Disbelieving in Witchcraft: Allori's Melancholic Circe in the Palazzo Salviati

Guy Tal

When Alessandro Allori painted *Odysseus and Circe* (Figure 1) in the Cortile degli Imperatori in the Florentine Palazzo of the Salviati family *c.* 1575-76,[1] the mythological sorceress Circe was already notorious to the sixteenth-century Italian *intelligentsia* from a variety of treatments. Her figure was favored for maiolica dishes and *cassoni* decoration and was frequently included in *Odyssey* fresco cycles.[2] She was interpreted allegorically by Pico della Mirandola, utilized for emblems by Andrea Alciati, and featured in dialogues based on her myth written by Giovanni Battista Gelli. In contemporary poems, authors modeled enchantresses upon her figure—Alcina in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Armida in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*.[3] Most importantly for this argument, she was the archetypal witch whenever a discussion concerning belief in the magic of transforming men into animals emerged in witchcraft treatises. Within this latter context Allori's Circe will be discussed.

The study of Italian images of Circe within witchcraft discourses has been neglected by art historians who have regarded Circe merely as a standard participant in a commonplace narrative of Odysseus's adventures. Her absence from the modern research on witchcraft imagery can also be explained by the fact that she was young and beautiful, and she worked during the day, both of which represent a substantial departure from the stereotype of the hideous old witch practicing *maleficia*, or harmful magic, within a dark eerie location.[4] This neglect of art historians to incorporate Italian representations of Circe into witchcraft studies reflects their general attitude towards imagery of witchcraft, which has hitherto focused almost entirely on Northern Europe. This is partially due to the relatively modest number and variety of Italian images compared to Northern ones, yet witchcraft was widely practiced in the peninsula, and witchcraft treatises written by Italian humanists prove their great interest in the subject.[5] The following argument demonstrates the response and contribution of Italian art to the witchcraft debate, which is exemplified here by one of the controversial topics extensively discussed in witchcraft treatises at the time: whether

The present paper grows out of research in progress for my doctoral dissertation "*Imago Maleficarum*: Witchcraft in Italian Art and Culture, ca. 1520-1700" with Bruce Cole as the advisor. Versions of this paper were presented at the Florida State University Annual Symposium, Tallahassee, and at the Cleveland Symposium, Cleveland Museum of Art. I would like to thank Daniel Unger, Giles Knox, Diane Reilly, and Efrat El-Hanany for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. Reasearch in Italy in the summer of 2002 was sponsored by the Friends of Art Award of the History of Art Department at Indiana University, and the travels to conferences were supported by the College of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University.

1 The Salviati family bought the palazzo in 1546 from the Portinari family who had lived in the palazzo since it was built in 1470s (today the palazzo is the seat of the Banca Toscana). On the palazzo see Leonardo Ginori Lisci, *The Palazzi of Florence: Their History and Art* (Florence: Giunti Barbera, 1985) vol. 1, 471-477. For documentation of the commission to Alessandro Allori and his collaborators Giovanni Bizzeli, Giovanni Maria Butteri, and Alessandro di Benedetto, see Guido Pampaloni, *Il Palazzo Portinari-Salviati* (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1960) 50-52.

2 For a concise survey on Circe in Italian art and literature consult Patrizia Castelli, "L'immagina della strega: La maga Circe," *Arte e dossier* 89 (1994): 22-26. For sixteenth-century fresco cycles of the *Odyssey*, see Marco Lorandi, *Il Mito Ulisse nella pittura a fresco del cinquecento Italiano* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1996) 450-473. On Circe in Italian maiolica dishes and *cassoni*, see Wendy M. Watson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics from the Howard I. and Janet H. Stein Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002) 205-206, cat. 72; Julia E. Poole, *Italian Maiolica and Incised Slipware in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 285-286, 338-340; Edmund W. Braun, "Circe," *Realexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, ed. Ernst Gall and L.H. Heydenreich (Stuttgart: Alfred Drukmüller, 1954) vol. 3, 784-786.

3 Circe was the witch who was mostly identified with Italy. See Gareth Roberts, "The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions," *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 188-190; *Giovanni Boccaccio Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2001) 151. On various interpretations of Circe by Italians, see Merritt Y. Hughes, "Spenser's Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4/4 (1943): 381-399; Elisabetta Framba, "Alcune osservazioni sull'interpretazione di Circe nella tradizione mitologica Rinascimentale," *L'idea classico a Ferrara e in Italia nel Rinascimento*, ed. Patrizia Castelli (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1998) 203-226.

