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**Hegemonic Masculinity as the Hero's Physical, Psychological, and Social Undoing
in Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe***

Belo Horizonte

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“often the fluttering tatters of ancient tradition have been sewed together in sundry combinations and torn asunder again”

The Birth of Tragedy

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

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Abstract

This Master's thesis investigates how hegemonic masculinity is portrayed in Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* as the hero's physical, social, and psychological undoing. It promotes a discussion of what encompasses hegemonic masculinity in the society Miller portrays by combining reflections on masculinity from ancient Greek and contemporary authors. It focuses on the analysis of five male characters — Odysseus, Telemachus, Telegonus, Achilles, and Patroclus — who often highlight opposite and complementary portraits of maleness in both novels. The thesis aims to demonstrate that while men who do engage with hegemonic masculinity tend to lose their personal identities, men who do not promote an example of reformed masculinities.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, hero, undoing, Homer, Madeline Miller.

Resumo

Nesta dissertação, é investigada como a masculinidade hegemônica é retratada nos dois primeiros romances de Madeline Miller, *The Song of Achilles* e *Circe*, como a autodestruição física, social e psicológica do herói. Ainda, a análise promove a discussão de como a masculinidade hegemônica é construída nos romances de Miller através da junção anacrônica de estudos de masculinidade da antiguidade e contemporâneos. Esta dissertação, portanto, foca na investigação de cinco personagens — Odisseu, Telêmaco, Telêgono, Aquiles, e Pátroclo — que frequentemente evidenciam retratos masculinos opostos e complementares nos dois romances. Com isto, esta dissertação atenta em demonstrar que homens que são identificados como hegemônicos em *The Song of Achilles* e *Circe* tendem a perder sua própria identidade pessoal

Palavras-chave: masculinidade hegemônica, herói, autodestruição, Homero, Madeline Miller.

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Introduction

“Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen”
(“On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”, Keats)

Literary critic Harold Bloom (1930-2019) argues, “everyone who reads or writes in the West, of whatever racial background, sex or ideological camp, is still a son or daughter of Homer” (*A Map of Misreading* 33). That is certainly the case with Madeline Miller (1978 -), the classicist who pens the novels investigated in my Master’s thesis, *The Song of Achilles* (2012), and *Circe* (2018). Miller’s fiction revolves around the recreation of Greek and Roman myths for a more contemporary audience. Besides *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, her work also encompasses the short stories “Heracles’ Bow” (2012) and “Galatea” (2021) as well as several essays and reviews in newspapers.¹

Acclaimed as revisionist myths, Miller’s novels tend to be categorized as part of feminist rewritings of Homer; however, the focus on her female characters has resulted in a lack of discussion of the figure that puts Homer’s epics in motion: the hero. According to Kevin Boon (2005), “the hero figure is primarily a male figure; thus the hero figure is part of a metanarrative of masculinity” (303). Therefore, I consider that any approach that overlooks the intrinsic construction and reformulation of male identities in Miller’s novels may result in a rather incomplete inquiry. In Miller’s novels, the hero works as a two-edged sword that is intertwined with the representation of men in literature and with the demotion of their male identities.

¹ Miller’s essays and reviews can be found on her personal website, <https://madelinemiller.com/>

Moreover, I consider that male identity is at the core of *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* because it is the main subject in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. As Thomas Van Nortwick contends, “Homer’s *Iliad*, the first work of Greek literature we have, gives us a rich model for how a man moves from adolescence to maturity” (*Imagining Men* 4). Achilles spends the whole epic failing to distance himself from his mother, Thetis, and only succeeds in it by getting closer to a patriarchal figure;² this is compelling evidence that *The Iliad* indeed shows Achilles’ struggle to mature.

Similarly, *The Odyssey* has in its background the story of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes, which mirrors what happens in Odysseus’ household.³ I concur with Emily Wilson that “[*The Odyssey*] traces [Telemachus’] developing maturity, as he begins to learn what adult masculinity might mean” (“Introduction” 48). With Odysseus gone, Telemachus has to step into his male role and, just like Orestes has done before him, reach maturity as well as authority by the act of avenging his father, killing the suitors, along with gathering *kleos* (glory) in the patriarchal Greek world.

Male maturity is also one of the main themes found in Miller’s debut novel, *The Song of Achilles*, which rendered the author the 2012 Orange Prize for Fiction.⁴ It covers the story of Patroclus and Achilles from their childhood until their deaths on the shores of Troy with a special focus on their homoerotic relationship. More than a war tale set during the Greek age of heroes, *The Song of Achilles* presents to its reader the Trojan War through the eyes of Patroclus, a first-person narrator, who, contrary to the one found in *The Iliad*, is a reluctant warrior-prince.

For this reason, *The Song of Achilles* can be considered a *bildungsroman* that traces opposite and complementary trajectories pursued by Patroclus and Achilles toward the

² *Il*, 24.477-512.

³ Written by Aeschylus, *The Oresteia* was composed of three plays that depict the tragic tale of Orestes, Clytemnestra, and Agamemnon.

⁴ Now The Women’s Prize for Fiction.

construction of their male identities. While Achilles engages with the ideal project of maleness through war and his godhood, Patroclus distances himself from it through his empathy toward – and almost partial identification with – some female characters and his anti-war attitude. *The Song of Achilles* demonstrates to what extent masculine identities are shaped by the notion of *kleos* and military prowess.

Similarly, *Circe* – shortlisted for The Women’s Prize for Fiction in 2019 – is also a *bildungsroman* that narrates, in an autobiographical manner, the existence of the eponymous narrator-character from her childhood until she decides to become a mortal woman. The novel emphasizes the encounters she has with humanity throughout the plot. The goddess, who only appears in a few lines of *The Odyssey*,⁵ presents to her audience different versions of old figures in Western literature, such as Prometheus, Penelope, Odysseus, and Telemachus.

Additionally, her experiences with gods and mortal men offer wide, diverse portrayals of male characters. In the novel, Circe’s body and her island, Aiaia, symbolize the juncture where masculinity representations are amalgamated with the violence men promote against women. Circe is condemned to exile by her father, Helios; her island is ransacked by pirates, and her nymphs are targeted as easy sexual prey by gods and mortal men alike. Not surprisingly, the novel leaves in its reader the quite poignant impression that masculine identity seems to be — indeed, must be — closely intertwined with women’s oppression.

The Song of Achilles and *Circe* are told by different narrators who have in common how they perceive the faults of Homer’s heroes. Both Circe and Patroclus judge these men’s actions and depict them in a more critical, sensible way. To a certain extent, their accounts counter Boon’s claim that “whether the [hero’s] status is deserved is irrelevant” (304). I consider that, by reinventing Homer’s heroes, Miller also contributes to reshaping our perception of heroic and contemporary masculinities. In approximating theories of masculinities to both novels, it is possible to conclude tentatively that whereas Achilles,

⁵ *Od*, 10. 135-574.

Telegonus, and Odysseus are exemplars of one culturally dominant form of masculinity, Patroclus and Telemachus offer a rather different portrait of maleness. These depictions demonstrate how crucial it is to question the notion that the hero figure is not harmed by the position he occupies in a patriarchal society.

Therefore, in Chapter 1, I promote a short review of masculinity studies and establish the links to promote what entails hegemonic masculinity in the society Miller depicts. As Simon Yarrow acknowledges in “Masculinity as a World Category of Analysis” (2011), “[i]t is difficult to think of the history of masculinities independently of feminist historiography” (117). The three topics I consider as crucial to the building of male identities during the Bronze Age are: distancing from women, divine bloodline, and sexual prowess. Chapter 1 points out and isolates these three characteristics as that which encompass hegemonic masculinity in Miller’s *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. Once I define what hegemonic masculinity entails in these novels, I can investigate how it promotes the undoing of Achilles’ and Odysseus’ male identities by thrusting them onto a path of psychological, social, and physical self-destruction.

In my Master’s thesis, I resort to some of Michael Kimmel’s definitions: manhood is to be comprehended as the opposite of childhood while masculinity refers “to a set of behavioral traits and attitudes that were contrasted with a new opposite, femininity” (*Manhood in America* 81). I also consider maleness/manliness as the expression of physical features because of the action of male hormones. However, to some extent, in Homer and Miller, maleness must be intertwined with the Greek word *andreia* (courage), for to the ancient Greeks, not only is *andreia* derived from *andros* (man), but it is also the supreme male feature.

Another rather complex term that often appears in this work is patriarchy. Aronson and Kimmel (2004) postulate that, “patriarchy is a male-dominated, male-identified, and

male-centered social system organized around an obsession with control that is gendered masculine” (588). In addition, Don Conway-Long (1994) suggests that any theory of patriarchy is focused on recognizing and untangling “a system of power relations of men over women” (62). I further the claim and add that patriarchy is a system that establishes power relations of hegemonic men over women and non-hegemonic men.

In Chapter 2, I investigate the figure of Odysseus as Miller rewrites him. It does not go unnoticed that rewriting Odysseus is not a new endeavor in literature; nor is it an easy one. As William Bedell opens his *The Ulysses Theme* (1985), “Sophocles and Euripides, Ovid and Seneca, Lydgate and Caxton, Shakespeare and Racine, Calderon and Metastasio, to mention only a few, had thought it worthwhile to attempt new portraits of [Odysseus]” (1). Not only does a new portrayal of Odysseus offer a dialogue with the Western canon, but also a reflection on masculinities. After all, the very first word of *The Odyssey* is *andra* (man)⁶ and it is a poem that unarguably centers on a father-son relationship.

In my understanding of hegemonic masculinity, Odysseus is the most hegemonic man in Miller’s *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, the greatest example of heroism or male virtue to the following generations in the post-Trojan War world. In Chapter 2, I enhance the discussion proposed in Chapter 1, as to what distinguishes men from gods, and I juxtapose the figure of Odysseus and the mythical figure of the Self-Made Man in North-American culture and literature, postulated by Kimmel (*Manhood in America* 13). Miller’s Odysseus offers some insight into what could be considered a hegemonic man in Homer’s world to new readers of the Classical tradition. Odysseus’ adaptability, his most impressive asset, is as important to his survival as it is to men who portray corporative masculinities in contemporary United States of America.

As Van Nortwick points out, “[t]he first and most famous story of a son’s apprenticeship is in Homer’s *Odyssey*” (*Imagining Men* 28). Chapter 3 offers an outlook on

⁶ *Od*, 1.1.

Odysseus' sons in *Circe*: Telemachus and Telegonus; on how both boys build their male identities based on their father's absence. In *Circe* as well as in *The Odyssey*, both boys have as Odysseus' inheritance their father's *kleos* (glory), the power of Odysseus' fame in the Mediterranean world. In the society Miller portrays, sons are expected to be inferior to their fathers. Conversely, ancient Greek masculinities are based on *agon* (competition), which can be attested by how much foundational myths are usually concerned with the anxiety of succession. Chapter 3 reflects on how Odysseus' grandiosity propels his sons either to emulate or repudiate their father's masculine identity.

Whereas Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 discuss the formation of important male characters in *Circe*, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 analyze how Achilles and Patroclus develop their male identities in *The Song of Achilles*. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how Achilles flirts with some aspects of non-hegemonic masculinity – like his sexuality and his refusal to participate in the Trojan War – while he charts a path toward a heroic reputation. It is possible to affirm that Achilles represents a contradiction in terms, for one can only achieve glory (*kleos*) in Homeric society if one performs and abides by the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity. This chapter has three sections, in which I discuss the concept of moment of engagement as coined by Rawyen Connell, in *Masculinities*, and analyze some specific moments that Achilles has the opportunity to choose whether he should engage with a hegemonic project of masculinity.

Chapter 5 closes the discussion on Miller's heroes. I use Connell's theory to approximate Patroclus' male identity to the identities of men the sociologist considers deviant and subordinate. According to Connell, deviant men are not bound to their hegemonic role because they have suffered with hegemonic men inasmuch as subordinate men, who in Connell's theory are homosexual men. Both categories have one thing in common: they approximate men to their adversary, femininity. In Chapter 5, I analyze how Patroclus establishes his male identity on three fronts: distance from women, sexuality, and war.

Moreover, resorting once again to the concept of second-self,⁷ I demonstrate how Patroclus “complements Achilles’ overbearing masculinity with a feminine presence” (“Like a Woman: Hector and the Boundaries of Masculinity” 234). I also affirm that because Patroclus balances both sides – masculine and feminine — he is the most apt character to receive the title of the Best of the Greeks (*Aristos Achaion*) in the society Miller depicts.

Despite the differences in their processes of masculinization, my Master’s thesis analyzes men who belong to a very specific social class. The reason for that is, “[m]ost surviving [ancient Greek] texts have little to say about anyone outside of a narrow, relatively wealthy, urbanized, and mainly citizen elite, and they only permit impressionistic statements about that limited group” (Strauss 15). Nevertheless, I acknowledge that some important masculine figures, like Peleus and Priam, might be overlooked.

Finally, I resort to two different translators to provide their Homer to these pages. While Robert Fagles is responsible for the quotations from *The Iliad* in my Master’s thesis, Emily Wilson is the one who translates *The Odyssey*. I do so because every translator brings more and more to the discussion. Although I acknowledge that one translator would have offered more consistency, I also consider that each one of these versions has a lot to offer to this study. Fagles’ *Iliad*, for instance, breaks from a rather traditional line of translators by choosing not to resort to the already familiar Latin names for his translation. Instead, his concerns with consonance between the Greek names and the sonority of English are a landmark.⁸

On the other hand, Wilson’s translation has been acclaimed as a woman’s first English translation of *The Odyssey*. Miller herself has praised Wilson’s *Odyssey*.⁹ Wilson’s care to

⁷ Van Nortwick establishes that Achilles and Patroclus’ tale — together with the pairs Enkidu/Gilgamesh in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and David/Jonathan in the Old Testament — is part of ancient Mediterranean storytelling motif in which the hero’s companion symbolizes parts of the hero’s identity he had to forsake or with which he had to come to terms on his journey.

See *Imagining Men* 8; *Somewhere I Have Never Traveled* 5.

⁸ See “How Different Translators Reveal ‘The Iliad’ Anew” (2023), by Wilson.

⁹ See “The first English translation of *The Odyssey* by a woman was worth the wait” (2017), by Miller.

balance Homer's portrayal of women in patriarchal Greek Bronze Age society to a 21st-century audience is outstanding. As Wilson affirms, "I try to avoid importing contemporary types of sexism into this ancient poem, instead shining a clear light on the particular forms of sexism and patriarchy that do exist in the text" ("Translator's Note" 89). Moreover, because Miller and Wilson are classicists with a shared feminist background, I perceive some similarities between Miller's characters and Homer's as Wilson's translation portrays them. Wilson confers some modern values to understand Odysseus and brings to light the opaque Penelope, who is so similar to the thoughtful, quiet tactician Miller rewrites in *Circe*.

The continuing interest in translating Homer suggests that his characters not only have lived in the imagination of the West for a long time but also shaped it. Achilles, Odysseus, Telemachus, Helen, Penelope, and many others have been re-imagined by many writers in the Anglo-American tradition, from Chaucer to Joyce. From those retellings, I focus my Master's thesis on how Miller builds and undoes the identity of some male characters in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. Both novels offer a classicist's perspective on the central heroic figure of Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* through characters who speak from outside the center of epic poetry.

Throughout my Master's thesis, I analyze what hegemonic masculinity encompasses in Miller and Homer and how it is a force working as the cornerstone of a heroic, godlike identity. From Chapter 1 to Chapter 5, my analysis invites the question of whether the title of Best of the Greeks is worthy of the hero's sacrifice. That is why I consider it important to

See "Enduring Epics: Emily Wilson and Madeline Miller on Breathing New Life Into Ancient Classics" (2023), by Wilson

begin my study by putting in the spotlight — as *The Odyssey* does — the stark differences and striking similarities between gods and men.¹⁰

Chapter 1: Of Gods and Men, Hegemonic Masculinity in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*

“Gods disguise themselves
as foreigners and strangers to a town”

(*The Odyssey*, 17.484-485)

Defining concepts such as masculinity or femininity has been a difficult task for those who have endeavored the attempt. So far, one of the most common definitions – if it can be perceived as a definition at all – is that masculinity is what femininity is not, and vice-versa. Consequently, instead of an accurate understanding of either term, what one has in one’s hands is a logical statement, a mathematical (in)equation.

The concern with those concepts is not a new thing; however, it may seem that contemporary times have been paying particular attention to gender. The differences between

¹⁰ *The Odyssey*’s first scenes take place on Ogygia — where we find a forlorn, homesick Odysseus — and on Mount Olympus, where the gods, happily assembled, ponder over mankind and the hero’s destiny. See *Od*, 1.12-19; Cf. *Od*, 1.27-30

men and women have been the subject of authors of the most distinct socio-historical background. Since the patriarchs and prophets of the Scriptures to the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in 1990, there has not been a time in which these differences have passed unnoticed. The intellectual agitation stirred by the French philosophers – the likes of Jacques Derrida, Simone de Beauvoir, and Michel Foucault – during the 1960s and 1970s shook the long-established impression that masculinity and femininity were natural, intuitive, and changeless features of one's constitution.

Interest in masculinity and, henceforth, men's studies could only flourish due to the dawn of feminist theories. The three waves of feminism saw, either as a reaction or as a counterpart, new ideas on masculinity take place. As Tim Edward notes in *Cultures of Masculinities* (2006),

[f]rom the 1970s onwards, many men working in political and academic circles alike were exposed to, if not forced to confront, feminism and indeed feminists whether in their working, academic, political or personal lives. Simultaneously, the rise of small networks of men's consciousness-raising groups seeking to address some of these issues and perhaps more fundamentally to explore what it meant to be a man galvanised many men's early enquiries into masculinity more academically (22).

Likewise, Connell emphasizes that the science behind masculinity has been concerned with three fronts. The first, drawing from Freudian perspectives, the second, firmly based on the notions of sex role, and the third, weaving the connections between anthropology, history, and sociology (*Masculinities* 7).

The three waves of feminism brought to light the ever-lasting contrast between biological and socio-cultural ideas of doing/performing gender, which, as a result, made us “aware of masculinity in the twenty-first century like never before” (*Cultures of Masculinities* 1). In fact, as Connell points out, “these views of masculinity and femininity, uncontroversial

in the biological sciences, are fiercely contested in the humanities and social sciences” (*Masculinities* 5). The aftermath of this uproar in the North-American social-political scene during the 1960s until early in the 2000s was a heated debate and the rising of some Men’s Movements such as the famous Mythopoetic Movement.

Promoted by Robert Bly and his book *Iron John: a Book about Men* (1990), the Men’s Right Movements claimed, under a strong anti-feminist bias, that men are not, in the least, privileged by patriarchy. Instead, according to these Movements, either men and women are equally oppressed or men suffer more the effects of the traditional gender structure. Men’s Movements, however, made the mistake to overlook the fact that a substantial portion of feminist theories are aware of the harm to which men are vulnerable on account of their gender role.

Although these movements proved to have a short life, the debate they stimulated resulted in the foundation and rise of men’s studies, a field of knowledge that encompasses men’s experiences and men’s lives. Under the aegis of these studies, it is possible to come to a reasonable definition of masculinity with which I concur and consider critical to my study: masculinity is built in a view of establishing “the social roles, behaviors, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time” (Kimmel and Aronson 504). By using masculinities instead of masculinity, what comes to the center of the discussion is the notion that “masculinity means different things to different groups of people at different times” (Aronson and Kimmel 504). Moreover, the use of a plural form acknowledges the perspective that, indeed, not only men build their masculine identities in opposition to femininity but also in relation to themselves and to an ideal of masculinity that is promoted by a singular socio-historical context.

To exemplify that, Michael S. Kimmel suggests in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (2006) that “American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to

women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment” (5). The reason for that is the assertion that “[a]t any given moment, several meanings of masculinity coexist” (Aronson and Kimmel 504). Being a white man differs significantly from being a black man in the U.S. Belonging to the work-class or to the middle class also affect the notion of a group of what it means to be a man. Considering this, it is noticeable that the interplay between race, class, and sexuality shape men’s identities in the West. The most striking examples are the subordination of gay men and the marginalization of black men in the US. As Connell exemplifies, while gay men are often excluded from cultural and political scenes, institutional racism is a component of black masculinities. What both types of masculinity have in common, however, is how they are easily oppressed and targeted as dangerous and/or deviant.¹¹

This discloses in the Anglo-American context how the inner relations that intertwine gender, class, and race take their toll in the construction of masculinity and men’s identities. Kimmel’s assertion concurs with sociologist Ervin Goffman’s perspective that, “[i]n an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (128). Any man who does not fit these criteria is to be considered – by society as well as by himself – lacking in masculinity.

Similarly, when analyzing the socio-historical context Miller depicts in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, conflicting definitions of masculinity also arise. Both novels are placed in the world of myth portrayed in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. A world that is echoed later during the classical period and spins around the figure of the hero; a figure that is, according to Kevin

¹¹To more on black masculinities, *Black Masculinity: The Black Male’s Role in American Society* (1982), by Robert Staples. To more on gay masculinities, *Homosexual: Oppression & Liberation* (1972), by Dennis Altman.

Boon (2005), a metanarrative of masculinity (303). Theories and conceptions on what should encompass masculinity concerned the ancient Greeks from Homer to Plato. However, not only is masculinity performed or portrayed by boys and men in Homer or Miller but also by mythological beings. To get a better picture of what ancient Greek gender-structured society looked like, one should also take into consideration that the Greek cosmos is formed by gods, goddesses, men, and women and that the interaction among mortals and immortals composed the bulk of these stories and prospects. With that in mind, I turn this discussion to ancient Greece.

Sarah Pomeroy notes in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1995) that “Classical mythology provides the earliest glimpse of male-female relationships in Greek civilization” (1). However, not only does it differentiate male and female but also, at its core, gods and men. In Homer’s epics as well as in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, to comprehend both figures is crucial to any analysis of these pieces of work.

Although “[t]he physiology of the gods corresponds to and mirrors that of men” (Clay 144), the greatest difference among gods and men can be spotted on the epithets to address both, *athanatoi* (deathless ones) and *thanatoi* (mortals). The mortal condition is, in fact, one of the key concerns of ancient Greek civilization, for it puts gods and men in distinct classes. In *Circe*, the eponymous character clarifies, “[o]f all the mortals on the earth, there are only a few the gods will ever hear of. Consider the practicalities. By the time we learn their names, they are dead. They must be meteors indeed to catch our attention. The merely good: you are dust to us” (90). However, as Jenny Strauss Clay argues in *The Wrath of Athena: Men and Gods in the Odyssey* (1983), Homer's gods are not only immortals: they do not grow old (141).

In several Greek myths that portray a goddess falling in love with a mortal man, the outcome is far from a joyful one. For example, in the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, we find the story of

Eos, goddess of dawn, who asks Zeus to grant her lover, Tithonus, immortality, but forgets to ask also for eternal youth. Tithonus' destiny is a dreadful one, for he is condemned to grow older each year, without dying. On the other hand, there is a plethora of stories in which a god gets involved with mortals and immortals and grants them a few wishes.¹² Pomeroy provides an explanation for that: “[i]mmortal females are expected to [have sexual intercourse] with males of similar ranks – that is, gods – while immortal males may enjoy females of lower, or mortal status” (10). In *The Odyssey*, Calypso, the nymph who had trapped Odysseus in Ogygia as a lover, scolds Hermes when she is ordered to free the Ithacan, “[y]ou cruel, jealous gods! You bear a grudge/whenever a goddess takes a man/to sleep with as a lover in her bed” (5.118-120). Nevertheless, what is quite transparent in those myths is that in the relationship between a goddess and a mortal, the goddess – albeit female – remains the stronger part.

Another constant feature of these stories is the connection between Zeus and civilization. Zeus' rule began when he and the Olympian gods overthrew the Titans. An allegorical reading of some myths allows us to consider the Titans as representative of wild, unruly natural forces that had to be tamed. Several monsters and beings who refused to abide by the Olympians' order were female,¹³ which renders Zeus the role of civilizer. Similarly, as Van Nortwick points out, “women were also believed to be closer to the raw forces of nature than were males, [therefore] controlling their power was, for the adult male, part of the larger project of creating human civilization itself” (50) with the social order mirroring the divine one.

Hence, in the society Miller depicts, “[t]he first level of organization to be managed was still the family ... as father and husband, [the adult male had] to establish his own branch,

¹² The myth of Zeus and Ganymedes, to which I return later, is one of them.

See *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (202-217); cf (*Od*, 5.118-130).

¹³ In Hesiod's *Theogony*, seeking revenge against the gods, Gaia begets Typhoeus, the giant who almost defeated Zeus (*Theogony* 820-881). The *Theogony* also displays the figure of Echidna, another female creature that quickens monsters. Several Greek myths embody this fear of femininity by demonstrating how females can be threatening to the social order.

with himself as the controlling authority” (Van Nortwick 50). That, however, does not address different constructs and ideals of masculinity in ancient Greek society, for, controlling the household (*oikos*) was only one social task expected from men. To get a better understanding of the concept, in the next paragraphs, I discuss the two predominant views on masculinity in ancient Greece, the Spartan and the Athenian.

Scott Rubbarth, in “Competing Constructions of Masculinity in Ancient Greece” (2014), notes that, although ideals of maleness might differ significantly in different Greek cities, courage in battle, control of one’s household and the ability to speak well in public often delineated male power not only in Homer’s epics, but also during the Classical and Hellenistic period (22).¹⁴ By extension, these are also part of men’s identities Miller portrays. However, features that prescribed maleness to men in ancient Greek society did not hold the same value to distinct cities. This assertion concurs with what I have stated before that masculinity is something to be achieved instead of being something natural. Therefore, I start this discussion by the one feature that is inherently woven in every ideal of masculinity held by Homer’s heroes, courage.

In the ancient Greek world, courage as a masculine attribute does not come as a surprise once the word *andreia* (courage) shares linguistic properties with the word *aner/andros* (man); however, Athenians and Spartans differed on the importance of courage to the masculine formation. On the one hand, the Spartans were professional soldiers who were forbidden by law to engage with any kind of activity except soldiery, which to a Spartan citizen made courage the main aspect of his masculine identity. On the other hand, Athenian men trained and warred only when it was necessary. Having a more pragmatic view, Athenians did not place *andreia* at the center of their activities as did the Spartans for two

¹⁴ History of Ancient Greece is often organized in four periods, the Minoan-Mycenaean period (circa 1600 BCE - 1100 BCE), Archaic period (circa 800 BCE - 480 BCE), Classical (480 BCE - 323 BCE), and Hellenistic (323 BCE - 31 BC). The period between the ruin of Minoan civilization and the Archaic period, whose beginning is marked by Homer’s and Hesiod’s poetry, has been named by scholars as the dark ages, for there is not much information or data about it. See Van Nortwick xv-xvii.

reasons: “the consequences of [cowardice] were less significant in Athenian society than [they were] in Sparta” (Rubbarth 26) and being head of a household was far more important to their masculine identities.

The household (*oikos*) would include the wife, children and the slaves under the command of the *kurios* (master). By proving to be a good administrator as well as husband and father, Athenian men demonstrated male power. Conversely, as Rubbarth argues, “[t]hose who failed to marry and produce children, or who squandered their inheritance, or failed to control their slaves also failed at being a man” (27), however, the Athenian state did not interfere in the way the *kurios* held the affairs of his household. In contrast, because Spartan men spent a great part of their lives either at camp or at war, they barely held – or were expected to – any responsibility to their states. In fact, several accounts – including Plutarch, one of the few sources we have on ancient Sparta, – claim that Spartan women led their husbands’ states.¹⁵

Finally, approaching the political sphere, that is where the disparity between Athenian men and Spartan men is more strongly delineated. Whereas politics did not occupy a central concern in Spartan men’s lives, Athenian men were expected to have a broad and active role in the city-state affairs. Athenian citizens were evaluated by their peers by their use of rhetoric. The more a man could swing his audience, the more he was seen as manly. Conversely, a man who could not speak well in public would be perceived as immature, lacking masculinity. For example, when Mentos advises Telemachus to gather the city’s council and publicly reproaches the suitors, Odysseus’ son answers thus,

I [Telemachus] am
quite inexperienced at making speeches,

¹⁵ I do not hold Sparta as an example of gender equality in antiquity, as some scholars or public opinion may do. It is true that Spartan women held more freedom than their contemporaries in Athens, but the whole gendered-system in Sparta reared girls for what they perceived to be their paramount task – and duty – in Spartan society, to give birth (See pp.20-21).

and as a young man, I feel awkward talking
to elders (*Od*, 3.22-25).

Even though Telemachus is almost twenty-one when *The Odyssey* starts – old enough to have warred and even attended some public meetings –, he evinces in these lines he has not matured enough yet. His claims – although legitimate and fair – are amusingly rebuked by the suitors due to his lack of maleness.

In comparing and contrasting these two models of masculinity in ancient Greece and approximating them to *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, I notice that the Homeric epics also differ in establishing their main masculine feature. After all, as Clay emphasizes, “The *Odyssey* is obviously a very different kind of poem from the *Iliad*, and Odysseus a very different kind of hero from Achilles” (141). *The Iliad* values courage – especially in its context of bravery in battle – whereas *The Odyssey*, a poem of *nostos* (return to home), reinforces the Athenian ideal that the adult man must succeed in his roles as head of the household and as citizen. Conversely, as I demonstrate in the last chapter of this Master’s thesis, *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* acknowledge a cluster of characteristics that, in the end, champion neither Achilles nor Odysseus.

The discussion above allowed us to notice to what extent the study of men’s representations in literature stems from men’s studies and how the parameters that work as a cornerstone for men’s identities alter. Still, one of the essential ideas men’s studies has provided for literary analysis is the concept of hegemonic masculinity. It has been acknowledged by several authors that although hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed concept,¹⁶ it can be perceived as a culturally constructed idea that reinforces some male characteristics in a specific socio-historical setting. In the Anglo-American context, the most accepted definition of the term considers that it “embodie[s] the currently most honored way

¹⁶ James W. Messerschmidt in *Hegemonic Masculinity Formulation, Reformulation and Amplification* (2018) discusses the history and further elaboration of the term.

of being a man, [as] it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically [legitimizes] the global subordination of women to men” (Connell and Thomas Messerschmidt 832). However, what Connell’s definition fails to consider is that, as pointed out by Victor J. Seidler (2006) and Kimmel (2006),¹⁷ hegemonic masculinity can promote men’s self-destruction, because it sentences men to a Stoic silence, disavows men of processing their feelings, and fosters commonplace notions of men as untouchable and invulnerable.

Nonetheless, as Connell strongly defends, male hegemony is most recognizable in patriarchal societies by its endorsement of male features that eventually lead to women’s domination. If one is acquainted with feminist theories, the connections between women’s oppression and masculinity may seem obvious; however, the same cannot be stated about the anxieties that inhabit the relations among masculinities. In order to tackle this issue, in *Masculinities* (2005), Connell systematizes four types of masculinities found in contemporary Anglo-American societies: the hegemonic, the complicit, the subordinate, and the marginalized¹⁸.

Similarly, Barbara Graziosi in “Homeric Masculinities: ἠννοπέη and ἀγηννοπέη” (2003) claims Homer’s epics favor two kinds of masculine portrayals: proper maleness (ἠννοπέη) and excessive maleness (ἀγηννοπέη) (63). The former is associated with men’s proper behavior toward each other and camaraderie on the battlefield, whereas the latter would be used to indicate men who trespass the limits between men and beasts and, out of the inability to respond reasonably to their feelings, would put themselves and their companions in harm’s

¹⁷Seidler argues that Connell’s theory poses masculinity as a problem to be solved. See *Transforming Masculinities* 3.

Kimmel, however, acknowledges that the history of manhood must encircle at least two narratives: the dominant one and the marginalized. See *Manhood in America* 4.

¹⁸ According to Connell (2005), complicit masculinity is characterized by men who do not perform hegemonic masculinity but still benefit from patriarchy, while subordinate masculinity is marked by the oppression of gay men or men who are associated with feminine traits by the hegemonic type. However, hegemonic, complicit, and subordinate masculinities are relations internal to the gender order. Conversely, marginalized masculinity is marked by differences among men of other classes and races. In the Western patriarchal context, black men are considered marginalized (*Masculinities* 76-81).

way. By comparing Connell's and Graziosi's ideas, I consider that both, proper maleness and excessive maleness, are two faces of the same coin, hegemonic masculinity. Connell, Kimmel, Rubbarth, and Graziosi make it possible to state that, when approximated to a literary text, theories of masculinities offer a powerful tool to investigate the formation and the undoing of masculine identities.

By acknowledging that masculinities are built historically and culturally, I affirm that a thorough observation of the society Miller depicts in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* provides valuable insight to identify which men are hegemonic and which are not. After all, as Kimmell and Aronson point out, “[i]n every culture, men contend with a definition that is held up as the model against which all are expected to measure themselves” (504). For this reason, although masculinity is defined against femininity, the hegemonic model of masculinity is simultaneously built in relation to other masculinities and women.

By approximating the concept of hegemonic masculinity to the agonistic society portrayed in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, I infer that hegemonic men in these novels would aim to occupy the status of *Aristos Achaion* [the best of the Greeks]. Therefore, in the next parts of this chapter, I propose why hegemonic masculinity in both novels encompasses these factors: distance from women, the pursuit of *kleos*, divine bloodline, and sexual prowess. As a result, I also argue that each one of these factors leads men in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* to promote physical, social, or psychological self-harm.

1.1) Distance from Women

I justify my criteria for, as conflicting and complex as a definition of hegemonic masculinity may be, it certainly covers one thing: hegemonic masculinity fears resemblance with femininity. As Judith Butler states in *Gender Trouble*, “[f]or [Simone de] Beauvoir, women are the negative of men, the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself” (10). Similarly, Rubbarth argues that in classical antiquity, “[m]uch of the rhetorical discourse

and vituperative literature relies heavily on identifying perceived female characteristics in men as a form of attack, insult, or moral admonition. The key theoretical move underlying the moralizing of gender discourse was the idea that men and women represent opposite impulses” (30). Thus, it is possible to perceive the reason why Achilles, Telegonus, and Telemachus distance themselves from the epitome of femininity in their lives: their mothers.¹⁹ In the patriarchal society Miller depicts, it is imperative that the separation between mother and male child occurs as soon as it is possible. In the very first scenes of *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus tells his audience that “[when he] was delivered, [he] was plucked from [his] mother’s arms by [his] father” (*The Song of Achilles* 1). It is no coincidence that Menoitius, the one responsible for this violent separation, fits the model of hegemony proposed in Miller’s novels for, according to Van Nortwick, heroes, kings, and warriors – hence, hegemonic men – in ancient Greek society must be in charge of this separation in ancient Greek society (27).

Conversely, in *Circe*, Telegonus – Odysseus and Circe’s son – and Telemachus, Odysseus and Penelope’s son, willingly break from their mothers to go on a journey after their father. After all, it is Odysseus’ responsibility to teach his sons “those arts of mortal men, swordplay, archery, hunting, speaking in council” (*Circe* 249). As noted by Connell (*Masculinities* 135) and Van Nortwick (7), masculinities seem to be formed under two requirements: supportive mothers and absent fathers. That is why “[t]o reach full manhood, heroes in Greek and other Mediterranean literature always need to separate from their mothers

¹⁹ In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Homer presents us two immature young men, Achilles and Telemachus. To be perceived as an adult, respectable man in *The Iliad*, Achilles must stop resorting to Thetis every time he is hindered from achieving what he wants. In a similar fashion, Thetis should stop protecting her child and finally accept that he is, indeed, mortal. In *The Odyssey*, Telemachus is the one who strives to go away from his mother, Penelope. The longer he stays at her palace in Ithaca, the less he will be able to gather glory for himself. For this reason, he leaves after Odysseus’s news. Miller rewrites the relation mother-child – and notably the relation immortal mother-mortal child – in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* and its impact on Telemachus, Telegonus and Achilles’s formation. Both immortal mothers, Thetis and Circe, are excessively shielding and overprotective. Nevertheless, their offspring decide to break the tie by engaging with masculine activities. Achilles goes to Troy to war while Telegonus sails to Ithaca aiming to be acknowledged by Odysseus, his father. The Homeric epics and the novels *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* evince how crucial it is to boys to disengage from their mothers in order to build their male identity fully.

and come to terms with ... the world of their fathers” (Van Nortwick 7). In fact, Odysseus is absent during the major part of the events in *Circe*. By contrast, the tales about Odysseus that both boys hear during their upbringing thrust Telemachus and Telegonus to mature as men, for they depict their father as the model of masculinity by which Telemachus and Telegonus are measured by the society Miller depicts in *Circe*. Their choice of leaving their homelands and going after Odysseus symbolizes their promptness to mature and accept their place in the social fabric as aristocratic, hegemonic men.

As has been noted, the separation between mother and male child in ancient Greek society is mediated by patriarchy. One example in the ancient world is the Spartan *agoge* (leading). The Greek historian Xenophon (430-354 BCE) in *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* (1925) explains the system thus,

[h]aving dealt with the subject of birth, I wish next to explain the educational system of Lycurgus²⁰, and how it differs from other systems. In the other Greek states parents who profess to give their sons the best education place their boys under the care and control of a moral tutor as soon as they can understand what is said to them, and send them to a school to learn letters, music and the exercises of the wrestling-ground. [...] Lycurgus, on the contrary, instead of leaving each father to appoint a slave to act as tutor, gave the duty of controlling the boys to a member of the class from which the highest offices are filled, in fact to the “Warden” as he is called. He gave this person authority to gather the boys together, to take charge of them and to punish them severely in case of misconduct. He also assigned to him a staff of youths provided with whips to chastise them when necessary, and the result is that modesty and obedience are inseparable companions at Sparta (2.1-2).²¹

²⁰ According to Herodotus (*The Histories*, 1.65) and Plutarch (*Life of Lycurgus*), Lycurgus is the semi-mythical figure who gave the Spartans their laws and founded the principles of their society. Scholars, nowadays, cannot seem to agree on whether he was a real individual.

