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An Analysis of Symbolic Violence in Classical Texts Comparatively to Modern Feminist Adaptations

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By

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Contents

Abstract: This thesis explores the symbolic violence and misogyny present in Classical texts, and then compares them to modern feminist adaptations or retellings of the same stories. We explore the treatment of Briseis and other enslaved women in the Greek camp throughout the *Iliad*, and compare Homer's perspective to Pat Barker's in her book *Silence of the Girls*. We then look at Ovid's *Metamorphoses* compared to *Wake, Siren* by Nina Maclaughlin, and finish with the comparison of Euripides' plays *Iphigenia at Aulis, Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, and *Hecuba* to *A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes. The thesis concludes that the adaptations bring a previously unheard and marginalized perspective to light, and also work to undo some of the damage that the original stories did on women's rights through to the present day, helping women to redetermine and reannounce what their role in their society should be.

Introduction

Texts and stories from Classical Antiquity have embedded crucial messages and thought-provoking themes throughout. However, these messages and themes are representative of the culture in which they were speaking to, which was a misogynistic culture that sought to exclude women from public life. When looking at these texts such as the *Iliad* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it becomes clear how the authors used these tales to send a violent message about the treatment and use of women; and unfortunately, the consequences of those choices still affect our societies today. Through the portrayal of these women, Homer communicates to the readers that the woman's role is to be silenced and used to the advantage of the males in control of them. This paper will argue that such Classical authors commit a form of symbolic violence by silencing and marginalizing women to that extreme, and will then compare specific scenes in those texts that highlight these injustices to recent feminist adaptations of the same stories.

Symbolic Violence

It is important to note that while violence tends to have a physical connotation attached to it, there are many forms of violence that are not physical. Symbolic violence is one of those, and is defined as a form of violence that

> "Is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity… through an act of cognition and of misrecognition that lies beyond -- or beneath -- the controls of consciousness and will" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 272 - 273).

Simply put, it is a power differential between two parties that restricts and strips power from one party and transfers it to the other, generally through the practice of cultural norms and expectations. An excellent example is that of gender roles, wherein women are expected to be subservient to men -- and consequently, there is a power differential between the two parties, with men having women's power transferred to themselves. Gender roles typically present

themselves through cultural norms and practices such as having women be the ones that do the cooking and cleaning, or expecting them to give up their careers in order to raise children; or if they choose to keep their careers, they are still the ones expected to be overly involved in the Parent-Teacher Association and their children's education. While none of these things are necessarily harmful by themselves and are generally imposed unconsciously on women by both men and women, women are nonetheless still expected to do these things, and are subject to ridicule and criticism if they choose not to. At that point, it starts inflicting harm upon women and removes their ability to freely choose what roles they want to fulfill -- even though neither men or women may be actively aware that these are pressures and rules imposed upon them. But, both parties have unconsciously agreed that this is a role women should fill -- and it is this precise removal of autonomy and free will that makes it symbolic violence.

Women were subject to symbolic violence in Ancient Greece, and as that was an overtly patriarchal society -- more so even than ours is today -- their restrictions and rules were much more severe and strict. In Sarah Pomeroy's book *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, the author discusses the patriarchal code that women were subject to in Ancient Greece and how, even though women have always been completely capable of having their own autonomy and free will, their society was nonetheless structured so that they were unable to, and they were instead completely dependent on the men in their lives. Women in Homeric Greece were viewed both symbolically and literally as objects and prizes such that owning them added greatly to a soldier's κλέος (glory), and their only purpose in life was to marry and have children (Pomeroy, 16-32).

When looking at the misogyny in Classical texts, it is important to note that while the modern world has racism and misogyny intertwined and interacting with each other, the Hellenic

era -- despite expanding over parts of Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa -- did not consider skin color or biology to be the source of one's race; rather, they were more concerned with whether or not an individual was a "citizen" or a "foreigner" (i.e., a "barbarian"). Consequently, when looking at these texts, it would be difficult to look at the intersectionality of race and gender in these societies, as we would be applying a different social construct than was present to these texts (McCoskey, 2020). Furthermore, not enough physical characteristics are given of the women discussed in either Ovid, Euripides, or Homer's works here for us to be able to determine which racial group they may have belonged to, further discouraging the potential for an intersectional lens on the symbolic violence present.

Even in regards to slavery, while the modern world has only had specific racial groups enslaved, in Ancient Greece, slaves were obtained through capture in war casually and sporadically, and most men were either killed or sold off. Women and children, however, were kept and became enslaved, and were referred to as trophies of war, passed around between men to symbolize the amount of κλέος a man had. Briseis was one of these women, and after having her city sacked by the Greeks, became a concubine for Achilles. Throughout the *Iliad,* it appears as though the only enslaved people within the Greek war camp are female; all of the men are freemen and soldiers. Moreover, there appear to be almost no females in the camp that are not enslaved. This separation between the two genders with females as enslaved and men as freemen are gender roles in this context exclusively, with the women being told to serve and the men being served. This inability for women to be anything other than a slave within the camp restricts women to an almost silent and completely marginalized role, as both parties have unanimously agreed that in the camp, a woman's role is to serve men; she is not to exist in any other way. This marginalization and objectification due to these harmful gender roles makes the *Iliad* ripe with

countless forms of symbolic violence (Westerman, 1-3). Furthermore, their use as a γέρας, or trophy of war, had them viewed as a collective, which denied them both free will and autonomy so that even in an epic, they were seen as someone's future possession instead of a thinking and feeling individual human being deserving of rights (Rodriguez, 2017).

Homer's *Iliad*

Briseis

Recognizing this, the *Iliad* begins in Book One with a verbal altercation between two generals, Agamemnon and Achilles, over the ownership of Achilles' prize, Briseis. Agamemnon had previously chosen a different girl named Chryseis to be his γέρας but her father was a priest and asked Apollo to invoke a plague upon the Greek war camp until his daughter was returned to him. Apollo obliged, and after a fair amount of deaths, the soldiers started to pressure Agamemnon into returning Chryseis. Eventually Agamemnon acquiesced to their demands, on the contingency that

> "Since Phoebus Apollo is taking away my Chryseis, whom I'm sending back aboard ship with my friends, I'm coming to your [Achilles] hut and taking Briseis, your own beautiful prize, so that you will see just how much stronger I am than you, and the next person will wince at the thought of opposing me as an equal" (Homer, 1.192 - 198).

It is clear here that Agamemnon feels as though losing Chryseis would be a blow to his κλέος and to rectify this, he needs to take someone else's trophy. As Achilles is respected and revered throughout the camp, Agamemnon decides that taking Briseis away from him would restore his κλέος while warning others not to oppose him again, as well as insulting Achilles and dishonoring him in the process. None of this fight appears to be about Briseis, but it is she who will suffer the most, and merely to appease two powerful men who want to assert dominance over each other.

Yet even though her fate is what the argument is about, we never hear her opinion or her

stance on what she wishes her fate to be -- she is stripped of her autonomy and free will, and any pain she experiences is immediately recentered and used to focus on the pain the males in this story experience. In this instance, her pain is used to focus on the dishonor that Achilles experiences, and we hear a lengthy speech about how wounded he is that his fellow soldiers would dare to treat him this way. This understanding and expectation by all parties that Briseis will not get to be a part of the discussion about her own fate, and that her role will simply be to wait for others to decide strips her of her autonomy and free will. By doing so, her treatment is clearly objectification, as she is viewed completely as a γέρας (trophy of war) and a symbol of a man's κλέος (glory). The restrictive role that both parties have unconsciously and unwittingly decided that Briseis must play is a form of symbolic violence, and marginalizes and silences her to an extreme.

We see these themes being repeated in Book Nine, when Briseis next makes an appearance. After being forced to give Briseis to Agamemnon, Achilles retreats from the war, refusing to fight for the Greeks any longer. Consequently, the Greeks start to lose the war, and eventually the situation is dire enough that Agamemnon sends Phoenix, Ajax, and Odysseus to convince Achilles to return. Upon arrival, each man attempts to sway Achilles, even mentioning that Agamemnon has agreed to give him an exorbitant amount of gifts to restore his κλέος, including tripods, gold bars, and

> "Seven women who do impeccable work, surpassingly beautiful women from Lesbos he [Agamemnon] chose for himself when you captured the town. And with them will be the woman he took from you, Briseus' daughter, and he will solemnly swear he never went to her bed and lay with her or did what is natural between women and men… He has three daughters in his fortress palace, Chrysohemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa. You may lead whichever you like as your bride… and he would give her a dowry richer than any a father has ever given his daughter" (*Iliad*, 9.271-292).

