

Feminist Voices in Modern Mythmaking

**On the representation of women in Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* and
Madeline Miller's *Circe***

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15-06-2020

Acknowledgements

After nine years, my time as a student finally comes to a close. With these thesis, I am able to complete my master's degree with a proud feeling. I am thankful for everything that I have learned along the way, and for all the insights that both my fellow students and teachers have given me.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their help and patience, and for taking an interest in all the essays and papers that I have written over the past years.

To my father, for his support along the way, and to my mother and Jurgen, for all the times they have pushed me and supported me, especially at the moments when I was procrastinating.

I also would like to express my thanks to my colleagues working at the KB, for enabling me to finish this thesis while also working fulltime.

A special thank you to Liesbeth Minnaard, for her helpful feedback on all parts of this thesis, and to Madeleine Kasten, for taking the time and interest to read my thesis as a second assessor.

And finally, to Ginny, my four-legged support system. For always providing me with a wagging tail in times of need.

Abstract

In the last few decades, there has been an emergence of feminist texts that relate themselves to Homer's renowned myths, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Inspired by these feminist narratives that revolve around the centring of the female characters within a myth, this thesis poses an analysis of the emergence and importance of mythmaking by women writers.

In my research, I have focused on Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* and Madeline Miller's *Circe*, two of the most recent examples of feminist mythmaking. Both Barker and Miller are able to give a voice to women that have often been silenced in 'classic' myths: Briseis and Circe. The texts foreground the complexity of their female protagonists by relating their stories to the patriarchal world surrounding them. Building onto this, both texts reflect on mythmaking and storytelling on an overarching level, thereby offering us a subtle critique on the way myths have been written and read in the past.

Strikingly, scholars have recently studied these feminist mythmakings as mere 'rewritings' or 'fictionalisations' of Homer's 'classics'. The effect is a limiting analysis in which the true intertextuality of the stories gets lost in a restricting methodology. In this thesis, I propose a new way to analyze these mythmakings in an appropriate and respectful way, by using the concept of 'mosaic mythmaking'.

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Introduction

Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) was the first literary work in which I read about the Trojan War. It shaped my mind. When I now think of the Trojan War, the first name that comes into my mind is not that of the godlike Achilles or the heroic Odysseus. To me, Briseis has become a defining figure within this mythical war. Stories about the Trojan War usually do not revolve around women, and as a Trojan queen, captured by the Greeks, Briseis is considered a trophy. She becomes a pawn in a game between Achilles and Agamemnon, who use her in a fight guided by their own masculinity. Briseis' representation in myths is usually based upon a lingering male gaze, instead of on her own identity. *The Silence of the Girls* turns this around, and makes Briseis the center of the Trojan War. The reader is encouraged to identify with her while she focalizes her own story. Through her eyes, vulnerabilities are laid bare and trauma is uncovered.

With *The Silence of the Girls*, Pat Barker has created a new writing that makes us reflect on canonic texts. Her Briseis offers us a new female perspective on a male dominated domain: that of mythmaking. Whereas Briseis has always been considered a "footnote" (Barker back page), the way in which her story has been ingrained in my mind, is a small proof of how this can be changed. To me, Briseis is no footnote, no mere girl who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Briseis takes up the role of a true protagonist, and is able to show us sides of the Trojan War that have never been told before. In this way, she is able to add crucial dimensions to the 'original' myths as written by Homer.

