

## Exploring the Interplay of Gender and Power in Madeline Miller's Novel 'Circe'

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### *Abstract*

*Power and gender are not distributed and viewed equally in a male-dominated society. Men usually have a significant role and are more powerful than women, while women often become the second sex or subordinated and powerless. This study aims to analyze the relation between gender and power in a male-dominated society. The object of this study is a novel by Madeline Miller, entitled Circe. The research method used in this study is qualitative. It uses the theory of power and gender by Lipman-Blument (1994) and the theory of gendered power by Lee and Pratto (2018) as the basis for the gender and power relation. The finding of this study shows that power and gender have an essential function in determining people's roles and power in society. In this case, gender shapes perceptions and patterns between men and women manifested in gender roles that lead to inequality between men and women.*

**Keywords:** *gender, gendered power, power*

### **A. Introduction**

Gender inequality has persisted over the years as one of the most significant social challenges. It is constantly linked to identity, roles, expectations of behavior, and what it means to be a woman, a man, a girl, or a boy. Even though women now have access to equality and the same chances as men, some of them, especially those who reside in societies with strong cultural traditions, still do not feel they are treated and given the same opportunities as men. Gender roles and stereotypes dictate how men and women should behave based on their gender. In men and women, gender establishes a pattern Lips (1991, p. 61) and develops into a personal identity (Price & Skolnik, 2017, p.2).

Since early childhood, social interactions, culture, and beliefs have shaped the pattern of gender role distinctions between men and women. They are taught how to fit into their gender roles. The norm dictates gender roles and stereotypes, but things are slightly different regarding women, particularly regarding power. Typically, men are seen as having more authority since, as stated by Beard (2017, p. Women are not supposed to be engaged in or act powerfully. People frequently criticize women for not conforming to prevailing social norms

or for being unable to fit into their gender position when they have greater power than males. Not only are gender roles different, but they are also valued differently (Lips, 1991, p. 13).

Lips (1994), in her study “Female Powerless: A Case of ‘Cultural Preparedness?’” explained that women are prepared to be powerless since childhood. Parents as adults encourage their sons and daughters to act according to gender norms, forcing children to behave according to their gender. Boys are more frequently left to their own devices to find answers and deal with issues, giving them the appearance of being more self-reliant and capable. While it is more common for girls to be given a precise solution to a problem than to figure it out independently, it leaves girls with the impression of being weak and not independent. As a result, women face more problems and difficulties when becoming adults, especially in the power hierarchy. They face fewer chances and limited access to economic, educational, and political decision-making. For example, boys are frequently encouraged to attend school and obtain higher education to prepare for work. In contrast, girls are burdened with household responsibilities that keep them from attending school.

The way gender is constructed today and how power is distributed in society has not changed all that much. Women’s thoughts and voices are not as respected as men’s, and there is still a strong belief that women belong to external power (Beard, 2017, pp. 8, 26). There are still gender and power disparities in society, the home, and the workplace. Fewer roles are available for women as power levels rise. Women frequently defer to their husband’s authority in the home because he is the family’s breadwinner, and they encounter more workplace promotion barriers. Many women still face limitations and inequalities in possessing power.

Previous studies have investigated the issue of power relations from various perspectives. Power can be operated as a means to control the body, particularly the female body, as depicted in “Power Relations on the Female Body in Seno Gumira Ajidarma’s Short Story *Istana Tembok Bolong*” in a journal article by Ningtyas (2021). The study’s finding clearly shows how power relationships can be used to exert control over the female body due to the capitalist culture, which is controlled by capital owners that only see female bodies as a commodity. On the other side, Rustiyani, Setyowati, and Widisanty (2019) argue that gender and power relation cause inequality between men and women. In the field, Waita (2019) analyses gender power relation representation and the propagation of gender ideology from a feminine perspective. The study shows that the weaker one is portrayed as a negative persona and has a lower position.

As a phenomenon, power dynamics are almost always present. Even the most casual observer will see that practically all relationships within a household and public spheres, such as between a child and parent, a wife and husband, a student and a teacher, a worker and a boss, are set up as power connections. In practice, the relationship between women’s power and men’s power is not entirely equal. Women face more difficulties in getting equality in terms of leadership and opportunities. Lee and Pratto (2018, p. 152) cite two factors as the causes of the disparity between men and women in obtaining power. First, men have more opportunities to achieve power, such as legitimacy and physical dominance, which may go against gender norms.

