PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF LETTERS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

N°:.....

DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

Of Riddles and Labyrinths: Knowledge and Limits of the Human Mind in Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi*.

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

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2024

Declaration

I, Ishak Litim, hereby declare that the thesis entitled “Of Riddles and Labyrinths: Knowledge and the Limits of the Human Mind in Susanna Clarke’s *Piranesi*” is my own work and all the sources I have quoted have been acknowledged by means of references.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I acknowledge and thank Allah for granting me guidance and strength to undertake this endeavor.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor, **Ms. Amel BENIA**, for her moral and intellectual support, as well as her patience and understanding during the circumstances I faced before and during the accomplishment of this work. I also want to convey my heartfelt thanks and admiration to her for everything she has provided us throughout our academic journey, especially during my Master's program and specifically while preparing my graduation thesis. Therefore, I must acknowledge that I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work under her supervision and guidance.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the jury members Dr. Senoussi and Dr. Amirouche, for taking the time to read and evaluate my dissertation.

Additionally, I would like to express my deep appreciation to my dear and distinguished colleagues, Chiraz Lehimeur, Ichrak Kroun, and Islam Laarbaoui, for their significant efforts in assisting me in completing this work and presenting it in the best possible manner. Certainly, without their valuable contributions, this work would not have come to fruition.

I would also like to thank my sister Karima for her assistance during the completion of this thesis. Lastly, my thanks extend to all the teachers in the Department of English at the University of M'Sila for their instruction and guidance

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who were the guiding lights in our darkest nights.

To those whose souls resemble ours. To the wanderers in the labyrinths of life filled with tears and smile.

Abstract

Since the dawn of creation, human curiosity and thirst for knowledge have engaged the mind, prompting existential inquiries about the truth surrounding existence. Driven by doubt and curiosity, the human mind's quest for genuine knowledge is constrained by factors beyond its capacity. Consequently, the pursuit of knowledge is similarly limited, as philosophers have theorized various constraints based on their convictions and backgrounds. These philosophical theories regarding the limitations of the mind and knowledge find representation in literary works, exemplified by Susanna Clarke's novel Piranesi. The novel delves into metaphysical ideas through unfolding events and the beliefs held by its characters. To enhance symbolic and aesthetic dimensions, Clarke employs elements of fantasy and mythology, enriching the narrative with deeper philosophical and moral meanings. Thus, this thesis aims to examine the novel from a philosophical perspective, elucidating the presence of philosophers' ideas regarding the boundaries of knowledge within it. Additionally, it explores the role of ancient myths, particularly the myth of the labyrinth, in conveying these ideas to the reader, besides serving as an aid in understanding the complexities of human psychology and the contents of the human mind. This endeavor is realized through the application of epistemological theories of Western philosophers from various epochs, such as Plato, Descartes, and Foucault, along with concepts derived from studies of mythology, particularly the works of Joseph Campbell, Edith Hamilton, Philip Wilkinson, and Neil Philip.

Keywords: Knowledge, Perception, Myths, Labyrinth, Mind, Limits.

Table of Contents

General Introduction

> The knowledge we seek isn't something new. It's old. Really old. Once upon a time people possessed it and they used it to do great things, miraculous things. They should have held on to it. They should have respected it. But they didn't.
>
> – Susanna Clarke, *Piranesi.*

Knowledge, a fundamental aspect of human cognition and understanding, plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions, decisions, and interpretations of the world. It encompasses the accumulation of information, the processing of experiences, and the application of learning to navigate complex environments. However, the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge are inherently constrained by the capabilities and boundaries of the human mind. The limitations of human cognition impose critical constraints on the extent and accuracy of knowledge. These constraints manifest through factors such as perceptual biases, cognitive biases, and the inherent inability to encompass the entirety of existence within conscious awareness. As individuals interact with their surroundings and seek to comprehend phenomena, they encounter the paradoxical nature of knowledge—its simultaneous expansiveness and restrictiveness. This dichotomy prompts profound philosophical inquiries into the nature of truth, the reliability of perception, and the ultimate reach of human understanding.

In literature, the exploration of knowledge often serves as a thematic centerpiece, offering narratives that scrutinize the boundaries and complexities of human cognition. Susanna Clarke's novel *Piranesi* exemplifies such exploration through its protagonist's quest to unravel the mysteries

of a labyrinthine “House.” Through Piranesi's meticulous observations and introspective musings, the novel delves into themes of perception, memory, and the elusive nature of truth within a confined yet boundless realm. The novel richly invokes various philosophical concepts echoing the thought of philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, and even Michel Foucault.

Thus, examining the interplay between knowledge and the limitations of the human mind in *Piranesi* not only enriches our understanding of Clarke's narrative but also invites broader reflections on the nature of knowledge itself. By critically engaging with these themes, this study seeks to elucidate how the novel challenges conventional notions of cognition and invites readers to contemplate the intricacies of human understanding amidst unusually enigmatic landscapes. The novel weaves philosophical thought with the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, thus transporting readers to other worlds

Mythology, as a repository of cultural narratives and symbols, holds profound significance in understanding human beliefs, fears, and aspirations across civilizations. Among the enduring myths, the tale of the labyrinth and the Minotaur stands as a compelling archetype of complexity and mystery. Originating from ancient Greece, this mythological motif embodies themes of confinement, exploration, and confrontation with the unknown. The labyrinth, often depicted as an intricate maze constructed to confound its inhabitants, serves as a metaphor for the labyrinthine depths of human consciousness and the enigmatic paths of life's journey. At its heart lies the Minotaur, a creature of half-human, half-beast nature, symbolizing primal instincts and the darker aspects of the psyche. This myth resonates through time, offering insights into the human psyche's quest for meaning and identity amidst intricate and perplexing landscapes. In Susanna Clarke's novel, the labyrinth emerges as a central motif, inviting readers to contemplate its symbolic power

and its implications for understanding the complexities of the human knowledge within the confines of a vast, enigmatic “House” that is evocative of a whole world.

In Susanna Clarke's novel *Piranesi*, the labyrinth serves not only as a physical construct but also as a potent symbol that reflects and challenges the boundaries of human cognition and understanding. While literature often explores themes of knowledge and perception, there remains a gap in understanding how Clarke utilizes mythological symbolism, particularly the labyrinth and the Minotaur, to probe the limits of human understanding within the confines of her narrative. The protagonist, Piranesi, explores a surreal architectural landscape that mirrors the intricate corridors of his own mind, prompting questions about perception, memory, and the nature of reality. Therefore, this research aims to investigate how Clarke's use of the labyrinth as a central motif in *Piranesi* enriches discussions on the complexities of human cognitive perception and its limits. By examining the interplay between myth, philosophy, and narrative construction, this study seeks to illuminate how the novel tackles notions of knowledge and the limits of the human mind, offering insights into the profound mysteries of the human psyche within the framework of a mesmerizing fictional universe.

This study attempts to answer the following main question: How does Susanna Clarke’s contemporary work of fiction *Piranesi,* portray the concept of human knowledge and the limits of the mind? This question will be answered by introducing sub-questions: How does the novel explore the relationship between knowledge and power? How does Susanna Clarke utilize the motif of the labyrinth to explore themes of knowledge acquisition and the challenges posed by the limits of human understanding? What role does the labyrinth play, as a symbol of confinement and exploration of the psyche, in limiting the protagonist's perception of reality?

In this regard, this thesis aims to develop an understanding of how knowledge is conceptualized in *Piranesi*, and how it is depicted as lost and bounded. Besides, it examines the idea of knowledge-power relationship as well as the limits of the human mind, memory, and perception through close reading of the text. Moreover, it seeks to figure out the ways in which the writer's inclusion of mythical elements and motifs such as the labyrinth, the minotaur, the statues, the hierophant and so forth, sheds light on the fragility of the human mind and its ability to acquire true knowledge, if such a thing exists.

Driven by a passion for epistemological philosophy, which concerns the concept of knowledge, its characteristics, and challenges, this academic study aims to explore philosophical and psychological issues in literature that engage with these themes in imaginative and creative ways. Therefore, the novel *Piranesi* was chosen as the ideal vehicle to achieve this goal. The novel is distinguished by its philosophical and psychological depth, particularly in the realms of epistemology and academia. Moreover, it represents a prime example in contemporary fiction works that reinterpret ancient myths and draw parallels with timeless classical literary works, thereby enhancing its narrative symbolism, depth, and aesthetic beauty. Hence, such research will help shed light on broader philosophical inquiries into the limits of human understanding as well as understanding the significance of including myths and fantasy – mainly labyrinths – in literary artistic representations.

Several researchers and scholars have attempted to study Susanna Clarke's writings starting with her first work *Jonathan Strange&Mr Norrell (2004)*, which is a captivating blend of historical fiction, fantasy, scholarships, mystery, magic, and psychology. Its follow-up, *The Ladies of Grace Adieu (2006),* in which Clarke represents a mesmerizing collection of ten stories, all set in a 19th century England, is intertwined with the world of fairies. Clarke's unique way of

portraying the characters along with melting reality, magic, metaphysics, and history in her works especially *Piranesi* that complicates any efforts to arrive at a one and clear understanding of it, are the main reasons that drive much of this research. Nevertheless, due to its recent date of publication, there is little published literature that examines the various themes of the novel. Therefore, this dissertation aims to contribute in enriching the available research.

Praise for *Piranesi* extends beyond British reviews, reaching international acclaim. In an article entitled "Ways of Knowing, Ethics of Care in *Piranesi's* Labyrinth", Courtney Sender argues that the novel is filled with epistemological questions by which we readers are pushed to question: what do we know about our own world? And how do we know it? In this article, Sender explains that the novel provides potential answers depending on the variety of the characters, each one of them is guided by a source of knowledge which he believes to be the most accurate. Moreover, in an essay entitled "Clarke's *Piranesi* as the Wordsworthian Scientist," Brenden Sanders states: "The novel's eponymous main character is deeply in love with the world—an infinite House—around him. His relationship with the House is reminiscent of the Romantic poets' attitudes toward Nature; however, Clarke's protagonist acknowledges the value of science in a way the Romantics never did" (Delta 297). This quote showcases that Clarke's writing career was marked by the presence of several authors or literary movements of previous eras such Romanticism, which is not awkward as she is a lover of Jane Austen, one of the most outstanding figures of this movement.

Among the researchers who have attempted to investigate Clarke's *Piranesi* literary value is Bartłomiej Błaszkiewicz. In an essay entitled "On the Idea of the Secondary World in Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi*", he argues that it is widely accepted that the impact of a new literary work can be gauged by its influence on future generations of writers. Their contributions to and

understanding of a particular literary genre will be shaped by their appreciation and reaction to this new addition to the body of literature. On the other hand, he adds:

> It is also, however, becoming increasingly appreciated that the mark of the impact of a text upon its native literary tradition may be discerned in the extent to which the classic works and motifs which have first provided the formative influence in the given work's creation will be redefined by the novel context that the new work bestows on them. (Błaszkiewicz)

This suggests that the influence of a text within its literary tradition can be measured by how it reinterprets and gives new meaning to classic works and themes that originally shaped it. In other words, the impact of a new work can be seen in how it innovatively presents and reshapes established literary elements and motifs in a fresh context. Besides, Błaszkiewicz's study of the novel through metaphysical lenses informs parts of my research in terms of tackling the idea of the Platonic world and the motif of the evil "genius."

Unlike the other reviews, Casandra Lopez, in an article that bears the title of "Reading Through the Awards: *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke" (2021), writes: "It almost feels like a story ripped from a Greek myth. A man is trapped in an unending labyrinth with rooms continuously flooded by the ocean. His only companions are the birds, thousands of statues, several skeletons, and a mysterious man he knows only as the Other." This excerpt from the article demonstrates that there are quite a number of readers who perceive traces of Greek civilization and art in the novel. Unlike published reviews and the few articles on the novel, this research focuses on the concept of knowledge, the human mind, and their limits along with the inclusion of mythology mainly the myth of the labyrinth in order to serve the research' aims and objectives.

Accordingly, a better understanding of the novel's main themes such as the limits of knowledge and human mind can be achieved through using a metaphysical approach. The latter, aims to understand the nature of the universe as well as the meaning, purpose, and the mysteries of life through introspection, logic, and reasoning. Therefore, this research utilizes Plato's work *The Republic*, Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in addition to René Descartes' skeptic theories offered in his outstanding book *Meditations on First Philosophy.* Furthermore, using concepts from myth studies in addition to insights on the symbolic significance of myths in psychoanalysis helps in analyzing the presence and influence of mythology and fantasy in the novel. This can be accomplished by employing works about myths written by several scholars such as Joseph Campbell, Edith Hamilton, Philip Wilkinson and Neil Philip, and the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Carl Jung.

The dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is entitled: "The Concept of Knowledge, its Limits in Western Metaphysics and The Significance of Myths". This chapter aims at laying the foundations of the work; it provides a philosophical background of the epistemological issue of the limits of knowledge and perception. It illustrates how western philosophers defined knowledge and their later encounter with skeptic thoughts leading them to reflect on its bounds and the theories that they provided in this concern. In addition to that, the chapter attempts to highlight the power and significance of mythology in literary works and the profound meaning behind its presence.

