



Madeline Miller's Circe: A Feminist Stylistic Approach

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Abstract

The present study explores the representation of the woman's character in literary works and also encompasses the retelling of Greek mythology from Madeline Miller's female protagonist's perspective. Gender stereotypes established by Greek mythology require that women must be submissive and marginalized. Those women characters that are not according to these stereotypes are termed as negative characters. Moreover, this representation of women's stereotypical characterization is done through predisposed language which is informed by male-ruling sexist ideology. These linguistic choices need to be addressed through feminist stylistic analysis. The present study will analyze Circe's character from the selected text Circe by Madeline Miller (2018) from the perspective of feminist stylistic analysis by employing Sara Mills' model of feminism (1995). It will investigate how Madeline Miller converts Circe's negative portrayal into a positive and empowered character in her retelling by challenging the stereotypical characterization of women. In particular, the study will look into Circe's character at the level of discourse in order to present her as a positive and empowered character.

Keywords: Feminist stylistics, Feminism, Stereotypes, Retelling, Characterization.

Introduction

An eminent literary critic Terry Eagleton says “To narrate is to exercise power” and the earlier established power relations have been subverted by creating a new perception of those relations by many writers during the twentieth century. In this regard, feminism as one of the distinguished voices stood against the dominating powers, particularly patriarchy. Subsequently, many female writers started rereading the texts narrated by dominant male sexist ideology, in order to decode the underlying meanings in texts and to retell earlier texts from the woman’s perspective. A remarkable surge has been observed in retellings of classics by female writers in recent years, which is why retelling as a genre has been used by several authors to explore contemporary archetypes. The major purpose of retellings is to use the space which was produced for suppressed and marginalized voices for feminist perspectives. Alicia Ostriker (1982) defines the revision of myths by female authors as follows, “old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy” (p.11).

Greek mythology holds gender stereotypes which have been perpetuated throughout history. For example, men are defined in terms of power, strength and bravery, whereas women are always defined in relation to men and also silent, voiceless and submissive. Women who do not fit in that established stereotypical frame are considered evil and negative. In Madeline Miller’s retelling, Circe’s character also violates these established stereotypes, so she is described negatively in terms of her power and sexuality. Miller in her retelling challenges the established stereotypical woman characterization in Greek mythology and presents an alternate feminist perspective.

Furthermore, as Circe’s character does not seem to hold a position in typical gender stereotypes established by patriarchy in Greek mythology, so she was described as a negative and wicked classical character, who uses magical power to turn Odysseus’s men into pigs. But in the retelling of Miller, Circe has a different perspective on turning men into pigs as she does so in her self-defence against

sexual assault. She had to come across the molestation due to lack of male guardianship, so this discriminatory, unfair and pitiable condition of a lone woman compelled her to turn men into pigs for her defence.

Contrary to Miller, Homer does not explain the reason for Circe's deed of turning men into pigs. The inference is that she is a playful witch who does so out of her wickedness. Miller explains that in an interview, "In the *Odyssey*, Circe is very clearly the incarnation of male anxiety about female power—the fear is that if women have power, men are getting turned into pigs. The word 'witch' is still used today as a slur against women with an amount of power that makes society nervous" (Wiener). When the retelling of classics is treated as a genre, it helps to liberate the marginalized and silent woman's voice from the male mythic account. This liberation doesn't present Circe's character in a different role but it solely appropriates her story where she tells everything from her own justified perspective. Therefore, Miller challenges the male narrative of Circe by releasing her from the conventions of man's epic. So, Circe reclaims herself as an empowered and positive character by breaking the typical gender stereotypes.

As a writer, Madeline Miller is a well-known feminist writer. Her interest in classics leads her to write *The Song of Achilles* (2011), her first and most famous book. Her last novel *Circe* (2018) promptly became the New York Times bestseller and award-winning novel. The present study is a qualitative analysis and descriptive in nature. Close reading has been used for the textual analysis. For this research, the model of feminist stylistic analysis (1995) by Sara Mills has been adopted to analyze Circe's character. To be specific, the feminist stylistic analysis is carried out at the level of discourse.

In the present study, only one novel which is the retelling of Greek mythology by a woman author has been selected. The reason behind selecting a woman character from the retelling of Greek mythology is that the sufferings and plights of Greek culture's women are as same as the women of today's society. Thus, this deep connection

with ancient mythology in the form of retelling from the woman's perspective highlights its importance and impact on contemporary audiences and its contributions to the ongoing feminist critical discussion.