In contrast, women face more restrictions due to gender norms. Second, because it is presumed that men hold positions of authority, women face more barriers than men when attempting to transfer their influence from one setting to another. In this perspective, the

gendered power exists between men and women. Men are more powerful and have more liberty than women, while women are tightly tied to gender norms and stereotypes.

Kerfoot and Knights (1994) examine the power and the reproduction/ maintenance of gender inequality and male dominance through the lens of Foucault. They openly distance themselves from the argument over the underlying causes of men's dominance and reliance on the old economic concept of power. They would instead establish a non-essentialist account of its dominance. Drawing on Foucault, they conclude that gender relations are a mirror of gendered subjectivities, which are created by power relations. The 'nature' of gender and power relations are linked significantly; gender is a product of power relations. In line with that, in order to better understand how power relationships arise, Lipman-Blumen (1994) looks at the essence of the human situation. Because of their marked intransigence to efforts to recalibrate the power relationships they reflect, rather than their particularity per se, gender relations offer a helpful setting to investigate the workings of power. Power dynamics reduce essential anxiety by presenting the illusion that everything is under control, causing the weaker party to become obedient and submissive.

Lips (1991, p. 6) sees gender power relations as a system or structure of power that goes beyond specific female-male interactions and the deliberate acts of dominance or attempts at equality that occur within such relationships. Gender power relations can also be described as disciplinary power. The presence of this structure, called "institutionalized sexism," frequently makes it difficult for women to be perceived as powerful, making the exercise of power by a woman appear at best power, and disparities between men and women exist.

The portrait of gender and power relation between men and women dapat ditemukan dalam karya sastra, salah satunya novel *Circe* yang ditulis oleh Madeline Miller. The story of *Circe* tells the life of a goddess with the least power named Circe, who lives in a male-dominated society. As she grows up, she learns that society treats women differently; women do not have significant roles or power. As goddesses, their lives are ruled and controlled by the gods. They are not allowed to possess power or make express their idea. Circe, who chooses to go against the rules, is exiled to the human world as a punishment, and in her exile, she finds out that male humans treat women the same as the gods. There, she learns to stand on her own feet to protect herself and the people she loves. Therefore, *Circe* is studied to obtain a deeper understanding of how gender and power relations impact shaping roles and power ownership. This study is limited to examining the relations of gender and power between men and women and how it affects the characters.

## **B. Method**

To examine the gender and power relation in Madeline Miller's *Circe*, the writer uses a qualitative approach to collect, analyze, and describe data taken from the object along with the theory of power and gender by Lipman-Blumen (1994) and the theory of gendered power by Lee and Pratto (2018) to support the analysis.

Lipman-Blumen (1994) described that gender roles play a crucial part in power relations since they reflect the power that individuals possess. The weak are kept in various degrees of slavery, inclined to be controlled by and submissive to the powerful party. They

lack the ability to make decisions and take action, and they only have restricted access to resources. In line with that, Lee and Pratto (2018) emphasized how gender stereotypes and gender perceptions of men and women contribute to the disparities between men and women in possession of power. Men are perceived as being mentally and physically more capable, as well as more influential, particularly in terms of power and authority, whereas women are perceived as having limitations, particularly their attachment to norms and societal standards.

## **C. Findings and Discussion**

### **The Relation of Power and Gender in Circe**

In Madeline Miller's *Circe*, gender and power relations are depicted by the interaction between the male and female characters in the novel. The male characters always hold the most significant control and rule the lives of the other female characters, while the female characters have less power and social influence.

#### **a. Gender Inequality**

In *Circe* novel, women and men are not viewed as having equal status in terms of roles and power, which causes gender inequality between men and women, as depicted in the following quotation.