This idea of turning Homer's stories around, however, is not new. *The Silence of the Girls* is a recent work that is able to turn the 'classic' myth around, but Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* (2005) and Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* (1983) have done so as well, long before the emergence of Pat Barker's novel. Why then, do these feminist myths that make us reflect on Homer still appear? As said, the genre of the myth has been controlled by male writers for centuries, and Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are considered canonical texts, on the cutting edge of fiction and historiography. As female writers wanting to change mythmaking, Pat Barker, Margaret Atwood and Christa Wolf have to battle years of male dominance. To be able to conquer the genre of mythmaking, it is necessary to contextualize and study these prominent, feminist texts. However, when I read recent analyses of *The Silence of The Girls*, I quickly discovered how texts like these are sometimes placed within a constructed hierarchy, a structure that should have been abolished a long time ago. Scholars tend to compare these new, feminist texts to Homer's myths, which, considering the intertextual elements, is a logical approach. However, the research does not stop at a comparison, for this comparison is always followed by a ranking, a hierarchy, in which books like *The Silence of the Girls* and *The Iliad* or

The Odyssey are not considered equal. By holding on to the idea of 'classic' versus 'rewriting', the feminist narratives will always be regarded in relation to a male myth.

The Silence of the Girls is not the only work that has to deal with this. Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018) is another excellent recent example of a story that twists the classic myths as we know them. Like Briseis, Circe is a character who in 'classic' myths has been defined by the man who meets her: Odysseus. Daughter of the God Helios and nymph Perses, Circe is immortal. After being condemned to a life in exile, she hones her powers and becomes an impressive enchantress. In most myths and stories, she is well-known for her power to turn men into pigs. Because of this, Circe has earned a reputation of a maleficent minx. In Miller's story, however, Circe is represented in a more complex and profound way. Identifying with Circe, the reader is able to learn more about her pain, and the way in which trauma and longing forced her into the exiled life of a witch.

Both Pat Barker and Madeline Miller give a voice to women who are considered side characters, mere distractions on a man's road to success. They were often regarded as difficulties even, as they take up some of the precious time of the great Achilles and the heroic Odysseus, who have wars to win and worlds to save. *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* turn this around, and this is of great importance, for it can and, in my opinion, should change the way in which we look at mythical storytelling. These women writers are able to create modern myths in which female voices are heard. Why do these new, feminist myths emerge, and what urgencies do they address in relation to the ongoing academic debate on feminist mythmaking? This is what I will study and explore in this thesis.

The books operate on the intersection of feminism and myth, history and fiction. This shapes the way in which the narratives are received, but it can also help in our understanding to what happens when these disciplines meet. They can lay bare each other's weaknesses. By studying the emergence of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* and their role within (academic) debates concerning feminist mythmaking and storytelling, my goal is to construct a respectful, non-hierarchical method to discuss, research and analyze works like these narratives, stories that are often referred to as feminist 'rewritings'. To do so, it is necessary to come up with a new concept to refer to these texts in a different way. We need a new methodology in which we can completely discard 'classic myths' versus 'rewritings'. Only then can we deconstruct the binary oppositions and hierarchical orders in which these feminist myths are forced.

In order to academically contextualize these texts as part of a longer literary tradition of feminist myths, I will delve into some influential texts, not only on feminism, but on mythmaking as a genre as well. Literary scholars like Maaïke Meijer and Linda Hutcheon have laid down a solid foundation for me to build my research on. Meijer and Hutcheon have both done research on this particular genre which is so often called feminist 'rewriting'. However, whereas Meijer focusses more on the role of intertextuality within these texts, Hutcheon focusses on the role and making of history

in relation to these myths. I will bring their theories together, and combine the ideas with more recent work on feminist mythmaking. Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci's work *Plays by Women About Women Play Writers: How Women Create Myths About Themselves* has proved to be of great value for my understanding of feminist myths. In this book, Uçar-Özbirinci is able to conceptualize the genre of myth. By using her insights and connecting them to Linda Hutcheon's and Maaïke Meijer's, I will be able to study how feminist myths are able to cross the boundaries of disciplines in their relevance. I am particularly interested in the methodologies that are used, and how the methods effect the analyzed narratives of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. This understanding of the particular approaches will help me explain why these narratives are still of an incredible importance and topicality.

