TOWARDS A FEMINISED MYTHOGRAPHY

A creative practice enquiry exploring mythic female characters from Early Welsh and Irish folktales as models for contemporary feminist films

Gabrielle Louise Russell

PHD

University of York

Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media

September 2025

Abstract

This creative practice research project by a female British filmmaker takes Early Irish and Welsh folktales as source material for contemporary feminist film narratives**.** Seeking to make interventions in the representation of women in cinema, it explores methodologies of feminised mythography in filmmaking practice, with dual aims: to express the inner life or spiritual journey of the heroine; and to find ways to invest contemporary female characters with mythic potency and power. Informed by Jungian archetypal theory and feminist revisionist mythmaking in women's literature, it develops an original methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking practice, evolved and demonstrated via two case studies where mythic models are explored and remoulded in feature films that reimagine mythic heroines as women living in the present day. Explored in three phases: interpreting and analysing mythic source material through a feminist lens; designing effective adaptation and screenwriting strategies; and the writer-director's role in bringing mythically inspired narratives to the screen, this thesis presents an innovative methodology for feminist adaptation that can be applied to a range of mythic figures, with potential uses beyond the filmmaking context explored here. Critical reflections on the creative process evaluate the strategies applied and offer new insights into rethinking and adapting the heroine's journey in feminist cinema.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. My portfolio of two feature films are my original works and have been written and directed by myself. *Deer Woman Child* is based on an original unpublished short story by Sarah Corbett. A CRediT statement of Authorship is attached. *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* is an entirely original work conceived, written and directed by myself. This work has not been previously presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Acknowledgements

Making films is a creative quest, and it is always a challenge to get films made. Which is why the opportunity to study at the University of York, to make films and think and write about them over these past seven years has been the gift of a lifetime. The two feature films that have been made during my studies have only been possible thanks to the financial support of the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities. To my supervisors, Dr Edward Braman, Andrew Vickers and Simon van der Borgh, thank you for all your support and advice throughout my PhD journey and in overseeing the making of the films, and to Dr Julia Havas and Dr Karen Quigley for your essential support during the preparation of this thesis. Thank you also to Leeds Beckett University who supported my research with essential funding.

One of the best things about filmmaking is that it involves collaboration with many talented people. These collaborations have deepened into great friendships over the years. My thanks to Sarah Corbett who wrote the short story outline for *Deer Woman Child*, you are an inspiration; Maya Lubinsky and Anna Zaluzckowska for your insightful feedback on *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan*; to my producer Laura Torenbeek huge thanks for your dedication and unfailing support. A massive thank you to heads of department Tunji Akinsehinwa, Steven Wyatt, Jane Morton, Megan McClean, Lia Hayes, Hoping Chen, Frankie Maiden, Alex Dixon, Maiken Hansen, Hafeed Jraybee, Birger Clausen, Lee Robinson and Marie Sankovitch; I'm so grateful for the privilege of working with you. Huge thanks to the Northern Film School for enabling the film productions, and to all the talented young filmmakers who volunteered. Thank you for giving your time and craft so generously, I so enjoyed working together with you all.

Special thanks to Olwen Fouéré, Jake Doyle, Aidan Callaghan, Ciara Ivie, Muireann Gallen, Keeley Forsyth, Lucy Litchfield, Margaretta Szabo and Jess Manley, and all our wonderful cast, for your brilliant work in bringing these stories to life.

Extra special thanks to my mum and dad, Linda and Bruce Russell for all your support and encouragement, and to my husband Stephen Goodwin who has walked this journey with me every step of the way, I couldn't have done it without you.

Contents

Abstract 2

Author's Declaration 3

Acknowledgements 4

Contents 5

List of Illustrations 8

Illustrations for Chapter 5: Script to Screen - *Deer Woman Child* 8

Illustrations for Chapter 6: Script to Screen – *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* 9

Introduction 10

Myths as models for the spiritual journey 11

Towards a feminised mythography in filmmaking 15

Introducing my research 19

Portfolio 20

Thesis structure 21

Positionality Statement 24

Chapter 1: Rethinking the Heroine's Journey 27

The Hero's Journey 28

The Heroine's Journey debate 29

Practice models for the Heroine's Journey 31

Conclusion 35

Chapter 2: Reclaiming Female Mythic Power 37

Representations of mythic female agency on screen 37

Taking control of the narrative 42

Evolving a methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking 46

Conclusion 47

Chapter 3: Analysis and Interpretation 49

Case Study 1: Rhiannon – 'Divine Queen' 51

Rhiannon: Evidence of deity and denigration 51

Rhiannon: Identifying an archetype 53

Rhiannon: Forming a creative interpretation 55

Case Study 2: The Morrígan – 'Phantom Queen' 56

The Morrígan: Evidence of deity and denigration 58

The Morrígan: Identifying an archetype 63

The Morrígan: Forming a creative interpretation 66

Conclusion 67

Chapter 4: Creative Adaptation 68

Strategies for creative adaptation 71

Rhiannon: Restoring the denigrated 'Divine Queen' in *Deer Woman Child* 71

The Morrígan: Creating a feminist 'Phantom Queen' 77

Conclusion 86

Chapter 5: From Script to Screen – *Deer Woman Child* 88

Embodying mythic characters 88

Resisting patriarchal abjection of the parthenogenic mother 94

The Otherworld as a metaphysical fictional space 95

Conclusion 99

Chapter 6: From Script to Screen – *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* 101

Configuring a feminist 'Phantom Queen' 101

Embodying mythic archetypes 105

Challenging the heteropatriarchal function of the mythic war goddess 112

Subverting the mythic warrior archetype 113

The Feminist Gaze – the cinematic language of empathy 115

Conclusion 118

Conclusion 120

Appendix 1: *Deer Woman Child* - A Story by Sarah Corbett 128

Illustrations Chapter 5: *Deer Woman Child* 133

Illustrations Chapter 6: *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* 161

Bibliography 187

Primary sources 187

Secondary sources 190

Online media 211

Filmography 214

List of Illustrations

Illustrations for Chapter 5: Script to Screen - *Deer Woman Child*

The illustrations listed below are stills from the film *Deer Woman Child* and can be viewed here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14sFKIWQ0OrA9Tl3tTP0iP22Ibp7jI43-?usp=drive_link>

Illustrations are included at the end of this thesis

Figure Title of image

1. Pryn in winter
2. Pryn in early summer
3. Pryn's winter costume
4. The white mare
5. Pryn and the mare
6. Portrait
7. Pryn reflected in mirror
8. Pryn observes her body
9. Pryn's eye
10. Pryn reading the letter
11. Sitting alone
12. Pryn attempting suicide
13. The deer watches Pryn
14. The deer's eye
15. Pryn's encounter with the deer
16. Deer ornament
17. Deer embroidery
18. Headless deer ornament
19. Antler sketch
20. Pryn picks berries
21. Pryn driving into town
22. Pryn with the white mare
23. Pryn enters forest
24. Pryn standing in ferns
25. Pryn gives birth in the meadow
26. The birth of the Divine Child
27. Pryn with baby in stable
28. Opening sequence
29. Pryn enters the story
30. Mountain face
31. Mountain summit
32. Mountains at sunrise
33. Forest in rain
34. Pryn at window
35. New dawn
36. New horizon
37. River in thaw
38. Pryn at the waterfall
39. Pryn enraptured
40. Pryn dips her toes into the pool
41. Pryn's foot underwater
42. Pryn swimming
43. Pryn lying on a rock
44. Cross dissolve
45. Flying over the forest
46. Pryn's rebirth
47. Lake at night
48. Shadows over rock
49. Sunburst
50. Night landscape
51. Forest night walking
52. Pryn in the forest at night
53. Pryn merging

Illustrations for Chapter 6: Script to Screen – *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan*

The illustrations listed below are stills from the film *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* and can be viewed here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14bpdmPdUJfSveQ9JA86zksEcAaoptp7p?usp=sharing>

Illustrations are included at the end of this thesis

Figure Title of image

1. Elder Erin
2. Erin's first appearance
3. Young Erin
4. Young Erin years later
5. Erin challenges the boy
6. Erin holds broken bottle
7. The Boy reacts
8. Young Erin walks Col out
9. Col walking out
10. Young Erin shoots Col
11. Female Prisoner appeals to Young Erin
12. Young Erin conflicted
13. Young Erin watching Col
14. Young Erin after executing Col
15. Young Erin after burying Col
16. Erin in the sea
17. Erin walks on the beach
18. Erin warns the Boy
19. Erin refuses to talk
20. Erin as tutelary intiatrix
21. Erin counsels the Boy
22. Erin embodies the raven
23. Erin stares at flame
24. Erin as seer
25. Erin's nightmare
26. Erin touches Col's face
27. Erin reaches out
28. The Boy takes Col's place
29. The Boy arrives
30. The Boy stands up
31. The Boy looks away
32. The Boy weeping
33. The Boy's initiation
34. The Boy standing over Erin
35. The Boy takes back the gun
36. The Boy makes a plan
37. The Boy leaves
38. The Boy singing
39. The Boy as carer
40. The Boy prepares an overdose
41. The Boy shoots Erin
42. The Boy grieves
43. Erin watches the Boy
44. Young Erin observes Col
45. Col's hands
46. Young Erin's Gaze
47. Col in the meadow
48. Young Erin observes unconscious Col
49. Col after interrogation
50. Erin staggers towards the sea
51. The Boy helps Erin walk
52. Erin's dying moments

Introduction

Since Laura Mulvey highlighted the problematics of a cinematic apparatus that positions women as objects of the 'male gaze', feminist filmmakers have grappled a seeming paradox – how to invite the spectator to look at female characters while avoiding objectification, how to represent female characters as subjects and portray female subjectivity on screen.[1] Reflecting on the legacy of feminist cinema in her recent book *Afterimages*, Mulvey notes an enduring theme of feminist filmmaking, 'how to find a voice for women's interiority, for the inside of the mind itself'.[2] My research is motivated by this quest to portray the innermost experiences of female characters and deepen expressions of women's subjectivity by representing the spiritual journey of the heroine on screen.

Informed by Jungian approaches that see myths as models for the exploration of the psyche, this creative practice enquiry considers how mythic female figures can be used as models for the spiritual journey of the heroine.[3] My approach to adaptation is inspired by principles of feminised mythography, a creative practice established in women's fiction. Mythography is the process of exploring myths and making new art works by borrowing from an existing mythic tradition. Feminised mythography, first defined by Alicia Ostriker in 1982, is the creative practice of feminist 'revisionist mythmaking', adaptation that reenvisions traditional myths through a feminist lens, offering women a means to redefine themselves and their culture.[4]

Although a popular mode in fiction, feminised mythography in cinema is rare, and my enquiry devises an original methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking. Combining creative uses of Jungian archetypes with the principles of feminist revisionist mythmaking, I take two female figures from Early Irish and Welsh folktales as models for contemporary female characters in feminist fiction films, adapting their narratives and reenvisioning the mythic heroine as a contemporary woman on a spiritual journey of inner transformation.

---

1 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' *Screen,* 16.3, (1975), pp. 6-18, p. 11.

2 Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2022), p. 102.

3 The word 'psyche' comes from the Greek ψυχή which primarily means 'soul,' but can also be translated as 'life', 'mind', or 'spirit'.

4 Ostriker, p. 71.

My enquiry asks two central questions:

- *How might mythic archetypes be used as models for the spiritual journey of the heroine?*
- *How might female mythic figures be adapted to create feminist representations of complex female characters that mobilise female agency?*

Following Robin Nelson's multi-mode, dialogical, dynamic model for practice as research and Agata Lulkowska's notion of 'filmquiry', this thesis presents a critical and practical account of an evolving methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking practice developed through the creative practice of writing screenplays and directing films: interpreting and analysing mythic source material; designing effective adaptation strategies; and exploring the role of the writer-director in bringing mythically inspired narratives to the screen.[5]

Myths as models for the spiritual journey

According to Jaan Puhvel 'mythology' is essentially 'storytelling,' not a true story or history, yet a story of the greatest importance because 'in myth are expressed the thought patterns by which a group formulates self-cognition and self-realisation, attains self-knowledge and self-confidence, explains its own source and being'.[6] Myths have long been used as models to explore human development in psychology, first by Sigmund Freud in his discussion of psycho-sexual development, and subsequently by Carl Gustav Jung.[7]

My research applies two Jungian concepts – *archetypes* and *individuation* – to consider how mythic female figures might be used as models for the spiritual journey of the heroine. Observing repeated images in both myths and in the dreams of his patients, Jung theorised that the human psyche contained archetypes, archaic 'primordial images', or thought forms that reoccur and

---

[5] Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 37.; Agata Lulkowska, *Filmmaking in Academia: Practice Research for Filmmakers* (Oxon: Routledge Focus, 2024), p. 11-12.

[6] Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore USA: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 1-2.

[7] Freud explained the construction of the individual psyche in narrative terms using the characters, plot, themes and narrative structure of the Oedipus myth as a model in 1910. See: Sigmund Freud, 'A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XI* (Germany: 1910), first English trans. by Joan Riviere, *Contributions to the Psychology of Love: A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men* (1925) *Collected Papers* 4, pp.192-202, in *Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, VII, (1953), ed. by Angela Richards, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1977).

manifest universally in all cultures and religious systems as well as in the individual psyche.[8] In his theory of the 'collective unconscious', Jung describes archetypes as 'complete personalities' or 'personifications' which are 'hidden' in the unconscious.[9] Jung initially identified four core archetypes: the *Self* (the totality of the individual psyche – the conscious and unconscious mind); the *Shadow* (the repressed aspects of the self); the *Anima* (the inner feminine side of the male subject) and the *Animus* (the inner masculine side of the female subject). He later added the *Child*, the *Trickster*, the *Old Wise Man*, the *Maiden*, the *Mother,* and the *Hero*, emphasising that archetypes are unfixed and expressed dynamically depending on cultural factors and therefore potentially boundless.[10]

Jung theorised that archetypes act as catalysts for a process of individual psychological development he called 'individuation', through which a person tries to achieve a unified sense of self.[11] Archetypes may be encountered or 'irrupt autonomously into consciousness' whereupon they are integrated into the personality.[12] My enquiry uses the Jungian notion of individuation to define the spiritual journey of the heroine as a psychological inner-life journey through transformation of consciousness. It examines the archetypes at play in female mythic figures and uses these to explore stages in the psychological development of the heroine.

James Hillman explains the implicit connection between myths and psychology, pointing out that *mythos* in the Aristotelian sense means *plot*, and psychology configures a plot of the human psyche.[13] Hence myths can be seen to chart the process of psychic individuation *as a story*. The spiritual journey of a character may therefore be defined as the struggle of a soul involved in an

---

8 C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types* Collected Works 6, (London: Routledge, 1992), para 746-749.

9 Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, CW* 9.1, 2nd edn., (London: Routledge: 1959), p. 284-285; for theory of the collective unconscious see pp. 42-43.

10 Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, CW* 9.1, pp. 275 – 289.

11 Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull, *Collected Works* 7, 2nd edn., ed. by H. Read et al., (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), (first publ. 1928).

12 Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, CW* 9.1, p. 285.

13 James Hillman, *Healing Fictions* 3rd edn (Washington DC: Spring Publications, 2019), (first publ. Barrytown New York: Station Hill Press, 1983). Hilman's use of plot is different to the structuralist definition of plot for example as deployed in the narrative theory of Vladimir Propp. Generally structuralist narrative theory this term to refer to linear sequence of events in story and not the spiritual journey of characters. See Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale,* 2nd edn., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968 (1928)). Also see: *The Poetics of Aristotle,* trans. by S.H. Butcher, 4th Ed., (London: MacMillan, 1920), p. 7.

unconscious individuation process. Joseph L. Henderson explains that the hero myth encapsulates the phases of development in the human life story by depicting the stages of the individuation process. The hero represents ego-consciousness and the hero's journey narrates the process of the discovery of the self through a series of initiatory rites.[14] These rites take the individual psyche through ego-death toward transformation and maturity, as Henderson puts it 'the theme is of new birth through death'.[15]

Joseph Campbell's comparative analysis of hundreds of mythological narratives *The Hero With A Thousand Faces,* applies archetypal theory to reveal underlying patterns in hero myths.[16] Campbell interprets these patterns to articulate a composite paradigm or *monomyth* which he argues form the archetypal stages of the mythic hero's journey.[17] The monomyth charts seventeen initiatory encounters with archetypes through which the hero advances on both his outer worldly quest and his inner-life journey through the dissolution of the old self towards rebirth.[18] This provides a narrative model for the spiritual development of the hero echoing the individuation process. Campbell's adoption of a three phase structure, 'Separation', 'Initiation' and 'Return', made the monomyth easily adaptable within a three-act screenplay.[19] Although never intended as a screenwriter's tool, it was applied to the development of screen characters and became associated with the success of films such as George Lucas's *Star Wars* trilogy, Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters*, George Miller's *Mad Max,* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.[20]

---

[14] Joseph L. Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man' in *Man and His Symbols,* Ed. C. G. Jung (First publ. London: Aldus: 1964) (London: Picador, Pan Books, 1978), pp. 95-156.

[15] Ibid., p. 113.

[16] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (USA: Princeton University Press, 1949).

[17] Ibid., pp. 3-46.

[18] Ibid., pp. 36-37. For Campbell's discussion of Jungian archetypes see pp. 17-18.

[19] Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, (New York: Dell, 1984, first publ. 1979).

[20] George Lucas acknowledged the impact of Campbell's monomyth on his *Star Wars* Trilogy in an address to the National Arts Club of America in 1985. See: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero's Journey* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), pp. 214-216; Christopher Vogler discusses growing film industry engagement with the Hero's Journey model in '*The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters*, (USA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1992), p. 3-6, 9. Vogler reports that George Miller, Steven Spielberg, Goerge Lucas, John Boorman, and Francis Ford Coppola all used Campbell's hero's journey narrative structure in their work. *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope,* dir. by George Lucas, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1977); *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back,* dir. by George Lucas, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1980); *Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi,* dir. by George Lucas, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1983).

Hollywood story analyst Christopher Vogler created an industry circulated pamphlet, '*A Practical Guide to the Hero with a Thousand Faces*', condensing the monomyth into twelve stages including seven encounters with Jungian archetypes: the Hero, Mentor, Threshold Guardian, Herald, Shapeshifter, Shadow and Trickster. Vogler later popularised the model in a screenwriting handbook *The Writer's Journey,* describing Campbell's model as 'exciting, useful story technology', demonstrating how archetypal approaches can be applied to narratology in creative practice.[21]

Campbell intended the monomyth to reflect the journey of both the male hero and female heroine, asserting that 'the whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women'.[22] However, his reliance on mostly male mythic hero narratives in developing his model created a markedly masculine perspective. Helena Bassil-Morozow observes that female characters on screen are rarely represented as experiencing the journey of individuation because male psychologists failed to consider the heroine's journey and the process of female individuation has been negated.[23] She explains that 'despite being a gender neutral concept, individuation has often been used to create or discuss male-centred narratives – mainly because they have been readily available' in mythos.[24] The spiritual journey of individuation has been 'hijacked by the male hero-mythologists' she remarks, adding 'To this day, we do not know exactly what a female journey is because there have not been enough female creators to map it out'.[25] She calls on creators to explore a wider range of archetypes when writing female characters to break free from restrictive gender representations, develop complex female characters and new articulations of female agency.[26] My creative practice enquiry responds to this call and asks how

---

[21] Christopher Vogler, '*The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters*, (USA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1992), p. 3. Vogler created his 'Practical Guide…' in 1985, and reports it was widely circulated in Hollywood giving evidence of film industry engagement with the monomyth. p. 3-6, 9.

[22] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* p. 121.

[23] Helena Bassil-Morozow refers to a conversation between Maureen Murdock and Joseph Campbell in which Murdock reported that Campbell indicated that 'women don't need to make the journey' as they are already at one with the *Self*. See: Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television: Post-Jungian Perspectives on Contemporary Female Characters* (New York: Routledge, 2023), p. 37.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 6, 37.

[26] Ibid., pp. 63-67; Bassil-Morozow defines agency is the capacity of a character to act in a given environment, to perform motivated action designed to produce a particular result, reflecting the ability of a character to control their environment.

female mythic archetypes can be used in feminist filmmaking practice as models for the spiritual journey of the heroine.

As post-Jungian feminists questioned the applicability of the Hero's Journey to female lives, psychologists, film theorists and creative practitioners began elucidating alternative models for the female spiritual journey. Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey,* developed a different structure based on female mythic goddesses; Victoria Schmidt, Valerie Frankel, Pattie McCarthy, and Helen Jacey all attempted to update Campbell's monomyth to be more reflective of contemporary social values.[27] In *Chapter 1: Rethinking the Heroine's Journey,* I examine these and propose a different approach to using mythic archetypes in filmmaking, shifting the focus away from the composite monomyth, to consider how a singular archetypal mythic figure might inform the spiritual journey of a unique female character.

Towards a feminised mythography in filmmaking

My decision to use singular mythic models is inspired by effective methods of adaptation established by feminised mythography in women's fiction. Popularised by writers such as Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Pat Barker, feminised mythography has evolved as a mode of women's literature. Carter's short story collection *The Bloody Chamber,* re-imagines well-known narratives of European folktales in favour of their female protagonists; Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad,* reenvisions Homer's Odyssey from the perspective of Penelope wife of Odysseus; and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* and *The Women of Troy,* reenvision Homer's *Iliad* from the point of view of captive queen Briseis in a critique of the hyper-masculine brutality of the Trojan wars.[28] All these works take female mythic figures from which to build a narrative, giving voice to victimised characters and revealing them as complex agentic women living in resistance to patriarchal culture.

---

[27] Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey: A Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (Boston, Shambhala Publications, 1990); Victoria Lynn Schmidt, *45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters,* (Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 2001); Valerie Frankel, *From Girl To Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend,* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2010); Patti McCarthy, 'The Heroine's Journey: Claire Beauchamp Reclaims the Feminine', in *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience*, ed. by Valerie Estelle Frankel, (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), pp. 182-207; Helen Jacey *The Woman in the Story: Writing Memorable Female Characters in Trouble in Love and in Power*, 2nd edn., (California: Michael Wiese Productions, 2017).

[28] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber,* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1979); Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (UK: Canongate, 2005); Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls* (UK: Hamish Hamilton, 2018); Pat Barker, *The Women of Troy* (UK: Penguin, 2021).

These texts are closely based on specific female figures from traditional myths which are reframed and reshaped by re-imagining the narrative from a female perspective and exploring women's agency, creating new expressions of female resistance to patriarchy. I discuss the principles and strategies of feminised mythography in more detail in *Chapter 2: Reclaiming mythic female power*.

Over the past five decades feminised mythography has evolved into a dynamic literary genre that challenges the ideological underpinnings of patriarchal myth. Natalie Haynes's *A Thousand Ships* was shortlisted for the 2020 Women's Prize for Fiction, and Madeline Miller's novels *Song of Achilles* and *Circe* have each sold over two million copies.[29] The success of these novels begs the question as to why feminised mythography is not more frequent in filmmaking.[30] Feminised adaptations of fairytales have been brought to screen: Angela Carter's *The Company of Wolves,* a reenvisioning of *Little Red Riding Hood* was directed by Neil Jordan in 1984; and Catherine Breillat directed her own screen adaptation of *Bluebeard* in 2009.[31] These films feature agentic, young female protagonists who overcome murderous male predators: Carter's heroine seduces the wolf; Brelliat's heroine outwits and defeats Bluebeard.

Besides these adaptations of fairytales, there are few examples of feminised mythography – using Ostriker's definition of intentional adaptations of myths through a feminist lens.[32]. Examples include Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx*, more recently Celine Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire.*[33] *Riddles of the Sphinx* uses the Oedipus and Antigone myth to explore the problems faced by mothers living in 1970s London. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire,* based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, subverts the lover's gender roles to create a lesbian love story set in 18th Century France. These films are intentional mythic adaptations that mobilise feminist ideas about women's equality, sexual freedoms, sacrifices and resilience under repressive cultural conditions,

---

[29] Natalie Haynes, *A Thousand Ships* (UK: Pan Macmillan, 2019); Madeline Miller, *Song of Achilles* (USA: Ecco Press, 2011); Madeline Miller, *Circe* (UK: Bloomsbury, 2018).

[30] This may be about to change as HBO have announced the development of a series based on Miller's *Circe,* and Netflix are currently creating another new series *Sirens* to be directed by Nicole Kassell.

[31] Angela Carter, 'The Company of Wolves' *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1979); *The Company of Wolves,* dir. by Neil Jordan (UK: ITC Entertainment, 1984); *Bluebeard,* dir. by Catherine Breillat, (France: Arte, 2009); *Little Red Riding Hood* is a European fairytale which can be traced back to several pre-17th Century folktales. Adaptations include: Charles Perrault, *Stories and Tales from Past Times with Morals,* (France: 1697); also: Brothers Grimm *Children's and Household Tales* (Germany: 1812).

[32] Ostriker, p. 71.

[33] *Riddles of the Sphinx,* dir. by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen (UK: British Film Institute, 1974); *Portrait of a Lady on Fire,* dir. by Céline Sciamma (France: Pyramide Films, 2019).

deploying feminist revisionist mythmaking principles. Interestingly, both are anachronistic adaptations, resetting mythic stories in a different time from the original myth, an approach I am pursuing in my research. Resetting ancient stories in the present day is a strategy of feminised mythography that not only exposes the patriarchal ideologies embedded in traditional myths but also enhances their contemporary resonance.

Like their counterparts in women's literature, these filmmakers use characters from Classical Greco-Roman mythology. My research expands this frame by taking as source material female characters from Celtic mythology. To date, very little has been done to adapt female figures from the rich resource of Early Welsh and Irish Literature in cinema. However, contemporised reenvisionings of female characters from *The Mabinogion* are extant in literature.[34] Fflur Dafydd's novel *The White Trail,* and Gwyneth Lewis's *The Meat Tree,* re-imagine mythic female characters in radically different time periods of the present day and distant future.[35] Alan Garner's novel *The Owl Service,* a contemporised evocation of the female character Blodeuwedd – a woman created from flowers who turns into an owl – was adapted for television as a mini-series, although he did not consciously intend feminised mythography.[36]

Legendary creatures from Irish folklore such as the Sídh – fairy folk – have been depicted in children's films like *Faeries* by Lee Mishkin, and in horror films like Corin Hardy's *The Hallow* and Ishana Shyamalan's *The Watchers.*[37] Selkie's shapeshift between seal and human form in *Selkie* by Donald Crombie, *The Secret of Roan Inish* by John Sayles, *Ondine* by Neil Jordan, and *The Song of the Sea* by Tomm Moore.[38] John Landis's *An American Werewolf in London* and Moore's *Wolfwalkers,*

---

[34] *The Mabinogion* is the collective name now given to eleven narrative tales found within two bound manuscripts, *The White Book of Rhydderch* (*c.*1350) Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales M.S. Peniarth 4-5; and *The Red Book of Hergest* (c1382-1410) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College 111. There are several translations extant, the version referred to in this thesis is by Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion A new translation by Sioned Davies,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[35] Fflur Dafydd, *The White Trail* (Wales: New Stories from The Mabinogion, Seren Press, 2011); Gwyneth Lewis, *The Meat Tree* (Wales: New Stories from The Mabinogion, Seren Press, 2010).

[36] Alan Garner, *The Owl Service* (UK: William Collins and Sons, 1967); Garner's modern day reenvisioning of the fourth branch of *The Mabinogion* was adapted for television. See: *The Owl Service,* dir. by Peter Plummer (UK: Granada Television, 1969-1970).

[37] *Faeries,* dir. by Lee Mishkin (USA: Tomorrow Entertainment, 1981); *The Hallow* dir. by Corin Hardy (UK, Ireland: Entertainment One, 2015); *The Watchers* dir. by Ishana Shyamalan (USA: New Line Cinema, 2024).

[38] *Selkie,* dir. by Donald Crombie (Australia: United International Pictures, 2000); *The Secret of Roan Inish* dir. by John Sayles (USA: Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1994); *The Secret of Roan Inish* dir. by John Sayles (USA: Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1994); *Ondine,* dir. by Neil Jordan (Ireland: Paramount Vantage, 2009); *The Song of the Sea,* dir. by Tomm Moore (Ireland: Studio Canal, 2014).

depict lycanthropy.[39] There are leprechaun stories, such as *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* by Robert Stevenson and ghost stories about banshees such as *Banshee Blacktop* by Sean Garland.[40] Mythical animals feature in *Into the West* by Mike Newell and witches in *The Outcasts* by Robert Wynne-Simmons.[41] But prominent mythic female characters from Celtic mythology have yet to emerge on screen.

Female filmmakers working in Britain and Ireland are beginning to deploy folkloric elements in their work. Andrea Arnold's *Bird,* depicts a teenaged girl avenging her mother's abusive boyfriend with the help of an enigmatic foreign man who turns into a bird*;* Kate Dolan's *You Are Not My Mother* depicts a young girl who discovers her mother is a changeling; and Nora Fingscheidt's *The Outrun* depicts a woman recovering from alcoholism who retreats to a Hebridean island where she dreams of mythic selkies.[42] The shapeshifting seals of Scottish folklore provide a metaphor for the recovery of her true self. These female-led dramas incorporate relationships with mythical creatures as metaphors of personal growth, elevating the agency of their female protagonists, offering glimmers of a mythically inspired contemporary women's cinema, but they do not adapt female mythic characters as the basis for feminised mythography.

Noting this gap in practice inspired my research methodology, which applies the principles of feminised mythography to adapt female figures from Early Welsh and Irish Folktales in feminist films. My research presents a unique contribution to knowledge by bringing previously unrepresented female mythic characters to screen and offering an effective methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking.

---

[39] *An American Werewolf in London,* dir. by John Landis (UK / USA: Universal Pictures, 1981); *Wolfwalkers*, dir. by Tomm Moore (Ireland: Wildcard, 2020).

[40] *Darby O'Gill and the Little People,* dir. by Robert Stevenson (USA: Buena Vista Distribution, 1959); *Banshee Blacktop*, dir. by Sean Garland (Ireland: Ison Distribution, 2016).

[41] *Into the West,* dir. by Mike Newell (UK: Miramax, 1992); *The Outcasts* dir. by Robert Wynne-Simmons (Ireland: Tolmayax, 1982).

[42] *Bird,* dir. by Angela Arnold (UK: MUBI, 2024); *You Are Not My Mother,* dir. by Kate Dolan (Ireland: Magnet Releasing, 2021); *The Outrun,* dir.by Nora Fingscheidt (UK: Studio Canal, 2024).

Introducing my research

My mythography takes as source material two female characters, one from Early Welsh literature, Rhiannon – 'Divine Queen' of *The Mabinogion*,[43] and the Morrígan – 'Phantom Queen' of the Irish tradition.[44] I chose these characters because they possess evident agency and influence and display supernatural powers such as the ability to move between mortal and otherworldly realms that suggest they originated as archaic female deities. Scholars including W. J. Gruffydd, Proinsias Mac Cana, Sioned Davies, Miranda Green, Angelique Gulermovich Epstein, Mark Williams, and Morpheus Ravenna, concur that these mythic figures derive from once powerful goddesses.[45] However, in the folktales their divine powers have been inverted, parodied, and corrupted in strategic ways to appear fallible, suspect and unreliable, indicating deliberate denigration. Williams explains that although these tales originate in pagan oral storytelling cultures, their final scribes were monks operating within the context of medieval Christianity whose ambivalence to the older gods and goddesses led to many mythological characters being denigrated and diminished.[46] When they were finally preserved in written form in the medieval period, they were shadows of their former selves. Mary

---

[43] Rhiannon is a prominent Otherworldly princess appearing in the First and Third branches of *The Mabinogion, 'Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed' / 'Pwyll Prince of* Dyfed' and 'Manawydan fab Llyr' / 'Manawydan son of Llyr', *The White Book of Rhydderch* (*c.*1350) Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales M.S. Peniarth 4-5; and *The Red Book of Hergest* (c1382-1410) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College 111. See: Davies, *The Mabinogion* pp. 4-21 and pp. 35-46.

[44] The Morrígan is a significant character in Irish mythology appearing in the Ulster Cycle tales: *Táin Bó Regamna - 'The Cattle Raid of Regamain',* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge /'The Cattle Raid of Cooley'*, and also in the Mythological Cycle tales from the *Lebor Gabálea Érenn /'The Book of the Taking of Ireland*' where she is listed as among the Tuatha de or 'God People' gods of Ireland, and *Cath Maige Tuired / 'The Battle of Maigh Tuireadh'* as well as making appearances in other stories.

[45] For analyses of Rhiannon's correspondences with the horse goddess Epona, see: Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 376; W. J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (1950), (London: Wakeman Press, 2016), p. 14; W. J. Gruffydd. *Rhiannon; an inquiry into the origins of the first and third branches of the Mabinogi.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), pp. 67, 98, 103; Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (London: Chancellor Press, 1997) first published Hamlyn, 1968), p. 51, 81; Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogion* (Wales: Llandysul, 1993), p. 51; Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins, and Mothers*, (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 50. For analyses of The Morrígan as a mythic war goddess, see: Angelique Gulermovich Epstein, *War Goddess: The Morrígan and her Germano-Celtic Counterparts.* Electronic Version, **#**148, September 1998, p. 198. <http://web.archive.org/web/20010616084231/members.loop.com/~musofire/diss/> [accessed: 15 August 2023]; Morpheus Ravenna, *The Book of the Great Queen: The Many Faces of The Morrígan, From Ancient Legends to Modern Devotions* (California: Concrescent Press, 2015), p. 5, 7.

[46] Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of The Gods of Irish Myth* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 44.

Daly calls this the 'stolen mythic power' of women that has been repressed by patriarchy.[47] My mythography reclaims this stolen power and restores the denigrated divine powers of these mythic archetypes by investing these in contemporary female characters to explore the articulations of agency they afford. My case studies take Rhiannon and the Morrígan as mythic models for contemporary female characters resetting their narratives in the present day.

This is applied research whereby my case studies result in the creation of two feature films directly demonstrating my methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking: *Deer Woman Child,* based on Rhiannon, and *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan,* based on the Morrígan.[48] Since completing the films, *Deer Woman Child* has screened at film festivals in Phoenix USA, Liverpool, London and Canada, and *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* screened at festivals in Galway, Vancouver, Berlin, Chicago, Los Angeles, and London, making an original contribution to feminist cinema.

Portfolio

Film 1: *Deer Woman Child* (59 minutes) https://vimeo.com/664306280

Password: Thistle

In reenvisioning Rhiannon, a denigrated fertility and sovereignty goddess, I portray Pryn, an infertile woman whose mysterious pregnancy leads to a personal re-birth.

Film 2: *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* (90 minutes) https://vimeo.com/1102944333

Password: Mordred

In reenvisioning the Morrígan, a war-goddess and death-bringer, I portray a dying elder female IRA veteran, Erin Morrigan enduring a final battle with the legacy of her violent past.

---

[47] Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 47.

[48] *Deer Woman Child,* dir. by Gabrielle Russell (UK: Green Film Productions and Make Believe Films 2022); *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan,* dir. by Gabrielle Russell (UK: Green Film Productions and Make Believe Films 2025).

Thesis structure

Positionality Statement

A statement discussing my positionality as a researcher, my feminist filmmaking ethos and my approach to collaboration.

Chapter 1: Rethinking the Heroine's Journey

In this chapter I consider how archetypes in myths can be used as models for the spiritual journey of the heroine. I explore Campbell's monomyth, feminist critiques, and the heroine's journey debate and explain how these inform my methodology for using archetypes in creative practice.

Chapter 2: Reclaiming Female Mythic Power

This chapter considers representations of female mythic power in popular cinema and asks how a feminist filmmaker might practice feminised mythography differently to reclaim 'stolen mythic power' and depict agentic representations of women on screen.[49] I explore divergent feminist perspectives from radical feminist critiques of myths as intrinsically patriarchal to spiritual feminist reclamations of the divine feminine. I discuss the problematic nature of gender essentialised ancient mythic figures and argue that by designing strategic approaches to feminised mythography it is possible to harness mythic female power and create potent articulations of women's agency.

Chapter 3: Analysis and Interpretation

In this chapter I articulate the first phase of my feminised mythography an in-depth study of Rhiannon and the Morrígan. Incorporating scholarship across Celtic studies, folklore studies and archaeology, I reveal correspondences with ancient female deities and evidence of their denigration. Applying Jungian theory I determine the presence of archetypes and consider how these characters provide models for the spiritual journey of the heroine.

---

[49] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology,* p. 47.

Chapter 4: Creative Adaptation

Here I discuss phase two of my methodology for feminised mythography – adaptation – defining my approach by reference to Margherita Laera's taxonomy of forms.[50] Confronting the challenge of configuring feminist narratives from complex, archaic mythic material I develop strategies of adaptation to revise mythic narratives and counter patriarchal elements. Applying these strategies to Rhiannon and the Morrígan I reenvision them as female characters in contemporary feminist films.

Chapter 5: From Script to Screen - *Deer Woman Child*

This chapter explores my work as a director when realising my first film, *Deer Woman Child* and presents a critical reflection on the third stage of my evolving methodology. I discuss how archetypes inform character embodiment and enable expressions of female agency. I use the imagery and symbolism of the mythic Otherworld to inform mise en scène and create a subjective, metaphysical fictional space for a woman's spiritual journey. I discuss how the film attempts to restore Rhiannon's stolen mythic power and reclaim the parthenogenic archaic mother – a figure of patriarchal abjection – with reference to Barbara Creed's concept of the 'monstrous feminine'.[51]

Chapter 6: From Script to Screen - *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan*

Here I reflect on my reenvisioning of the Morrígan, creating a complex anti-heroine characterised by the violent agency of the war goddess. I discuss my work as director shaping a feminist film that counters patriarchal valorisations of violence by depicting a character confronting her Shadow, revealing the devastating impacts of violence on perpetrators. I use cinematic language and tropes of the mythic Otherworld to depict Erin's spiritual journey subjectively, and Creed's concept of a 'feminist gaze' to portray Erin compassionately.[52]

---

[50] Margherita Laera, (ed). *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat* (London Bloomsbury: Methuen, 2014), pp. 4–10. Laera's framework refers to theatre, but her taxonomy and definitions may be applied to filmmaking.

[51] Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen* 27.1 (1986), 44-71.

[52] Barbara Creed, *Return of the Monstrous Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 16-17.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Reflecting on the effectiveness of my strategies for mythic adaptation and cinematic realisation, I present my conclusions about how mythic archetypes can be used as models for the spiritual journey of the heroine, and how feminised mythography in filmmaking contributes a new approach to rethinking the heroine's journey.

Positionality statement

Michelle Lam advocates that researchers examine the complexities of personal and social identities to become aware of how their positionality affects the power dynamics within research contexts and to develop decolonising and socially responsible approaches to practice.[53] In my creative practice there are two main dimensions to consider: my privileges as a filmmaker with access to funding, facilities and collaborators; and the cultural dynamics of a British filmmaker adapting from Welsh and Irish traditional narratives.

As a researcher in receipt of a White Rose College of Arts and Humanities scholarship, I am in a position of privilege, and their financial support has enabled the making of these films. I also had access to facilities, collaborators and further research funding as a Senior Lecturer at the Northern Film School Leeds Beckett University. As a writer director, I am at the top of the hierarchy in terms of decision making, however, as a feminist and a first-generation scholar from a working-class background I try to lead differently, creating inclusive communities, and de-colonising my practice.

Jukka Savolainen et al point out, 'the proper locus of intervention is not the individual scholar but the community in which the scholar participates.'[54] It is only through creating communities with built-in political diversity that we can make positive progress in reducing bias. My research community is the people who work with me on the films, my collaborators, the cast and crew. I assembled a gender balanced and ethnically diverse creative team. Senior crew included Dutch, Nigerian, Taiwanese, Hong-Kong Chinese, Irish, Lebanese, Bermudan, German, Egyptian and British personnel, from diverse political standpoints. As director, I make it my priority to invite contributions from all my collaborators. I trust and rely on the abilities of my team and invite their ideas and feedback, creating a culture of safety, respect and creative sharing.

As a British filmmaker working with Early Welsh and Irish folktales, the politics of creative adaptation are complex given the legacy of British imperialism and colonisation of these neighbour states. Though they were preserved when they were written down in the middle-ages by Christian

---

[53] Michelle Lam in 'Race, relational dynamics and anxious adjustments: the complexities of identities in relation to one another.' *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 45.2 (2022), pp. 129-136.

[54] Jukka Savolainen, Patrick J. Casey, Justin P McBrayer and Patricia Nanya Schwerdtle 'Positionality and Its Problems: Questioning the Value of Reflexivity Statements in Research' *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 18.6, (2023), pp. 1331-1338, p. 1336.

monks, these stories contain linguistic and cultural clues that suggest they pre-date Christianity.[55] Scholars argue they are rooted in much earlier Celtic mythological traditions of the pre-literate Iron Age.[56] Seeing these tales as windows to a deeper history, emerging from the oral traditions of the diverse peoples settling these isles, I felt able to engage creatively with them as remnants of our shared heritage.[57] However, I have been careful not to assume the position of authority or 'interpreter' of these tales. My adaptations are mythically inspired rather than recognisable re-writes of the traditional narratives. I practiced de-colonising principles, such as inviting Welsh and Irish artistic collaborators to work with me, making the empowerment of these collaborators implicit in my practice. Anglo-Welsh writer and poet Sarah Corbett wrote a storyline for the first film, *Deer Woman Child;* and Belfast born screenwriter Anna Zaluczkowska advised on the development of my second film *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan.*

Challenging oppression is what feminist filmmaking is about at its most basic level. But speaking for people who are not empowered to engage with the process is another form of oppression. I felt this keenly when working on *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* which speaks of the trauma of war and the impact of British colonialism. The trauma is still very much in living memory

---

[55] Most manuscripts were transcribed after the introduction of Christianity to Ireland in 550 AD. Between 600 and 1200 monasteries in the early Irish Church developed centres of learning, at this time monks were among the few literate groups in society, recording important cultural information such as medical and law tracts, hagiography, history, and literature including poetry and narrative traditions, all together in miscellaneous volumes. For an introduction see: Muireann Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009).

