

THE  
WORMING  
OF A MAD DOGGE:  
OR,  
A SOPPE FOR  
*CERBERUS*<sup>1</sup> THE  
JAYLOR OF HELL.

NO CONFUTATION BUT A  
SHARPE REDARGUTION OF THE  
BAYTOR OF WOMEN.

BY CONSTANTIA MUNDA  
— *A WOMAN LEADS THE ENTERPRISE.*<sup>2</sup>

*VIRG: AENEID: I.*  
*IF YOU DESPISE THE HUMAN RACE AND MORTAL WEAPONS,*  
*STILL TRUST THAT THE GODS REMEMBER RIGHT AND WRONG.*<sup>3</sup>

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SOLD AT THIS SHOP NEERE FLEET-BRIDGE, OVER  
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1617.  
EDITED BY BREANNA MOLAISON

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<sup>1</sup>“Soppe” means something like “salve” here. In Greek mythology, Cerberus is the three-headed, monstrous watchdog of the underworld

<sup>2</sup> From Virgil’s *Aeneid*, originally in Latin. Translation provided by Aikaterini Laskaridi Foundation’s ToposText project.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Introduction

Constantia Munda's *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* (1617) is an energetic contribution to the swath of Early Modern debates about women. She writes her piece as a response to Joseph Swetnam's polemic against women, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (1615), as the third woman—behind Rachel Speght and Ester Sowerman, to pamphleteer back at Swetnam in defense of women (Beal). Munda's piece pushes back against a tradition of anti-women writing as she satirizes Swetnam back: participating in what some call the "Swetnam Controversy": a collection of five texts, inspired by Swetnam's pamphlet, which either disparage or defend women (Boleyn). *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* confronts misogyny head-on with a firm, witty voice that insists on women's moral and intellectual dignity, refuses to accept male authority at face value, and humorously debases Swetnam; Munda's text is exemplary early 17th-century protofeminist writing.

Swetnam defines women thus: "[Moses] saith they [women] were made of the rib of a man, and that their froward nature shows; for a rib is a crooked thing good for nothing else, and women are crooked by nature" ("Arraignment"). This definition captures the sweeping nature of Swetnam's claims, as well as his moralizing tone, which Munda confronts in her own text. Swetnam portrays women as morally corrupt and practically useless as he amplifies common stereotypes through crude humor. Munda writes directly against this performance—indicting him for his unjustified confidence and flimsy arguments. The title of her piece, *The Worming of a Mad Dogge*, suggests not only that Swetnam's claims are wrong, but that they are parasitic in nature and must be purged from the public imagination. Throughout her text, Munda exposes contradictions in Swetnam's writing, mocks the arrogance of his tone, and illuminates how his argument depends on absurd stereotypes rather than an understanding of women's lived experiences.

One major theme of Munda's work is the virtue and intelligence of women. She refuses the idea that women can be categorized as a universally flawed group—an essential element of Swetnam's argument. Instead, she outlines the diversity of women's characters and counters these accusations with examples from history, scripture, and literature. The rhetorical effect of Munda's argument then moves beyond proving the goodness of women into a critical dissection of Swetnam's fallacious constructions of womanhood; Munda, instead of accepting the *Araignment*'s claims as the starting point of the discussion, shifts the attention within the "Swetnam Controversy" to the behavior and motives of men who attack women. She argues that this hostile subgenre of writing reflects the inadequacies and shortcomings of these men rather than the nature of women collectively. This reversal casts misogynistic writing practices—not women—as the real social and intellectual problem of the moment.

Munda also tackles the interrogation of male authority in her text. As Swetnam insists on his right to persecute women, Munda challenges his authority and why readers should trust it blindly; she

criticizes him not only for his hostility, but for presenting himself as the moral expert for women while lacking any authoritative standing to substantiate his claims. Here, her satire becomes central. By comparing Swetnam to a “mad dogge,” Munda strips from him the authoritative exterior he attempts to assume, and she reveals the pathetic underbelly beneath: showing him as a creature which is driven, like a dog, by impulse and ferocity rather than reason or expertise. This metaphorization also undermines the broader cultural assumption that men are intrinsically better suited to speak publicly, interpret scripture, or engage in social critique. Munda, by foregrounding Swetnam’s lack of actual authority, implies the capability of women to defend themselves against such groundless abuses.

