Who's the scariest of them all? Depictions of evil women in Greek folktales

Artemis Papailia

Adjunct Lecturer of Children's Literature, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece
papailiaa@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the portrayal of demonic women in Greek folktales and their significance in reflecting societal perceptions of femininity. We selected 17 editions of folktales in the Greek publishing industry as our primary source material and utilized content analysis as our method of analysis. Negative values such as ferocity, malice, brutality, wickedness, and ugliness were used as criteria to study the demonic woman's external appearance and personality. Vladimir Propp's Morphologie du conte (1970) served as a reference for examining the demonic woman's qualities such as name, origin, social position, age, external characteristics, and peculiarity of her appearance. We also focused on the demonic woman's actions and relationship with the hero/heroine to highlight the terrifying aspects of her inner world. The study sheds light on how the representation of demonic femininity in Greek folktales reveals societal and traditional assumptions about female gender. Our findings aim to demonstrate the different faces of the diabolical women in Greek folktales and present a collective representation of the demonic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Greek folktales are stories that have been passed down orally from generation to generation. The folktales of Greece are a part of a larger group of narratives that are spread across multiple continents, ranging from Europe to Asia and passing through North Africa. Although these tales are Greek, they do, also, possess unique qualities that are representative of the Mediterranean and Balkan regions (Angelopoulou & Brouskou, 1994, p. 9). By examining the different versions of these tales from various cultures, one can see the specific characteristics that are particular to Greek folktales. These characteristics may not be exclusively Greek, because when it comes to folktales there is not "original text" (Tatar, 1993, p. 77) but are indicative of the cultural influences that are present in the region.

Greek folktales are a rich and diverse collection of narratives that draw also upon Greek mythology, history, and culture. They feature a wide range of characters, including heroes and heroines, ordinary people and supernatural beings. These tales often involve themes of love, jealousy, revenge, and justice, and they provide insight into the values and beliefs of Greek society. In Greek folktales, the portrayal of evil women is a recurring theme. These female characters are often depicted as cruel, wicked, and ugly, and they play a significant role in opposing the heroes/heroines of the stories.

Examples of evil women in Greek folktales include witches, evil mothers-in-law, lamia, and shrews, among others.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the portrayal of demonic women in Greek folktales and their significance in reflecting societal perceptions of femininity. Content analysis has been chosen as the method of study because it allows for the examination of the texts from the point of view of thematic analysis. By examining the negative values carried by these characters, including ferocity, malice, brutality, wickedness, and ugliness, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between gender and power.

The current state of the research field reveals that while there has been some exploration of the representation of women in Greek folktales (Anagnostopoulou 2016 [2007]; Kanatsouli 2016 [1997]; Katrinaki 2019), there is still much to be uncovered about the portrayal of demonic femininity. Our study aims to address this gap by examining the characteristics of these characters in-depth and exploring their symbolic meaning in the context of Greek culture.

Through our analysis, we aim to provide a collective understanding of the diabolical woman/women as depicted in Greek folklore and to offer insights into the cultural and societal influences that have shaped these representations over time. Ultimately, our goal is to provide a deeper understanding of the role of gender in shaping cultural narratives and to encourage critical reflection on the ways in which these narratives contribute to our understanding of gender roles and power dynamics.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our study aims to investigate the portrayal of demonic women in Greek folktales and to understand how these depictions reflect societal perceptions of femininity. To achieve this goal, we have selected 17 editions of folktales in the Greek publishing industry as our primary source material. Our study analyzed 125 tales that directly or indirectly refer to the wicked woman.

We have chosen content analysis as our method. Content analysis is a research method that involves the systematic analysis of qualitative data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. It is a valuable tool for analyzing texts and can be applied to a range of materials, including literature, media, and historical documents. Content analysis involves breaking down texts into smaller units of analysis, such as words or phrases, and categorizing them based on predetermined criteria. In our study, we have defined the recording unit as the demonic woman as presented in Greek folktales. We will analyze the negative values associated with these characters, including ferocity, malice, brutality, wickedness, and ugliness. We will categorize these values into two categories: external appearance and personality.

To study the external characteristics of demonic women, we will focus on their names, origins, social position, age, and physical appearance. We will compare these findings with Propp's (1970) character archetypes to better understand the symbolism and meaning behind these characteristics. For example, the name of a demonic woman may reveal something about her character or background, while her age may symbolize her wisdom or her malice. However, it is essential to consider the limitations of Propp's analysis and its focus on male-centric narratives when studying folklore and fairy tales. Propp identified recurring character types, which he called "dramatis personae" or "spheres of action". According to Propp (1970), there are seven primary character types that are consistently found in these stories: the hero, the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess and her father, the false hero and the dispatcher. In his analysis, the princess and her father are often treated as a single unit, with the princess primarily serving as a passive goal or reward for the hero, while the father represents authority and tradition. This approach tends to diminish the agency of female characters, and the narratives appear more focused on the male characters' journeys and experiences.

In response to Propp's work, we will study and analyze Greek folktales from a feminist perspective. We will highlight the importance of examining the perspectives of female characters, understanding their motivations, and considering the ways in which they contribute to the story.

To study the personality traits of demonic women, we will focus on their actions and relationships with heroes/heroines. We will examine how these characters use their powers to oppose the heroes/heroines of the stories and how they interact with other characters. We will analyze the language used to describe these characters and the symbolism used to represent their actions. For example, the way in which a demonic woman attempts to harm a hero may reveal something about her motivation or her personality.

The use of content analysis in our study has several advantages. First, it allows us to systematically analyze many texts and identify patterns and themes. This will help us to draw conclusions about the portrayal of demonic women in Greek folktales and to understand how these depictions reflect societal perceptions of femininity. Second, content analysis is an objective method that is not influenced by the researcher's personal biases or opinions. This ensures that our study is based on empirical evidence and not subjective interpretation. Finally, content analysis is a flexible method that can be adapted to different research questions and materials. This means that our study can be replicated or adapted by other researchers in the future.

There are also some limitations to our use of content analysis. One limitation is that it may oversimplify the complexity of the texts and reduce them to smaller units of analysis. This may result in the loss of important nuances and details that are essential to understanding the texts. Additionally, our study is limited by the quality of the translations. This limitation is inherent in any study of translated literature and is something that we will keep in mind as we analyze our data. We will also make note of any instances where the translation may be particularly problematic and acknowledge this in our analysis.

