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**Rewriting *The Odyssey* from a Feminist Perspective in Madeline
Miller's *Circe* and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad***

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Dedications

I dedicate this humble work to;

My dearest parents, my brothers and my closest friends,

I will be forever indebted to you.

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Abstract

Feminist revisionism is an outburst of the second wave of feminism. The act of rewriting the classical works to focus on the side story of the marginalized characters has seen popularity among writers like Madeline Miller and Margaret Atwood. For instance, Homer's *The Odyssey* established its root as an influential classical work in Western society and literature.

Nevertheless, some female writers see Homer's treatment of his female characters as portraying them unfairly with a one-dimensional role. Thus, feminist authors seek to adapt well-known myths to give an alternative story to the mythic women that had been silenced in the past. This dissertation is concerned with the rewriting of the Greek Mythology characters' storylines from a feminist perspective. The purpose of the present research is studying and examining the novel of Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Margaret Atwood's novella *The Penelopiad*, with an intense focus on the protagonists of each work: Circe and Penelope as that both works are a feminist revision to *The Odyssey*.

Keywords: Myths, Feminist Revisionist Mythology, Representations, Homer, *The Odyssey*, Madeline Miller, *Circe*, Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, Rewriting, Circe, Penelope.

Table of Content:

Acknowledgments	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Content	iii
General Introduction	1
Chapter One: Theoretical Background	
1.1. Introduction.....	4
1.2. Myths and Feminist Rewriting.....	5
1.3. Feminist Revisionist Mythology.....	8
1.4. Circe and Penelope's Representations in Homer's <i>The Odyssey</i>	11
1.4.1. Homer's <i>The Odyssey</i>	11
1.4.2. The Representation of Penelope in <i>The Odyssey</i>	14
1.4.3. The Representation of Circe in <i>The Odyssey</i>	17
1.5. Conclusion.....	20
Chapter II: Myth-Remaking: Rewriting of Greek Myth	
2.1. Introduction.....	21
2.2. Introduction to Madeline Miller's <i>Circe</i>	22
2.2.1. Synopsis.....	22
2.2.2. The Female Voice and Representation in <i>Circe</i>	24
2.3. Introduction to Margaret Atwood's <i>The Penelopiad</i>	31
2.3.1. Synopsis.....	32
2.3.1. The Female Voice and Representation in <i>The Penelopiad</i>	33
2.4. Questioning the Credibility of Mythology.....	39
2.5. Conclusion.....	41
Chapter Three: Unearthing the Female Experience	
3.1. Introduction	42
3.2. Muting Female Voices	42
3.3. Resisting Muscularity	45
3.4. Minor Characters' Relationship to Circe and Penelope	51
3.5. Violence and Women's Oppression	54
3.6. Conclusion.....	58
General Conclusion	59
Work Cited	61
ملخص	65
Résumé	66

General Introduction:

It has been more than two millenniums since the existence of the ancient Greek world. However, Greek mythology continues to have an influence over western society and literature up to this day. Through the years, these stories mirrored the ancient society, thoughts, and representations of women. Such myths reviewed women as vulnerable, weak, and passive creatures that are entirely dependent on men. Nevertheless, by the dawn of the twentieth century, the need for myths remaking or rewriting was seen as a necessity. Feminist writers took the females stories from the classics to reformulate new texts that suit contemporary society. Writers like Margaret Atwood and Madeline Miller attempt to retell the old myths to voice the female characters that were shadowed and marked through their works. In doing so, their writings give a literary justice to the women that were left out in the ancient literary classics. Homer's *The Odyssey* has long been cited as one of the most influential works in Western history. Moreover, *The Odyssey* is the central essence of Atwood and Miller's works, in which they give alternative narratives to the marginalized female characters like Penelope and Circe.

In her novella "*The Penelopiad*", Atwood does not merely retell Odysseus's journey but instead focuses on reciting the journey of Penelope, his wife. Hence, the narrator of the novella is Penelope herself; she retells her story from her perspective. Atwood's Penelope is not just a loving and faithful wife who is submissive as she is presented in Homer's *Odyssey*; she is also an intelligent queen who managed to rule her kingdom in her husband's absence for twenty years. The author also shows the cruelty of the patriarchal society where females are treated as second-class citizens, in which they are treated as men's property. Likewise, Madeline Miller in "*Circe*" also retells the story of an existing female character from the Greek myth. Circe, a minor character in Homer's *Odyssey*, was abandoned by her father because she was less powerful and

less talented than her family members. From the perspective of the witch Circe, Miller's tale offers a different picture; a powerful goddess who, indeed, transforms men into pigs, but only when they merit it. Circe appears in a handful of lines in Homer's *The Odyssey*, yet Miller draws a whole novel with 24 chapters from his few verses.

From what had been mentioned before, myths reflect the popular thinking or the dominant culture relating to a specific period. Thus, women had been showing as; dependent, passive, and subjected. Feminist revisionist mythology came to change these representations to adopt modern world ideas. This research is aimed to explore how female characters are presented in the old texts and the new reframed ones.

The Odyssey portrayal of women is heavily patriarchal, as it presents women as subtly less and weaker than men in nearly every case. As the book contains many female characters, the mere concern is the main female character, Odysseus's wife "Penelope," and one of the Goddess, Circe. Therefore, this dissertation investigates how these characters are portrayed in Homer's epic and Atwood and Miller's works and how the new representations of the two characters differ from the classical ones. The research attempts at answering the following questions: How Circe and Penelope are presented in the original work *The Odyssey*? What are the representations of these female characters in both Madeline Miller and Margaret Atwood's revised works? How Miller and Atwood portrayed the struggles of Circe and Penelope in the patriarchal society?

The research will depend primarily on the feminist approach. Since the primary concern of the research is exploring the female characters from feminist lenses, it will be more suitable to apply the feminist approach in tracing the women position changes between past and present. Moreover, this research will analyze various data from different sources, mainly primary

sources, an intensive reading to the two works *Circe* and the *Penelopiad* and Homer's *The Odyssey*, alongside a notable amount of literature that revolve around the topic.

The research is divided into three chapters. The theoretical framework explains the subject-related concepts, concepts, and historical overviews. It covers the concept of Feminist Revisionist Mythology and its relation to Mythology. Also, it explores the relationship between women's rewriting and the second wave of Feminism. Moreover, the chapter concludes with a brief recap of Homer's *The Odyssey* and the representations of the main female characters revolving around the research. The second chapter analyzes Circe and Penelope's depictions in Miller and Atwood's works and seeks to examine the females' voices within them. Last, the third chapter is dedicated to drawing the main similarities and differences between *The Penelopiad* and *Circe* and compares the two characters to each other.

This research aims to illustrate the importance of myths in Western literature and, precisely, to feminist writers. Also, this research sheds light on how Greek myths are a heavily patriarchal in their nature as well as the importance of reading the past and mythology to gain a clear aspect in understanding the modern literature, especially those influenced by mythology.

Chapter One: A Theoretical Background

1.1.Introduction:

Women's Studies and the concept of re-visioning or re-writing have gained importance, particularly since the 1960s, with the development of feminism's second wave. Feminism has argued for the vital importance of re-writing of history in literature and history. Thus, Females must be familiar with the past writings, not to continue their heritage, but to liberate women from its suffocating control (Rich, 19). As such, concepts including Re-vision have gained significance in this regard, as it is a matter of survival. This frequently entails re-writing the past from a feminine perspective. As such, myths should not be abandoned, as Vanda Zajko notes that myth is crucial to feminism since it is one component of literature and culture that can include women's practices and views.

The theoretical section of this dissertation will serve as a baseline for the subsequent analytical chapters. As a result, this chapter will seek to trace the fundamental concepts and notions forming the core of Feminist Rewriting and Mythology. Thus, afterward, a clear image of the relationship between Homer's *Odyssey* and Margaret Atwood and Madeline Miller's chosen works will be obtained. This chapter is dedicated to three parts. The First part explains subject-related concepts and attempts to see the relation between myths and feminist Re-writing. Furthermore, to avoid confusion when comparing Homer's version of Penelope and Circe to Atwood and Miller, the representations of the two female characters in Homer's *Odyssey* will be given. After a brief recap of Homer's *Odysseus* plot, it will be focusing on the characters Penelope and Circe in particular, their myths, and their representation in the *Odyssey*.

1.2. Myths and Feminist Rewriting:

Myths in a simple term can be defined as classical or traditional stories about heroes, legends, or events that explain nature or human existence. Myths are product of culture, history and social structure, and values. According to Joseph Campbell, the writer of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in an interview with Bill Mayors; Myths are built civilizations, and informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage (Campbell, 28). Thus, fundamentally myths can be view as a way to understand the world and the human. Campbell describes myths as they existed to shape the human's experience he stated that myths tell us "how to respond to certain crises of disappointment or delight or failure or success" (60).

Myths are the creation of human imagination. They are archetypical dreams that deal with life's problems at their core (Campbell, 60). Margaret Atwood illustrated that "Myths are universal and timeless stories that reflect and shape our lives, they explore our desires, our fears, our longings, and provide narratives that remind us what it means to be human" (114). These stories through the years mirrored western society, culture, and thoughts. Each culture had its myths and by Western Mythology it mean Greek in which is heavily patriarchal. It is characterized by men's dominance that a look to Greek Mythology reveals how all heroes are men while women are identified as secondary characters with minor roles. It presented the archetypical images of women as they are vulnerable, weak, and passive creatures that are dependent on men.

Most of the female characters in the myths are voiceless. Essentially, focusing more on the male's perspective, his heroic journey and adventure leave women on the margins with small roles. Nevertheless, as has been mentioned above, myths influence societies and cultures. By

isolating women's voices in myths, societies, therefore, alienate women from the discussion of the unknown, the collective, and everything the world offers (Lake, 5). This distinction between the two genders does not acknowledge women's roles and importance. Hence, in response, modern female writers start the adaptation of well-known myths to give literary justice to the mythic women. Feminist re-writing, or revising, attempts to give alternative stories to the voiceless women throughout myths and history as well.

Re-writing or revision is the act of writing and revising a text to create a new one. It is an act of recollection in which the past is recalled and made sense of in the light of the present (Plate, 3). Women re-writing emerged in the 1970s leading by the feminist writers Adrienne Rich, and Helene Cixous in who both developed concepts relating to it. Based on the ideas of Lake Liedeke, a professor at Radboud University and the writer of *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Re-writing* Feminist writers seek to explore to what extent re-writing can afford us the meaning and the understanding of existence. Lake stated that "Re-writing from the woman's perspective inscribes this possibility of change within cultural memory" (39). In the words of Adrienne Rich about revision where she emphasized the importance of knowing the past and the images that captured women to break free from them and that can be through revising the history or the past.

Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction [...] it is an act of survival [...] For a woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.

In her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Helene Cixous encourages women to write about themselves and for themselves. She points out that despite the fact women had been pushed from

writing in the past and considering their works as nonsense, they must speak their words for the words to reach them. Cixous states that because "writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural –hence political, typically masculine" (879). Through centuries literature has been revolving and focusing on the masculine point of view, neglecting women's voices and not giving them enough appreciation. Harriet Macmillan asserted that by women writing about themselves they can restrain the effects caused by the patriarchal society, and by giving an alternative vision of the past the present and the future can be changed.

Adrienne Rich's notion, re-vision, is a key concept for twentieth-century feminist literature. It is well known that the number of women writers while having increased very slightly from the nineteenth century on (Cixous, 878). Between the 1970s and 1980s, re-vision became a motto for a wide range of women re-writing the classics, in which fictions of the past are re-narrated from the perspective of female characters. Revision aims at remembering the past differently, but why re-writing the myths specifically? Myths are associated with Western society, and a look back to the past can lead us to mythology. Myth informs our language, it has been an integral part of western education and it contains within it stories that continue to be told yet indicate, if not perpetuate, elements of misogyny (Macmillan, 45).

