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Literary Analysis of the book ‘Circe’ by Madeline Miller through a Feminist Approach

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Dedication

To my family and friends and to everyone who has had the patience to hear me rant about the books I love and hate.

Abstract

This qualitative literary analysis explores how Madeline Miller's novel *Circe* reconfigures traditional narratives of power and gender when compared to classical mythological portrayals, particularly Homer's *The Odyssey*, and how these transformations resonate with the contemporary female experience. The researcher conducted a comprehensive examination of Miller's text, employing detailed comparative research tables to systematically analyze character portrayals, thematic developments, and symbolic representations.

The findings reveal that Miller meticulously grants Circe a nuanced internal life and a first-person narrative voice, directly subverting one-dimensional mythological archetypes like the seductress or the submissive daughter. The study demonstrates how Circe's "female rage" evolves from reactive and vengeful, to a controlled protective force for self-defense. Furthermore, her relationships with figures from divine to mortal are revealed as transformative sites for the redefinition of power, shifting from inherited divine governance to power cultivated through skill, will, and resilience. The research concludes that Miller transforms Circe from a static mythological figure into a dynamic, relatable character whose journey powerfully connects ancient narratives of female agency and defiance with modern feminist perspectives on autonomy, voice, and overturning patriarchal norms.

Resumen

Este análisis explora cómo la novela *Circe* de Madeline Miller reconfigura narrativas tradicionales de poder y género en comparación con las representaciones mitológicas clásicas, particularmente *The Odyssey* de Homero, y cómo estas transformaciones resuenan con la experiencia femenina contemporánea. El investigador llevó a cabo un análisis exhaustivo del texto de Miller, empleando tablas comparativas de investigación detalladas para analizar sistemáticamente las caracterizaciones de los personajes, los desarrollos temáticos, y las representaciones simbólicas.

Los hallazgos revelan que Miller otorga meticulosamente a Circe una vida interna compleja y una voz narrativa en primera persona, subvirtiendo directamente los arquetipos mitológicos unidimensionales como la seductora y la hija sumisa. El estudio demuestra cómo la “female rage” de Circe evoluciona de ser reactiva y vengativa a una fuerza protectora controlada para defenderse a sí misma. Además, sus relaciones con figuras divinas y mortales se revelan como espacios transformadores para la redefinición del poder, pasando de un poder divino innato a un poder cultivado a través de la habilidad, la voluntad y la resiliencia. La investigación concluye que Miller transforma a Circe de una figura mitológica estática en un personaje dinámico y reconocible, cuyo viaje conecta poderosamente las antiguas narrativas de poder y agencia femenina con las perspectivas feministas modernas sobre la autonomía, la voz propia, y el derrocamiento de las normas patriarcales.

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Chapter I

Introductory Framework

Introduction

How does Madeline Miller transform narratives of power and gender in her reinterpretation of Circe compared to traditional mythological figures and with the contemporary female experience? That is the main question that this investigation proposes. The mythological figure of Circe, as taken from Homer's book *Odyssey*, is that of a powerful enchantress who uses both magic and her natural allure to charm men into her home and torture them by turning them into swine. She is part of Odysseus' journey, a famous and celebrated hero, who stumbles upon her island, and challenges the mythical goddess, saving his men from a precarious fate, and submitting to a seemingly evil woman by turning her into his side and transforming her into a source of heavenly aid.

In Homer's epic, Circe exists primarily as an obstacle for the heroic and celebrated Odysseus, a dangerous woman tempting him with her allure, whose power must be overcome or harnessed for the male protagonist's benefit. Her characterization is very two-dimensional; she is a powerful witch, yet her power is subdued by Odysseus' cunning nature. Her only remarkable and remembered action is her infamous transformation of men into swine, which is also presented as a malevolent act against the golden hero, rather than as a direct consequence of her life experience. Thus, the traditional narrative of Circe is not a representation of her complex identity, but a plot device to highlight Odysseus' valor.

It is this male-centered notion that Madeline Miller, who obtained a BA and MA in classics from Brown University, seeks to question and confront by creating a literary work such as *Circe*. The book is told in first person with the goddess as narrator, and it is this way that she flips the narrative and centers on the woman aspect of the goddess.

This reinterpretation serves a crucial purpose in relating ancient myths to the contemporary female experience. By giving Circe a complex identity beyond her interactions with men, Miller creates a character with whom women can deeply identify. The novel explores themes of isolation, autonomy, motherhood, and personal power, all of which resonate powerfully with the challenges faced by women today. Through Circe's evolution, Miller offers a compelling critique of traditional power dynamics and gender roles, demonstrating how even an ancient figure can speak to the personal experience of contemporary women. This is the central subject that will be explored and questioned ahead.

1.1 Problem Statement

Traditionally, Circe has been depicted as a manipulative figure, as a seductress who takes advantage of men and leads them to their demise. Her characterization is directly related to her interactions with male heroes and is portrayed only through their point of view. In *Circe*, Madeline Miller seeks to challenge that portrayal and reinterpret the character, adding more depth and identity, while also depicting a relatable depiction of femininity. This poses the question of how closely the experiences of women relate through time, and how well one can identify with the other.

This analysis also seeks to understand how Miller challenges patriarchal narratives and turns traditionally male-centered stories into ones that can be accepted as a critique of power dynamics, gender, and autonomy. In addition, to comprehend women's utilization of anger as a

form of retaliation, as it is depicted in the famous occurrence of the myth of Circe seeking revenge and turning men into swine.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objective

- To analyze how the author uses the character of Circe to question, generate criticism, and reconfigure the traditional roles of women in Greek mythology

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- To explore the relationships between Circe and other characters to understand the narratives of power and gender raised
- To examine the evolution of the character Circe and her quest for justice by exploring the concept of 'Female Rage'
- To evaluate the traditional representations of women in classical literature and how these are challenged in the novel

1.3 Justification

This research analyzes the interpretation of classical myths, specifically the figure of Circe, who is presented as a victim, and challenges this idea by focusing on her autonomy. This critique exposes how the play dismantles patriarchal structures and redefines traditionally established roles and archetypes of power. In addition, it presents an analysis that relates the female experience through the ages, comparing the women's experiences in classical and contemporary times to showcase the advancement of feminism in society. Finally, it contributes

to contemporary literary feminism by showing how classical myths can be reframed with a feminist perspective, even if the source may appear inherently sexist.

Besides its contribution to feminist literary theory, this research seeks to build a bridge in the gap between ancient stories and modern social narratives. By carefully examining how Miller adds onto Circe's life and creates a much more convoluted and nuanced being, we get to reflect on the perceptions of gender. It underlines the importance of revisiting classical texts with a more open and critical mind to reveal how similar our human experiences are throughout history, not only with the characters' experiences, but also with the hidden thoughts and intentions the classical authors had at the moment of writing the text.

1.4 Antecedents

The information and bases for the investigation are taken mainly from two literary works. First, one of the believed original texts recounting this myth is the *Odyssey* by Homer, specifically the 1919 translation made by A.T. Murray for Harvard University Press, which serves as the traditional source for the mythological figure of Circe. This text provides the conventional portrayal of Circe as a powerful but submissive enchantress, who is mostly defined by her interactions with the Greek heroes. Secondly, the book *Circe* by Madeline Miller, which is the inspiration and central base of this project, offers a modern first-person retelling of the goddess's life and experiences.

As well, it will be taken into consideration resources from previous projects and magazines following a similar analysis of Miller's writing and the female general experience.

In the text 'Contemporary Feminist Adaptations of Greek Myth' by Shelby Judge (2022), the author seeks to analyze the recent surge in women's writings adapting classical mythology and what this trend reveals about current issues within this decade's feminism and feminist

theory in general. The study's scope covers relevant novels like Margaret Atwood's 'The Penelopiad' (2005), which is a retelling of Penelope's perspective of the time of The Odyssey and is part of a series of contemporary authors rewriting Greek myths. The judge also mentions, as an example, the focus of this work, that being Madeline Miller's Circe. She analyzes these and other texts with a similar focus, under the scope of feminist classical and women's studies and sociology, exploring why female authors feel a need to retell these ancient stories differently.

'Expression of Female Rage: Defining a New Genre' by Victor Nordahl Pettersen (2023) is a thesis that explores the emerging trend, mainly in film, that is characterized by complex and usually violent main female characters, to understand the origin and meaning of the anger that they portray. It goes over movies like "X" (2022), "Pearl" (2022), "Gone Girl" (2014), and "Jennifer's Body" (2009), which are extremely popular cinematography pieces.

The author's main point is that these films tap into a desire for cinematic expression of 'female rage', a term used to describe this anger expressed by women, as a response to the systematic oppression experienced in a patriarchal society that traditionally shames and denounces female anger even when it is seemingly justified. It takes that anger and amplifies it, utilizing symbols to put it into shape. This thesis argues that this phenomenon offers a sort of cathartic release for audiences, particularly women, by experiencing their anger through the character's release and acts of violence, which are so often only portrayed by male characters, in a way that feels empowered and justified.

Another antecedent work related to the topic of this research is 'Circe and the Necessity of the Female Voice' by Mairead O'Hara (2022). Here, the author argues for the essential role of female perspectives in the interpretation of classical texts by comparing Homer's 'The Odyssey' with Madeline Miller's 'Circe'. The author's main point is to make a differentiation between

Homer, who is writing from a male viewpoint, and his depiction of Circe as a wicked witch and an obstacle in Odysseus' life as a view limited by the male perspective, in contrast to Miller's writing of 'Circe' which is written by a woman and narrated from a female point of view.

The paper focuses on and highlights the systemic misogyny of the world and how it clashes with Circe's existence. By exploring Circe's experiences, especially the trauma she has suffered, her relationships with the characters around her, and analyzing her natural goodness and empathy, the paper points out that female voices and representations are vital for understanding how classical narratives are still relevant and can very much resonate with contemporary women's experiences.

Once again related to the topic of contemporary adaptations of Greek myths, 'Reimagining Circe: Subversion of Patriarchal Mythic Patterns in Louise Gluck's Circe's Power' by Sandhra Sunny and Dr Sharmila Narayana (2024) takes another reinterpretation of the myth of 'Circe' and analyzes the feminist views that challenges the patriarchal portrayal of Circe found in the source of her story. This work focuses more on the poem 'Circe's Power' written by Louise Gluck in 1996, arguing how Gluck reclaims the goddess's voice and completely transforms her from her seductress archetype, into a benevolent, empathic, and human character. Gluck critiques the misogynistic lens through which female figures have historically been viewed in classical literature and studies and seeks to revise and redefine these outdated notions through a fresh feminist and female-driven perspective in her poetry.

As a historical antecedent, it would surely be needed to mention the source material of the central story of this whole discourse. 'The Odyssey' by Homer provides the oldest recorded written narration of Circe's chronicle, and this work would be impossible to write as it centers around said character. Homer gives us the foundation as it provides the original narrative of

Odysseus' travels, and how in his journey he comes to find the minor goddess, intertwining his life and that of his men with her and her island. This establishes the archetype of Circe as powerful, dangerous, and alluring, but centered around the world of the male gender; this is the idea that Miller would later critique and rethink. Understanding Homer's portrayal of Circe is crucial as a historical and literary context to appreciate the revolutionary values of the recent feminist work written based on the same characters.

There is seemingly a lack of literary academic studies contributions that dive into literary feminist works nationwide, specifically on the topic of mythological feminist retellings. However, one work that seems important to mention, as it is an analysis of a feminist literary piece by Costa Rican author Yolanda Oreamuno, is the article 'Yolanda Oreamundo, 'frivolidad ambiente' y pensamiento feminista en Costa Rica' by Sergio Coto-Rivel (2021).

This text offers a detailed analysis of historical feminist ideals by analyzing Oreamuno's essay, written in 1938. Coto-Rivel explores the critical vision the author possesses around the feminist movements of her time, pointing out that she sought a deep and radical thinking ideology to modernize feminist morals. She was critical of what she referred to as superficial reinvidications, and called for a more nuanced understanding of equality, redirecting her meaning for women to start thinking outside of the male's ideas of them, meaning stepping out of the female archetypes much similar to those imposed on Circe, and creating their feminine personality based on their actual qualities and thoughts.

Oreamuno's originality is her intention to prioritize thought liberation. Her essay might be experimental in a new way of thinking, mostly for her time, but it sets a path for feminist analysis and literary works in the country. It questions the systematic oppression found in society, as it is, for example, found in women's history and relationship with education. Coto-

Rivel highlights the author's vision on concepts like the patriarchy and the need for feminine voices, which sets her as a literary figure ahead of her time.

Collectively, these antecedents provide necessary historical, literary, and theoretical frameworks to analyze how Madeline Miller's 'Circe' not only reinterprets a classical figure but also contributes to contemporary feminist discourse by questioning and reconfiguring the traditional roles of women in Greek mythology.

1.4.1 Concepts

There are a few concepts that are needed to fully grasp and comprehend the context of this analysis. These terms provide the framework through which we can examine how Miller's novel challenges the traditional representations of female figures and offers a contemporary feminist perspective and ancient narratives.

1.4.1.1 Patriarchy/Patriarchal Structure

It refers to a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in all sorts of roles, such as those of politics, morality, and privilege. In a patriarchal structure, societal norms focus on the needs and ideas of male figures, and it purposely seeks the dominance of the male gender over the female gender. This is denominated as a system as it does not present as one alienated incident but works as an intertwined web of aspects in life and society, such as economic systems, education, politics, and familial relations, which altogether lead to the oppression and marginalization of women.

1.4.1.2 Archetypes

Archetypes are symbols and patterns of behavior of character types that are recurrent in many narrations, stories, and literary works. When talking about gender, archetypes often present stereotypical representations of men and women. For example, “the seductress,” which is a very recurrent one in Homer’s portrayal of Circe, pictures her as a traditionally attractive woman whose only focus is her desire to seduce the male protagonist. Analyzing these archetypes aids in understanding the constricted and outdated ideals of women that are often portrayed in classical literature.

1.4.1.3 Reinterpretations

In literature, reinterpretations refer to the revisiting and revising of already existing narratives, but with a new focus or exploring different ideas. In his case, feminist reinterpretations involve re-examining myths through feminist ideologies and views, which usually challenge the male-centered viewpoint of the original texts. Common ways in which these reinterpretations provide a new perspective to the narrative are by giving a voice to marginalized and forgotten characters and critiquing and warping power dynamics. Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’ is an example of a feminist reinterpretation of the myth of Circe, originally told in Homer’s ‘The Odyssey’.

1.5 Scope

This research seeks to explore how Miller’s first-person narration of Circe challenges the traditional patriarchal narratives and representations of women in classical Greek mythology. It will investigate the evolution of Circe’s character, focusing on her quest for autonomy and freedom, her ways of growing her power, and her relationships in diverse areas of life, all this as a critique of the established gender roles. This analysis will also consider the contemporary

relevance of Miller's interpretation by studying how it reinterprets ancient myths in a manner that resonates with the female experience regarding the challenges that come with living under a patriarchal system.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

They say myths are based on life and history, and the Greeks are no exception. It does not matter which epic or story you read, which character you analyze, or which version you hear, you will always find something in common, and that is that women are represented in questionable ways and under a generally not very kind lens. The myth of Circe is no different.

