



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann M^a Nuad

Of Metis and Magic

The Conceptual Transformations of Circe and Medea in Ancient Greek Poetry

In two Volumes:

VOLUME ONE

Thesis submitted by Evelien Bracke as a requirement for the degree of Ph.D. in the Department of Ancient Classics, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, September 2009

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Lovely maiden of the moon
and lovely daughter of the sun
in their hands hold the weaving comb,
lifting up the weaving shuttle,
weaving on the golden fabric,
rustling move the silver threads,
at the edge of the crimson cloud,
at the border of the wide horizon.

41st rune of the *Kalevala*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this thesis has cost me blood, sweat, and tears – and what a fine magic potion they would have made! Had it not been for the unwavering support and advice from my mentors, friends, and colleagues, my eight-year (!) long efforts might yet have been in vain. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. David Scourfield, without whose challenging observations, guidance, and encouragement at every stage of my research this thesis would never have left its infancy. I would also like to thank Dr Gordon Campbell, who co-supervised me in the first two years of this project, and Prof. Jan Bremmer and Dr Richard Gordon, who kindly took the time to read and comment on a first draft of what has been grossly reduced to part of chapter 2. Thanks also to Prof. Michael Clarke for helping me in my research on the Archaic evidence, and to Dr Fritz-Gregor Herrmann, who kindly answered my questions on aspects of linguistics. Thanks, finally, to Dr Owen Hodkinson and Simon Trafford for proofreading various chapters.

Further, my thanks goes to my colleagues at NUI Maynooth, who always had a kind word and/or a pint for me when the going was tough: Kieran McGroarty, Maeve O'Brien, Eoghan Moloney, Donncha O'Rourke, and Imogen Smith. A particularly big hug goes to Breege Lynch for being my substitute-mum and best office neighbour ever! My fellow postgraduates offered consolation in my despair, discussions when I needed feedback, and relaxation in my hour of need; a special thanks goes to Helen Gilmore McVeigh, Daniel Ball, Pamela Moran, Ruth O'Hara, Gayle O'Reilly, Kate Quinn, Bernie Trehy, and last but definitely not least, Sharon Tighe-Mooney and Brian Sheridan. My arguments on Euripides' *Medea* also benefited from the discussions I had

with my second-year undergraduate students in the Greek Tragedy lectures I taught at NUI Maynooth. The many years I have spent working on this thesis would have been devoid of joy had it not been for the emotional support network provided by the following people at various points (in no particular order): Ciarán McKeivitt, Brian Conway, Emma Galbally, Nathalie Slachmuylders, Sara Yserbyt and Koenraad Vandesijpe, Lieveke and Raf Bocklandt, Koen De Temmerman, Regina Schober, Christian Blinzer, Vicky Janssens, Kristof Moens, Jenny White and family, and the NUIM Outdoor Pursuits Club (especially Jason O'Brien and Jamie MacNamara). I would also like to thank the people at Swansea University and the University of Wales, Lampeter for receiving me so warmly; a special thanks goes to Martina Minas-Nerpel, Kim Ridealgh, James and Catherine Richardson, Troy and Yan Sagrillo-Wu, Matt Cobb, and Nick Barley.

Finally, what my family's support has meant to me over the last years cannot be expressed in words which do it justice. Thank you, Bobon, for the many letters and phone calls (Dank u, Bobon, voor de vele brieven en telefoontjes); thanks also to my brother, Joren, and Véronique, for the support only a brother can give (kaak). Many thanks as well to Mark Humphries, my dad, tante Lieve and nonkel Michel, Oma, nonkel Gilbert and tante Martine, Christophe and Sarah, Isabelle and Frank, and Camille and Amélie. My gratitude also goes to Circe and Medea, the obliging subjects of this thesis, for the many lessons they have taught me, not just about research and academia, but above all about myself.

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, for being the best mum in the entire universe, even when I am on the phone to her (again) at 3 o'clock in the morning; and to my son, Morgan, in spite of whose endless crying this thesis is finished, but whose smile makes my world complete.

I would not have been able to work on this thesis more or less full-time for such a long period had it not been for the following financial support: a three-year Daniel O'Connell Fellowship awarded by NUI Maynooth, a two-year scholarship by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS), and a one-year scholarship awarded by the Irish government.

I am grateful for the photographic images of Circe and Medea which I have been allowed to use by the following museums: the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the British Museum, London; the Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna; the Museo Nazionale, Taranto; the Louvre, Paris; and the Leiden Rijksmuseum. The MFA Boston have asked me to include the following specific information regarding the image which they have kindly allowed me to use (the image itself, with further information, can be found in Appendix 8):

The Painter of Boston C. A.
Drinking cup (kylix) depicting Herakles fighting Acheloos
Greek, Archaic Period, about 560–550 B.C.
Place of Manufacture: Greece, Attica, Athens
Ceramic, Black Figure
Height: 18.2 cm (7 3/16 in.); diameter: 26.7 cm (10 1/2 in.)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Henry Lillie Pierce Fund
99.519

ABBREVIATIONS

For the most part, I follow the standard abbreviations as listed in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* 3rd ed. (1996), xxix-xliv. Specific abbreviations are the following:

AA	<i>Archaeologischer Anzeiger</i>
AC	<i>Antiquité Classique</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London</i>
CAF	Kock, Th. (ed.) (1884), <i>Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta</i> , Leipzig.
CCH	Fowler, R. (ed.) (2004), <i>Cambridge Companion to Homer</i> , Cambridge.
CGF	Kaibel, G. (ed.) (1899), <i>Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , Berlin.
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CPh	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
DHA	<i>Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne</i>
DK	Diels, H. and W. Kranz (eds.) (1952 ⁶), <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , Berlin.
EGF	Kinkel, G. (ed.) (1877), <i>Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , Leipzig.
FGrH	Jacoby, F. (ed.) (1923-1958), <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , Berlin.
Fowler	Fowler, R. L. (2000), <i>Early Greek Mythography: Vol. I: Text and Introduction</i> , Oxford.
G&R	<i>Greece and Rome</i>

- GRBS* *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
- ICS* *Illinois Classical Studies*
- IEG* West, M. (ed.) (1971), *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati*,
Oxford.
- JHS* *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
- LIMC* Boardman, J. e.a. (1981-), *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae
Classicae*, Zurich and Munich.
- LSJ* Liddell, H. G., R. Scott and H. S. Jones (1996), *Greek-English Lexicon*,
Oxford.
- Most Most, G. (ed. and trans.) (2007), *Hesiod. The Shield, Catalogue of
Women, Other Fragments*, London.
- NCH* Morris, I. and B. Powell (eds.) (1997), *A New Companion to Homer*,
Leiden.
- OCD* Hornblower, S. And A. Spawforth (eds.) (1996³), *The Oxford Classical
Dictionary*, Oxford.
- Page Page, D. L. (ed.) (1968), *Lyrice Graeca Selecta*, Oxford.
- PEG* Bernabé, A. (ed.) (1987), *Poetae Epici Graeci Testimonia et Fragmenta*,
vol. 1, Leipzig.
- PGM* Preisendanz, K. (ed.) (1973-1974), *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die
griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 2 vols., Stuttgart.
- PGMTr.* Betz, H. D. (1992²), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation including
the Demotic Spells*, Chicago and London.
- PMG* Page, D. L. (ed.) (1962), *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford.

- PMGF* Davies, M. (ed.) (1991), *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta Vol I: Alcman, Stesichorus, Ibycus*, Oxford.
- RE* Pauly, A. F., G. Wissowa, and W. Kroll (1894-), *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart.
- REA* *Revue des Études Antiques*
- REG* *Revue des Études Grecques*
- RhM* *Rheinisches Museum*
- SO* *Symbolae Osloenses*
- Suppl. Mag.* Daniel, R. W. and F. Maltomini (eds.) (1989-91), *Supplementum Magicum, Papyrologica Coloniensia* 16.1-2, 2 vols., Opladen.
- TAPhA* *Transactions of the American Philological Association*
- TrGF* Nauck, A. (ed.) (1889²), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Hildesheim; Suppl. by B. Snell (1964).
- TLG* Stephanus, H. (ed.) (1831-65), *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, Paris.
- TrGF 1* Snell, B. (ed.) (1971), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta: Didascaliae Tragicae, Catalogi Tragicorum et Tragoediarum, Testimonia et Fragmenta Tragicorum Minorum*, Göttingen.
- TrGF 2* Snell, B. and R. Kannicht (eds.) (1981), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta: Adespota*, Göttingen.
- TrGF 3* Radt, S. (ed.) (1985), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta: Aeschylus*, Göttingen.
- TrGF 4* Radt, S. (ed.) (1977), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta: Sophocles*, Göttingen.

- TrGF* 5 Kannicht, R. (ed.) (2004), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta: Euripides*, Göttingen.
- Warmington Warmington, E. H. (1935), *Remains of Old Latin Vol. 1: Ennius and Caecilius*, London; and Warmington, E. H. (1936), *Remains of Old Latin Vol. 2: Livius, Naevius, Pacuvius, and Accius*, London.
- West West, M. (ed. and trans.) (2003), *Greek Epic Fragments from the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, London.
- WS* *Wiener Studien*
- YCS* *Yale Classical Studies*
- ZPE* *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This brief introductory chapter locates my thesis in the scholarly context and elaborates on its general approach.

(a) Contextualization

Circe and Medea are primarily known as the archetypal witch-figures of Greek and Roman antiquity. While some scholars argue that this image is unchanging throughout Greek literature,¹ others propose that their status was different in the earliest texts but developed subsequently. The main proponents of this latter category are Jakob Petroff (1966) and Alain Moreau (1994) writing on Medea's development,² Judith Yarnall (1994) on Circe's transformation, and Karl Kerényi (1944) and Angeliki Kottaridou (1991) examining both figures. The individual arguments put forward by these scholars, however, are not up-to-date with modern theories. Apart from Kottaridou,³ they all draw on the mother-goddess theory – which was rejected by the majority of classicists by the late 1990s⁴ – and exaggerate Circe's and Medea's benign pre-Archaic Greek origins and/or their malice in the Roman texts.⁵ Indeed, most of them perceive Circe's and Medea's transformations as linear, from benevolent goddesses into evil witches. A

¹ e.g. Gordon (1999: 178-79) and Ogden (²2009: 78-99) on both figures, Griffiths (2006) on Medea, and Luck (1999: 110-11), Carastro (2006: 141-59), and Collins (2008: 28) on Circe.

² See also Will (1955: 103-114), who briefly discusses the issue of Medea's development.

³ Kottaridou's (1991) argument is similar to the others, however, inasmuch as it also considers the developments of Circe and Medea from goddesses to witches to have taken place in the early Archaic period already, and argues it to be linear.

⁴ e.g. in Goodison and Morris (1999).

⁵ Regarding Medea, for example, Moreau (1994: 112) argues that “avant de se métamorphoser en barbare, sorcière et infanticide, Médée fut une déesse-mère, proche de Cybèle, Rhéa ou Gaia”. Rabinowitz (1998) argues along similar lines that the figure of Hecate developed from a mother goddess into a goddess of witchcraft, and argues that Medea and Circe developed similarly alongside Hecate.

different chronological approach is hard to find in modern scholarship. None can be found on Circe. Regarding Medea, the 1997 collection of essays edited by James Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston engages with her literary portrayals in a more complex manner than previous studies, discussing the individual texts chronologically; yet the collection dedicates little space to intertextual analysis. The main article in this collection on Medea's diachronic development, by Fritz Graf (1997b), moreover, restricts its analysis to elements of the myth, merely brushing the surface regarding Medea's status. This thesis, in response to these outdated assessments of the two figures, will explore the figures of Circe and Medea by elaborating on the poetic status of the two figures in particular rather than on their myths in general. I will also analyze Circe and Medea together, as this has not been undertaken in any great detail: apart from Kerényi and Kottaridou mentioned above, only Hugh Parry (1992: 43-62) devotes a chapter in his book *Thelxis* to a detailed examination of both figures together. It is significant, however, that, while Circe and Medea were mentioned alongside one another in Hesiod's *Theogony* and in Hellenistic poems such as Theocritus' second *Idyll* and Apollonius' *Argonautica*, the entire extant tradition in between those texts does not appear to have connected them explicitly. Though they were mentioned side by side in Hesiod and later in Hellenistic poetry, their transformations thus appear to have occurred separately. This issue has been overlooked by modern scholars, and deserves attention.

I wish to emphasize at this point, however, that I do not propose – as the scholars mentioned above have done – that Circe and Medea merely lost their divinity in their transformations from goddesses into witches. Though I perceive a general

tendency in ancient Greek and Roman poetry from the late Archaic period onward to depict Circe and Medea as mortal figures rather than deities,⁶ my key argument rather emphasizes their transformation from complex into polarized figures, namely powerful and as a rule evil witches, who are rendered powerless when subject to magic or love (I will elaborate on this polarization in chapters 2 and 7). Furthermore, I wish to underline that their transformations must not be sought in the extreme alteration of their powers, but rather in the altering reception and definition of their status and powers by successive generations of artists.

As early as the *Odyssey*, however, Circe uses drugs and a wand to transform Odysseus' men into swine. One cannot ignore that this action closely resembles a modern perception of magic and indeed scholars such as Marcello Carastro (2006) have argued that Circe's use of *θέλγειν*, "to immobilize" (e.g. *Od.* 10.213), must be interpreted as 'magic'⁷ even if the Greeks did not refer to it in such terms. I will argue in chapter 2, however, that this action must not necessarily be construed as magic in the Homeric context. Neither Circe nor Medea were ever represented as 'normal' deities in early texts either, nevertheless, and applying this Frazerian notion of the development of magic⁸ to my thesis would be taking a giant step backwards from the recent developments in scholarly understanding regarding ancient Greek magic. I will propose that the key to Circe's and Medea's Archaic representations and subsequent

⁶ But e.g. in Verg. *Aen.* 7.19 and Ov. *Met.* 14.33 Circe is called a goddess, and both Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* and the ending of Euripides' *Medea* are notoriously ambiguous regarding Medea's status. See my analyses of these respective texts in chapters 6 (Medea) and 7 (Circe) for further discussions of their status.

⁷ Carastro (2006) does not in fact use the term magic but adheres to the ancient Greek term *mageia*. For reasons upon which I will elaborate in chapter 2, I will use the English term 'magic' in this thesis.

⁸ i.e. magic as the opposite of religion. See Frazer (1925: 48-60).

transformations into witches can be found in the mental category⁹ of *metis*, first elaborately discussed in Marcel Detienne’s and Jean-Pierre Vernant’s (1978) *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*.¹⁰ I will argue that both Circe and Medea were originally associated with *metis*, which indeed encompasses certain elements of magic without the label of Otherness traditionally associated with magic. It was only in the fifth century BCE that the connection of the two figures with magic increased. I will elaborate on the details of my argument in chapter 2. For now, it rests to outline the key scholarly issues which this thesis aims to address, as well as the general approach I intend to take.

Though individual chapters of this thesis engage with many separate problems related to particular texts, my thesis as a whole addresses three current scholarly issues regarding Greek literature. First, I challenge Emma Griffiths’ (2006: 26) criticism of taking a diachronic approach to Medea – which can be extended to Circe – namely that it is prone to “elide or obscure connections by insisting on a strict idea of temporal progression”. Griffiths instead adopts a largely synchronic approach, offering the reader a general overview of Medea’s characteristics. This is a fruitful approach to some extent, as the lack of early evidence appears to impede any clear conclusions on the development of the myths concerning Medea. Though there is merit in this approach in terms of its understanding of the broad nature of these myths, it risks generalizing and thereby simplifying Medea’s characterization. I will argue that one cannot deem her or indeed Circe’s status in, for example, Hesiod’s *Theogony* as more than vaguely similar

⁹ Detienne and Vernant (1978: 3) hesitate to call *metis* a ‘concept’ as it was never explicitly formulated.

¹⁰ This is the English translation of the original 1974 French monograph by both authors called *Les ruses de l’intelligence. La métis des Grecs*, Paris. My arguments have also profited from more recent analyses of *metis* in Greek literature, such as those by Bergren (1983), Doherty (1993), Holmberg (1997), and Clayton (2004).

to their respective status in Apollonius' *Argonautica*. While acknowledging the paucity of early evidence, this thesis therefore deliberately takes the diachronic approach, arguing that it is possible to discern a transformation in the poetic representations of Circe and Medea. Taking into account the fact that certain poets might have resisted this development and created a more idiosyncratic image of the two figures, I do not insist on what Griffiths (2006: 26) dismisses as "a strict idea of temporal progression", but rather aim to examine the general trend of the development.

Secondly, my thesis explores a void in classical scholarship perceived by Detienne and Vernant (1978: 1) in their discussion of *metis*, namely analysis of "the various forms of wily intelligence connected with particular divine powers". Though many mythological figures have been examined in connection with *metis* since Detienne's and Vernant's key study,¹¹ Circe and Medea have not. In examining these two figures with regard to *metis*, I aim to further scholarly understanding regarding the use of *metis* by minor goddesses. My side-by-side analysis of Circe and Medea is, moreover, justified by the "close relationship between [these] two deities within the framework of a single sphere of activity",¹² which is – as my thesis will argue – that of *metis* and magic.

More tangentially, this thesis calls into question Marcello Carastro's (2006) recent definition of the semantic field surrounding the verb *θέλγειν*, "to immobilize", in the Archaic period. Carastro argues that this field is in essence the same as that of *mageia* ("magic") as conceptualized in the Classical period. In consequence, he proposes that the Homeric Circe can be analyzed as a witch even if she was not called

¹¹ e.g. Helen by Bergren (1981) and Penelope by Clayton (2004).

¹² Detienne and Vernant (1978: 187).

one by the poet of the *Odyssey*. Carastro's thesis offers a challenging response to the scholarly discussions of the last twenty years regarding the status and definition of magic in ancient Greece. I will, however, argue that he ignores certain important aspects of *thelgein* and thereby underrates its differences with *mageia*. By connecting both notions of *thelgein* and magic with the category of *metis*, I aim to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate concerning ancient Greek magic.

This thesis argues that this status is a Hellenistic and Roman creation, and that, in the Archaic texts, both figures were associated not with magic but with the broader notion of *metis*, which incorporates the concept of magic to some extent. Though th

(b) Approach

I have already defined my approach as diachronic. Further to this I have intentionally avoided making use of specific theories in my examination of Circe and Medea, though I have certainly been influenced by such theories as (post-)structuralism and narratology.

Secondly, I have focused my research on Circe's and Medea's representations in poetry. This might be perceived as problematic, as it appears to deny the interrelationship not only of Circe and Medea with other mythological figures, but also of poetry with other non-poetic literary discourses and with iconography. First, regarding the other mythological figures with whom Circe and Medea are connected, the fact that Circe and Medea were singled out as a pair of witches by Hellenistic and Roman poets (see chapters 2 and 8) supports my own choice of these particular figures. Other key mythological figures associated with them, such as Jason's Aeolid ancestors

and the protagonists of the *Odyssey*, will be mentioned at the appropriate points in this thesis. Regarding the representations of Circe and Medea in prose, there are relatively few references to either figure in Archaic and Classical non-poetic texts, which are the periods pivotal to my research. Some texts mention one of the figures as having given her name to,¹³ or passed by,¹⁴ a particular region; Herodotus famously mentions Medea among the abductions of women which led to the Trojan War; and Aristotle comments on aspects of Euripides' *Medea*.¹⁵ There are only two prose passages which comment on the status of Circe or Medea and are hence significant to my research;¹⁶ reference will be made to these in the relevant chapters. I will also occasionally draw on evidence from iconography when this reveals additional information concerning the status of Circe and Medea, and I have added a subchapter on Circe in Classical iconography to support my arguments on her development in poetry, as there is very little poetic evidence left.

I have also restricted my discussion to the representations of Circe and Medea in Greek – and, to some extent, Roman – poetry. Analysis of the earlier, mainly Near Eastern, material is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁷ I will not discuss any texts beyond the Augustan period either, as any Roman poems mentioned in this thesis are included merely to reinforce my argument regarding the status of Circe and Medea in the Hellenistic texts.¹⁸ I will argue that certain – particularly Augustan – poetic genres

¹³ Medea: Hdt. 7.62, Hecataeus *FGrH* 1 F 286. Circe: Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 5.8 and 9.15.1, Timaeus *FGrH* 566 F 84.

¹⁴ Medea: Xen. *Anab.* 3.4.11.4, Arist. *Mir.* 839b18, Timaeus *FGrH* 566 F 87 and 88.

¹⁵ Hdt. 1.2, Arist. *Poet.* 1453b13 and 1454b.

¹⁶ Pl. *Euthd.* 285c4 and Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.7.

¹⁷ See West (1997: 407-10), Yarnall (1994: 26-52), and Marinatos (2000) for Circe's Near Eastern origins; see West (1997: 478-80) for the Near Eastern origins of the Argonautic myth and Medea.

¹⁸ There is one exception: in chapter 2, I examine a passage from Statius' *Thebaid*, which postdates Augustus.

indeed engaged with the figures of Circe and Medea in a manner strikingly similar to Hellenistic poetry, though not merely in an imitative fashion but rather in a creative and responsive manner (see chapters 2 and 7). While acknowledging that the characterizations of Circe and Medea were not suddenly fixed after the first century CE, the purpose of this thesis does not necessitate analyses of later Roman texts, such as Seneca's *Medea*, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, the *Orphic Argonautica*, and Dracontius' *Medea*.

The four historical periods on which I draw in this thesis – Archaic (c. 750-479 BCE), Classical (479-323 BCE), Hellenistic (323-31 BCE), and Roman (for the purpose of this thesis, limited to the period from the third century BCE to the end of the Augustan era) – are of course artificial separations. They, as well as the dates associated with them, are used for the sake of convenience, and are meant as guidelines only. I am also aware, when discussing poetry, of the difficulty in separating the author of a poem from its narrative voice. For the sake of convenience, however, I will still refer to the names of poets, such as Hesiod and Eumelus, in order to denote poetic narrators.

Finally, regarding the use of Greek and Latin names and terms, I have adhered to the standard English notation of names, hence, for example, Medea rather than Medeia, and Circe rather than Kirkê. Greek terms used frequently in this thesis have been transliterated, for example *metis*, *thelgein*, *pharmaka*, and *nostos*. All translations from the Greek and Latin are my own unless stated explicitly. Cross-references to page numbers in this thesis are preceded by the number 1 or 2, referring to the volume of the thesis in which the page can be found.

It remains to elaborate briefly on the content of the following chapters. Chapters 3 to 7 will examine the transformations of Circe and Medea chronologically. I focus first on Circe's and Medea's representations in the earliest two poems, the *Odyssey* and *Theogony* (chapters 3 and 4). In the following two chapters, I investigate their characterizations in late Archaic and Classical poetry (chapter 5 on Circe; chapter 6 on Medea). Chapter 7 examines the Hellenistic and Roman depictions of both figures. Chapter 8 investigates the causes for the transformations which occurred in the poetic status of Circe and Medea, and chapter 9 offers a conclusion. First, however, in chapter 2, I will explain the central argument of this thesis, by placing Circe and Medea in the context of the discourse on magic and *metis* in ancient Greek and Roman poetry, as these are the paradigms that underlie the thesis. For chronological lists of the poetic sources on Circe and Medea, see appendices 1 and 2.

CHAPTER TWO
MAGIC AND METIS IN GREEK AND ROMAN POETRY

The aim of this chapter is to place the transformations of Circe and Medea in their context, namely the discourse on magic and *metis* in ancient Greek – and to a lesser extent, Roman – poetry. In order to establish this context, it is first necessary to offer a brief discussion of the Greek and Roman concept of magic. Next, I will expound the central premise of this thesis, namely that the status of Circe and Medea was not always that of witches. To this end, I will elaborate on their familiar status as witches in Hellenistic and Roman poetry, and compare their representations with contemporary portrayals of other witches. I will suggest a preliminary contrast between their Hellenistic and Archaic representations by examining their family trees from these respective periods. I will then elaborate on the status of magic in the Archaic period, discuss the terms *thelgein*, *metis*, and magic in respect to this issue, and make a preliminary connection of Circe and Medea with *metis* by exploring the etymology of their names. This chapter does not aim to provide an extensive discussion of Circe’s and Medea’s representations, but rather explores the key issues; more details will be provided in the relevant later chapters.

(a) “Double, Double Toil and Trouble”: What is Magic?

If the scholarly debates of the last century – generated by anthropologists such as Sir James Frazer (1925), Bronislaw Malinowski (1928), and Stanley Tambiah (1990) – have demonstrated anything, it is that there is no one definition of magic, not even within one particular context. Even among classical scholars, there is no consensus as

to what Greek and Roman magic entails. In a thesis which abounds in references to magic and witches, however, some attempt at definition is unavoidable.¹⁹ It is not within the scope of this thesis to elaborate on the various twentieth-century theories concerning Greek and Roman magic,²⁰ but I will briefly indicate two of the main issues one encounters while studying magic in Greek and Roman poetry, and suggest a working definition.

First, it is necessary to justify my use of the term ‘magic’ in the ancient Greek and Roman contexts, for this term – albeit based on the ancient Greek term *μαγεία*²¹ – is a modern construct; applying this term to the contexts of Antiquity is therefore far from straightforward. Ancient Greek, indeed, knew various terms which are similar in meaning to *μαγεία*, particularly *γοητεία* and *φαρμακεία*,²² and Latin knew, among others, *magia* and *veneficia*; there were differences in connotation between these terms which appear to have been greater or smaller depending on the historical context and the author using them.²³ As this thesis is not concerned with the intricacies of definition, I will maintain the English term ‘magic’ in order to refer to discourses associated with the Greek and Latin terms mentioned here. Similarly, female users of magic will be called by the standard English term ‘witches’ rather than *φαρμακίδες* or *veneficae*, terms derived from the concepts of *φαρμακεία* and *veneficia*.²⁴

¹⁹ Another concept which is used frequently in this thesis is ‘myth’. As this thesis is not concerned with its precise terminology, I use the working definition of myth suggested by Buxton (1994: 15), as “a narrative about the deeds of gods and heroes and their interrelations with ordinary mortals, handed on as a tradition within the ancient Greek world, and of collective significance to a particular social group or groups”.

²⁰ For a discussion of the development of classical scholarship concerning magic, see Versnel (1991), Graf (1995; 1997: 1-19), Dickie (2001: 12-46), Bremmer (2003), and Collins (2003: 17-18).

²¹ See Carastro (2006: 8).

²² See Bernand (1991: 44-48).

²³ See Carastro (2006: 17-61) on the Greek terminology.

²⁴ See Burriss (1936), McGuire (1994), and Cavanagh (2000) for discussions of the terminology.

The second issue concerns a definition of magic. This is a complicated matter, as the Greek and Roman evidence is by no means uniform, but can roughly be divided into two categories. Not only were there primary sources – writings (and objects) by and for magic-users – but there also existed a rich corpus of ancient secondary or discursive texts, written by people who (generally) did not use magic, but described or commented on those who did.²⁵ Though these two types of source had many elements in common,²⁶ and related with the same set of contemporary and past literary, ritual, social, and political discourses, they also differed distinctly in their goals and portrayals of magic and its users. Indeed, primary texts were in essence performative:²⁷ they were written in order to achieve a certain purpose by magical means.²⁸ As such, they entailed a variety of rituals: though which rituals were considered magical depended very much on the historical context,²⁹ some were more prone to association with magic than others. Collins (2008: 62) summarizes them as “purification, blood sacrifices, invocation of the dead, the writing of curse tablets and binding spells (*katadesmoi*), the use of charms (*epôidai*) and drugs (*pharmaka*), and the fabrication of wax figurines”. In the discursive texts, by contrast, “claims attributed to magicians [...] are much broader and include drawing down the moon, eclipsing the sun, [and] controlling the

²⁵ See Braarvig (1999) for definitions. I would like to thank Richard Gordon for first making me aware of this distinction.

²⁶ For example, Helios and Hecate, two of the main deities invoked in primary texts, were also popular in poetry in the same function. Helios in magical writings: e.g. *Suppl. Mag.* I.42.57 and *PGM* I.222-31; Hecate in magical writings: e.g. *Suppl. Mag.* I.49.40 and *PGM* IV.1430-35. Helios in poetry: e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 4.607 (as Sol); Hecate in poetry: Theoc. *Id.* 2.12; Verg. *Aen.* 4.511.

²⁷ See Carastro (2006: 177-83).

²⁸ Gordon (1999: 191), however, points out that what he perceives as the highest form of magic, Graeco-Egyptian temple magic, was “only partly directed towards action in the world: one eye is always cocked towards the mighty magicians of the glorious Egyptian past”. Though in essence performative, primary magical texts might thus also relate with literary representations of magic, as I have suggested above.

²⁹ See Graf (1997: 1-19), Fowler (2000), and Collins (2003: 17-20).

weather”.³⁰ The reason for this inconsistency is that ancient secondary texts were not performative but had a variety of different aims in their portrayal of magic; above all, however, as they perceived magic from a layman’s perspective, they tended to define it as Other.³¹ By ‘Other’ I mean anything that falls outside the norm (which might vary according to the context) because it is considered, for example, illicit or destructive on the one hand, or ineffectual on the other, and is hence met with either fear or ridicule. This Otherness of magic can primarily be seen in the discrepancy between the ancient primary and secondary sources with regard to gender: as male citizens were the norm, female foreigners might be regarded as Others and were open to association with magic. The evidence indeed reveals that, while both men and women practised magic in reality – as the primary evidence demonstrates³² – the ancient secondary sources on magic portray primarily women as possessing powerful magical abilities. Stratton (2007: 24) argues that “the two categories [of male and female] operate in binary opposition to each other. ... [W]hen focus is placed on the male, as it usually is, ideas about the female operate as a foil – the proverbial Other – against whom masculine ideals are constructed.”

Women indeed featured far more prominently in literary representations of magic than men. In Classical poetry, particular examples – apart from Circe and Medea – were Euripides’ Deianeira (Eur. *Trach.*), who accidentally poisons her husband, Heracles, by means of the poisonous blood of the centaur Nessus, and Aristophanes’ Thessalian women, who draw down the moon (*Nub.* 749-56). From the Hellenistic

³⁰ Collins (2008: 62).

³¹ For magic as Other, see e.g. Gordon (1999: 191-219). For Otherness in general, see Lissarrague (2002). Even narrators who professed to have taken refuge in magic themselves – such as the poet Tibullus – maintained this image of Otherness, e.g. Tib. 1.2.43-56.

³² See Graf (1997: 175-204), Dickie (2000).

period onward, a large number of witches featured in the poetic discourse on magic. Theocritus' Simaetha, Virgil's Dido, Horace's Canidia, and the many witches that populate the poetry of Tibullus and Propertius, are but the most famous ones.³³ Most of these women fell outside the norm of the society in which they were placed, particularly because they lacked a stable *kurios* or male guardian; hence, their sexuality was not controlled. Most witches were indeed either represented as old³⁴ or otherwise young and unattached (such as Simaetha or Dido). Old women no longer had a specific function as they could no longer bear children; they were, however, frequently portrayed as particularly lustful.³⁵ Young and unattached women, again, were also represented as dangerous because of their lack of a *kurios*. Though Greek (and, in Roman society, Roman) women were also open to association with magic, the most powerful witches were either non-Greek (or non-Roman) or living on the fringes of society. Women from Thessaly, Egypt, Syria – which were exotic places or, as Thessaly, situated on the fringe of Greek civilization – were particularly prone to connection with magic.³⁶ The polarized image of the witch as both frightening and ridiculous can be seen by elaborating on the image of the powerful (old and foreign) witches.

Female experts in magic were traditionally endowed with powers verging on the omnipotent: among other things, they could stay rivers, draw the moon from the sky,

³³ For Simaetha, see chapter 2. Dido: Verg. *Aen.* 4; Canidia: e.g. Hor. *Ep.* 5, Sat. 1.8; Tibullus e.g. 1.2; Propertius e.g. 4.5.

³⁴ e.g. Tib. 1.2, 1.5, 1.8.

³⁵ e.g. Dickie (2001: 104 and 246-47).

³⁶ Luc. *Phars.* 6 (a Thessalian woman). Outside poetry, Heliod. *Aeth.* 6.13 (Egyptian woman); Lucian *Dial. meret.* 4.288 (Syrian woman).

raise the dead, and control the weather.³⁷ Tibullus, for example, enticing Delia into letting him enter her house, promises that her husband will never find out since a *verax*/... *saga*, a “truthful wise woman” (Tib. 1.2.41-42) has put a spell on him (i.e. the husband). The witch’s powers are described in the following manner (Tib. 1.2.43-52):

*hanc ego de caelo ducentem sidera vidi
fluminis haec rapidi carmine vertit iter,
haec cantu finditque solum manesque sepulcris
elicit et tepido devocat ossa rogo; [...]
cum libet, haec tristi depellit nubila caelo:
cum libet, aestivo convocat orbe nives.
sola tenere malas Medae dicitur herbas,
sola feros Hecatae perdomuisse canes.*

This woman I have seen drawing the stars from the sky;
she sways the course of a whirling river with her song;
by singing she rips the earth apart, lures shades from their graves
and calls bones from the smouldering pyre. [...]
When she wishes, she chases clouds from the gloomy sky;
when she wishes, she summons snow in the summer season.
She alone is said to possess the evil herbs of Medea,
she alone to have subjected the fierce dogs of Hecate.

The enumeration of the witch’s quasi-divine powers allows the poet to draw attention to her frightening and powerful nature: she is not a character to be trifled with, and will be more than capable of dealing with Delia’s husband. Tibullus’ portrayal of this super-witch³⁸ anticipates Medea’s function in the representation of magic in poetry: the witch

³⁷ See also e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 4.487-91; Hor. *Epod.* 5.45-46, *Epod.* 17.78-80; Tib. 1.2, 1.8; Prop. 1.1.19-20, 4.5.5-20; Luc. *Phars.* 6.461-91.

³⁸ Gordon (1999: 204) calls this type of witch a “night-witch”. I do not think the precise terminology matters, as both are modern terms.

is said to be in possession of Medea's *malae herbae* (Tib. 1.2.51) and is thereby compared with her mythological forerunner and modelled upon her with regard to her power. With respect to her immense power, the witch is portrayed as the archetypal Other, overturning the order of the universe and of life and death. The sheer hyperbole of her abilities – construed as a catalogue of magical *adynata* – renders her a most frightening image.³⁹ That similar lists of omnipotent abilities accompanied descriptions of witches in other literary texts,⁴⁰ reveals that such hyperboles were a magical stereotype,⁴¹ portraying the witch as the ultimate Other. Comparable powers were indeed bestowed upon Circe and Medea in Hellenistic and Roman poetry: they were endowed with the ability to alter the course of the seasons,⁴² check the course of the celestial bodies,⁴³ extinguish blazing fires,⁴⁴ raise ghosts,⁴⁵ and manipulate the will of others by means of potions, spells, and the evil eye.⁴⁶ In Ovid's *Heroides* 6, for example, Hypsipyle – Jason's Lemnian mistress before he sailed to Colchis – describes Medea, the *barbara venefica*, "barbarian witch" (*Her.* 6.19) who has replaced her as follows (*Ov. Her.* 6.85-93):

*illa reluctantem cursu deducere Lunam
nititur et tenebris abdere Solis equos;
illa refrenat aquas obliquaque flumina sistit;
illa loco silvas vivaque saxa movet;*

³⁹ The listing of magical powers is not limited to depictions of women nor to poetry. Pythagoras, for example, was endowed with similar abilities: e.g. Porph. *Life of Pythagoras* 29-30.

⁴⁰ Also in prose: Apul. *Met.* 1.8.

⁴¹ I follow Stratton (2007: 23) in her definition of "stereotypes" as "broadly construed reductionist conglomerates of images and ideas about a group or type of people".

⁴² e.g. Sen. *Med.* 759-61

⁴³ e.g. Ov. *Met.* 14.365-70, Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.530-33, Sen. *Med.* 768.

⁴⁴ e.g. Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.531.

⁴⁵ e.g. Stat. *Theb.* 4.549-52, Val. Flac. *Arg.* 6.447-48.

⁴⁶ e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 7.10-24, Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.1638-93, Ov. *Met.* 7.206, Val. Flac. *Arg.* 6.448.

*per tumulos errat passis distincta capillis
certaque de tepidis colligit ossa rogis.
devovet absentis simulacraque cerea figit,
et miserum tenuis in iecur urget acus -
et quae nescierim melius.*

She strives to draw down the reluctant moon from its course
and hide the horses of the sun in darkness;
she checks the waters and stops the winding rivers;
she moves forests and living rocks from their spot.
Amid the tombs she roams, with her belt unfastened and her hair loose,
and collects certain bones from the tepid pyres.
She curses the absent and shapes waxen images,
and urges the slim needle into the wretched liver –
and what more I would rather not know.

Ovid's list of Medea's powers closely resembles the abilities attributed to Tibullus' witch. Medea is said expressly to practice love-magic – in the form of a voodoo doll (Ov. *Her.* 6.91-92) – because Hypsipyle suspects that Medea bewitched Jason into loving her.⁴⁷ This representation fits in with Medea's associations with love-magic throughout Hellenistic and Roman poetry, as more examples below will illustrate.

Circe's and Medea's powers, as well as those of the super-witches of Greek and Roman literature, were not solely represented as awe-inspiring, but were also often mocked in the context of poetry as ineffectual. This inefficacy of magic was a popular *topos* of Hellenistic and Roman poetry (particularly love elegy). In Propertius *Elegy* 2.28, for example, when Cynthia is ill, the poet prays to Jupiter, wondering which god

⁴⁷ Here, love-magic is represented as effective – to Hypsipyle at least, it appears that Medea's magic took Jason away from her – which supports the point I made on pp. 1.34-35 that magic is not *exclusively* represented as ineffectual in matters of the heart.

his mistress has offended. He also resorts to using magic in order to cure her (Prop. 2.28.35-38):

*deficiunt magico torti sub carmine rhombi,
et iacet extincto laurus adusta foco;⁴⁸
et iam Luna negat totiens descendere caelo,
nigraque funestum concinit omen avis.*

The bullroarers⁴⁹ whirling under their magical song come to a halt,
and the laurel lies parched in the quenched hearth;
And still – as so often – the moon refuses to descend from heaven,
and the black bird sings his funeral portent.

The narrator's disillusionment with and mockery of magic is expressed in the choice of verbs expressing defeat and passivity – *deficiunt*, *iacet*, *extincto*, *negat* – as well as the use of *totiens* to describe the moon's continuing refusal to be drawn from the sky. Though resorting to magic, the narrator admits that it is not usually effective. Indeed, at the end of the poem, he repeats his prayer to Jupiter and finally achieves Cynthia's restoration to health (Prop. 2.28.44).

The representations of Circe and Medea formed part of this *topos* of the inefficacy of magic. Apart from the examples given above, one example (concerning Medea) will suffice at present. In Horace's *Epode* 5, the witch Canidia and her accomplices are preparing an elaborate love spell in order to attract a man called Varus; the main ingredients of the potion are the marrow and liver of a young boy being

⁴⁸ Heyworth (2007: *ad loc.*) suggests *tacet* rather than *iacet*. There is not much difference between the two alternatives for my own interpretation.

⁴⁹ See Graf (1997: 179-80) for the *rhombus* in Theoc. *Id.* 2.

starved to death. After a lengthy description of the preparation of the ritual, the witches notice that it is not successful. Canidia then cries out (Hor. *Ep.* 5.61-66):

*quid accidit? cur dira barbarae minus
venena Medeae valent,
quibus superbam fugit ultra paelicem,
magni Creontis filiam,
cum palla, tabo munus imbutum, novam
incendio nuptam abstulit?*

What is happening? Why are the grim drugs
of barbarian Medea not having any effect at all,
by means of which she fled, having taken revenge on the vain mistress,
the daughter of great Creon,
when the mantle, a gift imbued with pus,
burnt away the new bride?

Canidia is here juxtaposed with her mythological counterpart: where Medea succeeded in her magical ritual, Canidia fails; as Canidia herself suggests, she might have been outwitted by some *venefica scientior*, a “more knowledgeable witch” (Hor. *Ep.* 5.71-72). Medea’s presence here is significant: for when Canidia compares Medea’s awesome power in killing Creusa with her own failure to attract Varus, she is in fact comparing two dissimilar brands of magic – poisoning and love-magic – with each other. Horace’s reference to Medea in the light of Canidia’s failure is therefore highly ironic: though Medea may be depicted as powerful in her revenge, Canidia’s alignment with her in the context of love-magic reminds the reader that, in matters of the heart, Medea was as powerless as the most vulgar Roman *matrona*, and Canidia was doomed to fail in her love spell. By exposing Canidia’s ignorance of her double parallel with

Medea, Horace makes a mockery of the whole belief in magic. Similarly, in Ovid's *Heroides* 12, Medea herself exclaims (Ov. *Her.* 12.163-67):

*serpentis igitur potui taurosque furentes;
unum non potui perdomuisse virum,
quaeque feros pepuli doctis medicatibus ignes,
non valeo flammam effugere ipsa meas.
ipsi me cantus herbaeque artesque relinquunt.*

Dragons indeed I could tame, and fuming bulls;
one man I could not,
and I who chased fierce fires with my learned drugs,
am not able to flee my own ardour.
My very spells and herbs and arts abandon me.

In this passage, the paradox between Medea's magical omnipotence and subjection to her own heart is well expressed; love, as in Tibullus and Propertius, is depicted as far superior to magic in its ability to bind one person to another.

In short, these examples reveal that the male writers of ancient secondary sources on magic perceived magic as the opposite of what they thought was desirable, most probably because it entailed rituals which they did not understand or approve of. Therefore, they distanced themselves from magic by placing it firmly in the hands of the people most removed from them: as the authors were male, the wielders of magic were represented as female; as Greece (or Rome) was the norm, wielders of magic were portrayed as foreign or on the periphery of this culture. It is among the foreign women figuring in the discursive texts on magic – and in poetry in particular – that Circe and

Medea can be found. Indeed, as mythological figures known for their inability to retain their lovers, they would have been ill-chosen assistants for real people attempting to overcome the vicissitudes of life by magical means.⁵⁰

The focus of this thesis will be on the discourse of magic and witches in the ancient secondary texts, that is, from the perspective of the non-user. As a working definition, I will hence use the term ‘magic’ to refer to certain figures, objects, and rituals (the most important of which have been summed up above) represented in the ancient secondary texts as deviating from the norm (i.e. Other), and polarized as either frightening or ridiculous. I now turn to Circe and Medea, in order to offer a preliminary examination of how these two figures fitted into this image of magic as represented in the ancient secondary texts.

(b) “She turned me into a newt”: Circe and Medea as Archetypal Witches

Circe and Medea have been passed down to modern times as the two archetypal witches of Graeco-Roman literature. Modern painters, writers, and theatre directors still draw on the rich material they have inherited from the Greeks and Romans.⁵¹ Irish poets have been particularly eager to incorporate the two figures in their corpus: Circe was introduced, for example, in chapter fifteen of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), in the form of Bella Cohen, a brothel keeper in Nighttown; Medea took the shape of Hester Swane, a traveller woman in rural Ireland, in Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* (1998).

⁵⁰ Circe is mentioned once in a primary magical text, namely *PGM* XX.III.1-70 (dated to the 1st century CE; see Betz [1992²: xxiii]). There, she functions similarly as in poetry, namely as mythological model for the person who undertakes the spell. The pharmaceutical powers attributed to her are, however, taken from the description of Agamede in *Il.* 11.741.

⁵¹ For a survey of modern interpretations of Medea, see McDonald (1997), and Hall, Macintosh, and Taplin (2000); for Circe, see Yarnall (1994: 99-193).

As these modern adaptations reveal, the ancient stories about Circe and Medea are open to constant modification in order to make the two figures fit into and reflect the altering socio-cultural context in which they are placed. The essentials of their depictions, however, have remained largely unaltered since the Hellenistic period. Circe and Medea are fundamentally represented as women at the margins of society, associated with destructive sexuality and, above all, with powerful, harmful magic.

When they were mentioned separately in Hellenistic and Roman poetry, features other than their magical abilities might be highlighted – for example Medea’s infanticide.⁵² As a pair, however, they were inextricably associated not only with powerful magic, but simultaneously – as I will argue – with lack or failure of that power when subject to love or to magic used against them. In order to demonstrate this seemingly contradictory status of Circe and Medea in poetry, I will examine a selection of Hellenistic and Roman poetic portrayals of magic in which Circe and Medea are mentioned side by side, not as protagonists of the poems, but in the background; this selection is only preliminary, and I will discuss further Hellenistic and Roman representations in chapter 7.

Theocritus’ Pharmakeutria

After Hesiod’s *Theogony* (c. 700 BCE), to which I will return in chapter 4, Theocritus’ second *Idyll* (early third century BCE) – sometimes referred to as the “Pharmakeutria”, the “Witch” – is the first extant poem to mention Circe and Medea together. In this poem, a young woman called Simaetha attempts to draw her lover, Delphis, back to her by means of a magical ritual. Near the outset of her ritual, Simaetha prays to Hecate –

⁵² e.g. Ps.-Lyc. *Alex.* 1315-18, Prop. 3.19.17-18, Ov. *Tr.* 2.387-88.

the goddess of witchcraft⁵³ – to make her drugs as efficacious as those of Circe and Medea (*Id.* 2.14-16):

χαῖρ', Ἐκάτα δασπλῆτι, καὶ ἐς τέλος ἄμμιν ὀπάδει,
φάρμακα ταῦτ' ἔρδοισα χερεῖονα μήτε τι Κίρκας
μήτε τι Μηδείας μήτε Ξανθᾶς Περιμήδας.

Hail, gruesome Hecate, and assist me to the end,
by not making these drugs at all inferior to those of Circe,
of Medea, or of golden-haired Perimede.

I will ignore the figure of Perimede in this discussion, since she might be regarded as a (possibly humorous) addition by Theocritus.⁵⁴ That the poet effectively models Simaetha on Circe and Medea suggests that most readers of this *Idyll* would have been aware of the two figures as belonging to the paradigm of 'powerful mythological witches' to whose image others might be fashioned. This comparison at the outset of the poem helps place Simaetha in a magical context, which the narrator already established, among other things, by her reference to Hecate roaming cemeteries (*Id.*

⁵³ See Marquardt (1981), Johnston (1990: 143-48), and Sauzeau (2000). As Johnston (1990: 2) points out, Hecate was endowed with functions other than that of goddess of witchcraft. I am aware of this diversity, but since her status as patroness of witches was well established from the fifth century BCE onward, it does not affect my argument.

⁵⁴ Perimede is a minor character who appears rather out of place side by side with the two most famous witches of Greek mythology. Moreau (1994: 110) suggests that she may be a purely literary invention modelled on the figure of Medea, on the basis of the Indo-European root *mēd- which appears in both names. However, Perimede features – independently of Medea – in a much earlier poem than Theocritus' *Idyll*, the *Ehoiai* (fr 10.25-34 Most), as the sister of the Aeolids, Jason's ancestors. I therefore suggest that the early genealogical connection with Jason's family might have triggered a closer association of Perimede with Medea because of their similarities in name. It appears that Theocritus was the first to depict Perimede as a witch and place her alongside Circe and Medea. One might speculate that this was his way of exhibiting his erudition: the intellectual reader might have been familiar with the figure of Perimede, and might have smiled at the inclusion of such an obscure figure in his poem on the basis of a linguistic and genealogical connection. At no point did Perimede acquire the same status as Circe and Medea: Prop. 2.4.8-9 was the only other Graeco-Roman poem in which she is mentioned again, and again as witch, alongside Medea. Propertius' representation was more than likely based on Theocritus' second *Idyll*.

2.12) and by her description of her aim as binding (καταδήσομαι, *Id.* 2.10) her lover. Indeed, the essential parallel which the reader is invited to recognize between Simaetha on the one hand, and the mythological witches on the other, is their use of *pharmaka*, “drugs”.⁵⁵ This comparison, however, triggers a second parallel between Simaetha and her mythological precursors, one which simmers underneath the surface of the poem. Though Simaetha creates a parallel between herself and Circe and Medea with respect to the strength of her love spell, love was in fact the one area in which the powers of the two mythological witches were inefficacious: in spite of their magical abilities, Medea was ultimately left by Jason, and Circe by Odysseus.⁵⁶ As Charles Segal (1981: 77) remarks, by mentioning such figures in Simaetha’s ritual, Theocritus confirms the girl’s position among “women whose relations with men are those of seduction and concubinage rather than marriage, unions unstable and ultimately doomed”. Circe and Medea thus appear to function not only as powerful witches, but also as archetypal women unable to retain their lovers. Simaetha’s act of modelling herself on these two figures with regard to their powers is indeed proven to be ironic when her ritual turns out to be unsuccessful at the end of the *Idyll* (2.164), hence confirming the underlying parallel between her and the two figures.

Theocritus’ second *Idyll* illustrates several points regarding the representation of magic in poetry which I have made in the previous section. First, the narrator is female, her ritual based partly on historically documented rituals but also interrelating with literary constructs of magic.⁵⁷ The alterity of magic is maintained through the use of exotic paraphernalia and spells. Secondly, though Simaetha’s ritual is described in

⁵⁵ See Segal (1981: 77).

⁵⁶ See Gibbs-Wichrowska (1994: 256).

⁵⁷ See Graf (1997: 176-190) and Faraone (1999: 142-43).

powerful terms – for example, through the enumeration of magical ingredients⁵⁸ – it turns out to be unsuccessful. This paradox between power and inefficaciousness is also present in the portrayal of Circe and Medea, in their inexhaustible magical power, which is yet inefficacious in their attempts to retain their lovers. Though only their power is explicitly referred to, their lack of power when subject to love is implied through the context of the aphrodisiac ritual and the representation of Simaetha’s ritual as ineffectual. This paradox – as I will argue – informs the majority of representations of Circe and Medea from the Classical period onward, though not all poets adhered to this polarized image, and various alternative perspectives were indeed possible. Examples from Roman poetry will illustrate this.

Tibullus, Propertius, and Statius

In their elegiac poetry, Tibullus and Propertius did not follow Theocritus’ treatment of Circe and Medea slavishly but incorporated the two figures into their *oeuvres* each in his individual manner. In Tibullus’ *Elegy* 2.4, the poet, madly in love with Nemesis, swears the following in order to gain the girl’s affections (2.4.55-60):

*quidquid habet Circe quidquid Medea veneni
quidquid et herbarum Thessala terra gerit
et quod, ubi indomitis gregibus Venus afflat amores
hippomanes cupidae stillat ab inguine equae,
si modo me placido videat Nemesis mea vultu,
mille alias herbas misceat illa, bibam.*

⁵⁸ e.g. barley (*Id.* 2.18), laurel (2.23), a piece of Delphis’ cloak (2.53).

Whatever potions Circe and Medea have,
 whatever drugs the Thessalian earth grows,
and the *hippomanes* which drips from the vulva of a passionate mare,
 when Venus breathes love into wild herds,
if only my Nemesis might look on me with a kind face,
 she might mix a thousand other herbs; I would drink.

In order to substantiate the power which his lover, Nemesis, exerts over him, the poet lists a variety of magical potions he is willing to drink if only she would behold him kindly. The concoctions of Circe and Medea, mentioned first, create an initial image of powerful magic steeped in mythology. This image is enhanced by the addition of two other kinds of magical drugs. First, Thessaly had been associated with magic – and particularly with witches who could draw down the moon – since the fifth century BCE.⁵⁹ Secondly, the *hippomanes* – whether it was a liquid secreted from a mare’s vulva or a growth on a foal’s body – was already said by Aristotle to be greatly in demand with witches.⁶⁰

Tibullus’ reference to Circe and Medea differs quite drastically from the one made by Theocritus. The latter suggested a comparison between Simaetha and Circe and Medea not merely on account of their pharmaceutical knowledge but also because of their inability to retain their lovers. The drugs belonging to Circe and Medea to which Tibullus refers, by comparison, are not inefficacious in the love context; on the contrary, the essence of Circe’s and Medea’s drugs is that they are enormously powerful. If one were to think of them as ineffectual, Tibullus’ statement regarding his devotion to Nemesis would be meaningless. Indeed, Nemesis’ power over the poet is

⁵⁹ Thessalian witches are first mentioned in *Ar. Nub.* 749-52.

⁶⁰ See *Arist. Hist. an.* 577a7-13. See also Faraone (1999: 10) and Gordon (1999: 173-74) for a discussion of the *hippomanes*.

not compared with but set above these three types of magical drugs: love is represented as possessing a magic of its own, wholly superior to the most powerful magical paraphernalia which exist in the world. This contrasting technique is different from Theocritus', who models Simaetha on Circe and Medea.

Propertius engages with the two witch-figures in *Elegy* 2.1, in which he expresses his proclivity for love elegy rather than epic on account of his supposed personal experiences. In order to articulate his loyalty to his mistress, Cynthia, he lists the kinds of magical potions he would take rather than leave her (*Elegy* 2.1.51-56):

*seu mihi sunt tangenda novercae pocula Phaedrae,
pocula privigno non nocitura suo,
seu mihi Circaeο pereundum est gramine, sive
Colchis Iolciacis urat aena focis,
una meos quoniam praedata est femina sensus,
ex hac ducentur funera nostra domo.*

Whether I have to touch the cups of the stepmother Phaedra
(cups which would not harm her stepson),
whether I have to die by a Circean herb, or
the Colchian cauldron burns over the Iolcian hearth,
because one woman alone has captured my senses,
from her house my funeral will be led.

In this poem, Circe and Medea (as the owner of the Colchian cauldron burning in Iolcus, Jason's home in Thessaly) are mentioned together with Phaedra in order to stress the power Cynthia wields over the poet. The presence of Phaedra is unexpected and problematic. Though in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (509ff.) the Nurse suggests preparing a *pharmakon* for her – whether to rid her of her love for her stepson,

Hippolytus, or to make him love her in return – Phaedra is not known in myth for her actual use of magic, nor does any version of the story survive in which she uses magic against Hippolytus. Associating her with Circe and Medea is unusual to say the least. Perhaps Propertius is referring to an alternative version of the myth where Phaedra did attempt to make Hippolytus fall in love with her through a magic potion.⁶¹ Heyworth's (2007: 112) alternative suggestion that the text should read *Thesei* instead of *Phaedrae* is tempting, as a more famous example of a stepmother attempting to poison her stepson was Medea, whose attempt at Theseus' life in Athens was foiled at the last minute by his father, Aegeus, who recognized his son. If Heyworth's conjecture is correct, Circe's drugs would be encircled by two descriptions of Medea's potions, namely the attempted murder of Theseus and the actual murder of Pelias in Iolcus. At the same time, however, the inclusion of a figure not traditionally associated with magic in the description of Circe and Medea is not unprecedented: Theocritus had added the unknown Perimede to the famous figures, and Propertius might have drawn on that example and included Phaedra, another figure not traditionally associated with magic.

Be that as it may, the status of Circe and Medea in this poem is still undisputedly that of powerful witches. As in the case of Tibullus' Nemesis, however, the mythological examples cannot compare to Cynthia: as Nemesis could make Tibullus drink any magical potion, so Cynthia alone has the poet's faithfulness until he dies. As Whitaker (1983: 14) suggests, this is the standard manner in which Propertius exploits myth: at 2.3.27, for example, Cynthia's beauty exceeds that of any mortal

⁶¹ Butler and Barber (1933: *ad* 2.1.51) suggest it might have been the subject of Euripides' lost *Hippolytus Veiled*.

woman, and at 2.14.3-8, the poet professes to love more than Odysseus loved Penelope and Electra loved Orestes. In Whitaker's words, "myth [...] represents a standard, but a standard that Cynthia's beauty or the experience of the poet [...] has now surpassed". Magic is thereby rendered ineffectual, as indeed the poet's designation of Phaedra's potions underscores. While Theocritus expresses the inefficacy of magic by describing Simaetha's ritual as unsuccessful, Propertius claims that no magic is strong enough to make him abandon Cynthia.⁶² Both Tibullus and Propertius, while maintaining the image of Circe and Medea as powerful witches, also represent them as subordinate to the superior power of love.

In order to demonstrate that Circe and Medea might be included in non-amatory contexts, I include a poem from the Silver Age, though this poem admittedly crosses the chronological boundary of my thesis. The context in which Circe and Medea appear in Statius' *Thebaid*, an epic from the Silver Age, is indeed different from that of Theocritus, Tibullus, and Propertius. In the *Thebaid*, an epic narrating the battle between the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polyneices, for the possession of Thebes, Eteocles despairs before the battle and consults Teiresias. In his performance of a necromantic ritual in order to consult the ghosts of the dead, the latter is aided by the virgin Manto (*Theb.* 4.549-51):

*iussa facit carmenque serit, quo dissipat umbras,
quo reciet sparsas; qualis, si crimina demas,
Colchis et Aeaeo simulatrix litore Circe.*

⁶² For the inefficacy of love-magic in Propertius, see Prince (2003).

She [i.e. Manto] did what she was told and wove the spell
with which she dispersed the shades
and called them back when scattered, similar to – if without the crimes –
the Colchian and deceptive Circe on the Aeaeon beach.

As in Theocritus' *Pharmaceutria*, a witch is compared with her mythological counterparts in order to create an image of powerful female magic. Statius' portrayal of Circe and Medea, however, places them in a radically different context from those by Theocritus, Tibullus, and Propertius: the poet has taken Circe and Medea out of the love context and instead highlights their criminal stigma (*Theb.* 4.550). The use of the paradigm of these two figures as mythological witches was thus not sterile but flexible and adaptable to various contexts. Indeed, in Statius' *Thebaid*, no underlying association of Circe and Medea with failed love-magic is distinguishable.

As these examples from Greek bucolic poetry, Augustan love elegy, and post-Augustan epic suggest, cursory references to Circe and Medea in Hellenistic and Roman poetry – whether or not combined with other magical paraphernalia or figures – conveyed an image of powerful feminine magic with origins in early mythology. It was an image open to adaptation. Some poets highlighted the frightful aspect of their magic, depicting it as immensely powerful (Tibullus and Propertius) and even criminal (Statius), some also represented it as ineffective compared to the greater power of love, and therefore somewhat ridiculous (Theocritus, Tibullus, and Propertius). In the latter poems, one might interpret Circe's and Medea's presence as signifying more than mere 'powerful witches'. Indeed, their status in myth as abandoned lovers of Odysseus and Jason respectively rendered them ideal paradigms of women unable to retain their lovers. The representations of Circe and Medea might, in short, draw attention to their

polarized nature or to only one of the two paradoxical aspects. In the Archaic period, however, I will argue that this particular polarized image was not only absent from the depictions of Circe and Medea, but that they were not in fact associated with magic at all. I will introduce this argument by comparing a Hellenistic family tree with an Archaic genealogy of Circe and Medea.

(c) Two Family Trees

In the Hellenistic period, a particular genealogy of Circe and Medea was drawn up. Though the earliest account we possess of this genealogy was written by Diodorus Siculus (1st century BCE), he most probably relied on an older source, either Euhemerus of Messene's *Hiera Anagraphê*, "Sacred Scripture" (fourth century BCE) or Dionysius Scytobrachion's prose epic *Argonautica* (third century BCE).⁶³ Diodorus writes (*Bibliotheca* 4.45.2-3):

φασὶ γὰρ Ἡλίου δύο γενέσθαι παῖδας, Αἰήτην τε καὶ Πέρσην·
τούτων δὲ τὸν μὲν Αἰήτην βασιλεῦσαι τῆς Κολχίδος, τὸν δ' ἕτερον
τῆς Ταυρικῆς, ἀμφοτέρους δὲ διενεγκεῖν ὤμότητι.
καὶ Πέρσου μὲν Ἐκάτην γενέσθαι θυγατέρα, τόλμη καὶ παρανομία
προέχουσαν τοῦ πατρός· [...]
μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα συνοικήσασαν Αἰήτη γεννηῆσαι δύο
θυγατέρας, Κίρκην τε καὶ Μήδειαν, ἔτι δ' υἱὸν Αἰγιαλέα.

Indeed, they say that Helios had two sons, Aeëtes and Perses.

Of these, Aeëtes was king of Colchis, and the other of the Tauric land,⁶⁴
and both excelled in cruelty.

Perses had a daughter, Hecate, who was superior to her father

⁶³ For Euhemerus as source, see Parry (1992: 45); for Dionysius, see Graf (1997b: 25). For a survey of Diodorus' sources, see Sacks (1990: 70).

⁶⁴ i.e. the Tauric Chersonese, a peninsula on the north side of the Black Sea.

in daring and lawlessness. [...]

After this, she [i.e. Hecate] married Aeëtes and bore two daughters, Circe and Medea, and also a son, Aegialeus.⁶⁵

Two elements in this genealogy are strong indicators of Circe's and Medea's status as archetypal powerful witches – i.e. witches incorporating all the elements commonly associated with magic in poetic representations – in Hellenistic and Roman poetry. First, that they are depicted as sisters corresponds with their joint appearance in contemporary texts as a duo of mythological witches, their characterizations largely intertwined. Secondly, that Hecate is their mother further underlines their magical status, as Hecate was the archetypal goddess of witchcraft from the fifth century BCE onward.⁶⁶ Indeed, Hecate's close relationship with Circe and Medea was also acknowledged by Theocritus:⁶⁷ if the latter knew of Hecate as their mother, Simaetha praying to her in order to make her own drugs as powerful as Circe's and Medea's would have been particularly poignant.⁶⁸

The Hellenistic and Roman poetic representations and family tree of Circe and Medea as witches rested, however, on certain assumptions concerning the nature and status of these figures in the earlier poetic tradition which did not necessarily correspond to their actual portrayals in those early texts. For example, the appearance of Circe and Medea in the context of love-magic – as in Theocritus, Tibullus, and Propertius (and Medea in Ovid) – might have reminded the reader of their failure to retain Odysseus and Jason as their lovers. Indeed, both figures were sometimes

⁶⁵ Aegialeus is an alternative name for Apsyrtus, derived from αἰγιαλός, “sea-shore”, “beach”.

⁶⁶ See n. 39 on p. 1.27.

⁶⁷ See pp. 1.26-27.

⁶⁸ Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.528-30 makes Medea a priestess of Hecate, not her daughter. The family tree mentioned by Diodorus was thus not canonical.

represented separately as lovesick women too.⁶⁹ If one considers the pre-Hellenistic evidence, however, as I will do in the following chapters, neither figure used magic in order to keep hold of her lover,⁷⁰ and the Homeric Circe indeed never wanted to retain Odysseus as her lover in the first place (see chapter 3). The connection of Circe and Medea with love-magic probably occurred on account of their associations with love and magic separately, influenced by the contemporary literary *topos* of the superiority of love to magic as discussed above.⁷¹

More importantly, Circe and Medea were perceived by Theocritus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Statius as mythological *ur*-witches, by which I mean the earliest witch-figures of Greek literature. As this thesis will argue, however, the earliest poems did not endow these two figures with this status at all. A brief discussion of Circe's and Medea's Archaic genealogy will shed some preliminary light on this. If one considers Hesiod's account of their family tree, a rather different image of the two figures indeed appears (*Theog.* 956-62):

Ἡελίῳ δ' ἀκάμαντι τέκε κλυτὸς Ὠκεανίνη
 Περσηὶς Κίρκην τε καὶ Αἰήτην βασιλῆα.
 Αἰήτης δ' υἱὸς φαεσιμβρότου Ἡελίοιο
 κούρην Ὠκεανοῖο τελέηεντος ποταμοῖο
 γῆμε θεῶν βουλήσιν Ἰδυῖαν καλλιπάρηον.
 ἦ δὴ οἱ Μήδειαν εὐσφυρον ἐν φιλότῃτι
 γείναθ' ὑποδηθεῖσα διὰ χρυσέην Ἀφροδίτην.

To untiring Helios, the famous Perseis, daughter of Oceanus,
 bore Circe and Aeëtes the king.

⁶⁹ e.g. Circe: Hor. *Carm.* 1.17.17-20. Medea: Prop. 4.5.41-44. See also chapter 7.

⁷⁰ See Prince (2003: 206), who makes this point about Medea specifically.

⁷¹ See also chapter 8.

Aeëtes, son of Helios who brings light to mortals,
married the daughter of Oceanus the perfect stream,
the fair-cheeked Idyia, through the will of the gods.
She yielded to him in love and bore him Medea
with the beautiful ankles through golden Aphrodite.

Further in the *Theogony*, Circe and Medea are referred to separately, in a list of goddesses who begot children from mortal men; I will return to these passages in due course.⁷² The image of Circe and Medea presented by Hesiod is starkly different from Diodorus' account. First, Circe and Medea are not sisters, but Circe is Medea's aunt.⁷³ Secondly, their mother is not Hecate: Circe's mother is Perseis, and Medea's is Idyia. The only clear sign of ambiguity in the representations of Circe and Medea is that Hesiod connects both of them with the Titans, a race of deities defeated and humiliated by the Olympians (*Theog.* 617-720): their ancestors are Oceanus and Helios, son of the Titan Hyperion (*Theog.* 371-74). There does not appear to be any direct association with magic. Gordon (1999: 178-79) appears to perceive the name of Medea's mother, Idyia, "she who knows", as an indication of Medea's magical status. Even if her name is interpreted as "seer", however, this does not connect Idyia with magic.⁷⁴ The family tree narrated by Hesiod appears to have remained largely unchanged throughout Archaic and Classical literature. In the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (or

⁷² Medea: *Theog.* 992-1002; Circe: *Theog.* 1011-16. See chapter 4.

⁷³ Medea is also Circe's cousin since Perseis and Idyia are sisters; see Hes. *Theog.* 337-56.

⁷⁴ One might draw a parallel with the name of Prometheus, traditionally interpreted as "he who knows in advance". Prometheus was not associated with magic until Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.844-56, where he gave his name to a drug called Prometheion, a plant grown from his blood. For other references to Prometheion, see also Sen. *Med.* 708-09 and Val. Flacc. *Arg.* 7.355-60. The drug might already have been referred to in Soph. *Colch. TrGF* 4 F 340, as Prometheus is mentioned, but the fragment is too short to be conclusive.

Ehoiai), Medea was said to have a sister, Iophossa,⁷⁵ and some time in the sixth century BCE, she was also given a brother, Apsyrtus.⁷⁶

A brief comparison of these Archaic and Hellenistic family trees of Circe and Medea suggests that a development took place in the portrayals of the two figures. I will indeed argue that in Archaic poetry both figures were portrayed not as archetypal witches but as complex deities; minor, ambiguous goddesses at the margins of the ancient Greek pantheon, but nonetheless immortals endowed with appropriate supernatural powers. In the following chapters, I will propose that the particular powers attributed to Circe and Medea did not form part of the concept of magic but of a broad and complex mental category called *metis* which indeed incorporated aspects of magic to some degree; I will therefore give a brief introduction to this notion and to its connection with magic.

(d) Magic or Metis?

The status of magic in the Archaic period is still the topic of heated scholarly discussion. Certain elements in the Homeric epics – such as the girdle with which Athena provides Hera in order to arouse desire in Zeus (*Il.* 14.214-21), or indeed Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into swine (see chapter 3) – are very similar to the modern understanding of magic. The concept of *mageia*, however, and similar concepts such as *pharmakeia* and *goêteia* (discussed above), are only attested from the Classical period onwards, which suggests that the concept of magic as such did not exist prior to the coinage of these terms. On account of this lack of conceptualization,

⁷⁵ *Ehoiai* fr. 193 Most. Apollonius calls her Chalciopé, see *Ap. Rhod. Arg.* 2.1149.

⁷⁶ The earliest reference to him is in *Naupactica* fr. 4 *EGF*.

some scholars have argued that no firm awareness of magic was present in Archaic thought.⁷⁷ Others argue the opposite, that there is little or no distinction between the Archaic and Classical periods in their understanding of magic. They classify Archaic figures and actions which resemble the Classical concept of magic as “proto-magic” or “magic before magic”.⁷⁸ In two recent studies of ancient Greek magic, the latter approach has been favoured. Collins’s (2008: 28) sweeping statement, however, that magical figures and rituals must have existed in the Archaic period because otherwise “we could not [...] account for why later Greeks were so willing to recognize magic in them”, does little to further scholarly understanding of this complex issue, as it fails to acknowledge that concepts and ideas can change with time. Carastro’s (2006) intricate discussion of the semantic field surrounding the verb *thelgein*, on the contrary, has added considerably to scholarly insight into the development of ancient Greek magic. By identifying correspondences in meaning between the Archaic notion of *thelgein* (and, connected with it, the verb κήλειν, which is translated similarly) and the concept of magic in the Classical period – particularly the aspect of ‘binding’ – he has demonstrated that certain links between the two notions must have been perceived by the ancient Greeks. In essence, Carastro proposes that the Classical representation of the Eastern figures of the *magoi* was anchored in the Archaic notion of *thelgein*. Hence, the fifth-century concept of *mageia* (which was created based on the representation of the *magoi*), rather than a new Eastern import, was rooted in a connotation of ‘binding’ present in this already existing, inherently Greek, Archaic notion. On the basis of this argument, Carastro maintains that magic and *thelgein* can be equated, and that a notion

⁷⁷ e.g. Graf (1997: 175) and Dickie (2001: 23). See also recently Stratton (2007: 43) who refers to Graf and Dickie.

⁷⁸ Respectively Parry (1992: 8) and Gordon (1999: 165).

of magic, even if it was not yet conceptualized as ‘magic’, was present in the Archaic mind frame.

Though I agree with Carastro’s basic argument on the correspondences between *mageia* and *thelgein* and with his proposed anchoring of magic in *thelgein*, I disagree with him regarding the ‘magical’ status of the notion of *thelgein* in the Archaic period. This thesis is only tangentially concerned with this issue, but as both Circe (in the *Odyssey*) and Medea (in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*) are said to immobilize others (*thelgein*), it is necessary to elaborate on the issue. Before I move on to a discussion of *metis*, I will therefore respond to Carastro’s argument regarding *thelgein*, and elaborate on the development of the concept of magic in the Classical period. I wish to clarify, however, that, even if one considers the concept of magic to have existed in the Archaic period, the general argument which I will make regarding Circe and Medea still holds. My present discussion is meant to be preliminary, and following chapters will further elaborate on the matter.

Immobilization through thelgein

First, I will argue against Carastro that he is incorrect in understanding *thelgein* as inherently “redoutable” (2006: 215) or “fearsome”, a necessary quality if one wishes to equate *thelgein* with magic. In order to place my counterarguments in context, it is first necessary to elaborate on the meaning of *thelgein*. The notion of *thelgein* is present throughout the Homeric epics: both gods such as Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Thetis, and Calypso, as well as mortals such as Aegisthus and Penelope have recourse to it.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁹ Zeus: *Il.* 15.594, 12.255; Poseidon: *Il.* 13.435; Apollo: *Il.* 21.604; Thetis: *Il.* 21.276; Calypso: *Od.* 1.57; Aegisthus: *Od.* 3.264; Penelope: *Od.* 18.282. *Pace* Carastro, who considers *thelgein* to be a solely divine

meaning of *thelgein* can be understood from the following example. In the *Odyssey*, it is said that Hermes ἀνδρῶν ὄμματα θέλγει / ᾧν ἐθέλει, τοὺς δ' αὖτε καὶ ὑπνῶντας ἐγείρει, “*thelgei* (I will elaborate on the translation below) the eyes of men, whomever he wants, while others again he wakes up from their slumber” (*Od.* 24.3-4). In this case, *thelgein* is represented as sleep-inducing and the opposite of waking someone. Most of the other Archaic examples of *thelgein* do not induce sleep as such, but a numbness, an inability to act or think for oneself, of which sleep can be seen as an extreme example. The effect of Circe’s *pharmaka*, forgetfulness, to which I will return in the following chapter, is another manifestation of numbness. Carastro (2006: 215) indeed sums up the effects of *thelgein* as “l’*éblouissement*, l’*immobilisation*, la *perte de vigueur*, l’*oubli* ou encore l’*illusion*”. There are various ways in which one might *thelgein* another person.⁸⁰ It can be achieved by means of certain instruments: not only Circe’s *pharmaka* can achieve it, but also words or song – such as a poet’s words (*Od.* 1.337-38) or the Sirens’ song (*Od.* 12.39-40, 44)⁸¹ – as well as Hermes’ wand (*Il.* 24.343-44). The Olympians, however, have recourse to *thelgein* without making use of any instruments or speech.⁸²

modus operandi. Where mortals take recourse to *thelgein* (such as Penelope and Aegisthus), Carastro (2006: 92-93) proposes that they express the immobilization by Eros. Though both examples of Penelope and Aegisthus are concerned with *eros*, the deity is not mentioned and indeed both mortals are said to *thelgein* by themselves. The swineherd Eumaeus, moreover, claims to be stupefied more than once by Odysseus’ tales, without the involvement of any deity (*Od.* 14.387, 17.514 and 17.521). The Homeric examples thus suggest that *thelgein* is not solely a divine mode of action.

⁸⁰ Carastro (2006: 68-79) also distinguishes between the various parts of the body on which *thelgein* works.

⁸¹ Other figures who *thelgein* with words are Thetis (*Il.* 21.276), Calypso (*Od.* 1.57), Aegisthus (*Od.* 3.264), Odysseus (*Od.* 14.387, 17.514, 521), and Penelope (*Od.* 18.282).

⁸² Zeus (*Il.* 15.594, 16.298), Poseidon (*Il.* 13.435), Apollo (*Il.* 15.322, 21.604), and ‘some god’ (*Od.* 16.195).

The verb is traditionally translated as “enchant” or “beguile”,⁸³ but neither translation effectively expresses what is entailed in *thelgein*. The *TLG* suggests as its basic meaning “I coerce someone to do whatever thing he resists by nature”.⁸⁴ In essence, there is a connotation of forcefulness in stopping another person from thinking or acting for him- or herself, and this is achieved through a stealthy, indirect approach (e.g. *pharmaka* mixed in with a potion, or soothing words) rather than direct attack. As the coercion resulting from *thelgein* effects a mental or physical paralysis in a person, I have chosen to use the translations “to stupefy”, “to stun”, and “to immobilize” rather than “to coerce”, which lacks the connotation of paralysis.⁸⁵ In its ‘binding’ ability, indirect approach, and use of *pharmaka* and speech/song, *thelgein* indeed closely approaches magic.

There is, however, one major difference. Carastro (2006: 215) argues that *thelgein* was construed as “redoutable”. Gordon (1999: 175) similarly states that “the exercise of such [i.e. stupefying] powers is untoward, even improper – the gods may have such powers but they ought not use them”. As I have argued above, Greek magic was represented in ancient secondary texts as either fearsome or ridiculous on account of its Otherness. If *thelgein* is to be equated with the fifth-century concept of magic, it ought to conform to this essential definition. Though Carastro states in the conclusion of his monograph that *thelgein* was represented as dangerous and fearsome, there is nothing in his earlier discussions of the Archaic evidence that clearly points towards this conclusion. Indeed, neither Carastro nor Gordon is able to pinpoint where this supposed impropriety in the use of these powers is expressed in Archaic poetry. I would

⁸³ “Enchant” e.g. by Pratt (1993: 73); “beguile” e.g. by Parry (1992).

⁸⁴ *TLG ad loc.*: *adigo aliquem, rem quamquam ad faciendum quod eius naturae repugnet.*

⁸⁵ Similarly, Carastro (2006) uses the translation “méduser”, which means “to dumbfound”.

argue that nothing in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* suggests that the use of stupefaction *in itself* is frowned upon. I agree with Pratt (1993: 73-81), who argues that, at least in the *Odyssey*, *thelgein* is often perceived as a positive experience. For example, when the bard Phemius on Ithaca sings of the homecomings of the Greeks after the Trojan War, Penelope asks him to stop his woeful song (ἄοιδῆς / λυγρῆς, *Od.* 1.340-41) and instead sing of one of the many θελκτήρια, “calming [songs]”, which he knows (*Od.* 1.337). In the case of poetry, the numbness which *thelgein* induces entails a temporary forgetfulness of one’s sorrows which is conceived of as beneficial. As my discussion of the *Odyssey* in the following chapter will emphasize, the theme of forgetting is key in that particular epic. One might indeed argue that forgetting is construed as a necessary step to remembering (though a step which the hero must overcome in order to survive): Odysseus indeed has to forget his Iliadic identity in order to achieve his homecoming. In this light, forgetfulness can be interpreted as a positive experience, and the ability to induce it a beneficial power.⁸⁶ *Thelgein* must therefore not be interpreted as inherently dangerous or ridiculous and hence magical. Indeed, the ambiguity in the verb does not derive from its wielder’s supernatural abilities but from his or her intentions. I propose that the key to differentiating between constructive and destructive uses of *thelgein* – which Carastro overlooks entirely – lies primarily in the intended duration. While Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Hermes, the poets, Odysseus, Thetis, Penelope, and Athena aim to immobilize others momentarily,⁸⁷ some figures intend the immobilization to be eternal. Calypso, for example, is described as follows (*Od.* 1.56-57):

⁸⁶ The ability of the Muses to induce forgetfulness is also represented as positive at Hes. *Theog.* 53-55.