[56] The term 'Celtic' was first used by early chroniclers of history circa 500 BC to refer to migration of large numbers of ethnically diverse peoples of common Indo-European heritage in pre-history. Moving westward, some entered the islands of Ireland and Britain and settled, as evidenced by remains of material culture. The term Celtic continues to be used by archaeologists and scholars of early literature to refer to the cultural beliefs, material and narrative remains of these diverse peoples. Celtic influence has been pointed out by many scholars including Patrick Ford, Catherine McKenna, and further illuminated by Miranda Green with reference to artefacts and other discoveries in the field of archaeology. See: Patrick Ford, *Branwen: A Study of the Celtic Affinities.* In *The Mabinogi: A book of essays* ed. by C.W. Sullivan (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp. 99-119; Catherine McKenna, 'The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll' *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 29 (1980) 39-52; Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995); Kenneth H Jackson, 'The Oldest Irish Tradition: A window on the Iron Age' (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 3; Alwyn Rees, and Brinley Rees, B., *Celtic Heritage,* 2nd edn, (London: Thames and Hudson,1989), p. 26.

[57] Scholars who argue that the stories were based on the older, oral tradition, include Proinsias Mac Cana, Myles Dillon and Miranda Green. See: Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Mabinogi* (Wales: Writers of Wales, University of Wales Press, 1971); Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1948); Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995).

and for many people the struggle is not over. For this reason, I am very grateful to the people who felt able to join us to make this film.

I assembled an Irish cast from diverse religious standpoints so that the research became a creative way to explore history, community and our own reckoning with the past. I encouraged my cast to speak through the work. Before taking up the offer, lead actor Olwen Fouéré (Erin Morrigan), consulted her friend Laurence McKeown about the script. McKeown, a former member of the IRA, had been a prisoner on The Blanket protests and on hunger strike. Fouéré was able to bring insider knowledge to the process of developing the script and to her performance as an IRA veteran in the film. Jake Doyle, a young actor from a working-class single-parent family in Portadown, Northern Ireland, was cast to play 'the Boy'. Doyle grew up in a border town and was able to bring his knowledge of the cultural context to the film. Throughout filming I invited him to offer ideas, encouraged improvisations and embraced his suggestions about his character and the story, which were essential to making the film more authentic.

Ultimately, I see these films as a continuation of an ancient tradition of storytelling through which these characters and their stories continue to speak to our world and move people in unexpected and personal ways.

CHAPTER 1: Rethinking The Heroine's Journey

In this chapter I ask how mythic archetypes can be used to explore the psyche and map the spiritual journey of the heroine. First, I clarify how archetypes can be understood to operate both in Jungian theory and in mythos. I examine how they are used as models for the spiritual journey of the hero in Campbell's monomyth, then turn to post-Jungian feminist critiques and alternative configurations of a Heroine's Journey. Maureen Murdock, Carol P. Christ and Annis Pratt consider mythic goddess figures as archetypes for women's development, while Naomi Goldenberg warns against reinstating gender essentialist archetypes, calling for a redefinition of the concept and for feminists to generate new archetypes. I explore alternative female-hero models developed for screenwriters by Victoria Schmidt, Valerie Frankel, Pattie McCarthy and Helen Jacey, and the post-Jungian approach advocated by Helena Bassil-Morozow who proposes appropriating a wider range of gender-neutral archetypes to construct the heroine's journey in new ways. Taking account of these scholarly debates, I present my approach to using archetypes to configure the spiritual journey of the heroine.

Jung considers that archetypes do not have a well-defined shape but are psychoid energies or pre-shaping possibilities that confer an innate tendency on psychic forms. They are recognisable due to their repeated occurrence and because they fascinate and impress the ego, creating an affect that Jung calls 'numinosity'.[58] He borrowed the term from Mircea Eliade's description of the 'mysterium facinans', or 'tremendum majestus' experienced by humans when encountering the sacred, suggesting a divine aspect to Jung's concept.[59] It is important to understand the distinction between Jung's classification of basic archetypes – Shadow, Self, Anima / Animus, etc. – and the archetypal forms evident in myth, folklore and religious symbolism. The symbols and characters of the mythos are not true archetypes in themselves, they are connotative representations that have been systematised and refined as a symbolic language over many years. As such they are coloured and imbued with the psychic currency of the archetype particular to a cultural and historical moment. Jung considered archetypes to be universally present in the psyche of all humans with repeated variants emerging across cultures. Similar mythic figures existing in diverse cultures across

---

58 Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* CW 8, para 405.

59 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* Trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harvest, Brace and World, 1957), p. 9.

time, evidences an underlying archetype. A mythographer can make a positive identification of a true archetype contained within a mythic figure by a process of comparative mythic elucidation, a thematic analysis that reveals correspondences, making it possible to trace archetypal associations.[60] This diagnostic process was used by Campbell in his study of hero myths and is the process I use in my research.

Campbell analyses the archetypal stages of mythic hero narratives to present the spiritual journey of the hero as a linear narrative. He discusses Jung's classification of basic archetypes but deploys the concept more broadly, identifying a range of archetypal images, characters and situations which he organises as *stages* or rites of initiation in the narrative of the hero's journey.[61]

Separation / departure stage	1. The Call to Adventure 2. Refusal of the Call 3. Supernatural Aid 4. The Crossing of the first Threshold 5. The Belly of the Whale
Trials and Initiation stage	6. The Road of Trials 7. The Meeting with the Goddess 8. Woman as Temptress 9. Atonement with the Father 10. Apotheosis
Return stage	11. The Ultimate Boon 12. Refusal of the Return 13. The Magic Flight 14. Rescue from Without 15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold 16. Master of Two Worlds 17. Freedom to Live

[60] William G. Doty, *Mythography, The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 82-83. Doty advocates 'a freely associative study […] tracking motifs and similarities in mythology and folklore, no matter where they originally occur.'

[61] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* p. 36-37.

Campbell's analysis demonstrates that working from the mythos, a mythographer can identify several archetypal elements in myths: archetypal figures; archetypal encounters; and archetypal situations or rites of passage; and use these to organise a spiritual journey *as a narrative*.

The Heroine's Journey debate

Post-Jungian feminists challenge the male bias of Campbell's monomyth pointing out that some stages are not applicable to a female spiritual journey. Sarah Nicholson critiques those stages that relate to the hero's encounters with female archetypes such as 'The Meeting with the Goddess' (whom the hero unites with by making love to her), or the 'Woman as the Temptress' (in which the hero encounters the archetypal Mother who is either loving and caring or threatens to subsume the hero).[62] She points out that these female figures exist only in service to the male hero. By 'defaulting to the vantage point of the male', Nicholson remarks, 'it is starkly obvious that at the journey's 'zenith' or 'central point' the hero is distinctly male'.[63] Nicholson concludes that Campbell's dissection of mythology loses sight of the female heroine because 'woman as hero is lost to the greater symbolic Woman', pointing out 'she is not fully allowed her subjectivity'.[64] Carol P. Christ highlights the monomyth's lack of inclusivity of female experiences and argues that women writers configure the female spiritual journey differently through rites of passage and experiences unique to women's lives.[65] Annis Pratt recognises different archetypal themes in women's literature including birth and transformation that evoke different patterns in the female individuation process.[66]

Seeking ways to configure a *heroine's journey* for women, feminist psychologists began exploring female mythic figures to find archetypes that could be more appropriately applied to women's lives. Jean Shinoda Bolen identifies seven Jungian archetypes in Greek goddesses,

---

62 Sarah Nicholson, 'The Problem of Woman as Hero in the Work of Joseph Campbell', *Feminist Theology* 19-2 (2011), 182-193.

63 Ibid., p. 187.

64 Ibid., pp. 190-191.

65 Carol P. Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers and Spiritual Quest,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980), p. 9.

66 Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns In Women's Fiction* (UK: Midland Books, 1981), p. 135-136.

emphasising their complexity and autonomy, inviting women to recognise how particular mythic archetypes illuminate their own psyche.[67] Miriam Polster approaches the heroine from the perspective of Gestalt therapy, emphasising women's transgressive ability to be heroes in a world that views heroism as a male role. Comparing the myths of Eve and Prometheus, she demonstrates that despite gender roles placing limits on acceptable behaviour, Eve's disobedience speaks to a generation of women choosing to resist patriarchal limitations and make their own decisions on how to live.[68] Clarissa Pinkola Estes explores indigenous folktales, elucidating women's growth via the Wild Woman archetype.[69] But none of these approaches consider the spiritual journey of the heroine as a narrative.

Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey: A Woman's Quest for Wholeness,* explores a diverse pantheon of mythic goddesses relating them insightfully to both the monomyth and the female individuation process. She recalibrates the stages of Campbell's monomyth with reference to accounts of real women's life experiences. Arguing that women are psychologically wounded due to the detrimental effects of living in a patriarchal culture that rejects and denigrates the feminine, she advocates a necessary reconnection with the feminine as a path to women's healing.[70] Murdock's heroine's journey, unlike the hero model, is 'one of moving more deeply into self rather than out of self', and centres on a 'descent to the Goddess' to reclaim her connection to the feminine and find wholeness.[71] While Murdock sees the heroine's journey as a spiritual inner-life journey, asserting 'The Heroine must become a spiritual warrior', the narrative she presents focuses on the disillusion of striving modern women whom she advocates abandon the pursuit of masculine goals and descend into the underworld of their unconscious and explore their 'inner terrain'. [72]

The enduring value of Murdock's work is that it demonstrates how female mythological archetypes speak directly to the experiences of the female life cycle. Murdock juxtaposes the lived experiences of real women with myths, revealing how women's journeys are always unique and

---

67 Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddess in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1984).

68 Miriam Polster, *Eve's Daughters: The Forbidden Heroism of Women,* (San Francisco: Jassey-Bass, 1992).

69 Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves,* (USA: Ballantine, 1992).

70 Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey: A Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (Boston, Shambhala Publications, 1990), pp. 10-11.

71 Ibid., p. 89, 87-109.

72 Ibid., p. 11, 4.

different as individuals take a non-linear, spiralling journey in and out of varied archetypal stages illustrated by mythic narratives. This offers a more complex and layered approach to understanding the female subject's spiritual journey in contrast to the linear hero model. By placing focus on the inner-life spiritual journeys of individual real women, Murdock's model avoids universalist claims and posits a nuanced interpretation of varied mythic figures as models for understanding stages of women's individuation. Murdock's approach has much to offer feminist filmmakers seeking to elucidate female subjectivity due to its configuration of the heroine's journey as a personal descent into 'inner terrain'. It presents an introspective heroine's exploration of the soul and proves that female mythic archetypes provide a compelling psychological framework to consider the female journey of individuation.

Practice models for the Heroine's Journey

Furthering the Heroine's Journey debate, Kim Hudson's *The Virgin's Promise* compares male and female mythic virgin archetypes with the hero model.[73] Helen Jacey's *The Woman in the Story*, deconstructs female character types in film and television, discussing issues of 'gender baggage', and 'gender mindfulness', discussing strategies to consider when writing female characters. She proposes a non-linear, non-Jungian model for the 'Real Heroine's Journey', which she articulates as a series of phases centred on themes of 'Identity' (discovery of the self), 'Relating' (to others and self) and 'Momentum' (volition, agency and activity) which can be woven through a female character's story.[74] Others sought to transpose Campbell's archetypal stages into a pattern more aligned with a female experiences. Victoria Lynn Schmidt presents a nine-stage feminine journey in three acts: 'Containment', 'Transformation' and 'Rebirth' in which the heroine faces her demons and undergoes rebirth.[75] Valerie Estelle Frankel developed a mythically informed model (using Jungian archetypes and stories from religious and literary traditions), that combines the structure of Campbell's monomyth with themes of descent and reconnection with the feminine that shaped Murdock's

---

[73] Kim Hudson, *The Virgin's Promise:Writing Stories of Feminine Creative, Spiritual, and Sexual Awakening,* (California: Michael Wiese Productions, 2009).

[74] Helen Jacey, *The Woman in the Story:Writing Memorable Female Characters*, (California: Michael Wiese Productions, 2010), pp. xiv, 249, 98 - 136.

[75] Victoria Lynn Schmidt, *45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters,* 2nd edn., (Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 2001).

work.[76] Frankel changes the gender of some of Campbell's archetypal encounters to account for the female perspective of the heroine's individuation process: 'The Meeting with the Goddess' becomes 'Confronting the Powerless Father'; 'Atonement with the Father' becomes 'Atonement with the Mother'; 'Master of Two Worlds' becomes 'Power over Life and Death'; and 'Freedom to Live' becomes 'Ascension of the New Mother'. Frankel configures a female journey in which the heroine tries to recover her shattered family and which valorises the Great Mother archetype, asserting 'the true goal' of the heroine is to become the 'archetypal, all powerful mother'.[77] But as Sophia Kobacker points out, 'Not all women perceive the female hero within the gendered confinement of women's usefulness as "man's saviours and protectors" as Frankel's pattern apparently suggests', and 'it fails to offer a narrative pattern that can be considered relevant to the majority of contemporary women'.[78] Patti McCarthy builds on Campbell, Murdock, Schmidt and Frankel's models to propose a nineteen-stage journey with further substitutions: Frankel's 'Wedding with the Animus' becomes 'Meeting the Animus', and 'Bladeless Talisman' becomes 'Talisman'.[79] McCarthy's model organises the stages in three archetypal phases to reflect the Triple Goddess concept imagined by Robert Graves: 'Awakening' – The Maiden; 'Transformation' – The Lover and Great Mother; and 'Rebirth' – The Crone.[80]

Although these attempts to configure a female version of the Hero's Journey based on Campbell's monomyth may have useful applications in creative screenwriting practice, their purpose – to find a staged linear model for the Heroine's Journey – is ultimately limiting. As Kobacker points out, not all female characters need to experience the same journey, and not all female heroes need to serve the same function.[81] Although revisionist models aim to update and reconstruct the monomyth 'to reflect more inclusive, contemporary social values', their strategy is often to deploy gynocentric alternatives to the androcentric stages of Campbell's model, resulting in a series of

---

[76] Valerie Estelle Frankel, *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend,* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland & Company. Inc.).

[77] Ibid., p. 3-4.

[78] Sophia Kobacker 'The Hero's Journey in Narrative Media: The Female Model', (unpublished thesis Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, 2019), p. 55, (citing Frankel, *From Girl to Goddess,* p. 317).

[79] McCarthy, Patti, 'The Heroine's Journey: Claire Beauchamp Reclaims the Feminine' in *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience,* ed. by Valerie Estelle Frankel, (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), pp. 182-207.

[80] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 380.

[81] Kobacker, p. 55.

adjustments (often gender reversals) to several archetypal stages.[82] These replacements are developed from a selection of female mythic figures derived from various traditions in world mythos, interpreted without a clearly defined strategy, other than to construe a female pattern. Forming a composite heroine's journey results in a reductionist approach to the mythological source material that reveals more about the concerns of feminists than the about the potential of mythic archetypes to inform creative practice.

The adoption of gender essentialised mythic goddesses as models remains problematic for feminists wary of embracing patriarchally configured figures. Naomi Goldenberg points out that connotative representations in mythos are often reflective of cultural gender ideologies, 'archetypes are descriptions of cultural conditions that are rooted in history' not 'inescapable determinants of history'.[83] Arguing that Jung's archetypes are based on outdated gendered stereotypes she calls for a 'formal critique and revision of the Jungian archetype' by feminists to redefine the concept.[84] 'We must redefine the archetype and experiment with new attitudes to myth and iconography', she writes, suggesting that feminist creators explore how archetypes might be used progressively, while refusing to set up new absolutes.[85] Goldenberg suggests that the universalist claims of Jung's definition be dropped altogether so that, '"Archetypal" might be usefully employed as an adjective to describe the degree to which an image affects us', freeing the concept from past patriarchal uses and inherent limitations and allowing for new feminist archetypes to enter cultural currency.[86] Goldenberg's proposal, 'to consider image and archetype as synonymous', redefines archetypes simply as images that confer 'affect' to a high degree.[87]

Bassil-Morozow considers attempts to configure a linear model misguided. She writes, ''Staged individuation', resulting in a staged narrative not only obscures the importance and meaning of the particular archetypes standing for various life events, but also creates a 'one size fits all' approach which offers little flexibility to the variety and wealth of human experiences.'[88] She argues

---

82 Ibid., p. 9.

83 Naomi R. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the end of Traditional Religions,* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1979), p. 60.

84 Ibid., p. 61-62.

85 Ibid., p. 62.

86 Ibid., p. 64.

87 Ibid.

88 Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television,* p. 49.

that what is needed is greater variety of options for the heroine, and that 'Female characters should use the entire spectrum of archetypes and archetypal situations'. Nevertheless, she insists that archetypes and the concept of individuation are useful in configuring the heroine's journey. She explains, 'Archetypes, as Jung envisaged them, are the constituents (as well as stages) in the individuation process', pointing out that although the classic Jungian view is that individuals encounter archetypes in a fixed sequence, contemporary Jungians think they are encountered in no fixed order, so the heroine's journey doesn't require a fixed sequence of archetypes to initiate the process of individuation.[89] She adds that although they are described in gendered terms by Jung, archetypes as psychological concepts may be understood as androgynous as they are encountered by individuals of all genders. She calls on feminist creators to move beyond the limitations of traditionally female gendered archetypes by exploring *all* archetypes, including those that have commonly been the preserve of the male hero such as the Shadow, Trickster, Child, Self and Hero in configuring the heroine's journey.[90]

Bassil-Morozow suggests an alternative creative solution to correct the male bias of hero narratives is 'de-stereotyping' the gendered archetypal stages of individuation, and '…dissolving the metaphorical bond respectively with performative femininity and masculinity'.[91] She advocates we 'think of the individuation process as consisting of many events, each focussed on a particular archetype or theme', and to explore female individuation using a wider range of archetypes because this 'opens up opportunities for exploring a range of human experiences instead of focussing on the hero myth and particularly its male version.'[92] She proposes a flexible model that considers nine Jungian archetypes organised into three themes: 'social adaptation', 'reality testing' and 'self-actualisation'; each theme covering a group of issues in a character's life. She argues that while the Hero's Journey has been configured and organised to tell the story of the male hero, the female hero's journey can still be imagined differently, because essentially the journey is about 'the hero's change of status and the different stages of this process'.[93] As in Campbell's stages of the hero's journey, the heroine must go through a dramatic sequence of challenges or trials (stages of initiation)

---

89 Bassil-Morozow, *Jungian Theory for Storytellers: A Toolkit* (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 18.

90 Ibid., pp. 42-79.

91 Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television*, p. 47.

92 Ibid., p. 49.

93 Ibid.

which force her to abandon the ways of her old self. As archetypes are not tied to particular stages, nor encountered in a linear model, the heroine's journey can consist of any or all of these, configured in any order as catalysts for the spiritual journey of the heroine who undergoes a radical psychological change and emerges wholly transformed.

For filmmakers seeking to evoke the heroine's inner-life and express this subjectively, Bassil-Morozow's post-Jungian perspective is most enabling as she points out that archetypes are not just images or characters that the heroine encounters, but *processes* in her psyche, as she assimilates them as constituents or personalities active in the unconscious.[94] This means that archetypes may inform a character's inner-life and psychological states, – not only through *extrinsic encounters* with archetypal images, characters and situations – but through *intrinsic archetypal processes* that create drives, attitudes, and impulses that result in behaviour.

Conclusion

The feminist mythographer may consider archetypes as a useful creative practice tool to configure the spiritual journey of a fictional heroine. Comparative mythographic elucidation applied to a study of female mythic figures, enables the identification of archetypes embedded in myths. Selecting mythic figures who endure rites of passage, the mythographer may configure a spiritual journey as a narrative. Feminists have explored a wide range of apposite female figures in world mythos, demonstrating that mythic female archetypes provide suitable models for the spiritual journey of women, because they speak to experiences unique to women's lives, and can be interpreted as analogous to processes of individuation.

Attempts to reconfigure an alternative female hero model based on Campbell's monomyth have revealed the limitations of pursuing a composite linear staged model of the heroine's spiritual journey. An alternative creative practice approach might avoid reductive, universalised fixed stage models. I propose using a more expansive analysis of singular mythic figures, exploring the varied and often contradictory archetypes they contain, towards a nuanced interpretation that embraces complexity. Exploring singular mythic figures with varied facets, provides plentiful material to imagine complex heroines and explore their psychology in depth. To mitigate the limitations of problematic gender essentialised archetypes, the feminist mythographer must carefully consider how each archetype functions ideologically and consider bespoke strategies to mitigate

---

[94] Bassil-Morozow, *Jungian Theory for Storytellers: A Toolkit* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 16 - 19.

reinstatement of patriarchal themes. With careful navigation of the culturally situated gender dynamics that myths reflect, it remains possible to adapt female mythic archetypes through a feminist lens to provide useful models for exploring the Heroine's Journey.

Goldenberg's call to rethink Jung's classification of archetypes and to understand them as affective images, offers a more fluid and diverse concept which allows the mythographer freedom to transform patriarchal archetypes and construct new archetypal images enabling the emergence of feminist archetypes. Following Bassil-Morozow's proposal to see archetypes as gender neutral, including those previously the preserve of male hero, such as the 'Self', allows a more diverse range of gender inclusive archetypes to become potential models for ever more complex female characters. Working with a wider range of archetypes, exploring available combinations, as Bassil-Morozow suggests, allows the feminist mythographer greater flexibility in depicting a heroine's spiritual journey. A character's story can potentially begin at any archetypal stage and move through a *change in status* towards another or even focus on facets of a single archetype. This offers potential to create complex female characters at any stage in life, making representations of women more diverse and authentic to our lives, as she puts it '…we are capable of multiple journey's' which link together in one long 'life journey'.[95]

Seeking to evoke female subjectivity on screen, I adopted the approach advocated by Bassil-Morozow that considers archetypes as active constituents *within* the psyche of the heroine, defining the stages of her development as she advances through the process of individuation. Using this approach, I would be able to dramatise inner-life processes as each archetype affects psychology and behaviour. By deploying archetypes as structures within the psyche of fictional characters, a story akin to the psychological process of individuation can be configured. The growth of the heroine may be expressed as the movement through one archetypal stage into another offering a subjective perspective of the Heroine's spiritual journey towards wholeness of 'Self'.

Adopting this strategy opens possibilities for imagining how mythic archetypes can be *embodied* by a character. By embodying an archetype, the heroine may reclaim the divine agency – mythic power – that an archetype affords. As mythic archetypes are characterised as divinities and identifiable by their numinosity and intense affect on the psyche, investing the heroine with archetypal characteristics may enhance her potency, agency and make her more memorable. I consider feminist debates about the reclamation of divine female power in *Chapter 2: Reclaiming female mythic power*, further evolving my methodology of feminised mythography in filmmaking.

---

[95] Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television*, p. 47.

CHAPTER 2: Reclaiming Female Mythic Power

Representations of mythically inspired female characters in popular cinema both *contain* and *repudiate* female mythic power conveying ambivalent messages characteristic of post-feminist trends. This chapter examines how a feminist filmmaker might practice feminised mythography differently, to reclaim 'stolen mythic power' and depict agentic representations of women on screen.[96] Informed by feminist debates about how myths and mythic characters function ideologically as models for gendered behaviour, I consider whether myths are intrinsically patriarchal. I explore how spiritual feminists have adopted mythic goddesses in attempts to reclaim the divine feminine and consider the problematics of adapting gender essentialised mythic figures as models for feminist films. I argue that by adopting the principles of feminised mythography developed in women's literature, it is possible to design effective strategies for feminist adaptation. I outline an evolving methodology, devising strategies for a feminised mythography in filmmaking, to harness mythic female power and create potent articulations of female agency.

Representations of mythic female agency on screen

Bassil-Morozow argues that traditionally, female characters in myths are too often depicted as passive and denied agency. She writes, 'More often than not […] women in myths and fairytales were mere props in the male hero's journey'. She argues that likewise in cinema, women on screen were too often limited to traditional representations of the 'female persona', which she describes as the 'social mask' of femininity.[97] She explains, 'the screen had long been helping to shape the mask, to keep it in place, to control its wearer, to dictate her behaviour and to transmit and solidify the message about […] normative female behaviour'.[98] Acknowledging that 'Narratives containing

---

96 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology,* p. 47.

97 Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television,* p. 11.

98 Ibid.

examples of the passive adaptor of the female persona are not particularly useful for providing role models for the next generation…'.[99] She calls for female creators to develop female characters with greater agency, breaking away from traditional representations of the 'mask of femininity' to explore female characters in greater complexity.[100]

Bassil-Morozow's analysis of female characters in film and television points to a historic lack of representations of female agency. She asserts, for too long 'agency and action had been reserved exclusively for male characters and female characters have historically been 'denied both agency and control'.[101] She defines '…elements of agentic expression' as 'the voice, gaze and control' which she argues have 'traditionally belonged to male characters in moving image narratives'.[102] To discuss agency, Bassil-Morozow uses Dan McAdam's taxonomy of two kinds of agentic behaviour. The first is 'generative' and motivated by the quest for power, achievement and immortality, characterised by decisiveness and force, and traditionally associated with stereotypes of masculinity, but which can also be expressed as being creative or productive as McAdam's puts it, ''to give birth' both literally and figuratively'.[103] The second is 'communal' agency motivated by desire to merge with others and form relationships and oriented towards love and intimacy. Traditionally, female characters in films have been characterised by 'communal' agency, but Bassil-Morozow argues that the dichotomy is a false one as heroines can and do express both drives.[104]

In my research, I am interested in exploring how female mythic power might be harnessed to enable potent expressions of women's agency on screen. But adaptations of mythic female characters often mirror the myths they are based on and and *proscribe* potent female agency. *The Legend of King Arthur* and *Excalibur,* present androcentric narratives in which prominent female characters such as Morgan Le Fay (half-sister of King Arthur), are demonised.[105] MaryLynn Saul points

---

99 Ibid., p. 67.

100 Ibid., p. 11.

101 Ibid., pp. 30, 36.

102 Ibid., pp. 63-67.

103 Dan P. McAdams, *Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, (New York: Guildford Press, 1997), p. 238.

104 Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television*, p. 64. citing Dan P. McAdams, p. 148, 238.

105 *The Legend of King Arthur,* dir. by Rodney Bennet (UK: BBC, 1979); *Excalibur,* dir. by John Boorman (USA: Warner Bros, 1981).

out that Morgan le Fay's malevolent villainy stems from Thomas Malory's 15th Century adaptation of the legend, and reflects cultural anxieties about femininity as she represents a 'symbol of the potential danger of uncontrolled female power.'[106] Likewise, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy reflects the gender norms inherent in the medieval literature from which Tolkien took inspiration.[107] Film adaptations by Peter Jackson have been critiqued by feminists for their conventionally gendered, idealised female characters.[108] Catherine Stimpson describes them as 'hackneyed [...] stereotypes [...] either beautiful and distant, simply distant, or simply simple.'[109] Although commentators also noted their warrior characteristics[110] and wisdom,[111] female characters are often 'restricted to the roles played by women in […] medieval romances – object of the quest, mother, temptress, witch – or else absent.'[112] These representations demonstrate an ambivalence to female power, which is often villainised, sexualised or essentialised.

Popular screen representations frequently reinforce the containment and control of female mythic power. An American television adaptation of Marion Zimmer Bradley's feminised mythography *The Mists of Avalon* reframes the Arthurian narrative from the point of view of Morgan

---

[106] MaryLynn Saul, 'Malory's Morgan Le Fay: The Danger of Unrestrained Feminine power', in *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 46: 2 (2010), 85-99, p. 85; Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur,* ed. by Helen Cooper, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[107] Medieval romance narratives stem from a body of medieval literature including pseudohistorical stories of the early Kings of Britain written between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries CE. The characters are thought to originate in early Celtic-Brythonic oral traditions. The first mention of King Arthur is in the Welsh poem *Y Gododdin* composed around the sixth century CE. These tales were significantly reworked and romanticised by Geoffrey of Monmouth and later adapted again by Thomas Malory, establishing the medieval romance genre that survives today. For first mention of Arthur see: Aneirin, 'Y Gododdin', in *The Book of Aneirin* / Llyfr Aneirin (NLW Llyfr Aneirin, Cardiff, MS 2.81).; for medieval adaptation see Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia Regum Britanniae / *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe, (London: Penguin Classics, 1966); for modern adaptation see J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (George Allen & Unwin, United Kingdom, 1954).

[108] *The Fellowship of the Ring,* dir. by Peter Jackson (New Zealand / USA: New Line Cinema, 2001); *The Two Towers,* dir. by Peter Jackson (New Zealand / USA: New Line Cinema, 2002); *The Return of the King,* dir. by Peter Jackson (New Zealand / USA: New Line Cinema, 2003).

[109] Catherine Stimpson, *J.R.R Tolkien* (United States: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 18.

[110] Jessica Yates, 'Arwen the Elf Warrior?' *Amon Hen* 165 (2000), 11-15.

[111] Maureen Thum, 'Sub-subcreation of Galadriel, Arwen, and Éowyn: Women of Power in Tolkien's and Jackson's 'The Lord of the Rings', in *Tolkien on film: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings,* ed. by Janet Brennan Croft, (California: Mythopoeic Press, 2004) pp. 231–256.

[112] Faye Ringel, 'Women Fantasists: In the Shadow of the Ring', in *Tolkien and His Literary Resonances*, ed. by George Clark and Daniel Timmons, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 159-171.

Le Fay, now called Morgaine.[113] The miniseries presents Morgaine as a priestess of an ancient gynocentric cult, alongside other female characters who are highly agentic and who significantly influence events.[114] But at the climax of the film Morgaine's magical powers fail. The epilogue shows her in a nunnery watching a young girl gaze upon a statue of the Virgin Mary, suggesting the defeat of the old goddess religion and the continuance of the goddess in another form. The ambivalent messaging conveys the idea that whilst mythic female power may not be entirely defeated, it must be safely contained and rehabilitated within patriarchal culture.

Themes of containment and rehabilitation of mythic female power persist in recent depictions of mythically inspired fantasy characters. *Maleficent* depicts the story of a powerful supernatural queen based on the evil fairy who curses Sleeping Beauty.[115] After Maleficent's wings are cut off by the young Prince Stefan (a symbolic rape), she curses his baby daughter Aurora so that she will prick her finger on her sixteenth birthday and fall into a sleep from which she will not wake until she receives true love's kiss. But Maleficent comes to regard Aurora with deep affection, regretting her curse, and when the girl accidently pricks her finger on a spindle, Maleficent declares her love for the child, breaking the curse. True love is revealed to be a mother's love for her (adoptive) daughter, reinforcing the idea that a woman's maternal attachment is paramount. Although the film uses feminist concerns to fuel the narrative via an analogous rape revenge story and stages a tumultuous journey of female growth and transformation, *Maleficent* reinforces the essentialist idea that women's true selfhood is to be found in their role as mothers.

Wonder Woman, is another film where mythic female power is compromised.[116] First introduced by *All Star Comics* as a confabulation of Greek goddesses, as 'lovely as Aphrodite – as wise as Athena – with the speed of Mercury and the strength of Hercules',[117] Wonder Woman came from a mythical society of goddess-worshipping warrior women to the USA 'to fight for peace, justice and women's rights.'[118] Jill Lepore relates how she was intended to mobilise values of first wave feminism - women's reproductive rights and suffrage movements - with her catchphrase 'Suffering

---

113 Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (USA: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983).

114 *The Mists of Avalon,* dir. by Uli Edel (USA: TNT, 2001).

115 *Maleficent,* dir. by Robert Stromberg (USA: Disney, 2014).

116 *Wonder Woman,* dir. by Patty Jenkins (USA: Warner Bros., 2017).

117 *All Star Comics*, Issue #8, (USA: December 1941- Jan 1942).

118 Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (Australia: Scribe, 2014), p. xi.

Sappho!'.[119] Rikke Schubart explains how her creator William Multon Marston wanted provide a role model who was 'tender, submissive, peace loving as good women are', combining 'all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman.'[120] She writes, 'Wonder Woman is an early example of how the Amazon is reinterpreted and placed in a patriarchal context', pointing out that Marston and artist Harry G. Peter envisaged Wonder Woman 'in a swimsuit-style costume the colours of the American flag and with a 'magic whip'', which she uses to tie men, but she loses all her power when men put her in chains.[121] Film director Patty Jenkins, presents Wonder Woman as a naïve character who needs to be guided by her male counterpart and requires the support of the male military to succeed in defeating Ares the god of war. Zoe Williams notes '*Wonder Woman* is not a film about empowerment so much as a checklist of all the cliches by which women are disempowered'.[122] Tatiana Siegal considers Jenkin's vision 'a post-feminist Wonder Woman', citing Jenkins as saying she 'strove to temper the character's traditional strength with vulnerability'. [123] The superheroine's powers are tempered, controlled and ultimately compromised.

These popular films are examples of how mythic female power continues to be denigrated when interpreted and placed within patriarchal contexts. They present a female power that is highly glamourised in narratives that undermine feminism by reinforcing hetero-patriarchal, essentialist and misogynistic ideologies: powerful women risk being out of control and dangerous unless their power is contained; independent women operate erratically unless under the close supervision of a male; strong women need to temper their rage and acknowledge their vulnerability. These films 'tendency to entangle feminist and antifeminist discourses' exemplify post-feminist trends in cinema.[124] The

---

[119] Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*.

[120] Rikke Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in popular Cinema, 1970 – 2006,* (USA: MacFarland, 2007), p.231. Schubart cites Marston from "William Moulton Marston", in *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* <http://wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Moulton_Marston> [accessed February 16, 2006].

[121] Ibid., p. 232.

[122] Zoe Williams, 'Why Wonder Woman is a masterpiece of subversive feminism', *The Guardian,* Monday 5 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jun/05/why-wonder-woman-is-a-masterpiece-of-subversive-feminism> [accessed 18 August 2025].

[123] Tatiana Siegal, 'The Complex Gender Politics of the 'Wonder Woman' movie' *The Hollywood Reporter,* May 31 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/complex-gender-politics-wonder-woman-movie-1008259/> [accessed 18 August 2025].

[124] Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10:2 (2007), 147-166, pp. 149, 163. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/1367549407075898> [accessed 1 March 2024];

persistent containment of female mythic power in popular cinema raises the question of how a feminist filmmaker might reclaim mythic female power and represent it differently.

Taking control of the narrative

Historically, feminists viewed myths with suspicion because of how they have been used in the service of patriarchy. Simone De Beauvoir examines myths of femininity advocating for women to de-mythologise the feminine.[125] Angela Carter describes myths as 'extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree' and advocates a 'radically sceptical' materialist view, positioning her work as 'anti-mythology' stating 'I'm in the demythologising business.'[126] Andrea Dworkin argues that patriarchy mythologises the feminine in oppressive ways by demonising or disempowering mythic female characters.[127] For Dworkin, mythic narratives function as psychological models for understanding ourselves and as such exert profound ideological control. She argues that myth and fairy tales 'delineate the roles, interactions, and values which are available to us' as women; 'they are our childhood models' and 'despite ourselves […] we act out the roles we were taught.'[128]

Dworkin and Carter were writing during the second wave of feminism at the height of debates in feminist criticism about whether myths are inherently patriarchal. But as some feminists viewed myths as patriarchal, the same myths were embraced by others to explore women's spirituality. Mary Daly called for a radical dissolution of the Abrahamic vision of God as male, refuting what she saw as patriarchal configurations of deity that subjugate women and serve to ensure the power and status of men.[129] Daly proposed an 'exorcism' of the various manifestations of the internalised 'Godfather' and initiated a feminist reclamation of the goddess. She called this 'hag-iography', a process of re-sacralising the crone image of the feminine and establishing a 'crone-ology' to reclaim what she saw as the 'stolen mythic power' of women.[130] She claimed, 'patriarchal myths

---

125 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1949).

126 Angela Carter 'Notes from the Front Line' in *On Gender and Writing,* ed. by Michelene Wandor (Boston, Pandora Press, 1983), pp. 69-77, p. 71.

127 Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York, Penguin, 1974).

128 Ibid*.,* p. 33-34.

129 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a philosophy of Women's Liberation* (USA, Beacon Press, 1973).

130 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology, The Metaphysis of Radical Feminism* (USA: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 1, 15, 16, 47. [Original emphasis].

contain *stolen* mythic power' and act like 'distorting lenses', arguing that 'it is necessary to break their codes in order to use them as viewers; that is, we must see their lie in order to see their truth.'[131]

As feminists sought alternatives to androcentric patriarchal religions, a Divine Feminine movement developed, energised by accounts of pre-patriarchal gynocentric civilisations and ancient goddess cults unearthed by Marija Gimbutas and popularised by Merlin Stone.[132] Following Daly, Naomi Goldenberg, Carol P. Christ, Christine Downing, and Rosemary Ruether advocated an alternative *thealogy,* to reclaim and embrace feminine expressions of divinity.[133] The subsequent proliferation of women's spirituality groups was documented by Margot Adler.[134] Today, feminist critics of the divine feminine movement such as Ella Poutiainen consider these thealogies 'closer to postfeminist rather than feminist ideals' because they emphasise 'femininity over feminism', and prioritise 'spirituality over politics', presenting 'essentialist and universalised conceptions of womanhood'. [135]

Examining myths through a feminist lens allows the mythographer to become conscious of their ideological function. William G. Doty argues that myths provide 'projective mythic or psyche models' of behavior, and in their complexity suggest the potentiality for all that humanity can be and become.[136] But according to Doty, myths can also project 'ways of imagining new possibilities as to who we are.'[137] Doty explains myth's function in presenting changing models of masculinity and

---

131 Ibid., p. 47, [original emphasis].

132 Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images* (London: Thames and Hudson. 1974); Merlin Stone, *When God Was A Woman* (USA, Harcourt, 1976).

133 From the Greek words 'Thea' - 'goddess' and logos - 'word', thealogy is the study of the divine from a feminine perspective, the term was introduced by Naiomi Goldenberg in the 1970's.
See: Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1979); Christine Downing, *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine* (Illinois: iUniverse, 1981); Carol P Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Rosemary Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (USA, University of California Press, 2005).

134 Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America* (USA: Viking Press, 1979).

135 Ella Poutiainen, 'A feminism of the soul? Postfeminism, post-secular feminism and contemporary feminine spiritualities' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 27:6 (2024), 1087-1104, pp. 1087-1088.

136 William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press: 2000), p. 43-44.

137 Ibid., p. 72.

femininity, stating 'they educate us in ways of acting our maleness and femaleness […] and even of *reconceiving* the social manifestations of masculinity and femininity.'[138] This raises the question of how myths might be deployed as ideological tools for women's emancipation.

As a feminist filmmaker, I am interested in how I might use mythography to re-envision female potentiality, as a tool for changing how the feminine is imagined, constructed and engendered. While my artistic approach to mythography is not aimed at expressing or endorsing divine feminine beliefs, I am compelled by Daly's question as to whether it may be possible to 'see' through the lie of patriarchal myths, not to perceive the 'truth' of an earlier gynocentric myth, but to illuminate hidden forms of female mythic power that have been culturally repressed or denied.[139] Considering denigration as a sign of patriarchal suppression, I am interested in understanding the potency of stolen female mythic power, and how it can be reclaimed. I am curious to discover what kinds of female agency could be articulated if mythic female powers were invested in fictional characters. My intention is not to create fantasy superheroines, but to reinstate agency that has been forbidden by patriarchal denigration. I want to discover how the restitution of repressed mythic power might reinvigorate representations of ostensibly 'real' women on screen.

My approach to mythic adaptation takes inspiration from the effective strategies of mythography established in womens' literature, defined by Ostriker as a creative practice that critically re-interprets mythic characters and narratives through a feminist lens.[140] She explains 'the core of revisionist mythmaking for women […] lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth' using strategies such as role-reversal; re-imagining marginal female characters as protagonists; giving female characters voices to tell their own stories from their own subjective perspective; and presenting women as subjects not objects so that 'the old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience.'[141]

The creative practice of feminised mythography in women's fiction has become an effective methodology for feminist interventions, both as a mode of resistance and as a generative space for reimagining mythic narratives, demonstrating their malleability and proving that misogyny is not

---

138 Ibid.

139 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 47.

140 Ostriker, p. 71.

141 Ibid., p. 73.

intrinsic to the process of myth making, but as Maggie Humm argues, is more likely a result of historically androcentric interpretations.[142] Humm advocates that feminist writers reject essentialist mythic gender representations and use traditional myths as 'familiar frames which can be reshaped and remade to give a truer picture of women's experience.'[143] This is an effective approach to adaptation as demonstrated by authors of feminised mythography in women's literature. The adapted narrative remains recognisably based on the story of the original myth, but the feminist reinterpretation exposes the patriarchal ideologies in the original story. The narrative is rewritten from the previously overlooked perspective of a female character, positioning her as protagonist. These adaptations explore how the heroine uses the agency available to them, sometimes focussing on the cruel erasure of female agency and sometimes on their radical uses of divine agency. For example, Madeline Miller's *Circe,* reenvisions Homer's *The Odyssey* through the eyes of the mythic sorceress, exploring how she uses her mythic powers to defend herself and exact revenge on her abusers.[144]

The feminist mythographer may create adaptation strategies that radically reenvision patriarchal aspects of traditional stories. Susan Sellers describes feminised mythography as 'an act of demolition, exposing and detonating the stories that have hampered women,' and 'a task of construction – of bringing into being enabling alternatives.'[145] She argues that existing myths are multifaceted stories which *can* be remolded in service of feminist ideology. Marina Warner agrees that myths allow for new meanings to evolve with each retelling **'**a good story […] will travel […] and travel back again in a different guise'.[146] Shelby Judge sees feminised mythography as a form of feminist revolutionary creative practice that reshapes mythologies as acts of intentional disruption, and challenges myths that have been used in the service of patriarchy for centuries.[147]

---

142 Maggie Humm, *Practicing Feminist Criticism: An Introduction* (London: Wheatsheaf, 1995), p. 24.

143 Ibid*.,* p. 24.

144 Madeline Miller, *Circe* (UK: Bloomsbury, 2018).

145 Susan Sellers, 'Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction', Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 189.