It should be mentioned that revising the old works or the past is also an act of reviving, correcting and completing the past. From this point of view, it should be noted that this work is linked to postmodernism literature and theory in terms of intertextuality, and thus rewriting is a crucial element in postmodernism. Intertextuality is an important feature in postmodernism, as it is applied in both works *Circe* and *The Penelopiad*. The two works refer to Homer's *The Odyssey*.

It is clear that classics are dominated by men, and that is written from men's perspective. Feminist writers like Margaret Atwood and Madeline Miller in their works *The Penelopiad* (2005) and *Circe* (2018), retell Homer's Odyssey from the female character's perspective. Atwood and Miller attempt to give alternative narratives to the women that had been overlooked by Homer. In doing so, their writing gives literary justice to the women that had been left out in the ancient myths. It can be concluded that feminist writing engaged in creating mythological revisions or reinterpreting the classics for the sake to fill the lack of the feminine touch in them through adopting the Feminist Revisionist Mythology method.

1.3.Feminist Revisionist Mythology:

Revisionist Mythology is a process of re-reading old texts from a feminist lens, and that by switching the male concepts from center to margins and displaces them with female concepts. Feminist revisionist mythmakers, includes Margaret Atwood, Madeline Miller, and many others. In *The Penelopiad* and *Circe*, both Atwood and Miller retell the story of Odysseus from Penelope's and Circe's perspectives. On one hand, Penelope is Odysseus's wife and the mother of his son, Telemachus, a faithful wife that waits patiently for her husband to return home. While Circe is a beautiful goddess that exiled alone on an island and helps Odysseus in his journey to return home. The authors seek to give an alternative story to the two female protagonist characters in the revised works, i.e. *The Penelopiad* and *Circe*. In the process of voicing the female experience, these writers have created new stereotypes to replace the existing ones.

Feminist revisionist mythmaking gives women writers a context to re-address the male's writing of female identity. It also explores the misogyny that is rooted in mythology. In her essay "*The Thieves of Language*" (1982), Alicia Ostriker states that the essence of revisionist mythmaking for women writers is to correct and challenge the gender stereotypes that are

embodied in mythology, and thus revisionism is revolving in the "hit and run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them" (73,74).

Ostriker indicates revisionist mythmaking as a powerful method to re-outline female identity, and to make corrections to constructed images of what women have collectively and historically suffered (Mookherjee 97). In *The Thieves of Language* she states:

Let me at this point, therefore, define the term "revisionist mythmaking" and sketch the background behind the work I will discuss. Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the user will be revisionist: that is, the figure or table will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible (72).

However, myth remaking or retelling is not merely associated with poetry. It extends to fiction as well "Among poets, even more than novelists" (Ostriker 69).

Revisionary mythology did not emerge from nowhere; rather it is an outcome of a change in female thinking. The second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s progressed with the slogan "The Personal is Political" to call for women's cultural and political inequalities as inevitably linked. On a more profound level, the movement desired to subvert the patriarchy which feminists conceived as an oppressive system for every aspect of women's lives. Nevertheless, the 1960s marked a landmark for social changes to women. For Peter Barry, Professor of English and the author of the *Beginning theory*, the women's movement has always emphasized the importance of how females are portrayed through literature.

The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the 'women's movement' of the 1960s. This movement was, in important ways, literary from the start, in the sense

that it realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority and their coherence. In this sense, the women's movement has always been crucially concerned with books and literature. (85)

Literature can be viewed as a platform for socialization, in that it serves as an example of how individuals should act. Thus, it implies to women and men too, the femininity standards and it embodies concepts regarding "legitimate feminine goals and aspirations" (Barry 85) and that throughout that representation of female characters within it. In the 1960s, feminist authors and critics started to notice "the ideologies embedded throughout the depictions of women in literature" (Lake 6). As stated by Barry, for Feminist Criticism, the 1970's was revolving around uncovering the patriarchy mechanisms; a masculine set of ideas that seek to explain the male dominance in society and impose them to gain natural differences between males and females. By the 1980s women switched the focus from attacking the male representations and dominance to exploring and analyzing the female representations and repressed experiences (Barry 85). Nevertheless, the Feminist Criticism went further by reckoning the discoveries and the approaches of other types of criticism like Marxism, archetypal and psychoanalytic (Barry 85).

Hilda Doolittle is one of the first's female revisionary authors. She accomplished tremendous progress in re-writing the Greek Mythological poems from female lenses. Doolittle encouraged other female writers to dig deep into the ancient mythology and then revise and reformulate them into new ones that include the female experience. Doolittle's works in revising ancient myths seek to create a balance between "separate binary elements, mal, and female that society has constructed for itself" (Lake 7). "*Eurydice*" is one of Hilda Doolittle's poems that tackled mythology from the female perspective that it sets about the myth of Orpheus, a

legendary musician in ancient Greek Mythology, from the standpoint of his wife Eurydice.

Doolittle set the ground for the future female writers and poets to look upon the patriarch's ancient mythology from viewpoint of women. Thus, feminist revisionary mythology comments on classic myths such as *The Odyssey* and seeks to correct the archetypal images that women had been identified with in the past, as what Miller and Atwood tries to tell in their works

1.4.Circe and Penelope's Female Representation in Homer's *The Odyssey*:

1.4.1. Homer's *The Odyssey*

The story of Odysseus belongs to the ancient world of Greek Mythology and Literature. *The Odyssey* is an epic poem, a sequel to *The Iliad*, around the 7th or 8th Century BC. Although, it's not well known the author of the epic because it's been passed down for many generations the and also the works *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are differing in terms of style and formula (Ancient-literature). Hence, the Greeks believe Homer is its author, while some scholars assume that Homer is the author of *the Iliad* only. Nevertheless, the two poems are recognized as classic masterpieces that have a great influence on Western literature. In his translation version of *The Odyssey*, A.N. Jefferas stated:

The Homeric Poems are the oldest surviving texts in Greek Culture. There are no internal references to their author or their origin and there are no contemporary documents to throw lights upon them. They exist in what they virtually a historical vacuum. Nor is there any reliable tradition about their origin in the earliest Greek literature following them. The Greeks all agree on the name 'Homer' and that there is a persistent tradition he was blind. (Jefferas V)

Odysseus or Ulysses (his name in the Roman Mythology) is the protagonist of Homer's epic, a Greek hero and mythical king of Ithaca. The poem revolving around Odysseus's home journey to

his homeland after the Trojan War ended. As it has been mentioned, *The Odyssey* is a second part of *the Illiad*; it tells the story of series of events that lasted 10 years in the war between the city of Troy and the Greeks, Trojan War, caused by Helen of Sparta also known by Helen of Troy when she got kidnapped by Paris, a Trojan prince. The war ended when Odysseus, with the help of the gods, asked the Greek warriors to build a massive wooden horse and hide inside of its belly for a surprise attack.

The story tells the journey of Odysseus to get back to his kingdom, Ithaca— precisely, after twenty from when he left his wife Penelope and son Telemachos for twenty years; ten years fighting the Trojans and another ten years spent them trying to get home. Among these years, He was trapped on the island of a nymph Calypso for seven years because she fell in love with him. As the years passed after the Trojan War, those who fought in the war had returned home a part of Odysseus and rumors start spreading that Odysseus is dead. The suitors come from all across Ithaca wishing to marry Penelope and convincing with the idea that her husband is passed away. In the meantime and somewhere else among the gods, Athena could convince Zeus to send Hermes to Calypso to release Odysseus. After that, Calypso herself fled to Ithaca to help Telemachos in finding his father. Telemachos embarks on a search for his father, paying a visit to some of Odysseus' former comrades, including Menelaus, and Helen, who had returned home a long time ago after the war. Menelaus informs Telemachos that he has received information that Odysseus has been kidnapped by the nymph Calypso.

After Calypso released Odysseus, as he builds a raft and starts sailing, he got sabotaged by Poseidon who breaks his temporary boat, because Odysseus injured his son, he then continued his journey swimming to the next island. After that, He is discovered by princess Nausicaa and welcomed by her father King Alcinous, and Queen Arete of the Phaeacians, where he begins

telling the incredible tale of his return from Troy. Odysseus recalls how the storms drove him and his twelve ships off course, how they visited the land of the Lotus Eaters and the experience they had with Lotus fruit, which causes memory loss, and how he defeated the giant one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus (Poseidon's son) by blinding him with a wooden stake. Despite the assistance of Aeolus, King of the Winds, Odysseus and his crew lost their way home. They managed to get away from the cannibal Laestrygonians after that, only to run into the witch-goddess Circe shortly after. Circe turned half of his men into animals and that by making them drinking a magical potion.

Nevertheless, Hermes warned Odysseus about Circe and gave him an herbal called molly to drink so he can resist the witch's magic, and by doing so he could convince Circe into returning his men to humans. They stayed at Circe's Land for a year, and before heading to their next destination, Circe advises him into visiting the Underworld and consulting the dead. By making a sacrifice of the dead, Odysseus could summon the spirit of the old prophet Tiresias—that tells him about the future and gives him disturbing news about the situation back at his homeland—as well other spirits including his mother who died out of sadness from her son's departure. Odysseus returned to Circe's island who tells him of the dangers that await him. On the remaining stages of his journey, he skipped the land of the Sirens, passed between Scylla and the Charybdis, and, completely ignoring the warnings of Tiresias and Circe, he tracked down the sun god Helios' holy animals. Zeus punished Odysseus for this sacrilege by wrecking his ship with a thunderbolt in which all of them drowned except Odysseus. He was stranded on the island of Calypso, where she forced him to stay as her lover.

After Odysseus finishes retelling his long journey, the Phaeacians agree to assist Odysseus in returning home by sending him to Ithaca's in a hidden harbor. Odysseus learns about his

household from a nearby swineherd while disguised as a wandering beggar and telling a fictional story about himself. He meets up with his son, Telemachus, who has just returned from Sparta, thanks to Athena's conspiracies, and they all agreed that the shameless and rapidly impatient suitors must be destroyed. Penelope organizes a target shooting contest for the suitors with the help of Athena, which the disguised Odysseus easily wins, and he then kills all the other suitors along with Penelope's maids. After the incident, Odysseus only exposes and confirms his true self to his wife and his father, Laertes. Given the fact that Odysseus has killed two generations of Ithacan men (shipwrecked sailors and executed suitors), Athena gets involved one last time, and Ithaca is once again at peace.

1.4.2. Female Representations in Penelope in *The Odyssey*:

Penelope is the daughter of Icarius, Spartan king, and Periboea, a naiad. She is initially named Arnaia or Arnakia; nonetheless, she was thrown in the sea by her father at a young age because of a prophecy he heard. A flock of ducks rescued her, and her parents changed her name to Penelope, meaning 'a weaver'. Many scholars throughout history have debated the roots of her name. Thus, many attempted to link her name to her loyalty, her rescue by a group of ducks, or her iconic trick with the weaving of the shroud — as an attempt to delay the marriage proposals, Penelope told the suitors that she would not get married until she finishes making a shroud for her father-in-law Laertes—. This deception with the shroud is a crucial aspect of Penelope's character; it indicates how smart and wise she is in decision-making. Penelope has permanently been affiliated with faithfulness.

