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Title of extract: **Lucan's Sextus Pompeius Episode**

Name of Author: **Ogden, D.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Sextus Pompeius. Powell, A. and Welch, K. (editors).**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Duckworth**

Pages scanned: **249 - 271**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Muses' Playground CLCS5001**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E.L. Harris*

Date authorised: 05.04.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

LUCAN'S SEXTUS POMPEIUS EPISODE:
Its Necromantic, Political and Literary Background

Daniel Ogden

In the second half of the sixth book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* we are introduced to Sextus Pompeius in Thessaly. Desperate – unstoically so – to know the outcome of the civil war, he scorns Delphi and similar oracles, and turns instead to the horrors of necromancy. Before the action moves on, we are treated to an extended excursus on the world of Thessalian witches. This narrows to a treatment of the activities of the most horrid of them all, Erictho. She it is that Sextus Pompeius seeks out. Defying her build-up, once introduced as an actor Erictho is a reassuring professional, bustling and accommodating, and charmingly touched to learn that her reputation has preceded her. She selects a Pompeian corpse from a battlefield that ought not yet to exist and drags it off to her cave. There she pumps into its veins seething blood and a magic potion containing all manner of outlandish ingredients, invokes the infernal powers, and makes the ghost materialize beside the body. It refuses still to re-enter it, until threats are issued against the infernal powers, whereupon the reanimation is successful. The prophecy, when it comes, is relatively disappointing, though it does indicate Caesar's victory.¹ This paper falls into two parts. In the first part I ask why Lucan should have chosen Sextus Pompeius to include in his necromancy. In the second I investigate the nature of, and background to, the necromantic technology used in the consultation. If Lucan's episode has little to tell us about Sextus Pompeius himself, it nonetheless testifies to the passions this controversial figure could continue to generate long after his death, and to the threat Octavian had perceived in him.²

Epic tradition dictated that Lucan include a necromancy scene in his *Pharsalia*, Virgil that the sixth book be its home. The scene is further justified by its gory invention and black humour, and by its thematic links with the rest of the poem. But the episode is not, ostensibly, well integrated into its narrative context. It remains detachable, its introduction

arbitrary, its conclusion inconsequential. This, also, may be art. Sextus Pompeius reappears only once, and briefly, in the ninth book, reporting his father's death to his elder brother.³ Lucan could have sent any actor, historical or fictional, to consult Erictho. Why did he choose Sextus Pompeius?⁴

When Lucan wrote, the Pompeian family's association with necromancy was probably well established already. Valerius Maximus reports that in 55 BC Sextus Pompeius' father, Pompey the Great himself, had joked that Helvius Mancius of Formiae, the low-born and very aged accuser of Libo before the censors, had been 'sent up from those below'. Helvius appropriated the notion of his own evocation from the underworld and remarked upon how many ghosts of fine Romans he had seen down there lamenting the fact that Pompey had butchered them.⁵

The elder Pliny records a tale of a spontaneous necromancy in connection with Sextus Pompeius himself from the Sicilian War (38–6 BC):

Bello Siculo Gabienus Caesaris classium fortissimus captus a Sexto Pompeio iussu eius incisa cervice et vix cohaerente iacuit in litore toto die. Deinde, cum advesperavisset, gemitu precibusque congregata multitudo petiit ut Pompeius ad se veniret aut aliquem ex arcanis mitteret, se enim ab inferis remissum habere quae nuntiaret. Misit plures Pompeius ex amicis, quibus Gabienus dixit inferis dis placere Pompei causas et partes pias: proinde eventum futurum quem optaret; hoc se nuntiare iussum; argumentum fore veritatis quod peractis mandatis protinus exspiraturus esset. Idque ita evenit.

During the Sicilian War Gabienus, the bravest man of Caesar's fleets, was captured by Sextus Pompeius. On his orders, Gabienus' throat was slashed, almost all the way through, and he lay on the shore the whole day long. In due course, by evening, a crowd had gathered round him, attracted by his groans and prayers. He begged that Sextus Pompeius should come to him, or that he should send one of his confidants, for, he said, he had been sent back with a message from those below. Sextus Pompeius sent several of his friends. Gabienus told them that those below favoured the Pompeian cause and pious [NB] side. Accordingly, he would have the outcome for which he hoped. He said he had been instructed to convey this message. As proof of its truth would stand the fact that he was destined to die immediately upon completion of his orders. And this duly happened.

Pliny *Natural history* 7.178–9

But the prophecy was, of course, false. Many take this supposedly historical episode as the major inspiration for the Erictho sequence.⁶ The falseness of this prophecy is curious. It was a commonplace of necromancy that it was the truest and most reliable form of divination. Lucan's Sextus Pompeius knew that the ghosts were more reliable than the heavenly gods, whose

prophecies were embodied by Apollo's Delphi and Zeus' Dodona, and than lightning-divination and astrological divination.⁷ Statius' Tiresias compares the power of necromancy favourably with augury, hieroscopy, Delphi and astrology.⁸ Philostratus explains that ghosts called up beside the blood and the pit could not lie. Hence the ghost of Odysseus was forced to tell Homer even about his disgraceful treatment of Palamedes, and so had to exact from him a promise that he would not mention Palamedes in his poems.⁹ The most ready explanation of the falseness of the prophecy is that it and the story to which it belongs were composed during the course of the war, before Sextus Pompeius' defeat, and indeed as propaganda in his favour. A parallel case may be cited. Phlegon of Tralles includes among his *Mirabilia*, compiled in the second century AD, a tale set at Thermopylae in 191 BC in the course of the war against Antiochus. The dead Syrian commander Bouplagos rose at midday from the battlefield, despite twelve wounds, to walk into the Roman camp and prophesy disaster for Rome, collapsing 'dead' again as soon as he had finished speaking.¹⁰ This tale, along with the accompanying one about the Roman commander Publius (of which more anon), was probably developed soon after its historical setting, since it belongs to the resistance literature that opposed the Roman intervention in Greece and since its prophecy was historically false.