²¹ Xenophon explains the whole *agoge* system in the second chapter of *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* which can be found on the *Perseus Digital Library* website and on the Works Cited part of this Master’s thesis.

This passage from Xenophon illustrates that young boys are to be led by their fathers together with the state. As soon as they come to the age of seven, they are to be parted from their mothers – who, after having gone through labor²², have no more say in the boy's life – and to be educated to serve their fatherland.

Nevertheless, distance from women and femininity was not a requirement to maleness only in ancient societies. It still concerns configurations of modern Anglo-American making of male identities. In *Masculinities*, Connell discusses how our notions of men's psychosexual development have as a starting point Freudian studies, which marked as pivotal the separation from the mother; the gap between pre-Oedipal and Oedipal status (20). The Oedipus complex is “the key moment in psychosexual development” (“Psychoanalysis on Masculinity” 12) in Psychoanalysis, which was based during great part of the twentieth-century on the dichotomies masculinity/femininity and activity/passivity. Although Freud never discarded the social aspect embedded within the psychic-biological separation between mother and male-child, for he perceived adult masculinity as a complex construction, many of the following decades saw the socio-historical construct of gender overlooked to make room for the dichotomy normal/pathological masculinity.

Firstly, during the rise of fascist regimes in Europe. Secondly, due to the takeover of conservative thinking in the West as an aftermath of the Cold War (1947-1991). Regarding the Interwars context, Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) reached the conclusion that Fascism could only thrive where the family would function as “the factory of the authoritarian state” (“Psychoanalysis on Masculinity” 28). Reich observes that authoritarian regimes use the social function of sexual repression to radicalize and exploit their societies. Hence, to Reich, “fascist movements [are] the culmination of repressive tendencies in capitalist society”

²² “[Lycurgus] believed motherhood to be the most important function of freeborn women. Therefore, in the first place, he insisted on physical training for the female no less than for the male sex: moreover, he instituted races and trials of strength for women competitors as for men, believing that if both parents are strong they produce more vigorous offspring” (*Constitution*, 1.5)

(“Psychoanalysis on Masculinity” 28). Reich’s research on Fascism opened the doors to exiled German scholars to tackle Nazism from a psychological standpoint, which culminated in the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). To Connell, *The Authoritarian Personality* is one of the first studies that depicts masculinity not only as a biological-psychological construct, but also as something deeply intertwined to the social-political setting that creates it.

Similarly, on the other side of the Atlantic, psychoanalysis practice had also been aligned with conservative views of society in the years that followed World War II (1939-1945), and, as a conservative tool, it was working in order to establish the dichotomies in terms of healthy/unhealthy psychological identities. As Connell explains,

[c]linical psychoanalysis in the United States, both with and without libido theory, thus evolved a normalizing psychology of gender whose main effect in practice was to reinforce social convention and whose main effect in theory was to define departures from hegemonic masculinity as actual or potential pathologies. Because this definition of healthy masculinity is given from outside the science, that is, by the dominant gender order, no theoretical consensus is required — and none exists (“Psychoanalysis on Masculinity” 27).

As a matter of fact, a large portion of the science concerned with gender in the first half of the twentieth century aimed at theorizing masculinity as a way to prevent the young boy from returning to a stage of identification with femininity, embodied in the figure of the mother. (*Masculinities* 33).

This corroborates David D. Gilmore’s perspective that in patriarchal societies masculinity is rather an achievement than “a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man” (“Masculinity as Homophobia” 119). Additionally, this strengthens the perspective that not only is masculinity an achievement, but also “a theory of the patriarchal

organization of culture and the mechanism of its transmission between generations” (“Psychoanalysis on Masculinity” 15), because boys are required to build their gender identity through emotional detachment from their mothers. In fact, as Arosón and Kimmell claim, “[t]he boy comes to define himself as a boy by rejecting whatever he sees as female, by devaluing the feminine in himself and in others” (504). The flight from femininity – marked by the passage from pre-Oedipal to Oedipal masculinity – is henceforth a constant feature in men’s lives in patriarchal societies as the one depicted in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* and it starts as soon as the boy is forced to distance from his mother.

To exemplify that, in Homer’s epics, as well as in other cornerstone works of Mediterranean literature – such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* –, part of the center is occupied by the struggle between the hero-to-be and his mother. In the first book of *The Iliad*, the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles makes the Phthian prince go back to his mother for help.²³ An attitude perceived as immature, for Achilles moves away from the company of men to seek out a feminine one. As Van Nortwick notes in *Imagining Men: Ideals of Masculinity in Ancient Greek Culture* (2008),

Thetis will indeed give Achilles unquestioning support [in *The Iliad*]. This is the principal role of mothers in the heroic tradition. We observe, however, that this devotion and validation, although they may make Achilles feel loved, in fact work against his progress toward mature manhood (7).

As a result, from the hero’s withdrawal in book 1 until his return to the battlefield in book 19 of *The Iliad*, Achilles is considered selfish, rash, and immature by his peers and other commanders of the Greek army.

Likewise, in *The Song of Achilles*, Peleus, Achilles’ father and the one in charge of his upbringing in ancient Greek tradition, strives to keep Achilles away from Thetis’ influence. Peleus is the one who trains Achilles in fighting before the boy is sent to Chiron and the one

²³ See *Il*, 1.413-416.

concerned with his reputation when the hero chooses Patroclus as his *therapon* (companion, brother-in-arms). Peleus asks Achilles, “[w]hy this boy? ... He [Patroclus] will add no luster to your reputation” (*The Song of Achilles* 37). Nevertheless, the main issue that prompts Peleus to thrust Achilles to his world – instead of the heavenly one inhabited by Thetis – is war.

Peleus is aware that fighting is crucial to build a masculine identity, for it is through war activity that men achieve glory (*kleos*) in the society Miller depicts in her debut novel. When Achilles finally accepts sailing to Troy, he metaphorically starts his journey from the overprotected, feminine world of Thetis to the masculine one full of perils, danger and *kleos* (glory) of his father. In choosing to go to Troy, Achilles yields to Peleus’ bidding and takes the first steps to break away from Thetis. In rewriting the hero’s story from childhood until death, Miller explores his immaturity by demonstrating how it is connected with Thetis’ unwillingness to abide by the conventions of the mortal world.

Separation from the mother in order to gain maturity and enter the world of men is a theme often present in *The Odyssey* and Miller’s rewriting of Odysseus’ tale, *Circe*. If in *The Iliad* Achilles is the one who must mature, in *The Odyssey*, this task is left for Telemachus, Odysseus’ son. Although there may be many similarities between both young men,²⁴ what distinguishes Telemachus from Achilles is that the former has not yet left his mother’s home, which renders Achilles as a figure a bit riper than Odysseus’ offspring. As Van Nortwick suggests, “[t]o grow up, a boy must find a way to separate from the protected world of childhood, which is represented by his mother. Going out from the household, run by women, into the public world of men requires him to achieve some distinction among his peers” (14). However, when it is likely that the boy will not find his path alone, patriarchy must intervene. In Telemachus’ case, having his father absent from home, patriarchal order assumes the form of Athena.

²⁴ See *Il*, 1.263-289; Cf. *Od*, 2.32-83. Both scenes portray Achilles and Telemachus addressing other men in an assembly. In order to illustrate their immaturity – hence, lack of some masculine traits –, both passages end with Achilles and Telemachus throwing, in a tantrum-like fit, the scepter – a symbol of male power – to the ground.

Even though Athena is a goddess, she often represents, in ancient Greek literature and mythology, Zeus' – therefore male – authority.²⁵ As Pomeroy (1995) points out,

Athena is a masculine woman. ... She is female in appearance and associated with the handicrafts of women and the fertility of the olive, but many of her attributes are those traditionally associated with males. She is a patroness of wisdom, considered a masculine quality by the Greeks. ... She is patroness of a number of mortal warriors and heroes. At times, she disguises herself as a man to facilitate personal contact with favorites (4).

Since Zeus is a patriarch, Athena – born from his head – can be perceived as part of his civilizing power, one of the forces behind his order in the Greek cosmos.²⁶ The fact that Athena chooses to guide Telemachus disguised as Mentos²⁷ emphasizes, according to Van Nortwick, “that her mission is at least in part about nudging Telemachus over the threshold into manhood, where he can summon the necessary authority to assert control over the suitors and his inheritance as a man” (28). Athena's advice to Telemachus is, “[you] must not stick to childhood/ you are no longer just a little boy” (*Od*, 1.296-297). Instead, he should “[b]e brave and win [himself] a lasting name” (*Od*, 1.302). Moreover, the plan she devises for Telemachus includes hiding every piece of information from his mother, Penelope.

In *Circe*, Athena also prompts Odysseus' sons, Telemachus and Telegonus, to assume their place as hegemonic warriors by distancing themselves from their mothers. After all, Athena is Odysseus' patron and, as Clay notes, both bear some similarities (42), which explains why she seeks them out to carry on their father's name throughout the Greek world. If Odysseus' sons succeeded with the goddess's aid, then Odysseus's name would be deathless, and so would his glory. What Athena attempts to do in *Circe*, by instigating

²⁵ See Van Nortwick 53.

²⁶ See *Theogony* (924-926).

²⁷ Athena disguises herself twice in her first meetings with Telemachus. Once as Mentos (*Od*. 1.102-106), and, then, as Mentor (*Od*, 2.267-269).

Telemachus and Telegonus to fight and to found new cities, can be explained by the virtue for which men lived in Homeric society, *kleos apthiton* (deathless glory).

1.2) Divine Bloodlines and *Kleos*

As Clay points out, in the Homeric world “heroes, to be sure, need the gods to win that glory and immortal fame which compensates at least in part for their mortality” (238). The pursuit of glory and the hero’s bloodline, are intertwined because ancient Greek culture was concerned with the amount of *kleos* (glory) a man could gather in war, the quintessential place where men could achieve their hegemonic status in patriarchal societies. According to Van Nortwick, “[w]ar is ... where masculinity is forged and expressed most vividly in Greek culture” (92). Similarly, in the patriarchal society Miller displays, if a man wants glory, he must put himself to the test.

However, it is not only at war that a man would thrive and achieve glory. As Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr (2020) notes, “[the Greek] noun *kleos* means [fame, reputation, rumor]. It is cognate with the Greek verb *kluein*, [to hear], and indicates, literally, that which is heard of or about someone – hence, their [fame] or [reputation]” (167). In fact, any deed worthy mentioning would enlarge the hero’s reputation that, in turn, should compensate for his death. To exemplify that, if one pays close attention to the very first lines of *The Odyssey*, one can notice that the poem’s scope is Odysseus’ doings and travels,

Muse, tell me how he wandered and was lost
 when he had wrecked the holy town of Troy,
 and where he went, and who he met, the pain
 he suffered in the storms at sea (1.2-6).

All cities Odysseus visits, all enemies he destroys, all goddesses he takes as lovers encompass his *kleos*, for those tales would travel and reach the confines of the Greek world. Given the first lines, it is clear that the poem is deeply concerned with Odysseus’ *kleos*. In *Circe*, this

concur with Telemachus' assertion that "[Odysseus] would rather be cursed by the gods than be No one" (279). Being no one in the patriarchal context of ancient Greek culture is similar to gathering the opposite of *kleos*, social shame (*aidos*).

In *The Rhetoric of Manhood: Masculinity in the Attic Orators* (2005), Joseph Roisman points out that "[a]mong the many duties of the Athenian man was the duty to guard against shame both by avoiding shameful actions himself and by condemning the shameful deeds of others" (66). *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* present at their core this intrinsic connection between *kleos* (glory) and *aidos* (shame) that will appear in Miller's rewritings of Homer. Achilles withdraws from combat because Agamemnon takes Briseis, his war prize, away, promoting a direct offense to the hero's glory. As Patroclus explains, "[because Briseis] is Achilles' prize ... to violate her is a violation of Achilles himself, the gravest insult to his honor. Achilles could kill [Agamemnon], and even Menelaus [Agamemnon's brother] would call it fair" (*The Song of Achilles* 292) Likewise, when the suitors rampage Odysseus' living, they are in fact attacking his masculinity, for, consequently, they put in jeopardy Odysseus' role as lord of the household. Both actions, Achilles' withdrawal and Odysseus' slaughtering of the suitors, are proof of the extension to which men are willing to go to guard themselves against shame and defend their glory. Since glory is subtly intertwined with hegemonic masculine traits in the society Miller portrays, it is possible to concur that when a hero defends his portion of *kleos*, he is, in fact, protecting his hegemonic status.

The other trait of male hegemony in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* is godhood. In *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, kings, princes, and heroes descend directly or indirectly from the gods, which puts male hegemony not only as a project but also as an imposition for these men. While Achilles is a demigod, Odysseus is Hermes' grand-grandson.²⁸ In contrast, such a distinguished lineage renders the heroes to be isolated from their peers for two reasons: firstly, because, as Connell and Messerschmidt argue, hegemonic masculinity is not "assumed to be

²⁸The Messenger of the Gods, son of Zeus and Maia.

normal in the statistical sense” (832), very few men fit the hegemonic status. Secondly, as Van Nortwick claims, isolation is the key feature that depicts the divine hero (14). Because he is placed above all men due to his ancestry, he deserves the title of *Aristos Achaion* (the best of the Greeks). Yet, such a status has its costs. The hero may be above all men; nonetheless, he is still mortal and is utterly distant from the gods. Hence, the heroic status only enhances his uniqueness and insulation.

1.3) Sexual Prowess

Finally, regarding sexual prowess, when we compare it to the ancient Greek context, it is possible to notice that in *The Song of Achilles* or in *Circe*, contrary to contemporary constructions of masculinity, homosexual desire does not negate masculinity. To exemplify that, in *Circe*, the homonymous character states “[g]irls and boys would sigh over [Telegonus]” (241), implying that Telegonus’ beauty will be the object of affection of both sexes without, however, diminishing his maleness. Rather, what the society Miller portrays in both novels expects from hegemonic men was their role as the dominant party.

As David M. Halperin argues, ancient Mediterranean cultures “tended to construe sexual desire as normative or deviant according to whether it impelled social actors to conform to or to violate their conventionally defined gender roles” (25). By contrast, in the light of contemporary Anglo-American societies, “[i]t is, indeed, difficult to find any aspect of modern life that does not include men desiring women and women desiring men as a premise, as necessary to being human” (Aronson and Kimmel 383). What Aronson and Kimmel point out is the fact that contemporary culture is molded by heteronormativity, the practice of presuming and establishing heterosexual desire embedded within social organization.

What both approaches to sexual desire have in common is, again, some contempt for biological and social female traits, which brings shame to a man in patriarchal constructs of masculinity. Whereas in contemporary Anglo-American society, masculine identity and male

hegemony are connected to desiring women (*Masculinities* 123), in Athenian society, hegemonic men must never accept being dominated. After all, in the views of ancient Greek and contemporary Anglo-American societies, both actions – desiring men and being the weaker part in sex – are performed by women. As I have argued before, Patroclus' father can be perceived as hegemonic not only due to his attitude toward his wife and son but also because he hints at his sexual appetites by mentioning that he can have sex with either female servants or young boys (*The Song of Achilles* 1).

What Miller states here is the institutional pederasty that took place in classical Athens and shaped the ancient Greek approach to sex and male desire.²⁹ Halperin claims in “A Hundred Years of Homosexuality” (1990), “sex [in ancient Greek society] was a manifestation of personal status, a declaration of social identity” (32). Because sex is hierarchical (Halperin 32) and men are responsible for guarding civilization (Van Nortwick 52), hegemonic men must perform hegemony in this area as well. Male hegemony that, in this case, would reflect the Athenian moral ideology. Therefore, as Halperin points out, “[s]ex between members of the superordinate group was virtually inconceivable” (31), whereas sexual intercourse that endorsed the social hierarchy was highly encouraged.

Moreover, considering the *aidos/kleos* system, which either rewards or shames men in ancient Greek society, sexuality can be “perceived through a competitive idiom by which men jockey for control over women as objects to achieve gratifications and dominance over other men” (Long 65). To that system, it is not enough to excel in battle – albeit, it is crucial –, for the man who would embody patriarchal/hegemonic masculinity would also attempt to dominate other men. Although Agamemnon is not the best warrior, the king can take any man's prize, any female slave he desires. The possibility of doing so shows the extent to

²⁹ In the classical period (479-323 BCE), the sexual relationship between an older male (*erastes*) and a younger male (*eromenos*) was encouraged among members of the Athenian aristocracy. Although there is not a consensus on the age of the parties, scholars agree that the growth of facial hair would put an end to the courtship.

which Agamemnon rules over the Greek soldiers and over other kings. Similarly, in *Circe*, Odysseus is the only one who can share Circe's bed. Because he is the captain, the king – therefore, the best man among his crew –, he is the one apt to be with a goddess and have a child with her.

Even though Achilles, as Miller rewrites him, complies with several hegemonic traces – more specifically, the disregard for women –, his status is sometimes threatened/questioned due to his relationship with Patroclus. In *The Song of Achilles*, before sailing to Troy, Odysseus, the agent of patriarchy, suggests the hero should leave the rumor concerning his role in sex behind, for, as Patroclus affirms, “such things were given up as [aristocratic men] grew older, unless it was with slaves or hired boys”(176).³⁰ Achilles dismisses Odysseus' suggestion; nevertheless, the outcome of their relationship is that Patroclus is always perceived as a lesser man in the social fabric, as I discuss in the last chapter of my master's thesis.

However, it may be injudicious to discuss sexuality as part of gender construction without adding any reflection on the male body, for, as Halperin claims, “[t]he social body precedes the sexual body” (38). Taking this into account, before analyzing *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, I discuss the relation between the male body and how its representation in Homer and in Miller enhances the male hegemonic features I have categorized in this chapter. Nonetheless, I must point out that I do not consider biological aspects of gender as conclusive, definitive features. What I do acknowledge is that the construction of masculinity and/or femininity entails physiological parts that civilizing forces weave together in a symbiotic relationship.

³⁰ Textual evidence in Homer points out that Achilles was younger than Patroclus (*Il*, 11.937-939). Authors from the classical period reinforce this notion. For example, Plato's *Symposium* and Aeschylus' lost play, *Myrmidons*, demonstrate this formulation. See *Symposium* 179e-180b. Aeschylus' fragments can be found on *Theoi* website. See fr. 135-136.

To exemplify that, I return to the discussion on psychic separation of mother and male child. From a psychoanalytic perspective – endorsed by medical approaches prior to the gay liberation in the 1960s –, any man or woman who does not comply with their gender prescription is to be considered unfit. As Arthur Flannigan Saint Aubin argues, “a man's most basic sense of self necessarily stems from or at least must necessarily include a conception and image of the body as male” (241). Similarly, the corporeal aspects of masculinity and femininity are to be understood by the ancient Greeks as opposite by nature, which establishes the following dichotomies: female/male, wet/dry, cold/hot, soft/strong.

Such differences were intertwined in the social fabric and used as a way to organize and guide the tasks men and women should perform in ancient Greek society. According to Xenophon (431 BCE-354 BCE),

[the Gods] from the first adapted the woman's nature to the indoor and man's to the outdoor tasks and cares. For [they] made the man's body and mind more capable of enduring cold and heat, and journeys and campaigns; and therefore imposed on him the outdoor tasks. To the woman, since he has made her body less capable of such endurance, I take it that [the gods have] assigned the indoor tasks. . . . Thus, to be a woman it is more honorable to stay indoors than to abide in the fields, but to the man it is unseemly rather to stay indoors than to attend to the work outside (*Economics* 6.18-25).

Xenophon's argument also highlights another fact pertinent to gender construction in this society: exposition. Whereas women – hence, the feminine body – had to stay indoors, locked in the *gynaikon* (women's quarter)³¹, men were always exposing their bodies not only on their farms, but also in games in order to establish their superiority.

In *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus' father is hosting the games where men's bodies are on display, “I remember the runners best, nut-brown bodies slicked with oil, stretching on the

³¹ *Od*, 4.119-120.

track beneath the sun. They mix together, broad-shouldered husbands, beardless youths and boys, their calves all thickly carved with muscle” (2). This passage illustrates that strength and beauty in the male body were highly praised in ancient Greek society. Since power is associated with male hegemony, it must be intertwined with a man's physical condition.

In Miller, Menoetius is “a short man, as most ... were, and built like a bull, all shoulders” (*The Song of Achilles* 1) and as Odysseus is “not so tall as some, but strong ... [and] joints well seasoned” (*Circe* 173). On the other hand, Miller shows us Peleus, Achilles’ father. Although Peleus is a king, he is not hegemonic in Miller’s rewriting. Instead, he might be considered a representative of complicit masculinity, for he still benefits from patriarchal structure without being hegemonic. He is given Thetis in marriage, despite her scorn for mortals because “the gods forced her to stay with her husband” (*The Song of Achilles* 19). Peleus’ non-hegemonic traits are emphasized by his physical appearance, “[Peleus] seemed old, bent over, but he was no more than fifty, [Patroclus’s] father’s age. He did not look like a man who could have conquered a goddess, or produced such a child as Achilles” (*The Song of Achilles* 29). In light of this, I affirm that Miller's depiction of men accentuates features which allow us to consider that, to some extent, male hegemony must be connected to the male body. The stronger, the faster, the more handsome a man is, the more hegemonic he seems to be.

Moreover, since glory is to be linked to godhood, it is important to consider that in this society the union between gods and mortals created a superior being in the social hierarchy. As Patroclus suggests, “[d]ivine blood purified our muddy race, bred heroes from dust and clay” (*The Song of Achilles* 19). Therefore, it seems critical to point out that, in Miller’s rewritings, men who descend from gods must have this mark recognized somehow. That is possible through the constant exposition of the male body for two reasons.

Firstly, as Long notes, “[v]iolent testing of masculinity, trials of strength and endurance in which men risk their lives, and dangerous rites of passage and initiations seem to

pervade all systems of masculinity” (62). Secondly, masculinity has some psychologic and cultural manifestations and metaphoric connections to the male body (Aubin 239). It is possible to affirm that heroic men are hegemonic not only because they occupy the summit of social hierarchy, but also because their lineage provides them the physical requirements to be hegemonic.

On the one hand, associating masculinity to men’s bodies corroborates to sustain the hegemonic/heroic model. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* present several occasions in which men take part in contests aiming to prove how strong or how fast they are³². Again, these scenes make it clear that in patriarchal societies hegemonic masculinity is something always tested and always threatened, “a goal sufficiently beyond an individual man's reach that it keeps him struggling on for a lifetime” (Long 62). On the other hand, this implication opens the path to an undisguised problem, aging. Even though Homeric texts and Miller’s *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* depict old men, there is no possibility of considering them as hegemonic, for, like children and women, they were not the focus of ancient Greek culture (Van Nortwick 122).

To summarize the discussion on what hegemonic masculinity encompasses in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* and how it leads Achilles and Odysseus to their physical, psychological, and social undoing, it is important to mention that in *The Song of Achilles* and in *Circe* there are several moments in which Achilles, Patroclus, Odysseus, Telegonus, and Telemachus have the chance either to engage with or to deviate from the heroic ideal. It is by engaging with or deviating from it that the male characters I analyze in my thesis find their path of self-destruction in Miller’s *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. Therefore, I organize this master’s thesis in the following order: Odysseus, Telemachus and Telegonus, Achilles, and Patroclus.

³² *Od.*, 8.143-235. These lines show Odysseus in the Phaeacian court competing with the sons of Alcinous and other noblemen, winning their respect due to his victories in throwing darts and archery. *Il.*, 23.302-995. During Patroclus’s funeral, Achilles sets several prizes to the games taking place in honor of his dead comrade.

I do so in order to fit each one of these characters in Connell's hierarchy. As Alex Hobbs (2013) suggests,

[a]nalysis from a masculinity studies angle assures the reader is attuned to representations of men, and how they fit and relate to hegemonic ideals. In short, there are two linked applications of masculinity studies to literature: to consider the more private realms in which masculine identity may be formed and performed; and to isolate and examine positive examples of male protagonists who do not conform to masculine stereotypes (390).

Because Odysseus is a mature man and fulfills all the criteria by which Athenian men were measured as hegemonic, he is, in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, the most hegemonic of the five, – which is why the next chapter is dedicated to analyze him –, while Telegonus, Achilles, and Patroclus could be considered *epeboi* (youths, from eighteen to twenty-one), and Telemachus in *Circe* is already an adult male like his father.

This separation based on age implies that Achilles, Telegonus, and Patroclus are not considered grown men in the society Miller depicts. Hence, they could not fulfill all requirements of hegemonic masculinity I established in this Master's thesis. By approximating Connell's system to Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* what is noticeable is that, apart from Telemachus and Patroclus, all the remaining characters I analyze may fall between the hegemonic and complicit models.

I consider thus because hegemonic masculinity – as Connell understands it – endorses patriarchy, a social system that is based upon masculine power and privilege (Messerschmidt 18, Kimmel and Aronson 588). Conversely, the interaction of male characters with goddesses, female slaves, princesses, and queens shows clearly how ambivalent this relation is. As I have stated before, hegemonic masculinity also works as a double-edged sword, for it establishes the anxieties among masculinities in which one model must prevail above the others. From

that perspective, even though Achilles is the greatest warrior in the Homeric epics and in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, he is not the most hegemonic character because he never occupies the position of a *kurios*.

This title must go either to Telemachus or Odysseus who had their chance to rule over Ithaca and it is almost impossible to discuss Telemachus's formation without having to analyze his relation with Odysseus and his brother, Telegonus. Moreover, as Aronson and Kimmel argue, "[u]nderstanding how we do masculinities (...) requires that we make visible the performative elements of identity, and also the audience for those performances" (506). In light of Kimmel's claim, it is possible to state that masculinity is simultaneously an enactment and a performance among members of the same social group. Some scenes in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* depicting a poet (*aedo*) singing the deeds of the greatest men of the past confirm this notion.³³ Considering that these poems were often sung in palaces, to ancient Greek society, performativity became not only a social prescription to a gender but also a way to achieve portions of *kleos*.

Nevertheless, what these songs rarely show is the price men had to pay to build their heroic identities in that society. On the other hand, Miller not only depicts the drawbacks of Homer's heroes but also the aftermath of their undoing to the ones closer to them, evincing how hegemonic men can harm themselves and everyone around them. That is why the next two chapters are focused on the analysis of Odysseus and his lineage. The next chapter, thus, establishes a connection between Odysseus's physical, psychological and social undoing and Telemachus's reluctance in assuming his father's role in *Circe*.

³³See *Il*, 1.1-3; cf *Od* 1.1-8.
See *Od*, 1.326-329; *Od*, 8.500-520.

Chapter 2: Odysseus, The Self-Made Man of Greek Myth

I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy
 (*Ulysses*, Alfred Lord Tennyson)

Whereas Achilles, the hero of *The Iliad*, figures in the very first line of the epic – “Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus’ son Achilles” (*Il*, 1.1) –, Odysseus is first mentioned in *The Odyssey* in the twentieth line of the first book. Before that, we are merely told that the subject of the poem is a complicated (*polytropos*) man (*Od*, 1.1).³⁴ Equally intriguing is the first mention to Odysseus in *Circe*. In a conversation with the witch, Hermes foretells her that one day “a man named Odysseus, born of [his] blood, will come to [Aiaia]” (86). Nevertheless, what is quite clear about Odysseus – either in the Homeric poems or in the later production associated with them – is his mysterious, double nature.

When they are put side by side, the distinctions between the heroes of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* highlight each other as do the differences between Achilles and Odysseus as

³⁴ “ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ/πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν ποτὶ λίθρον ἔπερσεν” (*Od*, 1.1-2). In my Master’s thesis, I resort to Emily Wilson’s translation of *The Odyssey*, where she opts for translating Odysseus’ most famous epithet, *polytropos*, as complicated. However, several translators acknowledge the daunting complexity of the term. Because of that, to my analysis, I consider – as Miller does (*The Song of Achilles* 165) – *polytropos* as someone of many twists and turns, which renders Odysseus unreliable and ambivalent.

Miller rewrites them. Before Miller, Odysseus has been portrayed or alluded to by several authors in Western literature. To mention a few, Odysseus' myth has inspired the writings of William Shakespeare, Lord Tennyson, and James Joyce.³⁵ Apart from Joyce's masterpiece, whose every chapter is named after an episode of Odysseus' homecoming, Shakespeare's and Tennyson's versions of the hero hold one thing in common, his restless and insatiable desire to learn.

Conversely, Greek literary tradition, especially Greek drama, depicts Odysseus in a rather unflattering light. In Sophocles's *Philoctetes* and Euripides's *The Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Odysseus is the owner of a quite repulsive personality. He manipulates, deceives, misleads, and resorts to any stratagem to achieve what he wants. These numerous and distinct portrayals can shed some light on the study of masculinities in literature, for they offer opportunities to compare and contrast these versions of Odysseus in relation to other men (real or imaginary) of the period in which these rewritings were established.

To exemplify that, as Van Nortwick notes, Greek Drama – especially Greek Tragedy – rises during the twilight of the heroic age and the dawn of democracy in Athens (80). Once it does, the sorrows of Hecuba in *Trojan Women* are as compelling as the deeds of Achilles in *The Iliad* and other poems of the Epic Cycle. In the Greek Drama era, Achilles' battle performance is to be interpreted with caution – even with some distaste – by the Athenian audience considering that Drama focuses on his hubris, which is one of the Homeric hero's many flaws. Having this perspective in mind helps us understand why Heracles (Hercules), Achilles, Odysseus, and many other heroes, when presented by playwrights, lack important male traits to come to terms with a world that is falling apart and being replaced by another. In this new era, they are aristocratic warriors called to arms in a democratic assembly.

By contrast, as Clay notes,

³⁵ *Troilus and Cressida*, *Ulysses*, and *Ulysses* (1922), respectively.

from the outset, Homer reveals a desire to present Odysseus in a favorable light. Such bias may entail the suppression or playing down of certain unsavory incidents; it may also require the rearrangement of the poet's traditional material in order to bring out the more positive aspects of Odysseus' character (38).

In *The Odyssey*, Nestor, Menelaus, Penelope, Eumaeus, Eurycleia, and many other characters have one singular version of the hero, the enduring warlord who has had his house usurped by the suitors. Conversely, in *Circe* we find different voices singing and telling Odysseus' story. In this novel, Circe, Telemachus, Penelope and, of course, Odysseus himself paint the hero with their own ideas and impressions of him. Following her literary predecessors, Miller presents us with an ambivalent hero, with so many conflicting accounts of his tales that it becomes toilsome to depict Odysseus accurately.

Thus, in *Circe*, one striking contrast in the depictions of Odysseus is between the portrait presented by Telemachus, already an adult man and the one Circe makes to her son, Telegonus. In some ways, Telemachus and Telegonus may symbolize two different kinds of readers. While Telemachus resembles a contemporary audience, ready to know the abominable chapters of Odysseus' story, Telegonus personifies the ancient readership, or even, in a bolder suggestion, the classical intake.

Although Homer depicts Odysseus rather nobly – the hero crying to go back home after being a guest on Calypso's island is one of the most compelling and sympathetic images of *The Odyssey* –,³⁶ the epic brings to light some aspects of the hero that can make even the unswerving reader into a skeptical one. In Book 19, Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, reveals to Penelope, “[Odysseus] would have been here [on Ithaca] long ago,/but he decided he should travel more/ and gather greater wealth. No man on earth/ knows better how to make a profit” (19.283-285). These lines confirm Telemachus' impression, in *Circe*, that, despite all

³⁶ *Od.*, 5.151-158.

tales he has been told, his father has stayed away from Ithaca of his own volition, aiming for personal gain.

Here, it is important to highlight once again the striking differences between Homer's Odysseus and Miller's. As noted, Homer attempts to portray Odysseus in a favorable, sympathetic light. Odysseus' leadership shortcomings are dismissed and overlooked; Homer's portrayal aims to contrast Odysseus with other men and to make him stand out rather than convey his flaws either as a captain or as the chief of a household. After all, he is the man Telemachus must emulate. Conversely, in *Circe*, Telemachus considers Odysseus to be a man who puts glory above his friends, his subordinates, and even his family.

On the other hand, in Telegonus' perspective, fabricated by Circe's chivalric retellings of his father's tales, Odysseus would be perceived as the perfect embodiment of Athenian masculine values: he is clever, brave, the user of great rhetoric, the chief of a household, and the just and benevolent king of Ithaca. As I have pointed out in Chapter 1, Athenian prescriptions of masculinity stem from both Homeric epics. Thus, Telegonus' desire to follow on his father's footsteps in *Circe* only supports the notion that the boy interprets his father's myth as many classical authors had done: ingeniously. In Telegonus' imagination, Odysseus is what he has always been to epic authors, a symbol of courage, determination, and shrewdness. It is essential to consider that each one of the characters who interact with Odysseus highlights either his virtues or his faults as a man inside the institutions and prescriptions that guide and rule patriarchal masculinity in ancient Greek society. They do so because they have similar notions of what masculinity encompasses in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*.

As Aronson and Kimmel argue, "[d]oing gender is a lifelong process of performances. As we interact with others, we are held accountable to display behavior that is consistent with gender norms – at least for that situation" (506). Perhaps, that is why Odysseus is so ambivalent. In Homer, Odysseus is a migrant, a pirate, a carpenter, a king, an athlete, a

beggar, a husband, a lover, a father, a son, a fighter, a liar, a leader, and a thief (Wilson 5). Similarly, in *Circe*, “he [is a] lawyer and [a] bard and [a] crossroads charlatan at once, arguing his case, entertaining, pulling back the veil to show you the secrets of the world” (183). Peculiarly enough, this ambivalence can be asserted in Odysseus' own name.

Therefore, to start my reading of Odysseus and justify why he is the most hegemonic man in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, I investigate the hero's name based on the Greek verb that originates it, *odysasthai*, which, in ancient Greek, means to cause or to suffer wrath. Another translation of the term would suggest antagonizing someone. As Clay notes,

[t]he name of Odysseus, then, reveals itself to have not one but two senses. It refers both to the active Autolyca³⁷ troublemaker and to the passive victim of divine wrath. As the Man of Wrath, Odysseus both causes trouble and vexation and is much vexed by the hostility of the gods [and other men]. These two aspects of Odysseus as victim and victimizer coexist side by side and correspond to the same doubleness observed in his identifying epithet, *polytropos* (65).

In fact, in Miller's rewriting, Odysseus' ability to provoke wrath and enmity is the primary characteristic of his ambivalence that we are presented.³⁸

In *The Song of Achilles*, Odysseus appears at the beginning of Patroclus's narrative, during the contest to the hand of Helen. In the novel, King Tyndareus of Sparta had summoned the most respectable Greek kings and lords aiming to give his daughter, Helen, in marriage to one of them.³⁹ Although Patroclus was only a boy at the time, his father, Menoetius had forced him to take part in the dispute as a suitor, for it “would do well to have [Helen] in [the] family” (6) once Tyndareus was in possession of a rich land and held many

³⁷ Odysseus' naming by his grandfather, Autolyca, is depicted in book 19 of *The Odyssey*, 401-409.

³⁸ As Clay points out, “[a]t [*The Odyssey's* center] is Odysseus, the man of many wiles, whose most characteristic trait is the fundamental ambiguity of his essential qualities (54). Moreover, in *The Odyssey*, another epithet Odysseus receives is many-minded (20.240). This suggests that every action the hero decides to take is based upon calculation and schemes.

³⁹ The myth of Helen and her siblings is presented by several authors in Classical antiquity. While some writers consider Zeus her father, others affirm that she is Tyndareus' offspring. In Homer, however, Helen is Zeus' daughter with Tyndareus' wife, Leda. See *Il*, 3.240; *Od*, 4.560-569.

commercial treaties with other countries. Another reason for Menoetius, a representative of the aristocratic class and male hegemony in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, desiring marriage was the rumor that Helen was considered "the fairest woman in [the Greek] countries" (5). In a society where women personify men's *kleos*, the connection between a wife's beauty and the husband's maleness is transparent.

Nevertheless, what Menoitus does not reveal is that presenting Patroclus as a suitor is only a ruse. His clear intention was to replace his wife and marry Helen afterward. Odysseus unmasks his plans in Tyndareus's hall and infuriates Patroclus' father (10). In this exchange, Odysseus is recognized not only by his provocative attitude but also by his scar in a scene that creates an immediate correspondence with the bathing scene in *The Odyssey*,⁴⁰

[Odysseus] was the last in line, sitting at ease on the bench, his curling hair gleaming in the light of the fire. He had a jagged scar on one leg, a seam that stitched his dark brown flesh from heel to knee, wrapping around the muscles of the calf and burying itself in the shadow beneath his tunic. It looked like it had been a knife, I thought, or something like it, ripping upwards and leaving behind feathered edges, whose softness belied the violence that must have caused it (*The Song of Achilles* 10).

