

Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities

Volume 5

Article 28

2023

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August Scrivener

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Recommended Citation

Scrivener, August (2023) "Circe," *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities*: Vol. 5, Article 28.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc/vol5/iss1/28>

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Circe

by August Scrivener

Circe, a story about a nymph who has the power of transformation, had a slow start. The characters seemed plain, having little individuality instead being mostly archetypes, and the conflicts were mainly due to spite or revenge. However, the story was supposed to be charged with female power. The very fact that the book was written through the view of a female nymph points to this fact. It seems like the story should be more nuanced and intriguing in places like plot and conflicts where usual myths were not. In the beginning and later places of the story, there was no clear message. In fact when Circe turned so many men to pigs, it was actually discouraging. What is the overarching message? Is it that Circe has the power to fight the ill intention of mortals, and to ultimately show that women can fend for themselves with trickery and force? That would be too basic for such a thought out book.

It was not until the end of the story, where an answer popped out and an otherwise waste of time became worthwhile. Circe is immortal. She cannot die and has powers which no mortal can attain. Her powers keep her safe from things like the malicious sailors and Scylla the monster. In the real world, people say things like "I want the power to fly or I would like to be invisible". In other words, they want powers so that they can fight evil or be stronger than they are. What Circe does in the end of the story goes against many people's aspirations. Circe decides to use her power of transformation to transform herself into a mortal. "I rise and go to my herbs. I create something, I transform something. My witchcraft is as strong as ever, stronger. This too is good fortune. How many have such power and leisure and defense as I do?"(384). When Circe transforms herself to a mortal, she loses her powers and inability to die. At first, this seems like the wrong choice. Humans are usually afraid of death and try anything to extend their life so that they don't die. For example, the constant changes and reinventions with regards to modern medicine help someone with cancer live ten more years than they would have. Why would Circe give up her ability to live forever? One answer occurs when Circe is thinking about her decision. Circe says, "I thought once that gods are the opposite of death, but I see now they are more dead than anything, for they are unchanging, and can hold nothing in their hands" (385). Circe claims that gods are more dead than mortals. To support her opinions, Circe uses the word unchanging to relate death with gods. On the contrary, it seems like changing goes hand in hand with life. For example, a chick who has just hatched has no feathers or strength to live on its own. Instead, it needs a parent chicken to help it survive. As the chick gets older, it changes by growing feathers and longer legs. At the end of the chicken life, its feathers will tarnish and its bones will become brittle. The last change the chicken will make is it will die. In contrast to a chicken, a

god usually does not need to change because the nature of a god revolves around the ability to live forever. They do not need to grow up to survive like a chicken will.

What makes Circe unique and inspiring is that she does change. In a sense, she goes against two entities: her own kind by becoming mortal, as well as going against the common belief of mortals that death is something to fear. When she turns herself into a mortal, two paradoxes arise: A god's inability to die makes them not alive and a mortal's ability to die makes them alive.

Circe makes another point that has to do with what being alive means. "Only that: we are here. This is what it means to swim the tide, to walk the earth and feel it touch your feet. This is what it means to be alive" (385). What Circe could be saying is that being a true mortal makes touching the earth and swimming with the tide feel more real. Gods seem to be so far removed from the natural world that they cannot truly experience it. Furthermore, the unavoidable death of a mortal makes touching the ground more precious and thus special, something to cherish. Whereas a god can touch the earth for eternity and perhaps takes it for granted.

Circe has the ability to transform and change physical objects. What makes her even more special is her ability to, in a way, break the fourth wall and change the audience's minds. When taking a step back, it is clear that Circe's actions are spreading a message. Perhaps it is as simple as spending an extra minute to smell the flowers on the corner of a street, or feeling the cold rain hit one's face as one steps outside of one's house. Maybe her ability to change could be a sign of wisdom. In the real-world humans should, once in a while, assess themselves and see where they might be headed. Perhaps someone is headed to a life of disappointment and needs to make a change. Another perspective is that there is no need to wish for special powers like being invisible or having super strength because the way the human cycle is set up makes a lot of sense, that is, the ability to die helps us live life alive.