



The Fridging of Selected Female Characters in Greek Mythology

Alneza M. Bangasin*

*Associate Professor, Department of Arts and Science Education University of Mindanao

Corresponding Email: alneza.bangasin@umindanao.edu.ph

Received: 30 June 2022 **Accepted:** 15 September 2022 **Published:** 10 October 2022

Abstract: *This study deals with the selected female characters from Greek Mythology. The selected female characters are analysed according to the trope Women in Refrigerator. Descriptive qualitative analysis has been employed in this study. The following female characters analysed in this study are Medea, Medusa, Arethusa, Andromeda, Danaë, Daphne, Eurydice, Antigone, Helen, and Cassandra. The aforementioned characters possess the trait of a fridged woman trope. These women have been, in one way, or another, killed, abused, and or depowered to serve the character of a male protagonist thereby reducing their characters as a plot device leaving no room for character development. This study is beneficial to enthusiasts of literature specifically the following: students, educators, and future researchers. This research will help readers to view female characters under the spotlight of the trope, Women in Refrigerator. The researcher suggests that authors be made aware of the aforementioned trope so that they do not compose their characters in this manner.*

Keywords: *Fridging, Trope, Greek Mythology, Feminism, Patriarchy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's place in literature, regardless of the genre, has been a ground for academic discussion. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir herself, enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it?

Over the course of time, the portrayal of women in different genres of literature is amongst the many that needs to be reviewed. The portrayal in question is that of why they are portrayed as inferior amongst men, why they always needed saving, and why, if they possess the same amount of strength as that of a man, they are depowered. It is always the man who comes and saves the day, because women, for as long as anyone could remember, is



considered *the second sex*, and or *the other*. To quote Simone de Beauvoir, once more, ‘For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the other.’

In fact, at the present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is still a world that belongs to men – they have no doubt of it at all and women have scarcely any. To decline to be the *Other*, to refuse to be a party to the deal – this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste. Simone de Beauvoir adds.

Like most duality, it will always cause strife between the parties involved. But like all that there is in the world, gives way to the question, how did this all begin? When all is said and done, which is not likely, it seems possible that women could have won the victory; or that the outcome of the conflict could never have been decided. How is it that this world has always belonged to men, and that things have only recently begun to change?

The inferiority of women could be traced back in the oldest genres of literature. Satirists and moralists have been delighted to show the weaknesses of women since ancient times. We are familiar with the savage charges brought against women throughout French literature. Poulain de la Barre, a little-known feminist of the 17th century says, "All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit.

Women being portrayed as damsels in distress, side characters, and overall inferior in a story that only highlights the adventure of the male character has been given a term by Gail Simone. Simone came up with the term Women in Refrigerator in 1999. The term was derived from by the 1994 comic, Green Lantern number 54, Green Lantern's girlfriend; Alexandra Dewitt was murdered and stuffed in the fridge, hence the name of the trope.

Simone created a website solely dedicated to the trope (sometimes formed as "fridging") "Women in Refrigerators" that she popularized. On that site, Simone collected and made a list of instances of female comic book characters that were killed off as a plot device. The term came to be used more broadly, over time, to refer to any character that is targeted by an antagonist who has them killed off, abused, raped, incapacitated, de-powered, or brainwashed for the sole purpose of affecting another character, most likely a man into motivating them to take action.

According to an article written by Vox in 2018, "the idea of the "fridged" woman wasn't literally about refrigerators but encompassed a litany of female comics characters who'd been subjected to extreme violence or death." In addition, looking at the many cases of comics, movies, and other genres of literature, it is easy to spot some recurring patterns of a refrigerated woman. The female character is often killed near the beginning of the story, and this tormenting event becomes a motivating incident for a male hero to go on a narrative journey.



The problem with fridging is that it perpetuates the idea that women are objects whose value is dependent on their sexual purity as well as their worth to a man. Most women characters that fall into this trope usually have nothing to say for themselves and solely exist only to get murdered. This leads to reducing their character into nothing but one-dimensional objects in a story that is all about men.

Moreover, writing female characters in this manner is off-putting. Portraying women as helpless beings comes hand in hand with body image of women in comics. This depicts women who have impractical proportions when it comes to how their bodies are drawn. Female superheroes are more often than not, displayed with hypersexualized clothing. This is due to the fact that most of the comic readers are men and they are the audience that the industry caters to.