This depiction suggests that Odysseus, as Karen Bassi (1998) observes, is "the idealized Greek male who fights and speaks the truth man-to-man" ("Orality, Masculinity and the Greek Epic" 316) and, because of that, – and on the likelihood that a part of Miller's readership is aware of Odysseus getting his scar during a boar hunt⁴¹ – he represents the union between wits and battling skills, reason, and physical excellence.

However, even claiming no interest in the bride-to-be, Odysseus enrages Tyndareus and the other suitors by indicating how dangerous it would be for Tyndareus to choose one

⁴⁰ The bathing scene, one of the most famous and touching parts of *The Odyssey*, depicts Odysseus' old maid, Eurykleia, recognizing him by his scar even though the hero has had his appearance changed by Athena. *Od.*, 19.385-477.

⁴¹ *Od.*, 19.427-466.

among them. An amused Odysseus observes, “I would like to know how you [Tyndareus] are going to stop the losers from declaring war on you. Or on Helen’s lucky new husband. I see half a dozen men here ready to leap at each other’s throats” (11). What Odysseus makes visible to Tyndareus and the suitors is the notion that violence and competitiveness are basic male features in this patriarchal society because in such a structure men are comrades at war, not in peace.

Odysseus is aware, just like Tyndareus and all the other men in that room are, that in the shame/honor system that organizes masculinity in this warrior society, *agon* (competitiveness) is far more important to delineate masculine identities than female ones. In a room “with so many princes and kings competing for a single prize” (*The Song of Achilles* 7), the likely outcome would be one man full of honor – personified by Helen – and the others ashamed.⁴² Thus, Patroclus’ first description of Odysseus already foreshadows the kind of hero we will find by focusing on his strongest expertise, shrewdness. Odysseus stirs confusion and strengthens his ambivalence when he promises to present the solution to Tyndareus on the condition that he should have Penelope, Helen’s cousin, in marriage.

Odysseus is outsmarted by Tyndareus, for the Spartan king does not allow him a way out of the pact. As Patroclus narrates it, during the sacrifice that would seal the warlords’ words, Odysseus had leaned back to the shadows in the hopes of being forgotten by his peers (*The Song of Achilles* 13). When Odysseus tries to withdraw from the treaty, he is not acting cowardly – although it seems like that. In *The Odyssey*, we are told that “many were the men

⁴²Societies that organize masculinity based on the honor/shame system often promote competitions that endorse antagonism and bellicosity. In *The Song of Achilles*, the scene in Tyndareus’ hall, for example, can be compared to the battle for Achilles’ arms. In this specific context, Odysseus and Ajax fought for Achilles’ armor, which symbolically represented the deceased’s position of *Aristos Achaion*. The outcome of this combat is Odysseus’ victory and Ajax’s suicide, because of the loss of honor. This event displays how strict this system is. Men cannot afford losing their honor and, if they do, they must resort to any means to reclaim it. In Ajax’s tale, it is the warrior’s death that restores his honor. Similarly, in Helen’s taking, in order not to be ashamed, Menelaus declares war on Troy. Another example of how this system works is the archery contest in *The Odyssey*. The suitors are reluctant about letting Odysseus – so far disguised as a beggar – try to string the bow because, if he succeeds, the suitors will be rendered weak by other men in Ithaca (*Od.*, 21.321-329).

whose cities [Odysseus] saw and whose mind he learned” (1.2).⁴³ In ancient Greek, “[t]he verb [*eidon*, (to see)] involve[s] knowledge gained through eyewitness or direct observation” (Clay 12). He is, instead, proving that, indeed, gathering knowledge is his greatest ability.

Odysseus knows the dispositions of men like Menoitius and Ajax⁴⁴ and realizes – rather sooner than the others – that the treaty will not hold, for heroic/hegemonic men would prefer to die than to suffer shame or have their glory tainted. In other words, Odysseus is aware that the Homeric hero, who measures his worth and manliness through honor, is emasculated by the possibility of failing in protecting his honor from slander. Moreover, Odysseus figures out that even if Paris had not stolen Helen, another man would have done it. Either way, it is possible to assert that a long and violent conflict, in which he had no interest, had already been foreseen by him.

Odysseus' first appearance in *Circe*, however, is rather distinct. As Circe affirms, because there was no man around on her island, pirates felt rather encouraged to act in a predatory manner towards her and her nymphs, “I did not pretend to be a mortal. I showed my lambent, yellow eyes at every turn. None of it made a difference. I was alone and a woman, that was all that mattered” (*Circe* 170). What Circe evinces is the notion that in patriarchal cultures, men fear the vengeance of other men while they regard women as (sexual) prey. Before any pirate tried to attack her or her nymphs, he would have inquired about the presence of a man on the island.

Differently from other men, who had tried to exploit or abuse Circe and her nymphs in Aiaia, Odysseus is cautious and respectful toward the goddess. Instead of claiming who he is or even trespassing the limits established by *xenia* (hospitality), Odysseus prefers to keep

⁴³ πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω (*Od.* 1.3).

⁴⁴ Ajax is one of the greatest heroes in Greek mythology, second only to Achilles in terms of strength and fighting skills. However, he is outsmarted by Odysseus during the contest for Achilles' armor and kills himself (*Od.* 11.544-566). In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the eponymous character cannot stand the fact that his defeat brought shame to him and not even the pleas of his slave, Tecmessa, and their son – in a scene that resembles Andromache and Hector's moving exchange in Book 6 of *The Iliad* – convince him otherwise. The relationship between Ajax and Tecmessa is explored under a more modern outlook by Pat Barker in *The Silence of the Girls* (2018).

his distance until he can assert whether Circe is an enemy or an ally. What follows, instead, is a dialogue where Odysseus and Circe work their wits to gather – and, more importantly, to conceal – as much information as possible from each other.

The retelling of Circe and Odysseus' first meeting by Miller is intriguing for three reasons. Firstly, because it disrupts the image Homer has depicted in *The Odyssey*, which shows “the proud witch undone before the hero’s sword, kneeling and begging for mercy” (*Circe* 181).⁴⁵ Secondly, Homer’s portrayal of Circe acquiesces to Bly's notion of Odysseus as a primitive masculine force that tames the matriarchal energy personified by the goddess using a phallic symbol, the sword (*Iron John* 4). Instead, in the scene Miller depicts, Odysseus “[does] not draw his sword, but his hand [rests] on the hilt” (*Circe* 177). Thirdly, in Homer and in Miller, Odysseus fears that, if he goes to bed with Circe before the witch swears an oath, she would “take [his] courage” (*Od*, 10.341), an unquestionably masculine feature as I have pointed out, and his manhood.

By taking his manhood, it is possible to ascertain two outcomes, Odysseus dreads that Circe will either cut off his genitals or make him sterile through her magic, “[t]he moment I [Odysseus] set down the moly, you [Circe] may cast your spell” (*Circe* 179). Both possibilities would symbolize a blow to Odysseus' honor. Since “men fear being made passive, vulnerable, female – whether by the actions of men or women” (Long 65), another possible reading of this encounter is that Odysseus personifies one of the most striking characteristics of hegemonic, patriarchal masculinity: fear of women’s sexuality.

Moreover, it is possible to state that in a patriarchal structure, “female power, through sexual behavior, is a constant concern, a behavioral anti-fetish, a fixation” (Long 74). Circe is the one who invites Odysseus to her bed not because “many find their trust in love” (*Circe* 179), but, simply put, because she holds more power in their mortal/immortal dynamic.

⁴⁵ *Od*, 10.321-324.

Miller's depiction shows how feeble Odysseus' hegemonic status is, at least when it comes to sexual prowess.

As I have argued before, social hierarchy does not allow females – divine or mortal – to choose their sexual partners as freely as males. Circe is a goddess whereas Odysseus is a mortal man – albeit one from divine blood –; hence, he is inferior to her in that society. Due to that, it is possible to infer that when Odysseus claims that “only a fool would say no to such an honor [going to bed with Circe]. But only a fool would say yes” (*Circe* 179), he is hinting that the proposal unsettles his hegemonic position. In patriarchal societies, sex is power (Long 65; Halperin 30), therefore “[t]he hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power” (“Masculinity as Homophobia” 125). This suggests that Circe's proposition rattles the patriarchal system for it takes the power of choosing – even of dominating – a sexual partner away from a hegemonic man.

Still, it is reasonable to bear in mind that Circe's position is utterly distinguishable from women like Penelope, Odysseus' wife. On the one hand, Van Nortwick points out that throughout centuries Mediterranean cultures have assumed that wetness is a feminine feature and, because sexual arousal was connected to wetness, women “were inherently susceptible to lust” (51). In a society where women are seen as the extension of men's glory, any possibility of female adultery would imply an attack on a man's masculine identity and, therefore, on the state. Once the state is a number of households commanded by the *kurioi* (lords), women who do not comply with this prescription are to be considered a threat to the entire system (Van Nortwick 52).⁴⁶ In other words, women must remain faithful to their husbands while men can share as many beds as they like, which is indeed what takes place in *The Odyssey*.

On the other hand, Odysseus, as the head of the household and the guardian of patriarchy (Van Nortwick 50), must control Penelope's sexual desire, even if from afar, for “it

⁴⁶ Euripides' *Bacchae* depicts quite ludicrously what can happen to a city if women get out of men's control. In *The Odyssey*, Agamemnon's ghost claims that “[Clitemnestra's story] will be hateful; she will bring/bad reputation to all other women,/even the good ones” (24.202-204).

takes constant male vigilance to prevent the destruction of family honor by women” (Long 74). The notion of control of women’s sexuality being embedded within patriarchal masculinity is reflected throughout *The Odyssey* in the cautionary tales of Clytemnestra and Helen. Helen claims that, if it were not for Aphrodite’s intervention – a metaphor to *eros* –, she would have never left Menelaus and their daughter (*Od*, 4.260-265), whereas Clytemnestra's extramarital affair with Aegisthus results in Agamemnon’s death and Orestes’s revenge (*Od*, 1.31-44). Both examples show how women’s sexuality – when not controlled or supervised by hegemonic men – can be dangerous and destructive to a family and to a state.

Similarly, in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, patriarchal fear of women’s sexuality disrupting civilization is present in a plethora of characters, of which it is worth mentioning Perses, Pasiphae, and Thetis. Starting with Thetis, as Patroclus tells us, “the Fates had foretold that her son would far surpass his father” (*The Song of Achilles* 19). To any mortal man this piece of news would imply the continuity of his lineage, an extension of his honor, which was not the case with a god. In *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus clarifies why Thetis is forced to accept a mortal man as a husband: had Zeus succeeded in marrying her, he would have been overthrown by their progeny. As a consequence, civilization would have been destroyed without its monarch.⁴⁷

Another example of a goddess threatening order in the cosmos is Perses, Circe’s mother. In *Circe*, the narrative starts in a mythical time after the war between the Titans and the Olympians.⁴⁸ The marriage of Helios, the sun god, with Perses is the one that breaks in the world a new kind of power, witchcraft (*Circe* 62). In order to keep the power balance, Zeus, the ruler of a new cosmos, and Helios, the old patriarch, come into an agreement that forbids Helios from “siring more children upon [Perses]” (*Circe* 63). Finally, the last example that

⁴⁷ *Prometheus Bound*, 907-927.

⁴⁸ In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the poet sings of the great war between Titans and Gods which culminates in Zeus’ victory and the Olympians’ rule. See *Theogony* 617-885. *Circe* explores these events and implies how feeble the power balance between these two kinds of gods is.

depicts patriarchal masculinity failing in controlling women is in the marriage of Minos and Pasiphae, Circe's sister.

Helios, Pasiphae's father, is sure that once Minos, a demigod son of Zeus and the Cretan king, becomes Pasiphae's husband, he will "hold her in her proper place" (*Circe* 62). However, what we notice in Crete is that Minos is terrified by Pasiphae because of a trick

Pasiphaë had played upon [him] in the early days of their marriage [when] Minos used to order any girl he liked to his bedchamber in front of her face. [In return, Pasiphae] cursed him with a spell that turned his seed to snakes and scorpions. Whenever he lay with a woman, they stung her to death from the inside (*Circe* 139).

With this act, Pasiphae shames Minos twice. She withholds from the king his hegemonic right of having any sexual partner he desires at the same time she ensures that his power to procreate and ensure civilization's continuity⁴⁹ is put in jeopardy. To put it differently, if Minos cannot have sexual intercourse as he pleases or procreates, he is to be considered a lesser man in ancient Greek society.

Conversely, as Pomeroy argues, fear of mature female sexuality evinces that heroes "could feel secure only with a virgin" (10). Therefore, it is not coincidental that the goddess who favors heroes throughout the epic tradition is Athena, the war goddess who is born out of Zeus's head.⁵⁰ Additionally, it is worth noticing that, of all the heroes who figure in the Homeric texts, Odysseus is the one who shares more resemblance with Athena, for both are famous throughout the Greek world in view of their *metis* (shrewdness). With that in mind, I start the next section discussing the role Athena has in the patriarchal structure and the construction of hegemonic masculinity in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*.

⁴⁹ Van Nortwick 52

⁵⁰ *Theogony* 886-900. One may argue the extent to which patriarchal portrayal of women in ancient texts contributed to the notion of virginity. A few myths, for instance, hint at possible love affairs among females. However, due to the fact that some goddesses never married a man, they are still considered virgin by ancient Greek literary tradition.

2.1 The *Polytropos* Man and the Goddess – Divinity, Patriarchy, and Male Hegemony

As paradoxical as it may seem, in patriarchal societies, women play an important role in the making of masculinities. In the society Miller portrays, I defend that they are either the personification of a man's glory or the judges of a man's behavior. To explain matters further, I suggest returning to a specific scene in the 2006 cinematic adaptation *300*, which depicts the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BCE).⁵¹ Although the movie does not comprehend the scope of my Master's thesis, the portrayal of ancient Greek masculinities in it offers quite an interesting contrast and a dialogue with contemporary masculinities.

On the one hand, we have the hyper-masculinized figure of the Spartan king, Leonidas (Gerard Butler), which is contrasted with the blatantly obvious queering portrayal of Xerxes (Rodrigo Santoro), the Persian conqueror. Despite the fact that both portrayals are historically inaccurate, they unveil that the construction of contemporary Anglo-American masculinities – here projected on the misleading portraits of both Spartans and Persians – is rooted in the anxieties related to the flight from femininity embedded within a strong militaristic culture.⁵²

However, returning to the question on the extent to which women influence the construction of masculinities, in “Leonidas's New Body: The Failed Hyper-Masculinization of the Hero in Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's Graphic Novel *300* (1998) and Its 2006 Film Adaptation” (2010). Sara Martín points out that

the scene in which Gorgo [the Spartan queen] sends off Leonidas to war as Spartan women did, bidding her man return either with his shield or gloriously dead on it, suggests – seeing [Gerard] Butler's anxious expression – that Leonidas fears Gorgo's judgment much more than he fears Xerxes. This image discloses how, far from being passive defenseless objects, women of all times have actively contributed to the making of the patriarchal hero (141).

⁵¹ See *Histories*, 7.198-238; See Plutarch's *Moralia* 141.

⁵² Another discussion the movie stirs can be done through Postcolonial lens. Released during the years post 9/11, the conspicuous portrayals of the Persians have not passed unnoticed by anyone acquainted with these theories.

What is being revealed in this exchange is what Long terms as the ephemerality of masculinity (62). One slip, like Odysseus tells Circe in book 10 of *The Odyssey*, and men are emasculated. Nevertheless, once we acknowledge the plurality of masculinities, what is evinced is that hegemonic masculinity is, in fact, the ephemeral type. The hero is as strong as he can position himself to women and to other men.

Once we can establish that women are a driving force in the construction of masculinities in ancient Greek society, it is inconceivable not to analyze the strongest female in this cosmos, Athena. Athena's several appearances in ancient Greek texts usually portray the goddess on a hero's side. She is the one who prevents Achilles from striking Agamemnon, the one who allows Diomedes to bleed Aphrodite and Ares in *The Iliad*⁵³ as well as she is the one who encourages Telemachus to leave his homeland and go after his long-lost father in *The Odyssey*.

However, of all heroes Athena helps, none is as favored by her assistance as Odysseus. This rather special bond between the hero and the war goddess is not coincidental. As Clay notes, it "arises from the similarities of their natures" (42). Not only do Odysseus and Athena share the same epithet but also they are recognized by their *metis*. Both master the art of disguise and deception, though, of course, Athena can change her appearance while Odysseus must resort to his persuasive rhetoric. To exemplify their similarity, – and henceforth their connection with hegemonic masculinity – it might be sensible to analyze their exchange when Odysseus finally reaches Ithaca in *The Odyssey*.

In Book 13, Odysseus finally returns to Ithaca. On the beach, he finds Athena disguised as a girl; however, Odysseus is not sure whether the Phaeacians had led him to his fatherland, and, afraid of losing his treasure, he again resorts to lies and deception. Instead of

⁵³ *Il*, 1.231-261.
Il 5.374-38; *Il*, 5.981-997.

revealing who he is, Odysseus claims to be a Cretan merchant. Athena discloses his scheme while acknowledging Odysseus' and her true disposition,

You clever rascal! So duplicitous,
so talented at lying! You love fiction
and tricks so deeply, you refuse to stop
even in your own land. Yes, both of us
are smart. No man can plan and talk like you,
and I am known among the gods for insight
and craftiness. You failed to recognize me:

I am Athena, child of Zeus (*Od*, 13.295-301).

Moreover, Athena claims that she has always stood by his side and taken care of him (*Od*, 13.301-302).

Even though *The Odyssey* confirms Odysseus' favoritism, it does not reveal why. Nevertheless, I tend to consider Athena as someone who endorses hegemonic masculinity because she often stands beside patriarchy or patriarchal figures. Firstly, Athena conceals her mother's identity, a detail that does not go unnoticed by scholars,⁵⁴ referring to herself in Homer and in other ancient authors, like Hesiod and Aeschylus,⁵⁵ as Zeus's child, as if she were born from the king of gods alone. Zeus is a patriarch in ancient Greek society and he is the voice of command in the whole cosmos. The only forces in that world beyond his control are the Fates.

His order – patriarchy – is ensured and protected by Athena, who, Circe reveals, in case a new conflict between Olympians and Titans breaks out, would hunt “[the Titans] down with her gray spear, [and with] her brother in slaughter, Ares, by her side” (*Circe* 13).

⁵⁴ Susan Deacy in *Athena* (2008) and Sarah Pomeroy in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves. Women in Classical Antiquity* (1995).

⁵⁵ See *Il*, 5.1015-1017.
Theogony, 886.
Eumenides 736-738.

Additionally, Athena's description in *Circe* is always hued with shades of violence towards other females and men who do not perform male hegemony. In the world Miller and Homer depict, anger (*menin*) and its synonyms are a driving force for men and gods.⁵⁶ Moreover, anger only strikes those socially below, like slaves, women, and children.

Considering Aubin's metaphors of masculinity in literature, Athena's portrayal in *Circe* acquiesces to the definitions of patriarchal masculinity, which must be "potent, penetrating, outward thrusting, initiating, swordlike, able to cut through, ... aimed, hitting the mark, strong, erect" (241). Another point to bear in mind is that masculinity may be associated with men; however, it is not an exclusively male feature. I concur with Diego Malachias Santos (2018) who argues that, although unusual, once we acknowledge the plurality of masculinities, some women can display masculine features (16).

To exemplify that, I return to Athena and Circe's first meeting, in Aiaia, where we are told that Athena's voice "slices the air" (*Circe* 216) and that "she was like a blade honed to a hair's fineness, so delicate you would not even know you had been cut, while beat by beat your blood was emptying on the floor" (*Circe* 217). In both portrayals, the comparison between Athena and a sword – a phallic symbol – is evident. In *Circe*, therefore, the goddess personifies hegemonic masculinity, a kind of masculinity always ready to charge and easily associated with Aubin's metaphors, which are intertwined with anger and violence.

Although Connell and Messerschmidt point out that male hegemony does not equal violence, it can be endorsed by force which ascends through culture, institutions, and persuasion (832). As the witch recalls it, Athena had come "[a]rmed and armored, from head to foot, helmet, spear, aegis, greaves. A terrifying vision: the goddess of war, ready for battle" (*Circe* 217). Like Circe, we may wonder, why would Athena assemble such a panoply against

⁵⁶ Anger and divine wrath are the scope of both Homeric poems. *Menis* (anger) is the word that opens *The Iliad* and, as Clay argues, Odysseus is someone who is constantly provoking wrath (65). Anger is also an important topic in studies of masculinities, for it seems to be the only kind of emotion (hegemonic) men are allowed to acknowledge and demonstrate if they do not wish to be considered inferior in patriarchal societies.

someone who knew nothing of combat (*Circe* 217). Once more, the imagery enhances the hostility and violence that populate the scene: Circe, holding her newborn child, Telegonus, facing the goddess of war, ready to fight with whatever seems fit, words or spears.

Moreover, this first meeting takes place after Circe's realization that Athena was the driving force that had been trying to kill Telegonus. The most remarkable part of this exchange is why Athena desires so strongly to kill him: in doing so, Athena would be protecting Odysseus from death for it had been prophesied that Telegonus would kill his father one day. Not only in this scene is Athena acting as the patriarchal force that tries to separate mother and male child but also as a force that prevents the patriarchal ruler – in this case, Odysseus – from being overthrown.

Secondly, even though Athena is known to bless some feminine arts, like embroidery, and can be associated – to some extent – with the feminine domain of fertility due to her connection to the olive tree, as I claim in Chapter 1, courage and reason are features that identify men as hegemonic in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. Likewise, courage and reason – not to mention war – are Athena's domains. In the impossibility of making Circe give Telegonus to her by force, Athena resorts to stratagems and reasoning.

Circe concludes that Athena cannot directly kill Telegonus for she has been forbidden by the Fates, but also warns us that Athena is

a goddess of argument, born from the bright, relentless mind of Zeus. If she was forbidden something, even by the three gray goddesses themselves,⁵⁷ she would not simply submit. She would set about parsing the constraint down to its atoms, and try to eke a way through (*Circe* 218).

The resemblance with Odysseus, the hegemonic hero, who must relentlessly open ways, through blows or words (*Circe* 253), is quite clear.

⁵⁷ The Fates.

Thirdly, I claim that Athena is a personification of hegemonic masculinity in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* for she is the one who thrusts men into a path that will win them glory and, eventually, destroy them. After returning to Ithaca, Odysseus' change and difficulties in coping with his new life are witnessed by Penelope and Telemachus. In Ithaca, Odysseus no longer has to battle monsters or other men; however "[e]very time he would calm [Athena] came again. Whispering in his ear, darting down from the clouds to fill him up with dreams of all the adventures he was missing" (*Circe* 285). Athena is aware that hers and Odysseus' honor are interconnected through the hero's portion of *kleos*. The less the tales of Odysseus are spread, the faster his glory vanishes. As Odysseus' patron, she cannot allow this.

Besides their shrewdness, I propose that Odysseus is helped by Athena because he represents hegemonic masculinity in that society, especially when it comes to his role as the agent of patriarchy. As someone who portrays heroic masculinity, it is his task to guide young men to build a hegemonic kind of masculinity too, or to abide by the patriarchal requirements of masculinity, like willingness to battle and flight from femininity. In *The Song of Achilles*, Odysseus and Diomedes are responsible for finding Achilles in order to make the young hero take part in the war to come. They track Achilles down and discover that he had been living on the island of Scyros, disguised as a girl.

Up to this encounter, Achilles is steadfastly against fighting at Troy for he knows that his death awaits him on the Trojan shores. More importantly, Odysseus realizes that Achilles wants to withdraw from war. For this reason, Odysseus resorts to the only thing that could make Achilles reconsider, shame. The Ithacan king is aware that he is no match for "the greatest warrior of [their] generation" (*The Song of Achilles* 161), so he threatens Achilles with words. If the Phthian prince refuses to fight, Odysseus will make sure that every inch of the Greek world finds out about his cross-dressing (*The Song of Achilles* 163).

Such an episode, if known by Agamemnon's forces, would not only shame Achilles for not fighting but also emasculate him. As Patroclus explains, "[i]t was one thing to wear a dress out of necessity, another thing for the world to know of it. Our people reserved their ugliest names for men who acted like women; lives were lost over such insults" (*The Song of Achilles* 163). In hiding at Scyros, Achilles is bidding to Thetis's will, for it was the nymph's idea to place the demigod in the forgotten place among other girls. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that this action is double-edged. On the one hand, Thetis tries to strengthen her bond with Achilles and protect him from his death. On the other hand, she is not allowing him to grow and mature to fulfill his fate as a hero – and as a man – in ancient Greek society.

As I have argued before, masculinity encompasses the idea of performance. In Scyros, as it is noticeable, Achilles falls short in his. This realization makes Odysseus the agent of patriarchy: he separates Achilles from Thetis in order to thrust the young man into the most masculine of activities, war. In a metaphorical sense, Odysseus takes Achilles from his mother's reach and gives him to Athena, who symbolizes combat. He is entitled to do so because, as he tells us, "[t]he gray-eyed maiden [Athena]..... Blesses and guards [his] purpose" (*The Song of Achilles* 166). Both scenes – the former in *Circe* and the latter in *The Song of Achilles* – show a hegemonic figure interposing between and attempting to separate mother and son.

Once I have established the connection between Athena and hegemonic masculinity, another aspect the goddess may represent in *Circe* is the destructive potential hegemonic masculinity has. When considering the social group which inhabits Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, competitiveness is a key concept that drives one "to distinguish oneself from others, [and one that] if not tempered by connection to others, is both destructive and self-destructive" (Van Nortwick 22). Moreover, in this group, hegemonic masculinity, like

kleos, is something to be achieved and, despite the fact it can be easily lost, “[b]y publicly demonstrating that he has at least the potential to conform to this model of masculinity, a boy or man may have his masculinity affirmed” (Higate and Hopton 433). As expected, when a man does not conform to this model anymore, his sense of masculine identity may be endangered.

Analyzing Odysseus' behavior after his return from Troy, it is noticeable that he no longer suits the domesticity of Ithaca. One of the reasons behind his restlessness and irritability is Athena,

[the] restless goddess whose schemes spun on and on. She had fought to bring her hero home, to see him lifted among his people, for her honor and his. To hear him tell the tales of his victories, of the deaths they had dealt to the Trojans together. But I [Circe] remembered the greed in her eyes when she spoke of him: an owl with a kill in its claws. Her favorite could never be allowed to grow dull and domestic. He must live in action's eye, bright and polished, always striving and seeking, always delighting her with some new twist of cleverness, some brilliance he summoned out of the air (*Circe* 285).

The image of an owl with a kill in its claws properly illustrates the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and men in *Circe* and *The Song of Achilles* because we are aware that this kind of masculinity is unachievable and endangers men by prompting them to isolation and self-harm.

When men perform heroic/hegemonic masculinity, it becomes clear that they cannot hold up to its standards for a long time. Male hegemony in the society Miller depicts is intertwined with youth, energy, and wit. When Odysseus is not fit anymore – either in shrewdness or physique in *Circe* –, Athena moves on to choose the next hero, leaving her

once chosen one behind, hence evincing the connection between the goddess, hegemonic masculinity, and the ephemerality of the hegemonic status in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*.

2.2 The Crew, the Household, the Kingdom – Odysseus and the Self-Made Man Myth in *Circe*

I started the discussion on Odysseus by comparing part of his heroic identity with Achilles and how both figures portray different kinds of masculinities in ancient Greek society. In this section, however, I investigate the relation the hero's myth has on the making of Anglo-American masculinities and how they can be approximated to the analysis of Miller's Odysseus. In my investigation, to comprehend the figure of Odysseus, it might be useful to go back to the myth of the Self-Made Man, which has contributed to the making of American masculinities since the United States Independence in 1776.

In *Manhood in America: a Cultural History* (2006), Kimmel distinguishes three types of masculine figures that were bound to forge the identity of the recently independent country. Curiously, like in ancient Greece a few centuries before, the theater was the setting of this battle.⁵⁸ Kimmel considers that during the antebellum these three archetypal male figures were the Genteel Patriarch, represented by what has remained of the British aristocracy in the country, the Heroic Artisan, found either in the family farm or in his craft shop (*Manhood in America* 13), and the Self-Made Man, embodied by the figure of the wealthy entrepreneur.

According to Kimmel, the Self-Made Man is “a model of manhood that derives entirely from a man's activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographical and social mobility” (*Manhood in America* 13). Moreover, Kimmel argues, the myth of the Self-Made Man gains strength at the same time the country kickstarts its expansion to the frontier. At the dawn of the 19th century, more and more men were

⁵⁸ Kimmel claims that Royall Tyler's comedy, *The Contrast* (1787), offers a meditation on North-American masculinities in the dawn of the new country.

abandoning their hometowns and heading west, searching for wealth and running away from the constraints of civilization, symbolized by the domestic space inhabited by women.

As Harry Slochower explains in “The Quest for an American Myth” (1970), “[North American] legendary figures are outdoor heroes, wandering like Paul Bunyan [North-American legend] and Davy Crockett [former US representative who was known as the King of the Wild Frontier] through woods and forests, like Mike and Huck Finn [*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*] down the rivers, with captain Ahab [*Moby Dick*] and Wolf Larsen [*The Sea Wolf*] in the Pacific, with Walt Whitman throughout our continent” (224). By approximating Odysseus with these figures of North-American history and literature, it is possible to consider the Greek hero as the Self-Made Man of the mythic world Miller portrays in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*.

First, Odysseus' travels render him geographically and socially mobile. In *Circe*, Odysseus rises up from just a small military leader in the expedition to Troy to the status of a living legend who had outlived not only the last conflict of the heroic age but the raging seas. Second, Odysseus is one of the last figures who pertains to the heroes' age in ancient Greek mythology. From Odysseus' generation onwards, – to which part of his crew belongs – “men constitute the degenerate offspring of the heroes [because] the fresh infusion of divine blood has ceased” (Clay 173). In other words, he is one of the last links between men and gods, which legitimates his status as a Self-Made Man, always ready to move forward, to push to the frontiers between civilization and wilderness. Third, Odysseus does not seem quite eager to be constrained by the domesticity of peace. Although *The Odyssey*, Laura Slatkin (2020) observes, “confirm[s] Odysseus as an estimable husband, son, and father, and as a benevolent king” (182), his attitude toward Telemachus and Penelope in *Circe* can be interpreted otherwise.

Duplicity is one of the many traits which distinguishes Odysseus in Homer as well as in Miller. The hero can be many things, he can assume many identities according to the situation in which he finds himself. While the young men Miller writes may seem naive and quite plain, Odysseus shapes his manner according to each individual — mortal or immortal — he meets in his adventures. Odysseus' distinct stances are linked to both his gendered identity and the status he occupies in the interactions he has.

As Aronson and Kimmel point out, “[w]e create and re-create our own gendered identities within the contexts of our interactions with others and within the institutions we inhabit” (507). Therefore, to shed light on the path of psychological, physical, and social self-destruction the hero blazes, it is interesting to analyze how Odysseus is portrayed by Miller in the positions patriarchal society places him: a father, a husband, a captain, and a king.⁵⁹ As I argued, each of these positions requires a set of prescriptions (and constrictions) that are indissociable from what was expected of hegemonic men in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*.

I affirm so because Odysseus is already an adult man in both novels, who is embedded with all the responsibility to abide by the social rules that govern his gender. On the one hand, as a father and husband, Odysseus is the chief of a household, the *kurios*, and thus must portray himself as capable of overseeing it. On the other hand, as a captain and a king, Odysseus is the commander of men who must at all costs establish his authority, especially as a military leader. Any failure in either portrayal would symbolize a lack of masculine traits, a blow in his portion of glory and hegemonic position.

⁵⁹ Another dissimilarity between Homer's and Miller's portrayals of Odysseus is, in Miller, we have no telling whether Odysseus is a good son to Laertes. Laertes' name appears three times throughout *Circe*, but only as one of Odysseus' epithets. Apart from that, Laertes is mentioned a few times in Telemachus' narrative (*Circe* 262-269). Nonetheless, Laertes' death is another blow on the hero's psychological condition since it hastens the hero's plunging into paranoia (*Circe* 264-266). In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus' return is catalyzed by his social role as a son to Laertes. He should not, like Achilles, leave Laertes defenseless in his old age (*Od*, 24. 226-349).

The figure of Odysseus as a captain overlaps with Odysseus as one of the Greek generals in the Trojan War. Both situations allow us to study this character in a central position where not only can he perform male hegemony but also is expected to do so. Additionally, in these places, Odysseus goes from the domestic sphere of the *kurios* to the public domain of military action. This contrast is important in the Greek world, for “[i]n Homeric poetry there is already a gendered distinction between the private and feminine space within the home with the public and masculine space outside it” (Loney 133). What I observe in this change is not that Odysseus is somewhat emasculated by moving from the battlefield to the realm of domesticity, or vice-versa. What I expect to show, however, is that even in an overly feminine territory, the presence of patriarchal masculinity must be based on the grounds of strength, violence, and authority.

To start with, as I discuss in Chapter 1, masculinity has two forks, the physical and the social. When we turn the discussion to the physical aspect of it, what I perceive is that even though beauty and sexual prowess were part of the construction of masculinity in ancient Greece, the excess of it – associated with the lack of other male traits, like courage in battle, strength, and rhetoric skills – could shame a man. This is noticeable in the figure of Paris, who in the Greek world is the “pretty wife-stealer” (*Circe* 192). Similarly, in the Homeric epics, Paris’s beauty is an object of mockery and contempt.

In Book 3 of *The Iliad*, Paris challenges Menelaus to a single combat that would put an end to the nine-year war. However, when the Trojan prince stares at Menelaus's figure, Paris is afraid, “[b]ut soon as magnificent Paris marked Atrides [Menelaus]/shining among the champions, Paris' spirit shook” (*Il*, 3.34-35). This act of cowardice is scorned by Hector and Helen. The former pointing to Paris’s beauty and sexual prowess, “[o]ur prince of beauty/ mad for women, you lure them all to ruin (*Il*, 3. 44-46), the latter criticizing his flee from the battlefield, “[s]o, home from the wars!/Oh would to god you'd died there, brought down/by

that great soldier, my husband long ago [Menelaus]" (*Il*, 3.499-501). In these scenes what is evinced is how the excellency of the male body must, like all features of hegemonic masculinity, be proved.

Paris may be handsome, "magnificent as a god" (*Il*, 3.17), but he lacks the courage to put his body to harm. Van Nortwick notes that the constant scenes of duels in Homer often depict one warrior being quickly killed or wounded (76). The twofoldness of these scenes is that by focusing on the two warriors, we may overlook the greatest confrontation happening on the battlefield: men against mortality. Nevertheless, when a man survives, there must be a way to prove it and grant him his due share of *kleos*.

In Miller's rewritings of Homer, *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, I perceive it as the role of scars. In the event of laying eyes on Odysseus for the first time, Circe claims that "[the scars] suited him. Enduring Odysseus, he was, and the name was stitched into his skin. Whoever saw him must salute and say: [t]here is a man who has seen the world. There is a captain with stories to tell" (*Circe* 188).⁶⁰ The scars evince attacks on Odysseus' mortality and his courage to face them. As a result, the scars work as marks of his endurance.

Contemporary and Homeric masculinities hold one feature in common: their connection and dependence on the military. In other words, the military is the place that forges masculinity (Aronson and Kimmel 546, Connell 213, Van Nortwick 74) due to a plethora of reasons. First, it is the institution that has historically been built for and by men. Secondly, in modern societies, male citizenship is intertwined with military service. Thirdly, the endurance of the warrior figure as a metonym for masculinity enhances the connection between men and the military.

Despite all these reasons, there is also one observation that clarifies how the military promotes one kind of masculinity "characterized by the domination of weaker individuals, competitiveness, and heroic achievement" (Higate and Hopton 433). If we apply this list to

⁶⁰ *Od*, 1. 1-6.

the characteristics I defined as male hegemonic features in Chapter 1, it is possible to affirm that the kind of masculinity the military endorses is, in fact, the hegemonic type. The relation between the military and maleness paves the way to link hegemonic masculinity with male aggression which, in response, associates men who do not perform male hegemony with lack of aggressiveness.

Furthermore, Aronson and Kimmel point out that “[h]egemonic masculinity corresponds with military masculinity in Western society because both are associated with aggressiveness and readiness to commit acts of violence” (547). Acts of violence are not necessarily directed to one’s enemies. In fact, in my analysis, I focus on two episodes in *Circe* where Odysseus commits violence in the position of captain and general.

From the start, in their first meeting, Circe recognizes that Odysseus is no ordinary man. No ordinary pirate or offender like the lot who have been to Aiaia, “[m]y attention was sharp on him now. Common sailors did not talk of regents, nor look so at home next to silver inlay. He was leaning on the carved arm of the chair as if it were his bed” (*Circe* 175). However, the most dazzling part of this exchange is when the witch and the hero go to the sty so Circe can bring Odysseus' crew back to human form again.

There, Circe realizes that Odysseus' men must have been rather young when they sailed to Troy,

[t]he pigs squealed, but when they saw [Odysseus] behind me their terror eased. I brushed each snout with oil and spoke a charm. Their bristles fell away and they rose to their feet as men. They ran to him, weeping and pressing their hands to his. He wept as well, not loudly but in great streams, until his beard was wet and dark. They looked like a father and his wayward sons. How old had they been when he'd left for Troy? Scarcely more than boys, most of them (*Circe* 183).

However, Odysseus is not as fatherly as he seems in this first scene.

