

“FEMALE IDENTITY”: REWRITINGS OF GREEK AND BIBLICAL MYTHS  
BY CONTEMPORARY WOMEN WRITERS

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**ABSTRACT****“FEMALE IDENTITY”: REWRITINGS OF GREEK AND BIBLICAL MYTHS  
BY CONTEMPORARY WOMEN WRITERS**

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This study approaches myths as patriarchal narratives and ideological tools and it argues that representations of women from an androcentric perspective in Greek mythology are also observed in the Bible. This study argues that patriarchy as a universal ideology has produced the same gender stereotypes beginning from Ancient Greece. Consequently, Western literature, which has the Classical and Biblical tradition as its main source, has reinforced the same female images throughout its history. Besides, it is suggested that, the Western canon failed to create alternative female models for the binary opposition of submissive wives versus the female evil figure and the main stereotypical characteristics had not been challenged until the emergence of feminist criticism. This study thus aims to discuss myths as one of the foremost sites of the construction of ideological subjects and it analyses the rewritings of Greek, Old Testament and New Testament myths by contemporary women writers in fiction; namely Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand*, Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, India Edghill's *Queenmaker*, Gail Sidonie Sobat's *The Book of Mary* and Michèle Roberts' *The Wild Girl* and it explores the textual strategies that are employed by women writers in order to subvert and revise the patriarchal ideology in myths, to come up with alternative definitions of female identity and to weave gynocentric myths.

Keywords: Myth, ideology, patriarchy, gender roles, rewriting

**ÖZ****“KADIN KİMLİĞİ”: YUNAN, İBRANİ VE HRİSTİYAN MİTLERİNİN  
ÇAĞDAŞ KADIN YAZARLAR TARAFINDAN YENİDEN YAZIMI**

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Bu çalışmada mitler ataerkil ideolojik anlatılar olarak ele alınmış ve Yunan mitlerinde görülen erkek bakış açısı ile tanımlanan kadın kimliğinin Tevrat ve İncil’de de gözlendiği savunulmuştur. Bu tez, ataerkil sistemin evrensel bir ideoloji olarak Antik Yunan’dan başlayarak tarih boyunca aynı cinsel kimlikleri yarattığını öne sürmektedir. Bu durumun bir sonucu olarak da, Klasik Yunan kültürünü, Tevrat ve İncil’i başlıca kaynakları olarak kullanan Batı Edebiyatı, bu erkek odaklı imgelerin yerleşmesinde ve meşruluk kazanmasında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Ayrıca, Batı Edebiyatı kanonunu oluşturan eserlerde, mitlerde görülen, erkeğe baş eğen, düzeni sorgulamayan, sessiz örnek kadın ve bunun karşısına yerleştirilen baştan çıkaran kötü kadın imgesi yüzyıllar boyunca tekrar üretilmiş, farklı kadın modelleri yaratmakta başarısız olunmuş ve bu klişeleşmiş kadın tasvirleri feminist edebiyat eleştirisinin ortaya çıkışına kadar derinliğine sorgulanmamıştır. Bu çalışma, mitleri ideolojik özne yaratmanın en önemli alanlarından biri olarak tartışmayı hedeflemiş ve Yunan mitlerinde, Tevrat ve İncil’de yaratılan kadın figürlerinin günümüz kadın yazarlarınca yeniden nasıl yazıldığını incelemiştir. Bu çerçevede Margaret Atwood’un *The Penelopiad*, Marion Zimmer Bradley’nin *The Firebrand*, Anita Diamant’ın *The Red Tent*, India Edghill’in *Queenmaker*, Gail Sidonie Sobat’ın *The Book of Mary* ve Michéle Roberts’ın *The Wild Girl* adlı eserleri ele alınmış ve yazarların mitlerdeki ataerkil ideolojiyi yıkmak, yeni bir kadın imgesi ve kadın odaklı bir mit yazımı yaratmak için kullandıkları metinsel yöntemler tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mit, ideoloji, ataerkil sistem, cinsel kimlikler, yeniden yazım

To  
My *Babaanne*, my inspiration,  
My Father, my backbone,  
Torsten, *Mein Gefährte, Mein Geliebter, Mein Freund und Mein Mann*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Theoretical Background.....	7
1.1.1 Feminist Criticism.....	7
1.1.2. Simone De Beauvoir.....	11
1.1.3. Kate Millett.....	17
1.1.4. Mary Daly.....	22
1.1.5. Gerda Lerner.....	34
1.1.6 Louis Althusser & Pierre Macherey.....	42
1.2. Methodology.....	47
2. THEORIES OF MYTH.....	51
2.1 A Historical Survey of Definitions and Theories of Myth.....	51
2.2 Feminist Criticism of Myths.....	97
3. REWRITINGS OF GREEK MYTHS.....	125
3.1 Margaret Atwood's <i>The Penelopiad</i> .....	125
3.2 Marion Zimmer Bradley's <i>The Firebrand</i> .....	151
4. REWRITINGS OF OLD TESTAMENT MYTHS.....	182
4.1 Anita Diamant's <i>The Red Tent</i> .....	182
4.2 India Edghill's <i>Queenmaker</i> .....	210
5. REWRITINGS OF NEW TESTAMENT MYTHS.....	236
5.1 Gail Sidonie Sobat's <i>The Book of Mary</i> .....	236

5.2 Michèle Roberts' <i>The Wild Girl</i> .....	259
6. CONCLUSION.....	274
REFERENCES.....	281
APPENDICES	
A. CURRICULUM VITAE.....	303
B. TURKISH SUMMARY.....	307

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

We are, I am, you are  
by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera,  
a book of myths  
in which  
our name do not appear

*Adrienne Rich, Diving into  
the Wreck*

This study will explore myths as ideological tools of patriarchal systems and it will argue that gender stereotypes set in Greek myths have been recreated later in the religious texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Thus, the continuation of gender stereotypes has enhanced the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology. However, encouraged by the feminist movement, women writers especially have attempted to revise and rewrite these myths. In this thesis, some feminist rewritings of Greek myths along with the myths recited in the Old and New Testaments will be analyzed so as to identify the accomplishments of some women writers in their attempt to deconstruct the phallogocentric<sup>1</sup> and phallogocentric<sup>2</sup> pattern of thought created by patriarchal ideology.

One of the foremost figures of radical feminism, Adrienne Rich, in her article “The Kingdom of Fathers”, defines patriarchy as:

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<sup>1</sup> Phallogocentric is “a term relating to the advancement of the masculine as the source of power and meaning through cultural, ideological and social systems” (Gamble, 294).

<sup>2</sup> Phallogocentrism is “a word combining ‘phallogocentrism’ and ‘logocentrism’ which connects patriarchal authority and self-legitimizing systems of thought which define themselves in relation to authoritative centre” (Gamble, 294).

the power of the fathers: a familial- social, ideological, political system in which men- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.... The power of the fathers has been difficult to grasp because it permeates everything, even the language in which we try to describe it. It is diffuse and concrete; symbolic and literal; universal, and expressed with local variations which obscure its universality (1977, 56).

In the analysis of patriarchal ideology, Adrienne Rich and other scholars and critics such as de Beauvoir (1949), Millet (1970), Daly (1968, 1973, 1979) and Lerner (1986) have called attention to its illusive universality. In other words, the submission of women by an androcentric system is attested in almost all cultures and religions. Patriarchy, furthermore, via different institutions such as marriage, motherhood, education, health, media and economics, exercises power on women and continues to oppress them. This unequal practice is so universal and omnipotent that, unfortunately, it is perceived as a “natural fact” by humankind. Yet patriarchy is a historical phenomenon; that is, it was established as an ideology at some point in the past. Therefore, it is a constructed reality which can be questioned, deconstructed and demolished.

In other words, this dissertation will argue that the gender stereotypes established in Greek myths, especially through patriarchal and misogynistic representations of women, continued to exist and were reproduced in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Greek myths constitute the most popular body of myths and their impact on Western culture is tremendous and continuous. After the fall of Ancient Greek culture, the Roman Empire, which became the super power of the ancient world after the Greeks, adopted the whole Greek pantheon by only latinizing the names of the deities. Especially during the Renaissance, when the ancient cultures and texts were recovered and studied, Greek myths gained popularity among the educated public. In the following centuries as well, myths were been widely studied and read and they have provided source material

for the literary works. As such, the impact of Greek myths on the Western consciousness still lingers.

The main source for the study of myths is literature, particularly the works of Homer and Hesiod, which were composed around 700 BC (Blundell, 15). Many myths, Blundell asserts, were created before that time and they were handed down through oral tradition until these two poets wrote them down. Blundell further notes that in the Archaic Period (750- 480 BC) the epic poems and hymns to the gods were the major genres through which myths were circulated. They were performed in cultural and religious gatherings and festivals, banquets, funerals and weddings. Also it must be noted that in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, when dramatists used myths as their tragic subject matter, myths became even more popular. Apart from literary works, myths were reflected on vase painting and relief sculptures, too<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, this archaeological evidence from the era also testifies to the broad circulation of myths. This wide circulation of myths hence, makes myths powerful ideological tools. Consequently, Greek myths give us a general idea about the Greek society's view of women which is apparently patriarchal and even misogynistic.

The exploration of Greek myths reveals that two types of women were created in these religious narratives. On the one hand, women are denied subjecthood and autonomy and they are passive agents in most cases. For instance, in the greatest epics of Western literature, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which are also among the main sources for Greek myths, female figures are always defined in relation to men; they are wives, mothers, slaves, daughters or lovers. Moreover, these women are submissive to patriarchal norms. For instance, Penelope, wife of Odysseus, in the celebrated epic, is pictured as the quintessence of loyalty. She displays the common features of a good wife and woman which are modesty, fidelity, obedience and excellence in domestic jobs according to the patriarchal ideal. In addition to these representations of mortal women through the lens of patriarchy, in the Greek pantheon, the immortals reflect the phallogocentric assumptions of Greek culture; that is, in Greek myths, goddesses, for example

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<sup>3</sup> See Boardman 1985, 1995, 1998, Carpenter 1991, Woodford 2001

Hera, Hestia, Athena and Artemis, are either wives or virgins who are in perfect accord with patriarchal values and customs. Furthermore, despite the fact that these goddesses are depicted as powerful females, their power is masculine in essence. For instance, Athena is born from the head of his father Zeus, fully-armoured and above all her other attributes she is the goddess of war and those who dare to confront her is brutally punished as illustrated in the case the war of Troy. In Greek mythology, on the other hand, those women figures that do not conform to the patriarchal norms are presented as “femme fatales”, “seductresses” or “witches” like figures such as Helen, Circe and Medea. To put it briefly, women in Greek myths are portrayed according to patriarchal assumptions.

Moreover, it can justifiably be argued that myths which are widely distributed and find their reflections in various media, such as literary works, art works and movies, advertisements and magazines in the modern era, are ideological entities in so much as they all reflect the social, cultural and political ideology of the culture in which they originated. Furthermore, the totality of the myths in which women are unmistakably secondary in importance can be considered an evidence of the patriarchal standards of their cultural background. Patriarchy is generally considered as a natural and timeless reality owing to its universality. However, just like myths which echo patriarchy, the patriarchal ideology is also a historical creation and thus, it can be asserted that myths are ideological narratives in which specific gender roles are created. As stated above, the present study, therefore, will assert that myths are ideological narratives of patriarchy that are utilized to justify and perpetuate the gender roles established by this ideology. The analysis of the deconstruction and also the reconstruction of these myths, furthermore, by contemporary women writers is within the scope of this thesis.

Therefore, it can be argued that the negative portrayal of women whose roots go back to Greek mythology has been used in the ideological narratives by patriarchy throughout the centuries. Especially from the Renaissance onwards, Western culture has associated itself with Ancient Greece as its cultural ancestor; therefore, the impact of myths has been tremendous on the consciousness of the

Western world. This representation of women from men's point of view is taken even further by the Christian tradition. Since Christianity accepts the Hebrew Bible as an authoritative text along with the New Testament, Eve and Lilith figures as personifications of female evil in addition to the submissive wife figures of the Old Testament perpetuate the androcentric depiction of women. It can be argued that the notion of virgin goddesses of the Greek myths is mirrored to some extent in the Virgin Mary figure of the New Testament. In short, with Ancient Greek culture, particularly with Greek mythology, the Western world entered under the spell of male-created images and this enchantment has been sustained for ages.

However, following the rise of feminist thought and action, in the 1970's and 80's especially, patriarchal myths have started to be rejected, the "silent and absent" figures in patriarchal narratives are given voice and the marginalized and the suppressed are put under the limelight. The "she-monsters" of the phallogocentric system are now given a "new" and "positive" meaning from a feminine perspective. As Jane Caputi notes these are significant attempts in "the quest to reclaim that symbolizing/naming power to refigure the female self from a gynocentric perspective and create a female oral and visual mythic tradition and use it ultimately to change the world" (425). It is, then, also the aim of this thesis to analyze the reactions of contemporary women writers to the patriarchal corpus of religious texts. For this aim, as stated above, the rewritings of myths by contemporary women writers will be examined from a feminist perspective.

The study of rewritings of literary and religious myths, naturally, calls for a definition of myth. This is, however, problematical as there is no consensus on the definition of the term. *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* gives the definition of "myth" as:

1. a story that people have made up in the past in order to explain how the world and mankind began to justify religious beliefs and social customs. Eg. Medusa was the unfortunate woman in the Greek myth that was loved by the - god of the sea. > used as an uncount noun to refer to myths as a whole. Eg...matriarchies in history, legend, myth. 2. an untrue idea or explanation often used showing disapproval. ... the myth of love at first sight.

As seen above, one of the most prominent dictionaries for English which is probably the most common tool of information for every level of education has set the meaning of the word “myth” as a “purely fictitious narrative”. This term “fictitious” creates the illusion that mythical stories are neutral and gender free tales. The establishment and emphasis of gender roles, nonetheless, in these texts, turn them into ideological tools. This very feature is clouded by the general view that myths are just “tales” about gods, goddesses and heroes.

In academic circles, however, despite the fact that various approaches have been developed by different scholars in order to explain the functions of myths, a clear definition of myth cannot be conceived. In his comprehensive study, *Mythography*, William Doty, after acknowledging the difficulty of proposing a single definition of myth, suggests a “comprehensive and polyphasic” definition of the term as follows:

A mythological corpus consists of a usually complex network of myths that are culturally important, imaginal stories, conveying by means of metaphoric and symbolic diction, graphic imagery, and emotional conviction and participation in the primal, foundational accounts of aspects of the real, experienced world and humankind’s roles and relative statuses within.

Mythologies may convey the political and moral values of a culture and provide systems of interpreting individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include the intervention of supra-human identities as well as aspects of the natural and cultural orders.

Myths may be enacted or reflected in rituals, ceremonies, and dramas and they may provide materials for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes (mythic unites) having merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as folktale, historical legend, novella, or prophecy. (2000, 34)

Yet, as seen above, despite Doty’s sincere intentions, this all-inclusive attempt can not provide a basic working definition either. To illustrate the arduous nature of defining myth, Manfred Frank declares that, “the correct definition of myth exists as little as that of the correct definition of human being itself” (quoted in Doty



2000, 32). The famous myth critic Northrop Frye also notes that “The word myth is used in such a bewildering variety of contexts that anyone talking about it has to say first of all what his chosen context is” (1990, 3). Thus, for the purpose of this study, I propose the definition of myth as: “symbolic narratives that are connected to belief systems or rituals and are undeniably androcentric in content.” The works in this study will be analyzed in the light of feminist theory. The next section, then, will be devoted to providing the theoretical framework of the dissertation, by focusing on those critics whose works establish the basis for this framework.

## **1.1 Theoretical Background**

### **1.1.1 Feminist Criticism**

Like the definition of “myth”, it is also difficult to provide an exact definition for feminist literary criticism. This difficulty is due to the fact that since its emergence in the 1960’s, feminist literary criticism has developed enormously. Consequently, a vast number of approaches have come out. Moreover, as Guerin et al., in their *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, underline, “feminist criticism is a political attack upon other modes of criticism and theory, and because of its social orientation it moves beyond traditional literary criticism” (182). They further assert that one should “refer to ‘feminist approaches’ rather than ‘the’ feminist approach as feminism is concerned with difference and marginalization of women.” Despite the diversity of methodologies, however, there are common issues that are shared by all of the feminist approaches. Maggie Humm, in the Introduction to her *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Feminist Criticism*, summarizes them as follows:

First, the issue of a masculine literary history is addressed by re-examining male texts, noting their patriarchal assumptions and showing the way women in these texts are often represented according to prevailing social, cultural and ideological norms... Second, the invisibility of women writers has been addressed.

Feminist critics have charted a new literary history which gives full weight to the texts of neglected women, and women's oral culture, previously regarded as extra-literary. Third, feminist criticism confronts problems of the 'feminist reader' by offering readers new methods and a fresh critical practice... Fourth, feminist criticism aims to make us act as feminist readers by creating new writing and reading collectives. (8)

In other words, feminist literary criticism is concerned with questions such as how literature represents women and consequently define gender relations, why women writers have been ignored and underestimated by the tradition of literary criticism, how one's gender affects the way that one perceives and interprets literary texts and whether there is a feminine mode of writing or not. As the quotation above illustrates, feminist literary criticism recognizes that literature both reflects culture and shapes it to a certain extent. Literature, therefore, is a very crucial medium that can either perpetuate or help to eliminate the oppression of women.

Humm, in the introduction of her work, outlines the achievements of feminist criticism as well and she writes:

The first and major achievement of feminist criticism was thus to highlight gender stereotyping as an important feature of literary form. The second and equally major achievement of feminist literary criticism was to give reasons for the persistent reproduction of such stereotypes. A third and triumphant success was the discovery of lost and ignored examples of women's literature and a hitherto unnumbered body of women's texts. (9)

Therefore, it can be suggested that to uncover the patriarchal definition and marginalization of women as a category has been one of the main concerns of feminist literary criticism.

As noted above, feminist literary criticism does not have a unified and static method. It has been said that a number of approaches have been developed since 1960 and these approaches are generally described as a series of waves. However, as critics note, there is very little consensus on how these waves are defined. This is also due to the fact that, as mentioned earlier, feminist criticism is

closely related to the Women's Rights Movement. For this reason, the political events and the academic approaches of the feminist movement are sometimes difficult to distinguish. But to put it briefly, according to general consent, the First Wave of Western Feminism strived for equal rights for women, especially in the social, political and economic areas. This wave is best known for suffragette activities. Then, it would not be wrong to say that the First Wave is a political one rather than an academic one. The Second Wave or Radical Feminism of the 1970s and 1980s focuses on women's otherness, the definition and analysis of patriarchy and the oppression of women, and finally, the literary representation of women. In other words, Second Wave Feminism concentrates on the ways in which women are represented according to prevailing social, cultural, and ideological norms. Radical Feminists, therefore, argue that cultural and literary representations are the reflections of a social and economic system. This wave also declares that gender is not a biologically given feature but instead, it is a socially constructed category. To put it in another way, gender, for Radical Feminists, is the socially produced attributes of masculinity and femininity. They, moreover, argue that the oppression of women is the most fundamental and universal form of domination. The New York RedStocking Manifesto in 1960 summarizes the Radical Feminist position as:

Women are the oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labour. We are considered inferior beings whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives... we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition... the conflicts between individual men and women are *political* conflicts that can only be solved collectively... We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination... All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from supremacy. All men have oppressed women... (qtd. in Bryson, 184)

The key texts of this wave include Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Mary Ellman's *Thinking about Women* (1968), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Eva Figes' *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970), Shulamith Firestone's *The*

*Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980).

Third Wave Feminism, sometimes known as postfeminism appeared in the late 1980s. As the name suggests this movement adopts postmodernist and poststructuralist theories. Unlike the Second Wave which considers gender as a cultural construction, the Third Wave feminists reject gender as a stable identity. Judith Butler, for instance, in her influential work *Gender Trouble* calls gender a continuous "performance" repeated daily and suggests that gender identities are fluid and multiple (128-144). Poststructuralist feminist theory, thus, rejects "woman" as a category. It argues that society creates sex as well as gender (Butler 1990, 1993, Haraway 1991, Braidotti 1994). In other words, poststructuralist feminist critics, drawing from the works of Michel Foucault, particularly *The History of Sexuality* (1976-1984), suggest that sex is not a biological category but a historical notion.

As stated earlier, this dissertation contends that myths are patriarchal narratives. In this context, then, gender stereotypes are established in these myths according to patriarchal assumptions. This representation of women through a male defined system, consequently, has been reproduced in various media and literature, throughout centuries and the perpetuation of patriarchy has been, thus, enhanced. As discussed above, patriarchy as an ideological system, the category of woman as the Other and the portrayal of women and the definition of gender relations in narratives are the central issues of Radical Feminism. For the purpose of this study, therefore, a radical feminist approach will be employed in the analysis of the texts. Accordingly, those figures that are associated with this approach will provide the theoretical background of this present study. Those are: Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Mary Daly and Gerda Lerner. Marxist critic Louis Althusser will also be referred to, as his seminal essay, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, provides us with the key terms for the study of ideology as a concept. Then, before the methodology of this dissertation is

presented, the coming sections of this chapter are devoted to those theoreticians and critics mentioned above.

### 1.1.2. Simone de Beauvoir

The first important work that argues the marginalization of women is, without doubt, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). Simone de Beauvoir, therefore, is rightly called 'the architect of the second wave feminism' (Humm, 36). Although *The Second Sex* was written almost half a century ago, the questions and the argument raised by de Beauvoir in her groundbreaking work still remain valid and significant as well. In the Introduction to her book, de Beauvoir expresses the subject position of women in a patriarchal world as follows:

A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. (15)

*The Second Sex* provides an intensive survey of the origins and the perpetuation of the patriarchal oppression of women. For de Beauvoir, gender is a construction. She argues that gender construction in the Western world starts early in history. She traces women's oppression to the invention of tools, which became the exclusive province of men. According to her, during the early stages of history, men, as physically stronger beings, were better adapted to heavy manual work such as fishing, hunting and fighting (94). At this stage, de Beauvoir notes, women were confined to the house to take care of their children and their housework. "Pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation", de Beauvoir writes, "reduced their capacity to work and made them wholly dependent upon the men for protection and food" (94). Men, consequently, had more freedom to invent social, intellectual and political systems of thought and thus devoted their energy and time to setting up a new civilization. All the institutions of Western culture,

then, were determined and founded by men from a male perspective. Men hence, have positioned themselves as the sole beings responsible for all aspects of public life and accordingly, women have been confined to a marginalized position in society. In other words, historically, the marginalization of women goes back to the early stages of human history according to de Beauvoir.

De Beauvoir also points out that the Western society is constructed to perpetuate patriarchal ideology and women have been kept in an inferior position (113-171). This persistence of patriarchal ideology throughout history has, unsurprisingly, enabled men to assume that they have the right to maintain women in a subordinate state, and many women, hence, have internalized this position. Consequently, both men and women perpetuate patriarchy, which, for de Beauvoir, is the core reason why patriarchy has continued to exist until today as an ideology. To put it in another way, as patriarchy is universalized by men and internalized by women, it has become transparent and natural.

With her most famous dictum, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman”, de Beauvoir declares that there is no pre-established female nature or essence (295). De Beauvoir acknowledges certain biological sexual differences between men and women; yet she is totally against the valuing of these differences and the usage of these value judgments to justify the oppression of women. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir also claims that women have been alienated from their bodies and they have been confined to traditional roles of wife and mother. For de Beauvoir, then, marriage and motherhood were artificially promoted as the most important roles for women in a society and this has been inscribed in the laws, customs, beliefs and culture of patriarchal society (445-568). De Beauvoir asserts that there is no essential femininity and, therefore, there is no such thing as a maternal instinct. These two concepts, for Beauvoir, are the fabrications of patriarchy to marginalize woman in life.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir is also concerned with how femininity has been conceptualized and how women became the Other as an ontological category. She observes:

For him [man] she [woman] is the sex- absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other. (16)

De Beauvoir, furthermore, claims that the Other is usually set up by individuals or groups who need a foil in an inferior position to define themselves as superior (17). The Other, then, never exists as a wholly autonomous entity in its own terms. De Beauvoir refuses any biological essentialism about both genders and declares that throughout history, “woman” has been constructed as man’s Other and consequently, she is denied an autonomous existence. In other words, de Beauvoir argues that throughout history, men have oppressed women to justify their own existence. She writes: “No group ever set itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other against itself” (17). Then, for de Beauvoir, women are defined as absolute Other to men who position themselves as universal objects. De Beauvoir further claims that unlike Jewish people or black people, women could not establish a minority group identity to raise consciousness and fight for equal rights. Women, in other words, are seen as a natural biological category without any distinctive identity. She writes:

They [women] have no past, no history, no religion of their own. They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, homework, economic condition and social standing to certain men- fathers or husbands- more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women, if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not negro women... The bond that unites her [woman] to her oppressor, is not comparable to any other. The division of sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. (19)

As seen above, de Beauvoir thus contends that gender is a social construction. Moreover, according to her, woman’s relation to her body has also been defined by patriarchal norms. She claims that a passive female body image is created by patriarchy and this very image is accentuated with gender myths and stereotypes; “they did invent her” she writes (218). Woman’s body, thus, is objectified by

man. As a result, women cannot have a personal experience and perception of their bodily images; they experience and define their bodies always in relation to the patriarchal image of the female body. De Beauvoir argues that since all cultural representations – myth, religion, literature or popular culture – are the work of men, then women internalize these images and definitions and, thus, they start to “dream the dreams of men” (290). Myths, de Beauvoir maintains, are the pivotal tools of patriarchy in their indoctrination. In her discussion of myths, she underlines the complexity of defining myths as follows: “It is always difficult to describe a myth; it cannot be grasped or encompassed; it haunts the human consciousness without ever appearing before it in fixed form.” She continues to comment as follows:

The myth is so various, so contradictory that at first its unity is not discerned: Delilah and Judith, Aspasia, and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena- woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is an idol, a servant, a source of life, a power of darkness; she is the elemental silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip, and falsehood; she is healing presence and sorceress; she is man’s prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his *raison d’etre*. (175)

As the above passage indicates, woman’s Otherness is also constituted through myths. Women in the myths are presented from a male perspective and they form an ontological category by which men can justify their existence; in de Beauvoir’s words, women turn out to be men’s *raison d’etre*. Myths, then, are patriarchal narratives. Simone de Beauvoir, in the section called *The Myth of Woman in Five Authors*, analyzes the female images in the works of Montherlant, D.H. Lawrence, Claudel, Breton and Stendhal and she notes that the Otherness of women is indisputably attested in the female characters in these works and she concludes:

For each of them the ideal woman will be she who incarnates most exactly the Other capable of revealing him to himself. Montherlant, the solar spirit, seeks pure animality in her, Lawrence, the phallicist, asks her to sum up the feminine sex in general; Claudel defines her as a soul-sister, Breton cherishes Melusine, rooted in nature, pinning his hope on the woman-child; Stendhal wants his mistress intelligent, cultivated, free in spirit



and behaviour: an equal. But the sole earthly destiny reserved for the equal, the woman-child, the soul sister, the woman-sex, the woman animal is always man! (281)

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir also reflects upon the psychoanalytic theories of female sexuality (71-83). De Beauvoir harshly criticizes Freud and his account of female sexuality, namely the “Electra complex”, saying that Freud fails to produce a theory for female sexuality. She argues that Freud’s model of female sexuality is essentially male; therefore a girl can only consider herself as a mutilated male body according to this theory. Besides, de Beauvoir objects to the penis- envy theory. She suggests that in patriarchal society, the girl actually envies the privileges that are brought by the possession of the penis, not the actual organ. In other words, the connotations placed upon the penis cause a sense of inferiority in girls. In her analysis of gender roles and sexualities, de Beauvoir also underlines the fact that girls and boys are rewarded or punished according to how successfully they conform to the desired models of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. That is, in their childhood boys are encouraged to be active and aggressive while girls are expected to be passive and submissive; “to be feminine is to appear weak, futile, docile”, de Beauvoir declares (359). She further argues that, eventually this early indoctrination of gender roles will continue to present itself in their adulthoods and in this way patriarchy is perpetuated incessantly. Yet, de Beauvoir also diagnoses that men are not the only party that is responsible for the creation of patriarchy and the oppression of women since women readily accept these gender roles that are determined for them. De Beauvoir, thus, contends that freedom is difficult for women as they lack the privileges of men in a society. Women, however, like men, are potentially free beings who are responsible for their own lives. For de Beauvoir, women should not be content with easy answers that are provided by society such as marriage and motherhood. Instead, they must become economically free and politically aware of their situation and above all women must aim to be independent individuals that realize themselves.

In conclusion, *The Second Sex* is a seminal work in any discussion of patriarchy. Mary Daly outlines the influence of de Beauvoir's work, which she identifies as an example of Be-Friending, as follows:

In the late 1940s the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's great feminist work, *The Second Sex*, made possible dialogue among women about their lives. For many years this work functioned as an almost solitary beacon for women seeking to understand the *connections* among the oppressive evils they experienced, for they came to understand the fact of otherness within patriarchal society. There were other feminist works in existence, of course, but these were not really accessible, even to the 'educated' women. *The Second Sex* helped to generate an atmosphere in which women could utter their thoughts, at least to themselves. Some women began to make applications and to seek out less accessible sources, many of which had gone out of print. Most important was the fact that de Beauvoir, by breaking the silence, partially broke the Terrible Taboo. Women were Touched, physically and e-motionally. Many women, thus re-awakened, began to have conversations, take actions, write articles- even during the dreary fifties. (2001, 374)

In other words, de Beauvoir has paved the way for the discussion of woman's marginalization and the perpetuation of patriarchy with the help of cultural representations and myths with her comprehensive analysis of woman as "The Other". But perhaps the most important of the many issues touched upon in de Beauvoir's study is that of women's involvement in shaping centuries of an oppressive ideology. Parallel to her existentialist worldview, de Beauvoir believes that women have been exploited throughout history, but they, on the other hand, have also permitted to be exploited. In other words, accepting patriarchy as the natural given is an instance of "bad faith" according to de Beauvoir. She, then, asks women to take control of their own lives and stop blaming men and patriarchy as the sole responsible agents for their exploitation.

### 1.1.3. Kate Millett

Kate Millett is another influential figure in the field of feminist literary theory and criticism. Her controversial book *Sexual Politics*, in which she merges feminist cultural criticism and literary analysis, has been one of the key texts of radical feminism. Millett's major contribution to the women's movement was that the feminist concept of patriarchy was first set out systemically in her work (Bryson, 185). Her work provides a powerful historical, social, political and cultural analysis of patriarchy. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that *Sexual Politics* has established an agenda for radical feminism.

In *Sexual Politics*, Millett declares that patriarchy is a universal ideology and it is so omnipresent that it appears to be natural and transparent. Our world, Millett believes, despite the geographical, racial and religious differences, is a patriarchal world. She asserts:

However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power.

This is so because our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once, if one recalls that military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance- in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hand. As the essence of politics is power, such realization cannot fail to carry impact. (25)

Moreover, for Millett, the personal relationships between men and women are fundamentally political (23). That is, the relationship between sexes is based on the ownership of power. These personal interactions, therefore, are based on patriarchal assumptions. According to Millett, gender roles are created by patriarchy and the continuation of these rules is also sustained by this ideology. She notes that patriarchy continually reduces women to a secondary position to justify men's superior position and this ideological oppression is maintained by various means by patriarchy (26). Giving the example of Nazi Germany, Millett

claims that patriarchy and racism are very closely related (159-161). Millett goes on to suggest that patriarchy, more than anything else, is a kind of racism since in any racist regime, the relationship between groups is essentially hierarchical, consisting of the oppressor and the oppressed.

Like de Beauvoir, Millett argues that the suppression of woman is not determined by biological differences (27). For Millett, also, the hierarchical order of sexes is a cultural construction. Womanhood, Millett points out, is associated with motherhood and submission. Women, thus, are reduced to their reproductive abilities, and deprived of any other identity. Millett observes that while men are associated with “aggression, intelligence, force and efficacy” women are related to “passivity, ignorance, docility, ‘virtue’, and ineffectuality” (26). As de Beauvoir remarks in *The Second Sex*, Millett too, maintains that early in their lives boys are encouraged to be aggressive and active while girls are prepared to be wives and mothers. This early indoctrination of gender roles later continues and is reinforced in the educational and social system. According to Millett, then, family is the main institution of patriarchy (33). In other words, family, as the major agent of socialization, is the place where children are first exposed to the expectations and values of the patriarchal society.

Millett goes on to argue that romantic love is another patriarchal tool for the manipulation of women (37). This romantic ideal strengthens woman’s dependency on men and as a result the oppressed and object status of woman is hidden behind the mask of “romantic love”. Accordingly, the perpetuation of patriarchy is attained and continued.

The other point Millett observes in the patriarchal world is that patriarchy by means of clever strategies, holds back any female alliance. In this way, as de Beauvoir also notes above, women cannot succeed in establishing a class of their own and fight for their rights like any other minority groups. Millett elaborates:

One of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron, and in the present between career woman and housewife. One envies the other her ‘security’ and prestige while the envied yearns beyond the confines of

respectability for what she takes to be other's freedom, adventure, and contact with the great world. Through the multiple advantages of the double standard, the male participates in both worlds, empowered by his superior social and economic resources to play the estranged women against each other as rivals.(38)

Women, thus, manipulated by the patriarchal ideology, are made rivals to each other. The categories of this rivalry, Millett continues to comment, are also patriarchal, such as age, beauty and virtue (38). Having failed to develop a collective body of resistance, then, women continue to depend on men for their existence.

In the economic sphere, Millett emphasizes the fact that the job opportunities for women are very limited (39). The available jobs, moreover, are low in status and money. In addition, women have never been paid for housework, since it is considered as the natural duty of women by the patriarchal world order.

As noted earlier, Millett declares that patriarchy is a form of ideological control. And similar to de Beauvoir, Millett also argues that women have internalized patriarchal images of womanhood. The ideological control of woman by patriarchy, for Millett, is attested in the legal penalties for women's adultery, lack of abortion rights, rape in the personal sphere and its cultural equivalent, pornography (43-46). On the topic of the perpetuation of patriarchy, in contrast to de Beauvoir, Millett believes that patriarchy is so universal and ubiquitous that women are only victims, not active agents. Bryson notes that this statement is found profoundly pessimistic by some scholars and the victim position of women also implies that women are essentially good and men are essentially bad (29). Yet, it can be argued that once women become conscious of the patriarchal strategies and institutions, they can reclaim power and fight against them.

Discussing the religious and literary myths of the Western world, Millett writes:

Under patriarchy the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture in regard to the female were also of male design. The image of women as

we know it, is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. (46)

Millett, thus, observes that patriarchy is, above all, an ideological institution which defines and controls women with man-made images. She, furthermore, considers myth as a patriarchal propaganda, “since it so often bases its arguments on ethics or theories of origins” (51). She continues:

The two leading myths of western culture are the classical tale of Pandora’s Box and the Biblical story of the Fall. In both cases earlier male concepts of feminine evil have passed through a final literary phase to become highly influential ethical justifications of things as they are. (51)

In other words, myths are ideological narratives of patriarchy. The misogynistic negative image of women is reflected in them and as these mythical accounts are used to explain the “ethics or theories of origins” they, then, reinforce the patriarchal assumption of female as essentially evil. Western patriarchal culture, as a result, utilizing these myths, has always associated women with evil. This negative perception of women has been so deeply placed in the Western world’s psyche that this misogyny became the reason for one of the most brutally organized crimes of the world history: namely “witch craze” or “witch hunts” of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In the last section of her book, entitled “The Literary Reflection”, Kate Millett exposes the patriarchal assumptions of a number of literary texts (235-362). Millett, in her analysis of the literary works of Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, Jean Genet and D. H. Lawrence, contends that all these writers in their works reflect male domination as a natural fact. Humm notes that in the analyzed texts, male values such as ‘violence, sexuality and the cash nexus’ are given as the features of the universal human condition (45). Besides, the relationships between the sexes in the works of these writers are also in accordance with patriarchal ideology. In other words, these writers associate deviance and passivity with femininity. Recognizing the fictional nature of these representations, Millett declares that literary works also function as a tool of patriarchy to objectify

women. Furthermore, these literary depictions, in the same manner as myths, serve as a model for men and women to experience and internalize gender roles. In this regard, for Millett, one cannot separate literature from the culture that produces it.

To sum up, *Sexual Politics* is a groundbreaking work in the history of feminist theory and criticism. As Sue Thornham notes, Millet's account of patriarchy "as a system of institutionalized oppression maintained by ideological means" was a turning point in the history of feminist thinking (37). In addition, Millett's vigorous social, historical and literary analysis of this phenomenon has paved the way for the future generations of feminist scholars. Millett, however, was criticized in the 1990s by postmodern feminists for presenting patriarchy as a static and universal ideology (Butler 1990; hooks 1984; Spivak 1987). Yet, Millett's contribution to the field is undeniable. Moreover, it should be noted that in order to explore patriarchy in a regional, ethnic or class framework, one needs a general definition of patriarchy to work from. Furthermore, the works of postmodern feminists also show that patriarchy or the oppression of women is, in fact, a universal and transhistorical phenomenon. It only adapts different techniques in different epochs, cultures, yet they are interconnected. In addition, recent feminist theorists also underline the fact that society today is fundamentally structured around women's oppression by men (Bryson 29). Moreover, one can suggest in the psyche of Western culture, Judeo-Christian tradition and iconography are deeply rooted.

The other point that later feminist critics remark on is that Kate Millett could not give a compelling explanation for the origins of patriarchy and therefore *Sexual Politics* could not suggest a strategy to end it (Bryson 29). For this accusation, Spender comments: "We don't need definite evidence of the first cause to know that men have power, that they have had it for a very long time, that they seem to have had it in every known society, and that they now use it to keep their power" (1985, 42).

Lastly, Toril Moi criticizes Millett by saying that her remarks on patriarchy are "obviously deeply influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's pioneering

analysis in *The Second Sex*, but this debt is never acknowledged by Millett who makes only two tangential references to de Beauvoir's essay" (25). However, suffice it to say, the interdisciplinary approach of Millett's *Sexual Politics* along with de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* have expanded the horizon of feminist criticism. Also with both de Beauvoir's and Millett's work the representation of 'woman' as a category in literature was given new meaning. Moreover, Millett's vivid style is celebrated by huge audiences and it still energizes readers. And unfortunately, after almost three decades, the ills of patriarchy which were diagnosed by Millett in her book, are still valid and continue to operate. Last but not least, the phrase "sexual politics" became a part of feminist discourse. In other words, it can be asserted that, Millett with her pioneering work has set an agenda for women's studies which has by no means been exhausted yet.

#### **1.1.4. Mary Daly**

Daly, another leading figure in Radical Feminism, is a philosopher, theologian, and political activist. In her early works *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968) and *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973) Daly focuses on the Christian Church, in particular the Catholic Church, as one of the cornerstones of all oppressive patriarchal social institutions. In other words, according to Daly, the Christian Church is a fundamentally sexist and patriarchal institution. In her analysis, Daly observes that the Church objectifies women either demonizing (e.g. Eve) or idolizing them (e.g. Virgin Mary). In her first book *The Church and the Second Sex*, echoing de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which she highly admires, Daly proposes an equality of the sexes within the Christian Church. Influenced by Existentialism, Daly calls for a genderless concept of the divine which can be accessed and experienced by every individual. She, thus, contemplates a new, genderless definition of God that will enable a "human becoming" (40).

In *Beyond God the Father*, Daly, further declares that the God figure in Christianity is a static, despotic and most of all a male figure (13). Daly continues



to argue that this father figure is at the heart of a system of symbols that are utilized to oppress women. She, furthermore, underlines the fact that in Judeo-Christian tradition the prophet, Jesus Christ, is male as well (1995, 4). Women, hence, Daly declares, become an outcast group in religion. To put it briefly, in de Beauvoir's words, they become the Other. This religious subjugation, then, justifies all other forms of social, racial, economic, and political oppression. Also in the book, Daly notes that patriarchal categories which are set up through language act as "a kind of gang rape" on woman's body and mind (1995,152). This symbolic categorization of women, thus, further objectifies and victimizes women. Therefore, it can be concluded that, like de Beauvoir and Millett, Daly, too, maintains that women and their bodies are defined by men according to patriarchal values, customs and assumptions.

Once more, like de Beauvoir, Daly declares that after thousands of years of male domination women have internalized the patriarchal ideal of femininity. In this regard, the definition of women through male-oriented lenses is considered as a natural fact. The perpetuation of patriarchy, then, is enhanced. Therefore, Daly points out that if women want to realize their own womanhood and individuality, they must strip away patriarchal assumptions about women. Women, then, must leave the internalized otherness to become authentic subjects. Yet, Daly admits this is not an easy task; she writes: "This is the courage to *see* and to *be* in the face of nameless anxieties that surface when a woman begins to see through the masks of sexist society and to confront the horrifying fact of her alienation from her authentic self" (1995, 4). As the quotation illustrates, this is a daring act. Nonetheless, only by refusing the patriarchal society and the "patriarchal false naming" can women establish a new self.

In the later works, such as *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1979) and *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (1984), Daly shifts her focus to the analysis of the male-biased linguistic structures that perpetuate patriarchy. In her seminal work *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly explains her aim in writing the book as follows: "This book is primarily concerned with the

mind/spirit/body pollution inflicted through patriarchal myth and language at all levels” (1991, 9). And she goes on to explain the title of her book as:

I am using the Gyn/Ecology very loosely, that is, freely, to describe the science that is the process of knowing, of “loose” women who chose to be subjects and not mere objects of enquiry. Gyn/Ecology is by and about women a-mazing all the male authored “sciences of womankind”, and weaving world tapestries of *our own kind*. That is it is about dis-covering, de-veloping the complex web of living/loving relationships *of our own kind*. It is about women loving, creating our Selves, our cosmos. It is dis-possessing our Selves, enspiriting our Selves, hearing the call of the wild, naming our wisdom, spinning and weaving world tapestries out of genesis and demise. (1991,10)

As the above passage indicates, Daly proposes a “woman defined woman” system as opposed to a “man defined woman” one. It can be observed that Daly places the emphasis on the “Self” realizing its full potential and at the same time establishing a new tradition of woman-centered rhetoric. As noted earlier, Daly declares that women have been trapped into patriarchal categories. In this categorization, moreover, as the power of naming is under the privilege of men, gender roles are defined by patriarchy. To illustrate this, Daly points out that femininity is a “man-made construct, having essentially nothing to do with femaleness” (1991, 68). Then, Daly asserts that women should not be doomed to such categories, but instead, they should subvert language and construct new categories; categories of their own. To become whole, Daly goes on to suggest, women have to strip away patriarchal categories of gender. She rejects androgyny, saying that it is a patriarchal notion, and prioritizes the “wild female” concept, which is, for Daly, beyond any category of masculinity and femininity (1991, 343-346).

Daly defines the journey of women in the process of becoming as “the discovery and creation of a world other than patriarchy” (1991, 1). In this context, it is worth noting that, like de Beauvoir’s concept of woman, for Daly as well, being a woman is not a state, it is, however, an ongoing process. “To be” Daly asserts has to be taken “as an active verb” (1991, 340). Daly, in *Pure Lust*, further

remarks that “Self is an essence in motion, a be-ing continually constructed through the interweavings of myth and language, a be-ing participating in Be-ing” (1991, 160-61). In other words, Daly replaces the static God of patriarchy with women who have “active potency/power to create and to transform, to render present in time and space” (2001, 149)

Daly, in the “Second Section” of *Gyn/Ecology*, subtitled as *The Sado-Ritual Syndrome: The Re-enactment of Goddess Murder*, claims that Chinese foot-binding, witch-burning, the Hindu suttee, female circumcision and gynecology are all forms of patriarchal mutilation or “Deadly Deception through Male Myth” (107-312). All these customs or practices, according to Daly, aim to dominate women. Patriarchy, Daly argues, also works through theology, metaphysics, and language. All these institutions, therefore, reflect the patriarchal and misogynistic agenda. To put it in another way, women are victimized in every sphere of life which is in fact controlled by patriarchy. In accordance with de Beauvoir and Millett before her, Daly, too, points to the prevalence of patriarchy. She states that “patriarchy is itself the prevailing religion of the entire planet” (1991, 39). Thus, it oppresses all women regardless of religion, ethnic origin and class. Nevertheless, due to the fact that patriarchy is presented as the natural order of life by social, cultural, political, biological and religious establishments across the world, this biased ideology continues to survive. Daly further observes that the only role models available to women are those crafted by patriarchy. Sometimes, Daly has been criticized for being essentialist, racist or separatist due to her generalizing definition of patriarchy. African American critic Audre Lorde, in *An Open Letter to Daly*, writes that, like Daly, she believes that women are oppressed regardless of their ethnic and racial origins; yet, she argues that Daly’s standpoint ignores the differences. Lorde asserts that Daly has written too little about the African genital mutilation and she also asks Daly to write on not only the similarities but also the differences between African mutilation, Chinese footbinding and American gynecology. She continues: “To imply that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tool of patriarchy” (1991, 67). This attack however, seems a little

unfair. As Daly comments in the “Introduction” to the second edition of *Gyn/Ecology*, for her patriarchy is a universal ideology which is exercised in different forms and degrees. Daly also notes that she had no intention of prioritizing patriarchal practices. Indeed, she explains that she exposes them to illustrate the universality of this ideology and thus, is trying to raise consciousness among women for uniting and fighting back. She writes: “I regret any pain that unintended omission may have caused others, particularly women of colour, as well as myself. The writing of *Gyn/Ecology* was for me an act of Biophilic Bonding with women of all races and classes, under the varying oppression of patriarchy” (1991, xxxiii). It may, however, be argued that this criticism, very much in the same manner as those directed to Kate Millett, is not a productive political move, either. To find who is oppressed more should not be the main concern of feminism; instead, women of different origins should form a class themselves, which de Beauvoir, in particular, observes as the major lacking feature of women’s history.

“To exist humanly is to name the self, the world, and god”, Daly writes (1995, 8). Since Adam, men have named, thus they have power. Language, then, is political and fundamentally patriarchal; it brings power and control. Language, according to Daly, then, as seen above, is gendered; Western language, in particular, is male- oriented. For Daly, patriarchal language, which she calls “The Lie”, silences and traps women (2001, 51). In the following passage, she explains her claim as:

Women’s minds have been mutilated and muted to such a state that ‘Free Spirit’ has been branded into them as a brand name for girdles and bras rather than as the name of our verb-ing, be-ing Selves. Such brand names brand women ‘Morons’. Moronized, women believe that male-written texts (biblical, literary, medical, legal, scientific) are ‘true’. Thus, manipulated, women become eager for acceptance as docile tokens mouthing male texts, employing technology for male ends, accepting male fabrications as the true texture of reality. Patriarchy has stolen our cosmos and returned it in the form of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and cosmetics. They have made up our cosmos, our Selves. (1991, 5)

Language, moreover, according to Daly, is one of the main media of patriarchy to maintain its hegemony. In this sense, she further points out that, language codifies, fixes and perpetuates the patriarchal status quo. In other words, seemingly natural or innocent terms in language all carry hidden patriarchal connotations. Daly, moreover, recognizes the fact that power and “reality” are constructed through language. Women, thus, must ask for the destabilization of patriarchal language. Daly believes that “gynomorphic” language, instead of patriarchal language, will bring a new awareness, it will also create a new female Self, unlike the patriarchal Other. As a result, in her oeuvre, Daly attempts to depose the phallogocentric language through etymological constructions and intends to invent a new vocabulary for women. She comments as follows: “It is the essential task of metaethics to examine and analyze this language, untangling the snarls of sentence structure, unveiling deceptive words, exposing the bag of semantic tricks intended to entrap woman” (112).

Thus, Daly suggests that a new alternative and subversive language can be created by unmasking the patriarchal assumptions of words and then by reversing terms such as “hag”, “crone” and “spinster” and loading them with positive connotations about womanhood. To realize this project, in 1987, with Jane Caputi, Daly wrote a dictionary which is entitled *Webster’s First Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*. In this “Metapatriarchal” dictionary, patriarchal language is scrutinized and consecutively reconstructed through etymological investigation, alliteration, linguistic invention, and mythological association. This same attempt for dislocating patriarchal language and replacing it with a woman-oriented one is attested in every work by Daly. Daly, then, analyses the terms such as hag, crone, spinster, fury, harpy, lesbian, which have negative connotations in patriarchal language, and turns them into positive stereotypes, terms that she calls “woman-identified woman”. To this end, Daly coins the word *Spinning* that is the unmasking of the patriarchal symbols and syntax and consequently replacing them with female-oriented positive connotations. This journey, according to Daly, is an ongoing journey and does not move in a linear way in time but works in the past, present and future simultaneously (1991,1). In other words, women destroying the

patriarchal symbolic system can build a new present and a new future. This “Amazon voyage” is a process of “women becoming” and as mentioned above, Daly tells that it is “very much an Otherworld Journey. It is both discovery and creation of a world other than patriarchy” (*Gyn*, 1). Daly, thus, proposes a world outside of patriarchy; a new self, rather than the self defined by patriarchy. For example, Daly *spins* the word Hag as follows:

*Hag* is from an Old English word meaning harpy, witch. Webster’s gives us the first and “archaic” meaning of hag as “a female demon: Fury, Harpy”. It also formerly meant “an evil or frightening spirit”. (Lest this sound too negative, we should ask the relevant questions: “Evil” by whose definition? Frightening to whom?) A third archaic definition of *hag* is “nightmare”. (The important question is: Whose nightmare?) *Hag* is also defined as “an ugly and evil-looking old woman”. But this, considering the source, may be considered a compliment. For the beauty of strong, creative women is “ugly” by misogynistic standards of “beauty”. The look of female-identified women is “evil” to those who fear us. As for “old” ageism is a feature of phallic society. For women who have transvaluated this, a Crone is one who should be an example of strength, courage of wisdom. (1991, 15)

In addition, Daly, calls *Gyn/Ecology* an example of *Hag-ography* (1991, 14-17) Instead of the term hagiography, the biography of saints, she proposes *Hag-ography* that she defines as women-identified type of writing. Daly asserts that patriarchy records the lives of women either as “pornography” or “hagiography”. Underlining the categorization of women as “bitches/saints”, Daly, then, maintains that women need a women-oriented historiography.

As mentioned earlier, Daly agrees with de Beauvoir on the fact that women have neither a history nor a religion of their own. She, therefore, proposes a gynocentric language and re-visioning. *Gynocentrism* is essential for Daly, as women have been denied the power to name. As a method of writing, she explains the term as follows:

Gynocentric writing means risking. Since the language and style of patriarchal writing simply cannot contain or carry the energy of women’s exorcism and ecstasy, in this book, I invent, discover, re-member. At times I make up words (such as

gynaesthesia for women's synaesthesia). Often I unmask deceptive words by dividing them and employing alternate meanings for prefixes (for example, recover actually says 'cover again') I also unmask their hidden reversals, often by using the less known or 'obsolete' meanings (for example, glamour as used to name a witch's power). Sometimes I simply invite the reader to listen to words in a different way, (for example, de-light)... Sometimes I reject words that I think are inauthentic, obscuring women's existence and masking the conditions of our oppression (for example, chairperson). (1991, 24)

Therefore, Daly asks women to take the initiative in *Feminist Naming*. She believes that every woman, gaining awareness, will develop her own gynocentric discourse. Daly argues that women must take the power of naming by employing subversive strategies; moreover, they can create their own sex-specific discourses, which would make it possible for women to name themselves. Women, hence, will be able to Name themselves. In this way, Daly suggests, patriarchal language and myths will be dislocated. To put it another way, supposedly neutral discourse, consequently, will be challenged and a women's discourse will be achieved.

In addition to those verbal inventions as *dis-cover*, *re-member* and *spinning*, Daly, in her works, uses *Prehistory* instead of herstory. In a footnote, she notes that the word "herstory" "implies a desire parallel to the record of men's achievement. It fails because it imitates male history" (24). Moreover, she uses the pronoun "we" for women whenever available in order to declare her identification with women. The instances she uses "they" are either to refer to the women of the past, or to emphasize her separation from certain groups. She argues that pronouns are "profoundly personal and political" (25); thus her choice of pronouns reflects her political agenda.

Capitalization is another aspect of Daly's gynocentric writing. She clarifies her method as follows:

I consistently capitalize Spinster, just as one normally capitalizes Amazon. I capitalize Lesbian when the word is used in its women- identified (correct sense), but use the lower case when referring to the male-distorted version reflected in media. Self is capitalized when I am referring to the authentic centre of

woman's process, while the imposed/internalized 'self', the shell of the Self, is in lower case. (1991, 25-26)

Daly's subversive utilization of punctuation marks also creates a rupture in the language which makes the reader reconsider the meaning and the etymology of the words. Daly, with her unique discourse and style, has become a Spinning woman herself, *unweaving* the patriarchal language and logic. With this re-versing style, then, Daly asks her readers to read and think with gender awareness. Daly, moreover expresses that, unlike patriarchal scholarship, she uses "women's experiences, past and present" as her primary sources. Her secondary sources are male authored texts from a variety of fields. Daly notes that she utilizes the latter to "expose their limitations, to display and exorcise their deceptions" or she uses them as "springboards" (1991, 27). However, Daly highlights the fact that she is always conscious that these male texts are written from misogynistic and patriarchal points of view. "Most of these books and articles", she writes, "were written at the expense of women, whose energies were drained and ideas freely and shamelessly taken over" (1991, 27).

Daly, furthermore, identifies "male methods of mystification" and tells "A-mazing" Amazons to beware. In *Beyond God the Father*, she identifies four mystification strategies of patriarchy (5). To begin with, there is *trivialization*. Here, women's problems are trivialized by giving emphasis to other problems such as wars, poverty, racism. Daly notes that women are asked: "Are you on that subject of women again when there are so many important problems- like war, racism, pollution of the environment" (1995, 5). In this way, the major issues of feminism are put into the background. The other strategy is *particularization*. This mystification method tends to focus on a certain aspect of women's problem to cloud the universal oppression of women. For example, Daly notes: "One hears: Oh, that is a Catholic problem. The Catholic Church is so medieval!" "One would imagine", Daly writes, "to listen to this, that there is no patriarchy anywhere else" (1995, 5). The next method of patriarchy is *spiritualization*. It is the "refusal to look at concrete oppressive facts". Daly gives the example of patriarchal authorities who cite a specific religious text which claims that "Christ is neither



male nor female”. She comments that this isolated example does not change the fact that the Christ image is male (1995, 5). By using a particular passage, thus, patriarchal ideology wishes to weaken women’s protest against the oppressive ideology. And lastly, there is *universalization* as a method, in which the oppression of women is treated as a problem of “human liberation” rather than a subject which deserves a particular interest. Later on, in *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly names more “male methods of mystification”. The first method is *erasure*; that is, the woman is repressed and ignored in the traditions of history, theology, literature, politics and philosophy. Daly gives the example of the victims of the witchcraft trials, and she notes that the information about these trials and the real number of victims have been erased in patriarchal records (1991, 8). The second strategy is *reversal*. The mythical and theological examples Daly underlines are Adam’s giving birth to Eve and Zeus’s giving birth to Athena (1991, 8). In these examples, women are robbed of their power of giving birth and this attribute is given to man. In this way, men become everything a woman is, in addition to their patriarchal rights. The third method is *false polarization*. In this one, patriarchy sets up false binary oppositions. Unlike French Feminism, Cixous in particular, Daly does not reject binary oppositions. In fact, it can be observed that she uses them frequently in her own theoretical writings. Yet, Daly’s binary oppositions privilege women. She notes that patriarchy establishes false binary oppositions, for instance male defined “feminism” is set up against male defined “sexism” in the patriarchal media” (8). And lastly the fourth strategy that Daly diagnoses is *divide and conquer* which succeeds by making women enemies to each other (1991, 8). Thus, women instead of uniting, rebelling and questioning the patriarchal ideology, compete with each other.

Daly, also, observes that myth, language and ideology intersect as we shall see in the following chapters of this present study. That is, in Daly’s view, they all share and reflect the patriarchal biases and the oppression of woman is perpetuated via myths as well. Therefore, Daly focuses on Western mythology as vehicles for mystification and for the control of women. Daly states that “myths and symbols are direct sources of christian myths” (1991, xxxii). Thus, along with

the revision of language mentioned above, in order to overthrow patriarchy, Daly also proposes the alteration of myths and subsequently replacing the patriarchal myths with those created and written by women. Daly believes:

This knowing/acting/Self-centering Process is itself the creating of a new, women-identified environment. It is the becoming of Gyn/Ecology. This involves the dis-spelling of the mind/spirit/body pollution that is produced out of man-made myths, language, ritual atrocities, and the meta-rituals such as 'scholar-ship', which erase our Selves. It also involves discovering the sources of the Self's original movement, hearing the moving of this movement. It involves speaking forth the New Words which corresponds to this deep listening, speaking the words of our lives. (1991, 315)

In other words, Daly calls on all women to *unweave* the patriarchal myths, language, and ideology and create new Selves. Daly suggests a feminist de/mystification as a counter act and notes that this method will consequently demonstrate that the patriarchal myths and their meanings are neither universal nor eternal and that they can be recreated (50).

Yet, despite her awareness about the universality and the prevailing power of patriarchy, Daly is optimistic about future. In *Quintessence... Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto* (1998), which is structured as a quasi-magical dialogue between Daly and a young radical feminist living in the year 2048, after giving an overview of the social problems that women were faced with in the 1990s, including the break-up of the second wave of women's movement, the expansion of genetic engineering, society's over reliance on technology, and the dominion of postmodern theory on academia, Daly imagines a future where strong women communities have developed and patriarchy has been shattered entirely. She believes in the potential in every woman and she is hopeful that in the future, strong women communities will be built and patriarchy will be wiped out.

Daly's analysis of patriarchal language and myths may resemble the theories of French Feminism, represented by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, who also attack the phallogocentric western world. Moreover, these

three French feminists also emphasize the fact that a feminine discourse is essential for women in order to reflect their experiences. Yet, Daly's concrete efforts to create a separate discourse for woman differ from the theoretical writings of the French Feminist School. Moreover, Cixous, who originally coined the term "écriture féminine" in her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" refuses to define it as it would be expressed in patriarchal language. Daly, however, asserts that these kinds of expressions are futile and do not bring any contribution to women's movement and tries to establish a separate discourse for woman by subverting the phallogocentric language, yet a language still communicating and making a political statement. Moreover, unlike Irigaray (1985) who notes that a woman is not a unified entity and she is "more than one sex", for Daly the unity of the subject is not problematic. These postmodern theories, according to Daly, demystify women's oppression very much in the same manner as patriarchy does (1998, 21). This point, I believe, makes Daly's theory more fruitful for women's cause. Daly herself also laments the fact that radical feminism is replaced by the postmodern theories in academic circles. For Daly, postmodern feminist theories are "an oxymoron, a mind-rotting deception" (1998, 140). She asserts that these postmodern theories lack the political agenda and Daly describes them as "a cause of mindbinding and inability to Name and Act against oppression" (1998, 21). She quotes Denise Thompson's brilliant analysis to illustrate her point:

The concept of "post-modernist" feminism is a contradiction in terms because, while feminism is a politics, post-modern feminism renders its adherents incapable of political commitment... While feminism needs to be able to identify domination in general, and male domination in particular, in order to challenge it, post-modernism refuses to identify and hence cannot contest, relations of domination and subordination. (1998, 140)

Radical feminist theories, Daly believes, still have a lot to bring.

It can also be observed that Mary Daly's work is highly political. Nevertheless, she is not didactic. That is, after offering her own lines of attack to

refute patriarchy, Daly notes that she hopes that other women will come up with their strategies and by sharing these insights in women's communities, a strong opposition and awareness will be created.

To sum up, Daly's radical feminist theory includes a wide spectrum of issues such as language, patriarchy as a universal ideology and mechanisms of patriarchy, mystification of women through myths, the construction of knowledge and the notion of Be-ing as an ongoing process which will be utilized in the analysis of the novels in this dissertation.

### **1.1.5 Gerda Lerner**

Gerda Lerner is another seminal figure in women's history. She is a professor of history, she founded the first graduate program in women's history at Sarah Lawrence College, and she also established a Ph. D program in women's history in 1984 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her books include: *The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Woman's Rights and Abolition* (1967), *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (1972), *The Female Experience: An American Documentary* (1977), *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (1979), *Teaching Women's History* (1981) and *The Creation of Female Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to 1870* (1993). Still, her most influential work is *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) in which she asserts that patriarchy is not a natural, biological or religious fact, but a human creation. Lerner, in a vast survey, sketches human history starting from the relatively egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies to ancient Greek culture, and by exploring archaeological, historical and literary evidence she presents the emergence and establishment of patriarchy in the ancient Near East and its continuation in the Western World. Lerner in her book claims that patriarchy was established in history at a particular time and this ideology for her is reinforced with law codes and symbols, and consequently, "Western Civilization rests upon the foundation of the moral and religious ideas expressed in the Bible and the philosophy and science developed in Classical Greece" (199). Therefore,

patriarchy as an ideology, Lerner contends, was already established as early as 600 BC (8).

Lerner defines patriarchy as: “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general”. Lerner continues: “it implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and women are deprived of access to such power” (239). It can be inferred then, patriarchy, is an *illusion* created by men and its existence and power is enhanced by various institutions.

Lerner further declares that women have been deprived of their history (4). In other words, they are the silent group whose contribution to the development of civilization is ignored, marginalized and repressed. Lerner believes that this marginalization is due to the fact that history writing is essentially a male activity. It can be observed that starting from the invention of writing in the Ancient Mesopotamia, historians were men. And as Lerner puts it: “what they have recorded is what men have done and experienced and found significant” (4). She continues to remark: “They have called it his History and claimed universality for it. What women have done and experienced has been left unrecorded, neglected, and ignored in interpretation” (4). Lerner acknowledges the fact that throughout history subordinate groups such as “peasants, slaves, proletarians” were also excluded from history. Yet, she notes that women, unlike the other subordinate groups, were excluded primarily because of their sex (5).

According to Lerner, the exclusion of women from history, gives the illusion that women have not contributed to the making of civilization. Given the fact that women have no history of their own, as expected, they do not have any heroines to identify with. Women, then, have no positive role models. In addition, Lerner also observes that lacking heroines who rebel against patriarchy or who live outside the patriarchal structure helps patriarchy to oppress women more. In other words, the deprivation of women from their history has a huge negative impact on the status of woman. Lerner contends that “the denial to women of their history has reinforced their acceptance of the ideology of patriarchy and has

undermined the individual woman's sense of worth" (223). A history of her own, hence, is one of the major steps in women's quest for autonomy.

Lerner demonstrates that the lack of female models is best seen in the pioneering feminist texts of de Beauvoir and Millet (227). She underlines the fact that these outstanding studies have male philosophers as their theoretical background. Hopefully, Lerner contemplates, with a female tradition; a "woman-centered" intellectual heritage will be established instead of "question-setting defined by "great men"" (227). Lerner describes to be "woman-centred" as "to step outside of patriarchal thought". According to Lerner, this is achieved by:

Being sceptical toward every known system of thought; being critical of all assumptions, ordering values and definition. Since such experience has usually been trivialized and ignored, it means overcoming the deep-seated resistance within ourselves toward accepting ourselves and our knowledge as valid. It means getting rid of the great men in our heads and substituting for them ourselves, our sisters, our anonymous foremothers. Being critical toward our own thought, which is after all, thought trained in the patriarchal tradition. Finally, it means developing intellectual courage, the courage to stand alone, the courage to reach farther than our grasp, the courage to risk failure. Perhaps the greatest challenge to thinking women is the challenge to move from the desire for safety and approval to the most "unfeminine" quality of all- that of intellectual arrogance and the supreme hubris which asserts to itself the right to reorder the world. The hubris of godmakers, the hubris of the male system builders. (228)

Thus, like Daly, Lerner also recognizes the fact that to dethrone patriarchy is challenging and even a frightening task, yet it can be asserted that after centuries of oppression, it has become a vital mission.

Lerner, after calling De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* a "brilliant" work, declares that de Beauvoir, however, was "wrong in thinking that woman has no history" (221). As a matter of fact, according to Lerner, women have a history, and they, as the half of the human population have definitely contributed to the creation of civilization. Yet, their achievements are not recorded. Furthermore, Lerner maintains that the few women who can make their way into myths and fables are represented as "amazons, dragon-slayers, and women with magic

powers” (222). Still, Lerner argues, women’s voices continue to exist “in the oral tradition, in folksong and nursery rhymes, tales of powerful witches and good fairies”. Lerner continues to suggest that “in stitchery, embroidery, and quilting women’s artistic creativity expressed an alternate vision. In letters, diaries, prayers, and songs the symbol-making force of women’s creativity pulsed and persisted” (226). Lerner states that without history, women would have “no future alternative” (222). It is, therefore, essential for women to develop awareness and reclaim the power to develop their own “ritual, symbols and beliefs” (222).

Like de Beauvoir and Daly, Lerner also argues that, in contrast to women, the other oppressed groups in history have always gained consciousness and they work for their freedom. Women, however, do not have this group awareness and as a result, they become lost in other racial, ethnic or religious minorities. This is because, women, Lerner says, have been taught that patriarchy is a natural condition. In other words, like de Beauvoir and Daly state before her, Lerner also thinks that women internalize their “sexual, economic, political and intellectual subordination” (234). Moreover, according to Lerner, as women depend on “male protectors”, they can not achieve any kind of bonding with their own sex.

Lerner sees the roots of patriarchy in the commodification of women’s sexuality by men. To put it differently, women have become outcasts due to their sex. In the agricultural societies, borrowing Levi-Strauss’ terminology, Lerner notes that, women are “items of exchange” between the tribes, thus, they are “reified” (24) and this practice of exchange has given man power over woman. Lerner further remarks that, later on with wars, women started to be enslaved (77). It is pointed out that the majority of war captives consisted of women. Men, generally, were killed but women and children were brought back to the victors’ household. They, then, became the property of their masters. In addition to their manual work in their captivity, Lerner notes that sexual service was also a part of their work. In other words, women were objectified by men because of their sexual and reproductive capacity. Lerner points out that no other group, in the entire history, has been oppressed because of their sex. She also suggests that, slavery, too, as an institution, has emerged from patriarchy (89). Men, Lerner

asserts, learn to oppress other people, by first dominating women. Thus, slavery is institutionalized. For Lerner, then, sexism and racism are very closely associated.

