Not Every Woman is an Island: Some Notes about Isles of Women and Colonisation in the *Odyssey*[1]

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Abstract

Comparing some characteristics of Archaic Greek colonisation and modern colonialism, the paper reads the Odyssean motif of the isle of women, the woman/island pair, and the related erotic imagery as the results of an interaction between historical events and literary imagination. Indeed, besides being commonly found in ancient mythologies, isles of women are generally considered as the mythic precursors of the vision that sees settlement of a new land as the conquest of a woman. Since the binarism and strong sense of a superior centre common to the colonisation of the New World and colonialism do not seem appropriate to Archaic Greece, the peculiarities of the ancient and modern erotic imageries related to the arrival of a seafarer in a new land and the woman/island pair can be understood by considering the differences between modern Western colonialism and the Archaic Greek decentred attitude to place, religion, and ethnicity.

Key Words – Homer; *Odyssey*; women; island; colonisation

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1. Introduction

In *The Raft of Odysseus*, Dougherty (2001: 130-134) associates the theme of marriage as developed throughout the Odyssean Phaeacian episode to an idealised and ambiguous view of colonisation as both a peaceful and violent process[2]. Indeed, the theme of marriage characterises Nausicaa's dreaming of Athena disguised as her best friend (6.27 «σοὶ δὲ γάμος σχεδόν ἐστιν […]» 'you will soon be married'), the princess's consequent desire to wash the garments of her bridal trousseau (6.49 «ἄφαρ δ' ἀπεθαύμασ' ὄνειρον […]» 'she was amazed, remembering her dream'), the washing of her bridal trousseau (6.57ff.), and Alcinous's ultimate expression of hospitality to Odysseus: his offer of Nausicaa's hand in marriage (7.311-314 «αἰ γάρ, Ζεῦ τε πάτερ καὶ Ἀθηναίη καὶ Ἄπολλον, / τοῖος ἐών, οἷός ἐσσι, τά τε φρονέων ἅ τ' ἐγώ περ, / παῖδά τ' ἐμὴν ἐχέμεν καὶ ἐμὸς γαμβρὸς καλέεσθαι, / αὖθι μένων […]» 'Athena, Zeus, Apollo, / what a congenial man you are! I wish / you would stay here, and marry my own daughter / and be my son')[3]. Moreover, according to Dougherty, the political and physical violence of founding a colony is alluded to in the first encounter between Odysseus and the Phaeacian princess (6.127ff.):

> Nausicaa, playing by the water's edge with her girl friends, is vulnerable to the lust of men who come upon her, especially those who want her father's land. […] But, in spite of all our expectations, Odysseus does not rape Nausicaa […]. As in the case of Pythian 9, the rape narrative is replaced by that of marriage, and […] Alcinous' generous offer of marriage recasts the projected colonial encounter as a marriage[4]. (Dougherty 2001: 133)

The passage thus resonates with erotic and colonial imagery and, according to the scholar, is echoed by Ferdinand's arrival and courtship of Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*[5]. Indeed, in a similar way to the *Odyssey*, issues of colonialism and New World settlement structure and organise the action of the 1611 Shakespearean play, as a shipwrecked foreign male replaces local suitors in gaining the hand of the young girl and power on the island. According to Dougherty (2001: 84), both the *Odyssey* and *The Tempest* exemplify a similar interaction between historical events concerning colonisation and literary imagination.

By Shakespeare's time and from the XV century onwards, the interaction between colonial events and literary imagination is also exemplified in travel accounts and isolarios by the portrayal of colonisation as an essentially violent process. In these texts, the settlement of a new land and, in particular, of a new island is frequently portrayed as the violent conquest of a woman. According to Perosa (2013: 56), in travel accounts and isolarios «la questione della conquista e del possesso, in

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[2] Comparisons between ancient Greek and modern European exploration and settlement of new lands are not new; on this subject, see Finley (1978); Hartog (1980); Hall (1989; 2008). Malkin (2004) discusses a cluster of issues pertinent to the nexus of ancient and modern colonial thought and practice. For a useful and attentive look at the post-colonial analogy between Archaic Greek colonisation and the more recent concepts of colonialism and imperialism, see also De Angelis (2009), with bibliography.

[3] If not stated otherwise, translations of the *Odyssey* are by Wilson (2018).

[4] The riverbank where Nausicaa and her maids – without any guards – are playing with a ball when she meets Odysseus for the first time, famously and symbolically evokes sexual harassment, amplified by the erotic allusion to the headgear which the girls throw off (6.100, cf. Nortwick [1979: 271]; Hainsworth [1982: 194]; Wohl [1993: 28]). Furthermore, Odysseus heroically moves towards Nausicaa like a lion (6.130), and she stands alone before him (6.141) as bravely as an Iliadic warrior. As regards *eros* and the relation between the episode about Nausicaa and the *Iliad*, Vallillee (1955); Gross (1976); Cairns (1990); Fornaro (1995); Glenn (1998); Burzacchini (2002); Mastromarco (2003); Nobili (2006).

[5] The echoes between this episode in the *Odyssey*, Pindar's odes, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* are even alluded to by Finley (1978: 50-51). Hall (2008: 91, 95, 97) mentions the XVII century play in relation to the colonial agenda indicated in the readings of the episode about Polyphemus.

ogni senso fisico e concreto, si pone come parte sostanziale dell'identificazione dell'isola-continente con la donna»[6]. Islands are thus represented as women to be conquered by the coloniser.

The woman/island pair (where the latter is identified as a colony, as something *other* than the fatherland to be exploited) continues to be utilised until at least the XX century; in a 1966 advertisement for *Fiji* perfume, woman and island are completely confused. According to the ideology promoted by the advertisement, in the words of Williamson (1986: 107), a «woman is an island because she is mysterious, distant, a place to take a holiday; but she is also an island within ideology – surrounded and isolated, as the colonist is by the colonizer, held intact as the *Other* within a sea of sameness». Both women and islands share the stereotypical association with nature and are opposed to the (just as stereotypically male) dimensions of culture and civilisation (to be exported to new lands). As a result, according to Williamson (1986: 107), women's and islands' *Otherness* in colonialist discourse is an expression of the prevailing cultural construct, which works to fashion duality against what deviates from it. The woman/island pair, continues Williamson, can be understood by looking at the social system at the beginnings of contemporary culture, but her paper does not discuss the ancient roots of her research; she deals with mass culture, colonialism, and the contextual connection between nature, femininity, and islands.