Indeed, if required to interpret Penelope in a few words, 'faithful' or 'loyal' would likely be the first words that come to mind. Penelope stands out as a prominent exemplar of idealness, as illustrated by Agamemnon's ghosts in the epic's final book:

The shade of Agamemnon loudly intoned: "Blessed have you been O son of Laertes, ingenious Odysseus, in winning a wife of such surpassing virtue! So upright in the disposition was Penelope the daughter of Icarius that she never forgets Odysseus the husband of her youth. (*Odyssey*. XXIV 232)

Each time Penelope interacts with the suitors in her place, the narrator tells us of her state. "As a veil for her face she held up" (I, 12). As a result, she emphasizes her purity by covering her face before meeting men who are not members of her house. Her Homeric epithets also show her virtue. Penelope is "self-possessed" (*The Odyssey*, IV), "long-courted" (*The Odysseus*, IV), "wise" (*The Odyssey*, V), "unswerving" (*The Odyssey*, XIII), "irreproachable" (*The Odyssey*, XV) and "cautious" (*The Odyssey*, XV). Penelope seems to be the prescribed model of the steadfast wife. Her goodness stands out when compared to her mortal companions in the *Odyssey*, such as Clytemnestra— in Greek mythology, Clytemnestra was Agamemnon, king of Mycenae or Argos, and the sister of Helen of Troy— who betrayed than killed her husband. In Hades, the Underworld, the spirit of Agamemnon tells Odysseus — back when Odysseus consulted the dead in book XI— that there is no chance that Odysseus will be suffering from the same fate as Agamemnon did. Agamemnon described Penelope as 'too intelligent' and 'understanding' (*The Odyssey*, XI).

However, In Greek Mythology, atrocious or morally doubtful— according to the social conventions— characters are those portrayed as sexual, loud, and dangerous. In *The Odyssey*, many female characters can fit this description, like the witch Circe or Calypso. Both females are portrayed as charming, singing, and weaving. However, their voices only appear to highlight the danger that awaits the men who fall into their traps. Circe and Calypso are described as not only seductive but also as "a threat," one so great that "no one, god or mortal, dares approach her

there" (VII, 282, 285). The connection between a female voice and her values works in reverse; if bad females are those who cross their boundaries, good women are those who know how to remain silent. Submission is associated with female stereotypes that are labeled as good. Judith Fletcher states in "Women's Space and Wingless Words in The Odyssey" "There is a sustained metaphor in the Odyssey linking speech and sexuality, doors and chastity, which is supported by the idea that a word has a physical nature, and that to speak is to let a word cross a boundary" (Fletcher 89). According to Judith Fletcher, Penelope is held up as an ideal woman. Because of her willingness to remove her voice in any situation that can encounter with Odysseus or her son's opinion or authority, "Penelope exhibits a restraint exemplifying the conventional female virtues—stay inside, work wool, and keep quiet—" (81).

Throughout the epic, Telemachus' commands towards Penelope fulfill a double objective. To begin with, his willingness to overrule his mother's role as head of the household demonstrates his growing masculinity and dominance "he signifies his coming of age by asserting authority over his mother[...] who until this now have had authority over him" (97). Hence, Penelope managed to rule Ithaca perfectly for twenty years. That indicates her cleverness, strength, and most importantly, her capacity to do it alone without masculine intervene, however as her son starts maturing, his voice overshadows hers. She seems fine with it or at least accepting it. As Fletcher states: "public spaces are repeatedly defined and emphasized as masculine by articulating other domestic places where women are silent; by acknowledging this distinction, the poem shows us how Telemachus eventually takes his rightful place in this masculine public world" (Fletcher 79). Second, Penelope's ability to abandon authority identifies her as a model mother and wife. Penelope had to be a recognizable Good Wife for The Odyssey's plot to succeed, and she had to be silent for Odysseus to want to return home.

1.4.3. The Representations of Circe in *The Odyssey*:

Circe is a character described in 'classic' myths by the man who encounters her: Odysseus in Book 10 and 12 from *The Odyssey*. Circe is divine. She is the daughter of the Sun, Helios, and the nymph Perses. After being sentenced to exile, she perfected her abilities and developed into a powerful sorceress. She is very much in the majority of myths and legends for her power to metamorphose men into animals "with her wand; and straightway hustled them to her ties, for they grew the heads and shapes and bristles of swine, with swine-voices too" (*The Odyssey*, X). Understanding Circe enables one to understand how male and female roles fit into society and the requirements imposed on them. Circe is one of many; ancient female characters were self-sufficient, independent, and in touch with nature. Women were probably hated by men and thus portrayed as witches and as forces of evil that needed to be repressed (Martinez 1). In addition, Circe is portrayed as "the beautiful goddess of the goddesses" (Homer, X), a dangerous and sexual enchantress that bewitches men literally and metaphorically. A goddess with "the comely braided hair, singing tunefully within by the great loom as she went to and fro, weaving with her shuttle such close imperishable as the will not goddesses, some lively lustrous thing" (*The Odyssey*, X). The tale of Odysseus' men accepting Circe's invitation and becoming tamed animals shows Circe's power.

Additionally, she defends and assists Odysseus and his crew. She is depicted as a 'stunning goddess' of sexual allure, 'queen of wild animals' who seduces men and turns them into domesticated animals. She approaches Odysseus, attempting to seduce him in order to exert physical influence over him. She then serves as their protector and advisor in their battles against the Sirens and in the Underworld. In *The Golden Age of Myths and Legend*, Thomas Bulfinch

describes her as "a powerful magician" (218) that practices her power by one touch to "victims of her witch's portions" (*The Odyssey*, X) by her "long thin wand."

Circe is depicted as having the ability to transform into invisibility and to fly across space. She was aware of the hero's experiences in the Underworld despite not having been there. She is also knowledgeable about conjurers and shares her experience with Odysseus as she instructs him on how to reach the Underworld "Circe has detailed us a quite different course, which will take us to the House of Hades" (*The Odyssey* X). In *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Daniel Odgen states about the characteristics of Circe:

Homer's Circe is the first great multitalented "witch" of Greek literature. She can tame animals with drugs, turn men into animals with potions, a wand, and perhaps spells, turning animals into men with ointment pass-through space unseen, and send magic winds. She also appears to command some erotic binding magic against which Odysseus must protect himself. It is Circe who is the guiding expert behind Odysseus's necromancy. She tells Odysseus that he must consult Tiresias by necromancy, she gives him detailed instructions as how to perform the rite, and provides him with the sheep he must sacrifice in the course of it [...] it is as Circe has gone to the consultation herself (she could, after all pass through space unseen). (39,40)

Thus, Circe had taught Odysseus how to speak, with whom he should speak, and what sacrifices must be made to reach the Underworld.

Women in Greek society were regarded as a subsidiary. When women's actions ranged against the natural order, men felt compelled to repress them (Spaeth,16). Women were made to seem unreasonable. Her own body guides Circe; her desire to have an intimate relationship with Odysseus encourages her to do so. In the *Odyssey*, Hermes advises the hero that sexual activity

would weaken him and make him "unmanned." Odysseus's masculinity is in jeopardy, as the sorceress's sexuality could leave him incapable. Circe subverts the social balance by performing as the active sexual partner, putting cultural conventions between sexes in jeopardy. Although Circe is a powerful titan goddess and a sorceress, she is depicted as a submissive to Odysseus. When he tries to attack her with his sword, she gets terrified and kneels and begs for mercy from a mortal.

1.5. Conclusion:

Myth is an exceptionally influential source for its stimulating effect on society's consciousness. It, therefore, links the past to the future. However, by means of myth, in which men's perspectives have dominated, gender stereotypes are formed and maintained. In this light, gender roles established in myths have been affecting the social structure. As a result, the patriarchal images have become an essential means for oppressing and silencing women.

Classic myths margined women from heroism, whereas revised myths aim to give women their own stories and change the patriarchal ideologies that shaped the classics. Hence, feminist revisionary mythology calls for the necessity of having a feminine voice throughout culture and history and that by breaking the so-called conventions of an oppressive male-dominated society. Nevertheless, throughout myth-remaking, these myths are questioned, deconstructed, and re-written. Feminist authors have begun to reform and recreate traditional myths from a female-centered lens in the past decades. Hence, stereotypes are used by women writers to describe, analyze, revise, and re-write their works. Following this conceptual framework, the upcoming chapter examines two contemporary women authors' re-writes of Homer's *The Odyssey*.

Chapter Two: Myth-Remaking: Rewritings of Greek

2.1. Introduction:

Ancient Greek mythology is primarily about masculine heroes and epic conflicts like the journey of Odysseus. On the other hand, female figures are always present, but only on the margins, frequently addressed in a stereotyped way. This image of the ancient mythological woman is now being questioned in modern society. Women in ancient Greece are less visible in historical contexts than women in subsequent periods. It has been suggested that as a result of their absence, myths become a refuge of abundance where women might behave and flourish in a challenging and exciting way (Zajko, 5). In Atwood and Miller's versions of Penelope and Circe, it is assumed that Penelope and Circe are doing just that. Their characters' emphasis points and places are vastly different, but both works share a common nerve: a female voice longs to be heard. The nature of these female voices and the amount to which they are relevant to this argument are the chapter's topics.

This chapter deals with the rewritings of Greek myths, precisely the myth of Odysseus. The two works to be analyzed are Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) and Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018), both of which are a revision of *The Odyssey*. Atwood's work is a re-writing of Penelope's story in which she aims to draw attention to Penelope's side of the story and give her a voice to narrate the events from her perspective. As the title implies, Miller's *Circe* revolves around the story and life of the Goddess of sorcery, Circe, her relationship with her family, and her relationship with Odysseus. Furthermore, it tackles down the female voice in each female character and questions how these female writers justify their characters against the patriarchal society.

2.2. Introduction to Madeline Miller's *Circe* :

The novel depicts Circe's journey towards self-identity as well as her continuous struggle between mortality and divinity. Throughout the novel, there are various aspects of her personality. She is first subservient, then compassionate, and eventually complicated yet flawed. Circe gradually matures into an assertive woman who rejects being walked across. The Goddess gradually begins to believe in herself, her abilities, and her ability to overcome all odds. She also discovers the importance of balancing between self-esteem and being aware of her capacity for protecting herself. Bit by bit, she grew to like mortality and ultimately discovers her authentic self among the mortals.

Circe, contrary to popular perception, is not solely a retelling of the *Odyssey*. It includes various aspects concerning women, such as; women's position in patriarchal societies, their interactions with men and other women, childbirth and motherhood, and abuse. Circe's life has been filled with sorrow and pain. Challenge she faces is remarkably identical to those faced by women throughout the feminist movement. An examination of the work indicates that Circe may be understood as an allegory of women's struggles during the first and second waves of feminism. Even though *Circe* was published in the 21st century, it talks about the problems that women faced in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as today. Thus, *Circe* is closely related to feminism and can be read as an allegory of women's struggle

2.2.1. Synopsis to *Circe*

Circe retells the story of a minor character in Homer's *The Odyssey* by the same name. Circe is depicted as a savage, beautiful, and powerful witch who charms men and tricks them into their possible death or into transforming them into wild animals in the epic. However, Circe, as imagined by Madeline Miller, is very distinct. Circe is a complex, broken, and compassionate

character seeking purpose and meaning in her immortal life. Circe's life journey was not any near joy. No one expected anything from a nymph that did not show any kind of skills or power during her childhood. She grows up cold and uninteresting in her household. The other nymphs, especially her siblings, constantly mock her, never encouraging her to feel like she belongs or that she matters. After the incident of her uncle — the Titan Prometheus, when he is whipped in front of the other gods, whereas the suffering of him was entertaining them — and through helping Prometheus a bit, Circe discovers that she does not want to follow the footsteps of the gods. As the years pass, Circe falls in love with a young mortal, and she fears that one day he will die and leave her alone. Refusing to accept this, Circe searches for pharmaka, a herb endowed with magical properties. Using it, she transforms him into a god. However, the mortal decided to marry another beautiful nymph named Scylla. Circe, overcome with jealousy, decides to get Scylla out of the way by transforming her into a six-headed monster that feasts mortal flesh using Scylla's same herbs.

