THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF CIRCE:

THE HISTORY OF AN ARCHETYPAL CHARACTER

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Abstract

The myth of Circe and Odysseus has been told, interpreted and retold from Homer's time to the present. This thesis begins with a detailed study of Homer's balancing of positive and negative elements of the myth and argues that Homer's Circe is connected with age-old traditions of goddess worship, particularly of Artemis of Ephesus. Chapters III and IV investigate the cultural context in which the purely negative Circe of the Homeric allegorists developed and how this allegorical Circe affected works by other ancient writers, particularly Virgil and Ovid. Later chapters demonstrate how this negative allegorical view of Circe prevailed through the Renaissance and seventeenth century, as evidenced in mythographies, Calderón's plays and by Spenser's Acrasia. The study concludes that allegorical interpretations of the Circe myth were founded on body-soul dualism, so that not until this belief is questioned and abandoned by Joyce and Atwood in the twentieth century are more original and/or positive Circes found.

Abstrait

Le mythe de Circé et d'Ulysse a été raconté, interprété et raconté de nouveau, depuis l'époque d'Homère jusqu'à nos jours. Cette thèse commence avec une étude détaillée des éléments positifs et négatifs du mythe d'Homère. Elle démontre aussi que la Circé d'Homère est liée aux vieilles traditions du culte des déesses, et plus particulièrement à celui d'Artemis d'Ephèse. Les troisième et quatrième chapitres s'intéressent au contexte culturel dans lequel les allégories purement négatives de la Circé d'Homère ont évolué et comment cette Circé allégorique a influence les oeuvres littéraires d'autres écrivains anciens, en particulier celles de Virgile et d'Ovide. Les chapitres suivant démontrent comment cette façon négative et allégorique de voir Circé a prévalu à travers la Renaissance et au 17ieme siècle et par évidence dans les mythographies, en les drames de Calderón et en l'Acrasie de Spenser. Cette étude conclut que les interprétations allégoriques du mythe de Circé ont été fondées sur un dualisme corps-âme, jusqu'à ce que Joyce et Atwood au vingtième siècle, remettent en question et abandonnent cette croyance, nous n'avons pas trouvé une Circé plus originale et/ou positive.

Where love reigns, there is no will to power; and where the will to power is paramount, love is lacking. The one is but the shadow of the other.

- C. G. Jung

The Temptress

So you thought you were alive! I swear I'll make your pores open like fish mouths.
When you hear banging pipes - that'll be your blood.
Light will soothe your eyes like a silk shawl.
Gravity will stab your heel like a thorn.
Your shoulder blades will cry for wings.
And you thought you were alive!
Listen - falling dust will deafen you your eyebrows will be burning gashes and you'll swear your memory began at the birth of time.

- Nina Cassian translated from the Rumanian by Laura Schiff

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Preface

Stories also have stories. I first became curious about the tale of how Circe has fared through the ages when I reread the Odyssey several years ago. Why was it, I wondered, that I had not before noticed what is plainly there to notice: that Circe acts as Odysseus' great teacher and guide, giving him the information he needs in order to return to Ithaca and Penelope? Why had I and almost everyone else I asked remembered her only as the witch who makes pigs of men? I began to suspect the presence of some powerful assumptions which make our perceptions and memory selective—assumptions which I wished to investigate.

As I pieced together the story of the Circe-Odysseus myth's reception in history, I began to see how connected it was to prevailing ideas about the nature of the body and the soul and about the power of women. In regard to these issues, the different Circes I encountered almost all seemed to be accurate reflections of the cultures in which they appeared. A considerable portion of this study, therefore, is devoted to examining these cultural contexts, in particular that of the first Homeric allegorists in Greece and that of the Renaissance poets who found Circe so singularly compelling. The Circe myth, I gradually realized, has functioned as a magnet for what writers of different eras have had to say about the relationship of sexuality, with all its possibilities for vulnerability and power,

to human nature as a whole. Eras in which belief in a body-soul dualism has prevailed have been exceedingly uncomfortable (though not unfascinated) with Homer's goddess-enchantress and have tended to view her allegorically. The relationship of myth to allegory thus became a kind of subtheme to my work.

To the best of my knowledge, the story of how the Circe-Odysseus myth has been regarded and reinterpreted through the centuries has never been told fully before. In my investigations I came across bits and pieces of it--Merritt Hughes' excellent article on "Spenser's Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance" (1943), Gabriel Germain's intriguing speculations about Circe's connections with ancient folklore and religion in his Génèse de l'Odysée (1954) -- but no one, with the exception of Bernhard Paetz, who has written a slim volume of uninterpreted references entitled Kirke und Odysseus (1970), has followed the path of the myth from the ancient world to modern or early modern times. Paetz's book proved to be a valuable bibliographic tool, providing me with leads to the Homeric allegorists in antiquity who so efficiently influenced the way in which the enchantress would be regarded for the next two thousand years. For the most part, however, I have proceeded independently, uncovering sources and connections as I have gone along.

All in all, Circe's meta-story has seemed fraught with meaning and well worth telling, even though in the process of telling it I have inevitably been drawn into areas of Western history and literature in which I have had no previous expertise and have therefore been in danger of making misjudgments.

Early in my investigation I had to decide on a rule about whom to include and whom to overlook, for European culture and literature are filled with legends about enchantresses and femme fatales. I decided, somewhat arbitrarily, that any character who was either named Circe or who changed men to beasts was within my desired range. I have departed from this guideline only in the case of Milton, whose Comus, we are told, is Circe's son and whose Paradise Lost was too vast and relevant to ignore.

Deciding on an overall organization for this study posed no such problem, for only one order seemed logical and natural: a strict chronological one. Again, I have departed from this once, in Chapter Two, which investigates Homer's possible sources for the Circe-Odysseus myth after I have retold that myth in Chapter One. For reasons of both drama and homage, it seemed wise to let Homer have the first word.

I wish to thank many people, without whose assistance I could not have completed this study:

The Friends of McGill, whose generous fellowships enabled me to travel to Greece and the Aegean coast of Turkey and to visit the museums and temple sites there—particularly those at Selçuk Turkey, where Artemis of Ephesus once was honored.

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Chapter One. Homer's Circe

When Odysseus and his men beach their ship on Circe's island, they are in extremis—hungry and driven by need to replenish their stores, mourning for comrades brutally murdered by the Cyclops and Laistrygoneans, fearful of what will come next. In this condition, stripped of his usual vigor and bearing, Odysseus would hardly seem fit for yet another adventure, particularly for one that will prove to be an archetypal encounter between the sexes. In the world of the Odyssey, however, the most desperate moments are frequently the most auspicious. The island of Aiaia, so clouded at first with vague and imminent danger, eventually becomes a place of pleasure and refuge for him and his men. And Circe herself, once she has played her sinister hand, acts as a true friend to Odysseus, one who helps him towards Ithaca, his destiny. There is an exquisite balance between the dangerous and beneficent in Homer's portrait of Circe, the oldest to come down to us.1

A close reading of Book Ten and of the relevant portion of Book Twelve reveals the elements of this balance. From the first phrase the poet uses to describe Circe, it is apparent; she is $\delta \epsilon i v \hat{\gamma} \delta \hat{\epsilon} \hat{c} \hat{c}$

¹ Very little Homeric commentary of any era recognizes the strength of both sides of Circe. An exception is Gabriel Germain's Génèse de l'Odyssée (Paris, 1954); see especially p. 249: "Elle commence en enchanteresse perfide et finit en bonne fée."

divinity, of another order of being than that of mortals, she is nevertheless accessible, for she speaks our tongue. Nor does she dwell on the pristine, lofty heights of Olympos; her island is low-lying and presumably far to the East, "where the dwellings and dancing floors of early-born Dawn are, and the rising places of the Sun" (12.3-4).3 The old Greek name for Asia Minor, Anatolia, is derived from $\partial V \uparrow \circ \lambda \dot{\alpha}_i$, this word for rising places; 4 this fact, combined with Homer's statement that she is sister to Aietes, who in the Argonaut legends figures as king of Colchis on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, strongly suggests that Circe's island is somewhere in that region.5 In Homer's time the Pontus or Black Sea was the edge of the known world; its shores were thought to be populated by wealthy, barbarous, shamanistic Scythians and by their Amazon

² Although Homer once applies the phrase to Calypso (12.449), he otherwise reserves it for Circe; it is her distinctive epithet.

³ This and all other translations from the Greek, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

⁴ And from its related verb ανατέλλω, "cause to spring up." See W. B. Stanford's notes to his edition of the Greek text (New York, 1959), I, 405.

⁵ Homer knew the Argonaut myths, which he describes as "of interest to all" (12.70). In Apollonius Rhodius' Hellenistic version, Circe, as aunt to Medea, is an active part of the cast.

The Italians, from Virgil's time to the present, have been eager to claim Circe and have named a mountain and a national park after her. Locating the island off the west coast of Italy is unconvincing, however, because for the Greeks the sun does not rise over the Tyrrhenian Sea. Also, Homer describes the island as low-lying, not mountainous. All attempts, of course, to trace literally the geography of the Odyssey are doomed to uncertainty. Long ago Eratosthenes warned that "the scenes will be found, when you find the tailor who sewed the bag of the winds, and not before." Quoted by Robert Brown, Jr., The Myth of Kirke (London, 1883), p. 97.

neighbors. With its aura of magic and gold, this region seems appropriate to Circe, daughter of Helios, the sun god. On the other side too her lineage is elemental; her mother is Perse, daughter of Oceanos (10.139). Connected by heritage with these great energies of sea and light, it is small wonder that Circe herself should possess the power to loosen the bonds of form, to transform.

Odysseus, of course, knows nothing of her or her powers when he lands on Aiaia.6 All he sees when he climbs a rocky lookout is a puff of smoke ascending from the island's thickly-wooded center. Having no choice but to explore, he shakes lots with his men and sends the winner, his captain Eurylochos, off with a scouting contingent. They weep as they set forth, for they are conditioned by now to expect the worst of the unknown.

What they find is an establishment which blends the stately with the sinister. Circe's home is made of stone polished smooth on all sides, a labor-intensive building material found nowhere else in the Odyssey and appropriate to the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity. When Odysseus later refers to this house as an Example of the status of a Mycenaean king or a divinity.

⁶ The name of the island might derive from the name of Circe's brother Aietes; or from 220, an exclamation of extreme distress (in which case it would mean "wailing"); or from 20, an alternate form of 30, the Greek word for earth, which Homer sometimes uses. It might also derive from the West Semitic ayya, which means "hawk." They all seem appropriate.

The unusual menagerie roaming her grounds is more disconcerting to Eurylochos and his men. Tamed wolves and mountain lions rise up to fawn on them, like dogs begging for tidbits. Monsters— Néw wpw—Odysseus calls them, as he tells his story at the Phaeacian court (10.219). The word is strong, used elsewhere only for Skylla and Polyphemos; it expresses the Greek horror at seeing the order of nature overturned. Yet Odysseus refrains from implying that these creatures were formerly human. That interpretation comes only from Eurylochos, when, after refusing to enter Circe's house, he reports back to Odysseus in terror. "She will make all of you into swine or wolves or lions," he says (10.432-433), and he goes on, with a boldness born of fear, to accuse Odysseus of rashness, of wantonly causing the death of his men.

Should we believe Eurylochos on this point? Certainly the predominant inclination of Homer's readers has been to do so. Yet an acquaintance with goddess-worship in the ancient world raises cause for doubt. One of the most common elements of this religious iconography, in Anatolia and Mesopotamia and later in Crete and Greece, was the goddess of wild things flanked by heraldic predators, particularly by lions.7 (Figures 1 and 2) Her ability to calm the most dangerous and deadly of beasts was taken as a sign of her awesome power.

The disparity in point of view between Odysseus and Eurylochos is one of Homer's most subtle techniques for developing complexity and

⁷ This iconography will be treated more thoroughly in Chapter Two.

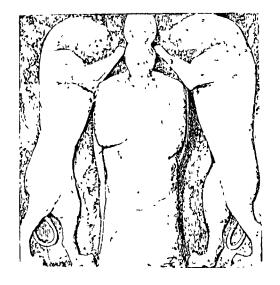


Figure 1.

Cybele and lions on the rock-cut Phrygian tomb of Arslan Kaia

Figure 2.

Lead relief from the temple of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, seventh century B.C.



Figure 3.

Circe, on Greek amphora found at Nola

fullness in his portrait of Circe. Consider, for instance, her music. Odysseus tells the Phaeacians that the singing with which she lured the Greeks over her threshold, as she sat weaving shining, ambrosial fabric on her great loom, was "of beautiful voice," on Kann (10.221). Eurylochos calls it high, meaning shrill or piercing (10.254)—the word Homer applies most commonly to the waits of the Trojan women. The same word is used to describe the playing of Demodokos, the harper at the Phaeacian court, whose music brings tears to Odysseus' eyes. It connotes an emotionally piercing quality, suggesting that Circe is truly and poignantly of human voice. Listening to her from a distance, the Greeks wonder whether she is goddess or woman (10.228, 10.255), an ambiguity they decide to investigate.

Circe welcomes them, of course, feeding them a brew concocted of grated cheese, barley meal, fresh honey and strong Pramnian wine, to which she adds a pinch of a "vile drug" which has the lotus-like side effect of making them forget their fatherland. Then she raises her wand, her \$\hat{\rho}(\theta)\delta_0\sigma_0\eta_0\e

⁸ So W. B. Stanford argues in "That Circe's ράβδος Was Not a Magic Wand," Hermathena, LXVI (1945), 69-71.

hand, compelling a naked sailor who turns round, abashed, to discover his small, curled tail. (Figure 3) The passos here is clearly an instrument of power.

All this time Eurylochos has hung back, wary but ignorant of the extent of the catastrophe. When he later tells of the companions' disappearance, Odysseus determines to go after them. He is intercepted by Hermes, who suddenly and magically presents himself. God of wayfarers and adventurers, Hermes is the only Olympian to venture into those scenes of the Odyssey which occur beyond the pale of human civilization. His intervention here seems prompted by affinity rather than by the express command of Zeus; he is Odysseus' greatgrandfather (though Homer makes nothing of the fact) and the two share a streak of cunning.9 Hermes, associated as he is with journeys, windfalls and male sexuality, is the perfect divinity to prepare Odysseus for his role in the drama awaiting him. He gives the hero an herb, a counter-charm, called "moly" in the language of the gods. It has a white, milky flower and a black root, difficult to pull up. For over two millennia etymologists have been searching for this plant, which has linguistic affinities with an old Greek word for wild garlic. Since this garlic has yellow flowers it does not seem ideal, and we can only conclude that the language of the gods has not yet been adequately understood.10

⁹ Hermes is father to the master-thief Autolykos, Odysseus' maternal grandfather and giver of his name; see Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth, 1960), I, 65.

¹⁰ Germain treats the subject of moly thoroughly in <u>Génèse de</u> <u>l'Odyssèe</u>, pp. 216-220. Other plants that have been suggested as the magical herb are purslane, white grape, marjoram, buckthorn, wild

The meeting between Circe and Odysseus is charged with recognition. She also has been prepared for the encounter by Hermes. Thus, when Odysseus appears she knows him by his power over her and calls him by name. When he holds his bronze sword above her, feigning intent to kill, she slides down and takes his knees in the primal gesture of surrender. This is the posture which Priam adopts when he comes to ask Achilles for Hector's body, and which Phemios, the harper at Ithaca, is later to assume as he begs Odysseus for his life. It is not her life, however, that Circe asks for; even with Hermes' help, Odysseus would not be capable of killing an immortal. The challenge, the play of power here, has far more to do with delight than fear. When Circe speaks she assumes an intimacy, gracefully measuring her words:

EUVAS MALTEONS EN BHONEV, OFFA MIGENTE

(Let us mount our bed, so that we may mingle in lovemaking and trust each other in friendship.) (10.334-335)

Odysseus accepts this invitation to pleasure and good faith, though first he has her swear the oath. $P \in Alm_S$ Homer calls her bed, a word meaning literally "beautiful all around" and often applied to

celery and mandrake.

the loveliest gifts of nature, such as harbors and rivers and olive trees.11

From this point on in Homer's version of the myth, Circe uses her formidable powers beneficently. Trust rather than perfidy follows from their lovemaking. Circe never behaves like the Hebrew enchantresses Judith and Delilah, who betray men when they are at their most vulnerable, in the sleep following love. If she has this capability, Homer chooses not to show it directly. The view of sexuality in the Odyssey is sunlit and undistorted compared to that in these Biblical myths.

After this interlude Odysseus remembers his purpose. True captain that he is, he refuses to partake of the sumptuous food set out by Circe's housekeeper, or to drink the wine her handmaids have ladled from a silver krater into golden cups, until his men are restored to their proper forms. Circe obliges, smearing an antidotal ointment on their skins which makes the bristles fall away. The men at once become younger than they were before, taller and more handsome (10.395-396). What could be more creaturely than the sound that is wrung from within them as they are released to human shape? That is wrung from within them as they are released to human shape?

¹¹ Robert Fitzgerald's translation as "flawless" seems apt, even though it does not suggest the visual quality which the Greek word connotes. No one else in the Odyssey has a bed which is "flawless," $\pi \epsilon \rho i \kappa \alpha \lambda \lambda \hat{n}_{3}$.

¹² Fitzgerald's translation of this phrase in line 398--"wild regret and longing pierced them through"--though inspired English, seems to imply that Odysseus's men did not wholly desire this second transformation. This implication is nowhere to be found in Homer. I

to themselves and greet Odysseus, Circe too seems to take on humanity. The passage ends with a line which elegantly and succinctly suggests the power of emotion to bind together the most disparate of lives in the intensity of a moment. "And the goddess herself took pity;" $\partial \epsilon \hat{\alpha} \delta' \hat{\epsilon} \hat{\lambda} \hat{\epsilon} \alpha i \rho \epsilon \kappa \hat{\alpha} \alpha' \alpha' \gamma' (10.399)$.

Then the easeful days of the Greeks upon Circe's isle begin. During the winter season when navigation is dangerous, they restore themselves in Circe's halls amidst an abundance of rich meats, honeyed wines and sensuous pleasures. Gentled perhaps by love, Circe is no longer referred to in Book Ten as "dread goddess of human voice," but rather as $\delta i \alpha \Theta = \alpha \omega v$, "divine among goddesses" (10.400, 455,503), an epithet also used for Calypso and Athena and, in the parallel form of $\delta i \alpha \gamma \nu \nu \alpha i \lambda \dot{\omega} v$, for Penelope. Discourse between the goddess and her lover now takes on a heightened courtesy and gravity, she addressing him as "hero" or "god-born son of Laertes, Odysseus of many wiles" and he replying $\hat{m} \delta i \nu \alpha$, "Lady." In some lost versions of the myth, Odysseus is so satisfied that he stays with Circe for years, fathering one or several children by her, including a son Telegonos who later kills him by mistake in his old age.13 Homer

agree with Paolo Vivante's reading of $\sqrt[3]{n} \in \mathcal{S}_U$ as "emerged from within," for its fits the context perfectly. See "On Homer's Winged Words," Classical Quarterly, XXV (1975), 7.

¹³ Hesicd, in lines 1111-1114 of the Theogony, mentions three sons born to Odysseus and Circe. E. A. Butterworth, in Some Traces of the Pre-Olympian World (New York, 1966), p. 57, states that several late Greek writers refer to a poem called the Telegony, which tells the story of the murder and its aftermath. Apparently, Telegonos, when he saw what he had done, brought Penelope and Telemachos and the body of Odysseus to his mother Circe, who made them all immortal. In another version, Telegonos marries Penelope; Telemachos, Circe.

does not mention any children born of their union, but he does suggest unmistakably that Odysseus forgets about Ithaca while on Aiaia. When "the long days had come to completion" -- that is, when the best sailing weather of the year had come round with the summer solstice--Odysseus' men tap him on the shoulder to remind him of their destination. The language here, highly unusual for subordinates addressing a leader, gives the measure of their exasperation. $\Delta \alpha_{
m MoV}$, they call him--an untranslatable term used of a person doing something so abnormal or incomprehensible as to imply a state of possession. The word mixes bewilderment with a tinge of insult; it is the one Odysseus is later to choose for Penelope, when, after he has killed all the suitors and been bathed and graced by Athena, she still withholds her recognition. Ordered by his men to remember Ithaca, his earth and fatherland, Odysseus comes back to himself at once and begs Circe to send him homeward. On their "flawless" bed he grasps her knees. The gesture of surrender thus becomes balanced, mutual.

She grants his request unhesitatingly, saying that she does not wish him to remain in her house against his will. In her letting go she is very fine. Whether it is merely beneath her dignity to content herself with a half-willing lover, or whether she actively cares for Odysseus enough to wish him to accomplish his destiny apart from herself, must remain unknown, for who can scan the will of a goddess? She gives him his freedom and her help without complaint or reserve. Unlike Calypso, she has not a trace of possessiveness.

Once the spell of pleasure between Odysseus and Circe has ended,

once he is back in plot and time, she again takes on some of her dread aspect. Her affinities with the Underworld are revealed when she tells Odysseus that it is necessary for him to go there in order to seek out the counsel of Tiresias. He reacts as would any mortal—with fear and despair—for he interprets her instructions as a death warrant. He knows, no doubt, that no human being save Heracles has come back from the house of Hades alive. Yet her directions reassure him, for in telling him what animals to sacrifice both at the mouth of the Erebos and back home in Ithaca, she seems to assume that he will live to return. It is left to him to break the news of this terrible journey to his men, who shed "mighty tears" (ômherov τάκρυ) and tear at their hair with grief.

Book Ten ends with Circe reassuming the remoteness and sufficiency unto herself which are her prerogatives as a goddess.

Veiled, wrapped in a finely woven, silvery cloak, she passes by

Odysseus and his men unseen. When they get to the shore they

discover her gifts, a black ewe and ram whose blood they will use to

summon the dead.

Where is the palace of Hades? As Homer tells it, the entrance to the Underworld lies on the other side of Oceanos, the circular river which bounds the world, close by the lands of a mysterious people called the Kimmerians.14 With the help of a vigorous breeze

¹⁴ The word which Homer uses, Kiphepiwv, has been disputed for centuries. Some editors have read it as Xeinepiwv, meaning Land "of Winter," and justified their choice by pointing to Homer's mention of the long days of darkness in this country. The word has also been associated with an historical people named the Cimmerians, whom Herodotos (4.11) locates in the Crimea beside the sea of Azov and who invaded Ionia in the mid-seventh century B.C., sacking the primitive

sent by Circe, the Greeks arrive after one day and night of sailing. After Odysseus fulfills her detailed instructions—digging a pit; pouring libations of milk, honey, wine and clear water; scattering barley; and last, letting the dark blood of the animals stream into the hollowed ground—the shades swarm up. The first to appear is that of Elpenor, one of their own number, who died when he rolled off Circe's roof in a drunken sleep their last night on the island. He begs Odysseus to return to Aiaia, so that he may receive cremation and proper rites. Circe's reappearance in the narrative is thus assured. When Tiresias appears, his advice to Odysseus, though necessary, is more moral than practical. Its essence is simple: restrain yourselves, do not eat the Oxen of the Sun. Although he reassures Odysseus that he, at least, will return to Ithaca, Tiresias does not give him specific sailing directions or a tally of the dangers he must pass on the way.

That kind of useful nautical advice comes from Circe, whose powers of prophecy prove exceedingly accurate. After Odysseus and his men have returned to her island, built Elpenor's pyre and allowed it to burn to embers, she comes down to the shore to welcome them. She holds out her usual generous quantities of meat and wine, speaking with a teasing, perhaps affectionate tone. $\sum_{k \in \mathbb{N}} \lambda_k \circ \lambda_k$, she calls them, "unflinching ones" . . $\sum_{k \in \mathbb{N}} \lambda_k \circ \lambda_k \circ \lambda_k$, "twice-diers"

temple of Artemis at Ephesus. These people may or may not be the same as those who appear earlier in Hittite and Assyrian inscriptions as the Gimirri. I am inclined to identify the Kimmerioi as the Cimmerians, because of their proximity to the Black Sea region, where many scholars place Circe. For a review of the dispute, see W. B. Stanford's note on p. 382 of the first volume of his edition of the Greek text (New York, 1959).

(12.21-22). The stalwart ones, well sated, fall asleep at nightfall and at that time Circe draws Odysseus aside with a human and intimate gesture. Lying beside him, she questions him about "each thing," about all the terrors and wonders he has seen, behaving in her curiosity exactly as Penelope will later during their first night of reunion in the olive bed. After she has heard him out she recites the dangers still to come -- the Sirens, Skylla and Charybdis, the Oxen of the Sun--and tells him how to avoid each. Her message is very much about the boundaries of heroism. When Odysseus wants to know how to fight off Skylla, she again teasingly addresses him as σκέτλιε and asks if he must always engage in battle. All his bronze-sworded valor, she says, will be powerless against this immortal monster. The best course for him and his men will be to bend to the oars, flee. The exchange is minor, occupying only a few lines, but it beautifully illustrates the perspective, constant in Homer, against which the glory of heroism is seen. Her divine -- or is it female? -knowledge makes military prowess appear as a limited thing.

At dawn the Greeks take to their ship and Circe heads upland, away from the shore. There are no goodbyes. Whatever kindness and intimacy has developed between her and Odysseus recedes with her into the unknown.

This, then, is Homer's version of the story. To say with certainty what it all means would be to violate the poet's mode of imagining, which is at every turn clear and immediate, presenting and accepting the wondrously varied sensuousness of life, elevating human

experience through the repetitions of ritual rather than by the transcendence of abstraction. In Homer there is virtually no abstraction, for the requisite vocabulary had not yet developed. Our bias to regard meaning as truth distilled from, somehow purified of, experience is irrelevant and distorting to a reading of the Odyssey, where the moment and its significance are one. Whatever meanings we find, if they are to be true to the spirit of the poem, must evolve naturally from the accretion of narrative detail. I believe the following do.

First, Circe, whenever she appears, is a figure of power. Homer shows both sides of this power, which is negative until challenged, after which it becomes beneficent. What he does not show—but what generations of later readers have seen in her, perhaps because the connection was already established in their minds—is a female figure whose seruality is inextricably connected with her will to dominate. The two drives seem, on the contrary, to work inversely within Circe. The only men she is shown transforming are those she does not wish to take to her bed. When her drug fails on Odysseus, she recognizes him and begins to desire him. What transpires between them is triumphantly sexual, being based upon mutual trust and surrender.

Second, out of this trust comes direction, freely given and received, which is essential to the plot of the <u>Odyssey</u>. Without knowing that he must be tied to the mast if he wishes to safely hear the Sirens' song, that he must not pause to fight with Skylla, that he must under no conditions touch the Oxen of the Sun, Odysseus would die before reaching Ithaca. Circe makes possible his return to

Penelope. These two female figures, the mysterious and the familiar, are the poles of his experience. It is his great good fortune that they are attuned.

Third, Circe, though she becomes imbued with human sympathies during her time with Odysseus, is and remains a goddess. Both of her repeated epithets, $\delta \leq 1/\sqrt{10000}$ and $\delta \approx 10000$, emphasize her divinity. The word $\delta \approx 10000$, meaning magician or charmer, was probably current in Homer's time—the related verb $\delta \approx 10000$ is used several times in Book Ten—but he never applies it to Circe, for whom $\delta \approx 10000$ is title enough. Many of Circe's qualities—her power to transmute, her foreknowledge, her connection with the Underworld—are comprehensible only as attributes of a divine personality. Again, our preconceptions get in the way. We are millennia removed from the worship of goddesses, whom we find difficult even to imagine; we are much closer to the era when powerful women were stigmatized as witches, figures whom we have no trouble at all bringing to mind.

Homer's perception of the feminine was not as limited as ours.

In Asia Minor, where his Ionic civilization was located on the Aegean coast, a rich tradition of female divinities extended back for centuries. Circe's connections with this tradition will be examined in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two. Where Did She Come From?

Long ago, when human existence was precarious and fertility therefore paramount, a great Mother Goddess was venerated almost everywhere.1 Bulbous figurines of carved stone attest to her presence in Europe during paleolithic times, more than fifteen thousand years ago. When we reflect that this divinity was worshipped for a period at least three times as long as recorded history, it does not seem foolish to look for traces of her cult in Homeric times and within the Odyssey itself. Compared to her, Zeus was an upstart; he seems to have originated as a storm god brought into the Greek peninsula around the beginning of the second millennium B.C. by invading Indo-European tribes.2

Who was she? Originally her attributes were all-encompassing. She was both nurturer and destroyer, controlling the mysteries of birth and death which were impenetrable to human intelligence. Her sexuality was thought to be connected with the fertility of animals

¹ For discussion of the universality of this cult see Robert Briffault, The Mothers (New York, 1927); E. O. James, The Cult of the Mother Goddess (London, 1959); Erich Neumann, The Great Mother (New York, 1955); and Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (New York, 1976). "Just as every adult was once inside the mother, every society was once inside the Great Mother"; Robert Bly, "I Came Out of the Mother Naked" in Sleepers Joining Hands (New York, 1973), p. 29.

² Martin P. Nilsson, in The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion (Lund, 1950), p. 633, mentions two antithetical strains in Greek religion, the Olympian and the chthonic. He thinks that "the antitheses are of a racial character."

and plants, her ebb and flow reflected in the rhythms of all living things. In later periods her different qualities were split off and incarnated in separate goddesses. By the classical era, for instance, Demeter had come to represent an abundant but rather asexual fertility, while Aphrodite embodied a robust sexuality divorced from childbirth and harvest. In spite of this splitting and the resulting proliferation of weaker goddesses, the consciousness persisted well into Roman times that the feminine divine was, in essence, one. In Apuleius' Golden Ass, when Isis appears in answer to Lucius' prayer, she announces herself as follows:

I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are . . . Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me. The primeval Phrygians call me Pessinuntica, Mother of the gods; the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call me Cecroprian Artemis, for the islanders of Cyprus I am Paphian Aphrodite; for the archers of Crete I am Dictynna; for the trilingual Sicilians, Stygian Proserpine; and for the Eleusinians their ancient Mother of the Corn.

Some know me as Juno, some as Bellona of the Battles; others as Hecate, others again as Rhamnubia, but both races of Aethiopians, whose lands the morning sun first shines upon, and the Egyptians who excel in ancient learning and worship me with ceremonies proper to my godhead, call me by my true name, namely, Queen Isis.3

Certainly most students of ancient goddecs-worship, frustrated by trying to keep provenance and pedigrees straight, would agree with Isis. A unity of identity does persist beneath a multiplicity of names.

³ Apuleius, <u>The Golden Ass</u>, trans. Robert Graves (Harmondsworth, 1950, p. 228.

In Anatolia, for instance, the native Hattian and Hurrian female divinities appear to be younger types of a goddess who figured in the wall paintings and stone sculpture of the recently excavated neolithic settlements at Hacilar and Catal Hüyük, dating back to 6500 The Hittites, though patriarchal Indo-Europeans, proved B.C.4 unusually open to these indigenous goddesses when they arrived in Asia Minor from the Caucasus around 2000 B.C., and placed one of them, the Sun Goddess of Arinna, at the head of their pantheon. also absorbed religious influences from Sumer and Babylon.5 One of their goddesses of eastern origin, Kubaba, was later adopted by the Phrygians and Lydians and metamorphosed into Cybele of the Hellenistic Graeco-Roman world. Another related Lydian goddess was identified by the early Greek settlers at Ephesus with their own Artemis, and her worship at the temple there was very much a crosscultural affair.6

What, if any, are Circe's connections with this extraordinarily fluid and vital religious tradition? To answer this question, we can only work with what Homer has given: her name; her association with both predatory animals and pigs; her derivation from the Sun and

⁴ Ekrem Akurgal, The Art of the Hittites (London, 1962) p. 78.

⁵ O. R. Gurney, <u>The Hittites</u> (London, 1952), pp. 125, 135-136. Gurney states that Sumerian mythology and language were studied in special schools at the Hittite capital of Hattusas, though Sumerian was no longer a spoken language.

⁶ Herodotos I.142 says that Ephesus was a Lydian city. T. B. L. Webster, in From Mycenae to Homer (London, 1958), p. 150, states that the Ephesian Artemis seems to have been the Hittite mother of the gods. He also refers to Pausanias' assertion that the shrine at Ephesus existed before the Greek migration, and that its priests came to terms with the invaders.

knowledge of the Underworld; and last, her liaison with a mortal man.

Let us begin with her name. Circe (Kipkn) is the feminine form of Kipkos, meaning falcon or hawk. Kipkos also has a secondary meaning -- circle -- perhaps originally suggested by the wheeling flight of hawks. Though the Neo-Platonic allegorists based their interpretation of Circe's significance upon this secondary meaning of her name, there is no compelling reason to follow their lead. normally uses the more common word for circle, κύκλος; the one time κίρκος appears in the epics with the meaning of circle it is in its alternate form, κρίκος. Besides, the more the association of hawks with Circe's character is investigated, the more convincing it becomes. The ornithological aspect of her name has a familial significance, since her brother Aietes' name derives from a ietos, meaning eagle. The name of her island, Aiaia, may be based upon a West Semitic word for hawk, ayya, though we have no means of knowing for sure.7 But there are better, more encompassing reasons for seeing the hawk in Circe.

Birds were for centuries regarded as figures of the divine, probably because their flight seemed miraculous to primitive humanity, a glimpse of a freedom apart from earth, gravity, mortality. In the <u>Iliad</u> and the <u>Odyssey</u> vestiges of this belief are apparent in the way diviners read bird flight for information about the future, and in the frequency with which Athena takes on bird disguises. At the

⁷ A suggestion originating with Victor Berard and developed further by Michael Astour in Hellenosemitica (Leiden, 1965), p. 284.

slaughter of the suitors, for instance, she flies through the hall as a swallow and disappears under the eaves (22.239). In Homer the gods rarely change themselves into any other animals than birds.8 In Mycenaean and Minoan art dating from a few centuries before Homer's time the association between birds and goddesses is even stronger. In a sixteenth-century shaft grave at Mycenae the gold-leaf figure of a nude woman with a bird on her head was found; the artist portrayed the goddess anthropomorphically, but seems to have believed that at the same time she appeared as a bird.9 The bell-shaped figure which Sir Arthur Evans called the Dove Goddess, from the Shrine of the Double Axes in the palace at Knossos, also is crowned with a bird. (Figure 4) Nilsson argues convincingly that these birds represent the epiphany of the deity.10 But clearly the Minoans and Mycenaeans also needed to see her in human form.

Later, in the archaic and classical periods, the ornithological elements became more integrated with the anthropomorphic ones, no longer seeming so strange to the eye. Winged Artemises, winged Nikes are the result. (Figure 2) To glimpse the Bird Goddess in what was probably her original form we need to go back to the Neolithic. The Proto-Sesklo culture in Thessaly has yielded a stone sculpture of a large-breasted, long-necked, beak-faced figure who is elegant, ugly and remote: a divinity one can imagine propitiating, but not

⁸ Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, p. 491.

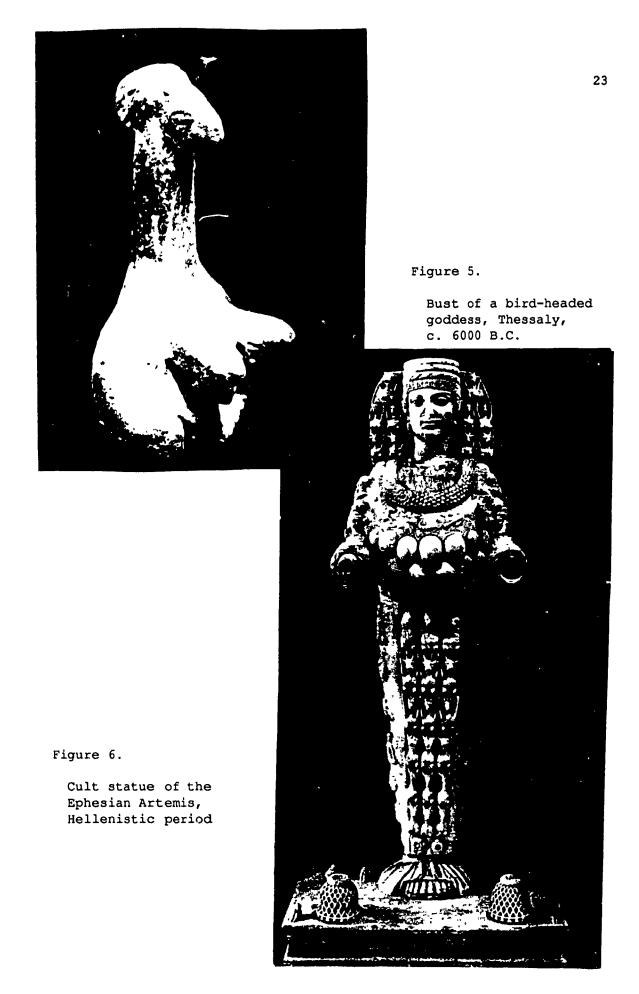
⁹ Webster, From Mycenae to Homer, p. 42.

¹⁰ Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, p. 330.



Figure 4.

Dove Goddess from the Shrine of the Double Axes, Knossos



invoking. (Figure 5). Compared to her, Circe seems familiar.

Flesh-eating birds such as hawks and vultures have a separate tradition of iconography in Egypt and Asia Minor. Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, was represented by a hawk and associated with the sun. He was believed to be immanent in the Pharoah and was symbolized by the winged disk, the Egyptian ideogram for royal power.11 Though Hittite and Assyrian kings later adopted this winged disk as their royal seal, the association bet sen king and hawk god never took root in Anatolia -- probably because there was already an indigenous hawk or vulture goddess. Her history, I believe, stretches from Çatal Hüyük to Hellenistic times, and Circe may well be one of her later incarnations. The Roman writer Aelian was quite familiar with the association between goddesses and birds of prey; he remarks that the buzzard is sacred to Artemis and the mermnus (a type of hawk) to the Mother of the Gods.12 Cybele or Kybebe, often called the Mother of the Gods, and the Ephesian Artemis were sister goddesses, sharing the company of beasts of the wild. One statue of Cybele unearthed from the ruins of a shrine at Pergamum, has a multiplicity of breasts, like those of the Ephesian Artemis in Figure 6.13 This sign of their kinship, however, is a Hellenistic innovation; in their older forms the goddesses are less encumbered.

¹¹ Henri Frankfort, The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient (Baltimore, 1955), p. 117.

¹² Aelian, On the Characteristics of Animals, 12.4.

¹³ Maarten J. Vermaseren, <u>Cybele and Attis</u> (London, 1977), p. 27.

It is at the Artemision at Ephesus, where Greek and oriental cultures merged, that we come closest to connecting Circe with the hawk goddess tradition. When its site at the mouth of the Cayster river was excavated by the British in 1906 and 1907, numerous small figurines of birds with hooked beaks were discovered, many of them in the foundation deposit of the lowest stratum. The leader of the expedition, D. G. Hogarth, concluded that the birds were "in most cases certainly, and in all cases probably Hawks" and that they were placed in the deposit intentionally "as offerings dedicated to the goddess, whose image would stand above them. "14 Also found at this depth was an ivory statuette of a kore or young priestess carrying a hawk atop a long pole on her head. She seems to be bearing the divine standard as part of a ritual procession. (Figures 7, 8) Hogarth dated the foundation deposit to 700 B.C., making it contemporary or near contemporary with Homer.15 Since legend places him in Chios or Samos or Smyrna--all places within fairly easy traveling range of Ephesus--it seems entirely credible that he would at least have heard of these votive offerings at Ephesus and been familiar with the tradition. He may also have knownof the legend, familiar to Pindar, Pausanias, Solinus and other ancient writers, that Amazonian women were the original builders of the Ephesian shrine and that they

¹⁴ D. G. Hogarth, Excavations at Ephesus (London 1908), pp. 95, 237.

¹⁵ More recently, the foundation deposit has been dated to the mid- or early seventh century because of the presence of coins found within it. This later date, of course, does not disprove the age-old association of hawks with the Ephesian Artemis. See Paul Jacobsthal, "The Date of the Ephesian Foundation-Deposit"in <u>Journal of Hellenic</u> Studies, LXXI (1951), 85-95.



Figure 7. Gold and electrum hawks found in the Archaic Artemision, Ephesus





Figure 8. Ivory priestess statuette from the Archaic Artemision, Ephesus

were living in the park surrounding it when the Ionian Greeks arrived.16 Here, perhaps, is the seed of Book Ten: a group of irdependent women in a green and pleasant place, spending their days absorbed in ritual, accosted by a company of adventurous strangers.

To trace the hawk symbolism back into Hittite and prehistoric cultures in Anatolia is to move farther away from Homer but it may clarify why flesh-eating birds should be associated with a female divinity. Swift and fierce, the hawk was the hunting bird of Ishtar, of the Hattians, and of the Mermnadian dynasty of Lydian kings.17 Gyges, who founded this dynasty by murdering his predecessor, held that his family had some special relationship with the Great Goddess.18 She was worshipped in the Lydian capital of Sardis under the name Kybebe, and had been known to the Neo-Eittites as Kubaba and symbolized by them in hawk or buzzard hieroglyphs. (Figure 9) As a carrion-eater, the buzzard was long ago thought to embody the death aspect of the original Mother Goddess, who took back into herself what she gave forth. The neolithic people of Catal Hüyük built shrines to this morbid aspect of the numinous at the lowest levels of their settlement, covering the wall with paintings of stylized,

¹⁶ Hogarth, p. 1.

The Amazons loom large in the post-Homeric Greek imagination, particularly in classical sculpture, where they are inevitably warred against and defeated. What a charged, symbolic encounter: male against female; patriarchy vs. matrilineal society; reason, perhaps, against nature. Homer is not as tendentious.

¹⁷ Charles Picard, Ephèse et Claros (Paris, 1922), p. 496.

¹⁸ R. D. Barnett, "Early Greek and Oriental Ivories" in <u>Journal</u> of Hellenic studies, LXXVIII (1948), 22.

Figure 9.

Neo-Hittite hieroglyphics representing the name of the goddess Kubaba, c. 950 B.C.

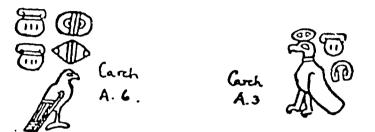


Figure 10. Vulture Shrine at Catal Hüyük

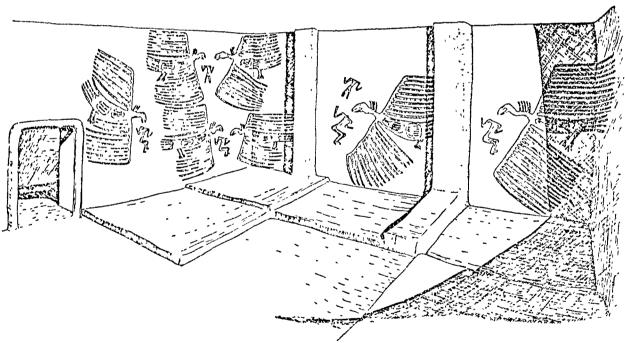


Fig 20 , Early phase of decoration of the "Vulture Shrine", VII, 8

broad-winged vultures about to devour much smaller human figures.19
(Figure 10) These frescoes pictured part of their death rites, for they exposed corpses to be cleaned before burying the bones beneath the floors of their houses. In a shrine at a higher level a pair of heavy plaster breasts protruding from a wall had birds' beaks in place of nipples; they were found to be modelled over griffon vulture skulls.20 What could express more directly or intensely the two sides of the Goddess? Eight thousand years after its creation, this symbolism still arrests with its terrible power.

Though nothing in Homer connects Circe with scavengers,

Apollonius Rhodius, several centuries later, tells of a strange

cemetery in the "plain of Circe" which the Argonauts pass by on their

way to Aietes' palace. Here male corpses are hung from willows and

osiers, presumably to be picked clean: a grisly footnote to the

iconography behind her name.21

The rearing, fawning wolves and mountain lions which seem so monstrous to Odysseus and his men when they enter the grove around Circe's house might have been quite natural to them in another context—on a seal ring, for instance, or as part of the accourrement of a shrine. Tamed predatory animals, sometimes in heraldic stance, were a familiar part of religious symbolism long before Homeric or

¹⁹ James Mellaart, "Excavations at Catal Hüyük, 1963" in Anatolian Studies, XJV (1964) 65, 75.

²⁰ Mellaart, "Excavations at Catal Hüyük, 1962," AS, XIII (1963), 70.

²¹ Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica, iii.310ff.

Mycenaean times. The mounds at Hacilar and Catal Hüyük have yielded several stone and clay sculptures of the Goddess with her leopard or catamount pets. Already she is Mistress of Animals, Torva Onpûv.

The oldest of these, from one of the upper levels of Catal Hüyük, shows an extremely corpulent and impassive woman seated on a throne flanked by felines, upon whose backs her arms rest. In clay sculptures from Hacilar, radio-carbon dated to the century between 5500 and 5400 B.C., her attitude is more playful. In one, she fondles a leopard cub as she sits on the back of its parent; in another, seated this time on two of them, she allows their tails to curl over her back and shoulders as she plumps her breasts. (Figure 11) According to James Mellaart, who led this archaeological expedition, the leopard was the most feared and dangerous animal on the then-forested south-central Anatolian plain; it was these peoples' chief rival in the hunt for wild cattle and deer.22 By subjugating it to their fertility goddess -- for the abundant proportions of her body make that attribute unmistakable -- they seem to have been affirming her power over death. Yet the leopards also probably represent the dangerous and arbitrary side of the Goddess' own nature, which she could unsheathe at will. "In iconography the animal which belongs to a god is an attribute of his, and in the last analysis it is a form of the god himself--companion animal and god are identical."23

²² Mellaart, "Excavations at Catal Hüyük, 1961," AS, XII (1962), 64-65.

²³ Wolfgang Lederer, The Fear of Women (New York, 1968) p. 167.

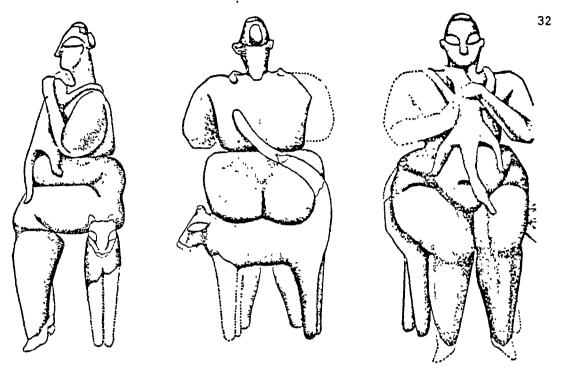


Fig. 22. The "Mistress of Animals" shown holding a leopard cub and seated on a leopard. Unbaked. House Q.5. Height 13 cm.

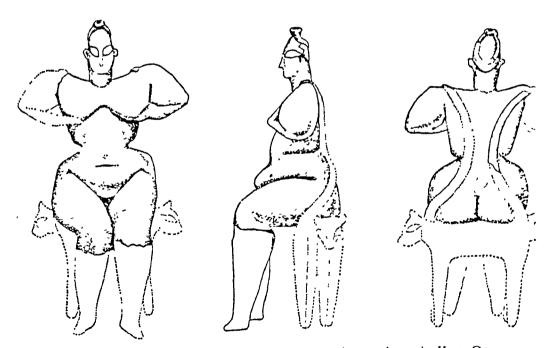


Fig. 23. The "Mistress of Animals" shown seated on two leopards. House Q5.

Height as preserved 9 4 cm.

Figure 11. Clay figurines from Hacilar

I believe it is significant that in Catal Hüyük the artifacts of the Mistress of Animals were found at higher, more recent levels than those at which the shrines to the Vulture Goddess were unearthed; she is a less direct and more refined representation of the affinity between fertility and death. Once the Tropyla Onpar became established in the religious imagination, there seems no longer to have been a need for the Vulture Goddess, who could then subside into that less threatening, less loathsome creature, the hawk. In succeeding cultures and centuries, as the Mistress of Animals became slimmer and more attractive to the modern eye, her deadly aspect became elegant. She took on the grace of her feline companions.

Before leaving behind the abundant and potent goddesses of
Hacilar and Catal Hüyük, it would be well to contemplate briefly the
culture which created them. The archaeological evidence, the lack of
fortification, suggests that these people lived for a period of at
least 1500 years without organized warfare, thus freeing their
energies for life-sustaining and creative expression. Pottery was
probably invented at numerous other places as well, out it was
certainly invented here; the lowest levels are accessmic, the highest
contain shards of thin-walled pots of pleasing design resembling
those of the Acoma pueblo. These people also wove, domesticated
animals, and farmed a variety of crops including bread wheat. Their
agriculture and their religious cults were very likely taken to Crete
by prehistoric emigrants.24 The sacral horns of Cretan palace

²⁴ Colin Renfrew, The Emergence of Civilization: The Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium B.C. (New York,, 1972), pp. 271, 273. Mellaart, AS, XIII (1963), 78.

shrines are to be found at almost all levels in Catal Hüyük. In the earlier levels they are genuine aurochs' horns, replaced in upper levels by plaster (as in Crete), presumably when the animal became more rare. Nothing, however, in Minoan-Mycenaean civilization conveys the same intensity of religious feeling as the shrines of neolithic Catal Hüyük.25

Because the Mistress of Animals motif is so widespread in ancient cultures of the eastern Mediterranean, it seems likely that it originated in other places besides south-central Anatolia. Some iconography of Semitic influence combines tamed animals with other aspects found later in Circe's character. The Egyptian goddess Qedes, who originated in Canaan, was pictured standing nude on the back of a lion; she was known as the "eye of the sun" and as the daughter of Ra, the Sun God.26 Her name bears a close resemblance to the Hebrew word for sacred prostitute, qedechâ.27 A nude winged goddess on the terracotta Burne; Plaque, dating from about 2000 B.C. in Babylonia, is standing or the hauches of two reclining lions. (Figure 12) Though she has talons for feet, she has nothing else in common with the grotesque, foreshortened Harpies of much later Hellenistic sculpture. Seductive and direct, everything about this

²⁵ Renfrew, Emergence of Civilization, p. 419.

²⁶ Germain, Genèse de l'Odyssée, p. 262.

²⁷ Since "prostitute" denotes a woman who sells her sexual favors, it is not at all appropriate for these priestesses who used their sexuality to express the power of Ishtar and other female deities. But what other English word is there? All which denote a sexually available woman—harlot, slut, etc.—have wholly negative connotations. Our language has no understanding of sex in a sacred or mythic context.



Figure 12. The Burney Plaque, Babylonia, c. 2000 B.C.

mysterious goddess is in proportion. Her beauty, like Circe's, is finely balanced against her ability to inspire terror. She was found in what appeared to be the shrine of a private house, and to this day no one knows who she is. Dated from the same era, a pre-Hittite tablet found in Cappadocia, which may be of Akkadian influence, shows a goddess flanked by two rearing goats with elaborate curved horns: one of the first instances of the heraldic posture.28

The Minoans and Mycenaeans were particularly fond of lion and griffon symbolism, which they used to represent both royal and divine power. Both were eastern imports, the griffon being invented in Syria and the lion indigenous to Asia and eastern Anatolia but probably not to Greece. In the most famous of Cretan seals, a supremely confident bare-breasted goddess stands atop a stylized mountain peak, her left arm extended as if in command, while a youth to the right pays her homage and paired lionesses perch beneath her feet. To the left is a shrire structure with four pairs of sacral 's celebratory, honoring a power horns. (Figure 13) The in seemingly beyond questic: ...allenge. The same goddess may be on a seal found at the hilltop stronghold at Mycenae; again she is flanked by rearing lions, but this time she has wavy lines above her head and above them the double-axe. (Figure 14) .f the wavy lines are bows, which seems likely in this context, then this figure is probably an ancestor of the huntress Artemis.29

Withir the Greek world, the Notvia Onpwv motif leads inevitably

²⁸ Germain, p. 262.

²⁹ Webster, From Mycenae to Homer, p. 27.

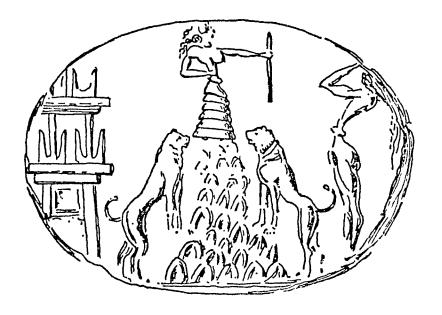


Figure 13. Goddess with lions on seal from Crete



Figure 14. Lentoid from Mycenae

to Artemis, who was for centuries the most popular female divinity and the most universally worshipped.30 "Where has not Artemis danced?" asks an old saying. And indeed her shrines were everywhere—in Boeotia, Sparta, Crete, Ionia, Attica, Sicily—wherever there were forests and wild animals and local fertility goddesses who could be assimilated with her tradition. This popular Artemis appears to have been an aboriginal heritage which the Greeks carried with them to the new places they settled. Although she was addressed as TOPOÉVOS, the title was used in its original sense of "unmarried" rather than "virginal." "In fact Artemis TOPOÉVOS may have been originally the goddess of a people who had not yet the advanced Hellenic institutions of settled marriage, who may have reckoned their descent through the female, and among whom women were proportionately powerful."31

Homer's chaste huntress, tallest and most beautiful among her nymphs, sister to Apollo, he cody her independence and penchant for wildness in common with this ancestor. His portrait of Artemis represents not the first to the last point in the development of her nature. The virginal huntress seems to have appeared in epic before she figured in the worship of the common people, who remained attached to the older, more fertile Artemis. Among the votive gifts given to Artemis Orthia in Sparta which have been dated to 700-600 B.C., animal types including lions, goats and bulls were popular.

