

Spring 6-2022

the Weak, the Wicked, the Divine: A Collection of Poems

Grace Hedin
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorsthesis>



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Hedin, Grace, "the Weak, the Wicked, the Divine: A Collection of Poems" (2022). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 1216.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.1247>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

the Weak, the Wicked, the Divine: A Collection of Poems

By Grace Hedin

An undergraduate thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Bachelor of Fine Arts

in

University Honors

and

Creative Writing: Poetry

Thesis Advisor

Thomas Fisher, PhD

Portland State

2022

Table of Contents and Poem Audio Timestamps

<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>I. the Weak</i>	10
<i>Weak</i>	[0:33].... 10
<i>Weal and Woe</i>	[0:52].... 11
<i>Cassandra and the Terrifying Burden of Knowledge</i>	13
<i>Ode to the War Bride</i>	[2:12].... 16
<i>Bryseis and Caring for Your Captor</i>	15
<i>The Unweaving</i>	[3:06].... 19
<i>Penelope and the Ritual Act of Coping</i>	22
<i>II. the Wicked</i>	24
<i>Wicked</i>	24
<i>Glimpses of Helen</i>	[4:50].... 25
<i>Helen and the Complications of Beauty</i>	28
<i>All Men are Pigs</i>	[7:06].... 30
<i>Circe and Revelations</i>	31
<i>I could give you a world</i>	[7:52].... 33
<i>Calypso and the Delusion of Creation</i>	35

III. the Divine	37
<i>Divine</i>	[8:58].... 37
<i>the Living Room War</i>	[9:27].... 38
<i>Hera and the Battlefield of Marriage</i>	39
<i>Glory of the Tide</i>	[11:02]... 40
<i>Thetis and the Codependency of Power and Parenthood</i>	43
<i>An Excerpt from Aphrodite's Lecture on Love, from the Manifestation of the Concept</i> .[12:55].	44
<i>Aphrodite and Love as the Undefinable</i>	45
<i>Epithets</i>	[15:23]... 47
<i>Athena and the Power of Titles</i>	51
Conclusion and Dedications	52
Bibliography	55

Introduction

Discovering Homer

When I was around eight or nine years old, I had just discovered the joys of reading. By the joys of reading I don't mean a love of letters or sentence structure, but a stark and lasting fascination with stories. When my father brought me to the Borders in the local mall, which is now a Zumiez, I picked up a thin book with the dimensions of my older sister's Calculus textbook. It was called *Greek Gods and Myths*, or maybe it was called something different; it's been a long time and memory is not bound to any particular timeline. I may not remember the exact title, but I do remember reading about Zeus, the Almighty King of the Gods, who had defeated his father and saved his siblings, had control over the sky and lightning, and had fathered most of the gods and goddesses I was reading about. When I first encountered this at age ten, I thought that Hera must be the most powerful goddess alive, to have mothered so many. Upon closer look, I learned with confusion that Zeus had fathered gods and demigods away from Hera, with other goddesses and titans and mortals and queens. Later in life, I discovered that most of these couplings, the conceptions of these major heroes and monsters, were assault. And as I got older and my interest in these myths grew, I read more about the women in these myths, from Medusa to Circe to Penelope to Danae. In practically every single one of these beloved myths I saw more and more violence, vilification, and oppression. The feeling was not pervasive, it was not as if this came out of nowhere; it is hard to talk about Greek gods without mentioning the inherent incest or kidnapping or child eating. Even as a child I knew that Hades had stolen his queen, who was also his niece. I was also aware that Zeus had advocated for the marriage. The older I got, the more I pitied the women in these myths, and the more I disliked Zeus.

As I entered college and discovered my love for writing was not limited by fiction but extended into a love of poetry, I knew it wouldn't be long before these myths showed their way into my work. Some of my longest pieces of poetry have been pages upon pages on the practices of ancient Sparta, or equating Achilles waiting for Patroclus to having a text message left on read, and when it came time to put together my Honors Thesis, it only made sense to include Greek mythology in some way. I wanted to see how the women in these myths operated, how they differed, and during preliminary research I noticed a pattern of distinctions these women seemed to be put in. There was, in short, the weak women, often victims of assault from the gods or other dominant males and strictly controlled by the males around them; the wicked women, often killers of men associated with wildness and not easily controlled; and the divine goddesses who, while still under the presentation of women, had the inherent power and status of divinity. Once I discovered these categories, I was able to find the format of my thesis. *The Weak, the Wicked, the Divine: A Collection of Poems*, is a Creative Thesis holding both poems based on female figures in Greek mythology and scholarly analysis on those same figures and poems. This project was originally planned to include a wide array of Ancient Greek myths and female figures, but after a short amount of research on the few written texts of a mythology that was mostly under oral tradition made me sharpen my focus to the works of Homer. Questions that I found myself encountering when researching this topic often fell to the role of modern womanhood and the reflections of the modern feminine experience in these ancient myths. The questions that I posed to frame my further research and writing of the poems is thus:

Is the feminine experience represented in Homer's works *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey* still relevant to modern womanhood? Furthermore, what does it look like to construct poetry

inspired by these works' female figures, weaving the structures of ancient and modern womanhood together?

With this question in mind, I will provide some background on Homer and the lasting effects of his work and the characters he works with.

