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Fan Fiction and the Trojan War: Contemporary Euripidean Perspective on the Treatment of Enslaved Women in The Silence of the Girls, A Thousand Ships, and For the Most Beautiful

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**FAN FICTION AND THE TROJAN WAR:
CONTEMPORARY EURIPIDEAN PERSPECTIVE
ON THE TREATMENT OF ENSLAVED WOMEN
IN *THE SILENCE OF THE GIRLS*, *A THOUSAND SHIPS*,
AND *FOR THE MOST BEAUTIFUL***

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Master

in

The Department of Liberal Arts

by
Richard Kennard Sheldon
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Abstract

This study examines three contemporary novels of fan fiction, authored by women, that retell the Trojan War: Emily Hauser's *For the Most Beautiful* (2016), Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), and Nathalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* (2019). This study offers a reading of contemporary Homeric reception by analyzing the conversations that the novels initiate between each other, Homer's *Iliad*, and Euripides' tragedies, *Hecuba* (424 BCE) and *Trojan Women* (415 BCE). The study establishes a connection between the three authors and Euripides by treating the novels as works of fan fiction. In so doing, the study identifies aspects of Homer's *Iliad* that Hauser, Barker, and Haynes find lacking, namely reductive ideas of the "heroic" and Achilles' achievement of glory through battle. The authors adopt a reading of Achilles in the *Iliad* that suggests these ideas carry with them consequences for women that Homer either overlooks or underrepresents. In undermining these Homeric ideals, the three authors incorporate aspects of Euripides in their representation of tragic ideas to differing degrees, which reveal distinct messages in each novel. Further, the study argues that the novels' portrayals of Briseis' and Hecuba's experiences and the messages evoked reflect growing cultural concerns of sexual violence and calls for female empowerment prevalent during the Trump administration and representative of the #MeToo movement, both of which were transpiring at the time of the publication of these novels. This study's view of the reception of Homer by the novelists offers a reflection on self and society for twenty-first century readers of Homer and Euripides.

Introduction

Emily Hauser's *For the Most Beautiful* (2016), Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), and Nathalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* (2019) portray female captivity in their retellings of the Trojan War. The three novels present the perspective of women enslaved by the Greeks during and after the course of the war through their main characters, Briseis and Hecuba, as well as Hecuba's surviving female family members who join her in captivity. Briseis is Achilles' slave, a princess whom he captured from Troy's allied city, Lyrnessus, during the Greek assault. Hecuba, the queen of Troy, is captured by the Greeks when they take the city. These two royal women serve as the protagonists in each of the three novels, and it is through their experiences as captives, their treatment as slaves by their Greek captors, and their relationships with other enslaved women that the authors, collectively, present a version of the Trojan War story that reflects cultural concerns of the twenty-first century.

This thesis employs a character analysis of Briseis and Hecuba as they are presented in the three novels, focusing on the three authors' portrayal of these characters in relation to Homer's *Iliad* and Euripides' *Hecuba* (424 BCE) and *Trojan Women* (415 BCE). Using reception theory, the study identifies areas in which the three authors align with these ancient sources and the areas upon which they expand, drawing inferences from these choices to discuss my reading and interpretation of the central message of each novel, and how those messages serve a greater purpose of representing the reception of Homer in the twenty-first century.¹ While not all novels necessarily express or advocate a message, the three authors' portrayals of Briseis' and Hecuba's experience and how those experiences operate with and against ideas in the *Iliad* suggest a dissatisfaction with Homer, or at least a desire to highlight different aspects of

¹ I discuss the importance of reception to my study below.

the Trojan War. Hauser, Barker, and Haynes do not glorify combat, warriors' successes, or the achievements of Achilles and Hector as seen in Homer's *Iliad*.² Their stories follow more the principles of Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*, with their portrayal of women captives who have been objectified as war prizes and who battle to survive captivity.

Achilles is the hero of the Trojan War and the greatest of all the Greek warriors. In the execution of his tale, Homer pays little attention to captured women and slaves such as Briseis, even though it is Briseis over whom Achilles and Agamemnon argue and the reason Achilles refuses to fight, thus almost costing the Greeks the entire war.³ Despite her role in the poem, Homer gives little space to Briseis, opting rather to employ her to initiate and inflate what Felson and Slatkin describe as, "competition between men conducted through women."⁴ The relevance and silence of minor characters such as Briseis have captured the imagination of many writers across the years, Euripides one of the earliest, and Hauser, Barker, and Haynes among the most recent.

In this study, I also argue that the three novels explored in this thesis can be considered works of fan fiction, and, although Euripides' texts may not be considered such due to the social and economic constraints of his time, the novelists adopt him into their fan community as a means of legitimization for their messages.⁵ Euripides, like Hauser, Barker, and Haynes, situates

² Clarke (2004) 77-78.

³ Felson and Slatkin (2004) 93 outline the importance of Briseis to both the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon, and to the outcome of the Trojan War.

⁴ Felson and Slatkin (2004) 95.

⁵ I define fan fiction below and discuss why I include the novelists but exclude Euripides from the category. I also discuss the implications of considering these works fan fiction for this study.

Hecuba and *Trojan Women* in the world of Greek mythology surrounding the Trojan War.⁶ The novelists emulate Euripides by interacting with and extrapolating from the existing Trojan War canon (at the head of which Homer's *Iliad* stands and which, for the novelists, includes *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*) to highlight the treatment of female captives. By establishing a community, each of these novelists contributes to this collective story and speaks with a collective voice. The novelists, and Euripides, identify a space lacking in Homer's work, namely his portrayal of women in the war, and provide those characters that space as well as attention and a greater voice.

Nathalie Haynes was asked in a recent interview what she felt Homer and Euripides got wrong, which her novel rectifies. She answers,

Well Euripides doesn't get very much wrong, truthfully....What happens is that then in the 5th century BC, when these stories are reinterpreted by the great dramatists, is that they realize, I think, that if you want drama you need to come off the battlefield, because the drama of the battlefield is quite limited in its scope, you know. It's a fight. One-dimensional.⁷

When speaking of the "drama of the battlefield," Haynes is not referring to the difficulty of presenting a battle on stage, as would have been a constraint for Euripides, but to the drama of human emotion.⁸ The battlefield, to Haynes, is "one-dimensional" and just "a fight." By excluding Homer from her response, Haynes implies that he does not provide the "drama" that Euripides creates with his portrayal of the human experience away from the battlefield. Haynes is not alone in removing the battlefield from her retellings. All three novels take place in the Greek camp, replacing the battlefield with gruesome and stark portrayals of captive women that

⁶ See Buxton (2007) for more on the treatment of myths and gods in Greek tragedy.

⁷ Garcia-Navarro interviewing Haynes (2021).

⁸ Scodel (2010) 3-5. She discusses the format and general construction of a performance of Greek tragedy, including the number of actors, chorus, and general structure of the plays.

aim to undermine Achilles' status as a heroic and all-powerful figure by shining a light on the consequences of his actions.

This viewpoint towards Homer and Achilles, which focuses on a singular aspect of the hero's actions, does not reflect the full scope of the *Iliad*, which does pull away from the battlefield at times and offer a more complex view of the human condition. For instance, Michelle Zerba argues in her book *Doubt and Skepticism in Antiquity and the Renaissance* in favor of Homer's contradiction of the very "heroic" model under which the three novelists label Achilles: "Increased scrutiny of heroic values is already at work in the character of Achilles, who discovers that his thought and actions are not adequately expressed in the structures that form this world."⁹ She points to his withdrawal from battle and refusal to fight as evidence, arguing "The withdrawal of the central character from the war that defines heroic excellence has consequences that infiltrate the lives of every soldier who fights on the plain of Troy."¹⁰ By virtue of these consequences and Achilles' conflict with Agamemnon, Homer calls into question the values of the "heroic," and the Greeks' justification for remaining at war.

Haynes' implication that Homer does not offer a view of the Trojan War away from the battlefield neglects many scenes from the *Iliad* that do offer such a view, such as in Book 6 when Andromache meets Hector atop the ramparts of Troy with their baby, Astyanax, and begs Hector not to return to battle, crying "'Please take pity upon me then, stay here on the rampart, / that you may not leave your child an orphan, your wife a widow.'"¹¹ Homer depicts a powerful moment

⁹ Zerba (2012) 16.

¹⁰ Zerba (2012) 30.

¹¹ Homer *Il.* VI.431-432. Translated by R. Lattimore (1951).

between a husband and wife that offers depth and complexity to these characters, and more than that, addresses the very concern of female slavery that Haynes, Barker, and Hauser centralize. Hector replies to his wife that his greatest fear is the thought of Andromache and Astyanax being dragged away to slavery, that nothing troubles him as much “as troubles me the thought of you, when some bronze-armored / Achaian leads you off, taking away your day of liberty, / in tears; and in Argos you must work at the loom of another.”¹² None of the three novels considered in this thesis includes this scene between Andromache and Hector, which reinforces the idea of the novelists adopting a simplified reading of Achilles and the *Iliad*. Omitting such scenes allows them instead to focus their attention on Briseis’ harsh experience as a captive, using Achilles to generate oppositional readings about the female experience.

Haynes, as we see in her interview, feels that in many ways Euripides supports her reading of the female experience, and all three novelists incorporate some aspects of Euripides’ presentation of the Trojan War into their novels, especially his depiction of captivity in *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*. In the same way the novelists omit certain aspects of Homer to reinforce their messages, they similarly include aspects of Euripides. A reception analysis of Briseis and Hecuba in each novel, therefore, weighed against both Euripides and Homer, reveals a connection in message between the three authors and Euripides: channeling Euripidean ideas, the novelists highlight the plight of female captives to push against Homeric representations of glory established through their views of Achilles and the Greeks.

Euripides was a nuanced and complex writer, and the term ‘Euripidean’ connotes many ideas, so I will here establish some context for the term and identify the areas from which my authors draw inspiration. Euripides’ compositions were submitted and performed in yearly

¹² Homer *Il.* VI.454-456. Translated by R. Lattimore (1951).

competitions at the Festival of the City Dionysia, a multi-day event created for Athenians to display the greatness and splendor of Athens.¹³ The festival was not limited to tragedies, but each year three tragedians submitted a trilogy and satyr play to be performed, and their ranking was determined by a panel of judges chosen by lot.¹⁴ Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are considered the three great Greek tragedians because theirs are the only tragedies that survive to us today, although Aeschylus preceded Euripides and Sophocles slightly (Aeschylus died in 456 BCE and Euripides' first submission to competition was in 455 BCE). Sophocles and Euripides met in the competition at Dionysia a number of times, generally with Euripides losing more often than winning.¹⁵ Any reading of Euripides, therefore, must consider that, because his tragedies were created for competition and prize money, Euripides' creative choices could have been affected by any number of factors, including a desire to win or to separate himself from his peers who experienced greater success than he in these competitions. Scholars such as John Gibert suggest Euripides' failure to win may have contributed to what we consider to be his style:

Within the framework based on Sophocles' high and Euripides' low rate of competitive success, it must appear either that Euripides kept trying, a little desperately, to win by using a variety of shock tactics, or that...he settled for the chance...to produce plays with which he could make a mark on the genre.¹⁶

Regardless of the intention behind his words, Euripides did make a mark on the genre, and enough commonality exists between his extant plays to indicate markers of Euripidean style, a style that “resonates with a familiarity” for modern readers.¹⁷

¹³ Scodel (2010) 40-41.

¹⁴ Gregory (2002) 167.

¹⁵ Scodel (2010) 49-52.

¹⁶ Gibert (2017) 44.

¹⁷ Micheline (2002) 55.

“Euripidean traits” or “Euripidean style” then, includes many different characteristics, several of which Hauser, Barker, and Haynes emulate in their novels. In her chapter on modern views of Euripides, Ann Michelini writes of a typical Euripidean tragedy, “Slaves, the elderly, and women are prominent, active, and vocal, and their interventions often have the effect of puncturing the heroic pretensions of dominant males.”¹⁸ In *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, Hecuba, her daughters Cassandra and Polyxena, and daughter-in-law, Andromache, fill this role, and they operate against their Greek captors, the dominant males. Rosanna Lauriola in her analysis of *Trojan Women* and Eric Dugdale in his reading of *Hecuba*, similarly identify this dynamic of female lead struggling against the abusive male.¹⁹ Dugdale goes a step further to suggest a larger theme, arguing “The suffering of women as a consequence of wars initiated and perpetrated by men is a leitmotif of the play. This suffering is borne communally and experienced empathetically.”²⁰ The scholars here identify a number of ideas but suggest a through-line that Euripides favors a female protagonist and a dynamic of women against men, which usually paints men in a negative light, typically undermining ideas of war or heroic epic, such as the *Iliad* in the cases of *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*.²¹

Euripides also incorporates political ideas or suggestions of the political and cultural landscape, much like many other writers, and it is an important element emulated by the three

¹⁸ Michelini (2002). 52.

¹⁹ Lauriola (2015) 50, Dugdale (2015) 102.

²⁰ Dugdale (2015) 102.

²¹ In drawing these conclusions, we must keep in mind that only eighteen of Euripides’ ninety-five total plays have survived in a complete form (with fragments from others), and that he did produce some plays with male leads.

authors of this study. Euripides wrote and “produced” *Hecuba* in 424 BCE during the Peloponnesian War. Scodel, for instance, argues that women enslaved in war are significant characters in Euripides because the war “led to large-scale enslavements of Greek women by other Greeks.”²² Scodel believes it is no coincidence Euripides put similarly enslaved women at the forefront of his tragedies. We cannot know how the Athenian audience reacted when confronted with such ideas, but by focusing on the plight of captive women such as Hecuba and her children, on their grief and suffering as victims of war, Euripides targets the wrongs of men and patriarchal society, a stance that would have been viewed as provocative.²³ Euripides’ political messaging is one of the reasons his work is so enticing to modern readers. In her book, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, Helene Foley describes a connection between Athenian society of the fifth century and modern society (twentieth century):

Athens faced in different ways negotiating conflicts between public and private worlds and identities and creating some coherence between them, challenging the limiting stereotypes of gender roles in order to accommodate to reality...balancing the need in a democracy for both egalitarian opportunity and sensitivity and the need for superior leadership. All these problems are now faced by twentieth-century women as well as men.²⁴

The problems faced in Euripides’ Athens remain in the twenty-first century. As Euripides brought to light contemporary issues by focusing on limited gender roles presented in Homer, so too do the authors of *For the Most Beautiful*, *The Silence of the Girls*, and *A Thousand Ships* bring to light concerns of their own contemporary culture and society. The messages projected

²² Scodel (2010) 59.

²³ Gibert (2017) 49.

²⁴ Foley (2001) 13.

by the novels reflect issues of female empowerment and sexual violence prevalent at the time of publication.

Before beginning my analyses of the novels, I will discuss my reasons for selecting these three novels, describe the valuable role reception studies play in establishing a dialogue between these three novels and the source texts, and establish how reception facilitates an ever-evolving meaning both of readings and reinterpretations of texts of antiquity. I then will explain how examining these three novels as works fan fiction and collaborative storytelling offers a unique reading of reception that reflects the cultural landscape presented by the novels.

Selection

For the Most Beautiful, *The Silence of the Girls*, and *A Thousand Ships* are among the most recent novels that have appeared in the wave of twenty-first century female-authored mythological fiction retelling tales of antiquity from the perspective of women. This trend of fiction follows the success during the mid-twentieth century of female-authored prose fiction set in the classical past that focused on male protagonists.²⁵ The increased publications of these novels and the increase in female authorship within mythological fiction is closely tied to the feminist movements of the twentieth century, but navigating these movements to the fullest extent is beyond the scope of this thesis. I will only discuss it briefly to acknowledge its role in developing the pool of novels from which I selected.

²⁵ This thesis discusses prose, but there are also many examples of poems and plays retelling tales of antiquity. For more on the history of female authored classical fiction see Hoberman (1997), Wallace (2005), Wallace (2010), Cooper & Short (2012).

With the success of authors such as Mary Butts (*Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra*, 1935), Mary Renault (Many, including *The King Must Die*, 1958 and *The Bull From the Sea*, 1962), and Naomi Mitchison (*The Young Alexander the Great*, 1969), to name a few, an increasing number of women joined the pantheon of contemporary fiction authors adapting characters and stories of antiquity. Following the feminist movements of the 1970s, these stories began to shift from centering on male protagonists to female characters and protagonists. Lillian Doherty writes on the increasing prevalence of female-authored works of historical fiction:

In the late twentieth century, women writers have self-consciously sought to remedy gap[s] in the classical tradition by retelling the myths from the points of view of the female characters. The range of genres and styles in which these retellings have appeared...suggests that the effort to reclaim a distinctive 'women's classical tradition' appeals to many women and at least some men at the turn of the millennium.²⁶

This trend continues into the twenty-first century with the success of novels such as Elizabeth Cook's *Achilles* (2002), Ursula Le Guin's *Lavinia* (2008), and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), which launched a multi-authored series of novels retelling mythological stories, entitled "Canongate Myth Series."²⁷ The success of Atwood and others made way for more female-authored novels that emerged and enjoyed success in the twenty-first century and featured female protagonists such as Cleopatra, Helen, Cassandra, Briseis, Hecuba, and Hermione.

From this diverse pool of recently published novels, and with the intention of identifying commonalities for my analysis and comparison, I selected three female-authored novels whose characters, source material, publication dates, and themes were as similar as possible. Among

²⁶ Doherty (2003) 21.

²⁷ Alexander (2005) gives a review of the first three novellas: *A Short History of Myth*, *The Penelopiad*, and *Weight*, as well as an overview of Canongate's planned publication series.

consideration, to name a few, were Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* (2005), Amanda Elyot's *The Memoirs of Helen of Troy* (2005), and Madeline Miller's *Song of Achilles* (2012). I ultimately selected three novels set during or following the Trojan War: *The Silence of the Girls*, *A Thousand Ships*, and *For the Most Beautiful*. All three novels share primary characters in Briseis and Hecuba, and the novels operate within a similar timeframe. Each novel sets its events just before the events of the *Iliad* and ends not long after the fall of Troy, with some deviation in the order in which those events are presented.

Selecting novels that center around Briseis and Hecuba facilitated comparison between the novels and the source material from which the authors drew. The *Iliad*, *Hecuba*, and *Trojan Women* are the sources that most directly influenced the development of these two characters in all three novels. Traces of sources other than these are certainly evident in each novel, but they are either small references, deal only with minor characters, or do not appear in all three works.²⁸ The *Iliad*, *Hecuba*, and *Trojan Women*, on the other hand, are critical to the development of each novel's main characters, as well as their plots, and it is therefore against those three texts that I generate my analysis.

For the Most Beautiful, *Silence of the Girls*, and *A Thousand Ships* were all three published between 2016 and 2019. The benefit of selecting novels published in such a tight period of time is that, whether intentional or not, they reflect certain aspects of their cultural landscape. Also important in my selection of these novels was their shared focus on the grief and suffering of enslaved Trojan women, the tragic portrayal of which reflects cultural concerns of female empowerment and sexual violence. Cooper and Short suggest that portrayals of historical

²⁸ For example, Hauser and Haynes list in the 'Author's Note' and 'Afterword' of their novels, respectively, some of their inspirations, including (among others): the *Aeneid*, *Heroides*, the *Odyssey*, *Oresteia*, and *Troilus and Cressida*.

fiction are particularly useful in offering insight into “the moment of writing,” because the writers use:

One period to comment on another....[and] it is this dual temporal dimension which both lends the women depicted in these novels their own particular characteristics, and which influences the ways in which their stories are re-told, and the unique emphases in each re-telling.²⁹

While the novels studied in this thesis do not technically qualify as historical fiction, for the *Iliad* should not be regarded as rooted in history but rather mythology, as the one that Cooper and Short suggest may be identified in the juxtaposition of their setting and publication.³⁰ Any work of fiction tells us something about the period in which it was composed and published, but works of fiction set in the classical past, such as *For the Most Beautiful*, *The Silence of the Girls*, and *A Thousand Ships*, provide modern ideas and actions for their characters that may be viewed through a deliberately anachronistic lens. These characters’ ideas and actions may be compared to the antiquated landscape in which those characters are set and contextualized within a society whose frame of thought would differ from the novelists’, allowing them to isolate and comment upon the areas and ideas with which they disagree in a way not possible for fiction set in a modern landscape. The contemporary influences and perspective of the late 2010s CE, reflected in Hauser’s, Barker’s, and Haynes’ character portrayals, stand out when being expressed by women who lived during the time of the Trojan War, where in a modern setting those same points, more regularly heard, may lose resonance. This is the “dual temporal” dimension Cooper and Short describe, where the novelists, through the anachronistic actions or thoughts of Briseis

²⁹ Cooper and Short (2012) 7.