As their captain, he must resort to other methods when necessary. If men acted against his orders, “he would shout, or strike them” (*Circe* 283). The notion that these men perceive Odysseus as a father-figure, who can either punish or protect them, draws our attention to the bond that men forge inside the military, and, more importantly, to the extent to which the leader position is woven with the hegemonic portrayal of one who must be willing to resort to violence. From a simple scolding to leaving men to perish on an island, Odysseus is the hero in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* who gathers *kleos* even when he acts against his own.

As a captain, Odysseus' greatest act of violence is returning home without any member of his crew. At the time Odysseus' crew reached Aiaia, their captain reveals to Circe that he had lost eleven of his twelve ships that had sailed to Troy. In numbers, Odysseus had lost “more than five hundred men” (*Circe* 181) before his landing on Circe's island. However, in Homer, “Odysseus' solitary survival, his return home [*nostos*] without ship or crew, is presented not as a failure of leadership on his part, but as his men's fatal inability to match Odysseus' capacity for shrewd judgment, for endurance, and for self-restraint” (Slatkin 181). What *The Odyssey* contrasts, thus, is Odysseus' kind of masculinity to the improper kind of masculinity his crew performs. Moreover, because it is clear that Odysseus' crew share some resemblance with the outrageous suitors – Odysseus claims his crew “behave like beasts” (*Circe* 175) –, their deaths are somewhat expected and used by the poet, and even by Miller, to raise Odysseus to a heroic status.

Nevertheless, it is as a warlord that Odysseus shows his true colors as a man ready to do anything to gather glory. It is at the Trojan excursion that Odysseus connects hegemonic masculinity not only with the physical excellence of Achilles or Ajax but with his *metis*. To associate the hero with *metis* is, therefore, to return to the figure of Athena and the rather distinct representations of war. The Greek war camp is the place where Odysseus puts his

cunningness to work. Just like the goddess with whom Odysseus has most in common, he plots and spurs, beats, and screams.

One of the most famous passages of *The Iliad* is the beating of the insubordinate Thersites by Odysseus.⁶¹ Here, Miller evinces the less noble side of Odysseus as an outcome of his position in the army, “Odysseus had endless patience for Agamemnon’s caprice, but with those beneath him he could be harsh as winter storms” (*Circe* 253). Odysseus beats Thersites not only because he is willing to harness men’s wills (*Circe* 253), but also because no other hero would debase himself to do so. If a man did not want to fight, that would shame him, not the ones ready to battle. However, Odysseus’ practical reasoning could not let men mutiny. In a way, as Miller shows us, Odysseus is the one who keeps the war going on through his twists and turns.

In Homeric tradition as well as in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, Odysseus is the hero who “promise[s] mercy to spies so they will spill their story, then kill[s] them after.⁶² [Who] beat[s] men who mutiny. [Who] coax[es] heroes from their sulks. [Who] keep[s] spirits high at any cost” (*Circe* 187); the hero who leaves allies behind to die (*Circe* 187).⁶³

Differently from other heroes, he is the one who prefers to gain glory using his wit instead of sheer brutality,

Ajax and Agamemnon would have battered at Troy’s locked gates until they died, but it was I [Odysseus] who thought of the trick of the giant horse, and I spun the story that convinced the Trojans to pull it inside. I crouched in the wooden belly with my picked men, and if any shook with terror and strain, I put my knife to his throat.⁶⁴

When the Trojans finally slept, we tore through them like foxes among soft-feathered chicks (*Circe* 187).

⁶¹ *Il*, 2.246-325.

⁶² *Il*, 10.105-500.

⁶³ *Il*, 2.819-825.

⁶⁴ *Od*, 4.256-260; *Od*, 8.502-520.

A first impression would render Odysseus lacking in heroism or male hegemony. He is not as strong as an Ajax or an Achilles – “I [Odysseus] am a fair enough warrior, but I know where I end” (*Circe* 196), or as chivalric as a Patroclus, as Miller rewrites him – “[Patroclus] never liked me [Odysseus] much, but then the good ones never do” (*Circe* 185). Be that as it may, it is unquestionable that Troy’s conquest was only possible due to his schemes. Odysseus, like Athena, resorts to any necessary means – honorable or not – to win and gather honor.

On the other hand, I acknowledge that, although the hero is a metonym of masculinity, the status does not prevent hegemonic men from performing deeds against our expectations of heroism. In the end, Odysseus' words are as fit for destruction as his acts. Occupying the hegemonic position of a captain allows him to promote violence against others without, paradoxically, harming his reputation. After Achilles' death and defeating Ajax in a duel, Odysseus is named the *Aristos Achaion*, the Best of the Greeks, a title that settles his positioning as hegemonic and propels him in a path of social, psychological, and physical self-destruction.

Once Odysseus has been discussed as a military leader, it is crucial to analyze the counterpart of war and the overly masculine Homeric world: the *oikos* (the household) and the contributions of this domestic space to the construction of masculinities in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. As Wilson notes, “Odysseus longs to recover his own identity, not as a victim of shipwreck or a coddled plaything of a powerful goddess, but as a master of his home and household, as a father and as a husband” (3). I perceive that this longing reflects Odysseus' desire to recover his identity as a hegemonic man for three reasons.

First, after the end of the Trojan War, the warriors go back to their lands where they can receive their share of glory which, to this point, would have reached the farthest places of the Greek world. Second, outside Ithaca and the confines of his ship, Odysseus does not occupy any position of power. Despite Ithaca’s irrelevance in comparison with Agamemnon’s

Mycenae or Menelaus's Sparta, during his homecoming, Odysseus' identity fluctuates between a guest and a beggar. Both positions put the once-great hero in the hands of other men.

A third reason may be pointed out, even in Aiaia and Ogygia, places where the hero found himself sharing the beds of a goddess, he is still disenfranchised. The *oikos* is a gendered space, regulated by "marriage and the begetting of legitimate children" (Berg 98). Not only is Odysseus not married to either of them but also he is rather submissive to representatives of the female gender. He has no say in Circe's island and he seems quite unwilling to share Calypso's bed (*Od*, 7. 81-85). Therefore, it is possible to state that his household at Ithaca is the place that endorses Odysseus' hegemony.

In Ithaca, Odysseus abides by the prescriptions of Athenian masculinity. As a result, his wife, children, and servants must see him as their lord (*kurios*). Another point of interest to us is that in the society Miller depicts, fathers and sons were by law responsible for each other. Any man who failed to protect, provide, or take care of his father and/or his son, would be considered a lesser man. As Barry S. Strauss in *Fathers and Sons in Athens: Ideology and Society in the Era of the Peloponnesian War* (1993) argues, "law remains an immensely valuable window into a culture: it provides one of the most authoritative models of what a society idealizes and also of what a society fears, indicated by its legal prohibitions" (62). However, the anxieties that lay beneath the Athenian law, which establishes the relation between fathers and sons, reveal the possibility of men attacking other men's honor.

Consequently, if necessary, father and son must preserve their reputation. Roisman notes,

[Attic speakers] told of fathers' taking the legal steps to certify their sons' legitimacy and ensure their free status of seeing to their sons' education and mentoring them of planning their careers and arranging their marriages...They reflected the

expectations that the son would continue the family line, show his father respect, comply with his wishes, and stand by him if he were attacked (41).

The most suitable example of a son protecting his father's reputation is the story that works as a background to the plot of *The Odyssey*, the tale of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes.

The story of Clytemnestra evinces why patriarchal masculinity aims to regulate female sexuality at the same time it establishes the most important duty in the father-son relationship, the safeguard of the family's honor. Notwithstanding, to evince how strong the bond between fathers and sons is, *The Odyssey* shows us another son carrying on the father's honor in the figure of Neoptolemus, Achilles' offspring. Odysseus meets both heroes, Agamemnon and Achilles, in the underworld. While Achilles regrets his glorious death, which prevents him from protecting Peleus from being ashamed (*Od*, 11.501-505), he still feels joy for Neoptolemus's triumphs (*Od*, 11.538-541). A similar lesson is taught by Agamemnon: had the king of Mycenae died without having fathered a male child, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus would have been left unpunished.

Odysseus faces a similar position. He has left his father, Laertes, unprotected and his wife, as far as he is aware, might be plotting his death with a lover. Odysseus knows so and reveals that the idea of Telemachus avenging him is strange but comforting (*Circe* 196). Furthermore, *The Odyssey* finishes depicting three generations of the same family – Laertes, Odysseus, and Telemachus – defending their shared honor.

As Strauss notes,

[i]n the last scene of the *Odyssey*, for example, Odysseus, his son Telemakhos and his aged father Laertes all prepare for battle against the friends and families of the suitors. Odysseus admonishes his son not to shame their forefathers [*paterôn genos*], and Telemakhos replies manfully. It is Laertes, however, who gets the most pleasure out of the interchange (74).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *Od*, 24.515-517.

In this exchange, another remarkable feature is that the battle the suitors' fathers wage against Odysseus' family should also be acknowledged as legitimate. After all, they are fathers who, by law or prompted by the honor/shame system that regulates masculinity, are bound to avenge their sons, ashamed by Odysseus. Laertes mirrors them for he is protecting his son's and grandson's reputation.

What is suggested in *The Odyssey* and in *Circe* is that, even though Odysseus had not been present during Telemachus' formative years, if Odysseus is killed – either by the suitors or by another warrior at Troy –, “[his] son will take to the seas. He will hunt down those men who laid [Odysseys] low. [Telemachus] will stand before them and say, [y]ou dared to spill the blood of Odysseus, and now yours is spilled in turn” (*Circe* 196). It is noticeable that some moral standard approximates Telemachus and Penelope. Despite Odysseus' absence, both must remain faithful to him and not stain his honor. Nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that the greatest feature that defines Odysseus as a father is distance from his children, a fact stated in both nouns, Telemachus and Telegonus.

The prefix *tele*, in ancient Greek, means distant. Telemachus is named after his father's ability with the bow, “[d]istant fighter, it mean[s]” (*Circe* 196), whereas Telegonus means the one who is born at a distance. This corroborates with the notion that in patriarchal societies absent fathers are crucial to male hegemony. In the Anglo-American context, for instance, men must protect and provide for their families. Mothers, on the other hand, have one task ahead: to keep the father as a constant reminder of what the boy must achieve and idealize for himself. In *Circe*, Penelope is the one who keeps Odysseus in Telemachus' mind (196) while Circe is the one who tells Telegonus Odysseus' tales.

Despite this, it is noticeable that Odysseus regrets losing Telemachus' rearing, “I know his mother will keep me in his mind, but I was leading the hunts by his age. I had killed a boar myself. I only hope there will still be something to teach him when I return. I want to

leave some mark upon him” (*Circe* 197). What we can imply from this declaration is that a father must establish his distance up to a point. The rearing of a male child requires, in the patriarchal society Miller depicts in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, a sort of specific knowledge – kept by the father – without which the boy cannot fully develop.

In *The Odyssey*, Telemachus has some father-like figures⁶⁶ who teach him the importance of hospitality, a central feature of elite masculinity in the Homeric epics. Nonetheless, “only his real father, Odysseus himself, can help Telemachus achieve what he most wants: a position of greater power in his own household” (Wilson 49), which can only be done by the punishment of the suitors. On the other hand, once Telemachus is able to stand against the suitors, the need for a returning hero would become pointless. From this perspective, it cannot be overlooked that the relationship between fathers and sons, like the relationship among other men in a patriarchal society, is based on competition.

Odysseus' return to Ithaca in *Circe* is less favorable to a father-son reunion because it exhibits an obvious problem: two warriors of aristocratic lineage – Odysseus and Telemachus – and only one throne to be occupied. In Aiaia, Telemachus reveals to Circe that Odysseus had exiled him due to fear of conspiracy, “I [Telemachus] was shut from [Odysseus'] councils. I was barred from the hall. I heard him shouting at my mother that she had nursed a viper” (*Circe* 267); that the war had turned Odysseus restless and violent and, in the end, he grieved he had “never met the father everyone told me [he] had” (*Circe* 261). Instead, his father was “this man of rage” (*Circe* 268) who couldn't even mourn the passing of his old nurse, Eurycleia.

If we bear in mind the hostility with which Odysseus treated the men under his command, we may find parallels to his change of heart toward Telemachus and even his anger against Telegonus. One aspect which is clear in *Circe* is that Odysseus not only misses the war, but also he desperately sees his glory vanishing. As a hegemonic man, he should be

⁶⁶ Eumaeus, Nestor, Menelaus, and Mentor (Athena).

always fighting, plotting, and pillaging. Peaceful Ithaca was not the place for such action. In his restlessness, Odysseus spends the rest of his days patrolling the beaches, awaiting for pirates and raiders until he finds his death.

In an accident that had been foretold by the Fates, Telegonus kills his own father on the shores of Ithaca. As Telegonus tells us, Odysseus had barely set eyes on him before charging (*Circe* 252). A thorough analysis of the exchange evinces that Odysseus is killed due to his inability to cope with the possibility of being overthrown, especially by someone he believes is inferior, “Odysseus' favorite pose had been to pretend that he was a man like other men, but there were none like him, and now that he was dead, there were none at all. All heroes are fools, he liked to say. What he meant was, all heroes but me” (*Circe* 271). Nevertheless, I analyze Odysseus' death in the light of the toll male hegemony has on men in the next section of this chapter. For now, it suffices to state that the hegemonic prescription of masculinity stranges fathers and sons.

In *Circe*, Odysseus has two sons whom he could not see clearly (271). To the hero, while Telemachus is a traitor, Telegonus is a pirate, and neither – according to him – is clever, brave, or strong enough to rule his kingdom or match his achievements. However, as Circe warns us, “no parent can truly see their child. When we look we see only the mirror of our own faults” (*Circe* 271). In fact, Odysseus' unrest in his final years only points to that. His outbursts against Telemachus may reflect his own inability to defend his family and property against the greed suitors. As *kurios* (lord of the household), that was Odysseus' responsibility – not Telemachus' – and his greatest flaw as a man in the patriarchal society Miller portrays in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. This flaw could tarnish his glory since, due to the ephemerality of *kleos*, the tales about his deeds at Troy were being replaced by other tales.

After Eurycleia's passing, “[Odysseus] set out on a skiff and came back a month later with gold belts and cups and a new breastplate, and splashes of dried blood on his clothes”

(*Circe* 268) and started raiding again. In Odysseus' pirate excursions to the islands near Ithaca, there is a rumor that he had fathered a child. Although we are not told the child's gender, that would have meant a clean slate to Odysseus, a second chance to rear a male child according to his hegemonic standards and worthy of his kingdom and name. Interpreted that way, I perceive that Odysseus' anger in fact is not against his sons, but towards himself, for he was not able to rear or protect neither and not act as a proper *kurios*. However, he does fit the most hegemonic of male portrayals in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, the soldier.

2.3 The Restless Slumber – Odysseus as a Contemporary Soldier

While *The Odyssey*, Wilson argues, “raises questions about whether Odysseus, as a fighter who has spent ten years at war, sacking and pillaging a foreign city, can adapt himself enough to succeed in an entirely different context – or whether he will bring the battlefield home with him” (66), *Circe* confirms those suspicions and states that, in fact, the hero cannot fit in a domestic arena, the warlord identity gradually overcomes the *kurios*'s. As I have demonstrated, the world Miller depicts in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* is a world divided into two spheres, the *oikos* and the battlefield, which can, nonetheless, assume interchangeable identities.

Odysseus' revenge, for instance, takes place in the space of the household, which, according to Alexander C. Looney (2020), “is an ethically ambiguous event, since it seems to glorify a form of domestic violence” (134). However, when we consider – as Miller does – Odysseus' tale as “at one level the story of an exhausted war veteran who is desperate to get home to his family. And when he finally gets home to his family, he discovers that it's much harder to re-enter his old life than he thought it would be” (Klein, “Miller on Myth”), it is possible to analyze Odysseus as a man who cannot cope with peace for two reasons: first, his achievement of the title of *Aristos Achaion* (Best of the Greeks) after Achilles' death in Troy

kindles in Odysseus an insatiable desire for glory. Second, for his anachronistic position as a man of war living in times of peace.

In *Circe*, Odysseus is the last of the heroes who fought at Troy to get home. This fact alone puts him in a rather distinct position because, in the patriarchal world Miller depicts, *kleos* and *nostos* are bound to be mutually exclusive. The relation is quite straightforward: men die at war and gain *kleos*. On the other hand, men return home and what awaits them is to become like “Nestor in *The Iliad*, reciting the litany of fallen heroes that went before to spur on a new generation” (Hedges 11). Moreover, bearing in mind the honor/shame system which regulates masculinity in this society, “*kleos* functions as compensation for the hero’s untimely death” (Garcia Jr. 167). Similarly, only hegemonic men gather enough *kleos* to be remembered after their passing.

In other words, glory is the reward a man gets for performing hegemonic masculinity in the most masculine of activities, war. Conspicuously, Odysseus' destiny seems not to comply with that demand either, for we are told that “he was destined to be killed by the sea” (*Circe* 254). The prophecy, it is interesting to notice, sustains Odysseus' ambivalence. It is impossible to point out whether Odysseus will be killed in a shipwreck or near the sea. What is clear, though, is Odysseus' ability to transform either place, the sea and the household, into a battlefield.

As Slatkin points out, “*The Odyssey* gives Odysseus the *aristeia* [(courage)] he lacks in the *Iliad*, and Penelope puts in his hands the necessary weapon [the bow] for it” (181). On the shores of Troy, Circe explains, Odysseus cannot use his bow due to politics. The bow is Paris’s weapon and to be leveled to Paris is to be deemed as a coward (*Circe* 192). Nevertheless, as Circe reveals, even though “[Odysseus] had left his bow behind when he went to war, the pain had followed him” (*Circe* 192). More interestingly, Odysseus reveals that he regrets this decision, for in the Greek camp “[n]o bowman would ever have been made

Best of the Greeks, no matter how skilled he was” (*Circe* 192). In this sentence, Odysseus subtly marks his desire to become the *Aristos Achaion*; it shows that, no matter how anxious for getting home he might have looked like, Odysseus did not fancy to be known simply as the king of “barren Ithaca” (*The Song of Achilles* 14), an island of goats.

Not only does the bow connect Odysseus with cowardice – a rather unmanly feature –, but also the hero shows himself as quite unheroic. Odysseus is the man behind “[a] thousand wily conspiracies and trials” (*Circe* 229), callous instead of unflinching, whose greatest deeds are not performed on the battlefield, but during what should have been a bloodless, quite harmonious voyage back. Like Telemachus, we can suspect that Odysseus chooses the route back home which would confer him more glory – and more disaster to others.

As an example, when we analyze the scene with the Cyclops, it is quite obvious that Odysseus and the surviving men would have escaped unscathed, if, in a moment of pride, Odysseus had not revealed his identity.⁶⁷ Like Telemachus, we may ask, “[w]hy did his men go to that cave in the first place? ... And Poseidon’s wrath that everyone pitied him for?” (*Circe* 279). And, like Telemachus, we can assume that it is only because Odysseus wanted more treasure and more fame.

However, it is worth wondering why that is so. Clay notes that “[Athena] is named as the judge in the famous contest between Ajax and Odysseus over the arms of the slain Achilles” (Clay 46).⁶⁸ As I have discussed in the first section of this chapter, Athena champions hegemonic men. In a contest between two warriors who undoubtedly perform male hegemony, she must crown the one who fits more in the definition. Moreover, there is a subtle connection between Achilles’ armor and the hero’s destiny: despite one’s greatness, death shall come and the title of *aristos* is as ephemeral as the generations of men who walk the earth.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Od.* 9, 492-507.

⁶⁸ *Od.* 11.547.

⁶⁹ *Il.* 6.

If, in *The Iliad*, the apparel connects Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector with their doom, in the contest between Ajax and Odysseus, it epitomizes Achilles' glory. Getting a man's armor is an act of emasculating and dominating him on the battlefield. In *The Iliad*, a plethora of scenes portray men dying and being deprived of their armor by other men. Achilles may be already dead, but his glory is immortal and so is his armor, made by the god Hephaestus himself.⁷⁰

The armor is proof that it belongs to a generation of men who “walked among [heroes]. [Men who] stood against Hector. [Men whose] sons will tell the tale” (*Circe* 195). Like women and war spoils, the armor is the embodiment of a man's honor. If Achilles was the best of the Greeks due to his skills in battle, the man who inherits his armor would be the next owner of the title. Nevertheless, in so doing Odysseus is prompted to maintain such a status. What the armor symbolizes, then, is Achilles' double destiny: the greatest warrior may become the Best of the Greeks, however, the price is his life.

On the one hand, getting the armor enhances the hero's similarities with Athena: he is the “hand that gather[s] all those pieces and make[s] them whole. [The] mind [that] guide[s] the purpose, and not flinch[es] from war's necessities” (*Circe* 186). On the other hand, he becomes a knife sliced to the bone (*Circe* 182). Years of battle and sea have their toll on Odysseus' body and mind.

In this section, I discuss how Odysseus' identity is undone physically, socially, and psychologically through his status as the most hegemonic man in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. I start this analysis by establishing the connection between Odysseus' psychological decline and the Trojan War. As we have become aware, “[m]ilitarized masculinity, and especially actual participation in combat, leaves psychological and physical scars on men” (Aronson and Kimmel 815). One sign that Odysseus is psychologically unstable is evinced by his sleep and his subtle changes in mood.

⁷⁰ *Il*, 18.547-720.

Circe reveals that

Odysseus' slumber was like his life, tossed and restless, heavy with murmurs that made my wolves prick up their ears. I watched him in the pearl-gray light of dawn: the tremors of his face, the striving tension in his shoulders. He twisted the sheets as if they were opponents he tried to throw in a wrestling match. A year of peaceful days he had stayed with me, and still every night he went to war (*Circe* 200).

Moreover, Circe acknowledges that the only one able to control Odysseus' restlessness was her, “[w]hen he had lived with me, I’d smoothed all those things away, wrapping him in my magic and divinity.” (*Circe* 268). Similarly, back in Ithaca, Penelope is one of the few who can be closer to him without triggering anger or contempt. This suggests that, as Kimmel points out, the separation of spheres – house/work in North-American society; the battlefield/*oikos* in ancient Greek – produces men unable to confront their emotional needs without women (*Manhood in America* 38).

Likewise, taking into consideration the relation Saint-Aubin establishes between masculinity and the male body, men cannot be “inquisitive, persistent, steady, objective, courageous, discriminating, dominant” (248) all the time. Rather, men must, quite frequently, resort to what Saint-Aubin denotes as testicular qualities: patience, stability, and endurance (250). In fact, enduring is another adjective attributed to Odysseus, the hero who has “endured the agonies of war, and struggled through the dangers of the sea” (*Od*, 8.183-184). Nevertheless, bearing in mind the ambivalence of Odysseus' name, it is possible to infer that Odysseus is a man who not only endures but also inflicts trouble (Clay 56).

On the other hand, peace means little to no trouble. Barren Ithaca becomes an unlikely destiny for the “man of war, honed by twenty years of strife. The Best of the Greeks after Achilles” (*Circe* 263). The character who can confirm the relation between Odysseus' undoing and war is the one who – but for Athena – matches Odysseus in thinking, Penelope. The

queen of Ithaca discloses the illusion embedded in Telemachus' and Circe's narrative, "[Telemachus] will have implied that his father was lost in the war. That he came home changed, too soaked in death and grief to live as an ordinary man. The curse of soldiers" (*Circe* 283). It is important to bear in mind that before marrying Odysseus, Penelope lived in Sparta, where they know everything about soldiering (*Circe* 283).

After comparing some of her husband's actions with the actions of old soldiers victims of war traumatic events (*Circe* 283), Penelope concludes that

[m]y husband's hands were [as] steady as a blacksmith's, and when the trumpets sounded, he was first to the harbor scanning the horizon. The war did not break him; it made him more himself. At Troy he found at last a scope to equal his abilities. Always a new scheme, a new plot, a new disaster to avert (*Circe* 283).

Penelope's memories make it clear that Odysseus, the most hegemonic man in this world, the Best of the Greeks, neither wants nor can afford to live in peace, inglorious, and forgotten. In light of this idea, I return to two of the most brutal episodes in *Circe*, the suitor's slaughter and Odysseus' death.

Contrary to Homer, from the outset, Circe displays – rather unfavorably – the intractability and the ruthlessness with which Odysseus punishes the suitors and the maids,

[o]f course they had not stood a chance. They were green boys, overfed and spoiled. It made a good tale: the suitors, lazy and cruel, besieging the faithful wife, threatening the royal heir. They had earned their punishment by all the laws of gods and men, and Odysseus came like Death himself to deal it, the wronged hero making the world right (*Circe* 263).

If, on the one hand, Odysseus had the right – according to Athenian law – to expel and punish the suitors; on the other hand, when he uses this excess of violence and transforms the room into a bloodbath, he demonstrates that he cannot act reasonably anymore.

As Clay notes, “[t]he story of Odysseus, the Man of Wrath, must be understood in terms of his both provoking and incurring wrath” (Clay 65). Odysseus' wrath confirms Telemachus' critique of his father, “[h]e could boast all he liked of the war, but all he had brought home was death” (*Circe* 267). The following days after his killing of the suitors and the maids lead to a series of conflicts with the fathers of the suitors as well as the fathers of his crew. Another episode which the likely ending would have been another bloodshed had Athena not intervened. It is important to ask why Odysseus' homecoming triggers so much violence and conflict in Ithaca and the possible outcome for the island.

Stephen Minta in “Homer and Joyce: the case of Nausicaa” (2007) notes that “Odysseus' actions, whether morally justifiable or not, have changed Ithaca forever. The island can never now resemble the home he has thought about for twenty years. No family will be untouched, all will hate Odysseus. The social and economic future of the island is hardly imaginable” (118). On another note, Ithaca can simulate the hero's mental state. After the passing of Eurycleia, Odysseus did not stay to burn her pyre and mumbled he was tired of living among ashes (*Circe* 268). Odysseus' choice of word is quite provocative, for ashes here may symbolize not only the transformation of Eurycleia's corpse but also allude to Odysseus' travel to the Underworld, the house of Death, where everything becomes grayish like ashes and shadows.

In the Underworld, it is possible to establish a comparison between Odysseus and his contemporaries. This scene already evinces the anachronistic nature of Odysseus, for there he met Agamemnon, Achilles, Patroclus, and Ajax, “bearing the wound he gave himself” (*Circe* 205). I analyze this scene contemplating two outlooks: openly, Odysseus is undead in the land of the dead; that is, he is an element who does not quite belong to the scene. On another note, I perceive him as a hero who outlives his own heroic age. The Best of the Greeks goes back to a time in which the hero has no battles to fight because all their battles were done (*Circe* 205).

Both aspects, however, suggest that this world of shadows inhabited by heroes of the past awaits Odysseus, that the land of the dead is the venue where hegemonic men can finally find rest.

Returning to the second episode in *Circe* where the display of hegemonic traits promotes the hero's undoing, I discuss the battle between Telegonus and Odysseus. Although I discuss Telegonus' relationship with Odysseus further in chapter 3, the confrontation scene is an important one to unveil the extent to which Odysseus was hurt physically, mentally, and socially after he had achieved immortal glory as the Best of the Greeks. When Telegonus reaches Ithaca and glimpses Odysseus' figure at the beach, the reception is quite joyless.

Before dying, Odysseus mistakes Telegonus for a raider,

I [Telegonus] thought he [Odysseus] knew me too. But he was shouting. He said I could not steal from him and raid his lands. He would teach me a lesson ...[Odysseus] was running towards me [Telegonus]. I said that he misunderstood. I had the permission of his son, the prince. It only made him angrier. I am ruler here, he said. [Odysseus] stood over me (*Circe* 252).

The scene ends up with Telegonus accidentally killing his father and fleeing back to Aiaia with Penelope and Telemachus.

The investigation of the hero figure and his anachronistic portrayal may shed some light on why such dreadful acts take place. Van Nortwick notes that the boom of Drama in classical Athens, which puts on the spotlight the confused figure of the soldier, evinces how ancient Greek society was not prepared to deal with the return of soldiers – in its majority, men – from battle. As expected, in times of peace, “lesser people depend on them, but in doing so they risk disaster if the hero's will and pride lead him to destructive and self-destructive acts” (81). In his final days, it is exactly as a man with no self-control that Odysseus is portrayed. All his actions are marked with violence. He pillages, shuts himself

with a few counselors, and patrols Ithaca's shores. All this culminates with Athena abandoning him, the final proof that he is not worthy of gathering *kleos* as the Best of the Greeks anymore.

Establishing a comparison between Odysseus and contemporary Anglo-American men, I perceive that there is a sphere which both figures occupy – although rather differently –, the work domain. As a representative of patriarchal masculinity, it is Odysseus' duty to achieve glory in order to maintain his hegemonic status and not shame the name of his father and forefathers. Not surprisingly, war provides the means to do so. Similarly, “[e]ven with contemporary changes in family structure, the breadwinner role has tremendous consequences for men's perceptions of themselves both within the home and in the workplace” (Aronson and Kimmel 109). Odysseus fears that if he fails in protecting his island or plundering others, not only will he lose his hegemonic status but also he will be replaced by another man who will eventually shame him.

It is implied in *Circe* that Odysseus perceives himself as an aging king who can only live in the stories he once recited to his men as a bard (*Circe* 184; *Circe* 185). He is now just like Achilles, a shadow of what he once was, a limping-gray figure (*Circe* 182) who cannot cope with his forceful retirement and the fading of his glory. As a result, Odysseus keeps risking his life in a perpetual state of mental warfare, withdraws from his wife and heir, and creates a path that leads him to his death without ever meeting his second child or living peacefully as a fair king.

In other words, “Odysseus is uncontainable, unreconciled. It is no surprise to find him leaving Ithaca again, in the stories that appear from Apollodorus to Tennyson” (Minta 118). Odysseus may be an open-ended character, *polytropos*; but, above all, he is a “man about whom songs are made” (*Circe* 258). When one inquires

the extent to which Odysseus can fully live outside the songs, one recognizes that Odysseus' survival is intertwined with his own ability of concocting tales as well.⁷¹

The tale Miller's Odysseus weaves is the tale of a self-made duplicitous war hero, a lighter version of the North-American Self-Made Man, who must stand alone on the shores of a time to which he feels he does not belong anymore. Kimmel points out that in the early 19th century, when men could not escape to the west or to the nearest pond – an allusion to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* –, men resorted to myth and fantasy (*Manhood in America* 43). As a man trapped in the *oikos*, Odysseus' behavior evinces the hero's attempts to escape the domesticity of Ithaca – a feminizing place that had been ruled by queen Penelope for far too long – through his tales and voyages.

Moreover, in Ithaca Odysseus, like The Self-Made Man, longs to make his history again, he yearns for a place that would reestablish his sense of masculine identity. It is no wonder that when the hero has no more tales to tell or cities to conquer – stories that would endorse the masculine features of courage, sexual prowess, and establish his distance from women –, Odysseus falls in a self-made trap which gradually takes its toll on his mind and alienates him from his family. The hero cannot stand living among ashes because these are what men – hegemonic or not – become in a world where there is little to no *kleos* to be achieved and every action, from dawn to dusk, is quite ordinary.

⁷¹In the Phaeacian court (Books 8 through 12 of *The Odyssey*), Odysseus tells his story like a bard, which convinces the king and queen to acquiesce to Odysseus' request for a ship and crew which makes his safe return to Ithaca possible (*Od*, 9.3-20).

Chapter 3: Telemachus and Telegonus, under the Shadow of the Father

“For few sons are equal to their fathers,
more are worse; and few indeed are better”

(The Odyssey, 2.279-280)

If ancient and modern theories on masculinity find it difficult to refute the commonplace assumption that masculinity is something inherently found in men, then it is

fair to consider that it might be difficult to dismiss the idea that masculinity is something that passes on, from father to son. In this light, masculinity is something that can be achieved, lost, and, more importantly, taught and mirrored. Moreover, considering the prescriptions of Athenian masculinity, which bind together fathers and sons through power institutions, the responsibility of bearing and bestowing this knowledge on future generations falls on the former.

In the overly masculine world *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* depict, after Achilles' passing, Odysseus is the model of masculinity that every boy and man must follow, for “[Odysseus] shaped kingdoms ... [and] the thoughts of men. Before him, all the heroes were Heracles and Jason. Now children will play at voyaging, conquering hostile lands with wits and words” (*Circe* 329). In a post-Trojan War world, marked by the demise of an entire generation of heroes (*Works and Days* 156-169), the figure of Odysseus can be associated with a link to a glorious past as well as to the daring, bold men who challenged the borders of the known Mediterranean world, and even to the threshold between the world of the living and the land of the dead.⁷²

Similarly, as I discussed in Chapter 2, to some extent, Odysseus' tales can be compared to the stories of Self-Made Men of American literature and folklore, like Herman Melville's Captain Ahab (*Moby Dick*), Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby (*The Great Gatsby*), and the cowboy figure in the unruly west during the early 19th century. In this new world, Odysseus represents the lost masculinity of the greatest heroes of his time. In the multitudes Odysseus contains, there is room to find the intrepid entrepreneur, the captain of a ship conquering the raging oceans, or the man on the brink of the civilized Greek world exploring the wild barbaric frontier.⁷³

⁷² *The Odyssey*, Book 11.

⁷³ In *The Odyssey*, almost every time Odysseus and his men reach a new place, they wonder whether they will find men who respect the gods and the law of *xenia* (hospitality). In other words, if they will find people used to the Greek civilization process. *Od.* 6.119-125; *Od.* 9.107-108; *Od.* 10.100-102.

However, another relation I would like to establish is the one between the upbringing of Telemachus and Telegonus and a post-Trojan War world in which heroism, just like in the early 20th century United States (*Manhood in America* 127), had begun to lose part of its brilliance. I argue so because, as Strauss points out, “[f]ather-son tension can be found throughout the entire period of ancient Greek culture, from the myth of Zeus and Kronos on” (13).⁷⁴ Besides that, it is clear that the father-son relationship in ancient Greece was also built upon competitiveness endorsed by a rather persistent notion that men who belonged to older generations were essentially better than men who were part of the younger ones.⁷⁵

To exemplify that, right at the core of *The Odyssey* lies a problem with ambiguous features: Odysseus' return. On the one hand, it may spur joy and assert the return of the *kurios* to his rightful place. On the other hand, it would (re)kindle the anxiety of succession.⁷⁶ As Wilson notes, *The Odyssey* also depicts Telemachus' journey to mature fully into his masculine role, which is defined by the expectations of assuming control of his father's household and wealth (51) — a desire expressed whole-heartedly in Euricleia's eloquent pledge to the young man in the epic, “[c]hild, I wish you would/take charge of all the household management/ and guard the wealth” (*Od*, 19.22-24). However, the poet of *The Odyssey* omits that Odysseus has a time limit to come back and overlooks the idea that had Odysseus reached Ithaca after Telemachus' complete takeover as the *kurios*, there would have been no need for his homecoming after all.

In *Circe*, however, what Miller depicts is how the estrangement of twenty years from his family is the domestic aftermath and how his absence acts as a cornerstone of Telemachus and Telegonus' formation. Whereas Telegonus attempts to recreate the heroic aspects of his

⁷⁴ See *The Theogony* 492-506.

⁷⁵ See the epigraph to this chapter
See *Works and Days* 106-201.
Il, 1.305-312.

⁷⁶ Several passages of *The Odyssey* hint that Telemachus is bound to assume his father's place. The last books of the epic even stress the need for Penelope to marry one of the suitors to preserve whatever had remained of Telemachus' inheritance.

father's myth, Telemachus' struggle is to disengage from any trace of male hegemony he may have inherited from Odysseus and patriarchal society. Both characters undergo distinct processes of creating a masculine identity, which are deeply intertwined with the influence of Odysseus' figure and myth in Miller's retelling.

Telemachus and Telegonus have Odysseus as a model of hegemonic masculinity. While the former abhors any resemblance with him, the latter anxiously seeks to fill his father's shoes. With Odysseus absent, I concur that the "Oedipal separation of boy from mother can be renegotiated, and to some degree reversed, in later practice" (*Masculinities* 124). The result, however, can be twofold. Either the boy will grow to develop a non-hegemonic masculine identity or, out of identification with the myth of the absent hero-father, the boy will engage with male hegemony and patriarchal masculinity. In the next two sections, I discuss these processes and how they shape Telemachus' and Telegonus' masculine identities.

3.1) Protest Masculinities and Absent Fathers

The world depicted by Miller in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* revolves around the symbolic father figure. It is the father, divine or mortal, who structures the cosmos, the *polis*, and the family. As Strauss argues, "[p]atêr [father, in ancient Greek] and the adjectival form *patrôios* [paternal] are frequent epithets of Zeus from Homer to the classical period. The plural, *pateres*, is commonly used to mean forefathers or ancestors, often in an appeal to the authority of the past" (24). In *Circe*, the goddess describes how the order of the cosmos depends on the harmonious relationship of the three patriarchs, Zeus, Helios, and Oceanos. Moreover, Circe evinces how ruthlessly one can be punished by them. While Prometheus is condemned by Zeus to a painful chastisement (*Circe* 15), Circe is burnt and exiled by her own father, Helios (*Circe* 54).

In Chapter 2, I mentioned how the father-son relationship in classical Athens – and in Homer – was regulated through a series of gendered prescriptions and how both were connected through duty. Nevertheless, what both sons of Odysseus have in common is that their mothers were responsible for their upbringing. Although some authors argue that the distant father figure seems to be pivotal for hegemonic masculinity to thrive, patriarchal prescriptions of manhood utterly repudiate the notion that boys should be raised solely by women.⁷⁷ This can be ascertained in *The Odyssey*, where Telemachus' journey to manhood is portrayed.

