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Bewitched: Form and Female Agency in Madeline Miller's "Circe"

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Abstract

This MA thesis examines Madeline Miller's novel *Circe* (2018), an adaptation of the Greek tale of the goddess Circe. Since one of the aims is to analyze the character of Circe in terms of feminist thought, the analysis is based on Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément's 1975 collection of essays *The Newly Born Woman* and the ideas of feminism and women's writing on women's liberation and representation. The analysis is also carried out by examining the metaphor of witchcraft because Circe is first and foremost a witch. Relying on the literary and theoretical insights, I study how witchcraft is used to reflect different aspects of womanhood and how Circe, as a goddess, can be used to represent a woman who, despite being continuously oppressed and barred from a functioning society, can break free and use the maltreatment to her advantage, all the while highlighting the values of women's writing. Even though the original myth of Circe dates back to the depths of Ancient Greece, the transformation of her depiction throughout the ages provides interesting and beneficial insights even in today's world, touching upon significant themes like women's emancipation, independence, and inclusion.

1. Introduction

*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.*

– Madeline Miller, *Circe*, 2018

The quote above echoes the ever-changing milieu of a modern woman's life, every effort documented in feminist thought that has led up to this moment, when women are notably leaving their marks in literary tradition and not in its margins. Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018) is a story about the goddess Circe, a figure in Greek mythology rewritten from the female gaze as opposed to centuries of wrongful depiction as an evil seductress. Greek myths have always figured in the literary, social, or cultural environment since the times of Ancient Greece up until its revival in the Renaissance and even now, in modern times. They can influence people's actions, thoughts, or creativity since they can be used to explain or communicate a didactic tale or whatever else is on one's mind. In addition, the countless deities representing different aspects bear a certain charm of the ancient world that today's society may find fascinating and would like to elaborate on further. To come back to Miller's adaptation of the myth of Circe, it does not simply retell and reimagine the story of the first enchantress, but also presents an important idea of another kind, the one that bears encouraging values regarding the rights of women; it can be said that it rejects Circe's widespread negative image of a predatory woman and presents an opposing one – a woman who celebrates her nature.

Another no less important aspect of the cultural history sphere wherein the object of this research figures is Homer himself, the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the latter an epic where Circe enacts the biggest role of her fictional life. As Christian Baier states,

Homer's epics, the Iliad and Odyssey, are considered not only "the beginning of classical Greek civilization," but also "the fons et origio [sic] of Western culture" in general, which in this context means European culture. Much more than the Odyssey, the story of Odysseus's ten years of wandering in his quest to return home, the narrative of the Iliad has left its mark on European history from antiquity throughout the Middle Ages and up to the present, when, as Adam Goldwyn puts it, "the Trojan War as an artistic topic went global." (2017, 36)

This suggests how Homer's works and the discourse of Greek myths within them strongly operate even today, producing relevant ground for conveying topics and stories relevant to each era after his own. There are seemingly countless characters to work with and to use them and their actions as tropes, all in an attempt to align their beings with an idea or an event. Not to mention the debates about Homer's identity or the forms of his works, it is safe to say that his legacy lives on in cultural history and does not intend to dissipate in near future.

Circe, as a transfiguration master, has undergone quite a transformation herself – all the way from antiquity to the Renaissance to now. Under the pen of a man, she was more or less the same – a wily sorceress, using her powers for her wicked gains. Why would they want to change her? She was brought to life in fiction a couple of millennia ago by Homer, a great scholar, so there must not be any reason to reshape her – she is already the way she is supposed to be. Even without any negative or evil intentions, men did not always depict the female gaze most accurately. Naturally, women, after they finally started taking up the pen and correcting the misconceptions, portrayed Circe in a more liberating way, the way where they let the female gaze through.

To start from the beginning, Homer's Circe personifies the dangerous strength of a woman's sexuality. Even if such an image was not the author's objective, later male authors picked up exactly on this motif up until and during the Renaissance. After Homer came Vergil and Ovid, the former portraying her in the *Aeneid* as the wife of Picus, while the latter in *Metamorphoses* tells more about the story of Picus being turned into a woodpecker (Rodax 1971, 585). Both of them focus on Circe being a wife of a man, not a woman in her own right with magical powers. When they do mention the powers, it is in speaking of her using them to transform Picus, to show that Circe did not use her magic in benevolence. However, during the 19th century, with the dawn of women's authorship, we can already detect some women writing about Circe. One of such pioneers was poetess Augusta Webster, who wrote a blank verse poem called "Circe", a part of her volume *Portraits* (1870). There she rejects the long-reigning belief that Circe is voluntarily malicious and instead writes that by turning men into pigs she merely took away the mask that made them appear human. Webster's writing is notable for the way she poetically analyses women's psyche instead of superficial and objectifying features. As Madhumita Biswas puts it,

Choosing not to use the anti-heroine archetype that has characterised both Medea and Circe down the ages, Webster probes deep into the consciousness of each woman to explore their psychological complexities, not only to understand who they are, but also why and how they have become who they are. Also, her use of dramatic monologue enables her heroines to speak in the privileged "I" mode, revealing their inner thoughts and defending their actions in their own subjective voices, thus offering glimpses into those aspects of their characters which were hitherto unknown to the world. (2015, 56)

We can detect here one of the budding instances of sharing a woman's voice, her own say in who she is and why she acts the way she does. The fact that more attention is being paid to women's psyche rather than bodily encounters can suggest the first step towards resisting the basic image of a woman through a man's eyes. No matter what the point-of-view is or what it conveys, it is an important step toward what Cixous initiated a hundred years after. This is what we see in women's writing – taking the phallogocentric definitions and forming them into those that women can be proud of and use without diminishing themselves. After such a long reign of patriarchal claims and restrictions, women have finally started to speak up and incorporate their own voices into literary theory, this way becoming a part of a new era of cultural history. Such comparison shows that Circe, as a character, has been

stereotypically portrayed by male writers/poets many times throughout the centuries, and only relatively recently women have taken the heroine into their own hands and started giving her some justice by portraying her in a brighter light. At this point, it is important to note that Homer depicted Circe as a *witch*, which brings me to the next point.

Today, witches are mostly used to scare children into obedience with an image of a green-skinned, warp-ridden hag with a pointy hat, flying a broom. She is a heroine or a villain in a countless number of adaptations in literature, cinema, and many other mediums, yet in most of these instances, she is still not free of that harmful, misleading depiction. To reach into the roots of the time when witchcraft was first viewed as evil, Kimberly B. Stratton refers to the ancient conflict between the Greeks and the Persians:

Persians became associated with tyranny, decadent effeminacy, cruelty, and chaos. Magic discourse, I argue, emerged at this time part and parcel of the new discourse of barbarism. Mageia – the religion of Athens's enemy, Persia – now also acquired associations with various characteristics and practices that Athenians regarded as un-Greek and barbaric. (2007, 41)

One thing is clear – this so-called *mageia*, enchantment, wizardry, was not deemed favorable by the Greeks. It aroused further suspicion and reason to eradicate the Persians, which became one of the first budding instances of the Otherness of the witchcraft. In addition, what makes witchcraft harmful, is the aforementioned association of decadence with femininity and effeminacy, just as Stratton noted in the quote above.

To venture towards the dawn of a modern novel, one of the first writers to produce them as we know them today, Nathaniel Hawthorne, does not leave the subject of witchcraft untouched as well. Through *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne introduces his strict Puritan ancestors as being one of the harshest inquisitors during the Salem witch trials and aligns the figure of the witch with Hester Prynne, an oppressed woman who is marked as an adulteress and thus struggles to repent and live a new life. The book is heavily permeated with the theme of occult and witchcraft in terms of metaphors, especially since witchcraft is closely associated with creating things out of nothing, much like a writer creates a novel, a romance – something that the Puritan society strongly rejected and claimed is the work of the devil. As Karl P. Wentersdorf explains,

In the traditional view of the Puritan world, fiction originated with the Devil. Just as English Puritans of the sixteenth century inveighed against romances as tissues of lies, and against the theatre as a place of sinful delight and thus an invention of Satan for the damnation of the godly, so the Puritans of New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries denounced fictional works – except for avowedly didactic writings like those of Bunyan and Richardson – as calculated to stir up the passions and thus corrupt their readers. (1972, 152)

This is also closely related to the fact that the so-called fallen woman, Hester, was marked with the scarlet letter “A” so that she would parade her shame around, all so that the society could publicly shun women who have disrespected the patriarchal norms.

Much later, with the emergence of popular fiction and its adaptations, witches started revolving in a friendlier environment. *Practical Magic* (1995) by Alice Hoffman became one of the first instances of the more pleasant image of a witch, of a woman who has accepted her shunned identity and continues growing strong. The Owens sisters, Sally and Gillian, have struggled all their life with having been born witches. The former tries to live a modest life and teaches her own daughters to suppress the gift of magic, while the latter does not repress her abilities to such extremes and uses her powers from time to time. After many challenges, the sisters finally embrace their true selves and make peace with their neighbors, all living in peace.

There is an innumerable amount of portrayals of witches in literary tradition, where Madeline Miller (b. 1978) has made her mark as well, projecting the classic Greek mythology through a contemporary lens, shaping the stories in a way that the modern reader would better understand them and compare the trials and errors with their own lives. Miller is an American-born author specializing in Latin and Greek, having graduated from Brown University where she gained a BA and MA in Classics. Her interests include modern adaptations of classic stories, which she has tried out herself in a few cases: her debut novel *The Song of Achilles* (2011), short stories “Heracles’ Bow” (2012) and “Galatea” (2013), as well as her newest novel *Circe* (2018), which I am going to analyze in terms of form and female agency. Both *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* have been ranked by Tutor House¹ as the top books for Classics students in 2021, implying that even modern reimaginings of classic stories are worth being taken into account for today’s society. While *The Song of Achilles*, the winner of the 2012 Orange Prize for Fiction, is a heartfelt retelling of Achilles and Patroclus’ bond and friendship and is discussed widely for its knack for easily bringing tears to readers’ eyes, *Circe*, a *New York Times* bestseller, brings a thorough account of age-old suppression and mistreatment of women.

