

The Female Persona in Louise Gluck's *Meadowlands*

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Abstract

This paper examines the poetry collection entitled *Meadowlands* by the contemporary American poet Louise Gluck (1943) from a feminist perspective. Most of Gluck's characters are feminine, because from the beginning of her early career, gender roles take place in her conflicted attitudes about sexuality and power. She basically concerns with the complicated intersections among womanhood, power relations, and desire. The female speaker she presents swings between the fragile victim and the grandiose goddess. Highlighting her contribution to American women's poetry, the study focuses on her revisionist interpretation of the *Odyssey*; the myth of Odysseus, Penelope, Circe and Telemachus. In Gluck's version of the myth, Odysseus' journey is not the central point as it is in the original myth. Furthermore, she focuses on the negatives of that journey: it is the same ten years journey, but away from Ithaca. Unlike most poets who revisited the *Odyssey*, Gluck is less interested in Odysseus while at the same time she provides the other people around him (the "minor" characters such as Penelope (Odysseus' wife), Telemachus (his son), and Circe (the sorceress goddess with whom he has love affair), with a great portion of her focus. she makes focal points out of those less significance characters. Gluck throws new light on these characters through presenting them as contemporary characters that think and talk in a modern way.

Keywords: Poetry - Louise Gluck - Meadowlands - Feminism - Revisionist Mythmaking - myth – Penelope

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Significance of the study

The primary purpose of this paper is to identify the dominant female persona employed by Louise Gluck in *Meadowland*. The female persona is a defining feature of Gluck's writings; her interest in it came as a result of her personal experiences. The study clarifies Gluck's interest in myth revision since she presents the classical stories in new light.

Literature Review

Gluck's work wins the attention of many critics because of its prolificacy, and uniqueness. The scholarly attention to her work focuses on the style of her lyric poems, as well as the growth of her poetic structures from the alone-standing individual poems to book-length sequences. While some critics have opposed her book-length sequences of poetry, others praised her efforts in this regard. Critics on Gluck focus on the personal philosophy that spreads in her work and interpret her repeated use of imageries of anorexia, hunger, and self-denial as metaphors for artistic creativity.

Her poetry attracts the attention of many feminist critics who are "interested in her treatment of gender roles and the identities and actions of the women in her poems"(Haerens and Slovy 123). They shed light on certain motifs, such as hunger, paralysis, silence, anger, and distrust that are repeated throughout her depictions of female experiences. For example, in her essay "Half in Love with Easeful Death: The Mythopoeic of Louise Gluck's *Averno*" (2019), Iman El Bakery analyzes Gluck's *Averno* (2006) from feminist, post-confessional point of view highlighting the poet's contributions to American women's poetry. She revises the traditional myth of the abduction of Persephone by Plato/Hades and the heroine's divided existence between two worlds; the earth and

the underworld. In *Averno* Gluck destroys the traditional paradigm of the female as an object, by giving voice to the "traditionally helpless victim". The poet challenges "the patriarchal, interpretational framework of traditional myth". Gluck expresses her own despair with love by using the myth mask to avoid "direct confessionism" (126).

While in "The Poetry of Louise Gluck: The Search for A Feminine Self Through The Lens of Kristevan Psychoanalytic Feminist Literary Theory" (2017), Allison Cooke traces the psychoanalytical and philosophical implications for the feminine figures appear in Gluck's oeuvre, particularly the figure of the young woman who often is distinguished as a daughter or a mother. First she studies the young woman/daughter in the poem "Fugue" and then the mother in "Persephone the Wanderer". Gluck sheds light on the difficulty the young woman has with the idea of "a maternal and body-focused femininity"(27). This difficulty is represented in Gluck's poems into two main attitudes: either the young woman wishes to keep her "non-maternal, pre-adolescent self", and contests against her mother, who is the source of that "restrictive"; or the young mother "develops a narcissism with and abjection of her own body as it becomes the space wherein a child develops"(28). Cooke raises a question of "who is 'you'?" for the female figures in Gluck's two poems. In her essay she tries to answer that question through the main concepts: "chora, potential capability, and paralinguage, as well as Julia Kristeva's concepts of the mirror stage, the abject, and narcissism"(27). She analyzes the complex and dangerous journey of identity that a young woman experiences; since in her attempts to find a truer understanding of herself as an "individual", Gluck's female figures separates her body and her mind (30).

Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts "Penelope's Song: The Lyric Odysseys of Linda Pastan and Louise Gluck"

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(2002), presents Gluck's revision of the mythological figure Penelope in *Meadowlands* as playing a great role in the broader interest of women poets and feminist scholars in reinterpreting Homer (3).