In the second chapter entitled "The Manifestations of the Limits of Knowledge and the Human Mind in *Piranesi*", the attempt is to analyze the novel from a metaphysical point of view. It begins by an examination of Clarke's depiction of philosophical beliefs through the nature of the setting and the development of the characters in their quest for knowledge. Besides, it analyzes

the significance of the labyrinth and other supernatural elements such as magic in order to deepen the understanding of her philosophical beliefs and inspirations. The chapter also focuses on the representations of other worlds and how these worlds can be read through the lens of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Finally, it offers an analysis of the ways in which the characters perceive knowledge and become entangled in power dynamics.

Chapter ONE: The Concept of Knowledge, its Limits in Western Metaphysics and The Significance of Myths

Introduction:

Human beings stand apart from other animals primarily due to their unique capacity to behave as if touched by the divine. This distinctive trait is directly associated with their exclusive ability to possess cognition, which is the process through which knowledge and understanding are formed in the mind. Thus, he has begun to traverse the realms of his mind - propelled by curiosity and doubt – in search of "Knowledge," perhaps considering it merely a means to access "The Truth." As Gibran Khalil Gibran once said: "Perplexity is the beginning of knowledge" (Alchin and Henly 1). As long as cognition has opened numerous gateways to complex capabilities, including a wide array of mental activities - such as perception, memory, attention, reasoning, language, problem-solving and decision-making - new ways were paved for diverse approaches to the quest for knowledge and truth, attributable to the accumulations nurtured by the human mind and the circumstances accompanying its inception in this vast and enigmatic universe. Later, emerged what remains a subject of debate and divergence to this day – the conflict between empirical science and religious belief.

Consequently, myths were inevitably given their place stemming from human imagination and creativity. Since the earliest human civilizations, myths have served as guides to people by recounting imaginable epics and tales of gods and their conflicts amongst themselves and with humans. Myths were not merely stories passed down for entertainment, but for the people of ancient world, they provided valid answers to several existential questions such as: Who created human beings? And for what purpose? Hence, they held their unique significance and power,

continuing to do so to this day. This is evident across various domains such as literature, music, cinema, psychology and even consumer culture, thereby giving rise to a relationship between knowledge and myths.

This chapter will offer a brief overview of the relationship between knowledge and myth. It comprises two main sections. The first part presents a historical survey of how western philosophers have conceptualized and interpreted knowledge, outlining the theoretical frameworks they have devised to elucidate its nature. Furthermore, it endeavors to explore their perspectives on the limits of knowledge in the human perception, spanning from Ancient Greece to the Postmodern era. The second part of this chapter aims to examine the socio-cultural significance of myths and their potency, particularly focusing on the myth of the labyrinth within western philosophy and Greek mythology, and the role myths play in artistic representations.

1. What is This Thing Called Knowledge?

Approximately 2,500 years ago, the nascent field of philosophy emerged in Ancient Greece, spurred by a profound sense of awe and wonderment derived from the observable world. Within this milieu, the early philosophers found themselves confronted by a multitude of natural phenomena – ranging from the celestial bodies such as the sun, moon, planets and the stars, to the myriad forms of life teeming on earth, as well as the capricious occurrences of weather, earthquakes and celestial events like eclipses. Eager to unravel the mysteries inherent in this rich tapestry of existence, they sought answers beyond the traditional realm of myth and legend, embarking instead upon a quest driven by intellectual and philosophical curiosity.

Initially fixated on deciphering the fundamental composition of the universe, these ancient thinkers posed inquiries that transcended mere empirical observations, delving into the very nature of existence itself. This line of questioning laid the groundwork for what we now recognize as

Metaphysics, the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of existence, truth and knowledge (Hornby 925). While modern scientific inquiry has made significant strides in elucidating many aspects of the universe's composition, certain metaphysical quandaries persist, chief among them being the enigmatic query: Why does something exist rather than nothing? Thus, metaphysics encompasses not only the external phenomena that populates the cosmos but also delves into the essence of human existence and consciousness. In this endeavor, it contends with profound existential questions: How do we perceive the world around us? Do objects possess ontological reality even when imperceptible to our senses? Moreover, it contemplates the intricate relationship between mind and body, pondering the existence of an enduring soul or consciousness. At the heart of metaphysical inquiry lies ontology – the branch concerned with delineating the fundamental categories of being- which serves as the bedrock upon which much of Western philosophy is erected (Buckingham 13).

In light of all what has been said about cognition, metaphysics, belief, curiosity and historical accumulations, knowledge comes to be mentioned; what is it? and why did it take up such a large space in philosophers' research journey? On the outset, a discussion concerning knowledge can remind of the quote that the outstanding Greek philosopher and polymath Aristotle (384 B.C – 322 B.C) states in his work *Metaphysics* in which he says "All Men by nature desire to know" (Aristotle 1). These words highlight the natural curiosity that all people possess. It implies that the search of knowledge is not just an intentional endeavor but also a fundamental aspect of human nature. Besides, this insightful saying emphasizes the importance of knowledge in directing our life, influencing choices, and influencing personal development.

Fundamentally, the remark suggests that information acquisition is a basic human desire, hence, knowledge is essential, whether one is looking for answers to big life problems or just has

to know how to get by on a daily basis (Aristotle 4). Now, let's try to understand what is meant by knowledge. As the Canadian philosopher Jennifer Nagel questions: What distinguishes knowing something to be true from merely believing it to be so? How can we even be able to know anything? (5). Factually, the second primary field of philosophy is Epistemology, which is concerned with the study of the nature and limits of knowledge. At its heart is the question of how do we acquire knowledge? How do we know that we know? Do we learn everything through experience or possibly all of it is innate? All of these and others are important concerns for philosophical thoughts since sound reasoning requires us to be able to rely on our knowledge. Furthermore, we need to determine the scope and limits of our knowledge, if not, we are unable to confirm that we are truly aware of what we perceive to be true and that our senses have not in any way "tricked" us into believing it (Buckingham 13).

2. Epistemology and Philosophers' Quest for Knowledge:

Epistemology is the philosophical study of nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge. The field is also referred to as the Theory of Knowledge because the term is derived from the Greek words *episteme* ("knowledge") and *logos* ("reason"). In Western philosophy, Epistemology has a long history that dates back to the ancient Greeks and continues to this day (Martinich and Stroll). However, this does not mean that knowledge is unique, for there are several types of it such as: Acquaintance knowledge, Procedural knowledge (also called Ability knowledge), and Propositional knowledge. This latter is the main focus of epistemologists as it deals with facts because a proposition is an assertion made in a sentence that states something about the world, such as Earth is flat, that bachelors are unmarried men, that two plus two equals four, and so forth. Besides, only intelligent animals like humans are capable of having this type of knowledge (Pritchard 3-4). Henceforth, philosophers who are considered traditional epistemologists adopted

a common definition of knowledge as justified true belief. This definition, often abbreviated as "JTB" was set by the Greek philosopher Plato (427 B.C- 348 B.C) in his dialogue *Theaetetus*, where he attempts to define knowledge, ended up with what this classical "tripartite" analysis of knowledge. The following set of necessary and sufficient circumstances can be used to determine the meaning of a sentence like "Smith knows that it rained today":

A subject ***S*** knows that a proposition ***P*** is true if and only if:

P is true: Truth Condition

S believes that ***P*** is true: Belief Condition

S is justified in believing that ***P*** is true: Justification Condition (ADE-ALI 141-142).

Even though this definition was criticized by certain philosophers throughout history, none of them came up with an alternative. Moreover, even Edmun Gettier, the American modernist philosopher whom his famous paper – which was published in 1963- entitled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", in which he provided two counterexamples to Plato's standard analysis implications. These examples demonstrate situations where a belief is justified and true, yet lacks the necessary connection to reality or proper justification to qualify as knowledge under the traditional JTB definition. (Dancy et al. 395). In light of this, it becomes clear that epistemologists lack the agreement on a unique concept of knowledge, which opens the way for "Skepticism", the first factor that pushes man – be it a scholar or a normal person – to consider the limits of knowledge in the human perception.

3. The Limits of Knowledge:

Plato once stated: "The learning and knowledge that we have is, at the most, but little compared with that of which we are ignorant" (Alchin and Henly 1). In this famous quotation, he asserts that our current understanding and expertise represent a tiny percentage of what lies ahead

of us. This highlights both the limits of human mind as well as the significance of admitting one's own ignorance. Besides, it inspires the human being to maintain his curiosity and humility while always searching out new information and widening his perspectives. Hence, Plato's quote may appear straightforward at first, but examining its ramifications further reveals an intriguing philosophical idea: the concept of the limits of knowledge in the human perception ("The Socratic Method"). On the other hand, while certain people may think of this quote as nothing but a Classical philosopher's metaphysical exaggeration, here comes the modern science to support such argument concerning the very strict boundaries of human minds.

For instance, the American astronomer Carl Sagan (1936-1996) came up with his famous theory of the "Cosmic Calendar" in which he illustrates how short human history has been by comparing it to a calendar year. In his theory, Sagan hypothesized that if the entire history of the universe were to be condensed into a single year, beginning on January 1st, then current theory would indicate that our galaxy started on Mai 1st. Earth created approximately on September 14th. Things appear to be moving more quickly after life emerges on September 25th, but the oldest photosynthetic plants don't begin to develop until November 12th and the atmosphere does not contain much oxygen until December 1st. Therefore, Earth did not exist for the first eight and a half months, and humans appeared finally by December 31st. Consequently, Sagan's theory does, in reality, make us aware that our perspective is only one, perhaps very recent and modest that provides us excellent reason to approach grand claims to knowledge with some humility (Alchin and Henly 3-4). Since the approach of epistemology which is concerned with skepticism and the limits of knowledge is very broad and complex, this research will mainly focus on the ideas of only certain philosophers whose views contributed greatly to the understanding of these concepts.

4. Plato on The Limits of knowledge:

Despite the fact that the Athenian philosopher Plato believed in the existence of absolute truths, his *Dialogues* also reflect an acknowledgment of the limitations of knowledge and complex views on the nature of human understanding. Hence, two of the main theories that include this idea are "The Theory of Forms" and "The Allegory of The Cave". In *The Republic,* Plato characterizes his master Socrates as asking propping questions concerning the virtues or moral ideas, in an effort to define them precisely. Socrates is credited with saying that "virtue is knowledge" (Plato 48) and that for someone to act justly, he must first ask what justice is. According to him, we must first consider what we mean when we refer to any moral concept in our thinking or reasoning, as well as what makes it unique among other things. He poses the question of how we might identify the ideal, or perfect form of anything, a form that holds true for all societies and all periods of time.

By doing this, he suggests that he believes there must be an ideal "form" of things in the world we live in, of which we are aware, regardless of whether those things are moral ideas or tangible objects. He talks about items around such as beds. When we see a bed, he adds, we know it is a bed and we can recognize all beds, even though they may differ in numerous ways. Moreover, he provides another example with dogs, who are in their species more different, however, all of them share the characteristic of "dogginess", which is something we can recognize, and that allows us to say we know what a dog is. Therefore, according to Plato, the reason why there is a shared sense of "dogginess" or "bedness" is not the only explanation, rather, every one of us has in his mind an idea of an ideal bed or dog that we use to identify any given instance (Buckingham 52-53).

In fact, a significant portion of Plato's metaphysics of Forms stems from his conviction that knowledge cannot be limited to the senses and cannot apply to sensible objects (Dancy et. al. 595). Henceforth, his reasoning leads him to only one conclusion: the idea of the ideal "bed" and

"dog" must exist in a world of ideas or forms, which is entirely distinct from the material world. In a more simplified way, his theory suggests that the real world is the world of Ideas, in which exists the Ideal Forms of everything, and that we, humans, are born with the concepts of these Ideal Forms in our consciousness. On the other hand, the illusory world – the one in which we live- is merely a World of Senses that contains only less sophisticated copies of the Ideal Forms. Thus, we are able to identify items in the world such as "dogs" because we recognize they are imperfect copied versions of the concepts in our minds. Briefly, Plato comes to the conclusion that we can only perceive this realm through reason; our senses are unable to perceive it directly. He goes on to say that the world outside of us is only a model for this world of ideas, which he refers to as "reality" (Buckingham 53). For instance, every dog we encounter in our life is a lesser copy of an "ideal" dog that exists in the world of Forms which we can only access by using our ability to reason. A more profound example is about Helen and Achilles who are ill-fitting imitations of the "Beautiful", which is itself maximally beautiful. According to this interpretation, the forms' "pure-being" consists of their being perfect exemplars of themselves and exemplars of anything else. Thus, the form of the Beautiful cannot be said to be both beautiful or not unlike Helen or Achilles, the same goes for Justice, Equality and all the rest of the forms ("Plato: Life, Philosophy, and Works").

Additionally, Plato goes on in illustrating his theory by presenting what has become known as the "Allegory of the Cave". In *The Republic*, Plato narrates that in an underground cave, a group of people is seated facing the walls, their heads held immobile by chains. Behind them, a fire burns continuously, casting shadows onto the cave walls. Along a road between the fire and the walls, people pass by, carrying various objects such as human statuettes and wooden and stone replicas of animals. These passing figures create shadows that are the only visible things to the chained

individuals facing the walls. Unaware of any other reality, they take these shadows for granted, perceiving them as the entirety of their existence. One day, someone arrives and frees the prisoners, granting them liberty. One of them is encouraged to face the fire and see the reality behind the shadows. Initially overwhelmed, he struggles as the firelight feels like it's burning into his eyes.

