shakespeare's witches in *Macbeth*, Sycorax and Prospero in *The Tempest*, Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*, and Fletcher's *The Prophetess* all have elements of the witch either using words, or having words used on her to persuade. From her very earliest depictions, the witch, who has semi-divine magical abilities, uses her speech more than any other overtly magical action to cause transformation. While the witch's arsenal may include potions and drugs used to alter memory and change how victims perceive events, she is found using language to seduce and create spells, persuading people to see what she wants them to see throughout early Greek and Roman literature. In the *Odyssey* both Helen and Circe manipulate memory through the use of both speech and potions, making their victims forget their homes and families:

...The lady Kirke  
mixed me a golden cup of honeyed wine,  
adding in mischief her unholy drug.  
I drank, and the drink failed. But she came forward  
Aiming a stroke with her long stick, and whispered;  
“Down in the sty and snore among the rest! (10.355-360)

When her drug fails, Circe assumes that her voice will succeed. Her belief in the power of her voice seems indicative of the nature of the magic of her spoken word. There is no indication that she thinks her word will fail even though the drug has. Odysseus' reply in return is voiceless:

Without a word, I drew my sharpened sword  
And in one bound held it against her throat.  
She cried out, then slid under to take my knees,  
catching her breath to say, in her distress:  
“What champion, of what country, can you be?  
Where are your kinsmen and your city?  
Are you not sluggish with my wine? Ah, wonder!  
Never a mortal man that drank this cup  
but when it pass his lips he had succumbed.  
Hale must your heart be and your tempered will.  
Odysseus then you are, O great contender,  
of whom the glittering god with golden wand  
spoke to me ever, and foretold  
the black swift ship would carry you from Troy". (10.361-374)

Odysseus relies on the masculine action of violence to solve the problem, pulling a very mortal weapon to threaten her with. His sword at her throat also suggests the sexual act, but unlike Circe's wiles through her speech, this sexual connotation is suggested through the physical thrust of the phallic sword. Circe responds once more with speech. She cries out and seemingly subjugates herself at his knee, once again using speech to persuade him. This time her actions are seductive. She flatters Odysseus with his reputation and puts herself at his mercy. She finishes

her speech by begging him to sheath his weapon, a very overtly sexual metaphor: they will later enact in the bedroom what he has already alluded to with his phallic sword at her throat.

“Put up your weapon in the sheath. We two  
shall mingle and make love upon our bed.

So mutual trust may come of play and love.” (10.375-377)

The only way for Odysseus to survive the experience of Circe’s bed is for the God Hermes to intervene. Hermes’ appearance to Odysseus before he meets Circe enables Odysseus to gain divine knowledge needed to combat Circe’s witchcraft. Circe is a figure responsible for subverting traditional ideas of domesticated womanhood and family life, and Odysseus has nothing in his weaponry to handle her. If he had treated her as a human woman, he would have been turned into a pig along with the rest of his men and remained on her island for as long as she decided to hold him. Through her use of herbs, drugs, and speech, the witch figure can manipulate reality and gain powers that, to their victims, are divine in nature. Other classical witch figures do the same thing: Medea uses speech and drugs to convince Jason’s father of her ability to restore youth, thus tricking him to get into the cauldron to be boiled to death. Here, Circe becomes an ally to Odysseus, later helping him on his journey. And while Odysseus and Circe do find a measure of pleasure and trust, Syphax is simply betrayed by Erichtho’s bed. Syphax is not prepared to handle the heroic ordeal of overcoming the witch’s seduction and defending against her voice. The actions of the classical witch are played by both female characters in Marston’s work.

Sophonisba and Erichtho mirror each other with many of their actions: Sophonisba uses her voice and the drugs used to escape Syphax’s bed in the same way that Erichtho does in order

get Syphax into her bed. Massinissa, Sophonisba's real husband, acknowledges her god-like qualities and her power of speech. The witch is not a god, but certainly not human:

*Laelius.* Cease your strife. She is a woman.

*Massinissa.* But she is my wife.

*Laelius.* And yet she is no god.

*Massinissa.* And yet she's more.

I do not praise God's goodness, but adore.

Gods cannot fall, and for their constant goodness,

Which is necessitated, they have a crown

Of never-ending pleasures. But faint man,

Framed to have his weakness made the heavens' glory,

If he with steady virtue holds all siege

That power, that speech, that pleasure, that full sweets,

A world of greatness can assail him with –

Having no pay but self-wept misery –

And beggars treasured heaped; that man I'll praise

Above the gods. (3.2.9-61)

Sophonisba is not simply human. If she is not human, but is not yet divine, she must therefore be a witch or some other supernatural creature. Massinissa also acknowledges the role of speech as a tool of divinity and pleasure that can override the virtue of man. His virtue protects him against the speech of powerful creatures, though he acknowledges man's weakness, stating that he will praise the man who can use nothing but virtue to hold these creatures at bay. Syphax entirely lacks this awareness of both Sophonisba and Erichtho being semi-divine, and cannot protect

himself from their powers and abilities later on in the play. After his encounter with Erichtho, he seems to understand that Erichtho's speech doomed him and in the end, uses his own words to damn Sophonisba.

In a similar manner, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus operates with a certain level of *metis* or trickery in dealing with these divine women, allowing him to be somewhat immune to persuasion in a way that Syphax isn't. Odysseus is not protected by his virtue, but by the knowledge given to him by the gods. Because of Hermes' intervention, Odysseus uses a drug to combat the witch's own use of drugs, and this use of drugs is why her speech is necessary as her main weapon in this scene. Marissa Henry posits in her article about the association of witches and drugs that, "Because his tactics are not the typical male strategies, but interwoven with feminine intelligence, he alone among men can mingle with men and women, humans and gods, without being cheated by their underhanded and magical machinations" (Henry 1). Marston also ensures that his villain Syphax will likewise take on feminine characteristics, but not in the positive way that Odysseus does. Syphax's feminine traits bring about his downfall, not his triumph. He does not combat the witch with her own tools; he takes on feminine characteristics that won't allow him to triumph:

*Syphax.* Her hymeneal torch burnt down my house,  
Then was I captivated when her wanton arms  
Threw moving clasps about my neck. O charms,  
Able to turn even fate! But this, in my true grief,  
Is some just joy, that my love sotted-foe  
Shall seize that plague; that Massinissa's breast  
Her hands shall arm, and that, ere long you'll try,

She can force him your foe as well as I. (5.2.80-86)

Syphax is blaming Sophonisba's seduction for allowing himself to be taken hostage. Her physical seduction is a charm in and of itself. Syphax, as a man, should be able to take responsibility for being unable to defend himself and choose an honorable death over capture. He uses his own situation as an example to threaten the Romans with Sophonisba's ability to seduce men into unworthy behavior. Not only has he taken on the feminine traits of surrender here, he has completely lost his ability to take responsibility for himself, and so has been completely emasculated. In the end, this emasculation will cause Sophonisba's death. If Syphax had taken responsibility for his own actions here, Sophonisba would have survived and been able to reclaim her place as the virtuous wife of Massinissa rather than as a witch-like figure. Once again, Syphax's worthiness is gauged by his response to Sophonisba's sexuality.

Another famous witch figure that was responsible for bringing down empires was Helen of Troy. The Romans would have been very familiar with Helen, which could explain their ability to believe Syphax's warning about Sophonisba's supposed seduction. In the *Odyssey* Helen is shown to do many of the same things that Circe does. Her ability to manipulate memory allows her to deemphasize her role in the fall of Troy and distract the attention away from her own guilt.

But now it entered Helen's mind  
to drop into the wine that they were drinking  
an anodyne, mild magic of forgetfulness.  
Whoever drank this mixture in the wine bowl  
would be incapable of tears that day –  
though he should lose mother and father both,

or see, with his own eyes, a son or brother  
mauled by weapons of bronze at his own gate.

Here, Helen's anodyne foreshadows the actions of Circe. Helen, as witch, will drug the men to ensure she gets the results she wants. This forgetfulness that she creates is very similar to Circe's physical shape changing. It enables Helen to have the ability to be seen the way she wants to be seen and to enthrall the men in her company.

The opiate of Zeus's daughter bore  
This canny power. It had been supplied her  
by Polydamna, mistress of Lord Thon,  
in Egypt, where the rich plantations grow  
herbs of all kinds, maleficent and healthful;  
and no one else knows medicine as they do,  
Egyptian heirs of Paian, the healing god.  
She drugged the wine, then, had it served, and said –  
taking again her part in the conversation. (*Odyssey* 4.243-250)

Helen is aided by the divine in the same way that Odysseus will later be aided by Hermes, and just as for Circe, speech is an important part in finalizing the outcome. Helen's use of drugs, memory, and storytelling creates a magical incantation that exploits those around her. Henry argues that "Helen uses her voice to make them remember, then tries to take advantage of the emotional significance of the memory she evokes" (Henry 2). Emotion is always a woman's tool and seems to be a significant part of Helen's use of speech in order to trick others into hearing what she wants them to hear. Here, Helen ensures that her victims are focused completely on her, being unable to remember even the sorrow of the death of a beloved parent.