Methodology

As this paper concerns with Gluck's quest for women's cultural identity, the researcher's argument suggests that feminist literary theory should be essential to the readings of Gluck's *Meadowlands*. This paper focuses on the major feminist concepts and the argument has been grounded on the fact that the conflict between men and women lasts forever. The researcher uses methods of feminist literary criticism in dealing with Gluck's poetry. Adopting the feminist strategies, Gluck critically engages himself with the concepts of patriarchy, home, identity, myths and heritage.

Introduction

Louise Gluck (1943) is a prominent American poet who is the author of more than eleven collections of poetry: namely *Firstborn* (1968), *The House on Marshland* (1975), *Descending Figure* (1980), *Triumph of Achilles* (1985), *Arart* (1990), *The Wild Iris* (1992), *Meadowlands* (1996), *Vita Nova* (1999), *The Seven Ages* (2001), *Averno* (2006), *A Village Life* (2009), and finally *Faithful and Virtuous Night* (2014). Gluck got many awards and honors such as, National Humanities Medal (2015), Wallace Stevens Award (2008), Poet Laureate (2003-2004), Bollingen Prize (2001), National Book Critics Circle Award (1985), The Pulitzer Prize (1993) for her sixth book of poems, *The Wild Iris*, PEN/ Martha Al-Brand Award for her first nonfiction collection of essays *Proofs & Theories* (1995), the Melville Cane Award for *The Triumph of Achilles* (1985), and recently The Noble Prize (2020) for literature, for "her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal". She is the 16th woman to win

The Noble Prize and the first American woman since Toni Morrison won it in (1993). Anders Olsson, the chair of the noble prize committee, praises Gluck's poetic voice as being "candid and uncompromising" "full of humor and biting wit" voice. Her poetry is hailed for its "striving for clarity"; it is known for "confronting the illusions of the self". Olsson believes that even if Gluck herself admits the importance of the autobiographical background of her writing, "she is not to be regarded as a confessional poet" (Flood); since the female writers "veil the sharply autobiographical elements of their work to prove female experience is as "universal" as the writings of white males which western culture has "canonized" (Rodier 187).

Gluck as a Myth Revisionist

In her article "Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" (1982), Alicia Ostriker believes that a poet is using myth whenever he/she "employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture". In her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-vision."(1972), Adrienne Rich defines "revisionist mythmaking" as "... the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction- is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (18). Ostriker defines the term as "the old vessel filled with wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible" (72). Therefore, she inserts the historic and the quasi-historic figures like Napoleon and Sappho among the mythic characters as are folktales, legends, and scripture. Using myth gives the writer "the sort of authority unavailable to someone who writes "merely" of the private self". The critic counts the various approaches women poets adopt in revising myth, starting from "hit-and-run attacks"(73) on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them, to portraying the female

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"destroyer, a figure women's poetry has been inhibited from exploring in the past by the need to identify feminist with morality"(77). According to her, the essence of revisionist mythmaking, for women poets, is in the confrontation and rectification of gender stereotypes depicted in myth. In "Stealing the Language: The Emergence of women's poetry in America" (1986), she states that myths are "the sanctuaries of language where our meanings for "male" and "female" are stored; to rewrite them from a female point of view is to discover new possibilities for meaning" (Ostriker 11).

Myth revision plays a significant role in Gluck's poetry, since "Nobody works a myth like Louise Gluck"(ORR 365). It makes up a great portion of her work, where she employs biblical, classical, historical, and fairy tale myths. In her early writings she devotes poems to Achilles, the Gemini, and Hyacinth. Besides, three of her most recent books_ *Meadowlands*, *Vita Nova*, and *Averno*_ include lyric sequences that base on the classical Penelope, Eurydice, Dido and Persephone myths, respectively. Mythology is employed by Gluck as an "attempt to stabilize and universalize the temporal, but also to deflect and reinforce the resulting "fated stasis". It is used in her poetry both to "diminish choice and responsibility" and to "provide justification for grandiosity"(Sadoff 82).

