

Original Article

## RECONFIGURING CLASSICAL MYTHS IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION: A TRANSMODERN COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MILLER, ATWOOD, AND DIVAKARUNI

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### ABSTRACT

Mythic retellings have acquired renewed prominence in twenty-first-century fiction as authors revisit classical narratives to address ethical, gendered, and political questions that earlier versions often left underdeveloped. This paper examines the reconfiguration of classical myths in the works of Madeline Miller, Margaret Atwood, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni through the conceptual framework of transmodernism, which integrates inherited cultural memory with contemporary critical concerns. Employing transmodern theory, feminist narratology, and comparative hermeneutics, the study analyses the ways in which these authors decentre heroic masculinity, foreground marginalised female subjectivities, and render mythic structures responsive to plural and cross-cultural interpretations. Although their narrative strategies vary—ranging from Miller’s humanisation of mythic figures to Atwood’s ironic interrogation of canonical authority and Divakaruni’s reclamation of indigenous feminine agency—their works collectively signal a broader transformation in the literary function of myth. Rather than preserving myth as a static cultural inheritance, these authors reconceive it as a dynamic narrative site that enables ethical reflection and critical reinvention. The paper demonstrates that a transmodern comparative perspective provides a coherent analytical lens for understanding this shift and highlights the continued adaptability of myth in contemporary literary discourse.

**Keywords:** Myth Rewriting, Transmodernism, Feminist Narratology, Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Myth Studies, Madeline Miller, Margaret Atwood, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

### INTRODUCTION

Classical myths have long served as foundational narrative frameworks through which cultures articulate their ethical values, social hierarchies, and conceptions of the human condition. Their endurance across centuries reflects not only their symbolic richness but also their capacity to absorb new meanings as different historical moments reinterpret them. In contemporary fiction, this adaptive quality has become particularly visible, with numerous writers revisiting canonical myths to interrogate the gendered, political, and moral assumptions embedded within earlier tellings. This resurgence aligns with broader shifts in literary studies, where myth is increasingly understood not as a closed system of inherited stories but as an evolving cultural discourse capable of engaging with modern questions of identity, power, and representation.

Within this renewed interest, the works of Madeline Miller, Margaret Atwood, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have attracted sustained critical attention for their distinctive approaches to mythic reconstruction. Although they draw from different cultural archives—Greek, Western, and South Asian—their retellings share a concern with the ethical implications of narrative authority and

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the silencing of marginalised voices within traditional mythic frameworks. Each author repositions mythic figures in ways that expose the limitations of earlier accounts and reveal alternative perspectives that classical narratives often suppressed or rendered peripheral. Their work thus exemplifies how contemporary writers use myth not merely to revive familiar stories but to reshape the interpretive space through which readers engage with inherited cultural memory.

A transmodern perspective offers a productive lens for analysing this creative reconceptualisation of myth. Transmodernism, with its emphasis on dialogic engagement between past and present, provides a theoretical framework for understanding how these authors simultaneously acknowledge the authority of ancient narratives and challenge their ideological foundations. Rather than pursuing a purely revisionist or oppositional stance, their retellings operate within a hybrid space in which continuity and critique coexist. This approach allows classical myths to be mobilised for new ethical and political purposes while retaining their symbolic resonance.

Despite the growing scholarship on mythic rewritings, comparative studies that examine the intersection of transmodernism, feminist narratology, and cross-cultural reinterpretation remain limited. Existing research often focuses on individual authors or specific cultural traditions, leaving insufficient attention to how myth travels across global literary contexts and is reshaped by different historical, gendered, and regional concerns. This paper addresses that gap by analysing the narrative strategies through which Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni reconfigure mythic subjectivities and reconstruct the ethical contours of their source materials. Through a transmodern comparative lens, the study aims to illuminate the evolving function of myth in twenty-first-century literature and to demonstrate how these authors contribute to a broader re-imagining of classical narrative heritage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### MYTH REWRITING: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONTEMPORARY SHIFTS

Scholarly interest in the rewriting of classical myths has grown substantially over the last two decades, reflecting a broader recognition of myth as a flexible narrative reservoir rather than a fixed repository of inherited truths. Early structuralist interpretations—most notably those of Lévi-Strauss and Propp—conceptualised myth as a system governed by recurrent patterns and binary oppositions. While these frameworks offered valuable insights into the architecture of mythic narratives, they tended to treat myths as stable cultural artefacts, detached from the socio-historical contexts in which they are continually reinterpreted. Recent scholarship, however, emphasises the dynamic capacity of myths to respond to cultural anxieties, ideological conflicts, and ethical dilemmas of their present moment. Scholars such as Marina Warner, Robert Segal, and Christina Bachinger have argued that mythic retellings in contemporary literature participate in an ongoing negotiation between tradition and innovation, where ancient stories are not merely replicated but re-examined for their interpretive possibilities.