According to Lerner, patriarchy emerged and was established in the Near East before the Western civilization. Lerner argues that the earliest archaic states in the Near East were set up in the form of patriarchy and the patriarchal family both mirrored and validated this ideology. Lerner argues that “the mixture of paternalism and unquestioned authority” became the most significant feature of the archaic states. This tenet was also mirrored in the patriarchal family, in which fathers, by early law codes, were given unlimited authority over children and women. In these patriarchal societies, patrilineal descent was practiced and male dominance was attested in “property and sexual relations, military, political, and religious bureaucracies” (106). She, moreover, notes that the codified laws of patriarchy were set as early as 1750 BC in Hammurabi Laws and Middle Assyrian Laws (102). Lerner in her book illustrates the fact that in the Code of Hammurabi, 73 laws out of 282 are related with marriage and sexual conduct. Likewise, 59 codes of the 112 surviving Middle Assyrian laws also deal with the same issues. To put it briefly, in both collections, women’s sexuality is regulated by law and in each case, women, compared to men, are, without any doubt, the oppressed side.

In the chapter called *Veiling the Woman*, Lerner demonstrates how patriarchy establishes a class formation among women by means of dividing them into “respectable” (that is under the protection of one man) and “not-respectable” (that is; not under the protection of one man). This division is further institutionalized with laws regarding the veiling of women. Lerner quotes the Middle Assyrian Law § 40 which writes:

Neither [wives] of [seigniors] nor [widows] nor [Assyrian women] who go out on the street may have their heads uncovered. The daughters of a seignior ... whether it is a shawl or a robe or [a mantle], must veil themselves... when they go out the street alone, they must veil themselves. A concubine who goes out on the street without her mistress must veil herself. A sacred prostitute who a man married must veil herself on the street, but one whom a man did not marry must have her head uncovered on the street, she must not veil herself. A harlot must not veil herself; her head must be uncovered. (134)



Similar dress codes for women are also observed in the later cultures. Especially all the monotheistic religions impose such regulations on women's clothing. Moreover, like Millet, Lerner too contends that women's sexuality is also controlled by the state in matters such as birth control and abortion. Lerner concludes that the sexual regulation of women is one of the basic tenets of patriarchal states (140).

As the above discussion illustrates, women's oppression has been institutionalized by law codes. Women's sexual conduct and other aspects of their life such as clothing, education and economic freedom have been regulated by laws. Therefore, patriarchy has become an ideology which is realized by the state and state institutions. In patriarchy, then, women are denied any kind of freedom, and consequently, they are obliged to be under the protection of men. Hence, women's subordination to men is achieved. In her book, Lerner gives the examples of powerful women in the ancient civilizations (54). Nevertheless, she notes that these women accessed power and privilege only via men as daughters, sisters, wives or concubines (74). As Lerner observes, throughout history "a man's social class was the result of the relationship to the means of production, whereas, a woman's social class depended on their ties to a man who gave them access to material resources" (215). Moreover, as women were denied any rights, they could not escape patriarchy. Lerner points out that they could leave their father's house only to go to live under their husband's hegemony. Furthermore, women who have refused such patriarchal codes have always been marginalized in history. These independent women were considered "not respectable". This respectable/not respectable categorization of woman by patriarchy, Lerner declares, also functions as another means of oppression on women. Men, for Lerner, "punish by ridicule, exclusion, or ostracism, any woman who assumes the right to interpret her own role- or worst of sins- the right to rewrite the script" (13).

Relying on the background knowledge presented above, we can move on to Lerner's idea of myth which is the most crucial point for the purpose of this study. The growth of patriarchy is attested in the cosmologies as well. In the

religious sphere, following the establishment of imperialistic states in the Near East, Lerner observes that, in due course, the all-powerful goddesses were replaced by an omnipotent male god (152). Especially with the emergence of the Hebrew religion, the creativity and pro-creativity characteristics of earlier female goddesses were passed on to a dominant male god. Nonetheless, according to Lerner, despite the subordination of women by men, women, as healers, seers and priestesses, have preserved their religious power. Moreover, the female power has continued to be venerated in the form of goddesses like Isis and Venus (159). Yet, this compensation cannot change the fact that the male dominated pantheons did become the means of patriarchal oppression. In addition, the sacred nature of these texts gives an illusion that patriarchy is a natural and even a God ordained fact.

In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Lerner also highlights the fact that with the changes in the cosmologies female sexuality started to be seen as evil and promiscuous outside its procreation purposes. In the Old Testament, for instance, the covenant regarding the salvation of humankind is made between God and Abraham; in this communication Abraham is treated as the representative of all humanity<sup>4</sup>. Women are, thus, marginalized and deprived of their subjecthood. Similarly, in Genesis the power of naming and pro-creation is given to men via Adam<sup>5</sup>. Lerner argues that:

This symbolic devaluation of women in relation to the divine becomes one of the founding metaphors of Western Civilization. The other founding metaphor is supplied by Aristotelian philosophy, which assumes as a given that women are incomplete and damaged human beings of an entirely different order than

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<sup>4</sup> Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3).

<sup>5</sup> And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him (Genesis 2: 19-20).

men. It is with the creation of these two metaphorical constructs, which are built into the very foundations of the symbol systems of Western civilization that the subordination of women comes to be seen as “natural”, hence it becomes invisible. It is this which finally establishes patriarchy firmly as an actuality and an ideology. (10)

As seen above, Western Civilization, for Lerner, is based on the Judeo-Christian tradition and ancient Greek culture and therefore, patriarchy as an ideology has become one of the major tenets of Western Civilization.

In conclusion, as an answer to those attacks which claim that Millett and Daly present patriarchy as a timeless phenomenon, Lerner places the emergence and the perpetuation of patriarchy within a historical framework. Furthermore, Lerner also underlines the fact that with an understanding of the past and a will to change, patriarchy can be overthrown for the sake of a more human, egalitarian system. Lerner reflects:

As long as men believe their experiences, their viewpoint and their ideas represent all of human experience and all of human thought, they are not only unable to define correctly in the abstract, but they are unable to describe reality accurately. The androcentric fallacy, which is built into all the mental constructs of Western civilization, cannot be rectified simply by “adding women”. What it demands for rectification is a radical restructuring of thought and analysis which once and for all accepts the fact that humanity consists in equal parts of men and women and that the experiences, thoughts, and insights of both sexes must be represented in every generalization that is made about human beings. (220)

Lerner, then, disagrees with the historians and anthropologists who claim that economic independence gives women autonomy and power to resist patriarchy. This assertion, for Lerner is “illusory” and “unwarranted”. She writes: “Reforms and legal changes, while ameliorating the condition of women and an essential part of the process of emancipating them, will not basically change patriarchy.” Lerner continues:

Such reforms need to be integrated within a vast cultural revolution in order to transform patriarchy and thus abolish it.

The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of men. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, the denial to women of knowledge of their history, the dividing of women one from the other, by defining ‘respectability’ and “deviance” according to women’s sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion, by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women. (217)

To sum up, Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy* presents a systematic exploration of the emergence and the perpetuation of patriarchy. She covers almost 5000 years of human history with detailed explorations of evidence to prove her hypothesis which asserts that patriarchy is not a timeless concept. In fact, it was created by humans at a particular time in the past. Therefore, with this awareness, it can be demolished for an equal future.

#### **1.1.6 Louis Althusser & Pierre Macherey**

In his *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Terry Eagleton, after identifying Marxism as “a scientific theory of human societies, and of the practice of performing them”, notes that Marxist criticism “analyses literature in the terms of historical conditions which produce it” (1976, vi). The main goal of this criticism, therefore, is “to understand ideologies- the ideas, values, and feeling by which men experience their societies at various times” (1976, vi). Eagleton believes that achieving an understanding of ideologies will “contribute to our liberation” (1976, viii). Eagleton, later, in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* provides a definition of ideologies as “modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving, and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power” (1983, 15). Since this dissertation will explore Greek and Biblical myths as ideological narratives in which gender roles are established and justified, the Marxist critic Louis Althusser will also be acknowledged in the theoretical background section. Louis Althusser is one of the foremost figures in the analysis of ideology as a concept. In his influential essay, *Ideology and Ideological State*

*Apparatuses* which appears in his collection of essays *Lenin and Philosophy* (1971), Althusser provides us with certain terms that have become the key concepts for any discussion of ideology. Althusser's primary concern in his works is the relationship between ideology and people. He, therefore, focuses on the ideological strategies that create subject positions for individuals. To Althusser, ideologies, thus, by means of human agency, maintain the status quo. He defines ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (36). And he declares that:

All ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not a system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live. (39)

Thus, for Althusser, ideology generates an imaginary relation between people and their real conditions of existence and this imaginary relation obscures the real basis of the relationship. According to Althusser, ideology is a system of representations that imposes itself upon us. Ideology, then, by using imaginary representations "interpellates" individuals; that is, ideology constitutes us as subjects (47-50) Althusser then, asserts that the main purpose of ideology is this "constituting concrete individuals as subjects". He claims that ideology is so pervasive that, once ideology creates a subject out of an individual that subject does not question her /his "identity" as ideology also creates the illusion that it is "true" and "obvious".

Despite the fact that "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence" Althusser goes on to argue that, "ideology has a material existence" as it "always exists in apparatus, and its practice or practices". Althusser asserts that ideology mainly works through two instruments which he calls "State Ideological Apparatuses" (15). The first is what Althusser calls "Repressive State Apparatuses" or the "RSAs" (18). These are the

ones which can force you to act according to the ideology of such as “the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc... Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question “functions by violence” – at least ultimately (since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take non-physical forms)” (17). In other words, these mechanisms control the public sphere through direct violence or the threat of violence.

The second mechanism Althusser looks into is “Ideological State Apparatuses” or “ISAs” (17). These are institutions which generate ideologies that the individuals internalize, and act in accordance with. These ISAs include schools, religions, the family, legal systems, politics, arts, sports, etc. These organizations generate systems of ideas and values that create subjects. Althusser maintains that the ISAs address the private sphere rather than the public. He also points out that RSAs exercise power primarily by “repression”, whereas ISAs operates “by ideology” (19). Therefore, compared to RSA, they are more difficult to differentiate. Despite the fact that the ISAs seem more diverse and more difficult to control, Althusser reflects that “to my knowledge, no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses” (20).

In discussing ISAs, Althusser argues that in the pre-industrial society the chief ISA was the family. However, later on, it was replaced by the church “which concentrated within it not only religious functions, but also the educational ones, a large portion of the functions of communications and “culture”” (25). This hegemonic power, Althusser contends, gave its place to the education system after the French Revolution. Althusser further names the education system the central ISA of the post-industrial era. He believes that, “no other ideological State apparatus has the obligatory (and not least, free) audience of the totality of children in the capitalist social formation, eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven” (30). Furthermore, Althusser observes that the education system indoctrinates children with the prevailing ideology during “the years in which the child is most “vulnerable” squeezed between the family state apparatus and the educational state apparatus” (29).

Louis Althusser also focuses on the “subject” in his discussion of ideology. He suggests that ideologies create identities and subject positions according to their interest. For Althusser, therefore, ideology is all-pervasive and it is impossible to escape its influence or exist outside of it. He elaborates as follows:

What thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes places in ideology... That is why those who are those in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says “I am ideological”. (49)

This insight might seem over deterministic and pessimistic. However, Althusser notes that one can resist ideology by being aware of its existence and strategies.

In the light of the above discussion it can be asserted that hegemonic ideologies such as patriarchy tend to hide their constructed natures and contradictions to eliminate the challenges to their domination. Since we are placed within the patriarchal ideology as subjects, there is no way outside it where we can situate ourselves and assess it critically. However, Althusser challenges the traditional Marxist dialectical model which argues that the basis of a society (the economic mode of production) determines the superstructure of a society. Althusser declares that superstructure is relatively “autonomous” (9). Literature, for example, according to Althusser does not merely reflect ideology; it has the power to react to and to resist ideology as the writings under study will illustrate. Unlike Marxism that holds that literature merely reflects ideology, and thus helps to perpetuate it, Althusser claims that the reality which is reflected in the text is always incomplete. A competent reader will therefore approach a text as a psychoanalyst, reading beyond what is written into the gaps and inconsistencies. He elaborates as follows:

The same connexion that defines the visible also defines the invisible as its shadowy obverse. It is the field of the problematic that defines and structures the invisible as the defined excluded, *excluded* from the field of invisibility and *defined* as excluded by the existence and peculiar structure of the field of the problematic; as what forbids and represses the reflection of the

field on its object. This is the case with oxygen in the phlogistic theory of chemistry, or with surplus value and definition of the “value labor” in classical economics. These new objects and problems are necessarily *invisible* in the field of existing theory, because they are forbidden by it- they are objects and problems necessarily without any necessary relations with the field of the visible as defined by the problematic. They are invisible because they are rejected in principle, repressed from the field of the visible: and that is why their fleeting presence in the field when it occurs (in very peculiar and symptomatic circumstances) *goes unperceived*, and becomes literally an undivulgable absence since the whole function of the field is not to see them, to forbid any sighting of them. Here again, the invisible is no more a function of *a subject's sighting* than is the visible: the invisible in the darkness, the blinded eye of the theoretical problematic's self-reflection when it scans non-objects, its non-problems, without seeing them, *in order not to look at them*. (writer's italics, 25-6)

As the demanding quotation above demonstrates, Althusser's symptomatic reading aims to expose the gaps, contradictions and other logical flaws in the text. These features, therefore, reflect the unconscious of the text. In this respect, in the evaluation of patriarchy what is unspoken and repressed should be exposed.

Althusser's “symptomatic reading” model also gave inspiration to Pierre Macherey's influential study *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966). Similar to Althusser, Macherey argues that a literary work is not “created by an intention” but “produced” under certain conditions. A writer, Macherey contends, can not transcend the ideology of his time, yet, the tension between the writer and the ideology is attested in the “incompleteness” and “de-centeredness” of the work (79). The main goal of the critic then, according to Macherey, must be to “to go beyond the work and explain it, must say what it does not and could not say: just as the triangle remains silent on the sum of its angles” (77). In other words, to demystify patriarchal ideology, Macherey suggests that one needs to seek out the contradictions. Macherey argues that the gaps and the silences in the literary works are also meaningful. For Macherey, then, ideology is always in the text along with realities and he writes: “What is important in the work is what it does not say” (87) and he adds “in order to say anything, there are other things which mustn't be said”. For this reason, studying these gaps could tell us something



about the ideology which produces them. Macherey also notes that even the writer is not always conscious of these gaps, yet this unconscious editing is significant. To put it in another way, the writer as an individual is also affected by the prevailing ideology. Macherey continues as follows:

We should question the work as to what it does not and cannot say, in those silences for which it has been made. The concealed order of the work is thus less significant than its real determinate disorder (its disarray). The order which it professes is merely an imagined order, projected on to disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the texts where incoherence and incompleteness bursts forth (155).

Therefore, a corpus of written evidence in which women are denied a voice can be interpreted as a reflection of the dominant patriarchal ideology.

To sum up, Althusser's theory of ideology and ideological apparatuses and the concept of interpellation, formation of subject position within the ideology and Macherey's discussion of gaps and silences lay the foundation for any discussion and deconstruction of patriarchy.

## **1.2. Methodology**

This thesis will analyze the rewritings of Greek and Biblical myths by contemporary women writers. The rewritings of myths are mainly observed in poetry and drama and despite the fact that there are numerous examples of mythological allusions and the exploitation of mythological themes and characters in novels, there are not many studies which focus on the feminist rewritings of myths in fiction. This dissertation aims at filling this gap and with its interdisciplinary approach drawing upon Classical Archaeology, art history, philology, feminist theology and feminist literary theory, it will attempt to contribute to feminist scholarship.

As the main focus will be myths, Chapter One is devoted to an overview of myth theories. In this chapter, different theories proposed by scholars such as

Freud, Frazer, Jung, Eliade, Levi- Strauss, Malinowski and Frye will be examined. Following this survey, it is also the aim of this chapter to explore feminist criticism of myths.

The rest of the thesis is devoted to the analysis of the rewritings of myths. To illustrate the perpetuation of the androcentric representation of women through centuries for each chapter two rewritings are chosen in order to compare and contrast the ways in which myths are deconstructed and recreated by different authors. Unfortunately, two rewritings of the same myth were not available. Therefore, rewritings of different myths will be analyzed. The authors chosen are from different national backgrounds yet they are all from English speaking countries, namely Great Britain (Michèle Roberts), United States (Marion Zimmer Bradley, Anita Diamant, and India Edghill) and Canada (Margaret Atwood, Gail Sidonie Sobat). This diversity will also illustrate the impact of myths across Western culture. As mentioned before, this study will not distinguish between Greek myths and the Bible. It will approach both corpuses of writings as androcentric ideological narratives. In order to have a better understanding of the ways in which women writers revise the myths, in each chapter before the analysis of the rewriting, a general discussion of the representation of women in the original text will be presented.

Chapter two, then, deals with the rewritings of Greek myths. The first work to be analyzed is Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) which is a rewriting of Penelope's story. Atwood's work is the revision of Homer's *Odyssey* in which she aims to draw attention to Penelope's side of the story. Atwood, employing parody, questions the "official account" that "does not hold water" (xxi). Working from the gaps and inconsistencies in Homer's epic, Atwood spins Penelope's story by giving her a voice to tell her own version. In Atwood's version, Penelope, the paragon of fidelity of Homeric epic, tells her own account of Odysseus's absent years, her struggle with the suitors, and finally Odysseus' homecoming and her union with him after two decades.

The second book of this chapter is Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Firebrand* (1987), in which Cassandra the Trojan princess and priestess of Apollo, narrates

the Trojan War. In Greek myths, it is told that she was given the power of prophecy by Apollo, but she was doomed to be disbelieved when she refused his love. Cassandra, the doomed priestess of Homer's *Iliad*, does not utter a single word in Homer's epic; working from the silence of this exorcised woman, Bradley tells the account of the Trojan War from her perspective by paying special attention to the social and economic realities of Iron Age. In so doing, she also illustrates the process of transition from matriarchal society and the worship of Mother Goddess to the patriarchal world order. Thus, the present chapter will focus on these women whose stories are not given place in the Homeric epics.

The third chapter will focus on the rewritings of Old Testament women. The first novel is Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* (1997). In the book, Dinah, who is briefly mentioned in the Old Testament as a rape victim, tells her own account of the biblical narrative. The silenced woman of the Bible narrates her rape story in a totally different light; as a love story. Diamant's book also underlines the forgotten women's culture in the androcentric biblical text and the importance of daughters in carrying on the women's tradition that is symbolized by the menstrual hut in the novel. For this end, Diamant makes her heroine Dinah also narrate her mothers', Jacob's wives, stories. In this aspect Diamant rewriting is an attempt to create a female genealogy in which positive and nurturing mother-daughter relations are signified (Irigaray 1993, 15-22).

The second book to be explored in this chapter is India Edghill's *Queenmaker* (1999). The book tells the story of another silenced woman of the Bible, Queen Michal; the daughter of King Saul and the first wife of King David. Edghill in her rewriting also weaves the stories of other women in David's story, Bathsheba and Tamar, from Michal's perspective. Setting the novel in David's court, Edghill explores the patriarchal nature of politics in which women are reduced to tokens of exchange between men and used as pawns for their own interest. Thus, Edghill gives voice to these women who are left on the margins of Biblical narrative that focuses exclusively on King David's life and his rise to power. In so doing, she also contemplates on the means of resistance that these

marginalized women employ to fight against the male-centered ideology in which they are entrapped.

The fourth chapter will focus on the most notable women of New Testament: Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Gail Sidonie Sobat's *The Book of Mary* (2006) chronicles the life of Mary, mother of Jesus. Sobat's Mary, unlike the idolized immaculate symbol of virginity and motherhood of Christianity, is a bold, sexual, politically active and assertive woman. In this unorthodox rewriting, Mary holding the power of the "Word", writes her own gospel juxtaposing historical and contemporary discourses and she tells her own version of the events recounted in the gospels of the New Testament.

Michèle Roberts' *The Wild Girl* (1984), on the other hand, is the gospel of Mary Magdalene. In some sources she is referred to as the devout disciple of Jesus who was formerly a prostitute, yet according to the Gnostic tradition she was the wife of Jesus and a prominent leader in the early Church. Roberts in *The Wild Girl* through Mary Magdalene's first person narrative raises questions about sexuality, maternity, power relations and biblical authority. Both *The Book of Mary* and *The Wild Girl* then confront the androcentric religious tradition and world order and both writers in their rewriting projects attempt to write a *herstory* that has been long subdued in the long "history" of patriarchy.

In the conclusion, after a brief overview of the arguments made throughout the preceding chapters, the degree of the success of women writers' attempt to demystify the patriarchal construction of female figures in Greek and Biblical texts by rewriting them and the impact of this revisionist mythmaking on the literary canon will be observed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORIES OF MYTH**

It is stated in the introduction chapter, today in daily usage, myth is equated with falsehood, fiction and illusion. Furthermore, in mass culture, mythological figures are downgraded to the Disney cartoon characters, commercial stars or fashion house logos. For instance, in the Disney version of Hercules, Zeus, the patriarch of Greek mythology, the bringer of storms and thunderbolts, is portrayed as a sweet old man, a kind of Santa Claus. In addition, today Gorgon Medusa is not known for her petrifying looks, but instead as the logo of Versace fashion house. It is also a common practice that mythical themes such as the Judgment of Paris or Garden of Eden are used in commercials. As André Dabezies aptly puts it: “the abused and overused mythical clichés have downgraded myth’s authority” (960). Throughout history, a wide range of definitions and interpretations of myth has been proposed by philosophers and scholars. Since this dissertation intends to study myth as a patriarchal ideological narrative, this chapter is devoted to theories of myth in order to provide a general background. First, a brief summary of early theories of myth starting from Ancient Greece will be presented. Following this section, a comprehensive survey of modern theories of myth from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century will be covered. And in the last section of this chapter, an overview of feminist myth criticism will be introduced.

#### **2.1 A Historical Survey of Definitions and Theories of Myth**

As stated above, the definition and interpretation of myth has been a major concern for people throughout the ages. To our dismay, there is not one particular discipline that studies myth. Each school of thought and academic discipline interprets myth from its point of view. Percy Cohen underlines this fact in his illuminating lecture entitled as “Theories of Myth” and he asserts that: “there are

many theories of myth, but they are not necessarily rival theories: the reason for this is that different theories often explain different statements of myth” (338). By the same token, even as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, there was no consensus on the meaning and function of myth in Ancient Greek philosophy. Some philosophers interpreted myth as allegorical narratives. For instance, Thegenes of Rheigon (6<sup>th</sup> century BC) argues that myths are allegorical tales in which natural phenomena are in constant battle. In his interpretation, Thegenes suggests that gods are the representations of natural elements; Poseidon represents water, Apollo represents fire and Zeus represents air. Thus, for Thegenes, mythical stories are allegories of natural forces (Dowden, 40). Another philosopher, Anaxogoras (ca. 499-427 BC) calls attention to the fact that in myths gods perform immoral deeds such as seduction, theft, fighting and adultery (Dowden, 41). Therefore, according to Anaxogoras, myths should be read as didactic stories that illustrate corrupted deeds and their unfortunate consequences.

In a similar vein, Plato (427-347 BC) in his *Republic* denounces myths, arguing that they set immoral behavioural models for children. He is concerned that these fictional tales and corrupt examples would harm the minds of the future leaders of his ideal republic. He elaborates as follows:

But stories like the chaining of Hera by her son, and the flinging of Hephaestus out of heaven for trying to take his mother’s part when his father was beating her, and all those battles of the gods which are to be found in Homer, must be refused admittance into our state, whether they be allegorical or not. For a child cannot discriminate between what is allegory and what is not; at whatever that age is adopted as a matter of belief, as a tendency to become fixed and indelible; and therefore, perhaps we ought to esteem it of the greatest importance that the fictions which children first hear should be adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue (Book II, 379)

Plato, thus, bans myth from his ideal republic. Yet, scholars point out the fact that despite his evident disapproval of myth, Plato himself is a mythmaker. Scholars note that Plato’s cave analogy, that is utilized to demonstrate the role of the philosopher in a society in Book VII of *Republic*, has become a myth itself

(Coupe 105; Dabezies, 960; Doty 2004, 103). Moreover, in *Phaedrus*, the story Plato recounts about the search of human beings for their soul mates has also been identified as an example of mythmaking.

The other figure in Ancient Greek philosophy that touches on myth is Aristotle. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle (384-322 BC) uses the term myth as ‘plot/story’ (Belfiore, 37). Later, Romans adopt this usage of the word and they latinize it as *fabula*. William Doty suggests that this Roman usage of *fabula*/myth in the sense of a story could be the reason of the equation of myth with fiction in daily language (2004, 104).

In Ancient Greece, the other important figure in the theory of myth is Euhemerus of Messene (ca. 330-260 BC). Euhemerus intends to rationalize myths rather than treating them as sacred texts or allegorical tales. In his fictional travel book, *Sacred Scripture (Hiera Anagraphe)*, he claims that on the island of Panchaia, in the Indian Ocean, he comes across a column on which the deeds of Ouranous, Kronos and Zeus are inscribed. According to Euhemerus’ account, these gods, in fact, are the ancient kings that are deified after their death. In time, their mortality is forgotten and they achieve an immortal status. Myth, then, for Euhemerus is a collection of historical accounts. Euhemerus’ rationalistic approach is later adopted by Hellenistic and Roman kings, Alexander the Great in particular, who claims to have an immortal pedigree and demands to be deified (Harris & Platzner, 30). This method of rationalizing myth has become a term and it survives to our day by Euhemerus’ name as euhemerism.

With the emergence and the spread of Christianity, myth lost its importance in the ancient world. Especially after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Greek myth was condemned openly and strongly by the Church fathers; the religious authorities regarded myth as pagan stories.

With the Renaissance (ca. 1500-1700), however, a revival of classical culture is experienced all around Europe. In this period, ancient Greek and Latin texts are restored and translated. With the recovery of classical texts, an interest in mythology is revived. Hence, myth is reintroduced to Western culture. Since

Ancient Greek and Latin cultures are idealized during the Renaissance, myth gains its popularity in scholarly circles again.

This positive reception of myth, however, changes in the Age of Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this era, an exaltation of reason is acknowledged. Myth therefore is viewed as a primitive narrative; pre-scientific and illogical. Moreover, it is during the Enlightenment period that the artificial dichotomy of mythos and logos (reason) is created. And as Doty points out, this dichotomy, along with other logocentric polarizations created during the Enlightenment, continues to affect our perception and outlook toward life from then on (2000, 90). Yet, scholars note that there is not much difference between the meaning of “mythos” and “logos” before the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and they were actually used interchangeably in many contexts (Dabezies, 960). In his thought-provoking essay “Gendered Discourses: The Early History of Mythos and Logos” Bruce Lincoln documents that in the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC texts, these two terms are used with very different implications. Lincoln’s analysis of Hesiod’s *Theogony*, to our surprise, reveals that *mythos* indicates “a speech that is raw and crude, but forceful and true” (3). Similarly, in the *Iliad*, the word *mythos* is used to designate “a blunt and aggressive act of plain speaking: a hardboiled speech of intimidation” (4). Lincoln also draws attention to the fact that in early Greek texts, myth is associated with the utterance of men. In these texts, *mythos* is spoken in settings such as “battlefields and the place of assembly” (6). *Logos*, on the other hand, is related to women’s speech”. Lincoln also stresses the fact that there is an apparent misogyny in the gendered use of logos. Lincoln writes that “*logos* is everything *mythos* is not: soft, not harsh; ornamented, not crude or coarse; devious, not straightforward. He proposes that around 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Greek men could no longer assert their power with a powerful, crude discourse (*mythos*), and hence they adopted a manipulative and persuasive discourse (*logos*). Their “intellect, education, sophistication and speech” gained importance, while “birth, rank, weapons, and brawn” became insignificant(12). Consequently, philosophers such as Heraclitus and Plato, Lincoln proposes, “revise the key terms, with the result that a sanitized, degendered *logos* became the favored discourse of philosophers,



while a trivialized and emasculated mythos was consigned to nursemaids and children” (12). As stated above, the privileged status of *logos* over *mythos* is a product of the Enlightenment. Then, as aptly put by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

Myth turns into Enlightenment and nature into mere objectivity. Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise power. Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own ends. (9)

Therefore, it can easily be asserted that reason became the myth of Enlightenment period and its hegemonic legacy is perpetuated until the emergence of poststructuralist discussion of “truth”. Moreover, it must be stated that the infamous witch hunts and trials in Europe took place during the so-called Age of Enlightenment. This irrational practice that killed hundreds of thousands of innocent women constitutes a sharp contrast with a period that championed reason. In addition, the 20<sup>th</sup> century with two world wars and many mass killings has proved that the over-elaborated hopes of the Enlightenment tradition are false.

In the Romantic period, (late 1770s- early 1800s), following the Enlightenment, in a stark contrast with the preceding period, philosophers and authors privilege nature over reason. Emotions are favored over reason. Additionally, it is also in this epoch that primitive cultures and people are considered purer and wiser since they are believed to live in accordance with nature, unlike modern individuals who live in a world polluted by industrialization and technology. Hence, the Romantic artists turn to ancient sources and nature for inspiration. To quote Barry Powell: “Whereas thinkers of the Enlightenment attacked myth as a product of primitive mental and emotional states, the Romantics, returned to myth as a vehicle for regaining lost truths” (qtd. in Doty 2004, 108). The Romantic Movement, thus, is a reaction to industrial capitalism. Seeing the ills of industrialization, modern people yearn for a past when people were thought to live in harmony with nature. For instance, one of the greatest

philosophers of all times, Friederich Nietzsche (1844-1900), in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by German Romantics, Schiller, Wagner and Schopenhauer, strongly opposes the rationalism of his era. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) Nietzsche declares that the rational world with its “scientific optimism” has lost its connection with myth. Thus, today’s world, Nietzsche contends, has been deprived of an exhilarating source. He writes: “Every culture that lost myth has lost, by the same token, its natural healthy creativity. Only a horizon ringed about with myths can unify a culture” (135). And he continues: “now the mythless man stands eternally hungry, surrounded by all past ages, and digs and grubs for root.” (136). According to Nietzsche, myth is an intense source of inspiration and nourishing power. Besides, he sees myth as a vital element for social cohesion. Nietzsche, in his work, identifies two forces in Ancient Greek culture. One is a primitive, instinctive and creative spirit that he calls the Dionysian aspect and the other is an artistic, aesthetic and intellectual energy that he relates to Apollo. Nietzsche suggests that Greek tragedy is the synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian traits. But in his contemporary world, Nietzsche asserts, primacy of rationality has robbed the Dionysian power. For this reason, he calls for a return to “a mythic home, a mythic womb” that he sees as the source of Dionysian energy (136). To put briefly, Nietzsche is among the earliest modern philosophers that holds a positive view of myth. He privileges mythical thinking as opposed to the harsh rationalism of his age.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the emergence of different disciplines, myth gained a new meaning. However, the study of myth from a scientific point of view started with the birth of anthropology as an academic discipline. Eric Csapo, in *Theories of Myth*, argues that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the zenith of Europe’s imperial expansion, European civilization came into contact with different cultures, languages and religions. According to Csapo, the desire to study these newly met cultures is the reason behind the foundation of anthropology departments. In this process, he asserts, “myth became a tool of European self-discovery” (11). Csapo observes that, during this era, still under the spell of logocentric Enlightenment paradigms, “myths were still objects of revulsion and

contempt, but interesting objects, mainly for the light they supposedly shed upon the character of the mythmaker” (11). Then he continues to comment as: “the mythmaker, whether non-European or ancient European, was primarily of interest as an object of comparison- a foil for his European observer” (11). Csapo concludes this insightful observation by saying that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, comparative anthropology and thus comparative mythology would not have been possible if European values were not “shaken both internally through rapid cultural change and externally through rapid imperial expansion” (13).

Having said that, at this point of the present study, the major theories of myth will be explored. One of the most outstanding figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the founding figures of social anthropology, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), as one of the founding figures of social anthropology, argues that myth and science are at odds. Tylor’s best known work is the two-volume *Primitive Culture*. In the second volume of this work, titled as *Religion of Primitive Culture*, Tylor interprets myth as a primitive counterpart of science. For Tylor, primitive people produce myth in order to explain the natural phenomena around them. In other words, myth is primitive science for Tylor. He holds that ancient people were rational beings and they tried to find answers to the incomprehensible natural phenomena around them. Yet, as a believer of evolutionary progress, Tylor views myth as a product of the early stages of humanity.

In the same vein, the German philologist and the founding father of comparative religion, Max Müller (1832-1900), approaches myth from a linguistic point of view. In *Natural Religion*, Müller maintains that Sanskrit is the oldest language of Indo- European language family. Thus, by studying Sanskrit and ancient Greek comparatively, he aims for the earliest name and form of a deity. He declares: “the Sanskrit name for dawn, Ushas, is the same as the Greek Eos; that the Sanskrit name for night, Nis, is but a dialectic variety of the same base which we have in Νύξ and Nox (noc-tis); that Dyaus is Zeus, and Agni, fire, is Ignis” (2004, 448). In other words, Müller is chiefly concerned with linguistic etymologies.

Müller argues that myths are the explanations of solar phenomena. He notes that ancient Indo-European (Aryan) people used concrete words to express the abstract concepts. Later on, people forgot the metaphorical nature of these mythological epithets, and as a consequence their symbolic meanings were lost. To put it differently, in time, the “rationally intelligible” meanings of words are lost and we are left with the “irrational” activities of gods, semi-gods and heroes. For Müller, language, thus, becomes myth.

Müller gives the example of Endymion to demonstrate his theory that language springs from myth. The classical myth tells that Endymion is a handsome young man who is the son of Zeus and Calyke. One night he falls asleep in a cave and seeing his beauty, the goddess Selene falls in love with him. After years of happily living together with Selene, since Endymion is only half-mortal, Zeus puts him into an eternal sleep, so that he would always be young and deathless (Bulfinch, 164-165). In *Chips from a German Workshop*, Müller starts his interpretation of this myth by saying, “We can best enter into the original meaning of Greek myth when some of the persons who act in it have preserved names intelligible in Greek” (1868, 78). Then he points out that Selene means “moon” and Endymion comes from the word *duo* which means “I dive into”. Then he continues as follows:

We may suppose, therefore, that in some Greek dialect *endua* was used in the same sense; and that from *enduo*, *enduma* was formed to express sunset. From this word formed *endumion*, like *ouranion* from *ouranos*. Endymion, therefore means setting sun... If *enduma* has become the commonly received name for sunset, the myth of Endymion could never have arisen. But the original meaning of Endymion being once forgotten, what was told originally of the setting sun was now told of a name, which in order to have any meaning, had to be changed into a god or a hero... In the ancient and proverbial language of Elias, people said “Selene loves and watches Edymion” “instead of “the sun is setting and the moon is rising”; “Selene kisses Endymion into sleep”, instead of “it is night”. These expressions remained long after their meaning ceased to be understood; and as the human mind is generally as anxious for a reason as ready to invent one, a story arose by common consent, and without any personal effort, that Endymion must have been a young lad loved by a young

lady Selene... Such is the growth of a legend, originally a mere word, a mythos, probably one of those many words which have but a local currency, and lose their value if they are taken to distant places, words useless for the interchange of thought, spurious coins in the hands of the many, yet not thrown away, but preserved as curiosities and ornaments and deciphered at last by the antiquarian, after the lapse of many centuries. (80-81)

Therefore, for Müller, myth is an attempt to explain natural incidents. As seen above, in general, 19<sup>th</sup> anthropologists regard myth as a primitive scientific explanation for the forces of nature. Both Max Müller and Edward Burnett Tylor tend to interpret myths as the explanations of “primitive man” for the natural phenomena around him. It should be noted that, both Müller and Tylor are the products of their own age and its paradigms. As with many other contemporary scholars, they are fervent supporters of cultural evolution. According to this model, based on Darwin’s evolutionary theory, humanity evolves throughout history. In other words, humans experience progress in the succeeding phases. Humanity, hence, advances from being savage to being primitive, and from this step to being a modern race. In the light of this theory, 19<sup>th</sup> century people regard themselves as the most civilized community in history. They believe that they have achieved this civilized position by reason and science. This mindset is evident in both Müller’s and Tylor’s interpretation of myth. Despite the fact that both scholars recognize myth as the product of “rational” men, it is obvious they both view myth and mythmaking as “primitive” phenomena.

Sir James Frazer (1854-1941) is another 19<sup>th</sup> century scholar who postulates a theory of myth. Frazer is considered as one of the most outstanding figures in the field, and his monumental study *The Golden Bough* has had an immense impact both on myth scholarship and literary studies. The work was first published in 1890, and later it was expanded to twelve volumes. Then in 1922, it was published as an abridged volume. Unlike Müller, who studies myth from a linguistic point of view, Frazer’s approach is anthropological. In his seminal work that is subtitled as “A Study in Magic and Religion”, Frazer presents a comparative study of myth, magic and ritual. Thus, he is considered as the

founder of The Ritual School in anthropology that relates myth to ritual. In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer's main focus is fertility rites and the image of the dying and reborn king. Frazer starts his study by referring to a Roman cult that was established at the precinct of modern day Nemi, Italy. In the grounds of this cult, Frazer reports, there was a sacred grove and sanctuary, dedicated to "Diana Nemorensis" or "Diana of the Wood". Frazer continues his account as:

In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.  
(1)

As stated in the quotation above, according to the cultic ritual, Diana's priest is killed by his successor. In this way, the new priest has to prove himself to be worthy of his office. After this almost literary introduction, Frazer illustrates his methodology as follows:

The strange rule of this priesthood has no parallel in classical antiquity, and cannot be explained from it. To find an explanation we must go farther afield. ....if we can show that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood of Nemi, has existed elsewhere; if we can detect the motives which led to its institution; if we can prove that these motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike; if we can show, lastly, that these very motives, with some of their derivative institutions, were actually at work in classical antiquity; then we may fairly infer that at a remoter age the same motives gave birth to the priesthood of Nemi. (2)

Therefore, by comparing similar practices in the ancient past, Frazer aspires to find the reason behind the ritual killing in the cult of Nemi. In his monumental

study, Frazer traces the origin of this rite to the cult of Adonis in the Ancient Middle East. He underlines the fact that the myths of Adonis, Attis, Osiris from the Ancient Middle East and Dionysus from Ancient Greece, all have the common theme of death and rebirth. In the related myths, these figures are the consorts of a goddess and they all have to die so that their powers are renewed in every spring for the sake of fertility. Frazer claims that this dying and regenerating god image turns in time into a more abstract concept. That is, he is turned into a vegetation spirit. To be exact, Frazer states that he becomes either a tree spirit or a corn spirit. Going back to Nemi, Frazer maintains that, in the Roman cult of Diana, the goddess of the earlier myths obviously finds her reflection in Diana and the priest is the manifestation of the consorts mentioned above.

Then, Frazer turns his attention to the scapegoat ritual. According to Frazer's theory, in the early societies, the king is believed to be the embodiment of fertility and the well-being of the community. Then, once the king is weak or ill, he is killed in a sacrificial ritual to ensure the fertility and the stability of the community. He explains this as:

For they [primitives] believe, as we have seen, that the king's life or spirit is so sympathetically bound up with the prosperity of the whole country, that if he fell ill or grew senile the cattle would sicken and cease to multiply, the crops would rot in the fields, and men would perish of widespread disease. Hence, in their opinion, the only way of averting these calamities is to put the king to death while he is still hale and hearty, in order that the divine spirit which he has inherited from his predecessors may be transmitted in turn by him to his successor while it is still in full vigor and has not yet been impaired by the weakness of disease and old age. (312-313)

In this myth, without doubt, the king is the key figure. It is believed that the death and the revival of the king will bring about the renewal of the land. For this reason, the old or ailing king is killed and replaced. Later in time, Frazer proposes, a human sacrifice is killed only in extreme circumstances, and in the long run, this practice turns into an animal sacrifice. It needs to be noted that Frazer, in the early edition of his work, interprets Jesus Christ as an example of the dying and

reviving king. However, he takes out this whole section in the later editions (Csapo, 43). This action has stirred a controversy in academic circles, so that Robert Graves claims Frazer did this editing in order to secure his office in the Trinity College, Oxford. In *White Goddess*, Graves declares that:

Sir James Frazer was able to keep his beautiful rooms at Trinity College, Cambridge, until his death by carefully and methodically sailing all around his dangerous subject, as if charting the coastline of a forbidden island without actually committing himself to a declaration that it existed. What he was saying-not-saying was that Christian legend, dogma and ritual are the refinement of a great body of primitive and even barbarous beliefs, and that almost the only original element in Christianity is the personality of Jesus. (242)

Going back to Frazer's interpretation of myth, according to him, fertility rites gave rise to myth. For him, the ritual of dying and reviving king is the origin of myth. In other words, according to Frazer, the fertility rites of ancient cultures led to the emergence of myth. Frazer also underlines the fact that there is a cyclical pattern in the theme of the dying and reviving king. For Frazer, then, myth is the remnant of fertility rites. In addition, it can be asserted that Frazer presents a universal culture in *The Golden Bough*. He supposes that every ancient culture has the same myth; in his case, the myth of a dying and reviving god. Furthermore, he believes that myth springs from a single source; that is the fertility rites.

The title of Frazer's work refers to the bough that every new king is expected to pluck from a sacred tree to prove his worth. Frazer, in light of the information he gathered from Norse, Celtic and Greek mythologies, suggests that by means of this pluck, the divine power of the sky is transmitted to the new king. Therefore, for the new king, to pluck the Golden Bough is an essential act to justify his worthiness and it is the sole way to acquire divine power. Frazer then turns to the ritual at Nemi and he concludes that the priest at Nemi is the remnant of the power which was believed to belong to the divine king, since he was also expected to pluck the "golden bough" from the sacred tree. This whole ritual, to Frazer, then, is the survival of the tradition of the replacement of kings to ensure fertility and good harvest.



Like Tylor and Müller above, Frazer is also a keen advocate of cultural evolutionism. He believes that humanity evolves in stages. The first stage is the Age of Magic, followed by the Age of Religion and finally there is the Age of Science. He argues that magic is an earlier stage of human thought and magic emerges, according to him, from the hope of controlling the natural forces. In his evolutionary model Frazer proposes that in the beginning magic was practiced communally, then this power is given to a class of medicine men/magicians. Eventually the omnipotent priest-king secures this privilege of practicing magic. In the Age of Religion, following the Age of Magic, the divine power is abstracted, and hence becomes religion. For Frazer, a Victorian himself, only Western civilization has reached the Age of Science. Myth according to Frazer then, is a primitive concept. However, today, contrary to Frazer's evolutionist worldview and interpretive framework, *The Golden Bough* has become a myth itself. J. B. Vickery in his work *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough* discusses the huge impact of Frazer's work on the field of literary studies. He also notes that the work has also been a major source of inspiration for authors such as D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot and E.M. Forster. Vickery, in addition, argues that *The Golden Bough* could be termed "a displaced quest romance". More than that, according to Vickery, "the myth underlying *The Golden Bough*- the myth beneath the myths, as it were- is that of Theseus and the Minotaur<sup>6</sup> (128, 136, 135). With regard to the impact of *The Golden Bough*, another comment comes from one of the most important literary critics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Northrop Frye. As mentioned above, Frazer underlines the cycle of death and renewal and Frye highlights this aspect of Frazer's seminal work as follows: "*The Golden Bough* isn't really about what people did in a remote and savage past; it is about what human imagination does when it tries to express itself about the great mysteries, the mysteries of life and death and afterlife" (2006, 272). As seen in the

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<sup>6</sup> The Minotaur is a half man, half bull creature. Pasiphae, wife of King Minos of Crete, as a result of a curse put on her by Poseidon, falls in love with the white bull that is sent from the sea by the God of Sea and the Minotaur is the product of their union. King Minos does not kill the creature but hides him in a labyrinth built by Daedalus. According to the myth, every seven year, seven Athenian maidens and boys are sent to the Minotaur as a tribute. Theseus, with the help of Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, slays the Minotaur.

reflections of the scholar above, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, despite the wave of harsh criticism it was subject to, has left its imprint deep in Western culture.

Jessie L. Weston, a disciple of Frazer, in her influential study *From Ritual to Romance*, carries Frazer's theory to a further point. She argues that the Christian myth of the Holy Grail also goes back to fertility rites. In her book, Weston asserts that the fertility rites of the ancient people are turned into "Mystery Cults" in the later centuries and in due course they are integrated into Christianity. And, in her study, Weston identifies Jesus Christ as an example of a dying/reviving god. Thus, clearly, Weston declares what Frazer hesitates to proclaim. Furthermore, according to her, the Holy Grail that is thought to have been used to collect the blood of Jesus on the Cross is a remnant of the ancient ritual paraphernalia. Weston draws attention to the fact that the quest for Holy Grail has become the most popular and important theme of King Arthur mythology and medieval romances. It was believed that once the Grail was found, in most versions it is Parsifal who succeeds in this mission, the Waste Land and the ailing king would be healed. Then, according to Weston, ancient fertility rites survive in the Christian myth of the Holy Grail. The influence of this myth can be observed also in the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. It is a well-known fact that, apart from numerous allusions in the works of Modernist writers, this powerful myth constitutes the major metaphor of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

On the relationship between myth and ritual, a group of anthropologists, also known as the Cambridge Ritualists, maintain that myth emerges from ritual. Moreover, they argue that ritual is the origin of drama, literature and religion in the ancient world. As the name suggests, this group includes scholars who have studied classics such as Jane Ellen Harrison, A.B.Cook, Gilbert Murray and F.M. Cornford. All these scholars highlight the fact that myth and ritual are closely related. The Cambridge Ritualists regard myth as the oral components of ritual. Therefore, according to this school of thought, myth is dependent on ritual. It is generally thought that Sir James Frazer and the ritual theory that he postulates in *The Golden Bough* are the main source of inspiration for this group. Yet, Martha Carpentier in her book *Ritual, Myth and The Modernist Text: The Influence of*

*Jane Ellen Harrison on Joyce, Eliot and Woolf* suggests that it is actually Harrison who originated the ritual theory. However, since Frazer's work is overly foregrounded, Harrison's contribution is disregarded. Carpentier notes that only recently, in the past decade, scholars started to acknowledge her merit. She asserts that this neglect is a consequence of Vickery's work mentioned above and Carpentier accuses him of undervaluing Tylor's and Harrison's studies in his study of *The Golden Bough*. She comments as follows:

Frazer was but one member of the group of scholars with an enormous sense of community and shared knowledge... If we examine the dedications and prefaces of the seminal works by the major contributors to this movement, we find that they do not reveal the overwhelming influence of any one figure (or if they do, that figure is not Frazer); rather they clearly reflect this sense of community and generational progress. (38)

Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), after years of visiting archaeological excavations in Crete, Delphi, Athens, Olympia, Eleusis and studying the artefacts and historical documents, in *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* contends that "Myth is the spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done; it is to *legomenon* [that which is spoken] as contrasted with or related to, to *dromenon* [that which is performed; cf. our drama]" (328). It can be observed that Harrison, in a similar fashion with Frazer, stresses the priority of myth. However, unlike Frazer's model that asserts that myth springs from fertility rites, Harrison states that myth emerges from rituals in general, not from one single ritual. In *Themis*, Harrison also argues that Classical Greek religion is the remnant of the pre-historic Minoan religion. The Minoan culture, which flourished on the island of Crete around 2000 BC, is the earliest known civilization of Greece and Harrison proposes that Minoan religion was matriarchal in nature and when the patriarchal Achaeans conquered Greece in 1200 BC, this religion was wiped away and the patriarchal Olympian pantheon was established. Yet, most of the traits of the former religion were integrated into the new one. Hence, it continues to survive in a different form.

As stated above, Harrison maintains that ritual is the source of myth. In order to demonstrate her theory, in *Themis*, Harrison recounts the myth of Zeus' infancy. According to the traditional version of the myth, since it was prophesied that Cronos would be dethroned by one of his sons, he swallowed his children. However, his frustrated wife Rhea hid the baby Zeus, her third son, in a cave at Mount Dicte. Here Kouretes, a band of young men, danced and made sounds by beating their feet and clashing their shields in order to conceal the baby's crying. Harrison proposes that this myth, originally, is a remnant of the initiation rites from pre-historic Greece (Graves 1992, 39). By comparing this myth to the initiation ceremony of the aborigines of New South Wales, she suggests that Kouretes were a band of young men of the tribe that performed initiation rites (1962, 38). They took young boys from their mothers, hid them for some time, made them experience a symbolic death and brought them back to the tribe as socialized members of the community. Thus, for Harrison, myth is the explanations of ritual. To put it differently, in Harrison's view, ritual is prior to myth. As opposed to Frazer, Harrison maintains that myth does not spring from human intellect or reason. She believes that religion is not a primitive act, instead it is "personal exaltation, immediate, non-intellectual revelation" (qtd. in Carpentier, 52)

In a similar fashion, in her earlier work *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* Harrison traces the cult of pre-historic Mother Goddess from Keres, the primitive spirits, to the cult of Demeter and Persephone and she claims that the Eleusinian Mysteries, dedicated to this mother and daughter, have originated from an earlier Mother Goddess cult. And she states that this earlier Mother Goddess is turned into a twofold goddess in Demeter and Persephone by the later patriarchal invaders. To quote Harrison:

The Mother takes the physical side, the Daughter the spiritual—the Mother is more and more of the upper air, the Daughter of the underworld. Demeter as Thesmophoros has for her sphere more and more the things of this life, laws and civilized marriage, she grows more and more human and kindly, goes more and more over the humane Olympians, till in the Homeric Hymn she, the Earth-Mother is an actual denizen of Olympus. The Daughter at

first but the young form of the mother, is maiden fashion sequestered, even a little *farouche*; she withdraws herself more and more to the kingdom of the spirit, the things below and beyond... She passes to a place unknown of the Olympians, her kingdom is not of this world. (1991, 276)

As seen in the quotation above, Harrison proposes a pre-history that is matriarchal in nature. However, she affirms that this culture was replaced by the patriarchal Achaeans and their religion. As the recent studies on Harrison indicate, this assertion of hers appeals to many feminist scholars. As a result, Harrison regains her rightful popularity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. In conclusion, it needs to be noted that probably the most important contribution of Harrison to the study of myth is her emphasis on its social and cultural context.

On the other hand, in his *Structure and History in Greek Myth and Ritual*, the German scholar of Greek myths and religion, Walter Burkert (1931) does not prioritize ritual. As opposed to the Cambridge Ritualists or to the Ritual School in general, he states that myth and ritual work together. In his book, Burkert focuses on the social and biological aspect of myth. For instance, he argues that in Ancient Greece, the reason behind the ritual hunting is not securing food. It is the communal nature of the action that is crucial. The shared experience during the hunt cements a group. Moreover, in the course of the event, Burkert maintains, the participants purge the excessive feelings of violence and anxiety of death. In other words, according to Burkert, ritual hunting is a cathartic act rather than an expedition for food.

Burkert also observes certain recurring patterns in Greek myth and he relates these to the basic biological and cultural processes that he calls “programs of action”. To put it differently, Burkert declares that both myth and ritual are shaped by some human drives. In his model, then, Burkert attempts to bring together biology, ritualism and structuralism (Csapo, 164). For example, in the case study that he calls “the girl’s tragedy”, he analyses the myths about the mothers of heroes including Perseus, Arcas, Epaphus and Telephus and Burkert

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<sup>7</sup> See Beard, Mary. *The Invention of Jane Harrison*, 2000 and Robinson, Annabel. *The Life and Works of Jane Harrison*, 2002.

draws attention to the common structure of these. He summarizes the common pattern as follows:

1. The girl leaves home.
2. The girl is secluded, e.g. with a band of girls accompanying a god/dess, via incarceration, or simply by taking a walk alone.
3. The girl is raped and impregnated by a god.
4. The girl faces tribulation, and is threatened with death and severe penalties by parents or relatives.
5. The girl is rescued by the son she bears when he attains manhood. (7)

Then, Burkert interprets this structure as:

The girl's tragedy can be seen to reflect initiation rituals; but these in turn are determined by natural sequences of puberty, defloration, pregnancy, and delivery. If, as observed in certain tribes, the girl has to leave her father's house at first menstruation and only acquires full adult status with the birth of a son, the correspondence to the tale structure is almost perfect. (7)

Thus, myth, in Burkert's view, is based on human biology. And, for Burkert, this is the reason behind the survival of myth to our day; it reflects the fundamental aspects of human life.

Fitzroy Richard Somerset Raglan (1885-1964), better known as Lord Raglan, is another advocate of the Ritual School. Like Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists before him, Lord Raglan holds that myth is closely linked to ritual. In accordance with these figures, he defines myth as the textual version of rituals. In time, he argues, rituals are either abandoned or forgotten, but myth survives. In his study, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama*, Raglan works out the pattern of a hero's life and then he applies this plot to the lives of twenty one figures including Oedipus, Theseus, King Arthur and Robin Hood. He argues that the majority of the figures considered as heroes share a similar life story. Raglan sketches out the life of a hero as follows:

1. the hero's mother is a royal virgin
2. his father is a king, and
3. often a near relative of his mother, but
4. the circumstances of his conception are unusual, and

5. he is reputed to be the son of a god.
6. at birth, an attempt is made, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather, to kill him, but
7. he is spirited away, and
8. reared by foster-parents in a far country.
9. we are told nothing of his childhood, but
10. on reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom
11. after a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,
12. he marries a princess, often a daughter of his predecessor, and
13. becomes king
14. for a time he reigns uneventfully, and
15. prescribes laws but
16. later he loses his favour with gods and/or his subjects and
17. is driven from throne and city, after which
18. he meets with a mysterious death,
19. often at the top of a hill.
20. his children, if any, do not succeed him.
21. his body is not buried, but nevertheless
22. he has one or more holy sepulchres. (174-175)

In Raglan's model, then, the hero is a king. Parallel to Frazer's dying/resurrecting king paradigm, he loses his throne and when he dies, he is deified and thus he becomes a god. Therefore, like Frazer who traces all myths to a single rite, that is the rite of king's sacrifice, Raglan pins down the origin of myth to the rite of regicide. It can be contended that Lord Raglan does not develop a theory of myth himself, but he applies Frazer's model to hero myths.

Another figure associated with ritual theories is the English poet Robert Graves (1895-1985). Graves in his book *The White Goddess: a Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, by drawing examples from different mythological traditions, proposes that Northern European mythology derives from a matriarchal religion that originated in prehistoric Greece. In his forward to the book, Graves announces:

My thesis is that the language of poetic myth anciently current in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe was a magical language bound up with popular religious ceremonies in honour of the Moon-goddess, or Muse, some of them dating from the Old

Stone Age [before 10,000 B.C], and that this remains the language of true poetry - “true” in the nostalgic modern sense of the unimprovable original, not a synthetic substitute. (2)

Unlike the scholars mentioned above, who relate myth to rituals, for Graves, myth is a disguised historical document. For instance, he interprets the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus as the veiled account of the invasion of the matriarchal Greece by the patriarchal Achaeans. As a result, the former Mother Goddess cult is oppressed by the patriarchal pantheon of the invaders. In this respect, Athena, who was a powerful goddess in pre-historic Greece, lost her authority to Zeus, which symbolizes the patriarchal sovereignty of the Achaeans. Yet, Graves is harshly criticized by scholars who argue that his theory has no historical basis. He is accused of romanticizing the past and trying to impose his fictional and poetic version of ancient history on Greek mythology. Juliet Wood notes: “Fascinating as Graves is, the combination of poor philology, inadequate texts and out-of-date archaeology needs to be pointed out” (12). Likewise, Hilda Ellis Davidson, in her book *The Roles of the Northern Goddess*, asserts that:

If scholars have been somewhat reluctant to explore the symbol of the Goddess there has been plenty of enthusiasm at a more popular level. Robert Graves' book *The White Goddess* has misled many innocent readers with his eloquent but deceptive statements about a nebulous Celtic goddess in early Celtic literature on which he was no authority. (11)

In addition, Graves' work presents the White Goddess as a source of inspiration for poets. In his reading, apart from the veneration of Mother Goddess, woman is portrayed as a muse, not a person in her own right. He writes:

...woman is not a poet: she is either a Muse or she is nothing. This is not to say that a woman should refrain from writing poems; only, that she should write as a woman, not as if she were an honorary man... she should be the Muse in a complete sense: she should be in turn Arianrhod, Bodeuwedd and the Old Sow of Maenawr Penardd who eats her farrow, and should write in each of these capacities with antique authority. She should be the visible moon: impartial, loving, severe, wise. (446)



As the quotation above indicates, Graves himself cannot escape from the patriarchal mindset. Nevertheless, with the impact of New Age beliefs and goddess worship in particular, Graves' poetic meditation still continues to appeal to the imagination of many people. Furthermore, his anthology of Greek myths is considered as one of the most inclusive studies.

In contrast to other adherents of the Ritual School mentioned above, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), the distinguished philosopher and historian of religion, asserts that myth comes first and then ritual follows. In *Myth and Reality*, Eliade defines myth as: "myth narrates a sacred story; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of beginnings. In other words, myth tells how through the deeds of Supernatural Beings a reality came into existence" (5). Thus, myth, for Eliade, is the explanation of origin. Accordingly, he argues that the earliest myth is the creation myth. Eliade further proposes that once the myth is read and re-enacted, the participants magically return to the time when the myth took place. As Segal suggests, myth, for Eliade, acts as a time machine that takes the participants to the moment of creation (73). Eliade explains this return in *The Sacred and Profane* as follows:

But since ritual recitation of the cosmogonic myth implies reactualization of the primordial event, it follows that he for whom it is recited is magically projected in *illo tempore*, into the "beginning of the World"; he becomes contemporary with the cosmogony. What is involved, in short, is a return to the original time, the therapeutic purpose of which is to begin life once again, a symbolic rebirth. (82)

Therefore, myth is a channel for going back to the "primordial time" and for evoking the creative power of the origin of the world. In this way, one reunites with gods and experiences the creation in a mystical way. In this sense, for Eliade, myth transcends time. It transforms the profane time into a sacred/primordial time. Closely related with rituals, myth for Eliade, is above all a narrative to be read and enacted. Then, according to Eliade, believing in myth and reciting it constitutes the ritual. Eliade stresses the relationship between myth and literature and he notes that the literary works are the "extensions" of cosmogonic and

creation myths (1982, 165). He contends that literature as “the off-spring of mythology inherits its parent’s functions: narrating adventures, narrating the significant things that have happened in the world” (1982, 166). Therefore, Eliade has a unique place in the study of myth and within the Ritual School due to his emphasis on the primacy of myth and its transformative character.

After the discussion of the ritual theories, this section will concentrate on the sociological theories of myth. Sociological theories, in general, are interested in the reflections of society in myth. In other words, myth, for sociologists, supplies information about the social structure, attitudes, values, customs and beliefs. Èmile Durkheim (1858-1917), the founder of sociology, strongly opposes the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s theories that view myth as the primitive explanation of natural phenomena. According to Durkheim, myth is the representation of communal values and morals. He defines myth in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* as:

The mythology of a group is a system of beliefs common to this group. The traditions whose memory it perpetuates express the way in which society represents man and the world; it is a moral system and a cosmology as well as history. So the rite serves and can serve only to sustain the vitality of these beliefs, to keep them from being effaced from memory and in sum, to revivify the most essential elements of collective consciousness. (375)

Thus, as the quotation indicates, for Durkheim, myth is a fundamental social notion. He argues that people tend to attribute model behaviours to their gods. Therefore, myth, by means of supporting some particular behavioural patterns, expresses and highlights social values. In other words, by studying the mythology of a society, one can have a general idea about their social and cultural values. Moreover, since myth is shared by a group, it raises a sense of community and it generates social cohesion. In Durkheim’s words, it acts as a “social cement” to bring a group together and to endow the group members with a collective identity. Durkheim, like the Ritual School scholars above, asserts that myth is also closely related to ritual. He views myth as the written account of a ritual that delivers the

deeper meaning of the practice. To put it briefly, then, Durkheim interprets myth as a social document that provides insights about societies' belief systems.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), a prominent anthropologist, in accordance with Durkheim, argues that myth is an elemental social force. In his seminal essay, "The Role of Myth in Life", Malinowski regards myth as an apparatus that establishes and maintains the social order. By means of myth, according to Malinowski, the social relations are structured and maintained. He comments on the nature and the function of myth as follows:

Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. (18-9)

Then, for Malinowski, myth is crucial for the establishment and continuation of social order. Similar to Durkheim, Malinowski also focuses on the social aspect of myth. As seen above, Malinowski asserts that myth systematizes beliefs and traditions and thereby it establishes a cultural continuity. Like Durkheim, Malinowski also draws attention to the fact that myth creates a social unity. Moreover, Malinowski proposes that myth validates social customs and institutions. He argues that myth acts as a "charter" or social contract by giving reasons for the contradictions and conflicts in a society. In other words, Malinowski believes that myth rationalizes the existing power structure. By presenting social institutions or practices as "it has been always like this", myth helps people to accept the paradoxes within the social, cultural and economical fields. In this respect, myth confirms and perpetuates the current social system. For Malinowski, then, myth has a justificatory content, rather than being a symbolic expression or an explanatory narrative. He comments:

It [myth] is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific

interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical rules for the guidance of man.(100-101)

In this sense, myth, for Malinowski, is not a symbolic statement but it is the direct statement of social realities. In addition, it confirms and reinforces the existing social structure. Drawing attention to the social aspect of myth, both Durkheim and Malinowski believe that myth reflects social customs, beliefs, practices, attitudes and institutions. Furthermore, for both scholars, myth enforces social uniformity and generates a feeling of community. In brief, Durkheim and Malinowski alike treat myth as a social record.

Another contribution to the theories of myth comes from the founding father of psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud (1856- 1939). Unlike Durkheim and Malinowski who underline the social aspect of myth, for Freud, myth is the reflection of individuals' psychology. He puts his interpretation of myth in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* as follows: "I believe that a large part of the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way into most modern religions, is nothing but psychology projected into the external world" (2003, 244). Freud compares myth to dreams and he adds that like dreams, myth is the expression of infantile fantasies that have been repressed. To put it differently, according to Freud, myth is the reflection of repressed instincts and drives. He declares that myth is the "wish fulfilment" of societies. In his essay, "The Relation of the Poet to Day Dreaming", Freud elaborates on this as follows: "... but it is extremely probable that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of wishful fantasies of whole nations- the *secular dreams* of young humanity" (1990, 140). Thus, in the same way as a dream is the projection of personal fantasies and repressed drives, myth is the expression of prohibited yearnings common to humankind such as incest, sibling rivalry, patricide and regicide. In addition, Freud also contends that myth, similar to dream, makes use of symbols. Then, for Freud, myth is a collective dream of humanity. As stated above, Freud considers myth as the manifestation of repressed feelings and desires. Therefore, just like

neurosis that finds its way to consciousness through dreams, myth for Freud, is a symptom of infantile fantasies of humanity that must be treated. Yet, despite this negative perception of myth, it must be stressed that Freud himself was very much influenced by myth, given that he names his key theory after King Oedipus, the mythical king of Thebes. Hence, it can be suggested that like Plato's cave analogy, Freud's Oedipus complex has also become a new myth in itself.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud states that the founding element behind religion, morality, society and art is the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, the Oedipus complex is the memory of a real episode in human history that he calls the "primal horde". In Freud's model a despotic father excludes the male members of the tribe from having sexual intercourse with the female members of the clan. The exasperated sons eventually kill the father and eat his body with the hope of attaining his power. Then, feeling an immense guilt, the sons turn the murdered father into a totem and a totemic feast is founded to honour him. In the quotation below, Freud elucidates this incident:

One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually. (Some cultural advance, perhaps, command over some new weapon, had given them a sense of superior strength.) Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father has doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things- of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion. (1950, 140)

Thus, Freud argues that the fundamental institutions in societies are founded on this prehistoric event. Freud goes on to suggest:

... the tumultuous mob of brothers were filled with the same contradictory feelings which we can see at work in the

ambivalent father-complexes of our children and of our neurotic patients. They hated their father, who presented such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires; but they loved and admired him too. After they had got rid of him, had satisfied their hatred and had put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him, the affection which had all this time been pushed under was bound to make itself felt. It did so in the form of remorse. A sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group. The dead father became stronger than the living one had been - for events took the course we so often see them follow in human affairs to this day. What had up to then been prevented by his actual existence was thenceforward prohibited by the sons themselves, in accordance with the psychological procedure so familiar to us in psycho-analyses under the name of 'deferred obedience'. They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free. They thus created out of their filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism, which for that very reason inevitably corresponded to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex. (1950, 141)

The fundamental institutions in society, then, for Freud, are based on the prohibition of incest and patricide. Freud hence names his theory the Oedipus complex and he claims that "the beginnings of religion, ethics, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex" (1950, 156). Primal horde theory, as outlined above, according to Freud, is the social versions of the Oedipus complex.

Freud proposed the term 'feminine Oedipus attitude' as a theoretical counterpart to the Oedipus complex. In his theory of psychosexual development of children, Freud argues that during the phallic stage (between ages 3 and 6), the female child realizes that she lacks a penis. Envious of her father's penis, she becomes libidinally attached to her father and starts to resent the mother whom she sees as the cause of her castration. This phenomenon, called 'penis envy' by Freud, is the core of his theory of female development. Freud argues that the wish for penis in some women is replaced by the wish for a baby and he claims that "the substitute for this penis which they feel is missing in women play a great part in determining the form taken by many perversions" (1992, 122).

In 1913, Carl Gustav Jung, also borrowing from Greek mythology, proposed the name ‘Electra Complex’ for this attachment to father. According to this myth, King Agamemnon of Argos, upon his return from the Trojan War, is killed by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Devastated by his father’s death, Electra, with her brother Orestes, plots the murder of her mother and her lover to avenge the slaying of Agamemnon. The tragedy of Electra throughout history has inspired many playwrights including Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, Jean Paul Sartre and Eugene O’Neil. Proposing the name for Freud’s ‘feminine Oedipus attitude’, Jung writes:

The [Oedipus] conflict takes on a more masculine and therefore a more typical form in son, whereas a daughter develops a special liking for the father, with a correspondingly jealous attitude towards her mother. We could call this the Electra complex. As everyone knows, Electra took vengeance on her mother Clytemnestra for murdering her husband Agamemnon and thus robbing her- Electra- of her beloved father. (1961, 154)

Then, Jung turns to the discussion of Freud’s Oedipus complex and concludes that “All of this is true also of the Electra complex” (1961,155). As seen, like Freud, Jung also fails to give an in depth explanation for his proposition on female sexuality.