Research questions

- How does Madeline Miller convert Circe's negative portrayal into a positive and empowered character in her retelling by subverting the woman's stereotypical characterization?
- How does analysis at the level of discourse reveal Circe's character from a negative to a positive and empowered character in Miller's retelling?

Significance

By observing male-dominating ideology and misogyny in literary works and society, feminist stylistics tries to present an alternate image of women both in language and society. Madeline Miller's Circe is presented as an allegory of a lonely woman's struggle as she was exiled to an isolated island due to her power of witchcraft. Her story identifies the today's woman of our society who is powerful educated and independent but for some reason, if she is single, she has to struggle a lot for her survival in society because patriarchal society isolates such a woman for being powerful. In other words, by studying Circe's perspective from Madeline Miller's retelling and connecting it with the plights and experiences of today's women, it becomes evident that such retelling of ancient myths can convey powerful and effective messages to contemporary society and modern audiences and even enhance contribution to the ongoing feminist progress.

Literature Review

It is challenging to define feminism comprehensively, however; Sara Mills (1995) defines feminism as: "Most feminists hold a belief that women as a group are treated oppressively and differently from men and that they are subject to personal and institutional discrimination" (p. 2). Moreover, it can be said that feminism is a political project which works to eliminate operation against women. History reveals that there are three waves of feminism. The first

wave of feminism, the second wave of feminism and the third wave of feminism. Currently, the fourth wave of feminism has started. All the above-mentioned waves of feminism present guidance and directions for feminist analyses and criticism.

The topic of the relationship between language and gender has had great importance for critics and scholars from different fields of studies for decades. Subsequently, it is significant to understand the relationship between language and gender. Thus, it is essential to study the nature of language and further its involvement with gender-related issues. In this respect, Graddol and Swann (1989) describe language as: “an important part of our personal and social identity; our linguistic habits reflect our individual biographies and experiences” (p. 5).

In the same vein, Graddol and Swann (1989) bring forth another concept which encompasses the Saussurean Model. It states: “the individual elements which made up a language system (the words of a language, say) did not have any meaning in an absolute sense, but could be defined in terms of their relation to one another” (p. 5). They continue to suggest that according to Saussure, in a community, among language users a word acquires meaning from social contact as the relationship between word and meaning is arbitrary.

Furthermore, many scholars inspired by feminist movements started detecting the gender issues which are being observed in language use. Graddol and Swann (1989) define the term gender as: “a social distinction between masculine and feminine” (p. 7). Additionally, Litosseliti (2006) defines feminism’s influence on linguistics in the following words: “feminist movement has undoubtedly influenced thinking in the social sciences and humanities, including linguistics, over the past 30 or 40 years” (p.1). According to feminists, language is their chief concern, particularly when discrimination between males and females is observed by English users in language use. When a language identifies gender biasness it is called to be sexist. Sara Mills (1995) refers to sexism as derogatory statements which are used for women.

According to Graddol and Swann (1989), instead of linguists, feminists initially bring the issue of sexism into the limelight, as they identify that language has always been a source to present biasness against females and males as the norms. (p. 99). Furthermore, according to Cameron (1992), feminists found sexism not only in the English language but also in German, Dutch, French, Japanese and Italian languages. Likewise, the linguistic theory is being adopted by the feminists around the late 1960s as they found language as an authentic “medium of representation” (p. 6).

It is significant to know about the stylistics before starting the discussion on feminist stylistics. Stylistics started developing in the 19th and 20th centuries, and in 1958 the origin of stylistics is initiated by a seminar in America and England as an interdisciplinary of linguistics and literature. As a linguistic science, it asserts that its research is concerned with the styles of texts. Simpson (1997) defines stylistics as follows: “a method of applied language study which uses textual analysis to make discoveries about the structure and function of language” (p. 4).

Feminist stylistics is a blend of feminism and linguistics. Sara Mills defines feminist stylistics in her renowned work *Feminist Stylistics* (1995) in the following words: “a form of politically motivated stylistics whose aim is to develop an awareness of the way gender is handled in texts” (p.165). Likewise, in this perspective, Ufot (2012) states: “Feminist Stylisticians seek to write the woman into relevance” (p. 2462). Similarly, in this regard Shah, S., Shakir, A., Rafique, S., & Zahid, S. (2014) state:

The purpose of this approach to stylistics is to explore the ways in which literature expresses (or otherwise) a decidedly female consciousness. In the process, literary art is seen essentially as a medium for the foregrounding of female experiences and the destruction of male stereotypes about women (p.92). Furthermore, Mills (1995) argues that linguistic details can be examined through feminist stylistics in order to reveal gender disparities.