One of the reasons why Miller keeps returning to Ancient Greek myths could be because of her degree in Classics or her being a seasoned expert of the Greek language, yet Greek myth adaptations can be called a trend in today’s discourse. After all, there is a plethora of gods and goddesses to choose from and shape their story to fit today’s realities, to make it relatable to a modern reader, all the while maintaining the charm of ancient stories. Such book adaptations most often have LGBT, feminist, and self-discovery topics to them, just like in Miller’s novels *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. One reason for that could be that these modern values and themes contrast strongly with the original ones of the Ancient Greek world and so in turn produce a fascinating effect of combining the old with the new. Other more prominent examples of rewritten Greek stories include *Autobiography of Red* (1999) by Anne Carson, a verse novel based on the myth of Geryon and the Tenth Labor of Hercules, *Aristotle and Dante Discover*

¹ <https://tutorhouse.co.uk/blog/the-song-of-achilles-and-5-other-books-classics-students-need-to-read>. Accessed: 21 December 2021.

the Secrets of the Universe (2012) by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, an LGBT young adult novel with the main characters' names based on real-life Greek philosopher Aristotle and Italian poet Dante Alighieri, *A Thousand Ships* (2021) by Natalie Haynes, another retelling of the Trojan war, yet centering on the women's perspective, and *Ariadne* (2021) by Jennifer Saint, a modern rebirth of the Cretan princess Ariadne.

To be able to process Circe's modern portrayal it is necessary to review her origins. Since Greek myths were not put in an anthology or a volume like we are easily able to do today, there were many versions of different myths, yet the idea remained more or less the same. In the classic, most popular version, Circe is the daughter of the titan Helios, the sun god, and the Oceanid Perse. After the other gods caught wind of her abilities, they banished her to the island of Aiaia where she was intended to spend all eternity. Once Odysseus' men step foot on the island they are transfigured into pigs, yet Odysseus himself is able to defeat Circe with the help of Hermes, the Olympian messenger and the god of travelers. He ingests the herb called moly, which acts as an antidote to Circe's charms, and so he draws a sword before her and wins her genuine affection as a bonus.² Resisting Circe is viewed as a victory against the witch, yet it can be seen without the negative implications: that was the budding instance of the love between them when each met their equal.

It has already been made clear that ancient myths were not written from a woman's perspective the way we would expect stories to be written today when the lack of it can be considered outdated and sometimes even marginalizing. In the age where equality is striven for so desperately, it has become unacceptable to give rise to one side of the story only. Bearing that in mind, we can view Miller's *Circe* as the newest remedy for that, as an account that allows us to review the initially misogynistic story in a different light, from a female heroine's point of view. Even though it is still a work of fiction, myths, just like then and now too, may be able to encourage us to establish values that align better with today's world and rethink the ones that perhaps may have been imposed.

Be it in art or literature, as mentioned before, Circe almost always bears the image of a vicious, seductive enchantress, the one who only recently has started to gain her own voice and momentum in different forms of portrayal. Bram Dijkstra explains how Circe's feminine confidence posed a threat to a man's resolve:

Given women's presumed regressive tendencies and their consequent interest in bestial relationships, it was also not surprising that the painters of the fin de siècle were especially eager to use Circe as a cautionary example of the eternal feminine. This Homeric witch's habit of turning men into swine was, after all, a clear indication of man's need to maintain his distance from the animal-woman. (1988, 321)

² https://www.greekmythology.com/Other_Gods/Circe/circe.html. Accessed: 22 February 2022.

Such representation may have been pushed forward as proof of a woman's insanity or volatility. For example, in his most famous work *Ulysses* (1922), Irish modernist titan James Joyce created a character named Bella Cohen to act as a modern representation of Circe. The fact that Bella is portrayed as a dominant, stern, and masculine woman can be deemed a personification of the patriarchal fear of a woman's inner freedom and her acceptance of her sexuality since the story's protagonist Bloom suffers from dreaming about how Bella degrades him and rides him like a horse, in other words, tames and takes advantage of his masculinity, feminizes him. Judith Yarnall explains the effect Bella has on Bloom: "Joyce's [Circe], who has no story of her own (a deficiency she shares with almost every other Circe imagined by a male writer), plays upon Leopold Bloom's sexual masochism like a virtuoso, like the turn-of-the-century femme fatale she emphatically is." (1994, 5). As we will discuss later in this thesis, it will become apparent that Circe was given a transformation of her own once she was taken into the hands of women creators and shaped through the female gaze, finally given her own voice and the chance to show the other side of the so often unjustly told story. *Circe* is a relatively new book, thus, to the best of my knowledge, little research has been done in analyzing the novel alongside the concept of women's writing and the metaphor of the witch.

To summarize, in this MA thesis I aim to examine the metaphor of witchcraft in terms of feminist critique, to analyze how Circe represents female empowerment, and finally, to highlight the importance of women's writing in literary tradition. To reveal the aspect of feminist thought in my research, I will draw upon *The Newly Born Woman* (1975) by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, a scholarly work of feminist philosophy discussing female subjugation and ways of liberation, while my analysis of the novel will be divided into four sub-chapters concerned with the aspect of the body, witchcraft, patriarchy, and womanhood, all of them presenting Circe as a heroine of her own *Bildungsroman*. The MA thesis will end with conclusions and a summary in Lithuanian.

2. A Woman's Voice: A Theoretical Framework

I look for myself throughout the centuries and don't see myself anywhere.

– Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 1975

As the seemingly never-ending debate about a woman's place in literature escalates towards the end of the 20th century, French feminist philosophers Cixous and Clément compile an anthology of their essays and dialogues under the title *The Newly Born Woman*. The quote above taken from the book is meant to call attention to the lack of feminine perspective in literature, one of the main themes of Cixous and Clément's dialogue. The title in itself already suggests themes for all sorts of women's liberation, yet there is even more meaning in the original French title: *La Jeune Née* since it is also a homonym for three more phrases, the first of them being *La Genêt*, an allusion to a French writer-turned criminal Jean Genêt, a symbol of political rejection, ideological commitment, and chaotic good, whose writing contained themes of homosexuality, prostitution, crime, and every other sort of vice he encountered. The other reason why Cixous and Clément pay homage to this dramatist could be because he represents resistance in general, a more radical one, the kind that the feminist discourse sometimes needs to shake up the stagnant society and lifestyle just enough. The second phrase is *Là je n'est*, which translates to "There I, a subject, is not", suggesting the lack of the feminine subject in the ages of literary theory, while the third one, *Là je une nais*, progressively means "There I, a subject (a feminine one), am born". Cixous and Clément take the non-subject and create it into the subject, into a female that is claiming her place in literary theory, lurking past Freud's blind spots like criminals, like the aforementioned Genêt (Cixous & Clément 1975, 166).

To delve deeper into the chosen theoretical framework, Hélène Cixous is a French feminist writer whose ideas have been majorly influenced by Jacques Derrida and Sigmund Freud. One of her more notable works is an essay called "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), where she initially introduces the concept of women's writing. Catherine Clément is a French feminist philosopher and the author of multiple novels and essays, some of them presenting reflections on Freud and Claude Lévi-Strauss. *The Newly Born Woman* consists of three parts: in "The Guilty One" Clément analyzes the image of a woman as a sorceress, in "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" Cixous presents the ways of liberation, while in the last part "Exchange" the authors engage in a discourse of their differences and similarities (ibid., p. x). In general, this collection of essays analyzes the ways a woman can express herself and eventually break free from the confines forced upon her by the patriarchal society and, naturally, there

are many terms relevant to feminist thought, yet the most important one to this MA paper is that of women's writing (*écriture féminine*).

Before analyzing the notion of women's writing it would be beneficial to briefly review a few other ones that figure in the book. It would be worth mentioning 'the French Freud' Jacques Lacan's theory of phallic language structure, wherein he makes the distinction between the penis and the phallus, naming the latter a signifier. According to Todd McGowan,

Lacan distinguishes the phallus from a fantasy, from a part-object, and from the penis. The phallus isn't the penis but instead symbolizes the penis. When he says this, Lacan marks his distance from any defense of patriarchy. Lacan's insistence that the phallus is a simulacrum rather than a substantial source of identity aligns him with the feminist project and not the patriarchal one. (2018, 12)

Lacan's theory provides the potential for feminists to speak up and proceed with their goals of women's writing by rejecting phallogocentrism, to take his concepts and shape them even further by presenting their own views, yet his ideas are not the only ones that got transformed. *The Newly Born Woman* starts with the section "The Guilty One", wherein the roles of the sorceress and the hysteric are presented. Respectively, Clément alludes to Jules Michelet's *sorceress* and Freud's *hysteric*:

This feminine role, the role of sorceress, of hysteric, is ambiguous, antiestablishment, and conservative at the same time. Antiestablishment because the symptoms – the attacks – revolt and shake up the public, the group, the men, the others to whom they are exhibited. The sorceress heals, against the Church's canon; she performs abortions, favors nonconjugal love, converts the unlivable space of a stifling Christianity. (1975, 5)

On the one hand, Michelet's *sorceress* rises from his book on the history of witchcraft *Satanism and Witchcraft* (1862), the original French title being *La Sorcière*, literally meaning 'the sorceress'. The French historian was one of the first people who used the metaphor of witchcraft/sorceress to convey the perspective of women and explain the witch trials in a sociological context rather than justifying them with religious, often harmful means. Qinna Shen highlights why exactly Michelet is popular among the feminist scholars:

La Sorcière is of vital importance for understanding feminist witchcraft. It incisively analyzes the apparent and hidden reasons for witch-hunting. The fate of the so-called witch bears out Michelet's antichurch stance. Likewise, the church and its misogynist views come under feminist attack. Thus, Michelet and his rehabilitation of the witch gain appreciation from the witch-admiring feminists, who are often atheist and/or anti-Christian, and see the heretic, the unorthodox thinker and a woman healer in the witch. (2008, 29)

On the other hand, Freud's infamous *hysteric* is a more categorizing and limiting notion, designed to explain the excessive behavior in women, which also strengthened the stereotype that women are ruled by their own emotions and therefore cannot make rational decisions. It even went as far as to become a proper medical diagnosis for a while.³ Both a *sorceress* and a *hysteric* denote a woman, and even if the former is more relevant to this thesis, the latter is worth mentioning as well since it is often used with

³ <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-hysteria-2795232>. Accessed: 19 March 2022.

the intent of diminishing a woman and condemning her psyche. Cixous refers to another phrase borrowed by Freud, the “dark continent”:

Not only is she the portion of strangeness – inside his universe where she revives his restlessness and desire. Within his economy, she is the strangeness he likes to appropriate. Moreover, the "dark continent" trick has been pulled on her: she has been kept at a distance from herself, she has been made to see (= not-see) woman on the basis of what man wants to see of her, which is to say, almost nothing. (1975, 68)

The “dark continent”⁴, according to Freud, signifies the uncharted waters of a map that is female sexuality, automatically marking a woman as something too different from a human to be explained in logical, concise terms. Such juxtaposition of different terms is vital to the discourse wherein Cixous and Clément are trying to take the negativity forced upon women and morph it to their advantage, to encourage women to claim their nature and resist the haunting imprints of the long past. It can be said that the fixation on the women’s bodies was an unhealthy obsession, another way of establishing control and power of the patriarchy, where unpredictability and disorder are not welcome. Not only does it cripple women psychologically and physically, but it also affects their view of their own beings since the patriarchy forced them to see their bodies as cages and not home.