The aim of this article is to investigate the Odyssean episodes of the isles of women and the related erotic imagery in the light of the Greek civilisation[7]. Indeed, besides being commonly found in ancient mythologies, isles of women are generally considered as the mythic precursors of the vision that sees settlement of a new land as the conquest of a woman[8]. Since the binarism and strong sense of a superior centre common to the colonisation of the New World and colonialism do not seem appropriate to Archaic Greece, the peculiarities of the ancient and modern erotic imageries related to the arrival of a seafarer in a new land can be understood by considering the differences between modern Western colonialism and the Archaic Greek decentred attitude to place, religion, and ethnicity.

2. The lady and the island

In her paper, Williamson (1986) relates the association between woman and island to their common association to nature[9]. The same association may be semantically suggested by the female gender of the Greek noun νῆσος 'island' (in ancient Greek, most isles have female names, even though there are not many eponymous women and goddesses) and the Odyssean depiction of the isles of women. Grammatical gender and the characteristics of Aeaea and Ogygia, in particular, may thus allude to a depiction of islands as fecund lands conventionally related to the *cliché* of female fecundity[10].

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[6] For an analysis of the erotic imagery associated with the discovery of unknown islands in Western texts from the XVI century onwards, Perosa (2013: 55-75). Létoublon et al. (1996: 10) only mention the erotic imagery associated to the discovery of unknown islands in ancient Greek texts.

[7] As they deserve a wider investigation and the present paper deals with the erotic peculiarities of the theme of landing and arrival on or near the Odyssean all-female islands, I have not dealt with other archaic texts where erotic conquest is considered as a *topos* in colonial discourse. This subject is studied by Dougherty (1993).

[8] For a quick survey on women and islands, starting from the ancient world, Tamburello (1995). On insularity and representations of islands in Homer, Pindar, Herodotus, and Callimachus, see Vilatte (1991). Not convincingly, the scholar argues that Homeric islands are characterised by symbols of power, birth and death and are opposed to the mainland. However, the noun ἤπειρος 'land' has just nineteen occurrences in the *Odyssey* and is only opposed to the island of Ithaca (*Od*. 14.97-100, 21.109).

[9] For the association between women and nature, Ortner (1974).

[10] «Le genre grammatical est pour le grammairien comparatiste un moyen d'aborder l'anthropologie comme études des représentations collectives propres à chaque culture» (Létoublon 1988: 128, cf. Létoublon et al. 1996: 16, 18). According to Wohl (1993: 24), the topography of Aeaea and Ogygia exemplifies «the profound (male) association of women with anti-culture and the fear that women in charge of their own sexuality would choose not to procreate […]. Without men to

Indeed, all three isles of women on which Odysseus stops – Aeaea, the island of the Sirens, and Ogygia – seem set the stage for a flourishing landscape; among the islands of Odysseus's travels, only the uninhabited Goat island is as wildly flourishing as the isles of women, especially those of Circe and Calypso[11]. In particular, Aeaea is a 'wooded island' «νῆσον […] ὑλήεσσαν» (10.308), which looks wild, as Circe's house rises 'through the woods and thickets' «διὰ δρυμὰ πυκνὰ καὶ ὕλην» (10.150, cf. 10.194-197), among lions and wolves (10.210-213). On the isle of the Sirens, the Sirens sit in a 'flowering meadow' «λειμῶν᾽ ἀνθεμόεντα» (12.159, cf. 12.45-46), the only detail given about their island's natural landscape. Calypso's Ogygia has a fabulous landscape characterised by luxuriant vegetation (5.63-67), a garden vine (5.68-69), fountains (5.70-71), and 'soft meadows of violets and parsley' «λειμῶνες μαλακοὶ ἴου ἠδὲ σελίνου» (5.72)[12].

Moreover, the isles of women are not just associated to nature in the *Odyssey* but also to their mistresses, as both women and islands are portrayed in a similar ambiguous manner[13]. Circe's *doma* rises in the wild (10.150, 194-197, 210-213), but it is also strikingly refined: it is 'built out of polished stone' «τετυγμένα […] ξεστοῖσιν λάεσσι» (10.210-211), the doors are bright (10.230, 312), and the rooms are rich in chairs, seats (10.233, 314), fair rugs of purple (10.352), golden baskets, and bowls of silver (10.354-355). The characterisation of the island is as ambivalent as its mistress, the deceiving enchantress significantly called «Αἰαίη» 'Aeaean' (9.32)[14]. Circe is the hostile sorceress who pretentiously transforms (or tries to transform, cf. 10.319-320) men into animals (10.230-243), but also the benevolent hostess who can be moved to pity (10.399) and sumptuously entertains Odysseus and comrades on two occasions (10.460-468, 12.18, 23, 29-30)[15].

The Sirens are divine female beings (12.158), just like Circe and Calypso, and similarly to the nymphs, they are distinguished by their wondrous singing (12.44, 183, 198). Moreover, they are just as ambiguous as their island. Consistent with the fact that the description of their isle is suggestively synthetic, there is no hint of their physical appearance[16]. First of all, its meadowlike and deathly aspect is announced by Circe: in the meadow, around about the Sirens 'lie / great heaps of men, flesh rotting from their bones, / their skin all shrivelled up' (12.45-46 «ἥμεναι ἐν λειμῶνι, πολὺς δ᾽ ἀμφ᾽ ὀστεόφιν θὶς / ἀνδρῶν πυθομένων, περὶ δὲ ῥινοὶ μινύθουσι»). Secondly, the field (but not the bones) is alluded to in Odysseus's report of the sorceress's prophesy: 'She said we must avoid / the voices of the otherworldly Sirens; / steer past their flowering meadow' (12.158-159 «Σειρήνων μὲν πρῶτον

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direct their fertility into socially productive channels, the lavish fruitfulness of the islands can create nothing more civilized than overgrown jungles».