Within this evolving discourse, mythic rewritings are increasingly recognised as interventions that reveal the ideological selectivity of classical canons. Retellings expose the silences, omissions, and contradictions embedded in earlier versions, enabling writers to re-engage myth not as a totalising narrative system but as a contested space through which marginalised experiences can be articulated. This shift from structural closure to interpretive openness forms the foundation of transmodern approaches to myth, which view retellings as dialogic encounters between past and present, rather than as acts of replacement or rupture.

### FEMINIST AND POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES TO MYTHIC NARRATIVES

Feminist criticism has played a central role in reshaping scholarly understandings of myth and its narrative politics. Foundational works by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Judith Butler, and Hélène Cixous foreground the ways in which classical myths have historically encoded patriarchal norms by privileging heroic masculinity and marginalising female agency. Feminist rewritings, therefore, seek not only to critique these inherited structures but also to reconfigure mythic subjectivities by granting voice, autonomy, and emotional complexity to female characters traditionally portrayed as passive, silenced, or morally ambiguous. Contemporary novelists, influenced by these theoretical trajectories, employ strategies such as interior monologue, alternative focalisation, and counter-narrative irony to destabilise dominant mythic perspectives.

Postcolonial approaches further complicate the terrain by interrogating how myth participates in cultural hierarchies and colonial knowledge systems. Scholars such as Gayatri Spivak, Ania Loomba, and Leela Gandhi highlight how mythic traditions can both preserve cultural memory and perpetuate hegemonic ideologies. Postcolonial retellings often reclaim indigenous or suppressed voices within epics and foundational narratives, thereby challenging the epistemic authority of canonised versions. By situating myth within the politics of representation, identity, and cultural legitimacy, postcolonial criticism aligns closely with transmodern concerns about ethical plurality and narrative inclusivity.

### CRITICAL RECEPTION OF MILLER, ATWOOD, AND DIVAKARUNI

Madeline Miller's works, particularly *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, have been widely examined for their humanisation of mythic figures and their nuanced reworking of Greek cosmology. Critics emphasise Miller's use of interiority and emotional realism to reframe divine characters as psychologically complex beings, thereby softening the distance between the mortal and the

supernatural. Her narratives foreground intimate relationships and personal agency, offering a counterpoint to the heroic valorisation of classical epics.

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* has attracted significant scholarly attention for its incisive critique of patriarchal mythmaking. Atwood employs metafictional commentary, choral interruptions, and acerbic irony to expose the silenced experiences of Penelope and the twelve maids, thereby reframing *The Odyssey* from the standpoint of gendered injustice. Critics note that Atwood's narrative strategy highlights the complicity of canonical narratives in maintaining social hierarchies, while simultaneously acknowledging their cultural power.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's retellings, particularly *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, have been discussed in the context of postcolonial feminist reclamation. Scholars point to Divakaruni's emphasis on interior consciousness, embodied experience, and indigenous epistemologies as interventions that challenge mainstream mythic discourses dominated by male perspectives. Her narratives decentre epic heroism by foregrounding the emotional, ethical, and political complexities of women situated within patriarchal and caste-bound cultural systems.

## IDENTIFIED RESEARCH GAPS

Despite extensive scholarship on mythic rewritings, critical studies often remain confined to single authors or isolated literary traditions. There is limited comparative research that brings together Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni within a unified theoretical framework, particularly one grounded in transmodernism. Existing analyses seldom address how these retellings collectively illuminate the evolving role of myth in a globalised literary landscape where cultural boundaries are increasingly porous. Moreover, while feminist and postcolonial frameworks have been widely applied to individual works, fewer studies explicitly explore how transmodernism reframes the relationship between cultural memory, ethical responsibility, and narrative reinvention across cross-cultural mythic traditions.

This paper seeks to address these gaps by providing a transmodern comparative analysis that situates the works of Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni within a broader discussion of myth's contemporary relevance. Through this intersectional approach, the study aims to contribute to ongoing debates about the adaptive, dialogic, and ethically charged nature of myth in twenty-first-century literature.

## METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Research Questions

**This study addresses the following research questions:**

- 1) How do Madeline Miller, Margaret Atwood, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reinterpret classical myths through a transmodern sensibility?
- 2) In what ways do these authors reconstruct feminine subjectivity and challenge the patriarchal narrative logic embedded in classical mythic traditions?
- 3) How are power, violence, and ethical responsibility reframed within these contemporary retellings?
- 4) What narrative strategies—such as focalisation, voice, irony, and cultural reframing—do the authors employ to reconfigure mythic structures across Western and South Asian contexts?
- 5) How do these retellings contribute to a broader global discourse on myth, identity, and cultural memory in the twenty-first century?

### Objectives of the Study

**The primary objectives of this research are:**

- 1) To examine how the selected authors revise classical myths within a transmodern interpretive framework.
- 2) To analyse the representation of feminine selfhood and narrative agency in their retellings.
- 3) To evaluate how each text interrogates structures of power, patriarchal authority, and systemic violence.
- 4) To identify the narrative techniques through which the authors reshape mythic meaning and cultural resonance.
- 5) To explore cross-cultural intersections that emerge when Western and South Asian mythic traditions are placed in comparative dialogue.
- 6) To contribute to contemporary scholarship on myth by demonstrating how retellings function as dynamic sites of ethical reflection and cultural negotiation.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

This study employs a qualitative, text-based interpretive design rooted in comparative literary analysis. Given that mythic retellings operate through symbolic, narrative, and ideological reconfigurations rather than quantifiable patterns, a qualitative approach enables a deeper engagement with the ethical, aesthetic, and cultural negotiations embedded within the texts. The analysis focuses on three primary works—Madeline Miller’s *Circe*, Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions*—selected for their prominent roles in contemporary mythic reconstruction and their distinct cultural traditions. The study does not aim for exhaustive coverage of all retellings by these authors; instead, it concentrates on representative texts that illuminate broader patterns of transmodern narrative adaptation.

Comparative hermeneutics provides the overarching methodological framework, allowing myths from different cultural lineages to be examined together without erasing their historical and regional specificities. This comparative mode foregrounds similarities in narrative strategy while also attending to the particular ethical and political contexts that shape each author’s intervention. The approach thus supports a balanced reading that situates the texts within their respective traditions while recognising the transnational circulation of myth in contemporary literature.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSMODERNISM

Transmodernism serves as the central theoretical paradigm guiding this study. Coined by Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, transmodernism proposes a dialogic relationship between past and present, emphasising continuity without collapsing critical distance. It rejects the oppositional binaries of modernism and the relativism of postmodernism, advocating instead a model that integrates cultural memory with renewed ethical engagement. In the context of mythic retellings, transmodernism highlights the extent to which contemporary writers neither discard mythic traditions nor accept them uncritically; they inhabit a hybrid interpretive space where transformation emerges through negotiation rather than rupture.

Applying a transmodern lens allows for an examination of how Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni draw upon ancient narrative structures while interrogating their ideological underpinnings. This framework illuminates the simultaneous reverence for mythic heritage and dissatisfaction with its limitations—particularly regarding agency, morality, and gender. The transmodern perspective is especially useful in comparative contexts, as it accounts for the global, intercultural flow of mythic motifs and the ethical reorientation that accompanies their retelling in the twenty-first century.

## FEMINIST NARRATOLOGY AS ANALYTICAL SUPPORT

To further refine the analysis, the study incorporates insights from feminist narratology, which examines not only what myths represent but how narrative techniques encode gendered hierarchies. Feminist narratology foregrounds elements such as narrative voice, focalisation, silencing, and interiority, providing a methodological bridge between textual form and ethical concerns. This framework is essential for analysing myths traditionally centred on male heroism, where female subjectivities often appear marginal, fragmentary, or symbolically instrumental.

By integrating feminist narratology with transmodern theory, the study is able to evaluate both the representational politics of myth and the narrative strategies through which contemporary authors reshape those politics. This combined theoretical approach elucidates how the three writers reposition female voices, construct alternative moral frameworks, and resist the canonical authority embedded within original mythic structures.

## COMPARATIVE MAPPING STRATEGY

The comparative structure of the study proceeds in three steps.

- First, each text is analysed individually to identify its key narrative interventions, ethical concerns, and strategies of mythic reconfiguration.
- Second, the texts are placed in dialogue with one another to map convergences and divergences across cultural contexts.
- Third, these patterns are interpreted through the integrated theoretical lens of transmodernism and feminist narratology, highlighting how mythic subjectivities are reconstructed in ways that respond to globalised literary and ethical concerns.

This mapping method allows for a nuanced reading that preserves cultural specificity while recognising shared transmodern impulses, such as the critique of heroic masculinity, the re-centring of marginalised voices, and the reorientation of myth toward contemporary ethical debates.

## SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study is interpretive in nature and focuses exclusively on selected literary retellings rather than the complete mythic traditions from which they emerge. It does not seek to provide an exhaustive historical account of the myths but instead examines how contemporary authors reshape them within transmodern cultural contexts. While this approach illuminates key narrative patterns, it does not attempt to universalise its findings across all retellings, acknowledging that mythic reconstructions vary widely across genres, regions, and historical moments.

## ANALYSIS

### RECONFIGURING MYTHIC SUBJECTIVITY

Classical myths traditionally operate through fixed character archetypes, moral binaries, and hierarchical cosmologies that leave little room for alternative forms of subjectivity. Contemporary rewritings, however, frequently disrupt these rigid structures by foregrounding individual consciousness, moral ambiguity, and experiential depth. In the works of Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni, mythic subjectivity is reconstructed not through heroic ideals but through introspection, vulnerability, and emotional complexity. Their reconfigurations challenge the classical emphasis on exemplary figures whose actions are framed as embodiments of cultural norms, replacing them instead with protagonists whose identities emerge through negotiation, self-reflection, and resistance to inherited roles.

Madeline Miller's *Circe* exemplifies this shift by relocating narrative focus from epic action to interior transformation. By granting Circe an autonomous narrative voice, Miller reframes a marginal divine figure as a fully realised subject capable of emotional growth and ethical agency. Circe's selfhood develops in response to isolation, desire, transgression, and her encounters with mortals, illustrating how subjectivity in contemporary mythic fiction becomes a site of affective learning rather than predetermined mythic identity. This emphasis on interiority counters the traditional portrayal of divine figures as distant embodiments of power, instead positioning them within recognisably human emotional frameworks.

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* approaches mythic subjectivity through a different but equally transformative strategy. Atwood dismantles the canonical authority of *The Odyssey* by juxtaposing Penelope's retrospective narrative with the choral voices of the twelve maids, whose execution in the original text receives minimal moral scrutiny. Through irony, retrospective commentary, and a destabilised narrative structure, Atwood exposes the patriarchal biases embedded within classical myth. Penelope's narrative positions her as a reflective agent grappling with suspicion, betrayal, and constrained autonomy, questioning the heroic narratives that traditionally centre Odysseus. The maids' chorus further complicates subjectivity by introducing a collective female voice positioned at the margins of mythic authority.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* expands the reconfiguration of subjectivity into the domain of postcolonial feminist reclamation. By narrating the Mahabharata through Draupadi's first-person perspective, Divakaruni contests the epic's long-standing emphasis on martial heroism and dharma-bound male protagonists. Draupadi's selfhood emerges through her negotiations with desire, injustice, political conflict, and emotional suffering. Her narrative foregrounds an embodied, indigenous feminine consciousness that resists the constraints of patriarchal and caste-based structures, thereby transforming mythic subjectivity into a space for ethical contestation and cultural memory.

Taken together, these retellings reposition mythic subjectivity as fluid, contested, and deeply affective. Instead of functioning as fixed embodiments of cultural ideals, mythic figures become sites of ethical inquiry and emotional depth. Through this shift, Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni contribute to a broader transmodern reorientation of myth, where subjectivity is understood not as inherited but as continually renegotiated within changing cultural, gendered, and political landscapes.

### FEMININE SELFHOOD AND NARRATIVE AGENCY

One of the most crucial interventions within contemporary mythic retellings is the reorientation of narrative authority towards female figures that were, within the classical traditions, historically marginal, instrumental, or even voiceless. Further, in these rewritings of feminine selfhood, the point is not merely a restorative gesture but one functioning as an epistemic and ethical reconfiguration of the mythic world per se. In giving women centrality in narration, Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni question the patriarchal systems of representation and expose the shortcomings of canonical frameworks that have so far defined mythic identity through the tropes of male heroism. Thus, their retellings foreground agency not so much as an inherited privilege but rather as a negotiated and often precarious process shaped by gendered constraints.

Madeline Miller's *Circe* restores agency to the female character by shifting the locus of power from the public heroic sphere to the private and experiential. It is through her convoluted relationships involving mortals and deities, her experiments with pharmaka, and her gradual assertion of autonomy against divine hierarchies that Circe's selfhood develops. Miller presents agency as an evolving capacity-emotional, ethical, and creative-rather than an exaggerated form of mythic power. Circe's denial to take up a

certain role within the Olympian order dramatizes the emergence of feminine subjectivity through resolute acts of self-definition challenging entrenched cosmological authority.