146 Marina Warner, *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of the Fairytale,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 7.

147 S. E. Judge, 'Contemporary feminist adaptations of Greek myth' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2022), p. 6. https://theses.gla.ac.uk/83239/ Accessed 23 Dec 2024.

Evolving a methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking

Scholarly analyses of female characters in Early Welsh and Irish folktales demonstrate both their resemblance to archaic female divinities and their subsequent denigration, making them suitable models for a mythography that aims to reclaim 'stolen mythic power.'[148] To explore the nature and potency of stolen mythic power, and use it in my feminist filmmaking practice, I developed a creative practice methodology for feminised mythography. Embracing the diversity of female characters in the mythos, I take a case study approach, based on a close study of individual figures. This process deepens the mythographer's insight, enabling consideration of *all* the mythic powers of a character to determine whether any are denigrated or 'stolen'. In this *analysis* phase, the mythographer determines which aspects of divine power are expressed or repressed by the mythic representation. Using this analysis, the mythographer can then make an *interpretation* beginning a creative process of adaptation. The mythographer considers possibilities for adaptation, by imagining how a mythic figure's divine powers might be invested in a fictional character. In this phase, the mythographer is concerned with exploring potential articulations of female agency, and how an adaptation might preserve or *reclaim* female mythic power. The mythographer may then consider appropriate strategies for adaptation, for example to *restore stolen mythic power* by conferring *all* the divine powers of a mythic figure to a contemporary female character.

It is important to bear in mind, as Bassil-Morozow reminds us, that goddess figures remain problematic models for screen heroines, as 'far from reclaiming her archetypal power, the female protagonist would be limited by a series of stereotypes'.[149] Studies of female mythic figures by Stone, Murdock, Green, Bolen and Campbell reveal that far from being stereotypes, mythic goddesses exhibit a wide range of powers and functions which are highly agentic, complex, and often contradictory.[150] Close analysis of a singular female mythic figure reveals multi-faceted aspects of

---

148 Daly, *Gyn/ecology*, p.47.

149 Bassil-Morozow, p. 67.

150 See: Merlin Stone, *When God Was A Woman;* Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey;* Miranda Green, *The Concept of the Goddess,* ed. by Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman: Powerful Archetypes in Women's Lives,* (New York, Harper Paperbacks, 2004)*;* Valerie Estelle Frankel, *From Girl to Goddess;* and Joseph Campbell, *Goddesses: Mysteries of the Feminine Divine,* ed. by Safron Rossi, (California: New World Library, 2013).

mythic power that provide complexity and agency. Still, the mythographer must take into account the ways that mythic figures have been constructed historically in patriarchal contexts, and devise strategies that restore mythic power while managing and challenging problematic patriarchal themes.

As a feminist filmmaker seeking to create films that explore the agency that mythic female power affords, I chose to avoid period adaptations set in medieval contexts which would potentially limit expressions of female agency due to traditional gender roles. Instead, I re-imagined female mythic characters as contemporary women living in the present day. Rather than creating high fantasy superheroines with sexy costumes, I reclaim what Daly calls 'stolen mythic power' by investing the divine powers of a mythic model in ostensibly *real* women. Rather than tempering this power, I harness all the aspects of mythic female power that a figure affords, to see how these might re-invigorate representations of women on screen. By allowing my characters the full expression of these powers, I aim to create heroines who are uncompromising and uncontainable.

Conclusion

In popular cinema, female mythic power is frequently contained and rehabilitated, resulting in ambivalent or contradictory messaging. In contrast, feminist revisionist mythmaking in women's literature shows the potential of intentional feminist adaptations to create complex and challenging female characters that speak to audiences today. My creative practice aims to extend the principles of feminised mythography into filmmaking to explore how mythic female power might be reclaimed. Feminists interpret myths as ideologically configured narratives that continue to shape how women are represented. For centuries, myths have been created in the service of patriarchy, but by interpreting myths through a feminist lens, the mythographer may take control of the narrative and harness their potential to re-mold how we see ourselves.

An effective methodology for adaptation must be grounded in scholarly analysis and interpretation of the source material to understand the ideological function and 'see the 'lie' of traditional mythic representations; how they denigrate and contain female power. Bespoke strategies of redress may be required in each case to counter instances of denigration and restore aspects that have been repressed. My strategy evolving from this discussion, is to harness all aspects of female agency embodied by a mythic female figure and restore those that appear to have been subject to repression or denigration. Where a female character can be identified as a goddess, her mythic powers can be understood to represent expressions of divine agency. Mythographic adaptation that

invests the heroine with powers of divinity may potentially create female characters with extra-ordinary agency. By investing these characteristics in contemporary heroines, I hope to re-invigorate representations of female agency on screen.

When selecting mythic figures for adaptation, it is important to assess their potential carefully, as this choice not only impacts the types of agency that may be conferred to the heroine, but also the narrative themes and events of dramatic conflicts that the character may experience. When developing contemporised adaptations, the mythographer must allow themselves freedom to consider new possibilities for reenvisioning to ensure that their adapted narrative is attentive to contemporary feminist concerns. The next chapter presents my analysis and interpretation of two mythic figures from Early Welsh and Irish folktales, Rhiannon and the Morrígan, exploring all their various facets and considering how they might inform complex agentic female characters in feminist films.

CHAPTER 3: Analysis and Interpretation

The methodology of feminised mythography in filmmaking can be broadly understood in three main phases: analysis and interpretation of the source material; creative adaptation and screenwriting; and bringing script to screen. In this chapter I consider the first phase, analysis and interpretation, and present two case studies of female mythic figures: Rhiannon, 'Divine Queen' of the Welsh tradition who appears in the First and Third Branches of *The Mabinogion*; and The Morrígan 'Phantom Queen' of the Irish tradition who appears in various stories from the Ulster and Mythological Cycles.[151] Both are powerful supernatural women who shape mortal destinies, exhibit correspondences with female divinities, and show evidence of later denigration making them compelling models for a feminised mythography that aims to reclaim stolen mythic female power. Their stories contain transformative rites of passage which can be reimagined as initiations or stages on a journey of individuation, and emotive themes (infertility, exile, trauma, warfare, and betrayal), which remain relevant today, making them good models for contemporised adaptation.

My analysis asks the following questions: what correspondences do these mythic figures share with ancient female deities; how have their divine powers been denigrated; how might they be understood as archetypes; and what aspects of their narratives might offer models for a heroine's spiritual journey? My analysis is informed by scholarship across Celtic studies, folklore studies and archaeology, using methods such as comparative analysis, which enables identification of the origins of mythic characters by tracing their narrative correspondences; etymology (linguistic history); and philology (linguistic structure) to pinpoint evidence of deity.[152] Gruffydd, Mac Cana, Davies, and Green concur that characters in *The Mabinogion* resemble older pagan deities strategically

---

[151] The Morrígan is a significant character in the Ulster Cycle tales: *Táin Bó Regamna (The Cattle Raid of Regamain),* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cooley)*, and also in the Mythological Cycle tales from the *Lebor Gabálea Érenn (The Book of the Taking of Ireland)* where she is listed as among the Tuatha de or 'God People' gods of Ireland, and *Cath Maige Tuired (The Battle of Maigh Tuireadh)* as well as making appearances in other stories.

[152] Comparative analysis is explained by Jaan Puhvel who advocates comparative historical methods of analysis of myth which include etymological and philological analyses of the primary written account of the mythic narrative. See: Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology,* (Baltimore USA: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 20.

denigrated via belittlement, humiliation, inversion of powers and negative association.[153] Williams identifies strategies that have been used to diminish the potency of mythical gods and goddesses of the Irish tradition, including parody, inversion of divine powers, and removal of literary references to mythic characters as 'gods'.[154] Taking their evidence of divine correspondences and patterns of denigration into account, I identify how mythic powers have been suppressed and how they may be reclaimed in feminist film adaptations.

These mythic characters contain archetypes which I identify by drawing on Jung's definition of primordial forms recognisable by their intrinsic numinosity, and Naomi Goldenberg's view of archetypes as highly affective images.[155] Archetypes may be recognised by their numinous charge, creating an 'affect' experienced as a shock. Noting my fascination with these elements, I confirm the presence of archetype using Doty's method of comparative thematic elucidation, 'a freely associative study that consists of tracking motifs and similarities in mythology and folklore, no matter where they originally occur.'[156] As archetypes manifest in diverse cultures in multiple forms, a comparative thematic analysis reveals correspondences, making it possible to trace archetypal associations through the particularities of shared motifs. These correspondences enable identification of archetypes in each mythic character under study. I then consider how these archetypes might be deployed to suggest stages in the heroine's development, also noting key dramatic elements in the folktale narratives such as peak experiences, relationships with significant others and emotional or physical trials, and how these provide a narrative map for the initiations and trials of the heroine's spiritual journey. Subsequent to my analysis, I begin the creative process of interpretation, imagining ways to reenvisage these figures as contemporary characters.

---

153 W. J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (1950), (London: Wakeman Press, 2016), p. 14; Gruffydd, *Rhiannon; an inquiry*, pp. 67, 98, 103; Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 51, 81; Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogion*, p. 51; Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 50.

154 Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* pp. 44, 68, (parody), 44 (inversion), 82, 86, 91 (deity status). Williams explains that although the tales originate in pagan oral storytelling culture, their final scribes were monks operating within the context of medieval Christianity whose ambivalence to the older gods led to many mythological characters being denigrated or Christianised, either via their incorporation as saints or religious conversion.

155 Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche,* CW 8, para 405; Goldenberg, p. 64.

156 Doty, pp. 82-83.

Case Study 1: Rhiannon – 'Divine Queen'

Rhiannon is a princess in the First Branch of *The Mabinogion* who rides from the Otherworld on her white mare in a tale called *'Pwyll Prince of Dyfed'*.[157] Pwyll, a mortal prince, is enraptured and sets his best horsemen in pursuit of Rhiannon but they cannot close the distance between her magical horse and their mortal steeds. She finally stops when Pwyll rides after her himself and bids her halt. Rhiannon says she loves him and asks his help to avoid an arranged marriage, telling Pwyll how to trick her betrothed. Rhiannon marries Pwyll but is unable to produce an heir and after three years Pwyll is advised to put her aside and take another wife. Pwyll asks for one more year and on the eve of the last day Rhiannon gives birth to a son. In the night her child is snatched away; her ladies in waiting, afraid of reprisals, kill a puppy, smear Rhiannon with blood and declare that she ate her child. As punishment Rhiannon is made to carry visitors to the castle on her back like a horse. Her baby son is found and raised by a nobleman and his wife after the child appears in the stable as his mare gives birth to a foal. The boy and the foal grow up together and when he is old enough, the boy is given the colt to ride. As the boy grows, he so resembles Pwyll that the couple realise who his father is and return the boy, reuniting him with his mother and ending Rhiannon's punishment. She names her son Pryderi, 'Anxiety'.

Rhiannon: Evidence of deity and denigration

Robert Graves links Rhiannon with the Roman mare-goddess of childbirth and fertility, Epona; and suggests that the name, Rhiannon, 'is a corruption of Rigantona (Great Queen).'[158] This is echoed by W. J. Gruffydd who suspects that the convoluted tale is contaminated by medieval folkloric themes. Gruffydd attempts to excavate and reconstruct the, 'more primitive' myth, proposing that in, 'the original and more logical version, Rhiannon was appropriately punished for giving birth to a foal.'[159] Gruffydd concludes that, 'Rhiannon is no mere figure of Fairy Folk-lore, but the survival of an immemorial myth in which she was the Great Mother who became identified with the Great Horse Goddess, Epona.'[160] Miranda Green agrees, 'her link with horses appears to indicate that she was a

---

157 *The White Book of Rhydderch* (*c.*1325-1375), Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS. 4-5.

158 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), pp. 375- 376.

159 Gruffydd, *Rhiannon; an inquiry,* p. 64.

160 Ibid.*,* p. 67.

horse-goddess,' and compares Rhiannon with representations of Epona in sculptures and material remains where the goddess appears as a woman accompanied by a foal or alternatively as a therianthrope, a supernatural being part human and part animal in form.[161] Patrick K. Ford concurs:

> Rhiannon is to be equated with a goddess worshipped by the Celts of Gaul and, after the Roman conquest of Gaul, by the Romans themselves. Epona, whose name means 'divine horse goddess', is attested in hundreds of statues and inscriptions on the continent and was revered even in Rome.[162]

Rhiannon is considered by Gruffydd, Graves, Davies, and Green to derive from the ancient horse goddess who bestows sovereignty to kings and fertility to the land.[163] She rides a white mare and chooses Pwyll, instead of marrying her betrothed Otherwordly suitor, conferring upon Pwyll the right to reign. Graves traces an ancient goddess cult throughout the classical world into antiquity, arguing that Rhiannon is an example of a primordial goddess archetype, the Great Mother, who variously appears in triple form as maiden, mother and crone with powers over birth, fertility and death. She confers sovereignty on the king who is not important for his own sake, but because the goddess bestows upon him the authority to rule the land. [164] Graves speculates whether a deliberate and strategic denigration of this goddess occurred due to an ancient shift from goddess worship towards patriarchal monotheistic religions.[165]

---

161 Green, *Celtic Goddesses,* pp. 51-53.

162 Patrick K. Ford, 'Prolegomena to a reading of the Mabinogi: 'Pywll' and 'Manawydan'' in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays,* ed. by C.W. Sullivan (New York: Garland Press. 1996), pp. 197-216, p. 206.

163 Gruffydd, W. J., *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (1950), (London: Wakeman Press, 2016), p. 14; Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 376; Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogion* (Wales: Llandysul, 1993), p. 51; Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins, and Mothers*, (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 49.

164 Graves argues that the sacred union of the king with the fertility-goddess was ritually enacted ensure the king's reign would bring fertility to the land. He cites an account by Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Topographia Hiberniae* to prove this kingship ritual survived in Ireland into the twelfth century. Giraldus described witnessing a ritual wherein the new king would only be crowned after he had been symbolically re-born from a white mare. In this ceremony the new king would crawl toward a white mare on all fours, like a foal. Afterwards the mare would be slaughtered and her flesh boiled in a cauldron. The king would bathe in the cauldron and eat the broth made from her flesh. The *Topographia Hibernica* (*Topography of Ireland*), also known as *Topographia Hiberniae*, is an account of the landscape and people of Ireland written by Girladus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) circa 1188. See: Graves, p. 375.

165 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 380.

Graves, Gruffydd, Ford and Green all concur that Rhiannon is a denigrated form of the fertility and sovereignty goddess, robbed of her mythic powers. Rhiannon's infertility presents a direct inversion of the divine powers of the horse goddess. When she magically produces a child, she is accused of killing it, condemning her to a humiliating exile from the royal household. Gruffydd compares Rhiannon's denigration with representations of the Tyweth Teg, the inhabitants of Annwfn (the Otherworld) of Welsh folklore, the Aos Sí of Ireland and the 'Fae' or Farie Folk of English lore. He suggests that certain characters in *The Mabinogion* possess recognisable traits of former deities from the Celtic pantheon but that their status and magical power have been denigrated to resemble the lower status of fairy characters.[166] Green explains how the folktale narrative inverts Epona's powers and Rhiannon is made to suffer:

> She may have been a goddess of fertility, although she had difficulty in conceiving a child; she was, by implication, a goddess of the Other-world, although she suffered from its power; she was an initiator but was powerless to prevent the abduction of her son.[167]

Analysis of Rhiannon reveals an excellent subject for feminised mythography because her powers of fertility and sovereignty are precisely inverted, suggesting the deliberate erasure of female mythic power, which may be restored or reclaimed in a feminist film adaptation.

Rhiannon: Identifying an archetype

Rhiannon's archetypal numinosity can be apprehended by her appearance on a magical white mare; her Otherworldly associations; and her sudden birthing of a child which is mysteriously snatched away.[168] Comparing Rhiannon with other similar female deities using comparative thematic elucidation enables recognition of an archetype. Macha, from the Irish tradition, shares Rhiannon's equine and fertility aspects and is also made to suffer a humiliating trial and separation from her

---

166 Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion*, p. 14.

167 Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins, and Mothers,* p. 53.

168 Davies, *The Mabinogion,* pp. 8, 11, 16.

children.[169] Macha also shares associations with agricultural fertility.[170] Demeter, Greek goddess of agriculture, harvest and nourishment, shares Rhiannon's equine, maternal, fertility, and sovereignty associations.[171] A goddess in charge of the divine order of the universe and the cycle of life and death, Demeter is identified as mother-earth goddess by her name: De is the doric form of De 'earth' and 'meter' derived from Proto-Indo-European means mother.[172] Rhiannon's correspondences with these goddesses suggest a Great Mother archetype.

Caitlin Matthews traces two archetypes in the characters of Rhiannon and her son Pryderi, the Mabon and the Modron.[173] The Modron is a grieving mother figure separated from and searching for her infant, the Mabon. Not names but titles, Modron translates as 'Matron,' an honorific for the divine mother of creation, and Mabon means 'son'.[174] Matthews expands on a theory originally proposed by Gruffydd that several characters within *The Mabinogion* represent the archetype

---

169 'The Curse of Macha' also known as 'The Debility of the Ulstermen' is a story from the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology from the 12th Century manuscript *Lebor na hUidre* (*The Book of the Dun Cow*) Royal Academy, Dublin, Ireland. Macha is an Otherworldly woman who takes care of Cruinniuc, a widowed farmer and his children, and Cruinniuc makes her his wife. Like Rhiannon, Macha has supernatural powers, and one day at court Cruinniuc drunkenly boasts that Macha is so fast that she could beat the King's horses. The King insists that he prove this. Heavily pregnant, Macha wins the race, gives birth to twins and then dies. As she dies, she curses the men of Ulster: when they most need their strength, they will suffer in labour like a woman. For correspondences, see: Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 77.

170 In modern Scottish Gaelic, an etymologically related word *Machair,* refers to fertile grassland used for feeding livestock.

171 Demeter transformed herself into a mare to escape from Poseidon's advances, hiding herself among horses. But Poseidon turned himself into a stallion and finding her, sired twins. Demeter Erinys / 'Furious Demeter' gave birth to a son Arion - a horse who could speak; and a daughter Desponia - a mare who was a multi-facetted goddess and corn-mother who blessed the land and the harvest.

172 Archaeological deciphering of the Linear A Inscription from Arkalochori also seems to link her name to the Mother Goddess. An inscription on a stone vase from the Peak Sanctuary at "Aghios Georgios sto Vouno" above the Minoan settlement/harbour of Kastri on the island of Kythera within sight of the island of Crete, can be read as DA-MA-TE (KY Za 2), which would appear to reference Demeter the Mother Goddess of Minoan Crete. See: Anon, *The Linear A Inscription from Arkalochori* https://www.teicrete.gr/arkalochori/linear-inscription.php [accessed 5 June 2018].

173 Caitlin Matthews, *Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain*: *An Exploration of The Mabinogion* (London: Arkana, 1987), pp. 149-168.

174 Derived from the Brittonic/Gaulish word Maponos, meaning 'Great Son' or 'Divine Son', and the Proto-Celtic root makwo- meaning 'son'. The Mabon is a missing child in what is thought to be the oldest of the stories in *The Mabinogion* the story of Culhwch and Olwen and the quest to find him drives the ancient narrative.

continually reconfigured through many variants.[175] She demonstrates how the Mabon and Modron are configured in the Welsh and Irish characters Rhiannon, Macha, The Morrígan, Ceridwen, Branwen and Arianhrod.[176] She writes, 'there is an archetypal mystery pattern underlying *The Mabinogion* in which many of its heroes can be seen as *types of Mabon.*'[177] Matthews argues that Rhiannon represents the Modron and identifies Pryderi as a form of Mabon.[178] According to Matthews, the Modron is usually a royal virgin who bears a child without the seed of a human father.[179] These traits, along with other shared motifs such as the loss of a child, suggest that Rhiannon can be understood to represent the archetype of the Modron.

Rhiannon: Forming a creative interpretation

The horse goddess's mythic powers of fertility and sovereignty have been directly inverted in Rhiannon's story. Interpreting this as patriarchal repression of female mythic power, I became curious to discover what kinds of female agency would be enabed if her powers were restored. I devised a strategy for feminised mythography to reclaim her stolen mythic powers in a feminist film adaptation. Imagining Rhiannon as a contemporary female character, I began to envisage an infertile woman who regains her fertility; a woman robbed of her sovereignty, who reclaims it. It is also important to consider the extent to which Rhiannon's divine powers are already patriarchally configured. Her fertility aspects present an essentialised femininity (fertile, nurturing, producing children and bringing fertility to the land); and her sovereignty aspect confers upon a male king the right to rule. A simple restoration of Rhiannon's stolen mythic powers might risk re-essentialising femininity and authorising patriarchy, so a feminist adaptation must resist these ideological themes.

Rhiannon's archetypes, the Great Mother and the Modron stand in apparent contrast to each other. Using these two archetypes to inform a fictional character's psychological development, I could structure a heroine's spiritual journey. Positioning them as polarities in a narrative, provides an axis for a change in status from one psychological state to another, a developmental trajectory for a

---

175 W.J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon; an inquiry into the origins of the first and third branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), pp. 91-94.

176 Matthews, p. 162-165.

177 Ibid., p. 152.

178 Ibid., p. 152-154.

179 Ibid., p. 167.

transformation from the psychological state of the Modron towards restoration as Great Mother. Key events from Rhiannon's mythic narrative offer dramatic and emotional intensity: her difficulty in conceiving; her sudden and mysterious pregnancy; and the shocking loss of her child; present a series of trials or initiations for structuring a spiritual journey. It becomes possible to imagine a woman grieving the loss of a child, who due to her 'infertility' has lost her 'sovereignty'. Rhiannon evidently experiences anxiety, humiliation, grief, and at last joy and relief, suggesting an intense emotional journey of a woman going through a spiritual journey of ego death and rebirth. The possibility of a virgin birth, (the royal virgin aspect of the Modron archetype) presents a potentially miraculous means by which her fertility and sovereignty might be restored.

Case Study 2: The Morrígan - 'Phantom Queen'

The Morrígan is a supernatural being of great power who makes many appearances in the Irish myths but does not have a singular narrative of her own.[180] A sorceress with powers of prophecy, she has strong associations with fate, divining the outcome of battles and intervening by using magic to thwart the enemy.[181] She is described in Irish lore as one of the Tuatha De, 'god people,' who after the arrival of humans in Ireland went into the hollow hills and became known as the Aos Sí, the people of the fairy hills. Morgan Daimler echoes Gruffydd on female characters in the Welsh tradition, 'in Irish mythology and folklore the Gods were reduced not into human characters, by and large, but into fairies.'[182]

---

[180] The Morrígan is a significant character in the Ulster Cycle tales: *Táin Bó Regamna - 'The Cattle Raid of Regamain',* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge – 'The Cattle Raid of Cooley'* , and also in the Mythological Cycle tales from the *Lebor Gabálea Érenn – 'The Book of the Taking of Ireland'* where she is listed as among the Tuatha de or 'God People' gods of Ireland, and *Cath Maige Tuired – 'The Battle of Maigh Tuireadh'* as well as making appearances in other stories.

[181] A powerful sorceress, the Morrígan performs magic when coming to the aid of the Tuatha Dé ('god peoples') in the first story of *Cath Maige Tuired* (*The Battle of Magh Tuireadh*) when she uses sorcery to help them defeat the Fir Bólg, (primordial beings of Ireland) by raining fire and blood down upon them. In the second battle of *Cath Maige Tuired* she appears to the god Lugh urging him to rise up and fight the Formorians, instigating a war between them. She also offers magical assistance to her husband, the Dagda, helping him to defeat the Formorians by killing Indech, their king. The Morrígan promises The Dagda she will 'take from him the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valour' later presenting the Tuatha Dé host with two handfuls of Indech's blood as proof of his destruction. Indech later dies in battle.

[182] Morgan Daimler, *The Morrígan: Meeting the Great Queens*, (UK: Moon Books, 2014), p. 31.

The Morrígan is a shapeshifter who manifests as a beautiful red-haired young woman; a thin grey-haired old woman; and in animal forms as an eel, a grey wolf, and red heifer; but most often she takes the form of a raven or crow. Sometimes she is referred to as 'Badb' (pronounced Bayv) which literally means 'Scald Crow,' feared by warriors as a bird of ill fortune and an omen of death. A highly numinous being she inhabits liminal spaces, often appearing at twilight or at night in transitory places in the landscape. She appears at moments of transition between life and death, and in her raven form alights on the shoulder of the dying warrior Cú Chulainn. She converses in riddles, poetry and curses, and conjures visions, such as when she appears to Cú Chulainn alongside a strange one eyed / legged / armed being, demonstrating her powers of magic.[183]

The Morrígan's repeated encounters with Cú Chulainn provide a series of connected scenes that form a dramatic narrative. She foretells his death in the story *Táin Bó Regamna* (*The Cattle Raid of the Important Calf*) appearing as a red haired, red cloaked woman in a strange chariot drawn by a one-legged horse. Alongside her a man is driving a cow which is crying out in distress. After an argument, Cú Chulainn leaps onto her chariot and holds his spear to her head upon which she tells him she is a satirist (a poet), and the cow was her reward for a poem. Cú Chulainn demands to hear it, and she chants that he will be slain during the Táin (raid). Cú Chulainn says she is not powerful enough to harm him, but she replies, 'I have power indeed. It is at the guarding of thy death that I am; and I shall be'.[184] She prophesises that when the cow she is driving gives birth to a calf and this calf becomes a young bull it will be the cause of the battle in which Cú Chulainn will meet his death.

Her prophecy comes to pass in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*), a war between two provinces over the now fully-grown Brown Bull. Here the Morrígan appears to Cú Chulainn as a beautiful young princess promising him victory in the battle if he will accept her as his wife.[185] But Cú Chulainn, exhausted from fighting, refuses her in an insulting manner. She vows to harm him when he is in combat using three disguises: an eel, she-wolf and a red heifer. Cú Chulainn retorts that he will break her ribs, take out her eye, and break her leg. During the battle, the Morrígan attacks Cú Chulainn in each animal form and he deals her his three promised blows. Later,

---

[183] Green considers one-limbed creatures to be depictions of magic ritual postures. See Miranda Green, *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 41.

[184] The Morrigan speaking to Cú Chulainn in *The Cattle Raid of Regamna* from *The Yellow Book of Lecan* in *Heroic Romances of Ireland* Vol II, trans. by A. H. Leahy, (London: David Nutt, 1906). <https://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/regamna.html> [accessed 25.4.2019].

[185] Note the Morrígan's first intention is a marriage that will bring Cú Chulainn victory, suggesting a sovereignty aspect.

Cú Chulainn sees an old woman (the Morrígan) milking a cow and asks for milk. He blesses her three times, each time healing one of her wounds, suggesting that although often malign, their complex relationship is mutually dependent and potentially healing. In the story *Aided Con Culainn (The Death of Cú Chulainn),* the Morrígan appears as 'The Washer at the Ford' a beautiful young woman standing in a stream, keening as she washes the blood from his armour, a vision that means he will soon die.[186] Finally, the Morrígan shapeshifts into a raven and flies over Cú Chulainn in his last battle, alighting his shoulder at the moment of his passing, in fulfilment of her prophecy.

The Morrígan: Evidence of deity and denigration

'The Morrígan' is a both a personal name and an honorific title often preceded in the Old Irish texts by 'an' - '*the* Morrígan. 'Rígan' is derived from the Gaulish Rigani (the same root as the Welsh character Rhiannon) and means 'queen'. Her name can be interpreted differently depending on whether the first part 'Mor' is given an Irish fada accent or not. In some texts 'Mor' is not accented and translates as 'Phantom Queen'.[187] Morgan Daimler says that the Old Irish 'Mor' comes from Old High German 'mara' and the Anglo-Saxon 'maere' as in nightmare, meaning 'Nightmare Queen'.[188] Alternatively, the Middle Irish spelling *Mórrígan* (with the accent) translates as 'Great Queen'; 'Mór' means great or large, and the Indo-European word 'Móros' means death. Angelique Gulermovich Epstein gives other possible interpretations of her name as 'Queen of death' or 'Queen of the Slain' defining her as strongly associated with death. [189]

There is unequivocal evidence of the Morrígan's divinity. In *The Lebor Gabála Érenn (The Book of The Taking of Ireland),* she is cited as one of the Tuatha De ('god people') as the daughter of Ernmais (mother of several Tuatha Dé goddesses), and Delbeáth son of Neit, God of War.[190] W. M.

---

[186] 'The Death of Cu Chulainn', trans. by Mary Jones, *Celtic Literature Collective,* <https://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/cuchulain3.html> [accessed April 4 2023].

[187] Charles Donahue points out that the unaccented 'o' doesn't occur in Irish, which Donahue suggests would indicate a name of antiquity pre-dating the Irish language with etymology from Indo-European roots. "…*The naming of the Goddess must have taken place very early and probably on the continent.*" See: Charles Donahue, *'The Valkyries and the Irish War Goddesses' PMLA,* 56-1 (1941), 1-12 (p. 12).

[188] Daimler, *The Morrígan: Meeting the Great Queens*, p. 2.

[189] Gulermovich Epstein, *War Goddess The Morrígan and her Germano-Celtic Counterparts.* p. 37.

[190] *The Lebor Gabála Érenn / The Book of The Taking of Ireland,* trans. by R. Macalister, (Dublin: Irish texts Society, 1941), p. 131.

Hennessy points out that she is also referred to as 'Anand, that is the Morrígan […] the wife of the Dagda' in *The Book of Lecan,* and is specifically referred to as a goddess in the *Metrical Dindshenchas* (*Lore of Places*) poem 49, 'Arrived the wife of the Dagda; a phantom is the youthful / shapechanging Goddess'.[191] Hennessy, Charles Donahue, Angelique Gulermovich Epstein and Morpheus Ravenna consider it most likely that the Morrígan is a form of an ancient war goddess.[192] In the *Tochmarch Emire (The Wooing of Emer)* the Morrígan is referred to as Bé Neit 'wife of Neit', the god of battle, taken to mean 'woman of war' or 'woman of battle'.[193] Ravenna points to the Morrígan's genealogy to support this interpretation: her mother's name Ernmais derives from the word 'ernbas'- from *iarn* which means iron and *bas* which means death; so her name literally means 'death by iron' interpreted as 'slaughter, or violent death'. Her father's name Delbáeth possibly derived from delbaid, 'to shape, form or fashion,' alternatively it could be a compound of Delb - 'shape' and áed - 'fire' meaning 'fire-shaped.' Ravenna writes, 'The primary progenitors of the Morrígan […] are Violent Death and the Shaper, or Shape of Fire. This in itself suggests that their primal identity is that of War Goddesses.' [194]

The Morrígan is frequently referred to as Badb Catha –'Battle Crow' – and she consumes the flesh of fallen warriors.[195] Ravenna suggests that Badb may be a title for an ancient war goddess, rather than a specific name, as the root - bodu suggests Indo-European transmission.[196] Badb is sometimes referred to as a sister of the Morrígan along with Nemain (whose name means 'frenzy'), together they are called Morrígu or Morrígna.[197] Hennessy is 'inclined to believe that their names

---

191 Kim Heijda, *War Goddesses, Furies and Scald Crows*: The use of the word babh in early Irish Literature, (Unpublished Thesis, University of Utretch, 2007).

192 W. M. Hennessy, 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' *Celtic Review* 1-6, (1870 – 75), 32-57 (Paris) <https://archive.org/details/revueceltique01gaid/page/32/mode/2up> [accessed 15 August 2023]; Charles Donahue, *'The Valkyries and the Irish War Goddesses' PMLA,* 56-1, (1941), 1-12; Angelique Gulermovich Epstein, 'Woman's Word: Threats and Prophecies, Lies and Revelations in Arthurian Romance and Medieval Irish Literature' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 12 (1992) 184–95; Morpheus Ravenna, *The Book of the Great Queen: The Many Faces of The Morrígan, From Ancient Legends to Modern Devotions* (USA: Concrescent Press, 2015), pp. 71, 75.

193 W. M. Hennessy, 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' *Celtic Review* 1-6, (1870 – 75), 32-57 (Paris) <https://archive.org/details/revueceltique01gaid/page/32/mode/2up> [accessed 15 August 2023], p. 35.

194 Ravenna, *The Book of the Great Queen: The Many Faces of The Morrígan,* p. 71.

195 Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, p. 41.

196 Ravenna, p. 75.

197 Peter Berresford Ellis, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, (London: Constable, 1987).

represent three different characters' with separate functions. He argues that the Morrígan's function is to incite valour in the warrior host and bring them victory.[198] He writes '[she]…incited to deeds of valour…' and '…intensifies the hero, nerves his arm for the cast, and guides the course of the unerring lance' suggesting a protective and tutelary function of the goddess.[199]

The Morrigan's repeated attempts to engage with Cú Chulainn despite his rebuttals are interpreted by Hennessy as the war goddess's attempts to offer the hero her special powers of protection, but because he refuses, he is doomed. He writes, 'Although apparently his tutelary goddess, the Morrígu seems to have been made the instrument, through the decree of a cruel fate, in his premature death.'[200] Hennessy considers the Morrígan as Cú Chulainn's protector, referring to their encounter on the eve of the fateful battle in which the warrior will lose his life. The Morrígan disarranges the warrior's chariot to prevent his departure and protect him from his tragic fate.[201] At the point of no return, she reappears flying over him in his chariot.[202] Hennessy interprets this as a *Lon laith* or 'bird of valor' rather than as an ill omen, seeing the Morrígan as, 'an agent in the fulfilment of what is "in dono" in dan or decreed for a person,' attempting to guide the errant warrior to his destiny.[203]

Ravenna sees 'a fundamental intimacy between warriors and tutelary war-goddesses.'[204] She relates how as a boy, Cú Chulainn ventures onto a battlefield to retrieve the injured King Conchobar but is beset by the spirits of slain warriors and thrown onto the bloody earth. As he lies afraid, he hears the voice of the Badb, mocking him and determined to overcome his fears, rises and completes his mission. Ravenna writes, 'Her attitude toward him is one of fierce tutelage, pushing him toward

---

198 Hennessy, 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War', p. 34.

199 Ibid., p. 41.

200 Ibid., p. 44.

201 Ibid., p. 50.

202 Hennessy gives two other instances of the 'bird of valour and championship' which flies over the head of heroes including Congal Claen in the Battle of Magh Rath and Murchadh son of Brian at the Battle of Clontarf; concluding that the Morrígan is here performing the same role for Cú Chulainn. Hennessy is referring to the raven of valour (totem of the god Odin) on the Norse banner, and also the Valkyries in their raven form. His editor Lottner adds, 'The Irish goddesses appear in the form of a bird, which is more especially considered a "bird of valor" of the hero. It is not always easy to find out what exact form they assume but it is generally that of a scald-crow.' See: Hennessy, p. 56.

203 Ibid., p. 53.

204 Ravenna, p. 378.

greatness.'[205] Green sees her as a sovereignty goddess whose fierceness and fecundity are intrinsic to her role as protector of the land.[206] Cú Chulainn's refusal of the Morrígan breaks this ancient code of conduct and seals his fate, because no matter how gifted, no man can triumph unless he makes union with the goddess.

The Morrígan has divine powers as a prophetess, symbolised by her totem bird the raven, once used by Druids in augury. Gulermovich Epstein points out that whenever the Morrígan speaks it is to foretell the future or bring about consequences.[207] She incites the Tuatha Dé to victory; foretells the Second Battle of Mag Tuired; warns the Dagda of an attack by the Formorians; and predicts when Cú Chulainn will die. She delivers prophetic visions of the future of Ireland. Her *Peaceful Prophesy* and *Dark Prophecy,* speak into existence a world of all possibilities.[208] Recorded in roscaid (a poetic form known to be archaic) these verses are among the very oldest parts of the Irish tradition, their survival another indicator of the Morrígan's importance.

The extent to which the Morrígan has been denigrated is difficult to determine. Patterns of denigration are evidently at play throughout the Irish tradition, characterised by Williams as, 'a series of crucial cultural strategies in relation to the gods,' deployed by Christian scribes while establishing the new religion in Ireland.[209] He remarks, 'the saga's authors were not mere passive transmitters of pagan myth and ancient tradition,' but were 'creative authors who hybridised their native inheritance with a vast body of classical and Christian learning, thereby engaging with the issues and demands of their own times.'[210] Ravenna concurs that the intentions and motivations of Christian scribes coloured each recension of the Irish tradition, shaping the narratives and their meanings in ways which diminished the status of earlier deities. 'Many characters who in earlier times may have been understood as Gods were recorded as pseudo-historical or legendary human characters and given

---

205 Ibid., p. 374.

206 Green, *Celtic Goddesses,* p. 41.

207 Gulermovich Epstein, *Woman's Word: Threats and Prophecies, Lies and Revelations in Arthurian Romance and Medieval Irish Literature.* Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium 12 184–95 (1992) p. 187.

208 Isolde Carmody and Chris Thompson, *The Story Archaeologists Mythical Women in Irish Folklore* Episode 6: 'Encountering The Mórrígan', 30 August 2012 < https://storyarchaeology.com/mythical-women-6-encountering-the-morrigan/> [accessed 2 August 2021].

209 Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* p. 40.

210 Ibid., p. 45.

deaths […] framing the Gods as mortal characters'.[211] Williams demonstrates other strategies of denigration including parody and inversion of mythic powers.[212] The Morrígan is not obviously parodied, nor does she become humanised and die. Aside from her injuries inflicted by Cú Chulainn (which are later healed), she remains undiminished and immortal. However, she does suffer humiliation when Cú Chulainn repeatedly insults her and refuses offers of help, and her prophesy regarding his death is most often interpreted in translations as a malign curse, suggesting denigration of the war goddess's powers of protection.

The Morrígan's malign character in the tales indicates another strategy of defamation. Gulermovich Epstein argues that medieval scribes would have been familiar with other Classical war deities, which influenced how they represented her. She writes, 'The Furies […] embody the horror, fright, confusion, carnage and frenzy of war, and its glory and immortal fame. The Irish translators […] considered them interchangeable with the Morrígan.'[213] Carmody and Thompson describe this process as mythic 'applicability' whereby one mythic character is attributed aspects of another, arguing that The Furies' demonic aspects were thus applied to the Morrígan, resulting in demonisation by association.[214] Through a medieval Christian prism the ancient war goddess may have been reframed and defamed as a demonic force provoking war; inciting warriors to frenzy; bringing death and destruction.

Evidence of the veneration of female war goddesses is common in material remains of Celtic culture, and many artefacts including charioteers and helmeted female figures brandishing spears or swords, suggest that female war-goddesses were popular figures.[215] Green argues that within Celtic martial culture, war goddesses had a positive heraldic iconicity, pointing out that ravens are commonly depicted on helmets and in bronze figurines from as late as 260 AD.[216] Ravenna shows

---

211 Ravenna, p. 12.

212 Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* p. 44.

213 Gulermovich Epstein, *War Goddess,* p. 198.

214 Isolde Carmody and Chris Thompson, *The Story Archaeologists Mythical Women in Irish Folklore* Episode 6: 'Encountering The Mórrígan', 30 August 2012. <https://storyarchaeology.com/mythical-women-6-encountering-the-morrigan/> [accessed 2 August 2021]. Carmody argues that the Morrígan was associated with the 'Bean Thúaid' which means 'Women of the North' and points out that 'thúaid' which means 'northwards' can be also mean the left side, which in Latin, (a language most familiar to the Christian scribes), translates as 'sinister' bringing evil associations.

215 Green, *Celtic Goddesses,* p. 33-35.

216 Ibid., p. 42.

how the words for raven and crow were commonly adopted in tribal names, 'across a very broad swath of ancient Europe, war deities in the shape of crows or ravens appear to have been worshipped', indicating a popular war goddess of great antiquity.[217]

The Morrígan is a complex war goddess with many divine powers as prophetess, protector of warriors, tutelary initiarix and guardian of destiny. Although less obviously denigrated than Rhiannon, the Morrígan has been demonised as a death bringer revelling in violence, and maligned by assimilation with mythic figures like the Valkyries, Furies and Harpies. Analysis provides evidence of strategic diminishment of the war goddess's powers of guardianship: her tutelary role is reversed as her offers of help are repeatedly rebutted by Cú Chulainn; she suffers humiliations and injuries; and is ultimately unable to prevent his death.

The Morrígan: Identifying an archetype

The Morrígan's raven transformations provide highly affecting moments of numinosity suggesting an archetype. Ravens were associated with knowledge, prophecy, death and fate, and as Green explains, the raven's calls were once interpreted as messages from the Otherworld.[218] D. Serjeantson and J. Morris point to the bird's oracular function as depicted in both Classical and Celtic mythology, 'The fact that ravens and to a lesser degree crows can 'talk' led to their being assigned the power of prophecy in many societies, especially prophecies of doom.'[219] Exploring the Morrígan's raven aspect reveals many mythic correspondences: Odin, father to the Norse gods is accompanied by two ravens and his powers of wisdom, poetry, death, divination and magic, resemble her own.[220] Comparative thematic elucidation reveals a wide range of bird-women with psychopomp aspects. Donahue, Gulermovich Epstein, and Ravenna all point to the resemblance between the Morrígu and the

---

217 Ravenna, pp. 75-76.

218 Miranda Green, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), pp. 177–81.

219 D. Serjeantson & J. Morris, 'Ravens and Crows in Iron Age and Roman Britain' *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 30.1, pp. 85–107, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), p. 99. Serjeantson and Morris discuss evidence of ritual burials of ravens in iron Age Britain, sometimes complete, sometimes disarticulated, some buried with their beaks pointing downward into the earth, often found in the lower layer or foundations of tomb sites and in ritual pits along with other animal remains, pottery, ritual offerings and human bones, suggesting a connection with the underworld.

220 Odin's 'blind' eye is able to perceive unseen realms. Note that one of the Morrígan's eyes is put out by Cú Chulainn in the *Tain Bo Cauilgne* / *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*.

