Illuminating Darkness: Virgilian Ambiguity and Lucan's Underworld

*Revised from a paper given to the Virgil Society on 5 December 2020**

Lucan's *Bellum Civile* (henceforth *BC*) has long been assumed to stand in striking opposition to Virgil's *Aeneid*. The *BC's* opening lines appear to adopt a competitive – even combative – stance relative to Virgil's epic undertaking: Lucan's declaration to sing of *bella plus quam civilia* (Lucan 1.1) goes beyond the *Aeneid*'s theme of *arma virumque* (Virgil, *Aen.* 1.1), while his description of his epic project as *inmensum opus* (Luc. 1.68) outstrips even the "greater" series of events – the war in Italy – which Virgil frames as his *maius opus* (*Aen.* 7.44–5) in the *Aeneid*'s latter books. Lucan's proem, with its visceral imagery of Roman self-harm and language of criminality (Luc. 1.1–7), seems to establish a decidedly destructive trajectory for the poem, a marked diversion from the theme of (extremely) hard-won progress towards Roman greatness which Virgil lays out (*Aen.* 1.1–7). Yet even as his poem's *furor* blossoms like a fresh bloodstain and Lucan presents us with harrowing descriptions of the Roman world in ruins (Luc. 1.24–39, 7.397–406), with laments on the triumph of Caesarian tyranny (Luc. 7.385–459), and with morbid images of the bodies of nations mouldering on the plains of Pharsalus (Luc. 7.617–43),[1] we should not – and cannot – take a wholeheartedly 'pessimistic' approach to the question of the *BC*'s engagement with Virgil's epic.[2] After all, this question depends entirely upon our conception of Virgil and his ambivalence.[3] To

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[1] Fantham (2010) 209–11. For an overview of tensions of remembering and forgetting, speech and silence, and civil war, see Thorne (2011).

[2] On broader questions of Lucanian optimism and pessimism, particularly regarding the outcome(s) of civil war and Nero's reign, see Sanderson (2020) 190–223, 231–6; and Sanderson (forthcoming), respectively.

[3] Casali (2011) 85.

quote Masters: "Lucan is either laying bare the ambiguities inherent in Virgil, or he is setting up a straw Virgil to smash down … there is … either a negation of an imagined Virgilian stance, or otherwise an assertion that what is worrying in Virgil's vision should not be left in shadow".[4] Also, Casali has shown that the *BC*'s proem not only challenges Virgil's epic beginning, but also alludes to and builds upon two Virgilian discussions of civil war at the close of *Georgics* 1 (1.489–92) and during the 'parade of heroes' in *Aeneid* 6 (6.826–35).[5] It is therefore, as Narducci has noted, excessively short-sighted to see Lucan only in raging opposition to Virgil.[6]

This study builds upon these discussions of the dynamics of Lucan's interaction with Virgil's epic by considering how some of the most shocking, horrifying, and g(l)oriously overblown elements of the *BC*'s necromancy episode represent a calculated development rather than irreverent perversion of elements already present in the *Aeneid*'s underworld episode.[7] These episodes have often been read in conjunction with one another given their comparable positioning in the sixth book of their respective epics, and their inclusion of key shared elements:[8]

Table 1:

SHARED ELEMENTS	VIRGIL	LUCAN
INTENTIONS	Virg. *Aen.* 6.243–64: Aeneas' brave and honourable intentions	Luc. 6.420–4: Sextus Pompey is unworthy and fear-driven
GAINING ACCESS	Virg. *Aen.* 6.98–155, 236: Aeneas buries Misenus and acquires the golden bough	Luc. 6.667–774: Erictho's necromancy brings the underworld into the upperworld

[4] Masters (1992) 194.
[5] Casali (2011) 85.
[6] Narducci (1979) 35.
[7] Weber (2012) takes a similar approach to Virgil's exploitation of inconsistencies in Homer. On interactions between the dead and the living as a stock feature of ancient epic, see Finkmann (2020); Reitz (2020); Heil (2022) 1–3. For an overview of irreverence in/and Lucan's necromancy, see Pinkham (2020) 36.
[8] For the structuring role of encounters with the dead in epic, see Heil (2022) 24. Finkmann (2020) 750–1, 774, 792–3, notes the presence of at least one of the following "character roles" in epic necromancy scenes: the consulter who requests the necromancy, the necromancer (intermediary between the living and the dead), the prophet ghost tasked with delivering the prophecy; and three distinct stages within the episode – preparations and votive offerings, invocations, conversations with the dead. Cf. Baertschi (2013) 116–19; Heil (2022) 6–7.

PROPHETIC FIGURE	Virg. *Aen.* 6.38–97: The reverent and revered Sibyl respects underworld laws and rites.	Luc. 6.695–718, 730–49: Erictho, while framed as a prophetic *vates* (Luc. 6.590–623), nonetheless bends the chthonic powers to *her* will.[9]
UNDERWORLD VISIONS	Virg. *Aen.* 6.679–702: Anchises leads Aeneas through Elysium to view figures from the future history of Rome.	Luc. 6.775–820: The corpse reanimated by Erictho describes an underworld in turmoil, with the shades of the damned delighting in Roman strife and suffering.[10]

Virgil's underworld episode is broadly understood as a kind of *nekyia*,[11] and the Cumaean Sibyl, Deiphobe, has been identified as not only Aeneas' tour guide for the underworld but also the instructor of a *necromantic* ritual and the facilitator for his conversations with the dead.[12] Given the wider metapoetic use of underworld scenes to explore one's relationship to earlier poetry,[13] this section of the *BC* can offer rich commentaries on Lucan's engagement with Virgil's own underworld episode. I begin by showing that since much of Erictho's characteristic impiety – her association with unspeakable acts, aggressively intimate relationship with the underworld, and execution of necromantic rites – is already present (albeit in a more muted form) in Deiphobe, we cannot read Lucan's witch as an uncomplicated perversion of Virgil's Sibyl. Next, through consideration of the specific means by which Aeneas and Deiphobe and Sextus and Erictho access the underworld, I demonstrate that Virgil's *katabasis* process already contains distinctively necromantic elements: the preparation and arrangement of Misenus' body anticipates Erictho's treatment and reanimation of the unnamed corpse, while the episode's overarching structure and the sacrificial process the Sibyl oversees correspond closely to evocation rituals elsewhere in the literary tradition. Finally, I examine an instance of ambiguity within Virgil's parade of heroes, the mention of the Drusi and the Gracchi (*Aen.* 6.842–3) – an ambiguity which is unpacked further

[9] For parallels between Lucan's Erictho and Virgil's Allecto (*Aen.* 7.341–571), see Tesoriero (2000) 272.
[10] On the limits of the corpse's prophecy, see Masters (1992) 193–9; Pinkham (2020) 34.
[11] On *nekoumanteia* more broadly in Greco-Roman antiquity, see Ogden (2001) xviii.
[12] Ogden (2001) xxvi, xxix; Finkmann (2020) 754. This piece follows Ogden (2001) xix in understanding "necromancy" as "communication with the dead in order to receive prophecy from them". For distinctions between *katabasis* and necromancy, see Heil (2022) 3–4. On necromancy as a particularly transgressive branch of ancient magic, see Gordon (1999) 174–6, 182–4, 253; Ogden (2002) 9–60. Cf. Baertschi (2013) 33–4; Finkmann, Reitz, and Walter (2020).
[13] Parkes (2010); Schiesaro (2013) 20–4; Trinacty (2014) 220–31. Cf. Hardie (1993) 59–65.

and more explicitly in Lucan's presentation of these families within the underworld. This in turn invites a more nuanced and pragmatic reading of Virgil's treatment of Roman history in the underworld. Rather than attempting to frame the *BC*'s relationship with Virgil as being simply contrastive, this piece instead endeavours to understand what the manner of Lucan's engagement with his epic predecessor can reveal to us about the darkness already present within the *Aeneid* itself.