³⁰ Lewis Farnell, <u>The Cults of the Greek States</u>, II (Oxford, 1896), 425; Nilsson, <u>Minoan-Mycenaean Religion</u>, p. 503.

³¹ Farnell, II, 448.

Deer began to appear during the following century, when Orthia apparently became assimilated to the Homeric type.32 Gentle, elusive, swift and wild: these qualities of her new companion animal suggest that the Lady of the Beasts herself became declawed. In this metamorphosis she lost much of the sexuality she once possessed as a goddess associated with human and animal fertility. Only by knowing her past can we understand why Greeks of the classical era regarded Apollo's lovely sister as Eileithyia, the divine midwife who protected women in labor. The primitive, unvirginal Artemis may well have been more like Circe than like Nausicaa.

One feature of her temples at Ephesus and Laconia in Sparta particularly recalls Book Ten. Each was surrounded by a park which was a sanctuary for her sacred animals. The park at Ephesus was very old, for the one at Laconia, which Xenophon dedicated in the fourth century, was modelled upon it 33 Similar walled gardens where trees and wild animals could flour.sn--"paradises" in the etymological sense of the word--surrounded temples and palaces in the Semitic world.34 In the second certury A.D. the sanctuary of the great temple of Ishtar at Hierapolis, according to Lucian, contained lions and bears that were so tame they would not harm visitors.35 One can imagine the awed accounts of pilgrims the travelled there--tales

³² M. S. Thompson, "The Asiatic or Winged Artemis" in <u>Journal of Hellenic Studies</u>, XXIX (1909), 295.

³³ Hogarth, Excavations at Ephesus, p. 176.

³⁴ Germain, p. 262.

³⁵ De Dea Syria, 41; quoted by Germain, pp. 262-263.

which would have been heightened as they were retold. Perhaps the sanctuary at Ephesus stimulated such legends in Homer's time. Though it is hard to believe that lions were really in the parks at Ephesus and Laconia, they certainly surround Artemis in reliefs and statuary found at these places.36 (Figures 2, 15) The exaggeration suggests itself.

Surely the tamed predators wandering through the grove around Circe's "sacred house" have some connection with this tradition.

In current popular opinion, pigs are comical, greedy and unclean: the lowest caste in the barnyard. They make good feasts, but the ides of using them for any spiritual or religious purpose seems ludicrous. Pigs are animals, the very exemplars of carnality—or so we have been conditioned to think. When Circe turns the Greek sailors into swine, we see her as for only changing their smooth skins to bristled pelts, but also as stripping them of all dignity and control, visiting upon them the masculine equivalent of the fate worse than death. How could be transformation be interpreted otherwise?

The picture changes somewhat when we discover that pigs were for millennia the sacred animal of the Vegetation Goddess. True, the transformation still seems a crude display of power, but one accomplished for impersonal, nonmalevolent reasons—the act of a deity whose concerns are probably larger than merely reducing a group of

³⁶ In the famous cult statues of Ephesus, parts of Artemis' dress and headdress are composed of deer, goat, cattle and lion heads.



Figure 15. Detail of the cult statue of the Ephesian Artemis

human males to helplessness. There is an abundance of evidence connecting pigs with the vegetative cycle of sowing-harvesting-replanting (or birth-death-rebirth). It would be well to review these myths, rituals and artifacts before deciding if and how they apply to the Odyssey.

No other animals except lions have so consistently been linked with goddess-worship. Pig representations, once again, go back to the Neolithic. An extremely well-shaped, pleasing sculpture of a pig (which may have been already domesticated because it has no tusks) was discovered in the mound of Nea Mukri in central Greece (c. 6000 B.C.).37 In a shrine at Catal Hüyük from the same era, two rows of plaster breasts modelled over enormous, tusked wild boars' skulls were found.38 The first certain connection of pigs with crops goes back to about 5500 B.C., the date of fragments of pig figurines impressed with grain which were uneastred in the valley of the Dniester near the Black Sea.39 The fast-growing body of the pig probably impressed these early farmers, who must have compared its fattening to corn growing and ripening. And the pig's large litters, a reproductive prodigality beyond that of any other domesticated animal, probably seemed like harvests in themselves.

Of all the symbolic motifs connected with Circe, pigs are

³⁷ Maria Gimbutas, The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 B.C. (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 211-212.

³⁸ Mellaart, AS, XIII (1963), 68-69. These were found on Level VI, near the shrine with the vulture skull breasts. Since the wild boar is also a scavenger and will eat corpses, I think these are connected with their death rites rather than with crop fertility.

³⁹ Gimbutas, p. 211.

historically the most Greek and Indo-European. At Cnidos, Eleusis, Delphi and throughout the Greek world, they were regarded as Demeter's own animal. In some versions of the Demeter-Kore myth, Persephone is out herding hogs (rather than picking narcissi) when a cleft opens in the earth and swallows her along with them. Just so, a group of goats was said to have fallen into a ravine at Delphi and to have given the site its name, for the earth was thought to be a womb which could be entered at such places, and through caves as well. Higher up the slopes of Parnassos, in the Corcyrian grotto, a great many small terracotta figurines of boars and of women with headdresses have been found. Ancient and crudely modelled, they almost certainly pre-date the worship of Apollo at the sanctuary. Of all the artifacts now in the museum at Delphi, only these and the navel-stone testify to an era when the earth's fertility was the most exalted human concern. The marble friezes and bronze statuary, the dazzling wealth of states and kings seeking to ratify their glory with the favor of the god, seem the work of another, more presumptuous species.

These figurines from the Corcyrian grotto may have been used in the rites of the Thesmophoria, a festival honoring Demeter which occurred each year at the sowing of new crops in October. It was performed solely by women and lasted for three days. Women carried the remains of suckling pigs (delphakia) which they had thrown to their deaths in caves or ravines several months before to the altar to be mixed with seeds. This was thought to ensure Demeter's

blessing upon the crop.40 Such sympathetic fertility magic sounds very primitive, but variants of these practices survived for a long time in many places in Europe. Near Meiningen, in the southern part of what is now East Germany, farmers in the nineteenth century mixed pork bones with their seeds before sowing!41

At Eleusis too the regenerative powers of pigs were an integral part of the rites, linked there to a concept of rebirth that was spiritual rather than physical. The Mysteries enacted there each September were older by far than the Homeric poems; their Mycenaean origin seems assured, for the telesterion itself was built upon the ruins of a Mycenaean building of the megaron type, thought to be the first temple of Demeter. On the third day of the annual ceremonies, after the priestesses and the Hierophant of Demeter had proceeded along the Sacred Way from Eleusis to Athens, the great mass of initiates--perhaps as many as 30,000-- was called to go down to the "With them they took young pigs, which they washed and then sacrificed, because they believed that the blood of this animal was the purest, and had the power to cleanse and rid the initiate's soul of hatred and evil. And because they believed that this was the finest gift that could be offered to the gods of the underworld, they buried the young pig after the sacrifice deep in the ground."42 After this cleansing and baptism, the initiates were considered ready

⁴⁰ Gimbutas, p. 214; Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, p. 312.

⁴¹ Germain, p. 144.

⁴² Katherine G. Kanta, <u>Eleusis</u>, trans. W. W. Phelps (Athens, 1979), p. 13.

to join the great procession to Eleusis, where on one of the last nights of the ceremonies they beheld the mystic vision which convinced them of the power of life over death, on the earth and within themselves. About this sight they were sworn to keep silent. Because this vow was kept, we can only guess what appeared to them. Some scholars say an ear of wheat; others, Kore herself returned from the dead, perhaps with a child. And still others believe the initiates saw an enactment of the sacred marriage of Zeus and Demeter, with the Hierophant and Chief Priestess taking the parts.43 Lasting over a thousand years and including among its initiates Aesclepios, Sophocles, and several emperors, the Mysteries at Eleusis must be considered a major religion, one which gave its believers an experience of spiritual union with the force of life itself. Purification with pig's blood was considered so essential to the preparation for this experience that the pig appeared on the small bronze coins issued by the Eleusinian city-state.44

Clearly, the Greeks of Homer's time and the centuries following would hardly concur with our view of the pig as an unclean animal.

In Apollonius Rhodius also the pig has purifying powers. When Jason and Medea go to Circe after they have murdered Absyrtus, she sacrifices a pig and uses its blood to ritually cleanse them.

The last connection between pigs and goddesses and vegetation is considerably more roundabout and complicated, but nevertheless

⁴³ Kanta, p. 16.

⁴⁴ George Mylonas, <u>Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries</u> (Princeton, 1961), p. 223.

important. In several myths of eastern origin a Great Goddess figure has as her lover a youth whose seed brings fertility to the land, but whose blood must be spilled if crops are to continue to grow. He himself is both sower and harvest. The oldest version of this myth, the Sumerian story of Inanna the Queen of Heaven and her lover Dumuzi, the shepherd-king, does not include any mention of pigs or boars. Dumuzi dies by other means. In a related Egyptian myth, however, Osiris, the divine husband of the queen-gcddess Isis, is castrated and killed by his enemy Set disguised as a boar. Babylonians seem to have drawn from both these sources for their myth of the goddess Ishtar and Tammuz, her young mortal lover who is killed by a boar. As the basic Semitic myth travelled westward into Anatolia and Ionia, the boar remained an important feature. 45 Cybele's young lover Attis, sometimes a shepherd and sometimes a Lydian prince, is killed or castrated while hunting that beast. Adonis, the youth adored by Aphrodite and warned by her not to hunt fierce animals, is nevertheless gored to death by a wild boar he has pierced with an arrow. Where his blood has stained the earth, the crimson anemone springs up. In these myths the pig is not the object of sacrifice, but its instrument -- like the Christian cross-- and, as such, takes on some of the sacredness of its function.

It is hard to assess what all the permutations of the basic myth mean, for as the boar enters it the fertility elements recede. In all versions the boy-lover, who has never been the Goddess' equal, is

⁴⁵ For a comparison and review of these sacrifical vegetation myths, see Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, vol. 1, pp. 71-72.

sacrificed and the power of the Goddess is in some way augmented by this sacrifice. We might remember here that Odysseus too as a youth is attacked and severely wounded in the thigh by a boar, but he survives and grows up to prove himself Circe's equal.

Having reviewed these myths and rites, what can we say of their relevance to the transformation in Book Ten? First of all, the fact that the pig is the preferred sacrificial animal in goddess-worship has obviously some bearing. It probably explains why the sailors become pigs rather than sheep or goats, and why Circe accomplishes the metamorphosis with such methodical confidence. Perhaps she has done it all before and has a labyrinth of sties The French classicist Gabriel Germain, who has investigated ritual and folkloric elements in the Odyssey more thoroughly than any other scholar, was so struck by the ceremonial aspect of the episode and by the abundance of sacred customs in which the pig plays a part, that he views the transformation as a ritual of initiation in which Oysseus's men die to their old natures, take on some of the pig's powers of vitality by sliding into their skins, and are eventually reborn improved in every way, younger and more handsome than before.46 He sees Circe as a priestess of the earth presiding over these rites. Although this view must seem farfetched to a casual reader of the Odyssey or to one who believes the poem itself contains all the information necessary for its understanding, I believe Germain's interpretation contains some truth. Anyone who has investigated the

⁴⁶ Germain, pp. 131-132, 149-150; Germain does not explain, however, why this "initiation" does not also involve the hero, Odysseus.

connection of pigs with goddess-worship and fertility rites must realize that the original audience for the Homeric poems, the crowds at the Pan-Ionian festivals or the nobility in their megarons, did not regard this animal as we do. Its stigmatization as unclean was the innovation of Judaism, an extremely father-oriented religion rigidly suppressive of older goddess-worship, and it did not prevail in the Greece of Homer's time.47

Germain errs, however, in being too gracious to Circe. Only at Odysseus' request does she change his men to their heightened selves, and were she not intent on pleasing him, they would presumably stay swine forever. The metamorphosis seems intended as immolation, not initiation. I view the act as a gratuituous display of power, rather like Jehovah's pyrotechnics before the suffering Job. Circe is saying "See. The Earth and its forces are mine; I can make you into my creature." Only a divinity who felt her powers eroding and under attack would be driven to act so unsubtly. The episode reflects, I believe, a turning point in cultural history: that time when patriarchy was replacing matricentral systems in myth, as it already had in society.

Another perplexity for modern readers of the <u>Odyssey</u> is Circe's dual connection to the Sun and to the Underworld. As a child of Helios, her domain and expertise would seem to be limited to the upper world, to the land of the quick upon which his light falls.

⁴⁷ Not all taboos on pork were Judaic. At the temple at Hierapolis in Syria, pigs were never eaten because they were sacred to the Goddess. Lucian, <u>De dea Syria</u>, quoted by Germain, p. 135.

Yet clearly her familiarity with Hades is extensive and her powers seem to extend to the infernal as well. In Greek cosmology, the under and upper worlds are rigidly separated after the Olympian revolution; Zeus and Helios and later Apollo have no concern with what occurs in the Kingdom of the Dead. In the myths of Anatolia and ancient Sumer, celestial and chthonic deities tend to be more integrated, even identical, and this less differentiated cosmology offers a good clue to Circe's origin.

According to a belief which is strange to us but was perfectly natural to the ancient mentalicy, the Sun was linked with the Underworld because it passed through it every night on its passage from west to east. Hence many sky or light divinities felt compelled to visit the dead. Inanna, the Sumerian Queen of Heaven, undertook an epic trip to the Underworld in order to add its crown to her glories—only to be defeated by the Queen of the Dead, whose demand for a life is not placated until Inanna substitutes her mortal lover for herself. Her example did not deter her Babylonian descendant, the moon and fertility goddess Ishtar, who exclaims in the Izdubar Cycle of her Descent:

- I spread like a bird my hands.
- I descend to the house of darkness.48

To appreciate how far removed these journeys are from Greek tradition, we need only try to imagine an Olympian--Zeus or Hera or Apollo--voluntarily foreswearing the light.

The deity who best represents this union of the chthonic and the

⁴⁸ Quoted by Robert Brown, Jr., The Myth of Kirke (London, 1883), p. 113.

celestial is the Sun Goddess of Arinna, the chief of the Hittite pantheon, who is equated in ritual texts with both Wurusemu, the indigenous Hattian Great Goddess, and with Ereshkigal, the Sumerian goddess of the dead.49 "She was one of a class of deities peculiar to Anatolia, a 'Sun-goddess of the Earth', whose concern was with the earth, the underworld and the dead."50 Her shrine at Arinna, the great religious center at the heart of the Hittite kingdom, said to be one day's journey from the capital at Hattusas, has not yet been located by archaeologists. Tablets found at the excavated rock sanctuary at Yazilikaya, however, are incised with cuneiform hymns of praise to her. One says:

Within the circuit of heaven and earth thou, Sun Goddess of Arinna, art the source of warmth.

Among the lands thou art the deity whose cult is most celebrated.

and thou art the father and mother of every land.51

The supremacy of the Sun Goddess of Arinna is testimony to the tolerance of the Indo-European Hittites, who respected the religion and customs of the autochthonous population when they swept into Anatolia around 2000 B.C. Rather than war against her, they accepted her and arranged a marriage for her with their own weather god, who amiably became her consort. The opposite balance of power was struck in the Greek peninsula, where the indigenous goddess (Hera) whom the

Achaeans married off to their storm god became a put-upon and

⁴⁹ J. G. Macqueen, "Hattian Mythology and Hittite Monarchy," Anatolian Studies, IX (1959), 176.

⁵⁰ Macqueen, 178.

⁵¹ Akurgal, Art of the Hittites, pp. 78, 80.

resentful wife living in her husband's home on high. Given the strength and history of goddess-worship in Anatolia, the Hittites' graceful and pragmatic solution is probably the only one that would have worked there.

Clearly Circe is a much lesser personage than the Sun Goddess of Arinna, and her claim to radiance is secondhand, through her father.

She seems, however, to be of the same peculiar non-Greek genre, a Sun Goddess of the Earth.

"It is too little observed that Greek goddesses do not associate themselves with mortal men."52 After writing these words, Martin P. Nilsson goes on to argue that whenever we find such a dalliance, we should expect an oriental source for the myth. The one-night idyll of Aphrodite and Anchises, for instance, takes place on Mt. Ida near Troy, a location which provides an important clue. It brings to mind the Idaean Mother, also known as the Mother of the Gods or Cybele, who was an incarnation of the Great Goddess originating at the junction of the Babylonian and Anatolian worlds at Carchemish. Even the Greeks recognized Aphrodite's eastern provenance, and though they insisted that her mythical home was with Zeus' collective on Mt. Olympos, they built her largest and most impressive earthly home at Paphos, on Cyprus. Since we know Circe only through her associations with mortal men, we have—if Nilsson's reasoning is correct—a strong case for associating her with the East.

What possible antecedents are there for her liaison with

⁵² Nilsson, Homer and Mycenae (London, 1933), p. 253.

Odysseus? He is a king, in rank and character stronger than his companions, and indisputably something positive issues from their union: not a child, not fields ripe and heavy with grain, but directions for the future which enable him to return to his "fatherland" and wife, to a civilization based on bonds of affection and loyalty which the values of the poem uphold. This configuration of goddess/mortal man/positive or sacred result was fundamental to Sumerian religious belief and ceremony.

At least by 2000 B.C. and perhaps as long as a millennium before that, the Sumerians celebrated an annual Sacred Marriage (\$\(\frac{\partial}{\partial}\) particles (\$\(\frac{\partial}{\partial}\) pa

The Sacred Marriage rite seems to have developed at a time of relative balance between the sexes--after the male role in procreation was known, but before females were subordinated in myth. The sexual act in this ceremony was a homecoming to the Mother Goddess, a

⁵³ Samuel N. Kramer, <u>The Sacred Marriage Rite</u> (Bloomington, 1969), pp. 64-65.

holy act performed in her service, enabling her to fulfill her powers. Inanna herself was not shy about expressing her desire or appreciation, and her voice in the sacred poetry is as alive and full of wonder now as it was four or five thousand years ago:

He has brought me into it, he has brought me into it.
My brother has brought me into the garden.
Dumuzi has brought me into the garden,
I strolled with him among the standing trees.
I stood with him by its lying trees,
By an apple tree I kneeled as is proper.

Before my brother coming in song,
Before the lord Dumuzi who came toward me,
Who from the tamarisk, came toward me,
Who from the date clusters, came toward me,
I poured out plants from my womb,
I place plants before him, I poured out plants before him,
I placed grain before him, I poured out grain before him. . .54

The dignity and directness of this poetry, its true sense of human connection with vital forces, comes from a consciousness which modern writers find tantalizingly difficult to enter.

The myth upon which the Sacred Marriage that the Chief Priestess and King acted out was based prescribes, in its later stages, an evil fate for Dumuzi. He is sent to the Underworld by Inanna as ransom for her own freedom, and remains there, temporarily dead, until his adoring sister Geshtianna offers to substitute for him. Inanna then decides that she will accept Geshtianna's offer for half of every year, but Dumuzi must stay in the Netherworld for the other half. He resurrects every spring, along with the vegetation which his own seed has caused to grow. In the ceremonial poetry Inanna speaks of this fate. Although she calls Dumuzi "man of my heart," she makes clear

⁵⁴ Kramer, The Sacred Marriage Rite, p. 101.

that he must suffer the penalty for touching the nakedness of a goddess:

My brother, I have brought about an evil fate for you, my brother of fairest face.

Your right hand you have placed on my vulva,
Your left, stroked my head,
You have touched your mouth to mine,
You have pressed my lips to your head,
That is why you have been decreed an evil fate,
Thus is treated the dragon of women, my brother
of fairest face.55

Were, in fact, mortal men sacrificed every year (or every seven years) to the Vegetation Goddess? Although this kind of human sacrifice is postulated by Sir James Frazer in The Golden Bough, his opinion was not based upon archaeological proof and is now generally discredited.56 No evidence exists that the kings of Uruk who took part in the New Years' Sacred Marriages lost their lives; it is exceedingly unlikely that they did, for by the time of the incised tablets and other archaeological evidence we possess. Sumer was patriarchal and the King was extremely powerful.57 Myths, at least those that have not been consciously crafted by poets, are generally conservative, one of the last elements of culture to reflect social change. It is at least conceivable that this particular myth originated in some prehistoric and as yet unexcavated culture where such grisly rites did take place, and that the narrative remained

⁵⁵ Kramer, The Sacred Marriage Rite, p. 105.

⁵⁶ The evidence for human sacrifice to male gods is much firmer: for instance, the Toltecs' offering of beating human hearts to their sun god.

⁵⁷ Kramer, who has investigated the subject thoroughly, does not mention human sacrifice.

unaltered long after the ceremony became more humane. But this is a supposition whose truth, in the absence of archaeological facts, cannot be judged.

There is one other echo from the Sumerian world concerning the dangers of a mortal man's acquiring (or refusing) carnal knowledge of a goddess. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, which originated in the middle of the third millennium B.C., the hero flouts Inanna's offers of love, for he is well acquainted with her fickleness:

Which of your lovers did you ever love forever? shepherd of yours has pleased you for all time? Listen to me while I tell the tale of your lovers. There was Tammuz, the lover of your youth, for him you decreed wailing year after year. . . You have loved the shepherd of the flock; he made meal-cake for you day after day, he killed kids for your sake. You struck and turned him into a wolf; now his own herd-boys chase him away, his own hounds worry his flanks. And did you not love Ishullanu, the gardener of your father's palm-grove? He brought you baskets filled with dates without end; every day he Then you turned your eyes on him loaded your table and said, "Dearest Ishullanu, come here to me, let us enjoy your mannood, come forward and take me, I am yours." Ishullanu answered, "What are you asking from me? My mother has baked and I have eaten; why should I come to such as you for food that is tainted and rotten? For when was a screen of rushes sufficient protection from frosts?" But when you had heard his answer you struck him. He was changed to a blind mole deep in the earth, one whose desire is always beyond his reach. And if you and I should be lovers, should not I be served in the same fashion as all these others whom you loved once?58

As could be expected, these words provoke Inanna's bitter wrath, and in revenge she sends the Bull of Heaven to destroy Enkidu,

⁵⁸ The Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. N. K. Sandars (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 86-87. In this and other modern versions the goddess appears as Ishtar, for translations are based primarily upon the Assyrian tablets.

Gilgamesh's beloved friend. Perhaps something similar would have happened to Odysseus had he ignored Hermes' counsel and spurned Circe, but the tone of Homer's episode is altogether more harmonious and less charged with sexual enmity than is Gilgamesh.

Homer may well have been familiar with Gilgamesh, for the epic was widely known in the ancient Near East. Tablets containing the poem have been found at the capital of the Hittites, and knowledge of it may well have survived among the Neo-Hittites and Lydians, with whom the Ionian Greeks were in close contact.59 Inanna's transformations of men to animals are thus a possible source for Circe's.60 There is a crucial difference, however, between the two stoties. The Goddess' desire is not entangled with her will to power in .tomer, who shows Circe to be capricious, but also capable of faith and trust, of relationship. Compared to Inanna or Ishtar, she is an appealingly human goddess, one who gives without demanding a life for her pleasure. To Homer, the nurturing side of the female divine is stronger than the deadly. The Sumerians' outlook was altogether more pessimistic; they were two thousand years closer to the primitive awareness that the Goddess who gives life can also arbitrarily take it back. The vulture skull breast is nearer to Gilgamesh than to the Odyssey.

⁵⁹ N. K. Sandars, "Introduction" to Gilgamesh, p. 12.

⁶⁰ The Odyssey shows possible influences from Gilgamesh at other points as well. See Germain, pp. 420 ff. Like Gilgamesh, Odysseus travels to the Land of the Dead (after being given directions by a female) and returns to rule his kingdom. Gilgamesh was the primal epic hero; it seems likely that Homer, as an Ionian poet, would have known about him.

A less dangerous version of the Sacred Marriage rite was open to commoners at temples of Ishtar and Aphrodite throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Sexual exchange between priestesses and worshippers seems to have begun in Sumer but became widespread in the ancient world, being practiced at temples of Ishtar or Aphrodite in Babylonia, Canaan, Arabia, Armenia, and even Corinth.61 Not only did it provide a means of enriching the temple, but also (and more importantly) of the participants' making themselves holy in the Goddess' sight.62 Women of wealthy and royal families, as well as of more humble ones, participated in the sexual customs of the Goddess, and they were free to marry or not as they wished.63 These women were believed to act in the Goddess' stead, bringing forth her blessings upon the individual and the comm_naty. Yet they were rigorously persecuted when Judaism became dominant in Canaan and women's sexual processes began to be regarded as unclean. It is as if, long after Ishtar's capriciousness had been tamed in practice, Jehovah's advocates decided to take revenge upon her.

As a female divinity who fancies mortal men, Circe thus belongs to a well-established eastern tradition which mingles the sexual, the bountiful and the lethal.

Whether Circe existed in a lost myth which Homer reshaped, or

⁶¹ Germain, pp. 269-270.

⁶² Herodotos, I.199. His attitude towards this practice, which he observed in Babylonia, was ambivalent. Recognizing its sacredness, he nevertheless called it "the foulest of customs."

⁶³ Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman, p. 155.

whether he was the first to imagine her, her kinship with ancient religious traditions is very strong. She is a composite figure, in whom elements of Sumerian, Anatolian and Greek goddess-worship are blended and unified. The force of her character is not Indo-European but almost certainly derived from Asia Minor. To the small, desperate band of Mycenaeans who landed on her shores she seemed the essence of the strange and foreign, someone whose homeland was near the dancing grounds of Dawn, far to the east. Their perception, I believe, was accurate. The question remains, how did this influence reach Homer? Since both in the Mycenaean age, the sixteenth to twelfth centuries B.C., and then again in Ionia, for about two hundred years before Homer's time, Greece was in close touch with the culture of the Near East and shared in their myth as well as their art, there are two possible eras or cultures which answer.64

Let us look at the first. It is well known that the expansionist impulse was fundamental to Mycenaean civilization; without that impulse there would have been no Trojan War, no <u>Iliad</u>. Generally, the Mycenaean routes of trade and piracy were aimed towards the legendary riches of civilizations on the eastern Mediterranean shore; Troy was an aberration. Mycenaean tombs and vases have been found in sufficient quantity at Miletus, Rhodes, Cyprus, Cilicia, and Ugarit (Ras Shamrah in modern Syria) as to suggest settlement in these places.65 At Ugarit ancient Near Eastern literature, epic material

⁶⁴ Samuel N. Kramer, ed., <u>Mythologies of the Ancient World</u> (New York, 1961), p. 260.

⁶⁵ Nilsson, <u>Homer and Mycenae</u>, p. 98; Webster, <u>From Mycenae to Homer</u>, p. 66.

independent of Gilgamesh, has also been found.66 At Miletus and Cilicia, which seem to have been principalities of the vast Hittite Empire, the Mycenaeans would certainly have come into contact with that civilization. And, in fact, Hittite archives of royal correspondence found at Hattusas verify this; they contain references and letters to the king of a region called "Ahhiyawa," over a period of two centuries from about 1380 to 1180 B.C. Both Hittites and Mycenaeans spoke Indo-European languages and may have understood each other without translation. "'Achaiwia' may be safely postulated as the name of the 'Land or the Achaeans' in the language of the Mycenaeans," who still used the digamma; it is the same word as "Ahhiyawa."67 The relationship between the two areas seems to have been friendly, though they may have found themselves on opposite sides in the Trojan War. They would have had ample time for crosscultural exchange, however, in the two hundred years preceding that disaster, and from such exchange the Mycenaeans would have had much The letters mention a Hittite horse-master's instructing a prince of Ahhiyawa in chariot warfare. Perhaps this prince, in the evenings following his lessons in the new, swift techniques of war, heard the old Sumerian poetry recited and took it as well back to his people. The Hittites had translated Gilgamesh into their own language.68 They could have been the intermediaries for this literature, as well as for the native religious customs of Anatolia.

⁶⁶ N. K. Sandars, "Introduction" to Gilgamesh, p. 12.

⁶⁷ O. R. Gurney, The Hittites, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Sandars, "Introduction" to Gilgamesh, p. 12.

The problem with this supposition is that we have no evidence whatsoever that the Greeks retained a memory of the Hittites, or that their own old acquaintance with Anatolia survived the political upheaval following the Trojan War and the Dorian invasion.69 It is much more likely that the Hittites were indirect, ghostly intermediaries, passing on Sumerian, Akkadian and native Anatolian culture to their own successors, the Neo-Hittites, the Phrygians and the Lydians, and through the Lydians to the Ionian Greeks.

When the Ionians first migrated to the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, probably between 1050 and 850 B.C.,70 the region, though thinly populated, was no more terra rasa than New England at the time of the Plymouth Colony's arrival. Their incoming culture met an established one, for the most part apparently peaceably. According to Herodotos (I.142), many of the cities in the Ionian League—Ephesus, Colophon, Lebedos, Teos, Clazomenae and Phocaea—were located in Lydia and used a distinct dialect. The Mermnadian dynasty of Lydian kings, established by Gyges about 683 B.C., was friendly to the Greeks and donated generously to Greek temples in both Asia Minor and Europe. Homer was probably contemporary with the last of the preceding dynasty of the Heraclids, and this dynasty too seems to have been friendly.71 Early cooperation of the two peoples at the

⁶⁹ Germain, p. 454.

⁷⁰ Webster, p. 141. He bases these dates on the fact that "late Protogeometric Attic pottery was found in quantity in Smyrna and yielded about 850 to a local Geometric style."

⁷¹ Euphorion of Chalcis wrote that Homer was born in Gyges' time, but his statement seems a generation or two off to many modern scholars. Germain, pp. 459-460.

temple of Artemis at Ephesus became a matter of legend.

If we date the Odyssey as Nilsson does, c. 700-680 B.C., then for at least two hundred years before its time Ionian Greek society was surrounded by, perhaps permeated with, eastern influence. wonder is that so little shows in the epics, that the imagination of the poet should be so wholly concerned with giving music and form to the treasured core of Mycenaean legend. Unquestionably, the milieu of Ionia at the time was intellectually stimulating and fertilizing, and it was from this center that the culture of the rest of Greece became revitalized. The contact with Lydian civilization seems to have been as generative to the Ionians as the experience of Minoan culture was to the Mycenaeans. As Germain puts it, Sardis was "a foyer of fusion and diffusion" through which the Greeks were introduced to an ancient cultural wealth.72 Phrygian music became one of the modes of Greek song and dance, and Greek science was immeasurably enriched by the knowledge of Babylonian maps and astrological calculations current in the school of Miletus. It is important not to exclude Greek literature from the benefit of this civilizing milieu. Greek poets sang at the court at Sardis and probably listened to eastern literature recited there.73 Though he worked with ancestral materials, Homer did so in a climate favorable to creation, one nurturing exploration and exchange, the fresh imagining of the ancient. Circe may have seduced her way into his Mycenaean subject matter, but once she appeared he shaped her to the needs of

⁷² Germain, p. 460.

⁷³ Germain, p. 461.

the poem, giving to her character a resonant balance that is neither Greek nor oriental, but Homeric.

This balance is an unlikely, almost miraculous achievement. Consider: Circe, as a descendant of the Great Mother who both gave life and took it back into herself, would naturally inspire both reverence and fear; she could be expected to behave like Inanna, the bride and executioner. The eagerness of male humanity to break free from, to react against, such all-encompassing power is quite understandable. Gilgamesh defies Ishtar for sound reason. Historically, however, the reaction against the Mother Goddess was almost always a vengeful over-reaction. When patriarchy was established in Mesopotamia and Greece, women's social and sexual freedom was severely curtailed -- as befitted beings newly believed to be inferior by nature. Athens in its golden age was markedly misogynist, a society whose intellectual radiance is dimmed for modern women who pause to imagine what their lives would have been like had they lived there.74 In Anatolia, where the Goddess religion was particularly strong and the centralized power of states relatively slow in evolving, motherright systems of social organization and inheritance lingered in some places into the time of Herodotos.75 Patriarchy was milder there at first, and the women of Ionia probably had more freedom than their

⁷⁴ For a thoughtful account of the development of this misogyny in Greek culture, see Marylin B. Arthur's "Early Greece: Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women" in Arethusa, 6, 24.

⁷⁵ I.173. "They [the Lycians] take their names not from their fathers but from their mothers; and when one is asked by his neighbor who he is, he will say that he is the son of such a mother, and recount the mothers of his mother."

counterparts in Athens. Now, of course, veiled Moslem women live in the vicinity of Çatal Hüyük. There is no need to reiterate here the social injustices to women under patriarchal systems; I want merely to point out that these injustices can be interpreted historically as part of a massive over-reaction to the original power of the Mother Goddess.

Before this repression of the feminine occurred, there was a delicate period in the evolution of many societies when men were dominant within the family and the state, but women still played active and respected roles in mediating between the human and the divine as priestesses, seers and healers.76 Female metaphysical power remained intact long after female social power had eroded.

"There was a considerable time lag between the subordination of women in patriarchal society and the declassing of the goddesses."77 The veneration of goddesses, as long as it lasted, appears to have protected women against the worst injustices. But once women had lost their control of religion, a negative aspect prevailed. Not only were a woman's sexual functions "treated as impure in themselves, but the same condemnation attache[d] to her feminine nature as such." She became regarded as "the root of all evil, Eve, a witch."78

The process of declassing the feminine provides the subject

⁷⁶ Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy (New York, 1986), p. 9.

⁷⁷ Lerner, p. 141.

⁷⁸ George Thomson, Studies in Ancient Greek Society: The Prehistoric Aegean (New York, 1965), p. 205.

matter for several Greek myths full of sexual enmity. I believe Homer's version of the Circe-Odysseus story deals with this mytho-historical circumstance, but resolves the tension in an unusual way. Compare it to the slightly later Amazon myths, for instance. To the Greek imagination, Amazons existed to be warred against and defeated, and so they are—thoroughly but tastefully—in the marble friezes at Delphi and on the Parthenon.79 Theseus, the Attic hero, and Heracles, the Panhellenic one, both travel to Amazon territory near the Black Sea, abduct an Amazon queen, and later kill her; both were celebrated for these feats. In addition, Theseus was revered as the defender of Athens when the Amazons supposedly made a retaliatory excursion into Attica.

The society which created these myths seems to have regarded the notion of free women as intolerable. Quite possibly, these free women had an historical identity. According to George Thomson, "this myth was engendered . . . as a symbol for the matriarchal institutions of a theocratic Hittite settlement at Ephesos, dedicated to the Anatolian mother-goddess. From there it spread over the Aegean.

Throughout the period of Greek colonisation, which extended to all

^{79 &}quot;After the Persians burned the citadel, and the finally victorious Athenians set about the tage of rebuilding it, they adorned the major temple, the Parthenon, with relief sculptures depicting not combat with Persians, but combat with larger-than-life adversaries--centaurs, giants, and Amazons. Any plucky mortal could kill a Persian, but it takes a hero to triumph over an Amazon. To fight an Amazon was the greatest trial of male strength and courage, a challenge fit for a Heracles and a Theseus. All other conflicts paled before this struggle, and the legend that their ancestors of old had resisted the onslaught of these warrior-women was an everlasting source of civic pride for the Athenians." Abby Kleinbaum, The War Against the Amazons (New York, 1983), pp. 11-12.

corners of the Mediterranean, the legend continued to expand in response to the expanding acquaintance of the Greeks themselves with the still matriarchal peoples with which they were everywhere brought in contact."80

The same bitter sexual enmity animates the story of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, which is told many times in the Odyssey, mainly to burnish by contrast Penelope's virtue as a chaste wife. By asserting her freedom to choose a lover and to rule in her own right, Clytemnestra must have seemed to the patriarchal Greeks not only disloyal, but also a dangerous throwback. Orestes' murder of her throws into sharp conflict the rival claims of mother-right and male-oriented justice. In Aeschylus' later trilogy, Athena, the one goddess with no experience of the womb, finally puts this conflict to rest by judging in favor of the males.

In Homer artistry never becomes tendentiousness. With calm, deliberative spirit, he acknowledges this bitterness between the sexes and relegates it to the background. In the foreground is Aiaia, the province of a nature goddess far removed from human civilization who is visited by the most supple and resourceful of Mycenaean heroes. With the help of an herb, a touch of grace, he appears as her equal and she recognizes him as such. She is not overthrown, but rather the woman implicit in every goddess is realized in her. When he wishes to leave, she gives him her blessing. And, having faced and loved the archetypal feminine, he is well prepared to return to the personal feminine. Homer's myth is

⁸⁰ Thomson, The Prehistoric Aegean, pp. 182-183.

thus an exquisite parable of achieved balance between the sexes--a balance that has, in many lives and societies, yet to be lived out.

Certainly the following era failed to do so. In it, Circe's career as a witch began.

Chapter Three. From Myth to Allegory.

Between Homer's time and Plato's, a revolution in thought occurred. This change was so encompassing, influencing almost all surviving written work from the period because it influenced the development of the Greek language itself, that it is difficult to know how to begin to describe it. Bruno Snell, a German classicist who has persuasively traced the shifts in perception which are indicated by shifts in the use of words between Homer's time and the fifth century, has termed this event in Greek culture "the discovery of the mind."1 The phrase is apt, for it suggests that for the first time human consciousness was perceived as an entity in itself, standing apart from as well as within nature. The wholeness of the archaic, mythic world in which Homer's gods and heroes lived and moved, rendered with belief as well as with superb artistry by the poet, was eventually ruptured by this discovery. The mythic world-whether it occurs in an archaic age, a primitive society or a childhood--demands awe and participation. It is not accessible to the person determined to see it clearly and logically by standing back.

If we restrict our perspective to literary history, this revolution in thought reveals itself in the shift from direct

¹ See Snell's <u>The Discovery of the Mind</u>, trans. T. C. Rosenmeyer (Oxford, 1953).

presentation of myth in poetry, as in Homer and Hesiod, to allegorical commentary upon that myth -- a commentary that is dualistic in nature, for it seeks to locate and follow the lode of meaning running beneath a literal surface. The tradition of allegory, which begins in the ancient world with commentary upon the Homeric poems, depends upon a belief in the penetrating power of mind and assumes the right of that mind to impose its logic upon a text. The intention of the allegorical commentator, to penetrate to and reveal the truth, is thus far more aggressive (though not necessarily more ambitious) than Homer's original intention, to render the song of the muse. 2 Homer was notably tolerart of female divinities, even of those who were ripely sexual, but this tolerance was not shared by later commentators, who tended to strip Circe of her divinity and to see in her a personification of passion and vice. That this should have happened is not surprising, considering the social and intellectual assumptions of the classical and Hellenistic eras. What is surprising is the tight, persistent hold which allegorical views of Circe have had on later poets drawn to her myth.

How and why did this allegorical tradition develop? Once developed, why was it invested with such authority, particularly considering all the riches of myth which it could not account for? Searching for answers to these questions requires looking beyond

² These ancient commentators habitually assumed that their own intentions were also Homer's. "There is a general failure in antiquity to make a clear distinction between allegorical expression and allegorical interpretation. What we call allegorical interpretation in this context normally takes the form of a claim that an author has expressed himself allegorically in a given passage." Robert Lamberton, Homer the Theologian (Berkeley, 1986), p. 20.

literature itself: first, at the development of philosophical ideas about the primacy of the soul or mind over the body; and second, at the change in the concept of divinity from an immanent force to a transcendent one. The tendency of post-Homeric Greeks to consider the elevated as the good created a climate of thought which sanctioned the assumption upon which allegory depends: that meaning is superior to the text (or experience) from which it derives.

This tendency to consider the elevated as the good also affected attitudes towards women, who were valued for their reproductive capacity and seen as inextricably connected with sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth. Once this over-under kind of dualistic thinking had developed, therefore, females were the natural occupants of the lower category of the dualism. An ideology of misogyny gradually developed which finds much expression in post-Homeric social organization and literature. Before discussing the early allegorical commentary on Circe, I will briefly review these attitudes, so that the commentary can be seen within its proper context.

The Homeric epics are innocent of dualism. Homer's view of human nature is essentially organic and unitary; his characters are not divided against themselves, nor swept by conflicting emotions. When Achilles, for instance, sulks in his tent he is pure in his anger, untormented by feelings of guilt about his absence from the battlefield. Nor is there any separation or opposition between the corporeal and mental life of Homer's heroes; appropriately, their organs of consciousness are located right in their torsos. These

include the thymos (8446), which is the generator of motion and emotion, and the noos (٧٠٥٥), the cause of ideas and images. "All mental phenomena are in one way or another distributed so as to fall in the sphere of either of the two organs."3 Thus, when Circe wishes to express her amazement at Odysseus' ability to drink her potion and yet retain his manly form, she exclaims "some steady will is in your breast" (10.329). Psyche (שְׁעִעִי), the word which later Greeks use for soul, has no connection with thinking or feeling in Homer. He uses the word in a more primitive sense; for him, psyche is "the force which keeps the human being alive. "4 Homer seems to take the presence of psyche for granted in the living man and thus has little to say about it. Only at the moment of death does the psyche take on a separate existence and become notable. Then it is breathed forth to fly off to Hades, leaving usually through the mouth. The corpse which it leaves behind Homer calls the soma (own), the term which later Greeks generally used for "body." But, as Aristarchus, the great Alexandrine editor of Homer was the first to notice, Homer never uses this word in reference to a living person.5 When he wishes to refer to someone's physical being, he uses one of two words meaning "limbs," avoiding the more general or abstract term.

This linguistic analysis strongly suggests that the Greeks of Homer's time did not even conceive of a human being's having a mental or spiritual life not expressed directly through the body. In the

³ Snell, The Discovery of Mind, p. 9.

⁴ Snell, p. 8.

⁵ Snell, p. 6.

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epics, the whole person is exposed and present in his words and actions. Only rarely--as when Odysseus debates whether to use honeyed words to persuade Nausicaa to help him, or whether immediately to seize her knees--do we sense a reserve of consciousness within. Because the Homeric character is exposed, he is vulnerable to the forces of emotion and danger pressing upon him and he shares this vulnerability with all other human beings, including servants and women. With the possible exception of Odysseus, whose mental suppleness looks forward to that of heroes to come, he does not know how to retreat into the refuge of his own consciousness or how to put distance between himself and the moment.

Only when the unity of a Homeric character is undone, at death, does his psyche come into its own. Yet what a paltry existence it comes into. Deprived of their powers of physical expression, the shades or psyches in Hades are pitiable, pale and vapid. They represent a state to which no sane Homeric Greek would conceivably aspire. Since salvation, or any afterlife other than fame (kleos), is not a motivating factor in Homer, his characters live richly, sensuously in the present. In vocabulary this focus results in an abundance of concrete nouns and precise verbs, but practically no abstractions. He uses no less than nine different verbs to denote the operation of sight, many of them connoting certain expressions in the eyes; by the classical age this choice of verbs had shrunk to two.6 Clearly, the Greeks lost as well as gained as their thought moved from concrete and primitive modes to more abstract and sophis-

⁶ Snell, pp. 1-2.

ticated ones.

In the era between Homer and Plato, the discovery of mind went hand in hand with the discovery of soul. Whether the word <u>logos</u> ($\lambda\delta\chi os$), meaning Reason as an ordering principle in the cosmos and also reason within the individual human being, or <u>psyche</u> predominates in the work of a writer seems to depend on his intellectual or spiritual bent. Both words are used to connote the inner life, the power of human consciousness. The first writer to call the soul of a living man <u>psyche</u> was Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 B.C.); in his opinion the soul was endowed with qualities which differed greatly from those of the body and physical organs.7 Heraclitus, however, did not invent the soul-body distinction; it was already current in the Orphic religion, whose original doctrinal literature has not survived, though we know of its existence through other ancient sources.8

The early sixth century B.C. was a time of considerable activity in the Orphic sect, a mystery-religion believed to have been revealed to mankind by Orpheus, a legendary priest and musician of prehistoric Thrace. "Mankind" is here probably the accurate generic term, for Orpheus, according to at least one later writer, would not allow women to participate in the group's rites or to enter the sacred precincts.9 He preached a radically new ethical doctrine, stressing

⁷ Snell, p. 17.

⁸ W. K. C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion (London, 1952), p. 11.

⁹ Guthrie, pp. 49-50.

vegetarianism, asceticism and individual responsibility for moral choice. These practices were thought to purify the soul, whose earthly existence was regarded as a temporary punishment, part of a cycle of reincarnations which might eventually end in permanent liberation from the body and a blissful existence in the highest heaven. Meanwhile, however, the impure soul was doomed to lengthy periods of residence in the house of Hades in between earthly incarnations. Obviously, the Orphics held a dualistic view of human nature; they believed it had a spiritual or divine portion, deriving from the god Dionysos, and an inferior, physical one, deriving from the Titans who had consumed Dionysos.

Because many Orphic concepts are familiar to us from Christianity and Buddhism, it is difficult to see them in perspective, to
appreciate fully the originality of the sect. For the first time in
history, it would appear, a religious reformer was preaching the
possibility of transcending the earthly cycle of life and death—the
cycle which had long been held to be holy in itself by believers in
the goddess religions.10 The Orphics aspired to become immutable and
divine. They could do so, however, only at the price of scorning
their inescapably mutable bodies, of becoming divided in their own
humanity.

Orphism was a demanding religion. Although its promise of an escape from death may have had universal human appeal, its insistence on an ascetic way of life did not. It remained a religion of the

¹⁰ The legendary Orpheus was probably one or two generations older than the Buddha, who preached a similar message later in the sixth century B.C.

few, in spite of the influence of certain portions of its doctrine on some of the greatest minds of Greece, including Pythagoras and Plato.11

Pythagoras, in fact, may have been the author of some of the lost Orphic literature.12 Born in Samos in 549 B.C., he was renowned in his own time as a spiritual leader and philosopher as well as a mathematician. He and his followers founded several spiritual communities where many of the Orphic precepts, including vegetarianism and bloodless sacrifice, became part of daily life. The best known of these was at Croton in southern Italy. Though they worshipped Apollo instead of the Orphics' Dionysos, the Pythagoreans too practised asceticism and purification, holding their goods in common and shunning material wealth and unnecessary physical pleasures. The saying "soma equals sema" (or "body equals tomb"), which echoes so clearly in certain Platonic dialogues, particularly the Phaedo, could have originated among either the Orphics or the Pythagoreans. Philolaus, a Pythagorean contemporary of Socrates, wrote that "ancient theologians and priests testify that the soul is conjoined to the body through a certain punishment, and that it is buried in this body as in a sepulchre."13

Although this bias against the flesh has, historically, often

¹¹ Guthrie, pp. 206, 157.

¹² Ion of Chios, a fifth-century authority, says that Pythagoras composed poems under the name of Orpheus. E. R. Dodds, <u>The Greeks</u> and the Irrational (Berkeley, 1951), p. 149.

¹³ Quoted in Iamblichus, <u>Life of Pythagoras</u>, trans. Thomas Taylor (London, 1818), p. 267.

been generalized to include a bias against women as producers and enticers of the flesh, the Pythagoreans were scrupulous about not doing so. Women were full participating members in their communities, which must have been among the few places in the ancient Mediterranean world where a sexual double standard was not tolerated.14 Pythagoras was interested in the human as well as the mathematical and celestial aspects of harmony. He believed that its presence in a marriage depended upon mutual fidelity.15

The Orphic and Pythagorean tradition was almost certainly of great influence on Plato, nourishing the transcendental and metaphysical elements in his thought. In 390 B.C. he visited a Pythagorean community in West Greece, and he maintained a lifelong friendship with one of their sect.16 The Socrates of the Phaedo, imprisoned and awaiting the hemlock on the day of his death, is a noble and courageous spokesman for this metaphysical tradition. Explaining to his friends why he views death as liberation rather than as loss or tragedy, and why he has no fear of it, he says "Death is, that the body separates from the soul, and remains by itself apart from the soul, and the soul, separated from the body, exists by itself apart from the body. Is death anything but that?"17 He is convinced this separation will make genuine gratification possible, for "so long as

¹⁴ Iamblichus, pp. 30, 37.

¹⁵ Iamblichus, pp. 37, 162-163.

¹⁶ Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational, p. 209; the Oxford Classical Dictionary (Oxford, 1970, 2nd ed.), p. 839.

¹⁷ Plato, Phaedo, 64C, in Great Dialogues of Plato, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (New York, 1958), p. 467.

we have the body with us in our enquiry, and our soul is mixed up with so great an evil, we shall never attain sufficiently what we desire, and that, we say, is the truth. "18 Employing a metaphor both powerful and disturbing, he sees the soul as crucified in its physical existence: "each pleasure and pain seems to have a nail, and nails the soul to the body and pins it on and makes it bodily, and so it thinks the same things are true which the body says are true. "19 The only adequate palliative for this kind of exquisite spiritual torture is, Socrates believes, philosophia $(\phi i \lambda \circ \sigma \circ \phi i_n)$, or the love of wisdom. "Those who love wisdom are practising dying, and death to them is the least terrible thing in the world." 20

Socrates, as Plato tells it, never suffers a failure of nerve; he enters death with his faith in the immortality of the soul intact. Those of his friends who cry, overcome by sadness, he gently rebukes. For this reason also he sends his wife away.21 In the Phaedo the judgement of earthly, physical life as a Sentence, as an unwelcome and forced distraction from the real life elsewhere, of truth, stands

¹⁸ Phaedo, 66B, p. 469.

¹⁹ Phaedo, 83D, p. 488; Plato emphasizes the concept of nailing by using two different words, προσηλοί and προσηκρονή, to describe it.

²⁰ Phaedo, 67E, p. 470.

^{21 &}quot;Then when Xanthippe saw us, she cried out in lamentation and said as women do, 'O Socrates! Here is the last time your friends will speak to you and you to them!'

Socrates glanced at Criton and said quietly, 'Please let someone take her home, Criton.'" Phaedo, 60A, p. 462.

Although Socrates' dismissal of his wife is not harsh, it indicates, at the very least, that he considers his emotionally restrained male friends more appropriate intimates with whom to share the moments before his death.

unappealed.

Just as the Greek philosophers came to value a man's soul or reasonable consciousness as the essential, superior part of his nature, so the Greek people gradually came to reverence those gods who lived on the lofty, clear heights of Olympos, far removed from the older generation of Titans whose bodies had been molded from earth and from their mother Ge, the ancient Earth Goddess herself. By the time Homer wrote, this revolution had already taken place in oral poetry, although it seems to have had little popular impact because all over Greece local nature and fertility deities were still being worshipped at country shrines.22 In the following century Hesiod extolled the Olympian revolution in his Theogony, a long poem which makes clear that the struggle between sky gods and earth gods was often a struggle between male and female deities. "Hesiod makes a polar tension between male and female a primary fact of his cosmology."23 At issue in this struggle was not only sovereignty, but also control of reproduction.

As Hesiod tells it, after Zeus defeated the Titans he consolidated his power through the impressive feat of giving birth to Athena out of his head. Zeus' self-sufficient reproductive power resulted from his incorporation of his first wife Metis while she was

²² See particularly Lewis Farnell's pages on the profusion of local Artemises during the pre-classical period in his section on that goddess in Vol. II of The Cults of the Greek States.

²³ Marylin B. Arthur, "Early Greece: Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women" in <u>Arethusa</u>, 6, 24.

pregnant. A Titaness "wiser than all gods and mortal men" and able to change her form at will, Metis nevertheless was deceived by Zeus' guile and literally swallowed whole by him!24 No myth could speak more clearly about male assimilation of formerly female powers, or reflect more directly men's growing control over women's sexuality and power to reproduce.

In the Theogony Hera angrily retaliates by giving birth to Hephaestos without male help, but a more important sequel to the story of Athena's birth is told in the Homeric Hymn to the Delphian Apollo. In this Hymn Apollo crosses the sea to Delphi and fights a she-dragon (Ápákalva) to take possession of the shrine. We are told that this dragon—later called Python—has been the nurse to Typhon, the monstrous child whom Hera brought forth to spite Zeus after Athena's birth. Because of the similarity of their names, it is reasonable to suppose that Python and Typhon are the same creature.25 Later versions of the myth add the detail that Python guarded the shrine for the goddess Ge, who herself spoke the oracles.26 When Apollo, the most radiant and perfect of the sons of Zeus, slays the dragon and takes possession of the sacred space, his victory puts the seal on those his father has already won. These myths also make the incidental point that the children Zeus fathers without Hera's help

²⁴ Hesiod, Theogony, 11. 886-891; trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Baltimore, 1983).

²⁵ Joseph Fontenrose, in <u>Python: A Study of the Delphic Myth</u> and its Origins (Berkeley, 1959), pp. 13-14, discusses the events narrated in the Homeric Hymn and makes this suggestion.

²⁶ Fontenrose, p. 15.

(Athena, Apollo) are vastly superior to the ill-shapen ones she brings forth without his aid. Even at the quintessentially female business of reproduction, Hera is outclassed.