⁸⁷ e.g. Zeus (*Od.* 16.298), Poseidon (*Il.* 13.435), Apollo (*Il.* 21.604), Hermes (*Il.* 24.343-44), poets (*Od.* 1.337), Odysseus (*Od.* 17.514), Thetis (*Il.* 21.276), Penelope (*Od.* 18.282), and Athena (*Od.* 16.298).

αἰεὶ δὲ μαλακοῖσι καὶ αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισιν
θέλγει, ὅπως Ἰθάκης ἐπιλήσεται.

Ever with gentle and charming words
she soothes him [i.e. Odysseus] so he would forget Ithaca.

The effect which Calypso hopes to have on Odysseus is not a momentary forgetfulness of his sorrows, but an eternal (note the poignant use of αἰεὶ) forgetfulness of his home, so he might become her immortal husband. The Sirens' use of immobilization (*thelgein*) is similar (*Od.* 12.41-46):

ὅς τις ἀιδρεΐη πελάση καὶ φθόγγον ἀκούσῃ
Σειρήνων, [...]
ἀλλὰ τε Σειρήνες λιγυρῆ **θέλγουσιν** ἀοιδῆ
ἤμεναι ἐν λειμῶνι, πολὺς δ' ἄμφ' ὀστεόφιν θῆς
ἀνδρῶν πυθομένων, περὶ δὲ ῥίνοι μινύθουσι.

Whoever approaches the Sirens in ignorance and hears their sound,
[...] the Sirens immobilize with clear song,
sitting in a meadow, and around them is a great heap
of bones of rotting men, and around the bones the skin is shrivelling.

The Sirens' transformation is an extreme and lasting form of immobilization, from men into corpses, and therefore the Greeks must be guided away from them (12.41-49). Circe's immobilizing powers (*thelgein*), I will argue in the following chapter, can be interpreted in similar terms. This eternal immobilization contrasts starkly with the forgetfulness induced by the poets, which offers temporary relief from suffering. It appears that this lasting effect of *thelgein* is primarily the domain of uncontrolled feminine figures, while male figures – though also female figures tightly incorporated

in the Olympian pantheon (such as Athena, Thetis, and Penelope) – immobilize (*thelgein*) in a constructive manner and with temporary effect.⁸⁸ In short, I agree with Carastro that there are strong links between *thelgein* and magic, particularly with respect to the notion of binding, often achieved through song or external paraphernalia such as the wand or (in Circe’s case) *pharmaka*. It thus appears highly likely that the concept of magic was anchored in the Archaic notion of *thelgein*. Nevertheless, I propose that *thelgein* is not represented as inherently “redoutable” or Other, as Carastro argues, and can therefore not be equated with magic. The construction of *thelgein* as constructive or destructive depends on its intended duration, and is often gender-linked⁸⁹ – though the binary gender opposition is, as the exceptions reveal, not maintained throughout the Homeric epics.

If the concept of magic thus did not exist in the Archaic period, it must have developed in the Classical period, as there is clear primary and secondary evidence for it from that period onwards. I will now offer a discussion of how the concept of magic crystallized in the Classical period

The Crystallization of Magic

The early fifth century BCE was a period of great upheaval in the Hellenic world; the Persian Wars in particular influenced the Western world in a way which, according to some, is still felt today.⁹⁰ The threat of a formidable common enemy suddenly united

⁸⁸ The only male figure who aims to induce eternal forgetfulness is Aegisthus (*Od.* 3.264). Though his feminization was well established in later poetry, e.g. in Aesch. *Ag.* 1625, there is no trace of this in his portrayal in the Homeric epics. He might thus be seen as an exception to the rule.

⁸⁹ *Pace* Carastro, who only briefly considers *thelgein* in the context of gender (2006: 156-57).

⁹⁰ See Bridges, Hall, and Rhodes (2007). See also Francis (1990) for the influence of the Persian Wars on Greek society in general.

the Greek world of which the *poleis* had thus far primarily considered themselves to possess separate identities.⁹¹ Though this temporary unity disintegrated rapidly after the Persian Wars – witness the Peloponnesian War later in the century (431-404 BCE) – the image of Persians and other Eastern peoples as Others or “barbarians” flourished in, for example, Athenian drama.⁹² Stratton (2007: 40) argues that “magic discourse ... emerged at this time part and parcel of the new discourse of barbarism. *Mageia* – the religion of Athens’s enemy, Persia – now also acquired associations with various characteristics and practices that Athenians regarded as un-Greek and barbaric.”

As I have already mentioned, there are two main perspectives on ancient Greek magic. On the one hand, using a modern definition of magic as a means of defining structures of which the ancient Greeks were not necessarily aware (i.e. an *etic* or *essentialist* approach), scholars such as Versnel (1991), Gordon (1999), Faraone (1999), and Carastro (2006) argue that the concept of magic always existed in Greece. On the other hand, scholars such as Parry (1992), Graf (1997), Wathelet (2000), and Dickie (2001), make use of a definition of magic adapted to the specific ancient Greek context (i.e. an *emic* or *linguistic* approach).⁹³ On this basis, they argue that there was no clear differentiation between what was ‘normal’ and what was ‘Other’ with regard to supernatural abilities in the Archaic era, but that the concept of magic only crystallized in the Classical period. Both approaches can be defended, depending on one’s definition. There are many elements in early Greek literature which a modern person

⁹¹ Hall (1989: 9) argues that, though some notion of pan-Hellenic identity existed before the fifth century BCE, individual identity was construed more in terms of the *polis* to which one belonged.

⁹² See Long (1986) on comedy and Hall (1989) on tragedy.

⁹³ The terms *etic* and *emic* – derivations from the linguistic terms *phonetic* and *phonemic* – were coined by the linguist Kenneth Pike (1967²): the term *etic* refers to the viewpoint of the detached observer of a society, *emic* to that of the normal participant in that society. For the distinction between the essentialist and linguistic approaches, see Ogden (2001: xviii-xix).

might classify as magical, for example Aphrodite's girdle which Hera uses in order to seduce Zeus (*Il.* 14.153-351),⁹⁴ Hephaestus' golden maidens (*Il.* 18.417-20), and Achilles' talking horses (*Il.* 19.404-18). Gods such as Hermes and Athena use wands,⁹⁵ and many gods use immobilization (*thelgein*) in order to achieve their goals.⁹⁶ Regarding the Homeric epics, however, one must acknowledge that, as Reinhardt (1996: 93) argues: "where everything works magic and every step is a spell, there can be no special gods in this field like Hermes or Hekate among the Olympians, nor can there be sorceresses like Medea or Circe."⁹⁷ In a world where almost everything to do with the supernatural might be classified as magic, there is nothing to set magic apart from the norm, and against the recent theory of Carastro (2006) I have therefore maintained an *emic* definition and argued that, as the notion of *thelgein* was not represented as Other in the Archaic period,⁹⁸ it cannot be classified as magic. Magic – as I have argued before – is by definition connected with Otherness, from which one must conclude that, if certain terms which a modern person might consider magical were not in fact represented as Other by the ancient poems in question, then these texts had no awareness of such an Otherness of certain supernatural abilities, actions, or figures. Rather than imposing the term magic on a period which seems either entirely full with it or deprived of it, I have therefore decided not to apply the term 'magic' to the Archaic period at all.

While it thus appears that there was no awareness of magic as a separate semantic field in the Archaic period, in the late sixth century BCE, some awareness

⁹⁴ See Faraone (1990).

⁹⁵ Hermes: *Od.* 24.2-4; Athena: *Od.* 13.429-33, 16.172-76, and 16.454-59.

⁹⁶ See pp. 1.48-49.

⁹⁷ Eitrem (1941: 39-44) also suggests that magic was not a distinct concept in the Homeric epics.

⁹⁸ I will offer further evidence in favour of this in chapter 3 on Circe's portrayal in the *Odyssey*.

gradually emerged of magic as a “distinct category of thought”.⁹⁹ First, the ancient Greek term from which the modern English word ‘magic’ is derived, *μαγεία*, the art of the *μάγος*, was coined.¹⁰⁰ The word first appears to have entered Greek vocabulary around the end of the sixth or the early fifth century BCE. From its earliest attestations, there was a clear discrepancy in the representation of the *magos*. On the one hand, to Xenophon, and Plato, he was merely a Persian priest.¹⁰¹ Plato, indeed, considered *mageia* to be the Persian *θεῶν θεραπεία*, “worship of the gods”. By him and Xenophon, the *magos* was perceived as part of the normal state cult of the Persians. Simultaneously, however, the *magos* was also associated with more ambiguous practices by other authors. Carastro (2006: 17-36) investigates how, for example, in Herodotus, the *magoi* are construed as Others with respect to their savage funerary practices, the inefficacy of their rituals, their trickery and deceit, and their impiety toward the gods. A similar representation of magic as inefficacious and transgressive can be found in tragedy.¹⁰² In Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example, Oedipus describes Teiresias in the following manner when the latter accuses him of regicide (Soph. *OT* 387-89):

ὑφεῖς μάγον τοιόνδε μηχανορράφον,
 δόλιον ἀγύρτην, ὅστις ἐν τοῖς κέρδεσιν
 μόνον δέδορκε, τὴν τέχνην δ’ ἔφω τυφλός.

He [i.e. Creon] has supported such a deceiving *magos*,
 a cunning beggar-priest, who has eye for profit

⁹⁹ Dickie (2001: 22).

¹⁰⁰ For the development of the term *magos*, see West (1971), Burkert (1983; 2004), Graf (1997: 20-60), and Bremmer (2003).

¹⁰¹ Xen. *Cyr.* 8.3.11, Pl. *Alc.* 122a.

¹⁰² e.g. Eur. *Supp.* 1110; *IT* 1338; *Or.* 1497. See Carastro (2006: 37-42).

alone, but in his art is blind.

Oedipus categorizes Teiresias as *magos* among itinerant healers and seers. Such figures, unlike the *magos*, were known in the Archaic period already. In the *Odyssey*, however, these healers and seers are described positively. When one of Penelope's suitors, Antinous, questions the presence of a beggar in the palace (who is of course Odysseus in disguise), the swineherd Eumaeus compares the status of beggars with that of other foreigners (*Od.* 17.382-86):

τίς γάρ δὴ ξεῖνον καλεῖ ἄλλοθεν αὐτὸς ἐπελθῶν
ἄλλον γ', εἰ μὴ τῶν οἱ δημιοεργοὶ ἔασι,
μάντιν ἢ ἰητῆρα κακῶν ἢ τέκτονα δούρων,
ἢ καὶ θέσπιν ἀοιδόν, ὃ κεν τέρπησιν ἀείδων;
οὔτοι γὰρ κλητοὶ γε βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν.

For who for himself invites another man,
an unknown foreigner, unless he is one of those whose skills are useful for
the state: a seer, a healer of ills, a wood-craftsman,
or indeed a divine singer, who gives pleasure through song?
Those men are indeed the most famous of men over the broad earth.

Though the status of the seers described by Eumaeus in society was marginal to an extent (they were usually foreigners or were itinerant), they are represented as highly respected and employed by the higher classes of society. In the Classical period, however, Oedipus' association of the *magos* with these itinerant Greek figures is construed as an insult.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ See Carastro (2006: 38).

When the term *magos* became current in Greek language, it also became associated with other figures, such as the φαρμακός and φαρμακίς (male and female users of *pharmaka*), and with the concept φαρμακεία. The word from which this concept is derived, τὸ φάρμακον, “drug”, had nothing to do with magic in the Homeric epics, where *pharmaka* could be used to heal (e.g. *Il.* 4.191) or destroy (e.g. *Od.* 1.261).¹⁰⁴ In the Classical period, however, the term *pharmakon* as well as its derivatives (as Pindar’s fourth *Pythian Ode* exemplifies) became partly associated not only with μαγεία, but also with another related concept, γοητεία. The name of the γόης is derived from the verb γοάω, “I weep or mourn”, a practice particularly associated with mourning over the dead. This verb was already attested in the Homeric epics.¹⁰⁵ From its earliest appearance, however, the concept of γοητεία (the art of the γόης) – similar to that of μαγεία – was connected with marginality and charlatans. In Plato’s *Meno* 80a3, for example, φαρμακεία and γοητεία are combined when Meno playfully claims that Socrates is bewitching him: γοητεύεις με καὶ φαρμάττεις, “You use tricks and potions on me”. *Thelgein* was first explicitly associated with magic by Gorgias in his *Apology for Helen*. The sophist uses the double tradition of Helen’s abduction – her arrival in Troy and the arrival of a phantom Helen, while the real Helen remained in Egypt¹⁰⁶ – to celebrate the power of speech. It is in this context of the celebration of *logos* that Gorgias mentions *thelgein* (*DK* 11.10):

¹⁰⁴ See also my discussion on pp. 1.101-02.

¹⁰⁵ e.g. *Il.* 5.413, *Od.* 4.721. Because of this association with death, the γόης has long been analyzed as a Greek version of the Siberian Shaman who guided the souls of the dead from the grave to the underworld by going into a trance wailing. This theory, however, has been strongly objected to by Bremmer (1983: 25-48; 2002: 27-40) because there is no definite evidence for the transfer of shamanic practices from Asia to Greece in that period.

¹⁰⁶ For the story of Helen’s phantom double arriving in Troy, see e.g. Pl. *Phaedr.* 243a-b.

αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι διὰ λόγων ἐπῶδαὶ ἐπαγωγοὶ ἡδονῆς,
ἀπαγωγοὶ λύπης γίνονται. συγγινομένη γὰρ τῇ δόξῃ τῆς
ψυχῆς ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἐπῶδῆς ἔθελε καὶ ἐπεισε καὶ μετέστησεν
αὐτὴν γοητεία. γοητείας καὶ μαγείας δισσαὶ τέχναι εὕρηνται, αἱ
εἰσι ψυχῆς ἀμαρτήματα καὶ δόξης ἀπατήματα.

For songs with divine origins lead through discourse to pleasure, and lead away from pain. Fusing with the opinion of the soul, the power of song stunned, persuaded, and modified it through its beguilement. The double arts of beguilement and magic were found, which are errors of the soul and tricks of opinion.

Gorgias here combines three of the terms associated with magic discussed already: *thelgein*, *goêteia*, and *mageia*. While the term *thelgein* had been used in the Homeric epics already in the context of *metis*, it is here for the first time in extant Greek literature found specifically in an account concerning magic.

A certain ambiguity – perhaps hints of Otherness – was already present in terms such as *magos*, *pharmakon*, γοάω, and *thelgein* in the Archaic texts. First, the *magos* as Persian was located outside the physical boundaries of the ancient Greek world and might therefore be perceived by some to be a potential threat to society. Secondly, as *pharmaka* might harm as well as heal, they were on the margin of the ethical boundary: people who used them might also abuse them. Thirdly, as ritual wailing (γοάω) was primarily associated with funerals, it touched upon the essential human taboo of death. Finally, *thelgein* effected immobilization of another person's free will and, particularly as the source of its power was not visible, could be dangerous. The ambiguity in these terms – though still within the normal framework of society – might thus account for

their subsequent development into the concept of magic. From the fifth century onward, however – and the Persian Wars appear to have accelerated this process greatly – the definition of these terms became partly specialized, represented as Other, and associated with magic. The original meaning of these words could still be maintained: *pharmaka* were still used in medicine, the verb γοάω could still refer to wailing for the dead, and the *magos* could still be described as a Persian priest.¹⁰⁷ Simultaneously, however, these terms (and their cognates) also acquired a more specialized meaning which might be conveyed by the modern term ‘magic’.

Now that I have refuted Carastro’s claim that the term *thelgein* in the Archaic period had the same connotation as the concept of magic in the Classical period, and have instead proposed that the concept of magic only emerged in the Classical period, I return to the Archaic period. I will argue that Circe and Medea were associated in that period not so much with magic, but with the notion of *metis* which, as *thelgein*, incorporated aspects of magic without its connotation of Otherness. I will explain this by exploring the category of *metis* and its connections with *thelgein* and magic.

Thelgein, Metis, and Magic

Thelgein is applied by many figures in the Homeric epics, but primarily by wielders of *metis*, “cunning intelligence”: not only Odysseus, but also Penelope, Zeus, Hermes, Athena, and Thetis. There are indeed many instances where *thelgein* is described in terms of cunning. For example, when Eumaeus describes Odysseus, disguised as Cretan stranger, to Penelope, he uses the following simile (*Od.* 17.518-21):

¹⁰⁷ For the non-magical use of *pharmaka* in medicine, see e.g. Hippoc. *Aphorismi* 7.87; for γοάω as wailing, see e.g. Soph. *OT* 30; for the *magos* as Persian priest, see e.g. Plato, n. 128 p. 2.95.

ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἀοιδὸν ἀνὴρ ποτιδέρκεται, ὅς τε θεῶν ἔξ
ἀείδη δεδαῶς ἔπε' ἱμερόεντα βροτοῖσιν,
τοῦ δ' ἄμοτον μεμάασιν ἀκουέμεν, ὅππότη' ἀείδη.
ὥς ἐμὲ κείνος ἔθελγε παρήμενος ἐν μεγάροισι.

As when a man gazes at a poet, who, taught by the gods,
sings words of desire to mortals,
and they desire to hear him without end, whenever he sings.
Thus he stunned me, seated in my hall.

Odysseus is described as dazing Eumaeus by narrating his adventures to him, disguised as a Cretan. The hero's bedazzlement of the swineherd is connected with his traditional quality, *metis*, as his deceptive tale is combined with his disguise. Indeed, when Odysseus meets Athena on the shore of Ithaca and he tells her a similar story of his Cretan background and adventures, the goddess smiles at his ruse and acknowledges their common *metis* (*Od.* 13.297-301). Odysseus' persuasive and mesmerizing use of language is thus referred to as *metis* and capable of immobilization (*thelgein*). Similarly, *pharmaka* too are connected with both notions: with *pharmaka*, Circe stuns Odysseus' men (*Od.* 10.213), but Helen's *pharmaka* are also called φάρμακα μητιόεντα, "cunning drugs" (*Od.* 4.227).

These examples reveal that a connection exists between the semantic fields of *thelgein* and *metis*. I agree with Carastro (2006: 107-08), however, that *thelgein* and *metis* are not identical. While some scholars have discussed the notion of *thelgein* and others that of *metis*,¹⁰⁸ no study has ever been dedicated to the comparison of the two.

¹⁰⁸ *Thelgein*: e.g. Parry (1992); *metis*: e.g. Detienne and Vernant (1978). Both have been discussed separately in relation to *gastêr*, "belly", in the Homeric epics by Pucci (1987).

Carastro (2006: 107-08), though he argues that there is only “une relation de contiguïté” between the two notions, and that “il serait fort réducteur d’assimiler l’acte de *thélgein* au domaine de la *métis*”,¹⁰⁹ does not elaborate on the differences between the two categories. The parallels and differences between *metis* and *thelgein*, however, are key to our understanding of the figures of Circe and Medea, and must hence be addressed. In order to appreciate these fully, I first elaborate on the notion of *metis*.

The groundbreaking work on *metis*, “cunning intelligence”, was done by Detienne and Vernant (1978), who explored the various functions of the goddess Metis, as well as numerous manifestations of cunning, in Greek literature. They define *metis* as the opposite of βίη, “violence”, being an intelligence which embraces “the ability to deal with whatever comes up, drawing on certain intellectual qualities: forethought, perspicacity, quickness and acuteness of understanding, trickery, and even deceit”.¹¹⁰ I will illustrate this definition by elaborating very briefly on the cuttlefish, one of the animals most expressly associated with *metis*.¹¹¹

The cuttlefish belongs to the same family as the octopus. Its amazing quality is that it can change its colour to match its surroundings, enabling it not only to dupe predators but also to lure its potential prey into a false sense of security. It is, furthermore, elusive in its secretion of ink: by means of this ink, it can create darkness and not only confuse its prey, but also any potential predators, allowing the cuttlefish time to escape from the darkness it has created. Its many arms, moreover, were thought

¹⁰⁹ See also Carastro (2006: 83 and 90).

¹¹⁰ Detienne and Vernant (1978: 44).

¹¹¹ My discussion is in essence a summary of the analysis of the cuttlefish by Detienne and Vernant (1978: 27-43).

to make up a knot or bond without beginning or end, which made it impenetrable and capable of reaching out in all directions. In short, the polymorphous nature of the octopus for the Greeks – as described in Oppian particularly¹¹² – rendered it a archetypal wielder of *metis*: impenetrable, it was capable of adapting to new surroundings and outwitting fierce predators. In response, fishermen hunting the cuttlefish had to deploy superior tricks in order to catch it. By using as bait “a female of their own kind which they [i.e. male cuttlefish] then grasp so tightly that nothing but death can make them let go”,¹¹³ fishermen were able to defeat the cuttlefish at its own game of deception and trickery. Quietly lying in wait until their prey arrived and maintaining vigilance allowed the fishermen to acquire their prey in spite of its *metis*. In order to defeat the creature which could not be caught (easily), fishermen created bonds, namely woven or twisted nets, thereby encircling the circle-shaped animal (it was described as circle-shaped on account of its coils). Both the cuttlefish and the fishermen were accordingly represented as endowed with *metis*.

Using this brief example, I will summarize the key aspects and terms belonging to the semantic field of *metis* as outlined by Detienne and Vernant (1978: *passim*). (1) As the opposite of βίη, *metis* entails an indirect approach to attack, deploying trickery (δόλος),¹¹⁴ craft (τέχνη), deceit, lying, and treachery. (2) *Metis* is able to adapt itself to any shifting situation (πολύτροπος, “turning many ways” or “versatile”),¹¹⁵ using rich (πυκινός, “dense” or “compressed”)¹¹⁶ knowledge from past experiences and premeditation, waiting (δοκείειν) for the right moment (καιρός) to arrive, when it

¹¹² Oppian *Hal.* 2.120-27.

¹¹³ Detienne and Vernant (1978: 39).

¹¹⁴ e.g. Aesch. *Pers.* 107.

¹¹⁵ e.g. *h. Herm.* 13.

¹¹⁶ e.g. *h. Dem.* 414.

suddenly strikes fast (αἰόλος, “quick-moving”).¹¹⁷ (3) It can transform itself, and is ambiguous (ποικίλος, “many-coloured”)¹¹⁸ and pliable, while remaining impenetrable (ἄπορος) itself. (4) Its form masks rather than reveals. As such, it can create the illusion that it is not *metis* (e.g. Odysseus pretending to be No Man; the Trojan Horse which is disguised as a gift but is in fact a trap).¹¹⁹ (5) Its special weapon is the bond, by means of which it can encircle (ἐγκυκλεῖν) and thus trap others. Expressions of this bond are the net, the web, the trap, and above all the circle. Indeed, the circle “ is perfect, because it completely turns back on itself, is closed in on itself, with neither beginning nor end, front nor rear, and [...] in rotation becomes both mobile and immobile, moving in both directions at once”.¹²⁰ Clytaemnestra’s use of an actual net to immobilize Agamemnon before she kills him is a poignant example of cunning. After she has killed her husband, Clytaemnestra exclaims (Aesch. *Ag.* 1381-83):

ὥς μήτε φεύγειν μήτ’ ἀμύνεσθαι μόρον,
 ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων,
 περιστιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν.

So he [i.e. Agamemnon] might not escape or avert his fate,
 I cast an inescapable net around him, like
 around fish, an evil wealth of cloth.

Through her name, Clytaemnestra is connected with *metis*.¹²¹ In her description of the net which she will use to trap Agamemnon and bind him in ἀπορία (Aesch. *Ag.* 1382),

¹¹⁷ e.g. Hes. *Theog.* 511.

¹¹⁸ e.g. *Od.* 7.168.

¹¹⁹ Odysseus: *Od.* 9.366; the Trojan horse: *Od.* 8.509.

¹²⁰ Detienne and Vernant (1978: 46).

¹²¹ Frisk (1960-72: *ad* μήδομαι).

moreover, she also activates the association of *metis* with fishing. This illustrates the complexity and adaptability of the notion of *metis* to different contexts.

A rich amalgam of figures, objects, and human pursuits is associated with *metis*. Among the most prominent gods are Zeus, Prometheus, Cronus, Metis herself, Hermes, Athena, and Hephaestus, but also sea-deities who can shape-shift, such as Proteus and Thetis. Alongside Clytaemnestra, Odysseus, Penelope, Nestor, and Sisyphus are the mortals most famously endowed with *metis*. All of these figures will be discussed at various points in this thesis. Human pursuits include fishing, hunting, politics, navigation, metallurgy, carpentry, and weaving. Fishing, indeed, as well as hunting, politics, and navigation, all thrive on adaptation to shifting circumstances. Metallurgy, carpentry, and weaving rely on mastery of nature, through the transformation of a natural thing into something useful for mankind, whether weapons (metallurgy), a ship (carpentry), or clothes (weaving).¹²² *Metis*, indeed, was often said to be woven or constructed.¹²³ Whoever possesses *metis*, however, is liable to be confronted by another cunning person, as violence is often not efficient in immobilizing a cunning figure, and hence superior *metis* must be used to overcome the wielder of *metis*. The binder can therefore be bound, but can also release himself or another from bonds. In this way, the two aspects of active and passive are entirely complementary, and can alternate with one another.

¹²² Fishing: see the above discussion of the cuttlefish; hunting: e.g. Oppian *Cyng.* 1.101-04; politics: e.g. Eur. *Phoen.* 494; navigation: e.g. *Il.* 23.316; metallurgy: e.g. Hephaestus at *Il.* 21.355; carpentry: e.g. Athena's help in the construction of the Argo, Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.1188.

¹²³ e.g. in the Homeric epics: *Il.* 7.324, 9.93-95, 9.422, 13.303; *Od.* 4.678 and 739. See also Detienne and Vernant (1978: 238 and 279-318), Snyder (1980), Bergren (1983), Slatkin (1996), Holmberg (1997: 13), and Clayton (2004: 23-52) for the connection between weaving and *metis*.

The main parallel between *metis* and *thelgein* lies in their indirect approach of a potential adversary – particularly, as I have pointed out above, through language and *pharmaka* – and in their ability to immobilize or ‘bind’ another. On account of these characteristics, both notions have been connected with magic.¹²⁴ The connection is, however, a modern one, as neither concept was construed as Other in Archaic literature. Gods and mortals were said to use both notions indiscriminately, and Odysseus’ *metis* was in fact celebrated, as it made an end to the Trojan War and guided him on his subsequent *nostos*;¹²⁵ the lack of Otherness in the representation of *thelgein* has been discussed above. There is, however, one major difference between *thelgein* and *metis* which cannot be underrated. While *thelgein* can only bind, *metis* also entails the ability to escape a bond by transforming oneself in case another cunning figure attacks.¹²⁶ While *metis* is a quality with which some figures are endowed and others are not, *thelgein* is a specific action which aims to have an immediate effect on another person. From my discussions of *metis* and *thelgein*, it thus appears that the semantic field of *metis* was larger and more flexible than that of *thelgein*, and indeed incorporated the latter to a great extent. Cunning figures, transforming or disguising themselves, could simultaneously take recourse to *thelgein* in order to bind others, as the aforementioned examples have indicated; figures who stun others (*thelgein*), however, do not automatically have access to *metis* in its entirety, such as the Sirens and Poseidon. While Carastro (2006) suggests a mere closeness between the two categories, I therefore argue that there is not merely a significant overlap, but that *thelgein* can

¹²⁴ For *metis*, see Detienne and Vernant (1978: 11); for *thelgein*, see above.

¹²⁵ See chapter 3.

¹²⁶ Indeed, in the example from the *Odyssey* (24.3-4) regarding Hermes’ wand, *thelgein* is contrasted with “waking” or releasing someone from slumber.

ultimately be interpreted as one of the two aspects of *metis*: for *thelgein* entails the act of immobilization, which is one aspect of *metis*. *Metis*, however, as I have said, also incorporates the ability to free oneself from an imposed bond by means of transformation of oneself. This is an aspect lacking entirely from the notion of *thelgein*. *Thelgein* can thus be interpreted, not as coterminous with *metis*, but as one of its two aspects.

In the fifth century BCE, the concept of magic emerged in ancient Greek society for reasons on which I have elaborated above. This concept was represented as Other in ancient secondary texts. It was, as Carastro (2006) has argued, partly anchored in terminology already associated with the Archaic notion of *thelgein*. New terms, such as γοητεία and φίλτρα (“potions”), were added to the semantic field which referred specifically to the immobilization of others by magical means, namely in terms of Otherness. The powers of magic as represented in ancient secondary sources were also much broader than the effect of *thelgein*: the witches’ ability to change the course of the elements and of nature has been examined already, and is a clear example. The goddess Hecate too, for example, had never been associated with either *thelgein* or *metis*, but was rapidly integrated into the new concept of magic.¹²⁷ There were, indeed, clear distinctions between *metis* and magic. *Metis*, as the discussion above has shown, relies on acuteness of intellect (being, for example, deceptive, versatile, and able to wait for the right moment to strike) and thus on an inner ability of its wielder to ‘transform’ him- or herself into whatever the present situation requires. Magic, by contrast, as my

¹²⁷ Johnston (1990) examines her development.

earlier discussion has outlined, relies rather on external paraphernalia (such as φίλτρα, “potions”)¹²⁸ in order to achieve its goal; in the confrontation of a potential enemy or rival, magic consequently focuses on the transformation of others rather than on that of oneself. In consequence, the wielder of *metis*, as a result of his flexibility of mind, is continually able to reinvent or ‘transform’ himself according to the present needs: when he is bound, his *metis* will allow him to find a way out to the greatest extent possible. *Metis*, owing to the use of intellect inherent in its wielder, is thus a fluid notion, incorporating the ability both to bind another and free oneself from a bond. Magic, on the contrary, as it relies on external paraphernalia, is more rigid: representations of magic generally tend to focus either on magic’s great power or its failure when confronted by either superior magic or love, as my discussion earlier in this chapter has demonstrated. In short, while *metis* is represented as a complex category, incorporating both acts of binding and freeing as a potential continuum, magic is a concept represented in ancient secondary texts in polarized terms: not only immensely powerful, but also subject to failure of that power when overcome by stronger magic or love. Most importantly, while *metis* (and *thelgein* as part of it) is never represented in terms of Otherness, magic is. I would argue that, initially, magic – through the notion of *thelgein* – formed one part of the two complementing aspects of *metis*. In the fifth century BCE, however, though there was still some overlap between magic and *metis* (such as the notion of trickery, *dolos*), magic became distinct from *metis*, was represented in polarized terms, and could not be interpreted as part of *metis* any more, as *thelgein* had before. It rapidly became a concept of its own not necessarily related

¹²⁸ Cf. e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.16-17.

with *metis* at all, but incorporating transformations on a more cosmic and fearsome scale.

In short, magic-as-*thelgein* was initially part of the category of *metis* and lacked any connotation of alterity. When the concept of magic actually crystallized, it was anchored in the notion of *thelgein* and as such acquired and retained some connection with *metis*. Simultaneously, however, magic came to be represented as Other and new terms and figures were added to its semantic field which had no connection at all with *metis*. *Thelgein* was drawn into this image of alterity, and both *thelgein* and magic lost much of their connection with *metis*.

The present comparison of magic, *thelgein*, and *metis* is, as I have already explained, only preliminary; it will be further elucidated by my discussions in the following chapters. Having explained the relationship between the key paradigms underlying this thesis, the precise argument of my thesis can be summarized as follows.

I will argue that Circe and Medea were not always endowed with the status of archetypal witches, but that this status was in essence a Hellenistic creation. In the earliest Archaic texts, though Circe and Medea were deities to some extent associated with what would be construed as ‘magic’ in the Classical period (i.e. *thelgein*), they were primarily represented as goddesses and strongly connected with the entire semantic field of *metis* rather than merely with *thelgein*. A combination of factors, however, led to the decrease of their association with *metis* in favour of an increasing connection with magical terminology in post-Hesiodic Archaic and Classical texts: at first, magical vocabulary was merely integrated in the cunning terminology used to

describe the two figures, but it rapidly became the dominant means of describing them. Chapter 8 will argue that the factors which promoted their transformations were partly inherent in the early literary representations of Circe and Medea, and partly a response to social and political developments in the Classical period. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the link of Circe and Medea with *metis*, though it still existed to some extent, became almost negligible in comparison with their general representation as witches. As this summary of my thesis reveals, I will not argue that Circe and Medea simply lost their entire connection with *metis* in favour of a unilateral association with magic, but will rather propose that the *predominant focus* of their representations shifted from *metis* to magic.

I will propose that the dichotomy of witch and victim of love or magic was already present in two opposite aspects of *metis* – namely binding and freeing – but that these originally intertwined aspects were separated because they became disconnected from the notion of *metis*. As a result, Circe and Medea came to be represented in polarized terms. In the process, both figures also lost their divinity in the majority of poems.¹²⁹ This particular transformation appears to have been unique to these two figures, and took place because specific aspects inherent in their representation became reinterpreted under influence of external social and political factors, especially in the Classical period.¹³⁰

I will now make a preliminary connection between Circe and Medea and *metis* by investigating the key figures in their family as well as the etymology of their names.

¹²⁹ But see n. 7 on p. 1.14 on the exceptions.

¹³⁰ See chapter 8.

(e) Circe, Medea, and Metis

In Hesiod's account of Circe's and Medea's family tree,¹³¹ the *pater familias* is Helios. Circe's father and Medea's grandfather crosses the sky daily on his chariot in his function of sun-god.¹³² On account of his position high in the sky, the *Iliad* calls him ὄς πάντ' ἐφορᾷς καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούεις, "you who see and hear all" (*Il.* 3.277). He has a particularly keen eye for spotting transgressions, for instance when he discovers the amour of Ares and Aphrodite (*Od.* 8.302) or when he reveals the abductor of Persephone (*h. Dem.* 62-89). He is also a god of oaths (e.g. *Il.* 3.277-79), an aspect which will be emphasized in Euripides' *Medea* (see chapter 6).

The etymology of the name of Aeëtes, Circe's brother and Medea's father, is disputed: since his city is traditionally called Αἴα, an epic equivalent of the term γαῖα,¹³³ "land", the derivation from this noun appears imperative, and Aeëtes is thus literally a "man of the earth". Alternatively, his name might be derived from ἀετός, "eagle",¹³⁴ connecting him with the sky and associating him with the Olympian sky-god, Zeus, whose symbol is the eagle.¹³⁵ A third explanation is derivation from αἴδης, "Hades",¹³⁶ which hints at a connection with the underworld.¹³⁷ Fourthly, the *TLG* suggests derivation of Aeëtes from the verb αἰάζω, "I wail", "I mourn". This connection with the act of mourning links connects him with funerals, death, and thus,

¹³¹ See p. 1.44 for the quotation.

¹³² He is called φαεσίμβροτος, "bringing light to mortals", at Hes. *Theog.* 958.

¹³³ Petroff (1966: 124).

¹³⁴ Yarnall (1994: 28).

¹³⁵ e.g. in *Theog.* 521-25, when Zeus sends his eagle to eat Prometheus' liver.

¹³⁶ See Séchan (1927: 235).

¹³⁷ Though Petroff (1966: 135) discards this possibility since the α- in αἴδης is privative (Hades as the "un-seen"), whereas he argues it is part of the root in Αἰήτης, the similarity between the names of Aeëtes and Hades might still have influenced the Greek audience on an associative level in a similar way to ἀετός.

in a sense, again with the underworld. Aeëtes is hence linked to the sky and the underworld, but in particular to the earth through the main etymology of his name. The name of his wife, Ἰδυῖα, is the pres. part. fem. of οἶδα, and means “she who knows, who sees”.¹³⁸

In the most literal sense, Κίρκη is the feminine form of ὁ κίρκος, meaning “hawk” or “falcon”. Since hawks are birds of prey, her name instantly associates Circe with the aggressive and rapacious nature linked with these animals.¹³⁹ This etymology also connects her with her brother, Aeëtes, since his name might be derived from ἄετός, “eagle”. A secondary meaning of ὁ κίρκος (= κρίκος = κύκλος) is “circle”. The Neoplatonists later interpreted this as the “circle” of life and allegorized Circe as the principle of reincarnation (see chapter 5); the circle has also been interpreted as symbolizing the sun and its daily journey through the sky, thus connecting Circe with her father, Helios.¹⁴⁰ The circle, however, also connects Circe with *metis* and indeed renders her its archetypal wielder, as she *is* the circle, in itself impenetrable but able to bind others. The circling movement made by birds of prey – such as the falcon – might connect them too with *metis*, as they wait for the right moment to strike their prey. This association with *metis* is further confirmed by the association of Circe’s name with ἡ κερκίς, “weaving shuttle”,¹⁴¹ which links Circe with one of the main human pursuits of

¹³⁸ I have left Perseis out of this discussion, as there is very little information on her. West (1966: *ad Hes. Theog.* 1001) argues that her name refers to the Persians. Frisk (1960-72: *ad Περσεύς*) does not mention Perseis but connects the name Perseus with the verb πέρθω, “I sack”, “I waste”, “I plunder”. As Perseis is an otherwise unknown figure, it is difficult to ascertain such a connection. Another possible association of her name is with a περσεύς, an otherwise unknown fish from the Red Sea. This would underline her marine connection as Ocean’s daughter; see Frisk (1960-72: *ad περσεύς*).

¹³⁹ Forbes Irving (1990: 241) makes this point regarding the figure of Daidalion.

¹⁴⁰ For Circe as the cycle of reincarnation, see Ps.-Plut. *Vit. Hom.* 126, and Porphyry, whose argument is preserved in Stob. *Flor.* 1.49.59-60. For the circle as representing the sun, see e.g. Frame (1978: 50).

¹⁴¹ Nagler (1996: 152). For a further discussion of the etymology of Circe’s name, see Canciani in *LIMC*.

metis, namely weaving. The hawk, the circle, and the weaving shuttle hence all point towards Circe's own binding power: while the hawk indicates an aggressive nature, however, the weaving shuttle connects her with a domestic task traditionally associated with women in general, and in the *Odyssey* particularly with Penelope (see chapter 3).

At the origin of Μήδεια lies the extended Indo-European root *mēd-,¹⁴² which Chantraine defines as “prendre avec autorité les mesures appropriées”, and which developed into two particular verbs in ancient Greek.¹⁴³ First, the root developed into μήδομαι, “I intend”, “I plan”, “I contrive”. Τὰ μῆδεα is not only the noun associated with this verb, bearing the standard meaning “plans”, “schemes”, but also has a homonym which refers to the male genitalia. Secondly, this root developed into the verb μητιάζω, “I deliberate”, “I contrive”, with its derivative noun, μῆτις, “cunning intelligence”.¹⁴⁴ These terms all bear some notion of Chantraine's definition of the Indo-European root. Through the *mēd- root, all these connotations are evoked in the name Μήδεια, and imply a complex tapestry of characteristics in its bearer; Medea's name could be translated, for example, as “cunning female” or “contriver”. Indeed, the *mēd- root suggests not only knowledge and authority to act, but above all cunning intelligence. Furthermore, Medea's potential association with the male genitals hints at a masculine and even emasculating power. Hence the mere mention of Medea's name evokes ambivalence: her name hints at power, yet power combined with an element of

¹⁴² This extended root was formed on the original Indo-European root *mēH₁- (with H₁ representing laryngeal 1) plus suffix -d. See Frisk (1960-72: *ad* μήδομαι) for a further discussion. The original root *mēH₁- is thought to have meant “to measure”.

¹⁴³ Chantraine (1968-80: 675).

¹⁴⁴ The original meaning of *metis* is thought to have been “measure” (related to the original Indo-European root – see n. 124 on p. 1.65 – and e.g. to the Latin verb *metior*, “I measure”). From this original meaning, the sense of balancing different things, and hence cunning as a means to achieve balance, probably derived. See Frisk (1960-72: *ad* μῆτις).

cunning, for example in the area of sexuality. Ultimately, her name might be interpreted as an alternative for μητις, rendering Medea yet another emanation from this category.¹⁴⁵

When one considers the structure underlying Circe's and Medea's family, a certain thematic unity is revealed:¹⁴⁶ the union between air/fire (Helios) and water (Perseis as daughter of Ocean) results in earth (Aeëtes). In this light, one might perhaps interpret Circe as the circle or cycle of these elements and hence of nature. Moreover, the combination of these elements with knowledge (Idyia) results in the figure of Medea (cunning plans). Kottaridou (1991: 151) argues that, similarly to Athena and her mother Metis, the name of Idyia here "bezeichnet... die Haupteigenschaft der Tochter." Idyia's name thus anticipates Medea's knowledge or insight and indeed her cunning. In short, Helios' insight, Aeëtes' connection with the eagle (similar to Circe's connection with the hawk), and Idyia's association with (fore-)knowledge, all point towards the presence of some degree of cunning intelligence in the entire family. This appears to culminate in the two figures of Circe and Medea – for the moment at least with regard to their names. This ancestry ultimately associates Circe and Medea with a more primeval and darker power than the Olympians, as the cunning quality implied in their names is integrated in an elementary chthonic and celestial symbolism.

¹⁴⁵ It is possible that the extended root *mēH₁d- was somehow connected with the root *med. This root resulted in the Greek verb μέδομαι, "I provide for", "I devise". Μεδέων and μεδέουσα, two derivatives meaning "guardian", are both applied to various deities, particularly Zeus and Aphrodite (Zeus: *Il.* 3.276; Aphrodite: *h. Aphr.* 5.292 and 10.4). In Latin, the same Indo-European root is preserved in the verbs *meditor*, "I contemplate", "I contrive", "I study", and *medeor*, "I heal" – the noun *medicina* is derived from the latter verb. If the two roots are connected, then Medea was also associated in name with healing qualities, similarly to Jason (see chapter 6). Whether the two roots were in fact connected is still debated. See e.g. Langslow (2004) for a discussion.

¹⁴⁶ See also Petroff (1966: 147-48).

(f) Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out to establish a background against which to examine the transformations of Circe and Medea. Having explored a working definition for the term magic in the context of Greek and Roman poetry, I examined the Hellenistic and Roman joint representations of Circe and Medea, and argued that, as a pair, they were traditionally portrayed as powerful witches from mythology. Simultaneously, some poems also alluded to the paradoxical failure of that power in the context of love, as both figures were unable to retain their lovers. I connected this paradox with the general depictions of magic in contemporary poetry, and illustrated how the portrayals of Circe and Medea closely resonated with general images of the frightening super-witch, but also shared elements with the mocking image of magic as ineffectual.

Next, I compared a Hellenistic family tree of Circe and Medea with the earliest extant account of their genealogy (Hesiod's *Theogony*), and argued that the contrasts between both accounts suggest that the figures underwent a transformation from goddesses into witches. I proposed that, in the earliest texts, the two figures were associated with *metis* rather than magic, anticipating my argument in the following chapters. I gave a brief overview of what *metis* entailed for the Greeks and how it relates to *thelgein* and magic, and made a preliminary connection of Circe and Medea with *metis* on the basis of the etymologies of their names and their family connections.

In the following two chapters, I will examine the earliest poems in which Circe (chapters 3 and 4) and Medea (chapter 4) feature, and argue that their status is indeed that of cunning deities.

A.

Goddesses of Cunning

*I who knew Circe have come back
to sink a furrow in the loam;
left twilights bellowing and black
for the soft glow of home;
to hear instead of a guttural sea
the needles of Penelope.*

Joseph Auslander, Ulysses in Autumn (1926)

CHAPTER THREE

CIRCE IN THE ODYSSEY

The Odyssean Circe was identified as a witch at least from the Hellenistic period onward, as examples from the previous chapter have illustrated, and she is still identified as such by the majority of classical scholars.¹⁴⁷ Statements about Circe's extreme nature – such as Reinhardt's (1996: 94) judgement that “Circe becomes charming in an instant after having been a monster” – are equally commonplace among the scholarly community.¹⁴⁸ In this chapter, I will challenge these modern scholarly conceptions of Circe as misunderstanding her Odyssean nature; I aim to reinterpret this Homeric figure within the context of the *Odyssey* itself, not in the light of the later tradition.¹⁴⁹ I will argue that, in the *Odyssey*, nothing in Circe's abilities sets her apart from the other characters, and as such presents her as a witch. On the contrary, Circe's pharmaceutical and transformational abilities are firmly intertwined with one of the central themes of the epic, *metis*, and connect her with the protagonists of the epic. To this purpose, I will first elaborate on the manifestation of *metis* in the protagonist, Odysseus, and in his divine protectress, Athena. Next, I will examine the *Apologoi*, Odysseus' “narrative” to the Phaeacians, demonstrate that the Circe episode forms an

¹⁴⁷ e.g. Luck (1985: 40-41), Kottaridou (1991: 13 and 21), Gordon (1999: 178-79), Karsai (2000: 182; he calls her a “magicienne”), Ferrari (2002: 27), Silk (2004: 40), and Collins (2008: 28-29).

¹⁴⁸ Most scholars focus entirely on Circe's destructive behaviour in the first part of the episode: e.g. Stanford (1964: 46) calls her a “luminous demonic creature”; Warner (1999: 2) describes her as “unreliable, immoral, wilful”. Yarnall (1994: 9 and 21), by contrast, interprets Circe as an entirely benevolent figure: she calls Circe Odysseus' “mystagogue” who represents the “primordial feminine [...] acting according to its own nature and making manifest the comparative inferiority of *individual* male being” (Yarnall's italics).

¹⁴⁹ There are certain aspects of Circe which I will not consider, such as the parallel between *Od.* 10 and *Il.* 22, discussed by Beck (1965); the one between the Circe episode and the Proteus scene, suggested by De Jong (2001: *ad loc.*); the obvious parallels between Circe and Calypso, assessed by Germain (1954: 249ff.), Crane (1988: 31), West (1997: 404-10), Reinhardt (1996), and Nagler (1996) will be touched upon briefly.

intrinsic part of this narrative, and that Circe’s so-called magical abilities can be interpreted as *metis*. I will explore the nature of Circe’s *metis* by comparing her portrayal with those of the protagonists of the epic. Indeed, I will propose that Circe’s unique ability to adapt to altering circumstances – a transformational ability similar to Odysseus’ own *metis* – renders her the one figure capable of helping Odysseus in a world where his Olympian helper-goddess, Athena, cannot venture. I will conclude that Circe does not need to be read as a witch-figure, but can rather be interpreted as a complex, cunning goddess on the threshold between the world of the adventures and the Olympian framework supervising the hero’s journey through this world. (Line numbers in this chapter refer to the *Odyssey* unless explicitly stated.)

(a) “I have a cunning plan!”: Metis in the Odyssey

Let us turn to the beginning of the *Odyssey* in order to understand the main theme of the epic (1.1-5):

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε.
πολλῶν δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
πολλὰ δ’ ὅ γ’ ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,
ἀρνύμενος ἥν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.

Tell me, Muse, of the many-wiled man, who wandered far and wide,
after sacking the sacred city of Troy.

Many were the peoples whose cities he saw and mind he came to know,
many the sufferings he endured in his heart upon the sea,
striving to save his soul and bring about the return of his companions.

As these opening lines of the epic indicate, the subject of the *Odyssey* is the eponymous hero himself, as the pivotal use of ἄνδρα as opening word of the epic indicates. Two particular elements qualify this ἄνθρωπος: the epithet πολύτροπος (1) and the descriptions of Odysseus as wandering (πλάγχθη, 2) and suffering (πάθεν, 4). Being πολύτροπος, “turning in many ways”, is one of the key features of *metis* I have discussed in the previous chapter,¹⁵⁰ and Odysseus is indeed the main mortal figure endowed with *metis* in Greek mythology, as the presence of this epithet in the opening description of the hero indicates.¹⁵¹ His most celebrated cunning feat was the ploy of the wooden horse, which enabled the Greeks to sack Troy, as it gave them access to the city.¹⁵² The Trojan Horse is a poignant example of cunning: using trickery rather than violence, Odysseus disguised warriors as a gift, men as (a wooden image of) an animal, a symbol of the Greeks’ future victory as an image of their defeat, and ultimately, a cunning trap as an inconspicuous-looking statue. Once inside the city walls, the transformation was reversed and the act of *metis* revealed for what it was. In the adventures narrated in the *Odyssey*, the hero has to deploy his *metis* as well (see appendix 3 for a brief summary of the *Apologoi*). Odysseus’ main act of *metis* during these adventures takes place during his confrontation with the Cyclops: he cunningly deceives Polyphemus by giving a false name – No Man, a word play based on the grammatical ability of the word οὔτις to change into μήτις, which is a homophone with μῆτις¹⁵³ – and, once the Cyclops is blinded, by ‘transforming’ himself into a ram

¹⁵⁰ See p. 1.55.

¹⁵¹ See also Pucci (1986) on Odysseus and the other figures of *metis* in the *Odyssey*. Pucci, however, does not mention Circe.

¹⁵² Reference is made to the Trojan Horse as Odysseus’ invention at 4.265-89.

¹⁵³ See Clayton (2004: 30).

by hiding underneath its belly. Having escaped Polyphemus by means of his *metis*, however, Odysseus is overtaken by his heroic search for κλέος, “heroic glory”,¹⁵⁴ and tells the Cyclops his real name. This causes Polyphemus to call down the wrath of his father, Poseidon, upon Odysseus, which will delay his homecoming.

The entire narrative of his adventures presented to the Phaeacians can also be construed as Odysseus’ cunning feat. Indeed, this story about creatures who did not offer the hero the right extent of hospitality might encourage the king of the Phaeacians, Alcinous, to grant Odysseus the correct amount of hospitality and send him homeward bound with speed. One might wonder why the hero has to deploy *metis* among a people who have received him hospitably, but the episode on Scheria is not without potential danger: upon his arrival, Athena in fact alerts him to the Phaeacians’ suspicion of strangers (7.30-33). Odysseus is thus by no means certain of hospitality; indeed, the episode with Aeolus, who received him hospitably but then spurned him when the Greeks were forced to return to him (10.1-77), had taught the hero that hospitality can easily turn into hostility, which justifies his cunning narrative. The second half of the epic develops one particular ruse of Odysseus, namely his disguise as a beggar once back on Ithaca. This ploy is executed in order to mislead Penelope’s suitors regarding his identity, develop a clear understanding of what is going on in his palace, and take revenge (books 13-24).

In all these examples, Odysseus adapts himself to the challenging situation and disguises (‘transforms’) himself, which enables him to acknowledge the weakness of his opponent and thereby overcome him. In his plans, he is traditionally aided by his

¹⁵⁴ See Segal (1996b: 209-10).

divine protectress, Athena. She was born from Zeus' head, after the latter had swallowed her mother, the goddess Metis, because, as the *Theogony* narrates,¹⁵⁵ it had been predicted to him that his children by her would overthrow him. In this way, Athena inherited the *metis* of both her mother and her father, but was not a threat any more as a female, since her *metis* was entirely controlled by her father (for her birth was taken out of the hands of her mother). In the *Odyssey*, Athena's *metis* is primarily employed in order to enable Odysseus' safe return to Ithaca. First, she ascertains that the Phaeacians will receive Odysseus favourably: she sends Nausicaä a dream which tells her that she will meet her future husband at the beach (6.20-43). By representing the hero as a potential husband rather than a stranger passing through on his way home, she enables Odysseus to acquire clothing and a guide into the city. Athena also has the ability to make Odysseus appear taller and more handsome, and even veil him in a mist to make him invisible when he is inside the city and no longer guided by Nausicaä (7.14-17). On Ithaca, in order to overcome the suitors, she again transforms Odysseus, this time into a beggar (13.429-38), so that he can observe the precise situation at his court. In the world of the adventures, however, Athena is powerless, as she admits to Odysseus when he finally arrives on Ithaca, because she feared the wrath of Poseidon (13.339-43). Though she is endowed with cunning intelligence to adapt to any situation, her territory is therefore limited – but so is Poseidon's: once Odysseus has arrived in Ithaca, the god's wrath disappears (6.329-31).

In short, as the opening lines of the *Odyssey* indicate, the epic will narrate the suffering which the eponymous hero experiences on his way home from Troy, being swept across the sea of an unknown world in which he has only his *metis* to rely on, as

¹⁵⁵ Hes. *Theog.* 894-98.

his companions are not endowed with that quality and his traditional divine helper is unable to offer assistance. In this unknown world narrated in the *Apologoi*, Odysseus meets an array of unusual creatures, one among whom is Circe.

(b) Circe in the Apologoi

In this section, I will propose that the representation of the Circe episode overall and of Circe's pharmaceutical abilities in particular is firmly intertwined with that of the other creatures of the *Apologoi* and their behaviour towards Odysseus and his men. I begin with a general interpretation of the *Apologoi*.

The World of the Apologoi

Structurally, Odysseus' adventures can be analyzed as a ring-composition around the Circe-underworld-Circe episodes.¹⁵⁶ This corresponds to the view that Odysseus' adventures are in fact a symbolic journey through the underworld, with the *nekuia* as culmination.¹⁵⁷ Though individual episodes have some underworld connotation, in the *Odyssey* they have been arranged into a world which differs from the normal, central world of mortals (i.e. Greece and the Mediterranean), and from the normal world of the immortal Olympians.¹⁵⁸

First, the inhabitants of this world are not normal mortals.¹⁵⁹ In the course of the *Apologoi*, the latter are invariably defined by their consumption of bread.¹⁶⁰ In this

¹⁵⁶ See Nagler (1996: 144), Tracy (1997: 376), and Most (1999: 490). See Tracy (1997) for other possible structures, and Marinatos (2001) for the interpretation of Odysseus' *nostos* as a cosmic journey, based on Near Eastern myth.

¹⁵⁷ Most episodes have been associated with the underworld. For Circe, see Crane (1988: 127-28); the Sirens, see Buffière (1956: 476) and Gresseth (1970); Calypso and the Sirens, see Crane (1988: 42); Thrinacia, see Crane (1988: 144-47).

¹⁵⁸ See Hartog (2001: 15-39) for a detailed anthropological discussion of Odysseus' adventures.

¹⁵⁹ See Vidal-Naquet (1996: 41-45).

world, Odysseus searches in vain for “bread-eating” mortals (σῖτον ἔδοντες, 8.222, 9.89, 10.101), finding instead food damaging to mortals (such as the Lotus, Circe’s *pharmaka*, or the cattle of Helios), or mortals serving as food (to the Cyclops, the Laestrygonians, and Scylla). Nevertheless, these creatures are no Olympian immortals either. They can be monsters (Scylla and the Sirens), giants (the Cyclopes, the Laestrygonians), natural elements (the whirlpool Charybdis), creatures whose only feature which differentiates them from humans is that they do not eat bread and who are therefore not ‘normal’ humans (the Lotus-eaters), demi-gods (the Phaeacians, e.g. at 5.35), and the Titans and their offspring (Circe, Calypso, and the inhabitants of Thrinacia). Apart from the Lotus-eaters, Aeolus appears to be the only human in this world but his geographical isolation – he lives on an island with bronze walls – and closeness to the gods (10.1-4) separate him from the ‘normal’ Greeks who live in the centre of the world (i.e. Greece).¹⁶¹ Secondly, in this world, ξενία, “hospitality”, is not practised to the right extent: either it is absent, which leads to the death of Odysseus’ men (in the episodes of the Cyclops, the Laestrygonians, and Scylla and Charybdis), or it is overabundant, leading to their temptation to forget their homes (λήθη, “forgetfulness”) and stay there (among the Lotus-eaters, Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso).¹⁶² Thirdly, there is no agriculture,¹⁶³ which makes it difficult for the “bread-eating” Greeks not only to find food, but also to sacrifice: Polyphemus implies (9.273-

¹⁶⁰ See Hartog (2001: 22).

¹⁶¹ As Detienne and Vernant (1978: 170 n. 111) have suggested, the bronze wall around his island can be compared to the bronze gates and the wall surrounding Tartarus in Hes. *Theog.* 732-33. In this light, Aeolus can be construed as having originally been an enemy of Zeus as he had to be bound, in spite of his closeness to the gods.

¹⁶² See Segal (1968), Hogan (1976), and Most (1999).

¹⁶³ See Hartog (2001: 24).

76) that sacrifice is not practised in this world, and even when Odysseus and his men attempt it, they are not successful (9.550-55).

Indeed, the Olympians do not venture into this world, with the exception of Poseidon – who, as Cook (1995: 53) argues, is, at least in the *Odyssey*, closer in nature to the non-Olympian inhabitants of the world of the *Apologoi* than to the Olympians¹⁶⁴ – and Hermes, whose connection with the entire place (and especially with Circe) is of a specific nature, as I will argue below. The world of the *Apologoi* is consequently a world where pre- or non-Olympian deities and creatures (or their offspring) live in some kind of chronological vacuum: every day is the same as the previous one, and the ‘normal’ order of things is reversed or perverted. Apart from the absence of agriculture, bread, and the proper extent of *xenia*, Circe and Calypso live without male guardians,¹⁶⁵ Aeolus’ children are all married to one another, and the Sirens and Scylla are composite beings. This is, as Hartog (2001: 23 and 28) has suggested, a “sterile”, “immobile” world, with “no past, no memories”, where no change ever occurs. To its inhabitants, Odysseus’ arrival is hence a dangerous intrusion, threatening to disturb their endless continuum. The consequence is that they all attempt to immobilize and assimilate him and his men to their own sterility. This takes place in two opposite ways. On the one hand, Odysseus and his men may be killed: the Cyclops, the Laestrygonians, and Scylla and Charybdis all correspond to this paradigm. On the other hand, they may be tempted by various creatures on various levels (whether this is done deliberately or otherwise): the Lotus-eaters, Circe, and Helios’ cattle tempt the stomach by offering food which

¹⁶⁴ See Cook (1995: 53), who argues that there is an “underlying difference of outlook between him and the other Olympian gods”. Whereas the other gods are absent from the Other world, Poseidon’s sphere is in fact contained in it; however, in the ‘normal’ world of Ithaca, he has to yield to Athena.

¹⁶⁵ See Marinatos (1995b: 21ff.).

makes one forget one's home;¹⁶⁶ the bag of winds which Odysseus receives from Aeolus tempts the crew's greed, since they believe it conceals a treasure; the Sirens tempt by offering knowledge of the past, present, and future; and Calypso tempts Odysseus by her sexuality and by offering him immortality. Yet it is only his men (never the hero) who actually succumb to the temptations. Even the relationship with Calypso is endured unwillingly by Odysseus (5.81-84).

Though the creatures of the *Apologoi* all attempt to immobilize or 'bind' Odysseus in their own ways, they are simultaneously supervised and coordinated – indeed 'bound' – by the Olympians. Zeus' power is acknowledged in the *Odyssey* time and again: apart from his general responsibility for people's fate, he is the one held responsible by Athena and Odysseus for the latter's delayed return (1.63, 1.348, 9.38, 9.261-62). Though the adventures feature the wraths of Poseidon and Helios,¹⁶⁷ as well as the tragedies of the individual episodes, the "causal chain of events [...] points [...] to Zeus rather than to Poseidon", as Reinhardt (1996: 68) argues. Indeed, one might propose that, whereas Poseidon only strikes Odysseus once (near the coast of Scheria, 5.282-96), Zeus firmly monitors the hero's passage through this sterile world, and controls this world itself: he is the one who sends a storm upon Odysseus' fleet after their battle against the Ciconians (9.67-81), who endows the Cyclopes with their Golden Age (9.106-11), allows Poseidon's wrath against Odysseus when the latter has blinded Polyphemus (1.64-79), provides Aeolus with authority over the winds (10.21-22), executes the vengeance Helios asks from him after Odysseus' crew have eaten his cattle (12.376-88), and (at Athena's behest) sends Hermes to Calypso lest she detain

¹⁶⁶ See Crane (1988: 32) and Cook (1995: 58).

¹⁶⁷ Fenik (1974) discusses the differences between the wrath of Poseidon and that of Helios.

Odysseus any longer from his *nostos* (5.29-42). Moreover, both Polyphemus (9.506-12) and Circe (10.325-32) had received predictions that Odysseus would one day come to them,¹⁶⁸ which would make at least part of his journey fated rather than accidental. So, though the Olympians do not regularly visit this world of Odysseus' adventures, Zeus maintains a firm grip over both this world and Odysseus' journey through it, encouraged by Athena who is worried about her hero's fate.

Though there are polarizations in the *Apologoi* between the norm and what deviates from it, between Olympian and Titan, and hospitality and hostility, the boundaries between these and other polarities are never fixed: they are deconstructed as much as established.¹⁶⁹ Poseidon's closeness to the creatures of the world of the adventures rather than to the Olympians has been discussed above; the boundaries between hospitality and hostility, moreover, are always opaque to Odysseus, as the episodes of Aeolus, Circe, and the Phaeacians demonstrate. Furthermore, in this world, Odysseus has to lose his Iliadic identity (experience a sort of λήθη by becoming No Man) in order to survive and face death in order to live (by entering the underworld). It is in this world of converging polarities that Circe can be found. On the one hand, her episode and pharmaceutical abilities are strongly interlinked with events in the other episodes of the *Apologoi*. On the other hand, the same abilities, I will argue, also connect her with the main wielders of *metis*.

¹⁶⁸ The prediction made to the Phaeacians (8.564-71) could be added to this. However, it does not mention Odysseus by name, and could thus be seen as a general prediction of the Phaeacians' punishment because of their hospitality to strangers – see Reinhardt (1996: 131).

¹⁶⁹ As Doherty suggests (1993: 10), “ideology, as articulated in and by language, structures the world by means of categories that at first sight are opposed and mutually exclusive. ... Yet in fact these categories are unstable.” See also Bergren (1981: 213).

Circe πολυφάρμακος

In my general discussion of the *Apologoi*, I have already touched upon certain narrative and structural elements which connect Circe with the other creatures of the *Apologoi*. I will now elaborate on these and other elements in more detail – these derive chiefly from the first half of the Circe episode, for reasons upon which I will elaborate below.

When he narrates his adventures to the Phaeacians, Odysseus naturally possesses hindsight concerning the creatures he has come across. Before elaborating on every episode, he gives a brief description of these, invariably defining them as in some way different from ‘normal’ humans: the Lotus-eaters, for example, are described as eating Lotus flowers (instead of bread, 9.84), the Cyclopes are portrayed as lawless creatures who live in a sort of Golden Age provided by Zeus (9.106-15), Aeolus is said to be close to the gods and to live on a fortified island (10.1-4), and the Laestrygonians live in a land where day and night follow each other in quick succession (10.82-86). Similarly, before narrating the Circe episode, Odysseus describes her as follows (10.135-39):

ἔνθα δ' ἔναιε

Κίρκη εὐπλόκαμος, δεινὴ θεὸς ἀυδήεσσα,
αὐτοκασιγνήτη ὀλοόφρονος Αἰήταο.
ἄμφω δ' ἐκγεγάτην φαεσιμβρότου Ἥελίοιο
μητρός τ' ἐκ Πέρσης, τὴν Ὠκεανὸς τέκε παῖδα.

There lived

Circe with the beautiful hair, an awe-inspiring goddess of human speech,
the sister of baneful Aeëtes.

Both were born from Helios who gives light to mortals

and from their mother, Perse, whom Oceanus bore as a child. Odysseus describes Circe as a beautiful θεός.¹⁷⁰ She is thus – like other creatures in this world – not human. She is not an Olympian either, however: she is a δεινή θεὸς αὐδήεσσα (see below on this epithet), the offspring of the Titan sun-god Helios, and sister of ὀλοόφρων Aeëtes. This genealogy connects her with other pre-Olympian forces and their offspring, such as Helios (in the Thrinacia episode) and Calypso (the daughter of the Titan Atlas [7.245] who is also called ὀλοόφρων [1.52]).¹⁷¹ Though these inhabitants of this world are close to the Olympians as discussed above, the Titans in particular were also known to have been subdued and humiliated by them and were therefore generally represented as resentful, angry, and rebellious.¹⁷² By immediately associating Circe with non-Olympian deities and their offspring, Odysseus' preliminary description of her is ominous for the following episode.

Indeed, when Odysseus initially explores Circe's island in search of mortals, he can see only woods (10.150, 197) – as in the other adventures, the land is not cultivated¹⁷³ – and notices smoke in the distance (10.196-97). These things remind Odysseus' men of the Cyclops (9.167) and the Laestrygonians (10.99), and of the disastrous outcome of the adventures they experienced on their islands.¹⁷⁴ In spite of this ominous sign, Odysseus sends envoys to go in search of bread-eating mortals. Their confrontation with Circe confirms her similarity to some of the creatures they encountered previously. When the men arrive at Circe's palace, they find it guarded by wolves and lions (10.213-15):

¹⁷⁰ She is called a *theos* at e.g. 10.220, 297, 310; also πόντια: 8.448; 10.394, 549; 12.36.

¹⁷¹ See Reinhardt (1996: 95).

¹⁷² See Hes. *Theog.* 664-720. See also Parry (1992: 73-74).

¹⁷³ See Hartog (2001: 24).

¹⁷⁴ See Reinhardt (1996: 92).

τοὺς αὐτὴ κατέθειλεν, ἐπεὶ κακὰ φάρμακ' ἔδωκεν.
οὐδ' οἱ γ' ὠρμήθησαν ἐπ' ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ' ἄρα τοί γε
οὐρῆσιν μακρῆσι περισσάινοντες ἀνέσταν.

She [i.e. Circe] stupefied them by giving them evil drugs.
They, for their part, did not rush upon the men, but rather,
wagging their long tails, stood on their hind legs.

The animals – whether they are merely tamed or are men transformed into animals by her *pharmaka*¹⁷⁵ – are Circe's peculiar menagerie. That intrinsically wild animals have been domesticated might have warned the Greeks about Circe's powerful and dangerous nature. The men, however, are misled by Circe's perceived domestic behaviour (10.221-23):

Κίρκης δ' ἔνδον ἄκουον ἀειδούσης ὀπί κελῆ,
ἱστὸν ἐποιχομένης μέγαν ἄμβροτον, οἷα θεάων
λεπτὰ τε καὶ χαρίεντα καὶ ἀγλαὰ ἔργα πέλονται.

Inside, they heard Circe singing with clear voice,
plying a great indestructible loom, as are the works of goddesses:
delicate, beautiful, and bright.

When the Greeks call to Circe, she welcomes them into her palace, as the Lotus-eaters (presumably) and Aeolus (10.14-15) did. Similarly to the Lotus-eaters, Circe also offers

¹⁷⁵ I agree with de Jong (2001: *ad loc.*) that there is no authoritative indication in the text that the animals are transformed men: Eurylochus later says they are (10.431-34), but this is only his interpretation. De Jong, Yarnall (1994: 11), and Pucci (1998: 159), maintain that the animals are merely tamed, sedated by the drugs. That the animals were in fact transformed men is still maintained by the majority of modern scholars, such as Canciani (1980: 49) and Schmidt (1995: 57). I do not think a conclusive argument is possible; it is true that the post-Homeric texts did describe these animals as transformed men (e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 7.19-20), but this might also be their interpretation of Eurylochus' words.

her guests a *pharmakon*. Whereas the Lotus-eaters might not have had evil intentions in giving Odysseus' men the Lotus to eat,¹⁷⁶ and Aeolus actually had good intentions in entertaining the Greeks, Circe's purpose is destructive. When Odysseus' men have drunk the *pharmakon* which Circe offers them in the guise of a broth, they forget their homeland (10.236). Circe then touches them with her wand (ῥάβδος), literally transforming them into swine, though their minds remain human (10.239-40).¹⁷⁷ Odysseus, notified by Eurylochus who did not enter Circe's house that his men need rescuing, goes to confront Circe and is met in the forest by a disguised Hermes (see below): against Circe's *pharmakon*, he offers Odysseus a plant called μῶλυ (10.305); against her wand, he suggests Odysseus use his sword (10.293-96); and against her ὀλοφώια δήνεα, "destructive plans" (10.289), he offers the hero advice, namely *not* to refuse her bed, yet to make her swear an oath not to unman him. When Odysseus has been able to overcome Circe in this manner, she recognizes him and says (10.329-32):

σοὶ δέ τις ἐν στήθεσσι ἀκήλητος νόος ἐστίν.
 ἦ σύ γ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι πολύτροπος, ὃν τέ μοι αἰεὶ
 φάσκεν ἐλεύσεσθαι χρυσόρραπις Ἀργεῖφόντης,
 ἐκ Τροίης ἀνιόντα θοῆ σὺν νηὶ μελαίνῃ.

The mind in your breast is not to be immobilized.
 Surely you are Odysseus of many wiles, whom
 the Argos-slayer [i.e. Hermes] of the golden wand always told me
 would come to me on his way home from Troy with his swift, black ship.

¹⁷⁶ This issue is not clarified in the *Odyssey*, but since the Lotus-eaters eat the Lotus themselves, there is no reason to suspect they have evil intentions towards the Greeks in offering them the Lotus to eat.

¹⁷⁷ See also Kottaridou (1991: 2). Carastro (2006: 144) argues that Circe's wand is used for guiding the men into the pig-sty only, not for transforming them into swine. Indeed, he argues that the men are not actually transformed into swine at all, but merely acquire an animal-like nature. The distinction, though interesting, is not vital for my argument.

This is the precise moment of Circe's transformation from hostile creature into beneficent hostess: similar to other hospitable women in the *Odyssey*,¹⁷⁸ she bathes her guest, feeds him, and gives him gifts upon his departure (a chiton and a cloak, 10.542; a black sheep and ram for his sacrifice at the entrance of the underworld, 10.571-72; and provisions for the rest of his journey, 12.18-19). She will also offer him valuable advice for his following adventures, to which I will return below.

This summary of the first half of the Circe episode reveals that, at the outset at least, Circe is connected with nearly every other creature of the *Apologoi*, and also with its key themes as discussed above. First, her Titan ancestry not only connects her specifically with Helios and Calypso, but also indicates her Otherness inasmuch as she is neither mortal nor an Olympian deity. Secondly, the woods on Circe's island remind the Greeks of the lands of the Cyclops and the Laestrygonians specifically, and differ from the cultivation of the land practised by the Greeks. Thirdly, in her extreme transformation from hostility to hospitality, not only is Circe the opposite of Aeolus, who turns hostile after an initial hospitable reception, but her episode also engages with the key theme in the *Apologoi* of faulty degrees of hospitality. Furthermore, in her weaving and singing, Circe resembles Calypso, who also engages in those two activities (5.61-62).

Portrayed as singing, Circe is represented as Other inasmuch as she is a *female* singing.¹⁷⁹ In the *Odyssey*, song is traditionally the area of male bards, such as Demodocus (8.43-44) and Phemius (1.337); normal women are not represented as singing. Circe, Calypso, and also the Sirens (12.44), however, are not normal women:

¹⁷⁸ See Pedrick (1988).

¹⁷⁹ Pace McGuire (1994: 103), who considers her singing as purely domestic.

unrestrained by a male κύριος, “guardian”, they live alone or, in Circe’s case, with female attendants (10.348-49). In the absence of a male guardian who might function as bard, they sing themselves, thereby appropriating a typically male manner of expression.¹⁸⁰ It is in this light that one can analyze Circe’s epithet αὐδήεσσα (10.136), which I have mentioned above.¹⁸¹ That Circe can be “heard” sets her apart from normal women who are constrained by their male guardian: in the absence of a guardian, Circe acts as her own poet. One might also argue that this epithet sets Circe apart from the Olympian gods: for they always venture among mortals in disguise, and inevitably take on the voice of whichever person they imitate, whether it be, for example, that of an old woman or of a young man. Circe, however, shows herself in her own shape to the Greeks, and therefore, they also hear her own voice. This renders her more menacing, as there is no barrier between mortals and Circe’s divine identity.¹⁸²

Structurally and in content, the Circe episode thus engages with the other episodes of the *Apologoi*, forming an intrinsic part of the narrative shaping the distinctions between the Greeks and the world through which they drift. Regarding Circe’s so-called magical abilities, these too are integrated elements of the narrative. First, Circe’s transformation of Odysseus’ men into swine and inducement of forgetfulness is an integral part of the theme of λήθη in the *Apologoi*. Whether by violence or by temptation, the creatures of the world of the adventures attempt to bind Odysseus and his men to their world, causing them – through death or transformation of mind or body – to forget their

¹⁸⁰ See Pucci (1979), Snyder (1980), and Holtze (1993).

¹⁸¹ See also Nagler (1996: 142-43).

¹⁸² The only other figure in the *Odyssey* described as αὐδήεσσα is Ino (*Od.* 5.334). She used to be mortal, but then became a sea deity. One might argue that this transformation caused her to maintain her own voice towards mortals.

nostos. Circe's transformation is merely an extreme case of this transformation. It is, moreover, not wholly without parallel. Calypso offers Odysseus immortality if he chooses to remain with her (5.135-36). Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men can be seen in conjunction with Calypso's temptation of the hero. Both extreme transformations cross the boundaries between normal mortals, Olympian deities, and creatures of the *Apologoi*: while Calypso's suggested transformation would cross the boundary between human and super-human (deity), Circe's transformations cross the boundary between human and sub-human (animal). The composite nature of Circe's transformations – the men are transformed into swine but retain their human mind – moreover, puts one in mind of Scylla, the monster with twelve feet, six necks, and three rows of teeth in each head (12.89-92).

Secondly, Circe's use of *pharmaka* not only connects her with the Lotus-eaters who offer Odysseus' men a *pharmakon*, but also engages with the gender issue already raised in my discussion of her singing. Indeed, both in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the use of *pharmaka* is traditionally a male area of expertise – which makes it similar to the art of song. In the *Iliad*, *pharmaka* are mainly used to heal people's wounds.¹⁸³ In the *Odyssey*, however, they are represented more ambiguously. Not only is their destructive rather than their healing quality emphasized,¹⁸⁴ but whereas the *Iliad* merely mentions one female pharmaceutical expert (Agamede) in passing, the *Odyssey* lingers on the deceptive drugs of two ambiguous females, Circe and also Helen (see below). Circe's expertise in drugs – represented by the epithet πολυφάρμακος (10.276) – need not,

¹⁸³ See *Il.* 4.218, 5.401, 5.899, 11.515, 11.741 (Agamede), 11.830, and 15.394. The exception is *Il.* 22.94, a Homeric simile in which a serpent has eaten evil drugs.

¹⁸⁴ e.g. *Od.* 1.261 (Odysseus uses *pharmaka* to poison his arrows) and 2.329 (the suitors believe Telemachus will poison them with *pharmaka* from Ephyra),

however, be perceived as magic. Indeed, this same epithet is used to qualify *male* physicians attending to the Greek heroes in the *Iliad* (16.28). It might thus merely indicate Circe's expertise in *pharmaka* rather than express a judgment on that expertise, as it does not bear any connotation of illicitness or the supernatural. I am not denying Circe's destructive and fearsome behaviour in the first part of the episode: her danger, however, derives from her transgression of gender-related boundaries rather than from her abilities themselves, as her appropriation of an epithet used for male figures (πολυφάρμακος) also demonstrates. It is because she is female that her pharmaceutical and singing abilities are dangerous, not because she uses *pharmaka* and song per se.

Finally, and importantly, we must turn to Circe's use of immobilization (*thelgein*). I have already mentioned these in the passage describing the wild animals roaming Circe's island above. The term also appears elsewhere in the Circe episode, when she attempts to transform Odysseus into a swine. Hermes warns the hero as follows (10.289-92):

πάντα δέ τοι ἐρέω ὀλοφώια δῆνεα Κίρκης.
τεύξει τοι κυκεῶ, βαλέει δ' ἐν φάρμακα σίτω.
ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὡς **θέλξαι** σε δυνήσεται. οὐ γὰρ ἑάσει
φάρμακον ἔσθλόν, ὅ τοι δώσω.

Of all Circe's destructive plans I will tell you.
She will offer you a broth, and cast into the food drugs.
But still she will not be able to stupefy you, as the
good drug that I will give you will not allow it.

As this passage illustrates, Circe will attempt to immobilize Odysseus' mind, presumably as she had succeeded in doing with the minds of his men. Later, when the

hero has withstood her transformation, she recognizes him on the basis of his ἀκλήητος νόος, “a mind not to be immobilized” (10.329).¹⁸⁵ The notion of *thelgein* has been discussed in chapter 2 already. I have there argued that it cannot be equated with magic, as there is no inherent Otherness in its use. This is confirmed by the example of Circe: her use of immobilization (*thelgein*), like those of Calypso and the Sirens, is intended to have a lasting effect. It is only Odysseus’ request after he has shared Circe’s bed which makes her revoke what would have been an unchangeable metamorphosis. This eternal forgetfulness starkly contrasts with the forgetfulness induced by the poets, which offers temporary relief from suffering (see chapter 2). Circe’s stunning capacity (*thelgein*) is thus destructive, and it confirms her place particularly among the feminine creatures of the *Apologoi*, such as Calypso and the Sirens.