'Each of them, except for Circe. You were all here when she confessed that she sought her powers openly. She had been warned to stay away, yet she disobeyed.' (Miller, 2019, p. 63)

When Circe admits that she is the one that turns Glaucos into a deity and turns Scylla into a monster by using *pharmaka* --a plant with magical powers that are forbidden by God-- it turns out that she is *pharmakis* (a witch), Circe faces criticism from the society and her family. It is believed that Circe is consciously pursuing a power that she should not have since in a male-dominated society women tend to be powerless. This demonstrates how the male-dominated system has control over women's access to resources, ensuring that they are unable to wield the same power as men. Women will face social repercussions from society when they go against the social norms that have been established, whereas men are not subject to the same consequences.

'That is how it works, Circe. I tell Father that my sorcery was an accident, he pretends to believe me, and Zeus pretends to believe him, and so the world is balanced. It is your own fault for confessing. Why you did that, I will never understand.' (Miller, 2019, p. 65)

Aeëtes, who also possessed the same power, did not receive the same judgment from society. Aeëtes emphatically says that his father and Zeus are only pretending to believe that he gets his powers by accident. However, in fact, they know that it is not an accident to maintain balance in society. Society believes that it is natural for a man to seek and have power but not for women. This illustrates that there is injustice and inequality between men and women. Aeëtes also expressed his surprise because Circe admits her power in public has implied that it is not normal for women to express their thoughts publicly. This continues when Circe gets punished for her action.

'We have agreed as well that these powers present no immediate danger. Perses lives beyond our boundaries and is no threat. Pasiphaë's husband is a son of Zeus, and he will be sure she is

held to her proper place. Aeëtes will keep his kingdom, as long as he agrees to be watched.’ (Miller, 2019, p. 62)

‘She defied my commands and contradicted my authority. She has turned her poisons against her own kind and committed other treacheries as well.’ The white sear of his gaze landed on me. ‘‘She is a disgrace to our name. An ingrate to the care we have shown her. It is agreed with Zeus that for this she must be punished. She is exiled to a deserted island where she can do no more harm. She leaves tomorrow.’ (Miller, 2019, p. 63)

Circe who is considered to have resisted by getting the power of the *pharmaka* is intentionally considered to have committed a crime and betrayal. Though Circe is not the only one who does that, there are Aeëtes, Pasiphaë, and Perses who have similar power, but only Circe gets the exile sentence just because only Circe openly admits it in public. They choose to turn a blind eye to the other three people and pretend that Circe deserves the sentence for going against the rules. Circe is also considered to have defamed her family name and is considered a child who does not know herself because a goddess with little power like herself deliberately seeks power beyond her control and is considered a threat to the survival of society. Likewise, with Pasiphaë, even though the power she got is considered an accident, Helios ensures that Pasiphaë will not be the same threat as Circe because she is married to Minos and is under her husband’s authority, ensuring that it is the right thing for her. Aeëtes and Perse get different treatments. They do not get any punishment for it. This shows that gender provides more advantages for men, where men are always superior while women are inferior. Women who make mistakes or oppose the rule will be a bad example to society. As stated by Aeëtes, ‘‘I heard Zeus wanted to make an example of you. But of course, Father can only allow him so much license.’’ (Miller, 2019, p. 64). This implicitly describes what will happen to women who dare to challenge the power and authority in society by using Circe as a bad ‘‘example’’ of a woman who does not obey the norm. They always make sure that women will always be under and need to be controlled by men.

## **b. Violence**

The view of women as weak in a male-dominated culture has various harmful consequences, one of which is gender-based violence.

In this novel, the act of violence is shown by the Gods and male humans to the Goddesses, especially nymphs. They assume that as a man, they are more powerful and have higher authority than other Goddesses, making them treat the Goddesses arbitrarily, as Circe heard the story from her cousins.

I had heard by then the stories whispered among my cousins, of what they might do to nymphs they caught alone. The rapes and ravishments, the abuses. I found it hard to believe. They looked weak as mushroom gills. (Miller, 2019, p. 26)

From the quotation above, the nymphs, goddesses with little power, are often kidnapped by humans to be used as sex slaves. The fact that the kidnapped nymphs are not only raped but also subjected to violence shows that nymphs are very vulnerable to sexual and physical violence. Circe cannot believe what she hears because, for Circe, nymphs are goddesses. Even though nymphs have little power but they have eternal life. Of course, they are considered

nobler than humans, who look weak and helpless without their help. Unfortunately, this happened to Circe while she was in exile.