Another concept that often occurs in writings about feminism or women’s writing is *jouissance*. As Jennifer Hagar talks about the new wave of feminism and its revolutionaries like Cixous, Monique Wittig, and Marguerite Duras, she also mentions that they draw their inspiration from the concept:

Their writings are inspired by the notion of la jouissance. La jouissance, (the french [sic] word for joy that also means coming) has come to refer to women’s specific sexuality – and by connection – women’s language, the pleasure of language. From the verb jouir (to enjoy, experience sexual pleasure) – the terms suggest fluidity, diffusion, duration without concern for ends or closure. (1980, 18)

The term then is associated with women’s acceptance of their bodily and sexual image, as well as the newly-found freedom to express themselves and become a full-fledged part of literary tradition, to weave their thoughts in a fluid, joyful manner, to simply be able to enjoy life.

As mentioned before, the term *women’s writing* was first coined by Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” and ever since became an important concept in the feminist critique. Cixous’ own understanding of women’s writing suggests that the old must be replaced with the new in terms of women entering the literary sphere and that women must understand just how important a role they can take up and project. The concept aims to create a new style of writing that is erratic yet smooth, partly mocking the stereotype that women are irrational and emotionally driven, yet in this MA thesis, we will mainly focus on the female agency in literature that women’s writing is welcoming, resisting the phallogocentric model. In addition, it seeks to bring an end to the silence and absence of women in literary theory, to allow women to *speak* by rejecting phallogocentrism and leaving the peripheries for

⁴ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/dark-continent>. Accessed: 13 April 2022.

the center. In terms of fiction, this is often completed by taking a minor female character from a book, a poem, *etc.*, and breathing new life into her by giving her a purpose and a chance to retell the events from her side, to make history into herstory. It is also considered a full-fledged literary category and despite its discreet reach, it is just as important as any other type of writing theory. The concept of representing women in writing in itself is not new, since, as mentioned previously, it certainly has been done before the 1970s by the Brontë sisters or Jane Austen, yet the distinctive factor here is that the category specifically seeks to portray how women have been (mis)represented in history compared to men and what can be done to remedy that. Now, women seek not only to be represented, but represented rightly, justly, and constantly.

Women's writing is inevitably linked with a woman's bodily image. As has been made clear now, women have been condemned for their sexuality, what we can now call a double standard. Clément, in "Signs and Marks: The Theater of the Body" chapter of *The Newly Born Woman*, talks about the Loudun witch trials of 17th century France:

Women's bodies must be bound so that the constraints will make the demons come out; then, when the spectators have gathered in a circle, when the lions have come into the ring, they are let go-the pleasure of danger, the raging beauty of wild beasts in constrained freedom, of the violent demoniacal forces gripping the women; but no, they are no longer women, no longer girls. The female body served only as intermediary, prop, passage. Passage accomplished, that which is no longer woman but beast, devil, symptom is set free. The girls are not released, the demons are: the girls are bound. (1975, 11)

The witch trials were a questionable affair to start with, not to mention how women were made to be monsters and tortured in unimaginable ways just because of some baseless and perverse suspicion and superstition. The female body was viewed indeed as only a vessel, an object, and the soul was what needed to be cleansed, even obliterated – all of this sounds like an unjustified excuse for conducting such inhumane acts. The 21st century is certainly not the 17th, yet there are still some cases today of children being cast out due to the suspicions of being a witch/warlock, little girls are being given away to marry, and the subjects of natural processes like menstruation or menopause are sometimes still taboo – that is exactly why a feminist's work is never done. According to Cixous, if women can express their sexuality and embrace their bodily agency outside the confines of masculine objectification, they will be able to create a new space where the phallogocentric standards will be deconstructed not only in theory but in practice as well (Jones 1981, 248). That is also why Cixous and Clément analyze so many sexualized and stereotype-ridden theories and encourage women to reverse the accusations they are being charged with because women's sexuality and bodily freedom are not something to be punished for; if men can enjoy and own their bodies, why cannot women? Thus, women's writing, as a domain of literary studies, is based on the extensive history of women's marginalization and seeks to highlight the ways of liberation, especially bearing in mind that women are condemned just *because* they are women, because of their bodies. Women's writing is meant to reveal all the toils and troubles of women

throughout the ages and how they can still create their own space where they are able to express themselves as who they are, claiming all the rights and wrongs, and creating a style that is inconsistent yet continuous, expressive yet sensible, imitating the joy and ability to finally be heard from the space that is their own.

Yet the body is not just the body, it is more a signifier than an actual sign, according to Vivian Kogan who draws on Cixous' ideas:

Ubiquitous and protean, the sign corps designates female anatomy, feminine libido, and the feminine unconscious. It can also refer to a particular woman's history or experience. The "body" as such is inseparable from the textual and intertextual corpus that articulates those significations. Cixous therefore seeks a protoplasmic form to render the constant displacement of the body, "le corps sans cadre, sans peau, sans mur, la chair qui ne sèche pas, qui ne se raidit pas, qui ne caille pas, le sang fou qui veut le parcourir ... à jamais"⁵. (1985, 77)

By applying these fuzzy boundaries to the concept of the body, Cixous allows women to expand past them and not be defined solely by their bodies, while still owning them. In addition, this also pertains to a couple of the main ideas of women's writing: the fluidity, the boundless plain in which women seek to exist, create, and leave a mark, and the claiming of something that was not allowed them or alienated.

By reviewing the fact that women were made out to be something to view and be either disgusted or fascinated with, we can make out a sort of degrading factor through which women's bodies were regarded. The witch hunts, exorcisms, experiments, and analyses were at least to some extent an inhumane prodding and probing at women as if to prove that they are not the same as men. Clément talks about women's portrayal in cinema:

Going even further, there is the spectacle of cinema, born partly, of course, through the scientific discoveries of the Lumière brothers and many scientists but also in part through the play of buffoons, of Méliès, of carnival stalls. Then, as an accompanying echo, there are the expressive, expressionistic women of the silent films, their mouths open wide in unformulated cries, which florid subtitles repeat. Frightened women, attacked by sleepwalkers in Caligari, raped in Metropolis, carried off by the monkey-king in King Kong. (1975, 13)

As it appears, not only in paintings but also in cinema and many other mediums of portrayal and adaptation, women are being presented in more or less the same light: frightened, stunned, violated, contorted into whatever images the patriarchy desires, thrown into the confines of the cult of frailty.

To understand the concept of women's writing at an even deeper level, it is important to analyze its historical context. The rise of the feminist discourse in the 1970s was the result of the previous decades of passive oppression when women were excluded from every sort of function of society, even as it was constantly evolving. One of the main issues recognized was women's appearance in texts being minimal and erroneous: "Women have been systematically excluded from public discourse, and language reflects that exclusion. Women have been quite literally 'seen' as objects of male discourse, but never 'heard'

⁵ "The body without frame, without skin, without wall, the flesh that does not dry, does not stiffen, does not curdle, the mad blood that wishes to run forever."

as subjects of a female discourse.” (Crowder 1983, 126). This perfectly illustrates the issue at hand, the one that so many women writers have been fighting for so long – to give a chance to women, fictional and real, to voice their own lives and perspectives. In addition, in the 1960s France, a new form of Marxism and psychoanalysis came together, in turn transforming art and literature. Cixous starts seeing her literary subjects as someone who constantly seek *Chemins de la liberté* (paths of freedom) and finds her space to cultivate her ideas in the form of seminars. Writing for Cixous becomes a way to reverse the suppression of the unrepresentable, a space where her texts undergo constant transformation (Conley 1992, 11-12). Some female side characters have been transformed in examples like *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys, a story from the point of view of “the madwoman in the attic” herself, *The Penelopiad* (2005) by Margaret Atwood, Odysseus’ journey retold by his wife Penelope, *Silence of the Girls* (2018) by Pat Barker, the retelling of the Trojan War from the point of view of Achilles’ concubine Briseis, and of course *Circe* (2018) by Miller.

It would be fair to discuss the problems and limitations of women’s writing as well. While Cixous and Clément present the aforementioned fuzzy boundaries that are inherent in women’s writing since it seeks to avoid limiting women’s self-expression, fuzziness also gives rise to uncertainty. The questions arise: what works exactly can be deemed to belong to women’s writing? Who can create women’s writing? There are no strict answers since, as I have just mentioned, women’s writing seeks not to limit but to expand, yet in an attempt to answer these questions, I would suggest that women’s writing encompasses a representation of the issues women deal with, *e.g.*, rejection, subjugation, abuse, misrepresentation, *etc.* The object of the discourse would be the problems, the experience, and ways to achieve liberation and solutions. Naturally, the plot or the discussion would revolve around a female heroine, potentially some already pre-existing one that has previously been neglected in another kind of discourse, yet again, women’s writing could act as a sub-genre in a piece of writing, presenting itself between the lines. As for who can write women’s writing, Cixous herself does not limit the concept to women only, claiming that men can take up the mantle too, given that they can accept their feminine side:

It is men who have inscribed, described, theorized the paradoxical logic of an economy without reserve. This is not contradictory; it brings us back to asking about their femininity. Rare are the men able to venture onto the brink where writing, freed from law, unencumbered by moderation, exceeds phallic authority, and where the subjectivity inscribing its effects becomes feminine. (1975, 86)

We could ponder that Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878) or Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856) or even Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* (1967) bear some faint traces of women’s writing in their portrayal of a woman, the troubles that haunt them, and how they attempt to fix them, yet it is still not the same as what women are looking for in books written by men today. In addition, despite Cixous’ claim, people are not so optimistic about men writing female characters without overly

sexualizing and romanticizing them. In May 2019, a Twitter account @menwritewomen⁶ was created by Meg Vondriska to review books where men create women characters with banal and cliché descriptions, unfortunately, still adhering to misogynistic views in literature. Nevertheless, the outlook initiated by Cixous is extremely important since the man/woman dichotomy can easily take a wrong turn and be radicalized, resulting in unnecessary and unhealthy disaccord between men and women. This also acts as proof that feminism is not something that “angry women” propagate, it is something that reasonable people, men *and* women, seek to establish in a functioning society.

