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Abstract

This article explores how female characters in Jennifer Saint's contemporary retelling of Greek mythology, Hera (2024), both mirror and oppose patriarchal norms. The study uses feminist literary criticism, analyzing the female characters' acts of resistance using Rosemarie Tong's Feminist Thought (2009) and identifying the patriarchal institutions depicted in the text with Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (2000). This analysis, which takes a qualitative descriptive method, focuses on close reading strategies to reveal how mythical stories can be reframed to subvert male authority and strengthen female autonomy. The results show that the novel depicts patriarchy through the subordination of the female body and the consolidation of male authority, which are ingrained in both domestic and divine power structures. The female characters respond by acting in ways that are representative of radical feminist tactics, such as refusing to play roles that have been prescribed to them, challenging male authority, and regaining control over their bodies and identities. These narrative decisions reveal the manufactured character of patriarchal power in addition to reimagining the roles of mythological women. The study demonstrates how patriarchal structures, despite their deep roots, may be challenged and redefined via resistance, both in fictional texts and in larger society discourse, and it confirms that literature is a powerful medium for criticizing gender inequality.

Keywords: Female Resistance; Feminism; Patriarchy; Patriarchal Practices; Radical Feminism

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INTRODUCTION

Literature plays a central role in both mirroring and challenging the social, political, and cultural realities that shape human life. Sridevi (2024: 216) claims that literature functions as more than mere artistic expression; it is a medium through which dominant ideologies, values, and power structures are revealed, critiqued, and occasionally dismantled. One of the enduring power systems embedded within literature is patriarchy, a hierarchical structure that privileges men while systematically subjugating women through a range of institutional, cultural, and interpersonal mechanisms. Across historical and contemporary texts,

patriarchal systems have influenced the portrayal of gender roles, familial structures, and the allocation of agency and voice. As such, literature becomes a vital resource in gender studies, providing insight into how patriarchal ideologies are reinforced and, crucially, how they can be resisted.

According to Pierik (2022: 74), the term patriarchy, derived from the Greek word *πατριάρχης* (*patriárchisi*), originally referred to the authority of the male head within a family structure. Over time, the definition has expanded beyond familial hierarchies to encompass a broader sociopolitical system in which male dominance permeates various sectors, including law, education, religion, politics, and culture. According to Millett (2000), patriarchy is not a biological or natural arrangement but a constructed and perpetuated social system. It is maintained through learned behaviors, cultural expectations, and institutional practices that prioritize male authority. As states by Brandmaier (2015: 1), in patriarchal societies, women's value is often reduced to reproductive and domestic roles, while their intellectual, creative, and political contributions are minimized or erased. This gendered hierarchy becomes internalized by individuals and societies alike, rendering it both systemic and psychological.

Feminist literary criticism, as a methodological approach, seeks to expose and interrogate these patriarchal patterns within literary texts (Tyson, 2006: 83). By analyzing how women are represented and how narratives structure gender dynamics, feminist critics reveal how literature has historically participated in the Tong (2009) marginalization of women, but also how it offers space for resistance. Feminist theorists like Kate Millett and Rosemarie Tong have made significant contributions to this field. Millett's *Sexual Politics* (2000) was among the first works to systematically examine how patriarchal power is embedded in cultural production. She argued that literature, as a form of ideology, not only reflects but also reinforces male dominance by promoting norms that glorify male power and silence female agency. Millett's work remains foundational for scholars examining gendered power structures in narrative fiction.

Radical feminism, as developed and articulated by theorists such as Tong (2009), goes beyond liberal demands for equality within the system and instead

calls for a complete dismantling of patriarchy. This framework critiques not only legal and economic inequality but also the deep-rooted cultural and sexual oppression that sustains male dominance. Radical feminists identify violence, coercion, and control over women's bodies as fundamental tools of patriarchy (Cottais, 2021). They emphasize that true liberation can only be achieved when these root causes are addressed. Tong's *Feminist Thought* (2009) provides a thorough exploration of radical feminist positions and highlights how female resistance can manifest in diverse and strategic ways, from rejecting traditional gender roles to challenging institutionalized sexual exploitation.