Like Helen, Circe drugs her victims with herbal potions to alter both memory and perceptions of reality, showing her power through the transformation of men into beasts. When Odysseus first comes to Circe's island, her unnatural power is immediately evident in the description of her home: "In the wild wood they found an open glade,/ around a smooth stone house – the hall of Kirke - / and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild/ in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil" (*Odyssey* 10.229-232). Circe's power is more suspect here because she changes the essential nature of both man and beast, stripping away their humanity and their ability to reason, just as Helen has also done by stripping away their human emotions earlier. Henry agrees, noting "In this way, Circe does literally what Helen does more figuratively: Helen can change memory and perception with her voice and her words, but Circe, with her magic, can make very real and drastic changes to reality" (Henry 3). Like Circe, Helen is also the daughter of a god. This delineation of the origins of the witch may explain Sophonisba's inevitable death. Unlike Erichtho, Sophonisba is completely human and her witch-like powers cannot fully protect her from suffering the complications of human virtue. In the tradition of the classical witch, Sophonisba uses drugs to escape from Syphax and his seduction, ensuring the death of a servant and allowing her to almost manage to escape. But unlike Circe and Helen, Sophonisba is unable to fully enact the powers of the witch.

Henry points out that the moly that Hermes gives Odysseus is a cure for Circe's drugs, but is also seen as being duplicitous in nature. It has white flowers and black roots, which are seen as characteristics of both the human world and the Underworld, and while men have difficulty in attaining it, the gods find it easily, "reiterating the idea of drugs being off-limits to mortals" (Henry 3). As Sophonisba discovers, drugs used by the witch can cause both healing and harm. This emphasizes the witch as a semi-divine figure, straddling both the human and

divine worlds. We may also begin to see the gender politics of the witch as magic-user; Odysseus may employ an antidote to Circe's drugs, but if he doesn't get Circe to swear an oath not to harm him, she will still take his manhood:

Let instant death upon it shine,  
and she will cower and yield her bed –  
a pleasure you must not decline,  
so may her lust and fear bestead  
you and your friends, and break her spell;  
but make her swear by heaven and hell  
no witches' tricks, or else, your harness shed,  
you'll be unmanned by her as well. (*Odyssey* 10.333-341)

Hermes also expresses that by meddling in tricks that belong to female goddesses, Odysseus inverts his gender role, which removes him from the proper place in the structure, both in terms of divinity and in terms of gender. Odysseus must go to the witch's bed. This is a heroic task he has to undertake in order to triumph over the witch, and he must be prepared to do this. Syphax does not have the cunning to deal with the inversion of sexual roles, nor the strength to deny the place of sexuality as Massinissa does. Syphax never bothers to pay attention to the need to insure his safety in the witch's bed, and thus loses his masculinity. Helen and Circe use the woman's weapon of drugs and seduction, but in using the moly, so does Odysseus: in this instance Henry contends that "Odysseus 'fights dirty' in the same way that Helen and Circe do, not following the rules of honorable, masculine warfare based on force, but cheating by using a drug to gain an unfair advantage" (Henry 4). Syphax is never able to take on the feminine role knowingly and intelligently in order to protect himself. His inability to understand what is happening to him is

an element of his downfall. Odysseus survives the witch; Syphax does not. Erichtho's danger therefore might be seen as something that could have been overcome with the proper preparation.

While Odysseus willingly shares Circe's bed, when morning comes he refuses to eat with her. (Syphax never has time to decide one way or another, as Erichtho leaves before he can even bring up the idea). Circe has promised not to harm Odysseus, and has submitted to him sexually, but when it comes time for him to partake of her hospitality, eating her food at her table, Odysseus is unwilling to act as a guest until she has restored his crew members to their human form. Indeed, Odysseus must brave the witch's bed before he can ask for the reward of the return of his men. The witches' bed becomes a heroic test that Odysseus and Syphax both must pass in order to gain victory. Like preparing for war, Odysseus has prepared himself to survive a night in the witch's bed, but Syphax has not. Syphax is unable to pass this test. Because he does not act like a hero, accepting Sophonisba's choice of Massinissa and arranging Massinissa's assassination instead of honorably challenging him on the field of battle, Syphax is not heroic and reveals a cowardly nature. Syphax is a villain and can be nothing else, unlike Odysseus who is a hero, even as he uses feminine tricks to survive his journey. Andrew Dyck discusses the test of the witches' bed in his argument over the folkloric narrative of this scene: "In the world of folktale to pass the night with a sorceress is not regarded as a pleasure but as a danger" (Dyck 198). The love of the witch is akin to a fight with any other monster, and therefore Odysseus waiting until breakfast is not strange. In traditional magical thought, night and the light of the moon are the domain of women and are equated with such goddesses as Diana and Hecate; daytime, the domain of men and of gods like Apollo, is when Odysseus chooses to exert his

power. Erichtho directs Syphax to allow Sophonisba to come to his bed at night, with no light to show him who comes:

Therefore I charge thee, by the fear of all  
Which thou knowest dreadful, or more, by ourself,  
As with swift haste she passeth to thy bed,  
And easy to thy wishes yields, speak not one word,  
Nor dare, as thou dost fear thy loss of joys,  
T' admit one light, one light. (4.1.171-176)

Not only is Syphax outside of his own sphere of power in the nighttime, but he also gives up his agency, and therefore his power, by not being allowed to speak. All of these factors create elements of emasculation. Odysseus does not speak but draws his sword; Syphax only submits and does as the witch commands. The witch's seduction is complete. Syphax willingly yields and does not use his own ability to speak in order to combat the witch's magic.

Sophonisba uses the witch's power of speech and drugs to escape Syphax. This in turn causes Syphax to turn to Erichtho for aid, which finally brings about his emasculation. Here again the use of speech and drugs causes a reversal of traditional gender roles:

*Sophonisba.* Vangue, we have performed  
Due rites unto the dead.  
*Sophonisba presents a carouse to Vangue, [and urges him to drink].*  
Now to thy lord, great Syphax, healthful cups;  
Which done, the king is right much welcome.  
*Vangue.* Were it as deep as thought, off it should thus. *He drinks.*  
*Sophonisba.* [Aside] My safety with that draught.

*Vangue*. Close the vault's mouth lest we do slip in drink. (3.1.142-148)

Sophonisba drugs Vangue and convinces him to divulge information she can use to escape the bedroom. When Syphax finds Vangue unconscious in the bed in place of Sophonisba, he slays Vangue in his own bed, foreshadowing his own downfall which will be brought about when he ends up in the wrong bed. Sophonisba has taken on the role of priestess with her rites to the dead, and her suggestion of healthful cups in Syphax's honor implies something magical. Her speech here should warn Vangue that the cup she offers is not simply a healthy toast, but something from the realm of the dead. Vangue is worried about the effects of the alcohol, completely ignoring the possibility that the drink could contain anything else. Sophonisba easily drugs Vangue who is completely unprepared to deal with the possible consequences of accepting a cup from the hands of a witch. Unprepared for the witch's draught, Vangue, like Syphax, also dies.

Another infamous classical witch figure, Clytemnestra, very famously uses speech to lure her husband to his doom. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Clytemnestra's speech to Agamemnon is often read as a magical incantation that Clytemnestra uses to lure Agamemnon to death in his own home. Laura McClure considers that people in ancient Greece and Rome had "the belief that control over language [could] translate into a control over the physical world [which was] traditionally associated with magic" (McClure 124). The last two lines of Clytemnestra's speech are based on traditional closing lines of magical incantations, and thus raise larger issues of feminine speech within the male dominated *polis*. McClure says, "These literary texts clearly associate magic with women, corroborating a pattern of representation with the broader literary tradition, where familiar female activities, such as administering drugs or producing cloth, as seen when Odysseus meets Circe weaving in the clearing, are depicted as coercive, magical practices" (McClure 126). Calypso, Circe, Helen, Penelope, Medea and Hera are also magical

women who weave and apply drugs to exert their magical power over men. When Odysseus first spots Circe, she is singing: “Low she sang/ in her beguiling voice, while on her loom/ she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright,/ by that craft known to the goddesses of heaven” (*Odyssey* 10.243-246). Just like the Sirens, Circe is dangerous when she sings. Due to the unnaturalness of her surroundings, Odysseus should find her power obvious. McClure continues this argument, stating that “In all these instances, cloth helps women to gain control over men, either by detaining, destroying, or seducing them; its presence in these texts represents the subversive potential of an ordinary, feminine activity to overturn the normal social order” (McClure 128). At the end of the *Oresteia*, by having Athena intervene with the Furies, Aeschylus makes the point that only someone who has a grasp of the masculine way of speaking can return order to the *polis*. Clytemnestra controls her speech, inverting the same gender role that Circe does with Odysseus, while the Furies have no control over their speech, and this lack of control threatens the order of the human world. The goddess Athena restores order by showing the Furies how to revert to a method of controlled speech, also reasserting traditional gender roles. Athena as a goddess of strategy and warfare is able to show the importance of the use of this control over speech. In Marston’s paradigm, Erichtho is dangerous because her speech is orderly. While Erichtho does not weave on a loom, the presence of cloth is still important. When Syphax approaches Erichtho, he is wrapped in a sheet, prefiguring his own winding sheet at his death.

