GODDESS OR DANCER: MYTHOLOGICAL FEMALE FIGURES IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *MORNING IN THE BURNED HOUSE*

DEUSA OU DANÇARINA: PERSONAGENS MITOLÓGICAS FEMININAS EM *MORNING IN THE BURNED HOUSE* DE MARGARET ATWOOD

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Abstract

Mythological figures are recurrent references in Margaret Atwood's writing, and they frequently appear in a revisited way, questioning the canon, classical mythology itself, and functioning as complex metaphors of contemporary society. The present study analyzes, under the light of feminist literary criticism, the recurrence of three mythological figures in a poetry collection by Margaret Atwood entitled Morning in the Burned House (1995). The analysis aims at verifying if and how they can be taken as a self-reflexive parody of the paradoxical condition of women in contemporary Western society.

Keywords: Mythology. Poetry. Feminism. Revisionism. Atwood.

Resumo

Personagens mitológicas são referências recorrentes na escrita de Margaret Atwood e aparecem, frequentemente, de maneira revisitada, questionando o cânone, a própria mitologia clássica e atuando como metáforas complexas da sociedade atual. Este estudo analisa a recorrência de três dessas figuras mitológicas sob o prisma da crítica literária feminista numa seleção de poemas de Margaret Atwood intitulado *Morning in the Burned House* (1995). A análise busca verificar se e como elas podem ser entendidas como uma paródia auto-reflexiva sobre a condição paradoxal da mulher na sociedade ocidental contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: Mitologia. Poesia. Feminismo. Revisionismo. Atwood.

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As a general concept, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1991) defines myth as "a story which is not 'true' and which involves (as a rule) supernatural beings—or at any rate supra-human beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. Myth explains how something came to exist" (Cuddon 562). Robert Graves, in the introduction of the *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (1959), defines mythology as "the study of whatever religious or heroic legends are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true" (v). Graves reinforces how odd Classical Mythology may seem for contemporary readers and agrees with the previous concept that mythology is taken by contemporary audiences as not true, that is, as a fictitious narrative.

Graves goes on to explain that myth "justif[ies] an existing social system and account[s] for traditional rites and customs" (v). In a similar way, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (2005) reminds us of the social aspects of mythology, its communal and human characteristic, which is embedded in language. David Leeming contends that "[m]yths might be considered the most basic expressions of a defining aspect of the human species–the need and ability to understand and to tell stories to reflect our understanding, whether or not we know the real facts" (xii). Mythology is, then, a type of fiction in which social groups deposit their hopes, creeds, and fears. It was also used to explain the origins of the world and natural phenomena, in times when the scientific explanation for such issues was not yet available.

The rise of feminist literary criticism and the dissemination of discourse studies in the second half of the twentieth century brought to the fore several other issues that must be dealt with when discussing myth. In his book *Mythologies* (1957), for example, Roland Barthes sheds new light on the discussion of myth, taking into account discourse analysis and presenting myth as an ideological construction, arguing that "myth is a type of speech" (109). It is important to consider the characteristics of mythological discourse that Roland Barthes addresses in the book. Barthes explains that anything can be turned into myth, however, no myth is eternal, "for it is human history which converts reality into speech" and "myth is a type of speech chosen by history" (132), a speech whose "intention is somehow frozen, purified, eternalized" (145).

To solve this paradox, Barthes states that the method used by myth is "[t]he elaboration of a second-order semiological system [that] will enable myth to escape this dilemma", and thus "[w]e reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature". This *naturalization* is responsible for transforming myth into a crystallized, universal truth. Myth, then "is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason" (150), "imperfectible and unquestionable" (151). That is how myth holds its ideological power, for it becomes an irrefutable type of representation. The way Greek mythology–and other types of classical mythology–created stories to explain the origins of the world or natural phenomena and how such stories were taken as truth by the Greek people, for instance, illustrate such *naturalization*.

However, as Northrop Frye reminds us, "[t]he word myth is used in such a bewildering variety of contexts that anyone talking about it has to say first of all what his chosen context is" (3). Therefore, I must make clear what is meant by Classical Mythology in this study. I propose the definition of myth as the following: "symbolic narratives that are connected to belief systems or rituals and are undeniably androcentric in content" (Dörschel 7).

