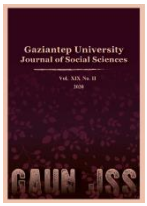

GAZİANTEP UNIVERSITY
JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Journal homepage: http://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/jss

Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article

An Island of One's Own: Home and Self-Fulfilment in Madeline Miller's *Circe*[1]

Kendine Ait Bir Ada: Madeline Miller'ın Ben, Kirke *Adlı Eserinde Ev ve Kendini Gerçekleştirme*

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MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Makale Geçmişi:
Başvuru tarihi: 18 Ağustos 2023
Kabul tarihi: 11 Şubat 2024

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Ben, Kirke,
Madeline Miller,
Ev,
Kendini gerçekleştirme,
Yunan Mitolojisi.

ÖZ

Kirke, Yunan mitolojisinin ikincil tanrıçalarından biri olarak efsunculuktaki engin bilgisiyle tanınır. Homer'ın klasik şaheseri *Odysseia Destanı*'ndan John William Waterhouse'ın tablosu *Kıskanç Kirke*'ye (1892), edebiyatta, resimde, müzikte ve popüler kültürde tasvirleri ve temsilleri çok sayıdadır. Yakın zamanda Kirke, çağdaş Amerikan roman yazarı Madeline Miller tarafından modern bir dokunuş ile yeniden yaratılmıştır. Miller'ın romanı *Ben, Kirke*'de (2018/2019), Kirke kendi hikâyesini başkahraman olarak birinci ağızdan anlatır. Roman, başkahramanın ruhsal gelişimine ve kendini gerçekleştirmesine odaklanır. Miller tarafından ilk bölümlerde aile evinde yeniden hayal edilen Kirke, masum ancak ihmal edilmiş, daima garip, bir kenara itilmiş, hor görülmüş ve ebeveynleri, kardeşleri ve akrabaları tarafından dışlanmış olarak tasvir edilir. Miller Kirke'yi öncelikle babasına ait büyük salonlarda, başarısız, kusurlu, eksik biri olduğuna ve ne bir nimfa ne de bir tanrıça olduğuna inandırılmış olarak resmeder. Ne var ki cadılık güçleri baş göstermeye başladıkça bazı eylemleriyle hayatındaki pederşahların dikkatlerini çekmeye başlar, bu erkekler tarafından cezalandırılır ve "Aiaia" adlı bir adaya sürgün edilir. Romanda bir kadının erkekler tarafından kendisine verilen bir cezayı nasıl avantaja dönüştürebildiği gösterilmektedir. Ötekileştirilen ve üzerinde bir ev, ormanlar, şifalı otlar, bitkiler ve hayvanlar olan ıssız bir adaya sürgün edilen Miller'ın Kirkesi cadılığını icra eder, hayatı keşfeder ve öz benliğini dışa vurur. Bu bakımdan bu makale, Kirke'nin kendi evine dönüştürdüğü adasının, Kirke'yi bir kadın olarak nasıl güçlendirdiğine odaklanmaktadır.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received: August 18, 2023
Accepted: February 11, 2024

Keywords:
Circe,
Madeline Miller,
Home,
Self-fulfilment,
Greek Mythology.

ABSTRACT

Circe is renowned for her profound knowledge of sorcery as a minor goddess in Greek mythology. Her depictions and representations are numerous in literature, painting, music, and popular culture, ranging from Homer's classical masterpiece *The Odyssey* to John William Waterhouse's painting *Circe Invidiosa* (1892). Recently, Circe has been recreated with a modern kick by the contemporary American novelist Madeline Miller. In Miller's novel *Circe* (2018), Circe voices her own story as the first-person heroine. The novel focuses on the spiritual growth and self-fulfilment of the protagonist. Reimagined by Miller in her family home in the early chapters, Circe is the innocent yet neglected child, always strange, pushed away, looked down upon, and alienated by her parents, siblings, and relatives. Miller first portrays Circe in her father's halls where she is made to believe that she is a failure, she is incomplete, lacking, and neither a nymph nor a goddess. However, as her powers as a witch begin to unravel, some of her practices draw the attention of the patriarchs in her life, and she is exiled by these men to an island named "Aiaia." How a woman can turn a punishment given by men into an advantage is shown in the novel. Marginalised and exiled to a deserted island with a house, forests, herbs, plants, and animals, Miller's Circe practices her witchcraft, discovers life, and manifests her true self. In this respect, this article focuses on how Circe's island, which she turns into her "home," empowers Circe as a woman.

[1] This article is the revised and expanded version of the paper presented at *VII. BAKEA International Western Cultural and Literary Studies Online Symposium: "Home,"* 15-17 September 2021, organized by Pamukkale University, Denizli.

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Introduction

> I breathed my house's air, thick with the clean smell of herbs. I felt that pleasure the bards sing of so often: homecoming.
>
> —Madeline Miller, *Circe*, 2018

Madeline Miller is an award-winning contemporary American author. *The Song of Achilles* (2011), *Heracles' Bow* (2012), *Galatea* (2013 e-book, 2022 hardcover), and *Circe* (2018) are among her published works. Like Miller's first novel, *The Song of Achilles, Circe* was "a breakout success" (Andreeva, 2019, para. 7), and quickly became an international best-seller. As in the case of Miller's other fictional works, *Circe*'s plot is set in the world of Greek mythology; and the protagonist is Circe, whose transformation "from an awkward nymph to a formidable witch" (Andreeva, 2019, para. 2) is at the heart of the story. Miller's *Circe* is a rather disruptive take on Circe's representation through history because in it, Circe has been recreated with a modern kick, as the heroine who retells her own story from the first-person point of view. It is attention-drawing since it presents a contemporary interpretation of Circe's character and actions from a female perspective by a female author. In other words, Miller chooses "to give the telling of the story" (Atwood, 2005/2018, p. 7) to this degraded woman, just like what Margaret Atwood did in her novel *The Penelopiad* (2005). Similar to Atwood, who stated in her introduction to *The Penelopiad* that she was curious "what Penelope [was] really up to" (2005/2018, p. 7), Miller was similarly after the reasons why Circe did what she did when she was writing this novel as she has suggested in several interviews. Accordingly, as a female author with the accumulation of contemporary knowledge of feminisms, Miller re-imagines what might have happened in Circe's life, what Circe might have experienced in the face of the mostly recounted events in literature, how she might have felt, and what she might have thought. By saving Circe from the ancient male perspective, she retells her most outstanding experiences with notable figures, such as Glaucus, Scylla, Daedalus, Medea, Odysseus, and Athena.