³⁰ It should be noted that the ancient Greeks would have considered the mythology of the *Iliad* as part of their history, but for the purposes of modern classification, these novels should not be considered historical fiction.

and Hecuba, are able to use a stark contrasting method to highlight their contemporary cultural concerns.

By depicting Briseis' and Hecuba's experience so graphically and candidly, the authors reflect contemporary societal concerns about the prevalence of sexual violence.³¹ This is not to say that these novels were necessarily written with a political agenda, but as Cooper and Short suggest, "It is nevertheless possible to discern an echoing of the political ideologies behind this kind of writing in the recent developments of female-authored historical fiction."³² The authors' novels were published during the Trump campaign and presidency and concurrent with #MeToo, a movement founded to raise awareness and give voice to female victims of sexual assault and abuse. In the way that history remembers Hoover's presidency for the years of poverty during the Great Depression and his "Hooverilles," the Trump years may well be remembered for the twenty-six women who accused him of sexual misconduct, and for a presidency that brought, among many other things, renewed attention to sexual assaults amid the #MeToo movement and a national conversation concerning sexual misconduct.³³ The former president's inauguration was met with the Women's March on Washington, held in solidarity across eighty-one countries.³⁴ If not explicitly conceived with such intentions, these novels manifest, at least partially, these contemporary cultural issues through their representations of Briseis and Hecuba's experiences in captivity.

³¹ All three of these authors are Caucasian and of British background, which should be taken into account when discussing and considering the cultural implications of their writing.

³² Cooper and Short (2012) 14.

³³ Relman (2020).

³⁴ Hartocollis & Alcindor (2017), Schmidt & Almukhtar (2017).

In the novels, Briseis is sexually violated repeatedly during her captivity in the Greek camp. Every night she must endure Achilles' sexual assaults on her body. During the day she moves among the camp performing chores for Achilles, finding opportunities to speak with other women captives and share their similar experiences. Resigned to their fate, and in an effort to survive captivity and cope with their enslavement, many women assimilate into their captors' lives. Female captivity and enslavement are mentioned in the *Iliad* but not fully explored (such as in the scene between Hector and Andromache), perhaps because such practices were an accepted consequence of war. Homer's willingness to acknowledge sexual violence, but not fully address it, echoes an issue raised by the #MeToo movement that encourages victims to make public allegations of sexual abuse and sexual harassment and to bring their stories forward. The three novelists invite us to consider parallels between Briseis' experience and women of the #MeToo movement by focusing on her silence and inability to voice the wrongs of what is being done to her. When she speaks to the other captive women they are convinced the only way to survive is to give in to their situation and hope the Greek men take them as wives. When Briseis confronts Patroclus in *A Thousand Ships*, he shrugs off her protests before taking her to his bed.³⁵ The portrayals of Briseis' relationship with Achilles recall Chanel Miller's powerful victim impact statement after she was assaulted on Stanford University's campus, a statement which opened with the line, "You don't know me but you've been inside me."³⁶ These novels, like the #MeToo movement, address sexual violence. Such parallels bring a heightened awareness to Homer's treatment of women in the *Iliad*, especially in the way the novelists reduce the poem to

³⁵ Haynes (2019) 92-93.

³⁶ Cosslett (2019).

a singular, masculine reading of Achilles that extols the glory, honor, and achievements of men at war.

Reception

This study applies reception theory to its analysis of *For the Most Beautiful*, *The Silence of the Girls*, and *A Thousand Ships* and their source materials, the *Iliad*, *Hecuba*, and *Trojan Women* to distinguish, through the authors' portrayal of Briseis and Hecuba, the way in which the authors channel Euripides to comment on Homer and develop messages that reflect their contemporary cultural landscape. Reception theory offers a way to view Homer through the traces Euripides' tragedies left upon the *Iliad*. This means that Euripides' plays, through their own interpretations of Homer, have contributed to and influenced the Trojan war narrative to the degree that readings and understanding of Homer are now forever changed. Considering the relationship between Euripides and Hauser, Barker, and Haynes, as well as Euripides and Homer, suggests the avenues by which the authors attempt to reach and read Homer. Such analysis places the *Iliad* in a new light, from which this study generates a reading of Homer, Euripides, and the modern novelists who draw on them.

Reception refers to the process by which a text changes over time as new readers or viewers experience, develop a meaning for, and reinterpret that text. The theory considers the response to a text and what goes into generating a meaning for it, a meaning that Charles Martindale suggests "is always realized at the point of reception."³⁷ In this way, a text becomes more than just itself, an object or event. It becomes something interpreted and understood by

³⁷ Martindale (1993) 3.

many different people at many different points of time. Reception studies, then, establish the importance of history at the point of reception, and the “mediated, situated, contingent...character of readings” that develop and evolve the meaning of a text.³⁸ Hans Robert Jauss describes this phenomenon as “the horizon of expectation,” a metaphor modified from Gadamer’s idea of the fusion of horizons between text and reader that suggests a reader’s understanding of a text is dependent upon personal experiences, knowledge, and historical and cultural situatedness.³⁹ The “horizon” represents a reader’s framework of reference, while “expectations” represents the approach the individual takes to the text, which encompasses his or her cultural influences and biases, based upon that person’s placement in history and which “shape the ways in which the text [is] regarded”⁴⁰ Horizons shift, and so too does the source text, when the interpreter engages that text in dialogue, and the text either resists or harmonizes with the interpreters’ preconceived views.

An important distinction must be made between reception and another form of analysis for studying ancient classics known as the “classical tradition.” The issue with thinking in terms of “tradition,” as Hardwick explains, is that it implies a linear path from antiquity to the present and suggests that there is an objective meaning to be obtained from ancient texts. She finds this line of thinking limiting because “The associations of value carried with [tradition] were narrow and sometimes undervalued diversity, both within ancient culture and subsequently.”⁴¹ Reception studies break away from thinking in terms of linear relationships between texts and argue that

³⁸ Martindale & Thomas (2006) 3.

³⁹ Martindale & Thomas (2006) 4.

⁴⁰ Hardwick (2003) 4.

⁴¹ Hardwick (2003) 3.

each new historical period's reception of a text not only reinterprets that text, but changes it, establishing a dialectical relationship and placing a great deal of value on how the receiver interprets a text. Reception studies are similar to reader-response theory, but reception's incorporation of the historical element distinguishes it from reader-response. Robert Newton discusses the difference between reader-response and reception in his textbook, arguing that reader-response "Lays little stress on a work's original reception and...denies that the work embodies objective constraints on the reader."⁴² Reader-response theory, then, does not account for the reception of a text from any other time period, focusing only on the single, contemporary reader's interpretation. Reception, therefore, lends itself more suitably than classical tradition or reader-response to analysis of the three novels of this study for two reasons: the novels operate within the textual world of Greek mythology, and the novels are heavily influenced by Euripides and Homer while simultaneously transforming how we might read these two ancient authors.

This situatedness in history necessitates an important distinction between an individual and society. As Hardwick points out, "Reception studies...are concerned not only with individual texts and their relationship with one another but also with the broader cultural processes."⁴³ An individual's reception of a text is important insofar as it sheds light on the original text and larger cultural processes, but it must be understood within the context of the larger historical situations. We can never be sure of the precise experiences and influences that have constituted another person's understanding of a text. What reception strives to do, and what this study does, is examine a particular text's reception of its original source from the perspective

⁴² Newton (1988) 220.

⁴³ Hardwick (2003) 5.

of the receiving text's time period and cultural situation to reveal new understandings of that cultural situation as well as new understandings of the original text.

Martindale acknowledges an objection to reception from Graham Bradshaw regarding the objectivity of pursuing an historical perspective. Bradshaw suggests that trying to imagine a text at specific moments in history is both “unhistorical and aesthetically impossible.”⁴⁴ For example, trying to see the *Iliad* in strictly fifth century BCE terms or to see *Hamlet* in strictly Elizabethan terms cannot be done. Recreating or implanting ourselves in any “other” situation or person is never completely possible, but that does not negate the value of reception. What it requires is developing as much of an understanding of an historical period as possible to contrast with other periods. Doing so enables better and new understandings of the original text, as well as revealing something of modernity (or of the contemporary time of the text). Reception confirms what Martindale recognizes as the “underlying relativism” of antiquity.⁴⁵ It establishes that the link between antiquity and modernity is symbiotic. Modernity requires antiquity as a reflection from which to judge itself, and antiquity may only be seen by looking backwards from modernity. The two are in a constant conversation that gains new layers as new periods of time get added.

For this reason, Martindale stresses “The importance of possessing reception histories for individual texts,” so that we may be aware of as many factors as possible “that may have contributed to our responses to texts of the past.”⁴⁶ In the case of this thesis, the three novels’ receptions of Homer are markedly different from Euripides’ reception of Homer because their

⁴⁴ Martindale & Thomas (2006) 4.

⁴⁵ Martindale & Thomas (2006) 8.

⁴⁶ Martindale & Thomas (2006) 5.

frames of reference are distinct, influenced greatly by the different time periods in which they operate. Many more receptions of the *Iliad* have been produced since Euripides' time that have contributed to the novelists' responses to the text. What demonstrates reception so beautifully is that the novelists' frame of reference for their reception of the *Iliad* includes Euripides, who is himself an example of a reception of Homer that is situated in antiquity. Authors such as Euripides were conscious of the fact that they were interpreting their own past. As Newton suggests, "The role of the critic is to mediate between how the text was perceived in the past and how it is perceived in the present. This relation needs continually to be rethought" to create what Kenneth Haynes describes as, "an infinite process."⁴⁷ Only, in identifying this process we must recognize the limitations of trying to access an original work.

Reception studies acknowledge that no one can achieve unmediated access to an original work. Even reading a poem such as the *Iliad* in the original Greek would not provide such access, and often many people's experience reading these texts comes through another person's translation, which are themselves an example of reception. A translation is limited in its representation of the original because, as Alexandra Lianeri explains in her chapter on translation and reception, "the act of translating can never succeed in achieving its goal, that the task of the translator implies a fundamental impossibility and failure."⁴⁸ Simply stated, a translation is an interpretation of the original text and likewise contributes to the infinite process of reception. A work can only be viewed through a filter of other texts that have been received, reinterpreted, and left their own mark on the original. As Martindale suggests, "Homer has been changed for us

⁴⁷ Newton (1988) 219; Haynes (2006) 47.

⁴⁸ Lianeri (2006) 147.

by Virgil and Milton, who have left their traces in his text, and thereby enabled new possibilities of meaning.”⁴⁹ There is no way of knowing the number or extent of texts that contribute to this process for each example of reception. One method of analysis is to examine on a case-by-case basis, as this study does, each of the three novels’ reception of aspects of the *Iliad*, *Hecuba*, and *Trojan Women*. This analysis does not attempt to navigate other influences that helped form each author’s interpretation, many of which even they would likely be unaware.

Because this study analyzes Euripides’ tragedies to uncover meaning in the three novels, it becomes important to outline some context for how reception in antiquity differs from modern reception. James Porter describes the difficulty associated with outlining reception in antiquity, lamenting that

While so much of the new scholarship in reception is theoretically sophisticated, as the essays collected in Martindale and Thomas (2006) amply demonstrate, to date no theory tailored to the specific exigencies of Greek and Roman reception exists.⁵⁰

For this study, then, I treat Euripides’ reception of Homer and the *Iliad* with the same approach that I use for Hauser’s, Barker’s, and Haynes’ receptions, with respect to his time period and society. I outline some of the important aspects of the Athenian fifth century BCE that help define Greek tragedy as we understand it, such as the festival competitions, Athenian democracy, the Peloponnesian War, and the texts themselves. Many of the tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides revolve around the same figures, and examining each of the three tragedian’s treatment of these characters and the way they adapt and refigure the story reveals some understandings of reception during the fifth century BCE. Using all of this as a frame of

⁴⁹ Martindale (1993) 6.

⁵⁰ Porter (2010) 474.

reference for historical context, I draw parallels between the way Euripides' reception of the *Iliad* reflects his contemporary cultural climate and the way the three novelists' reception reflects their own contemporary cultural climate.

The novels' incorporation of Euripides in retelling their versions of the Trojan War demonstrates that distinguishing historical context is an important aspect of modern reception. As Jauss describes, "The very history of effects and the interpretation of an event or work of the past enables us to understand it as a plurality of meanings that was not yet perceivable to its contemporaries."⁵¹ These meanings identify a lack in the original work, or gaps that new authors attempt to fill. Hauser, Barker, and Haynes channel Euripides to identify gaps in the *Iliad*. Through their graphic depictions of rape, violence, and executions, they confront the reader by bringing the treatment of women in the Trojan War to the forefront. By reducing the *Iliad* to a singular objective, Achilles' goal of achieving everlasting glory, the novelists call attention to the consequence of such an achievement for women who were victims.⁵² In the twenty-first century, the actions of the Greek men in the *Iliad* take on new meaning. While the *Iliad* does recognize that slavery, rape, and murder exist, the experiences of the captive women as represented in the novels suggest the *Iliad* did not go far enough in highlighting such atrocities, and that more should be said about the treatment of captive women.

⁵¹ Jauss (2001) 7.

⁵² Foley (2004) 184. He suggests that a defining characteristic of Homeric epic is glorious achievement in battle for men.

Fanfiction

One manifestation of reception can be found in a classification of texts called “fan fiction” or “fan works,” which are terms that I will use interchangeably. I consider *The Silence of the Girls*, *A Thousand Ships*, and *For the Most Beautiful* fan fiction. This thesis explores how viewing these three novels through the lens of fan fiction offers an avenue for the study of reception by revealing distinct ways in which the three novelists connect and interact not only with each other, but also with Euripides, by emulating him and claiming him for their own fan community. It further explores how these connections support my reading of the novelists’ commentary on their contemporary cultural climate. All novels on some level reflect the contemporary cultural climate of their authors, but fan fiction establishes a community whose shared passion may be used to further an idea or agenda. This passion reveals and emphasizes the traits and characteristics the novelists distinguish to adjust the Trojan War narrative, shining a light on the treatment of women in the collective story that fan fiction offers. In this way, fan fiction can enrich reception studies by engaging with the past through contemporary communities that evolve with the cultures of the time.

Defining fan fiction is difficult and controversial because scholars rarely agree on a single, accepted distinction for the categorization. In the broadest sense, fan fiction may be defined as a form of collective storytelling responding to specific texts.⁵³ This definition applies to *For the Most Beautiful*, *The Silence of the Girls*, and *A Thousand Ships*, all of which respond to one or more texts to retell and contribute to the story of the Trojan War. For this study I adopt Lynn Kozak’s definition, but it bears mentioning that other definitions take a much narrower view to account for historic, social, and economic contributors to the category, which is the

⁵³ Kozak (2018) 121. She also offers a range of definitions from different scholars in her article.

reason Euripides' texts may not be considered fan fiction in and of themselves. For instance, Judith Fathallah in her book, *Fanfiction and the Author*, defines fan fiction as, "'The unauthorized adaptation and re-writing of media texts.'" ⁵⁴ Fathallah's definition becomes problematic when considering works such as the three novels of this study because they deal with Homer's *Iliad*, which is in the public domain. Her definition may suggest that because Homer cannot authorize any adaptations, there can be no fan fiction of the *Iliad*. Yet, a simple search on the nonprofit fan fiction repository website, Archive of our Own (AO3), for fan fiction of the *Iliad* yields 633 submissions. ⁵⁵ If not confirming that texts retelling antiquity fall within the scope of fan fiction, the prevalence of fan fiction entries related to the *Iliad* and other texts of antiquity suggest that the constraints around fan fiction's definition may be lightening as the genre evolves.

Henry Jenkins offers one definition in his book on fan fiction and fan culture, arguing it simply has to do with 'fans.' He defines fan fiction as emerging from, "Fan culture," and remarks they are "generated texts that could be shared and exchanged and created in a social infrastructure." ⁵⁶ The difficulty for Jenkins lies in what constitutes a fan: "The word 'fan,' in popular usage, is slippery and expansive enough to include a broad range of different kinds of relationships to media, from the highly individualistic to the highly social." ⁵⁷ Jenkins' concept of a fan's social relationship to media is relatively recent. It evolved during a period of mass

⁵⁴ Fathallah summarizes Mirmohamadi (2017) 9.

⁵⁵ Accessed 2/5/2021.

https://archiveofourown.org/works/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&work_search%5Bquery%5D=the+iliad

⁵⁶ Jenkins (1992) 25.

⁵⁷ Jenkins (1992) 16.

production and distribution of media texts, following the establishment of copyright law, which is why many definitions suggest that a work must violate copyright law in order to be considered fan fiction. Herein lies the problem of classifying Euripides as a fan of Homer and his work an example of fan fiction. The current concept of fan culture and fan practice is linked to the capitalist market and is a product of modern ideas of fandom and community that did not exist during the fifth century in Athens.⁵⁸

To categorize a text as fan fiction, as Jenkins suggests, there needs to be a “fandom,” a community, associated with that work. Jenkins refers to fans as “Readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture.”⁵⁹ He discusses television in his example, but in the case of Greek tragedy, the appropriated text would be, for instance, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the competitions at the Dionysia would be the appropriation into a participatory culture. The problem with this view is that the ancient Greeks had no concept of reappropriating mythology in this way, for they did not view these stories as belonging to any individual or group. As Jenkins also explains,

Fandom originates in response to specific historical conditions...specific configurations of television programing, but also the development of feminism, the development of new technologies, the atomization and alienation of contemporary American culture, etc.⁶⁰

We cannot assign these historic movements to events in antiquity. What we have, then, is Euripides and Greek tragedy, which operate in certain aspects similarly to fandom and fan

⁵⁸ Farley (2016). She describes copyright and professional writing’s importance to understanding fan fiction, and argues, via systems theory, against labeling Vergil a fan fiction author.

⁵⁹ Jenkins (1992) 23.

⁶⁰ Jenkins (1992) 3.

fiction, but whose social, economic, and cultural constraints prevent us from categorizing them as such. This does not mean the works do not exhibit “fannish” qualities, or that a connection between Hauser, Barker, Haynes, and Euripides cannot be made.⁶¹ It simply means that the cultural application of fan fiction for fifth century Athens must come with certain conditions or limitations. Recognizing these limitations, the present study considers the three novels fan fiction as examples of collective storytelling responding to specific texts, and I explore the way they include and connect Euripides to their own modern fan community to “speak from a position of collective identity.”⁶²

The study of communities and fandom began with Star Trek conventions and groups that met in person, but modern fan fiction communities operate primarily through online websites where users can post submissions and hold discussions.⁶³ The communities embrace and encourage those who are passionate enough about certain texts to take an existing work, want more from it, and then create more from it. Jenkins explains that this passion is borne not simply from, “fascination or adoration but also frustration and antagonism.”⁶⁴ Each community finds like-minded thinkers, and the fan works created by the community members “Speak from a position of collective identity, to forge an alliance with a community of others in defense of tastes which, as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic.”⁶⁵ We see such a

⁶¹ Hellekson & Busse (2014); Kozak (2018). They argue the definition of fan fiction is broad enough that Euripides’ and other ancient texts may be considered fan fiction.

⁶² Jenkins (1992) 23.

⁶³ For the history of fan fiction website use, see Busker (2008), Mittell (2009), Whiteman (2009).

⁶⁴ Jenkins (1992) 23.

