'Honny-dewed tongues of harlots': Circe and the Sirens in Renaissance encyclopedias and mythographic compendiums

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When Renaissance poets, pamphlet writers, and dramatists used the Sirens as symbols of both erotic and literary pleasures and dangers, they were influenced by not only by the poems of Homer, Virgil, and Ovid but another set of texts as well: writings in the allegorical tradition. In classical and medieval Christian commentaries, Renaissance mythographic compendiums, and emblem books, the Sirens appear prominently, and their symbolic import cannot adequately be assessed without discussion of Circe, the enchantress who appears alongside them in countless such texts and whose story, in the *Odyssey*, is inseparable from theirs.[1] In order to defend as allegories the poems of Homer and Virgil, commentaries often champion the hero Odysseus. They do this in part by defining him as the antithesis to Circe and the Sirens, characters whom the commentaries gloss as embodiments of sexual but also poetic enchantments. In these texts, as in Renaissance poetry itself, Odysseus – the hero most like these temptresses in his guile but also most successful in overcoming them – becomes an important defense against the notion that poetry seduces as does the Sirens’ song. Not all of these allegories valorize Odysseus as an exemplary hero. Yet many paint him as an emblem of wisdom and temperance, defining both his cunning and his continence against the deceptive pleasures Homer’s temptresses. Commentators and mythographers thus implicitly defend classical epic by separating its hero from the enchantresses he overcomes, female characters whose temptations stand in

part for the temptations of poetic song. The allegorical tradition, moreover, provided Renaissance poets and playwrights with an important variation on this strategy in that secular and Christian mythographers alike not only took Odysseus as an emblem of virtue and rhetorical skill but also promoted his victory over the Sirens' song as a model for allegorical interpretation itself.

I
Classical and Early Christian Backgrounds

The allegorical interpretations of Circe and the Sirens on which this essay focuses – those that take these female characters as emblems for both erotic and poetic pleasures and dangers – begin in part as an explicit response to Greek attacks on poetry, accusations implying that Homer's poetry was as deceptive and corrupting as the temptresses that appeared in his works.

Of these arguments against poetry, the most influential is no doubt Plato's *Republic*. Defining poetry as mimesis, Plato's Socrates argues that poetry, because it imitates material things and thus is always at two removes from the Ideal, inherently misrepresents the truth. Further, poetry corrupts its audience by appealing to the inferior, irrational part of the soul. Thus even though poetry charms us, we must renounce it in much the same way that a lover must renounce a dangerous passion. Young men are especially vulnerable to poetry's enchantments, Socrates argues, because even if the poet's intention is allegorical, inexperienced young readers are unable to distinguish between what is figurative and what is literal. Having condemned a number of Homer's (mis)representations of the gods, particularly his depiction of Zeus' sexual exploits, Socrates concludes that such stories

> must not be accepted in the city, whether they are made with a hidden sense or without a hidden sense. A young thing can't judge what is hidden sense and what is not; but what he takes into his opinions at that age has a tendency

> to become hard to eradicate and unchangeable. Perhaps it's for this reason that we must do everything to insure that what they hear first, with respect to virtue, be the finest told tales for them to hear.
>
> (378d-e)[2]

Shortly following this passage, Socrates uses the words of Odysseus himself as an example of poetry's potentially corrupting influence. Discussing what kinds of poetry may be acceptable in the *polis*, Socrates asks, "And what about making the wisest of men say that, in his opinion the finest of all things is when 'The tables are full of bread and meat / And the wine bearer draws wine from the bowl / And brings it to pour in the goblets?' Do you think that's fit for a young man to hear for his self-mastery?" (390a-b). These lines, which Socrates' interlocutor agrees are not fit for young readers, come from Odysseus' praise for the Phaeacian banquet (*Odyssey* IX.8-10). Citing this passage, Socrates links the pleasures of poetry and those of the appetite. Encouraging the indulgence of both pleasures, he implies, Odysseus' words and the poetry in which they appear could corrupt young male readers, even, in this case, those who do not mistake the literal for the figurative meaning.

Unstated but implied by Plato is the suggestion that Homer and his hero could lead young men astray in much the same way that temptresses lead men astray within the *Odyssey*'s fiction. A number of classical writers resist such a position in part by championing Homer's hero. They do so by emphasizing Odysseus' difference from, rather than affinity with, Circe and the Sirens. For example, to the Cynic Antisthenes – like Plato, a pupil of Socrates – Odysseus represents the reasonable, temperate soul opposed to the passions as they are embodied in Circe, Calypso, and the Sirens. According to Antisthenes, moreover, Homer's description of his hero as "polytropic" does not indict Odysseus for duplicity, as some would claim; rather, it signifies the hero's eloquence and wisdom, for with his many verbal turns Odysseus can accommodate himself to various interlocutors under various circumstances.[3] Xenophon's interpretation is more explicitly opposed to Plato's. Whereas in the *Republic* Socrates condemns Odysseus' praise of lavish feasts as

unfit for the ears of young men, in the *Memorabilia* Xenophon recalls how the temperate Socrates had warned his companions against gluttonous over-indulgence by praising Odysseus' restraint before the delights of Circe's table:

> "I believe," he said in jest, "it was by providing a feast of such things that Circe made swine; and it was partly by the promptings of Hermes, partly through his own restraint and avoidance of excessive indulgence in such things, that Odysseus was not turned into a pig."[4]

Diogenes of Sinope similarly defends Homer by praising Odysseus and condemning Circe as an embodiment of sensual pleasure. The most representative image of Odysseus, according to Diogenes, is that of the temperate hero lying naked and desolate on the shores of Phaeacia and devoid of all material goods and pleasures, for pleasure attacks treacherously, as Circe does with the aid of magic potions, and lays siege to each of the senses.[5] Antisthenes, Xenophon, and Diogenes, then, defend Homer by insisting on a radical distinction between the temperate, eloquent, and wise hero and a temptress who represents dangerous appetite, whether gluttony or lust. Understood in this way, Homer's poetry is not itself responsible for inducing a passion that must be renounced; rather than corrupting readers, such poetry provides the example of a hero who thoroughly avoids such venal influences, now embodied in the enchantress alone.