In terms of gender representation, myth has been responsible for crystallizing a male centered discourse, from which women have for a long time been absent (Guerin 182). That is, as feminist literary critics highlight, a female language has been missing in mythology, as well as a female imagery and a history for women. As previously mentioned, mythical images of women are often, if not always, presented as twofold stereotypes developed by male ideals. In fact, that form of representation which shows women in an 'either/or' position does not occur only in mythology, but also in most female characters in literature. According to Alicia Ostriker (1985), "[i]t is thanks to myths we believe that woman must be either 'angel' or 'monster'" (12). It is also important to mention that in such binary representations there is not only opposition, but also a type of hierarchy, where "one leg of the binary is always superior to the other", and where "one term requires the other's absence for its presence" (Korkmaz 8).

Since the nineteenth century, revisionist (or

revisionary) mythmaking can be perceived in some literary works by women writers, among which the play *Proserpine* (1832) by English writer Mary Shelley stands out. In order to fight the dominant patriarchal culture in literary texts, especially in mythology, female poets and writers are inventing and revising myths so as "to forge an anticolonial mythopoesis, an attack on cultural hegemony" (DuPlessis 107). By questioning standard patterns of representation and thereby questioning the dominant cultural discourse, female writers are coming up with new perspectives regarding female imagery. By retelling mythological tales from a female perspective, "[r]evisionist mythmaking in women's poetry may offer us one significant means of redefining ourselves and consequently our culture" (Ostriker 11).

In the case of classical mythology, the act of envisioning a new viewpoint to the mythological narrative redefines a literary format, "the high epic genre", an ancient and traditional type of narrative in patriarchal cultures, calling "attention to its conventions and limitations by putting it in a new, contemporary context" (Staels 101). Such limitations in the male narrative shall be the core of the female rewriting of myth. The blanks left out by canonical literature provide the starting point from which women writers question and deconstruct not only such blanks, but the whole genre. Especially for women poets, one of the main purposes of changing traditional representations and stories is to put women back in literary discourse and, consequently, back in history. "In all these cases the [woman] poet simultaneously deconstructs a prior 'myth' or 'story' and constructs a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself" (Ostriker 12) along with her own experience and her own language. The myths and tales envisioned and constructed by women poets are, thus, more fair and plural, for "[t]hey are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival" (Ostriker 14). Such new representations show, as in the case of the ones analyzed here, multiple features and depth, approximating these figures to more human attributes.

Since her first works, Atwood has widely exploited mythology and its figures, both implicitly and explicitly (Wilson). Myth is an important theme already in her very first book, which was privately published in 1961 and was a collection of poetry entitled *Double Persephone*. In this work, it is already possible to perceive revisionist aspects of mythology among the seven poems in the collection. For instance, there is a reference to the mythical figure of Medusa represented by a girl (Davey). Besides this example, Atwood goes much further in the use of mythological intertexts. Atwood's works which make use of mythology at some level range from novels (see *The Robber Bride*, for instance), to short stories (see *Good Bones*), to poetry (see *Interlunar*, *Circle Game*), and several others, not to mention the ones previously referred to here. Atwood, however, does not merely use mythological figures; she deconstructs and transforms them in different ways with different purposes. In a way, it is possible to say that concomitantly to the act of revising classical mythological figures, Atwood creates modern myths. She does not create new ones from scratch, but she turns existing ones into something else, reiterating Barthes when he says an old myth cannot be killed, only replaced by a new one.

As Atwood mentions in *Lady Oracle* (1982), "every myth is a version of truth", meaning that every narrative takes the narrator's point of view and thus becomes her/his truth, even when it comes to ancient stories such as classical mythology. About rewriting myth, she explains in the Notes in *The Penelopiad* that she is not simply retelling *The Odyssey,* but also regarding other sources, for there is not only one version of ancient Greek myths: "a myth would be told one way in one place and quite differently in another" (xiv). To support the matter on history—as well as myth—being one viewpoint of truth, Coral Ann Howells states: "We live in a period in which memory of all kinds, including the sort of large memory we call history, is being called into question" (25).