Repeatedly, this quote highlights how women are objectified and viewed as extensions of a

man's κλέος. Achilles' refusal of this offer shows how the conversation was never about Briseis or the objects, but the honor and glory that came with them. By having his κλέος removed publicly like it was in Book One, any form of private restitution would be considered unacceptable and there is no number of women that Achilles could be offered to recover that loss.

This offer also calls attention to Briseis' lack of autonomy and free will when it comes to determining her own fate, as her ownership has now been transferred twice to a man in order to assuage and appease him in respect to his loss of κλέος. It is important to note that she is still a woman and a human being, and this is a considerable amount of trauma for any one person to endure. Nonetheless, Homer ignores this in favor of accentuating and focusing on Achilles' loss (which is Briseis, but only as a representation of his κλέος). In this way, Homer again brings attention to how female pain and trauma is marginalized and recentered around the development and pain of a male. At her expense, these men learn and evolve, with little regard to her own development and perspective. This objectification, silencing, and having her trauma used for the benefit of males is a form of symbolic violence that Briseis has now had to endure twice, with no form of agency on her part.

The last scene where we see Briseis is in Book Nineteen of the *Iliad*, and it is also the first (and last) scene in which we get to hear her voice. Briseis gives a speech mourning Patroclus, Achilles' close friend and confidante that passed away in battle dressed in Achilles' armor. Briseis is bereaved by this loss, and sobs loudly and publicly over Patroclus' dead body, stating that

> "'I have seen my husband, the man my father and mother gave me to, mangled with sharp bronze before my city, and my three brothers, all from the same mother, brothers I loved -- they all died that day… but you wouldn't let me cry when Achilles killed my husband and destroyed Mynes' city, wouldn't let me cry. You [Patroclus] told me you'd make me Achilles' bride, told me you'd take me on a ship to Phthia, for a wedding among the Myrmidons. I will never stop grieving for you, forever sweet.'" (Homer, 19.309 - 321).

Although this speech is spoken by Briseis, the focus is still not on her; rather, it is centered around Patroclus and how devastating the loss of him is. Briseis quickly zooms over the loss of her husband, three brothers and her city, marking them as a preset to the great and deep grief she feels at losing Patroclus, a man who promised her hand in marriage to one of her previous owners. She uses her past pain and trauma to recenter and exaggerate the focus of Patroclus' death, acknowledging it as a greater tragedy than all of which she has previously experienced.

By having her do this, Homer takes Briseis' pain and uses it as a propping point upon which the loss of Patroclus is situated. Her pain is clearly not her own, and there are strict rules as to who she is allowed to mourn, as is dictated by Ancient Greek society. Briseis has lost so much more than she is given credit for, and any pain around losing her family is either silenced or used to further a male's development and pain -- in this instance, Patroclus' death and what his loss means to other men. This inability to mourn her own losses by themselves outside of the context of Patroclus' death is an extremely restrictive role that is representative of symbolic violence, since both parties have (unconsciously) agreed that she is only allowed to mourn (or at least, only allowed to be seen to mourn) Patroclus, despite the fact that she has much more to grieve than the loss of this one person.

Homer wrote these three scenes in a way that symbolic violence against women is intertwined and woven throughout -- the plot is contingent upon the exploitation of women for the plot and character development of the male characters. Agamemnon and Achilles argue about

honor and status through Briseis in Book One. In Book Nine, we see Agamemnon learn and evolve a little bit and Achilles continues to be upset about his loss of κλέος, both at the expense of Briseis and her ownership once again. In both scenes, she is silenced and given no autonomy -- Homer even denies her the privilege of dictating her perspective to the reader, silencing her further. In Book Nineteen, even though we get to hear from Briseis, we again see her society restructure her for their benefit and marginalize her pain and trauma when not considered relevant to a man. The restrictions placed upon Briseis in the *Iliad* are an extreme form of symbolic violence, as the role she is relegated to objectifies and silences her almost completely, yet through the plot and Homer's narrative, it is clear how her exploitation is an integral part of Ancient Greek society.

When rewriting the *Iliad*, Pat Barker made sure to keep the patriarchal component of Ancient Greek society, but rewrote the narrative and the focus in a feminist way that, while unable to fully remove symbolic violence, did manage to return Briseis' voice to her. And although the symbolic violence committed against Briseis is still present, the shift in narrative paints that as an injustice against Briseis and Ancient Greek women. The feminist narrative does not change the society the book is written in, but changes the voices that are heard so that we get to hear and value women's perspectives. Through this, women are given some of their voices back, although it is still acknowledged how powerless they are in their own society.

In the rewrite of Book One of the *Iliad*, for example, Briseis and other slave-women are listening in to the argument between Agamemnon and Achilles, and share their own opinions and perspectives with each other. While Agamemnon and Achilles are arguing over the fate of Briseis, the reader gets to hear that "I [Briseis] wasn't interested in their insults, their constant jostling for power, I only wanted to know what was going to happen to me" (Barker, 88). The

focus here is on Briseis' fate, and highlights how bizarre it is that not only is Briseis removed from this conversation, but also that a fight about honor and glory is conducted through a woman, even if she is a γέρας. While she is still placed in the restrictive role that marginalizes and objectifies her, it is viewed as an unjust act and the reader sees how even though women are not given autonomy in their society, they are still shown to be capable of it. By accentuating this point, Barker adjusts female roles to be less restrictive and returns their voices to them in this book, even while they are still excluded and marginalized from their own roles in society.

In Barker's interpretation of Book Nine of the *Iliad*, similar points are made again. Barker first writes the scene similar to how it was presented by Homer, with Briseis not saying a word. Achilles converses with Ajax, Odysseus, and Nestor, and they present her as a form of present or prize for Achilles to receive. Upon his refusal, she is quickly ushered out again and the conversation continues, with Achilles pointing out how it was never about her, and what he truly wants is an apology to rectify the disrespect he suffered through the loss of Briseis. She is silenced, and used only as a prop or object through which a man is to be appeased. The next chapter, however, returns to Briseis' perspective and we get to hear her voice about the events that just occurred and how she feels about the situation. Briseis is quite cognizant of her minimized role, and even thinks to herself how the whole argument could have been decided without her presence -- like it had been the first time. By having us first see the scene as an accurate adaptation of Homer's narrative, and then returning to Briseis' perspective to give us her thoughts and opinions, Barker highlights how extreme the objectification was of Briseis, and how much the men in the room thought that the transfer of her ownership would solve their own disputes.

This brings back the message that the *Iliad* sends that women are exploited and have their own pain and trauma used to further the plot or the males' character development. However, with the quick shift back to Briseis' perspective, Barker critiques that and reminds the reader that this woman is a person that is being used as an object to appease a man's bruised ego. We hear through Briseis' voice about her concerns and fears that she is feeling throughout this scene. This is different from where her voice and perspective was glossed over and normalized in the *Iliad*. Barker keeps the objectification in her retelling and accentuates the restrictive role that Briseis is forced into in this scene. By doing so, she shows the reader how it is restrictive and a form of symbolic violence, while managing to return the silenced woman's voice to her in a way that critiques both the men in the book and the normalization of this treatment in the culture.

In the final scene we see Briseis in the *Iliad* mourning the loss of Patroclus -- and again, while the events that transpire are the same, it is the shift of focus onto the grieving woman and the recentering of her pain onto her own self that returns her voice to her, and both lessens and critiques the symbolic violence she is forced to endure. Barker discusses how Briseis uses the loss of Patroclus to mourn all the other losses she is experienced, but also made sure to give a depth to her relationship with Patroclus so that when she mourns him, she is grieving a loss that she suffered, instead of a loss that the other men decided she should grieve. Briseis is validly experiencing the loss of Patroclus, and Barker writes the scene so that we see how her bereavement is her own, and it benefits no man. Briseis additionally addresses herself how her pain was used in the *Iliad* as an exploitation and was given to the men. She addresses the reader themself, and asks why

> "Don't you ask me why I'm [Briseis] telling this as if it were a communal event? 'Our' grief, 'our' losses. There was no 'our.' I knelt at Patroclus' feet and I knew I'd lost one of the dearest friends I ever had" (Barker, 191).

Briseis combats the use of her pain for others' benefit, and reclaims it for herself in this quote. She refuses to share it, and amplifies her own voice while doing so. She is aware that she is in a patriarchal society that will attempt to use her pain for their benefit, and refuses to bend in this matter, which is much different from how Homer depicts this scene to benefit and express how great this loss was for men. By adjusting this role herself, Briseis challenges some of the symbolic violence imposed upon her, and reclaims and recenters her narrative to focus on herself and her losses, so that while all the events still occur and the plot is the same, there is a completely different focus on the characters and themes present.