These aspects of the text, then, advance the argument for the protofeminist nature of Munda’s piece. Though the author does not advocate for political equality or civil reform, as one may expect modernly, she confronts the idea that women should remain unseen and unheard in the literary world. Even the act of writing and publishing the text itself is a challenge to normativity for women in Early Modern England as they were expected to keep their thoughts and opinions out of the public sphere. Thus, Munda claims from men the right to publicly respond to false accusations, interpret scripture, and correct harmful ideologies from men. In doing so, she anticipates feminist strategies: like exposing the contradictions of misogynistic logic or reclaiming authority over one’s voice. Her ability to occupy this rhetorical space certifies *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* as a stepping stone in the increasing emergence of feminist thought.

There is, however, uncertainty around the authorship of Munda’s text. “Constantia Munda,” is almost certainly a pseudonym, and there has been no certain answer as to who wrote the work. Some speculate, due to the various references in the work as well as the satire’s strength, that the text was actually written by a man adopting a female persona to strengthen the argument (Beal). The unknown identity behind the pen name, though, highlights the difficulties for writing women of the time in publishing: Munda is by no means the only woman to write under a pseudonym to protect herself from criticism. Neither possibility of the author’s gender diminishes the piece’s significance, though. If the author was a man, the use of a female voice still showcases the intellectual space that gender discussions created for imagining different perspectives and challenging misogyny. Either way, the uncertainty reminds us of the precarious nature of evidencing the presence of Early Modern women in the literary world—and how easily voices can slip out of the historical record.

Editorial Note: All footnotes providing word definitions are sourced from the Oxford English Dictionary unless indicated otherwise. Additionally, all translations are the editor’s interpretations of Google Translate’s attempts at translation.

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**TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL LADY  
HER MOST DEARE MOTHER, THE  
LADY PRUDENTIA MUNDA, THE  
TRUE PATTERNE OF PIETIE AND  
VERTUE,<sup>4</sup> C.M. WISHETH INCREASE  
OF HAPPINESSE.**

As first, your paines in bearing me was such a benefit beyond requital, that t'was much to thinke what pangs of sorrow you sustained in child-birth, when mine infancy obtained the vital drawing in of aire, so your love, mingled with care, hath shown it selfe above the ordinary course of Nature: seeing you still are in perpetual Labour with me, even until the second birth of education may perfect me, you travail still though Churched<sup>5</sup> oft you be.

In recompence whereof, what can I give?  
But what I take, even that I live,  
next to the heavens 'tis yours. Thus, I pay  
my debt by taking up at interest, and lay  
to pawne what I borrow of you: so  
the more I give I take, I pay, I owe.  
Yet, lest you thinke I shall forfeit my bond,  
I present you, with my writing hand,  
some trifling minutes I vainly did bestow

<sup>4</sup> For more on this spelling of “virtue,” see the “Vertue” with an *e* chapter of Jessica Rosenberg’s *Botanical Poetics: Early Modern Plant Books and the Husbandry of Print* (2022). Though Munda likely uses the word to mean “virtue” throughout the text, Rosenberg hypothesizes “virtue” as its own practical term that “gave a name to the work that printed books promised to perform in the world” (83).

<sup>5</sup> “Churched” refers to the Christian churching ritual, meaning “The public appearance of a woman at church to give thanks after childbirth; the ceremony performed at this time” (“Churching”). Munda pays homage to her mother’s

in penning these lines so that all might know the scandals of our adversary. And I had gone forward had not Hester hanged Haman<sup>6</sup> before: yet what here I wrote might serve to stop the cur’s wide throat, until the halter came, since which I ceased to prosecute what I intended lest I should be censured that I undertooke a worke that’s done already: so his booke hath escaped my fingers, but in similar case to a malefactor that changeth place from Newgate unto Tiburne,<sup>7</sup> whose good hope is but to change his shackles for a rope.