In 1995, Sara Mills offered a model for stylistic analysis in order to present the feminist point of view. Feminist stylistic analysis is being conducted by the following works. There is a study “Angela

Carter's *The Bloody Chamber: A Feminist Stylistic Approach* done by Arian, S. (2016). By applying Sara Mills's model of feminist stylistics (1995), an analysis is made at the level of word, sentence and discourse. The analysis reveals that Carter subverts the traditional patriarchal fairy tales and also dismantles the established ideologies and gender stereotyping. Thus, it explores the world of Carter where women are powerful, strong and even cruel.

In this regard, there is another groundbreaking work conducted by Sheikh, A., Ali, F., Ali, H., Munir, H., & Suleman, N. (2019), to exhibit the representation of women in Pakistani short fiction. Their research is being conducted by applying the feminist stylistic model (1995) by Mills, which reveals that male writers use more sexist language to present female characters. Moreover, in this short fiction, there are numerous examples of jokes based on sexism.

There is another related work "Investigating Feminist Tendency in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" by Darweesh and Ghayadh (2016). Feminist stylistic analysis at three levels not only reveals the ideology and power relations that are embedded in the literary text but also perfectly exposes the author's true intention.

Related literature on Circe

There is a recent work "Circe and the Necessity of the Female Voice" conducted by O'Hara, M. (2022). This paper demonstrates the necessity of women's perspectives in the classical ancient texts by making a comparison between Circe's depiction in Homer's *Odyssey* and her description in Madeline Miller's retelling. Moreover, it also presents a study of the complexity of female experiences in the prehistoric world.

"Why Myth Matters: The Value of the Female Voice in Greek Mythology" is another work conducted by Rogers, K. E. (2021). This work reveals how the retelling of Greek myths from the woman's perspective establishes the importance of myths and their contribution to future feminist progress. The researcher examined three mythical female characters from the selected texts and relates

their new perspectives to the troubles and problems of today's women which can be evidenced by social and political events such as the #MeToo movement. Moreover, the researcher is trying to validate the power and efficacy of the messages that are extracted from these retelling and their impact on a modern audience.

Thus, it has been established from the aforementioned studies that feminist stylistic analysis has been conducted to explore different aspects of the texts with feminist concerns. Moreover, several studies have been conducted on Madeline Miller's *Circe* from thematic perspectives. In the present work, the researcher aims to conduct a feminist stylistic analysis on Madeline Miller's *Circe* by employing Sara Mills' model (1995) in order to convert Circe's negative portrayal which is established by Greek mythology into a positive and empowered character by breaking the woman's stereotypical characterization. In addition, feminist stylistic analysis has not been conducted to explore alternate dimensions of Circe's character so far, so this is the gap in the study which needs to be explored.

Research Methodology

For the present study, the adopted model of analysis is Sara Mills' model of feminism (1995). Moreover, an analysis will be conducted only at the level of discourse. Mills defines in her work *Feminist Stylistics* (1995), beyond the level of words and sentences, analysis at the level of discourse focuses on the larger-scale structures. Discourse analysis defined by Carter and Simpson (1989) is cited in Mills, as follows: "Discourse analysis should...be concerned not simply with micro-contexts of the effects of words across sentences or conversational turns but also with the macro-contexts of larger social patterns" (P.16). Subsequently, through these textual patterns and structures, the analysis makes a connection between words and phrases with a larger notion of ideology, according to Mills. Mills categorises analysis at the level of discourse into three parts; characterization, fragmentation and focalization.

Characterization

Mills argues when characters are constructed in texts the language choices are often informed by stereotypical notions. The difference between the description of men and women characters is based on stereotypical knowledge which can be revealed through analysis. Moreover, according to Mills, in the case of the description of the male characters their strength and trustworthiness and overall appearance are focused. They are described in terms of ‘sand-coloured’, ‘slight in build’, ‘broad, stocky’ (p.125). On the other hand, in the case of female characters’ descriptions, the main concern is to establish a degree of sexual availability and sexual attractiveness, according to Mills. So, the supposed sexual characteristics of female characters are highly emphasized for example, “there is a great deal of concern with the legs, skin, breasts and hair”, likewise “‘her legs were long, rather thin’ and ‘she had good legs’” (p.125). Furthermore, there are some terms for female characters which contain connotations of sexual attractiveness and also refer to the position of voyeurism which indicates “a position of meticulous cataloguing of difference” (p.126).

