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Lucan's Erictho and the Roman witch tradition

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LUCAN'S ERICHTHO AND THE ROMAN WITCH TRADITION

a Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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To My Family
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iii
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ...............................................................ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................iii

VITA ........................................................................iv

INTRODUCTION ............................................................1

CHAPTER

I. THE WITCHES OF ROMAN LITERATURE: A SURVEY ..........10

II. ERICHTHO AND MEDEA .............................................34

III. ERICHTHO AND REALITY .......................................55

IV. THE WITCH AS A COMIC FIGURE ............................82

V. THE EFFICACY OF WITCHCRAFT ............................107

VI. WITCHCRAFT AND CIVIL WAR ..............................127

NOTES .................................................. 137

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................148
INTRODUCTION

The *Bellum Civile*, or *Pharsalia*,¹ is Lucan's unfinished epic concerning the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. In the poem's sixth book, on the eve of the key battle at Pharsalus, Sextus Pompey seeks out a Thessalian witch, Erictho,² who at his request revives a slain soldier and compels him to give a necromantic prophecy on the upcoming battle. The goal of this project is to examine the figure of Erictho within the context of the role played by other witch figures in Roman literature, and more broadly, within the context of the role of witches and magic in Roman imaginative thought. I intend to show that by analyzing how and why earlier writers employ witches in their works it is possible to better understand the function of Erictho in the *Bellum Civile*, and that a greater understanding of Erictho can shed important insights into the *Bellum Civile* as a whole.

Before embarking on a discussion of Erictho a few general remarks on Lucan and his poem are in order. For a long time he has been outside of the mainstream of Classical scholarship.³ Even in antiquity he was a controversial figure, a role he no doubt relished. In
his own day he was certainly popular, and the prevailing opinion ranked him among the greater poets of the age, as is indicated by the testimony of, among others, Statius, Tacitus, and Juvenal. This high regard continued throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Yet there were some who criticized him as an unconventional poet, or an unpoetic poet. Modern scholars have tended to side with his detractors, although the new studies that have appeared in the past few years may indicate that this is changing. The major characteristics of the Bellum Civile which are most essential for an appreciation of Lucan and have defined much of the debate on Lucan's merits can be divided into three categories: Lucan's relationship to rhetoric, Lucan's relationship to Vergil (and traditional epic in general), and Lucan's relationship to Stoicism.

It is as a rhetorical poet that Lucan has drawn the most disapproval. This criticism stems largely from Quintilian's well-known remark that Lucan is a better model for orators than for poets (Inst. Or. 10.1.90). 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. The influence of this training on Lucan's style is great. He strives for pointed and startling effect. His poem is rife with sententiae. He is fond of hyperbole and elaborate, extended description.
The speeches of his characters are generally lengthy and stylized, and he is given to apparently irrelevant digressions.

The modern association of rhetoric with artificiality and empty ornament has made the title "rhetorical poet" a disparagement for Lucan. This association can however be misleading, and Lucan's rhetorical style can be appreciated when viewed in relation to his own age rather than the standards of modern taste or Vergilian canons. It can be demonstrated that Lucan's declamatory, hyperbolic style is not something to be "sifted through," but is integral to the nature of his epic. An important defense of Lucan in the realm of rhetoric is that of Mark Morford, who in a concise and selective study has shown that poetry and rhetoric are not (as critics of Lucan have assumed) mutually exclusive by illustrating how Lucan utilizes declamatory techniques as vehicles for important themes of the work.  

Lucan's relationship to earlier Roman epic, especially Vergil, is that of a rebel. Unlike the Flavian epicists of the next generation who strove to emulate Vergil, Lucan stands in conscious opposition to the Vergilian tradition in heroic epic. He rejects the usual divine machinery, a choice which apparently drew criticism from his contemporaries, as illustrated by the parody in Petronius' Satiricon 118-124. He also avoids traditionally epic
vocabulary, favoring the more prosaic, unheroic forms. Bramble, in spite of his obvious dislike for Lucan, gives a thorough analysis of this aspect of Lucan's poetry and its function. The effect is to create an atmosphere that is not only unheroic, but anti-heroic, and thus anti-epic.

This anti-epic stance is emphasized by Lucan's deliberate parody of Vergilian loci. The key studies for this technique are those of Guillemin and Thompson and Bruère. Throughout his poem Lucan confronts Vergil on his own ground. Numerous passages, scenes and descriptions are constructed so as to recall unequivocally a Vergilian context. But this reminiscence is then sabotaged by an ironic twist or a pointed contrast to show how ill-matched are Lucan's realities to the Vergilian ideal. Lucan's epic can thus be seen as a rebuttal to Vergil's Aeneid. Next to Vergil's heroic vision of Rome's legendary beginnings, he sets his own grim, ironic vision of the most pivotal event of Rome's recent past, and thus he exposes the lie of Rome's divinely ordained greatness.

Stoicism plays an equally important role in the Bellum Civile, although its function is sometimes not as clearly understood. It is doubtful that Lucan was a confirmed adherent to Stoicism, as is sometimes maintained, and attempts to interpret the Bellum Civile solely on the basis of Stoic doctrine inevitably fail. It would be more
accurate to say that Lucan was well-trained in Stoic doctrines and that these teachings reveal themselves in Lucan's poem. That Lucan should be influenced by Stoic doctrines is hardly surprising. He was the nephew of Seneca the Philosopher, to whom he owed his place in the Neronian court (perhaps not as great a privilege as it at first seemed) as well as a pronounced literary debt. He was also, with Persius, a pupil of the Stoic Cornutus. Furthermore Stoicism was prominent in the early principate, and provided a basis for intellectual opposition to the emperors. It was thus well suited to Lucan's anti-Caesarian epic. Throughout the poem Lucan draws heavily on Stoic teachings, the ethical doctrines, the terminology, and theories on the nature of the soul and the cosmos. Particularly important is the Stoic theory that the universe will end in cosmic dissolution, which Lucan uses as a metaphor for the disruption of order in the chaos of civil war. Also important is the prominent role played in the epic by Cato the Younger, who was viewed by Stoics of Lucan's day as the great Stoic exemplar and champion of libertas.

In some respects Lucan's stance in the Bellum Civile is decidedly un-Stoic. He takes a very pessimistic view of fate, and seems to have little or no belief in the ultimate benevolence of providence. This does not accord well with the Stoic values of endurance and conformity
to natural law. As Due remarks, Lucan often sounds like a Stoic who has lost his faith. On occasion he even takes the opportunity to parody Stoic doctrines. Johnson, in his recent work on Lucan, proposes that Lucan's treatment of Cato is in fact intended to ridicule Stoic pretentiousness.

In the history of Lucan scholarship Erictho has always been a controversial figure, and assessments of her in many ways reflect the standing of Lucan's poem as a whole. The episode, which fills approximately half of the sixth book, is a macabre fantasy, an elaborate display of morbid extravagance and gruesome detail. For those impatient with Lucan's excesses, Erictho is a symptom of his weaknesses, which are in turn seen as the weaknesses of the Silver Age, particularly its "decadent" fondness for scenes of magic and the occult. The entire episode has also been criticized as a digression, since it does not involve any of the major characters and does not advance the action of the poem. Even some proponents of Lucan have found fault with the scene. Morford, for example, refers to it as "the place in the work that his detractors may most justly point to." Others (and not only recent scholars) have been attracted to the scene in spite of its excesses. Heitland, while he dismisses the entire episode as "padding", confesses that it is the better half of the book and possesses "a certain dignity."
Much work has already been done to illustrate that the episode plays a significant role in the framework of the Bellum Civile. Generally, the scene of witchcraft encapsulates most of the important themes entailed in Lucan's vision of the Civil War. The emphasis on the macabre grotesqueries of Erictho's craft reflect the horrible atrocities of the conflict, and magic, which disrupts the laws of nature and reverses the course of life and death, symbolizes the disintegration of order that accompanies the civil strife. The necromancy thus emblematises the horror and chaos, the nefas, of the war, and hence is a fitting prelude to Book 7, in which the combatants come together at the crucial battle at Pharsalus. This aspect of the Erictho scene is an important factor in the studies Gordon, Fauth, and especially Johnson, for whom Erictho is the embodiment of Lucan's disordered universe.

More specifically, as an oracular encounter with death the scene is Lucan's nekuia. Since the nekuia is a regular element in traditional epic, Erictho's ritual is illustrative of Lucan's relationship to the epic tradition. The fact that Lucan replaces the traditional nekuia with a scene of witchcraft reflects his rejection of traditional divine machinery. In particular, it is a parody of Vergil's nekuia in Aeneid 6, where Aeneas, led by the Sibyl of Cumae, descends to the underworld and is granted a
revelation concerning his divine mission and the future
greatness of Rome. In Lucan the Sibylline priestess is
replaced with a loathsome witch, and the vision of Rome's
manifest destiny is countered with the corpse's description
of the upheaval in the underworld as the heroes and villains
of Rome's past do battle in a struggle that mirrors that
taking place in the upper world. 24

These various approaches to Erictho have gone a long
way toward illuminating her function within the framework
of the Bellum Civile. My goal in this dissertation is
to add to the understanding of Lucan's Erictho by examining
her role as a witch within the context of the traditional
presentation of the witch figure in Roman literature.
In previous scholarship, the witches of Roman literature
have been studied with a view to what they can reveal about
the role of magic in Roman life, 25 or, if approached from
a more literary perspective, have been looked at only within
the smaller context of a particular writer or work. It
is my position that there is a consistent tradition in
the treatment of the witch figure in Roman literature,
and that and understanding of this tradition as a whole
can provide valuable insights into the function of the
witch figure in particular writers.

In order to examine this tradition and its relationship
to Erictho, I begin this dissertation with a general survey
of the witches in the literary tradition, in which I
demonstrate the important continuities that unite the various witch figures as a consistent literary type, and that the treatment of Erictho accords with this tradition. In subsequent chapters I examine more specific issues in the role of literary witches: the role of Medea, the role of real magic in Roman society, the role of comedy in certain witch treatments, and finally the issue of efficacy in literary witchcraft. In discussing these issues, I illustrate how an analysis of the various literary witches can clarify some of the important issues in the witch tradition and discuss how these can pertain to Erictho specifically. In my conclusion, I illustrate how an understanding of Erictho's role as witch contributes to the scheme of Lucan's epic as a whole. I show that Lucan's presentation of Erictho accords with the traditional treatment of the literary witch not out of a devotion to conformity, but because the traditional witch, as understood by Lucan and his audience, was ideally suited to the needs of Lucan's epic, and for this reason an appreciation of the Roman witch tradition is vital to a full appreciation of Lucan's Erictho.
CHAPTER I

THE WITCHES OF ROMAN LITERATURE: A SURVEY

The term "witch" is one of those words easily understood but not so easily defined. It is even more difficult to define within the context of Roman literature, since the Romans did not have a single term that could be applied exclusively to those figures usually designated as witches by modern scholars.\(^1\) Loosely a witch can be defined as someone, a female, who is able to exert some kind of control on her environment by manipulating preternatural forces (i.e. magic). However, there are women in Roman literature, such as the Sibyl of Cumae, who have supernatural abilities but are generally not considered witches. There are also men who practice magic and perform the same feats as witches (raising the dead, changing shape), but they are not characterized in the same way and are not considered witches.\(^2\)

In this chapter I investigate the treatment of the witch figure in Roman literature through a survey of those figures usually designated as witches, with a view to establishing what aspects of their presentation set them
apart and identify them as such. By examining the definitive characteristics of these figures, I intend to demonstrate that the Roman witches are bound together by a continuity of both formal and thematic elements, to discuss the more significant aspects of that continuity, and to lay the foundations necessary for the more specific investigations of the subsequent chapters.

Witches in Roman literature can loosely be divided into three types. First there are the grand sorceresses of Greek myth, who come from beyond the edge of the known world and are of divine or semi-divine nature. The chief examples of this type are Circe and Medea, whom the Roman poets adopted from their Greek predecessors. In Roman literature Circe is treated only by Ovid (Met. 14.1-74; 248-415). Medea on the other hand attracted a number of poets, of whom only the works of Ovid and Lucan's uncle Seneca are extant.

The second type of literary witch is the amateur. These are ordinary women who turn to magic as last resort in a desperate situation, usually an unhappy love affair, which has gone beyond their ability to control by normal means. As with the mythic witches, Roman writers found the prototypes for the amateur witches in Greek literature. The most important of these is Simaetha, the witch of Theocritus' second Idyll, who performs a magic ritual in an attempt to draw back a wayward lover. Vergil, in his
eighth Eclogue, presents a scene of magic closely adapted from Idyll 2, and thereby produces the first extant witch portrait in Roman literature. Other amateur witches include heroines of myth who find themselves in similarly desperate situations. In the Aeneid, Book 4, Dido resorts to a self-destructive magic ceremony when abandoned by Aeneas. Likewise, in his Hercules Oetaeus Seneca's Deianira destroys Hercules via magical means and with the help of a nurse apparently well versed in the black arts.

The third category of witch is the most populous and, as a literary type, is unique to the Romans: the hag. These are mortal women--old and repulsive mortal women--who practice witchcraft on a regular basis. Far from dwelling in the mythic past, these hags are presented as part of the contemporary world and generally come from the lower strata of society, inhabiting the urban slums or the back-woods regions such as Thessaly or rural Italy. Outside of literature, in the realm of folklore, the concept of the hag is widespread. In Greek literature there are small references to old women who cast spells, and the image of the frightening crone with preternatural powers can be found in many cultures. It is among the Romans however that the hag-type witch receives treatment as a developed literary character. The Roman poet to pave the way is Horace, who creates the witch Canidia to murder children and conduct seances on the Esquiline within the
context of his *Satires* and *Epodes* (in particular *Sat. 1.8* and *Epodes 5 and 17*). Subsequent examples include Propertius' *Acanthis* (4.5), Ovid's *Dipsas* (*Am. 1.8*), Oenothea from the *Satiricon* of Petronius (134-138), and Lucan's Erictho.

It should be noted that this tripartite classification is my own, and is essentially a heuristic device to aid in the general analysis of the witch figure. It is not a division recognized by the ancient writers. In the subsequent chapters of this dissertation I shall examine the three types separately and demonstrate that each can enhance an understanding of the witch figure in general and of Lucan's Erictho in particular. Although these three categories (the sorceress, the amateur witch, and the hag) display obviously different characteristics, they are nevertheless only three sides of a consistent literary type. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to the major traits that unite the three types of witch. The Roman writers present each of these types as performing essentially the same tasks in essentially the same manner with little difference in terminology or motif. As I hope to demonstrate in this and subsequent chapters, this consistency goes beyond merely formal motifs, and points to a thematic unity in the treatment of the witch figure in Roman literature.
The terminology used by the Roman writers in presenting their witches is for the most part identical, indicating that the differences between the three types of witches are merely circumstantial. Regardless of social status, lineage, or milieu, all three types of witches were practitioners of the same art.

There are two terms in Latin used regularly to refer to witches: saga and venefica. The ancients derived the word saga from the verb sagire ("to perceive") and hence from the saga's role as a fortuneteller. It was generally reserved for the lowly professionals, never for the amateur witches or sorceresses. Venefica was derived from the witch's use of venena, which meant both magic drugs and poisons. It carried criminal associations and emphasized the sinister aspect of witchcraft. It appears with reference to hags (Canidia: Epod. 5.71; Erictho: 6.580) and to Medea (Her. 6.19; Met. 7.316)

Witches were more frequently identified by their activities than by any term referring to the witches themselves. This made it easier for the characterization of the witch figure to accommodate the diversity described above: it was what they did that mattered, not what they were. Thus Horace, in Satire 1.8, introduces a pair of witches as "women who twist the minds of men with spells
and philtres" (carmina and venena 1.8.19-20), and Ovid identifies the hag Dipsas as a witch by saying she is familiar with magic arts (illa magas artes Aeaæaque carmina novit: Am. 1.8.5).

The craft of the witch was most commonly identified by the two major tools the witch employed. These were the verbal elements (carmina or cantus) and the material elements, i.e. magic drugs or ointments (venena and herbae). These two elements were the core of every witch's repertoire, be they hag, sorceress, or amateur, and were often paired to indicate witchcraft in general, as in the quotation from Horace given above. Thus Medea refers to her skill at magic by citing the power of her carmina and venena (Ovid Met. 7.208-209); Glaucus begs Circe for magical aid by asking her to provide a carmen or a powerful herb (Ovid Met. 14.20-22); and the witch of Vergil's eighth Eclogue enumerates the powers of magic in terms of carmina and herba (see below). This usage was not limited to literary witchcraft. It can be found in Cicero (Brutus 217), and in Tacitus (Ann. 4.22).

The term "magic" (magia magica or some cognate thereof) was also applied to the activities of witches. Ovid's Dipsas knows magae artes (Am. 1.5.5). Vergil's Simaetha engages in magica sacra (Eclogue 8.66), and Dido in Aeneid 4 resorts to magicae artes (493). Deianira's nurse encourages her to turn to artes magicæ (Sen. Herc. Oet.
Erichtho invokes the soul of her dead soldier with carmina magica (B.C. 6.822), and the powers she calls upon are described as magici dei (6.576). The term "magic," of course originally referred to the practices of the Persian Magi. The ancient writers were well aware of the word's derivation, and sometimes connected the practice of witchcraft with the Magian priests. Thus Medea invokes Hecate as adiutrix cantusque artisque magorum (Met. 7.195), and Sextus Pompey seeks out a witch because he trusts the arcana magorum more than conventional oracles (B.C. 6.431).

The Witch's Catalogue

The most significant parallel between the three types of witches is the witches' catalogue. Nearly every portrayal of a witch in Roman literature includes an enumeration of the various powers of witchcraft. Often the catalogue is recited by the witch herself, in the same way that a Homeric hero recited his pedigree before combat. The catalogue not only links the various witch figures of Roman literature together, but sets them apart from their Greek predecessors. Only one such list occurs in extant Greek literature (Apollonius, Argonautica 3.528-533), yet it is almost obligatory in Roman treatments. The first Roman catalogue is that of Vergil's eighth Eclogue, which is divided into two parts. At the
begining of her ritual the sorceress says:

carmina vel caelo possunt deducere lunam,
carminibus Circe socios mutavit Ulix
frigidus in pratis cantando rumpitur anguis. (69-71)

Magic songs are able to draw down the moon,
with songs Circe transformed the comrades of Ulysses.
the cold snake in the meadow is burst by singing.

and at the conclusion of her rite she says:

his ego saepe lupum fieri et se condere silvis
Moerin, saepe animas imis excire sepulchris
atque satas alio vidi traducere messis. (97-99)

With these [herbs] I have often seen Moeris become
a wolf and hide in the forest, summon souls from the
deepest tombs and draw sown crops to another field.

Although Vergil's list is shorter than many subsequent
catalogues, it still lays some important foundations for
the portrayal of the Roman witch. First of all, Vergil
brings together "powers" from a number of different venues.
Circe's feat of turning men into swine is an episode from
epic, set among more rustic examples perhaps more
appropriate to a pastoral setting. Furthermore, the
examples chosen are a mix of Greek and Italian elements.
Drawing down the moon is the famous technique of the
Thessalian witches, whereas splitting snakes was attributed
to the Italian Marsi and moving crops an old trick feared
by Italian farmers, as attested by legislation against
it in the Twelve Tables. This amalgam of motifs makes
the catalogue sound like a stylized list.

Two noticeable omissions in this catalogue are the
ability of witchcraft to influence human passions
(although this is the precise task Simaetha\textsuperscript{14} is attempting), and the \textit{adunata}, obviously impossible tasks whose main purpose is to emphasize the tremendous range of power conferred by witchcraft. These elements, however, are included when Vergil approaches the subject of witchcraft in the \textit{Aeneid}. Dido describes the powers of the Massylian priestess she consults as follows:

\begin{quote}
haec se carminibus promittit solvere mentes
quas velit, ast aliis duras immittere curas,
sistere aquam fluiis et vertere sidera retro,
nocturnosque movet Manis: mugire videbis
sub pedibus terram et descendere montibus ornos.
\end{quote}

\begin{equation}
(4.487-491)
\end{equation}

This one promises that with songs she can release whatever minds she wishes, but give harsh cares to others, make running water stand still and turn the stars backward, and in the night she rouses the Dead: you will see the earth moan under your feet and ash trees descend from the mountains.

Although subsequent writers fatten their catalogues with a great deal of embellishment, they in general follow the same pattern begun by Vergil. Horace's Canidia recites her own catalogue at \textit{Epode} 17.76-81, as does Petronius' Oenothea (\textit{Satiricon} 134.12). In elegy Propertius and Tibullus as well as Ovid introduce their hags with a catalogue (Propertius 4.5.5-18; Tibullus 1.2.43-53; Ovid \textit{Am.} 1.8.1-18). Medea gives her own catalogue in both Ovid (\textit{Met} 7.192-219) and Seneca (\textit{Medea} 752-770) before embarking on a magic ritual. In Seneca's \textit{Hercules Oetaeus}, Deianira's nurse suggests to her that she win Hercules back through magic, and begins with a catalogue (453-464). The several
catalogues found in Ovid are the fullest before Lucan, so one of these will suffice as a last example. In Amores 1.8 Ovid describes the abilities of the witch Dipsas as follows:

illa magas artes Aeaeaque carmina novit, inque caput liquidas arte recurvat aquas; scit bene quid gramen, quid torto concita rhombo licia, quid valeat virus amantis equae. cum voluit, toto glomerantur nubila caelo; cum voluit, puro fulget in orbe dies. sanguine, si qua fides, stillantia sidera vidi; purpureus Lunae sanguine vultus erat. hanc ego nocturnas versam volitare per umbras suspicor et pluma corpus anile tegi; suspicor, et fama est; oculis quoque pupula duplex fulminat et gemino lumen ab orbe venit. evocat antiquis proavos atavosque sepulchris et solidam longo carmine findit humum. (Am. 1.8.1-18)

That one knows Aeaean spells and magic arts, and turns clear waters back to their source; she knows well what power there is in grass, the threads stirred up by the twisted rhombus, the excretion of the mare in heat. When she wishes, clouds gather over the whole sky; when she wishes, day blazes in a pure dome. If it is believable, I have seen the stars dripping with blood; the face of the Moon was red with blood. I suspect that this woman, transformed, flies about though the night shadows, and that her hag's body is covered with plumage; I suspect, and its rumored; also a double pupil flashes in her eyes and light comes from her double orb. She calls forth forefathers and ancestors from ancient tombs, and splits the earth with a lengthy chant.