Freud openly refuted the term ‘Electra Complex’ in his essay ‘Female Sexuality’ saying that: “We are right in rejecting the term ‘Electra complex’ which seeks to emphasize the analogy between the attitudes of the two sexes. It is only in the male child that we find the fateful combination of love for the one parent and simultaneous hatred for the other as a rival” (1992, 326). Yet, Freud in his writings cannot define ‘feminine Oedipus attitude’ and how a girl moves on to the next level of sexual development.

Many feminist theoreticians including Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Nancy Chodorow, Hélène Cixous, Shulamith Firestone, Luce Irigaray, Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, Kate Millet, and Juliet Mitchell have challenged Freud’s theory of female sexuality. On the whole, these critics argue that Freud’s model is essentially biologically determined and they also underline the fact that the notion

of penis envy is based on the idea that women are biologically inferior to men and the female body is defined by the lack. Moreover, the relationship between the daughter and the mother, characterized by hostility, rivalry and jealousy, is destructive rather than nurturing and healing<sup>8</sup>.

In his influential study, *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud also stresses his belief that religion has its roots in the primordial sin which goes back to the primal horde. By the same token, in his essay “The Future of an Illusion”, he affirms that: “The Primal Father was the original image of god” (1962, 38). In other words, to Freud, the father in the primal horde episode is the prototype of god. With regard to monotheistic religions, Freud interprets Judaism as the religion of the father. Christianity, on the other hand, Freud declares, is the religion of the son. In Christianity, the emphasis on the original sin is an echo of the primal horde and primal sin, according to Freud. Furthermore, with the crucifixion of Jesus, Freud maintains, the son also turns into a totem. Accordingly, the Eucharist, (the bread and wine ceremony) becomes the primal feast in which his body is consumed.

In conclusion, Freud, like Frazer and Tylor before him, believes that myth and religion are primitive modes of thinking that must be replaced with science and rationalism. Similar to these Victorian scholars cited above, Freud has a strong faith in cultural evolution and scientific progress. They all hold the belief that by means of reason and science people would move ahead.

Following Freud, his renowned disciple, Otto Rank, in his early work *Myth of the Birth of the Hero* does a Freudian analysis of hero myths. As a Freudian, he focuses on the early life of heroes, in particular, the birth. In his study, also reminiscent of Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, Rank compares patterns in myths, in this case of miraculous hero birth across cultures and religions through history. Consequently, he observes a pattern that is common to most hero myths including the myths of Gilgamesh, Moses, Oedipus, Hercules, Sargon, Cyrus the Great, and Karna. He outlines the pattern in these myths as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion, see de Beauvoir 1971, Butler 2006, Chodorow 1978, 1989, 1994, Cixous 1986, Firestone 2003, Irigaray 1985, Klein 1999, 2002, Kristeva 1986, Millet 1970, Mitchell 1974



The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father or (his representative). As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal or by a humble woman. After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion. He takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged on the other. He finally achieves rank and honors. (68)

As the quotation above reveals, Rank interprets the hero myth as a version of the Oedipus plot in which the protagonist kills his father to acquire status and recognition. Rank, then, like Raglan, does not develop a theory but he applies Freud's Oedipus complex to the hero myths.

Without doubt, the most famous disciple of Sigmund Freud is the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). Nonetheless, this alliance does not live long and later, Jung develops his own psychoanalytic theory and distances himself from his mentor. Today, Jung is best known as the founder of analytical psychology. The problem with Jung, as with Freud, is that neither scholar expresses his definition and interpretation of myth in a single work. Their reflections on myth are spread all over their opus. Therefore, one should trace the references to myth in their works in order to have an insight into their theories of myth.

Compared to his former teacher, Jung was more influenced by Eastern philosophy and mysticism. Freud, on the other hand, as seen above, concentrates his attention chiefly on classical mythology. As opposed to Freud who treats dreams as the personal symptoms of repressed feelings, Jung states that dreams are the communal vision of humanity. Then again, Jung, similar to Freud, acknowledges the fact that dreams can be compared to myths in the sense that they both reveal recurrent images and symbols. Nevertheless, Jung holds a more positive view of myth. While Freud interprets myth as the reflection of repressed

drives and considers mythmaking as a primitive act belonging to the earlier phases of civilization, Jung privileges mythical thinking over the rational and scientific mode of thinking. Myth, according to Jung, is a primordial language that is powerful and intelligent. In *Psychology and Alchemy*, he declares: “Myth is the primordial language natural to the psychic process, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythic imagery” (1968, 25). Jung, hence, views myth as a universal and sophisticated expression. Unlike Freud who regards myth as the projection of repression, Jung suggests that myth is the reflection of the “collective unconscious”. Jung gives the definition of the term he coined as:

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call it the collective unconscious. I have chosen the term “collective” because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all nature and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us. (2003, 2)

As the quotation illustrates, Jung identifies the collective unconscious as universal and communal. Furthermore, he asserts that this shared level of the unconscious is not personally developed but inherited. Unlike Freud, who argues that the unconscious is the storehouse of personal fantasies and repressed feelings, Jung emphasizes that the collective unconscious, as the term obviously suggests, is not personal but communal.

Jung, by studying countless myths, fairy tales, legends and their graphic representations, comes up with the conclusion that there are symbols and themes that appear recurrently such as great mother, wise old man, temptress and trickster. He then calls these common motifs “archetypes”. This word was used by Plato much earlier, in *Republic*, Book X, to denote the copies of original Forms and Ideas. Jung, however, uses the term in a different meaning. Jung asserts that

the collective unconscious is made up of archetypes and he defines the term “archetypes” in his essay “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry” as follows:

The primordial image, or archetype, is a figure- be it a daemon, a human being, or a process- that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure. When we examine these images more closely we find that they give form to countless typical experiences of our ancestors. They are, so to speak, the psychic residues of innumerable experiences of the same type. They present a picture of psychic life in average divided up and projected into the manifold figures of the mythological pantheon. (2001, 94)

Furthermore, archetypes, Jung proposes, are not shared patterns of thought that are passed down from one generation to the others; they are, as Jung puts, “not inherited ideas but inherited possibilities for ideas” (1953, 36). Jung, therefore, claims that archetypes are not pre-existing concepts. In addition, according to Jung, on experiencing an archetype, one undergoes an intense sensation, an almost cathartic encounter since it is shared by all humankind. Archetypes, thus, are transcultural and transhistorical. In other words, archetypes, to Jung, are universal and elemental.

Besides, Jung compares archetypes to myth. For Jung, archetypes are also the structural elements of myths. The archetypes reach the level of consciousness through dreams. And the mythic images, Jung maintains, resemble the archetypes that one sees in her/his dreams. Myth, therefore, communicates through archetypes in the same manner as dreams. Contrary to the earlier approaches that interpret myth as the explanation of natural phenomena or the remnant of earlier rituals, Jung argues that myths are “symbolic expressions for the inner and unconscious psychic drama that comes accessible to human consciousness by the way of projection” (1953, 15).

The other contribution of Jung is his identification of *anima*, *animus* and *shadow* archetypes. He argues that *anima* is the archetypal female that exists in

every male. Respectively, *animus* is the masculine archetype that resides in every woman. In Jung's words:

Every man carries within himself an eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that definite woman, but rather a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally an unconscious hereditary factor of primordial origin, and is engraven in the living system of man, a "type" ("archetype") of all experiences with feminine beings in the age-long ancestry of man, a deposit, as it were, of all impressions made by woman; in short, an inherited physical system of adaptation. Even if there were no women, it would be possible at any time to deduce from this unconscious image how a woman must be constituted physically. The same is true of the woman; that is, she also possesses an innate image of man. (1953, 100)

Yet, one can observe that Jung's distinction between *anima* and *animus* has a sexist character. He associates intelligence, vigor and reason with man, while he relates wisdom and creativity with woman. In other words, Jung's model establishes a binary opposition in which woman is inferior. And lastly, Jung defines *shadow* as the negative side of one's personality; "the small weaknesses and blemishes" (1953, 215). All these three archetypes, Jung asserts, are linked to the process of "individuation". He believes that only by achieving a balance between all these components, can one have a healthy and poised psyche.

As seen above, Jung develops a radically different theory of myth. Apart from psychology, Jung's postulation of archetypes has had a huge impact on literary studies and it has given rise to archetypal criticism that analyzes the archetypal symbols and themes in a work of literature. This approach has become one of the major schools of literary criticism.

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), adopting a Jungian perspective, introduces his own interpretation of myth. In his four volume series of *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, Oriental Mythology, Occidental Mythology, and Creative Mythology*, Campbell aims to demonstrate that there is an underlying common pattern in different traditions of mythology. In these works, drawing heavily from anthropology and history, Campbell employs a comparative approach. Consequently, by focusing on the similarities between Eastern and Western

religions, Campbell contends that myth, above all, reflects universal and unchanging truths about human nature.

In his influential and most cited study, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Campbell puts forward his theory of monomyth. After examining numerous myths from all over the world, Campbell discerns a fundamental structure that is told in infinite versions. As a James Joyce scholar<sup>9</sup>, Campbell, borrowing the term from Joyce's *Finnegans's Wake*, calls this common pattern "monomyth" or "the world myth". This myth, Campbell suggests, is the archetypal story of the "hero's quest". This quest consists of certain stages including "leaving home, benefiting from supernatural help, overcoming obstacles as a sort of initiation, acquiring magical powers and returning home" (110). He argues that the same pattern can be seen in the life stories of mythical gods, heroes and prophets including Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, Buddha, Apollo, Perseus, Heracles, the Frog Prince of fairy tales and Nordic god Wotan. Reminiscent of Jung's individuation process, Campbell compares this quest myth to the individual's journey into adulthood. In other words, the monomyth, Campbell claims, is the symbolic and archetypal portrayal of individual's growth to maturity. Campbell summarizes this rite of passage as follows:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common day hut or castle is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of the adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother- battle, dragon battle, offering charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet, strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. This triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis) or again- if the powers have remained unfriendly to him- his theft to the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft);

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Campbell is the co-author of a study on Joyce's *Finnegans's Wake* entitled *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans's Wake* (1944).

intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of a return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir). (245-246)

Thus, he asserts that this outline is common to many myths. In addition, Campbell maintains that the monomyth is timeless. It is, then, similar to archetypes; transcultural and transhistorical. For this reason, Campbell suggests that the monomyth continues to reflect the universal human nature and to guide people even today. Campbell's monomyth has had a considerable impact on directors and writers. George Lucas, for instance, acknowledges Campbell's influence in the making of his legendary Star Wars series. To sum up, it can be concluded that Campbell, like Raglan and Rank, does an analysis of heroic myths. Yet, influenced by Jungian concepts of archetypes and collective unconscious, Campbell, different from those two scholars, adds a psychological dimension to the hero myth by interpreting the fundamental structure of this myth as the symbolic narrative of a male's journey of growing up and his quest for selfhood.

Alternatively, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) interprets myth as a mode of thinking. Associated with hermeneutic phenomenology, in his three volume work *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer explores the relationship between language, myth and science. Thus, he contends that myth, language and science are all apparatuses that the human mind employs to project its experiences and perception about the world around it. According to Cassirer, myth is both symbolic and explanatory. For the symbolic aspect, he argues that myth by making use of metonymy and synecdoche, structures the world. Cassirer regards myth as a separate field of inquiry. He opposes the interpretations that consider myth as a primitive scientific explanation or a philosophical allegory. He argues that myth is not an archaic version of science or philosophy; it is an autonomous field of inquiry. Cassirer notes that myth like art and language, is a particular mode of representing emotion.

Regarding the explanatory aspect of myth, Cassirer views myth as a part of religion and he suggests that through myth, human beings express their mystical feelings. The reflection of human psyche can be observed in myths, and myth, thereby, sheds light on the working of human mind and symbol making activity.

In a similar vein, one of the foremost contemporary philosophers Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) states that myth is a dimension of modern thought. Like Cassirer, Ricoeur acknowledges myth as a mode of thinking. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, he maintains that “myth is not a regret for some sunken Atlantis” but “a hope for a re-creation of language” (349). According to him, myth points at a new horizon. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Ricoeur elaborates on the subject as follows: “Poetry and myth are not just nostalgia for some forgotten world. They constitute a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening onto other possible worlds which transcends the established limits of our actual world” (124)”. In other words, Ricoeur stresses the fact that myth is about the future rather than a product of the past. For Cassirer and Ricoeur, then, myth is a kind of philosophy rather than a narrative.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908- 2009) is one of the most distinguished contributors in the study of myth. Relying upon the tradition of structural linguistics, in his canonical essay, “The Structural Study of Myth”, Strauss defines myth as “a language to be known, myth has to be told, it is a part of human speech” (49). Following the Saussurian approach that argues that the relations between the units of sounds produce meaning, not the unit of sounds themselves, Lévi-Strauss devotes his energy to the relationship between the structural elements of myth. Therefore, the narrative aspect of myth is of secondary importance for Lévi-Strauss.

Similar to Cassirer and Ricoeur, Lévi-Strauss views myth as a mode of thinking. He suggests that the human mind perceives the world in pairs of contradictions. In other words, the human mind operates through binary oppositions. Lévi-Strauss argues that just as language is composed of binary oppositions, in the same fashion, he recognizes that myths are composed of binary oppositions such as light/dark, night/day male/female, humans/gods,

profane/sacred, wild/tame, sky gods/ earth gods. Therefore, he maintains that myths are created in order to reconcile binary oppositions. Myth, hence, Lévi-Strauss claims, is a meditation between contradictions. By means of myths, people come to terms with cultural problems such as why incest is forbidden or why humans eat cooked meat.

Lévi-Strauss, in contrast to Tylor, Müller and Frazer, suggests that myth and mythmaking are not primitive phenomena. He recognizes the fact that ancient men were different from the contemporary men. Yet, he argues, the mythic structure reveals the unchanging and universal operation of the human mind. As mentioned above, for Lévi-Strauss, “the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction” (48). In other words, myth is the projection of the human mind that aspires to solve paradoxes, dilemmas and contradictions. Thus, myth, Lévi-Strauss asserts, is a product of intellectual thinking. Moreover, the fundamental binary opposition of human beings, which is the dichotomy of nature and culture, has not changed or been resolved. That is to say, human beings experience themselves as animals, thus a part of nature. At the same time, they are a part of the culture that they produce. Since this contradiction has not been negotiated yet, according to Lévi-Strauss, myth is a timeless and universal concept.

As stated above, according to Lévi-Strauss, myth is a process of thinking. The human mind, Lévi-Strauss maintains, tends to arrange things in the sets of binary oppositions, not in the chronological order of the plot. Each myth, thus, consists of a pair of oppositions. As a result, the mental operation of humankind is reflected in mythical thought and myths accordingly. For this reason, studying myth is an analytical process. In this regard, Lévi-Strauss breaks down each myth into its component parts that he calls “mytheme”. These elements are arbitrary, Lévi-Strauss proclaims. Then, for him, it is their design, repetitions and contrast that creates meaning. In other words, Lévi-Strauss deals with the structural units of myth rather than the context or the plot. He explains that “if there is meaning to be found in mythology, it cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of myth, but only in the way those elements are combined” (50).



Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the Oedipus myth is given below to provide a general idea of his method. He charts the myth as follows:

Table 1 Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the Oedipus myth.

1	2	3	4
Cadmos seeks his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus			
		Cadmos kills the dragon	
	The Spartoi kill one another		
			Labdacos (Laios' father) = <i>lame (?)</i>
	Oedipus kills his father, Laios		Laios (Oedipus' father) = <i>left-sided (?)</i>
		Oedipus kills the Sphinx	
			Oedipus = <i>swollen-foot (?)</i>
Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta			
	Eteocles kills his brother, Polynices		
Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, despite prohibition			

In the Oedipus myth, Lévi-Strauss distinguishes four columns of elements that have common features:

1. overrating of blood relations
2. underrating of blood relations

3. killing of monsters

4. difficulties of walking straight and standing upright

As seen above, Strauss does not list the events in a chronological order. He groups them structurally, starting from the myth of Cadmus. Lévi-Strauss argues that the first and second columns establish a binary opposition; that is the “overrating of blood relations” versus the “underrating of blood relations”. If we concentrate on the Oedipus myth, then, he suggests that the first two columns, that are incest and parricide, are a binary opposition. In this regard, incest denotes “an over-rating of blood relations”, while, parricide stands for “an under-rating of blood relations”. The third and the fourth columns, Lévi-Strauss goes on to explain, constitute the binary opposition of “the denial of autochthonous nature of man” and “the acceptance of autochthonous nature of man”. Autochthony means being born from the earth and Lévi-Strauss believes that, parallel to culture versus nature opposition, the dilemma that whether man comes from earth or from the union of man and woman is the most essential contradiction of mankind. In this light, for Lévi-Strauss, Oedipus’ killing the Sphinx, thus the overcoming of the monster by a human, represents the denial of the autochthonous nature of man. Yet, being “swollen footed”, the meaning of Oedipus’ name, stresses the autochthonous nature of man, since it refers to the belief that when mankind springs from earth he has difficulty in walking. And he concludes his interpretation as:

Turning back to the Oedipus myth, we may now see what it means. The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous (see, for instance, Pausanias, VIII, xxix, 4: plants provide a *model* for humans), to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman. Although the problem obviously cannot be solved, the Oedipus myth provides a kind of logical tool which relates the original problem—born from one or born from two?—to the derivative problem: born from different or born from same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true. (53)

Therefore, Lévi-Strauss asserts that the structure of the myth is that 1:2::3:4. As seen here, the over-rating of blood relations is paired with the under-rating of blood relations and the autochthonous nature of man is paired with the denial of autochthony. Thereby, this myth, Lévi-Strauss states, is above all an attempt to resolve the cultural contradictions. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss argues that these contradictions cannot be solved, since they are fundamental. By means of myth, they can only be reconciled. In brief, Lévi-Strauss postulates a structural study of myth and he adapts the principles of structural linguistics to myth. He, by merging linguistics and anthropology, affirms that the structural analysis of myth reveals humanity's endeavour to mediate the cultural paradoxes. Thus, it presents the timeless and universal nature and the fundamental act of the human mind.

Another contribution to the theories of myth comes from the Canadian critic Northrop Frye (1912-1991). For Frye, myth and literature are closely connected; he asserts that literature emerges from myth. On the relationship between myth and literature, Frye notes that:

Every society has a verbal culture, which includes folk songs, folk tales, work songs, legends and the like. As it develops a special group of stories, the stories we call myths, begin to crystallize in the centre of this verbal culture. These stories, are taken with particular seriousness by their society, because they express something deep in the society's belief or visions of its situation and destiny. Myths unlike other types of stories, stick together to form a mythology... Literature as we know it, as a body of writings, always develops out of the mythical framework of this kind (1990, 443)

On the same topic, elsewhere he maintains that "literature is a reconstructed mythology, with its structural principals derived from those of myths" (2000, 138). In other words, according to Frye, literature and myth share common structural elements and literature is nourished from the storehouse of myths. Frye, furthermore, emphasizes the myth and literature continuum. According to him, since myth eventually becomes literature, we come up with mythological symbols and themes in fictional works. In addition, Frye argues that both in myth and literature language is the common element. In this way, like myth, literature is

also an expression of language. As a result, mythic thought and lexicon are attested to in literature.

Frye also suggests that the whole Western literature stems from the Bible. He acknowledges the impact of classical mythology on literature and also the continuation from classical mythology to biblical mythology. Nevertheless, for Frye, as a self-proclaimed Christian, the Bible is the fountainhead of Western literature. He calls the Bible “the Great Code of Art” (1982). For Frye, then, Western literature springs from the Bible and additionally the Bible nourishes it as the storehouse of themes, plots, and structure. Moreover, he holds that the Judeo-Christian myth of quest and salvation can be identified in almost all literary works. Similar to Campbell’s monomyth, Frye believes that the myth of quest and salvation is the central myth that appears repeatedly in literary works.

In his opus, Frye defines the task of myth criticism as the study of the structural principles of literature itself, its conventions, its genres, and its archetypes or recurring images. Myth critics thus have to examine the whole body of myths contained in the sacred scripture, especially in the Bible. Frye states that only after this comprehensive study, can the myth critic distinguish the genres and archetypes. As can be observed, unlike other myth scholars mentioned above, Frye’s main concern is the continuation of Biblical myths and the mythological structure of the Bible in Western literature. On this subject, Frye defends himself by saying that “Nobody would attempt to study Islamic culture without starting with the Koran, or Hindu culture without starting with the Vedas and Upanishads: why would not a study of Western culture working outwards from Bible be equally rewarding?” (2008, 14).

In addition, Frye holds that literature is an autonomous entity and not a reflection of exterior reality. Associated with the New Criticism School, Frye maintains that each text is an isolated piece that is complete in itself. Hence, it is not the reflection of author's life or intent, or historical and social background of the era that it is produced in. Then, Frye argues that the individual author and historical and social context should be ignored; instead the analysis of classical and biblical imagery free from the context should be aimed for. He asks the

readers and most importantly the critics to focus on the repetition of plots, genres and stylistic models.

In “Archetypes of Literature”, Frye introduces what he calls “archetypal genres” and he further develops this theory in his much renowned *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye argues that all genres derive from mythology. In Frye’s model, each season corresponds to a different genre. As mentioned earlier, Frye observes a central myth, namely the quest myth, in mythology. This myth has four stages: the birth, triumph, isolation and the defeat of the hero. Then Frye associates each genre with a season, a time of day, a stage of consciousness and lastly with a stage in heroic myth. He outlines his model as:

1. The dawn, spring, birth. Myths of the birth of the hero, his reawakening and resurrection, of creation, of victory over dark, winter and death. Complementary characters: father and mother. Archetype of dithyrambic and rhapsodic poetry as well as the romance
2. Noon, summer, marriage, triumph. Myths of apotheosis, hierogamy, and journey to Paradise. Complementary characters: companions on a journey and the fiancée. Archetype of comedy, the pastoral, the idyll, and the novel
3. Dusk, autumn, death. Myths of the fall, the dying god, violent death, and immolation, the isolation of the hero. Complementary characters, the traitor and Sirens. Archetype of tragedy and the elegy
4. Night, winter, desolation. Myths of triumph of the forces of darkness, myths of Deluge and the return of chaos, and of the downfall of the hero and of the gods. Complementary characters: giants and witches. Archetype of satire (1998, 226)

As seen above, Frye, like Frazer, underlines the cyclical pattern. He argues that nature provides forms for literary works. He writes: “Myth seizes on the fundamental element of design offered by nature- the cycle as we have it daily in the sun and yearly in seasons and assimilates it to the human cycle of life, death and rebirth (2000, 133)”. Despite this similarity, Frye differs a great deal from the scholars mentioned above in various aspects. Firstly, as Segal observes, Frye does not develop a theory of myth (82). He focuses, instead, on the mythic origin of literature. Myth, therefore, according to Frye, is merely a tool to study literature. Moreover, as illustrated, while recognizing the influence of classical mythology,

Frye puts the Bible at the heart of his criticism. Lastly, as indicated above, Frye calls genres “archetypes”. Unlike Jung’s concept of archetype that refers to the recurrent symbols and themes generating from the collective unconscious, Frye identifies the genres as archetypes. In brief, Frye develops a unique method of criticism that exclusively concentrates on the impact of Biblical myths and the structural pattern of the Bible on Western literature.

In a very different vein, Roland Barthes (1915-1980), another influential figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, defines myth as “a mode of signification, a form, a type of speech” (109). In his much celebrated work *Mythologies*, Barthes explores the ideological nature of myth. *Mythologies* consists of fifty-four journalistic pieces that Barthes wrote between 1954 and 1956 for the left-wing magazine: *Les Lettres nouvelles*. In these articles, Barthes analyzes the elements of popular culture including films, magazines, newspapers and commercials and he asserts that these manifestations of mass-culture are loaded with messages. Thus, he calls these cultural phenomena “myths”. In other words, for Barthes, myths are ideological constructs. Drawing upon Saussureian semiotics, Barthes argues that mythology “studies ideas-in-form” (112). Parallel to the signifier and signified in semiotics, for Barthes, myth is a signifier with an ideological message, which is the signified. He explains this with an example:

And here is now another example: I am at the barber's, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (a black soldier is giving the French salute); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier. (129)

Thus, the cover of *Paris- Match* is a myth for Barthes. It is a symbol conveying a message and constructing a “truth”. In the same vein, myth becomes handy tools for the ruling class and ideology. According to Barthes, myth naturalizes and legitimizes the capitalist ideology and practices via media and popular culture. In this way, capitalistic representations are given an aura of naturalness and universality. Hence, they help to promote and perpetuate the status quo. Barthes, therefore, asserts that underneath the popular representations, there is a heavy ideological message. In *Mythologies*, Barthes aims to reveal this underlying message. For instance, in the piece called “Wine and Milk”, Barthes argues that the association of wine with cosiness, sociability and French national identity is an ideological construct. The foregrounded associations of wine are actually hiding the connection between the interests of bourgeoisie and the economics of production. He concludes:

For it is true that wine is a good and fine substance, but it is no less true that its production is deeply involved in French capitalism, whether it is that of private distillers or that of the big settlers in Algeria who impose on Muslims, on the very land of which they have been dispossessed, a crop of which they have no need, while they lack on bread. There are thus very engaging myths which are however not innocent. (61)

Myths, then, for Barthes are created and employed as ideological narratives to lead or even manipulate the society. As seen, for Barthes, the ideological content of myths is of essential importance. On the imposed gender roles, Barthes gives the example of weekly *Elle* magazine. In his essay, “Novels and Children”, Barthes refers to a particular issue of this magazine that covers women writers. He notes that in a photograph 71 women novelists are shown as a “remarkable zoological species” and in the related article the fact that they are both mothers and novelists is highlighted. Barthes contends that being a woman writer definitely comes with a price. In Barthes’ words:

But make no mistake: Let no women believe that they can take advantage of this pact without first submitting to the eternal statute of womanhood. Women are on earth to give children to

men, let them write as much as they like, let them decorate their condition, but above all, let them not depart from it: let their Biblical fate not be disturbed by the promotion which is conceded to them, and let them pay immediately, by the tribute of their motherhood, for this bohemianism which has a natural link with a writer's life. (50)

Thus, Barthes maintains that myths are present in every aspect of life and they regulate and reinforce the dominant ideology, in this case, the capitalist bourgeois ideology. Barthes, unlike other theorist of myth, calls the cultural representations myth. His *Mythologies* in which he explores the mass-culture of his contemporary France from a semiotical and Marxist point of view, has left its tremendous and lasting imprint especially in the field of cultural studies.

René Girard (1923- ), the French historian and philosopher, is another figure who underlines the ideological aspect of myth. Like Barthes, he recognizes that myth can be used as an apparatus for political and ideological oppression. In his seminal work *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), Girard examines the nature of collective violence. He argues that in early societies, the urge to imitate others or "mimetic desire", in Girard's terminology, results in chaos and violence. In order to end this turmoil, society searches for a scapegoat to blame for the problem. This scapegoat or the "surrogate victim", Girard proposes, is generally a stranger, an immigrant or even a group. Then, the scapegoat is killed or exiled by the community so as to purge it of the violence. Later on, in order to justify the violent act, a myth is composed. Therefore, according to Girard, myth comes after the ritual with the aim of hiding the real motive. And accordingly, in the myth, to hide the real motive behind the killing, the scapegoat is portrayed as a villain that deserves to be killed. In other words, Girard suggests that myth is employed as a means to disguise and justify violence. By doing so, it mystifies the power structure and power relations. Thus, in Girard's theory, ritual comes first and myth comes second. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard analyses the Oedipus myth and he concludes that Oedipus is chosen as a scapegoat or a "surrogate victim" by the people of Thebes. In order to end the unrest within the society, Oedipus is exiled as a "sacrificial scapegoat" and then, the myth is created in



which “Oedipus becomes the repository of all the community’s ills” (1979, 77). And Girard continues: “In the myth, the fearful transgression of a single individual is substituted for the universal onslaught of reciprocal violence. Oedipus is responsible for the ills that have befallen his people. He has become a prime example of the human scapegoat” (1979, 77). In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of World* (1978), composed of a series of interviews with Girard, Girard compares the Oedipus myth to the Biblical myths of Cain and Abel, and in particular to the story of Joseph. He points out that similar to Oedipus Joseph of the Old Testament is exiled and sold as a slave in Egypt (2003, 149). Girard interprets the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis as the continuation of the sacrificial aspect of myth and he asserts that Christians fail to observe that the persecution of the Jews “simply *reflects* what the words of Christ, and his subsequent death, actually *reveal*: the founding death of the scapegoat” (2003, 225). Therefore, for Girard, myth is a tool to veil the violence. As illustrated, René Girard puts forward a very exceptional interpretation of myth and history in general. To conclude with his own words,

Suppose that the texts of mythology are the reflection, at once faithful and deceptive of collective violence that founds a community; suppose they bear witness to a real violence, that they do not lie even if in them the victimage mechanism is falsified and transfigured by its very efficacy; suppose finally, that myth is the persecutor’s retrospectively vision of their own persecution...

Suppose that far from being a gratuitous invention, myth is a text that has been falsified by the belief of the executioners in the guiltiness of the victim; suppose, in other words, that myths incorporate the point of the community that has been reconciled to itself by the collective murder and is unanimously convinced that this event was a legitimate and sacred action, desired by God himself, which could not conceivably be repudiated, criticized, or analyzed. (2003, 147-148)

In conclusion, as shown above, there is a wide spectrum of definitions of myth and its function in the criticism and philosophy. Depending upon the thinkers’ orientation, different definitions are proposed from anthropological, sociological,

psychoanalytical, theological and linguistic points of view. As indicated above, myth in today's parlance is equated with falsehood, primitive science and mere stories. Yet, all the theories above illustrate that myth is neither fiction nor speculation. It is a vital component of social life and narrative. Moreover, it has a tremendous influence in shaping an individual's or a culture's insight and attitudes about life and society. The culture, social norms, values, beliefs, institutions find their reflection in myth. In return, myth shapes the culture, thus the history.

Myth is an exceptionally influential tool. For its compelling effect on a nation's psyche, one can just need to look back how the "superior" Aryan myth was used by the Nazi regime to justify the holocaust of Jews. Moreover, mythmaking is an ongoing process; new myths are created in each era. Today, there is no doubt that the Wild West, America as the melting pot of cultures or the American dream themes have become the myths of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and they are usurped ferociously for the political, social and economical interest of USA. Moreover, heroes such as Superman, Gandalf and recently Harry Potter have got their place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century mythical pantheon. As Karen Armstrong asserts, "myths are not only metaphysical speculation but a crucial meditation about the culture itself" (66).

In today's global world, myth's impact on the mindset of individuals is even more tremendous due to the wide distribution of knowledge. Furthermore, through *mythopoesis*, which is defined as the process by which new myths are created and old myths are extended to include new dimensions, myth establishes a continuum between today and ancient past (Batto, 12). Harry Slochower in his book *Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics* proposes the definition of *mythopoesis* from the Greek word *poiein*, meaning to make, to create, as the recreation of ancient stories and he notes that it is also a "tradition of creativity" (14). Slochower, highlighting the ongoing process of recreation of myth and the revolutionary nature of mythmaking, comments as follows: "It [mythopoesis] also contains *the tradition of re-creation*. Unrest, disquiet and revolt are as much part of man's history as is the tradition of idolatry. The culture

hero in mythopoesis *chooses* his tradition, rejects the stultified in favor of the creative roots in the past” (15). It, hence, links the past to the future. In a dialectic relationship, then, by means of myth, gender stereotypes are created and reinforced but on the other hand these myths are confronted, deconstructed and rewritten. Thus, myth is a powerful ideological narrative and in order to understand today’s world, and shape future, we must recognize the impact of myth on culture. In this light, this thesis will argue that the gender roles established in myths have been reproduced throughout the centuries in various media. As a consequence, these patriarchal stereotypes have become one of the essential apparatuses for the oppression of women. Yet, in the past decades women writers, as a politically conscious act, started to revisit these androcentric myths and to rewrite them from a female-centered perspective. The next section, then, will be devoted to the feminist criticism of myths and a general introduction of revisionist rewritings by woman writers.

## **2.2 Feminist Criticism of Myths**

There is not a separate discipline called feminist myth criticism but most of the theoreticians and writers comment on the nature of myths and their impact on culture and literature. They call attention to the androcentric nature of myths in which the world is interpreted through the lens and discourse of men. In recent decades with the influence of the feminist movement, a resurgence of women-oriented studies is observed in different fields of social sciences, also in anthropology, archaeology, even in theology. Consequently, myths start to be scrutinized from a feminist point of view; male-oriented characteristics of these narratives are explored and the silenced or the unvoiced women of mythologies are traced. As mentioned above in the introduction chapter, feminist critics underline the fact that women in myths are defined first and foremost by their domestic duties and they are defined by their relation to men; as daughters, wives, lovers or mothers. In myths, culture, thus civilization is shown as a product of men, on the other hand women’s roles are confined to the private sphere. These

gender stereotypes created in myths has had a huge influence on Western world's psyche since they are recreated and consumed in literature, art, and popular culture. Myths, then, are not static and timeless narratives from the ancient past. On the impact of myths, Carolyn Harrington in the Introduction to *The Feminist Companion to Mythology* observes that:

For Westerners, our interpretation of our mythological heritage conditions the way in which we think about ourselves. Myth has been appropriated by politicians, psychiatrists and artists, among others, to tell us what we are and where we have come from... Women need to know the myths which have determined both how we see ourselves and how society regards us. (ix)

On the ongoing impact of mythologies, Luce Irigaray also argues the idea that modern world is secular is an illusion. For Irigaray: "we are all imbued with many Greek, Latin, Oriental, Jewish and Christian traditions, at least, particularly through art, philosophy, and myths without our realizing...The theories of Marx and Freud are not adequate, because they remain bound to a patriarchal mythology which hardly ever questions itself as such" (1993, 23).

In this environment, feminist mythmaking is interpreted as a powerful tool for counter-acting. In *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, Jane Caputi in her article titled "On Psychic Activism: Feminist Mythmaking" notes that feminists have employed and "revitalized" mythological symbols and figures from different traditions to establish a female oriented myth criticism as a field of resistance to the phallogocentric system. Highlighting the importance of myth and mythmaking, Caputi writes:

When women refuse and refute these thoughts/myths and instead foray into the realm traditionally forbidden to our sex- the realm of the sacred storyteller, symbol and mythmakers- we participate in the creative powers of Thought Woman, employing thinking, naming and willing as forms of power exercised consciously and/or intuitively in the creation of the world(s) we inhabit. (427)

By the same token, feminist writers and scholars including Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, Estella Lauter, Annis Pratt and Marta Wiegler and critics in the collection

*The Lost Tradition (1980)* edited by Cathy Davidson and E.M. Broner argue that myths as a notion are critical and essential in defining women's experience.

Most of the feminist scholars agree that the academic tradition of theories of myth is dominated by male scholars. Male critics thence are criticized for ignoring gender in their classification of myths and archetypes. The major figures in this field, like James George Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Northrop Frye, Carl Jung and Claude Levi-Strauss, overlook the gender aspect of myths and they approach them from a male perspective. For instance, Frazer's concept of "dying king", Levi-Strauss' key myth of Oedipus, again Freud's model of sexuality based on the Oedipus myth and Frye's interpretation of myths as narrative structures describing comic, romantic, tragic and ironic literature as autonomous verbal units are all undeniably male-oriented. By the same token, Hélène Cixous, in her seminal essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" refutes Freud's reading of the Medusa myth as one of many "theories anchored in the dogma of castration" and the notion of woman as the dark continent" (885). Female sexuality, she writes, is "neither dark nor unexplorable" but it has been crammed "between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss". Cixous encourages women to reclaim the Medusa and she proclaims that: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly, She's beautiful and she's laughing." (885)

Even such critics as Robert Graves, who give women a central role in their theory of myth, reduce them to the source of inspiration rather than autonomous entities. Diane Purkiss observes that:

A discourse of mythography which valorizes the truth of a central female figure as a bearer of power and meaning functions to block women from any kind of cultural engagement other than ancillary ones. Grave's Muse may write and may eat her children, but she is still a figure in a poetic discourse which assumes the poet to be male. (443)

Despite the fact that women in mythology are well-documented and discussed, they are reflected through a male discourse. As myths are recorded by men, and there is no surviving record of literary tradition by women in ancient times, in the absence of evidence, unfortunately very little can be said with certainty about the

realm of women as opposed to the women represented in myths. In Larrington's words "myths about women are not necessarily women's myths" (xii), and she adds: "Historically women have been disbarred from the means to fix their myths in literary form, to give them a distinctively female perspective" (xii). The heart of feminist criticism of myths, thus, is a refusal of existing mythical representations of gender. This criticism calls for the re-examination of the canonical texts and the recovery of the lost texts that couldn't make their way into the canon and the raising of awareness about their context in a multicultural and multidisciplinary approach. Therefore, the critique of myth from a feminist perspective is an indispensable part of feminist scholarship since it aims at a critical reading of culture and an unveiling of the ideological nature of texts.

As a method, feminist critic and poet Adrienne Rich offers the term "re-vision" in her 1971 essay "When We Dead Awaken". Rich gives the definition as:

Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of enter-ing an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male -dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name--and therefore live--afresh. A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order reassert it-self in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (1979, 35)

Rich, parallel to this definition, in her groundbreaking work *Of Woman Born* (1976), attempts to demystify the myth of motherhood. She distinguishes between the experience of motherhood and the patriarchal institution of it. Rich argues that the patriarchal world romanticizes or idealizes "mothers" at the expense of the reality of mothering experience. As a mother and a woman, challenging the

romanticized notion of maternal bliss, Rich asserts that the idea of motherhood as a universally positive and normative experience is a patriarchal invention. By drawing upon many diverse disciplines, including mythology, she argues that female power has been suppressed, resulting in the alination of women from themselves. Adrienne Rich traces the origins of the Hellenic figure of Pandora to Cretan earth-mother goddess, demonstrating her transformation from a position of “All-Giver” to a mere girl sent to tempt men. According to Rich, Pandora’s Box was originally a jar in which the goddess stored the bounty of wine, fruit and grain. (1984, 122). Rich believes that the entire Olympian mythology revolves around a fear of woman and she draws attention to the fact that Athena, the most venerated goddess of Greek pantheon, is born from the head of her father Zeus and depicted as virginal and childless. Thus, patriarchy robs women of their ability to give birth. Rich also argues that Greek mythology is full of terrible and destructive mothers, such as Medea<sup>10</sup> and Clytemnestra. Moreover, according to Rich, women are turned into mythical monsters particularly in the Western tradition by means of rape and violence and women learn and internalize these negative representations. Giving examples from different traditions, she argues that the hegemony of “patriarchal monotheism did not simply change the sex of the divine presence; it stripped the universe of female divinity, and permitted woman to be sanctified, as if by an unholy irony, only and exclusively as mother or as the daughter of a divine father” (1984, 119) and she is reduced to her reproductive role only (1984, 120). She puts forward the example of Apollo who has “assimilated a number of attractive aspects of the Great Mother- even to being paired with the moon. The Mother of Trees, of healing herbs and the preservation of life becomes a male god; the lunar goddess becomes her sister” (1984, 125).

Adrienne Rich, also comments on Demeter and Persephone (Kore) myth. She underlines the fact that: “the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), and Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy; but there is no presently enduring recognition

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<sup>10</sup> For a more recent study of the utilization of the myth of Medea and the theme of the murder of children in literature see Corti,1998.

of mother-daughter passion and rapture". (1984, 237) She notes that the myth of Demeter and Kore is celebrated at Eleusis exclusively by women, thus referred to Eleusinian Mysteries as there were no men to document the events. Rich concludes that:

Each daughter, even in the millennia before Christ, must have longed for a mother whose love for her and whose power were so great as to undo rape and bring her back from death. And every mother must have longed for the power of Demeter, the efficacy of her anger, the reconciliation with her lost self. (1984, 240)

As the quotation above indicates, Rich suggests that mythology can provide themes of female power which women can embrace and mothers and daughters can have their mythic model of nourishing and nurturing relationship instead of patriarchal ones. Like Rich, Luce Irigaray claims that female genealogies, in which positive, nurturing mother-daughter relations are signified, are missing in Western literature, and she advocates the development of such models (1993:15-22, 47-50). Feminist scholar and theologian Carol Christ also comments on this topic, but this time referring to Christian tradition:

Christianity celebrates the father's relation to the son and the mother's relation to the son, but the story of mother and daughter is missing. So, too, in patriarchal literature and psychology the mothers and the daughters rarely exist. Volumes have been written about the oedipal complex, but little has been written about the girl's relation to her mother. (1979, 285)

Likewise, in the collection of essays titled *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, the focus is on the mother-daughter relationship and the collaborators try to explain how and why the mothers and daughters of literature and myth gradually lost each other. The editors Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner, like Rich, Irigaray and Christ, observe that this is a neglected field in literary studies and they add:

But over the year there has been a new trend, with many scholars finding other paths to our mothers. By searching in unusual literature- in the private or hidden literatures of diary, tale, myth,



song and autobiography- women have been restoring the blurred image of our mothers. There has been an embracing of the maternal past". (xii)

As seen above, while some critics put forward alternative mythic models for women-bonding, scholars like Annis Pratt try to distinguish the feminine archetypes in myths and women's writing. She focuses her research on a uniquely feminine mythology and the collective women's psyche. In her article "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers: Notes Toward a Preliterary History of Women's Archetypes", Pratt proposes that women have a different means of communication such as weaving and spinning and she focuses on art, literature and needlework to explore "images, symbols, which recur in broad range of works by women and which can thus be described as a collective psychic repository albeit fluid and in progression rather than ontologically or even genetically absolute" (1978, 164). In this paper, Pratt studies Medusa, Philomela, Our Lady of Unicorn and flower patterns as archetypal female genitalia patterns from mythology, contemporary poetry by women and needlework. She concludes that these figures are archetypes of female empowerment.

In her essay, "Spinning among Fields: Jung, Frye, Levi-Strauss", Pratt demonstrates the fact that the archetypal theory is a male-oriented area and she encourages interdisciplinary feminist studies. She criticizes Jung for his lack of treatment of female psyche and she argues that:

Jungian psychoanalysis tends to assume that archetypal patterns derived from male experience are applicable to women's as well. As a consequence, female archetypes are interpreted according to male patterns, and the male patterns may be allowed to eclipse women's experience altogether. The feminine may be reduced to an attribute of the masculine personality rather than seen as an archetype deriving from women's experience that is a source of power for the self. (1985, 97)

For this reason, in her work, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, Pratt employing Jung's archetypal theory, sets out to identify the archetypal images underlying women's fiction. According to her, literature is gendered in form and it

reflects the psyche of female authors. In other words, women writers think and write differently from male authors. As a consequence, she argues, in the body of work produced by women writers over the past three hundred years, there is a continuity of themes and symbols. She notes that although women writers use the same themes or archetypes as male writers, they look at these issues and motifs from a different point of view, based on their experience as women. In addition, socially conditioned by patriarchy and alienated from their own psyche, Pratt suggests that 'women find it hard to translate the contents of their unconsciousness into recognizable symbols and myths' (1982, 138). Pratt analyses more than three hundred novels by women writers for her study. Her analysis is modelled on the three life stages of the ancient goddess later suppressed by patriarchy, namely: the maiden, the mother and the crone. Employing an inductive approach, Pratt studies novels from a wide spectrum, including lesser known lesbian, black, working class and popular fiction in addition to canonical works. She discerns the feminist archetypes that manifest themselves in four fictional categories: novels of development in which the young heroine resists the confines and constraints that the patriarchal society places on her, novels of domestic enclosure (marriage) in which the adult woman struggles with the roles of wife and mother, thirdly, novels of Eros, in which woman faces the issues and consequences of choosing to live her sexuality, love, relationship and solitude, and lastly, novels of rebirth and transformation, in which the older single woman, living on the margins of patriarchal life, achieves authentic selfhood and wholeness in solitude. In the conclusion of her study, Pratt advocates the notion of androgyny as the ultimate goal in the quest of fulfilment. Annis Pratt calls women's fiction a form of "unvention", an act of tapping a repository of knowledge lost from Western culture but still available to the author and recognizable to the reader as it is derived from a world with which she is already familiar from her experiences. The archetypes Pratt describes in the forms of images and plots are products of this rediscovery of the lost knowledge through intuition and imagination.

In her other major study, *Dancing with the Goddess*, Pratt offers a comprehensive study of Medusa, Aphrodite, and Artemis as archetypes. After exploring in detail the myths and archetypes associated with these goddesses whom she identifies as the different aspects of the Great Mother, Pratt discusses their representations in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry by men and women writers. Moreover, Pratt distinguishes the angles, approaches, and tones in the poems by men and those by women. She concludes that men are more likely to view Medusa, Aphrodite, and Artemis in traditional, patriarchal, fearful, or unpleasant ways, whereas women poets often, though not always, view these three goddesses as sources of empowerment.

Along the same line, Kristin M. Mapel Bloomberg in *Tracing Arachne's Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction* explores the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century American women writers. Bloomberg, employing a mythical metaphor for her study, asserts that these women writers, like arachne (spider), are intermediary or luminal figures who are “neither a creature of the sky nor of the earth, but a part of both” (2). Thus, she analyzes the works of writers including Djuna Barnes, Edith Wharton, Onoto Watana and Sarah Orne Jewett to see how these women writers of different ethnic origins employ mythical patterns and allusions, and she contends that patriarchal narrative tools are taken over by women writers who use these narrative strategies to construct a new narrative of their own.

In the field of feminist archetypal theory, scholars also attempt to identify feminine mythmaking. For instance, Estella Lauter in *Woman as Mythmakers* defines myth as “an usually potent story or symbol that is repeated until it is accepted as truth” and she argues that “mythic thinking is a continuing process and not a stage that human beings passed through thousands of years ago” (1). In her study focusing on poetry and visual art by women artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lauter suggests that women experience an alienation from myths due to their patriarchal nature and she observes that women artists reflect their rebellion with the creation of new myths via their art. Thus, for Lauter, mythmaking is an ongoing process. In addition, she maintains that mythmaking is a collective, historical process of self-definition by contemporary women. For Lauter, this is

not an attempt to determine the essential nature of woman but rather to honour and validate the experience of women; that is to say, the experience that has been denied and distorted by a patriarchal cultural heritage. Women then, Lauter asserts, are in the process of creating and living a new cultural myth that envisages the human being, the human ego and the human body that is not separate from nature or from other human beings. There is a fluid, non-hierarchical, non-competitive sense of Self and Nature in Lauter's model.

In the co-authored article, "Feminist Archetypal Theory: A Proposal", Lauter and Rupprecht underline the fact that an interdisciplinary approach is inevitable in a feminist study since "we cannot recover fully our lost history; too many documents have been destroyed or were never able to be made by women at all. *All* aspects of women's experience have been ignored or distorted or denied (222). Similar to Annis Pratt, they also highlight the fact that Jung's concept of feminine in his archetypal theory is essentially patriarchal and there is no "female imaginary" (224). Thus, in the light of studies above, we can conclude that feminist archetypal theory is a search for the female psyche, a consciousness-raising towards female archetypes.

In the study of myths, many feminist critics reject the Greco-Roman tradition as misogynistic and instead seek to trace pre-Greek myths and lesser known cultural myths in different parts of the world such as those of Native Americans. For instance, in *Spiders and Spinners* Marta Weigle draws from Western and Native American folklore, anthropology, classical literature and psychology and she presents a tremendous amount of material that she organizes then under general topics such as "Spiders and Spinners", "Goddesses", "Guides", "Moon, Menstruation, Menopause" etc. Weigle notes that perhaps the most important function of myth is its "world-creating", "world-affirming" aspects. She distinguishes male-centered myths that often serve as charters for male dominance in society, from female-centered myths that typically affirm and create the world itself. Weigle employs images of spinning and weaving in her analysis of the world creating, life affirming functions of myth. As Weigle notes, "Culture heroes, whether human or animal, female or male, bring or bring about

valuable objects, teachings and natural changes which make possible human society and survival” (53) and she calls attention to the paucity of female creators, deities and heroines in many of our traditional stories. She also laments the rarity of female heroes, as she puts it: “‘Creatress,’ ‘creatrix’ and ‘culture heroine’ are awkward and almost meaningless designations, reflecting the relatively weaker roles women play in creation, transformation and origin myths – when they appear at all in such narratives about ordering the world” (53). Marta Weigle writes that her volume is intended to be a source book that shows “how men have treated women mythologically”. Yet, her work can be considered more of an anthology than a critical study as she refrains from presenting a critical and scholarly debate and asks the readers to draw their own inferences about the excerpts.

Not all studies that focus on women are revisionist. To name one, Bettina L. Knapp, in *Women in Myth*, analyses myths from nine different lands including Greece, Middle East, India, Japan and China and her aim, she writes, “is to help awaken readers to new perceptions and to different judgments about themselves, others and life in general” (xii). Adopting an archetypal approach, she argues that in myths written by men, women “adorned, idolized or iconized, and thus dehumanized, they were transformed into cult objects- virtual untouchables” (xx). Thus, her study aims to demonstrate that by studying the representation of women in myths one can see through their idolized character and reach to the archetypal mothers, daughters, wives and sisters. As clearly seen in this statement, Knapp has no problem with the depiction of women in those myths. She takes the account of myths without any re-visioning, believing that the archetypes are present in these male-authored myths. She studies Isis, Deborah from Old Testament, Euripides’ Iphigenia, Babylonian creation myth Enuma Elish, Herodias/Salome and she argues that Herodias and her daughter are “paradigms of the Great Mother archetypes, in her avatar as castrator” (87). Although she acknowledges that “mother and daughter became the prototypes of the archetypal, all-consuming, sensual female”, Knapp does not question why Salome is presented as a “castrator”, a temptress who is manipulated by her mother (88). She suggests that

Salome is “the archetypal puella, the nonperson who lives through another and yields to “any authority” figure for better and for worse” (100) and she concludes that:

Nor did mother or daughter ever know *wholeness*. Each was a fragment of the other. Salome, the still-unformed non-person, however, ran the greatest risk of psychological dissolution. The decadent society that gave birth to these archetypal figures sent Herodias into the exile with her husband, her daughter’s fate remaining a mystery in the deepest sense of the world. Hidden within the folds of the psyche is where Salome remains, to reappear in all of her luster, beauty, and sensuality as an explosive force in yet other faction-ridden societies”. (110)

As the quotation above indicates Knapp’s portrayal and interpretation is very similar to the other temptress figures of mythology like Circe, Medea, Helen, Eve and Mary Magdalene. Thus, it is really difficult to imagine how this negative archetype can help women, as a cautionary tale? If so this is the real motive of patriarchal mythmaking and myth writing.

Along with feminist scholars, women writers and poets also turn to myths to revise and rewrite them. Especially African-American, Native American and Chicana writers turn to their indigenous myths as a medium to transfer, to tell their stories as opposed to the colonial discourse of white men. For instance, “connection to ancestors” is one of the central themes in Alice Walker’s extraordinary tribute to the lost and unrecognized genius of African-American foremothers in her essay “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens’. This theme recurs in the works of Toni Morrison, Barbara Omolade, Zora Neale Hurston, Audre Lorde and also in the writing of Native American writers Paula Gunn Allen, Lesli Marmon Silko and Chicana Gloria Anzaldua.

However, feminist critic and poet Alicia Ostriker sees revisionist mythmaking by women as a complex act of theft. Ostriker in her famous and much quoted essay “The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking” argues that rather than creating a new poetic language, women poets revise male myths from a woman-centered perspective. And she remarks:

At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, the deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature, there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora, Helen, Medea, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary and Cinderella. It is thanks to myth we believe that woman must be either “angel” or “monster”. (316)

For her article, Ostriker analyzes the poems of Muriel Rukeyser, Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, H.D. and Susan Griffin and she observes that “In all these cases the poet simultaneously deconstructs a prior “myth” or “story” and constructs a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself” (316). She defines this act as “revisionist mythmaking” and believes that eventually it makes cultural change possible. Ostriker also points out to the fact that modernist poets such as W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and T.S.Eliot like the Romantics turned to myth as a reaction to the rationalism and materialism. It was a heavily nostalgic act very different from the “self-exploration” of contemporary women poets who turn to myth to revise, to re-define and to re-write a past. This revisioning includes the challenging of the gender stereotypes embodied in myth and the revaluations of social, political, and philosophical values unlike the nostalgic longing of Modernist poets. To quote Ostriker: “Prufrock may yearn to be Hamlet, but what woman would want to be Ophelia?” (330).

In the same manner, poet and critic Rachel DuPlessis, in her article ““Perceiving the other-side of everything’: Tactics of Revisionary Mythopoesis”, attempts to define myth and to identify the narrative strategies employed by women poets in rewriting myths. On the difficulty that women poets face when turning to myths, she writes:

Myth best demonstrates its ideological character by refusing to acknowledge that it ever had any truck with the nonuniversal or the nontranscendent. Of all stories, myths are considered the most universal, describing deep structures of human need and evincing the most cunning knowledge of “mankind”. When a women writer chooses myth as her subject, she is faced with material that is indifferent or, more often, actively hostile to historical considerations of gender, claiming as it does universal, humanistic, natural or even archetypal status. (106)

DuPlessis observes that the most common method of rewriting myths by women poets is displacement. To put it differently, “giving voice to the muted” or telling the story from the “other side”. Thus, she believes, rewriting myths with a critical view from a noncanonical perspective demystifies the constructed nature of myths.

Following a similar line of thought, Diane Purkiss in her essay “Women’s Rewriting of Myths” focusing on the women poets rewriting myths like Anne Sexton, Liz Lohead, Judith Kazantzis, H.D, Elaine, Feinstein and Jenny Joseph and Sylvia Plath, distinguishes the most common strategy used by 20<sup>th</sup> century poets as the identification of the female speaking voice with that of a woman character in myth who remains “silent, objectified or inaudible in previous narration of the story” (445). She identifies three recurring modes of rewriting which can also be traced in women’s poetry: altering the focus from a male to a female character, reversing the features that were shown negative in patriarchal discourse into positive, and allowing a minor character to tell her tale. Although all these rewritings focus on the women’s experience, Purkiss believes, adopting postmodern strategies such as ironic and extensive use of popular culture, cliché, slogans of commerce, parody, high/low art and the juxtaposition of myth with the 20<sup>th</sup> century popular culture, the illusion of the timelessness of myth can be shattered. Purkiss contends that:

I want to close by suggesting that *no* possible strategy of rewriting myth (or anything else) can really constitute the kind of absolute, clean and revolutionary break with discourse and order sought in the days of feminism and poststructuralism’s greatest confidence. This does not imply the judgment must be suspended it is more important to be wary and even ironic about the strategies available when none are foolproof. A bit of political nous is a useful tool; it’s self-evident that there are occasions when one story will be more helpful than another. Women must continue to struggle to tell the stories otherwise. The possibilities are endless. (455)

Thus, Purkiss asserts that feminist rewriting of myths must be more than giving a voice to the silenced one. To put it differently, women must be the maker and



controller of the meaning rather than being the bearer of it. Likewise, Joanne Russ in her well-known 1972 article “What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can’t Write”, defining myths as plot-patterns in Aristotle’s terminology, underlines the fact that in Western literature there are stereotypical representations of women and she comments:

You will not find women but images of women: modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty schoolmarms, beautiful bitches, faithful wives, and so on. They exist in relation to the protagonist (who is male). Moreover, look at them carefully and you will see that they do not really exist at all- at their best they are depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play and often do play, but they are public roles and not the private women; at their worst they are gorgeous, Cloudcuckooland fantasies about what men want, or hate, or fear. How can women writers possibly use such myths?” (81)

Later in the article, she goes to assert that, “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 happen to us in the mythic terms our culture provides”(89-90). She argues that only experimental writing in different genres such as detective stories, supernatural fiction and most of all science fiction can provide “plots not limited to one sex”. (90) Russ goes on to suggests that the recreation of new myth in lesbian and science fiction novels represents an uncharted territory of women’s psychological and physical potential.

In a similar respect, novelist and one of the foremost fairytale scholars Marina Warner argues the mutability of myth allows for the weaving of new meanings and patterns and due to this fact, the compelling power of myths continues. She goes on to suggest: “myths are not always delusions, that deconstructing them does not necessarily mean wiping them, but that they represent ways of making sense of universal matters, like sensual identity and family relations, and that they enjoy a more vigorous life than we perhaps acknowledge, and exert more of an inspiration and influence than we think” (1994, xix). According to Warner, then, myths offer us new ways of making sense of our experience and present critical observations into the ideologies that lie

beneath our perceptions. By a careful examination of myth, she suggests, we can loosen its monumental hegemony and weave new variations into it. Warner insists that any new telling is at least as authentic as those of antiquity as they reach us from a long tradition of borrowings and adaptations.

As seen, for feminist critics and writers myth is an essential medium. While feminist criticism of myths offers a critical reading and awareness, rewriting myths, in a dialogic sense, is a writing back and a creating of an alternative tradition simultaneously. It should be noted here that the majority of the studies in this area are published in the late 70s and 80s. This coincides with the feminist movement when it was most strong. In the 2000s what we see mainly is a return to spirituality with the emergence of new pagan practices such as the goddess movement that will be discussed below. It can be argued that this is a result of the postmodernist movement which puts its signature in this era. Postmodernism, as briefly discussed above under the topic of the postmodern (third wave) feminism, calls for identity politics which results in the backlash of second wave feminism. The dark side of postmodernism, despite its exhilarating nature, leads people to promote their ethnic, racial and religious identities more. This is attested in rising nationalism and religious fundamentalism. In this atmosphere, consequently, the women's movement lost its political base advocating the unity of women. Thus, in this vacuum, some scholars and writers establish a different strand of scholarship in feminist myth studies called Goddess-studies. The advocates of this field argue that the feminine aspect of the sacred has been lost or repressed by patriarchal institutional religions. Accordingly, in the fields such as archaeology, theology, cultural studies, gender studies, psychology and literature, studies are initiated that call for a "reorientation of the culture towards the centrality of the female" (Green, 2). The feminist scholars in this area, employing a multidisciplinary approach, with the light of archaeological evidence, reread world history with a female-oriented perspective starting from the upper Palaeolithic period (ca. 35,000-9000 BC). In some studies, the notion of a prehistoric Mother Goddess exhibited in female figurines, murals and observed gender differences in burial customs are seen as evidence for the idea of

matriarchy or rule by women. Although there is no firm textual and archaeological evidence to prove matriarchy ever existed as a historical reality, there are those feminist scholars who turned to a theory of a universal mother goddess or matriarchy<sup>11</sup>. For instance, the supporters of this theory interpret the naked female figurines with accentuated breasts, buttocks and genitalia as the sign of a mother goddess cult. Furthermore, it is greatly emphasized that feminine power is ecologically harmonious and pacifistic. In this way, a kind of golden age of humanity is imagined. But the general consensus among scholars is that in the early societies women were empowered with a status equal to if not higher than that of men. Since a detailed review of recent scholarship on the area is out of the scope of this dissertation, only a brief outline will be given here.

Elinor Gadon, in *The Once and Future Goddess, A Symbol For Our Time* presents a comprehensive illustrated history of Goddess imagery from Paleolithic caves to contemporary women's art. She comments on the meaning and importance of the goddess concept as:

In our time, in our culture, the goddess once again is becoming a symbol of empowerment for women; a catalyst for an emerging spirituality that is earth centered; a metaphor for the earth as a living organism; an archetype for feminine consciousness; a mentor for healers; the emblem of a new political movement; an inspiration for artists; and a model for resacralizing women's body and the mystery of human sexuality. (xv)

Likewise, Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor's study *The Great Cosmic Mother* presents a wealth of biological, anthropological and archaeological evidence to conclude that religion originally centered on worship of the cosmic mother. They study the surviving images from the earliest periods of human civilization to demonstrate how the Earth was originally perceived as functioning according to the feminine cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Sjöö and Mor argue that this belief underpinned all mythological and religious thinking for at least the first of 200000 years of human existence and they attempt to document how in all the oldest creation myths, the female goddess creates the earth from her own body,

<sup>11</sup> On the notion and the discussion of matriarchy, see Bachofen, J.J., 1967; Engels, 1972 ; Bamberger, 1974; Georgoudi, 1992; Davis. 1971. Goodison and Morris, 1999.

how the earliest human images known to us are the pregnant guardian Venuses found in Upper Palaeolithic remains and how the burial customs illustrate the connection between death, rebirth and a universal mother. These scholars believe that women who had played a primary role in Neolithic society were overthrown with the shift to warfare during the Bronze Age with the advancement in metal technology and weaponry. Children, animals, land and women are reduced to resources and prizes in the new world order characterized by raid and conquest. They suggest that this is why patriarchy's primary myths from Indian *Mahabharata* to the Greek *Iliad* glorify war. Sjöö and Mor convey how the patriarchal sun or sky god was everywhere imposed on the formerly earth-and-moon worshipping communities by invasion or internal revolt. Yet, they assert, the concept of a universal mother goddess was not entirely eradicated; she was turned into a harmless consort with limited and negative powers (217).

By the same token, Marija Gimbutas, another important advocate of prehistoric matriarchal ideology, in the light of the archaeological evidence, argues that the pre-historic Greece and Old Europe were essentially a matriarchal society<sup>12</sup>. Gimbutas maintains that the snake goddess figurines, the naked female figures with emphasized genitalia and breasts and the mother figurines giving birth or nursing a child are all representations of the prehistoric Mother Goddess. Gimbutas also notes (2001) that the Mother Goddess was not only associated with fertility and birth but also with death and regeneration. Yet, she contends, in the years following the invasion of the Indo-European tribes from the steppes of Eurasia around 4500-2500 BC, the Mother Goddess cult lost its importance.

Çatalhöyük, the Neolithic site in Anatolia has a special and significant place in goddess studies. Being the largest and the best preserved Neolithic site found to date, it lies in the southeast of the present day city of Konya. The site was excavated by James Mellaart in 1961-63 and he remarks that Çatalhöyük is a prominent place of mother goddess worship referring to the numerous female figurines on the site (1965). Moreover, Mellaart believes that the fact that women have bigger burials on the site and the children are buried with their mother

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<sup>12</sup> See Gimbutas 1982, 1989, 1991,

suggests that the lineage is through the mother and maternal ancestors. This theory is hailed by the proponents of goddess worship. However, Ian Hodder, the head of the excavation since 1993, in the most recent interview states that:

Sir James Mellaart who excavated the site in the 1960s came up with all sorts of ideas about the way the site was organized and how it was lived in and so on. We've now started working there since the mid 1990s and come up with very different ideas about the site. One of the most obvious examples of that is that Çatalhöyük is perhaps best known for the idea of the mother goddess. But our work more recently has tended to show that in fact there is very little evidence of a mother goddess and very little evidence of some sort of female-based matriarchy. (Jeremy, n.pag.)

In this field another influential study is Merlin Stone's *When God was a Woman*. Stone's work brings together a great deal of evidence in support of her view that the status of women was higher in matrilineal goddess worshipping cultures than it was in patriarchal Israel and Judah. Riane Eisler, on the other hand, in *The Chalice and the Blade*, posits another model; not a hierarchy but a model of partnership. The ancient cultures, she suggests, possessed highly developed "partnership" spirituality. The philosophies we find in the Vedas and the Torah, she believes, were in effect stolen by the invading Indo-Europeans from the earlier, peaceful, spiritually sophisticated Goddess-worshipping cultures of Old European and Indus-Dravidian civilizations. Eisler argues that the Indo-Europeans were a savage clan that took the best elements of the ancient "Union with the Goddess of Life" philosophy, incorporated it into their belief systems and passed it off as their own invention. In the same manner, Barbara Walker's comprehensive study, *The Woman's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets*, drawing on the findings of archaeology, anthropology and feminist scholarship in religion and mythology, traces the transition from female-oriented to male oriented religions in western culture. Likewise in *The Myth of Goddess: Evolution of An Image*, Jungian analysts Anne Baring and Jules Cashford provide a thorough survey of the history of goddess worship from the Palaeolithic mother goddess through the great father god of the Iron Age to Eve, Mary, and Sophia.

Baring and Cashford attempt to delineate the transformation of the original creator goddess into a male god image during the Christian Era, from Wisdom/Sophia/Hockmah, to the incorporation of the archetypal feminine image associated with Christ as Logos, the Word of God, and finally to the Holy Spirit of the Trinity<sup>13</sup>. Yet, since most of the findings in these works belong to the times before the discovery of writing, the interpretation of them is complicated and controversial. As Sarah Pomeroy aptly puts it, “No one would call Renaissance Britain a matriarchy because of the reigns of Mary Stuart, Mary Tudor, and Elizabeth. Accordingly, the question of Bronze Age matriarchy remains the subject of tantalizing speculation (1975, 23)”. Thus, the theory of Mother Goddess has fierce adversaries as well. For instance, Angela Carter in her vigorous and smart style is critical of this notion in *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. To quote Carter:

If women allow themselves to be consoled for their culturally determined lack of access to the modes of intellectual debate by the invocation of hypothetical great goddesses, they are simply flattering themselves into submission (a technique often used on them by men). All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciliatory mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place. (5)

By the same token, in her book *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future*, Cynthia Eller also casts doubt on the wishful thinking inherent in such popular thinking about a matriarchal past. In her examination of what little evidence we have of how people might have lived in prehistoric times, Eller remarks that in fact we cannot and do not know enough to make such conclusions. This “myth” of a matriarchal past, for Eller, appeals to women today who are struggling to gain rights and build a better society. And she

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<sup>13</sup> On the survey of the Goddess, also see Downing, 1981.

proposes that reviving a prehistoric model is easier to many women than creating a new one. Instead of clinging to this imagined past as a model on which to build a future, Eller insists on creating new models and world views. She asserts that:

If there are no inherent barriers to women's equality, then the future of women does not rest on biological destiny or historical precedent, but rather on moral choice. What we must be and what we have been will of course have an effect on our gender relations, but ultimately these cannot and should not dictate what we want to be. If we are certain that we want to get rid of sexism, we do not need a mythical time of women's past greatness to get on with the effort toward ending it. (188)

As noted earlier, the influence of feminist movement is also manifested in religious studies. Both Jewish and Christian radical feminists, pointing out the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament ignore the experience of women by erasing them from history, argue that there is no place for women in the Bible. According to these scholars, God is always addressed in male language and the Bible justifies the oppression of women and dominance of men. For instance, Naomi Goldenberg, in *Changing the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* posits that: “Yahweh and Christ were shaped by males principally to deify themselves and to sanctify the power of men over women in patriarchal societies” (28). Thus a group of feminist scholars attempts to change the concept of the transcendent god into a female one with which women could identify and interpret in terms of their feminine nature and experience. To quote another important figure in the area, feminist theologian Carol Christ writes that:

As long as the Father continues to be invoked in churches and synagogues, the stage is being set for the continuation of pathological relationships to God and to the men in our lives. The God of the Bible, the God of liturgy and prayer, does not appear as a “Liberator” to many women. ... I am not optimistic that these questions can be resolved from within these traditions. For me, the discovery of alternative images and traditions has been empowering”. (1987,18)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Also see, Christ, 1997; 2003. ; Plaskow and Christ (eds.), 1989.