Fragmentation

According to Mills, the technique of fragmenting the female body is not only notable in pornographic literature but also in advertising images, romances, love poetry and other genres. She argues that the female experience is presented from outside the text because the scene is not focalized from her perspective and its sole reason is, “the female protagonist is not represented as a unified conscious physical being” (p.133). She, further, continues to suggest that in the fragmentation of the female “the body is depersonalized, objectified, reduced to its parts” (p.133). Further, she adds “the female represented as an object, a collection of objects, for the male gaze” (p.133). Thus, the fragmentation of the female is established by male focalization.

On the other hand, the technique of fragmentation is not used for the male body as he is presented as a whole body. Moreover, she states: “Representations of women fragmented into anatomical elements

occur far more frequently than do such representations of men” (p.133).

Focalization

According to Mills, in narratology, a wide range of work on focalization and point of view has been done. Focalization is categorized into internal and external focalization on the bases of the position relative to the story. Rimmon-Kenan’s (1983) interpretation of external focalization cited in Mills as external focalization “is felt to be close to the narrating agent” (p.74). She, further, continues to explain that external focalization appears in the first person in narratives. Moreover, Bal (1985) termed it as a ‘narrator-focalizer’ (p.37). On the contrary, the narrator and the focalizer are the same character in internal focalization but work independently to reveal the story, according to Mills. In addition, Mills argues that there is an aspect of focalization that is to identify the gender of the point of view. She, further, defines that supposedly neutral narration is always gendered and also proposes some particular ways which help readers to locate the gender of the point of view.

Data Analysis

Analysis at the level of discourse helps to illustrate the implicit or explicit meanings and ideologies in a text. According to Mills (1995), discourse analysis connects words and sentences with the larger-scale structures of ideology.

Characterization

A major part of the analysis at the level of discourse is constituted by the characters. Mills states: “stereotypical notions often inform the language choices which are made when describing characters in fiction” (p. 133).

The retelling of Madeline Miller’s *Circe* (2018) initially portrays Circe as a stereotypical character. By doing so, Miller maintains the setting of ancient mythology, where women’s characters are portrayed according to stereotypical notions. At the beginning of the novel, Circe’s character fits into the frame of stereotypical characterization as she is passive, innocent and voiceless. In her childhood, she was bullied by her siblings and mother. Her sister

and brother make fun of her in the following words: “Her eyes are yellow as piss. Her voice is screechy as an owl. She is called Hawk, but she should be called Goat for her ugliness” (p. 6). Furthermore, her mother calls her “Stupid Circe” (p. 9). Likewise, at the time of her birth, her physical appearance is described by her father in the following words: “Her hair is streaked like a lynx. And her chin. There is a sharpness to it that is less than pleasing” (p. 3). Her parents were hopeless as they realized that she has ordinary looks in comparison with her siblings and she would not be able to marry one of Zeus’s sons. As women are always defined in relation to men, so marriage is a significant aspect of a woman’s life in Greek mythology. This is the reason that Circe is considered a less valuable family’s member due to her incapability of marrying some immortal. Moreover, she herself values a lot of marriage when she fell in love with Glaucos as she says: “but I had begun to think beyond that, to say to myself new words: marriage, husband” (p. 40). Thus, her character ideally reinforces stereotypical notions at the beginning of the novel.

Additionally, there is another example of stereotypes which Circe’s character reveals. She was naïve which is why she promptly trusted everyone. As Aeëtes says: “You have always trusted too easily” (p. 60). Similarly, Circe proclaims her power and confesses that she has changed Scylla into a monster and Glaucos into an immortal. Subsequently, her father considers her power as a challenge and punishes her. Later on, her father and Zeus decided to exile her as a punishment.

Similarly, Circe’s characterization reveals stereotypical notions in another incident. As in Greek mythology, women were supposed to be silent and never allowed to voice themselves. By the time of exile, Circe was also such a typical character who couldn’t raise her voice for herself as she expresses: “I wanted to cry out, to plead, but my breath would not catch. My voice, ever thin, was gone” (p. 59).