Wiener describes "[t]he heart of the novel" as "a woman's yearning for self-discovery, purpose, and ultimately, empowerment" (2019, para. 1). The novel also carries the characteristics of a rewriting in that a previously silenced—by classical male authors, such as Homer, Ovid, and Virgil—female figure from Greek mythology is given a powerful feminist voice. Miller herself states in the interview with Wiener that while writing Circe, she was "stripping out Odysseus's voice, and giving Circe the chance to speak instead" (2019, para. 4). Miller further explains that, in the novel, "Circe goes on a similar odyssey" as Odysseus who tries to "get home to his family," and "she is born into a horrendous, abusive family and must find a way to leave them and make a new home for herself" (Wiener, 2019, para. 12). In this respect, Miller's novel can also be considered a kind of *bildungsroman* in that it focuses on the protagonist's physical, mental, and spiritual growth and self-discovery. Circe's growth is partly given through the places in which she lives. For instance, Circe's position as the heroine of her own story is further highlighted with the island of "Aiaia" to which she is exiled, and which becomes her "home." In Miller's *Circe,* how miserable and upset Circe is while living with her family in her father's "halls," how Aeaea gradually becomes for her a "home" in the sense of a space where one is free to discover their true self and actualize themselves, and how having her time and space all to herself empowers Circe are being told. It is in this respect that, the aim of this article is to examine the self-fulfilment and empowerment of the female protagonist concerning the theme of home in Madeline Miller's novel *Circe* (2018) with references to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Accordingly, "under what conditions" (Woolf, 1929/1977, p.47) Circe lives in the "family home" until she arrives at her own island, how she comes to get the island all to herself, and how the island of Aeaea, Circe's own "home," helps her discover her true self in a similar way put forward by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* will be illustrated as examples for the self-fulfilment and empowerment of Miller's Circe.

What does "home" mean as a noun? Does it mean the same as the word "house"? How does one differentiate the meanings of the nouns "home" and "house"? Or are they somehow intertwined? The answers to these questions and an outlook on their figurative meanings will make the literary analysis in this article more meaningful. First of all, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* defines "home" as a noun in six main articles: "1 a: one's place of residence: DOMICILE," "1 b: HOUSE," "2: the social unit formed by a family living together," "3 a: a familiar or usual setting : congenial environment," "3 b: HABITAT," "4 a: a place of origin," "4 b: HEADQUARTERS," "5 an establishment providing residence and care for people with special needs," and lastly "6: the objective in various games" (n.d., emphases in original). Accordingly, the first three articles are the most relevant ones in the context of this study. It should be underlined that the noun home can occasionally connote the meaning "house." According to the first three articles in this dictionary, the noun home can be used in the sense of a place where someone resides, a house, and a setting familiar to a person. The noun "house," however, in *Meriam-Webster Online Dictionary* is defined in nine different articles and seems more versatile in its meanings, most of which are irrelevant in the context of this study. The meaning relevant to this study is given in the first article in the dictionary as follows: "a building that serves as living quarters for one or a few families: HOME" (n.d., emphasis in original). The word house can be differentiated from the word home with its connotation of a building. Yet, it should also be noted that the word home is given in the dictionary as one of the meanings of the word house. In this study, Circe's home literally connotes the whole island of Aeaea, the flora and fauna on it, and Circe's palace, which is the building that serves as living quarters for Circe, including all her belongings, furniture, and food in it. As for the word home's figurative meanings, it certainly has numerous connotations, such as safety and protection from all types of external danger, warmth, food, family, control, privacy, and freedom. The popular saying "home sweet home" connotes most—if not all—of these meanings from a positive perspective. However, in literature and life, there are instances in which "home" becomes a negative place where one does not feel safe at all, is scared to death, and is threatened, or even killed. Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832, 1842) exemplifies the horrors of home in that the enclosed space the Lady of Shalott lives in signifies her imprisonment and the curse upon her, and leaving it eventually causes her death. In the first chapter of *Aurora Leigh* (1856) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, how Aurora defines her aunt's home-based life in England indicates that she associates it with imprisonment and lack of freedom; and she calls it "a sort of cage-bird life" (1856/1884, p. 12).

Furthermore, in certain cases, home can mean an abusive family for some, whose lives are turned into nightmares by their family members. In Miller's *Circe*, Circe's first home, which will be called the "family home" in this article, is owned by her father, the sun god Helios; and Circe lives there with her family. Miller portrays Circe's family home as a place of abuse while Circe's second home, the island of "Aiaia," is the place that empowers Circe as a powerful witch. The time Circe spends in these two different homes and how her experiences at each home shapes her character and life are illustrated in the following sections of the article.

Additionally, the categorisations Després (1991) makes for the meanings of home will be useful in this article in understanding what home means to Circe in different situations. Among them, ten of the categories are rather relevant to the content of this article. Each of them are sections entitled in her article as follows: "Home as Security and Control," "Home as Reflection of One's Ideas and Values," "Home as Acting Upon and Modifying One's Dwelling," "Home as Permanence and Continuity," "Home as Relationships with Family and Friends," "Home as Center of Activities," "Home as a Refuge from the Outside World," "Home as Indicator of Personal Status," "Home as Material Structure," and "Home as a Place to Own" (1991, pp. 97-99). Throughout the novel, Miller's character Circe experiences the island of

