

The Figure of Circe and the Power of Knowledge: Competing Philosophies in Calderón's *El mayor encanto, amor*

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At first, Calderón's mythological play follows the well-known story of Homer's *Odyssey*. On their way home from the Trojan War, Ulises¹ and his crew stop at the island of the witch Circe. Most of the Greeks search the island and arrive at the palace of Circe as their leader waits at the beach. Rather than be wary, they choose to indulge their desires and baser natures. As we know, Circe transforms all but one of them into beasts with a potion. However, from this point on Calderón begins to introduce significant changes into the story known from both Homer and Ovid. When Ulises confronts Circe, she gives him also a potion, but he does not drink, having learned of its danger and having learned how to render it useless.² Defeated, Circe cries out, '¿Quién cielos airados, / quién más ha sabido que yo?' (1515a).³ This early passage is key, indicating that she recognizes knowledge to be the basis of her power with which she attempts to control all of nature, the elements and men. However,

1 I have retained the Spanish spelling of the names throughout, in order to clearly distinguish between Calderón's characters and those of Classical literature.

2 In Homer, Odysseus is aided by Hermes who provides the moly root as protection against the effects of Circe's potion. In Calderón's play, the goddess Iris provides Ulises with a 'ramillete' of flowers, consistent with his decision to make Juno the divine patron of Ulises in this play. Juno plays a similar role in Act I of the three-author play *Polifemo y Galatea*. Mira de Amescua provided the first act, Pérez de Montalbán the second, and Calderón the third. Regarding the distinction between Iris and Mercury as messengers of the gods and Iris' association with Juno, see the sixteenth-century commentator Natale Conte, *Mythologiae*, trans. and ed. John Mulryan and Steven Brown, 2 vols (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), II, 779.

3 All citations of *El mayor encanto, amor* are from Pedro Calderón, *Obras completas*, ed. Ángel Valbuena Briones and Ángel Valbuena Prat, 3 vols (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966 etc.): Vol. I, ed. Ángel Valbuena Briones (5^a ed. 1966), with just the page-number given in parenthesis. All other works of Calderón will be cited, with both volume and page-number, from the *Obras completas*, Vol. I, ed. Ángel Valbuena Briones, 5^a ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966); and from *Obras completas*, Vol. III (*Autos sacramentales*), ed. Ángel Valbuena Prat, 2^a ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967).

Ulysses, in order to escape the enchantments of Circe, and escape the island, must display knowledge of an entirely different sort than that of the witch. In an aside, Ulysses declares, 'Hoy seré / de aquesta Esfinge el Edipo' (1518a). Clearly the struggle between the two is going to be a battle of wits: Who has the greater knowledge? This creates a dynamic in the play of opposing and competing philosophies in which dependence on natural philosophy and the occult sciences,⁴ seen through the lens of philosophical scepticism, must ultimately fail, while the tenets of moral philosophy lead to triumph.

It is primarily knowledge that distinguishes Calderón's Circe from that of Homer. In the *Odyssey*, she is described as a goddess, having great knowledge of poisons and potions. The Baroque Circe is quite a different figure. She relates how in her youth she received instruction with Medea, another witch, from a great magician. At some point, jealous men, fearful of such a learned woman, forbade her access to books, so she left their world to create her own island kingdom. There she moved on from more traditional studies to the darker arts mostly associated with divination: ornithromancy, quiromancy, pyromancy, necromancy. Frederick A. De Armas identifies Circe as a *mujer varonil* because of her studies, classifying her as a 'scholar'.⁵ She has clearly developed an encyclopaedic range of knowledge.⁶ However, this knowledge of the external world—the macrocosm—will ultimately prove suspect, unreliable, and the witch figure who employs it must fall in defeat.

Initially, however, Circe does seem to wield a great deal of power. She does transform Ulysses' men into beasts. But is significant that this occurs because they have surrendered themselves to their passions, their bestial natures. In numerous of his plays, Calderón presents *hombre-fiera* characters, men who behave as beasts controlled by their passions. In some plays, they are represented by men wearing animal skins. In this one, they actually appear to become on the outside what they have become on the inside, creatures in which reason, self-knowledge and self-control have been banished.⁷ In all of these plays, these *hombre-fiera* characters can only

4 Regarding the congruous relationship between witchcraft and natural philosophy in the Renaissance, see Stuart Clark, 'The Scientific Status of Demonology', in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1984), 351–74.

5 Frederick A. De Armas, 'Metamorphosis in Calderón's *El mayor encanto, amor*', *Romance Notes*, 22:2 (1981), 208–12, (p. 209).

6 See Antonio Regalado, *Calderón: los orígenes de la modernidad en la España del Siglo de Oro*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Destino, 1995): 'Circe, caracterizada por un saber enciclopédico y virtuosa de las ciencias prohibidas' (II, 217). See also W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Oxford: Basil Blackford, 1954): 'In Calderón's Circe, as Calderón portrays her, Ulysses meets the most formidable combination of erudition and voluptuous beauty that ever came his way. The catalogue of her intellectual accomplishments rivals Gower's testimonial to Ulysses' own learning' (187–88).