⁶⁵ Jenkins (1992) 23.

collective voice in Hauser, Barker, and Haynes, who represent a community of Homeric fans, and in the attempt to “forge an alliance,” these authors have connected themselves and their community with Euripides.

In her NPR interview, Haynes identifies with Euripides, attaching him to herself:

“Well Euripides doesn’t get very much wrong, truthfully. He writes eight tragedies about the Trojan War, which survive to us today. Fully seven of those tragedies have women as the title characters. So, he can also be in my gang.”⁶⁶

Here Haynes invokes the idea of community with her words, “my gang,” and adopts Euripides into that community. To her, he is a like-minded thinker who seeks to highlight the underrepresentation of women in the *Iliad*. Continuing in the interview, she further likens herself to Euripides through fan fiction’s idea of collective storytelling, “As time passes, we end up focusing on just a different bit of the story. Homer tells us in the *Iliad*.... About two months of the war, which lasts for ten years. And that’s the story we have.” Haynes sees herself and her peers as a new era of interpreters of the Trojan War, not unlike the Greek tragedians of the fifth century BCE, who are following Euripides’ model to showcase the women of the Trojan War. Euripides is a powerful voice to add to the community of Homeric and Trojan War fans and invoking him in this way gives credibility to the messages Haynes, Barker, and Hauser send in their novels.

This understanding of fan fiction enables a new focus of attention in reception studies regarding the collective storytelling of fan communities. Fan works, as Fathallah describes, “[c]reate new knowledge in fictional spaces, utilizing the gaps and possibilities of canon and reality to reveal basic assumptions and the possibilities they exclude.”⁶⁷ A community of fans

⁶⁶ Garcia-Navarro interviewing Haynes (2021).

⁶⁷ Fathallah (2017) 200-201.

and fan works, such as we see with Hauser, Barker, and Haynes, supports a reading of its authors' texts as combined representations of certain aspects of those authors' time, which invites a consideration of reception because reception examines the way a text is interpreted, refashioned, and renewed across history. Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington suggest "The choice of fan objects and practices of fan consumption are structured through our habitus as a reflection and further manifestation of our social, cultural, and economic capital."⁶⁸ They argue that as the pool of fandom and fan works grows, analyzing those works will provide valuable insights into modern life at the time of the fan works' publication. Further, they suggest that because fandom involves a kind of categorization based upon community association, these works are, essentially, a window into the mind frame of society; understanding the "why" behind these works may explain the "why" behind "specific forms of social and economic organization."⁶⁹ Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington speak here about gaining access to society through fan works that are pure, untainted by influencers like publishing companies or money driven agendas, but I disagree. Money and publishing cannot be entirely removed from the equation because many of fan writers strive for these as goals, seeing publication and monetary gain as success or "breaking in." Instead of a window into society as a whole, I suggest that fan works such as the three novels considered in this thesis offer a window into specific communities, each with its own agendas that speak to the concerns and interests of that community. Examining such novels as works of collective storytelling sheds light on those concerns and interests. Consider Pat Barker's assessment of her own novel's treatment of women:

⁶⁸ Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington (2007) 7.

⁶⁹ Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington (2007) 9.

Nothing happens in the book that is not happening in the contemporary world....There are young women who are illegal immigrants in this country working for no money. They're working for food and if they are sexually assaulted, which they very commonly are, they cannot go to the police. They can't complain to anybody. In effect, these women are slaves.⁷⁰

She recognizes and projects this cultural concern through her text, and it contributes to the collective voice of all three novelists. By analyzing the three novels' relationships to the *Iliad*, *Hecuba*, and *Trojan Women*, we can better understand how twenty-first century receptions of Homer reflect the contemporary society of which they are a part.

Organizational Breakdown

In considering the connections between Hauser, Barker, Haynes, and Euripides and how the three novelists shed light on the aspects of Homer and the *Iliad* they find lacking, I identify distinct, central messages in the three novels: *For the Most Beautiful* suggests that enslaved women fight courageous battles, which are just as heroic and valuable as the battles fought by the men; *The Silence of the Girls* depicts the brutal treatment of women in captivity to highlight the atrocities of the Trojan War that occurred away from the battlefield; and *A Thousand Ships* suggests that the consequences of war are pervasive and affect all women. The messages of *The Silence of the Girls* and *A Thousand Ships* overlap somewhat, and the two novels take a similar approach in highlighting the atrocities of war and the treatment of women in the *Iliad* that they feel Homer does not fully represent. The messages of each of the three novels both inform and are informed by the experiences of Briseis and Hecuba, and the three parts of this study analyze these experiences to identify both the reception of Homer and the reflection of Hauser's, Barker's, and Haynes' contemporary cultural concerns.

⁷⁰ Five Dials interviewing Pat Barker (2019).

Part One discusses Briseis' experience as a slave by examining the three authors' portrayal of her relationship with Achilles and Patroclus. It considers Achilles' treatment of Briseis and their romantic relationship. This part also considers Homer's representation of the Greek ideals of the hero and achievement of glory in combination with the novels' reception of Homer and, consequently, their representation of Achilles' character through their depiction of his treatment of Briseis. Similarly, Homer's portrayal of Achilles' relationship with Patroclus is received by the authors and Part One explores how that relationship affects Briseis. All three novels develop Briseis' experience through her interactions with Achilles and Patroclus, and Part One examines scenes in each novel that are derived from the *Iliad* to identify how the authors receive Homer to bolster their central messages.

The section discusses Briseis and Achilles in each novel, starting with *The Silence of the Girls*, then *For the Most Beautiful*, and finally *A Thousand Ships*. Briseis only appears in a handful of scenes from the *Iliad*, so the novels invent much of the interaction between the two characters. Part One, therefore, selects and discusses the scenes that derive directly from the *Iliad* and appear in each novel. The primary scenes from which this part draws are found in Book 1, in which Agamemnon takes Briseis from Achilles, Book 9, in which Agamemnon sends his generals, Odysseus and Ajax, to trade her back, and Book 19, in which Briseis cries and falls upon the corpse of Patroclus. These scenes are pivotal to the study because, as overlapping material, they demonstrate precisely where the authors agree and disagree with Homer, which may then be applied to other areas of the three novels.

Part Two applies a similar examination of Patroclus' and Achilles' relationship. As with the section on Briseis and Achilles, this section analyzes scenes that appear in the three novels and in the *Iliad*. It identifies the degree to which each novel indicates that Patroclus and Achilles

have a sexual relationship, and how this relationship reveals each authors' reception of Achilles. Since the novels present Patroclus from the perspective of Briseis, this section analyzes how Patroclus treats Briseis as a slave in direct comparison to how Achilles treats her. In each novel, these interactions inform the authors' representation of Briseis, which in turn informs the central message of their works.

Because Achilles' relationship with Patroclus plays such a pivotal role in the *Iliad* and is so important to defining his character, Part Two briefly discusses some of the history of scholarship behind the pair's relationship, including the range of speculation and interpretation of how sexually involved the two were in the *Iliad*. It also discusses the ancient Greek attitudes towards homosexuality and considers some important terms, such as *erastes* (lover) and *eromenos* (being loved), that inform the complex nature of the two men's relationship. Understanding this terminology and the history behind Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship provides context with which to approach the authors' reception of this relationship, and thereby their treatment of Achilles.

Part Three focuses on Hecuba and the Trojan women after the fall of Troy. As Parts One and Two employed Homer and the *Iliad* in its examination of the novels, Part Three employs Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*. The section details how the authors receive Euripides, follow his example to highlight the plight of women in wartime captivity, and draw attention to the consequences of war present, but not explored, in the *Iliad*. The authors execute this through their portrayals of Hecuba, her relationship with her surviving family (Polyxena, Cassandra, and Andromache), and her reaction to her own fate and the fate of her children. The difference in reception between the authors comes in large part from Hecuba's reaction to Astyanax's (Andromache's and Hector's son, her grandson) death, and Polyxena's sacrifice. Part Three

demonstrates that while the authors' treatment of Briseis operates in opposition to Homer, their treatment of Hecuba aligns with Euripidean ideas. The authors channel Euripides in portraying Hecuba's grief, anger, and helplessness in order to supplement their central messages identified in Parts One and Two.

Part Three provides a short introduction to Euripides and the two tragedies used in the thesis, briefly explaining the political landscape at the time Euripides wrote *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, as well as discussing the traits characteristic of a Euripidean play. I then analyze first *The Silence of the Girls*, then *A Thousand Ships*, and finally, *For the Most Beautiful*. The approach in this part mirrors Part One, identifying and analyzing the scenes from the original plays that correspond to scenes from the novels. Polyxena's farewell to Hecuba in *Hecuba*, Polyxena's words in *Hecuba* to Odysseus when he leads her away, and Hecuba's persuasive speech to Menelaus against Helen in *Trojan Women* play a vital role in the discussion of this part. How Hauser, Barker, and Haynes handle these scenes informs their representation of Hecuba and their reception of Euripides. The section concludes with a discussion of how the authors' portrayal of Hecuba works alongside their portrayals of Briseis to further the message of the novels. And finally, Part three discusses how Briseis' and Hecuba's experiences represent victimized women who are objectified, overlooked, and unheard in society. These messages reflect and evoke aspects of sexual violence and female empowerment prevalent in the authors' contemporary cultural landscape.

Part One. Achilles' Treatment of Briseis as a Vehicle for Message in *The Silence of the Girls*, *For the Most Beautiful*, and *A Thousand Ships*.

Achilles is the greatest warrior of the *Iliad* and the central character of Homer's epic poem. This is not the case in *The Silence of the Girls*, *A Thousand Ships*, and *For the Most Beautiful*, which explore what happens physically and emotionally to women captured during and after the Trojan War. Although these novels do not focus on Achilles, the authors nonetheless recognize how synonymous the warrior is with the *Iliad*, and thus how critical his portrayal is to any story about the Trojan War that takes inspiration from the *Iliad*. For these authors, Achilles represents Greek masculinity and oppression, and he becomes a vehicle to portray the women's experiences as captives. The different experiences of these women bring to light the distinctive message that each novel sends: *The Silence of the Girls* depicts the brutality of the Trojan War, exposing atrocities committed against female captives that do not appear in source works such as the *Iliad*; *A Thousand Ships* suggests that the consequences of war are pervasive, affecting all women, even those not present for the fighting; *For the Most Beautiful* contends that women in captivity fight their own battles, and that they are every bit as heroic as the men in the Trojan War.

Part One of this thesis explores each novel's portrayal of Achilles within the context of his treatment of Briseis. Because many of these interactions derive directly from the *Iliad*, comparing scenes in the novels to Homer's presentation reveals the extent to which the authors deviate from his story, and to what extent they deviate from one another. Examining how and to what degree the authors portray Achilles' romantic relationship with Briseis, Patroclus, both, or neither reveals a different version of Achilles in each story. In Part One, therefore, I examine this dynamic with respect to Briseis, and then with respect to Patroclus in Part Two. Whichever of the two characters Achilles is interested in, sexually and romantically, affects how he treats the

other, and thereby affects our reading of the character. By influencing how the audience views Achilles, the authors elicit empathy or antipathy towards the hero and all he represents, and thereby reinforce their central messages. These messages reveal the authors' receptions of Homer and indicate that the ideas of the "heroic" and achievement of glory through battle prevalent in the *Iliad* carry with them consequences for women that Homer either overlooks or underrepresents.

The Silence of the Girls

Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* follows the perspective of Briseis, whom Achilles takes as his slave after sacking Lyrnessus and slaying her husband in the process. She returns with him to his tent in the Greek camp, where he resides with Patroclus. Briseis must learn to live under the rule of a man who killed her family and who sexually violates her each night. Briseis recognizes that this is her new reality, and she will have to endure slavery to survive. Later, when Agamemnon must return Chryseis to her father to appease Apollo, he takes Briseis from Achilles. She must then serve Agamemnon and endure his sexual violations, as well as weather his feud with Achilles.⁷¹ After Patroclus is killed in battle by Hector, Agamemnon returns Briseis to Achilles as recompense for Achilles agreeing to return to battle the Trojans. She becomes pregnant with Achilles' child, and before Achilles dies, he marries her to Alcimus, one of his lieutenants.

On Briseis' first night as a captive in the Greek camp, she observes the Greeks celebrating their victory over destroying Lyrnessus, slaughtering its men, and enslaving its

⁷¹ A deviation from the *Iliad*, in which Agamemnon returns Briseis to Achilles claiming not to have lain with her.

women. While the men drink wine, sing songs, and smell of sweat and blood, Briseis dreads what will happen when Achilles takes her back to his hut. Her fears come to fruition when Achilles rapes her that night, during which she thinks bitterly, “I lay there, hating him, though of course he wasn’t doing anything he didn’t have a perfect right to do. If his prize of honour had been the armour of a great lord he wouldn’t have rested till he’d tried it out” (24). Briseis makes clear two things: that this sexual violence is a validated norm, and that she hates Achilles for it. As Briseis becomes accustomed to her role in the camp, Barker continues this line of thinking when Briseis ponders, “My only real duty was to wait on Achilles and his captains at dinner.... At first, I couldn’t understand why he wanted me there, but then I remembered I was his prize of honour, his reward for killing sixty men in one day” (32). Barker couples violence with validation by having Achilles flaunt Briseis like a shining piece of armor, his trophy. These two ideas recur throughout the novel, and by highlighting this brutal reality, Barker aims to disenchant the modern reader of any idealistic notions they may hold about the Trojan War or Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad*.

Achilles further objectifies Briseis when Nestor arrives to deliver the message that Achilles must yield Briseis. Achilles becomes irate, and when Nestor attempts to calm Achilles, he rails against Agamemnon, saying ““None of that gives him the right to take another man’s prize of honour. It doesn’t belong to him; he hasn’t *earnt* it”” (97). Briseis reacts to the conversation by homing in on the word ‘it.’ She directs the reader’s focus to the aspect of the conversation which most negatively reflects on Achilles. Briseis continues, “There was a lot more, but I’d stopped listening. Honour, courage, loyalty, reputation—all those big words being bandied about—but for me there was only one word, one very small word: *it*. *It* doesn’t belong to

him, he hasn't earned *it*" (97). The repeated word resonates in the reader's mind, signifying Achilles considers Briseis an object.

In the *Iliad*, when Achilles first learns that he must relinquish Briseis, Homer reveals Achilles' feelings when he cries to his mother, Thetis. Once Briseis is taken he complains,

And the anger took hold of Atreus' son, and in speed standing
He uttered his threat against me, and now it is a thing accomplished.
For the girl the glancing-eyed Achaeans are taking to Chryse
In a fast ship, also carrying to the king presents. But even
Now the heralds went away from my shelter leading
Briseus' daughter, whom the sons of the Achaeans gave me.⁷²

Homer does not name Briseis, instead referring to her as Briseus' daughter. Acknowledging that the structure of Homeric poetry might necessitate the poet to use Briseis' name only if it fit into the meter, referring to her only as the daughter of Briseus nevertheless creates distance between Achilles and Briseis.⁷³ Achilles also implies possession of Briseis when he says, "whom the sons of the Achaeans gave me." This distancing effect and signal of ownership suggest Achilles' issue lies with honor. Achilles makes an emotional complaint to his mother, not a rhetorical or political argument that might be levied in front of his fellow Greeks. Here, he would hold no reservations in making known his feelings for Briseis. He does not reveal any such feelings to his mother, and the nature of his complaints agree with scholarly assertions that Homer was not interested in exploring the love life of Achilles, but his honor.⁷⁴

⁷² Homer *Il.* I.386-392. Translated by R. Lattimore (1951).

⁷³ Clarke (2004) discusses Homeric verse in his chapter on Homer: 'Formulas, metre and type-scenes.' He explains the different groupings of name and epithet formulas, and how Homer uses them to fit into the structure of his verse.

⁷⁴ King (1987) 171; Fantuzzi (2012) 226 for example.

This reading is by no means definitive, and many suggest that Achilles' interest in Briseis extends into the romantic in addition to representing his honor. Here the question of translation comes into play, with close textual readings differing based upon different interpretations of the Greek. For example, Lombardo translates this same passage,

Agamemnon got angry, stood up
And threatened me, and made good his threat.
The high command sent the girl on a fast ship
Back to Chryse with gifts for Apollo,
And heralds led away my girl, Briseis,
Whom the army had given to me.⁷⁵

Lombardo's Achilles calls Briseis by name, referring to her as "my girl," which, while conveying ownership, also suggests familiarity. Familiarity does not imply that Achilles feels love for Briseis in this moment, but Lombardo's translation indicates a closer relationship than Lattimore's. Thus, the significance of this passage is influenced by interpretation. I do not suggest that Barker follows Lombardo's translation specifically, but she does adopt some of the sentiment offered by his translation. She focuses her interpretation on the possessive, and she even goes so far as to identify and remove the ideas of honor, courage, loyalty, and reputation from the equation. Briseis points them out, but then casts them aside, drawing attention solely to her identity as "it," evoking a negative reading of Achilles.

An even more telling distinction between the novel and the *Iliad* occurs when Agamemnon attempts to reconcile with Achilles. In both the novel and *Iliad*, Agamemnon sends Odysseus and Ajax as ambassadors to make a conciliatory proposal to Achilles. Unfortunately for Agamemnon, Achilles rebukes the offer and cites his injured honor. In Lattimore's translation, Achilles says of Briseis,

⁷⁵ Homer *Il.* I.402-407. Translated by S. Lombardo (1997).

And why was it the son of Atreus assembled and led here
These people? Was it not for the sake of lovely-haired Helen?
Are the sons of Atreus alone among mortal men the ones
Who love their wives? Since any who is a good man, and careful,
Loves her who is his own and cares for her, even as I now
Loved this one from my heart, though it was my spear that won her.
Now that he has deceived me and taken from my hands my prize of honor,
Let him try me no more. I know him well. He will not persuade me.⁷⁶

Briseis is Achilles' rightfully awarded prize of honor, his property. In Achilles' eyes, Agamemnon has undermined the entire justification for fighting against Troy. King writes, "The parallel between his loss of Briseis and Menelaus' loss of Helen implies a parallel between Agamemnon and Paris."⁷⁷ King cites Achilles' frustration at the other Greeks who seem oblivious to the obvious injustice. The reason they all sailed to war in the first place was because Paris stole Helen, who is essentially Menelaus' property. Now, Agamemnon threatens to steal Achilles' rightfully earned property, and yet all the Greeks seem to gloss over this fact. Hainsworth laments how Achilles objectifies Briseis by employing her as a tool in his argument: "It is a pity that he should make this declaration, emphatic though it is, only in a context where his rhetoric requires."⁷⁸ Fantuzzi agrees with a rhetorical reading of this speech, suggesting Achilles' words are geared towards persuading his friends and allies of Agamemnon's fallacy. Fantuzzi points out a cogent argument, made by one of the scholia, in which Achilles questions Agamemnon's and the entire Greek motive for fighting the war:

This speech is practical, showing that Agamemnon is either unintelligent or unjust. For if Agamemnon believes it is of little consequence to be wronged about a woman, he should not go to war over Helen; he is therefore stupid to wage war for an insignificant reason. If, on the other hand, receiving an offence for a woman is a serious and weighty matter,

⁷⁶ Homer *Il.* IX.338-345. Translated by R. Lattimore (1951).

⁷⁷ King (1987) 33.

⁷⁸ Hainsworth (1993) 108.

how is it that he is vexed after having suffered this at the hands of foreigners, but believes that he does no wrong if he does the same to friends?⁷⁹

Achilles refuses to fight when he receives no support from the other Greek leaders, a refusal which results in the Greeks almost losing the entire war, and points to Briseis as the cause in the same way that Paris stealing Helen resulted in the war.