At the end of Lucan's Erictho episode the reanimated corpse tells Sextus Pompeius that he will receive further prophecies in Sicily from the ghost of his father. This is a reference to a tradition, elucidated by Lucan's scholiast, that Sextus Pompeius was visited in a dream by the ghost of his father on the night before he died in Sicily at the end of this same war in 36. The ghost told him either to flee or to come to him.¹¹ But Sextus Pompeius actually died in Asia.¹² The fact that Lucan does not go on in the *Pharsalia* to narrate this encounter with his father's ghost is often adduced as the chief argument that the epic remains unfinished, but it is of course wholly insecure as such.

Pompeian necromancy occurs also in a somewhat obscure elegiac epigram found in manuscripts of Seneca. For this reason it is traditionally referred to as 'pseudo-Senecan'. The versification and vocabulary of the poem locate its composition in the period c. AD 50–80, which would in itself allow for composition by Seneca (d. AD 65), but they also indicate that in stylistic terms it is rather 'pseudo-Ovidian':¹³

De sacris evocantis animas Magnorum
Fata per humanas solitus praenosceret fibras
impius infandae religionis apex
pectoris ingenui salientia viscera flammis

imposuit, magico carmine rupit humum,
 ausus ab Elysiis Pompeium ducere campis,
 pro pudor, hoc sacrum Magnus ut aspiceret!
 Stulte, quid infernis Pompeium quaeris in umbris?
 Non potuit terris spiritus ille premi.

On the rites of one evocating the ghosts of the Magni

The impious chief of an unspeakable religion, accustomed to learning the fates in advance through human entrails, laid the spasming guts of a free-born breast in the flames and broke the ground with a magical incantation. He dared to draw Pompey from the Elysian Fields. For shame! That Magnus should look upon this rite! Stupid man, why do you seek Pompey among the shades of the underworld? His spirit could not be confined by the earth.

Latin Anthology no. 402 Shackleton Bailey,
 no. 406 Riese, *Seneca epigram* 16 Baehrens

This poem is difficult to interpret. It is usually held that the necromancer is himself one of the Pompeii Magni. This is supposed on the assumption that the Magnus in line 6 ('That Magnus should look upon this rite') refers to the necromancer. On this assumption Herrmann proceeds to identify the evocator as Cn. Pompeius Magnus, the son-in-law of Claudius executed in AD 47, and argues that his impious religion was Christianity.¹⁴ But there is no particular need to see the epigram as referring to a contemporary Pompeius: numerous other 'ps.-Senecan' epigrams focus upon the long-dead first Magnus alone. My own supposition, however, is that this phrase refers rather to the prospective risen ghost of the great Magnus, and that the poet's point is that it is shameful to make him, dead or alive, look upon the barbaric rites of human (and doubtless child) sacrifice. This also fits better with the phrasing of the lemma, for what that is worth. If I am right, then our reason for thinking that the necromancer is himself a Magnus may appear to dissolve, with only the consideration that the rites for calling up the Magni in general were most likely to be of interest to the descendants of the family remaining as support. Even so, I believe that the necromancer is after all a Pompeius Magnus, and none other than Sextus Pompeius. This is not only because the epigram would then chime in with Lucan's sequence and the tradition that Sextus Pompeius spoke to the ghost of his father in Sicily (and also with the Gabienus tradition), but also because of the description of the necromancer as impious (*impius*), first word in line 2. This is contrived in contradiction of the *Pius* epithet taken on by Sextus Pompeius.¹⁵ But, however we interpret the poem, identify evocator and evocated, and whatever period we imagine it to refer to, it does at least further attest a traditional association of necromancy with the Pompeii.

One further note to this poem. Already in the Late Republic it had become a commonplace that necromancy entailed child-sacrifice. Cicero accuses Vatinius of the practice in a superb piece of invective in 56 BC:

...tu, qui te Pythagoreum soles dicere et hominis doctissimi nomen tuis immanibus et barbaris moribus praetendere, quae te tanta pravitas mentis tenuerit, qui tantus furor, ut, cum inaudita ac nefaria sacra susceperis, cum inferorum animas elicere, cum puerorum extis deos manes mactare soleas...

...you, who are accustomed to call yourself a Pythagorean and to conceal behind the name of a most learned man your monstrous and barbarian customs, what crookedness of mind possessed you, what frenzy so great, that, although you have undertaken unheard of criminal rites, although you are accustomed to call up the spirits of the dead, although you are accustomed to make sacrifices to the ghosts of the dead with the entrails of boys...

Cicero *Against Vatinius* 14

If this rhetoric is rooted in any reality, that reality is likely to have been Vatinius' espousal of Pythagoreanism.¹⁶ If any necromancer did sacrifice boys, it will have been to create a ghost for necromantic exploitation, but the more usual association of boys with necromancy was as mediums. The scholiast to the *Against Vatinius* misidentifies the 'learned man', behind whose name Vatinius hides, as the Pythagorean Nigidius Figulus (died 45 BC), but the misidentification serves to indicate that Nigidius Figulus was independently associated with necromancy.¹⁷ He at any rate is said to have put a boy-medium under a spell so that he could find the fate of some stolen money, part of which had been buried and part of which had been spent.¹⁸ The boy may have communicated with ghosts like that of Herodotus' Melissa, which located lost treasure for Periander. The extant fragments of Nigidius' writings display interest in a range of divination techniques: augury, hieroscopy, oneiromancy, brontoscopy (divination by thunder) and astrology.¹⁹ The common notion that Nigidius was responsible for introducing necromancy to Rome appears unfounded and implausible given that the Romans had long been familiar with the necromantic traditions of Avernus.²⁰

This brings us back to Sextus Pompeius. A historical accident may have encouraged the Caesarians to align him with the horrors of necromancy. The home of necromancy in Italy had famously been the ex-volcanic lake Avernus. Odysseus' necromancy had been located there certainly from the time of Ephorus and probably from the time of Sophocles. Lake Avernus featured frequently in the Republican Latin tradition as a location for necromancy, and, most famously of all, became the site at which Virgil

sent Aeneas into the underworld. But in the course of the Sicilian war against Sextus Pompeius, in 37 BC, as we learn from Dio Cassius, Agrippa undertook a massive engineering project at the lake to transform it into a naval base. Many of his works and modifications remain visible today.²¹ The character of this supposedly dark, forbidding underworld entrance was completely transformed by these works, as Strabo explains:

