

CIRCEAN TEMPTATIONS: HOMER, VERGIL, OVID

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The legend of Circe, with its elements of love, witchcraft, strange and remote places, offered a rich field for the display of poetic talent. It is not surprising, therefore, that the goddess enjoyed a vivid literary life after Homer. Vergil in the *Aeneid* and Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, not to mention Apollonius of Rhodes, adapted this figure to their individual epic styles. This paper will attempt to show what each poet found relevant in the legend of Circe and how the two Latin poets transmuted the Homeric material for new purposes of their own.

I

The *Odyssey* is unusually cognizant of the charm and subtle power, the potential helpfulness and dangerousness of woman; and Circe embodies in concentrated form the complex ambiguity of the Odyssean female. If not yet *la belle dame sans merci*, she is still never quite free of the awesome, non-human, or even subhuman, distance of a demonic power.

In Vergil and Ovid her demonic aspect predominates. Yet even in the anti-Circean atmosphere of the Augustan age this goddess can still carry a fairy-tale charm, and the inviting aura of the ever-willing, mysterious female can still cling to her. Thus Horace, in one of his loveliest passages, can envision her as the inhabitant of a bright world of myth and art (*Odes* 1.17.17-20):

hic in reducta valle Caniculae
vitabis aestus et fide Teia
dices laborantis in uno
Penelopen vitreamque Circen.

For Homer and his immediate successors, however, the positive qualities of Circe are not so self-consciously overlaid with the patina of a venerable literary and mythical tradition. In the seventh century Alcman seems to have made his Circe even more helpful, in a matter-of-fact, practical way, than Homer's: she herself applies the wax to protect Odysseus' crew from the Sirens' song (frag. 80 Diehl=80 Page):

καί ποκ' Ὀδυσσῆος ταλασίφρονος ὥαθ' ἐταίρων
Κίρκα ἐπαλείψασα. . . .

Homer's Circe is, on the one hand, a "dread goddess" (*deinê theos*, 10.136), the sister of "evil-minded Aeetes," learned in fearful drugs (10.235, 276, 394, etc.) and destructive wiles (10.289). Even after he has escaped her first assault, Odysseus takes the precaution of having her swear a "great oath" not to make him *κακὸν καὶ ἀνήγορα* (10.299–301, 340–44). On the other hand, she has a compassionate warmth (or is it only the generosity of a woman toward her lover?) which is largely absent from Vergil and Ovid.¹ Aside from the delay of a year and the accidental death of Elpenor (for which Circe is not, of course, responsible: cf. 10.552–53), Odysseus and his companions suffer no lasting harm on Aeaea. Indeed, the victims of her magic come off looking younger, handsomer, and taller than before (10.395–96).²

Yet eerie magic there is, and the recurrent figure of the terrified and obstinate Eurylochus is there to remind us of Circe's other side (see 10.232, 244–60, 264–69, 429–37). Similarly, the note of vague wonder in the closing lines of Book 10 (along with her last gesture in Book 12, to be discussed later) keep before us the fact that she is, after all, an enigmatic and darkly potent figure. Here Odysseus, the narrator, abruptly comments on his tale with a rhetorical question which contrasts his mortal nature and Circe's mysterious power: she ties the lamb and black ewe on the ship (10.573–74),

¹ For the two sides of Circe see Gabriel Germain, *Genèse de l'Odyssée* (Paris 1954) 249–52, especially 249: "Elle commence en enchanteresse perfide et finit en bonne fée;" also Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958) 300.

² For a discussion of attempts to interpret this effect of the metamorphosis in initiatory and other terms see Germain (above, note 1) 131–32.

ῥεῖα παρεξελθοῦσα· τίς ἂν θεὸν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα
ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδοιτ' ἢ ἔνθ' ἢ ἔνθα κiónτα;

In a character who combines redoubtable magic with the quintessence of female sensuality, an element of callousness and selfishness may also have a natural place. But there is danger of exaggerating this aspect of Circe, as Stanford (who has a low estimate generally of her)³ seems to do when he compares her “*égoïsme à deux*”⁴ unfavorably to Calypso’s “warm affectionateness.”⁵ The latter, affectionate though she may be, is far less attentive to Odysseus’ real needs.⁶ And is it not equally egoistic to condemn the hero, without compunction, to an *immortalité malgré lui*?⁷ Neither character, however, should be considered solely in terms of ordinary mortal womanhood. Both are refinements of a common literary type, and a certain opacity of motivation is to be expected, though Homer goes less far in this direction than Vergil (see below, Section II).

Once won, however, Homer’s goddess exhibits a degree of helpfulness which is rare indeed in the monster-filled fairyland of Odysseus’ wanderings. Circe can undo the harm she has wrought; and, after she transforms his companions back into men, “the goddess herself pitied them”: (θεὰ δ’ ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτή, 10.399).⁸ Soon after, she delivers a ten-line speech of sympathy (10.456–65) for their sufferings on land and sea; and at the beginning of Book 12 she commiserates on their being twice visitors to Hades (12.21–27). She provides much essential instruction and equipment, both before the Underworld journey and after (cf. 10.504–40, 563, 571; 12.18–20, 25–27, 37–141). In fact, as many scholars have noted, her advice is far more useful,

³ W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme*² (Oxford 1961) 48: “The abruptness of her actions are more those of a marionette than of a fully developed character. . . . Her conduct has a sinister automaton-like effect, quite unlike Calypso’s manner.”

⁴ Stanford (above, note 3) 47.

⁵ Stanford (above, note 3) 48.

⁶ See *contra*, Stanford (above, note 3) 49: “Unlike Circe, Calypso uses all the wisdom and prescience of a minor divinity to study Odysseus’s thoughts and inclinations.” For a different view of the relation between Calypso and Circe, see C. R. Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y. 1966) 187, who finds Calypso “nothing more than a rather quick and pallid imitation of Circe, simply a plot device ready to hand.”

⁷ See Germain (above, note 1) 670, with the references cited in his note 1.

⁸ See Whitman (above, note 1) 300.

in a practical sense, than that of Teiresias whom she sends Odysseus to seek. Her magic, unlike that of her Vergilian and Ovidian counterparts, can prove unexpectedly helpful. When the Phaeacian queen, Arete, suggests (8.443-45) that Odysseus bind up his gifts to prevent thievery during the voyage, he uses a knot, "intricate, which Lady Circe taught him" (8.448).⁹

Yet for all her magical power, Circe retains a womanly curiosity. Though she has herself directed Odysseus to the Underworld, she is eager to hear his experiences from his own lips and draws him apart from his sleeping comrades with a human and intimate gesture (12.33-34):

ἡ δ' ἐμὲ χειρὸς ἐλοῦσα φίλων ἀπονόσφιν ἐταίρων
εἶσέ τε καὶ προσέλεκτο καὶ ἐξερέεινεν ἕκαστα.