[11] Barley, grain, and wine grapes flourish without being cultivated even in the land of the Cyclops (which the *Odyssey* does not call νῆσος, cf. 9.108-111). On this image, Vidal-Naquet (1970: 1285-1287).

[12] Translation by Murray (1919). «El adjetivo μαλακός que califica a las praderas que rodean la gruta de Calipso da idea de una cosa agradable y atractiva; es algo fecundo y esencialmente femenino» (Aguirre de Castro 1994: 313).

[13] For a parallel between the ambiguity of Circe, Calypso, and the Sirens, see Crane (1988: 43); Aguirre de Castro (1994: 312). Scholars have extensively demonstrated that the portrayals of Circe and Calypso are strikingly consistent with each other, cf. Stanford (1963: 14-20); Niles (1978: 48); West (1981: 186); Hainsworth (1982: 154); Aguirre de Castro (1994: 302-317; 1996: 146-147; 1999: 91-94); de Jong (2001: 13). A parallel between the two goddesses is explicitly alluded to in *Od*. 9.29-33.

[14] «Il soprannome di Circe Αἰαίη suona come il nome dell'isola su cui essa abita (X 135): linguisticamente sarebbe più corretta una derivazione del soprannome dal nome dell'isola: "l'appartenente ad Eea"» (Heubeck 1983: 184).

[15] Similarly, in 5.191-192, Calypso claims that 'my heart / is kind and decent, and I pity you' «[…] οὐδέ μοι αὐτῇ / θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι σιδήρεος, ἀλλ᾽ ἐλεήμων». Because of the initial bewitchment of Odysseus's comrades by Circe, Privitera (2005: 158-165), underlines the dangerous aspects of her hospitality.

[16] Since Odysseus visits Aeaea and Ogygia, we have a physical description of these lands (10.195-198, 210-213 on Aeaea; and 5.59ff. on Ogygia). He actually meets the ladies of these islands and their physical appearance and, indeed, that of their islands are essential parts of their powers of temptation (5.230-232 = 10.543-545). By contrast, the hero does not land on the isle of the Sirens. Perhaps even because their (birdlike) looks were so renowned as to make any physical seduction implausible, hearing – not sight – is the essential part of this alternative. Several scholars have addressed the problem of the Sirens' appearance and their (possible) birdlike form, cf., e.g., Gresseth (1970); Rossi (1970); García Fuentes (1973).

ἀνώγει θεσπεσιάων / φθόγγον ἀλεύασθαι καὶ λειμῶν᾽ ἀνθεμόεντα»)[17]. The 'flowering meadow' where the Sirens are sitting (12.45-46) is visually contrasted with bones and shrivelling skin even if fields are frequent in the descriptions of the Otherworld (11.539, 24.13)[18]. The synthetic picture of the island is as ambivalent as its mistresses, whose voice and song typologically stand between *nature* (cf. φθόγγος, according to *LSJ*, 'any clear, distinct sound', 12.41, 159, 198, 23.326) and *culture* (cf. ἀοιδή, 'song', 12.44, 183, 198)[19]. The Sirens are female beings who have appropriated the *Iliadic* form and content[20]. Their singing concerns the Trojan war and is just as attractive as aedic song[21]. The latter, however, gives the hero immortal *kleos*, while its female counterpart can make him die on an island which has neither name, nor geographical location[22].

Finally, Ogygia too is just as ambivalent as its lady[23]. The island is a gilded cage, spoiled not only by Odysseus's melancholic loneliness – the hero dolefully longs to return home (5.153) and suffers grievous pains (5.13), and his eyes are never dry of tears (5.84, 151-152, 160) – but also by Ogygia's and Calypso's known association with the afterlife[24]. The island is only seemingly an earthly place; the

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[17] «It is unlikely that under the Sirens' spell he should have noticed these grisly details, but again a demanding charge is left without confirmation» (Doherty 1995a: 87). Yet, Odysseus's silence on these details may be related to the importance of hearing in the episode. According to Bettini and Spina (2007: 79), «nelle parole con cui Circe metteva in guardia Odisseo sembravano doversi scontrare le ragioni della vista e dell'udito: la vista pareva dovesse offrire uno spettacolo raccapricciante, mentre l'udito veniva raggiunto da un canto irresistibile. Ma anche la visione era a sua volta contraddittoria: un prato fiorito allettante e ossa umana in putrefazione».

[18] Bettini and Spina (2007: 8) consider the Sirens' meadow a *locus amoenus* threatened by putrescence. About meadows in the Otherworld, Iriarte (1993: 149), with bibliography. For the relationship between the Sirens and the Otherworld, Aguirre de Castro (1994: 312); Loscalzo (2017: 194-195). About Circe, Calypso, and the Afterworld, see Note 24.

[19] This varied terminology labels this: «una vocalità di grado zero, […] un suono nettamente percepibile ma che non veicola alcun significato: […] un potente richiamo per i naviganti, che sono attratti da quella inaudita, indecifrabile sonorità [*phthongos*]. E anche dopo che questa si tramuta in *aoidé*, l'aggettivo che in Omero la connota – *ligyrá* – non è privo di ambiguità, dato che esso si applica al canto melodioso delle Muse e dell'aedo ma anche al fastidioso sibilare del vento, allo stridulo frinire degli insetti e al lacerante suono della frusta» (Pucci 2014: 80-81, cf. Iriarte 1993: 152-153). The Sirens' voice and singing are even referred to as ὄψ (according to *LSJ*, 'voice, whether in speaking, shouting, lamenting', 12.52, 160, 185, 187, 192), which is frequently associated to the female voice (Pucci 1996: 192).