Jennifer Saint's *Hera* (2024) is a compelling example of this emerging literary trend. The novel revisits the myth of Hera, the goddess of marriage, often depicted in classical mythology as a jealous and vengeful wife. Rather than adhering to these traditional portrayals, Saint offers a reimagined version of Hera as a woman constrained by divine patriarchy, yet capable of complex thought, strategic rebellion, and subtle resistance. In this version, Zeus divides the world into three domains ruled by himself, Hades, and Poseidon, excluding Hera despite their shared lineage. Her status as a goddess and consort is rendered hollow, highlighting how even divine femininity is subordinated within male-centered power structures. Although Hera outwardly conforms to the role of queen and mother, she internally plots to subvert the patriarchal order from within, a nuanced form of rebellion that aligns with radical feminist theory.

This research analyzes how patriarchal practices and female resistance are constructed in *Hera* (2024) through the dual lens of Millett's theory of patriarchy and Tong's radical feminist framework. Employing feminist literary criticism and a qualitative descriptive method, the study conducts a close reading of the text to identify patterns of male dominance and the corresponding acts of resistance enacted by female characters. Particular attention is given to the symbolic and literal expressions of power, the use of mythology to enforce or subvert gender roles, and the psychological dimensions of resistance. By focusing on a recently published novel that has yet to receive extensive scholarly attention, this research offers fresh insight into how contemporary literature contributes to feminist discourse.

Furthermore, this study holds theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it adds to the growing body of feminist literary criticism that interrogates mythological narratives through radical frameworks. Practically, it demonstrates how literature can serve as a tool for consciousness-raising and ideological challenge, especially in academic settings where students engage with texts not just as stories, but as vehicles for social analysis. In studying *Hera* (2024), readers are invited to rethink traditional gender assumptions, to question the myths they've inherited, and to consider how narratives can be reclaimed to empower those who have historically been silenced.

Ultimately, this study argues that literature remains a powerful medium for exposing and resisting patriarchal systems. Through reimagined narratives like *Hera*, female characters reclaim their voices and agency, challenging the norms that have long defined them. Such works not only contribute to feminist scholarship but also model the transformative potential of storytelling in the pursuit of justice and equality.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how patriarchal practices and female resistance are portrayed in *Hera* (2024) by Jennifer Saint. According to Creswell (2023), qualitative research is a method used to explore and interpret how individuals or groups understand and engage with a social or human issue. The research process includes developing questions and procedures, data analysis that builds inductively from specific details to general themes, and the researcher interpreting the significance of the data. The literary approach used for this study is feminist literary criticism, as defined by Tyson (2006), which examines how texts reflect or challenge the social and political oppression of women. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (2000) is applied to identify patriarchal practices, while Rosemarie Tong's *Feminist Thought* (2009) informs the analysis of resistance strategies aligned with radical feminism.

The primary data source is the novel *Hera* (2024), from which relevant textual elements, such as phrases, scenes, and dialogue, are closely read and interpreted. Data collection and analysis follow the procedure proposed by Miles

and Huberman (1994), involving reading, coding, categorizing, and interpreting selected passages. The researcher functions as the main research instrument, applying theoretical knowledge and critical insight to examine how literature challenges patriarchal norms and elevates female agency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study identifies how patriarchal practices are both reflected and resisted in Jennifer Saint's *Hera* (2024) through a feminist literary framework. Drawing from Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy and Rosemarie Tong's radical feminism, the findings reveal two central themes: the reflection of patriarchy through male authority and control over women's bodies, and female resistance through autonomy, redefinition of roles, and subversive strategies.

Patriarchal Practices Reflected in *Hera*

1. Male Authority and Sexual Hierarchy

The novel reflects a clear hierarchy where male gods wield institutional, political, and symbolic power. Zeus embodies the patriarchal logic Millett describes, centralized male authority, enforced not only through divine status but through control of narrative and distribution of honor. For instance, although Styx is granted symbolic recognition, it is Zeus who bestows it, reinforcing her secondary status (Saint, 2024: 11). The Muses, daughters of Mnemosyne, are stripped of political function and reduced to aesthetic ornaments, existing to glorify Zeus' victories (Saint, 2024: 16).

This is further emphasized when Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades divide the world among themselves while Hera receives nothing, despite being of the same divine lineage (Saint, 2024: 36). Zeus' justification, that Hera will be queen only through marriage—transforms political exclusion into romantic possession (Saint, 2024: 41). This illustrates Millett's view that patriarchy naturalizes inequality by embedding it in personal relationships.

2. Subjugation of the Female Body

Patriarchal domination is also enforced through control over the female body. Poseidon's gaze upon Hestia illustrates normalized entitlement to women's physicality, where discomfort is acknowledged but not confronted (Saint, 2024: 14). Ixion's internal monologue presents an explicit instance of violent male desire: he imagines subjugating Hera, seeing her divine form as something to overpower and violate (Saint, 2024: 23).

