

Architecture in the odyssey: a map of circe

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



In the *Odyssey*, Homer uses architecture and landscape as metaphors for the personalities of the people to which each respective architectural description relates. For this reason, a strong emphasis is placed on explicit details when depictions of homes, land, and interior design are mentioned. To further explore this notion, I will discuss the way in which Homer describes the architecture of Circe's home and how that can be considered a reflection of the traits associated with Circe. In the case of Circe, Homer uses the approach of taking the reader on two journeys at once. He starts by describing her surroundings and then creates imagery of her actual home and finally takes the reader inside her house. This geographic journey mirrors the journey he takes us on of Circe's personality as he uses the journey to show the reader her various traits. From this journey, the reader learns that Circe is alone, unpredictable, inviting, and vulnerable, among other qualities. In this paper, I intend to elaborate on the idea of taking the reader on a tour of Circe's persona using the tour of her living space which Homer already gives us in book X.

The first quality of Circe's which the reader is exposed to is her loneliness and isolation. Homer immediately reveals that Circe resides on an island that has a "beach of barren water" (X, 157-179). First of all, the idea that Circe lives on this island perpetuates the possibility of Circe suffering from loneliness as her home seems to be secluded from others. This is evidently confirmed when Circe yearns for Odysseus to stay with her and even proposes that she and Odysseus have sex, not because of the pleasure which she may feel from it, but because it may lead to the establishment of trust. Circe's desire for Odysseus to stay and to establish a sense of trust

with him echoes the idea that she is lonely and in need of company. Not just any form of company but one which she can develop a meaningful relationship with. The need to have “ faith and trust” (X. 161-335) with someone she just met also proposes the notion that Circe may be paranoid about her relationships with people. This insinuates that she finds it difficult to trust others. Furthermore, Homer seems to specifically use the word barren to describe the beach because it reminds the reader that metaphorically and literally Circe may also be barren as she has no family or children of her own which only further intensifies her loneliness as well as the lack of love in her life. Circe’s personality seems to be heavily influenced by the lack of people she has in her life. Circe’s isolation is essentially the foundation for the rest of her traits.

Subsequently, Homer then explores the unpredictable and jagged nature of Circe’s persona. He does this by offering more imagery of the island. When Homer writes that Odysseus “ climbed to a rocky point” (X. 156-148), the reader discovers that the island is rocky which implies that it may be difficult to navigate as rocks are usually rough and uneven. The rocky makeup of her island is a reflection of how she makes it difficult for people to figure out her true intentions which in turn also makes her difficult to navigate. This is substantiated by her initial niceness towards Odysseus’s men which is contrastingly followed by her decision to turn them into pigs with a potion. From this example, it is clear that Circe is indeed someone whose true intentions may never be known, making her personality easily categorized as questionable. In this way, the land around Circe not only provides us with imagery but helps to develop Circe as a character as she becomes more

dynamic with the exhibition of different dispositions. Navigating rocky territory also requires one to be careful. In fact, one will only be able to navigate the landscape successfully if well prepared. Since Circe shows that she is a sneaky individual, this scenery mirrors her personality. This is further emphasized when Hermes gives Odysseus the herb moly as well as a strategy before he encounters Circe. This just shows that Circe is too complex for one to risk approaching while unequipped. This also underlines her wittiness.

Speaking of Circe's questionable temperament, Circe's deceptive behavior is elaborated on in more detail as Homer continues to provide architectural descriptions. When describing the exterior design of her house, Homer points out that her house is "put together from stones" yet also mentions that the stones are "well polished" (X. 157-210). The reason this description is essential to take a closer look at is because when one thinks about stones, one thinks about the way in which they are hard, cold, and unappealing but in the case of the stones which make up Circe's home, they happen to be cleaned and made to look more appealing to the eye. The juxtaposition of 'well polished' and 'stones' suggests that these stones are outwardly beautiful but one must not forget that they still have the underlying qualities which make them plain and unattractive objects. The well polished stones can be compared to Circe as she seems to be very inviting and friendly on the outside but can not suppress her evil emotions on the inside. Just like the stones, it is easy to appreciate Circe upon first interaction and even forget that she is a monster. The stone metaphor reminds us that regardless of how

affable she initially is, it is beyond her power to rid herself of the inherent ‘hard, cold, and unappealing’ traits which she displays throughout book X.