As soon as Odysseus reaches Ithaca and reveals his identity to his son, the hero assumes the role of the good father who “offers to his son a model for how to move into the adult world, balancing the drive for dominance with the need for cooperation as a basis for social order” (Van Nortwick 39).⁷⁸ Penelope may have assured that Telemachus learned some aspects of aristocratic life, such as “combat [skills] from his cradle” (*Circe* 260). However, it is only Odysseus who can succeed in ripening his son for one day to assume his rightful place as the *kurios* of a household and the king of Ithaca.

Whereas twentieth-century Anglo-American societies expressed this disapproval through Freudian concepts, ancient Greek civilization resorted to mythology and legendary lawgivers, like Lycurgus in Sparta and Solon in Athens,⁷⁹ to justify this separation. Despite their chronological and cultural differences, one thing both cultures hold in common is that men must, to some extent, participate in their sons' education, for fathers are supposed to act as the source of healthy doses of masculinity. Kimmel even exemplifies this with the craze that overcame American society in the years that followed the First World War. In the 1930s

⁷⁷*Manhood in America* 136

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Marsiglio and Pleck 250.

⁷⁸*Od*, 16.185-324.

⁷⁹ Although approximately two hundred years separate Lycurgus' Sparta from Solon's Athens, both men are recognized throughout the Greek world as pivotal figures who laid the foundational stones that later would establish the Spartan oligarchy and Athenian democracy.

US, gender identity not only could but also had to be successfully acquired. The result was the rather questionable separation of the spheres, which in the US would rear boys to become breadwinner fathers while girls would become the homemaker mothers (*Manhood in America* 40).⁸⁰

Likewise, in ancient Greek society, fathers had, by law, ownership and authority over their children until they married (Strauss 62). In their position as *kurios*, fathers should teach their sons and daughters the law and taboos, acting as a force of the symbolic order. Fathers would not only prompt their sons to separate from their mothers but also urge them – and their daughters – to perform the required prescriptions for their gender. After that, the separation of spheres would follow based on two movements: a boy would move from the private domain of home, inhabited by the nurturing presence of his mother, and enter the public world, symbolized by politics, war, and work. Conversely, a girl should move from the house of her parents to the house of her husband where she would become part of the family (Van Nortwick 20).⁸¹

Besides the prefix *tele* (far) in their names, another aspect that Telemachus and Telegonus bear in common is their geographical isolation from others.⁸² Both men are reared on islands, Ithaca and Aiaia. That is compelling to my reading of *Circe*, for the Self-Made Man myth, of which Odysseus is a living embodiment, relies on the figure of men who are always moving and who are neither spatially nor economically confined. Hence, Ithaca and Aiaia cannot symbolize the *oikos*, this heavenly place to where Odysseus supposedly desires to return. Rather, because they represent a fixed place, they can be perceived as a starting point for Telegonus and Telemachus to fulfill their father's steps.

⁸⁰ More on that specific period of North-American gender history, refer to *Manhood in America* 127-147.

⁸¹ In *The Odyssey*, the exchange between Nausicaa and Alcinous implies that the king had already ascertained the princess' intention behind the innocent request – marriage. Nausicaa reveals that she wants to wash her brother's clothes because she must do so for her husband-to-be. In this same exchange, we are told that Alcinous' sons – even the married ones – live with him, because that was what Athenian law charged men to do (*Od.*, 6.56-71).

⁸² I have already discussed Telemachus' and Telegonus' names in Chapter 2.

At some point both young men have to leave their islands in search of Odysseus – or of Odysseus' myth – and earn the right to be recognized as his sons.⁸³ In other words, to leave boyhood finally behind, Telemachus and Telegonus need Odysseus' acknowledgment or the appraisal of any other figure who represents patriarchal masculinity in that society. After all, living on islands governed by their mothers is a situation bound, from the Athenian perspective, to hinder Telegonus and Telemachus from taking part in “official rites of passage, presided over by [their] father and other adult males” (Van Nortwick 27), that would mark their passing from boyhood into adult masculinity.

The post-Trojan world, which hurls men into an unheroic era, is one that presents us with a time frame without fathers and unexplored frontiers. In other words, a world where there is no Self-Made Man to guide boys on their path to male hegemony. Odysseus, like many heroes who went to Troy, is either lost at sea or presumably dead.⁸⁴ As a result, Telemachus and Telegonus are reared by their mothers, servants, and old men. It is clear that those are not suitable to ensure the right prescription of Athenian masculinity, for they cannot teach an aristocratic man to mature into his role.

In *Circe* and in *The Odyssey*, the fear of feminization is present in Telemachus' and Telegonus' formation. Telemachus' resolve to go after any shred of news of his lost father – together with his anxiety to be truly recognized as Odysseus' son⁸⁵ – and Telegonus' fixation on recreating the frontier by being one of Rome's founding fathers (*Circe* 305) can be understood as the symbolic effort to repudiate the feminine space of the *oikos* and the equally emasculating mother's presence. Moreover, in the figures of Aegisthus and Penelope's suitors, we have a glimpse of the kind of masculinity men embody when deprived of a heroic father: men who possess no strength, no *kleos*, and no respect for the sacred laws of *xenia* (hospitality). In this context, Telemachus realizes what it means to be a mature man in Ithaca.

⁸³ See *Od.*, 1.214-216; *Od.*, 3.120-121.

⁸⁴ See *Od.*, 3.108-120.

⁸⁵ *Od.*, 1.213-220.

In light of Connell's masculinities theory, the suitors portray complicit masculinity. Far from being hegemonic/heroic characters, they undoubtedly benefit from patriarchy and their position in Greek aristocracy. However, the absence of the most hegemonic man in *Circe* also leaves the possibility not only for complicit men to rule, but also for another kind of masculinity to rise. Also coined by Connell, the concept of protest masculinity encompasses men who are marginalized and pick up themes of hegemonic masculinity to rework or reform them in another context. To exemplify this, in contemporary Anglo-American societies, men who perform that kind of masculinity may scorn the cult of sports, exchange social roles with their female partners, and/or reject homophobia (*Masculinities* 112).

However, as Connell acknowledges, “[t]he project of protest masculinity also develops in a marginal class situation, where the claim to power that is central in hegemonic masculinity is constantly negated by economic and cultural weakness” (*Masculinities* 116). It is clear that, despite being Odysseus' heir, Telemachus is as powerless as his mother or the slaves. As Clay points out, in Ithaca, “political life has ceased; the assembly has not convened since Odysseus left for Troy. The suitors have succeeded in intimidating the citizens of Ithaca, who should be defending their king and his possessions” (232). Telemachus is aware of his precarious situation as he tells Circe “[the suitors] saw we could do nothing to them, a young man and a woman alone. When I reproached them, they only laughed” (*Circe* 262). Even though he could seize power in Ithaca, he would not have any support to hold it.

On the other hand, there is Telemachus' relationship with his father – or his father's reputation. As I have argued before, ancient Greek culture – like any other patriarchal society – endorses male competition, which leads us to acknowledge that antagonism is the cornerstone of Telemachus and Odysseus' relationship. Such competitiveness is amplified in two scenes of *The Odyssey*, the stringing of Odysseus' bow in Book 21 and the battle scene that concludes the epic (*Od*, 24.495-520). The bow scene can be considered a symbolic

reading of Telemachus not being an exemplar of male hegemony.⁸⁶ Telemachus' struggle to string the bow evinces how much he has toiled – and failed – to replace Odysseus. Those scenes might also suggest that while he lives, Odysseus will not allow anyone else to take his place as Ithaca's ruler.⁸⁷ Conversely, the battle scene against the suitors' relatives shows Telemachus eager to assume his rightful place as a patriarch beside Laertes and Odysseus.⁸⁸

More importantly, we are told that “[Telemachus] grew up like a tree,/handsome and strong, as if to match his father/when he becomes a man” (*Od*, 14.175-178). In other words, not only does Telemachus have to mirror Odysseus physically, but he also must compete with his father for *kleos* to fulfill his male identity. In a world built under the Self-Made Man's myth, Telemachus is bound to be always overshadowed by Odysseus, either in Ithaca or in any other part of the Greek world, for in the society Miller portrays Odysseus is also the man on whom Telemachus' honor and status depend (Wilson 63, Strauss 26-27).

Hence, once I established the relationship between Telemachus and other hegemonic/complicit men in his life, I now analyze how he acts toward women. Because women symbolize the threshold between male hegemony and male subordination, one important aspect of adult masculinity focuses on the relationships men develop with women. It is noticeable that the construction of hegemonic masculinity seeks to flee from femininity and/or from feminizing spaces/activities. For instance, contemporary Anglo-American men build their identities in traditionally male spaces like sports or the military (*Manhood in America* 35; *Masculinities* 113). Conversely, subordinate men – in Connell's theory, gay men – are usually denied their male identities precisely because their object of desire associates them, to some extent, with women.

Therefore, once Telemachus realizes he can eclipse neither his fathers nor the suitors, he turns to those below him. According to Wilson, “Telemachus is consistent in his notion that

⁸⁶ *Od*, 21.118-140.

⁸⁷ *Od*, 21.124-131.

⁸⁸ *Od*, 24,510-514.

masculine maturity means the suppression and exclusion of women and the suppression of female voices” (52). I would complement Wilson’s assertion with the idea that hegemonic masculinity requires the exclusion of other, less powerful male voices. To exemplify that, in Book 17 of *The Odyssey*, Telemachus scolds Eumaeus, the swineherd, when he tells off Antinous, the suitor’s leader, despite Eumaeus being morally superior to Antinous.⁸⁹

Eumaeus teaches Telemachus a little about hospitality – as Nestor and Menelaus do in Books 3 and 4 of *The Odyssey* – and is extremely loyal to Odysseus and his household; however, he cannot afford to address any of the suitors with contempt. By scolding him, Telemachus ensures that the social order is not overturned.⁹⁰ Regardless of their social status, the suitors are not models of male hegemony. It is rather clear in *The Odyssey* that these noblemen know that Odysseus is manlier than all of them.⁹¹

Nevertheless, to start achieving his masculine identity⁹² and status, guided by Athena – whom I have already analyzed as the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in *Circe* –, Telemachus practices “masculine self-assertion by putting down his mother” (Wilson 50). Athena’s bidding to Telemachus is to be brave and to earn renown (*Od*, 1.301); after all, “Greek conceptions of masculinity are intimately tied to the virtue of courage” (Rubarth 24). Additionally, in Homer, courage is a word rarely used to describe women, or any kind of feminine activity,⁹³ therefore, Athena’s pieces of advice – being brave and keeping Penelope in the dark – symbolize Telemachus’ trespassing the threshold of childhood by distancing himself from his mother and embracing his symbolic journey after Odysseus or the kind of masculinity his father portrays.

⁸⁹ *Od*, 17.393-395.

⁹⁰ In these passages of *The Odyssey*, it might also be argued that Telemachus’ motivation is to avoid the suitors’ suspicion. Nonetheless, I consider, as Wilson does, that in the world portrayed by Miller and Homer male hegemony entails asserting authority over those below (“Introduction” 50).

⁹¹ Several passages in *The Odyssey* emphasize that if Odysseus returned, he would have no difficulty in taking down the suitors. *Od*, 1.163-166, *Od*, 17.540-543, *Od*, 17.495-497. In Miller’s *Circe*, the eponymous character also concludes that the strife between the suitors and Odysseus can only resemble a slaughter (*Circe* 262-263).

⁹² I resort to this verb because, as I discuss in Chapter 1, in patriarchal societies, masculinity is something to be achieved as well as something that can be lost.

⁹³ More on the word and its gendered-contextualized use, refer to Rubarth 24.

In the social context Telemachus is, courage is a quality that only his father possesses. Stepping away from Penelope and going after Odysseus not only indicates the boy's readiness to become a man – which implies not being a boy anymore – but also a requirement in Athena's agenda: Telemachus must be urged to be equal to his father (Van Nortwick 30). However, in *Circe*, Telemachus seems to be on a path of reforming his masculine identity.

After twenty years, Odysseus finally reaches home, brings war with him, and acts diligently to disrupt Telemachus' relationship with Penelope. The slow disintegration of domestic bliss depicted in *Circe* enhances the notion that the construction of hegemonic men balances between the ruling of the home and the fear of the feminine space the *oikos* represents. As Kimmel argues,

[i]f, as contemporary feminist writers would have it, women had become prisoners in the home, then men were increasingly exiled from the home, unable to return without the fear of feminization. And so American fathers were increasingly estranged from the lives of their children (*Manhood in America* 39).

As a result of the separation of the spheres, Odysseus cannot act as he should at home anymore.

However, Telemachus, who was brought up by Penelope (*Circe* 260), and witnesses firsthand what heroic and complicit masculinities are like, can overcome the separation of the spheres. On the one hand, in *The Odyssey*, Telemachus tries to assert his masculine and adult status by assuming the role of his heroic father (Wilson 51). On the other hand, in *Circe* the prince, now almost thirty years old, is totally dissuaded from this idea. In Miller's retelling of *The Odyssey*, we find a reformed character who, once having suffered from hegemonic and complicit masculinities, deviates completely from both and is finally ready to champion his own homecoming story.

In the next part of this chapter, to analyze Telemachus' reform of his masculine identity, I propose a close reading of three critical passages in *Circe*: how Telemachus narrates the hanging of the twelve female slaves who laid with the suitors, Odysseus' burial, and his answer to Athena's proposal. The first scene takes place in Book 22 of *The Odyssey*. After the suitors' slaughter, Odysseus orders the girls to clean the hall and charges Telemachus and the herdsmen to "take out the girls/between the courtyard wall and the rotund/Hack at them long swords" (*Od*, 22.441-445). The idea of slashing the girls with swords corroborates the patriarchal notion that only Odysseus – and Odysseus' line – should have control of the household. However, Telemachus objects to this decision and hangs the girls instead.⁹⁴

According to Wilson,

[t]he choice of hanging over hacking is beneficial in that it keeps the girls' dirty blood off the clean floors, and maintains the tainted bodies in their self-contained state. Hanging also allows young Telemachus to avoid being too close to these girls' abused, sexualized bodies. The boy here demonstrates a newfound maturity in two highly problematic ways: he asserts himself by defying his father's instructions, and he belittles the women he slaughters. But Telemachus is still resisting the adult male role of the warrior, which involves a quasi-sexual act of penetration – using a sharp weapon to pierce and kill human bodies at close quarters (53).

In *Circe*, Telemachus retells this passage to a horrified goddess.

Circe almost disregards Telemachus' story, for the image the goddess has of Odysseus so far is one of someone kind and clever. While on Aiaia, Odysseus neither mistreats Circe's nymphs nor encourages his crew to consider them as sexual prey. To the witch, the portrayal Telemachus presents of Odysseus is inconsistent with the nobleman she met sixteen years before (*Circe* 269).

⁹⁴ *Od*, 22.462-464.

I argue that *Circe*, like *The Odyssey*, entangles in its center one man with distinct accounts of him. Circe, Penelope, Telemachus, and Odysseus himself have their chance to present to the reader contrasting stories of the hero. Miller challenges the audience to assert whether Circe really believes Telemachus' confession. On the one hand, this symbolizes Odysseus' ambivalence present in every account of him. On the other hand, these portraits illustrate how mercurial and dangerous men who assume the status of *Aristos Achaion* are.

In Homer, the killing of the suitors and those who aided them – no matter the circumstances – is necessary to reestablish Odysseus' honor and his status as hegemonic. Moreover, the execution of everyone involved in the plot to overthrow Odysseus is similar to a sacrifice, to a slaughter. Odysseus orders Telemachus to “carve [the girls] into joints like animals” (*Circe* 269). This act of violence not only places the girls side by side with the livestock that had been consumed by the suitors but also conveys Odysseus as the hegemonic man who uses his patriarchal status to demote women.

In *Circe*, Telemachus has a chance of revisiting his memories and confesses,

I [Telemachus] hanged [the slave girls] instead. I found twelve lengths of rope and tied twelve knots [...]. I had never seen it done, but I remembered how in all the stories of my childhood the women were always hanging themselves. I had some thought that it must be more proper. I should have used the sword instead. I have never known such ugly, drawn-out deaths. I will see their feet twisting the rest of my days (*Circe* 269).

As I have argued, in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, hegemonic masculinity is embodied in the belligerent figures of Odysseus and Athena. Moreover, I consider that the exchange between Athena and Circe over the fate of Telegonus⁹⁵ demonstrates the clash between women and hegemonic men: hegemonic masculinity is ruthless against women who do not abide by patriarchal rule.

⁹⁵ See *Circe* 216-220.

Before meeting his father, Telemachus embarks on a metaphorical journey towards manhood – that is, not to be a boy any longer – where he is taught by Menelaus, Nestor, Pisistratus (Nestor's son), and Athena (disguised as Mentos and Mentor). Telemachus' narrative in *The Odyssey* corroborates the notion that, in ancient Mediterranean cultures, stories of boys maturing into men were spread precisely because male children's experience should be regarded as a preparation for the ideal male role (Van Nortwick 25). Thus, Telemachus' obeying Odysseus' orders is just one more requirement to fulfill his hegemonic role.

In *The Odyssey*, every older male who steps in as a surrogate father figure to Telemachus aims to bring up the boy as a patriarch, or at least to set him in this direction. Patriarchy is, according to Conway-Long, “a system of power relations of men over women” (62). If Telemachus were to become an exemplar of male hegemony in Ithaca, he would never entertain guilt or repentance over the death of women slaves. Therefore, I consider Telemachus' reaction after the event a substantial change of heart toward his masculine reformation, which will later shape his relationship with Circe, his wife, and his daughter in the closing chapters of *Circe*.

The second event in *Circe* that confirms Telemachus as a non-hegemonic man is Odysseus' death. As Strauss argues, after the father's death, sons must arrange a proper burial and oversee every detail of the memorial ceremonies (3). Not only do patriarchal laws bind Telemachus to oversee his father's burial but it also requires that he punish the responsible for Odysseus' death, Telegonus. Even Circe – isolated on Aiaia – recognizes so, “[b]ecause you [Telemachus] are a prince, and the son of Odysseus. Because you respect the laws of gods and men. Because your father is dead, and my son the cause” (*Circe* 260). However, Telemachus shuns away from the responsibility by claiming that ordering Telegonus' death would be unjust.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, Odysseus' lack of emotional maturity in dealing with a world without glorious tales to tell leads him to bring war home with him. One of the outcomes of Odysseus' constant paranoia is his resentful relationship with Telemachus. The first measures Odysseus takes to ensure that his son would be ashamed is to reproach Telemachus on the matter of the suitors and to compare him to Achilles. “[m]y father [Odysseus] meant I was a disgrace, of course. A coward. I should have fought off the suitors single-handedly. Was I not fifteen when they first came? I should have been able to shoot his great bow, not just string it. At Troy I would not have lived a day” (*Circe* 266). By subjugating and disavowing Telemachus, Odysseus also ensures that, as Wilson notices it, the hero, and only he, can be the true lord of his household and the king of Ithaca (51)

Because the father is a symbol of authority,

[e]ven after a son turned eighteen, the father continued to retain the right to discipline extraordinary misbehavior by proclaiming a separation (*apokêryxis*). By this action, the son was removed from the household, left vulnerable to attacks on his citizenship, perhaps deprived of his name, and finally, cut off from his share in the patrimony (Strauss 65).

In Miller's narrative, Telemachus is separated from Penelope and forbidden to take part in any Ithacan council by Odysseus (*Circe* 268). In one single command, Odysseus embodies the symbolic father who promotes the separation of mother and male child – which, according to Van Nortwick and even Homer,⁹⁶ was high time it took place – and assumes the role of the hegemonic patriarch who neither shares power nor yields his portion of glory to other men, regardless of who they might be.

Nevertheless, Telemachus is bound to disrupt social order by, once again, acting in an unexpected way. In *The Odyssey*, we are told that if Telemachus finds out that Odysseus is

⁹⁶ Van Nortwick 27-29.
Od, 1.296-297.

dead, he should “go home, and build a tomb for [Odysseus]/and hold a lavish funeral to show/the honors he deserves” (1.289-293). Telemachus is urged to perform these rituals by Athena, for in this patriarchal society, “[d]eference to one’s elders and knowledge of the proper rituals for right relations to the gods are requisite qualities for a young man entering on his masculine inheritance” (Van Nortwick 32). Similarly, in *Circe*, laws of honor and the strictness of the bond between father and son in ancient Greece compel Telemachus to oversee the burial and memorial ceremonies and to avenge his father. Success in both actions is crucial if he is to achieve the status of a hegemonic man.

When Telegonus flees back to Aiaia, an astonished Circe notices that he brings Telemachus and Penelope with him. Contrary to her son, Circe is well aware that “Telemachus is sworn to kill [Telegonus]” (*Circe* 256) and that Odysseus' passing is everything that Telemachus needs to assume Ithaca's throne (*Circe* 256). In other words, Odysseus' death gives Telemachus that for which he yearns throughout *The Odyssey*, male authority. Finally, he can fulfill his hegemonic role as Odysseus' surrogate in this patriarchal society.

Despite all the power that awaits him in Ithaca, Telemachus decides to follow his brother back to Aiaia on account of his not being welcome in Ithaca “[b]ecause [he] watched while [his] father fell. Because [he] did not kill [Telegonus] where he stood. And after, when the pyre burned, [he] did not weep” (*Circe* 261). Telemachus' actions – or, rather, his inaction – disregard all the rules and laws established by ancient Greek society. Thus, once more, I consider it crucial to my analysis to juxtapose Telemachus and Orestes. The latter is a positive example of how sons must fulfill their duty towards their fathers under the scrutiny of patriarchal laws.

Orestes' tale⁹⁷ illustrates what Circe asserts: in patriarchal ancient Greece, “[m]ost men do not look for reasons to forgive their father’s death” (*Circe* 261). Moreover, Orestes' restless hunt after Aegisthus and Clytemnestra evinces how strongly the burden that governed the father-son relationship was. Orestes does what that society expects of him as a hegemonic aristocratic male heir. What is remarkable is that, although Orestes fulfills his duty of avenging Agamemnon, he is still punished by the Eumenides for spilling his mother’s blood, which points out the difficult position in which Telemachus finds himself.⁹⁸ Odysseus’ son refuses to chase the man who killed his father and, as a result, is chastised by his own people. In other words, by failing to perform his chore as a hegemonic aristocratic male, Telemachus is again ostracized.

In her recollections, Circe compares both men, Telemachus and Odysseus, and concludes, “[o]f all the sons in the world, he was not the one I would have guessed for Odysseus. [Telemachus] was stiff as a herald, blunt to the point of rudeness. He carried his wounds openly in his hands” (*Circe* 271). Telemachus does not accept the idea that it was his father’s influence that compelled him to perform the hideous act of hanging the slave girls. Moreover, because he had seen the destructive potential of hegemonic masculinity and wishes to distance himself from it, he withholds from killing his own brother despite the law demanding it. I consider that if he had done so, he would have approximated to a hegemonic model like his father.

He reveals to Circe, “I saw the end [of Odysseus and Telegonus' encounter]. [Odysseus] had wrested away the spear. It was not by Telegonus’ hand that he died” (*Circe* 261). Telemachus acknowledges that Odysseus is killed by his own folly, a notion that is reluctantly confirmed by Athena (*Circe* 306). Because Odysseus' political power comes from

⁹⁷As I point out in Chapter 2, Orestes' vengeful tale is mentioned in Book 4 of *The Odyssey* and works as a parallel story to the plot in the Homeric epic.

⁹⁸Besides *The Odyssey*, Orestes' story is famously depicted in Aeschylus' trilogy: *Agamemnon*, *Orestes*, and *Eumenide* and Euripides' *Orestes*.

Zeus⁹⁹, by choosing to acquit his brother, Telemachus disrupts a rather canonical structure that derives directly from the greatest patriarch in the ancient Greek world.

In *The Odyssey*, Wilson notes, Odysseus is the only lord who receives the epithet *diotrephes* (sprung from Zeus), which proves that somehow his hold to power on Ithaca is important to the king of gods (31). Likewise, Zeus is also the one who judges mortals and immortals alike and is responsible for protecting the balance of the cosmos (*The Iliad* 22.248-254; *Theogony* 73-74). This allows us to recognize that any threat to someone who organizes the microcosmos of a city-state can only mean a threat to Zeus' order.

Telemachus is a hazard not only to Ithaca but also to the patriarchal order and to male hegemony, for he had disobeyed Odysseus once, regarding the killing of the slave girls, which, despite it not being an outrageous act, marks the beginning of his path towards a reformed masculinity. The second time he does so, by neglecting to oversee Odysseus' burial and refusing to kill Telegonus, he disrupts all the social order established by the *patrios nomos* (the ancestral law). Nevertheless, the last time he stands against male hegemony is in front of the goddess who, in my interpretation of *Circe*, represents heroic-hegemonic masculinity in the society Miller depicts, Athena.

As Strauss points out, “[t]o be the son of Odysseus was to share in [his] honor and glory” (26) which concurs with what I argue in the first section of this chapter: masculinity may also be something inherited. Here, it is compelling to recognize that, regardless of his actions, Telemachus is still the son of a hegemonic patriarchal lord. A fact that neither he nor anyone around him would disregard, let alone Athena.

The goddess who had guided Telemachus in his path towards manhood would restlessly ensure that, after Odysseus' passing, Telemachus “took his inheritance” (*Circe* 298).

In *Circe*, Athena offers the olive branch to the eponymous character in order to have access to

⁹⁹ In the patriarchal world Homer portrays, kings descend directly from Zeus. See *Theogony* 96-100. See *Il*, 2.119-126. Cf *Il*, 2.226-239.

Aiaia and persuade Telemachus to assume his father's role. Athena's expectations toward Telemachus are to compel him to assume the role of the captain of the expedition that will found Rome.¹⁰⁰ I also compare Telemachus with Orestes, for when Agamemnon's offspring is being persecuted by the Furies, it is Athena who acquits him.

A grateful Orestes claims,

Pallas, savior of my house! I was deprived of a fatherland, and it is you who have given me a home there again. The Hellenes will say, [t]he man is an Argive once again, and lives in his father's heritage, by the grace of Pallas and of Loxias and of that third god, the one who accomplishes everything, the savior [Apollo] – the one who, having respect for my father's death, saves me, seeing those advocates of my mother [the Furies] (*Eumenides* 763).

In this interlocution, we can establish that not only do Telemachus and Orestes have similar upbringings and challenges, but also that both young men are pariahs. Both are fatherless and expatriate, on the run because of their transgression. Both are required to assume their father's place as hegemonic patriarchs and both have the same patron, Athena.

Athena's decision to come after Telemachus is not random: Odysseus' honor was also hers (*Circe* 285). Therefore, Telemachus' inheritance encompasses that of which he wishes to be no part, his father's legacy. It is Circe who realizes that the truce proposed by Athena was a ruse to approach Telemachus once more:"[a]nd now that her Odysseus is dead, where will [Athena] find more? ... Gods never give up a treasure. She would come for the next best thing after Odysseus. She would come for his blood" (*Circe* 285). An equally significant aspect of Athena's intention is that not only is she coming to establish Telemachus as the rightful king of Ithaca, but also to make him sail the ocean (*Circe* 299). That way, he can weave his own

¹⁰⁰ The belief that ancient Romans descended from the Trojans is the scope of another epic, Virgil's *Aeneid*. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book XIV presents several narratives intertwined with *Circe*'s tales that depict Rome's mythic foundation, which is alluded to in *Circe* 284.

tales, achieve glory, like his father, and, like his father, abide by the prescriptions of patriarchal masculinity (*Od*, 1.221-224).

However, Telemachus' reply shocks all those present in the room. He claims that “[f]or three days I have considered. And I find in myself no taste for fighting Trojans or building empires. I seek different days” (*Circe* 304). Even Athena’s threat does not disturb him. Telemachus' stubbornness – which Athena names as degeneracy (*Circe* 305) – evinces the last step towards his reformed masculinity. Despite the fact he might not be able to come to terms with the killing of the maids, Telemachus is bound to forswear any morsel of glory as long as it guarantees him that he will never be like Odysseus.

When Telemachus claims to Circe that he “cannot speak for those men [who would avenge their father regardless of the circumstances] (*Circe* 261), he completely deviates from the pattern of male hegemony. By declining the war goddess' proposal, he shows that he cannot act like those men either. Athena’s last warning to Telemachus is, “[t]here will be no songs made of you. No stories....You will live a life of obscurity. You will be without a name in history. You will be no one” (*Circe* 305). Undoubtedly, Athena’s threat would have convinced most men in ancient Greek society, because in this world to die without renown is deemed as emasculating.

A notably key point to end the discussion on Telemachus is the fact that fame/renown is what the ancient Greeks take as a surrogate for immortality (*Circe* 307).¹⁰¹ By refusing glory Telemachus is not simply disengaging from the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity; rather, he is choosing not to be destroyed by his own fate. In comparison, instead of Orestes, I resort now to the figure of Achilles – who I analyze throughout the next chapter. Achilles is

¹⁰¹ *Kleos apthiton* (immortal glory). In the Homeric epics, *kleos* (glory) is a sort of compensation for the hero’s death. As a result, glory can only be achieved on the battlefield or expeditions. That is, a man must be willing to put himself in harm’s way to conquer either his masculine identity or his immortality. Loney 135; Van Nortwick 132; Hedges 13; Clay 11
 “Achilles, once Best of the Greeks, who chose an early death as payment for eternal fame” (*Circe* 279)

also offered a quite similar choice by his mother, Thetis.¹⁰² He might either live a long life with his loved ones or die young full of glory. He sticks by the latter and repents it.¹⁰³ What *The Iliad* evinces is that *kleos* (glory) and *nostos* (glory) can be mutually exclusive (Garcia Jr 167), a notion that is endorsed in both *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*.¹⁰⁴

To complement the discussion on Telemachus' reformation of his masculine identity, I propose that, to some extent, *kleos* (glory) also excludes the *oikos* (the household), for, notwithstanding his good administration, the *kurios* (the household's lord) would never achieve renown solely through it. It is indubitable that men like Hector achieve an honorable status among Trojans and Greeks alike due to the fierceness with which they defend their household. However, in Book 6 of *The Iliad*, the contrast his frightful, blood-stained figure establishes with the peaceful and neat domesticity at the palace is enough to place these two concepts on opposite sides. In these scenes, the impression one has is that Hector is invading a sacred space, to which his warrior presence is a disturbance.¹⁰⁵

In *Circe*, Telemachus is a grown man who abhors glorious tales of hegemonic-heroic men like the suitors and his father, because men like those have wronged him his whole life. Miller's Telemachus is well aware of the dangers of seeking glory at all costs and the lines of a story that omits its unjust bits for the sake of the hero. Instead of Athena's promises of voyages and glorious tales, Telemachus chooses the rather domestic, dull life he leads with Circe. I argue that when he does that, he dissociates himself completely from the world of his father.

Telemachus' choice is symbolic for it can be juxtaposed with Odysseus' actions in Book 9 of *The Odyssey*. That contemporary readership deems Odysseus a rather faulty

¹⁰² *Il*, 9.497-505.

¹⁰³ *Od*. 11.488-491.

¹⁰⁴ *The Odyssey* clearly inflates the figures of Nestor, Menelaus, and Odysseus himself. Throughout *The Iliad*, these three men are depicted as rather untalented warriors. Their *kleos* (glory) is precisely embodied by their *nostos* (homecoming).

¹⁰⁵ *The Iliad*, 6.283-631.

commander is no news. Among the several episodes of lousy leadership exhibited during the homecoming tale, one stands out: the passage that takes place on the Cyclops' island. Unquestionably, it is Odysseus' greed for renown that renders the expedition its bleak ending and sets the path to future hardship.

Telemachus stresses this in *Circe* acknowledging that “[Odysseus] would rather be cursed by the gods than be No [O]ne” (279).¹⁰⁶ That is how Miller epitomizes the difference between father and son in *Circe*. When the author connects both men to the epithet ‘No One’,¹⁰⁷ Miller evinces that while hegemonic men abhor the lack of renown, men who abide by a project of reformed masculinities must reclaim it.

3.2) The Call to Arms Comes to All Men – Athena and Odysseus' Lineage in *Circe*

As I discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, masculinity, as the ancient Greeks understand it and as Miller portrays it in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, is something to be inherited. After all, in this warrior society, there is “a strong connection between one's father, one's name, and one's identity, especially one's public identity” (Strauss 27). Even though Telegonus is Odysseus' illegitimate son with Circe, he still has the right to share his father's name and glory. *Circe* makes it clear that Odysseus' sons' inheritance is their father's story. Each young man receives different versions of them directly from the witch of Aiaia.

As Strauss points out, to have a renowned father meant for any young man the promise of a rather rich public life, full of great deeds (27). Whereas Telemachus already knows who his father is – regardless of his doubts –, Telegonus runs over a different path. The first thing the boy needs to find out is whether he is the offspring of a famous man. When the time comes for Telegonus to leave boyhood behind, – in ancient Greek society, around fifteen or

¹⁰⁶ Οὐτις (in ancient Greek)

¹⁰⁷ *Od* 9. 364-367.

sixteen years old¹⁰⁸ – the first question he asks Circe is, “[w]ho was [my father]?” (*Circe* 228). The second, and the most poignant question to my purpose of establishing a parallel between absent fathers and hegemonic-heroic masculinities, is “[w]hy did he leave?” (*Circe* 228). Both questions open what Circe calls the gates of her memories with Odysseus (*Circe* 229) and mark the moment when Telegonus begins to receive his heritage.

Telegonus' infancy was wrapped up in tales that Circe wove: “I began to tell him stories, easy things of a rabbit that looks for food and finds it” (*Circe* 227). As a result, and as expected from any child, Telegonus began to fabricate his own stories as well and, as Circe reminds her audience, “[h]e liked best the stories of courage and virtue rewarded” (*Circe* 228). However, Telegonus starts crossing the threshold of childhood the moment Circe decides to replace fables with stories of Odysseus. I consider this episode the occasion that sets in motion Telegonus' process of building his masculine identity, for it is the first time he gets in contact with his father – albeit through his myth, the Self-Made Man's Myth.

In the scenes where Circe decides to disclose to Telegonus his father's identity, she can be compared to Homer, who endeavors at all costs to depict Odysseus as a chivalric, noble warrior. She confesses,

[y]et a strange thing happened when I began to recite [Odysseus' stories] back to Telegonus. I found myself hesitating, omitting, altering. With my son's face before me, their brutalities shone through as they never had before. What I had thought of as adventure now seemed blood-soaked and ugly. Even Odysseus himself seemed changed, callous instead of unflinching. The few times I did leave a story as it was, my son would frown. You did not tell it correctly, he said. My father would never have done such a thing (*Circe* 229-30).

Nevertheless, the outcome of this apparently naive storytelling is what I affirm in Chapter 2. Rather than skeptical and even disapproving of his father's actions, Telegonus symbolizes, in

¹⁰⁸ Roisman 26.

Miller's retelling, the ancient audience, who felt inspired by Odysseus' travels and adventures.¹⁰⁹ For Telegonus, Odysseus, as Circe portrays him, is the perfect male ideal of heroism, courage, and nobility.

When Telegonus starts to receive his inheritance – his father's stories through Circe – what occurs in the background is exactly what Telemachus has suffered before. The coals of father-son conflict are kindled. Strauss notes,

A teenager might suffer from the absence of his father, as [Telemachus] does for a long time¹¹⁰ or, guided by older mentors, he might have found the image of the absent father an inspiring role model — as [Telemachus] does at last with the help of Athena. Alternatively, a son might still feel himself in competition with his father's image even when the father himself is dead, or he might find that image surviving as a powerful internal censor (80).

Rather than satisfying the boy's curiosity, Circe's storytelling sparks in Telegonus the desire to search for his father and eventually become a hero himself.

Telegonus must cross the threshold that sets him apart from other men in this patriarchal society: he must leave home, for the achievement of a full masculine identity relies on the dichotomies *kleos/oikos* (glory/household) and renown/anonymity. In the section above, I demonstrated how Telemachus reforms his masculinity by choosing the household. Since both brothers represent two opposite kinds of masculinity, I propose that Telegonus' masculine identity parallels his brother's in terms of an antithesis. My starting point is the *oikos* (the household), for, as Rubarth argues, being the head of a household was among the requirements for Athenian masculinity (27).

¹⁰⁹ To some extent, Telegonus' yearning to fill in Odysseus' shoes and becoming a great conqueror might also be read through more conservative-driven lenses, to which the hegemonic construction of masculinity is a desirable outcome in a boy's education.

¹¹⁰ *Od.* 1.217–220.
Od., 16.188–189.

To assume this role, both boys face the same issue: because they live isolated with their mothers on islands that are susceptible to foreign or domestic attacks, they can be easily overpowered. Despite “[t]he foundation for the *oikos* was marriage and the begetting of legitimate children” (Berg 98), as soon as they came of age, Telegonus and Telemachus attempted to act as the *kurios* (lord of the household). Telemachus' outcome is already known through the lines of *The Odyssey*; he fails at stopping the suitors. Moreover, his outburst in Book 1 evinces how immature – albeit rather old – Telemachus is. To some extent, Penelope is the one who partly assumes this important male role in Ithaca.