Although this be a toy scarce worth your view,  
yet deigne to reade it, and accept in lieu  
of greater duty, for your gracious looke  
is a sufficient Patrone to my booke.

This is the worst disgrace that can be had.  
A Lady’s daughter wormed a dog that’s mad.

Your loving Daughter  
Constantia Munda.

**TO JOSEPH SWETNAM.**

What? Is thy shameless muse so fledged in sin,  
so cocked up in mischiefe? Or hast been  
trained up by Furies<sup>8</sup> in the schoole of vice,

multiple childbirths by acknowledging how “oft [she] be” a participant in churching.

<sup>6</sup> A reference to the Old Testament Book of Esther in which Queen Esther exposes Haman’s genocidal plot against the Jewish people; Haman is subsequently hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for others (Esther 7).

<sup>7</sup> Newgate was London’s principal prison from which condemned criminals were taken to Tyburn, the main site of public execution, to be hanged (“Newgate”; “Tyburn”).

<sup>8</sup> From Greek mythology, the “Furies” were three goddesses of vengeance “who punished men for crimes against the natural order” such as homicide and perjury (“Erinyes”).

where the licentious Devils hoist the price  
of uncaught mischiefe, and make a set reward  
for hell-hound slanderers that nought regard  
their reputation or the wholesome lawes  
of Virtue's commonwealth, but seek applause  
by railing and reviling to deprave  
the mirror of Creation, to out-brave  
even heaven it selfe with folly: could the straine  
of your barren-idle-donghill braine,  
as from a Chemic Limbeck,<sup>9</sup> so distill  
your poisoned drops of hemlocke, and so fill  
the itching eares of silly swaines, and the rude,  
truth-not-discriminating rustic multitude  
with sottish<sup>10</sup> lies, with bald and ribald<sup>11</sup> lines  
patched out of English writers that combines  
their highest reach of emulation but to please  
the giddy-headed vulgar: whose disease,  
like to a swelling dropsie, thirsts to drinke  
and swill the puddles of this nasty sinke?

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When people view not well your devilish book,  
like nibbling fish they swallow bait and hooke  
to their destruction, when they not descry  
your base and most unreverent blasphemy.  
How in the rough of fury you disgrace  
(as much as in you lies) and do deface  
Nature's best ornament; and think thou hast done  
an act deserving commendation;  
whereas thy merits, being brought in sight,

<sup>9</sup> A “limbeck,” the antiquated version of “alembic,” is “an apparatus . . . which was used for the distillation of various substances” (Cuenca).

<sup>10</sup> “Sottish”: drunken or otherwise stupid.

<sup>11</sup> “Ribald”: a socially inferior person considered worthless.

<sup>12</sup> “Pate”: head, or brain.

<sup>13</sup> “Dregs”: sediments.

<sup>14</sup> “Lees”: synonymous to “dregs.”

exclaime thus on thee, “Gallows claime thy right!”

Woman the crowne, perfection, & the meanes  
of all men's being, and their wellbeing, whence  
is the propagation of all humane kinde,  
wherein the bodies frame, th' intellect and mind  
with all their operations do first finde  
their Essence and beginning, where doth lie  
the mortal meanes of our eternity,  
whose virtues, worthinesse, resplendent rayes  
of perfect beauty have always had the praise  
and admiration of such glorious wits,  
which Fame the world's great Herauld sits,  
Crowning with Laurel wreaths and Mirtle bows,  
the tribute and reward of learned browes,  
and that this goodly piece of nature be  
thus shamefully detested, and wronged by thee.  
How could your vile untutored muse enfold  
and wrap it selfe in envious, cruel, bold,  
nay impudent detraction, and then throw  
and hurle without regard your venom'd darts  
of scandalous reviling, at the hearts  
of all our female sex promiscuously—  
of commons, gentry, and nobility?  
Without exceptions hath your spongy pate<sup>12</sup>  
(void in it selfe of all things but of hate)  
sucked up the dregs<sup>13</sup> of folly, and the lees<sup>14</sup>  
of mercenary Pasquils,<sup>15</sup> which doe squeeze  
the glaunders<sup>16</sup> of abuses in the face  
of them that are the cause that humane race

<sup>15</sup> “Mercenary Pasquils”: people paid to write defamatory pamphlets, or the pamphlets themselves. Derived from *pasquinade*, meaning a lampoon or libel likely published anonymously for profit.