Conversely, Marina Warner sustains in the book *Six Myths of Our Time* (1995), that rewriting and deconstructing myths, as she herself and several other writers have done, does not mean that myths are lies and must be completely dismissed. She asserts that myths are more inspirational and influential than people think (xix). Similarly to Warner, although rewriting myths and trying, with this, to fill in the gaps mythology carries for representing women so flatly and dubiously, Atwood does not mean to banish myths either. As she explains

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in an interview, she does not "believe that people should divest themselves of all their mythologies", for she thinks "everybody needs one. It is just a question of getting one that is livable and not destructive to you" (Ingersoll 32).

The mythological character Helen of Troy appears in *Morning in the Burned House* in a poem entitled "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing" (33 – 36). Immediately in the title of Atwood's poem Helen of Troy appears in a rather controversial conception if compared to her commonly given definition. In Greek Mythology, Helen of Troy–also known as Helen of Sparta–was the daughter of Zeus and Nemesis–also known as Leda. Helen was born from an egg, conceived by Leda because Zeus had taken the form of a swan and sought refuge with Leda, gaining her affection, which led to their intercourse. Helen was married to Menelaus, but she was later abducted by her admirer, Paris, a fact which initiated the Trojan War (Guimarães 167, 168). There is controversy, when it comes to Helen's seduction by Paris, as to whether she was taken by force or ran away with him of her own will. However, the fact that she was considered one of the most beautiful women among the goddesses is clear in Greek mythology. Helen's remarkable beauty was the "shiny object", the "consumption product" which triggered the male obsession and led to the war.

Atwood, however, shows this character in a different position from the one depicted by classical mythology, deconstructing the patriarchal binary distinction of women being either good or bad. Helen is no longer a goddess in the canonical sense, powerful and revengeful. Although she is still beautiful and sensual, she is instead depicted as a fragmented goddess, also submissive, and exploited, supporting Wilson's argument that "[s]ome of Atwood's creator-goddesses are failed or parodic" (217).

Helen of Troy is cited in different situations throughout Atwood's works. However, some characteristics collide. Throughout *The Penelopiad* Helen is shown as a beautiful, ambitious, vain, coldhearted but rather stupid temptress. In *The Tent* (2006), in the mini-fiction essay "It's Not Easy Being Half-Divine" (47), she is beautiful and vain, and a dishonest type of temptress as well. Some of these features coincide when it comes to the Helen built in *Morning in the Burned House*. Helen is depicted as a kind of trickster.

To put it shortly, "trickster is a boundary-crosser" (Hyde 7), the one to confuse the lines between opposites, between any pattern, "[t]rickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox" (7). However, although being criticized and oppressed in the strip club, Helen also has an outstanding position just as the one of a goddess. She also maintains her pride, as we shall see below.

After the reader is puzzled with the title of the poem, s/he faces the first lines, and all the hints they bring: "The world is full of women / who'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself / if they had the chance" (33). From these three lines, it is possible to observe that the poem is written in the first person singular and that the persona is Helen herself. Helen is given a voice of her own so she is able to tell her story. Helen is confessing about the prejudice she suffers for being a counter dancer, yet she is not a reliable narrator or in a position of victimization, as we shall see.

Intriguingly, Helen does not only complain of "people's" prejudice, she specifies it is the women's prejudice she suffers from more. The fact that this is the very first information we have of the character is emblematic. When Helen acknowledges that women judge her perhaps more than men, we immediately think of two things. The first is the fact that in Greek mythology she was very much envied and criticized by other women/goddesses, as we may also notice in *The Penelopiad*, in the several times Penelope criticizes her. The second is the more recent fact of women's history: women's lack of unity as a "minority" group.

Simone De Beauvoir mentions such lack of unity in the women's movement in *The Second Sex* (1949), comparing them to other "minorities" such as Jewish or black people (12-14). Millet also develops such theory in her famous work *Sexual Politics* (1970), affirming that patriarchy confines women in a position of rivalry, making them envy each other, for qualities such as beauty and age (38).

Although acknowledging other people's critics and judgment, representatives of society's standards of "morality", the persona does not seem to feel embarrassed or ashamed of her position. In fact, she questions her voyeurs about how delicate it is to classify certain jobs as degrading and others as respectful, and how thin is the line

that separates them.