Both the scene and the curiosity remind one of Penelope in 23.308, and Penelope too shares with Circe a certain ambiguity and mystery.¹⁰ One thinks of her sudden, veiled appearance in Book 1, the *dolos* of her web (2.85-110, and cf. Circe's weaving), the events of Book 19, with the touch of regret at the loss of her suitors in a dream (19.541-43). She too, like Circe, is surrounded by gluttonous would-be lovers. The parallels, however, may be partly due to the strange power wielded by so many of the women of the *Odyssey* (Helen, Arete, Calypso, Leucothea, Clytaemnestra, and even Nausicaa) and should not be pushed too far. Penelope is after all a mortal woman and an essential part of Odysseus' homeland. The test which he must pass to win her is not the primal sexual conquest which Circe demands (see below), but rather his knowledge of the shared secret of their marriage-bed of living olive wood, an affirmation of the continuity of family, the responsibility to life and the nurture of children, the sacred bonds on which human social order rests.

The blend of kindness and strangeness in Circe is especially in evidence as her active role in the narrative comes to an end early in Book 12. Here Circe returns to her mysterious island as Odysseus prepares to embark on the sea once more (12.143-44):

⁹ On the knot see Germain (above, note 1) 252; C. P. Segal, "The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus' Return," *Arion* 1.4 (1962) 55.

¹⁰ For Penelope's and Circe's similarities see Beye (above, note 6) 175, 178-79, who, in my judgment, gives them more weight than necessary.

ἡ μὲν ἔπειτ' ἀνὰ νῆσον ἀπέστιχε διὰ θεάων·
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν ἐπὶ νῆα κιὼν ὄτρυνον ἑταίρους.

There is no farewell. The goddess rejoins her mysterious landscape. She is once more the mysterious *δεινὴ θεὸς αὐδήεσσα* (12.150), as she was at her first appearance (10.136). Stanford, however, compares her, again unfavorably, with Calypso: "In contrast with Circe's nonchalance in parting with Odysseus once his comrades had re-awakened his desire to return to Ithaca, Calypso does all she can to keep him for ever."¹¹ This criticism, however, smacks a bit of the "documentary fallacy" and somewhat neglects the place of the scene in the narrative as a whole. Homer may well have felt that one difficult extrication from a clinging goddess' toils was enough. And if charges of "nonchalance" are to be bandied about, they might as well be leveled at Odysseus, whose acquiescence in his men's request for departure (10.472) takes less than one line: "So they spoke, and my manly spirit was persuaded" (10.475).

Odysseus himself assumes in Circe qualities of honor, affection, and understanding. As one may infer from his usual masterly tact in such matters (cf. his speech to Nausicaa, 6.149-85), he would request permission to depart in terms which he expects Circe to find valid. These terms are revealing. There are three of them: (1) Circe's promise to send him home, a promise, therefore, to which he expects her to keep faith; (2) his own eagerness to return; (3) the eagerness of his companions for home and their lamentations which "waste away" Odysseus' heart (10.483-86):

ῥΩ Κίρκη, τέλεσόν μοι ὑπόσχεσιν ἣν περ ὑπέσθης,
οἴκαδε πεμψέμεναι· θυμὸς δέ μοι ἔσσεται ἦδη,
ἦδ' ἄλλων ἑταίρων, οἳ μιν φθινύθουσι φίλον κῆρ
ἄμφ' ἔμ' ὀδυρόμενοι, ὅτε που σύ γε νόσφι γένηαι.

It strengthens Odysseus' case that Circe has already experienced the power of the last-named motive upon him. Only a hundred lines (but one year) before, he refused to partake of her banquet until his men were restored: "What man who is righteous would bring himself

¹¹ Stanford (above, note 3) 48.

to touch food and drink until he released his companions and saw them with his eyes" (10.383-85).

Though a witch and an enchantress, this *belle dame* can be compassionate, even reasonable. Circe, in fact, seems to understand her man better than did Calypso. Rather than keep him, a pining unwilling lover, in her bed for seven years, she sends him off at the first signs of uneasiness. Or is her understanding only the keen, practical intelligence of a consistent and determined hedonist, quick to scent the end of a pleasurable affair? The question, naturally, cannot be answered, for the ambiguity is a basic part of the characterization and is inherent in the impenetrability of the strange realm in which Circe reigns. Yet the touches of reasonableness, even kindness, and honor, are consonant both with Homer's delicate humanization of the entire episode and with his style in general. He gives us not the misty shapes of a phantasmagoric world, as Apollonius and to some extent even Vergil and Ovid tend to do, but rather the clear, firm outlines of basic human relationships drawn in a style which prefers precision and lucidity to overstatement or self-conscious "effect."

Homer's Circe is sensual, but not sentimental. From the first, she claims no hold on Odysseus' emotions. She invites him to bed as soon as he demonstrates his power to withstand her magic.¹² When they part without farewells, therefore, we see clearly and unsentimentally, as Homer saw, the inevitable brevity of a purely physical liaison, the limited expectations on both sides, and the weakness and immateriality of Circe's bond with Odysseus. We are thus turned again, subtly, toward the very different bond Odysseus is seeking on Ithaca.

For all her remote divinity, Calypso, unlike Circe, is not an enchantress and does not transform men into animals. When Odysseus needs a ship, she does not conjure one out of thin air, but gives him an axe and shows him the trees (5.234-40). A fairy-land character like Circe cannot offer anything but an ephemeral affair. From Odysseus' point of view, neither can Calypso; but that goddess, with a tenacity unusual in such figures, thinks otherwise. She actually wants to replace Penelope (see 5.203-24), as Circe never intends to do; and thus she poses a very different kind of threat from Circe's.

¹² See Whitman (above, note 1) 300.

Odysseus' year with Circe is like a mirage or a sensual dream of endless dinners of meat and wine (10.467-68), but without real substance; and Odysseus awakens as soon as his companions mention home. That single touch of reality, the lover's homeward thought, is enough to shatter the charm and melt the baseless fabric of the vision. Circe can then obligingly recede with the dream-world of her island as easily as Odysseus could have hoped.