This pivotal embassy scene from the *Iliad* demonstrates the range and power of interpretation of Homer. Achilles' withdrawal from battle and refusal to fight could be seen as a rejection of the masculine, heroic model to which Barker reduces Achilles. In Barker's embassy scene, her interpretation makes clear that Achilles' injured honor is his motivation not to fight and not his love for Briseis, and she casts him in a negative light. Achilles' response to Odysseus and Ajax is, "Tell him he can fuck her till her back breaks. Why would I care?" (139). Briseis reacts viscerally to this statement, gasping and pulling away from Achilles, and Patroclus must come to her aid to remove her from the situation. His words have lasting impact on Briseis, and they run through her mind when she sees or thinks of him.⁸⁰ In this way Barker emphasizes Achilles' character, or rather the aspect of his character that she wants to highlight: a negative masculinity concerned solely with reputation and that views these captured women as sex objects and property.

This reading shines a light on a facet of the Trojan War that Homer neglects. Where Homer concerns himself with the exploits of men and conquests of war, he fails to explore the

⁷⁹ Fantuzzi quoting the scholia, (2012) 111. 'Homeric scholia' refers to the unknown authors of annotations found in margins and between the lines of manuscripts generally deriving from the Hellenistic or Imperial periods. These annotations are meant to clarify the text of Homer or scholarship on Homer. See Schironi (2020) for the impact of the scholia on Homeric scholarship.

⁸⁰ Barker (2018) 141, 144.

unpleasant consequences of slavery that come with that victory. At the end of *Silence*, Briseis ponders,

What will they make of us, the people of those unimaginably distant times? One thing I do know: they won't want the brutal reality of conquest and slavery. They won't want to be told about the massacres of men and boys, the enslavement of women and girls. They won't want to know we were living in a rape camp. (291)

Barker addresses the experiences of those who lost the war and challenges the modern audience to reconsider works such as the *Iliad*, implying Homer underrepresents the consequences of the war. The *Iliad* does include many instances of death and does not shy away from depicting slavery but speaks of battle as a means for glory and slavery as one of the prizes. Homer even talks openly of rape when Nestor attempts to rally his comrades:

Therefore let no man be urgent to take the way homeward
Until after he has lain in bed with the wife of a Trojan
To avenge Helen's longing to escape and her lamentations.⁸¹

Sexual violence is encouraged as a tribute to the warriors' conquest but fails to account for the other side of that violence. Kirk agrees with this reading in his commentary on the *Iliad*, arguing, "The recommendation of mass rape (which is what it amounts to) is phrased in a typically epic – that is, bowdlerized – way, almost as if one were simply to take one's place in the marital bed for a long night's rest."⁸² Kirk identifies the tendency in epic, and Homer, to sanitize these instances of deplorable behavior. *The Silence of the Girls* demonstrates the consequence for these women, suggesting that brushing past these actions without detailing the experience of the women victims of rape, slaughter, and slavery masks the truth of what was happening. As a result, those who read works such as the *Iliad* today are left with idealistic notions that do not properly

⁸¹ Homer *Il.* II.354-356. Translated by R. Lattimore (1951).

⁸² Kirk (1985) 153.

represent the figures of the Trojan War, figures which are characterized and represented in *The Silence of the Girls* by Achilles.

Briseis' and Achilles' relationship culminates in *Silence* with Briseis' pregnancy, which Barker uses to illustrate Achilles' role in the patriarchy and to further reduce Briseis' value. Up until this point in the novel, Briseis has only served as Achilles' slave and sex object, and she has not been allowed any agency. This changes only after she becomes pregnant, and we learn through narration, "The idea of this new life worms itself into [Achilles'] mind. And with that comes a renewed fear of dying" (272). Following the death of Patroclus, Achilles had resolved to return to the war and accept his fate to die in battle, but that resolve falters with the knowledge of his unborn child. Achilles feels responsible, and while the life of Briseis is not enough to give him pause, the prospect of his baby does. To clear his conscience and ensure a good life for the child, Achilles makes his lieutenant, Alcimus, promise to marry Briseis in the event of his death, saying, "I want you to take her to my father. I want the child to grow up in my father's house.... No, there's no need to tell her yet. As long as you know what's happening" (274). Briseis does not enter into the equation here. Achilles speaks directly to Alcimus to negotiate Briseis' future, saying that she does not need to know anything. Briseis' agency is once again absent as Achilles passes her off to another man, not to secure her future, but to secure his unborn child's future.

For the Most Beautiful

Hauser's *For the Most Beautiful* splits its perspective between Briseis and Krisayis.⁸³ Briseis' story begins with her courtship and marriage to Mynes in Lyrnessus. The Greeks sack

⁸³ Hauser (2016) 375. Hauser respells the Greek, 'Chryseis,' as 'Krisayis.' According to her Author's Note, she does this "Both in order to maintain a more Anatolian presence in the text...and to avoid confusion between Briseis and Chryseis' names."

the city, Achilles slays Mynes and takes Briseis as his prize. In the Greek camp, she becomes Achilles' slave, but refuses his advances. Rather than punish her, he admires her spirit, does not sexually assault her, and allows her to voice her opinions. Despite the circumstances, Briseis falls in love with Achilles. Just as their romantic relationship begins, Agamemnon returns Kriemhild to her father and claims Briseis from Achilles. Offended and irate, Achilles refuses to fight. While serving Agamemnon, Briseis meets frequently with Patroclus, and during an argument convinces him to take Achilles' place in the war. Patroclus dies in battle, and Briseis is returned to Achilles in exchange for his agreement to return to battle. They do not interact again before Achilles dies. At the close of the novel, Briseis aids in the evacuation of Troy, and throws herself onto Achilles' funeral pyre in order to escape Agamemnon's guards.

For the Most Beautiful uses the relationship between Briseis and Achilles to shine a light on how women in captivity fight their own battles and to demonstrate, as Hauser writes in her afterword, "how rich and exciting their stories are in their own right – quite capable of rivaling even Achilles' tale" (376). Rather than the traditional heroic epic reading we see in *Silence*, Hauser draws upon erotic love to motivate her Achilles. She emphasizes Briseis' influence over the hero, contrasting the relationship with that between Patroclus and Achilles.

Briseis' and Achilles' relationship begins with violence. When he attempts to rape Briseis in his tent immediately after they return to the Greek camp from Lyrnessus, she fights back: "Without thinking what I was doing, without even deciding to do it, I scrambled to my feet and slapped him, hard, across the face before he had taken his next breath" (144). Rather than punish Briseis, even execute her for such a violation, Achilles is impressed. He says, "'Who would have thought it.... A slave girl, a match for Achilles'" (145). Hauser establishes two important points here: the enslaved women in the novel will take action to secure their future (rather than silently

endure as we saw in *Silence*), and she paints Achilles in a positive light when he acknowledges Briseis, our protagonist.

Briseis refuses to have sex with Achilles a second time, and again, he acquiesces to her. He tells her, “I shall not force you.... No one should make love because they have to” (152). Twice Briseis has challenged Achilles, the greatest Greek warrior, and succeeded. Achilles’ acquiescence draws the reader’s attention to his willingness to comply with Briseis’ demands and paints him in a positive light. Success for the women in *For the Most Beautiful* becomes vital, because failure would undermine the novel’s theme that women in captivity can play an active role in their survival despite their constrained position both as captured slaves and but also within the Greek social hierarchy. This is not to say Barker’s Briseis was unsuccessful. She perseveres in a way that emphasizes enduring slavery to survive. Success for Hauser’s Briseis lies in her agency and ability to survive by defying Achilles and the Greeks.

Hauser develops Achilles and Briseis’ relationship by establishing an emotional connection. She reveals that Achilles cares for Briseis in a remorseful exchange after Achilles sacks Pedasus. During the raid, he unknowingly slays her father and brothers. He returns to a distraught Briseis and learns who he just killed. Achilles speaks in pain, saying “‘I would never have wished to hurt you,’ he said gently, leaning towards me, his voice straining with emotion. ‘Never, Briseis. If I could take back what I did—’” (207). Briseis is filled with emotion, and despite what he has done, she understands and forgives Achilles. She acknowledges that he has a destiny and that his actions are an inevitability of war. In this moment, Briseis gives in to her feelings and for the first time sleeps with Achilles.

This act of consensual sex solidifies their connection and heightens the emotional impact for Achilles when Agamemnon takes Briseis away from him. Revisiting the passage from the

Iliad in which Achilles declares his love for Briseis, the words take on new meaning. Achilles cries,

Since any who is a good man, and careful,
Loves her who is his own and cares for her, even as I now
Loved this one from my heart, though it was my spear that won her.
Now that he has deceived me and taken from my hands my prize of honor,
Let him try me no more. I know him well. He will not persuade me.⁸⁴

Hauser, it would seem, latches on to Achilles' declaration of love in constructing her version of the relationship between Achilles and Briseis. Achilles declares he loves Briseis "from my heart."⁸⁵ Further, "Loved this one from my heart" suggests a deeper connection to Briseis than that of master and slave or warrior and prize of honor. Fantuzzi points out the practical nature of this speech, that Achilles addresses those Greeks siding with Agamemnon by pointing out that he has many other slaves, but "this one" he loves.⁸⁶ Where Barker interprets "this one" and "prize of honor" as objectifying Briseis, *For the Most Beautiful* suggests that "this one" raises Briseis above all others.

Losing Briseis catalyzes Achilles' refusal to fight, even more than Agamemnon's slight to Achilles' honor. When the herald Talthylus arrives to take Briseis to Agamemnon, Achilles does not speak of injured honor, but says instead, "'He thinks he can take away the only —' his voice grew thick and harsh... 'the only woman I've ever—' He broke off, breathing heavily. 'I swear it, if it were not for Athena's command, I should cut out his coward's heart and feed it to the dogs!'" (233). Achilles is angry over losing the person he loves, more than losing his prize.

⁸⁴ Homer *Il.* IX.341-345. Translated by R. Lattimore (1951).

⁸⁵ Homer *Il.* IX.343. Lombardo (1997) gives the same translation of the line.

⁸⁶ Fantuzzi (2012) 111.

In this way, Hauser intensifies the role women in captivity play in the story. In *For the Most Beautiful*, Briseis' actions and desires motivate Achilles, whereas in *Silence*, it does not matter to Achilles what Briseis does; her value derives from her status as a prize.

After she is taken away by Agamemnon, Briseis is unable to interact with Achilles. Instead, she meets with Patroclus while fulfilling her duties around camp, so that he can explain how her lover is doing. Patroclus relays Achilles' distress and anger at her removal, as well as his own jealousy of Achilles' affection for Briseis. He reveals that he is in love with Achilles and argues that he is more deserving of a relationship with Achilles (an important idea that I discuss later), and an argument breaks out between the two (277). She shouts at Patroclus in anger, "It is no wonder that Achilles does not love you, Patroclus, if you are a man of so little honour.... He told me so, Patroclus! He told me so himself! He thinks you are a *coward!*" (277). Hauser further reveals Briseis' influence over events and people by linking this verbal attack with Patroclus' motivation to fight in Achilles' place. Briseis tries to retract the statement by apologizing, saying "I am sorry, Patroclus, I said. 'I was angry, I only said it to upset you'" (277). But the damage has been done, and Briseis sets in motion the events that lead to his death, and consequently Achilles' return to the battlefield.

By the time Briseis reunites with Achilles after Patroclus' death, he is a changed man. Briseis begs him not to return to the battlefield, but the sight of Patroclus' dead body is too much for the Greek warrior, who according to Briseis, "seemed wild, desperate, possessed" (318). The loss of his lifelong companion shatters any desire for erotic love or romantic relationship, and Achilles returns to the war with only revenge in mind. He dies on the battlefield before he and Briseis can interact again in the text. His death signifies a point of no return for Hauser's Briseis. She has fallen in love with the warrior, but still harbors anger at the Greeks for destroying her

home. She is torn between the two worlds and finds herself with no more allies in the Greek camp. With resolve she declares, “Since Death had chosen to take from me the men I loved, I would join them in the Underworld myself and make my destiny at last” (361). Her final triumphant act is to drug the Greek sentries to enable the Trojan civilians to evacuate their city unnoticed. After her treachery is discovered, Briseis throws herself onto Achilles’ funeral pyre and dies. This is Briseis’ ultimate display of agency, choosing where, when, and how to end her own life. Hauser innovates here in an extreme way from Homer’s narrative, in both the evacuation of Troy and in Briseis’ death. Neither occur in the *Iliad*. Including them is a declaration of Briseis and Krisayis’ achievement, which undermines the Homeric idea of glory through battle, and reinforces Hauser’s overall message of female empowerment.

A Thousand Ships

Haynes’ *A Thousand Ships* is set in the aftermath of the Trojan War. The Greeks have sacked Troy, and Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena, and Cassandra await their fate in the Greek camp. Haynes flashes backward and forward in time to provide the perspective of many of the female characters associated with the war. In just one of the flashbacks, we see Briseis’ and Chryseis’ perspectives. First, we see through Chryseis’ eyes as she and Briseis wait for the Greek leaders to select which woman they want as their slave. Once Agamemnon chooses Chryseis and Achilles chooses Briseis, we shift to Briseis’ perspective. She begins her slave work in Achilles’ tent, serving food and drink and cleaning. We learn that Achilles has selected her not for himself, but as a gift for Patroclus’ sexual gratification. When Chryses arrives in the Greek camp to ransom his daughter, Agamemnon forces Achilles to yield Briseis. She then quickly recounts the

remaining events of the *Iliad*: Achilles' refusal to fight, Agamemnon returning her to Achilles, Patroclus' death, and Hector's death. Soon after, Achilles dies, and their chapter ends.

Achilles' role in *A Thousand Ships* is far reduced when compared to the other two novels. His life spans a mere two chapters of Haynes' story, and his relationship with Briseis, only one. Much of the purpose for these chapters is to relay the information from the *Iliad*. Dedicating so little space to these events requires uncomplicated characters. What we see on the page, therefore, focuses on the idea of Briseis as a prize and emphasizes Achilles' rivalry with Agamemnon. Haynes' treatment of Briseis as a prize and symbol of Achilles' honor aligns with the role many scholars see for her in the *Iliad*.⁸⁷ Achilles chooses Briseis not for himself, but for Patroclus, removing his emotional attachment from consideration. In fact, Briseis and Achilles never interact or speak to one another in the novel. She spends a great deal of time in Achilles' tent, and readers can assume words could have been exchanged, but Haynes leaves any such interaction off the page.

Briseis and Chryseis arrive in the Greek camp at the same time and are assembled in a lineup from which the Greek leaders choose which girl they will take as their prize. It is established that with each successful raid, the soldiers place the captured women in order from most to least beautiful, so that the leaders will have an easier time picking. They order Briseis and Chryseis in line, and Agamemnon, who gets first choice as leader, picks Chryseis, who has been deemed most beautiful. Achilles goes second and takes Briseis. Briseis follows Achilles and Patroclus back to their tent and listens as they complain about Agamemnon. This

⁸⁷ Kirk (1985), King (1987), Hainsworth (1993), Felson & Slatkin (2004), and Fantuzzi (2012) to name a few scholars who discuss Briseis' role as a prize of war.

conversation reveals that Achilles bribed the soldiers to place Chryseis ahead of Briseis in the lineup to cheat Agamemnon of the prettiest girl. They jibe,

‘Agamemnon chose first,’ the second man said. ‘He’ll never be able to say he didn’t.’
‘Imagine his face when he looks at that girl by torchlight tonight, and sees she is scarcely more than a child,’ Achilles said. ‘You should send your girl to collect water as close to his quarters as possible every day, so he can see what he missed out on.’ (85)

In this passage, Briseis and Chryseis are reduced to objects of beauty. Achilles’ suggestion to flaunt Briseis in front of Agamemnon implies she is nothing more than a trophy won in a contest. Further, this conversation is held right in front of Briseis, but she is ignored, which emphasizes her passive role in the novel. Haynes also uses this moment to heighten Achilles’ and Agamemnon’s rivalry.

Later, in conversation with Patroclus, Briseis discusses how Achilles slew her husband and brothers when he sacked Lyrnessus. Patroclus laughs, saying “‘They will call him the greatest hero who ever lived,’ he replied. ‘What are the lives of your kin, against the hundreds he has killed already?’” (93). Patroclus’ words clarify the novel’s interpretation of the *Iliad* and of Achilles: he is meant for glory, and the fate of a bystander like Briseis does not matter in his pursuit of greatness. Briseis understands this reasoning but questions whether Achilles’ path is the best. She replies, “‘Is that the only measure of greatness? Killing so many that you have lost count? Making no distinction between warriors and unarmed men and women?’” (93). Patroclus cannot answer these questions, and the reader is left to consider how they apply to Achilles’ legacy. These questions, and Patroclus’ inability to answer them, address the larger idea of the novel’s reception of Homer: Homer’s concern with achieving glory through battle is misplaced and underrepresents the women who must face the consequences of men’s actions. Briseis poses the questions to Patroclus, but she speaks as if confronting Homer about these ideas. Achilles and Patroclus, and Homer, may recognize the countless lives affected along Achilles’ path to

glory, but they fail to fully address or explore the consequences Achilles' actions. Ultimately, all three novelists, not merely Haynes, flatten the complexity of Homer's Achilles in order to highlight the marginalization of Briseis. Briseis represents all enslaved women in the three novels, and by reducing Achilles' motive and identity solely to representing a warrior code that seeks glory, the three novelists are able to demonstrate the consequences attached to Achilles' actions, namely, women's choice and agency. In so demonstrating, the novelists project the voice of those shaped by contemporary focus on predatory male relations towards women.

Returning to *A Thousand Ships*, this kind of reduction and simplification of Achilles may be seen when Agamemnon sends Odysseus to Achilles' tent to claim and bring back Briseis. This scene mirrors the beginning of the *Iliad* when Agamemnon incites his rift with Achilles. By replacing Talthibius and Eurybates, the heralds who deliver Briseis in Homer's poem, with Odysseus, Haynes deviates from the *Iliad* and simplifies the story, inserting the more recognizable Odysseus. Including him here also provides an opportunity for Haynes to explain briefly the role of the other Greek leaders, whose function in the novel is to support Agamemnon. They are described as "counselors" (100), and their reduced role highlights that Agamemnon and Achilles are the main players in the story. When Odysseus tells Achilles he must relinquish Briseis, "Achilles wept, from impotent rage, and Patroclus wept to see his friend so angered. But Briseis, carried away to another man's tent, and another man's bed, did not" (100). Haynes elects not to have Achilles speak during the exchange, and neither is he present during the council when Agamemnon orders Briseis taken. Removing Achilles' voice in these moments forfeits any depth that the reader can extract about his character, but Haynes is not concerned with a complex Achilles. Introducing complications for Achilles such as erotic love for either Briseis or Patroclus, or his battle with fate, might generate empathy for the character.

This would undermine Achilles' role as an example of Greek masculinity who demonstrates that the concern of these Greek warriors was glory, honor, and status.

Haynes has removed a sexual relationship between Briseis and Achilles altogether. It is not for himself that he claims her as prize, but for Patroclus. After being selected and following Achilles and Patroclus back to their hut, Briseis overhears Achilles say, "'Of course I bribed them. You said she was the one you wanted, and I wanted you to have her'" (85). It is not Achilles who forces her to bed, but Patroclus. Haynes writes, "She did not weep when Patroclus took her to his bed, even though the memory of her husband was still so raw that she could sense his presence" (100). By transferring the relationship to Patroclus, Achilles truly sees Briseis as nothing more than a prize, his slave. She becomes arguably more objectified than in *Silence*, for Haynes presents her as a pawn that Achilles manipulates. He uses her to cheat Agamemnon out of receiving the most beautiful war prize and then passes her off to Patroclus. When Agamemnon forces him to hand over Briseis, it is hard to find sympathy for the hero, knowing how and why he acquired her.

That Haynes switches the relationship from Achilles and Briseis to Patroclus and Briseis is an interesting deviation from the *Iliad* that brings up the point of Achilles' sexuality. Examining Achilles and Briseis' relationship in each of these three novels demonstrates that Achilles' decisions greatly depend upon his sexual relationship with and his feelings for the girl. The same is true for his relationship with Patroclus, who acts as Achilles' counsel and whose death drives Achilles back to the battlefield. The dynamic between the two relationships informs readings of Achilles in both the *Iliad* and in the three novels of this study. In Part Two, I examine Patroclus and Achilles in much the same way I examined Briseis and Achilles, exploring how the

novelists' use the two men's relationship to help reveal Achilles' character, his treatment of Briseis, and further the messages of their novels.

