

The Transformative Power of the Sea in Circe: An Ecocritical Reading Using Bate's Framework

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Received: June 2025; Revised: July 2025; Published: September 2025

Abstract

This study explores the role of the sea as a force of transformation in *Circe*, a novel by Madeline Miller, through an ecocritical approach grounded in Jonathan Bate's theoretical framework. The aim of this research is to examine how the sea is portrayed not merely as a natural element, but as an active agent of psychological and spiritual change for the protagonist. Employing a qualitative approach and a narrative methodology, this study analyzes how Bate's concepts of *dwelling* and inform Circe's encounters with the sea and shape her journey toward self-discovery and independence. The data are drawn from close textual readings of key narrative moments in the novel where the sea functions as a site of refuge, challenge, and inner reflection. The findings reveal that the sea serves as a symbolic landscape representing transformation, emotional tension, and eventual empowerment. This transformation is deeply rooted in her intimate relationship with nature, emphasizing the idea that the natural world is not a passive backdrop but a dynamic force within the narrative. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse of ecocriticism by highlighting the importance of ecological symbolism and nature-driven character arcs in shaping both narrative structure and environmental awareness in contemporary literature.

Keywords: Sea; Transformation; Ecocriticism; Madeline Miller

How to Cite: Salsabila, S., & Haryanti, R.P. (2025). The Transformative Power of the Sea in Circe: An Ecocritical Reading Using Bate's Framework, *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 5(3), 657-669. doi: <https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v5i3.2932>



<https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v5i3.2932>

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INTRODUCTION

The sea is a natural element that serves as a physical space as well as a force that shapes an individual's identity and journey. The sea has long symbolized the complex human-nature relationship, frequently depicting personal transformation and the quest for meaning (Riotto, 2023). Human life often relies on the sea as a resource, a pathway for travel, and a place for exploration (Lachance & Desbiens 2022). This illustrates how individuals and communities build their identity through dependence and a deep connection with the marine environment. The sea functions as both a boundary and a pathway, a protector and a threat. Over time, human decisions and interactions with the sea reflect a dynamic balance between sustainability and destruction that can occur due to unsustainable exploitation (Huang et al., 2023). Therefore, the sea in this context also serves as a symbol of freedom and the challenges faced by individuals throughout their lives (Warbrick et al., 2023).

This transformative process aligns with Jonathan Bate's concept of *dwelling*, which emphasizes the importance of inhabiting the natural world in an attuned and meaningful way. According to Bate, *dwelling* is not just about residing in a place, but about engaging deeply with one's environment to develop ecological consciousness and identity. By

situating Circe's transformation within this ecocritical framework, the present study foregrounds the sea not simply as a symbolic motif, but as an ecological and narrative agent that catalyzes Circe's existential evolution.

The sea in literature is often interpreted as a symbol of freedom and transformation, particularly in depicting women's struggles against oppressive social structures (Sarikaya, 2023). Circe's journey is portrayed as a process of self-liberation from the constraining social structures. The sea creates a liminal experience that transforms Circe from merely an object in male heroic narratives into an active subject who redefines herself (Grzybowska, 2023). Circe's journey in Miller's novel is marked by a gradual process of reclaiming her voice, which evolves from silence to a powerful self-expression as a form of resistance against patriarchal structures (Thomas, 2021). Ranjith (2023) emphasizes that Circe's transformation in the novel is a form of resistance against the oppressive patriarchal system, where her magical powers become a symbol of autonomy and humanity gained through the processes of exile and self-reflection. The witch character in *Circe* is reconstructed as a symbol of resistance against patriarchy and a representation of the marginalized experiences of women (Lundén, 2024). O'hara (2022) highlights the importance of women's voices in Circe's narrative, which serve as tools for empowerment and liberation from patriarchal oppression.