7 De Armas has made this same observation: '[T]he myth also fits in with one of his [Calderón's] major concerns, the dichotomy *hombre-fiera*, clearly exemplified in the figure of Segismundo in *La vida es sueño*' ('Metamorphosis in Calderón's *El mayor encanto, amor*', 208).

triumph by re-establishing self-rule by reason, and this is only possible through knowledge of self—the microcosm—a motif that Calderón refers to in many of his plays, the idea that man is a small world unto himself.

An examination of some of the man-to-beast transformations that occur in the play can bring to light the important philosophical tensions. When Ulyses confronts Circe and initially defeats her, he forces her to transform his crew back into their human forms. One by one, they stumble out onto the stage, restored. One of them asks, ‘¿Qué es lo que me ha sucedido / este rato que he soñado?’ (1515a). The use of the word ‘dream’ brings into question whether these men actually were transformed or whether Circe has been merely manipulating appearances. In *La vida es sueño*, questions are raised about deceptive appearances. What was the dream and what was the reality? It should be remembered that like the potion used against these Greeks, a potion was given to Segismundo to put him to sleep in order to move him and then change his perceptions of reality. Indeed, Augustine, in *The City of God*, describes the transformation of men into beasts as just this type of process, occurring ‘when the man’s senses are laid asleep or overpowered’.⁸ The Bishop of Hippo declares that demons have no real power to affect transformations; they can only ‘change the appearance of things created by the true God’ (624). Often, they cause a ‘phantasm’ to appear which leads observers to think that a man has been transformed, while he in his sleep also believes he has become a beast. Augustine specifically references the example of Circe and the companions of Ulysses, asserting that if any transformation did occur, it was done in the way he describes (625).

This passage from Augustine continued to be cited as authoritative in texts more contemporary to Calderón that dealt with the powers and activities of witches and demons. The most famous and influential of these was the *Malleus Maleficarum*, first published in 1486, and known in English as the *Witches’ Hammer*. It contains two sections that specifically address the subject of man-to-beast transformations. Part I, Question X is entitled ‘Whether Witches can by some Glamour Change Men into Beasts’.⁹ The conclusion drawn is that witches do not actually have the power to transform men; they can only affect outer appearances. This can function in two ways: a person can either be made to see another human being as an animal, or a person can be made to think that he is an animal. The example is given of a man who was made to think he was a wolf, and ran through the forest naked, living in a cave. Part II, Question I, Ch. 8 addresses the Circe myth directly, echoing Augustine:

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

8 Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 624.

9 Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 61ff.

drawn out of the repository or memory of images, and impressed on the imaginative faculty. And so imaginary vision was caused. (123)

A similar evaluation of the question appears in the *Compendium Maleficarum* of 1608, in which the author, Francesco Maria Guazzo, states,

No one can doubt but that all the arts and metamorphoses by which witches change men into beasts are deceptive illusions and opposed to nature. I add that anyone who holds the contrary opinion is in danger of Anathema.¹⁰

Calderón was undoubtedly aware of the prevailing theological opinion on the question. His Circe definitely appears to have powers more in line with those described in the texts of Christian commentators rather than the Classical works that ultimately serve as the source of the story.

The deceptive and unreal nature of Circe's power becomes manifestly evident when she describes how she intends to combat the forces of Arsidas, the jealous lover and rival for her affection, whom she has rejected in favour of Ulises. Arsidas leaves Circe's side, retreats into the mountains, and returns with an army to take by force what he could not win with his devotion. Circe announces that she will face him with fantastic hosts, shadows of her own making:

... aunque son tan pocos
 los soldados de mi parte,
 yo armadas huestes pondré
 en las campañas del aire,
 que con tropas de caballos,
 con escuadrones de infantes,
 fantásticamente lidien
 y fingidamente marchen. (1539a)

Arsidas recognizes the nature of Circe's hosts, and tries to calm his men who do not: 'No temáis, no temáis nada; / que esos monstruos incultos / son fantásticas formas, que no bultos' (1540a). He understands that the forms have no substance, and yet his men are deceived, and he loses the battle. Afterward, he

10 Francesco María Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 50. Any contrary opinion would place one at odds with the opinions and precedents of Augustine, Aquinas, and canon law, specifically the *Canon Episcopi*. For this reason, there was notable uniformity on this question in the numerous texts from the period that dealt with the subject matter. There did, however, seem to be a strong current of popular belief that the powers of witches and demons produced real, rather than merely apparent, results. For example, Jean Bodin, in his *De la demonomanie des sorciers*, defended the belief that some men did physically change into werewolves. See Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 122ff.

complains to Circe that she was victorious against him, not because of valour, but because of tricks, fakery, and 'apariencias': '... que mis gentes / a tus apariencias rindes, / pues huyeron de las huestes / que aparentemente finges' (1543a).