Part Two. Patroclus' and Achilles' Relationship and Its Effect on Achilles' Treatment of Briseis.

The opacity in the *Iliad* regarding the specifics of Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship has led authors and scholars to reinterpret Achilles and Patroclus' relationship as homoerotic to varying degrees, or to find no eroticism present whatsoever. On one hand, scholars such as Fantuzzi argue that "In terms of the poetics of the epic genre, Homer had no interest in emphasizing an erotic ontology of this exceptional intensity."⁸⁸ Others suggest instead that the eroticism between Achilles and Patroclus is plainly apparent to an educated reader, and W. M. Clarke in his chapter on Achilles and Patroclus suggests that it is telling that so many authors of antiquity thought of and represented the two as lovers.⁸⁹ Unanimity in opinion does not exist among either ancient or modern scholars, and as reception theory suggests, neither has unmitigated access to Homer. It is therefore dangerous to privilege one over the other, and regardless, this study does not suggest any "correct" interpretation of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship. Rather, Barker, Haynes, and Hauser are among the latest to reinterpret the relationship, and Part Two of this thesis explores Achilles and Patroclus' relationship in *The Silence of the Girls*, *For the Most Beautiful*, and *A Thousand Ships*, with attention to how their relationship affects Achilles' treatment of Briseis and the message of these novels.

An important concept to understand while discussing the controversy and dynamic between Achilles and Patroclus is the function of *eros* and the *erastes/eromenos* relationship. Deriving from the god of the same name, *eros* refers to passionate love. Like the modern English word 'love,' it may range in intensity from a more idealistic desire to intense physical desire.

⁸⁸ Fantuzzi (2012) 193.

⁸⁹ Clarke (1973) 381.

Erastes and *eromenos* are terms Kenneth Dover translates as ‘lover’ and ‘being loved,’ respectively, to describe a pederastic phenomenon in ancient Greek society in which an older man (*erastes*) would pursue and court a pre-adolescent boy (*eromenos*).⁹⁰ Further, more than simply pursuit, the terms include the connotation of how a sexual encounter would transpire between the two parties.

Dover describes the intent of the *erastes* and why the *eromenos* might reciprocate such a relationship:

What the *erastes* hopes to engender in the *eromenos* is...‘love in return’.... Love inspired by admiration and gratitude towards the *erastes*, coupled with compassion, induces the *eromenos* to grant the ‘favours’ and perform the ‘services’ which the *erastes* so obviously and passionately desires.⁹¹

The relationship did not require a sexual intimacy, but often did. Sexual or not, these relationships were accepted by society as regular.⁹² The *eromenos* may have multiple suitors, but once established in a relationship, was expected to acquiesce to the *erastes*’ advances. Such relationships were considered productive, giving the young boys a mentor of sorts to look up to and learn from. It was not unusual for the relationship to be employed as a military tactic, in which the *eromenos* would pair with a veteran soldier to gain martial experience.

The prevalence of the *erastes/eromenos* relationship in Greek society is why many scholars and readers of the *Iliad* believe that Achilles and Patroclus had such a relationship. The closeness of the two characters throughout the poem, coupled with Achilles’ visceral reaction to Patroclus’ death, suggest if not this, then some kind of close, intimate connection. Part of the

⁹⁰ Dover (1978) 16.

⁹¹ Dover (1978) 53.

⁹² Cohen (1991) 171.

reason for this is because Homer wrote no explicit passages in which the existence of a sexual relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is stated or implied, and the assignation of a sexual connotation to their relationship did not in fact emerge until Aeschylus' tragedies circa 500 B.C.E.⁹³ The extent of their relationship remains debatable and has been subject to countless interpretations. For instance, Plato describes Patroclus as Achilles' "lover," and that

Aeschylus talks nonsense when he says that it was Achilles who was in love with Patroclus; for he excelled in beauty not Patroclus alone but assuredly all the other heroes, being still beardless and, moreover, much the younger, by Homer's account.⁹⁴

Here, Plato argues that Achilles played the *eromenos* role in the relationship because he was the younger man, against Aeschylus' assertion that Achilles was the *erastes*.

These terms help contextualize the discussion of Part Two, which explores the extent of Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship in each of the novels, and specifically, how the degree of sexual intimacy between Patroclus and Achilles inversely affects Achilles' treatment of Briseis. While in some cases Patroclus and Briseis are in direct competition for Achilles' affections and in others Briseis has no agency in the situation, each novel uses Patroclus to further its depiction of Achilles.

The Silence of the Girls

Briseis is the internal narrator of *The Silence of the Girls*, and we see Patroclus and Achilles, in large part, through her eyes. Barker is deliberately ambiguous about Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship, and whether they have a sexual relationship. What the author does make

⁹³ Clarke (1973) 382; King (1987) 171; Fantuzzi (2012) 226.

⁹⁴ Plat. *Sym.* 179e-180a.

clear, through Briseis' observations, is that an intense connection exists between the two men, which could be indicative of an *erastes/eromenos* relationship. At first, Briseis remarks on the familial nature of these childhood friends and lifelong companions, remembering, "Once, I saw them walking together on the beach, Patroclus resting his hand on the nape of Achilles's neck, the gesture a man will sometimes make to a younger brother or a son" (33). Briseis, with a limited narrative perspective, identifies this moment as one suggesting a familial bond. She remarks about the nature of that the interaction, but at this point she dismisses it, as there is nothing to suggest more than simply a close bond shared between men who have spent a great deal of time together during and before the war.

For Barker, whether the two men have sex does not matter. The intense nature of their relationship exists to contrast with Briseis, who serves only as a slave, a symbol of honor, and means for sexual gratification. Briseis remarks of her first few days in camp, "I'd share Achilles's bed at night until he grew tired of me and then I'd be demoted to carrying buckets of water or cutting rushes to spread across the floors" (36). While Briseis endures her new existence as Achilles' slave, she gets to know his companion Patroclus and provides insight into the character of both men.

Briseis distinguishes a kind, caring Patroclus from a cold, indifferent Achilles. We see that serving as a foil to Achilles becomes part of Patroclus' role in the novel, as, for instance, Briseis recalls, "In those early days, I distrusted Patroclus's kindness because I couldn't understand it. Achilles's brutal indifference made a lot more sense" (34). Briseis' view of their relationship is tainted by her antipathy for Achilles, and she contrasts him with Patroclus to intensify their differing personalities and character traits, highlighting the "good" characteristics in Patroclus that Achilles does not possess. When Achilles displays rage against Agamemnon,

Patroclus arrives to calm his friend and help him think through the situation. Again, Briseis observes, “If [the day] had gone badly, Achilles would erupt, spewing out of contempt for Agamemnon.... Eventually, after a good deal of soothing from Patroclus, Achilles would pick up his lyre and begin to play” (48). Achilles is petulant, Patroclus is thoughtful. Fantuzzi describes their relationship in the *Iliad* as symbiotic, arguing, “The audience is thus left with fewer and fewer doubts that the disappearance of one of the two (and the resulting disruption of their common routine) will leave the other with the greatest sorrow and an absolute need for retaliation.”⁹⁵ Barker adheres to Homer’s representation of their symbiotic relationship in her interpretation, but also uses it to illuminate Achilles’ flaws.

Barker elaborates on the complicated nature of Achilles’ and Patroclus’ relationship through a conversation between Briseis and Patroclus. Briseis asks, ““Why are you always so nice to me?”” Patroclus replies, ““Because I know what it’s like to lose everything and be handed to Achilles as a toy”” (63). This exchange elicits sympathy from the reader for Patroclus and heightens his connection with Briseis, while simultaneously demeaning Achilles’ character. Patroclus explains to Briseis that in his youth, he accidentally killed a boy. As a result, he was sent to Achilles’ father, Peleus, to be fostered. There, his friendship with Achilles grew into the intense companionship we see on the page. Patroclus’ attempt to empathize with Briseis establishes the difference between the two. When Patroclus was given to Achilles as a toy, he acquiesced to his situation and developed a close relationship. Barker’s Briseis will never do the same, and moreover she recognizes while watching Patroclus and Achilles that there is no room for her in Achilles’ heart. Patroclus leaves Briseis to join Achilles on the beach, and Briseis

⁹⁵ Fantuzzi (2012) 209.

witnesses an intimate moment between the two in which Barker confronts the question of the erotic nature of their relationship. She writes, “For a moment, they stood facing each other, not speaking, then Achilles moved in closer till he was resting his head against Patroclus’s forehead. They stayed like that without moving or speaking for a long time” (65). Briseis feels embarrassed for stumbling into their private moment, and for the first time the text suggests an erotic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Barker alludes to the controversy when Briseis ruminates, “There were always those, then and later, who believed Achilles and Patroclus were lovers.... But what I saw on the beach that night went beyond sex, and perhaps even beyond love” (65-66). This is as close as we get to Barker’s acknowledgment of a sexual relationship between Patroclus and Achilles, and raising their relationship above the physical could indicate the “love of the soul” that Pausanias describes in the *erastes/eromenos* relationship.⁹⁶ For *The Silence of the Girls*, the moment on the beach illuminates for Briseis the depth of Patroclus’ and Achilles’ relationship. More importantly, by establishing such an intimate connection between the two men, Barker leaves little room in Achilles’ love life for Briseis.

Briseis recognizes the intuitive understanding between Achilles and Patroclus when Myron (the Greek in charge of camp maintenance) falls ill due to Apollo’s plague. The two companions exchange, “‘I’ll stay with him,’ Patroclus said. ‘No, you won’t,’ Achilles said. ‘You need something to eat.’ ‘So do you. Go on, bugger off, I’ll stay’” (75). This simple, lighthearted exchange reveals strength and comfort in the relationship. Patroclus puts Achilles first, and more importantly, Achilles puts Patroclus first.

⁹⁶Dover quotes Pausanias (1978) 83.

Barker presents Achilles' reaction to Patroclus' death as the apex of his love for Patroclus and the nadir of his interactions with Briseis. With Patroclus dead, Achilles cannot be soothed, and he blames Briseis. She remarks, "[Achilles] felt nothing but shame, he said, that he and his dear comrade Agamemnon had quarreled over a girl.... Better the girl had died when he took her city.... How much grief and suffering the Greeks would have been spared. How many brave men, now dead, would still be alive?" (188). Barker sums up Briseis' vital role in the Trojan War as Briseis becomes the object of intense remorse for Achilles, the reason his beloved Patroclus died. This recalls Achilles' argument with Agamemnon in *Iliad* IX, in which he compares taking Briseis to taking Helen, but none of his fellow Greek warriors took his side. Achilles could in this moment blame Agamemnon, but instead he calls him "his dear comrade" and blames Briseis, emphasizing just how far from his heart Briseis really is compared to Patroclus. When Patroclus dies and Achilles sees the body, he lets out a visceral scream, and, "Hearing his cry the women came pouring out of the huts and surrounded him, where he lay collapsed on the ground, powerless now for all his power" (181-182). Achilles' emotions burst forth; he cannot control himself, and he immediately returns to battle. By contrast, when Briseis was taken by Agamemnon, we did not see any such emotional outpouring.

Barker represents Patroclus as both a foil and a partner for Achilles. She maintains the ambiguity about their sexual relationship that many see in Homer, but there can be no doubt that the two share an intense bond in *The Silence of the Girls*. Barker's reception of the *Iliad* paints Achilles in a negative light, and she uses Patroclus to further that portrayal. His kindness towards Briseis shows what Achilles lacks, and his relationship with Achilles establishes that there is no room for Briseis to rise above her status as a prize and symbol of honor. She must then endure her captivity with Achilles, in which she is objectified and brutalized.

For the Most Beautiful

Hauser provides limited dialogue between Achilles and Patroclus and no access to their personal thoughts. Rather, she reveals their relationship through Briseis' reactions to events, as well as through her interactions with Patroclus and observations about Achilles. A rivalrous dynamic emerges between Briseis and Patroclus that we did not see in *Silence*. Rather than depict Achilles' many victories on the battlefield, Hauser sets up a different kind of battlefield, a love triangle involving Briseis, Patroclus, and Achilles that deviates from the imperative of fighting for glory in epic poetry that scholars such as Foley identify in Homer.⁹⁷ She creates a romantic battle with the prize being Achilles' affections and the power associated with them. The winner will not have power in the sense of controlling Achilles, but by virtue of being close to him and being loved and respected, he or she will have power to influence him, and the loser's presence will be diminished. Thus, if Achilles falls in love with Briseis, there will be little room left for Patroclus.

Hauser implies but never makes explicit the extent of Patroclus' and Achilles' romantic relationship. As I mentioned above, Patroclus becomes jealous of Briseis when Achilles turns his affections to her. This moment arrives as a revelation to Briseis, as Patroclus remarks, "‘I am sorry if it shocks you,’ Patroclus said stiffly, into the silence.... ‘You had no right to tear us apart’" (276). His statements heavily imply a preexisting relationship, but any evidence elsewhere in the book is only found in the subtext. It is vital for Hauser's Briseis to have the sympathy of the reader, and therefore it is possible Hauser fears providing more space for Patroclus and Achilles' relationship may dilute such sympathy.

⁹⁷ Foley (2004) 184.

One example subtext for Patroclus' and Achilles' relationship may be found in Briseis' first encounter with Patroclus, in which he cautions her not to refuse to have sex with Achilles:

'That is exactly why he wants you,' he said. 'He wants you in his bed because you are beautiful, but most of all because you are a princess. You are to him what all men want: that which they cannot have.' He took a deep breath. 'That is the only reason why you are still alive, Briseis.' (150)

When she attempts to run away from him, Patroclus stops Briseis and aggressively shouts,

'Briseis!' Patroclus called, running after me. 'Briseis, please stop!' He caught me by the shoulders and shook me, hard. 'You are bound to sleep with him. You have to. Achilles can be most...' he hesitated, looking for the right word '...most passionate when he is hot, in rage or in love. You have seen so already for yourself. There is no other way.' (151)

Patroclus' speaks as though from experience. When he says Achilles "can be most passionate," the reader can infer that Patroclus has experienced that passion himself. It suggests that the two are more than friends and fellow warriors and in a sexual relationship, and moreover, that Patroclus connects Achilles' love with rage and violence. This establishes a pattern for Achilles and warns Briseis and the reader of what it means to get close to Achilles.

Simultaneously, Hauser creates a disconnect here between Patroclus and Achilles. Patroclus speaks authoritatively about Achilles' emotions and desires, but Briseis proves Patroclus wrong. She wins over Achilles with her spirit, and he does not force her to sleep with him. Establishing distance between the men, Hauser makes room for Briseis to enter into a relationship with Achilles. In the process, she displaces Patroclus, who, in *Silence* and *For the Most Beautiful*, had such a powerful, symbiotic bond with Achilles that there was no room for Briseis.

Achilles' attraction to Briseis grows, and with it his emotional distance from Patroclus. We see this change evolve after Briseis declares that she will not have sex with Achilles. Patroclus again attempts to change her mind, but Achilles interrupts, "'Be quiet, Patroclus'....

[Achilles] seemed to fill the entire hut in his rage. 'Patroclus – get out,' he bellowed, and Patroclus stood up and ran, casting a single terrified glance at Achilles" (152). This is a striking response from Achilles, who rejects Patroclus, his lifelong companion, for Briseis in this moment. Achilles, "radiating heat and power and wrath, like an angry god" (152), terrifies his companion, signifying a victory for Briseis and a transfer in power from Patroclus to Briseis.

Despite Achilles' growing affections, Briseis cannot yet forgive his murderous actions against her family when he sacked Lyrnessus. She questions Patroclus, who defends Achilles' actions for reasons she cannot understand,

'I do not understand it. How can you bear to stay at home and defend him while he is out murdering innocent men? How can you, Patroclus?' 'It's not so simple,' he said, frowning. 'Men kill because they have to. Achilles is a man like any other. It is his job to kill. But he is capable of love, too.' (192)

This moment crystallizes the internal conflict of Hauser's Briseis, who eventually falls in love with Achilles despite her intentions. Briseis begins to acknowledge that war forces atrocities on both sides, and that Achilles may be more than the bloodthirsty man to whom she has been awarded when Achilles later explains to her, "From my earliest moments I have been trained to fight, told it is my duty and my destiny. I am a slave to my calling, Briseis, just as much as you are" (207). Achilles refers to himself when he describes Briseis' destiny and calling, and his words are sexually charged, as he advances towards her following his speech. Briseis describes the feeling "like a spirit" (207), as Achilles draws closer and she gives in to both Achilles and her feelings. In her own words she agrees with Achilles' assessment that he is her destiny, but adds, "He was both my downfall and my destiny" (208). Achilles' words are essentially a pick-up line, a seduction that succeeds because immediately following her revelation, Briseis has sex with Achilles for the first time. This marks the beginning of his romantic relationship with Briseis, and the end of the romantic relationship Achilles had with Patroclus.

This reading of Achilles contrasts with his crucial dilemma in the *Iliad*. Homer's Achilles must decide between leaving the war to live a long life in obscurity or staying to fight and die with glory.⁹⁸ Whereas Homer's Achilles threatens to sail away at one point, Hauser's Achilles makes no mention of a choice to return home.⁹⁹ Hauser places more power onto the erotic in directing Achilles' motives, and his love for Briseis keeps him in place.

In the struggle for Achilles' affection, Briseis defeats Patroclus once she becomes motivation for Achilles to remain in camp. Achilles could not simply leave with her because by this point, Agamemnon has reclaimed Briseis. Patroclus admits his defeat in the struggle for Achilles' affections when he confronts Briseis towards the end of the novel: "Of course you would not understand," he said. "You, with your beauty, whom every man you ever wanted has desired, and even the ones you did not.... I suppose *you* cannot imagine how it feels to watch the one you love spurn you" (276). Briseis does not initially understand the bitterness in Patroclus' voice or the painful expression on his face until he admits he is in love with Achilles (276). Achilles has rejected him in favor of Briseis, and Patroclus does not regain his place in Achilles' heart until after he dies.

After Hector kills Patroclus, Achilles resolves to return to battle to avenge his death. He states that he cares not about his quarrel with Agamemnon, and even when Briseis pleads with him not to fight, he ignores her. Achilles "had been destroyed, like a ripe crop of wheat flattened in a summer storm, when he had laid eyes upon Patroclus' dead body" (344). This shift of power back to Patroclus would seem to undermine Briseis' importance to Achilles. It also calls into question the power of erotic love that Hauser establishes as motivation for Achilles. Patroclus

⁹⁸ Homer, *Il.* IX.410-420 Achilles explains this as the prophecy his mother gave to him.

⁹⁹ Homer, *Il.* IX.356-363 for example.

and Achilles grew up together, so this could also be Hauser's interpretation of Achilles losing a childhood and lifelong best friend. As noted in Patroclus' remarks to Briseis above (276), Patroclus concedes bitterly before his death that Achilles' affections are only for Briseis. After his death, Achilles' emotions shift back to Patroclus when he refuses to acknowledge Briseis. His only concern is revenge against Troy for Patroclus' death. Achilles' love for Patroclus is re-established, thus rendering Briseis the ultimate loser in the battle with Patroclus for Achilles' affections.

Hauser makes clear that Achilles operates based upon his affection for those close to him. In this regard, Hauser's reception of the *Iliad* identifies a greater role for Briseis than Homer presents. By becoming the person for whom Achilles acts, Briseis' agency and her role in shaping events of the Trojan War drastically increase. Patroclus, then, becomes competition for her, and Hauser employs his character as a foil for Briseis to shed light on how and where Achilles places his affections. By having Briseis achieve success, Hauser delivers a message of female empowerment.