In the ancient world this interpretation of Homer's temptresses, defined against the hero who vanquishes them, soon becomes commonplace. We find it, for example, in the first systematically allegorical treatment of Homer's poems, traditionally known as the *Allegories of Homer* and thought to have been written by Heraclitus. Conceding Plato's point that "everything [in Homer] is profane, if nothing is allegorical," Heraclitus claims that Odysseus' entire journey is nothing but

a vast allegory, with the hero clearly representing interpretive wisdom and continence while his ignorant men, drinking from Circe's "kykeon" or cup of voluptuousness, give in to gluttony and for the sake of elusive pleasure condemn themselves to a life more miserable than that of pigs.[6] Neoplatonists, too, take Odysseus as a model for the renunciation of material things.[7] Maximus of Tyre, for example, sees Ulysses as an image of the soul exiled in matter, while Plotinus recalls this hero's renunciation of Circe and Calypso when urging his readers to turn from the obscurity of matter toward the clarity of eternal truths.[8] Although Proclus attempts to distinguish Homer's Sirens from Plato's Sirens of the celestial spheres, he nevertheless insists that both, along with the Sirens that preside over Hades, are "always bound to the material world." This is why the Muses are said to conquer the Sirens, Proclus claims, for the latter "produce a physical harmony, tied to matter" while "the Muses are specifically granted the noetic harmony."[9] Earlier Greek treatments of the Sirens had stressed their non-physical attractions, associating these singers with persuasive speech alone. Xenophon, for example, tells how Socrates, teaching his companions about friendship, likened to the "spell the Sirens put on Odysseus" the successful spells and drugs by which we charm others into being our friends. According to Xenophon, Socrates used the Sirens as examples of such effective persuasion: "I am convinced that the reason why men fled from Scylla was that she laid hands on them; but the Sirens laid hands on no man; from far away they sang to all, and therefore, we are told, all submitted, and hearing were enchanted." As we have seen, however, Neoplatonists reverse Xenophon's insistence that the Sirens represent disembodied eloquence as defined against matter, while Neopythagorians, too, take Homer's temptresses as symbols of matter and Odysseus'

victory over them as an allegory for the triumph of the reasonable soul over the flesh. Odysseus captive in Calypso's cave, for example, becomes an important image for that soul's imprisonment in the body. Circe acts as a figure for the body as well: if souls are caught in the Pythagorean cycle of rebirth it is because "[t]he urge for pleasure makes them long for their accustomed way of life in and through the flesh, so they fall back into the witch's brew of *genesiz* [generative and destructive nature]." Such souls, like Homer's hero, need both good fortune and self-restraint lest they "give in to their worst parts and emotions and take on an accursed and beastly life."[10]

Many leaders in the early church similarly use the enchantress as a monitory exemplum against lust, employing Odysseus' resistance to her blandishments as a model for Christian temperance. These Fathers may well have been influenced by not only Neoplatonic and Stoic commentary but another source as well: references to Sirens in the Old Testament. The translators of the Septuagint had used the Greek word for Sirens when translating the ancient Hebrew *tannîm* and *benôt ya' anâh* (terms meaning literally "jackals" or "hen ostriches") at Job 30; Isaiah 13, 34, and 43; Jeremiah 50:39; and Micah 1:8.[11] Clement seems to make a connection between Homer's Sirens and those of the Old Testament when he uses these temptresses to warn Christians against the sinful way of life they must leave behind:

> Let us flee from our old way of life as from the Sirens of which the story tells! For it throttles a man, it leads him away from truth, it robs him of his very life. It is a snare, an abyss, a trap, a devouring pestilence. For it [the old way of life] is indeed an island of doom heaped full of dead men's bones. And upon it sits *the comely harlot lust*, delighting men with the music of this

> world and crying: come hither, O, rich in fame, come thou pride of the Achaeans, steer thy ship to the shore and *hearken to the voice of a god* . . . Sail past lust. Sail away from the songs. They will bring thee death.[12]

Just as the "Sirens" of the Septuagint haunt the ruins of idolatrous Samaria and Babylon, so Clement's classical Sirens simultaneously encourage men to engage in idolatry and indulge in worldly pleasures. Later, Jerome's Latin translation of Isaiah 13:21-22 – "And howls answer each other through the halls and sirens dwell in the temples of pleasure [et sirenes in delubris voluptatis]" – explicitly conflates the Septuagint's demonic beasts of the desert with the lustful Sirens of Homeric commentary.[13] Ambrose, too, takes the Sirens of Babylon as symbols of wayward pleasures:

> Jeremiah wrote of Babylon that the daughters of the sirens dwelt there. By this he sought to indicate that the temptations of Babylon, that is to say, of the confusion that marks this world, are like those temptations to lust of which the ancient myths had to tell. And we should note well that these temptations enmesh the spirits of young folk with sweet but death-bringing song [*dulcem sed mortiferam cantilenam*] as they pass the rock-infested shores of this earthly life.[14]

Yet Ambrose, less anxious than Clement to defend what he calls the poets' "empty fable," suggests that Odysseus' temperance, while significant, may be surpassed by that of his Christian counterpart. The Christian man

> should not, like Ulysses, bind himself to the mast with physical bonds, rather should he with the bonds of the spirit fasten himself to the wood of the cross.

> Then he will not be cozened by the lures of lust nor will he risk setting the course of his life into the dangerous waters of desire.[15]

Appropriating Stoic and Neoplatonic allegories of Odysseus tied to the mast as a soul restraining itself before sexual temptations, these writers urge their readers to emulate and even to exceed Odysseus' self-restraint in the face of worldly blandishments.[16]

II

Early modern commentary: Ulysses as "right reader"

Similar interpretations of these temptresses as lustful pleasures recur throughout early modern commentaries and mythographic encyclopedias in the Latin West. Fulgentius, for example, takes not only the Sirens but also Scylla and Circe as personifications of cupidity, while the 11th-century Bernardus interprets Circe's potions as the false pleasures derived from wealth and temporal goods and reads Odysseus' transformed men as victims of lust sunk in foul worldly pleasures.[17] These commentators on the *Aeneid* were in all likelihood influenced by their predecessor Servius, who calls the Sirens "meretrices" and identifies Circe as a "clarissima meretrix" who "by her lust and blandishments . . . turned men into a bestial existence."[18] Later taken up by Isidore and Eustathius, this notion of the classical temptress as prostitute becomes standard in continental and English Renaissance mythographic compendiums and emblem books.[19]