2.1 The Myth of Circe

Homer, in his tale *The Odyssey*, first introduces Circe when Odiseus and his men find themselves in Aeaëa, the island inhabited by the goddess.

Lo, thy comrades yonder in the house of Circe are penned like swine in close-barred sties. And art thou come to release them? Nay, I tell thee, thou shalt not [285] thyself return, but shalt remain there with the others. But come, I will free thee from harm and save thee. Here, take this potent herb, and go to the house of Circe, and it shall ward off from thy head the evil day. And I will tell thee all the baneful wiles of Circe. (Homer, 1946)

She was a nymph, a minor goddess who turned into an outcast among gods, for the crime of showing her power, who had been exiled to a remote island, confined to her own company and lonesome magic. As seen in the previous excerpt from the book, Hermes aids Odiseus and instructs him on how to handle the deity and get back his men, whom she had turned into swine. The hero faces the witch, and in a sort of battle of power and wits, ends up in Circe's bed, with his men turned back to what they were before they encountered her powers. This extends into a long stay, and Circe is host to these men for a considerable amount of time.

This recount sets Circe as a figure of both allure and danger. Both light and dark. As usual in mythological recounts, views tend to be very binary, where a character is portrayed to be either or. Circe here is a representation of the typical female myth of seductiveness and destructiveness. At the beginning, she is seen with suspicion and fear, and later, as a tool and a guide for Odysseus, so that he can complete his arduous journey successfully. It is interesting, however, that she is rarely viewed with respect or admiration. Despite Circe's great power and excellent dominion of sorcery, she does not have much protagonism in the tale. Her mission only has a few phases, protagonist by fear and aid. The first few mentions of Circe in this tale that we get, are sort of a foreshadowing of her role, as we first see her mentioned when Odysseus says he is making a knot like the goddess told him, and then later in Book 9, he mentions how he was trapped and tricked by her. This juxtaposition follows her throughout the story.

In this portrayal, Circe and her power are widely defined about men. From Hermes, to Odysseus, to his men, she is often portrayed only as a sort of cause and effect of the others' actions. She is more of a female-shaped symbol and tool for the hero to play his part. Homer provides very little complexity with her character and story and is easily drowned in the waves of Odysseus' achievements, even when her help played a major part in his success.

“So, she spoke and presently came golden-throned Dawn. Then the beautiful goddess departed up the island, but I went to the ship and roused my comrades [145] themselves to embark and to lose the stern cables. So, they went on board straightway and sat down upon the benches, and sitting well in order, smote the grey sea with their oars. And for our aid in the wake of our dark-prowled ship, a fair wind that filled the sail, a goodly comrade, was sent [150] by fair-tressed Circe, dread goddess of human speech. So, when

we had straightaway made fast all the tackling throughout the ship, we sat down, but the wind and the helmsman guided the ship. (Homer, 1946)

As Bohelo (2024) comments, “When defiant and self-sufficient, Circe is deemed dangerous and manipulative. When she recognizes Odysseus has bested her and resorts to wooing him, she is praised as a woman with merit...”, Circe is only deemed a good woman when she turns into the stereotypical female, and she only does so when faced with a superior man. On the other hand, there is a sense of praise towards Odysseus for turning this seductress trickster woman into a softer and submissive aid.

The *Odyssey*'s portrayal of Circe is a great example of a woman who does not fit the shape they are expected to. She is not a maiden, nor a wife, nor a mother. She is a powerful force, an independent, capable, and beautiful woman. However, in the end, she's still bound by the tentacles of the patriarchy; she may hold immense power that can even change the shape of men, yet she falls under Odysseus' presence and serves him without much of a fight. This is not to mean that she is weak, just that even myths tend to follow and fall into archetypes, and of course, patriarchal notions.

This is precisely what inspired author Madeline Miller to write a retelling of this tale, but it gives more focus to Circe. In the book's appendix, she tells the interviewer that she “wanted to take a woman's life and set it at the center of an epic story”. This retelling presents Circe as the narrator of her own story, beginning from even before her birth, to the journey of her taking control of her life and future.

2.2 Recount of Madeline Miller's Circe

Miller (2018, p. 5) begins the book by naming Circe as a nymph, one like many before and after her, nothing special or distinctive. She follows by defying the word nymph, in Circe's

voice, she says that word for them, in their language, not only means goddess, but also possesses the meaning of bride. This quote, set at the very first page of the book, seems to be a very deliberate choice from the author, as it sets the tone for the whole book, and summarizes the character's life conflict simply: she is only someone about a man.

From the moment of her birth, throughout her life, Circe is treated almost as a nuisance by everyone around her, including -and especially- by her family. When her mother realizes that she will be having a girl, she sounds disappointed, and even disgusted, wrinkling her nose as she mutters the gender of her newborn child. Her father, the all-mighty god of the sun Helios, has always seen the women around him as objects to acquire power, which is why he expresses his distaste for his daughter, since, unlike his other children, she has no power, and unlike his other daughters, she has no groom. Since she possesses no beauty or power, she is of no use to anyone, and she grows up aimlessly wandering the halls of the gods, with no personality or sense of self.

Another matter that has branded Circe and shapes her is her encounter, or lack thereof, with kindness. The first time we see a portrayal of kindness and compassion in the book is by Circe herself, when she meets Prometheus at his trial and decides to give him something to drink. This is the first time that we see Circe as a source of help for someone else, something she will constantly be all her life, and for which her life is almost made for. In addition, despite this act being something good, she hides it from herself almost as if it were a crime, because in a way it was, since it defied the word and rule of Zeus. This is, in a way, also a demonstration of power coming from Circe in a non-traditional way. She defies a greater power by an act of goodness when cruelty has been dictated.

In a more literal way, the first time we see the goddess brandishing her power is almost by mistake. In a half selfless, half selfish act, she decides to turn Glaucus, a mortal fisherman she

met on one of her odd days, that she has -or thinks she has- fallen in love with, and who has had a hard life and deserves remuneration and retribution for the unjustness in his life. Here, Circe acts out of her desires, something she has never done once in her life. This leads her to make choices that may negatively impact on her own life. On the other hand, the first act of the so-called evil we see comes from Circe when she turns the nymph Scylla into a monster.

After turning Glaucos into a god, she gets instantly disappointed when he proves to be uninterested in her; instead, he turns his adoration towards Scylla. Blinded by her anger and resentment of her overall treatment by these creatures, the goddess turned Scylla into a monster. This incident is the second time Circe touches into her power. She comes to notice that both times, her feelings have guided her hand, and she is partly horrified and in awe of her actions.

The initial turning point of the story is when Circe confesses what she has done, and Zeus, possibly moved by fear of his position being threatened, makes an example out of the young goddess by sending her into exile to a remote and desolate island called Aiaia (referred to other sources also as Aeaea).

She defied my commands and contradicted my authority. She has turned her kind and committed other treacheries as well...It is agreed with Zeus that for this, she must be punished. She is exiled to a deserted island where she can do no more harm. (Miller, 2018, p. 74)

Though set as a punishment, this starts the journey of finally finding herself. Away from the prying eyes and controlling minds of the gods, ignored and forgotten, Circe turns her existence around and works on not only her magic and herbs, but herself. She starts to bloom alongside her magic flowers, into a goddess in name, not only by blood. She truly finds her power and character and makes a name for herself outside of her family relations.

However, life is not linear, and Circe's path also gets obstructed by dark circumstances. She encounters several groups of men who hold no respect for her and choose to take things by force. In one of the darkest and hardest to digest parts of the book, Circe is sexually assaulted, which causes a fracture in her already weak state of mind. She mentions how she's not surprised this happened to her, as this is a very common and normal experience among nymphs. They are constantly chased and later taken by force, seen as only objects of beauty and not actual beings. In this passage, we can see how deeply rooted her internal misogyny was, since being something she has learned since birth, Circe almost tries to rationalize what happened to her and even wonders how it is a surprise it had not happened before. We will dive into this thought further later, as this is not an isolated incident among women.

Such a traumatizing event is the catalyst for her newfound talent of turning men into pigs. She begins doing this almost as a precaution to avoid said tragic incident happening to her again. However, in her, one could say blind desperation, she does not give much thought to whom she directs her magic. This is how she comes to meet Odysseus, who here has one of his roles reversed in comparison to the source text: he is a secondary character, a passing moment in Circe's life, who only shapes her future. However, things are not that simple. Odysseus' presence and seeming respect for her make her idea of men shift in some ways. But even he falls into the preconceived forms of masculinity, as he is bound to have rage outbursts and moments of selfishness and greed, as some of the recounts of his travels come to prove.

After Odysseus leaves Aiaia and Circe with it, another male figure comes into the witch's life, in a much different way, however, as this one will plunge her into the hazardous and frustrating yet beautiful journey of motherhood. She has her son Telegonus in precarious circumstances, and he grows to be a very difficult child with much energy and little rest inside

him. Circe's life completely turns while taking care of her son, as that of mothers usually do. Yet she more than once remarks how she does not truly mind, as her only purpose has come to protect her offspring and make him happy.

When Telegonus grows, his restlessness grows with him, and he longs to leave the island and explore like his father once did in the many stories he has heard from his mother. Circe worries, but eventually, she relents. The young boy embarks on his journey toward his father's land, therefore building space for another turning point in the story. At a cruel turn of events, the father is murdered by his son, with no malice or evil, just a cruel misunderstanding and tragic fate. Telegonus then goes back to protect his mother, but he does not come back alone, as he brings with him his father's wife, Penelope, and his eldest son, Telegonus' brother, Telemachus. Circe welcomes them, if more than a little distrustful, under her son's petition. What comes is an interesting development of a relationship between the four, Circe and her son having such directly contrasting personalities to Penelope and her son.

In the end, Circe learns that she cannot control the lives of other people, goes after, having her son take Telemachus' place and go fight under Athena's protection, but she realizes that she can take control of her own. Circe finally understands just how much power over her existence she has, and she decides to confront her original perpetrator and jailer, her father Helios, and prove that he no longer holds property over her the way he used to. At the very end of the book, Circe regains her freedom in more ways than one. The book ends in a sort of open ending, but with the assured finale that Circe finally truly learned to listen to her voice and make her own decisions. Throughout her life, she had always been in motion, looking ahead, and now, her existence seemed to have finally found a meaning.

2.3 The patriarchy in Greek mythology

As it was previously mentioned, Greek mythology, like much of ancient Greek society, has a characteristic way of representing the female figures within its stories. Specifically, of the hierarchical system that controls the world, these reflect the gender hierarchies and societal structures of the time. The main figures and the most powerful ones are the gods, the famous and feared Greek pantheon, ruled at the head by the almighty Zeus. Meanwhile, women are usually depicted as secondary to men, their roles set and defined by their relationship with them. They are present to please, serve, aid, guide, and appease the male figures around them, fearing their power and their rage alike. On page 6 of the book, Circe recounts how her mother did not dare to disagree with her father, as everyone was well aware of how Helios possessed a volatile and explosive anger that could be extremely destructive, despite the god's radiant appearance.

“Greek male gods have always treated goddesses or lesser women terribly and adversely. Many instances from the myth, such as the story of Medusa, Lamia, and Electra, etc. can substantiate this statement. “(Ranjith, 2023) Women are an object of attraction, a way to obtain power, a being to destroy, a pretty thing to play with, or even something to fight each other for, but they are mostly never thought of as a being worthy of as much worship and respect as them.

These limited roles available to women in Greek mythology often reflect the broader societal views of gender. In ancient Greece, women were generally relegated to the private realm, managing the home and dealing with motherhood, while men were public and prominent figures like rulers, soldiers, and scholars. Even powerful female figures like Circe or Medea were usually isolated or rendered powerless by their emotional and physical connections to men. These women were punished for stepping outside their predetermined roles. These myths exemplify the danger that women face when they challenge the patriarchal order, thus

reinforcing the notion that women must remain submissive and adhere to the boundaries of gendered roles; otherwise, they would face severe consequences.

The patriarchal framework within Greek mythology not only has limited the agency of female characters but also has defined the narratives around their relationships with men. Even women who possess great power, like Athena or Artemis, often do so in ways that conform to male expectations -Athena is known as a virgin goddess, who, despite her strength and wisdom, is often depicted in a way that supports male action rather than challenges it. Her creation is proof.

Her father, Zeus, having swallowed his wife, in fact, the female nature, gave birth to Athena from his head, and in this way, he was in her place, the 'mind', the ruler and protector of Athens. Athena's nature, and in fact that of every woman's nature, was thought to be a derivative of the male (or her father's) nature. (Sahinidou, 2020, 132)

Despite coming to be one of the most powerful women in the myths, her life is usually portrayed through the heroes she patronizes. If someone as powerful and clever as the goddess of warfare and wisdom is relegated to the support of men, what else can be expected of the other feminine figures?

The patriarchal lens has had a lasting influence on how these stories are interpreted and rewritten, reinforcing the ideas of male dominance and female submission that are present in ancient Greek social norms. "The ancient myths and stories mirror and maintain the gender relations in the culture that have created them." (Altin, 2020). As a result, many of the mythological women's stories come to tragic endings, shaped by the power structures around them, rather than by their agency over their future.

2.4 Madeline Miller's Circe Character Analysis

Madeline Miller turns the narratives around and creates a rich, first-person perspective of a myth that delves into the complexities of Circe's character, upgrading her from a supporting character to the protagonist of the story. Miller's Circe's whole internal conflict is centered around finding her identity and her desires, discovering her being to her own making instead of falling into a predefined mold, unlike Homer's Circe, who is defined by the needs and preconceptions of the males around her. She is portrayed as a woman first and foremost, who even as a goddess, grapples with the intricate worries of her soul and the relationships around her, mostly the familial ones. Miller explores the inner life of a woman, in what seems to be a female biographical notion in theory, as it travels a journey of self-discovery and touches topics of empowerment and the daily defiance of patriarchal constraints, that mirror those of contemporary women.

One of the more notorious differences between the two portrayals of Circe is the way that Circe's power is perceived both by herself and by those around her. In the *Odyssey*, Circe's power -and her whole existence- is seen through a male lens. She is dangerous at first, when Odysseus finds himself on her island and is forced to challenge her to save the lives of his comrades. However, as soon as he successfully battles her threatening advances with his wit -and Hermes' help- she falls to his charm and no longer poses a danger. On the contrary, Circe's purpose takes a turn from challenger to aid, as she transforms into a magical source of aid for his quest. Contrarily, in Miller's version, Circe's power as aid only takes up a small fraction of the power's importance, focusing more on the self-liberation and strength-building aspect of her ability. This Circe does not only use her power to aid men or manipulate others, but she also learns to wield it to protect herself and live under her terms.

In other words, Miller's Circe is not so strongly defined by her relationships the way that Homer's Circe is. In the latter, she is the representation of both the dangers and allure of female sexuality, being described as beautiful and enchanting, her magical abilities as used as a symbol of feminine power that must be controlled or contained. This narrative reinforces the perception that female power is to be harnessed by a masculine figure and not her property to be utilized. Her relationships in this portrayal give no depth or identity to her story; they add to someone else's. Different from how Miller completely turns the narrative around. She revolves in all the relationships around Circe, and they are a means to her own personal growth and historical development, keeping her agency and control of her narrative without needing to submit her powers to anyone else.