4 Circe was included in the chapter "Nascita della strega" concerning Italian imagery of witchcraft, in the groundbreaking study by Eugenio Battisti, *L'antirinascimento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962) 138-157, esp. 140-141, but was not analyzed in the context of witchcraft discourses. A recent attempt to interpret her figure with regard to witchcraft debates, mostly in Northern art, was made by Charles Zika, "Images of Circe and Discourses of Witchcraft, 1480-1580," *Zeitenblicke: Online-Journal fur die Geschichtswissenschaften* 1 (2002) <*http://www.zeitenblicke.historicum.net/2002/01/zika/zika.html*>.

5 See, for example, Giuseppe Bonomo, *Caccia alle streghe: La credenza nella streghe dal sec. XIII al XIX con particolare riferimento all'Italia* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1971).

witches and their *maleficia* really existed. One of the significant viewpoints was skepticism about their existence, and this position is embedded in Allori's scene.

Allori's *Odysseus and Circe*, one of sixteen scenes of Odysseus's adventures decorating the lunettes and vaults of the two arcades in the Emperors' Court, primarily derives from book ten of Homer's *Odyssey*.[6] After a shipwreck near Circe's island, a group of Odysseus's companions seek shelter in her palace, but Circe greets them with unconventional hospitality. Using a magic wand and a bowl of poison, she transforms them into swine, lions, and wolves. Odysseus, however, is saved from the metamorphosis by Mercury who had given him an herb that would render ineffective any drug Circe might administer. When Odysseus enters Circe's house, she offers him the potion, but she then realizes he is immune. After he brandishes a sword, she swears not to harm him. Eventually, following a year-long amorous relationship with Odysseus, Circe transforms the men back to their original form and allows them to continue their journey.[7]

Allori chose to depict the moment when Odysseus, on the way to Circe, receives the herb from Mercury. Isolated in front of a huge rock and accompanied by a wolf-like animal and two lions (the transformed men) Circe sits relaxed in the foreground, unaware of the agitated figures in the rear: Odysseus hurrying to confront her, the nude Mercury on his urgent mission to provide Odysseus the apotropaic herb, and the running figures in the far background, probably Odysseus's companions, who escape from Circe to the harbor. While completely ignoring the open book leaning on the rock next to her, she supports her cheek with her left hand, and in the other hand holds her magic wand pointed toward the wolf. Her dreamy gaze at the wolf indicates her interior contemplation, and the wolf's mutual gaze at her echoes the lions' gaze at the spectator.

Only by comparing Allori's scene to its visual sources and understanding the extent to which he adopted the conventional depiction of the Circe legend, can one appreciate his innovative approach in employing the figure of Circe to embody the witchcraft debate. Allori was influenced by two versions of *Odysseus and Circe* decorating two rooms in the Palazzo Vecchio, both of which were painted by the Flemish artist Giovanni Stradano (Jan van der Straet). The earlier scene is part of the *Odyssey* fresco cycle, dated 1562, in Eleonora da Toledo's work room, known as the Sala di Penelope (Figure 2), and the later scene from 1570 is an independent oil painting in the Studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici (Figure 3). Both Allori and his patron who commissioned him to execute the fresco cycle, Jacopo di Alamanno Salviati, had close ties to the Palazzo Vecchio. Allori executed the *Odyssey* cycle only five years after collaborating with Stradano, among other artists, on the decoration of the Studiolo. By then Stradano was already an old colleague of his from the time they organized the annual dissection of 1563.[8] As to the patron, Jacopo Salviati was a family member of the Palazzo Vecchio's inhabitants, as a nephew of Maria de' Medici and cousin to Duke Cosimo I (who often visited the Palazzo Salviati, where a statue of him was later installed).[9] Thus, we can assume that both Allori and Salviati were highly motivated to draw on the Palazzo Vecchio decoration.

