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Ciris 68: an emendation

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Abstract: At *Ciris* 68 a reference is made to Scylla's appearance in the *Odyssey*, *hoc in carmine toto*; it is suggested that *toto* is corrupt and should be emended to *ficto*.

At 66–88 the *Ciris* recounts several alternative versions of the origin of the Homeric Scylla. Line 66 states that according to Homer Scylla's mother was Craetaeis. Line 67, badly corrupt, names as Scylla's mother a different goddess or monster, whose identity cannot be established with certainty. Then the poem mentions a third version, namely that Scylla was not a real creature at all, but an allegorical image of lust (68–69):

*siue est neutra parens atque hoc in carmine toto
inguinis est uitium et ueneris descripta libido.*

Or whether neither is her mother, and this whole poem tells of the weakness of the groin and venereal lust.

We may start with Lyne's comment: "I take *hoc in carmine toto* to refer to the *Odyssey* (*hoc* picks up the allusion in 58ff.). But the universality is odd. Does the poet actually mean that the *whole* poem was interpreted as an allegory of lust?"¹ This seems unlikely. To begin with, it is difficult to imagine such an interpretation. Comprehensive moral allegorical readings of the *Odyssey* did exist in antiquity, but they usually were centred on the figure of Odysseus as the model of prudence, triumphing over a variety of temptations (not just sexual).² More to the point, it is specifically Scylla who is at issue in the present context. Even though a prominent character, she only makes an episodic appearance in the *Odyssey*; it would be excessive to reduce the whole poem to a very specific kind of allegory, only to suggest that Scylla was an invention. Finally, the allegorical meaning exposed by the narrator matches too well the figure of Scylla³ (note also

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1 R.O.A.M. Lyne, *Ciris: A Poem Attributed to Vergil* (Cambridge 1978) 131. Lyne appears to be the only scholar who found *toto* problematic.

2 See e.g. J. Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer: Περὶ Ἀπίστων, *On Unbelievable Tales*", *TAPhA* 133 (2003) 51–97, at 68. Another approach viewed Penelope as an allegorical image of philosophy; see W.E. Helleman, "Penelope as Lady Philosophy", *Phoenix* 49 (1995) 283–302.

3 Cf. Fulg. *Myth.* 2.9 *Scylla enim Graece quasi αἰσχόνη dicta est, quod nos Latine 'confusio' dicimus; et quid confusio nisi libido est?* (On reading αἰσχόνη, see F. Jacobs, "Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii Mythologiarum libri", *Beiträge zur ältern Litteratur* 2, 1837, 416–429, at 421). Cf. also Heraclit. 70.11 Σκόλλαν δὲ τὴν πολύμορφον ἀναΐδειαν ἠλληγόρησε.

that *inguinis* at 69 evokes 59 *candida succinctam latrantibus inguina monstribus*, “girt with barking monsters around her white groin”). The point clearly can only be that Homer invented Scylla as an image of lust; *toto* is out of place here.

What can it be concealing? *Noto* is an obvious option, but saying that the *Odyssey* is well known feels redundant after the explicit reference to *Maeoniae* ... *chartae* at 62. It would also be preferable if the correction contributed to the meaning of the context, perhaps by justifying or explaining the claim that Scylla is merely an allegory. An attractive possibility might be *tecte*, “[i]n a concealed or disguised manner, covertly, secretly” (*OLD* s.v.), implying that lust is the hidden meaning, ὑπόνοια, behind the figure of Scylla.⁴ Yet the adverb is quite rare, and in poetry only the comparative form occurs.⁵ *Ficto* may therefore be a better solution, especially in view of *Georgics* 2.45–6 *non hic te carmine ficto | atque per ambages et longa exorsa tenebo*, “here I shall not detain you with a fictional poem, with digressions and long proems”. Virgil is claiming that the *Georgics* is a straightforward exposition of factual information.⁶ In the *Ciris* the point would be precisely the reverse: the *Odyssey* is not an objective account of Odysseus’ voyage, but a fictional narrative whose true meaning lies beneath the surface.

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- 4 For the metaphor of concealing in reference to allegorical discourse, cf. e.g. Men. Rh. (ed. L. Spengel, *Rhet.* iii.338.26), speaking of a φυσιολογία (physical doctrine) ἐγκεκρυμμένη καθ’ ὑπόνοιαν.
- 5 And only two times: Ov. *Ars* 1.276 *uir male dissimulat: tectius illa cupit*; [Tib.] 3.11.17 *optat idem iuuenis quod nos, sed tectius optat*. It may be worth pointing out, however, that *tecte* can be used of speaking indirectly (Cic. *Fam.* 9.22.2 *quod tu in epistula appellas suo nomine ille tectius penem*’).
- 6 Virgil’s claim can, of course, hardly be taken at face value; as R.F. Thomas, *Virgil: Georgics*, vol. 1 (Cambridge 1988) 164–165 comments, “this book [*Georgics* 2] contains three passages which have been characterized by critics as ‘digressions’, and there is only one other book in V[irgil]’s corpus (*Georgics* 3) which is still involved in its prelude as late as line 46”. Cf. further C. Nappa, *Reading after Accium: Vergil’s Georgics, Octavian, and Rome* (Ann Arbor 2005) 76.