

Seminar 4: Lucan's Erichtho and the Nekyia Tradition

For the seminar this week, we will be concentrating on Lucan's depiction of necromancy in book 6 of his *Civil War*. We will look at this in its own right, but also in relation to its predecessors in the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*.

Primary Reading

- Odysseus' Nekyia: Homer, *Odyssey* 11
- Aeneas' underworld journey: Vergil, *Aeneid* 6
- Sextus Pompey's necromantic consultation: Lucan, *Civil War* 6.417-830

Focus Questions

To focus your reading, and to prepare for the seminar, you should consider:

1. How is Sextus portrayed in this scene? How does he compare to Odysseus and Aeneas in their *Nekyiai*?
2. How is Erichtho portrayed in this scene? Compare her to a. Circe in the *Odyssey* and b. the Sibyl of the *Aeneid*. What are the differences/similarities in these depictions?
3. It has been argued that Erichtho is modelled on Vergil's Allecto of book 7 of the *Aeneid*. Can you see why this might be? How does this help us to understand Erichtho in Lucan?
4. What is the method of consultation with the dead in Lucan? How does it compare with that in *Odyssey* 11 and *Aeneid* 6?
5. How does Lucan allude to traditional epic underworld journeys in this scene? Why does he choose not to go down this route?
6. Compare the prophecy given in Lucan with those in the other two epics. How do they differ? What can these prophecies tell us about the individual epics.
7. How does an understanding of the Lucan's use of the *Nekyia* tradition and a comparison of his necromancy with *Odyssey* 11 and *Aeneid* 6 help us to understand the role of this consultation in the *Civil War*?

Secondary Reading

To help you in your analyses you should read **some** of the following:

Dick, B. F. 'The Technique of Prophecy in Lucan', *TAPhA* 94, 1963, 37-49.

[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/283634>]

Makowski, J. F. 'Oracula Mortis in the *Pharsalia*', *CPh* 72, 1977, 193-202.

[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/268312>]

Martindale, C. A. 'Three Notes on Lucan VI', *Mnemosyne* 30, 1977, 375-87.

[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4430735>]

O'Higgins, D. 'Lucan as *Vates*', *CA* 7, 1988, 208-26. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25010888>]

Ogden, D. 'Lucan's Sextus Pompeius Episode: its Necromantic, Political and Literary Backgrounds', in A. Powell and K. Welch (eds.) *Sextus Pompeius*. London: Duckworth, 249-71 [Library]

Zissos, A. 'Commentary on 6.719-830', 'The Necromantic Cast of Characters', and 'The Necromantic Prophecy'. All found on [this website](#).