In *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood approaches feminine agency through subversive narrative strategies that destabilize the heroic centrality of Odysseus. Penelope narrates her story retrospectively, using irony, skepticism, and self-questioning to expose the constraints of her domestic and political position. Atwood does not present Penelope as a rebel in any conventional way; rather, her agency lies in her interpretation of events, her managing of the affairs of the palace, and her intellectual autonomy in a world that denies her public power. Further exposing the limits of female agency within mythic structures are the choral interludes of the twelve maids, which indict the injustices of patriarchal judgment. The multi-layered understanding of feminine subjectivity that is offered resists canonical silencing.

Of the recent revisions, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* perhaps makes the most assertive reconstruction of feminine selfhood, locating Draupadi's narrative in affect, memory, and embodied experience. Divakaruni recasts Draupadi not as a symbolic catalyst for epic conflict but as a thinking, desiring subject who confronts the political, emotional, and moral complexities of her environment. Her agency is expressed not only through decisive acts-like her vows, alliances, and resistances-but in articulating personal longing, anger, and grief. Divakaruni's intervention underlines an indigenous feminist perspective that resists the epic's patriarchal and caste-based logic and re-inscribes Draupadi within a discourse of agency conventionally denied her.

Through these works, feminine selfhood is conveyed as relational, introspective, and charged with ethics. It does not emanate from supernatural abilities or any mythic destiny but from the struggle to claim a narrative space in traditions that, historically, restricted the roles of women to peripheral, symbolic, or sacrificial functions. Miller insists on emotional and moral autonomy; Atwood foregrounds

## POWER, VIOLENCE, AND ETHICAL REORIENTATION

Classical myths often function by way of strict hierarchies of power: divine authority over mortals, male supremacy over females, and heroic violence over communal ethics. These structures, embedded in the symbolic fabric of mythic narratives, often naturalise violence as an instrument of order or moral necessity. The contemporary retellings by Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni challenge these assumptions through their repositioning of violence as an ethical problem rather than a narrative inevitability. Their works interrogate how power functions within the mythic worlds and how its mechanisms produce trauma, silence, and structural injustice. By means of this critical engagement, they reorient mythic ethics away from valorised heroism and toward a more reflective, relational, and empathetic understanding of human and divine action.

In *Circe*, Miller uncovers the coercive underpinnings of divine power: how the order in Olympus extracts its power through punitive control and hierarchical dominance. It is in the experiences of Circe herself-from exile to transformations imposed upon her by gods and mortals-that the vulnerability created by structural power is foregrounded. Miller shows violence not as an expression of divine justice but as a feature of a cosmology indifferent to suffering. As Circe gradually refuses to toe these violent norms, her performances begin to mark an ethical turning away from classical mythic codes. A commitment to personal responsibility, emotional accountability, and the protection of others refashions mythic power as something that can be reinterpreted through acts of compassion rather than domination.

Atwood's *The Penelopiad* works through a much more overtly critical lens to reveal the gendered violence cloaked in *The Odyssey*. Atwood makes the execution of the twelve maids-a minor episode in the original epic-a pivotal ethical accusation against heroic authority. If Odysseus's actions are canonically cast as the reestablishment of order, Atwood reframes them as brutal acts born from patriarchal entitlement. Penelope's narration, weighted with retroactive guilt and limited agency, shows how systemic violence forms-and distorts-the moral framings of classical myth. The choral interludes sung by the maids amp up this critique, detailing the collected trauma perpetrated by both social hierarchy and narrative suppression. In this way, Atwood challenges the ways in which the mythic tradition is complicit in normalizing gendered violence.

Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* intensifies this critique of structural violence by situating Draupadi within crosscutting systems of patriarchy, caste, and political ambition. The public humiliation in the dice hall-perhaps the most iconic moment of gendered violence in the *Mahabharata*-becomes the emotional and ethical centre of Divakaruni's narrative. By narrating the episode from Draupadi's perspective, Divakaruni remakes it from a symbolic turning point of epic warfare into a visceral experience of bodily violation and political betrayal. Draupadi's subsequent desire for justice does not map neatly onto classical dharma; instead, she contests the moral authority of those-including her husbands-who claim to act in righteousness. Divakaruni revises violence as systemic rather than divine in its orchestration, expanding the ethical terrain of the myth.