As he is led out of the cave and exposed to the sunlight, the brightness blinds him. Gradually, however, he begins to understand the true nature of light and its role in the universe. He feels empathy for those still chained in the cave, accepting the shadows as reality. However, upon returning to the cave to enlighten them, he is met with disbelief and scorn. Despite his efforts to share his newfound understanding, they reject his teachings, preferring the comfort of their ignorance. Realizing that he can't force them to see the truth, he accepts that his perspective has changed irreversibly. He can no longer perceive the shadows as reality, but he also can't rejoin the detainees who remain chained in the cave. Their resistance to enlightenment is so strong that they would rather kill him than follow him out of the cave. It takes time for the man who has seen the sun to adjust to the darkness of the cave and the shadows on the wall. Compared to those who have never left the cave, he finds himself at a disadvantage, but his newfound knowledge grants him a deeper understanding of the world around him.

Plato used this story which states that there are only shadows of reality and truth- in order to convey his idea of a world of perfect Forms. Therefore, it is impossible for us to have real knowledge of the things surrounding us. Though, we may at best have opinions, true knowledge can only be obtained by reason, and the study of ideas rather than our deceptive senses. The challenge, thus, still lies in how we can learn about these concepts so that we can identify the flawed examples of them in the world we live in. In this context, Plato argues that our understanding of Ideal forms must be intrinsic. Accordingly, there are two components of every

human being: the body and the soul. Our souls have the reason that allows us to perceive the world of ideas, but our bodies have the senses that allow us to perceive the material world. In this regard, Buckingham explains that Plato believes that our immortal and eternal soul must have lived in the world of Ideas before our birth and still longs to return to that world when we pass away. Thus, we identify variations of the Ideas as a kind of memory when we perceive them with our senses in the outside world. Besides, he suggests that using reason -as opposed to observation- is the only method to acquire knowledge (Buckingham 52-54).

4.1.Skepticism:

Imagine a world where every certainty you hold dear is but a fragile illusion, where the very fabric of reality shimmers with uncertainty. This is the realm of "philosophical skepticism", a profound inquiry that challenges the very foundations of knowledge and belief (Dancy et al. 713). explain that Skepticism is the belief that we, humans, do not possess knowledge (714). In other words, it represents a questioning stance towards the assertion that humans have or can attain knowledge (Popkin). Factually, Ancient Greece gave rise to two skeptical traditions: the Academic and the Pyrrhonian. Academic skepticism derives its name from its origin at the Academy in Athens, initially founded by Plato, while the Pyrrhonian skepticism was named in honor of the Hellenistic philosopher Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 B.C) whose teachings are primarily known to us from the accounts of other philosophers and historians since he did not leave behind any other surviving works (Nagel 29-32).

Generally, traditional skeptics believe that there is not really a single compelling argument for anyone to accept (or reject) that, there exists a mind-independent reality. Hence, the proposition "There is a mind-independent reality" cannot be verified or falsified since it is cognitively meaningless according to the verifiability principle (Cherniak 10). For skeptics, any attempt

towards true justified beliefs will end in what they call “The Regress Problem”, it occurs when a series of connected elements has a first member but no final member, where each element leads to or creates the next one. An infinite regress argument is a type of argument that relies on this concept. These arguments typically object to a theory by pointing out that the theory implies an endless chain of elements, which is seen as problematic (Cameron and Ross). To sum up, Skepticism is a philosophical perspective or stance associated with the constraints and boundaries of what human beings can truly know.

4.2.Descartes on the Possibility of “Certain Knowledge”:

It is crucial to shed the light on the fact that philosophical skepticism did not disappear with the fall of the Graeco-Roman era, rather, it went through various series of adoption and critiques. Thus, there exists in the realm of philosophy several waves of it such as Modern Skepticism which emerged in the sixteenth century with the rising interest that was given to Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism, and Contemporary skepticism which originates with the French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes (1596-1650) (Dancy et. al. 715,719). Descartes was captivated by the desire of extending knowledge and understanding of the world especially in an era where people had become more skeptical about science and the possibility of true knowledge. Hence, his skeptic journey resulted in various theories among them are the ideas of “The Illusory World” and “The Evil Genuis.”

In the first theory, which is that of the Illusory World, Descartes initiates his inquiry by subjecting his convictions to a sequence of progressively stringent skeptical arguments, questioning the certainty of the existence of any entity. He entertains the notion that the familiar world might merely be an illusion. He also denies sensory beliefs and thinks that relying on our senses as a reliable foundation for knowledge and certainty is untenable. Accordingly, he supports

his concept with the argument of "optical illusion," a situation in which our senses can drive us into wrong beliefs. For instance, a straight object can appear bent in a cup of water. Moreover, he suggests the reality that we might be in a state of dreaming, wherein the seemingly tangible reality is merely a manifestation of a dream world (Buckingham 118-119). In this context, he states in the *Meditations on First Philosophy:* "Every sensory experience I have ever thought I was having while awake I can also think of myself as sometimes having while asleep; and since I do not believe that what I seem to perceive in sleep comes from things located outside me, I did not see why I should be any more inclined to believe this of what I think I perceive while awake" (Descartes 53). Here, Descartes highlights the feasibility of a dream world by pointing out the absence of definitive distinctions between wakefulness and sleep.

In fact, we cannot exactly relate the idea of the dream to Descartes exclusively, because, during the late Warring States period in China (476-221 B.C), a Daoist philosopher called Zhuangzi narrates in his parables the story of "The Butterfly Dream," which represents Taoism's inquiry into the distinction between reality and illusion ("Zhuangzi and His Butterfly Dream: The Etymology of Meng 夢 - the China Story"). The tale, as translated by Lin Yutang, unfolds us follows:

> Once upon a time, I, Zhuangzi, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, o all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Zhuangzi. Soon I awakened, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a distinction. The transition is called the transformation of material things. (qtd. in Reninger).

This story has significantly influenced subsequent philosophical traditions, spanning both Eastern and Western thought (Reninger). Hence, it could have been the inspiration for Descartes's idea of the Illusionary World.

After René Descartes reaches a point where certainty seems unattainable, he devises a potent method to prevent reverting to preconceived notions: rather than a reality filled with familiar objects, there exists only the individual, his convictions, and an "evil demon" manipulating his beliefs to stimulate the conventional world's existence. Therefore, when faced with considering a belief, he starts inquiring: "Is it plausible that "the evil spirit" is inducing this belief within me, despite its falsehood?" (Descartes 13). This imagination is indicated in the passage in which he states: I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon [*mauvais génie*] of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me (13). At this point, Descartes appears to have placed himself in a challenging predicament, where uncertainty permeates everything, leaving him devoid of any firm foundation. He portrays himself as being engulfed by an overwhelming whirlpool of doubt, rending him unable to establish a stable position. The pervasive skepticism obstructs his path towards reclaiming knowledge and veracity (Buckingham 120).

As a matter of fact, the hypothesis of an "evil genius" aims to impugn our understanding of empirical statements by demonstrating that our experiences are not valid source of beliefs. In addition, this hypothesis has a modern version which is the called "a brain in a vat", it was theorized by the American philosopher, mathematician and computer scientist Hilary Putnam (1926-2016), in this idea, the "evil spirit" is just replaced by an advanced computer linked to a person's brain and by which of the world surrounding him is nothing but a virtual reality (Dancy et al. 715). These two different versions of a similar idea are the original inspiration for the most

famous science-fiction movies that are considered among of the cinematic industry such as: *The Truman Show (1994), The Matrix (1999),* and *Inception (2011).*

Finally, Descartes acknowledges that there is only one thing that he knows for sure, one certainty he cannot question: his belief in his own existence. This result is evident in perhaps the most famous sentence in the history of western philosophy "I think, therefore, I am;" in Latin" Cogito, ergo sum". This is what is known to be Descartes' "first certainty." Furthermore, when he tried to apply the "evil demon" test to his "Cogito," he concludes that the demon can only convince him that he exists only if he really exists; in other words, he cannot doubt his existence unless he exists to so that he can do the act of doubting. Despite the fact that the "Cogito" is known to be Descartes' globalized principle, the Numidian philosopher and theologist St. Augustin of Hippo (354-430 A.D) had employed a similar reasoning in *The City of God,* stating: "For I am mistaken, I exist" (qtd. in Buckingham 120-121), indicating that without existence, he could not commit any mistakes. However, Augustine did not extensively develop this idea in his philosophy, nor did he reach it the same manner of René Descartes.

4.3.Michel Foucault and Poststructuralist Epistemology:

Poststructuralism, as a philosophical and literary theory, challenges traditional notions of knowledge by questioning the stability and certainty of meaning, truth, and language. It is a movement in philosophy and literary criticism that emerged in France in the late 1960s and had since impacted various fields such as literature, politics, art, cultural criticism, history, and sociology. Its controversial nature stems from its tendency to challenge established scientific principles and moral beliefs. Drawing upon the theories of notable philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault (Duignan). Factually, Derrida's epistemology was mostly concerned with the linguistic field since his theory

of deconstruction has revealed skeptic thoughts on knowledge which is delivered through written texts.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984), another prominent figure of the Poststructuralist era whose writings include vast revolutionary ideas concerning epistemology, ethics and politics, is more concerned about the nature and limits of knowledge. Foucault examines how our discourse, the manner in which we articulate and conceptualize ideas, is shaped by predominately unconscious regulations stemming from the historical context in which we exist. Precisely, what we perceive as "common sense" foundation of our thinking and communication is actually molded by these regulations and historical circumstances (Buckingham 302). Considering that knowledge emerges from historically situated and contingent methods of inquiry, how has this realization impacted our own understanding? Foucault sought to address this inquiry within the realms of knowledge in the human sciences, particularly psychiatry, penology, and sexology. Drawing inspiration from Gaston Bachelard, George Canguilhem, Friedrich Nietzsche, Foucault' objective was to unveil the "positive unconscious knowledge", or those concealed yet foundational elements that underlie the process of acquiring knowledge.

Around 1970, Foucault introduced new influential component into his analysis: power. He also devised a new "genealogical" approach to delineate what he termed "power/knowledge." As similar to "money is power", the well-known phrase ("*scientia potestas est*") "knowledge is power" was coined by Francis Bacon in 1597. Since then, it has been reformulated in diverse contexts, ranging from Thomas Hobbes to Michel Foucault. In recent times, this elusive concept has been crucial to the poststructuralist examination of the humanist subject (Garcia and Maria). Foucault conceptualized power as embedded within social relations, encompassing both domination and constraint alongside the generation of knowledge, pleasures, and subjectivities.

He introduced the concepts of "power/knowledge" to signify their inseparable interconnection, highlighting that power operates through knowledge and vice versa. Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche, Foucault employed "Genealogy", a term which refers to the approach concerned with the examination of the interplay between power and particular forms of knowledge (Dancy et. al. 381).

According to Foucault, power does not simply operate through force or coercion, but also through the production and dissemination of knowledge. In other words, knowledge is not neutral or objective, but is shaped by the dynamics of power within society. In his prominent work *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* he states:

> Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we all know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system a political means maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and powers it carries with it. (373)

In this quote, Foucault examines how institutions such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and the media function as sites of power/knowledge, regulating behavior, shaping identities, and defining what is considered normal or deviant. These institutions produce and circulate knowledge about individuals and populations, categorizing them according to various criteria and exerting control over their lives.

Therefore, Foucault's endeavor was, according to Dancy et. al., inherently political as it aimed to challenge our entrenched adherence to current categories and concepts. This was achieved by exposing their origins in the complex interplay of contingent conceptual shifts, historical

turmoil, and political strife (381-382). Moreover, in his book *Madness and Civilization,* Foucault has examined the history of "madness". He showcased the arbitrary ways in which madness has been understood and managed, as well as the distinction between "sanity" and "madness" over the time. Thus, his main aim was not merely to shed the light on the past but to free the present. In short, Michel Foucault's significant impact on epistemology is significant, it will likely stem from his introduction of power as a crucial factor in all understandings of knowledge and truth

5. On the Limits of the Human Mind:

Nick Chater, a behavioral psychologist, challenges the common beliefs regarding the existence of beliefs, desires, fears, a personality, an "inner life," and the subconscious. He argues that such notions are merely folk beliefs. According to him, the brain constructs perceptions of the world on the fly, and what we perceive as direct observations are actually a mosaic of conjectures and reconstructions. Chater suggests that there are no underlying processes or depths within the mind (qtd in Poole). In addition, Since Freud's time, there has been a shift in how we perceive our minds, both in everyday life and within academic psychology.

According to this perspective, our conscious thoughts represent only the surface of our mental processes. While one thought may emerge into our conscious awareness at any given moment, beneath this surface lies a vast and potentially tumultuous reservoir of various thoughts. Within this reservoir are deeper currents and hidden elements that shape the workings of the mind. From this perspective, our minds encompass more than just our immediate experiences. They are also repositories of various internal states such as beliefs, attitudes, motives, suspicions, hopes, and fears. Similar to how we perceive the external world through our senses, it is commonly assumed that we can also observe this inner world by turning our attention inward and utilizing

introspection to examine the contents of our minds. Furthermore, Freud and subsequent psychologists caution against relying too heavily on introspection, as our inner mental processes can be obscure and potentially distorted. Some thoughts may be suppressed or repressed, making it challenging to accurately assess our true thoughts and feelings. Therefore, various techniques such as hypnosis, word associations, dream analysis, behavioral experiments, and brain scanning are employed to gain deeper insights into our subconscious thoughts beyond conscious awareness (Hagan).

