CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Problems

There are a lot of definitions of the word 'myth'. People often associate myth with fables or heroic stories and often confuse them with legends. Most people collectively agree that myth is a made-up story created just for the sake of it. The novel *Circe* by Madeline Miller is one from many modern interpretations of Greek mythology.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2015:992), myth has two definitions: the first is a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people, and the second definition is something that many people believe but that does not exist or is false. An example of the first definition is the Greek mythology and their Olympians; each existing to give easy explanation why natural events such as thunder, ocean waves, and such happens. The second definition is a more recent approach which nature is not really that different with the first one: to explain unexplainable things like how the four-leaf-clover is considered to bring luck.

A lot of experts have different ideas about myth. Honko (1984:49) defines myth as a story of the gods, a religious account of how the world begin, the creation, fundamental events, great things gods did that affected how the world, nature and culture were created together with certain orders. A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it is how patterns of behavior comes to be. What differs them from legends and folklores are how they seem to be rather sacred. Barthes (1972:109) sees myth as a type of speech. It is a part of communication that has (underlying) meaning. He argues that anything (whether it is spoken or written text, an image, clothes, etc.) could be symbols. For Barthes every cultural product possesses meaning, and it is conditioned by myth. That being said, any cultural product can be the subject of mythological analysis and review.

Greek mythology is one of the biggest, most well-known mythology around the world. Starting from the Olympians to demigods, like Achilles and Heracles; and even magical creatures, like Minotaur and Pegasus, they are all familiar names that people have heard at least once in their lives. One of the reasons that enables

this to happen is the fact that there are a lot of modern reinterpretations of the stories in the form of novels and appearances of those characters and creatures in video games, movies, even animes and other literary forms.

There are not a lot of heroines in Greek mythology—or in fictions in general. The portrayal of a strong female as a main character has only started in recent years, with the film *Wonder Woman* being the peak of this strong heroine representation in 2017, as females are usually portrayed as weak and emotional; not as a character who saves the day. In the past, female characters who are strong are even mostly staged as villains like Medusa and Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*, sticking an image of strong women being bad. Else, a strong female main character only appears in a dystopian setting, like Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and rarely in normal settings like male hero does.

Circe is a sorceress from Homer's *The Odyssey*, Books X and XII. The novel *Circe* is one of the modern retelling of a piece from Greek mythology written by Madeline Miller, a story about the daughter of Helios. As a graduate from Brown University with BA and MA in classics degrees, Miller has been teaching and tutoring Latin, Greek, and Shakespeare for more than a decade. Before *Circe*, Miller has released another novel of the same genre titled *The Song of Achilles* (retrieved from https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/circe-by-madeline-miller-review-a-fresh-take-on-ancient-mythical-tale-1.3463249).

Falling under the genre of a fiction novel, *Circe* talks about the life of the sorceress from her own point of view; the hardships of a female. It tells the readers about how she sees the world and vice versa. Taking place in the Ancient Greek, the book gives an insight on how godly society works and a little of how humans live.

As a female main character, Circe seems a bit dim at first. She is not said to be pretty or strong, which are usually traits given to main female characters for them to be the main character: there is nothing out of the ordinary about her from the outside. She is just a daughter in a family where sons are preferred. On top of that, she is just another child of a nymph—lesser goddess whose job is to protect nature. There is nothing special about her. She is no one of significance even if she has Helios as a father.

Circe struggles with her own identity from the beginning. Being a daughter of the Titan Helios and a nymph called Perse, a daughter from the Titan Oceanus, she is an immortal even though she may not possess any super power. Being an ordinary daughter in a house of divinity means Circe is never the center of attention from the moment of her birth: daughters—females are objectified even in Ancient Greece regardless of your bloodline. She is just another child, another nymph who will not make a name for herself.

There are a lot of social problems present in this novel in many ways than one: starting from the higher class 'society' and their way of looking down on those considered below their class, abuse of power, patriarchy that leads to objectification of females, and so on. For the purpose of this research, the main focus would be the patriarchal problems.

A patriarchal society refers to a society in which men hold more power, associated with privilege, than women, thus making it a male-dominated society in every way possible. The problem of patriarchal system is dated back from as far as the age of Ancient Greek. This literature work shows how Circe fights with her own identity and a sexist society in a world of gods and heroes. Just like how modern females still have to live in an era where patriarchy stands, Circe is a representation of being a strong female in a male dominated society.

By using the myth theory by Roland Barthes, the writer expects to prove a certain myth regarding Circe as a strong main female character, living her life in a place where no expectations fell upon daughters but to marry. Representations matter. It gives others hope and insights on why those who are represented also matter, and why their voices should be heard, and Circe is exactly that. Analyzing this case might help readers better understand about how patriarchal society works, how it is never fair for females, and also how it does not really change throughout the ages in certain ways.

1.2   Identification of the Problem

The problem of this research is the existence of stereotypes against women, gender discrimination, and social construct against women in a patriarchal society represented within the novel, mainly through Circe as the main character. To address the problem described above, the author uses Roland Barthes's myth theory.

1.3   Limitation of the Problem

To make the research more effective and produce a useful outcome in accordance to the title, this semiotic study will only focus on signs via events that may occur within, such as: narrations, rites, and dialogues that are related to the problems of patriarchal society, self-discovery, and females being objectified.

1.4   Formulation of the Problems

Based on the limitation of the problems stated above, the writer classified the problem into the form of questions as follows:

1. What are the signs found in the novel *Circe*?

2. What are the interpretations of the signs?

3. What is the myth within the story?

1.5   Objectives of the Research

Based on the formulation of the problems above, the objective of this research is to uncover myths within the novel *Circe*. To fulfill this purpose, the analysis steps are conducted in the following ways:

1. To identify the signs found in the novel *Circe.*

2. To interpret the meanings of the signs.

3. To unravel a myth within the story.

1.6   Methods of the Research

This research is conducted by using qualitative approach by using the novel *Circe* as the primary source, in which signs in the forms of dialogues, narratives, and such suitable for the research will be collected. As the means of analyzing will be through interpretative research, the writer is the primary key in this research as an interpreter. Furthermore, the data of this research are analysed through descriptive method. Supportive literature works are also used as secondary resources.

1.7   Benefit of the Research

By doing this research, the writer expects to be able to present a useful outcome to the people who are in the field of linguistic in general and semiotic in particular, those who wish to read between the lines and find myths hidden within, and everyone who simply enjoys literary works. The writer also expects the research will be able to help those in the fields mentioned above by interpreting signs and symbols supported by Roland Barthes's theory of Mythologies.

1.8   Systematic Organization of the Reasearch

Related to the title of this research, the systematic presentation is written as follows:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It consists of: the background of the problems, identification of the problems, the limitation of the problems, the formulation of the problems, the objectives of the research, the framework of the research, the methods of the research, the systematic organization of the research.

CHAPTER 2: FRAMEWORK OF THEORIES

It consists of: the definition of semiotics, semiotics by Roland Barthes, novel, representation, female, female in Greek mythology, and patriarchy.

CHAPTER 3: REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE INHABITATION IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY THROUGH BARTHES'S ORDER OF SIGNIFICATION IN NOVEL CIRCE

It consists of: certain signs within the novel, their interpretations, and a particular myth as the final product. The concepts above must appear in the number of sub-chapters.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

It consists of: the conclusion from the previous chapters and the implication of the evaluated result.

The chapters above are followed by references, scheme of the research, research poster, curriculum vitae, and other required attachments.