In the same vein other feminists who reject patriarchal Western traditions have sought to replace it not by a new goddess religion but by reviving an old one. This strand, called the wiccan movement, invokes what they name the ancient tradition of European goddess worship and witchcraft. The wiccans argue that patriarchal doctrines and scriptures ignore the experience of women. Hence, a new religion must be established to incorporate the interests of women. Furthermore, parallel to the surfacing interest in ecology in the recent decades, this movement puts emphasis on natural remedies and herbal lore. One of the major figures in women's spirituality, Starhawk, defines Goddess as:

In the Craft, we do *not believe* in the Goddess, we connect with Her; through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves. She is here. She is within us all. She is the full circle: earth, air, fire, water, and essence body, mind, spirit, emotions, change. (103)<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, more reconstructionist feminists, rather than disregarding their religious traditions and turning to new forms, attempt to examine their traditions and scriptures from a female-oriented perspective. These scholars, acknowledging the patriarchal nature of religious traditions, with the help of modern scholarship, try to uncover the meaning of women's experience as recorded by their sacred scriptures. In addition, they aim to recover and highlight the spiritual contribution and participation of women throughout the ages within their tradition<sup>16</sup>. In this respect, Athalya Brenner's *The Israelite Woman* is a noteworthy example. Brenner remarks that: "Very few women of biblical times tried to acquire positions of prominence outside their home and immediate family, at least according to available Old Testament sources. Of those who tried, even fewer managed to achieve a degree of public recognition (3)". She then throughout the book attempts to recover women's stories in the Hebrew Bible in six "occupational categories", namely: queens, wise women, authors, prophetesses,

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<sup>15</sup> Also see Starhawk. 1982; 1987

<sup>16</sup> Also see Tribble, 1978; 1984 ; Ruether, 1982; 1985; 1992; Frymer-Kensky, 1992; 2002; 2006; Plaskow, 1990; 2005; Ostriker, 1993. Tribble, Frymer-Kensky, et al., 1995; Goldstein (ed.), 2009.



magicians and prostitutes<sup>17</sup>. In a similar vein, Elaine Pagels, in her studies focusing on the history of Christianity, investigates the female element. She argues, *Gnostic Gospels*<sup>18</sup>, offers convincing evidence that the female imagery of God abounded in these early Christian groups. She demonstrates that in the early Christian writings the Holy Spirit is viewed as a divine Mother, or Holy Wisdom and it is characterized as female. Then, Pagels concludes that the female symbolism and leadership are suppressed. Marina Warner also focuses on the enigmatic figure of the Virgin Mary in Christian tradition. Her book, *Alone of All Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* examines the various aspects of Mary's persona to trace the myths and her cult developed from the origins of Christianity to our day. As Warner puts it:

Whether we regard the Virgin Mary as the most sublime and beautiful image in man's struggle towards good and the pure, or the most pitiable production of ignorance and superstition, she represents a central theme in the history of western attitudes to women. She is one of the few female figures to have attained the status of myth- a myth that for nearly two thousand years has coursed through our culture, as spirited and often as imperceptible as an underground system. (1983, xxv)

Employing an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account evidence from theological writings, anthropology and art history, Warner provides a comprehensive documentation. Demonstrating the ways in which Mary's cult was put together, Warner argues that the exalted position of Mary is a reflection of an inherently patriarchal and even misogynistic mind-set. In the book the major roles that the Virgin Mary assumed as her cult developed are explored: her status as virgin, queen, bride, mother and intercessor. In all these roles, Warner notes, Mary

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<sup>17</sup> Also see Brenner, 2005; Brenner & Fontaine (eds.) 2001; Brenner (ed.), 2000; 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Gnostic Gospels are the collection of writings from 2<sup>nd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> century AD. These documents on the teachings of Jesus and early Christianity are called heresies by mainstream Christianity and the Catholic Church. They are not accepted as part of the Bible. Yet the discovery of 52 Coptic texts in Northern Egypt in 1945, today known as the Nag Hammadi Library, provides a wide selection of writings of Gnosticism and context for comparison with earlier found texts. One of the most controversial documents of Gnostic Gospels is The Gospel of Mary that is believed to be written by Mary Magdalene and it sheds light on the political struggle between female and male disciples of Jesus over the issue of female leadership. See Pagels, 1989; Leloup, 2002; King, 2003; Meyer (ed.), 2007.

is put forth as an ideal model for women to follow in her virginity, humility and purity. Moreover, it must be stated that all these roles are related to men and men-made world. This idealized portrait of Mary as a Virgin, as the bride of God and the mother of Jesus Christ/God makes it almost impossible for real women to identify with her or relate their daily experience to her. Thus, female nature and self-esteem are undermined and real women are condemned to an eternal inferiority.

In this respect, French psychoanalyst and feminist Julia Kristeva, relying on Marina Warner's detailed study, constructs her own interpretation of the cult of Virgin Mary. In her much acclaimed 1977 essay "Stabat Mater"<sup>19</sup>, she explores the Church reverence for the Virgin Mary and she argues that the Virgin Mother is the symbol of the repressed maternal Semiotic in the patriarchal Western world. The language of the preverbal order which is characterized by rhythmic drives is named maternal semiotic by Kristeva. This semiotic mode of communication is shared by the mother and the infant during the pregnancy and at birth the infant experiences a rupture with the mother's body and enters the realm of symbolic or the Name of the Father in Lacanian terminology. Yet, the manifestations of the semiotic drives surface in the language with contradiction, disruption, silences and absences<sup>20</sup>. In "Stabat Mater" Kristeva claims that in Christian tradition woman/mother is tamed and as the title "mater dolorosa" suggests (the suffering mother of Jesus) the Virgin Mother is only allowed to suffer. According to Kristeva, since the Church as one of the buttresses of patriarchal order and power cannot manipulate the maternal Semiotic, it aims to be in command of it by means of the image of the Virgin Mother. In this way, the whole notion of the feminine is reduced to the maternal aspect. Moreover, she is associated with death. Kristeva states that:

The ordering of the maternal libido is carried farthest in connection with the theme of death. The *Mater dolorosa* knows

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<sup>19</sup> Stabat Mater Dolorosa in Latin means "the sorrowful mother standing". It is a 13<sup>th</sup> century hymn of the Roman Catholic Church. The lyric is attributed to Jacope da Tordi. The text was later used by composers Pergolesi, Haydn and Rossini.

<sup>20</sup> For the further discussion of the Symbolic and the Semiotic see Kristeva, 1984

no male body except that of her dead son, and her only pathos (which is sharply distinguished from the sweet and somewhat absent serenity of the lactating Madonnas) comes from the tears she sheds over a corpse. Since resurrection lies in the offing, and since as the Mother of God she ought to know that it does, nothing justifies Mary's anguish at the foot of the cross unless it is the desire to feel in her body what it is like for a man to be put to death, a fate spared her female role as the source of life. Is the love of women who weep over the bodies of the dead a love as obscure as it is ancient, nourished by the same source as the aspiration of a woman whom nothing satisfies, namely, the desire to feel the thoroughly masculine pain of the male who, obsessed with the thought of death, expires at each moment of ecstasy? (144)

Yet, for Kristeva, the persistence of the cult of the Virgin affirms the enduring power of maternity and the primal needs of identification with the mother. Thus The Virgin Mary, as a symbol, stays outside of the paternal Symbolic order. Kristeva observes: “[milk and tears] both are metaphors of non-language of a “semiotic” that do not coincide with linguistic communication. The Mother and her attributes signifying suffering humanity thus become the symbol of a “return of the repressed” in monotheism (143)”. Furthermore, Kristeva argues that the Western world does not have pertinent discourses of maternity. Religion, specifically Catholicism defines the mother as sexless, sacred and suffering, on the other hand, science associates the mother with nature. Women, maternity and femininity thus have been reduced to the maternal function or in other words to reproduction. Like Warner, Kristeva concludes that the feminine ideal embodied by the Virgin is an unattainable end for ‘earthly’ women.

The influence of the feminist movement, hence the appearance of studies focusing on women is also witnessed in the Classical Studies<sup>21</sup>. The neglected aspects of social history such as the study of Greek families, private life, social and gender roles become the subjects of studies. The first major work on ancient Greek women was Sarah B. Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. Following this groundbreaking study, other

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<sup>21</sup> For a review of recent classical scholarship on women, see Katz 2000. Also see, Pomeroy 1991; Shapiro 1994; Zeitlin 1996.

volumes exclusively on ancient women appeared in the late 1980's and 1990's<sup>22</sup>. Yet, due to the nature of evidence, the discussion of women in the classical world is problematic and controversial. Pomeroy in the introduction of her 1975 work explains:

The literary testimony presents grave problems for the social historian. Women pervade nearly every genre of classical literature, yet often the bias of the author distorts information. Aside from some scraps of lyric poetry, the extant formal literature of classical antiquity was all written by men. In addition, misogyny taints much ancient literature. (x)

Thus scholars are careful and critical towards the ancient women. Besides the handful of women's poems and fragments, the sources are works of male poets from Homer to Hesiod, the plays of fifth-century B.C. dramatists, the essays of philosophers, notably Plato and Aristotle from fourth-century B.C. In addition, there are few legal documents, tombstone epitaphs and inscriptions along with the archaeological evidence. Although, scholars emphasize the fact that literature and myths can not be considered as the direct evidence for the status of women in Ancient Greece, they argue that they reflect various elements of the social realities of their time. For instance, Eva Cantarella, in her book *Pandora's Daughters*, notes that for the study of early Greek women the oldest documents are Homeric poems. She continues:

Here we will consider them as "historical" documents, whether or not the events narrated really happened or the characters really lived, or whether or not the Trojan War was really fought. Their historicity, of course, has proponents on both sides; some even attempted to pinpoint the war in time and space, and others (such as M.I. Finley) maintain that the events are poetic invention. But for our purposes, the question is irrelevant- the poems do not interest us as a record of events, but as documents that transmit the memory of culture... Even if the situations described are not true, they must be realistic. The characters surely behave according to the rules of real society; the ethic that inspired their deeds must be that which the poetry... taught and transmitted.

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<sup>22</sup> See Pomeroy 1987, 1994; Rabinowitz & Richlin 1993; Demand 1994, Fantham, Foley, Kampen, et al., 1994.; Reeder 1995; Hawley & Levick 1995,

The society described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is, in other words, a mirror of Greek society. (24-25)

The literary sources therefore provide an idea of women's lives in ancient Greece. Like Cantarella, Sue Blundell in her book *Women in Ancient Greece* underlines the problematic nature of myths as evidence for women's status saying that "the myths which we possess, were the products of the adaptations worked upon them by later patriarchal societies" (18). Blundell's work, as the title implies, also focuses on women. In this comprehensive study, Blundell discusses women's lives in Ancient Greece through the use of myths, plays, and primary sources such as legal documents and she contends that:

Women in Greek myth can be seen more often than not to be boundary-crossers: they are represented as anomalous creatures who, while they live in the ordered community are vital to its continuance, do not really belong there. They are always liable to cross over its boundaries into some disorderly state of being, and for this reason they are seen as highly dangerous. Perhaps equally as common as the destructive women of myth, though receiving far less attention, are the women who are victims. They are united with their more outgoing sisters in a basic antithesis: mortal women who are active are very often destroyers, while mortal women who are passive are very often destroyed. (19)

The other book concentrating on women in mythology is Mary Lefkowitz's *Women in Greek Myth*. Yet, Lefkowitz, as opposed to feminist scholars, argues that the portrayal of women in Greek myths is read with contemporary theories, in particular feminism, in mind. In the preface to the First edition she asserts that:

If my account of women's experience in myth and men's attitude towards women seems less negative than that given by other women scholars about the ancient world, it is not because I wish to be an apologist for the past, which I am delighted not to be living in myself, but because I am trying not to read into standards and preoccupations of the present. (xix)

Having said that, in the Preface to the Second edition, she elaborates on this issue further and she argues that women in Ancient Greece were vital for their communities and contrary to other critics who underline the misogynistic

depiction of women in literary sources and myths, Lefkowitz strongly believes that women were honoured in social life and myths. She writes:

Even in the myths that describe how women are seduced and abducted by gods, the women were chosen because they displayed qualities of courage, enterprise, and intelligence that made them stand out from other women. They became the founding mothers of Greek heroes and great families, an important role in a society which paid particular honor to mothers.(xiii)

As the quotation implies, Lefkowitz is an exception in the feminist scholarship on Greek myths. Yet, her other work, that she co-edited with Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* is an important resource that focuses on women's life in epigraphic, legal and literary evidence, inscriptions, epitaphs and state records. Another recent noteworthy contribution to the field is *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* edited by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard. This work is a collection of thought-provoking essays in which scholars from different disciplines explore the classical myths in modern settings and different media<sup>23</sup>.

To conclude, as this chapter illustrates, myth and mythmaking have been a controversial yet contemporary topic for every epoch throughout history. Scholars, critics and writers turn to myth to define, discuss, revise and rewrite. After this theoretical background and survey of the theories of myth, the next chapter will analyze two rewritings of Greek myth by contemporary women writers.

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<sup>23</sup> Also see Caputi 2004 on the use of mythic themes and archetypes in popular culture with special emphasis on cinema.

## CHAPTER 3

### REWRITINGS OF GREEK MYTHS

#### 3.1 Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*

Margaret Atwood's 2005 work *The Penelopiad* has been published as a part of Scottish publishers Canongate's ambitious and inspirational project. In this endeavour, writers such as A.S. Byatt, Jeannette Winterson, Chinua Achebe and Ali Smith have been asked to rewrite a myth "in a contemporary and memorable way". Atwood's project is the revision of Homer's *Odyssey* in which she aims to draw attention to Penelope's side of the story. In Atwood's version, Penelope, the paragon of fidelity of Homer's epic, tells her own account of Odysseus's homecoming and her union with him after two decades. Since the beginning of her career, Atwood has always been interested in myths and in her opus she has employed myths extensively as intertexts or subtexts starting from her first published volume of poems titled *Double Persephone* in 1961. She also gives voice to other mythological heroines like Circe and the Sirens in her poetry book *You are Happy* (1974), Eurydice in *Interlunar* (1984), Athena, Daphne and Helen of Troy in *Morning of the Burned House* (1996). For their enduring allure and influence, Atwood in "The Myths and Me" writes that:

Strong myths never die. Sometimes they die down, but they don't die out. They double back in the dark, they re-embody themselves, they change costumes, they change key, they speak in new languages, they take on other meanings... But myths can be used- as they have been, so frequently- as the foundation stones for new versions, new renderings- renderings that have, in turn their own contexts that find their meanings within their own historical moments. (35-36)

In her introduction to *The Penelopiad*, Atwood further elaborates on the reason why she has chosen to rewrite the *Odyssey* and she explains that:

I have chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids. The maids form a chanting and singing Chorus which focuses on two questions that must pose themselves after any close reading of *The Odyssey*: what led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to? The story as told in the *Odyssey* does not hold water: there are too many inconsistencies. I have always been haunted by the hanged maids; and in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself". (2006, xxi)

Penelope since the time of composition of Homer's epic has always been an enigmatic figure. In general, throughout literary history, Penelope is presented as the paragon of female virtue. She is portrayed as the long-suffering, loyal and virtuous wife, preserving Odysseus's house and the shroud trick to put off her suitors has been recognized as a sign of her intelligence. Thus, she has become the metaphor for fidelity and perseverance and these features are used to define the female behaviour. Yet, due to the inconsistencies and ambiguities of her motives, there has never been a complete consensus among the readers and the scholars alike about her real motives and character. Since she is depicted through the lens and mouth of the male characters and the narrator of the poem, the readers have no access to her mind. For this reason, when she really recognizes the disguised Odysseus, whether her announcement of the decision to remarry and to set up a bow contest for this end in the presence of the disguised Odysseus is intentional or not, are not lucid in the text. Thus, this has been one of the greatest riddles of literary history. The mentioned ambiguities in the epic enthrall many scholars who have tried to interpret Penelope's character and the workings of her mind. Thus, it will not be wrong to argue that the studies of Penelope have become a sub-genre within criticism studies. Here only a brief overview of history of research will be given since the literature on the topic spans centuries and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. As stated earlier, although in the later literature, Penelope is portrayed as the quintessential loyal wife, there are some alternative versions of her story even as early as the Hellenistic period. In this era, in popular literature Greek poet Lycophron of Chalcis in his work the *Alexandra* illustrates her as an adulteress who squanders Odysseus' asset with her suitors. Likewise, Duris of



Samos and Theocritus write that she is the mother of Pan fathered by all the suitors. Cicero also refers to Penelope saying that she bore Pan to god Mercury.

In the history of later literary criticism, one of the early commentators on Penelope is Samuel Butler, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century writer and the translator of the *Odyssey*. Unlike the *Iliad* which is a war epic characterized by fighting and heroic code of behaviour with the cast of characters exclusively male, in the *Odyssey* women are also at the centre of the stage. This point will be elaborated in the coming pages, but at this moment it suffices to say that the strong female cast of the epic has been one of the main differences in the discussion of the Homeric epics. Butler, hence, in his *The Authoress of the Odyssey* by pointing out the “domestic and female interest” in the epic, contends that it must have been written by a woman (269). Yet, his conception can not be identified as a feminist one as he argues that in comparison to the *Iliad*, in the *Odyssey* there is “something wrong” (6). His comments on Penelope’s sending secret messages to her suitors with the help of maids summarize the cloud of ambiguity around her motives. Butler writes: “Sending pretty little message to her admirers was not exactly the way to get rid of them. Did she ever try snubbing? All she had to do was bolt the door” (131). In the coming centuries, the interest in Penelope continued.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the influence of feminist criticism, the ways of identifying and celebrating the ways in which women resist patriarchal structures, how they manipulate their oppressed positions to gain what they want and claim a voice with which to articulate their own concerns under conditions of domination have become the focus of research. Parallel to this concern, female characters of classical literature and mythology are put under the lens. Consequently, there has been a momentous increase in the number of studies devoted to the figure of Penelope, the female character who occupies a central role in the largely male dominated genre of heroic epic.

Some scholars favour Penelope in their readings not necessarily as a feminist but as a strong character. For instance, Helene P. Foley in her discussion of Penelope calls her a model of ethical behaviour as she “remembers” her husband and remains loyal to him. In her article “Reverse Similes and Sex Roles

in the *Odyssey*”, she interprets Penelope as a powerful figure in her own right. In her domain, in this case *oikos* (house), Penelope tries to protect and defend “what is permanent and unchanging” using the power available for her (Foley, 19). In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus compares the reputation of Penelope to that of a good king whose land and people prosper under him:

Lady, no mortal man on the endless earth could have cause  
to find fault with you; your fame goes up into the wide heaven,  
as of some king who, as blameless man and god-fearing,  
and ruling as lord over many powerful people,  
upholds the way of good government, and the black earth yields  
him  
barley and wheat, his trees are heavy with fruit, his sheepflocks  
continue to bear young, the sea gives him fish, because of  
his good leadership, and his people prosper under him.  
(19.108-14)

And then he compares her to a shipwrecked sailor (23.233-240). For Odysseus, her experience and her trials at home are similar to his ordeals. On the other hand, Odysseus compares himself to a weeping woman (8.523-31). According to Foley, by comparing a woman to a man, Odysseus equates Penelope to himself. By means of the reversal of social and gender roles. Foley argues that Penelope has “a powerful and highly valued social and ideological position” in the poem (205). Likewise, John Finley in *Homer’s Odyssey* hails Penelope’s central role and he argues that unlike Odysseus and Telemachus who make journeys on sea and land, Penelope makes “an inner journey from the sad fixity of her twenty-year isolation” (2). Finley, like Foley, also stresses the fact that she keeps the memory of Odysseus and he continues: “well did she remember her wedded husband; therefore the fame of her excellence will never fade, but immortals will create for men on earth a fair song of prudent Penelope. That comes near making our *Odysseia* a *Penelopia*” (3). Richard Heitman, is another figure who chooses to read Penelope as a loyal wife without any hidden agenda and ambiguous motives. In *Taking Her Seriously*, Heitman announces that “this book is an attempt to take Penelope seriously”. He maintains that “she is a reliable reporter of her own mind” (2) and he is convinced that Penelope was not playing tricks. For him, all

her actions and decisions were founded upon a conviction that most likely her husband were dead and would not return.

Some recent feminist critics attempt to read Penelope as a subject subverting and resisting the dominant ideology. For instance Barbara Clayton in her study *A Penelopian Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey*, considers Penelope as a representative of *écriture féminine* arguing that in her role of weaver she resists the authority of phallogocentric discourse by unweaving. Yet, it should be noted that although this is an inspiring reading, there is no evidence in the text to support this idea. Several feminist scholars are also tempted to interpret Penelope's weaving as a metaphor for composing; just like a weaver, the poet interweaves the words together. In this regard, the critics as such Clayton, Bergren and Winkler discuss Penelope as a figure of female poet. According to Clayton, for instance, she is a "significant bard figure" (24), who weaves her feminine web of discourse.

Different scholars also offer various opinions for the recognition of Odysseus by Penelope. For instance Harsh, in his 1950 article "Penelope and Odysseus in Odyssey XIX" asserts that Penelope actually recognizes her husband but she cannot make it explicit as it is not for him to reveal himself to the treacherous maidservants who are sleeping with the suitors. In addition, for Harsh, the dream in which Penelope sees her pet geese slaughtered by an eagle is a code between husband and wife for the purpose of communicating secretly. In a similar vein, Amory, in her article "The Reunion of Odysseus and Penelope", suggests that Penelope intuitively knows her husband. The inconsistencies in her speech and actions are due to the fact that she "thinks intuitively rather than rationally" (104) and Amory believes that the recognition of Penelope takes place at the "subconscious" level (105). Following Amory's line of thought, Austin in his book *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (1975) also advocates the notion of intuition. Russo in "Interview and Aftermath: Dream, Fantasy, and Intuition in Odyssey 19 and 20" (1982) also writes that Penelope must have recognized her husband arguing that: "the spiritual harmony between the two, shown in their understanding of each other's language, makes it hardly credible that no

recognition has taken place (232). Winkler is another scholar who favours the theory of the early recognition. In *Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (1990), Winkler emphasizes Penelope's similar mindnessness to Odysseus and he maintains that Penelope uses her dream as a sign to communicate with her husband. He thus contends that Penelope with her wit is the perfect match to her cunning husband. Marquart in her article "Penelope *Polutropos*", likewise, argues that Penelope or as she calls her "Penelope *Polutropos*" (of many ways) with the help of her intelligences proves to be a "fitting mate for her wily husband". She argues that the bow contest is another reason, in a way a tool for delay and she would never marry someone else. All the interpretations above are exciting and inspiring, yet it should be underlined that there is no textual evidence.

On the other hand, Shelia Murnaghan in her article "Penelope's *Agnoia*: Knowledge, Power and Gender in the *Odyssey*" interprets Penelope's setting the bow contest and tempting the suitors not as a trick of *metis* (intelligence) but as a sign of powerlessness. For Murnaghan, as Penelope is out of tricks to delay her marriage to one of the suitors, she is obliged to establish the contest. According to her, Penelope definitely lacks the autonomy allowed to those male heroes. As she explains to Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, after her shroud trick comes out, her family forces her to get married, also her son expects her to get married as the suitors feast on his heritage.

The influence of the poststructuralist school of thought is also observed in the studies about Penelope. Since identity, disguise and memory are the essential notions of this school, scholars are tempted to apply them to the Homeric epic which has these concepts as the major themes. Feminist scholars Marilyn Katz and Nancy Felson focus on the complexity and the indeterminacy of Penelope's character and motivation<sup>24</sup>. Marilyn Katz's study *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey* focuses on the inconsistencies within the text. She argues that Penelope's characterization is an "indeterminacy" and her study sets out to analyze "fissures in the text" that condition its meaning" (15). Katz

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<sup>24</sup> For other poststructuralist readings focusing on the intertextuality, indeterminacy and multiplicity, see Pucci, 1987; Perradato, J. 1990; Bergren, 2008; Doherty, 1995.

criticizes early commentators for having an “ideological bias toward the unitary subject” (78) and she argues that “the indeterminacy around which the character of Penelope is constructed undermines the notion of a coherent, essential self and presents us with a notion of the person instead as constructed – invented on the spot, as it were- and ultimately brought into being as such by time, place and circumstance” (94). Yet she recognizes the fact that Penelope’s freedom is a consequence of having no effective guardian. Moreover, she does a poststructural analysis without referring to the social context of the poem. In other words, Katz does not take into account the society depicted in the poem and the society in which the poem was created and read. Nancy Felson also argues that there is an ambiguity in the text to elicit multiple responses from the audience. Similar to Katz, in *Regarding Penelope*, Nancy Felson, employing a narratological approach, conveys that Penelope is “a subject acting from her own desire” and thus “we must treat her as if she were a real character in real life with a world of her own” (64). Felson interprets Penelope as a forceful figure who challenges the traditional views of women in which women/wife is seen as an inferior or subservient to her husband. She notes that “we must treat [Penelope] as if she were a character in real life with a world of her own” and she goes on to suggest that she manipulates the plot, she plots her moves but since she is kept ignorant of larger parts, her designs “fit more than one plot trajectory” (73). Both Katz and Felson tend to read Penelope as a postmodern subject. Yet, as appealing as it is, if we consider the context, then in such a world it is too optimistic and even anachronistic to read Penelope as a powerful figure as an autonomous and subversive subject. We cannot deny the fact that in comparison to the *Iliad*, portrayal of the heroine in *the Odyssey* has an importance equal to that of the male hero. Penelope, without doubt, has a central role in the poem. She uses her intelligence (*metis*) to hold against the suitors and she keeps them at bay and tries to protect his kingdom until Odysseus comes home to defeat them. Nonetheless, most of the critics overestimate Penelope’s autonomy and they overlook the social and textual context of the poem. To put it differently, *The Odyssey* is an oral work that has changed throughout the centuries until it was put down to a written form

and for this very reason to apply a narrative theory is problematic. Moreover, feminist readings endow Penelope with an autonomy that the text doesn't support. Murnaghan in her article, "Reading Penelope" observes that: "Penelope has tended to be an embarrassment to the readers of the *Odyssey* particularly to feminist readers because she seems to embody weakness and despair, indeed because she seems to be a victim" (1994, 93). Likewise, W.B. Stanford in his book *The Ulysses Theme* asserts that "Feminists may dislike this, but despite the poet's admiration for feminine qualities, it can hardly be denied that Odysseus is the pivot of his poem" (58). Murnaghan calls the poststructuralist feminist readings "a project rescuing Penelope from a state of victimage" in which subversive textual strategies or theories are applied to the Homeric epic (1994,79). For contemporary texts it is a stimulating and creative method but applying them to the classical text can lead to anachronistic reading with the danger of ignoring the context and treating Penelope simply as a character without a setting or even worse as a real person. In the same article, Murnaghan also conveys that in analyzing Penelope, we could not interpret her as independent of the male characters surrounding her or the male poet that composed the poem. She elaborates this point as follows:

In interpreting Penelope, we have to remember that she is not a real person, but the creation of that presumably male poet, and that the male characters in the poem do not merely surround her but also control the society in which she must operate, thereby dictating the terms under which she must act. Without turning either that poet or those male characters into misogynistic caricatures, one has to acknowledge that the society portrayed in the poem is designed primarily to promote the interests of the men who control it, and that the poet's primary interest is in celebrating the achievements of his male hero. (1994, 80-81)

Then, any reading of Penelope without taking into account these aspects, would be engendered from a feminist point of view. To have a better insight into the social and culture context and the gender ideology of the era, we should look at the textual and historical evidence.

To start with the textual evidence, Homeric epics provide us with a panorama of the Greek times in which they were written. Despite the fact that these are fictional works, they without doubt reflect their own era. For one thing, it is expected that the bard or the poet would use familiar tropes, settings, themes and customs and traditions in order to attract and keep the attention of the audience. In a similar vein, Marilyn B. Arthur in her article “Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women” writes:

Our source for the Dark-Age Period will naturally have to be the Homeric poems, which were composed in the eighth century and whose outlook reflects, at least in part, Dark-Age life. They are thus our only cultural documents for a period that was crucially important in the development of Greece. For it was the time when the political, social and cultural forms of Greece were taking shape, and along with everything that was later to become known as specifically and peculiarly “Greek”. (8)

As seen, in the absence of written documents, the Homeric poems, although written down later and expected to be transformed and changed in due course, are our essential sources in order to grasp the social, cultural and ideological atmosphere of the period that constitutes the basic tenets of Western world view and mentality.

Later in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Hesiod in his *Theogony* where he gives the account of cosmogony portrays women with deceitful character and shameless mind, who need the patriarchal authority of the male to behave morally and right. To quote Arthur again:

In the light of the Hesiodic model for the cosmos, then, the female appears not only as hostile to civilization, in that she is allied with the monsters and beasts who wreak chaos, but she appears as well as being without moral dimensions, as a force which needs direction and control to become truly human. (25)

In the Homeric epics in general, the woman is defined and established as “The Other” as Simone de Beauvoir proposes in her seminal *The Second Sex*. This gender stereotyping has been a characteristic of Western civilization ever since. As Victoria Josselyn Wohl in “Standing by the Stathmos: The Creation of Sexual

Ideology in the *Odyssey*”, demonstrates, in the epic, several alternative forms of government are proposed: the royal court of Menelaus, the pastoral life of the Cyclopes, the endogamous society of Phaeacia with the powerful queen Arete or Circe’s and Calypso’s utopic islands where life is self-sustained without any agricultural activity. All these examples serve as a comparison to Odysseus’ homeland Ithaca to justify its validity. Wohl notes that:

By raising and subsequently discarding alternate modes of power and types of hero, the poet invests the rule of Odysseus in Ithaca with an air of inevitability, the naturalness of an ideology. The power structure established at the end of the poem is shown to be the best one, the inevitable one, since the narrative itself has demonstrated the undesirability of the alternatives.

Just as *oikos* is established as the “natural” unit of authority in the community, and creates a hero sustainable to lead it, the poem always also lays out the role of the woman in the *oikos* and creates the ideal for this role, Penelope. (19)

In other words, this arrangement of the woman within the house and the man in the community is presented as “natural”, thus sexual ideology is established and justified in the poem. To be more specific, in gender relations, in the norm exemplified with Odysseus and Penelope, it is emphasized that female subordination is necessary. In terms of idealization and ideologization of Penelope’s submission, in the *Odyssey*, Penelope is the embodiment of the ideal woman. McKay defines her as “ the embodiment of what the poet expected his audience to recognize as the ideal, perfect wife, beautiful and desirable, affectionate, constant, intelligent in a womanly way, knowing her place” (127).

Penelope willingly submits to Odysseus and her son Telemachus. Furthermore, she is praised in the poem for her cleverness in relation to the shroud trick, but this feature is still defined in terms of her role as a faithful wife. Also, Penelope in the poem wins her reputation (*kleos*) by remembering her husband. Self-sacrifice or martyrdom and passivity are the traits praised in Penelope as the virtuous wife, preserving the household.



As mentioned earlier, in the *Odyssey*, unlike the *Iliad*, women are at the centre of the stage. Yet, a careful reading reveals that female power, women's sexuality in particular, is seen as a negative and threatening faculty. For instance, Whirlpool Charybis and dreadful Scylla with six heads and eighteen rows of teeth devouring Odysseus' companions are both females. Likewise, the Sirens lure sailors with their seductive songs and the immortal enchantress Circe turns men into animals. Thus, the obstructions Odysseus encounters in his journey are portrayed as female and in the shape of physical danger and man-eating monsters. Another example of this outlook is seen in the character of Calypso. Calypso saves Odysseus from the sea and takes care of him on her island. Odysseus enjoys the incessant feast on this paradise. He however tells the story of his stay as being captured by the sea goddess. Sue Blundell comments that: "Modern readers may feel little sympathy for a man who protests continually that he is desperate to see his family once more, but for seven years has apparently made little attempt to tear himself away from the arms of his lover. To many women, this will seem like a piece of very familiar hypocrisy" (52).

In the poem, Calypso herself protests against the double standard of sexual ideology. Ironically when Zeus, who actually causes him to be cast off, intervenes to "rescue" Odysseus from Calypso after seven years, she proclaims:

You are hard-hearted, you gods, and jealous beyond all creatures

beside, when you are resentful toward the goddesses for sleeping  
 Openly with such men as each has made her true husband.  
 So when Dawn of rosy fingers chose out Orion,  
 all you gods who live at your ease were full of resentment,  
 until chaste Artemis of the golden throne in Ortygia  
 came with a visitation of painless arrows and killed him;  
 and so it was when Demeter of the lovely hair, yielding  
 to her desire, lay down with Iasion and loved him  
 in a thrice-turned field, it was not long before this was known  
 to Zeus, who struck him down with a cast of the shining  
 thunderbolt.

So now, you gods, you resent it in me that I keep beside me  
 a man, the one I saved when he clung astride of the keel board,

all alone, since Zeus with a cast of shining thunderbolt  
had shattered his fast ship midway in the wine-blue water.  
(5.118-132)

Calypso, thus voices her objection to the fact that gods can have mortal lovers, rape mortal women and have children with them, but goddesses are not allowed to have mortal men as lovers.

The other women of the epic Clytemnestra and Helen are set as foils to Penelope. Helen and Clytemnestra serve as examples to what happens when wives makes decisions in the absence of their husbands. Throughout the poem, these two women are drawn as the archetypal adulteresses. Helen, the reason for the fall of Troy, is also portrayed negatively in Greek myths. Known as the most beautiful woman, she is promised to Paris by the Goddess Aphrodite as a prize. Paris abducts her from her husband Menelaus's palace and takes her to Troy. To take revenge, the Achaeans gather an army and the renowned Trojan War starts. In this myth, although Helen is the reason for this epic war, she is no more than a property. She is first the prize given to Paris without her will then she is a property to be won back by the Achaeans.

After the murder of Agamemnon, Elektra, daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, plots the revenge of her father with her brother Orestes. It is worth noting here that in Sophocles's *King Oedipus*, it is stated that patricide is one of the biggest sins, however in the case of Clytemnestra matricide is not condemned, is even justified. Moreover, sacrifice of Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, to Artemis for sailing the ships to Troy has not been touched upon as the real motive for the wrath of Clytemnestra for her husband. Then, looking at the representations of three mortal female women illustrates the patriarchal nature of Greek myths. They are marginalized in the myths as they do not conform to the patriarchal norms.

The *Odyssey* opens with story of killing of Agamemnon. At the council of gods, Zeus tells the story of Agamemnon who was killed by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aigisthos on his return from Troy and Orestes' revenge of his father

by slaying them both. He canonizes Penelope and condemns all womankind because of Clytemnestra:

So there is nothing more deadly or vile than a woman  
 who stores her mind with acts that are such sort, as this one  
 did when she thought of this act of dishonour and plotted  
 the murder of her lawful husband. See, I had been thinking  
 that I would be welcome to my children and thralls of my  
 household  
 when I came home, but she with thought surpassingly grisly  
 splashed the shame on herself and the rest of her sex, on women  
 still to come, even on the one whose acts are virtuous.  
 (11.427-434)

Then, the whole gender would be punished like Eve of the Old Testament. This story establishes the outlook of the poem and it is evoked repeatedly in the course of the work. When he meets Odysseus during his journey to the underworld, Agamemnon warns him not to trust Penelope even though she is a paragon of virtue since “all women are vile” (11.427). Moreover, he advises him not to reveal his identity on his return:

So by this, do not be too easy even with your wife,  
 nor give her an entire account of all you are sure of.  
 Tell her part of it, but let the rest be hidden in silence.  
 And yet you, Odysseus, will never be murdered by your wife.  
 The daughter of Ikarious, circumspect Penelope,  
 is all too virtuous and her mind is stored with good thought  
 ...  
 When you bring your ship in to your own dear country, do it  
 secretly, not in the open. There is no trusting in women.  
 (11. 441-456)

Athena also refers to this danger and reassures Odysseus in Book 11.44 and in Book 13, saying that “you will never be murdered by your wife”. In the poem, it is suggested that women like Arete, Calypso and Circe can be in control in utopian settings but overall women are vulnerable to seduction in the absence of their husbands. The song sung by the court poet Demodokos in the court of Alkinoos in Phaiakia also reinforces the adultery associated with women’s vulnerability, The bard tells the story of Ares and Aphrodite who were caught by

Aphrodite's husband Hephaistos' invisible net. In the poem, women are portrayed in binary opposition. That is virtuous, helpful, passive and chaste woman is put as opposed to sexually active, devious and evil women in an either/or manner. Canterella interprets this fact as "the roots of western misogyny go back to a more remote epoch than is usually thought- they are already well-fixed in the oldest documents [Homeric epics and Hesiod's works] (22),

Agamemnon's story is used as a justification for the frailty of women. Hence throughout the poem Agamemnon acts like the mouthpiece of patriarchal ideology. In addition, Homer's *Odyssey* closes with Agamemnon's remarks about Penelope's loyalty and the curse of womankind because of Clytemnestra's actions:

O fortunate son of Laertes, Odysseus of man devices,  
surely you won yourself a wife endowed with great virtue.  
How good was proved the heart that is in blameless Penelope,  
Ikaros' daughter, and how well she remembered Odysseus,  
her wedded husband. Thereby the fame of her virtue shall never  
die away, but the immortals will make for the people  
of earth a thing of grace in the song of prudent Penelope.  
Nor did the daughter of Tyndareos fashion her evil  
Deed, when she killed her wedded lord, and a song of loathing  
Will be hers among men, to make evil the reputation  
Of womankind, even for one whose acts are virtuous.  
(24. 192-202)

As illustrated above, the only aspect of women that is highlighted is their fidelity and virtuousness in relation to their chastity.

It is important to note that in addition the centrality of Penelope's role, the whole epic revolves around her fidelity. Eva Canterella in her book *Pandora's Daughters* argues that, "The Homeric woman is not only subordinate but also victim of a fundamentally misogynist ideology. Behind the screen of paternal attention, already fragile enough, the Homeric hero mistrusts women, even the most devoted and submissive of them" (27). The recurrent question of Odysseus during his 20 years of homecoming is whether Penelope still waits for him. He asks his mother and Teiresias, the blind seer, when he meets them in the Underworld. In addition, he asks this same question to his guardian deity, Athena.

Odysseus wins reputation for his skills and counsel in the Trojan War (9.20, 16.241, 8, 74); for his role as a king (1.344; 4.726; 816), for his journey and revenge against the suitors (1.95; 3.78; 13.415). On the contrary, Penelope wins praise for her remembering Odysseus (24.196); for her intelligence (2.116). Froma Zeitlin argues that the immobility of the marriage bed of Penelope and Odysseus is the most distinctive feature that is mirrored in the personality of Penelope. Zeitlin writes: “She [Penelope], too, like the bed, is expected to be fixed in place from then on, and her continuing fidelity to him finds its direct correlative in the object that has remained in place through all these years as a secret that no one else knows”.

Telemachus, also reflects the patriarchal ideology that mistrusts women. He questions his mother’s fidelity and of all women: “My mother says indeed I am his. I for my part do not know. Nobody knows his own father” (1. 216-217) and on his return he sides with his father that he has not seen for twenty years and excludes Penelope from the plot and hides his father’s homecoming from her. Goddess Athena who is defined by Sarah Pomeroy as “the archetype of the masculine woman who finds success in what is essentially a man’s world by denying her own femininity and sexuality (4)” is also the mouthpiece of the patriarchal ideology in the *Odyssey*. She warns Telemachus about women:

For you know what the mind is like in the breast of a woman.  
She wants to built up the household of the man who marries her  
and of former children, and of her beloved and wedded husband,  
She has no remembrance, when he is dead, nor does she think of  
him. (15. 20-24)

Athena even holds up Orestes’ punishment of Aegisthus and his mother as model for his own actions in Ithaca against the suitors who are destroying his inheritance (1.298-300).

The patriarchal mistrust of women in manifested all through Homer’s poem. Odysseus keeps his identity secret from his wife until he kills the suitors since he has been told so by his mother in the underworld (11.181-3) and Athena (13.190-3). Also in Book 13, Athena praises him for not rushing home. Thus,

Odysseus excludes his wife from the final plot that he set for the suitors. He waits until he kills the suitors before he reveals himself to his wife, although he made himself known to Telemachus, Eurcylea and Eumaeus. Sheila Murnaghan suggests that Odysseus's exclusion of his wife is the expression of the general distrust of women; she aptly points out that "the poem self-consciously depicts the formation and authorization of a tradition of misogyny; even it places a counterexample at the centre of its story (1987, 238)". Murnaghan further elaborates her point as: "Odysseus' gesture of disguising himself from Penelope shows how the artificial nature of marriage makes women systematically unreliable to their husbands so that any woman, no matter what her character, can be regarded as treacherous" (1987,239). In a similar way, L.A. McKay also wonders: "What sort of a person was this Penelope for whom her husband abandoned a goddess- more than one goddess, indeed- but in whom he yet felt so little confidence on his return that she was almost the last person in the household to learn his identity?" (123).

As seen, Penelope's autonomy is missing and she is treated as an object of exchange. In Ancient Greece, the bride was used between houses to form alliances and in the process gifts were customary. In the absence of her husband, she cannot go back to her father's house and Telemachus also expects her to marry. Therefore, she has to choose among the suitors. Since her deception with the web is discovered by the suitors, she cannot escape marriage or devise a new trick. Penelope explains the social pressure on her as:

Now I can not escape from this marriage; I can no longer  
think of another plan; my parents are urgent with me  
to marry; my son is vexed as they eat our livelihood;  
he sees it all he is a grown man now, most able  
to care for the house, and it is to him Zeus grants this honor.  
(19. 156-161)

Hence, Penelope's father and brothers urge her to marry the suitor who presented the most gifts. In other words, the choosing of the husband depends on the one who will offer the most valuable gift. For suitors asking for her hand in marriage also aim for acquiring the wealth that will come with her. In Book 18 Athena

beautifies her and encourages her to use her feminine charm to cajole the suitors into offering expensive gifts. Penelope thus becomes a trick (*dolos*) like Pandora to enchant suitors and she is treated as an object to get more wealth. Agatha Thornton notes that “it [the *Odyssey*] is not a fairy story of princes competing for the hand of a beautiful queen, but it is a tale from times in which power based on wealth and brute force was little hampered by law, a tale of greedy and ambitious aristocrats trying under a thin veneer of courtliness to seize the absent king’s wife, wealth and position” (67).

It is clear that Penelope is objectified in the hands of the patriarchal system and consequently there is no human agency or autonomy on her side. She lacks the autonomy allowed to those male heroes. And she always has to wear a veil in the presence of men- thus symbolically she looks behind her veil, away from things. The veil is unmistakably put in front of her face by patriarchy. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier she never voices her thoughts. She is interpreted and represented as the Other from the perspective of men. Likewise, nowhere in the poem is Clytemnestra’s name given; she is referred to as Agamemnon’s wife, Tyndareos’ daughter. As seen, parallel to patriarchal ideology, she is treated not as a subject on her own right but in terms of her relations to men. Female characters including Penelope remain passive through the epic and their stories are secondary in relation to the story of Odysseus. To put it differently, the framework is set by men and the female characters are contained in it. In Carolyn Heilbrun’s words, “in literature and out, through all recorded history, women have lived by a script they did not write. Their destiny was to be married, circulated; to be given by one man, the father, to another, the husband; to become the mothers to men. Theirs’ have been the marriage plot, the erotic plot, the courtship plot, but never, as for men, the quest plot” (106). Despite the fact that a great panorama of women including goddesses, monsters, noble women and slave women is presented in the work, the primary focalization is Odysseus. The women are described or presented by the voice of the “male” narrator. Then, the *Odyssey* is a poem about a male hero and it sustains the patriarchal sexual ideology. Homer’s epic ends with the recovery of Odysseus’ marriage, family

and his kingdom, thus the essential institutions for the continuation of the ideology are maintained. Murnaghan calls the epic “a narrative in which female power is channelled into the reestablishment of a patriarchal order, and thus its own values are finally reaffirmed” (63). Then, it would not be wrong to assume that in Homeric epics the images of women are shaped to one degree or another by prejudices and stereotypes of a male-dominated society. Moreover, we see the continuation of practices in marriage, exclusion of women from political and public life in Classical Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century from which we have relatively richer textual documents. For instance, Aristotle in *Politics* writes that women are by nature inferior to men (1.5 1260a 21-24). To quote Aristotle: ‘the male is by nature superior and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled; the principle of necessity extends to all mankind’. According to him, women’s natural function is to reproduce, and to take care of her household. On the other hand, man’s life is defined by rational activity, polis life, higher learning, leisure. Aristotle also adds that, “For by nature the male is more fitted for leading than the female, unless he is in some way constituted contrary to nature; in addition, the older and complete is more fitted for leading than the younger and incomplete” (1259a 37). In his writing, obedience is seen as a woman’s natural state and he continues to comment “silence brings adornment to a woman- something however, that is not true of a man” (1260a 24). In *Poetics* he also argues that it is inappropriate for a female character to be portrayed as “manly or clever” (15.4). Likewise Plato identifies man with rationality and woman with carnal appetites. In the *Republic* he also argues that the ‘natural enemies’ of the Greeks are barbarians, just as women are ‘natural enemies’ of men. Then it can be asserted that the Homeric epics reflect the world they were composed in to some extent with customs, situations, conventions and characters.

Returning to Atwood’s retelling of the story, in the *Penelopiad*, Penelope, Homer’s paragon of fidelity, tells her own account of Odysseus’s homecoming and her union with him after two decades. In the interview on the RandomHouse.ca website, Atwood elaborates on her subject matter as follows: “There was something about the hanging- all pretty maids in a row, using just one



rope, how frugal- that was not only gruesome but suspicious. The evidence that supposedly condemned them just didn't add up" (n.pag.).

In Homer's *Odyssey*, it is recounted that Penelope waits for her husband for twenty years while trying to put off the suitors who want to marry her or "her wealth". On his return to Ithaca in disguise, Odysseus kills the suitors in a bloody massacre. Then he orders his son Telemachus to kill the twelve handmaids who have been having sexual liaisons with the suitors. Telemachus, with shocking economy, hangs the girls with a single rope. The *Odyssey* writes:

So too these women, their heads hanging in a row,  
The cable looped around each of their necks.  
It was a most piteous death. Their feet fluttered  
For a while, but not for long. (Book XXII, 494-497)

From these lines, Atwood takes the lead and in Adrienne Rich's terminology she "re-vision" the past. As quoted above in Chapter 1, Rich defines "re-vision" as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of enter-ing an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (1979, 35). Hence, Atwood revisits and revisions the past in order to write her own version of the story, or in her heroine's words, Penelope spins "a thread of my own" as an act of self-justification.

In Atwood's account, Penelope tells her story from the walls of Hades. In a self-conscious mode, she talks to the readers that in the "official version" she is "an edifying legend", "a stick used to beat other women with". And she goes on to comment on her "mythic" status as: "Why couldn't they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been? That was the line they took, the singers, the yarn-spinners. Don't follow my example; I want to scream in your ears- yes yours!" (2). Inviting the reader to witness her testimony, Atwood's narrator, in a confessional and personal tone, juxtaposes the personal account and mythic account of her story. She opens up her feelings about her husband; Homer's Penelope waits for her husband and on his return she never questions his version of his journey home. Atwood's Penelope, on the other hand, shares her uncertainties, doubts and innermost thoughts with the reader as follows:

Of course I had inkling, about his slipperiness, his wiliness, his foxiness, his- how can I put this? – his unscrupulousness, but I turned a blind eye. I kept my mouth shut, or, if I opened it, I sang his praises. I didn't contradict, I didn't ask awkward questions, I didn't dig deep. I wanted happy ending in those days, and happy endings are best achieved by keeping the right doors locked and going to sleep during the rampages. (3)

Thus through Penelope, Atwood comments on the condition of women in a male-oriented society who are condemned to silence about their own ideas and who are expected to be supportive and loyal wives.

Penelope, in the *Penelopiad*, is realistic about the workings of patriarchal society and she is well-aware of the dynamics of relationships. She knows that people compose praises to her beauty only because: “they had to tell me that because I was a princess, and shortly after that a queen, but the truth was although I was not deformed or ugly, I was nothing special to look at” (21). She also acknowledges the fact that she is smart; evoking Jane Eyre, she calls herself “plain-Jane Penelope” as opposed to Helen of Troy. She is aware that she confirms the patriarchal ideal of wife as “a plain but smart wife who had been good at weaving and had never transgressed, instead of a woman who'd driven hundreds of men with lust and has caused a great city to go up in flames?” (21-22). In addition to norms about the physical aspect of female ideal, Atwood's Penelope also remarks about the institution of marriage. She gives the background history of her marriage to Odysseus, the aspects which are not covered in Homer's version. She tells that her marriage was arranged by her father and she also points out that in her society, marriages are for having children to pass on your inheritance to, to forge new alliances or reinforce the already established ones. Parallel to this frame of mind, when the time has come for the suitors to compete for her hand in marriage, she knows that: “it isn't me they are after, not Penelope the Duck. It's only what comes with me- the royal connection, the pile of glittering junk. No man will ever kill himself for the love of me” (29). The chapter called “My Marriage”, in this way gives accurate historical information about the marriage practices of Bronze Age and later Classical Greece and through the

words of Penelope, the silent heroine of Homer's epic, the patriarchal ideology reflected in the epic is demystified. In addition, the *Penelopiad* underlines the fact that storytelling and writing are political acts in this sense.

As mentioned, Penelope's account of Odysseus' absence and her shrewd plot for the suitors is told directly from Penelope's mouth. Yet this version is as problematic and complex as Homer's. Atwood gives voice to a once muted heroine of the *Odyssey* but by employing an unreliable narrator, she highlights the fact that truth, the absolute truth, cannot be known, if there is anything like this. This postmodern concern with the nature of truth and the impossibility of capturing the past in an objective way make the novella a contemporary retelling. As Penelope "weaves" the story from her personal point of view, it is revealed that she is responsible for the murders of the maids. In fact, it was Penelope herself who asked the maids to spy on the suitors and she told them to have affairs so that she could learn more about the suitors' plan. She admits: "This plan came to grief. Several of the girls were unfortunately raped, others were seduced, or were hard pressed and decided that it was better to give in than to resist" (115). And, when Odysseus comes, she sacrifices these already victimized girls by saying nothing to save them in the face of Odysseus's accusations.

Atwood's multilayered narrative, with Penelope's version of the story, undercuts the master-narratives such as myth and history. Yet, craftily added, the Chorus of the Maids, in a dialogic relationship with Penelope's text, disrupts her version, demanding a voice, an identity and narrative justice. They act as agents of nemesis, haunting her and Odysseus. As a doubly marginalized group in terms of sex and social status, the maids comment, very much in the same fashion as the Chorus of Greek tragedy, on the ongoing text. Unlike the conventional Chorus, however, they do not reflect the consensus or the common sense of society. On the contrary, they give voice to the marginalized, suppressed and victimized. In a series of passages placed in Penelope's account of her story, the maids call attention to their tragedy. To illustrate: in a section entitled "The Chorus Line: A Rope Jumping Rhyme", they sing:

We are the maids/ The ones you killed/ The ones you failed  
 We dance in air/ Our bare feet twitched /It was not fair  
 We did much less/ Than what you did/ You judged us bad. (5)

Or in the section called “The Chorus Line: Kiddie Mourn: A Lament by the Maids,” they announce that:

We too were children. We too were born to the wrong parents.  
 Poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents;  
 parents who sold us, parents from whom we were stolen. These  
 parents were no gods, they were not demi-gods, they were not  
 nymphs or Naiads. We were set to work in the palace as children;  
 we drudged from dawn to dusk as children. If we wept, no one  
 dried our tears. If we slept, we were kicked awake. (13)

Thus, by employing various genres such as idyll, popular tune, ballad, sea shanty, court hearing and anthropological lecture, the Chorus engages in a lively and witty dialogue with Penelope. Atwood in her work not only mixes the historical periods by also upsets the generic hierarchy. To be more specific, popular genres are juxtaposed against high forms of literature and colloquial and personal discourse are juxtaposed against the lofty language of the epic. Like Penelope who is a ghost transgressing boundaries between the living and the dead, Atwood transgresses the genres in her postmodern rewriting of the epic. These different genres and various versions of the same story told from different perspectives cast doubt on the hegemony of the single truth and authority of Homer’s text to uncover hierarchical and patriarchal ideologies. This feature reinforces the ambiguity and unreliability of Penelope’s story and adds a polyphonic character to the text. To put it differently, although on the surface, Atwood’s text explores the gaps and inconsistencies in Homer’s epic, the Chorus’ comments on Penelope’s account opens up further questions and breaks up the existing text. In this way, a homogenized, coherent and static version is destabilized for the sake of ambiguity, complexity and metafiction.

Another important function of the Chorus is to comment on the issues of class. Since all the maids come from underprivileged families, their version sheds light on class dynamics in addition to gender relations. This is most manifested in

the section called “The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll”. The Chorus sings about the birth of Telemachus and they contrast his birth with theirs as the daughters of impoverished families. In their words:

For his birth was longed-for and feasted, as our births were not,  
His mother presented a princeling, Our various mothers  
Spawned merely, lambled, farrowed, littered,  
Foaled, whelped and kittened, brooded,  
hatched out their clutch.  
We were animal young, to be disposed of at will,  
Sold, drowned in the well, traded, used,  
discarded when bloomless.  
He was fathered, we simply appeared,  
Like the crocus, the rose, the sparrows  
engendered in mud. (67)

The Maids, as a chorus of “Everywoman” reclaim their voice in Atwood’s narrative to tell their stories which never finds their way into the aristocratic epics of Homer. Doubly marginalized, as women and children of lower classes, and most cases sexually abused by the masters or their guests, this is the first time that these nameless women speak out their stories.

Helen of Troy is another figure in *The Penelopiad* who questions Penelope’s account. Set as a direct opposite to Penelope, Helen, the epitome of the femme fatale, deconstructs the dichotomy that associates herself with beauty, seduction and eventually destruction. Helen points out the fact that Penelope is also the cause of many men’s deaths. Despite the fact that Penelope is seen as a victim, or a martyr who suffers, Helen’s questions reveal that she is also guilty of the slaughter of the suitors as well as the maids. To stir her conscience, Helen asks Penelope, during her brief visits to Hades, before reincarnating as another femme fatale, “Tell me, little duck- how many men did Odysseus butcher because of you?” (155).

Penelope, in choosing not to drink from the waters of forgetfulness and consequently not going back to the world reincarnated, spends her days in Hades, haunted by the ghosts of the maids. She however is the only one that chooses to stay in Hades and keep a distance from the modern world. It can be suggested that

her fidelity, her Homeric image, traps her in the past since fidelity and truth are contested topics in the postmodern world. Moreover, the underground, very much like the subconscious, is where the stories of the past are stored. In her collection of essays, *Negotiating with the Death*, Atwood writes her preoccupation with death as follows:

All writers must go on from now to once upon a time; all must go on from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending on how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of living and allowed to enter time once more- which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realms of the readers, the realm of change". (178-179)

On the other hand, unlike Penelope who chooses to stay in Hades, her adventure-seeking husband Odysseus, Atwood reports, goes back to life as a French general, a Mongolian invader, a tycoon in America, a headhunter in Borneo, a film star, an adventurer. As seen, Atwood brilliantly juxtaposes contemporary life with the mythic past. Thus, her narrative comments on today's world and communicates with the past simultaneously. In other words, *The Penelopiad*, spatially and temporally sets the contemporary against ancient times. Furthermore, in the section titled "Slandorous Gossip", Penelope comments on the different versions of her story in a metafictional approach saying that "at this point I feel I must address the various items of slanderous gossip that have been going the rounds for the past two or three thousand years" (143). Then, she attempts to demystify the stories or interpretations which suggest her infidelity and dismiss them as "monstrous tales" or "outrageous" charges about her sexual conduct.

As illustrated, Penelope, holding the ownership of the text, employs discourse to produce and establish "her truth." Since words give authority and the control of the discourse is directly related to the dynamics of power, Atwood's Maids also require control and recognition. From the story teller's point of view, I would propose that Penelope unweaves the "official version of myth" while weaving her own story and the Chorus of Maids unweaves her mythical story

even further. Moreover, the female narrators of the story dethrone the male writers of truth and history and highlight the ideological class and stereotypical gender roles that go unchallenged in the “transparent” patriarchal ideology of Homer’s text and power relations are exposed.

In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood also debunks Odysseus’s achievements as an epic hero and a lover with a tongue-in-cheek style. Acknowledging and underlining the fact that in the postmodern age reality is provisional and subjective, Atwood’s Penelope reflects on the adventures of her husband with Cyclop Polyphemos and Circe:

Odysseus had been in a fight with a giant one-eyed Cyclops, some said; no, it was only a one-eyed tavern keeper, said another, and the fight was over non-payment of the bill. Odysseus was the guest of a goddess on an enchanted island, said some, she’d turn his men into pigs- not a hard job in my view - but had turned them back into men because she’d fallen in love with him and was feeding him with unheard-of delicacies prepared by her immortal hands, and the two of them made love deliriously every night; no, said others, it was just an expensive whorehouse and, he was sponging off the Madam. (83-84)

As observed in this sardonic quotation, Margaret Atwood juxtaposes epic with bawdy behaviour and she questions the “epic hero” ideal. In addition, in the Chorus Line: *The Wily Sea Captain, A Sea Shanty*, the Twelve Maids, in sailor costumes, reinterpret Homer’s version of Odysseus’ trials. They sing:

Oh wily Odysseus he set out from Troy,  
his heart full  
Of joy, With his boat full of loot and  
For he was Athene’s own shiny-eyed boy,  
With his lies and his tricks and his thieving! (93)

The song continues with each stanza devoted to the un-official version of his “ordeals”. For instance, his stay on Circe’s island is retold as:

On the island of Circe, we were turned into  
swine,  
Till Odysseys bedded the goddess so  
fine,

Then he ate up her cakes and he drank up  
her wine,  
For a year he became her blithe lodger! (95)

The parodic discourse utilized by Atwood underpins the demythologizing agenda of the writer. One of the major figures in postmodern literary theory, Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, argues that:

There is nothing in parodia that necessitates the inclusion of a concept of ridicule, as there is, for instance, in the joke of burlesque. Parody, then, in its ironic “trans-contextualization” and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signaled by irony. But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. (32).

*The Penelopiad*, in this sense is a self-conscious mythologizing and demythologizing attempt of Atwood.

Margaret Atwood, using the mythical intertext, focuses our critical attention on the postmodern issues of reality and the impossibility of recapturing the past. In addition, she presents a sharp critique of gender and class. Unlike many revisions of myths that are content with simply reversing the gender hierarchy, Atwood, as she explains in her talk entitled “Spotty-Handed Villainess: Problems of Female Bad Behaviour in the Creation of Literature” explores female bad behaviour instead of portraying women as helpless victims within the patriarchy. Atwood argues that the representation of female villainy in literature can be narrowed down to the idea that women commit evil acts for good reasons. To quote Atwood:

If a novelist writing at that time was also a feminist, she felt her choices restricted. Were all heroines to be essentially spotless of soul -- struggling against, fleeing from or done in by male oppression? Was the only plot to be *The Perils of Pauline*, with a lot of moustache-twirling villains but minus the rescuing hero? Did suffering prove you were good? (If so -- think hard about this -- wasn't it all for the best that women did so much of it?) Did we



face a situation in which women could do no wrong, but could only have wrong done to them? Were women being confined yet again to that alabaster pedestal so beloved of the Victorian age, when Woman as better-than-man gave men a license to be gleefully and enjoyably worse than women, while all the while proclaiming that they couldn't help it because it was their nature? Were women to be condemned to virtue for life, slaves in the salt-mines of goodness? How intolerable. (n.pag.)

In conclusion, Atwood's scrutiny of female villainy, her depiction of women as independent agents with complex psychologies makes *The Penelopiad* exceptional. Yet, her portrayal of Helen as the stereotypical temptress and the antagonistic relationship between female figures like the Maids, Eurycleia, the nurse of Odysseus or Anticleia, mother of Odysseus lack female bonding. All the other female characters are perceived as rivals by Penelope. Despite the exceptional experience with form, genres and themes, this rivalry among women, not commented upon by Atwood, makes this retelling problematic in feminist mythmaking sense. Nonetheless, by using postmodern narrative techniques Atwood weaves a complex retelling of the story in which Penelope is not a simple victim but she is the oppressor. In other words, Atwood succeeds according to Angela Carter's formula that she sets for her rewritings of fairy tales; Atwood in her redraft of the Homeric epic: "pours new wine into old bottles and waits for an explosion" (37).

### **3.2 Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand***

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand* (1987) is a retelling of the Fall of Troy from the point of view of Cassandra<sup>25</sup>, the doomed prophetess of Homer's *Iliad*. Bradley (1930-1999), famous for her strong female protagonists and women-oriented themes, is a prolific writer of science-fiction and fantasy novels. *The Firebrand* is Bradley's only novel that is set in ancient Greece, yet revisiting myths and legends has been a prominent feature of her writing career. For

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<sup>25</sup> Since Marion Zimmer Bradley and Richmond Lattimore, the translator of the *Iliad*, adopt the Greek transliterations over the more common Latinized version, accordingly, in this section, the Greek transliterations of these names will be used.

instance, her best known work, *The Mists of Avalon* (1979) is another retelling. In this fantasy epic, Bradley rewrites the Arthurian legend from the viewpoint of Morgaine Le Fay. Morgaine, the evil sorceress, devilish seductresses and villain of Arthurian legend, in Bradley's version, is a pagan priestess and the guardian of Avalon. In this work, Morgaine, the narrator of her own story, tells the story of Celtic England and how Christianity, championed by Arthur, overthrew the indigenous earth-centered Goddess worship. In the same fashion, Bradley undertakes another woman-centered rewriting of a canonical Western epic in *The Firebrand*. Yet, the daunting success of *The Mists of Avalon* has overshadowed this book and it has not received much critical attention apart from brief references. In this novel, Bradley recounts Cassandra's account of the Trojan War and the eventual dominance of the Iron Age patriarchal religion causing the downfall of the Bronze Age Mother Goddess culture.

Kassandra, like other female characters, receives very little attention in Homer's war epic the *Iliad*. Her voice is never heard and her name is mentioned twice as the daughter of Priam, (13.366; 24.699). Bradley makes her the protagonist of her novel and through her words we read the chronicle of the Fall of Troy. Robert Graves gives the meaning of her name as "she who entangles men" (747). In the mythological sources and literary works in particular Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*<sup>26</sup> and Homer's *Iliad*, it is told that Kassandra is the daughter of Hecuba and King Priam, the King of Troy at the time of the Trojan War. Kassandra is a young woman with the gift of prophecy. According to the myth, Apollo's granting the gift of prophecy to Kassandra begins with her falling asleep in the temple of this god of prophecy, music and poetry. Her beauty stirs up the lust of Apollo who appears before her and promises to teach her the art of prophecy in return for sexual intercourse. Kassandra agrees to his terms but after accepting his gift, she denies him and thus breaks their bargain. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, she explains this confrontation to the Chorus as follows:

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<sup>26</sup> These two works tells the events following the aftermath of the Fall of Troy

Kassandra: The prophet-god it was who gave this power, for  
The time has been when I dared not speak of it

Chorus: For Apollo's self desired you. Was it so? We are all  
more delicate in prosperity

Kassandra: Yea, then, he wrought with me, and mighty was his  
charm

Chorus: And came you too to the deed of kind in natural course?

Kassandra: I promised but kept not faith Loxias [Apollo]

Chorus: And had he won you with inspiration already given?

Kassandra: Yes, already I prophesied to my people all that befell  
them

Chorus: And how could the wrath of Loxias [Apollo] reach you  
then?

Kassandra: After I did that wrong, I could never make any  
believe me. (43-44)

Thus, when Kassandra rejects Apollo at the last minute, he puts a curse on her gift. Consequently, Kassandra is doomed to tell the truth but no one would ever believe her. In Greek mythology, stories of gods chasing after mortal women constitute a category. These mortal women who fall prey to lustful gods suffer either because of jealous Hera's plots against them as in the stories of Leda and Europa or they are persecuted as a result of gods' uncontrolled power or passion. In all these cases, gods run after mortal women because of their physical beauty. Daphne, for example, is chased by Apollo despite her protests. When she starts to feel Apollo's breath on her neck during her flight, she calls for help desperately. In the end, Daphne's father, river god Peneus, hearing her pleas, transforms her into a laurel tree. Kassandra is no exception; Homer in the *Iliad*, describes her as "the loveliest of his [Priam's] daughters" (13. 365) and "a girl like Aphrodite the golden" (24.699). Hence, her beauty tempts Apollo and he offers a bargain to her. Yet, when refused at the last minute, she is punished eternally. Therefore, countless times before and during the Trojan War, Kassandra predicts what would come out of the war but no one believes her. It is Kassandra who runs around the ramparts of the city with her hair flying around her shoulders, crying, shouting oracles that no one comprehends. She recognizes the true nature of the Trojan Horse but her fellow Trojans consider her insane and try to subdue her when she is frantically trying to warn people of the impending disaster. Priam, disturbed by

her prophecies about the Fall of Troy, ignores her first and then tries to keep Cassandra locked up. When Troy finally falls to the Greek invaders (Achaeans), Cassandra is attacked and raped by Ajax of Locris in the temple of Athena where she seeks refuge. Athena enraged by this sacrilege, eventually takes her revenge from Ajax by killing him. Nonetheless, this is a personal revenge; Cassandra is not saved. The Goddess does nothing to help her, since Athena is not on the side of Trojans. Ultimately, after the Fall of Troy, Cassandra is taken as a war prize by Agamemnon to his homeland where both Cassandra and himself are killed by his wife Clytemnestra. According to another story about Cassandra, it is told that she bore twin sons Teledamus and Pelops to Agamemnon.