3. RESULTS

In Greek folktales, maleficent women are a common theme, often portrayed as antagonists to the hero/heroine. Our analysis of the selected 125 tales revealed several dominant themes regarding the portrayal of maleficent women in Greek folktales. These themes include the jealousy of women, female omnipotence, the distinct case of the evil mother, the presence of stepmothers and other wicked women within the family and social environment, the relationship dynamics between mothers and their children (specifically daughters), the prominence of witchcraft, and the portrayal of supernatural women. To facilitate a more detailed analysis, we categorized the maleficent women based on their position in relation to the hero, specifically whether they are members of the protagonist's family or part of the wider social environment. Additionally, we examined whether they possess supernatural powers, as this characteristic is often closely linked to their malevolence. This categorization allowed us to identify patterns and themes in the representation of these female antagonists and gain a deeper understanding of their portrayal in Greek folktales. You can find a comprehensive overview of the different malevolent women present in Greek folktales in the table below:

Type of Maleficent Women	Examples in Close Family Environment	Examples in Wider Social Environment	Examples of Supernatural Women
Bad Mother	X		x
Stepmother	X		x
Mother-in-Law	X		
Big Sister(s)	X		
Aunt-Cousin	X		

Unfaithful Wife	X	
Jealous Woman (maid, neighbor, teacher)	x	
Ungrateful Woman (usually a rich one)	x	
Woman of Colour (Black, Gypsy)	x	x
Midwife	x	
Witch		x
Lamia		x
Shrew		x
Mermaid		x
Fairy		x
Dragon's Wife		x
Fate (Moira)		x

3.1. Bad Women in the Hero's/ Heroine's Family

Greek folktales are replete with tales of evil women who pose a threat to the hero or heroine. These women, who often hold familial ties to the hero or heroine, are a representation of the negative aspects of femininity that are perceived as dangerous by society. In this section of the article, we will explore the portrayals of bad women in Greek folktales who are part of the hero or heroine's family.

3.1.1.   The Bad Mother

Greek folktales are renowned for their fantastical and eerie qualities, delving into the depths of human nature, morality, and societal norms. One recurring theme within these stories is that of the evil mother figure, a character who subverts the traditional loving and nurturing role typically associated with motherhood. These tales are simultaneously enthralling and unsettling, exposing the bleakest facets of maternal instincts and the catastrophic ramifications of such actions.

The narrative of Poulia and Avgerinos is part of a larger collection of tales that unambiguously explore the concept of cannibalism (Angelopoulou, 2003, pp. 65-71; Ioannou, 1990, pp. 209-213; Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 120-124). In this story, the negligent mother loses the venison her husband brought home for dinner and opts to slice off her breast and cook it instead. Upon tasting the dish, the husband praises his wife, who then confesses the true origin of the meat. Overwhelmed by the desire to consume human flesh once more, the couple deliberately decides to butcher their children and feast on them. This reversal of roles sees those meant to provide sustenance becoming consumers of the very flesh they should be nurturing. As a result, the parents transform into their children's most formidable adversaries. The mother forsakes her maternal obligations, offering her breast to her husband rather than her offspring. Instead of receiving the nourishment they require, the children are tragically converted into sustenance themselves (Katrinaki, 2019, pp. 90-91). In numerous renditions of the tale of the Poulia and Avgerinos, as we will see below, the biological mother is replaced by a stepmother, who frequently assumes the role of the malevolent and brutal guardian.

In a variety of stories, the mother is depicted dismembering her child and serving its liver to her husband (Angelopoulou, 2003, p. 190), echoing the ancient myth of Procne and Tereus. Tereus was the king of Thrace and married to Procne, the sister of Philomela. Tereus became infatuated with Philomela and, when she refused his advances, he raped her and cut out her tongue to prevent her from telling anyone. However, Philomela found a way to communicate her story by weaving it into a tapestry, which she sent to her sister Procne. Upon learning the truth, Procne sought revenge against Tereus by serving him a meal that included the flesh of their son.

At times, the bad mother is portrayed poisoning her children with contaminated food (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 397-399). The act of poisoning or contaminating food can represent an in-version of the nurturing role traditionally associated with mothers. Instead of providing sustenance and care, the bad mother figure introduces harm through a medium typically associated with nourishment.

In yet another tale, she and her husband abandon their children in the wilderness, leaving them to be devoured by wolves. The absence of sustenance forces the children to confront the dangers of the forest, ultimately leading them to encounter ravenous dragons that crave human flesh (Angelopoulou, 2003, pp. 78-82).

In another tale, a mother's jealousy of her daughter's beauty drives her to violently disfigure her face (Kafadaris, 1988b, pp. 47-50). Upon discovering the horrifying events unfolding at home, the girl's brothers rescue her from their mother's clutches. Undeterred, the mother persistently attempts to murder her daughter using bewitched items, such as a belt that induces asphyxiation or a spoiled grape. Despite numerous failed attempts, the mother eventually resorts to using a knife to end her daughter's life. Her cruelty knows no bounds, as she then tries to slay her newborn grandchild.

In a separate story, a mother attempts to seduce the young man her daughter is enamored with (Kafadaris, 1988b, pp. 229-232). Her relentless pursuits ultimately prove fruitless, and in a fit of rage, she sets her own home ablaze, consequently perishing in the flames.

The wicked mothers in Greek folktales represents a sinister and complex figure who blatantly defies the traditional image of a compassionate and supportive parent. The mothers in these tales are driven by their base instincts and desires, which override their maternal love and care for their children. Their actions may reflect underlying feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, or the struggle for power and control within the family unit. These narratives function as cautionary tales and shed light on the darker side of human nature.

Moreover, the tales reflect the societal expectations placed upon women and mothers in Greek culture. The wicked mother figure is often portrayed as the antithesis of the idealized mother, a stark contrast that serves to reinforce the importance of maternal love and care within the family structure. Stories of the malevolent mother serve as a stark reminder of the significance of a parent's nurturing role and the potential consequences that can arise when this role is distorted or neglected.

3.1.2. The Stepmother

The stepmother is another common figure in Greek folktales. We can find her first appearance in the myth of "Cupid and Psyche" written in the 2nd century AD by Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis. There, the goddess Venus, Cupid's mother, asks her son to kill Psyche, because she is feeling threatened by Psyche's beauty and the love her son has for her.