Conversely, on the few occasions a new ship harbors on Aiaia, Telegonus naturally assumes the role of the *kurios*. Before Circe could cast her spell or the castaways could consider plundering the island,

Telegonus was already stepping out into the hall. He wore a cape and a sword at his waist. He stood tall and straight as a man. He was fifteen. [He said], you are in the house of the goddess Circe, daughter of Helios, and her son, called Telegonus. We saw your ship founder and allowed you to come to our island, though usually it is closed to mortals (*Circe* 232).

In this same episode, Telegonus assumes “the head of the table and served the men” (*Circe* 232). Sitting at the head of the table, Telegonus shows that he is the lord of that household, not Circe; offering the men food seals the obligation both sides now have to mutual respect for the laws of *xenia* (hospitality). Telegonus is the host and as such he must treat his guests well and, on the sailors' part, they must offer him the same level of respect and deference.

However, no man in this society achieves glory by simply being a proper household lord. That is why in the Homeric world when a boy cannot take on the path of his father on his own, patriarchy must intervene. In *The Song of Achilles*, as I demonstrate, Odysseus persuades and bulldozes Achilles to fight. Similarly, in *The Odyssey*, Athena acts as the agent

of patriarchy, urging Telemachus to initiate his path toward the heroic masculinity Odysseus symbolizes.

In Telegonus' case, Hermes assumes this role. The trickster god appears to Telegonus and instructs him how to build a boat so he can sail in search of his father. For days and nights, Telegonus and Hermes work on a raft that could take the young man safely to Ithaca. Not only does Telegonus remind Circe that Hermes is his ancestor through Odysseus (*Circe* 234)¹¹¹ but also that he is more than ready to disengage from his mother's nurturing presence and embark on a journey after his father. This episode resembles Telemachus' endeavor in *The Odyssey*. Like Athena, Hermes, implies how much the success of their mission relies on keeping Circe unaware of their plans (*Circe* 234). Once again, the connection between an overprotective mother and a weak male child is established.

Differently from Telemachus, Telegonus decides to share the plan with his mother. Despite Circe's hopes that her son could always live with her, forever harbored on Aiaia, she realizes that even if Hermes had not aided the boy, he would have found another way himself. She acknowledges so in an image that interconnects Telegonus with Tennyson's *Ulysses*, "I had seen Telegonus' face when he used to look into the sea and whisper, horizon" (*Circe* 238). In Tennyson's renowned poem, an old Odysseus broods over the horizon and wonders whether he will ever again sail the seas on another journey.¹¹² However, in Telegonus' deliberation, the horizon is not a mere word, it represents the limit of the world known by the young man.

¹¹¹ In doing so, Telegonus is subtly claiming his ancestry from Zeus and his position as a hegemonic man in ancient Greek society.

¹¹² Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use

.....

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas (*Ulysses*, Alfred Lord Tennyson)

Across the sea, however, lie Ithaca, Odysseus, and the world of men. To conquer his masculine identity, Telegonus must, as Van Nortwick argues, leave Circe and go after the wisdom his father possesses (7). Telegonus' quest for his father ends at the exact place it begins: on the shores of an island. Alternatively, finding his father marks the beginning of Telegonus' maturation in his male role, for the sea is the place that connects father and son through two prophecies.

The first prophecy claims that Odysseus' fate is to die by the sea (*Circe* 254). The second reveals that Telegonus is the one responsible for his father's death (*Circe* 219). What they evince is that despite Telegonus' happiness and feelings of accomplishment, the reunion between father and son rekindles the anxiety of succession. Telegonus claims that as soon as he sees Odysseus on the shore, he recognizes his father because "[it was] as if all this while, my eyes had been waiting for just that shape" (*Circe* 252). However, Odysseus' reaction is unfeeling and bitter. In the light of patriarchal prescriptions of masculinity, Odysseus' intemperance can be excused because once a boy is fully grown, he symbolizes a threat to his father.

While neither Telemachus nor Circe through their recollections of the dramatic encounter can pinpoint whether Odysseus has recognized Telegonus as his own blood, I consider that what Odysseus sees on Ithaca's shore on the day he dies is a warrior holding a spear (*Circe* 254). In other words, Odysseus sees a younger version of himself ready to plunder his island, steal his glory, and emasculate him. I acknowledge the setting of this battle is symbolic because Odysseus conquers *kleos* (glory) sailing around known and even unknown parts of the world. Similarly, the sea is where Odysseus yields and passes the title of *Aristos Achaion* to another man.

With Odysseus' death, Telegonus is allowed to assemble the rest of his inheritance. In possession of Odysseus' title, Circe's son is bound to become one of Rome's founding fathers.

Odysseus' passing makes it possible to compare Telegonus with another heroic figure of the ancient Greek past, Theseus. Strauss argues that the ambivalence embedded in the event of a father's death is another unsolvable feature of patriarchal masculinities, "[in an annual celebration] the Athenians re-enacted the curious drama of their national hero: an ambitious young man who accidentally provoked his father's death and immediately obtained his patrimony" (4). The only person who stands in Telegonus' way is his own brother, Telemachus.

In this conflict, however, lies a rather unsettling issue: if they fight, Odysseus' line can be lost forever, which would not contribute to his *kleos* (glory) nor to the era's scarcity of heroes and heroic feats. As Clay reminds us, "*The Odyssey* begins where the *Iliad* ends. The great heroes already belong to the past and have become the *genos hemitheon*, the race of demigods, and the immaterial shades in Hades" (184). Telegonus lives in a time when men like his father can only live through their glory.¹¹³ Therefore, the next step Telegonus takes to achieve his heroic identity comes with the prophecy of a new empire rising in the west, which rekindles his desire to belong to this exquisite constellation of men.

In the last part of *Circe*, Athena comes once again to instill Telemachus with an offer to achieve glory,

Son of Odysseus...Zeus has foretold that a new empire will rise in the West. Aeneas is fled there with his remnant Trojans, and I would have Greeks to balance and hold them at bay. The land is fertile and rich, thick with beasts of field and forest, overhung with fruits of every kind. You will found a prosperous city there, you will build stout walls and set down laws to hold back the tide of savagery. You will seed a great people who will rule in ages to come. I have gathered good men from across our lands and set them on a ship. They arrive this day to bear you to your future (*Circe* 304).

¹¹³ Glory (*kleos*) can be defined as something one hears from others, "all we hear is the distant ring of glory" (*Il*, 2.275).

Like most prophecies in Greek myth, this is a double-edged one, for Odysseus has two sons. The goddess seeks Telemachus, but Telegonus is the one who accepts her gifts.

There is one final obstacle the boy must overcome: Circe. Van Nortwick points out that in heroic literature, mothers symbolize an especially powerful example of the detaining woman who would go to any length to keep the hero from accomplishing his mission (34). Telegonus finally convinces Circe and establishes by himself the needed separation between mother and male child. Athena promises to send her ship – and warns him there will not be another (*Circe* 307) – and Telemachus relinquishes the final piece of inheritance to his brother: Odysseus' bow.

Equipped with a ship and crew, Odysseus' bow, and Athena's protection, Telegonus has received all his inheritance from Odysseus and assumes his father's role as a hegemonic man. The impression *Circe* leaves is that, as Telemachus passes Odysseus' bow to his brother, his words ring true, “[y]ou will do better with them both [the bow and the city], I think” (*Circe* 308). Because of his upbringing, there is still some hope that the tales “with their happy endings and non-fatal wounds” (*Circe* 278) he was told might prevent him from becoming an example of destructive manhood.

Another point *Circe* makes is that the boys' inheritance is the legacy of heroic masculinity; however, in the niceties that spur the tales of the Self-Made Man, it is possible to find tales of virtue and even reconstructed masculinity. Telegonus had learned the kind of man his father was through Circe's fantastic tales. Unlike Telemachus, Telegonus has never had to come to terms with Odysseus' duplicity and anger, which leaves room for him to show us that the heroic tales he will weave might be filled with justice.

Justice, an extensive concept in the ancient Greek world,¹¹⁴ is “a strange word to hear on [Telemachus’] lips. [Because it] had been one of his father’s favorites. (*Circe* 261). Odysseus boasts that because the world is unjust, a hegemonic man must also be. However, in *Circe* Odysseus’ sons deviate from this notion. Once Telemachus and Telegonus are face to face, we can finally perceive how Odysseus’ myth shapes their sense of self. Whereas Telemachus reconstructs his masculine identity by disengaging from the pursuit of glory, Telegonus builds his male identity by rewriting the Self-Made Man’s myth.

Additionally, Telemachus may refuse his father’s title but reckons that Odysseus’ stories represent part of his inheritance. Addressing Circe, he acknowledges it is time he received them, “I think you have stories of my father...I would like to hear them” (*Circe* 277). As an adult man, he is ready for a full account of how Odysseus made his own name, without the fabricated morals behind them. Nevertheless, *Circe* highlights that, despite their blood, neither of them will ever be like their father, the man of rage.

To construct his masculine identity, Telemachus learns how to respect women and to seek fulfillment in a rather simpler life as a father and a husband. Likewise, Telegonus realizes that the Self-Made Man’s myth may be a blueprint to fame and to achieve hegemonic masculinity, but it is only worth it if the hero is noble and kind, especially to those beneath him. In the end, both men realize that despite life not being “a bard’s song” (*Circe* 268) stories can promote another kind of man, rather than the duplicitous, ruthless seeker of glory.

¹¹⁴ It is possible to perceive that ancient Greek authors were concerned with the relation between justice and masculinity. Centuries before the concept became the focus of Plato’s most famous dialogue, *The Republic*, Hesiod, Homer, and Aeschylus tried to assert to what extent powerful, hegemonic men could trespass any law. The conflict that opens *The Iliad*, for example, evinces that being unjust can make a ruler look emasculated in the eyes of his people. On the other hand, fair kings – like Priam – gain renown because they foster positive male features.

See *Theogony* 901; see *Works and Days* 31-32; see *The Iliad* 1.174-189; see *The Iliad* 1.264-271. see *Eumenides* 269-270.

Chapter 4: In Search of His Own Mythopoetic Tale, Achilles Between Godhood and Death

Mother tells me,
 the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet,
 that two fates bear me on to the day of death.
 If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,
 my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.
 If I voyage back to the fatherland I love, my pride, my glory dies ...
 true, but the life that's left me will be long,
 the stroke of death will not come on me quickly
 (*The Iliad*, 9.497-505)

My dear dear lord,
 The purest treasure mortal times afford
 Is spotless reputation; that away
 Men are but gilded loam or painted clay.
 A jewel in a ten-times-barred-up chest
 Is a bold spirit in a loyal breast.
 Mine honor is my life; both grow in one.
 Take honor from me and my life is done.
 Then, dear my liege, mine honor let me try.
 In that I live, and for that will I die
 (*Richard II*, 1.1.182-192, Shakespeare)

The ubiquitous Achilles' story, the tale of a young man who had once chosen glory over his own life, has survived the tides of time and inspired many authors, painters, playwrights, philosophers, and political leaders. To exemplify this, there is the famous story of Alexander the Great visiting the place where Achilles had been buried before he marched

East.¹¹⁵ No matter when or how Achilles' narrative is (re)told, the many versions of his tale bear a couple of similarities to one another.

First, at some point in his life, Achilles must endeavor in war activity, and, through it, he finds his doom on the Trojan shores. Second, because the hero is part mortal, part god, Achilles' story always seems veiled in a mist of mythopoesis. Moreover, considering the archetypal figures of the soldier and the hero, Achilles' tale, like any war story, is considered a metonymic narrative of masculinity. In Chapter 4 of my Master's thesis, I analyze how Achilles' portrayal in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* fluctuates between one of deviant and hegemonic masculinity. In this chapter, I establish a connection between Achilles' masculine identity in ancient Greek society and his undoing.

The first thing I take into consideration before I start my analysis is the narrator of *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus. A rather timid backstage figure – who nonetheless sets the major plot of *The Iliad* in motion –, Patroclus is only heard in a few lines of the epic poem.¹¹⁶ On the one hand, Miller's thriving success in retellings of classical literature belongs to a case Jeremy Rosen (2015) coins as minor-character elaboration. As a literary genre, minor-character elaboration allows the conversion of less important characters into protagonists, aiming at a narrative that is both compelling to and compatible with feminist, post-colonial, and multicultural agendas (Rosen 158). On the other hand, I consider that by promoting Patroclus to the position of the narrator, what we find, indeed, is Achilles' second-self re-telling his own story.

According to Van Nortwick, “[t]o express Achilles' divided nature [mortal and divine] and his struggles to resolve it, the poet of *The Iliad* creates in Patroclus an alter ego, or second-self, for his hero” (*Imagining Men* 8). In my Master's thesis, having Connell's

¹¹⁵ Alexander the Great's excursion to Achilles' tomb is documented in Plutarch's *Alexander* 15.8–9, as it is the theme of a few famous paintings.

¹¹⁶ Patroclus appears a few times as a solid figure in the *Iliad*. When he does utter his thoughts and feelings, it is either to reproach or persuade Achilles. *Il.*, 16.21-53; *Il.*, 16. 986-1000; *Il.*, 23.80-110.

hierarchy of masculinities in mind, I consider Patroclus an example of subordinate-deviant masculinity. In acknowledging him as Achilles' second-self, it is possible to affirm that Patroclus' accounts of Achilles' story can show singular and opposite aspects of the hero. Hence, in this chapter, I analyze some moments in Patroclus' narrative in which Achilles is portrayed either as a hegemonic hero or as a deviant young man.

I concur with Van Nortwick, who points out that “[t]racing Achilles' progress through the story will bring us to some seminal ideas about how the Greeks — and other cultures around the Mediterranean — thought about the shape of a man's life” (*Imagining Men* 7). *The Iliad* and *The Song of Achilles* depict Achilles' actual and metaphorical journeys to a heroic status in a patriarchal civilization. However, in the society Miller depicts, there is only one successful mode of masculine identity: the hegemonic model. In Achilles' case, to mature means necessarily to become an aristocratic, hegemonic man. However, unlike any other character in Greek myth, Achilles is presented with a choice: he can either go to Troy and die a glorious death or live a long life. Interpreted through a different lens, Achilles may choose to become a hero — a hegemonic man — which ties him to his tragic end; or he may choose to become a patriarchal aristocrat — a complicit man — and live a rather dull, obscure life.

In fact, Achilles has only one choice: life or death. As we know it, he sticks to the latter. Unless we study the socio-cultural engines that place him in this situation, his decision may seem quite ludicrous. As I discuss in Chapter 1, hegemonic masculinity in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* is constructed on three fronts: distance from women, *kleos* (glory), and sexual prowess. Achilles is bound to become a hegemonic patriarch because he is a prince and one of the last men of the race of heroes. However, as I argue throughout this chapter, Achilles, half-man, half-god, trespasses even the limits of male hegemony.

In *The Song of Achilles*, what we can perceive is that, like his nature, Achilles' masculine identity is not set in stone. That is why to unravel Achilles, as Miller writes him, I

resort to what Connell coins as the moment of engagement. The sociologist defines it as “the moment in which the boy takes up the project of hegemonic masculinity as his own” (*Masculinities* 122). Connell emphasizes that the moment of engagement is usually shaped by a father figure in the boy’s life; however, in Achilles’ case, whose mother is a goddess, he must be shaped into something utterly distinct from other men. Not only do moments of engagement symbolize Achilles’ attempt to be placed as an exemplar of hegemonic-heroic masculinity but these moments also evince the boy’s endeavor to achieve immortality.

The moment of engagement suggests that hegemonic men do not perform hegemonic masculinity all the time. What I propose is that in *The Song of Achilles*, there is one singular moment of engagement that seals Achilles’ Destiny. At that moment, hegemonic masculinity becomes the hero’s engagement with his own undoing. In the next sections, I analyze how Achilles builds his own masculine identity and the extent to which it leads him, like Odysseus in *Circe*, onto a path of physical, psychological, and social undoing.

4.1) Engagement with Immortality, Glory’s Antithesis

In the society Miller depicts, glory and death on the battlefield are deeply intertwined. Moreover, death has a crucial role in the making of masculine identities. In Book 12 of *The Iliad*, Sarpedon reflects on the meaning of immortality¹¹⁷ and concludes that he could never choose an undying existence because only the possibility of dying on the battlefield can yield glory to a man (*Imagining Men* 75). What Sarpedon’s speech emphasizes is that life – as a hero understands it – is also connected with a man’s maturity to accept death.

At the core of the Homeric poems, opposite masculine ideals can be traced. *The Iliad* shows Achilles’ inner conflict to come to terms with his human mortality whereas *The Odyssey* depicts its hero’s battle for survival. As I point out in Chapter 2, *kleos* (glory) and *nostos* (homecoming) are, to some extent, antagonistic concepts in Homer, for glory is the

¹¹⁷ *Il.*, 12.359-381.

only guarantee of an afterlife for any man.¹¹⁸ Similarly, in Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, death is not only "the loss of [one's] brilliance, [and] the withering of [one's] grace" (*The Song of Achilles* 166) but also doubly emasculating (*Imagining Men* 75).¹¹⁹

Because of his double nature, Achilles is offered to face two kinds of death: his physical death at Troy, which would render him undying glory (*kleos apthiton*), or his symbolic death were he to withdraw from battle. On the one hand, we have Thetis filling Achilles' dreams with just one part of his prophecy: one day he will become the greatest warrior of his generation (*The Song of Achilles* 38). On the other hand, it is Odysseus – the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* – who reveals the final piece, "if you [Achilles] do not come to Troy, your godhead will wither in you, unused. Your strength will diminish. At best, you will be like Lycomedes [the old king of Scyros] here, moldering on a forgotten island with only daughters to succeed him" (*The Song of Achilles* 165). What both prospects hold in common is that, at some point, the hero has to deal with a disturbing aspect of his legend-in-the-making, his mortality.

I affirm so because to admit he is mortal demands that Achilles dissociate himself from Thetis, his mother. As I argue in Chapter 1, the separation between mother and male child must occur if the boy is to evolve into a man. Likewise, classical literature offers some examples of how difficult it is for the immortal mother to bear a mortal child.¹²⁰ In *The Iliad*, Achilles resorting to Thetis in Book 1 is perceived as a sign of immaturity while his parting from her through the action of returning Hector's body to Priam shows he has matured and is finally ready to embrace his destiny as a mortal man.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ It might be argued that, to some men in Homer's epics, *kleos* (glory) takes the form of the long-awaited homecoming. Although I acknowledge the point, I still concur with Garcia Jr, who proposes that *kleos* and *nostos* are mutually exclusive concepts in Homeric society (167). That is because the three men who successfully reach home after the Trojan War — Nestor, Menelaus, and Odysseus — are not exceptional warriors in *The Iliad*.

¹¹⁹ In the patriarchal world Miller and Homer depict, death on the battlefield is doubly emasculating because not only is the warrior defeated by another man but also is killed by a sharp, penetrating weapon. See *Imagining Men* 74-75.

¹²⁰ See *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 192-201. Cf. *Il*, 1.491-499.

¹²¹ *Il*, 1.416-423.

Metaphorically, for Achilles, his being separated from Thetis means to be separated from his divinity. To understand how this separation reflects on Achilles' male psycho-social development, I analyze the figure of Thetis and how it shapes the hero in *The Song of Achilles*. The greatest feature of Thetis, as Miller writes her, is her contempt for mortals while her greatest ambition is to have Achilles made into a god (*The Song of Achilles* 52; *The Song of Achilles* 368). Thetis is so important to Achilles' psyche because Patroclus acknowledges that it was she who made Achilles as he was (*The Song of Achilles* 365).

Thetis' description in *The Song of Achilles* with "her bone-white skin and black hair bright as slashes of lightning" (86) may parallel her to a goddess of the underworld. Her expression is also "like [a] stone" (*The Song of Achilles* 365) and where she goes, her steps "wither the grass" (*The Song of Achilles* 366). In *The Song of Achilles*, she is an otherworldly, uncanny figure who is frequently described through water metaphors. However, what I emphasize in this section is Thetis' relationship with non-hegemonic characters. To exemplify that, I analyze one of Achilles' moments on Scyros.

At King Lycomedes' court, when Achilles' disguise as a girl is finally revealed, Thetis threatens the old monarch and forces him to keep hiding Achilles there. The decision outrages Deidameia, the princess, who is pregnant with Achilles' child. Deidameia answers Thetis' menace by indicating she will not be silent over the extremely shameful episode of Achilles' crossdressing.

Thetis' reaction is similar to Athena's in *Circe* when the war goddess wants to have Telegonus slain. Thetis snaps, "[y]ou [Deidameia] are a foolish girl Each word fell like an axe blade, sharp and severing. Poor and ordinary, an expedient only. You do not deserve my son. You will keep your peace or I will keep it for you" (*The Song of Achilles* 133). Like Athena, Thetis approaches non-hegemonic characters – especially women – with contempt

and a rather violent language, the language of male hegemony. Her words are like blades, axes, knives ready to attack, to pierce, and to subjugate her opponents.

As I point out in Chapter 2, hegemonic masculinity may be found not only in men. If Athena symbolizes the epitome of male hegemony in *Circe*, Thetis surely heralds it in *The Song of Achilles*. Although Miller's debut novel is populated with hegemonic aristocrats who push Achilles near to his doom — Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Diomedes — none of them holds as much power as Thetis. It is imperative to my discussion to emphasize that Thetis represents the feminine power capable of disrupting the male rule of Zeus;¹²² hence, in the smaller world of Phthia, she is a more hegemonic figure than her husband and king, Peleus.

On Achilles' return to Phthia, after his training season on Pelion, Thetis is the first to address Achilles, overruling Peleus' preference, "[s]on of my womb, flesh of my flesh, Achilles, she said Be welcome home" (*The Song of Achilles* 110). With a few words, Thetis claims Achilles is her legitimate son. This takes place after the boy's sixteenth birthday, which marks Achilles' entering his manhood. In other words, Thetis assumes Peleus' place by acknowledging Achilles not only as her son and heir but also as a man in ancient Greek society.

However, to the goddess, the only possible fate fit to Achilles' heritage is to make him into a god. As Patroclus exemplifies to his audience,

[if she could, Thetis] would take him to the caves of the sea and teach him contempt for mortals. She would feed him with the food of the gods and burn his human blood from his veins.¹²³ She would shape him into a figure meant to be painted on vases, to be sung of in songs, to fight against Troy. I imagined him in black armor, a dark

¹²² "The other gods recoiled to hear [the prophecy surrounding Thetis' child]. They knew what powerful sons did to their fathers — Zeus' thunderbolts still smell of singed flesh and patricide. They gave her to a mortal, trying to shackle the child's power" (*The Song of Achilles* 367).

¹²³ The notion of burning one's mortality out of oneself is present in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and in Heracles' myth.

helmet that left him nothing but eyes, bronze greaves that covered his feet. He stands with a spear in each hand and does not know me (*The Song of Achilles* 122).

What Thetis desires does not come to pass, because both Peleus and Patroclus — men who perform non-hegemonic traits — are present in Achilles' life.

As Marco Fantuzzi argues in *The Loves of Achilles: Intertextual Studies* (2007) “what did not happen to Achilles at the level of divine status, [Thetis] hopes to achieve at the level of heroic *kleos*” (104). Thetis is the driving force behind Achilles' legend and engagement with his hegemonic social identity. Moreover, Thetis is responsible for the upbringing of Pyrrhus, Achilles and Deidameia's son. Although I do not analyze Achilles' son in my Master's thesis, it is sufficient to state that, under Thetis' guardianship, the boy at the age of twelve excessively exhibits all traces of male hegemony: [h]e ransacks Troy, kills Hector's son, takes Andromache as his slave, and is killed by Orestes for stealing his bride (*The Song of Achilles* 361).

Without any consideration for Deidameia – or Lycomedes —, we are told that Thetis is going to claim him as soon as the child is born, for “[s]he wishes to raise him herself” (*The Song of Achilles* 172). In claiming Pyrrhus to herself, Thetis is promoting the separation of male child-mother even earlier than expected. Thetis knows that Achilles is bound to die at Troy; however, she is also aware that Achilles' glory must pass on and one way to ensure it is by raising the hero's son as an extension of his father's reputation (*time*).¹²⁴

Boon argues that, for men, the hero functions as “[a] transcendent object of worship, in the sense that it is often venerated without question, uncritically, and to excess, and . . . as an ideal, in the sense that heroic qualities serve as models for privileged masculine behavior” (303). Hence, Thetis' motivation to blaze Achilles' path with heroic deeds lies precisely in the boy's ability to become a hero sung in legends. In doing so, Achilles, despite his half-mortal

¹²⁴ In *The Odyssey*, Achilles enquires Odysseus about Pyrrhus and seems quite happy to find out about his son's glorious deeds of war. See *Od*, 11.508-541.

side, would be distinguishing himself from other hegemonic men who, nonetheless, already have some masculine privilege in that society.

To exemplify how Thetis ceaselessly endeavors to ensure Achilles gains renown in *The Song of Achilles*, I propose a close reading of some of the few interactions Thetis and Patroclus have throughout the novel. Their first meeting takes place after the goddess witnesses Achilles and Patroclus' first kiss, after which Thetis arranges everything to send Achilles to Mount Pelion. From this point forward, Thetis seems to be portrayed as Patroclus' fiercest antagonist

In "A New Voice for an Ancient Story: Speaking from the Margins of Homer's *Iliad* in Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*" (2021), Maria Antonietta Struzziero argues "[*The Song of Achilles*] moves center stage a homoerotic relationship barely hinted at in the *Iliad*, a reconfiguration that is relevant to our socio-cultural landscape and contemporary debates on gender and sexuality" (134). Whereas I partially agree with that notion, I also propose to delineate a second reason behind Thetis' hostility toward Patroclus: the honor/shame system that regulates masculinity in Homeric society. The second time Patroclus faces Thetis is in Scyros, the narrator seeks out the goddess to collect from her the last pieces of Achilles' prophecy.

Thetis reluctantly acquiesces to Patroclus' wishes but warns him:

[i]t will not be so easy as [Achilles] thinks. The Fates promise fame, but how much? He will need to guard his honor carefully. He is too trusting. The men of Greece — she spat the words — are dogs over a bone. They will not simply give up preeminence to another. I will do what I can. And you. Her eyes flickered over my long arms and skinny knees. You will not disgrace him. Do you understand? (170).

Alongside with Struzziero's position, who claims that contemporary anxieties over gender and sexuality populate Miller's debut novel, I consider that what is at stake in Thetis' threat is Achilles' role in sexual activity.

As Halperin points out, sexual desire could be deviant or normative" (25). Additionally, in the society Miller portrays in *The Song of Achilles*, sex is a manifestation of status and social identity (Halperin 32). Neither compulsory heteronormativity nor contemporary anxiety propel Thetis to guard Achilles' honor. Instead, it is the perspective of his son being ashamed and deemed as less manly by other Greek lords.

In the patriarchal society Miller depicts in *The Song of Achilles*, it is clear that Achilles and Patroclus can maintain a sexual relationship as long as the *erastes* (the older lover) and the *eromenos* (the younger lover) are roles well outlined. In other words, it matters little to whom Achilles feels attracted. As a hegemonic hero, an aristocratic man, he must be perceived as the *erastes*.¹²⁵ Again, I recur to the prescription that masculinity, like *kleos* (glory), is something that can either be achieved or lost.

I have already pointed out that battles offer the possibility of emasculating one. Similarly, does one's sexual practice. Patroclus confirms that their relationship can harm Achilles' reputation, because "[ancient Greek] men liked conquest; they did not trust a man who was conquered himself [in bed]. Do not disgrace him, the goddess had said. And this is some of what she had meant" (*The Song of Achilles* 176). Even though Miller's readers have no success devising who was which, in the society Miller portrays, rumor (*φήμη*) was enough to tarnish Achilles' heroic identity.

Such a line of questioning might have sounded alien to ancient Greeks; however, it is paramount to my analysis to acknowledge the immense difficulty of asserting the exact nature

¹²⁵ As Halperin argues ("Heroes and their Pals" 86), even Greeks who lived in later periods had trouble devising the nature of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship. Plato's *Symposium*, for instance, regards Patroclus as the *erastes* and Achilles as the *eromenos*, whereas Aeschylus' *The Myrmidons* does the opposite. See *The Symposium* 179e-180b. Cf.fr. 135-136.

of Patroclus and Achilles' relationship in Homer. Halperin affirms that even the *erastes-eromenos* arrangement reflects Classical Athens' social structure. Miller is a 21st-century author whose literary project aims to revisit Homer's world. In *The Song of Achilles*, some 21st-century masculine values are replicated. In Miller's debut novel, Thetis is one of the agents of hegemonic masculinity. As a result, Thetis does what she can to prevent the less desirable details of Achilles' legend from spreading.

To conclude this part, I juxtapose Achilles as Miller writes him with Homer's hero. As Van Nortwick argues, "[in Homer], we see two narrative patterns at work, the separation and return of the hero, and the separation of a boy from his mother and his evolution into a man" (*Imagining Men* 13). Similarly, *The Song of Achilles* evinces how Achilles' relationship with Thetis works. The goddess assumes Peleus' place – as the absent, yet admirable parent – and it is her belief that Achilles can be a god that marks his first steps toward a heroic masculinity. *The Song of Achilles* promotes another kind of breakaway between mother and male child that regular separation cannot accomplish: life and death.

Unlike mortal parents, Thetis cannot follow Achilles into the underworld (*The Song of Achilles* 368). Nor can Achilles linger on Earth or Heavens forever. Their separation, after Achilles' passing, will be final. I consider that, once Achilles has all the pieces of the prophecy, his engagement to his mythopoetic tale highlights the hero's confidence in letting go of his immortal half.

Additionally, Van Nortwick suggests that the hero's maturity can be asserted by the emphasis *The Iliad* gives to the boundaries between life and death through the symbolism of the unburied bodies. What Van Nortwick asserts is that mortality defines human existence (*Imagining Men* 87). In other words, Achilles' separation from Thetis marks the first step toward his physical, sociological, and psychological undoing in *The Song of Achilles*, because

he finally realizes that he is a mortal man. Even though he is partially mortal, it is still his duty to trade his life for glory on the battlefield.

The Song of Achilles can be divided into two sections: the first part covers Achilles' early years whereas the second part covers the period the hero spends in the Trojan War. Struzziero remarks that "[u]nlike the *Iliad*, *The Song of Achilles* devotes an ample section [chapters three to ten] to this phase of Achilles' preparation for manhood" (138). The first part marks Achilles growing up in Phthia, being trained by Chiron on the Pelion, and hiding away from recruitment on Scyros whereas the second part takes place in Aulis and Troy. In the next two sections, I analyze Achilles' growing into his masculine identity and undoing it according to each phase of his life.

4.2) Phthia, Pelion, and Scyros – Engagement with Life

The Song of Achilles is a *bildungsroman* in which the reader can trace the opposite and complementary path toward manhood taken by its two main characters: Patroclus and Achilles. Like Patroclus, the first place where Achilles starts to grow into his masculine role is in his homeland, Phthia. Both fathers, Peleus and Menoitius, are kings in their countries.

Traditionally, in patriarchal societies, the father is the one who initiates his son in the world. As Seidler (2003) argues, "the father was a figure of authority who was obliged to sustain a distance if he were to be effective. This was institutionalized within psychoanalysis, where the father's role was to separate mother from infant at a particular age" (*Men, Sex and Relationships* 6). The boy engages with the father's world which embodies the world of men's affairs, but he does not create an affectionate or close relationship with him. However, in *The Song of Achilles*, it is noticeable that Peleus does not fit in this description. In fact, he is portrayed as someone who "did not look like a man who could have conquered a goddess or produced such a child as Achilles" (*The Song of Achilles* 29). Also, Peleus is neither distant

nor authoritative. Instead, conscious of the hollow Thetis had left behind, the king of Phthia becomes a loving and proud father.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, Peleus is still an example of male expectations in this society; expectations that can be interpreted as “[t]he idea that masculinity is the internalized male sex role” (*Masculinities* 23). After all, Achilles is a prince and is next in line for Peleus’ throne; therefore, he must act as a Greek warlord. In addition, in the society portrayed by Miller in *the Song of Achilles*, it is Peleus’ duty to guide his son to perform the male sex role properly. Likewise, it is evident that there are several occasions in *The Song of Achilles* where Peleus acts as the guardian of Achilles’ hegemonic position.

Regarding the three features of hegemonic masculinity I discussed in Chapter 1,¹²⁷ I address how Peleus intervenes at each stage of Achilles’ upbringing. Firstly, Peleus questions Achilles’ decision when his son chooses Patroclus as his *therapon* (companion), because, according to the king, Patroclus would not add any *kleos* (glory) to Achilles’ reputation (*The Song of Achilles* 37). Secondly, as soon as Achilles reaches maturity, the king seems eager to make his son have intercourse with the slave girls of the palace, for “[i]t was expected; very few men [in ancient Greek society] came to their marriage beds without having done so” (*The Song of Achilles* 58). Moreover, Patroclus narrates that “[a]t thirteen we were almost late to do so, especially him, as princes are known for their appetites” (*The Song of Achilles* 59). To some extent, Achilles’ constant refusal to lay with one of the girls — and later on his relationship with Patroclus — can be considered a deviant trace from the hegemonic project.

Thirdly, and more importantly, Peleus’ desire to detach Achilles from Thetis, albeit subtle, does not go unnoticed. Due to his divine bloodline, Achilles’ separation from Thetis is not as plain as Patroclus’ separation from his mother. After all, Achilles’ godly half comes

¹²⁶ In Connell’s hierarchy, Peleus could be placed as a complicit man. However, as a father, his attitude toward Achilles can be perceived as deviant. The analysis of the Phthian king’s masculinity is beyond the scope of my Master’s Thesis.

¹²⁷ Distance from women, *kleos*, and sexual prowess.

from her. Here, what will define the boy's separation from his mother is the most masculine activity in Miller's and Homer's patriarchal society: war.

When Peleus orders Achilles' return from Mount Pelion, the king makes it clear that he had summoned his son back in the hopes the prince would fight in the Trojan War, for "[t]he taking of Troy is a feat worthy of our greatest heroes. There may be much honor to be won from sailing with [Agamemnon]" (*The Song of Achilles* 116). On the other hand, Thetis is not thrilled by the prospect because she is aware of the prophecy that foresees Achilles' death intertwined with the fall of Troy. As soon as she finds out Achilles is back in his fatherland, she takes him to the island of Scyros to wait until the war is over (*The Song of Achilles* 123). As Van Nortwick notes, in giving Achilles full support, not only is Thetis performing her mother's role in Greek epic tradition but also hindering Achilles from growing fully into his hegemonic , masculine role (*Imagining Men* 7).

However, Phthia marks a double standard for Achilles. Every time his father tries to impose what is proper for him to keep his hegemonic status, Achilles provides a negative answer. In Phthia, the boy learns to fight and to compete, but never spends too much thought on his reputation, for he acknowledges that, as the offspring of a hero and a goddess, part of his *kleos* (glory) is well secured. In Phthia, the only morsel of attachment Achilles has with the hegemonic project is his unwavering wish to become a hero, like Heracles (*The Song of Achilles* 56).

It is clear that in Phthia, the smallest kingdom in ancient Greece (*The Song of Achilles* 18), Achilles cannot mature all the necessary skills to bloom into the best warrior of his generation. Like his father and Heracles — the greatest hero against whom Achilles measures himself —, the boy starts his journey to his own heroic reputation. As Van Nortwick claims, in ancient Greek culture, a man should be educated to elevate his competitive virtues (*Imagining Men* 14). His first stop on this journey is at Chiron's retreat, on Mount Pelion.

There, not only does Achilles improve his fighting, music, and rhetorical skills, but he also starts to mature his sexuality. Away from the eyes of Thetis and the scrutiny of Peleus and other men in Phthia, Achilles and Patroclus can acknowledge fully their attraction to each other.

Throughout *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus and Achilles' courtship is symbolized by figs. According to Anne Sinha in "The Loves of Achilles: From Epic to Popular Fiction" (2017) "the figs first appear as a courting gift, then as a love gift [which] carries a universal meaning as the fig can refer in antiquity both to male and female genitals" (170). However, it is only when they turn sixteen – "[their] last year of childhood, the year before our fathers named us men, and we would begin to wear not just tunics but capes and chitons as well" (*The Song of Achilles* 95) – that their first sexual relation takes place. Patroclus also knows that, once Achilles occupies his hegemonic position in this patriarchal society, he is bound to marry. As an aristocratic man, though, marriage would never prevent Achilles from having lovers.

However, in the social fabric where sex is hierarchical, as Halperin points out, "[n]ot only is sex in classical Athens not intrinsically relational or collaborative in character; it is, further, a deeply polarizing experience: it effectively divides, classifies, and distributes its participants into distinct and radically opposed categories" (30). Despite their current positions, Achilles and Patroclus belong to the same social group. Therefore, any sexual intercourse between them is to be discouraged by those who hold more power in Miller's society. What is enthralling in it is that on Mount Pelion, Achilles does not seem concerned with this feature of hegemonic masculinity.

Moreover, on Mount Pelion, Achilles works on his warrior skills but is still disengaged from war or the battlefield – the place where *kleos* and male hegemony can be achieved. Achilles even claims he does not know whether he would fight if kings demanded (*The Song*

of *Achilles* 90). So far, I affirm that his boyhood has been marked by disengagement with the hegemonic project. Nevertheless, it is on Scyros that Achilles is on the brink of breaking from hegemonic masculinity.