In short, the Circe episode is intertwined with the other episodes of the *Apologoi* both thematically and structurally. Circe’s so-called magical abilities, moreover, are intrinsically linked to the thematic development of the *Apologoi* in general and to individual episodes in particular. There is thus nothing in her description which sets Circe apart from the other creatures as a witch. One must be consistent in one’s analysis of the *Apologoi*: if, as I have argued, Circe’s powers connect her with, rather than separate her from, the other beings in the world of the adventures, then either all of them must be magical, or none. Indeed, some scholars *have* perceived all the creatures of the *Apologoi* as magical,¹⁸⁶ or refer to the world of the adventures as the “Other”

¹⁸⁵ The verb κήλειν is similar in meaning to θέλγειν. See Parry (1992: 24).

¹⁸⁶ e.g. Griffin (1980: 166), Reinhardt (1996: 93)..

world.¹⁸⁷ As my discussion has highlighted, the creatures are indeed in some way the opposite of the ‘normal’ world of the Olympians and the Greeks, and can therefore be called “Other”. Simultaneously, however, this polarization is not maintained entirely, as my further discussion of Circe will argue.

As there is no connotation of illicitness inherent in the descriptions of *pharmaka*, singing, and *thelgein*, one can conclude that the *Apologoi* and indeed the *Odyssey* as a whole are not concerned with magic, but rather with transformation in general. Indeed, in the *Odyssey*, the transformational processes forced upon Odysseus do not only consist of those by the creatures of the *Apologoi*, where his men – and potentially the hero – are transformed from living into dead (e.g. by the man-eating Cyclops and the Laestrygonians, and by the Sirens’ tempting song), from men into animals and back (by Circe), from remembering into forgetting (by the Lotus-eaters), and Odysseus potentially from man into immortal (by Calypso). Odysseus himself is also subject to transformation internally, as is the relationship between the hero and his men. The first transformation derives from the tension within Odysseus between his own Iliadic search for κλέος and his cunning intelligence.¹⁸⁸ This is really set in motion in the Polyphemus episode, where Odysseus’ *metis* secures his survival, but the need to affirm his heroic identity leads to Poseidon’s wrath and the endangering of Odysseus’ *nostos*. Throughout the ensuing adventures, the hero’s *metis* is indeed put to the test: rather than actively pursuing glory, he must learn to integrate passivity, as the use of the verbs πλάγχθη and πάθεν in the opening passage (discussed above, pp. 1.78-79) reveals. Only when Odysseus integrates this passivity can he return to Ithaca in order to

¹⁸⁷ e.g. Cook (1995: 53)

¹⁸⁸ See Olson (1995: 1-23), Cook (1995: 52), and Segal (1996b).

resume his rightful place in society.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, in this passive quest for home – rather than an active search for glory – there is no room for his companions (1.5): try as he may, his men have no share in his adaptability and passivity, and their constant search for food and treasure leads to their doom.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, from the start, Odysseus’ companions disobey their leader because of their constant lust for food and drink. This culminates in the rise of Eurylochus as Odysseus’ rival, first in the Circe episode (10.428-48), and then in the Thrinacia episode, where he effectively persuades the rest of the crew to slaughter the sacred cattle, thereby signing their own death warrant (12.277-373). It is because the crew give in to the temptations of this world that they do not return home.¹⁹¹

The *Apologoi* thus further the theme of transformation which pervades the *Odyssey*. While Odysseus’ men are unable to survive the journey on account of their lack of adaptability, the hero’s *metis* enables him to undergo the transformation in himself as instigated by the violence and temptations of the creatures of this world. Among these, Circe is both paradigmatic and different. On the one hand, she fits in perfectly with the other creatures in her attempt to bind Odysseus and his men to her world. On the other hand, she alone, as I will presently argue, possesses the ability to transform herself once Odysseus has overcome her. Indeed, apart from Circe and

¹⁸⁹ Pace Olson (1995: 43-64), who argues that Odysseus does not experience any character development throughout the adventures. As Segal (1996b: 211) points out, however, Odysseus defines himself to the Cyclops as πτολιπόρθιος, “sacker of cities” (9.504), but later, among the Phaeacians, he introduces himself as πᾶσι δόλοισιν / ἀνθρώποισι μέλω, “known to all men because of my ruses” (9.19-20). This suggests that he has learnt to rely on his *metis* rather than his *kleos* in order to survive, and hence implies that he *has* experienced a character development, at least to a certain extent.

¹⁹⁰ See Hogan (1976), and Olson (1995: 43-64).

¹⁹¹ Eurylochus’ name means “broad trap” (εὐρύς and λόχος). In this capacity, Eurylochus thus vies with Odysseus not only with respect to his leadership, but also regarding the possession of *metis*, as a trap is a typical tool of *metis* (see p. 1.56). His cunning might be perceived in his ability to see Circe’s invitation to enter the house as a trap (10.232); as a result, he is the only man of the envoys to escape.

Aeolus, every being in this world has one approach to Odysseus: violence or temptation. Aeolus can be interpreted as a cunning figure: indeed, his name Αἴολος forms part of the semantic field of *metis*.¹⁹² He, however, receives the hero well, but when his men have opened the bag of winds which should have remained constrained, his wrath is unleashed and he reveals himself to be unreliable. Circe is the only figure in the *Apologoi* who is able to transform herself positively upon finding out who Odysseus is. Once aware of his identity, she becomes a hospitable host and indeed helps Odysseus more than any other creature of this world. I will argue that this transformation is possible on account of her own possession of *metis*.

*Circe's πολυμηχανή*¹⁹³

In this section, I will establish that Circe is endowed with *metis*. To this purpose, we must turn to the very first mention of Circe in the *Odyssey*. On Scheria, queen Arete offers Odysseus gifts upon his departure, but warns him to close the lid of the box in which they are kept, lest they are stolen. In reply (8.447-48),

αὐτίκ' ἐπήρτυε πῶμα, θοῶς δ' ἐπὶ δεσμὸν ἦλε
ποικίλον, ὃν ποτέ μιν δέδαε φρεσὶ πόνια Κίρκη.

immediately he [i.e. Odysseus] fitted on the lid, and quickly threw around it a cunning knot, which queen Circe had once taught him (in his mind).

This is the first mention of Circe. No mention is made of her transformation of Odysseus' men or of her aggression to him upon his arrival. Her quality referred to here

¹⁹² See chapter 2 and Detienne and Vernant (1978: 170 n. 111).

¹⁹³ *Od.* 23.321.

is cunning: the epithet of the knot she taught Odysseus is ποικίλος, literally “many-coloured”, one of the main adjectives associated with the notion of *metis* (see chapter 2). This particular application of cunning – the ability to bind something by means of a knot – moreover, points towards the particular *metis* implied in Circe’s name. Indeed, her name can mean “circle”,¹⁹⁴ and therefore “what binds”, since the circle is the ultimate symbol of *metis*. The first mention of Circe therefore not only terms her a wielder of *metis*, but also of a benefactor of Odysseus, who imparted knowledge inherent in her nature (i.e. the bond) to the hero.

The second reference to Circe is very different. When Odysseus begins his narrative to the Phaeacians, he describes her as follows (9.29-32):

ἧ μὲν μ' αὐτόθ' ἔρυκε Καλυψώ, δῖα θεάων,
ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι, λιλαιομένη πόσιν εἶναι
ὥς δ' αὐτῶς Κίρκη κατερήτυεν ἐν μεγάροισιν
Αἰαίη δολόεσσα, λιλαιομένη πόσιν εἶναι.

Calypso, the beautiful goddess, kept me there
in her hollow caves, longing for me to be her husband.
And similarly Circe held me back in her halls,
the guileful female from Aea, longing for me to be her husband.

Compared with the previous constructive portrayal of Circe,¹⁹⁵ Odysseus mentioning her alongside Calypso creates an image of two destructive, harmful women who wanted to keep the hero as their husband. As becomes clear from Odysseus’ subsequent

¹⁹⁴ See p. 1.64.

¹⁹⁵ Admittedly, in the first passage, the narrator is the poet, whereas Odysseus himself speaks in the second passage. This does not pose any problems for my interpretation, however, as Odysseus still refers to Circe in cunning terms in his final reference to her; see my discussion below.

narrative of the Circe episode itself, however, his initial statement to the Phaeacians is untrue: whereas Calypso did want to keep him, Circe did not, and actually helped him to return home. Though there are many parallels between Circe and Calypso – they are both depicted as weaving and singing, for example – Hermes, intervening in both episodes, intercedes in order to guide Odysseus away from Calypso, whereas he actually guides the hero *towards* Circe. Odysseus thus initially distorts the events as he will later narrate them: he focuses on Circe’s beguiling power and suppresses her help, perhaps in order to impress Alcinous and suppress his own unfaithfulness to Penelope.¹⁹⁶

Hermes’ intervention in the episode in order to guide Odysseus towards her – but with the capability of overcoming her danger – implies that it is necessary for the hero to confront Circe, as he will gain something from her. As Circe’s initial portrayal reveals, Odysseus receives more from her than advice and food: she imparts upon him practical information in line with her cunning nature. Circe is indeed the only figure (save Teiresias) throughout the adventures who can teach Odysseus anything; Calypso can merely provide him with an axe: the hero has to make his own means of departing from her island. This is why Odysseus must visit Circe. As he admits upon his arrival on her island, his own *metis* is spent (10.192-93):

ἀλλὰ φραζώμεθα θᾶσσον
εἴ τις ἔτ’ ἔσται μῆτις. ἐγὼ δ’ οὐκ οἶομαι εἶναι.

But let us quickly consider
whether any *metis* is left. I for one do not think there is.

¹⁹⁶ See Hogan (1976: 199).

These words from the mouth of the hero most celebrated for his *metis* indicate that something has gone amiss: the adventures so far, with the severe loss of men for whom Odysseus risked his life time and again, have gnawed at Odysseus' spirit. The last episode, ending with the Laestrygonians destroying all of Odysseus' ships save his own, has utterly shattered his versatility. At the beginning of the Circe episode, Odysseus has hence lost that particular capacity which set him apart from his men. This is the reason for Hermes' intervention. For Odysseus to achieve his *nostos*, the hero must be in possession of his main weapon, *metis*. As he lacks this quality for the moment, Odysseus must be provided with someone else's counsel. Hermes, however, is restricted to his role of messenger and does not care to linger in this world (as he reveals during his visit to Calypso, 5.99-104). What is needed is an ally from within this world. This is why Hermes guides Odysseus towards Circe, a cunning goddess who can restore Odysseus' strength. In order to acquire her help, however, the hero must overcome her. In order to bind a cunning deity, *metis* is required. Hermes, who comes to Odysseus' rescue, is indeed a god strongly associated with *metis* himself. In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, he is called πολύτροπος and αἰμυλομήτης, "with charming cunning".¹⁹⁷ The *Homeric Hymn* narrates how, as a baby, his first act was to steal his brother Apollo's cattle. In order to deceive him, Hermes created hoof prints which pointed the opposite way from the route he took; when Apollo accused him of the theft, Hermes pretended not to understand (after all, he had only been born a few hours). Zeus intervened, and Hermes offered Apollo a lyre which he had just created out of a tortoise's shell in reconciliation.¹⁹⁸ In the *Odyssey*, Hermes, similar to Circe, is

¹⁹⁷ *h. Hermes* 13.

¹⁹⁸ *h. Hermes* 68-502.

capable of immobilizing people (i.e. using *thelgein*), particularly by means of his wand (see pp. 1.48ff.). Hermes' possession of *metis* is also suggested in the first description of him in the Circe episode (10.275-79):

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ἄρ' ἔμελλον ἰὼν ἱεράς ἀνὰ βήσας
Κίρκης ἴξεσθαι πολυφαρμάκου ἐς μέγα δῶμα,
ἔνθα μοι Ἑρμείας χρυσόρραπις ἀντεβόλησεν
ἐρχομένῳ πρὸς δῶμα, νεηνίῃ ἀνδρὶ ἑοικώς,
πρῶτον ὑπηνήτη, τοῦ περ χαριστάτη ἦβη·

But when, as I walked through the sacred glades, I was about to arrive
at the great palace of Circe of the many drugs,
there Hermes of the golden wand chanced upon me
as I went towards the house, in the shape of a young man
with his first beard, whose youth was most striking.

Although, physically, Odysseus will face the goddess, the confrontation in this passage between the two compound epithets πολυφάρμακος and χρυσόρραπις implies that this is in actuality a battle of wits between the two gods, since both *pharmaka* and the wand are weapons of transformation used by them. In Hermes – through Odysseus – Circe will at last meet her match, since he too possesses transforming qualities and *metis*, which the hero has lost at the start of the episode. Indeed, one might argue that Circe does not become hospitable to Odysseus because he has been able to withstand her transformation, but because she has recognized him as Hermes' protégé. The latter had foretold that Odysseus would come to her (10.329-32; see p. 1.82); the presence of αἰεί (10.330) in Circe's revelation to Odysseus that she had been warned of his coming, suggests that this is not the first time that Hermes has visited Circe. Once Odysseus has

proven his superior *metis*, thereby revealing himself as Hermes' friend, Circe becomes his ally and benefactor, displaying her close resemblance to the main possessors of *metis* in the *Odyssey*.

Indeed, in her advice to Odysseus concerning his journey to the underworld, Circe resembles Hermes in his advice to the hero regarding his encounter with Circe herself: they both give the hero the right advice and tools (Hermes gives *moly*,¹⁹⁹ Circe gives Odysseus a black ram and ewe for his ritual, 10.571-72) in order to achieve a successful encounter. Circe's profound knowledge of the underworld and how to reach it questions her status of goddess 'bound' by the Olympians; perhaps in former times, her power extended beyond her own island. In the *Odyssey*, however, she is bound and cannot accompany travellers to Hades herself, but has to limit herself to giving them the right advice. Her authority, however, is never questioned: Odysseus must (χρῆ, 10.490) accomplish this journey before he moves on.²⁰⁰ Indeed, as Segal (1994: 40) points out, this is the only adventure that is truly imposed upon Odysseus. By imposing it, Circe not only brings the hero to the furthest point in his journey, but also steers him on his way home.

In her advice to Odysseus regarding the adventures which await him, Circe also resembles Athena. First, by pointing out all the dangers that lie ahead of Odysseus after the underworld – the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, and Thrinacia – she has a function similar to that of Athena, who tells Odysseus about the situation in the palace of Ithaca and how to amend it (13.330-440). Particularly in her explanation on how to avoid the

¹⁹⁹ See Scarborough (1991).

²⁰⁰ See Mugler (1979) on the necessity of this journey.

Sirens, Circe exhibits a *metis* similar to that of Odysseus himself and of Athena: she suggests putting wax in the ears of his companions lest they be seduced by the song of the Sirens; if he himself wishes to hear their song, he should be tied to the ship's mast and not released under any condition. Circe does not advise Odysseus to attack the Sirens directly in order to overcome their menace (for example, by shooting arrows at them), but makes use of the fact that their strongest point – that their attraction derives from their song – is simultaneously their weakest: if they cannot be heard, there can be no temptation. To Odysseus in particular, she again imparts information about binding. Being bound – retaining passivity, which is a quality he must incorporate (as discussed above) – now saves his life. Moreover, Circe and Athena share the same transformational ability: Athena's rejuvenation of Odysseus' father, Laërtes, is described in similar terms to Circe's transformation of the swine into men again: Laërtes is μείζονα δ' ἢ ἐπάρως καὶ πάσσονα, “taller and bigger than before” (24.369); Odysseus' men were νεώτεροι ἢ ἐπάρως ἦσαν, / καὶ πολὺ καλλίονες καὶ μείζονες εἰσοράσθαι, “they were younger than before, and much better-looking and taller to behold” (10.395-96). Finally, Circe's use of the wand, far from defining her as a witch, again connects her with Athena and Hermes rather than with the creatures of the *Apologoi*. As I have mentioned in chapter 2, Hermes uses a wand to rouse people or lull them to sleep (24.2-4), and Athena to alter Odysseus' shape physically to make him seem either older and uglier (13.429; 16.456), or taller and brighter (16.172-74). That these three figures specifically use a wand in order to transform people (whether in appearance or in awareness) confirms Circe's connection with the two Olympians.

Unlike Calypso, Circe does not desire Odysseus to stay as her husband once he has overcome her. On the contrary, she offers him and his men the possibility of recovering fully from their suffering (10.460-63):

ἀλλ' ἄγετ' ἐσθίετε βρώμην καὶ πίνετε οἶνον,
εἰς ὃ κεν αὖτις θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι λάβητε,
οἷον ὅτε πρῶτιστον ἐλείπετε πατρίδα γαῖαν
τρηχέης Ἰθάκης.

But come, eat food and drink wine,
until you have gathered courage in your heart again,
as when you first left your fatherland,
rugged Ithaca.

The Greeks are thus offered an opportunity to recover their strength, and Odysseus to regain his *metis*; indeed, his later use of a cunning knot taught to him by Circe implies that his stay with her was successful. Moreover, that Circe says “*until* you have gathered courage” signifies that she never intended to keep Odysseus. As Pucci (1998: 163) suggests, Circe offers the Greeks a “momentary homecoming”, but nothing more: their parting is swift and unemotional. In offering the Greeks this temporary *nostos*, Circe foreshadows Odysseus’ ultimate homecoming to Penelope.

Circe’s similarity to Penelope is widely acknowledged.²⁰¹ As Foley (1984: 62) suggests, “like Circe, Penelope has turned her guests into swine, into unmanly banqueters, lovers of dance and song rather than war”. Penelope, like Circe, possesses

²⁰¹ e.g. Segal (1968: 422) and Zeitlin (1995: 139).

the ability to *thelgein* men (18.282) and use *metis*.²⁰² In her deception of the suitors, for example, Penelope shows herself to be the equal of her husband. Her trick regarding the shroud is best known: by weaving and reweaving Laertes' funeral shroud, she delays her marriage to one of the suitors (2.93-110, 19.138-56, 24.128-46). Once that trick has been found out, she invents the contest with the bow and axes to decide once and for all who can be her new husband (21.68-100). Penelope and Circe hence share the quality of *metis*. Both women are bound to Odysseus, for in both cases he is the only one who can resist being turned into a swine and be their lover; in his presence, both women become an αἰδοίη ταμίη, "respectful housewife".²⁰³ When Odysseus returns from the underworld, indeed, Circe takes him by the hand and listens to his story as a friend, displaying care with a friendly gesture (12.33-34):

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

But she, having taken me by the hand, away from my beloved companions,
made me sit, lay beside me, and asked me about the details.

This resembles the scene in which Penelope listens to Odysseus' account of his adventures while lying beside him in bed (24.300-09). Circe thus serves as a second Penelope within the adventures, since she acts not only as Odysseus' lover, but also as his friend. Indeed, her island is the only place in the world of the adventures where one of the Greeks, Elpenor, can be buried (12.8-15): all the others die either at sea or in the

²⁰² See e.g. Winkler (1990), Marquardt (1993), Hölscher (1996), and Clayton (2004: 21-52) on Penelope's *metis*.

²⁰³ Circe: 10.371; Penelope: 17.94.

mouths of man-eaters (the Cyclops, the Laestrygonians, and Scylla). Circe, however, knows she is not Penelope, and fully respects that Odysseus will never be her husband.

In short, in the second part of the Circe episode, Circe displays *metis* similar to Athena, Hermes, Penelope, and Odysseus, and offers the Greeks hospitality and friendship in a world otherwise deprived of these qualities.

Circe is mentioned once more in the *Odyssey*, namely near the end of the poem, when Odysseus has avenged himself upon the suitors and has resumed his rightful place as Penelope's husband. To her, he renarrates the *Apologoi* – rendered in indirect speech in the poem – in which Circe is described as having δόλον πολυμηχανίην τε, “ruse and craftiness” (23.321). These two terms are again typical terms connected with the notion of *metis* (see p. 1.56), and Circe is here, as in her initial description, described in terms of cunning. Moreover, unlike δόλος, the term πολυμηχανίη is traditionally reserved for Odysseus himself.²⁰⁴ This is the only instance in the entire *Odyssey* where the term refers to someone else.²⁰⁵ That such a term, intrinsically referring to the hero's own cunning abilities, is applied by the hero himself to Circe can only imply that he not only considered her a worthy opponent but also deemed her the most valuable of helpers from the world of his adventures, endowed with a *metis* rather like his own.

A Cunning Transformation

In my analysis so far, I have more or less separated the first and second part of the Circe episode: in the first part, I have argued that Circe resembles the creatures of the

²⁰⁴ For Odysseus: e.g. 10.401 and 10.488.

²⁰⁵ In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 319, the term is used to refer to Hermes. This might further underline Circe's resemblance to Hermes too.

Apologoi, while she displays *metis* similar to Odysseus and his benefactors in the second part. In the other references to Circe in the epic, her representation is construed in similar terms. While Odysseus' comparison of her with Calypso links her with the creatures of the *Apologoi*, the other two references highlight her *metis*: again a dichotomy between Circe's Otherness and similarity to Odysseus is established. This dichotomy fits in with the polarization of the Greeks and Others explored throughout the *Odyssey*. As I have mentioned, however, polarizations are never fully maintained in the *Odyssey* – and neither is Circe's. Indeed, Circe's cunning is anticipated in various ways in the first half of the episode. I will presently argue that her use of *pharmaka* which appears to connect Circe most strongly with the creatures of the *Apologoi* also associates her with *metis*.

Circe's *pharmaka* connect her with the Lotus-eaters and with the theme of forgetfulness. The Lotus-eaters, however, offered the *pharmakon* to the Greeks out of hospitality, unaware of the dire consequences, while Circe offers the drug deliberately and indeed disguises it in a brew. In her indirect approach, she resembles Helen, who appears in book 4 of the *Odyssey*, when Telemachus, in search of news concerning his father, arrives in Sparta. When she notices that Telemachus and Menelaus are overcome with grief over Odysseus' fate, Helen acts as follows (*Od.* 4.220-32):

αὐτίκ' ἄρ' εἰς οἶνον βάλε φάρμακον, ἔνθεν ἔπινον,
νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἀπάντων.
ὄς τὸ καταβρόξειεν, ἐπὴν κρητῆρι μιγείη,
οὐ κεν ἐφημέριός γε βάλοι κατὰ δάκρυ παρειῶν, [...]
τοῖα Διὸς θυγάτηρ ἔχε φάρμακα μητιόεντα,
ἔσθλά, τὰ οἱ Πολύδαμνα πόρεν, Θῶνος παράκοιτις
Αἰγυπτίη, τῇ πλεῖστα φέρει ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα

φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἔσθλα μμιγμένα πολλὰ δὲ λυγρά.
ἰητρὸς δὲ ἕκαστος ἐπιστάμενος περὶ πάντων
ἀνθρώπων.

Immediately she cast a drug into the wine of which they drank,
banishing sorrow and soothing, causing forgetfulness of all worries.
Whoever would drink it entirely, when mixed in the bowl,
would not shed a tear upon his cheek all day long. [...]
Such cunning drugs did the daughter of Zeus possess,
beneficial ones, which Polydamna, the wife of Thon, had given her,
a woman from Egypt, where the fertile land bears the most
drugs, many beneficial when mixed, and many harmful.
Indeed, everyone is a specialist, knowledgeable above all
people.

Helen's purpose in administering *pharmaka* appears beneficent: by inducing a temporary forgetfulness, Telemachus and Menelaus will be able to calm down and restore their spirits. In this passage, the ambiguous nature of drugs is highlighted: they can be both ἔσθλα and λυγρά, depending on how they are mixed.²⁰⁶ Indeed, the Egyptians, whose country abounds in drugs, are not vilified as magicians: their expertise is held in great esteem. Rather than labelling Helen's use as *pharmaka* as magic, as others have done,²⁰⁷ I would rather focus on the epithet qualifying the drugs as μητιόεντα, "cunning" (4.227). Administering drugs disguised as a broth, being fully aware of their effects, is indeed an act of *metis*. *Pharmaka* are (1) an indirect means of assailing one's enemy, (2) used by a weaker person (here a female) at the right moment, (3) ambiguous inasmuch as they can be deadly or healing, (4) illusionary, as they can

²⁰⁶ Note that the Greek does not imply that there exists a dichotomy between *some* drugs which are beneficial and *others* which are harmful: the same drugs might work differently in a different mixture. See Bergren (1981) for an in-depth analysis of the ambiguity in this episode.

²⁰⁷ e.g. Collins (2008: 104).

be disguised in a drink or food, and (5) either binding as they restrain people, or freeing from bonds, as they heal. One might argue that it is because of these drugs, which temporarily immobilize Menelaus' and Telemachus' mind, that Helen is subsequently able to narrate her own version of her behaviour at Troy. In her narrative, she allows a disguised Odysseus to enter the city without giving him away (4.235-64), implying that her *metis* is in fact superior to his. Menelaus rectifies that story, narrating Helen's attempted betrayal of the Greeks: when they were hidden in the wooden horse, she imitated the voices of their wives in an endeavour to reveal them. It was only Odysseus' steadfastness which held the men from betraying themselves (4.265-89). In her use of *pharmaka* and speech, Helen thus usurps a particularly male domain of power, as Circe does too. One might argue, moreover, that Helen's soothing drugs allow her to take over the role of narrator and endow herself with a positive role in the Trojan War. As she has a male guardian, however, she cannot maintain that role and is corrected. This example reveals that Circe's drugs not only connect her with the immobile world of the *Apologoi*, but also with *metis*. Both Circe and Helen use drugs and speech (or in Circe's case, song) in order to soothe and persuade their audience. Both figures are ambiguous in their intentions: however, while Helen's intentions are less constructive than appear at first and she ultimately capitulates in the face of Menelaus' narrative, Circe, in contrast, transforms herself into a beneficent ally and allows Odysseus to assimilate her own *metis*.

Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men by means of *pharmaka*, which at first appears to be a typical reaction of a creature of the *Apologoi* to intruders (similar, for example, to the Sirens and Calypso), reveals itself to be an act of *metis*. Indeed, a figure

endowed with *metis* will use that quality in order to gain a way out of a difficult situation. Circe, a female figure living on an island without men and suddenly confronted by a group of armed men, would have had to surrender if violence had occurred (as she does when Odysseus attacks her with his sword). By using trickery (inserting the *pharmaka* into the brew she offers them), she is able to avoid violence and overcome the men. Her transformation is entirely in line with the behaviour of cunning figures: when confronted, they attempt to bind their opponent, in order to avoid being bound themselves. The first part of the Circe episode, in short, can therefore be interpreted as being as much connected with *metis* as the second part.

(c) Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out to challenge the common conception that the Odyssean Circe is depicted as a witch and as a figure split between hospitality and hostility. I first argued that Circe's so-called magical abilities are entirely intertwined with the individual episodes and key themes of the *Apologoi*. Denoting Circe alone as a witch is thus inconsistent: either all the creatures are magical, or none of them. Having argued that the *Apologoi* and the *Odyssey* as a whole are not concerned with magic but explore the transformations which Odysseus needs to endure in order to accomplish his *nostos*, I redefined Circe's abilities as *metis* rather than magic. Most clearly in the second part of the episode and indeed also in two references to her outside the *Apologoi*, her help to Odysseus is expressed in terms of *metis*. I went on to argue that her behaviour in the first part of the episode can also be interpreted as *metis*. The polarization between the creatures of the *Apologoi* and the cunning associated with Odysseus and his helpers is

thus deconstructed particularly in the figure of Circe. On the one hand, she transgresses the boundaries between genders in her appropriation of the male areas of singing and pharmaceutical knowledge, which renders her extremely dangerous. This danger is emphasized by her use of immobilization (*thelgein*) with an intended lasting effect, which aligns her with Calypso and sets her apart from other wielders of *thelgein*, such as the Olympian gods and most mortals. On the other hand, however, unlike any other figure in this world, Circe possesses a *metis* which allows her to adapt her behaviour positively towards Odysseus and bridge the boundary between her world and the Greeks. In so doing, she takes over the role of divine helper which Athena cannot fulfil in Poseidon's domain. I therefore conclude that, far from being represented as a witch in the *Odyssey*, the figure of Circe fits in closely with the themes of transformation and *metis* which pervade the epic.

There is no denying that there are elements in the Homeric representation of Circe which might be called Other: her status as female uncontrolled by a male *kurios*, her Titan origins, and her geographical remoteness from the centre of the world (whether Olympus or Greece) are the main elements. Circe's characterization is, however, not made up out of these elements alone: indeed, these characteristics are intertwined with Circe's *metis* and help to Odysseus. While incorporating elements which might be called Other, the figure of Circe is therefore not *entirely* Other. In the post-Homeric tradition, however, Circe's beneficent qualities will be largely ignored: as I will argue in chapter 5, her connection with *metis* will also diminish, and her aggressive and rapacious sexuality will become the focus instead of her helpful qualities. Whereas she is portrayed as a complex, cunning goddess without erotic

aspirations in the *Odyssey*, Circe will come to be represented more like the Homeric Calypso, as a temptress, a female dependent on men, and an emotional creature. From a transformational goddess, she will turn into a witch who has to use magic in order to control men. First, however, I turn to the representations of Circe and Medea in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

CHAPTER FOUR
MEDEA IN HESIOD'S THEOGONY

In the *Odyssey*, advising Odysseus on the dangers awaiting him on his homeward voyage, Circe makes reference to the Planctae, wandering rocks which have but once been passed by mortals (*Od.* 12.69-72):

οἷη δὴ κείνη γε παρέπλω ποντοπόρος νηῦς
'Αργῶ πᾶσι μέλουσα, παρ' Αἰήταο πλέουσα·
καὶ νύ κε τὴν ἔνθ' ὦκα βάλεν μεγάλας ποτὶ πέτρας,
ἄλλ' Ἥρη παρέπεμψεν, ἐπεὶ φίλος ἦεν Ἰήσων.

One sea-faring ship alone sailed past them [i.e. the Planctae]:
the Argo – known to all – sailing from Aeëtes.
And the waves would have quickly thrown her there upon the great rocks,
had not Hera sent her past, because Jason was dear to her.

This summary reference suggests that some version of the Argonautic myth was expected to be familiar (πᾶσι μέλουσα, 12.70) to the audience of the *Odyssey*.²⁰⁸ No such early version of the myth survives, however, which renders a discussion of Medea's earliest appearance in Greek myth rather problematic. The problem is not improved by the distinct agenda of the first text in which she does appear, Hesiod's *Theogony*, as well as by the issues of authenticity and chronology surrounding the ending of this poem. In spite of these problems, I will argue that the *Theogony* provides a starkly different image of Medea from the ones painted in Hellenistic and Roman

²⁰⁸ Meuli (1921) and West (2005) indeed argue that the *Odyssey* borrowed many elements from a pre-Odyssean Argonautic poem. See also chapter 8 of this thesis.

poetry, namely an image of a complex deity, not associated with magic but represented as a possessor of *metis* similar to the Odyssean Circe: in her brief appearance in the *Theogony*, I will propose, Medea is associated with Zeus' chief adversaries – Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis – who are all endowed with *metis*. Circe is mentioned in the *Theogony* too, though she does not play as important a role as Medea. I will assess her role too, but will not linger on her representation. In the light of her lesser importance in the *Theogony*, I have chosen to title this chapter “Medea in Hesiod's *Theogony*” rather than including Circe's name.

Before I embark on the argument of this chapter, I will elaborate briefly on Medea's absence from the Homeric epics and her possible origins, and on the issues I have mentioned above, namely those of the authenticity and chronology associated with the ending of the *Theogony*.

Whereas Circe plays a significant role in the *Odyssey* as chapter 3 has argued, Medea is altogether absent from the Homeric epics. This is peculiar in the light of the Argo's description as “known to all”. Indeed, many figures from the Argonautic story are mentioned in the Homeric epics, such as Jason, Aeëtes, and Pelias.²⁰⁹ Medea, however, is left unmentioned, her role as Jason's helper and consort taken up respectively by Hera – who will remain his divine helper throughout the poetic tradition²¹⁰ – and Hypsipyle, the queen of the Lemnian women. The help which Hera gives to Jason (though different from the help with which Medea traditionally provides Jason in Aea

²⁰⁹ Jason: *Il.* 7.468, 23.747; Aeëtes: *Od.* 10.137; Pelias: *Il.* 2.715, *Od.* 11.254-57.

²¹⁰ e.g. in Ap. Rhod. *Arg.*

itself)²¹¹ is emphasized in the *Odyssey*; moreover, the *Iliad* refers to Jason's relationship with Hypsipyle and the son they have together, Euneus (*Il.* 7.468, 23.747). The Homeric epics thus associate Jason with two female figures: one helper-goddess, and one mortal woman who ensures the continuation of his family by bearing him a child – neither of them is Medea.

Medea's absence in the Homeric epics is usually ignored or dismissed as insignificant, with critics arguing that she was so well-known that she did not need an introduction.²¹² Many figures from Greek mythology are indeed absent from the Homeric epics (such as Iphigeneia); this must not be taken as an indication that a certain figure did not yet exist. Huxley (1969: 61) and Hall (1989: 35) do question Medea's absence, and maintain that she must be a post-Homeric creation on the basis of the Homeric figure of Agamede (literally "great healer or wise woman"), ἡ τόσα φάρμακα ἦδη ὅσα τρέφει εὐρέϊα χθῶν, "who knows as many *pharmaka* as the broad earth nourishes" (*Il.* 11.741).²¹³ While the names of the two figures share the Indo-European root *mēd- discussed in chapter 2, I propose that they might not necessarily have been connected, as they are distinct figures attached to different myths. Jason's mother, Polymede,²¹⁴ literally "woman of much wisdom", also belongs to the same category of women, again incorporating the *mēd- root. Medea's initial incorporation into the Argonautic myth might indeed have been based on the aspects of cunning and healing capacities which she and Jason's family shared – not only does Medea's name

²¹¹ i.e. the potion which makes him invulnerable and the advice on the earth-born warriors. See e.g. Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.1026-51.

²¹² It is ignored e.g. by Graf (1997b) and Johnston (1997), writing specifically on the Archaic Medea. Petroff (1966: 6) argues that Medea does not need an introduction.

²¹³ See also Gordon (1999: 179) on Medea, Agamede, and Polymede.

²¹⁴ *Ehoiai* fr. 13 Most. See also Ps.-Apollod. 1.9.16.

resemble Polymede's, but Jason's name also means "healer".²¹⁵ This does not imply, however, that the two female figures were ever one figure, or that one was derived from the other.²¹⁶ An alternative approach to the Homeric silence on Medea, in the light of her pivotal role in the later Argonautic tradition, has been to construe her absence as meaningful. The *Odyssey* in particular is generally eager to draw comparisons between its protagonists and other mythical figures, for example between Penelope and Clytaemnestra, or Telemachus and Orestes.²¹⁷ Given Medea's kinship with Circe, her absence might therefore be interpreted in two ways. She may indeed have been so intrinsically connected with the Argonautic myth that her name did not need to be mentioned. From that point of view, Circe's mention of the Argo might have put an audience in mind of Medea's help to the Argonauts, and anticipated Circe's help to Odysseus. Alternatively, however, Medea might not have been associated with the myth at all. This is suggested by an inconsistency in Medea's geography in the earliest texts. Whereas Hesiod's *Theogony* and the early lyric poet Mimnermus²¹⁸ place Medea in Aeëtes' mythological land Aea (later Colchis), Eumelus' *Corinthiaca* locates her in Corinth.²¹⁹ For this reason, while some scholars have argued that Medea's origins must be sought in Colchis as she was part of the Argonautic myth, others maintain that she was originally a Corinthian goddess who was displaced by Hera and was subsequently

²¹⁵ See Mackie (2001).

²¹⁶ Another figure incorporating the *mēd- root in her name is Iphimedeia, who appears at *Od.* 11.305-20. Petroff (1966: 131) argues that Medea's name might have been derived from hers, as the name Iphimedeia already appears on a Linear-B tablet from Pylos; see Chadwick (1976: 95). It is very difficult to trace one figure back to another. As Medea appears in combination with Jason on a Cypro-Mycenean tablet which can be dated to the thirteenth century BCE (see Ephron [1961]), her name might be very old, and the couple Jason and Medea might both have been personifications of "healing" and "cunning". Moreau (1994: 83), however, disputes that the Cypro-Mycenean signs refer to Medea. Her early appearance is thus not wholly uncontested.

²¹⁷ For Penelope and Clytaemnestra, see *Od.* 11.436-46; for Orestes as model for Telemachus, see *Od.* 1.298-300.

²¹⁸ Mimnermus fr. 11 and 11a *IEG*.

²¹⁹ Paus. 2.3.10-11. See chapter 6.

associated with the Argonautic myth. Others again propose that there were originally two Medeas which coexisted and then merged.²²⁰ There are arguments in favour of any of these positions. Ultimately, however, I consider the question of Medea's origins to be unproductive, as this search for an 'original' image of any mythological figure cannot be concluded. Indeed, if one thing will emerge from my analysis of the primary texts, it is that there was by no means homogeneity even in the earliest poetic representations of Medea: she is given different husbands, characteristics, and functions, and is placed in different cities depending on the individual authors' agenda. Even if Medea was 'originally' connected with Corinth rather than with Colchis, it seems highly unlikely that Hesiod was the first to connect Medea with the Argonautic myth. Therefore, acknowledging that Medea was probably a well-known figure connected with the Argonautic tale by the Archaic period already, I now turn to the earliest text which mentions her, namely Hesiod's *Theogony*. I will examine Medea's status within this poem rather than in the function of a possible earlier tradition – nor, indeed, in the light of the later tradition which marked her a witch. The *Theogony*, however, is not without its issues: two of these – the chronology and authenticity of the ending of the poem – must be addressed before analyzing the epic.

Hesiod's treatments of Medea (*Theog.* 956-62 and 992-1002) and Circe (*Theog.* 1011-16) occur in a catalogue of goddesses who have offspring with heroes at the end of the *Theogony* (963-1020), the authenticity of which has long been disputed. West (1966: *ad* 881-1020) assigns the ending to a pseudo-Hesiodic writer and dates it later

²²⁰ Graf (1997b: 37-38) and Johnston (1997: 65-67) argue the precedence of the Colchian Medea; Farnell (1896-1909: 1.401-4) and Will (1955: 103-118) have argued the precedence of the Corinthian Medea. West (2002: 123-24), following Wilamowitz (1924: 234), maintains that two Medeas coexisted and merged.

than the rest of the *Theogony*, namely to the sixth century BCE, for structural, stylistic, historical, and linguistic reasons.²²¹ Structurally, West argues that the catalogue of goddesses who bear children to mortal men is closer to the *Catalogue of Women* than to the *Theogony*. Historically, he links figures such as Medeus and Perseis with the Medes and Persians, whose names – he argues – could not have appeared in Greek literature before 553 BCE. Stylistically, he finds the list “homogeneously bare and characterless”. Finally, linguistically, four formulae concerning marriage (e.g. μιχθεῖσ’ ἐν φιλότῃτι²²² and διὰ χρυσῆν Ἀφροδίτην)²²³ occur only in this list. Recently, however, scholars such as Dräger (1993: 27), Arrighetti (1998: 445-47), Malkin (1998: 180-91), and Clay (2003: 162-64) have contested West’s individual arguments and have proposed that this catalogue can be viewed as an integral part of the *Theogony*. Clay in particular argues persuasively that – while individual words may be later interpolations – lines 901-1020 do have a function in the poem as a whole when one considers its general agenda. Though some of West’s individual arguments still hold, I see no compelling reason for separating the entire ending of the *Theogony* from the rest of the poem. I will thus date this catalogue to the seventh century BCE, the date traditionally accepted for the composition of the *Theogony* as a whole. I will also follow the *communis opinio* that the *Theogony* postdates the composition of the *Odyssey*.²²⁴ In the present discussion, I will focus on the seemingly inappropriate phrase which ends the Medea passage in the *Theogony* – “and the will of great Zeus was accomplished (ἔξετελεῖτο)” (1002) – and propose that the figure of Medea is essential in the overall

²²¹ West was not the first to argue for a pseudo-Hesiodic ending to the *Theogony*. See West (1966: 398) for a discussion. See also Graf (1997b: 37) and Krevans (1997: 75).

²²² e.g. at Hes. *Theog.* 923, 941, 944, and 980.

²²³ e.g. at Hes. *Theog.* 822, 962, 1005, and 1014.

²²⁴ *Pace* West (1966: 46-47), who argues that the *Theogony* antedates the *Odyssey*.

structure of the poem. This argument will also have implications for the dating of the ending of the poem and I will return to this issue in the conclusion to this chapter. First, however, I will elaborate on Circe's minor role in the *Theogony*. Line numbers in this chapter refer to the *Theogony* unless stated explicitly.

(a) Circe in Hesiod's Theogony

Hesiod introduces the figures of Circe and Medea at the end of the *Theogony* in three separate passages. The first establishes their common descent from the Titans, in a list of unions between deities (*Theog.* 956-62, see p. 1.44 for the quotation); the second and third focus on Medea's marriage to Jason and Circe's union with Odysseus respectively. The two figures are represented as divine, for they are inserted in a list of ἀθάναται, "immortal goddesses" (968), who have offspring with mortals.

Circe's union with Odysseus is mentioned near the end of the list of unions between goddesses and heroes (1011-16):

Κίρκη δ' Ἡελίου θυγάτηρ Ὑπεριονίδαο
γείνατ' Ὀδυσσεῆος ταλασίφρονος ἐν φιλότητι
Ἄγριον ἠδὲ Λατῖνον ἀμύμονά τε κρατερόν τε·
Τηλέγονον δὲ ἔτικτε διὰ χρυσέην Ἀφροδίτην·
οἳ δὴ τοι μάλα τῆλε μυχῶ νήσων ἱεράων
παῖσιν Τυρσηνοῖσιν ἀγκλειτοῖσιν ἄνασσον.

Circe, daughter of Helios, Hyperion's son,
loved stout-hearted Odysseus and begot to him
Agius and Latinus, noble and strong.
And she bore him Telegonus through golden Aphrodite.
These indeed ruled all the famous Tyrsenians
far away in a remote part of the Sacred Isles.

This brief passage presents many questions, such as the status of Agrius and Latinus (Hesiod's creations or early Etruscan kings?), the location of Circe's island (east or west?), and the identity of the Tyrsenians.²²⁵ Regarding Circe's children, two separate traditions appear to have been conflated. On the one hand, Telegonus is a figure who will return in the *Telegony*, a poem from the epic cycle;²²⁶ Agrius and Latinus, on the other hand, have been interpreted as Etruscan kings, and thus connect Circe with Italy rather than with the east, where she was situated in the *Odyssey*.²²⁷ West (1966: *ad loc.*) argues that the verse regarding Telegonus is a later – possibly Byzantine – interpolation, probably inserted in order to complete the list of Circe's offspring with sons attributed to her in another tradition.

The potentially later date of Telegonus' introduction into this list of Circe's offspring does not affect my argument regarding Circe's status in Hesiod's *Theogony*. What immediately transpires is that, in this passage, Hesiod is not drawing on the *Odyssey* we know, since no reference was made to children born from the union between Circe and Odysseus in the Homeric epic. While it is not unreasonable that poets would have imagined offspring resulting from the union between Circe and Odysseus, what is vital for the purpose of this thesis is the fact that Circe, in the *Theogony*, is depicted as a mother, since this status appears contrary to the status of a goddess living without a male *kurios* with which she was endowed in the *Odyssey*.²²⁸ Indeed, in the *Odyssey*, the hero wanted to return to Penelope and Telemachus. If the

²²⁵ These are all issues dealt with, among others, by West (1966: *ad loc.*) and Malkin (1998: 180-91).

²²⁶ See chapter 5.

²²⁷ In the *Odyssey*, the goddess Eos (Dawn) is said to reside on her island (*Od.* 12.3-4). This suggests an Eastern geography, though this has been disputed by Dion (1971). See chapter 8.

²²⁸ Similarly, in the *Theogony* (1017-18), Calypso is said to have borne Odysseus two sons, Nausithoüs and Nausinoüs, who are also not mentioned in the *Odyssey*.

poet had mentioned that Odysseus begot children with goddesses whom he had encountered on his voyage, the hero's *nostos* would have been forever incomplete: children, one might argue, would have created a lasting connection between Odysseus and the world of the *Apologoi*, rendering him unable to return fully to the normal world of Penelope and Telemachus in Ithaca. In contrast to the *Odyssey*, however, the agenda of the *Theogony* is to list and narrate the birth and offspring of the gods. In this context, referring to the offspring of Circe and Odysseus is wholly appropriate. This does not take away from the fact that Circe's status in the *Theogony* has been diminished since she is referred to as a mother. This tendency will be continued in later Archaic poems, such as the *Telegony*. For now, however, let us turn to Medea.

(b) Medea and Metis in Hesiod's Theogony

Earlier in the list of unions between goddesses and heroes in which Circe is to be found, Medea's marriage to Jason is outlined (*Theog.* 992-1002):

Κούρην δ' Αιήταο διοτρεφέος βασιλῆος
Αἰσονίδης βουλήσι θεῶν αἰειγενετάων
ἦγε παρ' Αἰήτεω, τελέσας στονόεντας ἀέθλους,
τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπέτελλε μέγας βασιλεὺς ὑπερήνωρ,
ὑβριστῆς Πελίδης καὶ ἀτάσθαλος ὄβριμοεργός·
τοὺς τελέσας ἐς Ἴωλκὸν ἀφίκετο πολλὰ μογήσας
ὠκείης ἐπὶ νηὸς ἄγων ἐλικώπιδα κούρην
Αἰσονίδης, καὶ μιν θαλερὴν ποιήσατ' ἄκοιτιν.
καὶ ῥ' ἦ γε δηθηῖσ' ὑπ' Ἰήσωνι, ποιμένι λαῶν,
Μήδειον τέκε παῖδα, τὸν οὔρεσιν ἔτρεφε Χείρων
Φιλλυρίδης· μεγάλου δὲ Διὸς νόος ἐξετελεῖτο.

It was the daughter of Aeëtes, the king nurtured by Zeus,
whom the son of Aeson led away from Aeëtes by the will of
the immortal gods, after he had finished the many wretched tasks
which the great overbearing king had imposed upon him,
Pelias, hubristic and arrogant aggressor.
When he had finished them, the son of Aeson arrived in Iolcus
having suffered greatly, and bringing on his swift ship the girl
with the big eyes, he made her into his wife, young as she was.
She, at last subdued by Jason, the shepherd of men,
bore a son, Medeus, whom Cheiron, son of Philyra, raised in the mountains.
And the will of great Zeus was accomplished.

The discrepancies between this summary of the Argonautic tale and Hellenistic and Roman versions are striking. (For a summary of the Medea story as it was known in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see appendix 5.) First, while in the Hellenistic and Roman stories, Medea travels around the Greek world (going to Iolcus, Corinth, Athens, and then back to Media),²²⁹ she is only brought as far as Iolcus in the *Theogony*. Secondly, she only has one son with Jason while she has two (with different names) in the later tradition.²³⁰ Finally, the tale ends with the marriage of Medea and Jason in Iolcus and the birth of their son, suggesting what one might call a “happy ending”. This account contrasts sharply with the later Euripidean tradition in which Jason abandons Medea, who in her turn commits infanticide. Contrary to Hellenistic and Roman depictions, too, Medea is portrayed as a goddess. Indeed, this status appears to have been a common element in early Archaic poetry, as the poets Alcman (*PMGF* 163) and Musaeus (*FGrH* 455 F 2) also portray her as such. Not only is there no trace of magic or supernatural abilities in Hesiod’s portrayal of her, but Medea is actually

²²⁹ See also Graf (1997b: 21-22).

²³⁰ Their traditional names are Mermerus and Pheres, e.g. in Paus. 2.3.6.

represented as a passive female: passed from her father to her husband, she is not even mentioned by name but merely introduced as Aeëtes' daughter, which immediately establishes her proper place as κόῦρη, "daughter". On the surface, no image could be further away from the polarized image prevalent in later poetry. One might argue that Hesiod's agenda fully accounts for this summary depiction: the *Theogony*, aiming to provide an account of the rise to power of Zeus and of the divine genealogies, would naturally not be concerned with unnecessary elaboration of individual myths. Underneath this summary image, however, I propose that a complex representation of Medea can be perceived, as the phrase "and the will of great Zeus was accomplished" (1002) at the end of the Medea passage insinuates. To this purpose, I will first discuss the general composition of the poem, after which I will argue that Medea is closely linked with the main theme of the *Theogony*.

The telos of the Theogony

In my examination of the *Theogony*, I agree with Clay (2003), who maintains that the entire poem is centred around Zeus' rise to power. This is visible in the following outline of the poem:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1-115 | Invocation of the Muses as Zeus' daughters; |
| 116-403 | Pre-Olympian genealogies, including the birth of monsters which are slain by heroes; the castration of Uranus by Cronus; |
| 404-52 | Portrayal of Hecate as intermediary between the realms of earth, sky, and sea thanks to Zeus; |
| 453-506 | Zeus' birth and struggle for supremacy with his father, Cronus; |
| 507-616 | Zeus outwits Prometheus; |

- 617-880 Zeus' war against the Titans and Typhoeus;
- 881-929 Kingship of Zeus and his marriages, e.g. first marriage to Metis;
- 930-62 Other unions of deities, e.g. genealogy of Medea and Circe;
- 963-1020 List of goddesses who begot offspring with mortal men, e.g. Medea's marriage to Jason, and Circe's union with Odysseus;

Through the organisation of the events, Hesiod emphasizes from the outset of the *Theogony* that Zeus' supremacy is the *telos* of the cosmos, its "ending" or "completion".²³¹ Even before he is born, Zeus is connected with the main figures and events of the poem. First, the Muses, whom Hesiod invokes at the beginning of the *Theogony*, are introduced as his daughters (25). Secondly, the monsters mentioned among the pre-Olympian genealogies (e.g. the Hydra and Medusa) are slain by heroes connected in some way with Zeus (see below), and Hecate is portrayed as the personification of Zeus' will.²³² The main manner in which the poet anticipates Zeus' hegemony is through the succession myths, as a brief outline will demonstrate.

The primordial couple are represented as Gaia (Earth) and Uranus (Sky). Every time Gaia bears a child to Uranus, however, he hides it in the earth as he does not wish to be succeeded. Gaia, groaning under the constraint, devises a cunning plan: having created a sickle, she asks her children to castrate their father with it, thus putting an end to their concealment (154-82). Her youngest child, Cronus, accomplishes this task and consequently acquires supreme rule. Similarly to his father, however, Cronus refuses to let his children be born, as he fears they will overthrow him; he therefore swallows them upon birth (459-62), an act which reflects Uranus' confinement of his children

²³¹ See also Clay (2003: 13).

²³² See Boedeker (1983) and Clay (1984: 350) for discussions of the Hesiodic Hecate.

within the earth. Gaia and Cronus' wife, Rhea, devise a plan which will stop Cronus from swallowing his children: he is fed a stone instead of his youngest son, Zeus, who is allowed to grow up in secret on Crete (477-91). Cronus is then induced to throw up his offspring, and is dethroned by Zeus (491-506). Having defeated Cronus, however, Zeus – like his father and grandfather – does not remain unchallenged. He encounters resistance from four adversaries: the Iapetid Prometheus, the Titans, Typhoeus, and Metis. I propose that the confrontations which he has with these and with his father take place on two opposite levels. On the one hand, the war between the Olympians and the Titans, as well as Zeus' battle with the monster Typhoeus, son of Gaia and Tartarus (820-68), are encounters of violence (βίη): the confrontation is direct, and in both cases, Zeus and the Olympians are victorious. Zeus' confrontations with Cronus, Prometheus and Metis structurally enclose the armed combats with the Titans and Typhoeus, as the confrontations with Cronus and Prometheus are narrated before, and the swallowing of Metis after, these violent battles. None of these conflicts take place on the level of armed combat, but they are, in contrast, battles of intellect, of *metis*.

When he decides to castrate his father in order to stop him from hiding his children beneath the earth, Cronus is described as being ἀγκυλομήτης, “of crooked counsel” (168): he overthrows Uranus by means of an ambush (λόχος, 174), castrating him with a sickle created by Gaia – an act represented as a “crafty, evil plot” (δολίην δὲ κακὴν ... τέχνην, 160). This highly symbolic act of castration is emphasized through the ambiguity of the term μήδεα, which can mean both “male genitals” and “plans”. Hence, through ridding his father of his genitals – φίλου δ' ἀπὸ μῆδεα πατρὸς / ἔσσυμένως ἤμησε, “eagerly, he cut off the genitals of his dear father” (180-81) – and

therefore of his procreative powers, Cronus also thwarts his plan to retain supremacy. In order to overthrow Cronus, Zeus thus needs to demonstrate superior *metis*. Gaia helps him overcome his father, as it is through her cunning that Zeus is replaced by a stone which is then fed to his father.

Once his father has been overcome, however, Zeus has to face an adversary from his own generation. Prometheus, son of the Titan Iapetus, is described as αἰολόμητις (“of many-faceted cunning”, 511), ποικιλόβουλος (“with varying counsel”, 521), ἀγκυλομήτης (“of crooked counsel”, 546, this epithet connects him with Cronus, see above), and πάντων πέρι μήδεα εἰδώς (“knowing plans beyond any other”, 559). He attempts to deceive Zeus twice. First, he divides a sacrificial animal into bones covered in fat (which therefore appear appealing) and meat covered in skin (which appears unappealing) (535-60). Zeus sees through this, however, for his foreknowledge is superior to Prometheus: he is described as ἄφθιτα μήδεα εἰδώς (“knowing infallible plans”, 550; also at 545 and 561). Out of anger at this deception, Zeus refuses to grant humankind the knowledge of fire. Prometheus, however, steals fire and brings it to mankind in a hollow stalk (565-67). Mankind is consequently punished by the creation of woman (571-602), and Prometheus is chained to a pillar, his liver eaten by an eagle every day, until Heracles kills the eagle and frees him (521-34). Prometheus is thus ‘bound’ by Zeus’ *metis* (520-22) but ultimately delivered by the Olympian’s greater desire to honour his son, Heracles (526-31). Twice, Prometheus hence deceives Zeus by making something appear different from what it is (bones as meat, meat as skin; and fire as a stalk). Twice, however, Zeus overcomes the threat of *metis* through his greater foreknowledge.

Zeus achieves victory over Cronus and Prometheus on account of his superior cunning: for οὐκ ἔστι Διὸς κλέψαι νόον οὐδὲ παρελθεῖν, “it is impossible to deceive or outwit Zeus’ mind” (613). When the threats of the past and present generations of gods have ceased – both through the violent defeat of the Titans and Typhoeus and through the outwitting of Cronus and Prometheus – the risk remains that an heir will rise to challenge his father in the future. Zeus, warned by Gaia that a male child born from his first wife, Metis, will stand up against him, in response swallows not his children – as his father had done – but the mother (886-91). Thereby, he removes the risk that more children will be born, and incorporates Metis’ feminine reproductive capacity: for Zeus gives birth to Metis’ child, Athena, himself. She is born from his head in full armour (924-26). By uniting himself with Metis, Zeus physically connects himself with a mental category with which he is endowed already, namely cunning, as Metis is indeed the personification of the notion of cunning intelligence (μητις). By incorporating the capacity to give birth, Zeus is able to overcome the threat of an heir rising to challenge him, and secures his lasting supremacy. Indeed, Athena, who is born from her father’s head, is endowed with *metis* too, but as her mother has been removed, she sides with the masculine at all times,²³³ and is thus no longer a threat to her father’s hegemony, as she is a virgin goddess and will not produce an heir to challenge Zeus.

In his battles with the Titans and Typhoeus, Zeus demonstrates his superior tactical and combat skills. In the confrontations with Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis, on the other hand, Zeus does not apply violence but defeats his opponents in an indirect fashion. While they are all endowed with *metis*, a quality which enables them to change

²³³ This is mentioned explicitly e.g. in Aesch. *Eum.* 737-38.

the appearance of things, Zeus displays greater cunning. This is expressed in the epithet used most frequently to describe him, μητίετα, “cunning”,²³⁴ which is based on the *mēd- root. Alternatives are ἄφθιτα μῆδεα εἰδῶς, “knowing infallible plans” (545, 550, 561), μέδων (529), and μητιόεις (457).²³⁵ Indeed, “taking the right measures with authority” – Chantraine’s definition of the *mēd- root²³⁶ – is exactly what Zeus does in the *Theogony*: by taking the correct actions at the correct time, he is able to defeat his opponents in a battle of wits.

All these confrontations in the *Theogony* are construed as furthering the *telos* of the cosmos, namely Zeus’ supremacy. Terms based on the word *telos* indeed appear at strategic places in the *Theogony*. First, when Gaia asks which of her children will castrate their father, Cronus replies: μητηρ, ἐγὼ κεν τοῦτό γ’ ὑποσχόμενος **τελέσαιμι** / ἔργον, “Mother, I would promise and perform this deed” (170-71). By achieving (τελ-έσαιμι) the dethroning of Uranus, Cronus takes his place in the cycle of hegemony, though only temporarily, as his rule leads up to the permanent rule of Zeus. Zeus’ confrontation with Prometheus is represented in a similar fashion: seeing through Prometheus’ initial deception regarding the division of the sacrificial animal, Zeus contemplates the evils which he will unleash on mankind: κακὰ δ’ ὄσσετο θυμῷ / θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι, τὰ καὶ **τελέεσθαι** ἔμελλεν, “he foresaw in his mind evils for

²³⁴ e.g. at 56, 286, 520 and 904.

²³⁵ These are also the only epithets which refer to Zeus’ character. His other epithets refer to his function as leader or to his power over nature: αἰγίοχος, “aegis-bearing” (e.g. at 11, 966); Κρονίδης, “son of Cronus” (e.g. at 412, 624); θεῶν βασιλεύς, “king of the gods” (e.g. at 886, 995); μέγας, “great” (e.g. at 29, 1002), or πατήρ, “father” (e.g. at 36, 468); νεφεληγέρετα, “cloud-gatherer” (e.g. at 558, 944); ὑψιβρεμέτης, “high-thunderer” (e.g. at 568, 601); and ἐρισμάγαρος, “loud-thundering” (815).

²³⁶ See p. 1.65.

mortals, which he would also fulfil” (551-52). The attempted deception of Zeus by Prometheus is in consequence represented as part of Zeus’ vision of how to establish his authority on earth, namely through the creation of Pandora as a punishment for Prometheus’ transgression. The defeat of the Titans is also connected with the *telos* of the *Theogony* (638). Indeed, when the Titans have been defeated, the poet states explicitly that the *telos* of the cosmos has now been truly accomplished (881-85):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥα πόνον μάκαρες θεοὶ ἐξετέλεσαν,
Τιτῆνεσσι δὲ τιμᾶων κρίναντο βίηφι,
δῆ ῥα τότ’ ὤτρυνον βασιλευμένῃ δὲ ἀνάσσειν
Γαίης φραδμοσύνησιν Ὀλύμπιον εὐρύοπα Ζῆν
ἀθανάτων.

But when the blessed gods had fulfilled their task,
and had decided with the Titans on the honours by means of violence,
then they urged to become king and rule over the immortals
Olympian far-seeing Zeus, through the cunning of Gaia.

With the past and present threats of instability removed, the *telos* of the cosmos has been accomplished to a great extent: when the battle against the Titans is finished (ἐξετέλεσαν, 881), Zeus becomes king of the gods. The use of the compound verb ἐκτελέω – in contrast with the basic τελέω used in the individual episodes of Cronus and Prometheus – particularly emphasizes the ending of a cycle. The importance of the prefix lies in the fact that it is used only in this context – and in one other passage, to which I will come below.

Zeus’ supremacy is not secure with the defeat of his male foes, for there are more threats to his reign coming from female sexuality, as an heir might stand up to

challenge Zeus. In his marriage to Metis, this threat is overcome by means of Zeus' superior *metis*, when he confines not his children – as his father and grandfather had done – but the mother herself. In that way, the cycle of procreation itself is stopped rather than the offspring already in existence. While Zeus' battle for supremacy with the previous generations (the Titans and Cronus in particular) and his own generation (Prometheus) is concluded with the complete fulfilment of the *telos* of the cosmos, however, no such closure is achieved in the Metis passage to mark the defeat of future generations. And this is where I argue Medea becomes part of the central action of the *Theogony*. Indeed, the *telos* of Zeus is said to be accomplished entirely – μεγάλου δὲ Διὸς νόος ἔξετελείτο (1002) – in the second Medea passage, through Medea's union with Jason and the subsequent education of their son, Medeus, by the centaur Cheiron.

Medea and the telos of the Theogony

While the basic verb τελέω is attested a number of times in the *Theogony*, the composite verb ἐκτελέω, which suggests a greater degree of closure than the basic form, only appears in two contexts. First, it appears twice in the context of the defeat of the Titans (403, 881), where it indicates the ending of a long struggle not merely between two generations (Titans and Olympians), but also between representatives of both (Cronus and Zeus) and between competitors of the younger generation (Zeus and Prometheus). With the defeat of his existing male competitors, Zeus' hegemony is indeed achieved to some degree. The composite verb ἐκτελέω, however, also appears in the Medea passage (1002). The use of this particular verb suggests that, parallel to Zeus' victory over the Titans, Medea's marriage and the birth of Medeus can be

interpreted as accomplishing Zeus' supremacy. Yet one might consider this inappropriate or at least overstated, since the poet mentions Medea at the end of the poem, in passing, and as a passive figure passed from father to husband. How might her marriage and the education of her child by Cheiron further the sovereignty of Zeus? The *mēd- root, present in Medea's name, however, connects her with Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis, and as a result not merely with the main theme of the *Theogony* but specifically with Zeus and his cunning enemies. On the surface, Medea does not display any threat to Zeus as did the three other figures. By connecting the Medea passages with the wider context of the *Theogony*, however, I will presently suggest that Medea can be interpreted as posing a danger to Zeus' supreme power, but one which has been overcome before it revealed itself.

West (1966: 48-50) has argued that the *Theogony* ends with the Metis passage, among other reasons (which I have summarized above) because there are no more threats to Zeus' throne after he has swallowed Metis. One might argue against him that the following unions among deities and of goddesses with heroes do continue the theme of challenges to Zeus' supremacy. Clay (2003: 17) argues that the female's "continual impetus for change constitutes a radically destabilizing force in the cosmos". By marrying goddesses, whether to gods or to heroes, Zeus thus controls their fertility and subdues them through his male allies. The monsters listed near the beginning of the *Theogony* can be interpreted similarly. Among the pre-Olympian genealogies narrated near the beginning of the poem, some of the monsters mentioned are immediately linked with the hero who will slay them, even though that defeat will not take place for a long time: Medusa will be killed by Perseus (276-86), Geryones and the Hydra by

Heracles (289-94 and 316-18), and the Chimaera by Bellerophon (319-25). All three heroes are connected with Zeus,²³⁷ and their defeat of pre-Olympian monsters might hence be construed as anticipating Zeus' imposition of order on earth by means of heroes associated with him. Similarly, in the unions of goddesses and heroes, Zeus' power struggle, so far fought out between gods alone, is transferred to earth.²³⁸

Jason's journey to Aeëtes' land in order to acquire the Golden Fleece, imposed upon him by his evil uncle, Pelias, is indeed represented as a task to be completed: **τελέσας** στονόεντας ἀέθλους, "having completed the painful tasks" (994 and again 997). This phrase occurs only in one other passage in the *Theogony*, namely in the description of Heracles' labours (951). In the light of my discussion of the use of the verb **τελέω** in the *Theogony*, one might argue that Jason and Heracles are thus connected with the main theme of the poem, namely the *telos* of the cosmos, and indeed are represented as acting as Zeus' allies on earth. Heracles, as Zeus' son, fulfils this role by defeating monsters, particularly Geryones and the Hydra (289-94 and 316-18), which threaten the peace on earth. One might argue that Jason functions similarly, by accomplishing the retrieval of the Golden Fleece.

The will of Zeus, however, is only said to be fulfilled entirely by Jason's marriage to Medea and the birth and education of Medeus. The reason for this apparently incongruous description becomes apparent when one considers Medea's epithet **δηθηῖσα** (1000). This form is the aorist participle passive of **δάμνημι**, "I tame", "I subject to", generally used to denote the yoking of animals and the marrying

²³⁷ Perseus through Pegasus' status among the Olympians (285-86); Heracles as he is the son of Zeus (316); Bellerophon again through Pegasus (325).

²³⁸ I admit that the list of goddesses is rather random. The reason why Medea was not placed at the end if her union to Jason accomplished Zeus' will is unclear. However, this does not diminish the importance of the use of the compound verb **ἐκ-τελέω** in the passage.

of young girls.²³⁹ (An unmarried girl is by consequence ἄ-δάμαστος, “untamed”.)²⁴⁰ In spite of its use in the context of marriage, the verb’s principal (and earlier) meaning is “I bind”.²⁴¹ I propose that Medea had to be ‘bound’ by Jason because of her cunning capacities. That her union with Jason is surrounded by Olympian figures (Aphrodite and Zeus: 960, 962, 993) supports this. Indeed, even Medea’s father, though actually Titan offspring, is connected with Zeus rather than Helios in his epithet διοτρεφής, “nurtured by Zeus” (992). The representation of Medea as δμηθεῖσα, “bound” would not have sufficed to argue that Medea is represented as a threat to Zeus’ supremacy, as a few other female figures in the *Theogony* are described in the same terms.²⁴² The combination of this epithet, however, with the use of the compound verb ἐκτελέω in the same passage, with Medea’s connection with Zeus’ adversaries through the *mēd-root, and with the representation of Jason as Zeus’ ally on earth, suggests that Medea might have been thought of as a threat to Zeus’ supremacy at some level. Being bound by Jason, she not only resembles the monsters defeated by Heracles, but also, more importantly, Zeus’ cunning adversaries: Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis. She is indeed connected with the various figures in different ways. First, Medea’s name connects her with Cronus, since it echoes the way in which he defeated his father, namely by cutting off his μήδεα. Secondly, one might argue that Prometheus’ name anticipates the birth of Medeus, since it could be interpreted as “he who comes before Medeus”: pro-med(th)-eus. The connection between the two names suggests a strong association

²³⁹ For the yoking of animals, see e.g. *Il.* 23.655. For subjecting girls, see e.g. *Il.* 18.432.

²⁴⁰ e.g. at *Soph. Aj.* 450.

²⁴¹ Frisk (1960-72: *ad* δάμνημι) and Chantraine (1968-80: *ad* δάμνημι).

²⁴² e.g. the Chimaera (327), Theia (374), Rhea (453), and Thetis (1006).

between Medea and Prometheus.²⁴³ Finally, whereas Metis provides Zeus with a daughter (Athena), Medea, through Jason, provides Zeus with a male successor, Medeus. One might indeed argue that Medea's inclusion in the list of Zeus' adversaries lends a balance to the structure of the *Theogony*: Cronus and Prometheus are Zeus' male opponents from the past and present generations, Metis and Medea represent the future threat of an heir both among the gods (Metis' unborn son) and on earth (Medeus). Zeus binds Cronus by restricting him to Tartarus (851), Prometheus by chaining him to a pillar, and Metis by swallowing her. Similarly, Medea is bound (δηθηϊσα) by Zeus through her marriage to Jason.

The birth of Medea's son, Medeus, might indeed at some level have been construed as posing a threat to Zeus, as Metis' son would have done, since Medeus is named after his mother while traditionally, a son is named after his father. Telemachus, for example, is the symbol of Odysseus' "battle far away". Medeus' name thus suggests that he inherited his mother's cunning and perhaps her threat. By integrating the figure of Medea within the Olympian framework (supervised by the Olympians and tamed by one of their heroes), that threat (both hers and her son's) is removed. Instead, her son is educated by Cheiron, the centaur who also educated his father, Jason, and other heroes such as Achilles and Asclepius.²⁴⁴ Cheiron is not mentioned elsewhere in the *Theogony*, but more information about him can be gained from the Homeric epics and the Hesiodic fragments. Other inasmuch as he is a composite being, the centaur is the child of Cronus and Philyra.²⁴⁵ While centaurs are traditionally portrayed as immoral and

²⁴³ Later, the connection would become stronger through Medea's use of the plant Prometheion. See n. 74 on p. 1.45 and see also p. 2.17.

²⁴⁴ Jason: *Ehoiai* fr. 36 Most; Achilles: *Ehoiai* fr. 155.87 Most; Asclepius: *Il.* 4.192-219.

²⁴⁵ schol. *ad Ap. Rhod. Arg.* 1.554.

aggressive, the *Iliad* represents Cheiron as righteous and an expert in medicine (*Il.* 11.832). As Cheiron is known as an educator of heroes associated with Zeus, the fact that Medeus is entrusted to his care indicates his integration in the Olympian framework. By means of the taming of Medea and the incorporation of Medeus in the Olympian collective of heroes through his education by Cheiron, all aspects of the *telos* of the cosmos have now been fulfilled: the threat from the previous and present generations have been overcome, and not only the threat from a divine heir who might challenge his father, but also of mortal offspring from a goddess who might challenge peace on earth similarly to the monsters destroyed by other heroes. The presence of the verb ἐξετελείτο in the Medea passage is consequently appropriate, as it is here that the final part of the *telos* of the cosmos is fulfilled: the continuation of Zeus' supremacy on earth as well as among the gods.

(c) Conclusion

The seemingly inappropriate presence of the composite verb ἐκτελέω in the Medea passage of the *Theogony* first led me to investigate the figure of Medea in the broader context of the poem. While examining the occurrence of this composite verb and of its basic form τελέω, it emerged that the basic verb τελέω chiefly appears in the context of the main theme of the *Theogony*, namely Zeus' supremacy as being the *telos* of the cosmos. As the basic verb features in the context of Cronus' castration of his father, Prometheus' deception of Zeus, and the fulfilment of difficult tasks by heroes on earth (Heracles and Jason), I have argued that all these events are represented as vital stages in the establishment of Zeus' hegemony. The composite verb ἐκτελέω, in contrast, only

occurs in two contexts: apart from its unlikely appearance in the Medea passage, it is mentioned twice in the context of the Olympian victory over the Titans. As this victory marks the defeat of Zeus' enemies from the past and present generations, I proposed that one might reasonably expect that the second occurrence of this particular verb marks the defeat of an equally important group of competitors. I therefore set out to consider to what extent – if at all – the union of Jason and Medea and the subsequent education of their son, Medeus, by the centaur Cheiron, might indicate the end of a phase in Zeus' course to unchallenged power. Examining Zeus' adversaries – Cronus, Prometheus, the Titans, Typhoeus, and Metis (through her unborn child who, prophecy had it, would challenge his father) – I found that the confrontations between Zeus and these figures fall into two categories: while his battles with the Titans and Typhoeus are violent encounters, Zeus' conflicts with Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis are battles of wits, in which *metis* plays the key role. The figure of Medea ties in with these conflicts as her name is also based on the Indo-European *mēd- root and she is thus connected with *metis* etymologically. While the battle with the Titans is construed as marking the end of a particular phase in Zeus' struggle for hegemony, no such closure is found in the account of Metis, the one confrontation following the battles between Zeus and his male competitors. That the Medea passage brings closure to the *Theogony* inasmuch as it features the verb ἐκτελέω, is confirmed by Medea's connection with Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis.

In contrast to the confrontations between Zeus and these figures, however, no struggle between Zeus and Medea is depicted. I have argued that the terminology used in the Medea passage nevertheless suggests that Medea might have been seen as a

threat to Zeus's supremacy at some level. Jason is paralleled to Heracles through his achievement (*tel-esas*) of difficult tasks. Though these tasks refer first and foremost to Pelias' setting of the quest for him, that Medea is represented as $\delta\mu\eta\theta\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\sigma\alpha$ appears to suggest that "yoking" her was a task in itself, and that she was a powerful figure before Jason bound her, as is suggested by her name. The presence of the Olympians in this passage further emphasizes the importance of the union. I would therefore argue that, albeit indirectly, Medea is construed as a threat to Zeus' hegemony because of her cunning, similar to his other cunning adversaries. Moreover, the son which she bears to Jason, Medeus, encapsulates his mother's cunning qualities in his name, and might – like Metis' unborn son – have challenged Zeus at a given moment. By marrying Medea to Jason, however, Zeus is able to overcome Medea, as he had overcome Metis by swallowing her. By entrusting Medeus' education to Cheiron, finally, Medea's son is integrated into the Olympian network of heroes: the threat posed by mother and child is hence removed entirely.

In short, though Medea only makes a brief appearance in a poem which is not all that concerned with her characterization, the evidence suggests that her status in Hesiod's *Theogony* is different from the one with which she was endowed in Hellenistic and Roman poems. Medea is labelled a goddess – though nothing points at a former status of mother-goddess, as Petroff (1966: 142) and Moreau (1994) suggest – and is not associated with magic, but with the notion of *metis*. This argument holds even if one follows West in doubting the authenticity of the ending of the *Theogony*: for if not Hesiod, some post-Hesiodic editor of the *Theogony* who added the passage on Medea at a later stage, might have considered Medea a threat to Zeus' supremacy

similar to the other cunning figures. My argument on the pivotal role played by Medea in the *Theogony*, however, suggests that the ending is linked very closely thematically with the rest of the poem, and was thus likely composed at the same time.

The tension between the subjection in which Medea has been placed as δμηθεῖσα female and her Titan μήδεα will become the main focus of the Graeco-Roman poetic tradition. Whereas Hesiod maintains the tension between the two aspects of Medea through her *metis*, later poets will separate these aspects and turn Medea into a polarized figure, either subject to Jason in love or powerful through her magical knowledge.

When comparing Circe's and Medea's respective representations in the *Odyssey* and *Theogony*, I would like to suggest the following conclusions – taking into account the different agendas of the epics and the different functions held by the two figures. I suggest that both figures form an intrinsic part of the respective poems through their association with *metis*. Circe, bound by the Olympians, is able to bind Odysseus' men to an existence lived as a pig but also free them when requested. Medea may be represented as a δμηθεῖσα female, but through the etymology of her name and the construction of the passage narrating her union with Jason, she is linked with Zeus' main adversaries: it therefore appears that she might have been 'bound' by Jason exactly *because* of the cunning power suggested by the *mēd- root in her name. Both figures are thus bound by the Olympians, but when bound by the hero, also provide help and can bind in their turn. While the *Odyssey* puts particular focus on Circe's ability to bind, the *Theogony* emphasizes Medea's status as bound. Though both poets

allude or refer to both aspects of *metis*, their respective agendas determine which aspect is highlighted. Circe and Medea can thus be interpreted as emanations of the same paradigm of the female divine helper of the hero, both geographically remote and powerful in their cunning abilities.

In the *Theogony*, however, Circe is not represented with the same complexity as Medea. While the Medea passage fits in with the main theme of the poem through the verb ἐκτελέω, the passage narrating Circe's union with Odysseus is very brief and merely lists their offspring. What one can highlight is that Circe is represented as a mother, which is a status with which she was not endowed in the *Odyssey*. This fits into the agenda of the *Theogony*, since Circe's union with Odysseus removes her threat to Zeus' supremacy, as do all the other unions between deities and between goddesses and heroes. This trend will be continued in post-Hesiodic poetry on Circe, to which I now turn.

B.

From Metis to Magic

*Among women, Medea has the most cunning mind of all.
She is fox and badger, ferret and stoat, eagle and hawk,
She can master seven kinds of talk,
using the same words.*

Brendan Kennelly, Medea, 15

CHAPTER FIVE
CIRCE AS MOTHER AND WHORE

An Examination of post-Hesiodic Archaic and Classical Poetry

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, the complex Odyssean Circe was construed as the mother of Odysseus' offspring. While this representation can be explained as forming part of the poet's agenda, it does simultaneously signify that Circe's Homeric representation as a female figure functioning as her own *kurios* was subject to alteration. Barely any evidence on Circe remains from extant post-Hesiodic Archaic and Classical poetry. From the evidence which does survive, however, I will argue that the transformation of Circe's poetic representation, already visible in the *Theogony*, continues. To support my analysis of the poetic evidence, I will also examine contemporary evidence from prose and iconography at the end of this chapter.

(a) Post-Hesiodic Archaic Poetry

In Archaic poetry postdating Hesiod's *Theogony*, the lyric poet Alcman mentions Circe once, and the *Telegony*, a poem from the epic cycle, features her to some extent.²⁴⁶ Very little remains of either poem, however: apart from one fragment from Alcman, only references to the *Telegony* remain, made much later in the scholia on the *Odyssey* and in Proclus' *Chrestomathy*. In spite of the lack of evidence, I will argue that the evidence which remains can offer some insight into Circe's Archaic development.

²⁴⁶ Eustathius *ad Od.* 1796.2 mentions that the *Nostoi* also featured the story narrated in the *Telegony*. This is usually seen as an error on Eustathius' behalf, who might have got the title of the epic wrong. See Severyns (1928: 416). Burgess (2001: 243 n. 34) argues that Eustathius might have been "privity to information that reflects the earlier manifestation of the *Nosti* independent of its role in the Epic Cycle" and could hence have "shared" material with the *Telegony*. While it is possible that the *Nostoi* featured Circe, there is no evidence.