Across these retellings, power is represented as relational, unstable, and ethically fraught. Violence becomes a framing device through which the authors interrogate the very grounds of classical ethics, highlighting the contradictions between heroic ideal and human suffering. Their narratives propose alternative ethical orientations that prioritize empathy, accountability, and relational justice above divine mandate or patriarchal order. In this way, Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni recast mythic violence as an ethical problem rather than a storytelling requirement. With that, they contribute to a broader transmodern reevaluation of the morality of

myth, one that questions the hierarchical doctrines passed down and postulates a more humane, inclusive way of reckoning with power.

### **NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN CROSS-CULTURAL MYTH RECONFIGURATION**

Reconfiguration of classical myths in contemporary fiction not only involves thematic transformation but also deliberate narrative strategies that reshape how these stories are narrated, interpreted, and positioned within new cultural contexts. Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni apply different formal techniques, such as changes in focalization and narrative voice, metafictional commentary, and contextual reframing, through which they interrogate the ideological suppositions of their source texts. These are important narrative choices in challenging traditional mythic authority and in generating the interpretive openness characteristic of transmodern retellings.

Madeline Miller's narrative strategy in *Circe* is underpinned by sustained first-person focalisation, which provides the protagonist with a continuing interior presence throughout the narrative. By framing mythic events through Circe's perceptions, this choice invites readers into an affective proximity rarely afforded by traditional epic narration. Miller's descriptive emphasis on emotional nuance, sensory experience, and reflective introspection contrasts strongly with the detached, action-driven mode of classical epic. The prose rhythm is slow, immersive, and meditative to support this strategy, privileging interior transformation rather than external heroics. In so doing, Miller subverts the epic tradition's prioritisation of public deeds with a mode of storytelling that foregrounds psychological complexity and moral deliberation.

Margaret Atwood adopts a decidedly different strategy in *The Penelopiad*, employing metafiction, ironic commentary, and polyphonic structure in an attempt to interrogate the authoritative framing of *The Odyssey*. Atwood's Penelope narrates from the underworld; this automatically creates temporal distance and narrative irreverence. Such a posthumous perspective allows her to question canonical interpretations and to foreground the limitations of Homeric narrative. The inclusion of the maids' choral interludes—which range from ballads and courtroom parodies to anthropological mock-lectures—constructs a multi-voiced narrative that decentres singular truths. This is a polyphonic structure that directly clashes with the monologic texture of the classical epic, providing a critical space wherein alternative perspectives—most significantly those of marginalized women—can challenge the heroic narrative's moral frames.

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni adopts an embodied and culturally situated first-person narrative voice, rendering mythic time seamlessly into lived experience. Divakaruni relies on Indian narrative traditions—in particular oral storytelling, interior monologue, and intertextual layering—to create an immediacy of voice that is at once quietly intimate and historically expansive. Her use of sensory detail-heavy descriptions, temporal shifts, and reflective commentary situates Draupadi less as a symbolic epic figure than as participant-observer negotiating a political and affectively textured world. In telling the story through a specifically South Asian epistemology, Divakaruni challenges the universalising scope of classical retellings and insists on cultural particularity as shaping mythic meaning.

In all three, narrative strategies operate as instruments of ideological disruption: Miller's introspective focalisation humanises the divine; Atwood's polyphony reveals the ellipses and partialities of canonical storytelling; while Divakaruni's culturally embedded voice recovers indigenous agency from within the patriarchal epic. Though sharply divergent, their methods evidence a common determination to dismantle those narrative hierarchies which classical myths so often perpetuate. Through the use of techniques that emphasize subjectivity, multiplicity, and cultural particularity, these authors render myth a site of interpretive negotiation, and align narrative form with the ethical-political intentions of their retellings.

### **POSTCOLONIAL, WESTERN, AND GLOBAL INTERSECTIONS**

The resurgence of mythic retellings today happens within an increasingly integrated literary world, wherein cultural narratives transcend their places of origin and obtain new meanings across cross-cultural paths. The works of Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni epitomize this global movement, for each draws on mythic traditions distinctly connected to discrete historical trajectories that, however, converge in certain themes touching upon power, ethics, identity, and cultural memory. Their retellings are thus not mere national or regional rewrites but interventions within a globalized literary field characterized by transnational readerships and shared ethical concerns. Where Western, postcolonial, and global perspectives intersect in the writings of these authors, it points to how myth remains a site of cultural negotiation framed by the shifting dynamics of modernity, diaspora, and transmodern ethics.

Madeline Miller's engagement with Greek mythology exists within a Western literary tradition long positioned as foundational to European cultural identity. Yet Miller's retellings break from classical humanist understandings by imbuing myth with emotional vulnerability and ethical complexity. Her narratives resonate worldwide because they release Greek mythology from its Eurocentric framing and reorient it towards universal questions of selfhood, suffering, and relational morality. This shift reflects a broader cultural moment in which the classical myths circulate as global heritage rather than exclusively Western patrimony, enabling them to be reinterpreted in ways that exceed regional boundaries.

