

A post-structural and intersectional reading of Madeline Miller's *Circe*

Krishanu Singh, Shuchi Agrawal and Payal Nagpal*

Abstract: This paper investigates the feminist dimensions of Madeline Miller's *Circe* through post-structural, cultural, and intersectional feminist frameworks, it analyses the reimagined mythological narrative of a character overshadowed in ancient Greek literature. From a post-structural viewpoint, Circe's repudiation of static identities such as nymph, goddess, or witch stresses that fluidity also accompanies identity and language. Her narrative reclaims traditionally marginalized feminine traits, such as emotional labour and empathy, aligning with cultural feminism's emphasis on revaluing these characteristics. The intersectional lens highlights how Circe's story navigates multiple layers of alienation and power dynamics, offering insights into the interplay of gender, status, and autonomy within the constraints of both mythological and contemporary societal structures. By examining Circe's transformation from exile to empowerment, this paper reveals how feminist reinterpretations of ancient narratives can challenge entrenched gender norms and expand the understanding of identity and power.

Keywords: post-structural feminism, cultural feminism, intersectional feminism, ancient mythology, gender and power

Introduction

The character, Circe, of Greek mythology has long been associated with the theme of difference and strength. The epic of Homer's *Odyssey* makes her an evil enchantress whose identity is formed in response to her experiences with men and in opposition to the hegemonic norms of males. Madeline Miller brings forth a new perspective on the mythical figure of weaving deep storytelling with feminist themes. This paper explores Miller's retelling of Circe's tale

* Krishanu Singh; Shuchi Agrawal (✉)

Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Noida, India
Payal Nagpal

Department of English, Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University, India
e-mail: krishanu.singh@s.amity.edu (corresponding author)

by breaking down the layers of identity, power, and gender using post-structuralism, cultural and intersectional feminist theories as they appear in both old and new versions of the story. In Miller's reframing of Circe as more than the often-oblique, powerless character in Greek mythology, a systemic oppression and vilification of powerful women is told and retold not only for antiquity but also modern storytelling. The current research is going to fill the significant gap that exists in feminist literary analysis by integrating the three theoretical frameworks for analysing Circe's development. It critically engages with the female roles of mythology and gives importance to such stories in modern feminist discourses. The paper adds to the emergent corpus of scholarship that merges classical studies and contemporary feminist theory in order to develop a subtle understanding of how ancient texts feed into current discussions on gender and identity.

In ancient Greece, women's lives were confined strictly to the household. Women were merely used for childbearing and doing domestic chores. The strict social structure was an expression and reinforcement of patriarchal values where women were subordinate to men's authority. Figurative images like Circe are a product of the mass fears that people have against free women. Circe was banished to the island of Aiaia and symbolizes a greater societal impulse to exclude and suppress any woman who deviated from the expected roles or possessed power that was greater than that of men.

Circe falls into the group of mythological archetypes, which includes Medea and Pandora. Their tales show how society viewed their actions as going against the rules. Pandora brings chaos, Medea acts as the angry witch, but Circe has many sides. She's a rebel but at the same time, wise, and understanding. She changes from a nymph to a free witch breaking away from the usual roles of women in myths. She moves from being a victim to making her own choices.

The existing studies on Madeline Miller's *Circe* feature a multitude of interpretations, especially in regard to feminist viewpoints. Still, the criticism has so far failed to touch upon the post-structural, cultural, and intersectional analysis. Feminists from Judith Butler to Michel Foucault have profoundly impacted the concept of gender as fluid, performative, and discursively constructed, which resonates with the changing identities Miller depicts in Circe. Butler's (1990) ideas about gender performativity and Foucault's (1972) writings on discourse and identity offer essential resources for analysing the reasons which drive the titular character of the book to rebel against patriarchal identities in

Circe. So, too, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Hélène Cixous have studied the importance of discursive construction in female identity, as Circe the nymph transforms into the free sorceress.