In *Silence of the Girls*, Briseis is the primary character, and almost all accounts are through her perspective and narrative. Achilles and Agamemnon are merely secondary characters, and although it is clear that their society still values their opinion above Briseis', the book does not. Instead of altering the society itself, Barker rewrites the book so while the same plotline still occurs, and still at the expense of women, she depicts those exploitations and marginalization as an injustice and gives women the narrative, making it so that while they are still in a patriarchal society, the literature itself undoes some of the symbolic violence committed against them. When compared to Homer's work, which normalizes and validates this treatment and exploitation of women, it is clear just how much this is a feminist adaptation, and how much power is given to women through this narrative. As such, a retelling of the *Iliad* rewrites the work so women's pain and trauma are not exploited for the benefit of men. Similar to other rewrites and adaptations of misogynistic Classical texts (Small, 2018), this retelling of the *Iliad* through a feminist lens is a feminist act in itself, working to amplify female voices and return

their autonomy to them as much as is possible.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

When Ovid wrote his epic *Metamorphoses*, he wrote scenes of sexual assault and rape from the survivor's perspective, depicting it as the inhumane crime that it is. Whether it be the tale of Io or Leucothoë, the reader is shown how tragic these acts were. Nonetheless, while this is considerably progressive for the time period, Ovid does normalize these acts -- and while he shows that they are wrong, he also argues that these scenes of sexual assault and rape are inevitable tragedies, and that a woman's consent is irrelevant. In his tales, all that matters is the perpetrator's wish, and while it may be possible to avoid rape, it will require irrevocable changes (i.e., in Daphne and Apollo, Daphne changes from a nymph to a laurel tree). By making it clear consent is irrelevant, women's opinions are silenced, and they are stripped of their autonomy, even though we are given more of her perspective. In a retelling of these stories in her book *Wake, Siren*, Nina Maclaughlin modernizes these tales and paints these actions as complete injustices, and rightfully criminalizes the perpetrators with no chance of redemption.

Eurydice

In Ovid's account, "Orpheus and Eurydice" is an infamous romantic tale, wherein Orpheus goes to the Underworld to convince Hades (the god of the Underworld) to return his recently deceased wife, Eurydice, to him. Orpheus plays his lyre, and is so skilled that Hades agrees, on the condition that on the walk back to the world of the living Eurydice will walk behind him and Orpheus cannot look back until they reach the sun or she will be lost to him forever. Orpheus agrees, but ultimately fails to do so, as he is

> "afraid that she [Eurydice] would fail him, and desiring a glimpse of his beloved, turned to look: at once she slipped back to the underworld, and he, because he wanted to embrace her, or *be* embraced by her, stretched out his arms -- but seized on nothing, that unlucky man, unless it was the abnegating air. And she now, who must die a second death, did not find fault with him, for what indeed could he be faulted for, but his constancy? 'Farewell', she cried out to him one last time, and he had scarcely heard her cry before she took her place again among the dead" (Ovid, *Met*. 10.75-88).

Throughout Ovid's complete version of the tale, we do not hear Eurydice's opinion or perspective of this whole situation. The reader simply is left to assume that Eurydice would want to return with Orpheus -- neither Hades nor Orpheus think to ask her, and much like Briseis in the *Iliad*, Eurydice's fate is instead discussed between the two men without her presence or opinion. The only time we hear her speak is when Ovid tells the reader that she does not blame her husband for making a mistake that costs her her second chance at life -- she instead acknowledges that he is human and prone to error. As soon as she forgives him and says goodbye, she returns to the Underworld, and neither the reader nor Orpheus ever see her again. The marginalization that Eurydice endures alters the focus of the story onto her husband, and makes it so that not only is her opinion never given, her death (both times) is used to highlight Orpheus' grief and motivate him, urging his story forward. The reader never learns how Eurydice feels about Orpheus, and she only speaks when forgiving him -- again, moving his story forward and providing him with redemption before he even asks for it. In this way, Eurydice is silenced and relegated to a supporting role, unable to be a complete character in her own story. This silencing and marginalization is symbolic violence as it restricts her from becoming a full person or from having any aspect of herself that is not immediately recentered and refocused around a man -- in this particular instance, her husband. Not only that, but Ovid, Orpheus, and Hades do not give her a thought, nor do they consider her to be more than a thing or an object specifically designed for their benefit, and as belonging to them. While she is

supposedly a human being and a person, we do not get to hear her thoughts, and she is not even assumed to have thoughts; they are not developed, and neither Orpheus, Hades, or even Ovid care to learn what they are. Instead, what matters are their opinions about her fate and who she belongs to (and therefore, who she should go with). Again, this deprioritization and marginalization that strips Eurydice of her personhood before she even gets it is symbolic violence, and silences (based on Maclaughlin's interpretation) a very strong and complex character.

Nina Maclaughlin's version of this tale, however, is completely rewritten and depicts the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice as an abusive one that Eurydice is attempting to escape. Set in modern times, Maclaughlin shows how abusive relationships may come as a result of being exposed to toxic relationships as a child, how they develop slowly, with the abuse slowly building and growing in almost unrecognizable ways -- and how as it is done, the survivor can lose pieces of themselves, symbolically "dying". One night, Eurydice leaves Orpheus (here called O.) and goes to the Cobra Club (a direct reference to Eurydice's original cause of death via a snakebite), which is described as the Underworld. While at the club, Eurydice starts finding herself again, and explains a bit about how she chose the wrong kind of love because it was what was familiar to her. At this point, O. comes down and starts singing a song for her, enchanting everyone present and asking her to return to him. She gives her consent, and they start leaving, but O. starts insulting her and scolding her. They reach the door and Eurydice stops,

> "And then he [Orpheus] turned. And there in his eyes was the brutal thing that meant he was scared. I knew in my blood that scared made him dangerous. This is the way we burn from our mistakes. I pulled my hand away. I imagined I was made of a cloud and just let it slip from his grip. I turned around and floated down the stairs, down down down, back into the embrace of the Cobra Club" (Maclaughlin, 310-311).

While this is the same scene that Ovid depicts, Maclaughlin completely rewrites it so that

Eurydice's consent is the turning point of the story and is what Orpheus needs, instead of Hades' permission. And when he loses it, she returns to the Underworld -- and again, losing Eurydice is a clear consequence of his own actions, but Maclaughlin's version shows him losing her consent rather than disobeying an agreement he had made with a man.

Furthermore, at the center of Maclaughlin's story, the tale is about Eurydice; there is little to no focus on how Orpheus feels when he loses her, as this is a story about a woman's "death" and as such the focus stays on the woman. Not only that, but Maclaughlin rewrites this tale to discuss toxic and abusive relationships from the survivor's perspective, how they originate, and how leaving an abuser can be freeing. Maclaughlin takes this tale and rewrites it so Eurydice no longer endures any symbolic violence at the author's hand. She uses this tale to depict a feminist issue by rightfully focusing the narrative's trauma and pain around Eurydice instead of Orpheus, while still writing a story of strength and resilience. Moreover, she explores the survivor's perspective in an abusive relationship from meeting their abuser up til gaining the strength to choose to leave them, giving Eurydice exemplary character development, and giving readers an inspirational, under-represented narrative of an unhealthy or abusive relationship. Maclaughlin uses this story to send exceedingly crucial messages of self-love and resilience to women, and encourages them to do what is best for themselves, no matter what the cost may be to the men around them, or how invested they are in a relationship. With this rewrite, she states that even if it is on her wedding day, a woman should feel comfortable and content to leave a man who is abusive to her, and should be resolute in the fact that this is the right choice for her. This message of choosing oneself instead of choosing a man has become more common in recent years, but is still not normalized the way that it should be, making this a powerful message for the women who feel that it is not okay to be selfish and prioritize their own happiness over others'. This is

especially powerful when in regards to abuse, as perpetrators of intimate partner violence will often force and expect their partners to choose the perpetrator's wants over their own needs time and time again. By telling readers not to do this, Maclaughlin empowers them and helps both current and potential survivors of intimate partner violence learn to prioritize and love themselves, instead of only loving and prioritizing their partners.