Revisiting aspects of the myth, as Daniel Morris declares, gives Gluck the chance to achieve "self-expression and self-deflection"(2), She uses the "masks of legendary characters" to suggest "an expanded notion of what constitutes an experimental writing strategy that troubles the border between what we think of as commentary and interpretation" (31). Her versions of any myth act as "a compendium of references that enable her... to shift the stage upon which her personal, even autobiographical, expressions can take place as a series of masked performances". Moreover, "allusiveness enables her to be elusive; to at once reveal and hide the speaker's vulnerabilities through the distance afforded by referring to

myths and sources". According to Bonnie Costello's view, her poems, though involving the self, are impersonal, "negatively capable, or at least able to inhabit more than one perspective, to dramatize questions rather than project views" (qtd.in Morris 22). Thus, reworking on myth is not a way of escaping from experience but, furthermore, it lets the poet shape the facts of her life or what she called "a proof that suffering can be made somehow to yield meaning" (Morris 23). Although this technique is not uncommon among contemporary poets, Gluck's use of it delivers distinctive poetry because of the psychological particularity inherent in her approach (Henry *The Odyssey Revisited* 167).

The Female Persona in Gluck's Poetry

In her essay "The Use of Voice in Louise Gluck's Poetry"(2003), Myra Schneider suggests that what is common between Gluck's characters, in general, is their dual nature, with each character's struggling against a kind of inner conflict. Although there are some similarities among the sequences, each sequence has its independent characters. The poet uses voice in a highly unique different way. She presents the speakers talking to one another and to the reader arguing about the small daily matters of their lives in a very simple lovely way. Her characters are not "fleshed out" like those who are used in a verse play or a dramatic monologue poem. Gluck's characters are "mouthpieces" for a variety of contrasted viewpoints'; they express strong emotions, complex thoughts and abstract ideas run through their talk. A technique that helps Gluck to write deeply avoiding the "dense" of writing. The speaker of a poem is given "the immediate context", but exploring the story or situation behind it, is the reader's task. The sequences don't follow a certain chronology; they have been juxtaposed to comment on or even to paradox the different "strands" of Gluck's subjects (1).

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From the beginning of her early career, gender roles always take place in Gluck's "conflicted attitudes" about "sexuality and power". The female speaker she presents in her poems if not a "withholding goddess" she is a "without volition", "passive" and "immobile" female (Sadoff 86). Gluck presents a persona who swings between "the fragile victim" and "the grandiose goddess" whose love causes "tragic consequences". She depicts the female self as always "powerless, fragile and isolated" or as a "contemptuous" of the male-dominated social world. The female self "subjects herself to adversarial power regimes and a repetition of flight, ironic defense, denial, and prohibition". For Gluck the existence of Women's selflessness is because of their "dependency" and "lack of mobility". Her speakers keep their "compensatory longing for the ascendancy of the powerful individual, mythic or otherwise; she envies the power of men, and when she doesn't mock them (with castration) she covets their capacity for departure" (87).

In *The Art of Leaving nothing Behind: Feminist Consciousness in the Poetics of Louise Gluck, Barbara Guest, and Lisa Robertson* (2013), Kaisa Cummings criticizes Gluck's frequent presentation of female speakers who are always "trapped by cultural roles and feelings of powerlessness" (1). Her characters expose the past and use it as a lens for reshaping the present. Gluck calls attention to the problems of "female difference", or that which, for the poet, weakens idea of identity, as established by patriarchal systems through the repeated method of representing mythic women as versions of herself or the oppressed female. Gluck's work explores the "mythic landscape", a place that hosts some of the first and most permanent representations of "the oppressed or silent woman" (2). In other words, Gluck's poems frequently represent a female voice who:

struggles to fashion an identity through words in the face of a tradition in which her voice and vision have been effaced or ignored, usually through the will of paternalistic male characters ranging from father, to Yahuven, to ex-lovers and ex-husbands who wished to inscribe the meaning of her life on her behalf, ... through their imagination of a silence and silenced other. (Morris 35)

The young woman in Gluck's poetry enters the "decades-long" feminist discourse of "what it means to be a woman." since she fights against being identified as just her "body or as what her body can produce". Gluck's woman conflicts this limitation of self-identity as forced upon her by others. What she truly is, is her body and more; she attempts to be deeply analyzed, "emotionally and intellectually" (Cooke 35).

Revisiting the *Odyssey*: Classical Origin of Homer's *Odyssey*

The Odyssey is an epic poem written in 24 books by the ancient Greek poet Homer. It is about the story of Odysseus, king of Ithaca, who wanders for 10 years (although the poem covers only the final six weeks of Odysseus' voyage), trying to go home after the Trojan War. *The Odyssey* does not follow a specific timeline. Homer begins it from the middle of the tale, the reader knows about the previous events only through Odysseus's retelling. The first four books center around the incidents in Ithaca. Telemachus is trying to know anything that could help him finding his father, who has not been heard from since he left for war nearly 20 years earlier. Telemachus meets two men who fought with Odysseus in the war at Troy, Nestor and Menelaus, and finds out that his father is still alive.