[20] 12.184-191 «δεῦρ᾽ ἄγ᾽ ἰών, πολύαιν᾽ Ὀδυσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν, / νῆα κατάστησον, ἵνα νωιτέρην ὄπ ἀκούσῃς / οὐ γάρ πώ τις τῇδε παρήλασε νηὶ μελαίνῃ, / πρίν γ᾽ ἡμέων μελίγηρυν ἀπὸ στομάτων ὄπ᾽ ἀκοῦσαι, / ἀλλ᾽ ὅ γε τερψάμενος νεῖται καὶ πλείονα εἰδώς. / ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ᾽ ὅσ᾽ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ / Ἀργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν, / ἴδμεν δ᾽, ὅσσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ» 'Odysseus! Come here! You are well-known / from many stories! Glory of the Greeks! / Now stop your ship and listen to our voices. / All those who pass this way hear honeyed song, / poured from our mouths. The music brings them joy, / and they go on their way with greater knowledge, / since we know everything the Greeks and Trojans / suffered in Troy, by gods' will; and we know / whatever happens anywhere on earth'. About the form and content of these verses, Pucci (1996). For a parallel between the Sirens' and Demodocus's singing at Alcinous's court (8.499-520), Heubeck (1983: 323); Ferrari (2004); Bettini and Spina (2007: 82).

[21] According to Doherty (1995a: 88), the Sirens «cannot simply been relegated to the margins because they also wield the language of culture par excellence: the discourse of epic poetry».

[22] The Sirens «represent the most destructive, or rather the purely destructive, aspect of this figure [*scil.*, the deceitful goddess] within the symbolic structure of the adventures. They whose voice itself is death to the obligations of this world sing 'heroic glory' (12.189f.); that is, they seduce men (back) to the warrior world of the *Iliad*» (Nagler 1996: 147).

[23] According to Privitera (2005: 111), in *Od.* 5, «gli spettacoli naturali […] sono collegati coi personaggi e vengono opposti fra loro. L'autore collega la bellezza di Calipso con quella di Ogigia e oppone a entrambe l'immensità del mare e l'orrore della tempesta». Cf. Aguirre de Castro (2015: 138): «All the environment of Calypso – her garden and her cave – possesses the characteristics of a sacred realm, imbued by the sacrality of the goddess who inhabits it. But it is neither a place built by men to honour the gods, nor it is in the land of the human beings: rather, it is divine in itself».

[24] «Ogygian island (1.85) [is] a qualification that Hesiod [*Th.* 805-806] applies to the waters of the Styx, the infernal river flowing beneath the earth, across the black night, at the bottom of Tartarus» (Vernant and Doueihi 1986: 62 n. 6). On the deathly aspects of Ogygia, Anderson (1958: 6-9); Segal (1962: 44-45); Holtsmark (1966: 206); Hainsworth (1982: 155); Vernant and Doueihi (1986: 55, 59, 66); Crane (1988: 15-18); Bergren (2008: 63); Pontani (2013: 43-44). On Circe's close relationship with the afterlife (she gives Odysseus information about catabasis in 9.508-540), Crane (1987: 20; 1988: 127-129).

garden vine has grown spontaneously, without being cultivated: 'A ripe and luscious vine, hung thick with grapes, / was stretched to coil around her cave' (5.68-69 «ἡ δ' αὐτοῦ τετάνυστο περὶ σπείους γλαφυροῖο / ἡμερὶς ἠβώωσα, τεθήλει δὲ σταφυλῇσι»). Sacrifices – an important part of human life – are not made: 'nor is there at hand any city of mortals who offer to the gods sacrifice and choice hecatombs' (5.101-102 «[…] οὐδέ τις ἄγχι βροτῶν πόλις, οἵ τε θεοῖσιν / ἱερά τε ῥέζουσι καὶ ἐξαίτους ἑκατόμβας»)[25]. Since Ogygia only looks like an earthly place, thus Calypso only looks like a *good* woman. She hosts Odysseus and takes care of him: 'She took me to her home with kindly welcome, and gave me food' (7.255-256 «[…] ἥ με λαβοῦσα / ἐνδυκέως ἐφίλει τε καὶ ἔτρεφεν […]», cf. 8.453, 23.335)[26]. She even dreams of him becoming her husband (1.15, 9.30), but at the same time, she forcefully detains him (4.557, 5.14-17, 17.142-144, cf. 1.14, 1.55, 9.29-30) and her forceful way of speaking to both Hermes and the hero is not quite the behaviour one would expect from a good wife. After making Hermes sit down, she immediately starts to question him (5.85-89), a famous breach of etiquette since she should have offered the god a meal before enquiring about the reasons for his visit[27]. Moreover, she accuses the male deities of being jealous (5.118) and claims her role in saving Odysseus (5.130) and allowing him to depart (5.139-144). In the following scenes, Calypso claims merit for the hero's departure, as if the decision were her own, and she gives him suggestions on how to build a raft (5.162-164)[28].

According to this analysis, the *Odyssey* associates women, islands, and nature in representing all three isles of women as wild and flourishing places and in portraying them and their mistresses in an equally ambiguous manner. Moreover, in so doing, it portrays a specific association between each isle and its mistress. Both Aeaea and Circe embody a sophisticated wildness and magic (the sorceress's great *doma* is strikingly refined, and Circe is both hostile sorceress and the benevolent hostess); there is rarely any physical description of the ambiguous Sirens and their ambivalent isle (the ambiguous aedic song of the Sirens threatens the hero with death on an ambiguous island which is neither named, nor given a location); and Ogygia and Calypso are only apparently an earthly place and a good wife[29].

3. The hero on the isles of women

All three encounters between Odysseus and the respective mistresses of the all-female islands of Aeaea, of the Sirens, and Ogygia have sensual implications: Odysseus has an explicit sexual relationship with Circe and Calypso and is sensually tempted by the Sirens' voice and singing[30].