The island of Aiaia, where Circe resides, serves as a symbol of personal space that allows her to undergo a transformative journey and discover her identity independently, free from the influence of the gods' power and the restrictive social norms (Kut Belenli, 2024). Circe's isolation on Aiaia prompts introspection, encouraging her to explore her layered identity amidst the surrounding chaos. This intersection between alienation and self-reflection emerges as a recurring theme in modern feminist literature, where writers often emphasize the importance of solitude for deep personal growth (Spacciante, 2024). Miller's portrayal of Circe illustrates how the sea is not merely a barrier, but also a gateway to existential engagement and transformation (Behounek, 2025). The sea has become a crucial symbol in representing the protagonist's transformative journey.

Transformation refers to the significant change experienced by a character, narrative structure, or underlying theme, often reflecting an individual's journey from one state to another. Transformation is frequently tied to a hero's journey through phases of moral and ethical change. Characters initially perceived as antagonists often undergo a redemptive journey, seeking to free themselves from their past wrongdoings (Carollo et al., 2024). The sea's meaning as a transformative space becomes central to the narrative, driving Circe's profound internal change as she transcends the constraints of traditional roles that once bound her. Circe's character in *Circe* embodies the archetypes of the Goddess, the Mother, and the Witch which reflecting strength, independence, and the ambiguity of women's roles in Greek mythology (Harianja et al., 2024). Circe's identity transformation is highlighted through her struggle to reject beauty standards and expectations long imposed by the divine society. Pekerti et al., (2024) note that Circe faces discrimination for not fitting the gods' beauty standards, yet she resists and redefines those standards in pursuit of an authentic identity. Circe's transformation from an antagonist figure to a humanized woman reflects an effort to deconstruct patriarchal narratives in classical mythology (Stranding, 2025).

The transformation caused by the sea is not limited to physical aspects but also encompasses psychological and emotional dimensions. The sea creates fundamental opportunities in the exchange process that not only impact the physical but also the psychological and emotional aspects of a person (Wang et al., 2023). In many literary works, the representation of the sea serves as a metaphysical framework to reflect the inner journey and character of humans (Altun, 2023). Thus, Circe's journey across the sea

follows the same pattern, where each wave and storm marks a challenge to be faced and transforms her into a stronger and more independent figure (Sharma, 2025).

Circe's existential transformation is closely related to the presence of the sea as a transcendent force that shapes her body, space, and narrative. The sea not only brings guests to her island but also presents transformative experiences that reconstruct Circe's relationships with divinity, humans, and other beings (Narváez Villa, 2023). In this case, the sea represents an active narrative of nature, not just a backdrop, that encourages Circe to transcend her original fate as a marginal goddess and become an autonomous figure (Raczyńska, 2024). In a modern retelling like *Circe*, women's experiences are reclaimed from the dominance of patriarchal narratives, creating space for identity transformation and empowerment through the power of voice and isolation (Nizar, 2025).

Circe struggles with a sense of alienation, not only among her own group but also regarding her identity as an isolated goddess (Zhang, 2024). Circe discovered that the sea was not just a geographical boundary, but also a symbol of freedom, alienation, and personal strength. The depiction of the aggressive sea in the narrative reflects the tension between human agendas and the harmony of nature (Ramin, Z., & Razavi, 2023). In this context, the conflict between the external forces affecting Circe's life and the inner strength she derives from the sea creates a narrative rich in meaning and lessons.

Furthermore, it emphasizes that an individual's experiences at sea can serve as a mirror of the challenges faced throughout their lives. The sea is not only a place of exploration but also an arena where various existential challenges are faced (Buchan et al., 2024). Human dependence on the sea, in this case, involves two sides; the sea can provide protection while also posing a threat, depending on how individuals and communities interact with that nature. Moreover, the sea becomes an important marker in Circe's relationship with the outside world. In this case, the sea pushes Circe from a passive position to an active one, controlling her own destiny (Agha, 2025).

Van Veldhuizen (2020) connects this process of transformation with Deleuze's theory of becoming-animal, highlighting how Circe forms new relationships with nature through her powers. However, this study can be further expanded: the sea is not merely an element that brings humans and other creatures together, but also an inseparable force within the transformation process itself. Through the sea, Circe frees herself from old myths and roles, and shapes a new, more authentic identity.