1. Underworld Guides: Lucan's Erictho and the Dark Side of Virgil's Sibyl

Both Virgil's Sibyl and Lucan's Erictho are identified as *vates*,[14] privileged prophetic figures with significant associations with poetic production by the early imperial period.[15] There has been a tendency to read Erictho as the antithesis of Virgil's Sibyl, who is introduced as *sanctissima vates* (*Aen.* 6.65).[16] After all, Lucan's *Thessala vates* (Luc. 6.651) revels in and excels at that which is – at least etymologically – unspeakable: her powers compel the Olympian deities to permit her to commit every kind of crime (*omne nefas superi prima iam voce precantis | concedunt carmenque timent audire secundum*, Luc. 6.527–8).[17] By terming Erictho's god-granted ambitions and direct engagement with the underworld as *nefas*, Lucan appears to construct an unsolvable paradox between Erictho and the *vates*' fundamental affiliation with that which is *fas*.[18] In addition to engaging in particularly savage rites (Luc. 6.507–68, 667–774),[19] Erictho has developed an intimate and near-unparalleled knowledge of the underworld, a realm which should remain undisturbed: *coetus audire silentum, | nosse domos Stygias arcanaque Ditis operti | non superi, non vita vetat* (Luc. 6.513–15).[20] Lucan's use of *nosse* here indicates that this insight has been gained 'first-hand',[21] positioning Erictho's far-reaching powers in stark opposition to Virgil's polite request to speak of the underworld (*Aen.* 6.264–7).[22] Not only does Erictho reveal the underworld's secrets without permission – she shares detailed insights into various underworld figures, their histories, and their weaknesses throughout the necromantic process (Luc. 6.695–718, 722–3, 730–49)[23] – but

[14] For *vates* and necromancy, see Finkmann (2020) 750. On *vates* more broadly, see Newman (1986); Santangelo (2015) 178–9; Sanderson (2020) 26–30.
[15] Newman (1986) 8, 51–2; O'Hara (1990) 177–8. Cf. Sanderson (2020) 26–30, 42–57, 133.
[16] For an overview of such comparisons, see Sanderson (2020) 4–5, 31 (n. 38).
[17] Ahl (1976) 148; O'Higgins (1988) 217; Masters (1992) 205; Pinkham (2020) 25–7.
[18] For *fari*, *fas*, and *nefas*, see Feeney (1991) 276–83; Bettini (2008) 329–32.
[19] Santangelo (2015) 181–4; McClellan (2019) 159–60. Cf. Martindale (1980) 364–5; Gordon (1987) 239.
[20] Sanderson (2020) 37–8. Tesoriero (2000) 184 notes the emphatic use of *opertus* here to stress the "special relationship" Erictho enjoys with the unnamed underworld god. Cf. Finiello (2005) 164; Pinkham (2020) 29.
[21] For other examples of *nosse* in this sense, see Tesoriero (2000) 133.
[22] Tesoriero (2000) 133. For discussion of Virgil's appeal, see Horsfall (2013) 230–3. Cf. Sanderson (2020) 37.
[23] Ogden (2001) 177.

we are told that she defies chthonic laws to raise entire armies from the dead (Luc. 6.633–6), even before we witness her put these skills to work at Sextus' request.[24]

The corpse which Erictho reanimates to deliver Sextus' civil war prophecy – identified as a *vates* along with its creator (Luc. 6.628–9) – also demonstrates comparable disregard for underworldly protocols and engages with the underworld in a similarly irreverent manner.[25] Being only recently deceased, the corpse was unable to enter the underworld proper (Luc. 6.777–8).[26] Nonetheless, he gathered relevant information from other shades (*quod tamen e cunctis mihi noscere contigit umbris*: "but what it did befall me to get to know from all the shades", Luc. 6.789), knowledge which *noscere* here suggests was gathered 'first-hand'.[27] In fact, as the corpse's underworld description unfolds, he indicates that he himself *saw* much of what he is relaying, *vidi … vidi* (Luc. 6.785, 795).[28] The affirmative and personal tone of the utterance's opening line (*tristia non equidem Parcarum stamina … aspexi*: "I did not indeed see the gloomy threads of the Parcae", Luc. 6.777–8), as well as the use of *contingere* in relation to this reconnaissance (*quod tamen e cunctis mihi noscere contigit umbris*, Luc. 6.779), suggests that the corpse engaged actively and personally with the underworld in order to acquire this knowledge. This candid interaction with the chthonic realm mirrors the necromantic methods by which Erictho exercises her vatic powers. Both Erictho and the corpse can access the underworld's secrets (Luc. 6.513–15, 777–8), communicate with its inhabitants (Luc. 6.565–8, 695–718, 730–49, 779), and construct 'fated' utterances based on what they have learned (Luc. 6.527–8, 780–820). As such, the corpse's account of the situation in the underworld constitutes a kind of 'necromancy within the necromancy', replaying his creator's daring approach to the underworld and effectively returning the dead to the upperworld through his detailed descriptions.

Such a reading of Lucan's Erictho holds as long as we focus primarily upon references to the Sibyl's claims to piety. While Virgil's Deiphobe is apparently well-certified in this area, her credentials are stressed time and again, perhaps a little *too* emphatically. Nonetheless, there are certain ambiguities around her character, powers, and actions which cast a shadow of ambivalence over her and thus complicate a simplistic interpretation of Erictho as merely the tarnished inversion of her Virgilian counterpart. The dynamics of the Sibyl's

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[24] On Erictho's offer of an actual *katabasis* at Luc. 6.662–6 and her status as "the embodiment of a supernatural and underworldly worldview", see Masters (1992) 190; Reitz (2020) 453; Heil (2022) 78.

[25] On the limited vatic powers of the reanimated corpse, see Finkmann (2020) 790; Pinkman (2020) 33; Sanderson (2020) 150–62.

[26] Finkmann (2020) 781–2. Cf. Heath (2005) 396–7; Martin (2014) 8–9.

[27] Masters (1992) 198–9; Tesoriero (2000) 245; Finkmann (2020) 790. Cf. Heil (2022) 143.

[28] Tesoriero (2000) 246; Heil (2022) 139–42. For eyewitness accounts and historical autopsy, see, for example, Thucydides 1.22.2–3; Polybius 12.27.7; Marincola (1997) 63–86; Morgan (2000) 51–69.

connection with the goddess Hecate, her power to bend the laws of the underworld, her ability to 'speak the unspeakable' to Aeneas, and the 'hands on' approach she takes to her autopsy of Tartarus, force us to reconsider whether there really is "nothing unauthorized, destructive, wicked, or deceitful about her".[29] Even though we are told that Deiphobe is a priestess of Apollo and Diana (*Aen.* 6.35), as well as a prophetic vessel for the former (*Aen.* 6.9–12, 56–97), Virgil's Sibyl is, as Ogden has observed, "to some extent assimilated to a witch": she is *horrenda* (*Aen.* 6.10), a priestess of Hecate-Trivia (*Aen.* 6.35), and a guide for the epic's central figure to consult the underworld.[30] After Aeneas has acquired the golden bough and dealt with the body of Misenus – an episode to which we will turn shortly – the Sibyl offers a sacrifice to Hecate (*Aen.* 6.247) as part of a wider ritual to allow their passage into the underworld (*Aen.* 6.236–63). Horsfall notes that here Hecate is "clearly viewed as a principal deity of the underworld", despite her broader powers and association with witches.[31] While this may be the case on the surface, given the extensive prior and contemporary traditions relating to Hecate, witches, and witchcraft, it is impossible to entirely set aside the potentially transgressive undertones of this connection.

This is especially significant when we consider Hecate's connection with the horrible and *un*speakable activities of witches.[32] For example, Apollonius Rhodius dreads to specify the sacrifices Medea and the Argonauts make to Hecate: ...καὶ δὴ τὰ μέν, ὅσσα θυηλὴν | κούρη πορσανέουσα τιτύσκετο – μήτε τις ἴστωρ | εἴη μήτ᾽ ἐμὲ θυμὸς ἐποτρύνειεν ἀείδειν – | ἅζομαι αὐδῆσαι ("I stand in dread of telling all the things that the girl made ready in preparing the sacrifice: let no-one be acquainted with it, and let my heart not urge me to sing of it", Ap. Rhod. 4.247–50), details of which should not be known by mankind.[33] Horace implies that Canidia – who invokes Hecate and Tisiphone during her magical activities (Horace, *Sat.* 1.8.33–4) – makes no distinction between what should and should not be said and presumably speaks the unspeakable (*quid dixit aut quid tacuit?* Horace, *Epod.* 5.49), while preparing to harvest a child's body parts for a love potion.[34] Deiphobe is framed as a *vates*, a purveyor of *fas* – of things which are divinely permitted to be spoken.[35] However, Virgil also tells us that her links to Hecate go far beyond the sacrifice scene: guardianship of

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[29] Ogden (2001) 147. For the challenges and impossibilities of underworld autopsy in ancient epic, see Heil (2022) 33–7, 138–9.