Ovid has added the ability to control weather and change shape. He also mentions some of the specific implements of the witch: the rhombus(3) and hippomanes(4).15 These elements can be found in other catalogues as well, with minor variations. Two elements, it should be noted, are regularly included by all the Roman writers: the ability to bewitch heavenly bodies (usually the moon), and the
ability to raise the dead.

Lucan's presentation of witchcraft mirrors that of his predecessors. He begins by reciting a catalogue of the powers of Thessalian witches. This catalogue, extending from line 6.452 to 6.506, is by far the longest, but on close examination does not deviate from the established pattern. He claims that witches can inspire illicit and unnatural love (452-460), halt the natural progress of day and night (461-465), control winds and weather (465-472), reverse the course of rivers and waterfalls (472-476), level mountains (476-479), reverse tides (479-480), shake and split the earth revealing a sky below (485-486), make deadly creatures docile (487-488), kill snakes (491), and bring down the stars and moon from the sky. His only omission is that of necromancy, which he reserves for Erictho alone.

Since Erictho's function in the poem is to raise the soul of a dead soldier, Lucan makes this her specific area of expertise and includes a second catalogue devoted exclusively to Erictho's necromantic activities, which go beyond simply raising the dead. She dwells in tombs herself after evicting the former occupants (6.510-512). She delights in mutilating corpses by plundering their nails, eyes, clotted blood, and anything else she might find useful (6.538-553). She often hastens the living on their way so she can have powerful new ghosts at her
disposal (6.559-560), and can even perform a sort of inverted necromancy by using a corpse to send a message to the dead (6.563-568).

This kind of embellishment is typical of Lucan's rhetorical style. Although each of his two catalogues is far longer than any given by previous writers, he has not done anything intrinsically new, merely embellished a traditional format. The elements which are most regular to the witch's catalogue are the elements most embellished by Lucan. He devotes eight lines to the enchanting of the moon (6.499-506) and separates it from the rest of his catalogue with a parenthetical interruption (6.492-499). Necromancy, as discussed above, he gives to Erictho exclusively.

The Witch as Enemy

In the ancient world magic could be employed for a variety of uses and Roman writers illustrate that many of these uses (e.g., medicinal magic) were far from harmful or sinister. Yet in general use magical practices were usually regarded as something negative and contemptible. Perhaps the most vehement diatribe against magic is that of Pliny the Elder, who in Book 30.1.1 (and elsewhere) of his Natural Histories attacks the technique of magic, which he calls fraudulentissima artium. Magic was a method
which enabled an individual to exercise a private influence on the world. Since it operated through the manipulation of unseen forces, it was impossible to control or regulate, and thus at the very least could be seen as an unfair or illicit method of personal gain. An item from the Twelve Tables often cited by ancient and modern authorities is illustrative of the Roman attitude towards magic. It forbids the use of magic to move crops to another field (see above). The issue is not simply the use of magic for gain, but using it to profit surreptitiously from another's hard work.

The witch figure in Roman literature represents this darker, hostile side of magic. They are generally portrayed as a threat to the well-being of normal human society, either to individuals or on a larger scale. Thus Dido's magic curses the descendants of the Trojans, and looks forward to the threat to future Rome posed by the Carthaginians. Deianira's recourse to black magic results in the mortal destruction of Hercules, the champion of mankind.

Although Circe and Medea can be beneficial, they are also a serious danger. In the Metamorphoses, Ovid skims over Circe's aid to Ulysses, and concentrates on her use of magic to punish those who get in her way. At 14.51-71 she disposes of her rival, Scylla, by transforming her into a monster. Angry at Picus, the Latin king, for
rejecting her advances, she changes him into a woodpecker (14.346-396), and when his companions accost her for his disappearance she changes them into beasts (14.397-415). Similarly although Medea can be helpful to Jason, she also slays and dismembers her own brother, and when betrayed by Jason, she kills their children and murders Jason's new bride. She is also responsible for the deaths of two kings, Pelias and Creon, and attempts the murder of the hero Theseus.

The hags, who are more caricatures than characters, are especially vile and despicable. In Horace's Satire 1.8 Canidia, like Erictho, violates a graveyard both to raise the dead and to gather bones for her magic. Both Canidia and Erictho are presented as murderers of children. In Epode 5 Canidia prepares to slowly starve a young boy to death to obtain his liver for a magic ritual. Erictho goes even further: she will rip an unborn child from a pregnant woman (6.557-558) and boasts of her practice of sacrificing infants to the gods of magic (6.710-711). The witches' violation of tombs shows they have no regard for the normal sanctity of burial, and the slaughter of children illustrates that they are a threat even to the most innocent victims.

Even when the goal of the witch does not seem particularly malevolent, the witch's activity is presented as harmful and wrong. The amateur witch of Vergil's eighth
Eclogue wants only the return of her lover, yet she states her purpose as follows:

coniugis ut magicis sanos avertere sacris
experiar sensus (66-77)

that I might turn aside the healthy senses of my spouse with magic rites.

She seeks to drive her lover insanus, to confound his senses and force him to do something he would not normally do if he were in full control of his faculties. At the end of the poem, when it seems as though her lover has returned, she asks her magic to spare him (parcite carmina 109), implying that she sees her spells as harmful.

Magic was feared because it defied both control and understanding. The tremendous power attributed to witchcraft by the Roman writers set its practitioners on a level with the gods, or even above the gods. Lucan, enumerating the powers of Thessalian witches, digresses to discuss this very point.

Quis labor his superis cantus herbasque sequendi
spernendique timor? cuius commercia pacti
obstrictos habuere deos? parere necesse est
an iuvat? ignoto tantum pietate merentur
an tacitis valuere minis? hoc iuris in omnes
est illis superos, an habent haec carmina certum
imperiosa deum qui mundum cogere, quidquid
cogit tur ipse, potest? (6.492-499)

Why do the gods toil to obey songs and herbs, and fear to spurn them? What sort of compact holds the gods bound? Do they obey from necessity or pleasure? Do they [witches] deserve so much because of some strange piety, or do they prevail by means of tacit threats? Do they hold this authority over all the gods, or do these demanding spells hold one particular god, who is able to force on the cosmos whatever is forced upon himself?
Since it raised mortals above the level of the gods, witchcraft was viewed as something impious and hubristic. Furthermore, the ability to influence the world to any degree could be seen as a violation of the world's cosmic order. Witches, representing the darker side of magic, were therefore seen as agents of disorder. This idea is stated succinctly and humorously by Petronius' Trimalchio:

Sunt mulieres plussciae, sunt nocturnae, et quod sursum est deorsum faciunt (Satiricon 63).

There are super-wise women, there are night women, and whatever is up they make down.

The adunata included in the witches' catalogues emphasize this aspect of witchcraft. The ability to make running rivers stop running, bring rain when there are no rain clouds, cause normally immobile things (e.g., the ground, trees etc.) to move and cause the regular and orderly progress of heavenly bodies to become irregular, reinforces the idea that witchcraft itself is an unnatural art and a threat to an orderly universe.

The characterization of witchcraft as unnatural or illicit power was probably one of the reasons that the witch figure is exclusively female. In a predominantly patriarchal society a woman in a position of power or authority was by definition irregular and unnatural. Consequently, the most striking embodiment of a threat to natural order is a woman capable of wielding a mysterious
and uncontrollable power.\textsuperscript{18}

In Lucan, the connection of witchcraft with disorder and reversal is given special force. In his general catalogue he stresses the \textit{adunata} and deliberately phrases his description in terms that express a reversal of norms. Through witchcraft the natural sequences of things come to a halt (\textit{cessavere vices rerum} 6.461). Night becomes day; thunder is heard in a clear sky (6.467); there is rough sea with no wind (6.469-470); the Meander runs strait (6.475); and Olympus lies below the clouds (6.477). In, particular, Erictho's practice of necromancy is presented as a violation of the normal relationship between life and death:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
coetus audire silentum,
nosse domos Stygias arcanaque Ditis operti
non superi, non vita vetat. (6.513-515)
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

Neither the gods above, nor life itself prevented her from hearing the gathering of the silent crowd, from being familiar with Stygian dwellings and the secrets of hidden Dis.

and further on:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
viventes animas et adhuc sua membra regentes
infodit busto, fatis debentibus annos
mors invita subit; perversa funera pompa
rettulit a tumulis, fugere cadavera letum. (6.529-532)
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

She has buried in the tomb souls that are still alive and still in control of their limbs, even though fate still owes years death has entered unwilling; she has led from the tombs funeral processions in reverse, corpses have escaped death.

For Lucan, this aspect of literary witchcraft has a special significance, since it also embodies one of the
dominant themes of the epic. In the *Bellum Civile*, civil war is itself an unnatural horror, characterized by a reversal of social values wherein *ius* becomes *crimen* (1.2), and *scelus* is called *virtus* (1.667-668). This reversal is in turn reflected in a more general disruption of natural laws and cosmic forces. By stressing the inversion of order inherent in the witch tradition, he makes witchcraft emblematize the disorder and chaos of civil war.