Circe confesses what she did to her father Helios and the rest of the gods and because Circe's power is witch crafting, which is beyond the gods' limits. Derived by fears, the gods decide to exile Circe on the lonely island of Aiaia forever, and there Circe becomes a powerful witch. Over the years, Circe meets various heroes and legends, including Odysseus, who becomes her friend and lover. In the novel, the two have a complicated and passionate yet helpless relationship. Odysseus spends a year on Circe's island before returning to his current wife and homeland, leaving Circe with a child who may help her cope with her loneliness. Nevertheless, her child is mortal, and as he is going to die and leave her alone once again. Despite this, Circe gets in the face of the gods to protect and defend her son. Eventually, Circe decides to live a mortal life and leave her past life behind her.

2.2.2. The Female Voice and Representation in *Circe* :

Circe is a fictional autobiography in which Circe is the main character and the story's narrator. She tells the story of her own life. Her birth is the beginning of the tale, and the possible death is the end of it. Circe, as a goddess, has a longer lifespan than mortal women. Throughout the novel, the reader follows her character's progression over hundreds of years, bonding with her character development. The reader also felt her sadness and happiness. Her weaknesses are uncovered, but her maturity and confidence are as well growing dramatically. On the other hand, Circe emerges as "different" (3) in Miller's novel and seems to be destined for greatness.

Circe, on the other hand, is more than meets the eye. She encounters Glaucos, a sad, mortal man, while she was wandering a lonely island. She falls in love with him and ready to do whatever it takes to ensure that they will be together. That was the first time she uses her sorcery, which she is completely oblivious of. Although, and despite her ignorance, it is one of the first defining moments in which she can subvert her father's patriarchal court. Despite the gods' warnings that changing fate and turning a human man into a god is impossible, she succeeds in doing so. She thereby undermines the most powerful and enlightened deities who thought "it was Glaucos fate to be changed at that moment" (57). She makes Glaucos a god using a particular plant, 'Pharmaka,' without anybody realizing it. Glaucos and other gods are certain that he has been a divine all along since no one has the potential to "create" a divine. Moreover, Circe is still seen as defenseless, powerless, and worthless but it is not yet done to Circe and her talents.

Glaucos, who is meant to be her true love, falls in love with Scylla, a nymph. Circe returns to her metamorphosing plant, 'pharmaka', when she learns she means nothing to Glaucos other than a sister. She uses the plant on Scylla because she believes it brings out a person's actual looks

and character: "She would not be able to hide her adder malice anymore. [...]The halls would echo with her furious screams, and the great god would come to whip me, but I would welcome them, for every lash upon my skin would be further proof to Glaucos of my love" (48). Circe's ability to change people's fate is a clear sign of self-evolution and character development. She can make independent decisions based on her own experiences and beliefs, and no one can restrict her. Circe herself is becoming increasingly conscious of this. Circe is astonished when Selene, the nymph who saw Scylla's transformation into a monster, narrates the incident to her: "It felt impossible to picture the horror Selene described. To make myself believe: I did that." (50). Circe seemed to be becoming conscious of her abilities, her otherness, at this point. As a result, she starts to change. Circe begins to overcome her nervousness and discover her voice.

Her father and the other gods, on the other hand, continue to overlook her. Even when she tells Helios that she changed Glaucos and transformed Scylla into a monster, she gets laughed at. Circe continues to speak, attempting to convince Helios and the other gods that she does have the power until Helios gets involved saying:

"'Daughter, you begin to make a spectacle.' The words cut across the air. 'If the world contained that power you allege, do you think it would fall to such as you to discover it?' Soft laughter at my back, open amusement on my uncle's faces. But most of all my father's voice, speaking those words like trash he dropped. *Such as you*. Any other day in all my years of life I would have curled upon myself and wept" (54).

This passage is vital to understanding Circe's reality. What matters to Helios is Circe's reflection on him, not what she speaks, feels, or believes. She is his daughter, and she is now creating a 'show'; something unimaginable that for a woman to be able to channel such abilities in any form. The patriarchal structure that is reflected within Circe shows through in paragraphs like

this, and it becomes evident how Circe struggles with herself and is she is being held back by her other male figures, such as her father. Even though Circe confesses to the gods what she did to both Scylla and Glaucos, she does not get any punishment since the gods do not believe she can do what she did.

Everything changes when Circe's brother, Aeetes, comes forward and says he has the same powers as Circe's and that he recognizes these abilities in her. Because he is a man with a kingdom to rule, he is regarded seriously (57). Helios consults Zeus about the issue, as he is worried about the chaos and damage their witchcraft may unleash. Helios speaks up after deciding: "We have agreed [...] that these powers present no immediate danger. Perses live beyond our boundaries and is no threat. Pasiphaë's husband is a son of Zeus, and he will be sure she is held to her proper place" (63). The patriarchy that exists inside Helios' court is once again revealed. Circe is not the only one who suffers from it; her sister Pasiphaë is as well. Her fate is intertwined with that of her husband, who is tasked with keeping her in control.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the male siblings, it is the contrary, Perses, who is instantly regarded as trustworthy and truthful, unlike his two sisters. He is hardly either punished or exiled, the gods trust him, and Perses suffers no ramifications, but on the other hand, they blame Circe and treat her differently than the rest of her siblings.

Helios finishes his statement: "You were all here when [Circe] confessed that she sought her powers openly. She had been warned to stay away, yet she disobeyed. [...] It is agreed with Zeus that for this, she must be punished. She is exiled to a deserted island, where she can do no more harm. She leaves tomorrow" (63).

As a result, a small group of men decides how Circe will spend her eternity. Every choice is made based on men's authority, on a patriarchal framework. Circe is not taken seriously until her

brother asserts that she truly has power. She is continuously rejected and neglected as a woman there until males need someone to blame. Her brothers are saved when the decision is made, but she must suffer. This section is gendered, like the one that Helios rejects, Circe. Perses and Aeëtes are not regarded as a threat because they are men in command. Pasiphaë is not punished. Indeed she is also a woman. However, Pasiphaë is allowed to practice her power and be accessible only because she is married. Thus her husband is responsible for being the one to put her "in her rightful position." The depiction of this masculine society is clear once more. Circe is eventually forced to flee to an isolated island called Aiaia. At this point, she resolves to devote her whole attention to her abilities as a sorcerer (72).

On the other hand, Circe discovers that her new life in exile, the island of Aiaia, offers her more opportunities and freedom than past life in her father's place. In addition to that, Circe and her sorcery skills evolve and grow when any patriarchal structure does not constrain them. Moreover, despite being exiled, she is not entirely isolated. Throughout her hundreds of years in exile, she encounters many females and males characters — she befriends the god Hermes, Daedalus, the human she encounters within her mission to help her sister, her two nephews Ariadne and Medea, and not forget to mention Odysseus of course—. Meanwhile, Circe embraces her witchcraft, learning how to transform men into animals and wild animals into obedient pets. It is apparent that she starts to voice and express herself openly when she first decides to transform Glaucos and Scylla. However, it is on Aiaia that Circe truly blossoms. The changes 'the growth' that Circe goes through is remarked in Catherine MacMillan's article "*The Witch(ES) of Aiaia.*"

Concerning Circe's exile, MacMillan stated that: "In a sense, her exile on Aiaia allows Circe, who had once been a timid nymph at her father's court, disparaged and unloved, to grow

in maturity and confidence" (35). MacMillan demonstrates Circe's exile to Aiaia and Odysseus's appearance as core components in her growth and development. This would signify that a female character can only progress along with her relationship with male characters. Glaucos obligated her to initiate with witch crafting, her brother, who is the reason for her exile, and Helios, who punished her for spending her life in exile. Furthermore, MacMillan appears to hint that Odysseus is the one that enhances her strength (35). Circe's voice as a consequence of these men's actions suggests that she has always been and will continue to rely on male figures throughout her life.

Prometheus in chapter 2, he seems to fascinate Circe, and thus she thinks of him frequently throughout the novel (155). As a god who disobeyed Zeus's will and handed humankind the gift of fire, Prometheus talks to Circe, who does have a soft spot for mortals. Circe encounters Prometheus shortly after his public chastisement. It is their first and final meeting. While the Fury is torturing Prometheus, Circe is perplexed by the gods' reaction because no one seems to care about or even shows a bit of sympathy "Even I, who knew so little of discomfort, felt the ache of it. My father would say something, I thought. Or one of the other gods. Surely they would give him some sort of acknowledgment, a word of kindness; they were his family, after all" (15). Nonetheless, nothing occurs, and Prometheus is whipped by the Fury, for Circe feels like the infinity. The gods eventually get bored and choose to rest, eat their foods, and drink wine, while Prometheus is left soaking in his blood on the ground. Circe's first sign of autonomy emerges at this point. She approaches him and asks if she may offer him some nectar —fruit juice and pulp beverage:

"His gaze rested on mine. 'I would thank you for that,' he said. His voice was resonant as aged wood. It was the first time I had heard it; he had not cried once in all his torment. I

turned. My breaths came fast as I walked through the corridors to the feasting hall, filled with laughing gods. Across the room, the Fury was toasting [...]. She had not forbidden anyone to speak to Prometheus, but that was nothing, her business was offence. I imagined her infernal voice, howling out my name. I imagined manacles rattling on my wrists and the whip striking from the air." (16)

The previous section took a place hundreds of years before she meets Odysseus. Circe not only resists her father and Zeus' wishes by speaking to Prometheus, but she is also well aware of it. She is conscious that she may be punished and tortured due to her actions, but she continues to do so. Her convictions and emotions matter more to her than expected from her; therefore, she takes action. This demonstrates that as a female and a divine, surrounded by masculine Titans and Olympians concerned with force and power, Circe can make her own decisions as early starting from page 16 up to the end of the novel.

Miller portrays Circe as a woman whose memories, traumas, and circumstances shape into whom she is now a 'powerful witch'. In chapter 18, she mentions to her son her strong "You have never understood how strong I am" (219). As she gets in phases where she finally becomes capable of confronting and challenging the most powerful gods, Circe faces Athena, the Goddess of wisdom and war craft, to keep her son safe. She managed to spell on her island so the Goddess Athena could not enter the land and harm Circe's child "Athena could not cross my spell" (217). In addition to that, Circe grows to be braver as each chapter passes. "it struck me then that at the root of all those reasons was sort of 'fear'. And I have never been a coward" (305). The previous quote, along with Circe's incident with Prometheus, indicates that even though she was submitted to her father's rules, she has no fear when it comes to standing up for what she believes in. She can merit Trigon's venomous tail (246). This ancient god lives in the

deepest part of the ocean and has the greatest poison in existence, capable of causing endless suffering on even Olympian gods. Circe also stands up against her father's decision to keep her exiled for eternity. Not just that, she obtained enough power and confidence to threaten her father's strength if he would not promise her freedom.

"You dare to threaten me?" These gods, I thought. They always say the same thing.

"I do." My father's skin flared blinding bright. His voice seared at my bones.

"You would start a war." "I hope so. For I will see you torn down, Father, before I will be jailed for your convenience any longer". His rage was so hot the air bent and wavered around him. "I can end you with a thought". It was my oldest fear, that white annihilation. I felt it shiver through me. But enough. At last, enough.

"You can," I said. "But you have always been cautious, Father. You know I have stood against Athena. I have walked in the blackest deeps (303).

You cannot guess what spells I have cast, what poisons I have gathered to protect myself against you, how your power may rebound upon your head. Who knows what is in me? Will you find out?" The words hung in the air. His eyes were discs of ignited gold, but I did not look away (303).

Thus, Circe is fully aware of her strength, and she is not hesitating to use her voice or strength to stand up for herself.