Alcman

The only information on Circe from Alcman derives from a scholium on the *Odyssey*, which says that Alcman wrote the following (fr. 29 Page):

καὶ ποκ' Ὀδυσσῆος ταλασίφρονος ὦατ' ἑταίρων
Κίρκα ἐπαλείψασα.

And once Circe sealed the ears of the companions of stout-hearted Odysseus.

The scholiast comments that οὐ γὰρ αὐτὴ ἤλειπεν, ἀλλ' ὑπέθετο Ὀδυσσεῖ, “indeed, she did not seal [the ears] herself, but suggested it to Odysseus”.²⁴⁷ This is the only information concerning Circe one can find in Alcman’s poetry, and it may indeed be the only reference to Circe which Alcman ever made. In this fragment, the poet is referring to the advice which Circe offered Odysseus in the *Odyssey* concerning the Sirens, namely that his men should seal their ears with wax lest they be tempted by the Sirens’ song. That Alcman makes Circe perform the sealing herself does not correspond to the events narrated in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus seals his men’s ears (*Od.* 12.177). Alcman may have invented Circe’s action, or may have relied on an alternative oral tradition earlier than or contemporary to the *Odyssey* we know;²⁴⁸ this incongruity is not hugely important, however, since the step between giving advice and carrying it out is not enormous. That Circe appears to be described as helping Odysseus is important, for it indicates that she is represented in a positive light, namely in her function of divine helper.²⁴⁹ Sealing the men’s ears with wax is, moreover, as I have argued in chapter 3, an act of *metis*: by eliminating the men’s hearing, the Sirens’

²⁴⁷ schol. ad T. Hom. *Il.* 16.236.

²⁴⁸ See Bowra (1961: 22) and Burgess (2001: 116).

²⁴⁹ See Yarnall (1994: 79).

temptation can be overcome. Therefore, that Alcman presents Circe as helping Odysseus – and even more actively than in the *Odyssey* – suggests that she might have still been represented as an authoritative figure endowed with cunning intelligence whose beneficent features are part of her characterization. In the later post-Homeric texts, however, this cunning authority and beneficence will gradually disappear. Indeed, the only two other texts which represent Circe as Odysseus' helper are much later, namely Horace's *Epode 17* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 14.1-47.²⁵⁰

The Telegony

Telegonus, who appears in the list of Circe's offspring with Odysseus in the *Theogony*, also features in the *Telegony*, a poem belonging to the epic cycle. The chronology of this epic is disputed. Indeed, whereas the *Telegony* – along with other poems from the epic cycle – was considered more or less contemporary with Homer and Hesiod by the ancient Greeks, the majority of modern scholars have deemed it later on the basis of style, vocabulary, and content.²⁵¹ There is, however, no consensus as to when 'later' might be: as Burgess (2001: 11) reveals, depending on which poet the *Telegony* is attributed to – Eugammon of Cyrene or Cinaethon – the date can be pushed back or forward in time. In either case, Burgess argues that the *Telegony* could not have been written before the late seventh century. On account of the difficulty in dating the *Telegony*, I will keep the date of its composition general, and suggest a composition date between 700 and 500 BCE, with Hesiod as *terminus post quem*.

²⁵⁰ See chapter 7 for discussions of these texts.

²⁵¹ See Davies (1989: 3-5) for a discussion of the chronology.

One of the reasons that the *Telegony* is now dated later than the Homeric epics is that, similar to other poems of the epic cycle – such as the *Cypria* and the *Nostoi* – it narrates what had been left untold in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: the *Telegony* indeed tells the story of what happened to Odysseus, Penelope, Circe, and Telemachus in the aftermath of the *Odyssey*.²⁵² If we can trust the summary of the epic in Proclus’ *Chrestomathy*,²⁵³ the narrative goes more or less as follows: after the defeat of the suitors, Odysseus performs the sacrifices to Poseidon suggested by Teiresias in the underworld (*Od.* 11.119-37). He goes to Thesprotis, marries queen Callidice, wages war with the neighbours of the Thesprotians, and finally returns to Ithaca after the death of the queen. During his absence, however, Telegonus – Odysseus’ son by Circe – has gone in search of his father. When Odysseus returns to Ithaca, Telegonus has arrived there too. At this point in the story, Circe is introduced. Though a few fragments remain from the *Telegony*, none feature Circe. The only information on her function in the *Telegony* derives from Proclus’ *Chrestomathy* and (potentially) from one scholium on the *Odyssey*. Proclus introduces Circe in the story as follows (*Tel. arg.* 3-4 West):

κάν τούτω Τηλέγονος <...> ἐπὶ ζήτησιν τοῦ πατρὸς πλέων, ἀποβάσεις τὴν Ἰθάκην τέμνει τὴν νῆσον. ἐκβοηθήσας δὲ Ὀδυσσεύς ὑπὸ τοῦ παιδὸς ἀναιρεῖται κατ’ ἄγνοιαν. <...> Τηλέγονος δ’ ἐπιγνοὺς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τό τε τοῦ πατρὸς σῶμα καὶ τὸν Τηλέμαχον καὶ τὴν Πηνελόπην πρὸς τὴν μητέρα μερίστησιν. ἢ δὲ αὐτοὺς ἀθανάτους ποιεῖ <...>, καὶ συνοικεῖ τῇ μὲν Πηνελόπῃ Τηλέγονος, Κίρκῃ δὲ Τηλέμαχος.²⁵⁴

²⁵² See Dowden (2004: 197).

²⁵³ This is a “Summary of Useful Knowledge” possibly written by Proclus, the philosopher from the fifth century CE, outlined by Photius (c. AD 810-893) in his *Bibliotheca*. See Davies (1989: 7) and Dowden (2004: 197). For a discussion of the reliability of Proclus’ summary, see Davies (1989: 6-8).

²⁵⁴ The brackets refer to additional information from Ps.-Apollod. 7.34-37, added by West.

In the meantime, Telegonus, while sailing in search of his father, arrives in Ithaca and wrecks the land. Odysseus, coming out to help, is killed by his son unwittingly. Telegonus, upon discovering his mistake, brings the body of his father, as well as Telemachus and Penelope, to his mother. She makes them immortal, and Telegonus lives together with Penelope, and Telemachus with Circe.

The scholium on *Odyssey* 11.134, where Teiresias prophesies a death ἐξ ἄλός, “from” or “away from” the sea, for Odysseus,²⁵⁵ provides more information concerning the manner of Odysseus’ death (*Telegony* fr. 5 West):

ἔνιοι δέ ... φασιν ὡς ἐντεύξει τῆς Κίρκης Ἡφαίστος κατεσκεύασε
Τηλεμάχῳ δόρυ ἐκ τρυγόνος θαλασσίας, ἣν Φόρκυς ἀνεῖλεν
ἐσθίουσαν τοὺς ἐν τῇ Φορκίδι λίμνῃ ἰχθῦς. οὗ τὴν μὲν
ἐπιδορατίδα ἀδαμαντίνην, τὸν δὲ στύρακα χρυσοῦν εἶναι.

Some ... say that Hephaestus, during a visit to Circe, constructed for Telegonus a spear from the stingray which Phorcys had killed, because it was eating the fish in Phorcys’s lake. The spear head was of adamant, and its shaft of gold.

As the scholium continues that Odysseus is killed by means of this spear, constructed from the poisonous barb of a fish, the prophecy about his death “from” the sea appears to have come true. The scholium does not mention the poem(s) from which these stories derive(s), however. Its link with the *Telegony* is thus not certain. Even so, it appears that, as early as the late Archaic period, Circe’s son was represented as ultimately (though not deliberately) responsible for Odysseus’ death by means of a weapon made from a stingray. If this assumption is correct, I propose that Circe and her

²⁵⁵ See Severyns (1928: 412-15) for a discussion on the possible ambiguity of the prophecy.

son might have been connected with *metis* through the various elements of the scholium's summary.

A stingray is a fish with a poisonous spine growing out of its whip-like tail. Inasmuch as it hides underneath the sand in order to conceal itself from its predators and potential prey, one might argue that the stingray is associated with *metis*, similarly to the cuttlefish discussed in chapter 2. I have not found any further evidence on the ancient Greek perception of this fish in literary sources, but other allusions to *metis* in the scholium support this assumption.²⁵⁶ First, it is significant that the stingray is said to have been killed by Phorcys. In the *Odyssey*, he is called ἀλίοιο γέροντος, “the old man of the sea” (*Od.* 13.96, 13.345), and ἄλῶς ἀτρυγέτοιο μέδοντος, “he who rules the endless sea” (*Od.* 1.72). He is the father of Thoosa, the mother of Polyphemus. As Detienne and Vernant (1978: 20-21) argue, sea deities are particular wielders of *metis*, as the sea's fluidity promotes their polymorphic nature: their ability to shift shape is only broken when their opponent is able to grasp them and not let go. Proteus, the sea deity confronted by Menelaus on the island Pharos (*Od.* 4.351-70), who is also called ἀλίοιο γέροντος (*Od.* 4.365), is the most famous example of a cunning sea deity. When Menelaus grabs hold of him in order to gain information regarding his journey home, Proteus uses his δολίη ... τέχνη, “crafty art” (*Od.* 4.455) and transforms himself into many things (among others, a lion, a serpent, water, and a tree; *Od.* 4.455-59) before he admits defeat and helps the Greek leader. The epithet “old man of the sea” is only attributed to Proteus and Phorcys in the *Odyssey*, which suggest a close similarity

²⁵⁶ Moreover, many other fish were represented as cunning – see Detienne and Vernant (1978: 34) – so the assumption is not wholly out of context, particularly in the light of the other allusions to *metis* in the scholium.

between the two figures. As many sea-deities are associated with *metis*, Phorcys might have been represented in similar terms to Proteus.²⁵⁷

Secondly, the spear's creator, Hephaestus, is one of the main Olympian wielders of *metis*, particularly through his metallurgic art, one of the skills traditionally associated with cunning: in the *Iliad*, Hephaestus is indeed called πολύμητις (*Il.* 21.355), an epithet normally reserved for Odysseus.²⁵⁸ In Archaic poetry, he not only forges Achilles' armour, moulds the figure of Pandora, and binds Prometheus in chains after his transgression,²⁵⁹ but, together with Athena, he is also said to have taught men the skills by means of which they can live in houses throughout the year.²⁶⁰ Telegonus' weapon, if it combines the stingray's barb, adamantine, and gold, is thus a crafty creation, constructed from the barb of an animal which was possibly connected with *metis* and which was killed by a sea deity, and created by the skill of a cunning Olympian deity.

Circe's role in the story summarized by Proclus and the scholium – whether or not this story was narrated in the *Telegony* – is opaque. If she was the one who commissioned the weapon (as the phrase ἐντεύξει τῆς Κίρκης in the scholium arguably

²⁵⁷ In Archaic and Classical texts, Phorcys also appears to have been associated with *thelgein*, particularly through his offspring. Already in Hesiod's *Theogony*, he was said to be the father of Medusa (*Theog.* 276), whose mere gaze could immobilize people, and of the serpent which guarded the Hesperides' apples (*Theog.* 333). As the serpent (δράκων) is etymologically connected with the verb δέρκομαι, "I look, stare", it entails a similar notion of a fixing gaze as Medusa. See Frisk (1960-72: *ad* δράκων) and Chantraine (1968-80: *ad* δέρκομαι). For the association of δέρκομαι and *thelgein*, see Carastro (2006: 81ff.). In Sophocles (*TrGF* 4 F 861), Phorcys is represented as the father of the Sirens, which further supports his connection with *thelgein*. One might thus argue that Phorcys, similarly to Circe, is associated not merely with *metis* in general, but with its specific aspect, *thelgein*. For the general similarity between Proteus and Circe, see also Forbes Irving (1990: 176-77).

²⁵⁸ See Detienne and Vernant (1978: 269).

²⁵⁹ See chapter 3 on the role of Prometheus in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

²⁶⁰ For Achilles' armour: *Il.* 18.368-19.23; for Pandora: *Theog.* 570-84; for Prometheus: Aesch. *PV* 1ff.; as teacher of skills to mankind: *Od.* 6.233-34 and 23.160-61, and *h. Heph.* 20.2. When he makes Achilles' armour, Hephaestus does so out of loyalty for the hero's mother, Thetis, who held him when Hera threw him down from Olympus. As in the story on Telegonus as summarized by the scholium, Hephaestus is thus again associated with a cunning sea deity.

suggests), then she might have been depicted as a figure endowed with *metis*. As she is able to immortalize Telegonus, Telemachus, and Penelope when they arrive at her island, it also appears likely that she is still construed as a goddess (otherwise she might have had to immortalize herself too). Immortalization was, however, not a quality with which she was endowed in the *Odyssey*; it was rather Calypso's wish to immortalize Odysseus. This demonstrates that Circe might have taken over some of Calypso's features: indeed, Calypso's interest in having Odysseus as a husband too appears to have been transferred to Circe in the *Telegony*, as Circe is said to "live together with" Telemachus. In the *Telegony*, Circe is hence given a *kurios*, whereas, in the *Odyssey*, she had no wish to keep hold of Odysseus as her husband, as I have argued in chapter 3. The conflation of Circe and Calypso should not come as a surprise: the two figures were mentioned in the same breath by Odysseus at the outset of his *Apologoi* to the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*, as women who wished to keep him as their husband.²⁶¹ That the *Telegony* amplifies Circe's matrimonial wish – which did not actually feature in the Circe episode in the *Odyssey* – demonstrates the manner in which the Homeric epics were open to interpretation. Indeed, the marriage of Penelope and Telegonus exemplifies this too. This "happy ending" for Circe, Telegonus, Penelope, and Telemachus, however, has not been well received by scholars. Because of it, Severyns (1928: 409) has called the *Telegony* "une misérable poème" full of "invraisemblances". Its ending – which West (1966: *ad Hes. Theog.* 1011) has called "novelistic", and Malkin (1998: 126) "melodramatic" – is far removed from the complexity and

²⁶¹ See p. 1.91.

ambiguity with which the protagonists of the *Odyssey* were endowed.²⁶² It does, however, parallel the *Odyssey* in its comparison of Circe and Penelope: by their marriages to each others' sons by Odysseus, the similarities in their characterizations of the *Odyssey* are reinforced.

In short, if the scholium on the *Odyssey* refers either to the *Telegony* or to a contemporary poem, the following suggestions might be made. On the one hand, in the late Archaic story of Telegonus (as it might have been narrated in the *Telegony*), Circe might still have been associated with *metis* with which she can aid others: similarly to the *Odyssey* (and Alcman), in which she suggests to Odysseus' men that they put wax in their ears in order to overcome the temptation of the Sirens, she commissions Telegonus' weapon from Hephaestus. The stingray's barb, its association with Hephaestus and with the art of metallurgy, and the fact that the stingray was killed by the sea deity Phorcys, all connect Circe with *metis*. Her ability to immortalize Odysseus' kin and her son, moreover, renders her a powerful deity. Indeed, though some Olympian deities were able to immortalize their favourite mortals,²⁶³ most immortalizations of mortals by Olympians failed.²⁶⁴ Circe appears to be the only non-Olympian goddess represented as wielding the power of immortalization. On the other hand, that Circe is not only portrayed as a mother – similarly to the *Theogony* – but also

²⁶² As Malkin (1998: 126) points out, however, a plot summary would make Euripides' *Medea* or Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* seem ludicrous too. Burgess (2001: 170) adds that "a summary of the Homeric poems could make them open to the same charges leveled against the Cycle."

²⁶³ e.g. Athena immortalizes Diomedes, see e.g. Pind. *Nem.* 10.7; Artemis immortalizes Iphigeneia, *Cypria arg.* in Procl. *Chrest.* 8. See Burgess (2001: 167).

²⁶⁴ Thetis, for example, is unable to immortalize Achilles; Demeter cannot immortalize Demophoön, nor indeed Medea her children (see chapter 6). Thetis: alluded to at *Aegimius* fr. 237 Most; Demeter: *h. Dem.* 248ff. Eos was able to immortalize her consort, Tithonus, but forgot to ask Zeus to maintain his youth. Tithonus thus withered away. See *h. Aphr.* 5.218-38.

given a *kurios* in Telemachus appears to suggest a subjection to men which was not present in her Odyssean representation.

While my discussion of the *Telegony* is ultimately a conjecture, based on snippets of information from much later sources, the one element in Circe's characterization which does reveal itself in Proclus' summary is a degree of polarization. Circe might still have been endowed with *metis*, but she is becoming polarized in her power and lack thereof: Circe's divine power of immortalization and ability to design a deadly weapon contrast with the fact that she is reduced to the consort not even of the hero, but of the hero's son. Her union with a male figure – as represented in both the *Theogony* and the *Telegony* – ultimately deprives Circe of the threat which she posed to men's power in the *Odyssey*. This polarization between power and domestication will become even more apparent in Classical poetry, and will be applied to the semantic field of magic.

(b) Classical Drama

In Classical as in Archaic poetry, evidence on Circe is scarce: indeed, only fragments from Classical drama remain. In spite of this paucity of evidence, I will argue that a certain development can again be perceived in Circe's representation.

Tragedy

All that remains on Circe from Classical tragedy are a passage from Euripides' *Troades* and the title of a play by Sophocles, Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀκανθοπλήξ, "Odysseus wounded by

the prickle”.²⁶⁵ From the remaining fragments, one can deduce that, in this play, It was foretold to Odysseus that he would be killed by his son. Shunning Telemachus on account of this prophecy, he was eventually slain by Telegonus, his son by Circe, by means of a weapon made from the barb of a stingray (hence the title of Sophocles’ play), as the *Telegony* might also have narrated. No mention is made of Circe in the remaining fragments, but the fact that her son again appeared in connection with the stingray might suggest that some association between Circe and *metis* was retained.

Euripides mentions Circe in the *Troades* (415 BCE), a play which deals with the fate of the Trojan women after the city has been sacked. Among others, Cassandra’s future is elaborated: while prophesying her own looming death by the hands of Clytaemnestra, Cassandra also mentions the dangers which await Odysseus on his *nostos*, and Circe is listed in this context. The line preceding the quotation is missing (Eur. *Tro.* 435-41):

οὐ δὴ στενὸν δίαυλον ᾗκισταί πέτρας
δεινὴ Χάρυβδις, ὠμοβρώς τ’ ὀρειβάτης
Κύκλωψ, Λιγυστίς θ’ ἡ συῶν μορφώτρια
Κίρκη, θαλάσσης θ’ ἀλμυρᾶς ναυάγια,
λωτοῦ τ’ ἔρωτες, Ἡλίου θ’ ἀγναὶ βόες,
αἱ σάρκα φωνήεσσαν ἤσουσιν ποτε,
πικρὰν Ὀδυσσεῖ γῆρυν.

... where in the narrow strait between the rocks dwells
fierce Charybdis, and the mountain-dwelling man-eating
Cyclops, and Ligurian Circe who transforms men into swine,
and shipwrecks on the salty sea,
and those who desire the lotus, and the sacred cattle of Helios,
whose flesh shall one day bring forth speech,

²⁶⁵ *TrGF* 4 F 453-461a.

a voice bitter to Odysseus.

Though some scholars have regarded this passage as spurious on account of its supposed feebleness with regard to style and content,²⁶⁶ one might argue that, in the mouth of a raging propheticess, the disjointed references to Odysseus' journey are not inappropriate. In this passage, Circe is connected with Italy²⁶⁷ through the adjective Ligurian used to describe her, since the Ligurians lived in the North of Italy. She is mentioned here in her capacity as transformer of men into swine; the first part of the Odyssean story is thus highlighted, rather than the help which she offered Odysseus. As Cassandra is listing some of the dangers which lie in store for Odysseus, it is fitting that she makes reference to Circe's threatening rather than her beneficent aspect. Simultaneously, however, this does also suggest that Circe's transformation of men into swine was an aspect of her representation which was becoming more prominent – the evidence from Classical satyr-play and comedy supports this.

Satyr-Play and Comedy

A few fragments remain of a satyr-play by Aeschylus entitled *Circe*, but no information regarding her status can be derived from these.²⁶⁸ The subject of some early Classical vase paintings, however, suggests that they were inspired by a satyr-play, which might have been Aeschylus' *Circe* or a similar play. Regarding one particular vase (460 BCE), for example, the presence of Dionysus, combined with the building on the left which might be interpreted as the σκηνή, has led scholars to believe that this vase

²⁶⁶ e.g. Lee (1976: *ad loc.*).

²⁶⁷ As in Hes. *Theog.* 1011-16.

²⁶⁸ *TrGF* 3 F 113-15.

painting represents a scene from a satyr-play.²⁶⁹ A female figure chases off what looks like a chorus member dressed as a satyr, who is walking on all fours. The female figure has been interpreted as Circe because of her wand, and the actor as a man who has been transformed into an animal or is in the process of transformation. Though there is no way of ascertaining the link between Aeschylus' *Circe* and the vase painting, both suggest, as does Euripides' *Troades*, that Circe's status as transformer of men was gaining in popularity in the Classical period.

Circe also features in a number of plays from Middle Comedy. First, she appears in Aristophanes' *Plutus* (388 BCE). In this play, Chremylus, a poor man, finds the god Plutus ("Wealth") wandering the streets blind, since Zeus does not want him to discern between the just and the unjust; as a result, most rich people are unjust, while the just are poor. Chremylus decides to restore Plutus' eyesight, so he (who is, in his opinion, a just man) can become rich. He orders his servant, Cario, to fetch other old, poor men – the chorus – to help him in this task. When the old men prove to be reluctant to act, Cario leads them in an obscene song and dance. In this choral song, Cario first plays the Cyclops and then Circe, aiming to make the chorus members follow him as obediently as the goats and sheep followed Polyphemus, and as the transformed men followed Circe. The chorus respond by playing Odysseus, who overcomes both the Cyclops and Circe. At the end of the song, the old men agree to help Cario's master. Circe is introduced in the song as follows (Ar. *Plut.* 302-15):

ΚΑ· ἔγὼ δὲ τὴν Κίρκην γε τὴν τὰ φάρμακ' ἀνακυκῶσαν,

²⁶⁹ See *LIMC* "Kirke" no. 57; see also Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 93) and Jouan (2000: 236). This vase is situated in the Museo Regionale of Syracuse. In spite of several attempts, I have not been able to contact the museum to receive permission to use an image in this thesis.

ἢ τοὺς ἑταίρους τοῦ Φιλωνίδου ποτ' ἐν Κορίνθῳ
ἔπεισεν ὡς ὄντας κάπρους
μεμαγμένον σκῶρ ἐσθίειν, αὐτὴ δ' ἔματτεν αὐτοῖς,
μιμήσομαι πάντας τρόπους.
ὑμεῖς δὲ γρυλλίζοντες ὑπὸ φιληδίας
ἔπεσθε μητρὶ χοῖροι.

ΧΟ· οὐκοῦν σέ, τὴν Κίρκην γε, τὴν τὰ φάρμακ' ἀνακυκῶσαν
καὶ μαγγανεύουσαν μολύνουσάν τε τοὺς ἑταίρους
λαβόντες ὑπὸ φιληδίας
τὸν Λαρτίου μιμούμενοι τῶν ὄρχεων κρεμῶμεν,
μινθῶσομέν θ' ὥσπερ τράγου
τὴν ρῖνα. σὺ δ' Ἀρίστυλλος ὑποχάσκων ἐρεῖς·
"ἔπεσθε μητρὶ χοῖροι".

Cario: I'm Circe now, the mixer of drugs,
who one day in Corinth convinced the companions of Philonides
to behave like pigs and
eat mixed dung – she kneaded it for them herself.
I will act out the whole thing!
And you, grunting with pleasure,
follow your mother, piglets!

Chorus: So now you are Circe, the mixer of drugs and
bewitcher and befouler of the companions.
We will grab you with pleasure,
pretending to be Laërtes' son, hanging you up by the balls and
besmearing your nose with dung like a goat!
And you will say, gaping like Aristyllus:
"Follow your mother, piglets!"

Circe's geographical placement in Corinth (*Plut.* 302) associates her with a historical figure, a Corinthian hetaira mentioned earlier in the play, Laïs (*Plut.* 178), who was

known to have ruined Philonides, a contemporary of Aristophanes.²⁷⁰ Circe's Odyssean characterization is adapted to the comic context, and she features in Aristophanes' *Plutus* as provider of pleasure: the phrase ὑπὸ φιληδίας appears twice (*Plut.* 307 and 311). She does not merely provide the men with pleasure through their transformation into swine; indeed, the word for "swine" used (χοῖρος, *Plut.* 8) can also refer to the female pudenda.²⁷¹ Circe indeed provides the men with sexual pleasure, which is confirmed by the fact that, when the chorus take on the role of Odysseus, they "grab" (λαβόντες, *Plut.* 311) her with pleasure too, referring to the sexual union between Circe and Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Both Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men and her union with the hero were intrinsic parts of her Homeric characterization; in Aristophanes' comedy, however, these aspects are amplified to the extent of the ludicrous. This is a typical example of what Long (1986: 54) calls "mythological travesty" which emphasizes the "lowest elements of any myth", focusing particularly on sexual and culinary themes. Though this degrading portrayal is appropriate in the comic context, it does simultaneously reveal how the representation of Circe developed. Her transformation of Odysseus' men as well as her union with the hero do not form part of a complex characterization any more, but rather divide the Homeric figure into a powerful transformer of men and a victim of Odysseus' lust. No trace is left of Circe's *metis*: as a result, she is no longer able to free herself from her bond and the two intertwined aspects of *metis* – binding and freeing oneself – are separated into binding (transforming men into swine) and being bound (being "grabbed" by Odysseus). Circe's characterization is construed purely in terms of scatological and carnal pleasure,

²⁷⁰ See Kottaridou (1991: 73).

²⁷¹ See Kottaridou (1991: 73-74).

and she is polarized as dominatrix and whore. Equally important is that this is the first passage in Greek literature in which Circe is associated explicitly with magic: the term μαγγανεύω (*Plut.* 310), which is attested here for the first time, places Circe in a magical context.²⁷² Indeed, in Plato's writings (also written in the fourth century BCE), μαγγανεύω is associated with magical terms such as γοητέω (*Pl. Grg.* 484a) and ἐπωδαί (*Pl. Leg.* 933a3), and generally with deception by people pretending to have supernatural abilities (*Pl. Leg.* 908d4-6 and 933c5-9). Circe's transformation of men into animals is thus – for the first time in extant literature – described by means of magic-associated vocabulary. As so little evidence remains from post-Hesiodic poetry which makes reference to Circe, it is more than likely that Circe was associated with magic earlier. That she is here described as a deceptive poison-monger indeed suggests that this status was known to the audience. Some time in between the *Odyssey* and Aristophanes' *Plutus*, Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into animals might consequently have become expressed in magical terms.

Though not much evidence remains from other plays in Middle Comedy, there are fragments which suggest that Circe was represented along similar lines as in Aristophanes. One fragment from a play by Ephippus, entitled *Circe*, is as follows:²⁷³

A· οἶνον πίοις ἂν ἀσφαλέστερον πολὺ
 ὕδαρῃ. B· μὰ τὴν γῆν. ἀλλὰ τρία καὶ τέτταρα.
 A· οὕτως ἄκρατον, εἰπέ μοι, πῖει; B· τί φῆς;

A: You would drink much weaker wine, mixed with too much water.

B: No, by the earth, but three and four more times more.

²⁷² Carastro (2006: 158).

²⁷³ Ephippus fr. 11 CAF.

A: Tell me, will you drink it thus, unmixed?

B: What are you saying?

Very little remains to examine in this fragment: the speakers are unnamed, and the precise meaning of the second verse is unclear.²⁷⁴ In the light of the specific title, the speakers might be identified as Circe and Odysseus, or as two of Odysseus' men. The debate regarding the amount of water to add to the wine might point to a symposium-like context;²⁷⁵ and indeed, that speaker B is admonished to drink his or her wine unmixed suggests that a party is intended to follow this discussion. Moreover, the idea of drinking unmixed wine was considered barbarian in the Classical period, as Herodotus, Plato, and Aristophanes attest.²⁷⁶ One might thus arguably suggest that, from the perspective of at least one figure in the play, the drinking about to occur in *Circe* – and potentially associated with or organized by Circe – was thought of as something barbarian.

A second and final fragment comes from a play, again entitled *Circe*, written by another poet from Middle Comedy, Anaxilas. It describes Circe's transformation of men into animals. The speaker is not named:²⁷⁷

τοὺς μὲν ὀρειονόμους ὑμῶν ποιήσει δέλφακας ἡλιβάτους,
τοὺς δὲ πάνθηρας, ἄλλους ἀγρώστας λύκους λέωντας.

δεινὸν μὲν γὰρ ἔχονθ' ὑὸς
ρύγχος, ᾧ φίλε Κινησία.

²⁷⁴ Possibly, A was responding to B adding water to the wine, upon which B replied that in fact, (s)he used 3 or 4 times more wine than water – hence A's reaction that this would almost equal drinking it unmixed.

²⁷⁵ In Plato's *Symposium*, for example, the issue of how much will be drunk is debated at the beginning of the evening, at 176a4ff.

²⁷⁶ Hdt. *Hist.* 6.84, Pl. *Leg.* 637e, Ar. *Ach.* 73-78.

²⁷⁷ Anaxilas fr. 12-13 *CAF*.

She will turn some of you into huge mountain-roaming pigs,
some into leopards, others into hunting wolves or lions.

It's dreadful having the snout of a pig, my dear Cinesias.

Though the name Cinesias is not uncommon in the Classical period, that he is mentioned in the comic context suggests that he can be identified as a famous Athenian dithyrambic poet, a contemporary of Aristophanes who is frequently ridiculed by the latter and by other comic poets.²⁷⁸ Indeed, Cinesias is here being threatened with transformation into a wild animal. That Circe turns men into different kinds of animals corresponds to the representation of the story on vase paintings from the sixth century BCE onwards.²⁷⁹

(c) Conclusion

Not much remains of the post-Hesiodic Archaic and Classical texts on Circe. Taking all the material together, however, I suggest that a certain development can be perceived in the poetic evidence, and that at least some suggestions can be made.

In post-Homeric Archaic poetry, Circe's Homeric complexity rapidly disintegrates. While Alcman – in what little remains – still focuses on Circe's beneficent and cunning qualities which featured so prominently in the Homeric account, this aspect of Circe is omitted almost entirely in the subsequent tradition. Circe's association with all aspects of *metis* decreases. As a result, she loses the ability to free herself from a bond, and the two facets of *metis* – binding another and freeing

²⁷⁸ e.g. *Ar. Av.* 1372; *Lys.* 839; *Ran.* 153. Other comic poets who ridiculed him were Plato fr. 184 *CAF*, and Strattis fr. 13-21 *CAF*.

²⁷⁹ See e.g. appendix 7. Also see *LIMC* "Kirke", e.g. nos. 5, 5bis, and 14.

oneself – which were intrinsically connected in the *Odyssey*, are separated into binding and being bound. In the *Theogony*, Circe is indeed domesticated as mother of Odysseus’ children and hence deprived of her potential threat to Zeus’ supremacy (see chapter 4). In the *Telegony*, Circe’s characterization – though it might have retained her cunning capacities to a certain extent – is largely polarized. On the one hand, in her ability to immortalize Penelope, Telemachus, and Telegonus, she is portrayed as a powerful deity. On the other hand, by “living together” with Telemachus, her status is reduced from that of an independent goddess to that of consort.

In Classical drama, this polarization is driven to the extreme: the remaining evidence does not elaborate on Circe’s *metis* at all,²⁸⁰ and the polarization of her characterization is brought in connection with hedonism and magic, through the use of magic-related vocabulary in Aristophanes. In Aristophanes’ *Plutus*, Circe is portrayed as dominatrix and whore, on the one hand able to transform men magically into swine, and, on the other hand, a victim to Odysseus’ lust. In Ehippus’ *Circe*, she may have featured in the context of a barbarian symposium, and in Anaxilas’ *Circe* (as well as Euripides’ *Troades*), she features again as a transformer of men. From what remains, it appears that the transformation of the men back from swine into men and hence Circe’s beneficent aspect, was omitted almost entirely from the tradition.

One might wonder how the figure of Circe came to be connected with pleasure. This element was present in the *Odyssey*, but I propose that the subsequent tradition misinterpreted – or rather, reinterpreted – the Homeric narrative. Circe’s association with pleasure in Classical comedy might indeed appear an unexpected development,

²⁸⁰ The title of Sophocles’ “Odysseus wounded by the prickle” does not provide further evidence.

incongruous with her Homeric portrayal: while she did have a sexual relationship with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, it was not elaborated on or rendered in romantic terms, as was the case with Calypso. The development in Circe's representation, however, did not occur in a vacuum: indeed, from the sixth century BCE onward,²⁸¹ scholars/philosophers who started interpreting the Homeric epics symbolically – i.e. started “allegorizing” – interpreted the encounter of Circe and Odysseus as a battle between Odysseus as λόγος, “reason”, and Circe as ἡδονή, “pleasure”. Socrates was the first (in extant literature) to suggest that Odysseus avoided being turned into a pig because of his self-restraint; his crew, in contrast, were transformed on account of their gluttony, since they were unable to resist the food which Circe offered them.²⁸² This idea was further developed, among others, by Diogenes, a fourth-century Cynic whose approach is narrated by Dio Chrysostom, a Greek orator and philosopher living c. 40-120 CE. Diogenes analyzed the Homeric Circe episode as the battle between λόγος and ἡδονή, with Odysseus as the epitome of the former quality, and Circe of the latter. Dio Chrysostom has Diogenes say the following concerning pleasure (*Eighth Oratio: Diogenes or On Virtue*, 8.21 and 8.24-25):

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀντικρυς βιάζεσθαι τὴν ἡδονήν, ἀλλ' ἐξαπατᾶν καὶ
γοητεύειν δεινοῖς φαρμάκοις, ὥσπερ Ὀμηρὸς φησι τὴν Κίρκην
τοὺς τοῦ Ὀδυσσεύως ἐταίρους καταφαρμάξαι, κᾶπειτα τοὺς μὲν
σὺς αὐτῶν, τοὺς δὲ λύκους γενέσθαι, τοὺς δὲ ἄλλ' ἄττα θηρία.
[...] ὅταν οὖν κρατήσῃ καὶ περιγένηται τῆς ψυχῆς τοῖς φαρμάκοις,
γίγνεται τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη τὸ τῆς Κίρκης. πλήξασα ῥαδίως τῇ
ῥάβδῳ εἰς συφεόν τινα ἐλαύνει καὶ καθείργνυσι καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ἀπ'

²⁸¹ See Lamberton (1986: 15).

²⁸² This is narrated at Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.7.

ἐκείνου ἤδη ὁ ἄνθρωπος διατελεῖ σῦς ὢν ἢ λύκος.

Indeed, pleasure does not wage war openly, but beguiles and bewitches with awesome drugs, just as Homer says Circe drugged Odysseus' companions, and then some of them became swine, some wolves, and some other wild beasts. [...] Thus, when she has conquered and overcome the soul with drugs, the rest of Circe's routine soon follows. Having struck her victim with her wand, she easily leads him to the sty and traps him, and from then onward, the man goes through life as a swine or wolf.

For Diogenes – as presented by Dio Chrysostom – Circe symbolizes ἡδονή in all its facets: indeed, her drugs are the ultimate temptation. Men who are weak are reduced to animals, trapped by the pleasures they pursued; only strong, temperate men such as Odysseus can withstand the temptation. It is poignant that Diogenes' or Dio Chrysostom's interpretation of the Homeric narrative again ends with the transformation into animals: the transformation back into humans is, as in post-Homeric Archaic and Classical poetry, omitted altogether. Diogenes consequently focuses on the menacing, destructive side of Circe; her beneficent qualities, which were vital to Odysseus' *nostos* in the Homeric account, are suppressed.²⁸³ It thus appears that the comic associations of Circe with pleasure were influenced by, or emerged in the same context as, the philosophical discourse on reason and pleasure as allegory of the Homeric Circe episode. The association of Circe with pleasure in Classical poetry was hence not suddenly created in a socio-cultural vacuum, but indeed emerged in a general tendency to allegorize the two Homeric figures as “reason” and “pleasure”. A similar development can be discerned in the iconographic evidence. As there is so little

²⁸³ See Yarnall (1994: 74).

evidence on the figure of Circe in Classical poetry, I will briefly discuss the iconographic evidence as well, as this indeed reveals a similar development in Circe's representation.

Circe's Iconography

As Shapiro (1994: 56) points out, the Circe story, alongside that of Polyphemus, was among the most popular Homeric subjects for Archaic and Classical painters. The evidence concerning Circe that can be found on vase paintings is indeed more abundant than that of the literary texts: in his article in the *LIMC*, Canciani mentions thirty-seven Archaic and Classical vase paintings in total which he connects with the Circe story, ranging from the mid-sixth to the mid-fourth century BCE.²⁸⁴ I will only discuss nineteen of the vase paintings which he mentions in this chapter, all Attic – save three, which I add to the discussion for reasons I will explain below. I exclude certain paintings for various reasons: four vases do not actually represent Circe, but only men transforming into animals – they can therefore tell us nothing about the representation of Circe;²⁸⁵ two paintings have been argued to refer to dramatic performances;²⁸⁶ seven paintings are associated with the Theban Cabirion, which I exclude on account of the specific context in which they were made;²⁸⁷ Pausanias' identification of one female

²⁸⁴ All references to the *LIMC* are to this article on Circe specifically, unless stated otherwise. *LIMC* nos. 1, 3, 4, 11, 12, 39, 41-48, 50, 52, and 66 are Hellenistic or later, and might be in other mediums than vase paintings (such as statues or stone relief). There are also Archaic and Classical representations of Circe on mediums other than vases, but I will limit the current discussion to vase paintings: *LIMC* 35 – 38 are representations on bronze mirrors, 60 and 61 on gemstones (and Circe herself is not depicted), 40 is an Etruscan relief, and 62 – 64 are statues, again not depicting Circe. I will therefore eliminate those representations from my discussion.

²⁸⁵ *LIMC* 2, 7, 58, and 59.

²⁸⁶ *LIMC* 54 (depicting a scene from the *Telegony*) and 57 (possibly illustrating a scene from comedy).

²⁸⁷ The Theban Cabirion was a religious centre. Scholars – such as Moret (1991) have argued that the figures portrayed on the vases are to be connected with the religious worship. Because the context for

figure on the Cypselus chest (*LIMC* 51) has been discarded by most modern scholars;²⁸⁸ and finally, the subject of four vase paintings is difficult to determine owing to bad preservation or obscurity of the subject matter.²⁸⁹ On account of various reasons, I will therefore limit my present discussion to nineteen paintings. With regard to Archaic and Classical vase paintings representing Circe, I argue that this is a *full* discussion: I have not omitted any important paintings, apart from the aforementioned ones, for the reasons I mentioned. A discussion of these representations can thus lead to certain conclusions. I will argue that, though the medium of vase painting differs significantly from literature, a development can again be perceived in the portrayal of Circe, similar to the one visible in contemporary poetry.²⁹⁰ I will briefly examine the problems which arise from discussing vase painting in relation to poetry (and the Homeric epics in specific), after which I will discuss the various stages I observe in the development of Circe's portrayal in these vase paintings. For a chronological list of the vases discussed – with their listing in the *LIMC*, approximate date of production, style, provenance, and museum number – see Appendix 7. The images of some of the vase paintings I will discuss can be found in Appendix 8.

these vase paintings is thus radically different from that of the vases manufactured in Attica (and probably not in a religious context), I will not discuss them. For discussions of these vase paintings, see Walters (1894), Touchefeu-Meynier (1961), Moret (1991), and Buxton (1994: 126-27).

²⁸⁸ Pausanias 5.19.7. Most scholars now argue that Pausanias was wrong in identifying a female figure on this vase as Circe, e.g. Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 85), Carpenter (1991: 196), and Snodgrass (1998: 113).

²⁸⁹ *LIMC* 18 is badly preserved; *LIMC* 56 and 65 depict a man and a woman in confrontation, but it is difficult to ascertain whether these are in fact Odysseus and Circe; and *LIMC* 55 represents a woman sitting on a chair holding out a cup, with a long staff in her other hand and a bird of prey resting on the back of the chair. For the latter vase painting, see Canciani's discussion *ad loc.*

²⁹⁰ This is not an entirely new suggestion: Buitron & Cohen (1995: 36-38) have made a similar argument, but have paid little attention to the *precise* developments, instead focusing on *general* shifts in representations.

The relationship between Archaic epic and vase paintings is difficult to establish with any certainty. It is not my aim to enter into the discussion to a great extent, but the basic issue must be touched upon, in order to clarify how I will approach the representation of Circe in Archaic and Classical vase paintings.²⁹¹ The relationship between epic and art is mainly problematic on account of the fact that – as Giuliani (2004: 85-86) puts it – Archaic Greek society was a “pre-literate culture” because “[Archaic] poets make use of writing for their compositions, but the final result is presented to the public as an oral performance, and not as a written text”. That, in the Archaic period, epics such as the *Odyssey* were thus principally known through oral transmission implies that no one authoritative version of this story circulated. Artists (poets and painters alike) – though heavily relying on tradition – were to an extent free to elaborate on themes or stories according to their liking and their audience’s wishes. When one examines a vase painting from the Archaic and early Classical periods, it is thus difficult to establish its relationship with contemporary epic. This issue is further complicated by the lack of inscriptions of names on vases. It is thus complicated to determine whether a vase painting was based on the *Odyssey* but that the painter transferred it to his own medium in his particular way, or whether he was in fact following another tradition than the *Odyssey*.

With regard to the depiction of Circe on vase paintings, though the earliest inscription with her name only occurs on a vase from 490-480 BCE (*LIMC* 20), I argue that it is in fact possible to identify Circe by means of specific visual elements which can also be found in her Homeric representation. I propose that the precise combination of these elements – i.e. not merely their individual occurrence – makes up the figure

²⁹¹ See Frontisi-Ducroux (2003: 74ff.).

‘Circe’. For Circe is the only figure known from Greek myth who a) was confronted by a hero; b) turned men into animals; and c) used a cup (containing a *pharmakon*) and wand in order to do so. Though one cannot eliminate that similar figures were known in the oral tradition, it appears plausible that a female figure associated with at least two of these elements on a vase painting is Circe – though perhaps not exactly the Odyssean Circe we are familiar with: her depiction might also have been influenced by alternative oral traditions and the painter’s artistic license.²⁹² As I will argue, a development can be perceived in painters’ portrayal of Circe throughout the Archaic and Classical period.

The earliest vase often thought to depict Circe (Appendix 8.1, c. 575-550 BCE)²⁹³ is a Corinthian *aryballos* portraying a ship with men, one of whom is tied to the mast, whilst two birds of prey are hovering over them; three female figures – two of whom are winged – are watching the events from a rock; behind them stands a strange, chessboard-like house.²⁹⁴ I will reassess the possibility of identifying the female figure sitting behind the two winged figures as Circe, since it will illustrate the difficulty scholars have to connect iconography with literary texts.

The scene in this painting is in many ways similar to Odysseus’ confrontation with the Sirens at *Odyssey* 12.167ff., where Odysseus is tied to the mast of his ship in order to avoid the allurements of the Sirens. The way in which the Sirens tempt the hero appears to have been expressed differently in the painting than in the epic: perhaps

²⁹² Shapiro (1994: 56).

²⁹³ e.g. Pollard (1949: 358) and Brilliant (1995: 172). See Brilliant (1995: n. 20) for a bibliography of earlier identifications of this figure with Circe. Pollard argues persuasively against one of the earlier scholars mentioned by Brilliant, namely Bulle, that the figure is definitely not the mother of the Sirens, Chton, since that figure is not mentioned in the *Odyssey*.

²⁹⁴ See Vermeule (1979: 202) for a discussion of the chessboard-like house. See also Brilliant (1995: 172), who suggests it is either Circe’s house or her loom.

because singing was hard to express visually, the threat of the Sirens is conveyed by means of birds of prey hovering over the ship. The identity of the third female figure, however, is puzzling. Carastro (2006: 111) labels her a third Siren. It is tempting to accept this theory, particularly on account of the similarities between this scene and the typical representations of the Sirens in Archaic vase paintings: often, three winged female figures play musical instruments while Odysseus is tied to the mast of his ship. On account of the visual similarities between the two paintings – the three female figures on the rock, and Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship, the bow of which is shaped like a boar's head – it is appealing to identify the third female figure on vase 8.1 as a Siren. Indeed, her position behind the Sirens suggest that she is in some way similar to them. There are, however, problems with this interpretation. First, Sirens are not necessarily depicted as a trio; often, they are also often portrayed as a duo. The third figure is thus not automatically a Siren. Secondly, the third figure is not winged, and is indeed dressed and sitting down instead of standing on bird's feet. That she is sitting behind the Sirens might thus not only indicate a certain similarity to the Sirens, but can also suggest that she has a certain control over them and over the scene. Three figures from the *Odyssey* lend themselves to identification with this quasi-Siren: Penelope, Athena, and Circe,²⁹⁵ as these three women help Odysseus to return home and regain control over his palace yet also have a certain Siren-like quality, i.e. the ability to control men by means of immobilization (the verb *thelgein*). Both Penelope and Athena, however, can be removed from this list (unless, again, this is an alternative version of Odysseus' *nostos*), since neither are present in the world of the adventures

²⁹⁵ One might of course object that the figure depicted does not necessarily have to be a character from the *Odyssey*. This is a valid objection. Because we are uninformed about the oral tradition unless through writing, however, this point cannot be elaborated on and must therefore remain a question mark.

where Odysseus' confrontation with the Sirens takes place: Penelope is waiting for Odysseus at home, and Athena has no access to this world (*Od.* 13.339-43). There are stronger arguments to be made for identification of this figure with Circe, apart from using the process of elimination. First, this scene might be interpreted as a synoptic depiction (i.e. representing various moments in a story at the same time),²⁹⁶ depicting both Circe who told Odysseus about the Sirens, and Odysseus during his adventure with the Sirens. Secondly, Circe's position behind the Sirens indicates her similarity to these alluring creatures,²⁹⁷ yet also her control over their allurements. Though this image does not correspond entirely to the Homeric scene, it would present Circe in a role very similar to the one she played in the *Odyssey*, i.e. both as a menacing and alluring figure similar to the Sirens, and a divine helper. In later vase paintings, this ambiguity and complexity will be suppressed: the second part of the Odyssean Circe episode will be neglected entirely, and instead her transformation of Odysseus' men into animals, and her confrontation with the hero will become the two only subjects depicted.²⁹⁸ Since I will argue that a development can be discerned in the depiction of both subjects – Circe's transformation of men into animals on the one hand, and her confrontation with Odysseus on the other – throughout the Archaic and Classical periods, I will discuss both subjects separately.

²⁹⁶ See Snodgrass (1998: 59) for a definition.

²⁹⁷ Indeed, the birds of prey hovering over the ship remind one of Circe's name, which means 'falcon'. See chapter 2.

²⁹⁸ The only exceptions are *LIMC* 54 and 57, where she appears in the context of dramatic performances.

The earliest two vase paintings depicting Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into animals are Attic *kylikes* from c. 560-540 BCE (Appendices 8.2 and 8.3).²⁹⁹ The general composition of both paintings is very similar: a naked female figure stands in the middle of the scene, and mixes a drink in a cup; men with the heads of various animals (not only of boars, but also of e.g. a rooster, a lion, and a horse) stand around her, one of whom is reaching out to accept the cup; on the left, a man is walking towards the centre, his sword drawn; on the right, a male figure walks away from the scene. On account of the thematic similarities between these paintings and the Circe tale narrated in the *Odyssey* – the transformation of men into animals, the hero arriving to save them, and the mixing of a *pharmakon* – the female figure is generally identified as Circe, the man walking towards her with his sword drawn as Odysseus, and the man walking away from the events as Eurylochus. This is a synoptic scene, i.e. events which took place at different moments in the epic – Circe's transformation of the men, Eurylochus' flight, and Odysseus' arrival – have been condensed into one picture.³⁰⁰

There are two elements in these paintings which do not correspond to the Homeric story: first, the men are in the process of being transformed into different animals rather than just boars; and second, Circe is naked. I will not elaborate on the variation of the kinds of animals in which the men are transformed, since it is not an important deviation from the Homeric story.³⁰¹ The nakedness of Circe,³⁰² however, is

²⁹⁹ See also Frontisi-Ducroux (2003: 70ff.).

³⁰⁰ See Rasmussen & Spivey (1991: 83), Shapiro (1994: 57), Snodgrass (1998: 59).

³⁰¹ It might have been instigated by the fact that the variation is visually more attractive; and perhaps, also, painters interpreted the wild animals roaming Circe's land in the *Odyssey* as men transformed by Circe. See e.g. Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 124ff.), Buitron & Cohen (1992: 78), Giuliani (2004: 88).

³⁰² Circe also appears naked on the earliest vase painting representing her in confrontation with Odysseus, see below. In a contemporary representation on a Sicilian altar (*LIMC* 4, 550 – 530 BCE), Circe is depicted naked as well. Though this depiction is not a vase painting and I have left it out of my

highly significant, since it does not correspond to her Homeric depiction, where she is described as wearing clothes (*Od.* 10.543). Shapiro (1994: 57) and Snodgrass (1998: 59) argue that Circe's nakedness is unusual in Archaic vase painting, because women are usually portrayed with their clothes on.³⁰³ The only women who are depicted naked in the Archaic period are hetaerae, and always in an overtly sexual context.³⁰⁴ Shapiro (1994: 57) and Giuliani (2004: 88) suggest that Circe's nakedness indicates her erotic appeal, which looks forward to her relationship with Odysseus; Snodgrass (1998: 60) argues that it emphasizes Circe's "sexual forwardness".³⁰⁵ In the light of the sexual context in which other women are portrayed naked in Archaic paintings, this appears a sensible argument. Though there might be an element of erotic power in the paintings, I hesitate to accept this argument wholeheartedly. First, whereas the other women are either maenads or hetaerae, whom the Athenians would have expected to see in a sexual context, Circe is neither of these: indeed, in the *Odyssey*, her relationship with Odysseus' men was not of an erotic nature. One might object that painters might have interpreted Circe' role in the *Odyssey* differently, endowing her with a more obviously sexual role. I wonder, however, why her nakedness would subsequently be suppressed if it was such a clear indicator of Circe's sexuality. Indeed, in later, overtly erotic

discussion for this reason, it does support my theory that Circe's nakedness was an important feature of her at this time.

³⁰³ Cohen (1993: 37) follows a similar argument, suggesting that, where women were portrayed naked in Archaic vases, it was a sign of their "vulnerability to physical violence". She gives the example of Cassandra. As Cohen (1993: 37-39) has demonstrated, however, Cassandra's nakedness – combined with the representation of her as much smaller than Ajax (who is about to rape her) – indicates her role as a "helpless mortal victim of physical violence". See Bonfante (1989) for a general discussion of nakedness in Archaic and Classical art.

³⁰⁴ Charbonneau (1971) nos. 91 and 364; Boardman (1975) nos. 27, 46, 71, and 122 ; and Boardman & La Rocca (1975), pp. 76, 86, 90. All these paintings are Attic, apart from the one on p. 76 in Boardman and La Rocca, which is Corinthian. I call the sexual context overt, because either the women's genitals are being touched by men or other women, the woman is holding dildo's ready for use, the men accompanying the women are Satyrs (in which case we can deduce that the women are maenads), or the women are drinking together, suggesting a symposium context.

³⁰⁵ See also Snodgrass (1998: 59).

paintings (e.g. appendix 8.8), Circe is fully clothed in normal Greek dress. I would thus suggest that Circe's nakedness does not specifically refer to her sexuality, and that a more satisfactory argument must be found.

An alternative theory has been pushed forward by Buitron-Oliver and Cohen (1995: 37), who have proposed that Circe's nakedness rather points towards her magical abilities.³⁰⁶ Indeed, that nakedness in art in general suggests magical power has been argued by Bonfante (1989: 545): "When dress is normal, exhibitionist acts of nakedness often have a magical meaning. In the realm of magic, nudity wards off a spell or other harmful forms of magic, compels love, and gives strength to one's own practice of witchcraft and conjuring". In view of Circe's development into a witch, this is an enticing theory. Bonfante's statement, however, is sweeping to say the least, when one examines the evidence she gives: she (1989: 549-50) only gives one proper example of what one might call 'magical' nudity, that of the *hermae*, pillars with the head of Hermes (usually) and an erect penis which were – at least in Athens – traditionally placed outside the door and at street corners with an apotropaic function.³⁰⁷ There are, however, various problems comparing this depiction of genitalia with Circe's nakedness. First, though Bonfante might call the *hermae* 'magical', I doubt whether the ancient Greeks would have agreed with her: seen from an emic point of view, the *hermae* were a valid part of Athenian cult, ubiquitous in Classical Athens. Second, the *hermae* represent *male* nudity, which was, as Bonfante discusses in detail,

³⁰⁶ See also Giuliani (2004: 88).

³⁰⁷ Boardman & La Rocca (1975: 40). Bonfante also describes the erections of Satyrs as 'magical' but fails to explain this. I can only presume that she considers the composite nature of Satyrs to be the same as their 'magical' nature. I think their nudity is clearly sexual rather than magical, as the many vase paintings suggest of Satyrs with erect phalluses drinking with maenads, e.g. Charbonneau e.a. (1971) no. 91.

accepted at the time. Indeed, when Bonfante discusses female nudity, magic is not mentioned at all.³⁰⁸

If Circe's nakedness was meant to underline Circe's magical abilities, one might again wonder why it was not maintained in the Classical period, since it might have functioned as a powerful visual representation of her magical abilities. From the contemporary evidence on magic I have examined, however, it appears to me that nudity was not considered one of the main prerequisites of a successful magic-user; indeed, I have only found sporadic references to nakedness in magical rituals in the *PGM*,³⁰⁹ none in poetic representations of magic, and only one in visual representations.³¹⁰ Though this material is from a later period, it appears that, in general, nakedness was not considered to be a vital element of magical rites for the ancient Greeks, and thus does not refer to magical abilities specifically. I would therefore suggest that, rather than magical abilities, Circe's nakedness indicates her otherness in general: since all other female figures are depicted wearing clothes, Circe's lack of clothes implies that she is intrinsically not a 'normal' female figure. In this way, she *is* similar to *hetaerae*, who were outsiders in Athenian society, who could be abused by their clients.³¹¹ The non-sexual context, however, sets Circe apart from the other women. That Circe is displayed naked – which was common for representations of male figures in the Archaic period – might indeed signify that she is perceived as more

³⁰⁸ Instead, Bonfante (1989: 560) suggests that “female nudity, even when erotic, carries with it this sense of weakness and vulnerability. Greek *hetairai*, shown naked, or partially naked, were not citizens; they could be beaten or humiliated by the men who hired them.” This, however, is only applied to the time when female nudity became more common, i.e. the Classical period. Nothing is said about Circe's nakedness.

³⁰⁹ e.g. IV.154. Indeed, in the *PGM*, purity of clothes, body, and mind appears to be more important, see e.g. I.42, I.262, III.282, III.633, XIII.646-734.

³¹⁰ See Ogden (2009: figure 11.1).

³¹¹ Bonfante (1989: 560).

masculine, and hence more powerful, than other women. Atalanta is the only female figure in Archaic art who comes close to that in status: she is depicted half-naked (bare-breasted) when wrestling with Peleus.³¹² Atalanta is never depicted as entirely naked, but the example at least shows what direction one might look at. Compared to Atalanta, who was also a mortal rather than a goddess, the nakedness of Circe might have really conveyed her power, and made her – in status at least – similar to a man. Her power is further emphasized by her place in the middle of the paintings, on account of which she dominates the scene. One might argue that this is not unlike the status she is endowed with in the *Odyssey*, in which she is a powerful, ambiguous figure.

At the same time, certain elements in these earlier paintings also point towards Circe's association with pleasure which will emerge in Classical literary texts. First, though all the companions have already begun their transformation into animals, one of them still accepts the cup from Circe. One might argue that this chronological inconsistency might be expected on a synoptic painting, but surely the artist could have easily painted a fully human man instead, about to drink the *pharmakon*? This might indeed have provided a clear visual contrast with the men who had drunk the potion and were consequently transforming. Second, on painting 8.2 particularly, the movement of the lion-man's arms (the second animal from the right, to be seen more clearly on the detailed image) might be interpreted as dancing;³¹³ and on painting 8.3, the boar-man accepting the cup from Circe holds out his other hand in what might be understood as an open, friendly gesture.

³¹² Bonfante (1989: 559ff.).

³¹³ This appears to have been quite a common way of representing dancing figures. I have found examples of similar poses in Boardman (1974) no. 222 (the woman on the right), Boardman (1975) nos. 11 (the satyr on the right) and 75.2 (the woman holding fans), and Boardman & La Rocca (1975), pp. 76 and 78 (this is the clearest example).

To a large extent, as I have argued, this Circe resembles the powerful, ambiguous goddess she was in the *Odyssey*. I also propose, however, that one might perceive the beginnings of her development in these vase paintings: whereas the Homeric epic describes Odysseus' men-turned-boars as bewailing their fate (*Od.* 10.241), at least some of the figures in the paintings appear to be enjoying themselves. Indeed, perhaps it is no coincidence that these scenes occur on *kylikes*, cups primarily used for symposia. What Buitron-Oliver (1992: 92) says about a later, Cabiric vase portraying Circe might perhaps be applied to the cups currently under discussion, namely that the theme of the cup "is a tongue-in-cheek reminder to potential drinkers to beware of what they drink".³¹⁴ Even if this suggestion appears a little far-fetched, certain details in the paintings do imply that the transformation of Odysseus' men into animals began to be interpreted as a not altogether unpleasant experience.³¹⁵

This is confirmed by the representation of the same episode on two slightly later monoscentic vases (*LIMC* 5bis and *LIMC* 5; c. 510 BCE), where the transformation of the men has been given overt symposium and sexual connotations. *LIMC* 5bis, an *amphora* (private collection), features a seated woman in normal³¹⁶ Greek dress mixing a drink in a cup, flanked by two men-donkeys with erect phalluses, and two flamingo-like birds. *LIMC* 5, a *lekythos* from Taranto, figures a similar scene, but here the female figure is surrounded by men transforming into other animals (i.e. a lion, a bull, a boar, and a dog). Given the specific context – the transforming men, and the cup in which a

³¹⁴ That the cup which Circe offers the transforming men is suspiciously similar to the *kylikes* on which the paintings occur, supports this argument.

³¹⁵ One can find a similar interpretation of the men's transformation into animals in Plutarch's *Bruta animalia ratione uti*. See Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 129ff.).

³¹⁶ Giuliani (2004: 89).

drink is mixed – the female figure can again be identified as Circe with some confidence in both paintings. In both depictions, however, no hint is left of Circe’s former ambiguous nature. On *LIMC* 5bis, one of the donkeys touches Circe’s shoulder in what one might interpret as an amicable gesture, or indeed as a gesture of willingness. The men *want* to drink Circe’s potion. Moreover, their erect phalluses give an overt sexual tone to the painting, and the flamingo-like birds at Circe’s feet lend it an exotic, oriental atmosphere. On *LIMC* 5, the men-turning-animals are blatantly feasting: the bull-man and boar-man are carrying some sort of castanets,³¹⁷ and the lion is dancing (suggested by what I can only describe as the ‘hopping’ movement of his legs),³¹⁸ his mouth wide open to receive Circe’s potion. Garlands in the background emphasize the festive atmosphere in both paintings. This fully dressed Circe is not an ambiguous, powerful goddess anymore: the drink she offers the men provides them with pleasure. Though the *pharmakon* is not wine, the result of its consumption is similar: it reduces man to an animal-like creature, and brings his most instinctive (often sexual) urges to the surface. One might argue further that, by providing the men with the pleasure of an animal-like state, Circe has a great power over them, and indeed controls them. This depiction of her is thus already different from her depictions on earlier vases, where she retained some of the ambiguity of her Homeric portrayal: the ambiguous goddess has rather become a controller of men through her power to give them pleasure. In later vases, the element of pleasure will be discarded, and all that will remain is the controller of men.

³¹⁷ Touchefeu-Meynier (1961: 266), Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 88).

³¹⁸ This leg-movement can be found on other vases depicting dancing figures, e.g. Charbonneau e.a. (1971) no. 57 (the man on the left), Boardman (1974) no. 185.1 (a very clear example), and Boardman (1975) nos. 33.2 (where the movement is more pronounced) and 75.2 (the flute-player).

There is no iconographic evidence of Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into animals between 510 and c. 460, when three vase paintings illustrate how much the theme has developed in fifty years time (*LIMC* 8 from c. 460 BCE, and *LIMC* 9 and appendix 8.4 from c. 440 BCE). Though the subject of the paintings has remained the same, the composition has been altered – and indeed simplified – decisively: there are no more garlands, and the variation of animals in which the men are transformed has been discarded; Circe is again identifiable on account of the presence of a man turning into a boar, and her cup. *LIMC* 8, a *pelike* from Nola, depicts a standing Circe mixing a drink in a cup whilst a man-turning-boar holds up his hand as a sign of rejection and is walking away from her. On *LIMC* 9, an *amphora* from Nola, Circe is seated, and holds up a stick in a menacing gesture, as if she will hit the man-boar with it. The body language of the man-boar indicates desperation: he is walking away from Circe, holding his head in his hand.³¹⁹ The vase in appendix 8.4, a *crater* from Bologna, is in very bad condition, and it is thus difficult to make out the events portrayed. The left part of the vase depicts Circe pointing at a man-boar – shrinking away, perhaps in fear – with her wand (or stick, perhaps again to hit him) whilst four other men-boars are turned away from her (one of whom is leaning against a chair in a peculiar way, for which I can find no satisfactory explanation). Though the subject of these paintings is the same as that of the earlier vases discussed – i.e. the transformation of Odysseus' men into boars – their approach to the subject is rather different: there is no more sign of any pleasure which the men-boars might have derived from the transformation; on the contrary, that they are clearly unhappy with their fate is emphasized by their head

³¹⁹ This was a common way of depicting grief or dismay, see Boardman (1974: 199).

and hand gestures. Circe has become a domineering and indeed aggressive figure, either pointing her stick or wand at them, or mixing in the drug in an authoritative and threatening gesture.³²⁰

Though these vases are obviously only a small part of the entire collection of vases which must have been in circulation in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the evidence we do have seems to point in the same direction; we can therefore make tentative conclusions concerning the development of Circe in vase paintings depicting her as transforming Odysseus' men into animals. First, that post-Homeric visual artists liked portraying Circe as the transformer of Odysseus' men into animals indicates that she was generally perceived as a figure of authority, and particularly controlling men; the second part of the Homeric episode in which she helps Odysseus was ignored entirely. The precise manner of her portrayal, however, developed throughout time. Indeed, whereas the first vase paintings depicted Circe naked – which demonstrated her defiance of normality and hence her ambiguity and power – she was subsequently portrayed clothed. Ironically, by clothing her, artists stripped Circe of her Homeric ambiguity and power. Moreover, there appears to have been a development in the appraisal of her transformation of the men into animals: whereas the earliest vases hint towards possible pleasure that might be derived from the *pharmakon*, and paintings from the end of the sixth century BCE indeed underscore this element, depicting the scene with symposium and sexual elements, in the later vases, however, this element of pleasure is rejected entirely, focusing rather on Circe's dominant position and the men's desperation at their transformation. One might conclude that, in the course of one

³²⁰ The interpretation of Circe's authority in *LIMC* 8 can be derived from the boar-man's resisting pose.

century, Circe was gradually stripped, first of her ambiguity and power, and then of her association with pleasure, until all she remained was a controller of men, and as such an aggressor. I will argue that a similar – yet simultaneously contrasting – development is visible in the vase paintings depicting Circe’s confrontation with Odysseus.

From Peer to Prey: Circe’s confrontation with Odysseus

The earliest painting depicting Circe in confrontation with Odysseus (*LIMC* 19) comes from Vulci, and is painted in the pseudo-Chalcidian style. Though one should exercise caution approaching this vase in the same way as the other vases under discussion here, which are all Attic, it appears that its general depiction of Circe is at least similar to that of the Attic vases; therefore, I will discuss it briefly. The vase is dated around 530 BCE (slightly later than the earliest paintings representing Circe’s transformation of the men into animals) and again depicts Circe naked. She is holding a cup (the paint has faded), and is confronted by Odysseus face to face. Boar-men in the process of transformation are flanking the couple. I have already discussed the possible reasons for Circe’s nakedness in my assessment of the previous type of vases: quite possibly, her nakedness conveyed an ambiguity and power rather similar to the one she was endowed with in the *Odyssey*. However, a development is again already visible: the man-boar standing behind Odysseus is touching the hero on the shoulder. One might suggest this is a friendly gesture, but the fact that he touches the hero on the shoulder as he is about to draw his sword against Circe, might also rather imply that he wishes to check Odysseus in defence of Circe.³²¹ This might be connected with the earliest vases

³²¹ It is hard to find any correspondences with other vases, because the boar-men have feet rather than hands. The closest example I have found depict people holding someone else back by grabbing their

depicting Circe's transformation of the men, which display signs of the men enjoying their animal state.

In five slightly later vases (appendices 8.5 and 8.6 from c. 510 BCE, appendix 8.7 and *LIMC* 20=6 from c. 490 BCE, and *LIMC* 21 from c. 480 BCE), a development is again visible, though not as obviously as in the paintings depicting Circe's transformation of men into animals. The paintings in appendices 8.5 and 8.6 depict Circe seated and Odysseus advancing towards her with his sword drawn. Three men-boars are present, one of whom places his front foot around Circe's shoulder, as if to protect her from Odysseus' attack.³²² Whereas Circe mixes a potion in a cup in painting 8.6, she actually drops the cup in 8.5. Appendix 8.7 shows a standing Circe offering the potion to a seated Odysseus. As Giuliani (2004: 89ff.) suggests, the painter has interpreted the confrontation quite originally: the different seats used by Circe and Odysseus (she is standing in front of a chair, whereas he is sitting on a rock) indicate their difference in status (she belongs to the house, whereas he belongs to nature). Moreover, Giuliani suggests that Odysseus' reclining posture reveals his self-assurance in drinking Circe's potion, since he has received *moly* from Hermes. Not much is left of the fourth painting (*LIMC* 20=6), a *kylix* from Athens: the inside of the cup merely shows the hat and head of a (presumably) male figure, and a female figure looking him straight in the eyes and holding her arm towards him. That these two figures are indeed

shoulder with their hand, e.g. Boardman (1975) nos. 187 and 351. I think it is possible to make a certain connection between touching the shoulder with a hand (in which case the hand grabs the shoulder) and touching it with a foot, in which case it just rests on the shoulder.

³²² This is a significantly different pose from the boar placing his foot on Odysseus' shoulder: whereas the man-boar in 7.9 puts his foot *on* Odysseus' shoulder, the one in 7.10 places his foot *around* Circe's shoulder. The first pose seems to hold Odysseus back and might be interpreted as a sign of restraint; the second pose appears to shield Circe from an attack and might therefore be interpreted as protecting. The closest example of someone protecting someone else by placing their hand around their shoulder is Boardman (1975) no. 186, where Aphrodite appears to protect Aeneas who is about to be killed by Diomedes.

Circe and Odysseus is suggested by the subject painted on the outside of the cup, where a boar is visible.³²³ The final painting (*LIMC* 21, a *crater* from Agrigento) again shows Circe and Odysseus in confrontation, recognizable on account of Circe's cup. Though these five vases are quite different in composition and approach of the subject, and it is difficult to reach any conclusions owing to the fragmentary nature of the paintings, one development can again be discerned: all three paintings portray Circe fully clothed. Again it appears the goddess has been stripped of her ambiguity. Apart from Appendix 8.5 – in which Circe drops her cup, looking forward to her depiction on later vases – these vases portray her confrontation with Odysseus, however, still as one of equals. Circe and the hero are of the same status and power, whether seated or standing. This will change in the next series of vases, which appears from c. 470 to c. 440 BCE. Since five of such paintings survive, it appears this was a rather popular theme in Attic art.

LIMC 22, appendices 8.8 and 8.4 (the part on the right), *LIMC* 25, and *LIMC* 26 all depict a man pointing his sword menacingly at a woman, who is fleeing from him, her head turned towards him, and on all paintings but one dropping her cup and wand. In *LIMC* 26 (a *crater* from Italy), Circe is depicted in oriental dress, emphasizing her status as Other clearly.³²⁴ During the fifth century, paintings such as these of a man pursuing a fleeing woman were very popular on Attic vases, as Sourvinou-Inwood (1991) demonstrates. The first problem is again that of identification: how can we know that the two people depicted are Odysseus and Circe? The key is the portrayal of Circe, for unlike any other woman in Classical vase paintings, she is invariably portrayed with

³²³ See Giuliani (2004: 91ff.) for a discussion of this vase.

³²⁴ Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: *ad loc.*).

cup and wand. That men turning into boars are present on three of these vases supports this identification.

Though these paintings again portray the meeting between Circe and Odysseus, there is no direct confrontation anymore: Circe is fleeing from Odysseus. Artists have thus focused their attention on the moment after the confrontation, when Odysseus rushes towards Circe as if to attack her. In the *Odyssey*, however, Circe did not run from him; she supplicated him, but she did not run. As Buitron and Cohen (1992: 79) have rightly suggested, this composition was influenced by the contemporaneous depiction of other heroes in pursuit of women, such as Theseus and Peleus. Indeed, Odysseus' depiction is very similar to that of Theseus: as Sourvinou-Inwood (1991: 61) points out, "in the vast majority of scenes the pursuer is wearing a *chlamys*, usually on its own, sometimes over a *chiton*. *Chlamys* ... characterize[s] Theseus in fifth-century Attic iconography, with the sword and the spears and a hat ... completing the schema". Moreover, similar to other pursuance-paintings, Odysseus grabs Circe's shoulder in *LIMC* 22.

There is little doubt that the composition of these paintings of Odysseus and Circe was influenced by contemporaneous hero-pursues-woman paintings. One might, however, wonder why this compositional development took place – particularly given the absence of such a scene in the *Odyssey*. As Sourvinou-Inwood (1991: 67) has suggested, hero-pursues-woman vases allude to the sexual aggression to which the woman is about to be submitted. Since on three out of four paintings, Circe drops the cup she held, Odysseus' dominant position is obvious, and Circe has clearly been placed in the role of a victim. I argue that this development of Circe into a victim

reflects the contemporaneous development of Circe in the poetic texts, namely from ambiguous figure into a figure of extremes, either powerful beyond measure or – as in this case – entirely powerless.³²⁵

In the depiction of Circe in confrontation with Odysseus, it is again possible to suggest that a development took place between the late sixth century and the middle of the fifth century BCE. First, a powerful and ambiguous Circe (again on account of her nakedness) was stripped of her power by being clothed; then, the goddess who confronted Odysseus as an equal, became the victim of Odysseus in the chase scenes depicted on later vases: the complex goddess was tamed.

Conclusion

Perhaps the earliest vase painters depicted Circe in various contexts – appendix 8.1 offers a glimpse of that. In this painting, Circe can be interpreted as an ambiguous goddess similar in status and function to the one she held in the *Odyssey*. From then on, however, Circe's helpful side was suppressed entirely, and she was mainly depicted in two types of scenes. Both types – Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into animals and her confrontation with the hero – developed in the course of one century. In both, Circe was first depicted naked, which demonstrated, as I have argued, her defiance of normality and hence her power and ambiguity. In later vase paintings, however, her nakedness was suppressed, shifting the focus to her external paraphernalia

³²⁵ *LIMC* 34 is an Etruscan vase painting from the first half of the fourth century. I have not added it to my discussion of vase paintings representing Circe precisely because it is Etruscan. As Bonfante (1989:) has argued, the Etruscans had rather different ideas about representation of figures on vase paintings. This painting, however, does show that the particular portrayal of Circe as a victim of Odysseus might have been maintained: Odysseus is here shown as attacking Circe with his sword, whereas she holds her arms above her head in a sign of supplication, while the boar-man reclines at her feet, holding his hand out to Odysseus, perhaps to stop him from attacking. See Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 109).

of magic, i.e. the cup and the wand. In paintings depicting her as transforming men into animals, she became a provider of pleasure for men, by means of which she had control over them; in later vases, however, the pleasure was also suppressed, and she turned into a pure aggressor, with the men-boys lamenting their fate. In paintings portraying her in confrontation with Odysseus, she was first stripped of her nakedness. Then, influenced by contemporary vase paintings depicting heroes pursuing women, artists shifted their attention to what happened after the confrontation, namely Circe's flight and Odysseus' pursuance, thus making her a victim of Odysseus' aggression rather than his equal.

In short, in Archaic and Classical iconography, Circe's early ambiguity rapidly disappeared, focusing instead on the extremes of her behaviour: on the one hand, she became an aggressor of men; on the other hand, she became a victim of male sexuality. This development is parallel to the one which took place in poetry, and also looks forward to Circe's development into a stereotypical witch in Hellenistic and Roman poetry. Again, it appears that the fifth century BCE was the pivotal period for the development of the depiction of Circe: in the course of one century, she turned from an ambiguous goddess into a split figure, either an aggressor (as a witch) or a victim of Odysseus.

Before I examine Circe's depictions in Hellenistic and Roman poetry, where her association with pleasure will be incorporated in the representations of love magic, I turn to Medea's representations in Classical texts. I will argue that these developed along similar lines as Circe's, though important differences can also be distinguished.

CHAPTER SIX
MEDEA AS VICTIM AND WITCH

An Examination of post-Hesiodic Archaic and Classical Poetry

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, as I have argued in chapter 4, Medea was represented as a divine wielder of *metis* who had been "tamed" (δηθηθεῖσα) by Jason and was thereby deprived her of potential threat to Zeus' supremacy. In post-Hesiodic poetry, however, I will propose that Medea's connection with *metis* becomes merged with her association with magic. As there is more poetic evidence on Medea in post-Hesiodic Archaic and Classical poetry than on Circe, this chapter will be rather more elaborate than the previous one. I will focus on Medea's appearance in the epic cycle, Pindar's thirteenth *Olympian* and fourth *Pythian Ode*, and drama in general and – inevitably – Euripides' *Medea* in particular.

(a) Medea in the Epic Cycle

I have already discussed one poem from the epic cycle in the previous chapter, namely the *Telegony*. Medea appears in three poems of the epic cycle, namely the *Corinthiaca*, the *Nostoi*, and the *Naupactica*. As in the case of the *Telegony*, dating these poems is problematic: again, modern scholarship tends to date them later than they were dated in antiquity. Even among modern scholars, there is no consensus. The *Corinthiaca*, for instance, is dated by Huxley (1969: 64) to the eighth century BCE, by Graf (1997b: 34) to the seventh, and by West (2002: 109) to the middle of the sixth century BCE. Since it is nigh on impossible to come to any conclusion regarding their relative dating, I will date all three epics to the late Archaic period, more or less contemporary to the

Telegony, perhaps written some time between 700 and 500 BCE, with Hesiod as *terminus post* and Pindar as *terminus ante quem*. The order in which I examine them is arbitrary.

Eumelus' Corinthiaca³²⁶

Of the few fragments of the *Corinthiaca* which survive, only one offers some insight into the figure of Medea. My main source of information will therefore rather be an epitome of the epic by Pausanias, who lived more than five hundred years after the *Corinthiaca* might have been composed. I will also draw on a scholium on Pindar's thirteenth *Olympian Ode*. As such, my investigation – as was the case regarding the *Telegony* – will inevitably be speculative.

The *polis* of Corinth was of no real economic significance until at least 925 BCE,³²⁷ and was hardly mentioned in the Homeric Epics.³²⁸ In the *Corinthiaca*, as Huxley (1969: 60-67) and West (2002: 119-25) argue, Eumelus set out to provide his city with an epic past by creating it. First, he identified Corinth with a well-known city from the Homeric epics, yet one whose geographical location was opaque: Ephyra.³²⁹ Indeed, the poet represented Ephyra as the female founder of Corinth, in order to explain why historical Corinth can be equated with the Homeric city of Ephyra. Secondly, Eumelus inserted a form of the Argonautic myth into the early Corinthian mythology and manipulated the Corinthian regal genealogy in order to accommodate

³²⁶ West (2002: 110) argues that Eumelus was a Corinthian poet who lived at least two centuries before the *Corinthiaca* was written. Being the most famous Corinthian writer, he became associated with later Archaic Corinthian epics. Since his name is commonly used in modern scholarship to denote the author of the *Corinthiaca*, however, I will still refer to the author of the *Corinthiaca* as Eumelus.

³²⁷ See West (2002: 119).

³²⁸ Only at *Il.* 2.570 and 13.664.