If Homer's Circe embodies the pleasures of the flesh in both their restorative and dangerous aspects, she is yet more than an allegory of sensuality, as she becomes in later literature.¹³ While on the one hand she can transform men into swine, on the other she is surrounded by beautiful and highly wrought furnishings (e.g. 10.312, 314-16, 347, 354-70), tokens of a civilized refinement which Apollonius, Vergil, and Ovid all suppress (Ovid in part only). In Homer, though wolves and lions stand about, Circe's house is an elaborate edifice, built with "smooth-polished stones" (τετυγμένα δώματα Κίρκης / ξεστοῖσιν λάεσσι, 10.210-11), and is even called μέγα δῶμα or ἱερὰ δώματα (10.445, 554). Homer thrice stresses her clear and lovely voice as she plies the great, immortal loom; and it is thus that Odysseus' men encounter her (10.221, 227, 254), though not Odysseus himself (with what significance will appear below). For Homer, then, the two sides of Circe—lustful sensuality and the refinements of civilization, the power both to brutalize and to sing—can still coexist in a complex whole.

It belongs to the paradoxical mystery surrounding this character that the men who are to be transformed into swine meet her more civilized aspect, the beautiful singing and weaving, while Odysseus, wary of her charms, engages at once in a head-on conflict with her magic (drugs and wand in 10.317-19) and her sexual allure (the invitation of 10.333-35). Recognizing the danger for what it is, he sees Circe as his men cannot. Hence he meets the goddess on her own terms: the counter-magic of Hermes against her potions, his sword against her wand. This sword also matches her sexual seduction, for it is not only a mark of his heroic identity (10.321, for instance,

¹³ For instance, Heracleitus, *Alleg. Hom.* 70. For ancient allegorizations of Circe see Félix Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris 1956) 237, 379, and also chap. 9, pp. 500-20. For later allegories see Stanford (above, note 3) 183-84, 187-90.

uses the formula describing Achilles when he draws against Agamemnon, *Iliad* 1.190); it is also a symbol of his male sexuality.¹⁴ The hero's encounter with the goddess is played out on the level of an archetypal conflict between the sexes. The companions, who do not get this far, succumb to a lower appetite (see 10.234-35, 237); they meet gentler charms, but are made brutes. Odysseus, who leaps to a primordial sexual combat replete with primitive symbols, not only retains his human shape, but has his heroic identity reaffirmed in terms which echo the poem's opening line (10.330):

ἦ σύ γ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι πολύτροπος.

He is here recognized by his proper name as he seldom is in this strange world where he is so often disguised or anonymous. He is also given the epithet which most fully expresses his essential nature. Yet—paradox again—it is his men who must recall him to Ithaca.

Homer's emphasis, more than Vergil's or Ovid's, falls upon the hero's openness to adventure and on the human realities which that adventure conveys. Magic is an essential part of the tale and will remain so for the later poets. Yet Homer's magic is still subordinate to human character. In a sense it is Odysseus' own humanity as much as Hermes' herb which enables him to escape Circe's demonic, dehumanizing power. Divine help, as often in Homer, only validates human heroism. Odysseus is less vulnerable to her magic, not only because he is more intelligent than his men, but also because he acts from nobler motives. True, Odysseus elsewhere can callously place his companions' fate a poor second to his own curiosity, and perhaps does so in first approaching Circe's island (10.189-209). But later in this episode he chooses to essay her palace not merely out of desire or curiosity (though who can deny that they may have played a part?), but out of a human sympathy and concern for his men.

Circe's magic in her encounter with Odysseus (10.314-44) serves to underline the mysterious power of sex which she embodies and

¹⁴ For the sexual symbolism (somewhat exaggerated) see Richard Sommer, in G. Roppen and R. Sommer, *Strangers and Pilgrims* = "Norwegian Studies in English" 11 (Oslo 1964) 30-32, with notes 60 and 63 on p. 360; the former note calls attention to the "obviously meaningful" juxtaposition in 10.333-35. See also Germain (above, note 1) 263 and Beye (above, note 6) 201. For the sword-symbolism generally see Jessie Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge 1920) chaps. 6 and 7.

will have analogous functions in Vergil and especially in Ovid (see below, pp. 438-39). But it also brings forth the human qualities of Odysseus. Homer has in fact contrived the details of this encounter to maximize the human characterization or *êthos*, and he gains this effect partly by the contrast between the two sets of human characters involved: Odysseus on the one hand, the companions on the other.

At his first sight of Circe, Odysseus' mood is heavy (10.312-13):

She came out at once and opened the bright doors
and called; but I followed sorrowing in my heart.

One may contrast the companions' approach (10.230-31):

She came out at once and opened the bright doors
and called; and all followed her in their foolishness.

The repetitions bring out the differences all the more sharply:

ἡ δ' αἰψ' ἐξελοῦσα θύρας ὤϊξε φαινὰς
καὶ κάλει· οἱ δ' ἅμα πάντες αἰδρεῖσιν ἔποντο.
ἡ δ' αἰψ' ἐξελοῦσα θύρας ὤϊξε φαινὰς
καὶ κάλει· αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν ἐπόμεν ἀκαχήμενος ἦτορ.

When the companions approached the goddess, they deliberated before calling to her (224-28). The repeated verbs *φθεγγώμεθα*, *ἐφώνησεν*, *ἐφθέγγοντο* (228-29) convey their timidity. When Odysseus approaches, however, though troubled at heart (309), he is direct, unhesitating, and full of courage and determination (10.311):

ἐνθα στὰς ἐβόησα, θεὰ δέ μεν ἔκλυεν αὐδῆς.

Here too it is the goddess who hears *his* voice, not the reverse, as in 221. From the beginning Odysseus, not Circe, has the initiative.

Since Homer is unpreoccupied with an overt symbolism and can accept his mythical material with a simple, naive-appearing factuality, he can achieve a rich surface play of natural, human motivation. He thus gives us in this first encounter between hero and goddess both an illustration of Odysseus' superiority to his crew and a delightful and subtle feint between a shrewd man of the world and an expert seductress, a scene to be compared with the interviews between Helen and Telemachus and those between Odysseus and Nausicaa, Athena, and Penelope.