To conclude, Miller's revision of Circe's character portrays her as woman that she is not afraid of using her own voice. Miller was able to highlight Circe's voice and growth in the patriarchal world that she was living in. In the novel, Circe could break free from any male figure that oppresses her. At the end of the book, she obtains the freedom that she always longed for and leaves her island Aiaia. Using her knowledge, intelligence, and power, she manages to

bargains with the sun (her father) and the god of the gods, Zeus, two very powerful Olympian gods. Circe's always longed for the mortals and dislikes being a goddess that she decides to transform herself into a human by taking the same herbs she gave to both Scylla and Glaucos. Therefore, she could live a counted life peacefully beside the man she loves, have children, grow old with them, and then simply die. By doing so, she entirely contradicts the constructed image for her by the male mythmakers. However, the novel is unfinished, and the reader never learns if Circe succeeds in gaining the mortal life she so desires (333).

2.3. Introduction to Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* :

Atwood's early writings, as much as her later ones, are concerned with the fracturing of the self, or with the 'power politics' between lovers, or with the necessity to re-write mythological themes, such as Homer's Odysseus, from the silent perspective of the abandoned female characters. Although Margaret Atwood is considered to be a feminist writer, she believes that her perspective regarding feminism does not involve a feminist, or maybe even more importantly, that she is subsequently embraced by the feminist's second-wave movement in general. She is as hesitant to be associated with feminism as she is with any critical movement (Macpherson, 60).

Atwood's current works aim to demonstrate how women have begun to escape and transcend the roles that have been assigned to them. She contrasts the positions of women in Ancient Greece and nowadays. Her writings not only detail how women have gained some sort of control and demolished patriarchal thinking but also highlight what women still need to accomplish to obtain complete voice. Throughout Penelope's viewpoints, Atwood puts these mythical characters up to develop courage and power, to overcome patriarchal ideas. They are providing Penelope and the maids a voice to express their opinions and allowing them to recover

their bodies after males had attempted to appropriate them. In Penelope's narrative, Atwood asserts Penelope's voice into the world whilst also putting the truth and accuracy of *The Odyssey's* tale into doubt. Penelope attacks Homer's authority, so putting into question her authority as an author while also framing her perspective as one of many points of view. Penelope also describes how her sexuality has been seized and speaks out against this objectification.

2.3.1. Synopsis of *The Penelopiad* :

The Penelopiad is a novella written by Margaret Atwood that was published in 2005. Penelope, Odysseus' wife, and her twelve hung maids tell the story from their own points of view. It provides an alternative viewpoint on the events notably depicted by Homer in *The Odyssey*, bringing depth to a previously superficial image of a faithful woman and her deceptive maids. Drawing on Greek tragedy, Atwood alternates between the narrators of Penelope, who is now dead and in the underworld, and the hung maids, who speak in a chorus throughout the novel. Atwood's retelling of this legendary marriage draws attention to the inequalities between men and women, as well as the reader's understanding of how our cultural assumptions affect mythology and vice versa.

Penelope's cleverness, faithfulness, and achievement have made her a notable character for authors who are interested in re-writing myths. However, with her adaptation of *The Odyssey*, Margaret Atwood adopts an unusual method. Initially, *The Penelopiad* originated not from its title, but the interest of Atwood for *The Penelopiad's* twelve murdered maids. It says, in her introduction, that "I've always been haunted by hanged maids" (xv), and that's how Penelope is in *The Penelopiad* (xv). Atwood's text focuses on the 12 maids who slept with the suitors. She aims to make these neglected women visible and justice as much as to give Penelope a voice.

Penelope's voice, however, is jeopardized by the presence of women degrading women in the novella. In general, "degrading the other person" happens when a woman criticizes or judges another woman for her behavior, diminishing the degraded woman's voice whereas strengthening the shamer's a supposedly greater power. In *The Penelopiad*, this degrading occurs on two-level; when patriarchal women are degrading subversive women that are strong enough to use their voices and women with voices shaming patriarchal women. The latter depicts Penelope condemning Helen from *The Penelopiad* for supporting masculine thinking; Penelope seeks to obtain power by the subjugation of other characters, which is exactly the system she is attempting to escape from.

2.3.2. The Female voice and representation *The Penelopiad* :

Margaret Atwood has made a name for herself in the literary world through her books and articles. In her work *The Penelopiad*, Atwood gives voice to historical figures whose voices have been forgotten among Homer's *Odyssey*'s many readings and rewritings. Penelope and the maids are all given the freedom to retell their memories and viewpoints in the novella. Nevertheless, because the dissertation mainly focuses on Penelope and Circe's testimonies, Penelope is given a contemporary perspective and voice while keeping her historical status. She relates the tale of her life after her death in the Underworld, similar to *The Odyssey*.

Surprisingly, *The Penelopiad's* Penelope regards oral tales as an unreliable source of knowledge and the written language as reliable and accurate (Richards 169). Instead of portraying herself as the accurate written word, Penelope takes down Odysseus' description of the events in *the Odyssey*. She makes the reader question the truth of mythology, including her own. Hence, trying to eliminate the writer's authority has historically been shown to enforce male privilege (172-73). Her account takes on the same credibility or incredibility as Odysseus'

account. Atwood encourages readers to question not only the truth of Odysseus' perspective (or any perspective written down by Homer), as well as to doubt and challenge Penelope's point of view, "especially with the dissenting voices of the twelve hanged maids reminding the reader of their differing version" (Scanlon 18).

Moreover, Atwood inserts an implicit examination and criticism of her female ancestors into the narrative of Penelope. (Richards 183) Penelope adjusts her plot and instructs the twelve maids also to adjust theirs. She gives them the power to speak out, albeit that seems to fail her as they blame Penelope for their death. As Richards illustrates, the weaving is a symbol for female creativity throughout *The Penelopiad* (166).

Nevertheless, this symbolism promotes the theory that one must take into account various perspectives. Even before attempting to establish the reality, The Novella "[rejects] the feminist re-writing practice of 'recovering' a single female voice as if it can be made to speak for the experiences of all women" (Richards 185). According to Alicia Ostriker, revisionist myths, like *The Penelopiad*, are "acts of feminist anti-authoritarianism against the patriarchal praxis of reifying texts" (78).

Penelope starts her account, admitting her self-satisfaction in her quietness, stating, "I kept my mouth shut; or, if I opened it, I sang his [Odysseus's] praises. I didn't contradict, I didn't ask awkward questions, I didn't dig deep" (Atwood, *The Penelopiad* 3). Since she's dead, she freely reveals her narrative and voice. Although if she comes into realization of many people have dismissed her perspective throughout history (3). Penelope adds, "how they were turning me into a story, or into several stories, though not the kind of stories I'd prefer to hear about myself. What can a woman do when scandalous gossip travels the world? If she defends herself, she sounds guilty" (3). Thus Penelope gets her voice through engaged in opposition to the patriarchal

system, and therefore she expresses her voice. In addition, Penelope is determined that the world should be aware of her version and shows her importance and independence that had been overshadowed in the *Odyssey* by voicing her account.

Atwood in *The Penelopiad* handles in a much different manner the problem of body segmentation and female agencies. Penelope, in the start of *The Penelopiad*, worries her narrative won't be heard because "[she] can't make [her] self-understood, not in your world, the world of bodies, of tongues and fingers; and most of the time [she has] no listeners, not on your side of the river" (4). Atwood breaks Penelope's body into sections, symbolizing the fragmentation between her living body and dead voice in the real-life and her dead body and living soul in the Underworld. It seems that Penelope's body handled as a property in the real world. For example, Penelope narrates the competition that occurred when Odysseus gained her hand in marriage "It was more as if [the other suitors had] failed to win an auction for a horse rather than a bride" (41). Atwood tells how she is likewise unconnected to her sexuality, and she has no choice in her marriage. The maids say Penelope would be torn apart in the wedding room since the ground is rubbed and how terrible and embarrassing it is (42).

Penelope's time and life are taken noticeably: she waits twenty years for her husband to return from the Trojan War, doing her limited tasks as a wife and being devoted to him throughout the twenty years. Before departing, Odysseus tells Penelope that if she betrays him, he will "chop [her] into little pieces with his sword or hang [her] from the roof beam" (74). Odysseus, on the other hand, has many affairs while away as such his relationship with Circe and Calypso, two goddesses), demonstrating the double standard that exists between a male and a female and a married couple. Whereas Odysseus's romances never are openly addressed or criticized, Penelope's loyalty is continuously praised, and she is held up as an example of how a

lady should behave. Penelope's feelings on this hijacking of her time become apparent when Atwood recounts Penelope's perspective: "*Don't follow my example*, [she wants] to scream in your ears - yes, yours! But when [she tries] to scream, [she sounds] like an owl" (2). She readily confesses that she remained voiceless and actively supported the male oppression and the patriarchal concept of a "happy ending" where a woman must only obey her husband and keep silent. Nevertheless, her soul in the Underworld is now asserting her voice (3). Odysseus' threat to Penelope not only exposes the double standard but also demonstrates his patriarchal privilege to enslave her. By threatening to cut her body, he is fragmenting her body and preventing her from being complete and free, as others see her (Scanlon 27).

Atwood offers Penelope a voice and a sense of completeness and re-writing her role that initially been silenced from the inside of a classic literary work. She has effectively "revised," as Adrienne Rich defines it in her observations on females' writing, allowing us to "know [the writing of the past] differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (Rich 19). In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope's engagement in misogyny from feminine side is more problematic, as she shames and scolds Helen. Penelope's comments are primarily judgmental, and they reveal Penelope's envy of Helen to a large extent. Penelope, for example, talks about how no male would do such a thing. "Ever kill himself for love of [Penelope,]" stating "I was not a man-eater, I was not a Siren, I was not like cousin Helen who loved to make conquests just to show she could" (29).

Notwithstanding her attractiveness and popularity, Penelope feels compelled to distinguish herself from Helen's misbehavior and portray herself as superior to Helen. She also questions Helen's capacity to act in this manner without being disciplined. She comments:

Helen was never punished, not one bit. Why not, I'd like to know? Other people

got strangled by sea serpents and drowned in storms and turned into spiders and shot with arrows from much smaller crimes. Eating the wrong cows. Boasting.

That sort of thing. You'd think Helen might have got a good whipping at the very least, after all the harm and suffering she caused to countless other people. But she didn't.

Not that I mind.

Not that I minded. (22)

Penelope is upset because Helen has been allowed to act "dishonorably" and not be disciplined by the gods, even that Penelope herself questions the existence of gods in other parts of the novella. She practically parallels her condition to Helen's, believing that she has been condemned for waiting twenty years for Odysseus to return home and fight off suitors. However, Helen is continually lusted over. Even in the Underworld, people still fascinating her and conjuring her soul to meet her.

Penelope's repetition of "not that I mind" concerning Helen is not punished for her actions indicates the lack of sincerity in Penelope's words. It appears that Penelope follows the principles of the patriarchy to acquire the privilege which the "faithful and good wife" was supposed to have. Hence it is unjust for Penelope that Helen was not punished — but rather, she was worshiped in kind of a way - not respecting the patriarchal ideals about how a female should behave. Furthermore, her change of tense from "mind" to "minded" shows that she corrected herself to say that she did not care back then, but now she does.

This concern at the absence of punishment by Helen is undeniable as Penelope returns regularly. This concern about Helen's lack of punishment is particularly obvious when Penelope continually shames Helen throughout the story. What is remarkable is, instead of being furious

with society, Penelope decides to condemn Helen for its internal roles. This shame of Helen is troublesome because it demonstrates that Penelope feels the need to dominate a woman's conduct and condemn her to present herself and her voice. A female voice through reputing a woman's behavior under patriarchal authority is shown to us by Penelope's judgments when Penelope makes no effort to assist Helen in voicing the side of the story. In addition, Penelope feels Helen should be punished for her acts which promote the patriarchy, that she should be "strangled by sea serpents" or "turned into spiders" (22). She does not want to lift Helen; she tried to break her apart. By bringing Helen down in each change Penelope gets, readers notice that Penelope seems to be gaining a different power level.