In addition, one of the main concepts concerning the limits and unreliability of the human mind is the concept of memory. A general definition of memory is that it is a mental process that retains information for future use (Dancy et al. 520). However, since the human mind is limited, so is our memory. Factually, stored memories in a person's mind grant him an "identity"; but what if someone forgets his name, his birth date or his family members, would he still be himself? It obvious that our memories are the main source of the already acquired knowledge, but the problem that even if you remember any information of the procedural knowledge stored in your mind, you may not remember when or who told you this information. As the Italian author Primo Levi once stated: "Human memory is a marvelous but fallacious instrument. The memories which lie within us are not carved in stone; not only do they tend to become erased as the years go by, but often they change, or even increase by incorporating extraneous features." (Alchin and Henly 12-16). The unreliability of human consists of several reasons, one of the main reasons is that memory is blurred.

One reason for this is that mental images are often less vivid than actual perceptions. When attempting to remember something, such as the layout of a bedroom, the mental image may provide a general sense of the location and appearance of significant objects, including their shapes and

colors. However, this mental representation lacks the level of detail found in direct perception. Studies suggest that people are more adept at distinguishing between two objects when they are physically present compared to when one is merely remembered. Besides, another reason is that our memory systematically distorts our perception. To explain, Memory often causes systematic distortions in perception. For instance, individuals typically recall colors as being more vibrant and intense than they truly were. Similarly, studies indicate that when asked to remember vehicle speeds, people commonly overestimate slower speeds and underestimate faster ones. Additional research demonstrates consistent biases in recalling distance and size. Moreover, as previously mentioned, memory tends to favor expected events.

Furthermore, another cause for proving that memory is unreliable is personal, which means that does not serve solely to accurately report past events observed by an individual. Rather, the physical events serve as raw material for interpretation. Each observer constructs a meaningful interpretation based on their own beliefs, experiences, and needs. Once interpretation takes place, the events themselves become less significant. Additionally, since each person interprets events through their own worldview, different eyewitnesses observing the same event may have varying interpretations and memories (*Eyewitness Memory Is Unreliable*). As quoted by Tor Noerretranders: "We do not see what we sense. We see what we think we sense. Our consciousness is presented with an interpretation, not the raw data. Long after presentation, an unconscious information processing has discarded information, so that we see a simulation, a hypothesis, an interpretation; and we are not free to choose" (Norretranders n.p). To conclude, the human mind is bound by limits related to the cognitive processes.

6. The Power and Significance of Myths:

Mythology, derived from the Greek "*mythos*" meaning "story of the people" and "*logos*" meaning "word," refers to the examination and understanding of traditional narratives, often regarded as sacred, within a culture (Mark and Raddato). But what are myths? And why are they very important? A myth is a symbolic story, often with uncertain origins and passed down through tradition, that appears to recount real events, typically linked with religious faith. It differs from symbolic actions (cult, ritual) or places associated with religious practices (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience (Smith et al.). Moreover, myths are revered narratives that recount various aspects of existence, such as the origins of the universe, the rise of deities and humanity, the exploits of heroes and cunning figures, the characteristics of celestial realms and the underworld, and predictions for the need of time. These stories are integral to every human society and era and are transmitted across generations.

Thus, the power and significance of myths consists of their flexibility, which means that they are intricate and open to interpretation, holding multiple layers of significance. They are not rigid but rather adaptable, capable of adjusting to evolving situations and fresh insights. In addition to that, myths have been always powerful due to their authentic relation to religions because they play a vital role in every religion in which their narratives establish beliefs concerning the divine, human nature, and the relationship between the two. Although colloquially “myth” might suggest something fictional, fundamentally, all myths serve as avenues for probing essential truth. In other words, they are stories that reveal to us insights about ourselves (Wilkinson and Philip 14).

On the other hand, another criterion of importance of myths is their metaphorical use, because they are like poems, they employ metaphor to intertwine disparate elements of the world,

revealing profound connections and truths about humanity, as Jospeh Campbell states in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: “There is no final system for the interpretation of myths, and there will never be any such thing” (353). For instance, the ancient Sumerian tale of Inanna’s descent into the Underworld can be interpreted by contemporary readers as a vivid portrayal of a woman’s journey to embrace her inner power. Similarly, the creation myth of the Pima people of southwestern North America, where the god “Buzzard” fashions a miniature universe, mirrors our own reality. Each myth encapsulates a world of symbolic significance, as described by anthropologist Maya Deren: “Myth embodies the realities of the mind within the imaginative construct of the material world” (15).

Lastly, myths serve as an “entrance to society” for the reason that they are not only revered narratives addressing fundamental aspects of existence, life and death, but also reflections of the societal framework and values. Hence, they encompass beliefs about family dynamics, gender roles, legal systems, and various practical aspects such as food preparation, hunting, and farming (16). To sum up, as Michael Ayrton puts in his book *The Midas Consequence, “*We live by myth and inhabit it and it inhabits us. What is strange is how we remake it.” This quote encapsulates the profound interplay between humanity and mythology, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship wherein individuals both embody and shape mythic narratives. It suggests that myths are not static entities but dynamic constructs that evolve through human interpretation and interaction. Besides, the quote suggests that humans possess the agency to reinterpret and recreate myths, reflecting the ongoing dialogue between culture, imagination, and lived experience (17).

7. The Myth of the Labyrinth and The Minotaur

Anything that is impossible to penetrate or escape from could be referred to as a “labyrinth.” Yet there is a technical difference between a labyrinth and a maze: a labyrinth follows

a single path (unicursal), while a maze has branching paths (multicursal), making it possible to get lost only in a maze. In Greek mythology, the labyrinth was the extensive maze located beneath King Minos' palace in the island of Crete (Ferber 106). The myth tells that King Minos sought to solidify his rule over Crete by appealing to the god Poseidon for a white bull as a symbol of divine favor. However, he chose to keep the bull for his own purposes instead of sacrificing it as it was meant to. As a result, Poseidon caused Minos' wife Pasiphaë to develop an unnatural desire for the bull. Pasiphaë turned to the skilled craftsman Daedalus for help, asking him to construct a lifelike cow in which she could hide and satisfy her desire. The deception was successful, leading to the birth of the Minotaur, a creature with the body of a man and the head of a bull. As the Minotaur grew more violent and began preying on humans, Minos attempted to contain him in various cages. Eventually, Minos tasked Daedalus with building a labyrinth beneath his palace to imprison the Minotaur.

The labyrinth was so intricate that even Daedalus struggled to navigate it. Minos, aside from the Minotaur's presence, was a respected ruler who led Crete to prosperity and naval power. However, when his son Androgeus died under mysterious circumstances in Athens, Minos blamed the city and demanded retribution. He imposed a tribute of seven noble youths and seven virtuous maidens from Athens every nine years, to be sacrificed to the Minotaur. When Theseus, the son of King Aegeus of Athens, volunteered to confront the Minotaur as part of the tribute, he sailed to Crete with the other sacrifices. Ariadne, Minos' daughter, fell in love with Theseus at first sight and devised a plan to help him. She sought Daedalus' assistance in revealing the secret of the labyrinth and provided Theseus with a sword and a ball of thread to guide his way. As Theseus entered the labyrinth, he encountered the Minotaur and, using the thread to navigate, managed to slay the creature.

Following Ariadne's instructions, he retraced his steps and emerged from the labyrinth victorious. In gratitude for her help, Theseus promised to marry Ariadne and take her with him back to Athens. However, in a cruel turn, Theseus forgot his debt to her and left her stranded on the island of Naxos. His heartlessness brought about consequences; his sailors neglected to rise the white sails as agreed, causing King Aegeus, watching from the shore, to believe that Theseus was dead. Consumed by grief, Aegeus threw himself from a cliff into the sea, which therefore became known as the Aegean Sea. Finally, Theseus succeeded his father and ruled Athens, bringing back its prosperity and glory (Campbell 11-23). There is no doubt that the myth of the labyrinth is a magnificent epic full of wisdom and profound projections that had a significant influence on Greek mythology, western philosophy, literature, cinema and even psychology. It is something of a Jungian archetype.

Therefore, Theseus, the renowned hero of Athens, became synonymous with great deeds and adventures to the extent that the common saying emerged in Athens: “Nothing without Theseus.” He was the archetype of bravery and courage for the reason that he refuted any “easy” manner of conducting any mission, his idea was that he wanted to achieve heroism swiftly, understanding that seeking comfort and safety would not lead to greatness. His inspiration stemmed from Hercules, the most renowned hero of Greece, whom he aspired to, fueled by their familial connection as cousins (Hamilton 157-160). Likewise, Daedalus became a symbol for the skilled artisan known for intricate and sophisticated inventions and devices (Delahunty et al. 71). The symbolism of these figures gives the different characters in this myth a lasting appeal.

The earliest metaphorical use of “labyrinth” appears in Plato’s *Euthydemus,* where Socrates compares an unproductive philosophical investigation to navigating a labyrinth. He illustrates how one may believe they have reached the end of their inquiry, only to realize they are back at the

starting point. The Roman philosopher and polymath Boethius (480-524 A.C) also employs a similar metaphor in his philosophical work *Consolation of Philosophy* (Ferber 106). “The Ship of Theseus,” or “Theseus’ paradox,” poses a hypothetical scenario questioning whether an object remains the same entity after all its parts are replaced. This thought experiment, famously recounted by Plutarch in the later first century, involves a ship that undergoes complete restoration, leading to the query of its identity. The paradox was also contemplated by ancient philosophers like Heraclitus. In this idea, Plutarch raises doubt about whether the ship would retain its identity if every part were replaced one by one. Centuries later, Thomas Hobbes introduced a further puzzle by proposing a scenario where the replaced parts are used to construct a second ship, raising the question of which ship, if any, retains the original identity of the ship of Theseus (Levin).

Furthermore, the myth of the Cretan labyrinth continues to inspire human thought in different scopes. For instance, meditative labyrinths have extended their presence to various settings including hospices, lighthouses, and theological institutions, where “labyrinth-walking” has evolved into a form of contemporary spiritual practice often associated with the “New Age Movement.” According to Clive Johnson, author of *Labyrinth Alpha-Omega (2017)*, participants are encouraged to approach the labyrinth with an inquiry, maintain a relaxed focus termed "soft eyes," and wait for an internal prompting before entering the transitional space of the labyrinth. Johnson references labyrinth scholar Hermann Kern saying: “In the labyrinth you don’t lose yourself. You find yourself.” In other words, he suggests that rather than losing oneself within the labyrinth, individuals may discover deeper aspects of their identity and purpose through this reflective practice. In addition, Carl Jung (1875-1961) shares a similar perspective. He sees the labyrinth as a fundamental representation of the unconscious mind, emphasizing its capacity to be penetrated by elements that evoke a sense of strangeness and otherness (the "uncanny and alien").

Jung also views the labyrinth as a symbol of psychoanalysis itself, likening it to the process of navigating through the complexities of the human psyche. In his work *Man and His Symbols (1964),* he elaborates on how the labyrinth universally signifies a perplexing depiction of the matriarchal consciousness, suggesting that only those prepared for a profound exploration of the collective unconscious can successfully traverse its enigmatic paths.

The labyrinth abounds with Jungian symbolism akin to a deck of tarot cards. There is the wandering, instinctual, and shameful creature that must be avoided or overcome, alongside the figure of Ariadne, reminiscent of the anima, imbued with erotic qualities and serving as a savior. There exists the concept of the 'indirect course' or *Umweg* of the libido, characterized by Jung as a path of suffering, and the elusive nature of resolution. To sum up, in Jung's labyrinth, we become our own Ariadne, our own analyst (McConnachie). Similarly, walking through the labyrinth represents a journey inward akin to returning to the womb, with emerging from it symbolizing a rebirth. In the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, Ariadne's thread acts as a lifeline connecting Theseus to the outside world as he ventures into the underworld to confront the monster. Theseus escapes the labyrinth by following the thread, which later evolved into the word "clue," signifying a hint or indication, and subsequently "clueless" (Burton M.D).

Conclusion:

Man, who was privileged with the cognitive abilities that led him on a quest for knowledge is also the one encountering the reality of the limits of both his mind and knowledge. This mind, in which myths clash with empirical science and logic, has been since ever creating artistic works such as novels, poems, films, short stories, sculptures, paintings, and even architectural designs. Therefore, since first chapter focused on the theoretical aspect, delving into theories and philosophical ideas about the limitations of knowledge and human mind, as well as including the

Greek myth of the labyrinth and the Minotaur, the upcoming chapter will serve as a departure from those ideas and theories to conduct an analytical study of the novel *Piranesi* by the British author Susanna Clarke, The novel revolves around a young man trapped in what resembles a maze, which he refers to as "the House," where he is the only inhabitant besides another person known simply as “the Other.”