[30] Ogden (2001) 146. See *ibid.* xxvii, xxix on the Cumaean Sibyl's long-standing association with necromancy.

[31] Horsfall (2013) 140. For Hecate-Trivia as one of the patron goddesses of Avernus, see Ogden (2001) 69.

[32] For Hecate and witches more broadly, see Ogden (2002) 112, 116, 273. On Hecate, witches, and disturbance of the dead, see, for example, Theocritus, *Id.* 2.10–16; Horace, *Sat.* 1.8.25–45.

[33] Duncan (2001) 49. There is also a tantalising element of Hecate's own 'un-*see*-ability' at Ap. Rhod. 3.1194–220.

[34] Mankin (1995) 125.

[35] For a summary of discussions of *fas*, *fari*, *nefas* and (un)speakability, see Bettini (2008); Sanderson (2020) 27–8, 38,

the groves of Avernus was granted to her by Hecate personally (*Aen.* 6.118, 564),[36] who also granted her privileged knowledge of the underworld's darkest corners (*Aen.* 6.565). It becomes clear that Deiphobe has a particularly close and fruitful relationship with the very goddess who oversees and perhaps even facilitates acts of *nefas*.[37] While by no means as overtly threatening or repulsive as, say, Horace's Canidia or Lucan's Erictho, the nature of her connection with the goddess Hecate – and the chthonic autopsy she is able to carry out as a result of it – nonetheless casts a shadow over her identification by Aeneas as an entirely *sanctissima vates* ("most holy prophetess", *Aen.* 6.65).

The ambivalent implications of this contradiction become even more apparent when we consider just what Hecate's underworldly mentoring has allowed the Sibyl to understand as she describes *impia Tartara* to Aeneas (*Aen.* 6.535–627). This is the only section of the underworld described by the Sibyl rather than seen through Aeneas' eyes.[38] Although the chaste are explicitly forbidden from entering this realm (*nulli fas casto sceleratum insistere limen*, *Aen.* 6.563),[39] the Sibyl has attained an unparalleled understanding of its occupants and torments. Deiphobe warns Aeneas against asking for additional details (*ne quaere doceri | quam poenam, aut quae forma viros fortunave mersit*, *Aen.* 6.614–15), and ends her account by claiming that she would be unable to detail them all: *non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum, | ferrea vox, omnis scelerum comprendere formas, | omnia poenarum percurrere nomina possim* ("Had I a hundred tongues and a hundred mouths, a voice of iron, I could not encompass all the forms of wickedness, nor run through all the varieties of punishment", *Aen.* 6.625–7).[40] This is perhaps to be expected, given that those punished here have committed the most heinous of crimes (*ausi omnes immane nefas ausoque potiti*, *Aen.* 6.624).[41] Tartarus and its inhabitants would seem, therefore, to be unknowable (*ne quaere doceri*), uncontainable and incomprehensible (*non … comprendere*),[42] and ultimately *un*speakable

[36] For parallels between Aeneas' rationale for choosing the Sibyl as his guide and Aristaeus' need for Proteus to help regain his bees at *Geo*. 4.447–9, see Crabbe (1978) 21–2.

[37] For Hecate as an "exceptionally distinguished" teacher here, qualified to give a *full* account of Tartarus, see Horsfall (2013) 398.

[38] Zetzel (1989) 265. On the "confusion and problems" of this account of punishments in Tartarus, see O'Hara (2007) 92. On the "grandiose style" of this subject matter, see Reitz (2020) 446.

[39] Horsfall (2013) 398; Heil (2022) 76–7. Cf. O'Hara (2007) 92.

[40] We are perhaps even set up to anticipate the excursus' sudden ending – Deiphobe falters slightly in her revelation, asking whether she should mention the fates of the Lapiths, Ixion, and Pirithous: *quid memorem Lapithas, Ixiona Pirithoumque?* (*Aen.* 6.601). On the "hundred mouths" motif here, see Gowers (2005); Horsfall (2013) 432–4.

[41] On comparison with other instances of *nefas* in the *Aeneid* here, see Horsfall (2013) 432. The criteria for punishment here (*Aen.* 6.608–14) recall some of the stock themes and elements of civil strife, including kin-conflict, an issue we will turn to in the final section of this piece.

[42] *OLD* s.v. 11.

(*non... percurrere*).[43] Here, we cannot help but recall Virgil's own earlier anxiety of revealing unpermitted aspects of the underworld (*Aen.* 6.266–7).

However, despite these content warnings, the Sibyl delivers a detailed and lengthy account of Tartarus' various judgements, punishments, and occupants (*Aen.* 6.566–624). Now, while she tells us that she is privy to such insights only via Hecate's careful instruction, *ipsa deum poenas docuit perque omnia duxit* ("she herself taught me the gods' punishments and guided me through everything", *Aen.* 6.565),[44] the terminology used here of this instruction and later of her perception of Tartarus demands some further examination. First, Deiphobe suggests that she has taken a 'hands on' (or at least 'eyes on') approach to understanding Tartarus, claiming to have *seen* elements of the region and its occupants: *hic et Aloidas geminos immania vidi | corpora* ("Here too I saw the twin Aloidae, vast figures", *Aen.* 6.582–3); *vidi et crudelis dantem Salmonea poenas* ("I saw also Salmoneus, paying a cruel penalty", *Aen.* 6.585); *nec non et Tityon ... cernere erat* ("And Tityos too could be seen", *Aen.* 6.595–6).[45] Horsfall summarises attempts to sanitise the striking inconsistency of this passage: the repetition of this language of seeing (*cernere*, *videre*) could be understood as nothing more than an imitation of Homer's recurring ἰδῶν in the *nekyia* of *Odyssey* 11 (55, 87), a major model for this episode;[46] alternatively, we could take these terms as indicators of "seeing through Hecate's eyes or in the eye of the imagination".[47] Such interpretations may go some way in momentarily reassuring us of the Sibyl's propriety, but leave two crucial issues unaddressed: the nature of the terminology she uses to engage Aeneas' attention throughout this passage and the distinction between sharing insights gathered by personal autopsy as opposed to those acquired through hearsay.

In addition to indicating that she somehow *saw* these Tartarean secrets, Deiphobe also encourages Aeneas to *look at* and *perceive* elements of Tartarus' exterior (*cernis custodia qualis | vestibulo sedeat, facies quae limina servet?*: "Do you see what kind of sentry sits in the doorway, what shape guards the threshold?", *Aen.* 6.574–5), after outlining the judgements that take place prior to entry (*Aen.* 6.566–74). Since, as Horsfall reminds us, *cernis* here is "not simply synonymous with *vides*",[48] we are perhaps to infer a degree of discernment rather than passive observation here. This encouragement to Aeneas to look *and* comprehend

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[43] *OLD* s.v. 5. On the Sibyl's professions of speechlessness here, see Gowers (2005) 178.

[44] Horsfall (2013) 397. For a summary of inconsistencies surrounding and readings of this detail in and beyond antiquity, see Weber (2012); Heil (2022) 68–9, 77.

[45] On the *ekphrastic* quality of this passage signalled by this vocabulary of sight, see Gowers (2005) 177.

[46] Horsfall (2013) 399. On autopsy in Homer's underworld, see Heil (2022) 34–5. Cf. Knauer (1964); Bright (1981).

[47] Horsfall (2013) 397–8. For Virgil's exploitation of existing Homeric ambiguities ("warts and all"), see Weber (2012) 176–7. Cf. Heil (2022) 74.