Several studies have been conducted to uncover issues in *Circe* by Madeline Miller. MacMillan (2019) examining the use of the chronotope concept in this novel, focusing on the transformation of female identity. This research highlights how space and time in Aiaia serve as thresholds of change for Circe, revealing the marginalized position of women in classical mythology. This approach is highly relevant for illustrating how female characters are confronted with changing social conventions over time and space. Rizwana Sarwar & Saadia Fatima (2022) use a stylistic feminism approach to analyze Miller's language style that represents Circe's power. They state that the language style in *Circe* reflects women's struggle against the patriarchal structures that limit their freedom. Etiz (2023) compares *Circe* with *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood, using a herstory approach that highlights women's narratives in mythology. Morillo (2020) highlights how both novels present alternative perspectives on classical history and mythology that are dominated by male figures.

Qasim & Rahayu A. C. (2023) focus their research more on the patriarchal culture in *Circe*, specifically how the main character responds to and resists the oppressive patriarchal structure. They use a qualitative approach to explore Circe's resistance to patriarchal dominance, which creates space for female characters to develop and transform. Another interesting study is FitzGibbon (2021) which analyzes *Circe* through revisionist mythmaking, an approach that examines how Miller reshapes classical myths

by giving agency to female characters who were previously marginalized in Greek mythology narratives. Lim (2023) uses the monomyth theory (Hero's Journey) to analyze how Miller adapts the monomyth structure in *Circe*. This research shows how the classical narrative structure, often used in mythology, is modified to depict the journey of women in Greek mythology, which is typically filled with patriarchy and injustice. AKÇEŞME & ŞARLAR (2022) examine *Circe* using an ecolinguistic approach, which analyzes how figurative language, such as similes, is used to form non-hierarchical relationships between humans and nature. They show that the language in *Circe* not only reflects the relationships between humans but also with nature, especially the sea, which becomes a symbol of transformation for the main character. A significant gap thus persists in critically examining the sea as an active agent of identity formation and resistance within the novel.

The theme of the sea as a transformative force is not only present in the novel *Circe*, but can also be found in other literary works. In *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway (1952), the sea becomes an arena of struggle that tests Santiago's physical and mental endurance. Meanwhile, in *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (2001), the sea becomes a place that forces Pi Patel to survive and find new meaning in life. Both novels show that the sea is not just a setting, but a transformative catalyst that strengthens the spiritual and psychological journeys of their characters.

Circe is a novel by Madeline Miller published in 2018 with a total of 546 pages. As a work that occupies the top position on the New York Times Bestseller list, the novel *Circe* emphasizes the close relationship between humans and nature in the context of personal transformation (Miller, 2018). This novel offers a rich exploration of how the sea can shape a person's identity, choices, and journey. Research on the sea as a transformative force in *Circe* is important because it not only enriches the discourse of ecocriticism in literature but also encourages readers to understand how nature acts as an active agent in the formation of human identity. Thus, this reading underscores the urgency of re-evaluating the role of the environment in fictional narratives, particularly in relation to gender, independence, and social change.

Although prior studies have addressed themes of mythmaking, feminism, and narrative voice, few have treated the sea as an ecological and transformative force. By applying an ecocritical lens, this research addresses the gap by emphasizing the agency of natural elements, specifically the sea, in character development. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) explain the representation of the sea as part of nature in the story, (2) describe the construction of the sea as force of transformation in the story, and (3) explain the implications of the relationship between nature and human as depicted in *Circe* by Madeline Miller.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the theory of ecocriticism by Jonathan Bate as its main foundation. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning individuals construct regarding a particular issue or social phenomenon. This research uses Jonathan Bate's ecocriticism theory, which emphasizes the role of literature as a medium for cultivating ecological awareness. Literary works enable humans to reimagine their relationship with nature through the concept of *dwelling* (Bate, 2000). *Dwelling* in this context refers to the character's process of forming deep, meaningful connections with the environment—physically, emotionally, and symbolically. This ecocritical approach is used to analyze how natural elements, particularly the sea are presented as a transformative force in *Circe* by Madeline Miller. This study aims to explore the understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, and how the representation of nature in the novel reflects ecological forces and

transformations that occur both in the context of mythology and in today's ecological reality.