The relevance of pointing out that Circe's great knowledge merely enables her to manipulate appearances rather than control reality lies in the fact that appearance *vs.* reality is one of the major themes of the Spanish Baroque. The importance of this theme is due in great part to the philosophical scepticism that was in vogue at the time. The two currents of philosophical scepticism inherited from Ancient Greece were Pyrrhonism and Academic scepticism. Both types found adherents in early modern Europe. Pyrrhonism was particularly strong in France because of Montaigne and the Latin translations of Sextus Empiricus published in France in the sixteenth century. But Academic scepticism also had a well-established tradition, transmitted as it had been through the writings of Cicero, which were influential in the work of the Church Father Lactantius, whom Renaissance humanists termed the 'Christian Cicero', as well as Erasmus, who praised the Academic sceptics in his *Praise of Folly*.¹¹ Perhaps the principal distinction between the two philosophical systems dealt with the reliability of information derived from the senses and the ultimate ability to truly know anything. The Academics, going back to Plato's academy and ultimately Socrates who declared, 'All I know is that I know nothing', believed that information provided by the senses was deceptive, and therefore nothing about the physical world around us could truly be known. The Pyrrhonists, by contrast, believed that sense information had to be the basis for knowledge of the world around us; they merely chose to suspend judgment as to whether that information was true or reliable. The position of the Academics is more in line with the spirit of the Spanish Baroque regarding the deceptive nature of appearances, which all too often were discovered to be at odds with reality.¹²

However, the distinctions between Academic scepticism and Pyrrhonism need not always be applied strictly with regard to Spain's Golden Age. As Jeremy Robbins has observed, 'With certain exceptions, Spaniards only distinguished between the two sceptical schools in the most general way'.¹³ It is, therefore, often enough to note that the age was infused with a spirit of scepticism. There were a number of avowed sceptics, among them Francisco

11 Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1941): 'For such is the obscurity and variety of human affairs that nothing can be clearly known, as has been correctly said by my Academics, the least impudent of the philosophers' (63).

12 See Jeremy Robbins, 'The Rediscovery of Pyrrhonism', Chapter 1, in his *Arts of Perception: The Epistemological Mentality of the Spanish Baroque, 1580–1720*, *BSS*, LXXXII:8 (2005), 21–37: '[T]he influence of Academic scepticism far surpassed that of Pyrrhonism in Spain' (23).

13 Robbins, 'The Rediscovery of Pyrrhonism', in *Arts of Perception*, 26.

de Quevedo, whose works contain numerous overtly sceptical passages with citations from known sceptical thinkers such as Lactantius, Montaigne, and Francisco Sanches, whose *Quod Nihil Scitur* he cited at the beginning of his *El mundo por de dentro*. Elements of scepticism appear in the works of many of the best-known writers, including Cervantes.¹⁴ The scepticism of Calderón is less readily apparent, but important to recognize. Bárbara Mujica, David Hildner and Antonio Regalado have written about the philosophical scepticism central to Calderón's *En esta vida todo es verdad y todo mentira*.¹⁵ Arguably, there is an implicit scepticism present in the failure of the type of knowledge that Circe represents in Calderón's mythological play.

For those adherents of Academic scepticism no knowledge of the external world was reliable. This does not at all mean that study of the external world was unnecessary, but sceptics tended to scoff at and ridicule natural philosophers, dialecticians, mathematicians and astrologers for their dogmatism in approaching knowledge of the macrocosm. Francisco Sanches in particular, described dialecticians as resembling 'necromancers' and 'sorcerers' who claim to know a great deal when they know nothing,¹⁶ a comparison to be considered with regard to Calderón's Circe. For the Christian sceptics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were two avenues that lead to certain knowledge: (1) Divine Revelation, which in Catholic Spain extended to the authority of the pope and Church councils, and (2) moral philosophy that led to knowledge of self and control of self, the rule of reason. Regarding the first, it is true that Erasmus and Luther famously debated the ability to know for certain any theological matter, and scepticism did enter into this argument, but, as noted before, the main concern of scepticism was knowledge derived from the senses of the external world, not matters of theology that could be taken on faith.¹⁷ Certainly in Spain, the mistake of mixing scepticism with spiritual matters would be to invite the scrutiny of the Inquisition. Christian writers as a rule had to restrict any scepticism to knowledge of the external world.¹⁸ Therefore, the

14 See Maureen Ihrle, *Skepticism in Cervantes* (London: Tamesis, 1982).

15 See Barbara Mujica, 'The Skeptical Premises of Calderón's *En esta vida todo es verdad y todo mentira*', in *Texto y espectáculo: Selected Proceedings of the Symposium on Spanish Golden Age Theater*, ed. Barbara Mujica (Lanham: Univ. Press of America, 1989), 117–26; and also Regalado, *Calderón: los orígenes de la modernidad en la España del Siglo de Oro*, I, 637ff. and 713ff. David Hildner did so in a 2005 AHCT conference paper entitled, 'Conocimiento, poder y escepticismo en *En esta vida todo es verdad y todo mentira* de Calderón' (unpublished).