[48] Horsfall (2013) 404. Cf. Heil (2022) 84.

functions as a segue into the Sibyl's own Tartarean sightseeing and personal autopsy (*Aen.* 6.576–624):[49] both are shown to engage in a kind of active inquiry into a region which is full of *unspeakable* things. The ambivalent dynamics of this engagement with Tartarus force us to re-examine Aeneas' initial request to the Sibyl: *doceas iter et sacra ostia pandas* ("teach me the way and open the hallowed portals", *Aen.* 6.109).[50] Here, Aeneas asks the Sibyl for guidance, instruction, and revelation, and in doing so anticipates her own training by Hecate (*ipsa deum poenas docuit perque omnia duxit*, *Aen.* 6.565),[51] as well as her guided tour of elements of Tartarus: *tum demum horrisono stridentes cardine sacrae | panduntur portae* ("Then at last, grating on their raucous hinge, the hallowed gates are opened", *Aen.* 6.573–4). The repetition of *docere* (*Aen.* 6.109, 565), the simultaneous sense of opening and disclosure conveyed by *pandere* (*Aen.* 6.109, 574), and the hallowed nature of what is (asked to be) laid bare (*sacra*) mean that we cannot read Deiphobe's fulfilment of Aeneas' appeal without also thinking about her own instruction in this area. While Virgil's Sibyl stops short of revealing the full horrors of Tartarus, she perhaps says too much to leave us convinced of her status as *sanctissima vates*. In describing the region so comprehensively even thus far, in indicating the ambiguous means by which she became acquainted with this region and then instructing Aeneas to conduct the same kind of active autopsy, she has permitted the "chaste" to gain knowledge and access in defiance of the laws of the underworld (*Aen.* 6.563).

The question of autopsy leads us to the question of what sort of privileged insights can and should be shared more widely. As we have already noted, Virgil expresses concern over which underworld elements he might sing of, and requests divine permission for this endeavour: *sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro | pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas* ("let it be permitted to me to speak what I have heard; by your divine dispensation let me open up things plunged in the depths of the earth and in darkness", *Aen.* 6.266–7). As Gowers has shown, Virgil's narrative here is "consciously pitched at the level of partial revelation" and is framed as a "secondary account" based on earlier "hearsay".[52] Luck highlights an important qualification in Virgil's declaration: that he insists on revealing specifically those things which have been *heard* (*audita*).[53] In the context of mystery religions – which Luck cites as a significant influence on Virgil's underworld episode – sharing details acquired second-hand by hearsay (*audita*) was significantly less dangerous than divulging information gathered first-hand by observation and perception (*visa*), and thus did not break the

49 Heil (2022) 33.
50 On instruction, revelation, and mystery cults more broadly, see Luck (1973).
51 On the pedagogical sense of *ducere per*, see Weber (2012) 173.
52 Gowers (2005) 176.
53 Luck (1973) 160.

privileges of initiation.[54] Whether we actually take Virgil as an initiate of the Eleusinian mysteries matters not: we can still see a striking disjunction between what the poet himself frames as acceptable conduct in this sphere and what his apparently pious Sibyl actually enacts. Reading Lucan's Erictho as a mere inversion of Virgil's Sibyl only works if Deiphobe is entirely chaste, pious, and unproblematic. As we have just seen, this is not entirely true. Deiphobe's witchy dynamic, her connection with Hecate, disruption of underworld laws, and revelation of forbidden knowledge not only complicate her status as a vatic prophetess, but also foreshadow the qualities of Lucan's Erictho. Rather than perverting the image of her Virgilian counterpart, the *BC*'s *Thessala vates* augments and intensifies the Sibyl's ambivalent qualities and associations, bringing the *Aeneid*'s ambiguities into the light.

2. Corpses and Rituals: Accessing the Underworld

Lucan's Erictho delights in the dead, *hominum mors omnis in usu est* ("every human death is put to her use", Luc. 6.560): she harvests their body parts, mutilates their corpses, and plunders their bones and ashes (Luc. 6.525–6, 529–68, 581–7). During the necromancy episode, Erictho selects the corpse of an unknown fallen soldier (Luc. 6.627–31), drags it back to her liminal abode (Luc. 6.636–41), prepares and bolsters the body with a range of fantastical ingredients (Luc. 6.667–84),[55] calls on and threatens the underworld powers to release the shade to reoccupy its former body (Luc. 6.685–774),[56] and demands a prophecy in exchange for a proper burial (Luc. 6.762–74).[57] Erictho's treatment of the corpse is visceral and boldly creative, and leads to a kind of life returning to its chilly frame, which warms, quivers, leaps upright, and is finally granted the power of speech (Luc. 6.750–62, 776–820). Some key connections between this part of Lucan's necromancy episode and the underworld encounters of Virgil's Aeneas have been noted: first, in both instances an unburied body must be located and handled – in the case of Aeneas, the body of Misenus (Virgil, *Aen*. 6.156–235), in the case of Sextus, Erictho carefully selects a corpse to function as a prophetic vessel (Luc. 6.628–9) – in order to gain access to the underworld;[58] second, Erictho's ritual could be seen as a reversal of the order of Homeric and Virgilian chthonic consultations, since she provides a burial to the unburied corpse only once her objectives

[54] Luck (1973) 161.
[55] On the technical and professional precision with which Erictho carries out these tasks, see Sanderson (2020) 108–11; Heil (2022) 132–8. Cf. McClellan (2019) 160.
[56] On difficulties in communicating with and interpreting underworld entities more broadly, see Heath (2005) 392.
[57] Finkmann (2020) 760.
[58] Finkmann (2020) 760.

have been achieved (Luc. 6.820–5) in contrast to the experiences of Elpenor (Homer, *Od.* 10.51–89) and Misenus (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.156–82).[59]

O'Hogan has also demonstrated Lucan's close engagement with Virgil's account of Misenus' burial when detailing Pompey's meagre funeral on the shores of Egypt (Luc. 8.712–822).[60] Given the echoes of Misenus elsewhere in the *BC* and the broad parallels between his burial and elements of Erictho's necromancy, it makes sense to probe the Thessalian ritual a little more deeply. In doing so, we find that although Lucan is drawing upon Virgil's Misenus here, he is not simply inverting a straightforwardly pious Virgilian episode to underscore the *im*piety of his *Thessala vates* (Luc. 6.651). Rather, he draws out ambiguities already present in Virgil's verses, ambiguities which cast a distinctly uncomfortable tone over the burial rites, and forces them to stand centre stage. (Re)reading Virgil in light of Lucan's epic allows us to (re)consider the quasi-necromantic undertones of the burial rites the Sibyl orders Aeneas and the Trojans to perform for Misenus (*Aen.* 6.156–82) – particularly when read alongside the details of the subsequent sacrifice to Hecate and the underworld gods (*Aen.* 6.236–63). These undertones further desanitise Deiphobe as the instructor of a necromantic ritual,[61] and also leave lingering suggestions that *pius Aeneas* has taken an active role in a ritual which has hallmarks of both a necromantic reanimation *and* a human sacrifice.[62]

Let us begin with the framing of Misenus' body on the pyre. The Trojan band then rush to execute the Sibyl's orders and start to construct a pyre for Misenus: *tum iussa Sibyllae, | haud mora, festinant flentes aramque sepulcri | congerere arboribus caeloque educere certant* ("Then, without delay, in tears they quickly fulfil the Sibyl's orders, and compete to heap up an altar for the tomb from trees and raise it up to heaven", *Aen.* 6.176–8).[63] We find a rather disconcerting image in *aramque sepulcri*: although this convergence of terms for altar and tomb is not unique to this passage,[64] the phrase seems almost to set Misenus up as a part of the subsequent sacrificial package to enable access to the underworld. Aeneas and his comrades may appear to play by respectful ritualistic rules in their recovery and treatment of Misenus' body. However, all of this is performed not solely out of pious duty or obligation to a fallen companion, but as a means to a personal end: Aeneas' descent into