A Thousand Ships

Of the three authors, Haynes provides the most limited representation of Patroclus' and Achilles' relationship. Unlike *The Silence of the Girls* and *For the Most Beautiful*, Haynes does not even include much subtext that could suggest a sexual relationship between the two men. She does, however, highlight their close, intense relationship, but aligns with scholars like Fantuzzi who, in their reading of the *Iliad*, "Unavoidably conclude that just intensity, not erotic or sexual intensity, is the main feature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in narrative

terms.”¹⁰⁰ With only one chapter dedicated to Achilles and Patroclus, Haynes eliminates any doubt surrounding the matter by having Achilles secure Briseis as a gift for Patroclus.

Haynes first connects Patroclus and Achilles by describing their similar appearance through Chryseis’ observations as she lines up with other captives to be awarded to the commanders. Haynes writes, “[Achilles] turned to the man who stood beside him, slightly shorter, slightly less muscular, a darker reflection of himself” (80). The two appear inseparable on the page to match their mirrored appearances. Later, when Briseis has been selected by Achilles as his prize, and she follows Achilles and Patroclus to their tent, she observes the two men interacting. Patroclus bolsters Achilles’ pride for his successful “one-man killing spree” and Achilles consoles Patroclus for his “lesser martial prowess” (84). Briseis remarks to herself, “How curious, she thought. Two warriors determined to be so kind to one another” (84). One explanation for Briseis pointing out the Achilles’ and Patroclus’ kindness to each other could be to suggest a sexual relationship, but the rest of the chapter appears devoid of subtext to support this conclusion. Alternatively, Haynes acknowledges a relationship of extraordinary closeness between the two warriors, but not necessarily a sexual relationship. In *A Thousand Ships*, regardless of the extent of the relationship, it is a camaraderie in no way shared or competed for, as we saw in the other novels.

That Achilles chooses Briseis not for himself, but for Patroclus underscores Achilles’ deep attachment to his companion and marginalizes Briseis. We see this dynamic again when Odysseus arrives to take Briseis away from Achilles after Agamemnon claims her. Haynes writes, “She did not weep when Odysseus arrived in the Myrmidon camp.... Achilles wept, from

¹⁰⁰ Fantuzzi (2012) 193.

impotent rage, and Patroclus wept to see his friend so angered” (100). Here Achilles does not mourn the loss of a woman he loves. He claimed Briseis to give to Patroclus, and therefore Achilles’ anger and emotional outburst are for Patroclus’ loss, coupled with an outrage at Agamemnon for stealing his prize. Haynes’ addition of a sexual relationship between Patroclus and Briseis deviates from the *Iliad*, in which the only indication of Briseis’ feelings towards Patroclus comes after his body is returned to the Greek camp. Briseis falls upon his corpse and cries,

‘Patroklos, far most pleasing to my heart in its sorrows,
I left you here alive when I went away from the shelter,
But now I come back, lord of the people, to find you have fallen.
So evil in my life takes over from evil forever....
Therefore I weep your death without ceasing. You were kind always.’¹⁰¹

This passage suggests a bond of compassion between Briseis and Patroclus. This compassion, or pity, Fantuzzi identifies as Patroclus’ idiosyncratic contribution to the *Iliad*, in the same way that Achilles contributes rage.¹⁰² That Briseis would give such a response to Patroclus’ death despite her circumstances suggests Homer’s fondness for Patroclus, whose character he describes favorably, but “you were kind always” does not seem to carry enough weight to suggest a sexual relationship between the two, although it is not out of the realm of possibility. Fantuzzi, though, argues Briseis’ speech is targeted at Achilles:

Homer had left to the intelligence of his audience the task of understanding that Briseis’ lament for Patroclus, though concerned with Patroclus, was in fact addressed to Achilles, and was intended to be an expression of her anxiety about her own future, aimed at securing Achilles’ support.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Homer *Il.* XIX.287-300. Translated by R. Lattimore (1951).

¹⁰² Fantuzzi (2012) 203.

¹⁰³ Fantuzzi (2012) 129.

Such an appeal makes sense in *A Thousand Ships*, but in a different context. Achilles has shown no interest in Briseis, only acquiring her for his companion. With Patroclus gone, it would make sense that Briseis would be concerned for her well-being.

Haynes does include a similar scene in which Briseis confronts the corpse of Patroclus, but with a much different sentiment. Haynes writes, “While Achilles raged with grief, she washed Patroclus, and laid him out in his finest clothes. She was able to do for this man, her captor and her owner, what she had not been permitted to do for her husband. But she did not weep” (103). Briseis does not hold any emotional attachment to Patroclus. Their sexual relationship is one between master and slave. Including this in the novel serves two functions: to continue distancing Briseis from Achilles, and to keep Achilles singular in motivation.

Conclusion

Achilles functions in each of these novels as an example of men’s treatment of their female captives in the Trojan War, and as a means to portray the particular messages each novel projects. How Achilles treats Briseis, and the extent to which he acknowledges her, becomes a representation of Greek masculinity. Such blanket statements can prove problematic in many situations, but in these three novels, the authors do not show us how the other Greek leaders interact with their own enslaved women. They only explore Achilles’ treatment of Briseis. In that exploration, Achilles’ relationship with Patroclus functions as supplementary to his treatment of Briseis. Achilles’ decisions hinge largely on his emotional state, and many of his choices depend on the interests of his lover. The closer and more intimate the authors depict Achilles’ relationship with Patroclus, the more Briseis’ intimacy with and influence over Achilles is diminished, and vice versa. In this way the authors use Patroclus to either increase or decrease

Briseis' agency and role in shaping the events of the war. These factors are representative of how each author receives Homer, and their portrayals of Achilles, Briseis, and Patroclus identify the areas of the *Iliad* that Barker, Hauser, and Haynes find lacking.

In *The Silence of the Girls*, Achilles treats Briseis as a sex slave and does not acknowledge her or give her license to speak and act freely. His brutality towards her suggests he only thinks of her as a prize for his victory in battle, and no intimacy exists between the two characters. Achilles' relationship with Patroclus leaves no room in his heart for Briseis, and as a result, she must accept her role as a slave and find a way to endure. By diminishing Briseis' agency and revealing her brutalized existence as a result of Achilles' actions, Barker highlights the fate of captured or defeated women who Homer underrepresents.

For the Most Beautiful's approach paints Achilles in a different light, having him both acknowledge and fall in love with Briseis. Their sexual relationship is consensual, and Achilles allows her to speak and act in a manner that raises her to an equal in the relationship. Having accepted Briseis into his heart, no room remains for Patroclus, and as a result, Patroclus becomes jealous of Briseis. Hauser's novel creates a Briseis with a great deal of agency. She can exert influence over Achilles and thereby operate within the camp to fight back against the Greeks. In this novel, she is the reason Achilles does not sail home, she is the reason Patroclus jealously dons Achilles' armor and dies, and she is the reason that Krisayis is able to evacuate Troy successfully. Briseis' successes drive home Hauser's message that the captive women's battles are just as important to the Trojan War as the men who fight and die on the battlefield. Further, they demonstrate her reception of Homer's *Iliad*, that these were unseen events, the "hidden – side to the *Iliad*, the part of the story that Homer left more or less untold" (375), and that reflect Hauser's contemporary cultural ideas of female empowerment.

A Thousand Ships stresses the objectification of Briseis and depicts an Achilles who takes Briseis as a slave in order to hand her over as a gift to Patroclus. Achilles loves only Patroclus in this novel, and never once even speaks to Briseis. She becomes a sex object, a thing of beauty, a prize that was chosen purely to please Patroclus and to spite Agamemnon. Briseis becomes an example of how women of the time were marginalized, and what happens after they are captured by the enemy. Like Barker, Haynes diminishes Briseis' agency, and her reception of Homer suggests that he underrepresents the experience of captive women in the *Iliad*. All three of these portrayals invite readers to revisit the *Iliad* and reexamine Homer's glorification of battle that Achilles exemplifies. The experience of slaves, such as Briseis, serve as a counterpoint to the glorification of victory and demonstrate that the consequences of war are both heavy and pervasive.

Part Three. Reinterpreting Euripides: The Captivity of Hecuba and the Trojan Women in *The Silence of the Girls*, *For the Most Beautiful*, and *A Thousand Ships*.

This part discusses the degree to which *The Silence of the Girls*, *For the Most Beautiful*, and *A Thousand Ships* each interact with Euripides' tragedies *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, and how the authors reflect Euripides' plays in their novels. Each author's reimagination of Hecuba and the captive Trojan women (collectively or individually) works synergistically with their treatment of Briseis to deliver their respective messages: *The Silence of the Girls* reimagines Iliadic slavery by projecting Briseis' experience onto the grim future of the captured Trojan women, and highlights the deaths of Polyxena and Astyanax to evoke the brutality of the Trojan War; *A Thousand Ships* follows Hecuba as she witnesses or learns of the tragic fate of women captives, of whom Briseis is one, to suggest that the consequences of war are pervasive; *For the Most Beautiful* does not include specific events from Euripides, but draws upon traits of Euripides' characters to reinforce Hauser's message that the battles fought by the captive women are every bit as important to the Trojan War as the battles of combat fought by men, which is evidenced by the successful acts of revenge present in Euripides' *Hecuba* that manifest in the clandestine activities Hauser's Briseis and Krisayis (Hauser's respelling of Chryseis) engage in to thwart their Greek captors.

Euripides' *Hecuba* (424 B.C.E.) and *Trojan Women* (415 B.C.E.) take place after the Greeks have won the Trojan War, but before they sail home.¹⁰⁴ The two plays cover similar material, sharing some characters and setting, and both depict the suffering of the Trojan women whom the Greeks have taken captive. Differences do appear between the plays, particularly in

¹⁰⁴ For an in depth look at *Hecuba* including summary, analysis, and historical context, see Turkeltaub (2017); for an in depth look at *Trojan Women* including summary, analysis, and historical context, see Rabinowitz (2017).

scenes where Euripides emphasizes grief. *Hecuba* focuses on the defeated Queen Hecuba's grief over the death of her daughter Polyxena and her plot to avenge the murder of her youngest son, Polydorus. Earlier in the war, before the play begins, Hecuba secretly sends Polydorus to a friend and ally Polymestor, the king of Thrace, for safekeeping so that her son might avoid capture should the Greeks prevail. Although he accepted the child and agreed to shelter him, Polymestor kills Polydorus and steals the gold and treasures Priam and Hecuba had provided for their child's future. After Hecuba discovers the truth of her son's death, she convinces Agamemnon to help her exact revenge. She travels to Thrace to confront Polymestor, and, under pretense of passing information about hidden Trojan treasure, she and her fellow Trojan women murder Polymestor's sons and stab out the Thracian king's eyes. Appeased, Hecuba exits the play resolved to her fate as a captive slave.

Trojan Women portrays the fates of five captive Trojan royal women: Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena, Cassandra, and Menelaus' wife Helen, and does not concern itself with Hecuba's revenge. Rather, the play focuses on Hecuba's grief at having to watch each of her remaining children either executed or taken as a war prize slave to a Greek warrior or king. Troy has been sacked, husbands and brothers have been killed, and as the Greeks figure out the logistics of returning home, one by one they kill or take away the royal Trojans: Andromache's son Astyanax is thrown from the battlements to end Hector's bloodline; Polyxena, Hecuba's youngest daughter, is sacrificed to appease the ghost of Achilles; Helen is returned to Menelaus, but not before Hecuba attempts to convince Menelaus to execute his wife, arguing Helen's responsibility for all the loss of life; Andromache is taken by Achilles' son, Neoptolemus; Agamemnon claims and takes Cassandra; and ultimately, Hecuba is awarded to Odysseus. Euripides portrays the fates of these defeated women to highlight the victimization of women,

while underscoring this particular cost of war to undermine the Homeric ideal of glory through battle.¹⁰⁵ Euripides is not the only tragedian of his time to react to Homer, but his approach to the material, like the three novelists', often isolates specific heroic ideals in order to undermine them, which set him apart from his contemporaries.¹⁰⁶

Euripides entered his works in yearly competitions at the Festival of the City Dionysia. His first production occurred in 455 BCE, and he continued composing and competing until his death in 407/6 BCE.¹⁰⁷ While the plots of some Greek tragedies were constructed around the tragedian's more contemporary history, Euripides, like his predecessor, Aeschylus, and chief competitor, Sophocles, drew heavily from Homer in creating their own works.¹⁰⁸ At the time Euripides wrote *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were recited regularly in Athens at the Panathenaea and Dionysia, were integrated into Greek education, and were so popular that most everyone would have been familiar with the stories.¹⁰⁹ King suggests that unlike his peers, Euripides drew from Homer, "...not to praise but, rather, to critique the concept

¹⁰⁵ Rabinowitz (2017) 202-205. She discusses the anti-war message of *Trojan Women* in depth in her chapter on the play.

¹⁰⁶ Wright (2017) 468-496. Wright describes the different tragedians as being at odds with one another in their portrayal of traditional myth, and observes tensions arising, "between tradition and innovation."

¹⁰⁷ Scodel (2017) 27.

¹⁰⁸ Conacher (1967) 4. He indicates plot material from Greek Tragedy was drawn from traditional myths and legends of the past. See also King (1987) xvi. She mentions Sophocles and Pindar as reinterpreting Homer and Achilles in a way to honor the poet in a positive light and to continue what they see as his line of thinking.

¹⁰⁹ King (1987) 78. Scodel (2010) 11.

of self-aggrandizing ‘heroic’ behavior that Homer’s work had come to sanction.”¹¹⁰ Melissa Miller, in her chapter on gender in Euripides, suggests that the distinction comes in the treatment of men and women. Men in Homer, she suggests, are concerned with earning honor and making their names on the battlefield, while women operate largely within the “domestic sphere.” Even Penelope, who exercises a good deal of “cunning intelligence” falls victim to this restriction.¹¹¹ Euripides maintains the role for men but grants his women a greater voice and actions that have “political consequences,” which creates conflict between the two genders, resulting in an undermining of Homeric ideas and projecting an anti-war message.¹¹²

Euripides’ portrayal of women in *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* reflects the Peloponnesian War that had been raging for over a decade by the time his tragedies were written and performed. Lembke and Reckford describe the political landscape of the time in the introduction to their commentary on *Hecuba*:

Not merely fighting and killing but plague, frustration, uprooting of families from the country and crowding in the city, scarcity of food, inflation, corruption, and political factionalism and demagoguery had long since disrupted civilized life and embittered the Athenians’ normally bright and generous spirit.¹¹³

The war rendered the people of Athens strained and tense, and according to scholars like Scodel, left an impact on Euripides’ work. Scodel writes of the connection between Euripides and the war that “[The war] led to large-scale enslavements of Greek women by other Greeks.... It is no coincidence that Euripides in the mid-420s began composing plays about the fates of Trojan

¹¹⁰ King (1987) xvii.

¹¹¹ Mueller (2017) 500-501.

¹¹² Mueller (2017) 501.

¹¹³ Lembke & Reckford (1991) 6.

women after the city's fall."¹¹⁴ Although the *Iliad* represents and encompasses many ideas, and its complex discussion of war is part of what makes the poem so enduring, Euripides isolates the *Iliad's* glorification of war and finds a parallel between its presentation in the poem and his own warring contemporary society. Using this parallel, he constructs *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* not around a powerful warrior, but around female victims.

Euripides' strategies and approach to interpreting Homer to deliver his messages are key contributors to the way Barker, Haynes, and Hauser receive Homer. The three authors adopt a similar strategy in their portrayals of Briseis and Hecuba, where we see a dynamic of a female lead struggling against an abusive male, women suffering as a consequence of war, and calling to account the consequences of achieving glory through battle seen in the *Iliad*.¹¹⁵ As Euripides reflected cultural concerns stemming from the Peloponnesian War, Barker's, Haynes', and Hauser's portrayals underscore contemporary cultural concerns of sexual violence, while advocating calls for female empowerment.

The Silence of the Girls

The Silence of the Girls follows Briseis from her marriage to Mynes in Lyrnessus through the city's sack and her capture, detailing her experience as Achilles' slave. Hecuba and the Trojan women appear only briefly at the end of Barker's novel when Briseis observes them huddling in the same small hut in which she had been held the night she was captured. Briseis comments bitterly on each woman's fate as she recalls her own and reminds the reader of the

¹¹⁴ Scodel (2010) 59.

¹¹⁵ Lauriola (2015) 50, and Dugdale (2015) 102 suggest these are the qualities of Euripidean tragedy.

grim realities of the Trojan war. She recognizes that Hecuba and her children will soon undergo the same treatment she herself endured. Briseis meets the women and quickly learns to whom each has been awarded as a slave, and that Andromache's son, Astyanax, has been executed. Because Agamemnon had promised Achilles the best women after taking Troy, Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, sacrifices Polyxena to appease his father's ghost. A pregnant Briseis assists with both of their burials. She then is led away by her new husband, Alcimus, Achilles' former lieutenant, leaving the Trojan women to their fate.

Barker's first reflection on the fate of the Trojan women occurs when Briseis overhears Odysseus reminding Agamemnon that Achilles was promised the twenty most beautiful women in Troy in exchange for returning to the war. Agamemnon feels he must honor this pact even though Achilles is dead, so he selects Polyxena for sacrifice. Barker's Brises takes on the role of the Chorus of Women in *Hecuba* by making observations and comments to the reader.¹¹⁶ She reflects, "Achilles had to have a girl, and not just any girl either. The absolute best—'the pick of the crop.' And so Polyxena, Priam's virgin daughter, fifteen years old, was selected for sacrifice" (279). Polyxena is the first and youngest Trojan female introduced here, which signifies her importance, and Barker underscores the inhumanity and poignancy of her impending death. Briseis recalls, "She was the youngest of Hecuba's large family, always running to keep up with her sisters, wailing the great cry of youngest children everywhere" (280). Barker emphasizes Polyxena's youth to heighten the tragedy that war has brought to this child and her family. Moreover, Barker links Polyxena with "youngest children everywhere" to establish a connection

¹¹⁶ According to Gibert (2017) 51, Euripides tends to choose a Chorus that matches the protagonist's age and sex, and especially sympathetic female Choruses. Further, Euripides often opts for a limited perspective Chorus, rather than omniscient, in order to create dramatic irony and misunderstanding. For a general overview of the Chorus in Greek Tragedy, see Scodel (2010).

with the reader and demonstrate that even this family, though royal, cannot escape war's reaches. Polyxena represents both innocence and family, and Barker appeals to the reader in this way so that they might see something of Polyxena in their own lives and empathize with Hecuba over her loss.

Euripides, too, highlights the plight of women who had been overlooked or unconsidered by Homer in the *Iliad*. In *Hecuba*, for instance, he emphasizes the dire situation in which the war has left Hecuba when the Chorus tells the former queen that Odysseus plans to sacrifice Polyxena. They exhort Hecuba to do all she can to save Polyxena, saying, ““Kneel before Agamemnon. Beg him / Cry out, beg the gods-gods in heaven, gods below earth. / Prayer will save you from being made childless.””¹¹⁷ Hecuba is powerless. Euripides stresses that the former queen is just that, former. She wails in response to the Chorus,

‘No!
What can misery cry out?
What prayer, what pain, what dirge?
Made more helpless in my old and helpless years,
caught in slavery I cannot bend to,
cannot bear—oh no!’¹¹⁸

Euripides draws the tragedy of the circumstance onto Hecuba, who desperately laments how helpless she is. She has become a slave who is powerless to save herself or her daughter. Euripides elicits sympathy for Hecuba here, stressing the tragedy of a mother who mourns her daughter's impending sacrifice, but the tragedy of Polyxena's fate is somewhat undercut by Hecuba's distress over her own newfound status as a slave. Before turning to her daughter to

¹¹⁷ Euripides *Hecuba* 147-150. Translated by Lembke, J. & Reckford, Kenneth J. (1991). Lines 157-160 of the tr. I will use Lembke and Reckford's translation while providing both the original and Lembke's & Reckford's line numbers henceforth.

