T.C.
ISTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNLEASHING THE FEMALE VOICE: MADELINE MILLER'S *CIRCE* AND LAURA SHEPPERSON'S *PHAEDRA: A NOVEL*

Master of Arts Thesis by

Tuğçenur ŞAHİN

1502020006

Department: English Language and Literature

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NOVEMBER 2024

PLAGIARISM

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Tuğçenur Şahin

30.10.2024

University	**:**	**Istanbul Kültür University**
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Department	**:**	**English Language and Literature**
Program	**:**	**English Language and Literature**
Supervisor	**:**	**Prof. Dr. Gillian M. E. Alban**
Degree Awarded and Date	**:**	**MA- November 2024**

ABSTRACT

UNLEASHING THE FEMALE VOICE: MADELINE MILLER'S *CIRCE* AND LAURA SHEPPERSON'S *PHAEDRA: A NOVEL*

Tuğçenur Şahin

This thesis examines the portrayal of mythological female figures in the classical Greek texts written within the patriarchal discourses and explores how these portrayals show differences in the contemporary retellings of women writers. The perception of women in ancient Greek society, imposed gender roles and the condemnation of female sexuality and their body prevent women to live as individuals who have voice, agency and freedom. This oppression on women is reflected on ancient Greek literature, dominated by male authors, as stereotypical female characters and thus patriarchal ideology othering women establishes a presence in culture through writing. Increasing number of women writers in literature enable the production of feminist works that demolish the artificial gender roles and also enable the narration of women by women. In this regard, women writers' retellings in which they revise mythological female figures, carry an enormous significance as they indicate how deeply the patriarchal ideology is grounded in literature and how women writers' struggle to overturn this partial way of thinking that still continues in this present day. This thesis aims to shed light on the patriarchal discourses in the classical works presenting two mythological female characters, Circe and Phaedra and to illustrate the contemporary women writers' attempt to shatter these discourses through their retellings written from a feminist point of view. Through the selected two novels; Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Laura Shepperson's *Phaedra: A Novel,* I intend to point out the role of feminist retellings, focusing on female experience, voice and autonomy, in challenging the literary works written within the androcentric viewpoint.

Key Words: Patriarchal discourse, Feminism, Retelling, Greek Mythology, Madeline Miller, *Circe*, Laura Shepperson, *Phaedra: A Novel*

Universite : **Istanbul Kültür Universitesi**
Enstitüsü : **Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü**
Dalı : **İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı**
Programı : **İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı**
Tez Danışmanı : **Prof. Dr. Gillian M. E. Alban**
Tez Türü ve Tarihi : **Yüksek Lisans- Kasım 2024**

ÖZET

KADIN SESİNİN SALIVERİLİŞİ: MADELINE MILLER'DAN *CİRCE* VE LAURA SHEPPERSON'DAN *PHAEDRA: A NOVEL*

Tuğçenur Şahin

Bu tez, klasik Yunan metinlerinde patriarkal söylemlerle tasvir edilen mitolojik kadın figürünü inceler ve bu tasvirlerin kadın yazarların modern yeniden anlatımlarında nasıl farklılık gösterdiğini keşfeder. Antik Yunan toplumundaki kadın algısı, baskılanan cinsiyet rolleri ve kadın cinselliğinin ve bedeninin ayıplanması onların toplumda sesleri, benlikleri ve özgürlükleri olan birer birey olarak yaşamasını engellemiştir. Kadınlar üzerindeki bu baskı erkek yazarların hâkimiyetinde olan antik Yunan edebiyatına basmakalıp kadın karakterler olarak yansımış ve böylelikle kadını ötekileştiren ataerkil ideoloji yazı yoluyla kültürde bir yer edinmiştir. Artan kadın yazar sayısı yapay cinsiyet rollerini yıkan feminist eserlerin yazılmasına ve aynı zamanda kadının kadın tarafından anlatılmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Bu hususta kadın yazarların mitolojik kadın figürlerini ele aldığı yeniden anlatımları ataerkil düşüncenin edebiyatta ne kadar derinlere dayandığını ve kadın yazarların günümüzde hala bu taraflı düşünce biçimini yıkmak için mücadele ettiğini gösterdiği için büyük bir önem taşır. Bu tez, iki mitolojik kadın karakter olan Circe ve Phaedra'nın betimlendiği klasik eserlerdeki patriarkal söylemlere ışık tutmayı ve çağdaş kadın yazarların bu söylemleri feminist bakış açışından yazılan yeni anlatımlarındaki yıkma çabasını göstermeyi hedefler. Seçilen iki roman aracılığıyla; Madeline Miller'ın *Circe*'si ve Laura Shepperson'ın *Phaedra: Bir Roman'*ı, kadın deneyimine, sesine ve özerkliğine odaklanan feminist yeniden anlatımların andro-merkezli bakış açısıyla yazılmış edebi eserlere meydan okumadaki rolüne işaret etmeyi amaçlıyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ataerkil söylem, Feminizm, Yeniden Anlatım, Yunan Mitolojisi, Madeline Miller, *Circe*, Laura Shepperson, *Phaedra: A Novel*

To all the women who are silenced, marginalized and ill-treated at the hands of patriarchy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Gillian M. E. Alban for her insightful guidance, wisdom, and support in this academic journey. Without her invaluable comments and expertise this thesis would not be possible. Also I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my professors Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş De Oliveira, Dr. Esin Akalın, Dr. Ayşegül Turan, Dr. Defne Demir and Dr. Derya Altınmakas for their priceless support and wisdom during my education at İstanbul Kültür University.

I would like to individually extend my thanks to Madeline Miller and Laura Shepperson. Their inspiring works, *Circe* and *Phaedra: A Novel*, have served as invaluable sources of guidance and have significantly shaped the ideas and perspectives explored in this thesis.

Last but not least, I am genuinely thankful to my friends who are always by my side in times of joy and sorrow. Their continuous love, support and encouragement were my source of motivation during this process. Thank you for believing in me and making my life more fulfilling.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing has always been used as a strategic tool for ideologies to be established and encoded in the minds and the lives of people. Even though they are often presented as fictive narratives, the stories, fairy-tales, and myths consist of some cues about the existing ideologies, traditions and socio-cultural systems. One of the most common elements in these narrations is the practice of binary oppositions which are highly reflected through the female-male relationships. Lauri Honko in his essay "The Problem of Defining Myth" provides twelve approaches to describe the concept of myth. In one of them, he explains: "myths give support to accepted patterns of behaviour by placing present-day situations in a meaningful perspective with regard to the precedents of the past. Myths provide a valid justification for obligations and privileges" (Honko, 47). He continues with another definition of myth as: "[they] are considered to reflect certain facets of culture. This reflection is seldom direct or photographic but it may reveal values which would otherwise be difficult to detect" (47). Both of his descriptions are valid in the sense that behavioural or socio-cultural patterns in myths may show parallelism in contemporary life, particularly in human relations.

According to the female-male dichotomy, while men are associated with characteristics such as strength, power, logic, aggression, and courage, women are identified with being meek, voiceless, emotional, passive and weak individuals. Since the emergence of both oral and written literature, this biased way of thinking about the sexes is maintained by presenting women with certain labels and negative connotations because of their behaviour, character, or merely because of the way they are, whereas men hardly ever face such dictations, suppressions or constraints either in fictive or in real life. In fact, men have always been the ones who initiate power relations between the sexes and gender roles and they preserve their superiority by all means.

Additionally literature has been dominated by male authors for so many years; the discourse that they use almost entirely patriarchal and is based on elevating male supremacy and thus projecting women as the other, inferior or the second sex. By writing stories about fragile, silent, self-sacrificing and passive women and promoting "Eve", "Penelope" and the "angel-in-the-house" they have made a distorted and false image about women for centuries. Also, this fabricated image about women has become stereotyped and perpetuated by other authors in their works persistently. This

discriminatory approach to the sexes can also be seen in Greek mythology where most of the goddesses are usually depicted as jealous, lustful or cunning, yet the gods are demonstrated as powerful, just and mighty figures with strong bodies as authority figures. Since the earliest examples of written works about Greek mythology belong to male authors such as Homer, Hesiod and Euripides; they have plenty of stories which centralise male characters and frequently overlook female ones. These myths also shed light on the female-male relationship in ancient Greek society and illustrate how far back the patriarchal ideologies and cultural representation of both sexes date. Hence, I intended to analyse the misogynistic language and phallocentric discourse in literature along with women writers' effort to demolish this discourse that prevents female figures from existing as they are without being bestialised or marginalised.

Thanks to the emergence of feminism—both as a movement and as a theory, women have begun asserting their agency in literature through their works. They have written stories that glorify and praise the self-discovery, strength, and liberty of women. They show that women—both writers and fictional characters, can be both powerful and womanly at the same time. Thus, whether it is perceived as a mode of writing or a genre, feminist retelling of myths have a significant role in literature. Retellings function as a strong tool for women writers to shatter the stereotypical images of women and the patriarchal discourse which has caused the sexist language to be installed and maintained in culture. In other words, by writing books that empower the victimized and silenced female characters in Greek mythology, women writers have taken the initiative in changing and challenging this biased discourse based on demeaning views of women, and presenting the root of this problem of representation as not related to women but rather in the portrayal of patriarchy.

What encourages me in this study is to discover the way a stereotypical image has been socially imposed on women in fiction and in reality. Also, what inspires me is to identify the patriarchal discourse, which is greatly related to the male desire to keep hold of women by restricting their rights, independence and voice, from ancient Greek to contemporary literature. Hence, my interest in writing this thesis lies in exploring the rewritten stories about mythological female figures from a female perspective by comparing the narration of these figures with their primary versions in order to point out the differences in their portrayal, speech, and characterisation.

For this particular topic, I will work on Madeline Miller's novel *Circe* and Laura Shepperson's novel *Phaedra: A Novel.* The main characters of these two books will be the core of my thesis. In *Circe,* Madeline Miller exhibits more insightful and detailed aspects of Circe's life, showing her from a different angle than how she is depicted in the ancient sources such as Homer, Ovid, and Apollonius of Rhodes. Giving her the voice and identity she previously lacks, Miller demonstrates that she is far beyond being a witch or seductress. Similarly, in *Phaedra: A Novel,* Laura Shepperson provides the reader an opportunity to see the inner life of Phaedra. The novel touches upon various crucial issues such as class-based gender roles, power relations and injustice between the sexes which Shepperson interprets by retelling Phaedra's story from her own point of view.

With these novels, I aim to show the distinctions between the narration of Circe and Phaedra in Greek mythology and the nature of both of these writers' rewritings. Moreover, I intend to point out the misogynistic discourse of the ancient Greek authors, how they contribute to the promotion of patriarchal ideology by presenting fabricated images of women. I also aim to present how the contemporary writers such as Miller and Shepperson, reveal the everlasting battle of women for autonomy, equality and freedom through the revising of the stories of these mythological figures in their works.

I will begin by providing an introduction to the ancient Greek world, the way both sexes are pictured by mostly concentrating on the portrayal of woman and how she is identified both in Greek society and in mythology. Then I will proceed with the demonstration of female characters in the works of ancient Greek authors. This part will include examples from Homer, Hesiod and Euripides and how they present female characters and how they show them as epitomizing the constraints of patriarchal discourse. Then I will explain how women writers are asserting their characters in literature, the significance of rewriting for their works and how they are using retelling techniques to fight against phallocentricism in literature. I will provide a comprehensive literary review containing the retellings of other women writers to show the immense studies done in this field.

My study of work on Madeline Miller's novel *Circe* offers an in-depth analysis of the ancient sources where she is mentioned and depicted so as to compare Miller's version. I will proceed with *Phaedra: A Novel* by Laura Shepperson, showing how Phaedra is presented, to what extent she differs from the classical works that she is

narrated and why Shepperson revises the story of Phaedra. This thesis will present the depreciative representations of women in literature which go back to the ancient Greek myths and how in twenty-first century women writers are still working on demolishing this ideology that subjugates women's agency, freedom and identity by providing alternatives through their retellings.

CHAPTER I: SOCIAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND IN GREECE

1.1 Women in Ancient Greece and Mythology

As in every period of history, in ancient Greece, women are subject to certain roles and types of behaviour in their social, political, and private lives. The traditional way of perceiving the female sex is restricted to being either good or bad and this is determined according to her sexuality. Sexuality has been—and still is, "regarded as dangerous not because it is physically unclean or polluting…but because of its ability to deceive" (Lefkowitz "Mythology" 591). The relation between sexuality and deception originates from men's fear of women's sexuality. The male anxiety which is triggered by "the immense power that the female wields through her sexuality […] did condition Greek attitudes towards women" (Walcot 39). In order to direct this male anxiety, they find ways to control women's autonomy over their bodies; they make use of religion, marriage, law, politics and morality. Accordingly, the rights and freedom of women are so restricted and oppressed that she is treated as a property, the possession of a male figure in her life. As explained further by Luce Irigaray in her book *This Sex Which is Not One*:

> For woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity […] Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce. Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men. (31-32)

This clarifies how women have no authority over their bodies, their identities or sexuality. They are identified and valued—or devalued, as much as men grant. Therefore, the polarity which determines what type of women are decent and what type of women are evil is composed of socially constructed ideologies of patriarchy.

Importantly, being on the good side means that you are a virtuous daughter, a devoted wife and a mother whose initial duties are taking care of the needs of her husband, the household and her home. So, if you are on the good side, sexuality solely means reproduction for you, and this is only within the boundaries of marriage, which is often an arrangement between two families, not a decision made by women. Thus, this effectively puts women into a form of slavery in the domestic sphere, under the rules of a patriarch and with the duties imposed on her. Therefore, the ideas such as virginity, chastity and obedience are significant virtues regarding a woman. Those notions are so

significant that they find their place in Ancient Greek law as well. Sarah Pomeroy in her book *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* exemplifies one of the laws as:

> In the sixth century B.C. the Athenian lawgiver Solon institutionalized the distinction between good women and whores. He abolished all forms of self-sale and sale of children into slavery except one: the right of the male guardian to sell an unmarried woman who had lost her virginity. (57)

This underlines the legitimised inequality between the sexes in ancient Greece such that women are objectified and viewed as property that can be sold. Also, it shows that women do not have autonomy over their bodies thus, their sexuality is not a personal matter in this androcentric society. Additionally, as Lillian Doherty clarifies in her book *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*: "in legal transactions, a woman [is] never treated as an adult: throughout her life she [needs] a male 'master' (kyrios, often translated 'guardian'), usually a father, husband, or son, to act on her behalf" (24). This shows that the individuality of women is also discouraged and denied by the laws of patriarchy and women are dehumanised in the sense that they are seen as the extension of men who cannot function on their own. Also, Doherty points out the radically changing views about sexual intimacy as: "a double standard of sexual conduct, which [permits] some kinds of extramarital sex to men but not to women, [leading] to the division of free women into two basic classes, those who [are] 'respectable', i.e., marriageable, and those who [are] not" (26). With this example, the importance of women's preservation of their virginity is highlighted because according to the male ruler, this is the determinant of their innocence or wickedness, however, the same act is, of course, not applicable for male citizens. By imposing sexuality as a taboo or a sinful act and stamping them with such labels, men appropriate authority over women's body and their urges.

On the other hand, being bad basically means being aware of your own sexuality, being powerful, vocal and disobedient. The women on this side are almost always exposed to names such as whore, adulteress, rebel, witch, or monster. In fact, the names they are attributed are related to their relationships to men. When men are not satisfied with women's behaviour or the moment they realise that women are getting stronger—physically or status wise, they place these labels on women as a solution to exclude such women from society or to diminish their role. The main purpose of men to take such actions is to maintain their dominion over the female sex. Susan Sellers in her book, *Myth*

and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction indicates the root of the problem causing women to have negative connotations as follows:

> Structures of binary opposition, in which one term is defined against what is deemed as its other, have organised our thinking and decreed that woman shall operate as the negative of man. This pattern is transmitted in our culture and language as they create the world for each new generation. (22)

Being associated with negativity is connected to the language which privileges the male sex and marginalises the female as well as the socially determined roles that are imposed on women. Herewith, this way of thinking is deeply infused and largely accepted as a norm so much so that its marks can be observed in almost every aspect of life and culture. However, the issue of taking sides is hardly ever an obligation placed on the male sex. They are almost always the ones who hold power; they are the decision-makers, rulers, heroes, and warriors. They are the ones who may decide whether a woman is on the good or on the bad side.

The depiction of women and men in Greek mythology naturally mirrors the ancient Greek patriarchal society as well. As their mythology consists of the events and situations that Greeks take seriously, it includes some figures taken as role models and some who are conversely avoided because of their "misleading" behaviour. Penelope, for instance, is among the female figures who are taken as role models. She is frequently mentioned as "wise Penelope" (*Odyssey* v. 239) by Homer and presented as the ideal wife and mother in myths. What makes her ideal is her characteristics as virtuous, chaste, loyal, patient, and meek. The only thing known about her other than waiting for her husband, Odysseus, to return is her weaving. Since "weaving [is] a task which [is] considered the ideal pursuit for virtuous women. That's why Penelope is weaving and unweaving a shroud for much of *The Odyssey*" (Haynes "Pandora"). The reason why it is considered as the ideal pursuit is the fact that it hinders women from speaking because "Greek women do not speak, they weave" (Bergren 71). Thus what Penelope does can also be regarded as a "metaphorical speech," a silent substitute for (her lack of) verbal art" (72). Additionally the relationship between a husband and a wife in a patriarchal society is shown through Penelope and Odysseus. She is portrayed as such a devoted wife that while her husband is having affairs with other women, Penelope preserves her chastity, reputation and integrity against the persistent suitors by staying inside the domestic

sphere, and by weaving.

The Amazons and Medusa, on the other hand, belong to the category that men despise and women should refrain from due to their negative associations and actions which are totally against the stereotypical female image. In the article, "Greek Attitudes towards Women: The Mythological Evidence" Peter Walcot discusses the position of the Amazons as: "everything a woman ought not to be and they define the norm and the acceptable by setting that norm on its head; they illustrate the appalling consequence of woman usurping what is properly man's role and emphasize man's fear of any attempt at such a usurpation" (42). The Amazons thus challenge the roles and authority of men in many ways. First and foremost, they are female warriors and this is an attribute that men are assumed to have. They also reject any stereotypical roles of womanhood such as marriage, motherhood, and female beauty. Hence, their very existence poses a threat to patriarchy and its norms. This is probably why they are still known as living as outcasts and alienated from the society.

In the light of this, the myth of Penthesileia and Achilles is one of the examples of how patriarchy re-establishes their authority by eliminating a powerful woman. According to the myth, Penthesileia, the queen of the Amazons kills Achilles but Zeus intervenes and resurrects Achilles, upon which he kills Penthesileia. Hélène Cixous in her text "Sorties" comments on Heinrich von Kleist's tragedy *Penthesileia* by inferring her character as: "a woman warrior is not a woman; it is a woman who has killed the woman in her. Only through death does she return to femininity. To sexual difference" (Cixous "Sorties" 118). She implies that the presence of a glorious female warrior is not acceptable according to the rules of heteronormativity because one cannot be warrior and woman at the same time, hence she is reassigned to her femininity through death, the ultimate passivity. Additionally Mary Beard highlights the purpose of the myths about the Amazons as: "the Amazons [are] a Greek male myth. The basic message [is] that the only good Amazon [is] a dead one […] one that [has] been mastered, in the bedroom. The underlying point [is] that it [is] the duty of men to save civilisation from the rule of women" (Beard "Women in Power").

The other negative character in Greek mythology, Medusa as the only mortal Gorgon, has been a problematic figure for men with her presence and death. Defined both as beautiful and hideous, Medusa is known for her serpent hair and her ability to petrify

people with her gaze. Although she is considered as a monster goddess with her appearance and capabilities, she was not born as a monster but turned into one. According to the myth, she is raped by Poseidon in the temple of Athena, yet instead of punishing Poseidon, the rapist, Athena punishes the victim, Medusa by turning her hair into snakes. She becomes a terrifying and mighty monster whom everyone fears. Medusa as the "victim of the gods while herself goddess, she becomes a ruthless predator against all who attempt to face her down, in possessing the powerfully castrating and debilitating gaze and the sexual threat of the phallic mother or woman" (Alban *The Medusa Gaze* 3). However, her death is typically at the hands of a man, Perseus, who separates her head from her body, and uses her head as a weapon, subsequently returns to Athena. The violation and humiliation of her body both alive and dead demonstrates the inevitable consequence of a powerful woman in a patriarchal universe since "she [triggers] the unconscious memory of the beautiful, matriarchal goddesses, Medusa [becomes] the emblem for what these men most [fear]: sensual and powerful women" (Bowers 224). In addition to that Bowers also states how the demolition of Medusa's female gaze prevents the autonomy of all the female kind as follows:

> Patriarchal males have had to make Medusa—and by extension, all women—the object of the male gaze as a protection against being objectified themselves by Medusa's female gaze. The defense against having their own free subjectivity ignored, their vulnerability and fragility revealed, and their world shared was the destruction of female subjectivity. (220)

With her hair and petrifying gaze, "Medusa becomes again what she was once for women, an electrifying force representing the dynamic power of the female gaze" (235) and thus a dangerous threat to the gender expectations and the norms of the society. Additionally Gillian Alban comments on the frightening side of powerful women in myths in her article as: "despite woman's Othered status used to magnify men in their own flattering looking-glasses, mythic women asserting their gaze or vulvar power have been feared, revered, or desired for their monstrous force and transformative bodies (Alban "The Ferocious Medusa…" 50).

In the case of the Medusa myth, the order is restored through Perseus's slaughter of Medusa—as a symbol of patriarchy's victory. It may be implied that throughout history and in many literary works, women's efforts to gain their agency, to prove their power

and to assert their personality have been blocked. What is aimed to show through the myth of Medusa is the fact that neither in literature nor in any area of life, women's claim of identity and potency is granted with the adequate consideration and appreciation. Hence, both Medusa and the Amazons present characteristics that are against the ideologies of patriarchy and consist of almost all the inappropriate qualities a woman can possess. Therefore death is inevitable for them; this is the only way for patriarchy to manage its male anxiety and fear of women's power and sexuality.

Furthermore, the most forceful figures in Greek mythology, the Olympian deities and the way they are portrayed might be used to exemplify the ancient Greek patriarchal society as well. Zeus as the ruler of Olympus creates a male-oriented society where he rules everything, decides on everything and most importantly uses women, mortal or immortal, as he desires. In her book, Pomeroy demonstrates the biases between Olympian gods and goddesses as:

> The goddesses of Olympus appear in myth never to have had more than narrowly restricted functions, despite the major importance of their cults to Greek cities. On the other hand, gods enjoyed a wider range of activities. Thus Zeus and Apollo are examples of male deities who function as rulers, intellectuals, judges, warriors, fathers, and sexual partners in both homosexual and heterosexual affairs. (8)

With reference to this, Mary Lefkowitz emphasizes the sexual dynamics among Greek gods and goddesses as: "although the virgin goddesses [are] worshiped for their power over so many aspects of human life, they [act] only within limits defined by Zeus and with his approval, or with the cooperation of another god" ("Women in Greek Myth" 210). This signifies that even though they are goddesses with multiple spheres of influence, they are active only as far as Zeus defines or approves them. Hence, it can be argued that the presence of sexual hierarchy is clearly seen through the distribution of power among Greek gods and goddesses.

Accordingly, Zeus disregards women's power and insults what is essential to womanhood by appropriating their birth-giving capacity, as in the case of Metis who is swallowed by Zeus while she is pregnant with Athena. As a result, Athena was not born in the regular way but Zeus gives birth to her from his forehead. Emerging from the head of Zeus Athena's wisdom is believed to be coming from her father. In fact, her wisdom does not come from her father but her mother, Metis who is the symbol of wisdom. As

Catherine Keller explains:

> The wisdom of Zeus is none other than the woman in his belly…He fears what this womanly Wisdom will create, what will come out of her. He is afraid of losing his dominion, his absolute power and therefore himself—"she might bring forth something stronger than his thunderbolt". ("Of Swallowed" 330)

Thus he not only exploits the power of Metis but also manipulates Athena into thinking that she is her father's child. Yet the essence of her being belongs to her mother. Also, Zeus's appropriation of this female attribute of womanhood and his influence over Athena is evident in Aeschylus's third play from his *The Oresteia* trilogy, *The Eumenides* as she speaks of herself: "for there is no mother that gave birth to me, and I am for the male in everything —except for marrying—with all my heart, and am most thoroughly the father's child" (Aeschylus 737-740). Accordingly, the traits which are traditionally considered as masculine attributes, such as succession to property, power and authority are also gained at the cost of losing of her femininity and sexuality and identifying herself with these masculine traits. In the case of Athena, one of the three virgin goddesses, who is born out of the god—Zeus, refuses to marry or have a child. Hence, the depiction both of her physical appearance and characteristics show that her reputation as being the goddess of wisdom and warfare is related to her non-feminine traits, thus, this illustrates that gender roles are omnipresent in Greek mythology as well. For these reasons, it can be observed that goddesses or other mortal women in Greek mythology are regarded either as role models or as warnings. With respect to that, Sian Lewis talks about the pre-established gender roles of women as:

> The women of classical myth are, thus, either victims or monsters, the stories serving to model appropriate and inappropriate female behaviour. This view can easily be supported from a reading of the most familiar ancient myths: stories interpreted as encapsulating gender hostility include the wives and mothers in tragedy who kill their husbands (Klytaimestra, Deianeira) or their children (Medea, Prokne), the female monsters combated by heroes (the Gorgons, Harpies, and Amazons), the many accounts of young women or nymphs abducted by gods (Korone, Semele, Oreithyia, and Persephone), and the tale of the first woman of all, Pandora. ("Women and Myth" 445)

This comparison has almost always been present since the beginning of the world. In this

two-fold system one decides whether to be on the side of Eve or Lilith, or being 'femme fatale' or 'femme fragile'. Thus, what may be deduced is the fact that in the phallocentric world, women have always been forced or doomed to choose one side while men may sustain their lives without these clear-cut definitions. Nevertheless, as illustrated above, no matter which side women take, those who show a glimpse of personality and willpower are almost always shown as on the wrong side and their power is downsized, degraded and demonised.

1.2 Women in the works of Homer, Hesiod and Euripides

The gender roles which people adopt are related to the social and political ideology which is being imposed on people over the ages. In order for an ideology to be accepted and passed through the generations, writing plays an extraordinary role, and this is another area where men are more dominant than women particularly in early period of literature. What is known about women in the ancient Greek world depends heavily on the writings of men; the way they define women, the way they present them and the way they control women with the laws and rules that they themselves enact.

Authors such as Homer, Hesiod and Euripides are considered as among the precursors of ancient Greek literature. While their works are about the glories of warriors, lives of the heroes and praising the splendid power of the gods, they also reflect the male-female relationships of that time. In addition to that, they almost always centralise male figures in their poems or tragedies, leaving female figures as side characters or voiceless figures. When women do take part in these texts, they are either presented as ideal role models with silent, obedient, weak and fragile characters, or they are punished or marginalised for their vices. Hence, they never have much chance to be seen, heard, understood or even praised as much as their male counterparts. Moreover, these 'either-or' roles of women in these stories are again assigned to them by men because they lack the chance to speak for themselves and tell their side of the story. Thus, the picture male authors create about both sexes is strongly linked to the patriarchal and misogynistic ideology that they reflect on their discourses. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar states in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

> Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority […] they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of her

self-that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity. (Gilbert and Gubar 48)

Even though the narratives about mythological figures and events cannot be regarded as historical records, they are influential and effective in creating an ideology for the future writers and readers, especially male ones. Therefore the major reason for the exclusion and silencing of women in the writings of male authors is the phallocentric discourse which creates a stereotypical image of women and makes it persuasive over other authors and readers for centuries. Hence, it can be deduced that patriarchal discourse that dominates literature affects and limits the autonomy and the voices of women in literary works. Hence the roots of these discourses can be traced back to the literary works of ancient Greek authors such as Homer, Hesiod and Euripides.