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The second four books (V–VIII) introduce the main character, Odysseus, as he has been set free from captivity by the nymph Calypso on the island of Ogygia. He suffers a shipwreck and lands on the shore of Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians. In Books (IX–XII) Odysseus tells the Phaeacians of his distressing journey trying to find his way to home.

Finally, Books (XIII–XXIV), in the second half of the poem, Odysseus back to Ithaca, facing unexpected obstacles and danger. After his return, he is recognized only by his loyal dog and a nurse. In order to reunite with his wife and With the help of his son, Telemachus and Eumaeus (a servant and swineherd), and Philoetius (a servant and cowherd), Odysseus destroys the insistent suitors of his loving wife, Penelope, who resisted the disturbance of more than a hundred suitors—who have stayed in Odysseus's house, eating, drinking, and carousing while waiting for Penelope to decide who is among them she is going to marry. Odysseus kills them all, and gets rid of several of her maids who helped the suitors getting close to Penelope and takes back the rule of his kingdom (Blumberg).

Gluck's Version of the Myth

The *Meadowlands'* characters are never free to live a life of "free will or self-directed freedom". They know their lives are "scripted for them", and they evaluate their "destinies with a certain degree of irony, particularly when there are moments that serve to undermine or ironize the archetypal narratives of myth" (Nash 156). "Gluck is at her best in *Meadowlands* when she adds complex psychological insight to the people inside Odysseus' circle" (Henry *The Odyssey Revisited* 572). The poet "fills in a gap in the story, or supplies a missing voice or emotional register ... giv[ing] voice to the sensibilities of characters from whom little is heard in the *Odyssey*: they explore unspoken feelings of anger, lust, grief" (qtd. in Parker

31). She tries to complicate Odysseus' myth, particularly, in revising Circe to look as a more sympathetic character, and in presenting Telemachus and Penelope as having ambivalent emotions about Odysseus and about one another.

Penelope's Vacillating Personality

Penelope is the central figure of a sequence of poems that are presented in her own voice, such as "Penelope's song", "Penelope's Stubbornness" "Departure" and "Ithaca". The book's opening poem "Penelope's song" unfolds Penelope's vacillating personality by noting changes in her relationship to her husband; where she progresses through several varied emotions during the course of this poem and the subsequent poems too. It begins with a wife eager to meet her husband who has been away for a long time. The wife (Penelope) is getting disappointed with the absence of her husband (Odysseus) and her continuous waiting. She directly addresses her soul asking her to climb a tree and watch Odysseus' coming home:

Little soul, little perpetually undressed one,
do now as I bid you, climb
the shelf-like branches of the Spruce tree;
Wait at the top, attentive, like
A sentry or look-out. He will be Home soon; (1-5)

In her essay "Above an Abyss" (1996), Emily Gordon accuses Gluck's *Meadowlands* of deconstructing the *odyssey*, revising the story of a voyage away from the inevitable union between Odysseus and Penelope, with the wife in *Meadowlands* being presented as Penelope destroying their marital relationship (170). With alluding of infidelity, the wife continues addressing herself, "you have not been completely/ perfect either; with your troublesome body/ you have done things you shouldn't / discuss in poems." (7-10).

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Conspicuously, Gluck avoids specifying what Penelope has done in the absence of the wandering king. She also leaves out the details of the husband's wanderings, though the blame seems principally assigned to him (172). In a moment of honesty with the self (a moment of weakness) the wife confesses that in the long absence of man, woman has desires and bodily needs that must be satisfied. But shortly, Penelope reminds herself of the strength she has, so she decides to keep:

call out to him over the open
water, over the bright water
with your dark song, with your
grasping,
unnatural song – passionate,
like Maria Callas. (11-16)

Maria Callas is a very prominent opera soprano of the 20th century, Gluck uses her name here as a symbol of strength and insistence.

Paralleling herself to the siren who seduces Odysseus, Penelope tries to seduce him by her passionate singing like a bird tweeting on a tree. Again the wife conflicts the inner voice which insists on reminding her of her femininity and that she deserves to enjoy her life: "Who wouldn't want you?/ Whose Most demonic appetite/ Could you possibly fail to/ Answer?"(17-20). Penelope swings between two feelings; to be patient and loyal to Telemachus and keeps waiting for his long uncertain homecoming, or to stop waiting for his return, choose one of her suitor and goes on in her life where she has every reason to. Penelope makes her choice preferring "patience and loyalty" emphasizing:

Soon
He will return from wherever
He goes in the meantime,
Suntanned from his time away,

Wanting

His grilled chicken.