ἐμύθεον δ' οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ Ἀόρνῳ τὰ περὶ τὴν νέκυϊαν τὴν Ὀμηρικὴν καὶ δὴ καὶ νεκυομαντεῖον ἱστοροῦσιν ἐνταῦθα γενέσθαι καὶ Ὀδυσσεῶα εἰς τοῦτ' ἀφικέσθαι. ἔστι δ' ὁ μὲν Ἀορνὸς κόλπος ἀγχιβαθὴς καὶ ἀρτίστομος, λιμένος καὶ μέγεθος καὶ φύσιν ἔχων, χρεῖαν δ' οὐ παρεχόμενος λιμένος διὰ τὸ προκεῖσθαι τὸν Λοκρῖνον κόλπον προσβραχὴ καὶ πολύν. περικλείεται δ' ὁ Ἀορνὸς ὀφρύσιν ὀρθαῖς ὑπερκειμέναις πανταχόθεν πλὴν τοῦ εἰσπλου, νῦν μὲν ἡμέτερος ἐκπεπονημέναις, πρότερον δὲ συνηρέσειν ἀγρία ὕλη μεγαλοδένδρῳ καὶ ἀβάτῳ, αἱ κατὰ δεισιδαιμονίαν κατάσκιον ἐποιοῦν τὸν κόλπον. προσεμύθεον δ' οἱ ἐπιχώριοι καὶ τοὺς ὄρνεις τοὺς ὑπερπετεῖς γινομένους καταπίπτειν εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, φθειρομένους ὑπὸ τῶν ἀναφερομένων ἀέρων, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς Πλουτωνίοις. καὶ τοῦτο χωρίον Πλουτωνίον τι ὑπελάμβανον, καὶ τοὺς Κιμμερίους ἐνταῦθα λέγεσθαι. καὶ εἰσέπλεόν γε οἱ προθυσάμενοι καὶ ἱλασόμενοι τοὺς καταχθονίους δαίμονας...²² τοιαῦτα μὲν οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν ἐμυθολογοῦν, νυνὶ δὲ τῆς μὲν ὕλης τῆς περὶ τὸν Ἀορνὸν κοπεΐσης ὑπὸ Ἀγρίππα, τῶν δὲ χωρίων κατοικοδομηθέντων, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ Ἀόρνου διώρυγος ὑπονόμου τμηθείσης μέχρι Κύμης, ἅπαντ' ἐκεῖνα ἐφάνη μῦθος, τοῦ Κοκκήϊου τοῦ ποιήσαντος τὴν διώρυγα ἐκείνην τε καὶ ἐπὶ Νέαν πόλιν ἐκ Δικαιαρχείας ἐπὶ ταῖς Βαίαις, ἐπακολουθήσαντός πως τῷ περὶ τῶν Κιμμερίων ἀρτίως λεχθέντι λόγῳ, τυχὸν ἴσως καὶ πάτριον νομίσαντος τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ δι' ὀρυγμάτων εἶναι τὰς ὁδοὺς.

Before me people used to tell the myth that the Homeric *Nekuia* episode took place in Avernus. And they tell us that there was a *nekuomanteion* there and that Odysseus came to it. The gulf of Avernus is deep close to shore and has a good entrance. It has the size and nature of a harbour, but it cannot be used as a harbour because Gulf Lucrinus lies in front of it, which is large and shallow. Avernus is shut in by steep beetling banks that overhang it from all sides except for the entrance. Now they have been worked hard and cultivated, but formerly they were covered over with a wild wood of black and impenetrable trees. These made the gulf into a home for shades, because of superstition. The locals used to tell another myth that birds which flew over the gulf fell into the water, because they were destroyed by gases which came off the water, as in *ploutōnia*. And they took this place as a *ploutōnion*, and they believed that the Cimmerians lived there. Those who had sacrificed in advance and intended to propitiate the underworld powers sailed into it... [A prolonged description of the necromantic management of the site follows, including an important citation of Ephorus, which describes the underground tunnels of the Cimmerians.] These are the things people before me have said, but now that the woodland around Avernus has been cut down

by Agrippa, and the land has been built up, and an underground tunnel has been cut from Avernus to Cumae, all those things have been shown to be mere myths. Cocceius, who made this tunnel and also the one to Naples from Dicaearchia near Baiae, perhaps followed the tale I have just told about the Cimmerians, possibly because he considered it traditional to the area that its roads should be through tunnels.

Strabo C244–5, including Ephorus FGH 70 F134a²³

If, in the pursuit of war against Sextus Pompeius, Agrippa chased the necromantic ghosts away from Avernus itself, the temptation to align Sextus Pompeius with these ghosts and with necromantic activities must have been a strong one.

The association of the Pompeians with necromancy continued well after Sextus Pompeius' death, and remained relevant for Lucan. The epigram attributed to Seneca may, just, have been composed by him; one could not get closer to the influences bearing upon Lucan than this. Also, under Tiberius allegations of necromancy attached to Libo Drusus, whose mother was Pompeia Magna. Libo is usually held to be the grandson of Sextus Pompeius, but in *The Augustan Aristocracy* Syme appears to argue that he was rather Sextus Pompeius' grand nephew.²⁴ Libo was accused of plotting revolution against Tiberius and driven to suicide. Tiberius had made it a capital offence to consult a prophet about the death of the emperor.²⁵ Libo had supposedly progressed from Chaldaean oracles and oneiromancy to persuading one Iunius to call up (*elicere*) ghosts with incantations. He had also written mysterious symbols against the names of the imperial family and of senators, which were perhaps construed as magical instructions to ghosts to kill them. In the wake of this affair the senate expelled from Italy astrologers (*mathematici*) and magi, executing two of the latter.²⁶

There was, then, much to associate the Pompeii in general and Sextus Pompeius in particular with necromancy at the time at which Lucan wrote, and he accordingly constituted an appropriate hook upon which to hang the scene.