³²⁹ For Ephyra in the Homeric epics, see e.g. *Od.* 1.259, 2.328.

some of the key Argonautic figures: Helios and Aeëtes are the first rulers, to be followed by four generations of deputies; only then does Jason rule through Medea. These adaptations made by the poet of the *Corinthiaca* are visible in Pausanias' summary (2.3.10-11; see appendix 4 for Medea's Corinthian genealogy) (*Corinthiaca EGF 3*):

Εὐμηλος δὲ Ἥλιον ἔφη δοῦναι τὴν χώραν Ἀλωεῖ μὲν τὴν Ἀσωπίαν, Αἰήτηι δὲ τὴν Ἐφυραίαν. καὶ Αἰήτην ἀπιόντα ἐς Κόλχους παρακαταθέσθαι Βούνωι τὴν γῆν, Βοῦνον δὲ Ἑρμοῦ καὶ Ἀλκιδαμείας εἶναι. καὶ ἐπεὶ Βοῦνος ἐτελεύτησεν, οὕτως Ἐπωπέα τὸν Ἀλωέως καὶ τὴν Ἐφυραίων σχεῖν ἀρχήν. Κορίνθου δὲ ὕστερον τοῦ Μαραθῶνος οὐδένα ὑπολιπομένου παῖδα, τοὺς Κορινθίους Μήδειαν μεταπεμψαμένους ἐξ Ἴωλκοῦ παραδοῦναι οἱ τὴν ἀρχήν. βασιλεύειν μὲν δὴ δι' αὐτὴν Ἰάσονα ἐν Κορίνθωι, Μηδεῖαι δὲ παῖδας μὲν γίνεσθαι, τὸ δὲ ἀεὶ τικτόμενον κατακρύπτειν αὐτὸ ἐς τὸ ἱερόν φέρουσιν τῆς Ἥρας, κατακρύπτειν δὲ ἀθανάτους ἔσεσθαι νομίζουσιν. τέλος δὲ αὐτὴν τε μαθεῖν ὡς ἡμαρτήκοι τῆς ἐλπίδος, καὶ ἅμα ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰάσονος φωραθεῖσαν, οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔχειν δεομένηι συγγνώμην, ἀποπλέοντα δὲ ἐς Ἴωλκὸν οἴχεσθαι, τούτων δὲ ἔνεκα ἀπελθεῖν καὶ Μήδειαν παραδοῦσαν Σισύφωι τὴν ἀρχήν.

Eumelus said that Helios gave the region of Asopus to Aloeus, and that of Ephyra [i.e. Corinth] to Aeëtes. Aeëtes left for Colchis,³³⁰ having entrusted the land to Bunus, the son of Hermes and Alcidamea. When Bunus died, Eropheus, the son of Aloeus, thus also had the land of the Ephyraeans. Afterwards, when Corinthus, the son of Marathon, died childless, the Corinthians sent for Medea from Iolcus and bestowed upon her the kingdom. Indeed, through her, Jason reigned in Corinth. He had children

³³⁰ The *Corinthiaca* is the first extant text to situate Aeëtes' kingdom in historical Colchis rather than in a mythological place called Aea – see Moreau (2000).

with Medea, and every time she had one, she buried it,³³¹ bringing it to the temple of Hera; she buried them because she thought they would be immortal. In the end, she herself learned that she had hoped wrongly, and at the same time she was caught by Jason. Indeed, he did not forgive her, though she asked for it, and sailed off to live in Iolcus. Because of this, Medea also left, having handed the power to Sisyphus.

In a scholium on Pindar's *Olympian Ode* (13.74g), where Medea is mentioned as one of Corinth's cunning figures,³³² the following information is found:

Μηδείας μέμνηται ὅτι ἐν Κορίνθῳ κατῶκει καὶ ἔπαυσε Κορινθίους
λιμῶ κατεχομένους θύσασα Δήμητρι καὶ νύμφαις Λημνίαις. ἐκεῖ δὲ
αὐτῆς Ζεὺς ἠράσθη, οὐκ ἐπέιθετο δὲ Μήδεια τὸν τῆς Ἥρας
ἐκκλίνουσα χόλον. διὸ καὶ Ἥρα ὑπέσχετο αὐτῇ ἀθανάτους ποιῆσαι
τοὺς παῖδας. ἀποθανόντας δὲ τούτους τιμῶσι Κορίνθιοι, καλοῦντες
μιξοβαρβάρους.

It is said of Medea that she was living in Corinth and stopped the Corinthians being oppressed by a famine, through sacrifice to Demeter and the Lemnian Nymphs. At that moment Zeus desired her, but Medea was not persuaded, because she feared the wrath of Hera. Therefore, Hera

³³¹ Johnston (1997: 62) translates κατακρύπτειν as “to hide”, though she admits: “whatever ‘hiding’ implies”. Will (1955: 89) and West (2002: 123) translate it as “to bury”, analyzing it as Medea performing a ritual on her children similar to Demeter placing Demophoön in the fire to make him immortal (*h. Dem.* 239); there too the verb κρύπτω is used. Merely ‘hiding’ the children in Hera’s temple does not appear a specific enough act to immortalize them. I have therefore adopted West’s translation, and suggest that a conflation might have taken place between two alternative, post-Eumelan versions of Medea’s Corinthian story: in one version, she ritually ‘buries’ her children in order to make them immortal (e.g. in schol. *ad Pind. Ol.* 13.74); in another version, however, she ‘hides’ her children in Hera’s temple after having killed King Creon, in the hope that they will be safe there from the wrath of the Corinthians (e.g. in schol. *ad Eur. Med.* 264). Perhaps one can perceive in this passage Pausanias’ confusion rather than Eumelus’, since the alternative versions mentioned by the scholia are late – see Petroff (1966: 11). Graf (1997b: 34) suggests that Pausanias might have subconsciously ‘modernized’ Eumelus’ account, since he knew alternative versions of the story Eumelus would not have known and might have been influenced by them in his treatment of the *Corinthiaca*.

³³² See further in this chapter for a discussion of Pindar’s treatment of Medea.

promised her that she would make her children immortal. However, they died, and the Corinthians honour them, calling them half-barbarians.³³³

The extent to which this scholium refers to the narrative of the *Corinthiaca* is unclear. That Hera is ultimately responsible for the death of Medea's children because she fails to immortalize them, however, is an element present in the *Corinthiaca* and not encountered in the later tradition, and might therefore signify that, if not in the *Corinthiaca*, then at least in the late Archaic period, a version of the Medea myth existed in which Hera bore the responsibility for the death of Medea's children.

When comparing Pausanias' summary of the *Corinthiaca* and the details given by the scholium with the *Theogony*, certain parallels and differences are revealed, all equally problematic. First, though Pausanias' summary makes no mention of Medea's (im)mortality, scholars have argued that her status in the *Corinthiaca* has been reduced from that of a goddess to that of a heroine-queen.³³⁴ Graf (1997b: 36) proposes that this reduction in status is implied in Medea's submission to Hera and in her failed immortalization ritual. These arguments, however, can easily be countered. Minor deities often have to succumb to the Olympians: Calypso being ordered by Zeus to release Odysseus (*Od.* 5.116-29) is but one example. Moreover, even goddesses such as Demeter and Thetis cannot immortalize their favourite mortals, Demophoön and Achilles respectively.³³⁵ Medea's failure to immortalize her children does make her stand in stark contrast with Circe, who had the ability to immortalize Penelope,

³³³ The term *μῆσοβάρβαροι*, "half-barbarians" might reflect the scholiast's view on Medea than Eumelus's, as its only other occurrence is in *Hdt.* 2.1.15, where the inhabitants of an island called Cedreiae are referred to with that term.

³³⁴ See Moreau (1994: 49-50), Graf (1997b: 36), and West (2002: 125).

³³⁵ See n. 246 on p. 1.142.

Telemachus, and Telegonus in the *Telegony*.³³⁶ There is, in fact, no evidence whatsoever in Pausanias' epitome or in the fragments concerning Medea's divine or mortal status: she may or may not have been portrayed as a goddess. If the scholium referred to the narrative of the *Corinthiaca*, however, the fact that Medea prays to Demeter and to the Lemnian Nymphs suggests that she is represented as mortal, as a divine being would not have needed to pray to another in order to achieve her goals.

Secondly, though Medea is not portrayed as a witch, she is connected – albeit indirectly – with the process of immortalization, which is not altogether different from magic, since both imply an alteration of the natural order. In the scholium, she is also endowed with the ability to stop a famine by means of prayer which underscores Medea's power. This is a clear development from Hesiod's depiction of Medea, where her power was retained underneath the surface. In Eumelus, it is also expressed in another way: it is through Medea that Jason rules over Corinth. The poet did not need to introduce this element into the story, as Jason was actually connected with Corinth regardless of Medea, through Sisyphus, who, as brother of Jason's grandfather, Cretheus, was Jason's great-uncle (see appendix 7).³³⁷ This would have given Jason a claim to the Corinthian throne which was almost equal to that of Medea. By making Sisyphus ruler after Jason rather than before, however, Eumelus removes that claim in favour of Medea's kinship with Helios, and Jason only rules δι' αὐτήν, "through her", a detail which renders Medea, and not Jason, the key figure of the myth. Nevertheless, Medea is ultimately subordinate to Jason as he is king, and she is subject to his anger too, since he leaves her on account of the death of their children. In Euripides' *Medea*,

³³⁶ See pp. 1.136-43.

³³⁷ See also West (2002: 124 n. 79).

Medea will be established as the infanticide extraordinaire for later literature. In Eumelus, however, Medea is only indirectly responsible: she brings her children to the temple of Hera in order for them to be immortalized, but is deceived and they die, which renders Hera rather than Medea responsible for the death of the children. As Johnston (1997: 53) argues, this aggression is typical of Hera in mythology: though capable of bestowing children with exceptional qualities,³³⁸ she might also attack young children (Heracles and Hephaestus) and mothers (Alcmene and Leto), and occasionally drive mothers insane to the point of attacking their own children (Ino, Lamia).³³⁹

Certain developments in the representation of Medea are thus visible between the *Theogony* and the *Corinthiaca*: Medea might not have been thought of as a goddess any longer, and that she is left by Jason alters the “happy ending” of the *Theogony*. Moreover, though she is subordinated to Jason and Hera, she is also represented as the key figure of the myth, through whom Jason acquires kingship over Corinth, and a certain polarization can thus be perceived in her representation. Her association with Sisyphus, to whom she hands the power after Jason has left her, suggests that she might still have been represented in terms of *metis*. Her connection with him is no coincidence, as Sisyphus was well-known for his connection with *metis* already in the *Odyssey* (11.593-600), where his famous punishment in the underworld is narrated. Details concerning the reason for his punishment are first given by Pherecydes,³⁴⁰ who narrates that, when Zeus had kidnapped Asopus’ daughter, Aegina, Sisyphus told her father. As a punishment, Zeus sent Thanatos (Death) upon Sisyphus; the latter,

³³⁸ e.g. Heracles (Paus. 9.25.2), Achilles (*Il.* 24.59-60), and the Nemean lion and the Hydra (*Theog.* 313-14 and 327-28).

³³⁹ Johnston (1997: 54). See also O’Brien (1993) for Hera’s association with monsters.

³⁴⁰ *FGrH* 3 F 119.

however, bound Death in chains, so no one died any more until Hermes released him. Sisyphus also told his wife not to bury him upon his death, so when he died, Hades sent him back to earth to reproach his wife for forgetting his burial; once back on earth, Sisyphus refused to return to the underworld. When he finally did die, Sisyphus was punished for all these transgressions in the underworld, by eternally having to roll a rock onto a hill which kept rolling back. That Sisyphus' trickery of Death by literally binding him and mentally outwitting him was connected with *metis* is confirmed by the epithet given him by Hesiod, αἰολομήτης.³⁴¹ This epithet appears to refer specifically to a cunning capacity belonging to the Aeolid (*aiolo-mêtês*) lineage; indeed, Prometheus, Sisyphus' ancestor (see appendix 7), was also described by means of this epithet.³⁴² In his cunning deception of the gods and subsequent punishment, Sisyphus in fact resembles Prometheus, who tried to trick Zeus but was punished by being chained to the Caucasus, with an eagle daily devouring his liver. Medea is hence, in a similar fashion as in the *Theogony*, associated with a cunning figure. The choice of Sisyphus as Medea's successor also informs one's perception of Medea's status, as it associates her with the entire Aeolid lineage rather than merely with Jason. It is indeed peculiar that Archaic poetry associates Medea with two of the archetypal transgressors of Greek mythology: the *Theogony* connects her with Prometheus and the *Corinthiaca* with Sisyphus. These transgressors, however, belong to Jason's family, not Medea's. Jason's family also knew other transgressors, such as Salmoneus ἄδικος and Perieres ὑπέρθυμος.³⁴³ It seems likely that Medea was originally connected with the Aeolid

³⁴¹ *Ehoiai* fr. 10.26 Most.

³⁴² Hes. *Theog.* 511. See p. 1.119.

³⁴³ *Ehoiai* fr. 10.27 Most.

lineage (of which Jason's Argonautic journey was but an element) on account of their shared cunning quality.

In the one fragment of the *Corinthiaca* which does mention Medea, one might indeed find an allusion to Medea's own *metis*. The fragment describes the earth-born warriors springing up from the land, and goes on to say οὔτος καὶ οἱ ἐξῆς στίχοι εἰλημμένοι εἰσὶ παρ' Εὐμήλου, παρ' ᾧ φησι Μήδεια πρὸς Ἰδμόνα, "this and the other verses are taken from Eumelus, in which Medea says to Idmon."³⁴⁴ Exactly what she says has been omitted. However, Medea's words to Idmon – the seer of the Argonauts – concerning the earth-born warriors might arguably have referred to the advice she gave Jason on how to overcome them, which is well-attested in the later tradition.³⁴⁵ This advice is an act of cunning: Medea does not advise Jason to attack the earth-born warriors directly, but to throw a stone in their midst, hitting one of them, as a result of which they would all think the other was attacking them and kill one another. This indirect approach, deception of the enemy, and transformation of the enemy's strength into a weakness – the warriors' enormous physical strength is used against them – are typical elements of *metis*. If Medea's advice to Jason was present in the *Corinthiaca*, then it appears likely that she was connected with *metis* in this poem. Her association with Sisyphus was thus entirely appropriate – indeed, in Pindar's thirteenth *Olympian Ode*, the two figures will be mentioned alongside one another (see p. 1.174).

In short, my discussion of Eumelus' *Corinthiaca* – or at least, what is known about it from Pausanias' epitome and the scholium – offers some suggestions concerning Medea's post-Hesiodic development. In one way, her association with *metis*

³⁴⁴ *Corinthiaca* fr. 9 EGF.

³⁴⁵ e.g. in Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.1054ff.

still resembles her Hesiodic portrayal in her advice to Jason and in her association with Sisyphus. In another way, however, her depiction has been altered. First, in all likelihood, she is no longer represented as a goddess. Secondly, though she does not appear to have been portrayed as a witch, her association with the supernatural – through her indirect association with the process of immortalization, and her ability to stop the famine – has come to the foreground of the myth. Finally, that the Hesiodic “happy ending” is replaced by the death of the children and the dissolution of Medea’s marriage with Jason suggests that the tension between Medea’s power and subjection to Jason is becoming difficult to maintain: indeed, while Circe is given a *kurios* in the *Telegony*, Medea loses hers in the *Corinthiaca*. This tension between power and subjection will be elaborated in the later tradition.

More or less contemporary to the *Corinthiaca*, two other poems from the epic cycle also mention Medea. All that remains of these poems concerning Medea are some rudimentary fragments. These do nevertheless allow for some basic suggestions regarding her portrayal in these epics.

The Nostoi

The *Nostoi* is an epic poem narrating the returns from Troy to Greece of the main Greek heroes following the Trojan war; very little of it remains. The tale of the Argonautic quest, though it chronologically predated the Trojan war, was described to some extent too: one fragment from the scholia – the most substantial one to survive from the *Nostoi* – concerns Medea’s rejuvenation of Aeson (fr. 6 *EGF*):

Αὐτίκα δ' Αἴσωνα θῆκε φίλον κόρον ἠβῶντα,
γῆρας ἀποξύσασ' εἰδυίησι πραπίδεσσι,
φάρμακα πόλλ' ἔψουσ' ἐνὶ χρυσείοισι λέβησιν.

Immediately she made Aeson into a nice young boy,
after she had stripped off his old age with a skilled mind,
by boiling many *pharmaka* in a golden cauldron.

This is the first mention of *pharmaka* in the Medea myth as it has survived. The scholium also mentions that two other late Archaic poets, Simonides and Pherecydes, narrated the rejuvenation of Jason by Medea,³⁴⁶ but no further information survives.³⁴⁷

Medea's rejuvenations of Aeson and Jason are closely associated thematically with Medea's intention to have her children immortalized by Hera in the *Corinthiaca*. Whereas immortalization is the preservation of youth, rejuvenation is its restoration. There is, however, one major difference, which demonstrates Medea's further development: whereas Hera was meant to perform the immortalization in the *Corinthiaca*, Medea performs the ritual herself in the *Nostoi*, which indicates that she is acting independently rather than instructed by Hera. Kottaridou (1991: 132) argues that the presence of *pharmaka* demonstrates that "es ist [...] nicht die Macht der Göttin, sondern vielmehr das Wissen der Zauberin, über das Medeia hier verfügt." The image of the cauldron bubbling with *pharmaka* does appear temptingly close to a modern image of magic.³⁴⁸ Medea's method of transformation in the *Nostoi*, however, eludes

³⁴⁶ *Nostoi* fr. 6 *EGF*, referring to Simonides and Pherecydes.

³⁴⁷ Jason's rejuvenation by Medea might also have featured on contemporary vases. Five late Archaic and early Classical vases depict a man – who might be interpreted as Jason – appearing from a cauldron with a woman (thought to be Medea) watching. These vases are listed in the *LIMC* as referring to Jason's rejuvenation (*LIMC* "Jason" nos. 58-62). On only one of these is the male figure in fact specifically labelled "Jason" (no. 62). *LIMC* "Jason" no. 59 can be found in appendix 6.1.

³⁴⁸ Plato also represents Medea as a woman who boils people in a pot in order to transform them: *Pl. Euthd.* 285c4.

such simplistic equation with magic through a complex correspondence with the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad*, in the famous envoy scene in which Odysseus, Nestor, and Phoenix attempt to persuade Achilles to re-enter battle, Phoenix declares his loyalty to Achilles, his former pupil, in the following way (*Il.* 9.444-46):

ὥς ἂν ἔπειτ' ἀπὸ σεῖο, φίλον τέκος, οὐκ ἐθέλοιμι
λείπεσθ', οὐδ' εἴ κέν μοι ὑποσταίῃ θεὸς αὐτὸς
γῆρας ἀποξύσας θήσειν νέον ἠβώνοντα.

Dear child, I would not thus not want to be apart
from you, not even if a god himself would promise to
strip me from my old age and make me into a young boy.

The vocabulary in Phoenix's speech is very similar to that of the fragment of the *Nostoi*: the shedding of old age (γῆρας ἀποξύσας) and the word φίλος, "dear", though applied to different contexts, appear in both the *Iliad* and the fragment from the *Nostoi*. Burgess (2001: 154) argues that "such similarity in phraseology indicates not exact quotation but rather suggests that the Cyclic and Homeric poems stem from the same poetic tradition". Given the lateness of the *Nostoi*, however, it seems more likely that this is a genuine reference to the *Iliad*. There is one key difference between the two passages, namely is the specific reference in the *Nostoi* to Medea's skill (εἰδυίησι) and *pharmaka* in order to achieve the rejuvenation. One might argue that these create a contrast between Medea and the hypothetical god mentioned in the *Iliad*: Medea's use of a cauldron and *pharmaka* in order to rejuvenate others might indeed, as Kottaridou argues, construe her as a witch. In the *Odyssey*, however, Circe also used *pharmaka* in

order to transform people, and I have argued against an interpretation of her as a witch-figure. As no further specific vocabulary points towards magic or denotes Medea's Otherness, it is difficult to argue against or in favour of any direct association with magic in this fragment. One might, however, argue that, as well as a contrast, the link with the *Iliad* also establishes a parallel between Medea and the hypothetical deity from the *Iliad*: Medea might indeed have been represented as a specific materialization of the god with rejuvenating powers mentioned in the *Iliad*. Lack of any further information regarding the representation of Medea in the *Nostoi* prevents any conclusions. I propose, however, that the ambiguity deriving from this specific Iliadic correspondence might have been deliberate. Both levels of assimilation with and distancing from the hypothetical god in the *Iliad* might indeed have been present simultaneously in the portrayal of Medea in the *Nostoi*. If this is correct, Medea – in this single fragment of the *Nostoi* at least – might have been represented as a figure balancing on the boundary between the divine and mortal world, her powers somewhere uneasily on the edge between normal divine powers and magic.

The Naupactica

The *Naupactica* is a catalogue poem which deals to a certain extent with the Argonautic tale.³⁴⁹ From the remaining fragments, one can deduce the following information regarding Medea's status. First, in the account of the Colchian episode, Medea does not offer advice to Jason concerning the earth-born warriors, but the seer Idmon fulfils this function.³⁵⁰ Moreover, Aphrodite, and not Medea, is Jason's helper-goddess: she makes

³⁴⁹ See Huxley (1969: 69) and Hunter (1989: 15) for discussions.

³⁵⁰ *Naupactica* fr. 6 EGF.

Aeëtes desire his wife so that the Argonauts – whose ship Aeëtes intends to set on fire – are able to escape from the palace:³⁵¹

Δὴ τότε ἄρ' Αἰήτη πόθον ἔμβαλε δῖ' Ἀφροδίτη
Εὐρυλύτης φιλότητι μιγήμεναι ἤς ἀλόχοιο,
κηδομένη φρεσὶν ἧσιν ὅπως μετ' ἄεθλον Ἰήσων
νοστήσει οἰκόνδε σὺν ἀγχεμάχοις ἐτάροισιν.

At last, divine Aphrodite struck Aeëtes with
the desire to unite in love with Eurlyte, his wife,
since, in her heart, she was anxious lest after the contest,
Jason would return home with his warrior comrades.

While Aeëtes is making love to his wife, Medea hears Idmon shout to the Argonauts that they should leave, and runs after them, taking with her the Golden Fleece which is lying in the house, as she had promised to Jason.³⁵² Finally, Jason leaves for Corcyra after the death of Pelias, and this is where one of his sons, Mermerus, dies when attacked by a lion.³⁵³

This scarce information reveals two things. First, Medea is not inevitably represented as Jason's advisor regarding the tasks set for him by her father. Her connection with *metis* might indeed have been omitted, as taking the Fleece, which was lying in the house anyway, is far removed from her cunning skills demonstrated in her deception of the earth-born warriors or of the serpent guarding the Fleece. Secondly, as in the *Corinthiaca*, Medea's marriage to Jason does not enjoy a happy ending. As the death of Pelias is mentioned, one might presume that, by this stage, the episode in

³⁵¹ *Naupactica* fr. 7 EGF.

³⁵² *Naupactica* fr. 9 EGF.

³⁵³ *Naupactica* fr. 10 EGF.

Iolcus in which Medea has Pelias killed by persuading his daughters to chop him up, is established – indeed, this is supported by the iconographic evidence (see appendix 6.2). In this episode – which might have featured in the *Naupactica*, if the scholium is to be believed, but which definitely appeared on vase paintings from 520 BCE onwards – Medea rejuvenates a ram in a cauldron in front of Pelias’ daughters. She then promises them she can do the same to their father if they chop up the old man into pieces – of course, she omits the *pharmaka* from her ritual and Pelias dies. Similarly to the evidence from the *Nostoi*, the Pelias episode suggests that Medea, in the late Archaic period, finds herself on the boundary between *metis* and magic. Her deception of Pelias’ daughters can be classified as *metis*, as Medea disguises her intentions. Her method, however – depending on the vocabulary used to describe it – might have been classified as magic. In the *Naupactica*, a development is visible: Medea might have gained power and aggression – in her murder of Pelias – but might also have lost part of her complexity, if her use of *metis* in the context of the Argonautic quest became partly omitted.

Medea and Achilles

One more addition to the Medea myth needs to be mentioned. Two late Archaic lyric poets, Ibycus and Simonides, refer to Medea’s marriage, after her death, to Achilles in the Elysian fields.³⁵⁴ This is most significant, as Medea is clearly depicted as mortal.³⁵⁵ The appearance of Achilles in Medea’s story is, furthermore, important. First, Medea has become famous enough to be associated with – and indeed married to – one of the

³⁵⁴ See schol. *ad Ap. Rhod. Arg.* 4.814.

³⁵⁵ See also Kottaridou (1991: 134-35).

most famous Greek heroes. Secondly, she has become more generally connected with the theme of life and death and the issue regarding the boundary between them. Achilles, after the partial immortalization ritual which his mother performed on him, was killed by a wound in his heel. This story resembles that of the death of Medea's children caused by the failed immortalization ritual in the *Corinthiaca*, inasmuch as both myths demonstrate the inefficacy of human attempts to prolong life.

Summary

In short, my examination of Archaic poetry has revealed the problematic nature of the evidence as highlighted at the start of this chapter: the fragmentary state of the texts, as well as the unfeasibility of dating them in relation to one another, impedes any systematic analysis. As the previous chapter has argued, Hesiod's depiction of Medea – albeit brief – is radically different from the Hellenistic and Roman images. She is labelled a goddess, lacks any association with magic, and is indeed portrayed as a complex deity associated with *metis* and thereby with the central theme of the poem, namely Zeus' acquisition and preservation of supremacy as *telos* of the cosmos. The later Archaic evidence, however fragmentary, suggests that certain developments in Medea's status can be perceived. Regarding Eumelus, I have argued that, on the one hand, Medea might have still been associated with *metis* through her advice to Jason and her association with Sisyphus. At the same time, however, aspects of her characterization are becoming polarized: her power to stop the famine indeed stands in contrast with her subjection to Jason and Hera. She was also probably not represented as a deity any more.

The scarce evidence from the *Nostoi* and *Naupactica* both demonstrate Medea's increasing engagement in the action of the story. In the *Nostoi*, she rejuvenates Aeson and in the *Naupactica*, she hands the Golden Fleece to the Argonauts. Medea's ability to act was no sudden addition to the story, however. It was probably suppressed in Hesiod's *Theogony*, in favour of Medea's representation as $\delta\mu\eta\theta\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\sigma\alpha$ female. In the *Corinthiaca*, she was the proposed beneficiary (as the mother of the children to be immortalized) of Hera's immortalization skills. It was a small step to make Medea the performer of the ritual herself. Though the *Nostoi* might have maintained a degree of complexity in Medea's representation, through the parallel with the *Iliad*, her use of *pharmaka* in order to rejuvenate – depending on the vocabulary used to describe the ritual – brings her closer to the image of the witch and removes her from *metis*: this is further underlined by the fact that, in the *Naupactica*, not Medea but the seer Idmon offers Jason advice on the earth-born warriors. Medea's magical power will be made explicit in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, and her polarization as both powerful and subject to Jason and the Olympians already present in her Archaic representations will be expressed more explicitly.

(b) Pindar's Medea

Evidence on Medea is more abundant in Classical than in Archaic poetry, though all of it derives from Pindar's *Odes* and drama. On the whole, Classical poetry continues the development of Medea already discernible in the Archaic period: her characteristics are explored in new episodes and in alternative versions of known tales, both of which are woven onto the established Medea mythology. Importantly, Medea's magical abilities –

merely touched upon in late Archaic poetry – increasingly take centre stage in various forms and contexts. This can be discerned particularly in Pindar’s fourth *Pythian Ode* and Euripides’ *Medea*. While Pindar, I will argue, first introduces an image of Medea as a polarized witch and victim of magic into the Argonautic myth, Euripides represents Medea as an extreme embodiment of both *metis* and magic. I will argue that both texts are milestones in the establishment of Medea as a witch-figure. I suggest that they bring Medea to ‘the threshold of the witch’, by which I mean that, without actually depicting her as a stereotype, Pindar and Euripides fuse the terminology of *metis* and magic and indeed introduce the chief characteristics of the witch that will come to constitute this image of Medea in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. I will first examine Pindar, after which I will analyze Medea’s depiction in Classical drama, with Euripides’ *Medea* as focal point.

A member of the Theban aristocracy, Pindar composed his epinician poems in commemoration of victors in the pan-Hellenic games.³⁵⁶ The two odes which feature Medea are the thirteenth *Olympian Ode*, which celebrates the double victory of a certain Xenophon of Corinth in the foot race and the pentathlon (464 BCE), and the fourth *Pythian Ode*, which praises Arcesilas, king of Cyrene, victor in the chariot-races of the Pythian games in 462 BCE.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ See Kenney and Easterling (1995: 1).

³⁵⁷ The fourth *Pythian Ode* was written to be performed alongside the fifth *Pythian Ode*: whereas the fifth *Pythian* was designed for public performance, the fourth was performed to the intimate circle of the palace. See Burton (1962: 135).

In the short *Olympian Ode* 13, illustrating Corinth's excellence in both prowess and intellect, the poet introduces Medea as follows in a list of Corinthian heroes (*O.* 13.49-54):

ἐγὼ δὲ ἴδιος ἐν κοινῷ σταλαίς
μῆτιν τε γαρύων παλαιγόνων
πόλεμόν τ' ἐν ἡρώϊαις ἀρεταῖσιν
οὐ ψεύσομ' ἀμφὶ Κορίνθῳ, Σίσυφον μὲν πυκνότατον παλάμαις ὡς θεόν,
καὶ τὰν πατρὸς ἀντία Μήδειαν θεμέναν γάμον αὐτᾶ,
ναὶ σώτειραν Ἄργοϊ καὶ προπόλοισ.

I, a private individual, having set out on a public task,
singing of the cunning of the ancients
and of war among heroic merit,
will not conceal, concerning Corinth,
that Sisyphus was the most shrewd in his counsel, like a god,
and that Medea, against her father's wishes, established a marriage on her own
account, the saviour of the Argo and of its crew.

The complexity of this ode is beyond the scope of this thesis.³⁵⁸ It will suffice to note that Medea is depicted as one of two Corinthian mythological figures most famous for their possession of *metis*, the other being Sisyphus, who had already been connected with Medea in the *Corinthiaca*. The words which introduce Sisyphus and Medea into the narrative of the ode – οὐ ψεύσομ' ἀμφὶ Κορίνθῳ (*O.* 13.52) – imply that these two figures are not necessarily a credit to Corinth's history: Sisyphus' trickery of Death and Medea's murder of Pelias were indeed well known mythological tales by Pindar's time. The poet, however, is determined not to overlook these figures, and indeed to focus on

³⁵⁸ For a detailed analysis, see e.g. Hubbard (1986).

their more constructive characteristics: while Sisyphus is referred to as godlike (ὡς θεόν, *O.* 13.52) in his cunning, Medea is mentioned as the Argo's saviour. Though she disobeyed her father, her crime is construed as committed for the greater good of the Argonauts and, in consequence, of the Greeks. Hubbard (1986: 40 n. 41) indeed argues that Medea's "independence from her father (53) is balanced by her benefaction to the Argonauts (54)". She is represented as a powerful figure, actively breaking the ties with her Titan natal family in favour of a connection with the Argo and its panhellenic purpose.

A somewhat different image is painted in the fourth *Pythian Ode*, written two years after the thirteenth *Olympian Ode*, in celebration of the king of Cyrene, Arcesilas. In the fifth-century Greek world with its increasing development of democracy and oligarchy, the Cyrenian monarchy was rather atypical and Arcesilas' dynasty, which had lost but recently regained the throne, was under threat from political instability within Cyrene.³⁵⁹ Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* attempts to validate Arcesilas' reign, not merely by celebrating his victory, but also by connecting his lineage with the mythological past, in particular with one of Arcesilas' ancestors called Euphamus, one of the Argonauts. The connection between Arcesilas and Euphamus is made as follows.

In Libya, on the Argonauts' journey homeward from Colchis, Euphamus was given a clod of earth by a deity. He was told to dedicate this to Hades in his homeland, as this act would lead to the foundation of Cyrene by his descendants in the fourth generation (*P.* 4.43-49). The clod got cast overboard from the ship, however, and the

³⁵⁹ See Segal (1986: 12ff.) and Johnston (1995: 201-02).

foundation was postponed. Instead, Euphamus' descendants from his affair with one of the Lemnian women – with whom the Argonauts stayed on their homeward journey – moved first to Sparta, then to Thera, and from there to Libya (*P.* 4.254-62). One of Euphamus' descendants, Battus, there founded the Battiad dynasty to which Arcesilas belonged. By narrating the Argonautic myth, Pindar connects Arcesilas' lineage with the mythical era, a connection which lends his unstable rule authority and legitimacy.³⁶⁰ There is, however, a secondary purpose to this ode, only revealed in the final verses. Verse 281 introduces a figure thus far unmentioned, Damophilus, who, having plotted against the king, was exiled from Cyrene but now begs to be allowed to return. The poet praises Damophilus and his potential usefulness to the king were he to call him back. Farenga (1977: 8-9) argues that Damophilus was a friend of Pindar's, and that the latter was indeed actively seeking his return to Cyrene.

In between the themes of celebration and supplication is placed the first extant narrative of the Argonautic myth, beginning with the oracle which told Pelias to beware of a one-sandaled man (Jason), followed by the quest for the Golden Fleece, and ending with the Argonauts' arrival at Lemnos on their homeward journey. Medea features not only in the Argonautic story, but also as a major figure at the outset of the ode, as the following structure of the ode reveals:

- 1-12 Invocation of the Muse, and predictions made regarding the foundation of Cyrene by the Pythia to Battus at Delphi and, earlier, by **Medea** on the Argo's return journey from Colchis;
- 13-56 **Medea's** prophecy regarding Cyrene to the Argonauts in direct speech;

³⁶⁰ See Johnston (1995: 202).

- 57-262 Repetition of the Pythia's oracle to Battus. Argonautic tale: Jason's confrontation with Pelias; journey of the Argo; confrontation with Aeëtes; bewitchment of **Medea** with the help of Aphrodite; completion of the tasks set by Aeëtes and retrieval of the Golden Fleece; return home on the Argo with **Medea** (on the island of Thera she delivers her prophecy to the Argonauts narrated at 13-56) and arrival at Lemnos, where Euphamus beds one of the women, which signifies the beginning of Arcesilas' lineage;
- 263-79 Praise of and advice to Arcesilas;
- 279-99 Introduction of Damophilus.

There is a fundamental distinction between Medea's initial appearance (*P.* 4.1-56) and her later role in the Argonautic tale (*P.* 4.57-262). I will argue that, while Medea is portrayed as a complex goddess at the start of the poem, she is represented as a figure polarized as a powerful witch and a victim of Jason's magic in Pindar's subsequent narrative of the Argonautic tale. I will maintain that the powerful goddess represented at the outset of the ode indeed turns out to be bewitched by Jason already. That the poet only shares this information with the audience in the middle of the ode, I will propose, demands reconsideration of Medea's earlier status, which in its turn informs the contemporary political content at the end of the poem. I will also suggest that this ode is the first instance in (extant) Greek poetry in which the polarization in Medea between witch and victim is examined explicitly, and consequently a milestone in Medea's transformation into a stereotypical witch-figure. I will support this argument by placing Medea in the broader context of the fourth *Pythian Ode*.

Muse, Pythia, and ... Medea?

The fourth *Pythian Ode* begins by connecting Arcesilas' recent victory with the foundation of his dynasty by its eponymous founder Battus, and with the mythological

establishment of that same lineage by one of the Argonauts, Euphamus, seventeen generations earlier (*P.* 4.1-12):

Σάμερον μὲν χρή σε παρ' ἀνδρὶ φίλῳ
στᾶμεν, εὐίππου βασιλῆι Κυράνας, ὄφρα κωμάζοντι σὺν Ἀρκεσίλα,
Μοῖσα, Λατοῖδαισιν ὀφειλόμενον Πυθῶνί τ' αὖξῆς οὔρον ὕμνων,
ἔνθα ποτὲ χρυσέων Διὸς αἰετῶν πάρεδρος
οὐκ ἀποδάμου Ἀπόλλωνος τυχόντος ἰέρα
χρῆσεν οἰκιστῆρα Βάττον καρποφόρου Λιβύας, ἱεράν
νᾶσον ὡς ἤδη λιπῶν κτίσσειεν εὐάρματον
πόλιν ἐν ἀργινόεντι μαστῶ,

καὶ τὸ Μηδείας ἔπος ἀγκομίσαι
ἑβδόμα καὶ σὺν δεκάτῃ γενεᾷ Θήραιον, Αἰήτα τό ποτε ζαμενῆς
παῖς ἀπέπνευσ' ἀθανάτου στόματος, δέσποινα Κόλχων. εἶπε δ' οὕτως
ἡμιθέοισιν Ἰάσονος αἰχματᾶο ναύταις.

Today, you must stand alongside a man beloved,
the king of Cyrene with its fine horses, so that you,
Muse, joining Arcesilas in his celebration,
may raise the gust of songs owed to the children of Leto and to Pytho,
where once, seated by the golden eagles of Zeus,
in the presence of Apollo, the priestess
proclaimed Battus the founder of fruit-yielding Libya,
that he, having left the sacred island already, would build a city
of strong chariots on a chalk-white hill,

and that in the seventeenth generation
he would fulfil the word of Medea uttered on Thera,
which the strong-willed daughter of Aeëtes
once breathed forth from her immortal mouth, the queen of the Colchians.
Thus she spoke to the half-god sailors of spear-bearing Jason.

As this passage reveals, vast temporal gaps exist between the three key moments in Cyrenian history; these are linked by three female figures. Whereas, today (σήμερον, *P.* 4.1), the *Muse* stands by king Arcesilas to sing in his celebration, the *Pythia* once (ποτέ, *P.* 4.4) pronounced an oracle to Battus repeating *Medea's* predictions to the Argonauts regarding the foundation of Cyrene seventeen generations earlier (ἐβδόμῃ καὶ σὺν δεκάτῃ γενεᾷ, *P.* 4.10). By bridging the gap between the present celebration, the past foundation of Cyrene, and the predictions concerning it made long ago, these three female figures connect Arcesilas with the remote past, endorsing his ancestry and therefore the validity of his claim to the Cyrenian throne.

The poem continues with an extensive direct speech by *Medea* (*P.* 4.13-56) – the longest monologue by any figure in the ode – on Euphamus' receipt of the clod of earth and the foundation of Cyrene. *Medea* elaborates on her valuable help to the Argonauts: not only did she frequently admonish the crew to guard the clod of earth carefully (advice they did not heed), but it was also on her counsel (μήδεα, *P.* 4.27) that they carried the *Argo* over land in Libya on their return from Colchis.³⁶¹ When she has finished speaking, her words are described as follows (*P.* 4.57-58):

ἦ ῥα Μηδείας ἐπέων στίχες· ἔπταξαν δ' ἀκίνητοι σιωπᾷ
ἦροες ἀντίθεοι πυκινὰν μῆτιν κλύοντες.

These were the rows of *Medea's* words. But they shrank down unmoving
and in silence, the godlike heroes, listening to her dense cunning.

³⁶¹ Pindar is silent as to the reason that the *Argo* has to be carried over land. In Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.1370-79, the *Argo* is swept up on the shores of Libya and the Argonauts seem lost. When they see a horse galloping out of the water, the seer Peleus, interpreting this omen, suggests that they take the *Argo* on their shoulders and follow the horse's tracks inland. It is likely that Pindar was referring to a similar story. He, however, attaches a pivotal role to *Medea* rather than Peleus, as she takes the seer's role in recommending to the Argonauts that they carry the *Argo*.

This is the end of Medea's role in the first part of the ode, and her portrayal is rather idiosyncratic: not only is Medea's depiction as seer only paralleled in Greek literature by her prediction regarding Jason's death at the end of Euripides' *Medea*, but her connection with the Muse and the Pythia is markedly irregular.

First, regarding her prophetic status, whereas Medea's contributions to the Argonautic quest – particularly her advice to Jason regarding the earth-born men – appear to have been well established by Pindar's time,³⁶² her authority as seer is a specific function not encountered before. Though Pindar might have created it,³⁶³ it was not an altogether unreasonable addition to Medea's characterization in the light of her mother's name, Idyia (“she who sees”), and the function of her grandfather, Helios, as overseer of the sky.³⁶⁴ Medea's prophetic status is, however, highly ambiguous. On the one hand, it is unlike that of a mortal such as the Pythia, inasmuch as Pindar describes her speech as uttered by her ἀθάνατον στόμα (*P.* 4.11). This description of Medea's mouth as “immortal” has been under close scrutiny. Must this be interpreted literally, implying Medea's divine status, or metaphorically, perhaps indicating Medea's divine inspiration or her capacity as “extraordinary speaker”?³⁶⁵ While a metaphorical interpretation cannot – and indeed need not – be excluded, I cannot find any conclusive reason for not taking these words literally: other instances in Archaic and Classical literature where parts of the body – in particular the hands, head, face, liver, and indeed

³⁶² Only a fragment from the *Corinthiaca* survives which mentions Medea's help in overcoming the earth-born men. No information remains regarding the bulls which Jason had to yoke, but Pindar's reference to it suggests that it might also have been part of the tradition.

³⁶³ This is argued by Johnston (1995: 203).

³⁶⁴ See my discussion on pp. 1.63–66.

³⁶⁵ Wilamowitz (1966²: 387 n. 2) and Krevans (1997: 79) argue for Medea's divinity. Farnell (1930–32: *ad loc.*) and Segal (1986: 139) propose that it refers to divine inspiration. For Medea as “extraordinary speaker”, see Johnston (1995: 193) and also O'Higgins (1997: 113–14).

the entire body – are called ἀθάνατος, invariably refer to deities.³⁶⁶ It thus appears that the immortality of bodily parts is – in extant Archaic and Classical poetry at least – intrinsically connected with the immortality of their possessor. Medea’s divine status is confirmed by the Argonauts’ reaction to her words, which are called μῆτις (*P.* 4.58), by cowering in silence: this description echoes heroes’ reactions to deities in the Homeric epics.³⁶⁷ The initial image created of Medea is consequently one of a powerful (ζαμενής, *P.* 4.10) deity with exceptional prophetic capacities, similar to the Medea depicted in *Olympian* 13 in her cunning and independence.

That Medea is an “extraordinary speaker”³⁶⁸ is reinforced by the description of her narrative after she has finished speaking. Indeed, her words are labelled as “rows” or “ranks”, στίχες (*P.* 4.57), which suggests an image of her words as verse. This description, on the one hand, reinforces Medea’s vatic status, as oracles are traditionally delivered in verse.³⁶⁹ On the other hand, her “verses” of words actually connect her prophecy with poetry and with the all too mortal – and male – figure of the poet.³⁷⁰ Indeed, her initial address of the heroes (κέκλυτε, *P.* 4.13) is used almost exclusively by men in the Homeric epics.³⁷¹ Through these associations, not only is Medea’s divine status rendered more ambiguous, but she is also construed as transgressing gender boundaries by usurping a typically male mode of expression: poetic speech.

³⁶⁶ For the hands as immortal, see *Il.* 16.704 (Apollo), *h. Dem.* 232 and 253 (Demeter), and *h. Ap.* 125 (Themis). For the head, see *Il.* 1.530 (Zeus) and 14.177 (Hera). For the face, see Sappho 1.14 (Aphrodite). For the liver, see Hes. *Theog.* 524 (Prometheus). For the entire body, see *h. Dem.* 278 (Demeter). In Aristophanes’ *Birds*, moreover, though it postdates Pindar, the Olympian gods as a whole are described as having ἀθάνατα στόματα (*Av.* 220), which is the same phrase as Pindar’s.

³⁶⁷ For heroes cowering in silence to gods in the Homeric epics, see *Od.* 16.157-64 and 19.33-46. See also Griffin (1980: 152).

³⁶⁸ See n. 305 on p. 1.180.

³⁶⁹ e.g. in *Hdt.* 7.140-43.

³⁷⁰ See Segal (1986: 153ff.). See also O’Higgins (1997: 113 n. 32).

³⁷¹ e.g. Odysseus at *Od.* 10.189, Antenor at *Il.* 7.348. Penelope is the only exception: she uses this word at *Od.* 21.68. See chapter 8.

Secondly, Medea's connection with the Muse and the Pythia is ambiguous to say the least. At first sight, each female figure is flanked structurally by two male characters: one who monitors her, and a recipient of her help. The Muse is asked by the *poet* to stand by *Arcesilas* in his celebration; the Pythia makes a prediction under the auspices of *Apollo* to *Battus*; and Medea as *Aeëtes'* daughter foretells the future to the *Argonauts*. On the one hand, Medea is a beneficent figure, assisting the Argonauts on their return home with advice and prophecy; from this perspective, she resembles the Muse and the Pythia.³⁷² On the other hand, there are stark differences between Medea and the two figures. Both the Muse and the Pythia are ambiguous figures, since, in their prophetic capacity, they can either tell the truth or deceive.³⁷³ Segal, however, maintains that their ambiguity has been largely suppressed and that Pindar portrays them as "helpful female advisors" strongly incorporated into the male-dominated Olympian framework, as the presence of respectively the poet and Apollo reveals.³⁷⁴ Medea, on the contrary, is not controlled by a constructive Olympian force, but is initially defined by her chthonic ancestry, as her father, Aeëtes (*P.* 4.10), is the grandson of the Titan Hyperion. Even if she has betrayed her father by sailing away with the Argonauts, that her first description links her with Aeëtes rather than with Jason potentially alerted the audience to Medea's ambiguous status. She is, moreover, called the "queen of the Colchians", which contrasts her with the archetypally Greek Muse and Pythia (*P.* 4.11).³⁷⁵ If Pindar had wished to compare Medea positively with the Muse and the Pythia, he might have portrayed her as controlled by Jason from the

³⁷² Segal (1986: 157-58).

³⁷³ For the Muses as tellers of truth and lies, see Hes. *Theog.* 26-28. See also Johnston (1995: 199) and O'Higgins (1997: 103).

³⁷⁴ See Segal (1986: 27 n. 30) and Segal (2000: 617).

³⁷⁵ See O'Higgins (1997: 118).

outset, particularly as Jason will be glorified later on in the poem. That the poet defines her as a Titan descendant and a Colchian queen contrasts rather than compares her with the other two female figures; in this light, the fact that the Pythia's oracle is based on Medea's (*P.* 4.9) renders it inferior to hers and makes Medea even more formidable, a threat to the Olympian order.³⁷⁶ Medea's power is further underscored by the lack of contextualization: indeed, she is not introduced within the Argonautic story, but it through her. Only after the poet has introduced her as ambiguous and powerful Titan offspring and Colchian queen is she said to address the Argonauts.

In short, I propose that, initially, Medea's placement in close association with the Muse and the Pythia is complex. Pindar introduces Medea as a highly ambiguous and authoritative poet-seer, both similar to and different from the other female authorities. Albeit benevolent in her assistance of the Argonauts, her ambiguity is emphasized, first, by the fact that she is not controlled by the Olympians nor directly connected with a mortal male *kurios*; secondly, by drawing attention to her status as Titan offspring and suppressing her relationship with Jason and hence her subordinate status; and finally, by representing her narrative not only as prophetic speech, but also as similar to a – mortal and male – poet's expression. This puts Medea in an awesome yet frightening position, for she lingers – like her cunning words – on the boundary between different worlds: between the divine and mortal, benevolent and dangerous, and male and female. There is no hint as yet, however, of magic. Gradually, as I will presently argue, the poet will modify his audience's initial perception of Medea as a powerful and ambiguous deity, by representing her increasingly as subordinate to the

³⁷⁶ See Johnston (1995: 193) and Krevans (1997: 79).

Olympians and Jason on the one hand, yet powerful in her magical abilities on the other.

Medea, Jason, and ... Aphrodite!

After Medea's speech, the poet repeats the Delphic oracle to Battus (*P.* 4.59-62) which had already been mentioned at the outset of the ode; at this point in the poem, the story of the Argonauts is introduced. So far in the poem, as I have argued, Medea has been construed as a powerful divine figure whose prophecy antedates the Pythia's and is thus superior. Through the repetition of the Delphic oracle which postdates Medea's prediction to the Argonauts chronologically, but structurally precedes it at the beginning of the ode, Medea's speech is revealed to be enclosed by Olympian narrative. Rather than being a prophetic source and authority in herself, it thus transpires that Medea is structurally encircled by the Olympian prophecy. This contextualization renders her rather less powerful than she appeared at first.³⁷⁷ The narrative of the Argonautic myth further develops this.

While Medea's earlier rendition of the Argonautic myth highlighted the events on the return from Colchis, the poet now looks to the beginning of the Argonautic myth. Jason is now the protagonist, not Medea. Throughout the narrative, he is endowed with admirable qualities: he is respected, a good speaker, and a natural leader (*P.* 4.68-92). Similar to Medea in the first part of the ode, however, Jason too is endowed with a certain ambiguity, which is revealed in the Iolcian people's confusion of him with (other) mythological figures when he first enters the town (*P.* 4.86-92). They ask each other whether he might possibly be Apollo, Ares, Otus or Ephialtes, or

³⁷⁷ See Segal (1986:158).

Tityus. Jason's association with Apollo may be constructive, but his comparison with the other figures is more ambiguous. Indeed, there is one characteristic shared by all these figures (excluding Apollo) which appears to anticipate Jason's future actions. Ares, described by Pindar as the *πρόσις*, "husband", of Aphrodite (*P.* 4.87-88), was not always represented as such: in the *Odyssey*, Hephaestus was Aphrodite's husband, Ares her lover.³⁷⁸ Ares and Aphrodite were actually caught *in flagrante delicto* by Hephaestus and ridiculed by the other Olympians (*Od.* 8.266-366). Otus and Ephialtes, in their turn, were known for their attempt at overthrowing Olympus (*Od.* 11.305) and their chaining up of Ares (*Il.* 5.385). Hyginus, though his *Fabulae* postdate Pindar, also mentions that they desired Hera and Artemis, but were killed by the latter (*Hyg. Fab.* 28). Tityus, finally, desired but was killed by Leto (*Od.* 11.576-81). All these figures share male hubristic behaviour and particularly sexual aggression directed against goddesses, as the male heroes or gods either enjoy or desire an illicit relationship with a goddess. One might argue that this list anticipates Jason's later seduction of Medea, categorizes it as hubristic, and predicts Jason's potential punishment on account of it.³⁷⁹ These comparisons not only render Jason more ambiguous than he appears at first – he is not merely a mortal version of the benevolent Apollo – but also suggest a resemblance between the harassed goddesses and Medea, in parallel with Jason's comparison with the male figures. Hence, these comparisons corroborate the change in Medea's characterization from the beginning of the ode. By structurally enclosing her speech by the Pythia's prophecy to Battus, the poet had already rendered Medea's

³⁷⁸ Segal (1986: 29 and 67-68) does not consider the contrast with the account of Ares in the *Odyssey* to be ironic, and considers Jason's Pindaric comparison with him as positive.

³⁷⁹ Johnston (1995: 198-99) argues that Jason would ultimately be punished for his use of the *iunx* on Medea, as he used deception to persuade another.

narrative subordinate to the Olympian predictions. As a result, what initially appeared as unchecked authority was revealed to be controlled by the Olympian narrative. Now, a different technique – comparison with other mythological figures – is used to further this same idea: Medea’s association with goddesses sexually harassed by men actually places her – through implicit comparison, for the moment – not merely under male control but in fact in the role of victim rather than powerful prophetess. The next time Medea is mentioned, *within* the Argonautic myth, this portrayal is made explicit (*P.* 4.213-23):

πότνια δ' ὄξυτάτων βελέων
ποικίλαν ἴγγα τετράκναμον Οὐλυμπόθεν
ἐν ἀλύτῳ ζεύξαισα κύκλῳ
μαινάδ' ὄρνιν Κυπρογένεια φέρεν
πρῶτον ἀνθρώποισι, λιτάς τ' ἐπαοιδὰς ἐκδιδάσκησεν σοφὸν Αἰσονίδα·
ὄφρα Μηδείας τοκέων ἀφέλοιτ' αἰδῶ, ποθρινὰ δ' Ἑλλάς αὐτὰν
ἐν φρασὶ καιομένην δονέοι μάστιγι Πειθοῦς.
καὶ τάχα πείρατ' ἀέθλων δείκνυεν πατρῶϊων·
σὺν δ' ἐλαίῳ φαρμακώσασις' ἀντίτομα στερεᾶν ὀδυνᾶν
δῶκε χρίεσθαι. κατὰϊνησάν τε κοινὸν γάμον
γλυκύν ἐν ἀλλάλοισι μεῖξαι.

The lady of the fastest arrows,
having bound the speckled *iunx* from Olympus
to four spokes on the unbreakable wheel,
first brought the maddening bird to men, Cyprus-born Aphrodite,
and she taught the skilled son of Aeson suppliant chants,
that he might strip Medea of reverence for her parents,
and that desired Hellas might rouse her,
as she burned in her heart, with the lash of Persuasion.

And at once she [i.e. Medea] revealed the ways to accomplish her father's tasks. Having prepared remedies against cruel pain with oil, she gave them to him to anoint himself.

And they agreed to join with one another in shared sweet union.

Medea's initial powerful status, already diminished through structural manipulation of the narrative and mythological comparison, is deconstructed in this passage: instead of calling attention to her oracular, poetic, or cunning powers, the poet now calls her an expert in *pharmaka* (P. 4.221 and again *παμφάρμακος*, P. 4.233), shifting focus from Medea's general association with cunning to her specific magical knowledge. The *iunx* is still called *ποικίλη* (P. 4.214), a term associated with *metis*, but it is also referred to in specifically magical terms, through the use of the verb *φαρμακώσασα* (P. 4.221), from *φαρμακόω*. Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* entails the first appearance of this derivative of the noun *pharmakon*. This verb and other derivatives, such as the concept *φαρμακεία* and the verb *φαρμακεύω*, only appear in literature from the fifth century BCE. The verbs did not only mean "I administer a *pharmakon*", but also came to signify "I poison" or "I trick"; they were predominantly used in a magical context, never in the context of *metis*.³⁸⁰ That the *iunx* is here used by Aphrodite does not lessen its Otherness. Indeed, in order to bind the witch Medea, stronger magic is needed. The boundary between normal ritual and Titan magic is overcome by Aphrodite, who integrates Medea's magic and indeed teaches it to Jason. The Olympian transgression of boundaries, however, has a disastrous outcome already hinted at in Jason's

³⁸⁰ Carastro (2006: 36). For the use of the two verbs in the magical context, see e.g. Hdt. 7.114, Eur. *Andr.* 355, Pl. *Leg.* 933 D.

comparison with male transgressors of mythology.³⁸¹ In the earlier tradition, the death of Pelias and of the children (even if Medea was not yet responsible for the latter) symbolized this disastrous outcome of Medea's arrival in Greece.

Through the *iunx*, Medea's powers are now entirely in Jason's service. What was mere suggestion in Medea's implicit comparison with the goddesses earlier in the poem, has been realized: Medea has fallen victim to Jason, through his magical spell. This spell has been the subject of some discussion.³⁸² While this thesis is not concerned with the precise nature of the *iunx*, some consideration is necessary, in order to elucidate the relationship between Medea and Jason.

Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* is the earliest extant Greek text to mention the *iunx*. Later sources – e.g. Theocritus' second *Idyll* 2.17 – are clearly based on Pindar's account.³⁸³ The poet construes the *iunx* as a tool of love magic, by means of which one might instil desire in another person. Technically, it appears that – in Pindar's *Ode* at least – the *iunx* was composed of a bird tied to a wheel.³⁸⁴ Faraone (1993) argues that its purpose was to bind and torture its victim through sympathetic magic (as the bird is yoked to the wheel and whipped, thus the proposed victim of the spell is too). I find Johnston's (1995) arguments against his theory persuasive, however: she proposes that the *iunx* was “part of an extensive exploration of the effects of voice” in *Pythian* 4.³⁸⁵ Whether the main element of the *iunx* was the bird or the wheel, both constituents share

³⁸¹ This theme of the Olympian transgression of boundaries and its dire consequences will also feature in *Ap. Rhod. Arg.*; see chapter 7.

³⁸² For the nature of the *iunx* and its role in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, see Faraone (1993) and Johnston (1995).

³⁸³ See Johnston (1995: 180). See also Pirenne-Delforge (1993) on the *iunx* in Pindar and the later tradition.

³⁸⁴ Johnston (1995: 183) argues that, in iconography and later literary sources, it was either a wheel or a bird.

³⁸⁵ See Johnston (1995: 178).

the fact that they were thought of as being persuasive when heard.³⁸⁶ It was the sound of the *iunx* which bound its victim, not the sympathetic magic of the torture. This indeed ties in with the argument I have constructed so far regarding Medea, namely that she was represented at the start of the ode as a powerful figure, particularly through her speech. Gradually, however, that narrative power was taken from her: first, structurally, it emerged that her speech was encompassed by that of the Olympians; then, through implicit mythological comparison – the figure of Medea was indeed muted altogether – Medea was associated with goddesses overpowered sexually; and finally, in this passage, through the use of the vocal magic of the *iunx*, Medea’s voice, magic, and sexuality are brought under direct control of the Olympians and through them, of Jason.

This is the first passage in extant Greek literature which portrays Medea explicitly as a polarized figure in magical terms, both a powerful witch and a victim of Jason’s magic. It is also one of only two mentions of Medea within Pindar’s narrative of the Argonautic myth – quite astonishing in the light of her previous significance in the ode. The second of these two references follows the poet’s decision to cut the story of the Golden Fleece short and report merely the ending (*P.* 4.249-50):

κτείνε μὲν γλαυκῶπα τέχναϊς ποικιλόνωτον ὄφιν,
ὠρκεσίλα, κλέψεν τε Μήδειαν σὺν αὐτᾶ, τὰν Πελῖαο φονόν·

He [i.e. Jason] killed with trickery the grey-eyed serpent with its dappled back, O Arcesilas, and stole Medea with her own help, the death of Pelias.

In Pindar’s narrative of the Argonautic tale, Medea is represented as a polarized figure. On the one hand, she has great magical powers: she can bestow upon Jason a potion to

³⁸⁶ See Johnston (1995: 186).

protect him against the fire-breathing bulls, and reference is also made to her murder of Pelias. On the other hand, her powers are represented as subordinate to Jason's: for Medea only offers her magical potion to Jason after he has bewitched her with the *iunx*. Jason is indeed portrayed as wielding a *metis* of his own: it is through his superior τέχνη (*P.* 4.249) that he is able to overcome the serpent which is also endowed with cunning, as the epithet ποικιλόνωτος (*P.* 4.249), juxtaposed with Jason's τέχνη, reveals. Furthermore, Medea's murder of Pelias can also be read as orchestrated by Jason. Medea might be called "the death of Pelias" in this passage, but the beginning of Pindar's Argonautic story interprets the murder differently (*P.* 4.71-72):

θέσφατον ἦν Περίαν
 ἐξ ἀγαυῶν Ἀιολιδᾶν θανέμεν χεیرهσσιν ἢ βουλαῖς ἀκάμπτοις.

The oracle said that Pelias would die because of the proud Aeolids,
 whether at their hands or by their unyielding schemes.

In this passage, which precedes Medea's epithet Περίαιο φονόν in the *Ode*, Jason's Aeolid family is made responsible for Pelias' death; this makes Medea a mere instrument, a fact underlined by Jason's bewitchment of her, which robs her of her ability to make independent decisions. This bewitchment with Aphrodite's *iunx* is, moreover, rather curious and at first sight unnecessary, as Medea's love for Jason might have provided sufficient impetus for her helping the hero, as it does in other poems on the Argonautic quest.³⁸⁷ Erotic love, however, though alluded to in the reference to the

³⁸⁷ See Johnston (1995: 177).

marriage (*P.* 4.222-23), is not placed in the foreground of the text.³⁸⁸ Indeed, one might argue that Jason's spell is not even a real love spell,³⁸⁹ for Medea is not imbued with desire for a person, Jason, but rather for a country, Hellas. However, in order to acquire the help of Medea – who possesses powerful magical abilities – a stronger spell is necessary. Hence, the persuasion of Medea is placed specifically in a magical context. This is not surprising, as Medea was connected with certain magical abilities already – the rejuvenation of Aeson and of the ram, might indeed have been associated with magic already.³⁹⁰ By placing Jason's persuasion of Medea in the magical sphere, Pindar makes Jason defeat her at her own game: as the cunning serpent was overcome by Jason's superior *metis*, the witch is bewitched by his superior magic.³⁹¹ Medea, who was at the beginning of the poem depicted as a powerful yet ambiguous figure only connected with Jason through the Argonautic heroes, has now become a polarized figure: a powerful witch, whose powers are used solely for Jason's benefit, because he has bewitched her.³⁹² There is thus a clear disparity between the initial description of Medea in the context of the Battiad dynasty and her subsequent portrayal in the context of the inserted Argonautic myth. Indeed, it appears that the powerful prophetic Medea at the start of the poem was actually already under the influence of Jason, since, chronologically, her predictions took place after Jason bewitched her in Colchis.

³⁸⁸ I disagree with Segal (2000: 617), who argues that Medea is here depicted as “a nubile female charged with the dangerous power of sexual desire”.

³⁸⁹ *Pace* Segal (1986: 53) and Griffiths (2006: 18), who do consider it to be a love spell.

³⁹⁰ See pp. 1.165-68.

³⁹¹ Johnston (1995: 204) points out that this confrontation also reworks the encounter between Circe and Odysseus in the *Odyssey* (see chapter 3 of this thesis): Hermes' *moly* has been replaced by Aphrodite's *iunx*. Medea is thereby associated with Circe. While Circe's powers were entirely connected with *metis*, however, Medea's (or rather, the spell used against her) are described explicitly in magical terminology. Though the *metis* of Jason and Medea is maintained to some degree, the Homeric passage has thus been adapted and reinterpreted by Pindar, and placed in a specifically magical context. See chapter 8.

³⁹² See O'Higgins (1997: 111).

Summary: Medea, Damophilus, and Pindar

In short, while *Olympian* 13 retains the Hesiodic image of an ambiguous and cunning Medea, I argue that Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* is the first text in (extant) Greek poetry to explore Medea's polarized association with magic explicitly. I do not claim that Pindar conjured this image out of thin air. On the contrary, all the elements were already present in Medea's Archaic characterizations in one form or another. Her association with the supernatural had gradually emerged through association with Hera's (aborted) immortalization of her children in the *Corinthiaca*, and her own rejuvenation of Aeson in the *Nostoi*. The failure of her independent power, or her subjection to the Olympians, again, was present in the *Theogony*, where she was bound by Jason in marriage, and in the *Corinthiaca*, where she was under Hera's power. An explicitly polarized image of Medea in magical terms, as powerful witch *and* victim of Jason's magic, however, is new. Starting off with a highly ambiguous figure not dissimilar to Hesiod's Medea, the poet builds up to the polarized image he introduces. First, he structures the poem in such a way that it appears to the audience that Medea's narrative is more authoritative than that of the Pythia, but then – through ring composition – reveals that this is not the case, and that her narrative is in fact encompassed by Olympian narrative. Secondly, by using mythological exempla, he implicitly compares Medea with sexually harassed goddesses, suggesting that she too is a victim of Jason's aggression. Finally, Jason is depicted as actually bewitching Medea – who is represented as a powerful witch – by means of Aphrodite's *iunx*. In Pindar's text, the magical terminology is added to the semantic field of *metis*. Medea is referred to in terms of *metis* at the beginning of the *Ode*, but then also in terms of magic in the

narrative of the Argonautic myth. Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* can thus be analyzed as a key text in the transformation of Medea from cunning goddess into witch.

In order to comprehend Pindar's reasons for introducing this innovation in Medea's characterization, one must look to the end of the ode. Having finished his account of the Argonautic myth, Pindar returns to the initial topic of the poem: the celebration of Arcesilas. The king is reintroduced as the potential ἰατὴρ, "healer" (*P.* 4.270), of the political problems in Cyrene.³⁹³ While Arcesilas' comparison with Jason has been implicit thus far, his new title of "healer", echoing Jason's name, Ἰάσων, renders their resemblance more explicit.³⁹⁴ At this point in the ode, Damophilus is mentioned, an apt example of Cyrene's problems. Parallel to Arcesilas' association with Jason, Damophilus can be compared to Medea.³⁹⁵ Like her, he possesses formidable powers (otherwise he would not have been banished), which – if left unchecked – could be catastrophic. The mythological paradigm of Medea, however, reveals to Arcesilas that the enemy who appears fearsome is in actuality already controlled by him. Indeed, this is the image of Medea which I have argued is developed throughout the ode, for the fearsome and ambiguous figure introduced to the audience at the outset of the audience gradually emerges to be under the control of the Olympians and – through Aphrodite's magic – of Jason. One might argue that the poet suggest that, if Arcesilas succeeds in taming Damophilus, as Jason tamed Medea, the king will acquire a great weapon against his foes.³⁹⁶ Whether or not Arcesilas was successful in his taming of Damophilus, the transformation of Medea's characterization

³⁹³ See Segal (1986: 19).

³⁹⁴ See Currie (2005: 3) for the general association of mythical hero and *laudandus* in Pindar's *Odes*.

³⁹⁵ See O'Higgins (1997: 125). Damophilus can also be compared with Jason; see Johnston (1995: 201).

³⁹⁶ See Johnston (1995: 202).

into a polarized figure, as first made explicit by Pindar, will greatly influence later poetry.

(c) Tragedy and the Medea Tradition

Medea was a popular figure not only in Classical tragedy, but also in comedy. Titles and some fragments excepted, however, not much evidence survives; Euripides' *Medea* is therefore the chief source of information on Medea in Classical drama, as it is the only play concerning her which has survived intact. Certain fragments from drama do nevertheless offer some rudimentary information concerning the development of Medea's status in Classical tragedy. I will discuss the tragic fragments first, after which I will examine Euripides' *Medea*, to be followed by the comic evidence, as this postdates Euripides.

Though Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* is the earliest detailed account of the Argonautic story to have survived, it was by no means authoritative. Indeed, the plasticity of the myths on Medea allowed for different episodes (Colchian, Iolcian, Corinthian, Athenian) and alternative elements (e.g. regarding the identity of Jason's divine protectress and the person responsible for the death of the children)³⁹⁷ to exist side by side. This plasticity was fully exploited by the three tragedians, who built onto the existing episodes of the Medea myth, and further explored her powerful characteristics.

Aeschylus staged a play called *Trophoi* ("Nurses of Dionysus"), in which Medea rejuvenated Dionysus' nurses and their husbands by boiling them in a

³⁹⁷ Jason's protectress could be Hera (*Od.* 12.69-72), Aphrodite (*Naup.* fr. 7-8 *EGF*), or Athena (in vase paintings, e.g. *LIMC* "Jason" nos. 32 and 36); the children could be killed through Hera's whimsical nature (Eumelus fr. 9 *EGF*) or deliberately, by the Corinthians (schol. *ad Eur. Med.* 264).

cauldron.³⁹⁸ Here, Medea was taken out of the Argonautic context; her association with Dionysus might have been created in order to give Medea credibility in the specific context of Athenian tragedy. While this precise story might have been Aeschylus' own innovation, it built onto a tradition of Medea's rejuvenations of Aeson, Jason, and the ram in Archaic poetry.

Sophocles staged three plays – *Colchides*, *Scythae*, and *Rhizotomoi* (“Root Cutters”) – on the Argonautic story, and one called *Aegeus* on the Athenian episode.³⁹⁹ Of these, only a few fragments remain. In *Colchides*, Apsyrtus was killed near Aeëtes' house, and Medea offered Jason advice on the earth-born warriors. The only information that can be gained from *Scythae* is that, in this play, Medea and Apsyrtus were half-brother and -sister, and that Apsyrtus was killed possibly near Tomi (on the Black Sea). The *Rhizotomoi* sheds some light on Medea's nocturnal practices (*TrGF* 4 F 534):

ἡ δ' ἔξοπίσω χερὸς ὄμμα τρέπουσ'
ὄπὸν ἀργινεφῆ στάζοντα τομῆς
χαλκέοισι κάδοις δέχεται...
... αἱ δὲ καλυπταὶ
κίσται ῥιζῶν κρύπτουσι τομάς,
ἄς ἦδε βοῶσ' ἀλαλαζομένη
γυμνὴ χαλκέοις ἤμα δρεπάνοις.

She, turning her eye away from her hand,
receives the white, foamy juice,
trickling from the cut, in bronze vessels ...
... the hidden boxes

³⁹⁸ *TrGF* 3 F 246(a) and (b).

³⁹⁹ Sophocles *TrGF* 4 F 336-49 (*Colchides*), 534-36 (*Rhizotomoi*), 546-52 (*Scythai*) and 19-25a (*Aegeus*).

conceal cuttings from the roots,
which she, howling and chanting,
naked, severed with bronze sickles.

Whether this ritual is to be placed in the Colchian or the Iolcian context,⁴⁰⁰ this is the first extant fragment of Greek literature which elaborates in detail on Medea's own magical knowledge. That Medea's ritual can be interpreted as magical is indicated by the mention in the same play of Hecate, from the fifth century onward one of the chief deities invoked by literary witches, who was never associated with *metis*.⁴⁰¹ The combination of several elements – the use of bronze, the secrecy (κρύπτουσι and looking over her shoulder), and the chanting – underscores Medea's representation as witch.⁴⁰²

The precise content of *Aegeus* is impossible to ascertain, as the fragments are obscure; the play probably dramatized the events following Medea's marriage to Aegeus, which can be summarized as follows, based on information gained from later sources.⁴⁰³ When Aegeus' son, Theseus, comes to Athens in disguise, Medea persuades Aegeus that he is a threat to the throne and should be poisoned. As Theseus is about to drink from a poisoned cup, however, Aegeus recognizes him and stops him from drinking; Medea is consequently exiled. This story was most likely a Classical invention.⁴⁰⁴ Though it extended Medea's story beyond the Argonautic context, the continuation of the Archaic theme of Medea's destructive relationship with men (Jason, Aeëtes, Apsyrtus, and Pelias) makes the innovation understandable. Moreover, because

⁴⁰⁰ See Mastronarde (2002: 48).

⁴⁰¹ Soph. *TrGF* 4 F 535.

⁴⁰² See Kottaridou (1991: 211-12).

⁴⁰³ e.g. Plut. *Theb.* 12.2-3, Ps.-Apollod. 1.5-6, Paus. 2.3.8.

⁴⁰⁴ It was only represented on vases from c. 460 BCE. See Mills (1997: 243).

of Theseus' rise as Athenian hero in the late Archaic and early Classical era, it is not surprising that Pan-Hellenic myths such as the Argonautic myth became associated with him.⁴⁰⁵

Finally, apart from the *Medea*, Euripides staged a *Peliades* (455 BCE) and *Aegeus*.⁴⁰⁶ The fragments of *Peliades* do not offer any information on Medea. The play probably staged Medea's deception of Pelias' daughters, leading to their father's death; the *Aegeus*, like Sophocles' play, probably dealt with Medea's attempt to kill Theseus.

It would be precarious to form any judgement of Medea's Classical (Athenian) characterization on the basis of the aforementioned fragments and titles. What does appear to be the case, however, is that Medea became more explicitly connected with magic, and with stories beyond the Argonautic myth. Indeed, her magical abilities were also used for the benefit of people other than Jason, as Aeschylus' *Trophi* illustrates.⁴⁰⁷ Medea's connection with murder, moreover, was also reinforced, both by the invention of a new episode (the attempted murder of Theseus), and the dramatization of the murders of Apsyrtus and Pelias. In short, building onto the existing tradition, tragedians explored Medea's magical and murderous qualities, rendering her increasingly destructive and independent of Jason. This development will come to a climax in Euripides' *Medea*.

⁴⁰⁵ See Parker (1987). For the evidence of pre-Euripidean vases on Medea's place in Athenian mythology, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1997: 265-66).

⁴⁰⁶ The date of the *Aegeus* is highly disputed: Worthington (1990: 504) argues that it antedates *Medea*, Mastronarde (2002: 54) that it postdates it.

⁴⁰⁷ The fragment from Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi* is inconclusive on the recipient of the magical ritual prepared by Medea.

(d) On the Witch's Threshold: Euripides' Medea

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Medea's connection with Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis rendered her highly ambiguous. In the fragmentary post-Hesiodic texts, however, Medea became, on the one hand, increasingly associated with magic, and her destructive aspects were placed in the spotlight more frequently. On the other hand, her powers were used primarily to Jason's assistance because she fell in love with him, or, as in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, was bewitched by Aphrodite's *iunx*. It thus appears that Medea's Hesiodic complexity soon developed into polarization of her independent power and failure thereof in her relationship with Jason. This development culminated in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, in which the poet indeed introduced his audience to a polarized image of the 'witch bewitched', a Medea who used her magical powers solely in her function of Jason's helper-maiden.

Medea's role of powerful witch succumbing to Jason was, however, not tenable for much longer. Indeed, not only had Medea's involvement in the Argonautic quest – by means of *metis*, magic, and murder – grown to such heroic proportions that she overshadowed Jason, but as she had been linked in marriage with heroes such as Aegeus, Sisyphus, and Achilles,⁴⁰⁸ her ties with Jason had also been loosened somewhat. Though poems such as the *Corinthiaca* and the *Naupactica* had already described the end of Medea's marriage to Jason, no information remains on Medea's future after the end of her marriage: in the *Corinthiaca*, she merely left Corinth after the death of the children (Paus. 2.3.11); the *Naupactica* (fr. 10 *EGF*) mentions that Jason left for Corcyra following the death of Pelias, but does not refer to Medea. Euripides'

⁴⁰⁸ For Medea's marriage to Sisyphus, see Theopompus *FGrH* 115 F 356. For Medea's marriage to Achilles, see Ibycus and Simonides (schol. *ad Ap. Rhod. Arg.* 4.814).

Medea, building onto the traditional element of Medea's increasing separation from Jason, breaks vigorously with the tradition of the 'witch bewitched' which culminated in Pindar: rather than focusing on Jason's power and Medea's subordination to him, the play explores the disastrous events which occur when the bond between the powerful female figure and her loved one is suddenly broken, and Medea's power is thus no longer controlled and funnelled by a male *kurios*.⁴⁰⁹

Among many other things, scholars have portrayed Euripides' *Medea* as a barbarian witch, a heroine, a typical or untypical woman, an instrument of Zeus' will, a archetypal Other, an expression of the Athenian Self, and a reviser of the Argonautic saga.⁴¹⁰ It is the first description of *Medea* which I intend to reassess. I do not, however, aim to argue against any of the other interpretations; my own argument is meant to complement rather than disagree with the already huge secondary literature on Euripides' *Medea*.

Since Page's (1938: xxi) famous description of *Medea* as a barbarian witch,⁴¹¹ many scholars – the basic study is still Knox (1979) – have argued against Page that Euripides in fact downplays *Medea*'s magical qualities.⁴¹² There are indeed few explicit references to *Medea*'s magic throughout the play. Though I agree with this appreciation of Euripides' protagonist in essence, I intend to modify this view to a certain extent. I

⁴⁰⁹ Segal (1996: 17) suggests that the play explores a similar question: "Suppose that the suppressed woman of this patriarchal society had the will and the power not only to express her resentment openly but also to act on that resentment. What would such a woman look like, and what would the world that woman contains look like?"

⁴¹⁰ For *Medea* as barbarian witch: Page (1938: xxi); as heroine: Knox (1979; see also Bongie [1997]); as (un)typical woman: Barlow (1989), Sourvinou-Inwood (1997), Foley (2001); as instrument of Zeus' will: Kovacs (1993); as Other: Blondell (1999); as expression of the Athenian self: Rehm (2002); as reviser of the Argonautic tale: Hopman (2008).

⁴¹¹ Page (1938: xxi): "Because [*Medea*] was a foreigner she could kill her children; because she was a witch she could escape in a magic chariot."

⁴¹² See also Mastronarde (2002: 24-26).

will argue that Euripides, rather than focusing on the execution of Medea's revenge, focuses on her approach to it. Thereby, her *metis* – reacting specifically against the forceful *metis* of the Argonautic mission which bound her, and also imitating a divine mode of *metis* – rather than her magic is highlighted throughout the play. As the action of the play continually anticipates Medea's revenge, however, this gruesome revenge by magical means indeed becomes the understated climax of the play. In this way, I will argue, Euripides combines Medea's *metis* and magical powers to create the ultimate super- and sub-human being, whom the later tradition will receive as the archetypal witch. (Line numbers in this section refer to Euripides' *Medea* unless stated otherwise.)

The ἀπορία of Medea

The play opens with the entrance of the Nurse of Medea's children, who expresses her resentment towards the entire Argonautic quest in an unattainable wish (1-8):

Εἴθ' ὦφελ' Ἄργους μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος
Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,
μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι Πηλίου πεσεῖν ποτε
τμηθεῖσα πεύκη, μηδ' ἐρετμῶσαι χέρας
ἀνδρῶν ἀρίστων οἱ τὸ πάγχρυσον δέρος
Πελίαι μετῆλθον. οὐ γὰρ ἂν δέσποιν' ἐμῆ
Μήδεια πύργους γῆς ἔπλευσ' Ἰωλκίας
ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ' Ἰάσονος·

If only the ship Argo had never soared
to the land of the Colchians through the dark blue Clashing Rocks.

