

Berezhna M. V.,
*Candidate of Philological Sciences,
Associate Professor at the Department
of English Translation Theory and Practice
Zaporizhzhia National University*

THE NURTURER ARCHETYPE IN THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

Frequently women in myths, fairy tales, and novels are mere props in the male hero's journey: princesses and hags, mothers and daughters, dragons and water spirits, sirens and beautiful sorceresses. Not surprisingly, up until the end of the 1970s, cinema and television have mostly been depicting female development as tied to the male as well as connected with the family. They were various incarnations of two archetypes (defined by Jung) – the anima and the Great Mother [1, p. 120–121].

Jung postulates that archetypes are repetitive images in different cultures not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree. A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience [5, p. 79]. Further, he proposes several archetypal images, among which the mother archetype has a prominent position. Like any other, the mother archetype appears under an almost infinite variety of aspects [5, p. 81]. The archetype can be presented in the form of one's actual mother or grandmother, a motherly figure, a goddess, or any animal or object associated with fertility, longing, devotion, redemption, and protection.

The qualities associated with the mother archetype are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the mother. On the negative side, the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate [5, p. 82].

Various researches after Jung name the archetype the Universal Mother, the Caregiver or the Demeter (the Nurturer / the Overcontrolling Mother). Faber & Mayer note that the Caregiver (or Universal Mother) is represented by caring, compassion, and generosity. Commonly protective, devoted,

sacrificing, nurturing, and often parental. Usually very benevolent, friendly, helping, and trusting [4, p. 309]. Cowden, LaFever, & Viders indicate that the Nurturer takes care of everyone around her. She makes sure that all her loved ones are happy and content before taking a break or thinking of herself. Common sense and a steady hand make her an ideal mother, companion or friend. Her serene, capable and patient manner invariably soothes troubled souls or hurting hearts [3, p. 127].

Schmidt defines that love and belonging are strong motivators for the Demeter. The protagonist embodiment of the archetype is the Nurturer. She likes being connected with someone; she needs to be needed. The Nurturer has dreamed of having children for most of her life, and when she has them, they become her life. However, it is not obligatory for this archetype to have children to be the Nurturer. A sense of duty to help others is essential. If she does not have children, she channels her energy into helping and caring for others. She can often be found in the nursing and healing professions [7, p. 48]. For instance, Dr. Christine Palmer in *Doctor Strange* (2016) is an emergency surgeon who is a colleague and former girlfriend of Stephen Strange; she tries to take care of Strange after the car crash, which disabled him and sealed his fate as a disqualified neurosurgeon.

Frigga is shown as caring for the wellbeing of her sons Loki and Thor. Despite the men being adult full-grown gods, they stay children for Frigga. She cares about their proper nutrition: *If you could send Loki some soup / And eat a salad*; their appearance: *What are you wearing?* and their physical wellbeing: *What's wrong with your eye?* She openly express her affection towards them: *I love you / Yes, you are, honey*; she supports them by providing advice: *Everyone fails at who they're supposed to be, Thor. The measure of a person, of a hero... is how well they succeed at being who they are.* The Nurturer is a martyr of sorts who cares about the welfare of her children and puts others ahead of herself. Frigga sacrifices her life to save Thor's girlfriend, Jane Foster. When Thor comes back to the past and tries saving Frigga by revealing her future, she stops him, having accepted her fate.

Similarly, Laura also speaks about nutrition for her family: *Hey, you guys want mayo? Or mustard? Or both? Nate, mayo or mustard? Or ketchup. I got ketchup, too. Hey, guys! Soup's on.* Despite being Hawkeye's wife, not mother, Laura sometimes jokingly treats him as a child: *You are so cute. I'll explain when you're older, Hawkeye.* She cares about Hawkeye and his team of Avengers: *It's bad, right? Nat seems really shaken... They're a mess*; she supports him: *You know I totally support your avenging. I couldn't be prouder.* Laura also expresses her concerns about the safety of Hawkeye and the fate of their unborn child: *You need to be sure that this team is really*

a team, and that they have your back. Things are changing for us. In a few months' time, you and me are gonna be outnumbered. I need... Just be sure.