16 Francisco Sanches, *Quod Nihil Scitur*, trans. Douglas F. S. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1988), 180–81.

17 For a more lengthy discussion of this debate, see Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: Univ. Press of California, 1979), 5 ff.

18 This is one of the reasons why Regalado can speak of Calderón in terms of 'piedad y escepticismo' coexisting in the same person despite the contradictions seemingly inherent in such a stance (*Calderón: los orígenes de la modernidad en la España del Siglo de Oro*, I, 81).

dogmatism of Christian sceptics tended toward matters theological and moral, the principal concern of the latter being the study of self.¹⁹

Calderón provides a more indicative example of the importance of self-knowledge, as well as the deceptive nature of Circe's powers, in a subplot involving Clarín, the *gracioso* who finds himself transformed into a monkey, having offended Circe with an impertinent comment. Rather than transform him with a potion or an enchantment involving sleep, she affects the change merely with the power of her voice, which evokes a passage from Virgil, *Eclogue VIII*, in which she is said to have changed the comrades of Ulysses by song. The other Greeks, missing Clarín, express concern over what has happened to him and question where he might be. Meanwhile, he stands before them as a monkey, gesticulating, pointing at himself, yelling, 'Soy yo', but, their minds bewitched by the spell on him, they hear only monkey chatter. One of the Greeks, Lebre, puts a leash on him, thinking to take him home as a pet, and, at one point, hands him a mirror to hold. When Clarín sees himself, he shouts, '¡Qué hocico!' (1540b), and the spell is broken. The illusion of the monkey falls away, leaving Clarín human again.²⁰

This punitive transformation, not part of source material from Homer and Ovid, belongs to the important iconographic tradition of the monkey as 'the emblem of the sinner, the *naturae degenerantis homo*'.²¹ H. W. Janson, in his study on the ape in the art and literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, notes how apes and monkeys were presented as the *similitudo hominis*, and represented the Fall of Man. Indeed, many woodcuts from the period include an image of a monkey in the Garden of Eden with an apple in its hand. Unlike the serpent, who represents the devil and temptation, the monkey personifies 'the inability to resist temptation. In other words, he is a projection of man's own weakness'.²² In particular, the fettered monkey represents man enslaved to his passions. Calderón's presentation of Clarín on a leash, destined to perform 'maromas' and entertain for his supper, belongs to this tradition. The representation of the monkey with a mirror in its hand also belongs to a specific tradition, typically denoting *vanitas*.

19 Regarding the relationship between scepticism and moral philosophy, see Jeremy Robbins: 'It is the fusion and interaction of the two philosophies of scepticism and Stoicism that created the distinctive epistemological mentality and concerns of seventeenth-century Spain. In order, therefore, to understand fully the Spanish reception of scepticism, and thus its presence and influence across the seventeenth century, the impact of Neostoicism on Spain needs also to be considered' ('The Rediscovery of Pyrrhonism', in *Arts of Perception*, 37).

20 See also Susan L. Fischer, 'Calderón's *El mayor encanto, amor* and the Mode of Romance', in *Studies in Honor of Everett W. Hesse*, ed. William C. McCrary and José A. Madrigal (Lincoln, NE: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1981), 99–112. Fischer describes these transformations as a descent into 'a demonic lower world of the senses' (108).

21 H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1952), 86.

22 Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 133.

The ape, captivated by its own image, represented the foolishness of narcissism.²³ However, Calderón's use of the mirror breaks with this tradition. Clarín, rather than be fascinated with his own appearance, is horrified to see what he has become: a beast trapped in a sensory rather than rational realm. The image in the reflection cannot be a cause for *vanitas*, since that image is not what he knows to be his true form, or at least what he is supposed to be. What he sees is his fallen self, a source of shame. The realization breaks the spell. The mirror, then, is both instrument and metaphor for self-knowledge. This is the type of knowledge capable of defeating the powers and knowledge of the witch, a fact Circe seems to understand herself, since she had mentioned the cure to her curse in an aside: 'Hasta mirarse a un espejo / ya en su forma no ha de verse' (1529b).

It is essential to note that the experience of Clarín is consistent with the moral and theological message in many of Calderón's other works. In the *auto sacramental* entitled *El diablo mudo*, the allegorical character el Hombre finds himself in a fallen state because of Original Sin. El Conocimiento appears on stage as a venerable old man, described as the 'propio conocimiento del Hombre' (III, 945a). With the use of the mirror that he bears, he attempts to provide el Hombre with an awareness of the death that sin brings. His efforts, however, are stymied by the devil. El Hombre is left blind, to be guided by el Apetito, a character who, like Circe, acknowledges that self-knowledge is what is lacking: 'Claro está que no estuviera / ciego el Hombre, si en su propio / Conocimiento cayera' (III, 946b). Eventually, with the help of el Amor de Peregrino, sight is restored to el Hombre, and he sees himself for what he is: 'ya veo / que soy tierra, polvo, y nada' (III, 958b). This type of self-knowledge is necessary theologically as part of the process of redemption.