The Novelty of Witchcraft

Because witchcraft was regarded as abnormal and unnatural, it was often presented as something unfamiliar and new. Thus, although treatments of the witch figure adhere to a tradition that is almost formulaic, that very tradition also involves a claim to novelty. Thus Vergil refers to Dido's preparations as *nova sacra* (*Aen. 4.500*). Ovid emphasizes the issue of novelty in his presentation of Circe:

```
hic fusos latices radice nocenti
spargit et obscurum verborum ambage novorum
ter noviens carmen magico demurmurat ore. (14.56-58)
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Here she sprinkled the poured-out waters with a harmful root and thrice nine times with a magic utterance murmured a dark spell of perplexing new words.

Later, when Circe prepares a magical trap for Picus, Ovid describes it thus:
She takes up prayers and speaks praying words
and entreats unfamiliar gods with an unfamiliar spell,

Apparently the newer and stranger the magic, the more
powerful it was. Horace's Canidia declares that she will

non usitatis, Vare, potionibus,
o multa fleturum caput,
ad me recurrex, nec vocata mens tua
Marsis redibit vocibus:
maius parabo, maius infundam tibi
fastidienti pociurn, (Epode 5.73-78)

Varus, you will not run back to me because of the
usual potions, (0 you will soon weep much), nor will
your mind return summoned by Marsian words: I will
prepare something greater, I shall pour you, haughty
one, a greater drink.

The issue of novelty is an important theme in Seneca's
Medea. Throughout the play Medea reiterates that although
she performed great feats in the past, what she is planning
now to punish Jason and his new bride is something greater,
something new. In her opening monologue she declares that
her mind is pondering things that are "effera ignota horrida
(45)", wild, unknown, and shuddersome. Later as she chants
her spell she calls upon the moon to shine darkly and
frighten the populace with a new horror (horror novus 794).
Medea's nurse also sees the current enterprise as greater
than her previous deeds (673-675). Furthermore, Medea
frequently alludes to the "new marriage" of Jason and his
new bride (743, 839, 894). She plays upon the fact that
not only will Jason have a new wedding, but through her
magic it will be a new and horrible kind of wedding.

Naturally, Lucan is not about to be outdone. After listing the powers of the ordinary Thessalian witches, he presents Erictho as a new kind of witch:

_Hos scelerum ritus, haec dirae crimina gentis
effera damnarat nimiae pietatis Erictho_
inque novos ritus pollutam duxerat artem. (6.507-509)

These rites of wickedness, these savage crimes of a fearful race, Erictho had condemned for excessive piety, and she had introduced new rites to a polluted craft.

Similarly, when Sextus and his companions find Erictho, she is busy composing a spell that will prevent the war from by-passing her neighborhood (she doesn't want to lose all those corpses). The spell is described as something new:

_Ilia magis magicisque deis incognita verba_
temptabat carmenque novos fingebat in usus. (6.576-577)

She was trying out words unfamiliar to mages and the gods of magic and composing a chant for new uses.

The issue of Erictho's novelty, especially the implied dichotomy between her and the witches described in Lucan's first catalogue, has been an important factor in previous analyses. Martindale notes Lucan's stress on the issue, but rightly observes that the only novelty is in Lucan's use of a hag in the epic genre. Others, however, have seen Erictho has a new kind of witch. Gordon suggests that Lucan stresses the newness of Erictho's magic to highlight the abnormality of her brand of witchcraft as opposed to the "normal" magic of the other Thessalian hags,
and proposes that Erictho's abnormality stems from the fact that she is modeled, perhaps unconsciously, on a demonic, nightmarish "nightwitch" figure: an evil imaginary being responsible for the deaths of infants and of women in childbirth, and who represents fundamental reversal of social values.\textsuperscript{23} Johnson offers a similar interpretation, although from a different perspective. He asserts that Erictho is new in that she is a symbol of the disordered universe, a "witch's witch", delighting in evil for evil's sake, and hence she is different from previous witches for whom witchery is a sinister means to a more material end, such as love or wealth.\textsuperscript{24}

As I have already demonstrated however, Erictho is not really doing anything new. She dwells in Thessaly, a traditional abode of witches; she specializes in necromancy, a regular item in earlier witches' catalogues; and in numerous other respects she conforms to the traditional portrayal of the witch figure. Her claim to novelty is merely another facet of that tradition. Lucan's emphasis of her abnormality is important to her function in the poem, but it is only relevant within the context of the \textit{Bellum Civile}, not within the broader literary tradition.

Both Gordon and Johnson are, from different approaches, proposing that Erictho is new in that she is somehow a super-witch, more fundamentally evil than her predecessors.
It is my position however, that this aspect of Lucan's treatment is a function Erictho's symbolic role in the *Bellum Civile*, not a new shift in the presentation of literary witchcraft. Lucan's portrayal of Erictho differs from earlier witch portraits primarily in scale. As a character, Erictho is a minor figure drawn on traditional lines, but as symbol, she is called upon to assume a grand role as the embodiment of the evil and chaos of civil war. Therefore Lucan takes elements already inherent in the witch figure, and amplifies them to a level proportionate to the symbolic requirements of his epic scale. The image of the nightwitch most likely did, as suggested by Gordon, influence the image of the literary witch, but it is not an influence unique to Erictho, since the themes of malevolence and disruption of order are, as I have shown, part of the established tradition. Gordon points to Erictho's murder of infants (6.556-558; 710-711) as a link between Erictho and the nightwitch, but child murder is also a crime attributed to other witches, specifically Medea and Horace's Canidia (*Epode* 5). The frightful and malevolent qualities of the witch have greater force in Lucan, but are not fundamentally new.

Furthermore, Johnson's premise that Erictho is a figure of pure evil, above the concerns of ordinary human beings, seems to be an over-reading of the text. While Lucan does not enlighten his audience as to the motivation for
Erictho's witchery, this does not necessarily mean that she pursues her craft out of a sheer love of doing evil. Erictho's role in the plot of the *Bellum Civile* is an ancillary one, and hence there is no need for Lucan to reveal every aspect of her character. The necromantic ritual, which is the major reason for her presence in the poem, is performed at the request of Sextus, who is motivated by a very ordinary fear of the unknown (cf. 6.423-424). Moreover, on close examination, there are numerous suggestions of the small or mundane about Erictho. These elements will play a significant role in my own assessment of Erictho, and will be discussed more fully in the ensuing chapters.

**Summation**

In this chapter, I have presented an overview of the treatment of the witch figure in the Roman literary tradition, and established some of the definitive parameters of that tradition. I have demonstrated that although the Roman witch figure can be divided into three different types, these three types also exhibit a formal and thematic unity which binds them together as a literary type. Formally, they are linked by the terminology used, the techniques of their craft, and most importantly by the witch's catalogue, an almost obligatory element in the
Roman literary treatment. Thematically, the literary witch is presented as a threat to human society and is associated with disorder and novelty. Lucan's portrayal of Erictho accords with this tradition, suggesting that a fuller understanding and appreciation can be useful to an understanding of Erictho's role in the *Bellum Civile*.

Having established the unity of the Roman literary witch, in the following chapters I shall investigate more specific issues regarding the function of the witch figure by examining the different witch types as well as (in Chapter 3) the place of actual magic in Roman society. I shall demonstrate that an examination of the various treatments can offer significant insights into the literary role of the witch figure as a whole and of Erictho in particular.
CHAPTER II

ERICHTHO AND MEDEA

The sorceresses Circe and Medea possess a special status in the literary witch tradition, since as established witches of legend they offer an important heroic paradigm for other literary witches. The activities of the hags and amateur witches are frequently compared, often by the witches themselves, to the activities of their immortal counterparts. Thus Horace's Canidia equates her own witchery with that of Medea (Epode 5.61-68), Vergil's Simaetha includes a famous feat of Circe in her catalogue (Ec. 8.70), and likewise Petronius' Oenothea compares herself to both Medea and Circe (Sat. 134.12.11-12). Of the two, Medea rather than Circe seems to have had the greater role as an archetypal witch. Her story apparently held more appeal for the ancient writers, especially the Romans. Moreover, writers drew upon the Medea image in their portrayals of other practitioners of witchcraft. Vergil for example borrowed heavily on the presentation of Medea in both Euripides and Apollonius for his treatment of Dido in Aeneid 4, and Seneca followed suit in his portrayal of Deianira in Hercules Oetaeus. For Lucan, the image of Medea played an important role in the construction of
In this chapter I shall examine the relationship between the witches Erictho and Medea, beginning with a brief discussion of the image of Medea in antiquity, with an emphasis on her rôle as a witch. I will also discuss the special significance the Medea image had for Lucan, and how the myth is important to the *Bellum Civile* as a whole. The bulk of this chapter is then devoted to two specific treatments of the Medea myth, the story of Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the tragedy of Seneca, and to how Lucan used these two treatments in his Erictho episode. It can be demonstrated that by drawing on these two presentations, particularly that of Ovid, Lucan suggests a deliberate comparison between Medea and Erictho, and that this comparison can play a key role in an assessment of Erictho in the *Bellum Civile*.

Medea probably assumed the role of archetypal witch because so much of what characterizes witchcraft is inherent in her nature. Witchcraft is generally thought of as foreign, strange, and contrary to the established order. Medea comes from the mysterious realm of Colchis, beyond the borders of the civilized world. She is thus somehow not bound by the normally assumed limits and standards of behavior. Witchcraft blurs or attempts to blur the line between human and divine. Medea is the granddaughter of the Sun through her father Aeetes and granddaughter
of Ocean through her mother Iduia (Hesiod *Theogony* 958-962), and is thus of divine ancestry. However, in spite of her wondrous powers she is presented as essentially mortal, interacting with mortals as a mortal and at least attempting to take on normal human roles such as wife and mother.

Medea's behavior, particularly in her encounters with ordinary, civilized society, often overturns normal societal roles in shocking and horrible ways. Medea is the daughter who betrays her father for Jason. She is also the sister who not only kills her brother, but dismembers him in order to make his burial more difficult. Her most heinous deed however is doubtless her murder of her own children to revenge herself against Jason. Deeds such as these emphasize the threat that magic poses to human society. The fact that Medea uses no magic for many of her crimes makes little difference, and in fact emphasizes Medea's role as the embodiment of witchcraft. Witchcraft is a violation of natural order, yet Medea by nature is inherently unnatural. She is thus the perfect witch because she cannot be made subject to normal human rules.

Lucan himself was particularly interested in the image of Medea. It is known that among Lucan's lost works was an unfinished *Medea*. Furthermore Lucan alludes to the myth of Medea several times in the *Bellum Civile*, once in connection with Thessalian witchcraft (see below), and thrice elsewhere. The first is at 3.190, where Lucan
gives a catalogue of the peoples that flocked to Pompey's banner. Among them are the people of "Colchian Absyrtos." The Absyrtos is a river that flows into the Adriatic and was supposedly named for the site where Medea murdered her brother Absyrtos. By referring to the river as \textit{Colchis Absyrtos} Lucan makes sure his readers do not miss the reference.

Later, in Book 4, Lucan brings in the myth of Medea in connection with the Vulteius episode. Vulteius and a band of Caesar's soldiers are trying to slip through a Pompeian blockade to reach the Illyrian shore. When trapped they opt to slaughter each other rather than be captured. Lucan comments on this episode with a mythological simile:

\begin{align*}
\text{sic semine Cadmi} \\
\text{emicuit Dircaea cohors ceciditque suórum volneribus, dirum Thebanis fratribus omen;} \\
\text{Phasidos et campis insomni dente creati} \\
\text{terrigenae missa magicis e cantibus ira} \\
\text{cognato tantos inplerunt sanguine sulcos,} \\
\text{ipsaque, inexpertis quod primum fecerat herbis,} \\
\text{expavit Medea nefas. (4.549-556)}
\end{align*}

Thus from the seed of Cadmus the Dircaean troop flashed forth and fell from the wounds of their kin, an awful omen for the Theban brothers; and thus in the fields of Phasis the earth-born, sprung from the sleepless tooth, when their anger was aroused by magic spells, filled great furrows with kindred blood, and she herself, Medea, paled at the atrocity she had first done with untried herbs.

Finally, in Book 10, Caesar, trapped in the palace in Egypt and holding the young Ptolemy as a hostage, is compared to Medea:
Thus it is believed that the barbarous Colchian, fearing an avenger both of the kingdom and her escape, awaited her father with both her sword and her brother's neck at ready.

All three of these allusions associate Medea with the horrible crime of fratricide. The references in Books 3 and 10 refer to Medea's murder of her brother Absyrtos. The simile in Book 4 refers to the story of the soldiers who sprang from the dragon's teeth sown by Jason. Like the Theban Spartoi they battled among themselves and slaughtered each other in a kind of fratricidal war. Lucan suggests that the Theban incident was a portent of things to come, presumably the civil war between the sons of Oedipus. The conflict is therefore a civil war in miniature, the blame for which (for the Colchian version) is placed squarely on Medea's shoulders: according to Lucan the men turn upon each other because of Medea's spells and herbs. Thus for Lucan the myth of Medea was connected with the horror of civil war.

It is also worth noting that Lucan links Medea not only with civil bloodshed, but with a specific antagonist: Caesar. Absyrtos is a victim of Medea, and the inhabitants of Absyrtos join the forces of Pompey, who is destined to be defeated by Caesar. Vulteius and his men are Caesar's troops and slaughter each other out of a twisted loyalty
for Caesar's cause, just as the earthborn men turn against each other because of Medea's magic. The parallel in the Egyptian episode is obvious and explicit. Caesar is Medea and the young Ptolemy held as hostage is Absyrtos. Since Erictho performs her necromancy on behalf of Sextus Pompey, she is in sense associated with the Pompeian side. Therefore an understanding of how Lucan made use of the Medea image for his portrait of Erictho may suggest implications about the two protagonists, Caesar and Pompey, and will help clarify Erictho's role in the epic as a whole.

For Lucan one of the most important sources of the Medea legend was Ovid. Ovid approached the subject of Medea in three different works: a tragedy Medea, Heroides 12, and in his Metamorphoses. His Medea is now lost except for a few fragments. Heroides 12 gives a good sketch of the character of Medea as Ovid perceived it, but seems to have had little influence on Lucan. It is the presentation of Medea in the Metamorphoses that Lucan found most fruitful for his portrayal of Erictho.

Ovid relates the story of Medea (as Ovid presents it, it is clearly the story of Medea, not Jason) in the first half of Metamorphoses 7. He presents the entire story of Medea, albeit in a selective and telescopic fashion. The murder of Medea's brother Absyrtos is completely passed over, and the Corinthian episode receives only a few lines (7.394-397), while other episodes are
embellished a great deal.

The first episode upon which Ovid lavishes his attention is the beginning of Medea's love for Jason. Medea is presented from the very start as a creature ruled by violent passions, passions which can lead to violent deeds, as Ovid is careful to remind his reader: in her private debate she ponders the possibility that Jason might leave her in Colchis and go home to marry another, but she stops herself:

si facere hoc aliamve potest praeponest nobis, occidat ingratus! (7.42-43)

if he can do this, or prefer another to us, let him die, the ingrate!

Although Medea gives in to her emotions it is difficult to say that she surrenders. In spite of her passion for Jason she retains a certain arrogant self-confidence. When Jason asks for her aid and offers her marriage in exchange, her response is abrupt and imperious:

quid faciam, video: nec me ignorantia veri decipiet, sed amor. servabere munere nostro. servatus promissa dato! (7.92-94)

I see what I am doing: ignorance of the truth will not deceive me, but love. You will be saved with our help. Once saved, give what you promised!

With Medea's aid Jason acquires the golden fleece, and Ovid whisks the pair off to Thessaly. In Thessaly Ovid takes the opportunity to slow down his narrative again. Jason entreats Medea to restore youth to his aged father Aeson. Medea complies, and in an elaborate ritual described
at length succeeds in rejuvenating the old man by forty years. This episode however provides a prelude to one of Medea's most hideous deeds: the murder of Pelias. As in Corinth Medea slays her own children, here Medea perverts normal filial devotion and tricks the Peliades into murdering their father out of pious regard for his good health (cf. 7.336, 339).

Ovid wraps up Medea's career with a series of infamous crimes and magical flights from retribution. From Thessaly Medea escapes to Corinth with her winged dragons. After bringing down the royal house there and slaying her children, her dragons again take her to safety, this time to Athens, where she eventually tries to poison Theseus. When this attempt is foiled she vanishes in a magical cloud and disappears from Ovid's narrative.

It is generally accepted that Lucan was much influenced by Ovid and drew on his work as inspiration for much of the Bellum Civile.\textsuperscript{11} Thus it is to be expected that he turned to Ovid's Medea when he came to compose his own scene of witchcraft. However, the extent to which Lucan borrowed from Ovid for his presentation of Erictho suggests that not only was Lucan fond of Ovid's work, but that he intended to create a clear and deliberate link between Medea and his Thessalian necromant.\textsuperscript{12}

Lucan makes the first step toward establishing this link near the beginning of the witchcraft excursus. He
tells his readers that many magical herbs grow in Thessaly, and that during her sojourn in that region Medea herself had gathered there herbs which she had not brought with her (6.440-442). Therefore the witches of Thessaly, and presumably Erictho among them, are presented as following in Medea's footsteps. Furthermore this reference suggests a specific episode from the *Metamorphoses*. At 7.220-234 Ovid has Medea flying about Thessaly on her magic chariot, gathering herbs to restore the youth of Jason's father. This particular episode—the rejuvenation of Aeson—is in turn the model for Erictho's upcoming ritual.

The rejuvenation scene was in many ways an ideal choice for Lucan as a model. Here Medea is presented engaged in a long and elaborate ritual (one of the longest descriptions in Roman literature before Lucan). Moreover, Erictho's task is to resurrect a dead soldier, whereas Aeson is so old and frail that he is near to death (proprior leto 163), and when he is laid out for Medea's preparations he is described as similis exanimi, "like a lifeless corpse" (254).

Capitalizing on these initial similarities, Lucan develops Erictho's ritual on the pattern of Medea's. One of Medea's first tasks is to purify the old man:

\[ \text{terque senem flamma, ter aqua, ter sulphure lustrat} \]  

(7.261)

three times she walks around the old man with fire, three times with water, three times with sulphur.
She then must drain Aeson of his old blood in order to refill his veins with her magic brew:

stricto Medea recludit
ense senis iugulum veteremque exire cruorem
passa replet sucis; (7.285-287)

Medea opens the old man's throat with a drawn sword, and once she has let the old blood out she fills him with juices;

Erictho prepares her cadaver in much the same fashion, although her methods are more grisly and lack Medea's finesse:

pectora tunc primum ferventi sanguine supplet
volneribus laxata novis taboque medullas
abluit et virus large lunare ministrat. (6.667-669)

Then she with foaming blood fills the breast opened with new wounds; she cleanses the inner parts of gore and anoints it lavishly with lunar froth.

Lucan also drew upon Ovid for the ingredients of the brew which replaces the old blood. Medea's concoction is described as follows:

illic Haemonia radices valle resectas
seminaque floresque et sucos incoquit acres.
adicit extremo lapides oriente petitos
et quas Oceanii refuum mare lavit harenas;
addit et exceptas luna pernocte pruinas
et strigis infames ipsis cum carnibus alans
inque virum soliti vultus mutare ferinos
ambugui prosecta lupi; nec defuit illis
squeamea Cinyphii tenuis membrana chelydri
vivacisque iecur cervi; quibus insuper addit
ora caputque novem cornicis saecula passae.
his et mille aliis postquam sine nomine rebus
propositum instruxit mortali barbara maius (7.264-276)

There [in a cauldron] she brews roots cut in the vale of Thessaly, and seeds and flowers and bitter juices. She tosses in stones sought in the farthest East and sands which the tide of Ocean washes; she adds also frost gathered under the nocturnal moon and the wings
of a screech owl foul with its own flesh and the innards of the double wolf, accustomed to change its beastly features for those of men; nor among these was the scaley skin of the slender Cinyphian water snake missing, nor the liver of a lively stag; to these she further adds the face and head of a crow that has endured nine ages. With these and countless other nameless things the foreign woman prepared a greater than mortal plan.

Erictho's mixture, like her preparation of the corpse, is much the same but with more emphasis on the weird and gruesome and less on the fantastic:

Herein she mixes whatever nature has wrongfully brought forth. Neither the foam of dogs that fear water nor the innards of a lynx, not the node of a vile hyena was lacking, nor even the marrow of a stag fed on serpents or the remora, which holds back the ship in the mid-water even though Eurus is straining the ropes, and the eyes of dragons and the rocks that rattle when warmed beneath a nesting eagle; Not the flying serpent of Arabia and the viper born in the Red Sea, guardian of precious pearl or the skin of a still living Libyan horned snake or the ashes of the phoenix placed on an Eastern altar. Here afterwards she brought banes ordinary and having names, leaves saturated with an unspeakable song, and she added herbs which her vile mouth spat on at birth and whatever venom she herself had given to the world.

The two recipes are much alike in their general
character. Both concoctions include fantastic items gathered from the far off corners of the world. Medea uses eastern stones (266) and sand from the banks of Ocean (267), while Erictho incorporates strange snakes from the East (677-678) and ashes of the mythical phoenix (680). In both recipes these are mingled with other more mundane (although rather gruesome) elements such as herbs and organs of various animals. Several lines in particular reveal distinct parallels. Medea's concoction includes "the liver of a lively stag (273)," whereas Erictho's includes "the marrow of a serpent-fed stag (673)." Both witches add the cast off skin (membrana) of a snake: Medea a water snake (273) and Erictho a horned snake (679). Note also that Ovid describes his snake as "Cinyphian" and Lucan refers to his as "Libyan"; both terms are poetic synonymns for "African."

An important difference between the two passages is that Lucan goes to greater lengths to emphasize inherent wrongness of magic. He distinctly states that the elements of Erictho's brew have been wrongly born (670). Lucan also stresses the weird and the grotesque. Ovid is content with the description vivax cervus, but Lucan offers the bizarre image of a deer eating a snake. Ovid's account maintains a certain epic grandeur, while Lucan focuses on the mundanely gruesome. Medea uses the entrails of a werewolf, but Erictho must be content with saliva from
a rabid dog and the innards of a lynx.

The concluding lines of each recipe make clear the relationship between the two witches. Medea finishes off her recipe with the addition of "countless nameless things":