That Apollo was an intruder at Delphi is borne out by archaeological evidence as well as myth. The French excavators of the site have concluded that a female deity appeared at Delphi sometime after the Neolithic and think that she was Mother Earth.27 They have found numerous terracotta statuettes of nude female figures and animals, including some from the Corcyrian grotto high up on Parnassos, which may have been the location of the oldest oracle. The rich, complicated history of Delphi is that of the mainstream of ancient Greek religion: the story of the overthrow of a female deity, immanent in nature and embodying fertility, by the most transcendent and removed of the male Olympians, the god associated above all others with light, form and the clarity of reason. The only female deity worshipped at the site after 700 B.C. was the cerebral and virginal Athena, Apollo's closest female counterpart because she is untainted by the wildness which clings to his sister Artemis. The terraces around the lovely lower sanctuary of Athena Pronaia at Delphi have, ironically, proved to be especially rich in yielding objects from the older goddess cult.28

Greek religion, however, also proceeded apart from the mainstream. The continuity of worship of earth-related goddesses at

²⁷ Nilsson, The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, pp. 467-468; Fontenrose, p. 418.

²⁸ Fontenrose, p. 418.

Eleusis from Mycenaean to Roman times is proof enough that the old deities could remain powerful even after the newer ones had triumphed. The democratic cast to the worship at Eleusis, where slaves and foreigners (providing they spoke Greek) were permitted to become initiates differed greatly from the emphasis which the priests of Apollo at Delphi placed upon the sumptuous gifts of kings and citystates. The survival of the rites at Eleusis, even as the concept of deity was becoming elevated above nature, is testimony to the tremendous vitality and intellectual tolerance of ancient Greek culture. So is the existence of impressively strong and eloquent women characters in Athenian drama at a time when Athenian citizen women, except for participation in religious festivals, were expected to remain secluded within their households and to avoid any kind of public reputation.29 Generalizations about the ascendancy of male over female in Greek society or mind over matter in Greek philosophy and religion, no matter how carefully arrived at, cannot do complete justice to the complexity of the culture.

What about the actual social position of Greek women? Did it change substantially between Homer's time and the time in which allegorical commentary began to develop? Answers to these questions must be somewhat tentative, for the only evidence about the position of Greek women c. 750-700 B.C. derives from Homer's poems themselves, and these poems mingle the customs of Homer's own Ionian society with

²⁹ Pericles stressed in his Funeral Oration that respectable women should have no public reputation, whether for good or for ill; Thucydides, 2.46.

those of a much older, aristocratic Mycenaean one.

Social organization in the Iliad and the Odyssey is thoroughly patriarchal. Except for Circe and Calypso, island goddesses exempt from human institutions, we see no instance of a female's living independently or holding property in her own right. Idumo, one of the words Homer uses for "wife," is the same term used in legal documents of the fifth century; it derives from a root meaning "to tame" or "to bring under the yoke." In both Homer's poems and the Periclean era women's sexuality was very much brought under the yoke of the double standard. "Concubinage, even open concubinage, is permitted to husbands [in the Homeric epics] but not to their wives."30 Although prostitution and homosexuality flourished in fifth-century Athens and offered socially acceptable alternatives to conjugal sexuality for men, every attempt was made to confine the erotic life of citizen women to the marriage bed, for the duty they owed above all others to their household (oikos), and to the state (Noly) as a union of households, was to provide legitimate heirs.31 It would seem, then, that the actual position of women did not alter greatly in the intervening three centuries. Yet nowhere in the Iliad or the Odyssey do we find any disparaging comments about women's role, nor do we find the expressions of misogyny which became quite

³⁰ W. B. Stanford, The Ulysses Theme (Oxford, 1954), p. 45.

³¹ Marylin Arthur cites the work of Hans Julius Wolff on Greek marriage law, which "has demonstrated that the fundamental principle which governed the legal relations between individual, family and state in the Greek polis was that which defined the polis as an aggregation of oikoi"; "Origins of the Western Attitude Towards Women," p. 32.

common in later Greek literature. What has changed by the fifth century is the attitude towards women.32

Homer emphasizes women's inclusion in society as a whole, rather than her exclusion.33 In his portrait of Arete making decisions of state on Phaeacia, and in Odysseus' elaborate comparison of Penelope's character to that of a just king reigning over a fertile land, we sense that the poet fully believes women to be capable of noble decision and action. They take part in feasts in the great halls as assuredly as in domestic work in their own quarters. And in the magnificent scenes between Odysseus and Penelope in Books Nineteen and Twenty-three, Homer shows their marriage to be based upon mutual affection and respect: a union of two human beings who, no matter what the customs of their time may have proscribed, regard each other as equals.

Whether Homer's respect for women and lack of misogyny reflect his own enlightenment more than his culture's, we cannot know for certain. It is likely, however, that the Greek cities in Ionia were affected by the freer attitudes towards women current in Anatolia. Since oral poetry is a communal enterprise and Homer probably the most gifted of shapers rather than originator, it is reasonable to

³² The position of women differed considerably in different parts of Greece during the classical period; Spartan women, for instance, were less restricted than their Athenian counterparts. I will focus exclusively on Athens, however, because it figured most strongly in the development of cultural attitudes about the sexes.

³³ Arthur, p. 14. Occasionally, however, Homer <u>does</u> show a woman being excluded, as when Telemachos (11.356-359 and 12.350-353) formulaically tells his mother to go to her room and attend to her own work rather than to the work of men, which concerns war.

suppose that the regard for women expressed in the epics was consistent with his society's. Within a century and a half of Homer's time, his poems were known throughout the Greek mainland, standardized in text, and used as a basis for education.34 They may have helped to temper the negative attitudes towards women becoming dominant in Attica.

Hesiod, in the seventh century B.C., can fairly be regarded as the father of Greek misogyny. His account of the creation and deeds of the first woman, Pandora, in Works and Days rivals the Genesis account of Eve and the Fall in its scapegoating of the female sex. Pandora is a "beautiful evil," a kakov Kakov, whom Zeus bestows upon mankind in retaliation for Prometheus' theft of fire. Though golden Aphrodite has shed grace on her head, Zeus has commanded Hermes "to put in her a bitch's mind and a thieving heart."35 All the plagues which blight humanity can be blamed on her, for it is her curiosity which has freed them from the box in which they were confined.

Hesiod regards Pandora and her sex as a "steep trap from which there is no escape." One feels that he, like St. Paul, would counsel universal celibacy if only it would not result in the suicide of the species. Since marriage and the propagation of children are necessary, he advises the prospective groom to assure himself of the upper

³⁴ The standardization is thought to have occurred in the time of Peisistratos and his sons in Athens, c. 530-510 B.C.; see Stanford's introduction to the Greek text, xxvii.

³⁵ This and the next quotation are taken from the Pandora passage, 11.42-105 of Works and Days, as it is translated by Mary R. Lefkowitz in Women's Life in Greece and Rome, ed. Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant (Baltimore, 1982), p. 13.

hand by choosing a much younger wife: "You are at the right age to bring a wife to your house when you are not much less than thirty, and not much more . . . Your wife should be four years past puberty and be married to you in the fifth. Marry a virgin so you can teach her good habits."36 Hesiod's hostility was echoed by the poetphilosopher Semonides and, in the next century, by Phocylides, both of whom compare women to species of lifestock.37 His opinion that mature men should choose teenage brides became accepted social custom. In fifth-century Athens, young citizen girls moved directly from the sequestered quarters of their fathers' houses to the sequestered chambers of their husbands', seemingly without any interval of schooling or life in the open air.38 Under such circumstances, the life of newlyweds must have had overtones of fatherdaughter incest. The ideal young wife was pliable, eager to be

³⁶ Works and Days, 11.695-699; trans. by Lefkowitz in Women's Life, p. 14.

³⁷ Sarah B Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves (New York, 1975), p. 49.

³⁸ Evidence for the seclusion of citizen women in Athens is both literary and archaeological. Helene P. Foley, who has reviewed the relevant surviving prose, notes that orators praised the modesty of female relatives who were embarrassed to dine even with male kinsmen. She further notes that "in some law court cases witnesses had to be produced to certify the existence of a respectable wife, a woman who was referred to only by the name of her husband and father." See "The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama" in Reflections of Women in Antiquity, ed. Helene P. Foley (New York, 1981), pp. 130-131.

House plans of the time, as they have been reconstructed by archaeologists, place the <u>andron</u>, or men's dining room, near the street and far removed from the women's quarters, suggesting that respectable women did not attend <u>symposia</u> even in their own households. Plans are included in Susan Walker's article "Women and Housing in Classical Greece" in <u>Images of Women in Antiquity</u>, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit, 1983), pp. 81-91.

instructed by her husband even in matters of household economy. When Socrates, in Xenophon's Oeconomicus, asks Ischomachus whether his wife came to him as a good household manager or was educated to become one, he receives this reply: "How, Socrates, . . . could she have known anything when I took her, since she came to me when she was not yet fifteen, and had lived under diligent supervision in order that she might see and hear as little as possible and ask the fewest possible questions?"39 Any reservations that Ischomachus might have had about the rightness of his domestic arrangements are laid to rest by his beliefs. Since women have "fearful souls," he tells Socrates, "the god directly prepared the women's nature for indoor works and indoor concerns."40

Is Ischomachus' attitude an exaggerated caricature? That seems very doubtful, considering the status of women in Athenian law.

Under Solon's legal code, adopted when democracy was founded in the early sixth century, women were lifelong legal minors who had no political rights and practically no financial ones. The only women who could hold property were heiresses—and they (even if already married) were legally bound to marry their next of kin so that their property would stay within their father's household. One notorious statute permitted a young woman who lost her virginity before marriage to be sold into slavery by her father or guardian.41

³⁹ Xenophon, Oeconomicus, VII.5; trans. Carnes Lord, in Xenophon's Socratic Discourse (Ithaca, 1976).

⁴⁰ Oeconomicus, VII.25,22.

⁴¹ Eva Keuls, The Reign of the Phallus (New York, 1985), p. 5.

Another permitted a husband catching his wife in adultery to murder her lover.42 Athenian democracy, although it represented a great advance in political and intellectual freedom for men, appears to have further restricted the lives of women. Under the social and political structure of the city-state, women were recognized as an aspect of men's existence rather than as beings in their own right.43 Yet their role in producing legitimate heirs for the household and citizens for the state was crucial to the state's survival. No wonder Athenian dramatists viewed the female sex with great unease.

On the Greek stage the contradictions and paradoxes of the social system were exposed. Aristophanes often chose the ideological gulf between the sexes as his comic terrain. Within this gulf, deception and misinformation seem to have flourished. In the Thesmophoriazusae (11.502-503) he satirizes in passing the false childbirths of his time. Apparently some men knew their wives so little that it was possible for these women to feign pregnancy and labor in order to produce the purchased "heirs" who would save them from being divorced for barrenness. And in the Lysistrata he brilliantly exposes, through the device of the sex strike, the fundamental dependence of the Athenian state on its politically ignored women.

It was in tragedy, however, that unease about the position of women found its most penetrating and disturbing expression. Athenian

⁴² This statute provided the legal basis for Lysias' oration "On the Murder of Fratosthenes"; Women's Life in Greece and Rome, p. 44.

⁴³ Arthur, "Origins of the Western Attitude Towards Women," p. 50.

tragedy is filled with female characters whose strength of presence has rarely been equaled on stage.44 In their remorselessness, their willful eloquence, their insistence on public exercise of their own personal power, Aescyhlus' Clytemnestra and Euripides' Medea are the dark shadow of the radically privatized Athenian woman. Clytemnestra, by claiming the right to rule and the right to choose a lover, violates the bonds upon which most patriarchal societies have been based; Medea, by murdering her own children, violates the primary connection upon which all societies rest. And yet Medea, as Euripedes presents her, is not an outcast beyond the reach of the audience's sympathies. He permits her to speak for all of her sex:

Of all things which are living and can form a judgement We women are the most unfortunate creatures. Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required For us to buy a husband and take for our bodies A master; for not to take one is even worse. And now the question is serious whether we take A good or bad one; for there is no easy escape For a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage. She arrives among new modes of behavior and manners, And needs prophetic power, unless she has learned at home, How best to manage him who shares the bed with her.

⁴⁴ Readers and scholars for generations have been puzzling over this paradox. How could a society so repressive of women produce such strong female dramatic characters? We need to remember that the tragedies are set in the distant, mythic past—which may be eternal in the unconscious or in the imagination, but which is not eternal in social customs. Philip Slater's thesis in The Glory of Hera (Boston, 1968) is that this mythic past is also within the individual memory, repressed or unrepressed, of every Athenian male who was dominated at the beginning of his life by a much stronger woman, his mother. Slater further argues that the more repressive of women a society is, the more likely a woman is to find an outlet for her frustrated sense of personal power in the domination of her children, who grow up with extremely ambivalent feelings toward her. The dramatist, he believes, is gifted with intuitive access to this primal material and awakens the audience to its reality.

I find Slater's thesis psychologically convincing, although not wholly explanatory of the phenomenon that was Athenian drama.

And if we work out all this well and carefully,
And the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke,
Then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die.
A man, when he's tired of the company in his home,
Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom
And turns to a friend or companion of his own age.
But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone.45

Meder's words here seem to be an unexaggerated assessment of the lives of citizen women. Furthermore, they accomplish her objective of persuading the chorus of Corinthian women to support her. The chorus vows not to tell their king that Medea, a foreigner, is planning a revenge upon Jason that will also do him harm. Euripides, with brilliant iconoclasm, imagines a situation in which the compliant silence of women is turned against the state. Understandably, his play did not win the state-sponsored festival competition in the year (431 B.C.) it was presented.

Drama is the most subversive of literary genres because it depends upon conflict for plot and because it grants even "evil" characters a full personal voice. In its reverberant, torchlit space the world can be turned upside down. Athenian drama remains the best evidence of the far-reaching commitment to freedom by the society which produced it. Yet because this prized freedom was not made available to women--who were then ill-respected because they did not possess it--Athenian society undermined its own ideal of human dignity.

The attitudes whose development I have traced--the inclination

⁴⁵ Euripides, Medea, 11. 230-247, trans. Rex Warner in The Complete Greek Tragedies, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1959), III, 66-67.

to take pride in newly discovered powers of mind and to view them as only tenuously connected with the body, the tendency to conceive of the divine as transcendent rather than earth-connected and immanent, and the inclination to regard women with increased disrespect -- are all part of the climate of thought in which allegory was invented. Seeking for causal connections among currents of thought within this climate is, however, hazardous. To argue that the development of allegorical thinking depended upon a prior tradition of misogynistic thought would be patently absurd. Yet there is some connection, I believe, between the two. Both of these phenomena I see as indicative of the general trend in Greek culture to view the elevated as the good, and of the wish to use reason to impose meaningful order on the random or uncontrolled.46 In Homer's time logos ($\lambda \acute{o}_{\chi o \zeta}$) was not sharply distinguished from mythos (ωρθό); both words simply meant "the spoken word." But gradually their usage became more specific: mythos came to mean the word in its most ancient aspect, as in stories about origins; and logos came to mean the word rationally conceived. Only after this cleavage was made could allegorical commentary develop, for it consists of the operation of logos upon mythos, with mythos, so to speak, as the patient spread out on the table. Dualistic by its very nature, allegorical commentary emphasizes values and judgments, the discovery of meaning in texts. Once

⁴⁶ Again, once this over-under kind of dualistic thinking develops, women tend to be the natural occupants of the lower category of the dualism because of their intimate connection with the body, childbirth and sexuality. Anatomy apparently makes it easier for men than for women to convince themselves that they are preeminently creatures of mind.

invented, it lent itself very easily to the expression of negative attitudes current towards women, as the commentary on Circe makes plain.

The first reader who professed to see an underlying symbolic sense in Homer was Theagenes of Rhegium, who lived in the later part of the sixth century and may have been a Pythagorean. His commentary on the battle of the gods in Iliad XX was preserved by Porphyry, almost eight hundred years later. According to Theagenes, the strife beween divinities does not really represent deity at war with itself, but rather the strife between different elements of nature—Apollo representing fire, Poseidon water, etc.—or between different faculties of the soul.47 Theagenes may have been defending Homer from charges by Xenophanes of Colophon that his gods were immoral, or he may have been merely exercising a taste for symbolic thinking. So little evidence survives from the sixth century that it is impossible to know whether the original impetus for allegorical thinking was defer sive or positive.

Jean Pépin, who has studied the subject more thoroughly than anyone else, surmises that the Pythagoreans, holding Homer in high esteem, developed their own symbolic exegesis of his work and used it in their purifications.48 If so, it has been lost. Pépin's theory

⁴⁷ Jean Pépin, Mythe et allégoire (Paris, 1976), p. 97.

⁴⁸ Pépin, p. 96. According to Iamblichus, p. 41, Pythagoras believed that he himself had once been Eurphorbos, a character from the <u>Iliad</u>, in a former life. Diogenes Laertius, however, reports that Pythagoras, in one of his journeys to the underworld, saw Homer being tormented for lies he had told about the gods; Cynthia Thompson, "Stoic Allegory of Homer" (Diss., Yale, 1973), p. 36.

makes good sense, however, for the Pythagoreans were known to communicate symbolically with each other, especially in the presence of non-initiated strangers. Accustomed as they were to look for the soul within the person, they must also have been inclined to look for the soul, or underlying meaning, within a text.

This underlying meaning was known as the hyponoia (ὑπόνοια), literally the "undersense"; the first surviving use of the term comes from the fourth century B.C., though it must have been current before then.49 The term allegoria (ἀλληγόρια), meaning literally "saying something else," may have been used by Stoic philosophers in the third century B.C., but the first sure attestation occurs in rhetorical contexts of the first century B.C. Only slightly later, Philo of Alexandria, applying the tradition of philosophical interpretation of texts to the Pentateuch, uses both terms in his commentary. Subsequently both terms are used by Neo-Platonists and Christian writers.

Plato's attack on Homer and other poets in <u>The Republic</u> gave urgency to the development of allegorical interpretation, for now it became necessary to prove that the stories in the epics were not blasphemous or merely frivolous. What, specifically, are Plato's charges against Homer? First, that he lies about the gods, attributing to them crimes of parricide, deception and adultery not reconciliable with the idea of a divinity wholly good and immutable. (2.377-380). Second, that Homer presents death as a terrible misfortune, to be lamented by the living, when in reality death is

⁴⁹ All information in this paragraph is from Cynthia Thompson, "Stoic Allegory of Homer," pp. 21-22.

not a state to be feared (3.386-388). In Book Ten Plato develops the nore general charge that provides the philosophical basis for the others: that poetry is inherently false because, as an imitation of earthly life which is itself but an imperfect representation of the Ideal, poetry is at least two removes from truth and thus must appeal to an inferior part of the soul in its listeners (10.597-605). For all these reasons, Plato would ban poets from his republic and prevent them from corrupting the minds of youth. Even if Homer's objectionable tales have an underlying moral meaning, he says, they are not to be read or sung in his state, for young people cannot distinguish between the allegorical and the literal (2.379). Plato's awareness that Homer's poems were claimed to have underlying moral meaning shows that the tradition of allegory had begun to develop during or before his time.

The wish to defend Homer from Plato's charges was a primary motive among early allegorical commentators; they believed they could do so most effectively by stealing their opponents' fire, by finding philosophy within the epics. No writer of the time seems to have thought of defending mythic poetry on its own grounds against the virulence of this attack. This sort of defense would not occur until the time of the German Romantics, until sufficient centuries had elapsed for thinkers to gain perspective upon reason itself.

Instead, early supporters of Homer tended to share Plato's assumptions even as they argued against him. As might be expected, they read the Odyssey as a parable of the reasonable, temperate soul who stays on course in spite of an alluring assortment of carnal tempta-

tions. The complexity and balance of Homer's version of the Circe-Odysseus myth, which defy shaping to any clear and simple moral pattern, are ignored by the allegorical writers. Instead, they focus on the moment of Odysseus' drinking Circe's potion and on his meeting with Hermes before it. If we had to divine the story through allusions in non-Homeric classical and Renaissance sources, we would have great difficulty discovering that Odysseus consented to become Circe's lover or that she gave him directions to find his way home. These commentators shear the whole last half of the myth away. Their work shows how readily bias can be established as truth and, once established as such, how tenaciously it can flourish.

The ancients distinguished between two types of allegory, physical and moral. Physical allegory, to which historical exegesis was closely allied, attempted to relate Homer's poems to the familiar material world, to point out, for instance, the precise geographic locations of his fabled isles. According to one writer of this persuasion, Circe was merely a highly skilled $\frac{1}{2} \pi \alpha i \rho \alpha$, like the educated courtesans who flourished in the refined establishments of Periclean Athens.50 Moral allegory, which was far more ambitious, attempted to uncover the psychological or spiritual meaning of Homer's work. All the interpretations which I will discuss belong to this second category.

Two of Plato's contemporaries were the forgers of the Odysseus-as-Reasonable-Soul interpretation. Antisthenes (455-360 B.C.), who

⁵⁰ Felix Buffière, Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque (Paris, 1956), p. 237.

founded the Cynics and influenced the doctrines of the later Stoics, wrote many allegorical tracts on Homer, of which only fragments remain. According to him, it is Odysseus' temperance which permits him to escape the enchantments of Circe, just as it is the gluttony of his companions which puts them at her mercy. 51 Perhaps this point of view derives ultimately from Socrates, the teacher of Antisthenes. In Xenophon's Memorabilia (I.3,7) Socrates remarks that the counsel of Hermes, whom he thinks represents Odysseus' own temperance and repugnance for taking food beyond the point of satiety, saves him from becoming a pig.52 Diogenes of Sinope (400-325 B.C.), a pupil of Antisthenes, put forth an interpretation which has more psychological subtlety and force. He views sensual pleasure, not merely gluttony, as the antithesis of reason. Circe he regards as the personification of such pleasure, "more dangerous than all other enemies, because it attacks treacherously, like a magical drug, and makes a siege against each of the senses."53

Behind Diogenes' words lies a distrust of the body. His imagination focuses on the lives of Odysseus' men in the sty and on the animals in Circe's yard. They are "brutes without reason," "the image of the soul become the pitiable slave of pleasure, immobilised by the easy life and incapable of reaction which would free them."

"They serve her without ceasing, remain by her gate, without any

⁵¹ Pépin, p. 107.

⁵² Pepin, p. 107.

⁵³ Quoted by Pépin, p. 110. This and all other translations from the French, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

desire but for the voluptuousness which enslaves them, enduring a thousand other sufferings."54 What did Diogenes make of Hermes' advice to Odysseus not to spurn Circe's offer of the pleasures of her bed, of Odysseus' own consent to this union and his year-long stay in her palace? No fragments which survive address such matters.

The next extant allegorical interpretation of Circe's role in the Odyssey dates from several centuries later, though it shows no discernible differences in perspective or conviction. The Homeric Allegories of Heraclitus55 is usually dated to the age of Augustus on the basis of internal evidence; it is a collection of commentaries on selected passages of Homer, arranged according to the order in which they appear in the epics. These commentaries show no trace of the mystical exegesis favored by the slightly later Neo-Platonists.

Because the value they uphold is, above all, reason itself, they seem firmly within the Stoic tradition. Odysseus, to Heraclitus, represents visdom, the crown of all the virtues; he is imbued with the Stoic sense of the Divine as "the right reason which penetrates all things."56

Heraclitus introduces his work by taking cognizance of Plato's attack and saying "everything [in Homer] is profane, if nothing is

⁵⁴ Diogenes, quoted in Dion Chrysostom, Oratio, 24-25; Pépin, pp. 110-111.

⁵⁵ Not Heraclitus of Ephesus, but a later group of writers known collectively as Heraclitus the Mythographer; Thompson, "Stoic Allegories," pp. 4-5.

⁵⁶ Zeno, Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta, I.146; quoted by Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational, p. 238.

The greater part of Heraclitus' discussion of the Odysseus-Circe encounter concentrates on its prelude, Odysseus's meeting with Hermes. This most unpredictable and mercurial of gods represents, to Heraclitus, "reason of one's own," ὁ ἐμφρον λόχος (72.4). His wings symbolize the rapidity of the spoken word, his epithets his propensity to beam forth clarity. When Odysseus speaks with this god he is actually conversing, according to Heraclitus, with the better part of himself (73.9). The gift of moly, the plant of dark, tenacious root and milky flower, actually represents the coming of wisdom, a virtue difficult to acquire but luminous when possessed (73.10-12). Its presence is sufficient to overcome the powers of Circe, who symbolizes--what else?--sensual pleasure. Circe herself is not a major character in Heraclitus' exegesis, nor does he touch upon what transpires after Odysseus puts down her cup. Combining a sophistication which recognizes the divine as present in human intelligence with a simplicity which ignores the inconvenient, Heraclitus' interpretation of the episode has proved remarkably long-lasting. is occasionally expressed as the author's point of view even in

⁵⁷ Heraclitus [Mythographer], <u>Allegories d'Homère</u>, 1.1; ed. Felix Buffiere (Paris, 1962), p. 1. Πώντα γὰρ ἡτέβησεν, εί μηδὲν ἀλληγόρησεν.

twentieth-century Homeric commentary.58

A.D. work called The Life and Poetry of Homer, embraces a variety of Stoic, Pythagorean and Platonic influences in his interpretation.

His grand, inflated plan in the Life, which was once attributed to Plutarch, is to show that Homer is the source of all philosophy, and of rhetoric and several other human skills as well. He often states that Homer "hints at" (alvirativ) various ideas of later thinkers, and he clearly regards the epics as a vast encyclopedia with a complex, somewhat obscure structure of meaning.59 One of Ps.—

Plutarch's concerns is to demonstrate that the Platonic—Pythagorean concept of the soul as immortal but temporarily imprisoned in the body derives from Homer. Accordingly, he views Circe as the doyenne of metempsychosis, presiding over the transit of souls from body to body, form to form:

The changing of the companions of Odysseus into pigs and that sort of creature, suggests that the souls of foolish men take on the form of beastly animals, rushing into the turning circuit of all things, which is called Kirke by name and placed under the direction of the seemly child of Helios, living on the island of Aiaia. And he [Homer] has called it that because men from the dead wail and lament there. The sensible man, Odysseus himself, does not suffer that kind of transformation because Hermes, who is reason, keeps him unharmed.60

Several points here are worthy of notice. First, Ps.-Plutarch is

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Hugo Rahner, Greek Myths and Christian Mystery, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, 1963), pp. 181-222.

⁵⁹ Robert Lamberton, <u>Homer the Theologian</u> (Berkeley, 1986), p. 41.

⁶⁰ Ps.-Plutarch, The Life and Poetry of Homer, 126, in Plutarch, Moralia, VII, ed. G. N. Bernadakis (Leipzig, 1896), p. 400.

adapting and attributing to Homer a doctrine Socrates expounds in the Phaedo, that the souls of the foolish (or cruel) are likely to be reborn into animals whose natures match their own.61 Second, he does not see Circe as representing bodily pleasure, as allegorists had been regarding her for several centuries, but as far more metaphysical in her powers, since she is the turner of the wheel of incarnation. In this respect, he looks ahead to Porphyry and the Neo-Platonists, who believed that the significance of her name derived from its secondary meaning, "circle." Ps.-Plutarch's Odysseus remains in his usual role as Reasonable Soul, as capable of triumphing over rebirth as he is over pleasure. Once again the interpretation ends not at the Homeric episode's ending, but at the point of convenience to the interpreter. Did Odysseus' men suddenly gain wisdom in the sty, thus meriting their change back into men taller, more beautiful than before? If Ps.-Plutarch knows what Homer is hinting at in this second transformation, he prefers not to say.

The most philosophical and detailed of all the ancient allegorical commentaries on the episode is that of Porphyry (232-305 A.D.), a contemporary and student of Flotinus. Excerpted from an unknown work and preserved in the anthology of Stobaeus, it differs from the other interpretations discussed so far in that it uses the transformation of the sailors as the occasion for a fully-developed exposition of the fate of the soul after death. The emphasis is clearly on Porphyry's own abstract, Neo-Platonic ideas, only incidentally on the details of Homer's plot; thus the interpretation very nearly stands

⁶¹ Plato, Phaedo, 81E-82B; p. 486.

in its own right. Porphyry does, however, see Circe as a personification, and his notion of what she personifies is connected with the secondary meaning of her name:

Homer, for his part, calls the cyclical progress and rotation of metemsomatosis "Circe," making her a child of the sun, which is constantly linking destruction with birth and birth back again with destruction and stringing them together.62

He expands upon the interpretation offered a century or so earlier by Ps.-Plutarch:

Clearly, this myth is a riddle concealing what Pythagoras and Plato have said about the soul: that it is indestructible by nature and eternal, but not immune to experience and change, and that it undergoes change and transfer into other types of bodies when it goes through what we call "destruction" or "death" . . . The urge for pleasure makes them [the souls] long for their accustomed way of life in and through the flesh, and so they fall back into the witch's brew of yéveris, which truly mixes and brews together the immortal and the mortal, the rational and the emotional, the Olympian and the terrestrial. The souls are bewitched and softened by the pleasures that lead them back again into yévers, and at this point they have special need of great good fortune and self-restraint lest they follow and give in to their worst parts and emotions and take on an accursed and beastly life.63

Porphyry's view of Circe, strangely, partakes of the ancient regard with which devotees beheld the Great Goddess. She, they believed, both gave life and took it away, "constantly linking destruction with birth and birth back again with destruction." But wonder and fear are absent in Porphyry's account, replaced by a calmer note of

⁶² Translated by Lamberton in Homer the Theologian, p. 116.

⁶³ Lamberton's translation, pp. 115-116. He leaves the word yévers untranslated because it is a technical term in later Platonism, referring to the entire cycle of coming-to-be and passing away that is the existence of the sublunary realm. His translation of kukewas "witch's brew" seems a liberty which Porphyry may not have intended.

understanding, by the perspective which sees the entire wheel of incarnations as a temporary, sublunary phenomenon from which the lucid soul yearns to be liberated. In Porphyry's philosophy of transcendence, Circe is the Great Goddess of this world of yévens—but this world is, finally, not the one that counts. His powers of intellectualized belief have put her in a lesser place.

The great good fortune and self-restraint which Porphyry thinks will preserve souls from incarnation as beasts are, once again, personified as Hermes, "in reality, reason [$\lambda \acute{o} \chi \circ \varsigma$]."64 The chief difference between the ways in which these Stoic and Neo-Platonic commentators regard reason is that while the former view it as an end in itself, Porphyry sees it as a quality pointing the way to the transcendent good. If we can judge adequately from the passages discussed, both philosophies have a pronounced and equal distrust of pleasure and sexuality.

What a long, convoluted path has been travelled since Homer shaped his tale of a mortal hero's liaison with a divinity and of the trust and direction which evolved from it. In the dualistic and often simplistic writings of these early allegorical commentators, the sexual and the spiritual are thoroughly at war with each other; the human impulses towards pleasure and transcendence are presented as incompatible by nature. Homer's view of human nature as unitary, at one with itself and open to the gods, seems to have dropped out of culture during the centuries following his poems' composition.

⁶⁴ Lamberton, p. 117.

It may be that "the maturing of human consciousness is reflected in the great step from mythos to logos."65 If so, we need to define this maturing also as a splitting, as a separation of consciousness from currents of life flowing both within and without the person.

The characters in allegorical commentary go by the names of Homer's original heroes and deities, but they move in a diminished, less radiant world. As C. S. Lewis so eloquently puts it, "the gods died into allegory."66

The ancient commentaries we have looked at are not, it might well be argued, very important in themselves. Yet if we regard them as among the few extant texts of a once thriving and influential tradition, they take on undeniable consequence. These early allegorical Circes mothered later poetic ones.

⁶⁵ Erich Kahler, "The Persistence of Myth" in Chimera, Spring 1946, p.3.

⁶⁶ C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London, 1936), p. 78.

Chapter Four. The Legacy of Allegory.

How was Circe seen during the period from Hellenistic times to late antiquity? To follow her traces through these centuries is to become aware of a complicated interplay between the poetic imagination and allegorical thinking. The Circes of Apollonius Rhodius, Virgil and Ovid are all so different from Homer's that they speak of non-Homeric influences upon them. Almost certainly, these poets were familiar with some of the moralistic interpretations of Homer's goddess discussed in the previous chapter, and this familiarity entered into their reshapings of her. If we compare their Circes with a tantalizing, two-line fragment from Alcman, writing in the seventh century B.C. before the allegorical tradition developed, the older poet's freedom to emphasize the positive in her character is at once noticeable. Alcman shows Circe acting as a protector, applying wax with her own hands to the ears of Odysseus' men, so they might be saved from the Sirens' songs.1

Four hundred years later, in the <u>Argonautica</u> of Apollonius Rhodius, this benevolence is gone and only her sinister strangeness remains. "Sinister" is too mild a word for the Circes of the two Roman poets, who see her as a profoundly dangerous natural force. Not surprisingly, Ovid's imaginative portrait of her was later to

¹ Alcman, Frag. 28 in Lyrica Graeca Selecta, ed. D. L. Page (Oxford, 1968), p. 23.

draw the attention of Christian allegorists, who perceived her as a kind of Eve raised to a higher power, a demonic figure personifying the linkage between the feminine, the natural and the deadly.

Stripped of its positive side, the Circe archetype fit in remarkably well with Christian doctrines concerning the nature of women and sexuality which the early Church fathers promulgated during this period and passed on to the Middle Ages.

By comparison, the Circe of Apollonius Rhodius' Hellenistic epic is relatively innocuous. She dwells by herself near the head of the Adriatic and is visited in Book Four by Jason and Medea, who have escaped from Colchis via the Danube and the Rhone.2 Medea comes to her aunt to be purified of the murder and dismemberment of her brother Absyrtus. Though Circe obliges the pair, drenching them with the blood of a suckling pig, offering prayers to Zeus on their behalf and listening to Medea's partial confession, she is not eager to have them linger and demands soon afterwards that they leave her house. She functions more as a priestess than as a goddess, and Apollonius never uses the word $\theta \in \alpha$ in reference to her. All in all, she is a minor character in the Argenautica, barely figuring in its plot but providing a stroke of the bizarre.

Through the bizarre details of his portrait of her, Apollonius consistently associates Circe with the ancient and the elemental. We first see her surrounded by a flock of nondescript monsters, neither

² Apollonius' location of Circe's domain on the coast of Italy is indicative of his century, for by that time the focus of Greek exploration and trade had switched from East to West.

men nor beasts, who accompany her to her daily bath in the sea.3

These hobbling, ill-shaped creatures, we are told, are like those formed when the earth was still primeval ooze. They correspond to the fawning wolves and mountain lions in Homer, but also attest to Circe's connection with an epoch when life had not yet settled into its familiar forms, when anything could happen. Her eyes, too, reveal her elemental nature. They flash with intense rays of golden light, making her immediately recognizable to her niece Medea--and indeed to anyone--as a daughter of the Sun (IV.728-230). Sea, blood and fire--all agencies of transformation--are the stuff of everyday life and work to Apollonius' Circe. She seems to have little taste for the differentiated and human, and little impact on society.

The Circes of the two Roman poets are more negative than that of Apollonius and even further removed from the deep reservoir of Mediterranean myth, accessible to Homer, in which the feminine represented the source of both life and death and carried a full range of positive and negative meanings. The goddess-splitting (and -weakening) phenomenon noticeable in the development of Mediterranean religions occurs within poetry, too. Of the three roles Circe plays in the Odyssey--sinister mistress of animals, lover of the hero, director of his journey to the Underworld--she is allotted only the first by Virgil in the Aeneid. The second is capably and tragically filled by Dido in Book Four and the third by the Cumaean Sybil in Book Six.

³ Apollonius Rhodius, <u>Argonautica</u>, IV.662-684; ed. George W. Mooney (London, 1912), pp. 341-342.

Virgil's Circe, though a very minor character in her own right, is symptomatic of his treatment of the feminine throughout his epic. She makes a brief, haunting appearance at the beginning of Book Seven, when Aeneas and his men are about to land on Italian shores. Although she never again enters the narrative, the glimpse Virgil gives us of the intense hostility between the sexes acted out on her isle brings into sharp focus a tension latent and troubling throughout much of the rest of the Aeneid. Circe appears right at the poem's center, at the transitional point between Aeneas' Odyssean wanderings of the first six books and his Iliadic battles of the second six. Her presence reveals the grave underlying pathology between masculine and feminine which mars this otherwise very balanced, structured poem.

Virgil's description of Aeneas' ship as it brushes by the coast of Circe's howling isle retains several of Homer's details: her song, her loom, her fires of cedar. The terrible sounds, however, are original with Virgil, perhaps inspired by his knowledge of Aiaia as meaning "wailing":

They passed The isle of Circe close inshore: that isle Where, in the grove men shun, the Sun's rich daughter Sings the hours away. She lights her hall By night with fires of fragrant cedar wood, Making her shuttle hum across the warp. Out of this island now they could hear lions Growling low in anger at their chains, Then roaring in the deep night; bristling boars And fenced-in bears, foaming in rage, and shapes Of huge wolves howling. Men they once had been, But with her magic herbs the cruel goddess Dressed them in the form and pelt of brutes. That night, to spare good Trojans foul enchantment --Should they put in, or near the dangerous beach--Neptune puffed out their sails with wind astern,

Giving clear passage, carrying them onward Past the boiling surf.4

In Homer, whether or not the animals in Circe's park were once men is left ambiguous. The cowardly Eurylochus is convinced that they were, but Odysseus pays no attention to his theory. In Virgil, this prior transformation is fact. Nothing argues against his striking auditory image of enraged male energies kept chained by a female divinity.

Dea saeva, "wrathful goddess," he calls her, and he attributes to her the ability to evoke <u>furor</u> in all creatures which come under her spell. Any Homeric details that do not fit his picture of Circe presiding over a rustic and enraged domain Virgil is careful to suppress. There are no tokens of civilized refinement, no golden bowls, silver ewers or ivory-inlaid chairs. And certainly no flawless beds.

Virgil's Circe is a clear caveat, like the figures in Renaissance emblem books. "Beware of the feminine: its disorder is
contagious" would be an appropriate motto to accompany this portrait.

Perhaps the most telling touch in Virgil's passage on Circe is the strong wind which Neptune gives to the Trojans, enabling them to quickly pass her by. She is altogether too close to the mouth of the Tiber, to the future Rome, for Aeneas, were he ever to become engaged with her, to leave her conveniently behind, as he has already left

⁴ Virgil, The Aeneid, VII.10-24; trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York, 1983), pp. 195-196. All other quotations from the Aeneid will be from the Fitzgerald translation, with line references given to the Latin text.

⁵ A point made by Charles Segal in "Circean Temptations: Homer, Vergil, Ovid," <u>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</u>, XCIX (1968), 425.

Creusa and Dido. And why should he want to be engaged? Virgil has made her purely negative, a witch stripped of charm. There is no hint that Aeneas has anything to learn from her, as Odysseus learns from Circe. Circe in the Aeneid represents the archetypal feminine projected as evil and then evaded, safely skirted by. When we come to the end of Book Twelve, however, with its nightmare vision of men turned to raging beasts on the battlefield and of human trust dishonored, we might well ask whether the atmosphere of Circe's island has, after all, been left behind. Like a repression returning to wreak havoc in the life of the person who could not bear its truth, the power which Virgil attributes to Circe refuses to be ignored. Aeneas' own war- chariot is pulled by a team of fire-breathing horses that she has bred.

To bear out my contention that Virgil's treatment of Circe is symptomatic of his treatment of the feminine throughout the epic it is necessary to look at other episodes and passages in some detail. But before doing so I wish to make a central if obvious point. The whole motion of the Aeneid is away from home, away from the Troy Aeneas has known, from his wife and childhood, from his emotional center. He is impelled towards an abstract, glorious future (imperial Rome) by the persuasive hand of Fate: a power that is expressed primarily through the will of Jupiter and secondarily through Venus, Mercury, and, most compellingly, by his father Anchises. Virgil loosely based the wanderings of Aeneas in the first half of his poem upon the wanderings of Odysseus, but the direction of the two heroes is diametrically opposed. Odysseus, yearning to

return to wife and home, where he perceives his deepest identity to lie, must necessarily remain in good terms with the archetypal feminine. It represents both his completion and his origins. His search is marked by his acceptance of positive female values:

Odysseus' quest for identity is in fact inextricably bound up with the feminine. In seeking the wholeness of his being, he (Odysseus) passes through intimate experience with various embodiments of archetypal woman, each reflecting some aspect of what he as masculine hero lacks.6

Aeneas, seeking a future not yet grounded in reality, seemingly has less need of the feminine. Because territory is the first imperative of that future, the labor to bring it to birth requires, above all, the masculine arts of war. Empire and home are two different poles of the imagination, the one implying dominance and control, the other nourishment, safety and surrender. Traditionally, male energies have been associated with the one, female energies with the other. Seen in this light, the Aeneid is an exclusively masculine poem.

At many places in his epic Virgil makes clear that the <u>furor</u>, or violent, disruptive passion which threatens Aeneas' controlled obedience to Fate, is predominantly the work of females. Some of them are divine, others human. Juno is foremost among these hostile figures, as the first passage of the poem makes plain. Still smarting from her failure to be awarded the golden apple by Paris, she retaliates by throwing storms and obstacles in the way of his countryman Aeneas. Virgil trivializes the cause of her anger, but he

⁶ Charles H. Taylor, Jr., "The Obstacles to Odysseus' Return: Identity and Consciousness in the Odyssey," The Yale Review, 50 (1961), 579.

shows its strength to be ferocious. Through her messenger Iris, Juno incites the Trojan women in Book Five to burn their own ships while the men are off participating in Anchises' anniversary games. The women are "wrought to a frenzy" (V.659), raging out of control like the flames consuming masts and thwarts. A second outbreak of communal female madness, also indirectly engineered by Juno, occurs in Book Seven, after the Trojans have landed in Latium. The Fury Allecto, charged by the Queen of Heaven with the mission of stirring up hatred between Trojan and Latin, plucks a snake from her writhing tresses and tosses it at Amata, wife of King Latinus. The results are drastic:

in her viscera

The serpent's evil madness circulated,

Suffusing her; the poor queen, now enflamed

By prodigies of hell, went wild indeed

And with insane abandon roamed the city. (VII.374-377)

Amata in turn incites the other Latin women, who become "fired by sudden madness" to roam the forests like Bacchantes and who listen to her sing marriage hymns for Turnus and Lavinia. In both these scenes women's natural feeling (the Trojan women's weariness with sea travel, Amata's fond wish to see Turnus as her son-in-law) is roused to an insane pitch. Apart from the bloodlust of battle, Virgil does not show men being similarly overcome. Like the Stoic allegorists, Virgil distrusts female nature, viewing it as a reservoir of potentially roiling passions which threaten male achievement and control.

The most appealing impediment to Aeneas' fathering of the future Rome is, of course, Dido. She provides the clearest instance in the poem of a woman's natural feeling suddenly heightened to destructive

fury. Virgil has imagined her as a kind of alter-Aeneas, like him noble, bereaved and dedicated to the great work of founding a city; thus her willingness to let her life and work be consumed by passion illustrates a tragedy possible for Aeneas too. Aeneas appears to succumb to love for her, but when Mercury comes down to remind him of his mission, he is not torn by the conflicting claims of love in the present and glory in the future. His decision to leave is instantaneous:

Amazed, and shocked to the bottom of his soul By what his eyes had seen, Aeneas felt His hackles rise, his voice choke in his throat. As the sharp admonition and command From heaven had shaken him awake, he now Burned only to be gone, to leave that land Of the sweet life behind. (IV.278-282)

Compare this scene with its closest Homeric parallel, Hermes'interception of Odysseus on his way to Circe's house. There the divine advice is not to abandon but to engage with the feminine. Odysseus' relationship with Circe eventually helps him towards his goal; there is no conflict in him between the personal and the strategic or political. In Aeneas, however, "the personal and the political are experienced as mutually exclusive."7

When Aeneas tells Dido of his decision to leave, he acknowledges neither her emotions nor his own, as if to do so would make him vulnerable to them. Instead, he offers the legalistic excuse that here married her. Then he tells her that his real love is his future kingdom in Italy, to which he will sail "not of [his] own free

⁷ Christine Perkell, "On Creusa, Dido and the Quality of Victory in Virgil's Aeneid," Women's Studies, 8 (1981), p. 204.

will" (IV.361). As a human statement, the speech is appallingly inadequate. As Brooks Otis puts it, "he should have avoided excuses and taken his share of the blame . . . He could, in his heart of hearts, face neither Dido nor himself."8 In the overall scheme of the poem, however, Aeneas' disengagement from Dido, no matter how stilted or clumsy, is a moral victory. Only after Aeneas leaves her does Virgil repeatedly call him pius.9

Otis believes that when Aeneas journeys to the Underworld and sees the vision of the future Rome pointed out to him by Anchises, the personal and political elements of his character come together and he is decisively strengthened. Now his love for his father, and the springs of will which love calls forth, can be directed towards the accomplishment of his destiny. "Once he fully identifies his pietas towards Anchises with his pietas towards Rome, his spiritual regeneration is finally accomplished."10 Together Anchises and Aeneas stand on a ridge overlooking the Elysian Fields and admire the host of martial, virtuous souls mustered to be reborn as Romans.

After this moment of enlightenment, Aeneas returns to the upper world through the Gate of Ivory, through which false dreams pass. For centuries lovers of Virgil have wondered why he did not permit his hero to return through the reliable Gate of Horn. The most popular answer has been that since Aeneas is a living man, not a true shade,

⁸ Brooks Otis, Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry (Oxford, 1963), pp. 267-268.

⁹ Otis, p. 267.

¹⁰ Otis, p. 306.

he is not eligible for passage there. Could the substance of his vision also have an effect on which gate he passes through? Women are strikingly absent from this illustrious lineup of future Romans. Virgil may be suggesting an incompleteness, and hence a falsity, in this vision of a civilization which ignores the contributions of half of its members. The Augustan values which the poem overtly espouses seem, at times, to be subtly questioned by the poet.

The ending is a case in point. In the final lines, the usually controlled Aeneas gives in to a lust for revenge and kills an at last humbled Turnus. This murder of a suppliant comes as an emotional shock which Virgil does nothing to mute. No glimpse of dazzling and destined cities, no scene of enemies united by their common grief for the dead mitigates the pure destruction of this ending. It is as if Virgil has realized the human inadequacy of his ideology of empire and decided to dramatize it in this stark, brutal image of dominance and submission. Aeneid XII offers a terrible contrast to the compassion and grandeur of Iliad XXXV, in which Achilles yields to Priam's request for Hector's body and shares the old man's sorrow. When we consider these two final books side by side, Otis' contention that "we can partially describe the Aeneid as the creation of Roman civilization out of Homeric barbarism"11 becomes untenable. Michael Putnam's observation that in the Aeneid's final scene Aeneas becomes identified with or parallel to Juno, whose furor is unremittingly

¹¹ Otis, p. 385.

negative, is a more discerning assessment of its moral quality.12

Putnam sees Aeneas as yielding, finally, to the very <u>furor</u> against which he has struggled throughout the poem.

I believe that this final emergence of destructive passion from within Aeneas is linked to the overall imbalance between masculine and feminine in the epic. What Virgil has repressed in Aeneas and projected onto an unruly host of mortal and divine females finally comes back to demand expression. The ending of the poem is profoundly truthful because it reveals the terrible cost of attempting to sacrifice passion--stereotyped as feminine--to duty and control, rather than integrating these forces. From this perspective, it is not so strange that Virgil chose, whether intuitively or deliberately, to end his national epic with an atmosphere more suggestive of Circe's island than of the pax Romana. If he had lived to revise the poem to his satisfaction it might have concluded differently.13 As it is, the ending subverts the poem's overall Augustan ideology in favor of a more timeless truth.

Virgil's younger contemporary Ovid appears never to have been comfortable with the grandiloquence of Augustan ideology. Very early in his writings, in the first poem of the second book of the Amores, he explains how he was once working on "an inflated epic about War in

¹² Michael C. J. Putnam, The Poetry of the Aeneid (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 200-201.

¹³ That the <u>Aeneid</u> as we have it did not satisfy Virgil is proved by his instruction to his friend Varius to burn the manuscript. Fortunately, Augustus ordered this wish disregarded. <u>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</u>, p. 1124.

Heaven," but dropped it when his mistress locked him out of her chamber.14 Deprived of her favors, he came to realize that "her shut door ran to larger bolts" than any Jupiter wielded. And so he went back to "verses and compliments, my natural weapons," depending on the magic of elegiac poetry to soften and transform her will. This witty story, with its unceremonious relegation of Jove to the limbo of lost drafts, seems to tell the truth about Ovid's deliberate rejection of heroic poetry, about his decision not to compete with Virgil. Its cavalier treatment of the cosmic paterfamilias has anti-Augustan overtones. So unsympathetic was Ovid to the official ideology of empire and moral correctness that Augustus perceived his presence in Rome as a threat and banished him to the west shore of the Black Sea in 8 A.D. Ovid's libertine attitudes in The Art of Love were cited as the lesser of two reasons for his exile.

What was the primary reason? To this day it remains unknown, but it probably had something to do with Ovid's friendship with Augustus' daughter Julia and her followers.15 As a notorious adulteress, Julia was strongly associated with one of the first laws promulgated by her father after his accession to power as emperor. The lex Julia of 18 B.C. made adultery a

¹⁴ Ovid, Amores (II.1.14-20) in The Erotic Poems, trans. and ed. by Peter Green (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 111.

¹⁵ Peter Green speculates that Ovid may have witnessed a plot against Tiberius, the son of Augustus' wife Livia and a rival of Julia's connections to the succession. Green further surmises that the sexual scandal surrounding Julia's banishment was a coverup for a political scandal involving rivals for the succession. "Introduction" to The Erotic Poems, pp. 49-59.

criminal offence and required husbands to divorce adulterous wives.16

This law was aimed primarily against the mores of the aristocratic

class, who had been the base of power in republican Rome and were the

greatest threat to Augustus' new monopoly of power.

Although the legal position of women in republican Rome had been poor--they remained under the guardianship of their fathers or husbands for life--they were allowed to acquire property and also took an active part in the city's social life. Roman women did not suffer the indignities of exclusion which their Athenian counterparts had endured. In the poetry of the late republican period "both sexuality in general and the sexual relations between men and women are evaluated positively."17

The cultural atmosphere changed under Augustus. His program of moral rearmament promoted chastity and the growth of the nuclear family. As in Greece between the times of Homer and Plato, attitudes towards women shifted and became more negative. Ovid, who persisted in seeing women as equal players in the game of love, was part of the old guard.

There is a mystery connected with Ovid's portrayal of Circe in the Metamorphoses. Why should this poet, so sensuous and undoctrinaire, attuned beyond most others to the flowing and turning of currents of desire and to the varied forms through which such

¹⁶ Marylin Arthur, "'Liberated' Women: The Classical Era" in Becoming Visible, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston, 1977), p. 83. The lex Julia did not give wives the right to divorce adulterous husbands.

¹⁷ Arthur, "'Liberated' Women," p. 81.

currents reveal themselves, treat the mythic figure most clearly associated with metamorphosis in so heavy-handed a fashion? He gives Circe star billing in the fourteenth book of the Metamorphoses, and the role she plays can fairly be described as Queen of Lust. To Ovid, Circe personifies a female passion so extreme that it destroys anyone who obstructs its satisfaction. He tells three tales about her, concerning her desire for Glaucus, Odysseus and Picus. In each she is like an exaggeration of Diogenes of Sinope's allegorical figure, an abstract idea given new, voluptuous flesh and body. To say that she is unsubtle is vastly to understate the case. If her libido is not gratified, she is capable of changing a man who spurns her into an angry bird, of girding a rival's body with the heads of barking dogs, of making the air itself writhe with unnatural forms. Since Ovid is obviously not disapproving of sexual passion per se, why does he present Circe as such an unattractive caricature of it?

I believe there are two related answers to this question.

First, a stereotype intervened. This stereotype was partially provided by the Homeric allegorists' view of Circe. Although Ovid would not have been moved by their philosophy, the image they provided might well have mingled in his mind with another current one, that of the bawd-sorceress who counsels her beautiful young mistress not to waste her charms on poets but to go after someone rich. In Amores I.8 Ovid denounces a witch like this, a hag named Dipsas who "mutters magical cantrips, can make rivers/ Run uphill, knows the best aphrodisiacs." Dipsas may have been modelled after a similar figure in Propertius IV.5 and is a familiar type in Roman

elegy.18 Ovid's disdain for witchcraft is expressed many times in the Amores, The Art of Love and Cures for Love. Perhaps he found the sorceresses of his time easy to disparage because they often were servants, but there is a deeper reason also for his negative attitude towards them and towards Circe.