As one of the most prominent names in classical Greek literature, Homer (8^{th} BCE) is mainly known for his two epic poems, *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. In both of his works, Homer efficiently echoes patriarchal gender roles through his characters. Firstly, *The Odyssey* is about the adventures and journeys of Odysseus who tries to return to his home after the Trojan War. At the beginning of the book in a conversation between Penelope, Odysseus's wife and her son, Telemachus, Penelope asks the bard to perform something else and Telemachus comes forward and says:

> So, mother,
> go back to your quarters. Tend to your own tasks,
> the distaff and the loom, and keep the women
> working hard as well. As for giving orders,
> men will see to that, but I most of all:
> I hold the reins of power in this house. (*Odyssey* I. lines 409-414)

Homer in this part illustrates the family dynamics in a male-oriented society and through Telemachus, he expresses the duties and the things a woman is able to do. By "giving orders" he refers to speaking and how it is an act preserved for men, and how women are not allowed to speak or share their opinions whether on something trivial or important. Hence they are silenced and oppressed by an authority figure who might be their fathers, husbands and if the husband is not present, their son.

Secondly, Homer's other poem, *The Iliad* is about the Trojan-War and it focuses on the warriors and the heroes in the war. The women in *The Iliad* take part as the victims of the war are defined as "prize of war" or booty as in the case of Briseis, whom Achilles

claims as his property, and Chryseis who is taken by Agamemnon. Additionally, in most of the poem Briseis is used as a toy between Agamemnon and Achilles and throughout the whole poem she only talks once and only for the purpose of mourning the death of Patroclus. The only part where she is verbal is when she shows her emotion which is regarded as one of the stereotypical features of women. By overlooking the story and the personality of Briseis and Chryseis, the superficial way Homer approaches female characters in his works is revealed. Also, it is important to note that it is the women who are taken as captives at the end of a war; children and men are regarded as future threats, but women are not allowed to take such threatening actions, so they are left alive and subsequently used as slaves or whores.

Another character whom Homer both objectifies and sexualises is Helen of Troy. She stands as the reason for the Trojan War, yet Homer portrays her "terrible beauty" (iii. 190) to justify her not being punished or enslaved for her adultery. Helen, who is known as the most beautiful woman in the world, is portrayed as an object of desire by both Paris and Menelaus whom they both wish to achieve in order to boost their ego. Also, she is regarded as a prize just like Briseis, but this time not a prize of war but the winner's prize in the fight between Menelaus and Paris:

> Think of it: Paris and Menelaus loved by Ares
> go to fight it out with their rugged spears—
> all for you—and the man who wins that duel,
> you'll be called his wife! (iii. 164-167)

Moreover, in the case of Helen, her beauty can also be regarded as an insult because nothing much is known about her apart from her physical beauty, at least Homer did not let her prove that she possesses any more than that. In fact, when Helen attempts to prove that she has a character to assert her own thoughts and desires, she is supressed and reminded that she cannot do that, surprisingly not by a man but by a female divinity—Aphrodite, this time:

> Don't provoke me—wretched, headstrong girl!
> Or in my immortal rage I may just toss you over,
> hate you as I adore you now-with a vengeance.
> I might make you the butt of hard, withering hate
> from both sides at once, Trojans and Achaeans—

then your fate can tread you down to dust! (*Iliad* iii. 480-485)

She is almost portrayed as a vessel who is equipped with charm and beauty in order to satisfy men's desire and Aphrodite reminds her that she is a slave for Paris, her only importance is being Paris' lover. Sue Blundell summarises the role of the women in *The Iliad* as follows:

> Women provide causes and rewards, encouragement or restraint; they reflect the sufferings of warfare and represent the social ties which form the background to the battle scenes. Always, they exist only in relation to their menfolk. Although they are implicated in life's most serious transactions, they do not take an active part in them. (Blundell 51)

In this regard, it may be claimed that "the *Iliad* stresses the role of women as the objects over which men fight each other [...] war is something that happens "around" (amphi or peri) women: it is fought either in defense of […] or to conquer […] them" (Franco 57). Consequently, the narrative of Homer shows that the subjectivity and the agency of female characters are ignored or minimized, whereas male characters and their stories fill most of his works. Hence, the way he represents them, and the way he distributes the roles between both sexes as well as the discourse he uses proves him to be phallocentric.

The other important name in Greek literature is Hesiod (750-650 BCE) and his most notable works are *Theogony* and *The Works and Days. Theogony* is basically a poem about the lineage of the Greek gods and the creation of the cosmos. The world he narrates in the poem is largely male oriented and Hesiod's word preferences to define a character show huge differences in terms of which sex he is referring to. At the beginning of *Theogony*, he talks about his first interaction with the Muses, and then he narrates the first things they said to him: "Field-dwelling shepherds, ignoble disgraces, mere bellies: we know how to say many false things similar to genuine ones, but we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things" (*Theogony* p. 5). Through the Muses, what Hesiod aims to emphasize is the deceptive nature of women's speech, and he underlines the unreliability of their words. Regarding that, in her article "Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought" Ann Bergren explains women's ambiguous speech further as:

> These two modes of the Muses' discourse parallel the two kinds of speech attributed to women throughout Greek tradition. Women are both prophets and teacher, voices of truths. Think of the Moirai (Fates) who spin out the future […] Women are also

> tricky, alluring imitators in words. Re-call the speech in which Aphrodite imitates a 'virgin' in order to seduce Anchises […] But most women are, like the Muses, capable of both modes—indeed, as we have observed, the ability to falsify implies command of the truth. (Bergren 70)

Accordingly, Hesiod praises Zeus's achievements and strength in most parts of his poem, but when it comes to women, he says: "Zeus set up women as an evil for mortal men, as partners in distressful works" (*Theogony* 51). Also, when he talks about Pandora, he refers to her as: "for from her comes the race of female women: for of her is the deadly race and tribe of women, a great woe for mortals, dwelling with men, no companions of baneful poverty but only of luxury" (50). This shows that Hesiod's implication and assumptions about women involve misleading and misinterpreting evidence about women. Hence, it may be deduced that his words in *Theogony* to describe female figures, whether mortal or immortal, are based on denigrating them and creating a negative images of them.

Moreover, it is possible to see similar approaches to the female sex in his other writing, *The Works and Days.* In this didactic poem, Hesiod mainly talks about the life of a peasant, and gives moral teachings as well as making use of mythology. In the poem, he interprets the myth of Prometheus and Pandora and how she is created as a punishment for Prometheus' fault of stealing fire from the Olympian gods. In both of his works, he mentions Pandora, the way she is created, her beauty, and the aim of her creation as "the sheer, intractable deception" created as "a woe for men who live on bread." (*The Works and Days* 93). As a matter of fact, Pandora is designed as a tool for the punishment of Prometheus in this myth; the guilt is on Prometheus but the way Hesiod narrates it places all female kind together with Pandora in a position of deceitful, manipulative and evil creatures. With respect to that, Jane Harrison in her book *Mythology* explains the alteration in the portrayal of Pandora's story as follows:

> In origin there is no doubt that Pandora was simply the Earth-Mother, the All-giver, but an irresponsible patriarchal mythology [changes] her into a fair woman dowered with all manner of gifts, the gift of all the gods […] [thus] the Great Mother has become the Temptress maid. (pp. 65-67)

What she means by 'irresponsible patriarchal mythology' is the source of Hesiod and the way he pictures Pandora as an enticing woman who is merely created as a curse and punishment for mankind. This highlights the significance of a narration and the way it is

used as a powerful weapon to assert certain ideas that still exist today. Along with Pandora, Hesiod gives advice and instructions to men on how to deal with women, and the rest of the poem continue with his generalisations about them. In addition to that, he warns men by stating: "whoever trusts a woman, trusts swindlers" (*The Works and Days* 119), and this is highly related to his false assumption stemming from the Pandora myth where he pictures every woman as deceiver or seductress who should be silenced or castigated. In addition, he suggests men to "marry a virgin so that [they] can teach her cherished usages" (143), as if women are animals to be tamed. Accordingly, the emphasis on virginity draws attention to the perception that a woman who is sexually active without marriage is not considered as a good woman. Therefore:

> The archaic picture gives us representations of both good and bad women. [Since] the latter predominate in Hesiod, this has to do both with the poet's view of life, in which evil predominates over good, and with "the nature of things," rather than with "a contempt for the gender predominating in his time" (241). It is in "the nature of things," […] that as long as there are two sexes there will be two kinds of women, but praise of the good woman will be remarked less frequently than blame of the bad. (229, 242) (qtd. in Katz 74)

It can be deduced that the way Hesiod sees and portrays the female sex—as is illustrated in the case of Pandora, carries examples supporting the phallocentric world order and his misogynistic views manifesting the superiority of males' power both in Greek society and in mythology.

Another significant figure in Greek literature is Euripides (480–406 BCE) who is widely known for his tragedies. Along with Aeschylus and Sophocles, he is influenced by the works of Homer and Hesiod. Euripides has plenty of tragedies about mythological figures, both male and female, such as *Hippolytus, Andromache, Hecuba, Electra, Herakles and Medea.* In one of these plays, *Medea,* Euripides bases his story on the myth of Jason and Medea. As opposed to Homer and Hesiod's tradition, Euripides's story revolves around a woman, Medea, who is an absolutely verbal, active and courageous person. However, as exemplified above, ancient Greece is a patriarchal society and any women who pose a threat to this system with their assertiveness or actions are not welcome or accepted.

As Aristotle uttered, the aim of tragedy is to arouse the feeling of catharsis in the

audience. Even though Medea seems to be a powerful and an autonomous female character, Euripides aims to present her story to the audience for them to take a lesson and to present her as a warning, not as a role model. This is possibly why he structures her story in the form of a tragedy as oppose to an epic poem. Moreover, she is a foreigner, deceitful, and a murderous mother, hence she "clearly demonstrated to the Athenians what a mother should not be" (O'Neal 119). As the Nurse utters in her conversation with the Tutor:

> She loathes her children. They bring no pleasure
> when she sees them. I'm afraid of what she's
> thinking— fueled by her vengeful temper
> to some new plot. She is dangerous. (*Medea* lines 32-35)

She is a woman who murders her children and her relatives, is filled with evil desires to take revenge and has a manipulative side, thus, she is the kind of woman that men mostly avoid and some women are afraid to become. Additionally, Brad Levett in his article entitled "Verbal Autonomy and Verbal Self-Restraint in Euripides' *Medea*" illustrates the way she is being deceitful in Euripides's play as:

> First, Medea shows personal autonomy in her ability to overcome her so-called feminine susceptibility to persuasion, in particular erotic persuasion. Secondly, Medea learns to restrain and control her own words, hiding her true intentions as she effects her revenge, in particular by suppressing her "feminine" instinct to lament. The result of this combination of verbal autonomy and verbal self-restraint is her victory over Jason and the verbal mastery she evinces in the conclusion of the play. (55)

Medea supresses the qualities considered as stereotypical of women such as display of emotion, pretence, and seduction. Yet, her desire to gain revenge blinds her eyes so much that she takes the lives of her children and subsequently lives in banishment from society. Hence, by the end of the play, she does not emerge as the mother everyone would admire, rather she is definitely the outcast monster with an evil mind. Thus, what Euripides reflects in his play is the fact that a woman as a main character in a story cannot end up as a successful, admired role model because these stories are written to promote male misogynistic fantasies. Therefore, Medea as a castaway figure suits the aim of patriarchal society which is projecting women as a negative example. Although Euripides' portrayal

of Medea might be considered as a work centralising a powerful female character, if this was the story of a man who did similar things to Medea, he would probably not be alienated or turned into a monster. The play, for this reason, reflects the biased treatment of female kind. For these reasons, the language Euripides uses, and the way he represents Medea in his tragedy shows once again how deeply the phallocentric language is established in literature.

Overall, these three prominent writers in Greek literature as fore-comers have determined and shaped what literature is today with their works. However, they are also the pioneers of the patriarchal discourse which is disseminated and adopted as an ideology both by readers and writers. The way they portray both sexes has an enormous contribution on whether they are accepted as stereotypical traits and whether these traits become widespread in further works. Regarding that, Jess Zimmerman in her book *Women and Other Monsters* explains the hardship of being accepted as a woman—whether as a real or literary figure, and the influence of the written works on patriarchal discourse as follows:

> For women, the boundaries of acceptability are strict, and they are many. We must be seductive but pure, quiet but not aloof, fragile but industrious, and always, always small. We must not be too successful, too ambitious, too independent, too self-centered—and when we can't manage all the contradictory restrictions, we are turned into grotesques. Women have been monsters, and monsters have been women, in centuries' worth of stories, because stories are a way to encode these expectations and pass them on. (8)

Therefore, it may be argued that masculine and feminine characteristics, or the scale that determines how good or bad a woman is, are man-made notions which have gradually been embraced as a norm. This ideology is infused in the discourse of ancient male authors which projects the powerful female characters as warnings, not as heroines. This also has a significant impact on culture that prioritises phallocentricism. In other words, the existence of cultural representations of gender roles and the unequal treatment of the female sex in the ancient Greek world and myths reveal the domination of patriarchy both in society and literature.

After having considered the position of women both in ancient Greek society and literature, the following sections will include the discussion of how women come to have

agency and assert themselves in literature and strengthen their place with their works will be discussed. In addition to that, how far this gained agency has inspired women writers to go back to the past, to reinterpret the ancient literary works and to reveal the patriarchal discourse in them will be evaluated.

CHAPTER II: WOMEN'S WRITINGS AND THEIR EMPOWERING RETELLINGS

2.1 Women Writers' Claim to Agency in Literature

> "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind." —Virginia Woolf*, A Room of One's Own*

Patriarchal ideology has a tremendous impact on gender roles and the area of activities, characteristics and attributions that are associated with them. Since this ideology is formed by men and worked in their favour, women have a rather limited freedom and opportunity to be autonomous individuals who can openly speak for themselves or explain themselves. Accordingly literature, as in so many areas, is dominated and controlled by men for centuries. Women, on the other hand, are not allowed to make their voice heard as much as men because they are generally not allowed to do things that are viewed as unsuitable for them, and writing is one of these.

Also, the female characters are often not identified as strong, independent and vocal individuals who are easily welcome and accepted in those stories. When there are innumerable legends, myths, stories and tales written to glorify and contribute to the supremacy and the power of the male sex, for the females, this is not the same. Female characters typically take part in a story in two ways; one as marginalised for her misbehaviour and vices under the label of witch, monster or temptress while the other is silenced and oppressed by male authority figures and praised for her prudery, chastity and obedience as a symbol of the ideal woman. The features which determined the vices and the virtues of a woman are among the patriarchy's constructed norms to overrule and subjugate the female sex. Thus these texts which are written with a phallocentric language deterred women from appearing and becoming strong and independent characters.

This false and superficial image of woman is portrayed in the narratives of men and maintained by other male authors. To illustrate this, most of the stories of the women in Greek myths who remain ignored, unfinished, misrepresented and unheard can be given as examples. Accordingly, Hélène Cixous in her article, "The Laugh of Medusa"

emphasises the way writing is used to silence and oppress women as:

> Writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine-economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never *her* turn to speak—this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. ("The Laugh" 879)

Hence it can be inferred that writing contributes to the establishment of an ideology, which supports and promotes the androcentric point of view, as this standpoint aims to prevent women from gaining an opportunity to become involved in writing. In other words, it stands as an attempt to block women's freedom of expression by means of speech and writing. Additionally, the position of women in the field of writing places them in a disadvantageous situation since this action is regarded as inappropriate because of the gender expectations that are grounded on oppressing and controlling women. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar summarises the factors that hinder women writers effort to assert their character as follows:

> The loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention- all these phenomena of "inferiorization" mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart. (*The Madwoman* 50)

Nonetheless, the domination of patriarchy do not stop women who are courageous and determined enough to express themselves in writing. Virginia Woolf briefly summarises women's attempt to include themselves in literature from ancient Greece to Victorian times as:

> There was a Sappho and a little group of women all writing poetry on a Greek island six hundred years before the birth of Christ. They fall silent. Then about the year 1000 we find a certain court lady, the Lady Murasaki, writing a very long and beautiful novel in Japan. But in England in the sixteenth century, when the dramatist and poets were most active, the women were dumb. Elizabethan literature is exclusively masculine. Then, at the end of eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth, we find women again writing—this time in England—with extraordinary frequency and success. (*Granite and Rainbow* 77)

The persistence and ambition of women who determined to write in previous periods encouraged and inspired the following generations and women eventually clawed their way into literature, become authors, started writing stories about themselves and publishing those stories under their own names rather than male pseudonyms. By doing so, they obtain the space to prove that women can be self-governing, free-spirited and powerful without turning into monsters, sorceresses or whores, or the opposite; they can choose to be monsters and embrace their monstrosity and not get punished for that. Regarding that Gillian Alban in her book stresses how contemporary woman writers transform those notorious female figures and distinguish of their power in their works as follows:

> Whether they are mothers or witches, or perhaps both, unprotected foundlings, femmes fatales, vampires or vamps, these characters deconstruct and defy social roles and expectations. Within their significant differences, such twentieth century writers have reflected both the plight and the powers of the women they present, insightfully involved in their situations, whether overwhelmed, or rising above the obstacles placed in their path. (*The Medusa Gaze* 10)

In addition to that, Helene Cixous underlines the importance and the purpose of women's writing as:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history-by her own movement. ("The Laugh" 875)

Hence, it is crucial for women to write about themselves, their bodies and their past in

order to demolish the constructed traditional and stereotypical image of women that is created by men. In this regard, the role and power of writing stand as substantial method for women writers to assure their place in literature as individuals who have agency rather than individuals who are bound to be secondary by all means. Luce Irigaray in her book *Sexes and Genealogies* summarises what women have been deprived of for a long time and what they should demand as follows:

> We women, sexed according to our gender, lack a God to share, a word to share and to become. Defined as the often dark, even occult mother—substance of the word of men, we are in need of-our subject, our substantive, our word, our predicates: our generic incarnation, our genealogy. (*Sexes and Genealogies* 72)

What she means is that woman needs to write her story by using her own words and her experiences in order to unchain herself from the constricting man-made definitions, roles and stereotypes which have been imposed on women for eras. This writing provides women with the chance to change the existing power dynamics between the sexes and the conventional idea of womanhood as they create female characters who are self-governing and assertive in their works. Thanks to the increasing number of women writers and the emergence of feminism as a movement, such women have found the opportunity to write about themselves, their bodies, their self-discoveries. One of the most powerful ways for women to point out the inequalities they have been experiencing is through writing because "it is in writing, from woman and toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence, the place reserved for her in and through the Symbolic" (Sorties 93).

Therefore, "by challenging patriarchal ideology, by violating conventional practices, by inventing compelling female characters and by representing female lived experience and a feminine perspective […] women authors have successfully created a female literary tradition in contemporary fiction" (Chatraporn 51-52). Even though the traces of patriarchal ideology may still be found in every sphere of life, the women writers have accomplished and continue to demolish the distorted images, ideas and behaviour that have imposed on women by focusing on female autonomy, perspective and experience in their works.

2.2 The Purpose of Retelling

> "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us."—Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision"

With the help of writing, women have been able to show the suppression and discrimination that they have been exposed to for so long and by making use of their story and the way they are presented in the past is one of the ways to demonstrate this oppression. In the light of this, retelling as a writing technique stands as an effective method that is used by women writers to pave the way for changing the traditional ideology and sexist language in literature. By rewriting the stories of those characters who are silenced, secluded and supressed, from their own viewpoint, they attempt to reform and reimagine the established perception of womanhood and to bring back the autonomy which they have lacked for centuries. Thus historical and the ancient literary sources have a crucial role in rewritings since they provide women writers with the basis to expose: "the ideological foundations of a hegemonic discourse that has dominated the discussion of ancient women, and that continues to make its powerful influence felt in the discussion of women generally as part of civil society at the present moment in history" (Katz 97). In this respect, Sarah Iles Johnston in her article further emphasises how literature is used to create and sustain certain ideologies and how fictional narratives can also impact the way people perceive world as:

> Some types of fictional narratives, when they are well designed and well executed, not only teach their audiences certain facts […] or certain values […] but also teach them new modes of thinking or new ways of looking at the world that they subsequently apply, consciously or unconsciously, to other narratives and to situations in real life. (Johnston pp. 190-191)

For this reason, it can be implied that from its first examples, literature is used as a tool to spread patriarchal ideology positioning women as inferior in almost every aspect of life. Women writers, therefore, aim to shatter this partial way of thinking by producing books in which they revisit and reconstitute female characters who are despised and

misrepresented in literature for a long time. In her article "What Do Feminist Critics Want? Or a Postcard from the Volcano", Sandra Gilbert stresses the importance of rewriting the past as: "When I say we must redo our history, therefore, I mean we must review, reimagine, rethink, rewrite, revise, and reinterpret the events and documents that constitute it." (17). The past must be examined because it enables us to see the core of our on-going problems concerning the representation of men and women which is exceedingly controlled and shaped by patriarchy and its ideology encoded both in society and in literature. In order to overturn such ideology, women writers revise and retell the past events and their history from their own perspective. With that, they seek to transform the misogynistic language in literature and the misinterpreted images of women. Adrienne Rich touches upon the significance of revisioning for women as follows:

> Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction-is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. (Rich 18)

What Rich signifies by 'the act of looking back' is looking back at the history, the myths, and patriarchal tradition in literature from a new critical point of view in order to break the stereotypical portrayal of woman. Besides giving voice to those who are silenced, the purpose of retelling is also to resist the patriarchal discourse and to reveal the secondary position of women in historical and mythical texts. For this reason, it might be argued that:

> Rewriting myth is not only a matter of weaving in new images and situations but also involves the task of excavation, sifting through the layerings of adverse patriarchal renderings from which women were excluded, marginalised or depicted negatively to salvage and reinterpret as well as discard. (Sellers 22)

Likewise, retelling enables us to uncover the misrepresentations of women and rebuild our own image by ourselves by changing the old assumptions. In other words, the reason why looking back at history or the classical literary works is important in rewriting is the fact that it is the best possible method for pointing out the roots of a problem, its on-going effects in the present time and its possible impact in the future. In this case, women

writers' aim is to analyse and reveal the examples of misrepresented and mistreated female figures in old texts, particularly in myths, and to answer the question of "what if that was not exactly the way the story originally took shape?" and to provide alternative perspective through their rewritings. Alicia Ostriker in her article draws attention to the hardship of revising and reinterpreting the established norms and gender roles in areas such as mythology as follows:

> At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, the deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature; there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora, Helen, Medea, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary, Cinderella. It is thanks to myth we believe that woman must be either "angel" or "monster". (Ostriker 71)

Since all the information, ideologies and gender expectations are coded in us through these tales and become our truth, the task women writers aim to accomplish carries a significance since "the core of revisionist mythmaking for women poets lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth, revisionism in its simplest form consists of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them" (Ostriker pp. 73-74) and there are many female characters who are overlooked, victimised and marginalised in the epics, legends and poems of ancient authors. The women in these stories are exposed to labelling, having certain gender roles imposed on them to gain social acceptance, and frequently objectified and silenced. Additionally, in her essay Diane Purkiss highlights the possible outcome of rewriting of myths as:

> By rewriting the myth—changing the narrative, changing the position of the speaker, changing the spaces available for identification—you are held to be at once making a dramatic break with the myths as told by the fathers, and also to be recovering the dark, secret, always unconscious truths which the fathers have struggled to repress. (Purkiss 444)

This shows that revising of myths enables women writers to find the opportunity to breach the phallocentric discourse by providing these characters with the voice and the liberty they lack and with the chance to be who they truly are or may be. Along with that, they also reveal the truth that most of the myths narrated by male authors assume the purpose

of restricting and limiting women's sense of self, autonomy and dignity. Accordingly, women writers display the patriarchy's misrepresentation of the female sex as monster, witches or seductress by providing the background of their story and by resolving the negative connotations associated with them as well as correcting the false assumptions made about women.

Starting approximately from late nineteenth century and continuing to the present-day, literature consists of countless novels of mythological retellings such as Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* (1983) and *Medea* (1996), Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lavinia* (2008), Katharine Beutner's *Alcestis* (2010), Natalie Haynes', *A Thousand Ships* (2019) and *Stone Blind* (2022), Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), and *The Women of Troy* (2021), Claire M. Andrews' *Daughter of Sparta* (2021), Costanza Casati's *Clytemnestra* (2023) and many more.

The sources Wolf, Atwood, Haynes, Parker and Casati use in their retellings belong to Homer's epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey.* They reinterpret the female—both major and minor, characters in these two works. While Wolf, Atwood and Casati focus on a single character—Cassandra, Medea, Penelope and Clytemnestra, Natalie Haynes in *A Thousand Ships* and Pet Barker in *The Silence of the Girls* and *The Women of Troy* centralise many women in the Trojan War. The common traits of all these authors in their works is to highlight female experience, giving them the chance to be heard and taken seriously. Also, Haynes' other novel, *Stone Blind* concentrates on Medusa and delves into the question of who decides what a monster is throughout her novel. She provides the reader with a different Medusa than she is presented in the older sources.

Additionally, Le Guin, Beutner and Andrews separately make use of Virgil and Euripides' plays and Ovid's narrative poem. Le Guin's work presents Aeneas' wife Lavinia who in this rewritten version confronts her creator, Virgil. Beutner focuses on Alcestis who, according to Greek mythology, is an example of a self-sacrificing wife. In his revision, Beutner gives her a voice to tell her story from her own side and thus she is given the chance to acquire the autonomy she lacked. Lastly, Andrews' novel takes its origin from Ovid's story of Daphne and Apollo from his *Metamorphoses*. Daphne is the representative of the chaste maiden who protects her virginity at the cost of turning into a laurel tree. In the retelling of Andrew, she signifies Daphne's empowerment and proposes to the reader an adventure conducted by a woman. Therefore, through the

retellings of Greek mythological figures, women writers aim to indicate the patriarchal discourse embedded in literature and give a chance to those deprived of their own agency, sexuality, and voice to express the full range of their own experience.

More recently, the two particular retellings of Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Laura Shepperson's *Phaedra* shed light on the lives of two mythological figures who have been misunderstood and misinterpreted in many aspects. Firstly, Madeline Miller in her novel *Circe*, presents the mythological character Circe from her own perspective and with her own voice. In the novel, Miller takes the original story of Circe from many sources such as Homer, Ovid, and Eugammon and shows the reader many insightful and detailed aspects of her life and her personality from a considerably different angle. Miller uncovers various untouched subjects about her past, inner-self and the portrayal of Circe and thus enables the reader to see a different version of her than the one they already know. In addition to that Miller puts Circe at the centre of her book, gives her a voice and a chance to tell her story from her own perspective. Also, Miller enables the reader to see her life stages, from childhood, motherhood, to her maturity.