In comparing Allori's work with Stradano's Studiolo scene (Figure 3), we see that Allori favored lions and wolves as the prominent animals instead of the swine, which are placed in the background of the Studiolo scene although they are the animals most often associated with the story.[10] The location of the meeting of Odysseus and Mercury in the foreground of the Studiolo scene might have led Allori to comprehend it as a crucial episode of the narrative.[11] Inspired to an extended degree from Stradano's 1562 version (Figure 2), Allori preferred a rustic atmosphere to Circe's palace, and placed Circe in the foreground while relegating the meeting between Mercury and

6 The scenes are listed in Marco Lorandi, "'Sic Notus Ulixes?', *Antichità viva* 26 (1987): 19 and 27, n. 5. The first printed edition of the Homeric story was published in Florence in 1488. For the Italians' interest in Greek culture, see Judith Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1994) 99; Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 232. The *Odyssey*, however, was known to fourteenth-century Italian humanists, such as Giovanni Boccaccio (Brown 150-155) and Dante Alighieri (*The Divine Comedy: Inferno* 26). For the medieval interest in Circe, see Roberts 190.

7 The story appears in later classical texts, such as Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4:662-752; Virgil, *Aeneid* 7:10-24; Horace, *Epistles* 1.2:18-27; and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14:276-415. For a complete list of the classical and contemporary texts about Circe, see Lorandi 435-450. See also the discussion in Yarnall 9-25 and 53-98.

8 Frederika Jacobs, "(Dis)assembling: Marsyas, Michelangelo, and the Accademia del Disegno," *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002): 436.

9 Lisci 472.

10 The episode of feeding the swine in the background of the Studiolo scene is mentioned in the Homeric story (10.241-242), but is unprecedented in the Italian scenes of Circe. This image was common in Northern art, therefore Stradano, as a Flemish artist, most likely knew it. For more images of pigs' feeding (including the *November* scene in the Limbourg Brothers' *Les Trés Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*) see Paolo Scarpi, *Tra Maghe, Santi e Maiali: l'avventura del porco nelle lettere e nei colori* (Milan: Gallone, 1998) 6-8 and 23.

11 The importance of the meeting between Odysseus and Mercury and the place of the herb exactly in the middle of the composition are interpreted in the Studiolo context as a reference to the herbs that might be stored in the closet behind the painting. Although Circe also used herbs for her magic, in this scene she is a marginal figure and we cannot see the ingredients of her magic potion. Cf. Scott J. Schaefer, *The Studiolo of Francesco I de'Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio*, diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1976 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1976) vol. 1, 269, who prefers Circe's harmful poisoned herbs as a reference to the closet's contents over the apotropaic herb of Odysseus (whose identification with Francesco de'Medici is a possibility). A relation of Mercury to the quicksilver in the closet is suggested by Larry J. Feinberg, "The Studiolo of Francesco I Reconsidered," *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence*, ed. Judith A. Ruskin (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002) 56.

Odysseus to the second plane.[12] Allori, however, reversed Stradano's positioning of the figures, adjusting the scene to the right-to-left reading of his cycle instead of the left-to-right direction of the Sala di Penelope cycle.

While Stradano's two scenes furnished the basis for Allori's composition, he radically modified them. The most substantial change was the elevation of Circe to the single protagonist in the scene. Allori not merely enlarged her figure and projected her by placing a screen-like dark rock behind her, but also eliminated her confrontation with Odysseus (who, in addition to meeting with Mercury, attacks her in the Sala di Penelope scene and drinks from her potion in the Studiolo scene).[13] Deviating from his visual sources by emphasizing and isolating Circe, Allori constructed the foundations for the underlying message of the scene.

Along with Circe's solitude, Allori enriched her figure with three unusual motifs—her posture of resting the cheek on one hand, her dreamy gaze downwards, and the open book she ignores—and in so doing, identified her with the well-known personification of Melancholy. The artist's primary intention to depict Circe as a melancholic figure becomes obvious when perceiving her resemblance to traditional images of Melancholy.[14] Although Dürer's famous *Melencolia I* immediately comes to mind (the closed book rests on Melancholy's lap), other melancholic figures, which were certainly paraphrased from Dürer's engraving, more closely coincide with Allori's Circe, such as the woodcut in Antonio Francesco Doni's *I Marmi*, published in Venice in 1552 and widely known throughout Italy (Figure 4).[15] Similar to Allori's Circe the mournful maiden in Doni's woodcut sits on a lonely rock, her left leg stretches forward, the right leg is higher and bent backwards, and she supports her cheek with her left hand while the other hand rests on her knee. The isolation of the maiden by the surrounding sea perhaps reminded Allori of Circe's solitude on the island, and thus made this image more appealing for him to imitate. Other images of Melancholy as a single female figure supplied Allori other features of her image: Circe's elbow which rests on a flat surface and her isolation by the dark rock.[16] Circe's fixed gaze at a certain object, the wolf, is the only unusual motif among Melancholy personifications which are conventionally depicted with closed eyes or an unfocussed gaze.[17] The physical and psychological isolation of Circe from the other figures can now be understood as an iconographical necessity. She is in melancholy, a temperament or a physical illness which is characterized by solitude. There is no place for another figure in the realm of a melancholic person.