The main object of this research is the novel *Circe* by Madeline Miller, published in 2018. This literary text is chosen due to its rich depiction of nature, particularly the sea, as a transformative force that significantly influences the development of the protagonist, Circe. As the primary subject of a qualitative literary study, *Circe* is treated as a single case study, allowing for deep textual immersion and focused analysis. The sea in the novel is not just a passive background element but plays a vital role in shaping Circe's destiny, identity, and personal growth. To support the analysis, this study also uses secondary sources such as academic journals, books, and articles that discuss ecocriticism, the symbolism of nature, and Greek mythology. As a qualitative study, the researcher acknowledges their interpretive role in selecting and analyzing the data, and potential subjectivities are mitigated by engaging with multiple critical sources.

The main instrument is the text of *Circe*, analyzed through detailed, repeated readings to identify relevant themes. The researchers conducted in-depth reading and analysis of the text. In addition, the researchers also collected references from various scientific articles, books, and other secondary sources that are closely related to ecocriticism and environmental themes in literary works. All data and references obtained are used to strengthen the arguments and analysis in this research.

In data collection, the researchers go through several stages. First, the researcher will read deeply the novel *Circe* and relevant secondary sources to understand the use of the sea as a transformative force in the story. Second, the researchers identify the main themes in the novel, particularly those related to the sea, change, and the relationship between humans and nature. Third, the symbols found are classified based on their relation to the sea and ecological power, and then connected to the ecological context and transformation in the story. Fourth, the researchers analyze the data by tracing the relationship between the sea and the ecological changes that occur in the novel. Fifth, the results of the analysis are systematically reported by presenting the symbolism of the sea and its connection to ecocriticism theory. Sixth, the researchers draw conclusions that reflect the role of the sea in the novel as an agent of transformation.

Data processing, analysis, and interpretation are conducted by reading the text deeply to understand the representation of the sea in the story. The researcher will identify the symbolism of the sea and themes related to ecocriticism, as well as analyze the relationship between the transformations experienced by the characters in the novel and the influence of the sea on those changes. After identifying the main symbols and themes, the data are classified based on categories relevant to ecocriticism and ecological transformation. This analysis shows how the sea is positioned as an agent of change in the context of Greek mythology and how it reflects broader ecological issues. The results of this analysis are compiled into a report that explains the main findings and considers the implications of the sea's symbolism on ecological transformation in the story. This study concludes with a summary of the role of the sea in the novel *Circe* as a transformative force that can be used to understand the relationship between humans and nature in a broader ecological context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of the Sea as Part of Nature

In Madeline Miller's *Circe*, the sea is represented as an important part of the natural environment that affects the main character's life. Based on Jonathan Bate's ecocritical approach, nature is not just a setting, but an active agent in shaping the experiences of humans and other creatures (Bate, 2000). The sea is not only presented as a natural landscape, but also as a living space that shapes the experiences and identities of the main

characters. Its representation as a *dwelling* emphasizes not only physical habitation but also ecological embeddedness, where the human-nature relationship is continuously constructed. This concept is in line with Jonathan Bate's ecocriticism approach, which states that true dwelling is not just a physical structure, but a space where humans can meaningfully merge with nature. In this context, Aiaia Island symbolizes Circe's ecological dwelling, a living space that enables connection with the surrounding natural landscape. As a permanent residence, Aiaia is depicted with a narrative that emphasizes its natural beauty and the characters' attachment to their environment.

"I walked the hills, the buzzing meadows of thyme and lilac, and set my footprints across the yellow beaches. I searched out every cove and grotto, found the gentle bays, the harbor safe for ships. I heard the wolves howl, and the frogs cry from their mud." (Miller, 2018, p. 69)

The quote represents Aiaia's sea and coastline as a living space that not only functions physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. Circe does not simply "dwell", but rather has an active relationship with natural spaces such as bays, beaches, and harbors. Terms such as yellow beaches, gentle bays, and harbor safe for ships indicate that the sea surrounding Aiaia is not an alien space, but a familiar and safe space, making it a place of refuge as well as contemplation.