Valkyries, winged battle demons who take an interest in the fate of great heroes, appear in groups of three and function as psychopomps.[221] The Harpy of Greek and Roman mythology combine the body, legs and wings of a bird with female human head and torso, personify storms and bring death to sailors.[222] The Siren of Greek mythology are bird-women whose singing causes sailors to jump overboard in suicidal leaps.[223] The Gamayun, prophetic bird-women of Russian folklore, have dark, raven-like wings and convey divine messages that foreshadow deaths of statesmen. The Egyptian goddess Isis has wings of a falcon, guides souls into the afterlife and possesses the power to bring the dead back to life. Corresponding war goddesses in bird-woman form include Eris, the Greek goddess of strife, discord and war who is depicted as a woman in dark attire with human legs, arms, body and head, with dark bird-like wings.[224] Donahue and Ravenna also point out parallels with the bird-like Greek Keres, 'malevolent death spirits or death Goddesses who would haunt battlefields and who were tied to the fates of warriors, claiming them at their foretold moment of death.'[225] Ravenna concludes:

> 'In the *badb*, *valkyrja,* and *keres*, we are likely looking at the refraction through different cultures of a very ancient type of female battle spirit whose mode of action is fatality, death in war, foredestination and the prophetic knowledge of that fate, originating in the Indo-European level of antiquity.[226]

These correspondences suggest a bird-woman archetype, a psychopomp who flies between the worlds of the living and the dead. Ravenna suggests the goddess and the raven may have been

---

221 Donahue, p. 3; Gulermovich Epstein, *War Goddess,* p. 147-165; Ravenna, p. 130.

222 Hesiod, *Theogony,* trans by M.L. West, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1999), 265-267.

223 Siren first appeared in Homer's *Odyssey,* in a scene where Odysseus saves his crew's lives by tying himself to the ship's mast to resist their song. Homer didn't describe these creatures, but circa third Century BC Apollonius of Rhodes described them as part woman and part bird in his *Argonautica*.

224 Hesiod, *Works and Days,* trans. by David W. Tandy and Walter C. Neale, (USA: University of California Press, 1996) para. 800, 42 <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0132%3Acard%3D42> <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0132:card=800&highlight=eris> [accessed 21 April 2025].

225 Donahue, p.6; Ravenna, p. 131.

226 Ravenna, *The Book of the Great Queen*, p. 132.

eponymous and that in her bird form she acts as psychopomp, excarnating the remains of the dead and taking their spirits to another world.[227] In Celtic belief, reincarnation meant that death was seen as a transition to new life and a warrior's death was the most noble of all. Gulermovich Epstein agrees, 'A comparison of the Morrígan and the Valkyries […] supports the proposition that the war goddess is a psychopomp, translating her chosen warriors out of this world and into another.'[228] It may even be possible then, seen through a Celtic prism, to consider the war-goddess as a *regeneratrix,* a death bringing psychopomp promising glorious reincarnation in the Otherworld.[229]

Perhaps an ur-myth may lie in the Bronze Age petroglyphs of the Ancient North Asian Steppe where, as Esther Jacobson-Tepfer describes, larger than life women are depicted in scenes of battle, alongside broken chariots, dead warriors, and flocks of large flying birds whose broad, fingered wings resemble those of ravens.[230] Strikingly similar to the Morrígan is the image of a lone female figure leading a huge bull 'juxtaposed with males in conflict, within a scene of heroic dimensions.'[231] Jacobson-Tepfer asks whether these images, 'may actually refer to a mythic sphere in which the woman functions in the role of protector or guardian,' or even '[…] a liminal space where the woman occupies the threshold between realms of being.'[232]

As a psychopomp, the Morrígan presents a complex archetype: a death-bringer capable also of healing and protection; a shapeshifter who moves between the world of the living and the dead. In her denigrated malign form, she presents the archetypal Terrible Mother, a Shadow variant of the Great Mother, whose life-giving aspects are reversed, and who threatens the Hero.[233]

---

227 Ravenna, p. 76.

228 Gulermovich Epstein, *War Goddess,* p. 166.

229 Regeneratrix is a female regenerator, a mythic divine being who brings the dead back to life.

230 Esther Jacobson-Tepfer, *The Hunter, The Stag and the Mother of All Animals: Image, Monument, and Landscape in Ancient North Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 187-194.

231 Jacobson-Tepfer, p. 189.

232 Ibid., p. 190.

233 The Terrible Mother is a variant of the Great Mother archetype. For a detailed taxonomy of the Great Mother, see Eric Neuman, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype,* trans. by Ralph Manheim (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 147–210.

The Morrígan: Forming a creative interpretation

In the mythos it is only through her relationship with the warrior Cú Chulainn that the Morrígan's appearances find a shape as a dramatic story. Unlike Rhiannon, the Morrígan's feelings are undisclosed, and her inner-life remains unexplored. However, her ambivalent relationship with Cú Chulainn provides a central conflict. Key elements in their encounters – offers of allegiance, betrayal and revenge – provide a dramatic arc. A feminist adaptation might make the Morrígan a protagonist in her own narrative configured around an ambivalent relationship with warrior. A wartime setting provides an intense emotional context for a woman's spiritual journey. A feminist reclamation of the Morrígan's stolen powers might restore her tutelary role and reconfigure her as a mentor and protector of warriors.

Archetypally, the Morrígan represents the psychopomp; death-bringer and taker of souls. A Shadow archetype with fearsome qualities, suggests an anti-heroine. This presents a challenging model for feminised mythography that aims to encourage audience empathy with the heroine. But women can and do find empowerment in this fearless archetype, and it is notable that some scholars in the pagan community have embraced the Morrígan as a deity for women's devotional practice. Daimler, Ravenna and Lora O'Brien have all written in reverence of the Morrígan, emphasising her fierceness and ability to stand her ground in battle.[234] A contemporised adaptation of the Morrígan might embody a character who ruthlessly acts within an embattled and conflicted world, whose insatiable appetite for violence makes her as deadly as any of her male counterparts. However, this empowerment discourse might be characterised as post-feminist in its focus on personal power through demonstration of masculinised qualities of violence and ruthlessness. It is important to consider how the war goddess is patriarchally coded, as implicit in her function is incitement of the warrior's valor to achieve military victory and glory through violence. She fulfils an important role in a patriarchal narrative of glory won through fighting fearlessly, conferring upon Cú Chulainn an inalienable place in Irish culture as a peerless warrior. The Morrígan provides a problematic model for feminised mythography, and a feminist adaptation of this mythic figure requires creative strategies to critically examine and challenge these patriarchal notions.

---

[234] Morgan Daimler, *Raven Goddess: Going Deeper with the Morrigan* (Pagan Portals, 2020), p. 63; Ravenna, pp. 233-246; Lora O'Brien, *The Irish Pagan School* 'The Morrigan' blog post August 31 2022. <https://irishpagan.school/the-morrigan/#:~:text=The%20Morrigan%20is%20one%20of%20the%20most,goddesses%20of%20the%20Tuatha%20D%C3%A9%20Danann%2C%20certainly.&text=Although%20perhaps%20best%20known%20for%20being%20a,roles%20and%20mythology%20in%20Irish%20pe> [accessed 23 April 2024].

Conclusion

My analysis and interpretation of these two case studies informed my evolving methodology for creative adaptation by helping me develop suitable strategies for effective feminised mythography. When considering mythic characters as models for feminised mythography it is important to take into account the degree to which their divine powers have been compromised due to evident denigration. The mythographer may consider adaptation strategies to rectify denigration and restore these powers. To reclaim repressed female mythic powers, I will invest all the divine powers of the mythic model in contemporary female characters, exploring the agency that confer. However, in so doing, it is important to avoid reinstating patriarchal aspects of their mythic function. To configure a feminist adaptation of Rhiannon requires a strategy that avoids re-essentialising her fertility; and an adaptation of the Morrígan must attempt to subvert the war-goddess's function of glorifying violence.

In configuring a woman's spiritual journey based on these mythic models, it is necessary to position the female character as a protagonist in their own narrative, imagining their emotional and psychological inner-lives. Key events and relationships from the mythic narratives provide plentiful material for adaptation when interpreted as peak emotional experiences. These can be used to form a series of initiations to bring the character to crisis. When configuring the stages of the heroine's journey of individuation, mythic archetypes may be deployed as axial stages in the character's psychological development. Rhiannon's mythic archetypes – the Modron and Divine Queen – are different forms of the Great Mother archetype and provide polarities for a transformative trajectory. Archetypally, the Morrígan presents many facets, Mentor, Initiatrix, and Psychopomp. A Shadow form of the Great Mother archetype, this figure could be used to inform the journey of individuation of a dark Mother and death bringer confronting her Shadow. The creative strategies I developed based on my analyses and interpretations are discussed further in *Chapter 4: Creative Adaptation*.

CHAPTER 4: Creative Adaptation

This chapter discusses my approach to adaptation and the strategies I deployed to create contemporary feminist film narratives inspired by the mythic characters Rhiannon and the Morrígan. The strategies I adopted were informed by principles of feminised mythography deployed in women's literature and emerged from my analysis and interpretation. They are designed to pursue my research aims: to reclaim supressed mythic female power and use the mythic model to express a woman's spiritual journey. The questions driving the adaptation phase concern how mythic characters can be used to shape contemporary female protagonists: how I might reimagine mythic characters as heroines at the centre of their own narratives; how their narratives might be reset in the present day; how mythic archetypes might help to define the complex psychology of female characters and illuminate a spiritual journey; how mythic female power can be reclaimed and what new kinds of agency this affords.

My approach to adaptation is defined by reference to Margherita Laera's taxonomy of forms.[235] Transposing from literature to cinema is an *intermedial* adaptation process that involves an *intersemiotic* transmutation from a written / verbal semiotic system (literature) into a visual and aural semiotic system (cinema).[236] Adaptations that reset mythic narratives in the present day are *intertemporal adaptations*.[237] By reimagining mythic characters in a present-day setting I am 'relocating a distant source to more recent times', to 'bring the adapted work closer to its intended audience', a process Laera calls *actualisation*.[238] This involves *recontextualization* 'relocating a distant source to a different context', to amplify the relevance of the narrative to a contemporary audience.[239]

---

[235] Margherita Laera, (ed). *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat* (London Bloomsbury: Methuen, 2014), pp. 4–10. Laera's framework refers to theatre, but her taxonomy and definitions may be applied to filmmaking.

[236] Ibid*.,* p. 6.

[237] Ibid., p.7.

[238] Ibid*.,* p. 8.

Contemporising involves consideration of all aspects of the mythic narrative: locations and setting; imagining mythic characters as women living today and how the events of the folktale speak to contemporary culture; and adapting elements to construct a meaningful narrative, what Laera calls *transculturation*.[240] Lawrence Venuti argues that 'domesticating approaches' of transculturation can risk cultural colonialisation if they obliterate the source culture.[241] A reworking of Welsh and Irish traditional tales risks colonialisation. To mitigate this, I adopted anti-colonialist strategies, making my adaptations distinct enough to stand apart from the original narratives. I collaborated with Welsh and Irish writers, artists and actors, to create narratives that speak directly to the history of British colonialism by depicting characters who embody resistance to it.

Making feminist narratives that provide a 'resistant' text is a form of *interideological appropriation*, defined by Laera as 'using appropriation as a tool' to 'challenge the politics of the 'original' on issues like gender, race and power relations.'[242] Understood in terms of Laera's taxonomy my films may be defined as intermedial, intersemiotic, intertemporal adaptations, that recontextualise and actualise mythic characters in transcultural feminist interideological appropriations of traditional folktales.

As folktales are not feminist texts and do not always develop female character psychology, the story must be reframed from the point of view of the female protagonist and characters developed to convey a deeper understanding of their psychology and emotions. This necessitates editing and restructuring the mythic narrative and making changes to the plotline. These processes create a new story, albeit one haunted by the original myth. Linda Hutcheon explains 'When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works' deriving a new narrative from the original material, 'a process of creation' that 'involves both (re)interpretation and then (re-)creation'.[243] Hence 'an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative […] It is its own palimpsestic thing'.[244] Adaptation necessitates the deconstruction and restructuring of the folktales

---

239 Ibid.

240 Ibid.

241 Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 8–30.

242 Laera, p. 11.

243 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 6, 8.

244 Ibid.*,* p. 9.

to create a new storyline, shaping a psychologically coherent narrative in which the female character becomes the central agent, or heroine.

To construct a spiritual journey in the Jungian sense of individuation, the protagonist must be placed in circumstances that compel her on a journey of self-discovery leading to the death of her old Self and a radical transformation. A dramatic situation must be envisaged that provokes an unconscious process of self-questioning, catalysing a series of initiations. These trials must force the heroine to abandon the ways of her old Self, causing ego-dissolution wherein her sense of Self is dismantled. Finally, the heroine undergoes a radical psychological change and emerges transformed. By taking mythic figures and the archetypes they contain as models for a heroine's spiritual journey, growth can be expressed as a movement from one archetype to another. Terrie Waddell describes this layering of archetypes in films as entwined musical motifs with an 'archetypal dominant', an archetypal theme is 'infused throughout the structure of a film' so that the archetype is 'amplified […] via characterisation, dialogue, open ended narratives, bodily markings, set design' etc.[245] I have taken this approach when working mythic archetypes into my films.

Furthermore, my mythography aims to reclaim the mythic powers of folkloric female characters and invest them in representations of women on screen to discover how these powers allow for articulations of female agency. By translating the stolen divine powers of mythic figures into behaviours and actions within real-life situations I aimed to create challenging representations of women who embody patriarchally supressed forms of female agency.

Another aspect of Celtic mythology that presents interesting possibilities is that both Rhiannon and The Morrígan are supernatural beings who emerge from the Otherworld. In Welsh and Irish traditions, the Otherworld is a parallel metaphysical reality. This is not a fantasy realm but very real dimension of the natural world where magical forces are at work.[246] I decided to explore how tropes of the mythic Otherworld could be deployed to create a metaphysical fictional space for the spiritual journey of the heroine.

---

[245] Terrie Waddell, *Mis/takes: Archetype, Myth and Identity in Screen Fiction* (UK: Routledge, 2006), p. 27

[246] Often the tales refer to actual physical sites in the landscape such as the remains of Bronze and Iron Age earthworks or burial mounds and are named in the literature. Even today, especially in Ireland, certain parts of the landscape are considered gateways to the Otherworld where the spirits of the ancestors, divine and supernatural beings *'the ever-living ones'* reside.

I created two film adaptations, *Deer Woman Child* based on Rhiannon's story; and *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* based on the Morrígan. The storyline of *Deer Woman Child* was created in collaboration with Sarah Corbett who wrote the short story which I developed and adapted into a screenplay, while Corbett gave feedback on drafts of the script.[247] When developing *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan,* I consulted Anna Zaluczkowska who was raised in Belfast during The Troubles, and she advised me about historical figures that informed my further research. I devised a storyline and wrote the screenplay, consulting Zaluczkowska on drafts for feedback. Embracing collaboration with other women is a feminist approach to authorship. It is a feature of women's filmmaking historically, and many female filmmakers have adapted works of women's literary fiction. Shelley Cobb considers women's adaptive texts through the metaphor of conversation, which implies collaboration and establishes an intertextuality that provides 'opposition to the individualistic and masculine image of the auteur'.[248] Through creative co-authorship with Corbett and creative consultation with Zaluczkowska I aimed to counter patriarchal notions of auteurism and further decolonialise my practice.

Strategies for creative adaptation

I deployed five strategies for adaptation:

1. Contemporising the mythic character
2. Reconfiguring the mythic narrative making the female character the protagonist
3. Reclaiming mythic powers to give agency to female characters
4. Using the archetype to define and map the heroine's spiritual journey
5. Harnessing tropes of the mythic Otherworld to suggest a metaphysical fictional space

Additionally, it was necessary to devise bespoke strategies for interideological adaptation in each case. I will now discuss how these strategies were deployed in my creative adaptations.

---

247 Sarah Corbett, *Deer, Woman, Child.* (Unpublished short story). See Appendix 1.

248 Shelley Cobb, *Adaptation, Authorship and Contemporary Women Filmmakers* (UK: Palgrave, 2015), p. 2.

Rhiannon: Restoring the denigrated 'Divine Queen'

Rhiannon is a denigrated form of the Divine Mother, with strong links to Epona, a mare goddess of fertility and sovereignty. Rhiannon's creative power is inverted as she is represented as infertile and her child is stolen from her. She also evokes the Modron archetype, a grieving mother who has lost her child, until they are finally reunited and her status as Divine Queen is restored. Corbett and I considered how the events and relationships in Rhiannon's story could provide a framework for a contemporary narrative. Rhiannon's difficulty in conceiving provides an emotive and relatable issue as infertility is experienced by many women today. How this threatens the dissolution of Rhiannon's marriage, her sudden mysterious pregnancy, and the loss of her child, are narrative events that provide a map for a series of initiatory trails. After discussing these aims Corbett drafted a short story called *Deer Woman Child* outlined below.[249]

> A middle-aged woman Pryn, lives an isolated life on a mountain farm with her horse, after several miscarriages ended in marital breakdown. One day she saves a stag from a pack of wolves. The stag follows her home and stays in the barn over the winter. In the spring, Pryn realises she is pregnant. After some anxiety about the possibility of another miscarriage, the pregnancy seems to go well. But the rate at which the baby is growing is unusual. Some months later Pryn gives birth unexpectedly early, alone. The baby is strangely formed. When the midwife visits, Pryn shows her a grave and explains that her baby girl was stillborn. After the midwife leaves Pryn returns to the barn where she joyfully suckles a healthy deer-child.

Corbett's reimagining of Rhiannon as a woman who has suffered several miscarriages created a believable contemporary character with an emotionally devastating backstory. Echoes of Rhiannon's story are evident in Pryn's infertility leading to the end of her marriage; her association with horses; her mysterious pregnancy; the separation from her newborn child and their reunion. Pryn also encounters a stag, an Otherworldly animal which appears to Pwyll, Rhiannon's future husband in the folktale.[250]

---

[249] Sarah Corbett, *Deer Woman Child,* (unpublished short story), see: Appendix 1, p. 128.

[250] The stag that Pwyll encounters is white, (an indicator of its Otherworldliness) and as it is pursued by both Pwyll and Arawn, King of the Otherworld the encounter signals sovereignty and symbolically marks Pwyll as a future king.

Corbett gave me permission to make changes to the story when developing the screenplay. In Corbett's story Pryn has been separated from her husband for five years and already established her independence. In my screenplay, Pryn retreats to the farm immediately after leaving her husband, making the separation more immediate. I did this to intensify her emotional state creating a lonely character dealing with trauma, loss and grief; a woman in crisis poised for a spiritual journey. I developed Pryn's family history through the character of her late grandmother, from whom she inherits the farm, a Wise Old Woman archetype from whom Pryn learns how to survive as she enters a new stage of life.[251] I made the farm remote, run-down and without electricity, an additional trial for Pryn to navigate as she learns to survive. The stag is a masculine archetype, so I changed its gender to a female deer, and Pryn's horse became a white mare - Rhiannon's totem animal and symbol of Epona - creating a visible symbol of the horse goddess in the film. Contemporising the mythic character enabled the creation of a woman with a complex past, emotional wounds, a painful medical history, a family, and emotional needs, with whom audiences might empathise and relate.

My second strategy for creative adaptation involved re-framing the mythic narrative from the perspective of the female character, making her the protagonist. Reimagining Rhiannon's story, I considered how key events could trigger strong emotions and bring about a crisis, creating a dramatic arc. I made Pryn's crisis evident by adding a scene where she attempts to take her own life, building to this with scenes depicting her descent into depression. I dramatised Pryn's descent through her self-imposed silence. When Patrick enquires about her husband, Pryn remains closed and tells him they are separated. Her silence intensifies as her depression takes hold and she refuses to speak to the postman or the blacksmith. I emphasised Pryn's fragile psychological state by adding the discovery of a shotgun, increasing jeopardy and maintaining narrative tension. To bring Pryn to a crisis, I added a scene where she receives a letter from her husband asking for a divorce so that he can marry another woman who is carrying his child. I maintained the ever-present possibility of death even after Pryn's pregnancy had been established by playing on her fears of another miscarriage, such as when Pryn discovers that she is bleeding.

The strategy of positioning the female character as protagonist also means telling the story from her subjective point of view. When writing the screenplay, I imagined Pryn's subjective perspective, conveying intimate embodied experiences such as night sweats during her pregnancy, and pain at the discovery that she is bleeding. I revealed her inner-life via symbolic dream sequences

---

[251] The Wise Old Woman is a Jungian archetype which he describes as symbolic of 'wisdom and spiritual exaltation' and 'helpful instinct and impulse that […] cherishes and sustains.' See: C.G. Jung CW 9 /1: para. 158.

in which she runs through the forest at night like a deer; floats underwater like an unborn child; and rises above the forest in a spiritual elevation. By depicting the visions of her unconscious, I suggested processes of transformation in her psyche.

The third strategy – to reclaim mythic power – is most evident in Pryn's mysterious pregnancy. This divine conception reclaims Rhiannon's 'stolen' mythic power as a denigrated fertility goddess and gives the agency of the creatrix to Pryn.[252] The impossibility of her pregnancy and her magical child confer upon Pryn the Modron's mythic power of parthenogenesis. The incorporation of divine power in a contemporary female character provides a surprising denouement to an ostensibly realistic narrative. Pryn's pregnancy stands out as miraculous and her hybrid baby as a numinous archetypal image.

To reclaim Rhiannon's stolen mythic power as sovereign goddess of the land I emphasised Pryn's connection with the natural world. I used pathetic fallacy to symbolise Pryn's rebirth forging a parallel between Pryn's regeneration and the generative forces in nature. Starting her story at the onset of winter and moving through the seasons to the height of summer, I depicted the landscape as a transformative environment providing nourishment. Pryn finds berries and sources freshwater from a natural spring, creating a symbolic interdependency that connects her to life-forces in nature. Her deepening integration with the landscape – walking by the river, swimming in the waterfall, entering the forest at night – suggest that it is her connection with nature that catalyses her transformation, restoring her sovereign agency.

My fourth strategy is to use archetypes to define character psychology and chart the stages of my heroine's spiritual journey of transformation. The dominant archetype at play in the character of Rhiannon is the Divine Mother. In Jungian terms, this is the Great Mother or Good Mother who nourishes, protects and brings life, but in Rhiannon's case she is denigrated and infertile. This re-configures Rhiannon as the Modron who has lost her child. Using these two contrasting Mother archetypes as polarities I configured Pryn's spiritual journey from depleted Modron to reinvigorated Divine Mother. These archetypes define Pryn's behaviour and development. Initially, Pryn embodies the Modron, grieving and emerging from a patriarchal marriage (wherein her value resides in her fertility). Pryn retreats to her grandmother's farm where she endures the trials of the initiate which

---

[252] *Creatrix* is the feminine form of the Latin word 'creator' a post-secular feminist concept of the goddess that emerged during the second wave spiritual feminist movement inspired by the matriarchal theory popularised by Marija Gimbutas and Merlin Stone. See: Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images* (London: Thames and Hudson. 1974); Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (USA: Harcourt, 1976).

according to Henderson are 'submission', 'containment' and finally, 'liberation'.[253] Pryn reaches a crisis point where she attempts suicide; a submission symbolising the death of the old Self. The numinous encounter with the deer prevents her suicide and Pryn returns to the farm with a renewed will to survive, caring for herself and the animals on the farm through the winter (containment). As Pryn moves along the archetypal axis from Modron to Divine Mother she goes through ego-death to re-birth, literally giving birth to a new life. The birth of Pryn's child symbolises the birth of her new Self, the stage of liberation.[254] Her hybrid deer-baby is perfectly adapted for her new environment. Using these archetypes as a transformative axis, I was able to structure Pryn's spiritual journey of individuation and depict a woman actualising the Self archetype.[255]

Transforming Pryn from the depleted Modron to the reinvigorated Divine Mother creatrix source of all life, risked reinforcing essentialist notions about women's creative power as defined by motherhood. Pryn's desire for a child and the mysterious pregnancy that salves her despair suggests a psychological need or dependency. This recalls Freud's notion that a woman needs a baby to achieve fulfilment.[256] To disrupt this patriarchal theme, the story introduces a third archetypal figure – the deer – evoking the archetypal Deer Woman. In Welsh and Irish traditions, the Deer Woman is a divine animal from the Otherworld associated with fertility and safe birth. [257] Pryn's encounter with the deer magically heals her infertility and her pregnancy develops quickly like the gestation period of a deer (around 6 – 7 months). The encounter also causes Pryn herself to change. As her pregnancy advances, Pryn develops a heightened sensory awareness as she bonds with the deer-baby she is carrying. Her perceptions change, her physical senses are enhanced, and she can see in the dark, imbuing her with an animal-like consciousness. She adopts a wholly other way of being, walking barefoot in the forest at night, moving stealthily through the trees as if she is becoming a deer. These

---

253 Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man', pp. 95-156, p. 126.

254 Henderson, p. 126.

255 Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television,* pp. 37. Bassil-Morozow argues this is a journey still rarely enacted by female characters in film and television.

256 Sigmund Freud, 'On the Sexual Theories of Children' (1908) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, IX,* ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), pp. 205–226.

257 In the Irish tradition, the Deer Woman archetype is embodied in the character of Sadhbh, (a 'Mother' archetype), whose story relates to fertility and the importance of making the correct choice of life-partner.

physical changes during pregnancy become a metaphor for Pryn's transformative journey of individuation.

Clare Hanson describes the pregnant female body as 'mutable' as it 'undergoes continuous physiological (and sometimes pathological change)', and in *Deer Woman Child*, the mutability of Pryn's pregnant body becomes a metaphor for her psychological transformation, affording an uncanny fairytale quality to the narrative.[258] Pryn is becoming a transhuman divine goddess of nature, a lady of the beasts, a mistress of wild things. The completion of this process is embodied by the birth of her hybrid baby, a mythic therianthrope. When Pryn gives birth in a meadow (swiftly as a deer might) her hybrid child conveys sufficient numinosity to awaken the viewer to a conscious recognition of the archetypal image it presents: the *regeneratrix* – a female regenerator that causes things to be renewed or reborn – in this case, Pryn herself. The impossible pregnancy and magical baby create a paradigm shift from cinematic realism into fairytale and become evident metaphors for Pryn's transformation and rebirth, disrupting the reinstatement of essentialist notions about women's maternal role.

Pryn's half-human, half-deer baby is a representation of the Divine Child archetype, which Jung describes as a demi-god – half-human and half-divine – conceived and born under extraordinary circumstances symbolising the psychological struggle of the individuation process. Jung considers the Divine Child archetype to be an expression of the 'precious fruit' of future potential 'signifying a higher stage of self-realisation'.[259] For Jung, the Divine Child represents the concept of the Self.[260] Jung argued that the Divine Child archetype is genderless and may be represented through myriad images including children, plants, eggs etc. But as Waddell points out 'one of the most problematic aspects' of the Divine Child archetype is its 'predominant maleness.'[261] Pryn's hybrid baby presents a feminist challenge to the traditional patriarchal representation of the Divine Child both because it is a therianthrope (half-human, half-animal) and because it is female.

---

[258] Clare Hanson, *A Cultural History of Pregnancy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 3.

[259] C. G. Jung, *Collected Works 9 Vol. 1*, para. 286.

[260] C. G. Jung, 'Mysterium Coniunctionis', trans. by R.F.C Hull, in *Collected Works 14,* para. 103, (USA: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[261] Waddell, pp.103, 106. Waddell explains, 'The Divine Child archetype is a distinguishing feature of contemporary organised religious traditions: Christianity (Christ), Islam (Muhammed), Hinduism (Krishna), and Buddhism (Gautama Buddha) […] Each bases their mythologies around the motif of special, gifted, enlightened or supernatural child figures'. p. 103.

The narrative thus weaves together four archetypes – the Modron; the Deer Woman; the Divine Queen and the Divine Child. By incorporating totem symbols of these archetypes (the mare, the deer, the hybrid baby), I enhanced their recognisability. The title, *Deer Woman Child* highlights the Deer Woman archetype and functions as a form of address to our desired audience (Dear Woman), showing the possibility of survival and renewal through a descent to the deepest parts of the psyche.

My fifth strategy is to deploy tropes of the mythic Otherworld to suggest a metaphysical dimension to the narrative. In Rhiannon's story, magical events often take place in liminal places where the veil between the real world and Otherworld is thin, and water symbolism is used repeatedly to signify liminal sites.[262] In *Deer Woman Child,* I use water symbolically to suggest liminality. We first encounter Pryn lost in the moorland mist as she enters the Otherworld of the story. At a crisis point she kneels by a frozen pool and encounters the deer, a divine being.[263] In spring she dips her feet into a pool; and in summer she immerses herself to swim; finally, she dreams she is underwater. Pryn repeatedly crosses the threshold to commune with the Otherworld and find healing, and water becomes her conduit to regenerative forces in nature. This expresses a metaphysical dimension to the story wherein nature is in essence divine.[264]

The Morrígan: creating a feminist 'Phantom Queen'

In developing a contemporary female character, I embraced all the Morrígan's mythic powers – shapeshifter, death-bringer, seer, psychopomp – and restored her stolen powers as protector and tutelary initiatrix. The Morrígan's intimate associations with warriors suggested a contemporary woman with a close yet ambivalent relationship with soldiers. Representations of women in the military in film and television have been shown by Yvonne Tasker to be provocative figures of gender

---

[262] In Welsh folktales, water is often used symbolically to represent liminality due to its fluidity and transmutability as it can change form from solid ice to fluid water to vaporous mist.

[263] Both Irish and Welsh traditional folktales contain many examples of mortals encountering Otherworldly beings and supernatural interventions in certain places within the landscape such as deep pools of water, lakes, streams, megalithic earth-mounds, standing stones, and the forest.

[264] The emphasis on nature as the locus or embodiment of divine forces is a theme strongly present in the Romantic tradition in art and literature and which philosophically takes inspiration from Baruch Spinoza's alignment of God and Nature. Instead of seeing God as a supernatural deity and natural world as matter created by God from nothingness, Spinoza raised nature to the rank of the divine by conceiving of it as manifesting the fullness of all reality, which is at once nature and God. For Spinoza God and Nature were two words for the same 'One Reality'. See: Baruch Spinoza, 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus', in *Complete Works,* ed. by Michael L. Morgan (USA: Hackett Publishing Inc.: 1632-1677), p. 417.

disruption.[265] Tasker argues that the military woman presents a 'contested image' due to what Leisa D. Meyer identifies as the 'cultural inability to reconcile the categories of 'woman' and 'soldier''.[266] Tasker's analysis reveals anxieties about women's capability to perform this 'masculine role': whether women have sufficient control of their emotions; how their presence disrupts a masculine environment; whether men will accept orders from women; and whether women's presence provokes sexual violence. Women are rarely depicted in combat roles, but when they are there is 'a preoccupation with the policing of gendered behaviour and appearance', either to emphasise femininity through glamour or prove women's strength and endurance.[267] As Tasker points out 'the female soldier is a troubling category'.[268]

In the context of Ireland women were recruited into full-service roles in the Irish Republican Army (IRA) since 1970, and during The Troubles participated in bombings, killings and in the training and initiation of volunteers.[269] This presented an opportunity to create a contemporary feminist configuration of a female soldier: a veteran combatant, a woman of formidable reputation whose intelligence, power and foresight make her a legendary leader; whose discipline, self-control and self-sacrifice mean she is highly respected; and whose capability is never at issue.

In reimagining the Morrígan as a contemporary woman I developed a story in which an older IRA veteran endures a spiritual reckoning, a final rite of passage of a woman confronting a life after war. I called her Erin Morrigan; Erin is an old name for Ireland and her surname would make her Irish folkloric associations recognisable. A former member of a secret intelligence unit 'The Unknowns', Erin was involved in the transportation, interrogation and killing of suspected informers. She now lives alone in a safe house in a remote location surrounded by the hidden graves of her victims. She is dying from cancer and faces death with the same stoicism with which she approached life. She makes opium from poppies to control her pain, a powerful drug known to cause anxiety, paranoia

---

265 Yvonne Tasker, *Soldier's Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television since World War II* (London & Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 1–17, p. 7.

266 Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 3.

267 Tasker, p. 4.

268 Ibid.

269 'The Troubles' refers to the thirty-year period from 1968 – 1998 of ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland.

and hallucinations.[270] Her terminal illness provides a physical trial and initiates a spiritual journey in which she makes a final evaluation of her life.

Given the importance of the historical context, it was necessary to develop Erin's backstory. I focused on the Morrígan's relationship with the warrior-hero Cú Chulainn, using key events of their mythic encounters to construe a contemporary story. In the folktales, the Morrígan offers Cú Chulainn an alliance which he refuses, setting in motion a sequence of events that bring about his downfall. Adapting this relationship, I created a soldier character named 'Col', short for Colm, which comes from the Irish Gaelic word for 'dove', identifying him as a very different beast from the 'hound' embodied by Cú Chulainn, the hyper-violent hero of tradition. Erin meets Col when she is young and rising in the ranks of the IRA. He is a peerless soldier who joins her unit and becomes her lover. When she and her unit are arrested, she suspects Col is an undercover British agent. After her release from prison Erin interrogates Col and although he never confesses, she executes him, burying him in an unmarked grave.

This backstory evokes the Morrígan's relationship with Cú Chulainn and her ambivalence towards his fate. She foresees his death, accepts its inevitability, abides with him throughout his trials, witnesses his final battle, and at the moment of his death rests on his shoulder in the form of a crow. She is the death-bringer who aligns with the warrior yet cannot save nor forgive him. Likewise, Erin is compelled to interrogate Col, and although uncertain of his guilt must abide by his decreed fate. My feminist adaptation gives Erin control of Col's destiny. When Col is arrested, interrogated and killed it is under her orders. This addresses the machismo of the myth by making Col vulnerable and Erin powerful. *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* reenvisions the relationship of the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn, providing a dramatic arc: Erin's anger at Col's apparent betrayal; her calculated revenge; her ambivalence as the executor of Col's fate; and her battle with conscience as she is brought to confront her unresolved feelings about the past.[271]

With so much of Erin's story set in the past, I needed to develop her present-day narrative. In June 2018 rioting in Derry Londonderry disrupted the fragile peace in Northern Ireland. As the wider community condemned the violence, a younger generation were being recruited into the New IRA. I

---

[270] This idea was suggested by Jane Morton, (Production Designer on *Deer Woman Child)*, that Erin may be medicating herself herbally, a behaviour I liked, because it conveyed a key aspect of character: her independence (born of necessity to maintain secrecy), and her resolve to face death alone.

[271] *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan,* dir. by Gabrielle Russell (Green Film Productions and Make Believe Films 2025).

developed a younger male character to explore this issue, a teenaged boy who represents the young Cú Chulainn (known in the folktales as Sétanta).[272] He has been sent to Erin's safe house to lie low after accidentally shooting a girl. He bears an uncanny resemblance to Col, and his arrival brings to Erin's mind painful memories of the past. I wanted to counter the absence of older women in authoritative leading roles. [273] In creating this pairing of an older female veteran and young, inexperienced male recruit, I aimed to create an iconic leading role for an older actress, and a feminist power dynamic where the status and power are held by the female character. By configuring the youthful warrior as a fallible young recruit, I aimed to undercut the glamour and hyper-masculinity of the folkloric hero and offer a more reflective story focused on the trauma caused by violence.

While I was developing the story, the journalist Lyra McKee was shot dead during a riot in the Creggan area of Derry, Londonderry on 18th April 2019. A few days later, The New IRA claimed responsibility, offering an apology for Lyra's killing which they said had been unintentional.[274] Video material taken at the time revealed a young, masked gunman who was never identified despite the arrests and court appearances of co-conspirators, suggesting that he may still be living in the community or in hiding. I imagined the youth living alongside those grieving and his need to get away, remain hidden and nameless, and used this to inform the young recruit in the film deciding that he would remain nameless, referring to him only as 'the Boy'.

The Boy's resemblance to real life persons raised ethical issues, as referencing Lyra's killing in the film could be re-traumatising for the community. These concerns weighed heavily against the potential resonance of incorporating the event. I decided to fictionalise the event, avoiding direct references to Lyra while conveying the tragic arbitrariness of the killing of an innocent person, and showing the impact of the killing on the Boy's sense of self and destiny. I wanted to show something about the nature of violence that is often overlooked: that it has life changing consequences that affect not only victims, but also perpetrators. I developed a fictional backstory and wrote scenes

---

[272] The Boy represents Sétanta the young warrior Cú Chulainn, who earns the name Cú – hound – after he kills Cullan the blacksmith's guard dog and is made to take its place, proving himself a warrior in the tale *The Hound of Culann* from *Tain Bo Cúalnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*).

[273] According to Martha Lauzen's annual report, in the 100 top grossing films of 2024 only 5% of female characters were over 60 years old, and only 6.3% of characters were females in leadership roles. See: Martha M. Lauzen, *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2024,* <https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2024-Its-a-Mans-World-Report.pdf> [accessed September 2nd 2025].

[274] *The Irish Times*, April 23rd 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/new-ira-admits-responsibility-for-killing-of-lyra-mckee-1.3869002?> [accessed 12.5.2024].

depicting his regret, grief, and fears for his uncertain future. His spiritual journey speaks of the consequences of violence, the central theme of *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan*, a film that examines how people account for such actions over time, and whether they have remorse, regrets, or feel justified, even forty years on.

The strategy of imagining The Morrígan as a real woman in the present day enabled the creation of a psychologically complex elder female character who occupies an authoritative role in a military organisation and presents a challenging feminist representation of the female soldier. A woman of high rank with nothing to prove, involved in elite secret intelligence operations, principled and uncompromising, capable of the deepest feelings, yet who executes orders dispassionately, and has a tutelary role in the training and protection of soldiers. Contemporising this mythic model enabled me to write a relevant story at a crucial time: as some of those historically involved in the IRA express their ambivalence towards the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and mourn sacrifices made in the name of independence not yet won; and a disenfranchised younger generation are recruited into dissident Republican organisations such as the New IRA.

My aim during the screenwriting process was to embody in my protagonist all the Morrígan's mythic powers as tutelary initiatrix, prophet or seer, shapeshifter, and death-bringer. Erin's relationship with the Boy enabled me to reclaim her stolen mythic powers as a protector of warriors. Erin is the Boy's superior in rank and experience, and he sees her as a mentor, referring to her as 'a legend'. One of Erin's first tutelary actions is to make the Boy comprehend the danger he is in as she warns 'Safe? You're not safe here! You're not safe anywhere! From now on you're gonna need eyes sideways in your head!'. The next morning, Erin gives the Boy some basic rules to preserve his safety and hers. Intent on making him realise the seriousness of his situation she demands that he maintains the utmost secrecy, saying 'Never Talk. If you talk, you're as good as dead. If the enemy don't finish you, your own will. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?' Erin's dialogue carries the agency of a military superior as she tells the Boy 'You're a soldier now' and commands he stand to attention.

But there is a feminist twist to the sergeant-versus-private dynamic. Erin is not trying to dominate the youth in a patriarchal military hierarchy but demanding that he step up and meet her gaze. By saying 'Stand up. Look at me.' she makes him act bravely despite his fear, a lesson in becoming a warrior in a truer sense. Erin further demonstrates the agency of the tutelary initiatrix when she orders the Boy to end her life by shooting her. She demands that he kill on command, an initiation he must complete to prove himself a worthy soldier. When the Boy refuses, she taunts him saying 'There's not the makings of a soldier in you. I should turn you in', implying that she deems him

an unworthy initiate, echoing the Morrígan's taunting of Sétanta. Later she acknowledges his refusal as a struggle with conscience and counsels him 'We can choose our path, but not where it takes us. Understand? What's done is done. You'll learn to live with it.' Erin's interactions with the Boy evoke the tutelary and protective agency of the war goddess as she teaches the youth what it means to be a warrior.

The Morrígan's powers as a prophetess confer foresight on Erin. When the Boy asks her what will happen to him, she answers with certainty 'You're marked. You'll be the scapegoat [...] You will disappear', a prophecy that brings him to understand that he will always be a fugitive. She recovers the gun the Boy has buried in the meadow, already knowing where to find it. Later Erin has a hallucinatory vision of the Boy, his face beaten like Col after his interrogation, suggesting that she can see the young warrior's destiny. The mirroring of the Boy and Col in Erin's prophetic vision suggests that he will soon join the ranks of dead warriors, echoing the Morrígan's foreknowledge of the fate of Cú Chulainn.

The Morrígan's shapeshifting powers to change herself from an old woman to a young woman are evoked in the screenplay through scenes that cut back and forth through time, juxtaposing Erin's elder and younger self. Young Erin assumes a false identity as an IRA operative calling herself 'Lily' and changes her appearance frequently to hide her identity.

The Morrígan's mythic power as death-bringer confers on Erin the agency of a killer. This aspect of the mythic model presents a challenge to viewer empathy. To mitigate this, I made Erin a soldier who kills out of conviction for a political cause, and used traumatic flashbacks to dramatise her inner conflict about these killings. However, the Morrígan is not a self-critical or reflective character, so I didn't allow Erin to present conscious remorse. Instead, I established contradictions between Erin's statements and behaviours and her repressed emotional world. Erin is haunted by her crimes but maintains the belief in her right to kill these people as informers and infiltrators eliminated for the cause, insisting her victims collaborated with the enemy – 'They talked.'

These flashbacks are arranged in a non-linear order, erupting spontaneously like intrusive thoughts, and Erin's present-day reactions convey her ambivalent feelings about past events. The Boy's curiosity about Erin's past triggers these memories. When he asks Erin about her time in 'The Unknowns', the subsequent flashback depicts the death of one of her victims (a female prisoner).[275]

[275] The killing scenes are based on historical research into the IRA's treatment of victims and protocols deployed, as informed by the following publications: Séamus McKendry, *Disappeared: The Search for Jean McConville* (Dublin: Blackwater Press 2000); Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two men's war in Ireland*

These scenes reveal that Erin took part in killings she couldn't justify and for which she holds highly ambivalent feelings. During the killing of the female prisoner, Erin helps the woman stand after she has fallen and removes her gag so that she can speak. But as the woman pleads for her life for the sake of her children 'They don't have anybody else!' Erin is pressured by a male Provo to 'Shut her up!' and orders her to 'Walk. Keep Walking!' before another Provo knocks the woman out. Erin's account of the killing suggests the woman was justly punished as an informer, but the flashback reveals only a desperate woman begging for her life. Erin's conflicted feelings about this killing are evident in her reaction to the memory, blotting it out with opium.