Achilles is sent to the island against his will, under Thetis' orders, in the hopes that the boy is forgotten by Agamemnon during the drafting. As a youth entering the first stages of his life as a grown man, to battle is one of his primary occupations; therefore, running away from it would imply that Achilles is not ready to assume his male role neither as his father's heir nor as his countrymen commander-in-chief. Additionally, Connell emphasizes that the military is a field that shapes masculinity because armies depend upon the hero's figure to draft men (*Masculinities* 213). Miller endorses this view because, while hegemonic men in *The Song of Achilles* and in *Circe* are warriors, men who share non-hegemonic traits deviate from war activity.

However, I highlight Achilles' stay on Scyros for in this episode there is a total breaking from masculinity as a set of prescriptions. On Scyros, Achilles has to crossdress in the court of king Lycomedes. That way, Agamemnon's lieutenants might never find him. What is utterly surprising is, according to Patroclus, how well Achilles adapts to his new social role (*The Song of Achilles* 160). The days Achilles spends on Scyros can be compared to his idyllic years on Mount Pelion. Both places isolate Achilles from other men's and Thetis' scrutiny and promote the freedom to pursue other interests and even deviate completely from his gender role.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, as Kimmel points out, "[m]asculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine, not in the direct affirmation of the masculine, which leaves masculine gender identity tenuous and fragile" ("Masculinity as Homophobia" 127). The moment Odysseus and

¹²⁸ In *The Song of Achilles*, Heracles is the hero against whom Achilles molds himself and competes. It is rather curious that two of the greatest Greek heroes pile stories that link them with non-hegemonic traits. To exemplify that, both have a cross-dressing episode and are known to have partners of both genders. See Apollodorus' *Library* 2.6.3; See Apollonius' *Argonautica* 1207.

Diomedes unveil Achilles' disguise, the hero and Patroclus realize it is high time the prince engaged in the hegemonic project of masculinity. If Achilles does not go to war with them, the warlords will make the cross-dressing story known (*The Song of Achilles* 163), which would be a blow to his reputation. Moreover, Scyros is decisive to Achilles because it is there that the hero is told all the pieces of his prophecy: on the one hand, he is destined to be the best warrior of his generation; on the other hand, he realizes he will die in Troy (*The Song of Achilles* 166).

However, it is significant in my analysis to assert that Achilles' inner fears revolve not around his death but the loss of his glory,

I do not think I could bear it, [Achilles] said, at last. His eyes were closed, as if against horrors. I knew he spoke not of his death, but of the nightmare Odysseus had spun, the loss of his brilliance, the withering of his grace. I had seen the joy he took in his own skill, the roaring vitality that was always just beneath the surface. Who was he if not miraculous and radiant? Who was he if not destined for fame? (*The Song of Achilles* 166).

Once we assume that masculinity can be lost, it is noticeable that not even aristocratic men are completely shielded from the severity with which their male identity is judged.

If Achilles fails in his role as a hegemonic man, he knows that he is going to be ashamed. As Kimmel suggests, “[f]ailure will de-sex the man, make him appear as not fully a man” (“Masculinity as Homophobia” 127). To the standards of ancient Greek society, his cross-dressing experience is already a failure. The reason behind it — to hide from military draft under Thetis' plea — is equally (if not more) shameful and emasculating. Hence, there is no choice left to Achilles but to depart for Troy.

4.3) Aulis and Troy – Engagement with his Mythopoesis and Self-Destruction

After departing for Troy, Achilles' first stop is the harbor in Aulis, where, to mark his alliance with Agamemnon, he is bound to marry the Mycenae's king's daughter, Iphigenia. However, what takes place on the island is Iphigenia's sacrifice, orchestrated by Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Diomedes, three hegemonic kings. This scene portrays how hegemonic men in the patriarchal society Miller depicts can resort to the most extreme measures to achieve what they want — and not be punished for it.

As Patroclus tells us, “[h]uman sacrifice was an abomination, driven from our lands long ago. And [Agamemnon's] own daughter. We were horrified and angry” (*The Song of Achilles* 204). In Aulis, Achilles loses his innocence of blood, for, up to this point, he had neither killed someone nor witnessed a violent death. Moreover, it is in Aulis that Achilles has his first contact with true male hegemony. I affirm so because Peleus is not as ambition-driven as Agamemnon or Odysseus, the men who undoubtedly precipitate Achilles to his fall.

Not only does Agamemnon's scheme taint Achilles' honor but it also lays his path to engage fully with hegemonic masculinity and to become the Best of the Greeks. Aulis is the symbolic threshold between boyhood and adult masculinity to Achilles. After being confronted by Patroclus, in what I perceive as a dialogue between a representative of deviant masculinity and a hegemonic man, Odysseus reveals to Patroclus what he, Diomedes, and Agamemnon expected of the young boy, “If you are truly [Achilles'] friend, you will help him leave this soft heart behind. He's going to Troy to kill men, not rescue them ... He is a weapon, a killer. Do not forget it. You can use a spear as a walking stick, but that will not change its nature” (*The Song of Achilles* 207). Iphigenia's death opens the way for Achilles to start coming to terms with war and its brutality, either on the battlefield or out of it.

As Kimmel and Aronson claim,

[k]illing does not come naturally to men. Combat is a horrific experience marked by confusion, noise, terror, and atrocity in addition to any physical injury. Societies historically have worked hard to get men to fight — drafting them, disciplining them [to the point of shooting deserters], sometimes drugging them, and sometimes breaking family and community ties to replace them with military cohesion. After a war, many cultures honor veterans and confer special status or rewards on them. In some societies, war participation and war leadership open opportunities for political leadership. By contrast, men who refuse to participate may be shunned as cowards. All these inducements to participate in combat show the difficulty of getting men to fight (816).

That is why I argue that war is also the venue that directly leads Achilles to psychological, physical, and social harm because it is where he begins to exchange his personal identity for his glorious destiny.

Van Nortwick clarifies that by pointing out Sarpedon’s speech in Book 12 of *The Iliad*¹²⁹ in which Sarpedon, a hero, “briefly contemplates the existence he would have as a god, but then discards it: because he must die, glory must be won. We return here to the definitive quality of a masculine life as the Greeks understood it — mortality” (*Imagining Men* 76). To put it differently, war is where men experience death and physical pain. It is precisely because of this pain that hegemonic men must show willingness and promptness to battle. Trade his life for glory in war is what Achilles must do if he is to engage with the heroic model of masculinity.

Similarly, Simone Weil in “The *Iliad* or the Poem of the Force” (1941),¹³⁰ brilliantly exemplifies how war transforms men’s psyche in relation to death. As Weil argues,

¹²⁹ *Il*, 12. 310-329.

¹³⁰ “*L’Iliad ou le poème de la force*” (in the original in French).

all men are fated to die; true enough also, a soldier may grow old in battles; yet for those whose spirits have bent under the yoke of war, the relation between death and the future is different than for other men. For other men death appears as a limit set in advance on the future; for the soldier death is the future, the future his profession assigns him (22).¹³¹

What Weil in the first half of the twentieth century and Sarpedon in the Bronze Era propose is that war acclimatizes, benumbs men (and women) with the dreadful horrors of the no man's land,¹³² despoiling them of any future.

As Patroclus demonstrates in *The Song of Achilles*, “[o]ur world was one of blood, and the honor it won; only cowards did not fight. For a prince there was no choice. You warred and won, or warred and die” (221). Achilles is aware that, by marching to war, he risks losing everything to another man, even his mind. Alternatively, the battlefield is where Achilles is going to distinguish himself and rise to the status of *Aristos Achaion*.

In patriarchal societies, — such as the one Miller depicts in *The Song of Achilles* —, power is the core of masculine identities. As Henrik Berg points out in “Masculinities in Early Hellenistic Athens” (2011), “if we accept that in patriarchal societies there existed a hegemonic or ideal masculinity, it must have been the norm everyone was forced to relate to or compare themselves to [it]” (101). In Miller and Homer, war evinces the hierarchy that exists among masculinities — hence how much power a man holds and to whom a man should compare himself.

¹³¹ “Il est vrai que tout homme est destiné à mourir, et qu'un soldat peut vieillir parmi les combats ; mais pour ceux dont l'âme est soumise au joug de la guerre, le rapport entre la mort et l'avenir n'est pas le même que pour les autres hommes. Pour les autres la mort est une limite imposée d'avance à l'avenir ; pour eux elle est l'avenir même, l'avenir que leur assigne leur profession” (in the original).

¹³² In *The Iliad*, no man's land is the epithet that the poet uses to address the battlefield.

As Patroclus demonstrates, “[t]rained from birth in hierarchy, the lesser kings took the lesser places, leaving the front rows for their more famous peers. Achilles, with no hesitation, took a seat in the first row and motioned me to sit beside him. I did so, waiting for someone to object, to ask for my removal. But then Ajax arrived with his bastard half-brother Teucer, and Idomeneus brought his squire and charioteer. Apparently the best were allowed their indulgences” (217). Only the best and bravest can be in the first rows. Their willingness to occupy the most exposed positions on the battlefield reflects their glory and prestige in the army and in Bronze Age patriarchal society

Nevertheless, as soon as Achilles is initiated in combat, during the raidings in villages near Troy, his identity begins to be undone, giving way to the hero’s. As Boon suggests, the hero figure has the power to denote manhood and demote male identity (304). Similarly, Van Nortwick argues that manhood in ancient Greece is “the pursuit of distinction, the effort [to be separated] from other men” (*Imagining Men* 14). Achilles’ engagement with hegemonic masculinity in *The Song of Achilles* is his quest to become the greatest warrior in the army, the greatest killer. One cannot assume such a persona and still be kindhearted or pure. Part of Achilles has to die so the hero’s identity can take over.

Once we acknowledge the connection among hegemonic masculinity, *kleos*, and death it is fair to assume that hegemonic masculinity, to some extent, promotes men’s undoing in the society Miller portrays in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. However, the first to witness the dissolution of hegemonic men’s identities are the ones close to them.¹³³ To exemplify that, I resort to the following passage in *The Song of Achilles*, right after Achilles’ first raid.

When Achilles returns to his tent, soaked in blood, a horrified Patroclus narrates,

¹³³ In *Circe*, Penelope and Telemachus observe how Odysseus’ emotional state is feeble. They watch first-hand the hero’s transformation from a reasonable monarch into a paranoid, tyrant ruler.

[Achilles] smelled sharp and strange, and for a moment I was almost revolted at this creature that clung to me and shoved its face against mine. But then he sat back on his heels and was Achilles again, his hair damp and darkened, as if all the morning's sun had been poured out of it. It stuck to his face and ears, flattened and wet from the helmet. He was covered in blood, vivid splashes not yet dried to rust. My first thought was terror—that he was wounded, bleeding to death. Where are you hurt? I asked. My eyes raked him for the source of the blood. But the spatters seemed to come from nowhere. Slowly, my sleep-stupid brain understood. It was not his (*The Song of Achilles* 222).

In this passage, Achilles is no longer a boy or even a man; he is, as Odysseus foresaw, a killing machine.

Additionally, in patriarchal societies, powerful hegemonic men tend to cross several boundaries to keep their power and influence. Achilles is no different when it comes to his title of *Aristos Achaion*. Van Nortwick stresses that “[t]he tension between individual excellence and communal health is always at the heart of Greek ideals of masculinity” (*Imagining Men* 41). In *The Song of Achilles*, it is possible to highlight several moments where Achilles’ own grandeur gets in the way of his establishing a sense of union with other soldiers. Graziosi argues Homeric masculinities can be separated into two concepts: proper manliness¹³⁴ and excess of manliness.¹³⁵ Proper manliness and excess of manliness regulate how men behave and position themselves in relation to each other in ancient Greek society.

¹³⁴ Ἥνορέη, in ancient Greek

¹³⁵ Ἀγηνορίη, in ancient Greek

According to Graziosi, “[b]oth nouns are etymologically linked to the word ἄνηρ (man) and ... [both words] are gendered terms in Homeric epic” (60). Graziosi claims that, in Homeric diction, ἠγορέη is connected positively to those men concerned with the safety of the group on the battlefield (63). Conversely, Ἀγηγορίη is also considered by some scholars as “always pejorative” (Graziosi 62), for its meaning is intertwined with individualistic behavior and with isolation and extreme action (Graziosi 69). In addition to that, excessive manliness can be regarded as the hegemonic attempt to oppress men and women alike, putting masculinity against “the larger male project of establishing and guarding human civilization” (*Imagining Men* 52), whereas proper manliness is that which allows warlords to build rapport and a sense of communion.

When Agamemnon dishonors Achilles and reclaims Briseis — the embodiment of the young man’s honor (*The Song of Achilles* 282) —, Achilles withdraws from battle. At this point, Achilles’ unwavering wrath (*mēnis*) starts to spread. Achilles’ wrath is double-edged because it “alienates him from his *philoī* [peers]” (Muellner 101). Moreover, it is clear that “[w]hen [Achilles] acts to preserve his status, he causes death and suffering for those he is supposed to be protecting” (*Imagining Men* 77). Still, male hegemony and engagement with his mythopoetic story hinder Achilles and prevent him from going back on his word. Surprisingly, the once kind young man shows contempt for the other captains and even excitement over the news of dead comrades and Agamemnon’s downfall (*The Song of Achilles* 304).

In the diplomatic game devised by Odysseus during the embassy, Achilles' stubbornness puts him in a difficult position, because, now, not only do the Trojans hate him, but also the Greeks: "[the Greek soldiers] are angry with Achilles. They blame him for their losses. Agamemnon sends his people among them to stir up talk. They have almost forgotten about the plague. The longer he does not fight, the more they will hate him" (*The Song of Achilles* 313). Each defeat the Greek army suffers is perceived with delight by Achilles; however, as Patroclus notices, the hero's isolation only makes him resemble Meleager's portrait: hated and forgotten by his people. Indeed, Achilles' name is "on everyone's lips, [and] the power of his absence, [is as] big as a Cyclops" (*The Song of Achilles* 306). So is the revolt and resentment his withdrawal causes.

Achilles' social and psychological undoing is also marked by his inability to deal with his grief. It is only after the death of his lover that Achilles comes to terms with his destiny, to kill Hector – "the final dam before Achilles' own blood flow[s]" (*The Song of Achilles* 335) – and become *Aristos Achaion* (the Best of the Greeks). Deprived of his second-self, Achilles can truly show his colors as hegemonic and excessive. Achilles' social undoing is also marked by his self-deprivation of food, drink, sleep, or sex. According to Van Nortwick, when Achilles forswears all these symbols of Greek culture, he is also "signaling his withdrawal from all human life" (*Imagining Men* 9). Contrary to any other soldier – who need food and wine to recover their courage¹³⁶ – Achilles once more arms himself with "the qualities of the idealized hero figure [which are] always necessarily absent from ordinary men" (Boon 304). Likewise, he stands as proof that engagement with heroic masculinity can promote self-harm

¹³⁶ *Il*, 19.186-197.

The last piece of Achilles' social undoing and isolation is his unwillingness to observe the proper burial rites of Patroclus and Hector. Van Nortwick observes that "[b]y denying burial to both men, Achilles is keeping their souls from their final rest in the Underworld" (*Imagining Men* 11), expressly putting himself one step above his own nature. In assuring Hector that "[t]here are no bargains between lions and men. I will kill you and eat you raw" (*The Song of Achilles* 344), Achilles breaks with civilization and embodies excessive masculinity for once more he is approximated to a wild animal capable of the most hideous acts,¹³⁷ which horrify even the gods.

As Patroclus evinces, "[Achilles] rises at dawn to drag Hector's body around the walls of the city for all of Troy to see ... [but he] does not see the Greeks begin to avert their eyes from him. He does not see the lips thinning in disapproval as he passes" (*The Song of Achilles* 346). Hector's death is the final limit of Achilles' social undoing. Even the gods must intervene and show disapproval. However, not even they are capable of assuaging his wrath. Achilles' return to the world of men occurs only after his meeting with Priam,¹³⁸ the old king who resembles the warrior's own father in Phthia.

In these scenes, not only is Priam a substitute for Peleus but also a representative of patriarchy urging soldiers to assume their proper place in the social fabric, which may be either dying in war or preserving civilization during peace (*Imagining Men* 47). The hero is ready to fulfill his prophecy. His life can finally be traded for eternal glory, despite his grief. Reckoning with one's mortal condition is the landmark of manhood in Homer's world: in letting go of Hector's body, for example, Achilles is also accepting his own mortality, since his life and Hector's have been deeply intertwined by fate.

¹³⁷ *Il*, 22.308-12.

¹³⁸ *Il*, 24.559-576.

Achilles' social undoing is followed by his willingness to promote physical self-harm. After the hero is informed of Patroclus' death, his first reaction is to snatch "for his sword to slash his throat" (*The Song of Achilles* 336).¹³⁹ It is crucial to mention that in Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus only suggests wearing Achilles' armor in order to protect Achilles' own reputation and renown.¹⁴⁰ In other words, the first symbolic death Achilles suffers is the result of his engagement with his own heroic legend and patriarchal prescriptions to competitiveness.

Achilles' death wish only increases after Patroclus' demise. He fights at the edge of his force with the Scamander River, dismissing the fact that he is not a god (*The Song of Achilles* 343). Moreover, the hero starts to show immense self-hatred, as demonstrated through his armor — the personification of hegemonic masculinity. At the moment of Achilles and Hector's final battle, the Trojan prince is wearing Achilles' armor in a pursuit that "looks, almost, as if Achilles is chasing himself" (*The Song of Achilles* 341). When Achilles inflicts the final blow that strips Hector of his life, what the scene suggests is a symbolic suicide (*Imagining Men* 11). An in-depth analysis of the scene suggests that what Achilles wishes to kill is not Hector or himself, but the parts of his masculinity that promoted so much pain and death, to others and to himself.

¹³⁹ *Il*, 18.24-39.

¹⁴⁰ See *Somewhere I Have Never Traveled* 39.

However, because it is impossible — at this point — to dissociate the hero from his social armor of male hegemony, Hector’s death is, in my analysis, the death of Achilles’ hegemonic side. In their last conversation, Thetis reveals to Achilles that Pyrrhus, his son, is bound to be the next *Aristos Achaion* (*The Song of Achilles* 347). Then, and only then, it starts to dawn on the hero that hegemonic masculinity is an ever-demanding feature, something that will never be accomplished or even finished. The hero realizes that, to hegemonic masculinity, there will never be enough glory to be gathered, and that the title of Best of the Greeks is as ephemeral as his own life.

It is not possible to overlook that Achilles’ life is marked by the ambivalence of his own name and epithet, *okumoros*, swift-footed.¹⁴¹ What it suggests is the speed at which his fate unfolds. In her famous essay, Weil approximates war and force and affirms “[force’s] power of converting a man into a thing is double-edged” (25).¹⁴² Likewise, I propose to approximate heroic masculinity with force. As those who use force in Weil’s essay can be turned into stone by it (25), men who wear the hegemonic armor can be conquered by it and lose their identities in the pursuit of glory.

¹⁴¹ According to Leonard Muellner (2020), *akhos* (grief) is part of Achilles’ name (102). Similarly, “[w]hat *okumoros* [swift-footed] conveys about Achilles is a key to his whole persona, a notion that in fact subsumes his swiftness afoot: Achilles’ destiny as a warrior is as fast as can be, in the sense that it is compressed into the shortest time frame; he has the speed afoot that makes him the consummate warrior/hunter because he takes life itself at a dead run” (Muellner 99).

¹⁴² Telle est la nature de la force. Le pouvoir qu'elle possède de transformer les hommes en choses est double et s'exerce de deux côtés” (in the original).

The nature of hegemonic masculinity bends and shapes men in the world Miller depicts in *The Song of Achilles* until they are ready for their greatest achievement: their glorious death. It is noticeable that, during the several episodes in which Achilles has to balance his options, the hero disregards the hegemonic project — a project that, undoubtedly, pushes him toward unachievable masculinity. Conversely, every time Achilles has to embrace his heroic, godlike destiny, he is compelled to engage with the hegemonic project of masculinity and with his death. In conclusion, hegemonic masculinity in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* is that which leads men to their undoing.

Nevertheless, contrary to *The Iliad*, in *The Song of Achilles*, Achilles' death is not the center of its plot, albeit it does “belong to the message of the hero's song” (Sloterdijk 3). What is exposed in this rewriting — beyond the focus on the sexual relationship between the protagonists — is Achilles' greatest engagement with his own destiny and its aftermath. In my analysis, the novel stresses that what heroic masculinity demands of men is their undoing.

As R. Renehan argues in “The *Heldentod*¹⁴³ in Homer: One Heroic Ideal” (1997), “[t]he high road to undying glory was to be found primarily in being the best and in being preeminent above others” (112). *The Song of Achilles* makes it clear that to be the best warrior of his generation, to be *Aristos Achaion* (the best of the Greeks), Achilles has to go farther than any man has ever gone.¹⁴⁴ After all, Patroclus tells us, “the greater the monument, the greater the man” (*The Song of Achilles* 357). Clearer yet is the notion that, in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, the epithet, the Best of the Greeks, is a title posthumously bestowed.

The legacy behind such heroism and sacrifice leaves the impression that the path Achilles chooses to become *Aristos Achaion* is, like the Scamander's waters, not something golden now, “but a muddied, churning red, choked with corpses and armor” (*The Song of*

¹⁴³ Heroic Death, in German.

¹⁴⁴ See *Somewhere I Have Never Traveled* 53.

Achilles 341).¹⁴⁵ *The Song of Achilles* is an anti-war tale that depicts Achilles' metamorphoses from an innocent, sweetly boyish young man into a bait, "lost in Agamemnon and Odysseus' wily double meanings, their lies and games of power" (*The Song of Achilles* 315). Indeed, hegemonic/heroic masculinity may help those who perform it to scrape the stars and be compared to gods, but, in the end, every hero must come back to the mortal world.

How Miller depicts hegemonic men in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* leaves us to ponder, like Patroclus, whether Chiron, at the moment the centaur bids farewell to his apprentices, "[knew] or only [guessed] at Achilles' destiny" (*The Song of Achilles* 189). The figure of the legendary teacher, who had seen "boy after boy trained for music and medicine, and unleashed for murder" (*The Song of Achilles* 189), may as well help us reflect on what Seidler categorically affirms: hegemonic masculinity hinders us and prevents us from thinking about the powerlessness of men in specific situations (*Transforming Masculinities* 10).

It is exceedingly compelling that Patroclus dies trying to save Achilles' reputation in a frenzy for glory. In the end, Achilles' lover dies a fruitless death for an illusory cause. His realization after slashing Sarpedon, "I have killed a son of Zeus, but it's not enough" (*The Song of Achilles* 331), provides the only reaction to that which the hegemonic project demands of men: dismay over the parameters with which hegemonic men evaluate each other — and judge themselves. However, *The Song of Achilles* reinforces what Angela Hobbs, in *Plato and the Hero. Courage, Manliness, and the Impersonal Good* (2006), suggests is that "a new conception of *andreia* [courage, manliness] must be developed" (219). The novel's final chapter takes place in Achilles' tomb, where Patroclus' spirit and Thetis finally make peace by rewriting the scenes portrayed in Achilles' tombstone.

The pacifying act determines indeed what new kind of masculinity must be brought to life. Patroclus is the one who assures that Achilles' song of glory — for which he has traded his life — reminds one that Achilles is not "the things he did in his grief" (*The Song of*

¹⁴⁵ *Il.*, 21.265-410.

Achilles 366). Instead, Achilles' song, — rather, the hero's song — as the novel's title suggests, should eternalize Achilles' non-hegemonic actions, like the return of Hector's body to Priam, or the rescue of the slave girls from other hegemonic men. Patroclus, as Achilles' second-self and lover, promotes and glorifies the parts of the hero's tale whose engagement with hegemonic masculinity cannot tarnish.

Chapter 5: Miller's Patroclus: the True *Aristos Achaion*

“Stand in the trenches, Achilles,
Flamme-capped, and shout for me”
 (“Achilles in the Trench”, Patrick Shaw-Stewart)

“the prophecy that mother revealed to me one time ...
she said the best of the Myrmidons — while I lived —
would fall at Trojan hands and leave the light of day” (*The Iliad*, 18.9-12)

Patroclus and Achilles' story belongs to a similar pattern of ancient narratives in which a strong bond between two male (heroic) friends is broken by the weaker man's death. *The Iliad* is not the first war story to resort to that plot: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Book of *Samuel* in the Old Testament¹⁴⁶ also portray it. Similarly, the three tales emphasize that the

¹⁴⁶ As Fantuzzi (190-191) and Halperin (“Heroes and Their Pals” 76) point out, the tales of the couples of male heroes King Gilgamesh/Enkidu (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*) and David/Jonathan (*Samuel*) display a recurrent theme in ancient literature, which Homer's *Iliad* also represents.

surviving party can only move on through vengeance and that the lost friend is also part of the hero's identity.

As I state in Chapter 4, *The Song of Achilles* can be considered a *bildungsroman* that shows opposite and complementary paths to constructing male identities. Patroclus personifies the road not taken by Achilles, the other side of the hegemonic project, and, with that, Achilles' refusal to engage fully with hegemonic masculinity. Van Nortwick suggests that Patroclus is Achilles' second-self and represents in *The Iliad* parts of the hero that he either denies or with which he has lost touch through his arrogance and pride (*Imagining Men* 8). In Connell's theory of masculinity, Patroclus, as Miller rewrites him, can be perceived as a model of subordinate and protest masculinities.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, in Chapter 5, I discuss how Patroclus deviates from the hegemonic project in three sections that analyze how he builds his male identity against the three building blocks of hegemonic masculinity in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*: distance from femininity, *kleos* (glory), and sexual prowess.

5.1) Overcoming the Separation of Spheres: Patroclus' Identification with Women in Miller's *The Song of Achilles*

In *Imagining Men*, Van Nortwick claims "Hector is unique in the *Iliad* in that his character is determined so thoroughly by his interactions with women" (*Imagining Men* 63). The same can be stated of Patroclus in *The Song of Achilles*.¹⁴⁸ Throughout the novel, the narrator-character constantly distances himself from a world of men marked by closeness with the father, war, and the constant pursuit of *kleos* (glory). At the same time, he creates deeper connections with the women he encounters. In this section, I describe how Patroclus'

¹⁴⁷ According to Connell, homosexual men are subordinated by hegemonic and complicit masculinities while protest masculinity encompasses heterosexual men who do not subjugate, dominate, or disregard women. See *Masculinities* 78 and *Masculinities* 109.

¹⁴⁸ In my analysis, Hector could be considered an example of reformed hegemonic masculinity. Although he is not depicted in depth by Miller, he can be associated with Telegonus in *Circe*.

depiction by Miller approximates him to other women in the Greek epic and, therefore, leads him to build a masculine identity based not on male hegemony but partially on femininity.

Considering that, it is important to assert that two aspects divide men and women in the societies Homer and Miller depict, their roles and their constitution. To emphasize that, Connell (2005) points out, “[m]asculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations” (*Masculinities* 29). In the same fashion, Van Nortwick contends that “[f]or the ancient Greeks, as for other civilizations around the Mediterranean, men and women were fundamentally different by nature [*(phusis)*]” (*Imagining Men* 50). Because of that, femininity and the female constitution have been perceived as the opposite/complement to masculinity. By the same token, not only has femininity been seen as the weaker part of the social structure but also as a menace to the hegemonic male project.¹⁴⁹

In addition, as I have argued in Chapter 4, in Connell’s theory of masculinity, men are given opportunities to engage with the project of hegemonic masculinity throughout their lives. Therefore, I assume the moment of engagement must be connected with a process of masculinization based on distancing from women. The moment of engagement’s outcome is that it leads young boys “to devalue all women in [a patriarchal] society, [and consider them] as the living embodiments of those traits [young boys have] learned to despise [in themselves]” (“Masculinity as Homophobia” 128). To exemplify that, the very first memories Patroclus narrates in *The Song of Achilles* are those connected to the efforts Menoitius takes to separate him from his mother together with the hatred and contempt the king has for his wife.

¹⁴⁹ The notion that hegemonic masculinities thrive in the absence of women is rooted in contemporary theories of masculinities as it is in the classical intake of gender differentiation. To more about how contemporary authors have worked on the theme, refer to *Manhood in America* (pp.30-56). Cf. “Spartan Society: Structural Ritualization in an Ancient Social System” (2002). Likewise, ancient and contemporary theories of masculinity tend to agree that a female-ruled environment is likely to prevent boys from fully growing into their male roles, which is also a topic tackled by Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

However, because “hegemonic masculinity [is] not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832), moments of engagement might lead men to engage with other types of masculinities; men who later are perceived as either deviant or distant from the hegemonic type. Connell classifies such cases as protest masculinity, a category that is encompassed by men who go through “a process of Oedipal masculinization under the influence of fathers, brothers or symbolic patriarchy [but] in several cases [distanced themselves from] hegemonic masculinity, through realliance with the mother or a recognition and admiration of women’s strength” (*Masculinities* 135). The process that seeks to detach the boys from their mothers fails: instead, it distances boys and young men from the hegemonic type through an intense connection with feminine figures.

Consequently, this persuades those boys if not to admire women, at least, to recognize them as their equals. Patroclus opens his narrative by directly seeing the chasm between him and his father whose physical appearance resembles Odysseus. While Menoiteus is “a short man, as most of us were, and built like a bull, all shoulders” (*The Song of Achilles* 1), Patroclus is small and slight (*The Song of Achilles* 1). The difference between father and son soon broods into bitterness at the same time the association between Patroclus and his mother soon becomes evident. Not only does Menoiteus diminish and despise Patroclus as he diminishes his wife, but also the king becomes the closest example of how hegemonic men disrespect and disregard women — or those non-hegemonic.

In his memories, Patroclus narrates how other men have been cruel to his mother, “[a]t her temple a starburst of white gleams like bone, the scar from the time her father hit her with the hilt of a sword” (*The Song of Achilles* 3), and how much Menoiteus scorns them both (*The Song of Achilles* 4). As a result, instead of identifying himself with his father and starting to fill in his male role as a prince in Opus, Patroclus finds himself isolated and a recluse in his own father's kingdom, until he is finally exiled to Phthia (*The Song of Achilles* 18). Whereas

Achilles is separated from Thetis during his childhood, Patroclus, little by little, detaches himself from his father; this already starts to signify an opposite and complementary process of masculinization.

One of the great pillars of masculinity studies is the notion that masculinity is the flight from femininity. However, Connell notes that, to some extent, the separation between mother and male child can be postponed or even reversed (*Masculinities* 125). This might lead some men to rework their relationship with women to the point of identification with them. In *The Song of Achilles*, Menoitius inspires so much fear in the young boy that it is possible to affirm that Patroclus flies from the hegemonic type by either approximating himself to female figures or performing female tasks.

To exemplify that, I resort to a scene in *The Song of Achilles* in which, searching for information on Achilles' whereabouts, Patroclus goes after Peleus,

I went to Peleus. I knelt before him on a wool rug, woven bright with purple. He started to speak, but I was too quick for him. One of my hands went to clasp his knees, the other reached upwards, to seize his chin with my hand. The pose of supplication. It was a gesture I had seen many times, but had never made myself. I was under his protection now; he was bound to treat me fairly, by the law of the gods.....I pulled at his chin, tugging his face to mine (*The Song of Achilles* 122).

Although the supplicant's gesture appears throughout *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the one Miller's Patroclus mirrors is the one made by a female. One familiar with *The Iliad* cannot help but notice the similarities between Patroclus' supplicant gesture and the iconic scene in *The Iliad* where Thetis kneels before Zeus, the greatest representative of male authority, and pleads for Achilles' honor.¹⁵⁰

The second piece of textual evidence that shows the approximation between Patroclus and women is his name. In Book 9 of *The Iliad*, the embassy sent by Agamemnon tries to

¹⁵⁰ *Il*, 1.592-633.

make Achilles reconsider his return to the battlefield. Phoinix, Achilles' old tutor, resorts to Meleager's tale to dissuade the hero. The ancient warrior reveals that the only thing capable of convincing the brooding hero was the tears of his wife, Cleopatra. The resemblance between both characters has also been attested to beyond the fact that their names are made by the same Greek words, *kleos* (glory) and *patros* (father).¹⁵¹

Additionally, as Halperin argues, "Patroclus performs many of the functions for Achilles that a wife or female dependent normally performs in the Homeric World; for example, he places food before Achilles when the two of them are dining alone¹⁵² and, when they are entertaining guests, it is Patroclus who distributes the bread¹⁵³ ("Heroes and their Pals" 84). Miller corroborates this notion for when the assembly comes, it is Patroclus who oversees the food, who dutifully brings the platters, serves the warlords, and takes his seat beside Achilles (*The Song of Achilles* 306). To put it differently, not only is Patroclus Achilles' second-self, but he is also his 'wife'. When considering the patriarchal world in which both take part, it is rather clear that no hegemonic man would be willing to perform such tasks.

Patroclus starts to disengage from hegemonic masculinity because of his mother, and later on performs female tasks on camp. However, that is not enough to affirm that he is a representative of protest masculinity. To do so, it is necessary to analyze Patroclus' relationship with Briseis and other slave women.

After the ransacking of her city, Briseis is led to the Greek camp and exhibited as a war prize to be delivered to the best warrior, or to the most powerful man,¹⁵⁴ in other words, Briseis symbolizes the power of her owner. She, like Helen, has a high value in the currency

¹⁵¹ "Here is Phoinix's craft: Cleopatra, Patroclus. Her name built from the same pieces as mine, only reversed" (*The Song of Achilles* 309-310).

¹⁵² *Il*, 19.315-317.

¹⁵³ *Il*, 9.216-217; cf. *Il*, 11.624-641.

¹⁵⁴ Ideally, in the strong warrior culture Miller and Homer depict, the best warrior should be the most powerful man. However, that is far from being the case, because, whereas Achilles is undoubtedly the best warrior, Agamemnon is the wealthiest warlord and the Greek army's commander-in-chief.

of honor in ancient Greek society. However, Patroclus is aware of what that could mean to her: to be beaten, abused, and enslaved by Agamemnon. Even without knowing her, in an act of compassion, he pledges Achilles to take her away from Agamemnon's clasp (*The Song of Achilles* 226-227).¹⁵⁵

Patroclus' act of kindness and empathy can be perceived as an act of protest masculinity, because, according to Connell,

[h]egemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees or is taken to guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women [or other groups of men] (*Masculinities* 77).

Briseis is not the only girl Patroclus rescues through Achilles' influence over the Greek army. If we read Patroclus' intervention metaphorically, it is possible to affirm that when he steps in and stops Agamemnon and other Greek kings from taking the slave girls, he is preventing patriarchy's dominance over women from being established through another figure of male hegemony, Achilles.

However, the scene that summarizes Patroclus' relationship with women and seals his distancing from hegemonic masculinity is his plea to Agamemnon after his dishonoring Achilles and claiming Briseis back. Although Agamemnon swears he "never mounted [Briseis'] bed, never once made love with her" (*Il*, 9.160), it is no wonder contemporary authors have disregarded this claim. *The Iliad* emphasizes the camaraderie among men, more specifically the bounds that unite men at war. Whether Agamemnon's claim is true or not, Achilles is willing to forgive him as soon as he sets his mind on revenge against the Trojans.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Miller's representation of Patroclus may be aligned with contemporary notions of fairness in warfare, something alien to the society Homer depicts. Nonetheless, I do consider Patroclus an example of protest masculinity because not only is he the only male character who voices any empathy toward women but also the one who embodies women's grief in *The Iliad*. *Il*, 19.332-358.

¹⁵⁶ *Il*, 19.63-70.

To exemplify that, in a harsh and raw tale, Pat Barker in *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) leaves no doubt as to what will happen to Briseis once she is taken by Agamemnon. Similarly, Miller asserts that Achilles' honor is not enough to protect Briseis from the greedy commander-in-chief, which is why another man must intervene. In chapter twenty-six of *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus – horrified that Achilles had let Agamemnon take Briseis only to overthrow the general later – goes to the Mycenaean king and reveals to him Achilles' intention.

In the society Miller portrays, “[w]omen become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale” (“Masculinity as Homophobia” 129). When Patroclus places Briseis' safety over Achilles' honor, he completely disengages from male hegemony, because, as Struzziero notes, “[*The Song of Achilles*] is a clear and important rethinking of, and departure from, [*The Iliad*] as it shows Patroclus distancing himself from a masculine realm predicated on the exchange or trafficking of women, their bodies used as sexual objects” (146). On the other hand, when I analyze Patroclus' action through Van Nortwick's concept of second-self, I consider that he does what Achilles wishes he had done. That is, symbolically, the exchange represents hegemonic and protest masculinities performing their ways to be(come) men in a patriarchal society.

In Homer's *Iliad*, *aristeia* is defined as “excellence or prowess, including, in particular, the excellence or prowess of a Homeric warrior when he is on a victorious rampage, irresistibly sweeping all before him, killing whomever of the enemy he can catch or whoever stands against him” (Schein 80). Although Miller also depicts Patroclus' moment of brilliancy, alluding to the scenes of *The Iliad*'s Book 17, in my analysis, considering Patroclus a man who does not abide by nor performs male hegemony, his moment of *aristeia* is facing Achilles and revealing what he did.

As Karen Bassi (1997) argues, in the society *The Iliad* depicts, “man-to-man combat and man-to-man speech are mutually reinforcing practices required of the ideal heroic subject” (329). Patroclus, as Miller writes him, may not be a great warrior and may even conform to an ideal of anti-war masculinity. However, he is the son of a warlord and a nobleman, raised as Achilles’ companion. Although he does not fight like Achilles or is persuasive like Odysseus, Patroclus can stand up against either with his honest rhetoric and stand out as Miller’s *Aristos Achaion* (Best of the Greeks).