The novel's most harrowing scene is Zeus' assault on Hera, in which divine status offers no protection against male violence (Saint, 2024: 64). Hera is physically pinned, silenced, and reduced to a body—a clear example of Millett's claim that patriarchy upholds itself through domination of both public roles and private autonomy. Similarly, Poseidon's attempted assault on the mortal Coronis underscores how divine patriarchy extends unchecked even to mortals (Saint, 2024: 75).

The system not only isolates women from protection but turns them against each other. Zeus manipulates women's fear of Hera's wrath to enforce silence, deepening female disunity and shielding himself from accountability (Saint, 2024: 105). This strategy aligns with Millett's assertion that patriarchy maintains itself through fragmentation of female solidarity.

Female Characters' Resistance to Patriarchal Practices

Despite systemic subordination, *Hera* portrays moments of resistance that align with Tong's five radical feminist strategies: rejecting male authority, denying biological roles, withdrawing from patriarchy, discarding femininity, and opposing male-defined sexual norms.

1. Challenging Male Authority

Hera's most defining resistance is her strategic opposition to Zeus. Though publicly conforming as queen, she inwardly plots to dismantle his power, asserting, "She will use every resource she has to bring him down" (Saint, 2024: 69). Later, she forms a political alliance with Typhon, positioning herself as a revolutionary rather than a submissive wife (Saint, 2024: 130). This

demonstrates Tong's notion of challenging male authority from within the system, using proximity to power as leverage for resistance.

2. Rejecting Traditional Biological Roles

Both Hestia and Artemis explicitly reject the roles of wife and mother. Hestia demands control over the hearth and autonomy from marriage: "Swear to me now that I can stay as I am, untouched by anyone else" (Saint, 2024: 37). Artemis, traumatized by witnessing childbirth, similarly requests that no god may claim her, choosing independence over reproduction (Saint, 2024: 192). These acts are not passive denials but bold assertions of bodily autonomy, directly subverting patriarchal expectations.

3. Separation from Patriarchal Structure

Demeter represents withdrawal as resistance. She raises her daughter Kore in isolation, far from Olympus' political sphere, seeking "peace" and refusing to engage in patriarchal dynamics (Saint, 2024: 74). Likewise, Asteria transforms herself into a lifeless rock to escape Zeus' pursuit (Saint, 2024: 106). Though tragic, her erasure is a radical rejection of bodily access and identity within a system that only values women through domination.

4. Rejecting Femininity and Embracing Masculinity

Athena resists patriarchal coding by adopting traits aligned with masculinity—she is born fully armed from Zeus' head and claims strategic and martial power (Saint, 2024: 72). Her intellect and aggression defy expectations of feminine softness. Artemis mirrors this rejection, claiming dominion over the forest and asserting her right to the hunt (Saint, 2024: 190). Both figures redefine power and femininity on their own terms, challenging gender binaries imposed by patriarchal norms.

5. Rejecting Sexual Practices that Normalize Male Violence

Athena's defense of the mortal girl Coronis marks a rare but significant interruption of patriarchal sexual entitlement. She transforms Coronis into a crow to escape Poseidon's assault (Saint, 2024: 75). This act of solidarity directly opposes the divine norm of passive complicity, offering a model of resistance that protects the vulnerable and disrupts male dominance.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze how patriarchal practices are portrayed and resisted in *Hera* (2024) by Jennifer Saint, using Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy and Rosemarie Tong's radical feminist framework. The analysis confirms that the novel reconstructs mythological narratives to expose deeply embedded patriarchal systems, particularly those based on male authority and the control of women's bodies. In response, female characters in the novel engage in various forms of resistance that align with radical feminist strategies, demonstrating that agency can exist even within oppressive frameworks.

The research findings support the view that patriarchal power is not only systemic but also adaptable, often reinforced through divine, symbolic, and emotional authority. However, the novel illustrates that resistance can also take many forms—ranging from direct confrontation and political defiance to symbolic withdrawal and bodily autonomy. These findings affirm literature's function not only as cultural reflection but also as a means of ideological critique and gender reimagining.

Future studies may build upon this research by comparing *Hera* with other feminist retellings of myth or by exploring how different waves of feminism interpret female resistance in classical literature. Further interdisciplinary approaches involving psychoanalysis, mythology, or poststructuralism may also enrich the discourse on reclaiming female narratives in patriarchal texts.

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