Nevertheless, Penelope displays both her power over Helen and her authority on "accurate" behavior by humiliating her. Like a man who claims to be superior to a woman, Penelope is acting like she is better than Helen. Participation in this misogyny creates a gap amongst women and does not promote the establishment of "women solidarity" or "women must stand for each other." Women humiliating women raise the question that women achieve power solely by the same techniques that men do. However, Penelope should choose their approach rather than using tactics created by men.

All in all, Penelope's aim is quite evident from the start: "Now that all the others have run out of air, it is my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself" (Atwood, 13). It is like she wants to share her experience with the world because she is unsatisfied, if not horrified, with her representation in mythology, which resulted in further confusing; to what extent Mythology is veracity.

2.4. Questioning the Credibility of Mythology:

Miller and Atwood's intention shares a similar objective. Both engage in self-reflexive examinations of mythology and mythmaking, as well as narrative and reality. There are continual references to the distinction between fact and hearsay and how and who constructs stories, most notably in Atwood. As such, the official version of *the Odyssey*, the one in which Penelope is reduced to the role of a faithful and patient wife, is the version that Atwood aims to deconstruct through Penelope's voice (Morillo,12).

Indeed, storytelling may be associated with eradication and mistruth. Frequently, myths can obliterate one aspect of the tale or relate inaccurate facts. Finally, Penelope makes another connection between narrating and spinning when she affirms her desire to present her side of the story and "spin a thread of my own" (Atwood, 13). Nonetheless, this relationship has limits, as Penelope is famous for her ability to deceive through weaving. This begs the question - should we believe whatever Penelope says? We may infer, along with the maids, that "[t]he truth, dear auditors, is rarely certain" (Atwood 2006, 83).

Additionally, Atwood used the chorus of maids to cast more darkness in this regard since the twelve are baffled by Penelope's position and behavior. There are authority and veracity at stake here and the validity of many interpretations of the same story. Miller's work is quite similar, a heroine delivering her version of the story. As Penelope, Circe is fed up with the patriarchal rule, among even gods and titans, and determines to unearth her narrative.

A quick scan of Greek mythology reveals that all protagonists are males and that women exist only as supporting roles, whether as objects of desire or as disastrous figures like Pandora. Female writers try to reclaim history by re-writing the canonical texts from women's lenses and highlight the role of women and their importance. Miller and Atwood center their narrative on

female protagonists and retell a well-known tale from a female perspective. In these works, the "ex-centric" character becomes the center point of attention due to the gender type. Both Atwood and Circe's works are a deconstruction of Odysseus' myth. Thus, since the main focus of the thesis is how these females' characters representing in the contemporary revisionist works, this opens a door for another question; how Greek myths are being recreated and used to problematize the women dilemma in the patriarchal society?

2.5. Conclusion:

Both Atwood and Miller did a great job in re-writing the story of Penelope and Circe from Homer's *The Odyssey*. Through a simple reading of the three texts, one could clearly distinguish between the female representations in the original work and the revised ones. On the one hand, Miller's Circe is depicted as a powerful sorceress that could not only turned men into wild animals but also changing humans into their true self — she transformed Glaucos into a god, yet she turned her lover Scylla into a hideous monster and by the end of the novel she attempts to transform herself from Goddess to human —.

Therefore, Circe makes her voice heard with each chapter heard that she challenges the greatest gods with no fear. On the other hand, Atwood's Penelope is no longer the silenced and quiet wife that waits patiently and happily for her long-lost husbands. Although the events of the novella are narrated by Penelope after her death, she is determined to deliver her voice and perspective to the audience. Penelope makes her voice heard by questioning Odysseus's narratives of his journey and how she handled the suitors. Nevertheless, after analyzing the two books, there are similarities between the two female protagonists, just as they have their differences in the attitude and the background of each one, which will be dealt with within the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Unearthing the Female Experience

3.1. Introduction:

Circe by Madeline Miller and *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood are concerned with retelling myths from a feminist viewpoint, which is the central premise of this dissertation. This chapter examines the method in which these authors rewrite a canonical work with the ultimate objective of providing women who have been suppressed over time to find their voices. Both Miller and Atwood attempt to take on the patriarchal system that has kept these female characters silent for so long. The study will analyze how both writers shed light on the veracity of myths and, thus, the patriarchal system. It will also draw analogies between Circe and Penelope in the two texts and between the additional female characters that seem crucial to understanding their respective. This examination will reveal the many parallels between these works and also their points of distinction.

As demonstrated in this chapter, *The Penelopiad* and *Circe* are two opposed instances of how Greek myths may be utilized to problematize contemporary situations. Penelope is a typical wife who waits for her husband to return, but Circe is a tragic heroine, a courageous uncommon female who breaks the "norms" of what it means to be a woman. Both of these texts, however, address how women wish to be heard. Penelope focuses on her struggle as a clever female to have her worth openly acknowledged. How women are presenting as guilty Meanwhile, Circe expresses struggles that society should resolve.

3.2. Silenced Voices from a Female Perspective:

Women have always been marginalized in myths and history, and it is for this reason that females must "put [ourselves] into the text –as into the world and history" (Cixous, 875).

Atwood discloses in her introduction that she has "always been haunted by the hanged maids;

and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself"; that is why she has "chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelope and the twelve hanged maids" (Atwood 2006, 11). So the author retells a narrative from the feminine perspective, with a particular emphasis on individuals that are previously marginalized by society. Concerning this matter, Cixous states : "It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which the phallus has governed, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence"(881). The fact that the *Odyssey* has been regarded as a canonical work of literature through history must be considered at this point. That is precisely one of the critical objectives of many modern movements such as feminism, colonial studies, which is to revise the literary canon to become more equitable.

Indeed, female's voice is a central theme in *Circe* as well. She is a titan with a human voice, whereas the other gods and titans reject it since it sounds "like a gull crying" (Miller 2019, 81). On the other hand, Circe discovers that her voice is a significant trait in herself since it will help her get close to humans because they will no longer be afraid of her:

This is a story of a woman finding her power and, as part of that, finding her voice. She starts out really unable to say what she thinks and by the end of the book, she's able to live life on her terms and say what she thinks and what she feels. So, voice also played into evolution of the character (VanRy).

As a result, discovering her voice is a significant turning point in her life.

Both *Circe* and *The Penelopiad* are written in the first person narrative to focus on the protagonist point of view from a feminist thinking. As it has been mentioned before, the patriarchal system seeks to silence all of these women's characters, and it does it in various ways. One of them is mocking female voices and women's desire to label things because labeling is

robust for women to gain status. As in Pasiphaë's plot, males are always in the situation to name things, and they are typically the ones who say what they are named after, but women are often left without a voice.

This section will examine the major female characters in both books and the shifts they face throughout their journey. The desire to be free of patriarchal society is strong in both works and for all of the feminine characters that appear in them. As Circe wonders: "Would I be skimmed milk for crying, or a harpy with a heart of stone? There was nothing between. Anything else did not fit cleanly in the laughing tale he wanted to spin of it" (Miller, 89). In the novel Circe is acknowledgeable of the fact that women usually are either good or bad, and no other thing in between. Throughout the history, women appear to be constantly represented in paradoxical manner which divides them into 'the angel in the house' and 'the fallen woman'. The 'angel in the house' is a term that was well known in the middle of the nineteenth century, it used firstly in a poem by Coventry Patmore, which embodies the figure of the loyal women. The term, in general refers to the social constructed notion to the ideal woman. Whereas the 'fallen woman' is stereotypically associated with the woman's loss of innocence, and fallen from god's grace. Also who can become aggressive and manipulative at will, never bending to the patriarchal construction and therefore, prompting what will be later called the femme fatale (Morillo, 2019).

As it's been mentioned above, Circe is aware of the two, no less and no more images that men drew about women. For her, that's a typically men thinking, and as woman she is capable to be many things as the options are wide. She states that:

I held the thought in my hand. When that first crew had come, I had been a desperate thing, ready to fawn on anyone who smiled at me. Now I was a fell witch, proving my power with sty after sty. It reminded me

suddenly of those old tests Hermes used to set me. Would I be skimmed milk or a harpy? A foolish gull or a villainous monster?

Those could not still be the only choices (197).

Here, Circe remembers the old she, and how the men around her thought of her and still. The place and time of these words of hers are after she gained self-confidence and self-aware of whom she is. After she proves herself as powerful and competent witch, she still believes that there are more options for her to be.

Penelope, for example, fits into the first group, as these are the traits she is constantly ascribed, whilst Circe goes into the second. Women who fall into this second category finds themselves are being called by a slur names as such 'witch' ; in Miller's own words, "'witch' is still used today as a slur against women with an amount of power that makes society nervous" (Wiener 2019). Circe is represented as a witch from a patriarchal standpoint in that she offend men and instills fear in them about female strength due to her inability to be tamed. Interestingly, everybody tries to bypass her and dismiss her, whereas her brother, who has the same witch-crafts as hers, is widely acknowledged and praised. Circe is, in fact, chastised by her father and others around her for attempting to strengthen her skills (Miller, 65) and to bend the world to her will.

3.3. Penelope and Circe Challenging the Patriarchal Authority:

Both authors have much common ground when it comes to recreating a renowned tale. Therefore the comparison between the characters and novels is quite essential. Furthermore, both characters have specific characteristics, the most prominent of which are both characters from Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, which tells the same tale. Circe and Penelope love Odysseus in specific periods and bond with him, even though each one uniquely shows her love and

affection. Furthermore, whereas Circe is only referenced once in Atwood's novella, Penelope is a minor character in Miller's work that will have a very different ending — Penelope becomes a specialist in herbs. She succeeds Circe as the Witch of Asia's island, while Circe transforms herself into a human.

Circe and Penelope face nearly similar life events. To begin, they display their resilience and self-sustenance, which they developed from a troubled childhood. Circe is a nymph's daughter, whereas Penelope's mother was a Naiad, precisely a water nymph. The two are highly neglected by their mothers. Penelope describes her mother:

My mother, like all Naiads, was beautiful, but chilly at heart [...] when I was little I often tried to throw my arms around her, but she had a habit of sliding away. I like to think that she may have been responsible for calling up that flock of ducks, but probably she wasn't: she preferred swimming in the river to the care of small children, and I often slipped her mind. If my father hadn't had me thrown into the sea she might have dropped me in herself, in a fit of absentmindedness or irritation. She had a short attention span and rapidly changing emotions (Atwood, 16)

From her descriptions, it appears that her mother did not care about Penelope or did a little. The same thing goes with Circe; in the novel, she occasionally mentions how she is the least favorite child and that her mother prefers all of her siblings over her.

After Circe was born, her mother was not satisfied because Circe was just average and standard with no special skills, powers, or anything. She wanted another child immediately, "Come," she said. "Let us make a better one. " (Miller, 11) and also :

She would curl her lip when she saw me. Circe is dull as a rock. Circe has less wit than bare ground. Circe's hair is matted like a dog's. If I have to hear that broken voice of hers

once more. Of all our children, why must it be she who is left? No one else will have her.

If my father heard, he gave no sign, only moved his game counters here and there

(Circe, 40)

The one reason that Circe's mother seems to despise or dislikes her is that Circe's mother longed for higher social ranks. Thus, those of her children who could marry a god or a divine are favorable to her, and since Circe's destiny is marrying a human, she is not valuable.