his et mille aliis postquam sine nomina rebus propositum instruxit mortali barbar a mai us (7.275-276)

While Erictho's finishing touches are described thus:

quo postquam viles et habentes nomina pestes contulit (6.681-682)

The vocabulary and construction of these two lines are closely parallel, yet the lines are nearly opposite in meaning. Medea's ingredients are so unusual that Ovid has no names for them. Medea's use of such things emphasizes the fact that her craft surpasses ordinary knowledge and the task she has undertaken exceeds the abilities of ordinary mortals (mai us mortali). Erictho on the other hand uses materials that are viles, cheap or common, and which do have names. It seems as though Lucan models Erictho after Medea and then deliberately cuts her short. Erictho is merely a mortal playing at being a Medea, but she lacks her immortal/heroic stature. She makes up for this with her own hideousness.

This discrepancy is also carried through in the completion of Erictho's rite. The effects of Medea's ministrations are described thus:

bar ba comaeque
canitie posita nigrum rapuere colorem.
pulsa fugit macies, abeunt pallorque situsque,
adiectoque cavae supplentur corpore rugae,
membraque luxuriant: Aeson miratur et olim
ante quater denos hunc se reminiscitur annos.
(7.288-293)

Whiteness put aside, the beard and hair seized upon
a dark color. Leanness is thrust aside and flees,
pallor and stiffness go away, hollow wrinkles are
filled with added flesh, and the limbs grow full:
Aeson is amazed and recalls that four decades previous
this had been himself.

Compare this to the resurrection of the corpse:

protinus astrictus caluit cruor atraque fovit
volnera et in venas extremaque membra cucurrit.
percussae gelido trepidant sub pectore fibrae,
et nova desuetis subrepons vita medullis
miscetur morti. tunc omnes palpitat artus,
tenduntur nervi; nec se tellure cadaver
paulatim per membra levat, terraque repulsum est
erectumque semel. distento lumina rictu
nudantur. nondum facies viventis in illo,
iam morientis erat; remanet pallorque rigorque,
et stupet inlatus mundo. (6.750-760)

At once the clotted blood grew hot, warmed the black
wounds and coursed into the veins and extremities.
Struck by it, the innards tremble within the cold
breast, and new life stealing upon marrow unused to
it mingles with death. Then he quivers in every limb,
the sinews are stretched; the corpse does not raise
itself by its limbs little by little, but it is struck
from the earth and is erect at once. The eyes are
blank, the grin stretched wide. In appearance he
was not yet alive, already dying; the pallor and
stiffness remain, and he is dumbfounded that he has
been brought back to the world.

The most striking similarity between the two passages is
the violence with which the magic takes effect. In the
Metamorphoses passage the onset of youth is described with
the words rapuere, pulsa, and fugit. Likewise in the Lucan
passage the return of life to the corpse is described as
an assault: cucurrit, percussae, and repulsum. The detail
of the corpse leaping to its feet adds to this effect.
In both passages the magic takes effect rapidly and violently, as if to emphasize the formidable power exercised by witchcraft, and that that power is at odds with the natural order.

However, as was the case with the magic brew, here Lucan undermines his parallel as soon as he invites it. While the rejuvenation is an unnatural reversal of the aging process, the end result is beneficial and wondrous. Medea's success even solicits the interest of the god Bacchus, who requests the treatment for his aging nurses (Met. 7.294-296). Furthermore Medea's victory is absolute. Old age is utterly put to flight, leaving Aeson a robust young man. In Erictho's case Lucan never lets up on the very wrongness of the ritual being performed. Life creeps into the dead body like a thief (subrepens 753). It is significant that earlier the soul of the fallen soldier had been unwilling to return to its body (cf. examines artus invisque claustra timentem/carceris antiqui 721). Unlike Medea, Erictho is compelling an unwilling subject. Nor is the result of Erictho's spells a total success. Within the corpse life and death fight to a sort of stalemate. The poor soldier, when the witchery is completed, is neither alive nor dead, but stuck in some hideous in-between state. Erictho's hollow success is driven home by lines 759-760. Remanet pallorque rigorque at 759 echoes Ovid's remark at Met. 7.290: abeunt pallorque
situsque. While Aeson is renewed, relieved of his former paleness and stiffness, for the dead man the paleness and rigor mortis are still present. His reaction to the procedure (stupet 760) is a twisted reflection of Aeson's wonderment (miratur 292). Like the civil war in which this event supposedly takes place, Erictho's magic can produce nothing but atrocity.

The other presentation of Medea which influenced Lucan is the tragedy Medea of Lucan's uncle Seneca. Seneca's Medea like the Euripidean tragedy of the same name deals with the Medea's adventures in Corinth, and the essential framework of the plot mirrors that of Euripides' play. Medea learns that Jason is abandoning her to wed the Corinthian princess and becomes enraged. Creon, king of Corinth, fears her temper, and banishes her. Medea, however is able to gain a reprieve of a single day, and she uses that day to exact revenge on Jason. She sends the princess a gift of a poisoned robe and crown. These gifts result in the destruction of the princess, and of Creon as well. Meanwhile Medea slays her children by Jason and escapes Corinth in a chariot drawn by dragons.

A comparison of Seneca's Medea and Bellum Civile 6 shows that Lucan was greatly influenced by his uncle's play. An assessment of exactly how great that influence was is complicated by the fact that Seneca, like Lucan, was fond of Ovid and borrowed from Ovid's presentation
of Medea for his own. Nevertheless, many elements in the portrayal of Erictho point directly to the Medea of Seneca.

One of the important aspects of Seneca's play is his emphasis on Medea's superhuman nature. Seneca's Medea is an essentially static character who fiercely dominates the play from her opening prologue to her fantastic escape. Throughout the play she is isolated, set apart from the lesser characters of the drama. Euripides' Medea receives sympathy from the chorus of Corinthian women, as well as from Aegeus, from whom she is able to gain a promise of asylum. In Seneca's play however the chorus are aligned with Jason and his new bride, and view Medea as a threat to the well being of their city, and Aegeus has no part in the play; Medea thus receives no outside help and apparently needs none. She attains the status of a kind of elemental force, a supernormal power unto herself. When her nurse urges restraint, since she no longer has her former wealth and status, Medea rebukes her:

Medea superest: hic mare et terras vides
derrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina. (166-167)

Medea remains: here in me you see sea and land and sword, fire and gods and thunderbolts.

Medea has the power to upset the very fabric of the universe. In her opening monologue she predicts that her vengeance will upset heaven and earth:

effera ignota horrida
tremebunda caelo pariter ac terris mala
mens intus agitat. (45-47)
The mind within me stirs up wild strange horrible things, evils at which heaven and earth alike will tremble.

Later in the play this prediction comes to pass:

sonuit ecce vesano gradu
canitque. mundus vocibus primis tremit. (738-739)

Lo she has pounded the earth with her mad step and she sings. The world trembles at her first words.

Another way in which Seneca deviates from Euripides is the stress he places on Medea's witchery, which further emphasizes her superhuman nature, and helps to surround Medea with an atmosphere of macabre horror. Seneca devotes a long central section of the play to an elaborate ritual in which Medea imbues with magic poison the robe she will send to Creusa. Much of the material for Seneca's magic scene is drawn from what had become the standard witches' repertoire.

Medea begins by gathering ingredients for her magic poison. First she collects the venom of various snakes. Not content with normal snakes she reaches into the heavens to pull down the constellations Draco and Ophiucus, and summons the Hydra slain by Hercules and the dragon that guarded the golden fleece.

After gathering the venom she needs she adds a vast assortment of noxious herbs. These she draws from all over the globe, from Sicily, the Caucasus, Parthia and Germany as well as the more usual Thessaly. Like Lucan, Seneca emphasizes the wrongful and harmful qualities of
the elements she uses in her magic. Medea's nurse remarks:

congerit in unum frugis infaustae mala (706)

She gathers into one the evils of an ill-omened crop.

This recalls line 6.670 of the Bellum Civile: quidquid fetu genuit natura sinistro.

Seneca's Medea is not intrinsically different from previous witches. She simply exists on a grander scale and has been raised to virtually demonic proportions. It is in this regard that the witchcraft of the Bellum Civile has been influenced by the Medea of Seneca. At first glance, Erictho, like Medea, is presented as a kind of super-witch, a primal elemental being capable of playing with the forces of nature. She dwells in tombs, apart from civilized habitations (cf. 6.510). When she emerges on dark nights she is in the habit of toying with lightning:

si nimbus et atrae
sidera subducunt nubes, tunc Thessala nudis egreditur bustis nocturnaque fulmina captat. (518-520)

If mist and dark clouds hide the stars, then the Thessalian emerges from bare tombs and snatches at nocturnal thunderbolts.

Wild beasts run from her in terror, as illustrated when she goes onto the battlefield to find a fresh corpse:

continuo fugere lupi, fugere revolsis
unguibus inpastae volucres (627-628)

At once wolves fled, vultures fled, unfeasted and with their talons drawn up

Her very presence can blight crops and befoul the air:

semina fecundae segetis calcata perussit
et non letiferas spirando perdidit auras. (521-522)
She has scorched the seeds of fertile crops beneath her feet and destroyed un-deadly breezes with her breath.

However, while such a presentation may be appropriate for Medea, for Erictho it is incongruous. Medea is a witch of heroic dimensions, something more than human, capable of reaching into heaven to pull down poisons for her magic (cf. lines 690-691 Medea refers to the earthly product as a *vile telum*, a "cheap weapon." Lucan may have had that phrase in mind when he referred to magical material as *viles pestes* at line 681). Erictho on the other hand is merely a mortal, earthbound witch. She is part of the mundane present, not the heroic past. She dwells in tombs and spends most of her time pilfering corpses, and so is intimately aquainted with the basest refuse of mortality. In spite of her grandiose build-up, as a witch Erictho falls short of Medea's standard.

Medea, as the archetypal witch figure, as the most famous witch of epic and tragedy, represents what a witch should be in a grand epic poem. Lucan's epic is however an untraditional epic, deliberately devoid of the grand and the heroic. In his presentation of Erictho, Lucan draws upon the image of Medea as portrayed by Ovid and Seneca in order to invite his audience to compare his witch with Medea. He then deliberately undermines that comparison to demonstrate that the grandiosity of Erictho's magic is merely a facade.
Furthermore, the disparity between Medea and Erictho reflects the disparity between Caesar and Pompey. In Lucan's epic the Medea image symbolizes the horror of civil war, specifically as an emblem associated with Caesar and the Caesarian forces, while Erictho, who, as discussed earlier in this dissertation, likewise emblematizes the civil war, is associated with the Pompeians. Just as Erictho lacks the heroic stature of Medea, Pompey, who is presented by Lucan as weak and ineffectual and is destined to lose in this struggle, is a poor opponent for Caesar, Lucan's villainous victor.
CHAPTER III

ERICTHO AND REALITY

An issue often raised in regard to Erictho or other accounts of witchcraft in ancient literature is the relationship between the literary presentation and the magic that was actually practiced by the ancients themselves. Belief in and practice of magic were fairly commonplace among the Greeks and Romans, and so literary accounts of magic offer a window to an aspect of ancient life which seems bizarre and foreign to most modern readers. This is particularly true of Lucan's Erictho, who exists not in a mythic past, but in historical time, only a few generations removed from Lucan's readers. The effect of Erictho and her role in the poem thus depend in part on her relationship to the reality of witchcraft as perceived by a contemporary Roman audience.

Unfortunately, this avenue of scholarship has, while focusing on the question of Lucan's authenticity or of explicating the particulars of Erictho's witchery in terms of ancient magical technique, overlooked the issue of Lucan's literary motives. The tendency is often to treat the necromancy of Book 6 as documentary evidence for the practice of magic, or to see the abundant detail which
Lucan lavishes on his scene as an indication that Lucan was personally fascinated by magic, perhaps even a devotee. The idea is certainly possible, but unprovable and of little consequence. What is important is how magic was perceived by contemporary society.

The objective of this chapter is threefold. I shall begin with a general survey of the evidence for magical practices in Lucan's day (i.e. the mid-first century A.D.), to illustrate how prevalent such beliefs were among Lucan's contemporaries. This survey will be followed by a step by step analysis of Erictho's magic to determine how authentic Lucan's account actually is and whether a desire for authenticity is the sole motivating factor in his presentation. I shall conclude with a discussion of the attitude held by Lucan's contemporaries toward Erictho's real-life counterparts to determine how a realistic portrait of witchcraft would have been perceived by a Roman audience.

Although it is evident that belief in and fear of magic was prevalent throughout antiquity, such attitudes were particularly strong in the early imperial period. Tacitus, who was able to use contemporary accounts and senatorial records for his history of this period, provides ample evidence for the prevalence of belief in magic. Accusations of witchcraft played an important role in numerous trials. In A.D. 16, Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus was accused of sedition, and among the evidence against
him was an attempt at necromancy (Ann. 2.28). At Ann. 4.22, Tacitus reports that a woman named Numantina, former wife of a praetor, Plautius Silvanus, was in A.D. 24 tried for attempting to drive her ex-husband mad through witchery (carmina et venena). In A.D. 35 Marcus Aemilius Scaurus was accused of adultery and magic (magorum sacra, Ann. 6.29), and Titus Statilius Taurus, in A.D. 53, was charged with magicae superstitiones (Ann. 12.59). Numantina was acquitted after her husband was charged with the murder of his second wife. The others committed suicide.

The motivation behind most of these examples is clearly political (or worse: Taurus' fault was apparently that he owned gardens coveted by Agrippina), but the fact that an accusation of magic was a convenient and available tool says a great deal about the general attitude toward such things. Among the Romans belief in magic goes back to very early times, and the Twelve Tables attest that the threat of maleficent magic had sufficient reality to warrant legislation against it. That these or similar laws were apparently still in use in the middle of the first century, roughly Lucan's time period, and that they could be used to do away with political enemies, indicate that the fear of magic was still very real, even among the educated upper classes.

Furthermore, there is no need to assume that all those accused of magic were innocent. There were plenty of
professional magicians and fortunetellers ready to offer their services to paying clients. As a class they were generally seen as undesirable by the established government, in part because their predictions could arouse the ambitious and lead to insurrection (such was the case with the emperor Otho; see Tacitus Hist. 1.22 and 1.27). As a result they were periodically banished from Italy (Dio Cassius 49.43; Tacitus Ann. 2.32, 12.52). Their continued return attests that there was no shortage of people willing to employ them, regardless of their disfavor.⁵ In the case of Libo Drusus, Tacitus leaves no doubt that the man was in fact guilty of consulting magicians, although he was led into such activity by an informer. Another case in which the charges of magic were not unfounded is that of Servilia, daughter of Barea Soranus (Ann. 16.30-31). Servilia's father was charged with sedition, and in the course of the trial the accuser implicated the daughter as well, claiming that she had paid large sums of money for magic rites (magica sacra). Her defense was not to deny the charge, but to say that she had not contracted for any harmful spells, only for her father's safety. The court was moved only so far as to allow Soranus and his daughter to choose the manner of their deaths.

There was also a more sinister side of magic, which helps to explain why these accusations were taken so seriously. Practioners of the art were often involved
in heinous crimes. Such is the case with two *veneficae*, Martina and Locusta, who became noteworthy because of their involvement in imperial intrigues. Martina is credited with the death of Germanicus Caesar, nephew and adopted son of the emperor Tiberius (*Ann.* 3.7). Locusta in her turn engineered the deaths of Claudius (*Ann.* 12.66) and later of his son Britannicus (*Ann.* 13.15). Their methods primarily involved poisons, but they did not hesitate to augment these poisons with black magic, as is demonstrated by story of Germanicus' death. Tacitus, concerning the death of Germanicus, records the following:

> et reperiebantur solo ac parietibus erutae humanorum corporum reliquiae, carmina et devotiones et nomen Germanici plumbeis tabulis insculptum semusti cineres ac tabo obliti aliaque malefica, quis creditur animas numinibus infernis sacrari. (*Ann.* 2.69)

and there were found, dug out from the floor and walls, the remains of human corpses, spells, curses, and the name of Germanicus inscribed on lead tablets, charred and blood smeared ashes, and other devices of black magic by which it is believed that souls are consigned to the infernal powers.

Clearly, witchcraft was not merely an empty charge, or a convenient explanation for misfortune. It was a real crime and posed a real threat. Nor was it merely a danger to the high and mighty. As is to be expected, Tacitus and other sources present only the big cases, those with historical and political ramifications, but there were also *magi* and *veneficae* who operated on a smaller scale, whose activities, although unrecorded by the historians, have not gone entirely unnoticed. The handbooks of these
magicians, such as the magical papyri which provide detailed recipes for magic spells, and more general treatises describing the magical properties of plants, minerals and animal parts, have survived. Countless curse tablets (defixiones), such as the plumbeae tabulae mentioned in the above passage, have also been unearthed, and indicate that throughout antiquity magic could be used to gain an edge in almost any field of human endeavor: love affairs, the Circus, business, and even the courts of law. So prevalent were such practices that Pliny the Elder, a little more than a decade after Lucan's death, could say "there is no one who does not fear to be bound by dreadful spells (diris deprecationibus; N. H. 28.19)." A funerary inscription dating from the reign of Tiberius provides a small insight as to the role of witchcraft among the lower classes. The inscription (CIL 4.19747) records that a four-year-old-boy, a slave of the imperial household, was taken from life by a witch (saga), and admonishes parents to guard their children well so long as she remains on the earth.

A scene of witchcraft, therefore, is hardly out of place in Lucan's "realistic" epic. Since he had cast off much of the older epic machinery, a journey to the underworld such as presented by Vergil was out of the question. Witches and necromancy, however, were more acceptable. Necromancy was a part of practical magic.
As mentioned above, Libo Drusus was accused of hiring a magician to conjure spirits of the dead. According to Suetonius, Nero contracted some Persian magi to raise the ghost of his mother (Nero 34). Some of the spells in the magical papyri describe methods for interrogating corpses (PGM 4.1928-2005; 4.2140-2144). Erictho's grisly feat, which entails the physical resurrection of a corpse, is more extravagant than these examples, which involve only the raising of ghosts. There is however one spell (at PGM 13.279-288) which provides a technique for raising a dead body and causing it to walk around. The papyrus is late (fourth century), but is based on earlier materials, and so suggests that Erictho's performance is not beyond the claims of contemporary magicians.

Certain elements in the historical tradition may also have influenced Lucan's decision to have Sextus consult a necromant, even though the encounter with Erictho is a fabrication. Pierre Grenade has suggested that under the Julio-Claudian emperors the descendants of Pompey were often associated with magical practices, and offers two texts which seem to link Sextus with necromancy. The first is an epigram in the Latin Anthology which has been attributed to the younger Seneca (Reise 406). The epigram is entitled De sacris evocaturis animas Magnorum and deals with the conjuration of Pompey's ghost, either by Sextus or a later descendant of Pompey. The brevity of the epigram
suggests that the episode is a widely known story. If this is so it could have influenced Lucan's account.

The second text is found in the writings of Pliny the Elder. At N. H. 178, Pliny recounts the story that during the Sicilian War, in which Sextus continued to hold out against Octavian and Antony long after the events of the Bellum Civile, a Caesarian named Gabienus was captured by Sextus, who ordered his throat to be cut. Gabienus lay on the beach for an entire day. In the evening he began to moan and announced that he had been sent back from the dead with a message for Sextus: the Pompeian cause was pleasing to the infernal gods and the outcome of the war would be what Sextus wanted. In this tale there is no witch to compel the dead man to return, and Gabienus' message is far more positive than prophecy given in Bellum Civile 6 (see Chapter 5), but if Lucan knew this story it could have given him the idea of having Sextus receive an oracle from a dead man.  

It is thus evident that Lucan's witch scene is historically appropriate to the setting of the civil war. Ancient testimony illustrates that belief in and practice of magic was commonplace in Lucan's day, and that the conjuration of the dead was a normal part of the repertoire of contemporary practitioners. Although Erictho's ritual is certainly extravagant in its horrific detail, it accords in essence with the claims of the ancient magicians.
Furthermore, the historical tradition may have made Sextus an acceptable figure to receive an oracle of this sort. Sextus' visit to the witch before the battle of Pharsalus is not an historical fact, but it does conform to a more general sense of historicity.

The next issue to be addressed is whether or not the particulars of Lucan's witchcraft are authentic. Lucan was not the first to portray contemporary witchcraft in poetry, and since the ancients saw no essential difference between literary magic and the magic they encountered in their own lives, corollaries between literature and reality are to be expected. However, the amount of careful detail in Lucan's account must be taken into consideration in an assessment of Erictho. Much work has been done comparing Lucan's witchcraft with what can be known of the technique of actual witchcraft, the most important of which are the studies of A. M. Tupet and A. Bougery.11 The results show that the witchery of Book 6 is not merely an elaborate fantasy, but is a fairly authentic portrayal of ancient witchcraft. Unfortunately most studies of this nature lose sight of one important fact: namely that Erictho is a literary figure, no matter how realistic her portrait may be. Efforts to explicate the necromancy of Book 6 inevitably fall short because Lucan's concern for accuracy is subordinate to his literary considerations. It is my intention to illustrate how Lucan utilizes realistic magical
lore and how the realism of the witch scene affects Erictho's role as a literary figure.

Lucan's initial description of Erictho concentrates on the ghoulish aspects of her particular brand of witchcraft. She pilfers remains from tombs, funeral pyres and gallows, gathering pieces of the dead for use in her black art (533-562). Such items were fairly regular elements in magical preparations, as is demonstrated in the magical papyri, as well as in Tacitus' description of the items found in Germanicus' chamber. Those who died before their time or who died violently, aoroi and biaiothanatoi, were most useful for magic: their spirits would still be at hand for the magician, and anger over their death made them more powerful. Hence Erictho concentrates her attentions on the young dead:

fumantes iuvenum cineres ardentiaque ossa e mediis rapit illa rogis (533-534)

She snatches smoking ashes and smouldering bones of the young from the midst of funeral pyres

illa genae florem primaevi corpore volsit, illa comam laeva morienti abscidit ephebo (561-562).