The predicament of Clarín and the other Greek sailors turned into beasts becomes an issue for Ulises because Circe, when she cannot conquer him with her knowledge, decides to use her beauty: 'Venceráale mi hermosura, / pues mi ciencia no ha podido' (1520b). The dual danger now becomes manifest. Ulises must overcome 'una mujer con belleza y con ingenio' as Antistes had earlier tried to warn him, declaring that such a woman, with beauty alone, does not need potions to transform men into beasts: '¿Y quién vio que, siendo hermosa / una mujer con extremo, / para hacer los hombres brutos / usase de otros remedios, / pues de estas transformaciones / es la hermosura el veneno?' (1513a). Ulises comments on the ephemeral nature of such beauty in the zarzuela *El golfo de las sirenas* as he and his companions contemplate the new dangers of Escila and Caribdis:

La hermosura más perfecta, / ya a fable mire, ya esquivada, / ¿es, di, más que una apariencia, / tan hija aquella del viento, / tan hija del tiempo esta, / que cualquier aura la gasta, / cualquier hora se la lleva? (I, 1727)

23 Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 212.

Although the comment applies to the situation of this later work, the wisdom he displays exists as a result of his earlier experiences with Circe. The description of beauty as nothing more than ‘una apariencia’ serves to further establish the sceptical stance of Calderón with regard to everything Circe represents. The deceptive nature of her powers may extend even to her own physical appearance and the way she allows men to see her.²⁴ Despite this later insight, and the clear warnings earlier given by Antistes, Ulises fails to withstand the temptation of Circe’s beauty when employed against him. He falls in love with her and surrenders to his passions, spending the time in Circe’s palace alternately sleeping and indulging his lust for her, lost to his true self.²⁵

The other Greeks, although drawn to the witch’s beauty, ostensibly had been defeated and transformed when they partook of the drinks that Circe offered them. Hence their defeat can be understood as associated with the sense of Taste. Clarín’s transformation was realized with the power of Circe’s voice, naturally associated with the sense of Hearing. The witch conquers Ulises through the sense of Sight, utilizing her ‘apparent’ beauty. Traditionally, the five senses were seen as the enemies of reason, the avenues through which vice could enter.²⁶ This is a recurring theme in Calderón’s plays, particularly in those that deal with Ulises. In *El golfo de las sirenas*, Escila and Caribdis represent the temptations and dangers of Sight and of Hearing respectively. In Calderón’s *auto sacramental* based on the Circe myth, *Los encantos de la culpa*, Los Cinco Sentidos appear as allegorical characters through whom la Culpa—personified Sin who is at the same time Circe—orchestrates the downfall of el Hombre, in the role of Ulises. However, the importance of the senses exceeds their traditional association with the temptations of the flesh. Philosophically, for the sceptic, they represent the weaknesses of the flesh in that the senses provide unreliable information. Both morally and epistemologically, the senses are potentially deceptive.

In order to escape the grasp of Circe, i.e. his own passions, Ulises, like Clarín, will need to experience his own ‘mirror moment’ that will force him to look at himself. The use of a mirror or reflected image in just these types of

24 The events in Canto 7 of *Orlando furioso* are worth noting in that the hero Ruggiero faces a similar situation. Under the love spell of the witch Alcina, she appears to him as a tall blond of absolute beauty. When he is given a ring that protects him from all magic, Alcina is revealed to be a short, old, toothless hag without equal in ugliness. Calderón’s discussion of beauty as an appearance suggests the possibility of a similar deception in his version of Circe, since she does not seem to be the same immortal creature as is described in classical myth.

25 About the relationship between Ulysses and Circe, Natale Conti noted that ‘He toyed with her for about a year after that, during which time she presented him with a son named Telegonus and a daughter named Ardea’ (*Mythologiae*, II, 813). Calderón naturally presents a much abbreviated time-line in his dramatic interpretation of the story.

26 See Carl Nordenfolk, ‘The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 48 (1985), 1–22 (p. 3).

situations has a long tradition in literature, as it provides a means of self-knowledge. Perhaps more than any other, the figure of Achilles exemplifies the hero who abandons his own nature and duties as a warrior having undergone a transformation that leaves him outwardly effeminate, since he dresses as a woman and hides among women to avoid participating in the war that will bring him great glory but also death. Statius, in Book I of his unfinished *Achilleid*, describes the scene of *anagnorisis* when Ulysses arrives at the court of Lycomedes and presents as gifts certain weapons. Achilles cannot help but be drawn to them. As he handles the weapons, he sees his image reflected in the shield:

But when he came nearer, and the emulous brightness gave back his features and he saw himself mirrored in the reflecting gold, he thrilled and blushed together. Then quickly went Ulysses to his side and whispered: 'Why dost thou hesitate? We know thee, thou art the pupil of the half-beast Chiron, thou art the grandson of the sky and sea; thee the Dorian fleet, thee thy own Greece awaits with standards uplifted for the march, and the very walls of Pergamum totter and sway for thee to overturn. Up! delay no more!'²⁷

At the sight of the effeminate image before him, Achilles blushes with shame. In addition, the voice of Ulysses creates a sharp contrast between the Achilles standing before him and the man they know, the man he should be. By reminding him of his parentage, background and destiny, Ulysses leads him to embrace his true nature once again, to remember himself. However, this awakening began with the reflected image.