If only, in the valleys of Mount Pelion, the cut pine had never fallen
and furnished with oars the hands
of the fine men who went in search of the Golden Fleece
for Pelias. For then my mistress,
Medea, would not have sailed to the towers of the land of Iolcus,
her heart struck out of its senses by love for Jason.

These opening lines offer a succinct contextualization of the events which will unfold in the play, as they explain how the Argonautic quest for the Golden Fleece brought Medea to Greece. In the eyes of the Nurse, the entire campaign is to be regretted, a fact expressed by the unattainable wish following εἶθ' ὄφελε (1). The glorious exploits of the Argonauts are indeed conveyed in imagery of forceful transformation, binding, and cutting. I will argue that this imagery can be understood in terms of *metis*, designed to portray Medea as in a state of ἀπορία, “impasse” (362), brought about by this Argonautic *metis*, and anticipating Medea’s reaction by a similar *metis*.

The very first lines of the play articulate a dynamic image of the Argo “soaring through” (διαπτάσθαι, 1) the Symplegades. As Boedeker (1997: 139) has argued, it is quite possible that Euripides was the first to apply the term “Symplegades” (literally “they who clash together”) to the Clashing Rocks already known in the *Odyssey*.⁴¹³ The violent clashing together of the rocks is, however, forever halted by the Argo’s successful “soaring through”.⁴¹⁴ By irreversibly separating (“soaring through”

⁴¹³ See also Mastrorarde (2002: *ad loc.*). The Homeric term was Πλαγκταί (*Od.* 12.61), but Wandering rather than Clashing Rocks might have been referred to. See Page (1938: *ad loc.*) and Heubeck and Hoekstra (1988: *ad Od.* 12.55-72).

⁴¹⁴ The lasting consequence of the Argo sailing past is also mentioned at Pind. *P.* 4.210-11. Luschnig (2007: 5) interprets the word order – the Argo is separated from its epithet, while the Symplegades are placed alongside their epithet – as anticipating the shattering of the Argo into parts, referred to by Medea at the end of the play (*Med.* 1387).

[*δια-πτάσθαι*]) the two rocks whose main quality is their inevitable clashing together, and by thereby ‘transforming’ moving entities into mere immobile rocks, the Argo achieves the impossible: it connects things not connected hitherto, namely East and West. Similar transformational imagery can be found in the second description, that of the building of the Argo. As the Symplegades were separated by the Argo, thus the pine trees are separated (*τμηθεῖσα*, 4) from their trunk and fall (*πεσεῖν*, 3) to the ground in order to provide oars for the Argonauts. One might argue that the image of the cut pine tree resembles that of the separated rocks; the products of the cut trees, the Argo’s oars which are constructed from them, will indeed later connect East and West. The Argo is hence represented as itself the object of forceful transformation through separation (the trees from their stem) and construction (oars), but also able to transform in its turn the Symplegades into immobile rocks.

These two images of strong transformation demonstrate the Nurse’s particular view of the Argonautic quest: a heroic pan-Hellenic quest into unknown territory is expressed in terms of forceful transformation, connecting things which ought to be separate (East and West; the oars for the Argo), and separating things which ought to be connected (the Symplegades; the trees used for the Argo’s oars). It is as if, through her unattainable wish, the Nurse attempts to undo the Argonautic achievements – but to no avail, as she knows: because the Symplegades were actually separated, not only the Golden Fleece was brought to Greece, but also Medea. Indeed, the initial Argonautic imagery anticipates Medea’s forceful removal from her fatherland to Greece. Though

Flying is not an unusual way to describe a sailing ship: Page (1938: *ad loc.*) specifies that only warships were described as such. See also Mastronarde (2002: *ad loc.*). Here, the term might carry an additional meaning: in Apollonius’ *Argonautica* 2.329-31, the Argo is only able to ‘fly’ in between the Symplegades because a dove has been able to fly past them first; the Euripidean flying metaphor might well allude to that version of the Argonautic story, if it predated Euripides.

Medea is qualified by means of active verbs (ἔπλευσε, 7 and also κτανεῖν πείσσα, 9), her actions are explained as caused by external agent, for ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ' Ἰάσονος (8).⁴¹⁵ The imagery suggested by the participle ἐκπλαγεῖσα is similar to the cutting imagery in the descriptions of the Symplegades and the pine tree. As the Symplegades were separated and the pine trees were cut from their roots, Medea's θυμός is “struck away” (ἐκ-πλαγεῖσα) from its centre, “driven out of [its] senses by a sudden shock”.⁴¹⁶ Indeed, Boedeker (1997: 139) notes that the participle is based on the same verb as the name of the Symplegades, namely πλήσσω, “I strike” (respectively with the prefixes ἐκ- and συμ- added).⁴¹⁷ The Argo's heroic quest has thus transformed the Symplegades and Medea: by separating them (the Symplegades from each other and Medea's *thumos* from its centre), it has bound them (i.e. made the Symplegades stationary and bound Medea to Jason through marriage).⁴¹⁸ I propose that this transformational imagery at the beginning of the *Medea* can be understood in terms of *metis* – even though Euripides does not mention the term.

Through the specific descriptions of the Argo, the Nurse draws particular attention to its navigational ability and to its quality as a piece of carpentry, for the two elements of the quest highlighted in particular are the Argo “soaring through” the Symplegades and the oars being made from trees. Detienne and Vernant have argued persuasively that navigation and carpentry are crafts associated with *metis*. Navigation,

⁴¹⁵ Luschnig (2007: 181) similarly argues that the word order suggests that, though Medea acts, she is in fact caught up in the circumstances.

⁴¹⁶ *LSJ ad* ἐκπλήσσω.

⁴¹⁷ Perhaps one might even go so far as to suggest that Euripides changed the name of the Clashing Rocks for this precise parallel.

⁴¹⁸ Ironically, near the end of the play, Medea predicts that Jason will die πεπληγμένος, “struck” (1387) by a beam from the Argo, indicating that his treatment of the Symplegades and Medea will be imposed upon him. See also Luschnig (2007: 179).

the skill of a ship's pilot, involves the ability to "plot against the wind, to be forever on the alert, [and] to foresee the most favourable opportunity for action." Confronted with an ever-changing sea, "the pilot can only control it by demonstrating that he himself is similarly polymorphic."⁴¹⁹ The construction of the Argo from pine trees constitutes another manifestation of *metis*, this time connected with carpentry:⁴²⁰ as the trees "furnished" the heroes "with oars", one might argue that they were 'transformed' into oars through the art of carpentry. Indeed, Athena, one of the chief goddesses endowed with *metis*, traditionally helped with the construction and navigation of the Argo.⁴²¹ The cunning skills of carpentry and navigation are represented as enabling the Argonauts to overcome the danger posed by the Symplegades. In short, the entire opening passage conveys an image of the Argo as a symbol of *metis*: able to transform itself (trees into oars), it can navigate its way past obstacles (through the navigational skills of the ship's pilot), binding others (namely the Symplegades). As the Symplegades were overcome through *metis*, it can be argued that Medea too was brought to Greece through cunning: the Argonautic *metis* transformed her, for her *thumos* was ἐκπλαγῆϊσα, "struck out of its senses" (8). Through the forceful cutting of the pines and the separation of the Symplegades, Medea's *thumos* too is cut away from its normal place and bound to the Argonauts, Jason in particular, through ἔρωσ.

Though the term *metis* is not used in this passage, I propose that the language of binding and cutting, as well as the references to carpentry and navigation, activated the audience's awareness of the semantic field of *metis*. Cunning intelligence was indeed

⁴¹⁹ Detienne and Vernant (1978: 225).

⁴²⁰ Detienne and Vernant (1978: 215).

⁴²¹ e.g. Ps.-Lyc. *Alex.* 3, Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.18-19, Ps.-Apollod. 1.9.16. Athena is also represented alongside Jason on early vase paintings, particularly *LIMC* "Jason" nos. 32 and 36, which might refer to the cunning aspect of the quest.

already one of the qualities associated with the success of the Argonautic quest in the mythological tradition, not merely through the figure of Medea, but also through Jason's own *metis*. Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, for example, already made reference to the Aeolid cunning and to Jason's own *metis* in killing the serpent who guards the Golden Fleece.⁴²² Moreover, *metis* will be alluded to throughout the rest of the play by the repetition of key terms associated with it, such as δόλος (391, 413, 783), τέχνη (322, 369, 382, 402), and ποικίλος (300, 1159) – see below for further discussion. Medea's bond, furthermore, imposed upon her by the Argonautic *metis*, is also alluded to through the terms ἄπορος (362) and ἀμήχανος (392, 447, 552, and 647), both of which indicate her lack of physical and mental movement in the first half of the play.⁴²³ Through her manipulation of the key figures in the play, however, Medea will be able to create an opening in her ἀπορία and take revenge.

Indeed, the active verbs by means of which Medea is described anticipate her power. Her *thumos* may be ἐκπλαγεῖσα, but she is still capable of action: not only is she said to “sail” to Greece (7), but she persuades Pelias' daughters to kill their father through trickery,⁴²⁴ an initial sign of Medea's own cunning capacities. Through Medea's murder of Pelias, the Argonautic cycle itself was finished, as the person ultimately responsible for the quest (6) was punished. The end of a cycle is also suggested through the Nurse's description of Medea's position in Corinth: the continuity conveyed by the present tense of κατῴκει (“she is living”, 10) implies an

⁴²² Respectively Pind. *P.* 4.71-72 and *P.* 4.249-50; see pp. 1.187 and 1.190 for a discussion.

⁴²³ See Luschnig (2007: 10).

⁴²⁴ Easterling (1977: 81) suggests that the initial description of Medea portrays her “as a victim, even if also as a potential criminal.” See also Foley (2001: 257) on the portrayal of the “contradictory elements of Medea's character.”

end to Medea's constant relocations. The two participles describing Medea, moreover – ἀνδάνουσα, “pleasing”, and συμφέρουσα, “agreeing with”⁴²⁵ (11 and 13) – establish her as at peace at both levels of *polis* and family.⁴²⁶ Having been forcefully torn away from her normal place (i.e. her natal family), the Nurse points out that Medea has been able to replace that bond with another, namely the family which she and Jason have created. The unattainable wish through which all this information has been conveyed, however, anticipates that this peace has not lasted: now (νῦν δέ, 16), Jason has betrayed (προδοῦς, 17) Medea by marrying Creon's daughter, thereby destroying the bond of Medea's conjugal home. The bond between Medea and Jason was indeed of a specific nature, as her father was not present to acknowledge the marriage. Hence the oaths were taken between Medea and Jason rather than between husband and father of the bride. It is thus towards Medea personally that Jason has broken his oath (20-23).⁴²⁷ This cutting of the bond has made Medea aware of her situation as isolated captive: she is described as desolate (20-28), and is compared to a rock and a wave (28-29). These images not only convey Medea's obstinacy and what Page (1938: *ad loc.*) calls her “cruelty” in refusing to listen to her friends, but also reveal an underlying *raison d'être* for her behaviour, as both images allude to the Argonautic myth.⁴²⁸ First, the rock evokes the Symplegades, powerful guardians between East and West immobilized by the Argonautic *metis*. Secondly, the wave, as part of the sea, calls to mind the sea on which the Argonautic journey began, the sea tamed by the meticulous carpentry which

⁴²⁵ The precise meaning of this participle is disputed: see e.g. Mastronarde (2002: *ad loc.*).

⁴²⁶ Her relationship with the *polis* as a whole, however, also hints at her masculine characteristics too. See e.g. Foley (2001: 257-71) and Mastronarde (2002: *ad loc.*) for Medea's masculinity.

⁴²⁷ See Foley (2001: 259).

⁴²⁸ See Boedeker (1997: 129) for the general association of the images of rock and sea with the Argonautic myth.

constructed the mighty Argo's oars. The appearance of these particular images in Medea's description reinforces the idea from the play's opening passage that Medea, similar to the Symplegades and the sea, has been forced into submission by Argonautic *metis*.⁴²⁹ As a consequence, the metaphors not only provide insight into Medea's behaviour, but also explain it: her βαρεῖα ... φρήν ("heavy heart", 38) has been caused by her imprisonment by the Argonautic *metis*.

In summary, the Nurse's perspective of Medea's present predicament is of a particular nature: while offering the audience a summary of the quest which brought Medea to Corinth, she also conveys a particular image of the manner in which this was achieved. By means of the imagery of forceful transformation (separating and binding), the Nurse represents the Argonautic quest as relying on *metis*, and consequently Medea's arrival in Greece as caused by *metis*. This is pivotal in our understanding of the events which unfold in the play. Rather than as a woman reacting to her husband's new marriage by destroying everyone he holds dear, I argue that the audience is in fact invited to view Medea not merely as a figure of *metis* – for this image was well-known from the earlier tradition – but indeed as one who has suffered the worst fate of a cunning figure, namely being bound by superior *metis*. Though Jason's *metis* had been acknowledged in earlier literature, its positive consequences had received most of the attention, namely the success of the Argonautic myth. Euripides, by contrast, explores its negative effect. Indeed, now that the bond between Medea and Jason has been broken, and Medea's *thumos* is no longer ἐκπλαγεῖσα through love for Jason, the

⁴²⁹ At line 92, Medea is compared to a bull in the way in which she looks at the children. This image too provides insight into the cause of her present predicament. For Medea's bull-eyed glance associates her with her father Aeëtes' fire-breathing bulls which were yoked by Jason, aided by Medea's magic. Like the bulls, Medea has been bound by Jason. See Boedeker (1997: 131) for a general association of this image with the Argonautic myth.

Nurse anticipates that this cunning figure will react in an appropriate manner, namely through *metis*. I will argue that Medea, having manipulated the chorus, Creon, Aegeus, and eventually even Jason, into submitting to her requests, takes revenge through both *metis* and magic, binding her victims in death and Jason in familial isolation.

Even when she is still wailing inside the house, Medea's cunning is already attempting to find a way out: the Nurse fears she might be hatching (βουλεύσει, 37) a new plan, whether to kill herself, or Jason, Creon and his daughter, or her own children. Medea is heard calling upon the oaths with which she bound Jason to her (μεγάλοις ὄρκοις / ἐνδησαμένα, "having bound him with great oaths", 161-62). By leaving the confines of the house which she shared with Jason (ἐξῆλθον δόμων, "I have come out of the house", 214), Medea symbolically breaks the marital ζυγόν ("yoke", 242) which bound her to Jason – a connection she does not have to break, as she might have stayed in Corinth as the mother of his children.⁴³⁰ From this moment onward, Medea's revenge will rage forward with great force: as the chorus imply, πένθος γὰρ μεγάλως τόδ' ὀρμᾶται, "this grief is indeed raging strongly" (183). When she emerges out of the house, Medea does not appear to be out of her senses any more, and her plan for revenge is virtually fully fledged; step by step, her *metis* will overcome every obstacle, until she can achieve her revenge in the same way as she was brought to Greece: by binding her enemies through forceful transformation, in other words, through *metis*.

⁴³⁰ Jason refers to this at 448-49.

*The Personae of Medea*⁴³¹

In order to attain her revenge, Medea displays a variety of *personae* of women in her manipulation of the chorus, Creon, Aegeus, and Jason. The greater part of this argument has been put forward by other scholars,⁴³² but no emphasis has been placed on Medea's use of *metis*:⁴³³ Medea, indeed, does not merely use rhetoric, but adapts herself to every new opponent, making use of their weakness and transforming her rhetoric and approach accordingly. This is a typical element of *metis* on which I will elaborate presently.

Roused by Medea's wailing, the chorus of Corinthian women approaches her house. They sympathize deeply with Medea before they have even spoken with her: they understand her situation of δῦστανος / ... νύμφα, "unhappy wife" (149-50), express the wish that Zeus will help her see justice done (157), and repeat the Nurse's description of Jason as a traitor (206). It is indeed the chorus's unprompted sympathy which persuades Medea to come out of the house, and when Medea asks for their silence regarding her revenge, they promise it readily (267). It appears, however, that

⁴³¹ I use the term "persona" as used by Sourvinou-Inwood (1997). I disagree with Sourvinou-Inwood, however, on the application of the *personae* of "normal", "good", and "bad" woman to Medea in the play. In Sourvinou-Inwood's discussion, Euripides' portrayal of Medea appears to swing from one to the other *persona*, which downplays the complexity of Euripides' Medea. For example, Sourvinou-Inwood (1997: 256) argues that the nurse's first description of Medea "distances Medea negatively from a "normal woman" model in three ways: first, she is a foreigner from Colchis; second, she was struck by love of Jason [...]; and finally and most strongly negative, she persuaded Pelias' daughters to kill their father." As my discussion has already revealed, one might rather argue that Medea is primarily represented as a victim of the Argonautic *metis*, but one who has in the past displayed cunning behaviour, which anticipates the events to come in the play. While I do not disagree with Sourvinou-Inwood's essential argument for this particular passage, I do consider her analysis as simplifying Medea's complexity.

⁴³² e.g. Easterling (1977) and Foley (2001: 258-62).

⁴³³ Segal (1996: 17) speaks of Medea's use of "guile". That is the only allusion to *metis* I have been able to find in the secondary works I have read.

the chorus' promise – which entails rather more than mere sympathy – is only established on account of the subtle tale of parallels and distinctions between herself and the chorus which Medea weaves in their first encounter, based on their shared experience as most wretched (ἀθλιώτατος, 231) women. While they have in common the necessity of living with the husband they are given, the Corinthian women have their natal families to return to if their husbands tire of them, whereas Medea does not (230-266). Her speech about the sufferings of women serves to create a connection with the chorus and manipulate them into becoming silent allies in her revenge. It is only later in the play, when Medea announces the intended murder of her children, that the chorus object (811-13). By that stage, however, they are reduced to watching silently as Medea's vengeance with its unspeakable consequences unfolds. Medea's rhetorical abilities can thus arguably be interpreted as *metis*: finding herself in an ἀπορία – she has no more connections with either her natal or her conjugal family and is thus alone – she manipulates the chorus, hence acquiring allies, by taking advantage of their feelings as wretched women. Taking on the *persona* of the most wretched woman, she uses their weakness against them in order to acquire their silence. In her subsequent confrontations with men, Medea applies the same approach.

Having cunningly acquired allies to break her isolated situation, Medea finds herself in a second ἀπορία (362) when king Creon banishes her from the land. Creon is represented as a somewhat dogmatic ruler, certainly not in possession of *metis*: he does not “cloak his words” (παραμπίσχειν λόγους, 282) when speaking to Medea, and tells her that he fears she might harm his daughter. Fully aware of her powerful abilities, Creon calls her σοφή (“clever”) and κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις (“knowledgeable

in many evil ways”) (285), and δεινός (“awesome”) (356). Seeking to prove that she is not to be feared, Medea attempts to discard this cunning (ποικίλος, 300) reputation, portraying herself instead as the victim of her education. Her charming and manipulative discourse which might have deceived the chorus, however, is recognized by Creon for what it is, making him even more resolved to exile her (316-17). On the verge of defeat, Medea eventually prostrates herself before him. In a stichomythic petition, she appeals to a range of Creon’s emotions: her appeal to him as suppliant (326), refugee from her fatherland (328), and victim of love (330), are nevertheless repudiated. This petition might give an impression of a desperate Medea, but it is in fact a construction which allows her to probe Creon for his weakness. After a few attempts, she understands his highest priority, more important than his fatherland: his children (329). Medea immediately uses this weakness against him and changes the direction of her request: not wanting to stay in the land any more, she takes on the *persona* of caring mother and asks for one day to make provisions for her children (340-47); fully aware that he is making a mistake (350), Creon accedes to Medea’s request. Upon Creon’s departure, Medea is quick to reveal to the chorus that she only stooped to flattering Creon in order to gain time to avenge herself (368-69).

Before Jason’s appearance, Medea urges herself not to suffer mockery from Jason and to set her revenge in motion (404-06):

οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ’ ὀφλεῖν
τοῖς Σισυφείοις τοῖσδ’ Ἰάσονος γάμοις,
γεγῶσαν ἐσθλοῦ πατρὸς Ἡλίου τ’ ἄπο.

You must not suffer laughter
from this Sisyphian marriage of Jason’s,

you who are the offspring of a noble father, Helios.

This description of her struggle with Jason is significant in Medea's construction of the coming *agôn*. First, while Jason will later align himself with Olympian Aphrodite (527), Medea rather perceives the conflict as one between Titan forces: as Helios was the son of the Titan Hyperion, Sisyphus was a son of Aeolus and thereby a descendant of the Titan Prometheus (see Appendix 7). Rather than a battle between good (Olympian) and evil (Titan), Medea thus construes a struggle between equally ambiguous forces. Secondly, Jason's "Sisyphean marriage" refers to Jason's marriage to a descendant of Sisyphus, namely Creon's daughter.⁴³⁴ Jason, however, is also related to Sisyphus.⁴³⁵ That the latter was a figure archetypally connected with *metis* as early as the Homeric epics,⁴³⁶ suggests that "Sisyphean marriage" might also be read as "cunning marriage". It should not come as a surprise that Jason is represented as a wielder of *metis*, for he is captain of the Argonauts, whose quest has been described in terms of *metis* at the outset of the play. Moreover, Jason's *metis* had been acknowledged in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* already. By marrying the Corinthian princess, Jason has indeed employed *metis* to gain a way out of his own ἀπορία, namely his isolation and lack of means and status. The following *agôn* between Jason and Medea can hence be analyzed as a battle of *metis* – the only one in this play, as Medea and Jason are the only two characters endowed with cunning. In the *agôn*, Medea and Jason's viewpoints on the Argonautic story are diametrically opposed, both attempting to detect the weaknesses in the other's arguments in order to gain the upper hand (465-575). Where Medea sees her own hand in Jason's acquisition of the Fleece,

⁴³⁴ See Holland (2003: appendix).

⁴³⁵ See Holland (2003: 264) and appendix 7 of this thesis.

⁴³⁶ See my discussion on the *Corinthiaca* earlier in this chapter.

Jason sees Aphrodite's help, arguing that Medea was in fact forced into submission (ἠνάγκασεν, 530) by Eros' arrows. In reply to Medea taking the credit for all the heroic feats in the quest, Jason compares himself to the helmsman of a ship trying to steer away from a storm (523-25). This metaphor looks back at the Nurse's allusion to the cunning of the Argo's navigation in the opening passage of the play, and applies Jason's navigational *metis* to the *agôn* with Medea. By establishing himself as a cunning master of language, Jason attempts to take control of the present situation as he did of his ship. The chorus and Medea, however, are not persuaded by Jason's "sophistical"⁴³⁷ rhetoric: the chorus insist he dressed up his words (ἐκόσμησας, 576), Medea that he cloaked them (περιστελεῖν, 582). The *agôn* ends without a victor, and Jason exits.

Medea's conversation with Aegeus is in some respects the opposite of her *agôn* with Jason. Addressing her in friendly terms (663-64), the Athenian king is eager to receive Medea's counsel regarding his inability to have children, and his description of her as σοφή (677) is respectful. Like Creon, however, he too is drawn into Medea's plotting by means of her cunning persuasion. First, she highlights her reputation of being σοφή by making stichomythic additions to his account of the oracle concerning his childlessness, demonstrating keen interest. Then, when he is about to leave, her tears stall him (689); this gives her the chance to elaborate on her *persona* of 'poor woman suffering injustice', and explain the dire situation in which she finds herself. Finally, she draws him in by prostrating herself before him and promising him children by means of her magical arts (708-18). This final expression of her goodwill is enough

⁴³⁷ Easterling (1977: 184).

to convince Aegeus that he is right to offer her an oath not to hand her over to her enemies if she can make her own way to Athens (719-30). Medea's communication with Aegeus is quite similar – albeit on friendlier terms – to the one she had with Creon earlier on. In both cases, she presents different aspects of her character in order to find a weakness which she might use: in Creon's case, to gain time to plot her revenge and in Aegeus' case, to find a place to go to when she has accomplished her plan. For both men, their love of children is their weakness, as Easterling (1977: 185) has suggested. The acquisition of a safe harbour (Athens) signifies that Medea no longer finds herself in ἀπορία: having found a way out, she can now set her plan in motion, not only of killing the princess, but also her own children (772-810). The only aspect missing to put the plan into action is a means to give the princess access to the poisoned gifts of the crown and the robe. When Medea represents herself to Jason as a foolish woman who has come to understand what is best for her (i.e. Jason's marriage), he is easily persuaded (908), and promises to have the children bring the princess her gifts so they can stay (941). Indeed, Jason is sure he can persuade the princess himself (944), again drawing attention to his own cunning capacities. This time, however, they will not be to his glory but to his destruction.

Medea, the Argonauts, and the Gods

Having used cunning rhetoric against her enemies in order to set the stage for her revenge, I propose that Medea then also uses *metis* in its execution. Indeed, Medea employs a physically forceful *metis* similar to the Argonautic cunning used to bring her to Greece. The cloak and crown which she offers to Creon's daughter can be analyzed

as objects of *metis*. The cloak is called ποικίλος, “many-faceted” (1159) – a typical epithet of cunning⁴³⁸ – as it hides the identity of its wearer; the crown is described as a “bond” (σύνδεσμα, 1193) and may represent the circle (the ultimate weapon of *metis*)⁴³⁹ binding its wearer: the princess cannot remove it from her head. Both objects are not only guileful in their appearance inasmuch as they are poisons disguised as adornments, but also transformative, as they realize a horrendous transformation in the princess’s appearance: from changing colour and trembling legs, she starts foaming at the mouth, until ultimately, the flesh drops from her bones (1168-202). The latter horror is compared to the falling of resin from a pine (πέυκινος) torch (1200-02): this might have reminded the audience of the image of the pine tree (πέυκη, 4) being cut at the outset of the play. Through the repetition of the element of the pine tree, Medea’s revenge is construed as revisiting the Argonautic myth. This time, however, Medea is the one who does the cutting rather than the one being cut away from her fatherland, and Creon’s daughter – as the new victim of Jason’s *metis* – is now ‘cut’ from life.

Medea also re-enacts the Argo’s journey through the Symplegades by entering Jason’s house through the double door in order to kill their children (1080), as Hopman (2008: 161) argues. While the Argo’s cunning passage through the Symplegades effected their immobility and anticipated the penetration of Medea and the birth of the children, however, Medea, through her penetration of the doors to Jason’s house and the murder of the children, symbolically reactivates the Symplegades and undoes the

⁴³⁸ See p. 1.56 of this thesis, and Detienne and Vernant (1978: 19).

⁴³⁹ See p. 1.56.

Argonautic journey.⁴⁴⁰ In short, Medea makes use of *metis* not merely in the approach of her revenge but also in its execution, and indeed uses a cunning intelligence not merely resembling the Argonautic *metis*, but in fact surpassing and thereby nullifying it.

It has often been asked why Medea had to kill her children as well as the princess.⁴⁴¹ In the play itself, the chorus indeed sympathize with Medea's murder of Creon's daughter, but cannot fathom her intention to murder her own children.⁴⁴² Many reasons can be given: the children were in danger of being killed by the Corinthians anyway, they would have impinged on Medea's future relationship with Aegeus, tradition demanded it, and it was of course the most effective way of immobilizing and thereby destroying Jason entirely. All these reasons coexist in the play, but the latter notion is supported when considering Medea's particular execution of her revenge. For she does not only kill Jason's present wife, but also his children. I will argue that this revenge can be interpreted as imitating the cunning of the Titans and Olympians in their struggle for supremacy. A few words must be said at this point regarding the function of the gods in the play. I have already mentioned the Olympian and Titan gods in my discussion of Jason's Sisyphean marriage (p. 1.211-12). Since Kovacs' 1993 article on "Zeus in Euripides' *Medea*", the role of the gods in the play has been the subject of

⁴⁴⁰ Rehm (2002: 258) argues that Medea, by prophesying Jason's death by being struck (πεπληγμένος, 1386-87) on the head by a piece of the Argo, "closes off once and for all the distant space beyond the Symplegades". This statement is not at variance with my argument: Jason is indeed overcome by the same *metis* with which he brought Medea to Greece. For Medea, however, I argue that the ἀπορία has been overcome: by effectively nullifying the Argonautic quest, I propose that she undoes the bind of the Symplegades and reactivates them – symbolically rather than literally. See Rehm (2002: 254) on the metaphor of the Symplegades in relation to childbirth.

⁴⁴¹ e.g. by Easterling (1977: 177).

⁴⁴² Respectively at 1231-32 (rejoicing in the princess' death) and 811-13 (urging Medea not to kill her children).

close scrutiny. Scholars such as Segal (1996: 23ff.)⁴⁴³ have convincingly rejected Kovacs' argument that Medea is represented as an instrument of Zeus' will, who punishes Jason for breaking his oath and is punished in her turn for the murder of Apsyrtus. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge the many references to the gods throughout the play. It is striking that there is an almost equal number of references to Titan deities as to Olympian gods; the majority of references to Titan deities are Medea's, but she calls upon the Olympian gods the same number of times.⁴⁴⁴ She and the chorus, moreover, combine both groups of gods in their invocations.⁴⁴⁵ Throughout the play, there are also many references to the gods in general,⁴⁴⁶ which, in the light of the frequent mention of both Olympian and Titan gods, suggests that no distinction is made between the two groups. Indeed, Medea at least does not consider her confrontation with Jason as one between Titan and Olympian forces, as I have argued earlier. It also appears that both groups of gods condone if not support Medea's punishment of Jason:⁴⁴⁷ at the end of the play, Jason is left without offspring or bride, while Medea is triumphant in her grandfather Helios' chariot on the roof of her house (1321-22). One might argue, as Kovacs (1993: 59-60) has done, that punishment awaits Medea too: the chorus allude to a possible punishment while Medea is killing her children inside the house (1269-70). Though emotional torment will indeed haunt Medea for the rest of her life as she herself realizes (1362), she does ultimately escape at least physical punishment through the – admittedly indirect – help of her grandfather

⁴⁴³ See also Mastrorarde (2002: 33-34).

⁴⁴⁴ She calls upon the Titan gods Hecate (397), Helios (406, 746, 764), Gê (746), and the Titans as the old gods (493). She invokes the Olympian gods Themis (here a daughter of Zeus, 169) (160), Artemis (160), Zeus (332, 516, 1352), and Hermes (759).

⁴⁴⁵ e.g. at 148 and 764.

⁴⁴⁶ e.g. at 22, 747, 915, 1013, 1270, 1333, 1372, 1391, and 1416.

⁴⁴⁷ See Foley (2001: 248) for the idea that the gods support Medea's revenge.

in the form of his chariot.⁴⁴⁸ It is thus reasonable to argue that both Titan and Olympian deities condone Medea's revenge on Jason; just as no distinction is made between Greeks and "barbarians" in this play,⁴⁴⁹ there is none between Olympians and Titans.

In this light, Medea's elimination not only of the mother of Jason's future children, but also of his existing offspring, puts one in mind of the divine dynastic struggle for power as narrated in Hesiod's *Theogony*, particularly of the actions of Cronus and Zeus.⁴⁵⁰ First, Medea's murder of the princess is similar in approach to Zeus' swallowing of Metis, as this murder prevents the birth of any subsequent children. Secondly, Medea's murder of her children parallels Cronus' swallowing of his children, as this stops their development into adults. By swallowing – and thereby binding – their kin, the two divine kings attempted to stop the cycle of female procreation, and render their rule supreme and everlasting. Jason, however, is not divine, so Medea knows that ending his line in every way will not bring him supreme power, but bind him in isolation and death.⁴⁵¹ Medea cannot be equated with Zeus or Cronus either, though, but I would argue that she can be seen to act as a second Metis. While Metis was swallowed and hence bound inescapably by Zeus, however, Medea, first bound by Jason's Argonautic cunning, is as it were regurgitated when he leaves her. Therefore, her own *metis* is unleashed and she takes revenge on the man who bound her by combining Zeus' and Cronus' cunning stratagems. Not only does she put a stop to his *metis* (his Sisyphian marriage), but she also takes control of her own *metis*

⁴⁴⁸ See Segal (1996: 18 and 41).

⁴⁴⁹ Except by Jason (536, 1330) and Medea (256, 591). See Rehm (2002: 259).

⁴⁵⁰ See chapter 4 for the functions of Zeus and Cronus in the *Theogony*.

⁴⁵¹ That Jason might marry again and father more children does not feature in the play, and need therefore not be presumed. Medea's final victory on top of the house indeed indicates Jason's destruction. Her prediction of his future does not entail a new marriage or children, but an un-heroic death by means of a piece of wood from the Argo (1386-88).

and procreative power (by breaking her bond with him through the murder of their children). With the gods on her side, Medea is indeed capable of attaining the Nurse's unattainable wish expressed at the beginning of the play: by employing superior *metis*, imitating her enemies' cunning and using their weaknesses against them, she is able to "cut" her victims from their roots and symbolically reactivate the Symplegades. By imposing a fatal transformation on the princess and her father, and inflicting lethal cuts on her children, she binds Jason in isolation, the state which he had imposed on her at the outset of the play.

Medea's status at the end of the play – whether victorious or destroyed, human or divine – is highly contested. Foley's (2001: 268) term "dehumanization" summarizes the process most appropriately. On the one hand, I propose that Medea's divine mode of exacting vengeance, combined with her reliance on Helios' chariot and her statements regarding her children's cult⁴⁵² and Jason's fate (1378-88), all point towards her status as quasi-divine.⁴⁵³ On the other hand, the recurrence of the images of rock and iron, and the comparison of Medea with a lioness and Scylla (respectively 1279 and 1342-43) point to her sub-human nature.⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, by imitating the Argonautic *metis* – as a victim imitates her oppressors – Medea ultimately appears to have destroyed her own humanity, as she destroyed what she considered to be her Argonautic enemies.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² See Dunn (1994) for a discussion of the function of Medea's statement regarding the children's cult in the play.

⁴⁵³ Segal (1996: 22) calls attention to Medea's status between human and quasi-divine; Boedeker (1997: 128) calls her a goddess; Foley (2001: 267) calls her an "amoral deity".

⁴⁵⁴ I use the term sub-human merely in contrast with super-human, in order to contrast Medea's human status with her divine (super-human) powers and yet sub-human (animal) behaviour in her murder of her children.

⁴⁵⁵ This point is made by Foley (2001: 266) in relation to the theme of gender: "Euripides [...] seems to imply that the oppressed, by being trapped into imitating their oppressors, can in the end only tragically silence what should have been their own true [...] voice, destroy themselves, and confirm an unjust status quo."

Both levels of super- and sub-human coexist, and underscore Medea's ambivalent nature.

Medea's Magic

Having so far explored Medea's complex use of *metis* in the play, I will now focus on the representation of Medea's magic. Medea's pharmaceutical abilities were well known in pre-Euripidean literature, at least from Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* onward but possibly as early as the *Nostoi*, as this chapter has argued. In Euripides' *Medea*, however, there are relatively few explicit references to Medea's magical abilities. Creon alludes to her clever skills in general: σοφή πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις, "you are intelligent and knowledgeable in many evils" (285). Further in the play, Medea calls upon Hecate, goddess of witchcraft,⁴⁵⁶ to be her accomplice (396-97), and hints at her capacities by referring to the fire-breathing bulls, against which she provided Jason with a potion (478). Aegeus is promised an end to his childlessness by means of Medea's *pharmaka* (718), and the crown and cloak offered to Creon's daughter are, of course, imbued with deadly *pharmaka* (789). Knox (1979: 214) has argued that Euripides does not depict Medea primarily as a witch, and the scarceness of references to her supernatural abilities, combined with the lack of magic-associated vocabulary, indeed suggests this. Euripides, nonetheless, does not ignore Medea's magical capacities entirely. I propose that he links any references to magic with Medea's *metis*. Rather than downplaying her magical abilities, the poet thereby further intensifies her dangerous potential. This is most obvious in the conversation between

⁴⁵⁶ See n. 39 on p. 1.27.

the chorus and Medea after Medea's confrontation with Creon, when she deliberates whether to take a direct or indirect approach to her revenge. I quote the passage in full (leaving out lines 399-400; the lines regarding Sisyphus, which were quoted above, are repeated, as they are vital in the context) in order to show the full extent of the fusing of vocabulary (389-409):

μείνας' οὖν ἔτι σμικρὸν χρόνον,
ἦν μὲν τις ἡμῖν πύργος ἀσφαλῆς φανῆι,
δόλωι μέτειμι τόνδε καὶ σιγῆι φόνον.
ἦν δ' ἐξελαύνηι ξυμφορὰ μ' **ἀμήχανος**,
αὐτὴ ξίφος λαβοῦσα, κεῖ μέλλω θανεῖν,
κτενῶ σφε, τόλμης δ' εἶμι πρὸς τὸ καρτερόν.
οὐ γὰρ μὰ τὴν δέσποιναν ἦν ἐγὼ σέβω
μάλιστα πάντων καὶ ξυνεργὸν εἰλόμην,
Ἐκάτην, μυχοῖς ναίουσαν ἐστίας ἐμῆς,
χαίρων τις αὐτῶν τοῦμόν ἀλγυνεῖ κέαρ. [...] **ὦν ἐπίστασαι**,
Μήδεια, βουλεύουσα καὶ **τεχνωμένη**
ἔρπ' ἐς τὸ δεινόν. νῦν ἀγῶν εὐψυχίας.
ὄρᾱις ἅ πάσχεις; οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ' ὀφλεῖν
τοῖς **Σισυφείοις** τοῖσδ' Ἰάσονος γάμοις,
γεγῶσαν ἐσθλοῦ πατρὸς Ἡλίου τ' ἄπο.
ἐπίστασαι δέ. πρὸς δὲ καὶ πεφύκαμεν
γυναῖκες, ἐς μὲν ἔσθλ' **ἀμηχανώταται**,
κακῶν δὲ πάντων τέκτονες σοφώταται.

I will therefore wait a short while,
and if some safe fortress appears to me,
by craft I will pursue this murder, and through silence.
But if an unfortunate impasse forces me away from that [i.e. plan],
I myself will take the sword and, even if I am to die,

will kill them, and go to the utmost verge of courage.
No! By the mistress whom I worship
above all and have taken as my accomplice,
Hecate, who dwells in the centre of my house,
none of them will rejoice and grieve my heart. [...]
But come, spare nothing of what you know,
Medea, while you plan and plot.
Steadily approach the dread deed. Now I worry about courage.
Do you see what you endure? You must not suffer laughter
from this Sisyphean marriage of Jason's,
you who are the offspring of a noble father, Helios.
You know [i.e. the plan]. Moreover, we were born
women, incapable of good,
but the cleverest engineers of every evil.

In this passage, terms traditionally belonging to the semantic field of *metis* are fused with Medea's magical capacities. At the level of cunning, Medea reflects on any potential impasse (ἀμήχανος, 392 and again at 408) in which she might find herself. After all, she has been bound by the Argonautic cunning before and Jason's Aeolid *metis* might yet overcome hers again: that she describes her struggle in terms of a battle between two cunning families – that of Sisyphus and that of Helios – emphasizes this. She is nevertheless confident of her own cunning skills and refers to her δόλος (391) and τέχνη (402). Only if she cannot find a way out (392) will she take recourse to violence rather than stealth. Amid these references to cunning, the goddess Hecate is mentioned, mistress of Medea's hearth. Though Medea describes her approach to revenge as cunning, her mention of Hecate strongly anticipates the manner in which the revenge will be executed, namely through magic, as Hecate was never associated with

cunning but, from the fifth century BCE onward, represented as the key goddess of witchcraft. Her mere name would have triggered a strong association with magic with the audience. The chorus, indeed, acknowledge Medea's magical powers in the first stasimon which follows directly onto Medea's speech (410-11):

ἄνω ποταμῶν ἱερῶν χωροῦσι παγαί,
καὶ δίκαια καὶ πάντα πάλιν στρέφεται.

Upstream flow the waters of the sacred rivers,
and justice and all things turn in their stride.

The reversal of the natural order is a typical element to be found in poetic descriptions of magic (see chapter 2, pp. 1.35-36). That the chorus apply this magical *topos* to the male-dominated world as they perceive it reveals two things regarding Medea's power in her communication with the chorus. First, she has been able to manipulate the chorus into agreeing with her on the unfair fate of women. Secondly, she has also persuaded the women that she deserves their loyalty and silence because men have used their own magic to overturn the normal order of things (exemplified by the image of the rivers flowing upstream), and in order to overcome men, women will need stronger magic. By representing herself as a woman not only in possession of *metis* – which allows her to adapt to any situation – but also of external magical paraphernalia to transform others and with Hecate as ally, Medea is able to convince the chorus utterly of her ability to become the *alastor* of the female race. The destruction of her own femininity through the murder of her children, however, will stop her from becoming this. Euripides thus intertwines references to magic with Medea's cunning. Because magic is kept in the

background of the action but constantly alluded to throughout the play, the climactic murders, first of the princess and then of Medea's children, must have had a profound effect on the audience.

Indeed, in his representations of both the murder of the princess and that of the children, Euripides introduced immense innovations to the literary traditions. First, whereas Medea only used her pharmaceutical powers to Jason's benefit in the earlier tradition (as far as the extant sources suggest), in Euripides' play, her magical powers become more destructive: possibly for the first time in Greek literature, they are used against Jason rather than in his aid, and to kill rather than to heal or protect. Though the way in which Medea prepares the drugs is left unmentioned by Euripides – and Medea indeed never leaves the playing area to anoint the cloak and crown – their horrifying effect is elaborated on in tangible details by the Messenger who reports the death of Creon and his daughter (1136-230). Through the sympathy expressed by the chorus, the Nurse, and importantly, Aegeus – as he is a respected male figure as king of Athens – Euripides is able to maintain sympathy for Medea, perhaps up to the point where she states that she will kill her children. Nevertheless, Medea's destructive use of *pharmaka* brings her an enormous step closer to the image of the witch. Now that she is entirely disconnected from Jason by her own choice through the murder of the children, her lethal use of *pharmaka* renders her more frightening than she was in the pre-Euripidean tradition. To this is added Medea's deliberate murder of the children – in the earlier tradition, they appear to have been killed either through Hera's deceit (in the

Corinthiaca) or by the Corinthians.⁴⁵⁷ It appears that Medea's combined use of cunning and magic in her revenge, as well as her innovative lethal use of *pharmaka* and her premeditated murder of the children, rendered her a archetypal Other woman in the post-Euripidean tradition; in other words, a witch.

Summary

In conclusion, breaking with tradition, Euripides explores what might happen when a powerful woman, who thinks that she has been made to suffer injustice by her lover, does not merely accept her fate when he leaves her (as she might have done in the *Corinthiaca* and *Naupactica*), but strikes back. Euripides does not focus on Medea's execution of her revenge and thus on her magical powers. Instead, he initially portrays Medea as a victim of the Argonautic *metis*, and then explores her gradual organization of her revenge and hence the vast array of cunning qualities which the literary tradition had bestowed upon her. One might argue that Euripides does not actually mention the term *metis*. I propose that there is no need to: not only is Medea's name itself evocative of her cunning capacities, but certain terms connected with the semantic field of *metis* (such as δόλος, ποικίλος, τέχνη, and ἀμηχανία) frequently trigger her association with cunning throughout the play. As she is a woman with *metis*, Medea uses this tool to her own advantage and overcomes every ἀπορία by cleverly using different *personae* to manipulate those around her: to the chorus, she is the 'wretched woman among women'; to Creon, the 'loving parent'; to Aegeus, the 'wise woman' who can provide him with children; and to Jason, the 'irrational woman'. At the end of the play,

⁴⁵⁷ See earlier in this chapter and Paus. 2.3.10-11 for the *Corinthiaca*; see schol. *ad Eur. Med.* 264 for the version in which the Corinthians kill the children.

Medea has been able to reactivate the Symplegades (symbolically) and undo the Argonautic quest by destroying any evidence of her connection with Jason. To this purpose, she uses a transformative and forceful *metis* similar to the cunning intelligence used on the Argonautic quest, and combining the divine cunning of Zeus and Cronus. The combination of mortal and divine modes of *metis* anticipate Medea's ambiguous status at the end of the play. Indeed, the eradication of Jason's line has left Medea without a male guardian,⁴⁵⁸ not helpless, but with superhuman powers entirely unchecked. She has become a quasi-divine figure, yet one with demonic, sub-human features.

Though Euripides confines magic to the background of the action, Medea's gradual organization of her revenge does draw attention to her magical powers almost continually throughout the play. In Parry's (1992: 134) words, "Medea's words never quite become a spell, nor does the potent work of her *pharmaka* quite constitute a magic act. But both are too close for comfort." Indeed, Medea's innovative use of lethal *pharmaka*, as well as the separation of her status into super- and sub-human at the end of the play, and the horror of her infanticide, will be combined by the later tradition in one fearsome image of the witch.

(e) Comedy

Very little evidence on Medea remains from Classical comedy. A few comedies appear to have predated Euripides,⁴⁵⁹ but the only fragments from which information regarding Medea can be gained are from Middle Comedy. Many plays called *Medea* appear to

⁴⁵⁸ See Foley (2001: 243).

⁴⁵⁹ Deinolochus' and Epicharmus' plays, both called *Medea*. See appendix 2.

have been staged, for example by Cantharus, Antiphanes, Eubulus, and Strattis.⁴⁶⁰ Diphilus' *Peliades* might have staged Medea's deception of Pelias' daughters. All of the plays appear to be post-Euripidean, but nothing can be gained from them regarding Medea's status. In *Peace* (1013-14), a play staged ten years after Euripides' *Medea* (in 421 BCE), Aristophanes quotes two lines from the *Medea* of Melanthius, a tragic poet. The lines portray a man in anguish at the death of a woman during childbirth, who may – in the light of our knowledge of the Medea myth – be reasonably identified as Jason and his new wife, Creon's daughter. Olson (1998: *ad* 1009-15) suggests that Medea perhaps murdered Jason's new wife "with drugs ostensibly intended to ease her labour". As Melanthius is traditionally dated to the late fifth century BCE, his play probably post-dated Euripides' *Medea*. If this is so, this quotation demonstrates the influence of Euripides' play on the subsequent tradition, as Medea's use of destructive *pharmaka* might have become a more integral part of the myth.

One further fragment, from Eubulus' *Chrysis*, also indicates Euripides' influence on Medea's representation. In a speech against marriage, good wives are compared with bad ones (Eubulus fr. 116-17 *CAF*):⁴⁶¹

ὦ Ζεῦ πολυτίμητ', εἴτ' ἐγὼ κακῶς ποτε
ἐρῶ γυναῖκας; νῆ Δί' ἀπολοίμην ἄρα,
πάντων ἄριστον κτημάτων. εἰ δ' ἐγένετο
κακὴ γυνὴ Μήδεια, Πηνελόπη δέ γε
μέγα πρᾶγμ'. ἐρεῖ τις ὡς Κλυταιμνήστρα κακὴ.
"Ἀλκυστιν ἀντέθηκα χρηστήν. ἀλλ' ἴσως
Φαίδραν ἐρεῖ κακῶς τις. ἀλλὰ νῆ Δία

⁴⁶⁰ See appendix 2 for the references and a full list of comic poets who wrote on Medea.

⁴⁶¹ See Long (1986: 58).

χρηστὴ τίς ἦν μέντοι, τίς; οἴμοι δεῖλαιος,
ταχέως γέ μ' αἰ χρησταὶ γυναῖκες ἐπέλιπον,
τῶν δ' αὖ πονηρῶν ἔτι λέγειν πολλὰς ἔχω.

Much-honoured Zeus, will I ever speak ill of
women? I would rather die, by Zeus,
it [i.e. a woman] is the best of all possessions. If
Medea was a bad woman, Penelope was a
great thing indeed. Someone will say that Clytaemnestra was bad.
Against her, I place the obliging Alcestis. But similarly,
someone will speak ill of Phaedra. But by Zeus,
who next was a good woman, who? Oh what a wretch am I,
quickly indeed I ran out of good women,⁴⁶²
but I have many of the wicked ones still to mention.

Medea's place of honour as the first of evil women, compared with Penelope, the archetypal faithful wife, suggests the influence of Euripides' *Medea*. While pre-Euripidean texts focused on Medea's help to Jason and hence on her constructive side, Euripides focused on the destructive aspect of her characterization. It appears that this rapidly became canonical, as this fragment suggests.

(f) Conclusion

This chapter has investigated poems of the epic cycle, Pindar's epinician *Odes*, and Classical drama, and has argued that a gradual development of Medea's status can be perceived in these texts.

Hesiod's Medea was complex figure, represented as a divine wielder of *metis* who had been bound as Jason's wife. In the subsequent tradition, two developments can

⁴⁶² Literally: "the good women left me behind".

be perceived. First, Medea's status as deity becomes more ambiguous. As I have argued, she might not have been represented as divine any more in the *Corinthiaca*. In Pindar fourth *Pythian Ode*, Medea is represented as lingering between mortal and divine status at the beginning of the poem, but then turns out to be a (presumably mortal) witch who was bound by Aphrodite's *iunx*. In Euripides' *Medea*, Medea's use of both mortal and divine modes of *metis* leads to her representation as both super- and sub-human at the end of the play. This development reveals the poets' continuing struggle to fit an originally divine figure with enormous powers into a mortal world, and also exposes Medea's resistance to this categorization. Secondly, Medea's *metis* appears to have become linked with the emerging representation of her pharmaceutical knowledge as magic. While her rejuvenation ritual in the *Nostoi* might still linger on the boundary between normal divine power and magic, the presence of magic-associated vocabulary in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* indicates that Medea's powers have become construed as magic. While certain texts – such as the poems from the epic cycle and comedy – might have ignored Medea's *metis* altogether, Pindar and Euripides in fact combine Medea's *metis* with her magical abilities. Pindar contrasts the traditional image of a cunning deity at the beginning of his fourth *Pythian Ode* with the emerging portrayal of a “witch bewitched” in the Argonautic narrative, and thereby highlights the two contrasting sides of Medea – that of her power and its failure in the face of superior magic – which are becoming prevalent in her depiction: she was either depicted as powerful or submissive to Jason or the Olympians. The entire tradition so far focused on Medea's magical help to Jason. Euripides also combines Medea's *metis* with her magic, but to a destructive rather than constructive purpose. Thereby he breaks with the

literary tradition and, by means of his innovations regarding the deliberate infanticide and the fatal use of *pharmaka*, brings Medea ‘to the threshold of the witch’.

Unlike in Circe’s case, the iconography on Medea does not resemble the development visible in the poetic sources. Euripides’ *Medea* appears to have been the reason for this: while pre-Euripidean vases primarily focus on Medea’s rejuvenation of the ram in anticipation of her murder of Pelias (e.g. appendix 6.2 and *LIMC* ‘Iason’ 62 and ‘Pelias’ 11), after the staging of Euripides’ *Medea*, Medea’s role as infanticide becomes the main focus of iconography (e.g. *LIMC* ‘Medeia’ 36).⁴⁶³

In short, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, as chapter 2 has argued, Circe and Medea were connected with one another as the two archetypal witches of mythology. It has emerged from my chapters so far, however, that their respective developments were quite different. First, from the evidence which remains, it appears that Circe lost her primary association with *metis* more quickly than Medea: while many post-Hesiodic texts still connect Medea explicitly with *metis*, Circe might only have been linked with *metis* in the *Telegony*. Secondly, while Circe became primarily associated with sexual and other pleasure in the Classical tradition and was connected with magic in this way, Medea appears to have been established as archetypal witch through her destructive use of *pharmaka* and by her murder of her children. For this canonized her as an ‘evil woman’, as the post-Euripidean comic fragment suggests. I will now return to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and look in more detail at the key texts on Circe and Medea. I will argue that both figures are represented primarily as witches – not as

⁴⁶³ See Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) for a discussion.

cunning figures – in polarized terms, namely wielding extreme magical power but losing that power when subject to love or superior magic.

Continued in Volume 2.



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann M^a Nuad

Of Metis and Magic

The Conceptual Transformations of Circe and Medea in Ancient Greek Poetry

In two Volumes:

VOLUME TWO

Thesis submitted by Evelien Bracke as a requirement for the degree of Ph.D. in the Department of Ancient Classics, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, September 2009

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C.

Circe and Medea πολυφάρμακοι

*The nerves of my head are in such a bad way
that I think Circe must be revenging herself
for the unpleasant things I have said about her legend.*

James Joyce, in a letter to his publisher, while writing on 'Ulysses' (Gilbert [1957: 150])

CHAPTER SEVEN

CIRCE AND MEDEA IN HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN POETRY

In chapter 2, I assessed the Hellenistic and Roman poems which mention Circe and Medea side by side, namely Theocritus' second *Idyll*, Tibullus *Elegy* 2.4, Propertius *Elegy* 2.1, and Statius' *Thebaid*. While scholars have traditionally interpreted the status of the two figures as that of archetypal powerful witches, I suggested that one might rather read them as dichotomous figures: they may have been portrayed as commanding in their magical abilities in some poems, but others focused on the inefficacy of their power, particularly when subject to love. In many poems, however – especially those in which the theme of love plays a key role – I suggested that they were portrayed as polarized figures, whose immense magical power is nevertheless inefficacious in retaining their lovers. This image ties in closely with the contemporary polarized representation of magic in general.

Chapters 3 to 6 have argued that Circe and Medea, while portrayed as complex goddesses endowed with *metis* in the earliest Archaic poems, were increasingly represented as polarized mortal figures associated with magic. It thus appears that the polarizations which I perceive in the Hellenistic and Roman characterizations of Circe and Medea did not appear in a literary vacuum, but were shaped gradually as the association of the two figures with *metis* became subordinate to their connection with magic. As the predominant scholarly view on the Hellenistic and Roman portrayals of Circe and Medea is still that they are generally depicted as powerful witches, this chapter will elaborate on the point made in chapter 2, and argue that Circe and Medea, not only when they were mentioned jointly but also when appearing separately, were

primarily depicted as dichotomous figures. While, in some poems, only one extreme of their characterization (whether their power or submission) was explicit, I will propose that most poems represented them as polarized witch-victim figures.

Given the vastness of the Hellenistic and Roman poetic evidence concerning Circe and Medea, this chapter must necessarily limit its scope, examining only the key texts up to the Augustan period.¹ In practical terms, this chapter will comprise three sections: on the Hellenistic evidence (Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Lycophron's *Alexandra*), on early Latin drama, and on Augustan verse (Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid).

(a) Hellenistic Poetry: Apollonius and Lycophron

Apollonius and Lycophron were not the only two Hellenistic poets who wrote on Medea. Theocritus' second *Idyll*, which refers to Circe and Medea as a pair, has been discussed in chapter 2. Bion, a third-century tragedian, wrote a play called *Medea*, of which only one fragment remains, which cannot give any information on Medea's status. Callimachus' *Hecale* (first half of the third century BCE) narrated, among other things, Medea's plot to murder Theseus. One fragment from the *Hecale* contains the word πολύθρονον.² This can mean the same as πολυφάρμακον³ and if, as Hollis conjectures, it refers to Medea, it would suggest she was given the status of powerful witch. Lack of further evidence, however, impedes further analysis. Let us thus turn to Apollonius and Lycophron.

¹ My reasons for doing so have been outlined in chapter 1.

² Hollis (1990: fr. 3).

³ Hollis (1990: *ad loc.*).

Apollonius' Argonautica

An epic poem in four books, the *Argonautica* narrates the story of the Argonautic quest for the Golden Fleece. Medea appears as protagonist in books 3 and 4, as Jason's Colchian helper-maiden who aids him in the acquisition of the Fleece and is in return taken to Iolcus as Jason's wife. Circe only makes a brief appearance, in book 4, as Jason and Medea have to visit her in order to be expiated for their murder of Medea's brother, Apsyrtus.

Theocritus' summary reference to Circe and Medea suggests that there was an awareness in the Hellenistic period of the two figures representing powerful witches unable to retain their lovers by magical means. I will argue that Apollonius also engages with the polarization in the two figures, but in a more elaborate and complex manner: with regard to Medea, he explores the polarization within her characterization itself; regarding Circe, he examines the contrast between her and Medea. I will discuss the two figures separately, beginning with Medea. Line numbers in this section refer to Apollonius' *Argonautica* unless stated explicitly.

Medea: Apollonius' Maiden-Witch?

Apollonius' *Argonautica* is the earliest extant post-Euripidean poem featuring Medea. It is heavily influenced by Euripides' *Medea*: not only does Medea appear to develop from an innocent maiden into Euripides' vengeful Fury,⁴ but the two contrasting aspects of Medea – as both victim and wielder of *metis* – present in Euripides are also present to some extent in the *Argonautica*. A development can, however, be perceived

⁴ e.g. Hunter (1993: 123).

in the representation of *metis*.⁵ In Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* and Euripides' *Medea*, only the Argonauts (and, as their leader, Jason specifically) and Medea were represented as wielders of *metis*. In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, by contrast, *metis* has become omnipresent throughout the epic. The Argonauts and Medea have access to it, as well as figures one would normally associate with cunning, such as the respective helmsmen of the Argo and Aeëtes.⁶ Apollonius, however, also bestows cunning powers onto figures not normally associated with *metis*, such as Apollo, the Lemnian women, Polydeuces, Hera, Chalcioppe, and Arete and Alcinous.⁷ Because of the omnipresence of the notion of *metis* among the characters populating the *Argonautica*, Medea's association with it no longer sets her apart among all the others as the best helper for Jason. In Apollonius' account, however, it is not merely counsel which the Argonauts lack in their confrontation with Aeëtes, but external paraphernalia which would enable them to overcome the violence of the bulls, as cunning alone cannot overcome their physical strength. At this point, magic is needed. This is what Medea can offer the Argonauts. I am not denying Medea's continued association with *metis*. In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, however, cunning intelligence is primarily associated with the Argonauts. Medea *is* endowed with cunning, but it is represented primarily in magical terms, as the present discussion will reveal.

When one considers Medea's characterization throughout the *Argonautica*, her girlish lovesickness appears to stand in stark contrast to her formidable magical powers,

⁵ See Holmberg (1998) for a general discussion of *metis* in the *Argonautica*.

⁶ Cunning associated with the Argonauts: e.g. at 2.385, 2.1050, 2.1058, 2.1068, 2.1278, 3.184, 3.507, 4.492, 4.1336. Medea as cunning: 3.720, 3.743, 3.781, 3.912, 3.1026, 4.412, 4.1024, 4.1661. Helmsmen of the Argo, connected with *metis* through their navigational skills: Tiphys (1.560), Argos (3.475). Aeëtes, connected with *metis* through his kinship with Medea (also see chapter 2): 4.7.

⁷ Apollo (1.423), the Lemnian women (1.664-65, 1.677), Polydeuces (2.75), Hera (3.24, 3.30, 3.210), Chalcioppe (3.611, 3.668), Arete and Alcinous (4.1070).

which renders the poet's representation of Medea's psychology incoherent. Many scholars have attempted to overcome this issue, and its inclusion in the relatively recent Leiden volume on Apollonius (Glei [2001: 14-15]) indeed demonstrates that there is anything but a scholarly consensus on Medea's Apollonian status. Some scholars have argued that Medea's characterization alters abruptly – and is therefore inconsistent – between book 3 and book 4: whereas her innocence and lovesickness are the focus of book 3, in book 4 she appears as a terrifying witch.⁸ Other scholars reject the idea that the contrasting aspects of Medea are divided between books 3 and 4, but concur on her polarized characterization.⁹ Scholars who maintain that Apollonius presents the reader with a consistent image of Medea generally support their argument by referring to the love theme which pervades the epic.¹⁰

That Medea's portrayal consists of the juxtaposed images of innocent maiden and horrifying witch would usefully support my own thesis about Medea's polarized Hellenistic representation. The matter is, however, more complex than that, as one ought to expect from a resourceful and knowledgeable author such as Apollonius. Hunter (1993: 60) points the way for a more inclusive understanding of Medea by remarking that there is an "exchange of 'magic'" in the Apollonian narrative: Medea the witch is bewitched herself by Eros, similarly to Pindar's technique in the fourth

⁸ e.g. Collard (1975: 138) and Moreau (1994: 199-200).

⁹ e.g. Dyck (1989: 456), Hunter (1991), Natzel (1992), Duncan (2001; she juxtaposes the focalization and objectification of Medea), and Clare (2002: 247).

¹⁰ e.g. Ibscher (1939), Phinney (1967), Beye (1969), Zanker (1979), Hunter (1989), and Green (1997: *ad* 4.54). Moreau (2000b) argues that Medea is endowed with a status between mortal and divine in Apollonius. However, he bases his argument on one single example, namely Medea's make-up before she meets Jason (3.828-42). There are clear parallels in the vocabulary of this scene with Hera's toilette in the famous scene in the *Iliad* (14.170-86). I do not deny that Apollonius likely wished to draw parallels between Medea and Hera; these two figures were connected already in Archaic poetry, as my discussion of Eumelus' *Corinthiaca* has proposed (chapter 6). It appears to me, however, that Moreau's one example cannot be extended to a *general* view of Medea as demi-goddess in the *Argonautica*.

Pythian Ode.¹¹ The consequence of this statement for our understanding of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, however, has not yet been recognized fully. Medea's inconsistent behaviour is sometimes explained as a case of double determination, a concept of causality which reaches back to the Homeric epics, where divine and human motivation work side by side.¹² From this perspective, Eros' enchantment of Medea might be equated to Medea falling in love with Jason. As Feeney (1991: 80-82) points out, however, though Apollonius portrays Medea's feelings with verisimilitude, underneath that behaviour lies the enchantment by the actual god Eros. One must therefore acknowledge that, if Medea has been stunned (the verb *thelgein* is used to describe Eros' actions, see below), her so-called "innocent" and "lovesick" behaviour in the *Argonautica* cannot be seen as her own. While I do not wish to deny Apollonius' reliance on the tradition of double determination entirely, I will argue in the following paragraphs that Medea's polarized behaviour can also be understood on a different level. When one considers Medea's characterization in the light of the struggle between the Olympians and the Titans, Medea is consistently depicted as a powerful witch. From the moment when she is immobilized by Eros, however, Hera acquires power over her: in book 3, I will propose, she is made lovesick in order to render Jason victorious in his acquisition of the Fleece, while in book 4, Medea's power is allowed to resurface in order for Hera to take revenge on Pelias.

First, let us reassess the traditional view of Medea as a figure split between maiden and witch in books 3 and 4 respectively.¹³ It is true that Medea herself does not use magic in book 3, and that she is depicted to an extent as an innocent maiden. From

¹¹ See chapter 6.

¹² For the concept of double determination in general, see e.g. Dodds (1951: 1-18).

¹³ See also Phinney (1967).

the moment she is struck by Eros' arrow, she displays typical lovesick behaviour: her heart is panting, she forgets everything but Jason, glances at him repeatedly (3.284-98), paces along the corridor in search of a confidante (3.645-55), feels shame (αἰδώς) and doubt about her behaviour towards her parents (3.741-43 and 3.772-801), keeps staring along the path where Jason will appear (3.948-55), and does not dare to look at him (3.1009-10). In book 4, this behaviour appears to change dramatically: she does use magic (first to open the doors of the palace [4.41-42], later to charm the dragon [4.145-61] and kill Talos [4.1654-93]), and displays power and aggression rather than submission: when she puts the dragon to sleep, Jason is frightened by her power; she speaks furiously to Jason when he threatens to hand her over to the Colchians and advises him to slay her own brother in order to escape (4.355-94); and frightens even the narrator with the powers she employs to kill Talos (4.1673-75).

On closer reading, this straightforward dichotomy between innocent maiden and furious witch is not tenable. First, Medea is already described in powerful and magical terms in book 3: among other things, she is described three times as skilful in the use of *pharmaka* (3.477-78, 3.528-33, 3.844-68), is avoided by people averting their eyes when she passes through the streets (3.885-86), and says threateningly to Jason that she will find him if he forgets her (3.1111-17). Indeed, Medea is described similarly to other witches in Hellenistic verse (3.528-33):

κούρη τις μεγάροισιν ἐνιτρέφετ' Αἰήταο,
τὴν Ἐκάτη περίαλλα θεὰ δάε τεχνήσασθαι
φάρμαχ', ὅσ' ἤπειρός τε φύει καὶ νήχυτον ὕδωρ.
τοῖσι καὶ ἀκαμάτοιο πυρὸς μελίσσεται ἄυτμήν,
καὶ ποταμούς ἴστησιν ἄφαρ κελαιδινὰ ρέοντας,

ἄστρα τε καὶ μήνης ἱεράς ἐπέδησε κελύθους.

A girl lives in Aeëtes' palace
whom the awe-inspiring goddess Hecate has taught
the skill of handling herbs, as many as the land bears and the running water.
With these she quenches the blaze of an indomitable fire,
without delay she checks rivers running roaringly,
and binds stars and the course of the sacred moon.

This description of Medea's powers as able to overturn the normal order of the world closely resembles descriptions of witches discussed in chapter 2, which opposes the view that she is characterized as an innocent maiden in book 3. Similarly, book 4 does not present the reader with a wholly malicious and witch-like Medea. Indeed, for most of the book, she is passive. Her magical feats mentioned above are in fact the only actions she takes throughout the book: she cannot help the Argonauts when their ship is nearly swept into Ocean (4.636-44), when they encounter the Sirens (4.891-919), or are lost in Libya (4.1228-392). She is frequently portrayed as frightened (4.11, 4.48, 4.749, 4.1011-54, 4.1022, 4.1521-22), in love (4.213, 4.445), or both (4.1165-67); after she has lulled the dragon to sleep so that Jason can retrieve the Fleece, she is seated by him on board the ship, which indicates her inferior position to him (4.188-89).

These examples demonstrate that Medea does not suddenly gain powerful magical abilities once she has left her home, or stops loving Jason in book 4. Hence, the dichotomy between the innocent maiden of book 3 and the furious witch of book 4 is not tenable: Medea's psychology is complex and far from categorical. I maintain, however, that it is possible to discern a different kind of tension in the *Argonautica*, not

merely in the representation of Medea, but in the entire epic, namely that between Olympian and Titanic power.

What I have defined as (literary) ‘magic’ in chapter 2 is, in the *Argonautica*, employed by the Olympian gods and their Greek allies as well as by the Colchians. There is, however, as Clare (2002: 234-60) argues, a distinct difference between the Olympian and Titan powers. The first Argonaut to be mentioned after Jason, Orpheus, is described as follows (1.26-31):

αὐτὰρ τόνγ' ἐνέπουσιν ἀτειρέας οὔρεσι πέτρας
θέλξαι ἀοιδάων ἐνοπῆ ποταμῶν τε ρέεθρα.
φηγοὶ δ' ἀγριάδες κείνης ἔτι σήματα μολπῆς
ἀκτῆ Ἰθηρική Ζώνης ἔπι τηλεθόωσαι
ἐξείης στιχόωσιν ἐπήτριμοι, ἄς ὄγ' ἐπιπρὸ
θελγομένας φόρμιγγι κατήγαγε Πιερίθην.

But they say that he [i.e. Orpheus] stunned hard mountain rocks
and the course of streams by the music of his songs.
Wild oaks, still the sign of that song,
flourish at Zonê on the coast of Thrace,
standing closely together in rows, those which he had
beguiled with his lyre and brought down from Pieria.

As this passage reveals, Orpheus has a kind of stunning (θέλξαι, 1.27) magic which is similar to Medea's: both can control rivers and the course of nature. Later, Orpheus also stops a quarrel between Idmon and Idas (1.492-515) and makes fish follow the Argo (1.569-79) by means of his song. As Clare (2002: 235-40) argues, Orpheus is not only marked by his musical power, but also by his function as intermediary between the Argonauts and the Olympian gods, specifically Apollo and Artemis. He sings songs to

their glory and urges the Argonauts to establish an altar and rites for Apollo at the island of Thynias (2.669-713). While Orpheus' song is used in the context of the Argonautic group, Medea applies her spells (e.g. when she leaves the house, 4.41-42) in a solitary context. Apollonius thus appears to create a sort of Frazerian dichotomy between magic and religion: while Orpheus' power might be called constructive, Medea's will become increasingly destructive. It does not matter whether one labels Orpheus' power 'religion' and Medea's 'magic', or whether both are described as magic. It is clear that, while there is a parallel between their respective powers regarding their effect, their context and purpose differ. Furthermore, Medea's use of *pharmaka* is clearly something to which Orpheus has no access. This is the reason that she is Jason's ideal helper in Colchis, for Orpheus' power belongs to the world of Hellas. In Colchis, the land of Aeëtes, son of Helios, the Titans – not the Olympians – are worshipped. Because of the limits of the Olympian power in this world, neither Hera (the Olympian goddess most concerned with Jason's fate) nor Orpheus (the Argonauts' chief wielder of *thelgein*) can aid the hero in his quest. They thus need to rely on powers which are more in line with the Titan world they are entering. Hera's motives for helping Jason are complex: not only is she Jason's divine guardian, but as she was neglected by Pelias in his offerings to the gods, she also means to punish him (see below). To this purpose, at the beginning of book 3, Hera consults Athena regarding the manner in which Jason might acquire the Fleece from Aeëtes. Hera suggests involving Aphrodite in their scheme (3.25-28):

Δεῦρ' ἴομεν μετὰ Κύπριν, ἐπιπλόμεναι δέ μιν ἄμφω
παιδὶ ἐϞ εἰπεῖν ὀτρύνομεν, αἴ κε πίθηται,

κούρην Αιήτεω πολυφάρμακον οἷσι βέλεσσι
θέλξαι οἰστεύσας ἐπ' Ἰήσωνι.

Let us go to Cypris. Let us persuade her, confronting her together,
to tell her boy – if he would obey –
to beguile the daughter of Aeëtes who knows many drugs
in favour of Jason, by shooting arrows at her.

When they meet Aphrodite, their argument is similar, though it shows a slight variation in the portrayal of Medea (3.85-89):

ἀλλ' αὐτῶς ἀκέουσα τεῶν ἐπικέκλεο παιδί
παρθένον Αιήτεω θέλξαι πόθῳ Αἰσονίδαο.
εἰ γάρ οἱ κείνη συμφράσσεται εὐμενέουσα,
ῥηιδίως μιν ἐλόντα δέρος χρύσειον οἶω
νοστήσειν ἐς Ἴωλκόν, ἐπεὶ δολόεσσα τέτυκται.

But quietly tell your famous son to immobilize
the daughter of Aeëtes with longing for the son of Aeson.
Indeed, if she is his ally in his plot,
I believe he will easily acquire the Golden Fleece
and return to Iolcus, since she happens to be cunning.

Medea next appears when the Greeks are approaching the palace, now as priestess of Hecate, from the fifth century BCE onwards the goddess of witchcraft.¹⁴

These are the first three descriptions of Medea in the entire epic, and might therefore be interpreted as programmatic of the princess' characterization: significantly, Medea is not described as an innocent maiden, but as a powerful woman with magical

¹⁴ That Medea is called a 'priestess' does not impinge on her status as witch: Hecate's function as the quintessential goddess of witchcraft confirms Medea's status as witch. See n. 53 on p. 1.34.

abilities (i.e. pharmaceutical knowledge and a close connection with the goddess Hecate) and craftiness (δόλος, 3.89),¹⁵ who needs to be immobilized (*thelgein*, 3.28 and 3.86) and bound rather than persuaded to help the Greeks. Indeed, the epithet πολυφάρμακος connects Medea with her aunt, Circe (*Od.* 10.276), and consequently emphasizes her Titan nature.¹⁶ What is hence needed is a power stronger than Medea's, namely that of Eros: his *thelgein* does not neutralize Medea's power, but her ability to use magic *for herself*.¹⁷ Indeed, the effect of Eros' arrow is described as silencing (ἀμφασίη, 3.284) her heart and making her forgetful of everything but Jason (3.289-90).

From the moment Medea is hit by Eros' arrow, she is invariably depicted in terms of Hera's control over her; when Medea's own magical abilities are mentioned, they are connected with the past, when she was not yet bound by the Olympians. An omen interpreted by Mopsus, the seer of the Argonauts, can be read as a powerful metaphor of Medea's transformation. A dove, pursued by a hawk, falls into Jason's lap, while the hawk is impaled on the ship (3.540-43). Mopsus interprets the dove as being Aphrodite's bird, indicating that help will come from that goddess.¹⁸ He does not, however, mention whom the hawk represents. Earlier in book 3, however, Aeëtes mentions his sister Circe (3.309-13). I concur with Knight (1995: 179) that Circe is the

¹⁵ See also 3.478 and 3.528-33.

¹⁶ Pace Clare (2002: 244) who argues that Medea's "identity as a witch is hinted at rather than explicitly stated" at the beginning of book 3 and that she is represented rather as a victim of love-magic. The three passages which I have discussed above, however, point towards Medea's status as witch more than anything else.

¹⁷ This is in line with the general meaning of the term *thelgein* as outlined in chapter 2..

¹⁸ There have been numerous interpretations of the omen, e.g. by Knight (1995: 179) and Green (1997: *ad loc.*).

obvious candidate for the hawk, given the meaning of her name, “hawk”, and that of Aeëtes, “eagle”.¹⁹ Through the contrasting images of the dove and the hawk, a polarization becomes apparent between Aphrodite and Eros’ Olympian power on the one hand, and Medea’s Circean nature and Titan ancestry on the other. That the hawk is impaled signifies the submission of Medea’s powerful and potentially dangerous Titan nature to the love imposed upon her by the Olympians. Medea the hawk has thus been bound – the image is one of ‘impaling’ (ἔμπεσε, 3.542), which alludes to Eros’ arrows piercing Medea’s heart; this is a forceful transformational image, similar to Medea ἐκπλαγῆσα in Euripides’ *Medea* 8 – and transformed into Medea the dove. This metaphor symbolizes that, from this moment onwards for as long as Hera wishes it, Medea’s own use of magic lies in the past. What follows in the narrative demonstrates this.

On the morning of Medea’s meeting with Jason, she brings with her the drug which will make the hero invincible: Prometheion (3.844-57).²⁰ This plant is endowed with strong sympathetic magical powers: it first rose from the blood that dripped from Prometheus’ wound when Zeus’ eagle had eaten his liver, and when picked, Prometheus wails in agony. Medea is said to have picked it at night, having bathed in seven streams and having called upon Hecate Brimo seven times (3.858-63). As the poet has earlier described Medea as being kept indoors by Hera on the day of the arrival of the Greeks (3.248-50), the plant must have been picked by her *before* she was stunned by Eros. Here, one can see evidence of a formerly powerful Medea, a witch

¹⁹ See chapter 2 for a full discussion of the names of Circe and Aeëtes.

²⁰ For a discussion of Prometheion, see Moreau (2000b: 258-64).

capable of integrating Prometheus' strength, a symbol of strong Titan magic.²¹ In the present, however, she does not use it herself, but, coerced by the Olympians, destines it for Jason. The same essential point is emphasized when Medea drives through the town in a chariot with her maidens, the people avert their eyes when she passes by. Green (1997: *ad loc.*) argues that they do so in order to avoid her evil eye, which she will later use to destroy the giant Talos (4.1669-70). The Colchians consequently treat Medea as a powerful witch to be shunned, rather than as a young, innocent princess; they do not know that Medea has been bound by the Olympians and will not use her power except to aid Jason. When she finally meets Jason, Medea again behaves as a lovesick girl (blushing, averting her eyes). She can only give him the drug and tell him which necromantic ritual to perform to Hecate (3.1013-62); she cannot – as in her dream (3.623-31) – complete the tasks her father has set for Jason herself. In the present, she has no magical power of her own.

This lack of independent power is caused by the Olympian control over Medea – particularly Hera's interference – of which the reader is reminded throughout the poem. One might refer to the technique of double determination and argue that Hera and the other gods are not to be seen as external divine agents, but are merely Medea's internal feelings that have externalized in divine terms. Hera's actions, however, do not complement Medea's, but rather force the princess to act against her own wishes; it

²¹ It is interesting to note that this is not the first time that the *Argonautica* mentions the wailing Prometheus. When the Greeks first arrive in Colchis, they see the Titan chained to the Caucasus, wailing because his liver is being eaten by Zeus' eagle (2.1256). This might suggest that, when the Greeks first arrive, the Olympians are still firmly in control of the situation. As the Argonauts' stay in Colchis continues, however, their power diminishes and they have to rely on Titan magic to aid them against Aeëtes. Medea's torture of Prometheus confirms this and might even suggest that she has powers similar to Zeus. Indeed, Prometheus, far from being related to Medea, is in fact one of Jason's ancestors; his wailing might anticipate Jason succumbing to Titan magic and his destruction because of it. That Medea tortures a *Titan* might also anticipate her betrayal of her father later on in the epic.

would thus be incorrect to consider Hera to be an externalization of Medea's feelings.²² On the day of the arrival of the Greeks, for example, Hera keeps Medea indoors whereas she would normally go to Hecate's temple (3.248-50).²³ Next, when Medea, having taken counsel with her sister Chalciope, is finally alone, she explores her doubts and fears in a Euripidean-style monologue. Sitting in front of a casket with *pharmaka*, she considers committing suicide, but fear of death suddenly stops her (3.645-817). This lengthy psychological portrait of a girl torn between love and obedience is suddenly modified by an addendum of the narrator that Medea felt fear and put the drugs away "Ἡρης ἐννεσίησι μετάρτροπος, "changed by the compulsion of Hera" (3.818). Though, when considered at the level of human motivation, Medea is depicted as a girl in love, this interjection reminds the reader that this behaviour is not her normal state of being: it has been imposed upon her – she has been compelled or coerced – by Hera's will.