He believed in poetry-making itself as a magical art. Repeatedly in his early work, Ovid plays with the multiple meanings of carmen, which can signify "poem" or "magical incantation" or "spell."19 In Amores II.1, the same poem in which he discards his ambitions as an epic poet so that he can press his affair with Corinna, Ovid proclaims:

There's magic in poetry, its power
Can pull down the bloody moon,
Turn back the sun, make serpents burst asunder
Or rivers flow upstream.
Doors are no match for such spellbinding, the toughest
Locks can be open-sesamed by its charms. (11. 23-28)

Behind the outrageous bravado of these claims lies the justified pride of someone who has himself experienced creation, who has played with forms and transformed. For Ovid, poetry itself was a means of tapping and channeling the currents of life. His confidence in his own subtle art made him look down upon Circe's. To resort to creating monsters, rather than poems, must have seemed to him the essence of crudity.

Ovid uses Circe's crudities as an opportunity for lush, exaggerated poetics. The first of the three tales, about Glaucus,

¹⁸ Green, "Notes and References" in Ovid, The Erotic Poems, p. 277.

¹⁹ Green, "Notes and References," p. 290.

introduces us to her "more than ladylike desires" and explains the origins of the monster Scylla. Spurned by Glaucus because he is already in love with Scylla (who was originally a fair young maiden), Circe steals to the girl's bathing cove and poisons the water with magical herbs which distort her shapely body. Circe's behavior with Picus in the third tale follows a similar pattern. Having met him by chance in the woods, she lures him away from his hunting party, offers her love and, when he refuses because of his passion for the lyrical Canens, changes him into a bird. In both cases, the transformations are clearly motivated by personal revenge—unlike those in Homer, which seem the result of an earth goddess' determination to show off her divine powers. Ovid's Circe, for all her menace and flash, has no fundamental mystery or remoteness. She is an ordinary woman scorned, raised to a more explosive power.

Ovid's imagination, like that of Apollonius, is impressed by Circe's affinities with the elements. Twice (14.382 and 438) he calls her "Titaness," as if he were aware of her connection with the ancient Earth Goddess, Ge.20 He shows Circe herself taking pride in her primeval pedigree, for twice she advertises herself to potential lovers as a daughter of the Sun. Her power can shake the elemental framework of nature. When Picus' subjects come searching and ask her the whereabouts of their king (now become woodpecker), Circe throws restraint to the winds and puts on what must be the most impressive magic show in the Metamorphoses:

²⁰ Otherwise Ovid refers to Circe as "goddess" but not as "witch."

she, too quick for them, thrust like a veil Of raining mist her magic at their heads, The distillation of a million herbs, And called the ancient gods of night to help her, Gods from Erebus, ever-falling Chaos, And Hecate who heard her winding cries. Then (strange to say) the forest seemed to float; The earth groaned under it and trees, white-haired, Were like an arbour turned to frost in winter, And where her raining mist touched plants and grasses Blood stained the ground and stones began to bark, And through that midnight crawled snakes, horny lizards, And souls of those long dead weaved through the air. The young who witnessed horror in her magic Shook with their fears and as she touched their faces They changed from men to beasts who roamed the darkness.21

Such effects, though pleasurable as melodrama, are hard to take seriously. Ovid may have tired by this time of showing nymphs gracefully flowing into rivers and women branching into trees; in order to top his previous effects, he strains towards surreal excess. Circe's pharmaceutical skills easily lend themselves to such exploitation. The profusion and exaggeration of this passage, at the end of her appearance in the Metamorphoses, sates the reader and prepares the way, by contrast, for the calm entrance of the philosopher, Pythagoras, in the poem's next and last book.

Ovid's treatment of the Circe-Odysseus episode, which follows

Homer quite closely in detail though it is much condensed, has a

different, more muted tone. It is narrated by Macareus, a deserter

from Odysseus's crew. The chief advantage of this point of view is

that it offers a firsthand description of how it feels to go from man

to pig to man. Macareus stresses his thirst, his eagerness to take

²¹ Ovid, <u>Metamorphoses</u>, 14.403-415; trans. Horace Gregory (New York, 1958), pp. 395-396. Subsequent quotes from the <u>Metamorphoses</u> will be from the Gregory translation, but with line references to the Latin text.

Circe's cup, the lightness of her touch. In his case the transformation is deft; he slips into it as into an ordinary drunken moment:

The floor beneath me slipped and there I was
With pigskin growing on me, tough and hairy (14.279-281)

The retransformation bears more resemblance to a dancing bear's

delicate, deliberate defiance of gravity than to the poignancy of the
scene in the Odyssey:

We raised our heads, then seemed to stand almost On our hind legs, and as her songs went on, We found our feet, our shoulders grew, our arms reached out to wind themselves around Ulysses. (14.302-306)

Circe's songs here are incantations; they take the place of the heart-rending groans of the men in Homer. While this description is quite artful, it cannot compare to the intensity of the moment in the Odyssey when the whole spectrum of creation-goddess, man and beast-is joined in pain and pity.

Surprisingly, Ovid downplays the sexuality of the connection between Circe and Odysseus. While it is clear that they are lovers, their dalliance takes place well offstage. He also de-emphasizes the sailing directions which Circe gives, condensing them to two lines. Yet this is the first time since Alcman that they appear in the tale at all! On the whole, Ovid is not untrue to Homer's Circe; he just seems not much interested in her, much preferring his own casting of the goddess as spurned, revengeful Queen of Lust.

Ovid received from the allegorical tradition, I believe, a distorted, one-sided Circe, and for reasons of his own he chose to give this distortion flesh and blood, a new poetic existence.

Because she lacks complexity, she has not much power to stir feeling

in modern readers; yet Ovid's Circe has proved, from his time until the beginning of this century, more influential than Homer's. She was witch of choice to the Renaissance.

As a mythic representation of the female who damages males in their very humanity, Circe is an elder sister of Eve. True, their status differs in an important respect: Eve is merely a mortal woman; the strict monotheism of the Hebrews and orthodox Christians left no room for female divinities. But she is the protagonist of the most important Biblical myth concerning women and sexuality, and the biases the early Church fathers brought to its interpretation are essentially the same biases which the allegorists brought to bear upon Circe. The familiar dualistic formula that male:female as reason (or spirit):flesh fits the tale in Genesis very well. Because of Eve's relatively weak mind, she was seen as easy prey for the demonic serpent. And once their minds had succumbed to temptation, Adam and Eve were seen as left with little except their own sexuality, of which they were suddenly ashamed.

The writer of an epistle which was attributed to St. Paul, and accepted by orthodox Christians as canonical, saw in the Genesis myth ample justification for women's subjection:

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression. (I Timothy 2:12-15)

In another pseudo-Pauline letter the writer uses the metaphor of the body's proper subordination to the head to clarify the relationship

of wife to husband:

Wives, subject yourself to your own husbands as to the Lord.

For the husband is head [κεφαλή] of the wife, as also Christ is Head [κεφαλή] of the church: and he is the saviour of the body [rol σώματος].

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:22-24)

One wonders whether Christ himself, who was on friendly terms with a decidedly independent and attractive woman (Mary Magdalen), would have approved of these elaborations upon his teachings.

The spirit-flesh dichotomy which the pseudo-Pauline letters impressed upon Christian doctrine has a distinctively Greek cast.

Prejudice against women was so often associated with this dichotomy that it went unremarked in Greek culture, for it was part of the mental climate in which Greek writers lived and moved after the sixth century B. C. Here is Aristotle on what he perceived as the basic division in human nature:

It is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. . . the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior, and the one rules, and the other is ruled: this principle of necessity extends to all mankind.22

Aristotle's words need only to be coated with more urbanity and grace to become Plutarch's of several centuries later:

And control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman, not as the owner has control of a piece of property, but, as the soul controls the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her

²² Aristotle, <u>Politics</u>, 1254b3; trans. by Lefkowitz, <u>Women's</u> Life in Greece and Rome, p. 63.

through goodwill. . . so it is possible to govern a wife, and at the same time to delight and gratify her.23

Plutarch's understanding tone, very much that of the temperate, accomplished man of the world, cannot obscure the vastness of his assumption, that one sex has the existential right to control the other. Yet we do not have Plutarch to thank or blame for the fact that the ideas he expresses here are so familiar to us. That honor belongs to the writers of the Pauline letters, who made the spirit-flesh dualism and its correspondence to the sexes part of Christian scripture and thus enabled it to influence Western culture for centuries. They were better evangelists than they could have imagined.

Paul, in some of his more authentic epistles, does express ideas about men and women without rancor and with the tempering advice that they love one another. This equanimity was not true of Tertullian (160-230 A.D.), whose writings did much to promote an aversion to sex and distrust of female nature in later Christian doctrine. In a passage from "On the Apparel of Women" which was later to be quoted during the Renaissance, Tertullian addresses his female fellow Christians:

You are the devil's gateway. . . you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man.

²³ Plutarch, "Advice to Bride and Groom," 142E in Moralia, II, trans. F. C. Babbitt (London, 1928).

On account of your desert--that is, death--even the Son of God had to die.24 (italics Tertullian's)

The vindictiveness of this point of view must have been hard to reconcile with Christ's own emphasis on the spiritual imperatives of love and forgiveness.

Tertullian's view of Eve as the destroyer of the more virtuous sex has something in common with Clement of Alexandria's attitude towards Circe. Of the farly Church fathers, Clement, who wrote around the turn of the third century, was the one most steeped in Platonism and Greek culture. His familiarity with Homer, whom he thought the most gifted and authoritative of the pagan poets, was extensive. In his <u>Stromateis</u>, describing the journey and choices to be made by the Christian soul, Clement alludes to Circe to illustrate a point. Eventually, he says, such a person will come to a point of crisis when he must choose between the Logos (Christ) and love of the things of this world. He compares the position of the Christian at such a time to that of Odysseus on the path towards Circe's house:

If a man were to be turned into a beast, like those who were bewitched by the poisons of Circe, he would be suffering much the same fate as those who give a kick to the tradition of the Church and light-heartedly caper away to the edifices of private opinion; for such men destroy their chances of being men of God and of remaining true to the Lord. Nevertheless he who turns his back upon such aberration, heeds the Scriptures, and turns his life once more towards the truth, such a one, from being a mere man, is transformed, as it were, into a God.25

²⁴ Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women" in <u>The Ante-Nicene</u> Fathers, IV, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Boston, 1885), 14.

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, <u>Stromateis</u>, VII.16.95.1-2; quoted by Hugo Rahner in <u>Greek Myths and Christian Mystery</u> (New York, 1963), pp. 207-208.

There is no great difference between the way Clement uses Circe here and the way the pagan Neo-Platonists were about to; both see her as the goddess of this world, whose pleasures deflect the spiritual wayfarer from the Logos, or transcendent truth, which is represented—to Clement—exclusively by Christ. To Clement, Circe's powers are limited, for men hardly need aid in turning themselves into beasts. The truly wondrous transformations are those wrought by Christian revelation.

St. Augustine, writing two centuries later, also alludes to Circe and also sees her powers as limited. This allusion is unusual for Augustine, for he rarely refers to Homer and had only a minimal knowledge of Greek.26 But in the eighteenth book of The City of God he devotes three sections to tales of men changed into animals and can hardly avoid mentioning Circe. Maga famosissima he calls her, "most famous sorceress."27 His identification of her as a demon is all but explicit, for he devotes the entire next section (18) to explaining how these transformations are more apparent than real, since they are wrought not by the hand of God but by demons with limited, secondary powers. Augustine's writings were enormously influential during the Latin Middle Ages and his near-typology of Circe as demon was later to have echoes of its own.

Of much greater import than this isolated reference to Circe, however, is his overall attitude towards sexuality. Augustine did

²⁶ Lamberton, <u>Homer the Theologian</u>, p. 261; Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley, 1967), p. 36.

²⁷ St. Augustine, The City of God XVIII.17; trans. Eva Sanford and William Green (Cambridge, 1965), V, 418-419.

not, like Tertullian, scapegoat the female sex. The biographical evidence shows him to have been a warm and passionate man. fifteen years during his twenties and thirties he lived harmoniously with a woman with whom he had a son, and he remained extremely close to his devoutly Christian mother until her death. Yet he came to scapegoat sexuality itself, or rather to view it as the element in human nature which most intractably threatened spiritual development.28 In the Confessions Augustine quotes the Pauline text which finally converted him: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence" (Romans 13:13ff.). For him personally, the acceptance of Christ involved abandoning sexual life. Not until his old age, however, when his polemics against the Pelagians brought out the rigid, intransigent side of his nature, did he prescribe this abandonment for others. In his writings against the Pelagians, who denied the reality of Original Sin, Augustine isolates sexual intercourse as an element of evil within every marriage.29 He finally came to view carnal desire itself as the searing brand of the Fall. More than any other thinker except the canonical Paul, Augustine is responsible for transmitting pessimistic views of sexuality to the Christian West.

²⁸ John J. O'Meara, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Love in the Context of His Influence on Christian Ethics" in Arethusa, 2 (1969), 56. Also see Brown, Augustine of Hippo, p. 389. Augustine's views on the relationship of the spirit to the flesh were also influenced by Neo-Platonism. He read a Latin translation of Porphyry's edition of Plotinus before he converted to Christianity and was moved by this reading to change his mode of life.

²⁹ Brown, <u>Augustine</u>, p. 390. More precisely, Augustine says the married act rightly in procreation, but wrongly if they seek pleasure in the act.

Boethius is the last Christian thinker of antiquity to refer to Circe in his writings. She appears in a poem in the fourth book of The Consolation of Philosophy, written c. 523, when he was in prison and under sentence of death. Boethius' extensive knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy was rare for his time. He bases his view of the extent of Circe's powers on two lines from the Odyssey, 10.239-240, which state that, though the heads and voices and skins of Odysseus' men became those of hogs, their minds remained unchanged. To him this is evidence of the feebleness of the sorceress' brew:

Her herbs were powerless;
They changed the body's limbs
But could not change the heart;
Safe in a secret fastness
The strength of man lies hid.
Those poisons, though, are stronger,
Which creeping deep within,
Dethrone a man's true self:
They do not harm the body,
But cruelly wound the mind.30

Boethius' view of Circe here is highly idiosyncratic: he sees her negative side too as negligible. Evil, to him, resulted from the heart's desire to turn away from one's human nature and consequently to sink to the level of an animal. Right before the poem in which Circe appears, he remarks that "a man wallowing in foul and impure lusts is occupied by the filthy pleasures of a sow." Alone among all the commentators who have seen moral meanings in Homer's tale, Boethius insists that pigdom is caused by a man's free will and not by his victimization by any witch or goddess. Boethius seems

³⁰ Boethius, <u>The Consolation of Philosophy</u>, 4.3; trans. V. E. Watts (Harmondsworth, 1986), pp. 126-127.

relatively unaffected by the misogynist current which joined with Christian doctrine not long after the death of Christ.

Well over a century before Boethius' time, during the reign of Theodosius from 378-395, Christianity had become the state religion of the Roman empire. Theodosius essentially declared open season on paganism. Temples of divinities of both sexes were sacked and destroyed by roving bands of monks, including the temple of Demeter at Eleusis and the Artemision at Ephesus, which had once been considered foremost of the world's seven wonders. Most of the huge marble blocks used to construct the temple at Ephesus were reused as building materials for the new church of St. John Theologos, situated on a hill overlooking the ruins of Artemis' age-old sanctuary on the plain by the Cayster river. This high vantage point seems appropriate for the church of a saint who thought that creation began with something as abstract as "the Word." The world of ancient goddess religions, of those who believed that creation began within a female divinity's womb, now lay in ruins all around the Mediterranean.

The destructive energy turned against pagan temples still survives in many tracts written "Against the Heathen" by Christian polemicists. The tracts of Arnobius and Athanasius, both writing in the fourth century, show how far away the religious thinking of the time had moved from the veneration of anthropomorphic nature-based divinities. Arnobius attacks the Greek and Roman penchant for adorning temples with marble effigies of unmistakably male or female deities. "Have the gods, then, sexes?" he asks, "and are they disfigured by those parts, the very mention of whose names by modest

lips is disgraceful?"31 His revulsion against divine sexuality extends to every step of the reproductive process. He denounces the notion of "goddesses pregnant, goddesses with child . . . faltering in their steps, through the irksomeness of the burden they bear with them. . . shrieking as they are attacked by keen pangs and grievous pains." One can imagine Arnobius' spirited disbelief were he to be told that, at one point in human history, burdened goddesses were deemed the most awesome and potent force in the universe.

Arnobius' contemporary Athanasius lacks his tone of inspired prudery, but he objects to goddess worship on grounds that are more firmly based in the social realities of his time. He is particularly irked by the pagans' assumption that females are worthy of worship. "Would that their idolatrous madness had stopped short at males," he exclaims, "and that they had not brought down the title of deity to females. For even women, whom it is not safe to admit to deliberation about public affairs, they worship and serve with the honour due to God."32

The views of Arnobius and Athanasius and their fellow believers prevailed; in the late empire paganism was more vigorously suppressed than Christianity had ever been. Goddess worship was finished in Europe. Not until the yearning to complement the masculine divine with the feminine prompted the cult of Mary in the twelfth century

³¹ Arnobius, "Adversus Gentes" in <u>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</u>, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, 1886), VI, 466.

³² Athanasius, "Contra Gentes" in <u>Nicene and Post-Nicene</u>
<u>Fathers</u>, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York, 1892), 2nd
series, IV, 9.

did a version of it reappear.

During the period from the sixth to the fifteenth centuries, the texts of the Homeric poems were lost to the West, and his work existed only as fragments embedded in the literature of rhetoric and philosophy. During this period the Homeric tales themselves, burdened by now with centuries of moralizing, became thoroughly dissociated from the poetry which had been their medium and largely reverted to the oral tradition. As a glance at popular Renaissance mythographies will show, it was Circe as maga famosissima who flourished in this tradition, not Circe as

Undoubtedly, Ovid's portrait of Circe--which continued to be read, since the knowledge of Latin was never lost--contributed to her reputation as foremost among sorceresses. Numerous allegorical commentaries were written on the Metamorphoses during the twelfth century which still repose, unpublished, on library shelves.33 In the Ovide Moralise, an anonymous commentary in Old French dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century, she figures as a type for "la vile venismes" of this world, from which "Jhesucris" will save us.34 During these centuries many allegorical interpretations of Virgil were also written--in fact, by then allegory had become the basis of all textual interpretation whatsoever35--but they had less

³³ E. K. Rand, Ovid and His Influence (Boston, 1925), p. 135.

³⁴⁰vide Moralisé, ed. C. de Boer (Wiesbaden, n.d.), V, p. 70.

³⁵ Ernst Curtius, <u>European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages</u>, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953), pp. 204-205.

influence upon Circe's legend because she did not figure as heavily in the Aeneid.

For intellectuals who preferred commentary to epic narrative, the complex goddess had already been eclipsed by the witch as far back as Plato's time. Even the first of her allegorical interpreters had seen Circe as purely negative, and this one-sided attitude remains remarkably consistent from Stoic to Neo-Platonist to Christian. Gathered in a hypothetical room, these commentators might quibble among themselves about why she was dangerous or evil, but only Boethius, perhaps, would argue with the justice of that description. She would find no real champions.

Hence Circe, who survived as a remnant of the ancient Goddess within the Mycenaean setting of Homer's epic, could not survive with her plenitude or divinity intact in the Christian West.

Chapter Five. Renaissance Circes, Renaissance Women

Legend has it that pages of the text of Homer reentered Italy as a packing material buffering bottles of wine imported by a merchant in the fourteenth century. Perhaps the legend is true, for certainly Petrarch and his circle knew and valued some of Homer's work by the latter part of the Trecento. Widespread appreciation of the Iliad and the Odyssey in western Europe did not develop, however, until over a hundred years later, until after Constantinople had fallen to the Turks and some of the Byzantine Homeric scholars centered there had emigrated to Florence with their texts.1 The first printed edition of Homer appeared in Florence in 1488, shortly to be translated into Latin and thereafter accessible to the European learned community.2 Now the malevolent-beneficent goddess of the Odyssey could take her place beside Virgil's and particularly Ovid's later versions of her persona and could be shaped against prevailing Christian and patristic notions of women's nature. The resultant archetype of the seductive, dangerous, controlling woman was a dark

¹ The school of Chrysoloras, a Greek teacher attracted to Florence by a group of her citizens around the turn of the Quattrocento, was operating decades before these scholars arrived. But Chrysoloras' pupils Bruni and Niccoli concentrated on translating Plato and Aristotle, rather than Homer. See Hans Baron, The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance (Princeton, 1966).

² W. B. Stanford, "Introduction" to <u>The Odyssey of Homer</u> (New York, 1959), xxix.

muse for many European poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, Calderón, Milton: all were drawn to this figure and recreated her in some form. Never before or after has Circe had such a hold on the Western imagination.

Why--besides the obvious reason that she was rediscovered in Homer--did Circe exert such a powerful fascination during and right after the Renaissance? Associated with her figure, I believe, were both the sense of possibility and the acute anxieties of the era. As a wreaker of transformations, able to change seemingly permanent, god-given forms at will, this mythic figure was peculiarly expressive of the age. At a time when capitalist means of production were superceding feudal ones, when the absolutist state was gradually replacing the old medieval commune structures, when family organization itself was becoming more nuclear and patriarchal and less based on a network of kin, when the boundaries of the known world were vastly expanding and the universality of the Catholic church was drastically receding--when, in short, the social and cultural matrix into which persons were born was likely to be thoroughly altered by the time of their maturity--Circe's abilities metaphorically expressed a fact of life. With her seemingly unlimited powers, she was an appropriate emblem for an age in which some men's sense of possibility was so heightened that they, like Hamlet, could conceive of their species as "infinite in faculty."

Hamlet also saw himself and his kind as "the quintessence of dust." A powerful anxiety--aggravated by plagues, wars and the omnipresence of change--was the backlash to the Renaissance sense of

possibility. In this respect too Circe was an appropriate emblem of the age. Perhaps more clearly than any other mythic figure she embodied the unsettling power of woman <u>over</u> man: a power which ran counter to the established man-over-woman sexual hierarchy which was one of the secure anchors in this age of change. The magical or supernatural quality of her powers was also disturbing, for what was to differentiate it from the influence of demons, or her deeds from witchcraft? She was the mythic "witch" most familiar to this era still sufficiently medieval to believe in the power of witches and sufficiently disturbed to see these powers almost everywhere.

In this chapter I will explore how Circe was regarded in Renaissance mythographies and in Chapman's translation of Homer, leaving her reincarnations by sixteenth and seventeenth century poets to succeeding chapters. I will also examine in some detail how attitudes towards her were symptomatic of attitudes towards women of the time.

In 1531 the prototype of a characteristic Renaissance genre, the emblem book, first appeared. This was the Emblemata of Andreas

Alciati, which used visual images to communicate moralistic messages made explicit in coordinated mottos and poems. Alciati's book was vastly popular, probably because it offered crisp and accessible interpretations of classical learning in messages bold and unambiguous as the lines of its woodcuts. The Emblemata went through many editions, including some with alternative woodcuts and some with additional commentary. It may have been translated from Latin into

English in 1551, though, if so, no copies of that edition have survived.3 In 1586 Geffrey Whitney borrowed some of the woodcuts from the 1581 Dutch edition of Alciati, adding some from other sources as well and then publishing the collection as A Choice of Emblemes accompanied by English verses. Whitney or Alciati were part of the libraries of several Elizabethan poets; certainly Spenser was well acquainted with the emblem form by the time he wrote The Shepheardes Calender. In their premise that a surface image can teach moral meanings, emblem books are typical of medieval as well as Renaissance allegorical thinking. They draw, however, on many other sources of classical mythology besides Ovid's Metamorphoses, the only collection accessible to the Middle Ages.

Comparison of the Circe emblems from the 1551 Leiden edition of Alciati, the 1621 Padua edition (Figure 16), and the 1586 Whitney volume (Figure 17) reveals an important similarity. In each the female figure, holding some token of power, towers over her hapless victims, who kneel or cower before her. The unmediated visual message is "beware of the woman who stands over you." These woodcuts accord well with the women-on-top topos which sported with but did not seriously challenge the prevailing sexual order of the times. In popular art of the sixteenth century, the spectacle of an aggressive woman dominating a henpecked man was not at all unusual.4 An

³ Henry Green, ed., "Introduction" to Whitney's A Choice of Emblemes (1586; rpt. New York, 1967), xxvi.

⁴ According to Natalie Zemon Davis, "husband dominators are everywhere in popular literature [of early modern Europe] . . . The point about such portraits is that they are funny and amoral: the women are full of life and energy, and they win much of the time."

engraving by Martin Treu, from about 1540 or shortly thereafter, shows a determined wife, curls flying, in the process of beating a husband bent before her (Figure 18). In it she is the one wearing the pants. Much better known was Hans Baldung Grien's 1513 image of Phyllis riding Aristotle (Figure 19), based on the legend that Alexander's beautiful favorite got revenge on his woman-scorning tutor by persuading the old sage to get down on all fours and carry her naked through the garden as a prelude to enjoying her favors. In the Grien woodcut youth triumphs over age, passion over reason, and the female over the male. It represents the kind of reversal of hierarchies that the hierarchical societies of the Renaissance loved to contemplate and act out in festivals, as long as the acting out could be safely contained. The emblems of Circe with her rod and bowl must have been exciting in a similar, safe way.

Alciati's Leiden woodcut shows an enthroned Circe pointing her rod at curs and baboons who cluster round her feet. His Padua one shows her holding out her brew while two of Ulysses' sailors drink it from smaller bowls as they kneel in a small open boat. These Circes are clearly not Homer's goddess. Both images are accompanied by the

[&]quot;Women On Top" in <u>Society and Culture in Early Modern France</u> (Stanford, 1975), pp. 134-135. Davis admits on p. 142, however, that "in the early modern period, up to the late eighteenth century, the patriarchal family is not challenged as such even by the most searching critics of relations between the sexes."

Why, then, was the woman-on-top topos so prevalent? Probably because it expresses a truth which is the shadow side of patriarchy: that men are vulnerable to women. Louis Montrose's statement that "patriarchal norms are compensatory for the vulnerability of men to the powers of women" expresses this relationship succinctly. See "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture" in Rewriting the Renaissance, ed. Margaret Ferguson et al. (Chicago, 1986), p. 77.

Cauendum à meretricibus. EMBIEMALXXVI.



SOLE saile Circes tam magna potentia sertur,
Verterit vt multos in noua monstra viros.
Testis equum domitor Picus, tum Siylla bisormis,
Atque Ithaci postquam vina bibere sues.
Indicat illustri meretricem nomine Circe;
Es rationem animi perdere, quisquis amas.

Figure 16.

Circe in Alciati's Emblemata Padua, 1621

Homines voluptatibus transformantur.



Some had the thape of Goates, and Hogges, some Apes, and Assessmen.

Who, when they might have had their former snape againe, They did refuse, and rather wish'd, still brutishe to remaine. Which showes those soolishe sorte, whome wicked love dothe thrast, Like brutishe beastes do passe theire time, and have no sence at alt. And thoughe that wisedome woulde, they shoulde againe retire, Yet, they had rather CIR CB's serve, and burne in theire desire. Then, love the onesie ctosse, that clogges the worlde with care, Oh stoppe your eares, and shutte your ears, of CIRCES cuppes bewaie.

Figure 17.

Circe in Whitney's A Choice of Emblemes, 1586



Figure 18.

Husband-dominator in engraving by Martin Treu,
c. 1540-1543



Figure 19.

Aristotle and Phyllis, woodcut by Hans Grien, 1513

motto <u>Cavendum a meretricibus</u> ("Beware of Prostitutes") -- making Alciati the first, but not the last, interpreter to cast her as a whore. In the six-line verse which accompanies each image he refers to Picus and Scylla as well as "the men of Ithaca," revealing Ovid to be his primary source. The last line, "and whoever loves her has lost his mind's reason," makes clear that Alciati agrees with the long line of commentators who saw Circe's transformations of men as metaphorical and therefore able to be suffered again and again by any male who, in the grip of sexual ecstasy or obsession, sacrifices his will to pursue other goals.

The motto accompanying Whitney's borrowed woodcut of Circe is, in fact, "Men are transformed by pleasure."5 In this image the vile deed has already been accomplished, and Circe strokes the back of a hog with her wand while an ass, a goat and a dog docilely look on. Whitney cites Virgil and Ovid as sources for his verse, but his main source must have been a little-known dialogue by Plutarch, "Whether Beasts Have Reason," in which one recalcitrant victim of Circe eloquently expounds his reasons for preferring life as a hog and for refusing re-transformation.6 According to Whitney, all of Ulysses' men refused this offer "and rather wish'd, still brutishe to remaine." He concludes his verse with a quaint but wholesale

⁵ Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes, p. 82; "Homines voluptatibus transformantur."

⁶ This speaker is Gryllus, who inspired Spenser's Grill in the Bower of Bliss. Plutarch's dialogue was also the dominant source for Gelli's Circe, shortly to be discussed. Plutarch, "Beasts Are Rational" in Moralia, XII (Loeb Classical Library; London, 1957).

condemnation of sexual love itself:

love the onelie crosse, that clogges the world with care,

Oh stoppe your eares, and shutte your eies, of Circe's cup beware.

A similar admonition to remain sealed from desire, lest the self be destroyed by it, can be found in Whitney's verse accompanying the Sirens emblem. These enterprising Sirens flop out into the surf with horns and lyres, but wise Ulysses discerns their mermaid shapes beneath the waves and remains cold to their charms. "The face, he lik'de: the nether parte, did loathe" is the way Whitney puts it.7 The line recalls Lear's rant that "down from the waist" women are centaurs. It also brings to mind Spenser's Errour and Duessa, the one attractive in her upper body and the other attractive on the surface, Dut both loathsome in their private parts. A distrust of female sexuality was endemic in early modern Europe, having been fostered by centuries of patristic influence upon Christian doctrine. Alciati and Whitney merely reflect it.

Whatever their shortcomings in complexity, these emblem books have the virtue of making graphic the root of the fear which the Circe myth evokes. Most of the entries for her in Renaissance dictionaries are just as tiresomely negative, but the information they present does not cohere around any central point. Thomas Cooper, in his 1548 augmented edition of Thomas Elyot's Latin-English dictionary, mentions that Circe was once married to the king of the Scythians, whom she poisoned so that she could become a tyrant

⁷ Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes, p. 10.

in her own right. She was then expelled by her rebellious subjects, according to Cooper, and later fled to a deserted island.8 He gives no source for this obscure twist to her myth, which also appears in Natalis Comes' 1551 compendium of mythology. Comes attributes this legend to Dionysiodorus and uses it to explain Circe's emigration from the region of the Black Sea to the coast of Italy. The Elyot-Cooper dictionary does show, unmistakably, that its editor has read the Odyssey, for he ends his Circe entry with a fact about her which had been suppressed in Homeric commentary for roughly twenty centuries: that she caused Odysseus' men to become younger and more beautiful than they were before'

Cooper's 1573 Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Brittanica and John Florio's A World of Words, an Italian-English dictionary published in 1598, do not concain entries for Circe per se, but both mention an herb which bore a valiation of her name. "Circea" or "Circaeium" was also known as mandrake, the plant whose forked, man-shaped root was used to make a potent narcotic syrup. Perhaps Pliny, the ancient authority Cooper cites for this identification, imagined the herb as the pharmakon kakon Circe mixed with her barley, cheese and Pramnian wine.

The last of the Renaissance dictionaries at which I have glanced, Ambrogio Calepino's eight-language lexicon published in 1609, contains in its entry for Circe a wealth of information drawn from various sources. She murdered her husband, the king of the

⁸ Thomas Cooper, ed., <u>Bibliotheca Eliotae</u> (1548; rpt. Delmar, N.Y., 1975).

Sarmatians; 9 she mothered Telegonos; she ruled cruelly and poorly; she loved inordinately. Readers basing their knowledge solely on what Calepino and his fellow lexicographers said about the enchanters would have come away with treasures of odd information, but no narrative consistency or sense.

To remedy that deficiency, they could have turned to Natalis Comes' Mythologiae, the most famous and influential of the Renaissance mythographies and, like Alciati's Emblemata, a likely volume to be found in the libraries of Renaissance poets. It was first published in 1551 and was later issued in various editions. Comes' organizational strategy was thorough; he begins each entry by citing and briefly quoting from an abundance of classical sources, then he ambitiously presumes to tell his readers what they all mean. In his explication of names at the back of his work, Comes—with complete originality—derives Circe's name from the Greek $\kappa_1 \rho v \hat{\alpha} \sigma \omega_1$, the passive or middle form of $\kappa_2 \rho v \hat{\alpha} \omega$, meaning "to mix wine with water." After reading his commentary, one realizes that Comes has put aside the literal meaning of this verb and instead uses it in a most imaginative way. He correlates it with the Latin verb miscendo, which has definite sexual connotations.

Comes sees Circe herself as a mixture of two elements, heat and water, because of her derivation from Perseis, daughter of Oceanus, and Helios, god of the sun. This pedigree, Comes believed, aptly qualified her to be the supervising power over sex and births, for

⁹ Sarmatia was an ancient term for what would now be the steppes region of Russia; at its southern edge it verged on the Black Sea and overlapped with the region known as Scythia.

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"lust is made in animals out of moisture and heat."10 "It is the moisture of . . . Perse Oceanus which maintains the changing condition of matter and its seeds; the sun is the father or author of form in the generation of natural things; and therefore the conception and beginning of those things which are generated by the body belong to the powers of Circe, as she was said to be the daughter of the sun and the daughter of the ocean. "11 He sees her as personifying Nature itself, as a daughter of the elements who supervises their mingling and brings forth new forms. Comes, however, sees nothing sublime in this process and never refers to her as dea. To him the natural and the divine are antithetical. And so she represents "the worthless force of nature," which is unable to corrupt the "divine affable reason" and "immortal soul" of Odysseus.12 Comes is essentially reviving Porphyry's interpretation of the incident, though he avoids Neo-Platonic terminology and uses a slightly Christianized vocabulary. What else could the moly represent to Comes but grace--the "divine mercy" which is manifested in "the gift of Mercury"? The logical next step for Comes would have been to condemn nature as the work of Satan and to label Circe a witch, but his fundamental respect for mythology prevents him from doing so.

Arthur Golding, who published his English translation of the Metamorphoses in 1567, had fewer scruples about labelling. In his

¹⁰ Comes, Mythologiae (1567; rpt. New York, 1976), p. 174; this and other quotes from Comes are translated by Phyllis Stanley.

¹¹ Comes, pp. 174-175.

¹² Comes, p. 174.

"Epistle" prefacing Ovid's poem, Golding instructs both his readers and his patron, the Earl of Leicester, concerning the proper allegorical interpretations of the tales. "What else are Circe's witchcrafts and enchauntments," he asks us, "than the vyle/ And filthy pleasures of the flesh which doo our soules defyle?"13 His translation of Book XIV twice renders maga as "witch," though he also occasionally refers to Circe as a "goddess" and does not suppress Ovid's usages of dea. Fortunately, Golding does not often allow his doctrinaire disdain of sexual pleasure to intrude directly upon Ovid's fables of passion. His labelling of Circe as "witch" is entirely understandable, given Ovid's original caricature of her and given the fact that his translation was published at a time when witch-hysteria in England was intensifying.

Golding does not seem to have known Comes' Mythologiae. But in 1626, when George Sandys, the second English translator of the Metamorphoses, published his version of the poem "Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures," he included unattributed translations from Comes as part of his commentary on Book XIV. "Circe is so called of mixing," Comes-Sandys says, "because the mixture of the elements is necessary in generation which cannot bee performed but by the motion of the Sun: Persis, or moisture supplying the place of the female, and the Sun of the male, which gives forme to the matter: wherefore that commixtion in generation is properly Circe, the issue

¹³ Arthur Golding, trans., Shakespeare's Ovid, ed. W. H. D. Rouse (Carbondale, Ill., 1961), p. 6; ll. 276-277.

of these parents."14 Sandys also told his readers that Ulysses'
"immortal soul" was not in danger of being polluted by the maga's
inferior powers. The influence of Comes on this later English
version of Ovid is hardly surprising, given the prestige of his
Mythology and the age-old persistence of the view of Circe he adopts.

The modern reader, prompted by both common sense and Freud to view sexuality as an integral, essential part of human nature, can only marvel at Comes' assumptions in his commentary on Circe. Why is he so comfortable in condemning nature? Why does he fail to see that, even within the narrow scope of his own assumptions, lust can be reconciled with "affable reason" because it is the force that brings about the incarnation of more "immortal souls"? Perhaps every era has its massive blind spots and our current mania for preserving our safety with thermonuclear weapons would have seemed like one to him.

Every era also has a leavening of individuals whose clarity of mind and spirit is not obscured by cultural conditioning. Such a person was Giovanni Battista Gelli, born in 1498 in a small town a few kilometers along the Arno from Florence. In his maturity Gelli was a respected member of the circle of Neo-Platonic thinkers at the Florentine Academy and a valued acquaintance of Cosimo de Medici. He insisted, however, on practicing his shoemaker's trade until the end of his life and refused invitations to become a man of letters solely

¹⁴ George Sandys, trans., Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologized and Represented in Figures, ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall (Lincoln, Neb., 1970), p. 655.

dependent on noble patronage. The measure of independence the self-educated Gelli preserved for himself is evident in his thought on almost every page of his <u>Circe</u>, a collection of dialogues between Ulysses, Circe and the animals she has transformed which was first published in 1549. Though Gelli is now only an obscure footnote to cultural history, he was well known in his time; his <u>Circe</u> ran to five Italian editions before the end of the century, was translated into Latin and most modern languages, and could have been read by Spenser in the 1557 English translation of Henry Iden.

Gelli's <u>Circe</u> is a fresh, surprisingly modern, even subversive work enclosed within a seemingly conventional framework. It begins with an obsequious letter of dedication to Cosimo de Medici and ends with the standard denunciation of Circe as a "deceitful and subtle woman" by the one transformed animal (an elephant) who chooses to come back to human shape. In between, Gelli gently and wittily exposes the sexism of his own and prior times—including that expressed in Aristotle's philosophy—and shows himself to be cognizant of the limits of language itself. On almost every page the animating sentiment is that it is difficult to be human, that consciousness is a painful burden. Not the least among Gelli's subversions is his recreation of the character of Homer's Circe and his endowment of her with a voice.

The scheme of the work is borrowed from Plutarch's "Whether Beasts Have Reason." Ulysses, finally restless on Circe's island, tells her that he wishes to go back to Ithaca and to take with him any of her menagerie who were originally Greeks. Circe--dignified,

aware of her excellences, in all respects akin to the lover Homer's Odysseus addresses as norva -- replies that he is free to go himself, but may take with him only those countrymen whom he can persuade to become human again. To aid his persuasions, she promises to bestow upon any animal with whom he wishes to converse the capability of human speech. Ulysses then tries out his oratorical powers on a variety of creatures from the lower half of the Great Chain of Being: an oyster, a mole, a hare (who describes metamorphosis as "an experience which I can compare to nothing so aptly as to falling into a delicious and pleasant sleep"15), a deer, a dog, a horse, an elephant and others. The horse, whom Gelli presents as an exemplar of temperance, speaks for practically all of them when he says "while I was a man, I liked my condition well enough, and had a very low opinion of beasts; but now I have tried their way of living, I am resolved to live and die like a horse" (p. 113). Against such contentment Ulysses' elequence blunts itself. He comes away rather shaken in his own sense of identity, which depends heavily on verbal resourcefulness. Most of the dialogues are exercises in mutual incomprehension; only the two I will examine in more detail end in agreement.

The deer is the only one of the animals who is female and the only one who wins Ulysses over to her point of view. He starts off as an egregious sexist, ready to walk away when he discovers the deer's femaleness, for he is convinced that "you women merely

¹⁵ Giovanni Battista Gelli, <u>Circe</u>, trans. and ed. by Robert Adams (Ithaca, 1963), p. 59.

confound yourselves when you consider too long, for your mental capacities are but very shallow" (p. 84). Nevertheless, he pauses to listen to her arguments. The doe, like the Wife of Bath, shows herself to be familiar with classical learning, refuting Aristotle's ideas about sexual reproduction with a heavy dose of common sense:

We are so scorned that some of your wise men have asserted that we are not of the same species; others have asserted that a female is only a spoiled male or that nature has somehow been deficient in producing them. Now this is obviously directly contrary to the law of nature, for we are as necessary for the generation of men as man himself is.16

She also blames men for women's lack of achievement in historical times, for "you confine them within the walls of your house to such sordid business as is fit only for slaves, saying that only she is praiseworthy whose actions exceed not the limits of her own house" (p. 85). Here the doe sounds like a refugee from Periclean Athens, disgusted with its mores. Lastly and even more daringly, she rails against the sexual double standard itself: "Why isn't a family tainted by your unbridled appetites as you pretend it would be by ours?" she asks Ulysses (p. 90).

The best evidence that Gelli's Ulysses has preserved his Homeric suppleness of mind and sympathetic understanding of the feminine is

¹⁶ Gelli, p. 84. I interpret this speech as a rebuttal of passages such as the following from <u>De Generatione Animalium</u>, II, 3, 737a (trans. J. A. Smith and W. L. Ross):

^{. . .} for just as the young of mutilated parents are sometimes born mutilated and cometimes not, so also the young born of a female are sometimes female and sometimes male instead. For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male, and the catamenia [the female seeds] are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul.

his gracious capitulation to the doe's arguments. He comes to realize that "being a deer, she enjoys liberty, the most desirable thing in the world, whereas, should she be a woman again, she must become a servant, than which nothing is more irksome to a real human being" (p. 96).

Gelli's quite remarkable feminism here is not muted by its playful context. No other Renaissance thinker except Agrippa sees so acutely that the inferior social and political position of women results from cultural bias and not from nature.17 At a time when Aristotle's Politics and On the Generation of Animals had added a powerful ancient authority to the chorus of Christian fathers and clergy who denounced women as inferior by nature, and when even humanists who advocated education for women did not assume their full equality, Gelli stands almost alone in implying that women are as deserving of liberty and self-determination as men. He expresses his feminism through humor and indirection, but he does so much more ably than most of the Renaissance "defenders" of women did in their formal polemics.

The other dialogue in Gelli's Circe which has a clear winner is

¹⁷ Agrippa, in <u>De nobilitate et praecellentia Foemenei sexus</u> (written in 1509 and translated into English in 1542) begins by asserting the complete spiritual and intellectual equality of women. He then reminds his readers, "with a near-anthropological modernity, that women's social and political inferiority . . . has not, at other times and in other cultures, invariably obtained." See Linda Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620 (Chicago, 1984), pp. 39-41.

Woodbridge also points out that, in the pamphlet war known as the Controversy about Women, male writers often defended women for their modesty and good behavior, sometimes citing patient Griselda as a model. The outspoken, feisty examples the attackers of women used in their polemics are more to the taste of modern feminists.

the last and most complex of the volume. Ulysses succeeds in convincing an elephant that humans, because of their spiritual cravings and dim intimations of a more perfect form of existence, are superior to beasts. Here Ulysses draws heavily on the Neo-Platonic philosopy of Marsilio Ficino, which Gelli knew well. A hunger for the divine awakens in the elephant as his limbs shrink and smooth to human shape. His first impulse after re-metamorphosis is to give thanks to God. His second is to denounce Circe as a "pernicious enchantress" who robs her pets of their reason. (He quickly forgets that he is human again only by her dispensation.) Ulysses does not join the elephant in his insulting of Circe, with whom he remains on courtly terms. He freely admits, though, that he desires nothing more than leaving her isle (p. 179).

What is Gelli's own point of view in this ending? Does he agree with the elephant's ingratitude, as he seems to agree with his affinity for Neo-Platoni. thought? Knowing relatively little about Gelli, I cannot answer these questions with certainty. His book leaves the overall impression of being a good-natured, gently ironic expose of human arrogance. There is a fair possibility that Gelli's irony extends to its last pages as well and that he is commenting tongue-in-cheek on the human propensity to devalue the natural as soon as our consciousness of the transcendent awakens.18 I prefer to

¹⁸ Neo-Platonic philosophy had political connotations in the late Renaissance. Its emphasis on transcendence, on the ideal as superior to whatever was earthy and common and merely natural, was used to justify the power of the Medicis in Florence and the Stuart kings in England as supposedly ideal rulers. See my discussion of Tempe Restored in Chapter Seven and also Stephen Orgel's The Illusion of Power (Berkeley, 1975).

think that Gelli as philosopher-shoemaker was uniquely equipped to recognize this propensity and that, in describing the elephant's tandem impulses to pray and to denounce immediately upon regaining humanity, he is satirizing the way the loftiest of thinkers may turn out to be biased or prudish regarding the natural world. Gelli's seeming agreement with the orthodox allegorical view of Circe in this last dialogue could well be camouflage—and camouflage which is part of his irony. His overall portrait of the queen of metamorphoses is complex and original, very different in spirit from the brief, negative comments about her in writings by other members of the Florentine Platonic Academy.19

At least one other Renaissance Italian approached Circe from a completely fresh point of view: Dosso Dossi, an artist at the court of the d'Estes in Ferrara. In a large painting now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington and dating from early in his career, probably before 1520, he those a luminous, nude Circe teaching mysteries from her tablets to a small group of animals and birds gathered about her (Figure 20). Perhaps she is appealing to their still-human consciousness, which Homer insists Odysseus' men retained

In Gelli's last dialogue the Neo-Platonic elephant is, on the text's surface at least, wiser than the earth goddess Circe. Gelli begins his book by dedicating it to Cosimo de Medici and ends it with a dialogue informed by the philosophy of which Cosimo approved. This framing seems calculated; I believe it obscures Gelli's own, more personal point of view in the last dialogue.

¹⁹ Merritt Y. Hughes, in "Spenser's Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance," <u>Journal of the History of Ideas</u>, IV, 387-388, mentions Cristoforo Landino's remarks in his commentary on Virgil and Pico della Mirandola's warnings against lust (Circe) in a letter to his nephew Gianfrancesco.



Figure 20.

Circe, painting by Dosso Dossi, c. 1518

in their bestial form. Impassioned and abstracted, she holds court like a Moses wandered into the Peaceable Kingdom. The painting is one of the best examples of "Dossi's personal style of symbolism--elliptical, arbitrary and elusive."20 Why the tablets? Why do none of the creatures look at her or each other as she speaks? The immediate visual impression, aided by Dossi's predominantly dark palette, is of mystery, of currents of life arrested mid-breath. Only a stork who dips his bill into the shallow waters of a pond at her feet seems unaffected by this atmosphere of imposed and table peace.

Dosso, as Bernard Berenson speculates, was temperamentally a lover of high romance, able to create it with "a touch of magic" and drawn irresistibly to portraying legendary enchantresses.21 A maga holding tablets presumably full of arcane knowledge is depicted by Dosso not only in this "Circe" but also in his "Sybil" and in a mysterious third paint ng variously identified as "Circe" or "Melissa." I believe parage rrs in accepting the traditional identification of the enchantress in this third painting, which has been in the Borghese collection in Rome for centuries, as Circe (Figure 21). There is clear evidence within the painting that its subject derives from Ariosto, who was a friend and contemporary of Dosso at the court of Ferrara. To the upper left, miniscule figures of men are either merging into or emerging from the twin trunks of a tree, while at the tree's foot the artist has placed part of an empty

²⁰ Felton Gibbons, <u>Dosso and Battista Dossi</u> (Princeton, 1968), p. 114.

²¹ Berenson, The Study and Criticism of Italian Art (London, 1912), pp. 31-32.



Figure 21.

Painting by Dosso Dossi variously identified as
Circe, Melissa or Alcina, c. 1520

suit of armor. These details are a clear visual reference, I believe, to the episode in Canto Six of the Orlando Furioso in which the knight Astolpho, who is imprisoned within a myrtle tree, tells what has happened to him and to other chivalric lovers of the enchantress Alcina.

Since Homer's Circe restricted her transformative efforts to fauna, having nothing to do with trees, I cannot believe that she is intended as the sumptuous maga of this painting. Dossi's woman is seated within a magic circle rimmed with cabaristic inscriptions, arrayed in a turban and a gown of richly articulated crimsons and greens. Much of the detailing of the painting suggests an Oriental locale, which would accord with Ariosto's location of Alcina's isle as somewhere between the East Indies and Europe (vi.34). The walls and citadel in the right and central background also agree with descriptions of the cora'.

But is this crehant sets the evil Alcina, who entraps the males she seduces within rocks, trees and animals, or the good Melissa, who liberates the former's victims? The current expert on the Dossis, Felton Gibbons, identifies her as Melissa, citing her "benign . . . relaxed and calm" manner.22 No doubt Alcina appeared so to the men she drew within her magnetic field. The sind of the index of the session of the magnetic gives us about her is that her pleasant, serene appearance masks a sinister reality. Gibbons argues that "were the magician the evil Alcina . . . presumably the knights in the middle distance would not sit so easily but would have the sense to try to make their

²² Gibbons, p. 200.

escape." This point ignores the evidence of the poem, which describes Alcina's island as filled with enraptured, lolling courtiers. Only after Melissa has released Alcina's castoff lovers from their plant and animal forms do they depart "with all the hast[e] they might."23 Since the maga's rod and tablet are Dossi's inventions, nowhere mentioned in the poem, an identification cannot be based on them. The direction of her gaze, however, provides a clue. If we focus on the upper left of this otherwise richly sensuous painting, looking to the spot where the enchantress herself is gazing—at the homunculi fastened to bark, the impression received is overwhelmingly sinister and grotesque. This impression convinces me that she is Alcina, sister in spirit to Dosso's Circe, whose appearance is also quite lovely.

A fresh recreation of Circe is also to be found, rather surprisingly, in George Chapman's English translation of the Odyssey, published in two parts in 1614-1615. I say "surprisingly" because Chapman's cast of mind was nothing if not allegorical. In a note explaining a distinction he has interpolated in line 97 of Book I, concerning the opposing pulls of Odysseus' "judgment" and "affections" as he languishes during his seventh year on Calypso's island, Chapman reveals his conception of the poem as a whole:

This is thus translated the rather to expresse and approve the Allegorie driven through the whole Odysses, deciphering the intangling of the Wisest in his affections and the torments that breede in every pious minde:

²³ Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, trans. Sir John Harington (1591; rpt. Oxford, 1972), 8.13.7.

to be thereby hindred to arrive so directly as he desires at the proper and onely true naturall countrie of every worthy man, whose haven is heaven and the next life, to which this life is but a sea, in continuall aesture and vexation.24

This note is important because it reveals Chapman's faith that moral or philosophical truths lie hidden beneath the literal surface of the Odyssey--that Odysseus in struggling towards Ithaca is actually Everyman reaching with yearning for the shores of heaven. Even more significantly, it indicates Chapman's belief in an allegory which is dynamic, whose meaning and hero continue to develop through twists and turns of the plot. Chapman, like the Stoic and Neo-Platonic commentators on Homer stretching back two thousand years before him, tends to view human emotions as entanglements, as distractions from the true path indicated by reason or piety. He differs from them, however, in stressing Odysseus's originally passionate and unruly nature. As George Lord writes in what could be regarded as the thesis statement of his Homeric Renaissance, "the ethical bias of Chapman's Odyssey does not inhere in any attempt to make Ulysses a morally-perfect hero, but rather in the explicit emphasis which Chapman gives to the values which Ulysses must recognize before he can attain happiness."25

This ethical bias also allows for fair treatment of problematical goddesses. Chapman, as I hope to demonstrate, was tempted by the orthodox allegorical Circe, but his own more complicated moral

²⁴ George Chapman, trans., <u>Chapman's Homer</u>, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, vol. II (New York, 1956), p. 14.

²⁵ Lord, Homeric Renaissance (New Haven, 1956), p. 21.

view and his loyalty to Homer prevented him from passing her on. He would have come across this Circe in his chief reference, the parallel Greek-Latin edition of Homer printed with the commentary of Jean de Sponde (Johannes Spondanus), a continental humanist.26 In his "Argument" heading Book X, Chapman gives a rhymed synopsis of what is about to occur. "All save Euryloches" are

to swine

By Circe turned. Their stayes encline

Ulysses to their search, who got

Of Mercurie an Antidote,

(Which Moly was) gainst Circe's charmes,

And so avoids his souldiers' harmes.

A yeare with Circe all remaine,

And then their native forms regaine. (p. 169)

These lines contain an inaccuracy not found in his translation itself: the information that the Greek sailors wallowed in her sty for a year. They suggest that Chapman might have liked to have made the Homeric Circe worse than she really was, but felt duty-bound to follow the master in having her retransform Ulysses' companions within the day. This tension between what Circe was supposed to be for two thousand years and what Homer shows her to be animates his handling of her character.

For instance, Chapman is somewhat ambiguous concerning her status as a goddess. Though he continually shies away from translating the Oca in her formulas— $Ki\rho\kappa\eta$ & in her for

²⁶ The Latin translation in de Sponde's edition, published in Basel in 1583, was actually that of Andreas Divus. For information about Chapman's use of this text see R. S. Ide, "Exemplary Heroism in Chapman's Homer," Studies in English Literature, 22 (1982), 121-136.

Presence are each so described. Generally, Chapman either ignores Homeric formulas or gives non-literal translations of them, so his repeated balking at translating the Six Oxider formula may merely be in keeping with this habit. His rendering of Osure is Troking of Policy-literally "Odysseus of many ways" or "moves"—as "the man/ Of many virtues — Ithacensian, Deepe-soul'd Ulysses" (x.441-443) is an entirely typical shifting of meaning from the surface to the spirit which Chapman discerns beneath it.