Pygmalion's Statue

The story of "Pygmalion" is yet another creation myth wherein, similar to that of Pandora, a woman is created for man -- although in this instance, the woman is considered a gift instead of a punishment. Pygmalion, the main male character, despises women and is "dismayed by the numerous defects of character Nature had given the feminine spirit" (Ovid, *Met.* 10.313-314). Consequently, he remains single and sculpts a female statue with a figure that Ovid himself describes as "better than any living woman could boast of" (Ovid, *Met*. 10.318). Pygmalion is so aroused and impressed by his own work that he immediately starts caressing the statue and giving her "presents pleasing to girls… he dresses it [the statue] up and puts diamond rings on its fingers, gives it a necklace, a lacy brassiere and pearl earrings" (Ovid, *Met*. 10.331-336). Soon after, it is the holiday for Venus, the goddess of love, and Pygmalion goes and prays to Venus for his statue to come to life and be his wife. Venus grants this request, and Pygmalion goes home and immediately starts kissing her and groping her. As he does this, the statue comes to life, and Ovid ends the tale letting the reader know that they married and had a daughter nine months later. This tale is rife with symbolic violence and blatant misogyny. Pygmalion views women to be a commodity, and after window shopping through all the potential brides and coming up unsatisfied and disheartened by their "moral character", he decides to go build his own woman that is specifically designed to suit his every wish and desire.

This anti-woman perspective is very clear to the reader and is outright stated by Ovid (although Ovid himself seems to have no issue with it, and merely describes it as a prefix to the plot). Both Ovid and Pygmalion are comfortable with the belief that women exist for men, and men get to control the ways in which women exist and how women are presented -- and they even get to pass judgment on the character of the entire gender, viewing women as one entity and one product designed for male enjoyment. This suppression and severe gender role restriction is an excellent example of symbolic violence, as it refuses to see women as humans with complex thoughts and personalities, each one different from the other. Moreover, Pygmalion's gifts for "his" statue are stereotypical in nature and the gift of a "lacy brassiere" and other clothing highlight how she is to exist for him, and how these "gifts" he gives to her are really for his benefit, as few women would agree that a lacy bra is something that they wear for themselves. But it is a stereotypically sexy form of lingerie, and so by dressing her in it, he is benefiting himself -- again reminding the reader that Pygmalion's ideal woman exists only for his benefit, and she is to serve him in all ways. Even when he is doing something for her, it is entirely still centered around him.

Finally, when his statue -- who is never named -- comes to life, she gains consciousness while he is kissing her, which shows exactly how little both Ovid and Pygmalion value her consent. To further prove this point, we never hear a word from the statue, and they are quickly married, despite the reader never getting to hear the statue's own opinion of her husband. In a few quick lines of this epic, we are shown how little her opinion and voice is valued; she is promised in marriage to a man before she even becomes a person, and comes to life solely to serve that purpose. This is a very restrictive role that has been designed for her, and she is glorified for how well she fits it (i.e. suits his needs). Ovid also makes it clear how she is

supreme to all other women because of her body; readers never learn a word regarding her character (despite that being Pygmalion's primary critique of women), and the lack of voice she is given highlights how objectified she is, even when she becomes a person. Furthermore, this idolization of an object becoming a person shows how the ideal woman is an object to these men, which could not be a more excellent example of symbolic violence and how it is used to repress and silence women to an extreme. This symbolic violence teaches women to by default be ashamed of who they truly are and to silence themselves before men even have to.

In Nina Maclaughlin's book *Wake, Siren,* she rewrites this tale with a focus on the still unnamed statue, while fully calling attention to Pygmalion's hateful misogyny. Maclaughlin starts the chapter by discussing how Pygmalion hates women and specifically their bodies for having human qualities such as their body hair and their sweat -- and particularly, vaginal discharge. Maclaughlin refuses to view these traits as shameful, however, and paints Pygmalion as in the wrong and ignorant for not understanding how beautiful these traits are. Maclaughlin does not just rewrite this story, but rather she embeds in it a powerful message about loving one's body while also showing how misogyny presents itself in everyday life, and how self-aware women are about it. She talks about how

> "Women know when a man hates women… The men who hate women are surprised at this… A man who hates women builds one with a juicy ass and giant tits and no belly and a face that's foreign and empty and dumb" (Maclaughlin, 213).

In this excerpt, Maclaughlin describes how objectification and sexualization intertwine to create the "ideal woman" for men who hate women, and discusses how obvious this behavior is to other women. She shows her disgust at these men for viewing women as a product and a "necessary evil", and calls them out on their behavior while also relating it to a famous love story that has a fair amount of romanticized modern adaptations.

After Venus grants Pygmalion's request and brings his statue to life, Maclaughlin

discusses how the women tease her about not having stretch marks or muscles or power, and tells the reader that over time, the statue formed opinions of her own and became a woman with “imperfections" and a person. She argues that "There’s nothing duller than perfection… There is no love in loving the ideal. Pyggy doesn’t love me. He loves an idea in his brain” (Maclaughlin, 214). Not only does the reader get to hear the statue’s perspective, we get to see her own journey to self-love and becoming a person instead of a commodity ready for consumption by the male gaze (i.e., Pygmalion). The reader learns that power comes from being a human and unapologetically existing for oneself instead of others, and how it is impossible to love someone while denying them personhood. Not only is this tale rewritten to reveal symbolic violence imposed upon the statue, we see an arc of a woman learning how to become her own person and to understand that she does not exist for the consumption of men. These are important lessons for women to learn, and the rewriting of this tale from a “romantic” love story to a feminist coming of age tale presents these messages to the reader in a novel way that destroys the previous narrative given by Ovid and helps women to obtain the confidence to love their imperfections and reclaim their personhood -- fundamentally altering the shift as to what a woman’s role in this society is.

Thetis

In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of Achilles’ conception through the view of his mother Thetis, a sea nymph who was foretold to have a son that would be stronger than his father. This was concerning for Zeus, who, wanting to avoid the fates that befell both his father and grandfather, quickly arranged her hand in marriage to his mortal grandson named Peleus (despite having had strong sexual urges for Thetis himself). Peleus agrees to this arrangement, and is told of the grotto where Thetis sleeps naked. Peleus arrives and starts to “embrace” her,

but she quickly rejects him and so he resorts to force and wraps both his arms around her neck. As a nymph, Thetis had the power to change and metamorphose into varying animals -- she does so, and Peleus lets her go, but is undaunted. He offers wine and sacrifices to the gods asking for help, and Proteus appears and advises him to bind her while she is asleep and "press her" until she resumes her first form. Peleus does so, and although she attempts to escape by shapeshifting, Thetis quickly

> "[Realizes] her movements were constrained: she had been bound, and both her arms were now securely pinned. She groaned and told him, 'You would not have won without the intervention of the gods,' and then appeared to him in her own form, and he achieved what he desired to, and filled her womb with fabulous Achilles" (Ovid, *Met*. 10.370-377).

Throughout the work, Thetis is denied autonomy and free will. She is forced into a constricting role, forever tying her to a man she does not know and love (and who is a mortal, which is unheard of at best amongst the gods). This is all done because of a potential threat that any children she may someday have would be to Zeus. He is threatened by Thetis (more accurately, Thetis' womb) and so he marginalizes her and strips her of her autonomy so that he could ensure his power and status as the king of the gods. This is a gross abuse and mistreatment of women, and by literally forcing this gender-specific role of wife- and motherhood upon Thetis, no questions asked, he is committing symbolic violence and encouraging others to commit sexual violence against this woman because of forces outside of her control. Her voice is never heard -- the reader never learns if Thetis ever intended to become a wife or a mother, if she was aware of this prophecy, etc. All we learn is that Zeus knew of it, and that he had sexual feelings for her, and so in an attempt to control himself, he "assigns" her to a man -- knowing that he would be more likely to respect another man's "property" than a woman's autonomy, as in this society, like most societies, women are viewed as property, and "belong" to a specific man through the bonds of marriage. In this tale, we witness the switch from literal bonds to mental and marital bonds

when Thetis gives in to Peleus and he rapes her in order to claim her and have her as his wife against her will. It is understood that as soon as they have sex, Thetis is viewed as "belonging" to Peleus and will be considered his wife with no chance of divorce. In this way, with the forcing of roles and symbolic violence, her autonomy is stripped and she is relegated to a fate she did not want, eternally losing a piece of herself in the process.

When Maclaughlin rewrites this story, she begins with a shift in the narrative to Thetis, who tells her own story of rape and loss of personhood. Thetis discusses how she was told of the prophecy by Proteus, and then Jove heard of it. Again, like in Ovid's work, Jove wanted Thetis but did want to avoid his Kronos' and Ouranos' fates, and so he sent Peleus in his stead, telling him to take Thetis as his bride. Thetis describes the setting -- which was similar to Ovid's setting -- but highlights how hidden it was and how secure and safe she felt in it, further emphasizing the cruelty of the rape that was to take place here and how violating it was. So when Peleus comes and tries to rape her the first time, we not only hear Thetis say no repeatedly but see the shapes she changes into to make him afraid of her and flee. While this works, Peleus again receives advice from Proteus and returns with binds for her so that his second attempt to rape Thetis will succeed. Thetis metamorphosizes into countless shapes to try to escape, but eventually she has nothing left in herself, and Peleus rapes her and impregnates her with Achilles, for the first time making her body not her own, and denying her control over it. Thetis tells the reader that although Proteus argued that she only has one true shape (her human body), she disagrees and that each form she took was hers and that she has

> "All the animals inside me, their blood moves in my blood. I take any form I want… The one form I didn't choose, the motherhood forced upon me, I absorbed into myself as well, powerful as all the rest. Stillness is the only trouble. In our changing, we trick time, proving that once being does not mean always will be. I choose my shape. You choose yours. We don't always know what's inside of us, or what it might take to free that creature from its cage" (Maclaughlin, 238).

