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Giving Voice to the Villainess: Feminist Revisionist Mythology in Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018) and Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* (2021)

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Candidacy for the Doctorate Degree in Literature

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Declaration

I, Djihane CHABANE, solemnly declare that this dissertation has been entirely composed by myself. It contains no previously published material, except where explicitly acknowledged through proper citation and attribution. No part of this dissertation has been previously published or submitted in fulfillment of an academic qualification, degree-granting or otherwise, in English or any other language.

Ms. Djihane F.Z Chabane

Dedications

To my mother and role model, whose strength and willpower verge on the mythical. Without her endless support and encouragement, this work would have been nought.

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Abstract

Mythology transcends time and eras as it keeps getting rewritten, revisited, and rediscovered. Each thread sewn into the complex tapestry of myths further fastens its place in literature and popular culture. Previously a strictly elitist male endeavor, feminist revisionist mythology lays a feminine claim upon the body of myths that have been out of reach for centuries. This study investigates the incorporation of a feminine perspective into Greek myths as a subversive strategy to dismantle androcentric archetypes that define literary and cultural spheres. In so doing, Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018) and Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* (2021) are explored as novels reclaiming unvoiced villainous women alongside Northrop Frye's and Joseph Campbell's Archetypal theories to investigate their subversive reach. Findings reveal that a feminist view is crucial for breathing fresh air into ancient myths and providing narratives that women can connect with. However, it is crucial for women writers to tread the path of revision carefully lest they reinforce myths rather than deconstruct them.

Keywords: Mythology, Feminism, Revisionism, Archetypes

مستخلص

تتجاوز الاساطير حدود الزمن و العصور لان كتابتها و زيارتها و اكتشافها تعاد باستمرار. فكل خيط يخاط في نسيج الأساطير يرسخ مكانتها أكثر في الأدب والثقافة الشعبية. وبعد أن كانت ميدان النخبة الذكورية، فإن مراجعة الأساطير مع عدسة نسوية تطالب بأحقية المرأة في جسد الأساطير الذي ظل يعيدا لقرون و استنادا لما سبق ، تبحث هذه الرسالة في دمج المنظور الانثوي في دمج المنظور الأنثوي في الأساطير اليونانية كاستراتيجية تخريبية لتفكيك النماذج الأبوية التي تهيمن على المجالين الأدبي والثقافي. و في هذا الصدد يتم العمل على روايتي Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018) و Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* (2021) كأعمال تستعيدان صوت النساء الشريرات المهمشات، بالاعتماد على نظريات Northrop Frye وJoseph Campbell عن الأنماط الأسطورية لتحليل مدى تأثيرها التخريبي. و تبين النتائج أن الرؤية النسوية حاسمة في إحياء الأساطير القديمة وتقديم روايات يمكن للمرأة أن تتواصل معها.و مع ذلك ، فانه من الضروري أن تسير الكاتبتين بحذر في مسار التنقيح حتى لا تعززان الأساطير بدلًا من تفكيكها.

كلمات مفتاحية: الأسطورة، النسوية، التنقيحية، الأنماط الأصلية

Résumé

La mythologie transcende les époques, car elle ne cesse d'être réécrite, revisitée et redécouverte. Chaque fil tissé dans la tapisserie des mythes consolide davantage sa place dans la littérature et la culture populaire. Autrefois une affaire strictement élitiste et masculine, la mythologie révisionniste féministe revendique une appropriation féminine de ce corpus mythique resté inaccessible pendant des siècles. Cette étude examine l'intégration d'une perspective féminine dans les mythes grecs comme une stratégie subversive visant à démanteler les archétypes androcentriques qui dominent les sphères littéraires et culturelles. Pour ce faire, *Circe* (2018) de Madeline Miller et *Medusa* (2021) de Rosie Hewlett sont analysés autant que romans qui redonnent voix aux femmes summisent au modèle de « méchantes » et autrefois réduites au silence, tout en s'appuyant sur les théories archétypales de Northrop Frye et Joseph Campbell pour évaluer leur portée subversive. Les résultats révèlent qu'une perspective féministe est essentielle pour insuffler un renouveau aux mythes anciens et offrir des récits auxquels les femmes peuvent s'identifier. Cependant, il est crucial que les autrices abordent la révision avec prudence, sous peine de renforcer les mythes plutôt que de les déconstruire.

Mots-clés : Mythologie, féminisme, révisionnisme, archétypes.

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General Introduction

Mythology constitutes a significant aspect of the human experience, permeating every facet of our surroundings. Northrop Frye elucidates that myth represents a conceptual framework that influences various domains shaping contemporary thought, including anthropology, psychology, religion, sociology, and others (587). Whether overtly or subtly, mythological elements are interwoven within the creative expressions of human arts, philosophies, and social constructs.

The term myth itself originally derives from the word 'mythos,' which is Greek for thing spoken or story, that is, a narrative account not marked by imposing reason or arguments. On the other hand, mythology denotes a collection of myths pertaining to a particular tradition, the study of those myths, and a set of fictitious or exaggerated beliefs. The latter description of mythology appears to be the most referred to nowadays, particularly after works such as Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* have gained critical acclaim. Therefore, in these modern times, myth is widely perceived as synonymous with socially constructed falsehoods. Nevertheless, after careful consideration and investigation of ancient myths, it can be argued that they contain some form of truth, especially regarding the patriarchal bias cast on women. That truth hides within it historical insight into the thoughts and beliefs of the ancient societies that shaped those myths. This, among other aspects, explains why mythology remains as pertinent today as it was centuries ago. Among the plethora of myths present all over the globe, Greek and Roman ones generate the most interest, scrutiny, and passion from artists, writers, scholars, and critics, mainly due to the Western belief that they are successors to these civilizations.

As Mary R. Lefkowitz proclaims in her work Women in Greek Myth, the Greeks' most crucial legacy is mythology (207). Greek myths have been studied and inspected by a plethora of scholars; amongst them, psychoanalysts and feminist writers have constructed and cemented theories concerning the myths that are still referenced in modern times. While psychologists assume that those myths prove how human nature remains the same throughout the ages, feminists reject that assumption and claim them as evidence of human imagination's limitations (Lefkowitz, 208). Psychologists use myths to prove that humans have held the same fears, dreams, and aspirations since ancient times, as illustrated in Freud's Oedipus Complex[1]. Thus, it is common for scholars, such as Paul Ricoeur, to claim that myth is a dimension of modern thought.

On the other hand, Feminist scholars repeatedly expose the androcentric nature of myths, wherein gendered binaries are constantly set. Men are the heroes of their epics — Achilles[2], Odysseus[3], Heracles[4], Perseus[5], and so on— while the women are silenced in rigid roles as the heroes' aids, maidens to conquer, or monsters to defeat. Briseis[6] is a spoil of war and an excuse for Achilles' devastating rage. Circe[7] is merely a minor setback, then an aid to Odysseus. Hippolyta is a warrior woman to be conquered by Heracles. Medusa is a monster

[1] The Oedipus Complex is a Freudian Theory that implies that sons have incestuous thoughts about their mothers, as in the myth of Oedipus, wherein he accidentally married his mother.

[2] Achilles is the celebrated hero of Homer's "Iliad". He is known for his combat skills, and notably his only vulnerability, his heel, immortalized in the phrase "Achilles' heel."

[3] Odysseus, the cunning hero of Homer's "Odyssey," is renowned for his intellect and strategic prowess. He navigated a decade-long journey filled with challenges to return to his homeland, Ithaca.

[4] Heracles, also known as Hercules, is a celebrated Greek hero for his unparalleled strength and Twelve Labors, showcasing his extraordinary feats, including slaying the Nemean Lion and Hydra.

[5] Perseus is another Greek hero best known for his triumphant quest to slay the Gorgon Medusa and his resourcefulness in utilizing magical artifacts, such as the winged sandals, on his heroic adventures.

[6] Briseis is a woman taken as a war prize by Achilles during the Trojan War. The dispute over her possession between Achilles and Agamemnon is the pivotal start of Homer's *Iliad*.

[7] Circe is a sorceress in Greek mythology famed for her ability to transform men into pigs. She is featured in Homer's Odyssey, where she turns Odysseus' crew into pigs.

to be slain by Perseus. These women are then reduced to serve as shadows that enhance the heroes' blinding brightness.

In her thesis, *Feminist Rewriting in the Canongate Myths Series*, Macmillan states that recognizing myth as a repository for both truth and untruth is a critical task for the feminist mythographer; accepting that it merely expresses essential or primal truths that in turn inform narratives detailing women's oppression, mistreatment, or absence implies that such treatment stems from some fundamental truth—which she categorically rejects. However, dismissing them only as stories without grounding in experience or access to understanding is also restrictive. Myth is then found in the nexus between truth and falsehood (21). It is especially crucial to tread the line between truth and falsehood when exploring feminist revisionist mythmaking since writers use both to demonstrate their points and to eliminate falsehoods. Therefore, some truths of human nature have to be exposed. To dispel those falsehoods and finally set those mythical women free from their androcentric shackles. Feminist mythmakers use the power of revision to fit myths into a gynocentric space.

Revision or Re-Vision, as coined and explained by Adrienne Rich in her 1971 essay "When We Dead Awaken," is the act of looking back with a new critical direction, and consequently, an act of survival since women cannot know themselves and reach a full understanding of one another without realizing the harmful assumptions they are submerged in (18). Rich contends that looking back with a new critical direction is essential for breaking free from the shackles ingrained by societal norms and expectations. It serves as a transformative tool, enabling women to unravel and challenge the harmful assumptions and constraints imposed upon them. This process of reevaluating and reinterpreting the past becomes crucial to self-discovery and mutual understanding among women. Rich's concept of Re-Vision is an empowering call to recognize and dismantle oppressive structures,

fostering a collective consciousness that transcends historical silencing and facilitates a more authentic and liberated existence. In this way, Revision becomes a vehicle for women to reclaim their narratives, rewrite their histories, and forge a path towards greater autonomy and solidarity.

On the other hand, Diane Purkiss cautions against framing the concept of feminist rewriting of mythology in a way that implies women were never engaged in the myth-making process. She acknowledges that in many cultures, women play a central role as primary storytellers. This is a case of the protagonist of the Swahili tale, "A Woman for A hundred Cattle," wherein the protagonist exposes her father, husband, and suitor's foolish actions. Such tales are considered relatively rare in Western myths, especially from an 'ordinary' woman rather than a goddess. The woman in the Swahili folktale is also not subjected to negative retribution for proving herself to be of equal or higher intelligence than the men surrounding her. This can be seen as an apparent dichotomy to Metis'[8] tale, who was a titaness and spouse of Zeus, punished by her husband for her capacity of bearing a child wiser than him due to her own intelligence.

Purkiss also mentions the myth of Metis to show that Greek mythology exhibits misogynistic tendencies, illustrating how such myths, among others, serve to deny female capabilities. Accordingly, she confirms that, especially in Greek mythography, women have often been relegated to the margins and arrived later on the scene. This can be attributed to the fact that Greek mythology's transmission has been predominantly through male artistic expressions, leading to both the narratives and the language employed being shaped by and complicit in perpetuating various forms of patriarchy (441). Consequently, it is particularly

[8] Metis, the initial spouse of Zeus (the supreme deity in Greek myths), is renowned for her wisdom and intelligence. Yet, following a prophecy predicting that any offspring from their union would surpass Zeus in wisdom and power, Zeus deceived Metis by transforming her into a water droplet and swiftly consuming her.

essential to reinterpret Greek myths, as they have been authored by men who exert a significant influence on culture and literature.

This study's endeavors result from a sustained interest in mythology, particularly Greek and Roman myths. During my exploration of Classical mythology and its interpretations in English literature for a Master's thesis, Purkiss' assertion resonated profoundly. The women in myths and the subsequent male-centric interpretations are marginalized, even in contemporary reimaginings created by male authors. Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson Series*, which has been previously analyzed in a previous study, serves as evidence of the unintentional perpetuation of androcentric patterns. Despite Riordan's presentation of myths in a modern and inclusive manner, women such as Medusa and Circe remain restricted to reductive archetypes. Conversely, another work which has been examined revolves around the character of the villainess Circe from a fresh and gynocentric perspective. This work is *Circe* (2018) by Madeline Miller, which is pivotal in this dissertation, emphasizing the feminist elements rather than the mythological aspects. Consequently, this dissertation's focus extends a prolonged passion and exploration of mythology.

This study, therefore, examines *Circe* by Madeline Miller through a feminist revisionist lens, in conjunction with *Medusa* (2021) by Rosie Hewlett. Through a primary literature review, a central problematic arises. While these works challenge androcentric myths, they concurrently employ the very frameworks they seek to dismantle, raising questions about whether feminist revisions can fully transcend patriarchal structures or if they inadvertently perpetuate the cultural dominance of classical mythology. The analysis of these texts contends that revision and gynocentric symbolization are essential undertakings for feminists aiming to transform and reappropriate the symbols assigned to them by patriarchal

ideals. A shift in perspective is vital to genuinely unveil the misogynistic and insidious bias assigned to popular myths and archetypes. Through this examination, the following questions are addressed:

1. How do Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* use feminist revisionist mythmaking to subvert traditional androcentric narratives?
2. What strategies do Miller and Hewlett use to dismantle the 'witch/seductress' stereotype of Circe and the 'monstrous feminine' trope associated with Medusa?
3. To what extent do these works subvert and deconstruct binaries and archetypes perpetuated through androcentric myths and interpretations?

This study takes these questions into deep consideration. It acknowledges the practice of rewriting ancient mythology as a tool of utmost importance for liberating restricted feminine characters. In order to answer these questions, it advances the following hypotheses as methodological anchors for analyzing the primary works mentioned:

- *Circe* and *Medusa* utilize the feminist revisionist strategies of myth-smashing androcentric symbols and myth-making gynocentric ones to forge powerful feminine narratives.
- By giving voice to silenced mythical women, Miller and Hewlett develop narratives centered on feminine quests and reveal deeply ingrained, insidious patriarchal patterns that reduce and objectify women as pawns rather than as individuals possessing agency.
- Extensive feminist revisionist works, such as *Circe* and *Medusa*, inherently apply a hermeneutics of suspicion to myths and their interpretations, viewing these as ideological tools employed to symbolically subjugate women into binary categories of the virtuous or the wicked woman.

Ultimately, this study's purpose is threefold. First, it unveils patriarchal threads woven into the fabric of classical mythology as illustrated through the myths of Circe and Medusa. Second, it examines the narrative techniques, character development, and agency Miller and Hewlett utilize to construct gynocentric symbolism and amplify the voices of Circe and Medusa. Third, it attests that feminist revisionist mythology is a necessary endeavor to reclaim marginalized voices in myths. Consequently, the goal is to contribute to the ongoing discourse on feminist revisionism and its potential to reshape cultural narratives surrounding influential female figures, especially the ones deemed villainous.

To fulfill this purpose, this dissertation employs close textual analysis, feminist narratology, and archetypal criticism to examine the strategies of myth revision in Miller's *Circe* and Hewlett's *Medusa*. It reveals how these texts dismantle patriarchal archetypes by interrogating the construction of narrative perspective through a feminine lens, symbolic reconfigurations, and intertextual dialogues with classical sources. The methodology employs Jane Caputi's theory of myth-smashing and myth-making to trace subversions of phallogocentric stereotypes. For the exploration of mythology, archetypal criticism is explored through Joseph Campbell's monomyth and Northrop Frye's theories of modes, mythoi, and archetypes. Campbell's monomyth supports how *Circe* and *Medusa* align with and subvert the traditional heroic quest narrative. Conversely, Northrop Frye's structural theories reveal how these texts reconfigure gendered archetypes by transforming Frye's 'demonized' feminine figures into agents of counter-narrative. These foundational theories serve as pillars, supporting the subsequent analysis of how feminist revisionist mythology subverts inherent androcentric symbols.

These theoretical frameworks are defined in Chapter One as methodological guidelines. Starting with Feminism as a driving force behind the reinterpretation of myths,

the chapter engages with feminist theories weaving a comprehensive tapestry that encompasses the evolving discourse on gender and power. Then it centers feminist revisionist mythology as a result of the second wave movement of *écriture féminine*, its expansion by scholars such as Adrienne Rich and Alicia Ostriker, and Jane Caputi's conceptualization of myth-smashing and myth-making as symbol recovery. Then the definition shifts to mythology in various forms, progressing to Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye's archetypal theories. By dissecting these components, Chapter One paves the way for a straightforward comprehension of Feminist Revisionist Mythology and its subversive power.

Chapter Two focuses on Madeline Miller's *Circe* by presenting a meticulous examination of the acclaimed author's journey through the intricacies of Circe's myth. This chapter elucidates the nuanced layers of Miller's feminist revisionism, illuminating the transformative process by which Circe, the enchantress, emerges from the shadows of stereotype and misrepresentation. The chapter initiates its scrutiny by immersing itself in the multifaceted character of Circe, first by discussing her position in the original body of texts to which she belongs. Then, through a discerning lens, Miller's reimagining of Circe's persona is laid bare, exploring the author's creative agency in dismantling preconceived notions. The analysis extends beyond the textual boundaries, encompassing the broader landscape of character development. Circe's evolution becomes a focal point, emphasizing the subtleties that redefine her agency, aspirations, and, crucially, her autonomy within the narrative framework. The chapter dissects how Miller constructs a feminist narrative through the strategy of myth-smashing and myth-making. It also investigates how Circe's tale narratively corresponds to and subverts Campbell's monomyth by challenging established norms and tropes that have long confined female characters to predetermined roles.

In the same vein as its preceding chapter, Chapter Three centers on Rosie Hewlett's Medusa as a focal point for exploration. This chapter embarks on another analysis, dissecting how Hewlett grapples with Medusa's myth as an author and revisionist storyteller. Through an intricate examination of the character's evolution, relationships, and the pivotal events shaping her transformation, the chapter endeavors to gauge the effectiveness of Hewlett's feminist revisionism in dismantling the entrenched narratives surrounding this iconic and often misunderstood figure. It principally showcases how Hewlett effectively myth-smashes patriarchal symbols by establishing them as falsehoods to replace them with the actual truth. The analysis commences with a focused exploration of Medusa's character from the urtext to various following interpretations. The traditional portrayal of Medusa as a monstrous figure, her narrative confined to a tragic end at the hands of Perseus, undergoes a metamorphosis in Hewlett's hands. Followed by an investigation of how *Medusa* subverts Campbell's monomyth as a tale that refuses to be defined by phallogocentric archetypes. The chapter seeks to unravel the layers of complexity Hewlett introduces, shedding light on the nuances that redefine Medusa beyond the simplistic and pejorative lens history has often cast upon her. This chapter scrutinizes Hewlett's narrative choices and positions Medusa as a potent symbol of resilience and empowerment within the broader context of feminist revisionist mythology.

In Chapter Four, the focus rests on the deconstruction of archetypes. Frye's theoretical framework for critically assessing literary texts is heavily based on classical and biblical urtext. Thus, the patterns he identifies are largely androcentric in nature. Miller and Hewlett's aim to voice feminine villainized characters does not simply equate providing a narrative thread to Circe and Medusa, but deconstructing the androcentric archetypes they have been defined by for centuries in order to construct feminine definitions. Consequently, this chapter

explores these authors' deconstructions of patriarchal patterns through the subversion of Frye's categorization of heroic types, narrative mythoi, and binary archetypes. It concludes by defining *Circe* and *Medusa* as hermeneutics of suspicion since they are interpretative texts that criticize and skeptically assess the classical mythological urtext to expose its repressed androcentric meanings. Therefore, Chapter Four strives to unravel mythical phallogocentric symbolism that has persisted for centuries through subsequent Western interpretations and patternification of androcentric meanings found in Greek and Roman myths. Feminist revisionists, such as Miller and Hewlett, subvert these patterns that are now part of cultural and literary landscapes to let in the voices of the marginalized that patriarchal categorizations have shadowed.

As an illustration of a broader interdisciplinary movement that requires further investigation, this thesis emphasizes the juncture between myth, literature, and contemporary feminist theory. A primary aim of this project is to demonstrate the utility of myth in the process of revision. Within the evolving relationship between theories of subjectivity, literature, and classical archetypes, characters such as Circe and Medusa remain pertinent and serve as a crucial nexus point from which writers can reflect upon the past and advance into the future. It is noteworthy that, although the two texts analyzed have provoked critical discourse, particularly *Circe*, they have not been discussed in conjunction with one another as components of a larger literary initiative. This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of how contemporary feminist mythological reinterpretations may function in sympathy with or in contrast to each other, adhering to the notion of myth as a 'palimpsest,' comprised of overlapping and obscured narratives (Miles 4). This implies that myths overlap and intertwine independently of feminist revisionist interpretations; thus, it is essential to thoroughly investigate the influence and transformations brought about by feminist

revisionist mythmaking on the preexisting interconnected mythos and the symbols and constructs associated with them.

Chapter One: On Feminism and Myths: A Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter examines feminist revisionist mythology by investigating its main aspects in depth: feminism and mythology. First, Feminism takes the central stage and is defined. Additionally, it provides an overview of the history of how feminists utilized myths in different waves to strengthen their cause. Finally, feminist revisionist mythology is explored as a powerful subversive strategy to reverse insidious patriarchal ideology, particularly in revisioning male-centric myths to incorporate previously silenced feminine voices.

To how Madeline Miller and Rosie Hewlett deconstruct phallogocentric patterns present in Circe and Medusa's myths, Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is inspected to gather further analytical instruments. This entails exploring his theory of the monomyth or hero's journey, as a powerful narrative framework. Simultaneously, Valerie Estelle Frankel's *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend* is examined to provide feminine perspectives that are non-existent in Campbell's original theory. Furthermore, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism,* and most particularly, his archetypal criticism and theory of myths*,* is incorporated to gather further theoretical and analytical frameworks. In conclusion, this chapter encompasses the theoretical and descriptive knowledge necessary to analyze feminist revisionist mythology in *Circe* and *Medusa*, offering a comprehensive foundation for understanding how these authors challenge and reimagine traditional narratives.

1. Defining Feminism

The primary term in feminist revisionist mythology is feminism, which serves as the central element of this literary approach and strategy. Prior to their roles as revisionists, women who engage in the rewriting of myths identify as feminists, endeavoring to provide a

voice for the silenced women represented in these narratives. Comprehending the overarching concept of feminism and its correlation to the rewriting and revision of myths is crucial. This title aims to elucidate the central pivot of this strategy and its relationship to myth.

Diane Kravetz and Jeanne Marecek define feminism in the *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender* (2002) as "a doctrine advocating political, social, and economic equality of the sexes" and an "organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests" (457). Feminism is at once a body of theories and a sociopolitical movement that strives for women's rights and emancipation. Marilyn Frye in the *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* (2000) expands that as a theory, feminism accumulates into "systems of concepts, propositions and analysis that describe and explain women's situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them" (148). Feminist theories distinguish themselves from other theories by their interest in and respect for women's perspectives, as well as denouncing the hierarchy of power implemented by men. As a social movement, it holds the same concerns and demands equality by calling out the system of gender roles imposed by men in power.

As Anne Cranny-Francis and her collaborators explain in their book *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates* (2003), "Not only does the system of gender divide the human race into two categories, it privileges the male over the female. Gender operates as a set of hierarchically arranged roles in modern society which makes the masculine half of the equation positive and the feminine negative" (1). Therefore, women are defined as the weaker gender, and the feminine has negative connotations applied to it. This phenomenon is not a recent development; the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle asserts in his work *Economics* that men possess greater strength, courage, and extroversion, whereas women are characterized by lesser strength, circumspection, and introversion (qtd. in Cranny-Francis and Al 2). Therefore, the implication that women are inferior to men has been perpetuated for

centuries, and feminists seek to oust those implications and stereotypes set up by men centuries ago.

Feminism, as both a theoretical framework and a social movement, endeavors to disentangle the complex strands of patriarchal and androcentric beliefs that perceive women as weak, incompetent, and ignorant. In the pursuit of equality, significant movements have emerged throughout various historical periods, where women have employed written expressions and slogans to advocate for their rights, aiming to unravel specific oppressive patriarchal constructs. These historical movements are referred to as the Four Waves.

1.1.1 Feminism and Myths

In her article "Feminism and Ancient Literature", Helen Morales delineates a relationship between feminism and ancient literature, attesting that feminism, as a political and theoretical movement, has a deep connection with the classics and, by extension, myths. That connection is also mutually beneficial: Feminist writers interpret those ancient tales to leave their own impact on them, but they also promote them by striving to make those works, editions, translations, and theatrical performances affordable, comprehensible, and within reach for a larger audience to enjoy (2). Ancient literature was barred from women for centuries; it was considered exclusive to the elite scholars, predominantly male, and was regarded as too complex for the 'feminine frail mind'. Additionally, its study was conducted with a textual approach, especially during the late 19th to early 20th century. Textual criticism is a technique that strives to restore ancient texts to their original structure, thus making them as authentic as possible. Textual critics then have an assumption that their work requires the utmost neutrality and objectivity, and thus assume that only male scholars are up to the task. These "authentic" ancient texts are thus riddled with male bias and show a clear

lack of female perspective. Feminist classicists firmly position themselves in favor of having a personal voice in the dealings of myth since "sensitivity, or lack of sensitivity, towards gender politics shapes how a textual critic chooses to emend the text" (Morales 2). Classics and the study of myths have been a phallogocentric sphere for centuries, reinforcing the patriarchal aspects already present and stifling feminine voices even further. The rise of feminism proved that women are more than capable of being classicists and objectively interpreting myths, albeit with a much-needed gendered perspective.

Classical studies or Classics focus on Greek and Roman antiquity, whether history, language, or literature. These studies are the foundation of Western humanities and have been a staple of elite education for centuries. In *The Feminist Theory and the Classics*' introduction, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz declares that "Classics has been political by defining the epic and tragic genres as presenting great human truths" (9). To subvert the longstanding androcentric conventions perpetuated by the elite, feminists provide their perspectives devoid of male bias and employ them to further their political agenda. A starting point of subversion is the use of ancient myths. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard believe that "myths are (…) not only the products of an androcentric society, they can also be seen to justify its most basic patriarchal assumptions" (3). To subvert myths is, therefore, to subvert prevailing patriarchal assumptions. Feminists' use of myths is then not only logical but also imperative for the uprooting of patriarchy.

The most pressing subject first-wavers revolved around was political equality. However, another political aspect that is often overlooked, even in modern days, is the pertinence of the classics. During the first feminist wave, Euripides' *Medea* was extremely popular among suffragettes. Gilbert Murray's 1907 politically involved translation was frequently recited and referred to at suffragette meetings. Feminists have thus used myths and

figures present in those myths to strengthen and inspire their ideas. A short passage from Sylvia Pankhurst's The Suffragette Movement serves as an example of this use of myth to serve feminist ideas:

> Daisy Lord, the young servant sentenced to death for infanticide; Margaret Murphy, the flower seller, who, after incredible hardships, attempted to poison herself and her ailing youngest child (…) Sarah Savage, imprisoned on the charge of cruelty to her children for whom she had done all that her miserable poverty would permit. By reprieve petitions, by propaganda speeches and articles, the names and the stories of these unfortunates were torn from their obscurity, to be branded upon the history of the women's movement of their day. (qtd. in Hall and MacIntosh 518-19)

Similarly to Medea, these women committed acts considered horrid and contemptible. Still, for the suffragettes, these women were taking action when subjugated to a far inferior financial and social status as a direct result of patriarchy. Akin to Medea, these women's actions stem from injustice. "The moral of the stories is clear: it is the failure of men which forced these women to act and by acting empower themselves, just as it was Jason's desertion that forces Medea to act and by acting empower herself" (Wilkinson "20th Century Medeas"). Thus, the message the suffragettes wanted to relay by using the myth of Medea is simple: the oppression of patriarchy and poverty pushes women into doing unthinkable acts as revolt.

In the second wave, a key text was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. In this work, she establishes that the categorization of women as inferior is ingrained from ancient social, cultural, and philosophical conditioning. Ancient philosophers particularly espoused the categorization of women as weaker, lesser humans, paralleling their deeply patriarchal society. These views are upheld in contemporary times by white supremacist groups who

utilize those writings to spread their agenda of hate, such as "men's rights groups use [of] ancient Stoic texts to justify their belief that women and people of color are morally inferior to white men" (Morales, Feminism and Ancient Literature 14). The need for feminine perspectives is then absolutely crucial to separate these texts from harmful ideologies that should no longer be present in contemporary societies. Second-wave French poststructural feminists utilized these ancient texts to develop their feminist theories, successfully extracting the core values of ancient texts instead of focusing on obsolete ideologies. Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous use Plato and Greek tragedy to track down genealogies of gender construction, disassemble the patriarchal structures that have excluded women, and reimagine gynocentric ways of thinking and acting (Morales 4). This proves that despite its phallogocentric bias, Classics and mythology provide essential inspiration.

That influence then passed on to succeeding feminists such as third-waver Judith Butler, making "[t]he ancient world in general, and Plato in particular, function as our theoretical unconscious" (qtd. in Morales 24). A wide array of theorists then build on and utilize ancient texts to inspire and develop their studies, and feminist theorists are not exempt from this. Judith Butler also employs Sophocles' play *Antigone*[9] to present pressing ideas on the intersection of feminine agency, death, and power dynamics in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (2000). Columbia University Press exalts Butler's work as a redefinition of Antigone's legacy as the recovery of "her revolutionary significance and liberating it for a progressive feminism and sexual politics". Ultimately, Antigone as a symbol of resistance aids in exploring how feminine acts of defiance against authority result in dire consequences, such as death.

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[9] Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta. In Sophocles' tragedy, she defies her uncle Creon's order to leave her brother unburied and ultimately dies for resisting his authority.

The interweaving of myths and feminism expands in the fourth wave as well. This is illustrated in Helen Morales' exploration of the subversive power of classical mythology within her work *Antigone Rising* (2020). Within her fifth chapter #METU, she interweaves myths with the popular feminist movement #MeToo. She argues that Tarana Burke, the activist behind the movement, established it to promote "empowerment through empathy," therefore, mythical tales of assault provide the narrative ground for invoking audience empathy. She declares: "Some myths of sexual violence told by Ovid and other writers do just that. They invite us to empathize with the women who are assaulted, and they show insight into the psychology of sexual assault and the effects of trauma on the victims of the assault" (ch.5 #METU). Nevertheless, she acknowledges that these mythical accounts of violence, especially Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* have been rightfully criticized for eroticizing trauma. To dispel the fantasization of assault in mythical urtext, feminist revisionist works are of the essence. Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* expands on this premise, serving as a gynocentric tragedy of experienced assault and its resulting systematic marginalization.

The paradigm of the ever-growing connection between myth and feminism is then illustrated in the rise of mythical rewritings achieved by women. Works such as Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* (2005), Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018), Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), and Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* (2021) provide essential feminist narratives through the broad underpinning of mythology. Then, feminist revisionist mythology is a valuable strategy "because turning to the ancient material helps us, I think, to see how long-standing and, therefore, how hard to banish certain cultural narratives are" (Morales ch.1 Killing Amazons). By displaying the relationship between feminism and myths from the first wave onwards, this study showcases the legitimacy of feminist mythopoeia as a concrete instrument to undermine patriarchal structures.

1.1.2 Feminist Revisionist Mythology

In her book *Man Made Language* (1980), Dale Spender explores the androcentric nature of language, declaring it a manner of reinforcing women's subordination. She asserts that although both sexes use language, men hold more rights over it than women due to its nature as a product of male effort (12). To reinforce their monopoly, they historically banned women from contributing to efforts involving language; education, and authoring restrictions made the act of adding feminine perspectives to language trying. Due to this lack of claim, women have only been able to express themselves in male terms and "in this way, women become 'outsiders', borrowers of the language" (Spender 12). Women are then rendered invisible in the use of language. In languages like English, this can be seen in the use of what Spender coined as "he/man language," which is using the pronoun "he" as the generic pronoun and "mankind" to denote humanity. The question of utilizing a language that shuns them to express feminist ideas has been posed and debated by various feminists.

Among them is Hélène Cixous, who incites women to write with their 'white ink' in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" and thereby started the movement of "l'écriture féminine". This textual practice challenges phallocentric structures in language and culture. For Cixous, women who merely read remain trapped in the patriarchal net of logocentric and phallocentric words. In order to escape that net, women need to weave their own linguistic net through writing like a modern Arachne. Kristin M. Mapel Bloomberg alludes to this in the introduction of her book *Tracing Arachne's Web* (2009), "Accordingly, the figure of Arachne calls to mind a metaphor for women writing, one that is embedded in her name itself" (1). Women's writing, like weaving, is a form of art that is indelible and cannot be separated from the artist. Then, woman "must write herself, because this is the invention of a new insurgent

writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (Cixous 880). To write oneself is to change one's history; a glimpse of women's history can be observed through myths. Therefore, it is imperative for women to undertake the endeavor of mythopoeia or mythmaking in order to illustrate a new historical narrative. For this purpose, it is essential to revisit the ancient myths of the past.

Cixous does not refute the use of myths. Nevertheless, she rejects the past, maintaining that the future has to be separated from it. The effects of the past are forever present, but to repeat them is to strengthen them and "to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny" (875). Writing and rewriting are then essential to be set free from that past and to separate it from the future, thus breaking a destiny of oppression. Conversely, Elaine Showalter comments on women writers' lack of a history to build upon, forcing them to "rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex" (qtd. in Macmillan 40). As an attempt to find a feminine past, efforts have been made to find potential foremothers for feminism. However, critics, such as Lillian S. Robinson, believe those efforts are misguided since they attempted to put women into a pre-existing canon that has not been properly scrutinized or realigned (145). To reveal repressed foremothers out of the shadows could contribute to the formation of a secondary canon, one less prominent than the dominant Western patriarchal tradition. If left unchallenged, the dominant canon would continue its reign and rejuvenate itself due to a lack of opposition to keep it in check.

In her essay "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" (1982), Alicia Ostriker confirms the androcentric coding in male language. Her proposal to abandon the role of 'borrowers of language' advocates for a transition from polite borrowing to an act of theft. She likens selected American feminist poets to thieves, plundering reserved

language and dislodging primary meaning (71). A crucial facet of language that needs to be taken as one's own is mythology since the "need for myth of some sort may be ineradicable" (71). Ostriker declares:

> Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. (72)

Consequently, she describes feminist revisionist mythology as a necessary renewal of historically and culturally dominant tales. She illustrates her arguments with classical mythology, the body of myths that holds most sway in Western cultural landscapes due to its canonization as a 'high' culture. She argues that mythical revisionism elevates a woman writer's readership due to "the high literary status that myth confers and that women writers have often been denied because they write 'personally' or 'confessionally'" (73). Hence, by drawing inspiration from myths, female authors significantly enhance their opportunities for having their voices recognized.

Conversely, despite the literary elevation it proffers, classical mythology holds a position as an insidious patriarchal messenger that should be antithetical to feminist use. While these contradictions do not confine women alone, they remain remarkably relevant to women due to how myth permeates our collective unconscious despite its misogyny and harmful modes of expression. Furthermore, Ostriker argues that its creative qualities make it a legitimate tool worthy of stealing. By appropriating from androcentric myths, women infuse them with otherwise rare or ignored feminine perspectives, enacting change:

> The old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy. Instead, (…) they are corrections; they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival. (73)

Therefore, mythological revision is not a simple utilization of tale patterns and aspects of 'high culture' but an act of theft and deconstruction. Mythical revisionism is not passive, but serves a higher purpose of injecting essential feminine knowledge into an otherwise socially upheld patriarchal sphere.

Adrienne Rich, in her article "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1972), perfectly articulates the female act of rewriting, or Re-vision as she terms it, most notably in these lines:

> Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. (…) this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name-—and therefore live—afresh (18–19).

Her assertion that women should harness their creativity to reform and transform their circumstances in literature and society continues to resonate with feminists today. A

comprehensive understanding of femininity is essential for improving and altering societal conditions. In pursuit of this goal, feminists must critically examine the patriarchal components that dominate societies and either break or revise them. Consequently, revision and rewriting are the best ways to undermine the androcentric patterns present in mythology.

According to Susan Sellers, the misogyny present within mythic narratives is what inspires contemporary writers, providing the myth of Helen's kidnapping as a common example (30). Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard cite the Oedipus myth as an example of a violent tale that "normalizes gender asymmetries" (10). They remark that the poststructuralist Oedipus has come to symbolize patriarchal authority in all forms. At the same time, his daughter Antigone, who has an equally canonized tragedy, was largely ignored until feminists reappropriated her as a symbol of defiance. Cultural consciousness is still filled with Greco-Roman fables that are inherently misogynistic. This conforms with Kate Milett's declaration that women do not themselves develop the symbols by which they are described, but rather men divide them into symbols that benefit the patriarchal system (qtd. in Caputi, "On Psychic Activism" 425). Thus, Mythical female figures still either take the form of man's aid in the form of mother, lover, or maiden or villainess in the form of witch, seductress, or gorgon, confirming Alicia Ostriker's belief that "thanks to myth we believe that woman must be either 'angel' or 'monster'" (71). Hence, this reinforces the need for feminist revisionism rather than dismissing it as unradical.

Women must then liberate those figures from their phallocentric prisons. When feminists declare, "We are the myths. We are the Amazons, the Furies, the Witches. We have never not been here, this exact sliver of time, this precise place" (qtd. in Caputi 431), they claim these figures and embody them. Jane Caputi argues in favor of feminist revisionist mythology as a revival of mythological symbols and figures from various traditions to

establish a female-centric myth space as resistance to its original patriarchal system (425). To embody and reappropriate mythical spheres, women must revisit them and make them fully theirs. For this purpose, Caputi explains that the feminist revisionist's journey to dispel those symbols is twofold: first, patriarchal myth-smashing, which is to dispel the symbols attributed by men to women. Second, woman-identified myth-making, which is women reclaiming the ability to make their own symbols by taking previously androcentric ones and remaking them into gynocentric ones. Thus, feminist revisionism is a two-pronged approach of a critical, suspicious examination of the phallogocentric patterns present in myths and the incorporation of gynocentric symbolism.

Mary Daly and other feminist mythographers believe that a revision and rewriting of patriarchal notions is not enough. They debate the existence of ancient matriarchal societies that preceded and were suppressed by patriarchal ones, denoting a need to return to those ancient matriarchal societies. Scientists have allegedly tried to hide matriarchal cultures with a mother goddess at their center throughout history by downplaying the Great Cosmic Mother (Sjöö and Mor 56). Jane Caputi proclaims that patriarchy is a historical phenomenon and, therefore, "ancient myth traces the existence of a gynocentric consciousness" (*Goddesses and Monsters* 24). Cynthia Eller, on the other hand, does not believe in the myth of matriarchy; she states that it is best understood as an "enormous thought experiment, a play with reversals" (qtd. in MacMillan 36). Therefore, having concrete matriarchal and gynocentric elements in myths without insidious patriarchal attributes lurking between the lines is an idealistic view, at least in the case of classical mythology.

The contemporary spread of potentially worsening lived experiences for women strengthens Rich's call for revision, for women to look back into the past to correct patriarchal stereotypes and ideas. In Muriel Rukeyser's poem "Myth," Oedipus has a second

meeting with the Sphinx, with one question in mind: Why did he not recognize his mother? The Sphinx answered swiftly: “you answered, Man. / You didn’t say anything about woman.” The term man encompasses women, Oedipus rebutted, to which the Sphinx replied, “That’s what you think” (qtd. in Gubar 301). Women had to serve two fixed purposes in myth: to be a cause of desire or revulsion. To be a beautiful lover or wife, or a temptress and monster set as an example of what women ought not to be, thus reverting to the idea that women’s sole purpose is to be a dutiful wife, a loyal maid, and a womb. De Beauvoir believes that women have been unable to set themselves as subjects in part because they have not set themselves free from mythology. Because they have not created a space of their own and thus “dream through the dreams of men” (qtd. in Gubar 301).

Susan Gubar proposes that an answer to the question of how women can have their own dreams is proposed in Rukeyser's poem. By giving voice to the Sphynx, she displays the discrepancy between her own experience and how society defines her; therefore, “by using the myth, she does connect up to a past that has in part created her” (302). Gubar also acknowledges that mythology is not only to be subverted since there are positive, albeit rare, and not completely positive per se, female representations in myths. The first mythical figure that comes to mind is Demeter, the mother of Persephone and goddess of the harvest. Wrought with grief, she let the land run dry and crops perish until Hades agreed to set Persephone free for spring, which is why winter brings harshness and coldness while spring calls for the return of nature and life. However, feminists like de Beauvoir condemn the myth for perpetuating destructive stereotypes of female passivity and masochism since Demeter still does not take direct action against Hades. Despite the opposition to the myth of the mother and abducted daughter, women writers still found inspiration from it to write about their experiences as daughters and potential mothers, among them Mary Shelley. Gubar

discusses that for Shelley, the myth of Demeter and Persephone is a “female version of Paradise Lost” (303) wherein the interference of man is the sin that drives the garden into ruin and not some form of female sin. Thus, “the myth becomes an allusive structure in so much women's poetry because it articulates the pain of growing up female in a male-dominated world” (305). The abduction of Persephone and the grievous separation of mother and daughter imply that in a patriarchal society, women are divided from each other and from themselves.

Despite criticisms of upholding passivity, the writings centered around the Demeter/ Persephone myth still resonate today as paradigms of human tragedy since women writers have used it to describe feminine pain and experience. Therefore, “women writers tend to insist that the female role, while tragic, is not as passive as the original myth would imply” (Gubar 306). Again, as stated by Rich, women do not only use myths to revise and correct; they also use them to look back and understand themselves and how they have been culturally defined for ages. It is through the act of looking back, free of bias, and pinpointing harmful stereotypes that they can use myths "not to destroy / but to re-invoke / and name / afresh" (qtd. in Gubar 307).

Mary Lefkowitz proclaims that Greek myth glorified the role of mothers, especially heroes’ mothers, as they have been acclaimed to be of extreme beauty and wit. On the other hand, any woman who denied her femininity was condemned as an enemy or monster. For them to deny their femininity is to deny their role in society, the place they ‘belong to,’ which is home, taking care of their children, and their responsibility towards their family. Ancient writers such as Euripides used characters such as Antigone as a paradigm for the tragedies that would happen lest women refuse to enjoy the role society assigned them (216-217). However, Lefkowitz is concerned with life more than death, myth beyond tragedy, and the

lives of women outside of myth. She adds that while the ancient Greeks confined women to only their reproductive powers and familial duties, they 'at least' attributed to women a vital function that Church fathers, later on, denied them by placing a higher value on celibacy that offered women subservience rather than independence (218). By focusing on the real rather than the mythic, Lefkowitz denies the need to apply theories to myths and the need for revision, which underestimates the cultural impact they possess. Finally, she admits the limitations myths place on women but maintains that the traditional roles they were assigned still possess appeal and influence (218).

Despite the opposition, feminist writers still consider how to bring themselves into being without dependence on those versions of femininity constructed within patriarchal narratives, especially the ones present in myths. A practice of revision, which includes critical reading of cultural texts, would allow women to rewrite themselves, undoing the damage caused by phallogocentric ideals. Patriarchal and androcentric writings distort the image of women, of their bodies, negating their political value, and goad women against one another. However, by providing representations through a gynocentric lens, feminist revisionists contribute to broader conceptions of femininities. Rewriting also implies that they write themselves, as Hélène Cixous envisioned, by undertaking the act of revision directly and personally. The process of revision and rewriting can be applied to any body of androcentric writing; however, there exists a particular emphasis on mythology, especially classical mythology. This is called into question by Geoffrey Miles in the back cover of *Classical Mythology in English Literature*: "If classical mythology is dead, why won't it lie down?" It is precisely due to its refusal to lie down that there is a significant necessity for its rewriting and revising. MacMillan expounds that "any examination of the past will inevitably redirect our attention to myth," subsequently quoting Sam McBean, "it seems to be bound up in

considerations of what it means to turn to the past – it seemingly always asks us to consider the relationship between past and present" (46). Thus she asserts that myth informs our language, has been an integral part of a certain class of rarefied Western education, and contains stories that continue to be told yet indicate, if not perpetuate, elements of misogyny (46).

Purkiss gives more details about how rewriting can counter the writer's intentions. She says that the most common strategy deployed by 20th-century women poets was to give voice to previously silenced female characters from classical myth, an approach still commonly used today. The issue with this strategy is that it does not necessarily examine the female writer's position in the myth's creation and the status of myth in literature broadly enough (445). Purkiss states that rewriting mythical female characters into a new image, where any negative traits are revalued and represented as misunderstood or with new strengths, simply insists that "'positive' images of women are somehow timeless" and it invokes a "refusal to recognize the literariness of literature" (442). She adds that the feminist interest in the mother goddess and how it "does not come straight to us from prehistoric women, but was invented by men earlier this century for reasons which had nothing to do with empowering women" (442). Thus, the 'literariness' of myth is something that has been transmitted by its formation into text throughout time, and how it has influenced and has been received by cultures. The simple replacement of bad characteristics attributed to a mythical woman with good ones does little to engage with the myth's transmission and its place within literary canons. However, change is possible, and it has already begun.

Sellers's final response to the question 'why myth?' is that "its procedures enable the expression of more individually resonant, less easily co-optable, multifarious truths" (32). Truth becomes the driving force for telling stories. Schanoes believes that while

postmodernism has disrupted our understanding of truth and the self, we nevertheless maintain a fascination with the prospect of a 'true self;' she suggests that stories can be a way to access this, even through "a kaleidoscopic, constantly shifting set of identities that are always in the process of being constructed" (5). Schanoes believes in a "collaborative, affectionate relationship" (8). The revision of mother-daughter relationships, such as Demeter and Persephone's, is the model she draws up since through those retellings the writer becomes "simultaneously one's own mother and one's own daughter" (59). Hence, even if they do not engage with the complexities of such relationships, the concept of collaboration, kinship, and affection is useful. She adds that "revision has the potential to expose the ideological underpinnings of the stories that shape our lives, not in order that we surrender to them, but in order that we can shape them in turn"(57).

The ultimate conclusion to be drawn from these significances is the necessity of a view of mythological rewriting as an ongoing and collaborative practice. Myth is not simply a singular whole but an amalgamation of multiple subjectivities, institutions, and narratives. To an optimistic feminist, it can be perceived as a community space, even as androcentric structures shape it. The influx of recent feminist rewritings of myth showcases how a bond and a shared goal have gained strength throughout the years: to liberate women from their patriarchal cages perpetuated by myths, to uncover the truth, and reveal the mythical women's true potential. Rewritten myths must, thus, operate in connection with each other now.

1.2 Defining Mythology

Myth is a central element of feminist revisionist mythology. Therefore, an exploration of mythology, its definitions, and theories is im perative. Mythology, the age-old tapestry

woven from the threads of human imagination and belief, is a rich and complex reservoir of stories, symbols, and legends that have shaped cultures and civilizations throughout history. These myths, often rooted in ancient traditions and religious beliefs, serve as the bedrock upon which societies build their identities, moral codes, and understanding of the world. They are profound expressions of human experiences, fears, and aspirations. They delve into the mysteries of creation, the nature of good and evil, and the origins of mankind. Myths encapsulate the collective wisdom of a people, reflecting their beliefs about the cosmos, the afterlife, and the fundamental questions that have haunted humanity since its inception. Intriguingly, myths are not static; they evolve and adapt, reflecting societies' changing values and concerns over time. They are expressed through oral traditions, literature, art, and religious rituals, connecting generations and fostering a sense of continuity in the ever-shifting sands of human existence. In short, the first description of myth is of an everlasting well of stories tracing back to millennia of human existence.