This reflects the process by which the character's identity is shaped through continuous interaction and adaptation to the surrounding natural space. The sea and the island become a unified dwelling place that shows how humans (in this case Circe, though an immortal being) need ecological connectedness in order to grow and transform themselves. In *Circe*, home is not merely a structure, but an ecosystem that sustains identity and transformation. The sea, as part of this ecological dwelling, embodies what Bate describes as a meaningful habitation where humans are united with nature *"Only if we are capable of dwelling can we build."* (Bate, 2000, p. 262) The sea as a dwelling place does not automatically guarantee spiritual well-being if the relationship with nature is only hierarchical or dominative, as it was in Circe's life before her exile.

In *Circe* the sea around the island of Aiaia is not only depicted as a physical boundary, but also as a sanctuary that allows for a calmer and freer life to be lived by Circe. After being exiled by Zeus, Circe was placed on a remote island surrounded by the vast ocean. While the exile initially felt like a form of punishment, it was slowly transformed into a space that provided a sense of safety and empowerment. The protection Circe felt came not only from solitude, but also from the power of the sea that fortified the island from the power of the gods. The sea kept threats at bay, and its boundaries made intervention from the outside world difficult.:

"He told us that you took further precautions for him as well. That you have cast a spell over the island, and no god, not even Olympians, can pass." (Miller, 2018, p. 259)

From this quote, it can be seen that protection has been actively created, but what makes it special is the role of the sea as a fortress that separates Circe from the power of the gods. The existence of the ocean creates a space that cannot be easily penetrated, even by divine beings. The island, once considered a place of exile, is slowly transformed into a place of refuge, healing, and self-discovery. The sea is thus presented not as an alienating force, but as an ecological element that allows for the creation of a safe space. Protection and separation from the world of the gods create opportunities for Circe to rebuild herself. From an outcast woman to a figure who is sovereign over her own life.

In addition, the sea is also the source of life that sustains Circe's physical and spiritual existence. After being banished to the island of Aiaia, Circe not only faced isolation, but also rebuilt her life by relying on the natural wealth that enveloped the island.

In one scene, it is described how the plants that grow wild on the island are utilized by Circe as part of her magical practices:

"I took down a bunch of yarrow... 'Healing salves. Yarrow stops bleeding.' The air was musky-sweet and sharp with herbs."(Miller, 2018, p. 277)

From the quote, it appears that the sea as an ecological element surrounding the island has allowed new life to grow. Plants from the island's coastal and terrestrial ecosystems are processed into healing potions. In this excerpt, Circe describes her adaptation process to the environment of the island of Aiaia, which is surrounded by the sea. She learns to recognize and utilize the natural resources around her, such as plants and animals, which become an integral part of her magical practice and daily life. Through these connections, Circe finds ways to both survive and heal, both herself and others.

Furthermore, the sea is presented as a living space that opens up opportunities for freedom, exploration, discovery and transformation. Through the vast and boundless waves, the characters have been brought to new places, but more than that, they have also been brought to know themselves more deeply. Circe's experience with them has been shaped by the encounters made possible by the sea. Odysseus, one of the characters made present through sea travel, has been remembered by Circe in her tender contemplation:

"Odysseus, son of Laertes, the great traveler, prince of wiles and tricks and a thousand ways. He showed me his scars, and in return he let me pretend that I had none."(Miller, 2018, p. 194)

Through this quote, we can see that the sea is not only a link between islands, but also a space where wounds are met, heard and accepted. The sea brings Odysseus together with Circe, and from there he is remembered not as a god or king, but as a fellow human being. He opens himself, shows his scars, and makes space for Circe to be herself. Her journey across the sea presents real wounds, not just symbols of heroism, but scars of life's struggles. For Circe herself, the sea has opened up the world. The island, previously a place of exile, is transformed by the sea into a place of encounter, a place to learn from humans, and a place to understand a wider existence. The island is no longer filled only with solitude, but with meaning carried by the sea and the lives it connects.