In folktales, stepmother is often portrayed as jealous and spiteful, and she seeks to undermine her stepchild's relationship with their father (Angelopoulou, 2003, pp. 210-215). When the mother dies, the father usually remarries, and the new wife is presented as a jealous and cruel stepmother who is envious of her husband's children. She often forces her step-daughter to do hard work, inflicts violence on her, deprives her of food, and tyrannizes her with various tricks (Damianou, 1994, pp. 114-116; Kafadaris, 1988b, pp. 109-11, 535-538; Varvounis, 2000, pp. 54-56). The aim of the stepmother is to make the stepdaughter appear ugly so that she will not be a rival to her.

One common theme in fairy tales is the stepmother's jealousy of the beauty of her stepdaughter (Christovasilis, 2019, pp. 108-115). In some cases, the stepmother sends the stepdaughter up a mountain

to be eaten by a bear (Kafadaris, 1988b). These attempts to harm the stepdaughter backfire, and the stepdaughter manages to escape.

In some tales, the stepmother is also presented as a witch, who uses her magical powers to try and harm her stepdaughter (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 531-534). It is very interesting, also, that when the king dies, then the evil stepmother finds an opportunity to show the greatness of her demonism. In the tale of Marditsa, the stepmother is also presented as a witch. When she escapes from her guardianship she exclaims: "I will not let her, I will find her, to die by my hand. She cannot escape" (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 113-122). After her failed attempts to exterminate her, she pretends to be a breast-feeding woman to reach her ancestor, who has just given birth. She sticks a pin in her head and transforms her into a bird. She then takes her place and pretends to be herself. Of course, when her heinous deeds are found out, she is thrown off the cliff.

In some variants of the story of Poulia and Avgerinos, the mother is replaced by the stepmother figure (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 214-217). The mother gives birth to a child of her own, Avgerinos, and hates her husband's daughter Poulia because of her beauty. She either locks her in a cage or tries to sell her. The stepmother's desire to harm her stepdaughter is rooted in jealousy, and she will go to any lengths to eliminate her.

Bruno Bettelheim (1976) a renowned psychoanalyst in *Psychanalyse des contes de fees* argues that the stepmother represents the mother in the oedipal crisis. The stepmother's use of witchcraft and her desire for omnipotence is an attempt to assert her authority over the hero or heroine. On the other hand, the good mother of the heroine, who usually dies at the beginning of the fairy tale, is seen as the preoedipal mother. Bettelheim argues that the stepmother is an embodiment of the mother's authority and power, which is being threatened by the heroine's emerging oedipal desires. Also, he notices that "the fantasy of wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one's angry thoughts and wishes about her" (ibid, p. 69). Although, as Marina Warner (1995) points out: "Bettelheim's theory has contributed to the continuing absence of good mothers in all kinds of media […] have effaced from memory the historical reasons for women's cruelty within the home and have made such behavior seem natural" (p 213).

As Maria Tatar (1987, p. 44) argue, in many fairy tales adapted for a children's audience, the place of the evil mother is taken by the stepmother, so that she does not appear to be a direct threat to the child's relationship with the mother. The stepmother is a figure who is outside the family unit and can be easily eliminated.

In the tale of Keas, the stepmother convinces the father to neutralize his child. The poor boy manages to escape from her various traps, including poison in the food and a pit filled with sharp knives. When these attempts fail, she even tries to kill him with her own hands. Kea manages to escape and exclaims, "Bye mother bitch" (Varvounis 2000, pp. 75-86). It's very interesting here that Keas is accusing only his mother. The father, the male protagonist is depicted as a victim This portrayal can perpetuate gender stereotypes and reinforce the notion that women are responsible for the family's misfortunes, while the father is a passive character caught in the middle.

Of course, despite the stepmother's attempts to harm her stepchild, good always triumphs in the end, and the stepmother is punished for her actions. Ultimately, the figure of the stepmother in Greek folktales represents a complex and multifaceted aspect of human relationships and serves as a reminder of the power of jealousy and the enduring strength of familial love.

3.1.3. The Mother-in-Law

The mother-in-law is a common figure in Greek folktales and is often portrayed as an interfering and controlling figure who seeks to dominate her daughter-in-law. In traditional patriarchal societies, there are societal tensions that arise between mothers and daughters-in-law, and these tensions are often illustrated through the figure of the mother-in-law in folktales.

A recurrent motif is when the king is forced to go to war just before the queen gives birth, leaving his wife in the care of his mother. However, in most folktales, the moth-er-in-law works with the midwife (Antonakou-Antoniou, 1988, pp. 51-56; Demertzis 1987, pp. 70-76; Ioannou, 1990, pp. 269-274; Venetoulias, 2003, pp. 167-171) or a woman of color (Melisourgaki-Arfara, 1991, pp. 49-53) to kill her daughter-in-law's children, her own grandchildren. The mother-in-law is jealous of the relationship between her son and daughter-in-law and feels threatened by the daughter-in-law's position in the family.

In some tales, the mother-in-law is even shown attempting to harm her daughter-in-law or force her to leave the family. This is often done through heavy housework or by locking her in a high tower or throwing her into a pit (Damianou, 1994, pp. 120-128; Ioannou, 1990, pp. 175-179; Melisourgaki-Arfara, 1991, pp. 79-81; Venetoulias, 1995, pp. 124-130). We found, also, a tale, when she gives her a boyish haircut and sends her up the mountain to pretend to be a shepherd (Venetoulias, 1995, pp. 188-193). Moreover, in a setting of incestuous desire, the mother-in-law takes the place of the bride and pretends to be her son's wife (Demertzis, 1987, pp. 70-76; Megas, 1990, pp. 137; Papadimitriou-Spiropoulou, 1989, p. 78).

In the tale of Poulia and Avgerinos, Poulia's mother-in-law kills Avgerinos, who has been transformed into a sheep and cooks him. Poulia leaves the earthly world with her dead brother and exclaims, "from the evil stepmother I fell to the evil mother-in-law" (Venetoulias, 1995, pp. 55-61).

The mother-in-law in Greek folktales represents the traditional patriarchal society's views on women's roles and relationships within the family. The mother-in-law is often portrayed as an interfering and controlling figure who seeks to dominate her daughter-in-law. Her actions are often motivated by her fear of losing control and her desire to maintain her position within the family.

However, these stories also serve as a reminder of the power dynamics at play in traditional patriarchal societies. The mother-in-law's actions are a result of her desire to maintain control and her fear of losing her position within the family. These societal tensions between mothers and daughters-in-law reflect the power struggles that occur in patriarchal societies.