"Aiaia" in all these senses. They will be underlined in the relevant parts of the literary analysis in this article.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf famously asks the following questions regarding the condition of women who lived back in the day: "what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant?" (1929/1977, p.51). These questions examine the opportunities given to women and the (in)equality between the sexes. Such questions can also be raised while considering Circe's situation in the novel both in her father's divine halls during her childhood and youth and on her own island, "Aiaia," during the rest of her life. In her well-known work, Woolf claims that women could not become successful—not as successful as men—in their creative careers, especially as writers, for several reasons. Woolf suggests that, in the first place, women suffered from poverty, that is, they had no money of their own (1929/1977, p. 7-29). This meant that women lacked power, independence, and material means to achieve their career goals. Secondly, women did not have their own private space, more specifically their own room which would provide them with a "quiet" or "sound-proof" place (Woolf, 1929/1977, p. 58). As understood from Woolf's claims, she maintains that having one's own room enables people to concentrate on their thoughts and work more easily under quietude and not being bothered by others. Therefore, if one is after a creative aim, solitude, silence, and peace are necessary qualities of the space they use while making their art; and not having it is a problem. The third suggestion by Woolf about why women could not become as successful as men is that women had to give birth to children and take care of them for a considerable time and could not make time for themselves with such a difficult task to handle and with such amount of responsibility put on their shoulders by others (Woolf, 1929/1977, p. 27, 119, 121). In the following quotation, the emphasis on time that is taken away from mothers is evident:

> First there are nine months before the baby is born. Then the baby is born. Then there are three or four months spent in feeding the baby. After the baby is fed there are certainly five years spent in playing with the baby. You cannot, it seems, let children run about the streets. (Woolf, 1929/1977, p. 27)

The extract shows Woolf's emphasis on the time spent on childcare. In addition, Woolf underlines that women could not have the same education as men (1929/1977, p. 53) and were not even allowed to use the libraries (1929/1977, p. 83). She also draws attention to men's severe criticism of women and women's lack of self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of it (1929/1977, p. 66). In the light of these points, it can be argued that Woolf emphasizes that the main reason women could not pursue careers in the public sphere as men did was mainly the inequality between the sexes.

Accordingly, how Miller's Circe goes through similar and/or different experiences are used as significant referential points in this article. In the first place, Circe attains a "home" for herself only after she is exiled to an island as a punishment (Miller, 2018, p. 68) whereas her brother is given a kingdom, which can be interpreted as a reward, illustrating the inequality between the sexes. Home, as a concept, usually tends to represent the so-called domestic sphere, yet, in the case of Circe, her home, the island of "Aiaia" is both domestic (or private) and public sphere because the whole island, including her house on a hilltop, flora, fauna, the land, and the sea, belong to her (Miller, 2018, pp. 68-71). This meaning of home for Circe falls to the "Home as a Place to Own" category, indicated by Després (1991, p. 99). Furthermore, she has both material and immaterial means on the island to discover herself and her art, which is sorcery. There is solitude, silence, and peace on Circe's island that Woolf underlines as necessary for creativity and success. In that sense, "Home as Center of Activities" category is also meaningful here because Circe uses her home to make meaningful activities (Després, 1991, p. 98). Being a supernatural and immortal character and the daughter of a sun god from Greek mythology, Circe does not have to pay for accommodation, bills, or food, which shows that Circe does not

need money the importance of which is highlighted numerous times in Woolf's essay. Moreover, the house is magical and there is plenty of food, furniture, and all types of ware and luxuries; therefore, she does not have to worry about money, payments, shopping, cleaning, chopping wood, or other chores. These are evident in Circe's depiction of her house on the island in chapter seven:

> Certainly the house itself was no punishment. Treasures shone on every side: carved chests, soft rugs and golden hangings, beds, stools, intricate tripods, and ivory statues. The windowsills were white marble, the shutters scrolled ash wood. In the kitchen, I ran my thumb across the knives, bronze and iron, but also nacre shell and obsidian. I found bowls of quartz crystal and wrought silver. Though the rooms were deserted, there was no speck of dust, and I would learn none could cross the marble threshold. However I tracked upon it, the floor was always clean, the tables gleaming. The ashes vanished from the fireplace, the dishes washed themselves, and the firewood regrew overnight. In the pantry there were jars of oil and wine, bowls of cheese and barley-grain, always fresh and full. (Miller, 2018, p. 68-69)

Parenthetically, taking into consideration Helios' character depicted in the novel, it is apparent that he provides his daughter with such a "fit for the gods" house because he can, in the first place, and because he wants to maintain his own name and fame as a powerful god. In other words, it is not his feelings of love and responsibility for his daughter, but rather his self-love and ego which makes him give her such a house. What matters here is that, as a woman, Circe is free of mortal and daily chores that steal from a woman's time that Woolf complains about in her essay. However, this incident will also be analysed in the following sections of the article concerning Virginia Woolf's claim about men defining themselves through women.

In addition to the above-stated advantages of having an island of one's own, Miller's Circe also gradually discovers and improves her magical powers and begins using them to make her life easier. Her "struggle to find a place for herself as a woman in a man's world" (Miller, 2023b, n.p.) gradually paves the way to successfully managing her own life by herself. To illustrate, when Circe gives birth to a very difficult child, it takes years to raise that child all by herself (Miller, 2018, pp. 209-220). The whole responsibility is on her shoulders because she is a single mother and cut off from the world. Disconnection from the world of divine beings and mortals equally is also problematic for Circe because she does not have access to any books, libraries, education, or people for assistance if one is to assume that she needs them. After all, she is a goddess with magical powers. However, Circe's first-hand observations of, experiences with, and self-practices in nature, especially with herbs, plants, flowers, animals, and life (Miller, 2018, pp. 70-77) show that she becomes a self-educated and nature-schooled person in a Wordsworthian sense.

Circe and Her Home as Depicted in Mythology, Literature, Art, and Popular Culture

Represented and defined throughout history, especially by male authors including Homer, Ovid, Hesiod, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Virgil, Circe has often been depicted as a formidable, "a most beautiful and most dangerous witch" (Hamilton, 1942/2011, p. 307), at times even as an enchantress and a *femme-fatale*, living on an island, surrounded by wild beasts, forests, and herbs, turning men into beasts for being rejected or women into horrific monsters out of jealousy. Such depictions and representations of this female figure and her supposed passionate, impulsive, and formidable nature through the male gaze are almost countless in literature, painting, music, and popular culture, ranging from Homer's classical masterpiece *The Odyssey* to John William Waterhouse's *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses* (1891) and *Circe Invidiosa* (1892), from Circe in *Disney's Hercules: Animated Series* to Circe the sorceress Barbie doll. In addition to literary works, paintings, and portraits, her depictions also exist in ancient art on Greek pottery, in classical ballet, opera, *cantata*, songs, photography, comics, film, television, and video games. Although there have been female artists, such as the Swiss Neoclassical painter Angelica Kauffman and the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret

Cameron who represented Circe in their works, Madeline Miller's contemporary standpoint and rewriting style reimagines Circe from a new, liberating, and feminist perspective.