The Construction of the Sea as a Force of Transformation

The sea is not only a physical setting, but also plays a symbolic role as a space of change, transition and growth. This finding shows that the sea as part of nature has an active role in shaping human identity and existential journey. In this context, the sea is not merely a place of escape or seclusion, but also a catalyst that forces humans to adapt, face challenges and even reinvent themselves.

The sea in *Circe* is not only depicted as a vast and mysterious geographical expanse, but also as a silent space that allows one to meet oneself. When Circe is exiled to the island of Aiaia surrounded by the sea, Circe is not only separated from the gods and the crowds of Olympus, but also confronted with herself. In that isolation, a process of inner transformation began. Self-reliance, observation of nature, and relationships built with the creatures around the island became a way for Circe to grow. Feelings of loss, loneliness, and disconnection from her past are not used as a burden, but as a foundation to build a new identity. This process is reflected in the following quote:

"All this while, I have been a weaver without wool, a ship without the sea. Yet now look where I sail."(Miller, 2018, p. 69)

This sentence shows that the sea has given her direction, a place to sail, and a new meaning to her existence. As a woman who has been left marginalized, Circe is eventually shaped by the silence of the sea to become stronger, wiser, and more at peace with herself.

However, the process of change also comes through mistakes. One of the most important moments occurred when Circe turned a woman named Scylla into a monster out of jealousy. The act was later recognized as a huge mistake that left deep wounds and regret. In her conversation with Telemachus, this confession was delivered with sincerity:

"Scylla was not born a monster. I made her... Do not try to take my regret from me." (Miller, 2018, p. 308)

The regret is not erased, but accepted and learned from. Circe's personal transformation came not from her magical prowess, but from her ability to take responsibility for the hurt she had caused. The decision to face Scylla again, a creature of her own making, becomes a true form of courage and growth. As such, the sea has been used as a space of reflection, awareness and healing. Circe's inner journey shows that the sea not only separates, but also connects humans to their deepest values. In the solitude and silence of the sea, change into a better person can be found, not because of perfection, but because of the courage to admit, regret, and repair.

Furthermore, the sea is an important medium that allows for the elevation of status and transformation of the characters, both socially and spiritually. The transformation of human status into a hierarchically higher figure is explicitly shown through the character Glaucos in Circe's novel. An ordinary fisherman who lives a simple life has been elevated to immortal status thanks to the magic of sea herbs concocted by Circe. This process illustrates the sea as a source of power that is not only magical, but also hierarchical, as it is able to bring a person from the level of mortal man into the power structure of the gods.

"He spun the tale well: his ill humor, the drowsiness that fell on him like a boulder, and then the power lifting him like cresting waves, granted by the Fates themselves... Together they helped him shape his underwater palace, set with gold and wave-wrack treasures." (Miller, 2018, p. 43)

The sea is portrayed as having its own will to elevate humanity, with the waves pushing up and the underwater palace as a new symbol of power. Glaucos not only undergoes a change of form, but also gains a new place in the mythological order as a god. As such, the sea has functioned as a spiritual and political tool that facilitates the transfer of status from a mere mortal to a worshipped figure. However, this process of elevation did not escape its dark side. After his divine status was achieved, Glaucos slowly changed. He became a proud man and abandoned Circe who had once loved him so much. This change, fueled by the power of the sea, also created emotional distance, betrayal and grief. The sea, which was originally a means of upliftment, eventually also became a symbol of separation. Aside from Glaucos, Circe herself is a figure who experiences a gradual rise in status through her involvement with the sea. After being banished to the island of Aiaia, which is surrounded by the sea, Circe is at her lowest as an exiled goddess. However, over time, through her exploration of nature and sea-based magic, her identity and authority as a witch is shaped and strengthened. Circe managed to create a personal space of power that even great gods like Hermes and Athena respected.

"But Aeëtes had been right, my greatest gift was transformation, and that was always where my thoughts returned. I stood before a rose, and it became an iris. A draught poured onto the roots of an ash tree changed it to a holm oak. I turned all my firewood to cedar so that its scent would fill my halls each night. I caught a bee and made it into a toad, and a scorpion into a mouse." (Miller, 2018, p. 72)

In the solitude that surrounds her life on Aiaia, Circe's identity has been slowly reshaped. Not only have creatures and objects been transformed by her magical powers, but also her own self has been shaped through experience and reflection. What was once a rejected and marginalized figure has now been transformed into a person who realizes her own power, choices, and direction in life.