As previously stated, mythology is the quilt woven by the ancients to cover themselves from the fears and doubts of the universe surrounding them and explore their aspirations and imagination. This constitutes the general understanding of myth as it can also be constated from its etymology since the origin of the word myth comes from the Greek 'mythos,' which bears the meaning of 'word,' and, more precisely, the word of the ancients encapsulated within the realm of mythology (Baumgartner and Al 195). Another meaning 'mythos' carries is 'speech' or 'story;' this use can be seen in mythical tales such as Homer's *Odyssey* wherein Telemachus[10] inquired Nestor[11], king of Pylos, to relay whatever mythos —

[10] Telemachus, the son of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, remains on the island with his mother to fend off the suitors' attempts to usurp the throne.

[11] Nestor is another character found in the *Odyssey,* he appears as an old and wise king who led his soldiers and subjects to join the Trojan War.

with the meaning of 'stories'— he may have heard of his missing father, Odysseus. The general understanding of myth is, therefore, confluent with its etymology. A body of myths is a body of stories that represent the ancients' words.

Furthermore, Baumgartner and his collaborators suggest that, "Myth renews life and imparts to the world duration and stability" (195). Therefore, myth is not merely a historical account of the ancients' words and stories but also a carrier of formative creativity that inspires new ideas and, consequently, symbolizes revival. It is especially relevant since the incorporation of mythical stories remains relevant with modern works and is adapted to suit contemporary contexts —examples of this are the works that will be studied in this dissertation: *Circe* and *Medusa*. This practice of integrating or rewriting myths serves purposes beyond just fostering creativity. Ralph Ellison coined the term 'enlargement' for using myths and mythical characters to construct characters outside a limited and contemporary societal scope. This is illustrated within his work *The Invisible Man,* which parallels Virgil's Aeneas[12] since the protagonist's journey to Harlem's underground evokes Aeneas's one to the underworld[13]. What can be inferred is that myth fits into various categories and serves varying purposes, especially when used for the act of writing and storytelling, which explains its enduring longevity.

Tok Thompson and Gregory Schrempp provide in their book *Truth of Myth* (2020) core definitions of myth and declare that "understanding myth is a transformative act, a way of grasping the power of culture in one of its most elemental forms" (1). For them, the first defining trait of myth is what they term 'narrative.' The origin of myths as stories and tales

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[12] Aeneas is the protagonist of Virgil's *Aeneid,* which is considered the Roman *Odyssey,* it depicts his journey after the Trojan War to Italy where he established the city of Rome.

[13] Aeneas' descent into the underworld is a significant episode in *the Aeneid*. It occurs in Book VI, where Aeneas, guided by the Sibyl of Cumae, travels to the underworld seeking guidance and insights about his future and the destiny of Rome.

has already been established, so to view them as narratives is a natural progression since they refer to a communicative genre in which a series of temporally linked events are connected in a diachronic, causal syntax, or, to put it simply, they constitute tales (8). Nevertheless, while stories and narratives are closely linked, actual events and happenings that cannot be described as stories may also be narrated. Myths themselves have never been considered actual events despite being used for historical purposes. Despite this, they are frequently employed to discuss actual events in contemporary tales without exploiting real people's hardships and demises as writing material. Myths offer a symbolic and imaginative framework that allows storytellers to explore universal themes, moral lessons, and societal issues without directly depicting the often painful realities of individual experiences. This separation between myth and reality provides writers with a creative space to address profound human experiences, drawing inspiration from the rich tapestry of cultural and historical symbolism without sacrificing the sensitivity required when dealing with actual events and personal tragedies.

Myth is connected with narrative in terms of storytelling —the latter being the primary way for the transmission of myth. Storytelling, or narrative, is the transfer of knowledge from the past to the present to the future. As Pierre Janet asserts in *L'Évolution de la mémoire et la notion de temps:* "narration created humanity" (qtd. in Thompson and Schrempp 9). Myth as narrative is indeed a fitting description, but Thompson and Schrempp also warn of the paradoxically vast yet limited attributes that may attach themselves to myth from such a descriptor, "there is a danger in adopting too broad a definition: if a word means everything, then it means nothing" (9). As extensive yet constricting as this description may seem, it nevertheless provides sufficient insight into myth for the purpose of this study since it is primarily concerned with the ability of feminist mythmakers to subvert yet refresh such

ancient narratives to provide new ones, to cut the dead branches to allow space for new growth.

Another definition attributed to myth is that of falsehood, and to understand what is meant by falsehood, Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) is the treatise to turn to. *Mythologies* is a collection of essays that explores the ways in which cultural phenomena, particularly aspects of popular culture, are imbued with deeper ideological meanings. In the book, he argues that seemingly mundane aspects of daily life are 'mythologized,' meaning that they are infused with culturally specific meanings that go beyond their apparent surface. Therefore, for Barthes, myth is a type of speech that "cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification" (107). This signification comes into existence when powerful institutions in society, such as governments, advertising industries, or entertainment industries like Hollywood, assign a particular meaning to an actual idea, object, or image. These meanings then influence the way people view the world around them. By establishing these associations, these dominant social institutions essentially create and perpetuate cultural beliefs and values that are subconsciously adopted by the masses.

Throughout his seminal work, Barthes gives various examples of mythologized realities, including cleaning products, more precisely, soap powder and detergent. He quotes that "not only do detergents have no harmful effect on the skin, but they can even perhaps save miners from silicosis" (35). So, those seemingly mundane commodities are not only free of any harmful effects but have incredible healing properties. As can be seen, these products have been mythologized by ads to present a narrative of cleanliness and purity, associating the use of a particular product with moral virtue and societal acceptance. In essence, Barthes' concept of myth relates to the role of powerful institutions in constructing and disseminating ideologies through symbolic representations, emphasizing how they wield significant

influence in shaping collective perceptions and reinforcing cultural norms. Consequently, myth is also a type of speech consisting of falsehoods shrouding societal perceptions. The notion of myth as a mode of signification then highlights the pervasive impact of these symbolic constructions on the way individuals make sense of their reality.

The grapple surrounding myth, particularly in terms of its classification as falsehood or truth, transcends modern debates, having persisted for centuries. It is illustrated in the discourses of notable ancient figures such as Plato and the Sophists. According to renowned philosopher and anthropologist David Bidney, ancient Greek philosophy's major challenge regarding myth arose in the form of reconciling the rational truth with the traditional and religious beliefs prevalent in society. This task was particularly daunting as it involved integrating two seemingly disparate and, at times, conflicting worldviews. As such, scholars and philosophers of the time engaged in rigorous debate and discourse to arrive at a nuanced understanding of these complex issues (379). On the same page, Bidney cites the views of Emperor Julian[14] and philosopher Sallustius[15], who believed that myths were imbued with divine truths concealed from the unenlightened masses and only grasped by the wise. By contrast, the Epicurean philosophers[16], nicknamed the atheists of the ancient world, sought to dismiss and get rid of the traditional tales since they were fabrications that concealed purely naturalistic and historical events at best but were primarily used to bolster the authority of the

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[14] Julian held the title of Caesar in the Western Roman Empire from 355 to 360 and served as the Roman emperor from 361 to 363. He also gained recognition as a significant philosopher and Greek author. His refusal of Christianity and advocacy for Neoplatonic Hellenism led to his designation as Julian the Apostate in Christian tradition.

[15] Sallustius was a philosopher and sophist the 4th century AD. His work emphasizes the importance of allegorical interpretation of myths and rituals, reflecting Neoplatonic themes and a synthesis of Greek and Eastern philosophical traditions.

[16] Epicureans are followers of the philosophy founded by Epicurus (341-270 BCE). They prioritize the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain as key ethical principles. Contrary to hedonistic stereotypes, Epicureanism advocates for a balanced and simple life, emphasizing mental tranquility and friendship. The philosophy rejects fear of death and divine anxiety, promoting a materialistic worldview and a focus on modest pleasures.

priests and the rulers. Subsequently, It can be observed that myths have been at the center of debates for centuries. In ancient times, the two opposing parties were at odds on the religious aspect. In contrast, in modern times, mythical truth is not spiritual but rather historical and shares a glimpse of human nature.

Myths, throughout their existence, have proven to be a versatile and dynamic phenomenon, encapsulating a diverse array of definitions and meanings. At its core, myth functions as a powerful remnant of the ancients' worldview and belief systems, providing a unique window into the collective consciousness of ancient societies. As a cultural artifact, myth serves as a repository of the values, fears, and aspirations that shaped the perspectives of bygone civilizations, making it an invaluable tool for historians and anthropologists in deciphering the complexities of ancient cultures. Moreover, myth transcends its historical function, emerging as a fantastical lens through which ancient history can be perceived and interpreted. It offers a narrative framework that blends reality and imagination, creating symbolic narratives that convey cultural truths and reveal human societies' imaginative capacities. In this sense, myth becomes a bridge between the tangible and the intangible, offering insights into the psyche of ancient civilizations and their attempts to make sense of the world around them.

Beyond its historical and anthropological dimensions, myth assumes the role of a potent creative tool. Writers, artists, and creators have perennially drawn inspiration from mythological narratives to craft compelling stories, poetry, and visual representations. The enduring appeal of mythical themes lies in their ability to resonate with universal human experiences, transcending temporal and cultural boundaries. Myth, then, becomes a wellspring of creativity, fostering the continuous reinvention and reinterpretation of ancient narratives in contemporary contexts.

However, the multiplicity of myth extends beyond its positive connotations. It is essential to recognize that myth can also be perceived as falsehood, particularly when viewed through a critical or rational lens. Skeptics argue that myths, rooted in supernatural or divine elements, lack empirical evidence and are thus mere fabrications. This perspective highlights the tension between myth and empirical truth, questioning the veracity of narratives that may lack empirical substantiation. This can be contested by the belief that within the realm of myth, a deeper truth is embedded —an emotional, symbolic, or metaphorical truth that may not align with empirical realities but holds profound significance in understanding the human experience. However, as contested by feminists, what constitutes mythical symbolisms for the human experience is defined in male-centric limitations. This nuanced interpretation reinforces the idea that myth is not solely a repository of factual information but a complex and layered phenomenon that encapsulates diverse meanings.

1.2.1 Theories of Myth

In the introduction of his book *World Mythology*, Thomas J. Sienkewicz compares the study of myth to the tale of the mythical figure Sisyphus[17], the man condemned to an eternal limbo of rolling a boulder up a hill in the Underworld. In that vein, he states, "the universal and changeable elements of myth make a comprehensive treatment and bibliography as impossible as Sisyphus' task" (2). This principle similarly applies to the interpretation and theories surrounding mythology. Myths possess a universal and transformative quality that the interpretations of a specific myth or mythology, in general, transcend numerous contexts and thus can never be fully recorded. He also compares interpretations of myths to Penelope working at her loom. She weaved her step-father's funeral shroud by day and unraveled it by

[17] Sisyphus is a figure from Greek myths widely known for his punishment of rolling a boulder uphill, only for it to roll back down, thus repeating the process eternally.

night in order to stall her suitors from taking her husband's throne: "thread upon thread of interpretation is interwoven in myth. As one approach to myth goes out of favor and is unraveled from the fabric, another takes its place" (2). Dealing with myths is, therefore, a rather strenuous and demanding task, but to have a grasp of how myth has been utilized and repurposed throughout time, an overview of concepts and theories of myth is in order.

Robert A. Segal points out that no discipline is wholly consecrated to myth. Thus, theories of myth are not theories consecrated to myths in and of themselves but to their interdisciplinary relation to other aspects. Psychological theories of myth are about how myths reflect the human psyche; anthropological theories of myth are with regard to culture; Sociological theories of myth are still primarily concerned with society. Therefore, "there is no study of myth as myth" (2). Consequently, the sheer vastness of myth requires it to be studied with defined bounds.

Despite the myriad of myth theories and their focus on different concepts and aspects, the study of myth remains unified by an element other than the application of myth to a particular study. Indeed, Segal declares that "what unite[s] the study of myth across the disciplines are the questions asked. The three main questions are those of origin, function, and subject matter" (2). First, the origin of myth, the question of how something came into being, is a common one, and myths are no exception to that line of questioning. It has been established that Greek myths originate from oral tradition passed from generation to generation, then set into concrete form by writers and poets. Secondly, the function of myth asks the questions of why and how myth persists; this is a query in the minds of many—why have those problematic, violent myths not been buried in silence? Why are they written and rewritten with as much fervor as eons ago? The answers given are various and varied. Finally,

the subject matter of myth is what is refered to as the referent of myth. Alan Dundes corroborates that the referent can either be literal or symbolic:

> Theories of myth interpretation may be roughly divided into two major groupings: literal and symbolic. Literalists tend to seek factual or historical bases for a given mythological narrative while advocates of one the many symbolic approaches prefer to regard the narrative as a code requiring some mode of decipherment. It is essential to realize that the literal and symbolic exegeses [interpretations] of myths are not necessarily mutually exclusive. (167)

In short, in the pursuit of theorizing myths as subject matter, mythographers either read them straightforwardly in a historical context or interpret them symbolically and decode these symbols to unveil unconscious meanings. Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye belong to the latter category. On one hand, Campbell's monomyth is a theoretical accumulation of mythical quest myths as symbolic and universal narratives that reveal mankind's unconscious psychological journeys. On the other, Frye's theory of myths centers mythic rituals as necessary symbols for a structural criticism of literary narratives and archetypes. Since feminist revisionist mythology's aim is to subdue the androcentric symbolism permeating classical myths, the utilization of Campbell and Frye's models as guidelines to display how feminist mythmakers, Madeline Miller and Rosie Hewlett, smash androcentric patterns present in the mythical elements they revise.

Consequently, the theories of myth selected in this study are Campbell and Frye's explorations of the symbolic power of mythology. They have been designated to be explored within the themes of feminism, the subversive strategy of myth-smashing, and the creative aspects of myth-making. This focused inquiry aims to provide detailed insights within the limited scope of the connection between myth, feminism, and the artistic aspects of creating

gynocentric mythical symbolism. Thus, the analytical chapters of this study examine Miller and Hewlett's *Circe* and *Medusa* as subversive narratives through contrast with Campbell and Frye's symbolic categorizations. Subsequently, the remainder of this theoretical framework expounds upon Campbell and Frye's assertions.

1.3 Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey

The leading authority in mythological hermeneutics is Joseph Campbell, an American writer and mythologist renowned for his works on comparative mythology and religion. His works examine the universal function of myths in various cultures. His most acclaimed work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), explores the concept of the monomyth —a term he coined to describe a universal pattern of heroic narratives. This work has profoundly influenced various forms of storytelling, including literature and film. It offers valuable insights into the narrative patterns used to portray the hero's journey.

Campbell elucidates the hero's journey as a composition of seventeen stages organized into three acts: departure, initiation, and return. These acts illustrate the significant phases of the heroic journey and are further subdivided into various stages, or, as Claude Lévi-Strauss designates them, the mythemes that comprise the Monomyth. These archetypal patterns are flexibly employed to depict the hero's journey across diverse cultures and therefore do not adhere to a rigid schema. However, a figure depicting the monomyth is provided herein to provide a visual guideline to the acts and mythemes:

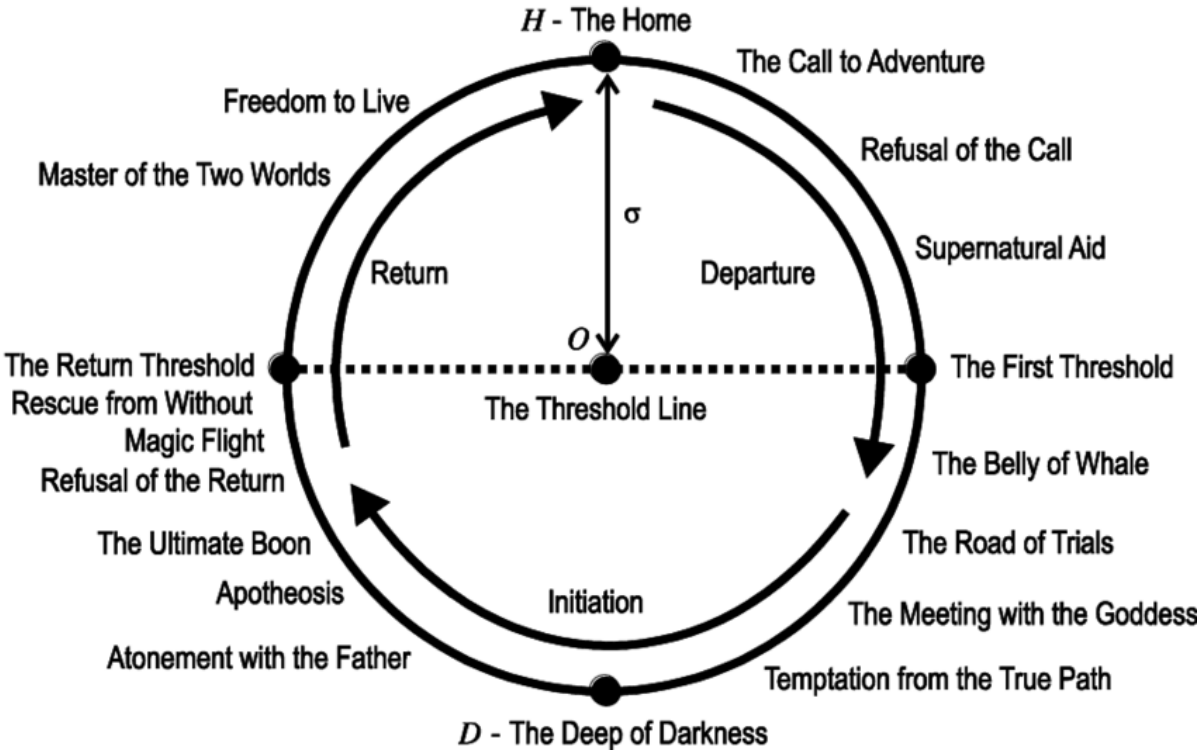

Fig. 1. Agamirza Bashirov. *The Campbell's Monomyth*. 2011, The Online Journal of Communication

As shown within this figure, the monomyth revolves around the threshold line. The first act of departure is a call to cross the threshold to embark on the journey. The second act of initiation takes place in the other world that resides beyond the horizon. The third and final act is the recrossing of the threshold in order to return to the ordinary world and the initial society. Each act encompasses several mythemes, as archetypal stages that the hero must persevere through to reach the journey's end. Therefore, the following titles describe these three acts and their mythemes to utilize them in the analysis of *Circe* and *Medusa*.

Before undertaking the descriptive scope of Campbell's monomyth, it is notable to mention the lack of a feminine perspective within Campbell's work. Feminists have deplored it as too male-oriented and androcentric to describe the heroine's experience adequately. Campbell himself acknowledges that heroines are rarely found in myths due to being from a male-centric point of view, and when it comes to a heroine's journey, he declares:

> I don't know what the counterpart would be in the woman's case . . . There is a feminine counterpart to the trials and the difficulties, but it certainly is in a different mode. I don't know the counterpart— the real counterpart, not the woman pretending to be male, but the normal feminine archetypology of this experience. I wouldn't know what that would be. (qtd. in Gerringer, "Joseph Campbell and the Hero's Journey")

For this reason, multiple feminist writers —using Ostriker's terminology— have stolen his schema and reappropriated it for a gynocentric focus on the heroine. Clarissa Pinkola Estés' *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1989), Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey* (1990), Maria Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994), Joan Gould's *Spinning Straw into Gold* (2005), and Valerie Estelle Frankel's *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend* (2010) exemplify the feminist need of setting symbols that represent women. These paradigms of patterning the female journey each delve into the paths taken by heroines. Estés and Murdock's Heroine Journeys focus primarily on the psychological perils of the modern woman; Warner and Gould's focus on fairy tales and children's folklore; Frankel's on myths, legends, and fairy tales. The lack of feminine perspective in theorizing and patterning myths has been instantly noticed and corrected by various feminist writers to declare that myths and archetypal studies are not a conference room with a 'men only' sign plastered on its door.

Out of the aforementioned formidable writers, Frankel's *Girl to Goddess* corresponds highly with the scope of this study and the journey crossed by the characters explored—Circe and Medusa. Thus, to analyze and explore Feminist Revisionist Myths, integrating Frankel's stages alongside Campbell's provides better objective insight. The Hero's Journey and Heroine's Journey mythemes are discussed in tandem to demonstrate how myth-smashers and

myth-makers confront and utilize androcentric patterns to form a gynocentric narrative that portrays an authentic female experience. For this purpose, the following figure representing Frankel's comparative table between Campbell's androcentric mythemes and her gynocentric ones is provided:

COMPARISON OF MODELS
THE STEPS OF THE JOURNEY

Campbell's Hero's Journey	*The Heroine's Journey*	*Stages*
The Ordinary World	The Ordinary World	Innocence and Discovery
The Call to Adventure	The Call to Adventure	Innocence and Discovery
Refusal of the Call	Refusal of the Call	Innocence and Discovery
Supernatural Aid	The Ruthless Mentor and the Bladeless Talisman	Innocence and Discovery
The Crossing of the First Threshold The Belly of the Whale	The Crossing of the First Threshold Opening One's Senses	Journey through the Unconscious
The Road of Trials	Sidekicks, Trials, Adversaries	Journey through the Unconscious
The Meeting with the Goddess Woman as the Temptress	Wedding the Animus Facing Bluebeard Finding the Sensitive Man Confronting the Powerless Father	Meeting the Other
Atonement with the Father Apotheosis	Descent into Darkness Atonement with the Mother Integration and Apotheosis	Meeting the Self
The Ultimate Boon	Reward: Winning the Family	Meeting the Self
Refusal of the Return The Magic Flight Rescue from Without The Crossing of the Return Threshold	Torn Desires The Magic Flight Reinstating the Family Return	Meeting the Self
Master of the Two Worlds	Power over Life and Death	Goddesshood and Wholeness
Freedom to Live	Ascension of the New Mother	Goddesshood and Wholeness

Fig. 2. Valerie Estelle Frankel. *Comparison of Models: The Steps of the Journey*. 2010. *Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend* 5.

This figure illustrates the dichotomies and similarities between Campbell and Frankel's models of the heroic journey. As can be observed, the stages are seemingly and deceptively similar at first glance, but as the hero and heroine's journeys progress, their paths diverge in the face of different experienced troubles. An examination into the reasons and the manner in which these paths differ is implemented within the following titles.

1.3.1 The First Act: Departure

This act is divided into five mythemes: call to adventure, refusal of the call, supernatural aid, crossing the first threshold, and the belly of the whale. These parallel

Frankel's: call to adventure, refusal of the call, ruthless mentor, crossing of the first threshold, and opening one's senses.

The call to adventure is the encounter of the hero or heroine with the extraordinary. Campbell asserts that the extraordinary may present itself as "A blunder — apparently the merest chance — reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (Campbell 52). This blunder may also be an event, a message, new information, or a problem. This first stage then "signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (Campbell 57). Therefore, this stage is the hero's encounter with destiny —a destiny that leads him to the unknown. This stage is the inception of the quest myth, as most mythological heroes had a call to answer, such as a call to war, exemplified by Achilles and Odysseus, or a need to fulfill quests to atone for a blunder, as for Heracles.

In Frankel's work, the call to adventure constitutes a need to repair what is broken. She cites A.B. Chinen, asserting: "When goddesses embark upon heroic journeys, it is to restore what has been broken or injured" (17). An example of this is the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis, who searches for her husband Osiris's body parts, strewn over the Nile, in order to resurrect him. What is broken is alluded to in different forms. It could be a lover's health or affections, a filial bond, a family's well-being, or an erosion of the heroine's psyche. Frankel then states that:

> While the hero journeys for external fame, fortune, and power, the heroine tries to regain her lost creative spirit, this image of moonlight or swansong calling her forth from her empty bedchamber. Once she hears the cries of this lost part of herself needing rescue, her journey truly begins. (20)

Frankel implies that while most androcentric heroes quest for material or ego-boosting rewards, the heroine risks leaving all that she has known to restore abstract yet meaningful spiritual growth. Thus, she seeks to regain agency through connections, emotions, and creativity.

Before embarking on his journey, the hero may reject the call. This stage is referred to as the refusal of the call by Campbell. This mytheme is the representation of human fear, hesitation, and insecurity or "a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest" (Campbell 59). This refusal may or may not bear consequences. Yet, consequences often accompany the refusal. Campbell exemplifies this point with the tale of Prince Kamar Al-Zaman in the Arabian Nights, whose refusal to marry led to confinement.

Within Frankel's work, the refusal stage is similar. This refusal is a form of fear, hesitation, or disobedience due to a reluctance to leave the comfort zone. This refusal, too, is juxtaposed with consequences. The heroine is banished, confined, and exiled, so outside forces force her out of her home; these forces are commonly presented in the form of a parental figure or a rioting society. Another reaction of this refusal is the sleep state. According to Frankel, the heroine in her adolescent stage "desires nothing more than to hide, to finish growing up before she leaves, to conceal herself from all eyes" (28). In order to escape the call of adventure, the heroine falls into a lethargic state. She sleeps surrounded by a ring of fire, poisoned thorns, or guarded by a dragon to protect her from outside interference, as is wont of fairy tales and myths. This stasis is lifted when the heroine is ready for adulthood, traditionally awoken by a prince charming, leading to marriage.

When the hero finally decides to undertake his fated quest, he is guided by what Frye terms the supernatural aid. The protective figure is "the benign, protecting power of destiny. The fantasy is a reassurance — a promise that the peace of Paradise (…) stands in the future

as well as in the past" (Campbell 68). This figure is archetypally portrayed as the guide, the teacher, or the mentor. In classical myth, this task is traditionally laid on the messenger god Hermes, the centaur Chiron, or the strategic Athena.

On the other hand, the heroine has two opposing types of mentors. The fairy godmother, the loving soul of her mother, or a helpful pet on one side; the evil stepmother, the evil witch, or the crone on the other. First, the good mentors offer the heroine gorgeous garments or tools to strengthen her feminine charms instead of swords (Frankel, 37). The good mentors offer wisdom, advice, and moral strength. Unlike male heroes, heroines must pay a price and endure trials and punishments under their mentorship. The mentor who prepares the heroine with these arduous tasks is the evil mentor represented in evil stepmothers and witches. These mentors are teachers of independence and are essential to the story since they balance the generosity of good mentors (38). Pain is necessary to achieve independence and develop the necessary skills to confront motherhood, and the bad mentors inflict that pain.

To prepare for the perils of labor and child-rearing, the heroines need the evil mentor to achieve the independence and skill necessary to attain it. Therefore, Frankel argues that the heroine must grow up in a rough environment to become an independent adult and a competent mother and wife. "The Terrible Mother is the heroine's catalyst. She represents the dark, unexplored side of the heroine" (42). The heroine must suffer at the hands of the evil mother to grow. to shed her childlike persona and grow into a full-fledged adult. The unexplored side is what prepares her for future battles. In conclusion, the heroine's supernatural aid is manifested in a dual balanced act of love, wisdom, and generosity from the good mentors and cruelty, despotism, and egotism from the bad mentors. While the hero

has an easier time in this stage and typically receives help from his mentor without much ado, the heroine has to start proving herself from an early stage.

The subsequent theme, which is of paramount importance, is the crossing of the first threshold. This is the point of no return; the hero must march forward without looking back. From this point on, his path is to be wrought with monsters, battles, and challenges. The first obstacle is often the threshold guardian. This guardian often challenges the hero to prove his worth. Thus testing his readiness and ability to embark on his quest. These monsters take various forms: ogres, sirens, dragons, and beastly creatures. One prime example Campbell pictures is the Central African mythological figure known as the Chiruwi. This is a half-man, in the literal sense, a one-legged, one-armed, and one-sided being. He challenges the hero to a battle, and from this battle, two paths are expected: either the hero wins, and the Chiruwi instructs him in medicine for his feat, or the hero loses both the battle and his life as collateral (Campbell 74). This example demonstrates that the hero may either receive a reward or an ability that will aid him in his quest from this guardian, or wind up dead and jump to the next stage: the belly of the whale.

The heroine's crossing of the threshold emphasizes the act of leaving society and the familial cocoon rather than entering a new world. This is a passage from reality to dream, from the conscious to the unconscious. The heroine finally decides to act on her hidden desires and leave what was restricting these desires. This move from the familiar world into the other world is a physical manifestation of a spiritual quest towards the fulfillment of dreams. Frankel brilliantly describes this shift herein:

> Upon approaching the Otherworld, a moment of transition presents: A shimmering barrier into fairyland, deep in the forest. A long, twisting tunnel into the realm of death. A mountain where one can don winged sandals and launch into the heavens ...

> or catastrophe. This forest, dark and mysterious, is a font of feminine power, the deep unconscious made manifest. As the heroine travels it, she explores the deepest recesses of her soul. (59)

In crossing this threshold, the heroine embarks on a journey through the unknown realms of the forest. She delves into the profound depths of her own psyche, signifying a transformative quest towards self-discovery and agency. Similarly, the hero's crossing of the threshold represents a move to self-reliance. However, the heroine's step is unique in the way it symbolizes a quest to reconvene with the femininity she had previously rejected.

The next mytheme, the belly of the whale, is closely associated with the crossing of the threshold and not a stand-alone stage. Since this stage represents the confrontation of the hero with the threshold's guardians or the threshold's powers, Campbell states that "[t]his popular motif gives emphasis to the lesson that the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation" (83). The belly of the whale displays the hero's entrapment and sacrifice, but that does not mark the end of his journey since it also symbolizes rebirth as a womb image (81). Through the death or near-death experience, the hero goes inward and attains a higher sphere of being, which makes him ready for the upcoming adventures. During this phase, the hero confronts his unconscious, which is often represented by water archetypes. The hero may plunge into water, get drenched by rain, or battle near a body of water.

Frankel provides an in-depth exploration of these water archetypes and the element of water as symbols of the unconscious mind. According to her, "Water is dual; it both saves and kills. Purification and regeneration. Tears, perpetuity, drowning, inundation. Amniotic fluid (60). Thus, perfectly embodying this stage's motions of the unconscious's rebirth and regeneration. She adds, "While men enter the sea and then return, like Odysseus, Achilles, or Beowulf, many women embody the sea, like the mermaid. Thus, the most spiritually gifted

heroines submit to the water's regenerative energy, integrating it so fully that they never leave its influence (61). This is a key element illustrating the divergence between the hero's and heroine's paths. While heroes enter water or emerge from it as they do with their unconscious, heroines embody this water and embark on their journey interlinked with their unconscious. This rebirth then marks the acceptance of the unconscious's influence.

The first act then portrays the innocent and inexperienced heroes before they face the challenges imposed on them to achieve their final goal. They may be afraid and unsure at first, but eventually, they will realize the importance of this journey to discover their true selves. The first challenge is represented as the moment they decide to shed their fears and cross the threshold, which is often guarded. Guardian monsters, ogres, dragons, and mysterious powers pose the first trial that must be overcome. This trial may result in triumph, which is rewarded with a gift that will aid them in their future endeavors. Or may result in death; this sacrifice does not happen in vain, as it is rewarded with their rebirth into stronger individuals.

1.3.2 The Second Act: Initiation

After jumping off the crag that is the threshold, the hero plunges into the perilous and unknown otherworld. The first trial is merely a taste of what is to come since the hero must pass on to the next stage: the road of trials. This seals the move from reality to dreamscape, from the known to the unknown, and from the ordinary world to the otherworld. Campbell declares this stage as the favorite phase of the myth-adventure, but also a favorite of literary adventures in general (86). The most famous mythical heroes, Heracles and Odysseus, are famous due to overcoming a multitude of trials and emerging victorious. Heracles dutifully completes his twelve labors, originating the term Herculean to denote strength. On the other

hand, Odysseus surpasses every hurdle on his way with his wits and becomes a figure that denotes wiles and intelligence.

During this road of trials, the hero's next stage is the meeting with the goddess. She is "the bliss-bestowing goal of every hero's earthly and unearthly quest" (95) and, therefore, the source of comfort for the lost hero during his time of need. She may be a mother, sister, lover, or bride whose existence provides solace and joy to face the remaining trials in the journey. On the other hand, this goddess may serve the opposite purpose. She can represent an evil mother, distant and cruel to the hero, or an unattainable lover who strikes the hero down. This archetypal goddess is then "the womb and the tomb " (99). She is either a protective and nourishing presence or a hampering and harsh one. In the context of myths, this goddess is frequently characterized as the former archetype, caring and beneficial. Nonetheless, her assistance may not be duly acknowledged. This situation is exemplified by two renowned mythological women: Ariadne and Medea. Ariadne is abandoned on the island of Naxos following her aid to Theseus in his escape from her father's labyrinth; Medea, on the other hand, is replaced by another bride after helping her husband Jason retrieve the golden fleece.

Regarding the heroine, she may also receive assistance from a protective goddess, but this has already been discussed in the section concerning supernatural aid. Frankel substitutes the encounter with the goddess for a confrontation with the father. Frankel declares that "the father is the king or sky god, unassailable head of the household. As such, he has total control, which often extends the power of life and death over his children" (88). The father may confine the daughter and prevent her from undertaking her journey, exemplified by Acrisius, who locked Danaë, Perseus' mother, in a tower. During this confrontation with the father, the heroine is often left to her own devices and must plan an escape. Simple escape, however, robs the heroine of a valuable stage of growth (90). By choosing to flee, she avoids

the direct 'confrontation' with her father, preventing her from completely overcoming her victim state, leaving her vulnerable to another impetuous figure. Even after successfully escaping from her father, Danaë would have been forced to marry a despotic king had her son, Perseus, not intervened. Consequently, Danaë had to be rescued once more and, therefore, never attained the title of heroine. In order to acquire this title, she must ensure that the male transgressor is held accountable for his actions and subsequently earn forgiveness.

The next stage is what Campbell terms the woman as the temptress, as a test of the hero's morals. Although women often embodied temptation in ancient tales, this mytheme's appellation is purely phallogocentric and perpetuates negative stereotypes. This mytheme is a stage of revulsion since the hero has to face the dark, hidden desires of his unconscious. It is a confrontation with the deceitful serpent. Campbell presents women as temptresses and immoral entities, while "the moral image of the father" is the hero's wake-up call (105). This illustrates the androcentric leaning of his theory and the necessity for neutral or gynocentric alternatives.

On the other hand, Frankel presents the dangers of being 'too good.' Self-sacrifice is not simply a show of goodness and morals. Frankel uses the example of Anderson's Little Mermaid, who mutilates herself for the prince, losing her voice and tail for legs that stab her like swords. Despite this sacrifice, the prince perceives her as a child or pet, never acknowledging her as a proper woman and thus marrying another bride. Frankel concedes that the mermaid's virtue allows her to ascend into an air spirit, but "this is counterpointed by her lack of achievement on earth" (102). Therefore, the heroine must perform balanced acts of kindness to receive the journey's boon.

Atonement with the father or the Ordeal represents the next stage in Campbell's Hero's Journey. The father is portrayed as the hero's archetypal enemy, characterized as the

ogre aspect of the father. Campbell also suggests that "the ogre aspect of the father is a reflection of the hero's own ego" (110). This implies that the hero must not only conquer this adversary but also relinquish his ego in the process. It is only upon completing the father's ego-shattering initiation that the hero comes to the realization that "the father and mother reflect each other, and are essentially the same" (112). Therefore, this phase of the hero's journey is not simply a trial to overcome but a realization of the self, within which the hero comprehends the true meaning of his journey. "The Ordeal is the central, essential, and magical Stage of any Journey. Only through 'death' can the Hero be reborn, experiencing a resurrection that grants greater powers or insight to see the Journey to the end" (Vogler 4). For the hero to be reborn, to shed his cocoon, and attain his final form, he must face literal death or an intense experience akin to it.

The heroine must similarly atone with the mother as the ultimate trial. Replacing the ogre aspect of the father is the devouring mother, who manifests all the dark aspects of the unconscious. The wicked witches and crones embody the devouring mothers the heroine must face. In order to succeed, the heroine must plunge into the underworld to confront her flaws and unfulfilled desires. According to Maureen Murdock, "this inner mother begins to function in us as a shadow figure, an involuntary pattern that is unacceptable to our egos" (27). Thus, the devouring mother represents the heroine's shadow self, and she can only grow after defeating her and integrating this dark side into herself. This integration is often manifested in the form of a death or near-death experience. Frankel expands that "to become adult she must gain feminine knowledge and face death in order, paradoxically, to give birth" (Frankel 126). Similarly to how Psyche heads to the underworld for her last task, emerging victorious and equal to her husband, the heroine must assimilate her shadow self to give light to a stronger self.

After facing trials, tests, ogre fathers, and devouring mothers, the hero and heroine ultimately begin to perceive the light at the end of the tunnel in the form of Apotheosis. "When the envelopment of consciousness has been annihilated, then he [the hero] becomes free of all fear, beyond the reach of change," quotes Campbell from Sacred Books of the East (129). The hero and heroine, by facing the unconscious, shedding their egos, and letting go of their fears, reach their highest self and full enlightenment to lead the journey into completion. Frankel adds that for the heroine to reach her highest self, she must also perform self-healing. Confronting her shadow does not automatically render her stronger, since this shadow remains a crucial facet of her being. This shadow is "…creative power, femininity, reintegration, but forever frozen, sheltered, until the heroine is prepared to admit it" (Frankel 136). This acceptance of her dark, hidden facets is the gauze that heals the heroine's wounded shadow, finally balancing the conscious and unconscious within herself. After attaining their full potential, the hero and heroine are no longer pushed and dragged by the journey but confidently stride forward to confront any obstacle to reach the ultimate boon.

The ultimate boon is the next stage of the journey. It is the reward for the efforts spent on the quest. The cornucopia, the elixir of life, and the holy grail are prominent imageries of the ultimate boon. They represent the highest form of reward as they satiate the hero and breathe life into him. This boon is not necessarily a physical reward since "the Elixir can be a great treasure or magic potion. It could be love, wisdom, or simply the experience of surviving the Special World" (Vogler 6). In mythology, gods carefully guard the treasure of immortality and reward those they deem worthy. Then, the hero does not seek the recognition of the gods per se, but what is under their protection. Classical heroes' ultimate boon is ambrosia, the elixir of life drunk by the gods. Psyche and Heracles are rewarded with it for achieving their trials and labors, rendering them immortal in form and history. However, the

gods may be overprotective of their boon, so the hero must deceive them to acquire it. Prometheus's theft of fire is a paradigm of this; the punishment he endures for this theft symbolizes benevolent sacrifice. His reward is the well-being of the humans he sought to protect with the stolen fire. Therefore, the ultimate boon is achieving the goal hallmarked by immortality, enlightenment, and strength.

The heroine is also rewarded with the elixir of life, but less commonly so than the hero. The objectives and rewards of heroes and heroines may differ from one narrative to another; however, upon the completion of their respective endeavors, they experience significant maturation into adulthood, which is defined as the immortal self. Frankel states, "The heroine's goal is to become a complete mother, resplendent with power. If her family is shattered, by either grief or remarriage, she cannot become whole without assembling the pieces" (145). Her encounter with the devouring mother prepares her for the act of childbirth and childrearing; thus, her elixir of life is the act of giving and maintaining life. Frankel expands:

> Women's capacity to nurture is often exploited, as culture assumes that this is a natural drive, requiring no reciprocation. Thus the mother is cast in the constant role of self-sacrifice. As others take mothering for granted, she does likewise, not realizing how much of the self she's giving up by denying her own needs. (146)

The heroine's quest displays that women cannot be perfect mothers overnight. They must journey through trials and self-assessment to gain the powers of patience, wisdom, and nurture. The heroine's self-sacrifice is not Promethean but regarded as a given and taken for granted. Unlike him, she does not get eternal recognition for her benevolence.

By setting foot on the first threshold, the hero and heroine remove themselves from the ordinary world and must confront obstacles, enemies, monsters, trials, and ultimately

death to reach their goal and receive their due reward. They may take different paths and use different methods to complete the trials, but throughout their quests, they grow into their highest self and prove themselves worthy of the reward they seek.

1.3.3 The Third Act: Return

The third and last chapter of the hero's journey is the return to the ordinary world. It consists of six stages. However, the three foremost mythemes are not meant to be successive stages but three possible outcomes of the journey, followed by the last three mythemes of crossing the return threshold.

The first possible outcome of the journey is the refusal to return. Campbell declares, "Numerous indeed are the heroes fabled to have taken up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being" (162). This goddess represents the bliss of the otherworld, where the hero may have found peace and prosperity, thus refusing to leave this newfound comfort and return to the harsh reality. This goddess may also be a captor refusing to let go of the hero. A literal example is the nymph Calypso, who detained Odysseus on her island for seven years, denying him his long-awaited return to the ordinary world, his home, Ithaca. However:

> … the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds. (Campbell 162)

According to Campbell, he hero has a duty to bestow his acquired knowledge, his boon of enlightenment, to his society in the ordinary world. Declining to do so refutes the hero's society of the boon's blessing.

The heroine may also be seduced by the comforting magic and otherness of this new world. "In those cases, she may need persuasion or the agency of another to return" (Frankel 154). After all, to remain cooped up in her comforting cave is to let go of her highest self. It seems as senseless as a butterfly casting away its wings to return to its cocoon. For this reason, allies persuade the heroine to cross the return threshold.

The second outcome is the magic flight or the escape from the pursuers. Ultimate boon in hand, literally or not, the hero needs to escape to the ordinary world to avoid the wrath of pursuers from whom he stole the reward. A typical cat-and-mouse chase ensues as the hero scurries towards the return threshold to endow the ordinary world with his prize. During this chase, the hero may use tricks to obstruct his pursuer's path. "A popular variety of the magic flight is that in which objects are left [or tossed] behind to speak for the fugitive and thus delay pursuit" (Campbell 167). The hero may thus cast hurdles, get the aid of magical objects, or use trickery to delay whoever or whatever is pursuing him.

The heroine must also use tricks during her magic flight, but before evading her enemy, she must use observation. "These powers of observation are powerful weapons beneath the heroine's consciousness, which she cultivates while in the underworld. She learns to observe, to make friends, to give of herself and her own sustenance" (Frankel 151). To denote this, Frankel relays the tale of Baba Yaga, a wicked crone from Russian folklore. The heroine, a young girl, and her little brother are forced to visit the cannibal witch by their cruel stepmother. The heroine observes and befriends the other inhabitants of the house, who aid her in her escape. Then, "the heroine must prove she has mastered the tools of the goddess

and their shapechanging magic in order to snatch power from her enemy" (152). She steals the wicked witches' feminine tools, mirror and comb, and tosses them behind to form obstacles that allow her to flee the underworld. Demonstrating that through observation and kindness, she reappropriates the witch's feminine powers and uses them for herself.

The third and last outcome is the rescue from without. This outcome becomes necessary when the hero cannot cross the return threshold. However, the ordinary world will not cast off its hero so easily; it will seek to force his return:

> Society is jealous of those who remain away from it, and will come knocking at the door. If the hero (…) is unwilling, the disturber suffers an ugly shock; but on the other hand, if the summoned one is only delayed — sealed in by the beatitude of the state of perfect being (which resembles death) — an apparent rescue is effected, and the adventurer returns. (Campbell 173)

Whether the hero is stalling willingly, by refusing to leave the fantasy and comfort of magic behind, or unwillingly, due to an injury or being held captive, the ordinary world will call for him and demand his return. To this end, allies or greater forces provide assistance and the last push necessary to surpass the ultimate threshold.

The heroine's ordinary world calls her name, too, as she stays behind in the underworld. This is illustrated in the myth of the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu, who withdrew from Earth and hid in a cave, letting winter and gloom descend upon it. By refusing to leave the other world, the heroine also deprives the ordinary world of her boon and enlightenment. Thus, the world seeks her and sends assistance to persuade her to return. Amaterasu remained sequestered in her dark cave despite the various attempts of the other gods to coax her out. To successfully capture her attention, they placed a mirror at the cave's entrance. Awestruck by her radiant reflection, the heroine was ultimately drawn back from

darkness, once again sharing her light with the outside world. Frankel interprets this myth, stating: "Here the great goddess undergoes a symbolic 'death,' by vanishing into a cave. Only the divinity of her own beauty and godliness can restore her to her worshippers, by the gods tugging her through the crack in symbolic rebirth" (155). Consequently, returning to the ordinary world is a spiritual rebirth, sealing in the heroine's growth.

The last step in sight, the hero and heroine cross the final threshold of their adventure. "The Return signals a time when we distribute rewards and punishments, or celebrate the Journey's end with revelry or marriage" (Vogler 6). They move from the divine to the human, from the magical to the real, from darkness to light, and from the inner to the outer. In their hands, the ultimate boon, the elixir, accompanies them to restore the ordinary world. However, as they cross, they comprehend that "…the two kingdoms are actually one. The realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the world we know. And the exploration of that dimension, either willingly or unwillingly, is the whole sense of the deed of the hero" (Campbell 181). This realization that the two worlds are not completely separate but actual extensions of each other is what they have to come to terms with in order to achieve the next stage, which is the mastery of the two worlds.

The hero and heroine who find the balance between the otherworld and the ordinary world become the masters of the two worlds, procuring power and knowledge from both worlds to better themselves and their societies. They are now masters of darkness and light, spiritual and material, unconscious and conscious. As Campbell expounds:

> Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back — not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other — is the talent of the master. (189)

The master of both worlds is a cosmic dancer who lightly skips, twirls, and prances from one position to another with the grace and knowledge necessary to navigate the different worlds. This does not denote a return to the otherworld but a return to the lessons learned from it. With this power, the hero and heroine find peace in the ordinary world and set towards the closing mytheme.

The final stage proposed by Campbell is the freedom to live. This stage is achieved through the miraculous process of passage, return, finding balance, and acceptance. It represents the culmination of a transformative journey, where the hero and heroine attain the ability to truly live life without fear of what lies ahead of them. “The hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become… He does not mistake apparent changelessness in time for the permanence of Being, nor is he fearful of the next moment” (Campbell 200). With this, the champion finds bliss in accepting the change happening within himself and his surroundings. It is the classic happy ever after or the hero’s peaceful surrender to the laws of the universe.

As previously stated, the monomyth is not merely a step-by-step formula that the hero must adhere to to experience the most quintessential adventure. Rather, it encompasses a set of diverse mythemes and patterns observed in world myths and folktales that have persisted over centuries. These steps may be altered, rearranged, and adapted according to the specifics of each narrative, a notion that similarly applies to Frankel’s heroine's journey. The monomyth is not simply a theory of patterns; it also serves as a guide to understanding heroic adventures and tales. The stories of Greek heroes such as Odysseus, Heracles, and Perseus are prime examples of these patterns.

On the other hand, most heroines have not enjoyed equal opportunities. In classical mythology, only a limited number of heroines experience these phases; rather, they are

frequently characterized as mothers, lovers, and temptresses, occupying secondary roles and functioning as archetypes within the hero's journey. By empowering these historically silenced women to embark on their own journeys as heroines, feminist revisionist mythologists endeavor to provide these myths with the female-centric perspective that has been notably absent.

1.4 Northrop Frye's Archetypes

Northrop Frye was a highly regarded Canadian-born literary critic and theorist who contributed significantly to literary studies. He has become one of the most influential figures in 20th-century literary criticism, notably due to his seminal work *Anatomy of Criticism.* This work, published in 1957, is regarded as his magnum opus. Margaret Drabble writes for the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* that "Frye's Anatomy of Criticism and his ideas of literary criticism steered literary criticism and theories from New Criticism to the larger meanings of literary genres, archetypes, and modes" (386). Thus, he has paved the way for a newfound and structured manner to analyze literature through archetypes.