What Miller accomplishes in her book is to show the other sides of Circe who is not merely a sorceress or an enchantress turning men into animals. While presenting her story, Miller interrogates certain issues such as violence, power, identity and womanhood. Looking from a feminist perspective, the book can be summarised as the story of a woman struggling with the patriarchal and the misogynistic society throughout her life. For example, when she finds out that she has supernatural powers like transforming anyone she prefers into various forms of creatures, nobody believes that she is capable of such things, even her father. And when they are finally convinced, she is punished for this and sent to exile on an island. This shows that the society she lives in does not accept women's power, unlike men's, for when women use it they are punished.

In *Phaedra: A Novel* Laura Shepperson reinterprets the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus and relates to many issues regarding the perception of woman in ancient Greek, the relationship between women and men, thus permitting the reader to see a more detailed and layered version of Phaedra as well as the ancient Greek society. According to the classical accounts, Phaedra is the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë. She is married to Theseus but falls in love with Theseus's son Hippolytus. Hippolytus rejects her and after that she accuses Hippolytus of raping her. When Theseus learns of this he asks his

father Poseidon to kill Hippolytus, which he does. The ending of the story changes depending on the source, whether Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca or Ovid.

On the other hand, in Laura Shepperson's retelling of the story, *Phaedra: A Novel*, Shepperson takes the reader on a journey to Phaedra's inner life. The author depicts her as an unfortunate character; after Theseus kills her brother Minotaur, she is married to Theseus whom she scarcely knows and goes to Athens from Crete. Phaedra's life in Athens has a major part in depicting women's misery and sexual harassment, including herself. It is a dangerous city for women as they have no values or rights as human beings. Phaedra who is presented as afraid and weak, a passive and silent woman, after Hippolytus rapes her, does not remain silent but demands justice by accusing Hippolytus of the crime he committed. Additionally, Shepperson's preference of writing her novel in the form of a tragedy tells a lot about the plot and the life of Phaedra. The book touches upon various crucial issues such as gender roles, class differences, power relations and injustice between the sexes through various characters along with Phaedra.

In contrast to the ancient Greek authors' representation of women in their poems and tragedies, both of these women writers do not aim to write these novels to show the superiority of one sex over the other or to create prejudiced assumptions about the male sex. In fact, what they intend to emphasise is how the myths of Circe and Phaedra are narrated within phallocentric discourses that limit them and prevent them from having the opportunity to speak for themselves, or to be assertive without being castigated. For this reason, both authors empower these characters as they overpower biased discourses regarding women via their writings.

For all these reasons, the phallocentric discourse, which has dominated literature since the earliest examples of written works, blocks the autonomy and the freedom of women by assigning them certain rules and roles, restricting their voices, their sexuality and defining them as monsters, witches or enchantresses. With the introduction of retelling, women writers strive to overcome the patriarchal language by revising the legends and myths of the past and rewriting novels that centralise women characters. By writing these novels "from a female point of view [women writers challenge a long-standing misconception by emphasising that] the monster woman is simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation" (Gilbert and Gubar 79). Accordingly, Paul Cartledge

in his book *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* emphasises what women writers aim to remind the reader through their retellings as follows:

> Even where a female character in an Athenian tragedy speaks with almost violently feminine authenticity […] the words were written by a male playwright and the character impersonated by a male actor before a largely or wholly male audience. In a predominantly sex-segregated society, as the world of Classical Greece was, it remains a question whether and how far a man can experience or sympathetically represent the reality of women's lives, particularly when his 'addressee' is also male. (65)

Thus the characters such as Medusa, Pandora, Circe, Medea and Phaedra are portrayed as monstrous, evil and violent characters because their male authors prefer them to be known as such. Therefore, Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Laura Shepperson's *Phaedra* are two examples of retellings that reveal women writers' ongoing battle with the male-oriented world order by illustrating the hardship of being a woman, their personal suffering and their relationship with the opposite sex and how they can rise above their subjugation and oppression by exploring their bodies, and strength as well as by embracing who they are.

In the light of what has been discussed in these chapters, the following section will analyse Circe from Greek mythology compare how she is pictured in the myths she is included and how Madeline Miller interprets and retells her story. Hence, the differences in the discourses of male authors and Miller's will be evaluated.

CHAPTER III: FROM A MISANDRIST TO A SELF-SUSTAINING WOMAN

3.1 Circe the Wicked Witch

Born as the daughter of the Titan god of the sun, Helios and Oceanid nymph, Perse, Circe of Greek mythology and literature has a significant place with her personality and her powers. She is a well-known witch, an enchantress, and a sorceress in Greek mythology. The goddess has an outstanding knowledge and talent regarding herbs and plants and also she has the ability to transform people into animals. Marica Felici in her article, "Circe: The Odyssey's Warning for Femininity" provides a more detailed description of her area of expertise as follows:

> Circe is without a doubt a pharmakis, someone who uses magical potions (pharmakoi) made by herbs and plants. Hence, a pharmakis is extremely knowledgeable about the natural world. Circe is connected with nature: her palace is surrounded by lush vegetation and guarded by wild animals. However, the sorceress is also perfectly in control of the natural world; she uses plants and flowers to create her potions, and she tames those feral animals. (Felici)

Although the power she holds is immense and it often leads her to malignancy, Circe essentially possesses skills that work for healing purposes. Her connection and knowledge about nature advances her mastery over plants and animals. Nevertheless the emphasis has never been on the benevolent side of her in her myths, in fact Circe is mostly notorious for her witchcraft, her dangerous nature and her ability to seduce and trick men into her trap. Hence it may be argued that the labels she is associated with are not purely related to what she has done in those stories but also highly influenced by how she is narrated in them because in these stories the authors do not provide a logical explanation for Circe's "wickedness" nor do they provide a background to her character. This reduces her to a superficial character who uses her magical powers for her womanly desires or just for her sinister aims—in this case both of which are highly related to her being a woman.

She takes part in the stories written during the Homeric, ancient Greek and ancient Roman periods by many authors and poets such as Homer, Hesiod, Apollonius, Virgil and Ovid. On account of all these stories about her written by male authors, those stories were written in accordance with their perception of both sexes, particularly the image of a stereotypical woman during those times. Even though each of these stories does not follow a single myth about Circe and they show some differences in her portrayal, there

is a common trait that is associated with her; her sexuality and the way she uses magic for her evil desires, which places her in the category of a stereotypical dangerous woman.

The first and well-known literary work she takes part in is Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, particularly in books 9 and 10. In the narration of Homer, Circe's distinguishing features are not her divine powers, her abilities or her outstanding relationship with nature but rather her seductive, manipulative and sexual urges and actions along with her witchcraft. In other words, her powers, her body, and her character are used against her to picture her as an evil woman by Homer. Thereby she poses a threat to the norms and rules of the patriarchy because she uses her body and her bewitchery on men. In the beginning of book 9, Odysseus briefly summarises what has happened to him before giving details about his adventures and he says:

> Calypso the lustrous goddess tried to hold me back,
> deep in her arching caverns, craving me for a husband.
> So did Circe, holding me just as warmly in her halls,
> the bewitching queen of Aeaea keen to have me too.
> But they never won the heart inside me, never.
> So nothing is as sweet as a man's own country,
> His own parents, even though he's settled down
> In some luxurious house, off in a foreign land
> And far from those who bore him. (ix. Lines 33-41)

Homer's different preferences in portraying both sexes is clearly seen here. He presents Odysseus as a virtuous and respectable man who is loyal to his wife and his homeland. On the other hand, the women whom he interacts with are pictured as seductresses that use either physical force—in the case of Calypso, or magic—Circe, in order to take advantage of him. He refers to Circe as "the bewitching queen of Aeaea"—which is also the title of book 10, and it directly puts Circe in the category of evil women, whom men should keep their distance from. It is because she is both sexually and capacity wise powerful and in patriarchal societies like ancient Greece, women were not allowed to be both powerful and sexual, hence her skills are not regarded as something to admire or praise but rather as something to denigrate her and place her as an outcast character in those myths.

Book 10 is about Odysseus' arrival at Circe's island, Aeaea and the time he spends with Circe until his departure. Throughout the book she is frequently referred to as "the lustrous one" (x. 501) or "lustrous goddess" (x. 536), indicating that her physical charm and beauty are adequate features for Homer to identify her. The first appearance of Circe occurs when she turns Odysseus' whole crew—except Eurylochus, into swine. With this action she proves herself a dangerous woman. Since she is a goddess and Odysseus a mortal, he does not have much chance against her. That is why Hermes becomes involved in the story by giving Odysseus a magic herb called moly to protect him from Circe's sorcery as well as "[to protect] Odysseus from Circe's seductive hospitality and potentially emasculating offer of sex" (Ager 20). Hermes' interference can be considered as a move to demean Circe's skills and also to demonstrate which sex is more powerful. Accordingly, Charles Segal interprets the connection between Hermes' help to Odysseus and the power relations between the sexes as:

> He meets the goddess on her own terms: the counter-magic of Hermes against her potions, his sword against her wand. This sword also matches her sexual seduction, for it is not only a mark of his heroic identity [...] it is also a symbol of his male sexuality. The hero's encounter with the goddess is played out on the level of an archetypal conflict between the sexes. (Segal pp. 425-426)

She might also be regarded as an example of the possible outcome a strong women may encounter in patriarchal societies; they are reassigned to their womanhood by diminishing their power, voice and assertiveness. Her relationship with Odysseus can be considered as evidence of her first being seen as a threatening, enticing, and a mighty witch who is gradually assigned as a "proper woman" by complying with her traditional womanly duties. Respecting that, after the magic does not work, her frightening glory fades away and she begins enticing him to her bed, helping him to bath and asking her maids to serve him. These happen because Odysseus proves that he is more powerful than her and her magic. Thus after she is defeated by Odysseus' indifference to her magic, she almost turns into a damsel-in-distress who has just found her prince charming. Other than her pure submission, the change in her actions can also be analysed as her deception that make him think that she obeys him.

Furthermore, in book 9 Odysseus talks about how neither Calypso nor Circe has "won the heart inside" him, however, he spends a year with Circe as her lover on her

island in book 10. Additionally, as stated in Hesiod's work, *Theogony*, they have three children: "Circe, the daughter of Hyperion's son Helius, in love with patient-minded Odysseus, gave birth to Agrius and Latinus, excellent and strong; and she bore Telegonus because of golden Aphrodite" (*Theogony* 85). Also Odysseus does not make any plan to proceed with his journey home until his men remind him: "High time you thought of your own home at last, / if it really is your fate to make it back alive/ and reach your well-built house and native land" (x. lines 521-523). Nonetheless this is not portrayed as something that shows Odysseus contradicting himself but rather it is projected onto Circe, the femme fatale, as one enticing Odysseus and making him forget everything by offering him her body and her services. Laura Aresi in her article "Hidden Seduction" draws attention to Circe's double nature as follows: "in the *Odyssey* Circe serves the double function of antagonist and helper: on the one hand, she hinders and stops the voyagers, seducing and then imprisoning them; on the other, after her alliance with Odysseus, she becomes for him a lover, a friend, and a prophetess" (Aresi 171). Circe's double function thus creates an ambiguity and the male authors preceding Homer find themselves in an advantageous position where they can shape and project her the way they prefer; depending on their narrative she might be a curing sorceress, a guide or she might be an evil witch, or a lustrous monster.

Therefore, in *the Odyssey*, Homer ignores the details about Circe's life or her character such as her childhood or what brings her to her island, Aeaea. He just picks up the myth from where it is relevant to his story and he demonstrates Circe as an evil sorceress who needs to be put in her place by the "hero" of this myth. In this story, Circe is only relevant through her sexual relationship with Odysseus and the way she turns his men into swine with her potion. Hence Odysseus' indifference to her magic and the retransformation scene afterwards are crucial in the sense that it demonstrates who is in charge of the power and also who is the hero of the story. In other words, this is the story of a skilful goddess who is reminded that she is just a woman after all by a mortal man because whether mortal or not, the superiority of the male sex is what is mostly underlined in these patriarchal works. As Miriam Robbins Dexter explains in her book *Whence the Goddesses*:

> In patriarchal cultures, energy [is] regarded as the property of the male. Woman [is] useful, in this male-centered view, in proportion to the quantity of energy which she

> [bestows] upon the males of her culture. With this load of energy, the males of these societies [are] then enabled to carry on the functions of society, as rulers or […] as warriors. (152)

Circe, thus, becomes an energising tool for Odysseus towards the end of book 10 with all the help she provides to him on his journey home as a hero. She lets him use her body, her service and her knowledge, yet she is left alone in her island after he is done with her. Hence, such a powerful goddess with many talents, Circe is not praised for who she is but for what she can offer the hero of the story. This also indicates that the description and portrayal of female figures who are regarded as evil or femme fatales by authors like Homer, depends heavily on their gender expectations and reflects the norms of the patriarchal ideology of that time.

The other writer who includes Circe in his story is Apollonius of Rhodes (3rd c. BCE). He is the author of *The Argonautica,* an epic poem focusing on Jason's journey to Colchis for the purpose of reclaiming the Golden Fleece with his men, Argonauts, as well as his relationship with Medea. The significance of Circe for Apollonius' story is the fact that she helps the hero of *The Argonautica* on his quest. In book 4, Zeus orders Jason and Medea to go to Aeaea for Circe to "cleanse themselves from the terrible stain of blood and suffer countless woes before their return" (iv. 333)—Medea helped Jason to kill her brother Apsyrtus. In a similar pattern with the *Odyssey*, another quest is taken to her island and she offers her help. As it is illustrated in Jason and Medea's first encounter with her, Apollonius' Circe is pictured as more humane than in Homer's *The Odyssey*:

> They found Circe bathing her head in the salt sea-spray, for sorely had she been scared by visions of the night. With blood her chambers and all the walls of her palace seemed to be running, and flame was devouring all the magic herbs with which she used to bewitch strangers whoever came ; and she herself with murderous blood quenched the glowing flame, drawing it up in her hands; and she ceased from deadly fear. (*The Odyssey* iv. 339)

Contrary to her divinity, the vision she had scares her, and this makes her seem harmless and weak. The fact that Circe's magic to entice the stranger is vanishing in her dream also foreshadows her interaction, particularly with Jason, as she does not bewitch him as she did to Odysseus' men. Additionally, in the case of Medea, Circe is blood-related with

her—the killer, and also with the victim— her brother, Apsyrtus, so Circe's speech also illustrates that she is not the right person for the purification:

> Poor wretch, an evil and shameful return hast thou planned. Not for long, I ween, wilt thou escape the heavy wrath of Aeetes; but soon will he go even to the dwellings of Hellas to avenge the blood of his son, for intolerable are the deeds thou hast done. But since thou art my suppliant and my kinswoman, no further ill shall I devise against thee at thy coming; but begone from my halls, companioning the stranger, whosoever he be, this unknown one that thou hast taken in thy father's despite; and kneel not to me at my hearth, for never will I approve thy counsels and thy shameful flight. (*The Odyssey* IV. 345)

Although she refuses to help them any further and dismisses them from her palace, she is not necessarily acting against them. This leaves the situation in an ambiguous state and also places Circe as an emotional decision-maker rather than being impartial in such situation where she is assigned as an authority figure. Accordingly, Mirjam Plantinga in her article "Hospitality and Rhetoric: The Circe Episode in Apollonius Rhodius' "Argonautica"" comments on Circe's reaction as follows: "it is usually expected that the supplicated will either actively help or hinder the suppliant. Circe, on the other hand, states her passivity: she will do nothing for them, but neither will she do anything against them. It is very interesting that Circe is able to adopt this position" (561). Even though the reason why Circe is chosen to absolve Jason and Medea from their crime is not explained, it might be regarded as Apollonius' attempt to depict a mighty goddess like Circe as a sentimental woman who has some difficulties in making the right decision or being objective in such situations. For this reason, her ambiguity and her not being fully objective as an authority figure are the indication of Apollonius's perspective of women in power.

Additionally, following a similar pattern as Homer, Apollonius' poem centralises a hero's journey—Jason, and his adventures, while female characters do not carry an equal importance but rather remain as side characters; their position is to trick men into making mistakes or convince them to commit sins by enticing them with their bodies or assist them in their heroic journey. For these reasons, Apollonius's choice of portraying Circe as a stereotypical woman who lacks logical and objective judgement by disregarding her abilities and her character implies that Apollonius, like his forerunners,

uses patriarchal discourse in describing Circe in *The Argonautica*. Thus while praising the hero of his story, he ignores female characters and their character developments.

Circe was present in the myths of the ancient Roman literature as well. Another epic poem where Circe has a role is one of Virgil's (70 BCE-19 BCE) notable works, *The Aeneid*, the story of Aeneas' quest from Troy to Rome and eventually becoming the ancestor of the Romans. Importantly Judith Yarnall in her book *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* suggests that: "traditionally and stereotypically, male energies have been associated with the one, female energies with the other. Seen in this light, *The Aeneid*, which celebrates the birth of Rome, is an almost exclusively masculine poem" (83). This can be illustrated by the female characters in the poem who are mainly depicted as fragile, obedient and passive women and those who interact with Aeneas die most of the time. For example, Creusa, Aeneas' wife gets lost and murdered. Dido, the queen of Carthage, is the lover of Aeneas and she kills herself after he leaves her. Lavinia, the princess of Latium, is destined to be the wife of Aeneas and her role is simply to be marriage material and obey her father. Unlike Lavinia, Amata, her mother does not submit to the marriage decision of her daughter and kills herself when she learns that her daughter will marry Aeneas. Juno, the queen of the gods is the antagonist of the poem; she does everything to stop Aeneas, however, she cannot succeed.

Thus it can be argued that the roles Virgil assigns to his female characters—devoted wife, desperate lover, obedient daughter, self-sacrificing mother and the enemy, in *The Aeneid* fit into his male-ruling sexist ideology and prevent those women from becoming strong and independent. Thus they are portrayed as stereotypical female figures who are expected to be passive and submissive, if not passivized through death and defeat by a man. For Circe, the situation is not different. Contrary to Homer, in Virgil's work Circe's role and voice are lessened and she only exists to the extent that she is referred to; she does not speak, she is solely mentioned throughout the poem. For Virgil, she is "only the dangerous enchantress who has mysterious power over the animal kingdom" ("Circean Temptations…" Segal 429) and thus "Circe never becomes a real character, but remains a part of the scenery against which the author develops the story of Aeneas' wanderings" (Stoffelen pp. 122-123). Therefore Virgil's preference for failing to give voice to Circe and including her in his story only by references might be inferred as Virgil's disregard of female power and his misogynistic narrative. In book 7 of *The*

Aeneid, Aeneas passes by the island of Circe without visiting her island Aeaea, and the type of goddess she is narrated from the following:

> From there you could hear the furious growls of lions
> bridling at their chains, roaring into the dead of night,
> the raging of bristly boars and bears caged in their pens
> and the looming forms of howling wolves: the men whose shapes
> the brutal goddess Circe changed with her potent drugs,
> tricked them out in the hides and look of wild beasts. (*The Aeneid* VII. lines 17-22)

The goddess Circe from Virgil's viewpoint is highly dehumanised and portrayed as a forceful and terrifying witch who uses her magic to deceive and harm men for her pleasure. Virgil creates a very dark and fearsome environment as he mentions her, which is also a way of him bestializing her in the minds of the characters and the readers. What Virgil emphasises is not her character or her inner self but rather her witchcraft, her sexual desires and her demonic side as one whom everyone should fear and avoid. In other words, "she is only a supernatural danger and an obstruction who symbolizes the lure of hidden passion" (Segal "Circean Temptations" 430). Accordingly, there is no way for Circe to be praised for what she is capable of since women stereotypically cannot attain power. Thus in *The Aeneid*, Circe's role and voice are minimised, there is no way for her to assert herself and for this reason she is almost portrayed as an insignificant figure except for where her relationship with Picus is narrated. Additionally, in book 7 Virgil presents Picus as Circe's husband whom she turns into a woodpecker:

> Picus, breaker of horses,
> whom his bride, Circe—seized with a blinding passion—
> struck with her golden wand and then with magic potions
> turned him into a bird and splashed his wings with color. (VII. lines 216-219)

Even though she does not have much role or lines in the poem, her dangerous abilities are highlighted in her transforming her husband, Picus into a woodpecker. Hence it implies that: "Circe's heritage lives on, ominously, in the ancestry of Latinus, which includes the Italic Picus, a victim of the sexual desire of Circe and of the metamorphic magic that she uses in the service of that desire" (Segal "Black and White" 2). Also, she is more hideous than the men she transforms which is most probably because she triggers male anxiety as a sexually active and powerful goddess. Although there is no background to Picus and

Circe or reason why she transforms him into a woodpecker other than Virgil's explanation of it as "a blinding passion" she possesses, Circe's motivation behind her marriage to Picus might be interpreted as:

> Circe, who wins Picus's heart and establishes her own position in his house by an act of witty deception. The horses are a gift of love and a power play (probably, as has been hypothesized, her wedding gift for him) […] [Thus] Circe's passion for Picus…will not lead her to any tragic outcome, nor will her independence and cleverness be in any way limited or compromised by her union […] Circe, throughout her successful marriage with Picus, gives rise to an illustrious lineage. (Aresi 174-175)

This means that the sorceress Circe as Virgil presents her, has a brutal and a wicked character who tempts and seduces men into her trap and after she loses her interest in them, she discards them in her own ways. In the light of these examples it might be inferred that Virgil's main character, the hero of his story is Aeneas, and he makes sure that everyone other than Aeneas stays as minimised as possible. Hence the women he encounters—Dido, Lavinia, Juno, and other women in the poem merely mentioned in this epic do not carry any importance for Virgil. That is why it is impossible to question the female voice, character or autonomy to some degree because scarcely any women in this epic ever speak. Therefore the lack of space given to women in comparison to men and the discrepancy in the depiction of the two sexes in Virgil's *The Aeneid* indicate his alignment with patriarchal discourse.

Lastly, Circe appears in another Roman poet's work— *Metamorphoses* by Ovid (43 BCE – AD 17/18). This narrative poem consists of varies stories and focuses on many themes such as relationships, nature, destruction, rape, power relations and fate. Circe mainly appears in three stories in book 13 and 14; Circe-Glaucus-Scylla, Circe-Ulysses and Circe-Picus-Canens. Throughout the stories in which she takes part, by removing her positive and healing attributes, Ovid prefers to picture Circe as a jealous goddess who is controlled by her sexual passion and thus possesses a destructive force, as it is exemplified in the cases of Scylla, Ulysses' men, Picus and his servants.

Accordingly, in book 13 Ovid depicts the story of Glaucus and Scylla but he only covers the part where the merman Glaucus sees Scylla and falls in love with her and tells her the story of how he was turned into a merman while he was a mortal man. After their

conversation, Scylla departs and Glaucus goes to Circe's palace to ask her to cast a love spell for Scylla. In addition to that, in book 14 the rest of the story about Glaucus and Scylla is explained. When Glaucus requests Circe to make Scylla fall in love with him, Circe falls in love with Glaucus and tells him: "I may be a goddess, the daughter born to the gleaming Sun; the power of my spells and my herbs may be great; but I pray that I may be yours. Reject the one who rejects you, respond to her who pursues you, and give two women at once the payment you owe them" (Ovid 428).

However, Glaucus rejects Circe and this offends her. Since she loves him she cannot punish Glaucus, instead she casts a spell on Scylla, turning her into a horrible creature. After this situation, Glaucus does not change his mind about Circe and so Scylla is punished for no reason. In this story Ovid presents Circe as a woman who does illogical deeds out of jealousy. Also, the story about Scylla differs from Homer's version "since Homer accepts Circe's explanation that this monster was brought into the world by her mother Cratais: "to prey on men," he absolves her from any personal responsibility since one can't control one's sadistic parents" (Rodax 586). In spite of that, Ovid changes the story by projecting her as a liar and blames Circe for turning Scylla into a monster as a result of her jealousy and anger stemming from her rejection by Glaucus.

Moreover, book 14 includes two stories about Circe; one is about Circe and Ulysses and the other concerns Circe and Picus. The story of Circe and Ulysses is the Roman version of Homer's *Odyssey* with a slight difference in the names of the characters. The importance of this story for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* can be explained by its difference from the main theme of transformation, since: "magic [is] a sign of power, generally irresistible power. Wherever it is applied in the *Metamorphoses,* its victim is helpless before it. Only Ulysses is an exception, thanks to the protection of the divine gift of moly" (Segal "Black and White" 11). Hence Ulysses' being unaffected by Circe's magic together with the reversal of his crew's mutation, are the key exceptions in this story and one of the reasons behind that is to praise Ulysses and present Circe as weaker than him despite her divine power.

The other story in book 14 is narrated by Maceraus, a former companion of Ulysses, who tells the myth of Circe and Picus. In this version, Picus is the son of Saturn and married to: "Canens, the singer" (439). Circe sees Picus in the forest while he goes hunting and falls in love with him, and then she confronts him:

> ‘I appeal to you, Picus,’ she said, ‘by your eyes which have captured my own, by your beauty, most handsome of men, which compels me, though I am a goddess, to kneel at your feet, be kind to my passion. Accept the all-seeing Sun as your father, don’t cruelly scorn the Titaness Circe!’ (Ovid 440)

She treats Picus as her prey and with her threatening words she does not give him any option but to obey her wishes. Nonetheless, he rejects her since he is in love with his wife, Canens. As a result of this, Circe becomes furious—“you’ll learn what a woman in love who is injured can do; and Circe is surely an injured woman in love!” (440), and she turns Picus into a woodpecker:

> A new type of bird had suddenly joined the forests of Latium. Furious to find it was he, he pecked at the wild tree-trunks with his hard beak, angrily dealing wounds in the length of the branches. His wings had taken the hue of his scarlet cloak, and the golden brooch with the pin which had gripped his garments was turned into plumage. His neck was ringed with a circle of golden yellow, and nothing remained of his former self but the name of the woodpecker, *picus.* (pp. 440-441)

This does not appease Circe’s anger and she also punishes the servants of Picus when she sees them searching for him: “Circe touched their wondering faces of fear with her poisoned wand. They succumbed to her magic; the poor young men were transformed to a medley of monstrous beasts, and none of them kept his normal appearance” (pp. 441-442). Canens, as a stereotypical figure of the devoted wife, dies out of grief after what happens to her husband. Hence Ovid’s portrayal of Circe and her relations with male characters indicate that her motivation derives heavily from her greedy desires and her jealousy which are human traits and contradict with her divinity. Thus by presenting Circe more humanely just as Apollonius did, Ovid may aim to lessen her qualifications and even punish her by causing her not to be loved by anyone. Charles Segal sheds light on the distinguishing features of Ovid’s Circe as follows:

> Circe is a formidable enchantress from the beginning. Her magic is an extension of her susceptibility to desire, her power over men, and her dangerous sexual jealousy and anger. In both cases magic is an instrument for exploring the intricacies and contradictions of human emotions (especially female emotions) in a remote and fanciful mythical atmosphere. (Segal “Black and White” 12)

As oppose to her divine nature, Ovid pictures Circe like a mortal woman who is ruled by her instincts and sexual urges in her interactions with men because in each case— Glaucus, Ulysses and Picus, she immediately falls in love with them which in fact cannot be regarded as a sign of love but rather of lust because she approaches them almost to possess them. In addition to that, love might be regarded as innocent, but for a woman to be lustful is not acceptable according to patriarchal norms because women's sexuality exists as long as it fulfils male sexual fantasies. Also, all these literary works are written by male authors and mirror their opinions about gender expectations and norms, hence Circe's lust for a man is never fulfilled, because: "the only way that Circe's lust can [remain as] love is to transform it into bestial form, not elevate to divinity" (Putnam 414). What is emphasised is that the feeling of love is such a dignified and sublime feeling that Circe as an evil witch is not qualified to possess that emotion; she can neither love nor can she be loved. The closest feeling to love that she receives is through turning men into creatures and this is not love, this is only a gratification of her desire, which also illustrates how Circe is placed in the position of a monster in Ovid's narration. Therefore, each myth about Circe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* presents Circe as the perpetrator of violence and men as the victims; she approaches the men she desires as prey to be hunted; when Circe is rejected by these men even without any specific reason— Ulysses' and Picus' men, she turns them into animals, which makes her a monstrous female who needs to be punished. Her punishment becomes her banishment from society.