Chapter TWO: The Labyrinth and Manifestations of the Limits of Knowledge and the Human Mind in Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi.*

Introduction:

As a writer deeply interested in myth making, Clarke weaves an outstanding narrative incorporating the myth of the labyrinth and the Minotaur in addition to reflections on Knowledge and the limits of human perception. Thus, this chapter provides an analysis of some key elements and major themes and key aspects found in Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi.* It explores the unique representation of concepts regarding the boundaries of knowledge and human perception in the novel through the lenses of various philosophers like Plato, Descartes, and Foucault. Additionally, it examines the incorporation of the Greek myth of the labyrinth and the Minotaur in the narrative. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the protagonist's quest for truth, his pursuit of the "Great Knowledge", and his efforts to unravel the mysteries of the mazy and complex world in which he is unknowingly trapped.

1. The Myth of the Labyrinth in Literary Imagination:

In modern artistic representations, particularly in works classified as "High Culture," ancient mythologies serve as rich sources. By borrowing narratives and characters from these myths and reshaping them into new contexts that resonate with modern public, artists not only popularize mythology but also enhance the appeal and significance of their own works (Mohamed and Gamila 1). In fact, many writers incorporate myths because they provide timeless symbols and archetypes that resonate universally. This universality reflects fundamental human experiences and emotions, which makes myths excellent allegorical tools.

Modern literature is among the main fields in which myths hold a huge significance and symbolism. As the Canadian literary critic and theorist Northrop Frye states in his book *Myth, Fiction, and Displacement*: "Literature is a reconstructed mythology, with its structural principles derived from those of myth" (603). Contemporary literary works often contain numerous mythological references from various cultural heritages. Additionally, several novels, poems, and short stories themselves serve as retellings of both famous and unfamiliar ancient myths, highlighting the significant role they play in inspiring writers and poets. This is not surprising given the symbolic and philosophical weight carried by myths, particularly since their inception as products of human intellectual creativity, vast imagination, and interaction with nature. For instance, the myth of Theseus and the labyrinth is one of the myths that a reader will mostly encounter in his journey through novels and poetry collections. The labyrinth serves as both a metaphor and narrative technique for postmodern literary experiments. Traditionally, labyrinths have been associated with horror. The Cretan myth, for example, depicts the labyrinth as a ritualistic prison for the monstrous Minotaur.

Over time, labyrinths have been interpreted in various ways: as spaces for spiritual transformation in medieval Christianity, symbols of gender and fertility in turf mazes, and as settings for entrapment in Gothic literature. In contrast, modernist representations of labyrinths prompted a new kind of engagement with mythology (Cox 1). Hence, postmodern literary works like *The Name of the Rose (1980)* and *Hawksmoor (1985)* depict labyrinths that notably lack female characters, although one could argue that the labyrinth itself symbolizes this absence (2). Moreover, the Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges' exploration of labyrinths offers a captivating perspective on the complexities of human existence. In his 1962 masterpiece *The House of Asterion,* Borges uses labyrinths as metaphor for the human condition, portraying our perpetual

quest for understanding amidst life's chaos. He views labyrinths as symbolic representations of the intricate workings of the human mind, where navigating through hidden pathways mirrors our search for meaning. Borges' interpretation is both philosophical and poetic, offering timeless insights into the nature of existence. Factually, most of Borges's works revolve around labyrinths, mazes and riddles ("Labyrinths").

In short, labyrinthine settings are frequently depicted in various literary works of different periods. For instance, the intricate passageways found in Gothic novels within castle settings, as well as forests, caves, and similar environments. Cities are also portrayed as labyrinthine, as seen in Eugène Sue's *Mysteries of Paris* and Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris;* with Hugo providing a detailed portrayal of complicated network of sewers beneath Paris in *Les Misérables.* Charles Dickens also portrays London as a labyrinth in works like *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House.* In addition to that, in detective novels, cities are often portrayed as complex and difficult to penetrate, presenting challenges that only the detective can overcome. James Joyce's *Ulysses,* particularly chapter 10 (Wandering Rocks), is likened to a labyrinth due to its intricate depiction of multiple characters' movements through the streets of Dublin, and also its intricate narrative structure, and it notably features a character named Stephen Dedalus (Ferber 107). Borges labyrinthine realms were among the inspirations for the contemporary British writer Susanna Clarke to write her 2020 novel *Piranesi* in which the protagonist is trapped in a house of endless halls and staircases. These literary works show how myths are still present in our modern time in all kinds of artistic products. All these postmodern works revisit the Cretan labyrinth emphasizing the encounter with anthropomorphic architecture (Cox 2).

2. Inside Clarke's Labyrinthine Realm :

Clarke has written numerous outstanding and widely popular works along her career. Her literary journey began with the publication of seven short stories and novellas in American anthologies. In 1990, she ventured to Turin to teach English to executives at Fiat, followed by a stint in Bilbao the next year. Upon her return to England in 1992, she resided in County Durham, where she commenced work on her debut novel, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell,* a tale set in early 19th-century London featuring two magicians who reintroduce magic to their homeland, and as they delve further into the realm of sorcery. They unearth hidden truths and confront perilous outcomes. Despite initial skepticism, that novel, completed after over a decade of writing, achieved unexpected commercial success, garnering critical acclaim and sparking interest in film adaptations.

Clarke's subsequent works include the short story collection *The Ladies of Grace Adieu (2006*), a compilation that comprises ten tales situated in a fairy-infused rendition of 19th-century England. Utilizing Clarke's trademark precision in historical context and language, these eerie and captivating stories transpire in a slightly altered rendition of reality, where individuals contend with playful yet troublesome interferences from fairies. Familiar characters from Clarke's previous novel, such as Jonathan Strange and Childermass, make appearances, alongside fresh interpretations of historical figures like Mary, Queen of Scots. The book features stories like "The Duke of Wellington Misplaces His Horse" and "Mr. Simonelli, or The Fairy Widower," the latter being shortlisted for a World Fantasy Award in 2001. In 2020, Clarke released her latest novel, *Piranesi* -which is authored by a single narrator using epistolary journal entries- received the prestigious Women's Prize for Fiction in 2021.

Her captivating novel *Piranesi* follows the journey of its eponymous protagonist through a surreal and mysterious world. The story revolves around Piranesi, who inhabits a vast and

intricate house filled with countless rooms, statues, and halls. He spends his days exploring this labyrinthine structure and documenting his discoveries in meticulous detail. As he navigates this enigmatic realm, Piranesi encounters strange phenomena and encounters another inhabitant known only as “The Other.” Through their interactions, Piranesi gradually discovers the secrets of his world and uncovers the truth about his own identity. Piranesi initially believes he is the “Beloved” child of the “House,” not knowing that he has been imprisoned for long years through deception and manipulation of his perception of reality. In this sense, he embodies the prisoners inside Plato’s cave who have no understanding of the real outside world and only experience the shadows of the real world.

Due to her influence by C.S. Lewis and Jorge Borges, Susanna Clarke chose a labyrinthine entity as the setting for her novel *Piranesi*. This labyrinth, referred to by Piranesi as "the House," is among the fantastical places of its kind, as described by the American writer Madeline Miller in her conversation with Clarke: ‘The House which has this ocean inside it is unlike anything I’ve ever read, it’s completely original.’ (“Piranesi: Susanna Clarke in conversation with Madeline Miller” 5:54-6:03). Clarke's distinctive narrative, stands out both in form and content. Structurally, the novel consists mainly of a collection of letters and journal entries. Despite the limited number of characters, the book’s strength lies in its unique plot and striking sequence of events, blending elements of fantasy. Additionally, the presence of artistic and aesthetic elements such as tides, staircases, halls, and enchanting statues enriches the narrative, sparking the reader's imagination and invoking a sense of skepticism and uncertainty, which are central themes in the novel. Furthermore, the quest for meaning, identity, and the “Great” and “Secret Knowledge” shapes the complexity and enthusiasm in the narrative, making it similar to solving a riddle or a puzzle for the reader.

To begin with, when asked by Piranesi why the other world is named the "Labyrinth," the Other replies: "A vision of cosmic grandeur, I suppose. A symbol of the mingled glory and horror of existence. No one gets out alive" (*Piranesi* 177). It is noteworthy that the use of the motif of labyrinths in literary works mostly traces back to the Cretan labyrinth of King Minos. Susanna Clarke, being a highly acclaimed author in the field of fantasy and the supernatural, chose to set her novel in a vast house resembling a labyrinth filled with countless statues, giving the impression that it mirrors an ancient Greek temple. Not only that, but within the folds of the narrative, there are many elements directly linked to ancient Greece. Piranesi observes, in relation to the statues, '…Men fighting, Women and Men being carried off by Centaurs or Satyrs" (37). In addition to these creatures, there are also several statues of Minotaurs and Hierophants. The presence of Minotaurs is a good piece of evidence that Clarke's unique labyrinth traces its roots back to the Greek myth of Theseus as explained in the previous chapter.

The potency and importance of myths lie in their flexibility; they are complex and open to interpretation, containing multiple layers of meaning. Rather than being rigid, myths are adaptable, capable of evolving with changing circumstances and new insights. Besides, another aspect of the significance of myths is their metaphorical nature. Similar to poetry, myths utilize metaphors to link diverse elements of the world, unveiling deep connections and truths about humanity.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the myth of the labyrinth stands as a grand epic brimming with wisdom and profound symbolism that greatly impacted Greek mythology, Western philosophy, literature, cinema, and psychology. It embodies a Jungian archetype as explained in his work *Man and His Symbols*, representing universal themes and motifs transcending time and culture. In the novel, Clarke contradicts Hermann Kern's idea in which he believes that in the labyrinth one does not lose himself, but rather he finds himself. The reason behind this is that

Piranesi is a person who has lost his identity as soon as he entered the House. This entity causes him a memory loss which makes him forget his true identity and all his past life. In one instance, the Other tells him "…the labyrinth plays tricks on the mind. It makes people forget things." (*Piranesi* 68). Hence, inside the house, he did not know even his name until he met the Other who named him Piranesi.

In fact, this name fits the character as it has a connotation of labyrinths. It is taken from the name of Giovanni Batista Piranesi, an Italian artist and architect from the 18th century who gained renown for his depictions of Rome's ancient ruins and elaborate etchings portraying imaginative and complex prison structures (Delahunty et. al. 367). Within the novel, the amnesia, the fast-paced and unfamiliar events, along with the few characters he encountered, led Piranesi to doubt the possibility of a conspiracy. Consequently, he embarked on a journey to uncover his lost past and identity. The truth which is that he was in fact Mathew Rose Sorensen, a writer who was entrapped by Valentine Ketterley, Arne-Sayles' student who wished to learn more about the House's unusual properties without getting lost in it himself (Keiper 125).

Carl Jung regarded the labyrinth as a fundamental symbol of the unconscious mind, highlighting its susceptibility to being traversed by elements evoking feelings of strangeness and otherness, often referred to as the "uncanny and alien." Jung also perceived the labyrinth as a metaphor for psychoanalysis, likening it to the journey of navigating through the intricacies of the human psyche. Similarly, Piranesi in the House started questioning his original identity: 'The ten Journals I possess cover a period of five years. Where are the Journals of my earlier life? And what did I do in those years? (*Piranesi* 111).

In the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, Ariadne's thread acts as a lifeline connecting Theseus to the outside world as he ventures into the underworld to confront the monster. Theseus

escapes the labyrinth by following the thread. For instance, Piranesi uses the chalk as Ariadne's "thread": 'Long ago I used to mark Doors and Floors with chalk in this manner because I was afraid of losing my way.' (132). Besides, in Jung's labyrinth, we become our own Ariadne, our own analyst (McConnachie). Occasionally, the Prophet and Raphael play the role of Ariade, they provide Piranesi with information that bring flashbacks into his memory. Yet, Piranesi also is his own "Ariadne", with his journal entries functioning as the "clue" which is the thread that prevented Theseus from being lost in the maze.

Moreover, walking through the labyrinth symbolizes an inward journey reminiscent of returning to the womb, and emerging from it represents a symbolic rebirth. In the same way, as Piranesi leaves the House and goes back to his normal life, he appears to be as if he started a new life, as if the world in which he spent most of his life with his family becomes suddenly unfamiliar. Obviously, the Cretan labyrinth is widely present in the novel. For example, the statues of the Minotaur are almost everywhere in the vestibules. Mythically, the Minotaur embodies the profound fears and desires hidden within the depths of our unconscious minds, depicted as a mysterious labyrinth. It symbolizes the intricate blend of primal instincts and lofty aspirations inherent to human nature (Zorbas).

Lastly, in one of the conversations between Piranesi and the Prophet, the latter argues: "Imagine water flowing underground. It flows through the same cracks year after year and it wears away the stone. Millenia later you have a cave system. But what you don't have is the water that originally created it. That's long gone. Seeped away into the earth" (*Piranesi* 90). In fact, these words depict what is known as "the ship of Theseus", presenting an age-old philosophical puzzle regarding the persistence of identity amidst change. This paradox, attributed to Theseus, proposes

a hypothetical scenario that challenges whether an object maintains its identity once all its components have been replaced.