Yet this distillation of the familiar battle between the sexes loses nothing of the evocative power of the supernatural and archetypal themes in the background, for Circe is still a goddess who walks a fine line between the human and the bestial, man and nature. She holds the hero for a year of sensual love, but she also sends him to the realm of the dead. One may recall the powerful and equally ambiguous Ishtar of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, who also attempts to seduce the hero and also threatens her lovers with dangerous transformations. So Homer's Circe, whose attributes of the *potnia thêrôn* connect her in part with the Great Mother, goddess of sexuality, death, and rebirth in the cycles of vegetation, has both life-giving and destructive functions: she holds the key to both love and death.¹⁵

II

In both Vergil and Ovid the complexity of the Homeric Circe is greatly reduced. Vergil underplays her sexual implications; and both Vergil and Ovid, for all their stress on the danger of the passions which she embodies, deny her a really effective male counterpart. Ovid's Glaucus and Picus flee her advances, and his Ulysses is a pallid lover at best. Homer's Odysseus, once assured of his personal safety, takes Circe on her own terms. He mounts her "most lovely bed" (*Od.* 10.336-47), and frees his companions afterwards (10.373-96). Ovid's Ulysses, however, comes as an *ultor* (*Met.* 14.290) and seems to treat the pleasures of that bed, in a somewhat cursory narrative, only as a means to his companions' freedom (14.297-98):

inde fides dextraque datae: thalamoque receptus
coniugii dotem sociorum corpora poscit.

¹⁵ For Circe and the *potnia thêrôn* see Germain (above, note 1) 258 ff. For the parallels with Ishtar see Germain 267-69, esp. 268. Note especially Gilgamesh's catalogue of Ishtar's lovers on Tablet VI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, transl. by E. A. Speiser, in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*² (Princeton 1955) 84, esp. lines 75-79:

As thou [Ishtar] didst hear this . . . ,
Thou smotest him and turn[edst] him into a *mole*.
Thou placedst him in the midst of . . . ;
He cannot go up . . . nor can he come down . . .
If thou shouldst love me, thou wouldst [treat me] like them.

The Homeric lure of Circean sexuality here becomes almost an item in a formal contract, one body for another.

Vergil virtually eliminates the positive, human side of Circe. She becomes only the dangerous enchantress who has mysterious power over the animal kingdom: *dea saeva potentibus herbis* (*Aen.* 7.19). Here Vergil takes over hints of Circe as Mistress of Animals, *potnia thêrôn*, in the Homeric narrative. But, being less close than Homer to the deep reservoirs of Mediterranean myth, he loses the full range of both positive and negative meaning which such a female goddess might carry. His Circe is primarily a goddess of death, not death and love.

Vergil had a precedent for his limitation of Circe's character, namely the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius. Apollonius' Circe, though still an essentially positive figure, is more closely in touch than Homer's with the ominous, horrific side of magic. It is she who has the power to cleanse Jason and Medea of Apsyrtus' blood (4.559-61, 585-88), and such purificatory quests tend to be dangerous. Jason and Medea reach her, consequently, only after a strange and terrifying journey. We are first introduced to her through a long description of a terrible dream, full of blood and fire, which she has had the night before (4.662-71). To be sure, she is cleansing away the terror of this nocturnal vision in the sea-spray and thus appears in a posture appropriate to her present function. Yet the dream sets the tone of supernaturalism for the episode. Her animals are not merely transformed humans; they are strange creatures, resembling neither man nor beast (4.672-73), with composite bodies (674-81) "like those beings which the earth herself made to grow from the primal mud, composed of varied limbs" (*μικτοῖσιν ἀρρηγεμένους μελέεσσιν*, 677). The engrafting of pre-Socratic anthropology upon the fabulous elements in the Circe-myth only enhances the *grotesquerie* and divorces the scene even further from the factuality and clarity of the Homeric narrative.

Vergil, however, has his own reasons for curtailing Circe's personality. He has already transferred Aeneas' sensual temptations to an earlier stage in the figure of Dido. Gods and men cannot intermingle as easily in the *Aeneid* as they could in the *Odyssey*, and Vergil's divinities are on a loftier plane and are more remote than Homer's. Hence Aeneas' amour must be with a purely human figure, though even Dido retains some remnants of the witch-like goddess (see *Aen.* 4.478-98

and 609-10). Since Aeneas' journeys are concerned less with private experience than Odysseus', he is not to encounter so stark an embodiment of female sexuality. His Dido is not only a human personality. She has a historical rather than a purely mythic reality. Thus his one amorous adventure has a historical framework and historical consequences in the relations between two great peoples (see *Aen.* 4.622-29). Vergil's hero, moving toward a divinely preordained goal among *reges et proelia* (see *Aen.* 7.37-45), is less free than Homer's to explore Circean delights;¹⁶ and it is the austere Sibyl, not the lovely temptress, who presides over the journey to Hades. Aeneas, at this point, is being prepared for battles of a different sort from those which await Odysseus. His face is now set toward history, not mythology; and it is an easy task for Neptune to steer the *pii Troes* past this *dea saeva* and her *monstra* (*Aen.* 7.19-21).¹⁷

As Knauer has noted, Vergil really inverts the significance of Homer's Circe.¹⁸ In the *Odyssey*, Circe is a goddess who ultimately furthers the journey and, indeed, proves indispensable to it. In the *Aeneid*, she is only a supernatural danger and an obstruction who symbolizes the lure of hidden passions. In this aspect, however, she has an important function in Book 7, for she foreshadows the violence, passion, and chthonic magic of Allecto, with whom she shares the themes of *venena* (see 7.341, 354) and *monstra* (see 7.348, 376). In a book in which sanity and order give way to brutish unreason, in which the authority of Aeneas, the gentle calm of old Latinus, and the pristine peace of the Italic countryside retreat before irate mobs and the lust for blood, Circe's presence in the opening lines is ominously appropriate. The emphasis on *saevus* given by the anaphoric word-play,¹⁹ *saetigeri . . . saevire* in 17-18, followed by *dea saeva* in 19, strikes what will become a dominant

¹⁶ On Vergil's abbreviations of the Homeric narrative and the restrictions surrounding his adaptations of the Odyssean part of his material, see Richard Heinze, *Virgils epische Technik*³ (Leipzig and Berlin 1915) 111.

¹⁷ On this aspect of the Circe passage in general, see C. P. Segal, "Aeternum per saecula nomen, The Golden Bough and the Tragedy of History," Part 2, *Arion* 5 (1966) 56-62.

¹⁸ G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer* = "Hypomnemata" 7 (Göttingen 1964) 136-38, especially 138.

¹⁹ I owe the observation of this word-play in 7.17-19 to my colleague, Professor Michael Putnam.

note in this book and later.²⁰ Circe at the beginning poses the threat of human brutalization which is to hang over both Aeneas' victory and Turnus' defeat.²¹

Circe also points backward as well as forward. As a character from the *Odyssey*, she recalls Aeneas' successful completion of his years of wandering. As he passes her by, one phase of his life closes, as did another with the death of his nurse, Caieta, in the very first lines of the book. His safe passage confirms his escape both from the seductions of a Dido and from the call of the open sea. At the same time, since her island belongs both to Odyssean myth and to Italian geography, she evokes here, at the very moment of arrival in the new homeland, that "magical, vaguely sinister Italy" (to quote Quinn)²² glimpsed in the earlier books (cf. 3.386). In this light too we may understand her associations with early Italic history and myth later in Book 7 (see below).