In one of the most influential such encyclopedias of myth, Boccaccio's *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*, Circe becomes a famous Italian prostitute. Further claiming that the classical Sirens literally were prostitutes and noting the Sirens of whorish Babylon in Isaiah, Boccaccio concludes that these temptresses lead men to their ruin "in sterquilinio obscene libidinis" [in the dung-heap of filthy lust].[20] In the sixteenth century, Lilio Giraldi and

Vincenzo Cartari, greatly influenced by Boccaccio, offer similar opinions; Giraldi's Sirens are simply "meretrices," while Cartari's represent "la bellezza, la lascivia, e gli allettamenti delle meretrici." When Richard Linche translates Cartari into English, he writes that the Sirens represent "the delicate purenesse of beautie, wantonnesse, pleasure, & enticing allurements to the dalliance of amourous embracements" and that their victims were like men "bewitched with the illecebrous and honny-dewed tongues of harlots."[21] Natalis Comes, too, makes the Sirens emblems of "very pernicious lust," yet provides an original and influential variation on this theme by claiming that Circe represents the natural mixture of heat and moisture which engenders lust in animals.[22] Andreas Alciati's *Emblemata*, one of the most popular Renaissance emblem books, summarizes this strand of allegorical commentary, presenting emblems of Circe and the Sirens in a section on lust entitled "In amatores meretricum."[23]

Renaissance English writers would have encountered similar allegorical expositions in a number of additional sources. These include Thomas More's translation of a letter in which Pico della Mirandola likens Circe's metamorphic powers to those of the "flesh if it make us drunk in the wine of voluptuous pleasure . . . and incline into sensuality and affections of the body";[24] Abraham Fraunce's book of myths, *The Third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch*, which includes the statement that "[a]llegorically, they [the Sirens] signifie the cosning tricks of counterfeit strumpets";[25] and Geoffrey Whitney, whose Circe emblem includes the motto, "Homines voluptatibus transformantur" [men are transformed by pleasure].[26] In addition, English readers of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* would likely have known Arthur Golding's translation and allegorical commentary – which includes the statement, "what else are Circe's witchcrafts than the vyle / And filthy pleasures of the flesh" – but also the translation by George Sandys, who identifies "lustfull" Circe as "bewitching pleasure" and who notes that those who "follow *Passion* and voluptuous *Sense* . . . charm'd by CIRCE's luxurie, and ease, themselves deforme."[27]

Clearly the association of the enchantress with *eros*, evident in Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, takes on a life of its own in both classical and Christian strands of the allegorical tradition from antiquity through the Renaissance. The epic hero becomes a model of self-restraint, particularly sexual self-restraint. Yet coexisting with this dominant interpretation is a parallel and often overlapping strand of commentary that emphasizes the important role the enchantress plays, in Homer and Ovid in particular, as a figure for specifically rhetorical and poetic seductions.

This tradition of commentary may be traced back to the writings of Horace and Plutarch, in which Odysseus' victory over the Sirens and Circe becomes not only an example of moral virtue but also a model for the triumph of poet and reader over the potentially dangerous pleasures of literature itself.

For Horace, the Sirens and Circe serve as emblems of what imperils his own art. In *Satires* II.iii., for example, Damasippus warns Horace that his writing now lacks satiric rigor and offers the following admonition: "Flee that evil siren / sloth, or what your good conduct has gained you prepare with balanced mind to lose." Damasippus personifies sloth as a Siren in part because these singers are associated with a poetry that is dangerously pleasing; in this context, they represent the laziness that Horace indulges – in himself and perhaps in his readers – when he fails to produce the biting satire on which his reputation as a poet is based. This association of the Sirens with sloth is cited time and again by Renaissance mythographers. But another passage from Horace that reappears frequently in Renaissance writings uses Circe and the Sirens as a metaphor for the temptations of poetry *per se*. Horace suggests that readers must approach literature with the same discriminating skill that Ulysses used when approaching these temptresses: "You know about the Sirens' song and Circe's potion: had he [Ulysses] drunk like the others, so stupid and so eager, ruled by a whore, he'd have become both brainless and foul, like a dirty dog or a pig who loves the mud." Simultaneously warning his readers that "[n]ow is the time to drink wise words into your young and open heart; take instruction from your betters," Horace offers what may be

seen as a response to Plato's attack on poetry: he implicitly contrasts the negative effects of the Sirens' song and Circe's cup with the instructive qualities of his own satire, urging his young (male) readers to be like Ulysses, "drink[ing Horace's] wise words" rather than the enchantress's debauched pleasures.[28]

Plutarch, too, emphasizes the temptress's dual association with sexual and poetic dangers. In his *Life and Poetry of Homer*, Plutarch voices the Neopythagorian interpretation that

> [t]he changing of the companions of Odysseus into pigs and that sort of creature, suggests that the souls of foolish men take on the form of beastly animals, rushing into the turning circuit of all things, which is called Circe by name . . . The sensible man, Odysseus himself, does not suffer that kind of transformation because Hermes, who is reason, keeps him unharmed . . .[29]

Judith Yarnall notes that in this passage Plutarch develops a doctrine Socrates had expounded in the *Phaedo* (81E-82B): the souls of the foolish will be reborn into the bodies of animals whose natures match their own.[30] Plutarch's dialogue "Beasts are Rational" humorously recalls this doctrine when its Odysseus teasingly suggests that Gryllus' own inclination to swinishness, rather than Circe's drug, caused his transformation into a pig. But in this elusive dialogue, Circe's persuasive speech may be the real cause of such metamorphoses. Resisting Circe's seductive rhetoric, Odysseus says to her, "it will certainly transform me into a beast if I am to take your word for it that changing from beast to man spells ruin." If we are to take Odysseus' word for it, Circe's claim that men prefer being beasts itself functions as a "new potion of words." Plutarch never lets us forget, however, that Odysseus, too, is a rhetorician, known for cunning and guile. Ending inconclusively, the dialogue leaves the reader to choose between the claims of Odysseus, on the one hand, and those of

Circe and Gryllus, on the other. Like the sorceress, Plutarch's dialogue itself requires the tacit cooperation of its audience if it is to enchant and transform us.

