

**Review**

# **Mothers, Matrons and Midnight Worries: Portrayal of Single Motherhood in *Circe* by Madeline Miller**

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This research examines how single motherhood is portrayed in Madeline Miller's *Circe* with an emphasis on the relationship between the protagonist Circe and her son, Telegonus. The study investigates Circe's parenting focusing on harmony between control and warmth using a thematic analysis by using Diana Baumrind's parenting philosophies as conceptual framework. The results shed light on the difficult choices single mothers make and how it is represented in literature. This approach seeks to increase our comprehension of their experiences by supporting careful representations that speak to modern reality. The results of this study may lead to more complex portrayals of single mothers, which would deepen our knowledge of their struggles and resilience and create an effective impact on the perception of society towards them. It also contributes to the existing literature on parenting philosophies.

**Keywords:** Single Motherhood, *Circe*, Madeline Miller

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Feminist studies have focused more on the experiences of single mothers, yet literature frequently presents them in a basic or stereotypical manner (Albelda et al., 2004). According to Akass (2012), these representations have the power to shape public opinion and exacerbate the stigmas women face. Through its nuanced interactions and multifaceted characters, Madeline Miller's *Circe* offers a compelling story that encourages investigation of these subjects.

A captivating character whose path speaks to modern audiences, Circe is moulded by her experiences of rejection and loneliness. Her relationships—especially with her son—capture the challenges and victories of

being a single mother, inspiring readers to consider the delicate balance between love and control.

The study's importance stems from its capacity to question and alter how society views single motherhood. A deeper comprehension of the emotional and psychological terrain that characterizes single motherhood is fostered by examining Circe's parenting decisions, which expose the effects of different parenting philosophies.

The idea of motherhood is critically examined by Miller's story, particularly considering modern single parenting. Given how literature influences public perceptions, Circe's depiction of single motherhood is a potent reminder of the necessity for genuine depictions that respect the fortitude and autonomy of single moms.

Through interacting with these accounts, we can advance a more empathetic and practical comprehension of their circumstances, ultimately promoting laws and social reforms that uphold their rights and well-being

## Literature Review

Since these representations have a big impact on how society views single mothers, scholars have turned their attention to how single motherhood is portrayed in literature and the media. According to Albelda et al. (2004), recognizing the complex difficulties faced by single moms in patriarchal countries requires that they be visible in feminist discourse. They draw attention to the ways in which the media frequently propagates preconceptions that might exacerbate the stigma associated with single motherhood rather than provide a fair assessment. The intricacy of single mothers' experiences may be misrepresented as being completely victimized or excessively romanticized because of this lack of nuanced representation.

In analyzing how single mothers are portrayed in the media, (Hadfield et al. 2007) discussed the idea of presenting motherhood by attributing identities to the choices they make, emphasizing that the role of media in establishing rigid traditional discourse of motherhood should be addressed. They argued that superficial representations of these women can worsen pre-existing social problems and further marginalize them. Emphasizing how literature and the media shape public opinion, she contends that sensationalized or simplified accounts might misrepresent the realities faced by single mothers. This distortion has an impact on how society views single mothers as well as how they see themselves, which may result in internalized stigma and decreased self-efficacy.

A lot of research has been done on how single parents are portrayed in fiction and how it compares to the sociological realities of the moment. For example, (Boyd, 1993) studied the portrayal of dads in adolescent fiction, examining 40 novels. The current study focuses on how single moms are portrayed in the literature. The parenting styles model developed by Baumrind in 1966 offers a helpful framework for examining the dynamics of parent-child relationships, especially when it comes to single motherhood. Although her caring style creates a strong emotional connection with her son Telegonus, the absence of formal instruction begs important questions regarding the consequences of her decisions. Readers are encouraged to reflect on how these interactions, particularly in single-parent households, can influence children's identities and destinies.

Further nuances of power, support, and autonomy are revealed through Circe's interactions with various characters, including Odysseus and her father Helios. Circe challenges the conventional narratives that

frequently portray single mothers as mere victims of circumstance by highlighting the larger themes of empowerment and agency via her battles with her identity and her role as a mother. A rethinking of motherhood is prompted by Miller's work, which highlights the power, resilience, and agency that single moms can exhibit.

It is crucial to promote authenticity and complexity as literary depictions of single parenting change. The way that Circe is portrayed challenges readers to consider the virtues and weaknesses of single mothers while also offering a critical analysis of the narratives that society has created around parenting. Circe provides a more sympathetic view of the reality of being a single mother by showcasing a heroine who negotiates love, sacrifice, and personal development, highlighting the value of complex depiction in literature.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative thematic analysis is used in this study to analyze how single parenting is portrayed in Circe. (Baumrind, 1966) divides parenting into four categories: permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and neglectful. These four categories are used to examine important interactions between Circe and Telegonus. Themes of warmth, control, risk, and empowerment as they appear in Circe's parenting can be examined using this framework.