3.1.4. The Big Sister(s)

The big sisters are often portrayed as domineering and bossy, seeking to control her younger sibling. They may be jealous of the hero/heroine's accomplishments or beauty and may seek to harm them in various ways, for example by pouring poison into her ear.

In Cinderella, it's essential to remember that various oral folk versions originated from a matriarchal tradition, portraying the challenges faced by a young woman who, with the support of her deceased mother as the guardian of societal values, seeks to reclaim her status and rights within the community (Zipes, 1988, p. 30). In Greek versions of Cinderella, the sibling figures take on a particularly terrifying role. Matricide and cannibalism are prevalent themes, with a mother and daughters making a deadly bet. The wager is based on whose spine falls off, whose thread is cut, or who is left last in the creation, depending on the variation. This tradition of making in traditional rural societies was a predominantly female activity, in which young girls learned the art to prepare for marriage. However, this raises the question of what happens to the relationship between the daughters when they reach marriageable age. In the story, the mother loses the bet, and the daughters must now

slaughter and eat her. Cinderella, unable to participate in this matricide, abstains from the cannibalistic meal.

Following the Christian traditions of mourning, Cinderella is rewarded by her dead mother with dresses, ornaments, and the famous pair of shoes. However, her good fortune often arouses jealousy in her sisters, who may attempt to kill her and take her place in the palace. In some variations, they even put their sister's children in a trunk and throw them into the river to drown.

The sibling figures in Greek folktales are particularly terrifying and serve to highlight the societal tensions that exist between siblings, particularly sisters. The themes of jealousy, betrayal, and violence are prevalent, and the consequences are often gruesome.

Despite the darkness of these stories, they also serve as a cautionary tale about the dangers of envy and jealousy. Cinderella's good fortune ultimately leads to her being rewarded, while her sisters' malicious actions result in their own downfall. Cinderella, in many versions of the folktale feel pity of her bad sisters and do not punish them. So, these tales remind us of the importance of treating others with kindness and respect, rather than giving in to feelings of envy and hatred.

3.1.5. The Aunt and Cousin

The portrayal of bad aunts and cousins in Greek folktales reflects the dangers of manipulative and deceitful figures in the lives of young heroines. These characters are often depicted as ugly and malevolent, seeking to harm the heroine and take advantage of her good fortune. In one such tale, a beautiful heroine marries a very wealthy man, and he takes them on a boat trip to Rhodes (Antonakou-Antoniou, 1988, pp. 102-104). However, the aunt takes advantage of the trip and throws her beautiful niece to the deck. Fortunately, the man discovers their evil actions and sends them away.

The aunt and cousin are often presented as manipulative figures who try to undermine the heroine's position and take advantage of her good fortune. They are usually portrayed as envious and resentful of the heroine's success, and they seek to harm her in any way possible. This type of character reflects the dangers of those who seek to undermine the success and happiness of others.

In many folktales, the aunt and cousin are depicted as ugly and malevolent, further emphasizing their villainous nature. Their appearance is often used to signify their in-ternal ugliness and malevolence, reflecting the belief that one's external appearance reflects one's internal state. In folktales, there is a clear distinction between good and evil. Characters are often portrayed as either beautiful and virtuous or ugly and malevolent, with little room for gray areas or complexity. The use of physical appearance as a reflection of inner character is a common trope in these stories, with beautiful characters being associated with goodness and ugliness being associated with evil. The quote "For, as her face was beautiful, so was her soul. The face is the mirror of the soul" (ibid) is a clear example of this trope. The beautiful heroine is not only physically attractive, but she is also morally good. Her inner beauty is reflected in her outward appearance, emphasizing the idea that inner character is just as important as physical appearance.

Despite their efforts to harm the heroine, the bad aunt and cousin are unsuccessful in their attempts. This reflects the idea that ultimately, goodness and kindness will prevail over evil and deceit.

3.1.6. The Unfaithful Wife

In Greek folktales, the theme of unfaithfulness is a common thread that runs through many stories. Women are often portrayed as being unfaithful to their husbands, resulting in disastrous consequences for themselves and their families.

One example of an unfaithful wife is the woman who enters an affair with a Jew (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 397-399; Megas, 1993, p. 96). To keep her infidelity a secret, she kills her own children, usually by poisoning or beheading them. This act of betrayal is so heinous that her punishment is equally horrific, usually involving being torn to pieces by wild animals or thrown to wild dogs.

Another example of an unfaithful queen is the woman who falls in love with a man of colour (Varvounis, 2000, pp. 131-134). When her husband finds out about her infidelity, he kills her lover, but the queen demands his head. To save himself, the king must solve a riddle posed by the queen. With the help of a beautiful daughter, he manages to solve the riddle and cut off the queen's head instead.

In yet another tale, the queen falls in love with a dragon and decides to get rid of her son to pursue her new love interest. She makes several attempts to kill her own son with a sword, eventually succeeding in cutting him into a thousand pieces. Her son's dying words, "Mother bitch, why did you do this to me?" reveal the extent of her cruelty and betrayal (Damianou, 1994, pp. 43-53).

These tales serve as cautionary tales for those who would consider betraying their spouses or families. They show the devastating consequences that can result from un-faithfulness and betrayal.

These tales demonstrate the importance of being faithful and true to one's commitments. Betraying those who love and trust us can have catastrophic consequences, not only for ourselves but for those around us as well.

In conclusion, the portrayal of bad women in Greek folktales reflects the cultural and social values of the society in which they were created. Women who deviate from traditional gender roles or who are seen as a threat to the patriarchal order are often demonized and portrayed as wicked and malevolent.

3.2. Maleficent Women in the Wider Social Environment of the Hero/Heroine

In addition to the bad women found within the family environment of the hero/heroine, Greek folktales also portray malevolent female characters in the wider social environment. These women may come from various social classes and positions, such as maids, neighbors, teachers, and wealthy individuals. Despite their differences, they share a common trait: they are presented as antagonists who harm the hero/heroine in some way. In this section, we will examine the different types of maleficent women found in the wider social environment of the hero/heroine in Greek folktales.

3.2.1. The Jealous Woman

Jealousy is a powerful emotion that can lead to destructive behavior, and this is certainly true in Greek folktales where we encounter a range of female characters who are driven by jealousy to commit heinous acts. These women, often depicted as evil and vindictive, are a common theme in Greek folklore and represent the darker side of human nature.