She plucks the bloom from the cheek of a youthful body and with her left hand cuts the hair of a dying boy.

She also makes her own biaiothanatoi:

et quotiens saevis opus est ac fortibus umbris ipsa facit manes (559-560).

And whenever there is need for fierce and strong shades she makes the ghosts herself.

Lucan's attention to these activities is not motivated
simply by a need for accuracy. These practices, tomb robbing, violation of the dead, and murder, are foul and criminal, and help to emphasize the wrongness of Erictho's brand of witchcraft.

Erictho's preparations for reviving the corpse also exhibit a certain attention to authenticity. As discussed in the previous chapter, she prepares the body by infusing it with a magical mixture composed of an assortment of bizarre and gruesome elements. The general tenor of the list of ingredients is reminiscent of the materials called for in the magical papyri, which often prescribe the use of such oddities as ape's eyes, wolves' heads, and roosters' gizzards. Lucan's recipe differs in that it is longer than the lists found in the papyri and that it includes only the strange and gruesome elements, whereas the papyri usually include more ordinary substances (honey, incense, herbs), but this does not mar the realistic tone of Erictho's ministrations. Most of the specific items mentioned by Lucan are attested in the surviving handbooks used by the ancient magicians. They are also found in less esoteric literature, in particular the Natural Histories of Pliny the Elder who, in spite of his expressed abhorrence for magic (or perhaps because of it), continually returns to the discussion of magical lore. Significantly however, although Lucan's recipe sounds authentic, few of the elements employed can be associated with necromancy.
This is because Lucan's realism is modified by literary concerns.

The first ingredient in Erictho's brew is the foam of dogs infected with hydrophobia (6.671). The author of the *Kyranides*, a treatise on the magical uses of animals, tells that the dog can provide the magician with a number of substances and body parts (2.21), but nothing is said of the saliva, or of the use of a rabid dog. Tupet suggests that Erictho uses this to prevent the resurrected corpse from being enraged, like a modern vaccine. This is however the reasoning of 20th century science, not of a Roman poet. The dog is an animal closely linked with magic, in both literature and practice. Barking dogs are said to accompany the appearance of Hecate, to whom the dog was often sacrificed. The dog is particularly associated with the sinister side of magic. A spell in the magical papyri (PGM 4.2785-2879) labelled "Prayer to Selene for any Spell" concludes with the instructions that for doing good, one should offer storax, myrrh, sage, and other harmless items, but that for evil purposes one should offer the material of a dog, a goat, and a virgin untimely dead. Therefore, Lucan probably uses this as the first component of Erictho's spell not for any particular attribute, but because the dog suggests black magic, and thus sets the appropriate tone. The fact that the animal is rabid, hence diseased
and raving, emphasizes the wrongness of the rite being performed.

The next items incorporated are the innards of a lynx and the node (usually understood as the neck joint) of a hyena (6.672). These animals are also associated with magical lore. The lynx was not useful to the magician per se, but it was credited with the creation of amber (sometimes called lyncurium), which was supposedly the crystalized urine of a lynx. Amber was remarkable for its quasi-magnetic properties as well as medicinal uses (Pliny N. H. 8.137). It could provide protection for the home, ease the fears of pregnant women or infants, and ward off disease (Damigeron-Evax 31). The hyena was according to Pliny highly prized by magicians (N. H. 8.105). It was a nocturnal and bisexual creature, which continually alternated between male and female (Kyranides 2.40.2-4). It could mimic human speech, strike dogs dumb with its shadow, and paralyze other animals with its gaze (Pliny loc. cit.). Its bile could be used to create various illusions (Kyranides 2.40.6-21) and to aid eyesight (ibid. 2.40.27-33). Its lungs could cure lunacy if the animal was sacrificed when the moon was in the right position (ibid. 2.40.22-23). The stomach could cure cholera (ibid. 2.40.39-40). The eyes could ward off nightmares and demons (ibid. 2.40.35-38) and the tongue could be used to keep men and dogs silent (ibid. 2.40.45-47). There are however
no ancient sources that specifically discuss the innards of the lynx or the anything that can be considered the node of the hyena. Although it is certainly possible that Lucan had access to works now lost, it is more likely that he included these items because they are oddities and, since they are associated with magical lore, are suggestive of magic.

The marrow that comes from a snake-eating stag (6.673) is attested in the ancient sources. Deer marrow is recommended as a medicine for animal bites and as an all purpose antidote (Kyranides 2.11.25-27). According to Pliny marrow of all kinds can be a useful cure for a number of ailments (consumption, gout, and hair loss) but deer marrow is by far the best (N. H. 8.119). He also claims that deer regularly war with snakes, and so various materials from deer can ward of serpents and cure snakebites (ibid. 8.118). It is doubtful that a necromantic rite has any need for these properties, and Tupet finds herself at a loss to explain the inclusion of this item.\textsuperscript{15} Lucan's reason for including this element in the list is more simple, and has been discussed in Chapter 2: aemulatio. A deer liver is mentioned in Ovid's description of Medea's magic, hence Erictho employs something from a deer as well to call attention to the parallels between the two rites. This also applies to the snake skin described at 6.679. Like the deer marrow a snake is invested with magical
properties. It could be used against a toothache, headache, and as a protection for the home (Kyranides 2.30.9-14). Both the deer and the skin are mentioned by Ovid probably because these animals are associated with rejuvenation, since a snake renews itself by shedding its skin, the deer by shedding its antlers. For Lucan their primary function is to recall Ovid's Medea.

The echenais, which can restrain ships even at full sail (6.674-675), is nothing more than the remora, or suckerfish. It supposedly had the ability to bring any vessel to a dead stop simply by attaching itself to it. In the Kyranides it is prescribed as a cure for gout (4.18.13-14). According to Pliny it could be used as an amulet to prevent miscarriage (N. H. 32.2) as a love charm, or to hinder litigation (N. H. 9.79).

The stones that rattle in the eagle's nest (6.676) are referred to elsewhere as aetites, which were supposedly used by an eagle to warm its nest and rattled because they contained smaller stones within. They are useful in childbirth, hinder abortion, preserve one who wears them, and possess a number of other protective abilities (Pliny N. H. 10.12; Damigeron-Evax 1).

The dragons' eyes (6.675) suggest a number of explanations. According to Pliny the eyes of a dragon (which could simply mean a python) could be used to prevent nightmares (N. H. 8.137). It was also believed that a
gem known as dracontite could be obtained from a dragon, and could be found either in its brain (Pliny N. H. 37.158) or its eyes (Philostratus 3.7). It could be used to make oneself invisible (Philostratus loc. cit.), or as a remedy for failing eyesight (Socrates et Dionysius 49). The author of the Kyranides discusses a plant called dracontios which gets its name from the fact that its seed resembles a dragon's eye (1.4.5-6). The seed makes its bearer sharpsighted, and can be a remedy for headaches (1.4.24-25).

For these items, the aetites, the remora, and the dragons' eyes, Tupet has attempted to use the ancient testimony to explain their inclusion. For the aetites and the remora she has postulated reasonable explanations. If the resurrection is thought of as a rebirth, then the aetites could be present because of its connection with childbirth. The remora, because of its ability to restrain, might be employed to restrain the soul and keep it in the soldier's body. For the dragons' eyes she is at a loss. Although her suggestions regarding the first two items have some merit, and may reveal a part of Lucan's reasoning, a simpler explanation could serve for all three and be more appropriate to the spirit of the list as a whole. These three items are included because, like the lynx and the hyena, they are unusual and associated with magic.
lore, and so they sound like things that would be found in a witch's brew.

Even the more fabulous elements employed by Erictho, the ashes of the phoenix (6.680), the flying snake (6.677), and the viper that guards the pearls of the Red Sea (6.677-678), do not diminish the air of realism that envelops Lucan's list. In antiquity the existence of these creatures was not something to be casually dismissed. There is no other ancient reference to the Red Sea viper, but the flying snake and the phoenix are both described by Herodotus in his account of Egypt (2.75;73). Tacitus records that the phoenix was said to have appeared during the reign of Tiberius (Ann. 7.28). Furthermore in the magical papyri fantastic designations could be used as code words for otherwise ordinary substances. Thus "blood of Ares" indicates purslane, "Kronos' spice" indicates piglet's milk, and "semen of Herakles" indicates mustard rocket.17

Lucan's reasons for adding these elements are probably several. Erictho's use of the fabulous serpents, as discussed in Chapter 2, recalls the fact that Seneca's Medea had made use of celestial serpents to poison the robe given to Creusa. Erictho is limited to snakes of the earthly variety, but nonetheless manages to obtain extraordinary creatures. Moreover, both the serpents and the phoenix come from the East, particularly Egypt. Egypt was a land associated with strange rites and arcane
knowledge, and played an important role in the Greek and Roman concept of magic. Lucan alludes to this connection of Egypt with magic in his discussion of Thessalian witchcraft (6.449-445). His mention of the eastern creatures here gives Erictho's magic a slight eastern coloring and thus enhances its illusion of authenticity.

Erictho's invocation has been often compared to the invocations found in the magical papyri. She begins with inarticulate sounds, which Lucan calls "far different from human speech" (humanae multum discordia linguae, 687), and which incorporate the sounds of various beasts (dogs, wolves, owls, snakes) and natural forces (thunder, wind and wave)(688-692). In the papyri the magician is sometimes instructed to bark like a dog, speak like a baboon, hiss, or make a noise like the wind. One spell explains that these sounds represent the name of the deity invoked (PGM 7.766-786). Another spell identifies a long series of vowels as the "immortal names" of divinities, which "are not declared in articulate speech by human tongue" (PGM 4.605-616).20

After this Erictho begins her invocation proper (6.695ff), calling on the various powers of the underworld, the Eumenides, Styx, Fates, Poenae, Chaos, Pluto, Persephone, Hecate. This incantation is often set beside the spell contained in PGM 4.1390-1495, a spell of attraction which involves the summoning of restless spirits,
who are then employed by the magician to attract a desired woman. Like Erictho's spell, the spell in the papyrus invokes the underworld deities to release the required shade, and includes most of the same powers called on by Erictho: Moirai, Poinai, Styx, Chaos, Hecate, Pluto, Persephone. Also mentioned is Aeacus, the gate keeper of Hades, generally identified with the ianitor mentioned in Erictho's spell (6.702).

After invoking the infernal powers Erictho recounts some of her previous abominable activities:

\[
\text{si vos satis ore nefando} \\
\text{pollutoque voco, si numquam haec carmina fibris} \\
\text{humanis ieiuna cano, si pectora plena} \\
\text{saepe deo lavi calido prosecta cerebro,} \\
\text{si quisquis vestris caput extaque lancibus infans} \\
\text{inposuit victurus erat, parete precanti (6.706-711).}
\]

If I summon you with a voice sufficiently loathsome and foul, if I never chant these spells ungorged on human flesh, if often I have washed breasts full with divinity chopped up with warm brains, if any infant was destined to live before he placed his head and entrails on your platters, obey my prayer.

Apparently these acts, cannibalism, murder, infant sacrifice, obligate the gods of magic to grant her demands. This kind of boast is not normal to the spells in the papyri, although these acts do conform to the popular notions of criminal magic, and this attitude is reflected in the extant spells. Recall that the all-purpose spell to Selene, mentioned above, called for the offering of material from a virgin untimely dead if the spell was to be used for evil purposes. Erictho's vaunt, like her habit of tomb robbing, emphasizes the perversion inherent
in her magic, in which unholy criminal acts confer power and status.

When the corpse does not respond to the first incantation, Erictho becomes angry. She whips the corpse with a live snake and berates the infernal powers with another spell (730-749). Here she adopts a more demanding tone and threatens to drive the Furies from the tombs of the dead, reveal shameful secrets of Hecate and Persephone, expose the underworld to sunlight, and finally to invoke an even greater power, left unnamed but usually identified as the mysterious entity Demiurgus. In the papyrus the composer of the above mentioned spell anticipates such a delay in compliance and provides a more forceful spell to be used in case this occurs (PGM 4.1435-1495). This seems to be regular practice in the papyri (e.g. PGM 2.45, 51, 144; 4.917, 1036), as is the threatening tone (e.g. 4.2095) and the appeal to a higher power (e.g. 4.1038). A particularly harsh threat can be found in PGM 12.141-143, where the magician threatens to tell the "great god Seth", who will spear the disobedient daimon, chop him up and feed him to "the mangy dog who lies among the dungheaps."

When the corpse finally rises Erictho makes her demand for a revelation. As payment for this favor she promises to make the poor ghost immune from all further witchcraft. She will cast a spell over him which will prevent others from summoning him back from the dead as she has done. The spell described at PGM 4.296-466, a love spell which
employs the untimely dead, makes a similar bargain. At line 385 the magician promises the ghost that he will grant him rest once he accomplishes the required task. The same kind of offer appears at PGM 101.14, where the dead are promised rest and water to quench their thirst. Although Erictho's promise is more extravagant, since she offers not merely rest but a rest that is permanent and unassailable, her bargain with the dead soldier reflects the practice attested in the papyri.

Scholars who comment on the details of Lucan's magic often remark on his careful accuracy. As I have shown however, accuracy per se is not Lucan's goal. The materials with which Erictho prepares the corpse represent a hodgepodge of magical ingredients, most of which are associated with magic, although not with necromancy. Erictho's incantation demonstrates an understanding of magical techniques and has affinities to a number of spells in the magical papyri, but it does not resemble the few spells specifically intended to interrogate the dead. The papyrus most often compared to Erictho's incantation is a love spell, not necromancy. Lucan uses these elements to drape Erictho in an illusion of authenticity and give a realistic flavor to his literary creation. Thus, Erictho is a figure who is almost, but not quite, acceptable as an historically credible figure.

Frederick Ahl calls Erictho a figure "on the borderlines of plausibility," in that she is less grand
or idealized than the characters of Vergilian epic.24 The authentic coloring of the scene emphasizes this de-heroicizing effect. By presenting Erictho as a realistic witch Lucan brings her down and separates her from her counterparts in earlier epics. Erictho, consulting the dead on Sextus' behalf, is assuming the role of Circe, who instructed Odysseus for his consultation of the dead in Odyssey 11, and of the Sibyl, Aeneas' guide through the underworld in Aeneid 6. Here as elsewhere Lucan opts to reject epic grandeur in favor of dismal realism. The laborious detail and technical precision give Erictho's witchery a prosaic quality. The inclusion of authentic particulars suggest authenticity but also dampen the horrific effects of the scene. Items such as suckerfish or eagle-stones are part of genuine magic, but in and of themselves they are only mundane curiosities. Erictho is undermined by being presented as the sort of witch familiar to his readers from their daily experience.

In order to understand the full impact of Lucan's "realism" it is necessary to discuss the status of "witches" in Roman society. As real-world witch, Erictho is also a member of a despised class, a fact which undercuts Lucan's nekuia even further. As discussed above, magic was often a serious crime, sometimes involving murder and child-sacrifice, and sometimes considered subversive to the state. Although the Roman authorities found expulsion en masse an easier way of dealing with the large numbers
of magicians infesting the city, specific cases could be punished with death, even when there were no political ramifications. An example of the fate of those found guilty of witchcraft can be found in Tacitus:

facta et de mathematicis magisque Italia pellendis senatus consulta; quorum e numero L. Pituanius saxo delectus est, in P. Marcium consules extra portam Esquilinam, cum classicum canere iussissent, more prisco advertere. (Ann. 2.32)

And the senate passed a decree expelling the magicians and astrologers from Italy; from among them Lucius Pituanius was cast down from the Tarpeian rock, and the consuls executed Publius Marcius outside the Esquiline gate according to the ancient custom, when they had ordered the trumpet to sound.

Furthermore, although magic was something to be feared, the professional practitioners of the art were generally from the lower strata of society. The nobles mentioned by Tacitus were mostly accused of hiring magicians, not of being magicians themselves. The real magicians, and especially the women who peddled witchcraft, were the baser, insignificant folk, worthy of note only when they could be contracted by the high and mighty. Horace in several passages speaks casually of the old fortunetellers no doubt common to the city streets of Rome, and gives a suggestion perhaps of the status of the average Italian saga:

fallacem Circum vespertinumque pererro
saepe Forum; adsisto divinis; inde domum me
ad porri et ciceris refero laganique catinum; (Ser. 1.6.113115)

I often wander through the trickster Circus, and in the evening the Forum; I visit the soothsayers; then I go home to a plate of leeks, peas, and pancakes;

In another poem, when Horace is unable to extricate himself
from a bore, he remarks:

namque instat fatum mihi triste, Sabella
quod puero cecinit divina mota anus urna:
hunc neque dira venena nec hosticus auferet ensis,
nece laterum dolor aut tussis, nec tarda podagra;
garrulus hunc quando consumet cumque. (Ser. 1.9.29-33)

For that sad fate is upon me which a Sabine hag,
shaking her prophetic pot, sang to me as a boy:
"neither dire poison nor an enemy sword will take
this one away, nor bellyache or cough nor slow gout;
a non-stop talker will use up this boy."

Although Horace is well aware of the darker side of
withcraft, such as he presents in Epode 5, encounters with
"witches", or at least with the sort who could be found
peddling prophecies on street corners, are part of normal
experience, and are to be taken lightly.

Other writers show that sagae were commonly held in
contempt. A fragment of the comic poet Turpilius reads
as follows:

Non ago hoc per sagam pretio conductam, ut vulgo
solent (Nonius 22-23 M)

I'm not doing this through a saga hired for pay, as
they commonly do.

The context of the line is unknown, but the sense is clear:
the speaker feels it beneath his dignity to hire a witch.
A contemporary of Lucan, Columella speaks of sagae with
similar disdain in a discussion of the duties of a villicus,
overseer of a farming estate:

Haruspices sagasque quae utraque genera vana
superstitione rudes animos ad impensas ac deinceps
ad flagitia compellunt ne admiserit. (de re rustica
1.8.6)

As for the soothsayers and sagae, both of whom by
means of empty superstition compel unsophisticated
minds to expenditures and then to shameful practices, let him not admit them.

The overseer is to keep these witches off the farm not because they are dangerous, but because they are a nuisance, like door-to-door salesmen. They are likely to corrupt the other farm workers, take their money, and generally interfere with the efficiency and respectability of the estate.

Not all those in the magical vocations were held in equally low esteem. There were, naturally, gradations among the practitioners of magic. Some, usually the men, had higher social pretentions and could claim a certain level of respectability. Those at the higher strata were the male professionals whose craft was purportedly based on acquired knowledge, usually from Eastern cultures such as Egypt and Persia. Although they were representatives of a foreign art, and thus suspect, their craft also implied literacy and scholarship, and so could lay claim to a grudging respect. The term magus carried such associations because of its original meaning of Magian, or Persian priest. Also in this category were the astrologers, the mathematici and Chaldaei. A number of emperors openly patronized astrologers or had them as part of their retinue. It is reported that Nero was avidly interested in the Persian Magi and attempted to learn their rites. There is also a story that the emperor Marcus Aurelius consulted certain Chaldaeans to find a way to cure his wife's passion
for a gladiator (H. A. Marcus Antoninus 19.3).

Their position was, however, always precarious. I have already noted that magicians and astrologers were periodically banned from Italy. Tiberius, frustrated by the inaccurate predictions of his astrologer Thrasyllus, was at the point of having him thrown off a cliff until one of his predictions finally came true (Suetonius Tib. 14). An astrologer who practiced during the reign of Domitian was not so fortunate, but was executed by the emperor to prove a point (Suetonius Dom. 15).

The "witches," saeae and veneficae, with whom the fictional Erictho has the closest affinity, were the lowest representatives of their trade. They were, as has been stated, presented as coming from rustic regions or less privileged levels of society, and so could claim no exotic mystique. As women their exercise of power was all the more illicit. Even the veneficae such as Martina and Locusta are merely tools of the powerful. Although their activities influence matters as important as the imperial succession, their own place in the grand scheme of things is very small and insignificant. Tacitus reports that, shortly after the death of Germanicus, Martina was found dead under mysterious circumstances (Ann. 3.7). She had apparently outlived her usefulness and was quietly gotten rid of. Locusta had problems with her employer as well. Suetonius reports that Nero, outraged because a poison she had given him for Britannicus worked too slowly, beat
her with his own hands and stood over her while she concocted something more powerful (Nero 33; see also Tacitus Ann. 13.15).

Erictho, it seems, is in poor company. Not only is she, as a practitioner of the magic arts, linked with a dubious and sinister crowd, but as a haggard old woman and a rustic provincial she is linked with the most lowly representatives of her profession: the humble fortune-tellers and potion-mixers, who may be laughable when they pawn their prophecies and despicable when they turn to murder, but are hardly figures of awesome dread. Erictho is not a true portrait of the average *venefica*. She is far more extravagant, horrific, and gruesome than any true-to-life figure. She is an exaggeration, a caricature. Yet it is important to recognize that for a Roman audience the model lying at the heart of this caricature is not a fairy tale figure but a figure familiar from their own experience, despised like an ordinary quack or cutthroat.
CHAPTER IV

THE WITCH AS A COMIC FIGURE

W. R. Johnson, in his insightful discussion of Erictho, offers the startling and unique perspective that Erictho is a comic figure; the absurd excesses of Lucan's portrayal combine elements of wit and horror to expose the "banality of evil."¹ Johnson's interpretation of Erictho is based upon his own conviction that the excesses of Lucan's portrait are there for comic effect. This ghoulish witch is too grotesque, too bizarre to be simply horrifying. She becomes a cartoonish figure, emblematic of Lucan's chaotic, subrational universe. Previous scholars have cautiously suggested that there is a touch of wit or satiric humor in Lucan's witch scene, but none have made this a key issue of their interpretation.² Johnson's position can thus be considered, as Masters suggests, a unique shift in the critical assessment of Lucan.³ Unfortunately, Johnson, by his own admission, is not intent on "proving" anything to the reader, merely with exhibiting his own impressions of Lucan's poem.⁴ Hence he exerts little effort to support his claim that Erictho is a comic figure, either with internal evidence or through an examination of the relevant tradition.