In classical literature the magical powers of the witch were not ascribed to witches alone, and were not always feminine. The Lotus Eaters in the *Odyssey* share the semi-divine powers of magical drug use and memory alteration seen in the literary tradition of witchcraft. Their drugs do the same things as Helen’s and Circe’s, but the Lotus Eaters are not gendered and have no apparent purpose in stopping the Greek’s quest to return home. The Lotus Eaters do not

necessarily appear human, living off their ambrosia-like lotus fruits, which in turn affect memory. When Odysseus meets the Lotus Eaters, he recognizes that these people are not simply human either and represent the same danger as the Furies with their uncontrolled speech in the *Oresteia*: not being fully aware of the power they exert over the physical world. Henry states, “As Odysseus and his men pass through the company of various divinities and near-divinities, they risk forgetting the rules that bind mortals together in families and in society as a whole, under the influence of the drugs, foods, and powers of these beyond-human beings” (Henry 4). So the Lotus Eaters are much like witches: semi-divine, able to use herbs that humans find difficult to locate and use, and threatening to the social order. Yet they have no goals, good or evil, and do not actively disrupt the affairs of humans the way Circe, Helen, or Erichtho might do. This magic associated with witchcraft then is a natural force, seen in classical literature as accessible to anyone. This power is not the vision of later writers, who saw the witch as having a careful plan defined by magic. Their speech is used to lure, but has no force behind it like that of the women. The drugs are their power.

The Lotus Eaters also show why paying attention to how the witch is visually represented is important. The Lotus Eaters are depicted as a languid people who care for nothing but pleasure. These visual cues help show what the society of the author is truly afraid of becoming. With Erichtho, this fear of witches taps into inversion and subversion of normal female roles: the role of virtuous wife, which Sophonisba should be fulfilling but cannot because she is unable to cast off her old husband and take on a new one, is taken on by Erichtho in her domination of Syphax in bed. The depiction of nude bodies, especially of both old and young women, challenges feminine ideals, and as Elizabeth Ann Pollard points out in her article about witches in Roman art, is able to “convey a degree of fear about women’s sexuality and seductive power,

especially as women appear to be satisfying themselves without male involvement” (Pollard 121). Erichtho is depicted as an old woman who tricks a man into sleeping with her. She states that she has wanted to have sex with Syphax for a long time, and she finally manages to do it through trickery, pleasing herself sexually and availing herself of his sperm in order to father demonic children. Syphax is unable to stop her, and when he discovers who he has slept with, Erichtho’s response is to laugh and disappear.

This rape is the opposite of masculine expectations of female sexuality. The fears encoded in classical literature about witchcraft become translated and transformed into the actual artistic depictions of witches in early modern art. Greek and Roman authors emphasize age and frightening behavior, often depicting witches like Erichtho intervening in the “male controlled civic sphere” as seen in McClure’s argument about the power of Clytemnestra’s speech. Pollard also points out that “Erichtho intervenes in the male-controlled civic sphere, with her magic performed for Sextus Pompeius in his treasonous, anti-Caesarian, pre-Pharsalus preparations, albeit with an arguably bland and anticlimactic prophecy. *Oenothea* literally penetrates the man, overthrowing expected gender roles in sex and magic-use” (Pollard 134-135). Erichtho’s original appearance in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* emphasizes? civic disorder. Sextus asks her to foretell the outcome of the Roman Civil War. Erichtho’s role is about creating civil disturbance, and this civil disturbance is continued by Marston with her seduction of Syphax. Because of her actions Carthage falls.

Statuary, mosaics, and terra cotta pottery in ancient Rome and Greece depicting elderly women in the classical period supported classical writers’ literary depictions of how witches subverted traditional female roles. Pollard also believes that “The Thessalian backdrop in which this story takes place, commonly associated with witchcraft, has (over)stimulated Lucius’s

imagination and made him fear that the artwork was magically possessed” (Pollard 136). The Thessaly depicted in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* is a dark, threatening place. While literary and artistic depictions do not necessarily have to correspond, the focus on the bodies of old women shares a complex visual language that was started in the classical period and continued through early modern art, influencing modern views of the witch. This idea of the ties between the witch and language is continued throughout the European witchcraft tradition. Most witches are depicted as ugly old women who exist on the margins of civilized society, like Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*. Erichtho’s visual appearance is terrifying, and the fact that her home is in a graveyard, a place as far outside of normal society as possible, emphasizes her existence outside the bounds of social control. We can understand Syphax’s extreme horror at finding himself in bed with this monstrous figure.

Erichtho, as the old hag, should be a classic crone figure. The Crone in English Renaissance drama is an important archetype. Because women often lived longer than men, who found their ends in war, sailing, and the dangers of their professions, the widowed crone was a figure who had outlived her usefulness in the bed and therefore in society. But although she may have outlasted her usefulness in bed, she had not yet let go of the property that her husband left behind and the resources that property entailed. Unlike other women, crones had control over economic resources, making them dangerous to social order. The crone therefore becomes a problematic figure for the rest of society when she stands in the way of their control of those resources and many witches were accused as a way for other members of the community to gain those resources. Moreover, her great age reminded Jacobean audiences of the impending grave. Jeanne Addison Roberts discusses the role of old women in her article on English Crones in the Renaissance, writing “Old women more than old men function as grim reminders of the grave

and are therefore to be defeated, ridiculed, or simply ignored” (Roberts 116). Erichtho once again subverts traditional roles as a crone. While she is an old hag, she is certainly not useless. Her power is frightening, and she doesn’t depend on assistance from a village that no longer needs her. In becoming a powerful crone figure, Erichtho, while sexualized, cannot be made fun of or laughed at. Her mere presence and her horrific actions are too terrifying for that. If women are valued for their sexual, reproductive potential, then Erichtho is a crone who refuses to give up that potential just because she is beyond seductive and childbearing years. And as her claiming of Syphax’s sperm shows, she still believes that she can bear children, thus completely denying her identity as crone.

Crone figures are reminders of other important older magical women. Roberts continues to say, “Hesiod speaks of a pre-Olympian Titan named Hecate, who later shared rule with Zeus and who specialized in war, athletics, and hunting. This goddess is referred to as Triple and is called by many names, all incorporating but not isolating her roles as Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer and as ruler of heaven, earth, and the underworld” (Roberts 117). Hecate very famously shows up in many Shakespearean dramas and other Jacobean witch plays. She is also a goddess that Medea famously calls upon in both the dramas of Euripides and Seneca. Just like Medea and Hecate, Erichtho demands that the gods fulfill her desires, and brings people back from the dead in order to prophesy: “She breathes dire murmurs which enforce him bear/ Her baneful secrets to the spirits of horror./ To her first sound the gods yield any harm,/As trembling once to hear a second charm” (4.1.121-124). The sound is uttered by her mouth, which once again controls her power.

In Greek tragedy, the powerful crone figure gave women agency for the first time. Roberts also [demonstrates or argues] that “Women who may be classified as crones--

Clytemnestra, Medea, Agave, Helen, and even Phaedra--move to center stage. Indeed their centrality seems inverse to the actual position of women in Greek society. These stage characters seem to suggest, rather than real experience, the power of the repressed--the subconscious male perception of the dangers of female vengefulness, irrationality, and lust” (Roberts 117-118). All of these are characteristics that Erichtho represents in *Sophonisba*, where Marston seems to be using Erichtho to evoke these male fears. Similarly, Elizabeth Sawyer says in *The Witch of Edmonton*:

Why should the envious world  
Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?  
'Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,  
And like a bow buckled and bent together  
By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,  
Must I for that be made a common sink  
For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues ... ?  
(2.1.1-7)

Erichtho is not poor, deformed or ignorant. She defies the traditional crone image. While Elizabeth Sawyer becomes a witch because she has been forced into it by her circumstances, Erichtho is a witch by her own choice and through the realization of her power.

Erichtho is described as a terrible old hag: “A loathsome yellow leanness spreads her face,/ A heavy hell-like paleness loads her cheeks,/ Unknown to a clear heaven” (4.1.102-104). She is feared even by the gods, yet she is able to simply trick Syphax into thinking that she is Sophonisba. She uses language to set Syphax up for his eventual downfall: “Erichtho has enacted a male nightmare by appropriating his valuable sperm” (Roberts 128). By sleeping with

Erichtho, Syphax plays out the traditional heroic fight of overcoming the monster, similar to other heroic seduction scenes such as the one between Odysseus and Circe; in this case, however, it seems that Syphax himself is the monster and the more obvious monster Erichtho is actually turning the tables on him. He lacks the heroic ability to subdue the witch and sleep with her on his own terms, and he ensures his own damnation through the process of his seduction. Erichtho's language is the mechanism that binds Syphax to her: we have seen her mouth as a magical agent as she presses her lips onto the lips of corpses, thereby forcing the gods to hear her spells. Erichtho's use of her mouth as an orifice and as an organ of speech is the source of her power: Her mouth becomes a channel between the living and the dead, and in the case of Syphax, her mouth is the channel between his will and her own. Erichtho is the most unnatural lover Syphax could take. In normal sexual relations, the vagina brings forth life. Sophonisba's intent was to use her vagina not as an orifice of sexuality, but as a way to create new life. Erichtho subverts this natural act by using both her mouth and her vagina for congress with the dead. Rather than bringing the divine into the world through birth as seen through the image of the Annunciation with the Virgin Mary, Erichtho communicates with the divine through sexual contact with the dead.