Homer and His Impact

Homer's famous works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are dated to the late 8th century BC, though the events of the texts take place around the 12th or 13th century BC, during a time of the fabled heroic age, with gods walking the earth and demigods finding their destinies. The stories follow the Trojan War and its aftermath, with the main heroes followed being the demigod Achilles and master tactician Odysseus, respectively. Throughout the myths, the audience encounters various gods and men, though women in the myths do hold some importance, with Helen starting the Trojan War with her love and Penelope protecting Ithaca while Odysseus is away. In the millennium since these stories first circulated, there have been mountains of creative pursuits inspired by them: fiction, brand symbols, and most commonly, poetry. Ancient Greek society in general has had long lasting impact on the Western World, Athens being known as the "birthplace of democracy," and ancient Greek allusion commonplace in contemporary literary works. The themes of *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*, the structures in place and the depictions of war and its aftermath, can be reflected to the ancient society that coined it, and furthermore reflect to the modern-day institutions influenced by it. The influence that Homer's works have is remarkable, but still archaic in certain customs, with the strong patriarchal views of Homer's settings, the treatment of women is something that has been both questioned and interpreted.

Series like *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* that are aimed to children seek to retell these stories in a modern lens, bringing the ancient to the present day, while books such as *the Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller retells the ancient story of *the Iliad* with new focus, highlighting with modern language the horrors and triumphs of the ancient world. When it comes to the contemporary poetry surrounding this genre, Postmodernists such as Louise Gluck and Anne Carson have produced substantial collections working with figures such as Odysseus and Penelope or Herakles and Gereon, respectively. A subcategory of this undefined, but longstanding, literary and poetic tradition from Greek works is more focused on the feminine perspective. Figures such as Hilda Doolittle focus on the figure of Helen in her work, or Jennifer Saint in her retelling the tale of Theseus and the Minotaur from the perspective of the princess Ariadne. It is within this specific discourse that I will be primarily focusing on in my research, that being the creative interpretation and discourse surrounding the female figures of Homer's works.

Thesis - Reflections of the Feminine

These stories and myths have survived a millennium for a reason. These myths about Greek gods and heroes have been bedtime stories for years, and there is always the reality check that these beloved heroes and mythological beings often committed horrific crimes against women. Of course, at the time that these myths occurred these actions were more commonplace, with a strong patriarchal systems, these women were often characterized mostly by their interactions with men; the victims of men, the killers of men, and divine women who have the agency of divinity, but ultimately help men in their heroic quests. These women are often brutalized as the catalyst for something, a cog in another man's story. These women are cast aside, and while there have been a plethora of works inspired by these women, such as *Circe* by

Madeline Miller or *Helen in Egypt* by Hilda Doolittle, there are not a lot of works focused on the similarities between the situations these ancient figures are placed in with the experiences of modern womanhood. Looking at the female figures of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, I will be analyzing the roles these women are categorized in; the Weak, the Wicked, and the Divine, and producing works of poetry that showcases the reflections of these roles beyond ancient myth into the present day.

The concept of a creative thesis can be a unique one, so I found myself with some freedom when it came to formatting my thesis. I have the challenge of balancing a critical analysis of the female figures of Homer's works with poems reflecting this analysis and vice versa. Much like the themes of my poems, weaving these concepts together will be reflected in the format. This thesis is split into three major parts, the first being the introduction, the second detailing both my creative works of poetry and my scholarly analysis, and the third part serving as the conclusion, where I give some considerations and thanks. The second part of this project is where I was able to take the most liberties when it came to format. One of the major themes I found myself encountering throughout the project was that of weaving, either physically crafting something or metaphorically weaving disparate concepts together. I thought it only fit that the format of my thesis reflects this, so much like sculptures having an exhibit label next them in galleries, after each of my poems there will be a short analysis, explicating the figure chosen and describing how the poem came to be. Three out of the thirteen pieces will not have analysis, those being the titular poem for each subpart, "Weak," "Wicked," and "Divine." These poems will serve as short introductions to the themes of each section. Having worked closely with Thomas Fisher as my Departmental Thesis Advisor, I now present the culmination of this

project, and begin the close analysis of both my own poems and the works and scholarship of
Homer.

I. The Weak

Weak

You must be careful,

for you are a lamb, a dog, surrounded.

You are a river fighting in vain

against the jagged cuts of rock.

Everyone is your enemy,

even yourself.

Weal and Woe

I want to talk

to sad songs like an oracle

prays to the gods

through weal and woe

and burning leaves that fill

my head with smoke

and whispers in my ear

darling it is getting bad again

when I am small

and hunched

and shaking

I like to think

the sad songs in my head

that chip my fingernails

and burn my throat

will be satiated but I *know*

convening with the gods bears a price

perhaps my eyes will cloud

and colors will dull

and I will speak my prophecy to an empty room

spitting and spewing

the waves I have held at bay

the gods cannot help but overtake my melody

they wash me against the rocks

they make me bear their price

you could have saved them all

and perhaps like Cassandra

the truth will remain ignored

and I will sit at my window waiting

and watching

and waiting

and watching

and speaking on deaf ears

as the wave crashes over us

Cassandra and the Terrifying Burden of Knowledge

"Weal and Woe" is among the first in this collection, which is fitting as it was the first poem I wrote for this thesis, even though I had no idea what my thesis would be at the time of writing. The poem came about after a panic attack, when I was trying to place all the sensations and feelings that I could not properly express during the attack onto the page. As I was writing, my throat raw and burning from crying, I thought of oracles. I thought of inhaling smoke and trying to commune with beings not physically there. Processes of divination are vast and varied over different times and cultures, and this poem definitely encounters the concept of unwanted divination; one that is of the self, and destructive. The phrase "self-fulfilling prophecy" comes to mind. I couldn't help but think about Cassandra, the lesser known princess of Troy, who was cursed to know the future but never be believed. Anne Carson describes Cassandra's predicament as "self-consuming truth," (Carson 3) facts of life chained to her eyes, only known, and most importantly believed, by her. She was forced to suffer alone in her knowledge, she foretold the fall of her city and the deaths of her family, but no one believed her. She could not save them. As I began this poem, I asked myself what someone like Cassandra would be like today, a sentiment that unknowingly lit the spark of this entire project, connecting the modern with the ancient, and this poem came to be.