<sup>16</sup> “Glaunders”: a contagious equine disease which entails jaw swelling and ulcerated nasal discharge. Munda uses the phrase to metaphorically depict the “infectious” abuses spread by Pasquils.

keepes his continuance: could you be so mad  
as to deprave, nay to call that bad  
which God calls good? Can your filthy claws  
scratch out the image that the Almighty draws  
in us his pictures? No! Things simply good,  
keep still their essence, though they be withstood  
by all the complices of hell: you cannot daunt  
not yet diminish, (how ere you basely vaunt,  
with bitter terms) the glory of our Sex,  
nor, as you michingly surmise, you vex  
us with your dogged railing, why! We know;  
Vertue opposed is stronger, and the foe  
that's quelled and foiled, addeth but more  
Triumph to the conquest than there was before.  
Wherefore be advised, cease to raile  
On them that with advantage can you quaile.

## THE WORMING OF A MADDE DOGGE.

The itching desire of oppressing the presse with  
many sottish and illiterate Libels, stuffed with all  
manner of ribaldry, and sordid inventions, when  
every foule-mouthed male-content may disgorge  
his Licambæan<sup>17</sup> poison in the face of all the world,  
hath broken out into such a dismal contagion in  
these our days, that every scandalous tongue and  
opprobrious witte, like the Italian Mountebanks<sup>18</sup>  
will advance their pedling wares of detracting  
virulence in the public Piazza of every Stationer's

shoppe. And Printing that was invented to be the  
store-house of famous wits, the treasure of Divine  
literature, the pandect<sup>19</sup> and maintainer of all  
Sciences, is become the receptacle of every  
dissolute Pamphlet.

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Woman, the second edition of the Epitome of the  
whole world, the second Tome<sup>20</sup> of that goodly  
volume compiled by the great God of heaven and  
earth, is most shamefully blurred and derogatively  
razed by scribbling pens of savage and uncaught  
monsters. To what an irregular straine is the daring  
impudence of blind-fold bayards<sup>21</sup> aspired unto?  
That they will presume to call in question even the  
most absolute worke composed by the world's  
great Architect? A strange blasphemy to finde fault  
with that which the Privy Councell of the high and  
mighty Parliament of the inscrutable "Tri-unitie"  
in Heaven determined to be very good. To call that  
imperfect, foward, crooked and perverse to make  
an arraignment and Beare-baiting<sup>22</sup> of that which  
the Pantocrator<sup>23</sup> woulde in his omniscient  
wisedome have to be the consummation of his  
blessed week's worke, the end, crowne, and  
perfection of the never-sufficiently glorified  
creation. What is it but an exorbitant frenzy, and  
woeful taxation of the supreme deity. Yet woman,  
the greatest part of the "lesser world," is generally  
become the subject of every pedantical goose-quill.  
Every fantastic Poetaster which thinks he hath

<sup>17</sup> The origin of "Licambæan" is unclear. Possibly derived from "Licham," meaning a living body—especially as the seat of desire—or a corpse.

<sup>18</sup> "Mountebank": an itinerant entertainer.

<sup>19</sup> "Pandect": compendium.

<sup>20</sup> "Tome": each of the largest parts or sections of a single volume of a book.

<sup>21</sup> One blind to the light of knowledge, who has the self-confidence of ignorance.

<sup>22</sup> "Beare-baiting": the practice of setting dogs to fight against a bear, which has been chained or tethered by the neck or leg, as a form of entertainment.

<sup>23</sup> "Pantocrator": the ruler of all things.

licked the vomit of his *Coriphaeus* and can but patch a hobbling verse together, will strive to present unseemly figments imputed to our sex (as a pleasing theme to the vulgar) on the public Theatre: teaching the worser sort that are more prone to luxury a compendious way to be sinful.