One such character is the teacher, who is often portrayed as jealous of one of her students and sends a witch to exterminate her (Antonakou-Antoniou, 1988, pp. 98-101). In some tales, she approaches one of her students to make her love her more than her own mother, with the aim of taking the wife's place at home and marrying the man. The teacher even convinces the child to kill her own mother, and as soon as the real mother is out of the way, she tortures the child who was treated so

lovingly at first (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 151-158). In the end, her punishment is swift and brutal, with woodcutters cutting her into a thousand pieces with their axes (Antonakou-Antoniou, 1988, pp. 98-101).

Another jealous woman in Greek folktales is the old gossip who spreads rumors about the beautiful village girl and tries to spoil her good fortune (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 133-135; Kafadaris, 1988b, pp. 380-382). This character is often portrayed as spiteful and envious, seeking to bring down those who have something she desires. Her end is usually less violent than that of the teacher, with the village girl often rising above the rumors and achieving her dreams despite the gossip's best efforts to stop her.

Perhaps the most terrifying figure in Greek folktales is the maid who plots to take the princess's place. This character is often portrayed as cunning and manipulative, driven by jealousy and a desire for power. In one tale, the maid ties the princess up and throws her into a pit to be eaten by wild beasts (Kliafa, 1977, pp. 52-56), while in another she orders the princess's brother to be killed so that her identity will not be revealed (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 325-333). When the maid is finally exposed, her punishment is just as brutal as that of the teacher, with some stories depicting her being scalded (Venetoulias, 1995, pp. 124-130).

In all these tales, the jealous woman is punished for her actions, often in a brutal and violent way. This reflects the cultural belief that jealousy and envy are destructive emotions that must be quelled to live a harmonious and peaceful life. The punishment of these characters serves as a warning to those who might be tempted to let their jealousy get the best of them, and a reminder that good will always triumph over evil in the end.

However, it is worth noting that some tales also show a more compassionate side to the princess or heroine, who may choose to show magnanimity and let the jealous woman work in the palace or find a peaceful way to resolve the situation (Kliafa, 1977, pp. 52-56). This suggests that while jealousy is a destructive emotion, forgiveness and compassion can also play a role in overcoming it.

3.2.2. The Ungrateful Woman
In Greek folklore, ungrateful and mean women are a common motif in folktales. These women are usually portrayed as very rich and tend to send their beautiful stepdaughters on a mission that they know is impossible to complete (Kafadaris, 1988b, pp. 519-521). When their stepdaughters can complete the mission with kindness and grace, they are rewarded with beauty, such as gold. The tale, initially presenting itself as a gender-oriented narrative, quickly transforms into a class-oriented cautionary tale. This shift reveals the complex interplay between gender and class, highlighting the ways in which societal hierarchies and power dynamics shape our understanding of both concepts.

When, then the ungrateful/rich women send their own daughters on the same mission, they return black and ugly due to their bad behavior. This only fuels their maniacal nature as they become obsessed with getting rid of their stepdaughters, going as far as taking her eyes off and offering their own black daughters in their place (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 472-474).

The theme of ungratefulness is particularly prominent in this category of women. Despite the kindness shown to them, they show no gratitude and instead become consumed by their own selfish desires. The ungratefulness is also reflected in their treatment of those around them, especially their stepdaughters who they see as a threat to their own wealth and status.

In some folktales, the punishment for their heinous deeds is severe. The ungrateful women are often met with a violent end, such as being thrown to wild beasts or tied to animals to be torn apart. This serves as a warning to others who may be tempted to act in a similar manner.

In one story, a gardener has an ungrateful and mean wife who shares nothing with anyone (Kafadaris, 1988b, pp. 140-142). Christ himself appears to her husband and tells him that there is no salvation for her and that she will burn in the fire of hell. This serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of ungratefulness and the importance of being kind and grateful towards others.

The portrayal of ungrateful and mean women in Greek folktales reflects the cultural belief in the importance of gratitude and kindness towards others. These women are seen as a warning to others who may be tempted to act in a similar manner and serve as a reminder of the consequences of selfish behavior.

3.2.3. The Woman of Colour

The woman of colour and the gypsy are often depicted as foreigners or outsiders, with their appearance or cultural background marking them as different from the other characters in the tale. She may be portrayed as exotic or alluring, but also dangerous or threatening. These characters are typically portrayed as cunning and manipulative, using their wits and magical powers to deceive and harm those around them (Varvounis, 2000, pp. 63-66). In Greek folktales, women of color and gypsies are often depicted as evil and scheming characters, who contrive various ways to kill the queen and take her place in the palace (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 264-273).

One common strategy used by these women is to take the queen's clothes and throw her in a well, taking her place in the palace (ibid). They may also use pins (a tool for knitting that every woman had in her house) to impale the queen or strangle her with their hands, and then bury her in a pit (Varvounis, 2000, pp. 67-74). In some tales, the evil sister may transform into a gypsy, covering her face with black coal and selling baskets as a means of breaking into the palace and harming her privileged sibling (ibid).

Despite their cunning and malevolent ways, these bad women are ultimately defeated by the forces of good. They may be drowned and thrown into the river, fed to wild beasts, or tied to animals to be torn into pieces (Damianou, 1994, pp. 58-64; Varvounis, 2000, pp. 63-66). These brutal endings serve as a warning to those who would use their power for evil purposes and highlight the importance of justice and morality in the face of such deception.

The portrayal of women of color and gypsies in Greek folklore reflects broader cultural attitudes towards marginalized groups, such as the Romani people and those of African descent. These groups have historically faced discrimination and prejudice and have been depicted as dangerous and otherworldly in many cultures. In the case of Greek folktales, the use of magical powers and deception by these characters serves to reinforce negative stereotypes and perpetuate harmful myths about marginalized communities.

At the same time, however, these tales also serve as a means of exploring complex power dynamics and social hierarchies. The struggle between good and evil, and the ultimate triumph of justice over deception, highlights the importance of morality and ethical behavior in the face of adversity. These themes are universal and apply to all people, regardless of their background or identity.

3.2.4. The Midwife

The midwife is a character who is often associated with childbirth and the female reproductive system. In Greek folktales, the role of the midwife is often depicted as crucial in the birth and protection of newborn children. However, in some tales, the midwife takes on a more sinister role, as she becomes an accomplice to the queen in getting rid of her newborn grandchildren.

The bad midwife is a common character in Greek folklore, often portrayed as a cruel and heartless woman who is willing to commit heinous acts in order to please the queen. She is presented as someone who will do anything to protect the queen's interests, even if it means sacrificing the lives of innocent children.