The intent of this chapter is to show that Johnson's perspective can be supported and qualified by examining earlier treatments of the hag in Roman literature. I intend to illustrate that the comic treatment of the witch is an established part of certain facets of the tradition, specifically in the treatment of the hag-type witch, and that Lucan drew upon and adapted this tradition in creating Erictho. I shall examine how and to what ends previous authors portrayed the witch as a figure of humor, and show how these treatments influenced Lucan's characterization. I shall also endeavor to illuminate how Lucan utilizes this traditional comic element to complement the themes of his own poem. Here I differ with Johnson, who maintains that by exposing Erictho's banality Lucan elevates her and places her at the head of the topsy-turvy universe of the Bellum Civile. As must be apparent from the previous chapters of this dissertation, it is my view that Lucan's intent is not to elevate Erictho, but to belittle her and undermine her grandiose pretentions. Lucan's comic treatment of her is in keeping with this end.

One of the unique features of Lucan's Erictho is that she is the kind of witch that had previously had no place in traditional epic. The lofty genres of epic and tragedy could recount the deeds of the great sorceresses, Circe and Medea, or present heroines such as Dido or Deianira, who turn to witchcraft as a desperate last resort. The
hag, however, the contemporary professional witch of low social status, had no place there. As discussed in chapter one, no extant literature suggests that the hag received extended treatment by poets Greek or Roman before the Augustan age. Here, in the works of the elegists and the invective poetry of Horace, the hag is presented primarily as a figure of comedy and ridicule.

The first hag of note in Roman literature is Canidia, the witch who figures prominently in the *Satires* and *Epodes* of Horace. A hallmark of Horatian invective is his use of irony and wit to convey his moral lessons, and so it is not surprising that he approaches his witch with a certain amount of humor. For Horace Canidia is a contemporary witch, an inhabitant of the less savory neighborhoods of Rome. She is presented as a hideous, sinister figure. She is also richly farcical. Horace consistently undermines her threatening qualities by wrapping her in a humorous context.

*Satire* 1.8 recounts an adventure of Canidia and a sister witch Sagana in an abandoned Esquiline graveyard. They habitually come here to gather bones and herbs, but on this occasion they conduct magic rituals. They sacrifice a black lamb and pour its blood into a pit in order to call up souls of the dead. They also perform an amatory ritual involving two effigies, one of wax and one of wool. The scene is sporadically detailed. The reader is given
glimpses of specific images in a condensed structure: the interrogation of the shades, the burning of the wax figure, and the burial of a wolf's beard and a serpent's tooth. Although it is difficult to picture exactly what is going on, these jumbled details adequately convey an atmosphere of macabre witchery. The horrific qualities of the narrative are however weakened before the pair of hags even appears on the scene. In the second line of the satire the narrator reveals that he is a wooden Priapus, placed there as a scarecrow to ward off thieves and birds. Priapus, the dwarfish god with the monstrous phallus, is a figure associated with vulgar humor, and his own comments within the poem reinforce this association. To assert the truth of his tale he says:

mentior at si quid, merdis caput inquiner albis corvorum, atque in me veniat mictum atque cacatum Iulius et fragilis Pediata furque Voranus. (37-39)

But if I'm lying may my head be fouled with a crow's white shit and may Julius and dainty Pediata and Voranus the thief come to piss and crap on me.

His presence in the satire informs the reader that the anecdote about to unfold is not to be taken seriously. Within this context, Canidia's graveyard seance is not frightening, but absurd. Horace emphasizes this by treating conventional motifs in a humorous fashion. Canidia and Sagana slay their lamb by ripping it apart with their teeth, and dig the pit with their nails. The sacrifice itself is conventional (cf. Odyssey 11.34-36 & Seneca Oedipus
556-559), but the technique is not. Such feral behavior on the part of two old women borders the bizarre and the ridiculous. Horace also redirects the witches habit of calling down the moon. Instead of having the moon descend due to bewitchment, Priapus reports that the moon, ashamed to witness the rites conducted, blushed (in other sources the enchanted moon takes on a ruddy color; cf: Ovid Amores 1.8.12 and Statius Thebaid 1.104-106) and hid behind some of the higher tombs (35-36). The episode ends in crude buffoonery. Priapus vents his outrage with a flatulent eruption. Canidia and Sagana are so startled that they drop everything as they flee into town, including Canidia's teeth and Sagana's wig (46-50).

Epode 5 presents a more frightening image of Canidia and her fellow witches. Canidia has kidnapped a young boy, who has been buried up to his chin and is being slowly starved to death. When the process is finished his liver will be removed and used to concoct a love potion. Although he begs for mercy, his pleas are ignored by Canidia, who is more concerned with the movements of Varus, her escaped lover. As a last resort he confronts the witches on their own terms, cursing them and vowing to haunt them after his death. On the surface Epode 5, dealing with the murder of a child, suggests a far more sinister side of witchcraft. Yet Horace provides ample hints that the Canidia of this poem is the same ludicrous figure of Satire 1.8. The boy's
first plea for mercy includes a thinly disguised slur: he entreats her by her children, "if Lucina was there called by real birth pangs" (*si vocata partubus/ Lucina veris adfuit* 5-6), implying that she has somehow faked a birth. Canidia and the other witches are absurdly hideous figures. Canidia's hair is tangled and interlaced with snakes (15-16); Sagana's hair bristles like that of a sea urchin (27-28); Canidia's nails are uncut, and her teeth black with decay (47-48--recall that in the satire her teeth were false and she used her nails to dig a trench). Canidia's lover, Varus, is referred to as a *senex adulter* (57), a character type out of Plautine comedy. Canidia incongruously equates her situation with that of Medea, when Jason had left her for the princess of Corinth. The comic allusion, the boy's subtle insults, and the witches' absurd appearance belie her posturing.

Canidia's comic role is reinforced in *Epode* 17, Horace's final witch poem. The poem is a mock recantation. Horace claims to be suffering from Canidia's magic and offers to make amends for his previous abuse. His apology is hardly sincere, and he belittles Canidia's witchcraft in the same breath with which he surrenders to it:

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ergo negatum vincor ut credam miser,
Sabella pectus increpare carmina
caputque Marsa dissilire nenia. (27-29)
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Therefore I am defeated so that, wretched, I believe what I denied: that Sabine songs can berate my breast and Marsian ditties leap about my head.
He also takes the opportunity to add further abuse, and slanders Canidia for her low birth and promiscuity, even while begging for release:

dedi satis superque poenarum tibi,
amata nautis multum et institoribus. (19-20)

I have paid penalties enough and more to you, much beloved of sailors and hucksters.

et tu, potes nam, solve me dementia,
o nec paternis obsoleta sordibus,
neque in sepulchris pauperum prudenter anus
novendialis dissipare pulvers. (45-48)

And you, since you have the power, release me from madness, 0 you who are not sullied with sordid parents, and did not, a knowing hag, scatter nine-day ashes at paupers' tombs.

The sarcasm of Horace's entreaty is lost on Canidia, who promises the poet that his punishment, like that of Tantalus, Prometheus and Sisyphus, will be eternal (65-73). She does not try to refute any of Horace's slander, but in fact confirms it, and reveals that she is actually proud of those very things for which the poet has ridiculed her: her crimes, her witchcraft, her licentiousness (56-57). Since she is so deaf to those who would tell her she is not what she believes herself to be, Horace gives up and allows her the last word.

Horace's treatment of Canidia is directed toward two ends. First he blackens her character (and thus justifies his attacks against her) by presenting her and her art as hideous and contemptable. She violates tombs, murders children, and brews deadly poisons. She is a bestial,
subhuman figure, and so a threat to orderly, civilized society. He defends against her threat by ridiculing her. She is repulsive and an inhabitant of the squalid and unsavory sections of the city. She is sexually loose, and her lovers are moreover sailors, hucksters and dirty old men. As for her magic, Horace does not disarm it by explicitly denying that it works. Instead he mocks her in spite of her magic powers. Priapus can scare her away even though she can call up the dead, and Horace, like the boy of Epode 5, can taunt Canidia while suffering from her spells. Her magic is an empty show. While it can be frightening and deadly to the helpless, it is not a threat to those who are prepared to see Canidia for the toothless old joke she really is. What is most frightening about Canidia is that she takes herself seriously, and so is likely to go on harming innocents while fooling herself. Horace's apparent surrender in Epode 17 is not a gesture of defeat, but of exasperation. Since Canidia is not a threat to him, she can safely be ignored.

The elegists take a similar stance against witches in their poetry, where the hag becomes a conventional figure. Witches and witchcraft are referred to in a frivolous manner and, as might be expected, are usually mentioned in connection with love magic. The poet's attitude toward magic varies depending on whether the witch uses her powers to his advantage or disadvantage. The
elegiac lover freely turns to magic to help himself or his mistress. Tibullus for example, in poem 1.2, tells Delia not to fear that their affair will be discovered. He has employed a verax saga (a reliable witch, 41) to ensure that her husband is deceived. Elsewhere, in 1.5, he reveals that when Delia was ill he assisted in a magic rite to restore her health (11-16). Propertius also turns to the aid of magic, although he has less confidence in its efficacy. In poem 1.1 he calls on the witches, who claim they can draw down the moon (19), to bring Cynthia to him. If they can do that he says, then he will believe in the power of magic. In 2.4 he complains that he is sick with love. Magical cures, however, have been of no help.

The hag becomes a figure of abuse when the poet seeks to blame her for his mistress's fickleness. Here the hag is merged with another figure, the lena, or bawd. The bawd has a long literary history as a promoter of illicit behavior. In Euripides' Hippolytus Phaedra's nurse assumes the role of a bawd as she tries to persuade her mistress to have an affair with her stepson. In the first mime of Herodas a bawd visits a wife while her husband is not home and tries to encourage her to take a lover. In Roman Comedy the bawd often provides an obstacle between the adulescens and his courtesan girlfriend. She can, like Scapha in the Mostellaria, urge the girl to find other
lovers, or she can keep the young man at bay, like Leaena in the *Curculio*. The bawd's role in comedy is mostly to provide vulgar farce and, as a threat to the young man's fun, a target for abuse. The elegists frequently adapted comic scenes for their poetry, and so the *lena* of elegy is primarily that of comedy.

Tibullus, in 1.5, complains that Delia has gone off with a wealthy lover. This betrayal is not Delia's fault, but is due to the machinations of a clever bawd (*callida lena* 48) who has it in for Tibullus. The *dives amator* and the *callida lena* suggest a comic setting. Tibullus curses her as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{sanguineas edat illa dapes atque ore cruento} \\
&\text{tristia cum multo pocula felle bibat;} \\
&\text{hanc volitent animae circum sua fata querentes} \\
&\text{semper, et e tectis strix violenta canat;} \\
&\text{ipsa fame stimulante furens herbasque sepulchris} \\
&\text{querat et a saevis ossa relicita lupis;} \\
&\text{currat etinguinibus nudis ululetque per urbes,} \\
&\text{postagat et triviis aspera turba canum. (49-56)}
\end{align*}
\]

May she eat bloody feasts and with her gory lips drink cups bitter with much gall; may souls flit about her complaining always of their doom, and may the fierce strix sing from her roof top; may she herself, goaded to madness by hunger, gather herbs in the graveyards and bones left behind by savage wolves; and may she, her loins bare, run and shriek through the cities, and behind her may the harsh mob of dogs drive her from the crossroads.

In these lines Tibullus expresses his wish that this nameless bawd suffer hunger, thirst and humiliation. This sort of malediction is a normal part of invective poetry, but what makes this passage significant is the way in which Tibullus phrases his curses so that they suggest witchcraft.
The reference to ghosts, the presence of the *strix*, the gathering of herbs from tombs, the bones, and finally the barking dogs and the mention of the crossroads all imply an atmosphere of witchery. Tibullus has taken regular witch motifs and recast them as abuse. The ghosts are present not to serve the bawd but to annoy her. The *strix*, elsewhere an element for magic concoctions or the witch in shapeshifted form, here appears as a bird of ill omen. Herbs and bones are gathered to satisfy hunger, not for magic. The dogs, who normally announce the presence of Hecate at the crossroads, are now driving the *lena* from those very crossroads.

Tibullus is apparently trying to accomplish two goals at once. On the one hand he wants the bawd to be punished for robbing him of Delia. On the other hand he also wants to imagine the bawd in as poor a light as possible. Although all he really knows about this woman is that she has somehow persuaded his mistress to seek a richer lover, he can justify his own rage against her by accusing her of other, far more heinous crimes. Thus he hopes she may eat raw (presumably human) flesh and that hunger will drive her to violate the dead. He also envisions her as a practitioner of black magic, and sees those very arts turning back on her. Tibullus' feud with the bawd has nothing to do with witchcraft, in spite of the fact that he calls her a *saga* several lines later (59). He begs Delia to
abandon the teachings of the "grasping witch" (*sagae praecipta rapacis/ desere* 59-60). The hag has not drawn Delia away with magic, but with advice.

In Propertius the comic treatment of the *lena* is more pronounced and her role as a witch more explicit. Propertius 4.5 is devoted exclusively to reviling a bawd by the name of Acanthis (i.e. "thorny": the name signifies how irritating she is to the poet-lover). Acanthis, like Canidia, is an ugly crone. Her skin is thin and wrinkled (64, 67); her teeth are hollow (68); her hair sparse (71). She also lives in disreputable poverty. She dwells in a small, rickety hut (70); her only inheritance is a dingy floor mat (69). The poem begins after the bawd is dead, and Propertius takes the opportunity to curse her beyond the grave:

\[
\text{Terra tuum spinis obducat, lena, sepulchrum,}
\text{et tua, quod non vis, sentiat umbra sitim;}
\text{nec sedeant cineri Manes, et Cerberus ultor}
\text{turpia ieiuno terreat ossa sono! (4.5.1-4)}
\]

May the earth cover your tomb, bawd, with thorns, and may your shade know thirst (which you do not want); may your Manes not rest in your ashes, and may Cerberus as an avenger terrify your foul bones with his hungry bark!

The vehemence of the curse seems humorously excessive, and the poet even allows himself a few jokes. The the hope that her ghost will know thirst points to the comic bawd, traditionally over fond of wine, and the the reference to thorns at her grave may be a pun on the crone's name. He then enumerates his reasons for hating the bawd. He
begins with her powers of persuasion: she could corrupt the likes of Hippolytus or Penelope (5-8). Like Tibullus he equates the bawd's ability to tempt his mistress away from him with the equally (from the poet's viewpoint) insidious practice of witchcraft. Thus the list of grievances quickly turns into a standard witch's catalogue. Acanthis can alter the flow of waters, call down the moon, change herself into a wolf, and blind jealous husbands (12-15; for the blinding of husbands, recall Tibullus 1.2.41). She has in fact been using her arts against Propertius:

\[
\text{consuluitque striges nostro de sanguine, et in me } \\
\text{hippomanes fetae semina legit equae. (17-18)}
\]

She has consulted striges about our blood, and against me she has gathered hippomanes, the secretion of a pregnant mare. 

The sample of the bawd's advice, which takes up the bulk of the poem (21-62), reveals the real reason for Propertius' enmity. Like a typical Plautinelena Acanthis advises a mercenary attitude toward love, and tells the girl what tricks she may use to drive up her price. Much to the poet's dismay, she also urges her to avoid those who have nothing to offer but verses. Propertius, however, gets the last laugh. As she completes her hated lecture Acanthis' decrepit body is seized by a cough, and she expires, spitting up bloody phlegm (67-68). Her demise is morbidly comic, as she breathes her last breath into her dirty mat and her tiny hut shakes with her spasms (69-
Like Horace and Tibullus, Propertius has vilified his enemy by accusing her of witchcraft. He triumphs over her by mocking her, and recounting her grotesquely ludicrous death. Ovid imitates Propertius' poem in Amores 1.8. His treatment lacks the vehemence of Propertius. He addresses the subject in a frivolous manner, stressing the farcical elements. He abruptly introduces his hag as a drunken crone by the name of Dipsas, or "Drinky" (2). She bears this name because she has never seen the dawn with a sober eye (3-4). Ovid then launches into his catalogue. He begins on a lofty note, referring to Dipsas' spells aeaecarmina "spells worthy of Circe" (5), and continues with the standard list: turning back rivers, weather control, enchanting the moon, etc. Ovid saves his curse for the end of the poem, and in the meantime he recounts the speech he chanced to overhear while hiding behind a pair of doors. Dipsas' sermon is considerably longer than that of Acanthis, but the tenor is the same. She is finally cut short not by a coughing spasm, but by the discovery of the poet's shadow. The betrayed lover restrains the urge to tear at the hag's hair and face, and settles for cursing her with an impoverished old age, long winters and eternal thirst (110-114).

Ovid hardly perceives the bawd as a real threat. Hence he devotes far more energy to ridicule than to
vilification. The list of powers immediately following an explicit description of the bawd's drinking habits is difficult to accept seriously. Ovid admits that much of the witchery he attributes to Dipsas is merely supposition and gossip (suspicor 14, suspicor et fama est 15). Ovid knows that she is simply a harmless, ridiculous figure, and so when he is discovered he repays her in kind: he does her no real harm, but adds a commonplace curse. 17

The Roman elegists were not the first to combine the roles of witch and bawd. In Euripides' Hippolytus Phaedra's nurse mentions that she has a magic charm (philtra 509-510) that is a cure for love. She mentions it merely as a pretext for entering the house so that she can approach Hippolytus on her mistress' behalf, but the casual remark suggests that old women, particularly those who acted as go betweens for young women, were expected to have some acquaintance with magical lore. Similarly Simaetha, in Theocritus' second Idyll, says that before attempting magic herself she had gone to the old women who cast spells (91), although she does not say whether she sought their help in freeing herself of love or in drawing her lover to her. In Roman literature there is a fragment of Lucilius that links the witch and the bawd:

aetatem et faciem ut saga et bona conciliatrix (271)
in age and appearance like a witch or a good procuress

With no context the precise significance of the remark
is uncertain, but it is clear that for Lucilius the bawd and the hag share certain features. Finally, it is worth noting that although the bawds of comedy are not given magical powers, they can referred to as *veneficae*. The term *venefica* is in this case simply a term of abuse. The masculine form, *veneficus*, was often used to mean simply "villain" or "scoundrel" without implying that the individual in question was actually a poisoner, and the feminine form could similarly be used without any real connotations of witchery. This usage may point to the development of the elegiac hag, whom the elegist berates as a witch even though his complaint has little to do with the supernatural.

The elegists seized upon a treatment already latent within the tradition. The comic witch had already been established as a literary type by Horace. Horace's Canidia and the hags of the elegists set the standard for the treatment of the hag in subsequent literature, as can be demonstrated by one last example. Although there are no other hags in Roman literature that predate Erictho, Lucan's contemporary Petronius presents a witch cast in much the same mold as her Augustan predecessors.¹⁸

Encolpius, the hero of Petronius' *Satiricon*, seeks the aid of a witch to cure him of his impotence. The witch, Oenothea, is a hag in the tradition of Canidia and Dipsas. Her name, "wine goddess" suggests the usual fondness for
alcohol. She is a priestess of Priapus, and thus associated with lewdness and vulgarity. The fragmentary nature of Petronius' work hinders clear understanding of the episode, although it is certainly filled with farce and slapstick. Oenothea is certain she can cure Encolpius, and as a price demands that he spend a night with her once cured. Her own sordid poverty and disreputable appearance undermine her claims of magical power, as does a tumble she takes off of a wobbly stool. Her treatment of Encolpius consists mostly of abusing his nether parts with various herbs and inserting a dildo up his anus. Eventually the poor hero decides he has had enough and makes a desperate escape, with Oenothea and an assistant witch chasing drunkenly after him.

Clearly for Lucan's readers the classic hag was a laughable figure. The humor is predictably at the hag's expense, and serves to sabotage her capacity to terrify or do harm. The witch's horrifying qualities, both her physical appearance and the darker aspects of her craft, are exaggerated to extreme proportions to make her utterly contemptible. The absurdity of these exaggerations, combined with the farce and vulgar slapstick, make the witch foolish. This foolishness is enhanced by mythological allusions, in which the witch, either by the poet or in her own words, is equated with the great sorceresses, Circe or Medea. Such a comparison can only bring ridicule upon
the loathsome, disreputable hags. Even when the hag seems to gain the upper hand, as is the case with Oenothea and Encolpius, the victory does not increase the witch's stature, but instead envelops the victim in the humor.

A witch of this sort seems out of place in the realm of epic. Previous hags had been essentially minor figures, concerned with minor, private problems. They do not belong on the high plain of epic, predicting the outcome of great battles. Lucan's poem, however, is not a conventional epic, and in drawing Erictho he has defied another convention by dragging the hag out of her usual genres and having her stand in as his anti-Sibyl. Erictho is a hag out of her element, but she shows a strong affinity with her predecessors, especially Canidia, the most clearly described hag of previous literature. Lucan gives Erictho a hideously bedraggled appearance:

\begin{verbatim}
tenet ora profanae foeda situ macies, caeloque ignota sereno
terribilis Stygio facies pallore gravatur
inpexas onerata comis. (6.515-518)
\end{verbatim}

Haggardness holds the witch's face, foul with dirt, and her features, unfamiliar to a calm sky, frightful with their Stygian pallor, are weighed down, burdened by tangled locks.

Her complexion is suited to the squalor in which the comic hag lives. Her deathly pallor is like that of Horace's witches, Canidia and Sagana:

\begin{verbatim}
pallor utrasque fecerat horrendas aspectu. (Ser. 1.8.25-26)
\end{verbatim}

a pallor made them both shuddersome to behold.
Erictho's uncombed hair is also conventional. Canidia's locks are similarly tangled in Epode 5 (*incomptum caput* 16). The need here is not that the witches hair be unbound for the practice of magic. In Satire 1.8 Canidia in the midst of a ritual has her hair simply loose (*passo capillo* 24). A like phrase is used of Medea in the Metamorphoses (*passis capillis* 7.257). For Erictho, and Canidia of Epode 5 the intent is to describe the witches' hair as an unkempt scraggly mass. Repulsive hair is in fact the most regular attribute of the hag, possibly because the hair of younger women can be so seductive. Sagana in Epode 5 has hair that bristles (*horret capillis* 27) like a sea urchin or wild boar. Acanthis and Dipsas have hair that is gray and sparse (*rari capilli* Prop. 4.5.71 and *albam raramque comam* Ovid Am. 1.8.111). Oenothea as well is described as a crone with tangled locks (*anus laceratis crinibus Satyricon* 133.4).

Erictho's normal pastimes are as gruesome as her appearance. The ridiculous glee with which she despoils the dead, and her elaborate methods of procuring the needed corpses are particularly hideous:

```latex
Ast ubi servantur saxis, quibus intimus umor ducitur, et tracta duerescunt tabe medullae corpora, tunc omnes avide desaevit in artus inmergitque manus oculis guadetque gelatos effodisse orbes et siccae pallida rodit excrementa manus. Laqueum nodosque nocentes ore suo rumpit, pendentia corpora carsit abrasitque cruces percussaque viscera nimbis volsit et incoctas admitso sole medullas. Insertum manibus chalybem nigramque per artus
```
stillantis tabi saniem virusque coactum
sustulit, et nervo morsus retinente pependit.
Et quodcumque iacet nuda tellure cadaver,
ante feras volucresque sedet; nec carparere membra
volt ferro manibusque suis, morsusque luporum
expectat siccis raptura e faucibus artus. (6.538-553)

But when they are preserved in stone, by which the
inner moisture is drawn out, and the bodies grow hard
once the filth of the marrow has been drained, then
greedily she rages against all the limbs and rejoices
to have scooped out gelled eyeballs and gnaws on the
pallid nails of the mummified hand. She snaps the
noose and the criminals' knot with her own mouth,
has plucked the hanging corpses and scraped the cross
and torn away the organs beaten by the rain and the
marrow cooked by the sun let in. She has carried
off the nail piercing the hands, the dark gore from
limbs dripping with rot and the clotted ooze, and
has hung from it if the sinew resisted her teeth.
And whenever a corpse lies upon the bare earth, she
squats there before the beasts and vultures; she does
not wish to pluck at the members with iron or her
own hands, and she awaits the bites of wolves, to
tear the limbs from their dry jaws.

The description goes beyond macabre into the realm of the
absurd, and thus Lucan has been criticized as excessive
by those who would see Erictho as a serious portrait.
However, Erictho's activities are not out of line for the
kind of witch who would rip a lamb apart with her teeth
or starve a child for his liver. Medea, Circe or Simaetha
would hardly set aside their dignity to chew through a
hangman's rope, but the classic hag has no dignity, and
freely debases herself in the practice of her craft. In
this regard Erictho's excessive antics are appropriate.

Aside from Erictho's physical appearance there is
little in her description that links her explicitly to
the comic witch. Lucan reveals nothing about her drinking
habits, and she has no use for amatory magic. Nevertheless
Erictho is in the habit of waiting by a corpse until it is mangled by wolves and vultures, and then snatching the morsels from its jaws (see above). In Epode 5 Canidia lists among the ingredients for her love charm "bones snatched from the jaws of a thirsty bitch" (ossa ab ore rapta ieiunae canis 5.23). Before conducting her rite Erictho ties up her hair with snakes (coma vipereis substringitur horrida sertis 656), just as Canidia's hair at Epode 5.15-16. The usual explanation for this is that the witches are donning the guise of Hecate, who is usually described as having hair wreathed in serpents (cf. Apollonius 3.1214-1215). Non-comic witches, however, Circe, Medea, or Simaetha, are not described in this fashion. The effect, as with the other antics of the hags, overshoots the macabre and is merely absurd.

Elements of black humor can be observed in the course of Erictho's rite. Her display of temper at the ghost's initial reluctance (see Chapter 3), lashing the corpse with a live serpent, is grotesquely ludicrous, and in keeping with her normal antics described above. Equally comical is the manner of the dead man's compliance with Erictho's second spell: instead of rising gradually, he snaps to attention like an obedient soldier (see Chapter 2). A more telling detail however, is the apology with which the resurrected corpse begins his speech. Although Erictho demands a thorough and specific revelation of the
next day's events, the corpse replies that he cannot be completely accurate because he hasn't been dead long enough. Since he has not yet crossed the river Styx, he can only report rumors he has heard from the farther bank. This strikes a blow at Erictho's credibility as a practiced witch, especially since Erictho had deliberately chosen a fresh corpse for her ceremony.\textsuperscript{20} Apparently, like her predecessors, Erictho is not all she claims to be.

Erictho, then, can be linked with the comic hags of satire and elegy. In appearance she is cartoonishly grotesque, her ghoulish activities are absurdly exaggerated, and her magical abilities are humorously undermined. There is however an important difference Lucan's treatment of Erictho that suggests that the humor of this episode is directed toward a slightly different end: for Erictho there is no punchline. No Priapus waits in the bushes to deflate the witch's delusions of grandeur. She does not collapse in a coughing fit. No one is at hand to expose Erictho as a joke and tell the reader that she is not really so frightening. Part of this is no doubt due to the genre in which Erictho appears. In the case of the Augustan hags, the poet intervenes to ridicule the witch and thus defeat her ability to threaten either himself or society. Although Lucan takes a more personal role in poem than other epic poets, his role in the poem is still not a confrontational one.\textsuperscript{21} He is a narrator, not a player, and Erictho is not a personal threat for him. Furthermore
the overall tone of the *Bellum Civile* is dark and pessimistic, hence the humor of his poem has a grimmer function than to arouse mirth.

The humor of the *Bellum Civile* is best described as what Johnson terms the "comic-ugly", which he considers an essential aspect of Lucan's narrative style.\(^{22}\) Throughout the poem Lucan uses his grim humor to expose the darker, unheroic underside of the supposedly great events and persons he portrays. The key figures of the Civil War and the deeds they perform are made to appear ridiculous, but that ridicule becomes bitter when one remembers that this was one of the decisive, definitive conflicts of Rome's recent history. For Johnson, the comic-ugly is for example vital to an appreciation of Lucan's treatment of Cato and his fantastic encounter with the bizarre snakes in Book 9, and in his presentation of Scaeva, the centurion who single-handedly holds off a Pompeian assault (6.144-262) and who does not even flinch when pulling an arrow from his eye, taking the eye with it.\(^{23}\) Lucan's black humor also manifests itself in his various battle scenes, which are notorious for their morbid absurdities. Masters offers such an interpretation of Lucan's account of the battle of Ilerda.\(^{24}\) Lucan's sardonic laughter does not diminish the horror of the Civil War, it merely robs the conflict of its grandeur.

An understanding of the dark humor of Lucan's poem is vital to an appreciation of the witch scene in Book
6. Here I disagree with Johnson, who maintains that the comedy inherent the episode is not at Erictho's expense. As I hope I have demonstrated, Lucan's treatment of Erictho is consistently designed to lessen her stature and to belie her grand pretentions. Lucan links her to Medea in order to show how poorly she compares to her mythic counterpart. He elaborates her rite with realistic details to suggest a connection with the lowly veneficae and sagae. The comic treatment, particularly her own error in selecting a corpse that is too fresh, casts doubt upon her own competence. Furthermore, as I have shown, the humorous treatment of the hag is usually directed against the hag, and as Johnson has shown, Lucan's use of humor normally serves to lessen the stature of his subject matter. By drawing Erictho as a comic hag Lucan illustrates that in spite of her frightful appearance and her magic craft Erictho is merely a deluded fool, like so many of the other characters in the epic.

Lucan's introduction of the comic hag into his epic underlines some of the key themes of the Bellum Civile. Where a grander figure might be expected, a figure more suited to act as a counter-part to Vergil's Sibyl and thus provide meaningful insights to the conflict about to reach its climax, there is instead a lowly caricature familiar to Lucan's readers from the genres of satire and elegy. By having such a figure preside over the major prophecy of his poem and over the scene that answers to Aeneas'
journey to the Underworld in *Aeneid* 6, Lucan gives the lie to the glorious vision of the *Aeneid*. He also emphasizes the hopeless pessimism of his own poem. As I discussed above, Lucan's treatment of the hag differs from earlier writers in that no one appears to expose Erictho and bring the mockery to a point. Instead, Sextus and his companions accept her as she presents herself. They believe she is a great power and quake in fear when they observe her in action (cf. 6.657-658). Since those around the witch accept her seriously, they are drawn down with her in ridicule. The irony, and the horror, of Erictho is that even though she is just a joke, no one in the poem is in a superior position, and so she carries on unhindered.
CHAPTER V

THE EFFICACY OF WITCHCRAFT

The presentation of Erictho as a comic figure raises an issue pivotal for assessing her role in the *Bellum Civile*: the efficacy of her ritual. The prevailing view is that the necromancy is a success, especially when her magic is compared to the other attempts at divination elsewhere in the epic. Erictho does resurrect the dead man and compel him to give a long and detailed revelation, a revelation which is usually and rightfully considered to be the major prophecy of the poem. The fact that the horrors of witchcraft can succeed and out-do the more orthodox avenues of divination is emblematic of the disintegration of order caused by civil war.

On the other hand, when the prophecy elicited by Erictho is examined carefully, it can be demonstrated that, although the witch's magic "works," the results are somewhat disappointing. The corpse's revelations are enigmatic. While his speech is lengthy, little of the information conveyed is relevant to the immediate concerns of the inquirer, Sextus. When the episode is over, Sextus' concerns remain fundamentally unanswered. The only scholar
to argue seriously against the efficacy of Erictho's necromancy is Masters, who in his recent work has subjected the scene to a careful analysis and raised most of the above points. My own assessment of this issue, while reached independently, agrees essentially with that of Masters. Our approaches, however, are directed at different ends. Masters is concerned with how the Erictho episode and its relationship to _Aeneid_ 6 pertain to Lucan's "composition myth." My goal is to address the issue of Erictho's efficacy and what it implies regarding her role in the _Bellum Civile_. In this chapter I shall discuss how the question of the efficacy, or rather inefficacy, of witchcraft is treated in the literary tradition, and to demonstrate how this tradition can help to illuminate the significance of Lucan's treatment of Erictho. The concern is not merely to show that Erictho's magic, and witchcraft generally, proves unsuccessful, but to understand why it does not, and what this implies for her role in Lucan's epic.

In Roman literature the witch, or at least the mortal witch, seems to be a character destined to fail. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the powers of the hag are generally derided and belittled so as to diminish any threat she may represent. Moreover, the poet can also triumph over the witch by describing her defeat. Thus Canidia is routed by the god Priapus, and Acanthis expires
in mid-sentence. The issue here is not whether magic works or not. As I have illustrated in Chapter 3, belief in the validity of magic was prevalent in the ancient world. Furthermore, within the literary context the poet accepts the reality of magic. The standard witch's catalogue affirms the potency of witchcraft, and removes the witch into a fantasy realm where witchcraft is an unquestioned truth. The failure of witchcraft lies in the inability of witches to achieve their desired goals or to exert any effective influence on their world. Succinctly, magic is cheating, and cheaters inevitably end up deceiving themselves. The powers of witchcraft are thus fraudulent and hollow. Horace can mock Canidia even while apparently suffering under her spells. Ovid can safely ignore the rantings of Dipsas, since she can do him no real harm. Those who fear witches can be assured that the hags will eventually be exposed as powerless frauds, and will get the punishment they deserve. Canidia is put to flight, and Acanthis is struck dead.

The presentation of the amateur witches also illustrates that in literature magic practiced by mortals is generally ineffective for achieving desired results. The amateur witches are not derided for their use of witchcraft, since they are not really wicked characters, merely misguided women who turn to magic as an attempt to regain some control over their lives. Their endeavors
are however desperate and futile. In Eclogue 8 Vergil's Simaetha tries to use magic to bring her lover Daphnis home from the city. Throughout her ritual she asserts the power of songs (carmina) to accomplish wondrous things. Her faith in the efficacy of magic is emphasized by her recitation of the catalogue at lines 69-71 and 97-99 (see Chapter 1), and by the fact that she herself has been a witness to the achievements of magic: she has seen Moeris, her instructor in the arts of witchcraft, use magic herbs to change into a wolf, raise the dead, and move crops from one field to another. At the conclusion of the poem something occurs to suggest to Simaetha that her magic has worked:

\[
\text{aspice, corripuit tremulis altaria flamnis}
\text{sponte sua, dum ferre moror, cinis ipse. bonum sit!}
\text{nescio quid certe est et Hylax in limine latrat.}
\text{credimus? an qui amant ipsi sibi somnia fingunt?}
\text{parcite, ab urbe venit, iam parcite carmina, Daphnis.}
\]

(105-109)

Look, the ash itself has of its own accord snatched the offering with a quivering flame, while I delayed removing them. Let it be a good omen! Something has certainly happened and Hylax is barking at the threshold. Can we believe it? or do those who love make up dreams for themselves?

Spare him, my songs, spare him, Daphnis comes home from the city.

Vergil leaves the conclusion ambiguous.³ Although Simaetha interprets the signs as a good omen, Daphnis is not seen, and Simaetha even expresses some doubt herself: perhaps he has returned, or perhaps she is merely deceiving herself.

The context of the poem heightens the doubt further.
Eclogue 8 is a contest between two singers, Damon and Alphesiboeus. The description of Simaetha's ritual is sung by Alphesiboeus in response to Damon's song, in which a goatherd bemoans the fact that his love is about to wed another. At the end of his lament he states his intention to kill himself by leaping into the sea. There is a clear relationship between these two episodes, both of which depict someone taking desperate measures to deal with an unhappy love. Since Simaetha's situation is coupled with that of a suicide, her solution to the dilemma (i.e. witchcraft) seems equally futile and potentially self-destructive. A further suggestion that magic is ineffectual can be found in Eclogue 9. Here Moeris, the magician mentioned at 8.96 and 98, has been evicted from his farm. Whereas Simaetha had been confident that magic could draw Daphnis back from the city, Moeris is driven out by forces beyond his control and is headed toward the city himself (9.1 and 9.62). His carmina have not helped him keep his farm, as he informs an inquisitive friend:

\[
\text{sed carmina tantum serta valent, Lycida, tela inter Martia quantum Chaonias dicunt aquila veniente columbas. (9.11-13)}
\]

But our songs, Lycidas, do as much good among the weapons of War as they say the Chaonian doves do when the eagle comes.

Moeris, Simaetha's instuctor in magic, whose powers influenced her own confidence in the power of spells, declares in his own words that his songs are impotent.
Songs and magic may be effective in the dreamy realm of Arcadia, but they are useless against the very real weapons of the outside world.

In Vergil's other magic episode, the story of Dido in *Aeneid* 4, the tragic consequences of witchcraft are clear. Dido, like Simaetha, turns to magic because she cannot bear the loss of her lover, Aeneas. Her goal is not however to draw him back. Although she tells her sister that she is preparing a rite that may either bring Aeneas back or absolve her of her love for him, her goals are in fact suicide and vengeance. She has a pyre constructed on which are placed her "marriage couch" and various accoutrements left behind by Aeneas (the *exuuiiae* required for sympathetic magic). As Aeneas is sailing away she mounts the pyre and pronounces a terrible curse against Aeneas and his descendants. May Aeneas and the Trojans be met with warfare when they reach Italy; may the peace they finally find be unfair to them; may Aeneas die before his time and remain unburied; may there never be peace between her people and the Trojans; and may an avenger arise in the future to wage war against the Trojan descendants. Having spoken her curse, she kills herself with Aeneas' sword. In doing so she makes herself an *aoros*, and thus gives power to her dying curse.5

Dido's fate illustrates the deadly consequences of dabbling in witchcraft, since the rite actually requires
her death. Yet even her sacrifice cannot grant absolute efficacy to her magic. Dido's reference to wars to be fought by the Trojans obviously points to the turmoil Aeneas will face in Latium. The perpetual hatred between the two peoples and the prediction of an avenger to come would easily be seen by a Roman reader as an allusion to the Punic wars and to Hannibal. There is thus some potency in Dido's curse. These events however were overcome. Peace is established in Latium, with the Trojans as the victors. Aeneas does not die abandoned, although he has no burial since he is carried off to heaven (cf. Livy 1.2.6). Hannibal was eventually defeated, and by the time of Vergil, the threat of Carthage was entirely removed. Dido's curse can cause trouble but cannot change the destiny of Rome.

Since it attempts to impose a godlike control on one's environment, witchcraft is a hubristic enterprise, and as such can backfire on the practitioner. Such is the case with Seneca's Deianira when she attempts to regain the love of her husband Hercules in Hercules Oetaeus. When Hercules brings home the young Iole as a consort, Deianira is enraged and at first considers violent action. Her nurse dissuades her and suggests that magic can be used to bring Hercules back to her. Deianira realizes that ordinary magic will not prevail against Hercules, but recalls that she has a special charm: the blood of the
centaur Nessus, tainted with poison from Hercules' own arrow. With his dying breath, Nessus had told her that such an ointment was said to be a powerful love charm by the witches of Thessaly, and so Deianira decides to use it. She realizes too late that the power of the charm is not amatory but destructive, and that she has unwittingly destroyed her husband. In grief and guilt she takes her own life. Her attempt to use magic as a solution to her problems fails disastrously, since she destroys her lover, and herself as well.

The only witches who are able to wield their power successfully are the quasi-divine sorceresses, Circe and Medea. They are never overwhelmed by external forces like their mortal counterparts, nor do they suffer any delusions as to the extent of their abilities. Instead they serve to remind the mortals they encounter of their own helplessness. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Circe is able to use magic to deal effectively with those mortals foolish enough to anger her. She turns her rival Scylla into a hideous monster. Picus, the Latin king who rejects Circe's advances, is transformed into a woodpecker. Likewise she turns Picus' companions into beasts, when they angrily accost her in their search for their missing king. Medea has already been discussed in Chapter 2. Like Circe she towers above mortals, and can commit heinous crimes without fear of punishment.
The magic practiced by these sorceresses is not inherently different from that practiced by mortal witches. They use the same methods and the same implements to accomplish their ends. The difference is in the sorceresses themselves. Since they are not entirely human, they are not bound by ordinary human limitations. The only area in which they seem to fail is in the pursuit of love. Medea loses Jason, and Circe is repeatedly unlucky in this field: she is unable to maintain a hold on Ulysses, and is rejected entirely by Glaucus and Picus. Ovid is well aware of this fact, and uses it as an example of how his poetry is superior to magic (A.A. 2.101-104). Conveniently however neither Medea nor Circe actually make use of amatory magic. The efficacy of their magic cannot be questioned, since it never fails to achieve their desired ends.

As the two great witches of myth, Circe and Medea are the witches' ideal. They are therefore emulated by the mortal witches who attempt to follow their example. Sometimes the emulation is conscious. Vergil's Simaetha alludes to Circe's legendary feats as an example of the power of magic, and both Canidia and Oenothea liken themselves to Medea (Horace Epode 5.61-66; Petronius Sat. 134.12.11-12). The comparison can also be by implication: Vergil models Dido in Aeneid 4 on Medea as presented by Euripides and Apollonius, and Erictho's activities recall the Medea of Ovid and Seneca (see Chapter 2). In either
case the parallel is delusive, since, as ordinary mortals, these witches cannot hope to equal their heroic counterparts. In their pursuit of magic power, hags and amateur witches are trying to assume a superhuman role. Success is necessarily denied them because they are, unlike their legendary idols, merely human.

Lucan's presentation of Erictho accords with the traditional Roman view of the potency of witchcraft. At first glance it appears as though Erictho possesses unbelievable power. This is after all why Sextus Pompey has decided to consult the witch. He is convinced that the gods of the upper world are ignorant and unable to help him. The vile art of necromancy, however, can tell him clearly and truthfully all he wants to know. Lucan's discussion of Thessalian witchcraft supports Sextus' opinion. Witches are able to compel the very gods (6.440-441 & 443-448) and reverse the very laws of nature (see Chapter 1). Erictho's powers are equally hyperbolic. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Lucan likens her to Medea, suggesting she is a witch of superhuman proportion with a god-like power to command the elements. Her ability to raise the dead implies a power over Fate, since the Fates must reweave the threads of those she summons back to life (6.703-704). According to Lucan she could call back whole armies if she wished:

Fata peremptorum pendent iam multa virorum, quem superis revocasse velit. Si tollere totas
temptasset campis acies et reddere bello, 
cessissent leges Erebi, monstroque potenti 
extractus Stygio populus pugnasset Averno. (633-636)

Many destinies of slain men now hung in the balance; 
whom did she wish to call back to the upper world? 
If she attempted to raise up whole battle lines and 
return them to the war the laws of Erebus would yield 
and a population drawn up by a monstrous power from 
Stygian Avernus would fight.

A careful reading reveals that Erictho's magic does 
not quite live up to its grandiose claims. Lucan begins 
his discussion of witchcraft by sowing the seeds of doubt. 
Regarding the prevalence of witchcraft in Thessaly he says:

Vanum saevumque furorem 
adiuvat ipse locus vicinaque moenia castris 
Haemonidum, ficti quas nulla licentia monstri 
transierit, quarum quidquid non creditur ars est. 
(434-437)

The place itself nurtures this empty and dreaded 
madness, as does the fact that the camp is near to 
the dwellings of the Haemonidae [Thessalian witches], 
whom no boldness of a made-up monstrosity can surpass, 
whose craft is whatever is not believed.

The "empty and dreaded madness" is Sextus' uncompromising 
faith in witchcraft. The use of the term furor suggests 
that his belief is a delusion, not the sort of opinion 
that would be held by a rational mind. It is furthermore 
an empty delusion, lacking real substance. Lines 436 and 
437 undermine magic's credibility. The horrors of magic 
exceed the horrors of fiction, and the sphere of the witch's 
art encompasses precisely that which is beyond belief. 
Lucan does not explicitly say that magic is not true, but 
by raising the issues of fiction and non-belief he puts 
the veracity of magic into doubt.
These doubts are quickly smothered by Lucan's hyperbolic rhetoric, and remain buried until Sextus' interview with Erictho. Sextus clearly believes no task is beyond her scope, as is demonstrated by his request:

Vel numina torque
vel tu parce deis et manibus exprime verum.
Elysias resera sedes ipsamque vocatam,
quos petat e nobis, Mortem mihi coge fateri. (598-601)

Either torment the gods or spare them and squeeze the truth out of the dead. Unbar the Elysian realms and compel Death, summoned in person, to confess whom of us he seeks.

Erictho is flattered by this speech, but oddly her first response is to warn Sextus that magic does have limits:

"Si fata minora moveres,
pronum erat, o iuvenis, quos velles" inquit "in actus,
invitos praebere deos." (605-607)

"If you would change lesser destinies," she said, "it would have been easy, young man, to compel the unwilling gods to yield to whatever course of action you wished."

Witchcraft can affect minor things, such as individual lives, but for greater things it is less potent, as she goes on to explain:

At, simul a prima descendit origine mundi
causarum series, atque omnia fata laborant
si quicquam mutare velis, unoque sub ictu
stat genus humanum, tum--Thessala turba fatemur--
plus Fortuna potest. (611-615)

However, whenever the world's chain of causes descends from a primary source, and all fates suffer if you wish to change anything, and the entire human race stands under a single stroke, then--we, the Thessalian throng, admit--Fortune has more power.

Erictho's confession is not a refusal of Sextus' request. While she admits that she cannot change the future she
goes on to say that if he is content simply to know what will happen that can be easily arranged. This is all that Sextus had asked for in the first place. Apparently Erictho assumes, not unreasonably, that Sextus wishes to know his fate so he can avoid it if Erictho's prophecy should be unfavorable. Here magic can provide no aid. A Thessalian witch can alter minor destinies, such as the span of individual lives, but when the fate of nations is in question it is better to put one's trust in Fortune.

Johnson sees this utterance not as a confession, but a boast, in that Erictho is merely placing herself above such trivial concerns as world history. It is, however, difficult to support such an interpretation from the text of the poem. As uncharacteristic as Erictho's admission may be, it is hard to read it as anything other than what it appears to be: an admission of the limitations of witchcraft.

Since Erictho has emphatically stated that revealing the future is something she can do with ease, one assumes she will be able to provide a full and precise revelation, unlike the seers of the earlier books who have made their predictions with difficulty and reluctance. At the end of Book 1, as Caesar marches into Italy, strange portents abound, and prophecies are uttered by three individuals. The first is Arruns, an aged Etruscan haruspex, who undertakes to read the omens at the request of the Roman
authorities. After making his sacrifice he finds the entrails too horrible to interpret, and so leaves his prophecy enigmatic and obscure. He is followed by Nigidius Figulus, the Roman astrologer, who tries to read the future in the stars. He can do little better than Arruns, discerning only that disaster is in store for Rome and the human race. The final prophecy of Book 1 is that of a Roman matron possessed and compelled to speak by Apollo. Her vision is more detailed than the others; in the course of seventeen lines she runs through the major battles of the war, the assassination of Caesar, and the subsequent renewal of strife. But her speech is allusive. A reader with the hindsight of history can easily trace the events of the war through her speech, but it is enigmatic to her contemporaries. The only other oracular episode before Book 6 is the Delphic episode in Book 5. Appius Claudius, an otherwise minor figure, visits the famous shrine and forces the Pythia do give him a prophecy. After much reluctance she complies, but her prophecy is obscure and ambiguous, offering Appius hope while actually foretelling his doom.

Erictho's skill at divination is deliberately contrasted to these other methods. Sextus scorns the conventional oracles and comes to her because she can provide what he craves most of all: certitude. The witch is eager and confident that she can accommodate him. When
she sets out to obtain a suitable corpse she is careful
to find a fresh one, whose lungs and vocal organs can still
provide a clear and comprehensible utterance. In the course
of her rite she specifically demands that every detail
of the future events be revealed:

Ducis omnia nato
Pompeiana canat nostri modo militis umbra. (716-717)
Let the ghost of a soldier, lately ours, declare all