For example, the portrayal of her sexuality, as seen with both Hermes and Odysseus, is a decision of her own making for pleasure and as a way to pass the time. She is not forced into it, nor is it the male's suggestion. She proposed the suggestion, and due to different reasons, both were accepted. It is under her terms to her gain, never as a way of survival or submission. Her mother also proves to be a great example to this point, as she was offered Helios by her father, Oceanos, as if it were a mere object to hand to the best bidder. The book quotes Oceanos telling Helios that his daughter is his if he wants to take her, almost in a transactional manner and with no regard to what his daughter could want. This proves a striking contrast to Circe's experience. In this way, Miller invites a reconsideration of the myths, offering a nuanced portrayal of Circe that resonated with contemporary feminist concerns.

In analyzing the male figures around Circe, we can come to a deeper understanding of the goddess's thoughts and Miller's characterization of a patriarchal society viewed through the

myth. Via these characters, Miller explores themes of control, manipulation, and familial relations in a patriarchal system.

Firstly, Helios, Circe's father, and the first male figure who presents in her life. She refers to him as arrogant and self-absorbed, reliant on his power and place as the god of the sun. He was never presented as a nurturing father, and his care for his children is conditional, based more on pride and power than on genuine affection. This void of connection is what draws Circe into emotional isolation, which later contributes to her rebellion. At the end, Circe accepts that she cannot change the way her father sees her, but also that he cannot change her spirit and conviction, and challenges his divinity, wielding the same manipulative tricks he would perform. For her whole life, she held the title of 'Daughter of Helios', but in the end, she chooses to relinquish this, as she realizes the empty power that it gave her comes pale in comparison to her freedom, and the power she can give to herself. "You have always been the worst of my children," he said. "Be sure you do not dishonour me." "I have a better idea, I will do as I please, and when you count your children, leave me out." (Miller, 2018, p. 361)

In the case of Aetes, Circe's brother, he is drawn in a cold and authoritarian manner. He is the king of Colchis and later, the father of Medea, known for his cruelty and control over his kingdom. Throughout his earlier years, however, he was more of a distant and neglectful connection in his sister's life, who never truly recognized her talents. Despite being raised by her, he never reciprocated the love and affection that she placed on him.

Looking closely at Aetes, we can see the signs of his true opinions even from the very beginning. His behavior towards Circe has been a sort of cold indifference from the very start. He treats her with contempt and talks to her as you would to a senseless child. He is a great example of how abuse and familial violence can come in different forms. He never screamed at

or outright harmed Circe, but he never respected her nor treated her as the equal she was. Circe finally opens her eyes to this reality when her sister tells her that Aeetes has never really liked or respected a woman in his life. And also, later, when they reunite again after his daughter's visit, is when she finally comes to understand that her brother only holds importance for his own beliefs and needs.

Hermes appears in Circe's in a blink and goes the same way. He is Zeus's son and the god of travelers, messengers, and mischief. For most of his appearance, he serves as a companion to Circe, mostly in her first years on the island, as she adapts to the place and the isolation of her confinement. Though he never willfully acknowledged the goddess, he is a perpetrator of the same patriarchal system as much as any. He treats Circe as a plaything, only interested in her to satiate his curiosity. However, Circe is aware of this as she says that he did not mean much to her, she never truly considered him a friend, and even goes on to compare him to a snake. But she also compares herself to one, meaning that both of them had secret intentions and no genuine affection; their connection was based on mutual gratification and personal interest. And later, on page 157, she mentions that she had to be careful with her mixed feelings and uncertainty, as those encouraged him more than anything, and actually, he views any form of resistance or hesitation as a game that filled him with pleasure. What makes this not as terrible is that Circe was not only aware, but she also shared the sentiment. As seen in the previous quotes from the book, she was also not interested in anything deep and sentimental from him. This reciprocity and consent are what make this not the worst distinction about the god.

It gets uglier, however, when Hermes delivers one of the book's most impactful and distasteful lines when, talking with Circe about how nymphs would run away from him, he says that nymphs are usually terrible at running away. This comment, in fewer words, expresses how

he takes them by force in a way that they find themselves unable to escape. This becomes much more important when put in context with not only Circe's own experience with assault, but also with the real-life contemporary epidemic of this issue. A study made by The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) shows that over 53% of women and over 29% of men reported experiencing contact sexual violence (Chen et al., 2023). This idea that Hermes voices is an actual thought that many men in our day still hold. They see women as something of a challenge, something they can take by force if they need to. No respect is held for her desires or the autonomy of her body.

The most interesting male characters to analyze and certainly the most refreshing are those of Daedalus and Telemachus. Dedalus is a master craftsman, characterized not only by his patience but by his undeniable humanity. This last characteristic is perhaps what attracts Circe to him. He behaves like a human, and so he treats others as such. Dedalus is not perfect, however, as his love for those around him makes him make sacrifices. He is a bit of a distant father to his son, as he has become a tool for Pasipahe to pull from him what she desires. He and Circe bond over the feelings of losing their autonomy and their deep thirst for freedom. One of the book's central ideas is vocalized by him when talking about the cage he is making for the minotaur. Circe requests it to be a comfortable place for the creature to live, and here is when he says that a golden cage is still a cage. This is important in the book's theme since women have been programmed to conform to the life that is dictated for them. It is fine if you cannot choose your career or who you'll marry or how you'll live, that you are alive and have the bare necessities is enough. But freedom to choose should be just as vital. "Due to the cultural expectations on both genders, for women to stay at home and for men to be the breadwinner, women's authority is

limited to domestic life” (Knaus, 2024). In many places around the world, women are painted into a role by society that cannot be changed. They are put in a cage against their will.

Moving to Telemachus, he is one of the final pieces in Circe’s puzzle of finding her path. His portrayal is quite different from Homer’s tale. Odysseus' son is pretty much the opposite of his father. He is peaceful, calm, and collected, with a patient temper, and his life is almost a mirror to Circe’s. Much like her, Telemachus grew under the shadow of his prominent father, always running away from his ire, never being enough at fulfilling his duties in the eyes of Odysseus. Always a shame to the family name, always punished. Perhaps it was this experience that made him, also much like Circe, fight all that was once against him, deciding to fit his future into Circe’s life, very uncharacteristic of men in the myth. Telemachus is one of the best representations of non-toxic masculinity in the book, as he decides his path away from societal preconceptions.

Lastly, Odysseus proves to be one of the most complex figures in this narrative; he stands as a middle ground between both of these groups. He was mostly respectful to Circe, recognizing her power and respecting her boundaries. But he was also prone to anger bursts, and the way he treated his son proved to be the opposite of how he treated the goddess. He is a personification that does not always equal goodness and respect.

While Madeline Miller’s portrayals of men in Circe offer a fresh and complex lens through which to view the classical representation of the patriarchy in mythological figures, it is Miller’s treatment of female characters that significantly shifts the focus of the story. It represents the diverse depictions of how the patriarchy affects women and how women choose to deal with that experience. Or better said yet, how women deal and learn to survive with the effects of it, and how that affects each other.

Scylla, for example, is one of the characters that has the most impact on Circe's life, even contending with the men. The act of turning her into a monstrous creature haunts the goddess for the rest of her immortal life, as she finds her feelings around the incident are mixed. On one side, she feels regret for having done such a deed out of jealousy and spite, and she believes Scylla deserves this as a punishment for her behavior and actions. On the other side, Circe comes to realize this one act turned her life around, and she wonders if her life would have changed as much if she has never dared to do such a thing in the first place, as all her freedom and her power came from this defiance of the gods and of her morals.

Then Scylla herself is a clever characterization of a wrongful idea that men have of women. And not only men, as Circe recalls, once the word spread about the nymph's predicament, women and men alike mocked and ridiculed the nymph, speaking ill behind the back of someone they had previously showered in compliments and metaphorical flowers. Even Circe, underneath the horror and realization of what she had done, finds time to marvel at such contrast and hypocrisy. Aetes adds to this when he comments on her transformation, telling Circe how it was not she who turned the other into something monstrous, rather, she just contributed to her finding her real shape, and it is in this passage that he shows his true thoughts of women as he says:

Even the most beautiful nymph is largely useless, and an ugly one would be nothing, less than nothing...But a monster, she always has a place. She may have all the glory her teeth can snatch. She will not be loved for it, but she will not be constrained either. (Miller, 2018, pp. 127-128).

Pasiphae is another complex character, like any in this book, and her relationship with her sister has an interesting characteristic. Pasiphae and Circe both grew up in similar circumstances,

being both daughters of the same god and the same nymph, both marauded the halls of the gods in the same way; however, their behavior could not be more different from each other. Circe remarks that she never felt a sorority with her sister, as she was always cruel and coldhearted. When Pasiphae seeks Circe's help on her son's birth, Circe wonders from the start what the true motives of the request are, since her sister was never even amicable to the other goddess.

Circe's sister gives out one of the most powerful quotes in the book, where she summarizes the attitude of the men and the scope of the patriarchy, as well as pointing out just how hard it is more a woman to thrive in such an environment, and the sacrifices that they have to make in order to so much as survive. Pasiphae comments to Circe that gods do not value goodness, or even wickedness. They only direct their attention to power and anything that holds it. This supports the previous point, how in the patriarchy, you're only of use as a means to acquire more power. It does not matter who you are and what you do, as long as it pleases those at the top of the hierarchy. Pasiphae specifically falls into one of the more nuanced victims of the patriarchy: the one who becomes the perpetrator. Pasiphae finds a way to survive in this hard world by contributing to it. She punishes women for men's faults, she uses people as tools to achieve her desires, and she has fallen so deep into it that she seems to enjoy it. It is important to mention these attitudes because the fact that this started as a survival method is understandable, but never excusable.

When talking to Pasiphae, Circe begins to realize that submission will get her nowhere in this cruel world. Her sister tells her that she finds it amusing how, even after all that time, Circe still believes deep in herself that she deserves respect, praise, and regard from the gods just by being obedient and following orders. He follows this by giving out her example; she alludes to

the hardships she went through their brother's hands, and to the things she had to do to keep him happy, a fact that even Circe was unaware of.

Pasiphae believed in Circe's power because she saw her female hood in it. However, she never truly respected her because Circe never turned to cruelty as a method of surviving as she did. Pasiphae admits that her power comes from her rage at being treated in such a manner, and yet she falls into the trap of doing to others the same misdeeds. She also mentions to Circe that they are the same, as Circe herself has fallen into that trap before (when turning Scylla). Circe responds to her admission of wickedness by saying they are not the same. Though Circe doubts it, that same doubt is what makes her statement true. Pasiphae successfully learned to repress her guilt at her actions, but her sister never did, and later remarks that it is that regret that serves as punishment for her offence.

Penelope is, at first glance, a very simple and unimportant character, but it is her nature and wit that finalizes Circe's transformation, making it sort of poetic, how despite all that men have done, her true journey of finding herself began with a woman and ended with another. Penelope's quiet, calculating nature and her natural allure portray a direct contrast to Circe and her chaotic nature. Their relationship starts with rivalry, the classic storyline of pitting women against each other because of a man. Penelope is the loyal and patient wife, enduring long years apart from her husband but keeping an unwavering devotion despite his absence. Keeping her role of wife and partner the way that is expected of her. While Circe is wild and rebellious, crafting her own life to her will. Despite this, both of them understand the feeling of being related to men who never comprehend them. This is what makes her relationship bloom into one of mutual respect.

This comparison between these two characters is a depiction of how women navigate the roles forced upon them by the patriarchal systems. Both of these characters' strengths manifest differently: Penelope with her emotional intelligence and her collectedness, and Circe with her defiance and independence. Despite Penelope being a representation of classical femininity, she is not reduced to her passiveness; it is another way of shaping her resilience. It is also quite interesting to notice how Athena never turned her interest in her when she presented so many of the qualities the goddess sought in her heroes, like she does with Odysseus. Perhaps the reason behind it is the general topic of this investigation: gender. Nevertheless, Penelope quietly addresses her future, choosing to remain at Aiaia and building an interest in the sorcery she observes Circe practice. At this time, through Penelope, Circe finally comes to understand that defiance can come in different shapes, and she chooses how to mold it. Penelope's silent resistance to the patriarchy gives the final push to Circe to take her life into her own hands fully once and for all.

2.5 The Female Experience

We do not need to travel to ancient times to experience a patriarchal hierarchy. Though time and history have helped change the social situation and give out more opportunities to women, this systematic oppression is still very much alive. Miller comments that such things as misogyny and sexism are timeless, and this experience was what inspired her to create a piece of literature centered on the woman in the myth, not the men. This exploitation of female behavior under oppressive regimes is not anything new, but it is certainly always something worth attention.

2.5.1 Female Rage

The female experience in a society such as the one we have is shaped by a complex conjunction of gender expectations and societal norms that set women in lower or predetermined roles. Patriarchal structures are naturally dominated by men, which makes women conform to their rules and often fall into positions of submission and suppression. This creates a 'bottled up' effect, where women's feelings and emotions, repressed for so long, come out in an outburst of white-hot anger, or other words, rage. This is where the term 'female rage' was coined. Not being an alienated experience, being so recognized and collectively shared by women, it soon started to be portrayed in media such as literature and mainly, in film. This media phenomenon and trope is a characterization of women's anger and frustration created by the constraints and personal trauma caused by this oppression and control.

Historically, women's feelings have been minimized and ignored, as women are often presented as overly emotional and hysterical. "Equating anger with strength amongst men while simultaneously using it as proof of emotional weakness amongst women. A woman who cannot keep her feelings of anger to herself is inherently more emotional." (Petersen, 2023). Their feelings are a related consequence of hormonal differences and inability to control their emotions due to a lack of intelligence. "Although she is justified in her anger, Creon can only seem to view her as an emotional woman whose power can be turned against him at any time" (Botelho, 74), In this passage the author is talking about the myth of Medea, however the same principle applies to the case of Circe and also of the contemporary woman. Since this anger is seen as a sort of senseless emotional response, women are feared in the way that an animal with rabies is they need to be put down or at the least, subdued.

But this anger is not senseless, and it goes so much deeper than bad behavior or throwing a tantrum. "There is a sort of relief in seeing one's anger or frustration as justified, especially

when embodied by a ‘monstrous’ woman, as many women are deemed for simply existing” (Botelho, 38). Female rage then defines this anger, finally erupting, and rationalization of it, portraying it as a logical and legitimate response to violence and oppression. And this representation has found itself a place in today’s entertainment media. Characters like those in ‘Carrie’ by Stephen King or the 2008 movie ‘Jennifer’s Body’ by director Karyn Kusama have embodied this phenomenon. Their anger is not directly tied to one specific event; it is the cataclysm of the congregation of episodes that took this person to the edge.

The question might arise about how female rage differs from male rage. The explanation comes tied to the reason; it is precisely about oppression that these differentiate. Men do not live under a systematically oppressive system based on gender. They can experience oppression, of course, but on a bigger level, it would be due to other reasons, for example, race, sexual orientation, religion, etc., but the gender marginalization is historically a female experience. It is also related to the fact that, different to women, male anger has always been a sign of strength. As Pattersen (2023) mentions, there is no social stigma to the rage of a man, as there is with the female equivalent.