A similar implication regarding the responsibility of the audience underlies the dialogue "Table Talk," in which Plutarch discusses the Sirens as symbols for the music of the spheres. In this work, to listen to the Sirens is not to be transformed into a beast but the opposite: it is to be elevated, proleptically, beyond the confines of the body. One of the men conversing around the table, Ammonius, offers this interpretation of the Sirens' song: it can remind the most virtuous human souls of their earlier state, freedom from matter. The ears of most souls are

> plastered over and blocked up, not with wax, but with carnal obstructions and affections. But any soul that through innate gifts is aware of this echo, and remembers that other world, suffers what falls in no way short of the very maddest passions of love, longing and yearning to break the tie with the body, but unable to do so.

In this passage, Plutarch differentiates between souls in love with matter (whose ears, like those of Odysseus' men, are blocked) and the wise soul, which, like Odysseus, seeks transcendent truth. The "gift" that allows this superior soul to hear the divine music is surely reason itself.[31] In "Beasts are Rational," as I have argued, Plutarch hints that Circean rhetoric requires the implicit acquiescence of its audience if it is to transform men into beasts. In "Table Talk," the Sirens' song works an opposite metamorphosis, elevating its audience beyond matter. Once again, however, Plutarch stresses that such transformation depends less on the temptress and more on the audience's state when faced with her blandishments.

Yet it is in the treatise "How the Young Man Should Study Poetry" (a treatise crucially important to Renaissance epic-romance and for the poetic theory of Tasso and

Sidney) that Plutarch places these arguments about Odysseus' right reason and about the audience's responsibility together in an explicit defense of poetry.[32] Plutarch admits Plato's point that poetry can have both positive and negative effects on its young readers:

> "Bad may be found in the head of the cuttle-fish; good there is also," because it is very pleasant to eat but it makes one's sleep full of bad dreams and subject to strange and disturbing fancies, as they say. Similarly also in the art of poetry there is much that is pleasant and nourishing for the mind of a youth, but quite as much that is disturbing and misleading, unless in the hearing of it he have proper oversight. For it may be said, as it seems, not only of the land of the Egyptians but also of poetry, that it yields "Drugs and some are good when mixed and others baneful" to those who cultivate it.[33]

Like the cuttle-fish and the *pharmakon*, poetry contains pleasing and nourishing matter but also "much that is disturbing and misleading." Having conceded as much, however, Plutarch goes on to counter Plato by claiming not only that good poetry hides philosophic truth beneath its fable (the point underlying earlier allegorical commentaries on Homer) but more importantly that young men, when tutored, can learn to distinguish between the pleasurable surface of poetic language and "what is useful and salutary therein."[34] This argument relies on the example of Ulysses tied to the mast of reason before the Siren-song of poetry:

> Shall we then stop the ears of the young, as those of the Ithacans were stopped, with a hard and unyielding wax, and force them to put to sea in the Epicurean boat, and avoid poetry and steer their course clear of it; or rather shall we set them against some upright standard of reason and there bind them fast, guiding and guarding their judgement, that it may not be carried away from the course by pleasure towards what will do them hurt?[35]

Later Proclus (AD 412-85) attempts to defend Homer but ultimately admits that poetry is unfit for young readers who have not learned to see beyond its harmful, surface meaning.[36] As the passage above suggests, however, Plutarch refuses to concede such ground. If young readers of poetry are not discriminating enough, he implies, it is because we have given up on them as Grylluses instead of training them as potential Odysseuses. Young scholars should emulate Odysseus, not his lesser companions, and "use poetry as an introductory exercise in philosophy by training themselves habitually to seek the profitable in what gives pleasure, and to find satisfaction therein; and if there be nothing profitable, to combat such poetry and be dissatisfied with it." Poetry and philosophy need not be at odds, as they are in the *Republic*. Rather, the former will prove excellent training ground for the latter. As a first step, Plutarch writes, "the young man should be introduced into poetry with nothing in his mind so well imprinted, or so ready at hand, as the saying, 'Many the lies the poets tell.'" This recognition of poetry's fictional status, and the consequent ability to avoid taking its surface narratives for truth, plays a critical role in the avoidance of possible enchantment by the poetic text. Equally crucial is a recognition of the necessity for an Odysseus-like "moderation" in reading, a discretion that involves "seek[ing] what is useful and salutary" in the allegorical fiction. Armed with these lessons, the reader who anticipates poetry's "sorcery" will avoid being "overcome by the enchantment" that would substitute fable for truth.[37] For Plutarch, then, Odysseus is an exemplary allegorical reader, one who can distinguish literal from figurative levels of meaning. The prudent discrimination practiced by this kind of reader allows him to discard the harmful kind of poetry – that which has no "kernel" of truth beneath its surface pleasures – while keeping the

useful variety. This ingenious interpretation of Odysseus at the mast as an allegory for the reader who has his cake and eats it too is one that Renaissance poets will return to with frequency as a defense of their own art.

These Renaissance writers are anticipated in the classical world by Philip the Philosopher, who defends poetry by extending Plutarch's use of Odysseus' victory over the Sirens as a figure of "right reading." In this instance the hero's mastery over Circe (rather than over the Sirens' song) becomes central to the defense of a specific poetic genre: romance. Of Heliodorus' *Ethiopica*, Philip writes, "This book, my friends, is very much like Circe's brew: those who take it in a profane manner, it transforms them into licentious pigs, but those who approach it in a philosophical way, in the manner of Odysseus, it initiates into higher things."[38] Philip associates Circe's charms with those of literary romance and takes Odysseus' victory over the *Odyssey*'s temptress as positive proof that young readers may be educated to interpret even wayward romances allegorically. As Patricia Parker has shown, this association of poetry with an effeminizing sorceress becomes a commonplace in the early modern period.[39] But for the Christians of antiquity, Odysseus' encounters with Circe and the Sirens serve as focal points for debates about the dangers and benefits of reading not just romance but any genre of pagan literature, itself understood as a Sirens' song. These writers inherited the association of the temptress with erotic temptation but also the notion that she, like classical literature, was a repository of priceless knowledge. Cicero most clearly articulates this interpretation when he writes, "Apparently it was not the sweetness of their voices or the novelty and diversity of their songs, but their professions of knowledge that used to attract the passing voyagers; it was the passion for learning that kept men rooted to the

Sirens' rocky shores." Quoting their song, Cicero continues, "It is knowledge that the Sirens offer, and it was no marvel if a lover of wisdom held this dearer than his home."[40] This dual association of the Sirens with erudition and rhetorical force reappears in debates about what the early Church deemed a particularly ambivalent kind of eloquence and knowledge: that of classical culture itself.[41] The allegorical significance of Odysseus at the mast becomes highly contested in such discussions about the benefits and perils of engaging with pagan culture.