Cultural feminist theory has thoroughly explored the recovery and appreciation of traditionally overlooked feminine qualities like nurturing, empathy, and emotional labor, which are prominently reflected in Circe's character. Earlier research, such as that conducted by Alcoff (1995) and Balsamo (1991), advocates for a reassessment of these characteristics, which have been historically viewed as subordinate within patriarchal frameworks. This method takes root in Miller's portrayal of Circe, who turns her solitary isolation on Aiaia into a supportive haven. Radin (1993) highlights the importance of carefully navigating cultural feminism, which Miller achieves by portraying Circe's nurturing and compassionate roles not as flaws but as significant sources of strength and empowerment.

The concept of intersectional feminism, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides deeper layers to the phenomenological analysis since it recognizes multiple genders, class, and power relations as vital factors in comprehending the diverse ways Circe is empowered and marginalized. It is the intersection of oppression that enables Circe to grasp her own particular oppression as the privilege of a goddess. Holmes (2023) and Snyder (2008) recognize the importance of intersectional frameworks in feminist scholarship as they help capture the diversity of identity that shapes disempowerment or privilege. This approach captures the complexity of Circe's dealings with other disempowered groups by highlighting the nuances of the power relations she navigates.

Therefore, while previous scholars have been interested in aspects of post-structural, cultural, or intersectional feminist theory, an important chapter in feminist literary criticism is under-examined: a trichotomy of each of these views as it applies to Miller's *Circe*. This research seeks to fill this deficiency through a synthesis of its views, tracing a sensitive examination of gender, power, and identity through Circe's narrative in the light of historical mythological conventions and modern feminist thought.

Post-structural feminism: Breaking down identity

Post-cultural feminism deals with a dynamic blend of psychoanalysis, literary analysis, and socio-culturalism. It dives deep into the

exploration of the relationship between society, language and power relations to understand their impact on gender dynamics. According to this theory, men and women cannot be categorized into fixed universal structures. This theoretical framework suggests that identities are flexible constructions moulded by cultural and socioeconomic circumstances, challenging the idea of rigid, universal gender categories. The word “kyriarchy,” which was first used by Elisabet Schussler Fiorenza in 1992 to characterize a social structure centred on dominance, oppression, and submission, is critically examined in this work. Some of the luminaries of post-structural feminists are Judith Butler, Rosi Braidetti, Donna Haraway, Druscilla Cornell, Julia Kristeva, Helena Cixous, and Luci Irigaray.

Post structural feminism argues that identities are constructed through language, culture and societal interactions and it is not innate or fixed. It is subject to change because of the dynamic nature of language and society. According to this theory, a person is not born with a fixed identity. It is attained by experience. Hence it challenges the binary understanding of gender that is male and female. It also claims that individuals can potentially embody multiple characters over time. The works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler deeply influence the approach by arguing that identities, including gender, are produced within specific cultural and linguistic frameworks. The cornerstone of post-structural feminism is the idea of deconstruction, a method of analysing texts, social practices, and discourses to expose gender binaries and hierarchy. Butler (1990) aptly puts it, “Identity is formed by a specific discourse, and its practice is controlled by the knowledge produced through that discourse”, also “Gender is a kind of improvised performance; the effect of a regulatory frame of normative gender ideals and practices.”

Post-structural feminism offers the best lens to understand how Circe’s identity shifts and changes. Her journey from nymph to goddess to witch resists all forms of binary opposition such as male/female, human/divine, and powerful/powerless. Indeed, her resistance to being fixed in a role illustrates the post-structural notion of resisting essentialist gender norms. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Circe is presented as a dangerous and supernatural figure, who threatens Odysseus and his men. Miller’s reinterpretation of her character humanizes her and portrays her as an active, intelligent, and emotional being. According to Judith Butler (1990), gender is a performative construct that is created by societal expectations. The story of Circe

shows how identity can be redefined through language and experience, thereby challenging the patriarchal discourse.