Maria Stark has few turns in the *MCU*. Still, her Nurturer archetype is recognizable: she expresses her love towards her son, Tony Stark: *Wake up, dear*; she tries to reconcile Tony with his father: *He does miss you when you're not here* and supports him by providing advice: *Say something. If you don't, you'll regret it.*

The female villains are rare and far between in the *MCU*. However, there appear two examples worth mentioning. The ambivalent aspect of any archetype, postulated by Jung [5, p. 81], is revealed by Schmidt [7] with the antagonist Overcontrolling Mother archetype. The motherhood narrative differentiates between mothers and “other” women, as in the case of adulteresses (illegitimate mothers), murderous midwives, barren or childless women and bad mothers. These are “other” women who represent the dark side of the feminine and the fears of women related to motherhood. These two elements are symbolised in the form of female evils which play the role of the villain in the motherhood narrative [6, p. 87].

The Overcontrolling Mother is the mother who projects her own disappointments onto her daughter so that she will not leave home and be independent. She is the master of inflicting guilt upon others [7]. In *Captain Marvel* (2019), the Supreme Intelligence is a supercomputer, ruling the Kree race and summoning the form of the late Mar-Vell to Captain Marvel. The Supreme Intelligence tries to guilt Carol Danvers into submission and serving the Kree on the false pretense of adopting her and giving her the superpowers: *We found you. We saved you. We embraced you as our own. Your power comes from us. But without us... you're weak. You're flawed. Helpless. Without us, you're only human.*

The villain of the motherhood narrative is necessarily a female evil, whose task is to steal, kill or harm the unborn/newborn baby [6, p. 88]. The Supreme Intelligence tells Captain Marvel: *On Hala, you were reborn...* meaning a new identity imposed on Carol Danvers by the Kree. The Supreme Intelligence calls Captain Marvel with her divided name “Vers”, which is a half of her family name “Danvers”. The Kree ruler needs to keep Vers separated from her past, to prevent her from becoming whole again, thus weakening her. The AI prefers destroying Carol than letting her remember the past, see the truth and rediscover her identity.

Another example of the Overcontrolling Mother is Ayesha in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017). Ayesha is presented as the Sovereign ruler, going against her female nature and giving birth to children by “*germinating them in birthing pods*”. In the post-credit scene, she speaks about her child Adam as the weapon she created to destroy the Guardians of the Galaxy. To underline her motherly function performed for the Sovereign race,

Ayesha addresses her maiden by the word-combination ‘my child’: *That, my child... is the next step in our evolution. More powerful, more beautiful... more capable of destroying the Guardians of the Galaxy. I think I shall call him... Adam.*

Thus, the Nurturer archetype is one of the traditional archetypes in fiction narratives, including the *MCU* franchise. The Nurturers are mothers and wives whose role is to care for the (super)hero: Maria Stark (Tony Stark’s mother), Frigga (Thor’s mother), Christine Palmer (Dr. Strange’s ex-girlfriend), Laura (Hawkeye’s wife), Meredith (Peter Quill’s mother), Gamora (Peter Quill’s girlfriend), Ramonda (mother of T’Challa and Shuri) [2]. The antagonist Overcontrolling Mother is the villain who manipulates, suppresses and harms her children, using them to feel needed and appreciated. In the *MCU*, Ayesha in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* and the Supreme Intelligence in *Captain Marvel* are representations of the Overcontrolling Mother archetype. The character’s archetype defines the role of the heroine in the plot, her actions and (verbal) behavior. The Nurturer’s goal is to take care of someone, which defines her narratives on providing food, comfort, safety, protection and reassurance, dependence, stability, love, and affection.

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