(21-26)

She chooses to keep dreaming of Telemachus' returning, suntanned and hungry, from a vacation; and a startling sense of the fragility of this great warrior. She is training herself to behave in a gentle manner: "... ah you must greet him;/ you must shake the boughs of the tree/ to get his attention,"(20-22); she is going to do anything makes him come home again. "But carefully, carefully, lest / his beautiful face be marred / by too many falling needles." (31-33); the falling needles of a pine tree may be the only "oblique allusion to the heroine's cloth working artistry, which signifies retirement (the upstairs loom) and an aptitude for aggression (some damage to the hero's face)" (Gregerson129).

In "Penelope's Stubbornness", the wife (Penelope) feeds up with the meddling of her life who constantly judge her pretending to pity her as she is the long-awaited "poor lady"(line 7) who waits for the return of an ever absent husband. She denounces involving themselves in her life without knowing her thoughts towards her life and the long love memories she has with her husband in a rhetorical question Penelope asks: "...who would send such a weightless being/ to judge my life? My thoughts are deep/ and my memory long;" (10-12). The word "envy" in line 12, "why would I envy such freedom/ when I have humanity", unfolds what Penelope tries to hide not only from others but from herself also; she exposes her real feeling of being restricted and trapped in this relationship of long waiting for a husband whose return is uncertain. In her subconscious, Penelope is envious and jealous of those couples who have a normal relationship. She actually wishes if she can release from that choking loyalty to an absent man. The poem's title conveys two meanings; the first one is Penelope's stubbornness and

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challenging others who criticize her for that invalid waiting, and the other meaning is Penelope's stubbornness and deceiving herself by pretending to be forceful and happy in this anonymous relationship.

In "Departure" Penelope flashes back to the night before Odysseus leaving for Troy. Describing the scene of the husband's farewell, the wife remembers:

The night isn't dark; the world is dark.
stay with me a little longer.
your hands on the back of the chair---
that's what I'll remember. (1-4)

Gluck complicates Penelope's character by depicting her as a wife who "foresees her husband's departure, rather than his return, and who projects the present moment onto a future full of longing for the past" (Pache 10). The wife cares for preserving a special memory to remember during her husband's absence more than caring for lamenting his departure. Even at the present time of remembering the night before Odysseus leaving, she remembers a lot of intense details even the less significant one of "in the other room, the maid discreetly/ putting out the light I read by." (5-6), but not her grief over the leaving to war husband. Penelope criticizes Odysseus' continuous desire of departure, expecting his long absence as a result of being sent into exile after being captured in war. Penelope's words are harsh and scathing as an indirect rejection of abandoning her for the sake of war:

That room with its chalk walls---
how will it look to you I wonder
once your exile begins? I think your eyes
will seek out
its light as opposed to the moon.

Apparently, after so many years, you need
distance to make plain its intensity. (7-12)

The word "distance" refers to a split in their relationship that is still going on even after "so many years" of absence. In an ironic sense of humor, Penelope criticizes Odysseus and the other Greek men who are leaving their families for the sake of war:

on the beach, voices of the Greek farmers,
impatient for sunrise.
As thought dawn will change them
From farmers into heroes, (8-11)

Again, the poet tries to question Penelope's real feelings towards Odysseus since along the whole poem Penelope talks about Odysseus' feelings for her as he "... lightly stroking [her] shoulders", "... holding [her] because [he is] going away..", "like a man who wants to feel longing again", but she never, even for once, express Penelope's yearnings for the leaving Odysseus. Until the husband startled her by asking her directly: "How can I know you love me/unless I see you grieve over me?" (27-28), since he perceives her cold feelings towards him.