The above-mentioned examples of the depiction of stereotypical characterization of Circe create an illusion of ancient mythology where women’s characters reveal stereotypes but later Miller

challenges these stereotypes of the woman characterization and presents alternate characterization in her retelling. Moreover, Miller also questions the negative portrayal of Circe's character in Homer's *Odyssey* and presents a counter-image of her in her retelling. So, Circe's character is presented in a different way instead of a typical description of women in terms of their beauty, sexual attractiveness and their typical household roles. After the exile, she is presented as a strong and powerful woman. When her father left her alone on an isolated island, she didn't get scared but rather made her loneliness a source of strength. As she states: "I stepped into those woods and my life began" (p. 65). She, further, adds by the time of her exile she was so agonized and wanted to plead with her family to rescue her but her inner strength didn't allow her to do so. As she expresses: "Yet when I thought of kneeling at their feet, I could not bring myself to do it" (p. 59) Thus, Miller subverts the stereotypical characterization and presents an alternate character of Circe in her retelling in order to reclaim her strong and powerful woman.

Likewise, instead of getting afraid of being alone, she overcomes all her fears and identifies her inner strength even in exile. As she expresses: "That is what exile meant: no one was coming, no one ever would. There was fear in that knowledge, but after my long night of terrors it felt small and inconsequential" (p. 65). She, further, continues to express that very soon she started enjoying a free life which has no influence of patriarchy. She feels her father's control is a symbol of patriarchy. As her father Helios is the god of the sun, she feels more comfortable at night in the absence of the sun. She states: "At night I went home to my house. I did not mind its shadows anymore, for they meant my father's gaze was gone from the sky and the hours were my own" (p. 66). Furthermore, by being able to overcome her all fears she becomes a strong woman. As she says: "but day by day I grew bolder" (p. 66). Therefore, Miller combats the stereotypical characterization and through her retelling presents an alternate characterization which reclaims Circe as a powerful woman.

In addition, a stereotypical representation of Circe's character is portrayed in Greek mythology as she is defined in terms of beauty and sexual attractiveness. Her hair is described as Circe's "lovely

tresses” (p.130) by Homer (2003), which signifies her beauty and island exoticism. In Miller’s retelling, the depiction of Circe’s hair is entirely different from Homer’s stereotypical description. Circe starts learning her witchcraft from scratch by toiling through the island, she states: “I learned to plait my hair back, so it would not catch on every twig, and how to tie my skirts at the knee to keep the burrs off” (p. 63). In Miller’s retelling, her same plaited hair implies her lone hard work, practice and dedication. Moreover, her hair does not denote a mysterious sexual adventure for a glorified hero. Thus, in Miller’s retelling, her hair description reveals her highly practised witchcraft through which she reclaims herself as a powerful woman instead of a negative or sexually attractive one.

Moreover, Miller breaks a significant stereotype regarding women’s characterizations by revealing the fact that a woman’s beauty is nothing except a demand of patriarchy, her actual power is her strength. As Circe is depicted as an average-looking woman but she is strong whereas her mother is extremely beautiful but not a strong character. As the text states: “Darling, your eyes are nothing to worry about. Nothing at all. Your mother is very beautiful, but she has never been strong” (p. 7). Thus, a woman’s beauty can never define her power and strength.

Moreover, Miller presents Circe’s character as opposing the stereotypical representations of women in Greek mythology. In Miller’s retelling, when Circe and Odysseus were in a relationship, she observed some scars on Odysseus’s body. She noticed that his scars signified the adventurous journey of his life which enhanced his glorification. On the other hand, she mentioned scars on her own body which identified her courage, strength, endurance, willpower and sheer determination, but there is no appraisal for them. She expresses:

I looked down at my body, bare in the fire’s light, and tried to imagine it written over with its history: my palm with its lightning streak, my hand missing its fingers, the thousand cuts from my witch-work, the gristled furrows of my father’s fire, the skin of my face like some half-melted taper. And those were only the things that

had left marks. There would be no salutes. What had Aeëtes called an ugly nymph? A stain upon the face of the world. (p. 173)

She appeared to have the least concern with this lack of recognition rather she praises and acknowledges her own worth and power. Further, she asserts her power as a witch and her control over Odysseus who is being glorified by the world: “My smooth belly glowed beneath my hand, the color of honey shining in the sun. I drew him down to me. I was a golden witch, who had no past at all” (p. 174).

Likewise, contrary to the stereotypical character, Circe proves herself a strong and powerful character even after being a rape victim. It is a general observation that for most women it is extremely hard to come out of the trauma of rape. When Circe saw her bruise after the sexual assault, she didn't let herself be broken rather gathered her shattered courage and even found herself a stronger woman. “The purple bruise at my throat was turning green at its edges. I pressed it, felt the splintered ache. Tear down, I thought. Tear down and build again” (p. 154). Thus, Circe even being a rape victim, reconstructs herself and reclaims herself as a powerful woman.