Because the theories of Linda Hutcheon, Maaïke Meijer and Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci have all been written before the emergence of both *The Silence of the Girls* and *Circe*, I will combine their research with more recent texts on these literary works specifically. Not even one year ago, Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos published their book *Homer's Daughters. Women's Responses to Homer in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*. In this collection of essays, modern, Homeric myths from a female point of view are analyzed. Complementary to this book is Edwin Gentzler's essay 'Women writers and the fictionalisation of the classics'. Both texts are focused on recent 'reworkings' of Homer's texts by women writers. By combining the foundational research of Meijer and Hutcheon with this renewed interest in feminist 'rewritings', I am convinced I will be able to research the emergence and importance of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* in a profound and critical way, doing justice to both the literary works as well as the ongoing debates surrounding these myths.

Because I will have to maneuver myself within a collection of complex academic theories, I will start of my first chapter with defining the concepts that are most important to my research. What is a myth? What is agency, and why is it a central concept in my analysis of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*? These terms and explanations will provide me with a solid basis to build my analyses on. As said, Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci's work on myths is an ideal starting point here. She not only explains the important connections between feminism and mythmaking, she is also able to define myth as an academical concept. My first chapter will thus be devoted to these concepts and the sensitivities and complexities they contain.

After this exploration of the various relevant concepts, I will continue to analyze the representation of the protagonists in my chosen literary myths by Pat Barker and Madeline Miller: Briseis and Circe. I have deliberately decided not to compare the narratives to Homer's work directly, and to focus purely on the stories on their own. In this way I aim to let the narratives speak for themselves, first. They have their own voices, power structures and complexities, and I want to lay these out as openly as possible. This will be the goal of the second chapter.

In the third chapter I will build onto the analyses of the second chapter, by studying how Circe and Briseis, as female protagonists, are able to reflect on the creation of stories and myths within the books. By studying their work in relation to the theories of Linda Hutcheon, Maaïke Meijer and Simone de Beauvoir, I will be able to discover if their theories might be applicable to Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* and Miller's *Circe*. If so, it will bring me closer to the specific connection between female voice, 'rewritings' and mythmaking in which I am interested.

In the last chapter, I will combine the theories of the above mentioned scholars with more recent work on *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. As posed, there is a tendency to put stories like these directly into the hierarchical order of 'rewritings', by only looking at how these stories differ from the 'classics'. I want to examine what happens when this is done, and what power structures are at stake here. How does this relate to the work of Hutcheon and Meijer, and what are the effects of this methodology on the narratives themselves? What new methods and concepts are needed to adequately lay bare the unique paradoxicalities and ambivalences present within these feminist narratives? By answering these questions I will come to a closer understanding of the immense importance of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* to the academic view on feminist voices in modern myths.

1. On Mythmaking

Making and breaking the myth

I will start this chapter with a short contemplation on the specific concept of the 'myth' as a genre. There have been many in-depth studies of this concept by philosophers, literary scholars and psychoanalysts. Thankfully, I will be able to base my own definition of the term on the work of the Turkish scholar Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci, who has done some useful and enlightening research on how women writers break and make myths in a feminist way. In her book, *Plays by Women About Women Play Writers: How Women Create Myths About Themselves*, Uçar-Özbirinci's goal is to reveal the "conscious as well as the unconscious mythical patterns woven by women in creating, revising, and even deconstructing myths (mythbreaking) as a reference point for understanding their own experiences, acknowledging their own identities, and finally declaring their own freedom as women" (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Introduction' 2). The first chapter of her research is solely dedicated to the concept of myth(making). Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci reconstructs the ongoing discussion on the origin and meaning of the concept, a debate that has been going back and forth for decades. Influential scholars like Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss have all discussed the concept before, highlighting different aspects and connotations present within the concept of the myth. Because it is not my intention to repeat her thorough research on this definition, I will focus on the aspects of this debate that will prove most valuable to my own analysis of modern, feminist myths.