1.4.1 Anatomy of Criticism Overview

Anatomy of Criticism is a book comprised of four essays, each of which tackles a theory on literary criticism. This study's focus rests principally on his third essay titled "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," which is explored in the ensuing titles. However, before proceeding with this essay's description, his theory on fictional modes from the first essay, titled "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes," is succinctly explored to analyze Circe and Medusa's heroic types.

In his investigation of fictional modes, he first categorizes the hero or central character into five divisions: the Mythic, the Romantic, the High Mimetic, the Low Mimetic,

and the Ironic. Within the Mythic, the hero is a divine being superior to mankind and his environment. Within the Romantic, the hero is superior to mankind and his environment, but only to a degree. He is then not a divine being but a human being who possesses great powers; these powers can manifest themselves in the form of supernatural strength, magic, enchanted weapons, or a surreal, benevolent disposition. Within the High Mimetic, the hero is superior to other human beings but not to his environment. He is a natural-born leader who holds authority over others due to his charisma. Within the Low Mimetic, the hero is equal to other human beings. Within the Ironic, the central character is inferior to the average human being and is often presented as a pathetic character who is looked down upon by the reader (Frye 33-34). Frye further contends that the term 'hero' may not precisely apply to characters in the low mimetic and ironic modes, given their substantial deviation from the conventional understanding of heroism, which fits the preceding three modes. The central character is then distinguished by his similarities or dichotomies to other human beings and his natural environment. Consequently, Frye's categorization enables the classification of central characters into loose divisions. A central character can then be divided into a god or half-god, a human in possession of magical abilities or tools, a charismatic leader, an average human being, or a particularly pitiable person.

Frye further distinguishes between fiction that centers around the hero's isolation from his society and fiction that centers around the hero's incorporation into it. He terms these two distinctive fictions as tragic and comic modes. Within the tragic mode, the mythical hero dies in what Frye calls a Dionysiac tale; the romantic hero is isolated from society and becomes a hermit surrounded by animals and vegetation. The high mimetic hero ironically becomes a fallen leader. The low mimetic hero is isolated by a weakness that renders him pitiable. The ironic hero becomes a, what Frye terms, pharmakos or scapegoat who is neither

guilty nor innocent; not guilty in the sense that what happens to him is inordinate in comparison to the actions that might have provoked them, and he is not innocent because he is a member of a guilty society rendering him guilty as well (Frye 35-41). The tragic mode then displays a hero shunned or isolated from society or his environment through death, return to nature, rebellion, fatal weakness, or undeserved consequences.

On the other hand, we have the hero of the comic mode and his integration into society. The mythic hero is accepted into the gods' society in an Apollonian tale. The romantic hero is integrated into an idyllic and pastoral environment. The high mimetic hero constructs his own society after heroically triumphing over his opponents. The low mimetic hero is rewarded with social promotion after facing hardships, such as ascending to a position of leadership or entering a happy marriage. The ironic hero takes various forms in comedy. He is seen as a rascal rather than a scapegoat, and the hardships that fall on him are, therefore, seen as comedic rather than tragic; the ironic hero may also be shunned and looked down upon by society but will ultimately impress them with a hidden ability or he decides to leave society by his own volition (Frye 43-47). The inclusion of the hero into society can then be done in various ways depending on his division and initial position within society or environment. This concludes the brief exploration of Frye's heroic modes and signals the exploration of the pivotal essay for this study.

1.4.2 Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths

According to James Schroeter, archetypal criticism used to be high fashion in American universities post-WWII; he states that "Since the War, it talks of myths, image clusters, 'universal archetypes,' rituals" (543). Before that, formal criticism had held most reign over literary studies. Archetypal criticism made its formal appearance in the fifties but

has been a quiet entity present in previous works such as Plato's whose "eidos or ideas were mental forms imprinted in the soul before it arrived in this world" (Deviya and Kevin 8), and James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). A seminal work that popularized and still has a say on this theory to this day is Jung's *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (*1959). Albeit its primary focus is psychological, this body of ideas and theories has a tight grasp on the world of literary criticism. Frye's theory of archetypes is an amalgamation of inspiration from Jung's psychological and Frazer's anthropological theories, transforming them for the specific purpose of literary studies. Thus, Frye's archetypes provide a framework for analyzing and interpreting literature beyond surface-level narratives.

The word archetype is a combination of two Greek words: *arche,* meaning beginning and *type,* meaning imprint (George and Gijo 54). Since myth is the most ancient body of patterns, it is the central power that gives archetypes significance. Hence, myth itself is archetype (Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature" 104). Furthermore, in his theory of mythos, myths do not simply serve as archetypes but also as narrative structures. He asserts that there are four of these narrative structures: the mythos of spring/comedy, the mythos of summer/ romance, the mythos of autumn/tragedy, and the mythos of winter/irony and satire. *Circe* and *Medusa's* narratives are primarily described as mythos of romance and mythos of tragedy, respectively. Subsequently, the mythoi explored herein are the summer/romance and autumn/ tragedy ones. The spring/comedy and winter/irony and satire mythoi have little to no relevance to the novels centered within this study and will not be explored.

1.4.3 The Mythos of Summer: Romance

The mythos of summer, or the romance genre, represents the most prevalent and frequently employed narrative framework in literature. It embodies the myths of heroes,

adventures, and quests, serving as the pinnacle of wish-fulfillment aspirations, virtuous heroes, and beautiful heroines. The most essential component of romance is the quest, which consists of the stages of Agon, Pathos, and Anagnorisis. Agon is the struggles faced and the conflict between the hero and the villain; this conflict will then lead to Pathos, which is a death struggle that results in death in most cases, one of the two dies during the conflict, and it is typically the villain who perishes; whether the hero winds up victorious or perishes does not matter in the anagnorisis stage since it is the exaltation and recognition of the hero as a worthy leader. "Thus the romance expresses more clearly the passage from struggle through a point of ritual death to a recognition scene" (Frye 187). Throughout this passage, from struggle to recognition, a set of typical characters are present within this mythos.

Frye states that typical romance characters have moral opposites confronting them. It is then a chess board of white characters, who are for the quest, and black characters, who are against the quest; these characters are set as chess pieces that represent moral opposites. The kings of the game are the hero on the white side and the villain on the black side. Frye adds that typically "the enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth" (Frye 187-188). Then, the hero of summer falls within the Mythic, the Romantic, or the High Mimetic modes that Frye delineates in his first essay. The queens are the archetypal heroine and the witch. The other pieces may vary, but typical characters on the white side are the companion, the helpful animal, and the wise magician. On the other side are the traitor, the dragon, and the evil magician. Neutral characters are also present and may be shown as gentle giants, shy nymphs, and children of nature. Another crucial point of the hero's quest is 'dragon-killing,' and the slaying of a mighty beast terrorizing a community or individual. This is a recurrent trope in myths and medieval romances. Not all romances may contain all

these typical characters and aspects, and each romance utilizes them differently. However, the core remains the same: the hero's quest and the three stages.

The summer mythos is composed of a cycle of six phases, focusing on the hero. The first phase depicts the birth of the hero, and Frye notes that said birth is often associated with water. An example of this is the birth of the hero Perseus. His father, Zeus, manifested himself in the form of golden rain, and Perseus was thrown at sea in a chest by his grandfather while still an infant. The birth of the hero is a vital aspect of ancient myths since these romances consider fertility and new life as the real source of wealth (Frye 198). The hero may then have false or true parents. The false father seeks the child's death, and the false mother is often shown as the evil, overbearing stepmother. On the other hand, the true father can be a wise old mentor, and the true mother can be the hero's caretaker.

The second phase is the hero's innocent youth. It is typically set in a pastoral and Arcadian world; the hero grows up in a pleasant wooded landscape surrounded by beautiful nature. However, the hero longs or is forced to leave the idyllic landscape to head towards a lower world to fulfill a quest. The third phase is the quest proper. It begins with the hero's departure from the pastoral world towards a lower, more dangerous world. As previously stated, the journey has three stages and necessitates the hero's going through a death struggle to gain recognition.

The fourth phase is primarily concerned with the hero's struggle to protect the innocent world. This phase is then "the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience" (Frye 201). This may be presented as a moral dilemma or a difficult decision the hero has to make. The fifth phase corresponds to Arcadian symbolism. It is then reflective of an idyllic view wherein the audience holds a higher position. Frye notes that this phase has a "tendency to the moral stratification of characters" (Frye 202). The

characters are then set into categories and hierarchies in which the true lovers, the hero and heroine, reign over the story.

The sixth and last phase is the penseroso phase. This phase's key element is isolation. This phase's typical character is the hermit. It may be a lone hero battling foes, an old mage too engrossed in his studies to leave his tower or a confined heroine. To create a sense of isolation, this phase's most common settings are the mountaintop, the island, the tower, the lighthouse, and the ladder or staircase (Frye 203). For this purpose, the flood archetype is also used. The hero survives with a small group, and they begin a new life in an isolated and sheltered spot. The penseroso phase's focus on isolation allows for deep introspection and self-exploration, often leading to profound insights and moments of revelation within the narrative.

Frye's concept of the summer mythos provides an extensive insight into romance narratives. It allows for a critical analysis of literary works' use of typical characters and themes to set the specific auras of life, adventure, and romance for which such tales are known.

1.4.4 The Mythos of Autumn: Tragedy

The mythos of autumn or tragedy directly follows the mythos of summer/romance. According to Frye, tragic fiction is a set that offers a disinterested quality in literary experience. He states that it is through "the tragedies of Greek culture that the sense of the authentic natural basis of human character comes into literature" (Frye 206). Therefore, tragedy is necessary to fulfill a deep sense of humanity within a work.

Autumn is the dying stage of the seasonal calendar and parallels the protagonist's fall. The protagonists of this mythos are the typical tragic heroes, set between the divine and all

too human. They are exceptional when compared to the average individual, yet they appear diminished when placed before an audience. Consequently, they exist within the high-mimetic or low-mimetic spheres. Tragic characters typically occupy a solitary position between a higher plane of paradisal freedom and earthly bondage. They are described as "great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass" (Frye 207), confined to a restrictive plane for their greatness. An example of this is Prometheus, the tragic character who is punished and shackled to a crag for his benevolence towards humans and for giving them the virtue of fire. Subsequently, tragedy focuses solely on the individual, and said individual's fall is inevitable if he associates with a community.

Fate is a central element of this mythos. It has an unbreakable bond with the protagonist, who struggles vainly against its hold. Then fate is the primordial law in tragedy and holds the supreme rank in the hierarchy. "The tragic hero has normally had an extraordinary, often a nearly divine, destiny almost within his grasp, and the glory of that original vision never quite fades out of tragedy"; this fall from glory is the ironic cruelty of tragic fate so "while catastrophe is the normal end of tragedy, this is balanced by an equally significant original greatness, a paradise lost" (Frye 210). Therefore, the catastrophe of tragedy is the loss of destined greatness, which cannot be brought back; this loss is brought about by the hero's actions and attitude.

Another key theme in tragedy is vengeance sought after by the hero. This thirst for revenge is, as Frye states, "a central theme even in the most complex tragedies" (209). To attain this goal, the hero goes against the law of nature and fate, thus disturbing the universe's balance. This balance must right itself somehow, and the hero's fall brings it back to its original shape, showcasing "the supremacy of impersonal power and of the limitation of human effort" (209). In short, "Tragedy is a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of

rightness (the hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls)" (214). This paradox is what makes the hero's fall tragic rather than ironic.

Tragedy's six phases also concern the hero. However, the order is reversed since the first three phases align with summer mythos, in which the tragic hero starts glorious and dignified. Then, the last three phases, which align with winter mythos, show the hero's fall into irony. The first phase of tragedy depicts an innocent and courageous hero. A typical figure of this phase is what Frye calls "the calumniated woman" (219), a mother whose child's legitimacy is questioned. This woman is often the tragic hero's mother and is martyred due to these false accusations.

The second phase of tragedy is the innocent inexperience of the hero. This inexperience often leads to the loss of a youthful life. Death is then a common occurrence in this phase. This phase is then similar to the romantic one, but includes the tragic element of death. The third phase is the tragic quest theme. It is a "tragedy in which a strong emphasis is thrown on the success or completeness of the hero's achievement" (220). While heroes of romance may go through hurdle after another without high expectations and emphasis on their achievement, the heroes of tragedies are reduced to the victory they must achieve. The death-struggle or pathos comes from the hero's courage and fight for love in romance. On the other hand, the tragic pathos arises from necessity or to quench a passion for revenge.

The fourth phase is the hero's fall, which is often brought forth by the hero's hubris or hamartia. This fall shows the descent from innocence to experience and from romance to reality. Within this phase, fate catches up with the hero and invokes punishment for messing with the natural balance. Additionally, sacrifice plays an important role within the mythos, and the hero's fall may be presented as a sacrifice for the greater good. This sacrifice is not recognized in tragedy and results in punishment or death.

In the fifth phase, the heroic elements of the tale are overtaken by the ironic ones. These ironic elements are demonstrated by placing the characters in a position of lesser agency or autonomy than the audience, such as through cultural subordination. Tragedies within this phase often address existential concerns and projections of fatalism, focusing on metaphysical or theological issues rather than purely social or moral dilemmas. The last and sixth phase presents a world of shock and horror. Frye states that the central image of this phase is *Sparagmos* or mutilation. The unrestrained horrors of torture, cannibalism, and humiliation make this phase "more common as a subordinate aspect of tragedy than as its main theme, as unqualified horror or despair makes a difficult cadence" (222). Therefore, it is mostly a minor theme used for a specific purpose. Within this phase, the hero loses all aspects of heroism due to the infernal pain of *sparagmos* and usually becomes a villainous hero. Frequent settings for this phase are jails, prisons, and torture chambers.

1.4.5 Frye's Classification of Archetypes

Frye gives an in-depth categorization of the archetypes found in these mythoi. For this purpose, he categorizes archetypes as apocalyptic, demonic, or analogical. The archetypes present in Circe and Medusa's narratives primarily fit into the apocalyptic and demonic types. Subsequently, only these two categories are emphasized. Then Frye further categorizes archetypes into five worlds: the divine world, human world, animal world, vegetable world, and mineral world. The divine world is, as its name suggests, concerned with the world of divinities such as gods and demigods. The human world is concerned with human societies and characters. The animal world is concerned with any kind of animal, domesticated, savage, or monstrous. The vegetable world is about vegetation, plants, or land. The mineral world is concerned with buildings, cities, stones, and water in all its forms.

Within the apocalyptic vision, these worlds are depicted positively. The divine world features an omnipotent, all-knowing god who unites the world. The human world presents a cheerful society with a hero who fulfills readers' desires, emphasizing themes of love, friendship, and marriage. The animal world includes domesticated, gentle creatures like sheep, doves, and deer. The vegetable world evokes a pastoral atmosphere with lush gardens, groves, and parks, featuring a tree of life with powerful magic and symbolic flowers such as roses and lotus. The mineral world showcases marbled cities and temples, precious glowing stones, and gentle geometric forms like domes. The unformed world is characterized by flowing rivers, mild waterfalls, and clear bodies of water.

Within the tragic vision, these worlds display eerie and grim archetypes. The divine world contains a circle of narcissistic, despotic gods who intervene in human affairs to safeguard their prerogatives or as pawns in a sadistic game of life. They also demand sacrifice and complete obedience to their whims. The gods of Greek tragedies are a paradigmatic case. The human world is constituted of individualistic societies where tyranny and anarchy reign. The hero is isolated and turns his back on his followers, or is isolated through treason and desertion. The animal world expels beasts and monsters. Birds of prey such as ravens and vultures; predators such as wolves and mad dogs; and the famed dragons of quests. The vegetal world comprises sinister woods, carnivorous plants, and dead, barren vegetation. The mineral world is a world of deserts, ruins, and sinister caves. The geometric shapes are sharp, such as crosses and spikes. Bodies of water take form in dark, tempestuous seas, whirlpools, and rain. Awful sea creatures such as leviathans and marids

Frye's archetypal theory will then be a tool in showing how female and male mythical heroes are written differently and how themes and images akin to those used in the original myths are applied to smash preconceived ideologies that pervade myths.

1.5 Conclusion

Feminist revisionist mythology is an intricate and complex strategy that has garnered the attention of various scholars and has been vastly debated. It consists of reading myths from a female perspective, not simply to denounce the androcentric elements that they are steeped in, but to take a stance and claim ownership over the myths. Myths, despite being cultural heritage, have been male-centric for centuries and are permeated within the collective unconscious, thus possessing insidious power. Revisioning and reappropriating them with feminine perspectives sheds light on the often neglected female experiences and challenges the dominant patriarchal narratives that have historically marginalized women's voices. By reinterpreting myths through a feminist lens, feminist mythmakers seek to unearth hidden meanings, symbols, and messages that empower women and validate their roles as significant contributors to cultural and historical narratives. This process not only critiques the traditional interpretations of myths as perpetuating gender inequalities but also strives to reclaim and reframe them as vehicles for expressing diverse female identities, agency, and resilience. Thus, feminist revisionist mythology serves as a transformative tool in reshaping societal perceptions and understanding of gender roles, promoting inclusivity, and fostering a more equitable representation of women in cultural discourses.

Chapter Two: Circe's Feminist Odyssey

Introduction

Madeline Miller's *Circe* is the first text that will be explored herein. Primarily delving into the strategies of myth-smashing and myth-making (mythopoeia) that novelist Madeline Miller utilizes to modernize myths and dismantle their androcentric biases. Through these strategies, Miller reimagines and modernizes classical myths while subverting the patriarchal stereotypes that have historically marginalized female figures within these narratives. Before delving into Miller's REvision of Circe, it is crucial to showcase the witch's position in various texts. Primarily, the ancient canonical texts of Homer, Ovid, and Apollonius of Rhodes. Then, subsequent interpretations of the sorceress follow suit to demonstrate the androcentric stereotyping thrown at her. Additionally, Eudora Welty and Margaret Atwood's REvisions are discussed as the first influential REvisions of the sorceress. The coalition and exploration of these eminent texts allow for a coherent analysis of Miller's feminist revisionist mythology.

Through her creative mythopoeia, Miller allows Circe to embark on a feminine epic she has been barred from by the patriarchal writers. Campbell's monomyth and Frankel's heroine's journey which have been investigated in the previous chapter are the frameworks to explore how Miller sings Circe's epic. Campbell's monomyth showcases the major aspects heroes have to endure and prove themselves to successfully become an inspiration for bards' songs while Frankel's feminine monomyth provides the feminine perspective and heroics lacking in Campbell's theory. By combining the two, Circe's heroic journey is explored in depth from a general and feminist perspective to showcase that women are fully capable of being the center of an epic despite the restraints of male tradition.

Ultimately, this analysis seeks to demonstrate that, despite the constraints imposed by male-centric traditions, Miller's Circe successfully positions a female character at the heart of

an epic narrative. This exploration highlights the capacity of women to be central figures in mythological storytelling, offering a fresh and empowering perspective on heroism that challenges and transcends the limitations of patriarchal tradition.

2. Circe's Positions and Representations in Texts

Circe is a millennia-old character found among humanity's oldest pieces of literature. Her name, taken from the Greek "Kirke," means "hawk", alluding to a divine, powerful bird of prey (Yarnall 28). Her ancient origins have led to numerous interpretations over the centuries. Despite her powerful name and her role as the witch of Aiaia, the portrayals of Circe in literature often fall short of capturing her full grandeur. Through the following title, this study investigates the interpretations of Circe throughout time, from her first written sighting in *The Odyssey* to works of contemporary time. First, by exposing the harmful stereotypes ascribed to her in patriarchal works and then showcasing two feminist rewritings of Circe by Eudora Welty and Margaret Atwood as a juxtaposition between the androcentric texts and Miller's own feminist rewriting to portray the advancement of feminist revisionist mythology. Due to the sheer number of creations Circe appears in, this exploration will focus specifically on four key mythological texts that Miller engages with and relevant subsequent interpretations to provide a focused analysis.

2.1.1 Circe in the Original Mythical Canons

The first written account of Circe comes from Homer's *Odyssey* —Homer's second epic poem after *The Iliad*— it is estimated to have been written in the eighth century BCE, making it one of the oldest canons of Western tradition. *The Odyssey* has been a staple of Western literary tradition for centuries. Consequently, a plethora of translations have been attributed to it. For the sake of this study, three translations have been perused, Robert Fagles', Richmond

Lattimore's, and Emily Wilson's, to garner a detailed account of Circe's original self. Ultimately, Wilson's translation is the onechosen to explore due to its modern flair, faithful interpretation of Homer's simple yet emotionally complex poetry, and feminine perspective. The qualities combined allow Wilson's portrayal of Circe and Odysseus to be as faithful to the original intentions of Homer, free from further male bias. *The Odyssey* follows a non-linear chronology and narrates Odysseus's story, who also narrates some of his adventures within the narration. One of these adventures involves Circe, the witch who will become the central character in Madeline Miller's revisionist Odyssey.

Circe is first mentioned in books eight and nine of *The Odyssey;* albeit brief, these mentions hint at her prominent traits as a cunning goddess. Odysseus ties a tricky knot taught to him by the witch (Homer 8.440), then relays how she wanted to trap him as her husband to King Alcinous (9.30). Her first formal appearance is in the following book, as Odysseus recounts how he and his men disembark on the island of Aiaia, "home of the beautiful, dreadful goddess Circe" (10.130), still numb from the previous loss of their companions during their laborious voyage. Beautiful, dreadful, trickster, witch, and goddess are the circle of words Homer revolves around to describe Circe, alluding to divine beauty and wicked powers as if stating: a shame that such a beautiful woman possesses such cunning powers.

Circe is first glimpsed weaving on her loom, a traditionally feminine craft in ancient Greece, as Homer describes: "They stood outside and heard some lovely singing. It was Circe, the goddess. She was weaving as she sang, an intricate, enchanting piece of work, the kind a goddess fashions" (10.220-221). These lines depict Circe as a paradigm of femininity, performing the creative, elegant acts of weaving and singing. For Odysseus' men, who were an uninvited audience to this act of feminine inventiveness, Circe appears as a harmless, gentle woman, which prompts them to unwarily knock on her palace's door and gratefully

accept the drinks she concocts. After all, one woman could do nothing against a group of warrior men, even if she is a goddess. "Then she struck them, using her magic wand, and penned them in the pigsty. They were turned to pigs in body and voice and hair; their minds remained the same" (10.238-240). Drunk on their hostess's wine, Odysseus' men are quickly proven wrong. The goddess wastes no time proving their presumptions wrong; reduced to squealing swine, the seafarers can only screech at their new fate of rummaging through the muddy ground for food.

The transformed men return to their human bodies after Odysseus' intervention. However, Odysseus cannot beat the powerful witch alone; with the help of the messenger god Hermes, he acquires an antidote and a plan to subdue the goddess. Instructed to attack her with his sword, bed her, and force her to swear an oath (10.290), he complies and effortlessly subdues the divine being with powerful magical abilities. The ancients' testament that men's virility overtakes women even if they are fathoms more powerful than them. This one altercation frees Odysseus' men and renders the "deceitful" goddess docile as an ewe and gentle as silk. She becomes the perfect hostess and invites the seafarers to feast at her palace daily for a whole year, providing every comfort they can possibly wish for. From powerful witch to perfect hostess, Circe loses her initial edge and becomes a man's ideal of the perfect woman. Stewing in the warm, luxurious abode of the goddess, Odysseus forgets his initial goal of returning to his wife and child in Ithaca. While Odysseus gallivants in Aiaia, said wife Penelope is still warding off suitors and waiting for her husband's —who had left home twelve years prior— homecoming.

In this way, Circe is written to symbolize the dangers of overindulgence in comfort or drunkenness. Evidenced by her exemplary hosting abilities, she acts as a catalyst for the protagonist to linger in bliss, thereby forsaking his cherished objective for a duration of

twelve months. When the warrior finally decides to resume his journey, Circe extends further aid to facilitate the completion of the crew's perilous voyage. She imparts guidance and provisions to steer them towards a triumphant return home. Even upon their departure, she grants a favorable gust of wind to propel them forward, ensuring a propitious start: "Behind our dark-prowed ship, the dreadful goddess Circe sent friendly wind to fill the sails" (Homer 12.150). However, despite her benevolence and invaluable assistance, her descriptors remain the same as when she is first introduced in book ten. She is persistently characterized as dreadful, underscoring her cunning magical abilities and the patriarchal tendency to vilify powerful women.

Circe, goddess and witch, dreadful yet caring, does not possess much of a voice besides being a pitstop for Odysseus and his men. She represents male anxiety about female power, embodying the patriarchal fear that when a woman possesses power, she will turn on men. It is then the role of men to strip women of their power and set them to their 'rightful position,' laboring in the home and providing meals and comfort. This is her role in *The Odyssey:* a witch subjugated into a hostess.

Following Homer's epic, Circe has subsequent representations in various ancient texts. Among them, a crucial account of Circe is found in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (third century BCE), wherein she purifies the hero Jason and her niece Medea of the ultimate sin of murder. After witnessing the couple in a supplication pose and presenting a bloodied sword, she immediately understands that they require a cleansing rite to absolve them of the murder they committed[18]. "Therefore she respected the ordinance of Zeus, Protector of Suppliants,

[18] In Greek myths, murderers were often exiled or absolved of their crimes through cleansing libations and sacrifice. Jason and Medea committed an especially heinous murder since they killed her own brother and scattered his limbs in the sea in order to deter her father's pursuit in the most gruesome mythical magical flight.

whose anger against murderers is as great as the help he offers them, and she performed the sacrifice…" (Apollonius 115). She is methodical and precise in her application of the holy rite; she sacrifices a milk-heavy sow, soaks her supplicants' hands with its blood, makes other proprietary offerings of cakes, and prays to Zeus. Her demeanor is calm, collected, and wise. She attentively listens to the travelers' tale but also correctly deduces the gravity of the murder. Despite the grave sin committed by Jason and Medea, Circe takes them as supplicants per Zeus' bidding, wherein "it had been her habit till then to bewitch any stranger who arrived" (114). Despite her pity for Medea, she declares disapprovingly: "I shall never approve what you have plotted and your shameful flight" (116). Herein, albeit mentioned briefly, Circe's role is pivotal in this tale, since she assures the completion of their journey. If Circe had refused to perform the purifying rites, the hero and his crew would have been doomed to sail the seas for eternity. This indicates her essential position, knowledge, and power. Ultimately, Appolonius provides a brief yet insightful portrayal of the goddess that is faithful to Homer's portrayal of the goddess. Cruel to strangers yet forgiving when approached correctly, with efficient hands and a wise mind, she understands the pair's plea but still condemns the barbaric act they've committed against her brother and his son.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* contains the most renowned Roman interpretation of Circe. As its title hints, this collection of poems relays tales of mythical transformations. Circe, who is deeply linked with transformative magic —by turning men into hogs— is evidently present in these tales. However, the Roman writer's Circe differs from the one seen in *The Odyssey.* He exacerbates her position as an evil magician by intensifying her witchcraft and portraying her as a jealous sorceress. Circe expresses stereotypical feminine jealousy towards Scylla, an unwilling recipient of sea-god Glaucos's romantic interest, and punishes the woman instead of the man. Thus, Ovid's Circe constitutes and follows an age-old tradition of women written

in an androcentric lens that renders them particularly keen on inflicting harm on other women for their lovers.

Circe appears in book fourteen of *The Metamorphoses,* sought by Glaucos to craft him a love potion. However, Circe "…possessed a heart more open than others to love's strong flames" (Ovid 14.25). This single line serves as the spur for Circe to fall in love with Glaucos instantly. This immediate attraction is not mutual as the latter promptly rejects her advances. In a fit of rage, Circe turns her frustrations on the innocent involved party:

> …She vented her spleen on the girl
>
> he preferred to herself. Enraged because he had scorned her attentions,
>
> she promptly pounded together some plants which were noxious with sinister
>
> juices, and chanted the spells of her witchcraft over the mixture (14.41-44).

Circe's powers are described as sinister, obscure, and cruel, clearly intending to characterize their user as an evil sorceress. Her benevolence and assistance to Odysseus are shadowed by the evil magic that should not be permitted for women to wield. She is now an entirely dreadful, malicious Circe who uses her abilities to harm not only men but the recipient of her misguided jealousy: the archetypal evil witch.

Ovid returns to Circe in "Macareus' Story: Ulysses and Circe," wherein he details more of her witchcraft. She orders her nymphs to concoct the potion responsible for turning Odysseus' men into pigs by blending barley grains, honey, wine, curdled milk, and mysterious potent juices (14.275). Similar ingredients to the ones used in *The Odyssey,* but instead of striking them with her wand, she taps it on each man's head, swiftly metamorphosing them into swine. A more delicate yet ominous movement, demonstrating the effortlessness of her vicious powers. Her assistance to the weary crew is barely mentioned,

diminishing her role in *The Odyssey,* wherein she paves the route for the crew's safe return. Instead, another instance of her jealousy is relayed by one of her assistants.

Circe, enamored with a mortal king named Picus, is spurned again by the latter. This time, with no innocent third party present to fall victim to her dark arts, the object of her affection is transformed. Ovid further details aspects of her magic, this time intensifying the dreadful descriptives, making it sound akin to dark, forbidden magic rather than a deity's power:

> Circe was framing her prayers in sorcery's language,
> worshipping unknown gods in outlandish charms which she commonly
> used to obscure the face of a silvery moon or to weave
> a curtain of rain-sodden clouds beneath her father, the sun god.
> So it was then as she chanted her spell: the heavens were darkened,
> mist steamed up from the earth, and all the king's followers blindly
> wandered and trailed through the wood, so that none was left to protect him.
> (14.365-371)

While Homer describes Circe as the goddess who speaks human languages, Ovid strips her of her human-like characteristics and entirely focuses on her position as a witch. She speaks in a sorcerous language, invoking dark and malicious gods, despite being a goddess herself, as the daughter of the solar titan Helios. Using these dark arts, she traps the king into a doomed fate. However, unlike Scylla, his transformation is not grotesque and cruel. He is not turned into a vicious monster with raging dogs sprouting from his waist. Instead, He is transformed into a woodpecker, a brutal yet lax fate compared to Scylla's. Consequently, this displays a harshness and increased cruelty to women rather than men.

Other ancient sources mention Circe in passing, similarly to an afterthought. Most focus on her brief romance with Odysseus and attribute three sons to their coupling: Telegonus, Agrius, and Latinus (Hesiod 1011). Others assert that Telegonus is the only son born of Circe and Odysseus, and this is the case for Eugammon of Cyrene, the author of *The Telegony*. Fragments from this lost tale relay Telegonus' voyage to Ithaca to meet his long-lost father. However, far from a touching meeting, he accidentally kills the latter while plundering the shores of Ithaca. The incident happens with a poisoned spear given by his mother. Grieving and mournful, he takes late Odysseus' wife, Penelope, and son, Telemachus, with him back to Aiaia. From this meeting, Circe marries Telemachus, and Telegonus marries Penelope, constructing a bizarrely complicated family tree as is wont of Greek myths.

Circe's influence does not merely rest in ancient texts, which are classics yet antediluvian and blurred. She remains an inspiration even in recent times; some of the most pertinent modern works are explored in the following title.

2.1.2 Subsequent Interpretations and Misrepresentations

Judith Yarnall, in her book *Transformations of Circe*, details multiple interpretations of Circe, comparing how she has been portrayed throughout time. Circe, as "the female figure who possesses the ability to transform, to give shape to others or to take it away," is paradoxically transformed, given shape, and unraveled in turn by male imagination (7). She is reduced to a wicked, lascivious sorceress not only by prominent Roman writers but also by church fathers such as Clement in the third century and St. Augustine in the fifth century, who lock her in the mold of evil seductress and claim that her powers are limited and vapid compared to the wondrous potency of christian revelations (94). These Roman poets and

church fathers have deprived Circe of any complexity and reduced her to a one-dimensional representation of female sin and unnatural female dominion over men.

The portrayal of Circe by Roman writers and church fathers is carried into the Renaissance period, the applauded culmination of Western art and creativity. Circe is no stranger to this flamboyant movement, but is displayed as a lurking evil witch representing the paradigm of female vice. Since this period's artists are fascinated by mythology, it is evident that such a mysterious and fascinating character as Circe is involved in the inspiring mythological tradition. Yarnall confirms Renaissance artists' penchant for the Roman transfiguration of Circe, opposite to Homer's more complex portrayal:

> If we compare ancient and Renaissance allegorical readings of the Circe myth we are struck by the proportionately greater emphasis Renaissance interpreters placed on Circe's alluring lasciviousness and by their lesser emphasis on Odysseus as representing the triumph of reason (126).

Throughout these various reinterpretations, Circe thus progressively becomes the archetype of the predatory woman, the wicked witch, and the dangerous femme fatale as men write about her. Rare instances portray her as the intelligent magician she is, but as already stated, they are quite sparse. Out of the roles she holds in *The Odyssey*, sinister witch, Odysseus's lover, generous hostess, and wise mentor, later interpretations' focus lies on the first one, and they mutate the second role into one of depravity and sordid lust.

Others do not mention her overtly, but highly indicate to her. Spenser's *Faery Queene* contains a character who is reminiscent of the goddess. Acrasia is the villainess of book two, a lustful sorceress who transforms her paramours who have lost their spark into animals, reminiscent of the mythical sorceress known for her transformation magic. James Joyce's Bella Cohen in *Ulysses'* fifteenth episode "Circe" is the seductress who lures Joyce's

Odysseus, Leonard Bloom. This Circe is "a massive whoremistress" (qtd. in Yarnall 175). Her palace is replaced by a brothel, and her wand is replaced by a black horn fan, a different instrument with a similar purpose, nonetheless. It represents the unnatural dominant woman who utilizes phallic tools. Albeit complex and robust, Joyce's *Ulysses* does not truly dedicate the eponymous episode to the person it is named after. Bella is simply the recipient of Leopold's hallucinations and repressed desires.

Yarnall asserts that despite the multiplicity of interpretations, Circe has had no voice but has instead been stifled, restricted, and limited in a case where men find comfort in trapping her within. As women have finally gained the right to have a say in the classics, they have turned to Circe and her mysterious presence and past. Aiming to fill the gaps purposefully left empty by men, they write to give her a voice and perspective.

Eudora Welty's 1955 short story "Circe" transforms and gives shape to the goddess in a concrete manner. The tale from *The Odyssey*'s tenth book is flipped into the witch's perspective. She watches from her loom as the sailors disembark on her shores; unlike the original work, she is not unaware or avoidant of the men's presence. She does not wait for a knock on the door but swings it open, ominously welcoming them with full intent to transform them into swine (Welty 43). The question of why she transforms men into pigs is not overtly answered but vaguely alluded to in her disdain at their frail mortality. Odysseus' name is scarcely mentioned in this short tale (only mentioned twice, to be precise) as if refusing to let him take hold of the story; this is Circe's tale now, after all.

This Circe basks in divinity. She feels the throngs of her powers yet grows ennui-ed of her unchanging days and her immortality, which rejects change despite her powers' strong ties to it. From Odysseus, she seeks a mystery only mortals hold; she is a mystery to others, but mortals are also mysteries to her. She expresses that "[t]here exists a mortal mystery, that,

if I knew where it was, I could crush like an island grape. Only frailty, it seems, can divine it —and I was not endowed with that property" (44). This immunity to frailty bears loneliness, the other side of the immortality coin. It shows a side of Circe never seen before, powerful yet lonesome. It also mentions the ungratefulness of the sailors who roamed her abode for an entire year; for them, a woman —even a goddess— hosting and providing meals is simple nature not work that should be appreciated, "I'd made them younger, too, while I was about it. But tell me of one that appreciated it! Tell me one now who looked my way until I had brought him his milk and figs" (45); "They carried off their gifts from me—all unappreciated, unappraised" (46). These lines showcase the male assumption that favors carried by women are merely the natural order of life. Men are powerful heroes, and women are their aids and shadows who deserve no thanks. Welty's Circe is the first spring breeze into the barren winter plains of Circe's vapid, degrading interpretations.

Another vital account of Circe appears in Margaret Atwood's "Circe/Mud Poems" (1974). These poems tap into the complex feelings of the goddess, mostly anger. Ostriker states that Circe, "who throughout Western literature represents the evil magic of female sexuality, is transformed in Margaret Atwood's 'Circe/Mud Poems' into an angry but also quite powerless woman" (78). Her island is not the lush Mediterranean land, green and lively with animals —transformed men or not— imagined in preceding works, but "burned and sparse" (Atwood 46). Aiaia is an extension of Circe, symbolizing her fatigue and exasperation at the immeasurable days that repeat themselves repeatedly. In this vein, she states:

> Men with the heads of eagles
>
> no longer interest me
>
> or pig-men, or those who can fly

(…)

All these I could create, manufacture,

or find easily: they swoop and thunder

around this island, common as flies. (47)

These animals all represent previous lovers who have been transformed, not by her fault, but "they happened because [she] did not say anything" (48). Her inability to have a voice or to voice what is within is not a fault of hers. Therefore, it is not her fault that these transformations happened. It is the blaring of patriarchy and the androcentric belief that women's voices do not matter that mutes the voice within. Atwood's poems allow this voice to be free at last: angry, scathing, and exasperated.

2.2 Madeline Miller's Reimagining of Circe

The most extensive English portrayal of Circe comes from classicist Madeline Miller, who consecrates an entire novel to her. Her Magnum Opus saw light seven years after her debut work, *The Song of Achilles,* published in 2011, which was itself published after ten years of grappling with the appropriate way to represent the ancient figures of Patroclus and Achilles. Despite an initial fear of revisioning the classics due to the restrictive nature of the domain, she went on to craft two of the most acclaimed Greek mythology novels.

While she describes *The Song of Achilles* as a retelling of the original story from a different perspective, she confesses that her initial description of *Circe* as a retelling is erroneous since she REvisions and REimagines her story previously vapid and empty outside of any relations with Odysseus (Miller, "Interview with Madeline Miller"). This restriction of feminine characters in epics deeply frustrates her, especially regarding Circe, since she attracted her child self's attention only to be sorely disappointed at the lack of concrete

character identity. As she grew up, she discovered that Circe is overlooked beyond Homer's work and states:

> [Circe] is such an interesting character, and she had been unfairly treated. Odysseus, who is telling the story in the original text, speaks about her in a very objectifying way: he is constantly talking about how beautiful she is and how mysterious she is. But he never reflects on her reasons for doing anything. I wanted to say more about her: who is Circe? Why is she turning men into pigs? (Miller, "The depth of myths")

Miller's Novel is an answer to these questions. Akin to a bildungsroman, she explores the character from childhood and through various stages of life, her encounters, relationships, and most importantly, her reclaiming her agency. For this purpose, Miller's foundations rest on four ancient mythological urtexts: Homer's *Odyssey,* Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica,* Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* and the lost epic *The Telegony.* Therefore, "Everything else is invention and extrapolation" (Miller, "Interview with Madeline Miller"). With these four mythological texts, Miller effectively uses the feminist revisionist strategies of myth-smashing and myth-making. First, she deconstructs the nefarious aspects of these myths. Then, she partakes in the art of mythopoeia*,* actively crafting an epic for Circe through the use of gynocentric symbolism.

Within this title, Madeline Miller's use of this strategy of myth-smashing and myth-making is analyzed to underscore the deconstruction of harmful stereotypes surrounding the character and the use of mythopoeia to build the character's agency.

2.2.1 Challenging Foundations of Myth and Enacting Mythopoeia

Before embarking on the myth-smashing and myth-making Miller enacts in her novel with the four foundational mythical texts mentioned above, a discussion of the backstory

Miller provides for Circe is necessary, since it stands as the first form of criticism of patriarchal elements. No previous texts have delved into Circe's childhood and living conditions with the gods. No writer has sought the reasons of how and why she landed in Aiaia besides some vague assumptions. The first act of myth-making is in providing this vital background, within it, Miller smashes the adjectives Circe has been described as for centuries.

2.2.1.1 Defying the Patriarchal Patterns in Youth

Circe takes reign of her story by claiming authority and agency through recounting her tale, similar to Odysseus in *The Odyssey.* While she is merely a stepping stone in the original, she is now the protagonist and the adventurer going on her odyssey. However, instead of homecoming, she seeks independence, freedom, and agency. She begins her epic with the conditions of her birth: "WHEN I WAS BORN, the name for what I was did not exist. They called me nymph, (…) That word, nymph, paced out the length and breadth of our futures. In our language, it means not just goddess, but *bride*" (Miller 1). The emphasis on the last word reports the real meaning attributed to nymphs. In the hierarchy of Greek gods, nymphs sit at the lowest rank, not just brides but perpetual victims of male aggression and female jealousy. They are meant to be brides, not in the matrimonial sense but in a proprietary sense; they are objects for the gods and even mortals to claim, often forcefully. Thus, starting her tale with this exclamation is her first step to deconstructing androcentric ideals by exposing them to the reader as harmful gender norms that restrict not only herself but also her peers.

In the same vein, Circe's mother, a naiad[19], daughter of Oceanos, is an object to claim as stated by her own father, "My daughter Perse. She is yours if you want her" (Miller 2).

[19] Naiads are nymphs guardians of bodies of fresh water such as fountains, rivers, and wells.

Unlike the primary meaning of the word nymph, Perse has to bargain to be an actual bride. She lays these conditions, "[i]t is marriage (…) or nothing. And if it is marriage, be sure: you may have what girls you like in the field, but you will bring none home, for only I will hold sway in your halls" (2). This instantly demonstrates that a nymph is not synonymous with the traditional sense of bride unless she actively fights for it. Marriage is the fate pronounced to Circe at her birth, too, as she exposes the androcentric restraints of her kind. Her birth as a girl displeases her mother; as a consolation, she aims to have her married off to a god. However, her hopes are crushed when Helios announces her possible future marriage to a mortal prince. Due to this, she sees no worth in Circe and declares, "[l]et us make a better one" (4). Circe's fate is assumed from her birth as a nymph. She is to be a token of ownership, one that is not even fit enough to be owned by a god or a god's descendant. Thus, she instantly becomes an abhorred object, cast aside to gather dust in her father's obsidian halls.

She grows up in this fashion, ignored and disliked, primarily for her squeaky voice. This squeaking voice is taken from Homer's description of "the beautiful, dreadful goddess Circe, who speaks in human languages" (Homer 10.130). Miller is attracted by this aspect of speaking in human languages and its meaning. Thus, she decides to make it a focal aspect of the goddess and attributes it as possessing a human voice opposite to a divine voice. Miller then enacts mythopoeia by expanding on a seemingly nugatory aspect of the witch. The short description Homer attributes to Circe is the first ground for myth-mashing and myth-making to create a gynocentric story of the character.

The first act of myth-smashing is dismantling the qualities most associated with her in *The Odyssey.* The beautiful goddess with glossy braids is not present in her childhood; she is as "ugly as a goat," and "her hair is streaked like a lynx" (3). Among mortals, she is a brilliant

being of beauty, but among gods, she is an ugly duckling, showcasing a paradox of beauty standards. This interpretation challenges Homer's Circe, who is described as a thing of beauty before anything else. As Miller states in the interview with Mélina Juin, Odysseus objectifies Circe and binds her to her beauty. By stripping this restraint, Miller invites the audience to shift their attention to Circe's inner workings, transforming the objectifying gaze into a curious and understanding gaze.

Her younger siblings Pasiphae and Perses partake in ridiculing her and voicing aloud every other god's thoughts, "[h]er eyes are yellow as piss. Her voice is screechy as an owl. She is called Hawk, but she should be called Goat for her ugliness" (6). These descriptors are taken and transmuted from previous ones she has been addressed by. Her glowing eyes that "threw out into the far distance sparkling rays which glittered like gold" (Apollonius 116) are now "yellow as piss." Her voice that speaks human languages is now "screechy as an owl." Her divine beauty is now a 'goat's ugliness.' By disrupting these descriptions and utilizing them to provide a background, Miller challenges the patriarchal stereotypes associated with Circe in favor of giving her depth and complexity. Circe does not fit the standards set by the divine patriarchal elite, and through this, Miller exposes the realities of women who do not or cannot conform to strict beauty standards.

Circe is portrayed as a lonely yet self-sufficient child who is the scapegoat of the gods' casual cruelty. The dread goddess with awesome power described by Homer is not present in this first part of her life. She is considered weak and useless in the divine halls, but despite her less-than-ideal situation, she is kind and warm. When Prometheus is brought into her father's halls for punishment and torture, she is the only one who attempts to talk with the forsaken titan. This interaction, short as it was, remains a core memory for Circe. The wonder of a god walking purposefully to the downfall he self-prophesied for the sake of mere mortals

is unbelievable for the arrogant gods, even to humble Circe, who thinks it is "madness to invite divine punishment" (18). This short scene is a pure act of myth-making. Miller conjures a meaningful scene and story out of the small link between the two characters. Through mythical genealogy, Miller invokes a logical and purposeful meeting between the two characters ("Madeline Miller with Dr. Kevin Kalish", 00:25:27-00:24:50). She attributes another link between the two, one that the other gods severely lack, which is empathy towards mortals. This shared trait is a foundational ground for the development of Circe's character throughout the novel.

Circe has been portrayed as a cruel, despicable sorceress by the majority of male writers who attempt to describe her. In Miller's novel, she shows a gentle temperament, which intensifies when she raises her newborn brother Aeëtes, abandoned by their mother for his lack of prophecy and bountiful future. Another child without a glorious future for his mother to brag about is cast away as useless. In this sense, Circe finds a peer, someone rejected like her. She, the hawk, and he, the eagle, are siblings who cohabit and care for each other. For the first time since her birth, she feels true love and affection, and "[h]e seemed to love [her] back, that was the greatest wonder" (23). The sole act of having a relative who seemed to care for her as much as she cared for them manifests her first bouts of joy. This period of happiness is short-lived and delusory since her brother ages up quickly, becomes a respected member of the family, and leaves to establish his ideal kingdom. He remains a god and will always seek privilege and a ruler's comfort before anything else, even his begging sister. This is another instance of mythopoeia as Miller delves into Circe's place as a sister, which has scarcely been discussed before. Besides the betrayal of Medea in *The Argonautica,* Circe does not show a thought for her brother; she is simply a lone figure on an isle full of beasts and transformed animals for company. In Miller's mythopoeia, there is a complex sibling

bond between the caretaking sister and the independent brother, which gives both characters a depth they have lacked throughout their various interpretations.

By allowing Circe to tell the tale of her youth, Miller exposes the patriarchal restrictions women face from childhood. As if cursed at birth, they are forced to conform to restrictive norms that only benefit men in power. By deconstructing and building upon what Circe has always been described as, Miller actively myth-smashes patriarchal stereotypes to replace them with gynocentric symbols. She exposes the androcentric constraints of beauty standards and women's objectification. Consequently, the shallow descriptors of Circe as a dreadful, beautiful goddess are turned into a relevant story of the struggle of growing up in a patriarchal environment but standing strong in front of them with feminine empathy and kindness.

2.2.1.2 Debunking Ovid's Jealous Witch

When Pasiphaë is married off to King Minos, Aeëtes leaves to establish his own kingdom while Perses leaves for Babylon. With this development, Circe is back to her childhood self, alone and forgotten like a pebble in her father's abode. Loneliness scratches at her more intensely than ever before as she declares: "I sat on the rocks and thought of the stories I knew of nymphs who wept until they turned into stones and crying birds, into dumb beasts and slender trees (…) I could not even do that, it seemed. My life closed me in like granite walls" (29). This is a far cry from the mysterious, collected goddess or the evil, lascivious witch. Her first thoughts of transformation are not of turning every man into a pig or every woman who angers her into a horrid monster. She is a saddened, self-deprecating nymph who laments an inability to transform into a river or tree, into a tragedy manifest.