In short, the role that supernatural element such as myths and magic play in Susanna Clarke's writing is with no doubt central. In *Piranesi*, unlike the author's other works, the labyrinth and the statues are the aesthetic and symbolic motif that shapes and constructs the profound meaning of the characters' quest for knowledge, truth, identity, and meaning. The novel explores themes of solitude, exploration, and the search for meaning, inviting readers to ponder the nature of reality and the human condition. With its richly imaginative storytelling and thought-provoking narrative, *"Piranesi"* is a compelling read that offers a unique and immersive literary experience (The Bibliophile).

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for the reader. In summary, Susanna Clarke's novel truly merits deeper exploration within the realms of philosophy, literature, and ancient myths.

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he finds himself. The reason behind this is that Piranesi is a person who has lost his identity as long as he entered the House. This entity caused him a memory loss by which he has forgotten all his past life: '…the labyrinth plays tricks on the mind. It makes people forget things.' (Clarke 68). Hence, inside the house, he did not know even his name until he met the Other who named him Piranesi.

According to Susanna Clarke, this name fits the character as it has a connotation of labyrinths. It is the name of Giovanni Batista Piranesi, an Italian artist and architect from the 18th century who gained renown for his depictions of Rome's ancient ruins and elaborate etchings portraying imaginative and complexed prison structures (Delahunty et al. 367). In the novel, Piranesi does not know he is actually imprisoned in a labyrinth by none other than "the Other," whom he believed to be his only friend in the House. The Other is in fact a scholar named Valentine Ketterly, a student of a great academic figure Arne Sayles. The latter is renowned for his theories on discovering other worlds and having actually found and visited them. To achieve his quest of finding the "Secret Knowledge," Ketterly imprisons Matthew Rose Sorensen (or Piranesi), a brilliant young scholar himself, and manipulates his journals to make him believe that he has always existed within the realm of the labyrinth. By imprisoning Piranesi, the Other attempts to discover the House's unusual properties and labyrinthine structure.

In fact, Carl Jung regarded the labyrinth as a fundamental symbol of the unconscious mind, highlighting its susceptibility to being traversed by elements evoking feelings of strangeness and otherness, often referred to as the "uncanny and alien," as mentioned in the previous chapter. Jung also perceived the labyrinth as a metaphor for psychoanalysis, likening it to the journey of navigating through the intricacies of the human psyche. Similarly, Piranesi in the House starts questioning his original identity when he starts having doubts concerning the memory gaps: "The

ten Journals I possess cover a period of five years. Where are the Journals of my earlier life? And what did I do in those years?" (*Piranesi* 111). Before his doubts and curiosity about the contradictions in the Other's account, Piranesi identified himself through the various Halls of the House. He perceived his identity as part and parcel of the House itself believing he is the beloved child of the house.

The Cretan labyrinth is widely present in the novel. For example, the statues of the Minotaur are almost everywhere in the vestibules. Mythically, the Minotaur embodies the profound fears and desires hidden within the depths of our unconscious minds, depicted as a mysterious labyrinth. It symbolizes the intricate blend of primal instincts and lofty aspirations inherent to human nature (Zorbas). For Piranesi, his favorite Hall in the House is the one of the minotaur statues. Whenever he needs to organize his ideas or think about what to do, he goes to the minotaur's house. Therefore, this is not merely a journey into the inner mind, but also one where he has to clear his mind in order to make serious decisions. This also shows his affinity to what the minotaur symbolizes as Piranesi faces both his fears and desires in that hall.

In the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, Ariadne's thread acts as a lifeline connecting Theseus to the outside world as he ventures into the underworld to confront the monster. Theseus escapes the labyrinth by following the thread. In a similar fashion, Piranesi uses the chalk writing left by the detective Raphael as Ariadne's "thread." Initially, he used to employ the same method when he was trying to memorize the structure of the House. He states, "Long ago I used to mark Doors and Floors with chalk in this manner because I was afraid of losing my way" (132). Besides, in Jung's labyrinth, we become our own Ariadne, our own analyst (McConnachie). Occasionally, the Prophet, who turns out to be Arn Sayle himself, and Raphael play the role of Ariadne: they provide Piranesi with information that bring flashbacks into his memory and incite him to look for

the truth. Yet, Piranesi is also his own "Ariadne;" His own journal entries become the "clue" which is the thread that prevented Theseus from being lost in the maze.

3. Plato's Other World in *Piranesi*:

In *Piranesi*, Clarke presents a fresh interpretation of the relationship between the modern interpretation of Tolkien's concept of the secondary world and the ideas surrounding metaphysical reality inherited from classical philosophy, alongside contemporary psychological theories (Błaszkiewicz 116-117). Therefore, The House, the fantastical realm depicted in *Piranesi*, bears resemblance to C.S. Lewis's Charn from *The Magician's Nephew* in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Just as the palace of Charn, the House is depicted as an unoccupied and seemingly endless network of corridors. Clarke openly acknowledges this homage in both her novel *Piranesi* and in subsequent interviews following its publication. However, in contrast to the *Chronicles*, where a Neoplatonic heaven reflects Plato's concept of a higher realm of pure forms, Clarke's novel presents a narrator who doubts the existence of any elevated knowledge, emphasizing instead a critical examination of the interplay between Plato's tangible reality and the world of artistry (Błaszkiewicz 116-120).

Factually, both Susanna Clarke and C.S Lewis' outstanding works are widely inspired by the Platonic views on the idea of another world's existence and that the knowledge we possess in our world is nothing but shadows of the actual one. In the novel, the Other tells Piranesi about the secret Knowledge they are looking for:

> The knowledge we seek isn't something new. It's old. Really old. Once upon a time people possessed it and they used it to do great things, miraculous things. They should have held on to it. They should have respected it. But they didn't. They abandoned it for the sake of something they called progress. And it's up to us to get it back. We're

> not doing this for ourselves; we're doing it for humanity. To get back something humanity has foolishly lost. (*Piranesi* 66–67)

The Other's words right here can be one of the most significant pieces of evidence that the realm in which Piranesi is trapped differs from the one where ancient people once lived and possessed that kind of knowledge, as if Piranesi and his fellow are living in another version of it. In this context, Matthew Rose Sorensen – who is later revealed to be the true Piranesi- states: "… Laurence was the great magus, the great seer who was about to guide us all into the next Age of Men." (177).

Plato's theory posits that the true reality is a realm of Ideal Forms, where everything exists in its perfect form. Humans are believed to be inherently aware of these Ideal Forms from birth. In contrast, the physical world we perceive through our senses is considered illusory, containing imperfect replicas of these Ideal Forms. In *Piranesi*, this concept might be seen in the contrast between the House, which represents the physical world characterized by its vastness, complexity, and material existence. It is the realm where Piranesi initially resides, navigating its corridors and chambers. In contrast, the Other World, glimpsed by Piranesi through his interactions with the statues and the sea, can symbolize Plato's realm of Forms. It is a higher reality, beyond the tangible confines of the House, where the purest expressions of truth and beauty exist. Hence, Piranesi's exploration of the House mirrors the philosopher's quest for knowledge in the physical world.

In the novel, Piranesi finds in his journals and an article written by him in which he talks about Arne Sayle's theory that resembles Plato's hypothesis on the existence of other worlds. He says: "This was the beginning of his most famous idea, the Theory of Other Worlds. Simply put, it said that when knowledge and power went out of this world it did two things: first, it created another place; and second, it left a hole, a door between this world where it had once existed and

the new place it had made" (*Piranesi* 151). Additionally, Plato proposes that our ability to recognize objects in the world stems from our realization that they are flawed imitations of the abstract concepts present in our minds (Buckingham 53). Thus, as Piranesi delves deeper into the mysteries of the House, he begins to uncover hints of the Other World, prompting him to seek understanding beyond the material realm.

For instance, Piranesi in an incident in the novel says: "The word 'Birmingham', for example, brings with it a blare of noise, a flash of movement and color and the fleeting image of towers and spires against a heavy grey sky. I try to catch hold of these impressions, to examine them further, but instantly, they fade" (*Piranesi* 110). This quote shows how Piranesi – in spite of his amnesia, starts recognizing certain items related to the Other World, which is in fact the normal real world, as they are embedded in his consciousness. Moreover, as the albatross descends rapidly towards him, Piranesi thinks: Perhaps the albatross and I were destined to merge and the two of us would become another order of becoming entirely: an Angel! (30). He envisions the possibility of their fusion into a celestial entity he has heard of but never witnessed—an "Angel"—and contemplates soaring through the world, bearing messages of peace and joy (Keiper 123).

In fact, not only names or birds bring a kind of flashbacks to Piranesi, statues, are also bearers of meaning and ideas in the novel. Accordingly, Susanna Clarke explains in an interview:

> If birds land on a statue of a gardener digging, that would be they were suggesting to him something about hard work and industriousness, so he sort of reads the combination of bird flight and statues as if it were a set of tarot cards, he was sort of reading messages from them (Piranesi: Susanna Clarke in conversation with Madeline Miller 17:38- 18:04).

In contrast to Plato, Clarke's world of the House is not an inferior imitation of another world, but a realm which Piranesi is happy to be part of. Clarke's decision not to depict the House as an inferior copy of a superior entity—a stance supported by both the morally upright Piranesi and the intellectually astute Arne-Sayles—marks a significant departure not just from Platonic philosophy, but also from the imagery found in Lewis's Chronicles (though not necessarily from his Christian beliefs) (Dugger 76).

In order to expound his concept of a realm of perfect Forms, Plato utilized the allegory of the cave, which illustrates the limitations of perceiving only shadows of reality and truth. Consequently, he posits that attaining genuine knowledge of our surroundings is unattainable; at best, we may hold opinions. True knowledge, Plato argues, can solely be attained through reason and the study of abstract ideas rather than relying on our deceptive senses (Buckingham 52-54). In the book, when Raphael was trying to persuade Piranesi to go back to the world, she tells him: "Here you can only see a representation of a river or a mountain, but in our world – the other world – you can see the actual mountain and the actual river (*Piranesi* 222). Yet, Piranesi rejects what she says as he sees the House in a different way than the others: "You make it sound as if the Statue was somehow inferior to the thing itself. I do not see that that is the case at all. I would argue that the statue is superior to the thing itself, the Statue being perfect, eternal and not subject to decay" (222). His response shows that, much like the people in Plato's cave, Piranesi perceives only what is inside the House/ Cave as that is what he can verify with his senses. The statues become a simulacrum and not the thing itself.

The words of Piranesi reflect Clarke's own version of the Platonic allegory. In other words, while Raphael's argument bears a clear resemblance to Platonic philosophy - he contends that the House, representing the realm of artistic imitation, is of lower quality compared to the Other World

from which it originates, mirroring Plato's view that the world of artistry is inferior to the physical world it mimics. In this case, the whole novel's narrative presents an inverted cave scenario where the external world isn't inherently superior to the cave (Dugger 76).

In addition, while the inhabitants of Plato's cave were unaware of a superior reality, Piranesi remains oblivious to ugliness. Upon revisiting his journal and rediscovering his tumultuous past, Piranesi undergoes a similar bewilderment to that of a cave escapee, confusing reality with madness. Thus, Clarke creates an analogy between Piranesi and the man who escaped from Plato's cave. Hence, as he gradually unravels the secrets of the House and encounters glimpses of the Other World, he embarks on a transformative journey akin to the prisoner who escapes the cave. His perception of reality expands, leading him to question his previous understanding and seek enlightenment.

Furthermore, just as the shadows in Plato's cave represent illusions or distortions of knowledge, the mysteries and illusions within the House serve as symbolic shadows obscuring the deeper truths Piranesi seeks. His journey towards enlightenment involves deciphering these shadows to uncover the underlying reality. In short, Piranesi firmly believes that the House is equal, if not superior, to the Other World. However, upon rediscovering the Other World, he may face a bewildering sense of confusion, similar to that of someone escaping from a cave (Dugger 76-77).

4. *Piranesi* Through the Lenses of Descartes:

Susanna Clarke's novel "Piranesi" invites readers into a world of mystery and intrigue, where the protagonist, Piranesi, navigates a labyrinthine structure known as the House. As Piranesi explores this surreal environment, themes of perception, reality, and the nature of existence come to the forefront of the narrative. Applying philosophical ideas from Descartes, particularly his

concepts of the illusory world and the evil genius, provides an illuminating lens through which to examine Clarke's exploration of truth and deception within the novel. Descartes' philosophical inquiries prompt readers to reconsider the reliability of their perceptions and contemplate the possibility of a reality that transcends conventional understanding.

4.1. Piranesi's Illusory World:

Descartes' theory of the Illusory World commences with a systematic examination of his beliefs, subjecting them to increasingly rigorous skeptical scrutiny. Buckingham explains that Descartes calls into question the certainty of the existence of any entity and entertains the possibility that the familiar world might be nothing more than an illusion. Furthermore, Descartes rejects reliance on sensory perceptions as a dependable basis for knowledge and certainty, citing the fallibility of our senses and employing the concept of "optical illusion" to illustrate how they can lead us astray (118-119). Besides, Descartes initiates his inquiry by questioning the certainty of the existence of any entity and considering the possibility that the familiar world might be an illusion. Similarly, in *Piranesi*, the protagonist's understanding of reality is constatntly challenged while he tries to make sense of the enigmatic House. Piranesi's perception of his surroundings shifts as he struggles with the mysteries of the House and its alternate realities.