The episode regarding Circe already contains an association between the themes of landing on a new island and the violent conquest of a woman, which will later be powerfully exploited in travel accounts and isolarios in a slightly different way. Odysseus rushes upon Circe with his sword as if he

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[25] On this subject, Vidal-Naquet (1970: 1284-1285, 1288).

[26] Translation by Murray (1919).

[27] On this aspect, Hainsworth (1982: 156-157). Calypso has been imposing her cordiality on the hero for seven years, «something which a good host would never do» (de Jong 2001: 130, cf. *Od.* 7.315-316, 15.68-74).

[28] As Odysseus doubts the truthfulness of Calypso's words (5.173-179), she strikes him with her hand (5.181) and finally, leads the way quickly, while Odysseus follows in her footsteps (5.192-193). For an analysis of the rhetoric of Calypso's discourse, de Jong (2001: 132-136); Pontani (2013: 32, 35-37).

[29] The difference between Circe's magical world, where guests are transformed into beasts, and Ogygia, an island whose traits are vaguely earthly, is emblematic. It defends a broader contextualisation of the episode about Calypso in the poem. It is not a worthless repetition of the happenings at Aeaea (cf. Niles 1978: 48; Hainsworth 1982: 153-154, 161; Wohl 1993: 26), and it has little to do with the need for a pause to give Telemachus time to grow old enough to play his role in the poem (cf. Delebecque 1980: 99-108; Alden 1985. Both provide useful bibliography). Aeaea and Ogygia, and consequently, Circe and Calypso, represent, in chronological order, a series of progressive stages on the way home and to Penelope.

[30] According to Doherty (1995a: 85), «in a *tete-à-tete* between female and male, a potential for seduction exists in almost every case […]. Of course, Odysseus is himself portrayed as exercising a kind of sàeduction over many of these females. […] in most cases, he succeeds […] only the Sirens and Helen remain permanently and potentially hostile».

were going to kill her (10.321-324) before he accepts the sorceress's invitation (10.334-335) and goes up to her 'dazzling bed' «περικαλλέος εὐνῆς» (10.347, 480)[31]. After finding favour with the hero, Circe – who had transformed his comrades into animals (10.230-243) and tried to transform Odysseus too (10.319-320) – is no longer hostile.

After leaving Aeaea, Odysseus sails towards the isle of the Sirens, but on Circe's counsel (12.47), he and his comrades row past the island (12.201)[32]. The episode – divided into Circe's prophesy (12.39-54) and the incident itself (12.158-200)[33] – begins with a reference to the Sirens' seductive power, as Circe first alludes to the fact that 'they beguile all men whosoever comes to them' (12.40 «ἀνθρώπους θέλγουσιν, ὅτις σφεας εἰσαφίκηται»)[34]. The theme returns throughout the entire passage (12.44, 52, 183, 187-188, 192); since love encounters frequently take place in fields, the meadow where the Sirens are sitting (12.45, 159) may have erotic overtones[35]. Yet, the fact that Odysseus and his comrades do not land on the island is just the first and, perhaps, the most important peculiarity which characterises the episode in comparison with the ones with Circe and Calypso[36]. Since the hero does not land on this isle of women, he cannot be tempted by any physical seduction; even if the Homeric Sirens were not birdlike – their aspect is not mentioned at all –, this temptation has nothing to do with seeing them[37]. As a result, only in this case is the power of temptation of the female beings not based on anything physical, but on the Sirens' voice and song[38].

Finally, Odysseus stays for seven years on Ogygia as Calypso's lover. However, when he arrived on the island, he had lost both his fleet and comrades, and is merely a shipwrecked mariner in need of the nymph's help. It is interesting to note that, unlike the episodes about Circe and the Sirens, it is Calypso and not Odysseus who refers to his arrival at Ogygia when Hermes tells her about Zeus's order to let the hero leave (5.146-147). 'This man alone, / clutching the keel, was swept by wind and wave, / and came here, to my home' (5.134 «τὸν δ᾽ ἄρα δεῦρ᾽ ἄνεμός τε φέρων καὶ κῦμα πέλασσε», cf. 7.248-255). It would be most unlikely to find a conquering hero making a landing in such a setting.

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[31] According to Wohl (1993: 25), the episode dramatises «both the overlapping sexual control and violence and the necessity of sexual domination in harnessing the woman's powers for the hero's good». Hall (2008: 189) shares this reading of the meeting between Circe and Odysseus as the sadomasochistic humiliation of a beautiful woman.

[32] «Circe's instructions make Odysseus' last adventures different from the previous ones: he now knows in advance what awaits him» (de Jong 2001: 297, cf. Privitera 2005: 161).

[33] Odysseus «partly mirrors Circe's words (158a = 39a, 162 = 51, 163-4 = 53-4), but he leaves out both the attractive side of the Sirens, referring to them only as 'divine' (158), and their dangerous side […]. These modifications are made in order to avoid alarming his companions, while at the same time making them accept that he alone will listen to the Sirens» (de Jong 2001: 301). For a reading of Circe's and Odysseus's paired account as a dramatisation of male/female competition, Doherty (1995b: 138).

[34] Translation by Murray (1919). «Employant à plusieurs reprises le verbe θέλγειν, Circé prévient contre la magie que comporte leur voix» (Iriarte 1993: 152). The same verb refers to Circe in 10.291, 318, 327 and Calypso in 1.57; about this parallel, Pucci (1987: 193-195); Aguirre de Castro (1994: 311); Doherty (1995a: 84-85). θέλγειν «non indica mai il mutamento magico dell'aspetto esteriore, ma sempre un'azione che causa (di solito temporaneamente) un mutamento della normale attività razionale e della coscienza» (Heubeck 1983: 235). According to Hesiod (fr. 28 M.-W.), the Sirens can even enchant the winds.

[35] Gresseth (1970: 208) considers «strange» the double mention of the meadow «in an episode that has such little detail about the main *personae* […]. It looks like a detail of embedded tradition that went with the tale, though to Homer it probably meant very little». However, it may be read as one of the episode's erotic allusions, cf. Aguirre de Castro (1994: 313).