Additionally, both have unloving fathers who viewed their girls as a burden or curse since none of them is appropriate to provide them with the glory they believe they deserve, either for their talents or their prospects for finding a suitable marriage. Circe seems close to her father than she is to her mother; she accompanies him wherever he goes and constantly seeks his approval "I preferred my father's quiet halls and spent every second I could look at my father's feet" (Miller, 14). Nevertheless, her father did not consider her brothers and sister "I was not my father's favoured heir" (29). The same goes with Penelope; her father wanted to murder her for some prophecy "I was quite young my father ordered me to be thrown into the sea" (Atwood, 13).

None of them is beautiful in revisionist novels. Both Circe and Penelope are portrayed as not so beautiful ladies, which causes them many problems. Scylla, a character in Miller's work, exemplifies the value of beauty in women. Circe's hatred against the nymph Scylla drives her insane, and she intends revenge by transforming her into a monster. Circe's brother, Aetes, even goes so far as to argue that Scylla's metamorphosis into the feared monster is better (64) because she will now be feared yet unrestrained. She enjoys both independence and popularity. Surprisingly, in his opinion, the most appropriate punishment would have been attractiveness because an ugly nymph "would be [...] less than nothing" (Miller 2019, 61).

Consequently, the essential quality is beauty. Penelope goes through the same struggle with her cousin Helen who considered a symbol of beauty "I was a kind girl – kinder than Helen, or so I thought. I knew I would have to have something to offer instead of beauty" (Atwood, 22). Penelope has all the good merits that make her an ideal wife, but she is not that attractive as Helen. Thus, others around them are continuously looking for an opportunity to mock them for their lacking of attractiveness. Circe is particularly maligned by her younger sister, Pasiphae, who never fails to remind her of her unattractiveness. Penelope, on the other hand, is frequently teased by Helen.

Circe and Penelope share the same childhood trauma, but the two are masters of illusion in their unique ways. Circe is a powerful witch who possesses a capacity for deception and metamorphosis (Miller, 74) – she manages to deceive the goddess Athena by putting a protective spell around her island to protect her son Athena can find him. Penelope also misleads the public by sewing and unweaving the funeral shroud. Additionally, Penelope and Circe are weavers of fabric and tales, respectively. As previously demonstrated, Penelope is known for her shroud trick, but Circe also weaves; she "spins spells and threads alike" (Miller, 131). As a result, it's unsurprising that both authors use terminology directly connected to the craft of sewing throughout their novels.

The two works introduce two distinct yet very similar female characters that reject patriarchal society in various ways. Both are clever, creative and have long been linked with males in both mythology and history. Circe and Penelope are prepared to confront anyone who mistreats them, whether they are gods or suitors; they gain bravery through their journey. This is particularly evident in Circe, who, like the heroine of a Bildungsroman— A Bildungsroman is a literary genre that concentrates on the protagonist's psychological and moral development from

childhood to adulthood with strong emphasis on character development.— matures from her naive and forlorn youth to ordinary maturity throughout the narrative, learning about herself and her talents. As a result, women are not represented here as "delicate beings, flowers, eggs, or anything else susceptible to being crushed in a moment's carelessness" (Miller 2019, 174). They are not docile, as they are in classical mythology. Indeed, when considering the words used to describe Penelope as loyal and patient, it noticed that they mostly allude to passivity, a state in which women are not supposed to accomplish anything; instead, they are expected to stay passive.

It is worth noting now how Homer portrays Penelope and Circe as opposite models of femininity: Penelope is the dedicated wife, the perfect embodiment of what a wife should be, whereas Circe is a witch, frighteningly imposing her will on men, including Odysseus, who is incapable of resisting her charms. Therefore, Penelope turned into an "edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with" (Atwood, 12) in *The Odyssey*. In other words, although Homer's Penelope is depicted as a devoted and patient wife, moulded according to patriarchal society's female form of goodness, Atwood's Penelope seizes the chance to share her side of the story, even advising women not to follow her example (Atwood 2006, 13). Like Atwood, Penelope understands the need for happy endings "happy endings are best achieved by keeping the proper doors locked" (Atwood, 13), which implies one side of the tale must be muted this instance hers.

On the other hand, Circe lives by herself on an isolated island while Penelope waits for Odysseus to return to a mansion. Again, it can be found the strong contrast that divides women into two categories: 'the angel in the house' and 'the fallen woman'. While Penelope symbolizes the ideal wife, Circe is frequently represented in mythology, history, and art "as a femme fatale, a predatory woman, even a misandrist, sexually free and independent"(.X) who attracts men

towards her house as a siren only to transform them into animals. Indeed, she is regarded as the first sorceress in Western literature, serving as a model for future female witches (Hodges 2020, 18). In consequence, the witch figure is the exact archetypal opposite of the good and loyal wife. She is a goddess that attempts to act autonomously and free of masculine authority, claiming her sexual and other powers (Jackson, 72). It's unsurprising, therefore, that John William Waterhouse, an English painter, who was so taken with sensual women, painted Circe three times to symbolize feminine strength and sexuality.

Nonetheless, in chapter 10 from *The Odyssey*, Circe is defeated by Odysseus. According to Homer, Circe goes above and beyond attempting to be the ideal hostess. Thus, as woman who is first shown as sexually predatory and strong is subsequently pictured bowing and pleading for forgiveness (Morillo, 18). Whereas in Miller's *Circe*, the writer depicted an alternative writing for the incident between Odysseus and Circe in their first meeting. It looks like Miller is aware of how much Circe is strong and skilled plus she is a goddess of sorceress, thus, it is kind of absurd to be depicted as she begs for her life from a mortal. In chapter fifteen, Miller wrote about the meeting:

"My lady, only a fool would say no to such an honor. But in truth, I think also only a fool would say yes. I am a mortal. The moment I set down the moly to join you in your bed, you may cast your spell." He paused.

"Unless, of course, you were to swear an oath you will not hurt me, upon the river of the dead." [...]

I thought: give me the blade. Some things are worth spilling blood for.

"I will swear that oath," I said. (173)

Here, Odysseus is well aware that Circe is way more powerful than he is, and so that he does not stand a chance against a goddess. Hence, he does not want to fight, more like seeking to a common arrangement that might serve the two.

Miller portrays Circe as a woman who pursues her sexual pleasure and expresses her independence. Yet she keeps reminding the readers of how Circe is representing in Homer's *The Odyssey*

LATER, YEARS LATER, I would hear a song made of our meeting [...] I was not surprised by the portrait of myself: the proud witch undone before the hero's sword, kneeling and begging for mercy. Humbling women seems to me a chief pastime of poets.

As if there can be no story unless we crawl and weep (174)

In the above quotation, Miller is referring to a scene in *The Odyssey* (Book X) in which Odysseus, prompted by Hermes' guidance, rushes towards Circe with his blade as if to murder her, and she cries and pleads for her life. Circe is entranced by Odysseus and submits to him, and thus order is restored.

3.4. Minor Characters in their Relations to Circe and Penelope:

This section of the chapter will explore more female figures from myths and rewritings, including Helen and Pasiphaë. Both characters are portrayed as Penelope's and Circe's rivals. To begin, it discusses Helen, who appears most significantly in Book IV of the *Odyssey* and also receives some revisions in *The Penelopiad*. According to this character, Atwood's Helen is the "root cause of all my misfortunes" (Atwood, 65). Helen is shown as a gorgeous and arrogant woman who is constantly compared to Penelope, whereas Penelope criticizes her for being extremely unpleasant toward her. Helen, as a consequence, experiences an amplification process in her character (Ingersoll, 116) and she is also represented as Penelope's arch rival. As a result,

Helen fulfills the aim of developing a sense of the need to be compared to other women to distinguish the self, also called Sororophobia. Hence, Penelope uses Helena as a cover for her troubles to a certain extent.

Pasiphaë, on her side, is portrayed as a powerful and charming sorceress who is essentially Circe's rival. Nonetheless, she plays a key part in Circe's development, since it is through Pasiphaë, Circe learns two crucial concepts; the actual power of their magical skills and the need and necessity for women's freedom. Both sisters have spent their lives working toward the same goal self-sufficiency. Pasiphaë, unlike Circe, was married to a king, Minos, and who was frequently unfaithful to her. This appears to be an affront to Pasiphaë, yet as a sorceress she is, and a daughter of a titan, she takes matters into her own hands. Pasiphaë follows the steps of other female gods such as Athena and Hera through pouring out her outrage into these females instead of confronting her husband; she gets her satisfaction and her own justice from Minos.

Furthermore, Miller presents an intriguing twist of events; unlike mythology, Pasiphaë is not driven by passion to copulate with a bull; rather, she decides to create a monster of her own free choice in order to be feared and recognized. As a result, this well-known mythological event is not shown as a punishment or a curse. Pasiphaë isn't "controlled by desires; rather, she governed with them" (Miller, 117). Thus, she does it on purpose in order for others to speak about her as the mother of a horrible monster. Despite this, Circe understands her sister's logic, because the monster is her "sister's victory, her goal given alive, her whip to use against Minos" (Miller, 121). Patriarchy, on the other hand, tries to oppose Pasiphaë's power and agency and that by calling her the monster. Nonetheless, Minos names the creator after him, the "Minotaur" and reclaims the glory by doing so instead of Pasiphaë (Miller, 120).

Back to Circe and her sister's bond, Circe believes Pasiphaë invites her to assist with the Minotaur's birth in purpose to disgrace her, just like Helen humiliates Penelope in Atwood's story. Miller, on the other hand, tackles Atwood's 'sororophobia' — a term that refers to the dynamic and complex relations between women's desires to connect with other women and their frequently conflicting need to establish and sustain their distinctiveness— by offering an alternative, more positive viewpoint on women's friendships. Circe's attention is drawn to the realms of femininity thanks to Pasiphaë. As a result, the scene in chapter 11 where both sisters reconnect and have a long chat marks a pivotal moment in the book. Pasiphaë describes how things function in a man's world in a noteworthy discussion with Circe:

"Let me tell you a truth about Helios and all the rest. They do not care if you are good. They barely care if you are wicked. The only thing that makes them listen is power [...] It is not enough even to be beautiful, for when you go to them, and kneel and say, 'I have been good, will you help me?' they wrinkle their brows (125).

She claims, adding that being attractive and appealing to their sexual wants will never be enough. Pasiphaë's power stems from her hatred towards men, and her constant desire to prove herself among men ; she uses sorcery and intimidation to be noticed, defend herself, and express herself.

Therefore, Circe realizes that what she and her sister have in common is much more than she ever imagines. considering both have been discarded by men and humiliated by male divinities who desire to exercise their power over them as a form of possession, because they seems to be afraid of their magical skills and growing strength. It's the on- going narrative of males

stepping on females in order to demonstrate their dominance; it's an everyday struggle felt by many women.

3.5. Violence and Women's Oppression in the Two Works:

Harassment is not missing from either book, as Circe herself describes maids and nymphs as "an endless feast laid out upon a table, beautiful and renewing. And so very bad at getting away" (Miller, 171). This section will discuss the maids' presence in *The Penelopiad* and then analyzes similar incidents in Miller's work.

The topic of the maids, who are depicted in *The Odyssey* as disloyal and reckless maids, is particularly amusing since as it disclose poem's last tragedy. These characters have the opportunity to explain their actions and their version of the story in *The Penelopiad*; they were forced to cooperate with the suitors, which resulted in them getting abused from these men, who "ordering the maids about and pinching their bottoms as if they were in their own homes" (Atwood, 54), in order to provide Penelope with such a pleasing service. As a result, they remained faithful till the very end, but Penelope simply exploited them as tools to further her own objectives. These servants present their narration in the form of a chorus, imitating the Greek choruses of classical plays, thereby adhering to postmodernist literature's aim in manipulating the plot while giving many narratives inside a single work. In fact, Suzuki believes Atwood's most significant innovation to be moving the servants to the center of the story and make their voices are as important as Penelope's voice (271).