Self-medicating with opium, Erin crosses to an Otherworld of nightmares and hallucinations. I used these to dramatise Erin's spiritual journey as a metaphysical battle. When developing the screenplay, I also included Otherworldly visitations of ghosts of the people she has killed. But in making the film I realised that these hauntings suggested psychosis, undermining Erin's mental acuity, weakening her credibility, detracting from her internal conflict. I experimented with visitations from the Morrígan herself, (as Erin's illness advances, she experiences hallucinations), but these Otherworldly beings disrupted the realism of the narrative and pushed the genre into horror. I found that externalising the antagonist in the form of ghosts / the Morrígan detracted from Erin's confrontation with her own Shadow, so I removed them.

Erin's association with the raven - totem animal of the Morrígan – symbolises her archetypal identity as psychopomp. The raven appears to follow and watch over Erin portending death and its haunting calls herald flashback scenes depicting Col. Erin has a nightmarish vision of Col being devoured by a raven, and two ravens fly over Erin's grave as she dies, evoking the psychopomp who takes the souls of the dead to the Otherworld. In Jungian terms, The Morrígan as psychopomp and death-bringer represents the Terrible Mother – a Shadow archetype.[276] My adaptation presents Erin as a woman confronting her Shadow, an archetype that Bassil-Morozow argues is rarely explored in female characters 'there is an abundance of narratives about the male and his shadow […] very few narratives portray a woman trying to make sense of her dark side.'[277] I evoked the Shadow / Dark Mother archetype in Erin's IRA code name, 'The Mother', and created an teenage pregnancy

(London: Faber, 2010); John Parker, *Death of a Hero: Captain Robert Nairac, GC and the undercover war in Northern Ireland* (London: Metro Books, 1999).

[276] Neumann, pp. 147–210.

[277] Bassil-Morozow, *Jungian Theory for Storytellers,* p. 50.

backstory where at sixteen, Erin gave up her illegitimate baby for adoption. Erin's spiritual journey is a woman's final reckoning with the things she has done as she comes to terms with her Shadow.

As Erin's relationship with the Boy deepens, she begins to confront her Shadow. She recalls entering the barn after Col's interrogation to see him hanging unconscious with horrific injuries admitting 'I couldn't forgive him'. Her role in his execution is unambiguous, 'I walked him out myself. Stayed with him. Heaved the earth over him myself'. Trauma is revealed through Young Erin's behaviour after Col's execution as she holds onto Col's dead body. Years later, this haunts elder Erin, demonstrated when in delirium she repeatedly calls out Col's name. A defining visual representation of Erin's internal conflict comes as she is approaching the end of her life and sees a vision of her younger self sitting in the armchair opposite her bed. As Erin cries out 'Who are you? What do you want?' Young Erin stares back in silence. This juxtaposition depicts Erin's psychic schism after killing her lover, a self-inflicted spiritual wound from which she never recovered.

By evoking all the divine powers of the Morrígan I aimed to portray a formidable woman, and yet by incorporating the darker aspects, I questioned whether I had created a monster. Creed argues that 'All human societies have a conception of the monstrous feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject.' [278] Erin's violence and remorselessness is shocking, and abject elements are woven into my depiction of her illness, such as when she coughs and vomits blood. Creed argues that horror films confront viewers with the abject – the corpse, bodily wastes – in order to expel it and reassert the human/non-human boundary. She explains how in horror films, the monstrous feminine is perceived *via the subjectivity of another character* and objectified, made abject, and finally destroyed. In this way, the Boy's killing of Erin could be interpreted as a patriarchal act of abjection, a purification by elimination of an abject figure. To avoid repeating this patriarchal pattern, I presented Erin's death as her own choice and made the boy's reluctance to kill her apparent. I placed focus on Erin's mental and emotional states and moved abjection away from the feminine body, placing the site of abjection within her psyche. Erin's inner process of abjection is different from the externalised cultural abjection that Creed writes about. Erin presents as a person in torment because the abject elements she is dealing with are memories that stem from her past acts of violence. She cannot separate effectively from these abject eruptions because they come into being through her psyche. Unlike many horror films where the main

---

[278] Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous Feminine', p. 44.

character is brought into confrontation with the monstrous abject and expels it, Erin cannot rid herself of the visions because she herself creates them.

Kristeva sees abjection not only as a collective cultural act but a personal psychic imperative that operates on the border between the conscious and unconscious, protecting the consciously functioning psyche from the unconscious.[279] Erin's memories and hallucinations threaten her sense of self and she must repress them if she is to protect herself from abject shame. Erin's psychic struggle to reconcile the actions of the past resonates with how Kristeva describes *self-abjection*, 'When that subject […] finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that is none other than abject.' [280] Erin's flashbacks and visions reveal that 'Deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject.' [281] As Kristeva explains, 'the one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject*'.[282] Erin presents as a deject, a pariah enduring a reckoning in her final weeks of life, attempting purification of her soul by confronting the abject within herself. This is apparent in several scenes: Erin's despair at invading memories; her violent reactions upon waking from nightmares; her vomiting and fits of coughing; all correspond with Kristeva's description of a person confronting the abject. The day before her death, Erin reaches Kristeva's ultimate abjection point 'The place ___ where meaning collapses'.[283] Erin laments this meaninglessness, saying to the Boy 'Once, on hunger strike, I thought that dying would be the most significant thing I could ever do. Now it's meaningless.' The Boy's attempt to comfort her 'But it's not meaningless, you're a legend', is met with resignation by Erin as she acknowledges the meaninglessness not just of her death, but her life; Erin wants to die and implores the Boy to help her.

I remained ambivalent about presenting Erin as a deject. I was concerned by how viewers might respond to Erin and my depiction of her beleaguered mental state. Would her illness be perceived as a punishment? Would the film be seen as a colonialist critique of Erin's politics? Was my depiction of her dereliction politically skewed? Of course, the film would likely divide audiences and ultimately, the viewer would eventually become the judge of Erin. The narrative actively invites this judgement. When making the film, it would be important not to present Erin as a monster so

---

[279] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 8.

[280] Ibid., p. 5.

[281] Ibid., p. 6.

[282] Ibid., p. 8, (original emphasis).

[283] Ibid., p. 2.

irredeemable that the film becomes her judge, answering rather than asking this question of the audience.

Conclusion

Although Rhiannon and the Morrígan present very different models with contrasting archetypes, I was able to apply my strategies of adaptation in both cases and write original feminist film narratives. My strategy of contemporising mythic archetypes as a real women created characters with layered backstories, emotional wounds, medical histories, relationships, families, emotional needs and internal conflicts, in film narratives of contemporary cultural relevance. Reenvisioning Rhiannon mobilised issues affecting many women such as infertility, miscarriage, divorce and depression, and brought to screen a female creatrix. The Morrígan, reenvisioned as Erin Morrigan, presented a challenging representation of an elder woman soldier in a culturally relevant story about ongoing political struggles in Northern Ireland.

Positioning each mythic character as protagonist and framing the story from her point of view enabled me to discover each character's unique voice and perspective on the world. By imagining their experiences subjectively, I was able to create complex female characters with uniquely embodied points of view and reveal their inner-lives in an emotionally coherent way.

The use of mythic archetypes provided a determining model for defining the way the characters might appear, think, behave and change. Significant events in mythic narratives when structured as a road of trials, provided a series of initiations of increasing intensity, culminating in transformation; a framework for the spiritual journey of the heroine. I found that archetypes contained in the mythic narrative of Rhiannon could be positioned as axial points creating a trajectory for the spiritual transformation of the character. Exploring the psychopomp archetype of the Morrígan I was able to create a narrative about a woman's final spiritual reckoning that depicts the integration of her Shadow. Incorporating totem symbols (the mare, the deer, the raven) enhances recognisability and imbues the heroine with numinosity, amplifying her potency.

My strategy of reclaiming mythic powers and embodying them in contemporary female characters afforded the evocation of potent female agency. The reclamation of Rhiannon's stolen mythic power of fertility, expressed via Pryn's reconnection with primal life-forces in nature, culminates in divine parthenogenesis; affording a feminist representation of a female creatrix imbued with the sovereign power of nature. The reclamation of the Morrígan's powers of prophecy

and tutelary protection brought wisdom, insight and generosity to the character of Erin Morrigan, while her death bringing powers conferred on Erin the formidable agency of the psychopomp.

Using tropes of the mythic Otherworld, I was able to suggest a metaphysical fictional space that helps to dramatise the inner life of characters. In *Deer Woman Child,* Pryn's dreams and spiritual flights symbolise her inner transformation. Representing supernatural figures from the Otherworld, such as female deities embodied by the deer, the mare and Pryn's therianthropic divine child, created numinous moments. The strategy of depicting Otherworldly creatures impacts the narrative mode, shifting from realism towards fantastic genres. These encounters require careful integration as they may potentially disrupt the realism of the narrative. Pryn's deer-baby shifts the naturalism into magic-realism, creating a fairytale-like ending. This deliberately disrupts realism, and undercuts essentialist themes to provide an uplifting denouement. In *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan,* Erin's Otherworldly visions, nightmares, and intrusive memories dramatise her internal conflict. However, Erin's supernatural visitations from the spirits of the dead shifted the narrative beyond psychological drama towards horror, creating a very different set of expectations. I excised the supernatural elements to focus on Erin's psychological journey. Otherworldly tropes were more successful at representing Erin's unconscious psyche via dreams, nightmares and hallucinations, evoking a metaphysical interior space and elevating an otherwise realistic narrative to a spiritual journey. Erin's visions could be seen as the result of her opium use and symptomatic of post-traumatic stress disorder and would not disrupt the realism of the narrative. But abject elements of the archetype risked demonising the character and I knew that when making the film I would need to control cinematic language to encourage empathy, establishing an intimate, compassionate feminist gaze.

CHAPTER 5: From Script to Screen - *Deer Woman Child*

This chapter explores my creative work as a director realising my first film *Deer Woman Child.*[284] I reflect on the third phase of my methodology for feminised mythography – bringing my adaptation to screen – discussing the formal and aesthetic elements of filmmaking, and the collaborative process of working with performers and crew. The considerations driving this phase of my research are how mythic archetypes inform character embodiment; how divine powers allow for expressions of female potency and agency; and how the imagery and symbolism of the mythic Otherworld can be evoked to create a metaphysical fictional space for a woman's spiritual journey. I consider the problematic essentialist themes in Rhiannon's story and discuss the creative choices I made as a feminist director to subvert these in my film adaptation.

The film can be viewed here: *Deer Woman Child* Film

Password: Thistle

Illustrations can be accessed here: Film Stills Figures 1 - 53

Embodying mythic archetypes

Mythic archetypes can be embodied through casting, costume and performance. The character of Pryn evokes three mythic archetypes: Modron, Deer Woman and Divine Queen. I cast Keeley Forsyth, a performer with a wide emotional range and capacity to embody these characteristics alongside Pryn's emotional rawness, fragility and independence. Forsyth trained as a dancer and works with movement, posture and gesture to express emotional and psychological states. I worked with Forsyth to incorporate each archetype in the different phases of Pryn's story, exploring how these archetypes allowed for expressions of female agency. I planned the shooting schedule to take place over a whole year to capture the changing seasons, which meant that Forsyth could develop her character over time.

In the first phase of Pryn's journey, Forsyth embodies the Modron archetype. I wanted to show Pryn as a grieving woman unconcerned with presenting herself as an object of the male gaze. Forsyth wore no make-up, tied back her hair and allowed her chapped lips and bitten down nails to

[284] *Deer Woman Child*, dir. by Gabrielle Russell, (Green Film Production and Make Believe Films 2022)

become part of her characterisation as depicted in Fig. 1: Pryn in winter. As Pryn moves from grief and exhaustion to rejuvenation her emotional recovery is reflected by changes in Forsyth's physical appearance. Forsyth changed her hairstyle from a short dyed 'bob', letting it grow out and wearing it loose as depicted in Fig. 2: Pryn in early summer.

The work of characterisation is not only a collaboration with cast, but also with a production designer, choosing the right costumes to convey the history of a character. I worked with Jane Morton who brought together a range of options to reflect Pryn's transformation from the grieving Modron archetype toward rejuvenation as Divine Queen. Initially, as Modron, Pryn wears a combination of a few practical articles designed for working outdoors: jeans, boots, winter sweater, woollen hat, scarf and sheepskin jacket, in a muted autumnal palette reflecting the fallen leaves, fallow meadows and grey skies of winter as depicted in Fig.3: Pryn's winter costume.

I directed Forsyth to use the Modron archetype to inform her performance developing an ascetic, stoic character who contains her emotions in silence. In her Modron stage, Pryn hardly speaks, even when prompted by questions from other characters. She never acts socially to please, presenting a recalcitrant character. As Patrick questions her about the farm she bluntly conveys her intention to live alone and limits her dialogue to the minimum necessary for communication of her essential needs. Later she remains silent and watchful as the Blacksmith talks about the mare; and she pointedly ignores the Postman's enquiries. Silence is not always a sign of agency in female characters, as Ella Finer notes ''Having a Voice' – the familiar sonic metaphor for having agency to act and represent oneself – was reserved for only some, not all women.'[285] Mary Beard has revealed the 'deeply embedded' historical mechanisms that silence female speech from ancient history to the present day.[286] Bassil-Morozow concurs that often in films 'speaking is a decidedly agentic activity',[287] but in this case Pryn embodies agency through her *choice* of silence. In her deep state of loss there is simply nothing more to say. She *can* speak but does so only when she wants to. In this way, Pryn's silent withdrawal is both an expression of grief and an act of resistance.

Forsyth filled this silence with agency, expressing the contained determination, anger and resilience of the Modron. In desperation she walks miles across bleak moorlands, and in fury she

---

285 Ella Finer, 'Feminism and Sound', in *Sound and Literature*, ed. by Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 315–333, p. 315.

286 Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (London: Profile Books, 2018), p.8.

287 Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television,* p. 27.

chops wood with an axe. The Modron's capacity for survival is embodied as she hefts buckets of water from a natural spring and deftly fires a shotgun, activities that are often the preserve of male characters. But Pryn is not a masculinised survivalist figure, she is modelled on the archetypal Mother who despite grief, remains steadfast, protecting and honouring other beings who share her world. Forsyth expresses this agency through her care of the sheep and chickens on the farm and her rescue of the frightened mare during a thunderstorm.

In the early part of the story, I weave in glimpses of the Divine Queen archetype to suggest the potential for Pryn's recovery. These are expressed through the symbolic use of the archetype's totem animal the white mare. When Pryn arrives at her grandmother's farm she encounters the white mare standing in the field watching her. I filmed the mare at twilight to enable it to glow against the darkening landscape like an Otherworldly being, as depicted in Fig. 4: The White Mare. Their relationship is developed through several scenes. Initially wary of each other they gradually gain trust, and as their affinity develops become aligned, depicted through their closer proximity. After Pryn rescues the mare from the thunderstorm, she brings her face closes to the mare's, breathing in synchrony. I captured this moment in an intimate close-up, as depicted in Fig. 5: Pryn and the Mare. Pryn sleeps in the stable next to the watchful mare and thereafter they are often in each other's company. Pryn's growing association with the mare symbolises her movement towards the Divine Queen archetype.[288]

To represent Pryn's spiritual journey of individuation I show her retreat into an internal world, inside the darkness of her grandmother's house during the winter, bringing her into a reflective confrontation with her old Self through use of mirroring images. Pryn discovers her portrait in one of her grandmother's sketchbooks and recognising herself, touches the paper as though trying to reach something she has lost. (Fig. 6: Portrait). After she receives a letter from her husband asking for a divorce, Pryn confronts her image in the mirror as depicted in Fig. 7: Pryn reflected in mirror, revealing her broken state at the moment of the collapse of her ego. The next time Pryn regards herself in the mirror, she observes changes in her body and makes contact with herself by stroking the skin of her expanding belly as depicted in Fig. 8: Pryn observes her body. After receiving news of

[288] A note on working ethically with animals: to reduce stress and enable the capture of desired 'performances' we adopted ethical filming strategies such as familiarisation. The White Mare in the film was a horse called 'Dolly' whose owner gave permission to Sarah Corbett to include her in the film. Dolly knows Corbett well as she takes care of her daily. During production, Corbett worked with Dolly, acting as her handler so that Dolly was always closely supervised and safe. We filmed Dolly's scenes in the location where she lives to help her feel safe and scheduled scenes in story order over a number of dates so that our frequent visits enabled Dolly to become familiar and trusting of Forsyth (and the crew) and consequently their relationship appears more familiar as the story unfolds.

the pregnancy Pryn begins to rebuild her sense of Self, symbolised by a new reflection in the tiny mirror of a music box in which a fragment of her eye is reflected, as depicted in Fig. 9: Pryn's eye. As Pryn meets her own gaze, the mirror reflects her gaze into the camera, breaking the fourth wall and amplifying the emergence of this newly visible Self. The refrain of the music box is taken into the score and developed into a new theme by composer Birger Clausen as Pryn enters the next stage of her recovery.

Pryn's embodiment of the Modron archetype is most evident from when she receives the letter from her husband, until her suicide attempt. During this sequence there is no dialogue, and I directed Forsyth to express Pryn's emotional state physically over a series of shots that convey her deepening crisis. As Pryn reads the letter a tight close-up shot of Forsyth's face focuses on the micromovements of her performance. This shot is rim lit from one side so that only the edge of her face is visible, focussing attention on her eyes, cheek and mouth as depicted in Fig. 10: Pryn reading the letter. Forsyth sets her jaw showing tension, her face twitches as she scans the page, she makes an intake of breath, and tenses as she stares at the page. She exhales, closes her eyes for a long moment, then her gaze drifts anxiously. In the following shot her hand is shaking as she places the letter on the table. Next, Pryn is in her darkening bedroom gazing towards the window as depicted in Fig. 11: Sitting alone. Forsyth maintains a quiet stillness as though lost in thought, her shoulders slumped, her spine curved. In the next shot she regards her reflection in a mirror, the lighting emphasising dark circles under her eyes, as she focuses on the pendant around her neck, scratching it with her thumbnail. Confronting her reflection, her eyes widen to convey despair as depicted in Fig. 7: Pryn reflected in mirror. I refrained from using a musical score over these shots, allowing Forsyth's performance and the mise en scène to convey Pryn's emotions.

Music is withheld throughout the following scene as Pryn enters the forest intending to end her life. Here I directed Forsyth to maintain the Modron's quiet determination, telling her that Pryn chose this place so that she would never be found. Forsyth's calm performance communicates Pryn's agency and resolve as depicted in Fig. 12: Pryn attempting suicide. As Pryn is about to pull the trigger she is startled by a deer foraging in the frozen landscape. Snow begins to fall, and a tentative piano refrain begins, conveying a sense of hope as Pryn responds to the presence of the deer. Forsyth releases the tension in her body and puts down the gun.

The deer approaches Pryn and stands close by, as depicted in Fig. 13: The Deer watches Pryn. Its eye becomes a mirror in which Pryn is reflected as depicted in Fig. 14: The Deer's eye. This shot creates a visual connection between Pryn and the deer as she is contained in silhouette within its eye. I suggested to Forsyth that Pryn recognises the deer as a creature akin to herself – a lone female

surviving in the face of extreme hardship – and is awakened to her own capacity for endurance. The encounter seems to Pryn a divine intervention from the Otherworld through which she is saved. Forsyth's performance suggests this awakening depicted in Fig. 15 Pryn's encounter with the deer. As Pryn stands and lifts her gaze towards the deer, the Modron's loss is still visible in her eyes, but she is no longer overwhelmed by her grief.[289]

The deer is a totemic animal representing the archetypal Deer Woman and this encounter initiates a new phase of Pryn's spiritual journey. Morton, incorporated imagery of the totem when Pryn returns to her grandmother's house, as depicted in: Fig. 16: Deer ornament, Fig. 17: Deer embroidery, and Fig. 18: Headless deer ornament; captured in a sequence of close ups as Pryn sketches a small deer antler (see Fig. 19: Antler sketch). After her encounter with the deer, Pryn's attitude changes and she becomes more concerned with restoring, renewing and redefining herself. To embody this shift, Forsyth softens her posture and communication style. When Patrick helps to fix the car, he remarks that she has changed and teases her about finding a man; Pryn laughs and replies in a friendly, joking manner. She becomes more outward looking, engaging with the world around her and notices the beauty of nature as winter turns to spring, picking berries and observing birds as depicted in Fig. 20: Pryn picks berries.

A new sovereign agency emerges as Pryn transitions away from the Modron and towards the Divine Queen archetype. Suspecting she might be pregnant she drives herself to a clinic, venturing into the wider world. Cinematographer Tunji Akinsehinwa used a drone to create a euphoric feeling of lift-off as Pryn drives from the mountain towards a town, giving a bird's eye view over the land as depicted in Fig. 21: Pryn driving into town. This is the first time we used an elevated view of the landscape to visually symbolise Pryn's spiritual elevation as her story enters a new chapter. Following the confirmation of her pregnancy, Pryn speaks with confidence to the midwife and nurses who tend her. She reverts to her maiden name, indicating that she has stepped outside the patriarchal marriage that once defined her.

Once Pryn's pregnancy is established, I directed Forsyth to embody the restored Divine Queen, changing her appearance as the season turns from winter to spring. Forsyth softens her posture, her face uplifted, her limbs moving fluidly, and her gestures become graceful. Pryn leaves behind her practical outerwear, adopting vintage dresses, blouses and skirts that belonged to her

[289] Note on working ethically with animals: we filmed the scene with a tame female deer in Fife, Scotland, at the home of John Fletcher, a veterinarian and his 30-year-old deer 'Thistle'. Thistle had been hand-reared and was living out her retirement in her own reserve, near Fletcher's deer farm. She was very relaxed and confident around our small crew, and Fletcher supervised Thistle himself so that she was attended and safely managed.

grandmother. Morton introduces softer shapes and layered materials as Pryn's colour palette shifts to paler tones of cream and rose. By midsummer Pryn wears a loose white cotton dress as a nightdress, and as her pregnancy advances, she wears it in the meadow, mirroring the white mare and suggesting a bride of nature. In an embodiment of the emerging Divine Queen archetype Pryn stands alongside the mare in the meadow at sunset, her pregnant belly pronounced, a contemporary visualisation of the mythic mare goddess as depicted in Fig. 22: Pryn with the white mare.

Pryn's pregnancy causes behavioural changes and she walks barefoot into the forest at night as depicted in Fig. 23: Pryn enters forest. I asked Forsyth to consider these scenes as altered states of reality where Pryn has entered the Otherworld. To physically embody the Deer Woman archetype, I directed Forsyth to emulate the movements and quick responses of a deer, reacting to sounds and hiding in the ferns as depicted in Fig. 24: Pryn standing in ferns. Forsyth adjusts her physical performance, moving stealthily and turning her head at the call of night creatures. She appears more instinctive and alert, imbued with the present-tense consciousness of a wild deer. This brings a transhuman agency to Pryn's character as she becomes increasingly immersed in and aligned with wild nature. Transhuman agency is a theme explored in Marielle Heller's film *Nightbitch,* which also associates motherhood with turning into an animal.[290]

Pryn's Otherworldly deer-baby is the final archetype depicted in the film. This magical creature, appearing towards the end of an otherwise apparently realist film, must be convincing if it is to achieve the archetype's numinous affect. As Waddell reminds us 'The archetype, as a glance at the history of religious phenomena will show, has a characteristically numinous effect, so that the subject is gripped by it as though by an instinct.'[291] Using a lifelike 'Reborn' baby model, Morton added realistic deer ears, and I created its legs using a polystyrene taxidermy form with fun fur and Fimo hooves. With the help of 'Reborn artist' Linda Soulsby who painted the model to give a life-like appearance, we created a deer-baby which, when carefully intercut with shots of a real baby, is both beautiful and satisfactorily convincing as a magical creature.

---

[290] *Nightbitch,* dir. by Marielle Heller (USA: Searchlight Pictures, 2024). Amy Adams plays a woman known only as 'Mother' who, in the process of raising her little boy, finds herself turning into a dog. Like Pryn, she dreams of being an animal, running in a pack with other dogs and killing small mammals in her neighbourhood at night. She notices changes in her body such as longer canine teeth, fur-like body hair and adopts dog-like behaviours in her waking life.

[291] Waddell, p. 14.

Resisting patriarchal abjection of the parthenogenic mother

Cinematic depictions of pregnancy and birth often treat the female body as a site of uncanny transformation associating childbirth with horror.[292] Films such as *Village of the Damned, Rosemary's Baby*, *The Stranger Within, Sharon's Baby, Alien, Eraserhead, The Brood, The Fly, and The Demon Seed* express deep anxieties about human gestation and birth.[293] Kelly Oliver points out how these representations depict the foetus as a 'hostile otherworldly invader' and 'resonate with Simone de Beauviour's description of pregnancy as possession'.[294] Invasive pregnancy and transformation of the mother's consciousness is a theme that continues to find cinematic expression in the horror genre, most recently with *Shelley, Prevenge, Immaculate* and *The First Omen* depicting mothers-to-be under the influence of evil, monstrous or demonic foetuses.[295]

The hybrid child is often presented as an abject creature, much analysed by feminists as expressive of anxieties about pregnancy and birth. Creed shows how horror films represent the reproductive function of the female body as abject.[296] Creed argues that 'the central ideological project of the popular horror film (is) purification of the abject […] A form of modern defilement rite, the horror film works to separate out the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability, particularly the mother and all that her universe signifies.'[297] Creed uses Kristeva's concept of abjection, to illuminate this process. She describes a key moment enacted in the infant psyche during

---

[292] Kelly Oliver, 'Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down', in *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Mothering,* ed. by Sarah LaChance Adams and Caroline R. Lundquist (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 241-262, p. 245. Oliver relates how during the 1940s and 1950s by the Hayes Production Code resulted in the repression of representations of maternity, but by the 1960s and 1970s horrific representations of pregnancy began to emerge.

[293] *Village of the Damned,* dir. by Wolf Rilla (USA /UK: Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1960); *Rosemary's Baby,* dir. by Roman Polanski (USA: Paramount, 1968); *The Stranger Within*, dir. by Lee Philips (USA: ABC, 1974); *Sharon's Baby*, dir. by Peter Sasdy (UK: Fox-Rank, 1975); *Alien,* dir. by Ridley Scott (USA: 20th Century Fox, 1979); *Eraserhead,* dir. by David Lynch (USA: Libra Films, 1977); *The Brood,* dir. by David Cronenberg (Canada: New World Pictures, 1979); *The Fly,* dir. by David Cronenberg (USA: 20th Century Fox,1986); *The Demon Seed,* dir. by Donald Cammel (USA /UK: Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1977).

[294] Oliver, p. 247.

[295] *Shelley*, dir. by Ali Abassi (Denmark: Indie Sales, 2016); *Prevenge,* dir. by Alice Lowe (UK: Kaleidoscope, 2016); *Immaculate,* dir. by Michael Mohan (USA: Neon, 2024); *The First Omen,* dir. by Arkasha Stevenson (USA: 20th Century Studios, 2024).

[296] Creed, Barbara, 'Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen* 27:1 (1986), 44-71, <https://academic.oup.com/screen/article-abstract/27/1/44/1630470?redirectedFrom=fulltext> [accessed 14 April 2023], p. 55.

[297] Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous Feminine', p. 53.

the pre-verbal stage of development in which the partially formed subject separates itself from the mother and 'rejects her for the father who represents the symbolic order'.[298] Creed extends Kristeva's concept beyond the pre-oedipal maternal figure, and posits the abjection of 'an even more archaic maternal figure' of mythological narratives – 'the generative parthenogenic mother – that ancient archaic figure who gives birth to all living things' and 'exists in the mythology of all human cultures as the Mother Goddess who alone created the heavens and earth.'[299] Creed argues that in patriarchal ideology, this 'parthenogenic archaic mother' defined as 'the mother as the origin of all life,' is perceived as abject and is represented in cinema as the 'monstrous feminine'.[300]

The parthenogenic mother in *Deer Woman Child* finds a contrasting feminist expression. Although Pryn's pregnancy affects a profound transformation and her deer-baby is non-human, the film does not follow the patriarchal 'monstrous feminine' abjection of the archaic mother. Instead, the metaphors invoked by Pryn's pregnancy and the birth of her child are positively transformative, and symbolic of rebirth. Pryn gives birth to her child alone in the meadow, a powerful agentic action as the Deer Woman archetype. Forsyth's performance evokes the Deer Woman archetype through the manner and speed of the delivery, the labour is painful but not overwhelming, and the birth is relatively swift. As Pryn moves through the meadow bending in pain she grasps the long grass in an almost four-legged deer-like posture. She drops to her knees and gives birth on all fours as depicted in Fig. 25: Pryn gives birth in the meadow. The baby is revealed only briefly during the birth scene, (see Fig. 26: The birth of the Divine Child) and the birth is not depicted as abject or bloody. The baby is not a frightening monster, rather the opposite. In an interideological image at the end of the film, Pryn joyfully embraces her *divine girl-child* in the mare's stable in a feminist reconfiguration of the Christian nativity as depicted in Fig. 27: Pryn with baby in stable.

The Otherworld as a metaphysical fictional space

In the folkloric tradition, the Otherworld is a parallel reality where divine beings and powerful forces reside, accessed through liminal sites in the landscape. The mythic landscape is a metaphysical space

---

298 Creed, p. 45; Creed is summarising Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.

299 Creed, pp. 58-59.

300 Ibid., p. 55.

that operates in a magical relationship to human characters. In *Deer Woman Child*, I imbued the landscape with Otherworldly elements to suggest a metaphysical fictional space for Pryn's spiritual journey. Incorporating the landscape into Pryn's story also evokes her sovereignty correspondence with Epona. By creating an integral connection between Pryn and the land, I suggest that Pryn's connection with Otherworldly forces in the landscape is what stimulates the recovery of her sovereign Self.

To depict the mythic Otherworld, I chose archetypal settings such as mountains, forests, lakes, waterfalls, and pools. Pryn's mountain farm is a composite of several locations in Cumbria, Scotland and West Yorkshire combining many archetypal features in one fictional place, infusing Pryn's environment with mythical imagery. Mountains and lakes are used at the beginning of the film to suggest the extremity and depth of Pryn's spiritual journey. The moorlands and forests are filmed in mist and twilight, creating a liminal environment suggesting a threshold to the Otherworld. I wanted the landscape to provide a metaphor for Pryn's healing through seasonal changes from winter to summer, so I visited locations several times to capture different seasons and weather conditions so that the land reflects Pryn's changing state of mind and transformation.

Using the landscape and weather metaphorically allowed me to create a visual language to evoke Pryn's inner life. At the start of the film, Pryn is surrounded by low cloud and has a limited vision of her world, just as she is clouded by grief. The opening sequence of shots show mist flowing over the mountains and lake (see Fig. 28: Opening sequence), and when Pryn first appears she emerges out of the mist, a lonely figure lost in a vast landscape (see Fig. 29: Pryn enters the story). A sheer granite mountain face (Fig. 30: Mountain face), provides a symbol for the difficult struggle ahead. Its treacherous slope and invisible summit obscured by mist and rain suggest jeopardy. Halfway through the film I use a similar shot of the same mountain (see Fig. 31: Mountain summit), but now the summit is visible, symbolising that clarity is being achieved. The clear sky contains a half-moon, a symbol of progression towards fullness, indicating that a new cycle is in process. Once Pryn's equilibrium is recovered, the landscape becomes vibrant and colourful, and just before Pryn goes into labour the sunlit lake and mountains (Fig. 32: Mountains at sunrise) resonate with powerful vibrations, suggested by the singing bowls in Clausen's musical score.

The landscape also provides 'mood cues' that prepare the viewer for a particular feeling or emotional state. I deployed Greg Smith's concept of 'mood cues' to elicit emotional responses by stimulating the brain's limbic system to anticipate emotions.[301] He explains that 'cues need not be

[301] Greg M. Smith, 'Local Emotions, Global Moods, and Film Structure', in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion,* eds. Carl Pantinga and Greg M. Smith, (USA: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 103-126.

linked to representations of human actors in any strong way. Emotional associations provided by music, mise en scène elements, colour, sound and lighting are crucial to filmic emotions'. In this way, a filmmaker can create and sustain mood via associations.[302] Smith writes 'a gray rainy day, a slouched posture, a frown, an oboe playing in a minor key, all associated with sadness […] can cue us to experience and express an emotion'.[303] Applying Smith's associative model enables the filmmaker to enhance the affective power of images to provoke an emotional response.

I used landscapes and weather elements as mood cues throughout, such as in Fig. 33: Forest in rain, a foreboding image which appears early in the film as Pryn is experiencing isolation and loneliness. During the winter, Pryn exists in a state of withdrawal, as she separates herself from the rest of the world. She is unable to see her way through her grief, and mist and rain obscure the landscape. I used the glass of the windows as a metaphoric veil and asked cinematographer Akinsehinwa to set the camera exposure for the exteriors whenever Pryn is near a window, so that the interior becomes darker and Pryn is surrounded by deep shadows as depicted in Fig. 34: Pryn at window, and Fig.11: Sitting alone. The dark interiors within which Pryn resides represent the state of mind of the grieving Modron. But after Pryn's encounter with the deer, the landscape takes on a new aspect and dawn brings clear skies and sunlight as depicted in Fig. 35: New dawn. As Pryn recovers she begins to gain clarity, symbolised in the wider view over the landscape in Fig. 36: New horizon, where atmospheric conditions bring a brighter Otherworld into sight. In this way, I used elements of Pryn's environment to express her emotions through symbolic locations and atmospheric conditions that evoked sympathetic feelings.

Water imagery symbolises Pryn's reconnection with the life force in nature as she gravitates to pools and waterfalls, where she enters the Otherworld. Associated with liminal sites in the folk tradition, water is symbolic of mutability as a changeable element that takes on various forms in different conditions. I used water as a metaphor to evoke Pryn's emotional states: the rain and mist suggest her grief; during her suicide attempt she kneels beside a frozen pool an expression of her despair and entrapment; after her encounter with the deer the ice begins to melt. Pryn's movement toward spiritual healing is symbolised by moving water, beginning with a wide shot of a flowing river as depicted in Fig. 37: River in thaw. This image is accompanied by the cry of a buzzard suggesting new feeling of freedom and spaciousness. Walking upstream, Pryn discovers a large waterfall and stands enraptured, as depicted in Fig. 38: Pryn at waterfall, a moment sound designer Frankie

---

302 Ibid., p. 126.

303 Ibid., p. 110.

Maiden emphasised by amplifying the torrent of water in surround sound to convey the rigour of Pryn's spiritual cleansing.

I also use water to symbolise Pryn's contact with divine forces of the Otherworld. When Pryn revisits the waterfall after learning of her pregnancy, she experiences a healing communion with nature. Forsyth lifts her face to the light in a state of rapture, gazing up at the sky, a symbolic reawakening as depicted in Fig. 39: Pryn enraptured. In Fig. 40: Pryn dips her toes into the pool, and in the next shot we see her foot under the surface of the water, suggesting unseen forces watching her (see Fig. 41: Pryn's foot underwater). The sequence suggests that Pryn is unknowingly making a connection, a breakthrough moment highlighted by Clausen's mysterious score. When Pryn returns to the waterfall she immerses herself (as depicted in Fig. 42: Pryn swimming) and afterwards lies on a rock warming in the sun. Water dances in the sunlight creating a delightful luminescence, emphasised by Akinsehinwa's use of a star filter. Pryn experiences a communion with nature represented by a cross-dissolve that merges a close-up of her face (see Fig. 43: Pryn lying on a rock) with a shot of the forest (see Fig. 44: Cross dissolve). To enhance this moment of communion, Akinsehinwa deployed a drone to lift the camera above the forest, suggesting Pryn's spiritual ascent (see Fig. 45: Flying over the forest). The water imagery is reiterated in a dream scene just before Pryn gives birth to her Divine Child / Self. Pryn is suspended in the depths of the pool like an unborn child, breaking the surface as her own water's break, (see Fig. 46: Pryn's Rebirth).

I depict the landscape as a living consciousness and imbue it with Otherworldly animism. I captured shots that linger on natural features where subtle movements suggest hidden forces. Slow motion waves move the surface of the lake (see Fig. 47: Lake at night) combined with Clausen's musical score, imply powerful forces beneath. Wind moves through trees casting shadows of leaves over rock, giving the stone illusory movement (see Fig. 48: Shadows over rock), and the sun bursts from behind a cloud, foreshadowing good news about the fate of Pryn's baby (see Fig. 49: Sunburst). These shots represent the landscape as a living entity animated by divine agency.

I also used Otherwordly imagery to create an *internal* metaphysical space for Pryn's spiritual journey. Early in the film I used shots of the landscape at night, such as the lake or the desolate moorland (as depicted in Fig. 50: Night Landscape), to suggest that Pryn is thinking about the places she has been through, invoking the powerful presence of the land and its impact on Pryn's psyche. But the most subjective depiction of the Otherworld comes through Pryn's dreams and altered states. These occur throughout the film and increase after her encounter with the deer. When Pryn dreams of running in the forest at night, I use point-of-view shots giving the impression that she is seeing the forest through a deer's eyes. As her pregnancy develops Pryn's dreams become more

lucid until she sleepwalks into the forest at night, barefoot in her nightgown (as depicted in Fig. 51: Forest night walking). Pryn's consciousness shifts into an altered state as she inhabits the Otherworld, as depicted in Fig. 52: Pryn in forest at night.

In folktales the forest is a site of entry to the Otherworld, and these nighttime visits indicate Pryn's increasing engagement with mystical forces as she gains agency in both the apparent world and the Otherworld. Editor Lia Hayes depicted this dual agency visually using cross dissolves, so that as Pryn walks through the forest she splits into two versions of herself. Her body takes on a ghostly semi-transparency in a sequence of images that suggest merging (as depicted in Fig. 53: Pryn merging). According to Joseph Campbell the 'Master of Two Worlds' stage in the Hero's Journey represents the hero's ability to integrate their newfound wisdom and experiences from the special world into their ordinary life.[304] This stage signifies a profound transformation where the hero transcends the limitations of their initial existence and becomes a balanced individual capable of navigating both the familiar and the extraordinary. At this point in the film Pryn becomes a walker between worlds – a mistress of two worlds.

Conclusion

Deer Woman Child reclaims Rhiannon's stolen mythic divine powers of fertility and sovereignty via the restoration of Pryn's fertility and sovereign Self. Investing Pryn with the divine agency of the mythic creatrix created a feminist representation of a culturally supressed archetype; the parthenogenic archaic mother. My reenvisioning refused the patriarchal abjection of this figure and presented a positive representation of divine maternal agency. This approach created imagery of the divine feminine, an idea popularised during the second wave of feminism that continues to inspire the spiritual feminist ideologies of contemporary post-secular feminist movements.[305] Restoring Rhiannon's mythic powers of sovereignty through her primary connection with the land provides a metaphor of Pryn's healing and invests Pryn with a sovereign agency with which she defines her new Self. Pryn develops the ability to move between worlds, giving her heroic status. Investing the landscape with tropes of the Otherworld provided a symbolic cinematic language creating a metaphysical space for Pryn's spiritual journey. Settings such as mountains, forests, lakes, waterfalls

---

304 Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, pp. 229–237.

305 I discuss post-secular feminist spirituality movements and my positionality regarding these in Chapter 2.

infused Pryn's environment with numinosity. Using imagery of mutable and liminal natural phenomena I was able to suggest divine forces at work in the natural environment. This imbued the landscape with an animistic consciousness that elevates the natural environment to the status of a living entity with its own agency that generates Pryn's transformation.

Using archetypes to map stages in Pryn's spiritual journey helped me to direct shifts in the character's internal psychological development. Collaborating with Forsyth as a performer and Morton as production designer we created an embodiment of the Mare Goddess, the Modron and Deer Woman archetypes, through a combination of performance, costume, props, and the depiction of totem animals. The use of archetypes enriched the process of characterisation, informing Forsyth's performances with clearly delineated behaviours at each stage. This created a complex female character who moves through different psychological states on her journey of individuation. I found that by depicting totem animals, archetypes became more recognisable, providing a powerful resonance due to their numinosity. Pryn's human-animal confluence when embodying the Deer Woman archetype amplified this affect, and conferred an unusual transhuman agency, creating an enigmatic representation of transhuman consciousness. I became curious to discover whether the potency of archetypal affect might be enhanced by use of more recognisable mythic archetypes. This is why in my next film, I chose to explore the Morrígan, a notorious character from the Irish tradition.

CHAPTER 6: From Script to Screen - *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan*

In this chapter I reflect on my creative practice as director when bringing *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* to screen and configuring a feminist reenvisioning of the Morrígan. I consider the implications of investing all the Morrígan's mythic powers in the character Erin Morrigan, and why evoking violent articulations of female agency presented challenges to feminist representations of women on screen. I discuss the filmmaking strategies I developed to manage this ambiguous and complex archetype, including character embodiment; countering the patriarchal valorisation of violence by depicting its impact on Erin and the Boy; and using cinematic language to convey Erin's spiritual journey compassionately.

The film can be viewed here: https://vimeo.com/1056810977 Password: Mordred

Illustrations can be accessed here: Film Stills Figures 1-52

Configuring a feminist 'Phantom Queen'

A key strategy of my approach to adaptation had been to restore all the powers of the mythic archetype, while exploring the agency afforded by these. The Morrígan presented a problematic model for a feminist mythography as embodying all aspects of the Morrígan necessitated violent expressions of female agency. As a feminist, I wanted to avoid perpetuating the valorisation of violence. Postfeminist valorisations of violent femininities have emerged in popular action and fantasy cinema. Rikke Schubart highlights as problematic these images of women's 'empowerment' based on their capacity for violence.[306] In making the film it was important to disrupt the connection between violence and empowerment.