After the introduction of the concept of women’s writing, other feminist philosophers have taken it upon themselves to present the notion from their perspectives. French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, for example, defines women’s writing as a force that can not only enter the patriarchal machinery but break it:

In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the subject or the object, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. Which presupposes that women do not aspire simply to be men's equals in knowledge. That they do not claim to be rivaling men in constructing a logic of the feminine that would still take onto-theo-logic as its model, but that they are rather attempting to wrest this question away from the economy [sic] of the logos. (1985, 78)

Once again the otherness is shaped into something revolutionary, something that has the force of breaking the old patriarchal norms and presenting another way of thinking and writing – a woman’s way. Another grand figure of feminist thought, Julia Kristeva, admits the influence of the Symbolic that has so long forbidden women from entering it. As Anne Rosalind Jones addresses it,

Women, for Kristeva, also speak and write as "hysterics," as outsiders to male-dominated discourse, for two reasons: the predominance in them of drives related to anality and childbirth, and their marginal position vis à vis masculine culture. Their semiotic style is likely to involve repetitive, spasmodic separations from the dominating discourse, which, more often, they are forced to imitate. (1981, 249)

In other words, women claim the irrationality forced upon them and once again turn it to project their nature, unbound and liberated. Jones then brings the ideas of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva together:

What Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous do in common, then, is to oppose women's bodily experience (or, in Kristeva's case, women's bodily effect as mothers) to the phallic/symbolic patterns embedded in Western thought. Although Kristeva does not privilege women as the only possessors of prephallogocentric discourse, Irigaray and Cixous go further: if women are to discover and express who they are, to bring to the surface what masculine history has repressed in them, they must begin with their sexuality. And their sexuality begins with their bodies, with their genital and libidinal difference from men. (ibid., p. 252)

It is evident then that the ideas are similar in their goals yet different in the understandings of each scholar, yet in general, the most important aspects to note are the freedom of women’s perspective and voice, sexuality, the claiming of their own spot in literary theory, as well as being the masters of their own nature rather than the puppets in someone else’s wrongful depiction. These feminist philosophers seek for women to be the sole masters of their own bodies and encourage women to project their beings

⁶ <https://twitter.com/menwritewomen>. Accessed: 14 April 2022.

and experiences into writing and life in general, this way challenging phallogocentrism anywhere it may manifest.

Another important theme for this MA thesis is witchcraft as a social construct and how it reflects on women. I have mentioned before that nowadays a witch is mostly an old hag with a big nose and a broom, yet there is still an underlying, negative meaning hiding behind the word. To my mind, sorceress, witch, enchantress – all of these can be used interchangeably to describe a clever woman, one that embraces and neutralizes all of the negativity by turning it into something becoming. The fear of witchcraft passed from country to country, age to age, yet the constant remained the same – witches are wicked women who threaten the well-being of any structure and peace. As Ronald Hutton notes, an archivist from Cologne Joseph Hansen pinpointed a place and time when the stereotype of a witch as a Satan-lover began – the early 15th century in the Western Alps. Later, scholars like Norman Cohn and Carlo Ginzburg provided their own views on Hansen's findings, establishing the topic as an important one to debate (2017, 192-193). Eventually, towards the end of the 20th century, women started to noticeably rise against subjugation, phallogocentrism, and patriarchy, which were said to be the main sources of impeding women's participation in any society. The figure of the witch did not disappear: Justyna Sempruch mentions familiar names like Cixous, Irigaray, Clément, and Kristeva and talks about how the witch figures in feminist discourse:

As a radical feminist identity, the 'witch' strategically represents both the historical abject figure subjected to torture and death, and a radical fantasy of renewal in the form of a female figure who desires (and articulates) a cultural transformation 'that has not happened yet' and also the one who already marks that transformation. (2004, 115)

The words *witch*, *transformation*, and *feminism* seem to go together often in this kind of discourse, consequently projecting a common goal: to transform the evil witch into a woman who is accepting her own identity and is proud of it, no matter what the society is trying to persuade her to believe or accept. These keywords bring up another no less important figure as well – Circe, the first witch, the phoenix woman. This is what Miller herself had to say about the feminist take on the concept of the witch during an interview:

*Circe is a witch, and I think "witch" is a word that always refers to the same idea—that of a woman who has more power than society wants her to have. Even in the original text, she absolutely falls into that category: she has been banned and sent to an island because of the knowledge and power she acquired. Misogyny, fear of women's power, hatred of women are undoubtedly parts of the history of interpreting Circe—her character had been vilified over the centuries. In the *Odyssey*, she's scary but she's also helpful. Later versions of her story left aside her helpfulness and treated her as a scary witch-goddess who turns men into beasts. Those reinterpretations actually tell us, "Watch out, this is what happens when women get power. They'll turn you into a pig!"* (Juin 2021, para. 20)

Intellect and knowledge inflicted fear in an androcentric society – a witch is sometimes called a wise woman, whose immediate ties with cognitive proficiency can be deemed one of the reasons why witches were demonized. It is clear then that Miller, at least to some extent, sees Circe as a witch, a woman in

general, the kind that was just described by Sempruch. Fear forces men to turn to patriarchy and deem women as dangerous, as *witches*, as someone who will no doubt conspire and scheme against everything they have been establishing for centuries.

This MA thesis aims to examine the metaphor of witchcraft in feminist thought, the way the character of Circe represents feminine liberation in Miller's *Circe*, and the importance of women's writing in literary tradition. By relying on Cixous and Clément's musings about women's writing and the role of the sorceress, I will try to describe the intricate relations between feminism, patriarchy, stereotypes, women's liberation, gaze, and voice, since Circe experiences all of these.

3. The Witch of Aiaia: Forms and Transformations

*Moreover, I have always been a bird. A bit vulture,
a bit eagle: I have looked the sun in its face.
Born several times – dead several times, so that I could be reborn from my ashes;*

– Cixous & Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 1975

This chapter of the MA thesis studies different aspects of Circe's life. The analysis is based on the four selected factors through which a woman can be defined: body, witchcraft, patriarchy, and womanhood. I see Circe as a symbol of a woman since she represents the one who has experienced it all: abandonment, rejection, motherhood, love, abuse, liberation. Therefore, throughout this chapter of the MA thesis, I will analyze how Miller and Cixous and Clément express their opinions on women's bodies, experiences, sorcery, and overcoming suffocating patriarchal norms. In addition, I will analyze Circe's character in terms of a modern woman and witchcraft and find connections between ancient times and the present. My research is principally based on Cixous and Clément's *The Newly Born Woman* as well as the notion of women's writing.

First and foremost, it would be beneficial to note that Circe, as a character, has come a long way from being stereotypically represented as a wicked, immoral libertine, to being a part of women's writing, which seeks to represent women and give rise to their voices. Initially, she started as a lone nymph on the island of Aiaia, the name of which is an onomatopoeia for wailing (Yarnall 1944, 81), reflecting the eternal sorrow that was planned for her, yet today Circe may project a whole other set of connotations. Miller's adaptation of the Greek myth gives voice to the goddess, who initially was created as an extension to Odysseus, a supporting character at best. It was intended that she would only act as an obstacle to the Greek hero, preventing him from returning to his motherland Ithaca for one more year with her charms and witchcraft, yet *Circe* turns everything around and naturally, gives the heroine all the spotlight. She was the one who guided Odysseus through his damaged reality and gave him useful advice such as stuffing his sailors' ears with wax and tying himself to the pole to avoid perishing at the claws of the sirens (Miller 2018, 207). Such a rendering of a minor character from a huge epic like the *Odyssey* by Homer is cardinal, especially for the community of women, since Miller's novel offers us a newly-born Circe, a phoenix-like woman who breaks free from the procrustean boundaries of literature written by authors blatantly ignoring female agency, what most often results in a one-sided portrayal of a woman. The patriarchal structures in the novel appear in the forms of the titans and the gods who shun and devalue Circe as well as any other woman they lay their eyes on. Such men constitute the major part of the society Circe lives in, where a woman is expendable and holds very little value. The story is narrated in retrospect by Circe herself, her story spanning from her childhood to when she undergoes

her final transformation. She awakens magic within herself and is cast out with the decision of her father titan Helios and the ruler of the Olympus Zeus to live on a secluded island – the fact that Circe acquired the power instead of being born with it terrified the gods and the titans, making them wonder how could she use these powers to challenge their long-established control. Circe had to learn to live in an unknown environment, which she gradually bent to her will and extracted every benefit Aiaia had to offer. There, she belonged only to herself, unlike her life at Helios' palace, where she was merely a wispy shadow in her father's solar presence. In Aiaia Circe bloomed and harnessed her powers, becoming a full-fledged witch, synchronized with the flora and fauna surrounding her:

I walked the hills, the buzzing meadows of thyme and lilac, and set my footprints across the yellow beaches. I searched out every cove and grotto, found the gentle bays, the harbour safe for ships. I heard the wolves howl, and the frogs cry from their mud. I stroked the glossy brown scorpions who braved me with their tails. Their poison was barely a pinch. I was drunk, as the wine and nectar in my father's halls had never made me. No wonder I have been so slow, I thought. All this while I have been a weaver without wool, a ship without the sea. Yet now look where I sail. (ibid., p. 71)

Being the daughter of a titan and a nymph, it is clear that Circe lives much longer than an average human, the time frame implying a period of perhaps a few hundred years, perhaps a millennium. This aligns with the idea that women's fight for representation has figuratively been just as long. Miller explores many themes in the book, such as othering, marginalization, motherhood, abuse, gender relations, and, of course, personal, womanly change, all of them intermingling together and producing what we can call a *Bildungsroman*, a story portraying the gradual growth of the main character, Circe's own transformation.

It would be beneficial to address the original genre of Circe's story – a myth. Greek mythology poses as a source of various types of knowledge, events, and stories. English and American literature were dependent on Greek mythology during different periods, the Renaissance era being perhaps the most heavily permeated with the revival of the Greek myths and many different mentions of gods and goddesses, each representing their own area of expertise, be it a feeling, phenomena, a time, or a place. Here is Miller's take on myths and their popularity:

I also think that their timelessness is due to the fact that they are so flexible, that each generation can rewrite them, rediscovered [sic] them, expand them so that they aren't one fixed thing. They have this ever expanding, ever shifting, ever changing ability to reflect the moment that we're in. They can rise to meet us wherever we are. Some of the things that I was looking at with Circe are not in the original text. I have been reading them in [sic] based on my modern perspective, and I think that's OK—that's what myths are for! The ancients did that too: there is Homer's version of the story but then, as soon as the Iliad and the Odyssey existed, they were being told and retold and expanded and changed.... The tradition of retelling myths is as old as myths themselves. (Juin 2021, para. 26)

Circe is firstly a retelling of a character that was supposed to remain in the peripheries of a story of a great man, yet the myth was reimagined to bear great effect on the community of women. The novel begins with a passage on how Circe was meant to remain unnoticeable, a margin of someone else's epic:

When I was born, the name for what I was did not exist. They called me nymph, assuming I would be like the lesser goddesses, our powers were so modest they could scarcely ensure our eternities. We spoke to fish and nurtured flowers, coaxed drops from the clouds or salt from the waves. That word, nymph, it means not just goddess, but bride. (Miller 2018, 1).