The concept of the myth has multiple dimensions, as Uçar-Özbirinci explains. Because the term has been explained and used by many scholars within different disciplines and fields of research, it has become a challenge to come to a thorough understanding of it. However, there is one crucial element that all scholars seem to agree on: myths are human products (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Mythmaking' 17). How these human products actually came into being, is a more complex matter. Whereas some scholars state that the creation of myths was something caused by external stimuli, others claim that telling and writing myths is something spontaneous, that is triggered by an urge from within. Max Müller and Sir James Frazer are advocates of the external explanation. They claim that the origin of myths can be found in a time when groups of people had forgotten about the true reasons behind their own rites and ceremonies. To cover this up, they came up with a made-up story to convince their descendants to continue the rituals without having to debate on its origin.

According to Müller and Frazer, this is how the genre of the myth was born (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Mythmaking' 17). Their theory incorporates an important power that is said to be present within myths: myths are able to fascinate society, and can even hold them hostage. And because there are some unnatural and fantastic elements present within a myth, it is quite impossible to prove that the

particular stories have *not* happened. After being repeated year after year for decades, both orally and in writing, myths seem to have achieved a mysterious aura.

As said, there are also theorists who claim that the need for myths is some sort of human instinct. According to these scholars, the creation of myths is not triggered by nature or someone's surroundings, but by an internal force. It should not come as a surprise that a psycho-analyst like Sigmund Freud approaches myth as an 'internalist'. Freud studies myths as a "wish fulfillment, enabling individual to violate taboos safely through displacement" (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Introduction' 18). In this definition of the myth, we can find some elements of catharsis: reading and identifying with characters within myths as a way to cleanse the psyche of an individual. Carl Jung adds to Freud's theories, stating that "myths, like dreams, are able to contain universal archetypes, which are derived from our collective unconscious" (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Introduction' 19). The link between unconsciousness and mythmaking is striking here, especially relating to the idea of 'universality'. I will come back to this connection later.

Although their theories differ, both the externalists and internalists seem to agree on the idea that myths have a strong relation to people as a group, to society and collectivity. This is something to keep in mind while unraveling the mysteries of the myth. I am not sure if there will ever be a definitive conclusion on the debate between externalists and internalists, and therefore it would be most productive to look at the construction of myths as a combination of both internal and external factors. Myths are connected to both society as a whole, as well as to the individual person who is able to find solace or truth in it. But what happens when a myth is created, and how does a myth differ from other stories? This is where the theories of anthropologists Ernst Cassirer and Claude Lévi-Strauss give an in-depth understanding. These theorists are able to lay down a solid understanding of myths, through which narratives like *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* can be understood as well. Cassirer declares that the myth is one of the most important tools used by a human. The goal of a myth is, to Cassirer, to comprehend the world. However, myth is no innocent medium in this sense. Myths create images to dominate reality. And, as Cassirer states, this "mythic image" even becomes a "true object" (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Introduction' 21). This complex relation between myth and truth is something that will prove crucial to my research, as the following paragraphs will show.

Adding to Cassirer's theories, Lévi-Strauss states that analyzing myths can enable us to obtain important information about humanity. He highlights the power of myth, and focusses on how myths can establish (unspoken) human laws. This highlights the significance of myths in our understanding of society. Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci uses Lévi-Strauss' theory in relation to feminist mythmaking, to underline how the meaning and status of this specific kind of mythmaking differs from 'classic' myths. She justly states how myths have been the domain of men for centuries. Consequently, men

have been the establishers of human laws, that are present within myths, for centuries as well. I agree with Uçar-Özbirinci's arguments here. The lack of female representation and the absence of myths written by women writers is a delicate issue that has to be kept in mind when dealing with modern feminist mythmaking. There are 'classic' myths in which female characters play a role, but myths about women are not necessary women's myths. (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Introduction' 3).