A reimagined modern retelling of Circe's narrative, who is traditionally portrayed, as a witch who transforms men into pigs, and is ripe for deconstruction. Numerous binary oppositions are witnessed in the narrative, male, female, human, animal, power or powerless. As both a goddess and a woman, Circe deftly challenges these dichotomies. The fluidity in the character of Circe from the beginning to last gives a remarkable example of post-structural feminism. Circe's narrative begins with her reflection:

When I was born, the name for what I was did not exist. They called me nymph, assuming I would be like my mother and aunts and thousands of cousins... In our language, it means not just goddess, but the bride. (Miller 2018)

Traditionally, Circe is the sorceress who changes men into pigs, this defining and sometimes misconstrued act established her within mythology. Circe reimagines an iconic transformation in the works of Madeline Miller as she carefully peels away layers and reveals the motivations behind a refined action. Miller explores the complexity of Circe's character, portraying her not merely as a vindictive enchantress but as a deeply empathetic and self-aware figure.

Circe's palace was a haven of warmth and hospitality, especially toward mortals, to whom she gave a special affection. This feeling of tenderness, maybe rooted in her own poignant experiences of having first love with a mortal, guided her first relationships with the men who arrived on her island. While she could have easily gone about using her potions powerfully, Circe did not use her potions right away. Her tendency to help rather than harm showed a great inner struggle-one that finally led to a conclusive act of transformation. When the intentions of the men turned nasty, Circe made her crucial decision in transforming them into pigs. The decision to choose pigs, among all creatures possible, was very symbolic.

In choosing an animal related to baseness and submissiveness, Circe was not only neutralizing the threat but also striking a blow to their inflated egos. These men, who were once fearless soldiers who had grown accustomed to dominance and violence, were now stuck in a pigsty-powerless and utterly humiliated. This role reversal served as a striking commentary on the dynamics of power and subjugation. Nymphs, such as Circe, were always shown to be at the mercy of

men's whims; now, it was the men who were at Circe's mercy. Through this act, Circe gained a sharper understanding of the harsh realities of the world and her place within it. This newfound clarity prepared her for future confrontations. When Odysseus' men arrived, brimming with aggression, Circe did not hesitate. Her swift transformation of these would-be marauders into pigs was not merely an act of defence but a demonstration of her growing resolve and mastery over her destiny. Miller retells this iconic episode in a way that reclaims Circe's agency by reframing her actions as deliberately empowering responses to male dominance. It challenges the reader to look at the very simplified portrayals of Circe as merely a vengeful sorceress, revealing her instead as an extremely complex and powerful figure.

Initially shown as a defenceless character trapped in a mythological hierarchy, Circe undergoes a significant metamorphosis. She rises from the shadows of perceived weakness to become the embodiment of strength and fortitude. She rewrites her fate through hardships and self-discovery, escaping the bonds of heavenly expectation to become an independent force. She skilfully uses her magic and knowledge to oppose the gods and carve out her route in mythology.

She was drawn to the tranquil courts of Helios because they offered a serene atmosphere where she felt a profound sense of belonging at her father's feet, even as her siblings, Pasiphae and Percy, often stirred trouble among other relatives. She took great pleasure in beholding her father's splendid magnificence. As the narrative unfolds, she employs her sorcery to dramatically transform Scylla and Glaucus into monsters and sea gods, respectively, which ultimately leads to her banishment to the isolated island of Aiaia. Initially, solitude was a challenge for her, but over time, she grew so accustomed to her own company that she began to resent interruptions, especially when other gods would punish their daughters by sending them to her as a form of exile. Thus, her character's remarkable evolution is shaped by a profound shift in her sense of wonder, environment, and personal experiences.

The linguistic shift profoundly impacts her character as well. Initially reserved and speaking in a subservient tone while at the courts of her father and other gods, she transforms upon her arrival in Aiaia. There, she harnesses the strength of her words to command and tame wild and fierce animals such as wolves, lions, and wild boars. She dedicates much of her time to crafting her potions, which are infused with power words, spells essential for their activation. This transition

marks her evolution from a submissive figure to a master of her domain.