Shortly after this desperate yearning for transformation, a pivotal character from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is introduced: Glaucos, the sea god with whom Circe was enamored. She seems to have the same disposition to have a heart more open to love's strong flames as Ovid's Circe. However, it is shown as a clear repercussion of entrenched loneliness and an acute want to escape her daily reality. Her mother's jabs became "like bees without a sting" (35), and her father's dismissive self-importance turned insignificant. Unlike Ovid's tale, Glaucos does not seek this Circe for a love potion. Quite the opposite, she is the first to approach him, who is not yet immortal. To quench a need for connection, she meets the sailor daily, absorbing his stories and holding long conversations. Circe is happy with this until the realization comes that, as a mortal, he, too, will be gone one day, leaving her alone again. Unlike the hate-filled transformations she performs in *The Metamorphoses,* the first transformation she performs is out of love, desperation, and defiance of the gods' rules.

To perform this transformation, she seeks the plants Aeëtes called pharmaka, potent with magic and hope, and bids the mortal to lie in a field of these plants awaiting a swift transmutation. However, what the mind concocts does not always come to fruition. The initial hope shifts into more profound desperation as she laments, "[t]he tears of those of naiad blood can flow for eternity, and I thought it might take an eternity to speak all my grief. I had failed" (42). At the height of despair, she tears up the potent flowers, stems from roots, petals from stems, until a humming sensation whispers the plants' secrets to her. The potency resides in the sap is what the hidden knowledge of her blood instructs. She follows suit and discovers her magical prowess.

Replacing the mysterious aura of vague cruelty and jealousy-induced rage from the previous interpretations of Circe is a kaleidoscope of emotions. This Circe is enamored, hopeful, desperate, enraged, and grief-stricken. This is a testament that to transform is to be

transformed. The introduction of her abilities is not the breezy sense of sudden power most gods receive or unexplained knowledge male writers have not deigned to uncover. She goes through trials, errors, and the emotions that come with them. This first transformation is the first sense of power for Circe, who always believed herself useless, proving that her feelings, too, result in transformations. The contrast between the Circe in Ovid's poems and Miller's Circe is striking. The former stands as a shallow stereotype of the jealous, wicked witch, while the latter is complex and fleshed out.

The newly transformed Glaucos, sea-god Glaucos, is an instant fit with the gods and nymphs. They attribute his new form to the fates[20], not suspecting Circe in the slightest. Glaucos's integration with the gods is quick and smooth; he now "laugh[es] like [her] uncles did, open-mouthed and roaring" (45). As one of the greater gods, the woman he must marry must be equal to his greatness in beauty, and that is not Circe. The latter, who has been believing that Glaucos' feelings were equal to hers the entire time, is back to her whirlpool of shock, grief, and desperation when she hears the news that he seeks to marry the nymph Scylla.

Unlike Ovid, Miller sets a chain of cause and consequence for the horrific transformation of Scylla, not out of unbridled jealousy but misguided jealousy that is the result of a loss of culminated hopes. Scylla is not the scared nymph who swims away from Glaucos; she is "beautiful Scylla, dainty-does Scylla, Scylla with her viper heart" (48). She is sneering Scylla, who does not even love Glaucos but revels in Circe's jealousy. Ovid's transformation of Scylla is the second transformation Circe seeks since she "thought if only

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[20] The fates, or the moirai, are a set of three sisters who weave the threads of life. Each thread represents a life, and each sister has a function. Clotho is the spinner, Lachesis is the measurer, and Atropos is the one who cuts the thread. In the case of Glaucos, the gods believe that the fates have decided to turn his thread divinely golden instead of cutting it short.

she were gone, it would change everything" (48). However, in this novel, Circe does not seek to turn Scylla into a beast but an ugly nymph, uglier than 'goat Circe' to everyone in the court. Circe pounds the potent flowers with the thought that "[t]he halls would echo with [Scylla's] furious screams and the great gods would come to whip [her], but [she] would welcome them, for every lash upon [her] skin would be only further proof to Glaucos of [her] love" (48). The ultimate reason for this transformation remains the same: Glaucos' refusal of her attentions, but with the context Miller provides, Circe is not a stereotypical jealous and raging witch anymore.

Again, the plan Circe concocts in her mind goes awry. This time, it derails entirely out of her control. Scylla is not an ugly nymph —but as her aunt Selene, the moon, recounts— a horrific monster with six heads, each filled with gaping teeth, slimy tentacles, and dogs' howling. The lashes she expects do not come, and Glaucos remains indifferent to her. The other gods are not affronted at Scylla's transformation, seeking retribution. Quite the opposite, it is a sport, a tale spun on their tongues and woven with mocking laughter. Their solipsism and cruelty deeply disturb Circe. Her core memory of Prometheus strikes back; his line that "not every god need be the same" (18) is now "not all gods need be the same" (52). This small change represents Circe's disillusionment with her family and surroundings; they are all the same evil, arrogant deities. Now she seeks the lashes, not for Glaucos' love, but for repentance, for thinking like them and venting her spleen on Scylla. Ovid's short tale that inspired these events is, in turn, modified. With a feminine perspective and feminine mythopoeia, Miller successfully myth-smashes the negative portrayal of Ovid's Circe. From the acts of an evil witch to the acts of an emotionally complex woman who feels human emotions and seeks to bear the consequences of her actions.

2.2.1.3 The Cycle of the Hero's Aid

Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* is the second body of myth Miller uses and deconstructs to perform the act of feminist revisionism. Jason and Medea appear on Circe's island to be purified, slowly moving towards her gracefully and surely, with heads lowered. The first change Miller applied is the way in which Circe is found. Apollonius's Circe is soaking in flowing salt waters, cleansing herself from a bloody nightmare she had the night before. Miller's Circe is not introduced in the same ominous manner; quite the opposite; she is picking strawberries in an area overlooking the harbor. The mysterious, ominous, and nonchalant Circe in *The Argonautica* is replaced by a fretting Circe, nervous yet pleased for the sudden visitors.

The visitors kneel and ask for catharsis; the rite performed to purify supplicants who have committed a great sin. Miller's focus is not on the rite or the crime of the pair but on the relationship between aunt and niece, which is not truly explored in the myth. Medea, in Apollonius' epic, is a submissive, tearful, and frail maiden, a description which is not befitting of her nefarious actions in Euripides' play. In *Circe,* Medea displays strength and astuteness from the moment she first steps into Aiaia since "… she walk[s] like a queen of the gods" (143). This Medea displays a doting submission to Jason only and does not cower in front of her aunt or the potential cruel punishment of her father. "She serve[s] [Jason] first, offering him the most tender morsels, urging bite upon bite" (144) and exalts his exploits while he "d[oes] not thank Medea for her aid; he scarcely look[s] at her. As if a demigoddess saving him at every turn [is] only his due" (146). Through Circe's observation, Miller exposes the selfishness and unappreciative attitude of male heroes who are put on a pedestal by gender norms. Patriarchy dictates that they are stronger and thus deserving of any aid from

women, hence the lack of positive descriptions of women's efforts in myth. The relationship between Medea and Jason is reminiscent of Circe and Glaucos'. Circe, who has been in the same shoes—or sandals, more accurately—stands as the woman who has gained wisdom through experience and offers counsel to a fellow victim of these gender norms. So, she predicts a grim future for the deluded niece and invites her to stay in Aiaia to practice the arts of magic together.

The Medea of *The Argonautica* might have accepted this proposition gladly since she expresses bitter regret for leaving her land and family behind (Apollonius 123). This Medea is the opposite. She shows no regret or tears. When asked if she feels any remorse, she declares: "I suppose I could weep and rub my eyes to please you, but I choose not to live so falsely" (147). Clearly a far cry from Apollonius' weeping maiden, Medea only takes on this persona for Jason's sake since "[t]his [is] a more pleasing tale: the princess swooning at his feet, forswearing her cruel father to be with him" (145). No hero would accept to be shadowed by a maiden, no matter how powerful she may be. Circe is a witness to this sad dynamic, and her pity is directed at her niece's willful surrender to androcentric ideals rather than the pair's perilous voyage. She expresses, "[n]ow that I kn[o]w who she [is], such meekness look[s] absurd on her, like a great eagle trying to hunch down to fit inside a sparrow's nest" (145). This reimagining of the cleansing rites primarily displays Circe as a witness, a spectator with experience predicting the future fall of another woman too fixed in a man's servitude to pick up undeniable signs that such devotion lacks reciprocity. This novel perspective is a testament to women's cycle of unappreciated sacrifice.

Circe attempts to thwart this cycle by suggesting that Medea stay on the island. However, it is not solely out of sheer pity nor benevolent familial kindness. Medea is quick to understand the reason behind the offered help. She expresses: "You do not know me for an

afternoon, yet you are scrabbling to keep me. You claim you want to help me, but who do you really help?" She divulges that the one Circe intends to help is not her poor, misguided niece but her own self, "who stinks of her loneliness" (150). Circe seeks a person to pass her lonesome exile days with, and Medea refutes it, stating, "I will not sentence myself to such a living death" (150). While the original encounter of the pair with Circe is not of much importance to the witch, the one Miller reimagines is crucial for her development. The naming of her restless feelings causes her to see her loneliness hang from everything, "clinging like spiderwebs, unavoidable" and "that old sickening feeling returned: that every moment of my life I had been a fool" (155). Thus, Miller takes the ancient myth, dismantling, deconstructing, and dislocating it to reveal the feminine voices hidden behind the rolling boulders of a hero's tale. Circe does not simply perform a rite. Even if she does so skillfully and wisely, she learns about her family and herself. Notably, the delusions she veiled her mind with to deny her cruel eternal punishment.

2.2.1.4 Switching From Odysseus' to Circe's Perspective

A pivotal shift occurs when Odysseus' ship disembarks in Aiaia's harbor. The disassembling of Circe's core from the work wherein she is most known. Circe, the dread goddess with the glorious braids from *The Odyssey,* is now a lonesome witch who has fallen victim to male violence and seeks protective retribution. By the time Odysseus' sailors arrive and are transformed into pigs, this spell has been a repeated practice, rolling off easily and practically. Circe, who has always been fascinated with mortals, cannot remain immune to the curse of her kind, even as the sun's daughter. Nymphs, brides, and perpetual victims of male aggression, whether from gods or mortals, always bear the high price for simply existing. She says so herself: "Brides, nymphs were called, but that is not really how the world saw us. We

were an endless feast laid upon a table, beautiful and renewing. And so very bad at getting away" (171). For the patriarchy, Circe has served her purpose of being (an unwilling) feast. However, she does not transform into a tree or a mourning river as she previously deplored. She is well past dwelling on every aggression committed against her through grief and tears. She has developed her powers with her own hands by connecting with Aiaia's forest, not shying away from trials and errors, and vigorously practicing. She is not bad at getting away now. It is the sailors who are so very bad at remaining human. Through this traumatic experience of Circe, Miller answers her childhood self's questions of "Why did she turn men into pigs?" Simply assuming that she did it out of pure female perversion is the reason men have contented, but from a logical and feminine perspective, this reasoning is empty and meaningless.

Margaret Atwood's Circe declares that these transformations are no fault of hers, and so does Miller's Circe. These transformations are protective spells. After her first encounter with the pirates, she can clearly see the wicked thoughts that rise within them upon the realization that she is a lone woman. Even as a goddess, she must stand no chance against a crew of men, for surely women remain weaker than men, no matter the circumstances. Their transformation then comes as retribution for holding these thoughts and underestimating her. Circe declares: "When I passed back by the pen, [they] would stare at me with pleading faces. They moaned and squealed (…) We are sorry, we are sorry. Sorry you were caught, I said. Sorry that you thought I was weak, but you were wrong" (171). In *The Odyssey* and other androcentric interpretations, Circe has had no say on why and how she did anything, her entire being merely an assumption and an object to be used by the hero. From a feminine perspective, Circe is no longer an object but a powerful woman who seeks revenge for being treated as such.

Chapter Two: Circe's Feminist Odyssey

When *The Odyssey's* events unfold, and the party of men is turned into pigs, Circe is not a groveling weak woman in front of Odysseus, nor is he an example of male virility threatening her with his mighty phallic sword. Circe dismantles that portrayal by narrating her tale and, therefore, denying the androcentric aspects assigned to not only her but Odysseus. Miller allows Circe to directly comment on how she has been written by male writers as she states: "I [am] not surprised by the portrait of myself: the proud witch undone before the hero's sword, kneeling and begging for mercy. Humbling women seems to me a chief pastime of poets. As if there can be no story unless we crawl and weep" (181). The last line is particularly true for women who have potential and power. To undermine and understate the power they hold, male writers turn these women into submissive maidens who adoringly and willingly subjugate themselves to the hero's mightier prowess.

In her interview for Chicago's Humanities Festival, Miller declares her insistence on restricting Odysseus to the restraints he has shackled Circe with while writing this novel. She keeps the basic structure of his meeting with Circe but changes some aspects since the tale of Circe is narrated by Odysseus and not the original narrator of the epic. Her narrative of Circe and Odysseus's meeting is free of his "total self-aggrandizement" ("Madeline Miller: Circe", 00:31:35). Thus, Circe is not flattened by male heroic tradition. To deconstruct this ancient tradition of stealing women's agency to strengthen men's, Miller deconstructs the overly masculine and androcentric features of Odysseus. He is not the classic hero, with a sword in hand, who jumps at the opportunity to make women crawl and weep. Miller's Odysseus is a testimony that "even the best iron grows brittle with too much beating" (Miller 189). He is witty, intelligent, and strategic, but also extremely exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally as a result of the long ten-year war against Troy and his losses against the monsters he encountered afterward.

The scene where the hero subdues the evil witch with his righteous and purifying sword does not happen. Odysseus declares, "I hope we may settle this with reason" as "He … put[s] the goblet down. He [does] not draw his sword, but his hand rest[s] on the hilt" (177). Circe is not the frightened and begging maiden who quivers at the sight of a sword but a woman who, through experience and age, does not cower anymore. She states, "[w]eapons do not frighten me, nor the sight of my own blood" (177). Save for the goddesses with perceived masculine skills —primarily Athena and Artemis— and the Amazons, women in myths do not stand bravely defiant in front of men but bend the knee as their aid or maiden in distress. For the hero to shine and boast of their exploits, these women must dim their light from overtaking their male counterparts. The manner in which Miller presents the relationship of Medea and Jason is the paradigm of this androcentric tradition.

Miller not only smashes the subjugation of women in myth but also adds depth and a logical streak. Odysseus, well known for his wit, originally dutifully adheres to Hermes' plan. However, in *Circe,* he is careful and does not drink the witch's offered wine even if he has the moly. When questioned on why he did not do so despite Hermes' assurance that her powers would be rendered useless, he states, "… I have a quirk for prudence in me that's hard to break. The trickster lord, for all I am grateful to him, is not known for his reliability. Helping you turn me into a swine would be just his sort of jest" (177-78). These small changes bear great results; Odysseus has more depth and character; he is not simply a man with uncanny wit but prudent and calculating, working with a strategist's trade tools. Instead of being a man who strictly adheres to the male heroic tradition, he is careful and non-dismissive of women's capabilities.

The confrontation between Circe and Odysseus is layered and encompassing; the pair are at a stalemate for both have something at stake as the goddess boldly says: "Then, Prince

Odysseus, we are at an impasse. For you have the moly, and I have your men. I cannot harm you, but if you strike at me, they will never be themselves again" (178). The two stand as equals, not seeking to subdue the other but coming to an agreement as they both acknowledge the other's strength. Circe eventually agrees to swear the binding oath on the river Styx[21] as she concludes that he is "a knife still. I did not care. I thought: give me the blade. Some things are worth spilling blood for" (179). The blood she spills in the end is the dwindling hope for Odysseus to remain on her island. As seasons pass, Odysseus remains at her side, but Ithaca remains at a distance, calling for him and his men, "That word between us, *Ithaca*, like the breaking of a spell" (193). During this idyll, Odysseus spills his entire story, Ithaca, the blood-soaked plains of Troy, and the horrors he faced during his voyage. However, Circe keeps her own tales locked, not voicing her struggles and feats. This shows the link Miller instills between *Circe* and *The Odyssey.* Odysseus does not relay much about the witch, not due to a lack of depth on her part but due to her veiling it behind a perfect front to perform the act of self-healing.

In order to let that game of pretend continue, Circe tries in vain to keep the hero within the island by showing him all its wonders and giving him tasks to fulfill his restless spirit. These attempts are not described in *The Odyssey*. However, Odysseus states, "Circe, the trickster, trapped me, and she wanted me to be her husband" (Homer 9.32-34). This displays the androcentric tendency of heroic narratives. Circe, despite holding the role of host instead of jailor, is described in the same way as Calypso, the nymph who forces Odysseus to remain on her island for seven years. Miller dismantles Odysseus' narration and displays Circe's

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[21] In Homer's works, an oath on the Styx is considered the most binding oath one can swear since even the god Zeus cannot retract his words once making that oath. In Hesiod's *Theogony,* the stated retributions for breaking that oath are to be rendered insensitive for a year and banished from divine society for nine years.

acquiescence to Odysseus' departure despite her anger: "My anger drained away. He was not my adversary. His road would be hard enough without the hurt we might do each other" (202). She then soothes him and helps him prepare for his departure as she does in *The Odyssey,* without any tricks or forceful attempts to trap him on her island.

After his departure, the keepsakes from Odysseus are tales of the world, its beauties and cruelties, but one thing she takes by herself is the child conceived without his knowledge. Miller has Circe craft her own contraception with her witchcraft and silphium[22], which is an interesting detail befitting an independent witch and demonstrating the use of contraceptives in ancient times. Circe could have conceived a child way earlier, but she only decides to bear one before Odysseus gets to leave her shores for eternity, not for anyone else but herself. The story of this child's birth might have been present in lost fractions of *The Telegony,* but the few remaining ones show no trace of it. Most of the epic may have been lost to time, but Miller's mythopoeia fills these gaps while smashing ancient patriarchal ideas. With myth-smashing comes myth-making, and the myth Miller crafts truly reaches an epic height during the birth and rearing of Telegonus.

2.2.1.5 Building a Gynocentric Epic

Miller states, "[e]pic poetry always centers on traditionally male stories, war, inheritance, death. But one of the most epic things I can imagine is birth —which has been excluded from epic poetry because it's traditionally female" ("Interview with Madeline Miller"). She then proves that birth and pregnancy deserve to be crucial parts of epics. By using the lack of content in *The Telegony*, she develops the epic aspects of motherhood.

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[22] Silphium is a, now extinct, plant that used to grow in the ancient city of Cyrene a Greek city-state in modern-days Libya. John M. Riddle and J. Worth Estes state that the plant has been used by ancient Greeks and Romans as an anti-fertility drug.

Besides extremely scarce figures such as Demeter, motherhood has been a disregarded aspect of myths. Other myths, such as Zeus' birth of Athena, steal the feminine power of birth to serve patriarchal purposes. By swallowing Metis and giving birth to Athena from his head, he claims the power of life for himself by snuffing out the mother. Women, then, are forced to be mothers but remain underestimated for it; its power can only be demonstrated when the patriarchal god does it. Additionally, the patriarch is the one who permits the return of Demeter's daughter, further undermining the strength of motherhood. Miller's epic depiction of motherhood is a boulder thrown at this tower of patriarchal denigration of the feminine.

Telegonus wreaks havoc in his mother's belly as if foreshadowing the storm that will fall upon Circe once he is born. As soon as Odysseus' anchor had lifted, she states: "I, who had never been sick in my life, now was sick every moment. I heaved until my throat was torn, my stomach rattling like an old nut, my mouth cracked at its corner" (209). The epic tale of motherhood does not start at the birth of a child but at these first instants of illness. The hold pregnancy toils have over Circe is especially strong; she passes her entire pregnancy in pain as if holding the entire world's storms within her. "*You are for* me" she tells the unborn child. For him, she is willing to face anything, for he is her beloved son, but also what she has always sought: "the solitude that would never be loneliness again" (210). Thus, she bears on with her arduous pregnancy, but childbirth is not any easier. By writing motherhood in epic form, Miller "create[s] a female oral and visual mythic tradition and use[s] it, ultimately, to change the world" (Caputi, "On Psychic Activism" 425). The epic, which has been a male tradition for centuries, has shunned any form of femininity as weak and unheroic. With *Circe,* Miller proves the opposite by writing about motherhood and birth and implementing them at the height of Circe's epic.

Eileithya, the goddess of childbirth, does not watch over the birth of Circe's child. So she must rely on herself, with no midwife or any form of outside help. She performs a c-section on herself and brings the child to light. An exemplar of a mother's fortitude and strength, she "did not go easy to motherhood. [She] faced it as soldiers face their enemies, girded and braced, sword up against the coming blows" (212). However, no preparation can truly protect anyone against the hardships of motherhood, especially when Pallas Athena herself seeks the death of the child. Falling pots, drones of wasps, and lashes of beasts and scorpions nearly carry the newborn to the underworld if not for the constant watchful eye of Circe. Despite her experience raising her younger brother, her mortal child is a stark contrast; every minute brings a new task that must be done to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

She can only release the breath she has caught up inside when she conceives an ingenious spell to ward off the goddess of war and protect the child. These spells show the true power of her witchcraft since even greater gods are afraid of Athena, so for her to deter such a powerful and strategic goddess displays how powerful she truly is. Turning men into pigs is mere child's play compared to these protective spells. Circe is then heightened to a truly formidable witch and mother, a far cry from the shallow, petty tricks she performs in the androcentric myths.

In *The Telegony,* Telegonus grows to cause the unwanted demise of his father. So does *Circe's* Telegonus, but first, he has to leave the island. Circe, still wrought with worry and visions of her son in a shroud, driven to death by Athena, refuses to let the boy leave the protective shores of Aiaia. Medea's words, "I will not sentence myself to such a living death" (150), are reflected in Telegonus' "[i]f this is life then I would rather die" (237). Miller then depicts how motherhood is also a road of trials and errors. Despite her prowess as a mother, she cannot force her son to be shackled to one place, unable to seek the horizon. When

Odysseus asks for permission to leave the island, she states, "I am a host, not a jailor" (202), but for her son, she feels akin to the latter. Especially when she threatens, "If you are too stupid to save your own life, then I will do it for you. My spells will do it (…) You have never understood how strong I am" (237). Circe realizes it herself shortly after. She realizes that this boasting threat is akin to what her own father would have done, his words above all. She relents and permits Telegonus to sail towards Ithaca, but before that, she must undertake the most dangerous feat to guarantee her son's safety.

She walks to the depths of the sea where no creatures roam except for an ancient beast: the Trygon. This is another clever mythopoetic element; Circe has had no opportunity to face such a great creature. In myths, only heroes have the privilege and ability to face great beasts. In this case, many before her have sought its tail, potent with the most concentrated venom, even Aeëtes. All failed to fulfill the beast's conditions, and fighting is no option since one strike of its tail would bring even Zeus to his knees, lamenting in agony for eternity. This trial shows that Circe's greatest power is not her witchcraft or the divinity she has from her father, but her endurance and willingness to sacrifice for a greater cause. For her son, she is ready to live a life of eternal damnation as she takes on Trygon's test and reaches for the poisoned tail:

> My body, with its simple good sense, baulked at self-destruction. My legs tensed to flee, to scramble back to the safety of the dry world. Just as Aeëtes had before me, and all the others who had come for Trygon's power.
>
> Around me was murk and dark currents. I set Telegonus' bright face before me. I reached. (246)

No gods would ever be willing to inflict even the lightest scratch upon themselves, let alone poison their limbs with eternal pain, for they have no purpose besides self-fulfillment. Circe has already proven herself to be different from that egocentric elite, but this truly solidifies

her position. However, the tail she acquires from Trygon is the same that causes Odysseus's untimely demise. The stingray's tail in *The Telegony* is then replaced by the tail of the lord of the stingrays arduously acquired by Circe.

The short fragment of *The Telegony* ends with the marriage of Circe with Telemachus and Penelope with Telegonus, all rendered immortal to bask in eternal, bizarre marriages. Miller details the encounter between Circe and the grieving trio: the long, awkward bouts of silence that reign instead of screaming, wailing reproaches. They all mourn Odysseus in their own way. Telegonus mourns the father he did not get to meet properly, Telemachus mourns the father whose tales spoke of a version he did not see in the one he got to meet, Penelope mourns the waiting for the return, not of her husband but the husband she used to know before his voyage, and Circe, observing them all in their griefs, mourns the illusion she has shielded herself and him with. Penelope and Telegonus do not marry. He is still a boy of sixteen, yet grown enough to discover the world and seek its wonders. Athena returns to take the boy away not through murder but through promised glory.

Miller does not do much myth-smashing for this body of myths due to its sheer lack of content. However, she smashes the stereotype that marriage is the happy ever after and that heroes are illustrious and irreproachable. Odysseus, best of the Greeks, man with a thousand wiles, cannot restrict himself to a life of domesticity. There are always lands to plunder, tricks to fool enemies, and monsters to defeat, and none of them are in Ithaca. His quest for constant glory and the whisperings of Athena that her favorite must always prove why he is a favorite are what made the iron grow too brittle for handling. Thus, Odysseus dies, not to any fault of Telegonus, who grew innocent and warm under his mother's care, but due to his mistrustful, conspiring mind that reflected his plundering habits onto the boy. The brittles of Odysseus are

laid bare, his anger at the ignorance and stupidity of the world taken out on his citizens, his wife, and his son.

Another crucial point is the unfair murder of the servant and slave girls who had to lie with the suitors. Margaret Atwood has written *The Penelopiad* to denounce the unjust murder of those servant girls who plotted with Penelope to rebuke the suitors. Additionally, Emily Wilson clearly states in her translation that the girls are slaves and, therefore, do not possess the freedom or ability to deny the suitors' advances, proving that their deaths were indeed unjust. Miller also mentions the unfairness of the servant girls' murder. From a feminine perspective, this set of murders is a great injustice.

On the other hand, male translators and interpreters of *The Odyssey* paint these girls in a bad light or their murder as simply another feat of Odysseus and his son to reclaim their due throne. In *The Penelopiad*, Telemachus is as remorseless of this crime as his father, both exclaiming their own version of "*what can I say? The world is an unjust place*" (261). However, Miller's Telemachus is liberated from the cruelty of mankind hidden in the golden platter of glory. He is a man of thirty who looks older from grief, regret, and repressed anger. His greatest regret is the murders he has soaked his hands with for his father. He is expelled from Ithaca for his morality, his refusal to kill Telegonus as vengeance for his father's death, and his lack of shed tears during the funeral (261). Since "this man of rage was all the father [he] had" (267), he cannot express grief at the loss of this man but of the one who bards sing about.

On the other hand, Penelope's glorified silent waiting is questioned in *Circe*. After Odysseus' return, she resumes her weaving-waiting in another manner. She witnesses the degradation of her husband as his virtues are replaced by the patriarchal aspects of the hero, who only seeks glory above all else. Despite her opposition to this new Odysseus, she does

not actively take action to thwart his bristling actions, preferring to resume her wait. Penelope, who is applauded as the archetypal faithful wife, the epitome of the perfect mythical wife, is now a silenced woman who cannot defy the aggressions of her husband. This silence causes a rift with Telemachus since her turning a blind eye to the patriarch's actions exacerbates his abuse of the son, who does not fit the patriarchal heroic mold. She laments, "I think of all the years of my life I wasted on that little man's boast. I have paid for it, that is only justice, but I have made Telemachus pay as well" (286). Miller delineates that glorifying the placating, silent wife strips her of agency and autonomy. Penelope regrets her endless waiting, for that is the only thing she can do now. By leading such a passive life, she could not take direct action in anything, not even to defend her child against the raging patriarch, frozen in an androcentric shackle of the ideal wife.

With the short fragments of *The Telegony*, Miller expertly performs mythopoeia as if stringing her own lyrics with an ancient lyre. Circe, Telegonus, Telemachus, Odysseus, and Penelope are given flesh restructured in a fresh, complex manner. The accumulation of these voices serves to amplify Circe's voice and thoughts. She is empathetic to their struggles yet reserved and cautious. When Athena claims Telegonus, she does not express anger at her guests, for she understands their positions and struggles. Through her narration of these characters, she uses her voice to uplift others as well. Therefore, Circe's transformative magic does not only lie in witchcraft but also in her storytelling abilities. With these abilities, she allows all victims of androcentric traditions to voice their strains in their own way.

Before undertaking the revolutionary task of mythical revisionism, Miller felt absolute terror at the prospect of changing the ancients' words and putting her stake in the patriarchal path of myths. As a trained classicist, it was even more difficult for her to let her works see the light, afraid of reproach from her peers and respected teachers. However, she

now encourages and proves that mythology has to evolve over history, and no amount of modifications or revisions will intrude on the original texts. Now, she boldly states: "I'm not gonna do anything to Homer. He's fine" ("Interview with Madeline Miller" 00:09:32-00:09:36). Indeed, he is fine. His texts remain cornerstones of literature. However, Miller, along with many brilliant revisionists, breathes new life into these myths to provide new perspectives for audiences to discover or rediscover epics. Consequently, through myth-smashing and myth-making, she performs regenerative transformation magic on the ancient texts, providing them with the power of the feminine that was non-existent in them. Circe now possesses agency, autonomy, and real character, which she has been denied for centuries.

2.3 Circe's Heroine Journey

Circe does not revolve simply around voicing the character it is titled after; it is the tale of this heroine's journey, her own epic to be remembered by. Miller took on the task of writing about Circe to uncover mysteries, subvert stereotypes, and let her perform her personal storytelling, but most importantly, to let the witch have her epic. Epics were only written about men, for only men were illustrious and strong enough to undertake such grandiose adventures. Miller proves the contrary with Circe's epic; she exhibits that, similarly to Odysseus, Perseus, and Achilles, she too can surmount trials and fight battles despite the shackles attributed to femininity. Within this title, Campbell's monomyth and Frankel's heroine's journey will be utilized to explore how Miller constructed Circe's epic just as various mythical heroes' epics have been structured. The ensuing table has been personally drawn to provide a visual guideline to Circe's monomyth that is explored within the subsequent titles.

Table 1

Stages and Descriptions of Circe's Monomyth.

Stages	Circe's Monomyth
Ordinary world	Circe is a nymph in Helios' court, shunned as a pharmakos and scapegoat.
	I. Departure
Call to Adventure	Prometheus' voice urges her to differentiate and separate herself from her oppressive environment.
Refusal of the Call	Helios punishes and scares Circe into dropping the call.
Supernatural Aid	Prometheus is the good mentor, and her devouring mother, Perse, is the evil mentor.
Crossing the Threshold	She is exiled to Aiaia for admitting her culpability.
Belly of the Whale	She experiences fear and paranoia during her fist night in Aiaia.
	II. Initiation
The Road of Trials	She learns witchcraft through drudgery and hard work. She faces the transformed Scylla and her sister Pasiphae, ultimately aiding in the birth of the Minotaur. She suffers through the psychological struggle of loneliness.
Atonement with the Mother	She realizes that her 'evil' mother and sister are equally trapped within restrictive patriarchal systems, and their thirst for power is their attempt to procure agency.
Meeting the Goddess	Circe meets and defies Athena.
Ultimate Boon	She is the first to win Trygon's tail through endurance, willpower, and sacrifice.
Apotheosis	She defies and confronts her father to liberate herself from her exile.
	III. Return
Rescue from Without	Circe is aided in defeating Scylla by Telemachus, whose tireless rowing results in a safe escape.
Crossing the Return Threshold	She leaves Aiaia, travels, and positively interacts with mortal communities.
Master of Two Worlds	She dreams and prophesies constant travels around the Mediterranean to explore the world of mortals while returning to Aiaia as her divine home to raise her family.
Freedom to Live	She gains the insight and liberation necessary to overcome fear, and drinks the elixir that will transform her into a mortal.

2.3.1 Departure

The driving force behind every journey and epic is the call to adventure. May it be wanted or unwanted, the heroine must heed that call and face the precipice. Circe's call is the voice of her uncle, Prometheus, urging her to do what the other gods would not do, to set herself apart from them. While in her father's court, Circe is in a state of stasis and

repression. The moment she believes she has put a step forward, she is hurled back to reality and the oppressive obsidian halls. Maureen Murdock expresses that the call occurs at no specific age; it only happens when the "old self" no longer fits (16). The shedding of the old self is displayed in the confrontation with the unconscious, followed by its acceptance. The heeding of this call is the primary phase for the integration of the unconscious.

After her transformation of Scylla, she is ironically the only person who feels pity and regret for the transmuted nymph. Her family, roaring with laughter and snickering with malice, appears repugnant in their gloated divinity. Circe, who was always shunned as different, vows to be different indeed, no longer the meek nymph who roams idly among them. Additionally, Campbell explains that "[a] blunder — apparently the merest chance — reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood […] The blunder may amount to the opening of a destiny" (34). Her 'stupid' answers and reactions to her family's goading, her mistaking of Aeëtes for a caring brother, and her illusions of a happy life with Glaucos all lead to this blunder that opens the path for destiny. The transformation of Scylla is not simply the attack of viciously jealous Circe. It results from decades of repressed emotions: anger, desperation, and shattered hopes. The accumulation of the repressed unconscious intermingled with the repressive air her family restricts her with leads her to declare, "I [am] not like them" (Miller 52). Her confession to the halls, commanding everyone's attention on her plea for punishment, is her declaration that she is not like them; she has empathy and depth they do not possess. Even then, she is rebutted by her family and father since no simple, jealous girl like her could dream of such power. Interestingly, the refusal of the call is not from the heroine but from another entity.

This refusal is manifested in the threshold's guardian, Helios. In the titans' halls, he reigns supreme among the ancient stones and rivers, the sun's light engulfing everything in its path. He is "The father, as the heroine's choking restraint, [who] represents part of the self that must be overcome. He is a force for tyranny and domination, the opponent in gender warfare" (Frankel 99). His apathetic disdain for his daughter, contemptuously stating that no weakling of her caliber could possibly hold even an iota of power, lies in this short and brutal query: "If the world contained that power you allege, do you think it would be to such as you to discover it?" At this point, she has had enough of being underestimated and mocked; thus, she overcomes the meek self her father encased her within. "*Such as you.* Any other day in all my years of life I would have curled upon myself and wept. But that day his scorn was like a spark falling on dry tinder. My mouth opened" (54). By refusing to take the brunt of scorn as she usually does but rising defiantly against it, she successfully displays how she has cast her old self behind to separate herself from her ordinary world of stasis in her father's halls. Her father, the threshold beast, unleashes his flames on her and scorches her into obedience, stalling her departure from the divine halls.

For this stage, her main supernatural aid is the brief but core memory of Prometheus. He is the ancient and wise guide who provides advice. Even if they are imagined conversations in Circe's mind, her meeting with him has influenced her enough to leave a lasting trace of the titan. His voice resonates in her mind when she decides to cast her lot away from her family, "*Then you must think, Circe. What would they not do?"* (53). These words are the push she needs to stand against her family, at the ready to follow the call of adventure. The second aid is the unexpected confession of Aeëtes that such transformative powers truly exist and that Circe does possess the ability to wield them. He states that "*pharmakeia*, such arts are called, for they deal in *pharmaka*" (57). Circe then shifts from the

archetypical *pharmakos*, scapegoat, to a pharmakis, witch. Helios and Perse's union bred four witch titans, and Circe is the last who came into her powers. Aeëtes, as a man and accepted member of the elite, has sway in his words that the silenced Circe does not. This is a recurrent event for many women who attempt to defy an established body or voice their opinions; their voices are squashed and only given importance when an individual believed worthy by the patriarchy speaks for them.

Additionally, as shown in Frankel's heroine's journey, the evil mother is also a form of mentor. Circe's mother, Perse, fits this role since her birth. This mother drives Circe to be the family's pharmakos, the scapegoat who is to be shunned, mocked, and ignored. After the birth of Pasiphaë and Perses, the mother's cold disregard turns into conspiring mockeries. At every mocking jest of the pair, Circe describes her mother's reaction as such: "My mother's laughter, silver as a fountain down its rocks. 'Stupid Circe'" (9). Perse, beautiful, calculating, and cruel, is the vision Circe shares of her mother. She shows animosity towards her, preferring to amass crumbles of her father's attention instead of attempting to make peace or approach her mother.

Circe once declares that "[she] had learned something from [her] mother after all" (39) that in order to garner the attention of the greater gods and her uncles, she must bind her hair in ringlets, wear her most beautiful outfit, pour their wine, and distribute bountiful smiles. Since nymphs can only garner attention through beauty and submission, this evil mother mentor teaches her to use feminine tools to reveal the beauty within but also independence, not through forcing tasks or chores but through vicious mocking and demonstrating that in order to attain something she seeks, she must use her feminine powers to pursue them.

Circe's punishment, her exile in Aiaia, is the crossing of the threshold. She moves from what she has known all her life: her father's halls, her grandfather's halls, and most

importantly, the small island where she first discovered her powers. Despite not truly being her home, that island is where she has found most comfort from her strolls with Aeëtes to her first meeting with Glaucos and lying in its shadowed, damp woods after becoming a scorched mass. This place is where she has been most comfortable experiencing loss and happiness. Now, she crosses the threshold into another island, riding on the threshold beast's golden chariot. This is the point of no return. Her first step into Aiaia will seal her fate and cast away all that she has previously known. So, she steps into Aiaia, and the chariot is gone the moment her foot hits the soil, and so "All those years [she] ha[s] spent with them [are] a stone tossed in a pool. Already, the ripples [are] gone" (67). Circe's crossing into Aiaia is in line with Frankel's theory that heroines journey not for glory or fame but for self-actualization and rescuing the part of themselves lost in the unconscious.

The belly of the whale is the mytheme of sacrifice, the "lesson that passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation" (Campbell 83). By answering the call of adventure, Circe commits an act of sacrifice. First, the burns from her father, then the exile to Aiaia. The entire ordeal of threshold crossing is bearing consequences and self-sacrifice, marking a stark delineation with the self-preserving family she has always known. As a naiad, Circe embodies the element of water and has always been surrounded by river gods and nymphs. She moves from a claustrophobic water archetype to the next. From her grandfather's halls deep underwater and beaming with rivers and moistness to Aiaia surrounded by sea on all fronts, Circe moves from one watery prison to the next. The only difference is the move from an iron cage to a golden one.

Circe truly feels entrapped in the belly of the whale on the first night in Aiaia. Sudden feelings of terror envelop the nymph as she relays: "All around me I felt the wild hollows of the island swelling in their darkness. Until that moment I had not known how many things I

feared" (70). The citric acid in the whale's stomach imbues Circe with "fear [that] sloshe[s] over [her], each wave colder than the last" (70). This night of terrors is the last trial for Circe to cross the threshold physically and mentally. When morning comes, she is ready to face the Otherworld and explore her unconscious magical powers in Aiaia's groves and forest.

The departure displays the heroine in her weakest and most repressed form. By crossing the threshold, she takes action to step away from silence, stasis, and repression towards the first inklings of autonomy. The first patriarchal hurdle is often displayed in familial settings, as is the case here. For Circe to liberate herself from it, she must remove herself from her deeply patriarchal and elitist surroundings since she has no ability to defy them. Having been silenced all her life, the first time she truly uses her voice is the crucial answer to the adventure's call. Now, she may heed the call to seek the healing of her unconscious.

2.3.2 Initiation

Circe's first step into the unknown Otherworld is delicate and nervous, but after the resurgence from the whale's belly, she emerges strong and certain. Aiaia's forest, which seemed wrought with danger at first, is no longer a place of fear but one to conquer for freedom. Thus, she "stepped into those woods and [her] life began" (71). Frankel states, "The forest, a feminine symbol, represents the dangerous side of the unconscious" (59). Aiaia's forest displays this by providing Circe with the tools necessary to develop her witchcraft. In Aiaia, she has full rein over her actions and no constraints to limit herself and her abilities. In other interpretations of Circe, her witchcraft is akin to a birthright, something she naturally possesses and takes full advantage of. Miller declares the opposite and describes the trials of Circe to garner her magical powers.

The first path of trials Circe faces after crossing the threshold is the drudgery of witchcraft. Circe explains that:

> Each herb must be found in its den, harvested at its time, grubbed up from the dirt, culled and stripped, washed and prepared. It must be handled this way, then that, to find out where its power lies. Day upon patient day, you must throw out your errors and begin again. (72-73)

Witchcraft is neither a snap of fingers nor a simple wave of a wand. It is a constant necessity of trials and errors, muddied skirts, and noxious smokes. Circe does not become the dread witch of myths overnight. Her insurgence is one of endurance, patience, and keenness. Her humble beginnings do not permit her much besides simple illusions and transformations, such as summoning the shadow of an owl or turning an iris into a rose. As an immortal, she has an eternity to master her craft, and so she patiently waddles through the intricacies of sorcery. This patience is rewarded with the power she has lacked all her life and the dispelling of fears.

Circe states that the first time she truly believed herself a witch was when she confronted a boar and thwarted its attack through willpower alone (76). In mythology, boars are beasts faced by princes and heroes, a test of sorts to prove their strength. By thwarting that animal through sheer will, she proves that she is successfully turning into a heroine by overcoming this test of strength. This encounter emboldens her; she summons a lion to her house —one of the beasts she feared on her first day on the island— and makes it her familiar. When Hermes lounges against her house, she repels her fears and talks with assurance, something her younger self could not have dreamed of when facing an Olympian. She becomes one of the rare nymphs who mingle with an Olympian and survives it. She does not fall victim to his deadly charms. He offers her stories, and she offers him amusement with

her boldness; it is a relation of equals. A nymph titan, previously the worm in the divine food chain, now stands up to one of the most resourceful and deceitful Olympians. This shows how far she has come from the initial departure stage. She states that Hermes "was a poison snake, and [she] was another" (83), showcasing a stalemate in wit and strength. Gadfly Hermes, as the all-knowing messenger, informs about the state of the world, delivers the prophecy of Odysseus' future visit, and provides useful information for her future trials.

For the first time during her exile, a ship sails to Aiaia. This ship comes with a purpose and a mission for the witch. Daedalus, the prized craftsman of Pasiphaë, kneels to personally deliver the queen's message. Circe is demanded to help deliver Pasiphaë's baby, an odd and mysterious request. Circe does not have the luxury to refute this trial since Pasiphaë instructed the sailors to sail past Scylla and Charybdis. If Circe refuses to provide aid to her sister, she consequently refuses to save the mortals' lives. Thus, she sails and confronts Scylla. She concocts her most potent draught, casts an illusion on herself to appear as her brother Perses, and directs the sailors to beat the oars relentlessly. While the sailors push the ship to sail as fast as possible, Circe attempts to cajole Scylla as her brother. However, the nymph inside the beast has lost her mind, only craving the nourishment of mortal flesh. Circe's potent draught fails at turning the beast into her initial self; worse, it only angers her and pushes her to attack the ship. Circe's efforts do not defeat nor harm the monster, but manage to stop her from attacking the sailors and eating them. This confrontation against Scylla, the beast even Odysseus could not face, shows that the witch has power and wit that surpasses heroes.

Despite this feat, Circe feels neither relief nor satisfaction. When the sailors offer their prayers and prostrations, illness and anger rise up her throat, not the offhand gloating divinity is known for. These are the only sailors who have survived Scylla, and the rest will turn into

"Cold smoke, marked with [her] name" (87). What Circe feels is guilt and frustration at having caused the existence of such a monster and her inability to stop it.

Scylla is not the only beast she faces on this voyage; as she delivers Pasiphaë's infant, a sharp pain takes her hand. The infant is not a normal child but the dreadful Minotaur. It has chomped her fingers off her hand and greedily seeks more flesh. This time, she has knowledge and power she did not previously have when she made Scylla. So, still a bloody mess, she explores Crete's woods to gather herbs for her next spells. She casts on the infant beast a spell to curb its deadly hunger. The myths of Circe and the Minotaur have been separate tales for thousands of years, but with Miller's mythopoeia, they have been interwoven into an epic tapestry. Circe has assisted in the Minotaur's birth, prophecied its death, and alleviated its monstrous instincts to spare as many mortal lives as possible.

During her visit to Crete, Circe has an attempted atonement with the mother. It is not done with her mother but with her sister, who is similar in character. Circe confronts Pasiphaë, demanding why she has sent for her aid and is shocked to realize that she has no one else to rely on. She loathes her family the same way Circe has always done. Pasiphaë states, "They do not care if you are good. They barely care if you are wicked. The only thing that makes them listen is power […] They take what they want, and in return they give you only your own shackles" (126-27). Circe was no exception. All nymphs are treated as lesser, beautiful or not, wicked or not, all shackled as powerless brides. Her sister and mother's wickedness is their attempt to garner power; her mother's collection of Helios' beads to show off to the other nymphs and her sister's cutting, sharp words are misguided strivings to rise in ranks. Circe's belief that she is not like them "represent[s] the heroine's internalized denigration of the feminine" (Frankel 41). Her denigration is openly stated in her youth: her vain, wicked mother and her powerful, cold, yet fascinating father. Frankel expands that

"This antagonist [the wicked mother] must be faced, even accepted, for the heroine to grow into a balanced adult" (41). In this case, Circe is facing Pasiphaë, the extension of her mother.

Her attempt to atone with the mother/sister is a failure since she is not yet prepared to face and accept these dark facets of her youth and herself. For that, she is shunned, never to meet her sister again: "I should have known you would be good for nothing to me. Get out. Get out and let me not see you again" (128). The newly acquired knowledge that her sister, the seemingly perfect puzzle piece in the wicked jigsaw of divine vanity, is, in fact, jagged from being forced to fit in is too much to take in at once. The evil mother and sister she has reprieved in her youth were trapped in the same net as her this entire time, and she has been too absorbed in her denigrations and seeking attention from men —Helios, Aeëtes, and Glaucos— to take notice.

Back on her island, Pasiphaë's voice has taken the same voyage. Taunting her, reminding her that her exile is punishment and not freedom, and speaking of her failure to atone with the mother, "You always underestimated [our mother]. I would not be surprised if she has witch-blood too […] You are sorry now you scorned her. You spent every day licking Father's feet, hoping he would set her aside" (135-36). Yet, she keeps this regret confined deep within herself, relishing in the stories of Pasiphaë's failures and losses she hears from Hermes. After she snuffs out Pasiphaë's gnawing mind, another one appears to take over. Medea and Jason's arrival on her island may have been a mere necessity to continue their voyage, but Medea's words resonate within Circe's consciousness. Another reminder that her exile is punishment and it means loneliness rather than freedom.

This loneliness leads her to experience the death or near-death experience that the hero has to face in the journey. When a ship of exhausted and ravenous pirates sails to her isle, she is over the moon at being the welcoming hostess. "Each time I passed they ducked

their heads at me. *Lady. Mistress. Our thanks.* I could not stop smiling. The fragility of mortals bred kindness and good graces" (161). However, these humble thanks are turned into violence when they register that she is alone, without male protection to avenge her. The change in character is not unnoticed by Circe, she readies a draught and slips it into their wine as a precaution. Despite her senses scraping at her mind to put them to sleep as the captain asks for her name, she relays: "There was something in his voice. I almost said it then, the spell-word that would send them to sleep. But even after all the years that had passed, there was a piece of me that still only spoke what I was bid" (163). The gender norms that have restricted her for centuries still have an impact on her. Her want to mend what is torn and broken, to feed the hungry, to be kind towards mortals, to be her own version of Prometheus, is grossly trampled upon. This mirrors Frankel's assertion that the heroine must not be overgenerous lest she be exploited for it.