The poem starts with the action of wanting, an imagining of communication with the depressing songs that give an odd catharsis to the listener, but this desire to commune with this sadness does not last long. This desire for this kind of prophetic power is subtle at first, but as the poem continues, the speaker finds themselves overtaken by this melody, sinking further into this panic state until they are screaming to no one. The poem ends in the "calm before the storm," so to speak, the speaker explicitly identifying themselves with the allusion of Cassandra, and simply

waiting, "as the wave crashes over us." While the action of this poem is a reflection of a panic attack, this reckoning of true sight or knowledge can feel especially poignant in the state of affairs today. The position of a woman not being believed, and the truth being ignored or cast aside, can draw many modern situations and developments to mind. With the figure of Cassandra, I wanted to show this overwhelming wave overtaking the speaker, one that they can see coming, but can do nothing about. The poem does not have a happy ending, and it does not ask for one, but the resigned acceptance of the speaker's fate is, while unsatisfactory, painstakingly familiar.

Ode to the War Bride

Sing an Ode to the War Bride, whose weeping creates

melody that reaches soldier's ears, allowing

them a moment of cold catharsis; release.

War Bride weeps for all.

Sing an Ode to the War Bride, who holds her

Captor, Defiler, Murderer, Kin-killer, Groom.

In the dark of night, nestled in a tent smelling of piss,

War Bride does not flinch.

Sing an Ode to the War Bride, so she can hear you.

Praise the dog who washes your feet after you

cut hers off; she does not have much left, but,

War Bride walks with you.

War Bride does not want to.

Bryseis and Caring for One's Captor

When I started writing about Bryseis, I knew that it was going to be complicated, at least in the subject matter. This poem encounters a figure that was a prize of war, and the setting of *the Iliad* is not a kind one to these women. Bryseis has little lines in the epic, most of her lines coming at the end, after the death of Patroclus, one of her captors that comforted her in her position of war bride of Achilles. When she mourns, it opens the floodgates for Achilles as well, and this release of emotion through her is a major theme for these figures. Zieliński speaks on this position in her own work, speaking on how, “the explosion of feelings manifested by women causes the men to share rapidly these feelings. (...) When Briseis finished the mourning speech for Patroclus, the other women joined her.” (Zieliński 5) Like the women of Troy mourning the fall of Hector, Bryseis mourning Patroclus gives opportunity for others around her to express their own mourning. The prizes of war are for use of sex, yes, but they are also used as a sort of funnel for their captors’ emotions, they mourn for them instead of with them. However, this catharsis the War Bride brings does not indicate any of the figure’s actual thoughts and feelings.

The position of the War Bride, particularly in the context of the poem, is one in constant contention with itself. She is alone, with no one but her both captor and husband, and she is forced to care for him, to love him, to mourn for him. It is not until the final line of the poem that the War Bride is able to speak her opinion, and simply confirms that this is not what she wants to do, but the context of the previous lines have established that she has no choice in the matter.

When writing this project in which one of the principle goals include blending the ancient and modern, I knew this figure of a war captive would be a delicate one. This collection encounters some dark themes, and while it was important to me to illustrate the horror in the War Bride, I wanted this to be subtle. This is where the form of this poem aided me. Within the

semiformal confines of this ode, I was able to find a voice and narrative that was genuine in the depiction of this figure, but not too graphic to develop any more nuanced meaning. The language of the poem holds a more nebulous setting, not explicitly modern or ancient, and this space is one that I use for a good amount of my poems.

The Unweaving

It is the morning, and you had plans,
big plans, that you placed on your walls like trophies
like runes, willing a blessed season into being.

It is the morning, and you are weaving
and weaving is all your will
will allow; the rhythm of your mind wanders
to familiar footholds, pulling chain by chain
change and unchanged, your mind wanders
to him.

You pull your hook and feel it
down to your bones
there is a story here.

Yarn is pulled, chains are created,
and all you can do is cast your story
all you can do is weave

and unweave

and pull

and chain.

It is the morning, and last night

you dreamt of him.

You dreamt of him speaking

literally

anything.

You dream of his face and it is blurred;

you are forgetting.

Pull the hook through.

The day is gold, like the thread you chain

and you despise the sun; you are copper wire,

rusted and abandoned

staining the halls you once

ran through,

pull through,

hook and chain.

It is the night, and you are mourning

but not enough, you are almost

finished, your hook

is heavy, sharp;

one more stitch-

pull the thread back,

it is not taut,

pull, and unweave,

and pull, and unweave.