Yet Knauer's point about Vergil's inverting the significance of the Homeric Circe is only partially correct. Homer's Circe, after all, is initially as dangerous as Vergil's, albeit in a different way. Vergil effectively borrows and enriches the aura of terror and mystery which surrounds the Homeric figure. But, characteristically, his enrichment lies in the evocative quality and the deliberate exploitation of multiple connotations in his language, rather than in character development or precise visual detail.²³

The limits of Vergil's narrative obviously forced him to a severe reduction of the Homeric figure, but the lines along which he simplifies are interesting. The complexity of the Homeric palace, the strange *ἱερὰ δώματα* "built with smooth-polished stones," becomes only *tecta superba* (7.12); and the adjective has connotations in the *Aeneid* (e.g. the

²⁰ The frequency of *saevus* or *saevire* in Book 7 is striking: lines 84, 222, 287, 329, 461, 511, 568, 592, 608, 664, 719.

²¹ See K. J. Reckford, "Latent Tragedy in *Aeneid* VII. 1-285," *AJP* 82 (1961) 255, who remarks thus on the transformed animals of Vergil's Circe: "To Vergil their brutalization is only an outward sign of the mastery that passion has over its slaves. Eluded but never really solved, the problem of dehumanizing passion re-awaits Aeneas."

²² Kenneth Quinn, *Virgil's Aeneid, A Critical Description* (London 1968) 177.

²³ For some aspects of the differences between Homeric and Vergilian styles see Brooks Otis, *Virgil, A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford 1963) chap. 3, especially pp. 41-61; also my remarks in my review-article, "The Achievement of Vergil," *Arion* 4 (1965) 127-30.

famous *debellare superbos*) which leave no doubt about the one-dimensional effect being sought.

Vergil still retains the singing of the Homeric Circe: she fills her remote groves with continual song (7.11-12):

inaccessos ubi Solis filia lucos
adsiduo resonat cantu.

But the phrase *inaccessos lucos* stresses the savagery of her forest home and her affinities with the wild. In the following lines the latter aspect of her character prevails over the songfulness. Whereas Odysseus' companions hear only sweet song, those of Aeneas hear the roars and howls of lions, boars, bears, and wolves (7.15-18):

hinc exaudiri gemitus iraeque leonum
vincla recusantum et sera sub nocte rudentum,
saetigerique sues atque in praesepebus ursi
saevire ac formae magnorum ululare luporum.²⁴

Vergil gives his chief aural emphasis to the wild animals, Homer to the goddess' song.

Vergil's next two lines (19-20) closely follow Homer:

quos hominum ex facie dea saeva potentibus herbis
induerat Circe in vultus ac terga ferarum.

But Vergil has significantly expanded the Homeric line (*Od.* 10.213), τοὺς αὐτῇ κατέβηλεξεν, ἐπεὶ κακὰ φάρμακ' ἔδωκεν, by the addition of *saeva* (in place of the colorless αὐτῇ), by the more graphic and terrible detail of *vultus ac terga*, and by the pointed chiasmic opposition, *hominum ex facie . . . terga ferarum*. The last two effects subtly stress the horror and eeriness of the metamorphosis from men into wild brutes; and this point, as suggested earlier, is in keeping with the tone of the book as a whole.

Homer never alludes to the roaring of Circe's animals. Interestingly, however, he uses the verb ἀμφιμέμυκεν, "roared about," in 10.227. Yet the verb refers not to the animals, but to the echo of Circe's song (10.227, καλὸν αἰοιδίαι, δάπεδον δ' ἅπαν ἀμφιμέμυκεν). The strong metaphor unexpectedly suggests a bestial sound rather than

²⁴ For the Homeric borrowings in Vergil's treatment of Circe's wild animals, see Conington *ad locc.* in John Conington and Henry Nettleship, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*³ (London 1883) vol. 3. Also the brief remarks of Reckford (above, note 21) 255.

a female voice. It locates the mystery within Circe, at the very center of her charms, and suggests, perhaps more subtly than Vergil, the ambiguous hint of bestiality which runs beneath her grace and art.

The animals which surround the Homeric Circe are correspondingly gentler and more agreeable than Vergil's, and they fawn on their fellows-to-be in terms which recall a settled and civilized life, for they are compared to dogs fawning about a kind master after dinner (10.216-19). Yet with the complexity characteristic of Homer's entire episode, their friendliness enhances the seductive danger of their mistress and dramatizes the easy allurements of her service. It is, in fact, just this unnatural tameness which is so unnerving, as the brief, but chilling comment in 10.219 shows: "They felt fear when they saw the terrible monsters;" and the effect is underlined by the contrast between the "hard-clawed wolves and lions"²⁵ in 218 and the extraordinary "fawning" in 219. The enjambement, *λύκοι κρατερώνυχες ἥδ' ἐλέοντες / σαῖνον*, points up the contrast even more strongly.

It is only natural that the Vergilian Circe, perceived (or rather heard) only from a distance (cf. *inaccessos lucos*), will appear more sinister, though in fact she is less powerful. Vergil's scene is mysterious, but the mystery is of a deeper and more somber cast than Homer's. His animals have thus lost all traces of humanity and are simply dangerous wild beasts. In Homer (*Od.* 10.240) the transformed swine retain their human *nous* as before. The lightness, if not quite humor, of the Homeric transformation (see *Od.* 10.239-43, 389-99), which Ovid will develop further (*Met.* 14.278-86, 302-5), is completely abandoned. Vergil tells us instead of lions resisting their chains (*iraeque leonum / vincla recusantum*, 15-16). With these four words, as with the ensuing detail, *sera sub nocte rudentum*, he creates a deliberately bizarre image of his superhuman enchantress violently asserting her power over these beasts. Homer, for all the flavor of fantasy in his tale, does not get so far away from the human reality of Circe. His adventurers, after all, cannot pass her by; they are to have dealings with her for an entire year. Vergil goes on to magnify the mysterious and elemental qualities of his goddess with the sound and rhythm of

²⁵ The epithet *κρατερώνυχες* (in this position in the verse) is used primarily of horses (twice of mules): *Il.* 5.329; 16. 724, 732; 24. 277; *Od.* 6.253; 21.30. It occurs only here of wolves.

line 18 and the suggestive periphrasis which makes not the wolves themselves howl, but their "shapes": *ac formae magnorum ululare luporum*. Homer's setting is a Bellini or a Giorgione to Vergil's Hieronymus Bosch.