In the *Address to the Hellenes*, for example, the Sirens specifically represent pagan philosophy: "no one who is capable of prudent discrimination will prefer the fine phrases of these two philosophers [Plato and Aristotle] to the salvation of his soul. No, he will rather, like the mariners in the old story, stop his ears with wax and so escape from the sweet peril of the Sirens that threatens to ensnare him."[42] Paulinas of Nola (353-431) makes the same argument, renouncing a pagan literature he likens to the dangerous song of the Sirens:

> Avoid this destructive sweetness of empty literature as you would the Lotus-eaters, who made men forget their fatherland by the sweetness of their berries, or as you would the Sirens' songs, those melodies of baneful seduction . . . . We must avoid them by being cleverer than Ulysses, blocking not only our ears but also our eyes and our mind, as it sails like a ship swiftly by, so that we may not be seduced by the delight that brings death and drawn on to the rocks of sin, be caught on the crags of death and suffer the shipwreck of our salvation.[43]

More influential for the Renaissance, however, is the Christian humanist argument which, like Plutarch's, praises Odysseus at the mast as an emblem of how to read

secular works allegorically for hidden truths. Clement is the first to hint at this interpretation when justifying the reading of pagan texts by learned Christians. Clement writes,

> It seems to me, that most of those who subscribe to the name of Christian are like the companions of Odysseus; for they approach our doctrine without any sense for a high culture. It is not so much the Sirens that they sail past and put behind them as the rhythms and melodies (of the genius of Greece). They stop their ears by their rejection of learning because they would never find their way home again once they had opened those ears to the wisdom of Greece. Yet he who seeks to choose what is serviceable . . . should in no wise turn aside from the love of wisdom like a beast without reason. On the contrary he should make a kind of beggar's collection – and that on as liberal a scale as he can – of helpful thoughts (from the wisdom of the Greeks). All that we must guard against is that we should dally there and go no further instead of returning home again to the true philosophy.[44]

Clement not only defends the practice of reading pagan literature; he uses a trope from that same body of literature to make his point. If Clement's detractors resemble Odysseus' feeble companions, like beasts deprived of reason refusing to value pagan culture, Clement himself is an Odysseus-like hero. In this passage, as well as in the "beggar's collection" of "helpful thoughts" it refers to (a self-reflexive reference no doubt, to Clement's own project, a miscellany littered with allusions to pagan myth), Clement appropriates the wisdom inherent in the Siren-song of Hellenic culture without being shipwrecked by it.[45]

While later mythographers do not explicitly compare themselves to Odysseus, they often take up this hero's position as "right reader" when they set out to write mythological compilations like Clement's, providing original allegorical interpretations of the myths they gather and offering interpretations of previous commentators as well. As I have argued, almost all of these Renaissance mythographers gloss Circe and the Sirens as emblems of lust. A number of them, however, also emphasize the temptress' association with specifically poetic seductions, enchantments that these compilers of myth, as experts in *allegoresis*, presumably have resisted successfully. Comes, for example, features woodcuts of Sirens and Muses on the same page and directly refers his readers to the passage in Book III of the *Ars Amatoria* where Ovid insists that the Sirens attracted sailors not with their good looks but with their vocal seductions alone.[46] Two other mythographers, Boccaccio and Golding, proffer this same notion that poetry is a Siren's song but nonetheless defend poetic eloquence by employing Odysseus as a figure for the reader.

In his individual treatments of the Sirens and Circe in the *Genealogie*, for example, Boccaccio emphasizes their erotic wiles but also their verbal skill. The meretricious Sirens are alleged to be the daughters of the Muse Calliope because of their (infamous) eloquence, while Circe is said to allure men with her "force" and "eloquence"("feminam . . . potentissimam fuisse viribus et sermone"), her "wiles "and "elegant words" ("suo blanditiis et ornatu sermonis").[47] In the last two books of his mythography, however, Boccaccio writes an explicit apology for poetry. Boccaccio's defense includes a number of arguments. The chief of these is his definition of poetry as allegory, verse that "veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of

fiction." If certain readers fail to discover that hidden truth due to lack of effort on their part, Boccaccio writes, "let them not blame the poets but their own sloth."[48] Boccaccio, moreover, challenges those who condemn poetry on the basis that it allures to sin. He does this by arguing against the manner in which such thinkers interpret Boethius, whose attack on poetry in the *Consolation of Philosophy* such writers often quote. In Book I Prose 1 of that treatise, Boethius recounts the story of how, while he was in prison languishing in self-pity and writing lyric complaints, Lady Philosophy appeared and banished from his side his poetic Muses, whom she denounced as "whores from the theater," flattering "Sirens" capable of nourishing only with a "sweet poison" that causes disease and death.[49] When poet-haters use this passage from Boethius to bolster their arguments, Boccaccio claims, they willfully misread it: Boethius can only mean to attack works for the stage, not poetry *per se*.[50] Finally, Boccaccio argues that his detractors, who judge all poetry to be lewd on the basis of their own responses when reading the worst of poems, should in fact be ashamed of *themselves*, not of poetry:

> What might one expect of them in case a girl by licentious glance and gesture, and soft utterance, held out an unholy promise to them, if they are allured by unuttered verses perused in silence? Well may the wretches blush and revise their mad counsel, considering how Ulysses, noble soul, spurned the sound, not of songs read in the closet, but the dulcet music of the Sirens, whom he passed by for fear of harm at their hands.[51]

Lascivious men would censor poetry because in their weakness they find themselves taking base pleasure from reading it. These fools, however, should note Ulysses, whose story shows that it is possible to pass by even the Sirens without succumbing

to their enticements. Boccaccio's Ulysses is not explicitly engaged in allegorical or figurative reading, as was Plutarch's. But Boccaccio does use both the example of the hero faced with the Sirens and the analogy between *allegoresis* and unveiling to defend poetry in much the same way that Plutarch does: by placing ultimate responsibility for any enchantment on the reader.