Penelope and the Ritual Act of Coping

In Emily Wilson's introduction of her translation of *the Odyssey*, she spends a fair amount of time talking not only about the relationship between Penelope and Odysseus, but Penelope herself. Wilson defines Penelope's mind in the text as, "ambiguous or opaque." (46) Penelope's mind in *the Iliad* is not one that is easily accessed, the reader is not privy to the inside of her mind, instead only seeing her reactions or other's interpretations of her. We hear of her worry of Telemachus and her weakness from her son, and we know of her cunning from the suitor's detailing of her deceit with her tapestry. The suitors describe how she tricked them, promising that she will decide who she will marry once she has finished a grand tapestry, spending all day weaving it. Little did they know, every night Penelope would unweave her tapestry, delaying her progress for two years before the suitors catch on. Mueller describes the context behind these actions, pointing out that, "Penelope cannot control events in the political sphere, but she exploits the medium of textile production to delay her inevitable remarriage, and perhaps even to modulate her desire." This image of Penelope using "woman's work" to her advantage, weaving and unweaving her work felt so compelling, and inspired "The Unweaving."

When I wrote this poem, I had some definite struggles with placing myself within the mind of Penelope, as it is not clearly articulated within the text. However, this ambiguity opened the door for a more creative approach to my form; Penelope's actions are so tied this routine process of weaving, so why not have this repetitious element incorporated in the form. The structure of the poem leans on this rhythm and monotony of the act of weaving, both in ancient tapestries and modern blankets. Using words like weave and unweave, pull and chain, I was able to give a glimpse not just into the mind of Penelope, but the mind of one who can only work through the anxieties of the mind through this routine work.

Weaving in the ancient world was a bit of a unique activity, as, as pointed out by Mueller: "Weaving, while analogous to poetic song, was a realm in which women did not compete directly with men. Women could win fame from the work of their hands without compromising male *kleos*." (11-12) Weaving was a task for women, and one where they held superiority over men. Weaving is also inhabited by Athena in her realm of godly duties, both war and weaving, men and women. Penelope is able to assert her own dominance over men through this women's work, but in a way the weaving is also for a man, as Penelope delays her suitors as an act of holding out for her husband Odysseus.

II. The Wicked

Wicked

Let me tell you a tale

of wicked women,

bold and righteous in anger,

for to be wicked you must be

clever, and clutch at the power

you see in the cold eyes

surrounding you.

Glimpses of Helen

I knew Helen of Troy.

She was at a bus stop, wearing blue jeans and
a sweater much too big for her. Her hair was down,
and her glasses were in danger of falling
off her nose as she fiddled with her bag.

There was a man behind her,
tall and half-shadow and too close to her.

The bus came five minutes late.

I sat behind her before the man could.

She called her mom and spoke about the sunset
and I could not go to sleep that night.

I hoped that she got home safe.

I knew the Face that Launched a Thousand Ships.

I was lucky enough to have her in my bed.

Her body was propped up against the pillows I kept
for much too long and she looked so relaxed

I could have sworn the bed was her own,
she nestled in like a wolf in her den,

she would never beg for scraps, that was my duty.

Her knees had no scrapes,
but the stretch marks on her thighs looked like rivers
and her eyes were so dark there was no reflection.

Anyone she graced with her gaze did not have a chance,
there was nowhere else to look. She didn't say anything,

but she took my hand in hers, and that was enough.

I knew Helen of Sparta.

Her name felt cool leaving my lips.

A name chosen, a title she bestowed upon herself,
a self-fulfilling prophecy that she predicted at three.

Her title is her own and she wears badges and jackets

only made from leather that has encountered heavy rain

and she is so damn beautiful but that does not matter much to her.

The last time someone deadnamed her she came home

with a missing tooth, bloody knuckles, and a prideful grin.

Helen and the Complications of Beauty

Helen of Troy is likely the most well-known figure in this collection; whether people know her from the film *Troy* or simply use her name in passing, Helen of Troy has a definite presence beyond just her origins in Greek mythology. Her beauty is known throughout the world, but she is still tied to war, as her beauty becomes a catalyst for carnage. Before the events of the Trojan War, Helen of Troy was known as Helen of Sparta, and was part of, by all accounts of *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*, a happy marriage to Menelaus, the king of Sparta. When Paris steals Helen away (under the blessing of Aphrodite), it is clear the reason for her being the chosen abduction is because of her appearance. It is difficult to say for sure whether or not Helen truly desired to go away with Paris in the first place, in *the Iliad* she blames herself for the war and rebukes her lust with Paris (VI. 349-359), but this situation is more complex than it may seem. The concept of consent, especially in the modern day, can feel debated and murky, but Ancient Greece had a morbidly misogynistic approach. The act of marriage, childbearing, and consent was entirely contingent on the males affected; meaning in this case that it was not the capture and rape of Helen that started the war, it was Paris stealing Menelaus's wife, his property. Summarized by Zielinski well, "Paris is disapprovingly portrayed by Homer not because he acquired his wife through kidnapping, but because he violated the law of hospitality: he acted as an enemy against someone who offered him friendship." Thus, the depiction of Helen's perspective during this capture is murky, she regrets what she has done and takes responsibility for it, but it is unclear if she wanted to go in the first place. After Troy's fall and Helen's return to Menelaus, she remarks that Aphrodite made her "go crazy," placing some blame on her as well. Helen's position as "The Face that Launched a Thousand Ships" is just that, a face. Helen is by no means a powerless character, but her mythic beauty also serves to endanger her.