In the case of Circe, there are many reasons for her to present rage, as there are many ways in which she was discriminated against and punished. However, the most notorious one is that of her animal transformations.

His rib cage cracked and began to bulge. I heard the sound of flesh rupturing wetly, the pops of breaking bone. His nose ballooned from his face, and his legs shriveled like a fly sucked by a spider. He fell to all fours. He screamed, and his men screamed with him. It went on for a long time. As it turned out, I did kill pigs that night after all. (Miller, 2018, p. 189)

It is a secret to no one, whether you have personally experienced it or not, how much trauma originates from a case of sexual assault, as that that Circe went through. “The sexualized nature of the violation of sexual assault adds a particularly traumatic aspect to the experience. Being sexually assaulted or raped can be one of the most traumatizing experiences a woman can go through.” (Haskell, Randall, 2019). This act is a horrible act that seeks to humiliate and objectify a human being for the sake of selfish pleasure.

It is all even more heartbreaking and infuriating when you come to realize that Circe never intended to be so dramatic in making her transformation. Even though she had used her magic as a form of defiance and survival before, she has never been cruel ever since her regrets with Scylla. She mentions how her original intention was to make the men fall asleep. She wanted only to use her sorcery as a prevention to avoid exactly what came to happen. But when the men came at her with violence, she knew no other way to act but with violence accordingly.

It is more than clear in the book that events such as this would have never happened if a man were present to chaperone the woman, as the men ask several times if the man of the house was present. They asked him to give their expected greetings for the hospitality, as if it had not been Circe herself who fed and cared for them. Upon realizing there was no man present, they decided to commit their heinous crime. Ranjith (2023) accurately points out how these men see women as property, following up with “a woman without a man is considered liable for violations.”

The exact details of this transformation of the men are also an interesting allegory to look at. Circe, at the moment, chose pigs, as they are an animal commonly associated with being wild and dirty. This is possibly related to the fact that that’s exactly how the assault made her feel:

dirty. Even though it was not her fault, she spent days trying to clean up all the remains of that moment from her mind and body.

Circe expresses how some of her actions following this are only done in defiance to take control of her sexuality. She mentions how her actions were not driven by any form of longing in the slightest, but they were more of a kind of intense anger directed inward, much as a self-inflicted wound, to confirm to herself and the world that she was the sole owner of her own body and will. She continuously takes some men to her bed and establishes sexual relationships with them, but not out of real want, this is part of her rage to grapple back the control of her body, that was taken at the moment of the rape.

This rage, besides being a relief, creates some sort of satisfaction in women. There comes a freedom when you finally manage to turn the tide, the offender becomes the offended, and vice versa. Circe mentions that her favorite moment of the transformations was seeing them wondering and confused at why she was not afraid of them and what they could do. This is what differentiates this transformation from that one of Sylla; she does not truly regret it as she sees this as fair payment. This is a solid and factual act of revenge, fed by the fact that she knew these men would not feel remorse for either of the things they planned to do to her. They were eventually sorry, but only sorry that they were caught and punished, not on account of their actions. They regretted that they mistook her softness for weakness and were plainly and painfully wrong. She takes pleasure in asserting her power over them since their initial intention was to assert it on her the same way.

As mentioned previously in her character analysis, Pasiphae relies on this same rage as a form of survival. She also uses it to keep her controllers in control, leaving them no choice but to relent unless they want to feel the full scope of her anger. In her case, however, there are more

victims to her anger than the original perpetrators, and this is what makes this turn into something crueler and more sinister than what her sister does, but it starts under the same circumstances: survival.

Pasiphae ponders what would happen if she did not have her own powerful and dangerous magic. She mentions to her sister how her husband, the king Minos, did not actually want a queen, but someone he can control and mold to his desires, someone to keep in chains under his control forever, and Minos, son of the powerful god Zeus, could easily get it with only a word to his father. But the reason he never raises his power against his wife is that he is well aware that Pasiphae would inflict harm on him first. His fear of her power is her only tool for her limited freedom.

It has been mentioned how and why power is taken back with these types of actions. We can also analyze how it is taken back with words. “The topic of the relationship between language and gender has had great importance for critics and scholars from different fields of study for decades” (Sarwar, Fatima, 2022). There is a known practice of taking back power by going back to using words that were previously stigmatized. This is the case of the word witch. Circe is known as the ‘Mother of Witches’, and of course, though that is partly due to her utilization of magic, it also can be related to her quality of being a woman who regained her identity.

The word witch has been used to insult and undermine women many years ago, as this word is constantly related to the mass hysteria of fear related to the utilization of magical practices, but more deeply, how these women who were usually accused of doing such deeds, were commonly independent and self-assured women who were both envied and chastised by others.

The word witch has been taboo, calling a woman a witch is reason enough for anger, but literary pieces like *Circe* by Madeline Miller or *Slewfoot: A Tale of Bewitchery* by Brom, amongst other works, have spun the utilization of this term. There is certainly certain magic in challenging a society that has plotted and united against your existence in such deep and systematic ways that have transcended the passing of time. This is magic in finding courage and bravery to go against a tide as strong as that of history.

This word, of course, cannot be thrown around easily; a woman has to decide for herself whether she wants to appropriate it for herself. Similarly to the way that at the end of the book, Penelope starts getting interested in Circe's practice of these magical arts, she chooses that path.

Penelope questions Circe on what defines a witch. She wonders if a witch is not her divinity, then what makes a witch? Circe admits that she used to believe that it was inherited, partly caused by the godly blood in her veins, but after having her son Telegonus, she notices how he completely lacks any kind of magical abilities, even though he shares her blood. She concludes that what truly builds and comes to define a witch is her willpower. A silent mutual understanding comes between them, shared from the foundations of their experiences as women and mothers.

It could be argued that the magic in Circe comes only from the fact that she is, after all, a literal goddess. But Penelope is proof enough that all it takes is conviction.

Reclaiming the witch is a relatively recent phenomenon, where contemporary women finally came to realize that they can choose to give power to a word only if they let it. Furthermore, they can give power to themselves if they let themselves. The vast majority of the points touched on in this analysis are experiences of the modern woman of this day and age. "It becomes evident that such retelling of ancient myths can convey powerful and effective

messages to contemporary society and modern audiences and even enhance contribution to the ongoing feminist progress” (Sarwar, Fatima, 2022).

Though times have changed and women have gained their deserved rights, there is still an ongoing fight against the oppressive patriarchy. Many movements have been born to fight for this cause, perhaps the most famous and the most related to the analysis on Circe is the #MeToo movement. A movement that serves to highlight the cases of assault that women have systematically endured silently for years. It is a call to action to punish perpetrators, but mainly to support victims and aid them in the journey to recovery and overcome the trauma caused by those harsh experiences.

‘Why Myth Matters: The Value of the Female Voice in Greek Mythology’ by Rogers, K. E (2021) is a relevant and detailed analysis of the retellings of Greek myths and movements such as the one mentioned. They bring up that the importance of movements as these to our society since they normalize and populate the act of talking about female issues such as rape and domestic violence. The author says:

I still hear the same warnings about the simple risks of existing as a woman in society, and I still feel unsafe much of the time as a result. The difference that I can personally feel due to #MeToo and other progressive feminist movements is that now, if I were to experience any form of sexual harassment or abuse, I know that I can tell someone about it and be believed, supported, and taken seriously. These things should be considered right and not privileges, but as history can tell us, that has certainly not been the case.

It is the same for retellings with feminist approaches as those of Circe by Madeline Miller. Talking openly about this brings the issue to the surface, and talking about female issues and how to fight them inspires and pushes women to do just that. Situations like those of bodily

autonomy like for example reproductive control, -subtly touched in the book with Perse being prohibited to have more children-, are extremely related to today, as it is with this case of the recent overturn of Roe V. Wade, the law that permitted women to have control over the choice of abortion in the United States.

Circe's journey thus reflects the ongoing fight for female empowerment in contemporary society, where women are increasingly challenging the patriarchal structures that have long defined their roles, reclaiming their rights to both their bodies and their narratives.

2.6 Themes, Symbols, and Motifs

Something that can and should recurrently be found in literary works are elements such as themes, symbols, and motifs. These three are similar elements that provide different functions and add value and sophistication to the text. By analyzing them, the reader can grasp a deeper and fuller meaning of the intentions and emotions of the author of the literary work, and it can expand their understanding of topics that might have gone unnoticed otherwise. Elements like these not only complement but also enrich the quality of the text and, in turn, do the same for the reader's experience.

2.6.1 Themes

Themes are underlying main ideas or messages that are explored in a literary work. They are a representation of the central arguments the author makes about life, nature, and emotions. The theme not only describes a happening in the story but goes further by explaining why it happened and what it means to the character and the story. Usually, themes are not explicitly stated, but rather woven implicitly through the character's thoughts, experiences, feelings, and

conflicts. One literary work can contain a plethora of themes, with some being more prominent and relevant than others.

2.6.2 Symbols

Symbols are objects, places, people, ideas, or actions that mean something besides their literal meaning. They are representations that relate tangible things like objects or people to abstract concepts like emotions or ideas. They add complexity to the text by adding more meaning and inviting the reader to make a deeper analysis and interpretation, which in turn allows the authors to communicate intricate ideas with much more power.

2.6.3 Motifs

Motifs are recurring elements, images, and ideas that appear throughout the literary work to contribute to the development of a theme. The difference between a symbol and a motif is that symbols are usually a single element, while motifs tend to be an interconnected pattern of elements. The repetition of these elements makes the reader focus on that idea and catch and uncover deeper meanings or even foreshadow events, which helps enforce the central themes of the text.

2.7 Plot

Madeline Miller's 'Circe' reimagines the life of the daughter of the sun god Helios and the ocean nymph Perse. From the moment of her birth, Circe is an outcast among the gods, lacking the beauty and the power characteristic of her kind and which her siblings do possess. She is empathetic and human-like in both her feelings and her voice, and this alienated her from her equals much farther as they see her as below them.

One day, she discovers that she might, after all, possess a kind of magic, which she uses to transform a mortal she had taken a liking to into a god, and later, a nymph whom she was jealous of into a monster. This last one caused a stir between the divinities, as Zeus realized Helios' children possessed a type of power and control of magic that he did not even understand. Because of this, Circe was punished, and by Zeus' divine order, she was banished to an isolated island called Aiaia.

On the island, Circe slowly transforms her exile into a period of self-discovery and growth. She works, learns, and further polishes her skills with herbs and magic, becoming a formidable wielder and witch. Even though she is isolated, her island becomes a famous stop and landmark for various well-known figures. The first of these visitors was the god of messengers, thieves, and mischief, Hermes. Circe begins a relationship with him, though it is transactional and fairly fleeting. Sometime later, Hermes' son, a hero named Odysseus, arrives on the island with his crew. After the hero saves his fellow warrior men from the fate of living as swine for the rest of his life, as they had been turned by Circe, he becomes her lover for over a year. These encounters shape her understanding of mortals and gods alike, just as a previous traumatic encounter with traveler men shapes her understanding of self-preservation.

One of the most significant points in Circe's life is the birth of her son Telegonus, son of Odysseus. Motherhood brings not only a new perspective to her life, but also a new challenge. Fighting with the anxieties of raising a child alone, and a mortal one at that, she discovers a type of love incomparable to any feeling she has felt before. As Telegonus grows, his curiosity and interest in his absent father intensifies and grows with him, eventually leading him to seek out Odysseus. This journey proves to be another challenge for Circe, as a tragic accident occurs at that time, and her son comes back but not alone: he brings Telemachus and Penelope, Odysseus'

other son and his wife, now a widow. Against all odds, they create a complex and unexpected family unit.

Living alongside mortals for an extended period, Circe finds herself drawn to the idea of a finite life. She witnesses Penelope's resilience and Telemachus' patience, contrasting them with the egotistical and self-serving nature of the gods. This experience leads Circe to question her immortality, and when her son Telegonus, yearning for adventure, leaves Aiaia to seek new experiences outside the only place he had ever known, the witch decides to face a choice about her destiny.

Ultimately, Circe confronts her father, finally standing up for herself and asserting her autonomy. With nothing left to hold her back, she finally dives into her independence and chooses with her heart, she decides to take a chance and become mortal, choosing to live alongside Telemachus, with whom she has formed a deep and loving bond. At the end, Circe has finally found a way to embrace her identity as a witch, her power, and her human emotions.

2.8 Author Biography

Madeline Miller is an American novelist. She earned her BA and MA in Classics from Brown University in Rhode Island. She is an experienced Latin, Greek, and Shakespeare high school teacher with over fifteen years of experience.

In addition to her Classics degrees, Miller pursued further studies at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought and focused on adapting classical works for modern performance at the Yale School of Drama.

'The Song of Achilles' was her debut novel, which received significant recognition, like becoming a New York Times bestseller, and being nominated for awards such as the 2012 Stonewall Writer of the Year award (to which she came as a finalist) and winning the 2012

Orange Prize for Fiction. Her next novel was 'Circe', which quickly earned her another New York Times bestseller and nominations, including being a finalist for the 2019 Women's Prize for Fiction.

Miller's novels have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and her essays have appeared in various prominent publications such as the Guardian, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, and Lapham's Quarterly.

In summary, Miller creates a rich and powerful transformative feminist reimaging of an intrinsically misogynistic tale, as is with usual classical mythological pieces. She offers a powerful narrative, that of a woman breaking the chains she was born into and going from passive captive to empowered witch, and in thus, engaging and touching upon relevant topics as identity, autonomy, and resilience.

On the last pages of the book, while Circe faces her father one last time, she does so with fear but with conviction. Taking back power does not mean thinking yourself superior; it means understanding the forces that work against you, knowing the risks, but still choosing to challenge them, and using your resources to fight for what you believe is right and what you deserve. Circe faces Helios, knowing he is the god of the sun, who is one of the most powerful titans and deities. And she is the only person who has faced an ancient god and came back not only alive but victorious, as she did when she faced Trygon and came back with his tail as a weapon, a feat that not even her brother Aeetes had managed. There are many ways to face oppression; it does not matter how it is done; the important part is that it is done with belief, conviction, and authority, trusting that we can change things for the better.

Circe was never given the option of her freedom; she had to both earn it through hard work and take it by force. Certainly, it is because of this that she understands the importance of

being given a choice, and so she does, to Penelope and Telemachus, two characters who also have had other people's ideas imposed on them for a very long time. She tells the latter that he asked his mother if she wanted to stay or go back to her home, Sparta. Penelope chooses to stay, and so Circe offers the same choice to the son.

The journey of female empowerment is not one of simple rebellion, but of profound self-discovery and realization. Circe grapples with her identity, her role as a daughter, lover, and mother, and the consequences of her choices, while living through a world that challenges her mere existence and seeks to define her for all eternity. Yet, she chooses to defy it and understands her true value. She says that she had carried a severity and many regrets for a long time, but that was not her; it was not what defined her; it was only the shape that the world had molded her into. She then realizes that it is up to her to keep it or not.

By reimagining this story, Miller invites the readers to see Circe not as a powerful mythological goddess but as a woman. This book is not only a critique of how mythology has historically silenced and diminished women, but an adaptation of how it feels to be a woman, a call to action, and a work of companionship and sorority so that women feel seen and understood in the cruel and lonely world that they tend to be pushed to by society.