However, what particularly draws attention as different in comparison to Miller's contemporary depiction of Circe, throughout history, Circe has been imagined mostly on her island, or at least around it, in her own environment, as a witch. In other words, her birth and early life with her family in the family home have not been imagined or represented. To illustrate, how "jealous" Circe "foul[s]" the "pool" where Scylla swims every day "with monster-producing poisons" (Ovid, 2004, p. 550) in order to turn her into an abominable sea-monster is depicted with the symbolism of the colour green in *Circe Invidiosa* (1892) by Waterhouse. Waterhouse's painting is based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* in which Circe leaves her island and goes to the cove where Scylla spends her time. However, in Miller's version, Scylla's transformation by Circe takes place before Circe is exiled to her island (2018, p. 48). Moreover, Circe also transforms Glaucos whom she loves into a sea god in Miller's *Circe* before she is sentenced to the island by Helios and Zeus (2018, p. 42-43). Among numerous works of art in which she is depicted on her island, John Collier's and Frederick S. Church's paintings can be counted. While in John Collier's 1910 painting *Circe* Circe sits as an attractive naked woman next to her tigers in the forest, in Frederick S. Church's 1910 painting *Circe*, Circe is depicted in a green dress and with copper hair, casting a spell on the shores of her island with four lions, that is her "familiars" behind her. Although in these portrayals Circe's "home" is the setting which captures her as a powerful witch, it is only Miller's portrayal that explains how Circe's character may have been shaped in her family home, through an imagination of Circe's early life, including her childhood and youth traumas, problematic family relationships, and unhappiness.

Another noteworthy characteristic in most of Circe's previous depictions is that the reasons she transformed people into animals have barely been touched upon or explained. Furthermore, whenever there was an attempt to explain her deeds, it was from the male perspective: men would claim that she was jealous, "rejected," "enraged," "offended," or her "attentions" were "scorned" (Ovid, 2004, p. 550), and that she was "angry" when she was turned down, and so forth. Furthermore, she has been renowned for her profound knowledge of sorcery, referred to as "Circe's deadly art" by Hamilton (1942/2011, p. 307), and has been represented as a dangerous woman with magical powers, namely the witch of Aeaea. The typical fear of a woman with magical powers is evident in the character of this figure, and the male efforts to take her down to an inferior position are apparent in her representations. To illustrate, when compared to the "stars"—the great gods and heroes—of Greek mythology, she has usually been described only as a minor goddess, an immortal being, or simply a nymph—"the lowest of the low in divine terms" as Miller states in her interview (Wiener, 2019, para. 8)—, almost always secondary to the great heroes of Greek mythology such as Odysseus, and defined as one of the daughters of the sun god Helios. In other words, she has often been defined or described as secondary to men or in relation to men, with her weaknesses, feminine qualities, or as an enchantress. Homer depicts her, for instance, as "the beautiful Circe, a formidable goddess, with a mortal woman's voice. She is the sister of the baleful Aeetes, both being the children of the Sun who lights the world, by the same mother, Perse the Daughter of Ocean" (2003, p. 128). Furthermore, Homer refers to Circe's house as "Circe's enchanted palace" (2003, p. 135) and Circe's bed as "Circe's beautiful bed" (2003, p. 137), suggestive of her seductive charm. As for Ovid, he depicts Circe as "Circe, the sun god's daughter" (2004, p. 548) and writes "Circe […] possessed a heart more open than others to love's strongest flames" (2004, p. 549). Ovid's depiction of Circe portrays her as a passionate, "fiery" woman, and Virgil's depictions in *The Aeneid* are even more "fiery" than those of Ovid. At the beginning of book seven in *The Aeneid*, Circe is mentioned as follows:

> And they closely skirt the coasts of Circe's land
> Where the Sun's rich daughter makes her deadly groves
> Resound with her endless song, and deep in her proud halls
> She kindles fragrant cedar flaring through the night
> As her whirring shuttle sweeps her fine-spun loom.
> From there you could hear the furious growls of lions
> Bridling at their chains, roaring into the dead of night,
> The raging of bristly boars and bears caged in their pens
> And the looming forms of howling wolves: the men whose shapes
> The brutal goddess Circe changed with her potent drugs,
> Tricked them out in the hides and look of wild beasts. (Virgil, 2010, pp. 213-214)

Virgil represents Circe as a woman of wild, dangerous, and deadly nature, symbolised by her lions, wolves, bears, boars, the nighttime, and kindles. While such attributes of Circe are interpreted as destructive and threatening by Virgil, in Miller's version they signify Circe's advantageous power against others who threaten her. Miller's following statement in the interview with Wiener illustrates Miller's attempt to pull Circe out of her classical representation by Homer:

> In the *Odyssey*, Circe is very clearly the incarnation of male anxiety about female power—the fear is that if women have power, men are getting turned into pigs. The word 'witch' is still used today as a slur against women with an amount of power that makes society nervous. I am always interested in people that others are actively trying to keep quiet! (2019, para. 7)

By virtue of Miller's portrayal of Circe with some insight into this figure's mind, through empathetic interpretations of what she must have gone through and why she did what she did, and with some polishing of backbone, character, and development of character, this mythological figure has gained a voice of her own and hence a new significance. Circe introduces herself as follows in Miller's novel: "When I was born, the name for what I was did not exist. They called me nymph, assuming I would be like my mother and aunts and thousand cousins" (2018, p. 1). Yet, through self-fashioning, Circe gets to name herself as a witch. Altın argues that "Miller uses the traditional image of Circe as a witch, but she makes marked changes in the nature of this ancient image" (2020, p. 148). Indeed, contrary to Virgil's adjective "proud" to suggest a negative pride in Circe, Miller's Circe becomes a positively proud witch only because she achieves it on her own. Circe does not prefer to spend her time on the grassy riverbanks of her mother's side because she does not care for the things they gossip about all day and does not understand them (Miller, 2018, p. 4). From the very beginning of her life, she feels she is different than her relatives, and she does not dream of being a woman like her mother, sister, or cousins one day. Although she does not know who she really is at the beginning, she knows that she does not belong with her family. Through her adventurous experiences on the island, she learns about fear, curiosity, courage, learning, discovery, and practice (Miller, 2018, pp. 70-73). After her long quest for her the discovery of her soul, she decides her own fate, and consequently chooses to become a full mortal by saying, "I have a mortal's voice, let me have the rest" (Miller, 2018, p. 333).