[59] Finkmann (2020) 760; Heil (2022) 45.
[60] O'Hogan (2021). Cf. Mayer (1982) *ad loc.*
[61] Finkmann (2020) 754.
[62] Aeneas will, of course, go on to engage in a voluntary human sacrifice of his own (*Aen.* 10.518–20) during a fit of rage following Turnus' killing of Pallas (*Aen.* 10.426–509). On undertones of human sacrifice in Virgil more broadly, see Dyson (1996).
[63] On tree felling and funerary contexts within the epic tradition, see O'Hogan (2021) 139–40.
[64] Horsfall (2013) 182.

the underworld. This is just one of the tasks Deiphobe outlines for him to complete before his request can be fulfilled (*Aen.* 6.142–55, 236), and we are reminded that these activities happen only because of her instructions: *tum iussa Sibyllae, | haud mora…* (*Aen.* 6.176–7). With the pyre constructed (*Aen.* 6.214–17),[65] the Trojans wash and anoint Misenus' body (*Aen.* 6.218–19). On the surface, this process recalls the step-by-step preparation of Patroclus' body (Homer, *Il.* 18.343–53), in which Achilles' comrades boil water, cleanse the dried blood from Patroclus' wounds, anoint him with oil, and place his robed body on a couch.[66] Homer notes the heat of the water used – θέρμετο δ᾽ ὕδωρ· | αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ ζέσσεν ὕδωρ ἐνὶ ἤνοπι χαλκῷ ("…and the water was heated; but when the water boiled in the shining bronze cauldron…", *Il.* 18.348–9) – but passes over the contrasting temperature of Patroclus' body, mentioning only his wounds and the crusty gore which covers him (*Il.* 18.344–5, 351).[67] Virgil comments on the chilly quality of Misenus' body as well as the temperature of the water heated by the Trojans: *pars calidos latices et aena undantia flammis | expediunt, corpusque lavant frigentis et unguunt* ("Some of them get ready hot water and bronze cauldrons bubbling in the flames, and they wash and anoint the cold man's body", *Aen.* 6.218–19). A clear contrast is drawn between the water and cauldrons and the frigid body to which they are applied, and by extension we cannot help but imagine the gradual return of quasi-lifelike warmth to Misenus' body during this process.

Closer inspection shows that the specific terminology used of the cleansing of the corpse (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.218–19) and its arrangement on the pyre (*Aen.* 6.220–2) seems almost to return some life to the defunct limbs, and in some ways even anticipates the reanimation of Erictho's anonymous corpse. Once the shade is forced to reluctantly re-enter its former body, its dried-up blood warms, courses through the body, and re-ignites its organs and limbs: *caluit cruor atraque fovit | volnera et in venas extremaque membra cucurrit. | Percussae gelido trepidant sub pectore fibrae* ("the blood grew hot and warmed the blackened wounds and ran into the veins and the extremities. The fibres in the frozen heart were struck and quivered", Luc. 6.750–2). The change in temperature (*caluit … fovit*) is the first indicator of this process, and the shift in agency from the newly (re)flowing blood in the first phrase to the *percussae fibrae* in the second indicates that life-giving power has begun transferring to the body's muscles, limbs, and sinews: *et nova desuetis subrepens vita medullis | miscetur morti* ("and new life, creeping into the unaccustomed marrow, mingles with death", Luc. 6.753–4). Movement then returns quickly as the limbs become active, *tunc omnis palpitat artus, | tenduntur nervi* ("Then he quivers in every limb, and the sinews are stretched", Luc.

[65] For echoes of Dido's pyre at *Aen.* 4.630–705, see Horsfall (2013) 204.
[66] Coray (2018) 145–8.
[67] Note Coray (2018) 147, here on ὠτειλάς.

6.754–5), and the whole body suddenly springs up from the ground: *nec se tellure cadaver | paulatim per membra levat, terraque repulsum est | erectumque semel* ("and not gradually does the corpse raise itself limb by limb from the earth, but it rebounds from the ground and is at once upright", Luc. 6.755–7).[68] Something similar also happens to Misenus. Once he is positioned on the pyre, the implicit suggestion of cold deceased limbs regaining quasi-lifelike warmth gains further credence as he (at least apparently) experiences a loosening of his limbs. With some warmth presumably restored to his stiff and cold body, Misenus can then be arranged and clothed in his usual garb prior to cremation (*Aen.* 6.220–2). The phrase *tum … toro … reponunt* ("then they lay … on the couch") appears innocuous at first glance: after all, *reponere* can denote a placing or putting into place, particularly of a body.[69] However, the verb also conveys a sense of bending or laying backwards.[70] Although the Trojans are clearly the ones manipulating the *membra … defleta*, this action nonetheless grants Misenus' corpse a kind of uncanny movement, almost as if it is still alive, autonomous, and mobile.

Virgil's scene features more than just Homeric echoes. In Book 3 of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, Jason prepares to offer a sacrifice to Hecate by washing and dressing *himself* appropriately for the act (Ap. Rhod. 3.1203–6):

> ἔνθ᾽ ἤτοι πάμπρωτα λοέσσατο μὲν ποταμοῖο
> εὐαγέως θείοιο τέρεν δέμας, ἀμφὶ δὲ φᾶρος
> ἕσσατο κυάνεον, τὸ μέν οἱ πάρος ἐγγυάλιξεν 1205
> Λημνιὰς Ὑψιπύλη, ἀδινῆς μνημήιον εὐνῆς.
>
> Then indeed first of all he washed his smooth body piously in the divine river, and around him he cast a dark robe, which Lemnian Hypsipyle had previously given him, as a memorial of their frequent union.

Given the *Argonautica*'s broader significance as an epic model for Virgil,[71] the epic's contribution to the wider Hecate tradition with which the *Aeneid* closely engages, and the parallels between Jason's self-ablutions and the Trojans' treatment of Misenus' corpse, and between Jason's motivations for cleansing himself in the first place and Aeneas' motivations

[68] For this sudden up-righting as a reversal of traditional representations of death, see Tesoriero (2000) 234; Sanderson (2020) 113.
[69] *OLD* s.v. 10, 10b.
[70] *OLD* s.v. 7.
[71] Nelis (2001). Cf. Reitz (2020) 441–2.

for seeking out and handling Misenus in this way, we ought to consider the implications of this scene for our reading of the burial of Misenus. Apollonius tells us that Jason is acting εὐαγέως ("piously", 3.1204) here and seeking to purify himself in a divine river (λοέσσατο … ποταμοῖο … θείοιο) before engaging in ritual practice. However, we know that he is sacrificing to a goddess associated with the underworld and witchcraft, in order to activate the power of the magic charms received from Medea (Ap. Rhod. 3.737–9, 1012–14) and thus complete his labours (Ap. Rhod. 3.1026–62, 1246–407).[72] Jason's cleansing is only the first stage of these rites (πάμπρωτα): it precedes the offering and invocation (3.1207–12) and the terrifying appearance of Hecate herself (3.1212–20). If we understand this as a crucial component of Jason's sacrifice proper, this has implications for our reading of Virgil's Misenus. Misenus is also subject to a comparable cleaning process with similar overtones of piety (*Aen.* 6.218–19), a ritual which is part of a larger activity intended to help achieve an individual's aim. The details of Jason's sacrifice itself – to which we will turn below – demand that we understand this Apollonian episode as an important precedent for Aeneas' means of engagement with the underworld. If we *do* accept this, we then have to read the cleansing element of Misenus' burial as an equivalent of Jason's self-purification, since Aeneas goes straight from Misenus to offering sacrifices to Hecate without performing any such ablutions: *his actis propere exsequitur praecepta Sibyllae* ("After completing these rites, he hurriedly carries out the Sibyl's instructions", *Aen.* 6.236). If Jason's dip in the river constituted one stage of an overarching sacrificial process, then the preparation of Misenus' body occupies a parallel position in Aeneas' series of tasks leading up to his entry into the underworld.