As a closing statement, there is a quote from the book that can highlight the points and intentions of this work, and hopefully, leave the reader on a positive note, with hope that there is a day in the future where the sentiment of this passage is fully recognized and shared widely. "It is a common saying that women are delicate creatures, flowers, eggs, anything that may be crushed in a moment's carelessness. If I had ever believed it, I no longer did" (Miller, 2018, p. 315).

Chapter III

Methodological Framework

This investigation seeks to examine how Madeline Miller reinterprets narratives of power and gender in her work “Circe”, particularly in contrast to traditional mythological representations and their relevance to contemporary female experiences. The character of Circe is depicted as a formidable enchantress who employs both her magical abilities and inherent allure to ensnare men, subsequently transforming them into swine. Within the context of Odysseus’ journey, Circe is portrayed as an obstacle that he must confront. This encounter ultimately leads to her submission, as Odysseus transforms her from a seemingly malevolent figure into a source of divine assistance for his quest.

In Homer’s epic, Circe is characterized as a dangerous woman whose allure poses a threat to the heroic Odysseus, and later, she is used as a tool to complete his purpose of getting home. This traditional narrative fails to capture the complexity of Circe’s identity, reducing her to a mere plot device that serves to highlight Odysseus’ valor. This is why Madeline Miller challenges this male-centric perspective through her literary work “Circe”. By employing a first-person narrative that positions the goddess as the narrator, Miller effectively reorients the story to focus on the feminine aspect of Circe’s character.

This reinterpretation is significant in its ability to connect ancient myths with the contemporary female experience. By endowing Circe with a multifaceted identity that extends beyond her interactions with men, Miller creates a character with whom women can resonate. Through Circe’s development, Miller provides a poignant critique of traditional experiences of contemporary women. This is the idea that has been analyzed for this research work.

3.1 Research approach

The research approach serves as the underlying plan that guides an investigation, mentioning the general guidelines and procedures for gathering and analyzing the data. This shapes the design of a study, influencing everything from the specific methods chosen to the way the findings are interpreted. Research approaches generally fall into one of the three categories: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Establishing a clear research approach for any kind of research or investigative work is fundamental as it ensures coherence and rigor throughout the study, as it guides the writer to the selection of appropriate methodologies and ultimately determines the scope and the statements drawn from the research work.

3.1.1 Qualitative

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach primarily concerned with exploring circumstances and factual ideas in depth to gain a rich and nuanced understanding of experiences, perspectives, and meanings. It focuses on the “why” and “how” of this phenomenon, using non-numerical information like words, observations, or stories. The goal is to interpret patterns and insights in a specific setting, rather than measuring or drawing broad conclusions about large groups. This investigation, which analyzes the reinterpretation of Circe in the literary text of ‘Circe’ by Madeline Miller, is a prime example of qualitative work. It involves close textual analysis and critical interpretation to understand symbolic meaning, develop themes, and examine narrative choices related to gender and power. By digging into the subjective experiences presented in the literature, this study aims to understand the underlying motivations and societal reflections found within these stories, instead of simply counting or qualifying them.

3.1.2 Quantitative

Quantitative research focuses on numbers and statistics. Its main goal is to measure things, test ideas, and find relations between different factors, often to apply these findings to a larger population. Creswell (2014) comments that this approach uses organized ways of collecting data, like surveys and experiments, to get clear, measurable results. It particularly answers questions such as “how many”, “how much”, or “to what extent”, and aims to discover patterns or connections that can be proven statistically.

3.1.3 Mixed

Mixed methods research is the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study. This approach, according to Creswell (2014), aims to use the best parts of each method to get a more complete and well-rounded understanding of a research question than just one of these two methods could provide on its own. Commonly, researchers who use this approach use the qualitative method to explore an idea first and then use numerical techniques for the quantitative data to test or confirm those previously collected ideas. This combination aids in connecting different pieces of information to give a more thorough and insightful view.

3.2 Research Design

Research design serves as a thoroughly structured plan that outlines the overarching strategy for investigation. It is the framework that guides the collection, measurement, and analysis of data, ensuring that the study effectively addresses its research questions and objectives, according to Creswell (2014). Choosing the appropriate and correct research design is a critical initial step, as it provides coherence to the entire research process. A well-chosen

design ensures that the evidence and ideas gathered are relevant and sufficient to support the conclusions drawn, thus providing a solid foundation for the research work.

3.2.1 Descriptive

As Creswell (2014) describes it, descriptive research design aims to accurately portray the characteristics of a particular phenomenon, population, or situation. Its primary goal is to answer questions related to “what”, “who”, “where”, or “when”, providing a detailed description of a reality. This design focuses on observation and description, gathering data to illustrate a phenomenon as it naturally occurs. This work adopts a descriptive research design because its core objective is to analyze and illustrate the transformation of Circe’s narrative and her characterization across different literary texts. It describes how Madeline Miller reconfigures traditional roles, explores power dynamics, and portrays the female experience in her novel ‘Circe’, highlighting the specific ways these elements are depicted rather than testing hypotheses or establishing causal links.

3.2.2 Phenomenological

Phenomenological research design is a qualitative approach focused on understanding and describing the universal essence of a “lived experience” from the perspective of those who experience it, according to Creswell (2014). According to Moustakas (1994), its main purpose is to delve into the subjective perceptions, feelings, and interpretations individuals have about a particular phenomenon, seeking to uncover the meaning they attribute to their experiences. In literary analysis, this approach can extend to exploring the deeply personal and subjective experiences depicted via the characters in the text. This investigation utilizes a phenomenological lens by examining Madeline Miller’s Circe. Miller’s novel is a profound

exploration of Circe's internal world, her isolation, her autonomy, and her rage. By analyzing these experiences crafted by the author, this work seeks to understand what Circe's life is like through her eyes and circumstances.

3.3 Information Sources

In academic research, information sources are the basis or foundation materials from which data and evidence are acquired to construct arguments and support the claims presented in the paper or work. These sources are categorized based on their originality and the event, phenomenon, or idea being studied. A clear understanding of the distinction between the three is crucial for ensuring the credibility and validity of the investigation.

3.3.1 Primary Sources

Primary sources, according to the University of Massachusetts Boston Libraries (n.d.), are original materials or firsthand accounts of an event, discovery, or artistic creation. They are the factual, direct evidence or raw data from a specific period or event, produced by first-hand accounts or those who created the work. These sources produce uninterpreted and unfiltered information, allowing researchers to engage directly with the original content and shape and share their conclusions. In this investigation, original works like Homer's 'The Odyssey' and Madeline Miller's 'Circe' work as primary sources.

3.3.2 Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are interpretations, analyses, or discussions of primary sources, says the University of Massachusetts Boston Libraries (n.d.). They are one step further apart from the original event or data, which means that they often provide commentary or synthesis of the

information gathered from the primary sources. Authors of secondary sources typically did not directly experience the event or create the original work themselves.

3.3.3 Tertiary Sources

The University of Wisconsin Stevens Point Libraries (n.d.) defines tertiary sources as sources that compile, summarize, or index information from both primary and secondary sources, providing a broad overview or background topic. They are usually used to gain a general understanding of a subject or to locate primary or secondary sources. While valuable for the research, tertiary sources generally do not offer original analysis or insights and are rarely cited as primary evidence in academic papers.

3.4 Analysis Categories

In qualitative research, analysis categories serve as thematic classifications that help organize and make sense of complex information. They function as systematic classifications that allow researchers to identify patterns and build coherent arguments from their observations or textual evidence, according to Maxwell and Miller (2008). These categories are fundamental to the process of qualitative data analysis, providing a structured approach to interpret the non-numerical data collected. For this research work, the analysis will be structured around the following key concepts: feminism, traditional women's roles, gender, and female rage.

3.4.1 Feminism

As defined by the American Psychological Association (n.d.), feminism refers to a diverse array of socio-political movements and ideologies that share the overarching goal of establishing and achieving political, economic, personal, and social equity of the sexes. It is

based on the premise that modern societies are largely patriarchal, prioritizing male viewpoints and often treating women unjustly, as Hooks (2000) mentions in her book 'Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics'. Feminist theory, which emerged from these movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experiences across various disciplines.

3.4.2 Traditional Women's Roles

Traditional women's roles encompass the established expectations and behaviors culturally associated with women in a given society, often dictating their responsibilities, social interactions, and their societal positions (Britannica, n.d.). Historically, these roles have frequently confined women to the private sphere of the home, focusing on domestic duties like childcare, and being a supportive but subservient member in family structures, reflecting societal norms that limit women's opportunities across several aspects of life and social development.

3.4.3 Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and identities that a society considers appropriate for different sexes, as defined by the American Psychological Association (n.d.). Unlike biological sex, which is related to physical and physiological attributes, gender is a social construct that varies across cultures and evolves. It influences how individuals perceive themselves and others, how they interact, and how power and resources are distributed within society, often leading to inequalities.

3.4.4 Female Rage

Female rage, as a concept explored in contemporary feminist and cultural studies, refers to the expression of women's anger, often understood and in response to systemic oppression and injustices. In many patriarchal contexts, the outward expression of female anger has been historically suppressed or demonized, in contrast to male anger, which is often normalized and rewarded. In literary and cinematic contexts, the depiction of female rage often serves as a powerful subversion of these traditional gendered expectations, providing an outlet for systematically generated frustration and reclamation of agency for female characters and, by extension, for audiences.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments refer to the systematic tools and methods used to gather information pertinent to the research questions. While traditional instruments like surveys or interviews are common in other research approaches, in qualitative literary analysis, these instruments involve structured approaches for organizing textual evidence extracted from the sources by the researcher. For this investigation, the primary data collection instrument will be the creation of carefully designed tables, which facilitate the organization and comparative analysis of the literary texts. These tables enable the researcher to visually track patterns, themes, and comparisons across the literary texts that align with the related categories and themes that are to be studied in the research.

3.5.1 Literary Analysis Chart of Textual Evidence Comparison between Homer's and Madeline Miller's Portrayal of Circe

For the first chart, there will be a comparison of the character of Circe in both of the source literary works, those being 'The Odyssey' by Homer and 'Circe' by Madeline Miller.

First, there will be a column titled “Aspect/Event” that will be dedicated to the happening or part of the story. Second, there will be a column for how that was portrayed in ‘The Odyssey’ called “Quote from ‘The Odyssey’”, followed by a column called “Homeric Portrayal of Circe”, which as the title suggest, it’s a short analysis of how Homer portrayed Circe in that specific event. Lastly, there will be a column titled “Quote from ‘Circe’”, which will work the same way as the previous column for the Homeric portrayal, followed by another one called “Miller’s Reinterpretation”, which will provide a short analysis of the changes that Miller provided for the character.

Table 1. Literary Texts Comparison

Episode/Event	Quote from ‘The Odyssey’	Homeric Portrayal of Circe	Quote from ‘Circe’	Miller’s Reinterpretation
Circe’s life in Aiaia				
Circe turning men into swine				
Circe challenging Odysseus				
Circe aiding Odysseus				

Table 1 Illustrates the Comparison between Homer’s and Madeline Miller’s Portrayal of Circe. Source: Researcher’s creation

3.5.2 Literary Analysis Chart of Circe’s Relationships in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’

This table will be a visual representation of the relationships of Circe with the characters in her life in the reinterpretation made by Madeline Miller.

First, there will be a column for each of the main characters who have a longer or deeper interaction with Circe, named “Character”. Next, there will be a column named “Nature of Relation” that will indicate the type or nature of that relation, that being of a family member, friend, or lover. Following that, there will be a column that will describe the dynamic of the relationship through the important interactions that Circe has with this character; this section will be named “Interactions/Dynamic”. Lastly, there will be a column with the title “Impact on Circe’s Development”, which will describe how this relationship impacted Circe’s life.

Table 2. Circe’s Relationship

Character	Nature of Relation	Interactions/Dynamic	Impact on Circe’s Development
Helios			
Perse			
Aetes			
Pasiphae			
Glaucos			
Scylla			
Hermes			
Dedalus			
Odysseus			
Telemachus			
Telegenous			
Penelope			

Table 2 Illustrates Circe’s Relationships in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s creation

3.5.3 Literary Analysis Chart of Circe’s Evolution and Portrayal of Female Rage in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’

This chart is designed to examine the development of Circe’s character throughout Madeline Miller’s novel, with a particular focus on her evolving understanding of justice and the manifestation of ‘female rage’ as a response to oppression and injustice.

The first column, titled “Injustice/Provocation,” will mention the event that challenged Circe. The second column will show Circe’s way of opposing this injustice, as the title suggests, with “Manifestation of Female Rage”. Lastly, the column “Impact on Circe’s Character” will show her evolution and how this made her change her perspective or her actions, and what she learned from that experience.

Table 3. Circe’s Evolution and Rage

Injustice/Provocation	Manifestation of Female Rage	Impact on Circe’s Character
Helio’s neglect		
Glauco’s betrayal		
Exile to Aiaia		
Sexual assault		

Table 3 Illustrates Circe’s Evolution and Portrayal of Female Rage in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s creation

3.5.4 Literary Analysis Chart of Traditional Female Roles in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’

This chart is a way of analyzing how Circe’s story portrays some of the traditional roles that have been assigned to women in society since the beginning of time. It also examines how Miller’s Circe engages with these roles and how she redefines them. The first column will be “Traditional Role,” and this is a fixed column with the four main different traditional roles

bestowed upon the character of Circe (‘The Submissive Daughter’, ‘The Wife/Domestic Ideal’, ‘The Seductress’, and ‘The Nurturer’). The next column, named “Event/Episode,” will be an example of a scene or event where this role is prevalent in the story. The last column, tagged as “Circe’s Challenge or Subversion,” will describe how or what Circe does to fight against these traditional roles that have been given to her without her consent.

Table 4. Traditional Female Roles in ‘Circe’

Traditional Role	Event/Episode	Circe’s Challenge or Subversion
The Submissive Daughter		
The Wife/Domestic Ideal		
The Seductress		
The Nurturer		

Table 4 Illustrates the Traditional Female Roles in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s creation

3.5.5 Themes Identification Chart

This chart will work as an aid to pinpoint and categorize the main themes present in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. The chart will be composed of four columns, the first one will have the main themes that can be analyzed in this research (power, control, humanity/mortality, womanhood, magic, anger/rage). The second column, called “Explanation in the Novel” will have a description of how this theme is portrayed in the novel, where it is mentioned, and in what context. The second-to-last column, named “Supporting Quote” will work as a space to add a direct quote from the text that exemplifies and backs up the portrayal of the theme. And lastly,

“Researcher’s Interpretation” will be a space for the researcher of this work to present their analysis of the theme according to their view and the points of investigation.

Table 5. Themes

Theme	Explanation in the Novel	Supporting Quote	Researcher's Interpretation
Power			
Control			
Humanity/Mortality			
Womanhood			
Magic			
Anger/Rage			

Table 5 Illustrates the Themes Found in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s creation

3.5.6 Symbols Identification Chart

This chart will work as an aid to pinpoint and categorize the symbols found in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. The chart will be composed of four columns, the first one will have the symbols that can be analyzed in this research (Aiaia, the loom, Circe’s lions, the swine transformations, Pharmaka, and Trygon’s tail). The second column, called “Explanation in the Novel” will have a description of how this symbol is presented in the novel, where it is mentioned, and in what context. The second-to-last column, named “Supporting Quote” will work as a space to add a direct quote from the text that exemplifies and backs up the portrayal of the symbol. And lastly, “Researcher’s Interpretation” will be a space for the researcher of this work to present their analysis of the symbol according to their view and the points of investigation.