When she interacts with Athena, who comes to take her son away, or when she boldly summons the sun god Helios to end her banishment, her domineering nature manifests in a deeply primal sense. This shift not only highlights her newfound autonomy but also underscores her formidable presence as a sovereign force within her rights. Once her banishment is lifted, she chooses to return to Aiaia, embracing its untamed wildness, rather than remain in her father's advanced and opulent kingdom. This decision highlights her deep connection to the raw, unbridled nature of her sanctuary over the luxurious, cultivated comforts of her ancestral home.

Circe becomes a compelling collection of post-structural feminist thought, providing a fertile ground for the dismantling of entrenched gender norms. In ancient mythology, she is depicted as a malevolent witch, endowed with unsettling and dubious talents, a portrayal that underscores the deep-seated societal fear of women's autonomy and power. When she reaches out to her father to request the lifting of her banishment, he regards her as a tarnished being, dismissively unwilling to help because, in his eyes, she holds no value. Rather than assist her, he coldly remarked, "You have always been the worst of my children." (Miller 2018, 313)

Although Pasiphae and Perseus have destinies in common with Circe—Pasiphae bears a monster and Perseus enslaves his wife—Circe alone is labelled the "worst" of Helios's children. The condemnation was not based on her actions but on her disobedience. Once humiliated at her father's feet, Circe had come to powerful strength, defying the submissive expectations that had been placed upon her. Her boldness made her stand out because she didn't show much fear of Zeus's anger when she went against the divine order by offering water to Prometheus when he was being punished. Helios, though himself divine, was shackled by fear of reprisal from Zeus and eventually agreed to the daring request from Circe - a complete inversion of power in the most traditional of settings. In that moment, Helios looked more submissive while Circe's audacity and independence shone through.

A close reading of Circe's story through the eyes of post-structural feminist theory shows a great deal of play between language, power, and identity. Her story moves past the mere sequence of events within a mythological tale, forming a deep study in the nature of character and

social subversion. Post-structuralism is the method of examining how Circe can acquire power within a patriarchal framework; it challenges the fixed, essentialist roles that women are typically assigned.

As she is a symbol of resistance and change, Circe's story serves as a critique of the powerful power dynamics that marginalize women. Her experience demonstrates how power and identity can be redefined by dismantling social structures and words. This viewpoint has far wider ramifications for questioning and redefining gender norms in addition to enhancing how her story is interpreted. According to this interpretation, Circe's story can make a strong statement about female empowerment that transcends its mythological roots and encourages resistance and independence in modern settings.

Cultural feminism: Reclaiming the feminism

Cultural feminism supports the attributes that, throughout history, have been assigned to women: caring, feeding, and creating. In Miller's text, Circe's connection to nature and her role as a healer and mother are symbols of reclaiming power. Her garden is her independence and creativity-she plants herbs there for her potions and healing. Life is growing where the gods tend to cause destruction, and worthiness is given to feminine character. The care she provided for Telegonus underlines the importance of cultural feminism within emotional labour. Even to be raising a mortal child would seem problematic, yet she became eager for motherhood because that became part of her power and persona. Her transformation of the island of Aiaia into a sanctuary underlines feminist reclaiming that previously marginalized or dismissed spaces.

Cultural feminism celebrates women's differences, such as their traditionally empathetic and nurturing characteristics, emotional labour, as strength and not weakness. It is not about obliterating gender differences but instead embracing them and valuing these traits, suggesting that women have a different alternative, more female-centric world instead of a male-value-centric system. This theoretical approach challenges the patriarchal tales by empowering the voices of women and demanding a society value shift to appreciate what the feminine role has become relevant for. In such a setting, Madeline Miller's *Circe* is a philosophic masterpiece that finds intense resonance in this philosophy when the narrative places Circe as a figure who embodies such transformative power of these feminine features. By mastering sorcery, building relationships, and never tiring of taking

care of others, Circe is beyond the limits placed on her by patriarchal norms and proves that such qualities are not only precious but revolutionary.