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* problematizes the Western mythological canon by directly challenging the ideological underpinning that grants it authority. Writing from a Canadian postmodern perspective, Atwood contests the hierarchies encoded in Homeric narrative and reveals how the Western literary traditions tend to silence or marginalize non-heroic voices-particularly, female voices. This critique by Atwood is not set strictly within a feminist framework but also questions the broader cultural hegemony of classical myths and their role in legitimizing particular narratives of civilization, morality, and power. Her retelling invites readers to reconsider how Western myths have shaped global cultural imagination and to recognize the ethical implications of their uncritical perpetuation.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work extends the field of mythic retellings by foregrounding a distinctly postcolonial perspective rooted in South Asian cultural memory. While Miller and Atwood revision Western mythic traditions, Divakaruni recuperates an indigenous epic that has historically been mediated through patriarchal and upper-caste interpretive frames. This retelling places Draupadi within a global literary conversation while maintaining the cultural and ethical particularities of South Asian epistemologies. Divakaruni's narrative brings forth how postcolonial re-makings challenge such cultural hierarchies that have more often than not favored Western myths as universal and relegated non-Western epics to subsidiary positions. By placing *The Mahabharata* within a global mythic discourse, Divakaruni upsets these hierarchies and asserts the centrality of South Asian mythic traditions in conversations about identity, agency, and cultural inheritance.

Together, the work of these three authors serves to underscore the ways that myth crosses cultural borders and how the act of retelling can be both absorbed and resistant to the global circulation of dominant narratives. Their texts reveal a shared transmodern impulse: an effort toward sustaining the emotional and symbolic resonance of classical stories while reworking them to address pressing ethical concerns of the present. It is an impulse attuned to a globalized literary landscape in which myth is no longer anchored in singular cultural identities but rather takes shape through cross-cultural dialogues, diasporic reinterpretations, and the ethical imperatives of an interconnected world. Through their respective approaches to the traditions of myth, Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni demonstrate how retellings can cross cultural divides, question entrenched hierarchies, and offer fresh options for global mythopoesis.

## DISCUSSION

Another important insight is the degree to which the retellings reflect the transnational circulation of myth in a globalised literary environment. While Miller and Atwood primarily engage with Western classical traditions, their narratives resonate far beyond their cultural origins due to their attention to emotional complexity, narrative multiplicity, and ethical ambiguity. Divakaruni's work, situated within a postcolonial South Asian context, demonstrates how non-Western epics can speak to global concerns while retaining their cultural specificity. The interaction between Western and non-Western mythic traditions suggests that contemporary retellings contribute to a global mythopoetic discourse in which canonical hierarchies are destabilised and diverse cultural epistemologies gain visibility.

The combination of such interventions has the effect of redefining the function of myth in contemporary literature: Instead of acting as fixed repositories of cultural authority, myths become lenses through which ongoing social and ethical debates can be articulated. The retellings by Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni reveal that myth remains relevant not because of its static historical prestige, but because of its capacity to absorb new meanings and respond to contemporary cultural pressures. Their works illustrate the potential of myth to foster ethical reflection, challenge entrenched hierarchies, and create spaces for voices that have been marginalised within traditional frameworks.

Overall, the discussion shows that the transmodern mythic retellings work through a double movement: they maintain the symbolic resonance of ancient stories, while at the same time transforming their ideological underpinnings. This tension between continuity and critique underscores the enduring power of myth to shape cultural imagination and to evolve alongside the ethical demands of the present.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This paper contributes to the scholarship on mythic retellings in contemporary contexts by exemplifying the way in which transmodern frameworks can help elucidate both the evolving ethical and narrative functions of classical myths in twenty-first-century literature. First, the research questions traditional notions of myth as a fixed cultural inheritance by demonstrating the ways in which retellings are also fraught yet dynamic interpretive spaces for multiple voices and differential moral positions. Through foregrounding feminine subjectivity and questioning the ideological grounding of classical narratives, it brings into focus the capacity of myth to continue participating in ongoing cultural conversations about gender, power, and justice.

The analysis extends feminist and postcolonial approaches to myth by showing how contemporary authors use narrative methods, such as interior focalisation, metafiction, and culturally situated first-person narration, to dismantle the hierarchical structures embedded in ancient texts. Hence, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how the narrative form itself becomes a tool for ethical critique and cultural intervention.