In addition, Circe's character is defined in terms of sexuality in Greek mythology. In the traditional ancient myths, women's characters are implicitly exposed to male sexuality or male appetite. Female sexuality or female desire is either indirectly mentioned or portrayed in a negative way. For instance, Circe was familiar as a seductress in Greek mythology. Moreover, she was portrayed as a negative character as she was widely known as a powerful enchantress who was capable of turning human beings into pigs for her mysterious sexual adventure. Miller deals with the issue of women's sexuality in a reformatory way and redefines it in her retelling. In her retelling, Circe does so for her self-defence, as she was being raped by the captain of the sailors on her island. Out of rage, she transformed them into pigs. As the text states: “He screamed, and his men screamed with him. It went on for a long time. As it turned out, I did kill pigs that night after all” (p. 152).

Thus, Miller redefines Circe's character from a negative portrayal to a positive one with thorough rationalization.

Moreover, another negatively depicted example of Circe's character in relation to sexuality can be observed when she met with Odysseus in Greek mythology. The implication is that she was attracted towards Odysseus to such an extent that she couldn't cast her spell against him and knelt to him before his great strength and glory, and became his mistress. On the contrary, Miller deals with the same issue in a reformatory way. In her retelling, Circe found a suitable match in Odysseus's character as he had shown great respect for her by sharing his personal life regarding Penelope. After years of exile and loneliness, she found herself attracted towards Odysseus. Moreover, she depicts her feelings when she heard her name in Odysseus's mouth. "It sparked a feeling in me, sharp and eager" (p. 163). Further, she adds: "I felt keen and hungry as a bear in spring" (p. 164). She had a keen desire for intimacy and companionship after a long period of exile and solitude. Moreover, it was a relationship of equality rather than a relationship between master and mistress. Thus, Miller's description of Circe's relationship with Odysseus presents her positive character.

Furthermore, Miller discusses the "female experience" of her own body. As Circe expresses her experience of sexual desire in the following words: "if there was a handsome one among them I might take him to my bed..... I did it to prove my skin was still my own" (p. 155). It has been observed in many texts, women are situated in the position of sexual objects for the male voyeurism which these texts naturalized. Mills (1995) argues that voyeurism refers to "a position of meticulous cataloguing of difference; in this sense, I would like to describe these terms as 'sexualized', that is, despite seeming to be simply descriptive terms, they are in fact terms which are related to the person's sexual attractiveness" (p.126). Miller questions this male voyeurism and dismantles it by exchanging its conventional order. The implication of male voyeurism is that women's characters are presented to be watched as objects and subjected to a position of voyeurism. On the contrary, Miller through female voyeurism places male characters in the position of sexual objects. For example, when Circe met with Odysseus, she

was looking at him with sexual intention and said: “I let my eyes rest on him, take him in” (p. 164). She, further, continues to express: “But beneath his ease I could feel a roil that Daedalus never had. I wanted to see it revealed” (p. 164). There is another example of female voyeurism when Circe wanted to see Odysseus’s body naked. “We lay together in my wide, gold bed. I had wanted to see him loosened with pleasure, passionate, laid bare. He was never laid bare, but the rest I saw” (p. 166). Hence, Odysseus’s character becomes subjected to the position of a sexual object. Thus, Miller through her protagonist’s assertive sexuality portrays her strong and powerful woman yet a positive one.

Similarly, Circe presents her character as the opposite of a stereotypical character by showing her assertive behaviour when she punishes men who came to molest her. By doing so, she subverts the patriarchal behaviour towards sexual assault which is almost naturalized by society. In this regard, Mills (1995) states: “extreme male behaviour such as rape may be understood to be only ‘natural’” (p. 105). She claims that no justification can be acceptable from the rapists and they deserve the same torment and helplessness that the assaulted women have gone through. As she says: “I kept the leader for last, so he could watch. He shrank, pressed against the wall. Please. Spare me, spare me, spare me” (p. 156). She expresses that the begging of the captain compensates to some extent her agony of going through the rape. Further, she adds: “Sorry you were caught, I said. Sorry that you thought I was weak, but you were wrong” (p. 157). Thus, she reclaims her empowered status by showing herself a strong and positive character.