Religious authorities in the Catholic Church often focused on the sexual temptations and supposed sexual crimes of witches. This focus is seen in other theatrical renderings of the time, such as in *Macbeth* when the witches contemplate what they will do to the sailor for his wife's refusal of her chestnuts. While Catholic philosophy believed that the demonic was behind witchcraft, the fifteenth century saw delineation between thought on the rituals performed by witches and the intent behind them. Michael D. Bailey assesses this idea in his article on the transition of thought on the role of magic in British society: "While they still maintained that

rites had no inherent operative or directive force, they were nevertheless deeply concerned that the proper forms of these rites be maintained, for improper forms could entail dangerous superstition” (Bailey 392). While priests in the Church were essentially practicing magic, they had the guidance of divine will and authority behind them. The rites and rituals they practiced were sanctioned by God and had a proper place in the organization of the Catholic Church, similar to Sophonisba’s rites both in marriage and for the dead. If someone other than a Church-sanctioned priest were to enact these rites, they would become improper and dangerous, threatening the order of the Church and God’s authority. Sophonisba’s discussion of these proper rites highlights the terror the general public would have had when confronted by Erichtho’s “dire” rituals.

The first lines that the audience hears Sophonisba speak are as she wonders why she has already been bound by the ritual structure of marriage, yet she still has to pretend that she doesn’t want to bed her husband, having to steal to his chamber and play at not wanting to complete the act. She says, “I hate these figures in locution,/ These about-phrases forced by ceremony...Let those that think and speak and do just acts/Know form can give no virtue to their acts/ Nor detract vice” (1.2.11-17). Locution is about language that is understood by its literal meaning and not how it actually functions within the context of the actions. Sophonisba understands that her actions are bound by the literal meaning of social expectation. She is a chaste woman who is expected to protest the attentions of her husband in order to remain virtuous in his eyes while she is acting out the consummation of their marriage. She points out that those who carry out the just acts that ceremony requires should understand that the literal acts themselves are not inherently honorable or dishonorable (just as Marston the poet’s words might be interpreted by the listener to be honorable or dishonorable). Here then, the sexual act is already tied up in the idea of words

and poetic speech. The physical and the spoken cannot be separated in the mind of the audience. Sophonisba has deliberately asked to be undone and then continued on to discuss the role of spoken ceremony within the act of physical penetration.

In her article on women's resistance to patriarchal culture, Lynda E. Boose says, "Within the multi-vocal ritual logic of Christian marriage discourse, the moment in which the woman was raised up probably dramatized her rebirth into a new identity, the only one in which she could legally participate in property rights" (Boose 183). This need for the completion of her marriage explains why Sophonisba's lack of consummation in her marriage with Masinissa, and then the continued lack of consummation in her false marriage to Syphax, is so important. Sophonisba is never able to cast off her old identity and fully become a woman. She is stuck forever between girlhood and womanhood, unable to exist as a fully realized participant in politics of the state, which are very important to this play. The marriages also therefore serve as a commentary on the divisive politics and religious issues of early Modern England. The sense of impending doom placed on the social structure of marriage was being constantly questioned by the people of England, and Erichtho's interruption of the natural order of Syphax and Sophonisba's marriage later on in the play contains Marston's own commentary on the state of these affairs in England. Sophonisba consents to her marriage with Syphax under strong duress, believing Massinissa to be dead. But because she refuses Syphax's bed, she is not fully recognized as a married woman. She finds herself in a nether world, a state of limbo. Marston was looking at the results of this very issue in England at the time of writing this play. Queen Elizabeth's refusal to marry ended with James I taking the throne. And while Queen Elizabeth was a powerful ruler, she had terrified the country with her refusal to marry and the lack of a royal heir. James I's own wife, Queen Anna, refused to bear any more children because of her unhappiness over the fostering of

her son Prince Henry and brought about her own miscarriage to ensure no other children were taken from her. The fear of women remaining outside marriage without taking church orders had horrifying consequences on the social order of Marston's day. In Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* this fear was articulated by Vincentio when he speaks of Mariana: "Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife?" (5.1.175). This need for marriage had much larger consequences on a royal level. Marriages make and break states and change the course of nations. The ritual of marriage was a necessity for men and women to ensure proper order was kept in place.

Zanthia, Sophonisba's maid, responds to Sophonisba's queries about the need for ritual in women's lives:

'Las, fair princess, those that are strongly formed  
And truly shaped may naked walk, but we,  
We things called women, only made for show  
And pleasure, created to bear children  
And play at shuttlecock, we imperfect mixtures,  
Without respective ceremony used,  
And ever compliment, alas, what are we? (1.2.18-24).

Through Zanthia's words the audience understands that women are not strong enough to bear the gaze of society unclothed. Though this gaze seems to be viewing more than just the clothing being worn, and even though the word "fashion" is mentioned later on, women are clothed by proper ritual. If men are strong enough without this ritual, they must also be protected *from* women with the ritual, because they are able to speak in a way that women aren't supposed to. Women are supposed to be seen and not heard, almost as if they are children. They are objects of

pleasure that serve no function other than child-bearing, which makes Erichtho's desire for Syphax's semen ironic. Donne echoes this importance in his in *Elegy XIX*:

Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee,  
As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be  
To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use  
Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,  
That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem,  
His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them. (33-38)

Donne shows that a woman's nakedness means that women no longer have their physical bodies to control; men will control both their body and their soul. When women dress to please men sexually, they are attracting male attention not to themselves as people, but to their bodies, which allows men to possess their souls. Women need proper attire to combat this type of soulful possession. Erichtho desires motherhood in a way that Sophonisba does not. She may be an unnatural mother, but the sex act is more than just physical pleasure for her. Sophonisba wants the physical pleasure she could find with Massinissa, but does not desire to have Syphax's children. Women need ceremony to clothe them and bolster their inherent character, without which they couldn't function at all. Erichtho clothes herself in the literal corpses of humanity for her own pleasure. Her rituals are both unnatural and semi-divine in nature. Erichtho inverts the ideas that Donne brings up and while she takes motherhood unnaturally, she also damns Syphax to Hell. Syphax unclothes himself and exposes his soul for Erichtho's possession.

Zanthia continues, saying "Take from us formal custom and the courtesies/ Which civil fashion hath still used to us,/ We fall to all contempt. O women, how much,/ How much, are you beholding to ceremony!" (1.2.25-28). Ritual gives women the form to speak and act, giving them

the strength and ability to function in a way that men can without that same ceremony. Fashion here is more than simply being clothed in material cloth; it is the stricture that holds women up and makes them more than simply children. Without ceremony, there is no virtue, only contempt. If these ceremonies are taken away, women can't speak or act at all. The ritual enables women to be more than what men see them as. For the witch Erichtho, using improper or dark rituals allows her to be able to frighten even the gods. Once again, Marston has used a female voice to point out the role of speech in women's lives.

Sophonisba clearly understands that the act of ceremony does not mean that there is virtue inherent in the actions of the ritual itself. Her willingness to speak this out loud challenges every formal notion that women must function within the confines of ceremony to be virtuous. In her first few spoken lines, Sophonisba is already challenging all female purpose and ideals. This idea is continued when Sophonisba is in the bedchamber with her new husband Massinissa. Sophonisba points out "A modest silence, though't be though/A virgin's beauty and her highest honour;/ Though bashful feignings nicely wrought/ Grace her that virtue takes not in, but on her" (1.2.43-46). A woman is judged by her silence. Even though her reticence is assumed, it allows her virtue to be physically worn, as a garment. A woman's virtue is not actually a part of her; it is something given to her by others, and by acting within the strictures of ceremony, she allows virtue to be something that is enacted upon her. Sophonisba continues, saying "What I dare think I boldly speak./ After my word my well-bold action rusheth/ In open flame then passion break!/ Where virtue prompts, thoughts, word, act never blusheth." (1.2.47-50). Sophonisba is not a character who will remain silent; like the classical witch she will speak, allowing her agency. Her passion, unlike the passion of Syphax, is well-reasoned and allows her to retain virtue as something that inherently cloaks or shields her. She controls her virtue through her words and

actions and this control is why she is such a strong woman. In controlling her virtue by speaking about it, Sophonisba has a control over herself in a way that no one else in the play does.

During this time period there was also a distinct shift between the focus on male and female sexuality to a greater focus on female sexuality alone. Men suddenly became more likely to be a victim of a sexual crime at the hands of a witch. A common fear was that the witch would steal a man's penis and cause infertility. When looking at the various discourses that concern witchcraft, such as the *Malleus Malificarum*, modern readers can easily see that the study of witches and demonology served as a very explicit form of discourse about the body and sexual experiences. In her article about early modern English sexuality and witchcraft, Julia Garrett states that "the period of the witch hunts offers a species of sexual discourse that becomes accessible in a variety of venues both public and private—in village neighborhoods, in the courtroom, in the theater—a discourse that is then reiterated and embellished in both the learned and popular literatures issuing from those sites" (Garrett 35). Because witchcraft became such an important issue, all levels of society were discussing and acting out arguments over the role of the witch. Marston frames his own argument about the role and abilities of a poet speaking out through the metaphor of witchcraft. While the religious rituals that were meant for people to turn to for aid look similar to those of the magical rituals performed by witches, the Church officials saw them as being dramatically opposed to the witch's practices. Kramer and Sprenger, the authors of the *Malleus*, both present complicated rationales about who is able to perform rituals and magic without being harmed by the demonic. Michael Bailey talks about the disenchantments of magic in the Renaissance in his article, saying that "Through the institution of structures as diverse, although ultimately closely related, as legal inquisition, sacramental confession, and pastoral preaching, the church in the late Middle Ages became increasingly

involved in investigating and controlling common beliefs and practices” (Bailey 401). By reinforcing the idea that witchcraft comes from the demonic, the church strengthened the idea that magic can only come from the divine and not from people themselves. This belief changed the discourse of witchcraft, ensuring that there was metamorphosis in the medieval mindset in regards to magical practice. Marston’s use of Erichtho as a vehicle for victory becomes more suggestive when the witch is the agent of positive change.