[36] «Compared with the mastering of Circe, which is consummated sexually, the encounter with the Sirens is more seductive foreplay than heroic conquest» (Schur 2014: 8).

[37] «No hace falta verlas para sentirse atraído por ellas. Quizá por eso no es necesaria la descripción física. El hombre se enamora de la voz (único rasgo que destaca en ellas el poeta)» (Aguirre de Castro 1994: 311).

[38] Interestingly, the creatures notice Odysseus's ship as it is as far distant as a man can make himself heard when he shouts (12.181), and the entire company is finally saved as they can no longer hear their voice or their song (12.198). The centrality and seductiveness of the Sirens' voice in this episode has been extensively studied with a convincing metapoetic approach, cf. Pollard (1952); Pucci (1987: 211; 1996); de Jong (2001: 298-299); Ferrari (2004); Bettini and Spina (2007: 194 n. 79, with bibliography); Di Benedetto (2010: 49-52); Pucci (2014); Loscalzo (2017).

According to this analysis, the *Odyssey* may associate the discovery of and arrival on a new island to the seduction of a woman. Indeed, even at a first reading, the theme of the episodes on the isles of women has some erotic overtones; the Phaeacian episode which Dougherty (2001: 130-134) analyses as resonating with colonial and erotic imagery is thus not the only one in the *Odyssey* to relate the arrival of the hero on a new island with the theme of seduction. Moreover, as each isle of the women portrays a specific association with its mistress, all three episodes exploit the erotic imagery in different ways. Firstly, the landing on an unknown island leads to a sexual relationship in the cases of Circe and Calypso (even though the moment when Calypso seduces the hero is not described), but not for the Sirens. Secondly, the landing on the island has some violent overtones only in the case of Odysseus's subjugation of Circe, as the sorceress and her power incarnate savagery and magic as she famously transforms men into animals, reducing them to a condition opposed to humanity. By contrast, in the episode about Calypso, the motif of violent subjugation is absent, in line with the conditions of the hero's arrival at Ogygia (5.130-134); and in the aborted meeting between Odysseus and the Sirens, the hero does not use violence on the creatures (even though it might be suggested by his resistance to their call thanks to the tight knots of his comrades, 12.178-179, 195-196).

4. Contesting *Otherness*

The analysis of the episodes about Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso has shown how they already set the stage for an association of women, islands, and nature, which can be considered a precursor of the later colonial woman/island pair, which represents islands as women to be conquered by the coloniser. In the *Odyssey*, the episode about Nausicaa analysed by Dougherty (2001: 130-134) as resonating with colonial and erotic imagery is thus not the only one to relate the hero's arrival on a new island with the theme of seduction. The episodes about Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso resonate with erotic imagery in a similar way. Dougherty (1993) has shown how erotic conquest appears as a *topos* in colonial discourse in texts which she relates to the Archaic Greek colonisation movement (e.g., Bacchyl. 10; Pind. *Ol*. 7, *Pyth*. 5, 9). Furthermore, although the *Odyssey* should not be read as an objective source of historical information, its special interest in the worlds and peoples overseas may be interpreted in the light of its audience's settlement on new shores, establishing trade contacts throughout the Mediterranean (Graham 1995; Dougherty 1993: 11-13). The poem must have been known to the VIII and VII century public of (not only) travellers (Malkin 2001: 11).

Scholars generally acknowledge the theme of a kind of colonial exploration and settlement of new lands in the episodes about the Cyclops and the Phaeacians, as the description of Goat Island is commonly perceived as the representation of a place suitable for the foundation of a colony (9.116-141), and Scheria is portrayed as the result of the Phaeacians' emigration and subsequent foundation of a new community (6.4-10)[39]. Even Ogygia is admired by Hermes (5.75-76) from a perspective that has been paralleled to that of a colonist (Clay 2007: 149)[40]. In this context, Dougherty (2001: 130-134) demonstrated how the first encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa (6.127ff.) seems to resonate with colonial imagery. In this paper, the analysis of the episodes about Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso suggests that also the arrival of Odysseus on or near their islands may resonate with a kind

[39] On Goat Island and colonisation, Hainsworth (1982: 187); Graham (1995: esp. 10-11); Burgess (2015: 144 and 150 n. 8); Clay (2007: 148); Hall (2008: 75). Byre (1994) does not negate the presence of a colonist's gaze on Goat Island, but he convincingly contextualises it. Indeed, at the Phaeacians' court, Odysseus speaks as a man whose gaze is as much sophisticated as his hosts', and thus, he deserves to be helped to come back to Ithaca. About Scheria as a colony, Vidal-Naquet (1970: 1297); Hainsworth (1982: 187).

[40] Odysseus recognises Aeaea as an island as he observes it from the bottom of a hill (10.194-197); according to Weaver-Hightower (2007: 1-42), visuality is one of the conditions of colonial island narratives.

of colonial erotic imagery, also thanks to the fact that they set the stage for an association of women, islands, and nature, which could be considered a precursor of the later colonial woman/island pair.

However, the episodes about Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso exploit the pair and the erotic imagery in ways that do not share the essentially violent overtones of later travel accounts and isolarios. While, according to Dougherty (2001: 133), the political and physical violence of founding a colony is alluded to in the first encounter between Odysseus and the Phaeacian princess (6.127ff.), the episodes about Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso exploit the motif in different ways, which should be explained in the light of the ancient and modern seafarers' different perceptions of new lands. Malkin's remarks on the myths of *nostoi* such as the myth of Odysseus and on the differences between ancient and modern colonisation can provide us with a methodological framework for reading the peculiarity of the pair and erotic imagery in the episodes about Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso[41]. The aim is to try and contextualise the peculiar erotic imagery associated with the discovery of new islands in the *Odyssey* in the light of ancient and modern different perceptions of new lands.