Miller's *Circe*: Circe Rewritten

Born and raised as an immortal being in the halls of the sun god Helios, Circe is depicted as the naive and neglected child of a divine and vain family until the final paragraphs of the fifth chapter (Miller, 2018, pp.1-48): during her time there, she is always othered as a strange child, pushed away, looked down upon, and alienated by her parents, siblings, and relatives. Her siblings, for instance, Pasiphaë and Perses, who are twins, are typical bullies unceasingly treating their sister horribly. They belittle her at every single chance, and they have very high self-esteem. For instance, Pasiphaë will marry an eternal son of Zeus and Perses is named after his mother (Miller, 2018, p. 6). In Circe's own words in the novel, the twins

> were clever and quickly saw how things stood. They loved to sneer at me behind their ermine paws. *Her eyes are yellow as piss. Her voice is screechy as an owl. She is called Hawk, but she should be called Goat for her ugliness*. (Miller, 2018, p. 6, emphasis in original)

Most of the emphasised words in the novel signify the sentences uttered by others, such as Circe's parents, siblings, and relatives, despising, teasing, or gossiping about Circe, although occasionally they stand for what is on Circe's mind. They constantly make fun of her, and actually, in Circe's words, "day by day they sharpened" (Miller, 2018, p. 6). Circe's half-sisters are the same; they also discriminate Circe as evident in the following line: "'She must be one of Perse's children, look at her eyes'" (Miller, 2018, p. 7). On another occasion, Circe's siblings and her mother Perse make fun of Circe because she does not have any ideas about her father copulating with his cows in the form of a bull to make new ones. When she rejects this, they laugh at her real hard, point at her reddened cheeks, and even call her "stupid" (Miller, 2018, p. 9). As in this example, the family members always ridicule, humiliate, and embarrass her. In the first chapter of the novel, Circe comments on her hopeless state of mind while living with her family as follows:

> Such were my years then. I would like to say that all the while I wanted to break out, but the truth is, I'm afraid I might have floated on, believing those dull miseries were all there was, until the end of days. (Miller, 2018, p. 9)

In the first six chapters of the novel, in her father's divine halls, Circe is made to believe that she has no power worthy of these great halls and that she is a failure, she is incomplete, lacking, and neither a nymph nor a goddess (Miller, 2018, pp. 1-65). In the eyes of her family, she is neither as potent or powerful like gods or goddesses nor beautiful and charming with her bodily features and charm like the many nymphs in her family. Her voice is likened to those of the mortals, and the family members always tease her because of it. Even her name was chosen accordingly. Circe was named by one of her aunts as "*Hawk*, Circe, for [her] yellow eyes, and the strange, thin sound of [her] crying" (Miller, 2018, p. 4, emphasis in original). In this respect, Circe, during her time with her family, is a "homeless-at-home" woman (Wardhaugh, 1999, p. 92). To put it differently, Circe is made to feel as if she is "nobody" in the family-home phase of her life. This destroys the concept of "home as relationships with family and friends" (Després, 1991, p. 98) for Circe because all these relationships are total failures and merely sources of unhappiness.

How her family members make Circe figuratively homeless at home can be examined in detail through examples of instances in which each relative humiliates or despises Circe. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf complains about the poverty of women and adds with a reproach to mothers the following statement: "[w]hat had our mothers been doing then that they had no wealth to leave us? Powdering their noses? Looking in at shop windows?" (1929/1977, p. 25). The type of mother mentioned sarcastically by Woolf can be found in the mother that Circe has in Miller's novel. Perse is "a naiad, guardian of fountains and streams" (Miller, 2018, p. 1) and all she cares about is her looks and being admired and making others jealous, and what she can show off with. What does Perse do, does she have no wealth to give to Circe? She swims and plays in fountains and streams all day, and always looks good, trying to seduce her husband to have another baby so that she can show off and talk about that child's great marriage or great kingdom in the future. She does not give anything valuable to Circe, and to make matters worse, she incessantly humiliates her daughter, which considerably damages Circe's self-esteem. The following insults illustrate the extent of the mother's humiliations of her child:

> *Circe is dull as a rock. Circe has less wit than bare ground. Circe's hair is matted like a dog's. If I have to hear that broken voice of hers once more. Of all our children, why must it be she who is left? No one else will have her*. (Miller, 2018, p. 35, emphasis in original)

If one is to assume the parents, especially the mother, as an essential element of one's home where one is supposed to feel safe, protected, happy, and loved, then Circe's mother, Perse, is one of the most "toxic" or abusive mothers one can imagine because she constantly criticises, abuses, and upsets her child. In that sense, Miller's Circe is depicted as extremely unlucky—chiefly in the first six chapters—when it comes to her mother.

As for Circe's father, he is depicted in Miller's version as a Titan—literally and metaphorically—who always "outshines" others—as he is also the sun god—including his children. Woolf's well-known metaphor of the "looking-glass" that she uses to describe the function of women for men is particularly applicable here. Woolf says:

> Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle […] [M]irrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. (Woolf, 1929/1977, p. 41)

Similarly, Circe's father metaphorically doubles his size by comparing his great powers with those of Circe. Helios is represented as a narcissistic god who likes showing off with his fearsome abilities to burn, light, shine, and destroy, and does not accept any matches or see any rivals to himself. Miller depicts him with a titanic personality he imposes on his children at every chance. Therefore, how Circe describes her father in Miller's novel is noteworthy: "My father has never been able to imagine the world without himself in it" (2018, p. 4). The following dialogue between Circe and Helios further illustrates how the father reflects his own figure onto his daughter while answering her questions and feels superior through Circe's alleged inferiority:

> 'What would happen,' I said, 'if a mortal saw you in your fullest glory?'
> 'He would be burned to ash in a second.'
> 'What if a mortal saw me?'
> My father smiled […] 'The mortal would count himself fortunate.'
> 'I would not burn him?'
> 'Of course not,' he said.
> 'But my eyes are like yours.'
> 'No,' he said. 'Look.' […] 'And this is the least of my powers. Can you do as much?'
> All night I stared at those logs. I could not. (Miller, 2018, p. 5)