The maids, like Penelope, are introduced in the second chapter, which is sarcastically written in the style of a rope-jumping rhyme — keep in mind that the maids were hung by a rope (Morillo, 21). As a result, they are forecasting their own fate to some extent. The maids' story is

marked by a heavy dose of irony, as they transform into satirists who eloquently attack the ruling order's worldview (Suzuki, 272)

From the start, it is an attack that exposes an issue that has been buried until now. Thus, the novella reflects not only gender concerns, but also class ones, as the maids were slaves, which had no part in mythical narratives. The maids endure double oppression; they face social persecution as slaves, and they confront gender oppression as females in a patriarchal society. These concerns were excluded in *The Odyssey*. Chapter 26, titled "The Trial of Odysseus," is absolutely important in this aspect. Howells, (14) argues how this chapter is a "satire on patriarchal institutions," since Odysseus is prosecuted for the death of the male suitors, but there is no mention of the maids' murder until they assert their right to justice. When Odysseus' lawyer is questioned about it by the judge, he insists that he was "acting within his rights" (Atwood, 96), as he was their owner. "Judge (chuckles): Excuse me, Madam, but isn't that what rape is? Without permission? Attorney for the Defence: Without permission of their master, Your Honour (98)". Odysseus justifying his acts of executing the maids, because they did not get his permission. Therefore, that the suitors would rape them, which makes no sense and only illustrate the darkness and irrational the patriarchal system might get.

The maids not only blame Odysseus and his son of murder, but also Penelope for her silence upon their executions. It's worth noting that these women get the final say in the novella; they are the last heard voice and perspective, since they don't only criticize and mock the patriarchal and noble society that sacrificed them. Thus, even though Odysseus, as a hero and a man, may luxuriate in the manly privilege of committing adultery and getting out of it without responsibility or consequence during in the epic, these maids are given the death penalty, showing the double standards of the patriarchy society (Suzuki, 272).

Circe is the one who suffers the same treatment as Penelope's maids in Miller's story. She suffers from the groping of males in her family, as do all nymphs: "[a] squeeze, a stroke, a hand creeping beneath the sleeve of [her] garment" (Miller 2019, 168). However, Miller wants to introduce an incident that would change the protagonist's character. Circe receives a visit from a party of sailors in Chapter 14, and she extends her generosity to them. However, when these men learn that Circe lives alone and that there is no male on the island, they seize the chance to sate all of their desires, and Circe, despite being a goddess, is raped by the crew's commander. Miller portrays the incident in a way facilitate for the reader to understand Circe's vulnerability and helplessness in the face of what is happening to her. Her surprise is genuine, and she recalls her sister Pasiphae's words; she had been too softened, Helios would never rescue her, and she is all alone. And besides, she is a nymph, as she had said presciently at the start of the novel: "if someone arrived, all I could do was screaming, and a thousand nymphs before me knew what good it did" (Miller, 70). Circe's actions will be shaped by this critical event, which will leave its imprint on her later acts toward others who will follow.

Circe, on the other hand, takes vengeance on those who have harmed her, unlike Penelope and the maids; she takes action and acts with agency. Afterwards, Circe considers on the situation and realizes that she was ultimately "alone and a woman, that was all that mattered" (Miller, 170). That is to say, despite the fact that she is a goddess, men attempt to use her for their own interests. They never express regret for what they do; instead, they express regret for being captured. Because of this, Circe develops into the character she is now known for: a sorceress who transforms men into pigs, in a way foretelling the second-wave feminists call of 'male chauvinist pigs' — It was a name used by some feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s

to describe some males, generally men in places of power, who held the belief that men were inherently superior to women.

3.6. Conclusion:

As it has been seen, Margaret Atwood takes a critical feminist approach to the narrative of Penelope and Odysseus. Atwood deconstructs myths and analyzes conceptions of story-telling and various interpretations of the same story through the voice of Penelope. Miller, for one, rewrites Circe's narrative, making the female gaze the central focus. Circe is a character who is allowed to develop her character. Subjects such as gender and class are evaluated as a result of Atwood's and Miller's reinterpretations. The authors offer voice and space to two previously silenced or marginalized voices in Homer's *Odyssey* while also attempting to parallel other women's experiences throughout history, including those of today. "Atwood's re-visioning of patriarchal myths creates a new feminist mythology," writes Wilson (2000, 226), and the same may be said of Miller. As a result, both novels are undeniably feminist rewrites that address sexism and how myths are built on women's oppression. In reality, the authors present a- previously were- minor female characters who fight for their independence.

Both Circe and Penelope have been alone for most of their lives. They have a lot in familiar both female characters learned resilience through the struggles of life, particularly when confronted with the discomfort and sorrow of not being accepted by those surrounding them. It is as if Miller wants to offer Penelope's character, the mythological Penelope, and the fictional Penelope in Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, the possibility to find serenity, understanding, and protection in a true sisterhood. Penelope has a new ending, a new beginning when she becomes the new witch of Aiaia by Miller.

General Conclusion

Myths, in general, had been dominated by men writing for centuries, and thus, they present masculine or patriarchal thinking. Mythology is heavily charged with symbols and reflects the structure of society, stereotypes of both genders, and cultural agenda. It presents a medium for scholars and writers to understand how past society lived, norms, and beliefs. However, it also provides an overlook of how women had been marginalized in mythology. As it has been mentioned before, myths are mainly involved around wars and battles, where men are in control, and. In contrast, women usually stay home waiting for their husbands to come home, as has been mentioned in the story of *The Odyssey* and how Penelope waits for his return for twenty years. Thus, ancient women had been silenced, oppressed, and dismissed in their roles and importance.

Through analyzing the representation of Circe and Penelope's characters in *Circe* and *The Penelopiad*, this dissertation has confirmed how females are repressed and muted from voicing their narrative in classical myths. The two authors seek to give literature justice to these suppressed women in their writing and succeed. According to what has been said, myths reflect the widespread belief or the dominant culture of a particular period. As a result, women have been portrayed as being reliant, passive, and subservient. In the process of changing these images, feminist revisionist mythology developed to embrace contemporary world thinking. The purpose of this study is to examine how female characters are depicted in both the original texts and the newly re-created texts.

The dissertation intends to answer the questions that had been mentioned in the introduction. First, it can be said that both Circe and Penelope, and despite their strength and capacities, are portraying poorly in *The Odyssey*. On the one hand, Circe is portraying as a submissive to Odysseus, even with the incomparable nature of the two; a skilled sorceress and

Goddess who lived for thousands of years versus a human and a mortal. On the other hand, Odysseus's wife Penelope is stereotyped as a loving and faithful wife who patiently waits for her husband. The issue of Penelope's narrative in Homer's epic is that she is a smart queen that could handle the kingdom, her son, and suitors for two decades, yet she could not get rid of the suitors, and instead she waits for her husband to get home and take action.

Second, through the act of rewriting or revision, Miller and Penelope manage to narrate the story of Circe and Penelope beautifully. Through first-person narrative style writing, both authors retell the life of the two characters from their perspective. Thus, Circe and Penelope's growth, childhood, and family issues are more focused and highlighted. Moreover, the authors in their writings questioning the credibility of Odysseus since Homer's *The Odyssey* also follows the first-person narrative and tells Odysseus's journey. Thus, Circe and Penelope get their voice and embrace their power and strength in the revised works. Finally, Atwood's re-imagining of patriarchal stories creates a new feminist mythology, and the same can be said about Miller's re-imagining of patriarchal myths. Thus, both books are openly feminist rewrites that tackle sexism and how myths are constructed on women's oppression. In actuality, the authors depict formerly unheard female characters fighting for their right to be heard.

Through the act of retelling the past, feminist writers seek to change the present. Therefore, the present research illustrates the importance of myths retellings in both literature and society. Although feminist retelling has existed since the 1970s, there is not much literature on the subject matter. However, it is important to stress that the research can be further carried out in understanding to what extent revised works give justice to the past silenced characters.

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ملخص

تعتبر مراجعة و إعادة كتابة النصوص الأدبية (Feminist revisioning) وليدة الموجة الثانية من الحركة النسائية وقد ظهر انتشارها في سبعينيات القرن العشرين. وقد حازت عملية إعادة كتابة الأعمال الكلاسيكية لغرض التركيز على الشخصيات الثانوية و المهمشة شعبية بين كتّاب مثل مادلين ميلر ومارجريت أتوود. على سبيل المثال، أسست ملحمة هومر/الأوديسية جذورها كعمل كلاسيكي مؤثر في المجتمع والأدب الغربي. ورغم ذلك فإن بعض الكاتبات يرون أن أسلوب هومر في الكتابة الشخصيات النسائية , مثلهن على أنهن ذات دور أحادي البعد فقط (one-dimensional). ومن هنا فإن هذه الشخصيات تُقْمَع وتُرفض في ضوء الذكورية (muscularity). وعلى هذا فإن الكتابات النسويات يسعون إلى تكيف الميثولوجيا المعروفة من أجل تحقيق العدالة الأدبية و منح قصص بديلة للشخصيات المقموعة اللاتي أسكنن في الماضي . وتتعلق هذه النظرية بإعادة كتابة قصة الشخصيات اليونانية في علم الأساطير (Greek Mythology) من منظور نسوي. تعتقد مناصرات الحركة النسائية أن عبر اعادة صياغة الماضي و كتابته فأنهن يستطعن تغيير و تحسين الحاضر. ان الغرض من هذه الطروحة ، دراسة و تحليل رواية سيرس (Circe) للراوية مادلين ميلر , و رواية البينوليبيا (The Penelopiad) للكاتبة مارجريت أتوود مع التركيز الشديد على الشخصيات الاساسية للروائيتين : سيرس و بينولوب. كلا الكتابين يشكل مراجعة لعمل الأوديسية ؛ أتوود و ميلر يسعين لاعادة سرد احداث القصة من وجهة نظر ، زوجة أوديسيوس بينولوب، والهة السحر التي ساعدته في العودة إلى وطنه بعد حرب طروادة، سيرس.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الأساطير، الحركة النسوية، هومر، الأوديسية، مادلين ميلر، سيرس، مارجريت أتوود، بينولوب، إعادة الكتابة، البينوليبيا.

Résumé

Le révisionnisme féministe est une explosion de la deuxième vague du féminisme. L'acte de réécrire les œuvres classiques pour se concentrer sur l'histoire secondaire des personnages marginalisés a vu la popularité parmi les écrivains comme Madeline Miller et Margaret Atwood. Par exemple, *The Odyssey* d'Homère a établi sa racine en tant qu'œuvre classique influente dans la société et la littérature occidentales. Néanmoins, certaines femmes écrivains voient Homer traitement de ses personnages féminins comme les dépeignant injustement avec un rôle unidimensionnel. Ainsi, les auteurs féministes cherchent à adapter les mythes bien connus pour donner une histoire alternative aux femmes mythiques qui avaient été réduites au silence dans le passé. Cette dissertation porte sur la réécriture des intrigues des personnages de la mythologie grecque dans une perspective féministe. Le but de la présente recherche est d'étudier et d'examiner le roman de *Circe* de Madeline Miller et la nouvelle de Margaret Atwood *The Penelopiad*, avec un accent intense sur les protagonistes de chaque œuvre : Circe et Pénélope que les deux œuvres sont une révision féministe de Odysée.

Mots clés : Mythes, Mythologie révisionniste féministe, Représentations, Homère, Odysée, Madeline Miller, *Circe*, Margaret Atwood, *La Penelopiad*, Réécriture, Circé, Pénélope.