In this tale of rape, we see Thetis first lose her control and power over her own body, and how she processes and deals with the lack of bodily autonomy societies claim to grant to all persons, regardless of gender. The reader is taken from the beginning, when a deal about her was seemingly made without her knowledge or approval, through the first attempt when she was able to overpower Peleus and reclaim her body before any further severe transgressions occurred (as an attempt in itself is a severe transgression). Finally, we see the rape occur and watch Thetis lose her own body in a vicious attack, but she ends the tale with a message to the reader about how powerful her body is and how it can be reclaimed. There is no permanent state of the self, and she tells the reader that their body contains multitudes and is their own, restoring their bodily autonomy and encouraging them to reclaim their body after having been stripped of it. Moreover, she empowers the reader and helps them to feel more secure and recover from the trauma they have experienced, altogether sending a powerful statement about life after loss and reclaiming one's own body and sense of self again. When coupled with the message that individuals are bound to change and that it is okay to take a different shape or form, she further tells the reader that transformation is good, and that being a different person than you were before your trauma is okay. You are the person you were before you experienced your trauma, and you are the person you are now, and both exist within you. These are empowering messages to send to trauma survivors, and when Maclaughlin uses this tale to tell them, she adapts the story to remove symbolic violence and empower both the main character and the reader, redetermining how we understand and view trauma. Portraying and rewriting this tale will hopefully helps rape survivors with similar experiences of trauma feel more comfortable identifying themselves as victims of rape, and assisting them further in their recovery process while at the same time fully placing all blame on the rapist and rightfully criminalizing his actions. Ultimately, this work tries

to reshift and further evolve our societal understanding of sexual assault and rape, thereby educating the public and working to spread awareness about rape itself, and helping survivors to be understood and heard.

Euripides

Finally, in February 2021, Natalie Haynes released a book titled *A Thousand Ships*, in which she explores the perspectives of women who were greatly affected -- and influential -- throughout the Trojan War, but were nonetheless silenced and forgotten about in favor of highlighting male-centric experiences and tragedies. Haynes gives voice to women such as Creusa and Penthesilea, who have unfortunately been silenced to the point where almost all accounts of their story are gone -- for Penthesilea, Haynes was forced to inspect fragments of both Quintus Smyrnaes and Pseudo-Apollodorus to develop a chapter on her. While it would be quite worthwhile to analyze the perspective of each woman's story and how Haynes changed it to better fit and speak to our present-day culture, limiting ourselves to only look at a few stories enhances our ability to better understand the changes and shifts in the stories. Consequently, we will explore the intertwining stories of Iphigenia and Polyxena, and how they were rewritten in a completely new perspective -- their own.

Iphigenia

In her afterword, Haynes credits the Classical sources that influenced her writings, and states that it was Euripides' plays about Iphigenia -- *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Iphigenia Among the Taurians* -- that influenced her chapter about her tragedy. Nonetheless, there are still alterations in the tales to drastically change the messages and interpretations of the story. Euripides' play *Iphigenia at Aulis* begins with her father Agamemnon attempting to warn his wife Clytemnestra not to bring Iphigenia to him (which is what his previous letter to her had said), and that they will

instead celebrate her wedding to Achilles at a later date. Unfortunately, his brother Menelaus soon interferes and it is revealed that there is no wedding, and that the gods have demanded Iphigenia as a sacrifice before they will permit the Greeks to set sail for the Trojan War. Menelaus and Agamemnon argue, with Menelaus feeling betrayed that Agamemnon is going back on his promise to kill his daughter, all so that Menelaus may go and regain his wife, Helen. In this statement, the hypocrisy of Menelaus becomes clear, where he expects a father to kill his own daughter so that he can keep his own woman. The objectification and level of entitlement that Menelaus has in this scene is extreme, as he feels that a young girl's death is the necessary and honorable choice so that he may maintain the amount of κλέος that his own wife gives him. Iphigenia means little to him, and he views her death as a predetermined sacrifice so that he can accomplish his own goals. Moreover, the focus of this discussion tends not to be on Iphigenia -- it is more so on how Agamemnon is unable to honor promises and be a good Greek and brother to Menelaus by refusing him this boon of sorts. This silencing and de-prioritization of a young girl's life is a commonplace theme throughout history, with women being stripped of personhood and their fate either bartered away or viewed as a necessary sacrifice for the benefit of men -- in this particular instance, so a fully-grown man may maintain his κλέος and social status by forcibly reclaiming his own possession (his wife, Helen). This restrictive role that Iphigenia has been assigned (without her knowledge at this point), is symbolic violence in the extreme, as will be her ultimate death.

It is at this point that a messenger announces that Clytemnestra and Iphigenia have arrived, and Agamemnon bemoans how he is supposed to tell his wife and daughter of this sacrifice, and acquiesces to Menelaus' demand; at this point, Menelaus empathizes with his brother and tells him not to kill his daughter, as he understands that this is too big of an ask not

only for Agamemnon, but for Iphigenia (finally understanding that she is her own person as well). However, while Agamemnon thanks him, he has come to the conclusion that Iphigenia's murder must occur as word will spread about the prophecy necessitating her death, and the army will step in if they do not go through with it. Iphigenia and Clytemnestra then reunite with Agamemnon, although he is unable to enjoy the reunion knowing what is to come. Agamemnon tries to convince Clytemnestra to leave before the "wedding", but is unsuccessful in his attempt. Soon after, Clytemnestra and Achilles accidentally meet, and as Achilles is unaware of the alleged wedding involving him and Iphigenia, the two ask a servant to clear the confusion for them. It is in this way that the two discover the plan to sacrifice Iphigenia for the war. Both are enraged (Clytemnestra at the betrayal of her husband and loss of her daughter, and Achilles for this sacrifice involving his name as part of the deception), and so Achilles offers to help Clytemnestra and Iphigenia avoid this fate, as he feels that

> "My body will no longer be untainted if the girl dies because of me and her marriage to me… I shall be proved the most cowardly of the Greeks, a mere cipher -- and Menelaus will be counted a man!… Agamemnon has insulted me brutally. He ought to have asked me himself for the use of my name to trap his child… I would have given my name for the Greeks if that was what was causing the voyage to Troy to founder. I would not have refused to promote the common interest of my comrades in arms. But as it is I am of no account, the commanders do not trouble themselves whether they treat me well or badly" (Euripides, 940-970).

Again, we see Iphigenia being a symbol of a man's honor instead of a person, but rather than to highlight or add to it, her death will result in the subtraction of their honor. Moreover, Achilles' primary reasons for wanting to prevent the sacrifice from occurring are to avoid the dishonor that he would feel. Similar to how he viewed Briseis in the *Iliad*, Achilles feels that Agamemnon insulted him by attempting to kill Iphigenia, and his primary focus is on the dishonor and shame he will be experiencing as a consequence of her death, rather than focusing on the person and life that is going to be sacrificed. Instead, Achilles states that if he had been included in this

deception, he would have agreed to it in the name of brotherhood, and so that the army could prosper at the expense of a young girl's life. And again, Euripides strips Iphigenia of her personhood and directly ties her pain and trauma to how it will affect the men in her life, rather than rightfully focusing and centering it on her and how losing her own life will affect her.

After developing a plan with Achilles, Clytemnestra informs her daughter of Agamemnon's intentions, and when Agamemnon returns, the two confront him. Agamemnon attempts to skirt answering their questions, but Clytemnestra soon lectures him regarding his actions, and Iphigenia pleads for her life. While Agamemnon is moved by their speeches, he remains steadfast in his decision and exits quickly. Iphigenia bemoans her fate, but Achilles soon arrives with a promise to protect her against the army. At this point, Iphigenia reaches a level of "clarity", and states that she sees that her mother is angry with Agamemnon for "no reason", and tells Clytemnestra that

> "His [Achilles'] reputation among the army must not be destroyed… I have made the decision to die. I want to do this gloriously, to reject all meanness of spirit… You bore me for the common good of the Greeks, not for yourself alone. Will countless warriors, with their shields their bulwark, will numberless oarsmen dare to strike against the enemy and die for their fatherland when Greece is wronged, and shall my life, my single life, prevent all this? How could we argue that this is right? And let me come to the next point. This man must not battle with all of the Greeks for a woman's sake, and die. It is better that one man should see the light of day than any number of women" (Euripides, 1372-1395).