Necromancy lurks too beneath another of Lucan's sequences of divination. In his fifth book he portrays the divination-obsessed Appius Claudius Pulcher (the consul of 54 BC and subsequently governor of Achaëa) forcing the Pythia Phemonoe to reopen the defunct Delphic oracle and prophesy about his fate in the civil war, thus causing her death. Critics contend that the episode mirrors Erictho's necromancy scene in significant thematic ways.²⁷ Lucan's Roman readers would also have perceived a connection between the sequences, not least because of Appius' supposed associations with necromancy in his own right. In 45–44 BC Cicero twice

claimed briefly and disparagingly that he practiced 'rites of necromancy' (νεκυομαντεῖα in the *Tusculans* and *psychomantia* in *On divination*).²⁸ In the *Tusculans* too he slyly compared Appius' emergence at gladiatorial shows to the emergence of the ghost of Deiphilus in Pacuvius's *Iliona* by using a distinctive quotation from the ghost's speech in that play.²⁹ The allegation of necromancy, if untrue, was lent credibility by Appius' demonstrated devotion to divination, the underworld and the combination of the two. Augur in 63 BC, he wrote a book on the office; in 50 BC he restored the small propylaea at Eleusis and was rewarded by the Athenians with a statue; and his benefactions towards the underworld prophet Amphiarus were similarly rewarded with a statue by the Oropians.³⁰ Appius must already have had a name for necromancy in 56 BC when Cicero abused his brother and sister Clodius and Clodia in his speech in defence of Caelius. The jury will have assumed that the 'empty terrors of the night' that had driven Clodius incestuously into Clodia's bed had been summoned up by Appius.³¹ In another dig at Appius, Cicero rhetorically raised their austere ancestor Appius Claudius Caecus from the dead (*exsistat*) to abuse the dissolute Clodia.³² Cicero more than once justified this sort of trope: 'It is permitted to orators and philosophers that the mute should speak and the dead be evoked from the lower world.'³³ When the trope acquired a technical term it was εἰδωλοποιία, 'ghost-making'.³⁴

Returning to Lucan's necromancy sequence itself, it must be admitted that the figure of Sextus Pompeius may allude to other figures in addition to Sextus Pompeius himself. His emperor, Nero, springs to mind in particular. Many of the emperors were attributed with necromantic practices, but none more so than Nero. After killing his mother Agrippina at Baiae in AD 59 he felt himself pursued by her ghost and by Furies, who chased him with whips and torches, as we learn from Suetonius. He turned to Persian magi to conjure up the ghost so that he could beg its forgiveness. Before the killing Nero had never dreamed, but afterwards he was plagued by doom-laden dreams which included the doors of a mausoleum opening of their own accord and bidding him enter. His awareness of his impious condition after the killing deterred Nero from participation in the Eleusinian mysteries; perhaps he feared meeting Agrippina again in the underworld descent that initiation entailed. Tacitus and Dio tell of the terrible effect upon Nero, in the aftermath of the killing, of the sight of the Baiae coast and of the sounds of trumpet blasts from nearby hills and the wails from Agrippina's (inadequate) place of burial. He could not escape them even by changing house, and so ran off to Naples. But what else could one who had committed murder beside

Avernus expect (even after Agrippa's taming of the place)? Indeed Nero's first attempt to murder his mother with a collapsible boat had actually taken place on gulf Lucrinus, just before Avernus, and, according to some, the Acherusian lake.³⁵ The attribution of necromancy to emperors was a convenient way of expressing their insanity, their attachment to bizarre un-Roman customs, their abuse of wealth and power, their anxiety about their own position, their homicidal cruelty and their ensuing guilt, and their desire to compete with gods.³⁶

A late and ultimately frustrating annotation to Horace merits brief attention. His third-century AD commentator Pomponius Porphyrio reports an observation of the second-century AD commentator Acro on the subject of Sagana, witch and sidekick of Canidia:

Memini me legere apud Helenium Acronem Saganam nomine fuisse Horati temporibus Pompei sagam senatoris qui a triumviris proscriptus est.

I recall reading in Helenius Acro that there was a witch in Horace's day by the name of Sagana. She belonged to the senator Pompeius who was proscribed by the Triumvirs. Porphyrio on Horace *Satires* 1.8.25

In the poem commented on (of c. 30 BC) Canidia and Sagana are shown performing necromantic rites and calling up ghosts in the former Esquiline cemetery. Now we may at first be tempted to see Sextus Pompeius in the 'Pompeius' here, and Erictho's historical prototype in Sagana, but we must not be hasty. First, for all that Sextus Pompeius was proscribed, he was never a senator. Sagana's name, deriving as it does from *saga*, 'witch', can hardly have been a real name. But, with due caution, we may find in Porphyrio's note evidence at least for a continuing tradition in which the Pompeii were associated with magic.³⁷

Before moving on from the issue of the reflection of historical figures in Lucan's necromancy scene, I cannot forbear to mention Marastoni's delightful if far-fetched notion that Erictho herself was modelled upon none other than Lucan's own wife, Polla Argentaria. The basis for this contention is the fact that in the *Silvae* Statius consoles Polla for her husband's death by suggesting that his ghost may respond to her calling by returning to the surface for a day (like Protesilaus).³⁸

In the second part of this chapter I turn to the background of the distinctive necromantic technology used in Lucan's episode with Sextus Pompeius. The single most striking innovation in the Graeco-Roman necromantic tradition, which is based upon evocation and κατάβασις (Homer, Virgil and elsewhere), is corpse-reanimation. This makes its first appearance, already in a fully and gloriously developed form, here in

the hands of Lucan's Erictho. We subsequently find two more elaborate sequences of necromantic reanimation in the novels of Apuleius (Zatchlas reanimates Thelyphron) and Heliodorus (the old woman of Bessa reanimates her son).³⁹ There are also numerous briefer references to the phenomenon.⁴⁰