Later, when Medea warns Jason not to forget her when he is back in his fatherland, and he promises to take her with him as his bride, this psychological portrait is complemented by the following narratorial comment (3.1133-36):

σχετλίη. οὐ μὲν δηρὸν ἀπαρνήσεσθαι ἔμελλεν
 Ἑλλάδα ναιετάειν. ὥς γὰρ τόγε μήδετο Ἡρη,
 ὄφρα κακὸν Πελίη ἱερὴν ἐς Ἴωλκὸν ἵκηται
 Αἰαίη Μήδεια λιποῦσ' ἀπο πατρίδα γαῖαν.

Wretched creature! Not much longer would she refuse to go
 and live in Hellas. For Hera was planning it thus,

²² See also Feeney (1991: 81-89) for the argument that the gods must be seen as valid protagonists of the epic.

²³ See also Hunter (1993: 59).

so that she would arrive in sacred Iolcus to be an evil for Pelias,
Aeaeon Medea, having left her fatherland.

Again, Hera's control over Medea's actions is expressly mentioned; indeed, the specific use of μήδετο is significant, since it shares the *mēd- root with the name Medea: Hera controls Medea's cunning with her own.²⁴ When Medea is mentioned as Pelias' "evil", it is as passive agent of the revenge; she does not make her own decisions. Note, at the same time, that Medea is called "Aeaeon" (3.1136): this epithet, which connects her directly with her Colchian home, Aea, and with Circe (who, in the *Odyssey*, lives on an island called Aeaea, see chapter 3), suggests that, when she arrives in Hellas, Medea will no longer be the dove she is for the moment, but will revert to using her full Titan, Circean power. She will still, however, be under Hera's power. I would thus argue that Eros' arrow, rather than merely rendering Medea lovesick, immobilizes her in the strictest meaning of the word: it makes her incapable of independent action. Hera controls her and therefore, in book 3, Medea is made lovesick merely because it is in Hera's interest. In Colchis, Hera wants her favourite hero, Jason, to shine (3.66ff.); Medea needs to be in the shadow, only providing the magical skill which Hera cannot offer her hero. From the moment Jason's task has been performed, however, and the heroes have sailed back to Hellas, Hera needs a vengeful Medea who can destroy Pelias because he has not honoured the goddess (1.14); Jason is then of secondary importance.

Hera's control over Medea hence continues in book 4. When the poet asks the muse regarding Medea's motives for leaving her homeland – whether she left out of love or fear (4.2-5) – he is quick to add the divine motivation: Hera created fear in

²⁴ See also Green (1997: *ad loc.*).

Medea's heart (4.11) and made her flee with the Argonauts (4.22-23). This is the second time Hera interferes when Medea tries to kill herself. This demonstrates that human and divine motivation do not always coincide: if Hera had not interfered, Medea might have killed herself; tradition, of course, needs her to live and come to Greece. From now onwards, however, Hera needs a powerful Medea, capable of using magic and murder herself. Indeed, Medea uses her magical song for *herself* for the first time in the poem in order to unlock the doors of the palace, so she can escape. When she speeds on her way to the Argo, she is described as follows (4.50-53):

οὐ γὰρ ἄιδρις
ἦεν ὁδῶν, θαμὰ καὶ πρὶν ἄλωμένη ἀμφὶ τε νεκρούς
ἀμφὶ τε δυσπαλέας ρίζας χθονός, οἷα γυναῖκες
φαρμακίδες.

She was not unfamiliar
with the route, since in the past she had often roamed that area for corpses
and indestructible roots of the earth, in the manner of
witches.

This passage, as many before, reminds the reader of the powerful witch Medea was before the arrival of Jason and Eros. Now that Jason's task has been fulfilled, Hera allows Medea's powers which have so far been suppressed to resurface so that Medea will be able to kill Pelias; therefore she fills the princess's heart with fear of her father rather than with love for the Greek hero. That Medea calls out for Phrixus' sons (her cousins) rather than Jason when she arrives at the Argo (4.70-72) might be interpreted as confirmation that her infatuation with Jason is coming to an end. Whereas Jason had to overcome the fire-breathing bulls and earth-born warriors himself, Medea now takes

action and lulls the dragon to sleep by stunning it (*thelgein*, 4.147 and 4.150); Jason, on the other hand, is compared to a young girl who rejoices at the sight of a nice dress (4.167-70). After the Fleece has been acquired, however, Medea is placed on a chair by Jason's side on board the ship (4.188-89): this inferior position with respect to Jason is – for him – the appropriate place for his future wife, though she will not be contained in that space for very long. Not much further on in the poem, the reader is again reminded of Medea's future function in the plan of Hera, who wishes (4.242-43)...

ὄφρ' ὤκιστα κακὸν Πελῖαο δόμοισιν
Αἰαίη Μήδεια Πελασγίδα γαῖαν ἴκηται.

... that Aeaean Medea would reach the Pelasgian land
as quickly as possible as an evil for the house of Pelias.

The reader is given more information than on the previous occasion where Pelias was mentioned: here, it is not merely Pelias, but his entire house which Hera wants destroyed. The ambiguity lies in the fact that Jason too is part of the house of Pelias, and will indeed be destroyed when Medea kills his future bride and her own two children.

Medea also takes part in the murder of Apsyrtus. When the Colchians have overtaken the fleeing Argonauts, a truce is established, and the decision is made to leave Medea in the care of the Artemisian temple on the island (4.345-49), Medea rages against Jason. He yields to her demands and she devises a plan to murder her brother. Though she does not commit the murder herself, she fills the air with beguiling drugs, capable of luring wild beasts from the mountains (4.442-44). After that moment, however, Medea remains passive until the Argonauts reach Crete. Her suggestion that

she confront the bronze giant Talos is unexpected;²⁵ many scholars have maintained that this particular episode – in which Medea displays all her malicious powers to their full potential – looks forward most directly to her behaviour once they arrive in Greece.²⁶ Indeed, Medea's power, rather than growing, is returning to its former strength so she will be able to deceive Pelias' daughters and kill the king in order to avenge Hera.

In summary, when one considers the portrayal of Medea throughout the *Argonautica*, one can perceive a subtle and intricate intertwining of different levels of motivation, which together lead to Medea's complex characterization. Considering only the human level, it is possible to see in Medea's behaviour a change from innocent maiden to malicious fury. A secondary tension also exists, however, not within Medea, but between her own Titanic magic and the Olympian power which is imposed upon her. As I have argued, when the gods are taken into consideration as full-blown characters in the epic, Medea is never depicted as an innocent maiden in book 3; on the contrary, time and again she is depicted as a powerful witch with cunning intelligence. This is precisely why Hera wishes to bind her to Jason. It is only the superior power of Olympian Eros that neutralizes Medea's magic. From the moment she has been immobilized, Medea's behaviour indeed depends entirely on Hera's whim: she is made to feel love so that she will help Jason when Hera wishes her hero to excel. When his task is done and that love is no longer Hera's primary concern, Medea is made rather to feel fear. This brings to the surface anger and resentment, which are necessary to create a more destructive magic at various steps of the return journey, and which will be of the

²⁵ See Holmberg (1998: 155).

²⁶ For detailed analyses of the Talos episode, see Dickie (1990), Buxton (1998), Powers (2002).

utmost importance when Jason and Medea have arrived in Greece and Medea must take revenge on the house of Pelias for Hera. There is consequently not so much a tension between Medea's innocence and her magical fury, as between Medea's powerful Titan magic on the one hand, and the superior Olympian power on the other. Ultimately, however, not even the tension between Titan and Olympian magic is maintained. By immobilizing Medea, the Olympians succumb to the temptation of using Titan magic, which leads to the arrival of disorder in Greece, in the form of Medea, rather than of order in Colchis.

Circe: Apollonius' Priestess

Circe is no key figure in the *Argonautica*, but she acts as a mirror image of Medea, thereby informing the reader's interpretation of Medea. She is first mentioned in the *Argonautica* by Aeëtes, her brother, when he sees his grandsons, the sons of his daughter and Phrixus, whom he thought had left for Greece, enter his palace with the Argonauts. Asking them what stopped them from completing their journey, Aeëtes comments on his knowledge of the huge distance between Colchis and Greece, as he once traversed it in his father's chariot (3.309-13):

ἦδειν γάρ ποτε πατρός ἐν ἄρμασιν Ἥελίοιο
δινεύσας, ὅτ' ἐμεῖο κασιγνήτην ἐκόμιζεν
Κίρκην ἐσπερίης εἴσω χθονός, ἐκ δ' ἰκόμεσθα
ἀκτὴν ἠπείρου Τυρσηνίδος, ἔνθ' ἔτι νῦν περ
ναιετάει, μάλα πολλὸν ἀπόπροθι Κολχίδος αἴης.

For I knew this,²⁷ having once whirled along in the chariot of my father,
Helios, when he brought my sister, Circe,
to the land in the west, from where we reached
the coast of Tyrrhenia, where she now still
lives, very far indeed from the land of Colchis.

The first mention of Circe situates her far from Colchis and indeed connects her, through her Italian geography, with the Mediterranean rather than with the Black Sea, and hence with the world of the Argonauts rather than with Colchis. That Aeëtes' portrayal of Circe follows closely onto Medea's bewitchment by Eros (3.275-98) is significant, as it draws a preliminary parallel between aunt and niece: Medea, like Circe, will leave her homeland and live in the Mediterranean. The reader might smile at the presence of Helios' chariot, which brought Circe to her new home, as it was more than likely modelled upon the chariot in which Medea escapes from Corinth in Euripides' *Medea* (1321-22).²⁸ On the reasons for Circe's removal from Colchis, however, the poet remains silent. Diodorus Siculus – whose sources on the Argonautic myth might have reached back to the fourth century BCE²⁹ and thus antedated Apollonius – suggests the following (Diod. Sic. 4.45.3-5):

Καὶ τὴν μὲν Κίρκην εἰς φαρμάκων παντοδαπῶν ἐπίνοιαν
ἐκτραπέϊσαν ἐξευρεῖν ῥιζῶν παντοίας φύσεις καὶ δυνάμεις
ἀπιστουμένας. οὐκ ὀλίγα μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς Ἑκάτης
διδαχθῆναι, πολὺ δὲ πλείω διὰ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιμελείας ἐξευροῦσαν
μηδεμίαν ὑπερβολὴν ἀπολιπεῖν ἕτερον πρὸς ἐπίνοιαν φαρμακείας.
δοθῆναι δ' αὐτὴν εἰς γάμον τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν Σαρματῶν, οὗς ἔνιοι

²⁷ i.e. the huge distance between Colchis and Greece.

²⁸ See Parry (1992: 51-52).

²⁹ See pp. 1.42-43.

Σκύθας προσαγορεύουσι. καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον τὸν ἄνδρα φαρμάκοις ἀνελεῖν, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τὴν βασιλείαν διαδεξαμένην πολλὰ κατὰ τῶν ἀρχομένων ὤμα πρᾶξαι καὶ βίαια. διόπερ ἐκπεσοῦσαν τῆς βασιλείας κατὰ μὲν τινὰς τῶν μυθογράφων φυγεῖν ἐπὶ τὸν ὠκεανόν, καὶ νῆσον ἔρημον καταλαβομένην ἐνταῦθα μετὰ τῶν συμφυγουσῶν γυναικῶν καθιδρυθῆναι, κατὰ δὲ τινὰς τῶν ἱστορικῶν ἐκλιποῦσαν τὸν Πόντον κατοικῆσαι τῆς Ἰταλίας ἀκρωτήριον τὸ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἀπ' ἐκείνης Κίρκαιον ὀνομαζόμενον.

And regarding Circe, having focused her thoughts on all kinds of drugs, she found roots of varying nature and unknown strength. Though she was taught by her mother, Hecate, about a great number of these, she found more by her own study and left to the other woman no advantage with regard to the knowledge of drugs. She was given in marriage to the king of the Sarmatians, whom some call Skythians. First, she killed her husband by means of drugs, after which she was given the kingship, committing many cruel and aggressive acts against her subjects. Because of this, she was banished from the kingdom and, according to some mythographers, fled to the ocean, where she seized a deserted island and established herself there with the women who had run away with her; according to some historians, she left the Pontus and settled in Italy on a promontory which until this day is named after her, Circaeon.

Apollonius' account only has Circe's departure from Colchis in common with Diodorus' narrative, but his readers might at least have been aware that a crime – possibly by magical means – was the cause of Circe's departure from home. If Apollonius was familiar with this story, the mere mention of Circe's removal from her homeland establishes a link between aunt and niece based not only on departure from their homeland for the Mediterranean, but also on lethal magical knowledge and on the destruction of their husband. While Circe has already committed her crimes and made her journey, Medea is yet to make her decisions. In short, Circe's first mention

establishes mainly implicit parallels between aunt and niece, similar to the references to Medea's Aeaeian nature (3.1136) and her status as πολυφάρμακος (3.27), which already acknowledged a parallel between the two figures; further connections are suspended, however, and Circe is not mentioned any more in book 3.

In book 4 of the *Argonautica*, Circe reappears: when Jason and Medea, having stolen the Golden Fleece, are pursued by Medea's brother, Apsyrtus, they decide to set a trap in order to eliminate him. Medea separates Apsyrtus from his soldiers and engages him in conversation while Jason approaches him from behind and stabs him to death (4.421-81). It soon becomes clear, however, that this crime cannot be committed without repercussions. The prow of the Argo turns to speech and forewarns the couple that they must find Circe (4.557-61): lest they incur the wrath of Zeus, they must be cleansed by her from the murder of Apsyrtus. The Argonauts hence set sail for the Tyrrhenian coast where Circe resides.³⁰ When they arrive, Circe is described as washing her hair with sea water in order to clear away an ominous dream, which is described as follows (4.665-69):

αἵματί οἱ θάλαμοί τε καὶ ἔρκεα πάντα δόμοιο
μύρεσθαι δόκεον, φλόξ δ' ἄθρόα φάρμακ' ἔδαπτεν
οἷσι πάρος ξείνους θέλγ' ἀνέρας ὅστις ἴκοιτο·
τὴν δ' αὐτὴ φονίῳ σβέσεν αἵματι πορφύρουσαν,
χεροῖν ἀφυσσαμένη, λῆξεν δ' ὀλοοῖο φόβοιο.

With blood the chambers and all the walls of her house
seemed dripping. Fire devoured the collection of drugs
with which she used to beguile foreign men in the past, whoever arrived.

³⁰ In the *Odyssey*, Circe's island was situated in the East (*Od.* 12.3-4). As early as Hesiod (*Theog.* 1011-16), however, she was also situated in Italy (see also p. 1.120). It is this tradition which Apollonius follows.

She herself with blood of a (sacrificial) victim quenched the glowing flame,
drawing it up in her hand; thus she put an end to the dreadful fear.

When the Argonauts meet Circe, they recognize her by her eyes as Aeëtes' sister (4.683) – for all Helios' offspring are endowed with gleaming eyes (4.727-29)³¹ – though she herself does not realize who her visitors are. Initially, she attempts to lure Jason's crew into the house by means of trickery (δολοφροσύνη, 4.687); Jason, however, orders the men to remain outside (4.685-89), while he and Medea enter the house alone. Circe invites them to take a seat, but because the couple are seeking purification for their crime, they sit down at the hearth, which is a traditional sign of supplication.³² Understanding that this couple have committed murder, Circe cleanses them of their guilt, among other things by washing their hands with the blood of a sacrificed piglet. It is only when Medea, once purified, looks at her that Circe finally understands it is a relative who is sitting before her: she recognizes her by her flashing eyes (4.725-29). Hearing of the horror of Medea's crime, however, she demands that the couple leave the house in spite of their kinship.

This is a brief summary of the Circe episode in Apollonius' *Argonautica*. I will argue that, while Circe's earliest descriptions draw parallels between her and Medea, these are soon relinquished in favour of a strong contrast between the two figures, which underlines Medea's polarization. In book 4, Apollonius immediately connects Circe with magic and transgressive feminine behaviour. First, in her dream, her *pharmaka* are referred to, with which she used to "beguile" (θέλυε, 4.667) foreigners. Secondly, there

³¹ See Buxton (2000).

³² See Mooney (1987: *ad loc.*).

are animals roaming her land *συμμιγέες μελέων*, “with mixed limbs” (4.674),³³ similar to some sort of Empedoclean primeval creatures which the earth used to bring forth herself (4.676-77).³⁴ In the light of Apollonius’ reference to Circe’s *pharmaka* in her dream, these animals might be interpreted as the men she bewitched. Finally, in attempting to lure Jason’s men into her house, she replicates her Odyssean behaviour towards Odysseus’ men when they first meet her.³⁵ These references to magic and to Circe’s allurements anticipate an encounter of the Argonauts with Circe similar in structure and content to Odysseus’ confrontation with her.

There are, however, hints in the description of Circe’s magical abilities which suggest that the Apollonian figure does not wholly resemble her Homeric counterpart in status and power. First, in the description of her dream, fire is said to destroy Circe’s *pharmaka*: this has been interpreted as the failing of Circe’s magical powers.³⁶ Moreover, the use of the adverb *πάρως* (“in the past”, 4.667) to describe Circe’s bewitchment of men suggests that the (effective) use of her magic lies behind her. Finally, while the Homeric goddess successfully lured Odysseus’ men into her palace and transformed them into animals, the Apollonian figure fails to draw Jason’s men into her house, as Jason commands his men to stay behind. Jason’s authority thus halts Circe’s potential control over the following events: rather than an aggressive confrontation first with a group of men and then with a hero, there follows a submissive supplication of Circe by a couple – this is of course required by the narrative, as Jason and Medea must be purified. In short, Circe’s magical powers, referred to at the

³³ I follow Mooney’s (1987) edition rather than Fränkel, who reads *γενέων* rather than *μελέων*.

³⁴ See Mooney (1987: *ad loc.*) and Clauss (2000: 13-14).

³⁵ Chronologically, of course, Odysseus lands on her island after Jason and Medea.

³⁶ See Kessels (1982: 161), Green (1997: *ad loc.*), and Giangrande (2002).

beginning of the episode, are quickly relinquished in favour of focus on her purificatory abilities. By so doing, the poet acknowledges the parallels between Circe and Medea, but chooses to reject them in favour of a contrast between niece and aunt, as I will presently argue.

Indeed, when Medea and Jason sit down at the hearth, Circe takes up her role of purifier: the rituals she performs stand in stark contrast with Medea's. While Medea's rituals described earlier in the poem are clearly magical in nature, Circe's rituals are based on normal purificatory practice,³⁷ and she invokes Zeus and the Furies (4.713-15) rather than Hecate, Medea's divine accomplice (3.478). Moreover, unlike Medea, who broke the rules of *xenia* by disobeying her father and eloping with a stranger, Circe obeys the rules of hospitality, offering seats and enquiring after her visitors' journey.³⁸ Indeed, explicitly comparing herself with Medea, Circe says to her (4.739 and 4.743-44):

σχετλίη, ἧ ῥα κακὸν καὶ ἀεικέα μῆσαο νόστον. [...]
ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ἰκέτις καὶ ὁμόγνιος ἔπλευ ἐμεῖο,
ἄλλο μὲν οὔτι κακὸν μητίσομαι ἐνθάδ' ἰούση.

Wretched girl, you have indeed devised an evil and shameful return. [...]
But therefore, since you are a suppliant and my kin,
I will not devise any other evil for you, since you have come here.

³⁷ A similar ritual is, for example, performed by Apollo in Aesch. *Eum.* 282ff. See Kottaridou (1991: 103). Carastro (2006: 158-59), on the other hand, argues that Circe's purificatory ritual resembles that of the *magoi* in Herodotus, and can therefore be interpreted as magic. As Circe's magical power has been referred to earlier in the episode, it is possible that one ought to think of her as a figure lingering between normal cultic powers and magic.

³⁸ She does not, however, offer them food, which means she is under no obligation to continue her hospitality to them and can dismiss them upon hearing of their crime. See Plantinga (2007: 553).

The application of *metis* to both Medea (μήσαο, 4.739) and Circe (μητίσομαι, 4.744) establishes a strong contrast between the two figures: as Plantinga (2007: 562) argues, while Medea has devised an evil *nostos* for herself,³⁹ Circe refuses to use *metis* in retaliation and thereby disconnects herself from her niece and not only from her magical practices but also from her destructive *metis*. The contrast between the two figures is further established by their eyes: both figures can be recognized by their gleaming eyes which all Helios' kin share (Circe: 4.683-84; Medea: 4.725-26). Circe's eyes only serve as a contrast with Medea's, however: while Circe is unable to lure the Argonauts into her house, Medea will later use the 'evil eye' on the Cretan giant, Talos (4. 1638-93) in an act of malicious magic. Medea's betrayal of her father is further emphasized by the description not only of Circe as Aeëtes' sister (4.684), but also of Apsyrtus as Aeëtes' son (4.697) and Medea as his daughter (4.731). These associations with Aeëtes underline Circe's loyalty and the horror of Medea's betrayal.⁴⁰ Indeed, upon hearing Medea's story, Circe, though she feels pity for her niece (4.737-38), sends her away from her house (4.745).

In summary, I argue that Circe acts as a mirror-image of Medea. Rather than representing Circe in similar terms to Medea, Apollonius introduces her magical abilities only to reject them – and thereby her similarity to Medea – immediately. Circe might once have wielded magical powers, but those belong to the past and to the realm of dreams. Though far removed from her powerful Odyssean status,⁴¹ Circe is still an

³⁹ Note that, though Medea's journey is technically not a *nostos* as she is leaving home for a new home, it is represented as such. This places her on one line with the Argonauts, and again in opposition with her father. See Plantinga (2007: 560).

⁴⁰ See Plantinga (2007: 549).

⁴¹ Indeed, as Nelis (2001: 229ff.) suggests, the prophecy which the Homeric Circe made to Odysseus concerning his subsequent adventures (*Od.* 13.37ff.) has been transferred to the figures of Phineus (*Arg.*

authoritative figure: not only does her purificatory knowledge starkly contrast with Medea's magical abilities, but her geographical stability and loyalty to her natal family contrast with Medea's geographical displacement and betrayal of her family. This contrast between Circe's geographical and emotional stability and Medea's vacillation between natal and conjugal loyalty, and magical power and incapacitating love for Jason (albeit imposed upon her), renders Medea's betrayal of her family more horrible, and her magical powers more anomalous and dangerous.

Summary

From my discussion, it is clear that Apollonius was familiar with an image of Medea as a powerful witch on the one hand, and a woman incapacitated by love on the other hand, an image which also appears in Theocritus' second *Idyll*. Though Apollonius retained Medea's *metis* to some extent, he primarily endowed her with typical features of the Hellenistic witch-figure. Rather than turning his protagonist into a stereotype, however, the poet established Medea's magical power as her own Titan ability, and her behaviour after she had been immobilized by Eros as controlled by Hera, thereby lending more complexity to the traditional image. Apollonius treated Circe in a similarly complex manner: aware of her traditional magical abilities, he introduced this image of her, only to dismiss it immediately. Instead of confronting the witch with another witch, the poet confronted conformity with anomaly, loyalty with betrayal, and normal ritual with aberrant, magical knowledge. In conclusion, while Apollonius' portrayals of Circe and Medea reveal his awareness of their dichotomous nature

2.311ff.) and Thetis (4.856ff.), again suggesting that this Circe is not the powerful divine helper she was in the *Odyssey*.

(particularly Medea's) which was present in the contemporary literary tradition, he integrated these potential stereotypes in his narrative in a complex manner.

Lycophron's Alexandra

A text of an entirely different nature is Lycophron's *Alexandra*. The *Alexandra*, an epic dense with obscure mythological allusions, narrates the confused predictions at Troy of Cassandra as told to Priam by a slave appointed to watch over her. Circe and Medea are mentioned separately at various points, though never as important figures.

Medea is referred to four times: she is mentioned twice as the future wife of Achilles (174 and 798), and she is said to offer a mixing-bowl to Triton to thank him for his help to the Argonauts in Libya (887-90; for the story, see Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* in chapter 6). The fourth reference to her, in the context of the Argonautic quest, is more elaborate. Medea is introduced as follows (1315-19):

καὶ λέβητι δαιτρευθεὶς δέμας,
οὐκ ἀσμένως ἔμαρπεν ἑρράου σκύλος·
ἀλλ' αὐτόκλητον ἀρπάσας κεραίδα,
τὴν γνωτοφόντιν καὶ τέκνων ἀλάστορα,
εἰς τὴν λάληθρον κίσσαν ἤρματίξατο.

His [i.e. Jason's] own body cut up in a cauldron,
without pleasure he seized the hide of the ram.
But he grabbed the self-invited crow,
who killed her brother and destroyed her children
and put her on the talkative jay [i.e. the prow of the Argo, which could
speak].

Cassandra's narrative places Jason's rejuvenation – doubtless by Medea, as she is mentioned two lines later⁴² – alongside her infanticide and murder of her brother. Though Medea's magical power is acknowledged in Jason's rejuvenation, it is not the only aspect of her characterization by means of which the poet defines her, as the references to her marriage to Achilles and gift to Triton suggest.

Circe is treated similarly: her marriage to Telemachus after Odysseus' death by the hands of Telegonus, as well as her subsequent murder by her husband, are referred to (797-98). Earlier in the poem, Circe is mentioned among the creatures which Odysseus comes across on his *nostos*. Having referred to the Cyclops, the Laestrygonians, Scylla and Charybdis, and the Sirens, the poet introduces Circe as follows (673-75):

ποίαν δὲ θηρόπλαστον οὐκ ἐσόψεται
δράκαιναν, ἐγκυκῶσαν ἀλφίτῳ θρόνα,
καὶ κῆρα κνωπόμορφον;

Which animal-casting woman will he not behold,
a serpentess, mixing drugs with barley,
and which beast-formed fate?

Circe's portrayal as δράκαινα suggests that she is seen as a dangerous figure connected with chthonic forces and perhaps specifically with the dragon who guarded the Golden Fleece; the use of her magical potion is also acknowledged.

Lycophron's narrative in general is far from straightforward, obscured as it is by mythological allusions, compound *hapax legomena*, and epithets or names not found

⁴² Though Medea is not mentioned as its executor, this can plausibly be implied, since this episode was part of the literary tradition (e.g. Simonides and Pherecydes, see *Nostoi* fr. 6 *EGF*).

elsewhere in Greek literature. One ought therefore to consider his references to Circe and Medea as idiosyncratic rather than the norm. Nevertheless, his account reveals that poets were not merely interested in Circe's and Medea's magical attributes: their other stories were still well known (such as Circe's marriage to Telemachus and Medea's to Achilles) and, at least in Lycophron, are given as much attention as their magical abilities. One might nevertheless suggest that Lycophron, in his various references to the two figures, is still aware of and influenced by their dichotomous images: in some passages, he represents the two female figures as domesticated through their marriages, while he lingers on their powers in others. In this respect, Lycophron's account is more in line with Theocritus' narrative than Apollonius', as the latter demonstrates a far greater creativity in adapting Circe and Medea to the agenda of his own poem.

Summary of the Hellenistic Evidence

Quantitatively, not much Hellenistic evidence remains on the poetic representations of Circe and Medea. Theocritus, Apollonius, and Lycophron, moreover, all treat the figures differently: while Theocritus mentions both figures only once, jointly, as mythological models with whom Simaetha aligns herself, Apollonius' Medea is one of the protagonists of an entire epic, while Circe acts as a mirror-image with which to compare her; Lycophron mentions the two figures separately – he does state that they are related (798), but nothing more is made of it. All three poets, however, appear to be aware of a polarization in the characterizations of both figures (though Apollonius does not dwell on Circe's) as witches and powerless women. In Theocritus, the underlying meaning of Simaetha referring to Circe and Medea is that they were unable to hold on

to a husband, so their powers were ineffective in love. In Apollonius, Medea's power is her own, while her so-called innocence is in fact orchestrated by Hera and Eros, and she is thus the victim of the Olympians; Circe, as I have argued, is represented as the anti-Medea, the witch turned priestess. Finally, Lycophron represents both figures on the one hand as wives – hence domesticated through marriage – and as powerful witches on the other hand. Though the three authors endow Circe and Medea with very different functions and scope in their poems, the general representation of the two figures, I argue, establishes the same essential polarization in all three poems. Discussion of some Roman poems will further exemplify this point.

(b) Early Roman Drama

Circe and Medea are not mentioned frequently in pre-Augustan Roman poetry. As the earliest Roman drama is more or less contemporary to the Hellenistic poems discussed above, however, the few existing examples provide an interesting parallel, as they demonstrate how contemporary Roman poets integrated the Greek figures into their Roman narratives. Circe and Medea both appear once (separately) in Plautus; I will also briefly discuss Medea's role – no references to Circe survive – in early Roman tragedy, specifically Ennius and Pacuvius, whose plays have only survived in fragments.⁴³

In Plautus' *Epidicus*, a female character – Acropolistis – is called a 'Circe' (604) because she deceived an elderly Athenian citizen, Periphanes, into believing he was her father. The common element between the girl and Circe is their trickery, possibly alluding to Circe's deception of Odysseus' men. This is the only information

⁴³ Accius also wrote a play *Medea sive Argonautae*, which staged the murder of Medea's brother, Apsyrtus. No evidence on Medea's characterization remains. See Accius fr. 381-427 Warmington.

provided, and indeed all the information on Circe from early Latin poetry. Though all it does is establish a link with the Homeric figure, it does appear that Plautus expected from his audience a familiarity with Circe's Homeric cunning.

The earliest extant reference to Medea in Roman poetry occurs in Plautus' *Pseudolus*. In the midst of a typical Plautian comedy of unattainable love and trickery, a rich procurer, Ballio, hires a cook in preparation for his birthday. When he rebukes the cook for being too expensive, the latter defends himself by informing Ballio that his cooking allows men to become two hundred years old (829). It is in this capacity that he compares himself to Medea (868-73):

*COC: Quia sorbitione faciam ego hodie te mea
item ut Medea Peliam concoxit senem,
quem medicamento et suis venenis dicitur
fecisse rursus ex sene adulescentulum:
item ego te faciam. BAL: Eho, an etiam es veneficus?
COC: Immo edepol vero hominum servator.*

Cook. Since today, with my soup, today I will treat you
just as Medea boiled up the old man, Pelias,
whom, by a potion and her drugs, she is said
to have made a young man again from an old one;
thus will I make you. **Ballio.** Hey, are you a magician as well?
Cook. On the contrary, I am truly a preserver of men.

That Plautus' reference to Medea is only slightly later than the Hellenistic texts discussed above is significant. This passage demonstrates that – similar to Theocritus – Plautus expected his Roman audience to be familiar with Medea's status as a witch: the

combination of the terms *medicamentum*, *venenum*, and *veneficus*⁴⁴ associates her firmly with magic. Plautus, however, modifies the literary tradition to suit his own comical purpose. Whereas the earlier literary tradition made Medea responsible for Pelias' death, the cook has her rejuvenate him.⁴⁵ By altering the well-known story, Plautus wittily warns his audience that the cook's intentions and abilities might not be what he claims they are. In spite of the poet's clever use of the complexity of the literary tradition on Medea, he does portray her as a witch. Similarly skilful adaptation of Medea's status will typify the entire Roman tradition on Medea.

Seneca's *Medea*, though the most famous of Roman tragedies on Medea, was far from the earliest (and will not be discussed in this thesis). Of the early Roman plays, however, little remains. Ennius' debt to Euripides is widely recognized, although Cicero's famous statement that Ennius' *Medea* was a faithful translation of the Greek original,⁴⁶ is an exaggeration: one might rather consider it a Latin interpretation of the Greek. The opening of the play also features the Nurse discussing the Argonautic quest (Ennius fr. 253-61 Warmington):

*Utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus
caesae accidissent abiegnae ad terram trabes,
neve inde navis inchoandi exordium
coepisset, quae nunc nominatur nomine
Argo, quia Argivi in ea delecti viri
vecti petebant pellem inauratam arietis
Colchis imperio regis Peliae per dolum;*

⁴⁴ Already in the earliest Roman texts, *veneficus* referred specifically to a magic-user. See Graf (1997: 46-48).

⁴⁵ This familiar story was also alluded to in Pind. *Pyth.* 4.250 and referred to in Lycophron and Eur. *Med.* 9. It might also have been the subject of Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi* and Euripides' *Peliades*; see Séchan (1927: 247-49), Jouan & Van Looy (1998: 518) and Dräger (2007).

⁴⁶ Cic. *Fin.* 1.2.4.

*nam numquam era errans mea domo efferret pedem
Medea animo aegro amore saevo saucia.*

If only, in the forest of Pelion,
beams of fir-wood, cut with axes, had not fallen down to the earth,
and from there a beginning had been made
to the launch of the ship which is now named
Argo, because the Argives, the chosen men,
carried in her, seek the golden fleece of the ram
of Colchis, by order of king Pelias, through trickery:
for never would my erring mistress, Medea, have set foot outside her house
sick in her mind, hurt by raging love.

While Ennius follows Euripides in the essential elements of the prologue (the cutting of trees, the building of the ship, and the subsequent departure from home by Medea, all represented in an unattainable wish), one specific term appears which was not mentioned explicitly in Euripides' *Medea*, namely *dolum*.⁴⁷ Ennius explicitly connects trickery with the Argonauts, while Medea is portrayed as lovesick and submissive to Jason. Though most of the remaining fragments reflect the content of Euripides' *Medea*, in one passage there is quite an exaggeration. While, in Euripides, Jason is said to have completed the tasks which Aeëtes set for him but Medea to have killed the serpent which guarded the Fleece (Eur. *Med.* 476-82), in Ennius, Medea claims not only to have lulled the serpent to sleep, but also that she tamed the bulls and overcame the earth-born warriors herself (fr. 282-83 Warmington). This exaggeration suggests that she might have been interpreted as more powerful than Euripides' protagonist.

⁴⁷ I have of course argued that the opening lines of Euripides' *Medea* can be interpreted as representing the Argonautic quest in general as relying on *metis*. The appearance of the term *dolum* – a term in Greek (δόλος) connected with the semantic field of *metis* – in a Latin adaptation of Euripides' play suggests that Ennius at least interpreted the opening of Euripides' *Medea* similarly to me.

Pacuvius' *Medus* dramatized the final episode of the Medea story, namely her return to Colchis. The main character was not Medea herself, but her son by Aegeus, Medus. The story, which can be reconstructed from the fragments and Hyginus *Fabula* 27 (which is similar in content) goes as follows. When Medus arrives in Colchis in order to find his mother (Pacuvius fr. 232-33 Warmington), he finds the throne usurped by his great-uncle, Perses, and pretends to be Creon's son. Fearing that Creon's purported son might kill him because of what Medea has done to Creon, Perses imprisons Medus (fr. 241). Medea subsequently arrives, pretending to be a priestess of Diana wishing to stop the famine which is oppressing the land (fr. 248). Upon hearing that Creon's son is in prison, she intends to kill him, but just before she does, she recognizes him as her own son. They are reunited, the usurper Perses is killed, and Medea is reconciled with her father, Aeëtes (fr. 260 and 261-63). The recognition theme of this story might have been modelled on the Athenian episode of Medea's mythology, in which Medea attempted to kill Theseus, only to be stopped by Aegeus who, just in time, recognized him as his son. Though not much remains, it appears that Medea maintained some of her traditional features; this is suggested by her invocation of the Sun (fr. 232-33) and her arrival in Colchis in a chariot drawn by winged serpents (fr. 242).

In short, the stories of Circe and Medea appear to have been very familiar to the Roman contemporaries of the Hellenistic poets, as Plautus' casual references to the two figures suggest. Though Medea was known to Plautus at least for her magical abilities, both her and Circe were also represented as cunning in early Latin poetry, which indicates that magic, albeit important in their portrayals, was not their only

characteristic by means of which the Romans represented them. In Augustan poetry, however, Circe's and Medea's magic will come to the forefront of their characterizations more strongly.

(c) Augustan Poetry

The Augustan poets were quite intrigued by the figures of Circe and Medea: Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid all introduced them in their poetry.

Virgil's Circe

Virgil refers to Circe in the *Aeneid* and to both Circe and Medea in the *Eclogues*. I will first discuss the *Aeneid*. Virgil's debt to the Homeric epics in the *Aeneid* is well established.⁴⁸ His description of Circe in book 7 – on the boundary between what are often called the *Odyssean* and *Iliadic* halves of the poem, and between Aeneas' wanderings and his eventual arrival in Latium – indeed looks back distinctly to the *Odyssey*, but also diverts from it (*Aen.* 7.10-20):

*proxima Circaeae raduntur litora terrae,
dives inaccessos ubi Solis filia lucos
adsiduo resonat cantu, tectisque superbis
urit odoratam nocturna in lumina cedrum
arguto tenuis percurrens pectine telas.
hinc exaudiri gemitus iraeque leonum
vincla recusantum et sera sub nocte rudentum,
saetigeri sues atque in praesepibus ursi
saevire ac formae magnorum ululare luporum,
quos hominum ex facie dea saeva potentibus herbis*

⁴⁸ See e.g. Knauer (1990).

induerat Circe in vultus ac terga ferarum.

They [i.e. Aeneas and his men] skirt the nearby shores of Circe's land,
where the Sun's rich daughter makes her unapproachable groves
resound with continuous singing, and in her immoderate house,
she burns aromatic cedar burns to give light through the night,
as she sweeps across the delicate web with the whizzing shuttle.
Hence can be heard the furious growls of lions
protesting against their bonds and roaring late in the night;
bristly boars and enclosed bears
rage, and shapes of enormous wolves howl.
These – having lost their human looks – the cruel goddess Circe
had clothed in the faces and backs of beasts by means of her potent herbs.

Aeneas's ship is, however, guided away from Circe's island by Neptune, who fills its sails with auspicious winds. Virgil's Circe closely resembles the Homeric goddess: she sings and weaves, and is an expert in the use of *potentes herbae* (7.19); she is even called a *dea* (7.19), a title which Apollonius had omitted. The atmosphere in this passage, however, is quite different from both the Homeric and the Apollonian passages: whereas the Homeric goddess functioned as one of Odysseus' benefactors after their initial confrontation, and the Apollonius' priestly figure contrasted with Medea's transgressive behaviour, Virgil's Circe – although in her actions closely resembling the Homeric model – is entirely malicious.⁴⁹ She is a goddess, yes, but one *saeva* (7.19) by nature, situated at the boundaries of the Roman pantheon, a fact emphasized by the adjective *inaccessus* (7.11) given to her land. The men she has transformed into animals have not become tame as in the Homeric story, but furiously rebel against their imprisonment, which is repeatedly suggested by the words *irae*,

⁴⁹ See Segal (1968: 429-36).

recusantum, rudentum, saetigeri, and saevire (7.15-18).⁵⁰ Virgil's representation of Circe is of a dangerous enemy to be avoided; the danger is, however, instantly removed. Indeed, whereas the Odyssean Circe sent the Greeks on their way with favourable winds (*Od.* 12.148-50), Neptune here sends the Trojans a favourable wind so they can avoid Circe's island.⁵¹ There is nothing for Aeneas to learn here: Circe's qualities as lover and guide to the underworld – attributed to her in the *Odyssey* – have been transferred respectively to Dido and the Sibyl.⁵² What is left of her Homeric character is a one-dimensional image of a malicious fury. In this ability to inspire *furor* in her victims (expressed in the roaring of the animals) she foreshadows the fury Allecto who will infuriate queen Amata and the wives of Latium (7.341-405).⁵³

Though the Trojans narrowly escape a confrontation with Circe, she is mentioned twice more in book 7. First, when a statue of one of the former kings of Latium, Picus, is described, the story of the king is narrated as follows (7.189-91):

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

Picus, tamer of horses, whom his golden wife, Circe, seized by lust,
had made into a bird – struck with her wand and transformed by her drugs –
and sprinkled his wings with colours.

⁵⁰ These transformations are in line with a general focus on the blurring between animal and human forms in book 7. See Hardie (1992: 63ff.).

⁵¹ That Aeneas avoids Circe's island is, as Nelis (2001: 259) suggests, consistent with Virgil's treatment of figures from the *Odyssey* in general. For the Trojans also avoid other Odyssean locations and figures such as Ithaca (3.272), the Phaeacians (3.291), Scylla and Charybdis (3.554-69), and the Cyclops (3.655-91).

⁵² See Yarnall (1994: 80).

⁵³ See Segal (1968: 430).

The transformation of Picus by Circe appears to have been a well-known Roman myth by Virgil's time,⁵⁴ and it will re-appear in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. If the first Virgilian passage on Circe represented her as a malicious figure, here the precise nature of her malice is emphasized: her magical abilities which allow her to control men. By briefly narrating this story, Virgil underlines the good fortune Aeneas has had not to be confronted with Circe. A detail on which the poet does not elaborate, however, but with which an informed reader would have been familiar with, is that Latinus – the present king of Latium – was Circe's son, as first mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* 1013.⁵⁵ Circe is finally mentioned in the description of Aeneas' chariot, drawn by the equine offspring of Circe's own horses (7.280-83). Through genealogy (Latinus as Circe's son), marriage (Circe as Picus' wife), and the horses drawing Aeneas' chariot, Circe is thus associated with the royal line of Latium: this connection renders Aeneas' first confrontation with her son, Latinus, potentially dangerous. For Circe's *furor* is not restricted to her island, but in fact pervades the Latin regal dynasty. As Hardie (1992: 68-69) suggests, "Neptune's protection of the Trojans [i.e. against Circe] is largely futile; if [the Trojans] are spared from being turned into animals themselves, they find in Italy a land that is thoroughly infected with Circean *monstra*." Circe's representation indeed anticipates the chaos which the Trojans will meet with in Italy, particularly once Allecto stirs Amata and Turnus to war.

Circe's power, however, is incorporated and used to a constructive purpose – ultimately, the foundation of Rome – by Aeneas through the horses which draw his chariot. While the first passage discussed represents Circe as a generally malicious

⁵⁴ Servius *ad Aen.* 7.190. See Stoffelen (1994: 131-35).

⁵⁵ See pp. 1.120 and Moorton (1988).

figure, her transformation of Picus places her malice squarely in the magical sphere. But what of Circe's status as *dea saeva*? Rather than seeing this as contradicting Virgil's representation of her as a witch, I would argue that, by terming Circe as such, the poet highlights his reliance on the Homeric tradition, since, in the *Odyssey*, Circe is called a δεινὴ θεός (e.g. at 10.136). As her description bridges the first and second halves of the *Aeneid*, Circe's characterization as both goddess and witch places her uneasily on the border between the divine and mortal worlds. She might be seen as (one of) the divine ancestors of the Latini, as Venus was of Aeneas. Circe, of course, is no Olympian goddess, and hence her power is represented as dangerous, including magical elements. Aeneas is nevertheless able to incorporate this native *furor* and apply it constructively. Virgil's Circe thus lingers on the boundary between deity and witch, on the one hand looking back at her Homeric portrayal, on the other influenced by her Hellenistic representations.

Virgil mentions both Medea and Circe in *Eclogue* 8, a poem based on Theocritus' second *Idyll*: two shepherds – Damon and Alphesiboeus – are holding a singing contest, in which they introduce the theme of the magical, transforming power of song. Medea is mentioned as a cruel woman (*crudelis*, *Ecl.* 8.48) murdering her children because of love. This reveals that Medea's status as infanticide was still well-known. Circe is mentioned in the second strophe of Alphesiboeus' song, which goes as follows (*Ecl.* 8.69-71):

*carmina vel caelo possunt deducere lunam,
carminibus Circe socios mutavit Ulixi,
frigidus in pratis cantando rumpitur anguis.*

Spells can draw down the moon from the sky,
with spells, Circe transformed Odysseus' companions,
the cold snake in the meadows is burst asunder by song.

In this *Eclogue*, Virgil has adapted Theocritus' mention of Circe to a more Roman context. On the one hand, the name Daphnis is Greek (hence the Greek accusative), and the ability to draw down the moon from the sky was taken from Greek literature.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Circe is associated with people who can make snakes burst. This magical ability was traditionally ascribed to the Italian tribe of the Marsi, whom Pliny calls descendants of Circe.⁵⁷ As in Theocritus' *Idyll*, Circe is introduced as a wielder of powerful magic, upon whose strength the narrator – Simaetha in Theocritus' *Idyll* and Alpheisiboeus in Virgil's *Eclogue* – calls to energize his or her own ritual.

In short, Virgil applies the figure of Circe to two different contexts. In the *Aeneid*, she appears not only to anticipate the fury Allecto, but also indicates the *furor* already present in the Latin people. As she is connected with them genealogically, she lingers between the divine and mortals worlds, and is represented as endowed with magical abilities. She is portrayed in a more polarized manner in *Eclogue* 8: though only her ability to transform men into animals is referred to, as the aim of the ritual is the return of a lover, Circe's inability to retain Odysseus might have anticipated the unlikelihood of this happening. This illustrates how a poet might incorporate one mythological figure in his poetry in different ways.

⁵⁶ See p. 1.35.

⁵⁷ Plin. *HN* 7.2.15.

Horace's Epodes

Horace has a keen interest in magic: it appears time and again in his poetry, particularly in the *Epodes* and *Satires*.⁵⁸ His magical *nemesis* is Canidia,⁵⁹ and it is usually in connection with her that Circe and Medea appear in his poetry. I will discuss Circe's representation in *Ode* 1.17 and *Epode* 17, and Medea's in *Epodes* 3 and 5.⁶⁰

In *Ode* 1.17, Horace, inviting his friend Tyndaris to come and join him on his Sabine farm, mentions the peace and quiet he will enjoy, singing to the accompaniment of the lyre of Penelope and *vitrea Circe*, "sea-green Circe", both of whom *laborantes in uno*, "suffer over the same man" (1.17.19).⁶¹ Horace's representation of Circe is different from Virgil's: Circe is portrayed solely as a love-sick woman, similar to Penelope. While Penelope's loyalty and love for Odysseus are themes drawn from the *Odyssey*, Circe's lovesickness for him is not: on the contrary, the *Odyssey* depicted Circe as allowing the Greeks to remain on her island only until they were rested (*Od.* 10.460-63). Circe's subordination to Odysseus is thus a stark exaggeration of her Homeric status, a theme which probably originated in the *Telegony* already, where she was represented as Telemachus' wife. Circe's epithet *vitrea* is also unusual. Not only does it connect her with the colour of the sea and hence with her status as islander, but the adjective also resonates with the context of the poem itself. Near the beginning of the poem, Horace states that, on his farm, the children need not be frightened of *virides colubrae*, "green snakes" (1.17.18). The green colour connects Circe with the snakes.

⁵⁸ e.g. *Epod.* 17, *Sat.* 1.8.

⁵⁹ Canidia features e.g. in *Sat.* 1.8, 2.1, and 2.8. For Horace's complicated portrayal of Canidia, see Tavenner (1930), Garrison (1991: 177-79), Hill (1993), Oliensis (1998: 68-96), Thom (2000: 43-51), and Cavanagh (2000: 160ff.).

⁶⁰ Medea also appears in *Epod.* 16.58. She is merely described as *impudica*, which emphasizes her proud nature.

⁶¹ This verse might be based on a poem by Anacreon, see schol. *ad Hor. Od.* 4.9.9. See Kottaridou (1991: 24).

Similarly to the snakes, however, this Circe need not be feared: in the peaceful context of poetry accompanied by the lyre as recited on his farm, she is reduced to a powerless woman in love. For Horace, not so much as love as poetry possesses a power superior to magic.

Horace offers a contrasting portrayal of Circe in *Epode* 17. Pleading with Canidia to release him from her magical bind, Horace offers examples of mythological figures who displayed lenience to their victims: alongside Achilles (who showed lenience to Telephus whom he had wounded and to Priam collecting Hector's body),⁶² Circe is mentioned (17.15-18):

*saetosa duris exuere pellibus
laboriosi remiges Ulixei
volente Circa membra; tunc mens et sonus
relapsus atque notus in vultus honor.*

The bristly limbs with hard hides they shook off,
the weary oarsmen of weary Odysseus,
by the will of Circe, and then their mind and speech
flowed back, and the accustomed honour in their appearance.

In his plea to Canidia, Horace reminds her of her mythological forerunner, Circe, who having transformed them into animals, leniently turned them back into men. This part of the Homeric episode is rarely mentioned in post-Homeric poetry.⁶³ Horace, in this case, draws a specific contrast between Circe and Canidia: while Circe was as powerful

⁶² Achilles showing lenience to Telephus: Eur. *Telephus*. *TrGF* 5 F 696-727c; to Priam: *Il.* 24.477-570.

⁶³ The only exceptions to Horace are Alcman (see chapter 5) and Ovid (see below).

as Canidia is, the former used her power also to the benefit of her victims. Canidia, however, is unmoved and hence even more powerful and malicious than Circe.

Horace's interest in Medea is mainly confined to the *Epodes*,⁶⁴ where she, as Circe in the poem previously discussed, primarily appears in conjunction with Canidia. It has been argued that the *Epodes* portray magic in general, and Canidia – and accordingly, Medea – in particular, as the worst of what is Other and dangerous in Roman society.⁶⁵ This representation, however, is ingeniously adapted to different contexts, as a brief discussion of *Epodes* 3 and 5 will demonstrate. Whereas *Epode* 3 places Medea in an amusing context, *Epode* 5 places her against the background of a macabre aphrodisiac ritual executed by four witches.

In *Epode* 3, the poet, pleading with Maecenas not to feed him so many garlic-rich dishes as they upset his stomach, compares garlic with a range of heat sources, most of which belong to the realm of magic (3.5-18).⁶⁶ Among viper's blood, *veneni* and *herbae*, Nessus' poison which killed Hercules, and Canidia, Medea is mentioned (3.9-14):

*ut Argonautas praeter omnis candidum
Medea mirata est ducem,
ignota tauris illigaturum iuga
perunxit hoc Iasonem ;
hoc delibutis ulta donis paelicem
serpente fugit alite.*

⁶⁴ In *Ars Poetica* 123 and 185, he discusses the staging of the story of Medea.

⁶⁵ See e.g. Oliensis (1998: 68).

⁶⁶ The two exceptions are garlic (3.3) and the heat of Apulia (3.15-16).

He was handsome beyond all the Argonauts,
their leader – as Medea marvelled at him,
she anointed Jason with this [i.e. garlic]
when he was about to secure the unknown yoke to the bulls;
having avenged herself on the mistress with gifts dipped in this,
she fled with the winged serpent.

In spite of the comical context of the poem, Medea's immense power is unmistakable, both in aid of Jason and to avenge herself on him: she makes Jason invincible against the bulls, kills Creon's daughter by means of poisoned gifts, and controls her grandfather's chariot drawn by winged serpents. Simultaneously, however, the equation of her powerful drugs with garlic also reduces her to a ridiculous poison-monger. Moreover, by comparing Maecenas' garlic-drenched cuisine with her poisons and – earlier in the poem – with Canidia's (3.8), the poet invites a comparison of his patron with these two witches, and mocks him in a gentle way, as this mythological hyperbole turns Maecenas into an effeminate mixer of potions.⁶⁷ In short, while maintaining the features of Medea as powerful witch, Horace – not unlike Plautus – moulds Medea's archetypal status to fit his own purpose.

In *Epode 5*, Canidia and her companions are preparing an elaborate love spell in order to attract a certain Varus; the main ingredients of the potion are the marrow and liver of a young boy being starved to death. After a lengthy description of the preparation of the ritual, the witches notice that it is not successful. Canidia then cries out (5.61-66; I only give the Latin as the translation has already been given on p. 1.30):

⁶⁷ Oliensis (1998: 89).

*quid accidit? cur dira barbarae minus
venena Medeae valent,
quibus superbam fugit ulta paelicem,
magni Creontis filiam,
cum palla, tabo munus imbutum, novam
incendio nuptam abstulit?*

It is noteworthy that *Epode 5* uses the same vocabulary to describe Medea's revenge on Creon's daughter as *Epode 3*: the same participial form of *ulciscor* is used (*ulta*), Creusa is called a *paelex*, and Medea's flight is put in the perfect indicative (*fugit*). There is thus a clear resonance between these two poems, though they place Medea in different contexts. Whereas, in *Epode 3*, Canidia and Medea were mentioned as powerful witches in the same breath, the present poem juxtaposes them: where Medea succeeded, Canidia fails; as Canidia herself suggests, she might have been outwitted by some *venefica / scientior*, a "more knowledgeable witch" (5.71-72). This technique of contrasting a contemporary witch with her mythological model echoes Theocritus' second *Idyll*, where Simaetha is also depicted as a shadow of Medea. The contrast, however, is unstable: indeed, when Canidia compares Medea's awesome power in killing Creusa with her own failure to attract Varus, she is in fact comparing two dissimilar brands of magic. Whereas Medea was indeed powerful in destructive magic, she was actually similar to Canidia in her failure to bind Jason to her by magical means. Horace's reference to Medea in the light of Canidia's failure is hence highly ironic: though she may be depicted as powerful in her revenge, the specific context reminds the reader that, in matters of the heart, Medea is as powerless as the most vulgar Roman *matrona*.

These four poems illustrate Horace's adaptation of the figures of Circe and Medea to different contexts. In his fascination with magic as symbol of the disorder and perversion which he saw taking place in contemporary Rome, Canidia might have been the key figure, but Circe and Medea are recalled to lend a further depth to Canidia's character by means of parallels and contrasts. While Horace mainly portrays Circe and Medea as powerful witches, he is aware of their other extreme too, namely their submission to men which renders their independent powers inefficacious. By referring to these two figures, particularly in conjunction with Canidia, the poet is able to explore the paradoxical juxtaposition of power and its failure in the witch-figure as a quintessential Other in Roman society.

Elegiac Witches

I have already discussed Circe's and Medea's appearance in Tibullus 2.4 and Propertius 2.1 in chapter 2. In this section, I will briefly assess their separate appearances in elegiac poetry, discussing Tibullus 3.7 (on Circe) and 1.2 (on Medea), as well as Propertius 3.12 (on Circe) and 2.4, 2.21, 2.24, 3.11, and 4.5 (on Medea).

Tibullus and Propertius' treatments of Circe are very similar. Both poems (Tib. 3.7.61-63 and Prop. 3.12.27) mention her in the context of Odysseus' *nostos*: Tibullus makes reference to her *pocula*, *herbae*, *cantus* and to her status as Helios' daughter; Propertius mentions her *fraudes* and *herbae ... tenaces*. Both poets thus refer to her in her status as powerful witch, though both emphasize that Odysseus is able to overcome her power. While Tibullus mentions Odysseus as a parallel of the strong Messala, Propertius refers to Odysseus in his praise to Postumus, a man happy because of his

chaste wife, Galla. Both poems focus on Circe's immense power and simultaneous inability to detain Odysseus from his *nostos*.

Medea's function in Roman love elegy has been discussed elaborately by, among others, Prince (2003), arguing along similar lines to myself that there is a contrast in Medea between her magical power and its inefficacy.

In Tibullus' *Elegy* 1.2, the poet, having found out that his lover, Delia, has married another in his absence, seeks comfort in wine. He attempts to entice Delia into letting him into her house by guaranteeing that her husband will never find out. For the poet has acquired the help of a *verax /... saga*, a "truthful wise woman" (1.2.41-42), whose powers are described in the similar fashion to those of other witches in Hellenistic and Roman poetry (1.2.43-52). Having described the *saga*'s power over the elements, Tibullus says that she alone has Medea's *malae herbae*, "noxious herbs" (1.2.51). Though the poet's depiction of magic is rather different from Horace's – the love poet actually engages the help of a witch, whereas Horace (as narrator of his poems) both spurns and fears magic – both poets make use of similar stock features of magic in their poetry: the magical abilities of Tibullus' witch are, for example, similar to what Canidia is trying to achieve in *Epode* 5, namely the subversion of the normal order of nature. That Medea is named in the witch's list of powers signifies that she is seen as the destroyer *extraordinaire* of order, mentioned to lend an air of credibility to the witch's capacities. In this particular passage, the witch is compared – albeit implicitly – to her mythological model: one might see her possession of Medea's *malae*

herbae as a means of incorporating the archetypal witch's abilities.⁶⁸ Tibullus' mention of Medea, indeed, is less complex than Theocritus' or Horace's: whereas those poets contemplated both sides of her polarized nature, Tibullus considers only her power.

Propertius was fascinated by the figure of Medea: she appears in no fewer than nine of his poems. While Tibullus adheres closely to a stereotypical description of Medea as powerful witch, incorporated in lists of magical figures and ingredients, Propertius explores different aspects of her characterization. It is, however, still possible to divide these portrayals of Medea into two groups: in some poems, she is depicted as a powerless victim of Jason, in others she features as a powerful figure, albeit not necessarily explicitly connected with magic as in Tibullus.

In *Elegy* 2.21, scorning Cynthia for her affair with a certain Panthus who turns out to be married, Propertius models Cynthia on Medea and Calypso, mythological women spurned in love. Not only was the Colchian deceived (*decepit*, 2.21.11) by Jason, but she was replaced in the home by Creusa (2.21.12). Poem 2.24 explores a similar theme, but here the poet compares himself with Medea, having been rejected – after only a few days of bedroom bliss (2.24.19-20) – from his mistress' home. Theseus, Demophon, and Jason are mentioned as mythological heroes who abandoned their lovers (Ariadne, Phyllis, and Medea respectively). Whereas, in the first two examples, Propertius focuses on the men, in the third, Medea receives most of the attention: having been brought (*vectast*, 2.24.45)⁶⁹ by Jason to Greece, she is then abandoned (*relicta*, 2.24.46) by the man she saved (*servato...viro*, 2.24.46). The

⁶⁸ Prince (2003: 213) argues that the description of the herbs as *malae* and hence “deceptive” “adds force to Tibullus' own disbelief in magic as cure for his lovesickness. I find this suggestion rather far-fetched: *malae* merely refers to the kind of magic Medea utilizes; it does not imply that it is therefore useless.

⁶⁹ I follow Goold (1990) rather than Heyworth (2007), who reads *nota est*.

passives are significant as they emphasize the shift in control in the couple from Medea to Jason; moreover, Jason's former dependence (*servato*) on Medea makes her present abandonment by him even more pitiable. By comparing himself with the deserted Medea, Propertius seeks to make himself the object of Cynthia's pity. Here, as in other elegies, Propertius indeed aligns himself with the feminine rather than the masculine, turning his female lover into the active, masculine partner.⁷⁰ That he compares himself more directly with Medea than with the other two heroines illustrates not only his fascination with this particular figure, but also her archetypal status as a woman rendered powerless by a man. This is even more noticeable in *Elegy* 4.5, where Propertius rages against an old hag, Acanthis, because she urges his lover to look for riches rather than love in a man. Opening the poem with a curse on the hag (4.5.1-4), Propertius proceeds to give a full account of her magical powers (4.5.5-20). These are similar in nature to those of Tibullus' *saga*, and involve bewitching the moon and foretelling the future by means of disturbing rituals. Whereas Medea was an important model for Tibullus' witch, however, she is absent in the description of Acanthis' powers. She appears later in the poem, in the hag's direct speech addressing the poet's lover about how to keep a man (4.5.41-44):

nec te Medeae delectent probra sequacis
(nempe tulit fastus causa rogare prior),
sed potius mundi Thais pretiosa Menandri,
cum ferit astutos comica moecha Getas.

And don't let the outbursts of submissive Medea delight you
 (of course she instigated contempt for having dared to ask first)

⁷⁰ See Hallett (1984) and Miller (2004).

but rather pricey Thais of elegant Menander,
when as a comedy whore she tricks cunning Getas.

Medea's absence from the description of Acanthis' powers, combined with her sudden appearance here – a comparison with a prostitute from an otherwise unknown play by Menander⁷¹ – draws attention to her submission to Jason, as contrasted to a powerful witch who dominates men, in this case Acanthis. Propertius, however, is overstating Medea's dependence, since no earlier texts made her "ask first" explicitly – though Apollonius did make her fall in love first (Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.275-98).

In the three poems of Propertius discussed so far, Medea is portrayed similarly, as a submissive and powerless figure, rejected by her lover. Whether she is depicted as such in order to elaborate on Cynthia's situation or that of the poet himself, the fact that Propertius makes such frequent use of this image confirms that Medea's lack of power when she was in love with Jason was conceived as a central part of her myth. In other poems, however, Propertius explores Medea's other side: her exceptional power. He does not do so only in a Tibullan manner – i.e. placing her in an explicitly magical context – but creates a much wider context for her power. In *Elegy* 3.11, for example, Medea is mentioned among other powerful women in an elaborate condemnation of Cleopatra – and, by implication, of Cynthia – and celebration of Octavian's victory at Actium.⁷² Medea is listed alongside other powerful females: the Amazon queen Penthesilea, Omphale (who oppressed Hercules when he was sold to her), Semiramis (an Assyrian queen and founder of Nineveh), and Cleopatra herself.⁷³ Medea's depiction (3.11.9-12) is similar to Ennius's: the poet makes *her* yoke the fire-breathing

⁷¹ Richardson (1977: *ad loc.*).

⁷² See Stahl (1985: 235-37).

⁷³ See Richardson (1977: *ad loc.*) for information on the different figures.

bulls (3.11.9-10), sow the dragon's teeth, and kill the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece. This is an exaggeration of Medea's achievements in the pre-Hellenistic literary tradition of the Argonautic quest. This overstatement – which also fits in with the awe-inspiring descriptions of the other commanding women in the poem – serves to underscore Medea's mythological status as a powerful woman, in her case one particularly connected with magic.

Finally, in poem 2.4, in a complaint about his inability to make Cynthia love him, the poet mentions that not even the use of perfume, magical potions or medicine, or sleep, can soothe his grief and release him from his lovesickness. Apart from the general term *herba* (2.4.7), he mentions as magical potions those of *nocturna* (2.4.7) Medea and of Perimede (2.4.8). The latter figure was more than likely borrowed from Theocritus, since there is no mention of her in other Hellenistic or Roman texts.⁷⁴ The educated reader might have been aware of this borrowing, and would have noticed Propertius' reliance on, and immediate departure from, his source. Not only does he not connect the two witches with a young girl but with himself,⁷⁵ but the implicit suggestion in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 that their drugs are inefficacious is made explicit: not even the potions of the most powerful magical figures can mend Propertius' broken heart. Regardless of the context and purpose, Medea is again introduced in a poem as a model, an archetype, of a powerful witch whose powers are, however, inefficacious in the context of love.

⁷⁴ See Papanghelis (1987: 36). See chapter 2 for Theocritus' reference to Perimede.

⁷⁵ For Propertius' transferral of the feminine to himself, see n. 70 p. 2.55.

The examples discussed above already allow for some suggestions to be made. Analysis of these texts suggests that, though individual poets were clearly aware of Circe's and Medea's complex nature, and could apply their characteristics to a variety of contexts, they most commonly represented both figures in poetry as archetypal figures, powerful in their magical abilities, but rendered powerless in their submission to Odysseus and Jason. Indeed, in certain poems – Tibullus 3.7 (on Circe), Horace's fifth *Epode*, and Propertius' *Elegy* 4.5 (on Medea) – where only one aspect of their dichotomous nature is developed, the context inevitably draws attention to their other extreme.⁷⁶ In other poems (such as Virgil's *Eclogue* 7 and Tibullus' and Propertius' portrayals of Circe), both aspects of their polarizations are explicitly present. Ovid's depictions of Circe and Medea follow a similar pattern.

Ovid

Medea features in two of Ovid's *Heroides* and in book 7 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Circe appears in books 13 and 14 of the same poem.

Medea in the Heroides

Ovid was engrossed by the figure of Medea: she featured prominently in his *Heroides*, *Metamorphoses*, and his lost play, *Medea*.⁷⁷ *Heroides* 6 and 12 offer interesting insights into Medea's polarized nature on account of the different viewpoints they offer. Whereas, in *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle, addressing Jason, represents Medea as the hateful barbarian who stole Jason from her, *Heroides* 12 is Medea's own tirade against Jason

⁷⁶ Pace Papanghelis (1987: 28), who suggests concerning Propertius that he treats "mythology in a loose and arbitrary manner" and that "the reader is invited to suspend the irrelevant associations" of figures.

⁷⁷ See Nikolaidis (1985) on the lost *Medea*.

for abandoning her in favour of Creon's daughter. The two letters are similar, not only in their addressee and angry tone, but also in content, since the suffering which Jason has inflicted upon the women is comparable: both Hypsipyle and Medea assert that they helped the hero in his quest; he married them (*Her.* 6.43-44 *cf.* *Her.* 12.83-86), had offspring with them (in Hypsipyle's case, twins: *Her.* 6.121), and then forsook them for another bride without informing them.⁷⁸ In Hypsipyle's letter, Medea is portrayed as entirely malicious and consistently depicted as a witch, whereas Medea's own letter depicts her as the wretched victim of Jason's duplicity.

Hypsipyle's perception of Medea is summarized in the first description of her as *barbara ... venefica*, "barbarian witch" (*Her.* 6.19). She reproaches Jason not merely for having taken another wife, but this specific wife, who is not Greek, and who did not win Jason by beauty or merit, but by her *carmina* (*Her.* 6.83). The subsequent description of Medea is a catalogue of all the stock abilities ascribed to witches in Roman literature (*Her.* 6.85-93; for the quotation, see p. 1.31). Though the list chiefly repeats claims made about Medea's powers before, Ovid – like other Roman poets – includes Medea's use of erotic magic (here in the form of a magical doll [*Her.* 6.91] and *carmina* [*Her.* 6.83]) in order to retain a lover. Similar to Ennius and Propertius (3.11), Ovid also makes Medea rather than Jason yoke the bulls. Hypsipyle's account, then, draws a stark contrast between Medea as powerful witch and herself as powerless victim.

The queen ends by cursing Medea, saying that she will suffer the same fate as her – which the reader knows is exactly what will happen – but Ovid manages to turn

⁷⁸ See Fulkerson (2005: 44-47). She also briefly discusses the issue of the authenticity of *Her.* 12 (2005: 43).

the ironic parallel around too. For, revelling in her rage, Hypsipyle declares to Jason (*Her.* 6.149-51):

*paelicis ipsa meos inplessem sanguine vultus,
quosque veneficiis abstulit illa suis!
Medeae Medea forem!*

As for your mistress, I myself would have soaked my face with her blood,
and your face, which she secured through that witchcraft of hers!
I would have been Medea to Medea!

Hypsipyle wishes Medea to become abandoned like herself, but would have also liked to be powerful like Medea and rid herself of a rival. This aggressive, bloody picture makes a strong contrast with the faithful, pious image Hypsipyle has drawn of herself so far – and it is Ovid’s achievement to demonstrate how the love for a man can turn “any woman into Medea”.⁷⁹ In *Heroides* 12, by contrast, Medea is the first-person narrator, who now places herself in the victim role and represents Creon’s daughter as the powerful new mistress.

Medea’s first description of herself is not one of a *barbara venefica* (*Her.* 6.19) but of the *Colchorum ... regina*, “queen of the Colchians” (*Her.* 12.1), a rather more noble title, though it still acknowledges Medea’s geographical Otherness. In her personal narrative of the events in Colchis, Medea focuses on her love for Jason and how he abused it. What Hypsipyle interpreted as Medea’s entrapment of Jason is expressed differently by Medea: *sic cito sum verbis capta puella tuis*, “so quickly was I,

⁷⁹ Fulkerson (2005: 54).

a girl, captured by your words” (*Her.* 12.92);⁸⁰ the passive *capta* reduces her to Jason’s prisoner. Her magical help to Jason is not suppressed entirely, but reduced to the margins of the action. That she gave him a magical potion is less important than her feelings about his safety when he confronts the bulls: *ipsa ego, quae dederam medicamina, pallida sedi*, “I, who had provided the drugs, sat in pallor” (*Her.* 12.97). Though she provided him with the drugs, she was seated while he used them, thereby again diverting the focus to her submission rather than placing her magical powers in the spotlight. Her lulling asleep of the dragon is reduced to one line (*Her.* 12.107) and her dismemberment of Apsyrtus is merely alluded to: *deficit hoc uno littera nostra loco*, “in this one place, my writing falters” (*Her.* 12.114). As for the death of Pelias, the responsibility is placed firmly in Jason’s hands, *pro quo sum totiens esse coacta nocens*, “for whom I so was so often forced to be a criminal” (*Her.* 12.132). By using the passive *coacta*, Medea creates an image of herself as helpless victim of a ruthless Jason.

In summary, the two portrayals of Medea in the *Heroides* offer extreme and contrasting images of Medea, and demonstrate Ovid’s awareness of, and interest in engaging with, Medea’s polarization already present in the poetic tradition.

Circe and Medea in the Metamorphoses

As figures capable of transforming others, it is not surprising that Medea and Circe feature prominently in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Scholars have heatedly discussed the matter of Medea’s polarized depiction in book 7. I agree with Newlands (1997: 178),

⁸⁰ I follow Showerman (2002: *ad loc.*) rather than Bornecque and Prévost (1965), who reads *sum* rather than *cum*.

who argues that “Ovid passes abruptly from a sympathetic portrayal of Medea as love-sick maiden to a tragic-comic account of her career as accomplished *pharmaceutria* (witch)”.⁸¹ After the poet has briefly explained the Argonautic journey from Iolcus to Colchis and Medea’s first infatuation with Jason, Medea takes over as first-person narrator: in a long soliloquy (*Met.* 7.11-71), she expresses doubts and love similar to the feelings expressed in *Heroides* 12. Again, the reader meets the innocent maiden Medea, who nearly relinquishes the idea of saving Jason in favour of filial loyalty, until she sees him again and the flame of her love is rekindled (*Met.* 7.77). Once she is convinced to help him, her help is largely disregarded by the poet (her drugs are mentioned briefly at *Met.* 7.98, 116 and 137); instead, her love, her fear for his safety, and her submission to him – she is called his *spolia*, his “spoils” (*Met.* 7.157) – are the main issues. Indeed, in this account of the story, it is Jason, and not Medea, who overcomes the dragon with herbs,⁸² and the murder of Apsyrtus is ignored altogether. Once Ovid turns to Iolcus, however, Medea’s magical powers become the focus.

In Aeson’s rejuvenation scene, Medea is suddenly described as a powerful witch: at midnight and full moon, she goes out to pick herbs, barefoot, with loose hair, alone. The description of her invocation of the gods and choosing of herbs is lengthy and similar to those encountered before in this chapter (*Met.* 7.192-219).⁸³ This time

⁸¹ Pace Rosner-Siegel (1982), who argues that Medea’s metamorphosis from innocent maiden into witch is a gradual development, rather than an abrupt change. Rosner-Siegel, however, distinguishes between the ‘good’ and the ‘wicked’ witch, the good witch being closer to a human being than the evil witch. It is possible to distinguish between Medea’s rejuvenation of Aeson and her murder of Pelias with respect to Medea’s intentions. Considering only her magical powers, however, there is no distinction between the two scenes. They are both equally removed from Medea’s behaviour to Jason in Colchis.

⁸² See Rosner-Siegel (1982: 237). Kenney (2001: 266) makes Medea put the dragon to sleep. This may be closer to the tradition, but though the text might be regarded as ambiguous, the context suggests Jason rather than Medea as the subject of *sparsit* (*Met.* 7.152).

⁸³ Rosner-Siegel (1982: 239-40) argues that each of the four stages of Medea’s magical ritual “marks a particular stage in Medea’s change from woman to witch” (Rosner-Siegel [1982: 239]).

Medea endows herself with the stereotypical abilities of literary witches (*Met.* 7.199-206):

*quorum ope, cum volui, ripis mirantibus amnes
in fontes rediere suos, concussaue sisto,
stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello
nubilaque induco, ventos abigoque vocoque,
vipereas rumpo verbis et carmine fauces,
vivaque saxa sua convulsaque robora terra
et silvas moveo iubeoque tremescere montes
et mugire solum manesque exire sepulcris!*

With the help [i.e. of the gods], when I wanted it, rivers flowed back to their sources while their banks were in awe; I calm the rough and rouse the calm seas with my incantation; I dispel clouds and gather them; I disperse and convene the winds; I break snakes' throats with words and song; I move living rocks and oaks, torn from their earth, and woods, and I command mountains to shake, the earth to groan and ghosts to leave their tombs!

This is a violent description of Medea's powers, and one far removed from her initial narrative, in which she portrays herself as an innocent victim of love. The drastic nature of the metamorphosis is highlighted by the fact that, whereas the Colchian episode focused on Medea's emotions, from now onwards, only the rituals are emphasized. This, as Newlands (1997: 186) suggests, underlines Medea's "remoteness from ordinary humans". The horror of her (temporary) murder of Aeson is described in full, highlighting Medea's dangerous and powerful nature, and looking forward to Pelias' imminent murder. In this episode (*Met.* 7.297-349), Medea's cruel deception of Pelias'

daughters is given particular attention – she feigns a quarrel with Jason and is called *fallax*, “deceptive” (*Met.* 7.326) – as well as the brutality of the daughters slaughtering their own elderly father. Medea, however, escapes punishment and flees to Corinth, where her revenge on Creon and his daughter, and the murder of her own two sons, is recounted in three lines (*Met.* 7.394-96). Medea’s final act after she has attempted to poison Theseus (narrated briefly; *Met.* 7.419-23) is to escape in a whirlwind created *per carmina*, “by her spells” (*Met.* 7.424).

Ovid’s portrayal of Medea in the *Metamorphoses* clearly distinguishes between the initial image of the innocent maiden (helped by the switch from third-person to first-person narrative near the beginning of book 7, focusing on Medea’s own thoughts and viewpoint), and the powerful witch-image once Medea is in Greece. This polarized image is in line with Ovid’s agenda, since, in the *Metamorphoses*, he is interested not so much in myths in their entirety, as in their transformational episodes of them. Hence the poet can lightly skip the murders of Apsyrtus and Creon’s daughter, not to mention of Medea’s own children, and focus on the metamorphoses: the earth-born warriors, the rejuvenation of Aeson, the incomplete rejuvenation/murder of Pelias, and indeed Medea’s own transformation. In the scene with the earth-born warriors, Medea’s help is not vital to the transformation, and she can thus be placed in the margin; in the episodes with Aeson and Pelias, however, her magic is of the utmost importance. Medea’s treatment in the *Metamorphoses*, as in the *Heroides*, reveals the poet’s keenness to engage with the two extreme sides in Medea’s characterization.

Ovid's treatment of Circe in the *Metamorphoses* is similar to Medea's. As has long been acknowledged, Ovid wrote his epic in answer to Virgil's *Aeneid*: the fixed fate of one hero became embedded in the ever-transforming history of the universe, and Roman mythology was traced back to its Greek – and particularly Homeric – roots.⁸⁴ Circe was vital in that context, since she embodied two of the epic's main themes: passionate love and metamorphosis. She appears in books 13 and 14, in the context of Aeneas' wanderings: when the Trojans see the strait of Scylla and Charybdis in the distance, the poet digresses on the story of Scylla. When the latter as a young, beautiful girl is approached by Glaucus, a sea god, she scorns him and flees. Circe is introduced into the story as follows (*Met.* 13.966-68):

*talia dicentem, dicturum plura reliquit
Scylla deum; furit ille inritatusque repulsa
prodigiosa petit Titanidos atria Circes.*

While he [i.e. Glaucus] said such things, and would have said more,
Scylla abandoned the god; he was furious and, enraged by the rejection,
headed for the monstrous home of Circe, Titan's daughter.

That *Circes* is the last word of the thirteenth book points towards her prominent role in book 14. Whereas Virgil's Aeneas was safely conducted away from Circe, Ovid's protagonists are drawn towards and confronted with her, with the devastating consequences suggested by the epithet *prodigiosa* given to Circe's house. In book 14, Glaucus, in his despair to gain Scylla's love, asks for Circe's help; the latter, however, falls in love with him herself. When Glaucus slights her on account of his love for

⁸⁴ See Tarrant (2002: 23-27).

Scylla, Circe poisons the pool where Scylla goes to bathe, turning the girl into a monster. In this way, Ovid explains why Scylla ate three of Odysseus' companions when they had to pass between her and Charybdis: it was because Scylla considered the Greeks her enemies since they had been helped by Circe (*Met.* 14.1-74).

After this digression on the transformation of Scylla, Ovid continues to narrate the Trojans' journey to Italy. One of Odysseus' men who was left behind on the island of the Cyclops, Achaemenides, narrates the stories of the Greeks' encounter with Polyphemus, Aeolus, the Laestrygonians, and Circe.⁸⁵ Apart from the story of Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into swine, Achaemenides also tells the story of Picus and Canens, which had been narrated to him by one of Circe's nymphs; the story is more elaborate than the one narrated by Virgil. Ovid makes Picus a Latin king in love with a girl called Canens, who is riding through the woods one day when he is spotted by Circe. Immediately in love with him, Circe lures him away from his horse by letting a ghost boar appear before him. When she reveals herself and makes her sentiments known, he rejects her on account of his love for Canens. Furious, she turns him into a woodpecker, and his companions into different animals. Canens, overcome by grief, pines away.