Like "Departure", "Quite Evening" is another poem about remembering Penelope's last night with Odysseus before his travelling to The Trojan War:

you take my hand; then we're alone
in the life-threatening forest. Almost
immediately
We're in a house; Noah's
grown and moved away; the clematis after
ten years
suddenly flowers white. (1-5)

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These lines allude to what is going on in the poet's (Penelope's) mind (her subconscious). This is the kind of life she wishes to live. She wants to have a stable life with a happy family, a loving husband and a helpful reliable son. Facing together the troubles of the "life-threatening forest". Noah is the name of Louise Gluck's son; she connects her personal life to the myth, wearing the mask of Penelope's personae:

more than anything in the world
I love these evenings when we're together;
the quiet evenings in summer; the sky
still light at this hour
so Penelope took the hand of Odysseus,
not to hold him back but to impress
this peace on his memory: (6-12)

Gluck tries to express the experiences and emotions Penelope felt about her marriage when it was troubled but going. Penelope tries to satisfy her husband with that flattering tone. Like a wife who attempts to fix a broken relationship that is tired of their quarrels, she takes Odysseus' hand not to prevent him from leaving but to give him a good memory of a moment of peace between them, so that he can remember her in his journey. Again Penelope cares for keeping memories more than lamenting the leaving husband. Penelope concludes the poem with a tone of an implicit aggression: "from this point on, the silence through which you move/ is my voice pursuing you." (13-14); even in the husband's journey's peaceful moments, the memory of the voice of his wife violating him will not let him enjoy this peace.

Gluck ends Penelope's poems with declaring her as an archetypal wife who is faithful by nature whatever her feelings are; she must be loyal to the absent husband. So in "Ithaca" Penelope knocks out all the confusing feelings and ideas from

her earlier poems, gathering her strength, with determination and tenacity she reveals:

The beloved doesn't
need to live. The beloved
lives in the head. The loom
is for the suitors, strung up
like a harp with white shroud_ thread. (1-5)

Renewing love in her heart and hope in her words, repeating the word "beloved" twice Penelope tells herself that even if Odysseus is not coming back and even if he is not alive, he already lives in her head. Then she reminds herself of her duty to keep weaving to distract and deceives the suitors keeping them away from her. As a loving wife she remembers the characteristic of her husband who was: "... the body and voice, the easy/Magnetism of a living man, and then/The unfolding dream or image/Shaped by the woman working the loom" (7-10). Penelope decides to wait for Odysseus' homecoming, devoting her life for his memory in case of his death. Furthermore, she will kill herself to prevent the suitors from having her: "they don't know that when one loves this way/ the shroud becomes a wedding dress." (20-21).

In "Telemachus' Burden", Telemachus sees Penelope (his mother) as: "...the sort of woman/ who let you know she was suffering and then/denied that suffering" (6-8). She is an arrogant aristocratic woman who cares for her social position more than anything else. Everything in her tells you she is suffering, however, she refuses to admit that because for her: "suffering was what slaves did" (line 9). She even refuses her son's attempts to "console" her. Telemachus believes that his mother rejects to marry again and chooses to wait for the absent king to come back, not for the sake of loyalty or love since: "If she'd been capable of honesty/She would have been/a

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stoic." (13-15). In fact, she chooses to scarify her happiness and wait for Odysseus because: "she was a queen, she wanted it understood/at every moment she had chosen/ her own destiny." (16-18). She chooses "waiting", to be glorified as the great free-will queen who is able to determine her destiny and to be praised as the loyal loving wife. Actually, she is forced to choose sacrifice or: "She would have had to be/ insane to choose that destiny." (18-19); because: "routines develop, compensations/ for perceived/ absences and omissions."(3-5), glorification and immortality are her reward for all what she has to endure, not just as a wife but as a queen who protects the kingdom during the king's absence. Therefore, Telemachus wishes:

good luck to my father, in my opinion
a stupid man if he expects
his return to diminish
her isolation: perhaps
he came back for that (20-24)

Because from the beginning she sacrifices everything not for the sake of his love
but to be praised for her wisdom and patience.

Circe's Goodness, Anger and Grief

Gluck presents Circe, "The Homeric earth-goddess and sorceress, who turns Odysseus' fellow sailors to beasts and who throughout western literature represents the evil magic of female sexuality"(Ostriker 77), as a more sympathetic figure with a more complex emotions. Circe is the main character of three individual poems that are titled in her name and can be read as series: "Circe's Power" "Circe's Grief" and "Circe's Torment". The poems' titles hint for the change in Circe's personality from being a powerful woman down to a tragic

powerless person as a result of falling in love (Parker 20). Alicia Ostriker considers Gluck's mythmaking revision to be interesting because, women poets often return to the portrayal of "the destroyer" and demonic female figures like Circe, throughout myth. Ostriker uses as an example Margaret Atwood's revision of Circe as:

... an angry but also a quite powerless woman. Men turn themselves to animals; she has nothing to do with it ... Circe is "a deserted island" or "a woman of mud" made for sexual exploitation, and her encounters with Odysseus are war games of rape, indifference ... what Atwood implies, as do other women who examine the blackness that has represented femaleness so often in our culture, is that the female power to do evil is a direct function of her powerlessness to do anything else. (Ostriker 78)