The three principal sequences of reanimation-necromancy exhibit considerable variations in the technology employed, but they do also share some common characteristics, of which two may be noticed by way of example. First, all three have an Egyptian context, and two of them also have a Thessalian one. Heliodorus' is performed by an Egyptian woman in Egypt; Apuleius' is performed by an Egyptian priest in Thessaly; and some of the ingredients of the potion of Lucan's Thessalian Erictho are distinctively Egyptian (see below). The Greek magical papyri from Egypt provide a significant degree of context, if not for reanimation, then at least for the physical manipulation of corpses and body-parts to achieve evocation. The most important group of recipes for this (to which we shall return) also have a Thessalian connection, for they are attributed to the wisdom of the Thessalian king Pitys. Secondly, the corpse must first be 'raised' upright onto its feet from its prone position before it can speak. The gesture graphically symbolizes the return to life, as in the case of the reanimation of Midas by Lucian's Chaldaean (ἀνέστησε). Such a feat is particularly impressive because rigor mortis deprives the corpse of the normal control of its limbs. Hence Erictho's corpse magically bounds to its feet without moving its limbs, in a fashion similar to the famous sequence of F.W. Murnau's 1922 classic expressionist movie *Nosferatu*, in which Count Orlok, the Dracula figure, rises from his coffin.⁴¹ When Apuleius' Thessalian witches attempt to raise the dead Thelyphron by calling his name, his limbs respond so sluggishly as he struggles to rise that the living but sleeping Thelyphron responds first. When the first reanimation attempt of Heliodorus' witch falters, the raised corpse's stiffness causes it to fall flat onto its face. Before raising it again the witch rolls it onto its back, which suggests that the corpse depends upon the same method as Lucan's to rise. When Zatchlas subsequently reanimates the dead Thelyphron from his bier, he is more successful (*assurgit*), although it is possible that the corpse raises only his torso rather than his entire body. One of the Pitys recipes in the Greek magical papyri is for an erotic attraction spell. It similarly requires that one lay out a corpse (or, perhaps, just a skull) on an ass's skin inscribed with a magical figure and *voces magicae*, in order to make the ghost of the dead man 'stand' by one as an assistant (παρασταθῆναι) in the night, before doing one's bidding.⁴²

The evidence for necromantic reanimation and for reanimation in general is highly literary. What were the Erictho scene's literary antecedents, and what necromantic practices in the 'real world' inspired it? The episode's most significant literary antecedent is Ovid's description of Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson in his *Metamorphoses*.⁴³ The tradition of Medea's magical rejuvenations of Aeson, a ram, Pelias (deliberately perverted), Jason and the nurses of Dionysus also stretched far back into Greek myth. The earliest source, a fragment of the seventh-century epic *Nostoi*, says that she eradicated Aeson's old age by cooking drugs in a golden cauldron.⁴⁴ In the sixth century Simonides was telling that she hacked up Jason and cooked him in her cauldron, presumably along with the magical herbs she had gathered, and this was to be the method usually attributed to her thereafter.⁴⁵ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, however, the demonstration ram and Pelias are hacked up and cooked in the cauldron as usual, but the method employed for Aeson is quite different.⁴⁶ She jugulates him (inevitably killing him), drains the old blood out of him and cooks new blood with magical ingredients in a cauldron. These techniques are accompanied by many rites familiar from evocation. Her prayers address the deities typical of necromancy, Hades, Persephone, Hecate, Earth and Night, and she claims to be able to split the earth open and bring the dead from their tombs. Black sheep are jugulated, and their blood is poured into trenches, and into these are poured also honey and warm milk. The centrepiece of both sequences is the pumping of hot liquids into the corpse through its wounds. Medea pumps the blood from a cauldron in which a protracted and bizarre range of magical ingredients is mixed.⁴⁷ Erictho also pumps seething blood into her corpse, presumably also from a cauldron. It may be that her protracted and bizarre range of magical ingredients is also mixed into the blood, or it may be that the blood is pumped in first simply to wash out the putrefaction, with the magical ingredients being pumped in subsequently, mixed in moon-liquid. The two lists of magical ingredients are broadly similar: Medea's contains Thessalian roots, seeds, flowers, black juices, pebbles, sands, hoarfrost, wings, flesh of screech-owl, guts of werewolf, skin of water-snake, liver of long-lived stag, eggs, head of nine-generations-old crow and many other nameless things. Erictho's contains moon-liquid, foam of rabid dogs, guts of lynx, hump of hyena, marrow of snake-fed stag, *echenais* (a ship-stopping sea-monster), eyes of dragon, eagle-incubated stones, Arabian flying serpents, Red-Sea pearl-guarding vipers, skin of horned snake, ashes of phoenix (these last four terms ostentatiously Herodotean-Egyptian),⁴⁸ spat-on leaves and herbs and poisons. Whereas the items of technology used in standard evocation scenes all have at least one direct and transparent significance for the

process, these reanimation and rejuvenation ingredients do not appear to do so. The basics of the technique Ovid's Medea uses to reanimate Aeson may have derived from an earlier account. It is possible that Ovid drew the basics of the technique in turn from a lost reanimation-necromancy scene of which we now have no trace, and that Lucan too drew on this.

The most pressing 'real-world' precedent for the imaginative development of necromantic reanimation seems to have been the exploitation of mantic decapitated heads ('cephalomancy').⁴⁹ The most striking example is the oracle of Orpheus' head. When the Thracian women tore Orpheus apart they cast his disembodied head into the sea. It put to at the island of Lesbos, where, Philostratus explains, it 'took up residence in a cleft in Lesbos and gave out oracles from a hollow in the earth' (ῥήγμα τῆς Λέσβου ὤκησε καὶ ἐν κοίλῃ τῇ γῇ ἐχρησμάδει).⁵⁰ The oracle was evidently configured as a small hole within a larger one. It is beautifully illustrated on an Attic red-figure hydria of the 440s, now in Basel. The central scene is surrounded by Muses, of which the innermost holds Orpheus' lyre. Orpheus' head nestles in a nook between two rocks on the ground. A consulter leans over and reaches down towards the head with his right hand. With his left he still holds two ropes which hang down from above the frame; he has evidently used them to climb down a vertical shaft.⁵¹ The configuration closely resembles that of the oracle of Trophonius, in which one consulted him in a small hole at the foot of a vertical shaft down which one descended with ladders. That oracle too is associated with a decapitated head in the *Telegonia*, that of Trophonius' brother Agamedes.⁵²