Table 6. Symbols

Symbol	Explanation in the Novel	Supporting Quote	Researcher's Interpretation
Aiaia			
The Loom			
Circe's Lions			
Swine Transformations			
Pharmaka			
Trygon's Tail			

Table 6 Illustrates the Symbols found in Madeline Miller's 'Circe'. Source: Researcher's creation

3.5.7 Motifs Identification Chart

This chart will work as an aid to pinpoint and categorize the motifs found in Madeline Miller's 'Circe'. The chart will be composed of four columns, the first one will have the motifs that can be analyzed in this research (transformations, outsiders, magic/Pharmaka, and Humanity). The second column, called "Explanation in the Novel" will have a description of how this motif is presented in the novel, where it is mentioned, and in what context. The second-to-last column, named "Supporting Quote" will work as a space to add a direct quote from the text that exemplifies and backs up the portrayal of the motif. And lastly, "Researcher's Interpretation" will be a space for the researcher of this work to present their analysis of the motif according to their view and the points of investigation.

Table 7. Motifs

Motif	Explanation in the Novel	Supporting Quote	Researcher's Interpretation
Transformation			
Outsiders			
Magic/Pharmaka			
Humanity			

Table 7 Illustrates the Motifs found in Madeline Miller's 'Circe'. Source: Researcher's creation

3.6 Collection data process and data analysis

The data collection for this research primarily involves an in-depth engagement with the chosen literary text and other academic works around the related topics. The process began with the reading of Madeline Miller's 'Circe', initially to understand the narrative and character, and then followed by a second, more focused reading to identify the themes and symbols related to the topics of femininity, agency, patriarchy, and power. During these readings, techniques such as highlighting and annotating were utilized to identify and extract key textual evidence that directly addresses the research questions. Simultaneously, sections related to Circe in Homer's 'The Odyssey' were reread with particular attention to the portrayal of this character, allowing one to draw a direct comparison with Miller's reinterpretation.

Beyond the literary texts, extensive research was conducted on the broader academic landscape. This involves seeking out and analyzing academic articles and books focused on the reinterpretation of classical figures, particularly through a feminist lens. Research also included foundational and contemporary feminist essays, examining the application to literary analysis and their insight into gender roles, power dynamics, and the general female experience. This process of reading, extracting, comparing, and analyzing allowed us to highlight and understand

patterns that will later help to create the arguments about traditional narratives of power and gender presented in this text.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the data collected, which is composed primarily of textual evidence from Madeline Miller's 'Circe' and Homer's 'The Odyssey', alongside the researcher's analytical thoughts. The purpose of this analysis is to interpret and make sense of the gathered information in direct relation to the totality of the research objectives. By carefully examining, under a feminist lens, the nuanced portrayals of Circe's character, her relationships, and the thematic foundation of the novel, this chapter aims to reveal how Miller actively questions, critiques, and reshapes traditional female roles within Greek mythology.

The analytical process involves a meticulous close reading of the primary texts, guided by the established analysis categories: feminism, traditional women's roles, gender, and female rage. Data was organized by utilizing the literary analysis charts developed in Chapter 3, which facilitated the extraction and comparison of textual examples. This structured approach allows for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, character roles, and especially Circe's evolution and manifestations of her anger.

4.1 Approaches to the investigation

This study, through literary analysis with a feminist approach, aims to examine how Madeline Miller reconfigures narratives of power and gender within her novel *Circe*, contrasting her portrayal with the traditional mythological depictions and exploring its relevance to modern female experiences. This reinterpretation holds considerable significance by bridging ancient

myths with the contemporary female experience. Through the development of Circe’s complex identity, which extends beyond her relationships with men, Miller crafts a character with whom modern women can deeply connect. Circe’s journey provides a profound critique of the traditional roles and challenges often faced by women, an idea that forms the central analytical lens for this research.

Table 8. Literary Texts Comparison

Episode/Event	Quote from ‘The Odyssey’	Homeric Portrayal of Circe	Quote from ‘Circe’	Miller’s Reinterpretation
Circe’s life in Aiaia	“So they stood in the gateway of the fair-tressed goddess, and within they heard Circe singing with sweet voice, as she went to and fro before a great imperishable web, such as is the handiwork of	A mysterious enchantress, potentially dangerous, seemingly alone, weaving. The focus is on her isolation, with little insight into her world or daily routine. She is just described very	“...the island seemed to me the wildest, most giddy freedom. Its shores, its peaks, all of them yawned out to the horizon, filled up with magic.” (pg. 154).	Miller transforms Aiaia from merely a setting for Odysseus’ encounter into Circe’s home and sanctuary. Her life there is mostly peaceful, and it is the place where she starts to discover

	<p>goddesses, finely-woven and beautiful, and glorious.” (Book 10, lines 220-224).</p>	<p>superficially and spends her time mostly just weaving. Her most mentioned characteristics are that she is dangerous and that she seduces men to their demises.</p>		<p>what life is like when she doesn't have to live under the gods' thumb. Here she builds her place to rule, where she can live by her own rules and standards and practice her magic.</p>
<p>Circe turning men into swine</p>	<p>“...but in the food she mixed baneful drugs, so that they might utterly forget their native land. Now when she had given them the potion, and they had drunk it off, then she</p>	<p>This act is portrayed as malicious, almost as an abuse of power, demonstrating her dangerous nature and lack of mercy towards innocent men. It serves as</p>	<p>“I felt a space open in me...My eyes lifted to his ruttid face. Those herbs had another use, and I knew what it was. I drew a breath, and spoke my word...His rib</p>	<p>Miller recontextualizes this act as a direct response to threats of violence and sexual assault. Her transformations are acts of self-preservation and</p>

	<p>presently smote them with her wand, and penned them in the sites. And they had the heads, and voice, and bristles, and shape of swine, but their minds remained unchanged even as before.” (Book 10, lines 235-240).</p>	<p>a warning against her inherent evil.</p>	<p>cage cracked and began to bulge, I heard the sound of flesh rupturing wetly, the pops of breaking bone...As it turned out, I did kill pigs that night after all.”</p>	<p>protection born from trauma and fear, not from evil and treachery. The men are not innocent victims, but aggressors. She is punishing them in the same way that they hurt her. It is a way to gain back power over her life after those men took it away from her.</p>
<p>Circe challenging Odysseus</p>	<p>“She brought me in and made me sit on a silver-studded chair, a beautiful chair, richly wrought,</p>	<p>Circe’s attempt to subdue Odysseus is a straightforward magical challenge,</p>	<p>“If you had the molly, why did you not drink? He must have told you that no spell I cast could</p>	<p>Miller portrays the challenge as a more complex test of wit and will, where Circe is genuinely</p>

	<p>and beneath was a foot-stool for the feet. And she prepared me a potion in a golden cup, that I might drink, and put therein a drug, with evil purpose in her heart. But when she had given it me, and I had drunk it off, yet was not bewitched, she smote me with her wand, and spoke, and addressed me: 'Begone now to the sty, and lie with the rest of</p>	<p>quickly ruined by Hermes' aid to Odysseus. Her power is shown to be effective against most, but ultimately inferior to this hero. She yields to him immediately without resistance after this occurrence and bends to his every whim.</p>	<p>touch you." "He did tell me...But I have a quirk of prudence in me that's hard to break...The world is an ugly place. We must live in it." "I think you're Odysseus, born from that same Trickster's blood." "And you're the goddess Circe, daughter of the sun." "Men do not know me for what I am." "Most men, in my experience, are fools." (pg.</p>	<p>surprised and intrigued by the hero's resistance, seeing him as an equal rather than a subject to control, and the same goes for him. The initial defiance and distrust led to a nuanced relationship, demonstrating her capacity to engage with intellect over brute force, rather than immediate submission. Odysseus is also impressed by her</p>
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	thy comrades.” (Book 10, lines 315-320)		203)	and treats her with a lot of respect.
Circe aiding Odysseus	“...but Circe took me by the hand, and leading me apart from my dear comrades, made me to sit, and herself lay down close at hand and asked me all the tale. And I told her all in due order. Then queenly Circe spoke to me and said: “All these things have thus found an end; but do thou hearken as I	Her aid is given after Odysseus has “mastered” her and extracted a promise. It is presented as a helpful but passive role, serving his heroic journey without deep personal cost or choice on her part. It is more magical instructions than aid based on genuine care.	”Listen to me,” I said. “There are things you must know.” I drew the journey for him. One by one, I laid out the dangers he must avoid, the shoals, the barbarous islands, the Sirens, those birds with women’s heads who lure men to their death with song.” (pg. 236)	Miller transforms Circe’s aid into a more active, personally invested, and empathetic act. She provides detailed guidance, driven by her affection for him and her understanding of human experience. She does not feel forced to help him, nor does she do it because he won their

	<p>shall tell thee, and a god shall himself bring it to thy mind.” (Book 12, lines 33-39</p>			<p>match; she does it because she genuinely cares about him.</p>
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Table 8 Illustrates the Comparison between Homer’s and Madeline Miller’s Portrayal of

Circe. Source: Researcher’s creation

Table 9. Circe’s Relationship

Character	Nature of Relation	Interactions/Dynamic	Impact on Circe’s Development
Helios	Father	<p>Neglectful, authoritarian. Circe constantly seeks his approval but only receives disinterest. He banishes her without care to get rid of her and punish her. He was never present and never helped her</p>	<p>She grows up feeling insignificant and powerless. It is the only ‘love’ that she knows, so she never expects much from others either, as she feels as if she is not worthy of love. Shapes her</p>

		<p>when she needed it most. He denounces her as a daughter when she challenges him at last.</p>	<p>understanding of divine cruelty and her disdain of immortality, as she never had it in herself to be that controlling and cruel to others.</p>
Perse	Mother	<p>Very neglectful and rarely present. She prefers her other children and treats Circe with disdain. She had never loved her and constantly mocked and belittled her by making comments about her appearance and her lack of powers.</p>	<p>Adds another layer to Circe's feeling unimportant since she has no powers. Her mother was even less present than her father, so Circe struggles with understanding motherhood. It also taught her at first to be competitive against other women, as her mother always tried to outshine all the other nymphs.</p>

<p>Aetes</p>	<p>Brother</p>	<p>Circe raises him, but he grows apart from her. She thinks he cares about her, but he leaves her without looking back. Their only connection is around their magical abilities, as it is he who introduces her to them. He is often condescending and dismissive of Circe, seeing her as lesser, even though she does not realize this until later. When Circe lets Medea escape, and he learns of this, he lets go of any impression that he ever cared about her.</p>	<p>Circe felt a pure and motherly love for him as she raised him. Initially, their dynamic fuels her desire for recognition, but his belittling attitude pushes her to try and prove herself. Realizing that he never cared about her, he feels betrayed by Circe, and it reinforces her isolation from her divine family. His harsh actions against his kingdom make her see that they have different values.</p>
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Pasiphae	Sister	<p>They were never close. Pasiphae was always sharp and cunning, constantly mocking Circe from a young age. She uses people for her gain, and Circe never liked that. Pasipahe asks Circe for help with the Minotaur's birth, as she was aware of her sister's skill.</p> <p>Pasiphae later reveals she's also a victim of the patriarchy, but her ways to survive are very different from Circe's, as she pushes people down to raise herself.</p>	<p>She never had love for her sister, so Circe never cared much for her. However, talking to Pasipahe at the birth does make her open her eyes about how they both survived in different ways. This solidifies Circe's commitment to using her power with more care and restraint and to be more aware of the consequences, as she does not want to fall into her sister's pattern of punishing everyone who does not follow her orders and using people as pawns in her games.</p>
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<p>Glaucos</p>	<p>Lover</p>	<p>She transforms herself for him. She thinks she loves him and that he has had a hard life, so she wants to turn him into a god to live with her forever. He speaks lovingly at first, but later abandons Circe and only cares about power and riches once he becomes a god. He becomes as vain and cruel as any god.</p>	<p>Her betrayal wounds her deeply, as she gave so much of herself to change him. Later, it is because he favors Scylla that she brandishes her powers, caused by her jealousy, and turns Scylla into a monster so he can not marry her.</p>
<p>Scylla</p>	<p>Rival</p>	<p>They were never close and didn't interact much until Glaucos came into the picture. Scylla is vain and mean to everyone, including</p>	<p>Circe's jealousy towards Scylla makes her lose control and use her newfound powers in the wrong way and turning the nymph into a</p>

		<p>Circe, and she only cares about herself, and most people don't like her but pretend they do. Circe turns her into a monster in an act of jealousy as she gets close to Glaucos.</p>	<p>monster, something that she regrets her whole life. This act is a regret Circe will have for centuries, not only the act itself, but also because Scylla will come to murder many innocent people; but this shows that she is a good person that made a mistake. She never forgets her cruelty until she finally corrects her mistakes and beats Scylla.</p>
<p>Hermes</p>	<p>Lover</p>	<p>They had a mutually beneficial relationship; it was all interesting and physical, and there</p>	<p>Though she did not care deeply for him, she at least had a little respect for him as a god. But the more she</p>

		<p>were no feelings behind it. Circe knew Hermes only cared for her as long as she entertained him, but she didn't mind because she had no true affection for him.</p>	<p>opened her eyes and her autonomy grew, the more she realized he was just another cruel and detached deity who played with others for fun and to brandish his power.</p>
Dedalus	Lover/Friend	<p>Circe met him when visiting her sister. He is smart, gentle, and lonely. Their relationship's core was loneliness. Both were deeply emotional and hurt beings who had suffered at the hands of the gods, and they bonded out of that pain. Circe is also connected to Dedalus' humanity</p>	<p>It helped Circe open to the idea that she can have a gentler and understanding relationship. She connected with Dedalus because of his mortality and human emotions, and though their relationship was short-lived and based on need, not true love, it was gentle, kind, and respectful,</p>

		and softness.	something Circe needed.
Odysseus	Lover	<p>He comes to her island as a challenge and leaves as a lover. They build a deep connection for some time, forming a passionate and complex affair, marked by emotional connection. Their dynamic is challenging, and they learn from each other. He is generally good to her, and yet he is still prone to anger when things do not go his way. Circe mentions that more than once, she will be the one to placate his</p>	<p>He is a transformative figure for Circe. He teaches her more about the complexities of human life and the pain of his mortality. However, his eventual departure forces her to confront loss and the finite nature of mortality. He was also a volatile man, good one minute and angry and vengeful the other, which caused some strain in Circe. At first, she idolized him for his valor, but when she met his son,</p>

		anger. Circe will come to have his son.	she realized his behavior was harsh.
Telemachus	Lover/Friend	<p>He is Odysseus' first son, who arrives on Aiaia years after his father. Their relationship is initially strained due to the nature of his arrival and also his lineage, but evolves into a deep, tender, and understanding partnership.</p> <p>Telemachus offers Circe a different kind of connection: one of patience, quiet companionship, respect, and profound understanding.</p>	<p>He represents a shift in Circe's relationships from intense, painful, and passionate to a more mature, stable, and patient love. He allows her to experience a deeper sense of domesticity and shared life. His gentle nature provides her with a sense of belonging. He never imposes anything on her, and this becomes the basis of their relationship. This encourages her to embrace her emotions and, ultimately,</p>

			mortality.
Telegenous	Son	<p>Motherhood fundamentally alters her perspective and priorities. It is a relationship of fierce, unconditional love and protection, but also one of fear and anxiety, usually related to raising and taking care of a child. As he grows, she also has to deal with the loneliness of him building his own life and chasing his desires.</p>	<p>Telegonus' birth is a catalyst for her personal growth. Motherhood makes her more compassionate, empathetic, and courageous, as she is faced with putting someone else's needs before her own. His existence gives her reason to better herself and pushes her to seek a mortal life. Being a single mother also helps her gain respect for herself as she raised her son on her own.</p>
Penelope	Friend	<p>Their interaction is brief but significant.</p>	<p>Penelope acts as a mirror for Circe,</p>