Another consideration when realising this film was the contemporary relevance of the narrative. Erin Morrigan embodies the death-bringer aspect of the archetype in her role as a high-

[306] Rikke Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in Popular Cinema, 1970 – 2006,* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2007).

ranking member of an IRA unit tasked with eliminating suspected informers. My adaptation was not only informed by similar historical figures and occurrences in the period of The Troubles, but by the continuing incidence of violent dissident action in Northern Ireland, raising ethical questions about the film's representation of real-life events. As director, I felt a great responsibility in bringing this archetype to screen, navigating the ethics of representing such a controversial figure. Depicting a female combatant engaged in violent political warfare raised fundamental questions about what constitutes a feminist character and a feminist film. How could I evoke the disruptive expressions of female agency this archetype affords while challenging the heteropatriarchal function of the mythic war goddess? In writing the screenplay, I had tried to manage these concerns by presenting Erin Morrigan as a dying woman whose final reckoning examines the personal cost of a life lived as a warrior. The story problematised Erin's complicity in militarised violence so that her actions were not condoned but questioned, and their traumatic consequences were revealed through depicting a wrecked character riven by internal conflict. Here I will discuss the interideological strategies I used to subvert the patriarchal themes in the mythic narrative when directing the film.

Erin might be seen as complex and ambivalent figure akin to an anti-heroine. Anti-heroes are described by D. A. Rico and colleagues as uncertain characters 'with a high degree of internal conflict', who 'have lived disastrous or violent experiences'.[307] Vogler defines them as 'flawed Heroes who never overcome their inner demons and are brought down and destroyed by them',[308] and F. J. Gil and F. Garcia argue that the anti-hero character 'executes evil in his quest for good', and is 'in constant questioning and conflict with the evil that resides within him'.[309] Alfonso Freire Sánchez argues that the anti-hero(ine) has their own code of ethics and acts outside the law.[310] Sánchez's analysis characterises the anti-hero(ine) as an intelligent, socially detached or solitary character with a deep-rooted internal conflict, whose methods are brutal and unorthodox, and who is constantly evolving and learning by error. These characters are often 'betrayed or underestimated by their

---

[307] D. A. Rico, J.A. Galindo, E. Maya, & R.F. Guerrero, 'The Graphic Novel's Dark Hero and Antihero: Ethical Models for the Adolescents in Contemporary Complexity', *Eureka Revista de Investigación Científica en Psicología* 16 (2019), 137-158, p. 11. < https://psicoeureka.com.py/publicacion/16-2/articulo/18> [accessed 10 August 2025].

[308] Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey,* p. 78-79.

[309] F. J. Gil and F. Garcia, 'Clear Hero and Dark Hero in the Cinematographic Narration,' *Área Abierta* 16.3 (2016), 1-16.

[310] Alfonso Freire Sánchez, 'The concept of anti-hero or anti-heroine in contemporary audiovisual transmedia' *Cuadernos.info,* 52 (2022), 246-265, p. 255. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.52.34771> [accessed 25 August 2025].

opponents' yet nevertheless possess the fortitude to 'resist adverse situations, suffering and loss'.[311] They have a complex redemption arc, are often motivated by revenge; have dysfunctional behaviours, disorders and addictions; and are unpredictable.[312]

There has been a recent proliferation on film and television of portrayals of complex anti-heroines considered both feminist and empathetic. H. L. Eklund argues that these morally ambiguous figures dismantle traditional perceptions of femininity, allowing characters to, 'transcend stereotypes', and 'challenging viewers to confront their own perceptions of morality, power and femininity'.[313] Thalia R. Ellington, sees these as 'complex morally ambiguous figures […] that challenge the binary understanding of gender'.[314] By 'reclaiming their agency and positioning themselves as active subjects rather than passive objects', they drive the narrative, defy victimisation and present women as violent, ruthless, and determined.[315] She argues that these characters offer a broader definition of strength as coexisting with vulnerability, encompassing resourcefulness, resilience, and protective and nurturing attributes. Audiences familiar with such figures might appreciate Erin's complexity as an anti-heroine and empathise with her despite her violent acts, but I remained concerned that I had created a monstrous character.

In her recent reflections about monstrous feminine figures in cinema, Creed recognises that female characters who were 'Portrayed in the films […] as terrifying yet subversive', had many feminist fans, writing 'Although monstrous, these so-called abject female figures […] were truly sympathetic and several like 'Carrie', became feminist icons.'[316] According to Creed many viewers found such characters empowering and they have since taken centre stage in the work of feminist filmmakers. Creed argues that for feminists, 'Monstrosity itself is potentially liberating' and heralds a 'Feminist New Wave' of filmmakers who have re-configured the monstrous feminine as an

---

311 Ibid., p. 257.

312 Ibid., pp. 259-261.

313 H.L. Eklund, 'The Construction of Female Anti-Hero Identities Analysing the Gender Roles of Eve and Villanelle in *Killing Eve', Paradigm Academic Press Studies in Social Sciences & Humanities* 3.11 (2024), 20-24, pp. 20-21.

314 Thalia R. Ellington, 'Subverting Gender Norms: The Role of Female Anti-Heroes in Modern Action Films', *Journal of Research in Social Science and Humanities* 3.8 (2024), 18-25, p. 20.

315 Ibid., p. 23.

316 Barbara Creed, *Return of the Monstrous Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2022), p. 9.

'empowering concept' and a 'central unifying figure in all Feminist New Wave films'. These are 'transformative characters' who 'challenge patriarchal definitions of what constitutes a proper feminine role' and whose 'oppositional stance […] has transformed into one of revolt'.[317] Erin Morrigan can be seen as a monstrous feminine character as Creed describes it:

> As she undertakes her personal journey into the dark night of abjection, she comes to realise that her only option is revolt. In acting against the patriarchal order she is seen by its representatives as abject – even a terrorist – but as Kristeva argues, there can be grandeur in such revolt. [318]

Erin Morrigan's revolt against the forces of British colonialism as an IRA commander challenges patriarchal definitions of a 'proper feminine role' and her characterisation strongly resembles the heroines in Creed's Feminist New Wave. Honouring the totality of the Morrígan archetype without tempering any aspect of her mythic powers had created a monstrous feminine character, and Creed's insistence that such characters were feminist and empathic was heartening. Yet Erin Morrigan was a terrorist whose life was dedicated to a violent struggle against colonialism and a film told from her point of view would likely divide audiences. As I brought the character to screen, I was concerned about how she would be received and whether the film would be interpreted as demonising those who in real-life had engaged in violence in the name of political struggle. Although Erin had committed terrible acts of violence the film must not valorise these, but neither should it demonise her. I wanted viewers to care about her whatever their politics. To this end I used cinematic language to encourage viewer sympathy, deploying what Creed calls a 'feminist gaze'.

> The feminist gaze invokes all the senses. It is compassionate and empathetic; it invites the spectator to situate herself in the place of the protagonist in the screen, to experience what the other is experiencing through affect. It is an all-embracing sensory gaze, one that understands the protagonist's daily life, emotions, relationships, bodily states, and desires. It sees and feels the whole person – details about the woman's life not normally presented by the male gaze: her contemplative moments, desires, scenes

---

317 Ibid., p. 2, 4.

318 Ibid., p. 13.

> of intimacy, and moments of self-recognition. This gaze draws an intimate connection between the spectator's act of looking and internalisation of what they are seeing and feeling in their bodily responses.[319]

This was the approach I took as a director, enabling the spectator access to Erin's 'daily life, emotions, relationships, bodily states, and desires.'[320] I would align the viewer with her as she endures her illness and spiritual journey and present her compassionately. Erin was a '*deject*' enduring the psychological process of self-abjection.[321] Looking at Erin with a feminist gaze, I would perform what Kristeva calls the 'aesthetic task' of *embracing the abject* with all that entails.[322]

Embodying mythic archetypes

In directing the film, I used character embodiment strategically, via casting, costume and performance to present a feminist portrayal of the Morrígan and Cú Chulainn. For the lead role of Erin Morrígan, I chose Olwen Fouéré. Raised in the west of Ireland, Fouéré established her reputation as a pioneering, politically conscious actress who takes an unflinching approach to difficult subjects. Fouéré's father was a Breton separatist who came to live in Ireland as a political exile, inspiring her admiration for activism. Fouéré often deals with loss, grief and trauma in her work, and takes a positive approach to representing difficult experiences commenting, 'the only way to deal with it is to make it part of your life - it nourishes your life'.[323] Fouéré was well suited to the role of Erin Morrigan and possessed the psychological capacity to explore the character.

Casting an elder actress as a protagonist in a leadership role challenges sexist and ageist patterns in the representation of women in cinema. According to Martha Lauzen's analysis in the one hundred top grossing films of 2022 (the year *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan* was filmed), only three

---

319 Ibid., p. 6, 17.

320 Ibid., p. 17.

321 Julia Kristeva*, Powers of Horror,* p. 8, (original emphasis).

322 Ibid., p. 18.

323 Olwen Fouéré Interviewed by Róisin Ingle for the *Irish Times Women's Podcast Episode 411 Big Night In With Olwen Fouéré,* <https://soundcloud.com/irishtimes-women/ep-411-big-night-in-with-olwen-fouere> [accessed 16 May 2024].

percent of female lead characters were over sixty years of age.[324] According to Lauzen, this figure has risen to just under five percent, 'ageism remains an issue' and the casting of an elder female in a leadership role is even less common.[325]

Fouéré came on board in summer 2020 and gave her initial response to the script at our first online meeting. She liked the extremity of Erin's character, how her story addressed the trauma of colonisation, and was interested in playing an IRA veteran. She felt strongly that Erin should be represented uncompromisingly and didn't want her to be seen as a victim. Fouéré thought Erin was better characterised by 'remorselessness, but facing the horribleness of it'.[326] She embraced the dark qualities of the character and vocalised Erin's position in the first person intoning, 'I hated doing it, but I did it. No apology.' She felt that a strength of the script was in 'acknowledging the monstrous, and the nobility of it.'[327] Fouéré's interpretation resonated with Creed's recognition of the grandeur of revolt, and I could see how by embracing Erin's uncompromising qualities, she could embody a complex and challenging female character.

I chose Ciara Ivie, a good physical match for Fouéré and a versatile actress capable of embodying the many guises of the mutable Young Erin. Her attractiveness could be weaponised, and her slight frame presented a beguiling vulnerability, qualities that are used by Young Erin in the story to prevent detection. Ivie came on board in summer 2022 after we had begun filming with Fouéré, and she studied Fouéré's performance to inform her own, matching her gestures, vocal delivery and emotional control.

An important strategy for feminised mythography is to create gender subversive representations, not only of female mythic characters but also male. The Boy represents Sétanta, the warrior youth who becomes known as Cú Chulainn. Aware that the Boy could be interpreted as a representative of the future of the Republican movement, I wanted to subvert the ultraviolent

---

[324] Martha M. Lauzen, *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2022,* Center for the study of Women in Television & Film, San Diego State University, (2022), ≤https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2022-23-Boxed-In-Report.pdf≥ [accessed 10 September 2023].

[325] Martha M. Lauzen, *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2024,* Center for the study of Women in Television & Film, San Diego State University, (2024), p. 1. ≤https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2024-Its-a-Mans-World-Report.pdf≥ [accessed 2 August 2025].

[326] Olwen Fouéré, Transcript of Zoom conversation on 6 August 2020.

[327] Ibid.

warrior archetype by creating a male character that was the antithesis of the hypermasculine Cú Chulainn. The Boy's defining characteristic is not his capacity for violence, but for compassion, expressed by his enduring care for Erin. Rather than bravado and violence he represents grace. I sought an actor who could provide a contrast, someone young enough to convey a childlike abandonment, yet mature enough to be able to convey the Boy's grief for killing the girl and his fears for his future. I chose Jake Doyle from Portadown, Belfast. His large eyes and downturned mouth suggested sadness and experience beyond his years, and his discipline, sensitivity and honesty as a performer gave me confidence that with the right direction, he could embody this promising yet tragically ruined character.

Collaborating with production designer Megan McClean, we decided that the elder Erin, who lives alone in a remote coastal location, would wear worn-down practical outerwear. Trousers and T-shirts combined with flat lace up boots, heavy cotton workwear and an old wax jacket, suggested a rural life, her military past, and the basic clothing she would have worn when she was imprisoned. McClean designed Erin's wardrobe to evoke the Morrígan's associations with the land, using colours inspired by the Malin Head location, blue, brown, greys and blacks with accents of white, reflecting the sea, granite rocks, sand and sky as depicted in Fig. 1: Elder Erin. Fouéré's long white hair was worn loose and her weathered skin exposed to suggest a life of outdoor activity and resilience. The opening scene presents Fouéré's face in close up, her hair flying in the wind and tears rolling down her cheeks as depicted in Fig. 2: Erin's first appearance. This introduces Erin as a lone elder woman experiencing intense emotions, while the low angle and tight frame confer intimacy and power, suggesting a woman of consequence embodying resistance and rebellion.

Young Erin appears in flashbacks set during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Her costumes, hairstyles and make-up were chosen to reflect the fashions of the era and McClean used contrast so that each time she is on screen her appearance changes. At first, dresses and coats with fitted waists present a heteronormative femininity, enhancing her attractiveness with full make-up and her long hair worn loose, as depicted in Fig. 3: Young Erin. But after her release from prison, Young Erin appears without make-up, hair drawn back in a ponytail, reflecting her hardened attitude. When executing Col, she wears a pale yellow fitted tea dress, indicating that she still uses femininity to disguise her identity, but over it she wears a long black leather coat, and carries a pistol conferring status and authority as depicted in Fig. 4: Young Erin years later.

I worked in collaboration with Fouéré and Ivie using the mythic powers of the Morrígan to inform performance. Each performer embodied different facets of the Morrígan and explored the articulations of female agency these afforded. Fouéré brought a warrior-like energy into her performance as the elder Erin, creating a sense of physical threat, embodying the uncompromising agency of the war goddess. Despite frailty caused by her illness, Erin maintains a warrior's strength and unyielding nature. This is exemplified when Erin challenges the Boy demanding who knows his whereabouts. She points with an outstretched hand, facing him with an aggressive posture, staring and raising her voice as depicted in Fig. 5: Erin challenges the Boy. Fouéré embodies the warrior in several scenes, sometimes with weapons such as when she gestures at the Boy with a broken bottle as depicted in Fig. 6: Erin holding broken bottle. These moments confer an unpredictable violent potency uncommon in representations of elder female characters. The Boy's swift reactions – standing up, stepping back and putting space between them – show that he recognises this threat and takes it seriously, as depicted in Fig. 7: The Boy reacts. But Erin is never actually physically violent to the Boy, and as the story unfolds, we come to understand her behaviour as an expression of protective agency.

The most direct embodiment of the Morrigan as death-bringer occurs when Young Erin executes her victims. To inhabit the vengeful attitude of the Morrígan, Ivie maintains a steady gaze on Col as depicted in Fig. 8: Young Erin walks Col out. Col faces forward, unable to see Young Erin behind him (see Fig. 9: Col walking out). This shot structure establishes Young Erin's command of looking relations, indicating her dominance. The execution of Col is the most explicit articulation of the death-bringer aspect, conferring deadly agency to Young Erin who is the first to raise her pistol directing it at Col's head, jaw set in resolve (see Fig. 10: Young Erin shoots Col).

Erin's acts of violence required careful management to prevent the viewer losing sympathy. To configure a feminist subversion of the heteropatriarchal function of the war goddess it was crucial that Ivie's performance communicate to the viewer that Young Erin takes no pleasure in violence. This was especially important in the case of the execution of the female Prisoner who begs Young Erin to spare her life for her children's sake. When directing this scene, I wanted to amplify the emotion and draw out Young Erin's internal conflict. I directed Muireann Gallen who played the Prisoner to weep uncontrollably and fall to her knees making a desperate appeal as depicted in Fig. 11: The Female Prisoner appeals to Young Erin. I shaped Ivie's performance to show ambivalence: holding Gallen roughly, and pulling her along until she falls, then releasing her gag in an act of mercy, her face grim as she orders her to stand. Two male Provos carrying torches move their beams over Gallen exposing her heightened emotion and desperation. The handheld camera communicates the

urgency of the situation. Finally, one of the male Provo's knocks the Prisoner out. Young Erin observes her unconscious body, her expression conveying revulsion at the situation as depicted in Fig. 12: Young Erin conflicted.

The Morrígan's shapeshifter aspect is evoked subtly, maintaining a realist mode by depicting dramatic changes in Young Erin. Through the lead up to her execution of Col and its aftermath, Ivie shapeshifts via her appearance, body language and emotional expression. For comparison, see Fig. 13: Young Erin watching Col and Fig. 14: Young Erin after executing Col. In the former scene Young Erin is wearing a light green summer tea dress with full make-up, her hair loosely arranged. She is sitting on a wall in a meadow with her hands in her lap watching her lover approach, as he nears, she leans forward and smiles. In the morning after executing Col, Young Erin rises from the ground having slept beside her lover's body, hair wet with rain, dark circles under her eyes and Col's blood on her face. She looks around with an expression of exhaustion and emotional dissociation. The psychological impact of this killing is evident in her final appearance. Young Erin sits motionless in her bedroom chair, her face, arms and yellow dress stained with blood and earth, staring into space; as if by killing Col her old ego has 'died'. (See: Fig. 15: Young Erin after burying Col) I directed Ivie to remain still for this shot so that she appears lifeless, creating an image that expresses the soul-destroying impact of violence on the perpetrator.

To evoke the psychopomp archetype I depicted elder Erin as a woman who has taken many lives. As custodian of a remote safehouse surrounded by the hidden graves of her victims, she is literally a guardian of the dead. I chose the location – an isolated coastal farm in Malin Head – because it was run down, on the very edge of the landmass, and had a range of outbuildings and natural geographical features where it would have been possible to hold interrogations and dispose of bodies in secrecy. Erin's illness also positions her as someone close to death. In the opening sequence I directed Fouéré to imagine she was watching a raven flying in the distance and then walk into the sea as if embracing her own death as depicted in Fig. 16: Erin in the sea. Fouéré finds an internal calm in this scene, establishing Erin's unconscious wish for a peaceful transition to the Otherworld. When moments later we see Erin wake in her armchair, I directed Fouéré to move slowly and with each movement to convey great pain. We learn that Erin is determined to manage her illness by self-medicating with a mixture of opiates and alcohol in an expression of agency that speaks of her warrior-like refusal to surrender. Her advancing illness forces her to increase the dosage, conveying her willpower yet also suggesting addiction and self-harm. I directed Fouéré to gulp the mixture expressing distaste, and to stand as the drug takes effect. In the following scene Erin walks along the isolated coastline, see Fig. 17: Erin walks on the beach. I directed Fouéré to use a

staggering motion to convey crippling pain and intoxication. I wanted to show the potency of her 'medicine' and pose the question of why she is dealing with her illness alone. Eventually we come to understand her fierce independence is due to her notoriety and fear of ignominy; she is prepared to endure great suffering to preserve her own sense of integrity.

The arrival of a teenage boy seeking refuge brings the tutelary initiarix aspect of the Morrígan into play. Erin becomes his mentor and protector as she proceeds to educate him via a series of stark warnings. She deduces what he has done despite his silence, and as the Boy eats at her table, Erin challenges him about the killing. I directed Fouéré to intimidate the Boy, stand and lean over the table towards him, staring him down with prolonged eye contact as depicted in Fig. 18: Erin warns the Boy. Lowering her voice to a wolfish growl she warns, 'There'll be hell to pay'. The wolf is a totem of the Morrígan and Fouéré used this in her performances to convey the protective and threatening aspects of the archetype.

Erin's tutelary role is evoked again a few days later as the Boy questions Erin about her activities in 'The Unknowns'. I directed Doyle to kneel on the floor and stoke the fire like a servant, and to pose his questions respectfully. By positioning him lower than Erin (she is seated in an armchair) he literally looks up to her. I directed Fouéré to demonstrate Erin's reluctance to speak of her past, and her unwillingness to think about the killings, which she indicates by exhaling heavily and wiping her hand over her eyes before saying, 'I'm not at liberty to talk about it' as depicted in Fig. 19: Erin refuses to talk. I directed Doyle to be persistent, indicating his need to learn how to cope with his own guilt. I told him to encourage Erin to open up by indicating he already knows the worst. Doyle carefully puts to her that she was 'Top Brass' and that her operational code name was 'The Mother', and that she made informers 'disappear'. To reveal Erin's conflicted feelings, I directed Fouéré to refuse to indulge him, retorting 'If you want bedtime stories, read a book,' as she leaves the room. The Boy's questions and Erin's reactions show that struggles with conscience are long lasting and not easily overcome.

Erin's tutelary role is powerfully expressed when she asks the Boy to end her life as depicted in Fig. 20: Erin as tutelary initiatrix. This scene evokes the Morrígan's forceful agency as initiatrix. I directed Fouéré to calmly confront the Boy with his own gun and ask him to shoot her there and then. When he refuses, I directed her to escalate the intensity of her challenges, asking what he thinks being a soldier is about, then to order and finally to demand he do it. Fouéré starts with coaxing whispers, 'It's alright. Take it…' gradually raising her voice as she demands he accept that he has already killed (the girl) and finally giving up only as the Boy begins to cry, revealing his conflict about his own murderous act. Back in her room, Erin tells the Boy to sit with her. Fouéré embodies

the authority of the tutelary goddess, adopting a wide-legged position in the chair, (see Fig. 21: Erin counsels the Boy), saying, 'We can choose our path, but not where it takes us. Understand? We all make mistakes. You learn to live with it.' Her delivery combines directness with compassion and moves the Boy to tears. Erin doesn't offer further comfort but simply orders him, 'Help me to the bed.' As she nears the bed she collapses onto it, and rolls onto her back exhausted, leaving the Boy to remove her shoes. Erin's stern manner, tough guidance, and frailty combine in a complex display of power and vulnerability that afford her status and agency as an elder woman and simultaneously encourage the sympathy of the Boy and the viewer.

Fouéré invoked the Morrígan's totem the raven, by fixing sideways gazes at the Boy, her eyes conferring avian watchfulness, using raven-like head movements as depicted in Fig. 22: Erin embodies the raven. Cinematographer Akinsehinwa used a wide-angle portrait lens to emphasise the sculptural quality of Fouéré's features. As Erin makes an improvised tool with razor blades and electrical tape, Akinsehinwa's under-lighting confers a corvid-like aspect to her face, and Fouéré's curiosity and focus, embodies the Bird-Woman archetype as depicted in Fig. 23: Erin stares at flame. Fouéré used the attitudes of the raven to express animalistic agency, and despite being unwell, embodying the totem enhances Erin's physical threat.

The Bird-Woman aspect is further incorporated into the film via Erin's encounters with a raven which appears in several scenes, appearing like a familiar, flying overhead and watching Erin in the meadow as she recovers the Boy's buried pistol.[328] The raven is afforded an ominous presence by Alex Dixon, sound designer. As its expressions of violence increase – tearing flesh from Col's corpse and beating its wings against the window as Erin lies in the bath – these actions are accompanied by visceral foley and threatening sub-bass. Both an omen of death and a symbol of the Morrígan's prophetic power, the raven is embodied by Erin when she offers a dark prophecy of the Boy's future. The pair are outside walking along the clifftops as the Boy asks, 'What will happen now?' and Erin tells him that he will be reviled as a scapegoat and must disappear. I wanted to show the complex feelings Erin has for the Boy, so I asked Fouéré to express sadness, as though she loved the Boy yet had seen his fate and could not save him from it. During the take, Fouéré wept (see Fig. 24: Erin as Seer), her frank delivery and evident emotion conveying a sense of conviction and inevitability,

[328] A note on working ethically with animals: Peter Bloom an experienced animal wrangler, trained a tame female raven 'Mordred' to perform these actions in the weeks prior to the shoot. Mordred was on set for four hours, supervised by Bloom and his assistant, and a veterinarian was in attendance. Shots where the raven is flying in the sky and scratching at the bathroom window were computer generated animations created by JAM FX London.

frightening the Boy. Fouéré's performance reveals her empathy with the Boy's predicament. Her intention, like that of the Morrígan, is to be the guardian of the warrior's death and to warn him of what is ahead. As the Morrígan said to Cú Chulainn, 'It is at the guarding of thy death that I am; and I shall be'.[329]

Challenging the heteropatriarchal function of the mythic war goddess

My approach to undercutting the heteropatriarchal valorisation of violence is to show its impact not only for victims but for perpetrators, a key theme of the film. The story frames Erin's journey as an end of life reckoning with the violent actions of her past. At first Erin is in denial, refusing to admit that she may have killed innocent people, but as she is brought to acknowledge her ambivalent feelings, she confronts and attempts to integrate her Shadow. As Erin enters the final phase of her illness, the repressed aspects of her psyche emerge, and she experiences harrowing memories, nightmares and visions. I asked Fouéré to evoke Erin's horror at the things she has done, a darkness that she must integrate to complete her journey of individuation. As Erin occupies abject mental and emotional states, Fouéré depicts her struggle viscerally to show the devastating impact of violence on her life.

To deepen intimacy and encourage viewer empathy, I portrayed Erin's inner-life visions from her subjective perspective. Camera angles and point-of-view shots allow the viewer to see the world through Erin's eyes, while sound and emotional musical cues connect the viewer with Erin's sensory and emotional experience. Erin has a nightmare involving a man she thinks is Col staggering along the beach (see Fig. 25: Erin's nightmare). She pursues the figure, calling out, 'Col! Col!', but when she catches up with him, she is horrified to see the Boy, his face beaten and bloody like Col after his interrogation. I asked the camera operator Danny Lavin to film at 30 frames per second, slowing real time to create a dreamlike effect, and instructed him to run alongside Fouéré, cantering the camera on a gimbal so that the horizon tilts to depict Erin's disorientation. Dixon makes Erin's voice echo to emphasise her emotional distress; while Clausen layers discordant vocal cries to create a sense of emotional overwhelm. In colour-grading this scene, I asked colourist Lee Robinson to emphasise the

[329] The Morrigan speaking to Cú Chulainn in *The Cattle Raid of Regamna* from *The Yellow Book of Lecan* in *Heroic Romances of Ireland* Vol II, trans. by A. H. Leahy, (London: David Nutt, 1906). <https://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/regamna.html> [accessed 25.4.2019].

contrast, creating a sharp silhouette of Erin's face against the movement of the sea, conveying her delirium.

When Erin hallucinates her younger self sitting in the chair opposite her bed (see Fig. 15 Young Erin after Burying Col) she is finally brought into a confrontation with her Shadow. This moment brings a climax to Erin's spiritual journey, setting up a potentially transformative moment. But Erin doesn't recognise herself, crying out, 'Who are you? What do you want?'. Unable to integrate her Shadow into her consciousness she loses the opportunity for atonement. As Erin enters a near death state, she has a vision of Col standing by her bedside and reaches out. Col leans closer and allows her to touch his face, a tender moment of connection as depicted in Fig. 26: Erin touches Col's face. Col closes his eyes in acceptance, allowing Erin to connect with her true feelings at last. Her spiritual trajectory is held in the balance, but the next shot shows Erin reaching into empty space, (see Fig: 27: Erin reaches out), then the Boy's face appears in place of Col, (see Fig. 28: The Boy takes Col's place) and it is the young man who accepts her embrace as he lifts her from the bed. The spectator must choose how to interpret this sequence, whether to see Col's presence as a spiritual visitation which offers forgiveness and transcendence or as a mere hallucination. The camera evokes Erin's subjective point of view conveying an embodied sense of her inner-life experience, deepening our intimacy with her regardless of how we interpret the scene. In Erin's psyche long held boundaries are dissolving and she finds herself able to forgive Col at last.

Subverting the Mythic Warrior Archetype

The Boy is witness to Erin's spiritual journey but he is also shaped by his own journey through a series of initiations that are designed to undercut the patriarchal configuration of the hyperviolent warrior. Disgraced after accidentally killing an innocent girl, the Boy initially inhabits a place of wretchedness, broken and afraid. I asked Doyle to use body language to express the Boy's dejection – his chest collapses, his shoulders round, and he drags his feet as he walks as depicted in Fig. 29: The Boy arrives. On the first morning after his arrival Erin wakes him and instructs him to stand straight like a soldier, as depicted in Fig. 30: The Boy stands up. I directed Doyle to avoid eye contact so that Erin has to say, 'Look at me.' Doyle conveys the Boy's vulnerability as he reluctantly accepts Erin as his Mentor – the first in a series of initiations. As he nods his silent assent, Doyle's hesitant performance conveys the Boy's awareness of the danger and consequence of agreeing to Erin's indeterminate deal.

What the Boy needs is to find a way to live with himself after killing the girl and maintain hope for his future. He hopes to learn from Erin how to manage his conscience but quickly realises that she is unable to manage her own. When he asks about her past experiences, she stares him down, as depicted in Fig. 31: The Boy looks away. When Erin delivers her devastating prophecy, Doyle portrays the Boy's shock and he protests, 'It was an accident! I didn't mean it!' and runs away. Later as he weeps in his bedroom, knees drawn up, head down, I positioned the camera behind him to make him appear more vulnerable, as depicted in Fig. 32: The Boy weeping.

The Boy comes to understand that he needs to reset his trajectory if he is to escape his fate, but Erin presents him with a challenge by asking him to end her life. Her request frames the act of killing as a rite of passage or initiation; to be a soldier he must kill on command (see Fig. 33: The Boy's initiation). When he refuses, the camera affords him a new status as he stands in the meadow, above Erin laid on the ground as depicted in Fig. 34: The Boy standing over Erin. This is a defining moment in the hero's spiritual development: the Boy never wants to kill again and the camera affords him strength in refusing Erin's order. As he takes back the gun, the camera remains lower than his eye-line, suggesting a new sense of agency developing in him, as depicted in Fig. 35: The Boy takes back the gun. I directed Doyle to remove the gun stealthily from Erin's hand as she sleeps, posing a new question, as to whether he will maintain his moral compass.

Erin's persistent requests force the Boy to confront a choice that will define him: to accept that he has already become a soldier and seal his fate by killing her; or to reject the order and recalibrate his life in the hope he can start anew. One sleepless night he makes a plan to change his name, as depicted in Fig. 36: The Boy makes a plan. The camera is positioned at a high angle to emphasise his vulnerability and suggest a presence watching over him. His whisper draws the viewer into an intimate relationship and evokes concern for his plight. The dramatic question remaining to be answered by the narrative crystallises: will he be able to forge a different path and evade his destiny or will he be forever 'marked' a 'scapegoat' and 'disappear' as Erin foretells? Ultimately the Boy does kill Erin, but the film doesn't answer the question about his future. I leave this for the audience to imagine as he walks away along the coastal road as depicted in Fig. 37: The Boy leaves. He is wearing the wax jacket that once belonged to Col and carrying Col's bag, suggesting his adoption of the Hero's mantel. However, the sun is shining and the road ahead is clear, so the final shot suggests there is hope for the Boy. He has learned a major life lesson after killing the girl, and through his care of Erin has redefined a new 'Self', earning a second chance.

The representation of the young hero as compassionate caregiver creates a feminist subversion of the hero-warrior archetype. As the Boy becomes a loyal servant his care of Erin allows

her grace. I directed Doyle's performance in the later part of the film to bring out the gentleness and compassion at the heart of his character, as depicted when he makes Erin's bed, helps her out of the bath, and brings her tea. This opens the possibility for an alternative trajectory for the Boy's future because his arc of transformation is no longer from acolyte to warrior. Instead, he is maturing into a compassionate adult as Erin's caregiver, a role traditionally associated with femininity. His care soothes Erin's distress and he becomes her confessor. Erin comes close to acknowledging his worth is when she asks, 'I've got you haven't I?', the Boy is all she has left. When Erin has a seizure, he holds her hand saying, 'It's OK… It's OK… I'm here…' and when Erin beseeches him, 'Stay with me…' and asks him to sing to help her sleep, he sings an old rebel song. Here, Akinsehinwa used back-lighting to create a halo, giving him the appearance of an angel, as depicted in Fig. 38: The Boy singing. The Boy cares for Erin selflessly, despite his struggle in witnessing her decline. I directed Doyle to maintain low status body language, with rounded shoulders and lowered gaze throughout the later phase of her illness and emphasised his exhaustion and sadness using high camera angles as depicted in Fig. 39: The Boy as carer.

In helping Erin to end her life, the Boy first attempts a feminine-coded mode of killing by preparing an overdose of opium, (see Fig. 40: The Boy prepares an overdose), but Erin can no longer take the medicine. Unable to bear her suffering any longer he carries out her final request to shoot her, a masculine-coded mode of killing, but struggles to pull the trigger as depicted in Fig. 41: The Boy shoots Erin. His reluctant fulfilment of her wish is depicted as a compassionate act, giving Erin the death she wants. He runs from the scene in horror, and mourns as night falls, as depicted in Fig. 42: The Boy grieves. In reconfiguring the hero-warrior archetype, I bring to screen a feminist reenvisioning of the young warrior who learns the devastating consequences of violence. He resists his destiny by becoming a compassionate care-giver, subverting the traditional gendered representation of hyperviolent masculinity and redefining the measure of heroism not as the capacity for violence but as the capacity to love.

The Feminist Gaze – the cinematic language of empathy

As director, I deployed a feminist gaze to align the viewer with Erin and encourage empathy with the anti-heroine by conveying her journey subjectively. I also reversed the traditional dominance of the male gaze by controlling the relations of looking, privileging Erin. Fouéré often uses unblinking prolonged eye contact to force the Boy to lower his eyes, as depicted in Fig. 18: Erin warns the Boy and Fig. 22: Erin embodies the raven. Her gaze articulates Erin's dominance over the Boy and she always stays in control of looking relations even when she is confined to her bed. As the Boy

examines her personal belongings, he is caught by her gaze and immediately apologises and replaces her things as depicted in Fig. 43: Erin watches the Boy. The camera also privileges Young Erin's point of view throughout the film. When she first encounters Col, Young Erin observes him with sidelong glances as he sits in the passenger seat of her car (see Fig. 44: Young Erin observes Col). Suspecting he has a gun she pays close attention to what he does with his hands (see Fig. 45: Col's hands). Later, Young Erin watches Col approach from an elevated position in the meadow as depicted in Fig. 46: Young Erin's gaze, and Col becomes the object of her gaze (see Fig. 47: Col in the meadow). This is repeated as she observes his injuries after his interrogation, as depicted in Fig. 48: Young Erin observes unconscious Col and Fig. 49: Col after interrogation.

But the 'feminist gaze' is not just about asserting the female gaze over the male.[330] It is about creating a compassionate gaze and engaging the spectator in an empathic viewing experience. To this end, I used cinematic language to convey Erin's subjective experience. The film begins with a dream sequence inviting the viewer into Erin's psyche to witness her dream. Giving access to her unconscious mind creates an intimate relationship from the outset. We used a gimbal for this scene to allow the camera to float in a disembodied motion. I directed camera operator Lavin to use a shutter speed of 30 frames per second and film Fouéré in a low-angle, big-close-up shot that allows Erin's face to fill the screen as depicted in Fig. 2: Erin's first appearance. Slow-motion creates an extension of time, a dreamy effect that allows the viewer more time to read her emotional state, while the camera's proximity establishes intimacy. I intercut a shot of the sky where a raven flies, symbolising her longed-for union with Col in death.

We often used the gimbal for Erin's dreams and altered states. I directed Lavin to match his pace with Fouéré to create a sense of connection between camera and character, aligning the viewer with Erin. For example, in an early scene when Erin walks alone on the beach, as depicted in Fig. 50: Erin staggers towards the sea, Lavin matches Fouéré's unsteady movements and maintains proximity with her to embody Erin's intoxication and communicate her subjective experience to the viewer. The camera stays slightly behind her and stops when she stops, establishing Erin's control over the camera and marking her as the dominant agency on screen. Lavin uses cantered tilts on the gimbal, balancing it off-centre, to convey Erin's instability in scenes depicting her distress. Later, after Erin collapses, the Boy helps her stand and the camera tilts precipitously as she sways, (see Fig. 51: The Boy helps Erin walk), providing an embodied sense of Erin's experience.

---

[330] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous Feminine,* pp. 16-17.

To encourage empathy for Erin I bring the viewer into her perspective as she remembers traumatic memories, such as when she recalls the execution of her lover Col. Here I design a 'scene of empathy', which Carl Plantinga describes as:

> A kind of scene in which the pace of the narrative momentarily slows and the interior emotional experience of a favored character becomes the locus of attention […] The prolonged concentration on the character's face is not warranted by the simple communication of information about character emotion. Such scenes are also intended to elicit empathetic emotions in the spectator. [331]

Plantinga argues that scenes of empathy utilise extended close-up shots of characters experiencing emotional states. This prolonged duration elicits an emotional response in the viewer by a process of emotional contagion which Plantinga describes as the process of 'catching' another's emotion in sympathy with the person observed.[332] The scene of Col's execution uses slow motion and a heavy musical score to emphasise the emotional affect that the event has on Erin. Cinematic language – extended duration close-ups, slow motion, moving camera and evocative music – conveys pathos, and point of view shots enable the spectator to see and feel the moment from Young Erin's embodied perspective, encouraging empathy.

Plantinga explains that the narrative must lay the proper foundations for a scene of empathy to be successful. Importantly, the viewer should believe the emotional state of the character to be true, for example by placing the character in a situation in which they are alone or not being observed by other characters so that the viewer understands their emotions are not a social display. Context is important, as viewer response is conditioned by whether we believe the character deserves our empathy, and empathy must be earned. He suggests that filmmakers deploy a scene of empathy only after the character has been through a trial or sacrifice, has neared the end of their life or died. I constructed such a scene of empathy at the end of the film as Erin dies, enabling the viewer to witness her final moments. In this scene Erin lies in a shallow grave, still alive. To elicit the maximum potential emotional response from the viewer, I felt it was crucial for the viewer to remain with Erin as she dies and be allowed catharsis by bearing witness to her death. The sequence starts

---

331 Carl Plantinga, 'The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face' in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* ed. by Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, (USA: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 239-255, p. 239.

332 Ibid., p. 249.

after the Boy shoots Erin and runs away. The structure is simple: a close-up shot of Erin's face as shown in Fig. 52: Erin's dying moments, is intercut with Erin's view of the sky. This creates a subjective sequence which aligns the viewer with Erin. As she gazes up at the sky a raven flies into view – a bird she associates with Col – so that Erin (and the viewer) is reminded of his presence during her last moments. These shots have extended durations and the final close-up of Erin lasts thirty-eight seconds during which she dies. Fouéré communicates Erin's awe and peace upon finally transitioning into death using facial micromovements, her eyes shining, a slight smile, and a last breath, to express a moment of transcendence. After her struggle, Erin's is accepting and unafraid, finally at peace. As Erin dies, Dixon emphasises her subjective perspective by enhancing the birdsong and insect sounds of the meadow, slowing down the bird calls so that they become lower in pitch and more melodic. The heightened emotion is supported by Clausen's score, a haunting neo-classical composition that evokes the spiritual by use of sustained strings playing a yearning melody. In this way, Erin's death is not meaningless but transcendent, the good death that she wished for. By presenting death as a moment of acceptance, the film affords Erin a final moment of grace.

Conclusion

The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan presents a contemporary reconfiguration of the Morrígan as Erin Morrigan, a woman engaged in a spiritual journey of reckoning with her Shadow. An elder female soldier with anti-heroine traits – solitary, conflicted, brutal and abject – she presents a gender disruptive, politically provocative on-screen representation. Her involvement in extra judicial killings during the Troubles and protection of a fugitive Boy make her an ambivalent, complex character who lives by her own moral code. Although Erin evokes violent expressions of agency that the war goddess affords, the film avoids postfeminist 'empowerment' rhetoric and refuses to perpetuate the patriarchal glorification of the warrior-hero. Instead, it presents a message as uncompromising as Erin herself – that perpetrators of lethal violence endure the impacts of their actions for the rest of their lives. The Boy's remorse at having shot an innocent girl and his struggle to carry out Erin's request to shoot her, subverts the hyperviolent mythic warrior archetype.

By exposing the spiritual devastation caused by violence, the film challenges the heteropatriarchal function of the mythic war goddess. Doyle's performance as the Boy offers a refutation of the hyperviolent warrior-hero archetype and presents a masculinity that embodies kindness, humility, loyalty, resolve and hope. Erin combines all the facets of the Morrígan while restoring her matriarchal, protective and tutelary agency. The psychopomp, a Shadow archetype,

enabled the exploration of the inner psyche of a complex and conflicted anti-heroine, a death-bringer enduring her own final reckoning.

The film presents Erin's difficult spiritual journey unflinchingly, countering demonisation by encouraging viewer empathy via a feminist gaze that provides an embodied experience of female subjectivity. Redemption is not given to Erin by the film but held in balance by the audience, who are invited to judge her compassionately. Mythographic reenvisioning has resulted in a culturally relevant, provocative contemporary narrative that evokes disruptive and challenging expressions of female agency. This representation of a 'woman in revolt' aligns with the themes of Creed's *Feminist New Wave Cinema*, making a unique contribution to this contemporary cinematic moment.[333]

[333] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous Feminine*, p. 2.

Conclusion

My research originated in a quest to depict women's subjectivity and inner-lives on screen, and present women's spiritual journeys in feminist film narratives that mobilise female agency. Informed by Jungian approaches to using mythic archetypes as models to explore women's psychology, I considered the 'spiritual journey' as the process of individuation towards the transformation of the self. This allowed me to focus on the inner-life journey of the heroine. I undertook two case studies using female characters from Early Welsh and Irish folktales as models, exploring how their narratives and the archetypes they contain could be used as a map for the heroine's journey.

In developing a methodology, I considered how established frameworks used myths as models, including 'The Hero's Journey' monomyth developed by Campbell, and alternative feminist models by Schmidt, Frankel, and McCarthy, which revise the archetypal stages of Campbell's monomyth to configure a narrative model for the screen heroine.[334] These use archetypes in a similar way to Campbell, configuring a composite journey from multiple female mythic figures to create a unified monomyth for the 'female hero'. A linear narrative is structured using *encounters* with archetypal characters and situations, organised as rites of passage in the heroine's journey. However, these gendered fixed-stage linear monomyths are reductive both in the range of human experiences they are able to represent, and of the mythological content on which they are based.