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A man should give himselfe either to vertuous speech, or prudent silence, and not let tongue and pen runne up and downe like a weaponed mademan, to strike and wound any without partiality, everyone without exception, to make such a universal massacre (for so I may terme it, seeing words make worse wounds then swords) yet lest villany domineer and triumph in fury, we will manacle<sup>24</sup> your dissolute fist, that you deale not your blows so unadvisedly. Though feminine modesty hath confined our rarest and ripest wits to silence, we acknowledge it our greatest ornament, but when necessity compels us, 'tis as great a fault and folly, "It is better to remain silent than to speak ill,"<sup>25</sup> being too much provoked by arraignments, baitings, and rancorous impeachments of the reputation of our whole sex, "It is foolish mercy to spare paper that deserves to perish,"<sup>26</sup> opportunity of speaking slipped by silence, is as bad as importance upheld by babbling "To speak what is fitting is better than to be silent."<sup>27</sup> Know therefore that we will cancel your accusations, traverse your bills, and come upon you for a false indictment,

<sup>24</sup> "Manacle": to fetter or confine the hands, or to handcuff.

<sup>25</sup> Originally quoted in Latin; editor's translation.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Originally quoted in Greek; editor's translation.

<sup>28</sup> "Malapert": presumptuous, impudent.

<sup>29</sup> Origins unclear. Text originally states "Juno's" rather than "Juno's," but changed for clarity. Juno may refer to the

and thinke not 'tis our waspishnesse that shall sting you; no sir, until we see your malapert<sup>28</sup> sauciness reformed, which will not be till you do "make a long letter to us," we will continue Juno's,<sup>29</sup> "Thus hatreds shall not depart, living angers will be dealt with by a violent mind, and healthy sorrow will bear eternal wars, having been removed by peace."<sup>30</sup>

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I read of a mad fellow, which had lost his goods by sea, that whatsoever ships had come into the port at Athens, he would take a catalogue of them, and very busy would he be in making an inventory of the goods they brought in and received, thinking all to be his. So you having peradventure had some cursed wife that hath given you as good as you brought, whatsoever faults you espy in others, you take that to heart: you run a madding up and downe to make a scroll of female frailties, and an inventory of meretricial<sup>31</sup> behaviours, ascribing them to those that are joined in the sacred bands of matrimony. Because you have beene guld<sup>32</sup> with brasse money, will you thinke no coin currant?<sup>33</sup> Because you have suffered shipwrecke, will you dissuade any from venturing to trafficke beyond Seas? Besides, you show yourselfe unjust in not observing a symmetry and proportion of revenge and the offense: for a pelting injury should not provoke an opprobrious calumny; a private abuse

Roman queen of gods: ruling marriage, childbirth, and women. The following quotation has no traceable origin.

<sup>30</sup> Originally quoted in Latin; editor's translation.

<sup>31</sup> "Meretricial": derived from "meretrrix," meaning prostitute.

<sup>32</sup> "Guld": to cover with a thin layer of gold.

<sup>33</sup> "Currant": of money—in circulation.

of your owne familiar doxies<sup>34</sup> should not breake out into open slanders of the religious matron together with the prostitute strumpet; of the nobly-descended Ladies, as the obscure base vermin that have bitten you; of the chaste and modest virgins, as well as the dissolute and impudent harlot. Because women are women, you will do that in an houre, which you will repent of all your lifetime after. Nay rather, if the rough of your fury would have let you look over it, you would have directed the floodgates of your poisoned streames that way where you perceived the common shore to run, and not have polluted and stained the cleare and crystalline waters. Because women are not women, rather might be a fit subject of an ingenious Satirist. “When she has imitated the form of the other sex”:<sup>35</sup> the reason is, “How can a woman in a helmet show modesty, when she has fled from her own sex?”<sup>36</sup> But when women are women, when we saile by the true compasse of honest and religious conversation, why should you be so doggedly incensed to barke in general?