As illustrated, Cassandra has generally been interpreted as a mad woman or a crazy prophetess. From the sources, it is understood that her family and her kinsman also see her as a frenzied lunatic. In the visual media, on ancient Greek vase paintings she is also shown half naked, her long hair flying around her shoulders in a wild fashion and she is depicted as helpless on her knees. Following this tradition, Shakespeare in his play *Troilus and Cressida* portrays her as a madwoman ranting and raving along the wall of Troy. Yet, feminist criticism and gender studies have proved that it is not unusual for a woman who does not conform to the patriarchal ideal of femininity to be labelled and marginalized as mad or witch as observed in the examples of Medea or Medusa. Thus, Cassandra starts to be interpreted as a tragic heroine, victimized and marginalized in a male dominated world of war. In this aspect, Cassandra can also be taken as a metaphor for women whose voice and ideas are shunned by the male-oriented world order. Eventually, especially in the twentieth century, Cassandra has become an important figure and a source of inspiration for women writers. For instance, like Bradley, German writer, Christa Wolf also revisits the myth of this doomed heroine for her 1984 novel, *Cassandra*. In Wolf's retelling, while waiting her death after the war in Mycenae at the gate of Agamemnon's fortress, in a long interior monologue, Cassandra tells the story of the Trojan War and her focus is the exposition of the patriarchal system, the silenced women of this world order and the transition of society from egalitarian matriarchy to

militaristic patriarchy. Since the present study focuses on the rewriting of mythical narratives by contemporary women writers writing in English, Wolf's impressive novel is not included.

In *The Firebrand*, Bradley subverts the tradition of male writers like Homer and Aeschylus; the victimized Cassandra of ancient Greek tradition is turned into a powerful and independent woman, mentored by the Amazons. In the epilogue, Bradley refers to a tablet found in the Archaeological Museum in Athens. It reads as follows:

Zeus of Dodona, give heed to this gift  
I send you from me and my family-  
Agathon son of Ekhephylos,  
the Zakythian family,  
Consuls of the Molossian and their-allies  
descended for 30 generations  
from Cassandra of Troy.

Taking the thread from this inscription, Bradley weaves another ending for Cassandra in which she is not killed but freed by Agamemnon's wife Klytemnestra. In this way, a woman is saved by another woman as opposed to the general patriarchal idea that a woman needs a man as a redeemer. At the end of Bradley's rewriting Cassandra makes her way to Asia Minor, the land of Mother Goddess with hopes of recreating a kingdom ruled by women. She is left to carry on the alternative epic of the Trojan women with her son Agathon.

Bradley's text focuses primarily on Cassandra. Thus, she gives us new insights into this otherwise established character who has been passed down by the works of male authors. In the Prologue of *The Firebrand*, an aged Cassandra, "oldest of the woman at the hearth", like Atwood's Penelope, to set the story straight, dispels a wandering minstrel singing the Homeric tale of the Fall of Troy and starts to tell her own story. Thus, the silenced woman of Homer's *Iliad*, reclaims her voice to write "her/story". Cassandra defies the minstrel who sings of "the battles and of the great men who fought them" and she says "I tell you I won't have those stupid lies sung here at the hearth" (2). Contesting the official version that is sung "from Crete to Colchis" (2), she says "it didn't happen that

way at all... Because I was there, and I saw it all". With this strong declaration, the personal version of history is juxtaposed with the official/patriarchal version. When the Minstrel asks her why she has never tried to correct the stories she replies "no man wished to believe the truth. For your story speaks of heroes and Kings, not Queens; and of Gods, not Goddesses" (3). In restoring Cassandra to the centre of the one of the major works of Western canon, Bradley destabilizes the androcentric mythic tradition and demystifies the account of Cassandra as the "raving lunatic". Mythmaking in the feminine, Bradley writes an epic that affirms the woman-centered values, challenging the patriarchal assumptions of the Homeric text.

In the *Acknowledgements*, Bradley explains why she weaves her/story of the Trojan War from the point of view of Cassandra. She writes:

Readers will be likely to raise challenges: "That's not the way it happened in the *Iliad*". Of course not, had I been content with the account in the *Iliad*, there would have been no reason to write a novel. Besides the *Iliad* stops short just at the most interesting point, leaving the writer to conjecture about the end from assorted legends and traditions. If the writers of Greek drama felt free to improvise, I need not apologize for following their excellent example.

Before focusing on a detailed analysis of *The Firebrand*, since it is a chronicle of the Fall of Troy told from a woman-centered perspective, a general overview of the representations of women in the *Iliad*, our major literary source for this fateful event, will be given.

Women in the *Iliad* are peripheral and the world of Homer is ruled by men according to the androcentric interests. In general, in the *Iliad*, women make very few appearances. Yet, as Sue Blundell underlines they are crucial for the plot (47). However, it must be noted that, despite their pivotal role in the development of the plot, Homer's women have no control over their lives or destinies. In other words, women are seen but not heard. As wives and daughters they have their purpose and place in the patriarchal world order but they do not take centre stage in the affairs of men. They rely on men for their lives and protection and as daughters

they belong to their fathers and as wives they are the property of their husbands. Along the same line, women in Homer's world and in the other myths and dramas are defined in relation to men; as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. To put it differently, they have no authentic identity of their own. The only females who exercise individual agency are deities like Athena, Artemis and Aphrodite. Even in this case, they act according to the expectations of the male-oriented society. As seen in the previous section, Athena in the *Odyssey* acts as the mouthpiece of patriarchy to express its distrust of women and their "frail" nature. On the other hand, the mortal women who use initiative are condemned and marginalized like Klytemnestra and Medea.

Most of the time, in Greek myths, women are prizes or pawns rather than being political and social subjects. Reduced to objects, they are not autonomous individuals and their importance relies on to whom they belong. As discussed above, since myths and epics are also ideological narratives in addition to being literary works, to a certain extent they reflect their own historical and social epoch. It can thereby be inferred that the ancient Greek society contemporary to the writing of the *Iliad* had similar conceptions about women and women's role in society.

The *Iliad* begins with the rage of Achilles. This wrath is because Briseis who was awarded to Achilles as a prize of honor is taken away from him. When Agamemnon was forced to liberate his own slave Chryseis, he took Briseis from Achilles for compensation. As a result, blinded with fury, Achilles decides to withdraw from the Greek army. As observed, the women have a significant role in the determination of the course of events in the poem. Yet, they feature as a piece of property rather than a human subject; women devoid of autonomy and political power are defined and treated as objects. To illuminate, in the following quotation Agamemnon confronts Achilles when he refuses to give his war-booty, a woman:

Not that way, good fighter though you be, godlike Achilles,  
strive to cheat, for you will not deceive, you will not persuade  
me.

What do you want? To keep your own prize and have me sit here lacking one? Are you ordering me to give this girl back?

Either the great-hearted Achaians shall give me a new prize chosen according to my desire to atone for the girl lost, or else if they will not give me one I myself shall take her, your own prize, or that of Aias, or that of Odysseus, going myself in person; and he whom I will be bitter.  
(1. 131-139)

As the quotation above proves, Agamemnon refers to Briseis as “prize” or “this girl”. Later on when they try to persuade Achilles to join the Greek forces, Agamemnon offers to return Briseis and he announces that:

I will give him seven women of Lesbos, the work of whose hands is blameless, whom when he himself captured strong-founded Lesbos I chose, and who in their beauty surpassed the races of women. I will give him these, and with them shall go the one I took from him, the daughter of Briseus. And to all this I will swear a great oath that I never entered into her bed and never lay with her as is natural for human people, between men and women.  
(9. 128-134)

As seen, Briseis, once again, is not mentioned with her name. She is listed as one of the properties to be offered to Achilles along with seven unnamed women from Lesbos. The only reference to her is her father’s name. In other words, she is a commodity, an item of exchange between men. For Agamemnon, she is only a slave girl that he has not slept with and she is the daughter of Briseus. Likewise, during the funeral games of Patroklos, the prize set for the wrestling match is:

There was a great tripod, to set over fire, for the winner.  
The Achaians among themselves valued it at the worth of twelve oxen  
but for the beaten man he set on their midst a woman  
skilled in much work of her hands, and they rated her at four oxen.  
(23.702-705)

Like Briseis above, the women here have no name and they too are treated as commodities of value. Throughout all the discussion about Briseis, her thoughts



are never voiced. She is seen and discussed through the lens of men. As a result, what we see is a property not a human being with feelings and choices of her own.

The other slave of war is Chryseis, the daughter of the priest Chryses. During the course of the war, like Briseis, she becomes the property of Agamemnon. Her father offers ransom to Agamemnon but he refuses summarizing her bleak future:

The girl I will not give back; sooner will old age come upon her  
in my house, in Argos, far from her own land, going  
up and down by the loom and being in my bed as my companion.  
(1.29-31)

Again during the negotiations we do not hear the voice of Chryseis; the entire discussion about her future and her life takes place between men. For Agamemnon, then, Briseis and Chryseis are replaceable. These two women are interchangeable as they are solely significant as prizes. They are substitutes for each other as well as tokens to establish and reinforce alliance between men. In other words, they are pawns moved back and forth between men.

Luce Irigaray, in her influential article “Women on the Market” argues that “The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women among masculine subjects. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would go back into anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom” (sic 170). Irigaray notes that the economic, social and cultural order is based on this exchange of women. Women, as commodities, are alienated from themselves, they lose their authenticity and agency; consequently they are reduced to “woman” or to be more specific “virgin”. They are valued because of their reproductive abilities, according to Irigaray. Utilizing Marx’s analysis of commodities as the foundation of capitalism, she further argues that women because of their reproductive capacities constitute the labor force and they are exploited by men as a class. Woman gets her value as she can be exchanged. Accordingly, she never has a value as herself but always in comparison with another commodity. Irigaray goes on to argue that woman is always defined in relation to man. She explains:

In still other words: all the systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued and rewarded in these societies are men's business. The production of women, signs and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he "pays" father or the brother, not the mother...), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another. (171)

Irigaray, thus, summarizes the universal patriarchal plot that is also echoed and reproduced in the *Iliad*. This patriarchal notion treats women as objects rather than individuals. They gain their value in this system of exchange due to their reproductive capacities and ultimately their "virginity" since the idea of commodity bring along the value of being the first owner. They are defined in relation to men in this male-oriented order, since man is the reference point for every kind of definition. Irigaray continues: "In this matrix of History, in which man begets man as his own likeness, wives, daughter, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in relations among men" (171-2). Then, she underlines the fact that "commodities among themselves are thus equal, nor alike, nor different. They only become so when they are compared by and for men" (177). Alienated from her self and her body, Irigaray maintains that: "*a commodity- a woman- is divided into two irreconcilable 'bodies'*": her "natural" body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values (180)". The value, then, does not come from the subject itself. In Irigaray's words, the value of women does not originate "from *their* natural form, from *their* bodies, *their* language, but from the fact that they mirror the need/desire for exchanges among men. To do this, the commodity obviously cannot exist alone, but there is no such thing as a commodity, either, so long as there are not at least two men to make an exchange. In order for a product- a woman?- to have value, two men at least, have to invest (in) her" (181). Women, in this way, become "fetish-objects". As Irigaray puts it, they are "the manifestation and the circulation of a power of the Phallus, establishing relationship of men with each other?" (183). For the exchange of

women among men, Levi-Strauss, in *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*, without any feminist perspective like Irigaray, observes that:

The emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women like words, should be things that were exchanged. In this case, indeed, this was the only means of overcoming the contradiction by which the same woman was seen under two incompatible aspects: on the one hand, as the object of personal desire, thus exciting sexual and proprietorial instincts; and on the other hand, as the subject of the desire of others, and seen as such, i.e., as the means of binding others through alliance with them. (494)

In the same line, as demonstrated above, in the *Iliad*, the war trophies Briseis and Chryseis are not treated as individuals but they are commodities and objects of exchange between Agamemnon and Achilles. Consequently, one can be replaced by the other. Thus, women are reduced to “body” only and they are treated as an abstraction in the symbolic order.

Likewise, Helen is also portrayed as a token of exchange between men. In the *Iliad*, she also sees herself from the point of view of man and thus calls herself a “slut” (3.180) and a “nasty bitch evil-intriguing” (6.344). She asks for a “bitter death” (3.173) and she wishes that:

when my mother first bore me  
the foul whirlwind of the storm had caught me away and swept  
me  
to the mountain, or into the wash of the sea deep-thundering  
where the waves would have swept me away before all these  
things had happened. (6.345-349)

Helen thus pronounces her shame and self-hatred. Yet, her guilt is not mirrored in any male character. That is; no male character of the epic has this self questioning and hatred for their committed murders and rapes. Helen suffers even though she is never the real reason for this war between men. As seen, in the *Iliad* women are either treated as causes or the rewards of war. Helen is presented as the cause of war; she becomes a symbol that the armies fight for ten years. In this way, she has lost her human characteristic and she is turned into an idea or an idol. The

warriors claim to fight over her possession. In the same manner that Greeks and the Trojans fight for the possession of Helen, two Greeks, Achilleus and Agamemnon fight over the slave girl Briseis. In this way, it can be argued that Briseis becomes a second Helen in the way that Helen is the alleged reason for division between men. It is the prestige of having them that allures men rather than their personality. In addition, it is worth mentioning once more here that The Judgment of Paris, which starts the whole chain of events is based purely on physical beauty, there was no mention of anything moral, emotional and intelligent. Also in the rest of the epic, as illustrated through Briseis, Chryseis and Helen, women are cursed or blessed for their beauty not for their personal merits.

Like the exchange of women between men, the marriage market of patriarchy can also be observed in the *Iliad*. In Book 13, Homer tells how Priam promises Cassandra to Idomeneus without any “bride price” in return for his promise to fight for the Trojans:

There Idomeneus, graying though he was, called on the Danaans  
and charged in upon the Trojans and drove panic among them  
for he killed Othryoneus, a man who had lived in Kabesos,  
who has newly come in the wake of the rumour of war, and had  
asked  
Priam for the hand of the loveliest of his daughters,  
Cassandra, without bride price, but had promised a great work  
for her,  
to drive back the unwilling sons of the Achaians from Troy land,  
and aged Priam had bent his head in assent, and promised  
to give her, so Othryoneus fought in faith of his promises  
(13.361-369)

As the quotation above illustrates, Priam does not hesitate to exchange her daughter for a promise to fight on his side. Again, similar to Briseis and Chryseis, Cassandra is reduced to an item of exchange for the best interest of the patriarchs.

In patriarchy that is founded on the idea that women should be submissive and meek, women exercising any kind of “agency” or women in power are perceived as a threat to this ideology. Thus, these women are portrayed as “evil” or “wicked”. The best example of this strategy is illustrated in the representation of Klytemnestra. In Homer’s epics and Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, she is depicted as

a cold-blooded murderer and a vengeful villain. Yet, the point that these writers overlook is that Klytemnestra has every reason for wanting to kill Agamemnon. In other mythical accounts it is told that Agamemnon kills Klytemnestra's former husband Tantalus and her baby. Then, he marries her by force and he orders the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia for Artemis to calm the winds when the Greeks prepare to embark for Troy. Iphigenia is asked to come under the pretext of marriage to Achilles, yet she is placed on the sacrificial altar where her throat is slit by Agamemnon himself. Thus, Klytemnestra's main motivation in the murder of Agamemnon is to avenge the death of her daughter. In addition to the conscious planning of the murder of her husband, in the male-authored texts of Homer and Aeschylus, the unacceptable behaviour is the willing action of Klytemnestra of taking a lover. In the *Odyssey*, for instance, Homer tells that before she "willingly" became the lover of Aegisthus, she "had possession of a good intelligence" (3.266). Thus, when she asserts her will, this "sensible" woman turns into a cold blooded adulteress and murderer in the eyes of the patriarchy. In other words, women asserting political and social power are portrayed as evil and they are perceived as subversive.

The other group of women of the *Iliad*, is the mothers and wives, exemplified by Hekabe and Andromache. Eva Cantarella in her book *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* maintains that although Andromache is generally cited as a model of a strong and powerful woman, she is still confined to home and domestic work (27). When she tries to dissuade Hektor against fighting, he replies:

Poor Andromache! Why does your heart sorrow so much for me?

....

Go therefore back to our house, and take up your own work,  
the loom and the distaff, and see to it that your handmaiden  
ply their work also; but the men must see to the fighting,  
all men who are the people of Illian, but I beyond others.  
(6. 486, 490-494)

Thus, the division of gender roles is pronounced. In Hektor's answer the recurrent themes are the feat of shame and the pursuit of heroic glory. Echoing the speech

of Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, when he orders his mother, Penelope, to go back into house, to her loom, it is clear that the gender ideology is well-settled in the texts of Homer. The typical virtues expected from women are subordination and obedience. Canteralla, for this reason, calls the Homeric woman “not only subordinated but also victim of fundamentally misogynist ideology” (27).

The voice of, otherwise silenced women of the epic, is heard only in the laments that they perform for the loss of their husbands and sons. Then, it can be argued that, these laments, mourning of women for their loved ones, are in a way the female authored texts of the masculine genre of epic. These passages are the places where we can hear women speak. Andromache’s lament, for instance, in Book 24 expresses her bitterness toward Hektor:

My husband, you were lost young from life, and have left me  
 A widow in your house, and the boy is only a baby  
 who was born to you and me, the unhappy. I think he will never  
 come of age, for before then heads to heel this city  
 will be sacked, for you its defender, are gone, you who guarded  
 the city, and the grave wives, and the innocent children,  
 wives who before long must go away in the hollow ships,  
 and among them I shall also go, and you, my child, follow  
 where I go, and there do much hard work that is unworthy  
 of you, drudgery for a hard master, or else some Achaian  
 will take you by hand and hurl you from the tower into horrible  
 death, in anger because Hektor once killed his brother,  
 or his father, or his son; there were so many Achaians  
 whose teeth bit the vast earth, beaten down by the hands of  
 Hektor.  
 Your father was no merciful man in the horror of battle.  
 (24. 725-739)

In these words, Andromache announces her frustration. Since Hektor has died, she and her child are prone to slavery or death and she is afraid that his fighting will be avenged by the murder of their own child. Hence, she blames him for leaving him undefended and vulnerable to slavery and death. Andromache’s lament is a universal cry for mothers and wives who have lost their dear ones to wars. In a similar way, Hekabe’s lament for Hektor (24.248-260) is silent about heroic glory. She is a mother mourning for her dead son, lamenting in tears. After Hekabe, we

hear Helen and likewise she praises his kindness and his “gentleness of heart” and his “gentle words” (24.772). Through the laments of these three women, the heroic code is called into question. The degree to which the heroic ideal of death was perceived differently by man and women can also be observed in Priam’s speech:

For a young man all is decorous  
when he is cut down in battle and torn with the sharp bronze, and  
lies there  
dead, and though dead still all that shows about him is beautiful;  
but when an old man is dead and down, and the dogs mutilate  
the grey head and the grey beard and the parts that are secret,  
this, for all sad mortality, is the sight most pitiful. (22.71-76)

As seen, for Priam, dying young in war is much more dignified than reaching the old age. But as Gail Holst-Warhaft observes in her book, *Dangerous Voices: Women’s Laments and Greek Literature*: “not one of the women praises Hektor as a hero in battle” (113). Likewise, Helene P. Foley in her paper “The Politics of Tragic Lamentation” also points to the subversive nature of laments and she writes: “In the *Iliad* the themes expressed in lamentation also subtly counter the dominant ideology of the poem (see especially the lamentations of Andromache), which celebrates the immortal kleos [fame] acquired by the warrior in battle. But the poet does not problematize this tension in a comparable way” (i.e. to tragedy) (44). Hence, masculine values of fighting, search of glory and male bonding are chosen over the feminine values of home, children, compassion and mercy. The Trojan War brings on childless parents, orphans, widows and people condemned to slavery and death as it is still today. The worst part, as war prizes, women are forced to make “love” to those who have killed their dear ones. They end up in bed with the killers of their husbands and sons. This is also the fate of Andromache since she is awarded to Achilles’ son Neoptolemus after the fall of Troy. In her lament, she is well aware of this fact that every woman will be captive soon. The fate of other women is no different; Hekabe is given to Odysseus when Troy falls as a prize, Cassandra becomes the concubine of Agamemnon and her sister Polyxena is sacrificed at the tomb of Achilles.

In the whole epic, the great divide between male and female spheres is illustrated. Males are shown engaged in activities such as fighting, drinking, sharing the bed with the opposite sex; on the contrary, women are busy with weaving, tending the children and the house, cooking and mourning for the lost members of their family. The masculine virtues are highlighted yet there is no acknowledgement of the feminine. As stated earlier, laments are the only means women narrate their pain and where they gain voice.

In *The Firebrand*, Marion Zimmer Bradley moves radically away from this traditional male-centered account of the Trojan War. Instead she puts women of Troy at the forefront. Thus, she introduces new voices that have not been heard before. Her text is a strong opposition to social and political hierarchy and patriarchy. She confronts the issues of power and sexuality. In so doing, Bradley challenges the negative female sexual stereotypes and offers a women-oriented perspective. She provides an alternative society and social order with matriarchy. To expose the androcentric systems of Troy and Achaeans alike more starkly, in *The Firebrand*, Troy is juxtaposed with Colchis just as Greek religion is juxtaposed with Great Goddess worship. The text sees the patriarchal life style as the source of oppression of women and building upon the ideas of feminism, Bradley uses the Fall of Troy to discuss and introduce feminist ideals. In Bradley's rewriting, "domesticated" house women who accept the new patriarchal regime like Hekabe, Cassandra's sister Polyxena, and Andromache are juxtaposed with "warrior women" descended from matrilineal tradition. The loss of the matriarchal ways as a result of the overwhelming patriarchal world order is the main theme of the novel. Hekabe, in Bradley's version, is originally an Amazon, sister to Penthesilea, the Amazon Queen and she was herself "born and raised on the plains and trained with sword and spear" (13). Then she marries Priam and she leaves the ways of women warriors and becomes an obedient wife to him. In *The Firebrand*, it is told that when she came to Troy, Priam "allowed her to handle weapons and practice with his soldiers but when she became pregnant with Hector he had forbidden it. In vain she told him that the women of her tribe rode on horseback and worked with weapons until a few days before they were delivered



of their children; he would not listen to her” (13). Priam argues that her occupation with weapons is needless, since now she has her husband and it is a husband’s job to protect the wife and the children. Thus, she is subdued as Priam’s wife in Troy. Priam, furthermore, makes his position in relation to her very clear when he decides to send Paris to be exposed since the omens tell him that he would bring destruction to the Trojan Kingdom. Hecuba, still under the influence of the ways and customs of the matriarchal tribe that she was brought up in, protests: ““Among my people,” she added resentfully, “a child is its mother’s, and no one but she who carried it to most of a year and brought it to the birth can say its fate, if she refuses to suckle and bring it up, that is her choice. What right has a *man* over children?” She did not say a *mere* man, but her tone of voice made it obvious”. To this forceful objection Priam replies as: “The right of a father. I am master of this house, and as I have spoken, so shall it be done- hear me, woman” (19). With these words, he introduces her to the harsh realities of this new world that she has come to as a bride: Instead of fighting back and trying to change the system, Hekabe chooses to internalize the role that she is expected to perform. Following this submission, she starts to be content when Priam lets her to wander around the palace unlike the other kings who do not let their wives and daughters go out from the confines of women’s quarter in the palace.

In addition to Hekabe, Priam, as the king of Troy has many concubines that bore him children. Therefore, in this system, it is important for any woman to secure her place and status by giving an heir. In this regard, Hekabe feels confident since her son Hektor is Priam’s favourite. Likewise, she contemplates that her four year old daughter Polyxena, would be married to one of Priam’s rival kings and “would cement a firm alliance and would be valuable as any son” (11). When Cassandra asks about the gender roles or the dynamics of patriarchal world, Hecuba’s only answer is “Customs have no reason, they simply are” (98). It is clear that she has internalized the patriarchy and she is dedicated to that oppression. This internalized submissiveness perpetuates in each and every generation of women. For example, Polyxena, following her mother’s example, likes to stay in the women’s quarters and busy herself with clothes, jewellery and

women's gossips. For her, the ultimate goal in life is to get married. When she has period, she is sent to the women's quarters but this seclusion does not cause her to feel entrapped and she accepts this as the fact of life. She is known as the "pretty one" or "the proper modest girl" (141), while Cassandra is "the clever one" (53). The patriarchal binary opposition about women is once more pronounced.

Queen Imandra's daughter, Andromache, is another patriarchal wife in *The Firebrand*. She is promised to Hektor and when she asks about him to Cassandra, she describes the "glorious hero" of the *Iliad* in a very different light: "He is a bully. You must be very firm with him or he will treat you- like a rug and walk all over you, and you will be no more than a timid little thing perpetually yessing him, as my mother does my father (113)". Yet, this insight does not stop her from marrying wholeheartedly, looking forward to starting her life as a "wife". Even her enthusiasm could not blind her to the working of the patriarchy. When Hektor scolds Cassandra who was watching the training of warriors in the courtyard and orders her to go inside and tend her spinning and weaving. Andromache protests, arguing that "My own mother, and yours too, fights like a warrior!" (159). But Hektor, trained in male-oriented ideology asserts that: "It is not suitable that my sister, or my wife, be out here before the eyes of soldiers. Get inside, and attend your own work; and no more conniving with this wretched hoyden here!" (159). As seen, the sphere reserved for women, is within the walls of their house and the only activities reserved for women, as we already learnt in the *Odyssey*, are spinning and weaving (159, 167).

As a foil to Hecuba, Queen Imandra of Colchis is introduced in the novel. Colchis, at the Black Sea region of Anatolia, also the native land of another strong marginalized woman Medea, is the home of this queenly mother. She is the keeper of serpent and healing lore. Cassandra learns the gift of healing in the Serpent Palace of Colchis and then Colchis becomes her spiritual home. In Cassandra's words:

The city was very different from Troy. Women went everywhere freely in the streets, carrying jars and baskets on their heads. The women's garments were long, thick and cumbersome, but for all their clumsy skirts and their eye paint, the women looked strong

and competent. She also saw a forge where a woman, dark-faced and soot-stained, with a warrior's thick muscles, was working. Bared to the waist to tolerate the fierce heat, she hammered on a sword. A young woman, not much more than a girl, worked the bellows. (90)

Her stay at Colchis helps Cassandra to differentiate the patriarchal life of Troy more plainly from life at Colchis. Experiencing and observing this unorthodox way of life compared to Troy, and looking at her hometown from a distance cause Cassandra to question her world and the underlying power structures. To put it differently, to compare these two worlds is a fundamental step in Cassandra's search for self-knowledge and the assertion of herself as an individual subject and above all a woman.

The other female group established as a foil to the meek and obedient wives and daughters of Troy is the Amazons. In Greek myths, the Amazons are supposed to live in the Black Sea region which is outside the "civilized" world. They are known as a race of warrior women, living without men, wearing masculine clothing and they take part in activities such as hunting, fighting and farming which are all exclusive to men in the traditional patriarchal society. In another story, it is also claimed that they cut one of their breasts in order to facilitate firing a bow (Apollodoros 2.5.8; Strabo 11.5.1). Yet, in vase painting and statuary they are depicted with full breast. In the *Iliad*, the Amazons are called "men's equal" (3.189), "who fight men in battle" (6. 186). These women reject the institution of marriage, they have sexual union once a year with men from neighbouring tribes and they favour girl babies to boys. There are many stories concerning the Amazons in Greek myths. What is striking in these accounts is that, despite their excellence in fighting in each case the Amazon women are defeated, killed, impregnated or raped by the Greeks. For example Heracles steals the girdle of the Amazonian queen Hippolyte, Theseus rapes an Amazon and Achilles in the *Iliad* pierces the breast of Amazon Penthesilea and when he realizes her beauty, he falls in love with her just before she dies. Moreover, the *Amazonomachy*, the defeat of the Amazons by the Greeks, is one of the most popular subject matters in Greek art. Parthenon, the prominent building of the

Athenian acropolis, is decorated with scenes from the *Amazonomachy*. In Greek myths, these women are associated with barbarism as opposed to civilized Greeks and meek, chaste and married Greek women. It can be asserted that these myths function as a message to Greek women. Then, the Amazon myths were once more employed to reinforce and justify the male domination.

In *The Firebrand*, the Amazons follow the ways of ancient matriarchy. Cassandra is sent to spend some time with them. As Priam wants to get rid of Cassandra and her ill-fated prophecies, he accepts her request to travel with the Amazons. Penthesilea, Cassandra's aunt, her mentor and the Queen of the Amazons, has a deep impact on her in many ways. This strong and independent woman is also the first to tell her that there might be "other reasons than simple wickedness why a woman might choose not to marry" (319). During her stay with the Amazons, despite the hardship of nomadic life in the harsh plains of Anatolia, Cassandra does not miss the walled life of Troy; she experiences female bonding and being among independent women and enjoys physical freedom. To explain the difference between the patriarchal and matriarchal view of women, Star, the friend of Cassandra in the Amazon tribe, tells her that "the city dwellers" [Trojans] lock their women in women's quarters because they believe that "women are so lecherous that they cannot be trusted alone" (72). At the end of her stay, transformed deeply, Cassandra wants to be a warrior, rather than being a wife. Penthesilea tells her that she would be more than welcome in her tribe, but her father has already chosen a husband for her, therefore she has to go back to Troy (104). Back in Troy, she misses the outdoor life, her freedom and her horse and she starts to interpret the life in Troy better in the light of her experience amongst powerful and autonomous women. She realizes that "among the Amazons a daughter was useful and welcome, while here in Troy a daughter was always thought of only as not being a son" (152).

As seen, in Bradley's rewriting, Cassandra is portrayed not as a doomed prophetess or a lunatic. On the contrary, she is a strong and insightful woman who has the courage to take a quest for her identity. Here Cassandra reclaims her own voice as opposed to the Homeric epic where she does not utter a single sentence.

In this version, Bradley, emphasizes her active agency. By doing so, the “canonical” version of her story is called into question.

Bradley’s Cassandra is a complex figure; she is an outsider. At Troy, in the palace, her warrior and prophetic skills are devalued. Moreover, she is constantly misunderstood by her mother and her sisters because of her “difference”. Yet, this difference is due to her rebellious character. She does not conform to the norms and working of patriarchy and she challenges and aims to disrupt this androcentric system. When she returns for the marriage feast of Andromache and Hektor she feels alienated; “*For once, she thought, I can be as carefree as any other young girl.* She was briefly aware that others did not observe themselves in this way; what was the difference?” (180, writer’s emphasis). Cassandra unlike Andromache who is excited about her new life as a wife, questions the world and gender roles and she pushes the borders drawn for her by the system. Having an inquiring mind and questioning the system around her, Cassandra is not satisfied with easy answers. For instance, when Andromache gives birth to a son, she rejects the label, “Hektor’s son” and she reminds Andromache that it was her who carried the baby and went through the labor and she announces that she would call him “Andromache’s son” (188). In the tribe of the Amazons, she remembers, the children carry their mothers name and also in some other parts of Anatolia, but in Troy, she acknowledges, “only the son of a harlot bears the name of his mother and not his father” (191). Her insightful and defiant outbursts such as this one, obviously, are not welcomed by other male and female members of her family.

Kassandra also questions gods, religion and the oracle. When people come to the Temple to consult, as the oracle she uses her mind and she gives answers accordingly. At the worst moment of the war, after seeing many people die and many women captured, enslaved, victimized, Kassandra wonders: “If the Immortals are worse than the worst of men, small, petty and cruel, then whatever They are, They are not for mankind to venerate” (551). For the love goddess Aphrodite, Kassandra also thinks that she was created by men “*to excuse their*

*own lechery*” (216). Thus, alienated from her family, she does not find the solace and the sense of belonging that she is seeking in religion either.

In *The Firebrand*, the reason for the curse of Cassandra is given with an alternative explanation. In Bradley’s retelling, the priest Khryse assaults Cassandra using the mask of Apollo. She, however, sees through his trick and rejects him. Shunned by Cassandra, Khryse spreads the rumour that she is cursed for refusing the love of Apollo. Cassandra has had foresight since she was a child but the words of Khryse make it “certain that her words would never be believed” (229). Therefore, in Bradley’s retelling the reason why patriarchs do not pay attention to Cassandra is essentially her gender. Her words are rarely heeded. The tradition of pathetic, victimized madwoman is reversed and she becomes the communicator of both warnings and wisdom, yet without any recognition because of her gender.

Throughout the book, Cassandra undertakes a self-discovery journey and her sexual agency is also stressed. She chooses to be a virgin not because patriarchal norms tell her but because she decides to stay a virgin. Similarly, when she decides to have sexual intercourse with Aeneas, it is her own decision. She experiences her own womanhood and her body as she decides and through this lovemaking she gains wisdom and she finds a common ground with the other women of her society. In the morning of their night together, when she helps Aeneas to get dressed for the war, she realizes: “Now as they stood close together, she thought of all the other women of Troy who for all these years had been fastening on their men’s armour and sending them out to fight- or to die- and realizes that for once she shared the concerns and the fears of these women” (461). In Cassandra, Bradley creates a strong, independent female heroine. She weaves a female-oriented tale, an alternative to the male dominated “reality” passed down through the traditional written histories.

As mentioned earlier, Cassandra is different and alone within the circle of patriarchal women. In some sense, Cassandra and Helen have similarities as possessing a disturbing otherness in the patriarchal world of epic and myths. One is abused and subjugated, the other is idolized, yet in the end they are

marginalized in the system which sees them as the Other. Cassandra's knowledge of doom leads nowhere as no one heeds her. Likewise, Helen's passivity as an object to be won and owned makes her equally helpless against patriarchy. Nonetheless, Bradley, unlike Homer, gives a human dimension to her. In this retelling, Helen is portrayed not as the cause or the reward of the Trojan War but as a real woman with her complexities and insights. To show Helen, "the most beautiful woman on earth", as the ostensible cause is also a patriarchal attitude. This is exactly the ideological manipulation of patriarchy which sets women as that Kate Millett points out in her *Sexual Politics*. To quote once again:

One of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron, and in the present between career woman and housewife. One envies the other her 'security' and prestige while the envied yearns beyond the confines of respectability for what she takes to be other's freedom, adventure, and contact with the great world. Through the multiple advantages of the double standard, the male participates in both worlds, empowered by his superior social and economic resources to play the estranged women against each other as rivals (38).

Bradley, not satisfied with the gender-biased explanation of the epics, gives an anthropological and economic explanation for the outbreak of the war. In *The Firebrand*, Cassandra recognizes that Helen is just an excuse for the siege of Troy (230); she says "if the Akhaians wanted the gold and good of Troy, they would have come against us knowing they were not fighting for 'honor' but out of greed (249). Likewise, Helen does not believe that Cassandra is mad, she says "You do not have the look of a madwoman. In any case, I prefer to make up my own mind" (238). In this way, different in various ways these two women establish a sorority between them.

Furthermore, in *The Firebrand*, Helen is drawn as a woman with morals. When she is accused by Creusa for attempting to seduce her husband she says that she is not interested in anyone's husband and she asks all Trojan women if they have ever seen her trying to seduce their husbands. Insightfully Andromache

voices her concern about this rift between women and she says Gods take pleasure in seeing people fight and she also believes that “Hektor’s greatest pleasure is battle, if this war stopped tomorrow, he would weep” (411). Later on in the novel, Andromache also realizes that the war that left her a widow and her son an orphan is men’s doing. She regrets attacking Helen verbally and calling her the reason of her misery. In her newly gained wisdom, she says that: “Sister, we are both victims in this war; the Goddess forbids this madness of men should separate us” (sic 488). As illustrated, Bradley, unlike Atwood’s depiction of Helen in *The Penelopiad* as the essential femme-fatale, portrays a more complex and three-dimensional character.

Despite the strong sorority among women, in *The Firebrand*, mother-daughter relationship is not much explored. As indicated earlier, Hecuba does not understand Cassandra and they could not build a nurturing and loving bond. In other words patriarchy estranges them. Hekuba, the ideological subject of patriarchy, has lost the connection with the matriarchal tradition that she has been brought up in. Subject to the norms of androcentric life, she interprets life and women through the lens of men. Therefore, she considers Cassandra as a wild child that has to be tamed. Since her childhood, Cassandra has seen visions but her mother tells her she is making up all these tales, imaging things (29). Hekuba even advises her to get married and she believes that once she has a husband and a child, she could be free of “evil dreams and prophecies to torment you [Cassandra]” (263). Despite this rift between mother and the daughter, Cassandra finds mentors or surrogate mothers in strong women like Queen Imandra and most of all in Penthesilea. Her bonds with them guide her in her journey of self-discovery. Besides, on her way back to Troy from Asia Minor, Colchis, Cassandra finds a deserted girl and she adopts her and calls her Honey. In this way, she establishes an alternative family of her own. By choosing to be a single mother, following the Amazons, she refuses to use the institution of marriage to have a child.

The heroic code of honor, rage and brutality is also problematized in Bradley’s work. French philosopher Simone Weil writes that “the true hero, the



true subject, the centre of the *Iliad* is force. Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away" (5). As seen, force here is masculine. Then, the *Iliad* is about war and rage. The poem opens with these lines:

Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus  
And its devastation, which put pain thousandfold upon the  
Achaians  
Hurl'd in their multitudes to the house of Hades, strong souls  
of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting of  
dogs, of all birds. (1.1-5)

Anger, insatiable desire for glory, revenge, and fate are given as the major features of the heroic code. Cassandra asks herself "But if war was too evil a thing for women, why, then, should it be good for men? And if it was a fine and honourable thing for men, why should it be wrong for women to share the honor and the glory?" (98).

In Homer's *Iliad*, all the "heroes" are brutal, overbearing and arrogant. Achilles after killing Hektor whom he called "great":

Now thought of shameful treatment for glorious Hektor.  
In both of his feet at the back he made holes by tendons  
in the space between ankle and heel, and drew thongs of ox-hide  
through  
them,  
and fastened to the chariot so as to let the head drag  
and mounted the chariot, and lifted the glorious armour inside it,  
then whipped the horses to run. (22. 394-400).

There is no humanity and compassion in this masculine world. Thus, in Bradley's version, the legendary heroes are stripped of their own glamour. Achilles is called "mad child" and Paris is depicted as self-centered and vain. About Achilles, Cassandra thinks that he "simply sees the world, all in terms of fighting and honor" and she wonders if he is really the greatest warrior of all time. For her, he is just "a child, proud of his new toy sword and shiny armour?" (289). In *The Firebrand*, Achilles is portrayed as a cruel man devoid of mercy. After he kills the Amazon Queen Penthesilea, he violently rapes the corpse (526). Some

versions of the story tell that Achilles fell in love with her when he took off the helmet and mourned her death. But Bradley's Cassandra in her painful loss, believes that the rape is a "cold-blooded act of contempt" and she remembers "he was like a mad dog" (527). To take revenge of this horrendous act, Cassandra kills Achilles with a poisonous arrow.

Kassandra and her daughter are too subject to this brutal plunder. After the Fall of Troy, Kassandra and her daughter Honey took refuge in the Temple of the Maiden but brutal and merciless soldiers raped both Kassandra and Honey who was just a baby and left her to die; "She (Kassandra) felt herself step out of her pain-racked body, conscious of the man still jerking away at her limp form, of Honey naked and torn, bleeding on the stone, still moving a little, whimpering through bruised limbs" (561). Then, as mentioned above, all the women of Troy are taken captives and distributed to Achaians. Hecuba is given to Odysseus, Polyxena is killed and "sacrificed, her throat cut and her body cast on Achilles' pyre as if she were some animal..." (568), Kassandra is taken by Agamemnon, Agamemnon takes her back to his kingdom in Mycenae. On the journey, Kassandra realizes that she is expecting. Agamemnon tries to comfort her and tells her that he would value her as a consort not as a slave. On board, Kassandra hopes she will have a boy as "who would choose to have any child born as a girl into this world, to suffer at the hands of men what all women suffer" (578). Agamemnon, when he learns Cassandra is expecting, also hopes for a boy. Yet his reason for wanting a boy is different than Kassandra's; he explains that his Queen Klytemnestra values only daughters, she has even sent their son away so that he would not train him.

In *The Firebrand*, the war spoils of the *Iliad*, Chryseis and Briseis go to the Achaian warriors by their own wish, because they fall in love with them. Kassandra thinking about them and herself wonders: "As for Briseis, or Chryseis, they are like puppy dogs, rolling over with all four feet in air if their master but gives them a pat. Perhaps the question is not why they do so, but why do I feel no desire to do so? (372). The bargain over Chryseis is also given in Bradley's work. Khryse, Chryseis' father, wants his daughter back not because he cares about her

but he is turning her into a merchandise. He wants Agamemnon to marry her and he says “if he will not marry my daughter, I want her back, and a proper dowry with her, since she is no longer a virgin and I cannot find a husband for her without a dowry” (380). Thus Bradley underlines the marriage economy of the patriarchal world that Irigaray refers to above. Likewise, even Polyxena, the dutiful daughter, rebels against the marriage market. She is offered to many men by Priam, yet all the suitors who want to accept the offer are the supporters of Achaians. Seeing this ongoing marketing of herself, she takes an oath and becomes a priestess but this does not save her from dying on the funeral pyre of Achilles as his war-prize.

Priam of the *Iliad* is an old, frail father who suffers the loss of his son, the just ruler who loses his kingdom and tries everything to stop the coming disaster on his people and city. In *The Firebrand*, however, he is also portrayed as cruel and unwavering. He cares little for his daughter’s warning and does not hesitate to exercise violence on her if she is stubborn. When she asks about Paris, her twin brother who was sent to Mt Ida, “he struck her across the face with such force that she lost her balance and skidded down the steps near his throne, falling and striking her head” (39). Besides, he is power-hungry and obsessed with victory. When Hektor dies, the other son of Priam, Troilus, wants to join the Trojan forces and Priam gives him his blessing, Hekabe rages: “Cruel old man! Unnatural father! We have lost one son today, will you lose another”. But Priam only says that Troilus is not a child and she should be proud that her son will fight in this war. The patriarchy in his frame of mind is evident when Priam refuses the help of the Amazons to defend Troy: “On the day when I call upon women, kin or no, for the defence of the city, Troy will be in evil straits, Kinswoman; may that day be far indeed?” (46).

In Bradley’s work, Agamemnon and Menelaus are also patriarchal stereotypes. For instance, Sparta, originally belongs to Helen; “Menelaus was a usurper who took the lady for her lands. Sparta is Helen’s own city by her mother-right; her mother Leda, held it, from her mother before her and her grandmother” (195). In *The Firebrand*, Helen brings her son Nikos with her to Troy. Aware of

the danger of patriarchy, she is afraid that Menelaus might turn his son to the image of himself or his brother Agamemnon. And Odysseus unlike the “wise and clever” hero of Homer is called “a horse thief”, “the notorious plunderer” and “a pirate” (158).

There is another layer of clash in the novel; one of the major conflicts Bradley presents in the *Firebrand* is between Apollo, the sun god of Greeks and Earth Mother. Apollo is the symbol of the Iron Age culture represented by Achaians, the patriarchal, male-oriented world order as opposed to the matriarchal ways embodied by the Great Mother. The “civilized” patriarchal cities of Troy and Greece are juxtaposed with the wilder, more ancient domains of Anatolia like Colchis and the land of the Amazons in the Black Sea Region. Furthermore, to highlight the difference, the cloistered and closeted world of patriarchal life is contrasted with the world of the Amazons who live in accordance with nature.

As briefly noted above, after rebelling against her family, Kassandra searches for a place that she could fit in, in the male-centered world of Troy. Hence she seeks a sense of belonging in the realm of religion and she leaves the palace to go the Apollo’s Temple to be initiated as a priestess. Here, she learns the ancient wisdom of serpent lore from a very old priestess; she teaches her how to feed them, care for them. Apollo dominates this oracle yet, she later learns that this primordial site originally belonged to Python (female snake-deity). However when the patriarchal religion took over the lands, it is told that Apollo overthrew Python and started to rule over the oracle. In *The Firebrand*, the women of Troy also observe the festival for grain, praying to the Earth Mother. Old ways, nonetheless, are beginning to erode; mother’s right is replaced by father’s right.

Serpent lore in *The Firebrand* represents the times when, in the light of archaeological evidence, women had a higher status in social life and the Mother Goddess was the most prominent religious personage. In Crete and elsewhere in Greece, the goddess was often pictured with her symbol of the snake which was considered the means of immortality because it could shed its skin and replenish it again. The serpent was considered as a metaphor for life’s energy. Karen Joines also notes that in Egypt the serpent was called “life of the earth”, “full of years”,

the “life of the gods”, and the “life of forms and of nutritious substances (20)”. Because serpents hibernate in winter and reemerge in the spring, they were the ideal symbols of rebirth and regeneration. Moreover, serpents were believed to be in touch with the earth from which they came. By destroying the symbol of the goddess, the patriarchal culture destroyed the political, social, and religious power associated with women. Thus, Apollo’s slaying the Python is the symbolic representation of this demotion. Likewise, in Greek mythology, Zeus conquers and kills the giant serpent Syphon and the snake-haired Medusa has her head cut off by Perseus. On the dominance of serpent iconography, Merlin Stone in *When God Was a Woman* also explains that in addition to the archaeological artefacts found at the palace of Knossos, the classical temple of Erechtheum in the Athenian agora is considered to be the home of Athena’s snake. Likewise, at the temple in Delphi the oracles were called Pythia and the tripod stool upon which the oracle sat was called Python. Later on the male priests of Apollo took over this shrine. According to Stone, the sculptures and the relief of women that is often identified as the Amazons fighting against men at this shrine may actually depict this seizure (203).

In Bradley’s novel, the Amazons, Kentaurians and Queen Imandra are more in tune with nature and the Mother Goddess. These groups are in stark contrast with Achaians epitomized by the monstrous Achilles who dishonours Hektor’s slain corpse and rapes the dead body of the Amazon Queen Penthesilea. Bradley draws heavily on the archaeological traditions focusing on the matriarchal past of Classical Greek culture exclusively Crete. Thus, in Bradley’s work the gradual domination of patriarchal religion over the Mother Goddess cult is told. The male gods of Achaians overthrew and subjugated the Mother/Earth Goddess. They brought their own gods consequently the worship of Earth Mother was driven to the underground.

Bradley also goes to great length to strip away much of the fantastical elements. For instance, in mythical accounts, Kentaurians are superhuman creatures, that are half-human and half-horse. Yet Bradley writes that they are just short, naked men riding horses. They also suffer from the economic and social changes;

unable to adapt to the new system of war and plunder, these peaceful people who follow the old patterns of exchange of goods and feed themselves from the natural sources around them, are wiped out. As for Olympian gods, in *The Firebrand*, they make their appearance through mortal characters. Thus, it is not really clear whether they are the immortals or people perceive them as gods. Helen summons the glamour of Aphrodite or Hektor channels to himself the fury of the Ares, the god of war. In addition, Achilles' heel has no supernatural explanation but rather Cassandra hits his unprotected heel with a poison-tipped Amazon arrow. Hence, in *Firebrand* characters and settings are realistic and demythologized and the scientific and the anthropological base of events are emphasized. As noted earlier, for Bradley, the real reason between the Greeks and the Trojans is the result of shifting trade routes and economic rivalry. Accordingly the outcome depends more on the use of iron weapons that are stronger than heroism. Bradley's characters are life-sized and humanized and she is sceptical of any religious/supernatural phenomena. As noted above, Cassandra suspects an apparition of Apollo to be a corrupted priest in a gilded mask.

To sum up, in Homeric epics and Greek myths the patriarchal ideology is imminent. On the ideological aspect of epics in terms of gender roles, Canteralla contends that "although the epics represent the confluence of songs that were handed down and reworked for centuries, the didactic and socializing function of epic poetry requires that the tales both express and, at the same time, contribute to forming public opinion, the distrust of women that the poems express is matched in the literature of the period immediately following" (33). To illustrate this, the following quotation can be proposed. In the *Iliad*, Andromache strongly opposes the idea of Hektor's going back to fighting with these words:

Hektor, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother,  
 you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband  
 Please take pity upon me then, stay here on the rampart,  
 that you may not leave your child an orphan, your wife a widow  
 (6. 429-432)

Yet, the later commentators of Homer find this powerful voicing of her mind so unusual that Aristarchus argues that Homer could not write these lines as “the words are unsuited to Andromache; she is being general instead of Hektor, and the advice is wrong” (qtd. in Lefkowitz 2007, 31). As seen, the expected behaviour from the genders are anchored very deep and strong in the minds of people and without doubt the mythical accounts and their reproduction in the epics, dramatical works and visual arts reinforce this constructed truth. For the sharp distinction of gender roles Lefkowitz also notes that: “the Greek term *heros* applies only to men, and the female equivalent, *heroine* is used for semi-divine creatures, like springs and nymphs. Women by their very nature cannot be heroes, because heroes get their title by killing, destroying, or accomplishing something extraordinary, like founding a city (36). Hence, we can assume that this gender role ideology of Homeric epics has not changed in the coming centuries since in different studies Pomeroy, Lefkowitz and Foley demonstrate that the conditions of life for Greek women did not change very much until the Hellenistic Age. The next section will focus on the rewritings of the stories of Biblical women by the contemporary women writers, since the Bible is unquestionably the most powerful narrative for the establishment and perpetuation of the gender roles.

## CHAPTER 4

### REWRITING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MYTHS

#### 4.1 Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*

Alicia Suskind Ostriker in her article “Out of my Sight: The Buried Woman in Biblical Narrative” asks:

What happens when women re-imagine culture? What is the relation of the female writer to the male text, the male story? How can we- how do we- deal with that ur-text of patriarchy, that particular set of canonized tales from which our theory and practice of canonicity derives, that paradigmatic meta-narrative in which numerable small narratives rest like many eggs in a very large basket- the Book of Books which we call the Bible? (1993, 27)

Anita Diamant, in her 1997 debut novel, *The Red Tent* aspires to answer this question. Diamant transforms the few lines about Dinah, Jacob's daughter, in the Genesis section of the Old Testament in which her rape and the following retribution is told into a novel. In this rewriting, Diamant makes Dinah the narrator of the book. Thus, she puts the marginalized figure of the Biblical narrative to the centre of her work and she gives her a voice to tell her own story as well as Jacob's four wives'. In an article from Reform Judaism Magazine, Diamant articulates her motivation for revisiting this Biblical character as: “I did not set out to explain or rewrite the biblical text but to use Dinah's silence to try to imagine what life was like for women in this historical period” (qtd. in Fetterman, n. pag.). In this way, intrigued by the silence of Dinah, Diamant composes her story by envisioning Dinah's world and her persona. For this end, Diamant, in her rewriting, changes the focus from men's stories and their relationship with god to women and their relationship with one another.

Since its publication, *The Red Tent* has been a topic of hot debate; some Christian and Jewish scholars accuse Diamant of sacrilege against the Bible.



Diamant explained in an interview posted on her website on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *The Red Tent* that: “there have been outraged emails and letters from people, who believe that I took terrible and wrong-headed liberties with a sacred text, claiming that I misread the Bible, defamed the matriarchs and patriarchs, even charging me with anti-Semitism” (n. pag.). The common point of all criticism from people of different religious traditions is the condemnation of Diamant for portraying the patriarchs of the Bible in an offensive way and for employing inaccurate masculine stereotypes. For instance, Rabbi J. Avram Rothman in his essay titled “A Popular Novel Characterizes the Founders of the Jewish People as Full of Intrigue, Lust and Deceit. Should that Bother Us?” writes: “We cannot accept that our forefathers, even in fiction could be petty, could be murderers, could be willing to throw away the relationship they fought so hard for with the Almighty” (n. pag.). In addition to the way in which the male characters are portrayed, the infuriated critics of the book argue that in Diamant’s book Jacob’s wives are presented as polytheists as opposed to the Judeo-Christian belief that Leah and Rachel are the founding-matriarchs of the Jewish people and monotheistic Judaism.

On the other hand, other critics tend to identify *The Red Tent* as a *midrash*. *Midrash* in Jewish theology is a story that attempts to fill the gaps in the Bible in order to explore the deeper meanings of the biblical text. Employed by rabbis for centuries to comment on the Old Testament and to present the message of the sacred texts in a more accessible way for the lay folk, *midrash*, in the recent decades has started to be adopted by women writers as a female genre. This change is a consequence of the contemporary Jewish women’s turning to the stories of Biblical women as a source of inspiration and identification. Contemporary women aim to revisit the silenced women of the Bible and they attempt to write their stories from a female-oriented perspective. Professor Howard Schwartz defines the *midrash-making* as: “a continuing process of the reintegration of the past into the present. Each time this takes place, the tradition is transformed and must be reimagined. And it is this very process that keeps the tradition vital and perpetuates it” (qtd. in Fetterman, n. pag.). In the light of this

observation, midrash-making can be compared to mythmaking as in both undertakings, the past is reimagined from a different standpoint. Yet Diamant in another interview at litlovers.com website calls her novel not a *midrash* but a “work of fiction”. She continues to explain as follows: “Its [*The Red Tent*] perspective and focus-by and about the female characters- distinguishes it from the biblical account, in which women are usually peripheral and often totally silent. By giving Dinah a voice and by providing texture and content to the sketchy biblical descriptions, my book is a radical departure from the historical text” (n. pag.). Diamant thereby filling the gaps about the absent, unnamed or silent women of the Old Testament, rewrites their stories and their world from a women-oriented perspective and she becomes the means through which these women tell their stories; stories that could not find their place in the “Father-text”, namely the Bible.

It is also worth noting here that *The Red Tent* was printed with no advertising budget. Apparently, the big publishing houses do not see a chance of success in this retold story of a forgotten woman of the Bible. Then with the personal recommendation of readers, through word of mouth, the book went on to become a New York Times bestseller in 2001. This incident delineates how the marketing industry works from different dynamics. On the other hand, it also demonstrates the power of the reading public, especially women who search for the stories of maternal foremothers.

The silence and the peripheral role of women in the Bible are very similar to the Homeric epics discussed. In this sense, the Bible is also a patriarchal narrative in which the androcentric ideology is expressed, exemplified and consequently validated. Like Greek myths, in the Bible, women are portrayed in stereotypical gender roles prescribed by the patriarchal world-view. Esther Fuchs in her book *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative* contends that:

The biblical narrative reflects the ancient patriarchal societies that produced it... That the biblical narrative is a literary masterpiece does not mean that it is not prescriptive or that it is non-political. The biblical narrative does not merely valorize the

power-based relations between men and women; it also legislates and authorizes the political subordination of women. (7)

Fuchs further underlines that the Bible is a text authored by men and it is androcentric in perspective. The biblical text while focusing on the stories of patriarchs, “reduces women to auxiliary roles, suppresses their voices and minimizes their national and religious significance” (12). And she goes on to argue as follows:

These narratives do not merely describe a male-dominated social order, but justify it as morally requisite and sanctioned by God. They do not merely tell us how women came to be inferior; they also tell us that this inferiority is necessary. In other words, though they often seem to be descriptive, they are more often than not prescriptive. (14)

Hence, as God is conceptualized as male in the Bible, accordingly a male-centered world order is set up. This construction of God as male dethrones the female Goddesses in the ancient Near East to whom the role of creatrix was originally assigned and testified in myths and legends<sup>27</sup>. The Bible by this means validates the ideology of male domination. In this way, women are defined in relation to men and submissive behaviour is presented as the exemplary model. Moreover, the primary role expected from women is characterized as being a wife and above all being a mother and producing male heirs. Only by means of being a mother to sons, can a woman attain status, authority and respectability. In addition, while assertiveness is praised for man, it is unacceptable for a woman to exercise autonomy on any matter. These prescribed roles for women have been influential in shaping and perpetuating the gender-roles in literature and in life. Lerda Gerner in *The Creation of the Patriarchy* also points to the power of the Bible as an ideological narrative and she argues that: “Western civilization draws many of its leading metaphors and definitions of gender and morality from the Bible” (161). In a similar vein, Alicia Suskind Ostriker states that:

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<sup>27</sup> For a detailed study of the relegation of Near Eastern Goddess for the sake of a single male God, Lerner 1986, 141-160 Frymer-Kensky, 1992.

...the biblical story of monotheism and covenant is, to use the language of politics, a cover-up; that when we lift the cover we find quite another story, an obsessively told and retold story of erased female power. Biblical patriarchy, as I see it, figuratively encodes within its text the repeated acts of literal murder and oppression necessary for its triumph. (30-31).

Likewise, both de Beauvoir and Millett identify the Bible as one of the founding texts of patriarchy. They in different ways aim to expose and criticize the patriarchal assumptions of the Bible. Yet, they do not set out to provide an extensive critique of biblical texts. Since de Beauvoir and Millett see the Bible as the institutionalization of power relationships, they focus initially on the power relationships established in the Bible to dominate women. For instance, De Beauvoir refers to Genesis 1, the story of the creation of woman from Adam's rib, to discuss the stereotypical images of women, concerning the woman's status as the Other. She observes:

Woman thus seems to be the inessential who never goes back to being the essential, to be the absolute Other, without reciprocity. This conviction is dear to male, and every creation myth has expressed it, among others the legend of Genesis, which, through Christianity has been kept alive in Western civilization. Eve was not fashioned at the same time as the man; she was not fabricated from a different substance, nor of the same clay as was used to model Adam: she was taken from the flank of the first male. Not even her birth was independent; God did not spontaneously choose to create her as an end in herself and in order be worshipped directly by her in return for it. She was destined by Him for man; it was to rescue Adam from loneliness that He gave her to him, in her mate was her origin and her purpose; she was his complement in the order of the inessential. (173)

Likewise, Kate Millett in the *Sexual Politics* maintains that:

As the central myth of Judeo-Christian [The myth of the Fall] imagination and therefore our immediate cultural heritage, it is well that we appraise and acknowledge the enormous power it still holds over us even in a rationalist era which has long ago given up literal belief in it while maintaining its emotional assent intact. This mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering, knowledge, and sin is still the foundation of sexual

attitudes, for it represents the most crucial argument of the patriarchal tradition in the West. The Israelites lived in the continual state of war with the fertility cults of their neighbors; these latter afforded sufficient attraction to be the source of constant defection, and the figures of Eve, like that of Pandora, has vestigial traces of a fertility goddess overthrown. There is some, probably unconscious evidence of this in the Biblical account which announces, even before the narration of the fall has begun – “Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living things”. (52)

As these scholars underline, the Bible, like Greek myths, marginalizes women’s voices and experiences. Besides, in the Bible, female sexuality is regarded as sinful and lustful. As authored by men, reflecting an androcentric worldview, the Bible expects women to identify with male experience. Thus, she is alienated from her authentic subjecthood as a woman. Therefore, it can be asserted that the Bible is also a political and ideological text; it justifies the cult and the authority of the father. In this worldview, mirrored in the Bible, the women need the protection of their fathers and brothers. Moreover when married with a dowry paid to the father, she is expected to be a virgin and in order to secure her place she has to give birth to male heirs. Through its powerful discourse, the Bible thus seeks to universalize and naturalize the domination of women by men.

In Genesis 34 it is told that Dinah, daughter of Leah and Hebrew patriarch Jacob is raped by Shechem, the son of Hivite King Hamor. After this incident, Shechem wants to marry her and his father Hamor offers to pay any bride price set by Dinah’s family. Yet Jacob and his sons announce that they would give their consent on the condition that all the male members of Hamor’s kingdom are circumcised. Consequently, Shechem, Hamor and every male in the city are circumcised according to Jacob’s wishes. Yet, Dinah’s brothers take advantage of their frail condition and:

And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and

spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house. (Genesis 34: 25-29)

On this account, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, professor of the Hebrew Bible, comments that: “The story is commonly called “The Rape of Dinah”. But the story is not really about Dinah who never speaks and essentially disappears from the narrative after the third verse. And it never tells us clearly that Shechem raped her (2002, 83)”. In Dinah’s story, patriarchal ideology, as observed in the analysis of the preceding novels, that treats women as an item of exchange between men is also observed. In the text, patriarchal authority is evident; the whole issue is discussed between Dinah’s father and brothers and they decide to execute the massacre of the whole city for the retribution. Moreover, women legally, socially and economically are inferior to men and throughout the whole chain of events, Dinah, her feelings and her opinions about the entire episode do not find a place in the account. In addition, the reaction of Leah, Dinah’s mother, to the rape and the consequent events are not given and what happened to Dinah after her “rescue” is not known; she disappears from the narrative. Thus, Diamant, in *The Red Tent*, not only gives her a name but a life story. In *The Red Tent*, Dinah also testifies as:

It’s a wonder that any mother ever call a daughter Dinah again. No one recalled my skill as a midwife, or the songs I sang, or the bread I baked for my insatiable brothers. Nothing remained except a few mangled details about those weeks in Schechem. (2)

On the absence of women in the Bible, Leila Leah Branner in her book *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* also notes that only in three Biblical stories both mothers’ and daughters’ names are included (62); these are the stories of Miriam, Dinah, and Tamar. Branner further points out when women’s names are mentioned, it is in the context of “extraordinary” events; namely rape and incest.

In the Bible, on the topic of rape it is written that the rape victim’s father has to be compensated for by the rapist: “If a man find a damsel that is a virgin,

which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days." (Deuteronomy 22:28-29). In Exodus 22, subtitled as *Protection of Property*, it also writes that: "And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins" (16-17).

In the light of these statements it can be concluded that patriarchal Hebrew law then penalizes not only the rapist but also the raped woman by forcing her to marry her assailant. The text also justifies the daughter's political incompetence and her inability to protect herself or defend her case in front of the legal authorities. Validating the authority of men by disregarding women and treating them as goods to be compensated, for this ideology suggests that women are properties belonging to men.

In the same respect, Dinah only becomes the reason for the revenge and this "rape" is taken as an insult to the men of her tribe. Her authentic subjectivity is not taken into consideration; she is just a property that is stolen. Her brothers are outraged because Shalem "defiled" Jacob's daughter. In the eyes of patriarchy, she is important as the daughter of Jacob, other than that she is not named (Genesis 34:7). In addition, during the marriage negotiations again Dinah is referred to only as daughter; Hamor addresses her not with her name but as "Jacob's daughter" (Genesis 34:7). Even if the sex were consensual, the decision is not Dinah's to make, therefore in the eyes of the brothers it was a rape.

A close reading of Genesis 34 reveals that in the biblical narrative, Dinah carries out one action. According to 34:1, Dinah "goes out to visit the daughters of the land" and in the text it is implied that this one action brings about her downfall. Various scholars suggest interpretations for this action that is presented as the reason for her rape. For one, Carolyn Leeb in her book *Away from the Father's House* suggests, "this was a trip to the local water source or well, since we do not know of other gathering places for women in ancient times. Her role in

the narrative is as object, as ‘bone of contention, not as subject. Her ability to initiate action is ended after the first verse in which she took the fateful step of going out” (136). Likewise, according to Gerhard Von Rad: “The story describes very realistically how Dinah once stepped outside the small circle allotted to the life of the ancient Israelite woman, how she looked around rather curiously at the “women of the land” that is, at the settled Canaanite women, and how she thus loosened the stone which became a landslide” (331). Alicia Ogden Bellis in *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women’s Stories in the Bible* also suggests that, “Dinah’s story is a sad tale of woman who dares to leave the safe confines of her tent” (87). Fewell and Gunn, in a similar vein, note that “Dinah seeks company elsewhere, among the women of the land, literally, among the ‘daughters’ of the land. Her search for connection, and perhaps for worth, however, meets a tragic end” (81). Hence, all these scholars point to the fact that Dinah’s leaving the house and going out to meet women with the hope of bonding or even observing, results in her being raped. Then, it can be argued that the implied message is setting a cautionary example for women and preaching them to stay within the confines of their household, under the patriarchal authority. Moreover, in the Bible, it is also recounted that Rachel meets Jacob at the well (Genesis 29: 9), also Rebecca is presented at the well (Genesis 24:15). Leah also goes to meet Jacob and this meeting leads to the birth of Dinah (Genesis 30:16). Then, Dinah is not an exception in her family to take a decision to go out unattended by a male guardian. In this respect, her rape cannot be justified by accusing her of subversion. The brothers’ overzealous reaction, killing all the men who are still in pain from the circumcision, the plunder of all city’s riches and women also bring the question whether the brothers were after the women and the riches of the city and the rape of Dinah was just an excuse to orchestrate what they had in mind since no one seems to be concerned with Dinah’s rights and her decisions. In the biblical narrative, it is clear that Dinah is not an individual or a woman but she is a daughter and a sister and nothing is conveyed about her psyche about the massacre. To put it differently, despite the fact that the section is called “The Rape of Dinah” in the Bible, Dinah is not given a voice. As discussed in the



Introduction of this present study, Pierre Macherey contends that the gaps in the narrative are political and ideological and they ask for an explanation. Diamant. On the gaps in Dinah's story, in an interview states that:

I was drawn to retell the biblical story in large part because of her silence. In Genesis 34, Dinah's experience is described and characterized by men in her family, who treat her as a rape victim, which in that historical setting meant that she was irredeemably ruined and degraded. Because she does not say a word (and because of the extraordinary loving actions taken by her accused assailant), I found it easy to imagine an alternative telling to the story, in which Dinah is not a passive victim but a young woman who makes choices and acts on her own initiative. Not only did I find it easy, I found it necessary (macmillanusa, 4).

Then, to fill this gap and explore the silence of Dinah, Diamant in her rewriting, gives Dinah her voice back and makes her the narrator of her life and her mother's stories. After telling the stories of her mother and Jacob's other wives, Dinah recounts her own story as a love story. Diamant on her website notes that:

I could never reconcile the story Genesis 34 with a rape, because the prince does not behave like a rapist! After the prince is said to have 'forced' her (a determination made by the brothers, not by Dinah), he falls in love with her and asks his father to get Jacob's permission to marry her, and then aggress to the extraordinary, even grotesque demand that he and all the men of his community submit to circumcision. Furthermore, I wanted Dinah and all of the women in my story to be active agents in their own lives, not passive pawns and victims. (n. pag.)

In the light of this insight, Diamant weaves a totally different narrative than the Bible and she portrays Dinah not as a daughter or a sister only, but first and foremost as a woman.