Accordingly, as it is illustrated in Euripides' Medea, Circe is not portrayed as a goddess whom everyone might admire but rather she is portrayed as an evil witch whom everyone should denigrate and fear. This is related to the power dynamics between women and men, and men "can control women by belittling them or demonise them to justify their fear. And so another set of stories is written depicting women as progressively more evil, then repeated to perpetuate their notoriety down the generations" (Shahrukh ix), and this is exactly what happens in the case of Circe. Since ancient male authors usually prefer to promote devoted wives, virgins and obedient daughters, female figures like Circe pose a threat for them because they have powers, they are sexual, vocal and assertive and thus they trigger male anxiety. For this reason, in each story Circe is left alone, rejected and hated for what she is capable of.

Considering all the myths and stories she is a part of, it is obvious that she is either portrayed as a side character in the story of a hero or as a villain who gives harm to a man who is a decent and honourable person. In addition to that, in all the myths the visitors coming or passing by her island, she never leaves her island and there is no background or any explanation to this situation. This shows that the authors who have mentioned her in their stories or plays just superficially portray her without providing her with a background, an identity or a voice, making her a shallow character. In this way, she remains only as a name, a femme fatale figure, a witch or however they desire to present her. That is why Circe both as a sexually active and powerful goddess cannot be praised for what she accomplishes but rather can only stand as a warning for women not to claim their rights or assert their identities as it is dictated in the writings of the ancient male authors. Therefore:

> Her longevity as a presence in Western literature suggests that she is an archetypal character, one who appears again and again as an expression of a basic human experience, fear or desire. She is an image […] generated by a node of energy or a patterning process in our collective unconscious that demands expression. Specifically, Circe offers an image of the strong woman who has power to give shape and form. (Yarnall 2)

For these reasons, the portrayals of Circe in the works of Homer, Apollonius, Virgil and Ovid ensure that her restorative side originating from her nature is ignored and gradually changed into a monster in their narratives. In each of the myths where she is introduced, Circe exists in relation to a male protagonist— Odysseus, Jason, Aeneas, Picus, Glaucus, and Ulysses, and this mainly mirrors these male authors' perspectives on the female sex in ancient times. They passivize the female characters in their stories by means of death or by minimising their roles and their importance because this is the image of woman they aim to reflect; for this reason they encourage and celebrate women like Penelope, Dido, Lavinia, and Canens. Also they criticize and discredit those who are self-assured, strong, verbal and sexual female figures such as Circe, Medea, and Juno by classifying them as monsters, witches, or evil. In addition to that these male authors deliberately present women like Circe as superficial as possible so that they may emphasise demonic, inhuman, dark and negative features that they believe are inappropriate for women to possess. Hence the dichotomy between decent and evil women is generated and

perpetuated by the male-oriented and misogynistic discourses of the male writers in pre-feminist texts.

3.2 Circe the Autonomous Woman

Witchcraft has always been associated with women and has never carried the same stigma with men. Those women who are labelled as witches are the types of women who cannot be controlled, oppressed, silenced and weakened by the authority of men because:

> A witch transgresses norms of female power. Witches are often called unnatural because of their ability to threaten men. With her spells, a witch can transform you into a pig, or defeat you in battle. She can curse you, blight your crops, ignore you, refuse you, correct you. (Miller "From Circe to Clinton")

This means that they possess everything that is considered inappropriate for women and they pose a threat to the power and authority of patriarchy. Most of the time, one does not need to be a real witch, it is adequate for her to be a woman who does not comply with social gender roles to be labelled as a witch. Both in real cases and in literary examples the witches often face punishment and live as outcast figures. Since they behave derogatorily against the established gender norms, punishment seems to be the only way for men to indicate their authority because "punishing witches accomplishes two things: it ends the threat and makes others afraid to follow in the unruly woman's footsteps" (Miller). Accordingly, the roles of the female witches in literature, specifically in mythology, are to be the antagonist or the warnings for the reader, and these characters generally do not have a decent fate where they become victorious or satisfied at the end. This is highly affected by literature having been dominated by men for such a long time and it has caused literary works to be written in the light of such established gender roles and patriarchal ideology. For this reason, female characters who behave and act totally against the norms are usually projected as evil witches.

While the ancient literary works often consist of stories about a hero or a war or a young man's journey to become a king, female characters are assigned to basic roles such as helper, war prize, devoted wife, or else the opposite; monster, witch, sorceress or whore. This role distribution also reflects the society's views on gender. The female figures in the latter category are described as evil women who are dangerous, sexual and wicked because their character and action do not coincide with what is socially expected of women. Additionally these literary figures maintain the archetypical witch image, thus

they have never found the opportunity to speak for themselves, either to prove what is known about them as fabricated, or the total opposite, to encompass who they truly are in any written ancient works. Hence their character, capacity and identity are only known so far as their creators prefer to demonstrate.

Circe, who is thought to be the first witch in Greek mythology, is one of such notorious women who are misidentified and misrepresented. In such myths, the focus is always on her witchcraft skills and how she tricks, allures, and uses people, especially men, for her own benefit or merely out of her sexual instincts. That is why she is often regarded as a dangerous and lustful woman and hence has been assigned negative connotations. The fact that none of the ancient male authors give any background to her life, the source of her power, why she does what she does, enables them to project her as a superficial character and thus they either barely refer to her or they take her story from where they think it is relevant to their story in which she usually partakes as an antagonist. She is not only disregarded and demeaned for her sorcery, but her womanhood and sexuality has a great impact on her projection as an evil person. Circe with her behaviour and appeal represents the female image that triggers male anxiety, threatens their authority and thus she stands as a warning for other women not to be like her, while for men she is considered as an object they aim to dominate over sexually, physically or both. In the cases where they cannot achieve that, Circe emasculates them through her sexuality, tricks and her magic.

While powerful women have overwhelmingly encountered ill-treatment or oppression or castigation in literature, with the emergence of feminism and revisionist myth writing, women writers have found the opportunity to give voice to those women who have been silenced, diminished and maligned in literature for too long. Madeline Miller is one of the outstanding names who determined to rewrite the stories of female characters who are misinterpreted and misunderstood in ancient mythology from a contemporary feminist point of view, presenting her own voice and experience. As one of her well-known works, *Circe* may be seen as a prominent example to this type of novel. Written in first person narration, Miller in her eponymous book *Circe* provides a detailed life story of Circe from her childhood to her maturity. Throughout the novel, Miller sheds light on Circe's multidimensional character by illustrating various stages of her life such as her position in her family, her relationships with men, her sorcery, her banishment to

Aiaia[1], her motherhood and repossession of her freedom, all of which contribute to Circe's self-discovery of her power, autonomy and voice and her identity as a woman. By doing this Miller deconstructs the gender stereotypes and labelling of women while overturning the patriarchal elements in ancient misogynistic discourses.

Contrary to the way Circe is portrayed in the ancient myths, Miller begins her novel by providing an in-depth analysis to Circe's familial background, her relationship with her parents and her siblings, and how this plays a significant role in her character development, self-image, as well as her relationship with men over the course of time. These unexplained and ignored aspects of Circe's life in Greek myths draw attention to the condition of women in ancient Greece as well. Since Circe is the first witch in Greek mythology, "the name for what [she] was did not exist" (Miller *Circe* 1) and this novel represents Circe's journey to find who she is and what she is capable of through her experiences. So she starts her life as a marginalised figure and is constantly exposed to the mockery and humiliation of her family members who often refer to her as "stupid Circe" (9). Thus she never receives love or affection from her parents and her siblings because she has no features resembling them and this allows her siblings to harass Circe: "her eyes are yellow as piss. Her voice is screechy as an owl. She is called Hawk, but she should be called Goat for her ugliness" (6). Circe's voice is an issue that is constantly repeated throughout the novel; it is either her siblings expressing their disgust about it or Hermes resembling it to a mortal's voice. Her voice symbolises patriarchy's view on an assertive and powerful woman who narrates her own story, talking about her emotions, experiences, and expressing her opinions in her own words. Thus it can be regarded as strange or different as it is in fact unusual for a woman to dare to be vocal in ancient Greek society.

Having being born as a girl in a patriarchal environment which imposes extreme limitations on women such as growing up to become somebody's wife, also affects Circe's placement as an outsider and an inferior character both in the eyes of her family and the society in general. That is why when Circe was born her mother Perse suggests to Helios, her father to "make a better one" (4). She has three siblings; Pasiphaë, Aeetes and Perses,

[1] The name of the island Circe dwells is known 'Aeaea' in the ancient Greek mythological texts, however, Madeline Miller refers it as 'Aiaia' in the novel of *Circe*. Thus it will be used interchangeably.

and she does not get along well with any of them except Aeetes whom she takes care of until he grows up and departs. As time goes by, all of her siblings get married, leave their father's court and become the ruler of a land Helios assigns to them. However Circe as the eldest child stays unmarried and this puts pressure on her as she finds herself questioning her own worth. This reflects upon the idea of marriage and how the value of a woman is equal to her marriageability in the ancient Greek world. Miller indicates the idea of marriage at that time by describing it as 'a bargain' or a 'contract' in the part where she refers to the marriage of Helios and Perse. In such a setting where she is despised by many divine creatures, Circe encounters one with whom she feels closeness and resemblance; Prometheus, the Titan sentenced with eternal punishment because he takes the fire from the Olympians and gives it to the human kind. In their short conversation, Prometheus provides Circe with a perspective that she has not been aware of up until that moment:

> 'Is it true that you refused to beg for pardon? And that you were not caught, but confessed to Zeus freely what you did?' 'It is.' 'Why?' His eyes were steady on mine. 'Perhaps you will tell me. Why would a god do such a thing?' I had no answer. It seemed to me madness to invite divine punishment, but I could not say that to him, not when I stood in his blood. 'Not every god need be the same,' he said. (Miller 18)

In this passage, Prometheus enlightens Circe by emphasizing that every individual has their own sense of being, encouraging her not to be confined to the expectations of her family and other deities. This interaction indicates Prometheus' impact on Circe as he represents: "a substantial milestone on her journey. There stands a Titan before her who does not cower but thinks for himself instead of being a part of the hive. Even if defeated, he illustrates for Circe that one can challenge the established hierarchy and act on one's own" (Raczyńska ""Give me the blade"). Even though Prometheus is punished for his actions, for Circe he represents the strength found in individuality and the resilience required to pursue her own path and thus inspires Circe to embrace her uniqueness.

In her novel, Miller reinterprets some classical myths involving Circe. One of them is the story revolving around Circe, Glaucos and Scylla. In Miller's version, turning Glaucos into an immortal man marks Circe's first experience with sorcery. Unlike traditional accounts, Miller portrays Circe's actions as motivated by genuine love and

tenderness since Glaucos is the first person for whom Circe experiences such feeling. By showing the affection Circe has longed for, Glaucos becomes someone that she desires for eternal companionship. Accordingly being a "pharmakis" (58), a sorceress, is someone that Titans and other Gods and Goddesses do not approve of and by making a mortal man—Glaucos, immortal, Circe proves that she holds "a power greater than gods own" (39) which when revealed, she pays for with her freedom. When Circe realises that Glaucos does not love her but falls in love with a sea nymph named Scylla, she warns Glaucos about Scylla's true nature and tells him that she is not as she appears. In order to prove to Glaucos what kind of person Scylla is, Circe cast a spell and desires "all her ugliness [to] be revealed," (48) and Scylla's ugliness burst out in the shape of a horrible creature. This shows that Miller, differently than other authors who narrate the myth of Circe and Glaucus, demonstrates Circe's motivation in her actions and this makes the reader empathise with her and also contributes to the shift in Circe's portrayal from an evil witch to an emotionally driven, immature girl. Thus Miller emphasises the complexity of Circe's character and her action in this reinterpretation and enables the reader to empathise with her by depicting her as more humanized.

Moreover, Miller shows Circe's inner conflict as well; when she sees the result of her magic, she feels regret and confesses to her father what she has done by stating: "I used wicked pharmaka to make Glaucos a god, and then I changed Scylla. I was jealous of his love for her and wanted to make her ugly. I did it selfishly, in bitter heart, and I would bear the consequence" (Miller 53). However, it is considered that she is not entitled to have such power since she does not carry the same divine powers as her family, and also as a female divinity she is not considered as authorized to such status: "If the world contained the power you allege, do you think it would fall to such as you to discover it?" (54). This scene illustrates that her kindness and honesty results in her humiliation by her father because of his belief that she cannot possess such power as a woman. Helios only believes in Circe's talents when Aeetes returns to his kingdom and convinces Helios about his and the other siblings' powers. With the help of this scene, Miller also demonstrates the value of a woman's opinion in comparison to that of a man. Accordingly, Helios makes a decision about his children's fate and he declares his judgement as follows:

> Perses lives beyond our boundaries and is no threat. Pasiphaë's husband is a son of Zeus, and he will be sure she is held to her proper place. Aeëtes will keep his

> kingdom, as long as he agrees to be watched […] Each of them, except for Circe. You were all here when she confessed that she sought her powers openly. She had been warned to stay away, yet she disobeyed […] She defied my commands and contradicted my authority. She has turned her poisons against her own kind and committed other treacheries as well… She is a disgrace to our name. An ingrate to the care we have shown her. 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. She leaves tomorrow. (pp. 62-63)

The unjust punishment Circe receives is totally related to the fact that she does not remain silent and confronts her father, which is regarded as a rebellion against Helios' orders and a violation of his fragile male authority. One of her first acts of assertiveness costs her dearly as she states: "I wanted to cry out, to plead, but my breath would not catch. My voice, ever thin, was gone" (63). Now she is silenced and expelled. Importantly, Circe's actions and expressions that Helios considers as harmful and disloyal are not treated equally when the agency is male— as in the case of Aeetes. In addition to that, it is highly related to men's fear of self-sufficient and powerful women since Helios' decision to banish Circe to a deserted island is not to prevent her from assaulting people but "he is afraid" (58) of her capacity and he wants to prevent her from breaching the existing order regarding men as the only power-wielders. Hence she is excluded from her environment so that she cannot influence other people with her abilities and expose the corruptness of this male-oriented system. Regarding that, Circe's eternal punishment can also be seen as mirroring Prometheus' situation, not because both of them help a human being but because no one knows the extent of their capacity or cares about the motivation that lies behind their actions. Therefore, as opposed to Miller's focus on the female voice and autonomy through her character Circe, she does not completely deny the realities of the time in which this story takes place, as is illustrated when Helios does not question his daughter's behaviour or intentions and forces Circe to obey the punishment he thinks she deserves since her words have no value in the mind of a patriarchal figure like him.

After her banishment, Circe's self-discovery and empowerment from a sensitive and meek goddess to a confident and powerful witch becomes clearer as it enables her to create a new sense of self away from the constraints of a male-dominated society. She states the recognition of her power and all the possibilities she can achieve and live as

follows:

> For a hundred generations, I had walked the world drowsy and dull, idle and at my ease. I left no prints, I did no deeds. Even those who had loved me a little did not care to stay. Then I learned that I could bend the world to my will, as a bow is bent for an arrow. I would have done that toil a thousand times to keep such power in my hands. I thought: this is how Zeus felt when he first lifted the thunderbolt. (73)

Here Circe becomes more confident as she recognises the immensity of the power she holds as well as the opportunity to reshape her life in the way she desires. In addition to that the island is a great place for Circe to discover the range of her capacity and her resilience which does not merely belong to flowers and plants but also arises from within her. Additionally, the island Aiaia carries a metaphorical importance for "it is the place where [Circe's] father […] vanquished a Titan giant, drenching the land with blood." (82). In that respect, this specific island Helios chooses to expel his daughter foreshadows Circe's overcoming of her father not physically but by overstepping his authority. The island can also be regarded as the symbol of Circe's assertiveness and freedom as is illustrated towards the end of the novel.

In her journey towards carving out her own identity, Circe's interaction and relationship with male characters plays a significant role. In Miller's version, Hermes is the first lover of Circe whom she meets during her exile on the island of Aeaea. Changing the portrayal of Hermes whose only function in Homer's *Odyssey* is to give Odysseus the moly plant, for his protection, to a companion of Circe in Miller's novel *Circe*, assists the narrative function, as Miller places Circe as the protagonist in her story while treating males as side characters. Moreover the fact that Hermes is interested and attracted to Circe's distinguishing features as a sorceress elaborates on Miller's aim to elevate the importance of Circe's character in her novel. Additionally Circe's relationship with Hermes does not reflect a traditional love affair, since they do not have any expectations of each other. Circe explains the dynamics of her relationship with Hermes as: "he was no husband, scarcely even a friend. He was a poison snake, and I was another, and on such terms we pleased ourselves" (83), thus both of them have no intention to make their interaction official by way of marriage as it is merely based on sexual purposes. Through their relationship Miller manages to shatter the patriarchal norms which confine women within the boundaries of marriage under the rule of her husband.

In chapter 9, Circe travels to Crete to help her sister Pasiphaë give birth, accompanied by Daedalus and his crew. However, in order to go to Crete, they must pass Scylla. On the ship, Circe asks the guard captain, Polydamas for his cloak and tunic because she plans to look like her brother Perses whom "Scylla loved […] once" (98), however, he is disturbed by her request and reveals his hesitation. Circe describes his reaction as: "his eyes narrowed, and I could see the reflexive no in them. I would come to know this type of man, jealous of his little power, to whom I was only a woman" (98). This encounter reminds her of Helios' deprecating gaze regarding her abilities, highlighting the constructed power dynamics between the sexes. Since she has the voice of a mortal, not possessing the glory of a deity as much as her parents and siblings, and above all since she is a woman, her considerably simple request threatens his authority. Nonetheless, Circe successfully manages to arrange the crew according to her plan, however, the realisation that her command is obeyed makes her question: "is that what it was like to be Perses?" (99). What she means, in other words is, is that what it is like to be a man, to be heard, to be respected, to be an authority figure and to hold power. When Circe achieves her plan to save Daedalus and his crew, they, as any mortals would, express their gratitude to Circe while her response, however, is unexpected:

> You fools […] I am the one who made that creature. I did it for pride and vain delusion. And you thank me? Twelve of your men are dead for it, and how many thousands more to come? That drug I gave her is the strongest I have. Do you understand, mortals? [...] I will never be free of her. She cannot be changed back, not now, not ever. What she is, she will remain. She will feast on your kind for all eternity. So get up. Get up and get to your oars, and let me not hear you speak again of your imbecile gratitude or I will make you sorry for it. (102)

Circe's anger and frustration is related to the remorse she still feels for what she has caused as well as being related to the knowledge Aeetes shared with her about how "monsters are a boon to gods" (86), stands as the reason why they worship and sacrifice to the gods and goddesses. This clarifies something completely opposite to Circe's character and thus she vehemently rejects seeing herself in such a position where she is respected and worshipped for the suffering she has caused. In chapter 13, Miller revises a scene from Apollonius' *The Argonautica* so as to demonstrate Circe's encounter with her niece, Medea. In this version, Miller briefly clarifies and attempts to modify the

infamous Medea image by providing details about the struggles and traumas in her life. By doing so, she shows that Circe is not the only example and there are plenty of female figures who are ignored and misinterpreted at the hands of the phallocentric discourse of male authors. Miller sheds light on the mind-set of the era, how certain attributions seem to be designed for the preferred sex, in the part where Circe implies that Jason comes up with a trick to take the Golden Fleece from Aeëtes and she realises: "Jason did not like that [since] he was a hero of the great golden age. Trickery was for cowards, men not bull-necked enough to show true courage" (145). As Circe has spent enough time to know that certain topics directly trigger men's ego and their fragile masculinity such as heroism, she does not say anything further.

This same chapter pushes Circe to intensely question and realize the discrepancy between how things seem and how things truly are, such as the sincerity and honesty of men when it comes to women. Circe discards her naivety and purity as she begins to see the true intentions of people, especially men; she comprehends that Jason is not as Medea describes him to Circe because she gathers that: "in his mind, he was already telling the tale to his court, to wide-eyed nobles and fainting maidens. He did not thank Medea for her aid; he scarcely looked at her. As if a demigoddess saving him at every turn was only his due" (146). Through Circe's statement it can be argued that the relationship between Medea and Jason mirrors the norms of the male-ruling sexist ideology where the female sex is always diminished by any means. Additionally her brother and Medea's father, Aeëtes, is also not as she remembers, and in fact he is a misogynist who "has never liked a woman in his life" (Miller 148). Even though it does not necessarily justify the deeds Medea commits, this provides a reasonable explanation, a background to Medea's action and the things that bring her to that situation, including the cruelty of her father and his misogynistic character. Thus as in the case of Circe, knowing a person's past, their struggle or the circumstances that bring them to their current status, prevents them from being known as mere names in history or literature, as they become fully-fleshed beings with whom you can emphasise and understand. Although refused by Medea, Circe also intends to develop a female solidarity where they can empower and inspire each other because both of them sustain their lives by resisting the patriarchal constraints and traditional gender roles as well as empowering themselves with the help of magic.

Chapter 14 features a highly graphic rape scene which stands as a crucial turning

point for Circe in her journey towards gaining agency and finding her own power. A nameless captain and his crew stop at Circe's island and ask for her hospitality and Circe gives them food and offers them her palace. However, the captain does not realise that she is a goddess and asks for the head of the house: "Then perhaps there is some other host we should thank? An uncle, a brother?" (163). This statement reflects the societal norms where it is unusual for women to live on their own at that time. When the captain learns that there is no man living with her, meaning that nothing requires his and his men's respect according to the codes of hospitality, he abruptly and violently attacks and silences her before allowing Circe the time to cast a spell to protect herself. This horrible scene underlines the importance of her voice as her source of power. Due to her lack of the physical appearance and divine voice of a goddess, Circe relies on magic as her only way to protect herself. By turning those men into pigs and ultimately killing them is her way of responding to the violence of the captain. This also suggests the possible outcome to those who seek to dominate her or to take away her voice.

In this scene, Miller also touches upon the power dynamics between the sexes in ancient Greek society; regardless of her divinity, a mortal man can overpower her and violate her body because she is "alone and a woman, that [is] all that [matters]" (170) to these men who see women as circumscribed by their desires and requests. This traumatic experience contributes to her character development as she undergoes a transformation from a weak and vulnerable woman to a powerful and mighty witch. What happens to Circe also strengthens her connection with witchcraft and makes her focus on improving her abilities as a sorceress. In addition to that, Miller's interpretation of Circe's first act of transforming men into pigs, in opposition to Homer's presentation of her as a monster who naturally possesses evil thoughts, provides a reasonable background to her action and shatters her monstrous and temptress image. Accordingly, this is not the only example Circe encounters; in the following chapters she narrates what happens to those men who think she is vulnerable, weak and easy to take advantage of as follows:

> A few of these, so few I can count them on my fingers, I let go. They did not see me as their dinner. 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 my bed. It was not desire, not even its barest scrapings. It was a sort of rage, a knife I used upon myself. I did it to prove my skin was still my own. (169)

This offers a completely different portrayal of Circe than the ancient texts she partakes in; she is neither a monster who harms or transforms every man who comes to her island without reason, nor does she always take revenge on men since she helps those who have good intentions. Additionally the reason why she has sexual intercourse with some of them is to show that her body belongs only to herself. Thus the more she proves that she is not afraid of men, the more she gains confidence and power. The fact that she turns the brutal and cruel men into pigs, keeping them in the pen near to where she dwells and constantly seeing their sad faces and mournings can be regarded as a reminder of their true selves that they are: "sorry [they] were caught [...] Sorry that [they] thought [she] was weak, but [they] were wrong" (171). Accordingly, Shelby Judge in her dissertation *Contemporary Feminist Adaptations of Greek Myth* analyses Circe's preference of turning men into pigs as:

> In transforming men into pigs, there is a reversal in gendered power dynamics because the men are humiliated and debased, hierarchically demoted to the 'muck', while she is the omnipotent figure that puts them there. The gendered language used to describe the pigs (their 'voluptuous' bodies; their 'delicate split[s]' invoking vaginal imagery; and their 'swollen bellies' suggestive of pregnancy) reinforces this interpretation that the men have been demoted and made effeminate, while she is the matriarch. This is demonstrated when she judges that 'men make terrible pigs' [Miller 172]: the men are pigs in the colloquial sense that they act disrespectfully towards women, but they also fail at being pigs, because they bristle at the debasement. (Judge 162)

Owing to her experience with men that consists of humiliation, objectification, and abuse: "she considers men to be savages and gives them a form to fit her opinion" (Dendle 183), in other words she brings out their truest selves. Accordingly it can be argued that Circe's interactions with men, seeing their brutal and violent sides, pushes her to advance in her magic as well as improving her self-image and confidence. Thus she comments on her transformation as follows:

> When that first crew had come, I had been a desperate thing, ready to fawn on anyone who smiled at me. Now I was a fell witch, proving my power with sty after sty. It reminded me suddenly of those old tests Hermes used to set me. Would I be skimmed milk or a harpy? A foolish gull or a villainous monster? Those could not

still be the only choices. (183)

This passage illustrates that she is aware of the transformation she is undergoing and she is also aware of the fact that this transformation is not necessarily the result of her becoming a dangerous or evil witch but rather a way for her to be an autonomous person. Miller also draws attention to the idea that women do not have to fit into the clear-cut definitions and the binary impositions that limit their choices but rather they are free in becoming who they wish to be.

Miller includes her interpretation of the story regarding Circe and Odysseus in her novel as well. Her interactions with Odysseus are depicted differently than those of the men who try to harm her. Even though their encounter occurs in the same way as Homer's depiction in *The Odyssey*, their relationship is distinctly based on equality and mutual respect, and this nourishes Circe's self-growth as well as her femininity. In spite of Miller's portrayal of Odysseus who treats Circe equally, she does not deny the fact that he grew up in a patriarchal society and still carries its ideology, as illustrated where he compares Helen to Penelope. He describes Helen as: "you will never get the whole truth from her. She has as many coils as a snake, and an eye always to her advantage" (194). The snake metaphor is commonly used for the type of a women who are sexual, manipulative and tempting, which are the typical features of evil women. On the other hand, he refers to Penelope as: "my wife […] She is constant. Constant in all things. Even wise men go astray sometimes, but never her. She is a fixed star, a true-made bow. Nothing she says has a single meaning, nor a single intention, yet she is steady. She knows herself" (194). Penelope is the kind of woman who is regarded as complying with the expectations of the society with her integrity and chastity and thus she is presented as the stereotypical wife image imposed by the patriarchal society. However, Miller's Penelope is not as steady as Odysseus implies but rather she is open-minded and willing to experience new things—after her encounter with Circe, she practices witchcraft. Although his word choices imply that Odysseus favours Penelope over Helen, both women have something in common, which is their intelligence and wit. Therefore, Odysseus' comparison can be regarded as the society's binary view on how a woman should or should not be.