In addition to showing his arrogant and egotistic side, these qualities also figuratively represent Helios's temper, anger, and intolerant nature. They can even be regarded as indicators of the fact that he has no tolerance for disobedience or disrespect, especially in the presence of others, as a typical patriarchal authority figure. As a significant element of the family home, a father is expected by the naïve child to be someone to turn to whenever needed. In the eyes of the child, a father is ideally a figure to protect and save his child when there is a difficulty, a threat, or a danger. Although fathers are also traditionally associated with authority in their children's eyes, they may become a fearful figure deep inside the child's mind as well since authority often comes as a package with fear. Since Circe's male parent is closer to the latter one, he is also depicted as a "toxic" or abusive parent in Miller's version. His abusiveness is most evident when he, together with Zeus, exiles his own daughter to a deserted island, to live alone away from her family (Miller, 2018, p. 63). However, although being deserted by their parents is one of the biggest nightmares of children, in Circe's case, it turns out to be a blessing because she can manage her own destiny by making her own decisions.

As Circe's powers as a witch begin to unravel starting with the end of chapter five, with the case of Glaucos being turned into a sea god and Scylla into a monster *"by Circe's hand"* (Miller, 2023a, n.p.), her practices of witchcraft, or *pharmakeia* (Miller, 2018, p. 57) are discovered in chapter six, and they "menace the gods themselves" (Miller, 2023a, n.p.).

Therefore, she is punished by Helios and Zeus and sentenced to live forever on an island on her own, banned to use *pharmaka*, that is herbs (Miller, 2018, p. 63). Helios is not convinced despite Circe's efforts to confess and explain that it was what she did which turned Glaucos into a sea god and Scylla into a sea-monster:

> 'I used wicked *pharmaka* to make Glaucos a god, 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.'
> '*Pharmaka*,' my father said.
> 'Yes. The yellow flowers that grow from Kronos' spilled blood and turn creatures to their truest selves. I dug up a hundred flowers and dropped them in her pool.'
> […]
> 'It is no matter. Those flowers have no powers in them, not anymore. Zeus and I made sure of that.'
> I stared at him. 'Father, I did it. With my own hands, I broke their stalks and smeared the sap on Glaucos' lips, and he was changed.' (Miller, 2018, p. 53, emphasis in original)

Indeed, Circe's power for transforming things and people is unacceptable for Helios because he has no tolerance for powerful women around him, which resonates Woolf's looking-glass metaphor once again. When Circe continues to try and persuade her father with expressions like "You are wrong" (Miller, 2018, p. 54) and "I say those plants have power" (p.54), Helios bursts with anger and attacks her with his bitter and hurting words:

> 'You dare contradict me? You who cannot light a single flame, or call one drop of water? Worst of my children, faded and broken, whom I cannot pay a husband to take. Since you were born, I pitied you and allowed you licence, yet you grew disobedient and proud. Will you make me hate you more?' (Miller, 2018, p. 54)

However, despising his daughter as such is not enough for Helios. What is worse is that Helios only believes that it was Circe who transformed Glaucos and Scylla when his son Aeëtes tells him and proves that what she says is true (Miller, 2018, pp. 57-58). Circe witnesses how silent his father becomes after being convinced, and she realizes it is because "[h]e is afraid." (Miller, 2018, p. 58, emphasis in original). The male child is heard and believed while the female child is yelled at and humiliated. This is another sign that Miller uses to show that the family home harms Circe's self-esteem. Later, Helios and Zeus confer about how to punish Circe, and the verdict is being exiled to an island named "Aiaia" "where she can do no more harm" (Miller, 2018, p. 63), which occurs at the beginning of chapter seven (p. 67). What Miller shows with this decision is to what extent men are afraid of and cautious about powerful women: In the case they cannot or will not decide to destroy a powerful woman completely, in other words kill her, they will send her away to a distant place where she will no longer cause any trouble.

It is also emphasised in the novel that Circe's brother, Aeëtes, whom she raised and cared for more than their mother, is given his own kingdom by Helios (Miller, 2018, p. 28) while Circe can get a place for herself only through punishment by Helios and Zeus. After all, in Circe's words, "[s]ons were not punished" (Miller, 2018, p. 159). Furthermore, Aeëtes breaking his ties with Circe and, in a way, deserting her is the final blow on Circe. She has no bonds left tying her to her family any more by the time they decide to send her away. The discrepancy between rewarding the male child with a kingdom with subjects, land, resources, and other advantages and punishing the female child with a deserted island evidently shows the discrimination between children. Yet, in time, Circe's purported punishment turns out to be an advantage for her. Marginalised and sent away to a deserted island with a house (which is rather a palace with endless food and resources in it which constantly renew magically), forests, herbs, plants, and animals on it, Circe is ironically free, has all the time in the world and chance to practice her witchcraft, discover life, and manifest her true self. For Circe's art, that is witchcraft, herbs, plants, animals are quite valuable although they are looked down upon by men as useless. Circe "turns the whole island into a laboratory to gain mastery over the art of magic" (Akçeşme and Şarlar, 2022, p. 1494). In that sense, Miller tells the story of a punishment

imposed upon a woman by men, eventually turning into a reward for the woman by virtue of privacy, freedom, time, and resources she attains. Circe's actual journey of self-discovery and self-fulfilment starts on this island which she calls home in the course of time. Constantly looked down upon, ignored, belittled, and eventually pushed away to the world of mortals by her family, the yellow-eyed goddess Circe sets out to invent her own power—witchcraft—at her new home. Moreover, it is not only her remarkable power that she discovers by virtue of her island, but she also learns how to make up her own mind, how to deal with bullies in her life, such as Hermes, Athena, and her father, how to protect herself from danger, how to communicate with others, how to love, and finally becomes what she yearns to become.