Circe's embracing motherhood becomes a very strong example of strength in traditionally feminine roles. Her care for Aeetes, and later on, for Telegonus, underlines the strength with which she could manoeuvre the issues of nurturing. "He ate from my fingers and did not flinch at my frail voice. He only wanted to sleep curled against my neck while I told him stories." (Miller 2018, 22)

However, while Aeetes was a divine child who grew fast and did not demand much, Telegonus, who was a mortal son of Odysseus, proved more difficult. Circe had faced all these challenges, showing an extraordinary capacity for patience and adaptability:

Every minute I must wash and boil and clean and scrub and put to soak. Yet how could I do that? When every minute he also needed something, food change and sleep. However, I wrapped him. However, I rocked him and sang. He screamed, gasping and shaking until the lions fled. Until I feared he would do himself harm. I gave him soothing herbs. (Miller 2018, 212)

Maternal strength is exemplified through the scene of Circe when she confronts the goddess Athena; there, she employed magic in protecting her son. Therefore, in this picture, motherhood is no disability but the deepest form of power. Through this mother's empowerment, she even took autonomy in exercising power at that level when it came with challenges of being against divine opposition. The essence of cultural feminism is that the reclaimed spaces are those in which women can flourish. This can be well illustrated in Circe through her exile to Aiaia, a place that was originally an isolation and punishment area but became a sanctuary of empowerment under Circe's care.

It is with feelings of loneliness and fear that Circe's journey begins,

Such were my years then. I would like to say that all the while I waited to break out.

But the truth is I am afraid I might have floated on believing those dull miseries were all there was until the end of days. (Ibid, 9)

However, over time, she establishes harmony in her surroundings. The garden becomes an image of her independence and creativity where life flourishes under her care. Her nurturing of this environment serves to highlight the power of feminine pursuits that patriarchal societies have long derided. Work on herbs, potions, and remedies underscores

her capacity for creation, healing, and sustaining—a far cry from the destructive tendencies of the gods.

When Penelope and Telemachus stepped on Aiaia, the hospitable nature of Circe, beyond what might be obligatory for her, illustrates that true strength doesn't just result from her use of magic but also through her display of empathy. She rediscovers and revives the womanly space – physical and figurative – during her process to self-liberate and emancipate. The emotional depth of Circe makes her and distinguishes her from other characters in the novel. Her empathy is seen in the early novel when she feels pity for mortals and resents the cruelty of the gods. Like for example, when Helios deliberately arrives late in his meetings knowing that some of the astrologers miscalculating his time will be executed, then this makes Circe tormented of being one of them. That sensitiveness is both her strength and also her weakness. Unlike her mother, who hoards material objects, or Athena, who exploits people she has power over, Circe's emotions are rooted in real concern. Her love for Aeetes and Telegonus, her brief but telling love for Daedalus, and her complicated relationship with Odysseus all attest to her rich emotional life. The most profound emotional impact of Circe is her relationship with Odysseus. The marks on his body and the burden of his experiences stir a deep feeling in her, which says much about the complexity of her character. Far from being a weakness, her empathy is what allows her to connect meaningfully with others, showing that emotional labour is a source of strength and resilience.

It is this central role of witchcraft which, for Circe, symbolizes, so desperately wanted to be repressed, by patriarchal societies in women: wisdom and power. The duality of good and evil she embodies, in fact, forms an ambivalent conception of self-sufficiency and autonomy. Isolation on Aiaia becomes for Circe a way of redeeming exile: whereas once it had been punishment, it is now a way of discovery and growth. Aiaia is now a refuge where Circe can learn her art, free from the fetters of patriarchal expectations, much like cultural feminism in its quest to reclaim spaces that empower women.

The story also condemns the exclusion of women who challenge societal norms. Circe's isolation symbolizes the broader societal trend of excluding strong women, but it is in isolation that she finds true strength. By turning Aiaia into a place of healing and creation, Circe is reclaiming her narrative that defies the restrictions placed on her. Miller's version of Circe can be considered as a deep probe into

cultural feminism, bringing about the traditionally feminine to represent sources of power, rather than subjugation. Reclaiming motherhood, emotional labour, and female spaces in the narrative of Circe is how the patriarchal norms are challenged to demean those qualities. It then becomes her story, becoming a testament to the potential of cultural feminism in granting emancipation, calling for readers to re-evaluate those societies where women's voices are trashed, contributions ignored, and worth erased. By reclaiming herself in such a manner, Circe redeems her own destiny and provides an outline for more comprehensive reforms within culture, illuminated in the light of her power and endurance.