The visitors become plunderers. The crew's captain attacks and silences Circe, rendering her unable to utter her spells, stripping her of her powers. She meets the fate of the nymphs she has always heard of, yet minimized. This drives the realization that she is no different and is considered equally "terrible at getting away" (158). She subsequently admits: "I am only a nymph after all, for nothing is more common among us than this" (164). Nevertheless, she distinguishes herself with her ability to prove that no men are needed to enact vengeance. So, she turns the initial sleeping spell into what she knows best: transformation. What Homer and the other interpretations do not describe is the pain and screaming of the men as their flesh is slowly rendered into a swine's, but Circe does as she finds comfort in this revenge. This act of vengeance represents Circe's assimilation with her dark side; she has experienced a near-death experience while fully conscious, since if she were not of titan blood, she would have been dead or passed out. Rape in itself is a death of

spirit, innocence, and autonomy, no amount of scraping her skin with sand will restore what is lost. Thus, Circe enacts vengeance for this loss, allowing her hidden, dark unconscious to soothe her pains. However, instead of accepting the shadow, she lets the shadow to seize control of her consciousness. The conscious retreats into a cave to treat her wounds, so the shadow reigns as she boldly states: "Let them see what I am. Let them learn the world is not as they think" (169). Ship after ship arrives on Aiaia and their only remnants are the pigs squealing in her sty.

This acceptance of the shadow self is not true acceptance but a defense mechanism. She allows her conscious to hide in the dark cavern of the unconscious to heal itself. As Frankel relates, the heroine has to leave that cave eventually, and it is often done with outside aid. For Circe, it is through the meeting with the goddess. Well, she is the goddess in this case, so it is the meeting with the hero. Their roles have been reversed, but the healing Circe provides in *The Odyssey* is paralleled by the healing Odysseus enacts in *Circe.* Her meeting with the hero marks the end of her overcrowded pigpens. As previously stated, Odysseus does not make the witch beg and wail for her life but has a battle of wits with her to prove himself worthy. No phallic sword has been swung around to threaten the woman who holds more power than she deserves. For him, her presence and help is the mytheme of the meeting with the goddess; then, in Circe's perspective, he must hold the same role he has assigned her. He is her comfort as she has been his.

The other meeting with the goddess is the confrontation with Athena. She is the distant and cruel goddess who seeks to reform the hero through hardships. Circe truly attains the height of her power with the looming threat of Athena's murder of her child. She casts a protective spell that rebukes all gods save for the ones who can dwell in the underworld. She wills her entire island to protect her son as supplementary protection and is the sole figure to

win Trygon's tail. Through this confrontation with Athena, there is the absorption and renewal of her dark unconscious, as Frankel states, "Absorbing the dark goddess teaches her to defend her children with a wildcat's fury, to stare down fears, Medusa-like" (145). This leads her to completely cast away any shred of doubt or feebleness for the valiant defense of her son. To confront that ancient beast, she walks into the equivalent of the underworld and the deepest part of the water element. Frankel states that "Dipping in water is returning to the Goddess and being reborn" (Frankel 60). Previously, despite her array of spells and witchcraft, Circe remained at the mercy of the gods to do their bidding. Helios overlooking her island as he lights the world, Selene doing the same at night, Hermes coming and going to get his fill of entertainment, Lesser gods sending their daughters to be mentored by her as punishment, Apollo enabling the burden of prophecy to take over her body for Odysseus' sake, and Athena deeming the death of her son necessary to prevent the loss of her favorite mortal. With Trygon's tail, she gains true limitless power, she gains the upper hand over her oppressors, and the freedom to live without despotic interventions.

Therefore, Trygon's tail serves as the boon of her quest. She does not acquire it for herself, but it is nevertheless her liberator. Even the consequences it bears can be interpreted as a boon. If Odysseus had not died, her son would not have brought Penelope and Telemachus. If he had not brought the mother and son, Athena would have taken Telemachus instead of Telegonus as the hero-heir to Odysseus. If Telegonus had not left with Athena's protection, Circe would have fretted for him till his death. With the ease of her son's guaranteed protection, she recognizes that she must break her exile to truly gain freedom and agency. To break her exile, she must confront her father, the sky and the threshold's beast.

All her childhood, Circe looked up to Helios as one who looks up at the sun, its light blinding yet fascinating. The thoughts of begging and wailing for his forgiveness and

protection often came into Circe's mind as temptations to stray from the journey. However, she has conquered trials, arduously expanded her powers, faced the devouring sister, journeyed towards the depths of the sea, and proved that she is indeed different from the vain gods in character and power. She has no need for his protection or goodwill. She experiences what Frankel describes as "a moment [that] occurs at which the heroine realizes her father (or his representative) is not the all-powerful god she envisions. He is insecure, fallible, mortal" (79). So, she bravely proclaims to the patriarch that her exile must be lifted: "Because I am your daughter and would be free" (Miller 311). As expressed by Pasiphaë, the vain gods only offer help for the powerful, and so Circe proves that the useless goddess who could not even manipulate water is now resplendent with strength. She opens her mouth to openly threaten Helios, a stark contrast with her first act of defiance during the departure phase, "You know I have stood against Athena. I have walked in the blackest deeps. You cannot guess what spells I have cast, what poisons I have gathered to protect myself against you […] Who knows what is in me? Will you find out?" (312). This time, she is not scorched into a burned mass. She stands straight as a spear with its blade aimed at her opponent. By confronting her father, she attains Apotheosis and reaches her highest self, "like a hawk borne upon the highest aether" (314), and attains full enlightenment, ready to face what comes ahead.

What lies ahead is her last trial. The monster she made, confronted, and failed to suppress, her own Frankenstein's monster, with slimy tentacles and six mucous heads to bout. In a sense, her forcing the threshold beast to lift her exile opens the true threshold towards the otherworld. This time, she seeks adventure on her own terms and with her own agency. These two instances of threshold crossing are parallels that portray the development of Circe as a character, from the timid pharmakos to the powerful and confident pharmakis. With this confidence, she uses her boon to free the world of the beast she mistakenly unleashed on it

and completes the heroine's task of sharing the boon's gift. The potent tail's poison, mingled with her years of practiced sorcery, is effective. She ultimately puts an end to Scylla and the cold smoke that travels to the Asphodel meadows marked with her name.

Her liberation from exile could indicate a return to her initial world. However, she does not seek those divine halls since her enlightened self is contrary to what they are and what they stand for. She is the dread goddess with a mortal voice, and she prefers the latter appellation rather than the former. At her height of existence, she realizes that her fascination with mortals is not a simple urge to mend their broken appearances but to join them in their imperfections, and for this goal, she must return to her true beginnings.

2.3.3 Return

The island where she used to roam with Aeëtes and Glaucos, attempting to fill her empty, eternal days with any form of connection and affection, is the place that witnessed her first meeting with the concept of change. The old place still holds something of comfort: The flowers she used to transform Glaucos and Scylla, potent with power from Kronos' spilled blood. According to Circe, they possess the ability to offer the truest transformation to their consumers. Their "old humming note rose up as if in greeting" (327), and Circe is confident to return their regards. She is not the nymph who has attempted to use them upon herself out of misery, but was too weak and afraid, a fledgling heroine. Now, she has become a true heroine who picks them with purpose and assurance. She knows that she can harness their powers best. She returns to this island with knowledge and wisdom, not for the evil deities who scorned her, but for herself. She does not refuse to return, she does not go through a magical flight either, but she is aided by Telemachus to cross the threshold. He is present during her confrontation with Scylla, beating the oars to escape the aftermath of her

transformation into stone. He is the guide fate provides her to sail freely and comfortably, from lands to isles; he stands as the aid in the rescue from without.

During her travels with Telemachus, Circe establishes herself as the master of the two worlds. She seeks to travel the world but still intends to return to Aiaia. She does not shed away the land that permitted her to harness her powers and face trials. She simply turns it into a home rather than a golden prison. She may stay there, but is not forced to. She travels back to Aiaia to conclude her last mytheme: the freedom to live. With the yellow flowers of transformation, she concocts a brew at the ready to face her fears. "These flowers had made Scylla a monster, though all she had done was sneer. Glaucos had become a monster of sorts too (…) *what creature waits within me?"* (331). Her mind conjures up that fear, yet it also conjures something she has not dreamed of for a while: a liberated future wherein she may grasp joy with her own hands. She openly dreams of a happy family with Telemachus, not alone during childbirth but with Penelope as the new witch of Aiaia to watch over her, traveling the world, visiting Telegonus' kingdom, and aging with its gray hair, wrinkles, and flesh sagging to the gravity of the earth.

Eudora Welty's Circe seeks the secret mortals share to destroy it; on the other hand, Madeline Miller's Circe wants to partake in that secret and knows the only way to grasp it is by becoming mortal herself. Circe states: "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" (333). She is now "the champion of things becoming, not of things become," and she is no longer "fearful of the next moment" (Campbell 200). So she confidently "lift[s] the brimming bowl to [her] lips and drink[s]" (333). She concludes her story with the freedom to live without fear and is prepared to achieve the ultimate transformation by changing herself into her ultimate form.

Circe's epic does not strictly follow the steps of the monomyth. Nevertheless, combined with Frankel's heroine's journey, her journey is a prime example of a heroine's epic. Miller masterfully makes a feminine epic by incorporating feminine aspects shunned by the patriarchal poets. Girlhood, womanhood, pregnancy, and motherhood are crucial elements of Circe's tale and serve as the storytelling elements that give the epic its scale and height. Through feminine arts and life experience, Circe grows into a powerful heroine worthy of having her tales spun and sung. The monomyth serves to showcase how Miller brilliantly wove a modern feminist epic.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, Madeline Miller's *Circe* is a compelling testament to the efficacy and transformative power of myth-smashing and myth-making in revitalizing ancient narratives. Through a nuanced reimagining of the myth of Circe, Miller not only modernizes Homer's epic but also provides a complex feminist perspective that challenges and redefines traditional gender roles within mythological contexts. By giving grounds for Circe to tell her own story instead of being described through the voices of men, she demonstrates how misguided and harmful androcentric biases are for female characters.

By deconstructing canonical texts, such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautica*, and Eugammon of Cyrene's *Telegony,* Madeline Miller reveals how historical portrayals have often confined female characters to marginalized roles, reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes. By first smashing the restraints of androcentric biases, Miller allows her myth-making to be written on a clean feminist slate with a nuanced understanding of female characters such as Circe. Additionally, by providing a voice to Circe, she bares unseen sides of other characters as well, she is not simply a storyteller who recounts

the events of her existence but an observer and a witness. Similarly to Penelope, she listens and observes as she weaves the stories of other crucial mythical characters. Consequently, by deconstructing the patriarchal narratives of the past and infusing them with contemporary insights and values, Miller provides a new lens through which to view female heroism and agency. Her use of mythopoeia allows for the creation of a narrative that not only honors the epic tradition but also subverts it to highlight the experiences and perspectives of women.

Furthermore, the integration of Campbell's monomyth and the heroine's journey into the analysis emphasizes how Miller's *Circe* aligns with and extends beyond traditional frameworks of heroism. While Campbell's monomyth offers a valuable foundation for understanding heroic journeys, Frankel's feminist extension of this framework illuminates the richness and complexity of Circe's epic. This synthesis of Campbell and Frankel's theories permits an in-depth exploration of how Circe emerges as a central figure in her own epic, reflecting the capacity of women to embody and drive forward epic narratives traditionally reserved for male heroes.

Ultimately, Miller's *Circe* exemplifies the benefits of reimagining and modernizing ancient myths. Through her creative and critical approach, Miller not only revitalizes a classical story but also expands its scope to include and celebrate feminine perspectives. This approach demonstrates that myth-smashing and myth-making are not merely academic exercises but vital tools for rethinking and enriching a wider audience's understanding of mythological traditions, ensuring that they resonate with contemporary values and inclusivity. By revisioning and reconstructing these ancient narratives, Miller contributes to a feminist mode of retelling and revisioning myths, where diverse voices and perspectives are given the prominence they have lacked for centuries.

Chapter Three: Medusa's Gaze and the Power of Revision

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Introduction

Similarly to Madeline Miller's *Circe*, Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* delves into a deliberate project of feminist myth revisionism. By uncovering the psyche of traditionally vilified women, she demonstrates a feminine perspective on phallogocentric interpretations. Thus, this chapter undertakes an investigation of Hewlett's gynocentric reimagination. To achieve this objective, this chapter has been structured according to a threefold methodological framework. The first aspect involves a historical exploration of Medusa, examining various myths to showcase her symbolic evolution. Given that symbolism has predominantly been male-centric, as declared by Kate Millet, the perspective of women has been hitherto marginalized or suppressed. The investigation into Hewlett's Medusa reveals the androcentric symbolism that has constrained her, subsequently contrasting it with feminine interpretations to illustrate the divergent views of her character from a woman's perspective as opposed to that of men. The second aspect entails an analysis of Medusa through Jane Caputi's lens of myth-smashing and myth-making. This serves as a demonstration of Hewlett's feminist mythopoeia and a concurrent critique of androcentric patterns. The third aspect consists of a detailed delineation of Medusa's narrative, utilizing Joseph Campbell's monomyth in conjunction with Frankel's concept of the heroine's journey.

This chapter's theoretical scaffolding resembles the previous one dedicated to *Circe*. By utilizing a similar three-pronged approach, Miller and Hewlett's strategies of deconstructing androcentric patterns and incorporating gynocentric ones are illuminated and illustrated interdisciplinarily and contrastingly. Ultimately, their quest, as feminist revisionists, is to reclaim the power of symbolization and naming, as Jane Caputi expounds. Consequently, through Hewlett's *Medusa*, this chapter advocates for a feminist reimagination and

revitalization of myths to reconfigure them as inclusive narratives that acknowledge feminine experiences rather than disregard them in favor of male-centric ideals.

3. Medusa Across Time

While Circe and Medusa both belong to the same body of Classical tradition, Medusa has a wider range of interpretations. Additionally, Medusa possesses an iconography that Circe lacks. Upon the mention of her name, an instant image is formed within the mind, albeit pictured in different manners, but always with a mane of snakes and a piercing gaze. Within the following titles, the principal aim is to discuss and lay out the main depictions of Medusa to assess how Hewlett uses them for myth-smashing and myth-making purposes.

3.1.1 Medusa as Apotropaic Gorgoneion

Medusa's initial depiction consists of a head and face directly facing the viewer, staring piercingly, baring her fangs, and mockingly displaying her tongue. This visage is engraved in ancient vases, temples, antefixes, coins, shields, and even ovens. Stephen Wilk, whose book is dedicated to Medusa's origin, mystery, and possible nature, states that her depictions initially "appeared around the eighth century BCE, and the image has been with us ever since" (31). The image of a monster who unabashedly stares straight ahead with her over-exaggerated features used to be an apotropaic symbol used to guard homes and individuals from evils, thus "[h]er ugliness was an amulet against invasions large and small, a prayer for staying safe and staying whole" (Zimmerman 35). Despite the abandonment of Medusa as a guardian who defies bad luck, this initial image of a head with a piercing gaze remains her trademark. Medusa's beginnings are thus of a Gorgoneion, a Gorgon's head used for protection by repelling bad omens with her expression alone.

Similarly to this imagery, her first appearance in written works is of a guardian Gorgoneion. In Homer's *Iliad,* she first appears as the fearsome face on Athena's shield, the Aegis: "She slung the tasseled aegis round her shoulders/—the dreadful aegis, bordered all around/with Terror (…) And on it was the head of the uncanny, terrifying Gorgon" (5.967-71). However, the Aegis is not the only shield to bear the protective Gorgon as shown in following parts of the *Iliad*: "Then he picked up his shield,/a splendid, deadly shield, strong on both sides, (…) The middle garland was a glaring Gorgon,/whose gaze was terrifying, and around her,/Panic and Fear…" (11.39-47). Although not named yet, the Gorgon of *The Iliad* is undoubtedly Medusa. Her exhibition on Athena's Aegis and her petrifying gaze are clear attributes of the snake-haired Gorgon.

She makes an appearance in Homer's other work, The *Odyssey*, when Odysseus journeys to the land of the dead to seek guidance from the dead prophet Tiresias. With Circe's instructions, he receives the ability to converse with the dead. To satiate his curiosity, Odysseus would have remained at his spot, seeking to inquire of every hero about their state. The only thing that halts him from stalling further is the thought of the terrifying Gorgon. "But masses of the dead came thronging round/with eerie cries, and cold fear seized me, lest/ the dreadful Queen Persephone might send/the monster's head, the Gorgon, out of Hades" (11.633-36). Despite being described by the same storyteller, Medusa is not simply a symbol displayed on shields to terrify enemies and protect its bearer. She is found in the underworld as a fierce protector of the land of the dead, not as an image engraved on an object, but as a monster.

Medusa as Gorgoneion is then a head with great power and terrifying features. There is no petrifying, no turning men into stone, no snakes for hair in sight, yet. She does not even possess a name, only referred to as the Gorgon. She is first named in Hesiod's *Theogony*

(730–700 BCE), wherein he states the genealogy of mythical characters and beasts. From Hesiod's account, the gorgons are not severed heads used to guard and repel unwanted intrusions, but the offspring of sea gods Ceto and Phorcys. Following this, Hesiod states:

> they are Sthenno, Euryale, and Medusa,
>
> whose fate was a sad one,
>
> for she was mortal, but the other two
>
> immortal and ageless
>
> both alike. Poseidon, he of the dark hair,
>
> lay with
>
> one of these, in a soft meadow
>
> (…)
>
> But when Perseus had cut off the head of Medusa
>
> there sprang from her blood great Chrysaor
>
> and the horse Pegasos. (274-81)

Medusa's image of Gorgoneion is then explained as the decapitated head of a monster born mortal among a pair of immortal sisters. Natalie Haynes in *Pandora's Jar* confirms that "Perseus was most likely added to Medusa's story to explain her existence and our interest in her separated head, rather than Medusa appearing in Perseus' story to give him a monster to fight" (41). This mortal birth and Perseus have been added to fit the image of a separated head. Additionally, Hesiod attributes the birth of mortal Chrysaor and winged horse Pegasus from her and Poseidon's coupling. This latter information takes a darker turn in the following portrayal of Medusa.

Archaic Medusa is an image and a face, the powerful Gorgoneion. As written by Homer and through archaeological findings, Medusa in that form is a pervasive icon in ancient Greek

culture, representing the all-powerful beast who has the ability to deter evil forces, the dead, and even bad luck. With Hesiod's account, power is seized from her, only described as a mortal monster used for Perseus' gain.

3.1.2 Medusa as Sacrificial Victim

Within Hesiod's work, Medusa's first change from the Gorgoneion as an amulet renders her a victim decapitated by Perseus. The tale of Medusa and Perseus is then expanded by Pseudo-Apollodorus, who gathered various stories and compiled them into a compendium during the second century BCE in *The Library*. He provides a description of Medusa and her sisters wherein he declares that the trio have "heads with scaly serpents coiled around them, and large tusks like those of swine, and hands of bronze, and wings of gold which g[i]ve them the power of flight; and they turn (…) all who beheld them to stone" (66). Thus, the powers fiercely attributed to Medusa are powers that all Gorgons possess, but Medusa, as the mortal one, is the only one susceptible to any attacks. Thus, overaided by Hermes and Athena, Perseus chops off Medusa's head, takes it as his bounty, and flees from her enraged sisters. No details of the decapitation are provided in Hesiod's early work. In Pseudo-Apollodorus, on the other hand, she is an unwary sleeping victim whose head is a trophy for the hero and the goddess Athena. She is then forcefully objectified as a weapon and shield decor instead of a guardian and protective symbol.

The most visited account of Medusa is her tragedy in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* Perseus, victorious after annihilating his enemies for the hand of Andromeda, relays the tale of Medusa's transformation. Ovid implements various changes to the story of the Gorgons, among them the change that the snakes only wreath Medusa's head and not her sisters. Due to

this, she is now the sole Gorgon who can render men into stone. Perseus then proceeds to explain why snakes crown her alone:

> Medusa was once an exceedingly beautiful maiden,
> whose hand in marriage was jealously sought by an army of suitors.
> According to someone who told me he'd seen it, her marvellous hair
> was her crowning glory. The story goes that Neptune[Poseidon] the sea god
> raped this glorious creature inside the shrine of Minerva [Athena].
> Jove's [Zeus] daughter screened her virginal eyes with her aegis in horror,
> and punished the sin, by transforming the Gorgon's beautiful hair
> into horrible snakes. (Ovid 4.794-801)

Despite Medusa's tragic fate, Perseus's tone is one of satisfaction for a false sin punished. Heedless of her human origins, he describes her as a creature, a tool to satiate male desires. While her coupling with Poseidon is not stated as rape in Hesiod's *Theogony*, here, it is undoubtedly an assault since "Ovid uses a brutal word – vitiasse– which means to injure, defile or damage" (Haynes 40). Worse, her transformation results from daring to be a victim in Athena's temple.

Annis Pratt explains that such tales of Gorgon slaying and murder of powerful women are "stories of 'riddance' in which the beautiful and powerful women of the pre-Hellenic religions are made to seem horrific and then raped, decapitated, or destroyed" (qtd. in Bowers 221). Thus, powerful feminine figures, such as Medusa, are slain, killed, and demonized due to their defiance of patriarchal ideals. Susan R. Bowers expands on this and develops on René Girard's argument that sacrificial victims lack a social link with the community. She asserts that women who are independent and not male property are instant scapegoats of the community. Medusa is a woman who does not rely on male protection, either as a priestess

for Athena or as a powerful gorgon. Subsequently, "[b]y being marginal to the patriarchal community, she meets Girard's criterion of sacrificial suitability" (Bowers 225). She is then a sacrificial victim, raped, beheaded, and murdered by the patriarchy under the descriptors of the seductive maiden and fearsome monster for not complying with the communal androcentric ideals.

3.1.3 Medusa as a Feminist Symbol of Rage and Power

Medusa's insurgence as a feared symbol of protection finally returns with feminist interpretations of the Gorgon. Objectified and victimized throughout time, Medusa gradually lost her role as guardian to be replaced by a sexualized object/monster to be attacked and used by men. Her decapitation is driven to symbolize male fear of castration by Freud in a phallogocentric theory explaining the male psyche. She is used by Perseus to defeat his enemies. She is deprived of her monstrous aspect and forced to avert her gaze, impotent, in Renaissance art[23]. Then, to be ogled at and complimented for her beauty and grace in the horror of her fate, exemplified in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery"[24]. Her role there is obvious: a display, a prop to gratify the male gaze instead of repelling evil. By ignoring her apotropaic aspects, they reduce her to the role of patriarchal victim that women in mythology have to endure.

One of the earliest, most influential feminist interpretations of Medusa is Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa." Wherein she takes the figure of Medusa and denies the phallogocentric theories associated with her, alluding to Freud's head of Medusa as castration

[23] As illustrated in the Head of Medusa by Caravaggio, the Uffizi painting of Medusa, and Perseus with the Head of Medusa by Cellini

[24] It is worthy to note that Shelley inaccurately credits the Head of Medusa painting at the Uffizi Gallery (not to be confused with the one painted by Caravaggio) to Leonardo daVinci. The artist behind the work remains anonymous, only referred to as a flemish artist.

anxiety. To escape the androcentric thoughts imposed on women, they must reclaim their bodies to realize that Medusa is "not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (885). Cixous' call to arms remains one of the most influential postmodern feminist manifestos.

In terms of retellings and fictional narratives, Medusa has been set as a secondary character, mainly to appear as the monster that has to be slain by Perseus or a Persean figure. As stated by Wilk, "Shamleau" (1933) by C. L. Moore and "The Gorgon" (1983) by Tanith Lee are the first works that put the Medusa figure at the center —and he did not miss to note that both works are written by women— this new focus on her ushered in her appeal as a feminist symbol (201). Second-wave feminist journals took the image of Medusa and chose her as a representative to demonstrate feminine power and anger. *Women: A Journal of Liberation,* in its 1978 edition, and *RE/Search,* in its 1992 edition, feature the Gorgon as their cover to represent female anger. Notably, Elana Dykewomon's 1976 collection of stories and poems, *They Will Know Me by My Teeth*, showcases the archaic Gorgoneion as a guardian to its cover, defending its content with her glaring grimace. This return of Medusa as a protective symbol also signifies women's anger.

Emily Erwin Culpepper, in her article "Ancient Gorgons: A Face for Contemporary Women's Rage," states that "[t]he Amazon Gorgon[25] face is female fury personified. This Gorgon/Medusa image has been rapidly adopted by large numbers of feminists who recognize her as one face of our own rage" (qtd. in Wilk 217). Indeed, in their book *Female Rage: Unlocking Its Secrets, Claiming Its Power* (1994), Mary Valentis and Anne Devane verify that women associate Medusa with feminine anger, even when they have limited

[25] It comes to attention that Culpepper refers to Medusa as an Amazon. Medusa has indeed been assumed as an African Amazonian queen by some ancient rationalist scholars, such as Diodorus Siculus (60-30 BCE) and Pausanias (143-176 CE). This theory has also been cited and developed by feminist scholars, such as Zsuzsanna Budapest.

knowledge of the myths (218). Medusa is then a guardian, a protector whose existence emboldens women to tap into the stifled rage buried within them.

Invoking Medusa's anger is synonymous with invoking her power. Culpepper writes about a horrific event wherein she was attacked at her home by a stranger. As she was attacked, she manifested complete control and let her feminine fury burst into a defensive energy, allowing her to push away and lock out the assailant. In an after-shock reflective moment, she lets her fury reembody her and recounts:

> As I felt my face twist again into the fighting frenzy, I turned to the mirror and looked. What I saw in the mirror is a Gorgon, a Medusa, if *ever* there was one (…) I knew the name to utter. "Gorgon! Gorgon!" reverberated in my mind. I knew why the attacker had become so suddenly petrified. (qtd. in Garber & Vickers 244-45)

Medusa then resonates within women, not as a defeated woman forced to be used and objectified, but as the opposite: an entity of anger and power ready to lash out at threats and dangers, petrifying them. Thus, Medusa's true power of petrification directly results from a righteous feminine rage. This protective Medusa is similar to her apotropaic Gorgoneion roots; the staring, terrible face, eyes decisively forward, not forced to powerlessness by averting her gaze elsewhere. Feminists then fully responded to Cixous' call for a reclamation of the feminine, transforming Medusa from an androcentric signifier of objectified beauty and castration anxiety to a heightened symbol of power and anger.

Medusa's anger takes an edge of vengeance with feminist interpretations of the Ovidian tale. Her rape at the hands of Poseidon, then subsequent blame by Athena, is unfortunately highly similar to the realities of many victims. Nevertheless, some interpretations assert that Athena's act is a protection. Medusa's locks are turned into hissing coils to enact vengeance on the patriarchal reality that ruined her fate (Haynes 40). This interpretation is highly

refutable since Athena is anything but the "cheerleader for women" (40). She is the opposite, the goddess holding most affection for male heroes. Miller's Athena and her strong attachment to Odysseus accurately represent her history.

Regarding feminist revisionist novels, Medusa is the most popular pick of women creatives. As of 2024, no less than five contemporary retellings have been released in English within the past few years. The most prevalent interpretations are Hannah M. Lynn's 2020 *Athena's Child*, Rosie Hewlett's 2021 *Medusa*, Jessie Burton's 2021 *Medusa*, Natalie Haynes's 2022 *Stone Blind*, Claire Heywood's 2023 *The Shadow of Perseus* (retelling the tale of Medusa, Danae, and Andromeda) and Nataly Gruender's 2024 *Medusa*. One thing for sure is that Medusa is deeply appreciated by authors who seek to utilize feminist revisionist mythology. This proliferation of Medusa's retellings is a testament to her role and importance to feminists. Yet, this excitement for Medusean retellings also points to a trending commercialization of feminist mythological retellings as commodities. Despite this counterproductive assimilation with commodification, these authors' intent remains undeniably feminist since they seek to express a complex account of a Medusean biography. This study and the following titles focus on Rosie Hewlett's feminist revisionist strategies of myth-smashing and myth-making to reveal falsehoods and truths.

3.2 Hewlett's Reimagining of Medusa

Medusa is Rosie Hewlett's debut novel, written during the global COVID pandemic and published independently, is the winner of the Rubery Book of the Year Award 2021. Hewlett is a Classics graduate from the University of Birmingham and uses her knowledge to bring to light strong feminine voices of the classical world ("Rosie Hewlett"). She precisely does this with her novels *Medusa* (2021) and *Medea* (2024), both eponymous novels uncovering feminist tales of powerful mythological women. On *Medusa's* back cover, she asserts: "*You*

know her name, you know her story. Just not the right one." Proving that she seeks to dispel the false phallogocentric tales associated with her to uncover and build on her true feminine potential.

3.2.1 Dispelling Falsehood and Uncovering the Truth

Rosie Hewlett openly states that her full creative powers and knowledge are dedicated to righting the tale of Medusa, not the one where she is Perseus' tool, an objectified picture of feminine suffering, or a phallogocentric castration symbol. Within the following titles, the myth-smashing and myth-making strategies used by Hewlett are explored to dispel those falsehoods and reclaim the truth.

Similarly to *Circe,* Medusa is reclaiming her voice by recounting her tale. The first chapter is appropriately titled: Voice. Medusa speaks in first-person to immediately claim the narrative and address the audience. She establishes direct communication by directly addressing her readers, prompting them to listen fervently. She is letting her true story see the light, and she wants all eyes to be on her, taking in every word, every sentence. She exhumes the falsehoods associated with her in contemporary societies to replace them with her realities. A variety of these falsehoods stray from her mythological history and are therefore myth-smashed in Barthes' sense, an inception of myth within myth. She deconstructs the myth as a fallacy and a public idea that strays from facts.

3.2.1.1 Medusa Objectified

Medusa's first words are: "I was beautiful once. / I would not recommend it." (7). Medusa, with her Janusian duality of divine horror and beauty (Shelley 1), rejects the latter and not the former. For the latter strips her of power and reduces her to a sexual object "[w]hich turns the gazer's spirit into stone" (1). Expressing regret in beauty instead of her monstrous appearance

testifies that, by not fitting into androcentric aesthetic standards, she gains freedom and independence inaccessible to her in the form of a patriarchal object of desire.

Medusa delineates that it is not the beauty that gives her the power to turn men into stone, as writers, such as Lucian and even feminine voices such as Christine de Pizan, claim. She declares: "To put it plainly, my beauty was the catalyst of my downfall" (40). Additionally, she defies the falsehood that her curse is due to hubris regarding her beauty. It is an entirely ludicrous idea to her as she states: "what kind of 'crime' is that anyway? A man can sing endlessly of a woman's beauty, but if she acknowledges it herself she is immediately the villain?" (40). Proving once again the patriarchal appropriation of feminine beauty for their objectification purposes. Beauty is a curse, Medusa bemoans; thus, she casts it as the cause of her misfortunes.

Per patriarchal decree, a woman's beauty is an instant agreement to be leered at, a visual feast for the insatiable phallic libido. Medusa, as a priestess of Athena in an abandoned temple, does not have the opportunity to interact with society and realize the reality and dangers of her beauty. Her first realization happens when she is seventeen and accomplishing her priestess duties. The arrival of men seeking refuge, food, shelter, or the like is not uncommon. However, in this particular case, he is not welcomed by the head priestess, and the only priestess besides Medusa, as is common, but he stumbles upon the unwary and socially inept young girl. A lack of knowledge of social cues does not obstruct feminine instincts and the dangers of the objectifying eye. Medusa's senses quickly warn her of her interlocutor's lust: "All the man had done was call me beautiful, yet I could not deny my discomfort, it was right there, squirming in the pit of my stomach" (41). The words uttered are harmless, but the intonation and gaze belie their speaker's intentions. She silently flinches away from the indeterred man as his morbid hunger intensifies. His desires are only

obstructed by the arrival of Theia, the old head priestess who raised Medusa, as the wise authority of the place.

The issue with the objectifying gaze is the shamelessness that accompanies it. As he gets caught by Theia, his first instinct is to display greasy innocence and defensiveness. It displays lust to its victim but denies it when confronted. Despite her instincts blaring warnings, Medusa could only stand petrified of the objectifying gaze, which petrifies with a vicious strain of fear. "Everything changed once my innocence had been stripped from me, leaving my body bare for men to shamelessly ogle. Where I had once been excited by the rare company of others, now I was afraid of it" (43). Before Medusa becomes the holder of the petrifying gaze, she is the subject of a patriarchal objectifying gaze. This event and her words resonate with Jean-Paul Sartre's: "…his look may make me feel that I am an object, a thing in the midst of a world of things. If I feel that my free subjectivity has been paralyzed, this is as if I had been turned into stone" (qtd. in Bowers 219). Paradoxically, the example of the being causing petrification is herein petrified herself in the face of objectification. By presenting Medusa as a victim of petrification, the perceived negative afflictions of her petrifying powers are exposed.

Her uncomfortable encounter with the stranger is a jest for her sisters, who declare that she should be or will learn to enjoy it someday (Hewlett 44). They imply that objectification is something to be enjoyed by stripping away the intrinsic discomfort that it causes. These declarations are resonant with the attitude of the self-objectified since there is "evidence that when women's appearance is focused on by others, they literally objectify themselves" (Heflick and Goldenberg 227). Her sisters are then the self-objectified women who have had to silence their intrinsic rejection of objectification to become willful victims of the androcentric traditions that paint women as sexual objects. That barely reassures their

youngest sister, who still believes it will cause unwarranted demise. With her lack of assimilation into society, she has not grown assimilated to patriarchal standards. Therefore, when exposed to it, the brunt is harsh and forthcoming instead of an insidious process. Ultimately, she is not eased into enjoying her beauty and grace.

Nevertheless, Medusa's insertion of her beauty as purveyor of her dismay is in larger part referring to the sexual assault committed by Poseidon. It is the reason "he's got his eye on [her]" (55), even though he also "has his eye on anything with a pulse" (57). These two statements display the paradox between stereotypes and reality in sexual assault. When beautiful women are assaulted, they are made to believe that their physical appearance attracted the unwanted attention of the aggressor. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Daphne, while fleeing from Apollo, begs her father to rid her of her beauty for it had "made her too pleasing" then "[t]he myth of Daphne's attempted rape tells us that it is the woman's appearance that is to blame for inciting male sexual aggression: she was asking for it" (Morales, *Antigone Rising* ch.5 #METU). Medusa by blaming her beauty is, in fact, blaming the patriarchal assumptions that are assigned to it:

> You might think beauty is a trivial thing to complain about. But beauty was my first curse. It exposed me to the world and left me vulnerable to its consequences, forcing me into the restraints of a dangerous stereotype. *You cannot look like that and not expect attention. She is asking for it, surely? She must secretly want it, mustn't she? Because all women do, right?* (40)

By blaming women's appearances when it comes to sexual assault, women are also made to believe their beauty is a curse, an intigator for the actions of their aggressors. However, beauty is simply one of the many arguments used to shift blame from the assailants to the victims.

3.2.1.2 Medusa Defiled

Ovid's interpretation of Medusa and Perseus' myth remains influential. Despite the obvious connotations of sexual violence, many, either to make myths more palatable or due to dismissal of feminine struggles (even if fictional), treat it as an event to be skipped or altered. In reaction, Medusa expresses: "I believe people prefer to tell these versions because it frees them of any accountability. They can remain blind to the realities of the world" (68). Initially afraid of speaking about her traumatic experience, because to speak of the events aloud is to fully dissect and understand what occurred to lay out the truth, she finally decides to speak of her trauma, to set herself free but also to expose the accountability of her aggressors, "I want the world to know what they did to me" (58). The emphasis lies on the pronoun they, for Poseidon, as the prime aggressor, is not the only one who inflicted harm. Athena, as the supposed protector of her priestess Medusa, does the opposite and lays the blame on the victim rather than her oppressor. For linearity, Poseidon's crime is discussed first.

Perseus speaks of the rape of the "beautiful creature" at the shallowest narrative level. The rape of women in classical myths are specks of allusions unexplored, skippable, and vastly ignored in the face of heroic virtues. Some myth scholars, such as E. M. Berens in his *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome* (1880), completely omit or change these narrations of feminine suffering. In his work, Danaë is happily married to Polydectes, and Medusa's tragic past is not mentioned; she is simply the Gorgon that heroic Perseus kills. *The Iliad*'s famed argument between Achilles and Agamemnon is the result of two men assuming a woman's existence as an object to be owned, a bounty of war that shall be received by the heroic man who excelled at plundering her town. This is a harsher degree of the objectifying gaze, the object appropriation. The former invokes the latter upon Medusa. Hearing of her

beauty, Poseidon heads to her with full purpose to appropriate for himself the rumored illustrious "prize", the shining apple perched on a tree.

Medusa is taken by fear at her first sight of the man emerging from the ominous water foam. For he is the reason she resides in an abandoned temple in the first place, that temple stands as the vestige of his rage against its builders. He decimated an entire city for their worship of Athena when he assumed them to be his followers. As the only remaining mortal —for Theia has passed away by now, relegating head priestess duties to her— in that decimated city, she knows the extent of the god's pettiness and anger. When he addresses her and urges her to walk with him, she walks on the eggshells of his ego, afraid that any crack may break into godly fury.

Poseidon wears a veil of overwhelming divine charm, presenting an image of power yet warmth. However, this facade does not last long as Medusa "caught his gaze and saw the ugly, unapologetic hunger that burned there" (61). The fear of his anger is then quickly intermixed with the fear of his unwarranted lust, as she struggles to find a position that neither stirs his anger nor lust. "Panic caused my mind to go blank. What should I have said? If I were too complimentary he could perceive it as flirting. But if I was not complimentary enough I could risk angering him…" (62). She is then forced between two precipices, as Poseidon represents a figure of absolute authority, any "wrong" move would lead to certain doom.

Through narrating the excruciating ordeal of being a victim of the violent, objectifying, and authoritative male dominance, she is emphasizing the importance of voicing abuse and letting it take form in others' minds for consciousness-raising. She is also dispelling the falsehoods constructed by androcentric interpretations:

> I have heard accounts that claim Poseidon and I were in love, that we were star-crossed lovers who started a secret affair, behind Athena's back (…) I have even heard versions that claim that *I* was the seducer, luring in unsuspecting Poseidon with my devious female ways. The sad thing is I am not even surprised by these lies. I was not the first woman to be blamed for a man's flaws and I certainly will not be the last. (68)

By openly voicing her trauma, Medusa places her audience in a position to listen, to ponder the androcentric interpretations restricting her, and to admit their harmful influence. Hewlett places Medusa and her audience in a consciousness-raising meeting to spread awareness and expose patriarchal violence. This pattern follows real instances of CR meetings, where women talk of their abuse to other women to address their trauma in a safe space, as well as share information on patterns of abuse to keep an eye on. This CR speech is also closely linked to the #MeToo movement. A movement that galvanizes survivors of sexual assault to speak out, denounce their aggressors, and reclaim agency by voicing their experience.

For Medusa, her safe space is Athena's temple, the place where she was raised, had a relatively happy childhood, and felt protected by Pallas Athena. Therefore, her only hope to escape Poseidon is manifested in that place. She instantly releases a sigh of relief when she invites him, for she is within "the safety of Athena's protective embrace" (63). However, there is no safe place for women when a man backed by patriarchal power is set on infringing it. Despite leaving the temple unscathed in his previous bout of anger, he is set on defiling it as a rebellion against female power because "[Athena] thinks herself above the rest of us (…) She's an entitled bitch" (64). By us he refers to himself and men who view it as natural for men to be above women. Medusa is thus a victim of violent patriarchal objectification and revenge on feminine power.

Poseidon's rape is the ultimate desecrating violence, not on Athena's temple as the myth states but on Medusa, her body, her mind, and her agency. It is a violent act of stripping away her subjectivity and breaking into her sacred space. Just as Poseidon left the city in ruins, Medusa is left crumbled into a similar state. This act of objectification and appropriation bears the heaviest toll on its victim. Medusa does not learn to accept the objectifying gaze and self-objectify herself as her sisters prescribed, but she is forced into self-objectification by an extreme act of patriarchal dominion. The ravages left her stating: "He had gotten what he wanted and now I was just another used toy, dull and uninteresting" (66). This forced self-objectification leaves its victim believing herself not an object of beauty and admiration — still an object nevertheless— like the case of Stheno and Euryale, but a broken and dull object.

3.2.1.3 The Structure of Blame

Medusa's suffering does not cease when Poseidon leaves. After his departure, she cannot let her sisters approach her as she states: "I could still feel him on me, as if I had been branded by his touch. It made me want to rip out of my skin, to tear the remnants of him from my body" (69). The trauma makes her dissociate from her body. It turns the latter into an object foreign to herself, one that she seeks to escape. The account from the metamorphoses does not allow her perspective; she is merely an object in the narrative, to be assailed, punished, and disposed of. Perseus relays that "Jove's daughter [Athena] screened her virginal eyes with her aegis in horror,/and punished the sin, by transforming the Gorgon's beautiful hair/into horrible snakes" (Ovid 4.800-02). Athena, present during the assault, shields her eyes as if being a witness is a great dishonor to her and immediately punishes Medusa, not Poseidon.

Medusa's account, previously dismissed, relays a different tale. Athena is not a soft maiden shielding her eyes in horror; she appears in a flurry of misguided anger, stating: "Did you take pleasure in defiling my temple?" (71). She is not punished for boasting of her hair or seducing Poseidon. She is punished due to Athena's assumption that she did. As her priestess, Medusa holds a glimmer of hope that the goddess she worshipped all her life might understand and even console her. However, she quickly realizes that her hope is a delusion and accepts her fate despite her sisters' pleas to the goddess.

No amount of pleading or reasoning touches Athena, and she is set on punishing the priestess and even her sisters. She proclaims: "Medusa, you will become as repulsive as your actions. Never again will you use your temptress ways, for you will be so hideous that no man will ever be able to look at you again" (73). Hewlett's revision then absolutely denies the punishment of Athena as an act of protection. Furthermore, it sets Athena as an elite who is set on continuing patriarchal bias.

Frankel is among the writers who describe Athena's punishment of Medusa as a protective act rather than misguided retribution. She adds that "Medusa is [Athena's] frightened childself, her rage at the gods and men, the abused self, the wounded part" (137). Jane Caputi shares a similar reasoning: "Medusa's enraged 'ugly' visage is mirroring Athena's" (*Gossips, Gorgons,* 163). Athena blesses Medusa with a face of pure fury that represents her repressed anima. She then attributes Athena's aid to Perseus as her casting away her dark side and unconscious, to fully devote herself to patriarchy. Her power, intelligence, and wisdom are used to uphold androcentric standards. She puts them at the disposal of heroes while harshly punishing women who dare to defy the standards she protects.

These interpretations of Athena are rejected in Hewlett's revision. She portrays Athena as a stubborn agent of patriarchy who imposes cruel punishments on women while coddling

heroes. She is then an example of internalized misogyny, as she tears down the feminine to appeal to patriarchal power systems. Medusa shares: "Athena is not capable of (…) compassion towards other women. In fact, I have reason to believe Athena hated women altogether" (75). Born from Zeus' skull, she is his favored child, for she serves as proof that he can appropriate the prowess of birth for himself. She "has become a sexless defender of the patriarchy, as an extension of Zeus" (Frankel 138). Hewlett's Medusa then firmly denies any allusion that Athena's punishment is in any form of protective aspect, but is a result of pure gender bias. Regardless of whether Athena's intentions were benevolent or malevolent, the outcome remains unchanged. Medusa is transformed into the fearsome Gorgon, a monstrous figure vilified by both gods and mortals. Nevertheless, even this enduring aspect becomes shrouded in falsehoods over the passage of time.

3.2.1.4 Revenge and Justice

The modern image of Medusa is that of a beautiful woman crowned with snakes. According to Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher, this image takes its roots from the fourth century BCE classical period. This image of the beautiful Gorgon expands throughout time and is mainly propagated by Renaissance artists. Then it changes and adheres to patriarchal beauty standards as time progresses. Medusa thus stands as a perennial example of how women should look to fulfill androcentric beauty standards. Contemporary Medusa is beautified and sexualized. She is a "symbol of seduction," according to Gianni Versace, who uses her as the emblem of his fashion brand. She is an icon of reptilian sensuality in Rihanna's cover of GQ magazine's 25th anniversary. Helene Cixous does assert that Medusa is beautiful and is laughing; however, in contemporary cases, this beauty is mostly sexualized and objectified to fulfill the desires of the male gaze and to trap women in unrealistic beauty standards.

Hewlett's Medusa rejects this beautification, for she sees beauty as a curse that pushes unwanted bias upon her. Her appearance is similar to Pseudo-Apollodorus' early account, a terrible face with glistening, sharp teeth, crowned by hissing snakes, whose scales blend into her skin. She also possesses broad wings that allow her to fly away from the devastated city that witnessed her ruin. Open mockeries of the objectifying depictions of the gorgons accompany her self-description:

> I have seen many different depictions of my sisters and me. Some are admittedly fairly accurate, whilst others are so far off the mark it is almost comical. The ones that make me laugh the most are where we are depicted as beautiful women, with snakes wrapped seductively around us. Honestly, people will try to sexualise anything, won't they? Well, I can assure you – we were not beautiful.
>
> We were hideous. (79)

Thus, she refutes the beauty standards forced on her in order to return to her apotropaic origins, face terrible and glaring, teeth barred against threat and danger.

She equally reappropriates her position as guardian. She hunts men who seek to assault vulnerable victims and petrifies them. Therefore, the petrified becomes petrifier. She seeks vindicating revenge on the objectifying gaze that petrified her and stole her priestly prowess and agency, representing fellow survivors and preventing future ones. Through Hewlett's Revision, Medusa narrates "a story that allow[s] women to reclaim their right to 'look' and not be merely looked *at"* (Tan 117). She does so by executing the eye for an eye principle. It is now a gaze for a gaze, petrifier against petrifier. Medusa does not simply turn men into stone; she petrifies those who seek to petrify through violent objectification.

Questions such as whether Medusa actually turns men into stone or is she simply capable of it, why she turns men into stone, and how she feels about her powers are ignored or

shallowly explored at best by androcentric interpretations. One of the reasons why these questions are dismissed resides in the "trite generalisation" Stephen Wilk concludes his chapter "the Gorgon Today" with: "To girls, she is a symhol of the power of their anger and the source of their inspiration. But to boys, she's just a real cool monster" (224). These assertions, albeit quite simplifying, clearly state the difference between gynocentric and androcentric perspectives. The proponents of androcentric bias do not see a necessity to explore the depths of a woman's experience, thoughts, and roots. They take what they see and do not realize the insidious implications lying beneath, nor the plethora of possibilities that characters akin to Medusa hold. For Hewlett and feminist interpreters, exploring those questions and proposing answers is crucial. Medusa, the face of fury, would not hold back from punishing her perpetrators in a "feminist fantasy of furious and devastating rape revenge" (Tan 117). Medusa openly states: "I would never be able to make Poseidon or Athena answer for their crimes; all I could do was take my revenge elsewhere. So I funnelled my bitter hatred through acts I deemed as justice" (Hewlett 100). Thus, she and her sisters sweep towns displaying the terrible face of the gorgoneion to repel the evils of men attempting to commit vile acts or in the process of committing them as an act of justice.