This immediately gives a reader the idea that Miller's Circe will be different, that she will not be just a nymph but something more, something that her godly society did not even have the name to call her by. On the one hand, the meaning of the word "nymph" being "bride" suggests that they are *meant* to belong to a man and not to themselves, they are meant to be someone's object, yet on the other hand, it evokes a connotation of having come from nature itself since nymphs excel in manipulating Earth's elements. In turn, it may also propose that this is exactly one of the reasons why they are meant to belong – the ruling of nature is associated with witchcraft and witchcraft is, automatically, a threat, therefore, a nymph must eventually submit. Whichever way we look at it, the unrepresentable women can finally become representable by creating their own domain of thought where they can express the unabridged versions of their lives and retell the stories of those who have been represented wrongly or not represented at all. Women's writing, after all, seeks to remind the world that women have been a part of history just as much as men.

3.1. Circe and the Body

As mentioned before, women's bodies and Circe herself have been the targets of patriarchal demonization and objectification, as portrayed in literature and mirrored in art, often in a decadent or promiscuous manner. There is apparently something about a woman's body that makes men want to see them objectified, dehumanized, or animalized. Not only would women act as entertainment for the patriarchy, but they were also seen as animals battling in the wild for the attention of their superiors. Moreover, in art, most often men tend to portray women as feeble and curvaceous, highlighting the aesthetically-pleasing sexual aspect of attraction, while women opt to represent the spirit rather than the body. For example, Arthur Hacker (see Appendix Fig. 1) portrays Circe as "a voluptuous turn-of-the-century model sitting enticingly on a barren floor strewn with petals and cut flowers, which the artist actually succeeded in transforming into a strange sort of livid, fleshy debris suggestive of the – for her lovers – dire consequences of Circe's carnal appetite" (Dijkstra 1988, 321), while Alice Pike Barney (see Appendix Fig. 2) chose to render her as "a lion-maned woman, growling like an animal, her vampire's mouth ready to devour all comers, while she hugs the enormous head of a nasty-looking boar" (ibid., p. 322). Both of the artists can be understood to represent masculine and feminine gazes on Circe respectively, the former bringing forth the *femme fatale* aspect of Circe, so often highlighted by male poets and writers, while the latter, as if in protest, draws Circe as a woman who is not conforming to the patriarchal standards of pleasant womanly representations and rather embraces the negatively-implied

animalistic aspect to claim the womanhood, denying the patriarchs' attempts to alienate it. The reason I chose to briefly discuss these two artistic portrayals of Circe is that paintings are at least to some extent based on her representations in literature, be it Homer, Ovid, Vergil, or even Milton or Eliot.

While men would choose to describe Circe as having shining, golden hair and eyes, voluptuous form, and striking beauty, Miller sees her having hair streaked like a lynx, unpleasant, sharp chin, yellow eyes, and a strange voice (2018, 3-4). The words are chosen carefully: streaked hair indicates disorder, something that might dispel the aesthetic pleasure, the sharp chin may denote Circe's assertiveness – certainly not the first quality that men would choose to depict – yellow eyes are not the same as golden, and a searing voice is not particularly charming. This way Miller rejects the conventional beauty cult and harmful expectations for women to always be “at their best” – already a very different value from those conveyed by male writers portraying Circe before her. Just a few generations ago certain aspects of appearance were particularly important: it was still relatively taboo for a woman to wear her hair down, undone since it signified a loose kind of lifestyle, a promiscuous nature. Even if today doing your hair is more a type of self-expression than anything else, not that long ago it was a way to keep yourself from being cast out to the edges of society. In *Circe*, Miller embraces the wild and natural state of a woman where one can keep her hair whatever way she wants it and dress and look the part and rejects patriarchal demonization, one form of it being Hermes, the Olympian messenger and Circe's first lover: “We laughed over all of it, and when he left, I knew he told stories of me in turn: my dirt-black fingernails, my musky lion, the pigs that had begun coming to my door, truffling for slops and a scratch on the back.” (ibid., p. 84). The relationship between Circe and Hermes was purely carnal with no place for love and Circe understood that perfectly. Being previously depicted as a nymph blindly following Odysseus, Miller's version of her offers a calculating woman who can enjoy bodily pleasures just as much as a man and not submit to one in turn, as if that was something a woman was not able to resist. In other words, Miller's Circe is a woman who controls her own body instead of being controlled by it.

During her time at Helios' palace, Circe was constantly surrounded by manifestations of patriarchal values in women – beauty and reproduction, since it was let on that these are the only things women are good for. Circe's mother Perse was very happy with her “duty” of giving birth to the children of Helios and seemed to think that her status elevated with each of them, yet she viewed her children as trophies. Circe tells us that her mother used to receive a reward for each child:

‘A bargain,’ he said, and gave her a necklace to seal it, one of his own making, strung with beads of rarest amber. Later, when I was born, he gave her a second strand, and another for each of my three siblings. I do not know which she treasured more: the luminous beads themselves, or the envy of her sisters when she wore them. I think she would have gone right on collecting them into eternity until they hung from her neck like a yoke on an ox if the high gods had not stopped her. (ibid., pp. 2-3)

Miller compares Perse with an ox and thus conveys an unpleasant image of a woman being a broodmare, a vessel, expendable and easily replaced. Perse's happiness and recognition are completely dependent on a man, an image that the patriarchy surely approves of. Circe's own motherhood acts as an antithesis to Perse's since her son Telegonus is a natural outcome of her union with Odysseus – she does not expect to be rewarded for having him but simply wishes to be a full-fledged family despite the usual model. Circe is actually happy about having a child and views him as a person in his own right, not a reward or a trophy.

As for beauty, it was seen as something both pleasant and dangerous if possessed by a woman. While men surely would enjoy a “pretty face”, they could also demonize it if something should go wrong, claiming that women's charms and looks are to blame. Circe herself is led to believe that these charms were her best way of assuring Glaucos' affections since she later regrets not using them, being bested by Scylla, who was no stranger to using her womanly glamour:

I watched the light sweep across his face. 'Is she not the most perfect creature you have ever seen? Her ankles are so small and delicate, like the sweetest doe in the forest. The river-gods are enraged that she favours me, and I hear even Apollo is jealous.' I was sorry then that I had not used those tricks of hair and eyes and lips that all our kind have. (ibid., p. 47)

When Circe establishes herself in the confines of her island she realizes that neither beauty nor using her body to gain affirmation constitute a woman's life. Therefore, she only sleeps with Hermes for her own gains – to get information, to please *herself*, and to deny him the satisfaction of her fawning over him like he would expect any woman to. This directly links up with Cixous and Clément's theorizing about women, their bodily agency, and *jouissance*, since it contradicts the phallogocentric views of women as hysterics who are controlled by their own bodies and some animalistic agency within them.

After breaking off all relations with Hermes, Circe meets Daedalus after he arrives at Aiaia to take her to Crete at her sister Pasiphaë's request. Circe felt a special affinity with him since they both unintentionally created monsters – Circe Scylla and Daedalus the Minotaur: “His shoulders were taut, tensed as if against a blow. The last time he had thanked me, I had stormed at him. But now I understood more: he, too, knew what it was to make monsters.” (ibid., p. 110). At first, Circe believed that it was solely the flowers with the power to transform and she was only channeling it, but Helios claimed he and Zeus stripped them of any magic. In addition, Circe's uncle Nereus said that the fish in the pond where Circe threw the flowers to transform Scylla remained unchanged. (ibid., pp. 53-54). It suggests, then, that Circe did not realize her own potential at first: after all, Glaucos turned into a god because she wanted him to turn into one and Scylla turned into a monster because she believed her to be one. Circe and Daedalus can also be seen as creators – the latter is a seasoned carpenter creating wonders and the former transforms creatures. The relationship they shared was brief but beautiful and laced with deep mutual understanding: “I had no right to claim him, I knew it. But in a solitary life, there are rare

moments when another soul dips near yours, as stars once a year brush the earth. Such a constellation was he to me.” (ibid., p. 132). As a farewell gift, Daedalus gifts Circe a cedar loom which becomes an object of wonder for many.

To summarize, Miller addresses the fact that most often in Greek mythology women were portrayed either as someone’s wives, concubines, or victims of unforeseen circumstances, battling such diminishing images by creating Circe as a woman who takes pleasure in her own body and its encounters, being its master rather than its slave. Miller’s portrayal of Circe owning her body also synchronizes with Cixous and Clément’s claims about the female bodily agency and relishing in *jouissance*.

3.2. Circe and Witchcraft

It has already been made clear that Circe is a witch in her own right which is the primary reason for her expulsion from her father’s halls – the titans simply cannot allow some power of unknown origins to dwell among them when their wielder might want to act against them and is, worst of all, a woman. Being a witch is also closely associated with being a woman, scheming, cursing, and otherwise corrupting society and its people. Throughout the ages, a witch came to represent many different things and be responsible for various events and occurrences, thus, the question arises: why is it exactly women who were charged with witchcraft and punished so brutally? Silvia Federici has an answer for that in her book *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (2018): the first instances of persecution of women for being a witch pertain to the rise of capitalism and agricultural reforms in feudal Europe. It was believed that women would lose the most from such changes because it obliterated their source of income and societal position (2018, 13-14). The situation is also responsible for initiating the demonizing of the notion of a witch, evoking an image of an old woman, a hag who is brewing potions and crossing the sky on a flying broom – respectively, a means of occupation and a tool that a woman living in Middle Ages was probably using daily. Naturally, the whole notion got contorted and gained new meanings as the time passed, yet the understanding that a witch equals danger remained. I say *danger* because if we were to hold on to the theory that Federici discusses, that is exactly what a woman started to represent during these times of agricultural revolution – a woman became a factor that could potentially threaten patriarchy’s hold on the world. Circe’s situation was similar – she displayed powers foreign to the patriarchs in her world, igniting fear, all because she fell in love with Glaucos the fisherman, who was the reason why her witchcraft awakened in the first place. She dreaded the thought of the end of his brief human life, thus she strived to turn him into a god so he could accompany her for all eternity:

It is hard to describe what happened next. A knowledge woke in the depths of my blood. It whispered: that the strength of those flowers lay in their sap, which could transform any creature to its truest self. [...] Glaucos’ lips had fallen open as he dreamed, and I lifted a handful of flowers over him, squeezing. The sap leaked and

gathered. Drop by milky drop I let it fall into his mouth. A stray bead landed on his lips, and I slid it onto his tongue with my finger. He coughed. Your truest self, I told him. Let it be. (Miller 2018, 42)

After turning Glaucos into a god and his bride Scylla into a monster, she stepped forward and confessed that it was all her doing, yet her father and uncles did not believe her since they could not comprehend and accept the fact that a mere woman could wreak such havoc: “If the world contained that power you allege, do you think it would fall to such as you to discover it?” (ibid., p. 54). Not only Circe’s father and uncles brushed off her potential but they refused to believe that there would be some other force in the world that could challenge theirs. That is, until her brother Aeëtes stepped up (who is also a sorcerer, just like all the children of Perse and Helios’ union), naming Circe *pharmakis* – a witch: “*Pharmakeia*, such arts are called, for they deal in *pharmaka*, those herbs with the power to work changes upon the world, both those sprung from the blood of gods, as well as those which grow common upon the earth.” (ibid., p. 57). Here Miller established the idea that to deal with nature is to deal with the divine power of the world, to tamper with the order that has been established by the high gods, another reason why Circe was seen as threatening – what if she would scheme something, away from everyone’s eyes?

