

Sirens passages (after *Odyssey* 12)

1. "...soon they saw the lovely island of Anthemoessa where the clear-voiced Sirens, daughters of Acheloos [a river deity], destroyed all who moored beside them with the enchantment of their sweet songs. Beautiful Terpsichore, one of the Muses, bore them after sharing Acheloos' bed, and once they had looked after the mighty daughter of Deo, while she was still a virgin, their voices mingled in song. When the Argonauts came, however, they looked in part like birds and in part like young girls. They kept a constant look-out from their perch in the lovely harbour: many indeed were the men whom they had deprived of their sweet return, destroying them with wasting desire. For the Argonauts too they opened their mouths in pure liquid song as soon as they saw them. The men made ready to throw the ship's cables to the shore, and would have done so, had not Thracian Orpheus, the son of Oiaeros, taken up his Bistonian lyre in his hands and played a fast rendition of a quick-rolling tune, so that its resounding echo would beat in their ears, thus blurring and confounding the other song. The lyre overpowered the virgin voices, and the ship was carried forward..." (Apollonius *Argonautica* 4.890-913)

2. "The Acheloides [Sirens], why should it be that they have feathers now and feet of birds, though still a girl's fair face, the sweet-voiced Sirens? Was it not because, when Proserpine was picking those spring flowers, they were her comrades there, and, when in vain they'd sought for her through all the lands, they prayed for wings to carry them across the waves, so that the seas should know their search, and found the gods gracious, and then suddenly saw golden plumage clothing all their limbs? Yet to reserve that dower of glorious song, their melodies' enchantment, they retained their fair girls' features and their human voice." (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 5.552 ff., sung by Muse in a song competition judged by nymphs)

2. "On the market-place of Coroneia I found two remarkable things, an altar of Hermes Epimelius (Keeper of flocks) and an altar of the winds. A little lower down is a sanctuary of Hera with an ancient image, the work of Pythodorus of Thebes; in her hand she carries Sirens. For the story goes that the daughters of Achelous were persuaded by Hera to compete with the Muses in singing. The Muses won, plucked out the Sirens' feathers (so they say) and made crowns for themselves out of them." (Pausanias 9.43.3, from the 2nd C AD)

"The Sirens, daughter of the River Achelous and the Muse Melpomene, wandering away after the rape of Proserpina, came to the land of Apollo, and there were made flying creatures by the will of Ceres because they had not brought help to her daughter. It was predicted that they would live only until someone who heard their singing would pass by. Ulysses proved fatal to them, for when by his cleverness he passed by the rocks where they dwelt, they threw themselves into the sea. This place is called Sirenides from them, and is between Sicily and Italy." (Hyginus *Fabulae* 141)

Claudian De Raptu Proserpinae 3.190 (Ceres questions the nurse after Proserpina's abduction)

"What force has driven away the winged Sirens?"

DRP 3.205 (nurse) (Sirens are Proserpina's companions): "she has ... the Sirens for relaxation"

DRP 3.254-8 (nurse): "the Sirens, daughters of Achelous, rose on swift wings and have gone to haunt the cliff of Sicilian Pelorus, where, incensed by this ill deed, they have turned their lyres, no longer harmlessly melodious, to destruction: their alluring voice holds ships fast; at the sound of their song the oars are curbed."