The necromantic undertones of Aeneas' access to the underworld are particularly striking in the final stage in this elaborate process: the sacrifice to Hecate. Lucan's Erictho does not offer a sacrifice to engage with the chthonic realm – she is content to address and threaten the underworld powers with her voice alone.[73] The sacrifice takes place in a deep cave (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.236–41), and Deiphobe begins proceedings by anointing black heifers with wine and sprinkling their hairs on a sacred fire (*Aen.* 6.243–6), while the victims' throats are cut and their blood drained (*Aen.* 6.248–9). Aeneas sacrifices a black lamb to Night and Earth and a sterile heifer to Persephone (*Aen.* 6.249–51), then burns bull carcasses for the Stygian ruler (*Aen.* 6.252–4). The sacrifice's success becomes clear as the natural world trembles and recoils at Hecate's approach (*Aen.* 6.255–8), and the Sibyl launches herself into the underworld with Aeneas following in her wake (*Aen.* 6.262–3). Although it ultimately

[72] On Jason's assistance from Hecate and Artemis (with her Hecatean qualities), see Nelis (1991) 102–3.
[73] Sanderson (2020) 37, 63, 113, 138.

enables Aeneas' *descent* into the chthonic realm, this sacrifice fits neatly within a wider tradition of – and contains all the hallmarks of – evocation rituals which share a specific goal: drawing something (or someone) *up* from the underworld.[74]

Aeneas' sacrifice largely follows the broad requirements of traditional evocation rites and recalls two major epic models:[75] Odysseus' consultation of underworld shades in Homer's *Odyssey* (11.23–50) and Jason's sacrifice to Hecate in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (3.1194–216), which we have already touched upon. Ogden and Finkmann both cite Homer's *Odyssey* as the earliest and most enduringly influential account of this kind of (ghost) evocation technology,[76] and the Apollonian scene follows this tradition closely despite ultimately evoking Hecate rather than a shade.[77] In both cases, the protagonist follows the instructions of a witch (Homer, *Od.* 10.503–45; Ap. Rhod. 3.1026–62), gathers his victims and offerings and digs a pit (Homer, *Od.* 11.23–8; Ap. Rhod. 3.1199–2001), sacrifices his victims and deposits their blood in the pit (Homer, *Od.* 11.34–6; Ap. Rhod. 1207–10),[78] and achieves his desired audience with the entity summoned (Homer, *Od.* 11.36–7, 44–50; Ap. Rhod. 3.1210–20). While we do get an infamous shift of narrative perspective as the episode unfolds which seems to suggest that Odysseus has himself ended up in the underworld (*Od.* 11.55, 87), Homer nonetheless indicates that the ghosts have made an ascent into the world of the living through the preposition ὑπὲξ: αἱ δ᾽ ἀγέροντο | ψυχαὶ ὑπὲξ Ἐρέβευς νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων ("and the souls of the perished dead gathered up out of Erebus", 11.36–7). We encounter something very similar during Jason's sacrifice to Hecate, who appears κευθμῶν ἐξ ὑπάτων ("from the furthest depths", Ap. Rhod. 3.1213).

There is even another Virgilian precedent for this kind of sacrifice serving to raise something from the underworld which bears a close resemblance to Aeneas' sacrifice to enter the underworld, and thus lends further credence to the necromantic – at the very least, the

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74 On the preference for above-ground interactions with the dead as opposed to formal *katabasis* in early Imperial epic, see Heil (2022) 18–24.

75 Ogden (2001) 179. On the liminality of necromantic spaces, see Finkmann (2020) 748; Heil (2022) 50. For an overview of blood sacrifice as an essential element of engagement and communication with the dead, see Heath (2005); Martin (2014) 1–3. Even though he doesn't dig a pit to receive the sacrificial blood which is retained in bowls without further details given of its use, the cave's depth and deathly qualities maybe go some way in compensating for this omission since Aeneas and Deiphobe are perhaps already partly on their way to the underworld.

76 Ogden (2002) 87; Finkmann (2020) 758. On Virgil's engagement with this Homeric material, see Bright (1981); Knauer (1964); Solmsen (1972). For Lucan's underworld and necromantic debts to Homer, see Heil (2022) 130–1. Cf. Baertschi (2013) 54–5.

77 For these parallels at Ap. Rhod. 3.1026–62, 1191–224, see Ogden (2001) 142 and (2002) 87. On wider parallels, overlaps, and tensions between religious and magical activities, see Gordon (1999) 163, 191–2, 210–15.

78 Odysseus also pledges to make further sacrifices – a barren heifer and ram – upon his return home (Homer, *Od.* 11.29–33), the very animals Aeneas offers (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.249–51).

nekyia-mantic – character of this scene.[79] In *Georgics* 4, Aristaeus sacrifices to Orpheus following his mother's instructions (*Geo.* 4.531–47) in order to regain his lost bees *haud mora* (*Geo.* 4.548–58).[80] Crabbe has already noted the close parallels between these two episodes, namely the killing of bulls and construction of altars (*Geo.* 4.541–3, 550–1; *Aen.* 6.243–4),[81] the inclusion of specific offerings for given individuals (*Geo.* 4.547, 553; *Aen.* 6.250–4),[82] and the protagonist's eventual engagement with a strange new state of things (*Geo.* 4.554; *Aen.* 6.268–9).[83] Aristaeus does not participate in a *katabasis*, nor are we explicitly told that the bees themselves arise from the underworld.[84] If anything, this can be taken as a moment of renewal and (re)generation, rather than of resurrection.[85] However, the bees *do* emerge from a place of death, specifically the rotting carcasses of cows and bulls: *liquefacta boum per viscera toto | stridere apes utero et ruptis effervere costis* ("bees buzzing through the putrid flesh of the oxen from the whole belly and swarming out of the burst sides", *Geo.* 4.555–6).[86] The bees exit the rotting viscera via an opening in the cows' flanks on an upward trajectory, rising from the ground to settle on a treetop (*Geo.* 4.557–8).

As we have seen, the sacrifice Aeneas and the Sibyl make prior to their descent into the underworld follows the key elements of traditional ghost evocation rites.[87] All that is missing is the upward movement of shades into the world of the living. We could be forgiven for assuming that this change in direction goes some way in at least muting the broadly necromantic associations of the preceding rites. But this is not the case. Aeneas and Deiphobe sacrificed to Hecate to obtain her favour for their entry into the underworld (*Aen.* 6.247), and although we do not get to *see* her – the Sibyl's exclamation and her departure with Aeneas move the scene along promptly (*Aen.* 6.258–63) – the disturbances in the surrounding environment indicate Hecate's arrival (*Aen.* 6.255–8):

> ecce autem primi sub limina solis et ortus 255
> sub pedibus mugire solum et iuga coepta moveri

[79] Indeed, this also continues in the post-Virgilian (and post-Lucanian) epic tradition, such as at Valerius Flaccus 1.730–850; Statius, *Theb.* 4.443–578; Silius, *Pun.* 13.381–895. Cf. Reitz (1982); Finkmann (2020) 756.

[80] On links between the underworld in Orpheus' story in the *Georgics* (4.453–527) and Aeneas' descent, see Crabbe (1978) 31 (n. 19).

[81] On complexities around the function of cattle carcasses at *Geo.* 4.538–53, see Thomas (1991) 213–14.

[82] Crabbe (1978) 23. Cf. Habinek (1990) 212.

[83] Crabbe (1978) 24.

[84] For clarification that this is in fact a new hive of bees, rather than the resurrection of dead bees, see Johnston (1977) 167 (n. 11).

[85] Johnston (1977) 162; Habinek (1990).

[86] Virgil also describes the generation of bees from a dead cow (this time contained and heavily putrefied) at *Geo.* 4.281–314. Cf. Dyson (1996) 280–1; Habinek (1990) 209.

[87] Ogden (2002) 179.