Intersectional feminism: Crossing overlapping identities

Kimbelé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality'; it is very important for feminist theory because it makes a questioning of the premise that gender oppression exists isolated, but rather deals with interconnectedness about class, sexuality, and status, which combine to show how they make unique experiences of privilege and discrimination. This means that intersectional feminism refers to the overlap of various identities, including gender, class, and status, which interact to determine experiences of privilege and oppression. Circe is at a point of uniqueness within the patriarchal hierarchy of the gods because she is both goddess and woman. She has some privilege from her divine lineage, but her empathy and defiance make her an outsider. Her relationships with other figures who are marginalized like Prometheus and Scylla depict her solidarity with people resisting oppression. Although Prometheus is penalized for his help towards human beings, he shows similarity with the resistance shown by Circe against cruel divinity. Similarly, the transformation of Scylla from jealousy, though introducing regret, has been matched to the complexity of power relation and its outcomes in the patriarchal world. Her relationships with family members, humans, and other outsiders outline the complexities of power dynamics. Her journey from exile to self-empowerment is a stunning tale of standing up and finding oneself.

Such has it been in the complex identity weaving roles in being a goddess, a woman, and a witch about the different phases of Circe's life, which seem illuminated beginning from vulnerability to empowerment. Initially, she was the nymph destined for marriage within the rigid patriarchal structure of her divine lineage; however,

her banishment marked a turning point while she was refining her mastery over nature and mythical creatures. Her transformation into a symbol of power defies the traditional categories; instead, she challenges societal norms in their attempt to bind her.

During all these changes, Circe's femininity continues to be a part of her personality. When Circe is associated with Daedalus and Odysseus, this depicts her sensitivity and emotional nature. And when she plays a role of mother to Telegonus that is when it reflects that she is strong enough to look after her child. Though she has been ridiculed and underestimated by her family, she rises above all this and becomes the legend among the gods and mortals alike. Being a daughter to Helios makes her carry dual burdens of expectations from God and patriarchal constraints on her, further complicating her journey towards self-actualization. In the demonization of Circe as a witch, society fears an independent woman with knowledge and power. The story of Circe speaks of resilience, the ability to thrive in oppression and claim her independence in a world that seeks to confine her.

Significance of Circe's tale in contemporary feminist theory

The journey of Circe, then, is one that has strong metaphorical applications to women who are looking to find their way within oppressive patriarchal societies. Standing outside her father's hall, she has been denied her rights, even though she was divinely born. She is punished in the form of exile to a remote island, reflecting the societal way, women who do not conform to the norms become isolated. But Circe does transform this exile into an empowering one by carving out an opportunity to redefine herself.

This story is very well known in contemporary feminist and the way intersectionality as a discourse is working. The journey of Circe from being a passive image to a psychological, independent self is the lifeblood of intersectional feminism, by which the process of self-confrontation and assertion this leads to the core of self-discovery. In grappling with the process of negotiating identity, Circe reveals how women can resist the imposition of systemic oppression and assert control over their lives. This is to create a template of contemporary feminist thought for her, dealing with the intersecting identities in the fight for equality.

Treatment of otherness and alienation

Circe's sense of alienation begins within her family, being mocked over her perceived inadequacies. She is tormented by her mother regarding not meeting superficial beauty requirements, and by her brothers over her voice and disposition. This is a good example of the concept of multiple marginalization, because Circe's gender and perceived defects make her an outsider even among her own. Her values also distance her from both mortals and gods. Unlike Helios, who has nothing but contempt for mortals, or her mother, who gains power through allure, Circe values empathy and connection. Her preference for mortals, as in Glaucus, Daedalus, Odysseus, and Telemachus, distinguishes her from her divine family. While her siblings indulge in cruelty, Circe's compassion defines her, even when it leaves her vulnerable. Circe's relationships with Penelope and Telemachus on Aiaia best demonstrate her inclusivity. She welcomes them into her island and into her life despite the risk that may pose, thereby transcending societal barriers in forging ties with them. Such an act only proves how she has renounced her isolation and opted for solidarity and community instead.