A similar passage from Canto XVI of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* serves to contextualize the imagery and conflicts of Calderón's play.²⁸ In the Italian epic, the young hero Rinaldo has succumbed to the enchantments of the witch Armida, and shirks his duty as the greatest warrior of Christendom. It is only when his weapons are presented to him by Ubaldo, one of the knights sent to free him, that he sees what he has become, a weak slave of love:

He turned his glance upon the brilliant shield
and saw himself for what he was, how tressed
with dainty touches, reeking with perfume,
his hair in curls and tassels on his vest,
his dangling sword effeminate at his side,
prettified—not to mention all the rest,

27 Publius Papinius Statius, *Statius*, trans. J. H. Mozley, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. P., 1961), II, 573.

28 Regarding Tasso's debt to Statius on this subject, see Beatrice Corrigan, 'The Opposing Mirrors', *Italica*, 33:3 (Sept. 1956), 165–79 (pp. 165–66).

for it's a dandy ornament he bore,
not a ferocious instrument of war!²⁹

The parallel to Achilles and his situation is obvious, as is the parallel to Calderón's Ulises and Circe,³⁰ Aeneas and Dido, Antony and Cleopatra and numerous other famous heroes made effeminate by passion.³¹ The specificity of the description here, however, is helpful in that the reflective surface of the shield is specifically mentioned. An instrument of war serves as a mirror and instrument of self-knowledge.

In addition to the reflected image, there is a second, and equally important, component to Rinaldo's victory over his own weakness. Adjunct to the sight of his own image, he must hear the truth as well from another character who acts as the voice of reason, and reminds the hero of who he is. In this case, Ubaldo takes the part Ulysses had played with Achilles in a long exhortation that calls Rinaldo to abandon love to fulfil his duties as a warrior. Then, finally, the faculty that allows the hero to shake off his servitude is mentioned, which is personified Reason:

... and the noble lad stood for a certain space
confused: he could not speak, he could not start.
But when to indignation shame gave place,
indignant Scorn, fierce fighter on Reason's part,
and a new fire spread over his blushing face,
a hotter-burning fire, leapt from the heart,
he flung his toys and bangles off for good,
pathetic emblems of his servitude. (306)

Reason awoke within him here as the result of self-knowledge, a power that Armida recognizes as 'a wisdom greater than her own' (307). As in Calderón's play, Tasso presents two types of knowledge in conflict, the knowledge of the witch Armida that she uses to control her surroundings, and Rinaldo's knowledge of self, essential to escape the witch, and acknowledged as the greater wisdom.

29 Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, ed. and trans. Anthony M. Esolen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 2000), 306.

30 Sloman has noted in passing the similarity between Calderón and Tasso here. See Albert E. Sloman, *The Dramatic Craftsmanship of Calderón: His Use of Earlier Plays* (Oxford: Dolphin, 1958), 147.

31 About Aeneas and Dido, Francisco Sanches presents a philosophical analogy in which he asserts that those who make dialectics their mistress are 'like Aeneas, who (forgetting himself, and quite oblivious towards Italy, for which he had been making), effeminate and out of his mind, clothed in the mantle of wantonness, became Dido's mere slave, devoting himself wholly to her and worshipping her alone; until at Mercury's warning he blushed for shame, his eyes were opened, and he realized that he had been disgracefully ensnared; and forthwith he put away his effeminacy and took manhood upon himself' (*Quid Nihil Scitur*, 275).

The important role played by the armour in restoring these two epic heroes to an awareness of their true selves provides the necessary background for understanding the dynamic of the armour scene introduced by Calderón into his mythological play. The scene occurs simultaneously with the battle between Circe and Arsidas. As she goes forth, she leaves Ulises behind, asleep in order to not risk losing him to the call of battle: 'Aquí tengo de dejarle / sepultado en blando sueño, / porque el belicoso alarde / no pueda de mi amor nunca / divertirle ni olvidarle' (1539a). Once again, sleep presents itself as an ally of the witch's arts, even as she recognizes that the call of war may be the only thing capable of taking Ulises from her. As Circe is absent from the palace, Antistes and a few of the other Greeks enter bearing the armour of Aquiles which they place at the feet of Ulises '... porque así / cuando despierte le vea' (1541a). They hope that he will awaken not only physically, but that the sight of the armour will awaken in him memories of who he truly is.