¹¹⁸ Euripides *Hecuba* 153-158. 165-170.

deliver the news and offer comfort, Hecuba first bemoans her own fate, desperately pleading for her own safety, “‘This path, that path, which / shall I take? Where shall I go? Where find / a god, a force, a defender?’”¹¹⁹ Euripides’ portrayal of Hecuba’s angst, in juxtaposition to her dread of Polyxena’s fate, represents the tragedy of “large-scale enslavements of Greek women” that scholars such as Scodel consider contributing factors to Euripidean tragedy.¹²⁰

Barker, on the other hand, directs her readers’ focus to the child Polyxena, pointing out that her death, in and of itself, is the tragedy. Both authors recognize the heartbreak of the young girl’s death, but Barker shifts her focus because Hecuba is not the protagonist of her story. In *Hecuba*, part of the reason Euripides prioritizes Hecuba’s distress over slavery is because she is the protagonist of that play. In *The Silence of the Girls*, Briseis is the protagonist, and we experience what she experiences. Briseis is in no danger of being enslaved at this point of the novel, being promised to marry Achilles’ lieutenant, Alcimus, and therefore when she witnesses Polyxena taken away and killed, she focuses on the tragedy of Polyxena’s premature death, thinking of her, “There at Hecuba’s feet was Polyxena—fifteen years old, her whole life ahead of her” (282). Briseis’ heart breaks to see such a young innocent girl soon to be stripped of life, and expecting a child herself compounds her feelings in this moment. Barker uses Polyxena to represent family and innocence, compelling readers to imagine losing their own child. Briseis’ reaction to Polyxena’s death here supports this idea and becomes a stark reminder of the consequence of the Trojan War.

In *Silence*, Briseis witnesses Hecuba’s grief, commenting on the former queen’s farewell interaction with Polyxena and offering a firsthand account of Polyxena’s death. When Briseis

¹¹⁹ Euripides *Hecuba* 162-164. 174-176.

¹²⁰ Scodel (2010) 59.

arrives to escort Polyxena away, she observes with surprise and admiration the interaction between the girl and her mother: “She was actually trying to console her mother, begging her not to grieve. ‘Better to die on Achilles’s burial mound,’ I heard her say, ‘than live and be a slave’” (282). Polyxena’s words of bravery reinforce Barker’s call for female empowerment, and Briseis praises what the young girl says, thinking, “Oh, these fierce young women” (282). A similar interaction between mother and daughter occurs in *Hecuba*, wherein Polyxena tells Hecuba, “I weep for you, grieving mother / For you, my tears, my dirges.... To die / is my chance for happiness.”¹²¹ There are multiple ways to interpret this. Briseis’ words suggest Barker has chosen a positive reading of Polyxena’s claim of empowerment, whereas Turkeltaub argues that despite Polyxena’s pronouncement, the girl nonetheless goes to her death, not freedom. He suggests Polyxena’s words are mere fantasy, and that “whatever freedom she appears to have during the sacrifice is at worst an illusion concealing Odysseus’s control over her and at best... ‘female submission to male violence.’”¹²² Turkeltaub’s somber interpretation underscores the greater issue of consequence highlighted by both Euripides and Barker.

In *Silence*, after the exchange, Briseis leaves with Polyxena to prepare her for the sacrifice, and Barker takes us step by step through the execution. As Briseis follows Polyxena, she recounts, “It was a long, uphill walk to the promontory. We positioned ourselves a step behind her, ready to support her if she needed it. I couldn’t stop remembering the stocky little girl who’d raced after her big sisters, shouting: ‘Wait for me!’” (284). The procession ends, soldiers gag Polyxena, and Pyrrhus executes her with one strike. Before returning to Hecuba, Briseis bitterly notes the callousness of Agamemnon: “I doubt if Polyxena’s death affected him

¹²¹ Euripides *Hecuba* 211-216. 225-230 of the tr.

¹²² Turkeltaub (2017) 147.

much. This was a man who'd sacrificed his own daughter to get a fair wind for Troy" (286). In both Euripides' plays and in *Silence*, Agamemnon orders the sacrifice of Polyxena to placate Achilles' spirit and gain a favorable wind to sail home. Agamemnon performed this same ritual before the war, sacrificing his daughter, Iphigenia, to gain a favorable wind to sail to Troy. The war has ended but yet another young girl has been killed, just as others will be in future wars.

When Briseis returns to the captives' tent after the sacrifice, Hecuba does not speak: "Hecuba looked dazed. We knelt before her and told her how bravely and quickly and cleanly and easily Polyxena had died. She nodded, twisting her hands around a scrap of cloth in her lap" (286-287). Barker portrays the desperation of this once powerful queen, whose deafening silence leads Briseis to appreciate Polyxena's bravery in the face of death, and Hecuba's bravery in accepting it. Hecuba's silence here may also be viewed as less than natural and call into question her desperation at facing her child's senseless death. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, for instance, Hecuba does not take her daughter's death silently. She laments the loss of Polyxena and her other children in a lengthy monody, crying,

And you, my poor Polyxena, where are
you? So many children, and yet no son or
daughter can help me now in pain....
Take me to the straw
pallet on the ground and the stony head-rest,
that I may cast myself down and be worn to destruction
by crying.¹²³

In *Hecuba*, Euripides again presents a distraught queen-mother, but one who expresses vengeance when her daughter is led away. She cries,

Don't leave me childless.
(to the Chorus)

¹²³ Euripides *Trojan Women* 503-509. Translated by Barlow, Shirley A. (1986). I will use this translation henceforth.

Friends, I am destroyed.
And so would I see Spartan Helen.
Her eyes flashed, her lovely lustful eyes, and she shamed,
she burnt Troy's blessedness.¹²⁴

In both tragedies, Euripides depicts Hecuba's anguish through her piercing lamentations and vengeful remarks, but *The Silence of the Girls* expresses that reaction by rendering Hecuba speechless. Barker, in so doing, isolates and stresses the lack of power these women have, implying that Hecuba has so little control over her situation that she cannot process the death, much less speak out against it.

Hecuba has little time to process her daughter's death because the Greeks abruptly deliver her grandson's, Astyanax's, dead body carried inside Hector's shield. The scene derives from *Trojan Women* in which the Greeks also deliver Astyanax's dead body on Hector's shield, and Hecuba lashes out in despair,

What could
a poet write for you as an epitaph on your tomb?
'The Greeks once killed this child because they
were afraid of him'.... You have not won
your father's heritage but you shall have his
bronze shield even if only as a coffin.¹²⁵

The Greeks executed the baby boy to ensure that he could never grow up to avenge his father. To honor Hector's valor in battle, they offer Astyanax's body in Hector's shield to his mother, Andromache. Barker's inclusion of Hector's armor recalls the scene from *Iliad* VI, in which Andromache speaks with Hector, and Hector's helmet frightens Astyanax: "So speaking glorious Hektor held out his arms to his baby, / who shrank back to his fair-girdled nurse's bosom /

¹²⁴ Euripides *Hecuba* 439-443. 469-473.

¹²⁵ Euripides *Trojan Women* 1188-1194.

screaming, and frightened at the aspect of his own father, / terrified as he saw the bronze and the crest.”¹²⁶ The scene foreshadows what happens in *Trojan Women*, demonstrating Astyanax’s fear is well placed, for the bronze of his father’s shield will be his tomb.

In *Trojan Women*, when the Greeks present the dead Astyanax to Hecuba, she voices her anger at what she sees as cowardice not reverence, but in *Silence* we see through the eyes of Briseis yet another silent reaction from Hecuba: “She fell to her knees beside him and began touching him all over. At one point, she seemed about to pick him up, but she drew back and left him lying where he was, in the hollow of his father’s shield” (288). Her silence forces the reader to reflect upon the grisly circumstances of Astyanax’s death and recoil with Hecuba at its inhumanity. Barker again stresses the helplessness of the situation, and the Hecuba of *Silence* is unable even to protest, unlike the Hecuba of *Trojan Women* who reprimands the Greeks. It is only when Hecuba is asked about burying Astyanax that she finally speaks, but even then, she struggles to do so: “Hecuba went on kneeling, rocking backwards and forwards, rubbing her empty hands up and down her thighs. ‘It doesn’t matter to them,’ she said, meaning the dead. ‘It doesn’t matter to them if they have a big funeral or not. It’s just for the living, all that. The dead don’t care. She was quiet after that’” (289). This anachronistic sentiment from Hecuba (for in Greek mythology the dead often care a great deal for their burial and how their bodies have been treated) highlights Barker’s reading of Polyxena’s and Astyanax’s deaths.¹²⁷ Barker juxtaposes this chilling response with Hecuba’s previous silence to emphasize the heinousness of throwing a

¹²⁶ Homer *Il.* VI.466-469.

¹²⁷ For instance, Priam goes to such great lengths to retrieve Hector’s body from Achilles partly because he fears Hector will be unable to pass safely into the underworld without a proper burial.

tiny child from the walls of Troy. With the deaths of these two children, hope is extinguished for Hecuba, and she is once again silenced.

Hecuba is not the only mother whose life is destroyed here, and Briseis observes how numb to life Andromache appears after learning of Astyanax's cruel death. Again, in a chorus-like aside, Briseis bitterly observes of Andromache,

Less than an hour ago, Odysseus had picked up her small son by one of his chubby legs and hurled him from the battlements of Troy. Her only child dead, and tonight she was expected to spread her legs for her new owner, a pimply adolescent boy, the son of the man who'd killed her husband. (282)

To Briseis, Hecuba and Andromache are the faces of true tragedy, not the men who fight and die honorably. She voices this inwardly: "Yes, the death of young men in battle is a tragedy—I'd lost four brothers, I didn't need anybody to tell me that.... But theirs is not the worst fate. I looked at Andromache, who'd have to live the rest of her amputated life as a slave, and I thought: *We need a new song*" (282). Briseis calls for action, calls to be heard, and it is a sentiment that not only the three novelists respond to, but also Euripides. He provides that voice in *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, calling to account the very underrepresentation Barker identifies through Briseis. This moment crystalizes the novel's message: senseless, gruesome murders of children, and captured women forced to become sex-slaves are the true victims of the Trojan War and should not be overlooked in favor of glorifying the battles and victories.

After the rest of her family has been killed or taken away, Hecuba is claimed by Odysseus as his slave and taken away as well. Briseis returns to Polyxena's body, and reflects, "The deep gash in her throat made her look as if she had two mouths, both silent. *Silence becomes a woman*" (290). Here Briseis recalls the frustration Tecmessa (Ajax's wife) expressed earlier in the novel because she could not talk to her husband about his post traumatic nightmares: "I'm supposed to just put up with it and say nothing, and if I do try to talk about it,

it's: '*Silence becomes a woman.*'" Briseis continues by remarking to herself, "Every woman I've ever known was brought up on that saying" (264), and expresses bitter frustration that she, Tecmessa, and Polyxena have never been allowed a voice in their lives, and now Polyxena's life has ended, forever silencing her.

Briseis' remark on Polyxena's death evokes the idea of silence and speaks to Barker's reception of Euripides and the way her portrayal aligns with his. Euripides objects to the *Iliad*'s glorification of war, and so too does Barker when she gives voice to silenced women. By incorporating at the end of her novel the Trojan women whose tragic experiences are witnessed by Briseis, Barker demonstrates a cycle of war, conquest, and slavery. Having earlier reimagined Briseis' personal experience as Achilles' slave, Barker provides a new round of captive Trojan women whose fate readers can extrapolate. Just as Briseis was captured and corralled into a hut before Achilles chose her as his slave, Hecuba and her family undergo similar treatment. Having depicted what Briseis experienced following her enslavement, Barker invites the reader to imagine what will happen to this newest batch of captured Trojan women. While contemplating their fate, Briseis lingers and reflects bitterly on the fate of Polyxena and Astyanax whose deaths, like those of other innocent women and children, are an unspoken cost of the Trojan War that should not be ignored.

A Thousand Ships

Barker derives much of her inspiration from the *Iliad*, structuring most of *The Silence of the Girls* around Briseis, and therefore what we see of Hecuba and her family comes through the lens of Briseis' experience. In *A Thousand Ships*, on the other hand, Haynes structures her plot around Hecuba, who is called by the Greek, Hecabe, in this novel. One explanation for this

spelling is that it emphasizes the queen's shift in status from Trojan to Greek now that she has been enslaved (The Greek version of Hecuba being Hekabe). She and the captured Trojan women create the backbone of *A Thousand Ships*, appearing in separated chapters entitled "The Trojan Women," which collectively create a narrative, broken up and interspersed throughout *A Thousand Ships*. In each chapter that revisits the Trojan women, Hecabe must watch as the Greeks divvy up her children one by one to either be executed or to become slaves of the various Greek generals. Polyxena is chosen as a sacrifice to the recently slain Achilles; Astyanax is killed to end Hector's male bloodline; Andromache is awarded to Achilles' son Neoptolemus; Cassandra is taken by Agamemnon; and Hecabe herself is selected by Odysseus.

Around this narrative, Haynes inserts one-off chapters about other women – both Trojan and Greek – who have been affected by the Trojan War. These include, for instance, wives and daughters who have been left without husbands or fathers, as well as wives and daughters of the kings and generals of the Trojan war. For example, Haynes shows us not only figures such as Creusa and Oenone (Paris' first wife), but also Greek figures such as Iphigenia and Penelope. We learn their individual tragic stories in short chapters, after which the story returns to Hecabe, who serves as a motherly figure and leader specifically for the Trojan women but for the novel as well. Although she is a slave and no longer the queen, her instincts to lead and feelings of responsibility for her people remain. For instance, early in the novel, when Troy has recently fallen and the Greeks have only just gathered all the captive women together, Hecabe searches for those unaccounted for: "Who else is missing?" she asked Polyxena.... Hecabe counted again. Creusa, Theano and Theano's daughter, Crino. All gone" (43). Haynes has already revealed the fate of each of these women in earlier chapters: Creusa perished in the fire, left behind by her husband, and Theano and her family were spared in recompense for Antenor's

treasonous action of allowing the Greeks entry into Troy. Haynes' Hecabe is not paralyzed by fear and grief in the way Barker's Hecuba was. This is a Hecabe who recognizes her status as former queen and accepts her role as the person her fellow countrywomen still look to for guidance. This sense of duty, of responsibility, takes shape in the form of revenge at the end of the novel. Haynes more closely follows the character of Hecuba found in Euripides' *Hecuba* than in his *Trojan Women*, and by enabling Hecabe to take action that results in success, Haynes promotes the ideas of female empowerment seen in both of Euripides' works, as well as in Haynes' own contemporary cultural climate.

By establishing Hecabe as the first voice of the Trojan women, Haynes emphasizes her importance in the same way that Barker highlighted Polyxena's significance in *Silence*. It is through Hecabe's experiences and inner thoughts that Haynes expresses the despair of her captured women. Her first appearance in the novel evokes the anger and revenge present in Euripides' *Hecuba*. Describing Neoptolemus, Achilles' son, she cries, "The thug who slaughtered [Priam] – an old man pleading for the protection of a god – would pay for his cruelty, his disrespect, his impiety. It was the only thing she could cling to, now everything else was lost" (30). Such anger overpowers despair among the Trojan women in this novel, and nowhere is this more evident than in Hecabe's focus on Helen.

Hecabe blames Helen for the Trojans' current situation, arguing that if Helen had done her duty and not seduced Paris, the war would never have happened. Moreover, Hecabe never accepted Helen as one of her own, and regrets that she had to shelter the woman in Troy. To Hecabe, Helen is an outsider whom she still considers a Greek, and these feelings surface when Hecabe confronts Helen while they await Menelaus: "'The Trojan whore: is that what they're calling you now?' Hecabe asked, her mouth twisting in disdain" (133). Hecabe's contempt

manifests here partly because she blames Helen for her current predicament, and partly because the Greeks now identify Helen as a Trojan. Helen is known today of course as “Helen of Troy,” and Haynes plays with this issue of reception by having Hecabe draw attention to the fact that Helen is far more Greek than Trojan, being raised in Sparta and returning to Greece as Menelaus’ wife after the war. Earlier in the novel, Hecabe disparaged Helen as “That conniving Spartan whore” (31), and she still considers Helen a Greek. She takes umbrage with the fact that the Greeks now consider Helen one of her Trojan kin. The point becomes an interesting reflection for Hecabe because she will soon find herself in Helen’s position. It is a position all who are enslaved after war must face: to be forced to assimilate into a new society and take on a new identity. Haynes’ Hecabe considers Helen a Greek, and so reveals that she will always think of herself as a Trojan.

Hecabe’s fighting spirit resembles her counterpart’s in *Hecuba*, but Haynes does differ from Euripides in the matter of assimilation. Where Haynes’ protagonist fights against the idea of becoming Greek after losing the war, in *Hecuba* we see a Hecuba that appears more resigned to the necessity for women of the time to assimilate into different cultures and circumstances. Speaking to Menelaus, the Trojan queen recalls a discussion she had with Helen in which she attempted to convince the woman to leave Troy, but Helen refused: ““Leave, my daughter; my children will make other marriages. I shall conduct you secretly to the Achaean ships. Put an end to the war between the Greeks and ourselves.””¹²⁸ Euripides’ Hecuba has a clear disdain for Helen, as the goal of this speech is to argue that Menelaus should execute the former Spartan. Even still, Hecuba refers to Helen as “my daughter” and includes her in “ourselves” when

¹²⁸ Euripides *Trojan Women* 1015-1019.

saying, “between the Greeks and ourselves.” Euripides’ Hecuba, therefore, appears to accept the assimilative nature of women at the time. Her argument against Helen in *Trojan Women* is not xenophobic, but rather she claims Helen’s actions are to blame for the entire war and therefore all the Greek casualties. She pleads, “Do not betray the friends she has slaughtered. I implore you on their behalf and on behalf of their children.”¹²⁹ Menelaus agrees, and promises to execute Helen as soon as they return to Greece, but Euripides never resolves this statement and Helen’s future is left up to speculation. In *A Thousand Ships*, Haynes’ Hecabe confronts Menelaus directly about what Euripides left unsaid in *Trojan Women*. She says coldly, “‘You won’t put her to death,’ Hecabe said. ‘She will have charmed you back into her bed before you return to Sparta. She will have done it by tomorrow’” (233). Menelaus does not deny it. Both versions of the queen, Hecuba and Hecabe, share bitter disdain for Helen and a willingness to speak brazenly to their masters, but each differ in the degree of power Helen exerts over Menelaus.

When Menelaus leaves the tent with Polyxena in *A Thousand Ships*, the girl is unaware that she is to be sacrificed. Up to this point, the Trojan women have been assuming they will be selected as slaves for Greek leaders. Polyxena accompanies Menelaus, therefore, under the impression that one of the Greeks has chosen her as a slave, and she asks, “‘To which of the Greeks are you taking me.... I did not think you were too much of a coward to tell a powerless slave what her future holds’” (239). Polyxena does not realize Neoptolemus will soon sacrifice her, nor that she will never see her family again. By contrast, Euripides’ farewell between Hecuba and her daughter in *Hecuba* depicts the essence of their characters: a desperate Hecuba and a brave, resolved Polyxena who is aware of her fate. Hecuba begs her daughter,

‘But you—if you have more strength than your mother,

¹²⁹ Euripides *Trojan Women* 1044-1046.

be quick, become a nightingale singing notes
so clear they stop this theft of life.
Stir pity. Grasp Odysseus' knees. Persuade.'¹³⁰

Polyxena steels herself and declares to Odysseus, ““Dying would be better luck than living, / for life without moral beauty inflicts endless pain.””¹³¹ This poignant exchange allows Euripides' Polyxena to reassure her mother, but Haynes' retelling deprives us of such an interaction. In *A Thousand Ships*, Hecabe is not present to witness Polyxena's bravery and dignity in the face of death and, therefore, Polyxena cannot calm Hecabe's anger and assuage her fear for her daughter's fate.