Also, Circe takes credit for herself in this analogy by describing how she sees herself in comparison to Penelope as follows: "when you are in Egypt, you worship Isis;

when in Anatolia, you kill a lamb for Cybele. It does not trespass on your Athena still at home" (pp. 194-195). Although she is a goddess whom Odysseus currently worships and adores, she knows she cannot be compared to Penelope to whom his heart truly belongs and who waits for him at home. Additionally, Circe realises that the things she and Odysseus do together are: "sort of [a] rehearsal […] When he sat by the hearth, when he worked in [her] garden, he was trying to remember the trick of it. How an axe might feel in wood instead of flesh. How he might fit himself to Penelope again, smooth as one of Daedalus' joints" (195). Moreover, it can be argued that through the relationship of Odysseus and Circe, Miller demonstrates the reversal of the position, perspective and role of the two characters. Unlike its narration in Homer's *Odyssey*, Circe in Miller's novel is the main character—hero of her own story, and Odysseus's role is to be her cameo and involved in a part of her life where he aids her in her realisation of her own worth, power and capacity through her journey. Hence, their relationship and the way they see each other do not coincide or comply with the norms of the patriarchal society. In addition to that, at the time of Odysseus' departure, Circe does not stop him or turn him into an animal or entice him with her magic, in fact she supports and assists him because she knows how it feels to be in a place you do not want to be, she respects his decision, as opposed to the way she has been narrated in male myths. Therefore, it can be argued that Miller's Circe is given the chance to alter her misrepresentation in Homer's *Odyssey* both as the embodiment of men's anxiety of female power—her transforming of Odysseus' men into swine, and as the gratification of their sexual fantasies—Circe's position as Odysseus's guide and 'pleaser'. In order to do that, Miller presents Circe as Odysseus' equal— even in a higher position as a goddess of power, vocal, self-assured, unbothered about fitting into the stereotypical image of the woman in men's mind' and as a self-sufficient person.

Miller's novel also consists of the progress of Circe's pregnancy, her experiences as a mother and how motherhood transforms and advances her on her journey. In the beginning of chapter 18, Circe realises that she is pregnant and on a sudden impulse she sends all the nymphs home in order to handle this situation by herself. The gods' cruelty continues at the moment when they do not let Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, to enable Circe to give birth. However, this does not prevent her; she manages to bear her son, Telegonus by cutting him out of her body with the help of a knife and a mirror:

I bared my teeth at the dark and crawled to the kitchen. I seized a knife and dragged

> a great bronze mirror to face me, for there was no Daedalus now to help. I leaned against the marble wall, amid the broken table legs. The coolness of the stone calmed me. This child was no Minotaur, but a mortal. I must not cut too deep. (pp. 211-212)

Thus, she is not only exposed to the psychological abuse of the gods—including her father, but also she is exposed to their cruelty through her physical suffering. She undergoes a considerable change as she becomes a mother; this both empowers her and it also becomes her biggest weakness. She says:

> My whole life, I had waited for tragedy to find me. I never doubted that it would, for I had desires and defiance and powers more than others thought I deserved, all the things that draw the thunderstroke. A dozen times grief had scorched, but its fire had never burned through my skin. My madness in those days rose from a new certainty: that at last, I had met the thing the gods could use against me. (214)

Accordingly Miller provides the reader with a version of Circe that is not depicted in any myth before; Circe as a mother. Motherhood is a topic which is of less interest and only vaguely referred to in the ancient male dominated texts. This again clarifies how important or relevant it is to discuss the hardship of motherhood or the sacrifices a mother makes for her child in their stories in which the ancient male authors take this for granted and minimize it. Even the role of a stereotypical devoted mother is generally minimized in their epics or war stories and they usually die in the end. Also, motherhood is regarded as sacred, and portraying monsters or witches as mothers creates a total contradiction against the purpose of viewing them negatively. By presenting Circe as a mother, Miller draws attention to the extent of her courage, strength and resilience, particularly when she dares Athena, rejecting her request to hand over her son in order for Athena to kill him and threatens her by stating: “you do not know what I can do” (220). It indicates that motherhood undeniably is a huge factor improving Circe’s level of bravery and confidence so that she dares to confront Athena. Beside her motherhood, Circe’s sorcery is another source of her power enabling her to raise her voice, to be more assertive and to show signs of autonomy as illuminated in the part where she casts a spell to protect her son from Athena. The way she uses her magical powers for good intentions also denies the man-made notion of witchcraft as inherently evil.

As Circe and Telegonus continue their residence in Aeaea, a captain and his crew

approach the island and they help them because of Telegonus' insistence. When the captain inquires of Circe whose house this is, Telegonus who is only fifteen at that moment approaches and declares: "you are in the house of the goddess Circe, daughter of Helios, and her son, called Telegonus" (232). Initially, Circe expects a similar story which usually results in Circe transforming those men into pigs as they try to rape her, however, the difference between people's behaviour towards Circe and Telegonus attracts her attention. She realises that the sailors' deference towards Telegonus is not related to Circe's divine status, it is related to the idea that those sailors consider Telegonus as the head of the house. This realization underlines the partial approaches and treatments based on gender and emphasises the systematic discrimination women are exposed to whether they are mortal or immortal.

As illustrated by Miller above, Circe does not become threatening or dangerous towards the people she loves, particularly when they decide to leave her. She feels sorry as in the case of Odysseus and Telegonus but she eventually lets them go and helps them on their journey as well. For Telegonus what she feels and experiences is new to her as a mother, making her feel both fear and strength. For example, in order to empower her son and to protect him from any possible danger on his way, she places herself in danger and dives deep into the sea to challenge Trygon whose tail is so poisonous that: "a single touch would kill a mortal instantly, [and] condemn a great god to an eternity of torment" (243) and from his tail she plans to make a weapon for Telegonus. By putting her life at risk and achieving something that made many hesitated before, including her brother—"You offered the same to my brother?" The offer stands for all. He refused. They always do" (245), she proves herself as a more powerful and courageous deity in contrast to so many others.

Furthermore, in her conversation with Telemachus, Odysseus and Penelope's son, Circe learns another version of Odysseus. With Telemachus' portrayal of his father in chapter 21, Miller highlights the line between truth and appearance which is a matter of the perspective of the teller in her reference to the ancient texts. Telegonus states: "I grieve that I never met the father everyone told me I had" (261). This shows that the Odysseus he knew from the stories is different than the Odysseus he meets in reality. Thanks to Telemachus' explanation, an unknown side of Odysseus emerges; he is arrogant, selfish, cruel and narcissistic, thinking everyone is conspiring against him. Telemachus describes

his father as: "this man of rage was all the father I had" (267). Additionally, he exemplifies how Odysseus humiliates Telemachus when he tries to explain that no one plots against him as:

> 'Do you know,' he said, 'that Achilles went to war at seventeen? And he was not the youngest man at Troy. Boys of thirteen, fourteen, all did themselves proud in the field. I've found that courage is not a matter of age, but true-made spirits.'[…] 'He meant I was a disgrace, of course. A coward. I should have fought off the suitors single-handedly. Was I not fifteen when they first came? I should have been able to shoot his great bow, not just string it. At Troy I would not have lived a day.' (266)

After his speech, Circe compares the days she spends with him to what Telemachus says, and interprets it as: "An idyll, I had called our time. Illusion might have been a better word" (268). This demonstrates that both Circe and Telemachus grew up with a lack of their father's love and are exposed to their abasement. In this regard, Miller also gives the reader the opportunity to look at heroes such as Odysseus and Helios from a different perspective, just as the way Telemachus talks about his father implies how different Odysseus is from how he is portrayed in those myths where he is mainly known for his heroic achievements and less for his role as a husband and a father.

Circe's interaction with Penelope plays a significant role, providing the reader with some important matters about womanhood and female solidarity. Through their friendship Miller problematizes and criticises patriarchal concepts that project women as each other's enemies by claiming them to be jealous creatures. Circe feels that she and Penelope are the two survivors who turn out to be strong individuals and she reflects on the misconception of women by stating: "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" (274). This is one of the instances where Miller presents Circe as breaking the shell that restrains her from finding what she is capable of and where her voice, power, and resistance lie. Additionally she portrays two women who know how to survive no matter what happens to them which is Miller's way to deconstruct the labels, roles and expectations that are associated with women or thought of as female traits. For this reason it can be argued that their bond symbolises the solidarity she sought which was rejected by figures like Pasiphaë and Medea.

On top of her struggles and accomplishments, the climax of her transformation

occurs where Circe confronts her father as a self-assured, powerful and autonomous goddess. She revolts against him and boldly asks for her freedom. In order to gain her freedom she even dares to threaten him: "if you do not see my exile ended, I will expose you again. I will tell Zeus what I did" (312) indicating that she will tell Zeus that she had comforted Prometheus. She stands as a powerful person in front of her father. It is clear that Circe's power does not only emerge from her supernatural skills but from her courage, intelligence and her resistance as well. Thus, she continues to disconcert Helios: "you know I have stood against Athena. I have walked in the blackest deeps. You cannot guess what spells I have cast, what poisons I have gathered to protect myself against you, how your power may rebound upon your head. Who knows what is in me? Will you find out?" (312). In her confrontation with her father thereby gaining autonomy and becoming free, Circe "declares her temerity through her actions like comforting Prometheus, withstanding Athena's force for years, and seizing single-handed the deadly stingray tail of Trygon; risking Helios' deathly wrath" (Alban "Power and Desire" 73).

Circe as a free woman has the romantic relationship she longed for and tried but failed to achieve before meeting Telemachus. Unlike her previous relationships, Circe with Telemachus is someone who is completely confident in her voice and in her being and: "unreliant on anyone else. She wants Telemachus to stay, but for him to do so, she needs to tear down all her barriers; he must know her, with all her faults and flaws. She cannot continue living a half-truth in regard to herself, and she is strong enough to endure Telemachus' rejection, should it come" (Thomas 22). This relationship makes her question and decide what kind of life she desires to pursue; she sees that she does not aspire the life of gods and goddesses because it is static and she does not match their cruel personality. As Miller remarks in one of her interviews:

> Transformation is Circe's greatest gift. Most gods are stagnant by nature; they never have to try, so they never fail, and therefore never learn, grow or change. Circe does all those things, supported by her tremendous will. She is also an artist, and art itself is transformative. An artist forges raw materials into beauty and meaning. That meaning then has the ability to change all those who experience it. (Wiener)

At the end of the novel Circe turns out to be a woman who has created her own life, earned her freedom by herself and most importantly she is a woman who finds the chance to tell her life in her own words and show that she is more than the names, the labels she is

associated with. In the last chapter of the novel, Circe's transformation and growth finalise through her understanding that her divinity and her immortality is not what makes her who she is but rather her decisions. Thus she desires to be a mortal with the same motivation she had at the time she turned Glaucus into an immortal; she is craving for a life that she can build with the people who love her and outside the world of immortals where she belongs. Also, by making such a decision, Circe once again shows that she has the autonomy and the power to form her life and become the person she wishes to be without concern for any rules, norms or expectations that are imposed on her. She just simply wishes to experience "what it means to be alive" (333) by herself.

To conclude, Madeline Miller in her novel *Circe* reimagines the character of Circe who is traditionally known for her witchery, tricks, mistreatment of men, by giving her the opportunity, the agency and the voice to share her own story. This viewpoint allows Circe to recount her experiences not only as a witch but also as a child, as a woman, as a lover, as a mother and possibly as a mortal. In the novel, Miller explains that "the work of retelling: "doesn't cast […] Circe into a different role. It merely appropriates her story and already existing associations into an elaborate space, i.e., a space of her own" (qtd. in Raczyńska). Unlike the male-authored texts that project Circe as an arrogant, jealous, deceitful, greedy and violent witch, Miller's portrayal reveals the struggles that shape Circe into an autonomous, confident, intelligent and powerful witch. Hence Miller crushes the established patriarchal ideology that limits women's capacity by assigning them to certain roles, discriminating against them in accordance to their preferences and ignoring their personality by way of demonstrating how deeply these biases are rooted in literature through a mythological character such as Circe.

Through her self-exploration, Circe occasionally shows her dissatisfaction with the way women are represented in those myths noting that: "humbling women seems to me a chief pastime of poets. As if there can be no story unless we crawl and weep" (181). Miller demonstrates that women's role are not necessarily the dramatic material to cry and suffer in men's writings, but rather they can become the bard of their own story and reflect their own experience. Also the novel offers an alternative version to Circe's story where she positions her as the main character who evolves into an independent, autonomous and powerful witch. By employing a contemporary feminist perspective, Miller critiques the constructed notions and roles about gender identity without praising

one sex or belittling the other. In addition to that, the purpose of Miller's decision to rewrite the story of a mythological female character is to illustrate how much patriarchal discourse affects the perception of woman. In order to do that Miller provides a background to Circe's life, her familial relationships, her process of becoming an expert in witchcraft, her discovery of womanhood and motherhood. This makes Circe a well-rounded character with whom might empathise and understand her motivations and developments. Importantly, the novel sheds light on the power of storytelling and the story teller's role in shaping characters and plots. Thus Madeline Miller draws attention to the matter of perception and preference and how the ancient literary texts affect the way we perceive gender identity and social roles in the novel *Circe*. Even though the novel revolves around the character of Circe, it includes other mythological characters such as Medea, Penelope, Odysseus and Telemachus, almost all of whom are narrated differently than they are known in the ancient texts. Miller's addition of different perspectives to the well-known characters of Greek mythology reveals the misogynistic archetypes in ancient literary works. For example, Penelope's prominent features are not her devotion but rather her self-sufficiency and her strength, and Odysseus is not the mighty hero that everyone praises and adores but an arrogant man who is blinded by power and fame. By revising these characters along with Circe, Miller not only criticises the literature that diminishes and misrepresenting the role of female characters but also elevates the power, resistance and individuality of such women throughout the novel.

For these reasons, Madeline Miller's novel *Circe* can be regarded as a ground-breaking literary work redefining a predominant classical mythological character and challenging socially established gender roles and norms. By rewriting the story of Circe, who is generally misrepresented, castigated and slighted in ancient texts, and making her the protagonist, Miller gives her the opportunity to convey her life experiences as an empowered individual. Miller's representation of Circe and other mythological characters therefore invites the reader to question and re-evaluate the myths, tales and stories that have constructed cultural perceptions of gender roles.

The following chapter will include the analysis and comparison of another female figure from classical mythology, Phaedra. First the representation of Phaedra in the works of the ancient authors will be examined and then it will be compared to the contemporary rewriting of Laura Shepperson and how she revises and treats Phaedra in her novel. The

main focus will be on the differences between the discourses on both sides and how far this influences the way we perceive gender.

CHAPTER IV: FROM AN EVIL WHORE TO POWERFUL WOMAN

4.1 Phaedra the Wicked Stepmother

Ancient literature consists of many notable characters—predominantly male, who appear in the legends, epics, myths and plays written by well-known authors. These literary works ranging from ancient Greek to Roman periods reflect the societal standpoint of their time through their plots, characters and settings. Indicative of the era, it is a highly patriarchal environment where people, especially women, are subjected to immense restrictions concerning their nature, sexuality, identity and freedom. Misogynistic doctrines permeate these literary creations, serving as vehicles perpetuating such ideologies across generations. Consequently, the fate of these female characters as well as women in such societies, are highly limited. Such characters are rarely known for positive connotations while the majority are castigated for their negative portrayal due to their cruelty, heresy and mischievous behaviour. In addition to that, how these characters are perceived heavily relies on societal views of sexuality. Thus it can be argued that the binary oppositions are valid both between the genders and among female characters themselves in these writings. Therefore these women are constantly silenced, overlooked, simplified, and objectified at the hands of ancient male writers for many ages.

In such situations in which "self-sacrifice or martyrdom is [considered as] the standard way for a woman to achieve renown among men [and] self-assertion earns a woman an evil reputation" (Pomeroy 109), Phaedra, as an exception, is known for both her evil reputation and her self-sacrifice in mythological accounts. The daughter of the king of Crete, Minos and the queen Pasiphaë, Phaedra is one of the remarkable female figures taking part both in the ancient Greek and Roman literature. Based on the one and only myth concerning Phaedra, her husband, Theseus and his son, Hippolytus, she has a reputation as an adulterous and deceitful woman. Even though each mythological account shows some changes in the narration, what remains is Phaedra's immoral thoughts and actions. Hence, the fact that she is depicted as a seductress, cheater, and a liar in each story while the male characters seemingly have no share in her deeds projects ancient male authors' partial and misogynistic perspectives on women through her character. Some of the most notable works Phaedra partakes in are written by both Greek and Roman poets such as Euripides, Ovid and Seneca. In each of these phallocentric texts, she is constantly disregarded, mistreated and denigrated for what she intends, her sinful and

corrupted feelings and behaviour. In these writings the stereotypical stepmother image is worsened by bringing Phaedra's sexuality under the spotlight, and as a result she is projected as a warning to expose women's nature and capabilities. However, the information about her inner self and her psychological status are ignored. Importantly, her background including: "the circumstances leading up to her wedding to Theseus are not known" (Halleran xxii). Therefore, it can be inferred that presenting Phaedra as merely an adulteress is their preference for projecting her as a naturally evil woman.

The first and best-known mythological work written about Phaedra is Euripides' play, *Hippolytus*. He has two plays under the same name, but only the later one has survived. The play basically delves into the taboo situation between Phaedra and her stepson Hippolytus. According to Euripides' narration, Phaedra is married to Theseus for a while and has children with him, but Theseus does not appear until the end of the play. Consequently, the majority of the play revolves around Phaedra's struggle for her forbidden love towards Hippolytus and the tragic outcome when this is revealed. Rather than reflecting an archetypical stepmother image, Euripides portrays "the 'love' of this stepmother for her stepson [as] not of a selfless maternal kind—and therefore unnatural for a stepmother—but [as] a sexual passion that is shameless, since it is she who takes the initiative, adulterous, since she is a married woman, and—in Roman eyes at least—incestuous" (Watson 20). In addition to that she also does not fit into the other stepmother archetype which is "traditionally hateful towards her stepchildren" (Mayer 42). In this sense, she can be regarded as the worst of her kind due to her incestuous and adulterous intentions towards Hippolytus.

Up until her death, Phaedra is in a constant struggle "between an interior self and her external image in the eyes of society" (Zeitlin 270), as she ultimately sacrifices herself to protect this external image. Accordingly, in most of his plays including *Hippolytus*: "reputation is what Euripides makes most important for the woman, and if this is lost, then the result should be like the end of Phaedra" (O'Neal pp.118-119). Nonetheless, when it comes to man, reputation is not as fragile as woman's since they are free to do almost anything. For example, while male characters like Theseus have committed any kind of adulterous deeds in numerous literary works in which they rape, abuse and treat women however they wish, whether they are married or not, for a married woman to have any feelings for a man and not even acting upon it knowing it to be wrong, is considered

as the most disgraceful behaviour of a woman. Even though she kills herself to save her and her children's reputation, this does not prevent her from being referred to as a whore. Respectively, as the title of the play suggests, the story is written to praise the righteousness of men who are presented as innocent and virtuous characters—no matter how dark their past is in other stories. Yet women, in particular Phaedra, is portrayed as a malevolent whore who is not as valuable as Hippolytus, the dedicated virgin. Regarding that, Hippolytus is devised as the protagonist while Phaedra is the antagonist of the play. Thus it can be argued that the play's title stands to emphasise Phaedra's wickedness as well as Euripides' misogynistic approach. On this matter, Philip Vellacott, the translator of the play, reflects his opinions on how far this play mirrors the ancient Greek society's view on woman as follows:

> The fact that Euripides was known in his day as a hater of women and not as a hater of men simply reflects the fact that the majority of men in his audience, watching the behaviour of Jason, Hippolytus, Admetus, Demophon, Agamemnon, Orestes, did not feel that these heroes' acts and attitudes were greatly unlike their own or were being held up for censure at all; while in watching Phaedra many of them knew at once that she was a whore, and did not trouble to listen to her words, which show her as a passionately moral woman. And it is not unfair to say that many scholars who in the past century and a half have interpreted these plays for the less learned have done so from a social standpoint comparable with that of the average Athenian of Euripides' day; while in fact one purpose to which Euripides' work as a whole is dedicated is to hold up to ironic question and criticism the attitude to life and its problems held by most men in his audience. (11)

Hence Euripides' treatment of both sexes illustrates how women and men are regarded in society such that people—in this case the audience, are not interested in Phaedra's intentions, inner conflicts or her endless feeling of shame and agony stemming from her affection towards Hippolytus but they simply label her as a whore. The play begins with Aphrodite[2]'s entrance so as to provide the audience with a background to the play. She remarks her despite for Hippolytus' worship of Artemis, the virgin goddess rather than her and she explains how she will punish him for that by making his step mother, Phaedra fall in love with him. She says:

[2] She is also referred to as Cypris throughout the play.

I will reveal the matter to Theseus and it will be brought to light.
As for the young man who wars against me,
his father will kill him with the curses the lord of the sea,
Poseidon, gave to Theseus as a gift,
that he could pray to the god three times not in vain.
Phaedra will keep her good reputation,
but still she will die. For I do not value her suffering more
than my enemy's paying me
such a penalty that I am satisfied. (*Hippolytus* lines 42-50)

Aphrodite's speech reveals that Phaedra does not intentionally develop feelings for Hippolytus but rather she is a victim of Aphrodite, just like Hippolytus. However, this evident information is disregarded throughout the play and does not prevent Phaedra from being represented as a woman of corrupted desires and deceptive personality. Also the range of selfishness and cruelty of the gods and goddesses towards mortals, as in the case of Phaedra who pays for it with her life, is emphasised at the very beginning of the play. Since Aphrodite's focus is on Hippolytus rather than Phaedra, she is not concerned about what will happen to Phaedra, thence she is used as a tool in Aphrodite's plan. Subsequently, from the beginning of the play to her death, Phaedra is in a state of constant anguish and shame for what she experiences. Her suffering is visible, as the chorus—consisting of the women of Troezen[3], utters:

that she wastes away in bed with a sickness, and keeps
herself within
the house, and delicate robes
shadow her blond head. (lines 131-134)

The word 'sickness' is continually used to express Phaedra's feeling for Hippolytus and the cure to this sickness is implied as Phaedra's death. To liken the feeling of love which is normally considered as a positive and pure emotion, with sickness, is to underline the wrongness of the situation. Accordingly, the Nurse also has an important role in the play such as the parts where she convinces Phaedra to reveal what is troubling her and her conversation with Hippolytus. During their conversation, Phaedra mentions her mother

[3] The setting of the play is Troezen where Hippolytus has received his training since childhood. Also, the reason why Theseus is absent at the moment is because he is in exile for murdering the king of Troezen.

and sister's ill-fated lives in relation to their love affairs—"O wretched mother, what a passion you had!"(337) / "And you, my poor sister, wife of Dionysus!"(339), and she refers to herself as: "the third unfortunate one" (341). Kenneth Reckford in his article "Phaedra and Pasiphae: The Pull Backward" comments on the repetition of the unlucky fate of the women in Phaedra's family as:

> Phaedra may have represented herself as a victim of the family curse, like her mother Pasiphae who loved the bull: the cause is still Aphrodite, who hates the offspring of the Sun god who revealed her adultery with Ares. Thus Phaedra's affliction has many precedents, being encouraged by Theseus' irresponsible (and typically male) behavior, inherited from poor Pasiphae, and ordained by Aphrodite. (311)

Hence it cannot be completely regarded as a family curse but rather Aphrodite's never-ending grudge against certain people with whom she has relations. When Phaedra tells the Nurse along with the chorus her affection towards Hippolytus, she declares her solution to this as follows:

> When passion wounded me, I started to consider how
> I might best bear it. So I began with this,
> to keep quiet about this disease and conceal it;
> for nothing can be trusted to the tongue, which knows how
> to admonish the thoughts of others,
> but itself comes to possess the most evils by its own doing. (Lines 392-397)

As it is imposed through binary oppositions, silence has always been associated with women, while assertion belongs to the male sex. Thus Phaedra's choice of muteness demonstrates embracing her role as a proper woman according to the dictates of the society. In addition to that, the reason why she plans to mute her feelings is the fact that it is forbidden, and also if it is known, it will ruin her reputation as a woman and as a mother because she: "[knows] well that [she is] a woman, /an object of hatred to all (lines 406-407). Hence, she considers death as her only way to purify herself from the sin she thinks of committing. Subsequently, the Nurse plans to make an enchantment to end Phaedra's feelings towards Hippolytus and for her to do that she needs a token from him. Phaedra warns the Nurse not to tell anything to Hippolytus, however, in the following scene she witnesses the conversation between the Nurse and Hippolytus where she

realises that her secret is being revealed. Hippolytus who earlier gives promises to the Nurse not to expose the secret she shared with him, is outraged and bursts out with his hatred for all woman kind as:

Zeus, why did you establish women in the sun's light
as counterfeit, an evil for human beings?
If you wanted to propagate the human race,
you should not have provided this from women,
but mortals ought to place bronze or iron
or a weight of gold in your temples
and buy offspring in exchange for a set value,
each one for its price,
and then dwell in their homes free, with no females. (Lines 616-624)

His thoughts on women not only illustrate his misogynistic tendencies but also mirror the broader societal attitudes towards women in ancient Greece. His despite for women continues as he explicitly states his negative views:

it's clear that a woman is a great evil:
a father who has begotten and reared her, gives a dowry in addition,
and sends her out of the house so he can be rid of the evil.
And the man who in turn takes this ruinous creature into his house
rejoices when he adds a pretty ornament
to the worst statue, and he toils, wretched one,
to deck her out with robes, while draining the prosperity of the house (lines 627-633)

Phaedra, who hears Hippolytus' statements, devises a calculated plan to protect her own reputation. While her action aims at safeguarding her public image, it serves to destroy Hippolytus's name and influence:

But in death I will be a bane for the other,
so that he may learn not to be haughty
at my ills; and by sharing this disease
in common with me he will learn to be moderate. (Lines 728-731)

Up until this moment, Phaedra may be regarded as relatively innocent, given that her initial feelings for Hippolytus are not her choice. However, her subsequent actions are

portrayed as she enacts a plan that ultimately results in Hippolytus' downfall. This indicates that she consciously causes his death in order to protect her own name. In addition to that, Hippolytus' knowledge of Phaedra's secret compels her to think strategically in the sense that she suppresses her feelings and begins to think of herself and her children because: "what Phaedra fears most is Hippolytus' tongue and its ability to defame her" (Mueller 150). When Phaedra's hanging body is found by the Nurse and the chorus, Theseus enters, realises his wife is dead and tries to learn what has happened. Then he sees Phaedra's letter in her hand and is shaken even more after he reads what is written on it—"Hippolytus dared to touch my marriage bed/by force, showing no honor for the revered eye of Zeus" (lines 885-886). Considering the letter's context, it can be argued that: "in writing her letter, Phaedra is as interested in avenging her unrequited desire as she is in protecting her own reputation" (Mueller 173). As if her incestuous and adulterous intentions were not sufficient, the idea that she seeks revenge due to not receiving a reciprocation of her love further degrades Phaedra's character. Her false accusation positions her as a woman who takes revenge against the man who rejects her and this portrayal as a selfish and cruel woman contributes significantly to her negative reputation in literature. Consequently, Euripides' preference for presenting her in this light compels him to reveal the inherent malice within her in a more explicit manner.