Intersectional feminism sees Madeline Miller's *Circe* as a powerful critique of identity, power, and isolation. Circe's complex identity as a goddess, woman, and witch reveals how privilege and oppression intertwine. She exposes the social forces that try to push strong women out of mainstream society. Her relationships with family members, humans, and other outsiders outline the complexities of power dynamics. Her journey from exile to self-empowerment is a stunning tale of standing up and finding oneself.

The story of Circe does something more than retell an old myth; it reflects and reiterates the new challenges women face as women grapple with overlapping identities. She changes from someone others define to someone who defines herself. This change proves the toughness and power at the heart of feminism's quest for fairness and freedom. As Circe recovers her own story, she recovers a new identity for herself and in the process creates an eternal metaphor in the battle against systemic oppression. This is the kind of narrative that Miller can join both ancient and modern ages through a deeply personal yet universally resonant story.

Relevance to modern times and further meaning

Madeline Miller transforms the story of Circe into a goldmine for discussion of contemporary feminism. This conversion from being an outcast to becoming a powerful self-defined woman is a trait that reflects the journey women in modern societies undergo when trying to find their way in patriarchal systems. Therefore, the process of resilience and self-empowerment clashes with deep-seated gender hierarchies and builds a strong critique of systemic oppression.

Instead of accepting the historical narratives used to reinforce patriarchy, Miller makes the reader believe otherwise of the old myth. Where Circe used to mean transformation, today she typifies the effort of feminists; hence it is marking what women are capable of—that they could take reins back and restate an identity against what society dictates. Through her own story, so do the many icons for feminism of today find an expression-like Sethe from Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), like Offred from Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Both the ladies, much like Circe, exemplify a quintessence of resumption and resistance as they have to strive against systematic oppression to repossess life control.

She fights dignity and freedom in the face of the dehumanizing effects of slavery, just as Offred does in quiet rebellion against a totalitarian regime. Universal themes, endurance, and defiance are the elements of Circe's journey in her story, where transformation and change come about in confronting and challenging oppressive systems, through the medium of these stories. In this context, Circe brings forth the ancient and the modern to illustrate that the battle for autonomy and equality is timeless through her tale.

Thus, Circe is not telling the myth but is in fact digging deeper into the ethos of feminism and offering us a story that's personal yet pertinent in the world. Circe, as described by the penmanship of Miller, will prompt readers into questioning the structural oppression it brings about and the unbreakable spirit of those to resist it, cementing Circe's position in history as a signifier of empowerment and change.

Feminist reclaiming of mythology

Feminist reinterpretations provide a very vast depth to an ever-broadening canon of literature, changing it into an inclusive but richly diversified one. Madeline Miller's *Circe* shows this transformation ability, as she demonstrates how old myths could be recreated into challenging deeply entrenched gender norms and also be used to

innovate perspectives in identifying power and identity. She reinvigorates old studies through her narratives, providing a critical inspection of cultural narratives which have lasted long enough perpetuating inequality.

Miller's *Circe* has the skill in weaving through post-structural, cultural, and intersectional feminism to unravel what is in the complex dynamic of identity, power, and gender. Miller disputes the patriarchal forms of control and celebrates the process of self-empowerment women undergo as they take back their freedom through deconstructive readings of canonical mythological texts. The transformation of Circe from an isolated figure to one of self-determination and empowerment assumes the symbolic form of the general feminist struggle against systems of oppression. This subtle reinterpretation transforms this book from a simple retelling of an ancient tale to a profound commentary on societal structures that continue to shape gender dynamics. This interdisciplinary approach in deconstructing Circe proves the relationship between classical studies and contemporary feminist theory. By putting Circe's story within its historical and cultural frames, this reinterpretation questions the past but also highlights its continued relevance in modern-day feminist discourse. This would challenge the readers to work out through the implications that traditional tales can bring to our expectation in society.