Circe's melancholy, however, is not justified by any textual source, nor does any account of the story—classical or contemporary—refer to her contemplative state. Thus, it is even more surprising that this image of a melancholic sorceress survived through the next century in Italy and even became popular.[18] Ann Percy, who rationalized Circe's melancholy by asserting that "Circe serenely contemplates the re-

12 On the *Odyssey* cycle in the Sala di Penelope, see Piero Bargellini, *Scoperta di Palazzo Vecchio* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1968) 238-248. The emphasis on Circe, as well as other female figures in the cycle (including four personifications of Virtues that are inserted in the narrative), is appropriate to the decoration of a separate social space of women, where Eleonora, assisted by her maidens, was working.

13 In sixteenth-century fresco cycles in Italy, Circe is usually depicted in confrontation with Odysseus: Bologna, Palazzo Poggi, Sala di Polifemo, 1550-51; Rome, Palazzo Ricci-Sacchetti, 1553-56; Bergamo, Palazzo della Prefettura, 1555; Genova, Palazzo della Meridiana, 1560-65; and Rome, Palazzo Farnese, Camerino Farnese, 1595. Allori did not refrain from using the continuous narrative method in other scenes in the fresco cycle: in the scene following Circe's, *Odysseus and Tiresias*, Odysseus appears twice, once in the background and once in the foreground meeting Tiresias. In the next scene, *Odysseus and the Sirens*, which is the scene opposite to *Odysseus and Circe*, Allori uses the mutual gaze to link Odysseus and his companions sailing in the background with the Sirens occupying the first plane. For the scenes see Lorandi, "Sic Notus," figs. 32, 33.

14 The fundamental study of the iconography of Melancholy remains Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1964).

15 Klibansky et al. 386-387, n. 37. Doni's woodcut was used as an emblem of Melancholia by Cornelis Massys. Abraham Bloemaert's *Melancholy*, which is claimed to be influenced from Doni's woodcut (Klibansky et al.,386-387, n. 37, and fig. 133), surprisingly has some characteristics of Allori's Circe, which cannot be found in Doni's emblem: the elbow rests on a flat rock and the overlooked open book is on the same surface. Perhaps Allori's Circe is the missing link in the sequence of influences, unless there is another unexplored source for both works.

16 In Klibansky et al., fig. 123, Melancholy and her human representative, the cosmographer, are topographically isolated from the daily scenes surrounding them (in a smaller scale) by a hill behind them. In another image Melancholia's elbow is resting on an elevated flat surface (Klibansky et al., fig. 122). Both images precede Allori's Circe.