Subsequently, Theseus determines to use one of the three curses his father, Poseidon once granted him. In addition to that, he banishes Hippolytus from the country. During their confrontation Hippolytus makes an attempt to defend himself and protect his honor by dispraising Phaedra and implying her wicked nature:

> What it was she feared that she destroyed her life,
> I don't know, for it's not right for me to say more.
> She who was unable to be virtuous acted virtuously,
> but I who was able to be so did not make good use of it. (Lines 1032-1035)

His speech implies that Phaedra is a liar and unchaste woman, yet his oath of silence keeps him from revealing the whole truth. In comparison to Phaedra's dead body and her letter, Hippolytus' words are not adequate to make Theseus believe in him. In light of that, Phaedra's accusation of Hippolytus with such a hideous crime can be explained in two ways:

On the surface, Phaedra wishes to preserve her children's good fame and her own;

she will not bring shame to her family, nor will she face Theseus over shameful matters (the discovery of her love for Hippolytus) just to spare one life (her own). But there is another, covert sequence of meaning. Phaedra will ensure good fame (for her children and herself) and reap the additional benefit of destroying her now-enemy, Hippolytus. (Reckford 325)

Thanks to her plan, she succeeds in protecting her and her children's reputation by positioning herself as the victim of a cruel man, Hippolytus, and damaging his reputation. However, this does not last for long as Artemis descends from the sky and reveals the whole truth to Theseus after Hippolytus is terminally wounded:

For stung by the goads
of the goddess most hateful to us who take delight in virginity,
she fell in love with your son;
and trying to overcome Cypris with her reason
she was destroyed, against her will, by the contrivances of her Nurse,
who, after she obtained his oath, revealed the sickness to your son.
And he, as was in fact just, did not go along
with these words, nor in turn, since he is pious by birth,
did he retract the pledge of his oath when he was abused by you.
And she, in fear that she would be found out,
wrote lying letters and destroyed
your son by her tricks, but still she persuaded you. (Lines 1301-1312)

The play ends with Hippolytus' death after his reunion with his father and symbolically with his dignity. Consequently, in this play, Euripides demonstrates Phaedra's conflict between her bodily desires and her reputation and he compares her with a chaste and virtuous man, Hippolytus, who does not fall for her evil intentions. Even though both Phaedra and Hippolytus are the victims of the jealousy of the goddess, Aphrodite, and equally innocent, the side favoured by Euripides is evident from the title of the play. Euripides illustrates his androcentric world view throughout the play, especially through the characters. He portrays Phaedra as a vocal character but his aim in this is to let her express her disgraceful personality by herself. Although she is assertive, Phaedra constantly wishes to be silent as she is afraid of the consequences of her feelings and she eventually reaches the ultimate silence by way of death. In addition to her infidelity, she

is selfish and a liar as she lies about being raped by only thinking of herself and her children and disregarding what will happen to Hippolytus' reputation and his fate. In other words: "she can cast aside the moral restraints of the society in which she lives and tries to seduce her stepson. When she fails, she plans his murder and makes her suicide the guaranty of his guilt" (Grene 55).

Thanks to Euripides' preferences in portraying her as such, none of Phaedra's attempts to save her name are accomplished at the end and she is remembered for her adultery, incestuous urges and immorality, not by her struggle to protect her chastity or the reputation of her children in this literary work. Euripides' Phaedra may also legitimize the myth that: "women lie about rape because they are malevolent and trying to entrap or punish innocent men ("Phaedra" Haynes). On the other hand, the men in the play—Hippolytus and Theseus, are pictured as noble, decent and honourable figures in spite of their background or the given information about them in the play. There is no background to Phaedra's marriage to Theseus or the way Theseus treats her and the given information including Hippolytus' view on women is disregarded. Additionally, Hippolytus who is an openly misogynistic person is presented as a decent man and the victim of his stepmother's incestuous desires as if: "sexual folly is not inherent in men, / but [only] in women" (Lines 966-967), as Theseus expresses it. Hence Euripides' mere focus on Phaedra's wrongdoings and praise of his male characters cause Phaedra to be castigated and blamed in the play. Therefore, the discrepancy in the portrayal of both sexes in Euripides's *Hippolytus* makes this play the tragedy of Hippolytus and the wickedness of Phaedra. Also, it clearly affirms Euripides's use of patriarchal discourse in his work.

Phaedra also partakes in the works of the Roman poets. The second work she is included in is Ovid's *Heroides* and she is also mentioned in another of his works, *Metamorphoses*. *Heroides* is an epistolary poem consisting of twenty-one letters and each letter is composed by a mythological female figure for their partner such as Penelope to Ulysses, Medea to Jason, Briseis to Achilles, and in this context Phaedra to Hippolytus. In his introduction, Harold Isbell, the translator of the play, informs about letter writing of women in antiquity as follows:

> Of the early letters all are written by women and all, with the exception of Sappho's, are written by figures found in classical myth. In every case these early letters are written by women to lovers who are now for a rich variety of reasons absent and

> whose absence may well be permanent. Some of these women are quite helpless when confronted by such a situation, while others fairly bristle with threats of either suicidal or homicidal destruction. Most write out of an erotic experience fully consummated and in many cases with offspring near at hand. Only one—Phaedra—writes in the hope of first enticing, then seducing, an aloof and virginal young man. (Isbell 9)

Sergio Casali points out the aim of Phaedra's expressing herself through writing both in Euripides' and Ovid's works as: "Phaedra is a character who (in literary history) has already written a famous letter—the letter by which, in Euripides' second Hippolytus, she falsely accuses her stepson, condemning him to death. Now Phaedra writes an elegiac letter, a letter of seduction" (Casali 1). It shows that, in each situation both authors follow similar patterns in portraying her; she fails to protect her chastity both as a mother and as a wife due to her intentions implying her infidelity and incestuous desires. Accordingly, in Ovid's version, Phaedra is pictured as a lustful and wicked older woman[4] who has an unhappy marriage and seeks a younger man's attention:

> Although Phaedra is closer in age to Hippolytus than to her husband, she is still to be regarded as an older woman, especially in terms of experience (whereas he is sexually uninitiated, she already has two children by Theseus when she meets her stepson for the first time); in other words, the myth centres on a relationship between an adolescent stepson and his older (but still youthful) stepmother. (Watson 89)

As she implies that she is a virgin at the beginning of the letter—"I offer you a purity long preserved" (Heroides 31), and then contradicting herself in the middle of it by mentioning her marriage and her children, might be explained as Ovid makes use of Phaedra's unreliability and humiliates her by having her expose her own lies. Ann De Vito explains this matter as:

> In a case where the letter-writer is hiding the truth from her addressee—or from herself—the poet must portray both the character's real and pretended situation through her own words, without benefit of guiding narration […] Because the poet

[4] Even though Phaedra begins her letter by stating "A girl from Crete sends her greeting to a man" (31), then she indicates the age gap between her and Hippolytus as "love that comes after youth/always burns with a harsher passion" (31).

> does not interrupt Phaedra's letter with narration, the reader is left with some unanswered questions: it is difficult to determine precisely, for example, whether Phaedra is trying to deceive Hippolytus or herself with her exaggerations. (pp. 324-325)

However, in either case, she is the one to blame as a woman who has both incestuous and adulterous intentions. This can also be explained as her level of passion for Hippolytus is so high that she becomes self-deceptive. Moreover, the author's preference for assigning Phaedra as the voice of this letter contributes to the portrayal of Theseus and Hippolytus as innocent and virtuous men since one of them is betrayed by his wife and the other is the victim of his stepmother' immoral plans. Also the stepmother herself utters her wicked and lustful thoughts in order to convince her stepson. From the beginning to the end of the letter, Phaedra is highly persistent in convincing Hippolytus to: "be equal in [her] guilt" (31). Efrossini Spentzou draws attention to Phaedra's physicality and how it violates the way the patriarchal society functions, as follows:

> The erotic gaze of desire has been traditionally associated with the assertion of patriarchal power. The gaze focused on a woman has been repeatedly read as accentuating the woman's passivity, just as it reduces her to the state of an inanimate object. Betraying signs of tacit vigour […] Phaedra's long and sensual depiction of Hippolytus' physical charms [signifies] the potential for a reversal of the traditional power relations between the impotent heroines and the all-powerful heroes. (92)

Her potential to replace her position from being the object to the subject of desire poses a great threat to the patriarchal ideology that defines women's identity and sexuality as lack, passive and inferior. In addition to that, in *Classical Mythology*, Morford and Lenardon explains how binary oppositions exist among mythological figures with reference to Hippolytus and Phaedra:

> The Greeks and Romans were fascinated with the phenomena of blinding passion and equally compulsive virginity. The passion was usually evoked by the mighty gods Aphrodite and Eros, who could gloriously uplift or pitilessly devastate a human being and a god. The equally ruthless force of chastity was symbolized by devotion to Artemis. Usually, but by no means always, the man defines lust and the woman chastity. In the case of Hippolytus and Phaedra (among others) these roles are reversed. (20)

That is why, by presenting Phaedra as a lustful and immoral woman, ancient male authors contribute to the perpetuation of this idea that sexual women are a threat to the workings of the society and its norms. For this reason, regardless of the literary works in which she is portrayed as assertive through her speech or writing, she is eventually reassigned to her womanhood by way of death and in the version where she is not dead, she is castigated for her vices. Similar to Euripides' narration, Ovid includes the part where Phaedra relates her adulterous and incestuous desires for Hippolytus with her lineage. What she means by that is the fact that her mother is raped by a bull and bears the Minotaur and her sister Ariadne helped Theseus to escape from the maze, eloped with him and then he deserted her. Theseus, who later marries Phaedra does not appear to treat his wife properly as she states: "Theseus and his son together have been the destruction of we two sisters" (*Heroides* 32). Phaedra's addition of extra knowledge about her past life indicates that she was not Theseus' first choice and he marries her out of a political arrangement which suggests that their marriage is solely based on a contract made between two countries. Accordingly, she compares herself with Hippolytus by stating:

> We have both been deeply hurt by Theseus.
> With his club he crushed my brother's bones
> and scattered them over the soil; then he left
> my sister helpless with the wild beasts.
> Your mother was a most courageous warrior
> and worthy to bear such a strong son.
> Where is she? She is dead, speared by Theseus. (*Heroides* pp. 33-34)

Phaedra's explanation might provide evidence indicating Theseus' cruel and misogynistic personality such that he does not give any value to the women in his life or treat them justly since "stories about the marriages of Theseus […] neither begin well nor have happy endings" ("Phaedra" Haynes). As the main focus of *Heroides* is Phaedra's persuasion of Hippolytus into an incestuous relationship, the facts she mentions above, including Theseus killing Hippolytus' mother, might be considered as Ovid's portrayal of Phaedra as devising an evil plan to make Hippolytus hate his father or even provoke him to revenge against Theseus. Her continuing disturbing questions support this claim: "I ask you, why did they not marry? / Why, unless perhaps he feared you as rival" (*Heroides* 34).

Ovid also includes Phaedra in his other renowned work, *Metamorphoses*. Specifically, in the section titled "Egeria and Hippolytus", the focus shifts to an episode where Hippolytus recounts his story to Egeria, wife of Numa Pompilius, who is the second king of Rome. Hippolytus provides a detailed account of the series of events that have led to his current predicament. He narrates what has befallen him as:

> Once Pasíphaë's daughter, Phaedra,
> failed to make me betray my father by sharing her bed,
> and then denounced me for wanting what she herself had been guilty
> of wanting. Perhaps she feared I would give her away, or was angry
> because I rejected her love. At any rate, I was convicted;
> although I had done no wrong, my father expelled me from Athens
> and laid a deadly curse on my head as I went into exile. (*Metamorphoses* 478).

In this version, Ovid provides the reader with Hippolytus' explanation of what has happened to him after Phaedra's plan did not work and the way he talks about Phaedra reveals his thoughts on her. In addition to that, the exclusion of the Nurse's role from the plot contributes to Ovid' aim to demonstrate Phaedra as the centre of condemnation. For these reasons, Ovid's portrayal of Phaedra both in *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* as the deceitful woman who fails to be a proper example of her kind, as a mother and as a wife, shows his thoughts on women as threatening and lustful creatures. In addition to that the involvement of Hippolytus' side in *Metamorphoses* and his word preferences to describe Phaedra can be considered as proving Ovid's misogynistic discourse in his works.

The other Roman work Phaedra partakes in is Seneca' tragedy *Phaedra*. The play mainly follows a similar plot with Euripides and Ovid's works with slight differences in details. In this version, she is pictured as a married woman who longs for her husband in his absence[5]. Her sexual side is presented more obviously both towards Theseus and Hippolytus. Also Phaedra is depicted more shamelessly in comparison to the previous works she takes part in. Despite her sinful act, she behaves as a desperate lover. Following a similar pattern as Euripides and Ovid, Seneca projects the reason of her desperation as not only her forbidden love but also the family lineage that almost entraps every woman in her family with sinful love affairs. As she utters: "The women of Crete can never/ enjoy

[5] In this version, the reason of Theseus' absence is depicted as he descends to the underworld to abduct the goddess, Proserpina (in Greek Persephone) for his friend, Pirithous.

an easy love. They always have monstrous affairs" (*Phaedra* Act I lines 27-28). By 'monstrous affairs,' Phaedra might refer to the bull with which her mother has intercourse, resulting in the birth of the Minotaur. Additionally, her sister Ariadne suffers from a love affair when she aids Theseus in killing the Minotaur, only to be abandoned by him later on an island. Hence, Phaedra views herself as a victim of a family curse, though her victimhood is not depicted in any mythological narratives she is included in. Accordingly, her way of linking the sexual desires she develops for her stepson to the unfortunate fate of the women in her family can be viewed as a rationalisation of her wicked impulses. Thus, in a way, she justifies her actions by presenting herself as innocent yet doomed to live in accordance with the family inheritance and the goddesses' preferences. In this regard, it can be argued that Seneca portrays her as a deceptive and highly sexual woman.

This draws attention to the idea of Seneca's choice to name his play as *Phaedra*. While Euripides' preference of assigning the title of his play as *Hippolytus* is for the purpose of underlining his innocence and casting Phaedra in the role of antagonist of the play, one might assume Seneca does the same with his play by naming it after Phaedra. However, it serves a different purpose. The possible reason why Seneca titles his play as *Phaedra* is to expose the darker aspects of her character. By doing so, Seneca not only underscores Phaedra's malevolence but also presents the play as a cautionary story about the destructive nature of female wickedness. This narrative choice seems similar to how Euripides portrayed Medea in his play. Moreover, Roland Mayer in his book *Seneca: Phaedra* explains the difference in Seneca's portrayal of her as:

> Seneca's Phaedra is no one's accomplice or cat's paw. She incriminates Hippolytus deliberately, and dies in the full knowledge of her own wickedness in compassing the death of an innocent man, a deed for which she cannot be forgiven. Thus Seneca is, unexpectedly for a Stoic, the complete realist: on his telling of the myth, there is no divine scheme which sets the agenda for the human actors. Everyone in this play acts as they choose to; passion overwhelms reason, but the passion is not imposed or directed from above. So the human soul is not besieged by some external enemy, rather it becomes the battleground of an internal, civil war. The characters work against themselves and each other, but not against a god. This is in effect a new kind of tragedy, operating upon a purely human plane. (46)

As Mayer mentions, the biggest difference is Seneca's preference of reducing the role of

divine intervention. This, in turn, increases the characters' conscious actions and alters the way the characters are regarded. In particular, this breaks the sincerity and reliability of Phaedra's character and her actions. Due to Seneca's interpretation, Phaedra's image is worsened and she is demonstrated as the villainous stepmother who seeks revenge by having her stepson killed after her love goes unrequited. Considering that, Phaedra's shifting her blame to her heredity is a great example of her possession of self-knowledge. Her destructive plan and selfishness also exemplify her evil nature. Contrary to the earlier interpretations, Seneca's Phaedra explicitly talks about her unfortunate fate to Nurse. The Nurse, in response, provides a strategic advice to help Phaedra manage the situation without harming her reputation. The Nurse says:

> There are two ways to be good. First: want the right
> things, no straying.
> The second is knowing and setting a limit to one's sins
> [.....]
> Sinners are worse than monsters.
> Monsters are caused by fate, but sin by character
> [.....]
> even if the holy powers favour you, and hide
> your wicked sexual acts, and if adultery
> is guaranteed the safety that great crimes never get—
> what of your instant punishments: bad conscience and fear,
> and a guilty heart which always fears itself?
> Women may sin unpunished, but never get off scot-free. (*Phaedra* Act I lines 140-164)

What is implied by the Nurse's speech is the importance of morality and how it should limit and control one's evil desires because committing a sin is considered as a conscious act, however, being a monster is a product of fate; in this sense, sinners are viewed as worse. Regarding that, the Nurse suggests Phaedra restrict her wrongful feelings and desires as she will eventually face with internal torment even if she would not face with punishment. However, she replies as:

> I know the things you say
> are true: but my lust forces me to follow

the worst decision. My mind knows but it wanders,

yearning for wise advice, and tries in vain to return.

[….....]

What can reason do? Passion, passion rules. (Act I lines 177-184)

Throughout Seneca's *Phaedra*, the protagonist expresses her dilemma between moral restraints and immoral desires, and eventually her immoral thoughts win. Despite her awareness of the moral dimensions of her actions, Phaedra's overpowering emotions ultimately prevail, reflecting the stereotypical woman driven by excessive emotionalism and irrationality. Since she cannot control what she feels, she hopes to protect her prestige: "The love that will not be governed must be conquered. Honour, I will not let you be tainted" (Act I lines 251-252). This assertion highlights her determination to maintain her social prestige even as she struggles with her uncontrollable desires. Act I ends with the chorus' ode:

when love gives commands;

old resentments yield to the fires of love.

What more can I say? Love conquers

even the fiercest creatures: stepmothers. (Lines 354-357)

There is a pun made with the word 'conquer' inferring that Phaedra will come off worse in this situation and her honour will be the one defeated at the end. Accordingly, the Nurse who tries to convince Phaedra to suppress her ill desires and fails, now attempts to persuade Hippolytus to have a companion, however, Hippolytus who hates woman and any kind of sexual act rejects her suggestion by stating:

Woman is the root of all evil. Full of her wicked schemes,

she lays siege to men's minds. How many cities have burned

because of their adulteries! How many wars they have caused,

how many kingdoms overturned, how many enslaved! (Act II lines 559-562)

His abhorrence towards the female sex is clearly noticeable and vivid in this version as well. Different than other authors, Seneca includes the conversation between Phaedra and Hippolytus and this demeans and worsens Phaedra's image in the literary history as she overtly entices Hippolytus into her sexual intentions:

Hippolytus: Mother, please tell me what your trouble is.

Phaedra: 'Mother'! that heavy title means too much.

A lowlier name would suit my feelings better; Hippolytus call me 'sister', or 'hand-maiden'—yes, call me your slave, I will serve you in every way. (Act II lines 608-612)

The way she talks to Hippolytus leads her to her own humiliation and starkly conflicts her plan to protect her reputation since Phaedra offers herself to be his slave. Hippolytus who has just learn the bitter truth about Phaedra's feelings, contemplates the situation as follows:

So, am I good for adultery?
Did I seem easy fodder to fulfil your fantasies,
the only man for such a crime? Is this restraint's reward?
No woman in the world can match your wickedness!
You have dared an evil worse than your mother's, mother
of the monster. You are worse. She only polluted
herself with her own foul lust; she did not talk about it; (Act II lines 684-690)

What Hippolytus means is that not only her having feelings for her stepson but also her openly speaking about it is inappropriate for a woman. Hippolytus, as a patriarchal figure, thinks Phaedra is in a position lower than her mother. Then, he takes his sword out to kill Phaedra but then he throws it away, realizing that this is what Phaedra wants. Knowing Hippolytus will not change his mind about her and is also now cognisant of Phaedra's secret, drives the Nurse to devise a plan:

Her guilt is out. Why slow to act, my soul?
We will flip the crime around, accuse him
of adultery: crime must be hidden by crime.
When you are afraid, the safest way is straight ahead.
Whether we initiated crime or suffered it,
what witness could know, when guilt is hidden?
Help! Help! Come, Athenian women, faithful servants,
bring help! Hippolytus-the rapist! He is assaulting us! (Act II lines 719-726)

The change in the Nurse's behaviour from defending Phaedra's self-restrain and morality to falsely accusing Hippolytus in order to protect her name is suggestive of Seneca's thoughts on the manipulative and deceptive nature of women. In act III, Theseus returns home, sees his wife in agony and asks Phaedra to tell him her problem. She hesitates first

but then shares what is troubling her: "I resisted his pleas, my heart did not yield/ to physical threats; but my body put up with the violence. /My blood will wash away this taint to purity" (Act III Lines 891-893). Rebecca Armstrong in her book *Cretan Women: Pasiphae, Ariadne, and Phaedra in Latin Poetry* points out the significance of Phaedra's speech as: "in Seneca's version, Phaedra's speech is a masterpiece of deception. She slowly forces Theseus to draw the (false) inferences himself, recalling in heavily ironic fashion the earlier slow and reluctant revelation of Hippolytus' name to the Nurse by Euripides' second Phaedra" (Armstrong 142). When Theseus requests to know who has violated her body, she shows the sword Hippolytus left behind in the previous scene as indicative of the offender. Theseus, who is enraged with the bitter truth, summons Neptune/Poseidon to punish his son. In the next scene, a messenger arrives and declares Hippolytus' death. In Act IV, Phaedra sees Hippolytus' dead body, confesses her lies and eventually kills herself by stabbing:

> You and I were not allowed to link our lives together;
> but we can join our deaths. Phaedra, if you are chaste,
> die for your husband. If unchaste, for your love. Can I return
> to a marriage bed polluted by such crime? The ultimate sin:
> to take my holy pleasure on sheets washed by revenge.
> No: only death can cure such evil love,
> only death can give me back my wounded honour.
> Death, I run to you; forgive me, and embrace me.
> [.....…]
> my story was all false.
> My crazy heart drank in the cruel plot;
> I lied. You have punished your son for a fiction;
> an innocent young man lies dead on the charge of rape.
> Truly, you were chaste and pure. Have your real character back.
> This righteous sword will pierce my own bad heart. (Act V lines 1183-1197)

Contrary to other accounts she partakes in, Seneca's Phaedra is the one who informs Theseus about the sinful and lustful feelings she has towards her stepson, Hippolytus. Regardless of this confirmation, she deludes herself into believing that she will be united with Hippolytus, as if they were star-crossed lovers and as if she did not cause him to die.

She also perceives death as the only path to redemption. However, in choosing between her options regarding her chastity, she dies as an unchaste woman because she commits the ultimate sin by loving her stepson. In the end, Theseus arranges a royal burial for his son while Phaedra is buried as a wicked woman. Therefore Phaedra's character and behaviour that completely conflicts with the societal expectations and gender roles, results in her being labelled as evil and thus costs both her reputation and her life.

Having analysed the most prominent works both in Greek and Roman literature involving the mythological character, Phaedra, it can be deduced that she is presented as one of the earliest examples of the archetypically incestuous stepmother. Whether her actions are derived from divine beings or her own doings, she is always the one to blame in each story. Hence it can be said that she has been treated harshly by ancient male authors who forgot she has a rapist and murderous husband and a misogynist stepson. All these male authors ignore the cruelty and violence of the men in her life and focus merely on Phaedra in exposing or sometimes exaggerating her actions. For example, it is known that "the women in Theseus' life rarely prosper: [the mother of his son, the Amazon, Hippolyta is raped and killed] […] Ariadne, [is] abandoned, his wife Phaedra takes her own life, his mother is enslaved in retribution for his actions" (Haynes "Helen"). Also, his son Hippolytus is a misogynist and he openly asserts his hatred towards the female sex. However, the ideas and behaviour of these two men towards women along with their violent sides are accepted as normal while Phaedra is indicated as the only guilty party in this myth. None of these male authors question the things these two men have done because they embody the norms of the patriarchal ideology and act in accordance with it. This is the reason why these literary works are written through the influence of patriarchal discourse.

Accordingly, Roland Mayer discusses the notion of fixed narratives in his book *Seneca: Phaedra*. What is commonly seen in mythological works such as the ones encompassing Circe and Phaedra, is the fact that a fixed storyline about a character is created by its first author and this established narration is either completely followed or elaborated with minimal changes by the subsequent writers. In the light of this, it can be argued that "by the time Phaedra is treated by Seneca, then, her character has already long been associated with ideas of an inherited tendency to sin, and this is developed into one of the major themes of his play" (Armstrong 64). Hence it might be inferred that Seneca

voluntarily maintains this story line in *Phaedra* which reflects both common sense and his views about gender expectations at the time. Therefore, it might be assumed that the repetition in these literary accounts has contributed to the creation and maintenance of the binary oppositions and these became fixed stereotypies through the generations.

4.2. Phaedra the Unyielding Young Woman

> "Any man can throw words up into the air, and it is women who must pay when those words land"—Laura Shepperson, *Phaedra*

The literary works of ancient male authors have contributed significantly to the establishment and maintenance of biased views on gender identity due to their treatment of female figures. Their followers have perpetuated these biases by retaining misogynistic portrayals of female characters in their stories as well. In the context of the myth of Phaedra, a similar path is followed. The authors consistently depict Phaedra as wicked and lustful and Hippolytus as an innocent and virtuous man. Additionally, the male characters' hatred towards women and their brutality are often ignored or presented as normal reflecting the societal structure of the time. This, in fact, demonstrates the absence of literary discussion exploring the subjects such as the possibility of Hippolytus raping Phaedra or any revelation of the brutality of the men in her life.

This crucial gap is precisely addressed and analysed in Laura Shepperson's rewriting, *Phaedra: A Novel*. Shepperson investigates many issues that have been ignored by early literary examples written about Phaedra and offers the reader a different version of her where the reader is not bombarded with information about how evil and detestable she is. In addition to that, Shepperson provides significant insights into the gender dynamics and power relations in ancient times by presenting Phaedra's early childhood, personality traits, familial relations, the period of time leading to her marriage with Theseus, and a new interpretation of the myth regarding her, Hippolytus and Theseus. Also the presence of a diverse array of characters, both male and female beyond Phaedra alone, contribute to the exploration of gender distinctions in the context of that period. This multifaceted approach demonstrates a deeper understanding of the societal roles and differences between men and women in the historical and cultural setting of the narrative.

Moreover, Shepperson structures her novel in the form of a traditional tragedy with

chorus and characters. By preserving its original form, Shepperson draws attention to how tragedies are used as a tool to perpetuate ancient male authors' misogynistic views and their generalisations about women, as female characters are often depicted in tragic roles where they cry, suffer, and endure pain. From a feminist point of view, the author challenges this biased portrayal while providing the reader with a neutral interpretation of the perspectives of people in ancient times. Shepperson's critique makes itself obvious from the very beginning of the play. In the prologue, the bard gathers his audience around to tell how Theseus has slayed the monster, the Minotaur and how "the promiscuous princess" (Shepperson 7), Ariadne tries to seduce Theseus. The narrator interferes: "The story the bard sang wasn't the truth. He had no idea what the truth was. He wasn't from Athens, and he'd been passed on the song by another traveling minstrel in exchange for his last piece of bread" (Shepperson pp. 7-8). Here Shepperson highlights the well-known expression of "there are always two sides to every story" meaning that the way a story is narrated may shape and alter one's perceptive of the person being discussed. In this sense, Laura Shepperson gives the impression that this will not just be the repetition of another classical story, but rather offers a new perspective on Phaedra's story that has existed for a long time.

