

The Curse of Pigs

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Epic Threads

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Artist's Statement

The Curse of Pigs is a poetic piece heavily inspired by Circe, who first appears in Book 10 of Homer's *Odyssey*.¹ The Curse of Pigs explores the emotions that Circe feels when Odysseus finally leaves Aeaea after a year of staying on the island with her.

I really wanted to lean into heavy and dramatic interpretations of the woman's role in ancient Greek society, confined to the private sphere of society.² This piece was sparked whilst I was conducting an analysis of how women are perceived in Homer's *Odyssey*, and particularly how Circe represents what a woman "shouldn't" be. I used themes of female sexuality to explore the abject through an ancient Greek lens. This includes the suggested "masculine" traits Circe adopts, simply by living outside of male authority,³ thus, in Kristeva's⁴ terms, violating the symbolic order—the masculine aspect of the abject, so to say—established by patriarchal law.

My goal with this piece is to break through the barriers created by expectations of woman, but to also take it a step further. To do this, I employed Julia Kristeva's⁵ theory on the abject, pulling from the idea that women's bodies⁶ are seen as inherently grotesque as they do not conform to the male aesthetic.

This also took me down a rabbit hole of reading the Hippocratic *Writings* and understanding how the ancients understood—or rather, by modern standards, didn't understand—the complexities of the female body. In particular, I became interested in ideas surrounding maternal health and the womb, including how the womb is related to the earth through comparisons between growth and health of a mother and child and that of plants.⁷ This is expressed throughout the poem with the references to the earth and the food motifs. My intention with these motifs was to combine nature with Circe's emotions, drawing inspiration from the original text (in which Circe is described to have cooked Odysseus's men food)⁸ to create an image of a woman who realises that she is no longer desired by the man—in the case of Circe, Odysseus—she invited into her home. Kristeva's theory on the abject allowed me to take the idea of female sexuality and images, such as food, and turn it into something grotesque. An example of this directly from the poem is found in the lines "The flesh boiled and seared/ Pulled away from the bones/Pulled away from the heart/So it is left alone" in which I aimed to intertwine the inspiration of Circe's cooking from the original Homeric mythology with imagery of the female body being 'cooked' to the point where the heart (inspired further by the *kradiē* (κράδιη), found in Book 20 of the *Odyssey*)⁹ and body are no longer one.

¹Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

²Helene P. Foley, "Review: Sex and State in Ancient Greece," review of *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*, by Philip E. Slater, *Diacritics* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 31–36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/464962>.

³Foley, "Sex and State."

⁴Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁵Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

⁶Elaine J. Lawless, "Women as Abject: Resisting Cultural and Religious Myths That Condone Violence Against Women," *Western Folklore* 62, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 237–69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1500319>.

⁷G. E. R. Lloyd, ed., *Hippocratic Writings*, trans. J. Chadwick et al. (Penguin Group, 1983).

⁸Homer, *Odyssey*.

⁹Shirley Darcus Sullivan, "What's There in a Heart? Kradiē in Homer and the Homeric Hymns," *Euphrosyne* 23, no. 1 (1995): 9–25, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.EUPHR.5.125971>.

The Curse of Pigs

When is a woman something vile?
When does she become poison?
When is she considered rotten and
When is she no longer desired?

Once you saw me pleasing
The ambrosia you drank
Supple and ripe
You once craved for me

The flesh boiled and seared
Pulled away from the bones
Pulled away from the heart
So it is left alone.

Grit-ridden nails
Pluck and pick the pieces
Of half-chewed
Love from my flesh
Flicked to the floor
While upon his chin and
Strangling his neck
The juices of my body
Have stained him.
And I sit. I stare as
His tongue presses
Between his teeth
In one final effort to
Discard my remains

Tortured

Is this what it is to live?

under men

Is this what it is to live feared?

On the fringes of the Earth
uncivilised—hands
that once fed men—plentiful.
Subordinate—knees on the floor
—Spoiling flesh.
That had been left
On the ground and—overlooked.

The Earth will welcome back
 The creature it has made
 What remains of the carcass
 But a man's hand will reject the Earth's offering
 No longer does it serve him
 And after the hunting season
 The creature that once fed him

will be forgotten

Discarded.

The shrill of my voice
 Makes his gods writhe in pain
 From offerings I spoke to him
 Of feasts, of meat, of me.
 He saw the mutilation
 From feast-to threat
 Upon a silver platter I was
 A creature that had snarled at its keeper
 That must be hacked down
 To its rightful size
 So its body can provide

Provide

-provide
 until it no longer is able
 And then provide some more.

His hunger has made something of me.

But after all I am just human

woman
 sorceress
 Maggoted meat

My lungs still breathe My mind thinks My heart . . .

Perhaps I lost it.

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