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But every wrongful contumely<sup>37</sup> and reproach hath such a sharpe sting in it, that if it fasten once on the minde of a good and ingenuous nature, ‘tis never drawn forth without anxiety and perpetual recordation of dolor,<sup>38</sup> which if you had known,

your hornet-braines would not have buzzed abroad with a resolution to sting some though you lost your sting and died for it: you would not like the cuttle fish spewed out your inky gall<sup>39</sup> with hope to turne the purest waters to your owne sable hew<sup>40</sup> . . . in the handling of your base discourse, you lay open your imperfections, “grabbing curses from the street-corner,” by heaping together the scraps, fragments, and reverisons of diverse English phrases, by scraping together the glaunders and offals of abusive termes, and the refuse of idle headed Authors, and making a mingle-mangle gallimaufry<sup>41</sup> of them. Lord! how you have cudgelled your braines in gleaning multitudes of similies as ‘twere in the field of many writers, and threshed them together in the floore of your owne deviser;<sup>42</sup> and all to make a poore confused maslin,<sup>43</sup> whereas thine owne barren soiled soil is not able to yield the least congruity of speech . . . sometimes you make me burst out with laughter, when I see your contradictions of yourselfe.

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I doe not wish you the same death,<sup>44</sup> though you have the same conditions and surname as he had, but live still to barke at Vertue, yet these our writings shall be worse then fires to torture both thy booke and thee: wherefore transcribing some verses that a Gentleman wrote to such an one as yourselfe in this manner I conclude,

<sup>34</sup> “Doxies”: female prostitutes.

<sup>35</sup> Originally quoted in Latin; editor’s translation.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> “Contumely”: insolent reproach or abuse.

<sup>38</sup> “Dolor”: mental pain or suffering.

<sup>39</sup> “Gall”: bile; bitterness of spirit; assurance.

<sup>40</sup> “Sable hew”: black color.

<sup>41</sup> “Gallimaufry”: a confused jumble.

<sup>42</sup> “Threshed . . . deviser”: i.e. “you’ve beaten (as in grain) these ideas together on the floor of your own invention.”

<sup>43</sup> “Maslin”: a mixture of various kinds of grain.

<sup>44</sup> Referring to the ancient Roman writer Labienus, Munda does not wish the same suicidal fate—ordering himself to be sealed in a tomb after Augustus burns his work. Not to be confused with war general Titus Labienus (“Suetonius”).

“Thy death I wish not, but would have thee live,  
to raile at vertue’s acts, and so to give  
good vertues lustre. Seeing envy still  
waits on the best deserts to her owne ill.  
But for thyselfe learne this, let not your hand  
strike at the flint againe which can withstand  
your malice without harme, and to your face  
returne contempt, the brand of your disgrace;  
whilst women sit unmov’d, whose constant  
mindes (arm’d against obloquy) with those weate  
windes cannot be shaken: for who doth not marke  
that Dogs for custome, not for fiercenesse barke.  
These any foot-boy kicks, and therefore we  
passing them by, with scorne do pity thee.  
For being of their nature mute at noone,  
thou darest at midnight barke against the moone;  
where mayest thou ever barke that none shall hear,  
but to returne the like: and mayest thou beare  
with grieve more slanders then thou canst invent,  
or ere did practise yet, or canst prevent,

mayest thou be matched with envy, and defend  
scorne toward that which all besides commend.  
And may that scorne so worke upon thy sense,  
that neither suffering nor impudence  
may teach thee cure: or being overworne  
with hope of cure may merit greater scorne.  
If not too late, let all thy labours be  
condemned by upright judgements, and thy fee  
so hardly earned, not paid: may thy rude quill  
be always mercenary, and write still,  
that which no man will read, unlesse to see  
thine ignorance, and then to laugh at thee;  
and mayst thou live to feele this, and then groane,  
because ‘tis so, yet cannot helpe, and none  
may rescue thee, till your checked conscience cry,  
‘This—this I have deserved,’ then pine and die.”  
“And when rage has ordered you to confess the  
truth, and your conscience betrays you, you will  
cry out: ‘I wrote it.’”<sup>45</sup>

**Finis.**

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<sup>45</sup> Originally quoted in Latin; editor’s translation.