Circe's maternal instincts were sparked by her father's lack of interest and her mother's neglect during her early years. Her experiences influence how she approaches motherhood, exposing important mistakes but also fostering deep bonds with Telegonus. This dichotomy captures the difficulties of parenting that many modern single moms encounter.

## RESULTS

Although Circe and Telegonus have a close relationship that demonstrates the affectionate nature of authoritative parenting, her methods frequently lack the limits required to provide security and direction. When Circe interacts with Telegonus, she exhibits a lot of warmth but little self-control, which might be harmful (Wood et al., 2019). Circe's choice to send Telegonus to meet Odysseus without sufficient planning or warning of the risks he may encounter demonstrates this imbalance. Such a choice brings up significant issues regarding parental accountability and the fallout from lax parenting practices.

Although Circe's affectionate disposition creates a strong emotional bond with her son, her absence of formal direction puts them at serious risk. Despite the dangers he faces, the choice to send Telegonus on a journey to meet his father demonstrates a serious

breakdown in protective supervision. This crucial point highlights the dangers of a parenting approach that places more emphasis on emotional ties than essential boundaries. Telegonus's journey's storyline serves as a warning about the negative effects of inadequate parental supervision. Circe's goals are based on love, but her inability to see the risks calls into question how to combine control and warmth in parenting. The findings show that care is important, but in order to provide a safe environment for kids, it must be combined with a knowledge of the risks.

Additionally, Circe's development throughout the narrative depicts a path from empowerment to solitude. In order to protect her son while battling her own past, she starts to express her agency as she negotiates her duty as a mother. The potential for development and self-advocacy in the midst of hardship is emphasized by this metamorphosis. By confronting her father and eventually learning how to cast protective charms, Circe demonstrates her capacity to stand up to the patriarchal forces that formerly oppressed her.

## DISCUSSION

Circe's motherhood is a complicated interaction between tenderness and control, as revealed by the thematic analysis of the novel through the lens of Baumrind's parenting approaches. Although she is the epitome of the loving side of parenting, Telegonus is at serious risk because of her unbalanced behaviour. This conflict highlights the need for genuine representations of single parenting in literature—representations that capture the complex lives of women who frequently balance love and responsibility. Miller's portrayal makes one consider the myths that society has about single parenthood. Literature should embrace the depth of single mothers' experiences rather than minimizing them to symbols of hardship. Motherhood is not just characterized by hardship; it is also characterized by fortitude, perseverance, and the ability to develop. As demonstrated by Circe, single mothers are people with substantial agency and the capacity for intense love, not just victims of their circumstances. Additionally, the analysis emphasizes how critical communication is to parenting. Telegonus and Circe's connection is lacking since Circe did not sufficiently warn him of the risks of meeting Odysseus. For single mothers, who frequently manage their responsibilities without the assistance of a spouse, open communication and mutual understanding are essential elements of successful parenting. The fact that Circe eventually developed into a more forceful person shows how important it is to stand up for oneself and one's child.

Circe's bond with her father, Helios, is also essential to comprehending her journey. Although she first aims for his acceptance, she starts to question the patriarchal

conventions that formerly held her back as she forges her identity as a mother. Her final encounter with Helios shows how she has changed from looking for approval to claiming her independence. This development is consistent with larger themes in literature that examine the reclaiming of agency and female empowerment.

Beyond the text's boundaries, Miller's story has societal ramifications. The way that Circe is portrayed as a single mother who struggles with her duties challenges readers to reevaluate the stereotypes associated with single parenting. By appreciating Circe's character's emotional depth, we can increase our understanding of the difficulties faced by real-life single mothers.

## CONCLUSION

Madeline Miller's Circe delves deeply into the intricacies of family dynamics and society attitudes through her examination of single parenting. In order to promote positive parent-child connections, this research emphasizes the significance of striking a balance between warmth and control in view of Baumrind's parenting styles. The difficulties of liberal parenting and Circe's loving nature make her trip a powerful reminder of the vulnerabilities encountered by single mothers. This study highlights how important it is for literature to capture the complex realities of being a single mother. Authors can help people comprehend love, responsibility, and personal development more compassionately by showing characters who deal with these issues. By highlighting the possibility of resilience and agency, Circe's journey from isolation to empowerment inspires readers to acknowledge the strength that comes with being a single mother. Finally, there are significant societal ramifications to how single parenting is portrayed in literature. By challenging preconceived notions and encouraging greater empathy, thoughtful and nuanced representations might open the door for more supportive laws and cultural perceptions of lone mothers. It is evident from reading these stories that single mothers are vibrant individuals who can love, sacrifice, and be empowered, rather than just being characterized by their difficulties. By means of Circe, Miller challenges us to reevaluate our viewpoints and to promote a more just and compassionate society that respects the hardships of single mothers.

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