There were many other mantic heads. Cleomenes I of Sparta, before coming to the throne, swore that he would include his friend Archonides in all his affairs if he came to power. When he did so, he cut off Archonides' head and kept it in a jar of honey. Before he embarked on any enterprise he would lean over the jar and 'discuss' it with the head.⁵³ Aristotle tells that when a priest of Zeus Hoplosmios in Arcadia had been decapitated by a person unknown, the head had repeatedly sung 'Cercidas killed man upon man'. A local man of the name was accordingly arrested and tried.⁵⁴ The detection of a murderer is a prime occasion for necromancy. Phlegon recounts two hellenistic tales of prophetic heads. The first he derives from a letter written to a king Antigonus. Polycritus the Aetolarch died after impregnating his wife. The child was born hermaphrodite. The dead father appeared, dressed in black, tore the baby apart and ate it, except for the head, which uttered prophecies of doom for the Aetolians. The second tale is linked with the 191 BC Bouplagos story mentioned above. In this the Roman general Publius was consumed by a huge red wolf which

again left his head behind, and this uttered prophecies.⁵⁵ Apuleius scoffs at the idea that the sea-skull (*marinum calvarium*) should be exploited for necromancy, and in so doing indicates that it was a common belief that normal human skulls should be so used.⁵⁶

The Christian Hippolytus 'unmasks' a fraud perpetrated by pagan necromancers, and in doing so conveys a vivid and thrilling impression of the experience of one sort of skull necromancy: a translucent skull, ringed with incense-burners, gives voice to prophecies (albeit without opening its mouth), before melting away into nothingness.⁵⁷ The skull is artificial, folded out of an ox's caul, and held together with wax and gum. The heat from the burners slowly melts the wax to make the skull dissolve. The voice is supplied by an assistant in a concealed room, who speaks down a crane's windpipe fed into the skull, the method also used by Alexander of Abonouteichos to give voice to his prophetic snake-puppet Glycon.⁵⁸

The Greek magical papyri derive mainly from the third and fourth centuries AD, but reflect an older Graeco-Egyptian magical culture probably already mature in the Ptolemaic period. These contain a number of recipes for skull necromancies. Of particular importance is a series of five spells in the Great Paris papyrus supposedly copied from a letter from the Thessalian king Pitys to the Persian mage Ostanes. Pitys appears to be a refraction of the Egyptian prophet Bitys or Bitos, who discovered eschatological hieroglyphics written by Thoth-Hermes (i.e. 'Hermetic texts') in a sanctuary at Sais and translated them on a tablet for the pharaoh Ammon.⁵⁹ In the first recipe, for example, the practitioner is instructed to go out, face east at sunset and invoke the Sun over the skull-cup (σκύφος) of a man who died by violence.⁶⁰ He is to burn amara and uncut frankincense and go home. He can make any inquiry he wishes of the skull by inscribing his query on its forehead together with a series of *voces magicae* in ink made from snake-blood and soot from a goldsmith's forge. He must write the same inquiry with myrrh on thirteen ivy leaves and wear them as a wreath. Helios, the sun-god, will then send the skull's ghost as an assistant to the practitioner at midnight (i.e. in his sleep), and it will tell him everything he wants to hear.⁶¹

Skulls were no doubt particularly favoured for corpse-based necromancy because they were more conveniently obtained and more easily manipulated than an entire corpse or skeleton and because, as always, they were symbolic of the dead person and indeed death as a whole. Some have considered that the skull was the seat of the soul for magical purposes.⁶² But the literary sequences of whole-corpse reanimation suggest that even in these cases the severing of the neck was magically significant. Apuleius'

Meroe cuts Socrates' throat prior to his reanimation, and Ovid's Medea cuts Aeson's throat prior to his rejuvenation. The spontaneous necromancy of Gabienus' corpse was delivered after he had had his throat cut almost to the point of full decapitation.⁶³ Lucan's Erictho searches on the battlefield for a corpse warm and fresh enough to speak with full voice as opposed to the ghostly squeak of a corpse dried out by the sun, and for one that retains its lungs intact.⁶⁴ This might seem to imply that the corpse's voice-producing mechanism needs to remain fully functional. But such a notion is then undermined by the fact that Erictho drags the chosen corpse from the battlefield to her cave by a hook in a noose round its neck, probably after also slitting its throat (the slitting of the throat depends upon the disputed interpretation of *traiecto gutture* at 637–9).⁶⁵ Certainly, a jugulated corpse would very suitably have embodied a prophecy of doom for the Pompeii, utterances apart. We are told that when Titius eventually killed Sextus he did so by cutting his throat. And before that a Ptolemy had famously decapitated his father, the great Pompey. Perhaps the tradition that the latter's ghost delivered a spontaneous necromancy to his son in Sicily on the eve of his death owed something to this decapitation.⁶⁶ The culture of skull-necromancy and magical skull-manipulation in general constituted a significant precedent for literary reanimation sequences in general and Lucan's in particular.

Notes

¹ Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.419–830. Important bibliography on the episode includes the following items: Ahl 1969, 1976; Baldini-Moscadi 1976; Bourguery 1928; Braund 1989; Dick 1963; Eitrem 1941; Fahz 1904; Fauth 1975; Gordon 1987; Graf 1987 and 1997a, 190–204; Grenade 1950; Johnson 1987; Korenjak 1996; Longo 1989; Marastoni 1979; Martindale 1977, 1980; Masters 1992; Morford 1967; O'Higgins 1988; Paratore 1974, 1992, 44–66; Rose 1913; Schotes 1969, 50–99; Tupet 1988; Verberne 1988; Viansino 1995; Volpilhac 1978. Many of the elements of this essay are drawn from my Ogden 2001b; see also Ogden 2001a.

² This matter is addressed also by Alain Gowing in this volume.

³ Lucan *Pharsalia* 9.126–45.

⁴ This question is addressed from a different perspective by Charles Tesoriero in this volume.

⁵ Valerius Maximus 6.2.8.

⁶ Grenade 1950, 38–40 and 52; Ahl 1969, 341–2 and 1976, 133–7; Martindale 1980, 367–8; Tupet 1988, 420–1; Masters 1992, 196 and 203; Gordon 1987, 232; and Viansino 1995, 501.

⁷ Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.425–34; cf. Bouché-Leclercq 1879–82, i.337 and Masters 1992, 186.

⁸ Statius *Thebaid* 4.409–14.

⁹ Philostratus *Heroicus* 43 (p. 195 Kayser).