Act I takes place in Knossos, Crete, where Phaedra was born and raised until her departure due to her marriage. As oppose to the portrayal of Phaedra in the ancient myths, Shepperson begins her novel by thoroughly discussing Phaedra's family dynamics, class-based gender roles in Greece, background to her marriage to Theseus and interprets how these influence her sense of self and her character development. The play begins with Phaedra's reminiscences about the time when she was eight years old; her mother, Pasiphaë talks to Phaedra and Ariadne about the inaccuracy of the rumours regarding their mother cheating on their father, Minos. Witnessing the hardship of being a woman and a queen, Phaedra says: "I wished that I was not a girl, and a younger sister at that, but a boy, my world filled with possibilities. I wished my future offered more than growing up to become a queen, and a lesser one than either of the two women before me" (13). She then talks about her relationship with her parents and the way she and her sister, Ariadne are raised. The two sisters receive education, which their mother finds unnecessary: "she knew that there was no real reason for us to learn anything much, other than how to apply our face paint and how to ensure that a palace was well run, the honored

guests taken care of, and the slaves properly directed" (14). This suggests that as long as they learn how to take care of their husbands, homes, and learn how to look beautiful, for women to receive education is futile since they will never need it. Phaedra also comments on how her father "missing the son who had died before [she] was born, asked that [they] be taught matters of statecraft, of how to ensure that a kingdom was protected and how to make sure that peasants properly paid their dues to the court" (Shepperson 14). As can be seen, both girls are born with certain duties and are never asked what they wanted. On this matter, Phaedra talks about how much she loves to do painting and is granted permission by her father to paint, yet her mother sees her and thinks: "painting [is] not an appropriate pastime for a young lady" (15). Thus, the information Phaedra provides about her childhood as a young princess reveals a lot about the patriarchal social order and oppressive gender roles in ancient Greece. Then, the narrator shifts to Xenethippe, an Athenian young woman, who explains the reason for Theseus' arrival in Crete. As it is briefly clarified in *Encyclopedia of the Ancient Greek World*:

> Athens (according to the myth) was at this time a subject city of Crete, having been subdued by the Cretan king MINOS. The Athenians were compelled to pay a yearly tribute of seven youths and seven maidens, who were sent by Athenian ship to Crete to be locked up inside the maze of the LABYRINTH. There the young people would be devoured by the ferocious Minotaur (bull of Minos), who was the monstrous half-man, half-bull offspring of Minos's wife, Queen Pasiphaë. Theseus, deciding to put a stop to this oppression, volunteered to sail to Crete amid the next batch of young people. (Sacks 346)

In this version, the tributes comprise fourteen young men and maidens including Theseus and those who manage to stay alive are given Cretan citizenship in return. Through Xenethippe's character, Shepperson provides the reader a comparison between Athens and Crete and how these cities are seemingly different but equally corrupted for lower-class citizens. The writer also sheds light on the type of life awaiting a commoner like her. She, as an agricultural member of a farmer family, says: "either I would have married another farmer, or, more likely, I would have been sent to the palace, to work as a maid. And everyone knew what work young maids at the palace really had to do, and the position they had to do it in" (18). Xenethippe implies the cruelty and abuse made by Athenian men and the very limited options the women have; to be a wife of someone or

work under the rule of a man, however, in either case they are subjected to sexual harassment and violence of the male sex. Thus she finds herself in such a position that she feels happy to be in a place that could possibly lead to her death. Nevertheless, she is reminded that men are the same everywhere at the time when a stranger grabs her and attempts to violate her body in the Cretan palace. Fortunately, the stranger is interrupted by Phaedra and leaves the scene. Phaedra then asks Xenethippe "are you going to tell someone about him" (24), and Xenethippe who is very surprised by that question as these types of behaviour are common among the men of Athens replies as:

> Your Highness, perhaps your father's men have a better code of conduct in public or when they are in the presence of women they deem their social equals. But behind closed doors, I can assure you that they are every bit as much animals as the men out there in those fields behind you. More so, because those are family men with their wives and children, and these so-called courtiers have left their wives behind to come to the palace for drinking and backslapping and whoring. (25)

The princess feels angry and upset with what she has heard from a commoner. Yet they continue to talk for a while. Then, to comfort her, Xenethippe says: "Knossos has its hidden secrets, its labyrinth below the surface. But Athens keeps nothing below the surface. Anger, greed, and lechery are all on display. And no one is safe" (Shepperson 25), in this way, she ensures Phaedra of her safety in Crete but reveals much about the conditions of women in Athens. Then, the chorus intervenes:

> They come to visit us, these upstanding citizens. They leave their wives on their farms and their estates, and they make use of the facilities of Knossos. They wash their hands in our fountains. They eat the king's fine food. They run those hands over our bodies. We are nothing more to them than another service, another amenity. Then they go back to their wives, refreshed. Ready to serve Crete. To serve Minos. No thanks to us. (26)

The chorus is composed of the voices of the women who are ill-treated, sexually violated, and harassed. Their role is to reveal the hypocrisy of men and underline the difference between appearance and reality. By including the women from each and every aspect of life, Shepperson provides a multifaceted perspective on their lives and a better understanding of their struggles and sufferings. Subsequently, Theseus, with the help of Ariadne, kills the Minotaur and they sail back to Athens. A week later, he comes back to

Crete accompanied by his crew and informs king Minos that Dionysos has claimed Ariadne as his consort. Now, he requests the hand of Phaedra, as he has been left without a partner. After his request, Minos and Theseus begin discussing this matter without consulting Phaedra's opinion. She utters her feelings about her exclusion from this conversation as: "these two men debated my future as if I were a piece of marble or a bar of gold, the full implications of their negotiations hit me with nauseating force" (47). Maarit Kaimio stresses the inequality between the genders in their experience and women's expression of sexuality and sexual impulses as:

> There is no doubt about male dominance in Athenian society. In sexual matters, the men had several accepted options: they could satisfy their desire with male lovers, hetairas, or female slaves as well as with their wives. The women were allowed no sexual experiences with men before marriage, and the marriage was an affair of exchange between two households, where the possible sexual attraction of the girl toward her future husband was not a matter of consequence. (96)

Usually, it is not a matter of concern whether Phaedra has affection for Theseus or wishes to marry him because she has no choice other than complying with her father's decision. However, in Shepperson's version, after the two men finish their conversation, Pasiphaë forwards their question to her daughter: "Your father and Theseus were asking whether you wished to go to Athens with Theseus. To be his bride" (Shepperson 47). Phaedra is, as her mother utters, a child at that moment and she has no idea of what marriage is thus she does not know how to answer that question. Then she begins thinking it over:

> The gods would give me a sign. But Theseus had already called on the gods, mentioning the goddess Athene. Was that my sign? I knew that the gods would seek vengeance on Theseus for the crimes he had committed. But what was my part in that punishment? Was I needed to bear witness? Perhaps a god had spirited Ariadne away precisely so I could fulfill my own task of accompanying Theseus. An answer was needed. I had to do what the gods wanted, even if it was not what I wanted. The scales in my mind's eye tipped in favor of the marriage. (48)

She accepts Theseus' propose, wedding rituals are made and Phaedra leaves Crete with her mother's maid, Kandake. The detailed background to the wedding of Phaedra and Theseus reveals that it is not based on love but rather arranged as a contract between the two countries. It is also clear that Phaedra is not Theseus' first option, he just sees her as

a strategic move. From Phaedra's perspective, this wedding is a sign from the gods for her to witness the suffering of the murderer of her siblings, thus she accepts to marry him. She repeats her wish to see Theseus dead while she is in Athens as well:

> As I lay on my bed or knelt in front of my shrine, I would wonder about what form the gods' punishment would take. I wanted to know how I would foresee that it was about to happen, so I could ensure I was there to witness it, just as I'd been there to witness Theseus's transgression. I even speculated whether I might have a small part to play in it. I would imagine leaving a rope coiled in the corridor for Theseus to trip on and break his neck, or else leaving a piece of food out which would turn rancid and cause him to choke and die. But I would always follow these thoughts by muttering, "As the gods wish." The revenge the gods would wreak would be enough for me. (Shepperson 93)

On the boat to Athens, Phaedra witnesses some situations that imply the dark aspects of Theseus' personality. She hears from a tribute that Xenethippe disappears after she angers Theseus. Also, she overhears a conversation between Theseus and the captain of the ship, Pirithous, regarding the color of the sail. By implication, Theseus asks him to keep the color of the sail as it is. According to the myth, Theseus and Aegeus agree upon changing the color of the sail from black to white if Theseus achieves his mission. However, Theseus forgets it and when Aegeus sees the color of the sail, he commits suicide. Hence, Shepperson changing this detail and presenting Theseus as consciously not switching the color of the sail lays the basis for projecting the level of his cruelty and power-crazed personality. When they arrive at the shores of Athens, they learn that king Aegeus is dead.

In act II, while Shepperson's exploration of Phaedra's awakening to the systematic mistreatment of Athenian women, her own experience of rape, and her determination to defend herself in the court reflects her transformative journey towards empowerment as a brave woman, the inclusion of the viewpoints of multiple female voices brings the cruelty and the oppression of women in ancient Greece forward. The act begins with Medea, the partner of the dead king Aegeus, and she plays a crucial role in demonstrating the brutality and violence of the Athenian men as a rebellious and notorious woman. She begins her narration by talking about the day when Theseus' ship returns to Athens. A messenger informs them the news and Medea sends one of her maidens to investigate the situation and discovers that Aegeus "has leaped from the cliff and killed himself" (72).

Then she sees Theseus with his bride Phaedra, who is also her cousin, coming towards the palace. She begins to study their faces, in particular Phaedra's, and tries to understand whether she is aware of the kind of a man she has married. With that, Medea refers to the women Theseus abducted, raped and harassed (75). This implies that the focus of Shepperson's story is not Theseus' heroic achievements but rather a neutral demonstration of his character. Additionally, Medea has no one to secure her place in the palace and knows that Theseus would not show her any mercy, thus she thinks of living there unnoticed until she can plan her escape. The possible reason why she is not welcome in the palace is due to her wicked reputation through her past actions. Shepperson presents her neither as a weak woman nor an evil witch; she is a remarkably intelligent and self-conscious woman as she utters: "I know that history will judge me, but history is written by men. I did not want to be at any man's mercy, not again" (76). This implies that Medea is acutely aware of her actions and their consequences. Nonetheless, her story is likely to have been exaggerated or distorted by ancient male writers, who may have embellished certain aspects to fit their own perspectives. This is comparable to the manner in which Theseus' story is often narrated as purified from his vices and sins according to the ancient accounts. Hence Medea is not interested in changing their perspectives or relying on their pity. By revealing this, Shepperson emphasises the selective storytelling depending on the authors' misogynistic interests.

Meanwhile, Phaedra, trying to become accustomed to life in the Athenian palace, begins hearing voices at night. These voices include warnings, accusations and terrible information about how Athenian men treat women. She says: "I didn't know these women, but I felt that we were sisters. I had shared their darkest nights and would wake a wiser woman" (90). Shepperson highlights the possible solidarity and wisdom that might be gained through collective female experience. This idea is also repeated by The Night Chorus themselves:

> We are the women of Athens, although we could be from anywhere […] Beware. Here are the men who have hurt us. We don't want it to happen to you. Alcestis forced me when I was only fifteen. I am old enough to be his mother, but […] Never, never, never be alone with Dioscouros. Won't someone listen? I just want to be heard. I just want to be believed. I had no choice. I didn't want to. It happened to me. And me. And me. Me, too. (92)

The author breaks the tendency to portray women solely as warnings or seductresses as in early narratives and focuses on the empowering force of the female sex as a whole. The idea of female solidarity is also repeated in the scene where Phaedra meets Medea and tells her about the female voices she hears at night that she refers to as The Night Chorus and Medea replies "women will always find ways of communicating with other women, even if men prefer them not to do so. Especially if men prefer them not to do so" (129). Shepperson draws attention to the notion of female solidarity and how it is viewed as an empowering source for women but prevented by men, just as any other thing that might make women feel assertive and strong. As their conversation continues, Medea asks if Phaedra hears such stories about Hippolytus through The Night Chorus and she says no, as he worships the goddess Artemis, and Medea replies: "if I had a feather for every man who claims to worship a virgin goddess and yet has his way with the woman who makes his bed, I would grow my own wings and fly far from this court" (130). This addresses the difference between reality and appearance, in particular, when it comes to male sexual morality and respect.

The narrator shifts to Kandake who talks about the rumours regarding Phaedra and Hippolytus. At night, she stays awake to listen to The Night Chorus to hear that Hippolytus is completely devoted to Artemis. She does not hear anything about Hippolytus, yet she knows how he looks at Phaedra and thinks: "desire that strong would have to be quenched somewhere, and I felt sorry for whichever maid might find herself blocking his path" (99). Accordingly, Medea who is the speaker at that moment, begins sending her maidens to receive news, but one night, she wanders in the palace and what she discovers reveals the realities of Athenian women: "I spied at doors and listened at windows, and what I saw made me despair. Old and young men alike, regardless of their politics, used and abused women as though they were mere tools for their pleasure" (100). Shepperson constantly underlines the ill-treatment of women in ancient Greece through multiple characters in this retelling. The possible reason for that is to draw attention to the fact that they have long been ignored, minimized and the way they are treated is normalised in these phallocentric texts. Moreover, Medea overhears Theseus talking to Herakles. Taking their names and reputation into consideration, she expresses her opinions about the biases and unjust standards applied to both sexes in such areas like heroism and admirability:

> Save a child from drowning, and you will be called a fine man, a savior, a man everyone wants to know. But be the child of a god, with big muscles or a cunning mind, who does nothing for anyone other than yourself, and you are a hero. This logic applies only to men, obviously. A woman descended from a god still has to be either a good woman or a witch. What would it take to be called a heroine? (101)

Additionally, she hears that they talk about Medea, in particular, the fact that she killed her own children and she utters: "everyone always focused on the killing of the children. No one ever asked why" (105), meaning the result is what interests people, while the process leading the person to that result is generally ignored. Especially for female characters, they are defined by their actions, while their psychological and emotional states tend to be overlooked and undervalued. That is why, in each story she takes part in, the emphasis is placed on the outcome of Medea's actions, since writers prefer to portray her as a disgrace to womankind as well as an example of their true nature. Even though murdering your child is one of the most heinous crimes that one may commit, in this scene, the men talking about her homicidal tendencies actually murder people as if they are part of their leisure time activity and this is undoubtedly accepted and perceived as natural—when the deed is done by a man.

In the part where Phaedra narrates the time she dines with Theseus, Hippolytus and Herakles, Shepperson presents the reader the ambiguous behaviour of Hippolytus towards Phaedra. For example, when her father humiliates or scorns her, Hippolytus interferes and defends her (114), however, when they are alone, Hippolytus acts similar to his father; "I care nothing of women" (114), "You call yourself a queen, but you are nothing" (115). Correspondingly, Phaedra may be considered as ambiguous not in action but rather in mind; she has some thoughts about Hippolytus which may be considered sexual but she always keeps those opinions to herself knowing it to be wrong and keeps reminding herself that "the gods would punish Theseus for his actions, and they wanted me here to bear witness" (116). In that dinner, Herakles also explains the reason of his arrival to the palace; to ask Theseus to go on a quest with him to Attica. This demonstrates that Shepperson follows a similar storyline to the mythological accounts written about Phaedra and Theseus, but differently, she provides a reasonable explanation to Theseus' departure. Some time after Theseus' departure, Phaedra wishes to talk to Hippolytus about men's treatment of women. When Phaedra shares her ideas with Kandake she does not

find it appropriate for her to talk directly to Hippolytus—considering the rumours surrounding the palace. Thus, Kandake suggests that she should inform Hippolytus by herself or arrange a private meeting. When Kandake goes to Hippolytus' room, he immediately dismisses her after hearing Phaedra's name: "I have had enough of that woman's name, do you hear me? I am sick of it —the torment—" (135). When the speaker switches to Trypho, the adviser of the former king, he begins his narration by talking about the rumours that "the princess Phaedra was accused of stealing his heart, and with it, his virtue" (142). As it is pointed out here, the woman is always projected as the seducer, the one who is driven by irrationality and immorality, whereas men are seen as the sources of the reason, the power-holders, the ones who is trustworthy, reputable and virtuous. That is why woman is the first to blame in any situation. In Phaedra's case, she is also an outsider which stands as a strong factor that determines her as unreliable.

Subsequently, Trypho describes a discussion taking place between Hippolytus and his friends at dinner. The men talk about Phaedra disrespectfully and imply Hippolytus has a sexual intercourse with her, but he reminds them that he worships Artemis. At that point, one of his friends named Rhesus interrupts him and says: "it's one thing to stay away from women when you are young, but men are supposed to bed women. Real men do" (143). Hippolytus injures him by throwing a knife to his shoulder and leaves the room. Here, Hippolytus may be seen as a young man who is so virtuous that he can hurt his friend who mocks him and his religious principles. In fact, this scene demonstrates Hippolytus' hypocrisy as it is made even clearer when Shepperson provides a highly graphic rape scene right after this. In the next scene, the speaker switches to Agneta, one of the maidservants of Medea, who witnesses Hippolytus raping Phaedra. She is in the wood to get some fresh air and sees Hippolytus on his horse coming towards her. Then Agneta sees Hippolytus stop and talk to Phaedra. Out of fear, she hides and watches Hippolytus sexually abusing her; Agneta witnesses Hippolytus pushing Phaedra towards a tree and she is unable to help Phaedra because "If [she goes] down there, he would only hurt [them] both" (146). Hippolytus begins harassing and beating her while at the same time asserting:

> Helios, look at your granddaughter now, look at her wicked body which she has flaunted at me, which she taunts me with—like I am her pathetic plaything […] I have spent my life dealing with women and their temptations. You cannot help

> yourselves—everywhere you go you disturb the air. And you are the worst of them. Worse even than your beast-loving mother. Yes, I know all about that. We all know about that. Is this what you wanted? Is this all worth it? Will this make you stop? (146-147)

While literally violating her body and soul, he continues to accuse her of tempting him, wanting this and deserving this treatment simply because of being a woman. He continues: "I know how to tame bulls […] I learned from my father" (147). As the bull is a significant symbol of Crete, Hippolytus probably refers to the Minotaur and Ariadne both of whom Theseus killed. When he is finished, Hippolytus prays to the gods, specifically to Artemis, and continues to blame Phaedra as follows: "It was her fault, not mine. She tempted me. She flung herself into my arms. Forgive me, Goddess, forgive my weakness" (147-148). After that scene, The Night Chorus interferes to articulate the rumours:

> Rhesus says that Phaedra tempted Hippolytus, and they lay down together in the field. He says she was so desperate she could not even wait to go indoors. Theseus has been away a long time. He's been away from her chambers longer than that! […] Andros says something similar. He says all Cretan women are like that. (149)

Since the chorus conveys what they hear from the men who come to their chambers at night, what they hear is based on the biased thoughts of men, thus the rumours are expectedly accusing Phaedra with being lustful and enticing. Accordingly, Shepperson enables her readers to observe Phaedra's emotional state and thought during and after the incident. The detailed description of Phaedra's physical and psychological pain and suffering illustrates the range of devastation she is experiencing: "every part of my body ached, even deep inside of me. I knew I should stand up, but I couldn't bring myself to do it […] No one had ever touched me like that. It had never even occurred to me that anyone would try. I remembered my earlier self, so happy and innocent" (150). This rape not only violates her body but is also "a complete betrayal of the bonds of kinship, the rules about hospitality" (151), thus it is a double sin. None of the ancient authors, let alone considering the possibility of rape, have attempted to view the situation from Phaedra's perspective. In every narrative, she is consistently portrayed as a highly sexualized, adulterous, and incestuous stepmother who poses a societal threat with her malevolent traits. However, Shepperson's reinterpretation introduces a fresh viewpoint, challenging

the sincerity of the male characters and offering a reassessment of their roles. Henceforth, she foregrounds and elaborates on the darker aspects of masculinity that are already present in many literary works, shifting the focus away from the traditional view that predominantly accuses women of bewitchment, enchantment and excessive sexuality. By highlighting these aspects, Shepperson offers a better understanding of the impartial treatment of both sexes in literature.

Moreover Shepperson's inclusion of the rape scene to the story enables her to draw attention to the importance of female solidarity as well. For instance, the Athenian women who most likely go through similar or the same situation as Phaedra, leave small gifts to her door, in order to make her feel supported. In that sense, creating a unity with other people who have similar experiences is one of the key elements keeping women strong in an environment where they are all unjustly treated. Some time after the rape, Phaedra realises that she is pregnant and begins to think of an explanation she can make for this to Theseus. In order to ask for his advice, she arranges a dinner with Trypho in her room. Trypho, who is aware of the fact that:

> 'Theseus intends to set up a court […] a court of law […] if a crime has been committed, the king sits in court over the accused man and decides his guilt […] under the new system, the men of Athens will act as jurors, and they will hear the case and decide whether the accused man is guilty or not' (165)

Suggests Phaedra to bring this issue to this new court. Trypho's offer reminds Phaedra of her social status, capabilities and her power and thus she thinks she can "make a stand. Against Hippolytus. Against every young man who thinks he can take advantage of a helpless woman. And against the man who taught him that would be possible…Against Theseus. Against the man who put [her] in harm's way" (165). As an alternative to Trypho's offer, her maid, Kandake arranges a boat to take her back to Crete, however, Phaedra who knows running away is accepting yourself as guilty answer her as follows:

> I have not committed any crimes. I am not an adulteress. I have remained faithful to my husband […] I have been cruelly used and cast aside by my own stepson. I tell you, I will have justice. The gods saw what happened, and they will not let this slide. Theseus killed my brother. Now his son has taken my honor. Master Trypho here tells me I can have justice in court. I believe this is what the gods intended to happen. (173)

With this speech, Phaedra declares she will accept Trypho's offer. In addition to that, this scene illustrates the transformation of Phaedra from a weak, innocent girl to a strong, determined and courageous young woman who challenges a man who perceives himself as exempt from any reprehensible actions towards women. Choosing to defend yourself against such a hideous crime a man has committed in a patriarchal society like Athens is a sign of bravery, and Phaedra not only feels it but also shows it to others. This indicates Phaedra's self-improvement and resistance. Yet, it is crucial to underline that the court consists of men, which disadvantages her situation, as Phaedra is at the mercy of men and their biased thoughts.

Act III is mainly about the trial and its aftermath. It begins with Theseus's return. Phaedra comes to Theseus's presence and briefly explains the situation as: "Sire, it is good that you have returned. There has been a serious breach of the laws of xenia, and the filial relationship. Your son has violated me, and now I am with child" (177-178). Hippolytus as expected denies the accusation and Theseus who is in a state of shock calls Trypho to discuss this matter in private and thus sends Hippolytus and Phaedra away. At that moment, a maid comes forward to escort Phaedra outside the room and she also sees multiple maids waiting outside and considers them as The Night Chorus. Pondering upon them, Phaedra thinks they are not beautiful in comparison to Ariadne and then she comes to the realisation: "perhaps beauty wasn't all that men looked for in women. Perhaps, when Hippolytus had forced himself upon me, my own looks had been less important than his need to control me. To own me" (179). This suggests that men derive pleasure from being in the position of power; hence, the physical attractiveness of women is of little concern to them. Instead, their focus is on exercising power, the desire to demonstrate their ability to do so simply because they can. Hippolytus is not the only one being disturbed about this situation, The Night Chorus is also unhappy and they express their feelings on this matter as:

> All she has done is rile them up, and now they demand more of us. They sit and listen, and they want more, more, more of us. Hippolytus has become a monster. He and his friends charge about the palace, protesting his innocence to everyone they see, and yet when they get back to their rooms and they see us, they enact the rape all over again. I felt sorry for her before, but she has made our lives harder. Why could she not be quiet? Do you even believe her? I heard she had her eye on

him from the start. We all saw her follow him round the court. She is expecting his child. Maybe she made all this up to convince Theseus that she was not unfaithful while he was away. Princesses can bring trials. But someone still has to make their beds, and lie in them, too. (183)

Thus, their sympathy now turning to resentment towards Phaedra stems from the more intense fury caused by the distress that Hippolytus and his friends inflict on the women in the palace. Phaedra as the sole vocal advocate addressing these issues, finds her assertiveness and autonomy unacknowledged and undermined by these women. This discord is further fueled by their collective suffering and the tendency to place the blame on Phaedra, leading to widespread speculation and disparagement of her character. With the increasing torture and anguish of men, the women in the Athenian palace warn Kandake to tell the queen to stop the trial as well. One of them expresses her unbearable misery as: "so Hippolytus took her once? He's taken me every night since. And he makes me sit there and watch him pray to the goddess afterwards. He makes me tell the goddess it was all my fault" (195).

In addition to that The Night Chorus, consisting of the lower class women, harbours envy towards Phaedra's royal status, which enables her the means to assert herself and defend her position. Also, the reality of the unjust treatment that lower-class women receive is made clear in the scene where Kandake testifies in favor of Phaedra. This is the last time she is seen in the novel because Kandake is murdered after she finishes giving her oral evidence—since she speaks against Hippolytus during the trial, three of his friends cut out her tongue, kill her and leave her body in Phaedra's room. Kandake's murder illustrates the possible outcome a woman of the common folk may face if she speaks and asserts her opinion in ancient Greece. Accordingly Phaedra is aware of it as she draws attention to the injustice of the laws herself: "I was the king's wife, living in Athens under the protection of xenia, the form of hospitality granted and guaranteed by the gods. The jurors might listen to me. They would not listen to a maid who had been taken advantage of by a fellow citizen" (189). Even though she is aware of her privileges, Phaedra never uses it merely for her advancement; she desires to make a difference, to stop this on-going order and she aims at a greater group, a group of women who suffer from the violence of the men. This animosity along with the inequalities, damage the female solidarity that was developing prior to the public revelation of the

rape. Nonetheless, Phaedra, who is already being called names such as liar, whore or witch, is determined to take revenge both for herself and her family against all rapists.