In some tales, the midwife is shown throwing the newborns into the water to drown them (Venetoulias, 1995, pp. 167-171) or locking them in palace basements (Kliafa, 1977, pp. 84-89) In other stories, the midwife poisons the children's food (Antonakou-Antoniou, 1988, pp. 51-56) or throws them into the dunghill (Kliafa, 1977, pp. 84-89). These actions are done in secret, with the midwife and queen hoping that no one will discover their evil deeds.

However, in some tales, the midwife takes pity on the children and chooses not to kill them (Antonakou-Antoniou, 1988, pp. 51-56). This is often because the midwife herself has children and cannot bear the thought of harming innocent babies. In these cases, the midwife often helps the children escape and keeps their whereabouts a secret from the queen.

Regardless of the midwife's motives, her actions always have serious consequences. When the queen's evil plan is revealed, the midwife is punished in the most brutal ways possible. In some tales, she is thrown off a cliff (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 269-274), while in others, she is tied to two horses and torn apart (Venetoulias, 1995, pp. 167-171). These punishments serve as a warning to others who may consider committing such evil acts.

The bad midwife is often portrayed as a symbol of evil and betrayal, in contrast to the good midwife, who is seen as a caring and compassionate figure. The bad midwife is often depicted as someone who is willing to put her own interests above those of the innocent children, betraying the trust that was placed in her as a midwife.

Interestingly, the portrayal of the bad midwife in Greek folklore may also reflect a cultural fear of women who wielded power and knowledge during childbirth. In ancient Greece, midwives were highly respected and were often called upon to assist with childbirth. However, there were also fears that midwives could use their knowledge for evil purposes, such as using their knowledge of herbs and potions to induce abortions or harm newborns.

Overall, the bad women found in the wider social environment of the hero or heroine are often depicted as outsiders, marked by their difference from the other characters in the tale. They may be jealous, ungrateful, or even supernatural in nature, using their powers or knowledge to manipulate and control those around them. Despite their differences, however, they share a common trait: a desire to undermine or harm the heroine, often for their own personal gain.

3.3. Malevolent Women in Greek Folktales: The Supernatural Creatures
In addition to the bad women found in the family and wider social environment, Greek folktales also feature supernatural female creatures. These malevolent beings possess powers beyond human capabilities and are often depicted as cunning and cruel. In this section of our analysis, we will focus on the portrayal of these supernatural women in Greek folktales. The tales featuring these characters reveal deeply rooted beliefs and fears about the supernatural and the unknown. We will examine the various supernatural female characters found in the tales, such as witches, shrews, lamias, mermaids, dragon's wives, fairies and fates.

3.3.1. Witches

Throughout history, witches have been a staple of folklore and mythology across many cultures. In Greek folklore, witches are often depicted as old, withered women with the power to cast spells and curses on humans. They are associated with dark magic, some of them are depicted with a magic mirror (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 113-122), and the ability to transform people into animals, while sometimes having a human dimension, such as being a queen or stepmother (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 113-122; Kliafa, 1977, pp. 84-89).

One of the defining characteristics of witches in Greek folklore is their ugliness and old age. They are even said to drink blood, which adds to their fearsome reputation (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 588-593). In some tales, witches are said to have supernatural children, such as dragons or crabs, who assist them in their dark deeds. They also have the power to transform humans into animals, such as turning a hero/heroine into a bird by putting a pin in his/her head or turning someone into a turtle (Kliafa, 1977, p. 68). The witches are often portrayed as living in dark cages with dragons or other frightening creatures (Damianou, 1994, pp. 29-38).

In addition to their ability to transform humans into animals, witches can also cast spells on objects such as jewelry or clothing (Antonakou-Antoniou, 1988, pp. 97-101; Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 588-593). For example, a princess may wear a ring that, when spelled by the witch, causes her to feel as if she is dead. The witch may also spell a dress or other items to make it appear beautiful, but it is cursed and brings misfortune to the wearer.

Some witches take their cruelty to another level by torturing their victims. In one tale, a witch lights a candle on the fingers of her bride-to-be to test her stamina (Varvounis, 2000, pp. 56-57). In another tale, a witch marbles her husband from the waist down because she is in love with a man of colour (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 331-334). The witch enchants the whole village and marbles him so that by hitting him every day on the back with 40 iron rods, she hopes to die.

Despite their fearsome reputation, witches in Greek folklore can be defeated. In the above tale, a king returns to his normal form and kills the witch who had marbled him. Finally, in a particular folktale, the stepmother is depicted as a witch who uses various methods to try and kill her husband's young daughter (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 588-593). She employs a range of sinister tactics such as offering the child a deadly grape to eat and transforming her into a bird while taking her position in the palace. The bird, sensing the danger, attempts to warn the palace, but the witch kills it and consume it to silence it. However, when her malevolent actions are uncovered, the king takes swift action by tying her to a horse with a rope, which results in her being torn to pieces.

Despite the gruesome nature of these stories, they serve as cautionary tales, warning readers about the dangers of jealousy and the corrupting influence of power. They also highlight the importance of remaining vigilant and wary of those who may hide their true intentions behind a benign façade.

Furthermore, the portrayal of witches as powerful and capable of wreaking havoc underscores the fear and mistrust of women in positions of authority and those who dare to defy gender norms. The association of witches with drinking blood and other evil deeds can be seen as a reflection of the patriarchal belief that women are carriers of evil and dangerous by nature.

3.3.2. Lamias

In Greek mythology and folklore, Lamia is a supernatural creature with the upper body of a woman and the lower body of a serpent or fish. Lamia is often depicted as a seductive and dangerous figure, luring men to their doom. In some versions of the myth, Lamia is also portrayed as a child-eating monster.

The origin of the name Lamia is uncertain, but it is believed to be derived from the Greek word for "throat" or "gullet". Lamia was said to have been a queen of Libya who was transformed into a

monster by the goddess Hera out of jealousy. In other versions of the myth, Lamia is the daughter of the sea god Poseidon and a queen of Libya.

Lamia is often associated with the concept of the "evil eye" and was believed to have the power to curse people with a single glance. She was also associated with the fear of maternal infanticide, a common theme in many cultures.

Lamia has been depicted in literature and art throughout history, from ancient Greek pottery to modern horror films. In John Keats' (1820) poem "Lamia", the creature is portrayed as a tragic figure, a beautiful woman who is transformed into a monster by her own jealousy and desire.