In the Bible and also in *The Red Tent* it is told that Jacob leaves Haran and decides to return to the land of his people and reunite with his family. There, in the land of Canaan, Jacob settles on the outskirts of the city Shechem. Yet, Diamant's plot diverges here. According to Dinah's story, one day Rachel is called to deliver the son of the King's concubine and Dinah accompanies her as an

apprentice. There she meets Shalem<sup>28</sup> and they fall in love with each other. Eventually, these two lovers make love and after sealing their love with their physical union, Shalem calls her his “wife”. Their marriage then unlike patriarchal marriages is confirmed with their lovemaking and mutual wish. The sexual attraction, the immediate bond between the couple and the intensity of their lovemaking turns the rape story into a love story. In Diamant’s work, it is underlined that Shalem loves Dinah dearly and he is kind and loving towards her unlike her father and her brothers. Dinah remembers the first time they made love as follows:

I did not cry out when he took me, because, though he was young, my lover did not rush. Afterward, when Shalem lay still at last and discovered that my cheeks were wet, he said, “Oh, little wife. Do not let me hurt you again.” But I told him that my tears had nothing of pain in them. They were the first tears of happiness in my life. “Taste them,” I said to my beloved, and he found they were sweet. And he wept as well. We clung to each other until Shalem’s desire was renewed, and I did not hold my breath when he entered me, so I began to feel what was happening to my body, and to understand the pleasures of love. (226)

As the quotation above reflects, the love between Dinah and Shalem is mutual and compassionate in addition to being passionate. When Dinah’s father and brothers are against this relationship and consider this union as a rape, Dinah contemplates that presenting her consensual love affair as a rape and demanding revenge in return is just an excuse for her brothers Levi and Simon. She becomes just a “cause” for their real motivation. Dinah thinks that: “It was clear that Reuben would get their father’s birthright and the blessing would go to Joseph, so they were determined to carve out their own glory, however they could” (234). Athalya Brenner in her interpretation of Genesis 34 also notes that Jacob “is worried about the political and military ramifications of his sons’ ostensible reprisal, fearing that the security of his outsider group is compromised. He does not behave as a caring father for his raped daughter; he is more concerned with pragmatic considerations

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Red Tent*, Schechem, the son of King Hamor of Genesis 34 is spelled as Shalem. In this present chapter, in the discussion of the novel, this version is adopted.

of group survival” (1998, 36-37). Accordingly, Jacob’s sons Levi and Simon execute the murders and looting. In *The Red Tent*, at the night of the massacre, Dinah wakes up during the night to realize that:

I was covered in blood. My arms were coated with the thick, warm blood that ran from Shalem’s throat and coursed like a river down the bed and onto the floor. His blood coated my cheeks and stung my eyes and salted my lips. His blood soaked through the blankets and burned my breasts, streamed down my legs, coated my toes. I was drowning in my lover’s blood. I was screaming loud enough to summon the dead, and yet no one seemed to hear. No guards burst through the door. No servants rushed in. It seemed that I was the last person alive in the world.  
(242)

Dinah tells the bloodbath murder of her beloved and the darkest point of her life in these words. Hence, circumcision is no longer a sacred symbol of Jewish men but it has become an excuse or a weapon to destroy people in their most vulnerable hour. Still grieving, Dinah curses her father and brothers who take her back and leaves Jacob’s camp for the last time. In Diamant’s retelling Dinah takes refuge in Egypt where she becomes a midwife and returns to her fatherland only once towards the end of her life.

Throughout the book, Diamant makes the notion of mother-daughter relationship and the forgotten history of women a major theme of her book since so little is written in the Bible about the stories of women. While the Bible includes all the details about the fathers and the sons, little is known about the mothers and the daughters. History has been written by men, not women and while the fathers’ stories are written by boys, the mothers’ stories are lost. The Bible thus tells the stories of patriarchs. However, as opposed to the written history and religious narrative, women pass down their stories orally; it is whispered from woman to woman. Likewise, Dinah in *The Red Tent* says that she will tell the stories of women of the family and her own life. Thus, Dinah remembers and honours them. Without their stories, Dinah’s story would not exist in isolation. Moreover, Dinah juxtaposes women’s stories with the patriarchal version of them recorded in the Bible. In other words, the continual cycle of

passing stories and wisdom is underlined in Diamant's version of Dinah and Jacob's wives. Thus, in this process, daughters are essential for keeping women's history alive throughout the centuries. As Dinah explains:

Daughters eased their mothers' burden- helping with the spinning, the grinding of grain, and the endless task of looking after baby boys, who were forever peeing into the corners of the tents, no matter what you told them. But the other reason women wanted daughters was to keep their memories alive. Sons did not hear their mother's stories after weaning. So I was the one. My mother and my mother-aunties told me endless stories about themselves. No matter what their hands were doing- holding babies, cooking, spinning, weaving- they filled my ears. (3)

Diamant through Dinah further contends that without a daughter to tell the story, women's history does not live on. Had women not passed their experience and wisdom to the next generations, then without any inspirational models or tales, the younger generation of women would not have the courage to stand up and fight for their rights and against patriarchy. In the *Prologue*, Dinah introduces the theme of creating a woman's history and addresses the reader as:

We have been lost to each other for so long. My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust. This is not your fault, or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who has no way of knowing. This is why I became a footnote, my story a brief detour between the well-know story of my father, Jacob, and the celebrated chronicle of Joseph, my brother. On those rare occasions when I was remembered, it was as a victim. Near the beginning of your holy book, there is a passage that seems to say I was raped and continues with the bloody tale of how my honor was avenged. (1)

Thus in a sense, as a narrator of the forgotten stories of silenced women of the Bible, Dinah becomes a storyteller, a mythmaker. By first telling the story of her mothers, Dinah denotes that without them she would have no story of her own, she says: "Wistful silences demonstrate unfinished business. The more a daughter knows the details of her mother's life- without flinching or whining- the stronger the daughter (2)." Hence, Diamant devotes the first part of *The Red Tent* titled

“My Mother’s Stories” to recounting the stories of the four wives of Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah. Being the only daughter among twelve sons born to four mothers, Dinah grows up with her mothers, learning their stories and rituals. Each of them teaches her different things; Leah teaches her taking care of herds, Rachel the art of midwifery, Bilhah spinning and Zilpah the art of storytelling. Dinah remembers:

Of course, this is more complicated for me because I had four mothers, each of them scolding, teaching, and cherishing something different about me, giving me different gifts, cursing me different fears. Leah gave me birth and her splendid arrogance. Rachel showed me where to place the midwife’s bricks and how to fix my hair. Zilpah made me think. Bilhah listened. (2)

In addition to the theme of mother-daughter relationship, mother genealogy is highlighted in *The Red Tent*. In the Bible, the long lists of genealogies demonstrate the importance of the name. For instance, Genesis 5, *From Adam to Noah* reads as follows:

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image; and called his name Seth: And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters: And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died. And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enos: And Seth lived after he begat Enos eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died. (1-8)

This partial quotation from the section demonstrates the significance of the name of the father and the absolute silence about the mothers’ names. Then in this case, the absence of the mother’s name or in general women’s’ names has an ideological meaning. It can be asserted that by naming only the father,

patrilineality is highlighted and justified. Mary Daly, in *Beyond God the Father*, writes that:

The religions of patriarchy- especially the Judeo-Christian tradition and its hideous blossom Freudian theory have stolen daughters from their mothers and mothers from their daughters... Still, the destruction has not been complete and women are beginning to dream again a time and space in which Mother and Daughter look with pride into each other's faces and know that they both have been victims and now are sisters and comrades. (149-150)

In the light of this quotation, it can be suggested that *The Red Tent* is the story of mothers and they are presented as strong and insightful mentors and compassionate caregivers. The men in the novel have little impact on the lives of their daughters as a source of kindness and love. In this regard, Naomi Graetz in her study *Unlocking the Garden: A Feminist Jewish Look at the Bible, Midrash and God*, states that “It is safe to generalize that in all patriarchal societies, daughters are less valuable than sons. In such societies, the daughters have value primarily on the marriage market and in their potential to bear children. The only acceptable role for a girl is wife and mother, whereas “daughter” is a temporary and dangerous status” (27). In *The Red Tent*, daughters are favoured in contrast to patriarchy. Leah when she realizes that she is pregnant again, after the birth of so many boys, asks Rachel to help her miscarry. But Rachel tells her to keep the baby since she carries a girl. She even offers to take on Leah's work load during her pregnancy. Dinah stays with her mother in the red tent for two months. According to the Bible, it takes two months for a woman to be cleansed after the birth of a girl and a month after a boy (Leviticus: 12). But Diamant adds her interpretation that giving birth to a “birth-giver” is a more important act. Dinah is cherished, pampered and loved by four women. After years of mixed emotions and loyalties among themselves, the sisters rejoice in the baby girl. Dinah becomes a bonding material among them and they dream that she will live on their legacy. After bearing the patriarch sons, these four women have been longing for daughters and Leah names her daughter:

During my sixty days [the number of days she has to spend after giving birth to a daughter], I whispered every name my sisters suggested into your little ear. Every name I had ever heard, and even some I invented myself. But when I said ‘Dinah’ you let the nipple fall from your mouth and looked up at me. So you are Dinah, my last born. My daughter. My memory. (82)

Then Diamant in *The Red Tent* foregrounds memory since memory and remembrance keep stories alive and the relics of women’s history are passed down to the coming generations. Dinah says: “I wish I had more to tell of my grandmothers. It is terrible how much has been forgotten, which is why, I suppose, remembering seems a holy thing” (4). After Dinah’s departure, there is nothing left to hold her mothers together and the four women die alone. At this point, Dinah takes a step back as the narrator of her own story and reports the fate of each family member; her birth mother Leah wakes up paralyzed one day and begs her daughters-in-law to give her poison to kill herself. Rachel dies giving birth to her second son Benjamin and Jacob abandons her body by the side of the road. Zilpah has already died of fever when Jacob smashes the goddess, while Bilhah is caught in bed with Reuben and disappears after being beaten in punishment. Lastly, Jacob changes his name to Isra’El so that he will not be identified as the murderer of Shechem.

Although, Dinah does not have a daughter to pass on her mothers’ and her stories to, throughout her journey in life, she meets surrogate daughters to whom she can pass her and her mothers’ stories and women’s tradition. For instance, years later, Dinah reunites with her brother Joseph in Egypt and one day, Joseph calls on Dinah and asks her to accompany him to see their dying father one last time. She goes with her husband only because Joseph forces them. When she arrives, she hides herself as a servant and she refuses to see her family members. Joseph after visiting Jacob tells Dinah that her father did not mention her name and he adds “Dinah is forgotten in the house of Jacob” (373). However, he is proven wrong by a young girl, Gera, the daughter of Benjamin, Rachel’s son. Assuming that Dinah is a nurse to Joseph’s son, Gera tells her about her family. From her, Dinah learns that Reuben, Levi and Simon have died and Judah has

taken the leadership of the clan. Eventually Gera tells the story of Dinah and she says that she would like to call her daughter Dinah. Hearing this, Dinah feels peace with the knowledge that her mothers' and her story are not forgotten and they will continue to survive.

In addition to Gera, Kiya becomes one of the torchbearers of Dinah's wisdom and story. Dinah meets her and becomes close to her when she moves to the Valley of Kings in Egypt. Kiya becomes a surrogate daughter and teaches the skill of midwifery to her. Thus, the female wisdom is passed on to the next generation. These different surrogate relationships can also be interpreted as alternative family ties. Unlike patriarchy which puts importance on the blood lines and patrilineality, women establish sororities, genealogies in a different way. Hence, Dinah understands that all women are connected to each other as derivations of the great goddess. After all these experiences with other women, she realizes that being a woman unites them all and makes them all one.

Diamant to accentuate women's time and tradition places the red tent at the centre of her rewriting. The red tent or the menstruation hut is the place where women spend their menstrual cycles. Although in the Bible there is no mention of a red tent, Diamant in her website notes that her research reveals that it was a common feature of many ancient cultures around the world from Native America to Africa, from Japan to Hawaii<sup>29</sup>. Thus she takes the liberty of creating such a female space for women to bring them together. In Diamant's retelling of Dinah's story, the red tent is a place to celebrate womanhood, birth and death. Furthermore, it is the space where women forge, break and rebuild their bonds to one another. Besides, it is a private place where women can enjoy being by themselves, free from the norms of patriarchal world and the duties of everyday life.

The red tent in Diamant's work also symbolizes tradition. At the beginning of the novel, when Rachel begins to have her period, Rachel's sisters and Adah, the birth mother of Leah, perform the initiation rites for her. Adah sings a special song announcing her entry into the world of women. They paint her hands with

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<sup>29</sup> For further information on menstrual huts, see Galloway, 1998; Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (eds.), 1988.



henna, scented oils are rubbed all over her body and they feed her with special food and sweets. When it is Dinah's turn, then her mothers do the same to her. It is also in the red tent that Dinah learns to sing the songs of women, eats their special foods and hears the stories of her grandmothers and the goddesses of her people. Thus, the tent is not a place of seclusion. Instead, it is the place where women get together and celebrate their womanhood. In this regard, the red tent is a sign of the feminine, ritual and power.

In *The Red Tent*, in addition to other textual records, it is told that in ancient times, women menstruate in accordance with the moon calendar. The moon also denotes the harmony between the women themselves and the women with the Earth. Accordingly, the women in Dinah's family menstruate at the same time, attributing their cycles to that of the moon and thus celebrate their lunar cycle together. Hence, it is underlined that, women are in touch with nature and their bodies are in harmony with the cycles of earth. Furthermore, women in Dinah's family have been practicing the rituals for goddesses in the red tent. The new monotheistic religion of Jacob's clan is patriarchal and it does not fit the lives of women. For this reason, they continue to practice it in their own space and they try to keep it to themselves since they know that he can not tolerate such practices. When Jacob learns the initiation rite of Dinah from the Canaanite wives of his sons, he smashes the idols of goddesses. Moreover, he forces his wives to discontinue following the old ways and convert to his religion. With the destruction of the red tent, then, the feminine tradition dies. The power of the red tent has been a threat to Jacob's authority. As the head of the tribe, in order to control his sons and his tribe, Jacob yearns to be the sole ruler. Hence, he has no tolerance of another authority. He feels that if he is to retain his power, he must threaten the power and the mystery of the red tent and he smashes the goddess statues with this motivation. In other words, by reacting in this way, he affirms his control. The loss of goddesses affects Zilpah so badly that she dies out of grief. In other words, she loses her identity and can not survive in the patriarchal order. As touched upon in the introduction of this section, this depiction of Jacob's wives as polytheists, worshipping goddesses was unacceptable for some readers who could

not imagine the revered matriarchs of the Bible as pagans. Yet, the archaeological and historical evidence testifies that at the early years of Judaism, the Sumerian gods co-existed with the Hebrew god Yahweh (Lerner, Stone). For instance, it is known that the moon was worshipped in the name of Nanna and Ningal and the fertility goddess Inanna was revered by the Canaanite women under the name of Anat. In *The Red Tent*, Leah also associates Inanna with menstruation and fertility:

The great mother whom we call Inanna gave a gift to women that is not known among men, and this is the secret of blood. The flow at the dark of the moon, the healing blood of the moon's birth- to men, this is flux and distemper, bother and pain. They imagine we suffer and consider themselves lucky. We do not disabuse them... In the red tent, the truth is known. In the red tent where days pass like a gentle stream, as the gift of Inanna courses through us, cleansing the body of the last month's death, preparing the body to receive the new month's life, women give thanks- for repose and restoration, for the knowledge that life comes from between our legs, and that life costs blood. (187-188)

Men assume that this is a painful curse but Leah says that the women know it is a gift to harmonize with the moon and to rest and restore themselves inside the red tent each month.

Furthermore, according to the Bible, menstruation is regarded as unclean. In Leviticus 15, under the topic of *Discharges Causing Uncleaness*, it is expressed plainly:

And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. And every thing that she lieth upon in her separation shall be unclean: every thing also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sat upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And if it be on her bed, or on any thing whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even. And if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and all the bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean.

As the passage above demonstrates, the blood that was venerated as a source of life and power in former times, thereby, has turned into a taboo under patriarchy. Diamant also juxtaposes these two contrasting views with regard to menstruation in *The Red Tent*. On the one hand, the monthly cycle of women is celebrated in the red tent. On the other hand, parallel to the patriarchal view of the Bible, the women and their bodies are regarded as strange and intimidating for men. In *The Red Tent*, when Laban, Dinah's grandfather comes after his daughters who take the household idols when they are leaving their motherland for Jacob's fatherland Canaan, refusing to give them back, Rachel boldly confronts him and she tells him that she sits on them during her menstruation. Hearing this assertion, Laban does not dare to touch them and leaves. Thus, it can be argued that women's blood is a mystery to men, it holds a power over them, and they overcome this fear by identifying it as impure and filthy. In a similar vein, Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, also observes that man's horror and resentment of woman's fertility and body is expressed through the taboos concerning menstrual blood (182).

In *The Red Tent*, Dinah is surrounded by strong and powerful women who speak their minds, follow their own women-oriented spirituality and worship their own goddesses. For instance, Rebecca, mother of Jacob and Esau, in *The Red Tent* is depicted as a representative of older women-centered traditions. She is the oracle of Mamre; she is a healer and prophetess. Dinah describes her as a tall, imposing woman with black eyes decorated with Egyptian-style makeup. She wears purple robes, "the color of royalty and holiness and wealth" (177) and a head piece with gold threads of material. No men are allowed in Rebecca's tent and she is waited on by ten women. When Rebecca learns that Tabea was not ushered into womanhood with the proper ceremony in the red tent and was instead shut up alone when she first began to bleed, Rebecca slaps Tabea's mother, Adath, curses her and exiles them from the tent. Dinah states: "Rebecca's anger was terrible. "You mean to tell me that her blood was wasted? You shut her up alone, like some animal?" (185). Tabea begs to be allowed to be a "Deborah", handmaids to Rebecca and her cult, but she is refused. Seeing this unyielding

Rebecca, Dinah begins to hate her grandmother. But Leah explains that Rebecca is defending the ways of their women, which are in danger of being forgotten. This portrayal of Rebecca as a stern woman about protecting the women's way is very different from the depiction of submissive wives in the Old Testament. Rebecca of *The Red Tent* rarely cooks except to make a weekly offering to the goddess. Instead of surrounding herself with family members, and living with her aging husband, she has a tent of her own away from him and she is accompanied by female servants/priestesses called Deborahs. This portrayal of Rebecca is a radical divergence from the biblical narrative in which women are defined within the framework of the patriarchal models; as wives, mothers and housewives.

One of the most compelling episodes of Diamant's rewriting is Dinah's initiation to womanhood. When Dinah has her period, she is surprised and for a moment she thinks of not telling this to her mothers and thus remains a girl in the eyes of the family. Yet, after a moment of hesitance she tells her mothers and they smother her with hugs and kisses. Her ceremony begins that night at dusk. Dinah is given sweet wine and her feet and palms are painted with henna. Her mothers dress her in a special dress, feed her with sweets and massage her neck and back. Dinah is asked to choose from the idols and she chooses a frog goddess and they take her outside to lie in a wheat patch in the garden. She lies naked facedown in the soil and her mothers oil the teraphim and insert it to break her hymen so that her blood returns to the earth and to the goddess Inanna: Dinah recounts this experience as:

I shivered. My mother put my cheek to the ground and loosed my hair around me. She arranged my arms wide, "to embrace the earth," she whispered. She bent knees and pulled the soles of my feet together until they touched, "to give the first blood back to the land", said Leah. I could feel the night air on my sex, and it was strange and wonderful to be so open under the sky. (205)

This ceremony is called "opening the womb". In this way, a girl's "first blood" is given to the female goddess Inanna, rather than to the man who first sleeps with her. The women of Jacob's tribe, on the other hand, are expected to prove their virginity and worth with the bloody sheets from their wedding night. By

displaying the bloody sheets, the husband validates his “purchase” of a bride. On the contrary, Dinah’s mothers refuse to validate their worth by giving their virginity to their husbands and instead claim their right over their bodies. In this way, Diamant empowers the female characters of the Bible. She endows them with this power by making women claim their virginity as part of the sacred women’s ritual, rather than giving it to their husbands on the wedding night. To the mothers, the hymen’s blood should be shared with the earth, not given to a man to prove his wife is a virgin. This ceremony performed is an expression of women exploring their own sexual agency. That is to say; by breaking Dinah’s hymen, the mothers give her the choice to sleep with a man if she chooses other than her husband without the consequences.

In addition to menstruation rituals, giving birth as a feminine experience is also explored in *The Red Tent*. Despite the fact that barrenness in women and their desperate and fervent wish to bear male heirs find much place in the biblical narrative, the incidents of giving birth are not included in this androcentric narrative. In stark contrast to this absence, in Diamant’s novel all the realistic details of giving birth are given. Here, giving birth is depicted as a communal event that establishes a strong bonding between women. The women close to the expecting mother support her during the labour. Moreover, the trials of childbirth also illustrate the strength and power of women. For instance, during Leah’s first labour, the midwife Inna helps her with herbs and essential oils to ease the pain, and then:

Inna talked and talked, banishing the frightened silence that had made a wall around Leah. Inna asked Adah about her aches and pains, and teased Zilpah about the tangled mat of her hair. But whenever a contraction came, Inna had words for Leah only. She praised her, reassured her, told her, “Good, good, good my girl. Good, good, good”. Soon all of the women in the tent joined her in repeating “Good, good, good,” clucking like a clutch of doves.  
(48)

Like the midwife’s bricks that women stand on while giving birth, mothers, daughters, sisters become the bricks for support. As mentioned above, the details

of childbirth also draw attention to the strength and endurance of women. Hence, it is an alternative way of power to patriarchal physical power. Diamant's novel further suggests that motherhood is not a role assigned by patriarchy, but it is a female experience. Giving birth is a battle of life and death for women and many women in the novel experience miscarriages, lose their child at birth or they even lose their lives. This influential portrayal of women in labour, reveals one of the most important episodes in women's life that is not found in the male-oriented narratives under limelight.

In the novel, midwives are fundamental helpers in the female sphere. Moreover, midwifery becomes a means for women to express and realize themselves. For instance, when Rachel has problems with conceiving, she eventually directs her wish for children into being a midwife. In other words, she compensates for Leah's fertility by taking up midwifery<sup>30</sup>. In this way, Rachel finds a way to define herself by something other than being a mother. The spoiled young girl turns into a more mature woman who explores her abilities and gifts as an expression of herself and through her gift, she begins to establish more nurturing relationships with other women and her sisters. Through her practice, she develops a sense of power and identity other than just being the beauty. Besides by helping mothers, she learns compassion and tenderness. Likewise Dinah also learn the skills of healing and midwifery and in her practice she realizes the power of women to carry and bear life. This training in the ways of womanhood makes Dinah knowledgeable about the cycles of women. This experience, moreover, strengthens her alliance to her mothers, their family traditions and the sanctity of the red tent.

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<sup>30</sup> In the Bible, it is told that Jacob, when he arrives in Haran, sees Rachel first by a well and falls in love with her. Rachel's father Laban is also Jacob's uncle. In love with Rachel, Jacob offers: "I will thee seven years for Rachel, thy younger daughter" (Genesis 29:18). Yet, Laban, hoping that he would convince him to another bargain for Rachel, tricks him on the wedding day and instead of Rachel he gives Leah, his oldest daughter, to him so that he could abuse Jacob's work power longer. Hid behind the veil, Leah enters the wedding chamber and only in the morning, does Jacob realize that it is Leah. Leah, in the Bible, is described as "tender eyed", and less attractive than Rachel (Genesis 29:17). The weak eyes are interpreted as lacking the sparkle and even as a sign of bad luck. The line: "he loved also Rachel more than Leah" also makes it clear that Jacob prefers Rachel to Leah (Genesis 29:30). To compensate, the Bible continues, "When the Lord saw Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren" (Genesis 29:31). Giving birth to a son, Reuben, Leah hopes that her husband will love her now (Genesis 29:32).

Diamant in *The Red Tent*, unlike The Bible, portrays women not only as mothers but as sexual subjects. In so doing, she fills the gap between lines in the biblical narrative in the matter of sexuality. For instance, in the Bible, it is told that Jacob felt betrayed when he was married to Leah instead of Rachel and yet the same Bible says that they spent a week in their wedding tent and even after Jacob married Rachel, Leah continued to conceive. Diamant rewrites a Leah who is sexual, who yearns for Jacob's body and takes pleasure in making love. Leah discovers her sexuality as:

When Jacob cried out in his final pleasure, she was flooded by a sense of her own power. And when she followed her breathing, she discovered her pleasure, an opening and a fullness that made her sigh and purr, then sleep as she hadn't slept since she was a child. He called her Inanna. She called him, brother-lover of Ishtar. (40)

Leah, the passive object of the Bible is rewritten by Diamant as a woman who turns into the love and fertility goddess Inanna in her marriage bed. All the women in the book embrace their experiences. Likewise, Dinah chooses who she will make her partner. She welcomes her sexual desires and shares them with Shalem. In this way, Dinah exerts her sexual agency. Later on, during her life with Benia, her second husband, Dinah also expresses her bodily satisfaction that she experiences with him as:

From our very first night, Benia took great care of my pleasure and seed to discover his own in mine. My shyness vanished in the course of that night, and as the weeks passed, I found wells of desire and passion that I had never suspected in myself. When Benia lay with me, the past vanished and I was a new soul, reborn in the taste of his mouth, the touch of his fingers. (326)

This quotation, unthinkable for the Bible, draws women as sexual beings who enjoy their bodies at any age. This is a stark contrast to the Biblical women, or wives to be more precise, who are presented as asexual except getting pregnant. The only women who are depicted as sexual beings in the Bible are seductive temptresses or "harlots" like Delilah, Judith, Jezebel and Tamar. Moreover, in

terms of choosing their mate, in *The Red Tent*, there are other instances where women declare their own authentic choices. For example, Bilhah chooses to love her step-son Reuben, despite the taboo. Likewise, Zilpah, the most spiritual of the sisters, who prefers the company of goddesses, after bearing twin sons, refuses to be with Jacob. Leah also takes special potions made with fennel so that she does not conceive after many births.

In *The Red Tent*, like Leah and Bilhah, the brilliant weavers of the book, Diamant composes a complex net of women including women from different backgrounds; namely the voice of the slaves with Werenro, midwives through Inna and Meryt, queens with Re-nefer and the abused wives and handmaids with Ruti, Laban's slave wife and Bilhah and Zilpah. Furthermore, Diamant gives names to the unnamed women of the Bible. For instance, Leah's mother is not named in Genesis but here she is given the name of Adah. She is a strong matriarch figure and she is the only mother any of the sisters had known. In *The Red Tent* it is told that Laban sexually abuses her daughters but when the girls tell this to Adah, she beats him with pestle and mortar and she threatens to curse him with skin disease and impotence (23). Only after this confrontation, does he quit harassing the girls. When she dies, the girls honour her with a funeral rite:

...they put ashes in their hair and honoured her. Leah washed Adah's face and hands. Zilpah combed her hair smooth. Rachel dressed her in the finest tunic they owned, and Bilhah placed Adah's few rings and bangles on the withered wrists, neck and fingers. Together, they crossed her arms and bent her knees so that she looked like a sleeping child. They whispered wishes into her ears so she could carry them to the other side of the light, where the spirits of her ancestors would greet her soul, which could now rest in the dust of the earth and suffer no more. (53)

Underlining the mother-daughter relationship, this quotation points to the significance of women-bonding once again. Still having the chance to practice their women-oriented rituals, Dinah's mother can give Adah a proper farewell ceremony. Yet, not as fortunate as her, as noted above, Rachel would die during giving birth to a male heir, and not having women comrades around her, her body would be buried by the road hastily and left behind without any signpost.



Diamant also gives a name to the wife of Potiphar. In Genesis 36-50, it is told that, Joseph, the youngest son of Jacob, is taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard of the Pharaoh's. Seeing his trustworthy and hardworking character, Potiphar makes him his personal assistant and puts Joseph in charge of his household. In the meantime, Potiphar's wife, unnamed in the Bible, tries to seduce him numerous times, but Joseph resists the temptation. Failed in her attempts, furious at being rejected, she sets a scheme and says that he tried to rape her. Eventually Joseph is put in prison but then saved when the plot is discovered. After this episode, there is no mention of Potiphar's wife in the Bible. Yet, Diamant rewrites this account and according to her version in *The Red Tent*, Po-ti-far sets Joseph above the other servants not because of his merit, but he is his lover. It writes:

But Po-ti-far's wife, a great beauty called Nebetper, also looked upon him with longing, and the two of them became lovers right under the master's nose. There is even some gossip who fathered her last daughter. In any case, Po-ti-far finally discovered them in bed together and he could no longer pretend not to know what was going on. So in a great show of anger and vengeance, he sent Stick [Joseph] to prison. (342)

As seen, Diamant takes the liberty to revisit the Bible and interprets and rewrites it from a female perspective and she gives voice and name to the otherwise unnamed women of the biblical narrative. The Biblical representation once again shows the stereotypical rendering of gender roles. Like the Greek myths, the submissive mothers and asexual and meek wives are contrasted with adulteresses and temptress women.

Furthermore, the learnt gender roles are also covered in *The Red Tent*. Joseph and Dinah are almost at the same age. Since they are the youngest of the children, they spend all their time together during their childhood and they are each other's best friends. But, when they reach puberty, Joseph wants to talk to his brothers and he tries to impress them. In the past, he used to share his dreams only with Dinah, when he grows up he starts to share them with everyone. This incident marks the end of Dinah and Joseph's close friendship and naturally Dinah

turns to her mothers. Mothers tell her the story of Uttu, the weaver, the great goddess Inanna's journey to the land of the dead, and of her marriage to the shepherd king, Dumuzi. Joseph in turn tells her the tales of patriarchs such as Isaac and Abram. Dinah reflects: "Those were the stories Joseph heard from Jacob, sitting among our brothers while the sheep and goats grazed. I thought the women's stories were prettier, but Joseph preferred our father's tales" (97).

In accordance with the patriarchal world view, since gender roles separate the worlds of women and men, Dinah really has no communication with her father Jacob. Due to the fact that she has no shared memories with her father, she remembers him through the lens of her mother's experience and stories. Her father at one point in the story even admits that he cannot quite evoke the image of Dinah's face, since he only has a vague impression of her appearance (231). Dinah recounts the time when he talked to Dinah in person after she served him food and water as follows:

"Dinah," he said. It was the first time I remember hearing my name in his mouth. "Thank you, girl. May you always be a comfort to your mothers." I looked into his face, and he smiled a real smile at me. But I did not know how to smile at my father or answer him, so I turned to run after my mother and Rachel, who had already begun the walk back to the tents. I slipped my hand into Leah's and pecked back to look at Jacob once more, but he had already turned away from me". (110)

Only when Shalem is dead, she has the courage to confront him and she accuses him of his responsibility in the mass murder of Shechem's men.

In addition to the father's tales, the father's god is also problematized by the women of Jacob's tribe. Jacob's god, the God of the Old Testament, is called El and also Yahweh and "El was the only god to whom Jacob bowed down- a jealous, mysterious god, too fearsome, (he said) to be fashioned as an idol by human hands, too big to be contained by any place- even a place as big as the sky. El was the god of Abram, Isaac, and Jacob, and it was Jacob's wish that his sons accept this El as their god, too. (73)". As opposed to the goddesses of women, El is the god of the patriarchs. But Dinah's mother could not understand and identify

with this “hard, strange god, alien and cold” (15). Besides, when Jacob tells the story of sacrifice of Isaac by Abram, after explaining that at the last second, God sends a ram to be killed instead of Isaac, he contends: “The god of my fathers is a merciful god” (73). But Zilpah questions this foreign god and asks: “What kind of mercy is that, to scare the spit dry in poor Isaac’s mouth? Your father’s god may be great, but he is cruel.” (73). Later they learn that Isaac, as an old man, still stutters, as a result of this trauma (74). Furthermore, after Jacob announces that his god has appeared to him and asks him to go back to Canaan, to the land of his father, Leah states that “sometimes I wonder if gods are stories and dreams to while away cold nights and dark thoughts” (106). In *The Red Tent*, thereby, the patriarchal nature of the God of the Old Testament is also demystified by women who do not hesitate to question this notion.

In conclusion, in rewriting Dinah’s story, Diamant demonstrates that women in the Bible have histories more complicated than that of the brief summaries written down by men. She recasts the female characters historically depicted as passive and victimized, as active agents. Ellen Umansky in her article, “Beyond Androcentrism: Feminist Challenges to Judaism” asserts that:

Unlike the biblical Dina, growing number of Jewish feminists are refusing to remain silent. If we are to create, or attempt to create, a non-patriarchal, non-androcentric Judaism- a Judaism in which the experiences of both women and men are seen as central- we Jewish women need to reclaim our voices. In so doing, we need to imagine what our foremother, like Dina, might have said, if only they had spoken. (33)

Parallel to this declaration, as a narrator, Diamant’s Dinah also refuses to be silent. In addition to telling her own story, she is also a keen and diligent observer of family dynamics. Furthermore, she is a distanced narrator and her detached perspective makes the impact of the gruesome events of the story more realistic. For this reason, *The Red Tent* is not an overly emotional narrative but a retelling to fill in the gaps.

In the light of the discussion above, it can be argued that exiled from the Biblical narrative, like her exile from her motherland, Dinah becomes a wanderer

like Werenro to tell her story. Diamant also employs the metaphor of weaving as a means of expressing the thoughts and feelings of women. Although Dinah as a weaver is not as good as Leah expects her to be, she weaves her own story and leaves another work that makes them all immortal. Likewise, Diamant weaves the threads of biblical narrative into a tapestry in which women tell their own stories. Thus, Diamant's rich retelling is a celebration of womanhood, mothers and daughters and women's stories, female bonding and the role of women in the religious traditions. Mary Daly maintains that: "The fundamental lost bonding, as Furious women know, is the bond between mothers and daughters" (1991, 346). Instead of the patriarchal father-right, Daly argues for the "Daughter-Right" and she notes that "daughterhood has universality which motherhood lacks; clearly *all* women are daughters" (1991, 347). And she continues to comment as follows: "The word daughter is less suggestive of a role than a given reality. Essentially, Daughter-Right names the right to claim our original movement, to re-call our Selves. It is the Self-centering identity that makes female bonding possible" (1991, 347). Then, it can be argued that Diamant's retelling of the Bible's silenced daughter is a manifesto for Mary Daly's Daughter-Right; it is a call to all women to reclaim their voice, their bond with other women. In the next section, the story of another forgotten heroine of the Old Testament, Queen Michal will be explored.

#### **4.2 India Edghill's *Queenmaker***

India Edghill in her 1999 debut novel *Queenmaker* revisits another forgotten woman of the Old Testament and she weaves the story of King Saul's daughter and King David's Queen Michal from a female-oriented viewpoint. In the Acknowledgment of her novel, Edghill notes that this book is an "attempt to give a voice to a biblical woman long condemned to silence" (9). Employing the silence about Michal, the only woman who is noted to "love" a man in the Bible, Edghill spins her rewriting. Michal's story like those of many other women of the

Bible has been overshadowed by the accounts of Biblical “heroes”. Edghill states how she was inspired to write the story of Michal as follows:

At first I thought I'd write a book about David's most well-known wives. But a quick look at the library catalog revealed many, many novels about Bathsheba and a good number about Abigail. But Michal...

Nothing, except one children's book called *Saul's Daughter* by Gladys Malvern. So I decided to concentrate on Michal (personal communication).

Edghill deploys the Biblical books of Samuel and II Samuel and Kings, in Alicia Suskind Ostriker's words, as her “ur-text of patriarchy” (1993, 27). These sections of the Bible primarily focus on the story of King David and his rise to power from a simple shepherd and harp player to the slayer of the Philistine giant Goliath and then to the King of Israel. In Biblical history, King David is the figure who unites the tribes into a nation state and triumphs over the vast territories between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. In addition to the story of David and Michal, Edghill amalgamates two other Biblical women to her plot; the stories of Bathsheba and Tamar are also interwoven with Michal's story and reinterpreted. Chronologically, the events recounted in *Queenmaker* are later than those told in *The Red Tent*. Unlike the nomadic tribe of Jacob in Diamant's *The Red Tent*, in Edghill's work we witness the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel based in Jerusalem by David. Thus, Edghill in her rewriting sets her novel in the court of David and in so doing she exposes the underlying power structure and the patriarchal nature of politics.

Working in the genre of historical fiction, Edghill after *Queenmaker* produced more work on the women in the Bible. Her 2004 book *Wisdom's Daughter* tells the story of Solomon and Sheba with an emphasis on “her/story” and her latest work *Delilah* (2009), as the title suggests, is a retelling of the story of Delilah who is probably the most famous “temptress” or femme fatale of biblical history after Eve. Edghill's first novel *Queenmaker* has always been compared to Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* by readers and critics since both books reimagine the life of voiceless women of the androcentric text; the Bible.

Edghill in an interview, after stating that she wrote her novel before Diamant's work, acknowledges the importance of *The Red Tent* and its success as follows: “*The Red Tent* has really opened up the field for reexamining biblical women's stories and re-imagining them for the modern day. After all, without the matriarchs, the patriarchs would still be wandering around in the desert refusing to ask for directions!” (Nesbeitt, n. pag.). She goes on to note that she supported Diamant's book by using it in the reading groups at the library where she still works as a reference librarian.

Writing *Queenmaker* in the later 1980s, before the huge success of *The Red Tent*, to publish her first novel, a rewriting of a forgotten woman of the Bible, has not been easy for Edghill. She remembers that when she took her book to an agent, although the agent was really excited by the book, she confessed to Edghill that the commercial success of a biblical novel was highly doubtful (Nesbeitt, n. pag). Thus the book was rejected. After many failed attempts, Edghill decided to self-publish the book and she sent out free copies to journals. Similar to the journey of *The Red Tent*, only after an encouraging review featured in the New York Times, the publishing houses started to show interest in republishing *Queenmaker*. Then, Edghill's work was picked up by several book clubs including the Literary Guild and the Book of the Month Club and as a result the book enjoys a long-awaited popularity. As illustrated here and in the previous section in the discussion of *The Red Tent*, the market industry is the major factor in the publishing world and this has a significant hindering negative affect on the attempts of establishing a canon of female-oriented rewritings of myths. On the other hand, this incident also highlights the power of women readers and their yearning to listen to the stories of the muted and forgotten women of the Bible.

Despite the fact that, *Queenmaker* has generally been received with enthusiasm, several readers were offended by the portrayal of David, saying that this David was nothing like the hero that they were taught at Church's Sunday School (Nesbeitt, n. pag). Pictured as a greedy, manipulative and ruthless ruler *Queenmaker's* David is in stark contrast to King David, the champion of Israel and the heroic character that has been reproduced in art history and cinema as

manifested in Michelangelo's Renaissance masterpiece *David* or Hollywood movies like *David and Bathsheba* (1951), *King David* (1985) and *David* (1997). Yet, Edghill finds these objections surprising and she notes that:

Most people only seem to remember David and Goliath. I was really shocked when this book came out at the number of people who asked me if that was what really happened, because I assumed everyone knew the basics of the Bible story. I'm not sure if these people have actually read Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, because all of these things are there in the King James version that I've got! They're frequently complaining that David is not portrayed as a hero. Well, every single thing in the Bible has been moved over to my novel... all the murders. And there's just no way to make the Bathsheba incident sound uplifting. It's one of David's least understandable actions. He violates all the Commandments and then says he's terribly sorry, and the next thing you know, he's got even more power. It's sort of amusing to see one-star reviews complaining about things that really are in the Bible. (Nesbeitt, n. pag.)

Michal's story in the Old Testament begins in her father King Saul's modest court. According to the Bible, the only woman who is told to "love" a man, Michal meets the charismatic and handsome harp player David when she is 11 years old. It is recorded twice in the Bible that she loves David (1 Samuel 18:20, 28). Saul fetches this shepherd who is said to compose and perform the best song to ease his tortured mind. King Saul, the first King of Israel, believes that his God Yahweh has abandoned him and for this reason he is haunted with nightmares. When Israel is threatened by Philistine giant Goliath, David asks permission from Saul to kill him. Saul, uncomfortable with David's growing popularity among people, lets him take this quest thinking that he would be killed by Goliath. Yet, he is wrong. David kills the giant with his sling with a single shot between his eyes and this victory makes him a hero. This miraculous success and the following military victories of David cause Saul to perceive David as a threat to his rule. Hoping to win his alliance, Saul proposes to him his elder daughter Merab. In the Bible, it tells: "Saul said to David, 'Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the LORD' " (1 Samuel: 17). David refuses this offer saying that he is

not worthy of being a son-in-law to Saul. Then, Saul marries Marab to another man. When Michal falls in love with David, seeing this as an opportunity, Saul this time offers her younger daughter to David:

And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son in law in the one of the twain. (1 Samuel 18: 20-21)

Yet, David again refuses this offer since he is too poor to pay the bride-price. Then Saul announces that the bride-price is hundred foreskins of Philistines with the hope that David will be killed in the campaign. When David returns with two hundred foreskins, he marries Michal to David. However, this is not the end of his plotting against David; Saul decides to kill David at their wedding night in their marital chamber. Recognizing the scheme, Michal's brother Jonathan who loves David dearly warns David and Michal helps him to escape. She even earns time for him by saying the soldiers that come to take him that he is taken ill and sleeping by placing a household idol (*teraphim*) in bed and pretending that it is David. Furious with this rebellious act, Saul marries Michal off to Paltiel, a widower living in the country, the next day. In the meantime, David marries another woman, the rich widow of Nabal, Abigail. Ten years later, after eliminating all his rivals, David becomes the king and he sends his chief-of-commander Abner to retrieve Michal. Leaving her grief-stricken husband behind, Michal comes to Jerusalem as the Queen of David.

The next time we see Michal in the Bible is when she scorns David after he dances and exposes himself as he brings the Ark of Covenant to the newly-captured Jerusalem in a religious procession. When David returns to the palace, Michal confronts him and says: "How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!" (2 Samuel 6: 20). It is clear that Michal's earlier love for David has now turned into contempt. Next the Bible states that Michal dies childless (2 Samuel 6: 23). This statement can be



interpreted as her barrenness is a punishment for her criticism though whether the punishment is from God or whether David abstains himself from her is not clear. As seen, except her disdain for David's exposure, Michal's feelings and thoughts during the course of these events are not reflected in the biblical narrative. The main protagonist of the narrative is obviously David since he has the last word in the biblical narrative and Michal is not given a chance to reply (2 Sam 6: 21-23). Since Word thus the authority of text is power then Michal is denied this power. Consequently, it can be suggested that in the Bible the control of narrative is reserved for men. The silence of the Bible about women and the general tendency of marginalizing their experience and defining male experience as universal are also illustrated in Michal's story. In this respect, Cherly Exum in her influential article "Murder They Wrote, Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative" argues that Michal here was, "denied offspring and voice in one fatal stroke, and thus killed off a narrative presence" (45). She notes that the moment Michal acts outside the frame drawn for her by the patriarchal structure; as "the daughter of Saul" and "the wife of David" and acts as an "independent agent" she is murdered by the narrative. Although Michal is not killed actually, for Exum, by banishing her from the narrative and denying her a role to play in the Davidic dynasty, she is murdered by the biblical narrative. Exum also observes that, women's stories "are part of men's stories, part of that "larger story" that we take as *the* story" (45). Then she asserts that the biggest challenge for feminist criticism is to reclaim women's stories from this big dark silence. After underlining the fact that the Bible is essentially male-oriented in terms of gender ideology, she states that: "the female perspective, the female voice, cannot be silenced, even by literary murder. The crime has been committed, the evidence is the text and the female perspective provides our clue for deconstructing it" (46). In this regard, India Edghill, as a woman writer, in her *Queenmaker*, rewrites the story of Michal. Calling into question the gaps in the biblical narrative, Edghill's creates an aged Michal who tells her/story in retrospect. Throughout the novel, Michal's transformation from an innocent love-struck girl to a powerful Queen is narrated. In her life time, Michal struggles between love and revenge, wisdom and

political power and life and death. Eventually, using her wits and her status, she learns the working of patriarchal world and she beats David in his own game with his own tools. Yet in the end, she chooses love and compassion over political power and revenge.

As observed in the novels analyzed above, in Michal's story too, women are used in politics as pawns; they are treated as commodities to exchange between man, to seal bargains or to show off prosperity. For instance, in the quotation above from the Bible, Saul promises his elder daughter Merab to David as long as he fights at Saul's side for Saul's god Yahweh. The main motivation of this marriage proposal then is to win David as an ally. When David refuses this offer, Merab is given to another man, Adriel of Meholah, who gives five armed men, five talents of silver and five hundred sheep. In this case, marriage is a treaty or a bargain between the husband and the father of the bride. Saul then offers Michal to David as a bride or in Exum's words: "when he learns his daughter Michal loves David, Saul is pleased and uses the opportunity to dangle a desirable prize, before his rival, to "become the king's son-in-law" (50). It is also important to note that despite the fact that it is told in the Bible that Michal "loves" David, there is no indication that the feeling is mutual. As opposed to Michal's emotional attachment, the whole marriage arrangement is a political contract between men; Saul is trying to get rid of him as a rival and David is trying to prove himself to Saul. As Ellen White in her article *Michal the Misinterpreted* underlines: "She is acted upon. She is a pawn in the ancient political wheel, which continues to roll over her" (457)". In line with the gender roles set by patriarchy, the only way of existence for Michal then is to be a bride and be given by one man to another without her consent. In other words, denied of choice thus of autonomy, Michal has no individual entity in the eyes of patriarchy; she has her value due to her status as a bride. In accordance with the biblical narrative, in *Queenmaker*, it is also told that when Michal saves David from Saul's ambush, furious to be deceived by his daughter, Saul disowns her. As a punishment she is locked in a tower and Michal says that: "By the time I learned even this much, David was far away in the wilderness- and I, too, was far away, and married to another man"

(52). As seen, Michal's feelings have no significance in men's world. Her father takes advantage of her love to plot against David and when this does not work out, he gets rid of her by marrying her to another man the day after her marriage to David. Like her first marriage, in the second one too Michal has no say on the whole chain of events.

As noted above, for bride-price, Saul asks the foreskin of hundred Philistines. Once again, as in the story of Dinah in *The Red Tent*, the patriarchs are obsessed with circumcision as a sign of their victory over other tribes. In other words, phallus is central in the biblical narrative. In this respect, it can be asserted that the patriarchal code of reference is inherent in the Bible. Moreover in the biblical text, politics is juxtaposed with love that is defined as a female sphere. In *Queenmaker* this is also acknowledged; Michal remembers her feelings for David: "David loved no woman, though he lay with many. Women loved him. Even I loved him once. When I was young, my very bones melted for love of David...In those days, the god I worshipped was David" (11-12). Only in her wise years can Michal see the true character of David, but when she was young, she did not question him or her feeling for him. When Michal realizes that her sister Marab is also affected by him, she says: "I did not wonder if she loved him. I knew she must. Everyone loved David" (30). Thus, in this frame of thought the main reference point in defining women is their emotions as opposed to the political power of men. In a similar vein Exum observes the characterization of Michal and David in the Bible as: "The situation is one in which the men's political considerations are paramount, while regarding the woman, we only hear that she loves. Already the text perpetuates a familiar stereotype: men are motivated by ambition, whereas women respond on a personal level" (50).

Besides, the Bible also states that David takes many wives after Michal. Levenson and Halpern in their paper "The Political Import of David's Marriages" suggest that through his wives David solidifies his political connection; Maacah, Haggith, Abital and Eglah are all employed to establish political alliances. Abigail, David's second wife and the widow of Nabal also brings to their marriage both great wealth and significant connection to the powerful southern

tribe of Caleb. Thus, as a patriarchal strategy, David uses women as tokens. In *Queenmaker* this feature of androcentric view of life is commented on through Michal. Experienced enough to recognize the dynamics of patriarchal politics, when Michal hears that David is taking another wife, she contemplates that: “King David was taking another wife; her father rules two villages and a lake somewhere- a treaty bride, poor girl (180)”. As observed, David’s wives are his property; they have no individual autonomy and most of the time, nothing about them or their stories are recounted in the Bible except their names. In this respect, Odgen Bellis in her book *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes* underlines that: “David’s wives are means to characterize him rather than to tell us something about the women themselves” (151). This statement is also valid for Michal; when David beats his rivals and becomes the King of Israel, he reclaims Michal. It is worth noting that when Michal is married to someone else David does not have any objections to this marriage yet when he needs Michal for his political aspirations he demands her return since Michal would symbolize the surrender of the House of Saul. Moreover, it must be stressed that David does not even go himself to reclaim her and confront her second husband; instead, he sends Abner, his chief-commander to get her back to him as if this was a military or a political issue. According to the Bible:

And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And Ishbosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish. And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned.(2 Samuel 3: 14-17)

Thus, Michal is taken away from her husband that loves her dearly. As the quotation above indicates her husband cries after her. Yet, this act is not presented as an admirable behaviour, the expression of emotions that is generally associated with women gives Paltiel almost a feminine feature in opposition to the heroic David to whom the narrative is devoted. Here, Paltiel is portrayed as weak and submissive. As this present study illustrated until now, these are the foremost

characteristics associated with women in the mindset of patriarchy. Then, it can be suggested that by juxtaposing the “feminine” Paltiel with the “masculine” David, the androcentric norms are highlighted and justified in the Bible.

India Edghill comments on David’s reclaiming of Michal as follows:

I was much struck by the wild emotional swings in her relationship with David, and by the fact that she saved his life, only to be ignored by him until he was king and needed something to add even more validity to his crown (personal communication).

Fewell and Gunn in their book *Gender, Power and Promise* also ask:

What might she have thought when the news came of David’s marriages? Did she feel deserted? She has betrayed her father for him. What commitment to her has he ever shown? Did she wonder whether he has ever loved her, or only used her? Did she love him still? She must have heard enough in the house of the king to suspect that her father had used her. Had she felt like Leah? Laban, Leah, and Rachel. Saul, Merab and Michal. But at least Jacob had loved Rachel. Had David ever loved Michal. Had David ever really loved anyone? (148)

The answer is silence in the Bible; Edghill fills this gap and in *Queenmaker* reimagines the meeting of Michal and David after ten years. In Edghill’s rewriting, when Michal comes to David’s court in Jerusalem, Michal realizes his touch still has power on her. Yet, after a marriage of ten years with Phaltiel, she recognizes that her earlier feeling for David was passion and she defines her affection as sickness; “I had been sick with love of him; I was cured of that illness now. I had been cured long since” (91). Michal asks to be let go and when David asks whether she loves her “old man” more than she loved him, she replies: “No. I love him better. He took me when no other would, and was kind. I loved you long ago, and you love many others now. Be content with them, and let me go.” (97) Yet, David is proved to be right; her passion for him is stronger than her mind, eventually they make love. She says: “David was right; my body and heart was still hot for him. But I was right too; it was too late for us” (99). When David makes love to her, she calls this union a “semblance of love”. Michal continues to

recount: “I lay quiet under his hand; he could set my body alight, as he said, but he could no longer content Michal. On our wedding night, David taught me love; today he had taught me lust. Phaltiel had taught me to know the difference” (99). This portrayal of Michal is a stark contrast to the Bible which associates sexual desire only with harlots, temptresses and adulteresses. Edghill in her rewriting portrays Michal as a sexual woman unlike those women of the Bible who are portrayed as married and asexual.

*Queenmaker*'s Michal is drawn as a resourceful and determined woman who struggles with a system that denies her any means to achieve her goals. Edghill states that: “My Michal takes a long time to learn to work the system, and to at least hold her own in her duel of wits with David” (personal communication). Michal's sole motivation now is taking revenge from David and making him pay for what he has done to her and to her family. Yet, as a woman without means and power to assert her autonomy, she adopts David's tools to defeat him; in her case, her wits and her status as a Queen.

On the other hand Edghill in her *Queenmaker* draws David as a devious patriarch; he shrewdly utilizes the power of words to lure his people. In Edghill's retelling the notion that Word is power is underlined. By so doing, she calls into question the androcentric nature of the Bible in which tales of men are told from the perspective of men and consequently women's voice and stories are silenced. As mentioned above, David is a songmaster and he starts his journey in life as a harp-player in Saul's court. When he kills Goliath, he composes a song about this victory and Michal remembers: “All the world knows David's story now- he always has a master's way with words, and always could tell a tale so that men repeated it to his credit” (11)” and later in the novel when she realizes that she is in love with David, she is surprised; she says: “I had no interest in harpers. My marriage-dreams were all of heroes mighty in battle, not of men who dealt in music and soft words. I did not know then that words and music are more deadly than any spear. (22). Yet, David is a master in using the words to manipulate people and truth for his own interest. For instance when he retrieves Michal by force to his court, to influence Michal, he promises her all the luxury. Unlike the

brutal force of Saul, David employs the art of manipulation and deceit to achieve his goals. Michal explains: “David did not rant, and rage, and swear I should do his will or have all my bones broken, as my father would have done. No, David was all soft, smiles and sweet words and lavish gifts” (101). In the same manner, when prophet Nathan comes and confronts David about taking another man’s wedded wife, Michal, he makes amends and apologizes to Michal and promises her to take her back to her husband. Yet, behind the scenes he plots the murder of Phaltiel. Michal tells in retrospect: “I knew nothing. I was awake now- but I was still blind” (141). Edghill elaborates on David’s scheme as follows:

My Michal had learned to love her new husband, and didn't realize that David would do anything to remain king. She stubbornly insists on returning to her placid life until that possibility is destroyed by her second husband's death. (This is not in the Bible, but seemed perfectly plausible.) (personal communication).

With her portrayal of David, Edghill attempts to deconstruct the heroic David of the Bible and destabilizes the androcentric authority of the biblical narrative. In *Queenmaker*, the news of Phaltiel’s death comes with a familiar face to Michal. Caleb, Michal’s step-son comes to David’s court to find Michal and inform her that Phaltiel was killed by the robbers. Caleb continues: “They slit Dove’s [Phaltiel’s donkey] throat and left her lying there- robbers would not have done that, would they, Mother?” (143). Like Dinah of *The Red Tent*, Michal is also robbed of her beloved with this tragic blow. In her mourning she realizes that: “Phalthiel was dead and would never come now to put his arms around me and take me home. Phalthiel was dead, no man knew how and why, and his loving wife dwelt in fine gowns and rich gems in the king’s house and did not shed one tear for him. I could not cry; the blow had driven too deep. (146)”. Victimized in the patriarchal system, she has no power or even voice. For instance, when Michal accuses David of being the murderer of her husband, David argues that all Jerusalem has heard that he had given his word to take her to her husband. Helpless, when Michal raves, he asks whether she is losing her mind or the madness of her father runs in her blood as well. In order not to be labelled as mad

and locked away, she has to be “meek and docile as a pet lamb as he had told me I must be, lest I be called mad” (151). Whenever Michal tries to tell the truths about him or challenges him, David keeps asking: “more mad ravings from my poor queen?” (228). Silenced, shut up and segregated, Michal is helpless. The marginalization of women by labelling them “mad”, “lunatic” is a patriarchal strategy that is also witnessed in Bradley’s *The Fireband* above in Chapter 2. In the same manner, David, the representative of patriarchy, attempts to silence Michal and her apt protests by threatening to identify her as “mad”.

Edghill in her work also touches upon the patriarchal world of war and illustrates how loyalties lie in the personal interests and how people can change sides quickly. For instance, Abner, the war-chief of Saul, has become the war-chief of David right away when Saul and his army are defeated at the war of Mount Gilboa. Likewise, David makes alliance with Philistines and defeats the army of Israel and kills Saul and even Jonathan who saved his life on his wedding night. In addition, he does not have qualms in killing the heirs of the House of Saul to be the sole ruler. *Queenmaker’s* David has been criticized by some readers, yet Edghill explains that: “Everything I’ve got there except one murder, which was a reasonable extrapolation, actually is in the Bible. The very least you could say, as one author put it, is that David’s enemies had a convenient way of dropping dead.” (Nesbeitt, n. pag.)

India Edghill in her retelling of Michal’s story also reflects upon the palace politics and rivalry among women. In *Queenmaker*, David’s wives and concubines compete for his favours. Lillian Klein in her study *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, comments on the rivalry among women as: “Of course, female rivalry over a man is very flattering to the male ego and sense of power. It is not surprising that rivalry among women was encouraged or at least projected as normal in these stories” (4). Likewise, all women in David’s harem fight to have a better position through their sons. Unlike Phaltiel’s daughter Miriam, who wholeheartedly welcomes Michal to their humble adobe, David’s wives are jealous, Michal recounts that: “they all stared at me like angry



cats. They were united at least in this- they hated me” (103). Thus, she realizes that she would not find any friends among them.

In the suffocating atmosphere of David’s harem, despite the fact that Michal is given rooms decorated with all kinds of luxury items and handmaids to her service, she feels lonely and isolated. She recalls that: “There were so many servants underfoot that King David’s wives and concubines spent their time with games and gossip, and not with the work of their husband’s house... An idle house lacked peace and purpose. David’s wives were all quarrelsome as sparrows, and David’s concubines were no better. They quarrelled over everything, and over nothing” (127). Surrounded by the walls of the palace, in the woman’s quarters, as the Queen of King David, Michal has cosmetics, jewellery, costumes, handmaids to serve her, yet she feels as if: “Michal was hidden away, veiled behind jewels and paint. I looked now like all the other women dwelling in King David’s house” (116). In other words, transformed into a luxury item herself, Michal loses her identity and she feels entrapped. This is true for all of David’s wives: rather than being individuals they are reduced to being show-cases of King’s splendour. As touched upon earlier, patriarchy suggests the seclusion of women from the active life. Yet, this secluded life in the palace suffocates Michal and everywhere she looks at she sees walls and she calls Jerusalem “my home, my prison” (294). Michal comes to recognize that as a farmer’s wife she had more freedom:

I dwelt in idleness and in comfort. The only thing I was denied was freedom; I might roam the women’s quarters as I pleased, but I might not set my feet beyond the brass-bound gate that led to the world beyond. I had tried once, and been turned back by armed men- guardians of the women’s gate, they said. They bowed low, and they too called me “great queen”, but they would not let me pass”. (128)

The class difference, hierarchy set by men, divides women further. Being the queen also isolates Michal; her status makes her lonely among all the other wives, concubines and handmaids. Michal says that: “I was weary of hate, weary of bored women and their venom-dipped tongue (182)”. Eventually, Zhurleen, the beautiful Philistine concubine to David, becomes her confidante and trains her in

the working of palace politics and how to survive in this world. She offers her friendship to her saying that, “A queen needs eyes and ears, and mine are keen and sharp” and she asks to be taken into the household of Michal. Experienced in the working of male-centered palace politics, Zhurleen asserts that: “The king will forget me one day; I know the queen will not” (108). Then she starts to teach Michal “diplomacy” and how to gain power in patriarchy and she advises Michal to take advantage of her sexuality to make David do what she wants and to impose her status and use her wits to win her game. As seen, Zhurleen advises her to employ the tools of patriarchy to stay alive and succeed in this world-order. It is also Zhurleen who tells her to send Caleb away and cut off all her communication with her previous family in order to save them from David. And she is proven to be right; when David learns that Zhurleen saw Michal’s step-son Caleb off and made sure he returned home safely, she is sent away. Michal mourns for her only friend, “one who did not lie to me and slant her eyes away. One who was my friend” (157).

The patriarchal gender roles imposed in the biblical narrative are further exposed in Edghill’s rewriting. As discussed above, the barrenness of Michal in the Bible is presented as a punishment for her rebuking David when she accuses him of sexual vulgarity. It is suggested that David refrains from any bodily interaction with her and she is denied from the prescribed role as a woman; being a mother and achieving status through her son. In *Queenmaker*, on the other hand, Michal cannot conceive in her marriage with Phaltiel either. When she remains childless, Phaltiel assures her that he does not want her to risk her life during giving labour. He reminds her that he has lost his first wife when she was giving birth to Caleb and he makes her understand that it is she that he wants, not more children. In this way, being a mother as the absolute feature of womanhood is subverted in Edghill’s work,

In *Queenmaker*, the prescribed formula by the male-centered system for being a wife is also highlighted. At the beginning of the novel, Michal offers her love and her obedience to David as: “I will learn to be meek, and biddable, - and I love you as well” (34). Gerda Lerner also observes that in the Old Testament

“many women are described in servile, submissive and subordinate roles” (176). The only asset of women is their beauty and they are expected to “decorate” themselves and be beautiful as an object. In this regard, Michal, when she hears that she will be marrying David, although she loves him dearly, questions this decision. She believes that she is not beautiful and to marry someone as handsome and charismatic as David, in her opinion, one has to be his equal in beauty and Michal thinks that: “David was a hero. A hero should receive great beauty as his prize, and I was not beautiful. When I was young I was thin and dun-colored like the summer hills” (11). It is clearly demonstrated here that Michal is alienated from her existence, her body and trying to meet the norm of patriarchy about the female beauty.

Similarly, in Edghill’s retelling, Michal’s older sister Merab is portrayed as an example of women who internalizes the patriarchal ideology. When David refuses Saul’s offer of Merab as a bride to him, Merab is given to another man called Adriel of Meholah. Michal is worried about her sister since she knows she has feelings for David. Yet Merab herself is not disappointed at all and when Michal asks her how she can bear marrying someone else instead of David, she replies that: “Bear what, little fool? Should I weep because I am to wed a man with many flocks, and many servants, instead of my father’s shield-bearer?” and Michal also remembers that: “She looked self-satisfied as a cat in the sunlight” (32). Nevertheless, this androcentric system that she internalizes without questioning kills her; in *Queenmaker*, it is told that Merab has died giving birth to her fifth son.

As mentioned above, Edghill weaves Bathsheba’s story into Michal’s in *Queenmaker* and revisits this woman who is one of most portrayed figures in art history<sup>31</sup>. Edghill explains how she reimagines the meeting of Michal and Bathsheba as: “So I had a David who would do anything to get his own way, and a smart Michal who battled him with the only weapons she had: her wits and her body. And then she meets Bathsheba...” (personal communication). And in Bathsheba, Michal finds a friend and an instrument to take revenge from David.

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<sup>31</sup> For a detailed study of the representation of Bathsheba in art and cinema, see Exum, 1996.

According to the Bible, the affair between David and Bathsheba occurs as follows:

And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child. (2 Samuel 11:2-5)

When Bathsheba gets pregnant while her husband is away fighting in the army corps of David, to cover up this adulterous relationship David recalls Uriah from the front planning that he would sleep with his wife and consider the child his own. However when Uriah comes back to Jerusalem, he abstains from sex with his wife as an act of solidarity with his brother in arms. When his scheme fails, David arranges to have Uriah killed in the battle. The Bible goes on to tell that David's affair with a married woman displeases Prophet Nathan, the highest religious authority. He confronts David and expresses his discontent by recounting a parable in which a rich man steals a poor man's ewe lamb (2 Samuel 12).

As illustrated, David abuses his power and his public office to have Bathsheba and he does not even hesitate to take extreme measures to hide his affair and have Uriah killed. And Nathan pronounces his discontent with his affair as Bathsheba is already another man's wife. It is clearly stated in Exodus 20 otherwise known as the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's." (Exodus 20: 14, 17). Here, it must be noted that in Hebrew law, a married man who has sex with a woman other than his wife is considered guilty of adultery only if that woman is another man's wife (Leviticus 20:10). Thus, the guilt lies not in the act of adultery for men but in

taking another man's property. After relating the parable to his act, David confesses his sin and repents and Nathan tells him that God has taken away his sin but he also proclaims that the baby will die as a punishment for David's adultery. The innocent newborn baby then becomes the scapegoat and he dies as the result of Nathan's curse for David's transgression. It can be argued that children like women in the Bible are victimized for the sake of patriarchs. Then, parallel to this androcentric worldview, Bathsheba in the Bible is denied subjecthood; she is portrayed as a passive object. In Samuel 2:11-12, the few times she is mentioned, she is called "the woman" (11:5) or "the wife of Uriah" (11:26, 12:9,10, 15). Only after she becomes the wife, "the property of David", she starts to be called "Bathsheba". In other words, Bathsheba acquires a name only when she belongs to a man and even then she is treated as a commodity like most women of the Bible. Likewise, Regina Schwartz in her article "Adultery in the House of David: The Metanarrative of Biblical Scholarship and the Narratives of the Bible" observes that:

When Nathan the prophet tells David a didactic parable about the rich man taking the poor man's only ewe-lamb, he drives home the point that the king's adultery is a violation of a property right: Bathsheba is compared to an animal, a favoured animal, to be sure, one that is like a daughter (alluding to the Hebrew word play on Bathsheba's name bath = 'daughter'), and the only one the poor man has; but the polluting of his woman is analogous to the slaughter of his animal. (344- 345)

The Bathsheba affair in the Bible also portrays the female body as the passive object of male lust. As illustrated in the quotation above, the whole event is narrated from a male perspective and even for female readers, Bathsheba is reduced to an object of gaze, a male gaze; she is portrayed as a body arousing desire. Frymer-Kensky in *Reading the Women of the Bible* also comments on the fact that men are the owners of the gaze in the biblical narrative and Bathsheba exclusively has become the ultimate object of male gaze and sexual desire throughout the history. On David and Bathsheba affair, Frymer-Kensky contends that: "We join him in this classical male gaze, just as we have shared the male

gaze at countless odalisques in the history of art. Nothing has happened, but our attention has been arrested: we too look at this woman. We cannot see her, but David alerts and causes us to wonder about her” (2002, 144). Furthermore by introducing Bathsheba through the eyes of David, the biblical narrator also puts us in the position of voyeurs. In addition, in the Biblical account, by withholding Bathsheba’s perspective of the events, the narrator does not let the reader acknowledge her autonomy as an individual and identify with her. Bathsheba, like the other examples that we have seen in this study, is denied assertion of herself as a subject to express herself. Identified as “a complete non-person” by Adele Berlin, Bathsheba is “on stage” in this story very infrequently and is silent except for the announcement of her pregnancy, which she does not deliver in person (73). Throughout the entire biblical accounts, no hint is given about her inner life. For instance, Bathsheba’s feelings about the death of her infant child are not expressed in the Bible. The narrator only reports that “And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him.” (Samuel 2, 12:24). A close look at this quotation will reveal that the subject verbs are all executed by David. As Adele Berlin aptly puts: “One and a half cold, terse verses to sum up the condition of a woman who has had an adulterous affair, become pregnant, lost her husband, married her lover, the king of Israel, and borne his child! These are crucial events in the life of any woman, yet we are not told how they affected Bathsheba” (72). Male, then is given the freedom of action and decision and he is executing authority while women are condemned to silence.