In 1567 Arthur Golding, the English translator and allegorizer of Ovid, uses Ulysses and the Sirens in a similar defense of poetry. In his "Epistle," Golding admits that readers of his book may meet with a "wanton word / Or matter lewd" and that some of them may "feele their myndes therby / Provokte too vyce and wantonnesse" (lines 547-50). Nonetheless, he argues,

> For sure theis fables are not put in wrighting to thentent
> Too further or allure to Vyce: but rather this is ment,
> That men beholding what they bee when Vyce doth reigne instead
> Of vertue, should not let their lewd affections have the head,
> For as there is no creature more divine than man as long
> As reason hath the sovereintie and standeth firme and strong;
> So is there none more beastly, vyle, and develish, than is hee,
> If reason giving over, by affection mated be.
>
> (lines 561-68)

Golding has the myth of Circe in mind as one such moral exemplum, for in another passage he draws on a common interpretation of that story – Odysseus as reason, the enchantress as sensual pleasure – to describe the lesson that his readers should learn from all of the tales he recites and comments on. To protect himself from the possibility that he might be accused of being a Circe, turning his readers into beasts through alluring fictions, Golding concludes

his preface “Too the reader” by urging his readers to "seeke a further meaning than the letter gives to see" and, if they cannot, to use the example of Ulysses before the Sirens:

> Now too thintent that none have cause heerafter too complaine
> Of me as setter out of things that are but lyght and vaine:
> If any stomack be so weake as that it cannot brooke,
> The lively setting forth of things described in this booke,
> I give him counsell too absteine untill he bee more strong,
> And for too use *Ulysses* feat against the Meremayds song.
> Or if he needs will heere and see and wilfully agree
> (Though cause misconstrued) untoo vice allured for too be:
> Then let him also marke the peine that dooth thereof ensue
> And hold himself content with that that too his fault is due.
>
> (lines 213-22)

On the one hand, Golding admits that for certain weak-willed, literalist readers, the "lively setting forth of things" in his own "booke" could act as a Siren-song. On the other hand, if such readers fail to abstain from reading Golding's book just as Ulysses passed by the Sirens, such readers alone, not Golding himself, will be responsible for any negative consequences.

In fact, Golding's advice to the reader to follow Ulysses' example is rather ambiguous, for although in some versions of the myth Ulysses stops up with wax not only the ears of his companions but also his own ears, in Homer and in a long tradition of commentary, Ulysses is praised not because he merely passes the Sirens by, but for his heroic ability to listen to their song without becoming seduced by it. Golding would have known this strand of commentary from a number of sources, including Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*;[52] indeed, he implicitly calls up its metaphors by urging his ideal reader to "seek a

further meaning than the letter gives too see." Golding, therefore, uses *both* versions of the myth – the Ulysses who stops his ears and his counterpart who doesn't need to -- in order to bolster his own defense of poetry. Like Ulysses himself, Golding would have his cake and eat it.

III
Conclusion

When early modern poets and playwrights turned to commentaries and mythographies as sources for the Siren myth, then, they often found versions of the legend that conflated the Sirens with Circe, and which used Odysseus' encounters with these temptresses in order to expound not only moral lessons but also lessons in the moral properties of (classical) poetry itself. It is through such compendiums and commentaries that Renaissance poets would have had ready access to Ulysses as an emblem of not only temperance pure and simple but also temperate, discriminating reading practices. Circe and the Sirens do not fully escape the charge that they tempt heroes, and readers, away from morality and duty. But the responsibility for that temptation does become shared with the reader, who is consistently imagined as male. The history of the Sirens in the Renaissance, therefore, must be understood as inseparable from this period's attempts to theorize, and legitimize, the activity of reading in general and the reading of classical literature in particular. It is this ubiquitous story of a Ulysses who overcomes the potential dangers of a Sirenic or Circean text, in commentary from Plutarch to Golding, that explains in part how consistently the myth of the Sirens, in early modern poetry and drama, acquires not only erotic but also meta-literary implications. If the Sirens are "harlots," as Linche in his translation of Cartari's mythographic compendium suggests, they are also have "honny-dewed tongues." The point of emphasizing the treachery they enact through their song, therefore, is not to advise

Renaissance readers to avoid entirely a Siren-like poetry; rather, the point is to teach these readers how to approach wisely poetry’s manifold pleasures.

NOTES

[1] My understanding of the allegorical tradition is greatly indebted to the work of Felix Buffière, *Les Mythes D'Homère et la Pensée Grecque* (Paris: Societé D'Edition "Les Belles Lettres," 1956) and Jean Pépin, *Mythe et Allégorie* (Aubier: Montaigne, 1958). Other useful discussions of this tradition and the enchantress's place within it include D. C. Allen, *Mysteriously Meant* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970); Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1963); Siegfried Walter De Rachewiltz, *De Sirenibus: An Inquiry into Sirens from Homer to Shakespeare,* Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1983; Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986); Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mysteries,* trans. Brian Battershaw (London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1963); and Judith Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994). For the allegorical treatment of Ulysses, see also W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1954).

[2] All citations of Plato are from *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[3] I rely here on Pépin's paraphrase of Antisthenes in *Mythe et Allégorie*, 109. On Antisthenes, see also Buffière, 367-69, and Stanford, 99.

[4] Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.iii.7-8, in Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomius*, trans. E.C. Marchant (Loeb Classical Library, 1938), 49.

[5] I translate Pépin's French paraphrase of Diogenes in *Mythe et Allégorie*, 110. On Diogenes' Ulysses, see also Buffière, 373-74.

[6] I emphasize Heraclitus' moral allegories, but he also provides detailed etymological, physical, and psychic interpretations of almost every aspect of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. For his treatment of Odysseus and Circe, see the *Allégories d'Homer*, trans. Buffière (Paris: Societé d'edition "Les Belles Lettres," 1962), sections 72-73. Heraclitus' commentary on the Sirens is missing in the extant text. For a discussion of the varied reactions of Renaissance humanists to this and other ancient allegories of Homer, see Anthony Grafton, "Renaissance Readers of Homer's Ancient Readers," in Lamberton and John J. Keaney, eds., *Homer's Ancient Readers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 150-57. Pépin (159) classifies Heraclitus as a stoic based on his valuation of reason above all other virtues and faculties, the very valuation that the treatment of Circe in the *Allegories of Homer* supports. Cf. A. A. Long, "Stoic Readings of Homer," in *Homer's Ancient Readers*, ed. Robert Lamberton and John J. Keaney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 41-66, who argues against the prevailing scholarly assumption that the Stoics read Homer allegorically.