In her other book, *The Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), Federici notes that midwives were also demonized and gradually shut out of their professions, being replaced by men (2004, 89). I mention this because Miller too portrays Circe in the role of a midwife, among many others. In her version, Circe helped her sister Pasiphaë to give birth to the Minotaur. Even though the episode was relatively brief, it is important for the fact that Miller seeks to present Circe as a character that would represent women in many types of situations and circles. By asking Circe for help, Pasiphaë projects her distrust for everyone in her and Minos’ palace. Although Pasiphaë taunted Circe continuously when they were young, the latter was essentially the only one who would answer her request. In addition, Pasiphaë feels like Circe is the only one who could actually understand her since both of them were trampled by men in their lives:

They take what they want, and in return they give you only your own shackles. A thousand times I saw you squashed. I squashed you myself. And every time, I thought, that is it, she is done, she will cry herself into a stone, into some croaking bird, she will leave us and good riddance. Yet always you came back the next day. They were all surprised when you showed yourself a witch, but I knew it long ago. Despite your wet-mouse weeping, I saw how you would not be ground into the earth. You loathed them as I did. I think it is where our power comes from. (Miller 2018, 127)

Perhaps Helios and the Olympians see Circe’s magic as something she uses on a whim, but to Circe, it is something that she has to actually work for:

Let me say what sorcery is not: it is not divine power, which comes with a thought and a blink. It must be made and worked, planned and searched out, dug up, dried, chopped and ground, cooked, spoken over and sung. Even after all that, it can fail, as gods do not. If my herbs are not fresh enough, if my attention falters, if my will is weak, the draughts go stale and rancid in my hands. (ibid., p. 72)

Work, toil, and trouble are all humane qualities, the ones that are foreign to gods, and Circe enjoys that – she enjoys feeling human since that separates her from the gods and their inherent cruelty and injustices,

it dissociates her from the bunch that rejected her in the first place. Among other things, she indeed does harness her potential to the point that could threaten the society in the eyes of men, should she wish to act against it – she creates a spell shrouding the island from any deity not dealing with the underworld to protect her son Telegonus:

I poured the blood-draught on the rock. It hissed like molten bronze in water. White smoke billowed into the air, rising, spreading. It massed, forming a great arc over the island, closing us in. A layer of living death. If Athena came, she would be forced to turn aside, like a shark meeting fresh water. (ibid., p. 223)

This could be seen as a hostile action in the eyes of the titans, be it Circe's father Helios or her aunt Selene: Helios soared the skies during the day and Selene during the night, having a clear sight of the exiled witch, yet the shroud prevented them from doing that. This could also represent the rejection of the patriarchal gaze under which women have been scrutinized for so long. For Circe, then, being a witch means using her power to protect her loved ones, in this case, Telegonus, as well as gaining control of her representation, the latter directly echoing one of the goals of women's writing. In addition, she goes on her own odyssey to retrieve the tail of Trygon⁷, a weapon that brings instant death to a human and an eternal demise to a god. Circe found the serpent in the depths of the ocean and asked for his tail, knowing full well that if she would touch its poison she would surely suffer for eternity, yet she was still determined to do *anything* to protect her son. The intent alone was enough for Trygon and so he surrendered the tail:

I lifted the blade, touched its tip to the creature's skin. It tore as flowers tear, ragged and easy. The golden ichor welled up, drifting over my hands. I remember what I thought: surely, I am condemned for this. I can craft all the spells I want, all the magic spears. Yet I will spend all the rest of my days watching this creature bleed. (ibid., p. 247)

Trygon himself does not appear as a direct symbol of patriarchy but rather a neutral entity who helps Circe understand her potential by surrendering his tail which evokes undeniable phallic imagery: the softness, the form, the discharge, and ultimately the cutting-off, potentially foreshadowing Circe's victory against the patriarchs by becoming who *she* wants to be.

Whilst Circe would sacrifice her well-being for the sake of others, her brother Perses is a different kind of witch. As mentioned in the introduction of this MA thesis, Greece and Persia were mortal enemies, the latter being associated with decadence and witchcraft. In some stories Perses is associated with Persia, the version that Miller incorporated in her novel: "He said he was going east, to live among the Persians. Their name is like mine, he said fatuously. And I hear they raise creatures called demons, I would like to see one." (ibid., p. 29). It was later revealed that Perses practices necromancy there, raising the dead from their graves and controlling the mentioned demons. We could ponder then that by building in the version where Persia is viewed as a home of demons in the eyes of the Greeks, Miller subliminally

⁷ A serpentine deity allegedly placed deep in the ocean by Uranus (Ouranos) because his poison is the strongest in the universe.

suggests that Perses represents the ancient, stagnant understanding of witchcraft, the one where witches and their activities are closely associated with all things morbid, *e.g.*, death, devils, and demons.

To summarize, Circe embraces her witchcraft and uses it to grow and protect her loved ones, unlike Helios and other deities would like to believe. It allows her to project her strengths and exceed boundaries, surpassing expectations of her own and others. Witchcraft, in turn, is associated with wisdom, an inherent bond with nature, and strength. As a final note, Miller's Circe ultimately denotes a witch woman who claimed all the accusations and turned them around, transforming all the negativity into a catalyst for her development.

3.3. Circe and Patriarchy

By now it has been made clear that in *Circe*, women were seen as replaceable and fleeting. Before further elaborating on the subject I would like to highlight that this MA thesis does not echo the subliminal ideology of the phrase “all men are pigs”, because that is simply not the case, no matter how thematically it may fit in regarding the myth of Circe. Speaking of, she was perhaps one of the most patriarchally-afflicted female characters in Greek mythology and culture in general, which is why it would be beneficial to briefly overview a woman's role and status during the times of Ancient Greece. According to Marilyn Katz, Ionians started to exclude women from society and banish them to the confines of their homes and female companions. The practice was later adopted by the Athenians, yet non-Ionian Greek women retained the freedom they had during Homeric times. In turn, with the inspiration of the Lydians, prostitution among well-born women became a norm, as well as the developing practice of homosexual relationships and companionships. During the fifth century, the practice of seclusion became even more widespread in Athens, forcing Athenian men to turn to hetairas, not only for sexual but also for intellectual fulfillment. Another century later, women started to reject the traditional roles and take up the then manly study of philosophy – the movement was heavily resisted and thus gave rise to misogyny. During the Hellenistic period women's lives were still restricted, and the prominence of hetairas was gradually overshadowed by a new image of a woman, the Hellenistic queen who controlled her own life, yet still in the confines of the court (1992, 72-73). In a way, hetairas were sorceresses, witches, the kind that we are discussing in this MA thesis – the ones that reshape everything that the patriarchy deems unfortunate about them. They remained in the peripheries of the Greek society yet still were one of the most prominent figures in the Greek world at that time, guiding philosophers and warriors through anything they desired their help at. A woman that owns her body can only be affected by misogynistic objectification if she gives them any importance. During these times, being a hetaira was perhaps one of the very few ways to own yourself as a woman, and by doing that

they maximized their potential and self-confidence, gaining an unreal amount of clandestine power, a way to overcome the suffocating grips of patriarchy and misogyny.

Circe was a source of potential revolt for patriarchy – as mentioned before, the gods and the titans feared what she might do with her witch powers. Helios banished Circe to an island of Aiaia, which we may regard as the edge of the center where everyone else resides, yet he failed to consider that she might come to terms with her being and flourish, eventually taking her life into her own hands. Though before that, while residing there, she had to overcome many trials brought upon her by the patriarchal world. The first one presented itself in the form of previously mentioned Hermes, who may appear as an exciting male character at first but is quick to reveal himself as a patriarch as well: women were objects to him too – objects of entertainment, pleasure, free to dispose of at any time he likes or when it does not suit him anymore. Even if he was quick to become Circe’s lover as he charmed her with his mischievous love for challenges, Circe knew that he is devoid of any pure intentions: “He wanted to see how moonish I was over him. But all the sop in me was gone. I did not lie dreaming of him during the days, I did not speak his name into my pillow. He was no husband, scarcely even a friend. He was a poison snake, and I was another, and on such terms we pleased ourselves.” (Miller 2018, 83). The fact that Circe sees herself just as poisonous as Hermes may suggest the difference between them – they both use one another for their own gains, but Circe still feels somewhat guilty for the sole fact of using someone, even if that person would not hesitate to use her in turn. In other words, Circe is more a human than a god. In a sense, Hermes represents the self-glorifying aspect of toxic masculinity and patriarchy, the wish to see women worship men in terms of some rigid androcentrism. Later, when Circe has grown as a woman, she realized that she has no need whatsoever for such a toxic presence in her already restricted life, so she cut all ties with Hermes and banishes him from Aiaia:

He vanished and did not return. It was no obedience. He was finished with me too, for I had committed the unpardonable sin of being dull. I could imagine the stories he was telling of me, humorless, prickly, and smelling of pigs. From time to time, I could sense him just out of sight, finding my nymphs in the hills, sending them back flushed and laughing, giddy from the great Olympian who had shown them favour. He seemed to think I would go mad with jealousy and loneliness, and turn them into rats indeed. A hundred years he had been coming to my island, and in all that time he had never cared for more than his own entertainment. (ibid., p. 159)

Another blow of the patriarchy that Circe had to endure was arguably the most heinous of them all – rape. Even after accepting the stray band of ragged sailors into her home to feed and nourish them, she was ravaged and forced to unleash her divine fury upon all of them. Even as she sensed the looming danger she did not want to believe it, she tried to convince herself that it is only her imagination playing tricks on her:

I thought – what? That I was being foolish. That something else would happen. That I had drunk too much of my own wine, and this was the fear it conjured. That my father would come. My father! I did not want to be a fool, to make a fuss for nothing. I could hear Hermes telling the tale after. She always was a hysteric. (ibid., p. 164)

The toxic patriarchal ideology is rooted so deep inside that Circe subconsciously tried to justify the sailors' actions to make them out as something they were clearly not. For a split second, she even hoped that her father, the man who banished her in the first place, would come and help. In addition, there is another symbolic take we can discern in this episode: the sailors came to Aiaia only after Circe's loyal lioness passed away. The lioness was Circe's familiar, a faithful attendant who was always ready to protect her: "I don't know what his men did. Watched maybe. If my lion had been there, she would have clawed down the door, but she was ash upon the winds." (ibid., p. 164). A lioness⁸, after all, symbolizes feminine powers and sisterhood – therefore, the incorporation of the lioness in the book can be seen as Miller's way to highlight the need for women to stay together and support each other in the face of adversity and always.