> silvarum, visaeque canes ululare per umbram
> adventante dea…
>
> But look – at the earliest sun's entrance and rising the earth groaned underfoot and the ridges of the woods began to shake, and dogs seemed to howl through the shade at the goddess' arrival…

The ground and woods tremble at her approach (*mugire … moveri*), and the apparent baying of dogs (*canes ululare*) indicates that the arriving goddess is Hecate herself.[88] These details recall Hecate's emergence following Jason's sacrifice in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, at which point the goddess *does* make an appearance:[89] she rises from the depths at the paling of the sky (Ap. Rhod. 3.1212–13, 1223–4), the meadows quake (Ap. Rhod. 3.1218–20), and hell-hounds howl (Ap. Rhod. 3.1216–17). Overcome by fear, Jason cannot look upon her (Ap. Rhod. 3.1221–3). So too in the *Aeneid* we are denied the chance to witness Hecate in the flesh. Virgil's *ecce autem* ("But look…") here serves not only as an "energetic pointer to a new turn in the action" following the conclusion of the sacrifice itself,[90] but also as a call to 'observe' the successful result of the evocation before Aeneas and Deiphobe advance to the underworld. Since the scenes leading up to Aeneas' descent into the underworld bear such remarkable structural similarities to other literary accounts of (ghost) evocation, we should not deny their status as part of a *nekyia*. The darker magical undertones are only compounded and highlighted by the sacrificial and necromantic details and descriptions in the preparation and treatment of Misenus' body, which cast a troubling shadow over this apparent display of loyalty and piety. Given the darker ambiguous qualities of Virgil's Sibyl which we have already examined, we ought not to be surprised that the rites she instructs and supervises should have a similarly ambivalent character. Lucan's Erictho may perform the most "horrific and overblown" necromancy in the ancient literary tradition in her attempts to bend the underworld to her will, but as Virgil's Aeneas and Deiphobe have shown us, this *modus operandi* is not wholly without precedent.

3. Underworld Figures: Inconvenient Truths?

We have uncovered striking ambivalences in the methods by which Aeneas accesses the underworld – details which demonstrate that Lucan enriches and extrapolates from existing

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88 On the symptoms of Hecate's arrival and conventional indications of epiphany, see Horsfall (2013) 225. On the association between Hecate and dogs, see Ogden (2002) 118–19.

89 Horsfall (2013) 225 notes Virgil's debt to Apollonius here.

90 Horsfall (2013) 224.

darkness in the *Aeneid* rather than simply inverting his epic predecessor. I will now finish by considering a further instance of Virgilian ambiguity within the underworld itself, which is then amplified by Lucan. After an extensive reanimation process, Erictho's chosen corpse shares information regarding the state of the underworld which has been disrupted by the chaos of civil war in the world above (Luc. 6.776–85). As we have already seen, the recently deceased and unburied corpse is unable to access the underworld proper, and so has to rely on hearsay from other shades in addition to his personal autopsy to fulfil this request.[91] As such, he is unable to offer comprehensive insights into the future of the Pompeian cause (Luc. 6.777–8, 812–17). The entire necromantic endeavour might thus appear "ineffectual", since the corpse ultimately "falls into the same 'silence' which characterised other ... forms of prophecy", forms which Sextus rejected due to this deficiency (Luc. 6.430, 813).[92] Furthermore, the detailed aspects of the corpse's utterance would have been "incomprehensible to Sextus",[93] but still reveal elements of Lucan's engagement with his epic predecessors.

As part of this excursus, the corpse lists the souls of the blessed who lament the violence of the conflict (Luc. 6.783–92), the shades of the damned who delight in this destruction (Luc. 6.795–9), and the punishments that await the conflict's victor (Luc. 6.799–802).[94] These catalogues have been read as twisted imitations of Virgil's 'parade of heroes' (*Aen.* 6.752–885) with which Anchises inspires a (clueless) Aeneas to continue on his journey which will ultimately secure this Roman future.[95] Virgil concealed the participants of some Roman civil wars in darkness, and Anchises appeals (vainly) to Caesar and Pompey to avoid civil bloodshed (*Aen.* 6.826–35).[96] In Lucan's underworld, individuals such as the Drusi and Gracchi who reside in Virgil's Elysium (*Aen.* 6.842) are condemned to Tartarus (Luc. 6.795–6), while the bloodthirsty Sulla is granted a seat in Elysium (Luc. 6.787).[97] Furthermore, in identifying a spot in Tartarus for Caesar – and by extension, his successors (Luc. 6.799–802) – the corpse questions the glory and deification of Rome's future Caesars and so "severs" the connection Augustus had sought to highlight between himself

[91] Cf. Heil (2022) 33–4.
[92] Masters (1992) 200–3.
[93] O'Higgins (1988) 229. In this way, Sextus parallels Aeneas, who would have been unaware of the future Romans who appear on his shield (Virgil, *Aen.* 8.626–731).
[94] Sanderson (2020) 151–62; Heil (2022) 144–5.
[95] Ahl (1976) 144. For exemplary catalogues and their influence on Lucan's 'black parade', see Tesoriero (2000) 249.
[96] For *Aeneid* 6 as a reflection on moral, religious, and eschatological values and frameworks, see Zetzel (1989) 264. For the broader commentary on forgetting violence suggested by Anchises' discussion of the transmigration of souls, see Quint (1982) 37–8. Cf. Zetzel (1996) 312; Fucecchi (2018) 27.
[97] Ahl (1976) 139, 144; Bernstein (2011) 264; Sanderson (2020) 152.

and the legacy of the Republic (Dio 66.34) by distancing the Imperial line from the "noble inhabitants of Elysium".[98]

In contrast with Virgil's underworld arrangement (*Aen.* 6.824–5, 842–3), Lucan locates the Drusi and the Gracchi in Tartarus. The two families are acknowledged alongside their rash reforms and daring endeavours respectively, and are effectively grouped together by the two charges listed which, while grammatically separate, are applicable to both families:[99] *vidi ego laetantis, popularia nomina, Drusos | legibus inmodicos ausosque ingentia Gracchos* ("I saw the Drusi, names with popular favour, rejoicing, extravagant in their laws, and the Gracchi who dared enormous undertakings", Luc. 6.795–6). Although Lucan does not name the Drusi explicitly elsewhere as he does the Gracchi (Luc. 1.266–7),[100] the details of the charges applied to both groups encourage us to relate their mention here to the *BC*'s wider discussions of 'popular' matters and 'excessive' actions.[101] The Drusi's *popularia nomina* link the family to other 'dangerous' Roman revolutionaries, and, by extension, to the distinctly 'popular' cause of Lucan's Caesar.[102] Likewise, *inmodicos* ("extravagant", Luc. 6.796) encourages us to consider their deeds in relation to other ideologically charged examples of futile or unseemly excess in the *BC,* such as Cornelia's grief for her murdered husband (Luc. 8.71), Pompey's career-long acquisition of wealth (Luc. 9.197), and Cleopatra's beautification for Caesar (Luc. 10.137). Furthermore, the association of the Drusi and the Gracchi with the tribuneship invites comparison with Lucan's other tribunes who, with the exception of Metellus who resists Caesar's plundering of the state treasury (Luc. 3.114–53),[103] remain anonymous and oppose the Senate and Republican cause (Luc. 1.266).[104]

We could also read this reorganisation of underworld figures as a sophisticated acknowledgement of the darker tones already present in Virgil's underworld, where the Scipios are connected with the Gracchi – *quis Gracchi genus aut geminos, duo fulmina belli, | Scipiadas, cladem Libyae* ("who [would pass over] the race of Gracchus or the twin scions of Scipio, two thunderbolts of war, the bane of Libya", *Aen.* 6.842–3)[105] – and the legacies of those credited with the destruction of Carthage are fused with those associated with civil discord.[106]

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[98] O'Higgins (1988) 221. Cf. Luc. 7.457–9 for further hostility of this kind.

[99] Tesoriero (2000) 259; Sanderson (2020) 160.

[100] For the imagery of a city divided into two factions evoked by *ancipiti … urbe,* see e.g. Lucan 2.447–8; Valerius Flaccus 3.46; Roche (2009) 236.

[101] On civil war partisanship in Lucan, see Fucecchi (2011).

[102] Tesoriero (2000) 259.

[103] Similarly, Curio was tribune in 50 BC (Appian, *BCiv* 2.27; Cicero, *Fam.* 8.6; Dio 40.60.4–61.3; Plutarch, *Caes.* 30.1–2) and is aligned with the 'popular' cause within the *BC* (Luc. 4.689–92).

[104] Sanderson (2020) 160–1.

[105] Within the *BC*, *fulmen* takes on problematic undertones given its association with power-hungry individuals (Luc. 1.143–57, 10.34).

[106] Ahl (1976) 141.