Finding monomythic models limiting, I explored alternative creative applications of archetypes advocated by post-Jungian feminists. Murdock and Shinoda Bolen use female mythic archetypes to illuminate women's psychology, demonstrating that female mythic figures and their narratives can be seen as analogous to the rites of passage in real women's lives.[335] Goldenberg's redefinition of archetypes as highly affective images enables the exciting possibility to create new feminist archetypes through creative practice.[336] Bassil-Morozow's argument that archetypes are

---

334 Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*; Schmidt, *45 Master Characters;* Frankel, *From Girl To Goddess;* McCarthy, 'The Heroine's Journey: Claire Beauchamp Reclaims the Feminine'.

335 Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey;* Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman.*

336 Goldenberg, p. 64.

gender-neutral, active constituents of the psyche encountered in no fixed order in the process of individuation, offers great flexibility when configuring the heroine's journey.[337] Engaging creatively with a more diverse range of gender inclusive archetypes, spiritual growth may be articulated as the heroine's movement through archetypal stages in the processes of individuation. Archetypal stages may be assimilated in any order, offering a wider range of potential narrative trajectories than fixed staged-development linear monomyths.[338] Using this approach archetypes inform character development - not only through *extrinsic encounters* with archetypal characters and situations - but through *intrinsic psychological processes* that create drives, attitudes and *behaviour*.

With this understanding, I developed a creative practice approach that uses mythic archetypes to inform the interior psychological processes of individuation. Archetypal aspects of a female mythic figure are used to define stages in the heroine's journey of individuation, illuminating her inner life. Contrasting mythic archetypes may define axial points on the heroine's journey of individuation, providing a trajectory for psychological growth. This offers a different way of using mythic figures when configuring the heroine's journey. Unlike 'female hero' versions of the monomyth, which analyse multiple mythic figures to compile a single composite narrative; this approach embraces plurality. The mythographer may consider *any* mythic model from the enormous resource of world mythos, as a potential model for a heroine's journey. A mythic figure may be analysed to reveal the archetypes they contain, and a spiritual journey may be configured by using these to inform archetypal stages in the heroine's psychological development.

Using archetypes as models for character development brings clarity to both the writing and directing process. The writer may use archetypes to define how a heroine may be imagined and embodied at each stage in her journey. Shifts from one archetypal stage to another can be expressed behaviourally and symbolically to communicate the heroine's changing status. The director has means to express her transformation cinematically, embodying each archetype using casting, costume, and performance. Because this approach considers singular mythic figures, and their archetypal characteristics are already well defined by the mythic narrative, it becomes possible to adapt events and relationships from the mythic narrative to configure the rites of passage necessary to catalyse the process of individuation. Significantly, using archetypes to inform characterisation

---

337 Bassil-Morozow, *New Heroines in Film and Television*, p. 37; *Jungian Theory for Storytellers,* p. 18.

338 Bassil-Morozow, *Jungian Theory for Storytellers: A Toolkit* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 16 - 19.

confers to the heroine enhanced potency and numinosity, creating memorable characters, and potentially enables extraordinary expressions of agency.

My analysis of contemporary screen representations demonstrated that while mythically inspired female characters are increasingly visible in cinema, female power is frequently contained and rehabilitated within post-feminist and patriarchal discourses. I wanted to discover how mythic female figures might be used as models for feminist representations of complex female characters that mobilise greater female agency. Inspired by the creative practice of feminist revisionist mythmaking in women's literature, I evolved a methodology for feminised mythography in filmmaking; reenvisioning myths through a feminist lens to create intertemporal, interideological film adaptations.

As source material I selected female characters from Early Welsh and Irish folktales which originate in the pre-Christian mythology of Wales and Ireland and performed two case studies exploring Rhiannon from the Welsh *Mabinogion* and the Morrígan from the Irish tradition as archetypal models for the spiritual journey of the heroine. Originating in pre-literate cultures, these mythic figures bear strong correspondences with divinities, but their potency has been denigrated, demonised and repressed. Using Mary Daly's notion of 'stolen mythic power', I aimed to reclaim the powers of these female mythic figures without tempering or containing them, by investing their powers in contemporary fictional female characters.[339] I wanted to explore the articulations of forbidden agency they afforded and create feminist representations of women on screen.

I developed a three-phase methodology with five strategies for adaptation that were repeatable in each case. The first phase, *analysis and interpretation,* deployed methods of scholarly analysis and comparative mythic elucidation to locate the archetypal identity of female mythic figures, assess their mythic powers, and the extent and type of denigration. I made an extensive study considering the ideological values and meanings contained in the mythic figures and allowed this to shape my creative interpretation forming an approach to adaptations.

In the second phase, *adaptation*, I employed five strategies of feminist revisioning: contemporising the mythic character as a real woman; making her the protagonist and framing her story from her point of view; using the mythic narrative events to map a spiritual journey of transformation; using archetypes to elucidate her psyche and the path of her spiritual journey; investing her with the mythic character's divine powers to explore the articulations of female agency

339 Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p. 47.

these afford; and using the tropes of the mythic Otherworld to suggest a metaphysical fictional space that supports the dramatisation of her inner-life.

The third phase involved directing the films and bringing the new mythically inspired narrative from *script to screen* in collaboration with cast and crew. My methods extended to embodying the mythic archetype via casting, costume and performance; using the mythic archetype to define the identity and behaviour of characters; restoring stolen or denigrated divine powers by means of action, symbolism and metaphor; managing the narrative expression of the archetype to shape its contemporary resonance; and using cinematic language to encourage empathy by using a 'feminist gaze'.[340]

During the creative process I discovered opportunities and limitations inherent in my strategies. Contemporising mythic figures enabled the creation of complex female characters in convincing situations, and culturally informed narratives that mobilise issues of relevance today. Positioning the female character as protagonist and framing the story from her point of view enabled the discovery of the character's voice and deeper exploration of her inner-life. These strategies helped to create emotionally coherent characters with whom audiences might relate. Using a feminist gaze in the cinematic expression, I was able to invite the viewer to engage intimately with the heroine's inner-life and subjectivity, encouraging empathy with my protagonists. Seen from the female character's perspective, the mythic narratives provided a series of initiations for a woman's spiritual journey of transformation.

Investing contemporary women with mythic female powers to explore extraordinary agency they afford proved to be a highly effective strategy for invigorating representations of women on screen. In adaptation it is possible to create new expressions of female agency that are usually repressed or contained. However, myths can act as a 'distorting lens', and mythic archetypes often include problematic aspects that cannot be easily ideologically reconfigured to serve a feminist purpose. Even when denigration is reversed and divine powers are reclaimed, they may still reinforce patriarchal ideologies. For example, by restoring the divine power of parthenogenesis to Rhiannon she still presents an essentialised femininity that foregrounds her maternal role. Likewise, restoring powers of tutelary protection to the Morrígan, maintains her patriarchal function as a war goddess, initiating warriors. Hence the mythographic strategy of restoration and reclamation is only as effective as the feminist sensibility and creative choices of the mythographer. By seeing myths through a feminist lens, and identifying ideological elements of the narrative, the mythographer may

---

[340] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous Feminine,* pp. 16-18.

expose, subvert or challenge patriarchal values via bespoke interideological strategies designed to counter the old ideological patterns.

These challenging aspects are often the most illuminating for feminist reenvisioning. The mythographer must find ways to resist and transform the old narrative, and what emerges are surprising representations that undercut patriarchal themes. For example, the narrative of *Deer Woman Child* uses the parthenogenic agency of the Modron / Divine Queen to provide a surprise reversal of expectations that subverts the essentialism of the mythic narrative. Pryn's magical pregnancy and the birth of her impossible hybrid child shift the narrative mode into fairytale, which forecloses essentialist readings because she gives birth to an apparent metaphor, not a *real* child. Possible interpretations are moved away from Pryn's maternal role and towards a poetic or symbolic 'rebirth'. Likewise, The Morrígan's violent agency as a war goddess necessitated an interideological approach to adaptation. I made the decision to include violent agency in Erin's characterisation while configuring a narrative that critiques it. Although Erin killed many people, the film does not valorise or glorify violence but presents its terrible consequences, portraying Erin as irrevocably damaged by acts of violence that she perpetrated. Thus, a narrative may be configured to subvert those values of the myth that are ideologically suspect, so that the film may convey feminist values even if the character does not.

Despite being essentialised and patriarchally configured, mythic archetypes also contain latent possibilities for feminist reconfigurations. The writer may find ways of reclaiming mythic powers in generative ways creating new archetypes and new expressions of female agency that speak to a contemporary audience. For example, in *Deer Woman Child* Rhiannon's divine powers of sovereignty and connection to the land were reconfigured via Pryn's deepening connection with nature, which catalyses her transformation. After her encounter with the Otherworldly deer, Pryn's behaviour changes and she becomes more deer-like as her pregnancy develops, visiting the forest at night. The narrative creates a confluence of deer and human as the creature that is being brought into being inside Pryn develops and Pryn exhibits a transhuman agency, gaining heightened sensory abilities. This bridging of the gap between human and animal culminates in the birth of Pryn's half-deer half-human child, and articulates a new archetype, a union of the Deer Woman and the Divine Child. This creature is not only a metaphor for Pryn's rebirth but speaks to the wider human imperative to live in a more harmonious communion with the natural world. In *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan,* the ancient war goddess is reconfigured as an elder high-ranking IRA veteran presenting a provocative, gender subversive representation of the female soldier. The patriarchal mythic warrior Cú Chulainnn is reenvisioned as a teenager struggling with conscience after accidentally killing a

teenaged girl. The Boy's refusal to end Erin's life precludes his initiation as a soldier, and Erin's frequent reiterations expose techniques of emotional manipulation and indoctrination deployed in the radicalisation of recruits. The film thus presents a feminist reenvisioning that valorises humility, loyalty and compassion over violence and glory.

Using archetypes to map the psychological development of the character helped to define character embodiment, behaviour, and clarify the heroine's spiritual journey. The focus on the assimilation of archetypes as psychological processes enabled expression of a woman's inner-life journey of individuation. Using this strategy, I was able to configure Pryn's transformation from Modron to Divine Queen; and Erin Morrigan's confrontation with her Shadow; bringing to screen feminist representations of women navigating the 'Self'.

Incorporating symbols of totem animals increases the visibility and numinosity of mythic archetypes in the adapted narrative. In both films, totem animals and birds, such as Rhiannon's white horse, the deer and the Morrígan's raven, play a role. These highly numinous images were deployed subtly to maintain an illusion of realism. The totem animals remain 'real' animals, carrying the potency of the archetype without disrupting the naturalism. I chose to deploy them subtly to avoid distracting the viewer or interrupting their emotional connection with the spiritual journey of the heroine. The realist mode of address is preserved, maintaining focus on the inner life psychological drama of the character.

When applied more boldly, archetypes are so striking that their numinosity creates a shock – the 'mysterium facinans', or 'tremendum majestus' – that Eliade used to describe their affect, disrupting the illusion of realism and shifting the narrative mode towards fantasy or horror genres.[341] When incorporating evident representations of archetypes, the writer must carefully consider their impact on the narrative. If the writer can plan for a generic shift in a way that supports the meaning and overall story value, the archetypal image may be successfully incorporated. In *Deer Woman Child,* the Otherworld is *extrinsic* and the numinous is encountered frequently by Pryn in her new environment, (meeting the white mare, connecting with archetypal landscapes, and inspecting her grandmother's witchy artifacts and strange drawings), so that early in the narrative the fairytale genre is already being cued. The numinous slowly infiltrates Pryn's unconscious, she is affected by it and so when her deer-baby is revealed, it is a logical result of the process of integration.

---

[341] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane,* p. 9

Using tropes of the mythic Otherworld to suggest a metaphysical fictional space enabled me to visually evoke or dramatise the inner-life of female characters. This strategy enriched the development of unique cinematic language in both films that helps to evoke the inner life or spiritual status of the protagonist. For Pryn the Otherworld is *extrinsic,* evoked via a landscape imbued with animist agency, offering connection with divine forces. For Erin, the Otherworld is *intrinsic* and internal, so Erin's spiritual descent into a confrontation with her Shadow is dramatised through the Otherworld of her memories, nightmares and hallucinations. The viewer perceives Erin's hallucinations as the product of her own psyche, erupting from the internal world of her unconscious due to her opium use. This cues psychological realism and creates certain expectations of the narrative. In developing the screenplay, Erin's visions of the ghosts of her victims cued the horror genre, so I decided to remove them because they suggested psychosis. The appearance of the Morrígan at the moment of Erin's death would have been incongruous, causing the established psychological realism to rupture, creating an unbelievable distraction at a crucial emotional moment.

The contribution of this thesis is threefold: it provides a new creative practice approach to using mythic archetypes as models for the heroine's journey of individuation that enables the articulation of female subjectivity on screen; this offers more expansive ways to use mythic archetypes to explore women's inner lives and configure the spiritual journey of the heroine; and extends the tradition of feminised mythography into filmmaking, establishing methodology with a set of strategies for mythic adaptation that may be adopted by other feminist filmmakers. These strategies were developed for the reclamation of mythic female power and to explore how mythic archetypes might evoke a female character's spiritual journey in feminist films. They may be applied to other mythic figures, providing a starting point for feminist creative practice. The mythographer may take a discretionary approach to their application in response to mythic models, to speak to their own concerns. The mythographer may choose the most salient approach to adaptation – intertemporal, actualisation, transcultural appropriation – to colour and shape their narrative and appeal to their intended audience. As I found in my case studies, feminist revisioning of mythic figures requires careful management of patriarchal themes for successful interideological adaptation, and the mythographer must develop bespoke strategies to shape preferred interpretations.[342]

Evolving a methodology for feminised mythography has extended the reach of my filmmaking practice, fulfilling my aims of deepening the expression of female subjectivity on screen.

---

[342] Interideological adaptation provides a 'resistant' text by 'using appropriation as a tool' to 'challenge the politics of the 'original' on issues like gender, race and power relations. See: Laera, p. 11.

Developing my methodology through creative practice has resulted in the creation of two mythically inspired feminist fiction films that reclaim mythic female power, bringing to screen representations of women that are challenging, complex, affective and culturally resonant embodiments of female agency. Both films have screened internationally at film festivals extending the reach and impact of this research. By engaging with characters in a process of self-questioning and revolt and depicting monstrous feminine archetypes in dialogue with contemporary feminist concerns, my films resonate with what Barbara Creed has described as Feminist New Wave Cinema, offering an original contribution to the evolving landscape of feminist filmmaking practice.[343]

[343] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous Feminine*, p. 4.

Appendix 1

Deer. Woman. Child.

A story by Sarah Corbett

For Pryn, there wasn't a choice. The buck came to stand behind her, brushing her sleeve with his stubby antlers just as the wolves, alerted by the blood of the rabbits that hung at her waist, came into the clearing. They wouldn't come much further as the road was on the other side of the thinning trees. Their leader dipped his head and turned his gold eyes the other way.

The buck followed Pryn through the town to her homestead. It was dusk and the lights were out in the few stores that lined the road. No-body saw them. Even Tom Finnegal, the farrier, was indoors boiling potatoes for his tea. The sky was loaded pink with snow; it would fall overnight. Bobby, the sorrel mustang, was waiting for her at the barn door as she dropped the rabbits on the veranda,

the deer at her heel. He whickered and blew the icy evening air from his nostrils. Al three walked into the dark of the barn.

The deer stayed until spring. Then he rubbed at the itch on the sides of his skull until the two-pronged antlers fell. Pryn found them at the base of the redwood in the far corner of the paddock, lying in the grass like a pair of hands. They were ridged and knobbed, but she could feel where the year's growth had pushed into the bone making it silken and hard at the tips. She arranged them on the mantelpiece and thought for the first time of Herne, god of the hunt. Great-Great Grandmother Ellie Worthing had come from a woodland village somewhere in the South-East of Britain and passed down through the female line the European tales, along with the thirty-acre homestead. I am the end of that line, thought Pryn, and put her hand to her belly where the muscles above her pelvic bone were aching. Her menses hadn't come all winter.

Mikey left five years ago after she refused to go through the IVF programme again. It's our last chance, he'd pleaded, how could you give up on our last chance? But she was forty-two, and after the twins they'd lost at fourteen weeks; she wouldn't survive that again. No, she'd said, and meant it, coming home the week after their final argument with three-year old Bobby from the

mustang round up over at Newlaw. I'm going to take him out to Grandma's place and break him; about time I had something of my own. Grandma Bren died two years last fall and mother lived in a centrally heated condo upstate - she *hated* the wilderness - so Pryn had come into her inheritance early. Now Mikey lived with Sharon and eighteen-month-old Louie two hundred miles away in Cantonville.

Bobby went barefoot, Pryn had read that the mustang hoof was hard and if he was never shod but kept in careful trim and his feed well supplemented, he would never need to be. This was good economy as she'd given up work to live here and Granma's legacy was small. His three-month visit to Tom was due on the day she found the antlers, and it was true, his toes were a little long. She saddled up and took the path along the river to town.

Thaw was well under way. The river swelled frothy brown as melt water ran from the banks and wet pine needles shone like candles on the trees. The path was slippery so she kept Bobby on the grass, springy with saturated mos. The season was in his step and he was glad to be going somewhere. He collected under her his dense, well-sprung body that was reminiscent of the ponies she'd ridden as a child; so light and so pleasing. Mikey had scoffed when she'd bought him. You'll never manage a Mustang, they're wild and they stay half wild no matter what you do with ‘em. But that was exactly why she’d bought him; she'd not even tried to take the wild out and they'd fit to each other easy as soaped

leather.

Tom worked slow and methodical, back bent into the horse, fingers black with grained in dirt and blunt ended, square nailed, feeling around each hoof for any weakness, chip or dent, a touch and murmur to Bobby each time he dropped one hoof and moved on to the next. When he was finished he and Pryn shared a brew of bitter coffee out in the yard before thirty dollars changed hands. Snowdrops were pushing through a soil-filed crack in the wall. They both looked in their direction and smiled.

‘You're looking well, Pryn, so is Bobby. When that coat comes through it'll be –‘

'Like a new-minted dime' said Pryn.

‘New minted yourself I'd say. Found yourself a beau?'

What out here? Are you crazy?' This too was part of their patter, trotted out each time, not tedious but easy and familiar. But Pryn had noticed the change. She’d been tired recently and had worried about something serious, but she'd had to admit that her skin had weathered the winter

better than usual and her hair was definitely thicker. There had been fewer strands in the bottom of the tub after her bath, then none at all the last few weeks. She put a hand to her hair, it was silky, not coarse, and had grown to her shoulder. Tom moved his head closer to hers.

'Something's changed. Sure you've not been visited?' Another one of their running jokes. When she'd confided about the twins and why Mikey had left he'd said, ‘What you need is a visit from the shining folk.’

'What, all the way from Ireland?'

'Well, they don't operate under the same law as us, do they?' She knew what he meant. These last few years she too had ceased to operate by the same law. She thought of the buck and opened her mouth to tell Tom, but he was emptying his dregs over the wall.

A fortnight later Pryn could no longer ignore it. She dug out the maternity bra and the loose waisted jeans she thought never to have to see again, and made an appointment at the new clinic twenty miles away in Grenfield.

'Well Mrs –‘

'Miss'

'Miss Prentice –‘

'Worthing, I’m Miss Worthing now, I've gone back to my maiden name.’

‘Miss Worthing,’ mouthed the Doctor, writing the name into the form on her desk. 'There's no doubt about it; you're nine weeks pregnant. I'll arrange for you to come for a scan at twelve weeks, which I would strongly advise given your age *and* your history. I have to warn you that there'll be no chance of a home-birth, that's if…’ She swallowed the rest of the words but Pryn finished her sentence,

‘If the pregnancy goes to term. It's Ok: four miscarriages before I was forty. It's going to be a long shot'.

The doctor nodded her young, too young head. 'And the father, is he around?' Pryn shook her head. How could she say that there was no father, that she had been, as Tom put it, 'visited'?

At the scan, Susie the antenatal technician grinned and pointed out the tiny throbbing dot on the screen. 'Listen to the heartbeat, she said, turning the sound up on the monitor. 'That's a strong one, and the foetus is big for twelve weeks. Are you sure of your dates?' Pryn had no dates, so she just shrugged and grinned back. She took the photo home and pinned it above her dresser,

irrefutable now, a miracle in grainy black and white. She had to squint to make out the over-sized head and bumps of arms and legs wrapped around the corded twist of the umbilical. And what was that - something Susie had missed - an extra limb curling from its back?

At twenty weeks the grin fixed and Susie tilted the monitor just out of Pryn's view. She picked up the internal phone and said brightly, conspiratorially into it, ‘Doctor Mistry, would you mind coming in here for a minute?' The Doctor's peachy cheeks blanched clear into her brown face when she looked at the screen.

'What is it?' Cried Pryn, 'Is it alive?' but Doctor Mistry was hurrying from the room.

'Yes, yes, don't you worry. Everything will be fine. Baby is very much alive'. Susie turned up the volume on the monitor and just like the first time the heartbeat sang out, only stronger, like the call of some giant bird. When Doctor Mistry returned it was with her colleague, Professor Brownlow.

The professor narrowed the white tufts of his brows and pursed the white ruff of his moustache. 'Hmmm' was all he said, and then to Pryn, 'May I examine you?' His hands were warm and soft as butter but sure, so sure, as they moved around her abdomen. He stood back and smiled, his teeth falsely white between his pink lips. 'There's nothing to worry about, baby's just large, very large, and growing quickly. In fact I would say that you could expect to deliver in about six weeks. We'll book you in for an elective caesarean, but we want to see you every week from now on. Any pain or bleeding and you must call us immediately, OK?'

'Can I see the scan?' asked Pryn, but Doctor Mistry had already turned off the monitor and Susie was wiping the gel and buttoning up Mikey's left-behind over-sized work-shirt over Pryn's engorged belly. Pryn couldn't help but notice how clammy the technician's hands were, and how much they shook.

Something was moving through her. All through early summer she carried the weight as it grew. It slept in the day, her movements about the farm increasingly rhythmic and slow, and woke at night, turning in its ever-tightening fold. Pryn could only drift in and out of sleep, for when it kicked it woke her with the pain. She took to lying in late and dozing in the afternoons in the swing chair on the veranda. Bobby came to watch from the paddock, his starred head nodding over the fence, what had happened to their long rides? She was giving herself over to it; it wouldn't be long now.

Never clear enough to fix on, her dreams took Pryn into the depths of the forest, far from the tracks she knew so well, far even from the sense she thought she owned of that place. This was a place of shiftings, of light and shadow, of the massed bodies of trees and the spaces in between, of dense softness underfoot and the alive dark at her back. Alertness ran through her body but also no

real awareness of where her body ended and the forest began. She woke each time woozy and diffuse, wary of the light, longing to return. As the weeks passed, she slept more and more, dropping from consciousness like a stone dropped in a well. She ceased to think in words; language slipped away and in its place came the shape and the urgency of a place that needed to be found.

The date set for the caesarean was the last day of June. Tom was to take her to all the way to the hospital in Cantonville and take Bobby to his place as she was booked in two weeks for the recovery. I know we're being cautious', said Doctor Mistry at her final scan, but we want to take the best possible care of you and of baby, of course, and we simply don't have the facilities here'. Pryn hadn't missed the increasing tension in the clinic staff each time she attended, and now Doctor Mistry's whole face appeared to be caught in a trap. But as their fear increased, so did her calm; she knew she wouldn't make it to Cantonville.

On the morning of the solstice the pains began. Pryn made it to the paddock before her waters broke and thanked god for solitude as she stripped of her soaked nightdress. The grass was dew wet underfoot and the pre-dawn was still cool. A sleepy Bobby nosed over. The way he pressed his forehead against her shoulder brought back the memory of the buck, the moment of its velvety nudge six months previous. She put one hand up to grip Bobby's mane as the next contraction doubled her over. For an hour they walked the field together, pausing as each contraction rooted Pryn to the earth, until orange

pushed through the indigo sky and set the tops of the trees on fire. At last, the relief between waves gave way to one huge pressure bearing down within her. They were at the corner of the field where it dipped to a hollow at the roots of the Redwood. Pryn dropped to her knees and put her hand between her legs. The baby's head met her fingers. What thick hair it had, what ears, like swatches of watered silk, then its long neck and spongy buds of hooves already pushing at the birth sac as the whole being slid from her.

When Doctor Mistry came to see why Pryn had missed her appointment at the hospital, Pryn told her that the baby had died at birth. She showed her the bucket of afterbirth and submitted to an examination, then took her to a freshly dug mound under the Redwood. The doctor left her a drug to dry her milk and wrote out the death certificate. They both knew without saying that this was the right, and the only way. After she left, Pryn went to the girl-fawn that lay in the barn in the bed of straw and blankets. Her strong brown legs kicked with pleasure as Pryn fed her, the bob of white tail pumping ta the base of the supple back, looking up at her the forest dark eyes in the human face.

Illustrations Chapter 5: *Deer Woman Child*



Fig. 1: Pryn in winter



Fig. 2: Pryn in early summer



Fig. 3: Pryn’s winter costume



Fig. 4: The white mare



Fig. 5: Pryn and the mare



Fig. 6: Portrait



Fig. 7: Pryn reflected in mirror



Fig. 8: Pryn observes her body



Fig. 9: Pryn's eye

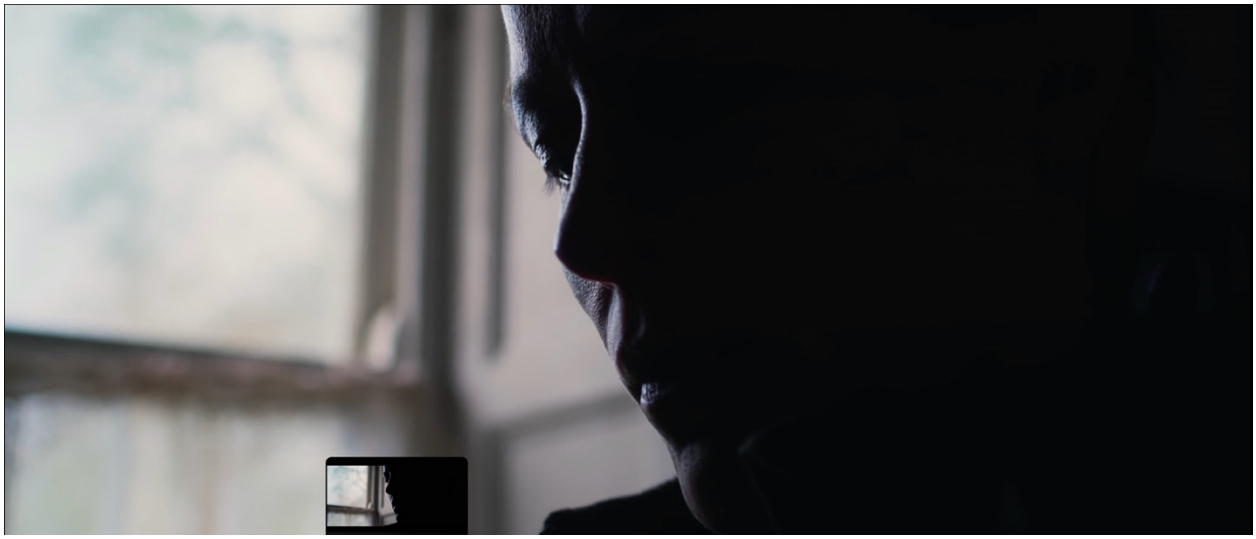


Fig. 10: Pryn reading the letter

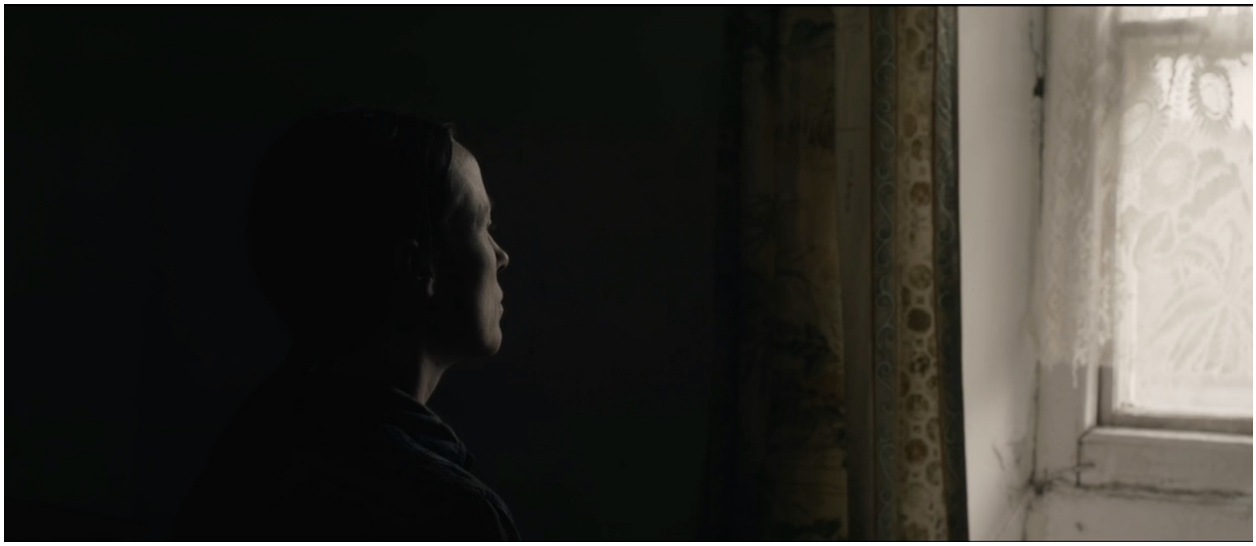


Fig. 11: Sitting alone



Fig. 12: Pryn attempting suicide



Fig. 13: The deer watches Pryn



Fig. 14: The deer’s eye



Fig. 15: Pryn’s encounter with the deer



Fig. 16: Deer ornament



Fig. 17: Deer embroidery



Fig. 18: Headless deer ornament



Fig. 19: Antler sketch



Fig. 20: Pryn picks berries



Fig. 21: Pryn driving into town



Fig. 22: Pryn with the white mare



Fig. 23: Pryn enters forest



Fig. 24: Pryn standing in ferns



Fig. 25: Pryn gives birth in meadow



Fig. 26: The birth of the Divine Child



Fig. 27: Pryn with baby in stable

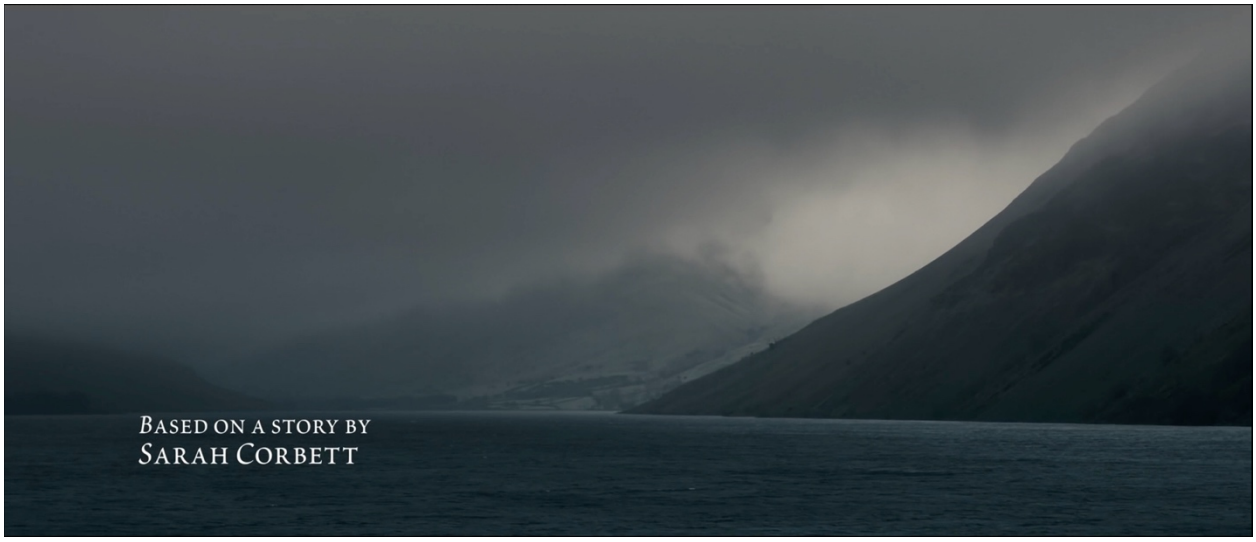


Fig. 28: Opening sequence



Fig. 29: Pryn enters the story

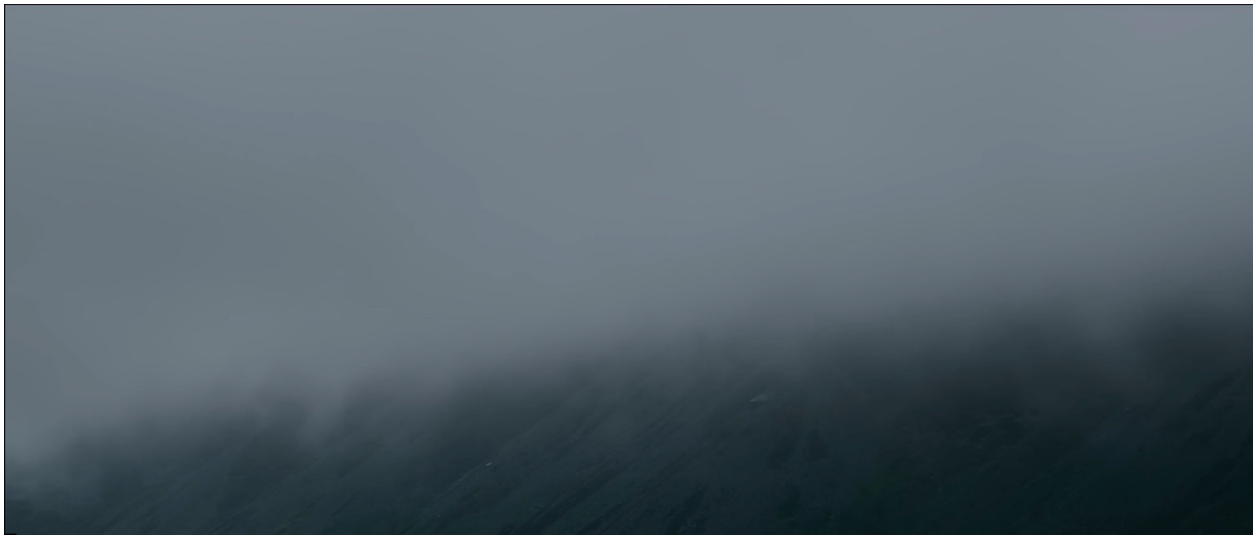


Fig. 30: Mountain face



Fig. 31: Mountain summit



Fig. 32: Mountains at sunrise

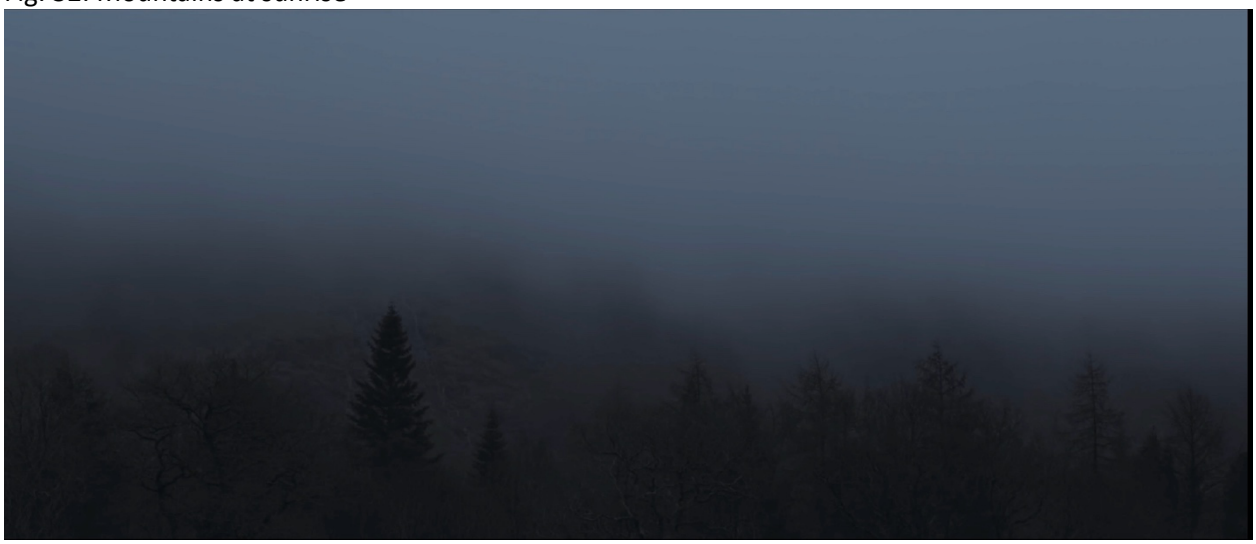


Fig. 33: Forest in rain



Fig. 34: Pryn at window



Fig. 35: New dawn



Fig. 36: New horizon



Fig. 37: River in thaw



Fig. 38: Pryn at the waterfall



Fig. 39: Pryn entraptured



Fig. 40: Pryn dips her toes into the pool



Fig. 41: Pryn’s foot underwater



Fig. 42: Pryn swimming



Fig. 43: Pryn lying on a rock



Fig. 44: Cross dissolve



Fig. 45: Flying over the forest



Fig. 46: Pryn’s rebirth



Fig. 47: Lake at night



Fig. 48: Shadows over rock



Fig. 49: Sunburst



Fig. 50: Night landscape



Fig. 51: Forest night walking



Fig. 52: Pryn in the forest at night



Fig. 53: Pryn merging

Illustrations Chapter 6 – *The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan*



Fig. 1: Elder Erin



Fig. 2: Erin’s first appearance



Fig. 3: Young Erin



Fig. 4: Young Erin years later



Fig. 5: Erin challenges the boy



Fig. 6: Erin holds broken bottle



Fig. 7: The Boy reacts



Fig. 8: Young Erin walks Col out



Fig. 9: Col walking out



Fig. 10: Young Erin shoots Col



Fig. 11: Female Prisoner appeals to Young Erin



Fig. 12: Young Erin conflicted



Fig. 13: Young Erin watching Col



Fig. 14: Young Erin after executing Col



Fig. 15: Young Erin after burying Col



Fig. 16: Erin in the sea



Fig. 17: Erin walks on the beach



Fig. 18: Erin warns the Boy



Fig. 19: Erin refuses to talk



Fig. 20: Erin as tutelary initiatrix



Fig. 21: Erin counsels the Boy



Fig. 22: Erin embodies the raven



Fig. 23: Erin stares at flame



Fig. 24: Erin as seer



Fig. 25: Erin’s nightmare

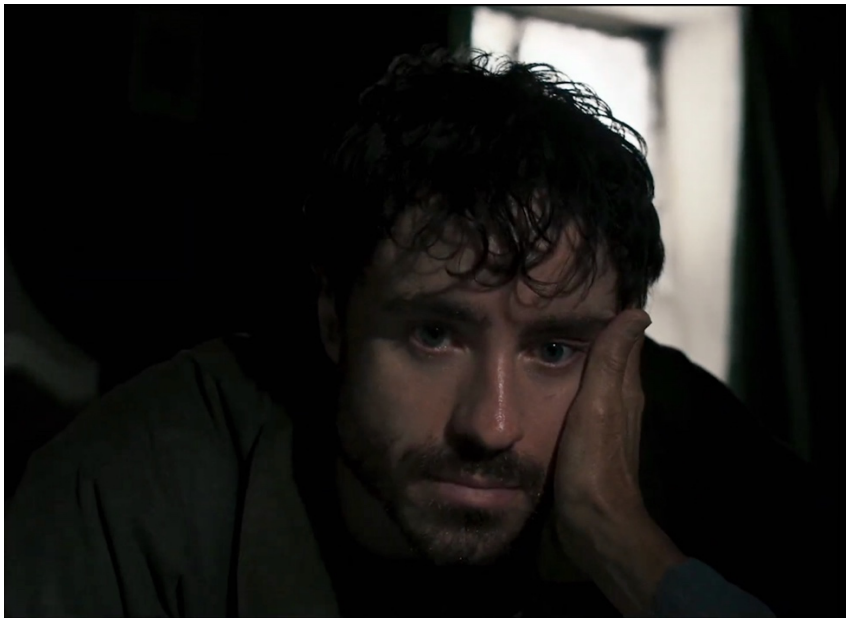


Fig. 26: Erin touches Col’s face



Fig. 27: Erin reaches out



Fig. 28: The Boy takes Col's place



Fig. 29: The Boy arrives



Fig. 30: The Boy stands up



Fig. 31: The Boy looks away



Fig. 32: The Boy weeping



Fig. 33: The Boy's initiation



Fig. 34: The Boy standing over Erin



Fig. 35: The Boy takes back the gun



Fig. 36: The Boy makes a plan



Fig. 37: The Boy leaves



Fig. 38: The Boy singing



Fig. 39: The Boy as carer



Fig. 40: The Boy prepares an overdose



Fig. 41: The Boy shoots Erin



Fig. 42: The Boy grieves



Fig. 43: Erin watches the Boy



Fig. 44: Young Erin observes Col



Fig. 45: Col’s hands



Fig. 46: Young Erin’s gaze



Fig. 47: Col in the meadow



Fig. 48: Young Erin observes unconscious Col



Fig. 49: Col after interrogation



Fig. 50: Erin staggers towards the sea



Fig. 51: The Boy helps Erin walk



Fig. 52: Erin’s dying moments

Bibliography

Primary Sources

All Star Comics, Issue #8, (USA: December 1941- Jan 1942)

Aneirin, *The Book of Aneirin* / Llyfr Aneirin (NLW Llyfr Aneirin, Cardiff, MS 2.81)

Atwood, Margaret, *The Penelopiad* (UK: Canongate, 2005)

Barker, Pat, *The Silence of the Girls* (UK: Hamish Hamilton, 2018)

—*The Women of Troy* (UK: Penguin, 2021)