In addition, in his theory, Descartes rejects reliance on sensory perceptions as a reliable foundation for knowledge, highlighting their potential for error. Likewise, in "Piranesi," sensory experiences within the House may be unreliable indicators of truth. For instance, when Piranesi describes the smell in the First Vestibule he says: "Today I concentrated my attention on the scent. It was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, but extremely interesting" (*Piranesi* 79). And then he also narrates: "I could hear faint sounds – a sort of vibration and a dashing noise, like the waves but less regular" (79). Since Piranesi is the only permanent inhabitant, and the Other's visits are rather

short, we cannot be sure whether what he experiences with his senses is true. Just as his memory has been manipulated by the Other into believing he has always existed within the House, it could be that his sensory experience is illusory. Piranesi's encounters with illusions, hallucinations, and surreal phenomena blur the line between reality and imagination, echoing Descartes' skepticism towards sensory beliefs.

Furthermore, Descartes uses the analogy of optical illusions to illustrate how sensory perceptions can lead to false beliefs. Likewise, in *Piranesi,* the House itself can be seen as a metaphorical optical illusion. Its labyrinthine halls and shifting landscapes challenge Piranesi's understanding of reality, forcing him to confront the possibility that what he perceives may not be true. As Piranesi narrates in the novel:

> Here I noticed something. The Shadows between the two statues were producing a sort of optical illusion. I could almost imagine that they extended backwards a long way and that I was in fact gazing into a corridor leading to a distant point where was a patch of mist light. This patch of light contained other lights that seemed to flicker and move (79).

Piranesi's words are evidence for the unreliability of his senses and the uncertainty of his sensory beliefs, as human beings are often prone to be mistaken or misled by such sensory illusions.

Besides, Descartes proposes the idea that our perceived reality could be like a dream, where what appears real may actually be a product of our dreaming mind. He supports this notion by noting the lack of clear differences between being awake and being asleep. (Buckingham 118-119). In the novel, the protagonist narrates:

> … the Water lapping the Walls in a thousand, thousand Chambers. It is a sound that accompanies me all my days. I fall asleep to it every night, just as a child might fall

> asleep, safe on its mother breasts, listening to her heartbeat. And indeed, this is what must have happened now, because the next thing I knew was that I was waking suddenly out of sleep. (*Piranesi* 58-59)

Reading this passage through the lenses of Descartes or Zhuangzi concerning their ideas of dreams and reality opens portals of interpreting it as if all the reality that Piranesi is experiencing is nothing but a dream; especially since dreams occur in more than one incident in the novel. For instance, when he was expressing his love for the Statue of a Faun which he believes to be warning him of some kind of danger, he says: "I dreamt of him once; he was standing in a snowy forest and speaking to a female child" (16). This dream appears to be meaningless and absurd, depicting the uncertainty and confusion related to the character's self and the reality of the realm in which he is. Yet, it also shows that Piranesi's has difficulty separating between the dream world and the real world.

4.2. Piranesi Deceived by an "Evil Genius":

In the play titled *Henri VI* Part 2, Shakespeare in the words of one of his characters who bears the name of Gloucester says: "Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven, Unless you be possessed with devilish spirits, You cannot but forebear to murder me" (*Henry VI,* Part 2. 4.7). These lines encapsulate the duality of knowledge as both a means of spiritual elevation and a potential source of corruption. This notion of knowledge being influenced by malevolent forces resonates with the philosophical concept of the evil genius proposed by René Descartes. Descartes suggests that our perceptions and understanding of reality may be manipulated by a deceitful entity, leading us astray from truth and reason. In other words, he creates an effective strategy to avoid falling back on preconceived ideas: instead of a reality populated with familiar objects, there

exists only the individual, their beliefs, and a malevolent entity manipulating their convictions to fabricate the existence of the conventional world (Buckingham 120).

Occasionally, the protagonist in the novel navigates a surreal and enigmatic world where perceptions of reality are constantly challenged. The House, with its shifting landscapes and mysterious inhabitants, serves as a metaphorical manifestation of the evil genius's deception. In the book, it happens that the motif of the evil genius is related originally to Laurance Arne Syles, who is portrayed as an intellectual figure and a magician interested in understanding the mysteries of the world and its alternate realities. As revealed by Matthew Rose Sorenson (Piranesi) in his journals: Arne-Sayles however had an alibi; he had spent the midwinter festival with some wealthy neo-pagans at a farmhouse in Exmoor. The neo-pagans (people called Brooker) confirmed this. The Brookers revered Arne-Sayles as an extraordinary genius and a sort of pagan saint (*Piranesi* 150). Arne-Sayles was a magician and a scholar who sought what he calls the lost knowledge of the ancients which he believes would grant him supreme power by which he will be able to access the other worlds. However, to possess this knowledge, he must perform witchcraft rituals, as Piranesi explains in his journals: “He had experimented with ritual magic and now thought it might be possible to get some of the powers back, providing you had a physical link with a person who had once possessed them (149). Arn-Sayles goes as far as stealing from a museum, an ancient skull of a seer believed to have existed thousands of years before.

Furthermore, one of Arne-Sayles’ students, Valentine Ketterley, who the reader knows as The Other shares the same fascination with other worlds as his teacher. The Prophet, who is actually Arn-Sayles, accuses him of being an “evil thief” who stole his ideas; he tells Piranesi after he finally manages to visit this other world, “Actually his ideas are mine. I was the greatest scholar of my generation” (87). Ketterley indeed fits the motif of the “evil genius” in the novel. He was

and one of Arne-Sayles' students, and he also sought to find what he calls the Great and Secret knowledge which will grant him extraordinary powers. Yet, to access this knowledge he has to choose victims whom he will perform magic rituals on.

Thus, he entrapped Matthew Rose Sorenson who was a scholar and a journalist and performed a piece of ceremonial magic by which he will make his victim imprisoned in a different reality, another realm, which depicts the idea of using human genius in order to manipulate other people's beliefs and cognition, 'He claimed that he personally was able to access the labyrinth-world simply by making adjustment to his frame of mind, by returning to a child-like state of wonder, a pre-rational consciousness.' (178). Initially, Piranesi believes his journals to be numbered 1, 2, 3, etc. Later on, he discovers that it was actually journal 21, 22, and so on, and that the number two was removed. He discovers that there is a discrepancy in the order of his journals and that the indexes he keeps do not match. This leads him to discover his own writing about the incident when he was imprisoned by ketterley. Within the pages of his journal entries, Sorenson describes a part of the ritual: More chanting. My amusement at discovering his secret sustained me for a while, but then I began to grow bored. He abandoned language altogether and seemed to drag out of himself a sort of animal growl that started in his stomach, impossibly deep, and grew higher, wilder, louder, more extraordinary (182). It is later speculated that Piranesi is not ketterly's only victim. One of the most intriguing mysteries for Piranesi, is the skeleton remains of some people whose identity is unknown. At the end of the story, when ketterly's deeds are revealed, Raphael speculates that they are the bodies of some students who were devoted to Arn-Sayles.

this recurrent theme of being trapped in an alternate reality has evolved over time, from malicious fairies to evil magicians, and now to the stock literary figure of the evil scientist. The notion of surpassing natural boundaries of knowledge and power, central to the identity of the evil

scientist, has taken various forms throughout history. Błaszkiewicz explains that In *Piranesi*, Valentine Ketterly and Arne-Sayles' intellectual pursuits mirror this ambition, viewing access to an alternate reality as a means to attain unparalleled knowledge and power in the primary reality. Despite them being eventually repulsive, their vision possesses significant intellectual breadth. In other words, behind their malice and self-indulgence lies a genuine intellectual fervor, albeit unrestrained by professional or ethical considerations. It is arguable that their discovery's weight transforms them into the selfish figures they become (114-116).

4.3. He Who Has Knowledge Has Power:

In *Piranesi*, Susanna Clarke presents us with a journey undertaken by multiple characters in search of the Great and Secret Knowledge. However, the purpose behind obtaining this knowledge is not the same for all characters in the novel. For instance, the Other (also known as Valentine Ketterly) seeks the possession of it in order to gain some sort of power. Piranesi on the other hand, initially goes along with the Other's plan in order to help his only living companion, although at some point he starts doubting the existence of such a secret knowledge.

In this context, Michel Foucault's concept of power involves its integration within social relations, encompassing domination, constraint, and the creation of knowledge, pleasures, and subjectivities. He introduced the notion of power/knowledge to emphasize their interconnectedness, highlighting that power operates through knowledge and vice versa. More precisely, Foucault's concept of power involves its integration within social relations, encompassing domination, constraint, and the creation of knowledge, pleasures, and subjectivities. (Dancy et al 381). Similarly, the Other's pursuit of the Great and Secret Knowledge aims mainly to use it as a means of power and domination. This idea is portrayed in the book where Piranesi narrates:

> The Other believes that there is a Great and Secret Knowledge hidden somewhere in the World that will grant us enormous powers once we have discovered it. What this Knowledge consists of is not entirely sure, but at various times he has suggested that it might include the following:
>
> 1. vanquishing Death and becoming immortal
> 2. learning by a process of telepathy what other people are thinking
> 3. transforming ourselves into eagles and flying through the Air
> 4. transforming ourselves into fish and swimming through the Tides
> 5. moving objects using only our thoughts
> 6. snuffing out and reigniting the Sun and Stars
> 7. dominating lesser intellects and bending them to our will. (*Piranesi* 8)

This passage perfectly illustrates the extent to which Foucault's ideas align with the Other's aspirations for supreme power through the acquisition of the Great Knowledge. Hence, by admitting that one of his goals is to dominate and control what he calls the "lesser intellects" and bending them to his will, the Other depicts the imagery of the hierarchal system in which societies are divided into different categories where there exists an elitist minority of intellectuals dictating the rules on the vernacular minority.

Additionally, Piranesi, as one of the victims of the Other, might be one of those whom the other considers to be "lesser minds." Whether this is true or not, the novel contains several parts showing how Piranesi is unable to identify the bad intentions of people whom he encounters. For instance, when talking this issue with himself, he says: "For example: he says that we will have the power to control the lesser minds. Well, to begin with there are no lesser minds; there are only him and me and we both have keen and lively intellects. But, supposing for a moment that a lesser

mind existed, why would I want to control it?" (*Piranesi* 61). Thus, even after knowing the Other's intentions behind his quest for Knowledge, he does not see in him anything but "goodness." Although Piranesi might be a "lesser mind" for the Other, the latter actually relies on Piranesi's incredible ability of documenting and organizing data. In a short period, he learns how to find his way around the endless halls in the labyrinth. He keeps everything recorded in his journals, with the minutest details of what he encounters daily.

Furthermore, according to Foucault, power is not solely exerted through force or coercion, but also through the generation and dissemination of knowledge. In essence, knowledge is not impartial or unbiased but is influenced by the power dynamics within society. In *Piranesi*, The characters go so far into assuming that obtaining the Great Knowledge leads to the creation of a force that is capable of moving humanity towards a new era. One of the index entries of Piranesi's journal reads "In Mai 1976 Arne-Sayles wrote a letter to the director of the museum, asking to borrow the head so that he could perform a magical rite of his own invention, transfer the seer's knowledge to himself and so to usher in a New Age for Mankind" (149). Arn-Sayles believes that the knowledge stored in the seers remains can help open the path to the other worlds. Following his master's footsteps, ketterley succeeds in finding a way that permits him to go in and out of the House whenever he wishes. This gives him the ability to deceive others and trap them inside the Other World.

Moreover, the House in the novel is described as a labyrinth that causes several unwanted symptoms if someone stays inside it for a long time. In one of his significant conversations with Piranesi, the Prophet interrupted with a pause then added: 'I must not stay long. I am all too well aware of the consequences of lingering in this place: amnesia, total mental collapse, etcetera, etcetera (91). If the prophet's momentary visit can case mental disturbance, then we have to rethink

Piranesi's mental faculties and his ability to correctly interpret sensory experience. Unlike the Other, who visits on certain days only, Piranesi is not even aware he is living inside a prison. Here, the cause of his amnesia and his eventual psychological collapse are is his imprisonment in the Other World.

What the Prophet claims about the House echoes Foucault's concept in which he examined how institutions like prisons, schools, hospitals, and the media function as sites where power/knowledge operates. These institutions regulate behavior, shape identities, and define what is considered normal or deviant. Hence, the House in the novel could serve as an institution created in order to "brainwash" any individual who is entrapped inside it. This demonstrates the extent to which controlling entities are capable of managing, distributing, and exploiting sources of knowledge to shape collective and individual awareness within societies. It also underscores the inseparable relationship between knowledge and power.