Repeatedly in this speech we see Iphigenia exemplify themes consistently present in Classical literature. Like Eurydice, her speech forgives and redeems Agamemnon of his wrongdoings before he even asks for forgiveness or truly commits the act. She marginalizes her own death for the benefit of her father, and portrays this as her duty to her country. She claims that she does not belong to her mother, or even herself, but rather to a patriarchal country. Her death is painted as a patriotic sacrifice, so that Menelaus can go and regain his own κλέος. She hopes to become a symbol and a "hero" of this war by sacrificing herself for it, further stripping herself of her

personhood and instead becoming objectified, a concept and an ideal by people who asked this of her yet never asked her opinion on it. Furthermore, her point that refusing to be sacrificed would result in Achilles losing κλέος and honor again highlights how that is prioritized more highly than her actual life, which is an extreme form of marginalization and de-personhood -- and this is seen as blatantly as possible when she tells her mother that one man is, by default, more important than any number of women. In this society, women are not only marginalized and not seen as equals, they are used like trophies and toys for men. Their personhood and ownership tends to be bargained and fought over, their fates discussed without their opinion, and when necessary, grown men will sacrifice a child's life in order to accomplish a quest. In this play, not only are women silenced, they are told precisely that their role is to exist for men and to die for men, and that it is an honor and not a great loss. This places them in extremely restrictive and harmful roles that are as misogynistic as possible and an extreme form of symbolic violence that not only normalizes, but glorifies the murder of innocent girls for a man's own misogynistic benefit.

After giving her speech, Iphigenia is complimented multiple times by Achilles for being the "ideal woman" as she is willing to give her life for the material and social benefit of men, and is sacrificed offstage. Soon after, Agamemnon returns to Clytemnestra and announces that Artemis replaced her on the altar with a deer, and that Iphigenia is now living amongst the gods, having been rewarded in a sort for her obedience -- again sending a horrifying message about the "ideal woman".

When comparing this work to Natalie Haynes adaptation of the same story, a few immediate changes are noted. Not only is the chapter from Iphigenia's perspective and narration instead of Agamemnon's, but Iphigenia and Clytemnestra never even discover that she is not

being married off to Achilles until at the altar when the sacrifice is about to occur. This rewrite accentuates and highlights the injustices that they experience and the betrayal that Iphigenia's father commits. More so, this shift in plot completely removes any opportunity for Agamemnon to receive undeserved redemption from the injured party -- his daughter -- the way that Euripides gives him. For Haynes' Agamemnon, there is no redemption, no forgiveness from the sin that he commits, and as we do not hear from or see Agamemnon until he slices his daughter's throat there are little to no opportunities for the reader to empathize with him in the way that Euripides does with his audience. Nonetheless, Haynes shows how she understands the societal structures that Iphigenia is living in, and while her writing stays female-centric, she knows that the men in Iphigenia's story only understand the tragedy as it relates to them, and their viewing of women as objects marginalizes and silences their pain, which is clearly accurate in Euripides' work. When Iphigenia is being sacrificed, the reader learns that

> "She knelt in silence before Agamemnon. Tears streamed into his beard, but he held the knife just the same. Her uncle stood behind him, his red hair glowing in the morning sun. She sensed his hand reach out to her father, offering strength for the ordeal he was about to undergo" (Haynes, 130).

Through this quote, Haynes shows the misogyny present in Ancient Greece, and how the men only focused on how events and tragedies affected them, even when the person injured was not themselves. Rather than offer Iphigenia strength before she is forcibly killed by her father so that Menelaus can go and forcibly retrieve his wife, Menelaus offers strength to Agamemnon, empathizing and pitying him more than the pre-teen girl. To them, Iphigenia is viewed as a daughter of a man instead of a person, and as such, they are obtuse and ignorant of the reality of their actions, as they only understand that they are causing harm to Iphigenia's father, rather than Iphigenia herself. Haynes understands this, though, and makes sure that this theme is critiqued heavily in her work. By doing so, Haynes uses it to further villainize Agamemnon and Menelaus

and emphasize the tragedy of the loss of Iphigenia, reannouncing her personhood through the critiquing of this misogyny and symbolic violence.

While Euripides' work focuses on Agamemnon's emotions and feelings leading up to the murder of his daughter, Haynes makes sure that her focus is on Iphigenia's final 24 hours, and we as readers are taken through her preparations for the "wedding", her interactions with her mother and infant brother, and finally, her walk to the altar, where she finally realizes what is occurring when it is too late to attempt to escape. Additionally, while Euripides writes the sacrifice to occur offstage, Haynes forces the reader to be witness to the actual crime, further highlighting the monstrosity of Agamemnon's actions. We see what Iphigenia saw, which is

> "Clytemnestra was being restrained by five men, one of whom eventually forced his arm around her throat. Still her mother did not fall limply into their arms. She continued shouting and flailing… One soldier was sure that in the crucial moment, the girl had been spirited away and replaced with a deer. But no one listened to him, because even the men (the young ones who had not fought in many battles, and the fathers of daughters who had fought in too many) who had looked away as the blade cut -- who had shut their eyes rather than see her blood pouring from her neck -- even those men had seen her white, lifeless body lying at her own father's feet" (Haynes 130-131).

Haynes' account is different from Euripides' in a crucial way, as while Euripides primarily focuses on the devastation and upset that Agamemnon faced, she gives him no such mercy and keeps the focus on the young victim rather than the adult perpetrator. Moreover, Euripides' choice to have the sacrifice occur offstage after Iphigenia agrees to it sidesteps the brutality of the actions that occurred, and sways the audience to understand Agamemnon's side and forgive his actions (just like Iphigenia did) without him even having to ask for forgiveness. Haynes, however, forces the reader to sit through the intimate details of what occurred, particularly highlighting Clytemnestra's rage and devastation and encouraging the readers to empathize with her and Iphigenia instead. Even more compelling, Haynes does away with the neat, bittersweet ending that Euripides tries to give, with Iphigenia having been "saved by the gods" and sent off

to a better life. Again, Haynes gives Agamemnon and the reader no such mercy, and instead leaves us in the wake of this crime, even showing how the soldiers themselves disagreed with Agamemnon's actions and thought them unjust and inhumane. This again dispels Euripides' previous argument for moralizing Iphigenia's death, which was that the army themselves would kill Iphigenia if Agamemnon did not. With this rewrite, Iphigenia's tragedy is hers alone, and Haynes refuses to focus on how it benefits the perpetrators, thereby fully criminalizing them and offering them no chance at redemption or forgiveness for their actions. We see the young girl's perspective of her own death, and the betrayal that she experiences at the hands of her father. While the injustices still occur, and she is still relegated to a restrictive role that will result in her untimely death for their benefit, Haynes returns Iphigenia's voice to her and maintains the focus on her in a way that Euripides and Agamemnon, himself, did not deem as valuable.

Polyxena

As the Trojan War begins with the sacrifice of a young maiden, so does it end; only this time it is the youngest (and one of two still-living) daughter of Priam and Hecuba, the former rulers of Troy. Polyxena appears in multiple Classical texts, namely *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, both by Euripides, and *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, depicting the aftermath of the Trojan War and the fates of the fallen women. After having lost Troy, all the women and children are rounded up and divided up to be enslaved -- which is precisely how Briseis and Chryseis were given (or assigned) to Agamemnon and Achilles after their city of Lyrnessus was ransacked. Additionally similar to Briseis and Chryseis, the enslavement of women here is an exclusively female experience; no men were taken to be enslaved during the ransacking of Troy. Therefore it is argued that this form of slavery is an extremely harmful and restrictive gender role brought on by the Greek army, and is used to control and own women, and to determine their fates and to whom

they will belong (i.e., to whom they will bring κλέος).