In the poem, it is possible to see that, although Helen is the narrator, she is not a completely reliable one. She threatens the reader and confuses her/him, as is typical of tricksters. We may also doubt her testimony when she says "My mother was raped by a holy swan. / You believe that? You can take me out to dinner. / That's what we tell all the husbands" (35), inferring that she is lying and that lying is a necessary practice for women in her position. This takes us back again to Penelope, from *The Penelopiad*, who is not a consistent narrator either, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Again, we are reminded by the character that truth is a matter of perspective.

Sharon Wilson says that "[a]lthough themes of sexual politics predominate, and patriarchal oppression is everywhere apparent, Atwood is always ready to reverse genders, giving us female 'oppressors' and male 'victims'" (226). However, the shifting goes further. We can perceive more than the obvious inversion, of women as oppressors and men as the oppressed ones. Both roles, oppressor and oppressed, change rapidly and frequently. This may take us back to the trickster type of text, confusing the reader, but more than that, deconstructing social and gender roles.

The mythological figure of Sekhmet is shown in the poem entitled "Sekhmet, the lion-headed goddess of war, violent storms, pestilence, and recovery from illness, contemplates the desert in the Metropolitan Museum of Art" (39-41). According to Egyptian Mythology, the name Sekhmet originated from Ancient Egyptian word "sekhem" and means "power" or "the powerful one". Sekhmet is depicted as a lioness and considered the warrior goddess and goddess of healing. Sekhmet is the eye of sun god Ra and was sent as a symbol of Ra's punishment for the people's disobedience and conspiracy against him. Although Sekhmet was supposed to punish only a few people, she became so furious that she nearly extinguished the entire human race. Ra had to intoxicate her with some alcoholic beverage resembling blood to prevent her from doing so (Borgeaud 12). She is the goddess of diseases and she is also the goddess of cure, but interestingly, only the cure to the disease she caused herself. It was believed that her breath formed the hot winds of the desert. She was said to protect the pharaohs while in battle and to destroy their enemies using arrows of fire (James 221-225).

The poem starts off referring to a man, in the very first line. However, the image we are given is not a traditional masculine and "patriarchal" one, for the character is not a strong, outspoken man. "He was the sort of man / who wouldn't hurt a fly" it says, pointing out his benevolence, his kindness, yet what comes next shifts the focus: "Many flies are now alive / while he is not" (39). Now, the man's kindness is turned into mockery, assuming that what he is, actually, is just naïve. The persona--Sekhmet, we presume--tells us that, although the man was kind, nurturing yet easily fooled, and she was strong, belligerent and audacious, they had the same fate, and we notice she does not think such fate is fortunate.

As we already know, Sekhmet was the eye of the sun god Ra, sent by him to deal with the revolt of men against Ra. Apparently, the people were not honoring Ra as they should, and that made Ra furious. When Ra sent his eye, Sekhmet, to fix the rebels, she was so "consumed with rage and drunk with blood" that she "lost all self-control" and practically wiped out humanity (Borgeaud 12). We may suppose, then, that the man who is cited in the poem is Ra, and that Sekhmet blames him for being so benevolent protecting humankind from the massacre Sekhmet wished for. Encyclopædia Britannica reminds us that "Some deities, notably such goddesses as Neith, Sekhmet, and Mut, had strongly ambivalent characters" (2012). However, the persona of the poem does not seem to be willing to end people's misery as they wish, at any time they wish. She makes clear she has the power to grant such favors, but she is not so noble in her generosity: "But if it's selfless / love you're looking for, / you've got the wrong goddess" (40).

"For some, Sekhmet came to be associated with notions of destruction; of power gone awry, drunk with its own potential, for its own sake" (LeBrun) and that is highly emblematic. The correlation that a goddess with enormous power lost control of it and nearly destroyed humanity is almost a moral bed time story told to little Egyptian girls in mythological times. The moral message this heavily displays of a woman not being able to keep up with her potential, and her father being the one who had to "put her in her place" is conspicuous.