Only during the Enlightenment were people able to once more separate magic from the demonic, and reconfigure superstition as being simply irrational instead of being an improper act. Bailey delineates these different time periods, stating that “The fifteenth century was, then, neither an end nor a beginning in terms of ‘magical thought’ or ‘disenchantment’ in Europe. It was, instead, part of a profoundly gradual transition whereby foundational Christian beliefs about the functioning of religio-magical rites shifted ultimately to the enlightened rejection (never fully realized in the eighteenth or subsequent centuries) of all ‘magic’ and much traditional ‘religion’” (Bailey 403). The sixteenth century therefore becomes a pivotal moment in connecting the medieval view of witchcraft with the modern beliefs about magical practice and ritual. Marston’s writing comes at the very end of the sixteenth century, demonstrating this shift in thinking.

These theories still form a large element in modern scholarly thinking on the current narrative of the place of religion and superstition in our lives. Marston was writing and critiquing these late-sixteenth-century views on witchcraft at a time when people were beginning to challenge church doctrine. The transition between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was disorderly in terms of both religion and political upheaval. The people who lived through this transition were tired of the bloodshed and the executions. Many of the Jacobean authors who wrote witchcraft dramas were protesting the senseless execution of women who had no recourse

or ability to defend themselves. Superstition was being overtaken by rationality, and the Enlightenment was on the horizon. Syphax is a character who has thrown aside reason, whereas Sophonisba and Erichtho both control and use reason to achieve their goals. Syphax is the ultimate villain because he brings about the downfall of the state and enables a disorderly world to exist. In the minds of the audience, he deserves to be tricked by the horrible Erichtho for doing these things.

Censorship was becoming a much larger issue to writers during the Jacobean era. With the introduction of the printing press, censorship had become a regular and important part of the production of written material. Mark Bland states in his article on censorship and authority in early modern England that “Yet, to many, the liberality of print also seemed overwhelming: liberal to a point of excess; liberal in that other sense of being unrestrained, wanting prudence and decorum, being on occasion even licentious” (Bland 152). All playwrights were required to submit their manuscripts to a censor before being allowed to produce them and in many respects, the censors have to be considered as contributors to the work. As Meg Livingston points out in her dissertation on the censorship of John Fletcher’s plays: “Including the official state censor as a ‘contributing’ force along with playwrights, actors, and other company personnel might seem ridiculous, almost blasphemous...the role played by the Master was fully integrated into the process of staging a new play or revival in the Jacobean era” (Livingston 3). Class and occupation, as well as gender and religion, were important factors in the themes explored throughout Jacobean drama as well. Unlike earlier eras, women were much more likely to be accused of witchcraft in the sixteenth century. Edward Bever focuses on this idea in his article on witchcraft and female aggression: “The most fundamental question is not why early modern male elites thought women were particularly susceptible to the Devil’s blandishments, but why

early modern common people – female as well as male – thought women were particularly likely to use magical powers against them” (Bever 957). Studies show that women who were the most likely to be accused of witchcraft were not poor, marginal outsiders, but women who were integral members of society, most often married and of equal station to their accusers, which shows how easily Sophonisba could be seen as a witch figure. The accusations seem to have risen out of economic issues and interpersonal conflicts that were not isolated incidents. Bever points out that “Modes of conflict included gossip, insults, scolding, threats, curses, ritual magic, legal action, and various forms of physical assault” (Bever 958). These actions all originate from speaking and the mouth. The differentiation between the village scold and the village witch was therefore perceived in how she was viewed by her neighbors, either through the willingness of these neighbors to retaliate through litigation or magic. And when women didn’t have the same access that men did to legal action, magical responses could take their place. Sophonisba has no recourse, therefore Erichtho becomes an acceptable outlet, whether Sophonisba is aware of her presence or not. Women might not be able to speak in a court, but they could create and speak a spell that would enable them to ensure the control they wanted. This is also seen in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* when Lady Macbeth becomes the witchlike figure who controls and persuades Macbeth to perform a murder she herself cannot commit.

Bever gives one example of a woman who confessed to causing the death of three children by kissing or blowing on them. This example is only one example of a woman’s mouth and sexuality being the source of her power. The use of verbal skirmishes could determine how a woman was treated by her neighbors, ensuring that the gossip spoken about specific women could heighten or ruin their reputations in the eyes of the community. The witchcraft hysteria therefore became a struggle for power between women themselves. Bever considers that

“Witches used the power of the range of behaviors from unconscious expressions of anger to premeditated use of poisons to compel compliance or punish defiance; accusers used the coercive power of the state as the most extreme step in a series of countermeasures that included appeasement and counter-magic to check these tactics or get revenge” (Bever 975). Witchcraft trials therefore served to diminish the power of women and strengthen men’s place in village society. Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew* serves as one example of a drama where a woman is disarmed in order to more easily domesticate and control her. We see all of these concepts of control and domestication reflected in the characters of Sophonisba and Erichtho, both of whom speak and kiss throughout the play. Sophonisba strives to be domesticated, and Erichtho never will be.

The *Malleus Malificarum* served as a critical foundation for the development of sexual knowledge within the witchcraft discourse. A debate arose between people of the villages and the witch finders over the need for physical searches for the witch mark on the body of the women accused. The ensuing debate over the validity and morality of a witch-finder’s search and conclusions show a variety of ways on how the thinking and articulation of sexual knowledge was put to use in Jacobean England with regard to witches. The witch could not be separated from her physical body. The witch came to embody the extremes of sexual depravity, which explains why the witch finder had to deploy depravity in return in order to perform his duties: therefore the witch is doubly to blame, both for her own obscenities, and for causing the noble witch finder to engage in obscene actions. The witch also acts as the opposition to traditional marriage, as seen in the fear that the witch can control men’s sexuality or cause impotence.

Through the drama enacted out in the witch trials and the ensuing debate of the threat of the witch through speech and ritual, the stage became an important part of the witchcraft

discourse, making the sensational more readily available to socially diverse audiences. Marston himself was using the witch figure to challenge perceptions of staged performance, as well as his own ability to speak openly. *Sophonisba* was the last play he wrote. Having been thrown in prison for his collaboration on *Eastward Ho* with Ben Jonson, and later imprisoned again in 1608, Marston uses the character of Sophonisba and her punishment for speaking the truth to question his own censorship by the crown. Through the character of Sophonisba, Marston shows that there is no reward for truth and virtue. Sophonisba dies even though she maintains her virtue. She may retain her dignity, but she still loses her life. Acting and witchcraft were also tied together in the mind of the public in the role of drama in the witchcraft discourse. In her dissertation, Dr. Shelby Richardson discusses the ties between witchcraft and drama: “In the minds of their adversaries, the trouble with both actors and witches is that because they are both engaged in similar projects—the manufacture of illusions and the subsequent ‘bewitching’ of their various audiences—both are dangerously subversive. Both are utterly untrustworthy, but also, potentially, utterly persuasive” (Richardson 22). Samuel Johnson, one of the first critics of Jacobean drama, also commented on Shakespeare’s refusal to use the unities of the theater in his preface of his critique of Shakespeare’s works insisting that Shakespeare believed the audience understood that what they were seeing was not real: “The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players” (Johnson 431). But the fear of actors holding the same power to enchant through speech was common in Jacobean drama, Richardson wrote:

It is such a sense of psychic vulnerability that those writing against theater in the seventeenth century were most afraid of. They feared that the audience, like the actors onstage, would enter a trance state, bewitched by the sights, sounds, and

powerful language of the theater, and could be made to believe almost anything.

They were convinced that through theater, the world of the imagination would

intersect the physical world, and almost anything might happen. (Richardson 78)

Erichtho's words trap Syphax and doom him forever to Hell, just as the words spoken by the actors on stage might actually entrap and ensnare the audience, dooming them to also be persuaded by accepting an unnatural state of womanhood in the world. What is being acted in the play might also be acted out on the audience members, and theater-goers were very aware of this possibility.

Richardson continues, "But Erichtho employs both language and illusion to trap Syphax, the very tricks of the theater that its critics so feared; and as we have seen, these are the same tricks used by Sophonisba for a 'noble' reason" (Richardson 107). So if these tricks are used for a noble reason, Marston is also trapping the audience with his own magic for a noble reason. Erichtho and Sophonisba both challenge the power of language and suggest that language is subversive enough without magic behind it. But when Sophonisba uses language in a ritual format to preserve her virtue, she is seen as acceptable; whereas when Erichtho uses the same forms of magic, she is seen as demonic. This use of language also supports the idea that Marston's purpose in writing the play is to challenge the role of language and its effect on his audience.