'Thank you, sweet.'

Sweet. The word set me back a moment. They had called me goddess before, and so I believed they thought me. But they showed no awe or religious deference, I realised. The title had been only a flattering courtesy for a woman alone ... 'When will your husband be home? We would toast such fine hospitality.' I laughed. 'Oh, I do not have a husband.' (Miller, 2019, p. 162)

'Then perhaps there is some other host we should thank? An uncle, a brother?'

'If you would thank your host,' I said, 'thank me. This house is mine alone.'

At the word, the air changed in the room ... All the men were rising now, their eyes fixed on me.' (Miller, 2019, p. 163)

The man threw me back against the wall... With his right hand, he tore my clothes, a practiced gesture. I remember what I thought, bare against the grinding stone: I am only a nymph after all, for nothing is more common among us than this. (Miller, 2019, p. 164)

When a ship comes to the island of Aiaia, the island where Circe is exiled, Circe welcomes and feeds the crew with pleasure. Before knowing that Circe only lives alone and there are no other men on the island, they are respectful to Circe, but after learning that Circe only lives alone, they begin to show their true faces and ask Circe many times to make sure that there are no other men on the island besides them. Circe notices the change in their attitude towards her. Circe thinks that they know that Circe is a goddess and that there is no way they will harm her. However, for the ship's crew, it is not something they need to be afraid of because they only see Circe as a woman, not a goddess. They think that they are stronger than Circe. They rape Circe and treat her arbitrarily. This shows that in gender relations, men do not see women's power because, naturally, in the male-dominated system, they are more powerful than women. As Circe stated that she is only a nymph, and this commonly happens to nymphs, it shows how women are only treated as sex slaves by men.

Brides, nymphs were called, but that is not really how the world saw us. We were an endless feast laid out upon a table, beautiful and renewing. And so very bad at getting away. (Miller, 2019, p. 171)

Circe states that the word nymph which means bride does not have the same meaning as the word itself. Circe likens the meaning of the word nymph as a beautiful party provided endlessly, implying that a nymph is only a goddess with a beautiful appearance that served to be a slave to the gods and decoration in every corner of the palace. Even though they know this, the nymphs prefer to stay rather than leave the palace because, as goddesses with low power, nymphs have no role other than to decorate the palace or take care of fish and flowers. It shows how women only have limited choices in their life.

### **c. Subordination**

Subordination occurs when one gender sex becomes inferior to the other. Women are often subordinate to men in most situations. In this situation, women frequently suffer from a lack of resources, poor decision-making, and loss of power.

In the novel, the woman's subordination is portrayed by some female characters, as shown in the following quotation.

They called me nymph, assuming I would be like my mother and aunts and thousand cousins. Least of the lesser goddesses, our powers were so modest they could scarcely ensure our

eternities. We spoke to fish and nurtured flowers, coaxed drops from the clouds or salt from the waves. That word, nymph, paced out the length and breadth of our futures. In our language, it means not just goddess, but bride. (Miller, 2019, p. 1)

From the text above, it can be seen that the main character, Circe, is initially viewed as a nymph at the beginning of the story. One of the goddesses with limited abilities can only call forth fish, tend flowers, call forth drops of water from the sky, and call forth salt from the waves. It illustrates how a goddess who was born as a nymph had limited options due to her power and position as in the male-dominated society, the one with less power usually has a small role and choice. Nymphs only have to take care of fish and flowers and fetch water and salt. Not only that, but Nymph is also in charge of guarding, as mentioned in the story, “*My mother was one of them, a naiad, guardian of fountains and streams.*” (Miller, 2019, p. 1). This emphasizes that women have the duty and responsibility to care for. In this case, women have the responsibility to manage the sources of life and reproduce life, and they have no choice because their power is limited, which positions them at the lowest. The word Nymph, which means bride, also emphasizes how women as brides have a significant role in the task of reproducing life. It suggests that reproduction is the fundamental social role of women.

Another thing that shows an indication of male-dominated in the novel is when Circe was born. In a male-dominated society, men and women are not considered equally based on their gender, so this affects the role of each gender in their environment.