However, even though the war was won, Achilles' spirit was not appeased and it was announced that only through the sacrifice of Polyxena, and the consequential κλέος that it would give him, would he be put to rest. As Iphigenia was sacrificed so the men could go to war, Polyxena is to be sacrificed so the men could return home. Similar to Briseis again, she is assigned this "honorary" role to further appease Achilles' honor and κλέος; she is his final γέρας that he is given for fighting in the Trojan War -- only, as Achilles is dead, his γέρας needs to be as well. This objectification is extreme and restrictive, as her own life is determined to be less important than a man's honor. Her lack of input in her own fate silences her, and turns her into a trophy that strips her of any personhood she once may have had. However, Polyxena prefers death to slavery, and although her mother Hecuba attempts to convince Odysseus to let her live, Polyxena comforts him and tells him that

> "I see you, Odysseus, hiding your right hand under your cloak and turning your head aside in case I touch your beard. Do not be afraid. You have escaped the Zeus, the god of suppliants, that lies in me. Yes, I shall follow you, not only through necessity but also because I want to die. If I prove unwilling to do so, I shall be seen as a coward, a woman too much in love with life" (Euripides, 343-349).

Instead of mourning her own death, Polyxena comforts one of her murderers and tells him not to worry about her pleading for her own life -- she will acquiesce to Achilles' request, in part because she has to, but also because she wants to. Then, in a fashion that mirrors Iphigenia's speech in *Iphigenia at Aulis* (again by Euripides), she states that if she did not want to be sacrificed, she would be "a woman too fond of her life". Polyxena decrees that a woman's life is worth less than a man's honor, and so she should be happy to give it if it will benefit him and to avoid being labeled a "coward" for fighting for her life. Instead, she will be obedient and submit to this role that is being forcibly assigned to her. She even convinces her mother not to be mad at her murderers and to not fight for her daughter's life. By making this her "choice", Euripides

redeems the Greek army for expecting this of her, and uses her voice to provide them with redemption before anyone has the chance to ask it of her. As such, although she has a speech and uses her voice, it is used to recenter the story around men and deprioritize her own experience and death -- it is her choice, and it will benefit men, so it is not such a tragedy so much as it is an honorable sacrifice for their benefit. This again highlights the restrictions of her role and what the purpose of it is, and how even when giving her narrative in a story about her, it is rewritten to be male-centric and her voice is used only to encourage her own marginalization.

Finally, Polyxena states in her speech how she is happy to die because she would much rather prefer this fate than that of a slave, which is her only alternative. Similar to the women in the Greek army camp in the *Iliad*, this form of slavery and objectification/attachment to males are only experienced by women, and as such is a gender role in and of itself. While readers may look at the fates of the Trojan women and decree them as not as bad as the deaths that all the Trojan men suffered, Polyxena puts that thought to rest and states that it is worse, as she argues that

> "But now I am a slave. First of all, the strangeness of that name makes me long to die. Then I may perhaps have a cruel-hearted master who will buy me for silver, me the sister of Hector and of many others" (Euripides, 358-361).

A long life of servitude and suffering, and relegation to the role of slave (which is something that only women will experience in this war) is in her mind, far worse than the quick death that is being offered to her. In either scenario, the rest of her life is to be used for the benefit of men -- she is simply choosing for how much time she is going to be used in such a way. The symbolic violence present here for all Trojan women is called to attention through the "honorable" and forced sacrifice of Polyxena, as the Greek army assigns her as a slave and κλέος to a deceased owner (Achilles), whereas all other Trojan women will meet the same fate to living owners. Consequently, we end the Trojan War as we began, with the marginalization and objectification

of women as a form of symbolic violence.

In her adaptation, Natalie Haynes adapts the story to be more female-centric and from the perspective of Polyxena, which helps the reader to empathize with her instead of with the men and the Greek army. Furthermore, we see her have an emotion that women generally are not allowed to have, especially in Ancient Greece -- anger. While she is still under the presumption that she is going to be assigned a soldier to be a slave to, Polyxena

> "Felt a sudden rush of anger flow through her, at Paris, at Priam, at Hector, at all of them. At all the men who should have protected her and who had instead left her. And her anger was tinged with the jealousy that they had died and she would be enslaved… The shame of all this was hers alone to bear" (Haynes, 238).

In the quote, Polyxena emphasizes the rage that she is entitled to, and expresses how, for the rest of her life, she is going to be paying for the consequences of actions she had no say or hand in. All of the men who volunteered their lives and hers when choosing to fight this war are now deceased, yet she lost her personhood and is going to belong to a man because of them. This anger is justifiable and valid, yet it is a seemingly rare perspective that these women are permitted to be mad at the men who made their choices for them. Giving voice to this anger centers the story around Polyxena as a wronged woman and ensures that her trauma is hers to bear, not a man's. After discovering that she is going to be sacrificed as a gift to Achilles, Polyxena does not give a speech where she acquiesces to their demands like she does in Euripides' accounts. Instead, she shares her preference for death over slavery with the reader, but does not provide redemption or forgiveness to these men by making it "become" her choice. In this way, Haynes keeps the focus on Polyxena and removes the symbolic violence that encouraged her to "give approval" of this decision.

Furthermore, Haynes uses Polyxena's story to call attention to the foulness of the two options presented to Polyxena, and brings up how either way, she is going to belong to a man and

be simply a γέρας and a signifier of a man's κλέος for the rest of her life. This is a similar argument that Euripides had presented, but Haynes' rewrites this to be more blatant to the reader and emphasize the restrictions of both roles presented to her (i.e., slave or sacrifice). She also shows how unconcerned and ignorant the men in this society are about this, as (unlike with Iphigenia) all the men seem unconcerned with the brutality of this sacrifice, and ask for no forgiveness or redemption. As they had already objectified Polyxena and assigned her to Achilles' spirit, they were complacent about her loss of life, and were all too willing to force her to sacrifice it for their benefit and to satisfy a ghost's κλέος. The emphasis on the repugnance of the two roles assigned to her begins to remove some of the symbolic violence thrust upon her, and calls to light the silencing she was forced to endure. While she is not removed from an assignment to these roles, the reader comes to understand how restrictive and harmful these roles were, thereby criminalizing them and the men who forced women to fill said roles. By calling attention to the unjustness of these roles, Haynes speaks out against them in a powerful way, helping the reader to fully empathize with Polyxena and understand just how much of a tragedy her story is (as well as all the other Trojan women's). This is much more effective than if Haynes had attempted to remove the restrictive roles herself, as it critiques the society that enabled and practiced this behavior instead of pretending that this society never existed in the first place. By giving Polyxena a voice to tell her own story and express her rage and emotions surrounding her death, as well as critiquing the actions of the men and the society that thrust only restrictive and harmful roles on women, Haynes removes some symbolic violence and encourages present and future societies to not only understand why these roles are so upsetting, but also to ensure that they do not share these similarities with Ancient Greek culture.

Conclusion and Influences on Modern Life

It can be difficult to understand why in recent years there has been an influx of feminist adaptations that return autonomy to women who have been silenced for over 3,000 years. Readers may not view this as a worthy cause, or may argue how it is no longer relevant to modern day life -- and as such, do not necessitate a rewriting. However, these texts are still present in our curriculum, and are read by countless students per year. Classical authors normalizations and even encouragements of the symbolic violence committed against women in their works often go unnoticed and undiscussed in almost all contexts, having an inadvertent, crucial effect on what we believe the role of women should be in our society today. This forcing of women to be obedient and subservient to men through various means is not a practice that has dissipated or lessened since the Classical era; we can persistently trace it chronologically throughout almost all cultures and societies in Western countries, as we can with the influences of the Hellenic era. Nonetheless, while we can trace these practices fairly easily, it can be difficult to obtain firsthand female accounts and perspectives of the mistreatment, as along with the forcible obedience typically came silencing and marginalization. However, in 15th century Italy, we hear a rebellious perspective from Arcangela Tarabotti, who was forced to be a nun by her father and had to unwillingly devote the rest of her life to a religious calling. In her work *Paternal Tyranny*, Tarabotti speaks out against this, as well as all the other facets of society and everyday life that Venice had interwoven into the mistreatment and suppression of women. In the section of Book One entitled “Liberty is of Greater Value than Life Itself”, Tarabotti not only references the Bible and the Catholic Church, but also Classical authors from Ancient Greece and Rome. Tarabotti refers to Plato’s gratefulness that he had been born Greek (and therefore, not a slave), and concludes that

> "So if liberty is the dearest, most desirable human joy, slavery and confinement must be without doubt a woman's most unbearable and odious misfortune, for she must suffer what God granted her to be taken away by men. Being wealthy, noble, intelligent, and perfectly healthy are gifts to make any creature rejoice; but if such blessing and good fortune must be enjoyed in a prison, they will seem despicable, even odious.… Let Cleopatra bear witness… Young, beautiful, rich, she was queen of Egypt, one of the happiest women alive. Yet rather than be subject to Julius Caesar and allow him to use her as a trophy in his triumphal processions, she chose to take her own life by clasping a poisonous asp to her arm rather than die in servitude" (Tarabotti, 79-80).