Adding magic and changes in perception to dramatic language incites further fear. Both drama and witchcraft are seen as peripheral to "normal" social function. Lee points out in her dissertation on the enchantments of the stage that witches are figures that usually function outside the boundaries of society: "The constitution of each prototype of these witches has a direct link to the political and ideological atmosphere of a particular society" (Lee 64). The

language of witchcraft is flexible and challenging in a way that normative language is not, in the same way that language in the theater is challenging and flexible. Words on stage are not normal words and have the power to control and incite subversive thoughts. Marston emphasizes this flexibility in his introductory statements about his role as poet rather than historian.

Erichtho first appears in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, a first century text that documents the Roman civil war between Julius Caesar and Magnus Pompey. Through the *Pharsalia* Lucan shows the atrocity of war, and through Erichtho evokes the unnaturalness of this kind of conflict. Diane Purkiss in her article on the deformities of desire articulates that "In Lucan's text, the witch Erichtho is a potent source of subversive energy, assisting the rebellious to achieve their aims by supernatural if not by natural means" (Purkiss 106). Erichtho embodies the unnatural death and gluttony found in war, and in Marston her sexual threat to Syphax is both spiritual and intimately physical. Erichtho's goals in the *Pharsalia* are to ensure that war continues, allowing her constant access to the bodies of the dead, which she needs for her unnatural rituals.

Lucan was recognized as a rhetorical poet, and his characters' speeches are very stylized, overshadowing the rest of his poetry. Mark Douglas Clauser, in contemplating Erichtho in his dissertation, considers that "Lucan, like Ovid and most Silver Latin writers, was trained in the schools of declamatory rhetoric, where students were taught to speak effectively and inventively on standard, often unrealistic topics" (Clauser 2). This declamatory style is essential to understanding the full poem, and once again emphasizes the idea of the influence of language and the ability to speak. This emphasis might explain why Marston chose Erichtho as his vehicle for the discussion of the use and virtue of language in a historical drama that does not otherwise include her as a character.

Like Lucan, Marston uses the witch Erichtho to defy Jacobean conventions of the tragic witch figure. Unlike other witches, Erichtho seduces the villain rather than the hero, and in the end, simply leaves, receiving no punishment, and bearing no consequences for her seductive act. Other authors who have tackled the subject have called Erichtho Sophonisba's foil, but this explanation allows scholars to too easily gloss over Erichtho's role in this play. Erichtho does not exist to be a counterpart to the virginal and virtuous heroine. Ann Elizabeth Whitaker in her article on disorderly women believes that "she makes explicit the dangers of the heroine's powers" and through her we begin to see why Sophonisba is so influential (Whitaker 69). Erichtho's triumph over Syphax offers an alternative to Sophonisba's tragic fate and is achieved through the Renaissance image of the witch as a person of persuasion and emasculation. She uses her mouth and her speech along with her sexuality to cast her influence and gain her ultimate goals. By allowing the witch to use these powers, Syphax is punished and loses everything.

In using her sexuality as a source of her magic, Erichtho makes her ties to death also expressions of the ideas of life and maternity. Whereas Sophonisba should be a figure of normative motherhood, Erichtho becomes an unnatural mother. Her overt sexuality forces Syphax to unwillingly give her his semen, the essence of creation and steals his animal spirit or soul. Purkiss also says that "War is a prolific producer of [chaos, pollution, dirt and disorder]; and in particular, the spectacle of dismembered and disordered bodies, living and dead, creates acute anxieties, and not only because the corpse represents death. In representing the end of life, it must also represent the beginning, the mother" (Purkiss 111). Erichtho has intercourse with the corpses of the dead, and also seduces the living, an unnatural act because she is hag-like, and antithetical to the conventional notion of the seductress. Syphax, by allowing the war to continue beyond when it should have ended, enables Erichtho to act within society as a subversive force.

The war produces disorder and gives Erichtho more corpses to use to gain power. By bringing about so much death, Syphax allows Erichtho to create new life through him. Even her sexual actions bring forth life and rebirth, though in a perverse way because the war has allowed her an ability to do so. She reassures Syphax that after their night together he has fathered a race of demons: “Know we, Erichtho, with a thirsty womb,/ Have coveted full threescore suns for blood of kings” (5.1.8-9). Her seduction is not simply sexual in nature; she needs Syphax to create life. Even the unnatural witch cannot achieve the creation of life on her own. Syphax has a noble bloodline that Erichtho finds worthy of fathering her children. The fact that he is such a despicable character and not noble as Massinissa makes him a suitable candidate for her needs. Marston is enforcing the early modern idea that the witch cannot force someone into action, but can only convince a person into the action she wants to occur. Syphax, because he has given up his honor and become a villain is much easier for Erichtho to convince than anyone else in the play would be.

Erichtho’s sexuality is tied entirely to the idea of death and the Underworld in both the *Pharsalia* and *Sophonisba*. Sophonisba also ends up in the grave, though she does so to protect the honor of her husband. While Sophonisba commits suicide willingly and is admired as “Woman’s right wonder,” Erichtho, who also willingly inhabits the grave, exists outside of any sort of patriarchal hierarchy. Grinnell points out that “For Marston she is the embodiment of the uncontrolled woman, the powerful woman who refuses to comply with patriarchal rules” (Grinnell 64). Erichtho knows that she can control the weak Syphax and she takes every advantage of him that she can.

Melissa Jane Schons points out in her article on the characterization of the witch that “Although Lucan does not incorporate associations with death, murderous tendencies or

inversions of fertility into his characterization of the Thessalian witches, he does attribute to them two characteristics typical of the hag: reversing the natural order and having associations with and control over wild animals” (Schons 152). Erichtho as a witch is uncontrollable by man, and her regenerative powers are those of a perverse woman, not a woman bound by the rules of society. The curses that were used to protect graves in ancient Greece were often written by women. In their history of witchcraft, Ankarloo and Clark write that “It is amongst the curse tablets that some of the most important documentation of women’s initiative in the ancient world is found. The actual words of women of antiquity (women’s ‘voice’) unfiltered through male sources, are rarely found” (Ankarloo and Clark 62). Erichtho as a woman who lives in a graveyard, exists in a place where women’s voices can be uniquely heard. Unlike Sophonisba, who lives within the bounds of society and has her voice constrained by male ritual, Erichtho’s voice in rituals is completely her own.

This idea of witch as someone who exists outside the bounds of normative society and who can persuade through language seems to have influenced many Jacobean dramas like *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, and *Sophonisba*, all of which portray witches who have the power to bring about someone’s downfall through nothing but persuasive speaking. The Wyrld Sisters of *Macbeth* challenge the idea of whether Macbeth would have ever allowed his ambition to overrule his good sense if he hadn’t been persuaded that his destiny was to rule. The mere implication of prophecy from figures like the Wyrld Sisters gives that prophecy a weight that it would not have born coming from a lesser source. Witches are prophets who are purveyors of unnatural and illegitimate rule and civil war. Purkiss discusses this idea and how it ties into the theater: “This theatrical war, which ironically saw the closure of the only institution likely safely to canalize the uncertainties thus created – the theatre itself – necessarily problematize identities

even as it licensed their recovery by brutal and illicit means” (Purkiss 124). The religious upheaval of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, along with the witch trials that continued through the English Civil War, show a great deal of unnatural order: authors like Shakespeare and Marston were examining what that unnatural order might mean for the rest of society. Purkiss continues this argument over the place of the witch-fueled discourse about the English Civil War, noting, “Elegantly equating weakness with femininity, and thus expressing through the figure of the witch terror of the feminization of the army and its consequent vulnerability, this statement encapsulates relations between Civil War witch-trials and the war itself” (Purkiss 109). Sophonisba is also at the center of a civil war. Carthage is torn apart by the actions of Syphax and Massinissa. Erichtho’s bedding of Syphax ensures that this civil war will doom Carthage in the face of Rome’s invasion. If this civil war hadn’t occurred, Carthage might have been able to fight Scipio off and save itself.

Female sexual desire can be seen as gluttonous, and Erichtho’s rape of Syphax seems to be a twisting of the male rationale for rape, contemporary with Marston’s writing of the play. Gender roles become confused and reversed: Syphax is unable to perform sexually with Sophonisba, giving him feminine qualities, which allows Erichtho to take advantage of his (male) person. Lee states that “Her maternal body (her womb) as the originator of the malefactors becomes their receptacle (their tomb), which like a disposable container of waste is to be thrown away” (Lee 54). By taking his sperm, she ensures that Syphax is doomed and will not survive. He may not be dead yet, but the grave is his only option after this point. She informs Syphax that through his lustful act with her, he is damned to Hell and has given her his vitality. It doesn’t matter what else Syphax does in his lifetime; he is doomed for eternity. Here, Erichtho takes on the role of

the demon Lilith, who is excommunicated from Eden because she refuses to be subservient to Adam: she becomes a succubus who is a mother to a race of demons.