Differently from VanSpanckeren, Beyer observes about Sekhmet that "Atwood presents the reader with a goddess who is fierce but gentle, human but also animal, and possesses feminine as well as masculine qualities",

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thus disagreeing that Sekhmet is completely evil, and reinforcing the idea that Atwood breaks the dichotomy of women characters being either good or bad. Moreover, in this particular case, Atwood even breaks the gender dichotomy, offering a goddess who is feminine and masculine at the same time. Also, Beyer goes on to assert that "[n]otions of war and aggression are typically associated with the masculine domain, yet in this poem they are given a female goddess" (285), reiterating the complexity of the poem as regards Sekhmet's revision as a character and a woman.

Sekhmet, not only in the mythological sense, but also in the poem, "represents the simultaneous presence of good and evil; creation and destruction; the ability and willingness to nurture and protect life, and the ability and willingness to take it away" (LeBrun). Atwood seems to take the "good or bad" notion to another level. The character is not only good or bad, and it is not in a place between the two: Sekhmet embraces every one of those possibilities at the same time.

The mythological character Daphne is presents to us in the poem "Daphne and Laura and So Forth" (26, 27). According to Greek mythology, Daphne is a minor character. She is described as a nymph, chaste and beautiful. Daphne is the daughter of rivergod Pineios. The god Apollo admired her so much she was almost ravished by him. So as not to be raped by Apollo, Daphne pled to Gaea to save her. In order to save Daphne, Gaea swallowed Daphne from the earth and in her place a laurel tree appeared. Apollo made that tree sacred to him (Graves 117, 118).

As regards Daphne's opinion on Apollo's harassment, we may infer she feels actually guilty in relation to his attempt to rape her: "I should not have shown fear, / or so much leg" (26). This is probably a criticism on the societies which condemn women who display parts of their bodies, assuming that such display is what causes arousal in men; especially the societies which force women to cover themselves.

According to Graves, Apollo did not succeed in ravishing Daphne. Graves asserts that Apollo "overtook [Daphne] and she already felt the eager arms of the god around her when she called upon the venerable Gaea to aid her" (118). However, in Atwood's poem, Apollo apparently ends up killing Daphne in the attempt to rape her: "His look of disbelief --- / *I didn't mean to! / Just, her neck was so much more / fragile than I thought*" (26). Again, in the following line, Daphne seems to be defending Apollo's crime, validating his acts because as a god--or a man--he is accustomed to getting whatever he wants: "The gods don't listen to reason, / they need what they need" (26). This is a reflection on how patriarchal society deals with male sexual needs, asking women to cover themselves and behave in order not to be raped, as opposed to teaching young boys that they must control themselves and respect women's wishes over their own bodies.

To properly finish the analysis we must close the circle and go back to the title. My hypothesis is that neither Daphne nor Laura is the protagonist here. They simply represent women, contemporary or not, and the problem with sexual violence women have faced since the beginning of humankind. Van Spanckeren affirms that "'Daphne and Laura and So Forth' portrays the fate of women harassed by men" (112), reinforcing my hypothesis that Daphne and Laura are the same, that is, they are portraits of women, many other women, leading similar lives, dealing with the same prejudices and dangers, regardless of their time. "Daphne and Laura and So Forth" may mean, then, an invitation to denounce and question what Daphne, or Laura, or any woman has been through.

As we saw, Atwood re-envisioned these three figures rendering them in contemporary settings, with their pains and pleasures, not forgetting, however, to account for their previously famous stories. Additionally, perhaps the main feature of the poems was that all three figures had their own voices, and thus told their stories through their own prisms.

One of the main characteristics I mentioned throughout the analyses was how paradoxically Helen, Sekhmet, and Daphne were portrayed. In every poem, some more than others, the mythological figures were both powerful and powerless, both oppressors and oppressed. I believe such paradoxes have to do with two main objectives: playful revision by means of parody; and something that is intimately connected to that: a metaphor for humanity.

One of the best ways of discussing parody in times of post-modernism is by referring to Linda Hutcheon's key

work *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (1985). To briefly synthesize parody, Hutcheon says that it is "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity" (xii). According to her, parody works by means of ironically subverting tradition, combining creativity with social critique. In *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), she refers to the subject again maintaining that postmodernism uses parody to "both legitimize and subvert that which it parodies" (101). Moreover, she identifies parody as "one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity" (*Parody* 2), and that is exactly what I mean by parody being related to my second hypothesis: the metaphor for humanity, to which I shall come back in the end of this chapter.