When I first started writing for this collection, I knew that Helen would either be the easiest poem to write, or the hardest, and as time went on, I quickly found that she fell in the latter category. I found it hard in staking my own grasp on a character with so many modern adaptations and interpretations. With so much scholarship, fiction, and poetry dedicated to the figure of Helen, dipping my toe into this pond felt daunting to say the least. It felt as if any attempt to say anything about this character had already been said before, and anything I wrote would be a poor imitation of authors like Hilda Doolittle or Natalie Haynes. I finally decided that I would not write strictly about Helen at all, rather, I took titles, epithets of Helen throughout the years, and wrote what I thought these different aspects of Helen would look today, a strategy I later used for the poem focused on Athena, titled Epithets. I chose my titles and the loose themes I wanted to encounter in them, Helen of Troy dealing with the danger of beauty, The Face that Launched a Thousand Ships showing a more detached yet empowered beauty, and Helen of Sparta tapping more into righteous pride. When writing this poem, I really tried to focus on Helen, and by extension beauty; as a title, a designation that can empower and endanger. The poem expands upon some of the present themes, duality of character reflected in the format, and the imagery of dogs and canines associated with Helen brings about some interesting ties between "Glimpses of Helen" and "Weak," in which dogs are characterized under the weak. This gives a tie between the Weak and the Wicked, Helen refers to herself as a dog in the text usually when talking about her seduction.

All Men Are Pigs

All men are pigs, and I mean it.

They squeal so loud, like a crack in your cup or a hard swallow.

Make you think they're the safe ones, I learned there are no safe ones.

When I mix and weave and watch their feet turn cloven, it's with grim satisfaction.

They charge and cry and stumble, but they pause when I begin eating their leftovers.

I am a lamp lit with fire, flies, and moss, revealing what was so desperately hidden.

I don't consider myself a witch so much as an experimental cook.

All men are pigs and I have decided to be the butcher.

Circe and the Act of Revealing

Before the writing process for this thesis began, before I even fully formed the concept of the project, I had the pleasure of reading Madeline Miller's bestseller *Circe*, a novel of the titular figure's mythical life, and how she came to meet Odysseus in the original text. The novel enraptured me, and I began to look had me looking at this figure that I only considered a mysterious witch in a new light. When I started writing for this project, I could not help but think of a key portion of Circe's characterization that Miller took some liberties with - "Circe turns men into pigs as a defense against sexual assault that she encountered because of lack of male guardianship and so-called divinity-" (Devi). This act of violence interpreted as self-defense makes sense with the world of Ancient Greece, and opened the door to pondering, why pigs? Why not cows, or fish, or ants? It is not explained within the text, but the implied choice within the action remained, and brought up the idea that perhaps Circe did not change these assaulters into pigs, but rather *revealed* them to be pigs?

The poem starts with an immediate tonal shift in title and 1st line, "all men are pigs, and I mean it," this abrasive start establishes the poem's first-person point of view and a conviction over its premise. The language also opens to the door with the pairing of visceral language and words like "squeal" and "gnaw" evoking images of carnage. The speaker presents their observations firmly, all while alluding to the themes of witchcraft, drawing connections between the crafting of spells and cooking a mean, a "womanly art."

While there is this tone of carnage, the mysticism lends to a sense of true sight and revelation; similar to Cassandra, Circe can also see beyond what the average mortal can. Within the context of the poem, Circe does not change these men into pigs, she simply reveals them to *be* pigs. While Cassandra can see the fates of those around her, Circe can see their core, who

they really are, so when the men that come to her island eat her spells crafted into food and their “feet turn cloven,” it is not necessarily the animal or form that Circe has chosen. “All men are pigs” in this context is not just the opinion of the speaker, but a fact they know to be true. This thread spreads to the pause her victims give when she eats their leftovers, she consumes her own spell and is unaffected, and the poem gives the impression that the speaker has little to hide or conceal. The phrase “all men are pigs” is this speaker's thesis statement, and this concluding statement gives a final gruesome image that has this cook become a butcher.

I could give you a world

I could give you a world,
a whole world, at the pads
of your calloused fingertips;
the blood and dirt caked under your nails
washed away, to fertilize new leaves.

We can make a new world,
together, in the afterglow,
our lips touch and the ground cracks,
hands meet hips and the stream boils,
I sink to my knees and our cliffside tumbles,
look at what we are creating.

You can pray no longer, for our world,
cracked and grown and full of us
will be all you-we need.

I know your half does not fit mine,

And that's okay, because my half

Will not fit anyone.

We can shave off the edges,

And craft our own whole.

Calypso and the Delusion of Creation

In the text of *the Odyssey*, Calypso is not portrayed as someone to evoke sympathy, her actions are ridiculed, and acts that seem kind on the surface have a veil of threat beneath them. The island of Calypso is where the story starts, Odysseus having been trapped there for seven years by the nymph, who, in the words of Wilson, "gives her human guest more than enough of everything a visitor could ask for, except the final crucial ingredient: pompe- the ability to get away." While Calypso's words and outward actions appear kind, there is an underlying threat, a lack of escape. The nebulous space of her island provides a gilded cage or sorts, with Calypso only wanting to love Odysseus and be loved by him in return, but this includes him giving up Penelope, something he refuses to do. It eventually takes the interference of Hermes to have the nymph let the man go (V.100-130), but the island's nebulous space has led to some connections between the space and the "realm of the dead" (Pontani). Calypso in the text is an elusive figure, one that gives the image of a perfect situation, but it is all a delusion, one that she herself is more convinced of than her captive.