Barbara Ehrenreich has an interesting take on patriarchy itself:

We have been encouraged to think of patriarchy as a solemn undertaking, a millennia-old system designed to keep women down and young men from getting out of line. Its favorite notions, over the centuries, have been Honor, Tradition, Power, and Glory. Its material manifestations range from pyramids to skyscrapers, from the simple lines of ancient Greek temples to the neoclassical architectural majesty of nineteenth-century European capitals. (2018, 13)

It would be fair to note that men are suffering from patriarchy arguably as much as women, although perhaps in a more concealed, passive way. Often, without any chance to think for themselves or adapt a non-toxic view on life, young boys and men are steered and sucked into the wheel of patriarchy. Glaucos himself was thrown right into that wheel when Circe turned him into a god – she acted out of deep infatuation, yet failed to consider his exposure to the same group of gods and titans who later turned on her. Not only did he instinctively reject the fact that it is Circe who granted him his godhead, but he took to the company of various river gods and titans: "In years to come, he would take my father's advice indeed. He lay with a thousand nymphs, siring children with green hair and tails, well loved by fishermen, for often they filled their nets." (Miller 2018, 52). By making Glaucos quite a susceptible male character, Miller suggests that patriarchy and misogyny do not equal men, it equals a toxic, age-old system. In addition, this advice that Glaucos took from Helios pertains to Scylla being turned into a monster since Glaucos and Scylla were engaged. Thus, Helios once again acts as a typical patriarch and conveys that a woman is replaceable by advising Glaucos to simply find another. Ehrenreich also mentioned "Greek temples" and "architectural majesty", which I would suggest relates to the aforementioned Lacan's theory of phallogocentrism, because the phallus of the patriarchy is often hidden in the most mundane things in our lives, e.g. architecture, art, even language, since statues, for example, are being erected⁹. Miller describes how Helios basked in his grandeur:

⁸ <https://www.uniguide.com/lion-meaning-symbolism-spirit-animal-guide/>. Accessed: 15 April 2022.

⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/erect>. Accessed: 15 April 2022.

My father's halls were dark and silent. His palace was a neighbour to Oceanos', buried in the earth's rock, and its walls were made of polished obsidian. Why not? They could have been anything in the world, blood-red marble from Egypt or balsam from Araby, my father had only to wish it so. But he liked the way obsidian reflected his light, the way its slick surfaces caught fire as he passed. Of course, he did not consider how black it would be when he was gone. My father has never been able to imagine the world without himself in it. (ibid., p. 4)

To summarize, Miller presents the struggle of gender relations as one of the main problems of the story, since it is apparent that she is not satisfied with how misogyny and patriarchy have been defining women and their relations with men over the ages. By touching upon themes like rejection or rape, she reminds us that patriarchy may be an intangible concept, but has very tangible consequences like heavily marring women's image of themselves and forcing them to believe they live as extensions to men – outcomes that Cixous and Clément urge to acknowledge so that it would be possible to reject them.

3.4. Circe and Womanhood

I see Circe as representing a modern woman, the one who has overcome centuries of transformations and is still faced with many more because the process of growth is never-ending. Miller transformed Circe's story into a *Bildungsroman*, wherein she finally morphs into her desired self, into someone who is enough for *her*. Yet we have come a long way to be able to represent women's lives in literature properly since it was mainly occupied by male perspective throughout the ages, which led to some misleading and generic images of women. *Bildungsroman*, of course, can be analyzed as a separate category, yet in terms of women's writing it perfectly represents the desired outcome of embodying women: the whole action of portraying women's lives, struggles, losses, and wins is meant to be seen as growth, as the ultimate goal of justice that women are seeking in terms of representation.

The motif that springs up in the novel from time to time and bears subliminal meaning is the aforementioned Daedalus' loom. It is presented as something Circe occupies herself with on the island, yet it raises a question about her nature: she is a witch and a goddess, the two essences of her being that contrast each other and in turn make her who she is. By being a deity and a master of transformation she could most probably conjure up or morph something into a cloth, fabric, or another type of textile should she wish it instead of manually processing the wool on the loom. It requires time and effort, yet it is exactly why she relishes in it – the toil gives the process meaning and makes her human. The loom could also symbolize sisterhood since Circe lets Odysseus' wife Penelope use it as they both gradually *weave* their friendship. Odysseus too appreciates the loom the first time he sees it, immediately differentiating himself from an average sailor who knew nothing of the quality of finer, daintier things like looms.

Women's writing encompasses everything: the struggles, sexuality, the body, blame and punishment, liberation. Miller's *Circe* represents these values in the fact that Circe is cast out into the margins and it

takes her centuries to break free and finally seize the opportunity to *choose* her new home and potential new self, Penelope and Odysseus' son Telemachus being not a possessive lover but a faithful partner. He appeared in Circe's life after Telegonus brought him and his mother back from Ithaca after an unfortunate meeting with his father Odysseus, ending in the latter's demise. Odysseus was cultured and family-oriented, but he was also plagued by the horrors of his own role in life that he could not ignore – he would be cast out to the edges of the society, just like Circe, should he do otherwise, and thus, ultimately, obeyed and gradually lost himself. Telemachus was the opposite of Odysseus – even though he had his share of the same misery his father was troubled with, he still held his own:

I had been watching him, as he talked, for his father's mannerisms, those tricks that were as indivisible from Odysseus as tides from the ocean. The pauses and smiles, the dry voice and deprecating gestures, all wielded against the listener, to convince, to tease, and most of all, to mitigate. I had seen none. Telemachus took his blows straight on. (ibid., p. 267)

After Circe's son Telegonus left to build his own kingdom, Circe planned to go and try to destroy Scylla once and for all on her own, but Telemachus insisted on going together. Such a seemingly innocent act of support was a grand start of their union: he was a man that had nothing to hide, who was already his true self and thus Circe could not keep away from him any longer:

I had kept away from him for so many reasons: his mother and my son, his father and Athena. Because I was a god, and he a man. But it struck me then that at the root of all those reasons was a sort of fear. And I have never been a coward. (ibid., p. 324)

Having ended Scylla's suffering by turning her into stone, Circe felt it is only fair to put herself through a transformation as well, to redeem herself for all the times she changed those who perhaps did not deserve it or went through it because of her selfishness. Neither Telemachus nor Circe herself knew what the transformation will reveal, the former still respected his lover's wishes and did not forbid her the opportunity to be her own person, heavily contrasting with the gods and the titans who did everything in their power to bar Circe from getting to know herself.

There are also instances when Miller highlights sisterhood in the novel, yet Circe did not have such supportive companionship straight away – her sister Pasiphaë was horrible to her, along with their brother Perses. The pair tormented Circe relentlessly:

The two of them were clever and quickly saw how things stood. They loved to sneer at me behind their ermine paws. Her eyes are yellow as piss. Her voice is screechy as an owl. She is called Hawk, but she could be called Goat for her ugliness. (ibid., p. 6)

The constant torment only hardened Circe's resolve against the future trials that would come her way. She never received even a sliver of genuine warmth from her family – her parents were narcissists and siblings were bullies, perhaps with the exception of Aeëtes, yet he too later succumbed to worshipping himself – despite all the nurture and care that Circe provided him when even his own mother refused to hold him in her hands, he looked down on her and became a merciless ruler of Colchis, setting his

dragons loose on sailors, stealing their will, and branding the slaves (ibid., p. 148). It could be said that the trust with her family was broken, yet it was never there in the first place, leaving Circe to trust only herself.

There is more to be said about Pasiphaë – she is also a witch and a queen of mortal king Minos, who kept her at arm’s length mostly because he too was afraid of a woman’s potential, which she certainly did not lack, for she was using her magic for way more sinister ordeals than Circe, willingly tormenting innocent people. One example of that is the curse she put on Minos, whose seed then turned to scorpions and killed the women who lay with him. Circe compares Pasiphaë’s witchcraft to her own:

I had never seen another witch’s craft room before, and I walked its shelves expecting I do not know what, a hundred grisly things, kraken livers, dragons’ teeth, the flayed skin of giants. But all I saw were herbs, and rudimentary ones at that: poisons, poppies, a few healing roots. I had no doubt my sister could work plenty with them, for her will had always been strong. But she was lazy and here was the proof. Those few simples were old and weak as dead leaves. They had been collected haphazardly, some in bud, some already withered, cut with any knife at any time of day. (ibid., p. 111)

Perhaps Circe expected Pasiphaë’s parlor to be terrifying exactly because of all the bullying during their early years, yet in reality, Pasiphaë did not seek breakthroughs, she only needed what she may use against others and to elevate her own power and standing. What is more, Pasiphaë is demonized as well: Minos hates her and feels tricked, having received such an evil-breeding “foul harpy” instead of the brilliant maiden he was promised (ibid., p. 116). Much like Circe, Pasiphaë too is cast out: the former acts out her role as an exile, the latter as an unloved, rejected wife, and both of them keep to themselves in their respective personal spaces/confines. Despite all the bad blood between the sisters, Pasiphaë still acknowledges the fact that Circe is a witch and a woman in the world ruled by men and claims that neither god nor nymph could have assisted her: “They would both have run screaming at the first tooth. They cannot bear any pain at all. They are not like us.” (ibid., p. 128). Sister or no sister, Pasiphaë was still cruel, so ultimately Circe rejected her statement claiming that they are not the same and never saw her again after visiting Crete. The last we hear about Pasiphaë is when Circe asks Telemachus about the bards’ songs: he claims that Minos is long dead and Pasiphaë has returned to some god’s halls to live in honor (ibid., pp. 289-290). The nature of the said honor is questionable since Circe’s mother Perse was also seen as doing honorable deeds as a woman in Helios’ halls, yet she still was “only a woman”.