Their hopes do not bear fruit, however. When Ulises does awaken, he first refers to the unnatural sleep that has held him: 'Pesado letargo ha sido / este a que rendido estuve' (1541a). Dramatically this declaration occurs at a moment in which there is an expectation that the hero will finally free himself from the shackles of love. But when he sees the armour, the moment is anticlimactic. Ulises explains that it is too late to help him:

El grabado harnés ilustre
de Aquiles a mis pies yace
torpe, olvidado e inutil.
Bien está a mis pies, porque
rendido a mi amor se juzgue
y segunda vez en mi
amor de Marte se burle.
Tarde, olvidado trofeo
del valor, a darme acudes
socorro contra mí mismo;
que aunque contra mí me ayudes,
hoy colgado en este templo
quedarás donde sepulten
sus olvidos tus memorias. (1541b)

Undoubtedly following in the established tradition, Calderón introduces the armour as a means of *anagnorisis*. He breaks with tradition in that the armour is insufficient. Ulises does not look at the shield; he does not see his own image. At this moment, the spell of love, the *encanto de amor*, is not broken. The inefficacy of the armour is understandable if one considers just what Ulises might see if he were to look at his own reflection. Presumably, nothing out of the ordinary. Unlike Achilles and Rinaldo, who became visibly,

outwardly, effeminate in their appearance, and unlike Clarín and the other Greeks who outwardly became beasts, Ulises has undergone no physical change as a result of his enslavement to Circe and his own passions. Since his transformation has occurred solely on the moral and spiritual levels, the sight of his reflected physical image would serve no purpose. The presence of the armour, though it reminds him of his martial nature and duties, is not enough to restore the rule of reason over the passions. Even had Antistes remained to provide the necessary exhortation that must accompany the delivery of the armour according to the established formula, the results would likely be the same, as Ulises had not heeded the warnings and advice of his companion earlier.

In his speech regarding the armour, Ulises displays enough awareness to realize that the struggle he must win is an internal one. Twice he acknowledges that he needs aid against himself, 'contra mí mismo'. His inability to overcome his own attraction to Circe has, in effect, made him like a beast on a spiritual level. Aquinas perhaps makes this point better than any other theologian: 'An animal is not able at the sight of something attractive not to crave it, because animals do not themselves have the mastery over their own inclination'.³² It is through the rational appetite, or the will, as Aquinas asserts, that one gains mastery over the sense appetite.

The event that allows the dominance of the rational to reassert itself in Ulises occurs when Calderón presents a different type of mirror in which the hero can finally see what he has become. The spirit of Aquiles rises out of the ground and confronts Ulises as he lies indolent in Circe's palace. He exhorts Ulises to come to his senses, and calls him 'afeminado griego' (1542a) in order to make him realize that he has lost himself and his true nature. Aquiles serves as the sufficient replacement for the reflective surface in that his personal history reflects the current situation of Ulises, a man who would abandon his duties as a warrior to remain a willing prisoner of love. The shame of Aquiles, and his eventual triumph over it, provides Ulises with the model of what he must do. In this way, Aquiles is both *speculum* and *exemplum*. As a type of living and animate mirror, Aquiles is able to speak to Ulises as a reflective surface could not,³³ and confronts him with his

32 St Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, trans. Robert W. Schmidt, S.J., 3 vols (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), III, 47–48.

33 Susana Hernández Araico has also commented on the emphasis that Calderón places on hearing rather than sight in his use of Aquiles: 'Así la función de la palabra y el oído imperan en el montaje sobre la ilusión óptica de la vista'. However, she arrives at this observation by comparing this play with the *memoria* of Cosme Lotti in which Virtue leads Ulysses to a pool of water so that he may see himself; she does not mention Calderón's use and adaptation of the armour tradition ('Génesis oficial y oposición política en *El mayor encanto, amor*', *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 44 [1993], 307–22 [p. 313]). See also Frederick A. De Armas, *The Return of Astraea: An Astral-Imperial Myth in Calderón* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1986), 140. De Armas treats Calderón's specific rejection of Lotti's *memoria* in the development of his play.

effeminacy, forcing him to 'see' that he has become morally weak. It is appropriate that Aquiles be the one to remind the king of Ithaca of his true nature, since Ulises had done the same for him in the events that Calderón dramatizes in his play *El monstruo de los jardines*. With the image of Aquiles before him to act as a type of mirror in the sense that he is a model of conduct, Ulises overcomes the *encanto de amor*, his passion for Circe, and embraces his true nature and duties as a warrior and king.

A corresponding confrontation takes place in the *auto Los encantos de la Culpa*, in which Ulises is confronted by el Entendimiento, who asks him, '¿Así, / Ulises, te has olvidado / de ti mismo? ¿Así entregado / a unos placeres fingidos, / que sin mí y con tus Sentidos / aquí vives engañado?' (III, 419a). Once again, the senses are seen in opposition to reason and understanding. Their association with 'placeres fingidos' further alludes to and illustrates Calderón's scepticism in that the information they provide is 'fake' and unreliable. However, the key phrase is clearly 'olvidado de ti mismo'. In order for Ulises to escape the 'engaño' of Circe / Culpa, self-knowledge is necessary.