In Greek folklore, lamias are often depicted as monstrous women with insatiable appetites for human flesh, especially that of children and they are used to live in dark forests. Lamias are also known for their magical abilities, including the power to transform themselves into black clouds to hunt down their prey (Ioannou, 1990, p. 220). They have been known to imprison beautiful girls in caves or wells that are used as symbol of the underworld (Kliafa, 1977, p. 67). Despite their vicious nature, lamias are also capable of bestowing rewards upon those who treat them well. For example, in one tale, a lamia gives a coal to an unfortunate girl, which, when lit, burns alive her wicked stepmother and two step-sisters (Kafadaris, 1988b, p. 538).

Overall, lamias represent a darker side of Greek mythology and folklore, embodying themes of gluttony, lust, and violence. Their reputation as man-eating monsters has persisted through the ages, making them a fascinating and enduring figure in popular culture.

3.3.3. Shrews

The term "shrew" refers to a small, aggressive mammal with a sharp, pointed snout. In Greek folktales the use of the term "shrew" reflects the belief (where we can find it also in Shakespeare's time) that shrews were aggressive and unpleasant creatures, and the word was often used to describe women who were seen as difficult or troublesome. These women are often depicted as causing chaos and destruction wherever they go.

The shrews in Greek folktales are typically human, rather than supernatural beings, but their actions are no less menacing. According to Maria Gasuka (2008), the shrews in Greek folktales reflect the patriarchal notion that women are carriers of evil and are therefore dangerous and ready to kill to feed their soul. A shrew eats mainly human flesh but also horses, an animal associated with masculinity (ibid). The association of horses with masculinity in Greek folklore may indeed reflect the cultural belief in the importance of male power and domination. Horses were often used as symbols of strength, power, and courage in Greek mythology and were often associated with male figures such as heroes and warriors. This connection between horses and masculinity reinforces traditional gender roles, in which men were expected to be strong and dominant. The fact that shrews, a female character, consume horses in Greek folktales, can be seen as a subversion of this gender norm and a commentary on the dangers of female empowerment. This portrayal of shrews as horse-eating monsters may also be interpreted as a warning against the fear of female agency and the potential for women to challenge male authority.

In Greek folklore, shrews are often depicted as man-eating monsters that devour animals and humans. One famous story tells the tale of a family with nine sons who finally have a daughter (Damianou, 1994, pp. 43-53). Unfortunately, the newborn girl turns out to be a shrew, a monstrous infant that always wants to feed on blood. As she grows up, she continues to consume everything in her path, including horses and raw meat. Her in-satiable thirst for blood makes her unique among Greek

folktale creatures. Despite her monstrous nature, the shrew appears no different from her brothers, causing unsuspecting families to fall prey to her appetite for destruction. The shrew is also depicted sharping her teeth. Despite her deceptive appearance, her sharp teeth give away her true nature as a man-eating monster. This depiction of the shrew highlights the danger of underestimating one's adversaries, as well as the importance of being wary of those who may hide their true intentions behind a harmless facade. In the end of the tale, the shrew's younger brother sends two lions to devour her, which is the final showdown between them.

In other folktales, shrews are depicted as being able to transform into haunts and live in castles (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 342-343). These shrews are often associated with malevolent magic and are feared for their ability to cause harm. Overall, shrews in Greek folklore represent a dangerous force that is difficult to detect and even harder to stop. The shrews in Greek folktales represent a complex interplay between gender roles and power dynamics, as well as the fear of the unknown and the dangers that lurk beneath the surface. Their violent and aggressive behavior serves as a warning to those who would underestimate the power of women and the dangers they can pose.

3.3.4. Mermaids

Mermaids in Greek folktales are fascinating creatures with a dual nature of both fish and women. In some stories, they are even referred to as the mother of the sea (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 112-119). The symbolism and cultural significance of mermaids in Greek mythology and folklore cannot be overstated. The mermaid's half-human, half-fish appearance represents the connection between humans and the sea, highlighting the importance of maritime culture in Greek history. The mermaid's association with the sea also highlights the sea's role in Greek trade and commerce.

Additionally, the mermaid's appearance, which is neither depicted as beautiful nor ugly, and her age being left unspecified, can be seen as a reflection of the mystery and unpredictability of the sea. Their actions towards humans are often depicted as malicious, as they enjoy sinking ships and threatening sailors to devour them and destroy their homes if they do not provide them with the best boy in their family (Damianou, 1994, pp. 39-42; Ioannou, 1990, pp. 357-372). This may suggest a warning against the dangers of the sea and its potential to cause harm. Interestingly, mermaids also aid sailors and captains in conceiving male children by offering them a bone for their wives to eat (Ioannou, 1990, pp. 159-166; Kafadaris, 1988b, pp. 358-365). In exchange for this favor, the mermaid will require the boy to be returned to her, usually at the age of 15 or 18, to marry her daughter (Kafadaris, 1988a, pp. 112-119). However, in most cases, the mermaid intends to devour the boy herself. In some mermaid stories, they require a specific punishment to be carried out in exchange for allowing a human to marry them. For example, a mermaid queen may demand that the one who wronged her must be punished by being thrown into a furnace that burns for seven days and nights (ibid, p. 277). This emphasizes the mermaids' potential for vengeful behavior and highlights the dangerous consequences of crossing them. It also serves as a reminder of the importance of respecting and coexisting peacefully with nature and its inhabitants.

The concept of a mermaid queen who eats her male children is particularly intriguing, as it plays on the fear of maternal infanticide, which is a common theme in many cultures. A queen who is herself a mermaid and has a taste for eating her own male children, eventually, she gives birth to a girl who inherits her mother's mermaid nature. The girl goes to school and devours all the other children and continuing to consume everything in her path until she is dead (Angelopoulou, 2003, pp. 183-189). This is a poignant reflection of the consequences of greed and selfishness.

3.3.5. Fairies

In many cultures, fairies are depicted as benevolent and magical beings who bring good luck and grant wishes. Fairies are also young, and they are depicted very beautiful (Sakellariou, 1987, p. 70). However, in some folktales, they are portrayed as malevolent and capable of causing harm. In the past, fairies were often associated with the devil and viewed as remnants of Catholicism. This led to the belief that they had the ability to harm and cause misfortune. This idea is reflected in some Greek folktales, where fairies are depicted as evil creatures who possess the power to curse, harm (with their own powers or by possessing magic items as a twig) (Kafadaris, 1988a, p. 157), or even eat those they encounter (Ioannou, 1990, p. 258).