When Haynes' Polyxena learns she is to be sacrificed, “She gave silent thanks to Artemis. She had said to herself many times that she would rather die than live as a slave” (241). Her words mirror those of Euripides' Polyxena, also thinking of her mother in this moment, reflecting, “Perhaps [her mother] would be happier knowing Polyxena was dead rather than enslaved, relieved if the shame could be contained to herself and would not cascade down through the generations of the children of Priam” (241). Unfortunately, Hecabe never learns of her daughter's sacrifice. Rather, she assumes that her daughter was selected as a slave by one of the Greeks, and no one tells her otherwise. This deviation from Euripides shifts the focus of the torment present in *Hecuba*, *Trojan Women*, and *The Silence of the Girls*, by allowing Hecabe to live in painful ignorance. Although Hecabe has been spared the agony of her daughter's death, she is not free from tragedy, for Polyxena's own words establish that death would be a comfort compared to slavery. Leaving Hecabe in ignorance is therefore a different kind of tragedy, for

¹³⁰ Euripides *Hecuba* 336-339. 362-365 of the tr.

¹³¹ Euripides *Hecuba* 377-378. 404-405 of the tr.

the former queen must live believing her daughter to be enslaved, knowing all that is implied by such a fate.

Soon after Polyxena is taken away, the Greek herald, Talthybius, arrives to take Andromache's son, Astyanax. When Talthybius explains that the baby is to be executed, the women are distraught. Hecabe cannot believe that they would commit such cruelty to a baby, and Andromache pleads desperately, declaring, "'I will never mention his father.' Andromache's voice was rising into a scream.... 'Never. The name of Hector has passed my lips for the final time if you will only spare my baby. Please. He will never know whose son he is'" (264). As with Polyxena's treatment, Haynes does not depict the aftermath of the boy's execution. She does not provide a scene with Astyanax mounted on Hector's shield for the women to lament. Hecabe's heart breaks for Andromache, who will lose her only son, but the former queen is still contemplating how to exact revenge against Polymester for murdering her youngest son, Polydorus.

Just before learning of Astyanax's execution, Odysseus tells Hecabe that in the morning, they will sail to Thrace, where she will be able to confront Polymestor (210). Mirroring what happens in *Hecuba*, Haynes explains that Hecabe and Priam smuggled Polydorus out of Troy in the early part of the war. They entrusted him and some Trojan treasure, meant to secure the boy's future, to Polymestor, but their Thracian friend betrayed them, killed their son, and stole his treasure. This betrayal and murder consume Hecabe's thoughts, and her preoccupation with Polymestor suggests that revenge takes precedence over grief in this novel. Haynes highlights the unjust deaths of Polyxena, Astyanax, and Polydorus to validate Hecabe's vengeful actions against the Thracian king who murdered her youngest and last remaining son.

While a captive in the Greek camp, Hecabe enlists Odysseus' aid in killing Polymestor and his family. Rather than having Agamemnon summon Polymestor to the Greek camp, as Euripides does in *Hecuba*, Hecabe sails with Odysseus to confront the traitor in Thrace. Odysseus calls on Polymestor and asks him to bring his two sons. When they arrive, he says, “‘Ah, you will not find your friend out here on the shore,’ Odysseus said. ‘She awaits you in that tent.’ He pointed to the grey cloth which had been stretched over a few poles to create a makeshift shelter” (219). Agamemnon takes similar action in Euripides' *Hecuba*, when he directs Polymestor to the women's tent in the Greek camp. Haynes has changed Agamemnon to Odysseus and moved the scene to Thrace, one explanation for which could be to line up the narrative with Odysseus' path in the *Odyssey*, wherein his first stop is Ismarus.¹³² The location has shifted, but Haynes keeps the revenge killing the same.

Hecabe confronts Polymestor with the knowledge of her son's death. When he denies her accusations Haynes writes, “In a flash, Hecabe had dragged her small, sharp blade across the neck of Polymestor's older boy. The blood spurted out indecently as two of her womenfolk did the same to the younger child” (224). She then turns her violence onto Polymestor, and “As he tried to gather his sons in his arms, desperately willing life back into them, the women instead plunged their blades into his eyes” (224). By killing Hecabe's youngest and last surviving son, Polymestor ended Hecabe's bloodline, and now she has ended his. This act of revenge is brutal, but Haynes has designed her protagonist as Euripides constructed his own in *Hecuba* – a grieving, distraught, defeated, vengeful mother whose actions we justify despite how heinous.

¹³² Homer *Od.* IX.39-61.

Both Barker and Haynes present the injustices inflicted on captured Trojan women, and like Euripides, they draw the audience into a world where violent, vengeful acts are carried out during and after war. Haynes differentiates herself from Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* by allowing her protagonist, Hecabe, to step out of the submissive, oppressed role and take action, something that Barker's protagonist, Briseis, is unable to do. In so doing, *A Thousand Ships* reflects the idea of female empowerment. Hecabe's ability to find agency and success in the face of male oppression and violence reflects such empowerment while still acknowledging and exposing that violence.

For the Most Beautiful

For the Most Beautiful is the story of Briseis and Krisayis, and it retells the Trojan War by portraying these two women's struggle from within captivity to strike back at the Greeks and ultimately save the civilians of Troy before the city is sacked. After being captured and awarded to Agamemnon, Krisayis becomes an informant. She passes information she overhears in Agamemnon's war meetings to Idaeus, the Trojan herald who negotiates with the Greeks on behalf of Troy. Her clandestine activities enable the Trojans to fend off the Greek attacks. Once her father, a Trojan priest of Apollo, pays Krisayis' ransom and frees her from the Greeks, the young girl returns to Troy to aid the resistance. After great effort, she convinces Priam and Hecuba to evacuate the civilians of the city, thus saving untold lives from the imminent Greek victory.

In Briseis' storyline, after her husband and family are murdered, she is taken captive from Lyrnessus by Achilles and successfully defends herself against his sexual advances before winning over his heart. Eventually, she develops feelings for the Greek warrior, and they initiate

a sexual and romantic relationship. Her allegiances are tested, wanting to save both Troy and Achilles, but after his death, she runs interference with the Greek sentries, and aids Krisayis in evacuating Troy. Not wanting to be captured and executed or to serve another Greek master, Briseis jumps onto Achilles' funeral pyre to join her beloved in the underworld.

The evacuation of Troy ends the novel, and Hauser concludes before the Greeks breach the gates and take the city of Troy. Thus, *For the Most Beautiful* does not present opportunities to analyze corresponding scenes from Euripides' tragedies as did *The Silence of the Girls* and *A Thousand Ships*. Hauser's novel is tragic, but it is also triumphant, and both Briseis and Krisayis succeed in taking the future into their own hands. Euripides still plays a vital role in Hauser's reception of the *Iliad*, particularly in how she portrays her characters rather than through the narrative itself.

In reimagining these two women and creating their storylines, Hauser incorporates some of the traits found in Euripides' female characters, particularly Hecuba's passion for revenge, present in *Hecuba*, and Polyxena's defiant spirit in the face of death. In the same way that revenge drives Hecuba, both Briseis and Krisayis are equally driven by their hatred for the Greeks, and ultimately successful in their efforts to defy them. Hauser instills into her Briseis and Krisayis the fighting spirit that Polyxena evokes in *Hecuba* when Polyxena chastises her mother,

‘And you, poor mother, don’t fight power.
Do you want to be thrown down, aged flesh bleeding,
And want to be shoved away, manhandled,
Hauled off in disgrace by some callow soldier?
No, not you! That does not befit you.’¹³³

¹³³ Euripides *Hecuba* 404-408. 432-436 of the tr.

Polyxena calls for resistance in her mother and urges her not to be passive. Hauser's Krisayis channels a similar rebellious spirit when confronting her father: "'By all the gods, don't you see?' I said, my voice rising uncontrollably. 'We are at war, Father! What use is it if you send me away.... If we do not do something soon, there will be no city left to serve!'" (205). Krisayis' loyalty to Troy compels her to act against the Greeks, and she fulfills this duty by spying and delivering information she overhears at the Greek councils to the Trojan leaders.

Hauser's women also reflect Euripides' representation of women as underestimated members of the community. Hauser's women succeed, in large part, due to their marginalization by the Greek leaders and captors. They give them almost no thought beyond their roles as slaves and war prizes, thus inadvertently enabling Briseis and Krisayis to operate surreptitiously and without much interference. Euripides' Hecuba takes advantage of such underestimation to execute her own revenge plot against Polymestor. She argues with Agamemnon and explains:

HECUBA. 'The tents hide a mass of Trojans.'

AGAMEMNON. 'You mean the captives, the Greeks' plunder?'

HECUBA. 'With them I'll take my vengeance on the murderer.'

AGAMEMNON. 'Just how can women overpower men?'

HECUBA. 'Sheer numbers. Add our wives, and we're invincible.'

AGAMEMNON. 'Invincible? Womankind deserves contempt.'

HECUBA. 'What! Did not women kill Aegyptus' sons
and empty Lemnos of every last male?'¹³⁴

Agamemnon cannot fathom how Hecuba could succeed, believing women to be inherently weaker than men, which is ironic, given his imminent death at the hands of his wife,

¹³⁴ Euripides *Hecuba* 880-887. 932-939 of the tr.

Clytemnestra. Hecuba understands Polymestor will be equally dismissive of women and reminds Agamemnon just how dangerous women can be. Hauser's Briseis also reminds Agamemnon, in similar fashion, of female power. After she and Krisayis have succeeded in evacuating Troy, she gloats, "'You have underestimated me, Greeks.... You have always thought that slaves and women were worth nothing...but because of a slave, the greatest of the Greeks is dead. Because of a slave, you will never have the Troy you think to gain. And, Agamemnon...you will *never* have me'" (364).

After her speech to Agamemnon, Briseis flees and commits suicide, casting herself onto Achilles' funeral pyre in an action that recalls a moment from *Trojan Women* with a different resolution. In the play, when the Greek herald Talthybius arrives to take Hecuba away to Odysseus, she contemplates her future and considers suicide:

'O Troy, who once breathed forth
your greatness among barbarian peoples, you
will now be robbed of your glorious name. They
are burning you and they are already dragging
us from the land as slaves.... Come let
us rush into the pyre. Best for me to die with
this country of mine as it burns.'¹³⁵

Faced with becoming a slave, Hecuba bitterly opines that death would be better, but ultimately acquiesces and leaves with Odysseus. Briseis, in *For the Most Beautiful*, carries out the action that Euripides' Hecuba could only contemplate. The queen believes death would be better than slavery but does not have the courage to follow through with the action, while Briseis succeeds in rejoining her loved ones in death. Rushing from the Greek war council's tent, Briseis flies to Achilles' funeral pyre: "At last, after all that I had endured, I would make my own fate, as both

¹³⁵ Euripides *Trojan Women* 1277-1284.

the men I had lain with in love had told me that I would.... I scaled the ladder and threw myself on to the flames” (364-365). Hauser chooses her words deliberately here, having Briseis choose her own fate because women having agency and the power to act is vital to *For the Most Beautiful*.

This representation of a female lead struggling against the abusive male is one of the key Euripidean traits outlined in the introduction of this study. Hauser’s reception of Homer incorporates, but then adapts this Euripidean dynamic in her portrayal of Briseis and Krisayis. Hauser sets up this dynamic to create opportunities for her women to succeed, not to present their suffering as a consequence of war over which they have no control or power as Barker and Haynes do. Krisayis’ and Briseis’ success is not the half-success of revenge that Hecabe achieves in *A Thousand Ships*. Hauser extends her call for female empowerment even further by having Briseis and Krisayis achieve total victory when they undermine the victory of the Greek men.

Briseis’ choice to take fate into her own hands and rush to her death, and Krisayis’s steadfast hatred for the Greeks that drives her to fight back against them embody the spirit of Euripides’ women. In these two characters, we see Hecuba’s regal defiance and thirst for revenge, as well as Polyxena’s bravery in the face of death. Traces of Euripides course through *For the Most Beautiful* despite Hauser not including specific scenes from *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*. As a result, what Hauser presents is a story of triumph for women. The representation of women suffering at the hands of men as a consequence of wars waged in the pursuit of glory and honor exist in *For the Most Beautiful*, but Hauser’s reception and retelling focuses on the successes of those women to advocate and demonstrate an empowerment of women in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

The Silence of the Girls evokes the brutality of war for female captives through a retelling of Briseis' family's murder and her experience as Achilles' bed-slave, and highlights a reality acknowledged but not fully explored in Homer's *Iliad*. In reducing the *Iliad* to this singular reading, the novel disenchanting its reader of the glory of war presented by Achilles in the poem. Barker incorporates aspects of Euripidean ideas into her reception of Homer, including Euripides' dynamic of enslaved women versus men in power used to critique the heroic message of the *Iliad*. Barker's reception channels this Euripidean strategy to undermine Achilles and the idea of glory obtained through battle. Through Hecuba and other captured Trojan women, Briseis reflects on her own early experiences as a captive and recognizes that these defeated women will soon be subjected to the same horrors she endured. Compounding the tragedy of their bleak futures, Barker highlights the deaths of Polyxena and Astyanax to allow the reader to experience the savage brutality inflicted on innocent children. *The Silence of the Girls* challenges its readers to take Briseis' experience and extrapolate it not only to the Trojan women, but also to all women in wartime captivity.

A Thousand Ships takes a different approach than *The Silence of the Girls* by retelling stories of many women victims of the Trojan War. The main plot follows events from *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* rather than the *Iliad*. With Hecuba as the novel's protagonist, Briseis becomes a secondary character whose inclusion in the story enhances the author's portrayal of Hecuba's character and experience, the reverse of what we see in *The Silence of the Girls*. Grief and revenge are therefore more prevalent in *A Thousand Ships* than in *Silence*, whose singular focus on Briseis limits its attention to the degradation of women captives. By retelling the stories of many silenced Trojan women, Haynes provides a different, but still emotional and immersive,

reading experience. Haynes portrays what Barker only asks the audience to extrapolate from Briseis' experience. Haynes' characters allow us to witness firsthand the different fates of many at the hands of Greek captors and the hardships brought on by war.

Haynes too incorporates aspects of Euripidean drama into her reception of the Trojan War. Like Barker in *The Silence of the Girls*, Haynes does so in order to further the message of her novel and highlight the areas of the *Iliad* that she finds underrepresent Briseis' and Hecuba's experience. Haynes depicts the consequences for women after their side loses in war, emphasizing the downside to victory no matter who claims it. Haynes focuses on the grief and anger felt by Hecabe as she watches her family either killed or taken away to a life of slavery. In this way she undermines Homer by focusing on a reading of the *Iliad* that glorifies victory, but depicting the consequences that go hand in hand with that victory. Further, by allowing Hecabe to exact her revenge on Polymestor, she also projects ideas of female empowerment. Giving Hecabe this kind of agency and ability to affect change in the narrative suggests support for Euripides' treatment of the character and a dissatisfaction with Homer's lack of empowerment for women.

For the Most Beautiful differs from the other two novels' reinterpretation of Euripides in that it does not incorporate events from his plays into its plot. Instead, Hauser integrates ideas from Euripides into the character of her protagonists: Briseis and Krisayis. Hauser focuses on the desire for revenge that drives Euripides' Hecuba and draws from Hecuba's interactions with Polyxena and Agamemnon to develop her two protagonists. In doing so, Hauser reimagines female prisoners of war who are ambitious, courageous, and fearless. She considers what might have been the motivations and feelings that drove them to change the course of the war in such a positive and successful way. As Haynes expressed through Hecabe's revenge, Hauser channels

Euripides by instilling in Briseis and Krisayis the ability to affect change in the narrative, thereby supporting female empowerment for her characters. Her novel answers the question that Euripides expressed when Agamemnon asks, ““Just how can women overpower men?””¹³⁶ Hauser provides that answer when Briseis and Krisayis trick the Greeks, drug the guards, enable the evacuation of Troy, and thus save countless lives.

All three novels suggest a dissatisfaction with Homer’s treatment of slavery and his failure to provide a level of agency to the women of the Trojan War. By channeling Euripides, the novels seek to highlight these lacking areas. *The Silence of the Girls* and *A Thousand Ships* use their portrayals of the Trojan women to demonstrate the brutal consequences of the conquests of war. *For the Most Beautiful* highlights the successes of women by shifting the narrative such that the civilians of Troy escape. By not allowing the audience to see Hecuba and her women captured, and by demonstrating the influence women have over men, Hauser suggests how the women of the *Iliad* could have been treated.

¹³⁶ Euripides *Hecuba* 882. 935 of the tr.

Conclusion

In retelling the Trojan War, Pat Barker, Emily Hauser, and Nathalie Haynes open a dialogue around Homeric reception and modernity, and the three novels speak to a particular dimension of twenty-first century reception of Homer that calls for greater representation and greater awareness of women. The novels support a reading of Briseis and Hecuba as conduits of Euripidean ideas and challenges to Homeric ideals of the heroic and the glory gained from battle as reflected in the *Iliad*. In giving voice to the largely silenced Trojan women captives, who are regularly subjected to abusive treatment and sexual assault by their captors, the novels reflect certain important issues in the authors' contemporary culture and society, including growing awareness of sexual violence and increased fervor for female empowerment, ideas which have galvanized a wave of twenty-first century female-authored fiction centered around the women of antiquity.

Concern about sexual violence is demonstrated most prevalently in *The Silence of the Girls* and *A Thousand Ships* in the way Barker and Haynes depict Achilles' treatment of Briseis. The two authors highlight Achilles' brutality towards Briseis, as well as his objectification of her. He rapes Briseis repeatedly in the case of *Silence* and enables her rape by Patroclus in the case of *A Thousand Ships*. By portraying the hero of the *Iliad*, Homer's paragon of heroic ideology, as sexually brutalizing towards Briseis, the authors undermine a triumphant reading of the *Iliad* and call for a reexamination of Homer's glorification of battle. Without portrayals of his victories on the battlefield, Achilles becomes a petulant soldier concerned with honor and reputation, someone who is represented with a negative masculinity and who views captured women as sex objects and property.

Barker and Haynes channel the way Euripides incorporates into *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* the events of his time to highlight the plight of women and undermine Homer's message of glory through battle. These authors expose the consequences for captured women – rape, slaughter, and slavery – and suggest that detailing the captives' experiences portrays a profoundly different story of the Trojan War. Revealing the abusive treatment of captured Trojan women reflects the authors' contemporary cultural concern for renewed attention to sexual assaults.

Unlike Barker' and Haynes' depictions of brutalization and objectification of Briseis, Hauser expands Briseis' agency in *For the Most Beautiful*. Through her portrayal of Briseis, Hauser demonstrates a reflection of contemporary calls for female empowerment, which are also reflective of the #MeToo movement. In *For the Most Beautiful*, Briseis becomes the person for whom Achilles acts, and thus Hauser empowers her to play a role in shaping events of the Trojan War. Her triumphant act to save the people of Troy and her ability to end her own life on her own terms suggest Hauser's desire for greater female agency and representation in the *Iliad*.

Like Hauser, Haynes reflects contemporary cultural calls for female empowerment through her portrayal of Hecuba. The former queen focuses on revenge for her youngest son's death and succeeds in the face of male oppression and violence. By assigning Hecuba this much agency and success, while simultaneously portraying an oppressed Briseis, Haynes projects female empowerment while still acknowledging and exposing violence. Haynes' change in the narrative suggests support for Euripides' treatment of the character and a dissatisfaction with Homer's underrepresentation of women. By incorporating much of Euripides' plot and characterization from *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, weaving it into their own retellings of the Trojan War, the

three novelists establish a connection with Euripides and an affirmation of his interpretation of the *Iliad*.

The three novels demonstrate the authors' shared passion for Greek mythology and especially the world of Homer, joining them together in a community that contributes to the collective story of the Trojan War. In adding to this collective story, the three authors strengthen their voice by speaking together and claiming Euripides for their community. They do not do so necessarily by design, but they each incorporate Euripides in such a way to help project similar messages. Their novels suggest elements lacking or overlooked in Homer's work and identify in the *Iliad* an acknowledgment of the consequences of war for women, but a failure on the part of Homer to fully represent those consequences. All three novelists establish the Euripidean dynamic of enslaved women against men in power to critique the heroic message of the *Iliad*. The novels are a call for twenty-first century Homeric reception to engage women such as Briseis and Hecuba more completely, and to reevaluate Achilles' achievements in the Trojan War, balancing them against the human costs accrued, to explore and define what it means to be heroic.

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Vita

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