The next time we see Bathsheba in the Bible is in Kings 1-2. Here, different from her earlier appearance as a passive object of male lust, Bathsheba is portrayed as a concerned mother about her son’s future. Toward the end of David’s life, she ensures that her son Solomon inherits the throne. It is told that Bathsheba along with the prophet Nathan and other supporters of Solomon plots to convince David that he has promised the kingship to Solomon. After securing the rule for her son, Solomon, she ceases to exist in the narrative (Kings 1:11-2:25). Hence, although the second depiction of Bathsheba can be seen as a stark

contrast to her earlier portrayal as a passive object, it should be noted that also in the King 1-2, she is depicted in accordance with the androcentric perspective; she becomes the helper for the next king of Israel and denied a subject position as an autonomous woman. In the framework of gender stereotypes established by patriarchy, she first becomes a sexual object then a mother. Besides, in the history of Biblical criticism, Bathsheba is often interpreted as a seducer and accused of tempting David. On this male-centered approach that aims to take the blame from David, Fewell and Gunn maintain that:

Androcentric interpretive tradition, anxious to lessen the blame that falls so unavoidably in this episode upon the great man, has not been slow to point their finger at woman. The woman made him do it! Why was she bathing where she could be seen, flaunting her body, tempting him? Patriarchy quickly invokes its controlling stereotypes, its Others. Bathsheba joins Eve, along with countless other Sirens of male mythology, in embodying woman as temptress. (157)

India Edghill in her rewriting of King David's women in *Queenmaker* also has to tackle this dilemma in the portrayal of Bathsheba. In an interview, Edghill explains that:

There are only two ways you can handle Bathsheba. Either the woman was bone stupid and didn't realize that the entire palace was overlooking her roof, or she was out there deliberately to seduce David. Eventually I came up with the method I used. She was up there deliberately, but [the result] wasn't exactly what she had in mind. (Nesbeitt, n. pag.)

Then, Edghill revisions Bathsheba in *Queenmaker* as a naïve young girl of 15 years old who makes the mistake of falling in love with David. Unlike David, Michal loves Bathsheba dearly. When she meets her, Michal has been suffering from loneliness in David's harem. Her only friend Zhurleen was sent away and she could not establish any nurturing and loving relationship with David's other wives who consider her as their biggest rival. Michal sees Bathsheba from her room at the palace and recognizing her loneliness in this new city that she has moved to as a bride, she invites her to the palace. Bathsheba is so innocent about

the palace politics that when Michal tries to tell about her loneliness and struggles, blinded by the splendour of the palace, she says: “But you are the queen! Everyone must love you” (186). Also, when Michal tells her that she wants to be friends with her, Bathsheba says she would be honoured. Now years wiser than Bathsheba, Michal answers back that: “Honor is a game for men; I would rather have a friend who loved me” (186). Edghill emphasizing the sorority between Michal and Bathsheba as opposed to the rivalry of women in David’s harem, writes that even when David takes Bathsheba as a lover, Michal is not jealous but sad for losing a friend. Moved by compassion instead of envy, Michal sees in Bathsheba “a woman in love” and she remembers her own innocence when she first fell in love with David. When Michal calls her one day, she says she is ill, actually Bathsheba is ashamed of her feelings for David and she could not face Michal. Michal recognizes the reason of change in Bathsheba and she mutters: “Ill; Bathsheba had said she was ill. Now I called her illness by its true name: David” (203). Yet, as Michal tells in the opening of *Queenmaker*, “David loved no woman, though he lay with many. Women loved him” (14). This is true for Bathsheba too; David wants to have Bathsheba, he has her and then he forgets her. Similar to the Biblical account, not recognizing her as a woman, David keeps calling her “Uriah’s wife” in *Queenmaker*. On the other hand, desperately in love with David, Bathsheba feels so sad when she loses the interest of David. Michal remembers that: “Bathsheba was still sick with love for David; she could not yet believe that David’s love was gone” (236). Bathsheba cannot see the fact that David never loves a woman but he uses them to gain political power or allies. As Alice Bach suggests: “from the chronological order of wives in David’s life, one can posit a setting of priorities of male ambition. First, the connection with the royal house, then the acquisition of personal wealth and the assurance of kingship, and finally a pleasurable sexual liaison” (136).

In Edghill’s rewriting, when Bathsheba is pregnant with David’s child, not knowing how to deal with this outcome, counting on the sorority between them, she first comes and gives the news to Michal. Angry and marginalized in men’s world, motivated by her hate for David, Michal sees this as an opportunity for



revenge. Since adultery is strictly forbidden by The Ten Commandments, Michal hopes that this affair would put David in a difficult position in the eyes of the people, so that at last people would see the real David; a conniving and vicious ruler. Michal ponders: “I could avenge my husband Phaltiel. I could avenge my brothers Jonathan and Ishbaal, and my father Saul. Yahweh had delivered the weapon I had sought into my hand; Yahweh’s weapon lies weeping and trembling at my feet. The weapon was Bathsheba” (214). In the light of this statement then, it can be suggested that Michal hopes to use Bathsheba as a pawn in a patriarchal manner. Yet, she underestimates the political shrewdness of David. Realizing Michal’s love for Bathsheba, David proposes the murder of Uriah as the only solution to save Bathsheba from the punishment of adultery; being stoned to death. Again defeated by David, Michal realizes that: “This was what David planned since I had first gone to him and told him that Bathsheba was with child... I knew I held Bathsheba’s life within my hands. Sweet, foolish, trusting Bathsheba- and her child. David’s child for whom David cares less than nothing. Against those lives I must weight Uriah (229). Hence, Michal despite her attempt to be a player on the political arena is defeated once again by David who unlike her does not let feelings of any kind influence him or hold him back from realizing his plans.

Edghill in her *Queenmaker* refuses to kill the product of this illicit affair. Unlike the Biblical narrative, in this retelling, the baby is still-born, but Michal saves the boy in the labor. Michal names him Solomon, “peace” and Bathsheba and Michal bring him up together. In this way, they establish an alternative family with two mothers. With the new found love in Solomon and Bathsheba, Michal reserves all her affection and power to her new “family” and she devotes the power of her status to make Solomon the next King of Israel. To achieve her goal, Michal does not hesitate to use another woman as a pawn. According to the Bible:

Now king David was old [and] stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king

may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel [was] very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not. (1 Kings: 1-5)

As the biblical narrative demonstrates, Abishag is given the traditional feminine role of a healer. Edghill in her rewriting makes Michal give Abishag to David to win his favours. In other words, Abishag becomes a pawn in the hands of Michal. It is clear that Michal, without any means to resist and fight back the world ruled by man, adopts patriarchal politics and she uses Abishag to achieve her goal. It can be asserted that patriarchal ideology is so powerful and universal that there is no other world outside where women can operate and have power. Nevertheless, unlike men who function in this androcentric world order without questioning it, Michal is conscious of her situation and she realizes that in the gender roles of this world “A man’s weapons are sword and spear; a woman’s her wits” (357). She also admits that she turns into a David herself; to protect Bathsheba, she tells lies. Michal says that “to spare her a moment’s pain, I too twisted truth to my own ends, just as David did” (290).

India Edghill in *Queenmaker* in addition to Bathsheba’s story also rewrites David’s daughter Tamar’s story. According to the Bible, Amnon, David’s son from another woman, is obsessed with his sister Tamar who is said to be very beautiful. Again, we witness the characterization of women in androcentric worldview. That is, the only feature of Tamar that is mentioned to define her is her physical beauty. The Bible continues to state that Amnon’s cousin Jonadab helps him to devise a scheme whereby he might have Tamar alone and he rapes her despite her protests. (2 Samuel 13). Like Dinah, Tamar is one of the few unmarried women who is named in the Bible. Yet, both women gain this “status” due to their being victims of rape. In this quotation above, likewise, we hear the voice of Tamar when she tries to protect herself. After this rape incident, Tamar is not mentioned in the Bible. In other words, as Exum observes above, like Michal, Tamar is also murdered in the text by the biblical narrator.

Returning to the Bible, when Amnon rapes her, he is filled with revulsion for “her”, not his act. Overcome by shame, Tamar takes refuge in her brother Absalom’s house. When David hears what has happened to his daughter, he does nothing to console her. Later, Absalom after avoiding his brother Amnon for two years avenges his sister by murdering him. Yet, a close reading of this section reveals that the reason for fratricide is complex. With Amnon dead, Absalom is the next in line for his father’s throne. Therefore, to take revenge for Tamar can be interpreted as a subtext for Absalom’s own ambition and greed for the crown. The Bible reports that Absalom remains in exile for three years and in the meantime David mourns for his son Amnon. Yet, there is no indication what Tamar does with the rest of her life. Moreover, David’s lament for Amnon further accentuates the absence of any emotional outpouring for Tamar. As seen, in line with patriarchal ideology, his sons and their future are a great concern for David. On the other hand, he does not attempt to provide any comfort for Tamar. To quote Diane Jacobson from her article “And Then There were Women in His Life: David and His Women”: “As for David, his absence from the story of his daughter’s rape speaks as loudly about his character as his central presence in the other stories of women. His soliticious care of his sons stands over against his callous disregard of his daughter” (407). Thus, prioritization of sons over daughter is underlined again in the biblical account.

Later in the Bible, Absalom rapes ten of David’s wives to denote his takeover of his father’s kingdom and it is told that they are raped on the roof-top. Then, it can be suggested that rape in the patriarchal ideology is about male politics and women’s bodies are acted upon. Echoing David’s seeing Bathsheba on the rooftop and having her, Absalom’s act can be interpreted as the continuation of the father’s behaviour by the son. In this way, it can be argued that the act of rape and reducing women to bodies to be acted upon is generalized and justified within the context of the of Biblical framework.

In *Queenmaker*, on the other hand, Edghill rewrites Tamar’s story as a love story. She explains in an interview that:

In the Bible it's definitely a rape, but I was looking for a nice guy in this, and David is not exactly my favorite character. If you decide the facts are being distorted for the purposes of the person writing that section of the Bible, you can rewrite it any way you want, as long as you keep to the same basic sequence of events. In the Bible, after Amnon rapes Tamar and is about to throw her out, she says, 'Don't do this -- our father will let me marry you.' I was sort of hanging the way I handled the Amnon-Tamar affair on that statement, and on the fact that I really didn't want a rape. I wanted one nice relationship. (Nesbeitt, n. pag.).

Through Michal, Edghill questions the Biblical version and she reimagines this whole episode in a totally different way. In *Queenmaker*, Michal finds Tamar and Amnon in her garden, “They lay close-pressed as if bound together. Tamar’s braids chained Amnon with living copper, fire-hot in the sun. They did not hear me. They would not have heard the king’s guard in full armor. They were beautiful against the lilies” (259). When Michal sees them like that and hears how Amnon loves her, she says: “My own heart ached; a small pang only, as an old wound might pain an aging warrior” (260). She remembers the times she was in love with David and she identifies with them. And when she learns that Absalom is against this relationship, she sees the real reason right away: “For Amnon was the eldest son; wed to Tamar, Amnon’s claim to David’s crown would be better than any others. Better than Absalom’s” (263). Michal cannot be fooled by Absalom’s reasoning, she has spent much time now in David’s palace and she recognizes the envy and ambition of Absalom. Absalom also tells her that Tamar got a knife and “plunged its blade into her own heart” but Michal doubts his version, she believes that:

It is not so easy to kill one’s self, when one is fourteen and hot for life. And if Tamar had indeed been dragged naked from Amnon’s arms, from Amnon’s bed, where had she found the knife that Absalom swore she’d turned upon herself. But whoever struck Tamar to the heart did not strike true. She lived long enough to suffer- and to name Absalom. (274)

Absalom tells David that he killed his brother not to see her “stolen away and dishonoured” (275) and her suicide attempt proves that she is also ashamed of

what Amnon did to her. In Michal's words, Absalom is "his father born-again" (275) in his cunning and shrewd way. His justification was "It is a brother's right to defend his sister" (276). Echoing Dinah's brothers' defence in *The Red Tent*, the notion of a virgin daughter as a commodity to be protected and bargained for by the patriarchs is also underlined here. Contesting the patriarchal version of Tamar's rape, Edghill weaves herstory as an ill-fated love story that was persecuted by male ambition and hunger for power.

In conclusion, in *Queenmaker* the dominant patriarchal system and how this system silences the voices of those not represented in the power structure are exposed. Rewriting Michal's story, Edghill also highlights the overtly male-oriented nature of the biblical narrative. In addition, since Michal becomes the most powerful woman in David's court only after adopting the patriarchal politics, Edghill's Michal realistically illustrates the position of a woman who is deprived of any other means to resist the ideology other than her sexuality and manipulation. Furthermore, Edghill by interweaving the stories of Bathsheba and Tamar, grants David's women a narrative life that is denied in the Old Testament. The next chapter will explore the rewritings of The New Testament women's stories by contemporary women writers.

## CHAPTER 5

### REWRITINGS OF NEW TESTAMENT MYTHS

#### 5.1 Gail Sidonie Sobat's *The Book of Mary*

Canadian writer Gail Sidonie Sobat makes Mary of Nazareth, Jesus' mother and probably the most acclaimed woman of history the narrator and protagonist of her 2006 novel: *The Book of Mary*. Similar to gospel writers of the New Testament, Mary in this rewriting holds the authority of the Word and the possession of the knowledge and she tells "herstory" through a series of journal entries and letters.

In the history of Christianity, Mary as Jesus' mother attains a cult and mythic stature of herself. She has many titles including *Madonna*, *Maria Regina*, *Theotokos* (mother of God), *Mater Dolorosa*, The Queen of Heavens and Church, *Aeiparthenos* (ever-virgin), In other words, she has been turned into a symbol and a role model and in the process she is constructed as a cultural, religious and historical phenomenon. The main actor of this mythmaking is the Christian Church especially from 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards. In the hands of the Church, Mary is turned into a "sublime model of chastity" and the ideal of the feminine personified (Warner 1983, xxi). Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* also observes that Mary has become "the most fully realized and generally venerated image of woman regenerated and consecrated to the Good" (212). Likewise, Marina Warner, in her seminal study, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of Virgin Mary*, writes that in the convent school that she attended, Virgin Mary was the role model presented to the young girls and her cult and feasts were central to their education. With "her chastity, her humility, her gentleness", Warner remembers, "she was the culmination of womanhood" and she continues as follows:

We were not troubled by question about the Virgin's personality about what her life had been, what she had been like. We

sometimes chattered about the colour of her skin- swarthy?- or the shape of her nose- Jewish? But we never probed history deeper, and although we did study the New Testament, we never noticed- it was not indeed called to our attention- how the Virgin is passed over almost in silence”. (1983, xx-xxi)

Actually, it is this silence and the process of turning Mary into a mythic paragon of the feminine by the Church that many critics and scholars explore and comment on.

In terms of factual evidence, in a stark contrast to the cult of Mary, in the Bible there is scant information about the historical figure of Mary of Nazareth, Jesus’ mother. The earliest reference in the Bible to the mother of Jesus is dated to AD 57; in Galatians 4:4, St. Paul announces that Jesus is full human and yet the son of God and he adds that Jesus is “made of a woman”. As seen, Mary is not even mentioned by name in the text.

Also in the Gospels, Mary is not cited often. Mark names her once as Jesus’ mother by name: “Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon” (6:3) and in the section called *Jesus’ Mothers and Brothers*, Mark mentions her once again, this time without giving her a name. Here, Mark writes that his mother and brothers arrive on a spot where Jesus is ministering, concerned about his welfare and security. When Jesus is told that they are waiting outside, “And he answered them, saying, “Who is my mother, or my brethren?”. And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother”” (3:33-35). Thus, Jesus declares that all those who follow him are his real family.

In the Gospel of John, Mary is not mentioned by name at all. Yet, John recounts two episodes where she is present. The first one is known as the wedding feast in Cana and according to this biblical narrative when there is no wine left at the wedding reception, Jesus’ mother tells him: “They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.” (2:3-4). Later in the same section it writes that his mother, together with his brothers and disciples, follows him to Capernaum (2:12). The last time we see Mary in

John's gospel is at the Crucifixion. John reports that Jesus' mother is by the cross with her sister Mary Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus sees his mother and one of his disciples standing next to her, he says to his mother: "Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (19:26-27). This disciple is later identified as John the Evangelist by the Christian scholars.

Mary appears more prominently in the gospels of Luke and Matthew that recount Jesus' birth and lineage. In Luke's gospel, Mary is mentioned by name in the Annunciation and the Birth of Jesus (1:27, 30, 34, 38, 41, 46, 46, 56; 2:5, 16, 19, 34) narratives. Matthew's gospel also mentions her in the section of the birth of Jesus (1:16, 18, 20; 2:11) and names Mary once more during his adulthood as his mother (13:55). Marian knowledge then comes from the two accounts of Christ's infancy as found in Matthew and in Luke that are written more than eighty years after the events described in the Bible. Although these gospels are almost contemporary, there are differences in the ways that they recount the events. In the case of Mary, both Mark and Luke agree that Jesus comes from the house of David, his birthplace in Bethlehem, his father's name is Joseph and that his mother is called Mary, otherwise their stories diverge. In addition, in Luke's gospel, Mary speaks four times whereas in Matthew's she is silent. Therefore it can be argued that there is no coherence among the biblical narratives about Mary.

As noted above, being the most informative about Marian knowledge, Luke's gospel recounts the stories of Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity and the Purification (or the Presentation of Christ in the Temple) and he describes the scene in which Christ is lost and found among the doctors in the temple. This is the only occasion apart from the wedding feast at Cana when Christ and his mother speak to each other in the Bible (Luke 1:48). But probably the most dramatic and significant biblical account for the cult of Mary is the Annunciation where the angel Gabriel announces her pregnancy as "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). Luke reports that Mary is "troubled" and Gabriel comforts her by saying: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive



in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.” (Luke 1:29, 30). Still puzzled, Mary asks: “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34) and Gabriel tells her that: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the God” (1:35). When Gabriel leaves, Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth who is also expecting a child after being barren for decades. Elizabeth greets Mary and praises her by saying “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:42) and calls Mary as “the mother of My Lord”. Mary answers her and this is her longest speech in the Bible. Also known as *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), she recites a hymn in which she gives thanks to God:

My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in  
 God my Saviour.  
 For he hath regarded: the lowliness of his handmaiden.  
 For behold, from henceforth: all generations shall call me  
 blessed.  
 For he that is mighty hath magnified me: and holy is his Name.  
 And his mercy is on them that fear him: throughout all  
 generations.  
 He hath shewed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the  
 proud in the imagination of their hearts.  
 He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the  
 humble and meek.  
 He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath  
 sent empty away.  
 He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel: as he  
 promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever

As illustrated, our knowledge about the life and personality of Mary, based on the biblical accounts, is really limited. Miri Rubin in his extensive historical survey of the reception of Mary, *Mother of God*, points out that the Quran mentions Mary’s name more than the gospels do. Yet, in the Quran she is never called the Virgin (83).

With the intention of filling the gaps in the gospels, early Christians start to compose narratives about Mary’s early life. In other words, the absence of scriptural tradition makes the proliferation of myth and legends about Mary

possible. Our major source for the early life of Mary is the apocryphal<sup>32</sup> *Gospel of James* also known as the *Protevangelium of James* from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. According to this account, Mary's parents are named Joachim and Anne. Mary is born to them at their advanced age and before Mary's conception, Anne is barren. The *Protevangelium of James* writes that Joachim and Anne, faithful to a vow they have made, present the child Mary in the temple when she is three years old. The child herself mounts the Temple steps and she takes a vow of virginity there (7-8).

After the composition of *the Gospel of James*, the most significant development in the cult of Mary comes with the Byzantine Emperor Constantine. After centuries of being considered as a forbidden pagan practice, in 313 AD Christianity is established as a lawful religion by Constantine. Consequently, the veneration of Jesus Christ and his mother Mary gains importance. For instance in Constantinople, the new capital of the East Roman (Byzantine) Empire, in the decoration of the churches, the image of Mary with the baby Jesus becomes a common iconographical motif. Constantine also establishes the Ecumenical Council and he himself chairs over the first one that is held in Nicaea in 325. The Council, composed of bishops and religious authorities and government officers, starts to preside over religious matters in the whole Christian world. The Council also functions as an ideological apparatus to justify the Emperor's rule over his country and the rest of the world. Then in 380 AD, Emperor Theodosius makes Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Along with the discussion on the nature of Jesus and the attempts to define him as God for the Christian Empire, Mary has become a major figure as the mother of God. As a result, the myth of Mary starts to be constructed through the lens of Church. To this end, in the Council of Nicaea for instance in 325 AD the Virgin Birth of Jesus is proclaimed and at the Second Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, Mary's perpetual virginity is declared. According to this declaration, she is a virgin during the pregnancy and the birth of Christ. Then in 431 AD, at the council of Ephesus, it is proclaimed that Mary is not just "Christ-bearer" but "God-bearer", *Theotokos*.

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<sup>32</sup> Texts that are not included in the canonical version of the Bible

Thus the Council decrees that Mary is the Mother of God because her son Jesus is a person who is both God and man, divine and human. Two decades later, in 451 AD, at the Council of Chalcedon, the Fourth Ecumenical Council of the Church, Mary is given officially the title *Aeiparthenos*, “Ever-Virgin” so she was and is a virgin before, during and after birth. Therefore, Jesus is her only son whose conception and birth are miraculous. Later in 649 AD, Pope Martin I declares Mary’s perpetual virginity as a dogma of the Church.

In this framework set by the Church, by remaining virgin and being a mother at the same time, Mary is unique in terms of womanhood. Yet, her eternal virgin status brings on some problems. For instance, the mention of Jesus brother’s and sisters in the Bible confuses the Christian religious authorities and scholars who propose and defend Mary’s lifelong virginity. Then Origen, Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) and other leading figures of the Greek Church maintain that these siblings are from Joseph’s earlier marriage (Warner 1983, 23). Also to connect Jesus to the House of David, later theologians such as Ephrem of Syria in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD argues that Mary is a relative of Joseph, thus both come from the House of David (Rubin, 36). The fact that during the Annunciation, Mary is already betrothed to Joseph is also highlighted by the Church. Therefore on the one hand the Church endows Mary with supernatural features and turns her into an idol, on the other hand, it makes sure that Mary is placed in the patriarchal order according to norms. As Marina Warner aptly observes: “in a patriarchal society, even the Messiah can only be legitimate if his mother is properly married” (1983, 20).

As illustrated above, Mary’s virginity is the fundamental essence of her cult. Yet again, in the biblical scripture and in apocrypha, there is little evidence for Mary’s virginity in general or for a virgin birth in particular. But for the Church, the virgin birth is the key argument for justifying the dogma that Jesus is the son of God. Moreover, for the Church that equates sexuality with corruption and advocates asceticism as the ideal state for human beings, the idea that the Savior is conceived as a result of sexual intercourse is unacceptable. For this reason, virginity of Mary has a fundamental significance in the Church doctrine.

This ideological manoeuvre, however, is not original to the Christian Church. The motif of virgin birth is a common theme in the Hellenistic world. Pythagoras, Plato and Alexander the Great are all said to be born through a virgin mother (Warner 1983, 35). With this claim, the exceptional nature of the person is emphasized. In addition, the divine impregnation is also observed in mythology. For instance, in cases of Apollo's, Bacchus' and Perseus' their mortal mothers are impregnated by the immortals. Hence, it can be suggested that the Christian Church adopts mythological motifs and gender roles from earlier traditions to construct a cult of Jesus as a god.

Feminist scholar Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (1991) also comments on the notion of virgin birth. She underlines the fact that Mary has no active role in this conception and birth. Daly also cites Helen Diner who argues that despite the fact that the "virgin birth" is sometimes considered as an example of parthenogenesis<sup>33</sup>, in the case of Mary this is exactly the opposite as she is a passive receptor. In parthenogenesis, Diner writes, the female is the creatrix, whereas in Christianity the Virgin is "only the vessel waiting in purity for the bearing of the Saviour" (qtd. in Daly 1991, 83). In a similar vein, Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of the Patriarchy* also points out the passive and receptive role of Mary is assigned by the Church, she argues that:

The power of the Virgin lies in her ability to appeal to God's mercy; it derives from her motherhood and the miracle of her immaculate conception. She has no power for herself, and the very sources of her power to intercede separate her irrevocably from other women. The goddess Ishtar and other goddesses like her had power in their own right. It was the kind of power men had, derived from military exploits and the ability to impose her will on gods or to influence them. And yet Ishtar was female, endowed with a sexuality like that of ordinary women. (143)

Therefore, the Virgin Mary of the Church, with her stressed docility and endurance, is developed into a silent and passive object of veneration.

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<sup>33</sup> From parthenos (virgin) – genesis (birth): reproduction without fertilization by a male. For instance, in Greek mythology, Gaia (Earth) creates Uranus (sky), Pontus (sea) and Ourea (hills) without a male partner (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 116).

In addition to the previous dogmas proclaimed, in 1854 the Catholic Church passes the theological dogma of “immaculate conception”. The Church thereby declares that Mary is conceived, born and lived without the stigma of the “original sin”<sup>34</sup>. Thus, she is also exempt from the consequences of the sin, including the pain of giving birth and the corruption of the grave. Baring and Cashford in *The Myth of the Goddess* note that, like other dogmas that are proclaimed by the Church, there is no reference in the New Testament to Mary’s “divine” birth and they argue that this idea of Mary’s “Immaculate Conception” is “theoretical and counterfactual” (552). That is to say, “she must have been immaculate or she could not have been Christ’s mother” (552). Marina Warner also contends that:

The Immaculate Conception remains the dogma by which the Virgin Mary is set apart from the human race because she is not stained by the Fall... As the icon of the ideal, the Virgin affirms the inferiority of the human lot. Soaring above the men and women who pray to her, the Virgin conceived without sin underscores rather than alleviates pain and anxiety and accentuates the feeling of sinfulness (1983, 254)

Thus the Church deifies the Virgin Mary as opposed to the cursed Eve. In the eyes of the Christian Church, Eve, like her Greek counterpart Pandora, is disobedient and transgressive. Furthermore, according to the Church, Eve is the sole responsible one for the falling of man from the perfect state of grace into hardship. In other words, Eve, thus woman, is the cause of the Fall, the wicked temptress, the accomplice of Satan and the destroyer of mankind’s peace. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* underlines this notion of woman as the source of evil as:

“To blame the evils and sorrows of life - loss of Eden and the rest - on sexuality,

<sup>34</sup> According to the Bible, humanity is condemned because of the guilt that Eve had committed. Genesis 3: 1-16 recounts the temptation of Eve and the following expulsion of Eve and Adam from Eden; Eve is seduced by the serpent and she in turn makes Adam eat the apple of the Tree of Knowledge. They are both reproached by God, who says to Eve: “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire [shall be] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis 3, 17-19). This guilt of Eve is later pronounced in the New Testament as: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

would all too logically implicate the male, and such implication is hardly the purpose of the story, designed as it is expressly in order to blame all this world's discomfort on the female" (53). Sexuality, therefore, is identified with female sex as Eve has turned into the personification of temptation and sin by the Church. As Warner puts it, for the Church, "woman was womb and womb was evil" (1983, 57). This identification of woman with sin and death is observed in the writings of early Church fathers in which they preach suppression of bodily desires and sexual chastity as the utmost virtue. For instance, in the Bible, St Paul writes that: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (Corinthians 7:1, 2). A few lines later, he asserts that chastity is the perfect state: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." (Corinthians 7: 8-9). Thus, St Paul contends that sexual desires are sinful and for those who cannot suppress them, marriage is the only solution.

In a similar vein, Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus known as Tertullian (AD150-215), one of the most powerful and influential figures in the early Church, in the piece entitled "On the Apparel of Woman", promotes the veiling of women and after addressing the female sex, he continues as follows:

Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the Devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert even the Son of God had to die. (132)

Likewise, St. Augustine in his treaty "The Excellence of Marriage" declares that the marriage of Joseph and Mary is the ideal form of matrimony as there is no sexual intercourse (37). A mutual vow of abstinence from sex is the highest good in marriage for St. Augustine. For the founding figures of the Christian church, then, it is essential to set the image of a Virgin giving birth to the Saviour as the

absolute opposite to Eve. Therefore, through the veneration of the Virgin Mary, the Church establishes his idea of womanhood. As Carol Christ observes: “Patriarchal religion has enforced the view that female initiative and will are evil through the juxtaposition of Eve and Mary. Eve caused the fall by asserting her will against the command of God, while Mary began the new age with her response to God’s initiative, “Let it be done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38) (1987, 127). And this dichotomy; the exaltation of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God and the condemnation of Eve as the source of all evil, dehumanizes both women.

After the Immaculate Conception, the most recent dogma about the persona of Mary passed by the Church is known as the Assumption of the Virgin. In 1950 Pope Pius XII declares the Assumption of the Virgin as an official doctrine. This statement asserts that Mary as the Mother of God could not die as a human being therefore her incorrupt body and soul is taken up to heaven. Following this dogma, in 1954, the Catholic Church proclaims her as the ‘Queen of Heaven’ and in 1964 she is given a new title: *Mater Ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church).

As outlined briefly above, the transformation of the historical woman who gave birth to Jesus into an idol is a process that has been established and perpetuated by the Church through centuries. Consequently, Mary of Nazareth has turned into a mythic persona and an unattainable ideal that is remote from the experiences of actual womanhood. Marina Warner states that: “Even her silence in the Gospels is turned to good account, becoming an example to all women to hold their tongues” (1983, 190). The Virgin Mary of the Church then is a patriarchal construct that reflects the androcentric nature of the institution. Mary Daly in *Beyond God the Father* attempts to disclose the underlying men-made and male-centered power structure of the Church and she notes that in Scripture, liturgy and theology with the use of masculine pronouns and titles such as Father, Son, Lord and King, the divine power is inscribed as male gender. In a similar vein, feminist theologian Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza also observes that “Mary myth has its roots and development in a male clerical, and ascetic culture and

theology and serves to deter women from becoming fully independent and whole human persons” (621). Likewise, Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* argues that “Mariological tradition functions in patriarchal theology primarily to reflect and express the ideology of patriarchal feminine” (149). As illustrated above, throughout centuries, Mary is presented by the Church as the apotheosis of passivity, obedience, motherhood and virginity and these features are in all accordance with the patriarchal idea of woman. In addition, by giving her the title *Mater Ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church) the Church associates Mary with itself and it can be argued that this title further accentuates her role as an idol created by men for men. Above all, Mary of Nazareth is employed by the Church to define and emphasize the godliness of her son. In order to justify and establish his divine nature, in the process Mary is proclaimed divine as a way of securing the divinity of Christ. In other words, she is defined in relation to her son. As Carol Christ underlines, “she is not God the Mother but Mother of God” (151). Similarly Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* also contends that the Virgin Mary is defined and venerated in relation to her son and God. She observes that: “for the first time in human history the mother kneels before the son, she freely kneels before her son; she freely accepts the inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of Virgin- it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat” (203). Hence Mary is turned into a tool of propaganda at the hands of the Church for the gender roles. To quote Marina Warner once again, “The Virgin Mary is not the innate archetype of female nature, the dream incarnate; she is the instrument of a dynamic argument from the Catholic Church about the structure of society, presented as a God-given code (338)”. In addition, as demonstrated above, the Virgin Mary is exempted from the pleasure of sexual union and giving birth. Thus she gradually becomes more abstract and distant from the experience of the women who look up to her for some identification in the male-dominated Christianity. She becomes “holy” but she is not a woman and the sanitized and desexualized ideal of Mary is far from representing the women’s experience. Sarah Coakley in her essay “Mariology and ‘Romantic Feminism’: A Critique”



argues that a new discourse and symbolism should be created to demystify the patriarchal and distorted perceptions of the maternal “other” (101). In this sense, Gail Sidonie Sobat’s *The Book of Mary* is an attempt to destabilize the patriarchal construction of Mary of Nazareth.

Gail Sidonie Sobat in *The Book of Mary* gives voice to the silent Virgin of the Gospels and the Christian Church. Contrary to the earlier texts in which her life is written by men, in Sobat’s retelling, Mary of Nazareth writes her own life story starting from her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sobat’s Mary is portrayed as a rebellious and independent teenager unlike the obedient and passive Mary of the Christian Church. At the beginning of the novel, the young Mary writes that she is given scrolls as a birthday present then she starts to pour her wishes and innermost feelings to on her scrolls. Just like any 14 year old, Mary is interested in her looks and in a confessional and colloquial tone she writes that:

My looks are alright, I guess. I like my hair the best. It’s black. Blue-black. It falls to the middle of my back when my mother lets me wear it down, which is never. She says I’m vain. My eyes are almond shaped and hazel. I like them. My lips are full. I don’t have a lot of colour in my cheeks, though. Guess you can’t have everything. My body’s nice enough. Not too skinny. Wish my legs were longer, but my breasts are pretty big. And they might even get bigger, who knows. After all, I am only fourteen-going-on-fifteen. My birthday’s in May. I am a Gemini. (11)

In addition Mary writes that she finds her life “so booooooring” and she runs away from her house most nights and goes to a club to dance and meet friends (sic 10). Mary also notes that she finds her name so commonplace and she thinks to herself: “Why in God’s name did our mothers name us both Mary? Don’t they know any other stupid names? What about Delilah? Or something exotic like Shakira? Nope. I got stuck, like a million other girls, with Mary?” (20) In the journal, Mary also confesses that she likes a young boy called Jeremiah and she puts on her “sexiest scent” to attract his attention (10). As seen, even this brief introduction illustrates the stark difference between the cultic figure of Mary set by the Christian Church and Sobat’s rewriting of it. Reimagining the life of a young Jewish girl, Sobat employs a conversational tone and she portrays a Mary that

sounds familiar to the readers. Her worries, her concerns and the way she interprets her life are not much different from any teenager's despite the two thousand years gap. In other words, Sobat's reinterpretation of Mary, in contrast to the unattainable abstract ideal presented by the Church, is one that every woman can relate to.

Smart and observant, Sobat's Mary in her journal entries also comments on the patriarchal society she lives in. She writes that her father Joachim does all the important work in his trading business, establishing the connections and doing much travelling, yet her mother is at the stall in the marketplace all day long and in the evening she takes care of the house. Still, unlike the silent submissive, almost absent mother figures of the Bible, Mary's mother Anne is insightful. She insists that her husband teach their daughters how to read and write. Both her parents, Mary recounts, know that knowledge is power and they did not want their children to end up "powerless and ignorant" (73).

In Sobat's retelling of the Marian myth, the image of Mary as the paragon of piety and chastity is destabilized. In *The Book of Mary*, she is drawn as a sexual being rather than an ever-virgin. In the book, Mary writes that "Whenever he [Jeremiah] looked at into my eyes, I got wet between my legs" (14). In their relationship, Mary also takes the initiative with Jeremiah; she makes the first move. Eventually they make sex and in a sensual and erotic piece of writing Mary narrates their lovemaking (17). In contrast to the portrayal of Mary who spends her days in the temple and takes the vow of virginity when she is just a baby, in Sobat's retelling, Mary is not ashamed of her body and she writes that she does not feel filthy or embarrassed and she adds "I love to learn about my body through his body. I don't believe that such knowledge is wicked" (30). Despite her conscious decision to make love to Joseph, Mary is realistic about the society she lives in. She thinks how mad her mother would be if she learned that she is not a virgin and she reflects upon the double standard of the male-centered culture as follows: "If my stupid brother Samuel slept with a girl, she wouldn't think twice about it. She'd think the girl was a slut. That's how it goes. Sam and the boys get all the breaks. I wonder if it's different anywhere" (29). She, then, believes that

the androcentric world order is universal. Still, she attempts to cross the borders drawn for her by the society and she tries to exercise her own autonomy and to have the ownership of her body. She knows all too well that in the patriarchal society she lives in, it is unacceptable for a woman to want a man. Mary recognizes the marginal or secondary status of women in her culture. In one journal entry, she writes that they have stoned a woman in the market place who is accused of adultery. She continues to recount as follows:

So how come I've never heard of a man stoned for adultery, no matter what the Torah says? Doesn't happen in my village. Only women and girls. Unmarried girls like me who lose their virginity. Women like Jez, paid for their services. I wonder how many of us there are. Bad girls and women, that is. Probably quite a few. Hiding. Hiding from men and their stupid laws" (20).

As mentioned above in the previous chapter, it is almost always women that are condemned with adultery according to the Biblical law. Mary realizes in her early age that patriarchy condemns those women who do not conform to the norms and she knows that if she wants to be with Jeremiah she has to do it secretly. As noted above, to have any bodily desires for women is considered immoral and lust is associated with sin and death in the Bible. The pressure of cultural and social norms is evident in Mary's lines in her journal. After she writes that they kiss, she immediately adds: "I'm going to have to burn this scroll. I am dead meat if my mother finds this. Or worse, yet, my father. They would call me the whore of Nazareth" (14). As illustrated, Mary knows the strict moral codes of the androcentric society that she lives in, yet she aims to challenge them as much as she can. She says: "So I am crafty. And careful. Always. You have to be to survive in this world" (9). Hence, from early age on, Mary learns that the world is not a place for women and one has to use her wits in order to find her way through patriarchy as a member of the suppressed group.

That's exactly what Mary does when she gets pregnant. Mary uses her wits and the power of knowledge when she realizes she is pregnant with a child. She writes down her surprise as: "Shit. I am pregnant. Can't lie to myself anymore. I am three weeks late. Shit. I just checked my calendar and scrolls" (30). In the

meantime Jeremiah is arrested, it comes out that he is an “opium and hashish dealer” and already married (35). Trapped and alone, Mary weaves a story to save her. Otherwise, when her pregnancy out of wedlock is realized, she will be one of the women that is stoned in the market place. When Mary is seeing Jeremy, she is also already betrothed to Joseph, a neighbour of Mary’s family who offers three cows, three sheep, five hens and a cock for her. Mary says that when she has her period it is not considered as a passage of rite to celebrate, but “it was immediately hush hush” and she suddenly becomes “Marriageable Mary” (28). In her diary Mary describes Joseph as an “old, nerdy looking” (15) and a “sorry schlump” guy (15). He has been interested in her but she does not pay much attention and she only flirts with Joseph to make Jeremiah jealous. Several times, watching Mary from a distance, Joseph tries to warn her about Jeremiah but she is too much in love and too young to take into account his warnings. When Mary’s father Joachim tells her that he has given her to Joseph, she refuses saying that she is not in love with him but her mother says marriage has nothing to do with love. Although Mary thinks that “I need to be resourceful if I don’t want to get married off to some old fart” (11), when she gets pregnant, she starts to see Joseph as a prospect.

To save herself from stoning, Mary decides to write a letter in which she explains to Joseph that that she is visited by an angel during the night and she is told that she would be visited by the Holy Spirit and she will be pregnant. The angel tells her that she will have a son and she should call him Jesus. Then looking at her letter and her story, Mary asks to herself: “Pretty good, huh? Angels are all the rage these days. I used my best grammar and most artistic calligraphy. I will send it over to Joseph’s this afternoon. Maybe he’ll come over to have me read it to him tonight. For the first time, I can’t wait to see him!” (41). As observed, since Mary is literate, she could use the power of language to set up her own truth thanks to her mother’s insistence on her education. Thus, Sobat, in her telling of the Marian myth, upsets the gender roles. As suggested throughout this present study, it is always the male-inscribed texts that define women and tell their stories. Here, Mary becomes the author and Joseph is the passive recipient of

this “truth”. Sobat’s portrayal of Mary challenges the conventional gender roles and questions the patriarchal ownership and the authorship of the text, in this case, the Bible. In other words, Sobat writes back to the “ur-text” and she presents a female-oriented version of the Annunciation.

With her version of the Annunciation, Mary is relieved, happy and proud of herself. Yet, Mary realizes that she misses one point in her plan about the visitation of the angel and the announced birth of her son Jesus; to quote Mary: “Thank you for my son. Holy shit!!! What if it’s a girl?” (45). Mary’s mother Anne does not believe a word of her story, she slaps her and asks: “What do you take me for? A fool?” (42). However in the end, she also collaborates with her story to save her daughter. Together, they make Mary’s father Joachim and Joseph believe that this is really a divine intervention. Mary says that the moment they tell both men is the “performance of a lifetime” (43). And she continues as follows: “I read the letter. Shaky voice and all. I lifted my face up to heaven and fell to my knees. I even cried. But my mother! She was the best. As I knelt, she leapt to my side, embraced me and began weeping with me. “Truly this is a miracle! A blessing upon our houses! Wise and powerful is God”. And then we prayed, two weeping, kneeling, wailing women” (43). Joseph is confused and numb with the news but then seeing Mary and Anne, he also kneels and starts to pray. Later, Mary learns that her mother has fed her father with “enough wine to convince him of my “miraculous” pregnancy” (44). Coupled with her mother, this witty and clever heroine of *The Book of Mary* is in stark contrast to the docile and meek Virgin Mary.

In *The Book of Mary*, unlike the unnatural pregnancy of the Virgin, Mary goes through a normal pregnancy with physical changes and discomforts. On their way to Bethlehem for the census, Mary complains:

Every ten minutes I have to pee. Do you think it’s easy to ride with a full bladder on an ass? ...You try squatting to pee at nine months pregnant. I’ve stopped caring how I aim. I’ve pissed down all down my legs and over my sandals.

I am exhausted.... I'm due any moment. I can barely sleep at night. God, my back aches. And Joseph's snoring!!! (49)

As the quotation illustrates, Sobat rewrites Mary just like any other pregnant women. When her labour starts, she has labour pains almost a day and she has to give birth, away from her mother and home, only with Joseph by her side. Mary writes that when she delivers the baby, they are all covered in blood and sweat. Mentioned briefly above, according to the Church doctrine, the Virgin Mary is exempt from the pains of childbearing that is given as a punishment to women for Eve's transgression. To quote once again, God declares in Genesis: "I will multiply your pains in childbirth. You shall give birth to your children in pain. You will long for your husband, but he will lord it over you." (3, 17-19). Then for many women, the Virgin Mary is foreign in the way that she is stripped from the regularities of a woman's body and turned into a sterile, abstract concept. In *The Book of Mary*, even after being a mother, Mary does not deny her sexuality. She longs for Jeremiah; she misses their passionate love making. On the other hand, she calls making love to Joseph a "conjugal duty". She feels that she owes this since he saved her and her child's life (62). In the novel, Mary unites with Jeremiah in her elder years and she writes that they celebrate "love and life" and reclaiming her body and desires, she says: "I am a woman with a woman's passion" (82). Defying the patriarchal idea that sex is filthy and sinful, in Sobat's work, Mary expresses and experiences her femininity throughout her life.

In Sobat's rewriting the patriarchal norms and expectations that confine women to the traditional roles of wife and mother are commented upon. In her marriage with Joseph, Mary has to fight for her individuality and autonomy. For instance, during their stay in Egypt, Mary learns the art of medicine and herbs. Yet, Joseph tells her to stop practicing the art of herbal lore, and calls her mentors Magda and Izel as witches. He tells Mary to follow the models of Biblical matriarchs like Ruth and Esther. Mary however refuses to lead a life imposed on her and she replies as: "I live my own life, not that prescribed by dead and buried prophets and martyrs! I aim to stay alive, Joseph. To keep my family alive. And to take care of others who need care" (73). Throughout their marriage, Mary tries to

change Joseph's mind about knowledge but Joseph has already made up his mind about the relationship between women and knowledge. In one of their confrontations, Joseph, mirroring the Church's understanding of Eve, declares that: "Eve wanted knowledge and look where it got us" (73). Despite all the opposition from her husband, Mary continues to read the works of Aristotle and Hippocrates and tries to learn more. In contrast to Joseph, Mary holds another opinion of Eve and she writes that: "I know it is dangerous for a woman to know such things. I don't care. I am hungry to know. Like Eve. No wonder she reached for that forbidden fruit. Wouldn't any woman reach if such a prize dangled tantalizingly before her? Grab it with both her hands" (75). When the family finally settles in Nazareth for good, she establishes "a house of cures" called Wellhouse to help the sick, fallen and marginalized. Even then Joseph does not understand why she is not satisfied with just being a mother and a wife but after seeing Mary's resistance he learns to keep his distance.

In *The Book of Mary*, in addition to the discussion of gender roles, gender identities are also deconstructed. Sobat reimagines one of Mary's daughters as a gay woman. Ann shaves her head, she has tattoos and piercing and she wants to be called Andrew. At first, Mary is confused; she does not know how to interpret her acts. And when she is told by a friend that her daughter loves women, she panics and she tries to change her daughter's mind. The difficulties she might face and the possible excommunication she might experience, frighten Mary. As one of the healers in the Wellhouse says: "it is a struggle in a world that doesn't accept deviance. There is nothing harder than defying tradition. There is nothing lonelier" (152). While Mary reflects upon her talk with Anna, she realizes that she uses the word "forbidden" referring to lesbianism. Then she tells herself: "Forbidden has been the theme of my life. Why now did I think of my daughter as transgressor?" (152). After deep introspection, with the acquired wisdom, Mary learns to respect Anna's choice of defining and experiencing herself.

Sobat in her retelling attempts to destabilize the authority of the Bible. In her version, Mary records that Jesus was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May not on 24<sup>th</sup> of December. Actually, the traditional Nativity scene iconography with newborn

lambs in the manger that is seen in churches and religious art also gives the impression that it is spring time. By the same token, Warner notes that there is no mention of a stable in the gospels and she adds that manger which comes from the Greek *thaten* can be translated as “crib” (13). She also argues that there is no reference in the Bible to the traditional Christmas story that the family is refused by the innkeeper and given a place at the corner of the stable. Warner writes:

It requires a herculean effort of will to read Luke’s infancy Gospel and blot from the imagination all the paintings and sculptures, carols and hymns and stories that add to Luke’s spare meditation of the hay and the snow and the smell of animals’ warm bodies as the Christ child was born that first Christmas night. Yet none of this circumstantial detail- with the exception of the swaddling bands- is present in the text. It is all the collective inheritance of western fantasy”. (1983, 13-14).

In the same manner, Sobat’s Mary writes that Jesus’ immortality is “just a story” that she makes up (55) or “a wild story” (56) surprisingly many people including her own son Jesus believes in.

Unlike the Bible where she is secondary and owes her significance to her son, *The Book of Mary* is Mary’s story and here, Jesus has a secondary role. As mentioned earlier, Mary in the Bible and in the Christian tradition gains recognition and importance not due to her own individual characteristics but because she is *Theotokos* (The Mother of God). In Sobat’s retelling, on the contrary, Jesus’ story is at the background. Mary believes that Jesus has been spoiled by Joseph and the rest of the family since he was a boy. When he bullies his sister, Mary asks him to go and apologize from her, but he refuses saying he is the “Son of God”. Seeing him insisting that he is the son of God, Mary explains to him:

In a sense, just as Sol is a daughter of God. Just as I am. But to lord it over your sister... or your mother... is not right. It is not what I want from you. It is not what your father expects of you. All children are gifts and you are precious to us. But I want you to forget the notion that you are God’s Chosen Son. I want you to treat Sol and me and your Papa and the children and the mothers in Wellhouse with kindness”. (89)



For Mary, then, her son is not special in any way. He is a miracle of life like any other soul and she does not hesitate to call him “little bastard” when he makes her angry (106). Unlike the Mary of the Bible who is fully devoted to her son and one of his most devout followers, Mary of this book does not believe that he is the Son of God. Consequently, they are estranged and as Mary writes: “He has slammed the door of his heart” (168). Even when they work out their difference, Mary does not accept that Jesus is a Messiah (Savior). When people start to call him Messiah and ask for his blessing, she refuses to see her son as “holy”. She states that: “He is my son. A good man. A carpenter, healer, gardener. A sometime fisherman, a sometime shepherd. A husband and brother. A teacher. But not the Messiah” (147). For Mary, all these attributes are good enough to be a human being, a miracle of life, he does not need to have any supernatural characteristics. Hence, Sobat portrays a “human” Jesus. Moreover, Mary is also depicted as a compassionate, yet normal, mother who worries about her children’s wellbeing and cares about them. To illustrate, in her letters to Jesus she writes: “I didn’t like the sound of that cough. Find an innkeeper, a woman who can cook up some chicken soup. I love Mary, but she cannot cook to save her soul. Eat your greens” (189) or “Would it kill you to visit your mother?” (203). In addition, she is jealous of Jesus’ affection for Mary Magdalene, just like any mother who is afraid of losing her son to another woman. In her journal, it is written: “Jesus has found a new soulmate. And I am sad it is not me. I wonder if other mothers feel as I do now. Mary talks to Jesus in such earnest. She listens. She has taught him to laugh again. I should be grateful... I am a foolish woman” (121). Then, just like young Mary, mother Mary is also portrayed as a character that shares many similar concerns with women. In this way, women can identify and establish solidarity through her.

In Sobat’s work, unlike the Virgin Mary that is placed on a pedestal as an isolated object of veneration, Mary is portrayed as a member of women’s community. She declares that as: “Women. The Mortar of my Life” (248). As opposed to the male-dominated Church, in *The Book of Mary*, the notion of sisterhood is emphasized. For instance, when Mary learns that she is pregnant, she

goes to Jezebel, the owner of the nightclub, for advice. Jezebel then introduces her to a secret community that is called Sisters of Eastern Star. She explains to Mary this sorority is composed of “women to help women. Wherever you go you dedicate your life to helping your Sisters” (37). Through Jezebel, Mary meets Izel from whom she learns the art of healing and midwifery. Izel also initiates Mary to the sisterhood and she tells her: “Always we seek to help women and their children. We are, after all, a Sisterhood. Women alone are powerless. But together we have more power than men of power care to admit... Many of us live on the margins of towns with outlaws, whores, lepers. In this way are we safe” (67). Thus, Izel summarizes the marginalized position of women in a patriarchal society. Following this revelation, Mary becomes a healer and through her life she dedicates herself to the welfare of women in need. Her Wellhouse becomes a refuge for pregnant women, prostitutes, single mothers and lepers. In other words, those who cannot find a place in the patriarchal world are given sanctuary in Mary’s house.

Sobat juxtaposes Sisters of the Eastern Star with Jesus and his disciples that preach the patriarchal religion of Yahweh and who have a visible disdain for women. During their stay at Wellhouse with Jesus, Mary confronts them and calls them a bunch of “parasites” as they dry up all the resources of Wellhouse and expect all women to serve and provide for them. In her journal, she pens:

Could that thick-as-a-rock Peter or that Janus-faced Judas pick up a hammer and nails and lend a hand? ...How about if Levi the tax collector collected his own garbage and picked up after himself once in a while? Do lazy Phillip and pallid Bartholomew minister in their sleep? Because it seems, if left to themselves, they’d snore away the sunlit hours. Every morning it is Hagar’s tedious task to rouse the two slackers? ...I am tired of Thomas sniggering at the women, especially at shy Delilah, whom he fancies but hasn’t a clue how to woo. I doubt if he has a civil tongue in his head. She is too good for him, at any rate. (225)

After Crucifixion, Mary also notes that none of the disciples try to save Jesus. Talking to her dead son through her journal, Mary identifies all of them as power hungry men “talking miracles and visions since your death. Reciting your final

words. Writing it all down like big important men” (242). She also writes that Paul, who becomes the spokesperson of the Movement, attributes all his ideas against love and women to Jesus to justify them. Hence, Mary comments on the political and the ideological nature of early Christianity and how it is institutionalized in the hands of men reflecting their misogyny.

In *The Book of Mary*, Mary also expresses her frustration with Judaism, the patriarchal religion of her community. Once, she writes that when she is in the synagogue, she feels that she does not belong there. Listening to Rabbi behind the screens reserved for woman so that they are not seen by men, she realizes that the sermon does not touch her heart; she cannot find anything to identify with the place and the language. Then she wonders: “What in this place of worship speaks to me? Where do I belong in a faith wherein the men thank you [God] daily that they were not born women?”<sup>35</sup> (98). Through her life, Mary confronts God; she questions him, she defies him and in a moment of desperation she cries out:

Where are you God? Damn you! When I most need you. Yahweh! There I’ve said your name. Aloud. I’ve written it. And no thunder-clap has come to claim me. You cannot and will not stop my tongue. Or my stylus. I’ve got things to say. Lots of things. Lots of questions, too. Beginning with- why did you put love in my heart if I’m not meant to be with the one I love? Why give me passion if I’m to quell it? Why give me a mind, if I’m not to use it? Why did you make women if we matter so little in this, your world? (38- 39)

In one of her letters to Jesus, she also writes that she has problems with the concept of male God and she suspects that her idea of Yahweh is not the same with the one Jesus is teaching. She writes:

I’m not even sure Yahweh is a “he”, Jesus. Who claims so but men? Who writes the stories? I am suspicious. I am even suspicious of the laws, while I try to respect and follow most of them. As you well know, I disdain the laws that prescribe and restrict women’s actions and prohibit our participation in the

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<sup>35</sup> The full text of this Morning Prayer is “Blessed are you, Hashem, King of the Universe, for not having made me a Gentile. Blessed are you, Hashem, King of the Universe, for not having made me a slave. Blessed are you, Hashem, King of the Universe, for not having made me a woman.” (In Siddur (Jewish prayer Book), 19)

synagogue, in the law, in letters and words. Laws that proclaim us unclean because we menstruate, lactate and conceive and give birth, (189)

For Mary, Yahweh of the Rabbis is “a man-god. A stern father. Forgetful. Inattentive. Capricious, Cruel... The angry father. The tyrannical husband” (206). But she believes that “benediction is love” (203). Enraged for being suppressed and pushed to the margins of the society, Mary creates her own spirituality. When she compares the compassion of women with the anger and ambition of man, at the end she chooses sorority over patriarchy and religion. The last sentences of her gospel read as: “One last thing... Yahweh. I have known many blessings. Much love. Love surrounds me. Buoy me. Drives me onwards. Love is the best theme of my life. Thank you for this love. I don’t understand you, Yahweh. I don’t believe in you. But I forgive you “ (251).

As a stark contrast to the unchanging Virgin Mary, Sobat’s Mary changes; through her journal entries and letters we read how she is transformed into a healer and strong woman from a love-sick girl. At the end of her Gospel, Mary writes that she is leaving Jerusalem for Ephesus, the land of Mother Goddess. She draws attention to the significance of women’s history and tradition and she underlines the importance of passing stories to the next generation of women. She concludes that:

Maybe someday daughters of granddaughters will read, laugh at my follies and learn from my terrible mistakes. Maybe they will recognize themselves in my youth, in my spirit, and think well of Mary of Nazareth. May be, by then, they will be free to write, and think, and act, and they too, will have marvellous stories of their own to tell. To remember. To keep alive the spirit of woman and of being a woman in a man’s world”. (250)

In conclusion, Sobat in *The Gospel of Mary* employing the contemporary discourse and juxtaposing the historical tale of Mary of Nazareth with the timeless issues of womanhood weaves a subversive, provocative and witty tale. Contrary to the Virgin Mary who is robbed of femininity and motherhood, Sobat’s Mary becomes a soul sister for women all around the world.

## 5.2 Michèle Roberts' *The Wild Girl*

British novelist Michèle Roberts' third novel *The Wild Girl* is a retelling of Mary Magdalene's life. The novel is the imaginary gospel of Mary Magdalene in which she recounts her early life, her love affair with Jesus and her encounters with him and the apostles. Mary Magdalene has been an enigmatic and controversial figure like Mary of Nazareth. After Jesus' mother, the second most important female figure of the New Testament, Mary Magdalene has been interpreted and presented as a redeemed sinner by the Christian Church. The traditional conception of her has been that of a prostitute. According to this interpretation, after hearing Jesus' teaching, she repents her sinful past; she becomes his follower and devotes her life to him. Throughout centuries, parallel to this image, Mary Magdalene has been delineated as a penitent prostitute in the history of art and culture. For instance, masters including Titian, Bernini, El Greco, Rubens and Caravaggio drew Mary Magdalene as a beautiful woman with long, loose hair, almost semi-naked and in deep contemplation with a skull and sometimes with a cross by her side. Likewise, in the movies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example in Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* she is also depicted as a repentant prostitute. In Martin Scorsese' adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis' provocative novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Mary Magdalene is the village whore. Similarly, in Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Weber's rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Mary Magdalene is presented as the former prostitute. On the other hand, in the contemporary popular fiction like *The Da Vinci Code*, she is the wife of Jesus who gives birth to his child and for female oriented spiritual communities, Mary Magdalene is the personification of the sacred feminine, a reflection of the Mother Goddess. Jane Schaberg in her study *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* aptly observes that: "No other biblical figure- including Judas and perhaps even Jesus- has had such a vivid and bizarre post-biblical life in the human imagination, in legend, and in art"(68). Likewise, about the myriad representations of Mary

Magdalene throughout history, Elaine Pagels, professor of religion from Princeton University, writes that:

Who was she, that elusive--and fascinating-- woman in the circle around Jesus of Nazareth? For nearly two thousand years, Mary Magdalene has lived in the imagination of Christians as a seductive prostitute; in our own time, contemporary fiction pictures her as Jesus' lover and wife, mother of his children. Yet the earliest sources that tell of Mary Magdalene--both within the New Testament and outside of it—do not describe either of these sexualized roles, suggesting that the woman herself, and how we have come to see her, is more complex than most of us ever imagined. Was she, then, one of Jesus' followers, whose wealth helped support him, as the earliest New Testament gospel, the Gospel of Mark, says? A madwoman who had been possessed by seven devils, as Luke says? Or Jesus' closest disciple, the one he loved more than any other, as the Gospel of Mary Magdalene tells us? Or, in the words of the Dialogue of the Savior, "the woman who understood all things"? (2007, xv)

As Pagels underlines, the information about Mary Magdalene in the Gospels is contradictory and sparse. Beside, in the canonical Gospels there is no indication that she is a prostitute. A close study of the cult of Mary Magdalene as the redeemed sinner would reveal that it has been constructed and perpetuated by the Christian Church and like Eve or the Virgin Mary before her Mary Magdalene has been set as a model reflecting Church's teaching about women.

The Four Gospels agree that Mary Magdalene is one of Jesus' female followers, she is present at his Crucifixion and she witnesses his resurrection. The Gospel of Mark that is identified as the earliest of all canonical gospels and the source for Luke and Matthew, written around 66 AD, writes that, in the Crucifixion, Jesus is forsaken by his male disciples and only women followers stay at the site. Mark reports that: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome" (15:40) are by the Cross and these women have been his followers and have "ministered unto him" (15:41). When Jesus' body is put in a sepulchre by Joseph of Arimathaea, they are also present. Since the next day is Sabbath, the rest day of the Jews, the body of Christ is placed in a temporary resting place until it is buried outside the city walls. Early in

the morning after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Salome go to the tomb to anoint his body and prepare him for the burial according to the Jewish customs. Yet, arriving at the tomb, they discover that the rock at the mouth of the sepulchre has been moved and a young man clad in long white garment is sitting nearby. The young man tells them to go to the disciples and tell them that Jesus is risen and he waits for them in Galilee. Yet, the women are afraid and they do not say any word to any one. Then Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, “out of whom he had cast seven devils” (16:9) and she shares the good news with other women. They all go and tell the disciples but they do not believe them. Only after Jesus himself appears to the eleven disciples, do they believe his resurrection and Jesus charges them with the mission of spreading his teaching (16:14-20). In Matthew and Luke, the same story is told with minor variations (28:1-17- 24:1-12).

In the Gospel of John, on the other hand, Mary Magdalene has a more prominent role in the Resurrection. Like other Gospel accounts, John also writes that Mary Magdalene is present at the Crucifixion but here Mary Magdalene accompanies Mary, the mother of Jesus and her sister, Mary Cleophas (19:25). After Sabbath, she comes to the sepulchre alone and she sees that the stone at the mouth of the burial chamber is moved. Fearing that the body has been stolen or taken, she runs and finds Peter and tells him and other disciples about the empty sepulchre. The disciples all follow her to the tomb and see that Jesus is risen. According to John, they all leave the site:

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet

ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the LORD, and that he had spoken these things unto her (John 20:11-18).

As the quotation demonstrates, according to the Gospel of John, she is the first witness of Jesus' resurrection and she is given the mission of spreading Jesus' victory over death. Thus she becomes the first apostle or the "apostle of the apostles" (Haskins, 67). After Resurrection, she is not mentioned again in the Bible<sup>36</sup>. As seen, the information about Mary Magdalene is scant and there is no reference to her being a prostitute before meeting Jesus.

Despite the fact that she is generally known as a prostitute or a fallen woman, there is no Biblical reference to support this idea. This reputation of Mary Magdalene actually originates from a 6<sup>th</sup> century sermon by Pope Gregory the Great. He amalgamates three women mentioned in the Bible and identifies them as Mary Magdalene; Luke's sinful woman (7:36-50)<sup>37</sup>, Mary of Bethany<sup>38</sup> (John 11:1-17, 12: 3-8) and Mary Magdalene. The Pope proclaims that Mary Magdalene

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<sup>36</sup> A cult of Mary Magdalene appears in France in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to the local legends, Mary Magdalene, Martha her sister, Lazarus her brother, as well as two other Marys from the Gospels has been washed up on the shores of Provence in a rudderless boat after they had fled persecution in the holy land. It is believed that Mary has retired to a cave in Marseille and she lives a life a penance for thirty years. Her relics were first venerated at the abbey of Vézlay in Burgundy. Then Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume in Provence also establishes a cult and it has attracted many pilgrims who wanted to see the supposed body of Mary Magdalene.

<sup>37</sup> When Jesus is having a supper with a Pharisee called Simon, a woman enters and kneels at Christ's feet and washes them with her tears, dries them with her hair, then anoints them with precious ointment. When the Pharisee says that she is defiling Jesus since "she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39), Jesus turns to him and asks him if a creditor releases one man from a large debt and another from a small one, which man "will love him most?". Simon says that the one with large debt would love him more. Jesus then reminds him that his host has not washed his guest's feet, or kissed them or anointed them with oil. The woman however did, so "her sins which are many, are forgiven, for she loved so much...." (Luke 4:47). This phrase "loved so much" is later identified as a reference to her sins and it is concluded that she is a prostitute. Yet, as Warner notes the verb *diligere*, to love and *agapo* in Greek has no sexual connotations (1983, 226). Matthew and Mark also tell the same story but in their version, the woman is not named as a sinner and she anoints Jesus' head instead of his feet (Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-8). The disciples tell her that to use the expensive oil is a waste since this money could be spent on another good cause. Then Jesus defends the woman saying: "For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she has poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial" (Matthew 6:12).

<sup>38</sup> Mary of Bethany is the sister of Martha and Lazarus and when Jesus visits the family she anoints his feet with expensive perfume and wipes his feet with her own hair (John 11:2, 12:3).



is an adulteress and a repentant prostitute and she has been redeemed by Jesus. In addition, he argues that the seven demons that Jesus casts away present seven deadly sins. The invention of the character of Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute has been a process and the misogynistic view of the early Church fathers is reflected in the sermon of Pope Gregory. All the common threads in the Gospel stories about three Marys: the anointment, the hair and the weeping are brought together and a totally different female figure is created. The Greek Church always distinguishes the three Marys but in the West after the sermon of Pope Gregory the Great, this representation of Mary Magdalene has dominated the Western theology, culture and art.

The Gnostic Gospels on the other hand portray Mary Magdalene in a totally different light than the Bible and the Church's interpretation of her. *Gnosis* means knowledge in Greek. In 1945 along the valley of the Nile River, in a village called Nag Hammadi, fragmentary papyrus manuscripts are found in a large earthenware jar by chance. These texts are the Coptic translations of works that had originally been written in Greek. Dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, these texts are denounced as heretical by the Archbishop of Alexandria and they present a radically different Christianity. These acanonical texts offer an alternative perspective on Jesus and notions of sin, truth, death and salvation. In the Gnostic Gospels, the presence and the authority of women around Jesus is observed. It is mentioned that in addition to 12 male disciples, Jesus has 7 women disciples (Acocella, 52). Moreover, in these texts the body is not seen interpreted as the source of evil and sin and instead of an institutionalized church authority, personal reflection and discovering the divine within are preached. God is described as having both masculine and feminine aspects and the union of male and female element in oneself is stressed to achieve divine wisdom. The publication of these gospels has had a tremendous impact on Biblical scholarship. Elaine Pagels in her book *Gnostic Gospels* explains the significance of these texts as:

Christians of every persuasion look back to the primitive church to find a simpler, purer form of Christian faith. In the apostles' time, all members of the Christian community shared their money and property; all believed the same teaching, and

worshipped together; all revered the authority of the apostles. It was only after that golden age that conflict, then heresy emerged: so says the author of the Acts of the Apostles, who identifies himself as the first historian of Christianity. But the discoveries at Nag Hammadi have upset this picture. If we admit that some of these fifty-two texts represent early forms of Christian teaching, we may have to recognize that early Christianity is far more diverse than nearly anyone expected before the Nag Hammadi discoveries. (1989, 20-21)

These texts then illustrate that there is not a unified concept of Christianity and they challenge the monolithic authority of the Bible, thus the Church.

In the Gnostic Gospels, a different conception of Mary Magdalene is observed. In these texts, she is the “foremost disciple” that is closest to Jesus and understands his teaching better than anyone else (Pagels 2007, xviii). For instance, the *Pistis Sophia*, dated to early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, is a long dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. Here, Jesus answers the questions that are put forth by his disciples and out of the 64 questions, 39 are asked by a woman that is referred to as Mary or Mary Magdalene and she is depicted as the leading disciple and a great spiritual figure. In the *Pistis Sophia*, Jesus says to Mary: “Mary thou blessed one, whom I will perfect in all mysteries of those of the height, discourse in openness, thou, whose heart is raised to the kingdom of heaven more than all thy brethren” (17). *The Gospel of Phillip* also names her Jesus’ companion: “The companion of the Savior is Mary of Magdala. The Savior loved her more than all disciples, and he kisses her often on the mouth. The other disciples said to him, “Why do you love her more than all of us?” (63, 30). In this gospel, Mary Magdalene is defined as the feminine aspect of God and the personification of the divine wisdom.