Throughout Book X and the poem as a whole, Chapman suppresses some of the sensuous details of the great feasting and bathing rituals in Homer. Perhaps these seemed merely repetitive to him; perhaps he saw no particular need for one of Circe's handmaids to massage Ulysses with olive oil after she had lavishly bathed him, or for another to pour water from a golden pitcher into a silver basin. In omitting details like these, however, Chapman changes the quality of Homer's verse, lessening its celebration and acceptance of the delights of the physical world. Because Circe's power is so grounded in these delights, Chapman subtly, perhaps unwittingly, undermines it.

In still other passages in Book X, Chapman devalues what is bodily or physical by adding disparaging judgments not found in the Greek text. When Eurylochus and the twenty-two scared sailors who have been chosen by lot to explore the island with him leave Odysseus and the others by the shore, Homer merely tells us that the former were "crying" (κλαίοντως) and the latter "lamenting" (γούωντως). Chapman's Ulysses remarks: "All . . . tooke leave with teares, and

our eyes wore/ The same wet badge of weake humanity" (x.278-279).

Homer's hero would never say such a thing, for in the Greek text

masculine tears are a simple fact of nature, like breath or thunder

or tides. Similarly, when Chapman's Ulysses is invited to mount

Circe's bed, he thinks of his men and hesitates, afraid "that I might

likewise leade/ A beast's life with thee, softn'd, naked stript,/

That in my blood thy banes may more be steept" (x.452-454). In

justice to Chapman, it should be pointed out that this is very likely

exactly what Odysseus fears from mingling sexually with Circe and

hence he makes her swear a great oath before he touches her. Homer,

however, is not as explicit. All Odysseus says to the goddess is

that he is afraid "you might place some evil on me while naked and

unmanned."27 The connotation of sexuality as bestiality does not

emerge from the Greek text.

Whatever Chapman takes away from Circe by devaluing the bodily and the concrete, he gives back by emphasizing her importance as a moral teacher. Circe assumes this role in Book XII when she gives Odysseus sailing directions and tells him of the restraints he must impose on himself and his men if he wishes ever to see Ithaca again. Previous believers in the allegorical meaning of Circe had never dared to comment on this long and crucial passage, for to call attention to it would have been to destroy their own credibility. Because Chapman's vision of allegory is dynamic, emphasizing the spiritual education of Ulysses, he is comfortable with the positive teaching role Circe assumes here and even adds to the fullness of

^{27 10.34]-- &}quot;όφρα με γυμνω σέντα κακὸν καὶ ανήνορα Θήης."

Homer's descriptions. In lines 25-27 of the Greek text the enchantress, having singled out Odysseus from the crowd feasting on her shores, tells him "I will show you the way and point out each [pitfall], lest you, suffering, come to grief on land or sea in some bad sack of trouble."28 Chapman's version is as follows:

Your way, and every act ye must addresse, My knowledge of their order shall designe, Lest with your owne bad counsels ye encline Events as bad against ye, and sustaine By sea and shore the wofull ends that raigne In wilfull actions. (xii.37-42)

She adopts here the rather patronizing tone of one who is perfectly sure she possesses superior knowledge, sounding like a mother chiding a son for his headstrong folly.

Chapman's translation of her warning against the Sirens makes clear that it is misguided <u>desire</u> that causes such folly:

whosoever shall

(For want of knowledge mov'd) but heare the call

Of any Siren, he will so despise

Both wife and children for their sorceries,

That never home turnes his affection's streame,

Nor they take joy in him, nor he in them.

The Sirens will so soften with their song

(Shrill and in sensuall appetite so strong)

His loose affections that he gives them head. (xii.58-66)

Homer's passage is grammatically puzzling and difficult to translate in a way that is both literal and smooth. It goes something like this: "Whoever, enticed by folly, listens to the voice of the Sirens--his wife and small children will not take joy in him. Nor will he, returning home, stand near [them]. For the Sirens will

^{28 &}quot;αὐτὰρ ἐχὼ δείξω δδον ἀδὲ ἔκαστα σημανέω, Υνα μά τι κακορραφίη δελεγεινή ἢ άλὸς ἢ ἐτὴ χῆς ἀλχήσετε πῆμα παισόντες ."

charm him with their piercing songs to stay within their meadows"

(xii.41-45).29 Chapman's interpretation of ou yavvval as "despise"

is oure license, and his translation of hayvon as "shrill and in sensuall appetite so strong" is an exaggeration that sheds more light on his own assumptions than on Homer's text. Clearly there is a prospirit, anti-senses bias to his translation. Yet in spite of this bias, Chapman reads the Odyssey freshly. If his Circe were the traditional allegorical one, the Queen of Lust, she would never be warning Ulysses against "sensuall appetites."

The last of Circe's instructions I wish to examine is her advice to Ulysses about how to pass through the strait of Scylla and Charybdis with minimal losses. She tells him to steer close to the rock of Scylla, and not to pause to fight when the monster grabs six of his men to feed her six mouths. Ulysses does not readily accept this prescription for seemingly cowardly behavior. When he protests, Circe replies:

O unhappy! art thou yet
Enflam'd with warre, and thirst to drink thy swet?
Not to the Gods give up both Armes and will?
She deathlesse is, and that immortall ill
Grave, harsh, outragious, not to be subdu'd
That men must suffer till they be renew'd,

²⁹ δς τις δίδρείη πελάση καὶ φθόχχον άκούση
Σειρήνων, τῷ δ' οὕ τι χυνή καὶ νήπια τέκνα
Θίκαδε νοστήσαντι παρίσταται οὐδὲ χάνυνται,
άλλά τε Σειρήνες λιχυρή Θέλχουσιν άοιδή,
ήμεναι ἐν λειμώνι.

λιχυρή is a variation of the word used to describe Circe's own voice. In his note to the Greek text, p. 407, W. B. Stanford says "λιχυρός and $\lambda ιχύ,$ describe the kind of sound the Greeks like best: it is defined by Aristotle in De Audibilibus 804a, 25ff. as consisting of sharpness and precision."

Nor lives there any virtue that can flie The vicious outrage of their crueltie, Shouldst thou put Armes on, and approach the Rocke, I fear sixe more must expiate the shocke. Six heads sixe men aske still. (xii.177-187)

Chapman here introduces some Christian overtones ("renew'd" in the sense of "redeemed," "expiated") but otherwise his version follows the original closely. In both Homer and his Jacobean translator the passage is important, for it points out the limits of military heroism. These limits chafe the nature of Ulysses, who arms for the encounter anyway:

then even I forgot to shunne the harme
Circe forewarnd, who willd I should not arme,
Nor shew my selfe to Scylla, lest in vaine
I ventur'd life. Yet could not I containe,
But arm'd at all parts and two lances tooke. (xii.336-340)

In both the original and in Chapman, he proves that he has halflearned from Circe in spite of himself, for he does not pause at
Scylla's rock to strike back at her even though he has grabbed his
weapons. After a few more violent misadventures, the rest of this
lesson about human and heroic limits penetrates Ulysses' character.
When, battered and brine-streaked, he finally comes to rest on the
civilized earth of Scheria, he kisses it in gratitude. And he
realizes that he owes his safe landing to the river god to whom he
has humbly prayed. Chapman emphasizes the difficult knowledge that
Circe has helped Ulysses to gain by adding two lines not to be found
in Homer to his hero's reflective speech:

But he that fights with heaven, or with the sea, To Indiscretion addes Impietie. (v.642-643)

As George Lord remarks, "by this interpolation Chapman calls the reader's attention to a major revolution in Ulysses' outlook and

prepares us for his glorification of the hero as the essence of virtue."30

By emphasizing Circe's role as a moral and spiritual teacher, Chapman restores her lost dignity and casts her as a central character in the dynamic allegory he thought the <u>Odyssey</u> to be.

Chapman's Circe is not quite Homer's—she does not reign with such splendid entitlement over the pleasures and forms of the flesh—but neither is she a distortion. With tension, verve, and a healthy loyalty to Homer, Chapman succeeds in bringing a magnificent epic into English. Beside his Circe, as beside Gelli's, those of the Renaissance mythographers reveal themselves as figments of a stale, programmed imagination shaped by unexamined prejudices acquired secondhand.

Having looked at the Renaissance stereotype, and at Chapman's and Gelli's departures from it, we can now ask what relationship that stereotype has to the ways in which women were regarded in early modern Europe. Since this stereotypical Circe has nothing to do with divinity (Christianity had long ago stripped her of that aura), she functions all the more efficiently as an image absorbing and reflecting cultural attitudes towards women, for she is not different in degree from human females.

Alciati saw her as the prototypical prostitute, Comes as a kind of alchemist causing lust to bubble up from the mixing of heat and moisture. Her sexual powers, in the stereotypical view, comprise

³⁰ Lord, Homeric Renaissance, p. 92.

very nearly all of her nature and give her the ability to change men to beasts in the sty of her bed. This emphasis is entirely consistent with sixteenth and early seventeenth century ideas about female sexuality. This was emphatically not an era in which brides were instructed to "lie back, close your eyes, and think of the Empire," as young Englishwomen were to be three centuries later. Elizabethan and Jacobean women were portrayed as dangerously lusty in the popular psychology of the times; they were thought to be imbued with far greater sexual appetite than men.31 Robert Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) emphasized the disparity of lust beween the sexes: "Worse it is in women than in men; when she is . . . an old widow, a mother long since . . . she doth very unseemly seek to marry; yet whilst she is so old a crone . . . a mere carcass, a witch, and scarce feel, she caterwauls and must have a stallion, a champion." Young women he believed to be equally affected by inordinate passion: "Generally women begin . . . at fourteen years old, then they do offer themselves and plainly rage. "32 Burton's view was not much different from that of Joseph Swetnam, whose antifeminist pamphlet of 1615 reflected the presumed lust of women in its title, "The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward and Unconstant Women."

Such lustful temptresses, it was thought, were responsible for

³¹ Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco, 1980), p. 132. This belief in the strength of the female libido goes back to antiquity. I have never read any explanation of why it disappeared (or was at least rarely expressed) by the mid-nineteenth century.

³² Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy (New York, 1932), III, pp. 56 and 55; quoted by Merchant, p. 132.

the corruption of the male. Like Eve, they were thought to use their warm and eager flesh to lead men spiritually astray. Renaissance indictments of women differ remarkably little from medieval ones, though they are usually phrased in more secular terms; 33 misogynists in both eras damned the sex by damning its progenitress. As late as the seventeenth century "prayers for women's use, composed by either sex, often referred apologetically to 'my Grandmother Eve.' Men in the seventeenth century were not, it seemed, descended from Eve."34 Even a writer as fond of women and as wittily self-aware as John Donne consented to this biased, age-old thinking when it served his purpose. Playing upon the idea of orgasm as a "little death," Donne asserts (in lines 106-107 of his long philosophical poem, "The Anatomy of the World") that

One woman [Eve] at one blow, then kill'd us all. And singly, one by one, they kill us now.

Donne goes on, in the next two lines, to admit that "We doe delight-fully our selves allow/ To that consumption." His equable admission that sex is, after all, an affair of both the sexes was not shared by male ideologues who believed that contemporary women bore the mark of their descent from Eve in their ferocious libidos.

Foremost among this group were two Dominican inquisitors,

Heinrich Kramer and Johannes Sprenger, authors of the Malleus

Maleficarum, a witch-hunting manual first published in 1486 and

³³ Katherine M. Rogers, <u>The Troublesome Helpmate</u> (Seattle, 1966), p. 100.

³⁴ Antonia Fraser, The Weaker Vessel (New York, 1984), p. 100.

authoritatively prefaced by an epistle from the Pope.35 They bluntly proclaimed that there was a cause-effect relationship between witchcraft and female sexuality:

To conclude. All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. See Proverbs XXX: There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, a a fourth thing which says not, It is enough; that is, the mouth of the womb. Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils . . . it is no matter for wonder that there are more women found infected with the heresy of witchcraft. And in consequence of this, it is better called the heresy of witches than of wizards, since the name is taken from the more powerful party.36

To a twentieth-century reader, such a passage reeks of hatred not only of women but of the body. What we recognize as attitudinal distortions were part of the standard wisdom of the times. Jean Bodin, a French jurist renowned for his learning and still quoted in textbooks on political theory, explained to the readers of his <u>De la démonomanie des sorciers</u>, published in Paris in 1580, why a disproportionately large number of women were tried for witchcraft. It was because, he says, of women's "bestial cupidity." He then elaborates:

For one sees that women's visceral parts are bigger than those of men whose cupidity is less violent. On the other hand, men have larger heads and therefore have more brains and sense than women. The poets expressed this metaphorically when they said that Pallas Athene, goddess of wisdom, was born from the brain of Jupiter and had no mother; they meant to show that wisdom never comes from women, whose nature is nearer that of brute beasts. We may as well add that

³⁵ This volume's title, which contains a feminine Latin noun, translates as "The Hammer of the Witches."

³⁶ H. Kramer and J. Sprenger, Malleus Maleficarum, trans. Montague Summers (New York, 1971), p. 127.

Satan first addressed himself to woman, who then seduced man.37

Bodin, like most thinkers of his time, believed that in women the lower nature ruled the higher, and he feared that the disorderliness of the sex would spread to society at large. He advocated strict persecution of witches to prevent such a disaster.

Obviously, the link between female libido and access to supernatural powers which Bodin, Kramer and Sprenger, and other witch-hunters proclaimed to exist with such conviction is also reflected in the Renaissance stereotype of Circe.38 A young, beautiful nymphomaniac-witch: what else is the Circe of emblem books and mythographics? To assume, however, that the majority of women burned at the stake on the Continent or hanged as witches in England actually fit this image would be a major error. The theory of the witch-hunters must be distinguished from their practice.

The typical sixteenth or seventeenth century witch put on trial for consorting with demons was certainly likely to be female, but also likely to be middle-aged or old.39 She was unlikely to have

³⁷ Bodin, <u>De la démonomanie</u>, p. 225; quoted in Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, eds., <u>Not in God's Image</u> (New York, 1973), pp. 209-210.

³⁸ In his <u>Démonomanie</u>, Bodin discusses Circe. He sees her as a prototypical witch in league with Satan and believes that her transformation of men to swine is literal, not allegorical. He cites Aquinas, who held that demons could impose any shape at will upon men, to back up his point of view. Hughes, "Spenser's Acrasia and the Renaissance Circe," 395.

³⁹ As Antonia Fraser remarks, in <u>The Weaker Vessel</u>, p. 112, these facts are now common ground among historians writing about the witch persecutions. Contemporary writers also agreed about the preponderance of females over males: King James put the proportion at 20:1; Alexander Roberts at 100:1. Both exaggerated. See also

been a sexual attraction or threat to her accusers. During the witch-hysteria the negative bias towards women which had been endemic for centuries and sanctioned by almost all cultural institutions found a very focused expression: it was channeled towards those women who, for reasons of age or poverty, were least able to defend themselves. The bitter question posed by the Witch of Edmonton to a London theatre audience could well have been asked by many of the thousands put to death:

Cause I am poor, deform'd, ignorant And like a bow buckled and bent together . . . Must I for that be made a common sink For all the filth and rubbish of Men's tongues To fall and run into?40

Historians such as Alan Macfarlane, who have painstakingly examined local census and court records for information about the witches and their accusers, have turned up little that conflicts with this analysis of witch persecutions as the scapegoating of the weak.

English witches in the county of Essex, as Macfarlane makes plain, were quite ordinary, likely to be old women well known but not

Alan Macfarlane's chart of sex ratios among accused witches in <u>Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England</u> (London, 1970), p. 160, and the following chart from William Monter's essay "The Pedestal and the Stake: Courtly Love and Witchcraft" in <u>Becoming Visible</u>, ed. Bridenthal and Koonz:

| REGION | WOMEN TRIED | MEN TRIED | PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN |
|-------------------|-------------|------------|---------------------|
| Southwest Germany | 1050 | 238 | 82% |
| West Switzerland | 893 | 237 | 80% |
| Venetian Republic | 430 | 119 | 78% |
| Castile | 324 | 132 | 71% |
| Belgium (Namur) | 337 | 2 9 | 92% |
| England (Essex) | 267 | 23 | 92% |

⁴⁰ Dekker, Ford and Rowley, The Witch of Edmonton, II, i; quoted by Fraser, p. 118.

very well liked by their neighbors. Nothing in his study contradicts the contemporary assertion of Reginald Scot that persons said to be witches "are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious."41 The typical age for a witch in Essex was between fifty and seventy, and she was probably a poor man's wife or widow rather than an aged spinster.42 Her motive for hexing her neighbors? Most likely revenge, after being denied some help or charity.43 Accused witches were likely to be those who often begged favors, but who were not considered to be among the harmless, permanently destitute. They went "from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe," according to Scot.44 These socially powerless persons may have regarded acts of witchcraft as their only means of redress.

While suspected witches were characteristically middle-aged or old, their victims appear to have been younger, more prosperous adults. The most common occupation of the husbands of witches was labourer; the most common occupation of victim families, yeoman.45

⁴¹ Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584; rpt. Carbondale, Ill., 1964), p. 29. Scot's book attacks both the "flat and plaine knaverie... practised against these old women" and the Demonology of Jean Bodin, published four years earlier. Though he loathed the injustice of the persecutions, Scot never doubted the reality or existence of witchcraft.

⁴² Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, p. 161.

⁴³ Macfarlane, p. 173.

⁴⁴ Scot, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Macfarlane, pp. 162, 150.

Land tenure in Essex appears to have been at least obliquely related to witchcraft cases. Prosecutions were heaviest in those parts of the county which were most heavily enclosed, lightest in those which still had unenclosed fields or forest.46 In this era of change, when manorial organization and the Catholic church were becoming weak in England and the poor could no longer count on finding alms at these doors, witchcraft accusations seem to have provided a socially acceptable means for blaming the victim. The new, nation-wide English system of poor relief, based on local compulsory taxation and expenditure, did not become fully functioning until well into the seventeenth century.47 In the decades between the demise of the old, informal welfare system and the rise of the new, state-regulated one, witchcraft accusations were at their height. Macfarlane believes such accusations were prompted by a tension between the old, communal ideal of neighborliness and a new, more individualistic ethic stipulating the investment of surplus wealth.

His socio-economic analysis is convincing and pragmatic but not,

I think, complete, because it virtually ignores spiritual or psychological causes. It should be added that in the sixteenth century,
before the mechanistic cosmos of Newton had been discovered, almost
everyone believed in witchcraft as a possibility. They believed in
witchcraft because they believed in a universe animated by spirits,
both good and bad. Practicioners of white magic (known as "cunning

⁴⁶ Macfarlane, pp. 154-155.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Stone, "The Rise of the Nuclear Family" in The Family in History, ed. Charles E. Rosenberg (Philadelphia, 1975), p. 20.

folk") were everywhere in England and probably everywhere on the Continent too. In Essex, Macfarlane has turned up the names of sixty-one of these cunning folk, two-thirds of whom were male; they were consulted about matters of health and lost property.48 Yet there was little overlap between white and black magic. Of the 287 people tried for witchcraft at the Essex Assizes--92% of whom were female--only six were known to be cunning folk.49 Given the centuries-old belief in a world permeated by spirits (a belief channeled by the Catholic church but never discredited) and the centuries-old tradition of misogynistic thinking (also channeled by the Church), why did the witch-hunting hysteria wait until the sixteenth century to erupt in full force? Certainly any satisfactory analysis of the phenomenon should be able to account for this timing.

Perhaps if there had been no Reformation there would have been no witch-hysteria, or a much less virulent one. The new Protestant sects preserved the medieval belief in demons; indeed, Luther and Calvin took great pains to point out scriptural texts elaborating the powers of witches and demons.50 And yet these sects abandoned the Catholic rituals dramatizing the expulsion of evil and the communal propitiation of God. Suspected Catholic witches could be washed clean of their sins by confession, penance and absolution. In Protestant regions, neither communal rituals for dealing with

⁴⁸ Macfarlane, pp. 117-118.

⁴⁹ Macfarlane, p. 128.

⁵⁰ Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, eds., <u>Witchcraft in Europe</u>, <u>1100-1700</u> (Philadelphia, 1972), pp. 193, 202.

suffering nor rituals for individual spiritual cleansing were given much credence. Hence Protestants, needing psychologically to believe in their own righteousness, were more tempted to cope with the misfortunes of daily life by pointing the finger at their neighbors; and the finger, once pointed, was more likely to lead to the stake or the gallows. In Catholic Spain and Italy, where the notorious Inquisition had jurisdiction over witchcraft trials, surviving records indicate that only a handful of people were put to death for the crime.51 Yet the Catholic record vis-a-vis the witchcraft phenomenon is not uniformly good. In Germany and Switzerland, regions particularly torn apart by religious dissension, the Church burned many witches as heretics.52 The single worst-hit region was the Catholic Bishopric of Trier in southwestern Germany, where in 1585 two villages in the region were left with only one female inhabitant each.53 The upheavals and anxieties of the Reformation left Catholics apt to see heretics everywhere and Protestants apt to project their own quilts and inadequacies on to their neighbors. Witchcraft may have been, in essence, a medieval phenomenon, but it blossomed rankly only when the medieval means of coping with it were no longer viable.

⁵¹ Monter, "The Pedestal and the Stake," p. 130.

⁵² In Catholic regions witchcraft was viewed as a variety of heresy and tried in ecclesiastical courts; in Protestant countries witch trials were generally shifted to civil criminal courts. Kors and Peters, Witchcraft in Europe, p. 193.

⁵³ Monter, p. 130; Merchant, The Deatn of Nature, p. 138.

The witch-hysteria of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries still stands, I believe, as the high-water mark of misogyny in Western culture. Other phenomena which affected women during this period—the somewhat half—hearted humanist vogue to educate and defend them; the combined impact of Protestantism, the emerging absolutist state, and changing economic conditions on family structures and relationships—may have been of temporary or dubious benefit to women's welfare, but at least they were not venomously harmful. The negative Renaissance stereotype of Circe has a far less obvious, more tenuous connection with these broad phenomena than she does with witchcraft. We should keep in mind, however, the primary reason the stereotype was negative: because it symbolized the power of woman over man.

The Renaissance Circe, I believe, is a high-toned example of the woman-on-top topos which was very much a part of popular culture. In this era of massive change and shifting authority, there was a great deal of discussion about the proper hierarchical relationship of the sexes. Myth--perhaps because it seemed safely removed from daily life--was combed for examples of what might be expected if females were allowed to assume a dominant position in society and in relationship. Among the literati, who were newly familiar with Herodotos' exotic tales, references to Amazons proliferated.54 These mythical Amazons and the stereotypical Circe evoked a mixture of

⁵⁴ For an incisive discussion of Amazonian mythology, which was "ubiquitous in Elizabethan texts," see Louis A. Montrose's article "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power, Form" in Rewriting the Renaissance.

Confronted with daily evidence of women's competence and strength, 55 but clinging to an ideology which held that women were created inferior, many people in early modern Europe were willing to entertain the notion that women could be dominant or superior as long as that notion did not intrude on their actual social or economic arrangements. Almost no one, however, questioned the idea of hierarchy itself; dominance-submission patterns might be flipped in the imagination, but they were not resolved there into equality. That step into a brave new world was rarely foreseen, let alone taken. Even members of the international humanist community, some of whom were very concerned with the issue of women's status and capabilities, persisted in thinking in terms of sexual hierarchy.

These paradoxes date back to the Florentine founders of humanism. Writers such as Leonardo Bruni helped to ensure that humanistic studies would be civic in focus, designed to develop able and engaged citizens rather than dry worshippers of antiquity. Bruni believed that young women as well as young men should be taught the liberal arts—and yet he stipulates in De studis et litteris that girls should be kept away from all forms of rhetoric, which "lies abso-

⁵⁵ Renaissance women helped run family businesses, occasionally dreased in men's clothing, and were socially active in villages and at court. Although the desirability of women's modesty and silence is stressed in text after text of the times, this does not seem to have been an era in which women routinely complied with that desire. Renaissance Europe was not Periclean Athens. See particularly Natalie Zemon Davis's Society and Culture in Early Modern France and Linda Woodbridge's Women and the English Renaissance.

lutely outside the province of women."56 He probably stumbled across Aristotle's prohibition on women's participation in public life, as well as across contemporary praise of the silent or quiet woman. The contradiction inherent in Bruni's position, that women should be educated humanistically and yet remain political nonentities, did not expire from its own illogicality; it reappears in later humanists' work.

Sir Thomas More, for instance, followed Bruni's generous lead in extending the discipline and delight of classical studies to girls. His own daughters received extensive instruction in Greek and Latin. More remarked to their tutor that if women "are worthy of being ranked with the human race, if they are distinguished by reason from beasts, that learning by which the reason is cultivated is equally suitable to both [sexes]."57 Yet More's respect for women as mutual learners and companions did not prompt him to wish to renovate the prevailing sexual hierarchy. In his <u>Utopia</u> the subjection of wives to their husbands is the one clearly authoritarian practice in a predominantly egalitarian society.

At about the same time More's daughters were studying the classics, Mary Tudor was being instructed by the great Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, whom her mother, Catherine of Aragon, had persuaded to come to England. Vives, at Catherine's request, wrote

⁵⁶ Bruni, <u>De studiís et litteris</u>, trans. William Harrison Woodward; quoted by Constance Jordan in "Feminism and the Humanists" in <u>Rewriting the Renaissance</u>, p. 253.

⁵⁷ Quoted by Kenneth Charlton in Education in Renaissance England (Toronto, 1965), p. 207.

De institutione foeminae christianae (1523), which argues for the humanist education of women. Catherine probably realized that one day Mary might rule and was concerned to have her trained for the part 58 If so, Vives' treatise, with all its prohibitions against women in government, must have disappointed her. Vives, like Bruni, argues that women should not be trained to be eloquent, and he makes a clear connection between the study of oratory and the practice of government:

Wene you it was for nothyng that wyse men forbad you rule and governaunce of contreis and that saynt Paule byddeth you shall nat speke in congragatyon and gatherynge of people? All this same meaneth that you shall not medle with matters of realmes or cities. Your own house is a cite great inough for you; as for the abrode neither know you nor be you knowen.59

Vives appears to be caught in what might be termed "the humanist bind": the tension, that is, between the genuine desire to extend the benefits of classical learning and the reluctance to question the authority of Aristotle's ideas on women's inferiority--especially since those ideas were corroborated by <u>Genesis</u> and St. Paul.

It was the rare humanist treatise that directly challenged

Aristotle. Catherine, however, was probably familiar with one such

document: Sir Thomas Elyot's <u>Defense of Good Women</u>, published in

1540. Elyot assigns Aristotle's views to a character within his

dialogue named Caninius. Caninius' mean-spirited, snarling stance is

⁵⁸ This is the guess of Garrett Mattingly in his biography Catherine of Aragon (New York, 1960), pp. 186-189.

⁵⁹ Vives, The instruction of a Christen woman; quoted in Constance Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists" in Rewriting the Renaissance, p. 253.

rhetorically opposed by that of another character, Candidus, and even more effectively refuted by the living, speaking presence of Queen Zenobia of Persia, a woman of great learning, temperate character and experience in rule 60. Unfortunately, Zenobia, by the time in which the treatise is set, has been defeated and taken prisoner by the Romans. And so Elyot's whole able Defense turns upon the paradox of an illustrious but theroughly superdinated woman's being held up as an exemplar of her sex.

Only a few Renaissance wore:, born into ruling families in states not bound by Salid law, were both well educated and unsubordinated. Margaret of Austria, Jianna of Naples and Elizabeth of England all represented this possibility, but Elizabeth, with her successful forty-five year reign, entodied it heat. While she was still an adolescent, one of Elizabeth's tutors, Roger Ascham, bragged about his royal pupil in a letter to a friend:

French and Italian she speaks like English; Latin With fluency, propriety and judgment, she also spoke Greek with me, frequently, willingly and moderately well, nothing can be more elegant than her handwriting whether in Greek or Roman characters. In music she is very skillful but does not greatly delight.

Her intellectual accomplishment and accuracy of judgment were ruch that many of her countrymen began to think it worthwhile to evaluate their daughters. Not only at it into but also within the houses of

⁶⁰ Constance Jordan thinks it likely that Denubla is a figure for Catherine of Aragon and suggests that Elyot may have written the treatise to persuade her to become pullitically involved as regent for her daughter Mary.

⁶¹ Quoted by Tenneth Chariton, Education in Benausaance England, p. 209.

some of the more rural English gentry, young girls began to share their brothers' Greek and Latin tutors.

Although the refinements of humanism tended to remain the prerogative of the wellborn, some of the humanist advocacy of female education did filter down to the middle classes. . few public grammar schools admitted a few exceptionally able girls, and Richard Mulcaster, master of the Merchant Taylors School of London, wrote in favor of this practice.62 In the years following Elimabeth's death, however, these schools again closed their doors to girls and private classical education for young noblewomen became less frequent.63 Without an illustrious example at the top of English society or farmaching changes in women's social and economic status at its roots, temale higher learning could not healthily survive for icng.

Basic literary for women was another story. Because of the instestant emphasis upon scripture reading, literacy rates for both sexes began to improve after the Bible was translated into vernacular languages. The overall impact of Reformation theology and practice in the condition of women, however, was decidedly mixed. On the one hand, there was a new emphasis throughout Protestantism on the quality of relationship between husband and wife. Conjugal affection recame the ideal to which members of the community aspired, replacing

⁶² Catherine M. Dunn, "The Changing Image of Women in Renaissance Society and Literature" in <u>What Manner of Woman</u>, ed. Marlene Springer (New York, 1977), p. 18

⁶³ See Antonia Fraser's chapters on female education in the seventeenth century in <u>The Weaker Vessel</u>.

time-hallowed sexual double standard was not tolerated, and adultery was grounds for divorce by either party in a marriage.64 Yet for all its emphasis on companionate marriage, Calvin's Geneva was a maledominated society and women's legal rights there actually declined.65 The emphasis Protestant sects placed upon domestic piety meant, in practice, that the moral control formerly exercised by priests was partially replaced by moral direction by heads of households.

In England, Protestantism combined with other powerful factors to change kin-based family structures to nuclear ones during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Land enclosures and the economic decline of villages forced an increasing morality of population, which in turn damaged the old kin structures to As gir loyalties declined, Tudor and Stuart monarchs sought to replace them with loyalty to the absolutist state, they mounted a managed propaganda campaign to inculcate the view that a litizen's first duty was obedience to the sovereign. The second of gineship also left wives increasingly exposed to the explicit in of their hubbands, without supportive relatives nearby, they had little regulated in origin or affection changed to rancer, for they had little regulated in right or legal existence under common is a The powers of sovereigns grew or

⁶⁴ Sherrin Marshall Wyntes, "Women in the Reformation Era" in Becoming Visible, ed. Bridenthal and Koonz, p. 13

⁶⁵ Lawrence Stone, "The Rise of the Nuclear Family" in The Family in History, ed. Posenberg, p. 57

⁶⁶ Many of these people or the move went to London, where population increased from 60,000 in 1500 to 550,000 in 1700; Stone, "The Rise of the Nuclear Family," p 23

parallel with those of heads of households during this period.67

James I was well aware of the connection between the patriarchal state and the patriarchal family. He wrote in 1609 that
"kings are compared to fathers in families: for a king is truly

parens patriae, the political father of his people."68. His vision of

himself as the father of one big national family complements an

insight Wilhelm Reich was to express centuries later in The Mass

invihility of Fascism that every patriarchal family is a miniature

als lutist state. "In the figure of the father," Reich declares,

"the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so

that the family recomes the most important instrument of power."69

But what if the prince of the absolutist state is female? Does this correlation retween authoritarian family structure and absolutist state structure still hold. Under Elizabeth it did. One of the greatest paradixes of this age of paradox is that during the reign of this crilliant woman at the top, who in effect held powers filte rideath over all her subjects, male hegemony was not only in tundermined—it may well have been reinforced. 70 From 1562

 $[\]mathfrak{t}^{\prime\prime}$ hawrence Stone convincingly argues this point in "The Rise of the Nuclear Family," p. 55.

⁶⁸ Quoted by Stone, "The Rise of the Nuclear Family," p. 54.

t9 Reach, The Mass Psychology of Fascism (New York, 1970), 1 25.

TO Louis A. Montrose, "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizarethan Culture: Gender, Power and Form," in Rewriting the Renaissance, p. 81. Other analysts of political and social power during the era, such as Stone, Gordon J. Schochet in Fatilarchalism and Political Thought (New York, 1975), and Stephen Greenblatt in Renaissance Self-Fashioning (Chicago, 1980), would agree with Montrose's point of view

onward, Elizabeth ordered Anglican parsons to read the Homily on Marriage to their congregations every Sunday. Women sitting in the pews heard that they were "the weaker vessels," and that therefore they should be "in subjection to obey (their) husbands. for the husband is the head of the woran, as Christ is the head of the Church."71 It seems quite clear that Elizabeth had no wish to tamper with the usual sexual hierarchy

Just as clearly, she emphasized her own difference from other women. Through self-mastery and mastery of others, she was able to promote her maidenhood into a list of virginity, appr printing unto herself as Astidea the same strong feedings of abiliation which Catholics turned towards Mary . If Jugh the hever despect to be any man's spouse, she item presented hermed as the nation's litit. wife and her subjects' rurturily mather. And, askillily manuple lating yet another female rile, the manqueraded as the love or extra in imagination if not in fact--chiner nourtlers. In much of the rhetoric and art of the time their political vulnerability toward her is camouflaged as sexual vulnerability. After her heath her godson, Sir John Harington, i mrented in Carefully in sec. wirls about Elizabeth's ability to mingle inminition with life time. "How knew now to aim their shaft against for ounninge, " he remains . "We d. I all love hir, for she saide she loved us, and mult wyrithe she shewed in thys matter "72

⁷¹ Quoted by Stone in "The Rise of the Niclear Family," p. 5.

⁷² Sir John Haringtor, <u>Letters and Epigrams</u>, quited by Muntrose, p. 84.

One female role which Elizabeth did not dare to take on was that of outright seductress. Although the role was powerful, as the Circe stereotype attests, it was invested with a negativity which probably would have been intractable even to her manipulations (to say nothing of the demands the role would have made on her emotions or her time).

Both of them some under imaginative scrutiny in Edmund Spenser's

The Faerie Queene And so, briefly, does the idea of sexual hierarthy itself

Chapter Six. Spenser and the Feminine

The best known Circe figure in English literature is not named Circe. Yet the ability of Acrasia, the seductress of the Bower of Bliss at the end of Book II of The Faerie Queene, to turn the men in whom she has lost sexual interest into animals leaves little doubt about her mythological ancestry Like Ariosto's Alcina and Tasso's Armida--her more immediate kin--Acrasia is the negative feminine incarnate, the woman able to deflect men from their selves and their quests, all the more dangerous because she is at first so alluring Adrasia curries the same allegiridal message and weight as the Circe of the Penaissance mythographers but is infinitely more powerful because freshly and fully envisined, because we as readers can wee the dew of perspiration which her "late sweet toyle" has left in her skin. Spenser's gift of image-making serves his allegory well, making his ideological convicts is temporarily convincing even to readers who would find them, if "tated without sizingent, repugning how much easier to take seriously the nowlousness of Errour of we are exposed to her vomit of stale distrines, or to relieve in the persistence of original sin if we watch Maleger spring up again and again, nourished by contact with the earth to which gravity compens us all.

"Allegories," as Angus Flet ther has remarked, "are the hatura.

mirrors of ideology. "I His words suggest a useful way to distinguish the symbolic narrative of allegory from the symbolic story-telling of myth by discerning the intent of their makers. If the characters and images of a narrative reflect beliefs already so firmly held that the author regards them as certainties, then it is most likely allegorical, if the story attempts to reflect the mysterious or body forth the unknown, it is primarily mythic in conception. Myth is the genre of origins, describing events which "took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings'" which becomes, through the telling of the myth, infinitely recoverable.2 Wonder is its haracteristic tone. Only later, when the explanations of myth have 'ardened into certainties and when ritual has become institutionalized, does allegory develop as a way of thought—first as commentary in myth, as we have seen with the Store and Neo-Platonic exegesis of Homer, and later as work in its own right.

¹ Angus Fletcher, Allegory, the Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, 1964), p. 355

² Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (New York, 1963), pp. 5, 18.

³ Spenser, "Letter to Ralegh" in <u>The Faerie Queene</u>, ed. A. C. Hamilton (New York, 1977), p. 737.

hoped to persuade his readers to consent enthusiastically to the prevailing political ethos of absolutism veneered with chivalry. The characters and action of <u>The Faerie Queene</u> reflect the certainties to which Spenser firmly adheres: his beliefs in the essential rightness of Elizabeth, of Anglican Christianity, and of the Queen's power in Ireland. The overall temper of the poem is conservative, celebratory and when necessary, as in Pooks V and VI, defensive. Spenser presents us with a world to apprehend but not to question.

And yet his lavish powers as an image-maker transcend his convictions. As C. S. Lewis has perceptively observed, Spensez excels nearly all other poets in his ability to translate "into the visible feelings else blind and inarticulate, "fir he has a profound sympathy with that which makes symbols, "the fundamental tendencies of the human imagination as such "4" Lewis goes in to point out how Spenser's imagery tends to be organized around primordial antithemen such as light and darkness, life and death. Spenser often seems blessed with unimpeded access to the collective unconscious, and the images he brings forth are likely to radiate more than the limited moral points he may wish them to reflect. The Garden of Adonis, the temples of Venus and Isls, the dance of the Graces on Mr. Acadale in each of these strongly visualized passages Spenser draws liberally from ancient reservoirs of myth about the feminine and presents us with goddesses who are imaginatively more compelling than the unrealized figure of Gloriana.

Spenser, like Dante, was both a mythic thinker and an allegori-

⁴ Lewis, The Allegory of Lave (London, 1936), pp 312-313

cal one, yet in his work these two modes of symbolic thinking often pull against each other. Calidore's mysterious and transcendent moment of vision, for instance, comes to him only in truancy, when he has put aside his allegorical quest for the Blatant Beast, whereas in the Commedia every formalized step of Dante's pilgrimage prepares him finally to apprehend the limitless rose of Being and Light. Perhaps allegory, in the hands of major poets, always tends to break back through into myth, to peak in moments of awe and vision which leave ideology far behind. Accepting that this is so-that allegory, if it 13 great enough, is inherently unstable--I still wonder about the quality of disharmony in the symbolic imagery of The Faerie Queene. Why, in Spenser's epic, do the most compelling mythic moments not seem to complement the allegorical framework? And what, if anything, do Spenser's perceptions of the feminine have to do with this disharmony? These are the questions which I hope my examination of some of the poem's episodes will at least partially answer.

Book I of The Faerie Queene begins as any poen which aspires to epic dimension should, with an invocation to the muse. Spenser's prayer to the "holy Virgin chiefe of nine" has its own peculiarities, however, for he wishes not only to be inspired by this figure, but also to please her sufficiently so that she will attend to his song. By the fourth verse of the Proem, Spenser's invocation has become the prayer of a courtier and he has identified his muse as "Great Lady of the greatest isle," she who dwells at Hampton Court rather than by the springs of the Helicon. His gradual elision of Elizabeth with

the inspirational goddesses of mythology suggests that in the poem which follows worldly concerns will be thoroughly mixed with unworldly ones, as in fact they are—But more importantly, the posture of appeal to a worldly, absolutist power which Spenser assumes by the end of the invocation is potentially compromising to his freedom of imagination.

external allegiance which is to cause such fissures in the allegory of Books V and VI remains latent throughout Book I and much of Book II. It is in these books of Holiness and Temperance that Spenser maintains his firmest control of the poem's alregorical purpose. Few characters in these books are problematical to readers. We know exactly what to think of them as soon as they appear, though Spenser typically withholds the significate of their names. Thus when Duessa first rides into the narrative, in I iii.13, we almost automatically compare the scarlet, gold and pearls of her gown with Una's whiteithan-snow attire, her "wanton parfrey" with Una's "lowly Asse," and interpret her within the context which Spenser has carefully provided.

The polarization between these figures of Trith and Falsehood is typical of the way Spenser imagines the feminine in the first two books. The positive figures, such as Una and Aima, are paragons, exemplars rather than women. Behause they are already perfect, they contain no tension or conflict and therefore do not stimulate much response from the reader. Una's appeal is primarily iconographic as she makes her slow way across the plain, leading her lamb with Red

The negative feminine in the first two books is far more interesting because more complex. Not until the appearance of Britomart in Book III does Spenser solve the problem of how to characterize goodness in a way that is neither static nor bland. Duessa, Phaedria, Acrasia, all have in common a double nature which couples the appealing with the horrid. Errour, the first enemy Red Cross encounters, is a particularly crude representation of this compounded negative feminine and perhaps is meant to train him to recognize its later, progressively more subtle forms. "Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide," Errour still retains a woman's shape in

the upper half of her body (I.i.14.7), making her conformation similar to that of the Sirens whose mether parts Ulysses loathes in Geffrey Whitney's book of emblems. Because her vileness is plainly displayed, Red Cross is never really in danger of being defeated by her, though at one point she winds her coils around his whole body in a way which makes unmistakably literal the inchetypal threat of the female to the male: engulfment. With Una cheering him on, and with his own ample reserves of courage and brute force, Red Cross successfully disentangles himself from the monster and proceeds to decupitate her. She expires most emphatically, spewing forth "a streame of cole black bloud" (1.24.9) in a crude but effective image of evil revealed. Red Cross, having released some of the terrific energies of destruction which most of Spenser's knights possess in abundance, rides off lightly to his next enjounter. His battle with Errour has demanded no mature self-mastery or spiritual knowledge, only the ability to recognize the obviously vile as vile.

Duessa exposes the shallowness of Red Cross's understanding, of a righteousness which can successfully defeat only external evels. When he meets her he is already fallen, having abandoned Una because he has believed in Archimago's false dream images of her Duessa (costumed as Fidessa) does not have to work to seduce him; she merely gathers the spoils which have falsen her way.

Two elements in Spenser's treatment of the encounters between Red Cross and Duessa-Fidessa derive from Ariosto: Fraducio's warning against her while he is imprisoned in a tree (I.i. 31ff.) and her eventual exposure as a hag (I viii 46ff.). Comparing his character-

ization of Duessa with Ariosto's of Alcina (who also provides a source for Acrasia in II.xii) reveals how Spenser has heightened her loathliness. Whereas Astolpho, the treebound knight in the Orlando Furioso, dwells on the bliss of his lovemaking with Alcina for several verses, Spenser's Fraducio merely says he "in the witch unweeting loyd long time" (ii.40.2), and then goes on to describe how he first realized her ugliness when he spied on her bathing during a witches' celebration. It was then, Fradubio tells us, that he saw her "neather partes misshapen, monstruous" (11.41.1) -- a peculiarly unpleasant detail which the more tolerant Ariosto, writing in a country in which witch-hunting never reached epidemic proportions, does not include. Duessa, unlike Alcina, is unveiled twice, once in warning and once in actuality. Her actual stripping comes only after she has found a more fitting mate for herself in Orgoglic and a more sumptuous role as the Whore of Babylon. It is done at the request of Una, who thinks exposure a more appropriate punishment for her than execution.

Surely this unrobing is one of the most unfortunately memorable passages of The Faerie Queene. What Ariosto accomplishes in one verse of description which never ventures below Alcina's neck, spenser does in three which focus particularly on Duessa's breasts and "neather parts," including a dung-clotted tail. "Her sowre breath abhominably smeld," Spenser tells us, and

Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,
Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld (viii.47.5-7)

The Faerie Queene is full of decapitations, hacked limbs and other
grisly details of physical description, but nowhere in its thousands

of lines are any male character's sexual parts so contemptuously described. Spenser's animus here seems redundant, inexplicable, unless we keep in mind that he was writing during the period when witch persecutions in England were at their height, when it was considered acceptable for pailers to search the bodies of aging women for signs of the devil's mark. At the time the first books of The Faerie Queene were published, witches were no longer regarded as heretical enemies of the Catholic Church but were prosecuted under secular law. 6 Spenser, in labelling Duessa unequivocally as a witch and in presenting her hidden reality as decrepit, appears to be influenced by the realities of Elizabethan justice

The more ugly the naked Duessa is revealed to be, the more amazing it becomes that the Enight of Holiness under found her beautiful. In Book I Spenser shows and explores the power which sexual jealousy and desire have to deflect a virtuous ran in mining rue course; we might understandably but erroneously conclude in mitted evidence of this book the Spenser views sexuality itself as evil, as the cause of the inevitable human lapse from grain. It is Duessa's treachery, after all, which is responsible for landing Red Cross in Orgoglio's dungeon. When Arthur rescues the withered spectre of the knight from his confinement, he is quick to draw the appropriate conclusion.

⁵ More than twice as many witches were prosecuted at the Essex Assizes during 1580-1599 than during any other twenty year period Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, p. 28.

⁶ Macfarlane, p. 14. The Witchcraft Act of 1563 put the orime within the jurisdiction of the secular crists.

This dayes ensample hath this lesson deare

Deepe written in my heart with yron pen,

That blisse may not abide in state of moital men.

(viii.44.7-9)

The implication clearly is that he who pursues a bliss of the body is likely to end up miserably entrapped, and will never—unless very graced and very penitent—be able to climb to the mountain top from which the permanent bliss of the New Jerusalem can be glimpsed. Red Dross, of course, acquires the requisite grace and penitence. He lives to see the Heavenly City and is disappointed when he finds he cannot go there at once. Instead, he proceeds to slay the dragon harrowing Una's parents' kingdom, becomes betrothed to her, and leaves her to cherish his absence while he fulfills his term of service to Gloriana. Bliss of both kinds is safely deferred.

The saga of Red Cross's fall and redemption, because it does not significantly depart from the dostrines of medieval Christianity, fiters a secure, satisfying basis for allegory. Politically, Una may stand for the truth of Anglicanism and Duessa for the whorishness of the Church of Rome, but in a much more fundamental way these two represent the archetypes of the spotless virgin and the soiled seductiess. Spenser, I believe, sacrifices his own rich response to the feminine by polarizing it in this manner, but in doing so he makes his allegory work.

The poles come closer together within the figure of Acrasia in Book II, who remains physically alluring from the first rumor of ner existence in canto 1 to her final, ignominious snaring and binding at the end of canto x11. Because Spenser switches his main frame of reference in the Book of Temperance from Christianity to classical

ethics, he can no longer appeal to grace (or revealed truth) as the primary bulwark against the temptation to inordinate sexual pleasure offered by the seductive woman. All that stands between Guyon and his surrender to Acrasia is the Palmer and the reasonable part of himself which the Palmer represents. The battle between the Palmer and Acrasia--or between Guyon's reason and Guyon's lust--is in all respects a more equal encounter than that between the opposing forces of Book I. Any thoughtful post-Freudian reader knows that this is a battle that cannot be permanently won, that the hest which can be hoped for is an outcome that mediates the clasms of both instinct and the repression of instinct demanded by divilization. Freud's formulation of the unending hostility between the pleasure and reality principles comes close to being an abstract rendering of the natural antipathy between Acrasia and the Palmer, and perhaps for this reason there is no part of The Faerie Queene which modern readers find so persistently fascinating and relevant to themselves as Guyon's journey through the Bower of Bliss.

Spenser, however, was obviously not influenced by Freud. He was writing at a time when Greek texts extelling, even venerating, reason had recently been rediscovered. Acrasia's name is the Greek feminine noun for "incontinence," a word used by Aristotle in his Micomathean.

Ethics and a concept much discussed by Aquinas in his synthesis of Aristotle and Christianity. It was a truism of Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy that reason was the most valuable human trait because it was the quality that alied men with the divine rather than

the bestial in themselves.7 Acrasia is the Aristotelian's Satan. By name and nature, she is the chief antagonist to the self-control which was thought to be the sign of the superior, rational man.

destructive climax, there are unmistakable signs that the values of classical ethics do not accord well with Spenser's temperament as a poet. Yet Spenser works hard to maintain the integrity of the allegorical framework he has chosen for the book, and for eleven cantos he is fairly successful in doing so. At several places in these cantos, however, the disparagement of earthy, material existence which became a marked strain in Greek philosophy almost as soon as the Greeks discovered reason, and which I have discussed at some length in Chapter Three, is quite apparent. The Mammon, Maleger, and Alma episodes all demonstrate this anti-material, anti-earth bias, and they are worth looking at in some detail because they hint at the two dequacy of classical ethics vis-d-vis the physical basis of life.

Mammon as lord of Avarice and ruler of a darkly glittering kingdom of riches beneath the surface of the earth should be a tempter second in power only to Acrasia. He has a great deal to fier Guyon--permanent wealth and a secure position as his son-in-law. Guyon, however, remains staunchly untempted and his experience in the Cave of Mammon "is remarkable for the complete absence of

⁷ Zeno, founder of the Stoic school, believed that God himself was "the right reason which penetrates all things." <u>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</u>, I.146; quoted by E. R. Dodds in <u>The Greeks and the Irrational</u>, p. 238

sympathetic response."8 Since there is no tension or sympathy between tempter and temptee, canto vii must rank in many readers' minds as one of the dullest in The Faerie Queene. Guyon's swoon and loss of consciousness upon reemerging in the open air come as a surprise, for the tour of Mammon's subterianean cave has seemingly cost him nothing. Only now do we begin to recognize that Guyon's "virtue" is based on an ignorance of his own vulnerability—that in making himself immune from temptation he has also closed himself off from his own physical needs for food and rest. Spenser's instinct here to bring in a guardian angel and then the Christ—like Pringe Arthur to defend Guyon seems profoundly right, for the Christian perspective is more accepting of human vulnerability and need than the Aristotelan one. Left to his own resources at this point, Suyon would be virtuous but unnourished, stripped of his arm in and left to die.

As it is, Guyon survives to be restored at the House of Temperance, where he travels with Arthur. The House of Aima, paralleling
in importance the House of Hollress within the Inrist in framework of
Book I, exhibits the limits as well as the tenets of the idealogy
upon which Spenser bases the book's structure. Aima horself,
representing the rational soul within the well-ordered body, i. a
bright but insipid figure. She has "not yet felt Cupides want on
rage" (ix.18.2). We might well wonder how, with no firsthand

⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, <u>Penalosance Self-Fashioning</u> (Chicago, 1980), p. 172. Greenblatt goes on to observe that "Mammon's offers are only attractive to those who are going to fall--a tautology not at all alien to Spenser or to Protestant though"."

knowledge of passion, she has been capable of finding the temperate golden mean between emotional extremes. Perhaps Spenser, in emphasizing Alma's virginity, meant to suggest some subtle spiritual quality, a resilient innocence lying at the core of almost everyone. It is far more likely, though, that Spenser meant Alma to be exactly what most interpreters have taken her to be: a calm, temperate anima figure whose lack of experience is somehow not relevant within the terms of the allegory. Arrayed in lily white, Alma leads her visitors on a tour from room to room of her castle, as Spenser, beneath the literal surface, discourses upon the parts and functions if the well-ordered human body

The first important point to note about this castle/body is that it in difficult to enter, for it has been under seige for seven years. Arthur and Guyon have to drive off a host of enemies before they are free to go in. Though the castle has numerous gates, each representing one of the senses, they are habitually barred to all outsiders. The disturbing but inescapable implication is that the self is a firtress in a hostile world and that the soul is a prisoner within it. Furthermore, the castle's walls are of Egyptian "slime," presumably constructed of the mudbrick common in the Mideast. Spenser's word choice here is very emphatic, forcing us to realize the basic, substantial weakness of the whole edifice. "Scone it must turne to earth," he remarks about the castle; "no earthly thing is sure" (ix 21.9). Having emphasized this weakness, Spenser then chooses to concentrate instead on the building's many excellences and balances. Among these are its geometric design, based on the figures

of the triangle and the circle . . . "the one imperfect, mortall, foeminine;/ Th'other immortall, perfect, masculine" (ix.22.4-5).

Spenser's rhetcric here takes on a decidedly Aristotelean cast 9

Alma's tour is methodical, leading through the parts of the house analogous to the heart, the chambers of the brain, and most of the digestive system. Only after it is over do we realize that she has ignored the genitals and that perhaps this house has been denatured. A question of inspired common sense which Stephen Greenblatt asks in his commentary on the Bower of Bliss in Renaissance Self-Fashioning is also relevant here. "How exactly," Greenblatt wonders, "does one distinguish between incrdimate sexual pleasure and temperate sexual pleasure?"10 Although Spenser implicitly confronts this question in Books III and . ', he skirts nompletely around it here. No sexual behavior more compelling than gracious flirtation has a place in the House of Temperance. How does its population get replenished. How, for that matter, do the inhabitants of the house eat, since it must be difficult to maintain a food supply while under seige. These abeyances of common sense seem not so much Spenser's as those of the ethical system he is intent upon allegorizing through Alma and her iwelling place

⁹ In <u>Politics</u> 1254b3, Aristotle emphasizes the necessity of the rational element in human nature ruling over the passionate one and draws an analogy to the proper rule of one sex over the other. "again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior, and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principal of necessity extends to all mankind. "The <u>Generation of Animals</u>, 729a, 741a, he states that the thild's soul derives from its make parent, the matter of its body from the female parent.