One of the most touching forms of transformation is shown when the deepest fear must be faced: the possibility of losing a child. For Telegonus' safety, a journey to the bottom of the sea has been made to meet Trygon, an immortal creature known for its danger and power. In the process, it was not only physical obstacles that had to be overcome, but also an inner battle fueled by motherly love and courage. The decision shows that true power is not only found in magic, but also in the sincerity of sacrifice.

Implications of the Relationship between Nature and Humans

This section outlines some of the implications of the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature found in Madeline Miller's *Circe*. The findings suggest that the interactions between humans and nature in the novel not only serve as narrative elements, but also reflect broader moral, emotional and ecological values. Nature is not simply a setting, but a living companion that shapes the protagonist's character, choices and consciousness. Through Circe's experiences with plants, animals and the ocean, it is reflected that human existence is dependent on balance and harmony with nature.

The sea and nature as a whole are depicted as essential elements that ensure human survival in *Circe*. Dependence on nature is not only seen in the main character, but also in ordinary people like Glaucos and the sailors who sail the seas to the island of Aiaia. Their lives are supported by the sea as a shipping route, a source of food, and an escape from the threat of the outside world. In this context, the sea has been presented as a space that provides both hope and challenge, a place where survival is determined by the ability of humans to read, respect and respond to the forces of nature. Circe's life as a witch was also shaped through a deep dependence on natural resources. In the process of healing and making potions, various natural elements such as plants, honey, and beeswax are used with knowledge that is passed down and developed gradually.

"I poured honey onto the yarrow, added beeswax to bind the salve. The air was musky-sweet and sharp with herbs." (Miller, 2018, p. 278).

This describes the process of making Circe's healing ointment. Natural ingredients such as yarrow, honey, and beeswax are all products of nature that are carefully processed using traditional herbal knowledge. This act of concoction not only shows Circe's technical prowess as a witch, but also shows how human knowledge is formed from direct experience with nature.

This relationship can be understood more deeply through the ecocriticism theory proposed by Jonathan Bate in *The Song of the Earth*. In his view, the relationship between humans and nature is symbiotic and interdependent: *"Man and nature are dependent on each other."* (Bate, 2000, p. 121). This statement emphasizes that nature is not just a setting or a resource, but an entity that has a role in shaping human identity, values, and life direction. In *Circe*, this concept is reflected through the ongoing interaction between humans and the environment. When Circe concocts medicine, or when sailors rely on the sea, it is shown that nature is not only used, but also respected and feared. Thus, human survival is shown as something that cannot be separated from the wisdom of reading, utilizing, and maintaining a balance with nature.

The relationship between humans and nature in Circe's novel is also reflected through the emotional and physical bond between Circe and the wild animals on the island

of Aiaia, especially the lioness who becomes her best friend and a reflection of her soul. This relationship illustrates how nature is not only a setting or resource, but also a living companion that has a great influence on the development of the human spirit and character.

"Sometimes we would play, she stalking behind me, then leaping up to grapple me by the neck. I smelled the hot musk of her breath, felt the weight of her forepaws pressing on my shoulders." (Miller, 2018, p. 73)

The lion, an animal generally associated with strength, survival, and wild instincts, is presented as a figure that is not frightening, but instead forms a relationship of mutual recognition and acceptance with Circe. In Circe's solitude, nature has been presented as a friend, teacher, and space for reflection. Bonding with wild animals such as lionesses not only shows courage, but also forms an empathic and tender side in her. The sense of security and acceptance that she does not get from the world of the gods has been fostered by the wild and voiceless nature. In this way, Circe shows that human existence can be lived not on top of nature, but alongside it. There is no domination, no fear, but rather a connection based on respect and mutual understanding. Furthermore, the moral implications of the relationship between nature and humans in Circe can be found through Circe's interactions with animals, particularly in the moment when the sailors are transformed into pigs. This process of transformation is not merely an act of revenge, but reflects a form of symbolic warning from nature against immoral human behavior.