This revenge also serves as a catharsis for readers who suffer from patriarchal bias and the brunt of its violence. Medusa is not 'just a real cool monster,' she becomes a symbol of justice. A literal and visual display of this is a statue crafted by Luciano Garbati, showcasing Medusa standing with Perseus' severed head in her hand. Its sculptor states that the statue is a reversal of Cellini's "Perseus with the Head of Medusa" (Jacobs, "How a Medusa Sculpture Became #METOO Art"). This sculpture has gained traction during the #MeToo movement as a symbol of feminine rage and justice, and was displayed in Lower Manhattan facing the criminal courthouse where sexual predators such as Harvey Weinstein were being prosecuted.

Albeit displaying strong symbolism, the sculpture is criticized for exhibiting Medusa in an objectifying manner, giving the spotlight to a male artist, and displaying the head of Perseus rather than her rapist Poseidon. Garbatti admits to being "a product of a patriarchal society" and crafting his oeuvre with no subversive intentions (Jacobs). She may have also appeared as 'just a real cool monster' to him. Nevertheless, the statue of Medusa with the head of Perseus is proof of the crucial symbolic and cathartic aspects of feminine revenge.

Medusa asserts her tale as the "true story, the final version, the recovery of a lost or buried voice" (Purkiss 448). She effectively wages war against the Doxa, the set of biased public beliefs Roland Barthes likens her to (*Roland Barthes* 132). Barthes compares the Doxa to a jellyfish or a méduse's sting, petrifying whoever comes in contact with it, and it does not spare the Medusa herself. The phallogocentric prevalent bias molds her into an image, an object made to fulfill a patriarchal audience's desires. The horrified, gaping-mouthed portraits, the brand logo, and the modern image of the sexualized monster are all depictions she actively denies as she seeks her own justice. Through myth-smashing and myth-making, Hewlett does not solely subvert the androcentric bias in myths but the Doxa that the public produces from them.

3.2.1.5 Medusa Weaponized

In most myths, Medusa is decapitated while sleeping peacefully in her lair, unaware of the intruder who infringes upon her abode. In contemporary tales, she is beheaded in a fight against Perseus or a stand-in Pseudo-Perseus. No matter the manner in which the beheading is accomplished, it is the exploit of the hero. It is his 'well-earned' prize. Hence, this dislocation of the head from the body does not return Medusa to her apotropaic roots but

further objectifies her into a weapon, guarding her killer against her will as his flashy weapon.

Hewlett's Medusa deconstructs this as another falsehood. She has had enough of being an objectified victim of an androcentric narrative; she prefers her monstrous form that prevents petrification. She is a being who, through hardships, has reclaimed power for herself and is unwilling to let it go for the ego and quest of any hero. Yet the fates do not cease their onslaught of misfortune on her and prophesy an early death. This time, however, she does not submit without a fight, for she has to continue her duties as a protector before fulfilling a hero's prophecy.

Hermes, bearer of bad news for Medusa, relays the prophecy of her early death by a hero's sword. He relays another information more life-changing than the news of her upcoming death. She is pregnant with "a child of lust and violence. A child born from the darkest moment of [her] life" (117). She expresses: "How could I bear that poison inside me? How could I ever love such a thing? Was there no end to my punishments?" (117). Then, she shortly answers her string of questions, "Yes, it was his child, but it was also mine. Mine to protect. Mine" (118). Medusa is in a difficult dilemma, a direct result of the violence and blame pushed on her. She claims the child as her own and solely her own, to deny the aggressor any positive affiliation with the child.

Her namesake "protector" is especially powerful with the fervency she consecrates to the well-being of her child. The Gorgon's lair is a place she has to find for herself, to guarantee her child's safety. Despite its strains, she finds peace and comfort in pregnancy. She asserts, "Let me tell you, being pregnant is wonderful;" however, she cannot fully dedicate herself to it since "being pregnant when you are a wanted monster is not so picturesque" (121). Her lair

is continually encroached upon by individuals pursuing glory, and the powers she has decided to renounce once more become necessary for self-defense.

Medusa cannot sleep peacefully in her cave; any intruder might be the foretold hero seeking her head and ending her child's life as a consequence. However, the hero Perseus is not the figure she had expected. Thus, she insists on introducing him and relating his true story: "Let me just start by saying that everything I am telling you here I was told by Perseus himself and so I will try to stay as true to his own words as possible" (135). The manner in which she narrates the background and history of Perseus presents a stark contrast to the way Ovid's Perseus recounts her tragic past. Her tone is empathetic, understanding, and tinged with amusement, devoid of any semblance of boastfulness or bitterness. She describes his adventures from the perspective of a friend. By utilizing her voice, she advocates not only for herself but also for all the misrepresented figures present in her myth, while illuminating the individuals whose transgressions have been conveniently overlooked.

She then denies and openly smashes the myth of her death stating: "Well, that is the version that history wants you to remember, a simple tale of good vs evil, of hero vs villain – an easy story to tell. But the truth isn't always so black and white, is it?" (148). By openly subverting the myth, she fully engages in the act of myth-making. No, she does not die in a blissful slumber, contrary to androcentric aims to present women as powerless in front of the masculine. She stands at her cave, ready for battle, willing to pursue any method to save her child.

However, A battle does not ensue. Medusa and Perseus face each other, through his shield, and realize that they are not what they expected of each other. Medusa is not "a crazed, ravenous monster (…) but an unarmed, pregnant…woman" (152). Perseus is not a hyper-masculine hero who seeks glory to feed his ego, but a boy with no concrete plan, simply

seeking to save his mother. In this revision, Hewlett meaningfully smashes the patriarchal myths of the virtuous mighty hero and the wicked subjected villainess, replacing them with a nuanced mythopoetic narrative of equality. Finally standing on equal grounds, Medusa strikes a deal with the hero: the life of her child for her head. Perseus, disbelieving, utters: "You mean you would voluntarily let me behead you? (…) Now, that really doesn't sound very heroic of me, does it?" (152). These words show the stark contrast between the androcentric and gynocentric Perseus. The latter would not kill Medusa in her sleep like a coward, but insists on keeping equality and only accepts under the condition of a fair fight.

The deal is not synonymous with an instantaneous friendship. It is the result of tense bouts of silence, discussions, and finally understanding. Medusa insists on truthfully relaying Perseus' tale due to this forged friendship. When Medusa gives birth to Pegasus and Chrysaor (not from her severed head's blood as the myth states), she is ready to allow the hero his quest boon. Her head is not a weapon but a willful sacrifice for the greater good, her children and the safety of Perseus and his mother. It is no longer the myth of good versus evil, but two individuals trapped by androcentric fate. Medusa laments: "He did not want to be a killer any more than I had wanted to be a monster" (166). When Perseus refuses to kill her, he is equally refusing the patriarchal binaries of the hero and villainess. Medusa does not deserve to have her life taken away, even if she is a feared 'monster' who has rendered many men into stone.

The fates still possess an equalizing aspect since no one, without exception, can deviate from what they foresee. Perseus attempts to avoid the inevitable, but Medusa, wise to their ways, ushers him to complete his quest. She addresses the audience's doubts: "You might also be feeling frustrated that I accepted my fate so readily, wondering, should I not have at least tried to fight back? But honestly, there was no point. I had no chance, no choice" (173). By directly communicating with the reader, she leaves no doubts about her reasoning and

actions; she stands by her decisions unwaveringly. She also stares decidedly from the underworld at Perseus' enemies:

> He had taken my head to Polydectes and let him look into the eyes of the monster Medusa. Of course, the foolish King had not even considered my fatal stare could endure after death. His tiny mind could not fathom the idea of a dead woman yielding any kind of power.
>
> And so, Perseus had defeated him.
>
> No, we had defeated him. Together. (186)

Medusa is therefore no weapon, no hero's aid, but a respected companion. There is a distinction between feminine characters and male characters when it comes to the hero's aid. While the hero applauds and respects the men as companions, women's aid is taken for granted and disrespected, as exemplified by Theseus' treatment of Pirithous and Ariadne. Hewlett's Medusa breaks the rigid definition of a villain to showcase a plethora of nuances. She is a punisher, a protector, a sister, a friend, and a mother. She is anything but a twisted seductress, a mindless monster, or a tool.

On the other hand, it is crucial to note that this focus on Perseus decenters Medusa and momentarily positions her in an inferior narrative position. Certainly, Medusa is the speaker and nevertheless possesses control of the narrative, but by solely blaming the fates and Athena, Hewlett does not explore the fact that Perseus still holds patriarchal privilege. He is overaided by the gods simply for being a man born with divine blood; women with similar lineage, such as Helen, do not receive this chance but are instead treated as an object to be claimed. Even if he participates in the quest unwittingly, the fact remains that his virtue is rewarded while Medusa's is dismissed.

While Perseus embarks on his journey, Medusa remains ensnared in limbo, unable to traverse the river Styx. She is rendered powerless, except when her head is utilized to deter Perseus's enemies. Only upon the successful completion of Perseus's quest can she escape the endless waiting; Athena sends forth a coin and a 'VIP pass' towards the meadow of Asphodel. However, her messenger Hermes does not miss to note: "[s]he didn't do it for you, Athena would let you rot for all she cared. She did it for Perseus... I think he felt guilty for cutting off your head and all. Bless him" (191). Then again, Medusa is not rewarded for her decisions but for the sake of Perseus, even if he does it for her. It indicates that women, even if powerful, must rely on a privileged figure's aid to receive any form of recompense and consideration.

In conclusion, despite deconstructing Medusa's androcentric definitions in favor of gynocentric ones. Medusa remains subject to patriarchal bias and has to be grateful for even the meekest reward. "I was destined to reside in the Asphodel Meadows, a place of indifference for ordinary souls. This had been a remarkable gift, as those deemed 'monsters' were usually sent straight to Tartarus, the pit of eternal suffering and torment" (194). The Meadows of Asphodel are a far cry from Tartarus and the Miltonesque and Dantesque interpretations of hell[26]. Nevertheless, to state that residing in a place for the ordinary is a great accomplishment is rejoicing at breadcrumbs from a patriarchal system. Despite immoral actions, heroes who accomplish similar feats are sent to the Fields of Elysium, the equivalent of heaven. This demonstrates that Medusa remains trapped within an androcentric space but has accepted it and let go of the anger she is hailed for by feminists, and no icon of fury would estimate the granted minimum as a remarkable gift.

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[26] Medusa and the image of the gorgon are inserted by Milton and Dante as figures who work for the devil and reside in the harshest place of hell.

3.2.1.6 Medusa Isolated

Medusa does not leave her children without a plan. She instructs Perseus to deliver them to her sisters, whom she bade to wait at a neighboring island. The myth does not explore the relationship between Medusa and her family and is dismissed in many contemporary interpretations. Natalie Haynes explains that "by separating Medusa from her family —her gorgon sisters, her sea-monster parents, her equine and gigantic sons— we make her seem more disposable" (51). This is a return to Bower's insertion on the sacrificial victim; with no familial relations, she does not fit within society, notwithstanding that her family itself does not fit the nuclear family standard.

This absence of relatives sets forth Medusa as a monster shunned from society or any social system. In Hewlett's revision, her relationships are highlighted; her sisters, mother figures, and children are crucial to her life and development. Medusa relays tales of a joyful upbringing, notwithstanding her initial abandonment by her mother and sisters, and living in a temple that overlooks a ruined city. "I was raised in the temple by Theia[27] and I was taught from my earliest years to live piously. I dedicated myself and my life to Athena, spending every day serving her" (Hewlett 18). Medusa's childhood is seemingly matriarchal; she follows the lead of her mother figure and dedicates herself to the glory of the goddess Athena.

Medusa grows with Theia and (the statue of) Athena as her guides. She states: "…in those days I utterly adored Athena. She was my idol, but more than that, I even naïvely considered her my friend. Growing up alone, living with a woman of few words, I found myself talking endlessly to that statue" (19). Due to the lonely backdrop of her life, living surrounded by empty ruins and under the tutelage of a well-meaning priestess whose "affection was stiff and

[27] It is worth noting that Theia is not a name but is synonymous with "aunt." The namelessness of the character represents the loss of her identity outside of priesthood due to the destruction of the city and a divide between her and Medusa who does not know anything about Theia's past personal life.

awkward, like wearing clothes that did not quite fit" (19), she seeks the inanimate statue of Athena for companionship. The effigy of Athena becomes more than a duty of worship, but an idol and close friend.

Her lonesome days are subdued with the return of her sisters, whose wild nature directly contrasts with Theia and Athena's strict and rigid one. Her first meeting with them is a plunge into the wilderness of their spontaneity and devil-may-care attitudes. This plunge is demonstrated in the way they carry her off the ground, ascending her towards the sky, then her sudden fall as they let go of her. Similarly to a rollercoaster, her fall is later slowed to a gentle decline towards her destination. This decline is also found in their relationship as Medusa's initial elation for finding her sisters turns into crestfallen disappointment for lacking the abilities and immortality they possess.

Stheno and Euryale, Medusa's sisters, are integral parts of Medusa's myth. In ancient accounts, such as Hesiod, Pseudo-Apollodorus, and Pindar, Medusa lives with her sisters and does not live in solitude. Medusa's death is actively avenged by her sisters as Pseudo-Apollodorus recounts: "the Gorgons started from their sleep and tried to pursue him[Perseus], but they were unable to see him because of the cap, which hid him from their view" (66). While Pindar speaks of "the dismal death-dirge of the Gorgons" (309) and "the cry exceeding shrill that burst from the ravening jaws of Euryale" (311). When contemporary interpretations set Medusa as a solitary monster, they strip her of her right to be mourned, avenged, and seen as a living being possessing consciousness, further reinforcing her objectification.

Hewlett's Medusa is actively protected by her sisters also before her death. They first refuse to enter Athena's temple since "[t]hey thought [Theia] would cast [Medusa] out if she knew [she] was born from monsters" (28). The first time they enter the temple is

correspondingly as an act of protection to defend Medusa from Athena's punishment as they face her head-on:

> "You should be punishing Poseidon, not Medusa." Stheno's voice was surprisingly strong in the face of an Olympian. "Medusa has never done a thing wrong in her life, all she has ever done is worship you !"
>
> "She's a good person," Euryale enthused. (72)

They stand with her and equally take on punishment in an act of sisterhood. This is a purely mythopoetic scene not present in Ovid's account of Medusa's solitude in taking the brunt of her assault alone. By highlighting the bond between the sisters, Hewlett actively engages in myth-making by filling in missing aspects of the myth.

In another act of myth-making, Hewlett gives Medusa a complex mother-daughter story. Although used to solitude, Medusa desperately seeks her mother and laments:

> "Mother, please." My voice sounded ragged from a sudden rush of overwhelming desperation. I felt the tears begin to spill again. "I want to meet you…please. I'm sorry… I'm sorry I'm a mortal. I'm sorry I have disappointed you. Please, just give me a chance…"
>
> I waited.
>
> And waited. (32)

Medusa does not interest the devouring mother in the slightest, a mortal woman cannot bring glory to the gods. However, a monstrous, powerful daughter is an object of pride, and this marks the return of the long-awaited mother. Instead of exhilaration, Medusa feels shame for meeting her mother in the state of the sacrificed woman: "I had wanted my whole life to meet my mother and now I could not even look at her (…) 'This is a punishment. This is a reminder of my guilt'" (87). Her mother rebukes: "I do not see a punishment' (…) 'You look

powerful to me" (87). Thus, the devouring mother who feeds on power only seeks Medusa at her lowest when her punishment comes with winds to fan the flames of her narcissistic pride.

As stated by Adrienne Rich, myths lack coherent mother-daughter relationships. Hewlett provides this crucial aspect, the mother-daughter bond or betrayal, that is explored in male heroes' father-son relationships. Regarding the father-son bond, the myths often relay tales of the Ancient Greeks' anxiety of intergenerational violence. Mainly the fear of sons overtaking their fathers and claiming the power of the patriarch for themselves, as seen in Kronos, Zeus, and Oedipus. On the other side, they additionally relay tales of sons enacting vengeance for the murder of their father, such as Neoptolemus and Orestes. The anxiety of violence is not common in mother-daughter relationships since they lack androcentric power to be stolen in the first place. In the case of vengeance, there are a few cases of feminine vengeance, such as Clytemnestra's murder of her husband, Agamemnon, for sacrificing their daughter, Iphigenia. However, the element of power between mother and daughter is still lacking.

In Medusa's case, power is central to her relationship with her mother. It is what kindles the relationship and what supports it. As a human, Medusa is deemed worthless by her mother, but as a gorgon, Medusa has far greater worth, even at the expense of her suffering. In *Medusa* and *Circe,* power in the mother-daughter bond starkly contrasts with power in the father-son bond. Devouring fathers fear that their sons' power may overtake and replace theirs, while mothers seek to achieve power through their children. Thus, a child who is incapable of being exceptional is deemed unworthy, especially by the devouring mothers.

3.3 Medusa's Heroine Journey

While Campbell's monomyth is explored in the second chapter in favour of Circe's epic, the hero's journey in a different manner for Medusa's tale. Campbell's monomyth shortcomings are especially evident in tales such as Medusa's. Her story lacks distinct aspects

of the hero's journey. She does not embark on a journey and quest for a boon; she is a human subjected to the strings of fate and gods. Elizabeth Vandiver explains that, for the ancient Greeks, heroes do not possess the same characteristics expected of them in modern times. Classical heroes are intertwined with folk memories of ancient Greek civilization, notably the Mycenaean one. Vandiver summarizes three definitions of heroes as perceived in Classical Greece: first, a person of the past who was revered and offered sacrifice for performing extraordinary deeds, even if said deeds bore disastrous consequences. Second, a person alive in the remote past, up to the time of the Trojan War. Third, a demi-god or a man possessing godly parentage. These definitions intersect with Gregory Nagy's description of the Greek hero as a "male or female, of the remote past, endowed with superhuman abilities and descended from the immortal gods themselves" (9). Despite Nagy's effort for inclusion, this description is applied to men more than women in Greek myths.

When applied to Medusa, what defines her as heroic in Ancient Greek culture is equally what defines her as a monster. Her transformation leads her to become exceptional; by turning men into stone, she can perform an unparalleled deed, whether it is for virtuous or nefarious goals is irrelevant. Yet, women being larger than life is not synonymous with heroism since "women who were acting in extreme ways were thought to be transgressing, where men might be considered pioneering or bold" (Cambridge Heroes Teacher Resources, 10). She also possesses divine parentage, but her parents, Ceto and Phorcys, "took responsibility for enriching the seas with hidden dangers" (Hewlett 12). Thus, they are known for birthing monsters rather than heroes. In the ancient cultural context, Medusa was too ordinary as a human to become a hero and was too extraordinary post-transformation.

Alternatively, in a modern context, the Western definition of a hero is "someone who is admired for their courage, selflessness, and noble qualities, and who is willing to take risks or

make sacrifices in order to help others or achieve a noble goal" (Cambridge Teacher Resources, 1). Campbell's heroes align closer to this modern definition than the ancient one. Despite illustrating his work with ancient Greek heroes, Campbell's heroes must gift a boon to better the ordinary world. Thus, he attributes to them a different sense of community from their culture.

Medusa is considered a villain in the case of ancient Greek culture since performing extraordinary feats is only acceptable for men. She is a villain in a modern context due to the inherited image of a villain and a perceived lack of noble qualities. Her categorization as a villainess is deeply ironic when considering the etymology of her name as protector. Hewlett insists on Medusa's meaning as protector. The latter states, "I am aware my name is now synonymous with monsters, but it might surprise you to know it actually means 'protector'" (18). Once she successfully gives birth to her children, she asserts: "I finally had lived up to my name: *Protector"* (174). The way protector is written in both statements showcases Medusa's relationship with her name. The first is between apostrophes to display distance between the name and its bearer and an ironic tone of incertitude. The second is in italics as it fully embodies its bearer. Medusa is confident and full of certitude that she is indeed a protector. Within the following titles, the steps Medusa took towards accepting her ability as *protector* are analyzed through an application of Campbell and Frankel's models.

For a facilitated and orderly contrast, Medusa's assimilation into a hērōs will be divided into the three initial steps of departure, initiation, and return. Additionally, the following table summarizes Medusa's monomyth stages.

Table 2

Stages and Descriptions of Medusa's Monomyth

Stages	Medusa's Monomyth
Ordinary world	Medusa is a priestess at an abandoned temple of Athena.
	I. Departure
Call to Adventure	Hermes warns Medusa that Poseidon has his eye on her.
Refusal of the Call	Medusa does not understand Hermes' warning and decides to forget about it.
Supernatural Aid	Theia the old wise head priestess offers advice to Medusa and subtly foreshadows her demise.
Meeting with the Goddess	Medusa meets her idol Athena but gets harshly punished for being raped by Poseidon.
Crossing the Threshold	Medusa and her sisters are transformed into gorgons
Belly of the Whale	Medusa is initially distraught at her transformation and becomes lethargic. Then she listens to her snakes' and mother's urging voices to experience rebirth.
	II. Initiation
The Road of Trials	Medusa and her sisters hunt men who are guilty of sexual assault.
Temptations	Medusa's snakes can speak to her inner mind and tempt her with their greed for absolute power.
Atonement with the Mother	Medusa defies her mother and refuses to do her biddings.
Apotheosis	Medusa gives birth to the children she has vowed to protect.
Ultimate Boon	Satisfaction at achieving her role of protector thus gaining a sense of peace in facing death.
	III. Return
Refusal of the Return	Medusa insists on being sacrificed in order to protect Perseus and his mother. When she dies, she is stuck in the Underworld's limbo, unable to cross the river Styx.
Rescue from Without	Perseus strikes a deal with Athena to allow Medusa entrance to the Meadows of Asphodel.
Master of Two Worlds	Throughout the tale, Medusa speaks from the Underworld, and her words are aimed at ordinary people in the world of the living. She relays her story to share necessary feminine information and wrath to the world above.

3.3.1 Departure

Medusa's "ordinary world" is all but ordinary. She lives in a temple surrounded by ruins of a fallen city, a macabre and ominous setting that foreshadows tragic events. The deserted ruins relay a message that "any who dwelled there would meet a violent end," and Medusa confirms, "Perhaps there is some truth in that, if my life is anything to go by" (15). Medusa is

self-deprecating and fully immersed in the tragedy of her life. However, she contends that despite the morbid background, her childhood is full of happy memories. She relays her childhood memories as "The sweet smell of incense, the cool touch of marble, the choking smoke after a sacrifice and the shock of cold water purifying [her] skin each morning" (17). Each of these happy memories describes her overall experience rather than mundane steps in her routine. The sweet smell of incense reflects her sweet disposition and the peaceful content of her childhood. The cool touch of marble represents the cold interactions with Theia and Athena that underscore her loneliness. The choking smoke is suffocation and frustration at her fate and lack of exceptionality due to mortal restrictions. The shock of cold water as purification contrast violent waves of violation during her rape by Poseidon.

Medusa begins her tale from the very beginning, from birth and childhood. By giving a complete account of her life, she successfully removes herself from labels of archetypal evil versus good and black versus white categorization. This clash of evil and virtue is dangerous, as Mary Daly states, "the naming, describing and theorizing about good and evil has constituted a maze/haze of deception" (qtd. in Appleton Aguiar 114). It is a deception of extremes since the concepts of good and evil vary in different cultures, although it is mostly based on Western/Christian cultures of moral virtue and wicked sins. The hero serves as an exemplar by being constantly morally virtuous while the villain performs a string of wicked sins. This belief restricts complexity and nuance. Through this lens, Pre-transformation Medusa is a heroine as she fits the archetypes of the maiden and the virgin; virtuously chaste and innocent. She is the archetypal heroine the hero returns to after accomplishing his quest. On the other hand, her post-transformation self is the villain who commits irredeemable sins of murder and sexual divergence by being subjected to rape.

This archetypal assignment renders her in a passive position of waiting and immobility, contrasting with the quest-seeking hero. She is doomed to a stagnant life of solitude, living in a desolate place. Her younger self accepts this life of anonymity as she declares: "I was of no importance, I was a nobody" (Hewlett 35). She affirms that the fates "were Goddesses, so whatever life they wove for [her], it would surely be the right one…" (35). Then, she immediately interjects saying: "I was deeply naïve back then (…) by the way, Fates, if you are listening (…) I just wanted to say: screw you" (35). By relaying her younger self's thoughts interwoven with her modern voice, she is showcasing the stark contrast between her naïve self, who willingly submits herself to a life lacking self-determination and her current self, expressing her anger and regrets from the Underworld. By openly stating "screw you," she is rebelling against the forces that stifled and restricted her independence.

Simultaneously, Medusa actively chooses to remain at the temple after Theia's death. Theia's death is the first loss Medusa experiences. As "the thick folds of smoke [of Theia's funeral pyre] chok[e] the evening sky, turning the blush of pink to a sinister grey" (46), so does Medusa's life start taking a turn for the worse. As she completely consecrates herself to running the temple, she further isolates herself from the rest of the world. She let go of dreams of independence and adventures of exploring the world with her sisters. She states, "I told myself this was the life the Fates had decided for me and I was okay with that," juxtaposed with "And that is when everything began to go wrong" (48). Again, by looking back into her early life, Medusa realizes that willful subservience and refusal to seek agency instigated her doom.

This refusal to leave the temple behind coincides yet diverges from Campbell's refusal of the call. He attests that "Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative (…) All he [the hero] can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of

his disintegration" (54). This aligns with the fact that "everything began to go wrong" when she fully submerges herself into mindlessly following fatalist ideals. Campbell also states, "the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest" (55). This diverges from the case of a feminine protagonist since what is estimated to be her own interest is, in reality, set by patriarchal standards. Most heroines do not willfully refuse the call but are constricted and pressured into it, a notion that Campbell does not discuss nor consider.

On the other hand, Frankel acknowledges that a heroine's refusal is due to outside forces. Nevertheless, she only discusses it in terms of domestic and matrimonial contexts. The heroine may be forcefully entrapped, or she may not be ready to leave the parental home. She does not actively refuse the call but "[s]leep allows her to withdraw, to come to terms with her changing self and then to reappear when she's ready to try adulthood and the sexuality it entails" (Frankel 28). The heroine is thus plunged into a sleep state, awaiting to be awakened at the right time, then she is magically ready for marriage and children. Frankel continues: "This sleep, of course, symbolizes the heroine's descent into death, where she must confront her mortality and gain wisdom from the experience. When she wakes, she has become stronger" (30). Even with Clarissa Pinkola Estés' assertion that "[s]leep is the symbol of rebirth" (qtd. in Frankel 30), the implication of passivity in sleep cannot be avoided. By equating passivity to strength and rebirth, Frankel normalizes androcentric stereotypes. The heroine must wait for her hero. She is not allowed to refuse the call altogether, only to stall it until she is ready to accept her role in the patriarchal system. While Campbell neglects the heroine's constrictions, Frankel glorifies passivity as a form of refusal.

Medusa's isolation is akin to the heroine trapped in a state of slumber. She is isolated from the outside world through entrappment in a protective setting. The temple and the solitude it

upholds protect her from unwanted objectification as she recounts: "it was a sort of comfort, to be wrapped up safely in my own privacy, away from the unwanted attention of men" (Hewlett 48). However, unlike Sleeping Beauty or Rapunzel's towers, the temple does not deter visitors. She is paid a visit by the Olympian Hermes, who would not have been deterred by any tower either way, as the messenger of the dark omens that will befall her.

Hermes does not explicitly tell tales of her future. However, his visit makes Medusa question her decision to remain devout to the fates for the first time. He relays the story of the Minotaur and asks for her opinion on the fate of the Minotaur, born and forced into the role of a monster to fulfill the gods' agenda. Medusa's answer is "[i]f the punishment is the will of the Gods, then I believe it was the right decision" (53). Unaware that the Minotaur's fate darkly parallels her own, she unknowingly validates her own doom. This constant repetition of fate and the gods' will is a leitmotif of Greek tragedy (Agard 117). Medusa stands as a tragic figure in a deterministic tale wherein "gods, or fate, or chance are the real 'masters of the show'" (Agard 121). By defying the gods and fates from the Underworld, a place where they have no influence or control, she takes rein of the narrative and her free will, openly interjecting her past naivety and defying the authorities of fate.

Although neither Campbell nor Frankel discusses the journey of the tragic hero/ine, the steps and aspects of the journey can be applied to them regardless. The refusal of the call may also reside in the protagonist's rejection of a prophecy or warning. For Medusa, she affirms the omen by relenting her personal determinism to the fates and deciding to ignore Hermes' implicit warning despite a perpetual, uncomfortable feeling of foreboding. This refusal of the call is an inescapable disintegration. Hermes' last message, "Poseidon wanted me to tell you he's got his eye on you!" (Hewlett 55), does not allow rebuttal as this ambiguous statement

contains his parting words. Therefore, Medusa is left adrift and ill-equipped when Poseidon resolves to act on his message.

Unsure of how to deter him without bearing hazardous consequences, she seeks the help of her mentor. The latter is the cult statue of Athena at the temple, which Medusa repeatedly sought for guidance and comfort despite the unresponsiveness of Athena's effigy. She repeatedly tells herself, "*Athena will protect me*" (Hewlett 65) with complete conviction that she will appear and thwart Poseidon's assault. However, "Athena never answered" (66). When the mentor finally appears, it is not to guide her priestess but to punish her. According to Frankel, such a mentor is the wicked mother who pushes the heroine into her journey through cruel acts. She acts "[a]s teacher of independence" (38) by harshly rejecting and punishing her. Athena forcing Medusa to leave her ordinary world is presented as a necessary step for the heroine's sake.

However, Frankel's insistence on the wicked mentor as a necessary helper minimizes the androcentric aspect of such abuse. The implications of being forced to learn independence through violence and neglect as preparation for the heroine's quests into marriage and motherhood affirm the harsh conditions that women face in those situations for the sake of upholding patriarchal systems. By stating that the wicked mother figures "are the real queens, masters of magic" and that "[t]he princess needs these skills to marry and rule" (42), Frankel excuses oppressive acts perpetuated by women under the guise of necessary training. It denies the reality that when a woman uses her power to subdue other women and gain authoritative value, she becomes a patriarchal tool used to denigrate other women. Additionally, contrary to a hero's training, the heroine's training is oftentimes not done willingly. Therefore, while the hero is guaranteed glory and elixirs for accomplishing perilous

tasks, the heroine does it with no promise of reward but as something she is expected to perform.

With no promise of virtue rewarded or "that good things happen to good people if they're patient" (Frankel 38), Medusa consecrates herself to the temple and allows the fates to dictate her life. The lack of positive acknowledgment, especially by the figure she idolized, mentally destroys Medusa. She accepts the vices and punishments forced on her as natural. She accepts them as retribution for not protecting the temple and does not express anger at this oppression, but overwhelming guilt and shame. These two suffocating emotions plunge her into a lethargic state. After escaping from the burning temple, she eventually finds and collapses in a cave. She remains on the floor unmoving, expressing: "I did not try to get up. What would be the point? Why would I want to?" (82). Medusa, utterly defeated, "tended to [her] misery like a little pet (…) Misery felt safer, it felt familiar" (83). As she remains still, she is in a death-like state. She does not allow herself food, water, or any movement, deeming herself unworthy of anything. The most harmful effect of victim-blaming and rape culture is the survivors' acceptance of violent acts as a result of their own making. Medusa accepts Athena's punishment willingly and falls into self-critical trains of thought. She bewails: "I felt guilty for everything — for destroying Theia's beloved temple, for ruining my sisters' lives, for disappointing the Goddess I had idolised since childhood. I hate to admit it now, but I even felt guilty for Poseidon's actions" (84). When the blame is shifted onto the victim, it does not merely let the aggressors get away with their actions but can plunge the survivors into a vicious cycle of self-blame and prevent them from seeking justice.

What pulls her out of her torpor, first, are her snakes, who, following Frankel's model, could serve as her unconscious. They communicate and impel her to accept her new skin. Her mother emerges from the sea as the second entity that thwarts her from returning to her cave

of guilt. She declares: "You can choose to see this as a punishment and spend your days wallowing in self-pity, if that's what you want. Or you can see this for what it actually is…an opportunity" (87). Thus, her mother, Ceto, urges her to let go of her guilt and tap into another emotion: anger. She compels her and pushes her to introspection: "Are you not angry for what they did to you? Are you not furious?" (88). The words crash down on Medusa's psyche, and she "finally felt the anger that had been bubbling quietly, hot and impatient" (89). She then rejects guilt as a reductive emotion to allow space for anger.

Audre Lorde delivers a powerful speech in "The Uses of Anger" wherein she discusses the importance of utilizing anger as a viable tool to confront oppression. She specifically discusses the racism faced by black women even in feminist spaces. However, her ideas stand for all marginalized groups, especially women of color, in different contexts and for various uses. She notably states that "anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification" (8). At the same time, "guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we will all perish, for they serve none of our futures" (7). Therefore, anger is an active agent of change while guilt and shame are passive defensive acts that reduce to stasis. Medusa realizes that her guilt is indeed of no use and allows herself to feel anger in order to fight the systematic violence that was imposed on her.

Campbell states that during the threshold crossing, the hero "is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died" (83). He speaks of "self-annihilation" (84) as the hero steps into his journey. He estimates that sacrifice is necessary during the crossing for the hero to be "released from ego" (82). The death-like inertia Medusa experiences in the cave could be compared to the self-annihilation Campbell expects of the hero before he rises through his ashes stronger and enlightened. The aspect of the hero's death-like state is

reflected in this fragment: "I turned to see a small rock pool, illuminated in the moonlight. I staggered over and collapsed beside it, like a dying animal coming for its final drink" (85). Comparing herself to a dying animal confirms the self-annihilation phase; on the other hand, the aspect of the final drink alludes to rebirth, for to drink from a pool illuminated by the power of the moon alludes to an elixir of life. Thus, rebirth follows, which happens when the water becomes the feminine tool of the mirror. "I gingerly hoisted myself up and gazed into the clear, still water. An unfamiliar face stared back (…) But what had caught my attention the most was my hair… It was *alive*" (85). Her snakes, alive and writhing, serve as the realization that she has not utterly self-annihilated. Thus, the snakes and Ceto's spurs galvanize Medusa to release an animalistic scream, contrasting the previous comparison to a dying animal. Wrath fuels the dying fire, and rebirth is successfully effected: "Now that rage was surging upwards, invading every inch of my body, overwhelming me, like a phoenix rising from the ashes" (89). The metaphor of the phoenix is the symbol of rebirth by excellence. Subsequently, like a phoenix, Medusa rises with the reignited flames of fury.

Before proceeding to the subsequent title, it is pertinent to reiterate that Campbell's emphasis is exclusively androcentric; Medusa's experience may exhibit analogous patterns to his monomyth. Nevertheless, her experiences and actions are significantly detached from the conventional interpretation of heroism, as she is traditionally portrayed as the adversary or monster to be vanquished. Consequently, her initiation stages diverge from the standard heroic quest.

3.3.2 Initiation

The rite of initiation that Medusa undertakes is one devised by her mother. Her mother instructs her to assault a pirate ship, which she approaches without hesitation, "[her] body

fuelled by the anger that had consumed [her]" (89). As she transforms the men aboard into stone, she embodies the title of the chapter, "Punisher." Her initiation, therefore, represents an antithesis to symbolic heroism; it mirrors the initiation of a villain. Nonetheless, her ostensibly malevolent actions are expressions of vigilantism. As she observes the various statues encircling her, she emits a laugh classically associated with villains. She describes it as "[a] loud, ominous laugh ripping from deep inside [her] (…) It felt like pure release" (94). This further contradicts Campbell's monomyth; her position opposes that of the hero, as she embodies the monster capable of easily overcoming her adversaries. These circumstances cannot be considered trials, given her invincibility against her opponents.

The end of the chapter "*Punisher*" moves instantly to "*Protector,"* as she accepts her transformation and vows to use it to safeguard fellow victims. Her story of avenging the wrongs committed against her is temporarily thwarted by a disclaimer: "Before I continue, I just want to interrupt to say that I recognise my following actions were wrong (…) I realise that meeting violence with violence is never the answer, of course it isn't" (98). She self-critiques the ethics of her previous actions, stating that her actions are wrong and affirming a cycle of violence. However, she first denies culpability stating: "If you ask me it is the Fates' fault" (98) by laying blame on the fates, she does not simply detract responsibility from herself but the rape culture and the rampant issues of sexual violence in patriarchal systems that impelled her actions. Fates or not, patriarchal men often abuse their power to oppress women. Laying the blame on three crones, whose entire existence relies on the indiscriminate handling of thousands of lives woven in threads, is reductionist. She maintains: "The guilt is theirs to bear and yet…why do I feel it weighing down upon me?" (98). This is a return to point-blank. The guilt she has tossed aside reemerges, exposing her psychological struggle

and oscillation between satisfaction for accomplishing acts of vindicating vengeance and guilt for enforcing cycles of violence.

Medusa sets aside that question, further repressing her guilt, and states: "Our wrath spread like a disease" (99). She describes her and her sisters' vindictive attacks as a large-scale disease. Allegorizing said wrath as unfavorable and bearing disastrous consequences. However, diseases are not as selective as their wrath is, since no disease targets men who assault women. Naming their wrath as a disease indirectly imparts to it a primordial yet inescapable quality. Diseases have always existed and remain in one form or another, and so does wrath. Feminine wrath has always existed, no matter how repressed it has been or framed as hysteria[28]. Acknowledging its perennial existence renders it ridiculous to ignore and futile to be ashamed of. This demonstrates that the road of trials she must pursue is psychological rather than a journey of physical struggles.

Medusa's road of psychological struggle is exacerbated by temptations. The patriarchal and Campbellian imagery of temptation is primarily displayed as feminine danger. The woman as fatale beauty and symbolic life is the prime androcentric paradigm of temptation, so the hero as "[t]he seeker of the life beyond life must press beyond her, surpass the temptations of her call, and soar to the immaculate ether beyond" (Campbell 112). Embodying temptation in feminine form is objectively viewing the quest from a phallogocentric perspective and consequently separates the quest from heroines. However, Medusa's temptations are the serpents that crown her head, and therefore, a physically attached yet mentally separated part of herself.

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[28] Hysteria is the first mental disorder attributed to women, as its first description dates back to 1900 BCE in ancient Egypt. Since then, it has become a pathologization of strong female emotions as medical madness. Thus, women who express intense anger and wrath are diagnosed with hysteria and punished under the guise of medical intervention.

Medusa first hears her snakes as the temple and the vestiges of her old life are set aflame, "*Let it burn*. I heard an unfamiliar voice whispering in my ear, soft and sinister. Something was tickling at my temples. *And let the old Medusa burn with it*" (78). She does not realize their physical nature yet, but they impel and reprimand Medusa to abandon emotions perceived as weak and passive: "*Guilt is for the weak*" (78); "*Self-pitying is beneath us*" (79). The powerful do not feel emotions associated with weakness and passivity; guilt and self-pity are considered self-victimization, puny and unproductive. Medusa concedes and listens to their taunts in order to gather strength for her acts of wrathful vigilantism. However, when she accidentally transforms a young boy, the snakes prevent any form of necessary guilt from re-emerging since "[t]hey had a real knack for blocking things out" (105). The snakes then act as a venomous mental shield, one that prevents any form of deep introspection and emotional growth. Therefore, their temptations rest on emotional manipulation and restriction.

Medusa recounts, "They whispered endlessly in my mind and I grew weak to their suggestions, letting them pollute my mind" (105). Thus, she describes them as a corruption of the mind similar to temptation. Frankel states, "Snakes and their dragon counterparts were frequent guardians, like Ladon, coiled around the golden apple tree in the Garden of the Hesperides" (68). Therefore, what Medusa views as cumbersome and manipulative defensiveness is, in fact, guardianship of mental stability. She realizes and relents, "I allowed the snakes' voices to shield me from my guilt, drowning out the unbearable pain lurking inside me" (Hewlett 108). Consequently, the snakes are not a simple temptation but a defense mechanism[29] that thwarts her from returning to a static place of misery. They symbolize the

[29] Anna Freud describes defense mechanisms as "unconscious resources used by the ego." Therefore, they are a variety of subconscious protective mental processes that decrease anxious thoughts, internal conflicts and external stressors.

dangers of overreliance on defense mechanisms. They become proponents of isolation, since they lead Medusa to leave behind her sisters, and detractors of change, since they refute Medusa's willfulness to undertake emotional growth.

Medusa finally disregards the snake's tempting defense mechanism when she fully acknowledges her pregnancy and recognizes the need to protect her children. She successfully gathers the mental strength to ignore and block their voices as she rationalizes: "They became an afterthought for me, as my mind was too preoccupied with the far more important matter at hand – my unborn child" (121). Nevertheless, the snakes are not the sole creatures against the pregnancy. Her mother, whose pride and glory rest on her children's fearsomeness, is against Medusa seeking peaceful isolation. When she seeks Medusa, "[h]er voice was cold and rippling, her lips shrivelled in disgust" and Medusa does not miss to note: "She did not even comment on my belly, which had now swollen considerably" (122). Medusa realizes the authentic nature of her mother, describing her using harshly negative adjectives such as 'cold' and 'shriveled'. Her aversion towards her mother is further enhanced through olfactory imagery, as she contemplates: "She smelt of salt and rotten fish" (122). This moment of realization and subsequent shift in attitude, from understanding and admiration to wariness and revulsion, underscores the necessity for atonement or confrontation with her mother.

Campbell declares, "One must have a faith that the father is merciful, and then a reliance on that mercy. Therewith, the center of belief is transferred outside of the bedeviling god's tight scaly ring, and the dreadful ogres dissolve" (120). His atonement with the father stage thus marks a need to accept the ogre father or the *senex iratus* as a necessary authority in life. He expands, "For the son who has grown really to know the father, the agonies of the ordeal are readily borne; the world is no longer a vale of tears but a bliss-yielding, perpetual

manifestation of the Presence" (137). He suggests that growth and understanding culminate in atonement with the father. However, when the father exhibits truly ogreish traits, atonement becomes unattainable unless it entails severing connections. Medusa, recognizing that her mother affords no place for her or her children, inquires: "Is it my fame you are worried about, or your own?" (Hewlett 123). As a prospective mother herself, she is compelled to choose the path that safeguards her children. Consequently, she chooses to sever ties and demands to be disowned (123). Nevertheless, the mother remains unyielding as she ominously states: "You will be remembered. I will make sure of it" (124). Despite the mother's unwillingness to sever their connection, Medusa acknowledges that this constitutes their final exchange. Therefore, the atonement with the mother remains incomplete, and Medusa is left to endure the consequences.

Medusa cannot reach apotheosis yet, for she has to fight and defeat the men sent by her mother as repercussions of the incomplete atonement: "My mother had been true to her word and my child was no longer safe" (125). Thus, to reach apotheosis, Medusa must defeat the enemies sent by her mother until she safely gives birth. Campbell states that during the atonement stage, "the hero may derive hope and assurance from the helpful female figure" (120). Medusa's helpful figure is paradoxical, for it is Perseus, the young man, who ultimately beheads her. They establish a friendship based on their shared objectives of protection. While narrating his story, she expresses, "Perseus's mind was resolute; this was the only way to ensure his mother's safety and nothing was more important to him than that" (Hewlett 139). His quest is not for glory or immortality but rather for the preservation of life. Medusa is concerned for her children's well-being, while Perseus seeks his mother's safety. Despite Perseus's determined intent to kill Medusa and protect his mother, his resolve falters as he hesitates, stating, "I did not expect a monster to be so… human" (151). Consequently,

they find themselves at a stalemate until Medusa suggests, "So what if we make an agreement, that you let me live long enough for my child to be born and then you can have my head" (152). The agreement they reach and the friendship that ensues provide Medusa with the hope and assurance necessary to achieve apotheosis, as she can confidently ensure her children's safety.

Another factor towards apotheosis is the emotional understanding and healing Perseus provides: "There was a sincerity about him that always caught me off guard. I had spent so much of my life ignored and unwanted, I was not used to this kind of warm openness" (156). This acceptance is what pushes Medusa out of her psychological stasis. "The weight of our future seemed to simply melt away, replaced by a wonderful contentedness I had not felt since childhood" (165). This sensation of contentedness represents a more subtle manifestation of apotheosis, as it implies internal peace. It is the effervescent joy that leads to true bliss upon achieving her life-affirming objective: "Childbirth is a wondrous thing (…) Afterward, I lay in exhausted bliss (…) I cradled my babies like little trophies" (171). Ultimately, the attainment of apotheosis is achieved through the acquisition of a boon. When she characterizes her children as little trophies, it unequivocally refers to the ultimate boon. Consequently, by attaining apotheosis and bringing forth life, she concurrently gains the ultimate boon.

Campbell asserts that "gods may be oversevere, overcautious, in which case the hero must trick them of their treasure" (168). In this context, the gods are not merely oversevere but are portrayed as antagonistic agents. They do not conceal their treasure from her; rather, they seek to extinguish the lives contained within her. Athena admits, "I should kill you right now before your little runts even see the light of day" (169). Her pact with Perseus, who serves as the conduit of their will, diverts their plan, necessitating that they await Medusa's approval to

be killed. Thus, she effectively seizes control of the quest, postponing her death until she attains apotheosis and bestows her gifts upon the world. Perseus may obtain her head, but on her terms. Therefore, she is not merely a monstrous being to be vanquished, but an active agent of her own destiny. Moreover, the boon is intended to benefit a community, as it "may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (Campbell 179). Her progeny, Pegasus, viewed as "a symbol of all that was good and pure" (197), and Chrysaor, recognized as "a beloved king" (198), substantiate this notion. Ultimately, she accomplishes "[t]he heroine's goal […] to become a complete mother, resplendent with power" (Frankel 145).

Consequently, Medusa's initiation is primarily psychological in nature due to her predetermined fate and the gods acting as restricting agents. This ultimately demonstrates that a journey can possess metaphysical attributes. Her ease at disposing of her enemies displays the quest dragon's perspective, showcasing how her demonization superficially revolves around her powers and subsequent acts of killing. A change in perspective reveals that the binary classifications of good and evil are overly simplistic and detract from the potential complexity of characters. From the pursuit of vindictive revenge to the imperative of ensuring her children's safety, Medusa's actions are articulated and substantiated within her own narrative framework, unveiling how patriarchal myth-making diminishes female agency to rudimentary tropes of monstrosity. Hewlett's reimagining amplifies a simplistic male-centric allegory that promotes the acquisition of glory through the subjugation of powerful women. The label of monster ascribed to Medusa is supplanted with affirmations of transformative experiences: woman, survivor, punisher, protector, and mother.

3.3.3 Return

The achievement of apotheosis and the acquisition of the boon signify the conclusion of the initiation phase and the necessity to cross or re-cross the threshold. For Medusa, a return to the temple of Athena and the ruins of the city in which she resided is not feasible. Therefore, the threshold she must traverse is the metaphysical boundary that delineates life from death. As elucidated by Campbell, the hero may opt to refuse the return and withdraw further (182). He cites the example of King Muchukunda, who chooses to retreat to an ascetic existence instead of returning to his ordinary life, which incites the fulfillment of sensory pleasures. This represents Medusa's destiny, as she is compelled to retreat to the eternal Underworld. Prior to this, she meticulously ties the untied knots and ensures that her sacrifice provides long-term protection. Consequently, she boldly defies Athena by declaring: "Leave my children alone. Do not let the Gods subject them to the pain and suffering you forced on me" (176). Having completed her initiation, Medusa has attained the confidence and insight necessary to confront her reality, declaring: "I will take the sacrifice. For my children. And for you" (177).