In the writing of the poem, the first line addressing the unnamed subject, "I could give you a world," was the first line I thought of, and this pleading statement set the tone for the rest of the piece. As the poem goes on, the speaker addresses their subject with images of love and destruction; the two can create many things together, but that does not mean that what they create is good or will last, though this does not matter to the speaker. While the speaker seems to be delusional over the source of her opinions or the reality of their situation, the final five lines bring in an interesting tonal shift. She admits to knowing they are not meant to be, that they do not belong together, but she is so enamored with this connection she has a new solution, eager

and ready to change herself for this person's love. This obsession the speaker holds is destructive, but all-consuming.

Part III. The Divine

Divine

When the world was made you did not even know what the world was;

but We did.

We were born under stars and from the ocean and from titans and heads;

We birthed you.

The holiest of Mothers and the chaos of offspring and the mightiest of hunters;

Pray to Us, for mercy and protection.

the Living Room War

In the aftermath of the Living Room War, she paces over broken glass and half folded laundry, quietly fertilizing the remains of a fierce battle. It is strange to walk around in such a space, both so desecrated and so damn holy, it's the quiet, she decides. The stillness. The top of the chair, plush and patterned brown, has a wound, an indent from the firm grasp of a hand that slowly raises, regenerates its previous shape. The Living Room War has taken no prisoners. She can only hope this battlefield will return to the weeds, overgrow and erase the scars upon it, but she knows this process will not complete in the span of a night. Regrowth takes time, and the hole in the wall will not repair itself in the way she wants it to. On the table there is a ring, simple and old and familiar. It is the only ring present, and that is something to be grateful for, she thinks. She picks up the ring and kneels at the end table, grasping a wooden leg like one would a queen, reverent. Her head falls against the sculpted slab of wood, and she prays.

Ox-eyed Hera, please,

guide us through the turmoil of

your own cruel blessing.

Hera and the Battlefield of Marriage

"The Living Room War" follows the aftermath of a married couple's fight, equating their marriage to a war and their living room to a battlefield. The woman we follow observes the room before kneeling at an end table, and praying to Hera, goddess of marriage, for aid. Hera, especially in the context of *the Iliad*, is ironic in her position of divinity; she is the goddess of marriage and queen of the gods, but her husband is consistently unfaithful. Arthur characterizes her well in his article:

In the figure of the goddess Hera we have a clever and intelligent woman who is impatient with the restraints to which her position as Zeus' wife subject her. She is jealous of his love-affairs and determined to use feminine and other wiles to get around him.

Hera in most Greek myths, but particularly Homer, is often depicted as the nagging and scheming wife, inadvertently playing into a modern trope of the cruel housewife figure, but in my reading of her I could not help but feel a deep sorrow. I wondered what it would be like to pray to Hera, to take in her own past and still ask for help. The final act of this poem is one of supplication, an ancient Greek tradition, summarized by Zartaloudis as a "reception of a foreigner/stranger," the supplicant asking a request of their host under the realm of *xenia*, the ancient Greek emphasis on reciprocal friendship between host and guest. The subject supplicates Hera in her prayer, giving a desperate plea, and that is when the final haiku of this haibun fulfills this request. The decision to make the form of this poem a haibun, which I will loosely define as the mix of prose and haiku, came fairly naturally when I chose the narrative of the piece. The prayer in the form of a haiku helped me to limit the words and syllables used and made me much more deliberate in my word choice, depicting the aftershocks of Hera's "cruel blessing."

Glory of the Tide

it is in the way he will walk unburdened,

embracing the Waves

that lick at his heels,

and bubble with his rage.

he will hold Her like a friend, for

She is to him.

the Waves hold him close,

Thetis dipping achilles into the styx;

breeding power into a being

not yet able to comprehend it.

no fear, the Ocean will whisper into his fine baby hairs,

for you will be greater than I.

and isn't that the only wish for a child?

he will grow under cultivation,

sorrow and burden crushed under the Tide,
for She will consume the hurt and push it back tenfold.

how could anyone tell him a different way?

for he has held the Mediterranean, Pacific Ocean,

The Glory of the Tide,

like a child gripping a parent's finger,

like an executioner wielding a scythe,

like the chosen one he is.

There will be no calm until he allows it,

and he will realize this,

realize with silver-footed Thetis at his back

nothing can stop him.

She will crash his enemies against the rocks

and be rewarded with a kiss on the cheek,

Her darling dashing raging boy standing away from Her

on red sand.

he will take and take

because he knows nothing else.

the tide will swell at his fingertips,

not consuming, not fighting,

simply shaping to his needs.

he will take and take

until he is Red Sea Greatest of the Greeks

The Glory of the Tide,

because He *knows*,

He knows mother atlantic could never refuse Him.

never Him.

Thetis and the Codependency of Power and Parenthood

"Glory of the Tide" is one of the two poems in this collection that I had written before the thesis project was conceived, the other poem being "Weal and Woe." The poem originated as an observation on the implicit power that men are shown from birth, but the piece soon developed into a study of the toxic and codependent relationship between the Ocean and her Boy. The two's relationship is a complex one, as the Ocean continually gives her power to her Boy, starting when he is too young to understand what power even is, he grows to take it for granted. There is a strong current of power that is being exchanged throughout the poem and the dangers of giving too much to an unsuspecting mind. The poem climaxes in the destruction of the Ocean-Mother's power and status as the "Glory of the Tide," the title being inherited by her Boy, who has been given no other reason to not expect the power he has. The figure of Thetis in the text of *the Iliad* is in constant worry over the fate of her son, Achilles, for it is prophesized that if he fights in the war he will perish. Thetis is adamant that he does not fight, and after the seizing of his war bride Bryseis this plan works, Achilles does not fight, holding his power back. However, after the death of Patroclus, there is no holding Achilles power and rage back, and all Thetis can do is preemptively mourn for her son, "capturing the attention of any attentive listener/viewer with the use of poetic innovations that produce an unfamiliar affect." (Tsagalis) Thetis was more focused on Achilles's survival than he was, and when Patroclus dies and he decides to fight, she can only give more of her power to help in his final act of revenge. Achilles ends in a rage, but Thetis, the Ocean, can only go on, weaker and in perpetual mourning over the mortality of her son.