"The truth is, men make terrible pigs" (Miller, 2018, p. 161)

The transformation of the sailors into animals is not only depicted as a form of punishment, but also as a revelation of their hidden true nature. In this case, animals, especially pigs, have been used as a medium by nature to convey a rejection of selfish human domination. Through the bodies of animals, corrupted humanity is clearly and undeniably revealed. Thus, it can be understood that nature in this novel is not merely present as a setting, but as an entity capable of reading and responding morally to human actions. In this relationship, humans are not positioned as sole rulers, but as part of an ethical ecosystem that demands responsibility. When nature is harmed, the consequences will be brought about, not by anger, but by the principle of balance.

Additionally, the moral implications of the relationship between nature and humans in Circe can be found through Circe's interactions with plants. Plants become an important element in her life, not only as ingredients for magic, but also as part of the process of understanding herself and the world. Plants are not only utilized as healing materials or magic tools, but are also treated with respect and deep understanding. In the process of making potions, every step is done with full awareness of the importance of harmony between humans and nature.

"I learned to recognize the different blooming vines and gaudy roses, to spot the shining dragonflies and coiling snakes." (Miller, 2018, p. 69)

Through this quote, it can be seen that Circe does not just "use" nature, but actually observes it, recognizes it, and even becomes one with it. The process of recognizing blooming plants, striking roses, and slithering insects and snakes shows that humans, in this case Circe, need to build a full ecological awareness. Circe does not just take, but understands. Not only seeing function, but also appreciating existence. The moral implication of this relationship is the importance of ecological ethics: that humans should not be lords over nature, but instead be part of an interconnected ecosystem. In Circe, plants are not treated as inanimate objects, but as living beings that teach patience, precision, and respect. Through a deep understanding of plants, Circe finds her strength

and independence. Circe's journey illustrates a model of ecological embeddedness where transformation is only possible through humility and receptivity to nature. This representation challenges anthropocentric worldviews and reflects a key ecocritical perspective: that literature can serve as a medium to restore ecological awareness and promote environmental values.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the role of the sea in Madeline Miller's *Circe* through an ecocritical approach, focusing on how the sea is represented as part of nature, how it is shaped as a transforming force, and how the relationship between nature and humanity is presented in the story. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the sea in *Circe* is not just a setting, but is present as an active force that deeply influences the lives of the characters. The sea becomes a home, a sanctuary, a source of wealth, as well as a place of exploration and a test of life. It brings about changes for the better in the form of status improvement, self-maturation, challenges, and the consequences of actions taken by the characters. Through Circe's relationship with the sea and surrounding nature, it is illustrated that humans coexist with nature in a mutually influential relationship. Nature not only gives, but also remembers, shapes, and even punishes. This aligns with Jonathan Bate's view of nature as an active shaper of human experience. Thus, *Circe's* novel conveys the message that true transformation, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, is inseparable from a deep connection with nature. The implication is that ecocriticism not only enriches the understanding of literature but also offers insights into how human identity and moral growth are shaped through interaction with the environment. This contribution is particularly relevant for environmental humanities, as it encourages readers to reconsider nature not as background but as an active participant in storytelling and identity formation. Additionally, these findings may be useful in pedagogical settings to foster eco-consciousness among students through literature.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis conducted, future researchers are encouraged to explore other elements of nature in *Circe*, such as forests, animals, and plants, to expand the understanding of ecological dimensions in mythological fiction. Comparative ecocritical studies between *Circe* and other myth-based works could also reveal diverse patterns of environmental representation. In addition, it is important to conduct a comparative study between *Circe* and other works of myth and nature, to see how these narratives shape human relations with the environment. This study was limited by the implicit nature of ecological messages, which were conveyed through metaphor and symbolism rather than explicit commentary. However, this subtlety highlights the need for ecocritical reading as a tool to uncover silent narratives of nature. Understanding these nuances may guide future research that bridges environmental thought and literary interpretation more holistically.

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