In his descriptions of lions, boars, bears, and wolves, however, Vergil has in fact taken up a hint in Homer's narrative. Three of these four animals are listed in a single line by the cowardly and frightened Eurylochus when Odysseus summons his companions back to the now friendly Circe (10.432-33):

ἧ κεν ἅπαντας
ἦ σὺς ἡὲ λύκους ποιήσεται ἡὲ λέοντας.²⁶

But Eurylochus is not here describing what has actually happened. He is in a panic. The whole of his short speech, beginning with the desperate and emotional 10.431: Ἄ δειλοί, πόσ' ἔμεν; is colored by a frantic, rhetorical tone of dire prognostic. It is just this note, however, that Vergil wished to sound for his version.

Circe's mysteriousness has another dimension in Vergil. Following Apollonius, he gives up the relative transparency of gesture and motivation in the Homeric figure. His dissolution of Homeric factuality is clear from the very beginning in his strange twilight setting (7.8-10). But it is present too in his handling of the loom, one of the details which he has carefully preserved from Homer (7.12-14):

tectisque superbis
urit odoratam nocturna in lumina cedrum
arguto tenuis percurrens pectine telas.

Behind this passage lies *Odyssey* 10.221-23:

Κίρκης δ' ἔνδον ἄκουον ἀειδούσης ὅπῃ καλῇ,
ἰστὸν ἐποιχομένης μέγαν ἄμβροτον, οἷα θεάων
λεπτά τε καὶ χαρίεντα καὶ ἀγλαὰ ἔργα πέλονται.

Vergil has not only added the suggestive synaesthesia of line 13, but has also changed the quality of Circe's movements. The Homeric operation is clear and simple. The physical action is rendered in its most essential and easily perceivable feature: ἐποιχομένη (repeated at 226 and 254). The goddess sings at her work like a cheerful housewife.

²⁶ Vergil's use of the Eurylochus passage is overlooked by Knauer (above, note 18) in his list of Homeric parallels to *Aen.* 7.15-20 (pp. 398-99, 512).

The loom too, despite the "light and lovely and radiant works like those of goddesses," has a reassuring (even if formulaic) solidity (*μέγαν*). The activity of Vergil's Circe is harder to visualize. *Percurrens* is a metaphor, as *ἐπιχομένη* is not. The complex word order and alliteration in line 14 also contribute to the studied blurring of detail. This weaving seems to produce no tangible results comparable to the Homeric *aglaa erga*. It appears, rather, as a magical, timeless gesture. So too the adjectives *tenuis* and *arguto*, significantly juxtaposed, point far from the concreteness of Homer's "big loom." On the other hand, it is characteristic of the complexity of the Homeric figure that her woven *aglaa erga* strongly contrast with the outcome of the episode, with its "swine who bed on the earth" (10.243). The goddess' initial domestic busyness takes on a grim and perhaps ironical coloring also as she throws her new guests acorns and cornel-berries instead of the elaborate *kykeôn* first offered (10.234-35).

Vergil develops the intangibility and distanced mysteriousness of his Circe a bit further in the brief account of Picus later in the book (7.189-91):

Picus, equum domitor, quem capta cupidine coniunx
aurea percussum virga versumque venenis
fecit avem Circe sparsitque coloribus alas.

The sinister *venena* accord well with the atmosphere of the beginning of Book 7, though the golden wand and the splash of color are brighter touches. But no human motivation for Circe's action is readily at hand. She is already Picus' wife in this version and does not have to win his favors as she does in the Ovidian episode; nor are grounds for jealousy suggested, as they are in Ovid. The phrase which ostensibly explains her reasons, *capta cupidine coniunx*, is the most mysterious of all. Conington even resorts to the desperate and implausible expedient of suggesting that it might mean *capta cupidine coniugii*.²⁷ But Vergil has so condensed his allusion that it is probably fruitless to attempt to reconstruct Circe's emotions. He is simply not interested enough in

²⁷ Conington and Nettleship (above, note 24) *ad loc.* See Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid, A Poet Between Two Worlds* = "Sather Classical Lectures" 18 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1945) 223, note 87: "It remains obscure why Circe, who was here supposed to be his wife . . . should have been frustrated in her love for him."

her as a character to develop her personality beyond the symbolic witch of 7.11-20.

A symbolic figure need not be presented in the round to be effective in a poem like the *Aeneid*, where the concrete and symbolic are in continual liquescent interfusion. Vergil's narrative needs Circe as the type of demonic, seductive power. His style, with its controlled rhetoric, its density of syntax, allusion, and imagery, can make the most of a symbolic Circe without our necessarily missing the more fully characterized, more womanly figure of the *Odyssey*.

Circe has one further appearance in the book (and in the poem).²⁸ Here too, though her motives are clearer, her actions are equally remote and secret. Latinus presents to Aeneas fire-breathing horses (7.282-83):

illorum de gente patri quos daedala Circe
supposita de matre nothos furata creavit.

The lines not only refer to her solar ancestry, but also, in *creavit*, hint at her connection with the *potnia thêrôn*. The epithet *daedala*, which occurs only here in the *Aeneid*, recalls the remote, mysterious Crete of Daedalus at the beginning of Book 6, and perhaps also Lucretius' *daedala tellus* (1.7, in the same metrical position), the giver of all life. Why Vergil should mention these details is uncertain. In the light of what has already been suggested about Circe's role in Book 7, however, one may perhaps speculate that mention of her here reflects the dangers in the background which will soon frustrate this happy alliance. As in 189-91, Circe points to elements in Latinus' ancestry and environment which he proves unable to control. This Circean gift reveals a truth about Aeneas' initial relations with the Latins which their king does not yet know.

III

Like Vergil, Ovid simplifies the Homeric Circe, but he goes a step beyond Vergil, and his direction is almost the reverse.²⁹ He greatly

²⁸ The only other mention of Circe is a passing reference to her island in 3.386. It is interesting that the three major references to her all come early in Book 7. See above, pp. 430-31.

²⁹ For other aspects of Circe in the *Metamorphoses* see my forthcoming "Myth and Philosophy in the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid's Augustanism and the Augustan Conclusion

lessens the mysterious aura which envelops the goddess in his predecessors. She becomes a female of strong passions as much as a remote, powerful goddess ruling over an enchanted island. Her power is easily the equal of the Vergilian Circe's, but its exercise is less serious.