While she seems to take on this almost masculine quality, Erichtho is also perversely feminine. In acknowledging that she has wanted Syphax sexually, she is acting out the female role of seducer. She gives Syphax what he wanted from Sophonisba: sexual access, and a womb to use in engendering new life. But Erichtho perverts this role, and Syphax engenders life as perverse and morbid as his own deeds and as the world he inhabits.

Sophonisba escapes from Syphax's bed and tricks him, after persuading him that she needs to perform a ritual in memory of her first husband. She escapes after drugging the servant Vangue, a very witch-like action, and tying up a Vangue in her place. Syphax is humiliated by this deceit and pursues Sophonisba wearing nothing but a bed sheet, which is once again a reference to the use of cloth in magic, and to the shrouds of the dead. After catching up with Sophonisba, who has been betrayed by her maidservant, Syphax tells Sophonisba that he will have her virginity, even if he has to kill her and sleep with her corpse, mirroring Erichtho's sexual propensities.

Sophonisba reluctantly returns to the bedchamber. Syphax, still in the bed sheet, standing at the cave's mouth calls for the witch Erichtho to aid him in his seduction of Sophonisba. He hopes that her magic can ensure that Sophonisba will be wooed instead of forced, which at this point seems like an action that is too little, too late. But, because of the early modern theory that rape would not result in conception, it is important for Syphax to have Sophonisba come willingly to his bed. If he forces her, he may be satisfied sexually, but the act will not result in an heir.

Sophonisba has already demonstrated the fact that she has control over herself. Sophonisba's actions confirm that she refuses to be controlled by a man, disrupting the natural order of sexual conduct. These disruptive effects force Syphax to turn to the witch, an unnatural force, to ask for

help. But just like Sophonisba herself, Erichtho refuses to conform to society's expectations of her role and her actions. In many ways, Erichtho saves Sophonisba by replacing her in Syphax's bed and, because of this, becomes an agent that restores the balance that Sophonisba has lost, again perverting the feminine. Erichtho nurtures Sophonisba by allowing her to escape being ravaged. Erichtho also avoids physically raping Syphax with her own persuasive abilities and ensures her own fertility through her bedding of Syphax.

Erichtho is tied to the use of her mouth and her inherent sexuality. Amy Lee in discussing the role of language for women says that "The witch's body testifies to her excessive sexual desire and voracious consumption, linking her mouth to her womb" (Lee 53). Erichtho's relation to the grave and death also contrasts her actions with the typical ideals of female roles, such as the ability to create life and to comfort and nurture. Through her ties to death and the grave, Erichtho takes on almost a masculine quality that can also be seen through Sophonisba's unwillingness to relinquish control over her life. Lee states, "Similar to the witch Erichtho's eerie femininity, the grotesquely inflated image of the grave, the pit, and Mother Nature contributes to dehumanizing and further [demonizing]" her actions (Lee 53). Lucan makes it very clear that even the gods fear Erichtho's powers; Marston too states "... her deep magic makes forced heaven quake" (4.1.106). Just as Lilith refused to comply with Adam's will, Eve also gives in to Mother Nature when she allows the snake to invite her into eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Whitaker says that "Marston turns Syphax's physical conquest of Sophonisba/Erichtho into Erichtho's triumph over him" (Whitaker 69). While he is trying to force his desire on Sophonisba, Erichtho inverts the situation and instead forces her desires upon Syphax. The rape he hopes to act out on the body of the virtuous heroine is instead acted out upon his own body. Sophonisba's seduction is a trick of theater, while Erichtho's seduction is blamed on the

supernatural. Syphax has failed with both women. He cannot get Sophonisba into bed himself and is unable to act out his masculine role without the aid of the witch. Here the feminine power of persuasion has won over the villain. In both regards: the feminine power has caused Syphax to not only sleep with Erichtho, but also to fail to have sex with his own wife, fulfilling traditional Jacobean beliefs of the witch denying a man the ability to procreate and perform sexually. This is also seen in *Macbeth* when the witch tells how she drained the seamen dry as hay: “I the shipman's card. I will drain him dry as hay” (*Macbeth* 1.3.18-19). The feminine power here has been disruptive of both sides of the female paradigm: it has forced sex with the witch while avoiding sex with the motherly wife.

One of the most outstanding parts of Erichtho's seduction is the fact that she does nothing more than tell Syphax not to light a candle, and reassures him that he will have Sophonisba come willingly to his bed. This need to perform sexually in darkness is seen throughout classical mythology and fairy tale stories: Cupid and Psyche, Beauty and the Beast, East of the Sun West of the Moon, ect. The audience is never told that Erichtho uses any magic whatsoever to disguise herself or cast any sort of illusion on Syphax, though Erichtho herself implies that magic will occur. Syphax is convinced by nothing but Erichtho's speech. His sight is robbed by natural darkness, not magic, but this loss of sight is just as controlling as any real magic could be. Purkiss says that the “Loss of sight is accompanied by a terrifying, dizzying loss of self, an *abysme* into which disappear all agency, all power of decision-making, self-fashioning, and action. The identity, carefully stiffened to meet the onslaught, suddenly and in fright dissolves into the darkened air” (Purkiss 110). This loss of sight might be part of why Syphax is unable to combat Erichtho at all. He has invited her interference into the situation and then completely blinded himself to her nature. He should be aware that Erichtho is an unnatural agent and should

have guarded against her possible trickery. Instead he walks blindly into the situation, unlike Odysseus who has carefully planned his interaction with the trickster character of the monstrous witch Circe.

Erichtho uses the bed to finally have her way with Syphax. While she explains that she wanted his sperm, she also tells him that he has made her younger: “Thy proud heat well wasted/ Hath made our limbs grow young” (5.1.18-19). Even after the sexual act, her words describe the magic she has done. Her seduction of Syphax has restored her youth.

Syphax is ultimately emasculated by Erichtho, a process begun by Sophonisba’s refusal of his sexual advances and her choice of Massinissa as a husband. This choice eventually causes the downfall of Carthage.<sup>1</sup> While the war between Rome and Carthage may not have been civil, the betrayal of Massinissa by Syphax is the same kind of unnatural civil conflict as a civil war. Massinissa should have naturally defeated the Romans and claimed his wife sexually, but because of Syphax’s interference, Carthage is lost, Massinissa becomes an ally of Rome and neither man is able to claim Sophonisba. Erichtho is not the cause of these conflicts, but she damns Syphax beyond any redemption and ensures the eventual outcome is tragic instead of comic.

Syphax also plays out the trope of the unnatural being who seduces through words. Through his use of language, Syphax convinces the Carthaginian senate to betray Massinissa and to put himself in charge. Syphax is, in many ways, a much more sinister character than Erichtho, who simply tricks one man to get what she wants. Syphax brings about the downfall of Carthage

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Sophonisba to Helen of Troy. Both can be seen as nation destroyers. Both choose one man over another and this results in the defeat of a nation. Helen of Troy chooses a man who is not appropriate and betrays her husband; Sophonisba chooses the right man and remains loyal to him at the expense of her nation’s military campaign. Both use speech to manipulate their circumstance and to alter memory.

through his actions, and damns an entire country.<sup>2</sup> In the end, Sophonisba must commit suicide because of Syphax's poisoned words to Scipio, which convince Scipio that Sophonisba has the power to persuade Massinissa to change sides once more. Indeed, it is Sophonisba who should be the witch figure throughout the play, but instead Syphax takes on this role, even though Erichtho is the only actual identified witch. Grinnell shows that "Erichtho is emblematic of the danger that the play sees in uncontrolled femininity. Sophonisba in her role as exception is notable precisely because she remains controlled even when the men believe she will turn witch-like" (Grinnell 66). Syphax has already turned himself into a monster by bringing about Massinissa's betrayal, and Erichtho ensures his complete damnation through her seduction. But though monstrous, and though he uses speech to destroy and beguile, Syphax is male, and so he is not seen as a magic-user the way Erichtho is.

John Byron Young makes the argument that within the *Pharsalia*, Erichtho is actually the hero and "also the supreme *uates*<sup>3</sup> and reflection of the poet" (Young vi). Her magical abilities to foretell the future by drawing up the spirit of a slain soldier from the underworld and speaking through the mouth of a corpse reflect the poet's ability to speak the truth through the mouths of others. Young believes that Erichtho is a "microcosm of the horror set about her and appears at the climax of the atrocities brought on by the civil war" (Young 1). John Marston models his Erichtho directly on this original ghastly witch figure. If Lucan is using Erichtho to comment on the true horror of the civil war, then we can only conclude that Marston is making a similar statement about the political environment in which he himself resides in England after the death

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<sup>2</sup> Again compare to Helen of Troy's nation destroying through the choice of an improper partner.

<sup>3</sup>"Two concepts of the poet—as craftsman (maker) and as inspired seer or quasi-priest—are already established in early Gr. lit. In Pindar, they coexist, but Plato (notably in the *Ion*) exaggerates the notion of poetic "mania" (see *furor poeticus*) to devalue the poet's claim to rational knowledge of truth." - "Vates." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. Credo Reference. Web. 3 December 2014.

of Queen Elizabeth and the assumption of the throne by James I. Marston is himself using Erichtho as a way for the poet to speak a truth that he wishes he could openly express about the ability to influence through language.