Last but not least, Foucault explored the historical understanding and treatment of madness, revealing how perceptions of sanity and madness have evolved arbitrarily over time. His primary goal was not only to illuminate the past but also to liberate contemporary society from its entrenched notions of madness and sanity. Through his view on the nature of madness, it is crucial to address the possibility that the other used his intellectual power in order to persuade Piranesi that he has gone mad. As he tells him in one of their meetings: "…because you're already mentally unstable" (97). Though Piranesi had a sense of resentment and denial towards this claim at first, he later became convinced of himself being mad when he mutters: "The Other and the Prophet have both stated that the House itself is a source of madness and forgetfulness. They are scientists and men of intellect. When two such impeccable authorities are in agreement then I believe I must accept their conclusions. The House is the cause of my forgetting" (112). The fact that Piranesi

describes the Other and the Prophet as “impeccable authorities” whose possession of science and intellect grants them the right to decide what is right and what is wrong, or who is mad and who is sane, proves the validity of Foucault’s idea that madness is nothing but the result of external factors set by certain individuals or institutions in order to provide a unified concept for madness

4.4. Piranesi's Faded Memory and Limited Perception.

According to Nick Chatter, the brain constructs perceptions of the world on the fly, and what we perceive as direct observations are actually a mosaic of conjectures and reconstructions. In a more simplified way, he suggests that there are no underlying processes or depths within the mind. Accordingly, Chatter proposes that the brain generates perceptions of the world in real-time, implying that what we perceive as immediate observations are actually a composite of assumptions and reconstructions. He contends that the mind lacks underlying processes or depths. For instance, in *Piranesi,* the protagonist while passing by his beloved Statue of the Faun, “He smiles slightly and presses his forefinger to his lips. I have always felt that he meant to tell me something or perhaps to warn me of something: Quiet! He seems to say. Be careful! But what danger there could possibly be I have never known” (*Piranesi* 15-16). According to this scene, Piranesi’s limited perception puts him in a state of doubt and uncertainty towards what the supposed message the Statue is supposed to convey.

The ongoing battle between Piranesi and himself is a depiction of the boundaries of the human perception. In the novel, it happens that he encounters an albatross gathering seaweed, he observes it trying to decipher what it wants to do and says: “The starred albatross spread his wings and stretched his neck; he pointed his beak at the Ceiling and made the raucous clacking sound. This; I thought, was an expression of enthusiasm” (32). Hence, the fact that Piranesi could not read

the behavior of the bird showcases how the human mind encounters uncertainty when it comes to similar cases.

Based on Chatter and Freud's theories on mind and perception, it occurs that Piranesi through his journey inside the House struggles with his incapability of perceiving and understanding all what he explores. For instance, when he expresses: "I knew that when I looked at it there was something very strange here. But the strange thing was so strange, so entirely incomprehensible that I found it difficult to form coherent thoughts about it. I could see the strangeness with my eyes, but I could not think it with my mind" (103). Much like Piranesi perceives the external world through his senses, he often believes he can also explore his inner world by looking inward and using introspection to investigate what's happening in his mind.

Another issue caused by the limits of the mind is what is known as the Agrippa's Trilemma, also known as "The Regress Problem", which arises when a sequence of linked elements begins with a first member but lacks a final one, with each element giving rise to or causing the next. An infinite regress argument uses this idea to object to a theory, suggesting that the theory implies an endless chain of elements, which is deemed problematic. The same way as Piranesi expresses when he was discussing some of his thoughts: "This thought led on to another" (*Piranesi* 61), or as the Halls and the Vestibules are described as labyrinthine and each one leads to another, or as the staircases being endless.

In addition to his bounded perception, Piranesi struggles more with his limited memory. Thus, he makes journal entries to remember things; as he declares: "…I keep my journal in which I write my thoughts and memories and make a record of my days" (13). However, even this attempt at trying to remember everything about himself and the House appears to be useless. For instance, when Piranesi suggests to the Other that the Secret Knowledge they are seeking might not exist,

the Other is exasperated and informs Piranesi they have already had this conversation a couple of times before. He tells him that he has amnesia leaving loopholes in his time records. Piranesi then wonders: “I invented the calendar I use, so how could it be ‘out of sync’ as he put it?” (71). Yet, in this situation, Piranesi starts questioning whose memory is lost, his or the Other’s, which puts him in a spiral of doubt and skepticism.

In fact, human memory's unreliability arises from various factors, with blurriness being a significant issue. Mental images tend to lack the vividness of real perceptions. For instance, when recalling details like the layout of a bedroom, the mental image might give a general impression of object positions and appearances, including shapes and colors. Nevertheless, this mental depiction lacks the precision of direct perception. In *Piranesi,* the protagonist sometimes encounters certain items in his journals or through his conversations with other characters; these items bring him sort of flashbacks but unfortunately, he could not entirely make sense of them. A case in point, when he encounters words that appear familiar to him, Piranesi says:

> A crowd of images stirs in my mind – strange, nightmarish, but at the same time oddly familiar. The word ‘Birmingham’, for example, brings with it a blare of noise, a flash of movement and colour and the fleeting image of towers and spires against a heavy grey sky. I try to catch hold of these impressions, to examine them further, but instantly, they fade. (110)

In this situation, one notices how he can be misled or even manipulated by his own memory. In a similar case, when describing his special attachment to the First Vestibule and why he has chosen it as a starting point to his System of Numbering the Halls, Piranesi mutters: “Knowing myself as I do, I do not think I would have chosen it had I not felt some sort of strong connection with it; yet I no longer remember wat that connection was” (78). Based on this case, we understand that our

memories play a crucial role in our accumulated knowledge. Yet, even if we retain procedural knowledge, recalling when or from whom we acquired specific information can be challenging.

Furthermore, Memory frequently introduces systematic distortions in perception. For example, when Piranesi started gradually restoring his memory, he remembered the name of a person called Stanley Ovenden: 'Yet his name, when the Prophet spoke it, had not been in the least familiar" (*Piranesi* 103). From this standpoint, it is understood that human memory is vulnerable to damage and to creating distortion of the data stored inside it. It can easily erode causing the person's perception to be limited and, thus, the knowledge they acquire from their surroundings to be unstable and fluid. Although Piranesi follows a scholarly method of gathering, sorting, and documenting information as a proud scientist does, he is not aware that what he stores is limited through his own perceptions, both the genuine and the manipulated.

Quite tragically, Piranesi's limited and rather selective perception, culminates in his loss of identity at the end of the story. The protagonist is not skeptic only concerning his mental state, but he has also an existential crisis. At first, he questions the name given to him by the Other: "Piranesi. It is what he calls me. Which is strange because as far as I remember it is not my name.' (9). Even after he knew who he really is – Matthew Rose Sorensen – he develops a kind of "split" personality in which he is struggling between the two identities. The shock of learning that he is not Piranesi, the child of the House, makes him rejects his true identity as Matthew. In this context, he expresses: "Perhaps I should send them a message explaining that Matthew Rose Sorensen now lives inside me, that he is unconscious but perfectly safe, and that I am a strong and resourceful person who will care for him assiduously" (217). Here, he is referring to his own family who believed him to be dead. He adores himself being Piranesi to extent that he does not to abandon it.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the novel explores the journey of humanity in search of knowledge, questioning whether such knowledge exists or not, thus illustrating the complexity of this journey as if it was an entry into an endless maze, hinting at the limitation of knowledge and the human mind's ability to perceive it. Additionally, the novel also addresses the quest for self-discovery, feelings of alienation and participation, and the intimate relationship that can develop between individuals and the world they inhabit. Piranesi reflects the plight of humanity in living within their confines of a limited perception that shapes their reality. In this way, humans' attempt to navigate the unpredictable and often hard to comprehend experiences is a labyrinthine journey.

General Conclusion

Knowledge has driven human curiosity since the dawn of creation. With cognitive abilities unique to their species, humans have pondered the natural phenomena surrounding them and delved into the intricacies of the human psyche. Thus, embarking on the journey of knowledge, humans believed they could attain it, only to confront the early realization that human knowledge is limited, tethered to the constraints of the human mind. Based on this notion of the limitation of knowledge, philosophers from ancient Greece to the postmodern era have explored and intertwined their theories about it.

As for myths and legends, they are tales passed down through generations, narratives where humanity encounters the divine, sometimes in harmony and at other times in conflict. These myths have not remained confined to books or bedtime stories told by grandmothers to children. Rather, they have permeated every aspect of life, from literature, poetry, and cinema to psychology, philosophy, and even the world of marketing and advertising. Each myth serves as a symbol, shaping identities for individuals or groups, signifying similarities between them. For instance, the myth of the Cretan labyrinth that has become a major reference point for expressing anything complex, intricate, or multi-dimensional in nature.

Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* examined these themes in her novel in which she discussed Man's pursuit of knowledge and the special relationship he can develop with the world in which he lives. All of these themes are presented in a fantasy setting filled with mythical items. She presented a few numbers of characters mainly Piranesi, the Other and Laurence Arne-Sayles; all of them are concerned with academia and scholastic pursuits since the novel revolves around the search for the lost knowledge, as well as the animosity and competition among the characters in their journey towards this purpose. This work laid the ground for the examination of the limits of

knowledge as well as the power and significance of the myth of the labyrinth in the context of *Piranesi* by establishing a profound philosophical and cultural background on how knowledge is bounded by the unreliability of the human mind.

The first part of this thesis presented some insights about the philosophers' pursuit to define and understand knowledge, leading to the emergence of the philosophical branch known as Epistemology. This eventually led them to the conviction that knowledge and the human mind are limited, resulting in the emergence of what is known as philosophical doubt. This was achieved through exploring the ideas of Western philosophers from different epochs, such as Plato, Descartes, and Michel Foucault. These elements provided a guide to the novel's characters and discussed the issues regarding the nature of knowledge, its limits and its relation with power. Moreover, the study employed Edith Hamilton, Joseph Campbell, Philip Wilkinson, and Neil Philip as theoretical references of mythology's significance – mainly the myth of the labyrinth and Theseus – and its role in the literary and artistic representations. This helped demonstrate the process undergone by Piranesi, the protagonist, of solving the riddle of his entrapment in the House and his journey to search for the Great and Secret Knowledge with the help of his journals and certain people whom he encounters inside the labyrinth. These journals and characters helped him to restore his lost memory as well as his original identity.

The subsequent analysis aimed to understand how the author addresses her perspective on knowledge and its limitations. Additionally, it clarifies humanity's inability to comprehend all surrounding phenomena flawlessly, likening it to being trapped in an eerie and enchanting labyrinth. Here, everything known to the individual about themselves and their surroundings is but an artificially constructed reality by individuals or entities surpassing them in knowledge and awareness. They employ these constructs to dominate those less intellectually equipped, with the

protagonist of the novel being a victim in this intricate web reminiscent of mystery films. Even the world in which the character resides, assumed by him to be the sole and supreme world, turns out to be nothing but a replica of the real world. This replica is not necessarily less beautiful or sophisticated, but ultimately, it is not the true world to which he belongs. In addition, the novel embodies the mythological idea of the labyrinth, laden with its symbolic and moral weight concerning the human psyche and the realms of knowledge and science. It incorporates various mythological and fantastical elements such as the Minotaur, the Satyr, the Centaur, and an infinite number of statues; not to mention the ocean that surrounds the house, with its waves incessantly striking against it.

Therefore, this study concluded that attaining absolute and genuine knowledge is impossible, and doubt will arise every time one strives to achieve this goal. Adding to this complexity is the fact that even in attempting to understand the idea of limitation of knowledge and the human mind, we encounter a divergence of philosophical ideas and their contradictions, making consensus on a single idea as an absolute truth akin to finding the Holy Grail. The author symbolically depicted this in the novel when she portrayed the protagonist as denying the existence of the “Great and Secret Knowledge”, asserting instead that knowledge is the understanding of oneself first and then reconciling with the world in which one lives.

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الملخص

شغلت المعرفة والفضول عقل الإنسان منذ نشأة الخليقة، فراح يطرح أسئلة وجودية يتساءل من خلالها عن حقيقة كل ما حوله، مدفوعًا بالشك والفضول. ولأن عقله الذي يسعى للحصول على المعرفة الحقيقية محدود بعوامل خارجة عن نطاق قدرته، فكذلك المعرفة التي يسعى خلفها مقيدة بحدود اختلف الفلاسفة في تنظيرها باختلاف قناعاتهم وخلفياتهم. وعليه، فإن لهذه النظريات الفلسفية المتعلقة بمحدودية العقل والمعرفة نصيبها من التمثيلات في الأعمال الأدبية، وتبرز رواية "بيرانيزي" للكاتبة سوزانا كلارك كمثالٍ جيدٍ على الأعمال التي تناولت هذه الأفكار الميتافيزيقية في ثنايا الأحداث المتوالية وعبر الأفكار والمعتقدات التي تحملها شخصياتها. ولإضافة الأبعاد الرمزية والجمالية، استعانت الكاتبة بالعناصر الفانتازية والأسطورية، مما وبالتالي، تسعى هذه الأطروحة إلى دراسة الرواية من منطلق فلسفي يبين حضور .ساهم في جعل الحبكة أكثر عمقًا ومعنوية أفكار الفلاسفة حول حدود المعرفة فيها، بالإضافة إلى دور الأساطير القديمة، وخصوصًا أسطورة المتاهة، في إيصال هذه الأفكار للقارئ. ناهيك عن كونها عنصرًا مساعدًا في فهم تشعبات النفس البشرية ومضامين العقل الإنساني. يتم تحقيق هذه المساعي عن طريق توظيف بعض النظريات الأبستمولوجيا لفلاسفة غربيين من حقب مختلفة، أمثال أفلاطون وديكارت وفوكو، بالإضافة إلى الاستعانة ببعض المفاهيم من دراسات الأسطورة، تحديدًا بعض أعمال جوزيف كامبل، إديث هاملتون، فليب ويلكينسون، ونيل فيليب.

الكلمات المفتاحية المعرفة، الادراك، الاساطير، المتاهة، العقل، الحدود.