Fragmentation

According to Sara Mills (1995), the female protagonist is not represented as a unified conscious physical being as her body is objectified, depersonalized and reduced to its parts, which is why the scene cannot be focalized from her point of view. Mills (1995) states: “Fragmentation of the female is therefore associated with male focalization” (p.133). On the other hand, Miller claims an alternate pattern of fragmentation which is associated with female focalization. So, in her retelling, her protagonist is represented beyond her body parts. Circe describes that by the time of her birth,

she was described in terms of her body parts when her father was trying to assess her beauty. She states: “My father considered, fingering the wisps of my hair, examining my eyes and the cut of my cheeks” (p. 3). So, her real worth resides in a prestigious marriage which was only possible because of her beauty. Unlike her siblings, she has average looks but her powerful character is beyond that description of her body parts or beauty and stereotypes.

There is another example of that pattern of fragmentation which is associated with female focalization. It can be observed that Circe’s character is not described in terms of fragmenting body parts. She states: “I had not used those tricks of hair and eyes and lips that all our kind have” (p. 42). So, her character is defined in terms of the whole body instead of body parts which reclaims her as a powerful woman.

In Miller’s retelling, there is another strong woman character Medea who is described beyond that fragmentation. So, Miller’s that pattern of fragmentation that differs from the conventional one represents her female characters as strong and powerful which can be seen in the following text: “but it was an odd beauty, not like my mother’s or sister’s. Each of her features alone was nothing, her nose too sharp, her chin over-strong. Yet together they made a whole like the heart of a flame” (p. 132). Thus, her whole body and strength are more focused instead of on individual body parts.

In addition, Odysseus’s description in terms of his body parts is another example of that pattern of fragmentation which is associated with female focalization. “Every line of his body was beautiful, perfect with grace. His dark, loose hair was crowned with a wreath. From his shoulder hung a shining, silver-tipped bow carved from olive wood” (p. 184). Some other descriptions of his character in terms of fragmenting body parts are as follows: “His eyes were bright now, storm-lit” (p. 171). “His hands were wide and calloused” (p. 162). “His shoulders were thick” (p. 170). “His legs were short but stiff with muscles... He was handsome” (p. 163). It is quite obvious that Odysseus’s body parts are focused on throughout the text. Thus, it is evident that the alternate pattern of fragmentation represents Miller’s protagonist empowered as she has

the liberty to describe Odysseus's character that way which is contrary to his traditional description as a great hero of Greek mythology.

Focalization:

Miller challenges the male-centred narrative of Greek mythology to create a new point of view in order to present Circe's character as a strong and powerful woman and also to change Circe's negative character to a positive one. Moreover, she gives the authority of narrator-focalizer to Circe. Homer's *Odyssey* is written from the male's perspective where women are not in limelight. According to Miller, Circe's sufferings, plight, experiences of life, relationships and her perspective about men should be highlighted to present her real potential and her strength.

Contrary to Homer's *Odyssey* which is written from the male point of view, *Circe* has a female narrator-focalizer as Miller has given that control to Circe to put forth her perspective. As she was silent, marginalized and negative in Homer's narration of *Odyssey*, so she reclaims her positive and empowered status through her own perspective. Thus, Miller dismantles Homer's male-centred narrative and endorses Atwood's (2005) statement as follows: She asserts "But Homer's *Odyssey* is not the only version of the story" (xiv).

Miller does not change Circe's character but adds her perspective. In this regard, Joanne Russ (1995) asserts: "We do not only choose or reject works of art on the basis of these myths; we interpret our own experience in terms of them. Worse still, we actually perceive what happens to us in the mythic terms our culture provides" (p.89-90). Being a narrator-focalizer, Circe puts forward her point of view about converting men into pigs. She explains the reason for transforming sailors into pigs. She expresses that because of her loneliness she would feel restless and always awaited to meet someone on her island. One day when some sailors came there and asked for help, she warmly welcomed them and served them food. Instead of showing gratitude to her for her hospitably, finding her alone without male guardianship, the captain raped her in front of his men who were waiting for their turn. Consequently, she

transformed them into pigs out of wrath. Her act of converting men into pigs is an effort of self-defence, whereas, in Greek mythology, she did such adventures out of her wickedness. Thus, by expressing her point of view, she proves herself a positive and powerful character.

Furthermore, as a narrator-focalizer, Circe presents her perspective that how the perpetuation of patriarchy should be dismantled. Being a rape victim, she does not isolate herself but rather wants men to learn a lesson from her. Being a witch she can disappear her island from men's eyes but she let them come and see the opposite of their thinking and plans. As she says: "Let them see what I am. Let them learn the world is not as they think" (p. 155). Moreover, in a patriarchal society, she depicts men wanting to see women as weak and begging in all circumstances. But when they saw the reverse situation, they got astonished to find a lone woman who didn't get afraid at the time of the rape. As she says: "It was my favourite moment, seeing them frown and try to understand why I wasn't afraid" (p. 156). She, further, adds that men want control over women and as a result want them to plead. She says: "They wanted the freeze, the flinch, the begging that would come" (p. 156). Therefore, Circe's point of view regarding demolishing patriarchal beliefs reflects her strength.