The loves, sorrows, deaths of characters like Glaucus, Scylla, or Picus do not stir our deepest concern, nor are they meant to. Their suffering, unlike that of an Odysseus or an Aeneas, bears only indirectly upon the creation of a cosmic or social order. With no central hero, no homeward journey, no ultimate goal, the *Metamorphoses* cannot really strike us with terror through dangerous figures like Circe. There is no cherished central purpose for such figures to obstruct.

Unlike the Vergilian figure, the Ovidian Circe has motivations which are completely intelligible, indeed only too humanly so. Her immediate response to Glaucus' request for help in his amour with Scylla is to offer herself: "melius sequerere volentem / optantemque eadem, pariliq[ue] cupidine captam" (14.28-89). Her words invoke the theme of *cupido* which Vergil had introduced (*Aen.* 7.189), though the motif was present, if not explicit, in *Odyssey* 10.333-35. Refused by Glaucus, she jealously plots against Scylla and poisons her cove with magical herbs. Her behavior with Picus later has the same pattern. Having met him by chance in the woods (typically while she is gathering new herbs, 14.346-48), she lures him away from his cortège, offers her love, and, when refused, changes him into a bird. Ovid makes it quite explicit how closely he has modeled his character after a mortal paradigm, the woman scorned (14.384-85):

non impune feres, neque, ait, reddere Canenti,
laesaque quid faciat, quid amans, quid femina, disces.³⁰

The rhetoric itself (*quid . . . quid . . . quid*), with its determined, one-sided pressure on a single point, is symptomatic of the loss of that delicate balance between feminine generosity and unpredictable feminine malignancy in the Homeric figure. Homer is capable of

of Book XV," *AJP* 90 (1969); and my *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses: A Study in the Transformations of a Literary Symbol* = "Hermes Einzelschriften" 23 (Wiesbaden 1969) 62-68.

³⁰ The next line, 14.385, is bracketed by most editors: "rebus, ait, sed amans est laesa et femina Circe." Compare also 14.25-27, where, however, a divine or mythical cause for this amorous *ingenium* is stressed. See in general Fränkel (above, note 27) 104.

rhetoric too, but the general clarity and simplicity of his style—*saphêneia*, in the ancient terminology—enable him to encompass ambiguities which do not have to be forced to one side or the other. His Circe does not have to be a villainess. His style does not ask us to make up our minds. Ovid's (as Vergil's) does.

Ovid follows Vergil (and Apollonius) in focusing on the elemental violence of the goddess. He therefore stresses her ancestry from the Sun and the Titans. *Filia Solis*, *Titanis*, *Titania* are recurrent epithets (13.968; 14.10, 14, 33, 346, 375–76, 382, 438). Both Homer and Vergil are unemphatic on this point (*Od.* 10.138; *Aen.* 7.11, 282). In *Aeneid* 7.11 the adjective *dives* is added, and Homer too seems to give her solar ancestry a positive and life-giving quality: *φαεσιμβρότου Ἡελίοιο*.³¹

Exploiting the Hellenistic association between magic and love which he had already drawn upon in the Medea episode of his seventh book, Ovid stresses that side of Circe which is concerned with witchcraft and enchantment. Three times (four with Merkel's text at 14.365) he calls her magic *venena* (14.55, 403, 413). He is thus drawing upon the exotic fantasy of Apollonius, though the immediate influence may have been the hint offered by the *venenis* of *Aeneid* 7.190. In the Picus episode Circe becomes a magician pure and simple. She can charm the moon, bring rain and mist, darken the skies (14.365–70). In the fine passage of 14.403–15 she can also cause trees to move and give stones voice. Ovid's rhetoric warms to its task. We move closer to the world of the *Argonautica* than that of the *Odyssey*.

Yet the magic may be more than a flourish of ecphrastic rhetoric. It may be an expression of the malignant and wildly destructive side of female passion which Ovid's Circe embodies so definitively. The very quality of abundance in such rhetoric suggests not only mysterious depths of elemental power, but perhaps also something of the overgrown, self-indulgent, undisciplined lushness characteristic of this goddess, an excess of growth, both within the soul and within the entire Circean realm of this part of the *Metamorphoses*. This magic and its results project the disordered, irrational state of Circe's whole being and convey her passion's blind, willful megalomania, its removal

³¹ See Stanford (above, note 3) 46. Note, however, the proximity to the "evil-minded Aeetes" in 10.137.

from the ordered, regular rhythms of external reality (one may again compare Medea and Dido). And in the world of the *Metamorphoses* passion rules. Inner irrationality finds outward form in magic, which, after all, is the arbitrary, topsy-turvy reversal of nature's processes for private aims. The sun overcast by a scorned woman's whim is almost an emblem for the entire poem.

It is perhaps because he concentrates on the elemental qualities of Circe—passion, magic, Titanic ancestry—that Ovid leaves out the Homeric details of her singing and weaving. The omissions are all the more striking since otherwise this part of Ovid's narrative follows Homer closely (cf. *Met.* 14.248–87 and *Od.* 10.224–45). He frequently mentions Circe's *carmina*, but these are “magical spells,” not songs (see 14.20–21, 34, 44, 302, 357, 366, 369, 387). Instead it is her victim, the innocent Canens, the wife to whom Picus remains faithful, who possesses these more civilized attributes: *feminea modulatur carmina voce* (14.341).³² Ovid, in fact, makes a special point of the fact that Circe's attendants do not weave, but rather spend their time in sorting out magical herbs (“*vellera motis / nulla trahunt digitis nec fila sequentia ducunt*,” 14.264–65); and Circe, of course, knows only too well the properties of all these herbs (268–70).

Ovid still keeps close to the Homeric details of the elaborate palace (cf. *atria marmore tecta*, 14.260) and the fawning animals (14.254–61). Here a close comparison of the two texts will be useful.

quae simul attigimus stetimisque in limine tecti,
mille lupi mixtaeque lupis ursaeque leaeque
occursu fecere metum, sed nulla timenda
nullaque erat nostro factura in corpore vulnus;
quin etiam blandas movere per aera caudas
nostraeque adulantes comitant vestigia, donec
excipiunt famulae perque atria marmore tecta
ad dominam ducunt (254–61).

ἀμφὶ δέ μιν λύκοι ἦσαν ὀρέστεροι ἢ δὲ λέοντες,
τοὺς αὐτὴ κατέελξεν, ἐπεὶ κακὰ φάρμακ' ἔδωκεν.
οὐδ' οἱ γ' ὠρμήθησαν ἐπ' ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ' ἄρα τοί γε
οὐρῇσιν μακρῇσι περισσαινόντες ἀνέσταν (10.212–15).