In 1941, the world of masked crime fighters saw the rise of Phantom Lady, a pin-up girl whose costume progressively showed more and more skin. This type of sensuous women drew criticism in Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent*, which then resulted in the formation of Comic Books Authority, a regulatory agency that would put a stamp of approval on comic books appropriate for young boys to read (Madrid 49).

Since the creation of overtly sexualized women in comics has been regulated, the Phantom Lady has now vanished into thin air and made way for the other women in comics. While the Phantom Lady is an empowered female character, the same could not be said for her successors. Lois Lane, the love interest of Superman has now graced the pages of a comic book. Lane is a feisty reporter whose desire is to marry her respected caped lover. Lane's attempt to do so usually lands her in bad situations that lead to her being a damsel-in-distress. Lois Lane may not have been objectified by unrealistic proportions and hypersexualized outfits; they were objectified by their extreme need to be married and their seeming incompetence to do much else.

Women's inferiority in the pages of a comic book has become so apparent and a great example of this is Sue Storm. Commonly known as Invisible Lady, Storm did not concern herself much with saving the world despite having super powers. She spends most of her time winning over the heart of Mr. Fantastic. As the study of Nelson (2015) points out, even when women in comics became more powerful, they were still inferior characters. In the rare cases that their powers matched their male counterparts, they were less important as evidenced by their apparent disposability.

Skeptics may argue that the objectification does not only apply to women, for men in comics are also portrayed with unrealistic body image. To that extent, it is fair to say that men are also objectified in comics. However, the male superheroes portrayed in comics are noble, powerful, and heroic. The male characters seem to die nobly, as heroes but shock value seems to be a major motivator in the *superchick* death more often than not, Simone adds. Because of this, men are likely to relate to these characters and form parasocial relationships, which in turn prevent the idealized forms from harming men's body images (Young). Women in



comics are often portrayed as ditzy and disposable so it is hard to form parasocial relationships with them.

Therefore, women are more likely to be negatively affected by the idealized female body images portrayed in comics. When it comes to the fates suffered by men and women, according to Simone, "If there are only fifty major female superheroes, and forty of them get killed/maimed/depowered, then that's more than significant numerically than if forty male characters get killed, since there are many time more of them total."

In the Philippines, there have been several studies conducted about the way women are portrayed in the media. *Towards Our Own Image (Part I)* (1986) by Rina Jimenez-David and Pennie Azarcon-dela Cruz is a study about women's oppression during the period of 1976-1985. It offers an overview of the representation and role of Filipino women in the various media forms in the Philippines. In the same year, Wilhelmina S. Orozco published a continuation of *Towards Our Own Image (Part II)* this paper provides a content analysis of the different portrayal and role of Filipino women in the Philippine cinema.

Orozco (1986) acknowledges the fact that for a certain period of time in Philippine cinema, films produced are oriented towards the taste of a predominantly male audience. The inference here is that producers and directors mainly cater to men or male viewers' perspective since they are presumably employed and can afford to pay their way to the movie house. Such a state of audienceship certainly fits well into the grand scheme of imperialist powers who themselves are male chauvinistic, and who prefer to keep half of the population, the women, ignorant, illiterate in order for them not to question nor to teach the children to be critical towards the prevailing social and economic order of the country.

Over the course of time, literature students from University of Southeastern Philippines (Main Campus) have taken interest in the portrayal of women in pieces of literature. This has made them well aware of the one-sided and imbalanced portrayal of women in between pages, written lines, and on screen. Undergraduate, graduate, and members of the faculty have successfully given spotlight to empowered women of literature through their published works. Many papers discussed powerful women that do not in any way fit themselves in the mold patriarchy has set for them. However, there is not enough discourse for the women in refrigerators thus far. The ones that characters are written merely to serve the character of the male protagonist.

Characters of women that are written in this manner need to be discussed just as much as empowered women do. Thus the researcher deems it necessary for the trope, women in refrigerator to be deliberated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Patriarchy is the term patriarchy refers to male dominance in both the public and private spheres. The term 'patriarchy' is commonly used by feminists to describe the power dynamic between men and women. Thus, patriarchy is more than just a term; feminists use it as a concept, and like all concepts, it is a tool for understanding women's realities. These days, it



is generally used "to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways' (Bhasin 2006:3).