‘A girl,’ my mother said to him, wrinkling her nose ... ‘She will make a fair match,’ he said. ‘How fair?’ my mother wanted to know. This might be consolation, if I could be traded for something better ... ‘A prince, I think.’  
‘A prince?’ my mother said. ‘You do not mean a mortal?’  
‘Surely she will marry a son of Zeus,’ my mother insisted. She had already begun imagining herself at feasts upon Olympus, sitting at Queen Hera’s right hand.  
‘No. Her hair is streaked like a lynx. And her chin. There is a sharpness to it that is less than pleasing.’ (Miller, 2019, p. 3)

Perse was unhappy that Circe was a girl when she was born. It can be seen when she wrinkles her nose while she tells Helios. It is obvious that Perse and Circe will find it challenging because they are female and do not hold substantial influence or roles in their societies. At that time, women do not have an important place, especially for the goddess with the least power. Perse’s excitement in ensuring that Circe finds “a fair match” suggests that women will be more valuable when they find a mate regarded favorably or as belonging to a higher social level. In this case, Circe, who was predicted to get a human partner, would be a disappointment because, in ancient Greece, humans were the lowest social class and had no power. Perse, who insists that Circe will marry Zeus’ son, knows that only then can she get recognition. Helios disagrees with Perse because Circe’s physical attributes, which are viewed as less appealing, also imply that women are valued according to their physical attributes.

The lack of power and role of women in the household makes women unable to choose or make decisions, as illustrated in the following quotation.

‘I want to marry Glaucos. Will you allow it?’  
He laughed. ‘Glaucos? He has his pick. I do not think it will be you.’ (Miller, 2019, p. 46)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Circe wants Glaucos to be her husband, but Helios thinks that Glaucos will not pick Circe to be her wife. Circe can marry Glaucos only

if Glaucos also wants Circe to be his wife. Circe even has to ask Helios permission for her decision and choice. It implies that women have limited choices even in choosing their spouse. They do not have the authority to direct and manage their own life. As illustrated in the quotation, women are endowed with different privileges and authority than men, who are free to pursue their own interests.

'I sit at councils with your father now. I do not have to beg for every scrap. Nymphs clamour for me, and I may choose the best among them, which is Scylla'. (Miller, 2019, p. 47)

When Circe expresses her interest to Glaucos once he is a powerless human, he is delighted, but when Glaucos becomes a god, he selects Scylla, the most attractive nymph, as his partner. It demonstrates how males have the freedom to choose and make choices for themselves. It also indirectly implies the relationship of gender and power between men and women. Circe, a goddess, had higher power and position than Glaucos, a human before Glaucos became a god.

It suggests that when women have a higher position than males, they have supremacy based on power relations, but when men and women have the same position, women will lose in gender relations.

On the other hand, the weak role of women and the limitations of women in power in the family, which is the primary basis of the male-dominated system, makes it invisible and natural, as depicted in the quotation below.

'The great gods sent me.'  
'Zeus?'

'No,' she said. 'My father.' (Miller, 2019, p. 156)

'Go home, then,' I said, 'if you are so miserable. I release you from your sentence.'

'You cannot. The great gods have commanded me. There is nothing you can do to release me. I am staying a year.'

It should have upset her, but she was smirking. Preening as if in victory before a crowd. I watched. When she had spoken of the gods exiling her, she had showed no anger, and no grief either. She took their authority as natural, irresistible, like the movements of the spheres. (Miller, 2019, p. 157)

When a nymph is sent to Aiaia, the island where Circe was exiled, to serve her sentence, the nymph uses the term "great god" to refer to her father. She refused to leave because the punishment she received was an order from her father when Circe allowed her to leave if she wanted to. It illustrates that in a male-dominated system, naturally, men become the highest authority and is able to rule the lives of other goddesses. The fact that the nymph says that Circe cannot do anything to release her shows that women lack influence and power in the household and society. The nymph who does not feel angry over her isolation depicted how male-dominated has been embedded in the family and society at that time so that the form of control and domination of men over women looks normal and natural.