However, during her quest for self-fulfilment, several tough incidents happen on the island that teach, change, and shape Circe. Visitors come to Aeaea, both mortal and divine, ranging from Odysseus to Hermes, from maids sent by gods as punishment to this island to strange men who try to abuse Circe. Maidens are sent to the island for punishment by Helios to assist Circe as maids, but they whine all the time and make life difficult for Circe instead of helping her. Although the maids on the island sent to help Circe remind Woolf's question about whether a woman has any servants to help her—a question to help people think about the difficulties in a woman's life—, consequently, Circe prefers a life without these spoiled girls, she prefers being alone, and sends them away from her palace (Miller, 2018, pp. 155-162). Therefore, in this novel, Miller gives more power and agency to women when compared to Woolf. In chapter fourteen, how Circe is raped in her own palace by the visiting men whom she accepts as guests and serves them food and wine is represented as a reason for her to later turn men into pigs (Miller, 2018, pp. 161-165). Before the rape scene, after being hospitably served by Circe, the men inquire if she has "a husband," if there is another host, like a "father" or "[a]n uncle, a brother" (Miller, 2018, p. 162-163), to whom they should thank. Circe's answer to them summarizes the situation: "'If you would thank your host,' I said, 'thank me. This house is mine alone'" (Miller, 2018, p. 163). Her answer resonates two meanings of home categorised by Després: "Home as Indicator of Personal Status" and "Home as a Place to Own" (1991, p. 99). In other words, she claims for herself a personal status as the owner of her own place as a woman. Later, after one of the men rapes her, she transforms all of them into pigs, then kills them. What they do can be interpreted as trespassing, and, in this respect, what she does is merely self-defence as the owner of the place. Circe recounts the rape incident by focusing on what a terrible, disgusting, and humiliating experience it was and by giving many specific details such as these:

> A mortal would have fainted, but I was awake for every moment. At last, I felt the man tremble, and his arm loosened. My throat was crushed inward like a rotted log. I could not seem to move. A drop of sweat fell from his hair onto my bare chest, and began to slide. I became aware of his men speaking behind him. Is she dead? one of them was saying. She better not be dead, it's my turn. A face loomed over the captain's shoulder. Her eyes are open. (Miller, 2018, pp. 164-165)

Circe rewrites her own story here, taking the control from the hands of the male authors, and claims that she almost passed out, she could not move, she was aware of men watching this offensive event, and she could hear them speak about their turns to rape her. Although Circe does not directly express how she feels at that moment, the vivid portrayal of the experience puts the reader of the text into her shoes to feel what she feels. Moreover, all of this happens in Circe's own home where she is supposed to be safe and the one in charge. In that sense, the rape incident surely disrupts the meanings of home "as security and control" and "as a refuge from the outside world" in Circe's mind (Després, 1991, p. 97). Miller also makes Circe recount the transformation of the men into pigs and their murder with a sarcastic tone as follows: "As it turned out, I did kill pigs that night after all" (Miller, 2018, p. 165). This sarcasm is Miller's way of saying that Circe did not transform men into pigs for nothing; she had a very valid reason for that. She needed to take the control back in her hands and ensure her own security. Men's

cruelty and abuse of Circe turned her into a woman who takes revenge. To take back the control of her home, she also decides to keep her animals around as a precaution and be her divine self when men come:

> I did not send my animals away anymore when men came. I let them loll where they liked, around the garden, under my tables. It pleased me to see the men walk among them, trembling at their teeth and unnatural tameness. I did not pretend to be a mortal. I showed my lambent yellow eyes at every turn. None of it made a difference. I was alone and a woman, that was all that mattered. (Miller, 2018, p. 170)

These show that Circe begins to take home "as acting upon and modifying one's dwelling" and "as permanence and continuity" (Després, 1991, p. 98). She gets to decide what happens next in her house to establish order. However, the quotation also shows that Miller portrays Circe as a person who feels desperate about her destiny as a woman in a men's world. Another example is when Circe realises that her father can see or watch her up from the sky and that there is no escape from this man. Although, in her early times on the island Circe knows that she can be seen or watched by her father Helios during the day, as he is the sun riding the skies in his chariot, or by her aunt Selene, the moon during the night, or by the Olympian gods any time, such as Athena or Hermes, and sailors who pass by the island, later, as she discovers and practices her magical powers, she manages to cast a spell to hide her island from unwanted eyes and thus has privacy, just like an ideal home (Miller, 2018, p. 210). Yet, it should be underlined that she has had no tutors, no education, and no guide whatsoever for her witchcraft or for any other thing she has achieved. Although it can be said that there have been some influential figures in her life, such as Prometheus, Daedalus, and Penelope, she is a self-made witch. Therefore, while in her countless depictions she is called a witch with a suggestive manner, in Miller's version becoming a witch is represented as an achievement and/or success because it is a tough job which requires a great deal of time, dedication, patience, hard work, and diligence. It is depicted in this work as a career and a gain. In addition to time and privacy, Circe also has peace and silence on her island, and she is able to concentrate on her work without any distractions. However, that peaceful and ideal environment is later disturbed with pregnancy and a baby, Telegonus, Circe's and Odysseus's son. Similar to Woolf's arguments about how having a baby steals a great amount of time from the mother's life, Circe is unable to give herself to her occupation while raising her child. The novel does not represent pregnancy, child-rearing, and parenting as easy or pleasant. To illustrate, in chapter eighteen, Circe's difficult pregnancy is told by Circe in detail:

> The sickness did not cease. Every hour it rode me. I could not understand why it took me so hard. I wondered if it was the mortal blood fighting with mine, or if I was cursed indeed, if some stray hex of Aeetes' had circled all this while and found me at last. But the affliction yielded to no counterspell, not even moly. It is no mystery, I said to myself. Have you not always insisted on being difficult in everything you do? (Miller, 2018, p.210)