Moreover, patriarchy is a system in which women are kept subservient in a variety of ways. The subordination we experience on a daily basis, regardless of class, takes various forms - discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence - within the family, at work, and in society. As a result, women's subordination is a situation in which there is a power struggle and men dominate women. Following through this ideology means "men are superior to women and women are part of men's property, so women should be controlled by men and this produces women's subordination.

Aristotle adds more fuel to the fire when he reiterates that, "woman's biological inferiority makes her inferior in her capacities, her ability to reason, and thus her ability to make decisions. Because man is superior to woman, he is born to rule and she is born to be ruled."

Feminism is a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that aim to define and establish the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes. Feminism incorporates the position that societies prioritize the male point of view, and that women are treated unjustly within those societies. Efforts to change that include fighting against gender stereotypes and establishing educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes for women that are equal to those for men.

Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's rights, including the right to: vote, hold public office, work, earn equal pay, own property, receive education, enter contracts, have equal rights within marriage, and maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to ensure access to legal abortions and social integration, and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. Changes in female dress standards and acceptable physical activities for females have often been part of feminist movements.

Some scholars consider feminist campaigns to be a main force behind major historical societal changes for women's rights, particularly in the West, where they are near-universally credited with achieving women's suffrage, gender-neutral language, reproductive rights for women, and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Although feminist advocacy is, and has been, mainly focused on women's rights, some feminists argue for the inclusion of men's liberation within its aims, because they believe that men are also harmed by traditional gender roles.

Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years and represent different viewpoints and aims. Traditionally, since the 19th century, first- wave liberal feminism that sought political and legal equality through reforms within a liberal democratic framework was contrasted with labour-based proletarian women's movements that over time developed into socialist and Marxist feminism based on class struggle theory. Since the 1960s both of these traditions are also contrasted with radical feminism that arose from the radical



wing of second-wave feminism and that calls for a radical reordering of society to eliminate male supremacy; together liberal, socialist and radical feminism are sometimes called the "Big Three" schools of feminist thought. The words "féminisme" and "féministe" first appeared in France and the Netherlands in 1872, Great Britain in the 1890s, and the United States in 1910. The Oxford English Dictionary lists 1852 as the year of the first appearance of "feminist" and 1895 for "feminism". Depending on the historical moment, culture and country, feminists around the world have had different causes and goals. Most western feminist historians contend that all movements working to obtain women's rights should be considered feminist movements, even when they did not apply the term to themselves. Other historians assert that the term should be limited to the modern feminist movement and its descendants. Those historians use the label "protofeminist" to describe earlier movements.

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. It encompasses work in a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, economics, women's studies, literary criticism, art history, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, oppression, and patriarchy.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- Identify the traits of the selected female characters.
- Determine the conflicts that were encountered by the selected female characters.
- Identify the resolutions to the conflicts in question.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher makes use of the descriptive-qualitative research method. This research method concerns itself with meanings instead of variables. It is used to obtain a deeper understanding of the underlying factors of particular opinions and motivations. It offers insight into the issue or helps to generate ideas or theories for future quantitative studies. This research design observes, describes, and provides documented aspects of the situation as it occurs. Descriptive research shows the characteristics of persons, situations, or groups and the frequency in terms of an occurrence of phenomenon (Dulock, 1993). Specifically, it utilized Gail Simone's trope of Women in Refrigerator, Simone de Beauvoir's concept of othering, and women's subordination to identify the traits, conflicts and resolutions that these selected characters went through.



4. DATA INTERPRETATION

Table 1: The Traits, Conflict, and Resolution in the Stories of the Selected Female Characters

SELECTED FEMALE CHARACTER	TRAITS	CONFLICT	RESOLUTION
MEDEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled in witchcraft • clever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betrayed by her husband, Jason. • Banished 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • escaped
MEDUSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • merciless • cold-hearted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexually Assaulted • Depowered and Killed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death
ARETHUSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loves hunting and freedom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexually Assaulted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • escaped
ANDROMEDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innocent • damsel in distress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helplessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saved by Perseus
DANAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restrained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-consensual impregnation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saved by Perseus
DAPHNE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • independent • a huntress • persuasive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexually Assaulted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transformed into a tree to escape being sexually assaulted
EURYDICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no other description found in her story other than her being Orpheus' wife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • defenselessness • bitten by a serpent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reunion in the after-life
ANTIGONE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong • defiant • passionate • family-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • defied the law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • death
HELEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gorgeous • referred to as "the face that launched a thousand ships" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • defenselessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • survived the Trojan war



CASSANDRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• can see through the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• depowered and sexually assaulted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• death
-----------	--	--	---

2. RESULTS

Much like Medea, Antigone also is the protagonist in her story who suffered through a lot because of patriarchy. Antigone, having the trait of a defiant woman for defying the orders of King Creon, does not exempt her from being a subordinate to the rules that patriarchy have set.

Antigone's character is doomed from the start for she defies the order of the king to not bury her brother. This event in her life story leads to her being thrown into a dungeon where she eventually took her own life.

The selected female characters, Andromeda, Danae, Eurydice, and Helen all proved to be characters that fall into the trope of a fridged woman. Andromeda and Danae were both mentioned in the story of Perseus. All the events in Danae's story were all results of her being a subordinate to patriarchy. From her being forced to live in a dungeon by her father and her being impregnated by Zeus against her will, up to rejecting the unwanted advances of Polydectes. These conflicts in her character are all the result of her being a victim of patriarchy for she does not have control over her body and she does not have a say in how her story goes.

Andromeda on the other hand, is a princess that was forced to atone for the sins of her vain-tongued mother and is offered to a sea serpent. This is where Perseus comes to play the role of the hero in her life. In the many various stories of her life, Andromeda is not given much description except for the fact that she is the woman Perseus saved and married. There was little to no mention of her personality in the story thus, making her fall under the fridged women trope.

At the mention of women being written without much agency to herself and not much description to herself but the fact that she needs to be saved by a man, comes another character, in the name of Eurydice. Eurydice is known for being the other in the tragic story of Orpheus. Right after the two were married, Eurydice was bitten by a snake causing her untimely death. This led to Orpheus rescuing her soul into the underworld. This event in her life clearly shows Eurydice's death being used as a plot device that serves as a fuel to Orpheus' journey to the underworld.

In all the various versions of how her story is told, Helen is always portrayed as a frigid woman. Whether she was abducted or willingly boarded the ship with Paris still does not change the fact that she is the woman who launched the thousand ships. This event in her life resulted to a war that lasted several years and caused unnecessary deaths. Her being subordinate to patriarchy is displayed in her character being reduced into an object of desire



by not only one man but a countless number of them. Her sexual prowess is not seen as her having the upper hand but she is utterly condemned and vilified for it, yet another proof that Helen is subordinate of patriarchy and an *other* story of the Trojan War.

Although Medusa is a victim of sexual assault, she is often portrayed in literature as a monster. Her sexual purity being violated by Poseidon is a proof of her being a subordinate of patriarchy. Medusa was punished by Athena for she thought that Medusa dishonored her temple. Despite her newly acquired prowess, in the story of Perseus, Medusa's character is reduced to being a reward to his journey thereby making her character the other in a story of a male protagonist.

Although chased down by different male characters, Daphne and Arethusa both suffered similarly. Arethusa was running away from the unwelcome advances of Alpheus and Daphne to Apollo as well. To save herself from Alpheus, Arethusa sought the help of Artemis and in an answer to her prayer she was turned into a body of water. Daphne on the other hand, sought the help of her river-gold father Peneus. Daphne chose to be turned into a laurel tree instead of being with Apollo. They may not fall under the category of a fridged woman; still struggles of these two women are both similar hence they are both victims and subordinate of patriarchy. Both female characters have had their essence reduced to an inanimate object just to get away from the conflict of men and their unwelcome advances. These two women should have had a better option as to how they would go on about their day had men just left them alone.

Another female character that also fell under Apollo's hands in Cassandra. Cassandra's character defies Apollo's advances to her which lead to her being cursed to spew prophecies that no one would believe. Cassandra's lack of influence over her life stemmed from her being referred to as Apollo's slave hence making her the other in her own story.

3. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the selected female characters are only fragile, defenseless, vulnerable, and does not seem to have much to say for themselves because of the way they have been written. Women who have their own agency and can defend themselves are written in a way that portrays them in a negative lens. Medea and Medusa is written in such a way that portrays them in a negative lens. Medea and Medusa is written in such a way that the readers and or audiences would see them as antagonists in their own stories. In the case of Medusa, some would resort to victim blaming. However, these are the female characters that best show that even if a woman has the upper hand and is more powerful than their male counterpart, the writers would still find a way to write them in a manner that would make them subordinate to patriarchy, hence, depower them. Antigone's character, despite having a defiant personality, still dies at the end of her story because of how she does not have a say on the decision of the state that is dominated by men. Had Antigone been heard, her fate would have been altered.



RECOMMENDATION

This study highlights the selected female characters in selected stories from Greek mythology and how we should view them as. The researcher recommends that readers of Greek mythology should consider analyzing the female characters from their own points of view and not from the male author's perspective. The fates of these selected female characters only further the notion that women are helpless and that even if a woman is not, they are still a subordinate to patriarchy.

For the authors, the researcher recommends avoiding writing female characters in accordance with the women in refrigerator trope. Refrain from writing women as though they are marginalized and in need of saving -- the kind of writing where the female character whose life is put in jeopardy and or killed right off in the beginning of the story is something that should no longer be practiced. Writers should start writing women in such a way that they have control over their lives and have choices as to what they should do with their bodies rather than not giving them agency for themselves. Authors should stop killing women simply to cause a male protagonist grief and for him to go on a rampage or an adventure to avenge her. This is comparable to the MacGuffin in being a part of the story that is more or less pointless. It's writing that takes the easy way out, and while it can be effective, it doesn't ask anything of the characters. Their conflict revolves around a moment that could easily seem like an excuse to build that conflict, and there is no room for character growth.

4. REFERENCES

1. Aggarwal. S. (2016) "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination" Volume 5, Issue IV, September 2016, SSN: 2277-1255 BHARTIYAM INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION & RESEARCH
2. Azarcon dela Cruz, P. and David, R (1986) "Towards Our Own Image; An Alternative Report on Women and Media" from [https://library.pew.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Towards?20our%20own%20image%20part%201.pdf](https://library.pew.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Towards%20our%20own%20image%20part%201.pdf)
3. Danae". GreekMythology.com Website, 12 May. <https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Mortals/Danae/danae.html>. Accessed 09 April 2021.
4. De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The Second Sex*. Published in the United States by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto. Originally published in France in two volumes as *Le deuxième sex: Les faits et les mythes* (Vol. 1) and *L'expérience vécue* (Vol. 11) by Éditions Gallimard, Paris.
5. Fournier, Jacob. "Medea Plot Summary." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC, 5 Jan 2014. Web. 22 Jun 2021.
6. Hughes, Bettany. 2005. *Helen of Troy: Goddess, Princess, Whore*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Gorman, Ellen. 2006. "A Woman's History of Warfare." In *Laughing with*



- Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought, edited by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, 189-207. New York: Oxford University Press
7. Nelson, Kyra (2015) "Women in Refrigerators: The Objectification of Women in Comics," AWE (A Woman's Experience): Vol. 2, Article 9.
 8. Orozco, W. (1985) "Towards Our Own Image; An Alternative Report on Women and Media" from <https://library.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/towards%20our%20own%/20image%2011.pdf>
 9. Ovid, Metamorphoses 5.572-633 Translated by John Dryden
 10. Orpheus and Eurydice." GreekMythology.com, Mar 10. 2021. https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/The_Myths/Orpheus_and_Eurydice/orpheus_and_eurydice.html
 11. Romano, AJ. 2018. "What Deadpool 2's fridging controversy says about comics' culture's gender gap" Rudman, L. and Mescher, K (2012) "Of Animals and Objects: Men's Implicit Dehumanization of Women and Likelihood of Sexual Aggression"
 12. Wilhelmina, Orozco. (1985) "Towards Our Own Image" An Alternative Report on Philippine Woman and Media. Wood, Michael. 1998. In Search of the Trojan War. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
 13. Zuraiq, Z. (2018) "Women in Refrigerators": Depictions of Abuse in Media. <https://www.indianfolk.com/women-refrigerators-depictions-abuse-media/>
 14. Zajko, Vanda. 2006. "Who are we when we read?": Keats, Klein, Cixous, and Elizabeth Cook's Achilles." In Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought, edited by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, 46. New York: Oxford University Press.