[7] Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, is particularly helpful on the Neoplatonic reception of Homer. Also see his article, "The Neoplatonists and the Spiritualization of Homer," in *Homer's Ancient Readers*, 115-33.

[8] Buffière, *Les Mythes d'Homère*, 388, 391.

[9] Proclus distinguishes Homer's Sirens from Plato's by arguing that while the former proceed from the dyad (grammatically there are two of them), only Plato's Sirens preside over the "circle of the One." I use Lamberton's translation of Proclus in *Homer the Theologian*, 231.

[10] Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 115-116.

[11] See Rahner, 357. According to Rahner, at Job 30:29-30, Job bewails his spiritual isolation by comparing himself to these wild Sirens, inhabitants of the desert wasteland: "I am a brother to sirens / and a companion of ostriches. / My skin is black and falleth from me / and my bones are burned with heat"; at Isaiah 43:20 the Sirens are also birds of the empty desert, welcoming the prophet's voice: "Behold I will do a new thing; / now it shall become visible: / I will even make a way in the wilderness/ and rivers in the desert. / Then shall the beasts of the field praise me / the sirens and the daughters of the ostriches, / because I give waters in the wilderness"; the prophet again evokes the Sirens when speaking of the spiritual wasteland that is Babylon: "Thorns grow up in their cities / and in their strong places. / It will be a dwelling place for Sirens / and a fold for ostriches" (Isaiah 34.13); and together with evil spirits, the Sirens celebrate the defeat of Babylon: "Now beasts make their homes there / and an empty echo is heard in the houses. / Sirens have their habitation there / and demons dance. / Ass-centaurs dwell there / and hedgehogs breed in the halls" (Isaiah 13: 21-22).

[12] As cited in Rahner, 357, emphasis mine.

[13] See also Paul Antin, "Les Sirènes et Ulysse dans l'Oeuvre de Saint Jerome," *Révue des Etudes Latines* 139 (1961): 232-41.

[14] *De Fide ad Graianum*, as cited in Rahner, 367. The comments of Ambrose on the *Odyssey* show that he too understands Biblical and Homeric Sirens to be analogous: "What else do these maidens signify but the enticements of enfeebling lust, which robs the deceived spirit of its strength and makes a woman of it? What signify those dangerous shallows but the reefs that threaten our salvation? For there is no hidden danger so great as that of worldly desire; while it flatters the senses, it breaks into the ship of life and shatters the power of the spirit, as it might be upon the rocks of the flesh." Preaching on Psalm 43:20, Ambrose again offers the moral and spiritual allegory of the Sirens as dangerous love of worldly things: "the Sirens symbolize singing lust and flattery. Just so does the lust of the world (saeculi voluptas) delight us with flattering flesh in order to deceive us." See Rahner, 366-67, 380.

[15] Rahner, 380.

[16] Methodius goes even further, contrasting his desire to hear God's voice with Odysseus' yearning to hear the Sirens' song of death: "As the Greek myth tells us, the ancient of Ithaca desired to hear the voice of the Sirens, because it was of unbridled sweetness; but he passed Sicily by, tied to the mast, and had his companions' ears stopped with wax, not because he grudged their hearing these voices or because he found it a pleasure to be bound, but rather

because the end and purpose of that song was death for all who heard it. I myself am no listener to such songs, nor do I desire to hear the Sirens' voices, for their singing is as a singing of death. Rather do I pray to receive an ear for a divine voice, and the more often I hear such a voice, the more mightily rises my longing to hear it anew. I will not be conquered by the unbridled lusts of that other kind of singing; let me rather be instructed in the divine mysteries. For I would attain my end which is not death but everlasting salvation." *De Autexusio*, I.1-3, as quoted in Rahner, 352.

[17] *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, trans. Leslie George Whitbread (n.p.: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 73-74. According to Fulgentius, the Sirens' physical appearance reflects their identity as the "allurements of pleasure." They are winged because, like pleasure, they quickly enter the minds of their lovers; the Sirens have hens' feet because the "indulgence of lust dissipates all it possesses" in much the same way that birds' feet scatter grain. For Bernardus' interpretation of Circe's potion, see Bernardus Silvestris, *Commentary on the first six books of Virgil's "Aeneid,"* trans. Earl G. Schreiber and Thomas E. Maresca (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 22-23. On the question of Bernardus' authorship of this commentary, see Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 36-37.

[18] *Servii Grammatici Qui Feruntur Vergilli Carmina Commentarii*, 2 volumes, ed. George Thilo and Herman Hagen (n.p.: 1961), 2:127 (on Circe) and 1:654-55 (on the Sirens). At 2:127, Servius also cites Horace's depiction of Homer's Circe: "aperte Horatius sub domina meretrice fuisset turpis et excors."

[19] For Eustathius, Calypso signifies the body in which Odysseus, the soul, temporally abides: "Like human flesh, her island is hot and moist, continually washed by the seas of passion." Even Eustathius, however, cannot entirely separate the Sirens from persuasive speech and poetry, proclaiming that "it would be sensible if philosophers permitted a little of the Sirens' sweetness to seep into their prose." These quotations of Eustathius are taken from Allen, 92-93, 213.

[20] Boccaccio, *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari: Laterza, 1951), 356. On the Sirens see *Genealogie*, Book VII, chapter 20. On Circe see *Genealogie*, Book IV, chapter 14, as well as chapter 37 of *De Mulieribus Claris,* in Boccaccio, *Opere in Versi*, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Milano: Ricciardi, n.d.), 732-36.

[21] Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, *De Deis Gentium* (1548; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), 240. Vincenzo Cartari, *Le Imagini . . . degli Dei* (1571; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), 244-47. See Linche, *The Fountaine of Ancient Fiction* (1599; rpt. New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), O^{r}-Oij^{v}.

[22] Natalis Comes, *Mythologie*, trans. Jean Beaudoin (1627; rpt., New York: Garland, 1976). On Circe, see 558-65; on the Sirens, 769-78. On Comes' enchantresses, see also John M. Steadman, "Dalila, The Ulysses Myth, and Renaissance Allegorical Tradition," *Modern Language Review* 57.4 (October 1962): 560-65.