"The bile" stinging to her throat and "headaches" and "kicks" of the baby follow this (2018, p. 210). Circe's labour is even worse because Circe's pains "dropped from the sky like a thunderbolt" (2018, p. 211). Circe further recounts the process with these words: "I remember crawling to the house from the garden, hunched against the tearing contraction" (2018, p. 211). Yet, the greatest difficulty for Circe on her island is knowing "so little of childbirth, its stages and progression" (2018, p. 211) and being alone. She has to be extremely strong and courageous since she is all alone in this, and the baby is stuck inside her. She has to cut herself open to get the baby out before it is dead, and she has to do it with the help of a kitchen knife and a mirror (2018, pp. 211-212), as depicted with the following lines: "I cut the cord, holding him all the while. See? I told him. We do not need anyone. In answer, he made a froggy croak and closed his eyes. My son, Telegonus" (2018, p. 212). This significant turning point in her life is evidently what gives further self-confidence and strength to Circe. Accordingly, unlike Woolf's depiction of being a mother as a great obstacle for a woman's creativity, Telegonus, being an

unnaturally difficult baby (Miller, 2018, pp. 212-213), contributes to a considerable extent to Circe's development as a person, and adds new qualities to Circe's character, such as patience, creativity, and willpower. One advantage of having Telegonus is taken by Circe as an advantage because she is not going to be alone on this island anymore. Her self-esteem is doubled after the birth of her child because she has to do everything by herself and be cautious all the time to protect her baby from every potential danger, especially Athena, who wants to kill the baby to prevent it from killing his own father Odysseus, Athena's favourite. Moreover, the baby is a mortal, so anything can happen to it any time. The vulnerability of Telegonus as a mortal baby to all kinds of human weaknesses such as diseases doubles the difficulty of Circe's task as a mother and strengthens her (Miller, 2018, p. 214). The following extract shows to what extent Circe is concerned and worried about her baby boy's safety and health, unlike her own parents who never had such concerns about her:

> His mortality was always with me, constant as a second beating heart. Now that he could sit up, reach and grasp, all the ordinary objects of my house showed their hidden teeth. The boiling pots on the fire seemed to leap for his fingers. The blades slipped from the table a hair's breadth from his head. If I sat him down, a wasp would come droning, a scorpion scuttle from some hidden crevice and raise its tail. The sparks from the fire always seemed to pop in arcs towards his tender flesh. Each danger I turned aside in time, for I was never more than a step from him, but it only made me more afraid to close my eyes, to leave him for an instant. (Miller, 2018, p. 214)

This "love and fear and no sleep" (Miller, 2018, p. 215) process takes Circe so long to realise that maybe some god is trying to harm Telegonus. Circe decides to touch a pool's surface and asks, "Does a god seek to harm my son?" (Miller, 2018, p. 215). When Circe learns that it is goddess Athena, who favours Odysseus and wants to protect him from the prophecy that his own son is going to hurt him, Circe figuratively turns into a tigress to do anything risky to protect her son, such as breaking her exile despite the dangers of being caught by the eyes of her aunt Selene during the night, going far and deep into the bottom of the sea, and cutting the tail of a creature for its poison (Miller, 2018, pp. 243-248). When there is nothing else left to do for her, she is ready to face the goddess Athena courageously to guard Telegonus from harm, and she says: "I want it finished and clear. I am tired of games" (Miller, 2018, p. 303). In the novel, Miller depicts confrontation as a significant development for Circe's character. One of the confrontations is Circe facing and challenging Athena, with which she learns to let her son go his way with the words "'My son,' I said, 'it is yours to decide'" (Miller, 2018, p. 307), and another confrontation soon after takes place with her father, Helios. Circe faces and challenges Helios and she is depicted as rather bold, daring, and decisive while doing it (Miller, 2018, pp. 310-313). Miller gives Circe a chance to gain a total freedom and a purge through these confrontations.

The final visitors of the island also have important roles to play in Circe's development and life: Penelope and Telemachus (Miller, 2018, pp. 257-333). Circe and Telemachus understand each other, and since they can share a lot, they fall in love. And in the end, the self-confident Circe makes up her mind one last time: "All my life, I have been moving forward, and now I am here. I have a mortal's voice, let me have the rest. I lift the brimming bowl to my lips and drink" (p. 333). Circe's home "as material structure" (Després, 1991, p. 99) gradually transforms into a home "as reflection of one's ideas and values" (p. 98). In the light of her new ideas and values, Circe decides to become a mortal and uses her magic on herself this time to transform into a mortal human being. Circe, known for transforming others into animals as punishment through magic, uses her witchcraft to become what she wants through transforming herself into a mortal being in her own will and power. She becomes a free, strong-willed, decisive, bold, courageous, and self-confident mortal woman at the very end of the novel.

Conclusion

As a figure from Greek mythology, Circe has frequently been depicted as a formidable witch and an impulsive, passionate, jealous, and dangerous enchantress since classical times. Often represented by male writers and artists, such as Homer, Ovid, Virgil, Waterhouse, and Collier throughout history, Circe has mostly been imagined from the male gaze until recently. Madeline Miller, however, rewrites Circe's story by giving voice to this female figure as an opportunity to give an account of her own life, experiences, feelings, and thoughts without any intervention by male figures. This article evidently shows that Miller's rewriting emphasizes the female perspective, and the female protagonist is stripped from men's thousands-of-year-old representation of Circe as a dangerous witch who turns men into wild beasts impulsively. Instead, Circe's own account in the novel unravels that Circe's patience was tried on numerous occasions and that she was oppressed, humiliated, abused, and pushed hard numerous times by several men and women to act in the ways she did. In relation to the techniques of rewriting Miller employs in the novel, the insight Virginia Woolf has suggested in *A Room of One's Own* about the fact that women need money, time, some personal space, and equal opportunities with men to become successful in their writing careers seems to echo in Miller's *Circe* in the way Miller reimagines Circe's life in two different homes: her family home and her own home in the island of Aeaea. Circe, surely, is not a writer, but she is an artist in her own way: Her art is her witchcraft. Miller's rewriting also represents Circe's island as a place for self-fulfilment and shows how the island gives a noteworthy opportunity to Circe to discover her talents, individuate, and redefine herself as a powerful witch. Moreover, the literary analysis in this article shows that Miller underlines Circe's empowerment using the theme of home in various forms throughout the novel, symbolising the different phases of Circe's life, and portraying Circe's character development and self-fulfilment. The analysis of the novel in this article presents Miller's portrayal of several themes of home which present a large collection of the meanings of home, such as a place where an individual can have "room" enough for self-actualization. In this article, several symbolic meanings of home in Miller's novel have been associated with Després's (1991) categorisations of the meaning of home, and Circe's perception of her two separate homes have been illustrated with examples from the novel. They include home as a space for relationships with Circe's family and friends, for security and control, for reflection of Circe's ideas and values, for permanence and continuity, as material structure, as a centre of activities, as acting upon and modifying one's dwelling, as a refuge from the outside world, as an indicator of personal status, and as a place to own. The mortal human body Circe adopts through self-transformation can also be regarded as a home embodying human life; in that sense, Circe becomes her own home with her new mortal human body.

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