#### **d. Oppression**

For a very long time, oppression has become a concern. It usually happens to women and girls. In a family, a man is seen as the head of the household and has authority over his wife and his children, it shows that in a family, women lack power and control. This can be seen in the following quotation.



She caught my father's eye when he came to visit the halls of her own father, Oceano...her hair was a warm brown, each strand so lustrous it seemed lit from within. She would have felt my father's gaze, hot as gusts from a bonfire. I see her arrange her dress so it drapes just so over her shoulders. I see her dab her fingers, glinting, in the water ... my mother knew he was coming. Frail she was, but crafty, with a mind like a spike-toothed eel. She saw where the path to power lay for such as her, and it was not in bastards and riverbank tumbles. (Miller, 2019, pp. 2-3)

In the quotation above, Circe explains that her mother, Perse, catches her father's attention at their meeting in the hall. Perse is described as a beautiful nymph. She knows that Helios, the God of the Sun, often visits her residence and does some tricks to get more attention from him. She is aware that as a nymph with little power, she does not have a significant role or power in society, and it is only through Helios that she can get the power. This illustrates how women in a male-dominated society depend on the power possessed by men. Women can only obtain this power by getting married to a powerful man since males who are placed above them in society have more authority. It causes women to feel dependent on men and are in a weaker position. Moreover, women also often have no control over themselves and have little influence in both society and family. This is depicted in the following text.

'Who is that?' my father said to Oceanos.

Oceanos had many golden-eyed grandchildren from my father already, and was glad to think of more. 'My daughter Perse. She is yours if you want her'. (Miller, 2019, p. 2)

The quote above illustrates that women not only have constrained positions and little influence in society, but they also have no control over themselves in the household. As the father, male, and head of the household, Oceanos has the authority and responsibility to make decisions for his family. Such judgments may be final even if they impact the child's future. Oceanos knows that Helios is a powerful deity with a significant societal role. Therefore, he does not solicit Perse's opinion first before talking to Helios that he can have Perse if he wants her. Oceanos also knows that if Perse marries Helios, he will also gain power and a more significant social role and influence, as Helios is one of the greatest gods. This also illustrates how women are considered as nothing more than commodities to be used to gain power and do not play a significant role in families.

Pasiphaë was contracted in marriage ... 'Minos,' my father said from his feasting couch. 'A son of Zeus and king of Crete.'

'A mortal?' My mother sat up. 'You said it would be a god.'

'I said he would be an eternal son of Zeus, and so he is.'

Perse sneered. 'Prophecy talk. Does he die or not?'

A flash in the room, searing as the fire's heart. 'Enough! Minos will rule all the other mortal souls in the afterlife. His name will go on through the centuries. It is done. (Miller, 2019, p. 25)

From the quote above, Perse is surprised that Pasiphaë will marry Minos, son of Zeus from the human race, but Helios insists that Minos is the best partner for Pasiphaë. It shows that Helios's decision is absolute and cannot be changed even though Perse disagrees with it. This illustrates how men have higher authority than women. Women do not have enough voice to change men's decisions. Helios also did not ask for Pasiphaë's opinion. This illustrates that women do not have the freedom to express their opinions.

The river-gods shook their heads, making sounds like water over rocks. Helios, you have the strangest children.

My father sighed. 'It is Perse's fault. All the ones before hers were fine.' (Miller, 2019, p. 55)

He agrees that something new moves in the world. That these powers are unlike any that have come before. He agrees that they grow from my four children with the nymph Perse. (Miller, 2019, p. 62)

When the gods and goddesses learn that the children of Helios and Perse have magical powers, they find it strange and nothing to be proud of. Helios, embarrassed by it, blames Perse as the cause of the problem. In this case, Perse as a woman gets an unfair trait. Just because she is a mother who gives birth to her child, she is blamed for oddities that are not necessarily her fault. Helios realizes that his three children possess powers beyond his control, and he does not want to be blamed by other gods and goddesses for something he has no control over. The other gods and goddesses only agree with Helios' statement.