17 In addition to Dürer's *Melencolia I* see Klibansky et al., figs. 114-116, 118, 122, 126, 128-130.

18 Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione's etching, for instance, incorporates elements from Allori's image, although the exclusion of Odysseus enables one to identify the woman as Circe, Ariosto's witch Alcina, or a generic sorceress figure. For works by Castiglione, see Ann Percy, "Magic and Melancholy: Castiglione's *Sorceress* in Hartford," *Wadsworth Atheneum Bulletin* 6.3 (1970): 2-15; Idem., *Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione: Master Draughtsman of the Italian Baroque*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1971); Bertina Suida Manning, "The Transformation of Circe: The Significance of the Sorceress as Subject in 17th Century Genoese Painting," *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Federico Zeri*, ed. Mauro Natale (Milan: Electa, 1984) vol. 2, 689-708. Both Manning and Percy overlooked Allori's image and consequently related the image of the melancholic sorceress as beginning only in the seventeenth century. Paulus Bor's *Enchantress* is another melancholic sorceress. She holds a magic wand, and instead of animals, she is surrounded by classical sculpture. See Denis Mahon and Denys Sutton, *Artists in 17th Century Rome* (London: Wildenstein, 1955) 11-12. A more debatable figure by the Neopolitan artist Francesco Solimena was identified as a meditative Circe by Odoardo H. Giglioli, "Unpublished Paintings by Francesco Furini, Valerio Castello and Francesco Solimena," *Burlington Magazine* 90 (1948): 289-290, fig. 21. Allori's Circe might have inspired the young sorceress in a tondo painted by Salavator Rosa in 1640s during his stay in Florence (although she is not in melancholy). For the tondo see Luigi Salerno, "Four Witchcraft Scenes by Salvator Rosa," *Cleveland Museum of Art Bulletin* 65 (1978): 224, fig. 2.

sults of having changed Ulysses' men to beasts,"[19] overlooked the complexity of this image, which embodies the disease of melancholy rather than a contemplative state, and is based on contemporary debates on witchcraft.

To decode the meaning of Circe's melancholy we should first examine the broad association of witches with melancholy. One of the main debates in the discourse of witchcraft in sixteenth-century Europe concerned the existence of witches and the reality of their *maleficia*. The common skeptical view regarded the riding to the witches' Sabbath and the pact between witches and the Devil as hallucinations that were planted in women's heads by devils as dreams and fantasies. Among the defenders of witches who rationalized the witchcraft phenomenon by giving natural and medical explanations, the Dutch physician Johann Weyer is the most famous. In his *De praestigiis daemonum*, first published in 1563, Weyer claimed that witches had a predisposition for psychological traits like despair, and illnesses like melancholy.[20] Their melancholy did not refer to their inner mental condition but to a physical illness caused by an imbalance of humours in their bodies, which left them with an excess of black bile.[21] Melancholy, Weyer diagnosed, was a female disease of the uterus, and thus, women were more vulnerable to the power of delusion by the Devil.

Weyer was affected by Italian writers, who expressed their skeptical attitude toward witchcraft by including in their treatises the medical justification of melancholy for the witchcraft phenomenon. The Italian humanist Pietro Pomponazzi had suggested in *De immortalitate animae*, published in Bologna in 1516, that victims of black bile, the cause of melancholy, became irrational with extraordinary visions, such as demonic possession.[22] A direct connection between melancholy and witches' delusions was established by the Italian physician Girolamo Cardano, whose *De rerum varietate* from 1557 was heavily cited by Weyer. In his essay Cardano described witches as "showing in their faces black bile and melancholy" and that "they see and hear some things and the cause of this is to be assigned to black bile, which arises partly from food and drink and air and grief . . . and partly from association with other crazy folk."[23] Those who opposed melancholy as a plausible explanation for the witches' delusion devoted great effort to explaining their resistance. In referring to the witches' fallacious activities mentioned in the Canon *Episcopi*, the Milanese professor of logic, Girolamo Visconti, dedicated a whole chapter to the subject in his *Opusculum de striis* (Milan, 1490) entitled "Six arguments to prove that the deception *does not* originate in the melancholic humor."[24]

Allori used the conventional image of Melancholy, usually interpreted as a state of despair, to depict the physical disease of melancholy. In this respect Allori's understanding of Circe agrees with the association of witches and melancholy by Northern artists who included a group of witches among various melancholic symbols or figures.[25] In Lucas Cranach's *Melancholia* series, for example, amidst symbols of melancholy, the riding of witches on beasts to the witches' Sabbath is one of the deceitful visions by female victims of melancholy.[26] In a late sixteenth-century French engraving

19 Percy refers to a different image of Circe, painted by Castiglione, but so far this is the only explanation for any image of a melancholic Circe. See Percy, "Magic," 8. Manning 689, neglects the connection between melancholy and witchcraft, and explains the melancholic state with regard to Vanitas: "The triumphant sorceress turns into the powerless Melancholia, imbued with the realization that all facets of human endeavor, together with life itself are irrevocably temporally fixed and ultimately doomed to cessation." The Melancholy, however, was the first association with Circe, prior to the Vanitas concept. On Melancholy and Vanity see Klibansky et al. 387-391.