Additionally, as a narrator-focalizer, she brings forth the fact of her life that before exile she had been spending a dull and useless life consequently she was weak and vulnerable. When she faced the biggest challenge of her life in the form of exile, she overcame her all fears and worked hard to learn witchcraft to attain the power for her survival. Her example is relatable to the strong, independent and successful contemporary woman whose destination is defined by her hard work, dedication and determination. As she states: "For a hundred generations, I had walked the world drowsy and dull, idle and at my ease. I left no prints, I did no deeds. Even those who had loved me a little did not care to stay" (p. 67). Thus, as per her life experience, hard work, willpower, determination and dedication are the only sources to empower women against the patriarchal society.

Furthermore, being a narrator-focalizer, she brings forth her perspective on why she prefers to transform men specifically into pigs. She, further, continues to tell that she wants them to get deprived of the hands with which they assault women. As she states: “It was a humiliation, a debasement. They were sick with longing for their hands, those appendages men use to mitigate the world” (p. 158). Moreover, she felt satisfied to see them changed into pigs who were still regretting their bad deed and their horrible transformation. As she states: “The gate closed after them and they pressed back against the posts, their piggy eyes still wet with the last of their human tears” (p. 157). Thus, her point of view shows her feelings of an empowered woman when she observes the similar helplessness and agony of a molested woman in the eyes of those transformed men into pigs.

In addition, Circe being a narrator-focalizer presents her point of view on the struggle of motherhood. She, further, continues to depict that there is a great appraisal and glory for the heroes and soldiers who fight on the battlefields, but there is the least recognition for women’s struggle as mothers. She expresses her feelings regarding motherhood: “I did not go easy to motherhood. I faced it as soldiers face their enemies, girded and braced, sword up against the coming blows” (p. 195). Moreover, she expresses that for the sake of the kid, she has to sacrifice her identity and skills which were required for her survival: “I thought of all those hours I had spent working my spells, singing, weaving. I felt their loss like a limb torn away. I told myself I even missed turning men to pigs, for at least that I had been good at” (p. 196). It can be said that Circe’s efforts regarding motherhood identify a modern woman’s struggle with motherhood which is regarded as worthless and taken for granted by the patriarchal society. Thus, despite the society, she herself celebrates her motherhood owing to her strength and power as a woman.

In addition, being a narrator-focalizer, Circe puts forward her perspective on how after getting power she got her freedom back which is not easier for a woman to achieve against patriarchy. There is a significant incident in Circe’s life when Circe proclaims her fullest power in front of her father Helios to get her freedom back from years-long exile. Helios appears and Circe demands to end her

exile. On his refusal, she realizes that no one will willingly release her from her exile. Subsequently, she threatens him that she would tarnish his reputation by exposing everything to Zeus. She adds that she would reveal that she had comforted Prometheus when he was being punished and also the Titans' treasonous whispers. To secure her freedom she uses fear to maintain her power: "You know I have stood against Athena. I have walked in the blackest deeps. You cannot guess what spells I have cast, what poisons I have gathered to protect myself against you, how your power may rebound upon your head. Who knows what is in me? Will you find out?" (p. 294). As a result, Helios agreed to end her exile in order to avoid accountability in front of Zeus for not having a check over his daughter. He says: "You have always been the worst of my children," he said. "Be sure you do not dishonor me" (p. 295). Thus, Circe attains her freedom from exile with her strength and power.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to look at Madeline Miller's feminist concerns in her novel that subverts the established mythic image carrying the stereotypical notions of her female protagonist. In the light of the analysis which is carried out at the level of discourse, it is clearly observed that Miller reclaims Circe's empowered and positive character from a wicked and negative portrayal which is established by Greek mythology, with a feminist interest. Despite the fact that Circe has evil powers in the *Odyssey*, she becomes subordinated and humbled by Odysseus. Miller explains this contrast in Circe's character traits and continues to explain that Circe does not become but in reality, is a kind, helpful and hospitable person. Thus, Miller explores new dimensions of Circe's character by reconstructing a new discourse which reclaims a sense of power and agency.

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