		<p>Being Odysseus' wife, they are initially wary of each other. Circe fears she will want to hurt her son, but once they get to know each other, they see they are just both mothers looking to do the best for their children.</p>	<p>reflecting her strength and wisdom as a woman who has faced many trials. Their encounter helps Circe understand a different side of motherhood and morality she hadn't considered before, and it allows her to shed some lingering resentment toward Odysseus. Their connection is based on a quiet yet deep understanding, recognizing each other's strength and resilience, and Circe learns a lot from her other's wise and patient personality. Meeting her finally</p>
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			confirms Circe's decision to leave the island and become human.
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Table 9 Illustrates Circe's Relationships in Madeline Miller's 'Circe'. Source: Researcher's creation

Table 10. Circe's Evolution and Rage

Injustice/Provocation	Manifestation of Female Rage	Impact on Circe's Character
Helio's neglect	She feels a deep resentment born of being constantly overlooked. Initially, it manifests as a desperate desire for approval. Later, it fuels a quiet defiance as she realizes her father's lack of interest frees her from his expectations. She challenges him despite his superior power and stands her ground on her desires and on taking control of her life.	That deep insecurity caused by never receiving her father's approval is what later plants the seeds of her independence. It pushes her to seek her power outside of the Olympian hierarchy. She grew up thinking that she had no value as not even her father took much interest in her and cast her aside at the first opportunity, but she came to understand that his

		neglect was based on his believed superiority, and not on her lack of character.
Glauco's betrayal	With this event, Circe feels a raw, desperate, and vengeful fury. This is Circe's first significant outward expression of rage, leading her to the transformation of Scylla. It is an act of jealousy, but also deep emotional pain and public humiliation. She gave a big part of herself for him, but he not only did not give it in return, but he completely cast her aside once he got power.	It solidifies her understanding of the harsh realities of love and the pain of rejection. It isolates her further; her actions of the transformation of Scylla are deemed monstrous and punished by the gods, leading to her exile. This act of rage finally teaches her the consequences of her power. It also makes her face the fact that she cannot expect to get anything from the gods, as they do not share her kindness and humility.
Exile to Aiaia	Initially, she experiences a feeling of deep injustice and abandonment, and later	Aiaia becomes both her prison and her sanctuary. The exile forces her to become

	<p>loneliness. However, over time, this rage transforms into a fierce protectiveness of her island and her independence. She channels her anger into honing her craft and mastering her solitude. She takes complete control of the island as if she were the Queen. She loves to hear the stories that have been created about her, as this finally gives her the power over people that she always lacked.</p>	<p>even more self-sufficient and delve deeper into her witchcraft. It allows her to grow apart from the expectations of the god and truly shape her own identity without the judgment of others. Her rage at her banishment transforms into a fierce pride in her work and self. At the end, she stops trying to prove herself to others and only works on bettering her magic and herself for her survival and comfort.</p>
<p>Sexual assault</p>	<p>This event awakens a cold, calculated, and wounding fury. This is a rage born of a profound sense of injustice against her autonomy. As they hurt her body and mind, she does the same when</p>	<p>This experience profoundly shapes Circe’s understanding of vulnerability. It hardens her resolve to protect herself and her domain at all costs. This act of violence and her response cement her</p>

	transforming them. The transformation both hurts them physically but also tortures them mentally. It is an act to inflict vengeance but also to ensure her safety. It is the most violent we ever get to see coming from Circe.	reputation as a formidable and dangerous witch. It underscores her commitment to never again be a victim. By raging this way, she tries to regain control of her body, which was so forcefully taken away from her.
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Table 10 Illustrates Circe’s Evolution and Portrayal of Female Rage in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s creation

Table 11. Traditional Female Roles in ‘Circe’

Traditional Role	Event/Episode	Circe’s Challenge or Subversion
The Submissive Daughter	Circe’s early life in Helio’s halls, enduring her father’s neglect and her mother’s indifference, while trying to gain their approval or at least avoid their disdain. She was constantly set aside or mocked by everyone in her family.	Her earliest acts of witchcraft are direct rebellions against her family’s dismissiveness. Her eventual exile, while a punishment at first, is ultimately her liberation from the expectations of her role. She embraces her banishment as a means to escape this oppressive dynamic.

<p>The Wife/Domestic Ideal</p>	<p>The arrival of Odysseus to Aiaia comes with the potential to fall into conventional marital expectations as she takes care of him and his men. These expectations are that women find a husband and create a household, take care of it, and please their husbands. Later, when Telemachus arrives, there is also an opportunity for her to live a life with a partner.</p>	<p>While Circe yearns for companionship and love, she never fully submits to the traditional role of a wife. With Odysseus, she always seeks to be an equal partner; she maintains her independence and her dominion of Aiaia. When she chooses mortal life with Telemachus, it is on her terms and in a partnership that values mutual respect.</p>
<p>The Seductress</p>	<p>Her relationship with Hermes and later Odysseus involves her power and mainly her godly allure. Her reputation precedes her as a “siren” or “witch”.</p>	<p>Her relationships with Hermes and Odysseus, while involving attraction, are based on deeper connections and mutual recognition of power, mutual want and need, and not just sexual enticement on one side.</p>

The Nurturer	Her role as a mother to Telegonus. She occasionally shows hospitality towards sailors who approach her island, including Odysseus and her crew.	While Circe embraces motherhood with fierce devotion and nurturing love for Telegonus, she does her best to maintain her identity besides that of just being a mother. When she does lean into the nurture role, it is rooted in the harsh realities of her knowledge of the dangers in the world. She nurtures growth and independence, not just comfort.
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Table 11 Illustrates the Traditional Female Roles in Madeline Miller's 'Circe'. Source:

Researcher's creation

Table 12. Themes

Theme	Explanation in the Novel	Supporting Quote	Researcher's Interpretation
Power	Explores various forms of power: divine, magical, and	“They do not care if you are good. They barely care if you are	Power is not merely an inherited status, but a force that can be

	<p>personal. The whole identity of the gods is based on who is more powerful. Circe begins as powerless in the eyes of the gods but slowly discovers her unique strength. Women also have very little power of their own; they are used by men to gain power.</p>	<p>wicked. The only thing that makes them listen is power.” (pg. 146)</p> <p>“What could make a god afraid? I knew that answer too. A power greater than their own.” (pg. 46)</p>	<p>cultivated, earned, and wielded. It is linked to knowledge and will. The novel touches upon the idea that true power lies in developing your agency and ability to shape your destiny. Women are also constantly used only as tools to acquire more power, not even seen as beings with their convictions.</p>
<p>Control</p>	<p>The struggle of control is central to Circe’s journey: control over her future, environment, body, and magic. She resists being controlled by</p>	<p>“They were pious men, honestly lost, and I would feed them, and if there was a handsome one among them, I might take him to bed. It was not desire, not</p>	<p>Control is depicted not only as a tool of manipulation, as it is with divinities, but also in Circe as a way of self-preservation. The novel explains how true freedom</p>

	<p>divinities and the expectations set on women. Her transformations are often acts of asserting control.</p>	<p>even its barest scrapings. It was a sort of rage, a knife I used upon myself. I did it to prove my skill was still my own.” (pg. 193)</p>	<p>comes from claiming internal control and defining one’s boundaries, and taking the reins and one’s own life.</p>
<p>Humanity/Mortality</p>	<p>Circe has always been fascinated and drawn to the mortal world. She shares humans’ desires, emotions, pain, and even her voice. She sees beauty in a finite existence and ultimately chooses to embrace mortality.</p>	<p>“When we fought over Athena, how did you know to kneel to me? That it would shame me?” “Ah. It was a guess. Something Odysseus said about you once.” “Which was?” “That he had never met a god who enjoyed their divinity less.” (pg.340)</p>	<p>The novel argues that the brevity of human life possesses a depth and meaning that immortality lacks. Humanity’s capacity for emotions provides a richer experience in life than the petty existence of the gods. Mortality offers freedom to her.</p>
<p>Womanhood</p>	<p>The novel deeply explores what it means to be a woman</p>	<p>“It is a common saying that women are delicate,</p>	<p>This text examines the unique challenges and strengths of</p>

	<p>in a patriarchal world. It delves into themes of female power, resilience, motherhood, sexual agency, and the societal pressure placed upon women.</p>	<p>creatures, flowers, eggs, anything that may be crushed in a moment's carelessness. If I had even believed that I no longer did." (pg. 315)</p>	<p>womanhood, particularly when women defy predetermined roles. It focuses on female self-discovery and the bonds between women, while exposing the injustices and violence they often face.</p>
<p>Magic</p>	<p>Magic is depicted as a craft and learned skill, but also as a deep connection to the world. It is the source of Circe's power both literally and figuratively, as it is what starts her journey to find her autonomy.</p>	<p>"Pharmakeia, such arts are called, for they deal in pharmaka, those herbs with the power to work changes upon the world, both those sprung from the blood of gods, as well as those which grow common upon the</p>	<p>Magic also works as a metaphor for knowledge and skill. It is an active, earned power that contrasts with the god's inherent abilities. It represents Circe's uniqueness and effort.</p>

		earth. It is a gift to be able to draw out their power.” (pg. 67)	
Anger/Rage	Explores the destructive and expressive aspects of female rage. Circe’s initial acts of magic are often fueled by raw anger. Over time, her rage evolves from impulsive vengeance to a more controlled and purposeful protective force.	<p>“They were all surprised when you showed yourself a witch, but I knew it long ago. Despite your wet-mouse weeping, I saw how you would not be ground into the earth. You loathe them as I did. I think it is where our power comes from.” (pg. 146)</p> <p>“I did not want their prayers, nor my name in their mouths. I wanted them gone. I wanted to scrub myself in the sea until</p>	Female rage is represented as a valid and powerful response to injustice and violation. The tracks Circe’s volatile anger to a more refined one, which becomes a tool for justice and protection. It represents her refusal to be a passive victim and to assert her agency.

		the blood showed through.” (pg. 193)	
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Table 12 Illustrates the Themes Found in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s creation

Table 13. Symbols

Symbol	Explanation in the Novel	Supporting Quote	Researcher's Interpretation
Aiaia	Circe’s island, where she is exiled. It is a place of isolation, but also a sanctuary where she learns about magic and life. It becomes her domain, a space she controls and where she wields her power to her will.	“I did not mind its shadows anymore, for they meant my father’s gaze was gone from the sky and the hours were my own. I did not mind the emptiness either. For a thousand years I had tried to fill the space between myself and my family. Filling the	Aiaia symbolizes autonomy. Initially, it was a prison, but it transformed into safety as it represents her severance from divine society. It is a physical manifestation of her inner world, a place of wildness and untamed power where she can live on her

		rooms of my house was easy by comparison.” (pg. 82)	terms
The Loom	The loom was a gift for Circe. She expresses how she admires it and its artistry but is not very skilled and uses it to create simple things but mostly because it works as a pastime for her. Odysseus mentions how his wife is a master of weaving, and later, Penelope asks permission to use it and proves her skill.	“Life is not so simple as a loom. What you weave, you cannot unravel with a tig. But I think I have made a start” (pg. 346)	The loom symbolizes patience, creation, and weaving one's destiny. The fact that Penelope is the best one using it makes sense, as she is a very wise, independent, self-assured, and patient woman. Just as she weaves garments, she weaves and controls her own life. This is something that connects both women.
Circe’s Lions	The lions are Circe’s companions for a good portion of the	“The lion could take care of herself.” (pg. 405)	Circe’s lions symbolize reclaimed power and tamed

	<p>story. In her isolation, they are her only friends. They also turn into her protectors and Circe mentions how vulnerable she feels when they are gone. They are wild animals, but they form a deep connection with the goddess. It is also a symbol to represent the new and changed Cice.</p>	<p>“I questioned him further...but when I asked him how far to those flowers I had given Glaucos and Scylla, he laughed at me. Do you think I will sharpen the lioness' claws for her?” (pg. 96)</p>	<p>primal instinct. There are always lions roaming around the island, serving as a sign of the dangers of the island and the goddess. However, they also symbolize loyal companionship. They match Circe's wild and untamed but kind nature, and they accompany and care for her, even one being a sort of familiar.</p>
<p>Swine Transformations</p>	<p>Circe turns sailors into pigs. It started with her defending herself and turning the sailors who attacked her into swine, then, in her</p>	<p>“I heard the sound of flesh rupturing wetly, the pops of breaking bone. His nose ballooned from his face, and his legs shriveled like a fly</p>	<p>They symbolize retribution, discovering true nature, and the animalistic desires of men. It is a direct punishment for their</p>

	<p>fear and attempt to protect herself, she kept turning all men who wandered into her island.</p>	<p>sucked by a spider. He fell to all fours. He screamed, and his men screamed with him. As it turned out, I did kill pigs that night after all.” (pg. 189)</p>	<p>attack on her, in the case of the sailors, revealing the ugliness inside them. For Odysseus men, they represent their lack of self-control and gluttony. It is also her method of defense.</p>
<p>Pharmaka</p>	<p>It is the name given to the specific type of magic that Circe and her siblings practice. It is mostly based on a connection to nature. Circe utilizes all types of herbs, plants, and potions to create her concoctions.</p>	<p>“Sorcery cannot be taught. You find it yourself, or you do not. “ (pg. 69)</p> <p>“Let me say what sorcery is not: is it not divine power, which comes with a thought and a blink. It must be made and worked, planned and searched out, dug up, dried, chopped and ground,</p>	<p>Pharmaka symbolizes the power of knowledge, but also the dangers of it. This dual meaning highlights magic’s potential for both healing and harm, as we see with Aetes and Circe. The slow build of the skill also shows the slow change in Circe of her learning to see her</p>

		cooked, spoken over and sung.” (pg. 83)	inner power and agency despite her cruel upbringing.
Trygon’s Tail	<p>The tail of the giant Titan Trygon, the father of Hecate, which Circe acquires to create a powerful weapon that helps her stand up to even gods and protect her son.</p> <p>Many gods have tried to get it, but they do not accept the terms, as that would put them in pain; however, Circe does.</p> <p>It is also the weapon that kills Odysseus.</p> <p>Later, she uses it to kill Scylla, thus correcting her wrong.</p>	<p>“Helios was not a god to be summoned, but I was the wayward daughter who had won Trygon’s tail.” (pg. 359)</p> <p>“It should have been returned to Trygon long ago, yet I had kept it for protection and something else I could not name.” (pg. 362)</p> <p>“Long ago, I changed you to this form from the nymph you were.</p> <p>I come now with Trygon’s power to</p>	<p>The tail symbolizes the defiance of divinity and the gods.</p> <p>But it also shows that Circe’s soft, kind power can be as strong as the gods’ demanding power, as she was ready to sacrifice herself to protect her son. This signifies her decisive break from immortality. This is the last act that gives her the confidence to face her father. This is the same weapon that puts an end to the now crazed Odysseus</p>

		make an end to what I began.” (pg. 369)	and the monster Scylla, signifying that the hero is now a monster too.
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Table 13 Illustrates the Symbols found in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s creation