In her book, Shepperson constantly touches upon the discrepancy between appearance and reality, particularly through male characters, so as to emphasise a perspective that is never portrayed or acknowledged in literary history. Shepperson challenges the reliability of Theseus' character and thus his heroic image by making additions to the story behind his murder of the Minotaur and the story of Ariadne. In the part where Theseus visits Phaedra in her chambers, he goes to ask Phaedra to end the trial and if she accepts, a safe passage back to Crete. Phaedra, with a marked display of audacity, implies that she could have arranged this if it had been what she wanted. Her intention instead is to witness those who are responsible for inflicting pain upon herself and her family enduring their own share of anguish. Accordingly, Shepperson presents a detailed confession of how Theseus kills the Minotaur and Ariadne in order to demonstrate Theseus' violent and murderous side:

> He wasn't even armed. Tried to reason with me. He should have fled. Or better still, fought back. At least your sister tried to fight back […] She helped me to find my path to the center of the labyrinth, in return for which she intended to come back to Athens with me. She laid the path, then hid in my boat. But she wasn't happy to find out that the beast was dead […] She tried to launch herself at me. Said she was going to tell your father everything. She would have destroyed me, and Athens with me […] I mean I put my hands around her throat and throttled her until she was dead. (pp. 203-204)

Here, what is illustrated is the fact that Theseus is more monstrous and cruel than the Minotaur who is frequently labelled as a monster in literary narratives. Theseus' cold-blooded depictions of his murders, viewing them as unremarkable, provide significant insight into the inherent injustice as well as the potential consequences of the justice system treating women and men unequally. Accordingly, Theseus' undermining and diminishing of Phaedra's character, just because she is a woman and Hippolytus is his son, can be observed in his question: "you want to destroy Hippolytus's entire life for the sake of a few moments of discomfort?" (205). The way he asserts his question minimises and also normalises the hideous crime his son has committed. By articulating Phaedra's thoughts on this question, Shepperson thoroughly indicates her discomfort with men's

undervaluing approaches to women as well:

> A few moments of discomfort? [...] Was it discomfort when I felt that pain deep inside of me, rough and unrelenting? Was it discomfort when he left me for dead? Was it discomfort when I discovered that I was bearing the child of a man I never wished to see in my life again, distending my stomach and weakening my legs, so every step reminded me of him? Was it discomfort that I could never again walk freely among men without wondering whether one of them was harboring thoughts of raping me, without knowing that any one of them could overpower me and use me as he saw fit? (205)

The author portrays the damage of such violent actions on a woman's body and soul and implies how unnatural it is to accept such behavior as normal. In addition to that, Phaedra's refusal of Theseus' offer, defiance of his opinions and her strong and unwavering stance against him illustrate her as a powerful, autonomous and chaste woman who does not let men mistreat her and her reputation. On the last day of the trial Hippolytus continues to blame Phaedra: "The queen begged me to have intercourse with her. She was desperate to lie with me. Me, a disciple of the goddess Artemis!" (212). Hippolytus finishes his oral evidence, the men in the courtroom begin voting and the result is declared as: "guilty…guilty…guilty. Gentlemen, you have found Hippolytus guilty of the rape of the queen, his stepmother, by forty votes to twenty-five" (215).After the court is dismissed, Phaedra, who thinks justice has been achieved for her, is faced with the reality that justice—which is controlled and utilised by men, always works in favor of them and for women, being right means nothing. At the end of the trial scene, Theseus reveals what will happen to Hippolytus as follows:

> 'He is to be sent to his mother's people […] they will take care of him. I understand they prefer to be on horseback, too. He can spend a year, perhaps two years there. And by the time he returns, he will be much more matured, and the court will welcome him back with open arms. He will be my heir' (217)

Given the lack of justice in Phaedra's case, alongside the death of Kandake, she feels lonely and desperate. Her hope for revenge against Hippolytus and Theseus with the help of the gods has perished. Phaedra shares her disappointment as "I had wasted so much time. I had waited and waited for the gods to provide vengeance, only now I realized that Medea had been right all along. There were no gods. If you wanted something done, what

was it she had said? “Sometimes a mother needs to take action herself” (219). Through the demonstration of the gods’ passivity in such a situation, given that Phaedra is the granddaughter of the sun god, Helios and also the king of all the gods, Zeus, she holds them equally responsible for this crime as they do not do anything on this issue—“Helios, Zeus, Poseidon, I will have the vengeance you should have taken! I do not care whether you exist or not. I will wait for you no longer” (223). Phaedra’s rage against the unjust behaviour of the gods shows the existence of the patriarchal order among divinities as they act in accordance with their own needs or interests.

In the Exodus part, the Furies appear and declare that: “someone must fall. It should be Hippolytus” (222). The inclusion of the goddesses of vengeance into the story foreshadows the following events and demonstrates the only divine creatures siding with Phaedra. She who once tried to defend herself and her rights by not being silent about the rape, fails, and now planning to serve her own justice without depending on any man, mortal or immortal. Considering her journey and the struggles she has to endure, it may be said that Phaedra’s strength is fueled by the rape incident as it pushes her to reach the limits of her power and resistance. Accordingly, Phaedra’s will for justice and equality draws her to the extent that she decides to kill the father of her child, Hippolytus. She takes “the double-headed axe, the labrys” (223) her father gave her as a gift and depicts that moment as: “I lifted my double-headed axe, and I was the sea bull, the monster, the Cretan bull, come to have my vengeance on the house of Theseus… I brought my axe down onto Hippolytus’s neck, the sharp axe parting his neck from his head as though his body were made of sea foam (225). The Night Chorus intervenes and declares the death of Hippolytus along with the speculations:

> How? Was it a riding accident? You could say that. He fell from his horse. I won’t be crying any tears, that’s for sure. Me neither. But how could Hippolytus fall? He is—was—the best rider in Athens. In all of Greece. It was the queen. I heard she took an axe to him. I heard she was a witch, like her cousin before her, and she caused a giant beast to rise from the sea. A giant beast? An axe? Does it matter? (226)

Their speech also reveals the notion that women cannot be powerful without being a monster, a witch or a divine creature. The source of their strength is often related to them being supernatural or the incarnation of evil. This is mostly the reason why they are

labelled with negative names or wicked attributions after they show any sign of power or assertiveness. After the murder, the narration shifts to Medea. At that moment her role is to convince Phaedra to give up her child to Theseus and in return, to grant her a safe passage to Crete. She talks to Phaedra and explains the possible consequences in case she accepts or rejects the offer. If she accepts: "He will raise the child as his new heir, if a boy, and marry her well, if a girl. He will spare no expenses" (232) and if she refuses to give up her baby, she "will remain chained to this bed until [she gives] birth, at which point [she] will be killed and [her] body tossed into the sea to be devoured by the sea beasts." (233). As they converse, Medea's murdering of her children[6] is brought up once more by Phaedra, and Medea finally expresses that it was her only choice and adds: "There are many things worse than death, especially for young girls with fathers who choose both brides and maids who are much younger than themselves" (234). The indication of Jason's possible incestuous tendencies offers a different perspective to the story and Medea's image. By depicting Medea's inner conflict and also adding more detail to her story assist Shepperson's aim to shatter the partial narratives in ancient literary works. Towards the end of the novel, Trypho, the adviser of the former king, and Theseus are having a conversation about the condition of Phaedra. Theseus, through his opinion on his son and Phaedra, reflects the ancient society's biased view on gender:

> There will not be another trial, another chance to do things correctly and with justice. I want revenge, not justice. That woman killed the most important person in my world. I will call on the gods, the Furies, the Kindly Ones, on every good spirit and bad one known to man, and I will see her dead […] You think she killed a teenage boy, a layabout, one who rode and played and added little to the life at court. But that is because you are not a father. She didn't just kill that boy. She killed the tiny baby I once cradled in my arms, holding my breath so as not to wake him. She killed the man he could have become—all the men he could have become. As his father, I used to watch him carefully for signs. Perhaps he would be a famous equestrian. Perhaps he would quest with Herakles—perhaps he would be the Herakles of his generation. Perhaps he would settle down and govern Athens with me. I could see so many possibilities. And she killed all of them. (241)

Here Shepperson presents Theseus' selfish and misogynistic opinions as he shows how

[6] Contrary to the mythological accounts, in Shepperson's version, Medea has two daughters.

much he does not value Phaedra, neither as a woman nor as his wife. The source of Theseus' anger stems from the fact that his lineage ends with him due to his son's murder. In this regard, it can be claimed that if Theseus had a daughter, he probably would not consider her future in such a detailed manner. Also, his lack of interest in thinking of the damage Hippolytus has inflicted upon Phaedra or that Theseus himself has caused to other women reveal his misogynistic character.

The last scene of Phaedra is where she finds the solution in killing herself. Even though this may seem a weakness or a failure in her journey to become a strong and successful woman, it actually demonstrates Phaedra as an active person who decides the path of her life as she herself utters: "I did not need to wait for gods to seek revenge any longer. I had taken care of it myself" (243). She learns that her expectation of divine assistance or justice is futile and she is the only person who can take action for her life. In addition to that, she also think of the life of her baby—"what if it were a girl? She would never be safe in this Athenian court, not without a mother to protect her" (243). Considering the realities of the life awaiting both her and her baby, Phaedra decides to kill herself.

In the next scene, Trypho discovers that Phaedra has taken her own life by using the sword of a guard. Following the disclosure of her death, he suggests a strategic plan to be devised for the bards to tell a particular narrative, that she was bewitched by Aphrodite to seduce Hippolytus. When her attempts fails, Phaedra decides to falsely accuse Hippolytus of raping her. Overwhelmed by the remorse for what she has caused, Phaedra ultimately ends her life out of shame. According to this plan, the whole situation will appear as "the actions of a jealous goddess" (246), which also stigmatise the goddess, Aphrodite, and cause her to be known merely as a sexual and envious divinity. Subsequently, The Night Chorus intervenes and questions the current situation and how the story these men have created for Phaedra is one-sided in constantly reflecting the male view as they utter: "These aristocrats. They blame everything on gods. So did Aphrodite also force Hippolytus to rape me?" (248). Through The Night Chorus, Shepperson provides a more neutral perspective while drawing attention to the fact that in most of the stories there is almost always a woman to blame and the men are shown with no guilt or any involvement. The Night Chorus questions: "If they are the heroes, does that make us the heroines? We keep going, we persevere, we ask for nothing, and we get even less.

Where are our stories?" (248). It might be inferred that since they are not like Phaedra; they are silent, passive and obedient as it is expected of them, they are still not qualified or worthy enough to take part in a story as a heroine or even to be heard. This also points out the lack of space the women find, whether they live in accordance with the socio-cultural expectations or not.

Finally, the play ends with Xenethippe's part where she hears the news about the death of Phaedra and does not believe what is being told by the bards since she knows the cruelty and brutality of the men in the Athenian palace. She is presented as the living witness of the changing order, the disbelief in the male narratives as well as the way their reliability is shattered. Xenethippe's character can also be regarded as a female bard who knows a different version of Phaedra's story as well as the capabilities the men of her time and thus she has the potential to make a change. Hence the purpose of Shepperson ending her book with a female voice reveals that she has achieved what she intends at the beginning; pointing out the partial representation of Phaedra in the ancient narratives and the constructedness of gender roles which have constantly been imposed on people.

Laura Shepperson in *Phaedra: A novel* revisits the character of Phaedra who has long been known for her insolent and depraved behaviour and her sexual and incestuous tendencies towards her stepson, by granting her the place and the autonomy to express herself, her life and her story from her own perspective. Shepperson's novel is not focusing on the result of Phaedra's actions, unlike in any other ancient narratives she partakes in, but rather demonstrates a detailed projection of Phaedra's childhood, familial background, personality, her marriage and the circumstances leading up to her death. Even though the novel centralises Phaedra, it contains multiple female characters such as Medea, Kandake, Xenethippe, Agneta and The Night Chorus. Inclusion of their voices and individual struggles portray the blatant realities the women from all ages and classes face in ancient Greek society. The female characters in the novel also represent the ones who would never find the chance to speak or to be part of a story in male-oriented texts of ancient literature. Thus Shepperson points out the discrimination and the injustice these female characters face at the hands of ancient male authors just because they are woman and not as worthy as their male warriors and heroes.

The novel also consists of many male characters such as Theseus, Hippolytus, and Trypho. Through these characters Shepperson reveals the difference between the

personas they reflect to society and their horrible selves through their relation to women. For instance, through Theseus, Shepperson reveals a man who is passionate about bringing a justice system to his country, however, treating women brutally. Accordingly, Shepperson presents Hippolytus as a devoted virgin for the most of the part, yet she also shares how he and his friends sexually abuse and harass women in the palace through The Night Chorus and she includes a striking scene where Hippolytus rapes Phaedra. In her journey to become a dignified, strong and vocal young woman in Shepperson's retelling, Phaedra's painful experiences contributes to her self-assertion and resistance. Additionally, the given information about her familial background, the class issues and its impact on gender perceptions and the detailed explanation of the story which always presents her as the guilty party provide a completely different perspective to Phaedra's character and her social position as a young woman. Although the novel ends with her death, Shepperson portrays Phaedra as a woman who retains authority over her life. Therefore, by redefining Phaedra's character Shepperson challenges the ancient male-authored texts that have misrepresented and marginalised Phaedra for a long time.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

As fairy tales, stories, myths and legends have great influence on cultures, they reflect certain ideology and also provide extensive insights into gender roles. These narratives have contributed to the creation of binary oppositions and the belief that certain roles are assigned to a certain sex. The role of literature in creation and perpetuation of the patriarchal ideologies in our culture have been demonstrated through the earliest examples of written literature that is controlled by men. The selected works of three men, considered as the forefathers of literature, Homer, Hesiod and Euripides, are examined so as to illustrate their biased narrations in which certain attributions and characteristics are assigned and imposed on women and perpetuated by their followers. These texts which are written within the patriarchal discourse also reflect the female-male relationships of ancient times. These social expectations, while forcing women to be virtuous, chaste, obedient and sexual—only for the purpose of reproduction, in order to be part of the society, do not restrict or impose on men any rules that limit their rights on their body, autonomy or lives in general. Thus it may be argued that Hesiod, Homer and Euripides have a major part in the creation and perpetuation of the patriarchal discourse through the roles and stereotypes they have created in their works. These literary works written within partial and misogynistic perspectives of women have influence the perception of gender roles and female-male relationships.

Additionally, these one-sided texts often portray female characters, particularly in Greek mythology, with either-or roles—either an angel who is silent and obedient of a patriarchal figure or a witch, a monster or a whore, and these roles are not chosen by women but attributed to them by men. As exemplified in Chapter I, while Penelope is portrayed as a role model and ideal woman, other female figures such as the Amazons, Medusa, Pandora or Helen are presented as warnings and labelled as wicked creatures thanks to these archetypes created by male authors. Moreover, what is presented through these narratives is the idea that if you desire to be a hero or a warrior, you need to be a man, because this character trait can only be found in male characters. That is why the notion of a female Achilles, for instance, does not exist in anybody's mind because neither in real nor in fictive life is there an example of it, at least with the same qualities and

character treatment in the ancient accounts. Also the genres and the plot differ depending on the gender of the protagonist. Accordingly the female characters such as Medea cannot be part of an epic poem as a protagonist, or heroine, they only have parts in tragedies in which they are killed, punished or marginalised for their deeds. In addition to that, even though they are skilful fighters, the Amazons are hardly ever thought to be heroines since they trigger male anxiety as powerful female figures, thus they challenge and pose a threat to the workings of the society in the ancient texts. That is why they are excluded and live as outcast figures.

However, with the help of feminism and along with that, women writers' assertion of their autonomy, individuality and creativity in writing, they find the opportunity to write about themselves, their bodies, and they may exist without stereotyping or limiting themselves with clear-cut definitions. The place of women writers, the importance of their writing in diminishing the dominion of patriarchal discourse in literature and the purpose of retelling are the topics discussed in Chapter II. Women writers' literary works are not presented as the repetition of already existing stories but demonstrate completely new ideas and female points of view. Once claiming their place in literature, women writers begin to look back at ancient texts, the way female characters are portrayed in revealing the patriarchal discourse, causing the misrepresentation of female characters. The reason for revising and retelling the stories of mythological female figures from a feminist perspective is thus to point out how deep these misogynistic texts are rooted in literature and how much they shape and affect the perception of gender roles.

To illustrate this, I have analysed two retellings, Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Laura Shepperson's *Phaedra: A Novel*, by indicating the differences in the portrayal of these two characters from their ancient versions. While making these comparisons, my main aim was to focus on the discourse and the language used to describe the character of Circe and Phaedra in the ancient narratives. Thus I studied the way they are defined, the attributions they are associated with and the level of autonomy they are given in the selected works authored by men. Subsequently, I separately examined Miller's and Shepperson's retellings in order to mark the way these texts challenge the patriarchal narratives through the changes made by contemporary feminist point of view with a close reading.

As demonstrated in Chapter III, the character of Circe is mainly known through

the works of Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes, Virgil and Ovid in relation to her wickedness and her violence as an evil witch. There is no additional information about her identity or any reasonable explanation of her actions that make her appear monstrous. She is the sorceress, a seductress and an evil goddess who uses and abuses men as she wishes. Thus her sexuality affects Circe's attribution as an evil witch as much as her magical skills. She turns men into swine in *The Odyssey*, she cannot bear his refusal and transforms Picus into a woodpecker in *The Aeneid*, and in *Metamorphoses* she turns Scylla into a monster as a punishment for Glaucus preferring Scylla over herself. Because of these one-sided texts solely emphasizing the vices of Circe, she is presented as the sorceress who uses her supernatural power for her sexual fantasies and evil purposes. On the other hand, Madeline Miller in *Circe*, centralises her character and tells the reader a broader and more detailed aspects of her life spanning from the beginning of her life to her implied death as a mortal. Writing from a feminist viewpoint, Miller enables Circe to tell her story including her position in her family, her relationship with men, the background of her exile to Aeaea, her motherhood, repossession of her freedom and the way she asserts her autonomy and power throughout her journey. The portrayal of her character in multiple dimensions and relations allow the reader to witness how Circe is treated as an outsider by her family members, how her innocent and genuine feelings towards Glaucus are ignored though she accomplishes a greater act when she transforms him into an immortal, and how this heartbreak through her rejection influences her relationship with men in general such as with Hermes and Odysseus and also how it results in her banishment.

Moreover, Miller portrays Circe as someone who has the ability to turn negative situations into positive ones. As her banishment helps her in her assertiveness and self-discovery as a witch, the incident of rape also contributes to her empowerment, confidence and character development. Hence, these situations can be considered as benchmarks on her journey to become the master of her life and realise her inner power. Accordingly, her power of transformation is presented as Circe's way of self-protection, as it is depicted where she turns those who rape her into pigs and kills them, not as an action initiated merely by an evil purpose. Circe's struggles during pregnancy and her role as a mother is another empowering factor in her life. This part of the novel is also crucial as it shows Circe's courage as a mother, particularly when she stands up to a higher divinity, Athena, in order to protect her son, Telegonus. Thanks to Miller's in-depth

analysis of her life story the reader is able to witness Circe's willpower and confidence, particularly when she reclaims her freedom by challenging her father and decides to spend rest of her life as a mortal. Therefore, Madeline Miller's eponymous novel *Circe* shatters the stereotypical monstrous witch image created by ancient male authors and offers a different and detailed perspective of her story by assigning her agency, a voice to prove that she is more than how she is defined.

In Chapter IV, the accounts of Euripides, Ovid and Seneca are used to demonstrate their classical portrayal of Phaedra by minimising her autonomy and addressing her guilt and immorality in each of their works. Phaedra is known for the one and only myth written about her; she as a stepmother who develops feelings towards her stepson, Hippolytus, ending up dying in different ways according to different accounts. As her story is perpetuated for many writers over the ages and she is presented as the guilty one in each of them, Phaedra has been associated with negative connotations such as the seductress, cheater, and wicked. Through the selective works by Euripides, Ovid and Seneca, Phaedra is regarded as the worst version of the stereotypical stepmother due to her corrupted and immoral intentions and feelings towards her stepson, Hippolytus. Even though the story is originally initiated with the jealousy of the goddess, Aphrodite, her involvement is almost forgotten and Phaedra is debased for her incestuous thoughts and sinful behaviour.

Conversely, Laura Shepperson reimagines the character of Phaedra in her book *Phaedra: A Novel* by providing her with a voice to retell her story from a feminist standpoint. The novel is structured as a play with its prologue, acts and exodus. Shepperson illustrates an extensively detailed portrayal of Phaedra's family structure, background to her marriage, the rape incident and its court case, her pregnancy and death, by pointing out how these struggles and painful events contribute to her character in her journey to be a determined, fearless, powerful, courageous and self-governing young woman. It also offers the reader another way to look at her character and story by exploring a different point of view claiming her honesty and revealing Hippolytus as a rapist and a violent man.

The novel has multiple female and male characters in their own parts. Through the various perspective of female figures, Shepperson clarifies the class-related gender norms and exposes the abuse and subjugation of Athenian women. The Night chorus who are composed of lower-class women shows how they are disregarded and devalued

through their constant exposure to the violation and harassment of men. Medea, for instance, does not belong to any group since she is treated as an outcast figure and she illustrates her struggle to stay alive in an environment where she is unwanted and detested for her past. This extensive portrayal of Athenian women provide critical insight into the hardship of being a woman and the cruelty of ancient Greek men. Phaedra's character plays a crucial role in understanding and resisting the mistreatment of women as she hears their sufferings every night and attempts to change this system as one in a higher position and having a voice. Still, Phaedra's privileged status does not protect her from the danger of men, as Hippolytus' rape of Phaedra demonstrates. Even though this terrible situation emotionally and physically harms Phaedra, it also contributes to the creation of a female solidarity, as all the women formed a consensus against, the violence and brutality of men. Shepperson's portrayal of Phaedra's empowerment with the support of other women stresses the uplifting and restorative power of women.

Personally, the rape incident also encourages Phaedra to make this a court case and stand up for her righteousness as the voice of those who are not allowed to talk. Though it is a sign of bravery and inner-strength for Phaedra, the court proceedings fuel the rage of men's fragile masculinity as Hippolytus and his friends become even more extreme towards the women in the palace and in return this damages the female solidarity. Moreover, Shepperson draws attention to the idea of justice and how it is not served justly when it is for the sake of women. In an environment where it is extremely hard for women to be assertive, Phaedra is brave enough to defend her dignity through this case. Yet, as this newly-established system is controlled by men, Hippolytus is not punished for his crime in spite of his plea of guilt. Thus, Phaedra whose sense of justice is shattered both by this governmental system and by the gods, kills Hippolytus and provides her own justice. For this action her other motivation is to see Theseus suffer for the damage he has caused to her family. That is why she commits suicide and kills herself and her baby in order to prevent the harm her child might face in the future depending on its gender and to put an end to Theseus' lineage.

With this particular end, the novel might be considered as another version of Seneca's tragedy *Phaedra*, but it differently offers the reader the story of a young woman who is self-governed, vocal, courageous and ready to take action not only for herself but for a greater group, the women. Even though her actions cannot be justified as she has

caused the death of Hippolytus, her baby and herself, the detailed description of her struggles, the reasons and circumstances leading her to this conclusion enable the reader to empathise with Phaedra and to understand her in a way. The end of Shepperson's novel also suggests that she does not rewrite Phaedra's story to favour one sex over the other or to portray Phaedra as a totally innocent figure, rather her aim is to demonstrate Phaedra's life with a more neutral aspect without stereotyping or turning her into a monster or a wicked figure. For this reason, the novel ends with a female character, Xenethippe who both knows Phaedra and the realities of Athens and thus does not believe their fictional narratives as stated by the bards. This can also be seen as symbolising the weakening power of patriarchal discourses with feminism.

Furthermore, the two selected works, Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Laura Shepperson's *Phaedra: A Novel* differ in terms of narrative structure, style and character development. Both novels individually explores the ways these two authors reimagine the stories of Circe and Phaedra by providing what they lack such as the voice, agency and resilience for self-growth. Miller places Circe as her main character and creates a bildungsroman through her life journey. However, in *Phaedra: A Novel*, though Phaedra and her journey is at the centre of her story, Laura Shepperson does not restrict herself and also includes the perspectives of different female and male characters belonging to different social classes so as to present a broader picture regarding the mistreatment of women in ancient Greece.

These two novels also share similar themes such as the theme of female solidarity. In Miller's novel, female solidarity is evidently demonstrated through the friendship of Penelope and Circe. These two women are known for their relationship with Odysseus; one is the wife and the other is the lover. In *Circe*, Miller enables the reader to individually explore Circe and Penelope's characters with a totally different perspective. The death of Odysseus brings them together and they eventually become companions. Circe who is a self-governed, confident and powerful witch and mother meets Penelope who is equally intelligent and open-minded. Miller permits the reader to know a different Penelope, the one whose only identity is not being Odysseus' wife or Telemachus' mother but rather Penelope who is brave and open to learn new things such as witchcraft. Her interest in sorcery strengthens Penelope and Circe's friendship to the extent that Circe leaves her island to Penelope after she repossesses her freedom and decides to leave. By highlighting

the uplifting force of female solidarity which Circe has tried to form with her sister and Medea but fails, and by presenting an alternative to Penelope's character, Miller achieves not only to demolish the constructed gender roles but also the labels unwillingly attained to these characters.

In Phaedra: A Novel, the female solidarity is seen through Phaedra's relation with multiple women particularly Medea and The Night Chorus. The women in this novel are mostly the victims and rarely the survivors of the cruelty and violence of men. However, when they unite, they empower themselves in many aspects. Phaedra's empathy for the lamentation of The Night Chorus and her discomfort from the actions of men encourages her to help them and she decides to talk to Hippolytus on this matter. Accordingly, after the rape incident, women in the Athenian palace leave gifts at Phaedra's door to express their emotional support and this situation incites Phaedra not to be silent about it. Hence, she makes the rape incident a law case to defend the right both of herself and of these women who are not able to speak. Even though this situation ends with Hippolytus and his friends brutally wreaking their anger on the Athenian women and thus damages the solidarity they have formed, Shepperson indicates Phaedra's selfless and fearless personality through this incident.

The relationship between Medea and Phaedra might also be considered as an example to female solidarity. Even though Phaedra is a queen and Medea is the partner of the former king, the cousins are seen and treated as outsiders. The circumstances make them closer and they almost become each other's mentor. Phaedra asks for Medea's advice for the crucial situations like her pregnancy. Their bond enables Medea's side of her story to be revealed as she infers the reason for murdering her children as Jason's possible incestuous tendencies in one of their conversations. Inclusion of her story changes Medea's image, if not showing background to the events causing her to be labelled as an evil mother. For these reasons, the female solidarity in *Phaedra: A novel* plays a crucial part in depicting the hardship of being a woman, the violence and brutality they constantly face as well as the empowering and healing source of their unity. Apart from their personal journey to become powerful, vocal and self-governing women, the help and support of other women in their lives contributes to Circe and Phaedra's inner-strength and character development.

Circe and *Phaedra: A Novel* are two prominent examples illustrating women

writers' aim to show female characters as strong and self-sufficient without turning them into monsters for their sexuality or powers. By challenging the ancient texts Circe and Phaedra take part in, these rewritings allow them to express their individual experiences as women and point out that what is important is not what they eventually do or become but rather the path, the whole background bringing these characters to certain situations and contributing to their identity. In this regard, the story of Circe and Phaedra demonstrate that they have agency over their lives and do not live just to comply with social expectations but rather with their own aims. Therefore, these two outstanding works of Miller and Shepperson can be considered as the manifestation of the ongoing battle of feminism against the unhealthy, discriminatory and othering mind-set of patriarchy that has its roots back in ancient periods.

The detailed analysis of Miller and Shepperson's retellings underscore the significance of revisiting the stories of classical mythology from a contemporary feminist point of view to reveal the demeaning representation of women in the patriarchal discourse back in the ancient Greek myths and how in the twenty-first century women writers are still try to break this ideology that subjugates women's rights, freedom and identity through their own works. What I aim to illustrate through this study is the fact that the retellings do not only carry the purpose of providing agency and voice to these female figures who have been silenced, mistreated and marginalised for so long but also aim to present the hitherto unspoken struggles of women writers against the patriarchal ideology to overcome such destructive and demeaning female images. Hence, this study deserves further investigation as it encourages people to look back at fairy tales, stories, myths and legends for the purpose of revaluating the ancient texts from a critical lens hence culminating in multiple perceptions. As the primary concern of this thesis is the Western texts, a further investigation could be employed to non-Western myths such as Asian and African and the way the female sex is presented and how much autonomy and freedom is given to these characters. The examinations of multiple mythologies of multiple cultures from a contemporary viewpoint may both reveal constructedness of gender roles globally and contribute to our perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

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