### **Circe's Deal Towards Gendered Power**

The male-dominated culture used in Madeline Miller's *Circe* shows the existence of gendered power in the relationship between male and female characters in the novel. Men are considered the central processor of power and domination in the male-dominated culture. In addition, from the previous section of the analysis, men are described as more powerful and have a more robust image, while women are described as weaker and submissive. Circe, as the main character in Madeline Miller's *Circe*, is aware that in her society, women are mistreated. Some parts of the novel show how Circe deals with gendered power in order to achieve what she wants.

#### **a. Break the Stereotype of Women**

In gender stereotyping, women tend to be quiet. They are not allowed to speak in front of the public. Otherwise, Circe, who is disappointed in Glaucos for choosing another nymph to be his wife, decides to tell the truth that she is the one who changes Scylla and Glaucos in front of the gods and goddesses.

'Father,' I said, 'it was I who made Scylla a monster.'

All around me, voices dropped. I cannot say if the very furthest couches looked, if Glaucos looked, but all my uncles did, snapped up from their drowsy conversation. I felt a sharp joy. For the first time in my life, I wanted their eyes.

'I used wicked pharmaka to make Glaucos a god, and then I changed Scylla. I was jealous of his love for her and wanted to make her ugly. I did it selfishly, in bitter heart, and I would bear the consequence.' (Miller, 2019, p. 53)

The quote above shows how Circe breaks one stereotype of women in the male-dominated society that women should be silent and hide their thoughts in public. This stereotype is undoubtedly an injustice to women because, as a result, women cannot express and voice their opinions, limiting the role and influence of women in society. Circe bravely voices her thoughts and desires, and for the first time in her life, she "felt the sharp joy", not only a joy but a short joy. Her desire to gain the attention of the gods and goddesses by saying that she is the one who turned Glaucos, a powerless human, into a deity implies that she has power and abilities. She will bravely accept the consequences that will be given to her, showing that she is not weak and robust enough to face the consequences. In the end, she catches their attention.

#### **b. Break the Gender Role**

Male-dominated cultures accentuate the biological distinctions between men and women, ensuring that males always play the dominating or masculine roles and women play the inferior or feminine ones.

In the novel, Circe and the crew of the Daedalus ship, who will go to Crete to meet Pashipae, must pass through the Scyla's strait. When Circe thinks about how to get them through safely, the crew has no respect for Circe despite knowing that Circe is a goddess but their attitude toward Circe change when Circe changes her appearance to resemble her brother Perses.

At once came the rasp of blades being sheathed, the thunk of spears set down. Even Polydamas, in his borrowed tunic, obeyed. I almost wanted to laugh. I had never been given such deference in my life. Is that what it was like to be Perses? (Miller, 2019, p. 99).

When Circe changes her appearance to resemble Perses, she notices that the crew treats her differently. They volunteered to help her to prepare a plan to pass through the Scyla's strait. When she became Perses, Circe earned respect without saying she was a goddess or using her father's name, Helios. Something she had never felt and earned before when she was a goddess, and by becoming Perses, she could finally get the help of the crew quickly.

In the relationship between women and men, women are considered to be the second sex. In sexual intercourse, women are often objects where they have no control over their bodies and tend to be exploited. Circe, who knows that it is not taboo in her society, refuses to give birth to a child from Hermes.

'Will you bear my child?' he asked me.  
I laughed at him. 'No, never and never.'

He was not hurt. He liked such sharpness, for there was nothing in him that had any blood you might spill. He asked only for curiosity's sake, because it was his nature to seek out answers, to press others for their weaknesses. He wanted to see how moonish I was over him. (Miller, 2019, p. 83)

Circe knows that Hermes does not really want to have children with her, nor does she have feelings for Hermes. Furthermore, Circe knows that Hermes is someone that she can trust. As stated in the text above, Hermes asks her just for his own sake. Circe refused to hand over control of her body to Hermes. She does not want to have any further relationship with Hermes despite knowing that she could use Hermes for her benefit, but Circe does not want to lose control of herself, and she is the one that has control over herself. She will only sleep and have children with the man she wants.

'I propose a truce,' I said. 'A test of sorts.'

What sort of test?' He leaned forward a little. It was a gesture I would come to know. Even he could not hide everything. Any challenge, he would run to meet it. His skin smelled of labor and the sea. He knew ten years of stories. I felt keen and hungry as a bear in spring.