Beyond the theological implications for redemption, self-knowledge has also been necessary philosophically since the phrase *gnothi seauton* was first uttered, going back at least to Socrates. The concept was not only appropriated into other philosophical traditions, such as Stoicism, but also by Christian thinkers such as Erasmus, who in his *Enchiridion* describes the pre-eminence of self-knowledge in philosophy:

The chief point of this wisdom is simply to know yourself, an injunction which antiquity believed to have originated in heaven and which great authors have found so pleasing that they consider the whole fruit of wisdom compactly enclosed in it.³⁴

This type of knowledge is necessary for self-control, the rule of self by reason, rather than slavery to the passions. Denise DiPuccio attributes the triumph of Ulises to his patriotism and desire to return home to Ithaca: 'Ulysses' patriotism finally overpowers his sensual love'.³⁵ This is certainly one factor. However, in the text, Ulises specifically states, 'Del mayor encanto, amor, la razón me sacó libre' (1543b). It is due to reason and self-knowledge that Ulises triumphs in the end. Accordingly, Regalado describes the hero in moral philosophical terms as 'una versión del personaje que recupera la interpretación estoica de Ulises como ejemplificación de la razón natural' (II, 231).

Regalado is correct in pointing out his natural reason and the influence of Stoic moral philosophy in Calderón. Still, it must be noted that in the text,

³⁴ Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, trans. Raymon Himelick (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1963), 62.

³⁵ Denise M. DiPuccio, 'The Enigma of Enchantment in *El mayor encanto, amor*', *Hispania* (USA), 70:4 (1987), 731–39 (p. 735).

Ulyses refers to himself, in passing, as ‘inclinado a las letras’ (1515b). The study of the external world is not evil *per se*, but there must be priorities. As Ernst Cassirer has observed of Renaissance thought in general, ‘genuine and true knowledge of the world must pass through the medium of self-knowledge’.³⁶ Clearly, Circe ignores these priorities, given over to passions herself, and inciting others to do likewise. From both a sceptical standpoint, and a moral philosophical standpoint, Circe’s great erudition fails. It is also no small matter that all forms of witchcraft and divination are condemned by the Church and Scripture. It is for this reason that Calderón cannot simply present Ulyses and his men sailing away safely on their way home. Rather, as they sail away, the audience sees Circe’s palace burn and fall into the earth, the complete destruction of all she represents.

Beyond the basic conflict of reason and the passions, there are many opposing themes in *El mayor encanto, amor*. On the mythological level, Ulyses and Circe are to be seen as Mars *vs.* Venus, love *vs.* war; on the astrological level, the solar *vs.* the lunar.³⁷ De Armas, in particular, has examined these aspects of this complex, multilayered work.³⁸ Also important are the philosophical oppositions and the types of knowledge that clash. In the *Philosophía secreta* (published 1554), Juan Pérez de Moya indicates how the Classical story was read and interpreted in the period: ‘Por Ulyses se entiende la parte de nuestra ánima que participa de la razón. Circe es la naturaleza’.³⁹ Nature, he describes more specifically as the desire for illegitimate things, and relates this to ‘el ingenio depravado’. Circe, then, can be understood in terms of her pursuit of both forbidden and impossible knowledge, attempting to know and master what the sceptics called ‘incerta natura’.⁴⁰ Accordingly Calderón creates in Circe a figure associated with natural philosophy and the occult sciences. The author’s emphasis on self-knowledge and reason in Ulyses associates the hero with moral philosophy.

36 Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (Philadelphia: Univ. Press of Pennsylvania, 1983), 112. Foucault discusses this subject at length beginning with a passage from Seneca’s Letter 65: ‘[F]irst examine yourself, take yourself into consideration, and then the world’. See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, ed. Frederic Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 274ff.

37 De Armas attributes Ulysses’ triumph over Circe at least in part to an astrological paradigm, ‘the triumph of the sun and Mars over the dark lunar and Saturnine forces’ (*The Return of Astraea*, 149).

38 For the mythological analysis, see again De Armas’ article, ‘Metamorphosis in Calderón’s *El mayor encanto, el amor*’, 208–12.

39 Juan Pérez de Moya, *Philosophía secreta de la gentilidad*, ed. Carlos Clavería (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995), 548. Pérez de Moya places special emphasis on the question of knowledge and the character of Ulysses, ‘que de todos los vicios y peligros se libraba con su saber’ (545).

40 See Edwyn Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), 150.

An implicit scepticism mediates the two types of knowledge, obviously favouring the latter. Within the epistemological scheme established by Calderón, attempts to control the macrocosm fail with any apparent power over it being just that, apparent. Whereas control of the microcosm truly is possible, and provides the means to escape the dangers and pitfalls offered by the external world and those who would control it.