Like Atwood, Gluck refuses to portray Circe as an evil woman; instead, she portrays her as sympathetic in her "affection, grief, and anger". In the first poem of Circe lyric sequence, "Circe's Power", Gluck does not present Circe as the corrupted goddess who misleads and abuses men. She presents her as a less demonic figure who denies being described as deceitful at all. Unlike the Homeric *Odyssey*, she makes a new version of the good Circe who hasn't any demonic intentions. The poem starts with Circe defending herself against being accused of turning men into animals: "I never turned anyone into a pig. / some people are pigs; I make them/ Look like pigs." (1-3). she believes that she does not turn the men into pigs, because they are already pigs, she just mirrors their inner nature, by using her magic to make their outward physical appearances look like what they already are from the inside. Furthermore she is: "... sick of your world/ that lets the outside

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disguise the inside." (4-5); the "your world" refers to the world of men (Odysseus and his sailors), of which the sorceress goddess and her maidens ("me and my ladies," line 10) are not a part. It is the masculine world where men depend on lying, misleading and deception in their relations with women. Circe not only cares for clearing herself, but she also shows sympathy and excuses Odysseus' men for their bad behavior since they: "... weren't bad men; / undisciplined life/ did that to them" (6-8). Circe emphasizes her ability to abuse the power she has, instead, decides not to. Rather, she reveals that:

Then I reversed the spell, showing you my
goodness
as well as my power. I saw
we could be happy here,
as men and women are
when their needs are simple. (13-17)

She dreams of a world where all men and women live in peace. Gluck confirms Circe's goodness and strength through declaring that it is only with Circe's help that Odysseus and his men could challenge "the crying and pounding sea"(20). Surprisingly, Gluck does not end her poem with reasserting Circe's kindness and goodness; instead, she concludes the poem with a threat that emphasizes Circe's power and destructive ability: "if I wanted only to hold you/ I could hold you prisoner" (25-26); Circe flaunts her power that it is she who let him go. She is too smart to be fooled by his tears; if she wanted to stop him, she would have. Gluck presents the same traditional inherent gender stereotypes by portraying women as "complex beings capable of flaws and a range of emotions" (Parker 28). Moreover, the poet makes the structure of the poems themselves supports her point of view of the evolving of Circe's personality from power to powerless, through reducing the size of each subsequent poem in the series and also through

decreasing the space it takes up on the page; "Circe's Power" is made of 9 strophes with 26 lines, while "Circe's Torment" and "Circe's Grief" are both consisting of a single stanza, 22 and 16 lines (29).

By the second poem "Circe's Torment", Circe is no longer the same sorceress who describes herself as "pragmatist"(Circe's Power 23), the one who asks confidently "you think a few tears upset me?" (Circe's Power 23-24), menacing to imprison anyone who dares to refuse her love. Lamenting the years of loving him, during his staying with her on the island and even after his departure, cursing the laws that prevented her from keeping him:

I regret bitterly
the years of loving you in both
your presence and absence, regret
the law, the vocation
that forbid me to keep you, (1-5)

She changes into a powerless, full of grief and sorrow. Circe questions about her lost power:

... how
could I have power if
I had no wish
to transform you (7-10)

Losing power here is not a real but a figurative one; Gluck sheds light on the issue of women who are forced to give up their identities and ambitions for the sake of love. Circe, a woman of great dignity and principles, refuses to love a man whose heart is possessed by another woman:

...in that single moment
over honor and hope, over

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loyalty, in the name of that bond
I refuse you
such feeling for your wife
as will let you
rest with her, (14-20)

The poem, however, ends with a threat, " I refuse you/ sleep again/ if I cannot have you"(20-22), but this time they look like in vain threats, which may implicitly express her disability or unwillingness to keep him, so she will curse him instead of that, while in "Circe's Power" Circe looks serious about her ability to control Odysseus if she wants to; Since in the first time she is threatening as a powerful goddess, but this time the threat is of a weakened by love, powerless woman.

Gluck criticizes how gender roles lead to female identity crises through depicting Circe as a powerless woman because of her heterosexual love. Despite her knowing about his avoidable departure, she chooses to love an immortal man (Odysseus). She also chooses to give him his freedom, instead of keeping him on the island, sacrificing her own desires and power for the sake of her beloved. Women used to sacrifice their needs and desires as a proof of their love and loyalty to husband, family, and society; as if sacrifice is a feminine duty. Circe's relation with a mortal man requires conforming to traditional gender roles by giving up her powers as a goddess for the sake of heterosexual love. She finds out that she loses her real power, because "she had no wish to transform" Odysseus, keeping him without his will, or do anything against his wish.