Although the Gracchi were related to the Scipios on their maternal side (Plutarch, *Tib. Gracc.* 8.5), this pairing is nonetheless odd, and perhaps goes so far as to tarnish the Scipios' glowing reference here as Virgil turns some names into other bearers of the same name.[107] Virgil's application of Tarquin's traditional epithet *superbus* to Lucius Brutus, *vis et Tarquinios reges animamque superbam | ultoris Bruti fascisque videre receptos?* ("Do you want to see also the Tarquin kings and the proud soul of Brutus the avenger and the fasces recovered?", *Aen.* 6.817–18), "create[s] a puzzle in the reader's mind" by transferring characteristic qualities between individuals.[108] While Virgil's *Gracchi genus* metonymically incorporates the entire family of Gracchi – including Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus – it is difficult *not* to recall the violence and discord associated with the two infamous brothers, despite Virgil not mentioning them by individual name. Virgil lists the Drusi alongside ardent protectors of the Roman state: *quin Decios Drusosque procul saevumque securi | aspice Torquatum et referentem signa Camillum* ("Moreover, see the Decii and Drusi far off, and Torquatus cruel with his axe, and Camillus bringing back the standards", *Aen.* 6.824–5).[109] This is perhaps understandable given their connection to Augustus through his wife Livia. Yet the *genus* also included the "notorious plebeian tribune" M. Livius Drusus, whose legislative reforms and murder became short-term causes of the Social War.[110] While their listing alongside the Decii, Torquatus, and Camillus might encourage their alignment with noble deeds and causes, the Drusi are – like the Gracchi – unable to shake the bad reputation of some of their kin. Against this murkier reading of the individuals featured in Virgil's underworld, the distribution of Republican figures across Elysium and Tartarus and the qualities assigned to these figures in Lucan's underworld may not seem quite so jarring, and instead appear as a sophisticated negotiation of the subtleties of Virgil's narrative. Lucan's plurals *Drusos* and *Gracchos* (Luc. 6.795–6) leave some ambiguity as to which member(s) of the family this is referring to and could function as an inversion of other pluralisations, which group together families according to their merits (Luc. 7.358–60, 583–5).[111] By pluralising the two families, placing them together in Tartarus, and uniting them with the same charges of 'popularity' and rashness, Lucan appears to tar the Drusi and the Gracchi with the brushes of their most problematic kinsmen, confirming the ambivalence already present in their representation in Virgil's Elysium.[112]

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[107] Ahl (1976) 141. On the praiseworthy conduct of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, see Augoustakis (2011) 190.

[108] Ahl (1976) 172–3; Horsfall (2013) 557–8.

[109] See, e.g., Cicero, *Sest.* 143; Virgil, *Geo.* 2.169; Manilius 1.789; Lucan 6.785–6; Juvenal 8.254. On the Decii and *devotio*, see, e.g., Cicero, *Fin.* 2.60; Livy 8.8.19–8.11.1, 10.28.12–10.30.10; Valerius Maximus 5.6.5–6; Virgil, *Aen.* 11.440–2; Leigh (1993).

[110] Horsfall (2013) 562–3.

[111] Sanderson (2020) 160.

[112] Sanderson (2020) 160.

Virgil offers plenty of opportunities to reflect upon uncomfortable elements of Roman history, from the bleak discussion of the impact of land confiscations in *Eclogues* 1 and 9 to details of the horrors of civil war in the *Georgics* (*Geo.* 1.489–97), and from Aeneas' notorious murder of Turnus at the epic's close (*Aen.* 12.887–952) to broader acknowledgements of the bloody cost of war and the death of the young within the *Aeneid* itself.[113] A key example of this kind of pragmatic negotiation of challenging parts of history comes during the *ekphrasis* of the shield of Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.626–728).[114] As Quint and Rossi have shown, this pictorial narrative links Roman potential with civil war throughout Roman history,[115] beginning with recollections of Romulus and Remus which inevitably allude to Rome's original fratricide (*Aen.* 8.630–41),[116] and continuing through the rape of the Sabines and the war with Alba (*Aen.* 8.635–45) – two conflicts which raise questions of kinship and ultimately resulted in the incorporation of these peoples into the Roman race[117] – and finally the battle of Actium, an internal martial climax disguised as a *bellum externum* through the 'othering' of Antony's forces (*Aen.* 8.671–713).[118] Just in case we missed the internecine undertones in these episodes, the presence of Discordia – the traditional personification of civil strife – in the depiction of Actium (*scissa gaudens vadit Discordia palla*: "Discordia advances rejoicing in her torn robe", *Aen.* 8.702) reminds us that we are watching scenes of *civil* conflict.[119] The intertwining of these 'foundational' examples of civil war within a wider narrative of Roman history and development thus presents a "dramatic historical paradox" which shows Rome's potential for expansion to be "inextricably connected with internecine conflict",[120] and suggests that civil war is something that Rome will have to navigate and negotiate again and again.[121] Given this broader willingness to engage with inconvenient truths of Roman history, we should not be so

[113] See, e.g., *Aen.* 1.1–49, 9.367–459, 10.426–509, 10.755–832, 11.768–835.

[114] Quint (1993) 23. For the relationship between the shields of Aeneas and Achilles (Homer, *Il.* 18.483–608), see Gransden (1976) 161–3. Bartsch (1998) 337 highlights parallels between Aeneas' viewing of Juno's Carthaginian temple (*Aen.* 1.464–93) and Roman readers' "viewing" of recent history on the shield. For ambiguities of right and wrong on the shield, see O'Hara (1990) 173–5.

[115] On the "fine irony in the fact that the epic's most influential statement of the imperialist project should disguise the reality of internecine conflict", see Quint (1993) 23. Cf. Hardie (1986) 348, 358–62; Fucecchi (2018) 27; Feldherr (2014) 301.

[116] Rossi (2010) 147. Cf. Gransden (1976) 163–4; Hardie (1986) 349–50.

[117] Rossi (2010) 147–9 contrasts this with Livy 1.13.5, 1.30.1. For allusions to the social war and Roman/Italian relations in the *Aeneid,* see Marincola (2010) 183–204.

[118] Gransden (1976) 174–82; Hardie (1986) 98–100; Quint (1993) 24–31, 62. Cf. Propertius 4.6; Hardie (1986) 353–8; Bartsch (1998) 332.

[119] Zeitlin (1971) 79. Cf. Gransden (1976) 181, on *Aen.* 10.6–15.

[120] Rossi (2010) 149. For Virgil's "balancing" between displaying Roman and Italian history on the shield, see Hardie (1986) 347–8. Cf. Bond (2010) 32.

[121] Sanderson (2020) 8–9.

quick to pass over ambiguities pertaining to periods of civil conflict within the underworld excursus.

Nor should we be so quick to brand Lucan as an ardent and irreverent rebel against Virgil's *Aeneid*. Erictho lacks respect for conventional Olympian deities, performs and creates frightening and fantastical magical rites, and even subverts the laws of the underworld with confidence. Yet we have seen that her description and actions – far from being an unprecedented departure from the conventions of earlier epic – recall traditional evocation scenes from Homer, Apollonius, and Virgil, and take up, embolden, and exaggerate the ambivalent qualities of the Virgilian Sibyl, her past and present deeds, and the tasks she assigns to grant Aeneas access to the underworld. Since Casali has demonstrated that Lucan engages *constructively* with Virgil more broadly to build upon the work of his predecessor,[122] we should thus follow Narducci's warning that it is excessively short-sighted to see Lucan in opposition to Virgil,[123] and accept Masters' thesis that "Lucan ... is laying bare the ambiguities inherent in Virgil", determined that "what is worrying in Virgil's vision should not be left in shadow".[124] To condemn Lucan as an anti-Virgilian maverick is to take a blinkered approach to the *BC*'s own epic artistry and majesty. Furthermore, such an attitude ultimately does a disservice to Virgil himself, to the *Aeneid*'s fluctuating gradation between optimism and pessimism, and to the troubling and ambivalent details which challenge us to interrogate the poem's nuance and pragmatism even as they glint out at us from the darkness.

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[122] Casali (2011) 85.
[123] Narducci (1979) 35.
[124] Masters (1992) 194.

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