As in Virgil's *Aeneid*, this Circe too is called a *dea*.⁸⁶ The accumulation of magic-associated vocabulary in Ovid's description of Circe leaves no doubt, however.⁸⁷ Circe is portrayed as a witch. That she herself worships strange gods – later named as Hecate, Night, Erebus, and Chaos (*Met.* 14.404-05) – further demonstrates that her

⁸⁵ Polyphemus (*Met.* 14.167-222), Aeolus (*Met.* 14.223-32), the Laestrygonians (*Met.* 14.233-42), and Circe (*Met.* 14.242-440).

⁸⁶ e.g. at 14.33 and 14.40.

⁸⁷ e.g. *magicus* (58), *herba* (14, 21, 69, 267), *carmen* (20, 34, 44, 387), and *venenum* (55).

status of *dea* is not to be taken literally. Though Ovid bases his description of Circe on the *Odyssey* – he retains her geographical remoteness and her ability to transform people into animals – his account of the story is greatly influenced by the literary image of witches known to Ovid’s contemporaries: instead of weaving, Circe supervises the sorting of herbs by her maidens (*Met.* 264-70). Magical drugs are her only concern: there is no room for more usual feminine activities such as weaving and singing. Indeed, the absence of Circe’s singing is put into stark relief by the constant singing of Canens with which she *silvas et saxa movere / et mulcere feras et flumina longa morari / ore suo volucresque vagas retinere solebat*, “used to move woods and rocks, soften wild beasts, slow down the long rivers, and stop the wandering birds with her mouth” (*Met.* 14.338-40). Canens thus possesses her own magical powers, similar to the ones Circe *used* to have: the softening of wild beasts looks back particularly to the fawning wolves and lions roaming Circe’s island in the *Odyssey*. The ambiguous Homeric figure, however, has been split into an innocent victim (Canens) and an evil witch (Circe). Ovid’s Circe is indeed an entirely malicious and self-centred *venefica*.⁸⁸ anyone who crosses her is coldly transformed into something sub-human. On the one hand, Circe is a very powerful witch. This is confirmed by the magical abilities she is said to possess (*Met.* 14.365-71), again similar to other Hellenistic and Roman witches: not only can she raise the dead (*Met.* 14.411) and create ghostly figures out of thin air (i.e. the boar she creates when she decides to seduce Picus, *Met.* 14.358-61), she is also able to transform Scylla into a monster, Odysseus’ men into animals and back into humans, and Picus into a woodpecker.

⁸⁸ See Segal (1968: 436-41).

On the other hand, however, Circe's power is ineffectual in matters of the heart. Her passions are inflamed quickly and she is described as being desperately subject to them. For example, when she first sees Picus, she *cecidere manu quas legerat herbae, / flammaque per totas visa est errare medullas*, "dropped from her hand the herbs she had gathered, and fire seemed to stray through her entire body" (*Met.* 14.350-51). Indeed, she is never able to acquire a lover by magical means, since both Glaucus and Picus reject her; Odysseus only consents to sleep with her after their confrontation (*Met.* 14.293-98). Whereas Virgil only mentioned Circe briefly, Ovid carefully explores both her powerful and her powerless side.

In short, in the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*, Medea and Circe are represented as polarized figures, whose quasi-omnipotent magical power fails when subject to love.

(d) Conclusion

Though the Hellenistic and Roman poetic traditions are familiar with images of Circe as cunning and Medea as notorious infanticide, fratricide, and evil stepmother, it is the association of the two figures with magic which prevails. Rather than merely as powerful witches, however, all the texts which I have discussed in this chapter portray Circe and Medea as either one-dimensional (whether powerful or powerless), or polarized, encompassing both aspects – immense (magical) powers and submission to love or superior magic – in their characterization without combining these into the image of a complex female figure. There are poems which dwell only on Circe's and Medea's power: Plautus, for example, knows Medea as a powerful witch and Circe as a

cunning woman. In Virgil's *Aeneid* and Horace's *Epode* 17, Circe is depicted as unilaterally powerful; while she is malicious in the *Aeneid*, however, she is endowed with leniency in *Epode* 17. Medea, too, can be depicted as a powerful witch, for example, in Horace's *Epode* 3, Tibullus, and some of Propertius' poems. In other poems, Circe and Medea are represented as powerless victims of love: for example Circe in Horace's *Ode* 1.17, and Medea in Propertius' poems (2.21, 2.24, 4.5) and Ovid's *Heroides* 12. At other times, however, both aspects are mentioned in the same poem: Circe's depiction in Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Medea's portrayal in Apollonius, possibly Ennius, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are clear examples. In other poems, though the inefficacy of the magical powers of the two figures when they are subject to love is not mentioned, it appears implicit, though only their magical power is referred to explicitly, for example in Theocritus' second *Idyll*, Circe in Virgil's *Eclogue*, and Medea in Propertius' poems (2.4, 3.11) and Horace's *Epode* 5. There was hence a variety of ways in which poets might incorporate Circe and Medea into their poetry. This aspect of Circe's and Medea's characterization has not been acknowledged fully by scholars; my discussions of Hellenistic and Roman portrayals of both figures, however, reveal that this pattern is clearly visible.

One aspect which appears only in Roman poetry is their use of erotic magic in order to retain a lover. This is a new element in their myths, as this was not attested in Greek poetry. Indeed, though Hellenistic poetry might have represented both figures as submissive to men because of love or magic used against them, Circe and Medea were never construed as using magic in order to retain a lover, and hence their magic was never portrayed as inefficacious. The step from being lovesick to trying to retain one's

lover by magic is, however, not a huge one, and adds to the tragic nature of the witch as victim of her own powers.

This is the end of my analytical examination of the poetic sources concerning Circe and Medea. Now that all the evidence has been examined and individual arguments have been made, I move on to a synthetical assessment of the gathered evidence.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHY THE WITCHES?

As I set out in the first chapter, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that a development can be perceived in the representations of Circe and Medea from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period.⁸⁹ In the previous chapters, I have focused on the manner in which this development may be argued to have occurred, examining the portrayals of both figures in individual texts. I have proposed that, while the earliest Archaic poems represented Circe and Medea as goddesses endowed with *metis* (chapters 3 and 4), the two figures were increasingly associated with magic and portrayed as dichotomous in later Archaic and Classical poems, whether almost omnipotent in their magical powers, rendered powerless when subject to love or to magic used against them, or polarized as both simultaneously (chapters 5 and 6). In the Hellenistic period, Circe and Medea came to be construed as mythological witches on account of their vast magical power, but their polarized image also survived; the Romans, particularly the Augustan poets, keenly incorporated these Hellenistic images and adapted them to their own context (chapters 2 and 7).

The beginning and end points⁹⁰ of Circe's and Medea's development from *metis* to magic can be distinguished in the portrayals of both figures. As previous chapters have argued, Circe and Medea formed part of a family tree of cunning figures in Hesiod's *Theogony*, and were again mentioned together approximately five centuries

⁸⁹ I have adapted the title of this chapter from Barbara Hill's 1993 article on Horace's *Satire* 1.8, "Whence the Witches". She, in her turn, adapted the title of Miriam Dexter's 1990 book *Whence the Goddesses*.

⁹⁰ I am aware that the representations of the two figures continued to develop after the Hellenistic period. For the purpose of this thesis, however, the end point merely indicates the point at which their status as witches came to dominate their representations, namely in the Hellenistic period.

later as witches in Theocritus' second *Idyll* among other texts.⁹¹ Their statuses – initially as figures of cunning and then as witches – must therefore have been similar enough for certain poets to mention the two figures side by side. Between Hesiod and the Hellenistic period, however, not a single text survives which mentions both figures. While one ought not to eliminate the possibility that Circe and Medea appeared together in some of the many texts which are now lost in the mists of time, the extant evidence – on which one must inevitably focus – suggests that the developments in their status from cunning goddesses to polarized figures occurred separately over the centuries.

Having explored the “how” of the transformations of Circe and Medea in the bulk of this thesis, the present chapter aims to address the question “why”. Two initial questions must be asked. First, why were the two figures not mentioned together by poets in the period between Hesiod and Theocritus; and secondly, why were they subsequently reconnected in the Hellenistic period? In answer to the first question, I will reconsider the Archaic connection between Circe and Medea, and argue that no specific connection was in fact made between the two figures. In answer to the second question, I will consider the two figures in the context of the general discourse of magic in the Classical era, the period in which I argue their characterizations were altered most drastically. I will propose that the principal cause for their (re)connection was that the poetic representations of both figures resonated increasingly with the changing discourses on magic in the Classical period. These two initial questions, however, will

⁹¹ Around the same time, Circe and Medea were also connected by Apollonius' *Argonautica*, and they might also have been connected in Dionysius Scytobrachion's *Argonautica*, if Diodorus Siculus indeed relied on that author for his information on Circe and Medea; see pp. 1.42-43. The relative chronology of these texts is, however, uncertain.

lead to the most fundamental issue of this thesis, namely why the transformations of Circe and Medea from cunning to magical figures occurred at all.

(a) Between Hesiod and the Hellenistic Period

As I have pointed out, there is no extant evidence – poetic or otherwise – to suggest that Circe and Medea were mentioned together in between Hesiod’s *Theogony* and the Hellenistic period. One might wonder as to the reason for this lack of connection. One obvious solution is to suppose that the two figures were in fact mentioned together but that the evidence no longer survives. Considering that Circe and Medea were represented as a tightly connected, practically interchangeable pair of witches in certain Hellenistic and Roman poems, however, it appears odd that no explicit evidence survives from the Classical period. In this light, rather than assuming that the evidence is simply lost, it is also possible to propose that no explicit connection was in fact made – though I want to emphasize that this argument is meant as tentative rather than conclusive. I will presently argue that no association existed in the early Archaic period between Circe and Medea in particular, and that it should thus not come as a surprise that no explicit connections can be found between the two figures in post-Hesiodic poets – until, that is, the Hellenistic period, by which time their representations had become very similar indeed.

It has long been held that the Odyssean Circe – similar to other elements in the *Odyssey*, such as the Πλαγκταί and the Sirens⁹² – originally formed part of a pre-Homeric Argonautic myth and was thus closely associated with Medea from the early

⁹² See Meuli (1921: 97-114), Danek (1998: 203ff.), and West (2005).

Archaic period onward. Most recently, West (2005: 43-5) has proposed the following arguments in favour of this theory. First, Circe is introduced in the *Odyssey* as the sister of baneful Aeëtes and, in her advice to Odysseus regarding the dangers lying ahead, she compares Scylla and Charybdis with the Πλαγκταί, which only the Argo could pass because Hera was Jason's divine protectress (*Od.* 12.69-72). Circe is thus connected genealogically with Aea, and is familiar with at least one particular element from the Argonautic quest. Secondly, the name of her island, Aeaea, refers back to Aeëtes' land called Aea, and the *Odyssey* locates her in the East (*Od.* 10.137-39 and 12.3-4) where Aea was traditionally located, while most of Odysseus' other adventures are located in the West. Finally, Timaeus and Pherecydes, two fifth-century authors, mentioned a place in Colchis named after Circe,⁹³ which, according to West (2005: 45), suggests that they regarded Circe as living there. West (2005: 45) concludes from this evidence that Circe probably played a role similar to Medea's in the earliest Argonautic myth: "She might have assisted her niece Medea with *materia magica*; but Medea seems from the extant versions to have been fully competent in that department in her own right. What Circe was perhaps better qualified to do was to give Jason advice on the route back to Greece, which was to take him through the Clashing Rocks and other regions of which he knew nothing."⁹⁴

That the Homeric Circe was derived from an Argonautic precursor is an idea which has held sway with Homeric scholars since the early twentieth century.⁹⁵ The evidence in favour of it can, however, easily be countered. First, that Circe is a relative

⁹³ Timaeus knows of a Circaean plain (*FGrH* 566 F 84). This is also referred to in Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.400 and 3.199-203. Pherecydes (fr. 100 Fowler) mentions that the Golden Fleece was kept on Αἰαίη νῆσος, the "Aean island" in the river Phasis. At *Odyssey* 10.135, Circe's island is called by the same name.

⁹⁴ See also Meuli (1921: 113).

⁹⁵ See West (2005: 45 n. 26) for a bibliography.

of Aeëtes and lives on an island named after her brother's land does not mean she lives near him; similarly, that she knows of the Argonautic quest does not imply that she figured in it. Secondly, though there appears to be a certain logic to the geography of the representation of the world of the *Apologoi* in the *Odyssey*, the location of Circe's island near the rising of the sun has been analyzed as ambiguous – the island might also be interpreted as located in the West⁹⁶ – which renders it difficult to use as evidence. Thirdly, the evidence for a Colchian place named after Circe dates from the fifth century BCE, which makes it rather late as evidence in defence of Circe's pre-Homeric Argonautic origin. Finally and importantly, the information given to Jason regarding the Argo's homeward journey, which West attributes to Circe, might equally have been given by any other figure, as indeed it was in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, where Phineus gave this advice (Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.317-408). In short, though West's arguments underline the clear genealogical connection between Circe and Medea as established in the *Odyssey* and *Theogony*, they do not necessarily imply Circe's presence or indeed her involvement in a pre-Homeric Argonautic myth, merely her kinship with its protagonists.⁹⁷ The structure of the *Theogony* supports this argument. After the two figures have been mentioned in the same family tree (*Theog.* 956-62), both are associated separately with their respective hero: Medea with Jason (*Theog.* 992-1002), and Circe with Odysseus (*Theog.* 1011-16). I propose that it is not necessary to assume a strong connection between Circe and Medea in particular in pre-Hellenistic poetry.

⁹⁶ See Dion (1972: 486-95), who places the Homeric Circe in the West.

⁹⁷ Similarly, for example, Pasiphae is from the Hellenistic period onwards said to be a sister of Aeëtes and thus also of Circe, and another aunt of Medea's; see e.g. Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.1074-76. Though Pasiphae is also construed as a witch (e.g. by Ps.-Apollod. 3.197-98), she is never more than fleetingly associated with either Medea or Circe. This supports my argument that a genealogical link does not imply a strong mythological connection.

Though they were related and shared certain characteristics, each figure can rather be conceived of as essentially connected with a different myth: Medea with the Argonautic tale, and Circe with the story of Odysseus' *nostos*. There is no need to invent for Circe an 'original' role in the Argonautic myth upon which the one she fulfils in the *Odyssey* might be based: her various characteristics in the Homeric epic indeed connect her strongly with the protagonists of both the epic in general and of the *Apologoi* in particular, and hence support my argument that she originally belonged to Odysseus' tale rather than an Argonautic myth.⁹⁸

The initial genealogical connection, as presented in the *Theogony*, might have been created on the basis of characteristics which were not merely held in common by Circe and Medea, but were shared by their entire family. Indeed, I have discussed the connection of Helios, Aeëtes, and Idyia in particular with *metis* in chapter 2, and this appears to be the overarching family attribute. There was one feature, however, which was shared by Circe and Medea but not by any of their kin in Archaic poetry: their use of *pharmaka* to transform people, whether into animals or into younger shapes of themselves or corpses. In the Archaic period, their pharmaceutical capacity – as I have argued in chapters 2, 3, and 5 – was not expressed in magical terminology, but was rather incorporated in their cunning. Hence, rather than setting Circe and Medea apart from their kin, it actually underlined their connection with other cunning figures in their family (e.g. Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men), or was merely part of their normal power as deities (possibly Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson). In the late Archaic and Classical periods, however, this particular use of *pharmaka* became associated with the newly emerging concept of magic, and hence the two figures were set apart from

⁹⁸ See chapter 3 of this thesis for the detailed argument on the function of Circe in the *Odyssey*.

their kin with regard to their powers. At this point, I would argue, the association between Circe and Medea specifically became stronger, an argument supported by allusions to the Odyssean Circe episode in the two key Classical texts on Medea, Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* and Euripides' *Medea*.

In Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, Medea's epithet παμφάρμακος ("with knowledge of all *pharmaka*", *P.* 4.233) is a clear allusion to Circe's Odyssean title πολυφάρμακος ("with knowledge of many *pharmaka*", *Od.* 10.276). Though Circe is not mentioned by name, no other female figure in extant pre-Hellenistic literature is given this epithet,⁹⁹ and it thus appears that this particular resonance in Medea's epithet draws attention to the pharmaceutical link between aunt and niece. This allusion, however, rather than merely associating the two figures, as later poets such as Theocritus will do, also establishes a contrast: while Circe had knowledge of *many pharmaka*, Medea knows *all* of them. The niece thus outdoes the aunt: Medea is not merely construed as different from Circe but as superior in her skills.¹⁰⁰ Another Homeric allusion in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* is, as Johnston (1995: 204) has pointed out, that Aphrodite's *iunx* was modelled on Hermes' *moly* which featured in the Circe episode of the *Odyssey*, as both pharmaceutical experts are overcome by a stronger *pharmakon*. Apart from the one verbal echo and the allusion to *moly*, however, there are no further references in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* to the Odyssean Circe episode. This lack of explicit allusions is striking, considering the characteristics which Medea and Circe have in common. Similarly to the Homeric Circe, for example,

⁹⁹ In Apollonius, Medea is described by the same epithet, which emphasizes the parallels between her and Circe (Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.27). See p. 2.77 for a discussion.

¹⁰⁰ Apollonius also construed Medea as superior to Circe in her skills, see my discussion of Apollonius in chapter 7..

Pindar's Medea is portrayed as usurping the male power of speech: when she addresses the Argonauts, she begins her speech with κέκλυτε, "listen" (*P.* 4.13), an address in the Homeric epics restricted almost exclusively to authoritative male speakers.¹⁰¹ There is only one female figure in the *Odyssey* who also uses this particular address, and it is not Circe – she is represented as usurping the male power of speech in different ways, as I have argued in chapter 3. The one female Homeric figure who does use the address κέκλυτε is Penelope (*Od.* 21.68). It therefore appears that, on this occasion, Pindar's Medea is likened to Penelope rather than to Circe, in her use of rhetoric as deception, but also in her wisdom and cunning intelligence used for the benefit of the hero. Indeed, Penelope uses the verb κέκλυτε to inform her suitors of the contest with the bow which she has set for them; as I have argued in chapter 3, this is an act of *metis* approximating her husband's cunning and used to overcome the suitors and, ultimately (though Penelope does not know this yet), accelerate the reinstatement of Odysseus as her rightful *kurios*. Similarly, Medea's speech, which is also called an act of *metis*,¹⁰² is represented as leading to the foundation of Cyrene many generations later. In short, in his allusions to the Homeric Circe episode, I propose that Pindar reveals his awareness of the polarized nature of the two figures: though both Circe and Medea are skilled in the use of *pharmaka*, the powers of both can be immobilized by the use of a stronger *pharmakon*, whether *moly* or the *iunx*. Simultaneously, however, this parallel is not drawn out, and instead, the poet integrates parallels between Medea and another Homeric figure, namely Penelope. It thus appears that, for Pindar, the association between Medea and Circe was only one mythological parallel on which he might draw;

¹⁰¹ e.g. Odysseus (*Od.* 10.189, 12.271, 18.43, 21.275), Mentor (*Od.* 2.229), Hector (*Il.* 3.86).

¹⁰² Her speech is called πυκινή μῆτις (*Pind. P.* 4.58); see p. 1.210 for further discussion.

it was not strong enough to dominate his representation of Medea in any way, or indeed to linger on for more than a moment. What it does reveal is that a connection *was* made by Pindar between the two figures on account of their pharmaceutical knowledge.

Similarly, in Euripides' *Medea*, there is only one specific reference to the Homeric Circe episode. The phrase ποταμῶν ἱερῶν, "of the sacred rivers" (Eur. *Med.* 410) in the second stasimon echoes the description of Circe's attendants in the *Odyssey* (10.351). The phrase in Euripides is the following (Eur. *Med.* 410-11):¹⁰³

ἄνω ποταμῶν ἱερῶν χωροῦσι παγαί,
καὶ δίκαια καὶ πάντα πάλιν στρέφεται.

Upstream flow the waters of the sacred rivers,
and justice and all things turn in their stride.

The Homeric passage from which the phrase "sacred rivers" is drawn, is the following (*Od.* 10.348-51):

ἀμφίπολοι δ' ἄρα τέως μὲν ἐνὶ μεγάροισι πένοντο
τέσσαρες, αἳ οἱ δῶμα κάτα δρήστειραι ἔασιν.
γίγνονται δ' ἄρα ταί γ' ἔκ τε κρηνέων ἀπὸ τ' ἀλσέων
ἔκ θ' ἱερῶν ποταμῶν, οἳ τ' εἰς ἄλαδε προρέουσι.

Meanwhile, four women were working busily in the halls,
who are her servants around the house.
They were born from springs and groves
and from sacred rivers, which flow forth into the sea.

¹⁰³ See also my discussion on Euripides' *Medea*, pp. 1.223-24.

In Euripides' *Medea*, the word order of the Homeric phrase has been reversed; neither phrase – whether ἱερῶν ποταμῶν or ποταμῶν ἱερῶν – is found elsewhere in pre-Hellenistic poetry.¹⁰⁴ Garner (1990: 94) suggests that “[i]n the *Odyssey* the rivers designate the origin of the four helpers of Circe, and [...] such an allusion does not further the restoration of women’s reputations. Circe, dangerously skilled with drugs, recalls the wrong side of Medea.” Garner’s comment, however, simplifies both Circe’s function in the *Odyssey* (see chapter 3) and Euripides’ adaptation of the Homeric phrase. Through the Homeric reference, the poet does not in fact compare the two figures with respect to their pharmaceutical knowledge; this is in line with Euripides’ tendency not to linger on Medea’s magical skills (see chapter 6). Instead, Circe and Medea are implicitly compared with regard to their place in the order of the world. As in Pindar, however, a contrast as well as a parallel is drawn between the two figures. Circe’s attendants are nymphs of, among other things, “sacred rivers” οἳ τ’ εἰς ἄλλαδε προρέουσι, “which flow forth into the sea” (*Od.* 10.351); these stand in stark contrast with Euripides’ upstream (ἄνω, *Eur. Med.* 410) flowing rivers. The natural order which was maintained in the Homeric representation of Circe is overturned in Euripides’ portrayal of Medea in this passage, and Medea is thus contrasted with her aunt. This contrast is emphasized by the reversal of the two words of the phrase.¹⁰⁵ Rather than extending this comparison with Circe, however, Euripides instead chooses to draw extensively on the representation of Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ I have not found either phrase in any other case either, in pre-Euripidean literature.

¹⁰⁵ See Garner (1990: 94).

¹⁰⁶ e.g. Garner (1990: 90-97).

I have found no obvious intertextual connections in pre-Hellenistic poetry between the Medea texts and the Circe texts, other than the few discussed above. Though the evidence is admittedly very scarce, the absence of further allusions in Pindar and Euripides particularly is striking; had the earlier tradition combined the two figures strongly, one might have expected more explicit connections in these and indeed other texts. Combined with my reinterpretation of Circe's link with a pre-Homeric Argonautic tale, the relative unimportance of the connection between Circe and Medea in Pindar and Euripides suggests that no strong association was perceived between these two particular figures in pre-Classical texts. This is also supported when one considers the respective developments in the status of Circe and Medea.

As chapters 2 to 6 have revealed, it appears that though Circe and Medea were represented as a pair of archetypal witches in the Hellenistic period, their transformations from cunning goddesses into witches occurred separately. Circe was associated with magic primarily as a provider of pleasure to Odysseus' men, whom she transformed into animals. In Aristophanes' *Plutus*, for example, this transformation into animals is described in terms of pleasure (Ar. *Plut.* 307), and Circe is also depicted as a hetaira-like figure (Ar. *Plut.* 302), an element which presumably derived from her sexual union with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. In Ephippus' comedy, moreover, Circe is associated with a symposium-like event; perhaps the *pharmakon* which Circe offered the men was interpreted as similar to alcohol in its inebriating and hence immobilizing effect.¹⁰⁷ The iconographic evidence supports my argument concerning the literary texts, as the majority of Classical vase paintings depict Circe either amid men in the process of transformation into animals, or being chased by Odysseus. Her associations

¹⁰⁷ Ephippus fr. 11 *CAF*. For all these references, see my discussion in chapter 5.

with physical pleasure indeed appear to have been key aspects of her iconographic representations, as I have argued in chapter 5. Medea, in contrast, was never hugely connected with pleasure; her association with magic rather emerged through her use of destructive *pharmaka*: though these were first used primarily in aid of Jason (in his confrontation with Aeëtes' bulls and the dragon guardian of the Golden Fleece, as narrated, for example, in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode* and Euripides' *Medea*), they were subsequently used for lethal purposes (the murder of Creon and his daughter) and connected with Medea's non-magical murder of her own children in Euripides' *Medea*. Circe and Medea were thus linked with very different aspects of magic. This difference can still be seen in the only ancient text which narrates a direct encounter between the two figures, Apollonius' *Argonautica*. There, Medea is indeed perceived by Circe to have destructive plans which will harm her natal family, and Circe is contrasted with her as the constructive and harmless priestly figure.¹⁰⁸ Though the two figures were firmly linked in Hellenistic and Roman poetry, it thus appears that their transformations from divine wielders of cunning into polarized witch-figures took place separately, in different sets of myths and through very different associations with magic. The Pindaric and Euripidean allusions which I have discussed above, though they also acknowledge the differences between the two figures, reveal that, at least at some point in the Classical period, a parallel was established between Circe and Medea in specific, particularly with regard to their pharmaceutical knowledge (as is visible in Pindar) and Otherness (in Euripides). I propose that it was partly because of the emerging awareness of these parallels which existed between the two figures that Circe and Medea became explicitly connected as witches in Hellenistic poetry. The next section

¹⁰⁸ See my analysis in chapter 7.

will address this issue, namely why Circe and Medea did become connected as a pair of witches in the Hellenistic period.

(b) Inventing the Witch¹⁰⁹

Circe and Medea were, in the earliest texts, figures of *metis* who subsequently became associated with magic and were then combined by poets into a pair of mythological *ur*-witches whose power was ineffectual in retaining their lovers. The answer to the question why Circe and Medea were connected in this fashion in the Hellenistic period appears relatively straightforward: both figures separately became increasingly associated with magic in the Classical period, and, as the previous section has argued, some awareness of parallels between them can be seen to have existed in Pindar and Euripides. It is therefore plausible that their connection was made because their respective associations with magic had developed similarly. It was not, however, mere association with *pharmaka* which promoted Circe's and Medea's connection as archetypal mythological witches in Hellenistic poetry: it was rather a combination of factors – both internal to their myths and external, namely social and political – which instigated this process.

In many ways, Circe and Medea were quite different figures before they were connected in the Hellenistic period.¹¹⁰ Geographically, while Circe's location was relatively stable and she remained confined to the outskirts of society (either on the

¹⁰⁹ This title is adapted from the title of Edith Hall's 1989 monograph *Inventing the Barbarian*.

¹¹⁰ Kottaridou (1991: 152) sums up their differences slightly differently: "Kirkes Domäne ist das Draussen, die Wildnis, sie verkörpert die Libido, den allmächtigen Naturtrieb, und ihre Macht ist gefährlich, da sie Gesetze und Ordnung nicht kennt. Medeia hingegen wird in die Menschenstadt, in die Zivilisation geholt; sie heiratet, und dadurch wird ihre Sexualität in geordnete Bahnen gelenkt, sie wird zur Mutter, und ihre Macht, in der Ordnung der Ehe gebunden, soll nur guten Zwecken dienen." See also Parry (1992: 51-52) for a similar summary.

Eastern border of the world in Aea, or at the Western edge of Italy), Medea moved ever more closely into the heart of Greek civilization (from Aea/Colchis to Libya, Iolcus, Corinth, and Athens) only to be removed back to her homeland in Hellenistic poetry.¹¹¹ Medea's pharmaceutical expertise was more often applied to protection and rejuvenation or destruction, while Circe's was used for transformation. These differences can be accounted for partly by the different degree of importance which each figure had in her myth: while Medea was a major protagonist in the Argonautic myth, Circe stood forever in Penelope's shadow as only one of the creatures which Odysseus came across on his wanderings. As a protagonist of a story regarding a journey, Medea was thus more likely to move around the world than Circe, who was herself visited by the hero. Simultaneously, however, it is striking that Circe, who, as she lived on an island with only female attendants and no male *kurios*, had to defend herself against intruders, did not kill these men but instead transformed them into animals. She might as easily have killed them by means of *pharmaka*. Indeed, only one murder by her is known from myth.¹¹² Medea, on the other hand, killed six people: two out of love (Apsyrtus and Pelias) and four out of hatred (Creon, his daughter, and Medea's two sons), but all six for the sake of one man, rather than in order to defend herself against this man. Transforming men into animals and killing them, however, are similar inasmuch as they are both means of immobilizing one's enemy. In this way, both figures are more similar than appears at first. Indeed, in spite of the different ways in which the two figures became associated with magic – in essence, Circe through pleasure and Medea through murder – there were also many parallels between them.

¹¹¹ See appendix 5.

¹¹² Diod. Sic. 4.45.3-5.

Both figures were associated with several male lovers (Circe with Odysseus, Telemachus, and Picus; Medea with Jason, Aegeus, Sisyphus, and Achilles) and children (Circe with Telegonus, and Latinus and Agrius; Medea with Mermerus and Pheres, and Medus or Medeus). Both were non-Greek female figures lacking a stable *kurios*, and endowed with cunning and pharmaceutical knowledge. While there are many differences between the representations of Circe and Medea, it appears that the similarity in their cunning intelligence, in their subsequent transformation into polarized figures, and in other elements, far outweighed their differences, and thus – after perhaps four centuries of separate mentions – the two figures were connected as a pair of witch-figures in the Hellenistic period.

The status of Circe and Medea as *the* archetypal pair of witch-figures of Graeco-Roman antiquity was ultimately a Hellenistic creation. In the earliest texts, the two figures formed part of a family of wielders of *metis*; it was only through their common knowledge of *pharmaka*, growing polarization, and other parallels that in Classical poetry awareness emerged of particular connections between these two figures specifically. This reassessment of Circe and Medea leads to the core of this thesis, as one final but key issue has not yet been addressed so far, namely why the association of Circe and Medea with *metis* transformed into a polarized connection with magic at all. In order to address this question, it is necessary not only to assess elements within the early representations of Circe and Medea which might have initiated this development, but also to examine contemporary discourses on magic and witches. These, I will argue, reveal that the transformations of Circe and Medea did not occur in a social and literary

vacuum, but rather responded to contemporary developments in the conceptualization of magic.

In one way, one might argue that the development in the representations of Circe and Medea from cunning goddesses into polarized magical figures was inevitable, inasmuch as both figures were already portrayed as being in possession of contrasting aspects in the earliest texts. In the *Odyssey*, though I have argued for a more subtle reading of the Circe episode in chapter 3, Circe was essentially depicted as hostile in the first part of her episode and hospitable after her confrontation with the hero. Similarly, Medea was portrayed as subordinate to the Olympians, yet with the capacity to bind and the authority to rule in Hesiod's *Theogony* and Eumelus' *Corinthiaca* respectively. The contrasting sides of the two figures can therefore already be discerned in the earliest texts. Ultimately, indeed, the concept of *metis* itself with which Circe and Medea were connected in the earliest poems comprises two opposite states of being: binding and freeing oneself from a bond.¹¹³ *Metis*, however, connects these two extremes through its wielder's capacity for fluidity and adaptability to new situations: a cunning figure can skilfully transform from one state to the other, as Odysseus used his *metis* in order to blind the Cyclops (thereby incapacitating and hence 'binding' him) and escape from his cave. This fluidity and adaptability in the wielder of *metis* prevents *metis* from becoming a contradictory concept. A person endowed with *metis* rather finds him- or herself on the boundary between the two states, forever ready to use his or her cunning in order to escape from a bond or to create one. The states of binding and freeing are thus two complementary parts of the intricately complex notion of *metis*. Take away a mythological figure's association with *metis*, however, and,

¹¹³ See pp. 1.54-58.

deprived of this cunning manner of achieving things, his or her actions merely appear as either of two extremes. This, among other things, is what the previous chapters in this thesis have argued occurred in the case of Circe and Medea. As the magic-associated vocabulary appeared and increased in their respective depictions, the *metis*-related terminology became subordinate to this and more or less vanished entirely in the Roman tradition. This has been discerned in my chronological analysis of the texts on both figures and can now be summarized as follows.

Circe was connected with πολυμηχανίη, δόλος, and the ποικίλος knot which she taught Odysseus in the *Odyssey*.¹¹⁴ In Alcman, that she closed the ears of Odysseus' men with wax again connected her with *metis*, and in the *Telegony*, she might still have been represented as cunning through her association with the stingray, Hephaestus, Phorcys, and the art of metallurgy. In Classical comedy, no terminology referred to her *metis*, but she was, in Aristophanes' *Plutus* 310, connected for the first time in extant literature with magic through the verb μαγγανεύω, which was never connected with *metis* but belonged exclusively to the semantic field of magic. In the Hellenistic period, Circe's *metis* was acknowledged by Apollonius (*Arg.* 4.744), but it was the representation of her magical knowledge which was pivotal, as it first paralleled her with Medea, but was then rejected in favour of a contrast between the two figures. In Theocritus' second *Idyll*, solely Circe's magic was mentioned. In the Roman texts, Circe's cunning was only acknowledged in Plautus' *Epidicus*; all the other texts connected her with magical vocabulary (such as *carmina* [Verg. *Ecl.* 8.68], *pocula* [Tib.

¹¹⁴ See *Od.* 23.321 and 8.447, and my discussion in chapter 3.

3.7.61-63], or *herbae* [Ov. *Met.* 14.350]) and people (such as the Marsi [Verg. *Ecl.* 8.72] or Canidia [Hor. *Ep.* 17]).

Medea's development occurred similarly. She was solely associated with *metis* in Hesiod's *Theogony* (through her connection with cunning figures such as Cronus, Prometheus, and Metis) and Eumelus (through her connection with Sisyphus). In the *Nostoi*, the mention of *pharmaka* in combination with the cauldron might have pointed to magic, though my examination of the fragment has indicated the ambiguity on account of the Homeric reference. In Pindar's *Olympian Ode* 13.50, Medea was referred to only with respect to her *metis*; in the fourth *Pythian Ode*, however, the semantic field of *metis* was interlinked with that of magic. Not only were Medea's μήδεα (*P.* 4.27) and Aphrodite's ποικίλος *iunx* (*P.* 4.214) referred to, but Medea was also said to provide *pharmaka* (φαρμακώσασσα, *P.* 4.221) to Jason, and this term derived from *pharmakon* has been linked with the semantic field of magic rather than *metis* in chapter 6. The *iunx*, moreover, later became a familiar element in literary depictions of magic.¹¹⁵ In Sophocles' *Colchides*, only Medea's magic was alluded to, by reference to Hecate and Medea's howling, nakedness, and cutting of roots. In Euripides' *Medea*, Medea's *metis* (represented by terms such as δόλος [*Med.* 391], τέχνη [*Med.* 322], and ποικίλος [*Med.* 300]) was, as in Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, linked with the semantic field of magic, as the figure of Hecate was connected with Medea's cunning, and the cloak, imbued with *pharmaka* (*Med.* 789) was called cunning (*Med.* 1159). While in Theocritus only Medea's magic was emphasized, Apollonius construed Medea's *metis* as linked with – yet subordinate to – her magical capacities,

¹¹⁵ e.g. Theoc. *Id.* 2.17.

which dominated her representation. In Roman literary descriptions, though Ennius referred to the Argonautic *dolum*, hence placing Medea too in the context of cunning (fr. 259 Warmington), all the other texts mentioned her solely in terms of her magical power rather than her *metis*.

It thus appears that, initially, Circe and Medea were both associated solely with *metis* (though the Homeric Circe, through her connection with *thelgein*, had a stronger connection than Medea with what would come to be construed as magic in the Classical period). From the Classical period onward, Circe lost this association almost entirely in favour of a connection with magic: only Apollonius and Plautus still testify to her status as cunning figure. Medea, on the other hand, did not wholly lose her association with *metis* but it did become subordinate to her status as witch in the Hellenistic period; and – apart from in Ennius’ adaptation of Euripides’ play – it disappeared altogether in her Roman depictions. The question is, however, why Circe’s and Medea’s *metis* – the ability to bind and escape a bond – was transformed into the polarized image of magic as powerful yet ineffectual when confronted with superior magic or love. So many other figures were associated with *metis* as well, without those cunning abilities ever being changed into something else: Athena, Odysseus, and Clytaemnestra are but the most obvious examples.

This question can be answered partly, again, by assessing the literary evidence concerning Circe and Medea themselves. What they have in common with one another, but not with other figures of *metis*, is their knowledge of *pharmaka* combined with their gender, lack of a stable *kurios*, and geographical remoteness. Already in the *Odyssey*, Circe’s knowledge of *pharmaka*, combined with her status as guardian-less female

living on an island far removed from the normal world, sets her apart from other cunning females such as Helen and Penelope. Though Helen possesses pharmaceutical knowledge, she is safely confined to Sparta by her *kurios*, Menelaus, and her narrative to Telemachus about her encounter with Odysseus in Troy is undermined and reshaped by him.¹¹⁶ Penelope, in her turn, is equally ambiguous as Odysseus' absence places her in a liminal state, neither in possession of a *kurios* nor without one; she is, however, not in possession of pharmaceutical skills and is confined geographically to Ithaca. Similarly, the Archaic Medea's knowledge of *pharmaka* contrasts her with other cunning figures in Hesiod and Eumelus, such as Zeus, Metis, and Sisyphus. Their common use of *pharmaka* sets Circe and Medea apart from such figures and indeed from the rest of their family, most of whom also appear to have been represented as wielders of *metis* in one way or another, as I have argued in chapter 2. It appears that, of all the mythological figures represented as wielders of *metis* in the Archaic period, Circe and Medea were the only two non-Greek female figures lacking a stable *kurios* who were endowed with pharmaceutical knowledge. This combination of their pharmaceutical skill with their geographical remoteness, lack of male control, and somewhat polarized characterization was, as I will presently propose, a key factor in their subsequent development, as it resonated with the changing contemporary discourses on magic.

I have already discussed the pivotal role of the fifth century BCE in the crystallization of the concept of magic. It appears that the notion of magic emerged as part of the image of Otherness generally associated with the East after the Persian Wars. I have

¹¹⁶ See pp. 1.100-02.

particularly discussed the term *pharmaka*, which became partly associated with magic, though it could also still be used in the context of medicine. I suggest that the increasing awareness of Otherness in some uses of *pharmaka* particularly instigated the association of Circe and Medea with magic. The use of external paraphernalia by both figures, however, was not the only factor which rendered them open to association with this new concept. Circe's and Medea's pharmaceutical abilities, however, were combined with other key characteristics which other cunning figures lacked, such as the absence of a *kurios* and non-Greekness. I will presently argue that these characteristics were also pivotal in the general representation of magic from the Classical period onwards. The combination of these particular characteristics with Circe's and Medea's pharmaceutical knowledge holds the key to understanding why the two figures were so keenly incorporated into the newly developed concept, and indeed further developed and expanded the semantic field of magic as they became represented as the two archetypal witches of ancient mythology.

The key aspects of Hellenistic and Roman magic as represented in poetry have already been touched upon to some extent; I now recapitulate. First, that the concept of *mageia* is ultimately derived from the Persian figure of the *magos* clearly indicates that magic was initially represented as Other because of its geographical removal from the norm, as the *magos* was originally a Persian figure. While women in general could be represented as marginal and Other,¹¹⁷ female experts in magic in particular were often portrayed as geographically marginal.¹¹⁸ Circe's and Medea's Colchian origins fit in with this general notion of magic as geographically Other. One might argue that

¹¹⁷ See e.g. Stratton on p. 1.24 of this thesis.

¹¹⁸ Luc. *Phars.* 6 (a Thessalian woman). Outside poetry, Heliod. *Aeth.* 6.13 (Egyptian woman); Lucian *Dial. meret.* 4.288 (Syrian woman).

Colchis indeed became construed as a magical place, particularly in Roman poetry, through its association with Medea. In Horace's *Epode* 17.35, for example, the poet mentions *venena ... Colchica*, "Colchian poisons". These might refer to Medea, but are here merely specified by their geographical designation. Through its famous magical offspring, Colchis itself thus became a place linked with magic.

Secondly, though the earliest figures to be associated with magic were men,¹¹⁹ women – as I have argued in chapter 2 – featured prominently in literary representations of magic. The representation of Thessalian women as witches might, however, have been based on Medea's association with magic, as she was connected with Thessaly through the Argonautic myth.¹²⁰ Most witches were either represented as old¹²¹ or otherwise young and unattached (such as Simaetha or Dido). Old women no longer had a specific function as they could no longer bear children; they were, however, frequently portrayed as particularly lustful.¹²² Young and unattached women, again, were also represented as dangerous because of their lack of a *kurios*. While Circe and Medea shared with other witches represented in literature their geographical marginality,¹²³ neither figure was ever portrayed as old, and one might argue that their active sexuality added to their danger.

Finally, already in the earliest references to magic-associated figures, a polarized image of magic can be perceived: on the one hand, Herodotus' *magoi* were

¹¹⁹ e.g. Teiresias in Soph. *OT* (see p. 1.56).

¹²⁰ See Phillips (2002).

¹²¹ e.g. Tib. 1.2, 1.5, 1.8.

¹²² e.g. Dickie (2001: 104 and 246-47).

¹²³ See n. 136 p. 2.100. Medea was situated in Aea – later Colchis – on the eastern fringe of the known world (Aea: Mimnermus fr.11 and 11a *IEG*; Colchis: Eumelus fr. 9 *EGF*), and Circe was located either in Aea, where the sun rises (*Od.* 12.3-4), or in Italy, near the Pompeian marshes, in a place liminal in its inaccessibility.

associated with trickery and deceit,¹²⁴ but on the other hand, a ritual they performed appeared to be received well by Strymon, the river god they were attempting to placate.¹²⁵ This polarized image of inefficacy and power pervaded ancient Greek and Roman representations of magic from the fifth century BCE onwards, and can thus be perceived as a key element in the developing discourse on magic. Indeed, it reached a high level of complexity in Plato's association of magic not only negatively with the sophists, but also positively with Socrates.¹²⁶ The polarized discourse of magic as deceptive and inefficacious on the one hand, and as a venerable and powerful art on the other, appears pivotal in the development of the concept, as feelings of fear and contempt went hand in hand to create the image of the Other. I have discussed this in detail in chapters 2 and 7 and will therefore not elaborate further on it here.

I have argued above that the main characteristics which set Circe and Medea apart from their kin in their Archaic genealogy were their pharmaceutical knowledge, their lack of a male *kurios*, an element of polarization present in their portrayals, and their geographical remoteness. I propose that it was the precise *combination* of these factors which set them apart from other cunning figures, and which resonated with the emerging discourse on magic in the early Classical period. Indeed, from the beginning, poets represented magic – which entailed a particular knowledge of *pharmaka* – in polarized terms, and represented it as primarily the domain of women and foreigners. When the Classical discourse on magic became established, origins were provided for

¹²⁴ e.g. in the conspiracy of the *magoi* against Cyrus, Hdt. 1.120.

¹²⁵ Hdt. 7.113.

¹²⁶ For the negative association of magic with the sophists, see e.g. Pl. *Leg.* 11.932e-33e; for the positive connection of Socrates with magic, see e.g. Pl. *Men.* 80a2-3. See Carastro (2006: 185-214) for a discussion.

the polarized image of the witch by connecting this image with two mythological figures already connected with polarization, *pharmaka*, and transgression of geographical and/or gender boundaries: Circe and Medea. Once both figures became associated with magic, they in their turn reinforced the general discourse on magic. Not only were they depicted, from the Hellenistic period onwards, as arch-witches with whom other literary witches might be compared, as chapters 2 and 8 have argued. Certain elements – such as Medea’s connection with Colchis and Thessaly, and Circe’s with *thelgein* – enriched the semantic field of magic, and became commonplaces in general descriptions of magic even when not connected specifically with either of the two figures.

(c) Conclusion

In this chapter, I have investigated the causes, first, of the establishment in the Hellenistic period of the image of Circe and Medea as a pair of witches, and secondly, of the development of these two figures from wielders of *metis* into witches. First, I have argued that the primary evidence suggests that no specific connection between Circe and Medea existed in the Archaic period; their powers rather formed an intrinsic part of their *metis* with which their family as a whole was endowed. The few extant allusions to Archaic poetry in Pindar and Euripides suggest that, in the Classical period, awareness increased regarding a connection between Circe and Medea specifically. This awareness appears to have been based particularly on their shared characteristics of pharmaceutical knowledge, though both Pindar and Euripides already drew attention to the distinctions as well as the resemblances between the two figures. It thus appears

that the Hellenistic image of a pair of mythological witches – as found, for example, in Theocritus' second *Idyll* – might indeed have been a contemporary creation, based on the increasingly similar developments of both figures separately between the Archaic and the Hellenistic period.

Regarding the development of both figures from wielders of *metis* into witches, I have proposed that the discourse on magic as it emerged in the early Classical period was able to incorporate the figures of Circe and Medea smoothly on account of four of their characteristics which set them apart from other figures and which resonated with the new concept. Not only was knowledge of *pharmaka* for nefarious purposes an intrinsic part of magic, but the discourse of magic was also construed in polarized terms and strongly connected with the feminine and the non-Greek. As two mythological female figures already connected with binding and the (in)ability to free oneself from a bond, as well as with pharmaceutical knowledge, the representations of Circe and Medea deeply resonated with this new concept, were assimilated into it, and in their turn enriched it with further connotations and imagery.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION: BETWEEN METIS AND MAGIC

This thesis set out to reassess the common scholarly interpretation of Circe and Medea as the archetypal witches of Greek and Roman antiquity. It has argued that this image is essentially a Hellenistic invention, and that the two figures were presented rather differently in the earlier texts. Contrary to scholars such as Moreau (1994) and Yarnall (1994), however, I have sought to reinterpret the two figures *within* the Greek context, rather than assuming their pre-Archaic origins as Mother Goddesses; I have also argued against a linear development from benign goddesses to evil witches. My analysis of the ancient Greek and Roman texts has suggested that the key to understanding the early representations and subsequent developments of Circe and Medea does not lie in the Frazerian distinction between magic and religion. This is the approach taken by Moreau (1994), Yarnall (1994), Kottaridou (1991), and others, who understand the transformations of Circe and Medea in terms of their change of status from divine to mortal. While I acknowledge that, a few poems excepted, Circe and Medea appear to have lost their divinity some time in the late Archaic period, this development can in fact be seen as part of a much broader transformation in the status of the two figures. I have argued that the key to understanding the transformations of Circe and Medea lies in the distinction between magic and *metis*.

While other scholars have only ever connected both figures with *metis* tangentially and usually separately, I have proposed that both figures were indeed *predominantly* construed as wielders of *metis* in the earliest Archaic texts, namely the *Odyssey* and Hesiod's *Theogony*. The Homeric Circe's transformational qualities

indeed connect her more with Olympians such as Athena and Hermes, and with Odysseus himself, in terms of their *metis*, than with the creatures which populate the *Apologoi*. Her pharmaceutical knowledge is not represented in terms of alterity, but rather as pivotal to the hero's *nostos*. Medea, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, is not connected with *pharmaka* at all, but is linked with the cunning opponents of Zeus in his struggle for hegemony. The two intertwined aspects of *metis* can be discerned in both myths. The Odyssean Circe, who appears to have been bound by the Olympians to the island Aeaëa, is able to bind Odysseus' men, but is in her turn bound by Odysseus with the help of Hermes – though one might argue that she in fact allows Odysseus to bind her, as she is aware of his alliance with Hermes. She then agrees to free Odysseus' men from their animal shape. Similarly, Medea, in the *Theogony*, is bound by the Olympians in her marriage with Jason, but appears to have been bound on account of her own cunning powers which connect her with Cronus, Prometheus, and the goddess Metis. In essence, the Archaic myths of both figures are thus very similar: both cunning figures are bound by superior Olympian *metis* (Hermes or Aphrodite), and aid the hero through their own *metis*. It appears, however, that no particular link was created between Circe and Medea specifically, but that both figures formed part of a larger framework of cunning figures, including not only Olympian (Zeus, Hermes, Athena, Aphrodite) and Titan (Helios, Prometheus, Cronus) gods but also mortals such as Odysseus and the Argonauts with Jason as their leader. Traces of this connection with a large framework of cunning figures can still be found in later texts. In the *Corinthiaca*, for example, Medea is connected with Sisyphus, while Circe was possibly associated with Hephaestus and Phorcys in the *Telegony*.

In the later Archaic and Classical poems, however, Circe's and Medea's association with *metis* diminished, and they were gradually represented in terms of magic. The two intertwined aspects of *metis* – binding and freeing oneself from a bond – thus became separated from the notion of *metis* itself. Without *metis* to link both opposites, however, they were represented in polarized and contradictory terms. In the *Telegony*, for example, Circe is both powerful in her ability to immortalize Telegonus, Penelope, and Telemachus, and reduced in power and status through her marriage to Telemachus. Similarly, Medea, in the *Corinthiaca*, is capable of stopping a famine, but simultaneously bound by Hera's whim regarding the immortalization of her children. It appears that Circe might have lost her connection with *metis* entirely in the Classical texts; Apollonius is the only post-Classical poet to connect her with *metis*. Medea, by contrast, did not lose her connection with *metis* altogether: in the Classical texts, it became fused with magical vocabulary, as my analyses of Pindar and Euripides have argued.

In the Hellenistic and Roman texts, Circe's and Medea's association with *metis* became largely subordinate to their status as witches, though Apollonius still maintained their cunning abilities to a certain extent. In the other texts, I have argued that both figures were not just depicted as stereotypical witches, but rather as mortal witches *polarized* as possessing immense magical power yet failing in that power when confronted with either superior magic or with love, which was – particularly in Augustan poetry – construed as stronger than any magic. The stereotypical representation of Circe and Medea in poems which only mention them briefly in the background might be contrasted with their more complex representation in poems in

which they are protagonists. This theory, however, cannot be wholly maintained, as poets such as Ovid and Virgil do mention (one of) the two figures in detail, and still represent them in stereotypical terms.

It thus appears that the transformations in the status of Circe and Medea must be sought primarily in the altered perception of their abilities from *metis* to magic. In the course of their transformation, both figures also lost their divinity. As they were already depicted as goddesses at the margins of the Greek pantheon in the Archaic period, the step to transforming them into witches, who through their immense powers approximated divine powers anyway, was not huge. The reasons for their transformations must not only be sought in elements already present in their myths, but also in the contemporary crystallization of the concept of magic. The altering representations of Circe and Medea as non-Greek, Titan females without a stable *kurios*, endowed with pharmaceutical knowledge, and already portrayed to some degree in polarized terms, indeed resonated deeply with the general depiction of magic and witches in the Classical period. While the two figures had not been specifically connected with one another in the Archaic period, the increasing parallels in their representations brought them closer together, as the allusions to the Homeric Circe episode in Pindar and Euripides exemplify. Hence, Circe and Medea, though initially they had been connected with magic in very different ways (one primarily through pleasure and the other through murder), came to be perceived as an inextricable pair of mythological *ur*-witches in Hellenistic poetry.

I finally turn to the beginning of this thesis, and reassess the scholarly issues which I anticipated addressing. First, regarding Griffiths' (2006) rejection of a chronological assessment of Medea (and, as a consequence, of Circe), this thesis has demonstrated that, in spite of the fragmentary nature of the sources, it *is* possible to discern a chronological development in the representations of both figures. Secondly, by investigating the two particular figures of Circe and Medea with regard to their *metis*, I have aimed to further the work on *metis* done by Detienne and Vernant (1978). I have shown that these two figures can be connected more than tangentially with *metis*, and were also connected with a broad framework of other cunning figures and terms. Further research can indeed be carried out concerning related figures such as Prometheus and Sisyphus, who might have undergone similar developments from *metis* to magic, though they never became such powerful representatives of magical power as Circe and Medea. It appears that Circe's and Medea's status as *female* Titan offspring struck a particularly sensitive chord with the Greeks, and – in poetry at least – they always overshadowed the male Titans who became associated with magic, similar to Hecate. Thirdly, I have argued against Carastro's (2006) theory that the Archaic semantic field of *thelgein* can be equated with the Classical concept of magic. While I have acknowledged the parallels between the two notions, I fail to perceive in the general representation of *thelgein* a connotation of Otherness, which is pivotal if it is to be equated with magic. I have exemplified this point by indicating the different effects of *thelgein* (temporary or lasting) and by pointing out that Circe's use of immobilization connects her with figures of cunning as well as figures from the

Apologoi, and thus reveals her own transformational abilities and *metis* rather than any proposed magical abilities.

And finally...

This thesis is riddled with phrases such as “perhaps”, “one might argue”, and “plausibly”. The fragmentary nature particularly of the Archaic and Classical sources will forever inhibit a full analysis of the early status of Circe and Medea, and therefore of their subsequent development. If further evidence comes to light, it might well contradict some of the arguments which my thesis has elaborated. I have not, however, tried to ‘prove’ the transformation of Circe and Medea; I have rather unravelled the texts in a Penelopean fashion, in order to explore how far the interpretation of such fragmentary evidence can lead us. This thesis has argued that such interpretation can indeed lead us to *metis*, and that Circe’s and Medea’s Hellenistic and Roman status as archetypal witches should not be taken for granted, but was in fact the result of a long and complex transformational process.

APPENDIX 1
CIRCE: CHRONOLOGY OF THE POETIC SOURCES

Poet	Works	Date
Archaic Poetry		
Homer	<i>Odyssey</i> bks. 10-12, 8.44, 9.29-32	c. 8 th century BCE ¹²⁷
Hesiod	<i>Theogony</i> 957, 1011-16	c. 700
Alcman	fr. 29 Page	c. 650-600
Eugammon of Cyrene or Cinaethon	<i>Telegony</i> in <i>EGF</i>	c. 6 th century
Classical Poetry		
Aeschylus	<i>Circe</i> , <i>TrGF</i> 3 F 113a-115	Early 5 th century
Sophocles	<i>Odysseus wounded by the Prickle</i> , <i>TrGF</i> 4 F 453-61	5 th century
Euripides	<i>Troades</i> 435-41	415
Aristophanes	<i>Plutus</i> 302-15	388
Anaxilas	<i>Circe</i> fr. 12-14 <i>CAF</i>	c. mid 4 th century
Ephippus	<i>Circe</i> fr. 11 <i>CAF</i>	Middle Comedy
Hellenistic and Roman Poetry		
Theocritus	<i>Idyll</i> 2	Early 3 rd century
Apollonius Rhodius	<i>Argonautica</i> 4.660ff.	c. 270-245
Ps.-Lycophron	<i>Alexandra</i> 673-75, 797-98	Early 2 nd century
Plautus	<i>Epidicus</i> 604	Early 2 nd century
Virgil	<i>Eclogue</i> 8; <i>Aeneid</i> 7	c. 39-38; 19
Horace	<i>Epode</i> 17; <i>Ode</i> 1.17	c. 30; 23
Tibullus	<i>Elegies</i> 2.4 and 3.7	c. 25
Propertius	<i>Elegies</i> 2.1 and 3.12	26 and 23
Ovid	<i>Metamorphoses</i> bks. 13-14	c. 9-12 CE

¹²⁷ The majority of the dates of this and the next appendix have been taken from the *OCD*. All the dates are BCE unless stated explicitly.

APPENDIX 2

MEDEA: CHRONOLOGY OF THE POETIC SOURCES

Poet	Works	Date
<i>Archaic Poetry</i>		
Hesiod	<i>Theogony</i> 956-62, 992-1001	c. 700 BCE
Eumelus	<i>Corinthiaca</i> fr. 1-9 EGF	c. 7 th century
Mimnermus	fr. 11 and 11a IEG	floruit 632-629
Simonides	<i>Nostoi</i> fr. 6 EGF	late 7 th century
<i>Naupactica</i>	fr. 7-9 EGF	late 6 th century
<i>Nostoi</i>	fr. 6 EGF	c. 6 th century
Ibycus	schol. <i>ad Ap. Rhod. Arg.</i> 4.814	mid to late 6 th century
<i>Classical Poetry</i>		
Pindar	<i>Olympian Ode</i> 13.54-55 <i>Pythian Ode</i> 4	464 462
Deinolochus	<i>Medea</i> , test. 3 and fr. 4-5 CGF	early 5 th century
Epicharmus	<i>Medea</i> , test. 35 and p. 55 CGF	early 5 th century
Aeschylus	<i>The Nurses of Dionysus</i> , TrGF 3 F 246a-d	early 5 th century
Sophocles	<i>Colchides</i> , TrGF 4 F 336-49 <i>Rhizotomoi</i> , TrGF 4 F 534-36 <i>Scythae</i> , TrGF 4 F 546-52 <i>Aegeus</i> , TrGF 4 F 19-25a <i>Medea</i> , TrGF 4 F (title only)	5 th century
Euripides	<i>Peliades</i> , TrGF 5.2 F 601-616 <i>Aegeus</i> , TrGF 5.1 F 1 – 13 <i>Medea</i>	451 455-430? 431
Aristophanes	<i>Peace</i> 1013-14	421
Melanthius	<i>Medea</i> , in Aristophanes <i>Peace</i> 1013-14	late 5 th century
Neophron	<i>Medea</i> , TrGF 1 F 15.1-3	late 5 th century ¹²⁸
Morsimus	<i>Medea</i> , TrGF 1 F 29.1	late 5 th century
Cantharus	<i>Medea</i> , 1-4 K-A	late 5 th century

¹²⁸ The date of Neophron's *Medea* is still contested. See Mastronarde (2002: 57-64) for a summary of the debate. I agree with Mastronarde that Neophron might be placed *after* Euripides.

Euripides II	<i>Medea</i> , TrGF 1 F 17.1 (title only)	5 th century
Antimachus	<i>Lyde</i>	c. 400
Strattis	<i>Medea</i> , 34-36 K-A	400-370
Eubulus	<i>Medea</i> , 64 K-A <i>Chrysis</i> , CAF II 116-17	Middle Comedy
Antiphanes	<i>Medea</i> , 153 K-A	Middle Comedy
Carcinus Jr.	<i>Medea</i> , TrGF 1 F 70 (title only)	early 4 th century
Aphareus	<i>Peliades</i> (title only)	341
Theodorides	<i>Medea</i> , TrGF 1 F 78a (title only)	4 th century
Dicaeogenes	<i>Medea</i> , TrGF 1 F 52 (title only)	4 th century
<i>Hellenistic and Roman Poetry</i>		
Callimachus	<i>Hecale</i> fr. 4, 7-10, 16-17	<i>floruit</i> c. 280-246
Theocritus	<i>Idyll</i> 2	early 3 rd century
Rhinton	<i>Medea</i> , CGF 9	early 3 rd century
Biotus	<i>Medea</i> , TrGF 205	3 rd century
Apollonius Rhodius	<i>Argonautica</i>	c. 270-245
Ps.-Lycophron	<i>Alexandra</i> 174, 798, 887-90, 1315-19	early 2 nd century
Plautus	<i>Pseudolus</i> 868-73	191
Ennius	<i>Medea</i> fr. 253-61 Warmington	c. 239-169
Pacuvius	<i>Medus</i> fr. 232-42 Warmington	c. 220-130
Accius	<i>Medea sive Argonautae</i> , TrRF pp. 216-20	2 nd century
Horace	<i>Epodes</i> 3 and 5	c. 30
Tibullus	<i>Elegies</i> 1.2 and 2.4	c. 28 and 26
Propertius	<i>Elegies</i> 2.1, 2.4, 2.21, 2.24, 3.11, and 4.5	c. 22-16
Ovid	<i>Heroides</i> 6, 12, 17.229-234 <i>Metamorphoses</i> bk. 7	c. 5 c. 8 CE

APPENDIX 3
THE APOLOGOI OF THE ODYSSEY

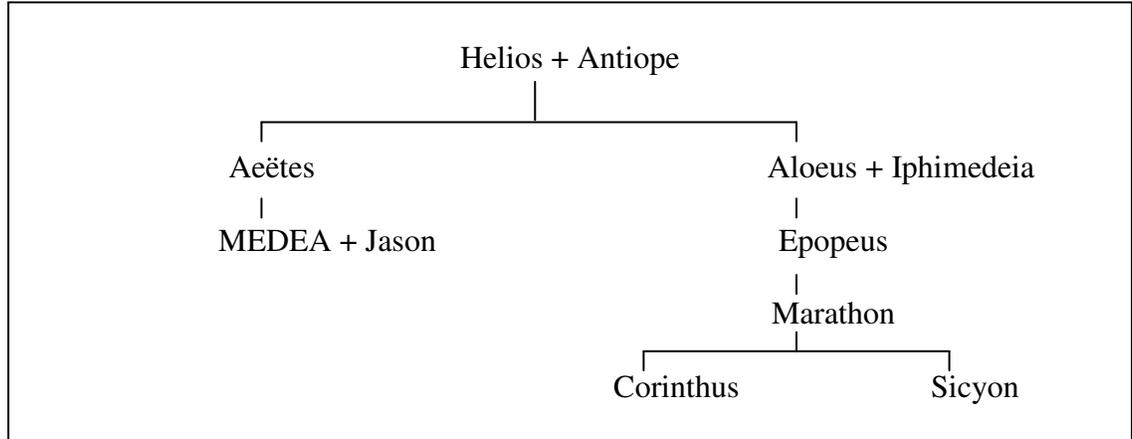
At Alcinous' court on Scheria, Odysseus narrates his travels to the Phaeacians. He begins his narrative with his departure from Troy with twelve ships carrying five or six hundred men in total.¹²⁹ At the start of book 9, Odysseus sacks the city of the Ciconians. His men, however, refuse to leave, tempted by the food and wine (9.43-46) and are subsequently driven to their ships by the Ciconians and their neighbours; seventy-two Greeks die in battle. After a terrible storm which Odysseus attributes to Zeus (9.62-83), the Greeks arrive at the land of the Lotus-eaters. The envoys which Odysseus sends eat the Lotus flower, thereby forgetting their *nostos* (9.97), and Odysseus has to bring them back to the ships. The Cyclopeia need not be repeated as it is discussed in chapter 3. After this episode, the Greeks land at Aeolus' island, where the latter feasts every day with his sons and daughters who have all married one another. Aeolus sends a favourable wind to speed Odysseus on his way home, and offers him a bag containing the other winds which need to remain locked up; the crew, however, are overcome by jealousy suspecting that the bag contains some treasure and as a result open it, upon which the ships are blown back to Aeolus' island. The latter now turns Odysseus away, saying that he must be hated by the gods (10.75). The next island the Greeks come across is that of the Laestrygonians, where Odysseus' scouts are eaten by the giants, and all the ships are destroyed save his own, which the hero himself had anchored outside the harbour. They then arrive at Circe's island (see

¹²⁹ Reinhardt (1996: 69) argues that there are five hundred, Cook (1995: 60) that there are six hundred.

chapter 3). At the end of their stay, Circe sets the Greeks a task: they have to sail to the underworld, and perform a ritual which will enable them to consult the seer, Teiresias, concerning the remainder of their journey home (book 11). Having done so, the Greeks return to Circe's island, where she instructs them on how to overcome the danger posed by the Sirens (12.166-200), and Scylla and Charybdis. Having prevailed over the Sirens and Charybdis, Odysseus is unable to avoid Scylla (as Circe had foretold), and has to witness the monster devour six of his men (12.245ff.). On the island of Thrinacia, the remainder of his men eat the cattle of Helios, which they had sworn an oath not to touch (12.303-65). As a result, Zeus again sends a storm during which they are all killed apart from Odysseus, who can narrowly escape Charybdis when he passes her again. After ten days, he arrives at the island of Calypso, where the nymph keeps him prisoner for seven years (12.447-53). At the end of this period, Hermes is sent to ask Calypso to let Odysseus go, and after twenty days, the hero arrives – naked and near death – at Scheria, where the Phaeacians finally give him a safe homeward journey (books 5-8, and 13).

APPENDIX 4
MEDEA IN EUMELUS' CORINTHIACA

*A. The early Corinthian Genealogy*¹³⁰



B. The early Corinthian rulers

Ephyra (and Epimetheus)¹³¹ – Helios – Aeëtes – Bunus – Epopeus – Marathon –
Corinthus – Jason through MEDEA – Sisyphus

¹³⁰ *Corinthiaca* fr. 2 and 3 EGF.

¹³¹ *Corinthiaca* fr. 1 EGF.

APPENDIX 5

A POST-CLASSICAL VERSION OF THE MEDEA MYTH¹³²

Medea, the daughter of Aeëtes, king of Colchis,¹³³ is a witch (φαρμακίς) and priestess of Hecate. Jason is a Greek hero who has embarked from Iolcus on a quest with the Argonauts, in order to retrieve the Golden Fleece, which is in possession of Medea's father, for his uncle Pelias. Aeëtes, not at all eager to part with it, sets impossible tasks for Jason, intending to rid himself of the intruder: Jason has to yoke two fire-breathing bulls, plough a field with them, sow dragon's teeth on that field and defeat the warriors that spring from the earth. Infatuated by the hero, Medea decides to help Jason with her magical powers, by means of which he can accomplish the tasks and get hold of the Fleece: she gives him a magic potion which will render him invulnerable and give him superhuman strength for his confrontation with the bulls, and offers him the advice to throw a rock in the midst of the earth-born warriors, who will think that one of them has attacked the others and will kill one another. In exchange for her help, Jason takes Medea with him to his homeland, Iolcus, and marries her. On the way to Greece, Medea and/or Jason kill(s) Medea's brother, Apsyrtus, in order to delay the pursuit by the Colchians; consequently, the couple need to be purified for this bloodshed and halt at the island of Medea's aunt, Circe. Medea also kills a bronze giant called Talos, who throws rocks at the Argo when the ship approaches Crete.

Upon their arrival in Iolcus, Jason discovers that Pelias has murdered his (Jason's) parents and brother, and becomes intent on revenge. Medea takes action and

¹³² This summary of the story is based on Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Ps.-Apollod. 1.9.16-28.

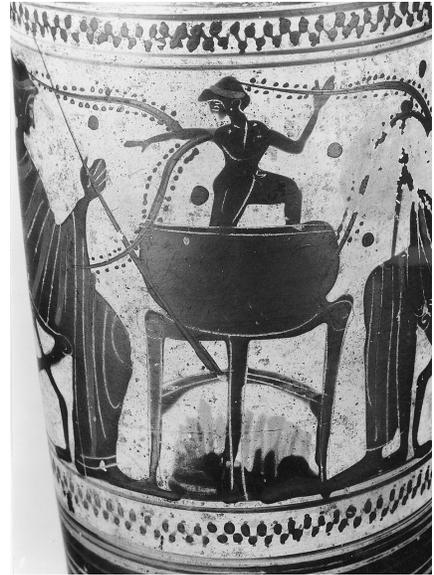
¹³³ Colchis is more or less equivalent to modern Georgia. See Braund (1994) for a discussion on ancient Colchis.

persuades Pelias' daughters to chop up their father in order to rejuvenate him, by demonstrating her skills on a ram which she rejuvenates into a lamb. She leaves out the magic spell, however, and Pelias dies. Consequently banished by Pelias' relatives, Jason and Medea flee to Corinth, where they live for ten years and have two sons, Mermerus and Pheres. When Jason decides to marry king Creon's daughter, however, Medea is slighted, her revenge immediate and devastating: she murders the king and his daughter, as well as the children born to her and Jason. Now entirely bereft of home and family, Medea flees to Athens, where king Aegeus has promised her a safe haven. With Aegeus, she has a son, Med(e)us. However, after she has tried to kill Aegeus' son from his first marriage, Theseus, she is banished from Athens with her own son. After Med(e)us has founded Media, Medea finally returns to Colchis. When she finds her father's throne usurped by his brother Perses, she kills the latter and restores the kingdom to Aeëtes.

APPENDIX 6

MEDEA IN ICONOGRAPHY

- 6.1 *Lekythos* from Vulci: Jason emerging from a cauldron with two women sitting on either side.
Early fifth century BCE
Leiden, Rijksmuseum PC 32
(*LIMC* “Jason” 59)



- 6.2 Attic neck-amphora from Etruria: Medea rejuvenates a ram, with Pelias (left) and his daughters (right) watching
c. 510-500 BCE
London: British Museum B221
(*LIMC* “Pelias” 10)
Photograph © Trustees of the British Museum



APPENDIX 7

CIRCE IN ICONOGRAPHY: CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

No.: number of the image in Appendix 8

LIMC: number of the image in Canciani's article on Kirke in *LIMC*

Subject: subject of the vase painting

Subject A: Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into animals

Subject B: Circe's confrontation with Odysseus

No.	<i>LIMC</i>	Date BCE	Style	Provenance	Museum	Subject
1	53	575-550	Corinthian	Boeotia	Boston, Museum of Fine Art 01.8100	--
2	13	560	Attic	Thebes	Boston, MFA 99.519	A
3	14	550-540	Attic	Unknown	Boston, MFA 99.518	A
	19	530	Pseudo-Chalcidian	Vulci	Vulci, Antiquarium del Castello dell' Abbadia	B
	5bis	510	Attic	Unknown	Private collection	A
5	5	510-500	Attic	Taranto	Taranto, Nat. Mus. 20324	A
	15	510-500	Attic	Taranto	Taranto, Nat. Mus. 9125	B
6	16	510-500	Attic	Sicily	Berlin, Nat. Mus. F 1960; now destroyed	B
7	17	490-480	Attic	Eretria	Athens, Nat. Mus. 1133	B
	20=6	490-480	Attic	Athens	Athens, Nat. Mus. Acr. 293	B
	21	480-470	Attic	Agrigento	Private collection	B
	22	470-460	Attic	Agrigento	Erlangen University 261	B
8	23	460	Attic	Nola, S Italy	Paris, Louvre G 439	B
	8	460	Attic	Nola	Dresden, Staatl. Kunstlg. 323	A
	9	440	Attic	Nola	Berlin, Nat. Mus. F2342	A
4	10=24	440	Attic	Bologna	Bologna, Civ. Mus. 298	A/B
	25	440	Attic	Taranto	New York, Met. 41.83	B
	26	440	Attic	Italy?	Warsaw, Nat. Mus. 140352	B
	34	1 st half 4 th C	Etruscan	Vulci	Parma, Nat. Mus. C 161	B

APPENDIX 8

CIRCE IN ICONOGRAPHY: IMAGES

- 8.1 Corinthian *aryballos* from Boeotia: the Sirens and Odysseus – and Circe?
575-550 BCE
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, no. 01.8100 (*LIMC* 53)



- 8.2 Attic *kylix* from Thebes: Circe and transforming men
c. 560-550 BCE
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, no. 99.519 (*LIMC* “Kirke” 13)
Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Detail:



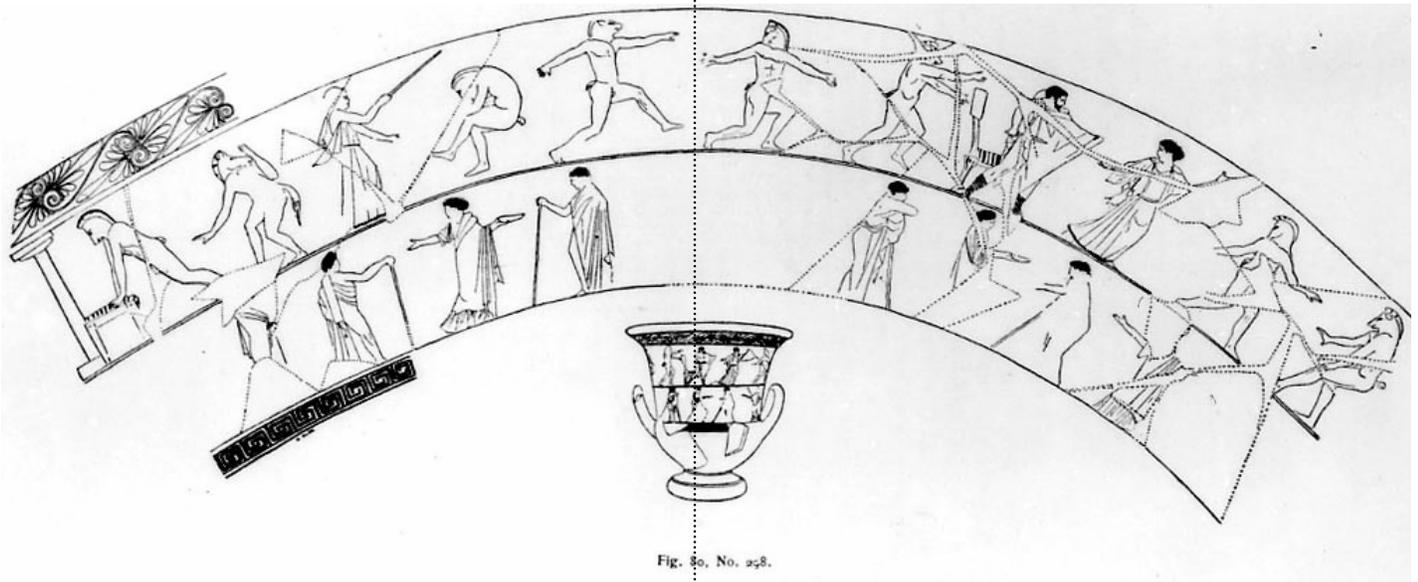
8.3 Attic *kylix*, provenance unknown: Circe and transforming men
550-540 BCE
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, no. 99.518 (*LIMC* 14)
Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



8.4 Attic *crater* from Bologna. Top LEFT: Circe and men-boars; top RIGHT: Odysseus and Circe
440 BCE

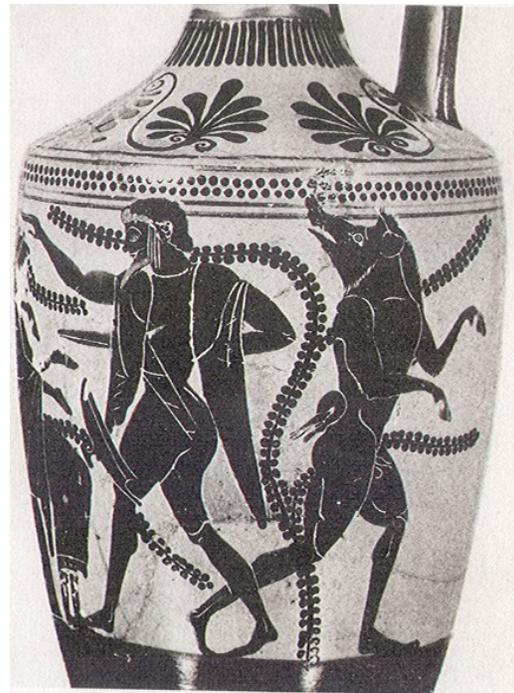
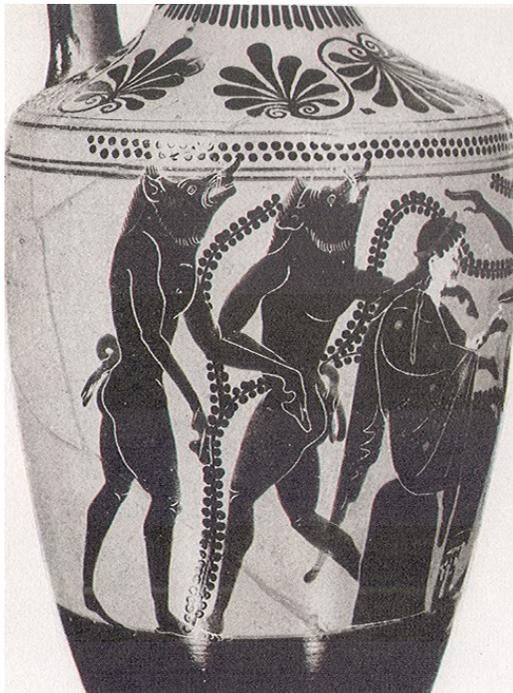
Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico, no. 298 (*LIMC* 10 = 24)

Image © Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico



8.5 Attic *lekythos* from Taranto: Odysseus menaces Circe
510-500 BCE

Taranto, Museo Nazionale, no. 9125 (*LIMC* 15)



- 8.6** Attic *lekythos* from Sicily: Circe mixes a drink for Odysseus
510-500 BCE
Vase destroyed (*LIMC* 16)



- 8.7** Attic *lekythos* from Eretria: Circe offers a cup to Odysseus
490-480 BCE
Athens, National Museum, no. 1133
(drawing) (*LIMC* 17)



8.8 Attic *oenochoe* from Nola: Odysseus chases Circe
460 BCE
Paris, Louvre, no. G439 (*LIMC* 23)
Photographs © Louvre Museum, Paris



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Ap. Rhod. Apollonius Rhodius

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Ar. Aristophanes

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Call. Callimachus

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