In "Circe's Grief", Circe uses one last way to get Odysseus; she tries to affect him by acting against his wife:

In the end, I made myself
known to your wife as
a god would, in her own house, in
Ithaca, a voice without a body: (1-4)

It is obvious that she failed to change Odysseus' feelings for

his wife as she wanted in the second poem, she tries to divide them by possessing Penelope via "a voice without a body"(4), she believes that: " if I am in her head forever/ I am in your life forever" (14-15). Therefore, Circe goes to Penelope in her house not to convince her to let Odysseus back to Circe, but to possess her body as a ghost does, because this is the only way of staying close to Odysseus: to live in his wife's body. As a result of being unable to see Circe, who is invisible, Penelope: "paused in her weaving, her head turning/first to the right then left/though it was hopeless of course/ to trace that sound to any objective source:" (5-8).Circe talks to Penelope and it seems that she told her about Odysseus's coming home soon and about her plan of possessing her body because Penelope couldn't "... return to her loom/ with what she knows now" (10-11). She stops weaving may be because of her fear of what Circe is going to do with her body, or may be because of her happiness since suffering ends when Odysseus comes home again.

But what is really interesting is that in her last disappointed attempt to get the attention of her beloved, Circe refers to herself as a "god" not a "goddess" when she talks about desecrating Penelope's body and breaking into her thoughts: "... when/ you see her again, tell her/ this is how a god says goodbye:" (11-13). Although the last poem presents Circe as a cruel and terrible female, or at least more malicious than the other two poems, she doesn't do that in the traditional way of evil. Rather in order to achieve her revenge, she has to attack not the beloved but his wife, since it is the only choice left for a woman to accomplish her revenge against the man who has not accepted her love, far from the gender roles that will prevent her from confronting. Therefore, she acts as a "god" who is a symbol for male dominance and conquest, using male power as she is left with none of it (parker 31).

Gluck explicitly links Circe to the only poem that is in a voice of another woman, other than Circe, among the

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contemporary poems by calling it "siren". In "Siren", there is an intense psychological inner conflict between the abandoned, defeated woman, who is supposed to be Circe, and herself; between what she was before falling in love, as she was: "a good waitress" who "could carry eight drinks."(20-21), and what she becomes after falling in love, as she turns into a "criminal" as a result of falling in love of a married man. She is jealous of his wife who is an obstacle in the way of her love. She wants the wife to suffer and wants her life to be "like a play/ in which all the parts are sad parts."(6-7). In an insidious attempt to separate them, she tells the husband:

If your wife wouldn't let you go
That proved she didn't love you.
If she loved you
Wouldn't she want you to be happy? (13-16)

Her rhetorical subconscious question: "Does a good person/ think this way?" (8-9), exposes the continuous conflict that runs within her, as she knows that what she is trying to do is not correct. She feels like a "siren" that seduces men and separates them from their wives. She is not satisfied about herself: "I think now/ if I felt less I would be/ a better person." (17-19). The poem's final scene of the dream announces clearly the conflict that is going in her mind between the good woman (waitress), her true self, and the evil woman (siren) to whom she returns as an inevitable result of falling in love:

I used to tell you my dreams.
Last night I saw a woman sitting in a dark
Bus - -
In the dream, she's weeping, the bus she's on
Is moving away. With one hand
She's waving; the other strokes
An Egg cartoon full of babies. (22-29)

The woman in the dream is the wife who is assumed to be Penelope; the dark bus is her marriage that is destroyed as a result of her husband's involving in a relation with another

woman. The dream represents Circe's unconsciousness where she feels guilty for separating the couple, ruining their lives, and displacing the children whom she describes as "an egg carton full of babies" (29). This dream is an ultimate proof of Circe's good nature, because a real siren doesn't feel guilty about seducing men away from their families.

Conclusion

Gluck interweaves mythological and contemporary characters through *Meadowlands* to inscribe the dissolution of a contemporary marriage, seen through different perspectives (ancient and modern), and view the aftermath of that collapse. She portrays the mythic women as versions of herself or the oppressed female. This mythological construct allows Gluck to make her narratives less personal and more archetypal. Through her revision of myth the poetess calls attention to the problems of female difference, and the idea of identity.

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