Table 14. Motifs

Motif	Explanation in the Novel	Supporting Quote	Researcher’s Interpretation
Transformation	The repeated instances of Circe’s magic physically alter beings. More broadly, Circe’s continuous personal evolution from a weak nymph to a powerful goddess.	“...my greatest gift was transformation, and that was always where my thoughts returned.” (pg. 86)	This motif reinforces how physical transformations often reflect inner states. It also delves into Circe’s capacity to change and grow her character the more she experiences and learns. It underscores that transformations can be literal or not,

			and good or not.
Outsiders	<p>Circe’s feeling of being an outcast within her divine family due to her lack of powers, her exile to Aiaia, and her interaction with mortals who came to her island.</p>	<p>“[My mother] would curl her lip when she saw me. Circe is dull as a rock. Circe has less wit than bare ground. Circe’s hair is matted like a dog’s. If I have to hear that broken voice of hers once more. Of all our children, why must it be she who is left? No one else will have her.” (pg. 41)</p>	<p>This motif is related to themes of isolation and need for connection. Circe began feeling like an outsider which caused her great pain, but ultimately it became the source of her strength and wisdom, allowing her to shape her identity and independence and live outside of the restrictive societal norms.</p>
Magic/Pharmaka	<p>The learned witchcraft, relying on herbs, incantations, and knowledge of the natural world. It is her</p>	<p>“Let me say what sorcery is not: is it not divine power, which comes with a thought and a blink. It must</p>	<p>This motif symbolizes the power acquired through knowledge and skill, in contrast to</p>

	<p>chosen art and the primary source of her power.</p>	<p>be made and worked, planned and searched out, dug up, dried, chopped and ground, cooked, spoken over and sung.” (pg. 83)</p>	<p>inherited divine power. It represents Circe’s connection to nature. It was her tool to acquire her autonomy and power, not only physical but inner power too.</p>
<p>Humanity</p>	<p>The qualities and experiences associated with mortals, including love, growth, vulnerability, mortality, and emotion, which Circe admires and embraces at the end.</p>	<p>“ How does your divinity feel?” I closed my eyes. If I had been a mortal I would have heard the beating of my heart. But gods have sluggish veins, and the truth is, what I heard was nothing.” (pg. 28)</p>	<p>This motif functions as a critique of divine existence. It favors the emotional and more meaningful finite life of mortals, rather than the cruel, unchanged, and detached existence of the gods. It drives Circe’s ultimate choice of life.</p>

Table 14 Illustrates the Motifs found in Madeline Miller’s ‘Circe’. Source: Researcher’s

creation

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Purpose of the Conclusion

This concluding chapter serves to consolidate the findings presented in the previous analysis, combining its key points to provide a clear and complete response to the main research question: how Madeline Miller reinterprets narratives of power and gender in *Circe* in contrast to traditional mythological representations and their relevance to contemporary female experiences. It will revisit the objectives outlined in Chapter 1, assessing the extent to which each has been achieved through the detailed textual analysis and exploration. Instead of merely summarizing the key insights, this section aims to articulate the general implications of Miller's reinterpretation, highlighting its significance for understanding both classical interpretation and modern feminist discourse. Furthermore, it will offer a concise summary of the main arguments and their contributions to the existing body of literary research and analysis.

5.2 Conclusion

This section presents the core conclusions derived from the comprehensive analysis of Madeline Miller's *Circe* in comparison with Homer's *The Odyssey*. By exploring the various facets of Circe's character, her intentions, and the themes in the novel, this research has highlighted how Miller masterfully reinterprets ancient myths to resonate with contemporary discussions on power and gender. The findings directly address the specific objectives set forth for this investigation.

5.2.1 To explore the relationships between Circe and other characters to understand the narratives of power and gender raised

The analysis revealed that Miller meticulously crafts Circe's relationships not as mere plot devices, but as dynamic sites where power and gender narratives are constantly redefined. In her early life, Circe's interactions with divine figures like her parents, Helios, and Pasiphae, underscore a rigid patriarchal hierarchy where her perceived weakness, such as her lack of powers and her mortal voice, leads to neglect and ridicule, highlighting a narrative of inherited power and gendered insignificance.

However, her subsequent encounters dramatically shift this dynamic. The transformative betrayal by Glaucos, for instance, forces her to discover and wield her power, thereby initiating her journey from victimhood to agency. Her famously complex relationship with Odysseus further exemplifies this negotiation of power, initially a confrontation of wills, it evolves into a period of mutual learning and deep respect, where Circe's magical intellectual power is acknowledged, rather than simply overcome by the hero's brute power or intelligence, as is usually present in the overused archetype of the beaten and defeated witch.

Ultimately, Miller culminated Circe's evolution with relationships with her profound maternal bond with Telegonus, and the reciprocal companionship offered by Telemachus demonstrates a reconfigured understanding of power rooted in love, choice, and shared humanity, rather than dominance or divine decree. Through these evolving relationships, Miller powerfully illustrates that power is not solely inherited but can be cultivated through skill, resilience, and autonomy, and that gender roles are fluid rather than fixed, as Circe navigates alliances, complex relationships, and conflicts on her terms, often defying traditional expectations of female submission and forging a unique path forward.

5.2.2 To examine the evolution of the character Circe and her quest for justice by exploring the concept of 'Female Rage'

The study concludes that Circe's character undergoes a profound evolution, with "female rage" serving as a pivotal catalyst in her quest for justice. Initially, this powerful emotion manifests raw, reactive anger, erupting in response to profound personal pain and betrayal, as exemplified by the occasion of Glaucus and Scylla and their respective transformations. Similarly, it manifests in response to direct threats, crudely portrayed by the sexual assault by the sailors. In these instances, her rage is depicted as an untamed yet ultimately defensive force. This forementioned destructive expression of anger is crucial for her survival and the establishment of boundaries in her sanctuary, Aiaia.

That said, as her character and understanding of her power develop, her rage transforms from a purely reactive impulse into a more controlled, strategic, and even protective manifestation, particularly evident in her fierce maternal protection of her son Telegonus against divine interference like Athena. This mature rage is not about vengeance but about safeguarding those she loves and about asserting her autonomy.

Ultimately, her quest for justice evolves from personal retribution to a broader assertion of self-determination and the right to forge her destiny, entirely on her terms. Her deliberate choice of a mortal life, consciously shedding the burdens of cold immortality, is presented as a profound act of self-justice, a final and resolute expression of her evolved rage against the oppressive, unchanging nature of the gods and the system that they represent. It is a powerful statement of liberation and self-creation.

5.2.3 To evaluate the traditional representations of women in classical literature and how these are challenged in the novel

The research established that Miller's *Circe* fundamentally challenges and reconfigures traditional representations of women in classical literature. By providing Circe with a rich, internal life, complex motivations, and crucially, a first-person narrative voice, Miller directly critiques the one-dimensional portrayals of female figures often relegated to archetypes such as passive victims, evil enchantresses, or heroic aids on heroic journeys. The novel actively challenges established mythological archetypes, transforming the dangerous sorceress into a figure whose so-called monstrous actions are acts of justified self-defense against male aggression and predatory behavior. Similarly, the submissive daughter archetype is dismantled as Circe progressively learns to assert her will and defy the divine authority of her indifferent family, especially Helios. Miller demonstrates that Circe's great power stems not from inheriting divine gifts or from her lineage, but from learned skill, intellectual capacity, and self-improvement.

This comprehensive re-evaluation transforms mythological women from static symbols into dynamic, relatable characters whose experiences resonate deeply with contemporary feminist perspectives around agency, voice, and the overturning of patriarchal norms. By granting Circe this depth and autonomy, Miller offers a powerful and essential re-reading of classical narratives for a modern audience, demonstrating how ancient stories can illustrate and speak to the complexities of the contemporary female experience.

5.3 Restatement of the Research Question

This research set out to answer the central question: "How does Madeline Miller transform narratives of power and gender in her reinterpretation of Circe compared to traditional mythological figures and with the contemporary female experience?" Through a comprehensive

qualitative literary analysis, this investigation has successfully achieved this objective by systematically dissecting Miller's novel *Circe* in direct comparison with Homer's *The Odyssey*.

The achievement of this research question is evident in several key areas. Firstly, the detailed comparative analysis of specific events and character portrayals in both *The Odyssey* and Miller's *Circe* (as it was detailed in the comparative charts) allowed for a fundamental identification of how traditional narratives of power, particularly those rooted in patriarchal divine authority, are fundamentally reconfigured. For instance, while Homeric tradition presents Circe's magic as an exotic and dangerous force to be overcome by a heroic male, Miller delves into the origin and craftsmanship of her pharmaka, emphasizing it as an earned skill and profound connection to the natural world, a form of power distinctly different from the inherent, often complacent might of the Olympians. This shift not only democratizes power but also grounds it in labor and knowledge, often dismissed as feminine pursuits in traditional narratives.

Secondly, by employing analytical categories such as feminism, traditional women's roles, gender, and female rage, the study was able to critically evaluate how Miller challenges and subverts established gender archetypes, providing a nuanced understanding of Circe's agency and evolution. Specifically, the exploration of Circe's journey from being the submissive and forgotten daughter to an autonomous individual on Aiaia highlights a radical departure from the passive roles often assigned to female figures in classical mythology. Her transformation of her male aggressors into swine, rather than being mere evil, becomes a potent manifestation of self-defense and reclamation of bodily autonomy. This disruption portrays female rage not as irrational hysteria but as a justified and powerful response to injustice, aligning ancient experiences with contemporary feminist discourse on the validity of anger in the face of oppression.

Finally, the exploration of Circe's internal life, her relationships, and the development of her "female rage" directly connects these ancient narratives to the complexities of the contemporary female experience, demonstrating how Miller instills a mythological figure with modern resonance, thereby fulfilling the core inquiry of this research. The nuanced portrayal of her relationships, from the fraught familial bonds with Helios and Pasiphae, to the profound connections with Odysseus, Telemachus, and Telegonus, depicts a woman who learns to navigate love, loss, and motherhood outside the confines of divine rigidity. Her ultimate choice to embrace mortality is perhaps the most profound connection to the contemporary female experience in a way. It speaks to the pursuit of a meaningful, self-defined existence over eternal, yet empty privilege, acknowledging the fullness that comes with embracing vulnerability and growth. This deliberate choice underscores Miller's central argument: that true power and fulfillment lie not in inherited status, but in the courage to choose one's path and define one's worth.

5.4 Unexpected Results

While the research managed to confirm the hypothesis regarding Madeline Miller's reinterpretation of Circe's character and traditional female roles, the analytical process unveiled several more nuanced and somewhat unexpected insights. One notable finding was the complex portrayal of male characters within Miller's narrative. While the study anticipated a clear critique of patriarchal figures, Miller often presents male characters (as those of Odysseus and Telemachus) with complexities that allow for genuine connection and mutual learning, rather than just as antagonists (such as Helios). This challenges a simplistic "male vs. female" power dynamic idea, suggesting that Circe's personal growth is not always despite men, but sometimes

through interactions that reveal shared humanity and respect, even within a patriarchal framework.

Additionally, the exploration of “female rage” proved to be more complex than initially anticipated. While expected to be a direct response to injustice, the analysis demonstrates that Miller portrays Circe’s anger not as a singular emotion, but as an evolving force. It transitions from raw, reactive anger (as seen in the transformations of Scylla and the swine) to a more controlled and protective manifestation of it, eventually turning into a quiet determination that fuels her quest for autonomy and justice. This evolution of rage, from destructive to filling, offered a deeper understanding of transformative power within the narrative.

5.5 Recommendations

For students embarking on similar qualitative literary analysis projects, the following recommendations are offered to facilitate a productive and insightful research journey. A foundational aspect of any compelling literary analysis lies in the researcher’s genuine engagement with the source material. Therefore, selecting a text that elicits personal enjoyment, provokes critical thought, or resonates on a deeper level is indispensable. By choosing a source material that the student is familiar with and knowingly enjoys, they will create a connection with the topic that will enhance motivation and lead to a more profound and enjoyable research process.

For effective literary analysis, a thorough understanding of the primary text is crucial. It is strongly recommended that students approach their chosen source material with multiple readings. Firstly, to make yourself acquainted with the story and theme of the book, and later, to zero in on specific analytical points that will be the topics to develop in the research. During these deeper dives, active annotation becomes a powerful tool, as it will aid in writing down the

opinions and key points to touch on later in the analysis. Simple yet effective strategies like underlining key phrases, using different colors to highlight specific aspects (for instance, one color for thematic ideas, another for symbolic elements, and a third for character analysis), and writing notes directly on the margins or on a separate notebook can greatly enhance the understanding. Taking detailed notes on observations, initial interpretations, questions that arise, and connections noticed between different parts of the story helps to build a comprehensive analytical framework, which ultimately strengthens the quality of the final research analysis.

For students interested in literary analysis, focusing on reinterpretations of mythological tales offers a particularly rich and rewarding line of study. These retellings, like Madeline Miller's *Circe*, provide a unique opportunity to explore how ancient stories and characters are reimagined through a contemporary lens. By choosing a mythological retelling, the student can investigate how authors engage with established narratives, either by challenging traditional perspectives, giving voice to previously marginalized characters, or exploring modern themes within a familiar framework. This type of analysis allows the researcher to delve into the author's creative choices, understanding why they choose to alter, keep, or highlight certain elements, and what new meanings emerge from their reinterpretation. This is a notable way to connect classical literature with current cultural conversations, offering fresh insights into human experiences and literature.

For future research building upon this investigation, there could be an opportunity to assertively analyze Madeline Miller's *Circe* from a distinct, yet complementary, political perspective, specifically focusing on the entrenched patriarchal systems depicted within the novel and comparing it to current governmental schemes in society. While this study examined power and gender broadly, a political lens could delve deeper into how the various forms of male

dominance function as a structured system of oppression against female figures. This approach could explore the political implications of Circe's exile, her strategic use of magic as a form of political resistance against her oppression, and how her eventual choice of mortality can be interpreted as a political act of defiance and rejection of a fundamentally unjust divine rule. Such an investigation could analyze the specific mechanism of patriarchal control, the power dynamics inherent in the interactions between male and female characters, and how Circe's journey critiques and ultimately attempts to dismantle or escape these oppressive political structures, offering a rich understanding of the novel's socio-political commentary.

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