An Excerpt from Aphrodite's Lecture on Love, from the Manifestation of the Concept

(...) so here is the eternal crux of love that you all seem to neglect, it is natural, and entirely on you. The amount of instances that I have been invoked for heart ache, heart break, whatever you wish to call it, I mean really. Here is the truth that you all seem to seek; I am an extension of love, rather than the manifestation of it. By that I mean that Love, capital L, is an umbrella, an ocean, an earth; you cannot simply pluck one fish out of the sea and decide that this specific fish is the One, the Ocean, the Umbrella. You must realize that Love is complicated and terrifying and different and so painstakingly mundane. It is the best and the worst and the mediocre and it's everywhere. You might know the Greeks have seven kinds of love, which I suppose is quite a lot to mortals, but to me? I am composed of every single one, every single Love. Though even saying that feels like a falsehood, doesn't it? Believe me when I say that Love is an absolute mess. I am Love, and I am not Love, and in a way every single being in this world is some form or some kind of love, whether Mania or Eros or Agape or Philautia. And at the very same time, that entire idea is muddled, and complicated. Love is a mess because people are a mess, because this world is one made of chaos, concealed and made beautiful, but it was beautiful before, wasn't it? I mean, I admit I have little way of knowing; I did not craft the earth, nor did I shape the cosmos or even create beauty itself. I did not create love, but I am love, a part of love, and I do have some sway in that realm.

I am quite sorry, I've gotten quite off topic, haven't I? Well, as I was saying (...)

Aphrodite and Love as Undefinable

Next to "Glimpses of Helen," this piece was among the hardest to write. Part of the difficulty of creating poems based on existing characters is that their representations all lean on each other, and it is quite possible for a figure as old as Aphrodite to have hundreds of different personal interpretations. Figuring out my own "version" of the goddess of love took some definite work. The main problem I found myself facing was just how complicated the concept of love and divinity is. Pickup defines this complexity well with their distinctions on divinity:

A deity is not, strictly speaking, a person, with a well-defined personality. Rather, a deity represents first and foremost a divine power, one which can manifest itself in nature, in society, or in an individual, without itself being any of these manifestations.

When it comes to a divine and complex concept such as love, I turned around different formats in my head before attempting to imagine communing with this being. I asked myself how Aphrodite herself might define love, which led to a second question; what if the goddess of Love had to give a lecture on that very concept of her being? What would that look like, to have this being so connected with Love trying to explain every nuance and distinction clearly and concisely in 45 minutes? The poem catches a period where knowledge and passion catch up with each other's much that being concise is not an option. Aphrodite in this poem is fit to bursting with knowledge and cannot just separate herself from explaining love. The poem gives no certain definition of what Love is, or what it really means, rather it points out the chaos and the nuance and just accepts it. Aphrodite is immediately indicated as the speaker of the poem, and the prose format gives the impression of the indications from the title, a digital excerpt forms a lecture. As I was thinking about exactly how I wanted my version of Aphrodite to speak, what kind of tone she would hold, and I couldn't help but think of the lectures I've been in these past years, on

niche topics that the professor seems to know every single detail of, but couldn't quite articulate it succinctly. I started to associate this poem's Aphrodite in the image of a professor knowing so much about their topic or focus that they seem to be bursting with knowledge, a volcano of facts and tangents and nuance that they couldn't define in one sentence if they tried. Love is both simple and complex, defined and undefinable, and this piece seeks to illustrate that.

Epithets

Parthenos. Virgin.

She is born with clarity,

wise beyond her years and

wise beyond her family.

She stays close to her Father,

She does not know her Mother but

She does know Her actions.

She meets Love and War and decides

Wisdom will partake in very small doses .

If all is to be fair, strategy favors observation.

Promachos. She who fights on the front lines.

There is a certain kind of battle

that has Her emboldened. There are few others

of Her kind on the battlefield,

She can see War and the threads of blood,

connecting these soldiers

in a gruesome tapestry.

As She strides beside the dead and

the alive (soon to be dead),

She decides then that there are no sides here,

not really.

The dead next to Her wear

different armor, opposing banners.

She can't help but think, that the

red and yellow and brown and white

looks all the same to Her.

Nike. Victorious.

Some say there is victory in death,

but when bullets ricochet

and Her blood, rarely exposed,

is gold and fertilizer, She knows

the only victory is surviving.

Where Her blood is spilt
there will not be flowers of grain,
but marble and concrete, there will not
be a forest in her wake but a civilization.

War has a victor, but She
will fertilize the bloody remains
by pulling the chain of tendons
until a tapestry is weaved.

Ergane. Weaver.

She is a spider and warrior.

She thinks it is strange how

her fingers move,

divine and fleet, across thread.

She wonders how the Fates must feel,

snipping the thread and

discarding the excess, the waste.

She will not discard anything, She decides,

with a conviction that builds cities.