¹⁰ Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p . 15

Classical ethics which exalt reason as the completely adequate guide to proper conduct inadequately address the mysteries of sexuality and generation and undervalue the physical basis of life.

The fierce, long-standing battle going on outside the gates of the House of Temperance is inevitable, given the unnaturally calm atmosphere within. Spenser seems to be imagining here what Freud later theorized that the energies of life only appear to submit to repression, while in reality regathering their strength beyond the boundaries of acknowledgment. The castle's assailants, particularly those attacking the unnamed fifth gate with "darts of sensuall delight" and "stings of carnal lust" are described as bestial and distorted. They are "like Snalles" or "like spyders," "like ugly Urchins thicke and short" (xi 13.3-7) Spenser seems to know that his rigid Knight of Temperance would be no match for Maleger, the formidable leader of this subhuman mob. He never allows the two to c ifront each other in battle - Instead, he brings in Arthur as Maleger's opponent. Their pattle is bloody, difficult and ideological, pitting the forces of the Christ-like knight against the resilient strength of the firstpurn son of Mother Earth. Maleger's weakness is his atrength, for every time he falls he revives on contact with the maternal ground. Whether we identify his purely destructive energy as death, disease or original sin matters less than the fact of its malevolence and its origin in nature. 11 Within the allegorical framework of Book II, purely natural energies

¹¹ Madelon S. Gohlke, "Embattled Allegory. Book II of <u>The Faerie</u> Queene," <u>English Literary</u> Remaissance, 8 (1978), 132-133.

are degenerate.

The climactic encounter of Book II is, of course, that between Guyon and Acrasia. Since Arthur has by now vanished from the Book of Temperance as mysteriously as he first appeared in it--suggesting that the paths of grace cannot be foretold--Guyon must now make do with the Palmer's reasonable counsel as his chief aid. The struggle in the Bower of Bliss is the struggle between reason and lust, unmediated by the action of Christian grace. Spenser seems to acknowledge tacitly that the outcome of this contest is in doubt, for he carefully controls the terms of Buyon's temptation. He handicaps Acrasia by allowing her neither a voice nor the opportunity to directly confront and seduce h.s hero Given these advantages, Guyon is victorious, though his victory may strike us as cheap and difficult to admire. What would have happened if Spenser had allowed Guyon to discover Adrasia alone in her verdant glade, singing in her own melodious voice about the fleeting sweetness of love? if Guyon had met Acrasia as openly as Odysseus comes to Circe's door? Since Circe is Acrasia's ultimate ancestor, this comparison is not irrelevant. The high seriousness and mutual challenge which Circle and Odysseus bring to each other have no part in the drama between Suyon. and Acrasia. In order to share this seductress too carefully controlled by her creator, the Knight of Temperance reduces himself to a creeping, peeping Tom . Two th usand years of distorted multural attitudes about sexuality intrude upon their encounter

Though he allows Acrasia herself only a limited role, Spenser does not otherwise constrict the force and allure of sensual pleasure

In the Bower of Bliss. His poetry rises to the opportunity that the Bower presents, as if the landscape of that green isle had the power to evoke the excellences distinctive to the genre of poetry itself.

Intensity, musicality, gorgeously physical images: all appear plentifully in Spenser's verse in canto xii. The Bower is a carefully crafted locus amoenus

A place pickt out by choice of best alive,
That natures worke by art can imitate (xii.42.3-4)

and its creation must have challenged Spenser to use all the resources of his own inescapably sensuous art. One of its chief paradoxes is that it makes Spenser himself into an Acrasia who lures the reader to become progressively more absorbed in the pleasures of his lines.

Not that opense: puts morality aside, for the Palmer with his red and his stern words is always present in the Bower. The figure of the Palmer has no counterpart in Spenser's immediate sources, Ariosto and Tasso. In the Orlando Furioso Ruggiero travels to Alcina's isle alone; in the Gerusalemme Liberata Carlo and Ubaldo travel to Armida's palace together, but neither acts as mentor to the other. The Palmer's magical red, which has the power to tame raging beasts, 12 is similar to Ubaldo's charmed staff and to the magic ring (given to him by the benigh Melissa) which Ruggiero carries. The rod

¹² The raging beasts which guard the way to the enchantress appear in both Tasse and Virgil. There is no suggestion in Tasse, however, that the beasts are her erstwhile lovers, as they clearly are in both the Aenerd and The Faerie Queene. The beasts in the Odyssey, who may or may not be Circe's former favorites, are placed and tawning. Only Spenser and Virgil emphasize the rage of male creatures under the enchantress's control.

is important, for with it in hand the Palmer can stroke or smite into submission any force which threatens, even churning, towering seas (xii.26.6-7). An instrument with such powers would seem to need a divine provenance; Spenser rather coyly tells us that

Of that same wood it fram'd was cunningly,
Of which Caduceus whileme was made,
Caduceus the rod of Mercury (xii 41.1-3)

but he stops short of saying it was the gift of a god. We are left with the paradox of a figure who allegorically represents reason being able to exercise at will supra-rational powers. The Palmer's possession of the magic rod would seem to be one more instance of Spenser's adjusting the odds for this encounter. Not only does he deprive the Circe-figure of her voice, but he puts the instrument she originally possessed in her first literary incarnation into the hands of her opponent! With the rod to supplement his constant, stein vigilance and his habit of morally interpreting each phenomenon as it appears, the Palmer offers Guyon a formidable kind of aid. He is like a superego which has magic to fail back upon

Furthermore, Spenser has enjowed the male Palmer with much of the positive side of the original Circe. On the voyage to Acrasia's isle, he functions as a warner and a guide, just as Homer's Circe does when Odysseus is ready to leave her domain. The Palmer steers straight and tells the meaning of each peril as it appears; he and the ferryman together see that Guyon safely voyages past the Gulf of Greediness, the Rock of Vile Reproach, the Wandering Islands, the horde of shapeless sea monsters. The Palmer, again like Homer's Circe, possesses the power to retransform, to bring heasts back to

human shape by stroking them with his rod. Stripped of her positive side, the archetypal Circe is simplified into a witch, which is the word Spenser uses repeatedly for Acrasia. The fact that she is a "faire Witch" (72.2) merely makes her negativity more dangerous.

Once arrived on the isle and past the raging beasts, the Palmer and Guyor, come to the outer gate of the Bower, which is set in an encompassing wall. The function of this gate is not to bar, for it "ever open stood to all" (46.2), but rather to inform about the quality of life within its confines. Spenser follows Tasso in offering a full description of the scenes carved on its surface, but he deliberately changes the myths which Tasso uses as the source of these scenes. Both Spenser's and Tasso's gates are warnings. Tasso's gate is adorned with two mythological tales beautifully worked in silver. One shows Heracles effeminized, serving Iole, the other the battle of Actium with Antony pursuing Cleopatra and dying in her arms. Of these, the second is emphasized, with its point about the power of a beautiful woman to distract a wairior from his proper task. The myth Spenser substitutes, about Jason and Medea, is altogether more sinister and more charged with male-female enmity. Medea's "furious loving iit" of jealousy issues in two dead children and a bride consumed by flames "Beware of the death-dealing woman"is the primary message of Spenser's gate. It is a message that has already been hinted at in Mordant's name and in the glimpse of Cymochles lying "in his ladies lap entombed" (v.36.3). The secondary meaning of the gate concerns the confusion of appearance with reality, for the waves through which the Argo sails are so artfully

carved upon the unreliable medium of ivory that they appear as "frothy billowes."13 Taken together, these messages suggest that within the confines of the wall what appears as the quintessence of life will be, in reality, death-serving.

Our intellectual mastery of Spenser's carefully developed symbology may be beside the point, however. "We can master the iconography, read all the signs correctly, and still respond to the allure of the Bower."14 Or we can choose to curtail that response But to say, as one critic has said, that "the Bower of Bliss is a dead thing, a painted artifice gleaming with gold and silver and crystal"15 amounts to little more than an admission that it is possible, with blinkered senses, to progress through Spenser's lines as determinedly as the Palmer. Spenser's distinctive achievement in this canto is his success in drawing the reader into the confinite between the poet and moralist in himself.

The signs of now we are <u>supposed</u> to interpret events in the Bower continue to multiply. The poet says forthrightly that the false Genius, the porter of the first gate, is "the foe of life" and

Not that celestiall powre, to whom the care Of life, and generation of all That lives, pertaines in charge particulare, Who wondrous things concerning our welfare, And straunge phantomes doth let vs oft forsee, And oft of secret ill rids vs beware

¹³ Spenser's use of ivory here recalls Virgil's in the Agnerd, where the Gate of Ivory is the one through which false dreams pass. I owe this observation to Prof. Mary Davison.

¹⁴ Greenblatt, Penaissance Jelf-Fashloning, p . "

¹⁵ Joan Larsen Klein, "From Errour to Adrasia," Huntington Library Quarterly, 41 (1978), 199.

That is our Selfe, whom though we do not see, Yet each doth in him selfe it well perceive to bee. (47.2-9)

These lines, besides being the first convincing sign that a healthy vision of sexuality may yet be found in The Faerie Queene, imply that the pleasures of the Bower are sterile and dead-ended. A few verses later we are told that Art (presumably Acrasia's art) "as halfe in scorne/ Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride/ Did Cecke her, and too lauishly adorne" (50.6-8). Tasteless excess would seem to be the hallmark of Acrasia's style, along with a compulsion to meadle with the temperate perfections of nature.

When Spenser describes Excesse personified, however, the sensuousness of his poetry gets in the way of reader disapproval of her. We see her reaching for riper fruit "whose sappy liquor, that with fulnesse sweld, Into her cup she scruzd" (56.3-4). The images of plenitude and the long vowel sounds are so inherently appealing that it is difficult not to perceive Guyon's dashing of her cup to the ground as a spastic overreaction. 16 Similarly, though Spenser has told us that Art and Nature work against each other on Acrasia's island, when we actually see or hear their mixed effects, it is hard not to delight in their harmony. The choir of human and natural sounds at the heart of the Bower is described as a tasteful, delicate blandishment of the ear in which "birds, voyces, instruments, windes,

¹⁶ Guyon's dashing of the cup is markedly different from the behavior of Odysseus, who takes the cup Circe offers him and drains it, confident that a charm he already possesses (the moly) will protect him from the pernicious drug. Unlike Odysseus, Guyon seems to need violence as a release—perhaps because, also unlike Odysseus, he will not allow himself the release of pleasure.

waters, all agree" (70.9).17 What living, hearing person would not delight in "silver sounding instruments" which meet "with the base murmure of the waters fall"? To dismiss these harmonies as mere artifice is to undervalue the power and complexity of Spenser's imagination. C. S. Lewis, who emphasizes the rivalry between Art and Nature in his well known commentary on the Bower, makes his point by selecting his evidence very carefully. Though Lewis dwells on the painted my found in verse 61, which he calls "metal vegetation as a garden ornament," he never mentions the beguiling water music.18 The difficulty of interpretation springs from the inconsistency of Spenser's imagery, for some of it is dued to his moral stance and some of it seems the work of an inspired and freely delighting hedonist.

The main temptation Guyon confronts on the island is offered not by Acrasia, but by two "wanton Maidens" splashing in a streaming fountain. These nubile nymphs, who originate in the fifteenth foor of Gerusalemme Liberata, are appropriate seductresses for the inexperienced Guyon. Whereas Carlo and Unaldo pass by them unmoved,

¹⁷ This water music, in which normally discrete sounds and agencies all blend into each other, is probably intended by Spenser as a metaphor for the morally unwholesome dissolution of boundaries which goes on in the Bower. If so, the archetypal association of water with the flow of life transcends and contradicts Spenser's limited moral meaning

¹⁸ Lewis wonders, apropos of the painted rvy, "whether those who think that Spenser is secretly on Acrasia's side, themselves approve of metal vegetation as a garden priament, or whether they regard this passage as a proof of Spenser's abominable bad taste..." Lewis, "The Faerie Queene" in Essential Articles for the Study of Edmund Spenser, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Hamden, Ct., 1972), p. 6. This collection will hereafter be referred to as EA.

Guyon slackens his earnest pace and feels secret pleasure in his "stubborne brest." Spenser, while retaining most of the details of Tasso's description of the bathing girls, heightens the episode's lascivious tone.19. His girls respond to the awareness that they are being watched with behavior that is teasingly obscene, further kindling Guyon's lust and causing him to incur a firm rebuke from the Palmer. Since Spenser is no more willing to allow Guyon to confront Acrasia one-to-one than he was to allow him to face Maleger, the bathing girls episode represents the height of his hero's personal, inner conflict in canto xii. Guyon proves himself capable of lustful response and proves himself even more capable of immediate, thoroughgoing repression. In Tasso this episode has a lesser importance, for the relationship between Armida and Rinaldo, her temporarily captive knight, is complex, emotionally charged and thoroughly developed; the aplashing girls are just a lively part of the landscape on the way to the enchantress's garden. The adolescent titillation they offer cannot compare to the drama of adult sexuality, even love, between Armida and Rinaldo in the sixteenth and later books.

When Acrasia finally appears upon her bed of roses, we begin to see why Spenser shields Guyon from her allure. Her gaze and touch have the power to draw forth the "molten" spirits of her lovers.

Verdant lies in a posture of surrender, his head cradled in her lap,

¹⁹ One of the details Spenser retains is the comparison of the bathers rising from the water to the morning star. Ironically, he has already used this comparison to praise Gloriana in II.ix.4.

his armor hung on a nearby tree.20 So completely has he abandoned himself that

ne for honcus cared hee, Ne ought, that did to his advancement tend, But in lewd loves, and wastfull luxuree, His dayes, his goods, his hodie he did spend. (80 6-9)

What Acrasia offers is not only sexual pleasure—"long wanton moys"—but the melting of the will and the end to all quests 21. The Bower of Bliss, in spite of the Palmer's insistence to the contrary, is aptly named. In this tableau if the lovers Spenser vividly shows the power of a moment of pleasure and abandonment to take on an aspect of eternity, to deliver those that share it from all consciousness of goals and of time.22. That this mense of timelessness is partially illusory—that Acrasia will time if Verdant within the nour, day or year—is indisputable, nevertheless, I believe Spenser protocializes here a common human experience which threatens the literly, mequential arrangements upon which civilizations are built increasing it threatens the accomplishment if pleases specified ty Flivaleth—Sloriana.

Guyon is only a voyeur to this experience of files, yet he

²⁰ It is at least possible that opender, in treating this tableau of Verdant and Acrasia, was influenced by a ntemporary English views of the "idle" Irish, who often assumed Verdant's posture for a very practical reason. Eynes Moryson remarked in his Itinerary: "And nothing is more formion among them than for the men to lie upon the women's laps on green hills till they will their lose, with a strange numbleness proper to that nation " Quoted by David B Quinn in The Elizabethans and the Irish (Ithaca, 1966), p. 69

²¹ Greenblatt, <u>Renaissance 'elf-Fashioning</u>, p ./3

²² The <u>carpe diem</u> song of the rose may be viewed as an ironic counterpoint to this visual image.

reacts to it with a passion of destruction which shows that he has been deeply stirred. Perhaps we most fear what we most desire.

Giyon's excessive violence is that of someone threatened at his core.

With his heavy sword he turns their bliss to balefulness

Their groves he feld, their gardens did deface,
Their arbers spoyle, their Cabinets suppresse,
Their banket houses burne, their buildings race,
And of the fairest late, now made the fowlest place (83.6-9)

In destruction he achieves the release which he has otherwise denied timbelf.

framewing fibork II. He reveals himself to be as volatile as ly: hier, a travesty of the foliant of Temperance Spenser has hered fore presented him as reing Guyon's incendiary fit amounts to a talk admission on Spenser's part, I believe, that classical ethics and tadequately contain or address the realities of human passion as i need. In this mense, the razing of the Bower is profoundly fightful spenser, in apparent contradiction to his original plans in the book, is saying "no" to a system of ethics and allegory which represses full humanity, "no" to a distorted vision of sexuality. At the end of Book II the Benaussance Circle-figure, with her age-old allegorical periodee, is led away in chains of adamant. Mercifully, who does not appear again in The Faerie Queene.

Spenser has now, almost, cleared the ground for construction of a more comprehensive symbolic narrative. A central theme in the following books is "the effort to free the feminine from masculine

tyranny. "23 Britomart inaugurates this effort by her easy defeat of the proud Guyon in the first verses of Book III. Repression is no match for the power of virtuous love. Although Guyon lingers in the narrative for a few more cantos, he is soon enough gone for good.

My discussion of the remaining books of The Faerie Queene wil. focus briefly on Spenser's reiragining of the ancient feminine livine and then more extensively on Britomart's characterization and role Why, in an extended minigraph is Circe's history and symbol gy, bother to discuss at all the forks of The Fagrie Queene which remain these books offer an unparallelet upportunity to examine what happens when a major artist sweeps builting stere types or error process on relationships out of his mind a distempts to imagine the territary The flames which consume the Power of Bliss burn away - strictions, thickets of bias which prevent Spenser fr r envisioning any nourishing, life-promoting ground of temining power in Born. and II. In several of his most brilliant out a in the following books--the Garden of Ax his in III v., the Demple of Venus in IV v. the Temple of Isis in 7 vil, the dance of the Grades on Mt. A lift. in VI x--he reaches tack to an lent mythic source, or enting the feminine, as if he knew intuitively that if he wanted to find a healthier basis for sexual relationship he has to return to pre-Christian times . Only rarely is these books dues he follow age - 0.1

²³ A. C. Hamilton, "Introduction to Book III" of The Faerie Queene, p. 299.

models of polarizing the feminine into the impossibly positive and the impossibly negative, nor does he stereotype it as Lust which must be properly subjugated by massuline Peason. If Spenser eventually resuccumbs (as I believe he does) to the pressure of culturally—sarstified habits of thinking, it is not because he has not tried to tree ringelf.

Precisel, recause Spenser fullds on more original ground in the lifer froks, fin control of his allegaries is less firm. The neat fathern is now 3. Fland-inspired quest accomplished per book breaks inwo in Pook III, whose knight, Britamart, has never met Gloriana and involve fulfill her own personal quest within its span. Although the pathern returns in Pooks V and VI, much that is of deepest interest in those books relates problematically to the quests. The thin myth a given material which Spenser adds in the later books more the fast of with a natural which Spenser adds in the later books more that the first with a natural, with the union of apposites, than with the knightly rusiness of triumph and submission.

If pp site? I view her as the alternative muse of The Faerie where, as a tiquie who pulls at the poet's imagination almost as the right as Elizabeth dies and who counteracts the latter's influence? While demands and submission hierarchies. Again and again in the images he associates with her, Spenser emphasizes Venus as a well—spring of accord and of life. In the garden she shares with Adonis tile and temale harmonicusly mingle to replenish the universe. This garden and the garden surrounding her temple in IV.x are sanctuaries of dexuality, places where "franckly each paramour his leman knowes"

and no one has to settle for the indefinitely delayed gratification which Spenser's armored, quest-obsessed knights seem to think is the human norm. The configuration of powerful female and adoring young male consorting in a shady grove at the center of the Garden of Adonis calls to mind, of course, Acrasia and Verdant in the Bower of Bliss, but the sexual pleasure it Venus and Adonis, because it is linked with generation and with the very axioms of the universe, is not viewed as negative in sterile by Spenser. He even gives their cld myth an original twist, in that evens somewhat the halance of power between them. The buar which gored Ar his to death is, in The Faerie Queene, implisited within a roxy cave beneath the mount which they use as their bed. Openser's Airma is atil. ".uh.est to mortalitie," but the means of his seath remain siterly vague and for removed from the boar's order tasks. This alteration is vestile archetypal pattern closer to a dynamic equilibrium of the seven, and marginally closer to the social realities which Species know

The Temple of Venus cant in Book IV surfairly free exhaustry and the resolution of apposite. Because hate has along it ally intruded upon the temple grounds, conforming this and along not are naturally, it has to be spiritually and ethically activities. The figure of Concord, a commonplate of Renautorial emblem is own, quarts the portals of the temple and representation tempering and attached at 24. Spenser describes her as reing diving in stature, a force of

²⁴ Thomas P. Roche, Jr. distasses these emblers in The Kindly Flame (Princeton, 1964), pp. 17-30. He identifies Openser's Cambina, who appears in a chariot drawn by yoked lions and who holds the caduceus carved with entwined serpents, as another figure of Concord Cambina's lion chariot connects her with Cypele, the Phrygian Magna

equilibrium which keeps the planets and elements in balance. In the tableau on the temple's porch we see her at work, in the process of achieving equilibrium from the resistant material of her two sons. Hate, chafing against the forced handclasp with his prother, bites his inpland gnashes his teeth. Just as in the Amorett: the warring lovers are connected at last my a bond which no discord can sever, so here too the handclasp holds.

The odd cult statue of Venus within the temple is an elaborate cymusol of accordant wholeness. Its feet and legs are entwined by a shake biting it lawn tail; further up, the statue is veiled to cover male and temple genitals which enable this Venus to beget her own. A line in his description of this statue, Spenser the sophisticated blizated has maked use of the most primitive of symbols.

A line of shake diting its lawn tail, is humanity's oldest and most increase, if shake diting its lawn tail, is humanity's oldest and most increase symbolic image of whileness. It represents a time before the species differentiated itself from nature, or before the child differentiates himself from the hourishing, encompassing mother 25.

Neumann als points out that the urbbros is found in myths (usually creation myths) from Egypt, Barylon, Phoenicia, Africa, India, Mexico and the Navano trice. Where all Spenser find it? Possibly through reading Macrobius, who says that the Phoenicians originated the

Mater, who habitually appeared in such a vehicle in ancient art. Cambina's presence in Book IV is one more instance of Spenser's drawing on old sources of the feminine divine to summon the energies of love and reconciliation so important to his middle books.

²⁵ Erich Neumann, The Origins and History of Consciousness, trans R F. C Hull (Princeton, 1973), pp. 11-12

image.26 Or possibly in Horapollo's <u>Hieroglyphica</u>, where it appears as the second plate and represents the universe.27

No source for Spenser's inspired association of the symbol with Venus has ever been found, though he may have known that snakes were commonly associated with Athena and some other ancient deities 78. According to Martin P. Nilsson, the historian of Greek religion, the snake often appeared as an attribute of obthoric (usually female) gods because it was associated with the underworld and with crops. These primitive deities, like the Great Mother who gave life and took it back into herself, had "the inable aspect of lords of the dead and of fertility."29. Since Spenser's Venus, as ruler of the garden from which life comes and to which the dead repair, might well be considered obthoric, the unitorial seems an appropriate end lem for heremand particularly appropriate to be entwined around the part of herself which is closest to the earth.

What about the bisexual nature of the statue? Aithough there are ancient antecedents for an hermaphroditic Venus--Marie bell virtuells us that the people of Cyrrus worshipped a hearder Aphrodite called Aphroditos and that some womans belonged to the sult of a raid

²⁶ Neumann, Origins, p 1.

²⁷ Horapollo, <u>Hieroglyphios</u>, trans. Alexander Tirner Cory. (London, 1840), pp. 7-8.

²⁸ Spenser would not have known about the Oretan Unake Goddens (unearthed only in the early twentieth century), whose statuettes snow snakes entwined around her arms, shoulders and waist, but not her legs. None of these snakes form the uroboros round

²⁹ Nilsson, The Mindan-Mydenaean Peligion and Ita Survival in Greek Religion, p. 279.

Venus--I believe it more likely that Spenser drew the symbol from his own imagination.30 The hermaphroditic, self-conceiving Venus represents the ideal wholeness and potency of any pair of lovers. It can be interpreted as a later, more differentiated version of the same emotionally charged concept expressed by the uroboros. As Neumann remarks, "the uroboros appears as the round 'container', i e., the maternal womb, but also as the union of masculine and ferinine opposites, the World Parents joined in perpetual cohabita-. r. "31 Neumann's last phrase here is a fairly accurate description f Venus and Adonis in their garden. Though Spenser chooses not to place Adonis within the precincts of the Temple, he includes the male element within Venus heiself. Clearly he views the hermaphrodite image as positive rather than grotesque, for in the original, 1590 ending to Book III Soudamour and Amoiet are figuratively described as Buth a coalesce pair. Their emmrace marks the only time in The Faerie Queene that virtuous lovers are physically united--a union which Spenser, upon further thought, decided to annul.

At this point one might well ask what relationship these mythic

³⁰ Marie Delcourt, <u>Hermaphiodite</u>, <u>Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity</u>, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (London, 1961), pp. 27, 29. Leticurt points out in her introduction that, although the hermaphic lite was apparently originated to express the human impulse towards wholeness, once the symbol took sculptural shape it inspired no further legends because people were put off by its grotesqueness.

³¹ Neumann, <u>Origins</u>, p. 13. The association of round forms and bisexuality also appears in Plate's <u>Symposium</u>, in Aristophanes' fanciful myth about the origin of the sexes and of love. According to Aristophanes, human beings were originally androgynous and spherical, the gods punished them as one would divide an egg with a hair, and ever since then we have longed for our other halves.

images of Venus have to Spenser's overall allegorical framework. I would answer "not much," except to Britomart's quest for Artegal as her mate; and they relate to Britomart's quest only conceptually, for the ancient goddess whom Spenser most obviously associates with his Knight of Chastity is Isis rather than Venus. The sense of union, wholeness and fruition which Venus symbolically represents in The Faerie Queene compensates for and balances against the linear emphasis on achievement and dominance inspired by Elizabeth-Gloriana By paying homage to Venus as his alternate muse, Spenser makes it possible for his poem to take on a deeper, more human resonance even as fissures threaten his allegory.

Nowhere is the tension between the imperatives of quest and daty and the imperatives of love more obvious than in Book VI. Again

Venus and her powers pull at the poet's mind. Sir Calidore, entrusted by Gloriana with the task it subduing the Blatant Beast which has slandered Artegal, becomes "viniyhidull of his vow and high beheast" when he falls in love with Fastbrella, the fairest of the shepherd community. His moment of illuminating vision, in which he spontaneously apprehends the relation of courtesy to grade and love, comes to him only when he is ignoring his duty, even because he is ignoring his duty while freely wandering the countryside and allowing himself to follow the beckenings of beauty. Clindore happens upon Mt. Acidale, but once he has dispovered it he has the inner sense to appreciate the surpassing worth of what he has found opened has placed this mountaintop scene like a jewe. If it's poem, it's importance to him is indicated by the fact that it is the only place in

all six books where he admits himself (disguised as Colin Clout) as a persona.

The vision of the hundred naked handmaids of Venus dancing around the three Graces, who in turn circle Colin's sweetheart, is a mandala of delight. All of its motion is oriented towards the centrality of the fourth, most human Grace, who occupies the position Venus herself would normally assume. Spenser compares her to a gem in the midst of a richly enhanced ring (x.12.7-9), to the Corona Borealis surrounded by moving stars (x.13). She is the fount of all value, the earthly Venus, the one to whom Colin pipes. In the April ecloque of The Shepheardes Calender, Spenser had awarded the position of the fourth Grace to the Queen (Elisa), but now he replaces her with his own beloved, Elizabeth Boyle, though he does not mention her ly name. In this most elaborate and personal of compliments, Spenser fades the boundary between human and divine, between love as an earthly passion and love as a cosmic force. Mt. Acidale is Spenser's Frimavera, more homely and less complex than Botticelli's great visual allegory, but inspired by the same belief in love as a bridge tetween visible and invisible worlds.

Unlike other, imagined scenes of bliss in <u>The Faerie Queene</u>, this one is not fervently quested for or deferred; it is simply there, presented to us whole, so that we may see and experience it before we interpret. As long as Sir Calidore remains rapt and silent, the dance goes on, but when he begins to ask questions, evidencing the need to stand back and <u>know</u>, the Graces flee and Colin breaks his bagpipes in a fit of pique. What a departure from the

ending of Book II, where Spenser glorifies the voyeur as hero. His understanding has clearly evolved, for now he makes quite plain the loss of pleasure and immediacy which the voyeur suffers and which he causes others to suffer too. Being told that the vanished Graces

on men all gracious gifts bestow,
Which decke the body or adorne the mynde,
To make them louely or well fauored show,
As comely carriage, entertainement kynde,
Sweete semblaunt, friendly offices that bynde,
And all the complements of curtesie (x.23.1-6)

is a poor substitute for hearing their "feete fast thumping th' hollow grounds" (x 10.4). Cal.dire comes down from the mountaintop wiser and probably sadder, confirmed in his desire to pursue Pastorella before he pursues the Blatant Beast. Spenser, for once, places the demands of his hero's heart above the call of his sworn, political duty

This vision of Venus's handmaids, along with those of her gardens and her temple, belong, I believe, to a mythic strain in The Faerie Queene which subverts Spenser's ideology. If the quests specified by Elizabeth-Gloriana are his poem's thesis (and for the most part Spenser's imagination of the feminine is bound up with the union of chivalry and nationalistic power-seeking which the Queen inspired in the most able of her male subjects), then the delights of Venus and her followers are its antithesis. Spenser has a sturdy apprehension of the power of the feminine in ancient myth, but he also has a thorough familiarity with the dominance-and-submission pattern of thinking which his culture believed prescribed the right relationship of man to woman and of England to her hascent empire.

Only in his characterization of Britomart, whose quest is for the man.

she is fated to love and marry, does Spenser succeed--temporarily--in synthesizing these two antithetical strains.

By far the most durably appealing of the female figures in the poem and often celebrated by feminist critics for her womanly bravery and mettle, Britomart is clearly imagined by Spenser to be the exceptional woman. As such, she functions as a model of virtue for the sex: an emblem of loyalty and chastity in love upon which his female readers might presumably have fashioned themselves. Yet she is also exceptional in another way. Her royal blood and her role as progenitress of Elizabeth exempt her from the standards of conventional female behavior and assure her of a position at or near the top of any hierarchy she happens to encounter. Britomart offers Spenser's imagination scope, an opportunity to revise "not only a literary and cultural view of love but also a literary and cultural view of woman "32 In Books III and IV he takes full advantage of this scope, but all his brave explorations concerning man-woman relationships come to ground against the political realities of Book V, where his thinking reverts to hierarchy and he is once again primarily concerned not with relationship between but power over. Britomart's presence in her last scenes is thus far less impressive than in her early ones.

From the beginning, when she rides into the poem and immediately unhorses Guyon, Spenser emphasizes Britomart's military prowess. He

³² Harry Berger, Jr., <u>The Faerie Queene</u>, Book III: A General Description" in <u>EA</u>, p. 397.

connects her with the Amazons, those women "of antique times" who were "wont in warres to beare most sway,/ And to all great exploits them selues inclind" (ii.2.2-3). Trained from infancy to toss spear and shield, Britomart disdains "the fine needle and nyce thread," the conventional pastimes of noble ladies. Spenser, of course, had plenty of precedents for the Amazonian woman in epic--Homei's Penthesilea, Virgil's Camilla, Ariosto's Bradamante--but he puts the convention to particularly good use. Britomart's training in the martial arts, her nerve in seeking and fighting for what she wants, enables her to avoid completely the behaviors of practiced passivity prescribed for other women in Faeryland as in England. She is no Petrarchan sonnet-woman, schooled to be the quiet object of her lover's ardent desire. Her forthright energy and deeds enable Spenser to explore what a love relationship between a man and woman would be like if both were active seekers and partners.

The Amazonian strain in Britomart is predominantly positive because it ensures her social freedom. Amazonian mythology per se, whether in classical or Renaissance texts, was rarely so unambiguously positive. It often symbolically embodied and controlled "a collective anxiety about the power of the female not only to dominate or reject the male but to create and destroy him. "33 In ancient Greece, tales about Amazon societies and queens seem to have development."

³³ Louis Montrose, "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Chaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture" in Rewriting the Renaissance, p. 71.

The great exception to the ambiguity of Amazonian mythology is Ben Jonson's 1609 Masque of Queens, where it is used entirely positively. Jonson was writing after the death of Elizabeth, who seemed to be wary of such myths

oped as a result of colonists' encounters with cultures which were still matrilineal.34 They were late myths, expressive of a threat to patriarchy rather than of the original procreative or nurturing power of the feminine. Men of the late Renaissance had fresh access to these myths as well as fresh access to primitive matrilineal cultures. Sixteenth-century travel narratives often relocated the ancient Amazons of Scythia in Africa or the Americas, just within the receding boundaries of terra incognita.35 Representations of Amazons were common in Elizabethan texts, and the usual attitude expressed towards them mingled fascination with horror.

One type of writing in which references to Amazons were conspicuously absent was the encomium to Elizabeth. Though the Amazon metaphor seems, on the face of it, suited to strategies for praising a woman ruler, Elizabeth may well have found its undertones too sinister to suit her tastes or political interests. 36 If so, she displayed great acumen. Even Spenser, who begins by referring to these ancient martial women in an unambiguously positive way and even chastises men for treating them unfairly (III, ii), later envisions. Amazons as unrestrained man-dominators. Radigund is to Britomart as a negative to a photographic image, she is filled with vengeance ruther than radiance, but her lineaments are very similar. Because she is such a matched opponent, Radigund has the strength to subvert

³⁴ George Thomson, Studies in Ancient Greek Society: The Prehistoric Aegean, pp. 182-183. For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of the Amazons to the Greeks, see Chapter Two, pp. 63-65.

³⁵ Montrose, p. 71.

³⁶ So Louis Montrose speculates, pp. 77-78.

Britomart's carefully developed characterization. Elizabeth was wise to be wary that poems praising her as a second Hippolyta might sully her image as the nation's loving wife and mother.

One reason the Amazonian strain is so positive in Britomart because Spenser is careful to contrast her armored exterior with the very vulnerable woman within. Her first sight of Artegall in Merlin's magic mirror pierces her to the core, destroying her former boundaries and stability. Spenser makes clear that because of her strong emotional nature, her choices are to seek or to pine, probably unto death. Britomart is no nun-like Platonist content to worship an ideal image; from the beginning the spiritual and the physical are integrated within her character. Her love for her future husband begins as an affair of the imagination, but sexual consummation in marriage is its goal. Very early, Britomart complains to her nurse-Glauce about the "wicked fortune" which seems to require her to "feed on shadowes, whiles I die for food" (III 11.44 s). Her knightly quest for her mate provides, if not an outlet for her passion, at least an expression of her energy. And Spenser, in irreding an actively seeking and loving heroine, recreates an archertypas pattern which had failen out of favor in Western culture. Britomart's mythic forebearers are Psyche performing her tasks and enduring her ordeals so that she may be reunited with Cupid, Isis wandering through Egypt in search of the parts of Osiris' body so that the may put them back together and make his dead bunes live. Unlike most of the other knights in The Faerie Queene, Britomart Beries her own heart. She is the least political, the least ideological of them,

but she eventually becomes entangled in hierarchy and ideology because the man she loves serves both.37

Before looking at the Artegall-B:itomart configuration which represents, I believe, Britomart's downfall as a sympathetic character, I want briefly to examine the episode which best illustrates Britomart's particular excellence her rescue of Amoret from the House of Busicane in cantos xi and xii of Book III.

The episole contrasts Britomart's integrated nature with Am ret's fragmented one. Britomart, as has already been mentioned, is no stranger to the spiritual and physical longings of love; her firsthand knowledge of love's power acts as an immunization, so to speak, against the much more superficial and stylized representations f passion which Busirane conjures up. But Amoret, whose training for womanhould has consisted of carefree years in the erctic innersanctum of the Garden of Adonis followed by lessons in silence, ledience and passivity in the Temple of Venus, has no such integrated understanding. She has been schooled in both sexuality and the repressit or fear of sexuality. Therefore she is natural prey for both the Harry Carl, who probably represents her own suppressed lust, and for the sadomasochistic Busirane, who evokes her fear of passion. Spenser's account of Amoret's trials really amounts to a critique of the normative femininity of his time, which prescribed that married wemen should be both ripely sexual and thoroughly

³⁷ In another sense, of course, Britomart is all along entangled in hierarchy and ideology. Of royal blood and destined to be the mother of the Tudor line, she serves a future political absolutism by serving her own heart and searching for Artegall, who is destined to be the father of the line.

submissive. He seems to have understood the dangers of living out such a prescription.

The Busirane episode points out the dangers inherent in female submission. Amoret's passivity is very much the reason for her captivity. The masque which Busirane presents in his House and inwhich she forcibly takes part is, we learn in IV.1.3, the very name masque which he presented at Amoret's wedding feast. This spectacle enabled him "by way of sport, as oft in maskes is knowen" to abduct her away from Scudamour and their friends. The masque objectifies the conventions of Petrarchan love discourse; "the twelve figures that follow Ease are sonnet metaphors come to life "36 Faray, Desire, Doubt, Daunger, Grief, Fury, etc.. all are allegorical representations of states of mini which exist in the poet subject as he pursues his lady-object. The rich silks and painted plumes of the figures' costumes are intended to dazzle and distract, to lead the viewer away from the realization that the type : "I ve" themfigures represent is based on pharatoms in the make subjective minimum. not on interpersonal reality. Britomait is at this to have undit serious to be taken in by this prinception of love as a subject - do not dualism. It could well be argued that all she knows if love at this ruint is a phantom within her mind, but Artegili's image is a phant " she is seeking with all her being to make real. The Ber outness of her quest protects her from being impressed by the view of love the masque presents, she is "neither of idle shewes, his of faire harms. aghast" (x11.29.9).

³⁸ Roche, The Kindly Flame, p. 77.

At this point the love-object herself enters, her trembling teart displayed in a silver basin. The appearance of Amoret, the flesh and blood woman, among all the walking personifications is startling Britomart immediately recognizes the real as real, though she has never seen Amoret before. The next night, as the inner room's door opens when the masque is about to begin, Britomart enters find Amoret tied to a pillar and "the vile Enchaunter . . . figuring strange characters" with her blood. The masque figures are . where to be seen, for they have been transmuted to writing on a gage (thus bearing out the interpretation that they were a pack of . nmet_trepes) Britcmart overpowers the arch-manipulator Busirane indicated Amorest out, in the 1590 version, to the waiting Scudamour. In ugh many details it the episcde remain mysterious, it leaves an .erwhe.ming infression of Britomart's integration and competence, and of Amoret's and Soudamour's powerlessness 39. Through this what rate allegery Spenser shows, among other things, the damage that results when I we is conceived as the operation of a subject upon an : "+"(*

the of the major disappointments of <u>The Faerie Queene</u> is that we here get an extended glimpse of Britomart, who is clearly capable of ve as relationship, united with Artegall. Why not? I suggest that it is because Artegall, as Spenser conceives him, is not capable of suitained, inter-autjective relationship and behaves, except for trief moments, as an executor of the ideology of conquest. His

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³⁹ Soudantur has been powerless to rescue Amoret from Busirane lecause he too has been an abductor, he too has played the aggressive materiale and thus has been part of the problem.

character is almost purely determined by his role, which is to "liberate" Irena (Ireland) from Grantorto (the Pope and Catholicism), who is forcibly and unjustly depriving her of her heritage. Nowhere else in Spenser's poem is the gap between Faeryland and Elizabethan realpolitik sc minimized as in Book V. One only has to check Spenser's idea of Artegall's heroic mission against historic fact - i.e., Ireland's conversion to Catholic Christianity in the fifth century—to realize that the poet's imagination here is corrupted and partisan.

As secretary for years to the highest Elizabethan official in Ireland, as a probable witness to the strategic slaughter by English troops of 600 Italian and Spanish Soldiers who had some to the air of the Irish at Smerwick, and as a gentleman made landed by the awarr of a portion of the repellique Earl of Desmond's confice ated estate, Spenser was hardly a disinterested party to the English attempt to suppress indigenous Irish culture and impose religious and points a curisdiction 40. Cruel as this colonial policy seems to report the Spenser it was not repugnant simply because and rich to the point call consensus within which he moved and hair to hearly there is the field. The allegorical picture he draws in hook V, therefore, in

⁴⁰ Spenser arrived in Ireland three months refore the seage and massacre at Smerwick, to which he presumably traveled with Lord Grey Grey was later accused by the Spanish ambassador to Elizabeth's construction of cruelty and bad faith during this incident. See Alexander Judson, The Life of Edmund Spenser, vol. 8 of The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition (Baltimore, 1945), pp. 89, 9.

⁴¹ David J. Baker, "'Some Quirk, Some Subtle Evasion' Legal Subversion in Spenser's <u>A View of the Present State</u> of Treland" of Spenser Studies, IV (1986), 149.

for the most part internally consistent, but it is a distorted reflection of historical truth.

Artegall's dedication to his role as Elizabethan imperialist makes him insufficiently available to Britomart. Although they come together twice, both interludes are cut short by Artegall's insistence that he must complete his mission for Gloriana before they are free to marry. Spenser never presents a love relationship which is both positive and consummated. His knights, as Stephen Greenblatt Abserves, again and again "reach out longingly for resolution, clusure, or release only to have it snatched away from them or deferred, the whole of The Faerie Queene is the expression of an intense craving for release, which is overmastered only by a still rese intense tear of release."42 Spenser's focus, rather, is on the preliminary and less anxiety-provoking union of recognition. The rescipnition state between Artegall and Britomart on III vi, when he shears away the ventail of her helmet and falls to his knees before her Leauty, . prohably the most eagerly anticipated moment in The Factive Queetin. Spenser uses many figures--most of them brawn from Inventional somet thetoric-to describe the effect of Britomart's tallance up. Antegall's unprepared senses: "her angels face" is "like to the suddee marne"; her yellow hair is "like to a golden. I ider . framed in goldsmithes forge with cunning hand"; she is like "some heavenly goddesse". The imagery is of light suddenly revealed, of the sun abruptly rising.

This scene is mirrored by Artegall's reaction to Radigund when

⁴² Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p. 179.

he unlaces her helmet during their battle in V.v. Again he involuntarily drops his sword when he discovers his opponent's loveliness.

Radigund's beautiful face, though bathed in the blood and sweat of battle, appears

Like as the Moone in foggie winters night,

Doth seeme to be her selfe, though darkned be her light.

(v 12 8-9)

Spenser's image here suggests an important point. Radigund <u>is</u> the moon to Britomart's sun, the Jungian shadow to her moral radiance. She is Britomart's double, "split off from her as an allegorical personification of everything in Artegall's beloved that threatens him."43 Artegall's reaction attests to their connection, he is initially attracted and awed by the one as by the other. He shortly learns, however, that a ferocious will to power exists behind this second pretty face.

Radigund vengefully forces men into the surmissive rise women have been socialized to live out. Whereas in Book III openser has pity for Amoret in the traditional, passive feminine role, in story V ne finds the role beneath contempt, "a sordid office for a mining brave" as Artegali's (v.23.4). (Presumably twining the distaff is not a sordid office for those not born masculine and brave.) There is an inconsistency in his attitude. Does he think women are damaged by passivity, rendered incomplete as human beings, or does he believe they are properly destined to play that role? Bilt mart rescues

⁴³ Louis Montrose, "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture," p. 78. The polarization of feminine nature illustrated by Una-Duessa thus creeps back into the poem in Book V.

they are properly destined to play that role? Britomart rescues

Artegall from captivity as she has rescued Amoret, and afterwards

takes steps to ensure that no more men will fall into this form of

'hralldom. While Artegall is resting and recovering his self-esteem,

she there as Princes rained,
And changing all that forme of common weale,
The liberty of women did repeale,
Which they had long vsurpt; and them restoring
To men's subjection, did true Justice deale:
That all they as a Goddesse ner adoring,
Her wise-come did admire, and hearkned to her loring.

(vii.42.3-9)

one of the most instasteful details here is the Amazon women's <u>love</u> for their own loss of freedom. Another is the willingness of such an exceptional woman as Britomart to impose subjection upon them.

The attunement to the feminine and interest in inter-subjective personal relationship which Spenser shows so abundantly in Books III and IV has now been completel jettisoned. It has been tossed out in the rate of a "true lustice" which consists of power over: the power of non-over womer which mirrors the power of England over Ireland.

The mart's efficiency in restoring proper hierarchical order to the Amazen lands enables Artegall to ride off on his quest to liberate Irena. Her archetypal connection with Isis, goddess of mercy, which openser emphasizes so beautifully and vividly in the Isis Church episode, is firm this point on in the narrative forgotten. 44 For all of Spenser's moral confusion in the Legend of Justice, Book V does clearly illustrate one ethical reality: that political hierarchy and dexual hierarchy go hand in hand

⁴⁴ For a detailed analysis of the symbology of Britomart's dream in Isis Church, see the Appendix.

Spenser's ideology and allegory of imperialism. We do her more honor by remembering her as she begins, as an actively loving heroine whose bravery is matched by her vulnerability, than by focusing on what she finally becomes. She illustrates more clearly than any other character in The Faerie Queene the complexity of Spenser's apprehension of the feminine. Her characterization is rooted in the ancient archetypal pattern of the noble Isis-like woman who quests for reunion with her love, yet it is overlaid with far more ambiguous Amazonian associations, and it finally becomes half of a positive-negative configuration which she shares with Radigund. Having rejected such stereotyping—the same sort of stereotyping which forced the originally whole mythic character of Circle into a limited negative mold—Spenser nevertheless succumps to it.

This retreat is entirely understandable, given the tensions concerning the role and nature of women in English Renaissance society. What is remarkable is how thoroughly Spenser explores his experience and intimations of the feminine in the large, richly articulated canvas of The Faerie Queene. It is fascinating to watch him come to grips with the negative image into which not only woman but sexuality itself had been dist by classical and Christian thought. Though he tries hard to uphold this image, and succeeds for most of his first two books, something-perhaps his poet's understanding of what the sources of life really are--prompts him to dast it aside when he dismisses his priggish Knight of Temperance. In the figures of Isis and especially Venus, which he found in Plutarch,

Ovid and other ancient sources, but which also embodied, I believe, his own intuitions about the power of the feminine, Spenser found inspiration to imagine a basis for man-woman relationships not sanctified by cultural dogma. This strain of The Faerie Queene, which I consider the mythic as opposed to the allegorical, probably seemed to Spenser entirely harmonious with the allegorical framework he had built (which can be considered as a vast and intricate compliment to Elizabeth). Book V reveals to us, with our advantage of historical hindsight, how antithetical they are.

Chapter Seven. The Seventeenth-Century Temptress

When the chained and presumably unrepentant Acrasia is led away from the Bower of Bliss, Spenser seems to be freeing himself from the power of a negative stereotype. In the later, more exploratory books of The Faerie Queene Circe figures have a remarkably weak hold upon his imagination. But none of Spenser's contemporaries, as far as I can tell, went through a similar process of dealing with the archetype of the seductive, death-dealing woman and then moving beyond it.

This archetype continued to flourish in European literature during the following century and found its purest, most extreme expression in Calderon's dramas in Counter-Reformation Spain, two of which are based upon the Circe-Odysseus myth and will be analyzed in this chapter. In Los encantos de la Culpa Calderon pushes the standard Christian allegorical interpretation of the myth as far as it will go, bluntly renaming Circe "Sin" and presenting her as an alluring impediment to salvation. She is temptress to the Everyman figure of Odysseus, just as Eve in the work of Calderon's contemporary John Milton holds out the apple to Adam and invites him to forget about heavenly injunctions.

Calderon and Milton, who as Jesuit and Furitum would seem to have nothing in common, in fact both believed in a Platonized Christianity which assumed the existence of ontological hierarchies, and both regarded the female sex as at least potentially subversive

to these hierarchies. Circe never enters Milton's work directly, but as an archetypal female subversive she certainly haunted the edges of his imagination, first as the mother of the title character of Comus (who is nothing less than a male Circe) and later as a probable influence upon his characterization of Eve. Before exploring Circe's relationship to Milton's Christian Platonism, however, I shall briefly discuss her connection with the Platonic tradition in the early seventeenth century masque.

Circe is but a shadow in <u>Comus</u>, the ghostly mother of a son who excels her "at her mighty art."! She was a familiar presence, however, in early seventeenth century masques, which often drew upon the body of Graeco-Roman myth popularized during the Renaissance, a corpus in which, as we have seen, she was a common allogorical figure. Masques in this period were the most aristocratic of dramatic productions, not only because their staging, with its emphasis on elaborate sets, lavish costumes and mechanical contraptions, required huge outlays of cash, but also because they traditionally ended with the restoration of order from above and with a presentation of participants before the reigning authorities in the audience.! One of their conventions required that a dance of

l John Milton, <u>Comus</u>, l. 63, in <u>Odes, Pastorals, Masques</u>, ed. David Aers et al.

² Sometimes the reigning authorities were characters within the masques, as when Charles I's queen, Henrietta Maria, played Divine Beauty in Aurelian Townshend's <u>Tempe Restored</u> or James I's queen, Anne of Denmark, took one of the leading roles in Ben Jonson's 1609 <u>Masque of Queenes</u>.

"antimasquers," country louts or other unruly sorts who represented the forces of disorder, be followed later in the drama by the measured quadrilles of "masquers," seemly nymphs or gentlefolk who were associated with the superior forces of order. Obviously, Circe's uncouth menagerie had great potential as antimasquers and it is for this reason more than any other, I believe, that her myth was adapted to the form. Comus was preceded by at least two other masques in which transformed, beast-headed revelers tramped out their rude measures. The problem with tailoring the myth to this most courtly of forms, however, was how to subdue Circe heiself within a limited span of elapsed dramatic time.

The usual solution was to partray her as a woman of dangerous gifts but susceptible charms, someone willing to behave when she wished to please a loved man. Hence the Circe of William Browne of Tavistock's <u>Inner Temple Masque</u>, produced for an audience of law students and teachers in 1614, is relatively tame and benigh. She knows how to raise one dead, walk on water, pull down the moon—a host of feats inspired by both Gospel and classical legend—but in this brief drama she limits herself to casting a spell of sleep over Ulysses and his men.3 When she wishes to wake him fecause she desires him, she squeezes moly ver his eyes. Then the two project to watch a series of dances and indefinitely pastpone their love—making. Brown's fluent but desultory verse is entirely devoid of both conflict and allegorical ambition. It is no more than the verba.

³ William Browne, The Whole Works of William Browne, ed W Carew Hazlitt, II, 244-245.

occasion for a series of songs and dances.

Browne's Circe, however, has one quality in common with that of Aurelian Townshend in <u>Tempe Restored</u>, produced at court seventeen years later, each voluntarily cedes her transforming rod, the symbol of her power, to another character (to Ulysses in the first instance, to Minerva in the second). Who could be less threatening, more scintillating and suited to a night's elegant entertainment, than a Circe who freely gives her magic away?

The Circe of Tempe Restored does so because she has to be true to her part in Townshend's Platonic allegory.4 Instead of representing unadulterated just or passion, she personifies "desire in general". Which hath power on all living creatures. Desing mixt of the Divine and Sensible "5 She is a malleable character capable of ren. varion because she represents the whole Neo-Platonic (or Ficinian) Lintinuum between the sensual and the ineffable. She becomes so attached to one of her pet beasts that she yields to his pleas to be regranted numan form, whereupon he immediately escapes from her domai. At this point, covelorm and enraged, her pain makes her seek diversion. Her hymphic arrange a pageant for her, a kind of masque within the masque, which features Divine Beauty descending on a cloud with her sixteen male and female attendant spheres and stars.

⁴ Aurelian Townshend, <u>Aurelian Townshend's Poems and Masks</u>, ed. E. K. Chambers (Oxford, 1912). When <u>Tempe Restored</u> was published later in 1631, Townshend followed its text with a paragraph overtly stating its allegerical leaning.

⁵ Townshend, Poems and Masks, p. 97

realizes the depravity of her former zoological tastes and voluntarily gives up her magical rod. Celestial Harmony floats down from above, Heroic Virtue dances in from the wings and all bow or curtsy before the King.

Ostentation.6 The transcendental aspects of the masque required the ingenious devising of clouds sturdy enough to support seventeen people in a controlled descent to the stage floor and must have challenged the ingenuity of Inigo Jones. "This sight altogether was for the difficulty of the Ingining and number of the persons the greatest that hath been seene here in our time," Townshend proudly remarks.7 Charles I's queen, henrietta Maria, deigned to play the role of Divine Beauty, appearing in an elaborately slivered gown whose luminescence was designed to contribute to the play's overall moral effect. Townshend thought it likely that "Corporeal Beauty consisting in simetry, colour, and certaine unexpressable orace,

⁶ Masques in the early seventeenth century Stuart courts were not merely inniquous entertainments. They had an important ideological function, flattering the king who sat in the choice seat in the audience through on-stage idealizations of his role. Neo-Flatonic philosophy was an important element in this idealization. Stephen Orgel, in The Illusion of Power (Berkeley, 1975), p. 46, describes the masque as "the triumph of the aristocratic humning". "At its center," he remarks, "is a belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization. Philosophically, it is buth elatenic and Machiavellian, Flatonic because it presents images of the good to which the participants aspire and may ascend; Machiavellian relause its idealizations are designed to justify the power they desentate " The influence of Neo-Platonio philisophy on the English masque an be discerned as early as Ben Johs. It's Masque of Blackhesse in 1605. See "The Imagery of Ben Jonson's Masques of Blacknesse and Beartie" in D. J. Gordon, The Renaissance Imagination, ed. Stephen orge: (Berreley, 1975).