[23] Andreae Alciati, *Emblemata Cum Commentariis* (1621; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), 336-40, 487-95. Emblem #76 bears the motto "Cavendum a meretricibus" (beware of whores) with a picture of Circe above it, while #116 likens the Sirens to prostitutes.

[24] Giovanni Pico, first letter to John Francis, trans. Thomas More in *The English Works of Sir Thomas More*, 2 vols. (1557, ed. William Rastell; rpt. ed. W. E. Campbell, New York: Dial Press, 1931), 1:363. Pico's second letter to this same Gianfrancesco, also translated by More, continues this use of Circe as a metaphor for fleshly lust.

[25] Abraham Fraunce, *The Third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch* (1592; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), 23[v]. Fraunce also notes that as Proserpina's companions, the Sirens resemble "strumpets and wanton huswiues [who] follow riches & aboundance, figured by *Proserpina*, the Lady of fruite and corne."

[26] Geffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes*, ed. Henry Green (1586; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967).

[27] Arthur Golding, *The XV Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled "Metamorphoses," translated oute of Latin into English meeter*, rpt. in *Shakespeare's Ovid*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse (1567; rpt. London: Centaur Press; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), 6. George Sandys, *Ovid's "Metamorphosis." Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures*, ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall (1621; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 645, 7.

[28] Horace's treatment of Ulysses is somewhat ambivalent. While Horace's dialogue between Ulysses and Tiresias (*Satires* II.v) paints the former as a self-seeking fortune hunter advised by the prophet to pimp his own wife for pecuniary gain, his *Epistle* reverses this satiric attack on an anti-heroic Ulysses. Although "treachery, fraud, impiety, lustfulness and rage" ruled "inside Troy's walls and outside too," Ulysses proves the exception to the rule: "However, what Bravery and intellect can do/ Is taught by the useful example of Ulysses." The test case of this wise, stoic hero who "suffered much but wouldn't sink" is his victory over the dominating whore Circe. Petronius, in turn, will playfully satirize this fear of Circe's ability to control men with her sexuality when Encolpius, the shipwrecked protagonist of the mock-epic *Satyricon*, finds himself mysteriously impotent with a prostitute named Circe (as will Bloom before Bella Cohen in Joyce's *Ulysses*). In Horace, however, the threat of Circe's dominating sexuality remains inseparable from the dangers of poetic and linguistic confusion. See *Horace's Satires and Epistles*, trans. Jacob Fuchs (New York: Norton, 1977).

[29] As quoted in Yarnall, 76. Allen, 84, notes that this work was appended to the 1488 Florentine edition of Homer.

[30] Yarnall, 76.

[31] *Quaestiones convivales*, 14.774E, in Plutarch, *Moralia* (Loeb Classical Library, 1969), 9:281.

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[32] See my essays "Jonson's Siren Stage," *Studies in Philology*, XCVI.1 (Winter 1999): 68-95; " 'Her filthy feature open showne' in Ariosto, Spenser, and *Much Ado About Nothing*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 39.1 (Winter 1999): 41-67; and "Tasso's enchantress, Tasso's captive woman," forthcoming in *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.2 (Spring 2001).

[33] Plutarch, "How the Young Man Should Study Poetry," in *Moralia* (Loeb Classical Library, 1979), I: 77-79.

[34] Plutarch, "Young Man," 75.

[35] Plutarch, "Young Man," 79.

[36] On the contradictions in Proclus' defense of Homer, see Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 153, 162-232.

[37] Plutarch, "Young Man," 81, 83, 85.

[38] My paraphrase of Philip the Philosopher is entirely indebted to Lamberton's in *Homer the Theologian*, 149-53, and I quote from Lamberton's translation, in Appendix I, of Philip's "An Interpretation of the Modest Chariclea from the Lips of Philip the Philosopher."

[39] Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), 10.

[40] Cicero, *De Finibus* (Loeb Classical Library, 1914), 48-49, 449-50.

[41] For more detail, see Rahner, 360-62.

[42] Rahner, 362.

[43] "[P]erniciosam istam inanium delcedinem litterarum, quasi illos patriae oblitteratores de baccarum suavitate Lotophagos, et Sirenarum carmina, blandimentorum nocentium cantus evita.... [Sirenas] oportet ultra Ulyxis astutiam cauti non auribus tantum, sed et oculis obseratis et animo navigio praetervolante fugiamus, ne sollicitati delectatione letifera in criminum saxa rapiamur et scopulo mortis adfixi naufragium salutis obeamus." Both English translation (by P.C. Walsh) and Latin original are taken from David Thompson, *Dante's Epic Journeys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 69.

[44] Clement, *Stromata*, VI, ii. 89, i (GCS, II, p. 476,ll. 14-25), as cited in Rahner, 337-38.

[45] This distinction between wise, Odyssean readers and their less heroic counterparts operates as well in writings that take Odysseus as a type of the wise Christian safely engaging not only with Hellenic poetry and philosophy but also with another potentially dangerous body of literature: the doctrines of heretics. For a detailed explanation of the association of the Sirens with heresy, see De Rachewiltz, 71-86.

[46] Comes, 770. For woodcuts of the Sirens and the Muses, see the page entitled "Figures" at the beginning of Comes’ Book VII.

[47] For this linguistic aspect of the Sirens' temptations, see Boccaccio, *Genealogie*, in *Opere*, 355. Boccaccio makes the quoted statements about Circe's eloquence in *De Mulieribus Claris*. Here I cite the English translation by Guido A. Guarino in Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 77-78.

[48] Charles G. Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry; being the preface and the fourteenth and fifteenth books of Boccaccio's "Genealogia Deorum Gentilium"* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), 62.

[49] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Green (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1962), 4-5.

[50] Osgood, 94-96.

[51] Osgood, 77.

[52] In Book III of the *Ars Amatoria*, for example, Ovid distinguishes between Ulysses, who listens to the Sirens' song, and his companions, who do not: "The Sirens were wondrous creatures of the sea, who with tuneful voice detained vessels, how swift soe'er they sailed. *Hearing them the son of Sisyphus all but unloosed his body; . . . his comrades' ears were stopped with wax*." The Latin reads, "Monstra maris Sirenes erant, quae voce canora / Quamlibet admissas detinuere rates. / His sua Sisyphides auditis paene resolvit / Corpora, nam sociis inlita cera fuit." See Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems* (Loeb Classical Library, 1979), III: 311-14 (pp. 140-41).