The Gnostic Gospels also highlight the tension between Peter and Mary Magdalene and the jealousy of the disciples of her privileged status in the eyes of Jesus. For instance in the *Gospel of Mary* that is ascribed generally to Mary Magdalene Peter says to Mary: “Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than all other women. Tell us the words of the Savior that you remember, the things you know that we don’t because we haven’t heard of them” Mary responded, “I will teach you about what is hidden from you.” And she began to

“speak these words to them (10, 1-10)”. In this Gospel, Mary is challenged by Andrew and Peter since they don’t want to accept her ministry just because she is a woman:

Andrew responded, addressing the brothers and sisters, “Say, what you will about the things she has said, but I don’t believe that the Savior said these things, for indeed these teaching are strange ideas.” Peter responded, bringing up similar concerns. He questioned them about the Savior, “Did he, then, speak with a woman in private without our knowing about it?” Are we turn around and listen to her? Did he choose her over us?”. (17:10, 11)

Hearing these comments, Mary weeps and asks Peter whether he thinks that she makes up the things she teaches and attributes them to Jesus. Then Levi defends Mary saying: “Peter, you have always been a wrathful person. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. For if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then for your part to reject her? Assuredly the Savior’s knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us” (17:13). In a similar vein, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, Simon Peter asserts that: “Mary should leave us, for females are not worthy of life” (114). As illustrated in all the gospels above, the apostles, especially Peter, challenge and oppose the presence of women among the disciples and he sees Mary Magdalene as a rival.

When Jesus dies, he does not leave a formal organization. The patriarchal and hierarchical church as an institution develops through time and as reflected in the writing of early Church fathers, women’s position and their right to hold the position of authority has been a major issue of debate. Despite the fact that in the Gospels Jesus displays equanimity regarding genders<sup>39</sup> and he has women in his entourage, the early Church adopts a misogynistic view of women. Consequently, the tradition of strong female models is erased and women are demeaned and

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<sup>39</sup> In the famous scene called “woman taken into adultery”, when people want to stone a woman said to be an adulteress, Jesus says: “So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 4:4-42). Also Jesus has his longest exchange with a woman in the Bible and he reveals himself as a Messiah first to this Samaritan woman who has had five husbands. Jesus thus breaks a cultural taboo; he speaks with a woman in public and since Samaritans are considered outcasts in Jewish thought, she is a doubly marginalized figure in the eyes of people. Yet, he talks to her, venerates her and drinks her water (John 4:3-42).

silenced. Since the status of Mary Magdalene, manifested in the Gnostic Gospels, as the apostle of the apostles would directly challenge the male-dominated church and the authority that is vested on male autonomy, she is shunted aside and the sources that emphasize her ministry and role have been excluded from the New Testament canon. Finally by the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, with the sermon of Pope Gregory, Mary Magdalene is transformed into a repentant prostitute. Jane Schaberg identifies this process as “harlotization” of Mary Magdalene (9) and she writes: “The pattern is a common one the powerful woman disempowered, remembered as a whore or whorish” (78). Mary Magdalene thus becomes the symbol of repentance and the name ‘Magdalene’ is given to the asylums for the reclamation of prostitutes (Baring and Cashford, 587). Then it can be suggested, in the light of the information above, Mary Magdalene, similar to the Virgin Mary, is a product of Church’s mythmaking endeavour. She is a fallen woman but after renouncing her body and choosing the life of a hermit to repent she becomes a saint. In other words, in order to be revered, she has to give away her sexuality and womanhood. Hence, she is used to justify the Church’s association of women with flesh, sin and death. As Marina Warner underlines: “St. Mary Magdalene, together with the Virgin Mary, typifies Christian society’s attitudes to women and to sex. Both female figures are perceived in sexual terms: Mary as a virgin and Mary Magdalene as a whore- until her repentance” (1983, 225) and a few pages later she notes that: “Together, the Virgin and the Magdalene form a diptych of Christian patriarchy’s idea of woman. There is no place in the conceptual architecture of Christian society for a single woman who is neither a virgin, nor a whore” (1983, 235). Mary Magdalene then in the hands of the Church becomes “a manageable, controllable figure and effective weapon and instrument of propaganda against her own sex” (Haskins, 94). Although the Second Vatican Council removes the prostitute label in 1969 after much debate that there is more than one Mary in the Bible and that Mary of Magdalene and the unnamed sinner are two different figures, it is not easy to destabilize her mythic portrait that has been perpetuated for hundreds of years in different media.

Susan Haskins in her study of Mary Magdalene asks: “Nietzsche wrote that every culture needed myth and was impoverished when it lost or lacked myth. In losing the myth of Mary Magdalene, however, has not our culture not only nothing to lose, but also everything to gain?” (400). In this line of thought, Michèle Roberts in her book *The Wild Girl* attempts to deconstruct the image of Mary Magdalene established by the Church. In the Author’s Note, Roberts explains that: “The gospels, Sara Maitland has remarked, (*A Map of New Country*, RKP, 1983) “are not simple reportage but the first attempts at theology”. A narrative novel creates a myth, in the same way: I wanted to dissect a myth; I found myself at the same time recreating one (7).”

In her rewriting of Mary Magdalene’s life, Roberts draws from the Gospels, the traditional French legends and myths about Mary Magdalene’s coming to France and above all the *Gnostic Gospels*. Roberts’ portrayal of Mary Magdalene heavily relies on the Mary Magdalene of the Gnostic Gospels and she interweaves the biblical and Gnostic sources rather than juxtaposing them. Robert thus aims to fill the gaps in these texts and to compose an account of Mary Magdalene’s life from a female-oriented perspective. In an interview, Roberts clarifies her opinion of the patriarchal nature of the Church and she explains the reason of her engagement with the stories of women from the history of Christianity in her works as follows:

Yes, you see I think the Church has been an institution of great oppression to women. Of course, to men too. I really don’t think the Church gave much to women at all. But since we have had the Church for centuries and the history of being a human being, of woman in this case, was connected to the history of the Church, that’s what we have to battle. So, I think my attitude is that I’m telling stories about women who fight back, who might be crushed by the Church in some ways, but might find ways, even through the Church, to fight back. But it’s not that the Church liberates women. The Church, I think, is misogynistic and oppressive and terrible. The Catholic Church is a force of dreadfulness in history, but women are very clever. They fight back. They become heretics. They involve themselves in alternative religions. They become poets. There is a long tradition of mystical writing by women: poetry and prose which

resists the Church and proposes alternatives. Fantastic and powerful stuff (Garcia Sanchez, 140)

As indicated above, Roberts aims to challenge the Church's misogynistic representations of women. To this end, instead of distinguishing different Marys in the Gospels, in her retelling of Mary Magdalene's story, Roberts adopts the Church's amalgamation of three women into one; Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, the unnamed reformed sinner who washes Jesus' feet and dries and anoints them with precious balm and Mary Magdalene the witness of Resurrection.

As the title suggests, Roberts subverts the patriarchal ideal of subservient woman in her work. In her Gospel, Mary Magdalene writes that when her mother dies, she runs away "from the authority of the men of my own village" (14). Yet, on the road she falls into the hands of other men. She encounters a group of merchants and when she asks them to take her to Jerusalem, on her first night on the road, they rape her: "One after another. There were four of them. I fought and shrieked, but desisted when a knife was held to my throat. There was only one sort of woman, they told me, who roamed about boldly and alone" (15). Therefore, it is suggested that there is no place for a woman outside the confines of her father's or her husband's house. If a woman defies those borders that are drawn for her by the society and does not conform to the patriarchal way of life, she is regarded as a "wild beast, in need of taming" (15). Mary Magdalene however interprets this traumatic experience as a way to freedom; she says: "I was brutalized but I was freed" (15). She thinks that since she is raped and not a virgin anymore, then no "honourable men" would marry her (15). Mary Magdalene refuses to belong to any patriarchal institution of authority. Hence, she decides to be "wild". Thereby, the patriarchal dichotomy of respectable versus wild woman is demystified.

After the rape incident, her journey takes Mary Magdalene to Alexandria, rather than Jerusalem. In this city, she dresses like a young boy as her experience on the road teaches her that there is no freedom of travel or mobility for a single woman. Here, she meets Sibylla, a *heteria* (prostitute), who takes her under her

wings and teaches her how to write. Sibylla also introduces her to different schools of Greek philosophy, history and music. Spending four years in her house and getting an education that she is denied because of her gender, Mary Magdalene notices that despite her knowledge, there is no other profession for Sibylla even in this cosmopolitan city since she is not married or under any kind of male guardianship. Mary Magdalene writes: “Necessity drove her to it since she was not married and had no way of becoming so. If I were to stay in Alexandria, an unmarried woman, necessity would dictate that I should behave as she did” (23-24). Therefore, she decides to go back to her hometown Magdala. Yet on her return, she sees that after the death of their father all their wealth is gone. Her sister Martha takes care of the house and her brother Lazarus is an alcoholic. Mary realizes that she needs to support them but since there is no way of making money for a woman outside the house, she starts to practice prostitution.

In *The Wild Girl*, Michèle Roberts reimagines Mary Magdalene and Jesus as lovers and she portrays a human Jesus rather than the son of God or God himself. When Jesus and his disciples come to stay at their house, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Lazarus are all affected by his charismatic character and his teaching. Mary writes her first impression of Jesus as follows: “I looked at the man who was speaking. He seemed to me quite ugly, with the lined face and a big nose, a slightly hunched back. Then I became aware of his energy that poured from his eyes and his wide mouth, from the set of his long limbs” (33). Mary then recognizes that he has a feminine side and this feature of his character makes him an extraordinary and inspiring teacher and individual: “He had the grace of a woman. The way he bent forward and listened, the way he used his hands, letting them point and fall and gesticulate, seemed to me the way of a woman; the way he leaned his head first on one side and then the other, the way he reclined at will, letting his arms drop and his mouth relax, was utterly feminine” (33). As a stark contrast to the Bible, in which femininity is associated with evil, darkness, death and sin, here the feminine features of his character help him to communicate with

both gender and influence people. Femininity then is interpreted not as a curse or condemnation but as a merit.

Besides, as briefly mentioned above in the discussion of the Gnostic Gospels, the union of male and female elements is the way to achieve wisdom and salvation. Likewise, in *The Wild Girl*, Jesus teaches that one can reach God only by experiencing both the male and the feminine side, he says: “You must remember that you can know God only when you know parts of yourself and let them together, the light of the Father married to the darkness of the Mother” (63). Moreover, echoing the Genesis Chapter of the Bible, Roberts’ Gospel of Mary Magdalene writes that: “In the beginning, there was a unity, and so there were no words. Creation began. First of all, one made two. And so it takes two to make one” (123). Therefore it can be suggested that in contrast to the patriarchal hierarchy that privileges man over woman, in Gnostic Gospels and in *The Wild Girl*, man and woman do not constitute a dichotomy but a unity.

In addition, unlike the asexual prophetic Jesus of the Bible, in *The Wild Girl*, Jesus is drawn as an ordinary man. After Mary Magdalene washes his feet with her tears and dries them, Jesus praises her hair. Mary coyly admits that she dyes them with henna and chamomile. Jesus says, roaring with laughter: “Mary, Mary, do you think I don’t know that? I am not totally ignorant of women as you suppose” (43). This representation is a radical subversion of the later Church’s preaching of asceticism as the ideal state. In *The Wild Girl*, sexuality is not in opposition to spirituality. Actually, it is regarded as a manifestation of it. Mary Magdalene through the “sacred union” experiences her body and this bodily union is a way of contacting her psyche. In other words, the sacred is experienced with the way of the physical union:

They became one: I no longer knew what was inside and what was outside, where he ended and I began, only that our bones and flesh and souls were suddenly woven up together in a great melting and pouring ... I pierced through the barrier of shadow, and was no longer an I, but part of a great whirl of light that throbbed and rang with music ... I was pulled back by the sound of my own voice whispering words I did not understand: this is the resurrection and the life. (67)



Then, compared to resurrection, the physical union is a victory of life over death.

In the gospel of Mary Magdalene, parallel to the Gnostic Gospels, the relationship of Jesus and Mary is a companionship based on trust and understanding and above all they are equals. After they make love, Mary writes that:

Jesus forgave me nothing, because he said there was nothing to forgive. Nor was he afraid of me. Instead he praised me, singling out as beautiful all the parts of my body I always thought others despised: my height, my leanness, my long back, my long toes, my unruly hair, my broad shoulders, my stubby nose. He told me I was courageous and strong, with a gift for loving and for happiness, and I believed him and thought I might grow to be so, and he listened seriously to everything I said. He made me rock with laughter at his jokes. He played with me, and we were children and animals together. We gave each other new names, as lovers do, foolish ones that grew out of the jokes we made together and out of the pleasure that we had. (45)

Even though, Roberts reimagines Mary Magdalene as a prostitute in the way the Church does, through the words of Jesus, she states that Mary has nothing to repent for. In contrast to the Church for whom Mary Magdalene is a penitent sinner, in this rewriting, her courage, strength and her gift of loving are underlined. Moreover, the body is not seen as the source of sin and something to be denied, but as Jesus asserts “the body is the mirror of soul” (73).

As in the Gnostic Gospels, the Apostle Peter in *The Wild Girl* is also the representative of patriarchy. Simon Peter expresses his disapproval of Mary Magdalene openly in the book. Foreshadowing the teaching of the coming Church, he preaches self-denial and chastity and he regards women as “unclean” and a “gateway to evil and to death” and he is against having women in their circle (62). He confronts Jesus when he kisses Mary Magdalene and argues that kissing is “abomination” (62). Yet, for Jesus sensual love is also a way of expressing affection and he says:

So, Simon, be like Mary, for she is trying to join the male to the female inside herself, and to break down the boundaries between what is above and what is below, and what is inside and what is

outside, and to become whole. ... You must do the same for yourself: first you must know what is male, and what is above, and what is outside, and then you must learn from the woman how to join her and become whole, as Mary is learning from me and I from her. (61-62)

Roberts in her rewriting thus deconstructs the male symbolic order in which the feminine is regarded as “inside” and below thus associated with the body while the masculine that is “above” and “outside” thus linked with the transcendent spirit. After Jesus’ death, Simon Peter wants to shun Mary Magdalene and she writes her disappointment as: “There was no mother. There was no unity. The dream of harmony shattered into pieces like an earthenware jar thrown across the floor of my room. A clay envelope broken, the edges of true words jagged and sharp, incomprehensible. And no healing unguent to flow out and heal me. Just odd words in pieces. Fragmented memories and desires.” (179). Consequently, Mary Magdalene is denied any place or status in the early Church and her voice is silenced. Yet, Mary, mother of Jesus, supports her and urges her to write down her Gospel, her own version of Jesus’ teaching (113).

As an alternative to the patriarchal conception of the world in the Bible, in *The Wild Girl*, Mary Magdalene dreams the creation of the world. In this alternative Genesis, Mary sees the feminine part of God that is called Sophia (Wisdom). Sophia has a son who forgets that he is the product of male and female aspects of God and he starts to believe that he has created himself. Sophia names him Ignorance (82). Ignorance voices the condemnation of women and the conception of women expressed by the early Church fathers: “You are a woman damned by your desires and by your freedom, he hissed: you are nature, matter, temptation, death and putrefaction. Through you, and through the product of your cursed body, men know death... (101). Jesus interprets Mary’s dream as a warning about the consequences of ignoring the duality of God:

Men have forgotten the feminine and the darkness, and praise only the masculine and the light. The children of Ignorance are the adversaries of God because they prevent the man and the woman from living out the fullness of God. The children of Ignorance perpetuate a false creation, a world in which one side

of knowledge is stifled, in which barriers are set up between man and woman, body and soul, civilization and nature. (82)

In the dream, Mary Magdalene also sees that Sophia has a daughter Zoe, “also called Eve of life” (79). Sophia through Eve-Zoe creates the world and Adam and breathes “Wisdom and Soul” into him (79). Then she becomes his mentor and instructs him about the world and the apple she offers to him is the fruit of wisdom and knowledge. In *The Wild Girl*, Roberts through Mary Magdalene’s dreams, challenges the biblical account of the Fall. The conception of women as the source of evil and sin is thus deconstructed. Moreover, the feminine element is placed at the centre of the creation myth. Here Eve/Zoe creates the world. It is suggested that the Fall is not caused by disobedience but by renouncing the Mother and the separation of male and female. This is also underlined in *The Gospel of Phillip* in the Gnostic Gospels: “When Eve was still in Adam death did not exit. When she was separated from him death came into being. If he again becomes complete and attains his former self, death will be no more” (63). Hence, the essential union of male and female elements is once again underlined.

Lastly in Robert’s rewriting, the matrilineal tradition is favored as opposed to the patriarchal Church of Peter and the Apostles. Mary Magdalene writes that after being shunned by the Apostles, she leaves Jerusalem. Together with Salome, her sister Martha and Mary, the mother of Jesus, she goes to France and builds a sanctuary. Here they preach another version of Christianity whose maxim is “love conquers all” (157). Mary Magdalene gives birth to Jesus’ daughter and writes down her gospel in France. Her gospel is later found by one of her granddaughters and the importance of daughters in passing down mothers’ tradition is implied. Therefore, it can be argued that, Roberts, reclaiming the role of the one of granddaughters of Mary Magdalene, takes the threads from the Gnostic Gospels and spins Mary Magdalene’s story and gives her lost and forgotten Voice and Word back.

## CONCLUSION

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."

Muriel Rukeyser "Myth"

This study has approached myths as powerful ideological narratives in the sense that they justify the existing order of things, traditional beliefs, rituals and roles. "One constant rule of mythology" writes Robert Graves, "is whatever happens among the gods above reflects events on earth" (1987, 3). In most cases, the relationships and attitudes which are given mythological sanction are usually reflected in laws and customs. Therefore, this study has argued that myths are one of the foremost sites of ideological construction of individuals; they create gendered subjects, mimic ideological paradigms and furthermore supply literature with subject matters and models which reinforce and perpetuate these norms.

The theoretical framework of this study has illustrated that patriarchy as an ideology is a system of beliefs and ideas that dehumanize women through a restrictive definition of what their "true" role supposedly is and in making sure that they are confined to it. It is also suggested that myth has been a powerful

apparatus for imposing such a definition. Through myths, the universal subordination of women by men is exemplified and justified. Thus, these narratives act as ideological writings and consequently they create an ideological subject. In other words, the gender roles pronounced in these mythical accounts constitute a homogeneous corpus in which the stereotypes are created and asserted. As Schaberg underlines, “Patriarchal images of women were used to blame them, to warn them, to confine them, to undermine their self-confidence and talents, to wipe out their history and to idealize them” (1994, 82).

This study has argued that there is a continuum from Greek myths to the Bible. That is to say, the androcentric gender roles which were set in Greek myths have been recreated later in the Old Testament and the New Testament, thus the male-dominated worldview is established and justified. The analyses of these texts have revealed that the position of power and authority are reserved for men and women are expected to be wives and mothers solely, responsible for home bearing and rearing children. In the myths, parallel to the patriarchal mores, it is also observed that women, rather than being authentic subjects, are treated as commodities to be given away, traded for, sold, taken, owned and possessed. Moreover, this study has suggested that that patriarchy’s preference for docile women created a binary opposition in itself: submissive woman is privileged. Consequently, independent and strong women are marginalized, ostracized or ridiculed and this conception is reflected in myths. As Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics* states, “the image of woman is created by men and fashioned to suit his needs” within the patriarchal system (46).

In this study, it is also underlined that the Greek myths and the Bible have become the foundation of Western literature and the characters and the themes of those epics still continue to be a source of inspiration and the hallmarks of the canonical western literature. Lerner underlines this cultural and religious hegemony as: “Western civilization rests upon the foundation of the moral and religious ideas expressed in the Bible and the philosophy and science developed in Classical Greece” (199). In addition, it is also pointed out that these texts, being male-oriented and male-authored, primarily recount the story of men and largely

record the sorts of socio-historic events in which men are the main actors and conquerors. In other words, the androcentric logic of the roots of Western culture is mirrored in these overtly male-dominated chronicles. Therefore, it is contended that for any feminist reading and rewriting, the study of the representation and the justification of gender roles in these works is vital. To quote Ester Fuchs:

A hermeneutics of resistance is the first step in a process of liberation. As we resist the political messages and as we question the function of the Bible's narrative strategies we loosen the grip of the myth of male supremacy over our consciousness and imagination. No woman is free of this grip, because the biblical narrative has in many ways been inscribed in Western culture and its consumers. To some extent we have become the male-authored texts, and by re-reading the biblical text, one of the most power sources of male-hegemony, we in fact also re-read ourselves. (2003, 7)

Alice Ogden Bellis also writes that: "Stories have been used against women, but stories can also provide tools to use in the struggle for wholeness and dignity" (3). In a similar vein, this study has maintained that writing is a political act and women writers by rewriting and revising myths aim to expose the patriarchal nature of these narratives and by providing alternative accounts they contest the "official versions".

In the analysis of the selected works of fiction for this study, several common points are distinguished: firstly, the authors give voice to the silenced female figures of myths. As mentioned above, Greek myths, epics and the Bible are male-authored texts reflecting the patriarchal interests. For this reason, in these narratives, female figures are marginalized and unvoiced. The silence of women in biblical narratives and Greek myths is "a loud silence", as Ostriker puts it (1993, 41). Women writers then, employing this silence in the texts, weave geocentric versions of myths; Penelope, Cassandra, Dinah, Michal, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene are all given voice to tell their own stories from a feminine perspective. It is also worth underlining that except *The Firebrand* all the works are first person narratives. Reclaiming the voice, these figures become the creator of meaning and they have the authority thus the power of the "Word".

Therefore, it can be suggested that women writers question the notion of power, truth and discourse in their revisions. Moreover with the female narrators, the perspective through which the events are recounted changes; men's stories and their relationship with each other and gods are shifted in favour of women's stories and their relationship with each other. This female-oriented perspective brings along the criticism of the dominant patriarchal system and underlying power structures. For instance in *The Penelopiad*, Penelope demystifies Odysseus' heroic valour by saying that Cyclop Polyphemos was only a one-eyed tavern keeper and the reason for the fight was an unpaid bill. Likewise, in *The Firebrand*, Bradley through Cassandra exposes the brutality of war and questions the heroic code by presenting the heroes of the Trojan War as murderers and rapists. Similarly, the heroic king of the Bible, David, in *Queenmaker*, is portrayed as an ambitious ruler who does not hesitate to manipulate the truths for his own interest and has no qualms to kill his rivals. Furthermore, in *The Red Tent*, Jacob and his sons are portrayed as ruthless slayers who take the advantage of the frail condition of the people of Schechem that are recovering from the circumcision that is imposed on them by Jacob's clan. Likewise, the twelve apostles in *The Book of Mary* are depicted as power hungry men who are good for nothing. These revisions of myths and mythical figures receive many reactions which are not always encouraging. Authors Diamant and Edghill explain in the interviews that many male readers interpret these portrayals as blasphemy. These reactions to the books clearly demonstrate the enduring power of these narratives in the mindset of people.

The other point that is observed in the analysis of the revisions of myths by women authors is that the female protagonists, in addition to reclaiming their voice, are given autonomy in these retellings. Those women that are always defined in relation to men as wives, mothers, slaves, daughters or lovers are presented as individuals. In the rewritings, women characters also change throughout the course of events. They undertake a journey of self-discovery and they learn about themselves and become wiser women at the end of the novels. Therefore, unlike the static and stereotypical representation of women in the male-

authored texts, as a result of the complex portrayals in the rewritings, the women of the Bible and myths gain personality and individuality in the hands of women writers.

Moreover, as opposed to the patriarchal dichotomy of virgin versus whore, women writers depict their heroines as sexual beings, experiencing their femininity. For instance, Atwood questions the chastity of Penelope, the paragon of fidelity of the Homeric epics and she hints that Penelope has had liaisons with the suitors. In *The Book of Mary*, Sobat reimagines a Mary, unlike the Virgin Mary of the Church whose virginity has become a subject of Papal decrees, that chooses to make love to the man she loves. Similarly, Michèle Roberts, in *The Wild Girl*, not only refuses to portray Mary Magdalene as a penitent prostitute, but also reimagines Jesus not as an asexual prophet but as the lover of Mary Magdalene. Moreover, the female experience of giving birth is given a central place in the rewritings. It is worth noting that in *The Red Tent*, *Queenmaker* and *The Book of Mary*, giving birth and midwifery are highlighted with dramatically illustrated episodes. Giving birth, this exclusively female experience is reflected as the celebration of life and an occasion of woman-bonding as opposed to the Bible that asserts in the Genesis that giving birth and labour pains are a punishment for women for Eve's transgression. Hence, women writers defy the patriarchal assumption that associates women with death, evil and sin. Furthermore, in all retellings writers through their heroines contest and question the patriarchal religion and problematize the conception of god as a male.

The other significant point that is common to all rewritings with the exception of *The Penelopiad* is the emphasis of sorority. In these novels, nurturing, loving and compassionate relationships among women are foregrounded. In addition, in contrast to the Bible and myths in which patrilineality and male genealogy are highlighted and justified, in the rewritings, female genealogy and positive relations among women are underlined. For example, in *The Red Tent*, *The Book of Mary* and *The Wild Girl*, it is asserted that the women's traditions are passed down to the next generations through daughters. Moreover, in these works, unlike patriarchy, as pointed out by Millet,



that aims to make all women rivals to each other by categories such as age, beauty and virtue, a great importance is put on the notion of woman-bonding. For instance, in *The Book of Mary* and *The Wild Girl*, those two women, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, that are created as foils by the Church are portrayed as comrades. Similarly, in *The Red Tent*, the wives of Jacob realize the patriarchal plot that aims to separate them and make peace with each other. In addition, in *Queenmaker*, Bathsheba and Michal are not drawn as rivals who fight for the love of King David. On the contrary, when Bathsheba falls in love with David, Michal is not sorry for losing her husband but her friend. The only problematic text in this aspect is Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. Atwood in her opus generally explores the complex and problematic relationships among women, and sorority has not been one of the themes she reflects upon. In a similar vein, in *The Penelopiad*, the rivalry between Helen and Penelope is given and Helen is presented as the epitome of seductive women.

The last point to be considered in this part is the influence of these rewritings on the literary and mythological canon and their potential to destabilize them. As illustrated in the discussion of the publication history of *The Red Tent* and *Queenmaker*, even in the early 1990s it was not easy to publish these retellings of myths. Moreover, it must be noted that compared to the original texts and their reproductions in different media, these literary revisions are not widely distributed. Yet today, it would not be wrong to argue that, with the individual efforts of many women writers the rewritings of myths has gained the status of a subgenre. The publishing house Canongate's ambitious and exciting project of rewritings of myths by prominent literary figures justifies the emergence of an alternative canon. It would be naïve to expect a sudden change. Yet it can be argued that these rewritings bring awareness about the constructed nature of gender roles and the illusive universality of androcentric ideology. Moreover, the popularity of these books signifies the wish of female readers to read more about the women of the Bible and myths and their search for more inspiring and realistic role models. Thus, it can be contended that, the novelists analyzed in this study subvert the patriarchal ideology of the original texts and by offering alternative

versions they attempt to deconstruct the hegemony of the texts that marginalize and disempower women. To conclude, Arachne's daughters have reclaimed their words and voices and they have started to weave a canon that is for women by women this time.

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### TAUGHT COURSES

2006 Spring - Research Skills  
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## FELLOWSHIP

Visiting Graduate Student, University of Alberta, Modern Language and Culture Studies Department, Canadian Literature Center, Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

## FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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## PUBLICATIONS

1. "The Application of Brecht's Epic Theatre in Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest*". *British American Studies (BAS)*, vol. XIII, 2007, 49-59.
2. "To Set the Record Straight for Good": Postmodern Rewriting of Myth in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*". *Redefining Modernism and Postmodernism*. Eds. Şebnem Toplu & Hubert Zapf. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 221-229.
3. "Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea (Gake No Ue no Ponyo)". *Marvels & Tales*, Volume 24, Number 2, 2010. 363-366 (Review)
4. "Leaning the Limits of Myself: Jeanette Winterson's *Weight* as an Existentialist Text". *American, British and Canadian Studies Journal (ABC)*, vol. XV, 2010. 104-119.

## EDITED WORKS

*Jeanette Winterson and Her Work. Proceedings of the 14<sup>th</sup> METU British Novelists Conference*, 14-15 December, 2006. 2007. Editor. (with Assist. Prof. Margaret J. Sönmez)

*Angela Carter and Her Work, Proceedings of 15<sup>th</sup> METU British Novelist Conference*, 12-13 December, 2007. 2008. Editor (with Assist. Prof. Dürrin Alpakın Martinez-Caro).

## GIVEN TALKS

14.03.2006 (Invited) Middle East Technical University Book Club- Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

29.03.2007. (Invited) Middle East Technical University Book Club- Charles Bukowski: High (?)\_Low (?) Literature.

19.02.2009. (Invited). Ankara University, Faculty of Medicine Book & Literature Club, Fairy Tales and Ideology.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“The Application of Brecht’s Epic Theatre in Caryl Churchill’s *Mad Forest*”. West University of Timisoara, XVI British and American Studies Conference, 18-20 May 2006, Timisoara, Romania.

“What if God is One of Us: The Postmodern Pantheon in Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*”. Fantasy Matters Conference, University of Minnesota, 16-18 November, 2007. Minneapolis, USA.

“This Time It is Going to be Different: Three Rewritings of Bluebeard by Contemporary Women Writers”. Gender Trouble in Modern/Post Modern Literature and Art Conference, Halic University, April 17-18 2008, Istanbul, Turkey.

“The Feminine Condition in Sevgi Sosyal’s *Tante Rosa*’.” Woman in Literature, Language and Culture Conference, Anadolu University, 29 April- 1 May 2008, Eskişehir, Turkey.

“The Wandering Jew in India: Identity Displacement and Memory in Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay*.” Midwest Popular Culture Association/ Midwest American Culture Association Conference, 3-5 October 2008, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA.

“Benim İstanbulum Bir Masaldı Sonuçta: Mario Levi ve Musevi Kimliği”. (My Istanbul was a Fairy-Tale After All: Mario Levi and Jewish Identity) İstanbul Üniversitesi. Akşit Göktürk’ü Anma Sempozyumu, 12-13 March 2009, İstanbul, Turkey

“A Sort of Fairy Tale: *Howl’s Moving Castle*”. University of East Anglia, Fairy Tale after Angela Carter Conference, 22- 25 April, 2009 Norwich, England.

“To Set the Record Straight for Good”: Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad*”. Ege University 12th International Cultural Studies Symposium, 29 April-1 May 2009, Izmir, Turkey

“Take the Weight off Your Snakes”: The Revisions of the Medusa Myth in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Women’s Poetry”Ankara University, II. International Western Languages and Literature Symposium, 4-6 May 2009. Ankara, Turkey.

“You could have Chosen Differently. You did not: *Weight* as an Existentialist Text”. Athens Institute for Education and Research, 4th International Conference on Philosophy, 1-4 June 2009, Athens, Greece.

“Every Moment is Two Moments: Identity and Archaeology of Memory in Anne Michael’s *Fugitive Pieces*”. Imagining and Representing Identities in Canada:

Words and Images of The Cultural Mosaic Conference, 19.March 2010, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

““Bed of Roses (?)’: *Beauty and the Beast* and Its Post/Modern Rewritings”. NeMLA 2010 Conference, 8-11 April 2010, Montreal, Quebec/ Canada.

“The Eternal Return”: The Myth of Demeter and Persephone in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*”. The Association for the Study of Women and Mythology 2010 Conference, 23-25 April 2010, Pennsylvania/U.S.A.

“By the Bog of Cats I Finally Learned False From True”: Rewriting *Medea* in Modern Ireland”. University of Regina and International Association of Philosophy and Literature *Cultures of Differences: national / indigenous / historical* Conference, 24-30 May 2010, Regina, Alberta, Canada.

## TURKISH SUMMARY

### “KADIN KİMLİĞİ”: YUNAN, İBRANİ VE HRİSTİYAN MİTLERİNİN ÇAĞDAŞ KADIN YAZARLAR TARAFINDAN YENİDEN YAZIMI

Bu çalışmada mitler ataerkil ideolojik anlatılar olarak ele alınmış ve Yunan mitlerinde görülen erkek bakış açısı ile tanımlanan kadın kimliğinin Tevrat ve İncil’de de gözlendiği savunulmuştur. Bu tez, ataerkil sistemin evrensel bir ideoloji olarak Antik Yunan’dan başlayarak tarih boyunca aynı cinsel kimlikleri yarattığını öne sürmektedir. Bu durumun bir sonucu olarak da, Klasik Yunan kültürünü, Tevrat ve İncil’i başlıca kaynakları olarak kullanan Batı Edebiyatı, bu erkek odaklı imgelerin yerleşmesinde ve meşruluk kazanmasında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Ayrıca, Batı Edebiyatı kanonunu oluşturan eserlerde, mitlerde görülen, erkeğe baş eğen, düzeni sorgulamayan, sessiz örnek kadın ve bunun karşısına yerleştirilen baştan çıkarıcı kötü kadın imgesi, yüzyıllar boyunca yeniden üretilmiş, farklı kadın modelleri yaratmakta başarısız olunmuş ve bu klişeleşmiş kadın tasvirleri, feminist edebiyat eleştirisinin ortaya çıkışına kadar derinliğine sorgulanmamıştır. Bu çalışma, mitleri ideolojik özne yaratmanın en önemli alanlarından biri olarak tartışmayı hedeflemiş ve Yunan mitlerinde, Tevrat ve İncil’de yaratılan kadın figürlerinin günümüz kadın yazarlarınca yeniden nasıl yazıldığını incelemiştir.

Feminizmin kadın odaklı bir hareket olması ve feminist eleştiri kuramının temel çalışma alanının da kadın imgesinin edebiyatta yaratılması ve yansıtılması olması nedeniyle, bu kuramlar, bu çalışmanın teorik çerçevesini oluşturmuştur. Bu bağlamda, kadının ötekileştirilmesine ve ataerkil sistemin tanımının ve çözümlemesine odaklanması nedeniyle, İkinci Dalga Feminist Hareketten de ana kuramsal alt yapı olarak yararlanılmıştır. Bu akıma göre, kültürel ve yazınsal imgeler, sosyal ve ekonomik sistemlerin yansımalarıdır ve kadın kimliği, hâkim sosyal, kültürel ve ideolojik normlara göre şekillenmektedir. Bu yüzden, edebiyat kadınların ezilmesinin tartışılmasında ve kadın hareketinde vazgeçilmez bir

öneme sahiptir. Bu çerçevede, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Mary Daly, Gerda Lerner'in kuramları kullanmıştır. Ayrıca, ideolojinin özne yaratım sürecini tartışmak için Louis Althusser ve ideolojinin edebi eserlerin yaratım sürecine yansıyan etkilerini tartışmak için de Pierre Macherey'in fikirlerine başvurulmuştur.

Yukarıda adı geçen ve bu çalışmanın kuramsal alt yapısını oluşturan önemli isimlere kısaca değinmek gerekirse: Simone de Beauvoir, kadınlığın nasıl kavramsallaştırıldığını ve kadınların Öteki olarak nasıl bir ontolojik kategori haline getirildiğini *İkinci Cins* adlı eserinde gözler önüne serer. De Beauvoir'a göre, Öteki kavramı, kendini üstün ve güçlü olarak tanımlamak isteyen bireyler ve gruplar tarafından yaratılmış bir kavramdır. Bu yüzden Öteki, tanımı itibari ile hiçbir zaman tam bir özerkliğe sahip değildir. De Beauvoir'a göre, cinsel kimlikler doğuştan gelen biyolojik tanımlar değildir. Tarih boyunca kadın, erkeğin Öteki olarak tanımlanmış ve sonuç olarak da kendine özgü bir aidiyetten ve kimlikten mahrum edilmiştir. 'Kadın doğulmaz, kadın olunur' diye yazar de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir ayrıca, kadınların her zaman üyesi oldukları sosyo-ekonomik sınıflar içinde kaybolduklarını, sadece kadınlara ait, tüm sınıfları ve yerellikleri kapsayan bir azınlık grup kimliği yaratamadıklarını ve bu yüzden, kendi hakları ve eşitlik mücadeleleri için bir bilinç geliştiremediklerini ifade eder. De Beauvoir'a göre, edilgen kadın imgesi ataerkil sistem tarafından yaratılmış ve bu imge, cinsel kimliklerle ilgili mitler ve klişelerle toplumların bilincine yerleştirilmiştir. 'Onlar [erkekler] kadını yaratılar' diye özetler bu durumu. Böylece, kadın bedeni erkekler tarafından nesneleştirilmiştir. Bunun sonucu olarak, kadın, kendi kişisel imgesini deneyimleyemez; kadın bedeni ve kimliği, her zaman için ataerkil sistemin yarattığı imge üzerinden tanımlanır. De Beauvoir, bütün kültürel temsillerin- mit, edebiyat, popüler kültür- erkeklerin yaratımı olduğunu öne sürer ve kadınların bu imgeleri ve tanımları içselleştirdiğini, böylece, 'erkeklerin rüyalarını görmeye başladığının' altını çizer. Buna göre, mitler, erkek egemen sistemin en önemli ideolojik araçlarından biri haline gelir. De Beauvoir'a göre, kadınlar kendileri ve sistemle ilgili kolay cevaplarla tatmin olmamalı ve kendilerine sunulan annelik ve evlilik kurumlarını sorgulamadan

kabul etmemelidirler. Kadınlar, her şeyden önce, kendilerini gerçekleştirmiş bireyler olmaya çalışmalı ve kendi varoluşlarını yaratmalıdırlar. Ataerkil sistemi değişmez bir gerçek olarak görmek, ancak bahane bulmaktır. De Beauvoir'a göre, kadınlar, kendi hayatlarının kontrolünü ele almaya çalışmalı ve sömürüye karşı başkaldırmalıdırlar. Görüldüğü üzere, de Beauvoir, kadının Ötekileştirilmesini ve ataerkil sistemin mitler ve kültürel temsillerle varlığını yüzyıllar boyunca sürdürdüğünü tartışması nedeniyle, her dönem feminist kuram içindeki önemini ve geçerliliğini korumaktadır.

Erkek egemen sistemin tartışılmasında başvurulan diğer bir isimse Kate Millett'dir. Millett, *Cinsel Politika* isimli çalışmasında, ataerkil sistemi evrensel bir ideoloji olarak tanımlamış ve bu sistemin tarihsel, sosyal, politik ve kültürel çözümlemesini sunmuştur. Millett'in ataerkil sistemi kuramsallaştırılmış bir zulüm ideolojisi olarak tanımlaması, feminist hareketin dönüm noktalarından biridir ve ataerkil düzenin kuramlaştırılması ve tartışılması açısından çok önemli bir yere sahiptir. Millett'e göre, kadın ve erkek arasındaki ilişki, doğası itibarı ile politiktir. Yani, bu ilişkinin temelinde, güç ve bu gücün mülkiyeti vardır. Erk ve politika arasındaki bağ, biyolojik temelli değil, kültürelidir. Millett'e göre, cinsel kimlikler ataerkil sistem tarafından yaratılmış ve bunların devamlılığı ise, ideoloji tarafından sağlanmıştır. Bu düzende kadın, erkeğe göre ikincil duruma getirilmiştir. Bunun sürekliliğini sağlayan 'akıllı' stratejiler de düzen tarafından üretilmiştir ve bunların ortak noktası kadınların birleşmesini engellenmektir. Böylece, yukarıda de Beauvoir'ın da altını çizdiği şekilde, kadınların kendi sınıflarını yaratıp, siyasi bir mücadele vermelerinin önü kesilir. Bir başka deyişle, kadınlar birbirine rakip duruma getirilip, birleşmeleri engellenir. Bu rekabetin kategorileri de, yine ataerkil sistem tarafından konulmuştur. Millet, bunları yaş, güzellik ve erdem olarak tanımlar. Böylece, kolektif bir direnç oluşturamayan kadınlar, varlıkları için erkeklere bağımlı olmaya devam ederler. Millet, erkek egemen düzenin kadınları tanımlamak ve üzerlerinde baskı oluşturmak için kendi yarattığı imgeleri kullandığını söyler. Millett'e göre mitler, bu anlamda, ideolojik propaganda araçlarıdır ve Batı dünyasının en temel mitleri Pandora'nın Kutusu ve Havva'nın Âdem'e elmayı yedirmesi ve bunun sonucunda Cennet'ten

kovulmalarıdır. Bu anlatılarda, olumsuz bir kadın imgesi gözlemlenir; kadın kötülüğün kaynağı ve nedeni olarak tasvir edilmiştir. Bunun sonucunda da, ataerkil Batı dünyasında kadın, her zaman kötülükle ilişkilendirilir.

Mary Daly de, benzer şekilde, kadınların ataerkil kadın tanımını içselleştirdiğini savunur. Bunun sonucu olarak da, kadının ve kadınlığın erkek gözüyle yapılan tanımı, doğal ve gerçek bir olguya dönüşür. Ataerkil sistemin yüzyıllardır süregelen hâkimiyetinin altında yatan neden de budur. Daly, kadınların kendi kadınlıklarını ve varoluşlarını kazanmaları için bu tanımlardan ve yargılardan kurtulmaları gerektiğini belirtir. Bir başka deyişle, kadınlar, gerçek ve özgün kimliklerine kavuşmak için içselleştirilmiş Ötekiliklerinden sıyrılmalıdır. Daly, kadınlık yolculuğunu bir süreç olarak tanımlar ve bu yolculuk ‘ataerkil dünyadan başka bir dünyanın keşfi ve yaratılmasıdır’. Bu bağlamda, Daly’nin kadın tanımı, de Beauvoir’inkine benzer şekilde, devam eden bir sürece işaret eder. Daly’e göre, varoluş, ‘etken bir fiildir’. Daly de yukarıdaki kuramcılar gibi ataerkil sistemin teoloji, metafizik ve dil aracılığı ile kendini devamlı olarak yeniden yarattığını savunur. Bu bakımdan, tüm bu kurumlar, erkek egemen sistemin yansımalarıdır. Özellikle dil, ideolojik olarak ataerkildir ve temelinde erk ve tahakküm vardır. Bu anlamda, ideolojinin hâkimiyetinin sürdürülebilirliği için elzemdir. Daly’e göre, dil, temelde ataerkil egemenliği tanımlar, temellendirir ve sistemin kendini idame etmesine olanak tanır. Bir başka deyişle, ‘doğal’ ve ‘masum’ görünen kavramlar, içlerinde erkek egemen çağrışımlar taşırlar. Bu açıdan, Daly’e göre, ‘kadın odaklı’ bir dil, yeni bir farkındalık ve beraberinde yeni bir kadın kimliği getirecektir. Daly de mitolojiyi sistemin ideolojik araçlarından biri olarak görür. Bu bağlamda, kadınlığı tanımlayan ataerkil mitlerin kadınlar tarafından yazılmış olanlarla değiştirilmesi gerekmektedir. Böylece, erkek odaklı yazılmış olan mitlerin evrenselliği yıkılacak ve ebedi gibi görünen doğaları bozulacaktır.

Gerda Lerner’de ataerkil düzenin değişmez bir sistem olmadığına işaret eder ve bu sistemin tarihsel bir sürecin sonucunda ortaya çıktığını söyler. Batı dünyasının kültürel ve sosyal temellerinde İbrani, Hıristiyan ve Antik Yunan kültürlerinin olduğunu belirtir ve bu yüzden, bu kültürlerde görülen erkek egemen



dünya görüşünün, Batı dünyasının üzerine kurulduğu temellerden biri olduğunu söyler. Lerner, ayrıca kadınların bir tarih bilincinden mahrum olduğunun altını çizer. Bir başka deyişle, kadınların dünya kültürüne yaptıkları katkılar, erkeklerin yazdığı tarihte göz ardı edilmiş ve dünya nüfusunun yarısı oluşturan kadınların hikâyeleri sessizliğe mahkûm edilmiştir. Bu yüzden, kadınların ve kadınlığın tarihinin yazılması, kadınların özgürlüklerini kazanmalarının ilk adımlarından biridir. Lerner, ataerkilliğin doğuşunu incelediği çalışmasında, egemen ideolojinin kadınlar üzerindeki iktidarını, kurumlar ve özellikle hukuk aracılığı ile sağladığını belirtir. Kadınların cinselliği, eğitimi, ekonomik özgürlüğü ve diğer yaşam alanları, erkek egemen sistemin çizdiği çizgilerle tanımlanır ve burada da din, mitoloji gibi anlatılar önemli bir yere sahiptir.

İktidar ve birey anlamında kuşkusuz en önemli kuramcılardan biri de Louis Althusser'dir. Althusser, egemen iktidarın ideolojik özne yaratmada kullandığı yöntemleri ortaya koyduğu çalışmasında, ideolojiyi somut şartlar üzerinden kurulan sanal bir kurgu olarak tanımlar ve ideolojilerin mevcudiyetleri için en gerekli ögenin birey olduğunun altını çizer. İdeoloji, her ne kadar sanal bir kurgu olsa da, her zaman somut bir karşılığı vardır; sistem aygıtları sayesinde varlığını sürdürür. Bu aygıtlardan biri olan edebiyat, Althusser'e göre, egemen ideolojiyi pasif bir şekilde yansıtmak ve yeniden yaratmakla sınırlı kalmaz. Aynı zamanda, ona karşı koyma ve tepki verme özelliğini de içinde barındırır. Bu anlamda, metnin bilinçaltına ulaşmaya çalışan aktif bir okuma yapılmalı ve metin içindeki hatalar, boşluklar ve çelişkiler izlenmelidir. Böylece, ideoloji ile ilgili bastırılmış ve söylenmemiş saptamalara ulaşılabilir. Benzer şekilde, Fransız kuramcı Pierre Macherey de yazınsal bir metnin sadece bilinçli bir yaratım olmadığını, belli şartlar altında üretildiğini savunur ve yazarın, yarattığı eserle içinde bulunduğu ideoloji arasındaki çelişkilerin yaratılan eserde kendini gösterir savunur. Bu anlamda, eserdeki boşluklar, önemli ve anlamlıdır.

Bu kuramsal altyapı bağlamında, bu tezde, Yunan, İbrani ve Hıristiyan mitlerinin günümüz kadın yazarları tarafından yeniden yazımı incelenmiştir. Mitlerin yeniden yazımları, daha çok tiyatro ve şiir alanlarında karşımıza çıkar ve roman alanında mitlere birçok referans verilmesine ve mitolojik temaların

kullanılmasına karşın, mitlerin kadın odaklı yeniden yazımı üzerine çok fazla çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Bu tezde, bu boşluğun giderilmesi amaçlanmış ve klasik arkeoloji, sanat tarihi, filoloji, feminist teoloji ve feminist edebiyat kuramları kullanılarak, disiplinler arası bir çalışma hedeflenmiştir.

Bu amaçla Margaret Atwood'un *The Penelopiad*, Marion Zimmer Bradley'nin *The Firebrand*, Anita Diamant'ın *The Red Tent*, India Edghill'in *Queenmaker*, Gail Sidonie Sobat'ın *The Book of Mary* ve Michéle Roberts'ın *The Wild Girl* adlı eserleri ele alınmış ve yazarların mitlerdeki ataerkil ideolojiyi yıkmak, yeni bir kadın imgesi ve kadın odaklı bir mit yazımı yaratmak için kullandıkları metinsel yöntemler tartışılmıştır. Çalışmanın ana konusunun ve mitlerin yeniden yazımı olması nedeniyle birinci bölümde, Antik Yunan'dan başlayarak, mit kavramı tarihsel süreç içinde ele alınmış ve Freud, Frazer, Jung, Eliade, Malinowski, Frye gibi bu alandaki önemli isimlerin mitlerle ilgili kuramları ve bu konu ile ilgili yorumları verilmiştir. Bu girişten sonra, feminist kuramcıların mitlerle ilgili eleştirilerine yer verilmiş ve bu konuda yapılmış belli başlı çalışmalar tartışılmıştır.

Tezin daha sonraki bölümleri, mitlerin yeniden yazımlarının incelenmesine ayrılmıştır. Her bölüm için iki eser seçilmiş, aynı mitin iki tane yeniden yazımı bulunmadığından, birbirinden farklı iki mit ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışmada incelenen yazarlar, İngilizce konuşulan geniş bir coğrafyadan seçilmiştir; Margaret Atwood ve Gail Sidonie Sobat, Kanada, Marion Zimmer Bradley, India Edghill ve Anita Diamant, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Michéle Roberts ise Birleşik Krallıktan gelmektedirler. Aynı dili konuşmalarına rağmen, her ülkenin kültürel alt yapısı fark olduğundan, bu geniş coğrafya, mitlerin Batı dünyasının kadın yazarlarını nasıl etkilediği ve onlara nasıl ilham verdiğini göstermesi bakımından bilinçli bir tercihtir. Bu çalışmada, Yunan mitleri ve Tevrat ve İncil'de geçen hikâyeler arasında bir fark gözetilmemiş, her kategori içindeki hikâyeler, erkek merkezli güçlü ideolojik anlatılar olarak ele alınmıştır. Kadın yazarların, mitleri yeniden nasıl yorumladıklarını ve yazdıklarını daha etkili ve derin bir şekilde sunmak amacı ile her bölümde, eserlerin analizinden önce,

yeniden yazıma konu olan eser ve bu eserin feminist bakış açısı ile yapılan tartışması sunulmuştur.

İkinci bölümde, Yunan mitlerinin yeniden yazımı incelenmiştir. Bu amaçla incelenen ilk eser, Margaret Atwood'un *The Penelopiad* adlı kitabıdır. Bu kitap, Homer'in *Odyseia* destanın kahramanı Odysseus'un karısı Penelope'nin hikâyesinin yeniden yazımıdır. Atwood, kitabında Homer'in hikâyesinin boşluklarını ve tutarsızlıklarını sorgular. Bu parodik eserde Homer destanın sessiz ve kenarda kalmış kadın kahramanı Penelope'nin hikâyesini ve *Odyseia*'da geçen olayları, Penelope'nin yorumu ile kendi ağzından dinleriz. Atwood'un kitabında Penelope, Odysseus'un uzaklarda olduğu 20 yıl boyunca neler yaptığını, kendisi ile evlenmek isteyen talipleri ile nasıl başa çıktığını, Odysseus dönüşünü ve uzun yıllar sonra kavuşmalarını anlatır. Bu bölümde incelenen ikinci eser ise Marion Zimmer Bradley'in *The Firebrand* eseridir. Bu eser Homeros'un *İlyada* destanının kadın bakış açısı ile yeniden yazımıdır; Troyalı prenses ve kâhine Cassandra, Troya Savaşını ve kendi hikâyesini anlatır. Yunan mitlerine göre Tanrı Apollo Cassandra'ya bilicilik yeteneği vermiş ancak Cassandra'nın onun aşkını reddetmesi üzerine onu lanetlemiştir. Bu lanete göre Cassandra, her zaman doğruyu söyleyecek ancak hiç kimse ona inanmayacaktır. *İlyada* destanın bu lanetli kâhinesinin sesini Homeros'un eserinde bir kez bile duymayız. Cassandra'nın bu sessizliğinden ve dışlanmışlığından ilham alan Bradley, Troya Savaşını yeniden yorumladığı romanında, Cassandra'yı eserinin başkahramanı yapar. Bu eserde ayrıca, Troya Savaşının çıkmasının ardındaki sosyo-ekonomik nedenler, Bronz Çağından Demir Çağına geçişteki toplumsal değişiklikler ve anaerkil bir toplumdan ataerkil bir topluma geçiş süreci tartışılır. Kısaca, bu bölümde Homeros destanlarında seslerini duymadığımız kadınların hikâyeleri incelenmiştir.

Üçüncü bölümde ise, Tevrat'da bahsi geçen kadınların hikâyeleri incelenmiştir. Bu bölümde tartışılan ilk roman, Anita Diamant'ın *The Red Tent* isimli kitabıdır. Bu eserde, Tevrat'ta tecavüz kurbanı olarak geçen Dinah'ın hikâyesi anlatılır. Diamant'ın yorumunda, Tevrat'ta sessizliğe mahkûm edilmiş Dinah, kendi hikâyesini anlatır ve bu sefer, bu bir tecavüz ve şiddet anlatısı değil

bir aşk hikâyesidir. Diamant'ın kitabı ayrıca kadınların tarihinin ve kadın geleneklerinin kız çocukları aracılığı ile kuşak kuşağa geçmesinin ve korunmasının önemini altını çizer. Bu anlamda Diamant, daha çok erkeklerin ve erkek çocuklarının hikâyelerinin anlatıldığı Tevrat'a bir alternatif olarak, kadınların hikâyelerini ve sevgi dolu ve sağaltıcı anne-kız ilişkisini öne çıkarır. Bu bölümde incelenen diğer kitap ise İndia Edghill'in *Queenmaker* romanıdır. Bu eser de, Tevrat'ın başka bir sessiz kadın kahramanının, Kral Davud'un karısı Michal'in hikâyesidir. Edghill, ataerkil politik sistemin eleştirisini yaptığı eserinde, Kral Davud'un sarayındaki entrikalar ve ayak oyunlarına dikkat çeker ve bu sistemde kadınların erkekler arasında sadece değiş tokuş nesnesi olarak görüldüğünü söyler. Davud'un hayatındaki, Bathsheba ve Tamar gibi diğer kadınların da hikâyelerinin yeniden yorumlandığı bu romanda Edghill, erkek egemen sistemde köşeye sıkışmış ve elinde hiçbir siyasi gücü olmayan kadınların durumlarını anlatır.

Dördüncü bölümde ise, İncil'deki kadınların hikâyeleri incelenmiştir. Gail Sidonie Sobat *The Book of Mary* adlı kitabında, İsa peygamberin annesi Bakire Meryem'in hikâyesini yorumlar. Sobat'ın Meryemi, Hıristiyanlığın bakireliğin ve anneliğin modeli olarak sunduğu Meryemden oldukça uzaktır. Bu kitaptaki Meryem, cesur, güçlü, kurban olmayı reddeden, siyasi bilinci olan ve kendi varoluşu için mücadele etmekten kaçınmayan, cinselliğine sahip çıkan ve onu yaşayan bir kadındır. Sobat'ın eserinde Meryem, erkek İncil yazarları gibi, kendi İncil'ini yazar ve 'Söz'ün gücüne sahip olmanın gerçekleri yaratmada ve yansıtmada ne kadar önemli olduğunu gösterir. Son kitap ise, Michéle Roberts'ın *The Wild Girl* adlı kitabıdır. Bu da, yukarıdakine benzer şekilde, Magdalalı Meryem'in hikâyesidir. Bazı kaynaklara göre, bu kadın İsa'nın müridi olmadan önce bir fahişedir, diğer kaynaklar göre ise, İsa'nın karısı ve erken Hıristiyanlık döneminin en önemli liderlerinden biridir. Roberts, bu eserinde Meryem'i kitabının kahramanı yaparak önün üzerinden cinsellik, annelik, güç ilişkileri ve siyasetini tartışır. Böylece her iki kitap da, erkek merkezli İncil anlatıları yerine kadınların tarihini ve onların anlatılarını öne çıkarır.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, mitleri, mevcut düzeni korumak ve doğrulamak için kullanılan güçlü ideolojik anlatılar olarak ele almış ve günümüzde de en etkin ve baskıcı sistemlerden biri olan ataerkil düzenin doğuşunda ve devamında, mitlerin önemli sistem araçları olarak kullanıldığını ve kadın kimliğinin tanımı ve yorumu ile zihinlerdeki birçok klişenin yerleşmesinde büyük rol oynadığını savunmuştur. Bu anlamda mitler, ideolojik özne yaratarak ve edebiyata konu, tema ve rol modeli sağlayarak bu düzenin devamına katkıda bulunmuşlardır.

Bu çalışmada altı çizilen diğer bir nokta ise, Yunan mitlerinde karşılaşılan cinsel kimliklerin, Tevrat ve İncil’de gözlemlendiğidir. Bu metinlerde tüm güç ve otorite odaklarının erkeklere ait olduğu ve kadınların bu sistemde köşeye itilerek, sadece anne ve eş rolüne mahkûm edildiği görülmektedir. Mitlerde ayrıca, kadınların özgün bireyler olarak tanımlanmadığı, aksine, erkekler arasında değiş tokuş yapılan, sahip olunan, üzerinde otorite kurulan, satılan nesnelere olarak gösterildiği görülmüştür. Ayrıca bu tezde, ataerkil sistemin, her zaman için başkaldırmayan, sorgulamayan kadın modelini tercih ettiği ve buna uymayan kadınların ‘cadı’, ‘baştan çıkarıcı kötü kadın’, ‘şirret’ gibi tanımlamalarla aşağılandığı, dışlandığı ve alay edildiğinin altı çizilmiştir. Böylelikle, Kate Millett’in dediği gibi ‘kadın imgesi erkekler tarafından ataerkil sistemin ihtiyaçlarına uygun olarak yaratılmıştır’ (46).

Bu tezde ayrıca, Yunan, İbrani ve Hıristiyan mitlerinin, Batı kültürünün temelini oluşturduğu ve bunlardan ilham alarak yazılmış eserlerin, hâlâ günümüzde, edebiyat kanonunun başlıca eserleri olduğuna dikkat çekilmiştir. Lerner, bu kültürel hegemonyanın altını şöyle çizer: ‘Batı uygarlığı Tevrat ve İncil’de ifade edilen dini ve ahlaki fikirler ve Antik Yunan’da geliştirilen bilim ve felsefenin üzerine inşa edilmiştir’.

Bu çalışmada savunulan diğer bir nokta ise mitlerin ve tarih metinlerinin erkekler tarafından kaleme alındığı ve olayların erkek bakış açısı ile anlatıldığıdır. Bunun doğal bir sonucu olarak da, tarih boyunca başarı elde etmiş ve insanlığın gelişimde rol oynamış tüm kişilerin erkek olması tesadüf değildir. Başka bir deyişle, erkek odaklı Batı kültürünün kökleri, bu ataerkil anlatılarda bulunabilir. Bu nedendir ki, herhangi bir kadın odaklı okuma ve yeniden yazma için, bu

eserlerdeki cinsel kimliklerin sorgulanması önemli ve gereklidir. Buna paralel olarak, bu çalışmada yazının siyasi bir eylem olduğu ifade edilmiş ve kadın yazarların, mitleri yeniden yorumlayarak ve yazarak, bu metinlerdeki ataerkil ideolojiyi sorgulamaları ve bunların yerini alacak yeni anlatılar yaratmaları politik yönü ağır basan bir hareket olarak yorumlanmıştır.

Bu çalışmada incelen eserlerde bazı ortak noktalar gözlenmiştir: ilk olarak, kadın yazarlar, mitlerdeki sessizliğe mahkûm edilmiş kadınlara ses vermişlerdir. Penelope, Cassandra, Dinah, Michal, Bakire Meryem ve Magdalalı Meryem, kadın yazarların yeniden yazımlarında kendi hikâyelerini kendi sesleri ile ve kadın bakış açısı ile anlatmışlardır. Seslerine sahip çıkarak ve sözün gücünü kullanarak anlattıkları hikâyelerinde anlamın ve gerçeğin yaratıcısı olmuşlardır. Böylelikle, kadın yazarlar, bu yeniden yazımlarda güç, gerçek ve söylem kavramları sorgulamışlardır. Ayrıca, kadın yazarların eserlerinde, kadın odaklı anlatıların bir sonucu olarak, kadınların hikâyeleri ve birbirleri ile olan ilişkileri öne çıkarılmıştır. Bu kadın odaklı anlatım, hâkim ataerkil sistem ve bu sistemin güç odaklarının eleştirisini de beraberinde getirir. Örneğin, Homeros'un *Odyseia* destanında Odysseus'un kahramanlıkların biri olan Tepegözün öldürülmesi, Atwood'un eserinde, tek gözlü bir bar sahibi ile Odysseus arasında ödenmemiş bir fatura yüzünden çıkan basit bir kavga olarak verilir. Benzer şekilde, Bradley, *The Firebrand* adlı romanında, Cassandra aracılığı ile savaşın vahşetini gözler önüne sürer ve *İlyada* destanının kahramanlarını katil ve tecavüzcü olarak gösterir. *Queenmaker*'da da Davud, rakiplerini ortadan kaldırmak için cinayet işlemekten çekinmeyen, halkı kendi istekleri doğrultusunda etkilemek için gerçekleri saptıran, hırslı, açgözlü ve zalim bir politikacı olarak resmedilmiştir. Tevrat'taki Yakup ve oğulları ise, *The Red Tent* adlı romanda, Schechem halkının zayıf anından yararlanıp, tüm erkeklere kıyım yapan merhametsiz kişiler olarak gösterilmişlerdir. *The Book of Mary*'de de, benzer şekilde, İsa'nın havarileri, güç peşinde koşan tembel, düşüncesiz ve kaba erkekler olarak sunulmuşlardır. Bu yorumlar, her zaman iyi eleştiriler almamıştır; yazarlar Diamant ve Edghill, kendileri ile yapılan röportajlarda, özellikle erkek okurların, bu portreleri kutsallığa saygısızlık hatta küfür olarak algıladıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bu tür

tepkiler, mitlerin ve dinsel anlatıların hâlen insanların zihninde ne kadar büyük bir güce sahip olduğunu gösterir niteliktedir.

Mitlerin kadın yazarlar tarafından yazımının incelenmesinde gözlemlenen diğer bir nokta ise, bu anlatılarda kadınlar, özgün ve güçlü kişiliklere sahiptir. Mitlerde sadece eş, kız kardeş, anne ve sevgili, yani erkeğe göre tanımlanan kadınlar, yeniden yazımlarda birey olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, bu kahramanlar, değişmeyen sabit karakterler değil, kendi varoluş yolculuklarını yapan, değişen, bilgeleşmeye çalışan kadınlardır. Böylece, erkekler tarafından tanımlanan ve yazılan klişe kadın karakterler, kadın yazarların elinde kimlik, kişilik ve derinlik kazanmışlardır.

Diğer bir nokta ise, ataerkil sistemin kurguladığı bakire ve fahişe karşıtlığından farklı olarak, kadın yazarlar, kadın karakterlerini cinselliklerini yaşayan ve buna sahip çıkan bireyler olarak tasvir etmişlerdir. Örneğin Atwood, romanında Penelope'nin sadakatini sorgular ve onun talipleri ile ilişkiye girdiğini ima eder. Benzer şekilde, Kilisenin hayatının sonuna kadar bakire kaldığını söylediği Meryem, Sobat'ın kitabında, sevdiği adamla istediği için ilişkiye giren bir kadın olarak çizilir. Michéle Roberts da Magdalalı Meryem'i günahkâr bir fahişe olarak anlatmayı reddeder ve İsa'yı da aseküel bir peygamber yerine, Meryem'in sevgilisi olarak kurgular.

Kadın kimliği ilgili olarak, kadın yazarların eserlerinde, doğum deneyimi de çok önemli bir yer tutar. Bu çalışmada incelenen eserlerde, doğum yapmak, Tevrat'da bahsedildiği gibi Havva'ya verilen bir ceza olarak değil, aksine, hayatın kutsanması olarak yorumlanır ve kadınları birleştirici bir olay olarak yansıtılır. Böylece, kadın yazarlar, kadınlığın, kötülük, günah ve ceza ile ilişkilendirilmesine karşı çıkarlar. Yine bu çizgide, incelenen tüm eserlerdeki kadın kahramanlar, Tanrının erkek olarak kurgulanmasını, kendilerine ve deneyimlerine yer bulamadıkları, kendileri ile özleştiremedikleri erkek merkezli din kavramını da sorgularlar.

İncelenen eserlerdeki diğer bir ortak nokta ise, *The Penelopiad* dışında, kadınlar arasındaki dayanışmanın altının çizilmesidir. Burada, kadınlar arasındaki dostluk, anlayış ve kardeşlik öne çıkar. Buna paralel olarak da soyun erkekler ve

erkek çocuklar üzerinden tanımlanması yerine kız çocuklar ve kadınların, soyun devamındaki önemi vurgulanır. Örneğin, *The Red Tent*, *The Book of Mary* ve *The Wild Girl* romanlarında, kadınlara ait gelenekler ve adetler, kız çocukları aracılığı ile bir sonraki kuşağa taşınır ve böylece kadınlığın tarihinin altı çizilir. Böylece, yukarıda Kate Millett'in işaret ettiği ataerkil sistemin kadınları birbirine rakip göstererek birleşmelerini engellenmesinin karşısına kadın dayanışması konulur. Örneğin, *The Book of Mary* ve *The Wild Girl* eserlerinde, Kilise tarafından birbirinin karşıtı olarak sunulan Bakire Meryem ve Magdalalı Meryem, iki yakın dost olarak gösterilirler. Aynı şekilde, *The Red Tent*'de de Yakup'un karıları onları birbirine düşman etmeye çalışan ataerkil sistemin oyununu fark edip, birbirleri ile barış yaparlar. *Queenmaker* adlı romanda da Davud'un ilk karısı Michal ile sonraki eşlerinden biri olan Bathsheba arasında bir kıskançlık veya düşmanlık yoktur, aksine, Bathsheba, Davud'a âşık olduğunda, Michal en iyi arkadaşını kaybettiği için üzülür. Bu anlamda incelenen eserler arasında farklı olan Atwood'un romanıdır. Ancak, kadınlar arasındaki rekabet ve düşmanlık, genel olarak, Atwood'un diğer tüm romanlarında da gözlemlenen bir izlettir. Aynı şekilde, burada incelen eserde de, Helen ve Penelope arasındaki rekabet işlenmiştir.

Bu çalışmada üstünde durulan diğer bir nokta ise, mitlerin yeniden yazımlarının edebi ve mitolojik kanon üzerindeki etkileridir. *The Red Tent* ve *Queenmaker* kitaplarının incelenmesinde belirtildiği üzere 1990ların başında bile, bu yeniden yazımları bastırmak zor bir süreçti. Ayrıca, bu yeniden yazımların, orijinal eserler kadar yaygın bir dağıtımını olmadığını da göz ardı etmemek gerekmektedir. Fakat yine de, bugün, kadın yazarların çabası sonucunda, mitlerin yeniden yazımının edebi türler arasına girdiği söylenebilir. Canongate gibi önemli basımevlerinin edebiyatın ünlü ve güçlü kalemlerine, mitleri yeniden yazdırma projesi de bunun bir kanıtıdır. Elbette, tüm bunlar, yeni bir edebiyat kanonun ortaya çıkması için tek başına yeterli değildir. Öte yandan, bu yeniden yazım örneklerinin popülerliği ve özellikle kadın okuyucuların desteği, bu yolda bir gelişme olduğunun göstergesidir. Sonuç olarak, bu yeniden yazım örnekleri, ataerkil anlatıların hegemonyasını kırmakta ve değişmez ve sorgulanmaz gibi



görünen ataerkil kurgulara karşı kadınların daha bilinçli ve farkında olmalarında önemli bir rol oynamaktadırlar.