According to Malkin (2004), the distinctiveness of the ancient and modern perceptions should be understood by looking at the differences between the binarism and strong sense of a superior centre of Western colonialism and the Archaic Greek decentred approach to the so-called colonisation. When the waves of colonisation first swept through the Archaic small Greek city-states, they took place in such a way as to leave little room for binarism. As stated by Malkin, the

> Greek civilization of the Archaic period was a world of many gods and numerous, sovereign political communities sharing a sense of youthfulness and a peripheral geographic situation. Ancient Greek political culture was diametrically different both from the ancient model of the vast, multiethnic empire and from the modern idea of a national state. Greeks lived in hundreds of small, sovereign, and autonomous city-states. (Malkin 2004: 346)

According to the scholar, in Archaic Greece, this multiplicity complicated any sense of centre from which the world was regarded, judged, and colonised and which is, by contrast, essential to modern issues of colonialism and New World settlement. In the European colonisation of the New World and XIX and XX century imperialism, the idea of a centre was prominent. By contrast, in Archaic Greece, observes Malkin (2004: 349), «there was no center to begin with […]. Other peoples were not "others," since their lands possessed a familiar, even expected, environment (with some exceptions in the Black Sea)»[42].

As a result, in modern colonial imagery, the woman/island pair can be considered an expression of Otherness in line with the prevailing cultural construct, which was useful for fashioning duality in contrast to what deviated from it, since islands and women are identified as Other than the fatherland and are to be exploited (Williamson 1986: 107)[43]. In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, the erotic imagery and related woman/island pair seem to resonate with the absence of binarism because of the different perception of new lands. It is in this regard that it should be noted that in the episodes about the isles of women, the sensual implications do not share the essentially violent overtones of later travel accounts and isolarios. Only in the case of Circe is the subjugation of a somewhat violent nature.

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[41] Malkin (1998) reflects on the myths of *nostoi* as a way to mediate encounters and conceptualise ethnicity and group identity in the Archaic period. Moreover, he describes Circe and Calypso as nymphs who cushion Odysseus's arrival in new lands, «mediating between maritime and terrestrial perspectives, aiding the integration of the newly arrived in a foreign and alien country or into Ithaca» (Malkin 2001: 25).

[42] «Apart from some cases in the sixth century and sweepingly so after the early fifth century, Greek identity in the Archaic period was neither formed nor reinforced oppositionally, and the Greeks did not regard the civilizations to the east as peripheral, inferior, poor, or young» (Malkin 2004: 349).

[43] For a critical approach on female Otherness in the Greek world, duBois (1982: 4-18). Famously, the Odyssean representations of Circe, the Sirens, and Calypso have been frequently considered as representations of the Other, cf., e.g., Segal (1962: 20); Vidal-Naquet (1970: 1282); Wohl (1993); Clay (2007: 143, 148); Burgess (2015: 143).

In line with these remarks, it has to be noted that the Odyssean isles of women and their mistresses do possess environments and traits which can be considered peculiarly familiar to Odysseus: Circe lives in a *doma* located 'in a place of wide outlook' (10.211) – at Ithaca, Eumaeus's yard is built «περισκέπτῳ ἐνὶ χώρῳ» (15.7) –, and the sorceress's *doma* is rich in chairs, seats (10.233, 314), fair rugs of purple (10.352), golden baskets, and bowls of silver (10.354-355). On Calypso's isle, there is a garden vine (5.68-69) and fountains (5.70-71), and the nymph lives in a cave (5.226) – at Ithaca, near the Phorcys's bay, there is the famous cave of the Nymphs (13.105-112)[44]. Both Calypso (1.14, 86, 4.557, 5.6, 14, 30, 57, 149, 153, 196, 230, 17.143, 23.333) and Circe (10.143) are called nymphs, and, in the *Odyssey*, the sole mortal woman to be called νύμφη is Penelope (4.743, 11.447)[45]. According to Calypso, if the hero knew how much suffering would have overwhelmed him before reaching home, he would have kept the *doma* with her (5.206-208 «εἴ γε μὲν εἰδείης σῇσι φρεσίν, ὅσσα τοι αἶσα / κήδε' ἀναπλῆσαι, πρὶν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἱκέσθαι, / ἐνθάδε κ' αὖθι μένων σὺν ἐμοὶ τόδε δῶμα φυλάσσοις» 'if you understood / how glutted you will be with suffering / before you reach your home, you would stay here / with me'). Alluding to the *doma* (5.208), Calypso alludes to the duties of a husband, and in referring to her presence alongside him (5.208), she talks about the 'reciprocity' of a faithful couple (Pucci 1987: 54 n. 8); *homophrosyne* is a famous trait of Odysseus's and Penelope's marriage[46]. Finally, the Sirens' words to the hero concern the Trojan war: they know 'everything the Greeks and Trojans suffered in Troy, by gods' will' (12.189-190 «[…] πάνθ' ὅσ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ / Ἀργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν»); this is a well-known motif that Odysseus experienced in Troy. As demonstrated by Elliger (1975: 105), these islands do not simply match the oddity of fantastic places since they are actually characterised even by realistic traits[47].

As a result, because of these similarities and despite the fact that the theme of colonial exploration of new lands is generally acknowledged in the *Odyssey*, and the association of women and islands with nature influences both the representations of the Odyssean isles of women and the woman/island pair in accounts of Western colonialism, all three Odyssean isles of women are exploited in such a way that they cannot be merged with «the Other within a sea of sameness» that Williamson (1986: 108) refers to in her paper. First there is Circe, the bewitching charmer, who has a relationship with the hero without asking anything more; second the Sirens, the enchanting singers, who have appropriated aedic song. Third we have Calypso, the divine lover, who constantly charms Odysseus 'with soft and wheedling words' (1.56) and dreams about becoming his wife, but who acts absurdly for a respectable Greek spouse. Significantly, after the temptations of the isles of women, the erotic imagery associated to the hero landing on a new island is exploited on Scheria, an isle that is not inhabited only by women and which is, thus, more similar to Ithaca[48]. Indeed, the closer the hero gets to Ithaca and Penelope, the more the isles of women and their mistresses become subtly tempting[49].