20 Johann Weyer, *On the Deceits of the Demons* (the translation is from the second edition in 1583) in *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, "De praestigiis daemonum,"* ed. George Mora, trans. John Shea (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991) 181-186. See Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997) 199. On melancholy in witchcraft treatises, see Sydney Anglo, "Melancholia and Witchcraft: The Debate between Wier, Bodin, and Scot," *Folie et deraison à la Renaissance*, ed. Aloïs Gerlo (Brussels: Editions de l'Universite de Bruxelles, 1976) 209-222; H. C. Erik Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999) 182-227. Cf. Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) 251-255. Schiesari argues that witches mourn for the lost phallus and that "female melancholia is the result of a breakdown in the patriarchal order."

21 Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London: Harper Collins, 1996) 378.

22 Pietro Pomponazzi, *On the Immortality of the Soul*, chapter 14. See the translation by William Henry Hay in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall Jr., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1948) 372.

23 Girolamo Cardano, *Concerning the Variety of Things*, book 25, chapter 80 in Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*, ed. Arthur C. Howland (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1939) vol. 2, 446-447. On the immediate success of this treatise and its influence on Weyer, see Clark 221, 238.

24 [Editorial italics.] Girolamo Visconti, *Opusculum de striis*, chapter 1 in Sergio Abbiati, Attilio Agnoletto, and Maria Rosario Lazzati, *La Stregoneria: Diavoli, streghe, inquisitori dal Trecento al Settecento* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1984) 94-96. See also Bonomo 156-159.

25 A Northern drawing depicting a witch standing near a melancholic male is Klibansky et al., fig. 139. An interesting case is a witch who has just castrated a melancholic man. Of course, the castrated man has all the reasons to be in melancholy; nevertheless, he can be compared to Saturn who was both castrated (in Klibansky et al., fig. 47, a woman, not Zeus, castrates him) and associated with melancholy. For the illustration see Charles Zika, "'Magie'-'Zauberei'-'Hexerei': Bildmedien und kultureller Wandel," *Kulturelle Reformation: Sinnformationen im Umbruch 1400-1600*, ed. Bernhard Jussen and Craig Koslofsky (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999) 330, fig. 22.

26 For the delusion of the witches' ride, see Sigrid Schade, *Schadenzauber und die Magie des Körpers: Hexenbilder der frühen Neuzeit* (Worms: Werner'sche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1983) 76-78. For further discussion on Cranach's *Melancholias*, see Patrizia Castelli, "'Donnaiole, amiche de li sogni' ovvero i sogni delle streghe," *Bibliotheca Lamiarum: Documenti e immagini della stregoneria dal Medioevo all'Età Moderna*, exh. cat. (Pisa: Pacini, 1994) 56-62.

Saturn and his Children witches fly and dance under the figure of Saturn who rides in his chariot in the sky above them.[27] This engraving demonstrates the theory of associating planetary influences with particular social groups, occupations, and temperaments, in which Saturn was linked to melancholic illness, and influenced those associated with death, violence, and evil, including necromancy and devilish arts.[28]

The illness of melancholy may be applied specifically to Circe's sorcery. Most writers on witchcraft could not accept the phenomenon of the metamorphoses of the witches themselves or their victims into animals as real magic. Even those who believed in witchcraft doubted confessions of witches that contained the magic of transformation. As the modern historian Stuart Clark explains, "It was philosophically and morally distasteful to suppose that the human *anima* could function in an animal body."[29] This category of magic could not be explained by the common demonological theory that witches were capable of practicing *maleficia* through the assistance of devils, otherwise metamorphoses would constitute a second creation to that of God. Demonologists and authors of witchcraft treatises solved the problem by rationalizing metamorphoses as deceptive illusions, caused in some cases by devils.[30]

This skeptical view corresponds to a comment about Circe in the famous witchcraft treatise *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of the Witches*) written by the two Dominican inquisitors Heinrich Kramer (Institoris) and Jacobus Sprenger and published in 1487. Known and quoted in Italy almost immediately after its publication, the *Malleus* gained a revived interest when it was first published in Italy in 1574, a year before Allori painted the fresco cycle, with a second impression a short time after the first, in 1576. In the chapter entitled "Of the manner whereby they change men into the shapes of beasts" Circe's enchantment was explicitly considered a delusion:

> Now when the companions of Ulysses were changed into beasts, it was only an appearance, or *deception of the eyes*; for the animal shapes were drawn out of the repository or memory of images, and impressed on the imaginative faculty. And so imaginary vision was caused, and through the strong impression on the other senses and organs, the beholder *thought* that he saw animals. . . . But how these things can be done by the devil's power without any injury will be shown later.[31]

Circe's melancholy is an illness that causes her to hallucinate she is a witch practicing *maleficium* of metamorphosis, but this magic happens only in her imagination. Her melancholic state is the only signifier of the illusory animals, and her gaze at the wolf, which is reinforced by the magic wand pointed in the same direction, elucidates the vision she imagines. Circe, of course, does not understand the animals as merely phantoms; only the spectator, who, like a physician, diagnoses her disease, identifies the animals as symptoms of the melancholic illness. Accordingly, this image comprises two levels of narrative—reality and illusion—which could not be comprehended by any visual convention for distinguishing indirect narrative from direct narrative, such as clouds containing dreams, apparitions, or visions.[32]

To further eliminate any indication of the corporeality of the magic, Allori refrained from depicting the transformation as a physical process. He also excluded the bowl of the poisoned concoction Circe was supposed to hold, perhaps in order to express his disbelief in the poison as the magical means for transformation. The preference for the magic wand over the poison echoes the distinction of Weyer between the two: "But it is clear that human beings are not transformed by the herbs and poisons on this basis, and so it follows that the efficacy is bestowed upon them by charms."[33] According to Weyer, the fake, ineffectual poison used by Circe differs from a real poison, an evil medication that harms people, and is practiced

27 The engraving of Martin de Vos was the source for two versions by Henri Leroy (Klibansky et al., fig. 53) and Crispin de Passe. For the witches in the engraving of Crispin de Passe, see Charles Zika, "Fashioning New Worlds from Old Fathers: Reflections on Saturn, Amerindians and Witches in a Sixteenth-Century Print," *Dangerous Liaisons: Essays in Honour of Greg Dening*, ed. Donna Merwide (Melbourne: U of Melbourne, 1994) 270-274; repr. in Charles Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003) 438-442.

28 Zika, "Fashioning," 260. See also Klibansky et al. 383.

29 Clark 191-192.

30 Clark 192.

31 [Editorial italics.] In part 2, question 1, chapter 8. See *Malleus Maleficarum by Jacobus Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer*, trans. Montague Summers (London: The Folio Society, 1968) 97. The idea of Circe's falacious magic was based on St. Augustine's *City of God*, chapter 18. It was cited and analyzed in later treatises, such as Weyer 337-342 (book 4, chapter 22), who announces the discussion in the title "Nothing has the power to transform men into beasts. An explanation of the stories concerning the transformation of the companions of Ulysses and Diomedes, and the transformation of the Arcadians." For discussion on Circe in witchcraft discourses, see Roberts 183-206, esp. 187-190.

32 For pictorial conventions of narrating dreams and visions, see Sixten Ringbom, "Some Pictorial Conventions for the Recounting of Thoughts and Experience in Late Medieval Art," *Medieval Iconography and Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. Flemming G. Andersen et al. (Odense: Odense UP, 1980) 38-69; Michael Cole, "The Demonic Arts and the Origin of the Medium," *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002): 628. Northern artists also demonstrated Circe's illusory magic by comparing the witch to the daily life figures of a conjurer and a trickster. In a woodcut from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, dated 1493, Circe exercises her sorcery with trickery apparatuses on a table beside her, and is assisted by a maidservant. For the woodcut see James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985) 320, fig. 354; Zika, "Images of Circe," fig. 2.