¹⁰ Phlegon of Tralles *Marvels* 3; cf. Hansen 1996 *ad loc.*

¹¹ Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.813 with scholiast *ad loc.*, for which see Masters 1992, 203 and Viansino 1995 *ad loc.*

¹² Dio Cassius 49.18.

¹³ I am most grateful to my colleague Byron Harries for the close and technical analysis of the poem that underpins this conclusion.

¹⁴ Herrmann 1946, 305–7 and Grenade 1950, 28–33, *pace* Collard 1949, 51–2. Agrippa: Strabo C245.

¹⁵ Cf. Virgil *Aeneid* 6.612–13, with Servius *ad loc.*, and Powell 1998, 88, for a similar use of *impius* against Sextus Pompeius. In this volume Charles Tesoriero also discusses the supposed 'impiety' of the Pious one.

¹⁶ Tupet 1976, 206–8 and 1986, 2664 and 2671–2, urges that the allegations are true; cf. Garosi 1976, 55–8 and 68. For Neopythagoreanism at Rome and its magical associations see Furtwängler 1900, iii.257–63; Nock 1927 and 1929, 187–8; Dodds 1973, 207; and Rawson 1985, 30 and 94.

¹⁷ Scholiast Cicero *Against Vatinius* 14 = Nigidius Figulus T x Swoboda. Cf. Furtwängler 1900, iii.260–1; Morford 1967, 63; Garosi 1976, 55–6; and Tupet 1976, 205 and 1986, 2670–2; and Volpilhac 1978, 275.

¹⁸ Apuleius *Apology* 42.

¹⁹ Fragments collected in Swoboda 1964; he pronounces astrological prophecy at Lucan *Pharsalia* 1.638–72.

²⁰ *Pace* Kroll 1936, Cumont 1949, 98, and Viansino 1995, 499.

²¹ Dio Cassius 48.50.

²² Thus, meaningfully, the Greek text as it stands in the MSS, with προθυσάμενοι, aorist, and ἱλασόμενοι, future. Editors like to emend to ἱλασάμενοι, 'and had propitiated...', after Eustathius.

²³ Strabo asserts the identification of these Campanian places with Odysseus' underworld consultation also at C26. Some of this material is recycled by Servius on Virgil *Aeneid* 3.442, 6.107 and *Georgics* 2.162, and much of it by Eustathius on Homer *Odyssey* 10.514–15 and 11.14. Cf. Hardie 1977, 281.

²⁴ Syme 1986, 256–7.

²⁵ Paulus *Sententiae* 5.21.3.

²⁶ Tacitus *Annals* 2.27–32, especially 28; cf. Bourguery 1928, 300; Barb 1963, 103–6; Potter 1994, 16 and 69; Graf 1997a, 54.

²⁷ Lucan *Pharsalia* 5.111–236; see Ahl 1976, 130; Masters 1992, 181–95; and Tesoriero in this volume; cf. also Morford 1967, 65–6. Phemonoe's correspondence with Virgil's frenzied Sibyl becomes explicit at 183; cf. Virgil *Aeneid* 6.77–97.

²⁸ Cicero *Tusculan disputations* 1.37 (νεκρομαντεῖα, 44 bc) and *On divination* 1.132 (*psychomantia*, 45–44 bc); cf. Tupet 1976, 206 and 1986, 2671.

²⁹ Cicero *Tusculans* 1.44; Pacuvius at Warmington 1935–40, ii.239; cf. Hickman 1938, 81.

³⁰ Augurship book: Cicero *Ad familiares* 3.4.1, 3.9.3 and 3.11.4; cf. Münzer



1899, 2853. Eleusis: *CIL* i 619 = *CIL* iii 547 (inscription), *IG* ii² 4109 (statue base) and Cicero *Ad Atticum* 6.1.26 and 6.6.2; cf. Münzer 1899, 2853. Amphiarus: Petrakos 1968, 154 no. 9.

³¹ Cicero *Pro Caelio* 36.

³² Cicero *Pro Caelio* 34.

³³ Cicero *Topica* 45; cf. *De oratore* 1.245 and *Orator* 85; cf. Ganschinietz 1919, 2417.

³⁴ Hermogenes *Progymnasmata* 9 (2nd century AD) and Aphthonius *Progymnasmata* 11 (4th–5th centuries AD).

³⁵ Suetonius *Nero* 34 and 46; Tacitus *Annals* 14.5 and 9–10 (cf. Köstermann 1963–8 *ad loc.*) and Dio Cassius 61.14; cf. Statius *Silvae* 2.7.119. The ghost of Agrippina appears also at [Seneca] *Octavia* 593–645.

³⁶ See, e.g., Pliny *Natural history* 30.14–18 (Nero again), Dio Cassius 69.11 (Hadrian), Eusebius *Ecclesiastical history* 7.10 (Valerian), 8.14 and *Life of Constantine* 1.36 (Maxentius), and the discussion at Ogden 2001b chapter 10.

³⁷ Cf. Dickie 2001, 167–8 and 346 n.39. Porphyrio also attempts to find a historical prototype for the more prominent Canidia in a Neapolitan perfumerseller called Gratidia (on *Epodes* 3.8 and 5.43). Manning 1970 takes him seriously in this, but I do not.

³⁸ Statius *Silvae* 2.7.120–3; Marastoni 1979.

³⁹ Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.654–827; Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 2.28–9; Heliodorus *Aethiopica* 6.14–15.

⁴⁰ In a simile clearly derivative of Lucan's episode Statius compares Ide as she searches for her dead sons on a battlefield to a Thessalian witch planning necromancy. Claudian's Megaera, posing as a sorcerer, claims to have dragged corpses back to life with incantations. Statius' 5th- or 6th-century AD commentator Lactantius Placidus thought that Virgil's Moeris (also perhaps Egyptian, in view of the name: cf. Herodotus 2.13 and 101) called up ghosts from the bottom of tombs in order to reanimate corpses. Isidorus of Seville speaks of *necromantii* who make the resuscitated dead prophesy by their prayers (Statius 3.140–6; Claudian *In Rufinum* 1.154–6; Lactantius on Statius *Thebaid* 3.141, with reference to Virgil *Eclogues* 8.95–9; Isidorus of Seville *Etymologiae* 8.9.11). Some other reanimation sequences, although not involving prophecy, are important for the elucidation of the technology used in the mantic variety. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* again Socrates is reanimated by the Thessalian Meroe and the living although supposedly dead Thelyphron is 'reanimated' by unnamed Thessalian witches (Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 1.12–17 and 2.30). In Lucian's *Philopseudes* a Hyperborean mage is said to have the power to reanimate even mouldy corpses, while a Chaldaean restores the slave Midas to life after he has been bitten by a poisonous snake (Lucian *Philopseudes* 11 [Chaldaean] and 13 [Hyperborean]; cf. also Photius' summary of Iamblichus' *Babyloniaca*, 74b for another Chaldaean reanimation). Important too, and preceding Lucan, is the sequence of the rejuvenation–reanimation of Aeson in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.179–349).