Another example of a woman suffocated by patriarchy is Circe’s niece Medea. Circe meets her when she arrives at Aiaia’s shores with Jason to rid themselves of miasma, a thick aura of murder, after killing her brother on the ship fleeing their father Aeëtes. Only later Circe beheld her true colors – Medea was blinded by the love for Jason and so did everything to ensure their life together, yet she failed (or chose to fail) to acknowledge that Jason, deep down, is terrified of her. Medea too was subjected to misogyny early on since her father was a patriarch who could not stand a woman being just as skilled in witchcraft as him (if not more), not even if it is his own daughter: “He punished me for it. He said it made me

unmarketable, but in truth, he did not want me taking his secrets to my husband.” (ibid., p. 148). Circe tries to persuade Medea to see sense by bringing up Jason’s fear and the witch-hunt his people would unleash: “They will resent you. Worse, they will suspect you, for you are the daughter of a sorcerer and a witch in your own right. [...] They will seek to undermine you at every turn.” (ibid., p. 150). It can be said that Jason is the personification of patriarchy’s petrifying fear of women’s potential and Medea represents a woman that has been spiritually trampled by the patriarchy and misogyny, which forced her to try so hard to prove herself to Jason as a woman, forgetting herself and any moral values in the process, only yearning for approval.

Even after such a lack of womanly support, Circe does find herself faced with another woman whose resolve almost matches her own – Penelope, the wife of Odysseus. In the beginning, Circe had reason to suspect her, because it was Penelope who suggested Telegonus during his visit to Ithaca to take her and Telemachus to Aiaia, where she knew Athena would not be able to reach her son due to the aforementioned protective spell. Of course, Circe felt tricked after finding out, yet realized that this is exactly what they have in common – they would do anything to protect those dear to them. With the newfound trust in Penelope, Circe leaves Aiaia in her hands since she has started taking up the art of witchcraft herself: “You were right. It is mostly will. Will and work.” (ibid., p. 329).

It is also worth analyzing Athena, the goddess of war and wisdom, one of the most prominent female deities in Greek mythology. In Miller’s rendering she is portrayed even more grand and menacing than the patriarchs Circe has encountered before:

I had stood in the presence of great gods before: my father and grandfather, Hermes, Apollo. Yet her gaze pierced me as theirs had not. Odysseus had said once she was like a blade honed to a hair’s fineness, so delicate you would not even know you had been cut, while beat by beat your blood was emptying on the floor.
(ibid., pp. 216-217)

As I see it, Athena acts as a cautionary image of what would happen should women lose sight of their goals for liberation and give rise to hubris. In the novel, Athena is Odysseus’ patron and does not care for anything or anyone except her own goals and interests – at first she aims to kill Telegonus so that he would not be able to meet with Odysseus and thus bring the latter’s demise, and then she seeks his son Telemachus to act as his father’s replacement. Telemachus refuses the lands Athena promised, so she offers them to Telegonus, who accepts, yearning for new horizons.

The concluding paragraph of *Circe*, to my mind, represents the journey of women’s representation: “All my life, I have been moving forward, and now I am here. I have a mortal’s voice, let me have the rest. I lift the brimming bowl to my lips and drink.” (ibid., p. 333). Circe finally does what she attempted to do at the beginning of the book – ingest *pharmaka*, an herb that reveals the true form of any living being, and see who/what she is exactly. Derrida’s reasoning about *pharmakon* suggests that it can be translated as *drug*, which would mean *remedy* and *poison* simultaneously (Derrida 1981, 71). The flower *pharmaka*

is Circe's *pharmakon*, yet is it remedy or poison? Previously, *pharmaka* in her hands worked as poison – Glaucos became another self-serving god and a patricide, Scylla was turned into a monster, and men were turned into pigs, thus it leaves the reader (and Circe herself) hoping that it would finally work as a remedy. For Derrida, *pharmakon* is also a metaphor for writing:

Socrates compares the written texts Phaedrus has brought along to a drug (pharmakon). This pharmakon, this "medicine," this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent. (ibid., p. 70)

In other words, writing too has the power to remedy or poison something – views, values, images, *etc.* Women's writing, in this case, acts as a remedy for the restriction of the female gaze in the literary theory and advocates for women's representation, just like Circe consumed *pharmaka* as a *pharmakon* to be able to bring out her true self and just like Miller aims to remedy the view on women today. Nevertheless, it is imperative to focus on the remedy aspect of writing and minimize the subjectivity that may give rise to the poison aspect, since as mentioned before in this thesis, it is truly easy to stray and spark discord between men and women. Writing in itself is not "beneficent" or "maleficent" – the intention laced within makes all the difference.

We get a glimpse of the future before Circe drinks from the bowl since Circe who narrates *is* from the future. She invokes a vision of her life after her transformation: "I have aged. When I look in my polished bronze mirror, there are lines upon my face. I am thickened too, and my skin has begun growing loose. I cut myself at my herbs and the scars stay." (Miller 2018, 332). We can understand, then, that Circe became a *human*, someone she was always meant to be – a being that a woman, naturally, is too, despite all the efforts in history to prove otherwise. In "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays", Cixous sees a woman as an explosive, boundless being who does not conform to any suffocating frames pushed on her by a man's own selfishness, suggesting that one way out of the margins is to embrace this explosiveness and live for yourself (Cixous & Clément 1975, 91). Ultimately, Circe undergoes the transformation for the sake of *herself* and leaves the peripheries, eyes on the very center.

4. Conclusions

This MA thesis was written reflecting on H el ene Cixous and Catherine Cl ement's insights on women's writing in their collection of essays *The Newly Born Woman*. The thesis aimed to analyze the metaphor of witchcraft in feminist thought since the patriarchy drew quite a diminishing image of a witch throughout the years, thus I thought it important to review it from the feminist side as well. In addition, I reviewed Circe's representation as a symbol of female empowerment, especially because up until recently she was seen as a symbol of decadent female sexuality, and finally, I drew on the importance of women's writing in literary tradition, because it was notoriously lacking in female voice for many ages, overshadowed by male writers.

Having examined and discussed the chosen materials it can be concluded that, firstly, today a witch represents an artistic, intuitive woman who controls her own life and rejects the negative notion of a witch, *i.e.* an evil woman seeking to inflict discord in any society. At first, Miller presents Circe as a woman who has been beaten down by the surrounding patriarchal values and manifestations, but then, mirroring Circe's power to transform, she too offers a different image of a witch by shifting its connotations from stagnant and toxic to liberating and empowering. Secondly, Miller's novel shows Circe in a different light compared to her predecessors: she is no longer a malevolent seductress, but a woman who steers her life towards her own desired direction and voices her story on her terms, earning her place in the center by repenting for her mistakes and redeeming herself. Finally, *Circe* can be said to belong to women's writing because Miller reimagines the story of the goddess with previously merely a supporting role. Circe acts as a symbol of a modern woman because despite being a goddess she still experiences subjugation and abuse yet shows that with a strong will and belief in yourself it is possible to transcend any boundary sent your way.

The analysis of the novel shows that Miller was not satisfied with how a woman is presented and viewed today and thus provided her own version of bringing a female character from the margin to the center, exactly what Cixous and Cl ement meant to convey by discussing women's writing and the ways out of the grips of patriarchy. By touching upon themes like abuse, rejection, self-reflection, destruction, family, love, and liberation, Miller created a new image of a witch-woman who rejects any harmful expectations and stereotypes and tells her story from her own point of view, like a *sorceress* from *The Newly Born Woman*. As a final note, Miller's *Circe* is a fine example of women's representation claiming its rightful place in literary theory, inviting us to reevaluate how women were represented before and see what was missing.

Summary in Lithuanian

Šio magistro baigiamojo darbo objektas Madeline'ės Miller romanas „Kirkė“ pasakoja apie graikų mitologijos deivę Kirke, ištrėmtą į nuošalią Ajajos salą dėl savo naujai atrastų raganišku galių. Įbauginti patriarchai dievai ir titanai tikėjėsi užgniaužti ir nutildyti Kirke, bet saloje ji susigyvena su savo pačios moteriškumu, dievybe ir galiomis, išmoksta valdyti savo burtus ir taip tampa didingesnė nei ją ištrėmę dievai. Knygoje pateiktas smurto, moteriškumo, marginalizacijos ir laisvės temas nagrinėjau pasitelkusi Hélène'os Cixous ir Catherine'os Clément esė rinkiniu „The Newly Born Woman“ atsižvelgiant į *moterų rašymo* koncepciją ir jos pagrindines mintis, tokias kaip moterų gyvenimo ir elgesio su jomis vaizdavimą literatūroje. Taip pat analizuoju raganavimo metaforą ir jos virsmą pozityvumo link, mat Kirkė, kaip minėjau, ir buvo nubausta už raganavimą.

Per amžius literatūroje stigo teisingo ir sąžiningo moterų vaizdavimo, tad šio darbo uždaviniai yra išnagrinėti raganavimo metaforą feminizmo diskurse, analizuoti Kirke kaip moterų įgalinimo simbolį ir aptarti *moterų rašymo* svarbą literatūrinėje tradicijoje. „Kirkės“ analizę padalinau į keturis moterų vaizdavimo faktorius atitinkančius poskyrius: kūniškumą, raganavimą, patriarchiją ir moteriškumą. Pirmiausia tiriū, kaip moterys dėl savo kūno ir seksualumo buvo baudžiamos ir demonizuojamos, tada diskutuoju apie raganos metaforą ir jos kilmę, analizuoju, kaip patriarchija veikė moteris praeityje ir šiandieną ir galiausiai kalbu apie moteriškumą ir moterų vaidmenį literatūros teorijoje ieškodama šios dienos paralelių. Taigi, Madeline'ė Miller, pasitelkdama moterų rašymo pagrindines temas, atskleidžia Kirkės kelionę į laisvę ir moters vaizdavimą istorijoje bei literatūroje.

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Appendix



Figure 1: Arthur Hacker, *Circe* (1893)



Figure 2: Alice Pike Barney, *Circe* (ca. 1918)