Due to the nature of her death, her head permanently untethered from her body, a ritual burial is impossible. Therefore, when she reaches the Underworld, she must stand among "[t]he unburied. Souls who would never find their way across the River Styx, because they never had a proper burial. Forever trapped in this limbo, cursed to never rest in peace" (185). This is a torment characterized by an eternal stasis of nothingness, air, and the whispers. Medusa is reduced to utter powerlessness and therefore requires a rescue from without to fulfill her journey. The ally who assists her in this impasse is Perseus, who continues to grapple with the guilt and sorrow stemming from his act of killing her. He proposes one final

agreement with Athena, requesting: "And please, allow her to find peace. As we discussed" (188). The latter fulfills her end of the bargain and guarantees Medusa's residence at the Meadows of Asphodel, "a place of indifference for ordinary souls" (194). However, Medusa is nothing but ordinary, "[she] is the face of feminine fury, banished to the underworld by frightened mortals" (Frankel 142). As the symbol of feminine fury, Medusa cannot remain in the underworld in perpetual silence, confined in yet another state of stasis.

Frankel articulates that Medusa, as the apotrope of feminine wrath, can reemerge in times of necessity, as she references Culpepper, who states that "[t]he Gorgon has much vital, literally life-saving information to teach women about anger, rage, power, and the release of the determined aggressiveness sometimes needed for survival" (142). Consequently, when she shatters passivity and silence by narrating her experience, she is imparting essential feminine knowledge. This significant insight connects her to the world above. By directly addressing the modern world as her audience. She constructs her personal narrative as a testament to the struggle and resistance of women against the patriarchal constraints that had previously confined her to an inevitable fate. Thus, she proclaims: "I have spoken out into that void, offering my voice to the world above. Now, all there is left for me to do is to stand back and wait, to see if anyone up there will actually listen" (Hewlett 199). She heralds personal truth against phallogocentric falsehoods, demonstrating an omniscient understanding, and now shares her tale as a call to defy oppressive systems that victimize women. This positions her as the master of two worlds and concludes her journey.

In conclusion, Medusa's monomyth rests on subverting her villainized role in quest narratives. By displaying her reluctance to cross the threshold, her psychological turmoil during the initiation, and her re-crossing the threshold as a sacrificial act of protection, Hewlett deconstructs the rudimentary stereotypes assigned to Medusa. Moreover, she exposes

the glorification of passivity and endurance of mistreatment in Frankel's heroine's journey. Hence, by utilizing Medusa as a conduit for a gynocentric perspective, Hewlett smashes the reductionist stereotypes associated with her.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter excavates several interpretations of Medusa to display how she has been interpreted and reimagined for centuries. This investigation leads to an in-depth analysis of Rosie Hewlett's extensive reinvention of Medusa, exploring how she deconstructed androcentric symbols permeating the Medusa myth and incorporated gynocentric ones as a new mythical thread to the character. For this aim, Caputi's myth-smashing and myth-making approach demonstrates how Hewlett has dismantled androcentric patterns and dispersed phallogocentric stereotypes that have arisen from popular interpretations of the myth.

Hence, Hewlett, basing her novel on Ovid's tale of Medusa, wages against falsehoods perpetuated by cultural beliefs and the unwary promotion of patriarchal ideals. Medusa, initially a powerful apotropaic figure, has been progressively objectified to serve male-centric narratives. Ultimately transformed into a monster, slain to serve the hero's ego or fulfill expectations of the male gaze. Medusa is the archetypal quest beast in Joseph Campbell's monomyth. While seemingly paradoxically, this framework displays how Hewlett breaks this aspect of the gorgon. While Campbell's hero's journey is vastly constructed from androcentric narratives, his own bias cements the feminine characters' position as silenced aids or monsters. By centering Medusa and allowing her to voice her personal narrative, Hewlett transforms Medusa from a silent monster into a subject of trauma, survival, and reclaimed agency.

Furthermore, Estelle Frankel's heroine's journey amplifies Medusa's voice as a cry of fury, galvanizing other women to tap into their inner anger and release it for protection and agency.

This chapter has proposed a different perspective to feminist revisionist mythology, delineating that authors can utilize this strategy with similar purposes yet different approaches. Hewlett's exposition of androcentric modern societal biases reflects how the phallogocentric ideals present in myths are upheld by modern patriarchal systems.

Chapter Four: Circe and Medusa's Subversion of Narratives and Archetypes

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Introduction

Feminist Revisionist Mythology seems to be a strategy of simple retellings of ancient myths from a feminine perspective. However, it is through that feminine lens that oppressive phallogocentric bias is uncovered. Circe and Medusa, the infamous witch and gorgon, bear strong negative archetypal connotations. Madeline Miller and Rosie Hewlett's pick of these characters is a deliberate decision to dismantle patriarchal archetypal ideals. Unsilencing them and allowing them the agency to follow their own journeys is not simply a template for feminine epics. Intentional, calculated, and purposeful deconstruction of common androcentric myth patterns is necessary. Since Greek mythology constitutes a vast bulk of archetypal patterns in literature and culture, it is essential to investigate and explore them. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* provides the theoretical framework for a critical and extensive exploration of characterization, narrative structures, and archetypes in poetry and prose. Thus, this study argues that the investigation of *Circe* and *Medusa* through his theories of heroic types, mythoi, and archetypal categorization is crucial to display how they dismantle and subvert the androcentric symbolism in myths and their resulting archetypes.

First, the heroic types showcase how Miller and Hewlett position Circe and Medusa as protagonists and women existing in patriarchal settings. Second, the mythoi as narrative structures taken from myths and subsequent works inspired by myths, similar to Campbell's monomyth, draw the path the authors took to shape powerful feminine plots. Third, Frye's categorization of archetypes as binaries of good versus evil is subverted and deconstructed by the authors as restrictive and marginalizing limitations. This three-fold explorative schema is then a concrete paradigm of how Miller and Hewlett subvert and modernize ancient recurring patterns in myths.

The chapter concludes with a practical application of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion, which reveals the act of voicing silenced women in myths as an enterprise that sheds skepticism on the body of myths and intertextual webs within which they belong to expose normalized androcentric ideals. By exploring *Circe* and *Medusa* through Frye's archetypal criticism and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion, this chapter uncovers how structural and symbolic shifts in these novels dismantle classical patriarchy.

4. Circe and Medusa Through Frye's Archetypal Framework

As a succinct guideline, the ensuing table is provided as an abridged presentation of *Circe* and *Medusa's* features in relation to Frye's categorizations of heroism, narrative mythoi, and archetypes:

Table 3

Circe and *Medusa:* According to Frye's Models.

Circe	**Medusa**
Heroic Types	
Ironic hero Later transforming into Romantic hero	Ironic hero Later transforming into a Mythic hero
Mythoi	
Mythos of Summer/Romance: The romance quest Feminine lens on the questing journey of *agon, pathos,* and *anagnorisis*	Mythos of Autumn/Tragedy The fall of the tragic hero Moral law and hamartia as corrupt patriarchal fetters
Archetypes	
Circe fulfills the role of the heroic figure. Subversion from Witch to heroine.	Medusa fulfills the role of the tragic hero. Subversion from a monster to tragic hero.

Circe and *Medusa* are both subversive works aimed at deconstructing the androcentric elements of myths. In doing so, they do not conform to restrictive narratives and hierarchical points of view. Through this framework of the two works through Frye's theory of myths, Miller and Hewlett's use of similar yet diverging strategies to dispel patriarchal aspects is scrutinized. In the following titles, each section will be explored in depth to discuss the similarities, differences, and subversion of archetypal patterns in both novels.

4.1 Heroic Types

Fitting Circe and Medusa into heroic types is the first step towards the subversion of their original characters. As characters written by men for a male audience, they have been deprived of a feminine perspective and voice for centuries. Miller and Hewlett dedicate their works to giving a voice to these voiceless characters who have been reduced to dwellers in the shadows of patriarchal canonical heroes: Odysseus and Perseus. As stated in the previous table, the protagonists do not fit into one specific heroic type. As characters with the power to transform, they are in the best position to realize that transformation is necessary for life and personhood.

Circe begins her tale as a divine being, which logically should allude to the mythic hero. However, her position as an immortal is weak compared to her environment. Frye states the mythic hero is "a divine being, and the story about him will be a myth" (33). Additionally, he describes the mythic hero as superior in kind to other men and their shared environment. This inequity of position in her father's hierarchical realm reduces her from divinity to a nymph, the lowest position in classical mythology. As she states, "it means not just goddess, but *bride*" (1), she means brides who are stolen, married against their will, forcefully taken, or transformed into inanimate objects for the grief of abandonment. Even among nymphs, she is the pariah of the titan society, an immortal who is too mortal compared to her peers. Thus,

Miller subverts Frye's rigid classification and aligns the attributes of the mythic hero with the ironic hero.

Frye states that for the ironic hero: "We have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity" (N. Frye 34). This is true for Circe, who is constantly isolated and looked down upon. The ironic hero defies the norms of conventional heroism; consequently, this initial stage for Circe is her stage of voicelessness. She fits into what Frye calls *pathos,* a mode that presents its hero as isolated by a weakness that appeals to the audience (38). This *pathos* is more substantial due to the "inarticulateness of the victim" (39). Due to her hawk-like voice, Circe is alienated and forced into silence. She is then a voiceless, inarticulate character subject to the abuse of her peers and environment.

Her status shifts with the appearance of Glaucos. The mortal with whom she falls in love. To Glaucos, she is a superior being and then shifts from an ironic hero to a romantic one, as he considers and calls her a goddess. However, despite the appellation, Glaucos refers to her as such only in visual terms. He is distraught when he realizes she is a being hundreds of years old, that she has to apologize, saying: "It was only a stupid joke. I never met him, I only wished to. Never fear, we are the same age" (35). The way she denies the truth of her being is a testament to a need to lower herself to fit Glaucos' ideal of her. In his lens, she is a goddess in terms of beauty and grace; to go beyond that would be to have a higher position, one he would be uncomfortable with. This position shift is an ironic myth, "a story of how the god of one person is the *pharmakos* of another" (Frye 43). The relocation from her father's court to Glaucos' island also displays the feminine perspective of navigating different gender stereotypes and norms.

When Circe discovers the power of her witchcraft and is subsequently exiled to Aiaia, she encounters another heroic shift. Her shift into the romantic mode of heroism begins with its

ironic aspect. This incites "the suspension of natural law" (Frye 36), meaning that the hero's environment is greatly limited to vegetation and the animal world, one of elegiac isolation. However, Circe's mournful attitude quickly shifts to one of confidence and self-exploration as she devotes herself to her witchcraft. She gains powers and rescues Daedalus' crew, constrains the minotaur, and turns Odysseus' crew into pigs, thus gaining more attributes of the romantic hero. This informs a shift from isolation to integration into society. Similarly to traditional classical heroes, she gains respect from powerful gods and goddesses, albeit reluctantly, mainly Athena and Helios, as she perseveres through romantic quests.

Finally, when she reaches apotheosis, she is freed from isolation and ready to fully integrate into society. She willingly chooses to do away with the divine society, as she rejects their inherent narcissism and strives to join mortal society. However, in order to join mortal society, she must reduce herself, as she has done with Glaucos. It is unbearable and inconceivable for mortals to believe themselves equal to an immortal being. Therefore, to join mortals, she must become human. She takes the brimming elixir of mortality and puts it to her lips as she dreams of a future community. The traditional elixir is one of life and immortality. Heroes strive and fight for it out of "a profound desire to cheat death and gain immortality" (Tatar, ch.1). They seek to join the divine society in an Apollonian tale. Circe, conversely, does the opposite, something inconceivable for those heroes. She lets go of her immortality and divine position to join the mortals. Through this ending, Miller subverts the very notion and goal of romantic heroes such as Heracles, Achilles, and Theseus. These heroes strive for immortality by joining a divine society or having their names carved in history. Circe does the opposite and seeks mortality and anonymity. Thus, the traditional notion of the romantic hero is deconstructed. Consequently, Circe defies a single mode, embodying Frye's spectrum to revise mythological heroism. Her growth mirrors

a descent from mythic irony to ascent through a romantic agency in a feminist subversion of the heroic narrative.

Medusa's heroic modes are equally blurry. First, she speaks from a temporal place vastly distinct from her narrative. She is a voiceless body in the modern Underworld, angrily looking up at the contemporary world, which is still ravaged by similar oppressions to those she endured millennia ago. She begins her tale by calling from the depths, decidedly assured to relay her story. She imposes herself, directly speaking to her audience, and takes on the role of orator. "My story has never really been 'my' story" (Hewlett 7), she states. She is tired of being the ironic hero, looking from below as others look down on her. She steps up and calls for equality and positions herself in the high-mimetic heroic mode. When she relays her tale, her heroic mode turns ambiguous. As a priestess, she holds sway over other women. Priestesses enjoyed liberties that women in ancient Greece could not have. They can fully engage in civic engagements by holding sacrificial rituals for the gods when other women are not considered citizens. However, Medusa does not truly possess that privilege. As the priestess of an abandoned temple, she has scarce communication with society. She is then isolated according to Frye's tragic mode. She then fits the descriptors of the ironic hero.

However, when mortal men are involved, the low-mimetic definition is disturbed. Due to the male gaze, she becomes an object of desire rather than an equal person. Her position as a priestess does not spare her from the nefarious effects of objectification. It is akin to the oracle of Delphi, whose position was also initially held by young, virginal women. However, Diodorus Siculus relates that this tradition was thwarted when Echecrates the Thessalian kidnapped and violated the last virginal Pythia; from that point, the position was held by women in their fifties (16.26.6). This historical account proves that even in such a high-standing position, women are up for grabs by men who disregard them. Thus, heroic modes

are vague for female characters who are always at risk of objectification and hence considered societal objects rather than full-fledged members. This is a consideration Northrop Frye disregards as he categorizes his heroic modes with male characters in mind.

When Medusa is transformed into a gorgon, she develops mythic qualities. Her position rises above mortals and even her immortal sisters. Her newly acquired powers are "an opportunity to be powerful and feared. An opportunity to right the wrongs the world has forced on [her]" (88). As a monster, she is the opposite of the traditional sense of heroism. In Frye and Campbell's classifications, she is the mythical beast in the traditional male hero's quest, the dragon slain to gain its boon. Through mythopoeia, Hewlett centers this forsaken monster, created to be slaughtered over and over by the hero in different male-centric narratives. Now that she can voice her tale, Medusa's narrative shifts from an immoral, silent threat to a complex protagonist. The shifts in heroic modes prove her complexity. Her relation to her surroundings is a constant variable.

As a gorgon, Medusa gains supernatural powers and takes on the epithets of punisher and protector. She believes she is no longer objectified as a thing of beauty but as a powerful creature who can dispose of her enemies. She prefers this position as she states: "It is far more rewarding to see a man's eyes fill with terror than ugly lust" (101). However, objectification persists and merely shifts into alienation. She is called a beast, a monster, a creature, but no longer a woman. This shift into a mythic character disposes of her humanness as she becomes the mythological beast of epics. She relays her perspective on the hero's archetypal beast slaying when she narrates: "Men across the land were rallying together to try to hunt down the famous snake-haired Gorgon. They wanted my head on a trophy and the glory that comes with it, but all I wanted was to be left alone" (121). Thus, she effectively subverts the traditional beast-slaying archetype as an anti-mythic figure, a divine

being deprived of agency. Though monstrous, her emotional core is deeply human, blending low-mimetic pathos with mythic horror.

Despite the alterations in heroic modes, Circe and Medusa's voices remain constant as they struggle against patriarchal fetters, adding tragic dignity. This differs from the figures Frye notes as mythic or high-mimetic. It implies an ironic heroic edge that cannot be disposed of. Therefore, the novels redefine heroism not as a triumph but as resistance. Even in anonymity and defeat, Circe and Medusa's endurance in the face of persistent struggles makes them heroic.

4.2 Narrative Structure: Subverting Frye's Mythoi

As depicted in Chapter One, Frye's theory of myths consists of four mythoi: Comedy/ Spring, Romance/Summer, Tragedy/Autumn, and Satire/Winter. Additionally, Frye split each mythoi into six phases to encapsulate many literary works and how they may shift between comic and tragic movements. However, within Miller and Hewlett's works, this linearity is disrupted. The following titles are an investigative analysis of *Circe* and *Medusa's* narratives in line with and opposing Frye's theory of myths.

4.2.1 Circe and the Mythos of Summer

As an ironic hero and pharmakos, Circe does not initially fit Frye's idea of the romantic hero of summer. He states, "The essential element of plot in romance is adventure, which means that romance is naturally a sequential and processional form" (186), meaning that the hero will most likely be a journeying adventurer. Circe, on the other hand, is exiled for a vast part of her tale. An exiled figure as a questing hero is paradoxical, yet here lies the subversion. Exiled and spatially constrained female characters are a staple of myths, as most women in ancient Greece were constricted to the domestic sphere and could not participate in

civic engagements. While in the domestic sphere, these women's roles revolved around the *oikos* or household. Slaves and working-class women were under the obligation of preparing food and cleaning, while the wives and daughters were most preoccupied with weaving and the spinning of clothing. Circe's exiled lifestyle is not much different from that of an ancient Greek noblewoman. The practice of witchcraft is a sustained routine of gardening, animal herding, and overlooking her hearth. These acts are done alone in complete vulnerability, while her weaving is a social task that she guards herself with in the presence of guests.

When she first confidently approaches the practice of sorcery, she states: "By Rights, I should never have come to witchcraft. Gods hate all toil (…) Witchcraft is nothing but such drudgery" (72). While the classic hero toils by journeying and defeating enemies during his *agon* (conflict) phase (Frye 187), Circe toils in the practice of witchcraft as "[e]ach spell was a mountain to be climbed anew" (73). This likens witchcraft and invisible labor done by women to male-centric heroic struggles of violence as honorable toil. This is a popular and necessary deconstruction of androcentric quest narratives as Maria Tatar states: "Rarely wielding the sword and often deprived of the pen, women have relied on the domestic crafts and their verbal analogues—spinning tales, weaving plots, and telling yarns—to make things right, not just getting even but also securing social justice" (Tatar, Introduction). Through this interpretation of epic conflicts, Miller inserts feminine aspects into the traditional features of the romantic quest as a subversion of the idea that feminine labor is easy work and thus unheroic.

Miller inserts more feminine attributes into the male-centric concept of the quest. Her first and only voyage out of the island in the *agon* phase happens to involve performing midwifery. An epic scope is implemented when the baby she delivers is a bull-headed monster that bites her fingers off (107). Upon her return to Aiaia, the conflicts she endures are

psychological battles against loneliness and depression. This leads to a traumatizing experience, the assault by the pirates. Within traditional romantic mythoi, tales of sexual assault are separate from the hero. They either depict how the hero was conceived[30] without much ado or portray him as the rescuer who slays the assailant of the heroine[31]. However, the perspective of the victim is overlooked and dismissed as unimportant. Circe's narration of the attack portrays how it is a horrifying struggle as she likens herself to a corpse: "My flesh seemed to have congealed around me. My skin stretched over it like a dead thing, rubbery and vile" (167). She becomes a spiritually deceased figure after discarding the pile of pirate cadavers on her floor. Frye identifies the death struggle as *pathos w*ithin the romance quest as "often the mutual death of hero and monster" (192). However, it also bears similarities to what he conceives as the *pathos* character of tragedy or the suppliant, which he classifies as "often women threatened with death or rape" (217). This difference in *pathos* demonstrates Frye's overlooking of female characters as romantic protagonists, while Miller disrupts it by centering what Frye considers "pathetic pathos*"* as an epic protagonist.

Frye's classification of the death struggle aligns with the traditional notion of dragon-killing. According to him, the dragon often takes the form of a sea monster such as the leviathan (189). It is accurate in Circe's case, as the dragon she must face is the overlord of the sea: Trygon. He continues: "The ritual analogies of the myth suggest that the monster is the sterility of the land itself" (189). This is indeed the case for Trygon too, as he dwells in a place where "[t]he sand was not smooth but jumbled with pieces of bone. All that died in the sea came to rest there at last" (Miller 245). Thus, Circe journeys to a metaphorical

[30] Such is the case of Achilles, Heracles, and Perseus.

[31] This is epitomized in Heracles' rescue of Deianeira from the centaur Nessus.

underworld, a place of darkness, silence, and death —the final resting place of "bones of a thousand years" (247).

"Lastly, if the leviathan is death, and the hero has to enter the body of death, the hero has to die, and if his quest is completed, the final stage of it is, cyclically, rebirth, and, dialectically, resurrection" (Frye 192). Circe, facing Trygon and standing among the pale bones, reflects the hero entering the body of death. The following step is to die. However, as an immortal, the concept of death differs. For immortals, death is a never-ending sacrifice, as Trygon's condition for its power is to reach for its tail and accept an eternity of excruciating pain. Circe's fingers reach for endless damnation but grasp at empty currents. The beast's trial is fulfilled as his demand is the willingness and intention of sacrifice rather than the act itself. Nevertheless, in claiming her reward, there is an aspect of slaying a willing living being that nauseates her.

The following passage recounts Circe's dread of harming the creature and taking her reward: "His voice was calm, as if he told me to slice a fruit. I felt dizzied, still reeling. I looked at that skin, unmarked and delicate as the inside of a wrist. I could no more imagine cutting it than an infant's throat" (Miller 264). The act of tearing the beast's flesh as its blood flows among the water is not described as victorious, but the opposite: "I remember what I thought: surely, I am condemned for this. I can craft all the spells I want, all the magic spears. Yet I will spend all the rest of my days watching this creature bleed" (247). Thus, slaying the sea monster and claiming her boon is another condemnation. This is again confirmed with her parting thought: "The darkness around us shimmered with clouds of his gilded blood (…) I thought: I cannot bear this world a moment longer" (247). She shows empathy as this sea monster is not her enemy but an ancient, wise being, a perennial part of the sea's environment. This defies the dragon-slaying notion of culture against nature, wherein the

civilized hero defeats the savage wilderness. As a scholar of monsters, Emily Zarka explains that dragons "represent the power of nature. Stories about people taming dragons can be seen as stories about the ability of humans to dominate forces that cannot always be controlled" ("The Myth of Monsters"). Thus, taming sea monsters can be construed as a metaphor for dominating the sea itself.

Zarka continues, "To gain control over a dragon underscores the problematic idea that humans are superior to all other animals in nature" ("The Myth of Monsters"). This is highlighted in Circe's experience with Trygon. She is by no means superior but quite the opposite. She balks at the necessity of harming him. Therefore, Circe's *pathos* is not about domination over nature but a willingness to delve into its uncertainties and respect it as a source and embodiment of life, even in desolate, death-like settings. Therefore, heroism "requires not just intelligence and courage, but also care and compassion: all the things it takes to be a true heroine" (Tatar, Introduction). Miller then effectively subverts the problematic aspect of the dragon-slaying ritual in traditional heroic quests through acts of heroic compassion and empathy.

Trygon is not the only sea creature Circe confronts. Scylla stands as the archetypal dragon that terrorizes the hero's community. Circe defeating Scylla is not simply a part of her quest but a necessity to right her wrongs. She admits and proclaims, "I am the one who made that creature. I did it for pride and vain delusion" (Miller 102). Thus, all of the mortals preyed on by Scylla are her victims also. However, her regrets only stretch to the mortals eaten by the monster. Her initial guilt towards Scylla, whose highest crime is petty court gossip and squabbles, is easily dismissed after her exile. Before realizing that Scylla feeds on sailors, she states, "There was no honesty in regretting what had given me life" (85). She infers that her

life in Aiaia is worth the life of the nymph she transformed. Therefore, in this case of dragon-slaying, Circe does not approach Scylla with empathy but as an enemy to be rightfully killed.

While also a beast of the seas, Scylla is mindless, unable to speak or form coherent thoughts like Trygon. Yet, Circe still likens her to her pre-transformed self: "Scylla had always wanted the light of day. She had always wanted to make others weep. And now she was a ravening monster filled with teeth and armoured with immortality" (85-86). This association showcases Circe's perception of Scylla, not as a power of nature but as an unnecessarily cruel creature. Scylla, as a being lurking on the edge of the sea within a cave rather than being immersed in it, illustrates how she does not truly belong in the sea but is an outlier within its limitations.

Their first confrontation happens during the *agon* phase during her voyage to Crete to assist in giving birth to the minotaur. Their second confrontation is then a confirmation of Circe's growth. She no longer perceives the monster as the nymph: "These flowers had made Scylla a monster, though all she had done was sneer" (331). She recognizes her mistake not only towards Scylla's victims but also towards Scylla herself. Circe no longer permits the absence or denial of regret concerning the nymph. When she relays the tale of the transformation to her partner Telemachus, she grips onto her regret and allows it to remain within as an anchor:

> 'Her name,' he said. 'Scylla. It means *the render.* Perhaps it was always her destiny to be a monster, and you were only the instrument.'
>
> 'Do you use the same excuse for the maids you hanged?'
>
> It was as if I had struck him. 'I make no excuse for that. I will wear the shame all my life. I cannot undo it, but I will spend my days wishing I could.'
>
> (…)

'It is the same for me,' I said. 'Do not try to take my regret from me.' (323)

The monster she has to face possesses no cognitive abilities anymore but has become a gruesome killing machine, "She shrieked, that old baying cacophony, clawing at my ears" (319). Her use of animalistic descriptors, such as baying and clawing, strengthens Circe's view of Scylla as an irrational monster: "Long ago I changed you into this form from the nymph you were. I come now with Trygon's power to make an end to what I began / And into the mist-soaked air, I spoke the word of my will (319). Before uttering the word used to kill Scylla, she first proclaims her accountability. She is the one who transforms the nymph into a viciously mindless, cruel monster due to vanity. Therefore, she must be the one to free the world from this monster and free the remaining material shreds of Scylla the nymph. This last instance of pathos liberates Circe from an intense guilt gnawing at her core for centuries. She has liberated not only the community but also a part of herself as she states, "I was seeing before me again that rocky mass that had been Scylla. She was gone, truly gone. For the first time in centuries, I was not lashed to that flood of misery and grief. No more souls would walk to the underworld written with my name" (322). Thus, Circe's ultimate pathos is the last confrontation with Scylla, as she experiences liberation and exaltation from the battle. It follows Maria Tatar's concept of heroism: "True heroism is situated not in those striving for glory and immortality but in fearless women who sought to preserve life" (ch. 1).

The following stage is the anagnorisis stage, or "the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict" (N. Frye 187). Circe gains the recognition of the gods after obtaining Trygon's tail, a feat none of them could have achieved. This boon and her witchcraft elevate her status among the divine. The gods, who once viewed her as an outcast and a mere witch of no true power, now see her in a new light. Her bravery in confronting Trygon, a formidable and feared sea god, and her

cleverness in securing his mighty weapon demonstrate capabilities that surpass their own. In the divine realm, where power dynamics are constantly at play, this newfound recognition shifts Circe's position significantly. The gods, often preoccupied with their own agendas, rarely afford such respect to those they see as lesser beings. However, Circe's achievement is so remarkable that they cannot ignore it. As a result, she earns their respect and a newfound sense of autonomy and authority. This allows her to threaten her father, Helios, and put an end to her exile.

However, Circe seeks to distance herself from the divine elite and does not care for their disgruntled recognition. Circe's true recognition comes from within herself and not from the gods. She realizes her worth and potential by understanding that she is not defined by the limitations others impose on her. This inner transformation is more significant than the external acknowledgment from the gods, marking a pivotal moment in her journey towards self-actualization. She is now ready to shed her old form and declares, "I had been old and stern for so long, carved with regrets and years like a monolith. But that was only a shape I had been poured into. I did not have to keep it" (323). In this moment of profound introspection, Circe finally embraces her identity, free from the constraints of an oppressive divine system and the burdens of the past. She acknowledges the power she holds within, born not from her immortal lineage but from humane choices and experiences. This acceptance allows her to envision a future unshackled by her former limitations, where she possesses agency and shapes her destiny according to her desires and beliefs.

Frye's assumption that recognition is the hero's celebration by the system he belongs to is thus limiting and androcentric. Whether Circe is accepted by the divine or mortal society is naught due to both systems' inherent distrust of feminine power. This phase of anagnorisis is crucial in Circe's story, as it underscores the themes of empowerment, self-discovery, and the

redefining of one's place in the world. It highlights the idea that true heroism lies not just in power or societal recognition, but in courage, intelligence, and the ability to possess full agency.

Additionally, Frye divides the quest's characters into two categories, likening them to black-and-white chess pieces. The white participants are the hero and his aids, while the black participants are the villains who oppose the quest. Frye's simplification of quest characters into white (good) and black (evil) is inherently Eurocentric and caters to Western moralistic values, as stated by Theresa H. Pfeifer:

> In the Eurocentric ideology of oppositional pairs of categories, the undialectical opposition of white-black, light-dark, good-bad, clean-dirty results in the color *white* being perceived as good and *black* as evil. Black as the symbol of evil and death is not a cultural universal but a peculiar characteristic of Western masculine-biased culture —in many cultures white is the most nefarious color. (533)

Therefore, this interpretation of the quest is inherently a Western masculine bias through association with the moralistic Cartesian system of dualism. Circe's subversion of the quest automatically dismisses the dualism associated with it by Frye. It is not a chessboard of black-and-white characters with neutral side pieces but a kaleidoscope of individuals with myriads of aspirations and journeys.

Circe's relationship with her son Telegonus is a paradigm of this multitude. Telegonus grows up with his eyes set on the sea's horizon, but Circe transforms her island to serve as a protective bubble to preserve and restrain his life. In Telemachus' journey, she can be perceived as an evil character who opposes his quest. Athena points out Circe's overprotective selfishness in her contestations: "Will you keep him hobbled all his life, like a broken horse?" (Miller 306). This pushes the mother to relent and admit: "I thought of Icarus,

who had died when he was free. Telegonus would die if he were not. Not in flesh and years. But all that was sweet in him would wither away and die (…) One of us must grieve. I would not let it be him" (306). This showcases the single perspective and biased nature of traditional heroic quests; the protagonist's hardships and successes are the crux of the tale, while other characters' quests are dismissed or must run parallel to the hero's. This is a case in point in feminine writing. Maria Tatar states, "Suddenly we are given a different perspective, and we discover that stories operate with kaleidoscopic dynamism, changing dramatically when given one small twist. What we will see in the pages that follow is that, when women begin to write, the story changes" (Introduction). When Circe narrates her tale, she does not take a linear, episodic approach to storytelling, but allows the stories to weave through each other, her interlocutors' quests to add notes to her song, and their voices to resonate through hers.

Madeline Miller subverts the rigid linearity of the quest by deconstructing the three phases Frye proclaims as necessary steps. The traditional hero's agon and struggle are not simply a matter of fighting enemies but can also be a domestic and psychological grapple. Implementing feminine tasks such as domestic chores, midwifery, pregnancy, and motherhood bends epic and quest restrictions from male-dominated concepts of violence and toiling. The pathos and death struggle can be presented differently from the traditional dragon slaying. When the dragon slaying occurs, the subversion of the notion of culture against nature is a primordial aspect of feminist ecological thought. Pathos necessitates the hero as a virtuously moralistic beacon and, less often, a round figure willing to fix mistakes and embody regret and redemption. Lastly, anagnorisis and redemption can be personal growth and agency, gaining recognition from a society, or the cup of immortality is antithetical to the hero who seeks freedom.

4.2.2 Medusa and the Mythos of Autumn

The mythos following the Summer and Romance one in Frye's wheel of mythoi is the autumn or tragedy. While the romance's focus is on the hero's rise through the three stages of *agon*, *pathos*, and *anagnorisis*, tragedy is centered around the inevitable fall of the hero. Frye describes the tragic hero as "somewhere between the divine and the 'all too human'" (207). This fits Medusa as her shifts from ironic, low-mimesis, and mythic heroic positions place her between tragic mortality and divine power. Medusa's narrative is replete with elements of divine punishment and mortal suffering. It thus resonates deeply with the core themes of tragedy in Frye's framework. He continues that, "the tragic hero is typically on top of the wheel of fortune, halfway between human society on the ground and the something greater in the sky" (207). This implies the fall of the tragic hero since the fall is often brought about by divine or impersonal forces such as gods or fate.

The fall of the hero is then a result of something beyond, a cosmic law that cannot be shaken. Law or *dike* is then tragedy's absolute ruler as Frye explains, "The sense in Greek tragedy that fate is stronger than the gods really implies that the gods exist primarily to ratify the order of nature, and that if any personality, even a divine one, possesses a genuine power of veto over law, it is most unlikely that he will want to exercise it" (208). The tragic hero is then shackled and forcefully brought down by the tragedy's unmovable law. As unshakable as this law is, it is nevertheless reductive to assume it as a "moral law" (Frye 210). Medusa's initial stand on top of the wheel of fortune as Athena's priestess renders her a devotee and follower of divine law; therefore, becoming a victim of the very law she enforces shakes her belief in its morality.

Frye adds that "characters may grope about for conceptions of gods that kill us for their sport, or for a divinity that shapes our ends, but the action of tragedy will not abide our questions" (208). Her position as a priestess and the tragic action thwart her initial questionings and doubts concerning the fates, "I felt disturbed by the idea of my entire being being decided by beings I had never met" (Hewlett 34). These doubts are answered and rationalized with the concept of divine will. Theia, who holds the position of tragic mentor, is the messenger of the fates' law: "Sometimes things happen in life that seem unfair and often we do not understand why. But you must remember that the fates always have a plan for us" (33). When Medusa asks whether the fates are "good people", Theia answers, "They are Goddesses, Medusa. It is not our place to question them" (34). This solidifies the lack of moral import from the tragic divine law in Medusa. Repercussions occur when the law is breached, but the values it upholds may be arbitrary and not necessarily moralistic.

Medusa internalizes Theia's teachings and eventually relents on her doubts about the fates, "Who was I to question these Goddesses' divine bidding? I was of no importance, a nobody, a tiny dust mote dancing in their light (…) I decided to trust the fates, as I blindly trusted all the gods back then" (35). The blind and naive trust in the arbitrary moralistic conditions of the fates hampers the conditions of the tragic fall, which is *hamartia* or fatal flaw. This flaw is represented as the hero's hybris, which Frye defines as "a proud, passionate, obsessed or soaring mind" (210). Medusa, who spends her days praying and protecting the temple of Athena, is the antithesis of the proud and callous hero. This invokes doubts on the very notion of a fatal flaw. What is described as the Greek tragic hero's hybris can then be morally justified, as with Antigone, whose hamartia is resisting unjust authority.

Her hamartia then comes as a result of no fault of her own, but a result of a god's trespassing over moralistic values. The flaws she deplores herself for are her beauty and

innocent trust in the fickle gods. She laments, "beauty was my first curse" (Hewlett 40) and "I was deeply naïve back then" (35). However, what she describes as flaws are prerequisites in a dominant patriarchal society; consequently, she falls for conforming to patriarchal societal norms as she later realizes, "I claimed earlier that beauty was my first curse, but perhaps it was actually being born a woman" (75). Poseidon is the one who commits the fatal flaws of pride, violence, and desecration. Then the temple wherein she seeks Athena's protection from his actions tragically becomes the place of her punishment. Pallas Athena, unable to expel her rage onto Poseidon, invokes *dike* on Medusa. This showcases a transfer of the fatal flaw's punishment from its perpetrator into its victim: "I was not the first woman to be blamed for a man's flaws, and I certainly will not be the last" (68). This becomes the fall of the hero from the wheel of fortune, from an esteemed societal position of a beautiful priestess to a shunned, monstrous being.

Paradoxically, when she turns beastly, she attains a concrete form of power. The tragic hero's fall and divine law's punishment are a loss of prestige and eminence. As is the case with Oedipus, who becomes blind and exiled, and Prometheus, shackled to a crag in a state of eternal agony. William G. McCollom, in his "Downfall of the Tragic Hero," discusses the reasoning behind the tragic hero's fall from grace. One of the answers he provides is an "implied doctrine of *imputed hybris*" (51), meaning an audience's assumption that the great hero must be proud. The forest's tallest tree must be proud of its height above the others. This logic is applied to Medusa with the assumed greatness of beauty. She must be proud because she is beautiful. The imputed hybris turns into an imputed prize as Medusa relays that "[w]hen you are beautiful everyone thinks you owe them something and that they have the right to simply reach out and take it — to stare, to touch, to claim" (43). The loss of her beauty liberates Medusa from these assumptions, and thus allows her to reach power she

could not attain before. The power to invoke fear is not considered a fall from grace by Medusa but rather a blessing: "being feared was more fun than being desired" (40). This disrupts the tragic description of fall as a loss of power and greatness. Medusa becomes great because she falls under the uncertain law of the gods and fate. Thus, by turning Medusa's punishment into an eventual liberation, Hewlett deftly deconstructs and subverts Frye's rigid categorizing of hamartia*,* dike*,* and the tragic hero's fall.

Alternatively, McCollom speaks of "a kind of tragedy in which fate or external evil is the chief cause of catastrophe and in which the hero's central action or failure to act is not morally culpable but does nevertheless contribute to the final result" (53). This resonates with Medusa's predicament as her punishment is not her fault but Poseidon's. The central action of seeking refuge at the temple is another contribution to the invoked fall. This provides a reasoning that does not rely on Aristotle's hamartia as "a condition of being not a cause of becoming" (Frye 213). Thus, Hewlett's Medusa emphasizes a narrative where patriarchal external forces and circumstances lead to her downfall, circumventing traditional Aristotelian concepts of flaw and moral culpability and constructing a tragedy based on martyrdom as a result of systemic patriarchal laws and gaining freedom from being removed from it.

Frye adds that, "In its most elementary form, the vision of law (*dike*) operates as *lex talionis* or revenge. The hero provokes enmity, or inherits a situation of enmity, and the return of the avenger constitutes the catastrophe" (208-09). However, he does not speak of the hero seeking his revenge on the arbitrary visions of law. When Medusa becomes a gorgon, she seeks to avenge the assault and unjust punishment committed against her by murdering men who possess the same flaw as Poseidon, an overstretched pride to take what they seek from women through violent means and coercion. She states, "With each victim I looked upon I imagined Poseidon's arrogant eyes staring back, turning slowly to cold, dead stone" (Hewlett

100), confirming that the gorgons' unleashed wrath upon the men they attack as an act of revenge. This elevates her to a rank she did not possess before, as she states that she and her sisters "felt like gods" (99). This denotes a rise after the tragic fall that displays Medusa's resilience, which indicates a transformation of Medusa's narrative from a tale of martyrdom to one of empowerment. Hewlett's reworking of Medusa thus challenges traditional tragic narratives of heroism and justice by constructing a tragic hero as an avenger of the unfair law enforced upon her.

Another crucial aspect of tragedy is sacrifice, as Frye explains, "Anyone accustomed to think archetypally of literature will recognize in tragedy a mimesis of sacrifice" (214). He terms sacrifice as a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of rightness that gives rise to a pitying sense of wrongness (214). The audience is aware that the tragic hero must fall, but will pity the necessary application of tragic law. Medusa is a famous iconographic beheaded monster. Therefore, the audience is well aware of her fate. However, her act of sacrifice to save her children is an unknown mythopoeia constructed by Hewlett. The audience then pities a mother's fate of sacrificing her life for her children, cutting her life short to allow her children to have one. In addition, Medusa's inability to raise her children adds additional tragedy to the need for sacrifice. The punishment of Athena and Medusa's transformation into a gorgon is not the only result of Poseidon's hamartia. The children she vows to protect are another result. This realization puts her in a state of shock as she recounts:

> A nausea crippled my stomach as the waves of understanding hit me one after the other, like a relentless storm battling against a weathered ship desperately trying to remain afloat.
>
> It was *his* child.

> It was a child of lust and violence. A child born from the darkest moment of my life. (117)

The vivid description of her feelings and nausea reflects the assault she endured. Her use of nautical descriptors are the same she uses to speak of the rape, "I was a drowning woman desperately trying to fight the ocean, kicking and screaming hopelessly against the forceful waves" (66). Medusa's realization is not only about the birth of her children but also about the role she is forced to play in the cycle of tragedy. Her sacrifice is not simply physical; it is an emotional sacrifice, an internal struggle that underscores the depth of her suffering. Her children, though innocent, serve as a reminder of her pain and the cost of her endurance. Yet, their existence becomes her redemption. As she relays, "nothing else mattered anymore, he was my whole world now (…) for me, I felt there was simply no alternative. I loved that child, whether I wanted to or not. He was mine and mine alone. I told myself he would be the one thing I would do right by " (121). This complexity adds layers to Medusa's character, transforming her from a flat monster in mythology to a tragic hero whose story evokes empathy and sorrow.

Through sacrifice, Medusa inadvertently mirrors the humans' struggle against fate and the desire to protect their loved ones, even at the cost of their own well-being. She willingly cuts ties with her mother, isolates herself in a cave, and stands alone against hundreds of men questing to take her head as their boon. Only allowing herself hope when her purveyors cease their journeys to her cave, but as the narrator of her tragedy, she quickly retracts:

> It pains me now to think how hopeful I had let myself become, how I had actually believed I could live happily ever after… After everything I had been through, I was still so naïve. Had I not learnt anything? I guess some things never change.
>
> Hope is a dangerous thing. (129)

When the tragedy attempts to go upwards at this point, Medusa, as the controller of the narrative, thwarts the motion. When there seems to be a delicate balance between accepting fate and fighting against it, she calls her past self innocent and naïve for holding trust in the fates. As the narrator, Medusa has an ironic tone of denouncing the fates for controlling her life.

What the fates decree comes to pass. The prophesied hero meant to behead her appears, and Medusa's hope is snuffed out. Hewlett's Perseus is a dichotomy to the hero's original myth. While the mythical hero unashamedly beheads Medusa during her sleep, Hewlett's Perseus refuses to fight a pregnant woman. Medusa directly addresses the audience to deny this tale, "I'm sure a lot of you *think* you know the next part to this story, when the great, heroic Perseus snuck up on the sleeping monster, effortlessly cutting her head off and leaving the island victorious. Well that is the version history wants you to remember, a simple tale of good vs evil, of hero vs villain" (148). Thus, this Perseus possesses moral heroic qualities rather than solely divine inheritance. He maintains an innocence that Medusa has long lost due to her tragedy. The traditional questing hero is then set as the fate's enforcer, and the conventional evil dragon in the romance quest has shifted the noble idea of the quest on its head and turned it into a tragic tale. The hero who must kill the dragon to win his boon and attain anagnorisis sheds tears as he swings his sword while the hideous monster angles her neck towards the blade with dignity and confidence. She has made a deal with the hero: the safe birth of her children in exchange for her head, and she delivers the hero's boon not simply willingly but forces him to fulfill the conditions to save his mother as she saves her children.

This tragic sacrifice then showcases the other side of the traditional heroic quest. Through Medusa's perspective, her death is not an epic to reward her murderer with glory but a tragic

implementation of the fates' bidding, "[w]e were both victims of Fates' cruel ruling" (174). The mythos of romance is transformed into the mythos of tragedy due to a change in perspective. While her story is an afterthought in Perseus's, she takes time to fully tell his tale from his birth to his struggles and journey towards her lair. Thus, the hero is liberated from toxic masculinity standards through Medusa's narrative.

Before the due sacrifice, Medusa's relationship with Perseus shifts the tale into one with comic undertones. The tragedy, which was limited by the narrator, gains momentum and has short comic spikes. Frye sets the comic and tragic motions as opposites in his narrative wheel of mythoi, and Hewlett subverts the restriction of removing the comic from the tragic and vice versa. As they allow themselves to become friends, Medusa amusedly muses: "What strange dynamic was this? My killer doing favours for me? I let out a small laugh to myself, shaking my head incredulously" (154). She also narrates, "I remember I felt genuinely happy, which may sound daft considering my fate was looming before me, cold and resolute. But, at times, the weight of our future seemed to simply melt away, replaced by a wonderful contentedness" (165). Hewlett's comic undertones in Medusa's sacrifice mimesis display that simple joy can be found in the face of cruel fate. Its presence looms over the short-lived joyful instants. Nevertheless, it proposes an ironic catharsis wherein the audience may find relief in the tragic hero's enjoyment of simple pleasures before the impending doom.

Medusa faces her inevitable death with the same friendly banter she shares with Perseus, "'Just don't miss, okay? The last thing I need is you messing this up.' I smiled and despite himself Perseus let out a small laugh, flecked with his tears" (177). Medusa gains the strength to laugh in the face of cruel fate from the act of voicing her story, transforming the kaleidoscope of painful and confusing emotions into a cathartic experience: "he just let my words flow out, like blood gushing from a wound. It felt cathartic, to form my pain into

words and release each one from my body" (163). The relief she feels after giving voice to the struggles she has kept under strict lock within herself encourages her further to proceed with her planned sacrifice. Thus, Medusa's sacrifice bears both tragic and romantic elements; it is the fall of the heroes into the whale's belly to liberate the world. This mimesis bears romantic aspects of the questing hero's sacrifice to protect his comrades rather than succumbing to impersonal external fates.

The act of tragic sacrifice is then shifted into a romantic one as she declares, "I didn't feel afraid. In fact, I felt an overwhelming sense of triumph" (174). She faces her opponent, head held high, ready for his strike while he sobs and raises his sword reluctantly: "I stopped just behind Perseus, the perfect distance for him to strike. He held my gaze in the shield, his eyes red-rimmed, his lips trembling" (177). This perspective, a deeply empathetic and emotional ordeal, radically deconstructs the androcentric ideals assigned to the myth, which she openly deplores:

> I have seen many depictions of my death. Perseus is always portrayed as the triumphant hero, handsome and powerful. Whilst I am continually reduced to nothing more than a gawping head, mouth hung slack like some kind of gruesome sex-doll (…) My one and only triumph in life has been substituted for a lifeless corpse. (179)

Hewlett denounces the depictions of Medusa's beheading as a grotesque image designed for the male gaze. Perseus stands as the exemplary man who upholds phallogocentric values by slaying unruly women such as Medusa. He stands over her, who is reduced to a "gruesome sex-doll," an inanimate object existing to satiate male fantasies. Her depiction of Perseus as an empathic and moral hero then shows true heroism rather than idealized violence as heroism.

The traditional dragon-slaying aspect of the quest myth is additionally subverted when the hero who must slay the monster realizes that what has been termed a monster is, in fact, a fellow human. Perseus defies Athena and states, "I will kill a monster for you, my Goddess, any monster you like (…) But I will not kill a pregnant woman" (168). It is possible to consider this interpretation a subversion of xenophobia, a word taken from the ancient Greek words *xenos,* which means stranger or foreigner, and *phobos,* meaning flight and fright ("The History of the Word 'Xenophobia'"). Ancient Greeks have historically held prejudice against foreigners, especially women, who are deemed barbaric, savage, and strange (Flores "Exclusion of Foreigners in Ancient Athens"). Women are dehumanized, as seen in the case of Alexander the Great describing Asian women "as being 13 ft. tall and had boar tusks and oxen tails" (Flores). This alienation forms a beastly image of women who are considered strange and foreign, thus rationalizing savage acts as civilizing justice. Alexander the Great's killing of Asian women is then "due to their eroticness and their strangeness, making the world 'sane and safe again'" (Flores). Perseus' refusal to kill Medusa because she is a woman and not an abject monster defies this narrative of killing women defined as monstrous as a civilizing action against the beastly barbaric other.

Through her mythopoetic sacrifice, Hewlett simultaneously subverts several androcentric aspects. By centering Medusa's voice, the narrative dismantles the androcentric heroism of the original myth, replacing it with a tragic yet defiant reclamation of dignity. Perseus, no longer a triumphant slayer but a reluctant participant in fate's cruelty, embodies a moral heroism that challenges xenophobic and gendered violence. The comic undertones woven into their bond, their fleeting moments of joy amidst impending doom, serve as a radical assertion of humanity in the face of dehumanizing doctrine. Consequently, Medusa's death is not a defeat but a subversive victory: her laughter, catharsis, and deliberate choice reframe

her sacrifice as an act of resistance. In doing so, Hewlett reimagines tragedy as a space where empathy dismantles old hierarchies.