She will burn the threads together

and continue her work.

Polias. She of the City.

Contrary to popular belief, a God

can feel so very small,

in certain places, certain circumstances.

Her Mother was a mountain, a palace,

and then she was a fly, a grain.

Anyone can feel small when they are surrounded by

constructs beyond them.

When She sits on a bench and looks up,

the mountains are concrete,

and the trees weave

in and out of the cracks, but

not high enough. She decides a God can feel small in a city,

and there can be a wonder in that.

Athena and the Power of Titles

Particularly in the works of Homer, Athena is an extremely powerful and complex character. The golden daughter of Zeus, aider of heroes, and accomplished in both womanly crafts and men's war, she presents as a series of contradictions. Wilson gives a very interesting take on this dichotomy that Athena presents, explaining, "her skill in weaving clothing for domestic use sits uneasily with her ability to weave deception and military strategy for the tapestry of war" (35). Athena is a female divinity that holds claim over the realms of both genders, and these complexities have led to many different iterations of goddess. With all these complexities, trying to characterize her within a poem felt at times like a fool's errand. In my research of the figure, I found a list of her different epithets, titles given by different cults based around the aspect of Athena they most heavily worshipped, and the format of this poem came to be. These different epithets and designations of Athena helped to give the poem a more fluid setting and narrative. Each stanza and designation give a different glimpse of Athena, and it is here that the themes of weaving and conflict in previous poems climax, weaved together and placed side by side. Athena is so present within both the Iliad and the Odyssey as the aid of both gods and heroes, like the figure of Hermes traveling between Olympus and the Underworld, Athena is able to occupy multiple spaces between gods and heroes, male and female.

Conclusion and Dedications

This thesis was done in support of the Honors College at Portland State University, under the supervision of Thomas Fisher. There is an audio accompaniment within this piece, with timestamps located after the Bibliography.

This project has been such a labor of love, and I absolutely could not have accomplished all that I have without the help of some very wonderful companions and peers. I would like to give my thanks and concluding thoughts.

Thank you to my Departmental Advisor Thomas Fisher for embarking on this journey with me and working so closely to guide my path in this thesis.

Thank you to my wonderful friends and family, for supporting me and allowing me to talk your ears off about niche topics you did not fully understand. You were all there to listen and give support, and I will always be thankful.

Thank you to my roommate's cat, who sat with me while writing and allowed me to cry into his fur when the stress became too much.

Thank you to Cassandra, for foretelling this series in her own way, I am happy to be any sort of vessel you would allow me to be.

This project has been the culmination of almost a year's work, and the themes I encountered; weaving, war, and the dichotomy of the masculine and feminine, have changed the way I look at classic texts and figures.

Bibliography

1. Arthur, Marylin B. "Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women." *Arethusa*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1973, pp. 7–58,
2. Carson, Anne, et al. *An Oresteia: Agamemnon by Aischylos, Elektra by Sophokles, Orestes by Euripides*. Faber and Faber, 2009.
2. Devi, N. Banita, and Nganthoi Khuraijam. "From Subjugation to Empowerment: Recasting Homer's Minor Character in Madeline Miller's Circe." *UGC Care Group I Journal* 10.17 (2020): 274-279.
3. Doolittle, Hilda. *Helen in Egypt*. New Directions Books, 1974.
4. Homer, Caroline Alexander. *The Iliad*. Vintage Publishing, 2017.
5. Homer, Emily R. Wilson. *The Odyssey: Translated by Emily Wilson*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2018.
6. Homer, Wilson, E. R., & Wilson, E. (2018). Introduction. In *the Odyssey* (pp. 1–79). introduction, W. W. Norton & Company.
7. Laurie Layton Schapira (2016) Laurie Layton Schapira on Mythology, *Jung Journal*, 10:2, 69-72, DOI: [10.1080/19342039.2016.1158589](https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2016.1158589)
8. McClymont, J.D. "The Character of Circe in the Odyssey." *Akroterion*, vol. 53, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.7445/53-0-37>.
9. Mueller, Melissa. "Helen's hands: weaving for kleos in the Odyssey." *Helios*, vol. 37, no. 1, spring 2010, pp. 1+. *Gale Academic OneFile*,
10. Mueller, Melissa. "Recognition and the forgotten senses in the Odyssey." *Helios*, vol. 43, no. 1, spring 2016, pp. 1+. *Gale Academic OneFile*,
11. Pickup, Sadie, and Amy Claire Smith. "Chapter Six: Rethinking Aphrodite as a Goddess at Work." *Brill's Companion to Aphrodite*, Brill, Leiden, 2010.
12. Pontani, Filippomaria. "Speaking and Concealing – Calypso in the Eyes of Some (Ancient) Interpreters." *Symbolae Osloenses*, vol. 87, no. 1, 2013, pp. 30–60., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00397679.2013.822722>.
13. Thanos Zartaloudis (2019) *Hieros anthropos – an inquiry into the practices of archaic Greek supplication*, *Law and Humanities*, 13:1, 52-75, DOI:[10.1080/17521483.2019.1605962](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521483.2019.1605962)

14. Tsagalis, Christos C. "The Poetics of Sorrow: Thetis' Lament in 'Iliad' 18, 52-64." *Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2004, p. 9., <https://doi.org/10.2307/20546799>.
15. Zieliński, Karol. "Women as Victims of War in Homer's Oral Poetics." *Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 3, Aug. 2019, p. 141. *Crossref*, <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8030141>.

Audio Accompaniment Timestamps