that pertains to the Pompeians to the general's son.

When the dead man finally rises, Erictho's address to him
reiterates her demand for details, and her superiority
to the more orthodox divinations:

"Tripodas vatesque deorum
sors obscura decet: certus discedat, ab umbris
quisquis vera petit duraeque oracula mortis
fortis adit. Ne parce, precor: da nomina rebus,
da loca; da vocem, qua mecum fata loquantur."
Addidit et carmen, quo, quidquid consulit, umbram
scire dedit. (770-776)
An obscure lot is suited to tripods and prophets of
the gods: let him withdraw assured whoever seeks the
truth from the shades and bravely approaches the
oracles of harsh death. Do not be grudging, I pray:
give the affairs names, give the places; give a voice
by which the fates might speak with me." And she
added a spell by which she enabled the shade to know
whatever she requested.

The tripods are a clear reference to Delphi. The vates
deorum encompass a broader range, but certainly include
the divinations of Book 1. For Erictho, these seers cannot
compete with the exactitude of necromancy. She wants no
riddles, but insists on specific details, names and places.
Her final spell seems to assure that her demands will be
met.
The corpse's first words, however, as discussed in Chapter 4, reveal that this will not be the case. He begins by offering an excuse for his failure:

"Tristia non equidem Parcarum stamina " dixit "aspexi tacitae revocatus ab aggere ripae;" (777-778)

"I have not even looked upon the sad threads of the Fates" he said, "since I was called back from the bank of the silent shore;"

Erictho has called the soldier back too soon. Since he is but recently dead he has not yet crossed the river into the underworld proper, and so is not yet in a position to know what the fates have in store. This casts some serious doubts on Erictho's competence as a witch. She purposely selected a fresh corpse. During her incantation she indicates awareness of the fact that the shade is still on the threshold of Hades (primo pallentis hiatu/ haeret ahhuc Orcei 714-15). She even uses this fact as a bargaining chip: since the ghost has hardly even gotten to Hades, it shouldn't be too much trouble to send him back up. Yet this is the factor which prevents him from having certain knowledge of the future.

In spite of his disadvantage, the corpse does have quite a bit to say. He has been able to learn what fate has in store from the activities of the Roman dead on the farther bank (in other words, he can offer distant hearsay). The civil war among the living has apparently spilled over into the realm of the dead. In Elysium the Optimates of the past are grieving. Scipio and the elder Cato mourn
the coming demise of their descendants. Only Lucius Brutus, the first tyrannicide, rejoices. The revolutionaries, Catiline, Marius, the Gracchi, are exultant. They have broken their chains and are laying claim to the Elysian fields. Modern readers and Lucan's contemporaries can discern the significance of these events. The plight of the good Romans reflects the coming defeat of the Republican cause. Metellus Scipio and Cato of Utica will soon take their own lives after the Pompeian defeat at Thapsus, and hence their late ancestors grieve. Brutus rejoices for the future assassination of Caesar at the hands of his descendant. For Sextus, however the corpse's revelations must be incomprehensible.

If Sextus is astute he may surmise that Caesar will somehow be victorious. Pluto is even now preparing fetters for the victor (799-802), while the dead are readying a place for Pompey in the fields of the blessed (802-805). These statements are, however, shrouded in enigma. No details, no specifics are provided that can be of any help. The corpse is more intent on side-stepping the issue altogether. The outcome of the war is inconsequential, since both combatants will eventually join the ranks of the dead. His only advice to Sextus is to hurry up and die:

Properate mori magnoque superbi quamvis e parvis animo descendite bustis
et Romanorum manes calcate deorum.
Quem tumulum Nili, quem Thybridis adluat unda,
quae ruitur, et ducibus tantum de funere pugna est.  
(806-810)

Hasten to die, proud of your great courage, descend from tombs however humble and trample the shades of Roman gods. It is only a question of whose grave the Nile will wash, whose the Tiber, and for the leaders the battle is merely over their burials.

The corpse's allusions go far into the future. He refers to Pompey's death in Egypt and Caesar's in Rome. The Roman gods are the deified emperors, not gods at all but ghosts like all the rest.

Regarding the information Sextus is most anxious to hear, the outcome of tomorrow's battle and his own fate, the corpse is enigmatic and reticent, and tells the youth he will have to await another prophet:

Tu fatum ne quaere tuum: cognoscere Parcae  
me reticente dabunt; tibi certior omnia vates  
ipse canet Siculis genitor Pompeius in arvis,  
ille quoque incertus, quo te vocet, unde repellat,  
quas iubeat vitare plagas, quae sidera mundi.  
Europam, miserri, Libyamque Asiamque timete:  
Distribuit tumulos vestris Fortuna triumphis.  
O miseranda domus, toto nil orbe videbis  
tutius Emathia. (811-810)

As for you, do not ask about your destiny: The Fates will allow you to know even though I am silent; a surer prophet, your sire Pompey himself will declare all to you in the fields of Sicily, though even he will be uncertain whither to summon you, whence to drive you away, what regions and what stars he should command you avoid. Wretches, beware of Europe, Libya, and Asia: Fortune has allotted you tombs in the lands of your triumphs. O wretched house, in the whole world you will see nothing safer than Thessaly.

As before, a reader with knowledge of Roman history can easily interpret these words. Pompey will fall in Egypt, his elder son Gnaeus will be killed at Munda in the last
real battle of the war. Sextus will hang on waging a pirate war from Sicily until he is finally driven out by Agrippa and subsequently killed at Miletus. According to a scholiast, the reference to the surer prophet alludes to a tradition that Pompey appeared to Sextus in a dream on the eve of Agrippa's invasion and either warned his son flee or commanded that he come to him.\(^{11}\) Whatever the case, the corpse is denying Sextus the full and clear prophecy he had been guaranteed. Even Pompey's ghost will not be able to provide certitude (ille quoque incertus 814).

The only information Sextus can glean from the dead man's words are of little practical value. He is told to beware Europe, Asia and Africa; in other words all three continents of the known world. Sextus, who sought out a necromant because he feared the unknown, is now told he has nothing to look forward to but doom. This is hardly a prophecy to inspire confidence. It merely underlines the futility of prophecy, a theme that runs throughout the Bellum Civile,\(^ {12}\) and recalls Erichtho's earlier admonition that magic has little power to alter fate.

The necromancy episode has been criticized as mere padding because it does not in any way advance the action of plot of the poem.\(^ {13}\) Sextus is only a minor character. His first appearance is in this scene; he takes no role in the battle at Pharsalus (historically he was not there).
and appears again only briefly in Book 9, to inform Gnaeus of their father's death. The apparent insignificance of the witch scene, and of Sextus, emphasizes the inefficacy of witchcraft, which, for Lucan, in turn reflects the futility of human endeavors. In spite of Erictho's grand posturing and the elaborate, extended descriptions of the ritual, the entire episode might just as well not have happened, since events would have gone on unchanged in any case. In other epics, a nekuia provides the hero with essential information, both practical and otherwise. Odysseus learns of the troubles that face him on the way home, and learns of the true emptiness of death. Aeneas is told of the future destiny of Rome and thus strengthens his resolve. In both cases the nekuia is an essential element in the plot. Witchcraft, however, in the literary tradition, is a futile endeavor, and so Lucan's sham nekuia teaches only futility.
CHAPTER VI

WITCHCRAFT AND CIVIL WAR

In the preceding chapters I have illustrated how the presentation of Erictho can be illuminated by an examination of the literary tradition of the witch figure in Roman literature. Now, to conclude this study, it is necessary to see how Erictho's role as a literary witch affects her function in the Bellum Civile as a whole, and to demonstrate that Lucan utilized these traditional elements in his treatment of Erictho because they were ideal for his own literary purposes.

It has already been demonstrated by previous scholarship that although the Erictho episode does not advance the action of the poem, it serves an important function as an expression of some of Lucan's primary themes, and thus sets an appropriate tone for the climactic battle in Book 7. As a prelude to Pharsalus, the scene of witchcraft in Book 6 presents an image of unnatural horror and atrocity, and so epitomizes the prevailing attitude of the epic and becomes a fitting backdrop for the upcoming conflict, where the opposing combatants of the war come together. More significant is the way in which this
episode, as Lucan's nekúia, underlines Lucan's anti-Vergilian message. Not only does Lucan counter the promise of the Aeneid with the corpse's grim prophecy of death, but the grisly form and setting of the scene rebuke the Vergilian model as well.

These assessments have however been incomplete, and have been hampered by the fact that Erictho has been viewed within the isolated context of Lucan's epic rather than within the literary tradition of the witch figure which was familiar to Lucan and his audience. Now that Erictho has been examined within the context of the Roman witch tradition, it is appropriate to demonstrate how this analysis can further qualify her connection to the whole of Lucan's epic.

As I have demonstrated the various witches of the Roman literary tradition exhibit a continuity in both form and theme. Formally, they are linked by the terminology used, the techniques of their craft, and most importantly by the obligatory witch's catalogue. Thematically, the literary witches present a hostile threat to civilized human society and are oppositious to natural order, associated with the reversal of accepted human norms. Lucan's portrayal of Erictho accords with this tradition. The terminology and other formal elements used to describe Erictho echo the traditional presentation, as does the atmosphere of unnatural horror which dominates the episode.
Other important issues that clarify the function of the witch figure can be divined by examining the presentation of different witch types, all of which offer significant insights into the literary role of the witch figure as a whole and hence are relevant to the presentation of Erictho.

In Chapter 2, I demonstrated that Lucan invites comparison between Erictho and the arch-sorceress Medea, and thereby highlights the dichotomy between the two witches. As I have shown, the sorceresses, particularly Medea, function as a heroic paradigm for other literary witches. Although in her magic Medea employs the same techniques and performs the same feats as her mortal counterparts, she is also a superhuman, larger-than-mortal figure. As such she is not bound by ordinary human limitations and so can perform horrible, unnatural deeds with success and impunity. Mortal witches, the hags and amateur witches, strive to emulate these sorceresses, although with less efficacy, since they are striving to be something they are not and to exceed the limits of human endeavor. Lucan's use of this aspect of the witch tradition is specific and deliberate. He carefully constructs his scene of witchcraft so that it recalls the treatment of Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and to a lesser extent the *Medea* of Seneca. He develops Erictho into a parody of Medea such that just as he invites comparison between the
two witches by choosing Medea as his model, he undercuts that comparison to emphasize the fact that his witch falls short of the heroic, epic paradigm.

The fact that belief in and practice of magic was widespread in antiquity is also important to the role of the literary witch. I have shown that, in accordance with the realistic nature and historical setting of the epic, Lucan's witch scene exhibits a substantial affinity to the magic practiced in Lucan's day. Although the episode itself is fictional, it does recall elements of historical tradition regarding Sextus Pompey and the Pompeians in general. Furthermore, Lucan goes to great lengths to give Erictho's rite a mantle of realism, notwithstanding his poetic embellishment and rhetorical hyperbole. When the gruesome exaggeration is brushed aside, Erictho's activities are akin to those attributed to ancient magicians. The details of the ritual itself demonstrate a careful attention to authenticity, as can be proven by examining them in light of magical papyri and magical treatises. These details are however not an accurate presentation of a necromantic rite, indicating that Lucan is more concerned with creating an atmosphere of realism than with realism per se. This realism functions to link Erictho with her real-life counterparts, the sagae and veneficae. For Lucan's contemporaries, these "witches" are for the most part lowly, disreputable figures. They can be dangerous,
but are insignificant, minor characters, playing only a small role in the grand scheme of things. Thus the realistic aspects of Lucan's portrayal of Erictho undermine her grandeur and emphasize the unepic qualities of her role.

Erictho's stature is further diminished by the fact that she is presented as a comic figure, as can be illustrated by the literary tradition. The hag as literary type was developed primarily by the Augustans, and functioned as a target for mocking invective. In Horace and the elegists the hag is a figure of vulgar farce. Her ugliness is exaggerated to absurd levels, and her equally exaggerated magical powers are belittled. Thus ridiculed, the witch's ability to threaten the poet or society is lessened or defeated. In creating Erictho Lucan translates the comic hag from her normal haunts into the realm of epic. Like earlier hags, Erictho is a grotesquely cartoonish figure, whose gruesome antics reveal established literary elements of farce and slapstick, and this comic treatment discredits her role as a terrifying witch.

Finally, I have demonstrated that in the literary tradition witchcraft practiced by mortals is presented as futile and ineffective. Although the issue of whether or not magic worked is never questioned in the literary treatments of witches, witchcraft, except for that practiced by the great sorceresses, usually fails to achieve the
desired goal. Thus the hags are made to appear foolish, and for amateur witches such as Dido or Deianira witchcraft proves tragic and self-destructive. In the case of Erictho, I have shown that an appreciation of this aspect of the witch tradition can clarify the assessment of Lucan's witch scene, since, aside from the recent work by Masters, scholars have seen Erictho as a powerful and terrifying witch. On careful examination, it is evident that the success of Erictho's ritual is minimal, since the corpse she resurrects fails to give the accurate, detailed prophecy requested by Sextus. Furthermore the prophecy delivered by the corpse is only a message of futility and helplessness.

Now that Erictho has been analyzed with an appreciation of the Roman literary tradition, a full assessment of her role can be made. She is a hideous figure, who delights in gruesome abominations and is thoroughly at home in the chaos of civil war. She is also, however, a mundane and lowly figure, a caricature of the wretched sagae of Lucan's contemporary world, and thus a poor parallel to the legendary Medea. Her grotesque extravagances, drawn in the manner of the traditional Roman hag, make her grimly farcical rather than truly fearsome. Her magic moreover, is a futile endeavor, since her elaborate ritual is flawed, produces no useful information, and is inconsequential to the subsequent events of the war. In sum, Erictho is
a portrait of horrific banality. Her ugliness, her evil
craft, her sinister atrocities, are all in vain, since
she is in reality merely a deluded, ineffectual, wretched
mortal.

A character of this sort is well suited to preside
over the major prophecy of the Bellum Civile. For Lucan,
the civil war is a horrible abomination. His presentation
is darkly comic, and deliberately devoid of heroic, glorious
sentiments. These are the characteristics with which Lucan
has invested Erictho. Hence Erictho embodies not only
the ugliness of civil war, as has been suggested by previous
scholars, but also the banality and the grim humor that
is entailed in Lucan's vision of the conflict.

The emptiness of Erictho's prophecy, discussed in
Chapter 5, is also indicative of the prevailing tone of
the epic. The overriding mood of the Bellum Civile is
one of despair and inevitable doom. The bloody struggles
of the war are of no avail since in the end the villain
Caesar will triumph and Rome will lose her freedom. The
efforts of individuals to control their own destiny are
in vain since they cannot hope to prevail over the whim
of Fortune, who controls the course of events and for the
moment is firmly on the side of Caesar. The various
prophecies in the epic predict only catastrophe and death,
such that at the beginning of Book 2 Lucan denies that
there is any benefit derived from prophecy, since it can
only rob mankind of fruitless hopes (2.4-15).

Additionally, the presentation of Erictho is significant in that, as discussed in Chapter 2, it underscores the disparity between the two antagonists, Caesar and Pompey. Erictho is consulted by a Pompeian, and is thus linked with the losing side. Moreover, Pompey is the character in the poem who most emphatically exemplifies the impotence of human endeavor against the vicissitudes of Fortune. Lucan's Pompey is weak and ineffectual, a poor excuse for a champion of the Republic and yet a perfect emblem of it.¹ He is compared to a rotting oak waiting for the wind to knock it down (1.136-142), or a sailor who lets the storm take his ship where it would (7.125-127). In Book 7 he allows himself to be drawn into battle at Pharsalus, against his better judgment and to his own defeat. The consultation of the witch on the part of Sextus underlines the weakness and futility of the Pompeian cause, and this weakness is emphasized by the dismal prophecy of the corpse.

The only character who seems to be able to control his own destiny is Fortune's favorite: Caesar. Caesar in the Bellum Civile is forceful, dominant, confident and invincible.² He usurps not only the Roman government, but also divine world and even the language of the poem.³ He is also, as discussed in Chapter 2, associated with another witch: the sorceress Medea. As I have illustrated
above, Lucan uses the image of Medea to represent the horror of civil war, and specifically uses this image in connection with Caesar and the Caesarian forces. Medea, as a mythical sorceress, is a witch's ideal, the kind of witch who can perform horrible atrocities with success and impunity. She is thus an appropriate symbol for Lucan's Caesar, the cruel and indomitable villain who destroys everything that stands in his way. Lucan has thus used two witches to emblematize the hideous conflict of the civil war. Medea stands for the atrocities perpetrated by the invincible Caesar, while Erictho embodies the horror, the banality, and the futility that characterizes the struggle for the other, lesser players of the epic.

In this dissertation I have attempted to explicate the role of Lucan's Erictho through an understanding of the traditions that govern the treatment of witches in Roman literature. I have discussed the various continuities in the presentation of literary witches, and demonstrated that Lucan's treatment of Erictho conforms with the literary tradition. Furthermore, Lucan's adherence to the tradition is not dictated by a devotion to conformity, since the treatment of Erictho also accords with the prevailing mood of the Bellum Civile, and is a significant expression of some of Lucan's dominant themes. Lucan's Erictho is a traditional Roman witch because for Lucan, the traditional witch figure, as understood by a Roman audience, was ideally
suited to the needs of his epic. For this reason, a fuller understanding and appreciation of the role of the witch figure in Roman literature is vital to an understanding of Erictho's role in the Bellum Civile.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Throughout this dissertation I use the title *Bellum Civile*. For a discussion of the debate on this subject see Frederick Ahl, *Lucan: an Introduction*, (Ithaca and London: 1976), 326-332.

2 Throughout I use the spelling "Erichtho", which is the form given in the edition of A. E. Housman, *M. Annaei Lucani De Bello Civili libri decem*, (Oxford: 1927), and is now generally preferred over the older "Erichtho".


7 For a discussion of this aspect of Lucan's style, see C. A. Martindale, "Paradox, Hyperbole and Literary Novelty in Lucan's *De Bello Civili*, *BICS* 23 (1976): 45-54.


Sullivan, 117-120.


Johnson, chapter 2, esp.44-45.

Williams, 180-184.

Morford, x.

Heitland, Pharsalia, xxxiii, lxxv.


Gordon, 234-235; Fauth, esp. 238ff.; Johnson, 19-20.

See Feeney, 289ff.

This is a key factor in the analyses of Ahl, 140-147;

CHAPTER I


The witch in Vergil Eclogue 8 claims to have learned her craft from a man named Moeris. Tiresias raises the dead in Seneca's *Oedipus*. However, the treatment of male magicians does not conform to the characteristics of the literary witch as delineated in this chapter.

Since this project is toward an explication of Lucan's witch I have excluded the witches who appear in post-Neronian literature, and so do not discuss Medea in Valerius Flaccus or the witches of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

See Chapter 2 for the treatment of Medea in Roman literature.

For the purposes of this study I accept Hercules Oetaeus as genuine. See Norman T. Pratt, *Seneca's Drama*, (Chapel Hill and London: 1983), 28.

In Italy magical abilities were attributed to a number of rustic peoples, notably the Sabines and the Marsi. See Tavenner, 21-25, and Kirby Flowers Smith, "Magic (Greek and Roman)," *Encyclopaedia of Reliogion and Ethics*, 1951 edition, vol. 8, 276.

In Aristophanes Clouds 749-755 a character refers to the trick of the Thessalian witches of drawing down the moon. Plato refers to this as well at *Gorgias* 513a. Simaeatha in Theocritus' second idyll says that before trying magic on her own she had consulted certain old women (2.19).

See John Widdowson, "The Witch as a Frightening and Threatening Figure," *The Witch Figure*, Venetia Newall ed., (London and Boston: 1973), 200-220. The numerous articles in Max Marwick, ed., *Witchcraft and Sorcery*, (Harmondsworth:
1970), will also suggest the range of this kind of witch figure.

9 The best collation of motifs is that of Ludwig Fahz, De Poetarum Romanorum Doctrina Magica Quaestiones Selectae, RGVV 2.3, (Giessen: 1904). See especially pp. 43-58 for Lucan's debt to earlier authors.

10 Cicero De divinatione 1.31.65

11 The ancient sources are Pliny N.H. 30.3ff and Apuleius Apologia 25

12 All translations unless otherwise specified are my own.


14 Although Vergil does not give a name to this witch, for the sake of simplicity I shall refer to her as Simaetha, after her Theocritean counterpart.

15 On the rhombus see Tupet, 50-55. For hippomanes ibid. 79-81.

16 Pliny N.H. 18.41 discusses a court case involving this law.

17 For Hercules role as a hero in Seneca see Pratt, 115-116


19 For a discussion of this theme see Bramble, "Lucan," 41-43 and 47-61; and Martindale, "Paradox, Hyperbole," 45-47.

20 See Gordon, "Lucan's Nekuia," 234

CHAPTER II

1 Although Medea herself is never mentioned by Homer, there are references to the Argo (Odyssey 12.70) and Medea's father Aeetes (Odyssey 12.70 and 10.137). Medea does however appear in Hesiod Theogony 961. Accounts of Medea in Greek literature include Pindar Pyth. 4, Euripides' tragedy Medea, a lost Medea of Neophron (for which see Denys Page, ed., Euripides: Medea, (Oxford: 1938), xxx ff.), and Apollonius' Argonautica. Roman treatments preceding Lucan include lost tragedies by Ennius, Accius, Ovid, and Lucan himself (see André Arcellaschi, Médée dans le théâtre latin d'Ennius à Sénèque, (Rome: 1990)), as well as extant treatments by Ovid and Seneca (see below).


4 Malcolm Davies, "Deianeira and Medea: a foot-note to the pre-history of two myths," Mnemosyne 42 (1989): 469-473, suggests that this may have been the original nature of Deianira's character.

5 Gordon "Aelian's Peony," 80-82.

6 For a fuller discussion see Arcellaschi, 318-324.

7 Lucan was not the first to see the episode of the
earthborn men as a civil war, and he no doubt had in mind the passage of Ovid Met 7.141-142: terrigenae pereunt per mutua vulnera fratres / civilique cadunt acie.

Arcellaschi, 320, suggests that Lucan's use of Medea was in part inspired by the fact Caesar had used the image of Medea as propaganda. He bases this assertion primarily on the fact that Caesar had placed a painting of Medea in the temple of Venus Genetrix (ibid., 10, 423-424).

Martindale, "Lucan's Nekuia," 368-369, discusses some of Lucan's reasons for having a Pompeian consultant.

For a discussion of the surviving fragments of Ovid's Medea, see Arcellaschi, 247-267.


Previous discussions of Lucan's use of Ovid's Medea include: Martindale, "Lucan's Nekuia," 372; and Baldini Moscadi, 145-146.

See chapter 3 for a discussion of the specific ingredients.

Interestingly an early editor emended the text here from et viles to nec viles on the evidence of the Ovidian line, although subsequent editors have restored the manuscript reading. For a discussion see W. E. Heitland, "Notes on the Text of Lucan," CR 9 (1895): 152-153.


In these lines Lucan is drawing on the pattern of Ovid's Invidia (Met. 2.791-794).

For Pompey in the Bellum Civile see Ahl, 150-189; and Johnson, 67-100.

CHAPTER III

See especially Ludwig Fahz, De Poetarum Romanorum Doctrina Magica Quaestiones Selectae, RGVV 2.3, (Giessen:
1904), 58-64; and A. Bougery, "Lucaen et la Magie," REL 6 (1928): 301-305.

2A point discussed by, among others Bougery, op. cit. 301-302; Martindale, "Lucan's Nekuia," 371; Johnson, 21, n. 21.

3Liebeschuetz, 126-139.


5On this point see Phillips, "Nullum Crimen," 264.


7Martindale, "Lucan's Nekuia," 373

8Bougery suggests that the consultation may be factual (300-301).


10This episode is also discussed in Martindale, "Lucan's Nekuia," 368; and Ahl, 133-137.

11For example: Fahz and Bougery (see above), and A. M. Tupet, La Magie dans la Poésie Latine, passim.


13For the connection between dogs and Hecate see Apollonius 3.1217; Theocritus 2.12. The connection with sinister magic is discussed in Fritz Graf, "Prayer in Magical and Religious Ritual," Magika Hiera, 191.

14There seems to have been some confusion as to whether lycourium was another name for amber, or another element
similar to amber. The relevant passages in Pliny include: N. H. 8.137 and 37.34.

15 Tupet, 71-72

16 Tupet: for the echenais, 67; dragon's eyes, 70-71; eagle stones, 58-59.


18 Georg Luck, Arcana Mundi, (Baltimore and London: 1985), 25-26; K. F. Smith, "Magic (Greek and Roman)," 278


21 See note 18 above.


23 Nock, 227; and Martindale, "Lucan's Nekuia," 372-373.

24 Ahl, 148


CHAPTER IV

1 Johnson, 22-23


3 Masters, 180
4 Johnson, 64; see also the review of Johnson's book by Lynette Thompson, CJ 86 (1990): 85-87.


6 Noted by Martindale, "Lucan's Nekuia," 370. However Martindale focuses on the novelty of a gruesome realistic witch in epic, not on the comic qualities.


13 Normally it is only male magicians who transform themselves into wolves: e. g. Vergil Eclogue 8.97; Petronius Satiricon 62.

14 For the meaning of these lines see Tupet, 376-377.


16 Richlin, 75-76.

17 Kathleen Morgan, Ovid's Art of Imitation: Propertius

Post-Neronian hags include Philaenis of Martial 9.29, and the witches of Apuleius' Metamorphoses.


I discuss the issue of Erictho's efficacy in Chapter 5; see also the remarks of Masters, 198-199.

For Lucan's first person intrusions into his poem see Williams, 233-234; and Berthe Marti, "Lucan's Narrative Techniques," La Parola del Passato, 30 (1975): 82-86.

Johnson, 56.

Ibid. 55-60.

Masters, 58.

CHAPTER V

Ahl, 32-33 finds her far more informative than the Pythia; See also Johnson, 19-22, for his hyperbolic discussion of her power over the universe.

Masters, 196-204.


Segal, 181-182.

A discussion of Dido's ritual as magic can be found in Tupet, 232-266.


Erictho's remark is indeed puzzling and has been commented on by most scholars who treat this scene. Masters sees it as a non sequitur and as a parody of the Sibyl's witticism at Aeneid 6.125-129. Others have noted its oddity but offered little in the way of an explanation. See Martindale, "Three Notes on Lucan VI," Mnemosyne 30 (1977): 379; and Ahl, 132.

Masters, 180-196.

Dick, "Technique of Prophecy," 49; Makowski, 195


Heitland, Pharsalia, xxxiii.

CHAPTER VI

The unheroic characterization of Pompey is well established. See Ahl, 149-173; and Johnson, 67-100.

See Ahl, 197-209; and Johnson, 101-134.

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