With one audacious action, Patroclus chooses to protect a woman at the same time he trumps Achilles’ attempt to achieve more glory. Therefore, Patroclus places himself in the way of the hegemonic project of subordinating women as well as demonstrating that Achilles — who so far had shown a strong moral compass —, when in pursuit of his hegemonic status, is capable of terrible non-heroic deeds to achieve what he fervently wants: to be remembered as the best warrior of his generation.

Patroclus, as Miller writes him, portrays a kind of masculinity that neither diminishes nor scorns femininity. Moreover, I acknowledge that Patroclus alone can achieve the title of the Best of the Greeks precisely because he is the character among those analyzed in this Master’s thesis who successfully overcomes the separation of the spheres. Achilles may have lived part of his life as a woman on Scyros; nevertheless, that does not prevent him from disregarding Deidameia’s feelings or treating Briseis simply as a token of his hegemonic status. Conversely, by showing empathy towards women, Patroclus occupies a higher moral ground and brings to light the qualities we, contemporary readers, wish heroes of the past might have.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ The poet of *The Iliad* conveys so much emotion and shows so much distress over Patroclus’ death that, even for the ancient Greek audience, one might assume that Patroclus impersonates some valor Achilles may have lost during his heroic journey or that, in the poet’s conception, he is the Best of the Greeks. Moreover Miller points to Patroclus’ valor in the enigmatic prophecy that links Achilles’ death to the demise of the best of the Achaeans.

To summarize the discussion on Patroclus' identification with women, I consider it crucial to read closely the passage of the battle for Patroclus' body after his death.¹⁵⁸ Patroclus' corpse becomes a spoil of war and, like the captive Trojan women, it can yield glory to those who have it. Symbolically, because Patroclus can be considered Achilles' second-self, Hector and the Trojans know that shaming Patroclus' corpse will shame Achilles' reputation too.¹⁵⁹

Therefore, I propose approximating Patroclus to Briseis. In my analysis, they are the embodiment of the hero's honor in *The Iliad* and *The Song of Achilles*. Similarly, both are taken by representatives of hegemonic masculinity — Agamemnon and Hector — and both are claimed to be returned to the hero intact.¹⁶⁰ While a plethora of soldiers dies in the scenes Homer depicts, only Patroclus' death is perceived as a direct blow to another man's honor, which suggests, once more, that not only is he the weaker part in his relationship with Achilles,¹⁶¹ but also that he can be associated with other women possessed by Peleus' son.

¹⁵⁸ *Il.*, 16. 984-1012.

Book 17 of *The Iliad* focuses on the battle for Patroclus' body returning back to Achilles.

¹⁵⁹ *Il.*, 17. 282-291.

¹⁶⁰ It has been suggested that death on the battlefield is emasculating because it involves one being penetrated by a sharp weapon (*Imagining Men* 77). By the same token, assuming that Agamemnon has never "mounted [Briseis'] bed" (*Il.*, 9. 159), nor has Hector desecrated Patroclus' body as he would have done had the Greeks failed to rescue it, both passages evince how hegemonic men can be emasculated through their women or by those subordinated to them. Similarly, in Book 6, Hector expresses his fears and concerns when Troy falls (*Il.*, 6. 539-556). As moving as this passage is, it cannot be overlooked that it also alludes to the shame Hector would feel if his wife were enslaved by another warlord.

¹⁶¹ I discuss Patroclus and Achilles' relationship in the next section.

5.2) Sexuality

The second topic I discuss in this chapter is Patroclus' sexuality and how it shapes his maleness in *The Song of Achilles*. Although Patroclus can be considered an example of protest masculinity because of his empathy and respect towards women, this is not the only trait portrayed by men who do not engage with the hegemonic project; nor is sympathy towards women considered enough to hinder men from positioning themselves as complicit to the hegemonic type.¹⁶² Van Nortwick notes that in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, "Helios [the Sun] is kind to Demeter in her grief, but urges her to be grateful that Persephone has such an admirably powerful husband [Hades]" (*Imagining Men* 20).¹⁶³ Male characters might show solidarity to women; however, they are still bound to protect the patriarchal structure or act in consonance with some patriarchal expectations.

For this reason, I consider that another feature of Patroclus' deviant masculinity in *The Song of Achilles* is his openly homosexual relationship with Achilles. Regarding that from our contemporary standpoint, it seems rather trivial to affirm that "[t]he relationship between gay sexuality and masculinity appears, at first glance, quite simple: gay sexuality negates masculinity" (Edwards 70). While it is undeniable that heterosexuality plays a huge part in how maleness is performed in and perceived by our contemporary society, the same cannot be assumed in the society of which Patroclus and Achilles are a part.

Connell's observation that "[p]atriarchal culture has a simple interpretation of gay men: they lack masculinity" (*Masculinities* 145) does not suffice to answer the questions this chapter poses and why Patroclus is a non-hegemonic character among those I investigate in my Master's thesis. Firstly, there are differences between masculinity as it is perceived by society and how it is represented in literary works. For instance, Hobbs argues, "if heterosexuality is mandatory for a hegemonic model in sociological terms, this is complicated

¹⁶² Even though Achilles protects some slave women from Agamemnon and other warlords, he is still attempting to achieve his heroic status among the Greek army.

¹⁶³ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 74-89.

in literature” (391). Likewise, Connell states, “[s]ome cultures regard homosexual sex as incompatible with true masculinity; others think no-one can be a real man without having had homosexual relationships” (“Studying Men and Masculinity” 49). Secondly, it is equally important to state that ancient Greek society did not scorn male-male relationships, — on the contrary, same-sex pederastic relations like those between the *eromenos* and the *erastes* were quite encouraged.

Thirdly, I partially concur with Sinha, who contends that in *The Song of Achilles* Miller plays in a subtle way on this motive [Thetis’ opposition to Achilles and Patroclus’ relationship¹⁶⁴] to justify the guilt and embarrassment of the heroes with which modern young readers could identify themselves without introducing the anachronistic notion of homophobia in a universe where the notion of homosexuality does not exist (168).

Nevertheless, what does exist in the society *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* portrays is sexual deviance, which, according to Halperin, is the notion that an aristocratic man yielding his power and dominance to other men of the same social status during sexual relations was inconceivable to ancient Greek society (23).¹⁶⁵

Likewise, contemporary and ancient definitions of masculinity undoubtedly converge to one feature: hegemonic men have power, which is reflected throughout their relationships and actions. That is why “Homer [makes] Patroclus, (...) – the subordinate member of the relationship – (...) physically weaker than Achilles and socially subservient to him, the older and wiser of the two and hence, the one whose job it is to watch over and instruct his unruly comrade” (“Heroes and Their Pals” 78). On the other hand, Patroclus, as Miller writes him, is not older than Achilles, nor does he look physically weaker.

¹⁶⁴ *The Song of Achilles* 63-64.

¹⁶⁵ *The Song of Achilles* 176.

In ancient Greek patriarchal society, homosexuality did not tarnish maleness; the role one took on sexual activity, however, did. Miller, like her predecessors, does not clarify whether Patroclus and Achilles' relationship could be perceived as a pederastic one. It would not be possible to affirm that Patroclus represents protest or subordinate masculinity, for it still leaves room for the possibility of his being the *erastes* (the older lover), the one who holds power in a homoerotic relationship between men in classical Athens.¹⁶⁶ For that reason, I investigate Patroclus' interaction with two women, Deidameia and Briseis.

Whereas I acknowledge that *The Song of Achilles* can be massively read as a queer tale, I do not overlook the fact that, throughout the novel, both Patroclus and Achilles have sexual relations with Deidameia. Another point in their opposite paths to a masculine identity is that while Achilles does not seem attracted to women, Patroclus does. That is sufficient to point out that Patroclus does not quite fit in contemporary definitions of homosexuality.

I choose these two encounters, one with Deidameia on Scyros and the other with Briseis at the Trojan shores, to argue that, to some extent, the social process of masculinization is dependent upon the perception of femininity as the other, which may or may not result in sexual desire for the other (*Masculinities* 123). On the other hand, the disengagement from hegemonic masculinity must come across with the yielding of sexual prowess. In these scenes, Patroclus does not deem Deidameia or Briseis as inferior nor treats them as an extension of his status. In the brief exchange with Deidameia, it is clear that the princess is the one who holds the power and willingness to choose him as a sexual partner.

Another point to be considered in the construction of hegemonic masculinities regarding sexuality is that Van Nortwick posits that men in ancient Greece were considered

¹⁶⁶ Halperin points out that Greeks from the Classical period read Homer anachronistically and assumed Patroclus and Achilles' relationship as a pederastic one ("Heroes and their Pals" 86). Although pederastic relationships were part of Athenian social structure and devised under very strict rules and norms, it is not the only possibility to approach Patroclus and Achilles. In my analysis of Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, I resort to a more contemporary interpretation of Patroclus and Achilles' relationship because homosexuality in ancient Greece is quite a complex topic.

the guardians of civilization, and, therefore, they had to procreate (*Imagining Men* 52). Achilles, compelled by Thetis — one of the representatives of hegemonic masculinity in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*—, is forced to father a child with Deidameia to carry on his name and glory. Later on, Patroclus has the same chance with Briseis, but he refuses it. For a brief moment, the protagonist contemplates what a peaceful life with a wife and children would have been like, and later discards it (*The Song of Achilles* 268).

As Achilles' companion, Patroclus is aware that, if he wishes, he may have “wives and lovers both” (*The Song of Achilles* 267). Patroclus' decisions champion what Hobbs claims one aim of masculinity studies in literature is “to isolate and examine positive examples of male protagonists who do not conform to masculine stereotypes” (290). Nevertheless, to discuss one's sexuality as part of one's identity is almost impossible without recurring to the notion of gender roles or gender performance.

To summarize the discussion on how Patroclus' sexuality is part of his and Achilles' masculine identities, I resort to the scene of Patroclus' funeral. In *The Iliad*, Achilles and Andromache cradle the head of their lovers.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Patroclus notes that “[Achilles] collects [Patroclus'] ashes himself, though this is a woman's duty. He puts them in a golden urn, the finest in our camp, and turns to the watching Greeks” (*The Song of Achilles* 350). In the end, the hero also instructs his men to mingle their ashes and bury them together (*The Song of Achilles* 350).

Halperin notes that whereas Patroclus performs some wife duties to Achilles, “[t]he conjugal associations, however, work reciprocally So each, in a sense, is wife to each” (“Heroes and Their Pals” 84). Miller also implies that, to a certain degree, Achilles and Patroclus represent the husband-wife dynamic. Before sailing back to Ithaca, Odysseus pays a

¹⁶⁷ *Il*, 23.136-37. Cf *Il*, 24. 724.

visit to Pyrrhus, the one responsible for overseeing his father's funeral, and begs Achilles' son to reconsider burying Patroclus' ashes together with Achilles'.

Pyrrhus is adamant: his father must be buried alone, for Patroclus was just a servant, another Myrmidon. Odysseus tries to dissuade Achilles' son by arguing that his consolation is that he and Penelope might meet again in the underworld (*The Song of Achilles* 364). Subtly, Odysseus denotes that Patroclus and Achilles are as married as he and Penelope are. Pyrrhus, who holds the same opinion as Thetis, denies his request. To the hegemonic prescription of masculinity, in the society Miller portrays in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, Patroclus may represent a stain to Achilles' status.

Even though Miller does not suggest that Achilles is the weaker part of the sexual activity, the sheer rumor that he might have been is enough to threaten his hegemonic status. Conversely, Patroclus can be approximated to Connell's subordinate masculinity role, for he, as Miller portrays him in *The Song of Achilles*, lacks the social status to be deemed as the dominant part in sex. However, to unravel Patroclus' masculine identity as non-hegemonic or non-complicit, I resort to the last field that builds hegemonic masculinity in ancient Greek society: war.

5.3) War — The Venue That Builds Masculinities

Regarding hegemonic masculinity and war, I concur with Kimmel, who affirms that “[a]ll wars are meditations on masculinity” (*Manhood in America* 49). Considering the novel's setting, it is clear that the expectations toward a man gravitate around his military excellence.¹⁶⁸ As Van Nortwick notes, the warrior's role “seemed to [the ancient Greeks] to exemplify something quintessentially masculine” (*Imagining Men* 74). However, in an utterly martial world, unlike his peers, Patroclus, as Miller writes him, does not show any interest in

¹⁶⁸ To exemplify that, one can allude to the moments of *aristeia* (excellence) that take place throughout *The Iliad*.

fighting. He is considered unfit to battle by Chiron and, when given the choice to learn how to be a warrior, he prefers not to get involved in soldiery affairs. He would rather learn the art of ealing (*The Song of Achilles* 75).

Throughout this chapter, I argue that Patroclus is not hegemonic. So far, I have discussed how he can be approximated to some female characters and how he does not perform his sexuality as a patriarchal Greek warlord would. Despite that, those arguments are not enough to affirm he does not fulfill any part of his hegemonic role; that is why Achilles, his counterpart, also performs some femininity in *The Song of Achilles* and does not care to demonstrate how sexually dominant he is. Therefore, the watershed between both characters and their (dis)engagement with hegemonic masculinity is their relationship with war.

The connection between the soldier figure and masculinity is well explained by Chris Hedges in *War* (2003). Hedges argues, “[t]he soldier is often whom [men] want to become” (16). Nevertheless, Patroclus refuses such a connection and, contrary to Achilles, never demonstrates any inclination towards war affairs. In his own words: “I was not a prince, with honor at stake. I was not a soldier, bound to obedience, or a hero whose skill would be missed” (*The Song of Achilles* 241). Patroclus is aware that, as a man, in the society Miller portrays, he is expected to perform some degree of hegemony, especially to comply with his martial duties. However, his position, as a former prince, exempts him from performing well on the battlefield or pursuing glory.

Struzziero notes that

Miller frequently underscores Patroclus’ ethically complex and tormented awareness of the problematic aspects of heroic self-assertion, and his perception of the harsh reality of war stripped of the heroic stereotypes that underlie it. Patroclus’ view problematizes war and the warrior values that motivate men to fight, and voices Miller’s anti-war reading of the *Iliad* (141).

Whereas in Homer glorious passages of battle thrive, Miller's Patroclus narrates aspects of war that are often neglected: the horror, the realization of the slaughtering, and the settling routine of a war camp (*The Song of Achilles* 260). Patroclus' horrifying impressions of war activity can be juxtaposed to the ones proposed by Achilles and Odysseus, the most hegemonic character in my analysis.

Whereas Odysseus can conjure "the war spear by spear" (*Circe* 185), Patroclus' concern is that war stories would only rekindle the memories of Achilles' cruelty (*The Song of Achilles* 366). The term hegemonic masculinity distinguishes a very specific behavior that is performed by a select number of men (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Even though hegemonic masculinity is not predominant among men, it is certainly the most valued type as well as it is the most easily recognized by society in general, especially in artistic or literary productions. When Patroclus chooses to engrave Achilles' tombstone with tales of kindness and beauty, he is working against the hegemonic prescription of giving the hero his *kleos* (glory) after his death and, once again, demonstrating that the man behind the hero's armor may be as hurt as non-hegemonic men.

Connell (2005) asserts that "[t]he figure of the hero is central to Western cultural imagery of the masculine. Armies have freely drawn on this imagery for purposes of recruitment" (*Masculinities* 213). In Western history, men and the military seem to be amalgamated notions. This exemplifies why Van Nortwick affirms, "[t]o write about men and war would seem to be the easiest job I have in [*Imagining Men*]" (*Imagining Men* 74). On the other hand, *The Song of Achilles* and *The Iliad* depict how the hero figure denotes manhood and demotes male identity (Boon 304). In other words, the hero figure is a double-edged sword that prompts men to act against themselves quite often.

Patroclus' death in the *Song of Achilles* illustrates this notion. In *The Iliad* and in *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus' end unfolds after he decides to wear Achilles' armor and fight the

Trojans. While it is undeniable that Achilles' armor connects the three men who wear it — Patroclus, Hector, and Achilles —, it can also be stated that it is a symbol of male hegemony. Like Odysseus' bow, only the bravest man, the *aristos* (the best), the most hegemonic man is worthy of it. Additionally, “[i]n Greek of all periods, the adjective *aristos* [best] is the superlative of *agathos* [good], but in the *Iliad*, whose world is a world of war, good and best mean good or best in battle” (Schein 80). To become the best in battle, the warrior must resort to his *aristeia* (excellence in battle). However, if there is a lesson that Miller seems never tired of teaching, it is that *aristeia* leads to the hero's death.

In *The Song of Achilles*, when Patroclus goes to battle wearing Achilles' armor, his identity is amalgamated with Achilles' myth, “[b]ut there was a line of rallied Greeks behind me screaming [Achilles' name]. I did not stop” (330). In his passage, the hero and his second-self become one through the armor. As a result, Patroclus accepts not only the armor or the hegemonic status that comes with it, but his early end. After all, Achilles' myth is the tale of a young man who meets his doom too early. In Chapter 4, I discuss how Achilles' engagement with hegemonic/heroic masculinity leads him to his loss of personal identity. Likewise, once Patroclus engages with hegemonic masculinity, through Achilles' armor, he can no longer be himself.

As soon as Patroclus puts Achilles' armor on, he becomes the symbol and embodiment of a masculinity that unravels his own identity. I claim that in the society Miller depicts, hegemonic masculinity is the cause of the hero's physical, psychological, and social undoing. In *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus, who so far has never gone into battle, is known among allies and enemies alike for his kindness. After Patroclus experiences what it is like to be Achilles at war — a powerful, invincible warrior (*The Song of Achilles* 329) — his identity is replaced by the heroic/hegemonic role.

The connection between war and men's physical harm may seem easily established.¹⁶⁹ However, the same cannot be stated about the hero's social and psychological undoing. By analyzing how Patroclus envisages Troy's destruction, in one of the passages that mirrors Patroclus' frame of mind while he wears Achilles' armor, it is possible to witness a changed character.

Patroclus admits that

[t]he thought of Troy's fall pierces [him] with vicious pleasure. [The Trojans] deserve to lose their city. It is their fault, all of it. We have lost ten years, and so many men, and Achilles will die, because of them. No more. I leap from the chariot and run to the walls. My fingers find slight hollows in the stone, like blind eye-sockets. Climb. My feet seek infinitesimal chips in the god-cut rocks. I am not graceful, but scrabbling, my hands clawing against the stone before they cling. Yet I am climbing. I will crack their uncrackable city, and capture Helen, the precious gold yolk within. I imagine dragging her out under my arm, dumping her before Menelaus. Done. No more men will have to die for her vanity (*The Song of Achilles* 332).¹⁷⁰

Not only do these moments reflect the protagonist's psychological condition and evoke the sense of a dislocated, fragmented psyche (Struzziero 142) but they also demonstrate how *aristeia*, the desire to become the best warrior on the battlefield, leads Patroclus to isolate himself from his companions and contemplate the daydream of ransacking Troy alone, putting himself and others in danger.

As I have argued in this Master's thesis, to some extent, hegemonic masculinity can be associated with what Graziosi coins as excessive manliness because both lead men to a risky position from which they can rarely escape unscathed. In some scenes of *The Iliad*, men's

¹⁶⁹ According to Neta C. Crawford in "Blood and Treasure: United States Budgetary Costs and Human Costs of 20 Years of War in Iraq and Syria, 2003-2023" (2023), although it is difficult to tally the total costs of the last conflicts in which the US took part, the numbers of casualties closes 600.000 people.

¹⁷⁰ *Il*, 16.115-119.

willingness to promote self-harm is represented through the use of animal similes. Graziosi and Michael Clark notice that, in those specific moments, heroes are approximated to beasts,¹⁷¹ which endorses the argument that men who engage with the hegemonic roles of their masculine identities are also engaging with their doom.

To exemplify this, I analyze Patroclus' death on the battlefield as Miller writes it in *The Song of Achilles*. As the armor has been put on him piece by piece, it is unstrapped from Patroclus' body: "[m]y helmet. I see it beside me, overturned like an empty snail shell. My armor, too, has been shaken loose, all those straps that Achilles had tied, undone by the god [Apollo]. It falls from me, scattering the earth, the remnants of my split, spilt shell" (*The Song of Achilles* 333). In *The Iliad*, during moments of extreme danger or bravery, heroes are compared to lions or boars. Conversely, in what should have been his greatest moment in an epic narrative¹⁷² — his glorious death —, Patroclus is compared to a snail whereas Achilles' armor, the epitome of male hegemony and heroic identity, to a frail shell.

What the reading of this passage suggests is that, once men engage with hegemonic/heroic masculinity, they might never come back to their old selves. Whereas it is possible to affirm that showing no interest in fighting since his childhood and that showing an unusual sexuality place Patroclus as a type of protest and subordinated masculinity, the notion that he might portray some aspects of hegemonic masculinity cannot be overlooked. What *The Song of Achilles* points out is that, indeed, the military is the most important arena for hegemonic masculinity to thrive¹⁷³ and, as such, it is the greatest destroyer of men's identities.

Conversely, by promoting an anti-war Patroclus to the position of the storyteller of a war story, Miller is also rectifying the notion that all men can be represented by the historical

¹⁷¹ See Graziosi (2003)
See Clarke's "Between Lions and Men: Images of the Hero in the *Iliad*" (1995).
Cf. *The Song of Achilles* 344.

¹⁷² Clarke 152; Schein 68; Muellner 101; Loney 135; Renehan 107.

¹⁷³ See *Masculinities* 213.

few men who have been considered the epitome of masculine achievement in patriarchal societies (Hobbs 384). Hobbs states,

[w]hile flawed male protagonists are only flawed compared to a reader's notion of socially prevalent hegemonic ideals, the very fact that such a character is the protagonist of the novel instead of a more traditional hero-type could suggest that literature champions a different model of masculinity (390).

Patroclus, as Miller writes him, cannot be considered a role model of hegemonic masculinity either; rather, he represents those men who do not glorify war as a venue to express masculinity.

That is enough evidence to place him as the true *Aristos Achaion* in my analysis. That is why at the center of *The Song of Achilles*, there lie two narrative patterns of hero stories. To prove my point, I juxtapose Patroclus with Achilles' son, Pyrrhus. Raised by Thetis, Pyrrhus embodies a kind of masculinity that is "characterized by the domination of weaker individuals, competitiveness, and heroic achievements" (Higate and Hopton 433). Moreover, Pyrrhus fits all the criteria I discuss in Chapter 1: he descends from a noble, divine line; he is inconsiderate to women; the dominant part in sexual activity; and he is exceedingly skillful at war.

The moral battle that ensues after Achilles' death and Pyrrhus' arrival at Troy takes place at Achilles' funeral monument. Not only does Pyrrhus forbid that Patroclus be buried with his father but also makes sure to engrave the obelisk with Achilles' most atrocious acts in the Trojan War (*The Song of Achilles* 365). That is compelling evidence that Achilles' story, told by someone who shares the same values prized by the ancient Greek warrior's code, must be one of power. The engraved obelisk represents Achilles' triumphs at war: it portrays him as the Best of the Greeks because he has accomplished his duty on the battlefield and achieved undying glory. However, I consider that Patroclus does not match any of the criteria of the

hegemonic or complicity¹⁷⁴ types because he has the power, through his narrative, to change Achilles' story, from one of hegemony to one of kindness and even powerlessness.

In *Transforming Masculinities* (2006), Seidler argues that framing masculinities only as a relation of power never leads us to consider men as powerless (10). It may seem rather peculiar to regard Achilles as a powerless figure in his own story, — however, in the last chapter of *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus' ghost resents how people likely remember the hero by “[k]illing Hector, killing Troilus. For things he did cruelly in his grief” (*The Song of Achilles* 366). Grief is precisely the key factor to unravel Achilles' frailty.

As Van Nortwick notes,

[after Patroclus' death] we see Achilles in a self-created hell, trapped by his own feelings, looking for relief by abusing the corpse of his enemy. But because [the *Iliad*] has symbolically connected Hector and Achilles through the latter's armor, this savagery is also directed inward, a vivid picture of self-loathing (*Imagining Men* 14).

Similarly, Seidler states men tend to “escape from emotions and feelings they have learnt to interpret as threatening to their male identities” (*Transforming Masculinities* 12). Because Achilles is unable to deal with his grief, he becomes reckless, cruel, and brutal.

Whereas Pyrrhus wishes that Achilles' tombstone be engraved with the hero's excesses and bloodthirstiness, Patroclus, an exemplar of protest-subordinate masculinity can put Achilles under a different light. Through his storytelling, Patroclus persuades Thetis to rebrand Achilles' monument completely, so both can finally rest together (*The Song of Achilles* 369). Moreover, it is symbolic that Thetis is the one who rewrites the engraving with the help of Patroclus, who had chosen to learn the art of healing instead of warfare. In my analysis, the goddess also portrays male hegemony as she is the driving force behind Achilles' and Pyrrhus' engagement with heroic masculinity — consequently, behind their tragic ends as

¹⁷⁴ According to Connell (2005), complicity masculinities are represented by men who benefit from patriarchy without representing it like the hegemonic types (*Masculinities* 79).

well. By finally being able to accept her son's death and carving Achilles' tombstone with Patroclus' name, Thetis may be denoting a kind of reformed, healed masculinity.

Read metaphorically, *The Song of Achilles*' last scene unfolds in two manners. On the one hand, it depicts hegemonic masculinity looking back at the aftermath of its own impossible demands, "I could not make [Achilles] a god" (*The Song of Achilles* 368). On the other hand, it portrays the union between the hero and his second-self, which implicitly shows that men can only heal themselves when they come to terms with aspects of their identities patriarchal masculinity teaches them to despise and/or to suppress.

Van Nortwick points out that no other figure in ancient literature is as self-destructive as Achilles when it comes to isolation and the pursuit of glory (*Somewhere I Have Never Been* 39). Conversely, Patroclus represents the power men have to heal wounds and rebuild themselves through sensitivity and empathy, especially toward the weak. If in *The Iliad*, excellence can only be achieved on the battlefield, in *The Song of Achilles*, love is "most powerful in helping men achieve excellence and happiness" (*The Symposium* 180c). What the sexual and spiritual union of Achilles with his second-self portrayed in *The Song of Achilles* evinces is that men can only reform and heal their masculine identities if another version of heroic masculinity is given the chance to be brought to light.

Final Considerations: Homer, Miller, and Contemporary Anglo-American Masculinities

“So what if I'm not a world-class man of war?

How can a man be first in all events?”

(*The Iliad*, 23.747-748)

Barry Strauss opens *Fathers and Sons in Athens* with a plea: “[p]ity the Greeks: for two millennia and more, they have been the chief mirror in which the intellectuals of Europe and European derived civilizations have chosen to see, not the Greeks as they were or might have been, but rather, themselves” (1). Centering the stage of all Greek blueprint is Homer, who, as Rafael Silva claims, embodies a complex metonym, as “Homer stands for the entire field of classical scholarship throughout its history” (*O Evangelho de Homero* 34).¹⁷⁵ The last twenty years or so have witnessed the rise of a new type of novel focused on rewriting the Classical past. This phenomenon seems to confirm what Strauss and Silva point out: there is an undeniable connection between Homer and the West.

As I argue in Chapter 1, the hero, a metanarrative of masculinity, is the figure who puts the Homeric epic in motion. Men, masculinities, and literature may seem, at first, a rather uncomplicated set of topics. However, the first objection appears at the onset of such a study: what is masculinity? If any set of conclusions can be drawn from most studies on masculinity, then three are the most highlighted by theoreticians.

Firstly, the notion that, since the day women left the home, masculinity has always seemed to be in crisis somehow. As a result, men are often seeking ways to manufacture

¹⁷⁵ In the original, “[a]credito ter sugerido bem o lugar de Homero nisso tudo, de que forma sua figura parece encarnar uma metonímia dos Estudos Clássicos — representando, de certa forma, a própria área”
To more on how contemporary authors have contributed to the reshaping of Classical studies, refer to Silva’s *O Evangelho de Homero: Por uma outra história dos Estudos Clássicos* (2022), pp.593-626.

manhood (*Manhood in America* 105). Secondly, the idea that the development of manly masculinity must be restored through a return to a sort of savage man, a creature of the wilderness, of a less-civilized past. Assuming the standpoint of the heroes who populate Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, these men reside in the heroic age sung by Homer and Hesiod and set the bar to Achilles, Patroclus, Odysseus, Telemachus, and Telegonus find their masculine identities. Similarly, for generations of men who have lived in the US, this recreation of the past spurs back to the quasi-mythical time of the frontier and the conquest of the west of the US. Thirdly, the belief that men can only be(come) men when they are set apart from women. Femininity is, therefore, bound to oppose masculinity.

I concur with Kimmel, as the sociologist eloquently puts it,

[masculinity] is neither static nor timeless; it is historical. [It] is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. [Masculinity] does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture. [It] means different things at different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by letting our definitions in opposition to a set of others — racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women (“Masculinity as Homophobia” 120).

What Kimmel shows is that it is not possible to answer what masculinity is without focusing on a specific time and place and that it needs other definitions to come to light. More importantly, masculinity can be considered plural; hence, even in a specific social-historical context, there might be more than one definition. Among those definitions, the concept of hegemonic masculinity stands out. Once we acknowledge that there is a model of hegemonic masculinity, it is possible to design the kind of relationships that might take place among hegemonic and non-hegemonic men.

For that reason, I endeavor to identify what encompasses hegemonic masculinity in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. The set of characteristics I consider allows me to affirm that, in the society Miller portrays, hegemonic masculinity is not exclusively performed/portrayed by men. I acknowledge that while I may not have mentioned foundational authors to Gender Studies as often as would have been expected — like Foucault and Butler —, I resort to writers like Herodotus, Plato, Plutarch, and Xenophon to delve into how ancient Greek society may have considered gender roles.¹⁷⁶ I chose these authors because I consider that, as the epigraph that opens my Master's thesis suggests, past and present are intertwined. The constant depiction of ancient heroes in novels, movies, and TV shows provides enough evidence that ancient Greek ideals of masculinity still pervade contemporary Anglo-American imagination.

As Struzziero notes, Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* are an important rethinking of and a constant departure from Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (146). Madeline Miller rewrites Achilles, Odysseus, Telemachus, Telegonus, and Patroclus in *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*. Throughout my analysis, I point out the impossibility of discussing the role of the Homeric hero without intertwining this discussion with the construction of masculinities in Bronze Age warrior society, despite how difficult and complex the discussion may seem. Nonetheless, I state that both authors — Homer and Miller — built their own version of what Bronze Age society might have been.¹⁷⁷ Wilson argues that “the Homeric poems reflect a mixture of artifacts and practices that existed at different historical times” (“Introduction” 14). Since my analysis is focused on Miller's fictionalization of the chronologically complex Homeric world, some historical inaccuracies might be expected.

¹⁷⁶ Despite that, it is undeniable that Butler's notion of gender performance and Foucault's discussion of sexual desire and male authority in *The Use of Pleasure* (1985) are embedded in some studies over gender and sexuality to which I resort.

¹⁷⁷ It is well established that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* depict a society whose demise occurred at least 400 hundred years before Homer's own time. See Wilson's “Introduction” (5-23) and Knox (23).

Contrary to what might be expected in an analysis of a feminist rewriting of Homer, I contend that hegemonic/heroic masculinity can be harmful not only to those characters who are stuck in the margins of Homer's epics but also to those who supposedly benefit from the hegemonic position. Whereas some might dispute that Homer's hegemonic aristocratic warriors could not have been harmed by the social position they occupy, I tend to differ. After all, it is Agamemnon's and Achilles' inability to deal with the loss of status that puts the whole plot of *The Iliad* in motion — the aftermath of which is the unnecessary demise of many warriors. Likewise, in Sarpedon's famous speech in Book 12, it is quite clear that the acquisition of glory (*kleos*) is what drives men toward the battlefield and the horrors of war.

Throughout my Master's thesis, I affirm that Miller's Patroclus voices Miller's anti-war view of the world. Similarly, some scholars and commentators tend to argue that Homer's *Iliad* can also be read as an anti-war poem.¹⁷⁸ The fact that the last lines — out of the 15,693 that compose the poem — display Hector's funeral is a poignant piece of evidence that *The Iliad* might be a poem much more concerned with the human condition than with the glory of war. It does not go unnoticed that, even though Priam and Achilles are enemies on opposite sides, they need each other to learn how to come to terms with grief.

I put at the center of my master's thesis the link between what encompasses hegemonic masculinity in Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* and how it leads hegemonic men to a path of physical, psychological, and social undoing. Hegemonic masculinity, in Miller and Homer, puts *kleos* (glory) and *oikos* (household) as opposite ideals of male achievement. Odysseus may spend the whole *Odyssey* trying time and again to reach Ithaca, but what Miller's *Circe* shows is Odysseus' struggle to flee the overwhelmingly feminine domestic space. Contrary to the ending of *The Odyssey*, Miller's Odysseus seems

¹⁷⁸ See Schein 73-76.

Caroline Alexander's *The War that Killed Achilles: The True Story of Homer's Iliad and the Fall of Troy* (2009).
Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994)

indifferent to domestic pleasures¹⁷⁹ and is only able to find peace in pillaging and warfare — unarguably male activities in Bronze Age Greece.

Similarly, *The Song of Achilles* makes it clear that Achilles is not bound to return home if he is to get undying glory. Miller's Achilles is as exceptional as Homer's for he, too, has two fates. That is not enough to prevent the hero from engaging with the hegemonic status and, like Odysseus, the most hegemonic character in my analysis, Achilles also represents the antagonistic relation between *kleos* (glory) and *oikos* (household).

While in Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe* the hegemonic status may harm men, Homer sheds an ambiguous light on his hegemonic characters. Homer displays men's breaking down and men's *aristeia* (excellence in battle) by using similes that approximate them to wild animals. Conversely, Miller focuses on Achilles', Patroclus', and Odysseus' fragmented frames of mind and erratic actions. Odysseus, who in *Circe*, can be considered a middle-aged man, starts fabricating his own tales emphasizing he would rather die at the sea again than — to quote Lord Tennyson's *Ulysses* — by boredom, surrounded by fools and an old wife.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, Patroclus hallucinates inside Achilles' armor, and Achilles — like Demeter in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*¹⁸¹ — forswears symbols of human life and embraces a figurative death.

Another important concept to analyze Miller's characters is the figure of the second self. In *Circe*, Telemachus and Telegonus symbolize different ideals of a son's inheritance. Whereas Telegonus wants to travel and fight, Telemachus is happy with a rather dull, domestic life. However, both show a healthy way to deal with their father's legacy. In *Circe*,

¹⁷⁹ *Od*, 24.298-299.

¹⁸⁰ It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me
I cannot rest from travel. (*Ulysses*, Lord Tennyson).

¹⁸¹ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 189-199.

both boys must cope with different versions of Odysseus and find a way to build their masculine identities as something other than just another part of Odysseus' tale of glory.

In *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus and Achilles also complement each other, reflecting an old pattern of male friendship in ancient literature, like *Gilgamesh* and The Old Testament. Whereas *Gilgamesh* presents the antagonistic relation between nature and culture embedded in its protagonists — King Gilgamesh and Enkidu —, *The Song of Achilles* ends with Achilles and Patroclus holding hands in the underworld, symbolizing the end to mortality/immortality conflict. In my analysis, the last scene of *The Song of Achilles* represents the struggle hegemonic men have against themselves.

In Miller's debut novel, I consider Thetis a figure of male hegemony. Her blessing to Patroclus' soul following Achilles in the underworld resembles another pair of a hero's mother and his companion: the goddess Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, and Enkidu. In *Gilgamesh*, Ninsun adopts Enkidu as her foster son.¹⁸² Although Thetis' approval of Patroclus is not as warm as Ninsun's is, in a symbolic reading, she represents the hegemonic ideal of masculinity finally allowing the hero to unify parts of his identity that are often in conflict. In other words, men can only find wholeness if they let go of the hegemonic ideals and embrace the weaker parts of their identities.

On the one hand, my Master's thesis studies a specific type of man: young, physically strong, and a member of a royal dynasty. As I argue in Chapter 1, I can approximate Patroclus and Telemachus, as Miller rewrites them, to models of subordinate and protest masculinities. However, that is not enough to overlook their potential to become hegemonic or to engage with the hegemonic ideal of masculinity since they do belong to the Greek aristocracy and can be rather skillful warriors.

¹⁸² *Gilgamesh*, I. iii, 119-129.

On the other hand, masculinity studies have pointed out the difficulty of studying aging men or boys in literature.¹⁸³ I consider that it is because those two groups of men might not be able to engage completely with hegemonic masculinity. Boyhood is invisible to masculinity and, as Roisman points out, in ancient Greek culture “[t]he elderly were seen as no longer capable, physically or mentally, of meeting the standards expected of younger men. They were often associated with lamentable behavioral traits” (205). As a result, boyhood and old age seem to be categories outside the domain of masculinity.

Whereas in *The Iliad*, Priam, Nestor, and Phoenix offer bitter remarks on old age, *The Odyssey* shows the aftermath of a generation of boys that grow up without their fathers in Bronze Age Greece. Although my Master’s thesis focuses on a specific group of men, it may pave the way to discuss novels like *An Arrow’s Flight* (1998), by Mark Merlis, and *Ransom* (2009), by David Malouf. Both respectively bring to the center Pyrrhus and Priam, Homeric characters who have had their lives intertwined with Achilles’, but have not, unlike Patroclus, found a way out of the hero’s shadow.

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¹⁸³ See “Masculinity Studies and Literature” 389.

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