⁴¹ Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.754–7; but the corpse is at least able to walk by the end

of its prophecy, 825.

⁴² *PGM* IV 2006–2125.

⁴³ Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.179–349; cf. Bömer 1976 *ad loc.* for a general commentary.

⁴⁴ *Nostoi* F6 Davies.

⁴⁵ Simonides F548 *PMG*/Campbell; see literary and iconographic sources collected at Halm-Tisserant 1993, 235–7 and 243–7, with Plates and at Moreau 1994, especially 45–9; cf. Graf 1997b, 33–4; Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, 262–6; and *LIMC* Iason nos. 59–62, Peliades 4–21 and Pelias 24. Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 282–3, argue that the ram-skeleton found above a silver bucket in a Thessalian tumulus at Pilaf Tepe symbolized rebirth.

⁴⁶ Cf. Fahz 1904, 162–3; Bourgery 1928, 306 and 309; Morford 1967, 67 and 71; Vessey 1973, 242; Tupet 1988, 424–5; and Rabinowitz 1998, 97.

⁴⁷ Cf. also Seneca's *Medea* 670–843, in which she calls upon underworld powers while cooking herbs in a cauldron; cf. Annequin 1973, 88–9, and Paratore 1974, 173–9.

⁴⁸ With Lucan 6.667–80 cf. Herodotus 2.73–5.

⁴⁹ Cf. Deonna 1925 and Nagy 1990; for necromantic skulls in Mesopotamia, see Scurlock 1995, 106; for comparative material from a range of cultures, see Deonna 1925, 48–69, and bibliography at Bremmer 1983, 46–7.

⁵⁰ Philostratus *Heroicus* 28.8–12 (p. 172 Kayser); cf. *Life of Apollonius* 4.14.

⁵¹ Basel, Antikenmuseum, BD 481 = *LIMC* Orpheus no. 68 (Mousa/Mousai no. 100); see above all Schmidt 1972 for reproductions and discussion. For other representations of the prophesying head of Orpheus, see Furtwängler 1900, iii.245–56 and plates xxii.1–9, 12–15 and xxx.45–8, Cook 1914–40, iii.102 and plate xviii and *LIMC* Orpheus no. 70 = Apollo no. 99 (dictating oracles to Musaeus). Cf. also Robert 1917; Linforth 1941, 123–33; Eliade 1964, 391 (comparing the practices of Yukagir shamans); Graf 1987, 92–4 (misinterpreting the ropes as spears); Doerig 1991, 62; Nagy 1990, 208–14; and Small 1994.

⁵² For fragments of the *Telegonia*, see Davies 1988, 73–4. Pausanias 9.37 has a related tale of Trophonius' and Agamedes' robbery of the treasury of Hyrieus; cf. Frazer 1898 *ad loc.*, with 28 parallel folk-tales from a wide range of cultures. See also Brelich 1958, 53; Clark 1968, 71; and Schachter 1981–94, iii.69, 74–5 and 84. Note especially the comparable tale of Rhampsinitus at Herodotus 2.121.

⁵³ Aelian *Varia historia* 12.8. For much Indo-European comparative material see Nagy 1990; the Icelandic tale of Odin and Mimir seems quite close (Snorri, *Heimskringla* 1.12–13).

⁵⁴ Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 673a; cf. Linforth 1941, 134–6, citing Grimm's folktales nos. 28 and 47 as parallel.

⁵⁵ Phlegon of Tralles *Marvels* 2 and 3; cf. Hansen 1996 *ad loc.*

⁵⁶ Apuleius *Apology* 34; cf. Abt 1908, 215–18.

⁵⁷ Hippolytus *Refutations* 4.41 (formerly wrongly ascribed to Origen); cf. Hopfner 1921–4, ii.616–17.

⁵⁸ Lucian *Alexander* 15 and 26.

⁵⁹ Iamblichus *On the Mysteries* 8.5 and 10.7 (Bitys); Zosimus *On Apparatus and Furnaces* Fr. gr. 230–5 Jackson (Bitos); cf. Fowden 1986, 150–3. Potter 1994, 69, sees the attribution of the recipes to him as an attempt to make 'low-grade' necromancy respectable.

⁶⁰ Hopfner 1921–4, ii.416–23, read the *skyphos* in these recipes as an actual cup, and therefore classified them as lecanomantic.

⁶¹ PGM IV 1928–2005

⁶² Hopfner 1921–4, i.195 and ii.616; Collard 1949, 38.

⁶³ Pliny *Natural history* 7.178–9; Deonna 1925, 47, rightly includes this episode in the cephalomantic tradition.

⁶⁴ Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.619–31.

⁶⁵ Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.637–9. The cutting of the throat depends upon the interpretation of *traiecto gutture*: see discussion at Grenade 1950, 39; Ahl 1976, 137; Volpilhac 1978, 284; Tupet 1988, 423; and Masters 1992, 197. The need for a warm corpse is also undermined by the fact that the corpse chosen is in any case cold, 750–2, and full of putrefaction, 668.

⁶⁶ Jugulation of Sextus: Velleius Paterculus 2.79.5 (*iugulatus*). Pompey's necromancy in Sicily: Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.813, with scholiast *ad loc.*, for which see Viansino 1995 *ad loc.* and Masters 1992, 203. Decapitation of Pompey: Lucan 9.138–9; Valerius Maximus 5.1.10; Pliny *Natural history* 5.68; Plutarch *Pompey* 80, etc.

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