Hewlett's reworking of tragedy simultaneously adheres and transcends Frye's Aristotelian tragic categorizations. The novel reimagines Medusa's myth as a feminist tragedy, overtly exposing how divine and patriarchal systems sacrifice the marginalized to maintain order. It asserts that victims of this order can forge bonds and friendship, yet succumb to its ordained predictions. By turning the quest myth into a tragic one, the traditional binaries utilized are blended into a complex amalgamation of emotions. The hero and monster binary is subsequently transformed into a sorrowful deal between friends. Thus, her story becomes a poignant retelling of enforced feminine sacrifice and the enduring strength of maternal love and friendship, leaving the audience to reflect on the true nature of heroism and tragedy.

While Circe and Medusa's narratives align more closely with different mythoi, their approach and subversion bear significant similarities. Circe's mythos, largely a summer/ romance one in nature, still bears ironic narrative tones. It is the case before her exile to Aiaia, which can be interpreted as a tragic sacrifice that is made by the hero for empowerment. Circe's pharmakos status at her father's court categorizes her as an ironic hero as well. Consequently, when subverting narratives their limitations are expanded.

4.3 On Dispelling Archetypes

While the mythoi are cyclical narrative schemas, the archetypes are recurring images found in these narratives to evoke the mode and vision that is carried within these narratives. Frye split archetypes into sets of binary visions: the apocalyptic and demonic imagery, another manifestation of good and bad dualism. In addition, he classifies archetypes into various forms or worlds, as he illustrates in the following example:

divine world	=	society of gods	=	One God
human world	=	society of men	=	One Man
animal world	=	sheepfold	=	One Lamb
vegetable world	=	garden or park	=	One Tree (of Life)
mineral world	=	city	=	One Building, Temple, Stone

Fig. 3. Northrop Frye. *Pattern of the apocalyptic world of the Bible*. 1957. *Anatomy of citicism* 141.

The worlds depicted in apocalyptic imagery are portrayed as paradisiacal visions of the elements they signify, whereas those represented in demonic imagery embody evil and hellish visions. However, this categorization is derived from biblical moral guidelines, as seen in Frye's example, thereby leading to a bias in the representations of good and evil aligned with Christian moral codes. Nevertheless, these archetypes are recurring motifs in various literary works and have become integrated into Western culture. Therefore, it is essential to discuss how *Circe* and *Medusa* employ these archetypes to illustrate how these works challenge traditional binary thinking in cultural contexts.

To achieve this objective, a table has been drawn illustrating the archetypes present in these novels, based on Frye's concept. The apocalyptic versus demonic dualism of these archetypes will be examined in relation to each world to facilitate a comprehensive comparison and to explore how Miller and Hewlett subvert and alter archetypes to incorporate feminine perspectives. Archetypes represent another domain in which "[w]oman is the bearer of meaning, but man is its maker or controller" (Purkiss 449). Given that women have been predominantly portrayed and defined by men throughout history, archetypes are fundamentally and irrevocably permeated with androcentric and phallocentric discourse, resulting in the marginalization of women and their inability to articulate their own imagery.

Consequently, a subversion of the archetypes as designated and created by men is essential to establish feminine counterparts.

Table 4

Circe and *Medusa,* As Categorized Through Frye's Concept of Archetypal Worlds

Frye's Archetypes	Circe	Medusa
Divine world	World of gods and titans as static, elitist societies	World of gods and divine law as cruel and arbitrary
Human world	Mortals as victims of divine whims Circe as isolated hero	Individualistic societies of mortals Medusa as isolated hero
Animal world	Domesticated hunting animals, transformed pigs, and monsters	Snakes as traitorous companions and devils
Vegetable world	Flowers and vegetation as voiced magical items, lush gardens, sinister woods	Lack of vegetation, barren lands Extensive blades of grass
Mineral world	Helios' obsidian halls Isolated yet lush island The sea as border and horizon	Abandoned temple, city ruins, ominous cave The sea is an amniotic fluid and bounding memories

The following titles will expand upon the content of this table and explain Frye's archetypal categorizations in the context of Miller's *Circe* and Hewlett's *Medusa* and how they are subverted through the implementation of feminist perspectives.

4.3.1 The Divine World

Circe and *Medusa's* interpretations of the divine world are similar and conform to demonic imagery. Circe's alienation from her family and the immortals stems from their cruelty and dismissal of all that is mortal. From her perspective, gods are greedy beings who mete out misery upon humans for shallow glory and pride. During a conversation with Hermes, he asks: "who gives better offerings, a miserable man or a happy one?" (84). This question disturbs the foundational knowledge of divinity she has assimilated into the obsidian halls since his answer is the opposite of what she has believed for centuries. He reasons that happy

mortals think themselves beholden to no one as they are occupied with their lives. Therefore, the solution isw to "kill his wife, cripple his child, then you will hear from him. He will starve his family for a month to buy you a pure-white yearling calf" (84). This realization deeply disturbs Circe as she realizes a vast multitude of gods' glory and treasures are from desperate mortals begging for clemency. It is especially the case of her father, "who would raze a whole village if he thought it would get him one more cow" (84). The heaping altars she "gloated inwardly over" are thus ashes of snuffed lives and miseries for shallow prideful satisfaction (85). Through her self-actualization, she recognizes that the gods are not the glorious deities they claim to be:

> This was how mortals found fame, I thought. Through practise and diligence, tending their skills like gardens until they glowed beneath the sun. But gods are born of ichor and nectar, their excellences already bursting from their fingertips. So they find their fame by proving what they can mar: destroying cities, starting wars, breeding plagued and monsters. All that smoke and savour rising so delicately from our altars. It leaves only ash behind. (118)

This affirms her affection and connection with mortals as she acknowledges that she identifies more closely with them than with her divine lineage. Thus, in order to gain agency, she seeks mortality and denies her divine roots.

Helios, who symbolizes the sun and should therefore signify positive aspects such as life and light, is reimagined as a narcissistic and cruel god. He is the scorching nature of the sun, burning whoever attempts to perceive him for too long. He views mortals as a source of material treasures and glory while dismissing their efforts to predict his course as he does with astronomers. He declares, "Helios the sun was bound to no will but his own, and none might say what he would do" (Miller 8). Purposefully throwing their calculations off course

and thus signing their death warrants. Circe's initial admiration and ignorance of her father's misdeeds slowly but decidedly transmutes into anger as she recognizes and realizes that he is not a powerful, glorious sun god but a despotic, narcissistic one.

Her view of Helios then counters popular solar archetypes. When she requests her freedom, she sardonically considers: "I looked at his face, blazing with righteous power. The Great Watchman of the Sky. The Saviour, he is called. All Seeing, Bringer of Light, Delight of Men" (311). This reflects Greek poets' hymns to Helios. For them he "is expanded from a formal god in the Greek Pantheon, who is worshiped in various cults, into an ethical god who is the god of sacred oaths, who brings evil and crime to the light of day, who hears and sees all things" (Notopoulos 165). The poetic symbolism of Helios as righteous, heroic, morally superior contradicts Circe's perception. When injustice befell her, she expected his righteous revenge as "the patriarch outraged at the insult to his child" (167). However, her father remained out of reach, shedding light on earth as she progressively becomes disillusioned. He may hear and see all things, but similarly to the real sun, he is unapproachable, unreachable, basking in his glory, revelling as the world turns around him. Thus, Miller subverts the Greek pantheon and their divinity through unraveling their negative traits and proportionally weaving their positive aspects as trickery.

Medusa's stance is similar. However, corrupted, cruel divinity is a leitmotif of tragedy. Therefore, her criticism is not as subversive as it is in Circe's romance quest. Medusa's perspective is from the mortals beaten for the gods' amusement. As a priestess, she devotes her life to pleasing and appeasing the goddess Athena. Following Hermes' reasoning, this should warrant a life free from misery and divine retribution. However, he displays scepticism towards Medusa about her blind devotion. When she declares, "I trust the judgement of the Gods," he answers, "[r]emind me to ask you again in a few months" (53).

While insidiously revealing her future, he probs at the foundation of her beliefs. He indirectly questions whether her devoutness would still apply if the gods' judgment were imposed upon her. Akin to someone left out of a joke, Medusa stands confused and unaware of the barely veiled prophecy.

Medusa disregards the warning by describing Hermes as a god "who would hand you a candle in the darkness, whilst simultaneously tripping you over and then would stand back and laugh as the world burnt around him" (55). He is then another deity who invokes torment upon mortals through trickery and darkly comic deceit. Then, Circe similarly describes him as "[t]hat laughing gadfly of the gods" (Miller 79). The descriptor *gadfly* is a term that bears philosophical meaning as it is the descriptor assigned to Socrates by Plato. The gadfly is then an "image [that] has become culturally significant (…) as a way to identify those who attempt to change their communities by pestering others and acting as their conscience" (Marshall 163). Hermes is then a disturber of the order; he goads and questions the status quo, yet is deeply assimilated within.

Medusa, whilst born from gods, is thoroughly mortal, so while Circe is persecuted for bearing resemblances to them, Medusa is exposed and abandoned. Nevertheless, she barely bears any resentment towards her mother for this: "I do not blame my mother for abandoning me. History will remember her the Mother of Monsters, she bore fearsome, infamous children. She couldn't have the like of me ruin her track record" (Hewlett 16). The disappointment is lifted when Medusa becomes a gorgon and her mother returns, since she "had finally gotten rid of her mortal child. She finally had her monster" (95). The delight of being accepted is finally eclipsed. It turns into resentment when she accepts that she is simply another pawn to maintain her mother's record in her insatiable quest for power: "Don't lie mother, all you really care about is yourself (…) You force your children to do hideous

things, so you can leech off their infamy" (123). Her child-self's pleading: "I'm sorry I'm a mortal. I'm sorry I have disappointed you. Please, just give me a chance" (32) is then turned into rejection when she declares: "Disown me then, abandon me" (123). Medusa's relationship with her mother is similar to Circe's and Helios's as admiration turns into disappointment and complete rejection. They realize that their positions as deities contradict their abilities to be parents due to prioritizing their glory and pride over everything else.

While Circe and Medusa critique the divine world, their perspectives differ. As an immortal, Circe regards mortals with pity and feels a drawn line that she cannot cross: "I felt it like a rebuke. That old uncrossable gulf, between mortal and divinity" (Miller 301). Becoming mortal is her solution to jump over the gulf and consequently reach the mortal realm while separating herself from the divine and setting their lot aside. Medusa is on the other side of divinity, as a mortal of godly parentage, her mortality weighs heavily upon her shoulders. Calumniated by the gods, she declares that "[t]he safest life for a mortal is one free of divine interference" (Hewlett 18). She crosses that line and frees herself through death and time. Death offers a form of immortality as she is now unaffected by time, and thus can watch the world progress and discard the religious principles of myths. She rejoices: "Now they waste away on Mount Olympus, waiting endlessly for the day they might become relevant again. But the world does not want them anymore, and why would they? They are nobodies now. They are nothing" (74). The reclamation of agency is then found in a separation from the divine world, which excludes and oppresses rather than aids and welcomes, as it does in classic heroic quests.

In conclusion, the portrayal of the divine world as demonic demonstrates the bias of communities in positions of power, which set merit-based hierarchies as they see fit, often marginalizing those who do not conform to their ideals. Circe and Medusa, though differing

in their origins and methods, both reject the oppressive structures of the divine realm—Circe by embracing mortality and Medusa by transcending it through death. Their stories highlight the limitations and cruelties of divine authority, offering alternative paths to autonomy outside the rigid confines of Olympian rule. Ultimately, their narratives challenge the traditional glorification of the divine pantheon, exposing the flaws in a system that demands submission rather than operating through compassion. Both figures reclaim their agency by openly rejecting the divine world, proving that true power lies not in godhood and the power it bears but in freedom and agency.

4.3.2 The Human World

While the divine world is similarly demonic in both novels, the human world is dichotomous. Circe, who learns to accept her mortal aspects by fully becoming one, is contrasted by Medusa's ambiguous view of mortality. This dichotomy stems from their position regarding their communities. As an immortal, Circe feels removed and longs for a place among a human society, as it represents an apocalyptic community in her standards. The family and community she belongs to is a paradigm of Frye's demonic human world which contains "one individual pole [as] the tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless, melancholy, and with an insatiable will, who commands loyalty only if he is egocentric enough to represent the collective ego of his followers," who is portrayed as Helios commanding the sky and titan society with a narcissitic grip. At the same time, Circe is "the *pharmakos* or sacrificed victim, who has to be killed to strengthen others" (Frye 148). Her exile and punishment are synonymous with the sacrificial death of the pharmakos, and she is then the isolated hero of the demonic human world. Her position as a woman who does not conform to her society's standards then automatically marginalizes her as an excluded individual,

reinforcing her role as the pharmakos. In contrast, Medusa's relationship with mortality is more ambiguous, as she exists in a marginal space between divine curse and human suffering. Unlike Circe, who actively seeks integration into human society, Medusa is forcibly alienated from both divine and mortal realms due to her monstrous transformation. Her narrative reflects the demonic world's oppressive structures, yet she lacks the agency that Circe eventually attains. Medusa's tragedy lies in her inability to reconcile her humanity with her cursed existence, rendering her a perpetual outsider. Thus, while both characters embody Frye's concept of the pharmakos, their experiences diverge in their engagement with mortality and community. Circe's eventual embrace of humanity allows her to transcend her pharmakos categorization. In contrast, Medusa remains trapped in a cycle of victimization, underscoring the divergent consequences of their marginalization within their respective worlds.

This dichotomy highlights the novels' exploration of autonomy and subjugation within patriarchal and divine hierarchies. Circe's narrative arc demonstrates the possibility of self-actualization through the rejection of oppressive structures, while Medusa's fate illustrates the inescapable brutality imposed upon those who cannot conform. Both characters, however, critique authoritative hierarchization's inherent cruelty, reinforcing Frye's assertion that the marginalized figure, whether by choice or force, functions as both a scapegoat and a mirror to societal corruption.

Additionally, Frye states that demonic destructive characters are "symbolized by a harlot, witch, siren, or other tantalizing female, a physical object of desire which is sought as a possession and therefore can never be possessed" (149). The first parts of this thesis's second and third chapters demonstrate how Circe and Medusa have progressively been assimilated into negative villainous archetypes of the seductive witch and monster. However, within these

feminist reworkings, they break free from such restrictive archetypes. Justyna Sempruch in *Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature* states: "The exilic narratives, especially the Anglo-American radical feminist texts, revalorize the unbelonging roles of midwives, healers, herbalists, and crones" (13). Hence, the negatively perceived archetypes of the witch and tantalizing female monster are reclaimed in positive feminine terms through valorizing feminine work and are revealed as victims of corrupt societies that are pushed into enacting violent retribution in search of justice.

4.3.3 The Animal World

Frye qualifies predatory animals such as wolves and lions as creatures lurking in demonic realms. Frye states that "[t]he wolf, the traditional enemy of the sheep, the tiger, the vulture, the cold and earth-bound serpent, and the dragon are all common [in the demonic world]" (149). However, within Aiaia, both apocalyptic and demonic animal archetypes are present. Lions and wolves that she feared during her first night on the isle become her valiant aids and protectors. She gathers them as a barrier to protect her son from divine intervention: "I laid him in his crib, then drew it close to the fire and set my lions and wolves around it. They could not stop a god, but most divinities are cowards" (Miller 216). The shift from feared animals into protective beings displays Circe fully assimilating with nature.

Additionally, Circe is a dichotomy to the traditional idea of a heroine. Her pick of lions, wolves, and boars as familiars is a rebellious decision against idealized mythical women: "I thought of those prancing goddesses who carry birds on their shoulders, or have some fawn always nuzzling their hands, tripping delicately at their heels. I would put them to shame, I thought" (76). The imagery of heroines and goddesses, carrying apocalyptic archetypal animals as familiars such as birds, sheep, and fawns, is contrasted with the demonic vision of

a horde of predatory beasts lurking around her house and isle. By openly rejecting and opposing the assimilation of prey animals with herself, she rejects the imagery of passivity and victimhood associated with them.

Circe's prime associated animal is the pig or boar due to her decision to transform men into these creatures. Yarnall states, "The pig or boar, then, functioned in radically different ways as a familiar of the Goddess, in its tame form it was the preferred sacrificial animal; in its wild, mythic form it was the instrument of sacrifice" (Yarnall 46). Therefore, the pig is a sacrificial imagery used to satiate feminine goddesses, such as Demeter. Yarnall then alludes to Circe's transformation of men into pigs as a grapple for a shackled sense of power: "It is as if Circe is saying, 'See. The Earth and its forces are mine; I can make you into my creature any time that I want.' Only a divinity who felt her powers eroding and under attack, we might speculate, would be driven to act so unsubtly" (47). This mirrors Miller's Circe, whose vindictive need for revenge and reclamation of power rests on these transformations, "I have been found. Let them see what I am. Let them learn the world is not as they think" (Miller 169). The pigs are then a vehicle of sacrifice in the sense that the sailors' shedding of their human bodies for swiny ones is a testament to her power over them.

While the sailors despise their new bodies as a form of debasement and humiliation, she encourages: "Come, I would say to them, it's not that bad. You should appreciate a pig's advantages" (172). She ennobles pigs as clever, enduring animals thriving in harsh conditions, symbolizing humble, resistant power. However, she follows up, "They never listened. The truth is, men make terrible pigs" (172). Circe subsequently perceives this transformation as a blessing, extolling the merits of the pigs. This represents an eco-feminist critique that advocates for the full consideration of animals, rejecting the notion of viewing them as inferior beings.

On the other hand, Medusa's existence is irreversibly interconnected with snakes. The creatures that crown her head have become the hissing witnesses of her power. Frye's categorization of the snake as a demonic archetype largely stems from the biblical trickery of Eve by the snake. Hewlett's Medusa and her serpentine companions fit Frye's interpretation rather than the traditional symbolism of snakes in ancient Greece, "as a symbol of rejuvenation because it sheds its skin" (Kidd 1). As such, it has been used by ancient Greeks and Romans as a protective talisman, which coincides with Medusa's primary myth, the apocryphal gorgon (2). Medusa states that her snakes are a gift from Athena, one bearing nefarious intentions, for she has implemented them as an attempt to drive Medusa into madness due to their constant hissing, chattering, and whispering (114). The imagery of the nefarious snake, which goads its listener into seeking higher forms of power, is established in Judeo-Christian tradition. Therefore, Hewlett strays from Medusa's ancient context in order to incorporate popular modern elements into it. She anthropomorphizes them as overbearing cronies that sing her praise when she commits acts of violence and reprimand her when she seeks quiet and anonymity, "My snakes, my little 'gift' from Athena. It took me far too long to realise how toxic they really were" (Hewlett 105). Thus, they are her serpents of Eden urging her to commit sins. Hewlett's depiction of the animal then conforms to prevalent archetypal norms and lacks concrete subversive intentions.

4.3.4 The Vegetable World

Aiaia's forest has grown from the blood of slain giants. The demonic imagery of its insurgence is contrasted with Circe's perspective. As the living being most familiar with its ways and cycles, Circe is symbiotic with the lush forest. She carefully studies each flower and plant to harness their magical attributes. Through painstaking familiarization, she forges

a vital synergism of giving and taking. However, she later realizes and relents that Aiaia does not need her to thrive; nature is self-sufficient, contained within itself, yet generous to whoever respects it. The flowers turn towards her in greeting and easily yield to her knife. Thus, the vegetable world is an apocalyptic one. Frye exemplifies Circe's garden as a paradigm of demonic vegetation (149). Yet, through Miller's lens, the sinister enchanted garden is revealed to be a powerful, generous force through its self-sufficiency, which aids Circe in claiming agency for herself. Thus, Miller transforms the vegetable world in a sense where "flower means force instead of frailty (…) and earth means creative imagination instead of passive generativeness" (Ostriker 71). Again, her subversion rests in removing the passive aspects of feminine archetypes to construct powerfully empathic and imaginative spheres.

Medusa's lack of descriptive vegetation is another tragic allusion, for barren lands are synonymous with death and the absence of security. When she crashes on an island, she speaks of a "dusty landscape" (81), despite being in the Mediterranean's landscape, which is known for its vegetative abundance. This reflects her mental state, as she focuses on sterility and stasis as comforting places, believing herself unworthy of nature's lush generosity. Additionally, the rare mentions of vegetation bear strong demonic descriptions as shown: "The tree was enormous, its knotted branches looming high above our heads, like gnarled limbs" (29). This displays nature not as a welcoming sphere but as a menacing and intimidating force, further emphasizing Medusa's alienation from the natural world. The twisted imagery of the tree mirrors her fractured psyche, suggesting that even in the rare instances where life persists, it is distorted and unwelcoming. The Mediterranean, typically a symbol of vitality and abundance, becomes a wasteland in her eyes, reinforcing her belief that she is condemned to exist outside the nurturing embrace of nature.

In conclusion, Circe and Medusa's perceptions of the vegetable world are rigid opposites. While Circe gathers strength and imaginative agency through nature, Medusa only views desolation as her psyche transforms lush places into a desert. Thus, the absence of flourishing vegetation in Medusa's narrative is not merely a setting but a manifestation of her inner turmoil. The land, like her, is deprived of warmth, a cursed space where growth is stifled and beauty is perverted. Conversely, Circe turns the demonic archetype of the sinister forest into a fertile, beautiful land of abundance and magic.

4.3.5 The Mineral World

Circe's birth and youth are spent in her father's halls. She describes them as "dark and silent (…) buried in the earth's rock, and its walls were made of polished obsidian" (Miller 4). Nestled deep within the Earth's crust, it alludes to protective isolation, yet for Circe, the Obsidian halls buried deep within the sea's entrails are suffocating and restrictive. She states that Helios has personally picked Obsidian as a mineral material to reflect his eternal light, with no account for how the dark halls would look barren of his presence. This is the first inkling of her father's oppressive narcissism: "My father has never been able to imagine the world without himself in it" (4). Divine abodes reflect apocalyptic imageries of abundance and luxury; however, despite the flowing treasures, Circe's perspective reflects demonic archetypes due to its repressive dark halls. When Helios' light does not imbue his halls, the torches and fireplaces reflect a constricting "sealed furnace of heat without light, like the City of Dis in Dante" (Frye 150).

Additionally, Frye discusses the use of torture devices and instruments of warfare. The public punishment of Prometheus epitomizes a torturous performance: "The Fury rose up on her vulture wings and drove the manacles high into the wall. Prometheus dangled from them,

his arms drawn taut" (Miller 15). Here, the demonic archetypes are vivid, with the Fury being portrayed as "grey and pitiless, as if cut from living rock" (14). This paradoxical imagery of living rock conveys the power of a menacing, unyielding demonic entity, whose presence and actions are cruel and relentless. This leads to Circe's first infantile yet eye-opening realization, "all my life had been murk and depths, but I was not part of that dark water. I was a creature within it" (19). This reveals her dawning awareness of complicity and alienation. The 'dark murk' alludes to the toxic hierarchies of Titan society, where violence is both spectacle and scaffolding. Circe's metaphor of being "a creature within it" underscores her precarious position: she is neither fully submerged nor free, but suspended in a liminal space where witnessing torture becomes the first step towards questioning the structures that enable it.

In Aiaia, the house within which she resides is "a monument to [her] father's pride" (69). The abundance of treasures and luxuries, disenchant rather than relieve: "Among those empty, perfect rooms, I felt — I could not say. Disappointed" (69). Her exile is a golden cage compared to the eternal agony that Prometheus must face, shackled to his crag. She explains the cause of her disappointment, "Scylla was no Zeus, and I was no Prometheus. We were nymphs not worth the trouble" (69). Seeking harsh punishment is the masochistic quest for agency and severing ties with the dark, murky divinity she rejects; this explains why she seeks the dangerous forest of Aiaia rather than the comfortable cornucopian house. The forest full of predatory beasts and gnarled roots becomes an apocalyptic Garden of Eden for Circe, as the seemingly demonic animal and vegetal worlds provide forms of growth and liberation.

Medusa's home is yet another demonic archetype of isolating structure. The ruined, barren city surrounding her temple is a wasteland. She speaks of "a solitary temple set against the bones of a city (…) I would play amongst the rubble and debris, oblivious to the dark reality

lying beneath the ruins" (Hewlett 18). This reflects Frye's "great ruins of pride" since this cursed city came into being due to Poseidon's bruised ego (Frye 150). The temple is equally sterile and empty, encapsulated in spotless marble, a mineral synonymous with cold prestige. At its center is Athena's statue, equally cold and lifeless. Medusa's imaginative efforts fantasizing about a friendship with the goddess she admires are vain, as Athena's statue bears a perfect likeness. This alludes to the futility of seeking a bond with patriarchally driven, elitist women.

The unformed world, which Frye discussed in his essay "Archetypes of Literature," is incorporated within the mineral world in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Therefore, the sea and similar bodies of water as archetypes fall within the mineral world. The sea is a crucial element in both tales, as they are protagonists born within the confines of the sea and then trapped by it. Circe is first presumed to be a naiad, or water nymph, mirroring her mother. However, she possesses none of the powers they do; her affinity for water and, consequently, the sea is thus lacking. However, the sea is a fluid prison encircling her island during her exile. That is what she believes during most of her imprisonment. She subtly refers to it through her description of the sun and Helios' chariot: "My father's chariot slipped over the sea and began to douse itself in the waves" (Miller 68); "my father's chariot was slipping into the sea" (92). She melts and submerges Helios and the sea into one entity through the expressions 'douse' and 'slipping into,' the sun's journey ending in submersion into the sea underscores its engulfing and marginal qualities. She only realizes that the sea is not necessarily a border when her son, Telegonus, puts his faith and hopes in it as a horizon: " I had seen Telegonus' face when he used to look into the sea and whisper, *horizon*" (238). The sea is transformed from a bounding border into a body of opportunities and a surge of agency. This allows her to mirror her initial negative view of the sea from despondency into hope.

Breaking her exile liberates her from seeing the sea's horizon as fetters and danger, but as opportunity and adventure. Before she takes her future into both hands and drinks the elixir of mortality, she states: "My divinity shines in me like the last rays of the sun before they drown in the sea" (333). The "drowning" light no longer signifies oblivion but transition. Likened to the sun, the sea does not destroy her divinity but transmutes it, just as her mortality becomes a form of liberation.

On the other hand, the dark sea from which Medusa is born, the amniotic fluids bearing her into the sandy shores, becomes a repulsive, shackling memory due to Poseidon's assault. The "deep aching inside [her], a longing to be back within the water" is replaced by dark, dreadful, and crashing waves; so she states, "I never long for the ocean anymore" (Hewlett 25). Therefore, the expanse of water becomes a fluid prison that fills her mind and memories. Alternatively, as an exiled woman on an island, the sea is a literal prison that surrounds and restrains her.

4.4 Voicing Circe and Medusa as Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Circe and *Medusa* are novels that employ the first-person narrative technique. This allows for a deep exploration of the protagonists' psychology, perception of their surroundings, and suspicion of the ideologically androcentric archetypes they have been reduced to. As characters from ancient Greek tradition, they have been vastly interpreted and reinterpreted in phallogocentric terms. Consequently, the texts they belong to uphold androcentric subtexts that defy feminine meanings. Through personal voice and storytelling, the protagonists aim to create new meaning to the body of myths they belong to.

This is boldly stated in *Medusa*'s back cover: "You know her name. You know her story. Just not the right one." The word *right* in this context is open defiance and an overt confession of deconstruction. In the first chapter, succintly titled "Voice." Medusa declares:

"You see, you really shouldn't believe everything you read. Storytelling can be such a dangerous thing" (Hewlett 7). Then, she persists, "history is written by the winners. Or, more simply, history is written by men (…) this is why my story has never really been 'my' story" (7). Through the character of Medusa, Hewlett invokes the need to doubt and critically approach stories and myths. This aligns with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion which is a "commitment to unmasking 'the lies and illusions of consciousness;' (…) a distinctively modern style of interpretation that circumvents obvious or self-evident meanings in order to draw out less visible and less flattering truths" (Felski "Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion"). Thus, Hewlett questions and attacks the assumption that history is unbiased and that myths hold universal truths. Medusa's voice is a vessel for deconstruction. As a prominent figure in Western culture, she holds sway in her mind, and the imagery at the mention of her name is instant. The pick of Medusa is then self-evident for the hermeneutics of suspicion. By giving voice to an icon of mythology, the interpretation is heightened from an insider's perspective.

Circe differs and does not address her audience. Her narrative is strictly an experience and storytelling. The spatiotemporal setting is strictly limited to her own lifetime and experience. Subsequently, her overt criticism of the androcentric aspects of her myth must conform to that boundary. She describes her first interaction with Odysseus through a phallogocentric poet's lens:

> Years later, I would hear a song made of our meeting. The boy was unskilled, missing notes more often than he hit, yet the sweet music of the verse shone through his mangling. I was not surprised by the portrait of myself: the proud witch undone before the hero's sword, kneeling and begging for mercy. Humbling women seems to

> me a chief pastime of poets. As if there can be no story unless we crawl and weep" (Miller 181)

She remarks that the poet is young and unskilled, which implies that these androcentric biases are passed down from one poet to another. As a fledgling poet, he has already internalized the patriarchal conventions that demand women's humiliation as a necessary plot device. This description highlights phallogocentric storytelling as not simply an individual failing but a systemic tradition perpetuated through artistic apprenticeship and cultural transmission. Her description in Homer's *Odyssey,* reflected in her perspective, exposes how she has been used as a plot device to satiate the phallogocentric appetite. Furthermore, Odysseus' narrative prowess is altered: "He recited the story as if he were giving a recipe for meat" (181). The implications that "a recipe for meat" holds are twofold. First, the recital of a recipe implicates a matter-of-fact and linear approach devoid of the embellishment that storytelling requires. Second, the dealing with meat implies blood and butchery, which is an accurate metaphor for the violence perpetrated on and by Odysseus during his warfaring in Troy and the following journey back to Ithaca. Therefore, Odysseus narrates his tale in a non-performative manner, and when his wit and ornamental lies are missing, his tale becomes one of unnecessary violence, gore, and misguided pride. In the presence of Circe, an isolated yet strong woman who has similarly seen her fair share of gore and horror, performing is a vain enterprise.

Steward explains, "The goal of interpretation, Ricoeur repeatedly reminds us, is not some world *behind* the text, neither a subtext nor an Urtext, but a world *in front* of the text, a world that opens up new possibilities of being" (306). Thus, Miller and Hewlett's revisionism bears strong hermeneutical goals through the act of mythopoeia, giving new perspectives to the mythological urtext and smashing intertextual negative subtexts. They argue that myths are ideologically pervaded with patriarchal bias; therefore, beneath the fantastical veneer of

heroes and gods lie androcentric ideals that carry into modern thought through the canonization and implementation of classical mythology into academic and popular culture.

While both novels aim to offer new feminist, mythical outlooks to their audience, the narrative techniques used differ. As mentioned, Circe is narratively spatially and temporally constrained, meaning that what she narrates is firmly placed in the ancient Greek and Mediterranean context. This is particularly evident in her use of specialized language for metaphors. First, fauna and flora of the Mediterranean are abundant in metaphors and descriptions such as "I felt keen and hungry as a bear in spring" (179) and "sharp as crushed cypress" (284). The metaphors related to edibles are simplistic and less common, but as fitting regardless: "They frowned, as if I had offered them a plate of something foul" (21); "Would I be skimmed milk for crying" (86). Other metaphors utilize images from domestic and natural settings, emphasizing Circe's environment and her place in it. "All this while I have been a weaver without wool, a ship without the sea" (71); "Like two volcanoes trying to decide if they should blow" (81); "Above me the sky stretched out its empty hands" (155); "The time when I had softened like wax was past" (314); "the sea made a sound like a shuttle weaving" (315). Circe pulls the audience into her context through this specialized language in descriptions and metaphors. This aligns with author Madeline Miller's aim of broadening access to myths for a far-reaching readership as she states in an interview by Jeffrey Brown: "I hope that my novels can be part of that too, and sort of saying, these stories are for everyone. These stories are for you. You don't have to feel alienated from these stories" (Miller "Madeline Miller Answers your Questions").

On the other hand, Rosie Hewlett's *Medusa* is a soberly descriptive and informative work, meaning that it lacks metaphors and states the protagonist's thoughts and experience in simple language. She uses direct, plain language to address the harsh realities of female

marginalization, placing immediacy above lyrical quality. Moreover, Medusa directly engages with the reader while in the Underworld, and her presence in that place grants her omniscience. She is an omniscient narrator in the context of the modern world, as she peers up from the fields of Asphodel, she witnesses the world's changes while she remains in stasis. Even her life is subject to change that time imposes as she has to witness that passively, "You see, my story has been retold and reimagined so many times over, sometimes even I do not regonise it" (Hewlett 7). Her decision to take the role of narrator is an active shift from passive listening to producing truth. The closing chapter —titled "Voice." similarly to the introductory one— parallels and acknowledges her opening statement: "I have come to accept that my story will continue to be retold, whether I like it or not (…) the lies will ever mingle with the truths and the monster" (198). This cyclical structure then highlights the inevitability of reinterpretation. Nevertheless, Medusa's act of narration itself becomes part of her myth's timeless intertextuality: "What matters is that my voice finally has a voice amongst the others" (198). By giving voice to Medusa, Hewlett consequently casts her stone into the inexhaustible lake of reinterpretations, driven by the political aim of heightening awareness regarding feminine struggles that contemporary women can identify with.

Despite being an entity dating back thousands of years, Medusa speaks with a contemporary demotic voice. Diane Purkiss explains that such language contrasts "traditional association of the classics with high culture and inaccessible scholarship" (446). Therefore, similarly to *Circe,* it expands readership to a broader popular audience who may not be familiar with classics and ancient mythology. Medusa's narration peppered with modern British colloquialisms like "I shudder at the thought of those inexperienced and overpriced tour guides" (Hewlett 125), "Bollocks!" (127), and "VIP treatment" (191) creates a deliberate dissonance with her ancient Greek origins. This linguistic anachronism serves as more than

accessibility; it forges a powerful bridge between antiquity and modernity, revealing how little patriarchal structures have evolved. The jarring juxtaposition of ancient myth and contemporary vernacular underscores the timelessness of her struggles: objectification, sexual violence, victim-blaming, and the systemic demonization of unruly women. Hence, Hewlett transforms Medusa from a frozen artifact of myth into a living interlocutor, her slang-laden protests echoing across millennia to indict persistent archetypal misogynies. The language that seemingly disturbs the urtext becomes a radical reinterpretation, proving that Medusa's story is not simply an ancient myth but a reminder of all the silenced women who still wait to be heard.

Through their distinct narrative approaches, both Circe and Medusa accomplish a collective feminist objective: the reclamation of mythological women from the distortions of patriarchal tradition. Miller's *Circe* immerses readers in an ancient world through intricately textured, context-bound prose, with her metaphors deeply rooted in the Mediterranean landscape, aiming to reconstruct the witch's life with profound characterization. Conversely, Hewlett's Medusa transcends temporal boundaries through colloquial immediacy, with her protagonist's omniscient voice bridging millennia to reveal the enduring scars of misogyny. While Circe's constrained perspective critiques androcentric mythmaking from within its spatiotemporal logic, Medusa's defiant anachronisms execute a hermeneutic of suspicion, interrogating the myths themselves alongside the cultural machinery and doxa that perpetuates their biases. Nonetheless, both novels converge on Ricoeur's imperative: they challenge the illusion of mythic 'truth' to project new feminist possibilities of existence, where women, historically diminished to archetypes, emerge as architects of their own narratives. By achieving this, Miller and Hewlett do not merely revise myths; they employ revisionism as a powerful tool, transforming once-silenced figures into agents who reveal the

violence of canonization and demand accountability from the present. Their works serve as a testament to the unfinished nature of mythology.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Feminist Revisionist Mythology, as a complex act of deconstruction and reconstruction, is more than simple reinterpretation. The deconstruction of archetypes transcends imaginative rewriting and is proven to be a necessary feminist enterprise to question and subvert androcentric ideals that are deeply ingrained within the Western cultural sphere. The exploration of *Circe* and *Medusa* through Frye's theoretical framework displays a three-fold archetypal subversion: First, through the protagonists' characterization, or in Frye's terms, heroic typology. Second, through narrative structure or mythoi. Thirdly and finally, through specific, traditionally recurring archetypes. This investigation leads to a discussion on the authors' use of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion as an interpretative technique to critique and question mythology and its retelling as an elitist phallogocentric body of tales.

By engaging in feminist revisionist projects, Miller and Hewlett do not merely retell myths; they make them accessible to a broader audience through assimilation, modernization, and voicing the silenced and marginalized. Their works extend beyond reinterpretation and shed light on oppressive yet canonical patterns in literature and culture. This suggests that Feminist Revisionist Mythology is an essential cultural intervention that disrupts classics as an androcentric authority and opens new possibilities for diverse storytelling. Myths' timeless prestigious position within both high and low cultures becomes an accessible sphere for the people previously set aside and cast away from accessing this male-dominated area. Therefore, rewriting and reinterpreting myths through a modern feminist lens is crucial to shift away from elitist phallogocentric bias.

General Conclusion

Classical mythology remains an integral part of the human experience today. It permeates cultural, philosophical, literary, psychological, and anthropological spheres. Whether overtly or subtly, mythological elements persist in creative expressions, reinforcing their enduring relevance as timeless tales. However, this powerful cultural status conceals ancient and recurring patriarchal patterns. Women in classical mythology have been historically relegated to marginal positions, either idealized as passive and submissive aids or villainized as women who held power. Thus, feminist revisionist mythology is a reaction to classical mythology as a male-dominated field and its production and sustaining of androcentric archetypes. This dissertation thus explored feminist revisionist mythology as a strategy for revealing suppressed feminine voices and subverting the patriarchal structures carried through mythology. It has scrutinized two contemporary novels utilizing this strategy: *Circe* by Madeline Miller and *Medusa* by Rosie Hewlett. It did so through an amalgamation of theoretical frameworks to impart a detailed, multifaceted perspective.

The first framework defined is Jane Caputi's myth-smashing and myth-making as a feminist deconstructive strategy. Second, as a theorization of mythological narrative structure, Joseph Campbell's monomyth was described in tandem with Valerie Estelle Frankel's heroine's journey, which provided the feminine perspective of mythical and folkloric stories that Campbell lacks. Third was Northrop Frye's systematization of myth, narratives, and archetypes, which confers a universal framework to literature. The subversion of these overarching archetypes displayed how a feminist lens is necessary to uncover and dispel deeply rooted androcentric patterns. These varying theories constructed the

methodological foundation and guiding path for exploring and investigating this dissertation's central works: *Circe* and *Medusa*.

Accordingly, the first chapter focused on methodological frameworks. It defined feminism and the rise of feminist revisionist mythology as a subversive strategy. Then, it delved into defining mythology in its varying forms. Mythology is complicated since it is constructed of multitudes and encompasses various definitions and theories. Subsequently, this dissertation's delineation of mythology has been limited to its definitions as stories, narratives, and societally accepted falsehoods. Correspondingly, theories of myth have been limited to Joseph Campbell's monomyth from his *Hero With a Thousand Faces* and Northrop Frye's formulaic patterns of myth from his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Due to the sheer liberal content present in *Anatomy of Criticism,* my use of Frye's categorizations has been limited to his theories of modes, precisely heroic types; his narrative mythoi, particularly the mythoi of romance and tragedy; and his classification of apocalyptic and demonic archetypes. Using theories that systematize and maintain phallogocentric motifs of myths may sound contrary to this dissertation's aim. Yet, within this paradox, this study argues that analyzing *Circe* and *Medusa* through these theories has showcased their subversive and skeptical approach to androcentric ideals. Exhibiting feminine perspectives to these commonly accepted, rigid, and male-centric biases diminishes their status and questions their assertion as universal truths.

The second chapter then explored *Circe,* scaffolded by Caputi's tandem of myth-smashing and myth-making, followed by Campbell and Frankel's heroic journeys. Before investigating the novel through these theoretical schemata, an exploration of Circe's diverse representations is delineated with the aim of demonstrating how Miller deconstructs phallogocentric aspects assigned to Circe and replaces them with gynocentric ones. Starting from her urtext, Homer's *Odyssey*, wherein she stands as a powerful enchantress, suppressed

into supporting and providing for Odysseus, who stands as the representative of male heroics. Other mythical canons are shown to display their interpretations of Circe, notably Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which molds Circe into the nefarious witch archetype. This archetypal perception is upheld by subsequent interpretations, especially during the Renaissance period. Thus, Circe has been limited to a flat character symbolizing male-centric fears and fantasies. She gains deep insight and a voice when written by women such as the writers Eudora Welty and Margaret Atwood. Thus, Miller's novel is a continuation of such nuanced writings of Circe.

While Welty and Atwood's interpretations of Circe are restricted to short-length prose and poetry, Miller's novel offers a deep exploration of the mythical figure by presenting her tale as a bildungsroman. She offers the audience an immersive view of Circe's psyche and experience as she grows strong enough to seek agency and freedom. Miller's strategy then pivots around disturbing foundational selected myths while connecting them through acts of myth-making. Since Circe's presence is traditionally silenced and dismissed, Miller relies on her creative mythopoeia by utilizing seemingly unrelated myths to her. Such is the case of Prometheus' punishment and the Minotaur's birth. Myths devoid of influential or powerful women became tales of Circe's growth. Therefore, Miller's myth-making inserts Circe in preexisting myths and constructs gynocentric symbols within them. Circe performed a courageous act of empathy towards Prometheus, which gifted her the critical ability to recognize her environment's oppressive structure and willfully withdraw from its patriarchal hierarchical system.

Miller's mythopoetic abilities were vividly illustrated through Campbell and Frankel's monomyths. She subverted Campbell's androcentric narrative pattern to create a feminist epic celebrating women's strength and endurance. In addition, she exposed the glorification of

violence in classical epics as male-authored tales tailored for male audiences. From her perspective, Odysseus was transformed from a witty and daring hero to an obsessive glory-seeking despot. Circe's heroine's journey was not a simplistic replacement of androcentric paradigms with gynocentric ones, by replacing warmongering with motherhood, for example. It critically questioned the male-centric epics' aims. Rather than glory and immortality, Circe sought humble self-actualization. It demonstrated that the elixir of life and immortality is a fantasy of attaining corrupted divine power. It showcased that seeking agency and attaining emotional and psychological growth are ample rewards for the questing hero.

In a similar vein, chapter three discussed Rosie Hewlett's use of myth-smashing and myth-making as acts of dispelling falsehoods promulgated by patriarchal standards in favor of establishing gynocentric truths. Hewlett's extraction of mythological urtext is limited to Ovid's short description of Medusa's backstory and pre-classical physical descriptions of her transformed form. These were elaborated upon in the initial titles that explored Medusa's urtext and its subsequent interpretations across different periods. Hewlett's myth-smashing focused on myth as defined in Barthes' terms, falsehoods created by an authoritative force and widely accepted within society. Through Medusa's voice, she sardonically mocks modern interpretations of the gorgon as a suave creature whose complexities are distilled to fit constrictive ideals of femininity. Additionally, it critiques the modern erasure of Medusa's experience of sexual assault and victim blaming as one of her most popular mythical interpretations. Consequently, and akin to a #MeToo survivor, Medusa, through Hewlett's mythopoeia, wrathfully denounces the patriarchal system that protects perpetrators and punishes victims.

Medusa's monomyth diverges from Circe's in the sense that she cannot actively and physically seek agency. As she continually has to bear the fates of systematic oppressors, she

cannot find space to experience full emotional growth until she reaches the static immortality of death. Hewlett's reimagining of Medusa positions her not as a monstrous figure but as a tragic heroine whose narrative arc reflects enforced stasis rather than transformative agency. In contrast to Circe, who actively reshapes her destiny through magic and defiance, Medusa remains constrained by the limitations of her curse, only reclaiming her voice in death. Hewlett's construction of myth serves as an act of posthumous justice, enabling Medusa to convey the rage and grief that her petrified form could not express during her life. *Medusa* deviates from Campbell's narrative classification of the monomyth while simultaneously challenging the universal androcentric symbolisms he attributes to it.

The fourth chapter encompassed how both *Circe* and *Medusa* dissent from Frye's patterns of myths. Since Frye's grouped patterns are portrayed as universal literary structures, Miller and Hewlett prove the opposite by unsettling these ancient motifs and revealing their phallogocentric bias. These archetypes are, in turn, either entirely deconstructed or replaced by gynocentric ones. First, Frye's heroic modes are divided into five aspects based on the protagonist's level of power. Their application delineate how Circe and Medusa deconstruct them by refusing to fit into a single category and their how their relationships to power differ as women. Then, Miller and Hewlett's narrative constructions were investigated in juncture with Frye's mythoi to depict how male-centric narrative elements can be transformed into gynocentric ones. Frye's concept of archetypes was divided into the apocalyptic and demonic, demonstrating how Circe and Medusa invert the demonic archetypes with which they have been defined. Finally, Miller and Hewlett's literary techniques and strategies were displayed as part of a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding the original body of myths that their chosen characters belong to. Their interpretations of myth are not a simple reinforcement of myth's

historicity but an active critical assessment of the culturally accepted androcentric patterns and ideals sustained through them.

This dissertation has strived to demonstrate that feminist revisionist mythology is a crucial strategy for approaching mythical tales. Due to their timeless nature, mythical tales are bound to an infinite cycle of reinterpretations and rewritings. Thus, to circumvent repeating phallogocentric patterns, a feminist lens and strategic approach are crucial to dismantle androcentric symbols and alter them into all-encompassing ones. Miller and Hewlett provide concrete examples of these schemata. This study's methodological approach and analysis confirm feminist revisionist mythology as a potent power. Androcentric symbols of myths have become accepted as truth due to a sustained process of interpretations confirming them. However, by being laid bare and replaced through a feminist lens, feminist revisionism demonstrates that mythology's timelessness does not necessitate its patriarchal aspects to endure with it.

Nevertheless, this dissertation is constricted to a Western perspective and characters who still hold a higher position than other women. Similarly, Madeline Miller and Rosie Hewlett are both authors who possess a considerable amount of privilege compared to other women who subvert or seek to subvert myths. As white women with educational backgrounds in Classics, they garnered a critical foundation on the workings of mythology and ancient Greece and Rome. Therefore, they belong to high culture but use their privileges to rewrite myths in a manner that appeals to the marginalized and low culture. While this study has argued for feminist rewriting as resymbolization of myths, it reiterates its limitation as a prospective commodity. *Circe*'s commercial success has pushed publishers to seek similar works, and herein lies the issue. While promoting feminist reinterpretations integrates gynocentric symbolization of myths within the cultural sphere, it nonetheless contributes to

oppressive power structures, primarily capitalism, which are intended to be deconstructed. Further studies on the relationship of feminist revisionism of Greek and Roman myths and commercialism are necessary to encourage gynocentric rewriting in a manner that does not insidiously advance capitalist co-optation. The tension between feminist mythmaking as an instrument for liberation and its commodification within mainstream publishing reveals a paradox. While these retellings contest patriarchal narratives, their marketability poses a risk of diluting their radical potential into more palatable products suitable for mass consumption. Consequently, this diminishes feminist revisionist mythology's radical essence into a commodified trend produced to fit societal standards rather than encourage a disturbance of the status quo.

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