3.3.6. Dragon's wives

Dragon's wives are a fascinating and significant type of supernatural women in Greek folktales. Unlike some other supernatural women, such as mermaids or witches, little is known about the appearance of dragon's wives. They are often portrayed as fierce and powerful creatures who possess the ability to curse their children or transform them into worms (Kafadaris, 1988b, p. 105). This ability is symbolic of the danger and unpredictability associated with these women in Greek folklore. However, the dragon's wife is ultimately punished for her wicked deeds. This serves as a warning to those who seek to harm others or act selfishly. Additionally, the vindication of their children highlights the importance of justice and the eventual triumph of good over evil. The theme of punishment for wrongdoing and the importance of justice is common in Greek folklore and mythology, serving as a reminder of the consequences of one's actions.

3.3.7. Fate (Moira)

The concept of fate and destiny played a significant role in ancient Greek religion and mythology, and the Moirai, also known as the Fates, were the personifications of this idea. The Moirai were a trio of sisters, with each sister representing a different aspect of fate. Clotho was the spinner, Lachesis was the allotter, and Atropos was the unturnable, representing death. The word "Moirai" comes from the Ancient Greek word "moira" meaning "lots, destinies, apportioners". We didn't find any descriptions about their external characteristics in the folktales under examination.

The Moirai were believed to determine a person's fate and portion in life, death. his concept instilled a sense of fear and awe in people, as they believed that their lives were predetermined and beyond their control. In many Greek folktales, characters are presented as being afraid of their fate or trying to avoid it. In the story of Sleeping Beauty (Megas, 1993, p. 102), one Fate foretell that the baby girl will prick her finger on a spindle and die on her 18th birthday. This prophecy instills fear in the parents and leads them to take extreme measures to prevent it from coming true.

Similarly, in other folktales, characters go to great lengths to avoid their fate (Oustamanolaki, 1988, p. 141). This fear of the Fates and the desire to control one's destiny is a common theme in Greek folklore and mythology.

Overall, the portrayal of supernatural women in Greek folktales reflects the anxieties and fears of the society that created them. These malevolent women, with their dark powers and sinister intentions, serve as cautionary tales about the dangers of the un-known and the consequences of defying the natural order.

4. DISCUSSION

In conclusion, the present study undertakes an in-depth analysis of diabolical women in Greek folktales, elucidating their multifarious characteristics and providing a comprehensive depiction of their demonic nature. By examining these intriguing characters, we hope to provide valuable insights into the intricate

and diverse roles they play within the Greek folktale. By examining the dominant themes and categorizations of maleficent women, we have uncovered the deep-rooted cultural beliefs and values that have shaped these representations. We identified several recurring themes that demonstrate the complex relationship between gender, power, and evil in these narratives.

a.   Jealousy of women: One common theme found in our analysis is the portrayal of women as jealous and competitive. This portrayal reinforces the idea that women are inherently envious and unable to form supportive relationships with each other.

b.   Female omnipotence: The portrayal of women as powerful figures, both within the family and in the wider social environment, highlights the fear of female power and the potential threat it poses to traditional patriarchal structures.

c.   Evil mothers and stepmothers: The depiction of evil mothers and stepmothers in Greek folktales is indicative of the anxieties surrounding motherhood and the maternal role, as well as the potential for abuse and manipulation within these relationships.

d.   Witchcraft and supernatural women: The association of women with witchcraft and supernatural powers further emphasizes the fear of female power and the potential danger it poses. These characters often use their powers for evil purposes, reinforcing the idea that women's power is inherently destructive and threatening.

e.   Relationship dynamics: The portrayal of complex relationships between mothers and their children, particularly with daughters, highlights the ways in which gender roles and expectations shape family dynamics and contribute to the construction of malevolent female characters.

The results of our study align with previous research on the depiction of women in Greek folktales, which have also identified themes of jealousy, supernatural powers, and family dynamics as central to the portrayal of evil female characters (Anagnostopoulou 2016 [2007]; Kanatsouli 2016 [1997]; Katrinaki 2019). Our findings further expand on this body of work by offering a more detailed categorization of demonic women and high-lighting additional themes such as the portrayal of women of color and the prominence of witchcraft.

Our study supports the working hypothesis that the depiction of demonic women in Greek folktales reflects societal perceptions of femininity and gender roles. The association of negative values such as ferocity, malice, brutality, wickedness, and ugliness with evil female characters emphasizes the cultural expectation that women should adhere to traditional norms of behavior and appearance. The portrayal of these characters as deviating from these expectations underscores the societal fear of powerful or unconventional women who challenge traditional gender roles and power structures.

In analyzing the depictions of evil women in Greek folktales, it is crucial to consider the influence of the story of Adam and Eve. The biblical story of Eve's disobedience and temptation of Adam has had a lasting impact on the portrayal of women in folklore and cultural narratives. By becoming the real serpent in the garden (Tatar, 1993), Eve sets a precedent for the depiction of women who disrupt traditional gender roles and norms.

When looking at Greek folktales, we can observe a pattern of women breaking the rules of feminine behavior, often by seeking knowledge and power. These transgressive acts by women can be traced back to the story of Eve, who pursued forbidden knowledge and ultimately disrupted the divine order. The depiction of these women in Greek folktales serves as a reflection of society's anxieties about female autonomy and its potential to challenge patriarchal structures. Nevertheless, Ruth Bottingheimer (1987) clever points out that "Eve came to stand for all women" (p. 171).

To critically analyze these portrayals of maleficent women, it is essential to consider the socio-historical framework of Greek society. Greek culture has been historically patriarchal, with clearly defined gender roles and expectations. The vivid scenes of torture and execution present in these folktales reflect the harsh consequences that befall women who dare to defy societal norms. These narratives serve as cautionary tales, warning women against challenging the established order and illustrating the potential dangers of their actions. The emphasis on female transgressions in these narratives serves to reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, perpetuating the idea that women who challenge the established order are inherently evil or dangerous.

Considering our findings, future research directions could include a comparative analysis of the portrayal of demonic women in folktales from other cultures to determine whether these themes and categorizations are unique to Greek folktales or are more universally applicable. Additionally, further exploration of the role of race and ethnicity in the representation of maleficent women could provide valuable insights into the intersectionality of gender and cultural biases in folktales.

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