Future study will be possible by extending the intersection of mythology and feminism to other cultural traditions; this offers new dimensions of feminist literary analysis. The untold stories of marginalized figures across cultures can be further enriched in the literary canon by scholars to promote a more inclusive understanding of human experiences. Miller's *Circe* reminds us of the timeless capacity of storytelling to question, transform, and inspire.

Conclusion

The works of Madeline Miller stand well above being a simple retelling of ancient myth; the story of Circe penetrates deep into the heart of feminist explorations under post-structural, cultural, and intersectional perspectives. Using these lenses transforms a seemingly insignificant mythological character to be one of power, endurance, and defiance against systemically enforced oppression. Hence, it challenges the institutionalized patriarchal values yet reinstates,

reclaiming the virtues ascribed to those aspects of women identified as unacceptable.

In such a context, the trip of Circe embodies the post-structural feminism, where dynamic identity does not conform to straitjacketed sexual definitions. The deconstructions of her roles like a nymph, goddess, a witch, and a woman form a dynamic play in which the spatiotemporal sequence of language, culture, and identity forms itself. Her transformation negates the static labels given by gods and society, thereby illustrating how it is not a fix but a growth along the lines of experience lived in. This rejection of stagnant categorization does not merely redefine her character but question the wider societal constructs of gender and power.

Through the presence of nature, emotional profundity, and the position of the healer-mother, Circe finds cultural feminism in Miller's account. Initially presented as an island of exile, the space comes to represent empowerment under her care. Her "life-sustaining herbs" and potions symbolize the recovery of feminine spaces patriarchal societies have historically discarded. In that, her nurturing relationships and her empathetic actions, Circe personifies the strength residing within stereotypically feminine characteristics as a counterargument to ideas that such strengths can only manifest as weaknesses. Her is, in the context of this paper, an inspiring tale of emotional labor as a revolutionary quality.

From the perspective of intersectional feminism, yet another aspect is added: at once she occupies a privileged and yet a marginalized space. Being a goddess, Circe wields divine power, but in defiance of societal norms and showing sympathy to mortals makes her alienated from the divine and mortal worlds. Her alliance with other marginalized figures, such as Prometheus and Scylla, makes the interconnectedness of oppression clear and emphasizes the importance of resisting systemic hierarchies. The relationships and choices of Circe reveal the complex dynamics of power, status, and identity, thus providing a subtle critique of the societal forces that seek to confine women.

The implications of Circe are broader than the framework of mythology. Miller's reinterpretation has a direct resonance with contemporary feminist struggles, a metaphor for women's ongoing battle for autonomy and equality within patriarchal systems. Circe's transformation from a marginalized figure to a self-empowered individual mirrors the journey of modern women who break free from

societal expectations and reclaim their narratives. The story encourages readers to question the traditional power structures and recognizes the continued relevance of feminist discourse.

Furthermore, Circe exemplifies the feminist power of reclaiming mythology. Through this feminist re-reading of ancient stories, Miller not only reinvigorates classical scholarship but also makes contemporary literature richer and more diverse. This cross-disciplinary method bridges the distance between the historical accounts and modern feminist theory, enabling a greater understanding of the relationship between past and present in creating gender dynamics.

Future research may extend this study by analysing other mythological characters using feminist perspectives, exploring untold stories across cultural traditions. Such studies would add to a more inclusive literary canon and foster a greater appreciation of marginalized voices in human history. Miller's *Circe* reminds us of the transformative power of storytelling, challenging societal norms, celebrating resilience, and imagining a more just world.

In conclusion, Circe is more than a reimagined myth-it is powerful commentary on the complexities of identity, power, and gender. Through her journey, Circe reclaims her narrative by defying the constraints of patriarchal expectations and emerging as a symbol of feminist empowerment. Her story invites the reader to reflect on the struggle for justice and equality that has been ongoing throughout the centuries, making Circe a timeless and universally relevant work that bridges the ancient and modern worlds.

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