Hence, based on Hutcheon's theory of parody, we may conclude that Atwood indeed uses parody to subvert the ancient tradition of mythology. She does this ironically not only because of the vulgar language, the questionable settings, but also because the goddesses ironically represent modern women and critique society's values and ideologies. Not to mention that, with a dash of irony, these issues become more interesting and play with the readers' common knowledge and prejudices.

Hence, by "installing and ironizing" mythology through means of revision and modernization, Atwood brings forward her own ideology, which in this case is drawn out of a feminist criticism of mythology itself, of the literary "canon" in the form of the "epic", and of patriarchal society in general.

As I have already mentioned, giving the female mythological figures a voice of their own means at least two things. At the same time, it is an act of rebellion against the institution of "History", which is essentially biased for portraying one singular point of view—the one of white middle-class men. Also, it is an act of inclusion, making history more fair and plural, not by excluding men, but by adding women and their experiences in the history of the world, which also involves the world's religions and creeds, hence, mythology. Mythology is especially suitable for such revision and inclusion, as in Susanna Braund's words: "myth permits endless reinvention, revisioning, refocalization, renewal. It is always available to articulate both the certainties of the dominant culture and the challenges to those certainties" (206).

The second hypothesis I want to defend here has also to do with parody: Hutcheon sustains that "[p]arody is one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity" (*Parody* 2). Therefore, besides being "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance" (xii), parody also serves the purposes of self-reflection, that is, the reflection on our own condition. I find that especially relevant, for that may be the most important objective of parody, if not of literature or art itself. A similar discussion had already been triggered before, and it shall be retrieved here. I believe the paradoxical representations Atwood delivers of those three mythological characters function as self-reflection. They are but a representation of women's condition in contemporary Western world. The "powerful/powerless" contradiction reminds us of how Western women have climbed some important steps towards equity, but at the same time, how far we all are from the top, if such a thing actually exists.

However, we have also seen that Atwood does not portray only the binary opposites as regards the mythological figures' personalities and situations, but also all the complexity that is in between. For Beyer, "[t]hese apparent contradictions" render these figures "a complex symbol, but also rather a human one, multifaceted and open to a plurality of interpretations" (285), reiterating that complexity is related to richness and humanity.

As I see it, contradiction, paradox, and complexity are not features which belong exclusively to the female domain. Nevertheless, Maggie Humm (1986) believes that women indeed bear more contradictions than men, and she blames that on self-image: "Inevitably the ideology of women critics is likely to encompass more contradictions than the ideology of men since women are provided with many more confusing images of themselves than are men" (7). Humm's theory is indeed interesting, for women actually have contradictory images of themselves, being feminist revisionism, that is, the construction of new identities for women, an example of that.

Of course, features of contradiction and complexity apply to both men and women, being, one could say, the ultimate self-reflection on the human condition. But the contradictions of the so-called universal subject (mostly male) are well known. Walt Whitman, for example, explicitly dealt with the issue in *Leaves of Grass* (1855): "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then… I contradict myself; / I am large… I contain multitudes" (55). It is

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time, therefore, as Atwood recognizes, to give voice to the contradictions of women.

Consequently, I believe it is correct to affirm that Atwood presented us, through the three characters we analyzed, goddesses that superbly subverted not only classical mythology, but also history. The three figures were boundary-crossers. Be it by rage, deceit, fear, revenge, or any other of the dozens of features they displayed to us, they all told us their stories from their own viewpoints. Revisionism grants literature an ideology that carries self-reflection and inclusion. Hence, such activity proves vital to our constant need for reinvention, for we are "shape-shifters" with ever-changing language, and thus, literature must evolve with us and represent us in different periods.

Atwood has been revising ancient stories for a long time, yet hardly half of all the intertextuality she used has been acknowledged by critics so far. There are vast references still unaccounted for, not to mention that Atwood is still alive and writing. Feminist revisionism shall continue, as well as feminist critics of those narratives. Therefore, I hope the present study may have helped feminist criticism by covering at least a small part of such an inspiring, still uncharted territory that is the revision of classical mythology. This research shall not end here, for I am daily amazed by the plurality and contradictions which are inherent to Atwood's characters and, if I may, contradictions which are the very core of the human condition.

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