⁷ Townshend, Poers and Masks, p 3.

shining in the Queenes Malestie, may draw us to the contemplation of the Beauty of the soule, unto which it hath Analogy. "8 Thus philosophy was used to rationalize the misuse of the nation's wealth. With production costs per masque presented at the royal court in the 1630's approaching 20,000 pounds, it is small wonder that the Civil War was only a few years off and that the masque as a genre did not survive this upheaval.9

Tempe Pestored also beautifully illustrates another of the masque's conventions: the reconciliation of opposing characters and tirds by the end of the drama. In his late plays with masque-like elements, The Tempest and The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare nimself partially bends to this convention. In Townshend's bauble, the intractably wisker traditional Circle is re-characterized so that she can to her share of reconciling. Fellaps watching such entertainments helped members of the Stuart courts convince themselves that the deepening factionalism in their country could, after all, be smoothed over. If they could really believe in the king as the tamer of nature he was often portrayer as onstage, in the queen as Divine Beauty or the giddess of flowers, then problems about Ship Money or furitans or Ireland would recede to insignificance.10

Milton as an anti-royalis' must have had mixed feelings when he was invited by Henry Lawes, musician at court and music tutor to the

⁸ Townsheld, Foems and Masks, p. 99.

⁹ Peter Mendes, "Appendix" to <u>Comus</u> in John Milton, <u>Odes,</u> <u>Eastorals, Masques</u> (Cambridge, 1975), p. 166.

¹⁰ A point made by Stephen Orgel in The Illusion of Power, p. 52.

children of the aristocratic Egerton family, to write the text for a masque to be produced at the family seat, Ludlow Castle, in 1634. He was then twenty-six and unknown, attracted, I imagine, by the guaranteed audience for this potential work and by the opportunity to collaborate with an accomplished musician. But the reconciliation convention in particular would have been anathema to Milton--unacceptable for reasons of both politics and temperament. Almost certainly, Lawes suggested the Circe myth to him as the subject for the new work; Lawes and young Alice Egerron, the fifteen-year o.i daughter of the family, had participated in the production of Tempe Restored three years earlier and the experience would have been relatively fresh in their minds. Comus, towever, has nothing in common with Tempe Restored Not only is the vapility of the earlier play replaced by puetry which pushesses sinew and retinement, Michin als makes two important plot change. First, he ignores the reach illustion convention entirely, and second, he makes hime a man

The heart of this drama is a defate about virginity and promiscuity which is a standiff, with neither the ladyker formus convincing each other or ceding ineturical grand is a seek. It temptation trial—rather that if reconciliation—were what imagined Milton's deepest creative engagement, the great works if this maturity all center around such scenes. Believing as he is that "that would purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is intrary," in Milton was not about to create an adversary whose will would go six was a

¹¹ John Milton, <u>Areopagitica</u>, Loted in Mendes' "Appendix," p. 113.

crucial moment and leave the purity of his young Lady protagonist insufficiently challenged. Comus, his male Circe, combines the indefatigable appetites of his father, Bacchus, with his mother's knowledge of sorcery. "Much like his father, but his mother more"

(1 57), he is more than a mater for the hapless young Lady.

But why the sex change of the sexual tempter? Before Milton gave him new late, Comus was an unscure character in classical mythology whom ben Tonson had presented as "the god of cheer or the relly" in his masque of 1618, Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue.12 Why, with "the great and famous allegorical figure of Circe. . . one of the rest-known symbolical figures of the Renaissance"13 available to him, did Milt to spurn her for the role of sexual tempter and chose contead her much less illustribus sont. The obvious reason is the constraint of casting. Alice Egerton, who must have been destined in the leading included the masque even existed, could not play against a female tempter without their dialogues being construed as fullowed as it is as the invention of Circus as the cast as a new rest of Alice imperiorly to star while still making the

¹² Mendes, "Appendix," p. 163

¹³ Reserving Tuve, "Image, F rm, and Theme in A Mask" in John S. Lekh if, ed., A Maske at Ludl w. Essays on Milton's Comus (Cleveland, 1968), p. 142. Tuve maintains that Circle is "the hinge upon which Milton's whole invention mives" in Comus and that "he has caught and deepened every important phase of the significance she had point "

¹⁴ The Egerton family would have been exceedingly anxious to avoid all appearance of scandal, since they were related to the family of Lord Castlehaven, who had recently been executed for various sexual crimes. The Castlehaven case was a major scandal of the early 1630's. Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution (New York, 1977), p. 43.

myth, with its attractive potential for temptation scenes, available for Milton's exploration. The change of sex of the Circe figure may also have been, for Milton himself, a kind of psychological masking and protection. It put a woman, not a man, in the vulnerable position. Not until almost three decades had gone by and he was composing Book IX of <u>Paradise Lost</u> did Milton allow himself to express in poetry the consequences of a fully sexual woman's assault upon a virtuous man's resolve.

Whether or not we agree with it, Milton's view of sexuality in Paradise Lost seems to derive from lived experience, in Comus it has the rigid insubstantiality of theory. Sexuality in this masque is not a force Milton associates with divilized human life. He views it as belonging to the domain of Johns and his routers, an nomething properly expressed only in the dark depths of the forest or in comust palace within the forest's clearing. Though he does not deny the reality of the forest—an age—cla symbol of the mysterious and the unconscious—Milton presents its reality as dangerous. It is a place in which to get lost, not to live. And so the Lady, in the midst of her adolescence, becomes as distributed in the dark with at the beginning of the play as Lante lies at the beginning of the law as lante.

Before we even see in hear her, however, Miltonives in forming the full power and vilte of enters with "charming-rolling one hand, his glass in the other" and urges his beast-heated follower, to dance.

We that are of purer fire Imitate the starry choir, Who in their nightly watchful sphere, Lead in swift round the months and years. The sounds, and seas with all their finny drove
Now to the moon in wavering morris move,
And on the tawny sands and shelves,
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves;
By dimpled brook, and fountain-brim,
The wood-nymphs decked with daisies trim,
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep.
What hath night to do with sleep?
Night hath better sweets to prove,
Venus now wakes, and wakens Love (11, 111-124)

These lines hardly sound like the utterance of a rapacious brute.

Comus shows himself here to be capable of delicacy and even aware of that most hallowed of Pythagorean and Neo-Platonic concepts, the music of the spheres. To dismiss the dance of Comus and his followers as "rict, and ill-managed merriment" (as the Lady later does) or as "barbarous dissonance" (as the Attendant Spirit does, fails to convince the reader whose ear has already been blandished by Circe's in For the reader, the dynamics of experiencing Comus are very similar to those or experiencing Spenser's Bower of Bliss: the mensuousness of the poetry itself leads one way while the moral dues intended by the poet point to another. Because sensuousness is more timeless than moral stande, this element in the verse of Milton and Spenser has strengthened with age.

The young lady, with her impervious chastity, represents the other half of the play's debate. Marshalled on her side are the Eider Brother, the Attendant Spirit, and the moral convictions of John Milton himself. The argument for chastity which these characters present is essentially an argument for the virtue construed in its narrow sense as cellbacy or virginity. Only in the lines about Venus and Adon's and Supid and Esyche which Milton added to the Spirit's epilogue to the printed version of 1637 does he favorably

allude to sexual life of any kind. In 1634 he seems to have been flirting with the idea of celibacy as the only path to virtue; the attitude towards sexuality in marriage which he expresses in the "Hail wedded Love" panegyric in <u>Paradise Lost</u> was still decades away. Thus, when the Elder Brotner delivers his speech praising "saintly chastity" he uses the virginal Diana and Minerva as examples.

According to the Brother, this virtue is so dear to heaven

That when a soul is found sincerely so.

A thousand liveried angels lackey her

Till oft converse with heavenly nabitants

Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape,

The unpolluted temple of the mind,

And turns it by degrees to the source essence,

Till all be made immortal (1.434-454, 458-46.)

Though the boy speaks gradefully, he has been stermly tutures, thoroughly indoctrinated in the austere patristic notion that to free the spirit one must renounce the flesh. And what if he become not renounce the flesh, but "by lest and lavish set of son, betain detilement to the inward parts". Then, the Elder Brother asserts, "the soul grows clotted by corragion" (il 464-466). This image if the once-fluent soul sourly soll diffing reveals at the Military puritanical refinement and him attunement to the senses.

The Lady, who has by now halvely followed into the his palace, behaves once there in a manner for brither would certainly appliant. She refuses Comus's cup or tour, thosing instead to act as the exemplar of "the sun-clad power of chastity," of "the sage and serious doctrine of virginity" (ii) 785-786). When Comus seems to persuade her, she turns a deaf ear to his eloquence. One does not want to hear that

Beauty is nature's coin, must not be hoarded, But must be current, and the good thereof Consists in mutual and partaken bliss, Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself. (11 738-741)

Comus's verbal br.lliance may delight the reader, but it leaves her unmoved and the denate becomes a stalemate. Before Comus has recourse to rape, her two brothers burst in, brandishing swords and a magical herb which the Attendant Spirit has given them. Haemony, whose name combines the Greek words for blood and wine (haims and wine) and thus carries a Christian connotation, is Milton's version of moly. Though a spraggly version of the plant grows on earthen suil, it comes into full golden flower only "in another country," greenmanly the Platonic "orgad fields of the sky" which the Spirit speaks of in the epilogue and from which heavenly grace proceeds. The grain which haeming along recally represents has committed powers. of him protect against enchantments but not undo them. As Comus leap, up to escape from the boys, he points at the Lady with his rod on traduce, her to like all power to act or move. Her brothers are powerless to resche her, perhaps because her paralysis is an accurate representation of her moral position, of the repressive chastity which can preserve her virtue but not her vitality. Her alienation from her own flay is complete.

At this point Milton would seem to have written himself into a thetorical corner. But <u>Comus</u> is a masque, not an academic disputation, and poetry and music accomplish what moral; ilosophy has tailed to do. The Spirit, who earlier has boasted of his Crpheus-like power to "still the wild winds when they roar. And high the waying woods," now demonstrates his musical abilities. At his

delicate and lovely call, Sabrina, the nymph of the river Severn, comes forth. Who could fail to respond to a song such as this?

Sabrina fair
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair,
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save.

Beneath its lyricism and refinement, the song draws upon images of hair and water which are often archetypally associated with fertility and sexual life. Sabrina, even though Milton has been careful to first describe her as "a wrigin pure," represents a type of grace which comes from below, not above.15. Her waters sprinkled on the Lady release the enchantment, bringing her back to the experience of her own body. They also rescue Milton himself from completely rejecting Nature within the allegorical scheme of Compa

The masque ends traditionally, with the presentation of the leading players to the resident powers that be, in this case the parents at Eudlow Castle. The Attendant Spirit problams that the children have been tested and finis steadfast and now are ready

To triumph in victorious dailed Ofer sensual folly, and irremperance (i. 3/3-9/4).

The delicate symbolic resolution which Cabrina brought to the Nature vs. Virginity debate has been juy been forgotten. Multon allows the Spirit to have the last word and the Spirit becrons enticingly to a

¹⁵ The fact that Sabrina comes up rather than down is mechanically as well as symbolically important. It required contraptions much simpler and less costly than those, for instance, in Tempe Restored.

paradise "up in the broad fields of the sky." His message is that you too can follow if you

Love virtue, she alone is free, She can teach ye how to climb Higher than the sphery chime. (11. 1018-1020)

Since the whole conceptual framework of the play suggests that repression is the better part of virtue, this advice is less appealing than it seems. The Spirit's message really is that you too can follow if you deny a large part of your own nature.

When Milton prepared the script of <u>Comus</u> for publication three years after the masque's performance, he may have belatedly wished to find some reconciliation between the forces of nature and repression. He added a passage to the epilogue which locates the Garden of Adonis up in the celestial fields (though, instead of reaping sweet pleasure of each other, as in Spenser, this Adonis recovers from his wounds in slumber while Venus watches sadily over him). Perhaps by then Milton telt the play's noral stance to be too rigid and looked to Spenser, when he regarded as "his brigina." and "a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, "16 for guidance. Spenser's garden, however, is located on eith, its imagining involved an acceptance of human sexual nature. Milton's garden is in some transcendent Neverneverland where babies appear, like Cupid and Psyche's twins, out of their mother's "fair unspotted side."17. The reference to the Garden of Adonis in

¹⁶ Hill, Milton and the English Revolution, p. 59.

¹⁷ In a well known article, "The Action of Comus," E. M. W. Tillyard argues that Milton's belated reference to the Garden of Adonis does provide an effective resolution to the masque's debate. He holds that "the Attendant Spirit by mentioning the Garden of Adonis, the very workshop of nature, gives the solution. This garden

Comus is an adornment which reveals the young Milton's uneasiness about the place of sexuality in his poems or in life.

Thirty-odd years and three marriages later, Milton securely locates his archetypal garden on earth and identifies it as the locus of both pleasure and disaster. In <u>Paradise Lost</u> there is no reversal of the tempter's sex, nor does Milton shy away from imagining an erotically persuasive woman. To what extent does Milton's characterization of this erotic Eve draw upon the allegorical Circe so familiar to his time? The answer is not much--until she bites the apple.

Until the serpent appears in Eden, Milton's Eve is the model patriarchal woman. With little sense of her own power, she has little in common with Homer's goldess, Cvid's queen of lust, or the arch-witch of the Renaissance — Her nativity scene in Book IV very subtly describes how Eve is weared away from self-regard and the desire for self-knowledge.ld Shortly after Eve first wakes to being, she sees her own reflection in a pool. The image she sees pleases her but she is lured away from it by the pronouncements of a disembodied voice which tells her it will lead her to "hee whose image

has all the bounty described by Tomus and all the comeriness and order insisted on by the Lady." See A Maske At Ludlow, p. 53. I believe Tillyaid's argument is very fraqule because it overlooks the location of Milton's garden.

¹⁸ This scene and several coners in <u>Paradise Lost</u> have been very insightfully analyzed by Christine Frould in "When Eve Feads Milton Undoing the Canonical Economy," <u>Critical Inquiry</u>, 16 (1983), 321-347. Much of my discussion of <u>PL</u> is indebted to Frould

thou art."19 She then tells Adam at length about her transformation from newborn innocent to submissive woman:

what could I do, But follow straight, invisibly thus led? Till I espi'd thee, fair indeed and tall, Under a Platan, yet methought less fair, Less winning soft, less ariably mild, Than that smooth wat'ry image: back I turn'd, Thou following crid'st alcud, Return fair Eve, Whom fli'st thou? Whom thou fli'st, of him thou art, His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart Substantial Life, to have thee by my side Henceforth an individual schace dear; Part of my Soul I seek thee, and thee claim My other halt: with that thy gentle hand Seiz'd mine, I yielded, and fior that time see How beauty is excell'd by manly grace And wisdom, which alone is truly fair. (IV.475-491)

Her words reveal how little time Eve has had to exist in herself hefore she is made aware of her ontological debt to Adam; they also reveal that until she is seized by him, albeit by oxymoronic gentle seizare, she prefers her own independent existence. Her submission to him is secondary, it involves a suppression of the first impulse of her nature, which is to be in herself rather than to be someone's "other half." Eve finally yields to the force of Adam's desire for completion, seemingly because of its very force and not because she feels some complementary lack of wholeness in herself. Once she yields she accepts the inferior feminine position which is axiomatic in Milton's poem. She is a quick study; it doesn't take her long to learn appropriate behaviors for the low hierarchical position which is almost as natural to her as irawing breath.

¹⁹ John Milton, <u>Paradise Lost</u>, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1962); IV.472.

Milton's use of the pool image in this passage suggests that Eve's original self-delight is narcissistic and that she does well to leave it behind. The image, however, also has other associations not qued or intended by Milton. Eve gazes at herself in the waters, recalling the waters that the Spirit of God moves over in Genesis 1.2, when darkness is upon the face of the deep. The waters in Generis may well be a remnant of the nearly suppressed feminine, material element in that Creation myth. The Garden of Eden tale war probably derived by the Hebrews from a far more matriarchallyoriented myth of the Sumerians, called "Enki and Ninhursag "20 In the Sumerian story the Great Guddess Ninhursag forgives the eater of a magical plant who mars the trinquility of the paradise she has preated and peace is once more restored. Seen from within this historic but un-Miltonic Context, Eve's gazing at her refle tion in the waters is a communing with much lider, maternal powers. These older powers barely rupple the surface of Milton's epic, which is a lofty and eloquent dramatization of a secondary myth. The myth's secondariness, its insistence up nother Greation of a trade today up of a male one, can be proved absorbed every human restry overestion. Just as Zeus swallows Metis ... rder to give birth to Athena, is Alam also (but rather more vaguely) appropriates for none proceeds we power. In spite of its secondariness-mul, mule accurately, because of it--the Genesis story became the standardata, myths of

²⁰ See Amaury de Piencourt, <u>Sex and Power in Ristory</u> (New York, 1974), p. 37. Merlin Stone's chapter on "Unraveling the Myth of Adam and Eve" in <u>When God Was a Winar also traces</u> and documents the twists which the patriarchal hebrews gave to a much older myth.

patriarchal Western culture. The Biblical judgment pronounced upon Eve, that her desires would be subordinate to her husband's and that he would rule over her, has been echoing for over two millennia.

By the end of the passage about her nativity Milton's Eve internalizes her inferior position, finding Adam's manly grace and wisdom nore attractive than her own beauty. She spares herself much pair, and confinct by doing so. Her self-assessment agrees with Adam's (VIII.540-546), Raphael's (VIII 567-575) and God's (X.145-151) assessments of her relative worth, all of which stress her intellectual interiority and her unfitness to govern. These judgments of Eve as unintelligent are comments on her spiritual nature as well, fir as Baptael says to Alam about the soul, "Reason is its twing" (V.487) and the of the agencies of its ascent. On the ladder of Flatonic into logy which Ruptael describes, intellectual spirits are higher than purely animal thes, which are in turn higher than vegerative nes 21 When Adam complains in VIII.551-552 that Mall higher knowledge in (Eve's) presence falls degraded" he is not just tem and the lack of intellectual companionship, ne is also implying-assuming he has learned from Fajhael's discourse--that Eve is the dragging anch : to spiritual ascent Clearly the Platonic Christianity upor which Milton pased Faradise Lost oculonot accommodate Eve's uriginal self-delight. And so it goes underground in her character, repressed beneath her internalized sense of inferiority

²¹ frem as he describes the possibility of men eventually becoming angels as their bodies "up to spirit work," Raphael very beautifully uses a metaphor drawn from the lowly, vegetable world to describe this ascension and unfillding, V.479-490.

until the serpent's flattery and her own desire for knowledge and power draw it out.

Milton's insistence on male authority, on the proper male role as being "Guide and Head" of the woman, goes all the way back to St Paul and was ratified by every institution within his own seventeenth century culture. Under the common law of England at the access: n : James I, women were nonentities; one hundred years later their legal situation remained exactly the same 22. Upon marriage, a woman's right to own property abruptly deased; as the Lawes Resclutions, printed in 1632, succinctly put it, "That which the husband hath is his own. That which the wife hath is the hustand's "2" Although literacy rates for both sexes went in in England during the seventeenth century (due to the importance Bentaryana piarea upon milimoreading), female equation beyon having interacy at maily terimed compared to Elizareth's reign - Birls were to I ager aimitted to the handful of grammar soncers which had hee reserved them, and the few acmen who aid manage to grow up learned during Milt of , time or metimes found themselves octrhed to their attainments .4 Gazy the Quakers and Gertard Winstanley of the Ligger frozialmenthe equality

²² Antonia Fraser, The Weaker Vesser (New form, 1984), pp 1, 465. Gordon Schochet, in Patriarchalism in Political In aght, points out how authoritarian, patriarchal family structures in seventhenth-century England reinforced authoritarian political attitudes

²³ Quoted by Fraser in The Weaker Mease., p ...

²⁴ Fraser, The Weaker Vesimi, pp. 137, 120-17. Fraser quites Anne Bradstreet's 1643 comment in the decline is respect for tenale intelligence after the death of Elizabeth.

Let such as say our Dex .e rold of Heasin, Know fits slander now, but times was Treason.

of women in seventeenth-century England. Milton's liberalism, his defense of resistance to tyranny, did not extend to countenance resistance to domestic tyranny, nor did his advocacy of educational reforms extend to include those benefitting the female sex.25. Ahead of his time in his views on many issues, Milton remained very much of it regarding sexual politics.

The submissive, un-Circe-like Eve of the earlier books of faradise Lost is, in many ways, an undentably alluring creature. She enters the pier veiled in her (wn golden tresses, which fall

Dishevel.'d, but in wanton ringlets wav'd As the Vine ourls her tendrils, which implifd outjection, but requir'd with gentle sway, And by her yielded, by him rest receiv'd, Yielde's with only submission, modest pride, And sweet reluctant amorphs delay (IV 306-311)

remains about at as Sabrina's but freer, as befits one expercenced en us: to be the mother of us all. Multon emphasizes her
dexuality is mother very first, but also emphasizes that her behavior
is compliant, to magnessive. The choice of the adjective "wanton"
to describe feet singlets Multis repeats at least twice in his
describe feet singlets Multis repeats at least twice in his
describe feet singlets Multis repeats at least twice in his
describe feet singlets Multis repeats at least twice in his
described from the plant life to the garden (IV.629, V.295),
subjecting from the magnes the woman and the vegetation in a
constantly substitute way. The adjective also suggests a propensity to
do not of central, as the garden does when untended. As long as Eve
remains under Adam's authority, towever, Milton describes their love
in the most glowing of terms. "Imparadis't in one another's arms,"

²⁵ Christopher Hill, in <u>Milton and the English Revolution</u>, and A N Wilson, in <u>The Life of John Milton</u>, both report that Milton sometimes used the proverb "One tongue is enough for any woman."

Their wedded love is "founded in Reason" and the source of all "relations dear" (IV 755-757). Nevertheless, Raphael finds it necessary to instruct Adam about the difference between true love (which "is the scale by which to heavinly Love thou may'st ascend") and carnal pleasure (which causes a sinking or descent). The Great Chair, of Being rathles even in their bower.

Eve's tasting of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge upsets the proper hierarchical relationship but only between dual and humanking, but also between man and woman and between reason and appetite within numan nature. Eve's plucking of the apple gives her the power that alter the order of Greation are cranditing terretemp family—first a patriarchal soman to a Direct transforms terretemp family—first a patriarchal soman to a Direct transforms for the serpent regins speaking with Eve, Micholand and Linear transforms for the serpent approaching the light rustling leaves, but pair to attent of, for one was a significant for castling leaves, but pair to attent on, for one was a significant for the series of the s

To such disport before her through the Field, From every Beast, more rule us at her call, Than at Circean call the meri megals's a (IX tion),

The reference is invalous to risk in in no way in the contract to the serpent, but it does in with a contract Military and it has in the poem's composition

When the serpent regins of earling, he distress to Eve with the contact titles once reserved for Irania or Isla on Alteria of Ephesia.

"Sovian Mistress," he calls her, "Queer of this Universe"

"Empress of this fair world." In appeals to the woman who wonders at

her image in the pool, who feels the affinity between her own tounteousness and the garden's, who is aware of the effect her beauty has on Adam to the creature whose existential reality (merely hinted at my Milton) has been masked by her position in a hierarchy. Eve's haste of the fruit seals her connection with the snake and the tree-both totems of the goddess in ancient Cretan and Near Eastern art, frough Milton could not have known that—and brings her into a sense inher own power. A heightened, aggressive sexuality is a large part of this power, her eyes dart "contagious fire" which Adam cannot resist. She becomes like Apolionius' Circe, like one of the children in the Sun whose lineage tells in the rays of golden light flashing fire their eyes.

At his orders, moment of decision, Adam behaves far more like for our Alini, whose lives have meaning only in the presence of the fell veriform. Then like the more plous Aereas, who unhesitatingly realizes to absolute the beloves woman so that he may remain obedient the gois. In <u>Faradise lost</u> the fall into Original Din is a fall of patriarchal hierarchies and back into the ethos of a time when transcendent delty rules over the immanent force of Nature. "I feel the link of Nature draw me," Adam avows to Eve.

Flesh if Flesh

Bone of my Bune thou art, and from thy State

Mine never shall be parted, bliss or wce. (IX.913-916)

Adam's words very beautifully speak for union, rather than for the gradutions so important to the plem's Flatonically-influenced inhebital structure. The knowledge which he and Eve gain from the fruit of the Tree is, at first, a heightened knowledge of desire.

Who could have imagined that the young poet of <u>Comus</u>, so intent on telling his characters and his audience how they might learn to sport in the broad fields of the sky, would one day write the most famous lines in English poetry in favor of earthly, sexual love?

By the time Adam and Eve awaken from their lovemaking following the Fall, however, Milton has reimposed in all their strength the hierarchies which he seemed temp rankly to suspend. Henceforth Adam and Eve cannot innocently submerge themselves in passion, their guilty self-consciousness signals the supremacy of mind over tody even when they choose to opey the dictates of their hodies. Milton as narrator keenly describes true war between consciousness and physical nature, in which high passions sorely shake Adam and Eve's

inward State of Mini, calm Region once And full of Peace, now too 'man's turbulent For Understanding rul'door, and the Willheard not her lore, both in subjection now To sensual Appetite, who is m beneath. Usurping over sovran Peasin plain'd Superior sway. (IX.1125-1.31)

It is an old, old story, this tale of sensual appetite iming from reneath to overcome <u>sovereigh</u> reason, and it expresses, I believe, the nearly universal human uneadiness at the fact that onsilouness, with all its possibilities, flowers from nature and it subject to codily imperatives and constraints on hot since nomer's time, when the seat of intelligence was believed to be incoded somewhere in the chest, has Western builture been able to accept invalibuences rathered effactly as a function of payroal design out a theory, when, over Eve, like Carbe, have often been regarded as the enemies of what is most precious and distinctive in numer nature. Mutter's heel in his

own terms, represents the power of the low over the high; herself "th' inferior, in the mind and inward Faculties" (VIII.540-541), she embodies the downward pull towards mortality, sexuality, earth.

In Adam's temptation scene Milton expresses the power of this pull as eloquently as it has ever been expressed. He is not like the homeric allegarists who sweep half a myth and all its human drama out itters truly interpretations so that Odysseus, representing the radiance of Lopisor Reason, may remain untarnished by Circe's dark temale powers. Adam engages with Eve as fully as Odysseus engages with liste, it's she has the power only to make him lose his home, not help him find it again. That power belongs to Milton's Christ, who, my extending his gifts of grace from on high, holds out the process if an everyll, transpersent home. Unfortunately, death is

M... i'r intemporary Calderf, was much more directly fascinated by the implications of the Nr. mytr. Two of his plays based on the story survive in mayor endage, and i, a fiesta written relatively early in his career, in 163t, and Los endantes he la Culpa, a sacramental auto written summtime after Calderón took orders as a priest in 1650 1. The first, sepular play illustrates nothing so

²⁶ The penitent, well-instricted Adam refers to death as "the Gate of Life" in XII 571

²⁷ The English titles of the plays are <u>Love, the Greatest</u> <u>E. chantment</u> and <u>The Sorceries of Sin</u>. All quotations will be taken the Love the Greatest Enchantment, The Sorceries of Sin, The levition of the Cross, trans. Tenis MacCarthy (London, 1861), the plays will hereafter be cited as <u>LGE</u> or <u>SS</u>.

much as Calderon's opulent sense of the Baroque and his wide acquaintance with ancient and Renaissance literature; the allegorical <u>auto</u>, however, uses the tenets of a conservative Christianity to probe human nature acutely and dramatize its deficiencies. Calderon's <u>auto</u> is more extreme than other allegorical interpretations of the Circe myth but more enlightening for rust this reason, it does not stop short of dramatizing the tale as an ideological struggle between the forces of life and death

Before he matured as an artistic defender of the Counter-Reformation, Calderin served a lengthy stint as court playwright for Philip IV, responsible for priviling suphisticated entertainments. Ilberally financed by the royal treasury with Inda golistical Kite staging of his creations, Calderin was in a positive India Theological to doubt have court entertained, what theatries doorward the court of the Stuarts would have dared to command the rulling of a island, complete with parapets and waterfall and a stall, peaked mountain, in the midst of a royal lakel. Gust was the detail to many encants, whose audience gathered in a June evening as indicate the illuminated point of the Pien Return place hear Madrid P. In many ways Calderin's account of the relationship retweet our early Stroke follows homer closely, but he transforms her original Points and Stroke Rabian Nights.

This Circe is a formulable combination of ergin or and combined turns beauty, fully capable of nationaging Digoses in every way. The boasts of her mastery of both the liberal arts and the kin comes

²⁸ MacCarthy, "Introduction" to LOE, pp 5-5

Like Owid's lustful sprocess, she can summon mists, earthquakes and lightning at will, like Ariosto's Aldina, she can change spurned lovers not just to animals, but also to plants and trees. However, when Clysses proves immune to her potion (because he carries a fouquet of magical flowers given to him by Iris, who plays Hermes) and draws his sword, she immediately falls at his feet and offers to retransform his men. Then follows an interlude of mutual courtliness and of nutual struggle with the conflicting interior voices of love are price. Calderin's most original contribution to the myth in this play is his depletion of how Clide and Odysseus mirror each other. Since both are arrogantly aware of their sexual and intellectual powers, they are a good match for each other. And both eventually civier for their price to their passion.

The relative of Calderfr's plit in <u>B. payor encanto</u> is more: In the relative of Calderfr's plit in <u>B. payor encanto</u> is more: In the relative of the Unitary of a relative the more subtle interior conflict between pride and the As in the Ogyssey, Unyspec' men remind him of his obligation relative their follows. Cust as Tasso's Carlo and Ubaldo plank a suit of armit to summer the specificand Pinaldo to his martial duty, where Unyspec' men blow trumpers and platter Achilles' weapons to so k their leader at of his se sual bream. They underestimate finds attractions of taken the dire, threatening ghost of Achilles himself to send Ulyases on his way. Once he moves, he moves quickly, telling his men that

tilght today
Is an act as prave as prudert,
Since the sorcerier of love
He alone who flies, subdueth (LGE, pp. 134-135)

Calderon's Ulysses does what Virgil's more upright Aeneas may well have longed to do: sneak away from the seductive woman without any final scene of farewell. Circe, no longer valuing her powers since she knows the greatest of them is love--and love has failed hermonsumes her own palace in flames and goes down with it. She ends her life as Dido does. Whateve, sympathetic understanding Calderon has previously extended to her is now irrevocably withdrawn. The stereotypical conflict between I we and duty with which the play concludes can be described in more archetypal terms as that between a male whose sense of identity ultimately depends upon coursely and conquest, on exploits performed away from the secure center, and a female whose identity lies (as the infather surpribe) to discover) at that denter. "This effortivity lies (as the infather surpribe) to discover) at that denter. "This effortivity lies (in the lamb to her hand to he had that from any stronge clysoes into a time.

proximately equal rate and female forces tasted for as least two decades. In <u>los encantos de la Tulpa</u>, a frama if greater unity and depth, he recasts the confinct of traditional Photogram, terms which during the Torpus Christianal aut of Los encantos aut of Los encantos de la Tulpa, a frama if greater unity and depth, he recasts the confinct of traditional Photogram, terms which during the Torpus Christianal of the section of the secretary automates and are the nuclearist. If the demonstrate the value of the secretarist in this case the nuclearist. If it is an Everyman play, with Tryuses running remained "The Mar" (h. Homore) and Circle reconsistences "Sir" (La Dunga) of more dues and feeds as a character on the stage what the similation and feeds as a faculty of

the soul.29 Circe here represents much more than just sexual lust; she is a figure for all the earthly delights which, Calderon believes, cause human beings to turn away from the love of God towards an idolatrous lust for life.

Many of the play's scenes correspond to those in El mayor encanto, amor and follow Homer in pattern, if not in meaning. Los engantog opens with a terrific sea storm. The Man's ship, piloted by ris Understanding (E. Entendimiento) and crewed by his Five Senses, tarely makes it to harbor at Circle's island. No sooner are they there than the impetious senses, traveling ahead of the Man (who has fallen asleep), tecome enslaved. The Hearing, entited by Sin's handmaid Plattery, is turned into a chameleon. Smell, by Calumny, 100 a blen. Taste, by Glutt my, into a pig: Touch into a pear, by Is dividuancess, and Sight into I tider, by Envy Even Understanding finds in difficult to resist the assaults of Pride with her poisoned may be alsyling the rule of the wary Eurylophos, Understanding comes tack to report the extent of the disaster to Clysses. He describes Clice as "most beautiful," as speaking in a voice that is "softly thank, yielding swift to pity's law" (SS, p. 169); yet he recognizes her as "Sin, that flerge and fel. Monster full of ravening rage." Her attractiveness, in Calderbr's allegorical scheme of things, is proof of her loathsomeness. She can be delicate and radiant as Dawn (a meetupher later used repeatedly to describe her) and still be really

²⁹ J. Richards LeVan, "Theme and Metaphor in the <u>Auto Historial</u>: Calderon's <u>Los encantos de la Culpa</u>" in <u>Approaches to the Theater of Calderon</u>, ed Michael D. McGaha (Washington, D.C., 1982), p. 191.

In this play Iris with her saving flowers is identified as Penance. She appears when the Man, on his way to Circe's palace, prays for forgiveness for his failure to supervise his own senses. The bouquet she drops is "all dappled o'er with virtues from the life-blood of a lamb" (SS, p. 175). It protects Ulysses from Circe's brew, but not from her personal attractiveness. One by one he drops the flowers as he succumbs to her seductions. Her allure is by no means purely physical, for she promises to share with him the full, heady range of her powers.

Thou wilt see my deep researches, -Thou my wonders *ilt examine.
All the secrets of my science
Will be bared to give thee answer (SS, p. 184)

These enticements, complemented by her "raptures, ravishments, estrancements, pleasures, plisses, fundest favors," quite overcome the curious Greek. The two sit down at a sumptuous table which has miraculously appeared in Sim's garden of earthly delights

At this point Understanding and Penance Leenter and the drama intensifies to a crescendo of counterpoint. Music, who is Circle's most seductive servant, continually advises the Man.

On' forget that thus must see!
And but think that thou sust live!

while Understanding and Penance repeatedly counter

Ch! forget that thou dost . ve!
And remember thou rust die! (SS, p. 194)

In this most rasic of contests, it is the fear of death which finally wins. As the Man repents of his pleasure-seeking lust for life, the lavish foods on the table disappear into thin air and are replaced by the plain, substantial bread of the Eucharist--which alone, according

The horceries of Sin is the last allegorical interpretation of the Circe myth that I know of, and also the most intense and inclusive. Like the ancient Stoics' Circe, Calderón's has the power to subvert the faculty of reason in human nature, for "man by sinning/ Is transmuted to a brute . ./ In whose soul no reason dwells" (SS, p. 170) — Like the Circe of Porphyry and the Neo-Platonists, his Sin is the goddess of this world, presiding over a realm of appearances wastly inferior in value to an itherworldly domain of Reality. And like the Ever: Jude:-Christian myth and of Milton, she has the power and diffect humanity from God and from its true, transcendent home.

Calderon's allegory, unlike many of Spenser's, is flawlessly consistent and can be attacked unly by those who stand outside its assumptions. The chief of these assumptions is that natural life has no value per se, but only as preparation for participation in an inequalidly Fingdom of God to which the doctrines and sacraments of the Church offer the only routes. Calderin is heaven-bent on rejecting the intrinsic value of earthly, bodily existence. He reconciled Christianity and Flato by devaluing the ordinary human appetite for life 30. In his meraphysical scheme of things, the human

³⁰ Manuel Duran, in "Towards a Psychological Profile of Pedro Calderon de la Barca," prohes the playwright's attitudes rowards authority and his despair about earthly life. He believes that "Calderon's plays reconcile Flate and the New Testament to an extent that is. . . much more complete and meaningful than any attempt by Frasmus, Fico della Mirandola, and the numerous Renalasance scholars who attempted that task." See Approaches to the Theater of Talderon,

fear of death is the most valuable trait in our psyches, for it acts as a spur to piety.

To anyone r t sharing Calderon's conservative brand of Christianity, his identification of life with death and death with life is a delusion perpetrated by sleight-of-faith. I find Freud's comments on religion in <u>Civilization and Its Discontents</u> particularly applicable to Calderon's authoritarian faith:

Religion. . . imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner-which presupposes at intimidation of the intelligence. At this price, by forcitivy fixing them in a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a missedelusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But thardly anything mire st

freshed's terms, the prokes by the tage at the square, the here is they were entertained they were being the square the first had a experience of their senses in favor of an ideology which severely opposite their highly the pleasure principle. It is hardly surprising that Calderin's plays, and particularly his <u>autos</u>, have failer, but of favor or the respinal twentieth century. 32

In his thoroughgoing rejection of rational life and of the

p. 27

³¹ Sigmund Freud, <u>Civilization</u> and Its Lib press on The <u>Standard Edition of the Complete Payorul gioal Worrs of Agrand Freud, trans James Strainey, XXI (London, 1961), p. 84</u>

³² Bruce W. Warpropper, in "The Standing of Calier?" in the Twentieth Century," remarks hat "Calier&" is unpopular of they among Spanish scholars but also among Spanish breative writers and intellectuals"; Approaches to the Theater of Calder&n, 1 2

authority of the senses. Calderin is much more extreme than Milton, but in his casting of Woman as the primary impediment to spiritual ascent he is identical. He can afford, paradoxically, to create the most attractive Directione Homen's. Sin is passionate, generous, intelligent, and imbued with a treshness and beauty metaphorically associated with wildflowers, primising and dawn. She is in every way (except eschatologically) a fitting mate for the willy and curious lysses, for she represents eartily life at its best. By deliberately making his line as attraction, the master playwright of the uniter-hefogration emphability, the master playwright of the uniter-hefogration emphability is strength of the faith whom is at left reject here are also has is back to this archetype all of its an left powers. Calderin's Direct is gradess of this world, respicies and left healty and danger.

Chapter Eight: Midern Nices

The less eschatiligically- riented cultural chimate of England never produced an unterpretation of the Carce myth as extreme an Calderon's. In fact, in Englard mythologish was shortly to quote of style. Awed by Newton's mathematically-demonstrate: Fleatial mechanics and by the powers of toman reason to which the may many of such mechanics attested, English Intellectual, It lamies Jims its generation had little use for all obegive, ryth please to begin and tended to regard the accumulated her hape of myth memory as a collection of traine and pretty of home, surface for second of the walls of elegant country to use to the control of the property of the first on these age rold of ries foring the wroter in first or the contract porary play about llyssed. "We have been too early a qualified with the poetical fernes to expect a griple are from their felling to show them as they have already freehold who is to do not him to find the second tunns to give them new qualities or rower lies from some the confidence Villating received notion: "...

This mid-eighteenth dentur, Flow it myrris and leaful is exhausted system which had no believable to the purity with war and to he ably distanced by Plake and Later - main. The blaze went of the create his own system of myth, resturing to be a livery young in

¹ Quited by W. B. Starform in the Gaysage Trans (at rd, 1961), p. 11

regarded as the "single vision" of the rationalists. Shelley, Keats and many of their contemporaries found the cld Greek myths still imaginatively stimulating and expressive of human truth. Like withsts of any other era, nineteenth-century writers and painters trought their own issues and feelings to their reworkings of myth.

As a result, the arcretypal image of the dark, dangerous woman proliterates in ineteenth-senting interative and insular and 2 Ferme tarales with an ismual beliefan, Judith, Calore, and Feats's Belie dare land Merch extressed the edding rexual half of the glodge...

I darkation into which fineteenth dentury culture forces when openied framelesss and Britonart-Padigund partings were, in a dense, projection, for trey prefigures the kind of qualistic sujection, go is men which returns tablear in English-opeaking cultures the number journ later. For every chaste, subservent and splittually radiant Augel of the scuse (or nousehold Num, as Branch ratia calls the interestype), shall figures of ministrous devictions when existed in imagination of rother reality and course Such

[.] Firsteatherts of this image in sineteenth-century British and a American interactive see Candra M. Silbert and Susan Gubar, The Mine man in the Affic offe Woman Writer and the bineteerth Century Diferary Imagination (New York, 1979); Elizabeth Hardwick, Seduction and Betrayal (New York, 1974), and Leslie Fledler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1966). For a thorough discussion of the image in fin-de-siècle visual art and literature, see Bran Lijkstra's Laus of Ferversity (New York, 1986).

³ In the Clice chapter it <u>livases</u> Joyce makes blear flow these two sterectypes reflect and depend if or each other. Bella-Bello, the threatening, aggressive man-womal, disappears only when the pure tymph springs to life out of the engraving hanging above Bloom's bed

At least one fineteenth-dertury woman, Chailonte Bronte, was cutspokenly aware that these polarized sterentypes had rothing to do with the real nature of women. The protagonist of her novel <u>Shirley</u> explains that "the pleverest, the abutest men are often under an

polarization reflects an extreme discumfort with sexuality. It was as if the spirit-body qualism which had permeated Western culture from Plato's time onward, and in which the female sex had generally been assigned the part of the body, were now cast on a slightly different way. In this imperiods and increaging patriarchal century, women were permitted to represent aprint if they were sufficiently amenable to male regeminy.

One would expect Circe to be a popular figure in such a climate of thought. Several well known caunters of the time, including Arthur macker in England and I also Chilo in France, produced canvases deplotling her powers of Increaker's "one emails of any increase in the england site of programmer in the role of the first term in a term of the predictive and area areas in the site of the england area grants around their increases which there examples of the england of

There is a pure the relation of the second o

A One of them not inherwise mentioned here was the English painter John William Waterhouse, who criduces a ruge canvas entire a "Circe Poisining the Sea " It was based in ovids legens is Circe's transformation of Soylla | See Patrick Base, Femre Fitgle (New York, 1979), plate 5



"Circe," painting by Atthur Hacker, 1893

Pictures volume of 1893, when the painting was first exhibited, was impressed and taken in by its overt moral message. He believed Hacker had "sought to accentuate the degradation of bestrality and sensual depravity, the depth of which is clearly sounded by the indifference of the human beings to the horizble change which is taking place around them "" books Chaush's painting (Figure 13), which was exhibited in the circuit laber, has in entirely different visual impact, fre which is retitiedent of the into graphy of any pengoodess art. Thalon's stylizer line sits on a throng transer by wichs, before a blazzing elemental bundoner night aim is disabled in solute, as it lemanding timage to tempowers. A few texts the normal-looking pigs it. In the lark to begin up body, we havely remanders of her identity, but him whomerfuleye restriction from a conin alterthought. This Direct is fiver employees, it is given by a physical purtrait if her suggests that the organization her myth which is we impressed him was her besse total months and tast outselver many allegorical interpretations of the barroing is terminary to the power i the Curbe myst, in indra which master, the track the contract of and the fruenciaway contured in the continuing interpretation

Two wither articles to the total 1, Allee like (alley in the conliar ted Applet, all or submodel of an incomplete for an incomplete for an incomplete for an incomplete formal at my ner in a, will, winders model or in a
Applet's dangerously pretty line was, inthingly, useless, new torse
likestrations for a new edition of restors premate Newtons of train
images suggests any reassections is positive transformation of the

⁵ Quoted by Dijkorra in 12 13 of respendity, p. 321



Figure 23 "Time," painting by Iculs Chalon, 18**6**8

1

concept of the feminine promulgated by the fin-de-siècle male establishment. The Circes of these temale artists seem merely revenge-minded ferme fatales.

Curiously, I have not been able to find any figure named Circe in nineteenth century English in American literature. Although a cultural climate which severely polarized the feminine would seem ripe to receive her, she seems to have appeared only to visual artists, not to writers. I have no hypothesis to explain this literary absence.

When Circe re-emerges in literature, in the epis destitution in James Joyce's <u>Clysses</u> and as the narratur of Margaret Atw. 44's cycle of "Circe Mud Poems" published in 1974, she has been imaginatively transformed. Both Joyce and Atwo i question many if the premises upon which Western call re, in historical times, has been called that made is more important than female, that order and reason are distinct from and superior to body, that woo all order necessitates riemarchy—even theratory forology imposed—and that civilization has been a steady mann of progress. Their our endance still formidative tightes, but, a linge to so when are under with them represent a step in the process is waking in in the what degree Cedalus, in one of his oust many fraction is included to endance in his oust many fraction in formidative, in one of his oust many fraction in formidative, in one of his oust many fraction in formidative, in the line is the process.

It would make little services laboure by ensile or contacted in

f James Juyce, <u>Duysses</u> marmor deworth, useb), p. 10, the exact quite is "mist by is a high-marm from which I amorphise to aware."

Clyanes without first discussing the prientation of his epic novel as a whole - Joyce's choice of Leopold Bloom, the incommonly decent common man, as his Ulysses says much about the moral understructure of his work. How ironic that this novel, whose here--in an unprepossessing way-haritually behaves here charitably towards the other numer beings he end unters than any other hero of modern flotion who springs to ming, should have text dersored as morally decadent on r th sijes of the Atlantic - coyce rever idealizes Bicom and insists throughout of the hero's sometimes messy and ridiculous humanity, but there has be little doubt that he intended him to be exemplary. When I you first mentioned his epic work in progress to his friend Frank budger, he stressed that he pursidered his Ulysses to be both a mpuete mal and a good one in Indeed, onyce seems to have neen affiliated to the liteauf writing a modern Chyasey because he considere: Diyaseus to be the only ocmplete hero in literature, as well as "the first gentleman in Europe "8

They are both to Jews of the Diasporar-and the war derings of first are seen in relation to a fixed center rocupied by a lived which more seen in relation to a fixed center rocupied by a lived which more observed by roth display an attunement to the feminine which more observed by locally masculine nerces such as Admilles of Aeneas Tack. In the Circle episide Bloom undergoes a

Frank Budgen, James J with article Making of Ulysses (alomington, 1960), p. 17 $^{\circ}$

 $[\]kappa$ Budger, p. 17. Grybe thoush Cdysseus's delicate behavior with Nausicaa earned him tris title

In both Diyssels and bloom, this emitional gensitivity where the connected with value ratifity and with a lapsoity to crack some liners poem's first lines. There in roduces his formal to a taking experienced many woes, and to derive this very name from a very manning. The grieve "9 Cdyssels's literary as furthern reconnected with the long gash on his thigh made by a flar's tupy when the war an abolest cent 10. This near-wound to his menerativity is different formationly by Bloom, who has been given. In sense, by death, to be the alreed impotent with Molly since the death of their infant or enever year earlier. Bloom's conditional insteaded is, to by an extensity of the novel, in seems of the only an extensity of the novel, in seems of the only an extensity of the novel, in seems of the only an extensity of the novel, in seems of the only an extensity of the novel, in seems of the only an extensity of the novel.

⁹ W B Stanfird, "% top" to the agageg, 11, 42

If The star fith this wour i endowes his out mailberound Eurycleia to identify him when he has returned to Inha our reggar's disguise and she is bathing his feet. The work also owner to Clysseus with his grandfather, who have him of IT was the cived when the two were northing in the outputs.

and by a perhaps unconscious desire to avoid the further biological fatherhood which would expose him anew to the possibility of such a loss. This impitence exposes Bluom to the masochistic elements in his lawn nature. It also connects him with a long tradition of mythic heries, including Alonis. Attis and the Fisher King, who suffer wounds to their generativity. Type may well have intended Bloom to be been as part of this tradition.

Atthough Coyse could hardly be more aware of the valnerability is male sexuality, he does not endorse the standard allegorical point in triaming when for this valnerability. Bloom lives with the order causes of this payons wound every day, powerless to heal more little courageous enough not to plane anyone else for his pain. In his reliabal to trialize in the phychic relief of projecting angerman is viewery More as a witch with has somehow unmanned num-mBloom as much the self-mustor and daysomes when he keeps his with and his self-pissessin through one danger, as situation after another.

The ways in which I you by the thinake Bloom unlike Daysseus also conditioned a treat deal about the values on which the novel rests.

Most by and, Broom is a kind the speaks in his councils, he has a servally, to lask, a gradeus to presidently watch over him.

Instant which whim in the following trunk to the buttoner shop, the provide with the public batts, a round in which he moves as one numan arom among there in the owner in a great city. Only in fantasy, during the paythic datharase if the Circe chapter, does Bloom bruefly diminate his fell wimen-minst a lord Mayor of Dublin and then as the root accounted (and larer billowed) lespoin the First. But even as a

dominator, at the top of the political heap, Bloom shows himself to be concerned with the bettermer; of his kind. In the new Bloomusalem he proclaims that "free money, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state" will be available to all (p. 462). Social and political hierarchies exist in <u>Ulysses</u>, but they are hardly condoned by Joyce and they certainly are not belstered by the position of any of his central characters.

Similarly, Joyce stripped away Edysseus's dometimes included and sometimes restrained prodivity for violence when he refashioned the here as Bloom. Although the <u>Cayssey</u> is a poem of relationship and by no means a paean to might, the rapacity to idminate through force is an integral part of Caysseus's hereic character. Before he learned, through Circe's tutelage and his own ritter experience, the limits of military prowess, Caysseus is not above sanctioning episodes of mass destruction like the sack of Icharus. Ismaris has no parallel in Bloom's adventures. Nor is the way Caysseus initially the most different and less confident in an massenistic and less confident in an

Bloom's remandation of interpretation of contract part of the character, and it is based to the part of interpretation of the contract of the care-spirited matrator and to the wemoproble and anti-semition of them. Where the others seem to be awed by what happens at "the black or end of a gun," Bloom sees that kind of power as if "no use " "Force, hatred, history, all that," he tells them and us, is "not like for men and women.

And everypody knows that it's the very opposite if that

"Love . . . I mean the opposite of hatred" (p. 331). His vision of history as a saga of hatred and domination dovetails with Stephen's earlier statement that "history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." Bloom's defense of love causes the brutes in the pub to mock him and question his masculinity, but it stands out as one of the clear acts of courage in the novel. In this episode Joyce is, I believe, questioning the norms of heroism and maleness which have prevailed for centuries. Both he and Bloom recognize that a history based on destruction and domination is not worth prolonging.

It is important to know and remember that Joyce considers Bloom the complete and good man, because otherwise we as readers can easily lose our bearings in the relativistic world of <u>Ulysses</u>. As a result of Joyce's ingenious and varied techniques of narration, we see both Bloom and Stephen from many points of view. Joyce himself is Proteus, transforming his voice and vision from the sniping of the anonymous narrator of "Cyclops" to the pulp romanticism of Gerty McDowell to the river roll of Molly. Each of these and other narrators communicates a piece of the truth, but we would be foolish to accept any single narrative voice in the novel as the bearer of the final truth about the characters. Relativity—and the questioning, anti-authoritarian stance that relativity implies—are built into the very structure of Ulysses.

Often the multiple narrational voices have the effect of complementing each other. In chapter after chapter we see Bloom's moral excellence and Stephen's intellectual excellence displayed, even though the narrator (the Thersites-like character, for example) may not appreciate what is displayed. Also in chapter after chapter, in fantasy if not in fact, we see an abundance of sexual behavior.

Sexuality is one of the few givens in Joyce's relativistic world.

It is appropriate, therefore, that the climax of the novel takes place in a brothel. The Circe chapter, set in and on the streets outside of Bella Cohen's establishment in Nighttown, is the most important of all to the plot, for in it Bloom and Stephen find each other. Bloom's loss of a son is assuaged in this and the following chapters, for a few hours at least, by his caretaking of Stephen. And Stephen's need for a spiritual father who will take his wellbeing to heart and who will model a more complete humanity is met briefly by Bloom. The first moment of union between them takes place inside the brothel when they look into the hall mirror, surrounded by a hatrack, and jointly see the face of the antlered, cuckolded Shakespeare who has figured in Stephen's theories but who is more appropriate to Bloom's experience.

This moment of shared vision is not discussed by Bloom and Stephen, so it is hardly a moment of communion. Only we as readers, we as audience for the dramatic script which is the Circe chapter, know about it. "Circe," as a surreal play within a novel, is artifice compounded and at two or three removes from verisimilitude. Joyce's choice of the dramatic format for the chapter has the effect of giving him as playwright-director even greater freedoms than those he has assumed in previous parts of the novel. No longer is he content with the dazzling, Protean changes of voice and perspective

which have accounted for much of the complexity and richness of Ulysses up to this point. Now he tampers with the very givens of existence. Axiom One: language is a human prerogative, not accessible to inanimate objects. In "Circe" a button, a cake of soap or whatever else Joyce wills to speak, speaks. Axiom Two: human beings are doomed to carry their identities, somewhat shaped and battered by experience, from birth to grave. In "Circe" male can become female, human can become flying insect, the dead can rebecome the quick.

Axiom Three: items from one character's exclusive personal experience are not accessible to the memory of another. "Circe" functions as the memory-bank of the novel, wherein details of thoughts or events which occurred to one character can and do pop up in the speech or vision of another. Bloom's beholding of the antlered Shakespeare of Stephen's fullblown theory is a case in point.