As a result, the Odyssean representations of the islands of Aeaea, the Sirens, and Ogygia and their mistresses do not depict the *absolute Other* to conquer and exploit, and, consequently, their sensual implications are not as strong as the later representations of settlement of a new land as the violent

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[44] In this sense, I do not agree with Vernant and Douelhi (1986: 62 n. 6) who consider the «gilded cage» at Ogygia a as «figure of the elsewhere».

[45] Malkin (2001: 16) observes that «the concept of *Nymphe* provides a literary mediation between the *Nymphe* Calypso and the *Nymphe* Penelope, playing on the double meaning of the word in ancient Greek».

[46] On Odysseus's and Penelope's *homophrosyne*, Arthur (1973: 16); Bolmarcich (2001). In *Od*. 6.180-185, Odysseus wishes Nausicaa a marriage characterised by 'reciprocity' «ὁμοφροσύνην» (6.181).

[47] On this subject, see also Iannucci (2012).

[48] Scheria and its inhabitants hold a liminal position between mortals and gods (cf. 5.35, 6.203, 7.201-206, 19.279), and Nausicaa's human beauty recalls divine splendour (6.16, 102-109). On Phaeacian liminality, Vidal-Naquet (1970: 1294).

[49] If the hero preferred the temptresses to returning home, he would not return to the *oikos*, which stands at the centre of Archaic Greek society. Outside, there are plenty of female characters to be rejected. For a reading of the *Odyssey* as furnishing «a smooth and exactly calibrated symbolic modulation from the exotic world to the centre of the *oikos*» and Penelope, Nagler (1996: 153-161).

conquest of a woman. The arrival of Odysseus on or near the unexplored islands of Aeaea, the Sirens, and Ogygia reflects the hope, although certainly not the assurance, of discovering marvellously prosperous lands with familiar features and also the desire to return home[50]. Odysseus stays for a year on Aeaea (10.469): at the end of the year, the hero asks Circe to 'fulfil the vow you made to send me home. My heart now longs to go' (10.483-484 «ὦ Κίρκη, τέλεσόν μοι ὑπόσχεσιν, ἣν περ ὑπέστης, / οἴκαδε πεμψέμεναι· θυμὸς δέ μοι ἔσσυται ἤδη»). On the isle of the Sirens, the hero knows that 'if anyone goes near them in ignorance, and listens to their voices, that man will never travel to his home, and never make his wife and children happy to have him back with them again' (12.41-43 «ὅς τις ἀϊδρείῃ πελάσῃ καὶ φθόγγον ἀκούσῃ / Σειρήνων, τῷ δ' οὔ τι γυνὴ καὶ νήπια τέκνα / οἴκαδε νοστήσαντι παρίσταται οὐδὲ γάνυνται»). Finally, he stays for seven years on Ogygia. However, at the end of the period, at night he still sleeps at Calypso's side perforce, 'not wanting her though she still wanted him' (5.155 «οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐθελούσῃ»), while by day he yearns for Ithaca (1.14, 1.55, 4.557, 5.14-17, 9.29-30, 17.142-144)[51]. Following Malkin's studies, the hero's desire to return home cannot be easily explained in a context of colonisation, strictly speaking (the term commonly referred to the foundation of *poleis* resulting from the organised activity of a *metropolis* under the guide of an *oikistes*). According to Malkin (1998: 14), «the reality reflected in the *Odyssey* […] evokes a situation of sailing *and returning* rather than sailing in order to settle overseas»; it is, more appropriately, a protocolonial reality.

Indeed, the Archaic public of the *Odyssey* did travel across the Mediterranean, but not to Hellenise it, since their society missed a central point of reference, and their world was essentially decentralised and fragmented. Archaic Greek exploration and settlement of new lands was not as hierarchical and centralising as modern colonial thinking. Indeed, in this multifocal network, there were no Others to conquer or to control; there were people who were part of a material and cultural background which could be mutually understood. Archaic Greek Ancient Mediterranean exploration did not occur across an alien ocean but within familiar geographic and climatic features, along contiguous seashores or toward observable lands, among peoples who were not others to conquer but, more sophisticatedly, different within a *same* (Malkin 1998: 17; 2004: 351).

The Odyssean peculiarities of the representations of the isles of women, their mistresses, and the related erotic imagery with regard to modern accounts of the discovery of new lands may be read as the product of these events and the related imagination. As Archaic Greek Ancient Mediterranean exploration was not similar to the conquest of the New World, the themes of landing on a new island and the conquest of a woman are differently exploited. The Odyssean isles of women do not portray the absolute Other to conquer and exploit, but they do possess environments and traits which are both *familiar* and at the same time *mysterious* to Odysseus.

Paraphrasing Williamson (1986: 108), on Aeaea, the isle of the Sirens, and Ogygia, «woman is an island because she is mysterious, distant», related to the *cliché* of islands' and women's fecundity as well as to the ambiguity of the island and its mistress. However, because of the differences between Archaic Greek colonisation and modern colonialism, woman is not «also an island within ideology – surrounded and isolated, as the colonist is by the colonizer, held intact as the Other within a sea of sameness». She is, more sophisticatedly, different within a same. Indeed, the Odyssean motif of the isle of women and the related erotic imagery express the variabilities of seafaring and landing on new lands in a world where myths could be used as charters for mediation between seafarers and indigenous populations[52].

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[50] Cf. Malkin (1998: 4).

[51] After Calypso tells Odysseus that he can leave Ogygia, 'they went inside the hollow cave and took / the pleasure of their love, held close together' (5.226-227 «ἐλθόντες δ' ἄρα τώ γε μυχῷ σπείους γλαφυροῖο / τερπέσθην φιλότητι, παρ' ἀλλήλοισι μένοντες»). The hero does not leave the island immediately; he spends a few days constructing a raft. Yet, the poet says nothing about the other nights he spends on the island.

[52] On this function of myths, Malkin (1998: 20-22).

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