Because of her ability to make use of the corpses that the civil war creates, Erichtho is able to take on the role of the hero in ways that no one else in Lucan's *Pharsalia* may. Young says that "Erichtho wholly embodies the darkest horrors intrinsic to civil war that Lucan wishes to convey in his epic" (Young 4). Erichtho has power and control in a world that has lost its social order. Marston also uses her this way, placing her in the middle of the play's events just as the social order becomes completely disrupted, allowing her to emphasize the horrors of Sophonisba's situation. In this way, Sophonisba becomes symbolic of the state of England. If Lucan's comment is that the Roman civil war is an atrocity on all sides, then Marston is showing the atrocity of political situation in England. Both dramas take place within a world of loss of control and of destruction. Erichtho, on the other hand, can neither be controlled nor destroyed. Grinnell states that, "She remains dangerously free from the resolution of the play that establishes Massanissa's honor and Sophonisba's death...Even when she leaves the stage she remains a monster at large, haunting the resolution of the play as a dramatic counterpoint to the glory of the controlled woman Sophonisba" (Grinnell 67-68). Sophonisba is successfully killed and can no longer have the power to control men. Erichtho is still there, waiting to take advantage of someone else. The virtuous woman is gone and only the unnatural one is left. There is more than just a sinister implication to this state. Hope dies with Sophonisba and leaves only the infernal being behind.

When the audience of *Sophonisba* meets Erichtho for the first time, Syphax has called to her from the mouth of a cave in the Carthaginian desert, oddly the same cave whose mouth led to

a forest when Sophonisba exited it earlier. The desert as a place of death allows Erichtho to be in Carthage, even though she is still identified as a Thessalian witch. Marston seems to imply that Erichtho can exist in any dead space, be it a Thessalian graveyard or an African desert. Syphax describes Erichtho's dread appearance and the places of death she inhabits. "Here in this desert, the great soul of charms/ Dreadful Erichtho lives, whose dismal brow/ Contemns all roofs or civil coverture./ Forsaken graves and tombs, the ghosts forced out,/ She joys to inhabit" (4.2.97-101). Erichtho cannot inhabit civilized space; she refuses to live in a traditional dwelling. Instead she forces the ghosts out of the graves she desires to inhabit and she violates the corpses found therein.

In describing Erichtho's treatment of the corpses themselves, Marston focuses on her mouth specifically: "she scrapes dry gums for her black rites...then doth she gnaw the pale and o'ergrown nails/ From his dry hand. But if she find some life/ Yet lurking close, she bites his gelid lips,/ and sticking her black tongue in his dry throat,/ She breathes dire murmurs which enforce him bear,/ Her baneful secrets to the spirits of horror." (4.2.111-122). In inhabiting their graves, she has violated the corpses of the intended inhabitants, just as she has violated the rules of civilization by inhabiting the graveyard itself. Erichtho uses her mouth and her tongue to force her way into the mouths of the corpses. She then forces her words into their mouths, enabling the spirits of the underworld to hear her desires, which they are in turn forced to obey. Syphax himself is the one to explain these things to the audience. Syphax should understand the implications of her power. Instead, he only desires her magical aid, never imagining that her power might be turned against him.

Erichtho herself spells out her intentions for Syphax. She tells him that "To us heaven, earth, sea, air,/ And Fate itself obeys. The beasts of death/ And all the terrors angry gods

invented,/ T'afflict th'ignorance of patient man,/ Tremble at us" (4.2.129-133). And here is where she finishes by saying, "I do not pray, you gods: my breath's 'You must'" (4.2.138). She has told Syphax exactly what she does. The powers of the world around them are afraid of Erichtho. And how does she do it? She speaks. She is able to do so, she explains, because the "patient man" is afflicted by her. Syphax's impatience gives her the opening she requires to act. If he had been patient and wooed Sophonisba in an acceptable manner, the call for the witch would never have occurred. Syphax has now explained Erichtho and her actions to the audience, and she in turn has told him exactly what she does. But seeing nothing but his own goal, Syphax does not heed the witch's inherent warning. The witch's words do not seem to penetrate his ears, as they do everyone else's. They do not penetrate the way that the Holy Spirit's words penetrate the Virgin Mary, because Erichtho has not yet readied Syphax for procreation, as Gabriel has with Mary at the Annunciation. At this point, Syphax is so blinded by his desire that he is completely oblivious to the danger he is in, which marks him as the perfect candidate for Erichtho's desire for perverse procreation.

And in speaking to Syphax, Erichtho's monologue upholds the idea of demonic forces that use the magic of speech. "So that, where holy Flamens won't to sing/ Sweet hymns to heaven, there the daw and crow,/ The ill-voiced raven and still-chattering pie/ Send out ungrateful sound and loathsome filth" (4.2.149-153). The raven and the magpie are both birds of death and ill omens. Where Hymen and the Flamens usually sing holy hymns for those getting married, as seen throughout Shakespeare's plays, here the omens of darkness and despair are instead singing the wedding hymns. These ungrateful sounds and loathsome filth are subconsciously tied back to all of Marston's earlier descriptions of Erichtho's acts and words. The noises that Erichtho brings about cannot be holy and Syphax should be well aware of the

danger these sounds represent. As Erichtho enters the play for the first time and throughout her appearance and action, infernal music is played. Not only do the words she uses overshadow the her actions, but the music is an obvious warning about Erichtho's true nature to the audience.

As Erichtho tells Syphax how to proceed, she says: "And easy to thy wishes yields, speak not one word,/ Nor dare, as thou dost fear thy loss of joys,/ T' admit one light, one light" (4.2.174-176). Erichtho's ability to speak is being denied to Syphax entirely, as is his ability to see by denying him lighting the candle. In this way the marriage bed can be completely violated. Syphax has ripped Sophonisba away from her rightful place and Hymen can "no longer sing his hymns" and neither can his holy acolytes. In their place, Erichtho says, "birds of death will speak horrible, hellish words." Just like the Harpies in the *Odyssey* or the Furies in the *Oresteia*, these ill-omened birds represent disorderly speech that is dangerous to civilization and to man. By the time the Erichtho tells him not to light a candle, Syphax should be fully aware of what is in store for him. His willful ignorance shows the deadly power of the witch. Everything she has told him should have warned him away from the outcome that he desires, and though her words are truthful, they still set him up for his own rape.

She reassures him that she will be using a charm, which is also produced by sound: "Then, when I shall force/ The air to music, and the shades of night/ To form sweet sounds... Whose potent sound will force ourself to fear" (4.2.176-181). She is using sound itself to mimic the natural night environment, but in the end, this sound will force fear to occur. She finishes by saying, "My wisdom is my sense,/ Without a man I hold no excellence./ Give me long breath, young beds, and sickless ease./ For we hold firm, that's lawful that which doth please" (4.2.186-190). Erichtho has laid out exactly what she hopes to gain by using her words: to sleep with young men and regain her youth. She justifies it by saying that anything goes as long as she

is pleased. She has no civilized, lawful boundaries holding her in check. Her morals are ruled by her pleasures, just as Syphax's have been. But unlike Syphax, she uses her voice and her breath to accomplish those things that she desires. Erichtho disappears after calling for the infernal music that first leads her in. Syphax ends the scene by reiterating Erichtho's terribleness, and in a sort of ridiculous reminder, the audience hears Erichtho herself call out her name when Syphax needs to emphasize her power. Erichtho, unlike Syphax, is not brought low by hedonistic behavior. Her femininity changes the need for stoicism.

Act five opens when Syphax learns that it is Erichtho in bed with him. She laughs hysterically at his shock and anger, and before disappearing off stage with his sperm and the vitality she took from him, she reminds him "Know he that would force love, thus seeks his Hell" (5.1.21). Syphax has damned himself, and unlike the monstrous Erichtho, he cannot control anything that happens to him from that point onward. When Erichtho disappears, Syphax questions, "Can we yet breathe? Is any plagued as me?" (5.1.22). Erichtho has used her words and her sexuality to steal his breath as well as everything else.

Erichtho's words and the use of her mouth forces her will on even the gods. Syphax has left the confines of civilized society and offered himself up willingly to the persuasion of the witch, just as the audience who has come to see the play has done. Everything that happens afterward is influenced by Syphax's interaction with the witch. While Sophonisba manages to keep her virtue, Syphax uses his own poisoned words, doubly poisoned by the witch's influence, to convince Scipio that Sophonisba needs to die. Sophonisba commits suicide at the behest of Massinissa who is convinced in turn by Scipio that she will have an evil influence on him. While Erichtho initially saves Sophonisba's honor, she also allows Syphax to finally kill her. In one sense, Marston's message is that early modern women who speak cannot survive. When a

woman speaks and persuades, she takes on the identity of the witch, and incites the fear of social norms falling into disorder. Sophonisba's father strengthens this notion when he curses the senators of Carthage with "the curse of women's words" and claims that he has been "enticed" (2.3). Women who speak cannot triumph. Looking at Erichtho in this light, Marston suggests that the witch holds a power that both women and poetry can acquire that regular men cannot: the truly magical ability to articulate the chaos that no one else will acknowledge.

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## Vita

Lauren E. DeVoe was born in Newark, Ohio. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Miami University of Ohio in 2008. She joined the University of New Orleans English graduate program to pursue a M.A. in English Literature in the Fall of 2013.