More than a thousand years after the end of the Classical era, Tarabotti speaks out against the still-present oppressive treatment of women, and refers to Classical influences to accentuate her point and heighten not only how objectifying women and refusing them claim over their own personhood is oppressive and unjust, but points to a Classical woman that (like Polyxena) preferred death over the symbolic and literal violence presented to them. Furthermore, her repeated references to Classical authors and histories emphasize the level of influence that existed only 400 years from the present -- and while we have evolved considerably since, our current society still has these influences present in our morals, viewpoints, and story-telling. Women today are still routinely silenced through fear and cultural norms. Being told that their voices naturally should not be a part of public life, and that their primary role should be within the home or supportive of a man in their life sends a distinct message that women should excuse themselves from participating and should choose to silence their own voice. If they do not, they have to face the fear that comes with breaking a cultural norm, and are subject to forms of extreme ridicule and detestation (Chemaly, 2018). In Mary Beard's manifesto entitled *Women and Power*, she discusses this, and how this practice stems from similar treatment in Classical texts such as the *Odyssey*, wherein Telemachus hushes his mother, Penelope, and tells her to return to her

> '"quarters, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff… speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.' And off she [Penelope] goes, back upstairs" (Beard, 4).

This exclusion of women from public life was seen as natural and good, and as Ancient Greek society shifted and greatly affected our development into the society we have today, these roles still play a hand, although the tactics used may have become more subtle and insidious.

Even in media and pop culture these stories are retold for the entertainment of the general public, and if these stories do not have any analysis or shift regarding the gender narrative, they may unwittingly perpetuate the same misogynistic lessons that Ancient Greeks intended for their readers to learn, thereby encouraging those readers to take away and possibly embody the same restrictive and harmful gender roles. Additionally, in most modern retellings of these stories done via the screen, the women subjected to the symbolic violence tend to have Nordic features, thereby using these tales to apply a racial beauty standard and a social construct about which "type" of woman is empathized with and represented -- thereby conducting a racial marginalization and silencing that was not done by Classical societies.

The tale of Iphigenia is exceptionally repeated in modern day media, as in Season Five, Episode Nine of *Game of Thrones*, we watch Stannis Baratheon willingly sacrifice his pre-teen daughter for the blessing of a god so his army would be better able to win a war. This adaptation of the tale shares similar themes, and again consists of a father killing his daughter so he can achieve a personal goal. However, while the writers of this show do still portray this as a "necessary evil", they do not provide Stannis with the redemption and forgiveness from his daughter that Iphigenia gives to Agamemnon. Instead, the audience watches in horror as Shireen screams for her father to save her, right up until her death, refusing to sugarcoat the realities of his choice. While this still shows a woman being sacrificed for the benefit of men, the aftermath of this choice shows how this was the wrong choice and that it leads to the downfall of Stannis;

most of his army abandons him after watching the forced sacrifice of Shireen, and his advisor is exiled and accused of murder for this crime. The refocus and rewriting of this story shifts the original message that a woman's life is worth less than a man's (and that she should be more than willing to give it when they ask) to fully criminalizing the murderers for their actions and leading them to their downfall because of their forced sacrifice. As such, this helps us to understand how adaptations can help societies to not only undo the harmful work and messages that the original tale passed on, but also to adjust these stories, appropriately telling the reader a new feminist message about what women's roles in this society should be.

Similarly, in 2012 the film *Ruby Sparks* hit theaters, and is almost an explicit adaptation of the story of *Pygmalion* by Ovid. Unlike Ovid, however, the film both names the girl the protagonist created, and continues after she becomes a person. In the film, the primary conflict is that she wants full autonomy over herself whereas he wants her to only fulfill the roles he desires of her. He does not like when she talks to and hangs out with other people, and the climax of the film is when he forces her to perform embarrassing acts until she locks herself away from him. He then realizes that he is not allowed to control people and sets her free. While this is arguably a lesson that men should have already learned (possibly in infancy), it is a more feminist adaptation of this tale, as it does inform and educate the reader that people have personhood and exist outside of a man's perspective and understanding. This reminder that women are people and individuals is not something that Ovid or Pygmalion even consider in their story, and they instead glorify the fact that their specific woman is an object instead of a person, telling the reader exactly what they think of women in one succinct metaphor. This movie does dismantle that, and tells the same story with a completely different message that women do not exist for the benefit of men -- nor should they. By adjusting a Classical tale, this film works to undo the

harmful impact that the story of *Pygmalion* has had on societies for thousands of years. Furthermore, this reiteration readjusts what we think the role of women in society should be, and frees them up to make their own choices by returning their own autonomy and voice to them.

A recent article entitled "Dangerous Beauty in the Ancient World and the Age of #MeToo: An Interview with Curator Kiki Karoglou" by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City analyzed the shift in how women have been silenced throughout the millennia, primarily through the demonization and villainization of women. Throughout time, women with power have been viewed as dangerous -- with examples such as Medea and Medusa being prominent -- and women without have been seen to be a "proper" or "correct" woman, such as Briseis. Although Medusa and Medea are still beautiful women (which is typically their redeeming quality), it is made clear that their power and autonomy needs to be stripped from them, one way or another. The villainization of these women still tells readers that women should subject themselves to a restrictive and marginalized role; but this is done through the antagonization and besmirching of women who refuse to submit, instead of the normalization and revering of women who do, such as Briseis. These stories of "dangerous" women have persisted through today as a warning for what women should not do, ultimately reinforcing the marginalization and silencing that the Trojan women endure. As recently as 2016 there were a series of photos published that photoshopped Hillary Clinton's head onto Medusa's. All of these photos were of Medusa being beheaded, and a few included Donald Trump's head photoshopped onto Perseus' while he held up the beheaded Medusa. These creators were encouraged by Classical texts to convey that powerful women need to be metaphorically, symbolically, and literally silenced, and distinctly shows the ways that the misogyny present in Classical antiquity is used to advocate for misogyny today.

Furthermore, this belief that a woman's role is to be subservient and obedient to men can lead to women having an increased risk of experiencing intimate partner violence, as society has perpetuated these harmful ideas and the oppression of women through symbolic violence that stems from stories. In her article, "The Normalization of Violence in Heterosexual Relationships: Women's Narrative of Love and Violence", the author, Julia T. Wood explores some of the external influences that encourage women to either normalize or stay in abusive relationships. Wood is particularly interested in understanding the level of influence that gender and romance narratives have on them. When understanding the gender narrative, Wood discovers that the narratives that perpetuated the idea that women should care for men were extremely harmful. Further damaging was the message that men should be dominating and controlling of women while women should simply defer and be subordinate. Wood discusses how

> "Interviewees spoke of knowing that they needed to please their men. Explaining how she felt about her boyfriend's continuous criticisms of her body, Janelle described 'feeling like I had to look a certain way for him' and definitely in terms of 'well, I'm supposed to please him'. Denise recalled that 'I wanted to be like he wanted me to be, so I kept trying to figure out what he liked.' Mary gave up visiting her mother each afternoon in order to have her boyfriend's dinner ready when he came home and quit resisting when he 'made me get up every morning at like seven o'clock to start cooking his breakfast and start cleaning the house'" (Wood, 2001).

Despite being in an abusive relationship, these women normalized the behavior and viewed the controlling and restrictive role they were forced into as normal and even healthy. They had the perspective that they were supposed to exist for men, that their primary purpose should be to please their partner, and as such, when men took advantage of them and abused them, it was considered normal, when in fact it was harmful and an unjust oppression. Analyses of the modern gender narrative clearly have overlappings with Ancient Greek understandings of gender and the roles that men and women fulfill. As such, when it comes to our modern day perspective about women's roles in regards to men, the symbolic violence women have been forced to

endure for millennia is still perpetuated and can lead to violence within their personal relationships, and encourage them to marginalize and silence themselves as their partner actively oppresses them.

Through the analysis of scenes of symbolic violence in Classical texts, we can see just how extreme the restrictions were for women in Ancient Greece. Women were objectified and seen as symbols of a man's κλέος, and were stripped of autonomy and their free will, all the while being forced to experience pain and trauma at the expense of and for the direct benefit of men. When compared to modern adaptations, we see that while culture may not be able to be changed, the narrative can be altered so that women are able to communicate their own perspectives and opinions to the reader, returning some of their voices to them, and accentuating for the reader how unjust their symbolic violence is. For us today, these are crucial works to rewrite as the literature still affects our modern culture. As such, these feminist adaptations of these patriarchal and misogynistic pieces of literature help women to regain not only their voices and their narrative, but also to redetermine their role in society and the extent to which women experience symbolic violence today.

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