Third, the comparative framework adopted herein makes for a considerable methodological contribution. The placing of Western and South Asian mythic traditions in conversation with each other challenges the Eurocentrism of assumed universality of classical narratives and foregrounds the importance of cross-cultural literary intersections. Such an approach demonstrates how myth circulates within a globalized literary ecology and how retellings from diverse cultural contexts can jointly redefine the global mythopoetic imagination.

Finally, the combination of transmodernism with feminist narratology throughout the research findings provides a theoretically framed model that can be applied in identifying a wide array of contemporary literary works. In identifying shared transmodern impulses—the entwining of continuity and critique, insistence on ethical responsibility, and recovery of the voices of those marginalised—the research brings to light how classical myths are still relevant and adaptable to the ethical and cultural demands of the present.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has explored how contemporary retellings by Madeline Miller, Margaret Atwood, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reconfigure classical myths through a transmodern sensibility that rethinks inherited narrative authority while engaging critically with the ethical demands of the present. By closely analyzing narrative voice, gendered subjectivity, power structures, and cross-cultural reinterpretation, this study shows that these authors collectively challenge the ideological underpinnings of classical mythic traditions. Neither replicating ancient narratives nor disengaging from them, their re-tellings inhabit a reflective space within which continuity with the past coexists with sustained interrogation of its limitations.

A key finding is the centrality of feminine selfhood in these retellings. Through the foregrounding of the interior lives, moral dilemmas, and the embodied experiences of Circe, Penelope, the twelve maids, and Draupadi, the authors disrupt the patriarchal narrative logic through which classical myths have always been passed down. Feminine agency is reimagined not as mythic exceptionality but as a constitutive narrative force with the ability to reshape ethical contours of the story world. This narrative repositioning shows how contemporary authors expand the representational possibilities of myth while challenging symbolic hierarchies inscribed in their classical forms.

The work also demonstrates that violence, classically depicted as heroic or divinely sanctioned in classical mythology, assumes new ethical importance in these renditions. Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni reinterpret violence as a function of structural power that is deserving of critical attention rather than celebration. Their narratives foreground the emotional and moral aftermath of violence, so the emphasis is transferred from heroic validation to moral liability. This reorientation is linked to a more pervasive transformation of myth's literary function, which now functions as a medium for the interrogation, rather than the reinforcement, of dominant cultural values.

Finally, the comparative reading underscores how myth circulates and evolves within a globalised literary environment: Miller reinterprets Greek mythology beyond its Eurocentric heritage; Atwood destabilises canonical Western narratives through feminist and metafictional critique; while Divakaruni reclaims an epic tradition of South Asia from within a postcolonial framework. Considered together, their works demonstrate how contemporary retellings facilitate cross-cultural conversations that confront entrenched hierarchies, broaden the scope of mythic interpretation, and underscore shared ethical concerns.

In sum, the transmodern comparative lens in this study brings into view a guiding proposition: classical myths survive not through the fixity of their authority but rather through a process of cultural contextual repositioning. In reenvisioning myth as a dialogical, ethically charged, cross-culturally resonant narrative form, Miller, Atwood, and Divakaruni demonstrate the enduring relevance of myth within the twenty-first century. Their works affirm that myth remains a vital literary resource capable of fostering critical reflection, amplifying marginalised voices, and participating in the ongoing renegotiation of cultural memory.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the study offers a comprehensive comparative reading of the selected mythic retellings, it takes shape from certain limitations that are important to acknowledge. First, the analysis focuses on a single representative text by each author, which is sufficient for establishing interpretive patterns but does not take into account the full range of their literary engagement with myth. A broader corpus might reveal other variations in terms of narrative technique and thematic emphasis. Second, the study adopts a mainly textual and hermeneutic approach, without including reader-response data or reception studies which could illuminate how diverse audiences interpret these retellings across cultural contexts. Third, the research foregrounds gendered and ethical dimensions of mythic reconfiguration but does not examine other potentially significant intersections such as eco-mythic frameworks, queer mythography, or digital mythmaking.

Future research might extend this comparative model in a number of productive directions: for instance, the role of mythic retellings within diasporic communities; or the use of reimagined myths by younger audiences across digital and hybrid media forms. Cross-cultural comparative work could also be extended through the inclusion of African, East Asian, or Indigenous mythic traditions in order to highlight global patterns of narrative transformation. Further work could develop a more systematic transmodern

theoretical model that brings together feminist ethics, narrative theory, and postcolonial critique. These extensions would advance our understanding of how contemporary retellings negotiate cultural memory and participate in evolving global conversations about myth, identity, and representation.

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