The Book of Ballymote (BB), A.D. 1391, Dublin, The Royal Irish Academy, RIA MS. 23 P 12 (Cat. No. 536)

The Book of the Dun Cow / Lebor ne Huidre (LU) c.1106, Dublin, The Royal Irish Academy, RIA MS. 23 E 25 (Cat. No. 1229)

The Book of Leinster / Lebor Laigen (LL) c.1160, Dublin, Trinity College, TCD MS. 1339

The Book of Úi Mhaine / The Book of Hy Many (HM), c.A.D. 1394, The Royal Irish Academy, RIA MA D ii 1 (Cat. No.1225)

The Cattle Raid of Regamna, from *The Yellow Book of Lecan* in *Heroic Romances of Ireland* Vol II, trans. by A. H. Leahy, (London: David Nutt, 1906), <https://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/regamna.html> [accessed 25.4.2019]

Carter, Angela, *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1979)

Corbett, Sarah, *Deer Woman Child* (Unpublished short story)

Dafydd, Fflur, *The White Trail* (Wales: New Stories from The Mabinogion, Seren Press, 2011)

'The Death of Cu Chulainn', trans. by Mary Jones, *Celtic Literature Collective,* <https://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/cuchulain3.html> [accessed April 4 2023]

Garner, Alan, *The Owl Service* (UK: William Collins and Sons, 1967)

The Great Book of Lecan (Lec.) A.D. 1397-1418, Dublin, The Royal Irish Academy, RIA MS. 23 P2 (Cat. No. 535)

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales,* (Germany: 1812)

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, *Children's and Household Tales* (Germany: 1812)

Haynes, Natalie, *A Thousand Ships* (UK: Pan Macmillan, 2019)

Hesiod, *Works and Days,* trans. by David W. Tandy and Walter C. Neale, (USA: University of California Press, 1996)
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0132:card=800&highlight=eris>
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0132%3Acard%3D42> [accessed 21 April 2025]

Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans by M.L. West, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1999)
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0130> [accessed 21 April 2025]

Hibernia Antiqua, before 908 CE, Oxford University, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson. MS. B. 502, SC: 11849

Lady Gregory's Complete Irish Mythology, (London: Bounty Books, 2014), first publ. (London: John Murray Publishers, 1902)

Lewis, Gwyneth, *The Meat Tree* (Wales: New Stories from The Mabinogion, Seren Press, 2010)

Liptrot, Amy, *The Outrun,* (UK: Cannongate, 2016)

The Mabinogion, trans. by Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Macalister, R. A. Stewart, ed. and trans. Lebor Gabálea Érenn / The Book of the Taking of Ireland (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1941)

Malory, Sir Thomas, *Le Morte d'Arthur,* ed. by Helen Cooper (USA: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Miller, Madeline, *Song of Achilles* (USA: Ecco Press, 2011)

— *Circe* (UK: Bloomsbury, 2018)

Monmouth, Geoffrey of, *Historia Regum Britanniae* / *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe, (London: Penguin Classics, 1966)

The Poetics of Aristotle, trans. by S.H. Butcher, 4th edn (London: MacMillan, 1920)

The Red Book of Hergest (c1382-1425), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Jesus College, MS. 111

Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Lord of the Rings* (UK: George Allen & Unwin, 1954)

de Troyes, Chrétien, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion,* trans. by Burton Raffel, (USA: Yale University Press, 1987)

Walton, Evangeline, *The Island of the Mighty* (USA: Ballantine Books, 1970)

— *The Children of Llyr* (USA: Ballantine Books, 1971)

— *Prince of Annwn* (USA: Ballantine Books, 1974)

— *The Song of Rhiannon* (USA: Ballantine Books, 1982)

The White Book of Rhydderch (*c.*1325-1375), Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales Peniarth MS. 4-5;

The Yellow Book of Lecan / *Leabhar Buidhe Lecain,* (YBL), Dublin: Trinity College, MS. 1318, Unit: Cols 573-958 [s. xiv–xv]

Zimmer Bradley, Marion, *The Mists of Avalon* (USA: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983)

Secondary Sources

Adler, Margot, *Drawing Down The Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagan's in America* (USA: Viking Press, 1979)

Alfonseca, Kiara, 'The feminist movement has changed drastically. Here's what the movement looks like today' *ABC News Online* <https://abcnews.go.com/US/examining-modern-feminism-wave-now/story?id=97617121> [accessed 28 December 2024]

Arnold, M., *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1865)

Bachofen, Johann Jakob, *Mother Right: An Investigation of the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World* (1861), trans. by David Partenheimer, (Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 2007)

Banet-Weiser, Sarah, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018)

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies,* trans. by Jonathan Cape 2nd edn, (London: Vintage, 2000), first publ (Paris: 1957)

Bassil-Morozow, Helena, *Jungian Theory for Storytellers: A Toolkit* (New York: Routledge, 2018)

Bassil-Morozow, Helena, *New Heroines in Film and Television: Post-Jungian Perspectives on Contemporary Female Characters* (New York: Routledge, 2023)

Baumgardner, Jennifer, *F'em, Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls* (Berkley CA: Seal Press, 2011)

Beard, Mary, *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (London: Profile Books, 2018)

de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex,* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1949)

Berresford Ellis, Peter, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, (London: Constable, 1987)

Bettleheim, Bruno, *The Uses of Enchantment: The meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (UK: Penguin, 1976)

Bhrolcháin, M., *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009)

— 'Ré Tóin Mná: In Pursuit of Troublesome Women' in *Ulidia: Proceedings of the first International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, eds. J.P. Mallory & G. Stockman, (Belfast and Emain Macha: 1994), pp.115-122

Bolen, Jean Shinoda, *Goddess in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1984)

Bollard, J.K. (1975). 'The Structure of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi' in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays.* Ed. by C.W. Sullivan, (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp.165-196

— (1982). 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi*',* in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays.* Ed. by C.W. Sullivan, (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp.277-302

Bolotin, Susan, 'Postfeminism: Voices from a new Generation', *New York Times Magazine,* 17 October 1982 <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/17/magazine/voices-from-the-post-feminist-generation.html> [accessed 29 February 2024]

Billington, Sandra, and Miranda Green, eds. *The Concept of the Goddess* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Bogutskaya, Anna, *Unlikable Female Characters: The Women Pop Culture Wants You To Hate* (Illinois, Sourcebooks, 2023)

Braidotti, Rosi, 'Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment', *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 14.3 (2008), 7-36 < https://rosibraidotti.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/271.-Affirmation-Pain-and-Empowerment.pdf > [accessed 2 March 2024]

— *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)

— 'Writing as a Nomadic Subject' *Comparative Critical Studies* 11.2-3 (2014), 163-184 Edinburgh University Press, doi: 10.3355/ccs.2014.0122 < https://rosibraidotti.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Braidotti-Rosi-Writing-as-a-Nomadic-Subject.pdf> [accessed 2 March 2024]

Breeze, A., *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997)

Brent Plate, S., *Religion And Film: Cinema And The Re-creation of the World,* 2nd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017)

Byrne, A., *Otherworlds: Fantasy & History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Caldecott, Moyra, *Women in Celtic Myth* (London: Arrow Books, 1988)

Campbell, Joseph, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (USA: Princeton University Press, 1949)

— *The Hero's Journey* (California: New World Library, 1990)

— *Thou Art That, Transforming Religious Metaphor,* ed. by Eugene Kennedy (California: New World Library: 2001)

— *Goddesses: Mysteries of the Feminine Divine,* ed. by Safron Rossi, (California: New World Library, 2013)

Carey, J. 'Time, Space and the Otherworld', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 7, (1987), 1-27

— *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955)

Carter, Angela, 'Notes from the Front Line' in *On Gender and Writing* ed. by Michelene Wandor, (UK: Pandora, 1983), pp. 69-77

— *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago, 1982), (first publ. Gollanz, 1977)

Chadwick, N. Kershaw, 'The Borderland of the Spirit World in Early European Literature' in *Trivium* 2 (1967), 17-36

Chadwick, N. Kershaw & H. Munro Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932)

Creed, Barbara, 'Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen* 27.1 (1986), 44-71, <https://academic.oup.com/screen/article-abstract/27/1/44/1630470?redirectedFrom=fulltext> [accessed 14 April 2023]

— *Return of the Monstrous Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2022)

Christ, Carol P., *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers and Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980)

— *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997)

Cobb, Shelley, *Adaptation, Authorship and Contemporary Women Filmmakers* (UK: Palgrave, 2015)

Daimler, Morgan, *The Morrigan: Meeting the Great Queens* (UK: Moon Books, 2014)

Daly, Mary, *Beyond God The Father: Towards a philosophy of Women's Liberation* (USA: Beacon Press, 1973)

— *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978)

Davies, Sioned, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* (Wales: Llandysul, 1993)

— *The Mabinogion A new translation by Sioned Davies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus,* trans. by B Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 1987)

Dillon, Myles, *Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 1994)

Dolan, Josephine, 'Crumbling Rejuvenation: Archetype, Embodiment and the 'Ageing Beauty Myth'', in *The Happiness Illusion: How the Media Sold us a Fairytale,* ed. by Luke Hockley & Nadi Fadina (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2015), pp. 75-88

— 'Smoothing the Wrinkles', in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, ed. by Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner and Lisa McLaughlin (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 342-351

Donahue, Charles, *'The Valkyries and the Irish War Goddesses' PMLA,* 56.1, (1941), 11-12

Downing, Christine, *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine* (Illinois: iUniverse, 1981)

Doty, William G., *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2000)

Dillon, Myles, *Early Irish Literature* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1948)

Dundes, Alan, *Interpreting Folklore* (USA: Indiana University Press, 1980)

Dworkin, Andrea, *Woman Hating* (New York: Penguin, 1974)

Dyer, Richard, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Routledge, 2013)

— *Stars* (UK: British Film Institute, 1979)

Eklund, H.L., 'The Construction of Female Anti-Hero Identities Analysing the Gender Roles of Eve and Villanelle in *Killing Eve', Paradigm Academic Press Studies in Social Sciences & Humanities* 3.11, (2024) 20-24

Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (USA: Harper, 1961)

— *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion,* trans. by Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harvest, Brace and World, 1957)

Eller, Cynthia, 'Divine Objectification: The Representation of Goddesses and Women in Feminist Spirituality' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* 16.1 (2000), 23-44

Ellington, Thalia R., 'Subverting Gender Norms: The Role of Female Anti-Heroes in Modern Action Films', *Journal of Research in Social Science and Humanities* 3.8 (2024), 18-25

Faber, Alyda, 'Redeeming Sexual Violence? A Feminist Reading of *Breaking The Waves*' in *Literature and Theology* 17.1 (2003), 59-75

Field, Syd, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, (New York: Dell, 1984, first publ. 1979)

Finer, Ella, 'Feminism and Sound', in *Sound and Literature*, ed. by Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 315–333

Flieger, Verlyn, 'J. R. R. Tolkien and the Matter of Britain', *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R.Tolkien, C.C. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoetic Literature,* 23.1, Article 5 <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol23/iss1/5> [accessed 16 August 2024]

Ford, Patrick. K. 'Branwen: A Study of the Celtic Affinities', in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays,* ed. by C.W. Sullivan (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp. 99-119

— 'Prolegomena to a reading of the Mabinogi: 'Pywll' and 'Manawydan'' in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays,* ed.by C.W. Sullivan (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp. 197-216

Frankel, Valerie, *From Girl To Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend,* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2010)

Franz, Chris, 'Can you guess what every woman's worst nightmare is? The Good For Her Film, and Contextualising Rape-Revolt in post-Weinstein America and Promising Young Woman' *Brief Encounters* 8 (2024), <https://briefencounters-journal.co.uk/article/id/206/> [accessed 19 August 2025]

Frazer, Sir James, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion* (1922), (New York: Macmillan, 1935)

Freud, Sigmund, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Random House, 1938)

— 'On the Sexual Theories of Children' (1908) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, IX,* ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959)

— *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XI* (Germany: 1910), first English Trans. by Joan Riviere, *Contributions to the Psychology of Love: A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men* (1925) Collected Papers 4, 192-202, in *Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, VII, (1953), ed. by Angela Richards, trans. by James Strachey, (London: Penguin, 1977)

— *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, VII (1953), ed. by Angela Richards, trans. by James Strachey, (London: Penguin, 1977)

Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton USA: Princeton University Press, 1957)

Gadon, Elinor W., *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time* (USA: Harper, 1989)

Gamman, Lorraine, and Margaret Marshment, *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture,* 3rd edn, (London: Women's Press, 1994)

Gamman, Lorraine, 'Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze' *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture,* ed. by Lorriane Gamman and Margaret Marshment, 3rd edn, (London: Women's Press, 1994), pp. 8-26

Gantz, J., *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (London: Penguin, 1981)

— 'Thematic Structure in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi'*,* in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays* ed. by C.W. Sullivan, (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp.265-275, (first publ. Medium Aevum 47 (1978) 247-254)

Gardner, Gerald, *Witchcraft Today* (London, Rider and Company, 1954)

Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 3rd edn, (New York: Basic Books, 2017), (first publ. New York: Basic Books, 1973)

George, Michael W., 'Television's Male Gaze: The Male Perspective in TNT's Mists of Avalon*',* in *The Middle Ages on Television: Critical Essays,* ed. by Meriem Pagés and Karolyn Kinane (USA: MacFarland, 2015)

Goldenberg, Naomi R., *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979)

Gimbutas, Marija, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images* (London: Thames and Hudson. 1974)

Gil, F. J., and F. Garcia, 'Clear Hero and Dark Hero in the Cinematographic Narration,' *Área Abierta* 16.3, 1-16

Gill, Rosalind, 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10.2 (2007), 147-166 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/1367549407075898> [accessed 1 March 2024]

Goodison, Lucy, *Moving Heaven and Earth, Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Change* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1990)

Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948)

Green, Miranda, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1992)

— *'Back to the Future: Resonances of the past in myth and material culture',* in *Archeology and Folklore,* ed. by Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius J. Holtorf (London: Routledge, 1999)

— *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins, and Mothers* (London: British Museum Press, 1995)

— *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992)

— 'The Gods and the Supernatural: The Nature of Celtic Religion', in *The Celtic World,* ed. by Miranda Green (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 465-488

— *The Concept of the Goddess,* ed. by Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996)

Gulermovich Epstein, Angelique, *War Goddess The Morrígan and her Germano-Celtic Counterparts,* Electronic Version, 148, (1998) <https://archive.org/details/WarGoddessTheMorriganAndHerGermanoCelticCounterparts/page/n197/mode/2up> [accessed: 15.8.2023]

— 'Woman's Word: Threats and Prophecies, Lies and Revelations in Arthurian Romance and Medieval Irish Literature' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 12 (1992) 184–95

Gruffydd. W. J., *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (1950), (London: Wakeman Press, 2016)

— *Math Vab Mathonwy: an inquiry into the origins and development of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi with the text and a translation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1928)

— *Rhiannon; an inquiry into the origins of the first and third branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953)

Hanson, Clare, *A Cultural History of Pregnancy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Hanson-Smith, Elizabeth, 'Pwyll Prince of Dyfed: the narrative structure', in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays,* ed. by C.W. Sullivan, (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp. 153-164

Hasian, Marouf, Jr., *'Zero Dark Thirty* and the Critical Challenges Posed by Populist Postfeminism During the Global War on Terrorism', *Journal of Communications Inquiry* 37.4 (2013), 322-343

Heijda, Kim, '*War Goddesses, Furies and Scald Crows*: The use of the word babh in early Irish Literature', (Unpublished Thesis, University of Utretch, 2007)

Henderson, Joseph L. 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man' in *Man and His Symbols,* ed. by C. G. Jung, (First publ. London: Aldus: 1964), (London: Picador, Pan Books, 1978)

Hennessy, W.M., 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War' *Celtic Review* 1.6, (1870 – 75), 32-57 (Paris) <https://archive.org/details/revueceltique01gaid/page/32/mode/2up> [accessed 15 August 2023]

Hillman, James, *Healing Fictions,* 3rd edn, (Thompson, USA: Spring Publications, 2019), (first publ. Barrytown New York: Station Hill Press, 1983)

Holub, Christian, 'Yorgos Lanthimos on whether Poor Things is feminist: "I try to make films more open than that" ', in *Entertainment Weekly,* 21 February 2024, <https://ew.com/yorgos-lanthimos-discusses-whether-poor-things-is-feminist-8598210> [accessed 29 February 2024]

hooks, bell, 'Postmodern Blackness' in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics, Postmodern Culture* 1.1 (1990), 23-31

Hudson, Kim, *The Virgin's Promise:Writing Stories of Feminine Creative, Spiritual, and Sexual Awakening,* (California: Michael Wiese Productions, 2009)

Humm, Maggie, *Practicing Feminist Criticism: An Introduction* (London: Wheatsheaf, 1995)

Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*, (London: Routledge, 2006)

Hutton, Ronald, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999)

Ingle, Róisin, 'Big Night In With Olwen Fouéré' *Irish Times Women's Podcast* Episode 411 <https://soundcloud.com/irishtimes-women/ep-411-big-night-in-with-olwen-fouere> [accessed 16 May 2024]

Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985)

Jacey, Helen, *The Woman in the Story:Writing Memorable Female Characters*, (California: Michael Wiese Productions, 2010)

Jacobson-Tepfer, Esther, *The Hunter, The Stag and the Mother of All Animals: Image, Monument, and Landscape in Ancient North Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Jackson, Kenneth. H., *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964)

— 'The Oldest Irish Tradition: A window on the Iron Age' (Lecture, 1964)

— 'Some Popular Motifs in Early Welsh Tradition', in *Etudes Celtiques* 11, (1964-65), 83-99

Janisse, Kier-La, The *House of Psychotic Women: An Autobiographical Topography of Female Neurosis in Horror and Exploitation Films* (USA: Fab Press, 2024)

Jones, M., Celtic Literature Collective (1998-2017), <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/etain.html> [accessed 1 July 2017]

Jones, Pete, 'Diana in the World of Men: a character network approach to analysing gendered vocal representation in *Wonder Woman*', in *Feminist Media Studies*, 20.1 (2020), 18-34, doi: 10.1080/14680777.2018.1510846

Judge, S. E., 'Contemporary feminist adaptations of Greek myth' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2022), <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/83239/> [accessed 23 Dec 2024]

Jung, Carl G., *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, Collected Works* 9.1 (London: Routledge, 1959)

— *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1972)

— ed. *Man and His Symbols* (London: Aldus, 1964; repr. London: Picador, 1978)

— 'Mysterium Coniunctionis', trans. by R.F.C Hull, in *Collected Works* 14 (USA: Princeton University Press, 1993)

— 'Psychological Types', in *Collected Works* 6 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1971)

— 'The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche'*, Collected Works 8*, 2nd edn., (London: Routledge, 1970)

— *Symbols of Transformation,* trans. by R.F.C. Hull (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956)

— *Synchronicity* (London: Routledge, 1985)

—*Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read et al. (Eds.), *Collected Works* 7, 2nd edn., (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), (first published 1928)

Khader, Serene, *Faux Feminism: Why We Fall for White Feminism and How We Can Stop* (UK: Beacon Press, 2024)

Kobacker, Sophia 'The Hero's Journey in Narrative Media: The Female Model', (unpublished thesis Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, 2019)

Krzysztof Kieslowski (Interview) *Réalisation,* dir. by Dominique Rabourdin, (France: Arte, MK2TV, 1994), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-k6sIN-2K4> [accessed 8 August 2025]

Kristeva, Julia, *About Chinese Women* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977)

— *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* Vol 2. Trans. by Jeanine Herman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

— *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

Laera, Margherita, ed., *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat* (London Bloomsbury: Methuen, 2014)

Lam, Michelle, 'Race, relational dynamics and anxious adjustments: the complexities of identities in relation to one another.' *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 45.2 (2022), 129-136 Larrat Keefer, S., 'The Lost Tale of Dylan in the Fourth Branch of The Mabinogi', in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays,* ed. by C.W. Sullivan, (New York: Garland Press, 1996)

Lauzen, Martha M., *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2022,* Center for the study of Women in Television & Film, San Diego State University, ≤https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2022-23-Boxed-In-Report.pdf> [accessed 10 September 2023]

— 'It's A Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2023' <https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-Its-a-Mans-Celluloid-World-Report.pdf> [accessed 29 February 2024]

— *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2024,* Center for the study of Women in Television & Film, San Diego State University, (2024), p. 1. ≤https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2024-Its-a-Mans-World-Report.pdf≥ [accessed 2 August 2025]

Lepore, Jill, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (Australia: Scribe, 2014)

Lucia, Cynthia, *Framing Female Lawyers: Women on Trial in Film* (USA: University of Texas Press, 2005)

Lulkowska, Agata, *Filmmaking in Academia: Practice Research for Filmmakers* (Oxon: Routledge Focus, 2024)

Mac Cana, Proinsias, *The Mabinogi* (Wales: Writers of Wales, University of Wales Press, 1977)

Mac Cana, Proinsias, *Celtic Mythology* (London: Chancellor Press, 1968; repr. 1997)

MacKenna, M., 'The Irish Mythological Landscape and the Táin' from *Ulidia 2 Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. by R. Ó hUiginn, and B. Ó Catháin, (Maynooth 24-27 June 2005)

Mac Killop, J., *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Matthews, Caitlin, *Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain*: *An Exploration of The Mabinogion* (London: Arkana, 1987)

McCarthy, Patti, 'The Heroine's Journey: Claire Beauchamp Reclaims the Feminine' in *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience,* ed. by Valerie Estelle Frankel, (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), pp. 182-207.

McCrory Hatcher, Melissa, "Finding Woman's Role in the Lord of The Rings" *Mythlore* 25.3-4 (97/98) (2007), 43-54

McKendry, Séamus, *Disappeared: The Search for Jean McConville* (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 2000)

McKenna, Catherine, 'The Theme of Sovereignty in Pwyll' in *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 29 1980), 35-52

McRobbie, Angela, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: SAGE, 2009)

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller, *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Moloney, Ed, *Voices from the Grave: Two men's war in Ireland* (London: Faber, 2010)

Montel, Amanda 'Influencer Witches of Instagram: Meet the mystical millennials who are spellbinding the internet' *Cosmopolitan* Magazine (Oct 30th, 2018)

<https://www.cosmopolitan.com/lifestyle/a22886013/witches-instagram-social-media-influencer/> [accessed 22.11.2024]

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. (New York: Oxford UP, 2nd Edition, 1979), pp. 803-816.

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, 16.3 (1975), 6-18

Mulvey, Laura, *Afterimages: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2022)

Munro, Ealasaid, 'Feminism: A Fourth Wave?' *The Political Studies Association,* 5 September 2013, <https://www.psa.ac.uk/psa/news/feminism-fourth-wave > [accessed 19 August 2025]

Murray, Margeret, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A History of Scottish, French and British Witchcraft, with a guide and notes on the spells and familiars of witches* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921)

Murdock, Maureen, *The Heroine's Journey: A Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (Boston, Shambhala Publications, 1990)

Nagy, J.F., '150 Jahre Mabinogion' in *Deutsch-walisische Kulturbeziehungen,* ed. by B. Maier and S. Zimmer, (Berlin: Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2001)

Nelson, Robin, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013)

Newstead, Kate, 'Angelina Jolie's Extraordinary Star Body in *Maleficent* (2014)' *Exclamat!on an Interdisciplinary Journal* University of Exeter, (2017) 88-97

Ní Bhrolcháin, M., *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009)

Nichols, Ross, *The Book of Druidry: History, Sites and Wisdom* (London: Aquarian Press, Harper Collins, 1990)

Nicholson, Sarah, 'The Problem of Woman as Hero in the Work of Joseph Campbell', *Feminist Theology,* 19.2 (2011), 182-193

Neumann, Erich, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype,* trans. By Ralph Manheim, (USA: Princeton University Press, 1983), first publ. (New York: Bollingen, 1953)

Nutt, D., *Heroic Romances of Ireland, Volume II,* ed. and trans. A.H. Leahy. (London: 1906)

Oliver, Kelly, 'Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down', in *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Mothering,* ed. by Sarah LaChance Adams and Caroline R. Lundquist (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 241-262

Olmsted, Garret S., *The Gods of the Celts and the Indo-Europeans* Archaeolingua 6 (Budapest: Archaeolingua Alapítvány, 1994)

O'Rahilly, T.F., *Early Irish history and Mythology* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946)

Ostriker, Alicia 'The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking', *Signs* 8.1 (Autumn 1982), 68-90

Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1923) first publ. (Germany, 1917)

Parker, John, *Death of a Hero: Captain Robert Nairac, GC and the undercover war in Northern Ireland* (London: Metro Books, 1999)

Pearson, C and Pope, K., *The Female Hero in American and British Literature*, (New York: Bowker, 1981)

Pickle, Gary Andrew Bailey, 'The Chivalrous and Feminist King: How the Arthurian Legends Chronicled the Formation of Two Gender Identities.' (Unpublished Thesis, Eastern Kentucky University, 2019)

Pinkola Estes, Clarissa, Women Who Run With the Wolves (USA: Ballantine, 1992)

Plantinga, Carl, 'The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face', in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* Ed. by Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, (USA: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 239-255

Polster, Miriam, *Eve's Daughters: The Forbidden Heroism of Women,* (San Francisco: Jassey-Bass, 1992)

Poutiainen, Ella, 'A feminism of the Soul? Postfeminism, post-secular feminism and contemporary feminine spiritualities' *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 27.6 (2024), 1087-1104

Pratt, Annis, *Archetypal Patterns In Women's Fiction* (UK: Midland Books, 1981)

Propp, Vladimir, *The Morphology of the Folktale,* 2nd edn, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968 (1928))

Puhvel, Jaan, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore USA: John Hopkins University Press, 1987)

Ravenna, Morpheus, *The Book of the Great Queen: The Many Faces of The Morrígan, From Ancient Legends to Modern Devotions* (California: Concrescent Press, 2015)

Rees, Alwyn, and Brinley Rees, B. *Celtic Heritage,* 2nd edn, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989)

Rhys, J., and J. G. Evans, Eds. *The text of the Mabinogion and other Welsh tales from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887)

Rich, Adrienne, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' *College English* 34.1 (1972), 18-30

Rico, D. A., J.A. Galindo, E. Maya, & R.F. Guerrero, 'The Graphic Novel's Dark Hero and Antihero: Ethical Models for the Adolescents in Contemporary Complexity', *Eureka Revista de Investigación Científica en Psicología* 16 (2019), 137-158

Ringel, Faye, 'Women Fantasists: In the Shadow of the Ring', in *Tolkien and His Literary Resonances*, ed. by George Clark and Daniel Timmons, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 159-171

Rivers, Nicola, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Rodrick, Stephen, and William Earl [interviewers] 'Emma Stone, and Yorgos Lanthimos on 'Poor Things' Crazy Rehearsals and Never Making a Taylor Swift Joke Again. *Variety* February 21st

2024 <https://variety.com/2024/awards/features/emma-stone-yorgos-lanthimos-poor-things-taylor-swift-jokes-interview-1235915119/> [accessed 29 February 2024]

Ross, A., 'Ritual and the Druids' in *The Celtic World,* ed. by Miranda Green, (London: Routledge, 1995) pp. 423-444.

Ruether, Rosemary, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (USA: University of California Press, 2005)

Rushton, Richard, 'Reading Three Colours Blue' *Senses of Cinema,* 10 (2000) <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2000/feature-articles/blue/> [accessed 8 August 2025]

Russell, Gabrielle, *Deer Woman Child*, 'Eras of Feminism' *Cultivate: The Feminist Journal of the Centre for Women's Studies* 6 (2024), 51-53

Sánchez, Alfonso Freire, 'The concept of anti-hero or anti-heroine in contemporary audiovisual transmedia' *Cuadernos.info,* 52 (2022), 246-265, p. 255. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.52.34771> [accessed 25 August 2025]

Saul, MaryLynn, 'Malory's Morgan le Fay: The Danger of Unrestrained Feminine Power' *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 46.2 (2010), 85-99

de Saussure, Ferdinand, *Course in General Linguistics (Course de Linguistique Générale),* ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger, trans by Wade Baskin, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1916)

Savolainen, Jukka, Patrick J. Casey, Justin P McBrayer and Patricia Nanya Schwerdtle 'Positionality and Its Problems: Questioning the Value of Reflexivity Statements in Research' *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 18.6 (2023), 1331-1338

Schmidt, Victoria Lynn, *45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters,* (Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 2001)

Schubart, Rikke, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in popular Cinema, 1970 – 2006,* (USA: MacFarland, 2007)

Sellers, Susan, 'Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)

Serjeantson, D., & J. Morris, 'Ravens and Crows in Iron Age and Roman Britain' *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 30.1 (2011), 85–107

Sessle, E., 'Mysogyny and Medb: Approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism', in *Ulidia: Proceedings of the first International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, ed. by J.P. Mallory & G. Stockman, (Belfast and Emain Macha: 1994)

Seymour, St.John., *Irish Visions of the Otherworld: A Contribution to the Study of Medieval Visions* (New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930)

Siegal, Tatiana, 'The Complex Gender Politics of the 'Wonder Woman' movie' *The Hollywood Reporter,* May 31 2017,<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/complex-gender-politics-wonder-woman-movie-1008259/> [accessed 18 August 2025]

Sims-Willams, P. 'Some Celtic Otherworld Terms', in *Celtic Language, Celtic Culture: A Festshrift for Eric P. Hamp*, ed by A. T. E. Matonis and D. F. Melia. Van Nuys. (California: Ford and Bailie, 1990), pp. 57-81

Sjoo, Monica, and Barabara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (USA: Harper One, 1987)

Smith, Greg. M., 'Local Emotions, Global Moods, and Film Structure' in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion,* ed. by Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (USA: John Hopkins University Press, 1999)

Sobchack, Vivian, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (USA: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Spinoza, Baruch, 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus' in *Complete Works,* ed. by Michael L. Morgan (USA: Hackett Publishing Inc.: 1632-1677)

Stacey, Judith, 'Sexism by a subtler Name? Postindustrial Conditions and Post-Feminist Consciousness in the Silicon Valley', *Socialist Review,* 17.6 (1987), 7-28

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (USA: Harper Collins, 1979)

Stimpson, Catherine, *J.R.R Tolkien* (USA: Columbia University Press, 1969)

Stone, Merlin, *When God Was a Woman* (USA: Harcourt, 1976)

Strauss, Claude Levi, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979)

Strauss, Claude Levi, *Mythologiques* (France: Librairie Plon, 1964)Sullivan, C.W. Ed. *The Mabinogi: A book of essays* (New York: Garland Press. 1996)

Tasker, Yvonne, *Soldiers' Stories: Military Women In Cinema and Television since World War II* (London & Durham: Duke University Press, 2011)

Telyndru, Jhenah, *Rhiannon: Divine Queen of the Celtic Britons* (UK: Moon Books, 2018)

Thum, Maureen, 'Sub-subcreation of Galadriel, Arwen, and Éowyn: Women of Power in Tolkien's and Jackson's 'The Lord of the Rings,' in *Tolkien on film: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings,* ed. by Janet Brennan Croft, (California: Mythopoeic Press, 2004), pp. 231–256

Todorov, Tzvetan, and Weinstein, Arnold, 'Structural Analysis of Narrative' *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 3.1 (1969) pp. 70-76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1345003> [accessed 2 March 2024]

Tynan, Karina, *Tain: The Women's Stories* (Ireland: Bard Mythologies, 2021)

Thurneysen, R., *Die Irische Helden-und Königsage bis zum Siebzehnten Jahrhundert,* (Halle, 1921)

Vinaver, E., *Form and Meaning in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1966)

Venuti, Lawrence, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)

Vogler, Christopher, '*The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (USA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1992)

Waddell, Terrie, *Mis/takes: Archetype, Myth and Identity in Screen Fiction,* (London: Routledge, 2006)

Wai Kit, Ow Yeong, 'Born Again: Transcendence and Renewal in Narratives of Spiritual Rebirth' *PRISM: USP Undergraduate Journal,* 5.1 (2013), 6–13

Wait, G., 'Burial and the Otherworld' in *The Celtic World,* ed. by Miranda Green, (London: Routledge, 1995) pp. 489-511.

Warner, Marina, *Once Upon A Time: A Short History of the Fairytale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Wehr, Demaris S., *Jung & Feminism: Liberating Archetypes* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987)

Whittock, M., *A* Brief *Guide to Celtic Myths and Legends* (London: Robinson, 2013)

Williams, Mark, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of The Gods of Irish Myth* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016)

Williams, Sir Ifor., *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1930)

Williams, Zoe, 'Why Wonder Woman is a masterpiece of subversive feminism', *The Guardian,* Monday 5 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jun/05/why-wonder-woman-is-a-masterpiece-of-subversive-feminism> [accessed 18 August 2025]

Wilson, Emma, 'Three Colours: Blue: Kieślowski, colour and the postmodern subject', *Screen* 39.4 (1998), 349-362

Wood, J., *The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature* in *The Mabinogi: A book of essays,* ed. by C.W. Sullivan, (New York: Garland Press, 1996), pp. 61-78

Yates, Jessica, 'Arwen the Elf Warrior?' *Amon Hen* 165 (2000), 11-15Zipes, Jack, *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films* (New York: Routledge, 2011)

Zipes, Jack, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013)

Online media

'Angelina Jolie, William Hague, and Sexual Violence in Conflict ', *Women's Hour*, BBC Radio 4, 11 June 2014

Blackie, Sharon, *Adventures in Nutopia: New myths to live by,* <https://druidry.org/adventures-in-nutopia-podcast> [accessed 31 October 2022]

Carmody, Isolde, and Chris Thompson, *The Story Archaeologists Mythical Women in Irish Folklore* Episode 6: 'Encountering The Mórrígan', 30 August 2012 <https://storyarchaeology.com/mythical-women-6-encountering-the-morrigan/> [accessed 2 August 2021].

Empey, Julia A., *Between Post Humanism and Post Feminism: Beyond the Gaze* Post Humanism Cinema Media Philosophy Series Final Event Brock University Canada. Online Lecture, 14 February 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTiTUHVQJdc> [accessed 23 February 2023]

GenZHer Instagram pages <https://www.instagram.com/genzher_/> [accessed 28.12.2024]

The Irish Times, April 23rd 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/new-ira-admits-responsibility-for-killing-of-lyra-mckee-1.3869002?> [accessed 12.5.2024]

Lauzen, Martha M., *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2024,* <https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2024-Its-a-Mans-World-Report.pdf> [accessed September 2nd 2025]

Martell, Katie, *Faux Feminism* website <https://www.fauxfeminism.com/> [accessed 28.12.2024]

O'Brien, Lora, *The Irish Pagan School* 'The Morrigan' blog post 31 August 2022. <https://irishpagan.school/the-

morrigan/#:~:text=The%20Morrigan%20is%20one%20of%20the%20most,goddesses%20of%20the%20Tuatha%20D%C3%A9%20Danann%2C%20certainly.&text=Although%20perhaps%20best%20known%20for%20being%20a,roles%20and%20mythology%20in%20Irish%20pe> [accessed 23 April 2024]

Ronan, Saoirse, 'Saoirse Ronan speaks about how the mythic Selkies shaped the journey of her character in the film *The Outrun',* <https://www.facebook.com/reel/3393660837433760> [accessed 7 March 2025]

Soloway, Joey (formerly Jill), 'The Female Gaze' Keynote talk at Toronto Film Festival 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnBvppooD9I> [accessed 2 February 2018].

University of Texas at Austin Linguistics Research Center *Old Irish Online* <https://lrc.la.utexas.edu/eieol/iriol/30> [Accessed 25 August 2025].

Filmography

A Promising Young Woman, dir. by Emerald Fennell (Focus Features, Universal, USA / UK 2020)

Agnes, dir. by Mickey Reece (USA: Magnet Releasing, 2021)

Alien, dir. by Ridley Scott (USA: 20th Century Fox, 1979)

Alien 3, dir. by David Fincher (Twentieth Century Fox, 1992)

American Gods, showrunners Brian Fuller, Michael Green, Chris Byrne, Lisa Kussner, Charles Eglee (USA: Starz, 2017-2021)

Antichrist, dir. by Lars Von Trier (Denmark / Sweden: Nordisk Film Distribution, 2009)

The Ascent, dir. by Larisa Shepitko (USSR: Mosfilm, 1977)

The Assistant, dir. by Kitty Green (Bleecker Street Media, USA, 2019)

Banshee Blacktop, dir. by Sean Garland (Ireland: Ison Distribution, 2016)

Bird, dir. by Angela Arnold (UK: MUBI, 2024)

Black Narcissus, dir. by Michael Powel and Emeric Pressburger (UK: General Film Distributors, 1947)

Bluebeard, dir. by Catherine Breillat, (France: Arte, 2009)

Breaking the Waves, dir. by Lars Von Trier (Metronome Films, Warner, 1996)

The Brood, dir. by David Cronenberg (Canada: New World Pictures, 1979)

The Company of Wolves, dir. by Neil Jordan (UK: ITC Entertainment, 1984)

Darby O'Gill and the Little People, dir. by Robert Stevenson (USA: Buena Vista Distribution, 1959)

Decalogue, dir. by Krzysztof Kieslowski (Zespol Filmowy, SFB, Telewizja Polska, 1989)

Deer Woman Child, dir. by Gabrielle Russell, (UK: 2022)

The Demon Seed, dir. by Donald Cammel (USA /UK: Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1977)

The Devils, dir. by Ken Russell (UK: Warner Bros, 1971)

Eraserhead, dir. by David Lynch (USA: Libra Films, 1977)

Excalibur, dir. by John Boorman (USA: Warner Bros, 1981)

Faeries, dir. by Lee Mishkin (USA: Tomorrow Entertainment, 1981)

The Fellowship of the Ring, dir. by Peter Jackson (New Zealand / USA: New Line Cinema, 2001)

The First Omen, dir. by Arkasha Stevenson (USA: 20th Century Studios, 2024)

The Fly, dir. by David Cronenberg (USA: 20th Century Fox,1986)

The Hallow dir. by Corin Hardy (UK / Ireland: Entertainment One, 2015)

Ida, dir. by Pawel Pawlikowski (UK: Artificial Eye, 2013)

Immaculate, dir. by Michael Mohan (USA: Neon, 2024)

Into the West, dir. by Mike Newell (UK: Miramax, 1992)

Joan of Arc, dir. by Carl Theodore Dreyer (Société Générale des Films, 1928)

The Legend of King Arthur, dir. by Rodney Bennet (UK: BBC, 1979)

The Mists of Avalon, dir. by Uli Edel (USA: TNT, 2001)

Maleficent, dir. by Robert Stromberg (Disney, USA, 2014)

Mad Max: Fury Road, dir. by George Miller (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2015);

Mephisto, dir. by István Szábó (Mafilm, HR, ORF, 1981)

Moulin Rouge, dir. by Baz Luhrmann (USA: 20th Century Fox, 2001)

Nightbitch, dir. by Marielle Heller (USA: Searchlight Pictures, 2024)

The O.A., written by Brit Marling and Zal Batmanglij, dir. by Zal Batmanglij (USA Netflix, 2016)

Ondine, dir. by Neil Jordan (Ireland: Paramount Vantage, 2009)

The Outcasts, dir. by Robert Wynne-Simmons (Ireland: Tolmayax, 1982)

The Outrun, dir.by Nora Fingscheidt (UK: Studio Canal, 2024)

Portrait of a Lady on Fire, dir.by Céline Sciamma (France: Pyramide Films, 2019)

Prevenge, dir. by Alice Lowe (UK: Kaleidoscope, 2016)

Ratcatcher dir. by Lynne Ramsay (Pathé, BBC, 1999)

The Reckoning of Erin Morrigan, dir. by Gabrielle Russell (UK: 2025)

The Return of the King, dir. by Peter Jackson (New Zealand / USA: New Line Cinema, 2003)

Riddles of the Sphinx, dir. by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen (UK: British Film Institute, 1974)

Rosemary's Baby, dir. by Roman Polanski (USA: Paramount, 1968)

Saint Maud, dir. by Rose Glass (UK: Studio Canal, 2019)

The Secret of Roan Inish, dir. by John Sayles (USA: Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1994)

The Secret of the Kells, dir. by Tomm Moore (Ireland: Buena Vista International, 2009)

The Selfish Giant dir. by Clio Barnard (BFI Film 4, Artificial Eye, 2013)

Selkie, dir. by Donald Crombie (Australia: United International Pictures, 2000)

Sharon's Baby, dir. by Peter Sasdy (UK: Fox-Rank, 1975)

She Said, dir. by Maria Schrader (USA: Universal Pictures, 2022)

Shelley, dir. by Ali Abassi (Denmark: Indie Sales, 2016)

Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope, dir. by George Lucas, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1977)

Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back, dir. by George Lucas, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1980)

Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi, dir. by George Lucas, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1983)

Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens, dir. by J. J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd. and Bad Robot, Disney, 2015)

The Song of the Sea, dir. by Tomm Moore (Ireland: Studio Canal, 2014)

The Stranger Within, dir. by Lee Philips (USA: ABC, 1974)

Through a Glass Darkly, dir. by Ingmar Bergman (Criterion, Janus Films, 1961)

The Trial of Joan of Arc, dir. by Robert Bresson (France: 1962)

The Two Towers, dir. by Peter Jackson (New Zealand / USA: New Line Cinema, 2002)

Thelma & Louise, dir. by Ridley Scott (USA: MGM/UA Entertainment Co., 1991)

Village of the Damned, dir. by Wolf Rilla (USA / UK: Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1960)

Viridiana, dir. by Luis Bunuel (France: Films Sans Frontieres, 1961)

The Watchers, dir. by Ishana Shyamalan (USA: New Line Cinema, 2024)

Wolfwalkers, dir. by Tomm Moore (Ireland: Wildcard, 2020)

Women Talking, dir. by Sarah Polley (USA: United Artists, 2022)

Wonder Woman, dir. by Patty Jenkins (USA: Warner Bros., 2017)

You are Not My Mother, dir. by Kate Dolan (Ireland: Magnet Releasing, 2021)

Zero Dark Thirty, dir. by Katherin Bigeolow (USA: Columbia Pictures, 2012)