'I have heard,' I said, 'that many find their trust in love.'

It surprised him, and oh, I liked the flash of that, before he covered it over. (Miller, 2019, p. 179)

When a ship arrives on her island, Circe feels interested in the ship's captain, Odysseus. Circe wants Odysseus, but she understands that Odysseus is not a stupid man. He knows that Circe is a goddess. To make Odysseus follow her wish, Circe treats him and makes a deal with him. Even though she falls in love with Odysseus, she does not want to lose control or get

caught up in his love. By making a deal, Circe will not depend on him and can protect herself and still have control over herself.

In a male-dominated culture, women have the characteristics of being weak and powerless. It causes women to experience oppression. Circe, tired of the oppression and sexual harassment she was experiencing, decided not to follow those characteristics.

Let them see what I am. Let them learn the world is not as they think... They were pious men, honestly lost, and I would feed them, and if there was a handsome one among them I might take him to my bed. It was not desire, not even its barest scrapings. It was a sort of rage, a knife I used upon myself. I did it to prove my skin was still my own. (Miller, 2019, p. 169)

Circe decides to show her true being when another ship comes to her island. The crew, who know that Circe lives alone on the island, are not aware because they think Circe is only a woman, even though she is a goddess. Circe realizes that even though she is a goddess and a child of Helios, she cannot deny the fact that she is only a woman who lives alone in her exile. In order to protect herself, Circe shows her true power as a witch. She takes control of the men who oppress her, who only see her as a sexual object. Circe carefully arranges a plan to trap the crew and chooses the most handsome among them to sleep with her, proving that she has power and still controls them and her body.

I kept the leader for last, so he could watch. He shrank, pressed against the wall. Please. Spare me, spare me, spare me.  
No, I would say. Oh, no. (Miller, 2019, p. 171)

Circe saves the captain for last to satisfy her desire to see the captain's fear. As he is a man and the captain, he has higher power and authority over his crew or women.

In another part, Circe, who wants freedom and to live with the people she loves, ventures to meet her father, Helios, demanding her freedom.

'You dare to threaten me?'  
'I do.' ... His rage was so hot the air bent and wavered around him. 'I can end you with a thought.'  
It was my oldest fear, that white annihilation. I felt it shiver through me. But enough. At last, enough.  
'You can,' I said. 'But you have always been cautious, Father. You know I have stood against Athena. I have walked in the blackest deeps. You cannot guess what spells I have cast, what poisons I have gathered to protect myself against you, how your power may rebound upon your head. Who knows what is in me? Will you find out?'  
The words hung in the air. His eyes were discs of ignited gold, but I did not look away.  
'If I do this thing,' he said, 'it is the last I will ever do for you. Do not come begging again.'  
(Miller, 2019, p. 313)

Circe, who feels it is time for her to be free from her father's restraints and live happily with people she cares about, comes to meet Helios. Helios, who feels he is the one who takes control of Circe's life, is angry because Circe openly opposes and threatens him. Although she feels fear, she knows it will only prevent her from living the life she wants. As a great god, Helios has the power and ability to kill Circe; however, Circe has a power that he cannot control, far exceeding his own. Circe is no ordinary goddess. Circe knows that nothing will frighten even the most powerful god than a power greater than him. To achieve her goals, Circe uses these

advantages, and Helios agrees. Circe decided to get out of the gender perspective in her society that being a woman does not mean she had to be afraid and weak.

#### D. Conclusion

After completing the analysis of the novel, this study has two conclusions. First, in Madeline Miller's *Circe*, the relation between power and gender is depicted in several ways, such as gender inequality, violence, subordination, and oppression experienced by the female characters in the novel. In this relationship, men dominate women in power relations and gender relations, while women experience more injustice, especially in gender relations. It indirectly shows that power and gender are essential in determining people's roles and power in society. In this case, gender shapes perceptions and patterns between men and women manifested in gender roles that lead to inequality of power between men and women. In other ways, women become the second sex or subordinated parties and powerless. Second, Circe is aware that in her society, women are mistreated. She decides to break through the norms in the system by not following the existing gender roles and stereotypes. Instead, she chose to stand on her own feet in order to be free and live the life she wanted.

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