Joyce himself is the Circe of "Circe." As writer-director he pre-empts the maga's magic, her ability to change given forms at will. As on Aiaia, in "Circe" anything can happen, and the episode's atmosphere of vaudeville tinged with terror results from this fact. In this chapter Joyce, as Robert Newman has remarked, "seeks to dissolve distinctions by collapsing Ulysses into a memory where the laws of intellect are no longer operative... the network of connections within Ulysses grows and becomes increasingly elaborate until we realize that everything somehow connects with everything else."11 It would be foolish to regard Joyce's nominal Circe, Bella

¹¹ Newman, "The Left-Handed Path of Circe" in the <u>James Joyce</u> Quarterly, 23 (1986), 226.

Cohen, as the figure who presides over this vast network of possibility. She is merely one character in a script with others, on a par with Bloom, Stephen, and the dubiously young women who work for her.

As the magus, Joyce pulls fantasies from his characters' unconscious like rabbits from a hat. They are complete, surprising, suddenly there in all their fullness. Bloom's psyche provides most of the content for these fantastical dramas, and yet Bloom himself-the chief actor within them--does not seem to be aware that they are taking place. The nineteen pages (455-468) during which Bloom progresses from Lord Mayor to Martyrdom fit neatly between two of Zoe's sentences as she goes on talking to him.12 Bloom would need an unconscious which worked at the speed of light in order to call up all these dynamic images within the requisite flash of time. And in order to learn from these elaborate masquerades, to profit from the psychic release which is taking place, he would seemingly have to be conscious of what is happening. Joyce as authorial wizard is doing nothing less than suspending the laws of psychodynamics which had been recently pioneered by Freud and Jung. Or rather, he is bringing to bear on these laws the Everyman concept, the literary trope in which one man's experience can stand for all of humanity's and all of humanity's can become relevant to that one man's. As already noted in the instance of Bloom's and Stephen's looking into the mirror and jointly seeing Shakespeare, in "Circe" individual experiential

¹² This clarifying observation regarding space, time and text is Hugh Kenner's in <u>Ulysses</u> (London, 1980), p. 120.

boundaries do not necessarily hold. Nor, in Bloom's case, is it necessary for a character to be conscious of the psychic release which is taking place in order for him to be freed by it. But more about that later.

Within the "anything goes" atmosphere of "Circe" the rigid proprieties of Irish Catholic culture regarding sexuality are predictably demolished to rubble. On Mecklenburg Street maidenheads go for ten shillings each (p. 433), one commodity among others in a nightmare world which exposes all that has been hidden or repressed. In "Circe" characters' sexual feelings and fantasies are objectified, set out on the stage of the reader's mind to be seen for what they are. These feelings, Joyce believed, provide common human ground. About the time that he first began composing <u>Ulysses</u>, he commented on this commonality in a letter to his brother Stanislaus:

Anyway, my opinion is that if I put down a bucket into my own soul's well, sexual department, I draw up Griffith's and Ibsen's and Skeffington's and Bernard Vaughan's and St. Aloysius's and Shelley's and Renan's water along with my own. And I am going to do that in my novel (inter alia) and plank the bucket down before the shades and substances above mentioned to see how they like it: and if they don't like it I can't help them. I am nauseated by their lying drivel about pure men and pure women and spiritual love and love for ever: blatant lying in the face of truth.13

In "Circe" Joyce's lowering of the bucket into Bloom's psyche brings up a host of sexual impulses typical not just of Bloom but of turn-of-the-century European culture.

All of Bloom's dramas in "Circe" have a strong masochistic element: he is advertised as a cuckold; pilloried for his social

¹³ Joyce, Letters, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York, 1966), II, 191-192.

reform schemes; publicly diagnosed as "a finished example of the new womanly man" (p. 464); and--worst of all--ridden by the she-man Bello, who throws him on a flaming pyre when she finally tires of him. Male masochism was a phenomenon not much written about or labelled before the late nineteenth century, when the sexologist Krafft-Ebing justified his naming of it after Leopold Sacher-Masoch, author of Venus in Furs, by claiming that before that novel was published in 1870 "this perversion . . . was quite unknown to the scientific world as such."14 Joyce used Sacher-Masoch's fiction as one of his sources for the Circe chapter and even describes Mrs. Bellingham, one of the elegant society viragos who denounce Bloom at a mock-trial for his perversions, as "a Venus in furs" (p. 448). In Idols of Perversity Bram Dijkstra points out that male masochism was a logical consequence of the extreme and simplistic polarization of women that took place in the last half of the nineteenth century.15 In a cultural climate which considered only evil, power-hungry women to be fully sexual, men interested in reciprocal sex would be willing to seek victimization. Bloom's perversions of imagination are not so much his own as his time's; they actually attest to his normality. They also provide the measure o'the cultural conditioning he has to overcome within himself in order to see and accept Molly as she is and to treat her well.

Having made these general remarks about the chapter, I want now to focus on that moment when Bloom meets the nominal Circe of the

¹⁴ Quoted by Dijkstra in Idols of Perversity, p. 393.

¹⁵ Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity, p. 393.

chapter, Bella Cohen, and on the dynamic scenes which follow.

Joyce's casting of this archetypal figure as whore sports with a centuries-old tradition--the motto over the 1621 Alciati emblem of Circe had warned readers to "Beware of Prostitutes." But Joyce does not accept this tradition uncritically and he does not allow his hero to heed the Alciati motto. Bloom engages with Bella-Bello as thoroughly in imagination as Odysseus had engaged with the transforming goddess in actuality.

This Circe is "a massive whoremistress" (p. 485), a formidably vulgar figure. She has kohl-rimmed, glittering "falcon" eyes: a detail which suggests Joyce's awareness of the meaning of her name (see p. 20 above). In place of the bowl of transforming brew and of her driver's stick, she carries a black horn fan which immediately springs into a life of its own. This, in Joyce's version, is her instrument of power. The fan keeps tapping Bloom until he pays homage to its holder, hailing her as "powerful being" and declaring that he "enormously" desires her domination (p. 486). The fan demands that he kneel and lace Bella's shoes. Bloom at once complies, thus assuming the old Greek posture of surrender, the posture that Circe had assumed at her doorway with Odysseus.

This sex reversal shortly becomes an overt fact of the drama.

Bella becomes Bello and Bloom becomes a female slave avidly participating in an orgy of humiliation. As he becomes female he also figuratively becomes a pig. She (or he) exclaims "Truffles!" and Joyce's stage direction at this point reads "with a piercing epileptic cry she sinks on all fours, grunting, snuffling, rooting at his

feet" (p. 488). Perhaps these transformations or degradations would not have happened if Bloom had held on to the potato he habitually carried in his pocket because it was his grandmother's preventative against disease. But when he entered the bordello he gave it to the whore who greeted him, Zoé, and he realizes too late that "I should not have parted with my talisman" (pp. 486-437).16

Is the potato Joyce's version of the Homeric moly? Superficially, yes. Joyce must have enjoyed inventing this homely equivalent of Homer's mysterious plant. But the notion of moly as a protective and beneficent influence Joyce, like the Homeric allegorical commentators, took figuratively as well. He wrote to Budgen in 1920, when he was working on the Circe episode, that

Moly is the gift of Hermes, god of public ways, and is the invisible influence (prayer, chance, agility, presence of mind, power of recuperation which saves in case of accident. This would cover immunity from syphilis--swine love)... In this special case his plant may be said to have many leaves, indifference due to masturbation, pessimism congenital, a sense of the ridiculous, sudden fastidiousness in some detail, experience.17

To Joyce's catalogue of Bloom's guardian influences I would add two more: his love for Molly and his feeling of responsibility towards Stephen.

Once Bloom's fantastical orgy of humiliation with Bello has begun, Joyce plays it through to its sacrificial end. Bello tells Bloom that "what you longed for has come to pass. Henceforth you are

¹⁶ Zoé's name, as Mary Davison pointed out, has a special significance; it is related to both $\eta \not\in \omega_i$ (meaning "a living" or a "means of subsistence") and $\kappa \not\in \omega_i$ (meaning "animal" or "creature").

¹⁷ Budgen, James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses, pp. 230-231.

unmanned and mine in earnest, a thing under the yoke" (p. 490). He becomes a "wigged, singed, perfume-sprayed, ricepowdered" whore: the person at the very bottom of the nineteenth-century European power structure. After suffering various indignities, including having his pelvic capacity measured, he finally submits to death on command. To find the ultimate humiliation visited upon women, Joyce had to go outside of European culture altogether. He (and Bello) transform Bloom at this point into a Hindu widow doomed to die on her husband's pyre. Only when the suttee smoke rises does Bello finally disappear for good.

Her place is immediately assumed by an ethereal nymph who takes form out of the smoke. This is the nymph from the picture hanging above Bloom's and Molly's bed (a vantage point which she has found very bruising to her chaste sensibilities). "What have I not seen in that chamber?" she asks (p. 497). "What must my eyes look down on?" The timing of this pure nymph's appearance is extremely significant, for it attests to Joyce's recognition that the impossibly pure woman and the voracious virage are interdependent, that they are two faces of the same sick cultural mentality. Whereas Bella-Bello inspired in Bloom a passion of self-mortification, this nymph evokes his feelings of sexual guilt. Bloom feels he has to apologize to her for his "soiled personal linen," and he confesses that he has been "a perfect pig" (p. 497). The more guilty Bloom beccaes, the more removed and ethereal the nymph becomes, until she eventually garbs herself in the habit of a nun.

At this point Bloom is rescued by complete happenstance, by the

popping of his trouser button. "Bip!" the button says, and it recalls him to the moment and his senses--rather as Odysseus, immersed in the delights of Circe's palace, was suddenly recalled to a memory of Ithaca by the prompting of one of his men. Bloom remarks to the nun-nymph coldly, "you have broken the spell." He then asks her a question which someone should have asked St. Augustine in his later years, when he was intent on denouncing sexuality: were only ethereal where would you all be, postulants and novices?" (p. 501) In desperation the nymph strikes at Bloom's loins with a poinard. He seizes her hand and she "flees from him unveiled, her plaster cast cracking, a cloud of stench escaping from the cracks." This stage direction I interpret as Joyce's comment on the repressed sexuality he saw festering everywhere beneath the hard mask of Christian piety. To put it mildly, he was not fond of the Platonic element in Christianity and saw no point in valuing spirit which did not dwell in flesh.

Once Bloom has defeated the nymph in this fantastical drama, he finds the actual Bella Cohen much less formidable. The whole time the drama has been going on he has been staring at her without seeing her. Now he does, and he curtly dismisses what meets his eye as "mutton dressed as lamb" (p. 501). For the rest of the chapter and the book neither of the polarized stereotypes of women have any hold upon him, although he still reveals himself to be extremely sensitive to Molly's adultery and given to masochistic bouts of fantasy about it.

Stephen's encounter with the fantastic feminine in the Circe

chapter is of a different nature than Bloom's.18 Instead of engaging with the spectre his mind calls up, he tyrannically rejects it and thus reveals his comparative unreadiness and immaturity. His reaction is completely understandable, however, for his vision of his mother risen from the dead, "her face worn and noseless, green with grave mould" (p. 515), is more visually terrifying than anything Bloom has had to face. When Stephen asks her to tell him "the word known to all men" she doesn't answer him directly. Instead she gives him advice he does not want to hear: the standard Irish Catholic admonitions to pray, to repent, and to beware of the fires of hell. He reacts to these cliches with a fury of self-assertion, shouting out "Non serviam!" as if it were a war cry (or moly) which could save Then he raises his ashplant and, waving it as if it were Siegfried's sword, brings it down upon the chandelier. In the ensuing confusion the ghoulish Mrs. Dedalus vanishes. Stephen has for the moment rescued himself, but he has not begun to come to terms with his mother, with the feminine she represents, and with his guilt for abandoning her when she was dying.

Richard Ellman remarks of this scene that "in Stephen's case the saving grace is 'the intellectual imagination,' which preserves him from surrender to mother Dedalus, mother church, mother Ireland,

¹⁸ Stephen's vision of his dead mother is indisputably his vision, and not just a fantastic figure provided by Joyce as a result of his authorial rummaging in the contents of Stephen's unconscious. Stephen speaks to this ghost and reacts to her--as Hamlet behaves towards his father's ghost, as Bloom is later to speak and react to his vision of Rudy.

Bloom's dramas with Bello, the nymph, and Mrs. Bellingham et al. are of a different order. They have no effect upon his actions or speech in the moment.

mother England, all demanding his filial alllegiance. "19 I cannot agree, for it seems to me that an intellectual imagination that projects onto the mother the whole weight of the cultural authority which he is in active rebellion against makes it harder, not easier, for Stephen to acknowledge his own emotional identity. I can find no instance in <u>Ulysses</u> in which Bloom indulges in this kind of projection onto Molly. I view Bloom, from whom Stephen has much to learn, as Stephen's moly in the Circe chapter. Or perhaps, more accurately, Bloom is Stephen's Hermes, the soul-guide who points him in the direction of a more complete humanity.

Joyce's Circe episode ends with the overt rescue of Stephen by Bloom—an incident that was based on an actual event in Joyce's life which, more than any other biographical event, provided the germ of Ulysses.20 When the drunken Stephen is knocked down by a British soldier whose girl he has flirted with and whose king he has supposedly insulted, Bloom dusts him off and takes him home. As Bloom approaches the supine Stephen, he is confused by the mumbling he hears. He catches a few words of a poem he does not recognize (Yeats's "Who Goes With Fergus," which, as we have learned from the Telemachus episode, Stephen recited at his mother's bedside). That these words should be on Stephen's lips when he is semi-conscious strongly suggests that his earlier rejection of his mother's ghost

¹⁹ Richard Ellman, <u>Ulysses on the Liffey</u> (New York, 1973), p. 146.

²⁰ Ellman, in his essay "<u>Ulysses</u>: A Short History" which is appended to the Penguin edition of the novel, discusses Joyce's rescue by Alfred Hunter and its effect on the conception of <u>Ulysses</u>; see pp. 707-710.

was an act of superficial bravado. He is still entangled with her in "love's bitter mystery."21

Bloom stands over Stephen, his bearing "silent, thoughtful, alert . . . his fingers at his lips in the attitude of secret master" (p. 532). Suddenly a figure appears on the dark wall opposite him: "a fairy boy of eleven . . . dressed in an Eton suit," with "a delicate mauve face." The shild reads a book of Hebrew from right to left and kisses its pages. Bloom calls out "Rudy" in wonder and recognition, but this apparition of his son gazes back at him with unseeing eyes. Ellman calls Rudy's appearance "the seal upon Bloom's Good Samaritan act" and says that the triad of chapters which Circe concludes ends with a recovery of life stronger that that which occurs at the ending of any other triad.22

Certainly the chapter ends with promise: that Stephen will recognize and assume his own deep emotional bearing; that Bloom, through his own acts of charity, will cease to be paralyzed by loss. But because Joyce, for all his stupendous wordplay, is an emotionally reticent writer, we do not know if these promises will ever be fulfilled. Though we can strongly suspect that Stephen will meet his Nora and turn into Joyce, that Bloom will at last be able to banish the shadow of death from his marriage bed, Joyce gives us no such easy satisfactions.

Nor can we say with complete assurance that it is because of the

²¹ This is a phrase from Yeats's poem. It appears in Joyce's first episode and earlier in the Circe chapter, spoken by Mrs. Dedalus when she appears to Stephen in the brothel.

²² Ellman, Ulysses on the Liffey, p. 148.

psychic release which has occurred in the Circe chapter that Bloom and Stephen are able to realize the father-son bond which is potentially healing for both of them.23 In "Circe" all the walls come tumbling down--primarily the thick masonry which Irish Catholic culture set up between appearance and the psycho-sexual realities of people's lives, but also individual characters' walls between the conscious and the unconscious. Whether coincidental or consequential, Bloom and Stephen emerge at the end of this chapter, which dramatizes the expression of wild and dynamic energies, with a firmer sense of direction. Their encounters in "Circe" seem to help each towards the resolutions he needs to make.

In any case, the direction they assume is towards Molly. Having just implied that certainties were foreign to Joyce's mind when he was composing <u>Ulysses</u>, I must in one respect renege. Molly almost certainly represents "the nonrational sense of being which supports us all, which impels us to stay alive even when life seems a blight."24 Her "yes" to Bloom among the rhododendron on Howth head is an ecstatic version of the inarticulate yes of our hearts when they keep on beating. Of all the characters in Ulysses, Molly is the

²³ The phrase "psychic release" is somewhat misleading. Bloom, whose fantasies take up most of the chapter, never acts them out. Stephen, with his chandelier-bashing, does, but his acting out seems intended as a sign of his relative immaturity. The primary psychic release is literary: Joyce lets down the walls between his characters' inner impulses and the reader.

However, as mentioned before, Joyce brings the Everyman concept to bear upon the laws of psychodynamics. Though Bloom and Stephen do not become conscious of their unconscious wishes in the way that a patient in psychotherapy might, they nevertheless seem to learn from the psychic Walpurgisnacht of "Circe."

²⁴ Marilyn French, The Book as World, p. 250.

least individual and most symbolic. She is Woman as Natural Force,
Woman as Goddess, and only secondarily Marion Bloom of 7 Eccles
Street. Earthy, lyrical and well aware of her own powers, Molly has
at least as much in common with Homer's immortal Circe as she does
with his mortal Penelope.

For Leopold Bloom, the archetypal feminine and the personal feminine are one and the same woman and he is married to her. After the brief moment in the Ithaca chapter when he and Stephen stand side by side in the garden looking up at the light in Molly's window, he goes in and performs the bravest of his acts: crawling into her adulterous bed. To get there he, like Odysseus, has had to slaughter suitors. The suitors, for Bloom, are not really Boylan and the host of other men to whom Molly has been attracted.25 They are the culturally-conditioned temptations in his own head to see Molly as a sexual possession who has humiliated him or to view her as the polarized evil woman. We know from the Circe chapter that these are strong temptations, but Bloom, with his scrupulous moral nature and his abundant charity, has been able to defeat them. Ithaca ends with him curled like "a manchild in the womb" beside the ample earth of Molly, who lies "in the attitude of Gea-Tellus" (p. 658). Quite simply, he accepts her as she is. He chooses love rather than hatred.

Joyce must have been aware that this ethic of responsibility for

²⁵ It is unlikely that Molly has acted on these other attractions. As Ellman says, "the book makes clear that this first relationship [with Boylan] is something new"; <u>Ulysses on the Liffey</u>, p. 165.

one's own demons and acceptance of the life of others was foreign to any culture he knew. He had written to Nora in 1912, two years before he started <u>Ulysses</u>, "I am one of the writers of this generation who are perhaps creating at last a conscience in the soul of this wretched race."26 From our vantage point, with two world wars and two obscenity trials for <u>Ulysses</u> intervening between 1912 and the present, Joyce's Stephen-like conviction that art can create conscience looks somewhat naive. Certainly, however, <u>Ulysses</u> demonstrates conscience in an imaginatively compelling way, demonstrates that there could be an alternative to the saga of domination and subjection which Stephen recognizes as history.

Ending as it does with Molly's voice, a voice which moves
"slowly, evenly, though with variations, capriciously, but surely
like the huge earthball itself round and round spinning,"27 <u>Ulysses</u>
is like a return to ancient spirituality. It recalls a time when
woman and earth were revered as the sources of life. This simple but
radical idea of giving the ancient feminine a present, living voice
is also used by Margaret Atwood in her twenty-four poem cycle of
"Circe/Mud Poems," published in 1974 and narrated by Circe herself.

²⁶ Joyce, Letters, II, 311.

²⁷ This is Joyce's description of the movement of Molly's monologue in a letter to Budgen; <u>James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses</u>, pp. 262-263.

Though he took care to salt Molly's voice liberally with pettiness and clearly intended her to be both individual woman and archetype, Molly is more believable as the latter. As Marilyn French remarks, "no real human being could ever have Molly's absolute and blind ignorance of all events except sexual ones"; The Book as World, p. 249.

Atwood's Circe retains most of the archetype's traditional powers but also incarnates a very modern feminist consciousness, one which casts a cold eye on the conventions of heroism and quest myths. Indeed, Atwood seems to have been attracted to Homer's telling of the Circe-Odysseus myth because she saw in it a metaphor for the meeting (or collision) of patriarchal manhood and feminine power occurring in her own time.

The "Circe/Mud Poems" are part of You Are Happy, Atwood's sixth book of poetry. Much of her earlier work had revealed a heightened sensitivity to sexual politics and to the consciousness of the oppressed. In Power Politics (1971) one of Atwood's speakers expresses the stereotype of male domination and female victimization as strongly as anyone probably ever has. She tells her lover "you fit into me/ like a hook into an eye/ a fish hook/ an open eye."28 The exposed, unflinching stance of this speaker represents a gain in consciousness over the withdrawal and non-engagement of some of Atwood's earlier poetic personae, but her role as an aware victim advertising her wounds did not satisfy Atwood for long. By the time of the publication of her second novel, Surfacing (1972), Atwood had already realized the pitfalls inherent in dwelling on victimization. In the novel's last pages its anonymous narrator sums up an important insight she has painfully grasped:

This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. A lie which

²⁸ Reprinted in Atwood, Selected Poems (Toronto, 1976), p. 141.

was always more disastrous than the truth would have been.29

Atwood's adoption of the Circe persona, rich with power but lacking in innocence, represents the next step in this evolution.

This Circe is both like and unlike Homer's. Like the goddess of Aiaia, she is connected with sacred natural forces, with the moon (to which she has built temples) and with the earth (to which she keeps her head pressed, hoping to collect "the few muted syllables left over").30 Yet for all her foresight and intuitive understanding, she is a priestess rather than a goddess. She shares the same order of being as Odysseus and their meeting is an affair of equals. Atwood has no need for Hermes and his gift of moly in her version of the myth, for the power between the lovers is already evenly balanced. In one regard I find her perceptions closer to Homer's than those of any intervening interpreter of the myth: she focuses on the issue of trust between a man and a woman and on the relationship of trust to sexuality.

Atwood's cycle tells the story of a love, an intense but brief affair which goes through many seasons of feeling during its short span of time. The series is framed by beginning and ending poems in italics which seem more obviously metaphorical than the others. The first poem (p. 46) I interpret as a comment on the disaster of patriarchal history. Odysseus approaches Circe through a charred landscape, where the trees are sparse and blunted. Because Circe is

²⁹ Atwood, Surfacing (Don Mills, Ont., 1973), p. 191.

³⁰ Atwood, You Are Happy (New York, 1974), pp. 47-49.

identified with her island's landscape throughout the series, the wounded state of the environment reflects her own condition and, even more widely, that of other powerful women for whom history has been a wasteland. Though she sees that Odysseus represents "power, power/impinging," Circe does nothing to turn him away. The remark she makes about him in the last line--"You find what there is"--could be said with equal truth about a skilled lover or a forceful imperialist. Which does she consider him to be? As we are to find out, roles shift like tides between them.

In the next three poems Circe describes her life before

Odysseus. Given her boredom with manufacturing pig-men and "men with
the heads of eagles" who no longer interest her, we begin to understand why she has done nothing to hinder Odysseus's arrival. He

might be one of the new kind she is looking for, one of "the ones who
have escaped from these [prevailing]/ mythologies with barely their
lives" (p. 47). These new, imagined men "would rather be trees" than
participate in the power games which have enabled her, with male
connivance, to turn men into beasts. Circe clearly recognizes in the
third poem that transformation requires mutuality, that it is not her
work (or fault) alone.

The sixth poem, addressed to Odysseus, is Atwood's most trenchant critique of patriarchal ideology. Her Circe has no respect for Odysseus's supposedly heroic deeds. "There must be more for you to do," she tells him

than permit yourself to be shoved by the wind from coast to coast to coast, boot on the boat prow to hold the wooden body under, soul in control. (p. 51)

She perceives the poverty of the dualistic, over-under way of thinking and living that has resulted in a massive devaluation of body, woman and nature in Western culture. "Don't you get tired of killing?" she asks; "Don't you get tired of saying Onward?" Instead of filling his life with hollow victories and predatory wandering, she advises him to

Ask who keeps the wind Ask what is sacred.

In just over a hundred words Atwood's Circe thus dispenses with the ethos of domination and progress which has prevailed for millennia. Her voice here is flawlessly intelligent and assured. But her radiant self-possession, as Atwood shortly makes clear, depends upon distance, upon her position on the far periphery.

Once this Circe and her Odysseus draw closer in sexual attraction, her self-possession becomes at risk. As in Homer's version, she is the first to surrender; she permits Odysseus to become close enough to assume the posture of a rapist holding down her arms and hair. "Let go, this is extortion," she tells him,

you force my body to confess too fast and incompletely, its words tongueless and broken. (p. 55)

With this mock-rape as the beginning of their experience as lovers, understanding between them does not flower smoothly or naturally. Probably because of the more than 2500 years of women's subjection intervening between Homer's Circe and Atwood's, the latter extends no gracious invitation to Odysseus to mingle with her in lovemaking and

trust. Indeed, he has to <u>order</u> her to trust him in the twelfth poem, and she has to sacrifice in order to comply. Up to this point she has worn a sacred talisman around her neck, a withered fist whose fingers rub together in the "worn moon rituals" of goddess-based religion. Now he unbuckles the fist, symbolically breaking her connection with the angry ancient powers which have protected and sustained her.31 Newly vulnerable herself, she is at last able to see Odysseus's vulnerability and to acknowledge the man beneath the hero role.

The fifteenth poem is the jewel of the series, the only one which reveals the compassion of which this Circe is capable. She speaks to Odysseus with all her old precision, but now also with a lover's tenderness:

Your flawed body, sickle scars on the chest, moonmarks, the botched knee that nevertheless bends when you will it to

Your body, broken and put together not perfectly, marred by war but moving despite that with such ease and leisure

Your body that includes everything you have done, you have had done to you and goes beyond it

This is not what I want but I want this also. (p. 60)

With these words she acknowledges his past, his suffering, the grief implicit in his name. Perhaps she too wants to be regarded in this

³¹ Atwood's perception that the old goddess powers are embattled and vengeful (shaped in a fist) has its source, I believe, in Homer's version. It is probably no accident that the original Circe turned Odysseus's men into swine, the sacred animals of the vegetation goddess. See Chapter Two, pp. 47-48.

way, with full acknowledgement and acceptance. Perhaps she desires the surrender to be mutual, as it eventually becomes in Homer's version. If so, she does not get what she wants and she herself is as much to blame for this failure as Odysseus.

The voice of the eighteenth poem is that of a woman who knows herself too well, who knows that the most subtle and effective of impediments to love is her own temptation to retreat from engagement back into the witch or goddess role expected of her: back into invulnerability, omniscience, seeming immortality. Musing to herself, she admits that it is not Odysseus she fears

but that other who can walk through flesh, queen of the two dimensions. (p. 63)

That other is her Persephone-like other self, the arrogant one who thinks she is acquainted with the borders of life, the one who "knows the ritual" and "gets results," who closes herself off to any feeling from the outside world. This Circe catches herself in her own power game, revealing that she can judge herself as harshly as she judges all the tiresome heroes saying "Onward." This ruthless self-consciousness and honesty give Atwood's Circe a complexity and believability beyond that possessed by any of the others.

Having predicted her own retreat from intimacy, she goes on to demonstrate it. But by this time Odysseus is in retreat too, safely ensconced in a study where he is writing down his version of his adventures—a more patriarchal verson of the Odyssey, perhaps. She tries to warn him that the saga is not finished, that "fresh monsters are already breeding in my head" (p. 64), but he fails to listen.

And why should he? As she admits, "it's the story that counts"

(p. 68) and he thinks he has control of the story. By the end of the twenty-third poem the love once alive between them has all but disappeared in the wake of each of their separate retreats into the strategies of defense, control, survival. The series up to this point bears out the truth of Carl Jung's description of the seesawing relationship between the desire to love and the will to dominate.

"Where love reigns." Jung wrote, "there is no will to power; and where the will to power is paramount, love is lacking. The one is but the shadow of the other."32

The final, framing italicized poem softens the series as a whole because it suggests an alternative to the endless cycles of sexual power struggles and lost love. In its first lines Circe allows herself to conceive of a landscape other than the charred forest she has known. "There are two islands/ at least," she says, "they do not exclude each other" (p. 69). On the first, familiar one she is "right" and in control; her affairs happen over and over, running like a bad film through a jerky projector. But on the second island, the one she admits "I know nothing about/ because it has never happened," the atmosphere remains alive with possibility. She imagines herself and Odysseus walking through a field in November, licking melted snow from each other's mouths, stopping to examine the still unfrozen track of a deer. The vision seems as fragile as its flakes of snow, untested, evanescent. Yet its evanescence is, I

³² Quoted by Linda Schierse Leonard in On the Way to the Wedding (Boston, 1986), p. 109.

believe, its point. The island, miraculous in an ordinary way, exists potentially in any moment and is the magnification of a moment. As such it represents an escape from history, a leap into the timelessness of love.33

Atwood's Circe is able realize this moment in imagination only. Her ability to call it to mind, however, points the way for the lovers in "Book of Ancestors," the last and most perfect of the poems in this volume. These lovers are well aware of scenes of violence in the collective past; they have toured a Toltec temple where they have seen a fresco of a priest cutting out the heart of a sacrificial victim.34 But their intense trust for each other gives them faith to believe that they are not doomed to recreate this scene figuratively. For them "History is over" (p. 95); they "take place/ in a season, an undivided space" similar to that of the island Circe has imagined. In that space of reality, they meet in front of a fire at midwinter and gently open to each other in love. The woman's words in the poem's last lines connect their encounter with the sacred rites of the priests:

³³ Atwood would, I believe, agree with William Blake on the potentiality of the moment as both an escape from and a redirection of time:

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.
For in the Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
Events of Time start forth & are conceived in such a Period
Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.

⁽Milton, plates 28 and 29)

³⁴ Jane Lilienfeld points out that the victim's posture in the sacrifice parallels that of Circe as Odysseus takes her for the first time, "thus aligning her firmly with the victims of the priestly elite." See "Silence and Scorn in a Lyric of Intimacy: the Progress of Margaret Atwood's Poetry" in Women's Studies, vol. 7 (1980), 192.

what

they tried, we tried but could never do before . without blood, the killed heart . to take that risk, to offer life and remain

alive, open yourself like this and become whole (p. 96)

What necessitated slaughter in the past now has been chosen freely
and mutually and thoroughly transformed.

This transformation into wholeness is not one that Atwood's Circe, for all her clarity, wit and power, has been able to achieve on her own. Nor has she been able to provide direction to Odysseus, who chooses not to listen to her. I believe Atwood's adoption of the Circe mask provided the poet herself, however, with the direction she needed. It allowed her to speak in the voice of a woman unashamed of her strengths and unwilling to confine herself to a victim's role. It allowed her to explore the condition of such a woman on the periphery of patriarchy and in relationship to a male equal. And finally, it enabled her to discover and express the limits of power conceived as the will to dominate rather than as the capacity to love.

Like Joyce, Atwood used the Circe myth as a sharp instrument with which to critique her own culture and as a stimulus to imagine something more.

Conclusion. Transformation

Up until now, having focused on permutations in the characterization of Circe as she appears in literature through the centuries, I have deliberately said little about the significance of the event that provides her myth with its node of fascination: the manto-beast transformation. Her power to wreak this change is the one constant in her myth from Homer to Spenser to Atwood, and it is the one quality she possesses that is invariably remembered by anyone who has heard of her. Her raised rod, potent brew and crowded sty give vivid, unforgettable image to a fear that seems to be nearly universal but was perhaps not always so. That is the fear of losing conscious control, of being carried or impelled beyond the recognizable, familiar boundaries of personal identity into a realm of experience where one is disoriented and helpless.

Transformation in itself is a charged concept, radiant with the magic it implies, and it lends itself just as readily to the business of gaining control as to the misfortune or necessity of losing it. I would argue that our species should be defined not merely as toolmakers or symbol-makers but more generally as animals that transform. When the first, broken-off sticks were sharpened into digging tools able to leave fleeting marks on the earth, or when cries of warning and alarm were differentiated and codified into syllabic units which objectified perception, our ancestors began exerting control over--

and transforming--both their environment and their own inner experience. Because the acquisition of language and technology developed incrementally, in a way not perceptible within the life span of any single human being, these quite amazing cultural transformations have not until quite recently inspired the wonder evoked by those that have always gone on routinely within women's bodies. Menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation: these biological mysteries caused women to be associated with the awesome powers of transformation, even though they themselves were not the directors of these powers but merely the vessels through which they passed.1 As many archaeologists and scholars of myth have now made clear, women were the pattern upon which the first anthropomorphic (or, more accurately, gynomorphic) divinities were based. The Great Mother who created, nourished and finally reabsorbed, who was believed responsible for the whole mysterious round of life and death, had as her accessible representative every fertile adult woman. The ability to effect transformations, which anyone looking back at our cultural history might regard as the quintessentia: 14 human quality, was at first regarded as the quintessentiall, feminine one.

It makes sense to see Homer's Circe against this background, to which the evidence presented in Chapter Two connects her. Her affinity with hawks, large felines and pigs (the animals most commonly associated with Anatolian and Hellenic nature goddesses) and

¹ In <u>The Great Mother</u>, pp. 29 ff., Erich Neumann sees these "blood-transformation mysteries" as underlying both of the two characters of the feminine which he distinguishes: the elementary (which has primarily to do with physical development) and the transformative (which has to do with psychical development).

Homer's repeated references to her as $0 \le 6$ all argue strongly that she should be viewed as a being with as sound a claim to divinity as that of the Olympians. Certainly she possesses a pre-emptory streak equal to that displayed by Zeus. The change she initially brings about in the lives of Odysseus' men is seemingly unmotivated and obviously nasty; it has to do with losing humanity rather than developing it. The horror of being imprisoned with full human consciousness in the body of a swine is not one Homer glosses over. Any sophisticated, post-Freudian interpretation of the sailors' forcible reacquaintance with the animal basis of their nature as salutary because psychologically integrating is given the lie by the heart-rending sounds that are wrung from them as they are released from bestial form. These men return to their humanity as to the ground of all desire. Circe's first transformation, which separates them from this ground, is hardly the act of a typical nurturing mother goddess.

It is an act which becomes comprehensible, however, in terms of the time when the <u>Odyssey</u> was most likely composed, c. 700-680 B.C. This was an era when the powers of goddesses were under attack and waning, when patriarchy was replacing female power in myth as it already had in social and political organization. 2 And, judging from the Agamemnon-Clytemnestra-Orestes cycle and from the slightly later Amazon myths, it was an era when hostility between the sexes was at.

² Both Riane Eisler, in <u>The Chalice and the Blade</u> (New York, 1987), pp. 78-89, and Gerda Lerner, in <u>The Creation of Patriarchy</u>, p. 57, make the point that the declassing of the goddesses took place long after patriarchy was firmly established.

high level. I view Circe's act as the vengeance of a divinity driven to prove her powers, to flaunt the fact that adventurous seamen could be made to root and snort like her pet animals. This negative transformation is expressive of an imbalance and unease in the power relationship between the sexes; I do not see it, however, as expressive of an unease about sexuality itself.

In the Odyssey the sexual relationship between Odysseus and Circe is redemptive, bringing into trust and balance all that is negative and imbalanced in the first part of the myth. Odysseus begins by holding a sword to her throat, but he ends by taking her knees in the gesture of entreaty and surrender. She responds generously and compassionately, with directions which are essential to his voyage home. This competent, patriarchal hero, representing the new order, confronts an exemplar of the old, female-centered one and eventually opens to her and receives her blessing. Would that history had followed the course of Homer's myth and that all patriarchal heroes were as receptive as Odysseus to the wisdom of the feminine. He receives from Circe a whole set of instructions which have to do with the acknowledgment of human limits, with the recognition that some powers (Scylla, Helios and his oxen) are too potentially destructive to tamper with and must be respected and left alone. Odysseus returns to Ithaca because he is no Faust or Alexander, because he finally believes that the will to control and dominate everything he encounters -- a drive which he has already ruthlessly acted out during the sack of Ismaros -- will in the end destroy him too. Any alert and fair-minded reader of the Odyssey

recognizes Circe's primary role in teaching Odysseus this difficult lesson. His willingness to listen to her I attribute to the bond of pleasure established between them, to their mutual trust and affection.

Although Homer shows something indisputably positive issuing from the relationship of Circe and Odysseus, almost all later writers who touch upon the myth, until the time of James Joyce twenty-six hundred years later, seem to regard their liaison as too dangerous even to acknowledge. Instead they focus on Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men, which they interpret as a parable of the bestiality which will befall the male who allows himself to surrender to a woman who sexually entices him. Diogenes of Sinope, writing after the time of Plato in about 350 B.C., describes the sailor-pigs as "brutes without reason . . . the image of the soul become the pitiable slave of pleasure"; he sees them as paralyzed by "the voluptuousness which enslaves them."3 In the view of classical and Renaissance allegorical interpreters who follow Diogenes, Odysseus is to be applauded for his possession of the steadfast reason or hoxos which allows him to drain Circe's cup and yet remain unchanged; they see his ability to defeat the sinister sexuality which she represents as heroic. Their view--clearly not Homer's--is the one which has until recently prevailed. We are faced, then, with a phenomenon which would seem hard to believe: one of the most important episodes in one of the two bedrock works of Western literature was consistently and grossly

³ Quoted by Jean Pépin in Mythe et allégoire, pp. 110-111; translation mine.

misread for centuries. Only the existence of persistent, pervasive and unacknowledged biases can account for this fact.

These biases include, I believe, a profound distrust of the body and a fear of the loss of rational control which is an integral part of sexual experience. Furthermore, this uneasiness about carnality and sexuality was projected on to Woman, who, in the words of Dorothy Dinnerstein, "serves her species as carnal scapeguat-idol."4 These biases do not show up in Homer's poem because he lived and wrote in a time when the experience of being human seems still to have been unitary, when consciousness was not conceived of as a refuge removed from harsh experience and distanced from the body's keen pleasure and pain. Homer's heroes possess a bright sentience which is inseparable from their life-embracing, death-facing flesh. They share "the seeming identity of body and mind . . . and thence the loveliness of the former" which Coleridge noticed in infants,5 probably because they are described by Homer in a language which had not yet developed the abstract vocabulary which can and often does pull intelligence away from sense experience. Every Homeric character exists forthrightly in his or her bodily vulnerability, open to the currents of danger and emotion and divinity which press from within and without. The great feasting and bathing rituals in Homer are hymns to this wondrous existence in the body, which is abruptly snuffed out by death.

⁴ Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur (New York, 1977), p. 124.

⁵ Quoted by Dinnerstein, p. 120.

Plato, or perhaps the Pythagoreans and Orphics before him, changed all this. Their longing for the eternal led them to postulate the existence of a pure realm of Being which had its muted, imprisoned echo within the soul of every human being. The body--so bright and cared for and prized in Homer--was viewed by the followers of Plato and Pythagoras as a prison or tomb. The resulting body-soul or body-mind dualism readily lent itself, in the generations following, to misogyny, for how could eternally pregnant and lactating women be considered creatures pre-eminently of mind? In this climate of thought Homeric allegory developed and Christian belief was codified into doctrine. The concept of spiritual equality before Cod, which briefly flourished in early Christian worship and which is expressed in some of Paul's epistles, 6 conflicted with the male/soul, female/body typology common in Greek thought and articulated in other writings attributed to Paul. Under the authoritative hand of the early Church bishops and fathers, this conflict was resolved in favor of hierarchy and typology. Now Circe as the sexual temptress able to deflect the (male) soul in its voyage towards Logos was joined by an archetypal blood-sister -- the sinful, hungry Eve, responsible for the loss of humanity's eternal, paradisical home. They were cast in these roles by ideological dualists, whether Neo-Platonist or In contemplating these developments in the centuries following Homer, I am saddened by how thoroughly the longing for the

⁶ For a discussion of the egalitarian strain in early Christian worship and in the Gnostic gospels, particularly the Gospel of Mary, see Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade, pp. 120-128, and Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York, 1979).

eternal, so poignant and universally human, became entangled with existing gender and power arrangements. And this entanglement proved extraordinarily long-lived. A metaphor Plutarch uses to describe marriage—as the bonding of the governing soul, represented by the man, with the governed body, represented by the woman—was still current in England in the seventeenth century.7

I can find no other essential change in the meaning of Circe's transformation or in the reading of her myth until the twentieth century, until after Freud and his followers had illuminated the interconnection and dependency of conscious mental systems on organic, unconscious ones and it was no longer tenable to view consciousness as a phenomenon that existed apart from rature. Although feminist thinkers have attacked Freud for his patriarchal assumptions concerning female development, they have not honored him sufficiently for destroying the old, pernicious body-mind (or bodysoul) dualism which so efficiently buttressed misogyny. As a destroyer of outmoded assumptions, Freud was matched by Einstein. By showing that energy and matter convert to each other under extreme conditions, Einstein terminated a dualism intimately related to that of mind and body. In this new climate of thought, the old certainties of allegory begin to look feeble, and the dualistic reading of the Circe myth, which persisted in all its strength at least through

⁷ The excerpt from Plutarch's "Advice to Bride and Groom" is on pp. 122-123 of this thesis. The gist of his thought was repeated less gracefully in the early seventeenth century by Thomas Tuke and in the sixteenth century by Juan Luis Vives (who, however, saw the husband as representing reason). Tuke and Vives are quoted by Diane Kelsey McColley in Milton's Eve (Urbana, 1983), p. 11.

the seventeenth century, seems at last to be expiring.

The basic pattern of seductive, sexual Woman impeding starryeyed Man in his pursuit of distant glory obtained, however, for a very long time; it can be found in Calderón as in Virgil and Spenser. Virgil and Spenser, both worldly, imagine glory as the glittering imperial city or the fey imperial court--something far different than Calderon's Kingdom of God, which is accessible only through death-but the renunciation of sexual pleasure as the most powerful impediment to this glory can be found in all three writers. In Virgil this renunciation is so strong that Circe's island occupies only a score of lines and is safely skirted around by Aeneas, who not long before has piously sailed away from Dido's flaming pyre. In Spenser the renunciation is not easy or secure, for it conflicts with the neopaganism so congenial to his poetic imagination and with his temperamental openness to the feminine. Nevertheless, Guyon does manage to turn Acrasia's bliss into balefulness and Artegal does slip out of Britomart's embrace to go off and subdue the Irish rebels. To read The Faerie Queene is to watch a major poet almost break out of two thousand years of cultural conditioning and follow his own instincts about what promotes life and what does not. This same tension between pleasure and its renunciation is skillfully allegorized and dramatized in Calderon's Los encantos de la Culpa, but the outcome of the contest there is never fundamentally in doubt, as it frequently seems to be in The Faerie Queene. How else could a luxuriant character named Sin end her stay on the Corpus Christi festival stage than by going down in quake and flames?

All three of these writers, we should note, are quite honest about the <u>cost</u> of renouncing pleasure and sexuality in favor of distant, imagined glory. The <u>Aeneid</u> ends with carnage and violated trust; Book II of <u>The Faerie Queene</u> with a merciless, incendiary fit; Calderón's <u>auto</u> with apocalypse. And in not one of these works is there any real compensation, for neither Virgil nor Spenser nor Calderón succeeds in presenting the motivating glory convincingly on page or stage.

This destruction is symptomatic, I believe, of what happens when we pursue some vision of the eternal and absolute (even if we insist on mingling this vision with worldly power, as in the case of "eternal" Rome) while dishonoring our earthly, finite, inescapably sexual and mortal roots. One of the reasons we now face nuclear destruction is, I am convinced, our failure to acknowledge our own creatureliness and also the potential finitude and death of the earth. As Carol Christ points out,

our religious and philosophical traditions since
Plato have attempted to deny finitude and death
and have prevented us from fully comprehending our
connections to this earth. . . . We must learn to love
this life that ends in death. This is not absolutely
to rule out the possibility of individual or communal
survival after death, but to say that we ought not to
live our lives in light of such a possibility. Our task
is here."8

We have a great deal to learn from the willingness of Homer's characters to embrace life and face death in the moment, from their radiant sentience and courage, and yet we cannot go back to their

⁸ Carol Christ, The Laughter of Aphrodite (San Francisco, 1987), pp. 213, 215.

time before the development of abstract thought and language, before consciousness learned to stand back from experience and from nature.

Certainly the way to begin healing the rift opened by this dualism is to use our consciousness to recognize the harm the rift has caused. Joyce's Dublin in Ulysses is the image of a society inured to a fractured way of life. In it, sexual feeling is everywhere but everywhere denied, made to retreat into romantic euphemism or shameless cynicism by the combined forces of the Catholic Church and of the scientific rationalism with which Mulligan and his cohorts are heavily dosed. Molly Bloom's ability to shed all contradictions, to maintain her own luxuriant vitality in the teeth of these forces of denial, certainly testifies to Joyce's belief in the power of the feminine to endure with health and elan. Yet he does not view the feminine as the Other, as the possessor of mysterious powers of transformation inaccessible to half of the human race. In his Circe chapter he as author pre-empts this power, endowing inanimate objects such as buttons with language, a Jewish grandfather with wings, and his humane but masochistic hero with a sex change. He uses the power to transform to effect a massive exposure and detonation of cultural hypocrisies and contradictions. Bloom and Stephen walk away from the Circe chapter and the chaos of Nighttown with a much firmer sense of where they are going. Home to Molly, as it turns out, to a cherishing of sexuality and of life which has always been there to come back to.

Similarly, in Margaret Atwood's cycle of Circe poems, Circe herself is not the sole possessor of the power to transform.

Although on her island men do take on animal forms, it is as the result of a collaborative effort: she permits to happen what they secretly will. Atwood's series, like Joyce's chapter, is really an exposure of the dualism, of the whole folly of projecting on to Woman the burden and delight of the carnality which we all bear. This Circe is bored and heartsick with the role into which she has been cast, although she is not above playing it for all that it is worth from time to time. Her last words, however, are a renunciation of the role and a wistful imagining of what life and relationship would be like if men and women cast aside the securities of power hierarchies and together faced the mystery of their existence. What if?

I wish to second her question. What would our tenure on this planet be like if we wholeheartedly accepted our identity as spiritual animals who long for the eternal but who are capable of finding it only in the moment in which we stand rooted? Perhaps then there would be no need for Circe myths, with all the freight they carry concerning sexual hostility and vulnerability and control, and no need for Circe's emphatic reminder to those who come to her door that they are, unmistakably, creatures. Perhaps then Circe herself would suffer a death as gentle and natural as the one which Homer's Teiresias predicts for Odysseus.

Appendix. Britomart's Dream in Isis Church

I wish to examine Britomart's dream in V.vii.12-16 primarily in the light which Spenser's chief source for the Isis Chuch episode, Plutarch's "Of Isis and Osiris," sheds upon it. Here is a brief synopsis of the dream and of the circumstances which provoke it:

Britomart comes to the temple of Isis, who, Spenser tells us, is "a Goddesse of great powre and souerainty" representing "that part of Iustice, which is Equity," on her way to liberate Artegall from the captivity which Radigund has imposed upon him. She kneels before the cult statue, which shows Isis standing with one foot upon a crocodile whose tail wreathes her legs, and pays homage to the goddess. Right before Britomart falls asleep at the statue's feet, it inclines towards her, seeming to promise favor and good fortune. Britomart dreams that she is one of Isis' priestesses, dressed in a gown of white linen which suddenly is transformed to a robe of royal scarlet. She is happy also to find a golden crown upon her head. But her felicity is interrupted by a raging fire which threatens to engulf the temple. Suddenly the crocodile sleeping at the idol's feet bestirs itself and greedily swallows the flames. He threatens to devour Britomart too, until she beats him back with her wand. At that point he becomes meek and amorous; she accepts him as her lover and bears him a lion-son. The impropriety of these last events shocks Britomart awake and, in confusion and horror, she tells her

dream to the Chief Priest. He tells her not to fear, for the crocodile is a figure both for "the righteous knight that is thy faithfull louer" (Artegall) and for the god Osiris, whose sternness is held in check by the merciful nature of his wife, Isis. The dream foretells, according to the priest, the strong royal progeny of Artegall and Britomart.

This dream would seem to be perfectly straightforward, since

Spenser himself (through the words of the priest) interprets it

within the text. Two difficulties, however, arise. First the

dream's message that justice should be tempered by mercy does not

accord well with the ending of Book V. Second, Spenser's use of the

crocodile image is highly ambiguous and becomes even more ambiguous

when we discover how Plutarch uses the image.

What does Book V as a whole have to say about the relationship of mercy to justice? Although later in canto vii Britomart--with the dream and its interpretation fresh in her mind--does restrain Talus from killing all of Radigund's women, her Isis-like influence is nowhere to be felt in canto xii, wherein Artegall and Talus together slaughter Irish rebels who are thinly disguised as the soldiers of Grantorto. The "true Iustice" Artegall deals out consists of whole-sale destruction: "Not one was left, that durst her (Irena) once have disobayd" (xii.25.9). Spenser's only regret about this justice is that it is stayed before hidden offenders have been ferreted out and punished. Detraction's charge that Artegall is guilty of "reprochfull cruelties" is clearly meant to be interpreted as loathsome slander, but it rings unfortunately true.

The poet's attitude in canto xii is entirely consistent with the one he was to adopt several years later in A View of the Present

State of Ireland. This prose treatise, written to persuade Elizabeth to deal more firmly with the rebels, states that "our feare is leste your Maiestes wonted merciful minde should againe be wrought to your wonted milde courses and perswaded [that] by some milde meanes either of pardons or proteccions, this rebelliouse nacion may be againe brought to some good conformacion . . "I Much as Spenser may have wished Britomart's dream vision to be a guide for judicious conduct, he was—if he deemed the necessity pressing enough—willing to sacrifice its illuminations. The dream chafes against his overall allegory.

The fit between dream and allegory in Book V becomes even more awkward when we realize what Plutarch has to say about crocodiles in "Of Isis and Osiris." Spenser scholars have eagerly pursued correspondences between details of ritualistic practices in Isis Church and in Plutarch's account, but they have unaccountably ignored Plutarch's references to the rapacious reptile. Plutarch mentions the crocodile several times, but in his most important reference to it he associates the beast with Osiris' archenemy Typhon (which is Plutarch's Greek name for the evil or contrary Egyptian god Set):

When things are going along in a proper way and making rapid progress towards the right end, the power of Typhon obstructs them. For this reason they [the Egyptians] assign to him the most stupid of the domesticated animals, the ass, and of the wild animals, the most savage, the crocodile and the hippopotamus . . And they relate that

¹ Spenser, A View of the Present State of Ireland, vol. 9 of The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition (Baltimore, 1945), p. 242.

Typhon escaped Horus by turning into a crocodile, and they would make out that all animals and plants and incidents that are bad and harmful are the deeds and parts and movements of Typhon.2

Just as Osiris represents the positive male fructifying power in the universe, 3 Typhon (or Set) represents its destructive counterpart and is responsible for Osiris' death and dismemberment. With bold originality and with a truth perhaps inadvertent, Spenser conflates these two male principles in his use of the crocodile image. His association of a living Osiris with the beast seems to have no convincing precedent in Egyptian myth and iconography, although drawings do exist which show the mummy of Osiris being borne on the back of the crocodile-god Sebak. 4 Plutarch also provides a source for the relationship of Isis to the crocodile within the dream. He says that crocodiles show fear and reverence for this goddess, and adds that Isis showed mercy upon Typhon, refusing to put him to death when her son Horus delivered him to her in chains. 5 In both Plutarch and Renaissance sources the crocodile is associated with voracity, and in emblem books it also represents guile, hypocrisy and lust. 6

² Plutarch, "Of Isis and Osiris," 49 and 50, in Moralia, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Loeb Classical Library; London, 1969), V, 123. Plutarch is fascinated with Typhon and devotes as much attention to him as to Osiris.

³ In Egyptian mythology Osiris is also the judge of the newly dead, deciding which shall receive immortality. See E. A. Wallis Budge, Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection (New York, 1973), pp. 305-347. Plutarch does not much dwell on Osiris as judge of the dead.

⁴ Jane Aptekar, <u>Icons of Justice</u> (New York, 1969), p. 91. Except for this one detail, Aptekar builds a very weak case for the association of Osiris with the crocodile in places other than Spenser.

⁵ Plutarch, "Of Isis and Osiris," 18 and 19; pp. 45, 49.

⁶ Aptekar, pp. 95, 105.

Since Plutarch, whom I take to be Spenser's chief source for the crocodile image, is almost entirely negative concerning it, Spenser's use of the reptile as a figure for Artegall is highly intriguing. Through this device Spenser is acknowledging, I believe, the shadow side of justice and the shadow side of love. Britomart is shocked by the beast's threatened attack upon her in the dream, but later accepts him sexually and bears him a son. On one level the dream is telling this virgin-warrior what Peauty and the Beast fairy tales have been telling generations of young girls: that to enjoy the sweetness of sexuality you must first accept its bestiality. On another and more complex level, Spenser seems to be warning himself that the impulse to destroy (Typon-Set) can easily masquerade as the desire to impose justice, and therefore both should be subject to a higher, more compassionate power. His archetypal imagery expresses subtleties of meaning which his ideology will not tolerate. It is entirely possible that in Britomart's dream Spenser is indirectly critiquing his own ardent imperialism.

In any case, generations of readers of the Isis Church episode have been struck by the dream's compelling imagery, which seems to spring directly from someone's unconscious, whether Britomart's or Spenser's. Its quality is like that of our own most powerful nighttime dreams, which tell us as dreamers what we need, but do not want, to know.

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