33 Weyer 339.

not by witches but by poisoners.[34]

The patron's—or the artist's—interest in showing his disbelief in witchcraft, particularly in Circe's sorcery, is rooted in Christian ideology. Through the ages, in laws concerning witchcraft belief, those who believed in the existence of transformation were convicted of heresy, even if the law deemed the transformation an illusion. The ninth-century Canon *Episcopi*, which established the propaganda against witches and was the starting point for discussions about witchcraft by Renaissance humanists, includes a reference to the belief in transformation: "Whoever therefore believes . . . that any creature can be changed or transformed to better or to worse or be transformed into another species or likeness, except by the creator himself . . . is beyond doubt an infidel."[35] This conviction is restated in the twelfth-century collection of ecclesiastical law, Gratian's *Decretum*, and initiates the chapter about transformation in the *Malleus*. In *De strigiis* written in 1505-10 by the Lombard inquisitor, Bernardo Rategno da Como, Circe's magic is directly associated with the heretical belief in transformation and the condemnation of its believer as "infidel and worse than a pagan."[36] This close association between Circe and heresy clarifies the motive of the patron Jacopo Salviati to express his disbelief in witchcraft, and hence his Catholic faith, by showing a melancholic Circe. In contrast to the faithful, the figures of Mercury and Odysseus, pagans who believed in the reality of Circe's sorcery, might allude to the opposite side of the controversy about the existence of witchcraft.

Lastly, the lions' gaze at the spectator, just as the wolf's gaze at Circe, invites the viewer to experience the delusion of the transformation. Once again, the Palazzo Vecchio decoration served as a source of inspiration: the left lion was copied from one of the tapestries designed by Allori's master, Bronzino, for Duke Cosimo I (Figure 5).[37] Enlivened by naturalistic appearance and animated frontal faces, the lions' existence is intensified for the beholder, who is in conflict between his knowledge considering their status as phantoms (signified by Circe's melancholy) and their corporeality through the gaze that announces their awareness of the beholder's presence and accordingly their own. To be sure, the lions' ambiguity (whether real or illusory) was not created by Circe, but by the artist, and in that sense, the witch and the artist are comparable—for both attempt to challenge nature by creating new images, albeit a mere illusion.[38]

The spectator's confusion regarding the gaze of the lions demonstrates the paradox between the two readings of the scene, first as a myth and then as a message about a contemporary debate: the melancholic illness of Circe cancels her magic and her own identity as a witch. Allori, of course, had no interest in questioning the reality of an old pagan myth. Instead, he aimed his skepticism at two contemporary debates: the preposterous belief in the magic of transformation that a faithful Christian must reject, and a more controversial belief concerning the existence of witches.

Indiana University at Bloomington

34 Weyer 267-273, 559-561. On poison in witchcraft discourse, see Clark 196, 199.

35 *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2001) 62-63.

36 Cited in chapter 7 (Abbiati 206). Circe is absent from the Canon *Episcopi*, but is mentioned in the *Malleus* in the same chapter with the story of the transformation of Diomedes's companions and St. Augustine's discussion on Circe's magic. Thus, it seems likely that Bernardo's main source was the *Malleus*. The idea is repeated in Weyer 341 (book 4, chapter 22): "And the *Decretum* declares that a man who believes that any creature can be transformed . . . into another appearance or likeness . . . is worse than a Pagan or an infidel."

37 Janet Cox-Rearick, "Art at the Court of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (1537-1574)," *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence*, ed. Judith A. Ruskin (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002) 39.

38 For a stimulating discussion on the dog's gaze at the spectator in Dosso Dossi's Borghese *Sorceress*, see Giancarlo G. Fiorenza, *Studies in Dosso Dossi's Pictorial Language: Painting and Humanist Culture in Ferrara under Duke Alfonso I d'Este*, diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2001 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2001) 284-289. For the illusion in art and witchcraft, see Cole 621-640; Rebecca Zorach, "Despoiled at the Source," *Art History* 22.2 (1999): 260-261, who compares Titian's creation of illusion to illusion in witchcraft.

Figure 1. Alessandro Allori and collaborators, *Odysseus and Circe*, *c.* 1575-1576, fresco, Cortile degli Imperatori, Palazzo Salviati, Florence. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 2. Giovanni Stradano, *Odysseus and Circe*, 1562, fresco, Sala di Penelope, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 3. Giovanni Stradano, *Odysseus and Circe*, 1570, oil on panel, Studiolo of Francesco I de'Medici, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 4. Antonio Francesco Doni, *Melancholia*, woodcut from *I Marmi*, vol. 2, Venice, 1552. Courtesy of Cornell University, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carol A. Kroch Library.

Figure 5. Agnolo Bronzino, *Justice Rescuing Innocence*, 1546-1553, tapestry, Museo degli Argenti, Florence. Scala/Art Resource, NY.