³² Fränkel (above, note 27) 105 points out the contrast between Canens' “sweet, spellbinding melodies” and “Circe's weird incantations.”

One notes at once that Homer's narrative is quieter. He uses the simple copula, ἦσαν, in 212, where Ovid has the elaborate and aggressive *occursu fecere metum*. The mystery of Circe's power is suggested in the simple κατέθελξεν and κακὰ φάρμακα in line 213, while the restraint and simplicity of 212 contrast with the intricacy of Ovid's line 255. Ovid's "thousand wolves" and the homoeoteleuton and polysyndeton of *mixtaeque . . . ursaeque leaeque* bring Circe much closer to the vast multiplicity of the animal world than she is in Homer and thus produce an effect analogous to Vergil's *gemitus, rudentum, ululare* in *Aeneid* 7.15-18. Like Vergil, he is fascinated by the suggestive possibilities of the wild beasts; but, as the lighter tone of his narrative demands, he stresses their tameness rather than their wildness, adding a gratuitous *blandas* to the Homeric picture (*Met.* 14.258, *Od.* 10.215) and elaborating a new detail (14.259).

He strikes a note half-way between Homer and Vergil, however, in the setting in which Ulysses' companions are entertained. Circe's victims pass through a rich palace, but they are soon led to a *pulcher recessus* (14.261) where she sits surrounded by her nymphs sorting flowers (264-67). Ovid thus attenuates the civilized locale of Homer and relinquishes the palace itself for a sense of sylvan surroundings, but on the other hand he does not go as far as Vergil with his roaring beasts and *inaccessos lucos*. Ovid exploits this sylvan touch later when he sets the Picus episode *silva in alta* (14.364).

In giving Circe woodland nymphs for companions, Ovid is perhaps developing the connection between Circe and nature implied in Homer's account of the serving-maids who come "from springs and groves and from holy rivers which flow forth into the salt sea" (*Od.* 10.350-51). But Ovid is seeking a light rustic flavor, whereas in Homer these traits are probably dim survivals of a strange and primitive nature-goddess. On the other hand, Homer is careful to keep this aspect of Circe well in the background. True, she can send a favoring wind (*Od.* 11.6-8, 12.148-50); but that power belongs to many Homeric divinities regardless of any specific connection with wind or sea.

Ovid, however, makes an original use of the geography of Circe's mythical realm. In the *Odyssey* her abode combines the remoteness of sea with the impenetrability of dense forest. Odysseus' first view of Aeaea juxtaposes these two elements: he sees both an island set low

in the middle of a "boundless sea" and smoke arising from "thick scrub and woods" (10.194-97). And later Hermes departs from "the well-wooded island" (*νησον ἀν' ὑλήεσσαν*, 10.308). Vergil too had combined Circe's *litora* with *inaccessos lucos* (*Aen.* 7.10-11). In Ovid this combination of sea and woodland provides a focal point for some of the material in Books 13 and 14. Here Circe has a dominant role in three myths: that of Scylla and Glaucus, that of Ulysses and his companions, and that of Picus and Canens. The first tale has an exclusively marine setting; the second (as in Homer) combines sea and woods; the third is exclusively sylvan. By playing upon Circe's connection with both sea and forest, Ovid is able to make her presence in tales (1) and (3) more natural. She can thus serve as a link between Books 13 and 14 and as a unifying figure throughout 14. The fact that she is so eminently a goddess of metamorphosis obviously aids her unifying function. The passionate, amorous side of Circe which Ovid has greatly expanded from hints in Homer and Vergil also makes her a natural link between two stories of love, those of Scylla and Picus.

Ovid's geographical flexibility in the handling of Circe has another aspect which also points to his inventive and innovating spirit. In all his predecessors (including Apollonius) the goddess is essentially a stay-at-home. Her victims come to her, lured perhaps by her song and the inviting smoke from her hearth. Her activity is limited to her palace and its immediate environs, nor is there any suggestion (even in *Od.* 10.569-74) that she ever leaves her island. By allowing her freer movement, however, Ovid gives her a more active initiative and a more aggressive role. She herself invades hitherto peaceful places. Thus she destroys Scylla in the *grata quies* of her cove and Picus in the remote Ausonian woods over which he rules (see 14.320, 326-32, 342-43).

CONCLUSION

Circe's appearance in these three works reveals something of each poem's basic qualities. The Circe episode of Homer is characterized by a clarity and intelligibility of action and motivation and by a subtle fusion of the imaginative charm of the fairy tale with precise observations of human nature. Homer is able to infuse into his story the

numinous power of strange demi-gods while yet retaining strict narrative control and tight logical consistency.

In Vergil, Circe has become part of a symbolic setting, a stage of a journey which is moving on to more definite and less private realms. By highlighting and exaggerating some of the more sinister details of the Homeric figure, Vergil uses her to foreshadow the dangers of human brutalization, dangers, however, which lie not in past myth, but in present and future history. She is thus a removed and "mythical" counterpart to his Allecto.

In Ovid the elemental sexuality of Circe occupies the foreground. The Homeric complexity of awesome enchantress and benign adviser, of songstress and goddess of the wild, has contracted to a one-sided emphasis on female passion. The greater attention which Ovid gives to Circean magic adds a romantic coloring which is appropriate to his poem and affords the opportunity for fine displays of rhetorical *topoi*, as in 14.386-415. Yet this magic has more in it than just the "cheap operatic profusion" found by Hermann Fränkel,³³ for it is a manifestation of that arbitrary violence which pervades the entire work. As a goddess both of passion and of metamorphosis *par excellence*, both of love and of invincible magic, Ovid's Circe comes close to summing up the underlying spirit of his poem.

In Homer too, though much less definitively, Circe has something of this synoptic quality, for she holds in balance the two opposing possibilities of the fantasy-world of Odysseus' wanderings: strange, incomprehensible danger, yet sudden, equally inexplicable generosity. Her island, precarious landing place, yet safe refuge for an entire year, is thus a natural point of departure for the final plunge into the deeper unknown: Hades, the Sirens, and the dark adventures of Scylla, Charybdis, and Thrinacia.

³³ Fränkel (above, note 27) 105. His explanation for what he regards as a mistake or a lapse of taste here is that the story is told by a maidservant of Circe, "proud of the formidable powers which her mistress wielded" (p. 105). See also my *Landscape* (above, note 29) *loc. cit.*