Without a doubt, it is admirable to observe how Circe manages to create an image of herself which at first paints her to be amiable. From the moment we are introduced to Aiaia, the reader is told that the harbor which Odysseus and his men pull into is “fit for ships to lie” (X. 156-141). As a result, when the above portrayal of the harbor is subsequently given, it is insinuated that Circe is always ready to receive guests and actually looks forward to having company. This connection can be drawn because for someone who lives away from other creatures, the idea that her harbor is perfectly suited for a ship to fit is odd. It is clear that she remains optimistic about receiving guests. Moreover, Circe’s home is said to be in an “open place” which conveys the message that Circe is a welcoming individual. Again, this is particularly bizarre because she is situated in the middle of a forest so it is as though she purposely makes the surroundings of her house look and feel open to create the impression that she is. The image of an open place triggers thoughts of airiness which is a desirable trait when referring to a place. This, in turn, creates the illusion that Circe must have appealing traits. She does not fail to emulate this as mentioned before, when she acts in a very hospitable way towards Odysseus’s men.

Despite the scene in which the reader is given a glimpse of Circe’s potential to be a decent person, Homer reels the reader back by continuing to expand on his characterization of Circe as an evil monster. The reader is told that Aiaia “lies low” (X. 157-211) and that Circe’s home is located in the midst of

“ undergrowth and forest” (X. 156-150). The hidden nature of her home and island highlights Circe’s secretive ways. It raises the question- what does Circe have to hide? This question is answered as it is revealed that Circe actually has a pigsty specifically for men who she usually transforms into swines using her potion which apparently no man can stand up from once it has “ passed the barrier of his teeth” (X. 329). Due to the exclusivity of her location, she is able to perform all the evil deeds her heart desires without suffering any consequences as no one knows about them but her. It can be concluded that Circe is someone who likes to get away with doing whatever she wants. Accordingly, the assumption can be made that Circe is well aware of her evilness and embraces it. She even seems to take pride in it as she boldly tells Odysseus that no one else can overcome the effects of her potion.

The final evil trait of Circe’s that the reader is exposed to is her possessiveness. An important detail which is shared about Aiaia is that an “ endless sea lies all in a circle around it” (X. 157-195). An island enclosed by an endless sea seems to be one which would be hard to escape from. Similarly, Circe makes it very hard for people to leave her presence. She does all that it takes to ensure that people do not have the chance to elude her. Whether she has to charm them or agree to an oath, Circe will ensure that she has the company of whom she pleases. She intentionally puts individuals in positions which make it hard for them to escape her just like the endless sea which encircles the island. Consequently, the description of an endless sea accurately depicts this trait. Also, islands are already known to be surrounded by water so the fact that Homer explicitly mentions this

detail regarding Aiaia demonstrates how Homer creatively uses the landscape to reflect Circe's attribute of being possessive.

The last stop on this tour of Circe's traits depicts Circe's more humanlike qualities. To explain this, Homer uses descriptions of the interior decor of Circe's home. Therefore while Homer takes the reader inside Circe's home, he also takes the reader inside Circe's being. The reader finally gets a glimpse of the more intimate components of who Circe is. Circe's bed is referred to as "beautiful" (X. 161-347) while her coverlets are described as "splendid and stained in purple" (X. 161-352), which are both very positive descriptions. The beauty of Circe's bed, an item which is very unique to everyone and is located in one of the most private areas of a home indicates that in the depths of who Circe is, she has the ability to be a genuinely goodhearted person. This is most evident when she holds up her side of her agreement with Odysseus and finally changes his men back to humans. After the reader is exposed to all of the negative aspects of Circe's persona, the reader finally gets a sense of Circe having an authentically appealing side to her. In addition, the aforementioned ethereal description of her coverlets also represents Circe's gracefulness and delicacy. Splendid signifies that the coverlets are alluring while purple is usually associated with nobility and other positive attributes. Circe eventually shows typically humanlike qualities when she displays signs of fear after Odysseus pulls his sword on her. This event shows that Circe can be fragile and that even though she is evil, she still has the ability to feel non-monstrous emotions. Lastly, her gracefulness is witnessed when she notices Odysseus's sorrow and his lack of appetite.

Circe immediately seems to feel guilt and tries to alleviate his pain by changing his men back which was a rather noble and graceful gesture.

That marks the end of the tour. Through the analysis of Circe's living space, the reader is allowed to familiarize him/herself with Circe's character. Since Circe evidently has trust issues and is a bit dangerous to interact with personally, the reader is able to get closer to her through other avenues such as the use of her surroundings as an extended metaphor for who she really is. After learning about Circe and her home, it can be concluded that Circe is very dynamic as she has a considerable number of contrasting qualities. A tour of the different aspects which constitute her home is definitely a potent way to reflect this facet of her character.