To be able to contextualize feminist myths, it is thus necessary to acknowledge that myths are mainly the products of male writers. Which leads to the conclusion that "it is those patriarchal texts that have determined an identity for women as well as fixing their place in the society" (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Introduction' 4). This conclusion seems pessimistic, and it is something I will further delve into in the third chapter, because Uçar-Özbirinci is not the only scholar pointing out the fixed place of a woman within male mythmaking. But there is hope: "women should work to find new images and stories, in other words, persistent patterns, which will gradually induce a change in the patriarchal order" (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Conclusion' 242). In combining forces and starting a new era of feminist mythmaking, women writers should and could be able to undermine these years of one-sidedness. Although feminist narratives have been written for the last few decades, they incorporate a relatively new genre, considering the centuries of male mythmaking. The power structures that are at stake here, are incredible, and it is crucial to be aware of this when studying the emergence of feminist mythmaking.

Past, present, future

A central point that most scholars touch upon when studying myths, seems to be the idea that a myth is able to construct meaning that refers to an alleged truth. Here, Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci quotes Estella Lauter, who claims: "myth usually takes the form of an unusually potent story or symbol. Regardless of its origins (in group ritual or in the dreams of individuals), it is repeated until it is accepted as truth" (Lauter 1984:1). Myths are able to construct representations with a meaning that becomes an alleged truth. In this way, a myth can have an tremendous impact on a belief system. It is no longer 'just a story', it becomes a pillar to society's values. What are the implications of this?

According to Linda Hutcheon, all narratives are constructed (59), and myths are no exception here. In 'Re-presenting the past', Hutcheon studies the connection between (postmodern) fiction and history. She does not specifically mention myths as a genre here, but I am certain that her research on the boundaries between fiction and history are relevant to the understanding and importance of myths, especially in relation to the findings of Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci. Although we should be aware that myths are not the same genre as historiography, myths are not quite fiction either. Because myths are stories that deal with alleged truths, I would argue that they can be seen as a genre of fiction that even intersects with history. However, this does not automatically lead to the

idea that we should consider myths factual – for, as Hutcheon argues, we should also always be aware of the fact that even historiography itself is a textual construction. This textual construction “does not in any way deny the existence of the real past, but it focuses attention on the act of imposing order on that past, of encoding strategies of meaning-making through representation” (Hutcheon 63) To Hutcheon, no historiographic text is a neutral or innocent one. By writing history, historiographers add a structure and impose an order on past events. With this in mind, the boundaries between history and fiction become somewhat blurred. The disciplines can be considered as closely related to each other, and to mythmaking.

And because myths embody both historiographic- and fictional elements, they are a complex and almost ambivalent genre of text. Other scholars have also pointed out how the relation between past, present and future is incorporated within mythmaking. Uçar-Özbirinci mentions Wilfred L. Guerin, who, in his work *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* states that “myths have powerful effects both on the consciousness as well as the unconsciousness of people” (Uçar-Özbirinci, ‘Introduction’ 2). This statement seems to be related to the arguments of Jung and Freud that I mentioned before. Guerin moves on by pointing out how myths are “a dynamic factor everywhere in human society; it transcends time, uniting the past (traditional modes of belief) with the present (current values) and reaching toward the future (spiritual and cultural aspirations)” (Uçar-Özbirinci, ‘Introduction’ 3). In other words, myths are not made in a vacuum, they are stories made and molded by humans, based on affairs within society, and at the same time effecting that society. Every myth has its own specific goal, its own truths to endorse. This means that a mythmaker is in control of the writing and establishing of these specific truths. And thus, mythmakers deal with power structures: they can make or break the way in which truth and values are perceived by society. This explains why ‘classic’ myths are still considered relevant and powerful, even centuries after they were written. As long as different myths keep up the same values, these values will be accepted as the truth.

As revealed in its combination of the words 'myth' and 'making', mythmaking suggests that myths are made and created by people to suit their needs. As stated earlier, myths become the narrative patterns that provide individuals with the necessary words or stories that help them shape their lives. Myths function as the keys that unite a group of people. Thus, once again, mythmakers, who possess these keys, have the power to adjust, to manipulate, and to change these societies. (Uçar-Özbirinci, ‘Mythmaking’ 22) If in a specific culture certain myths are constantly repeated, this will lead to conclude that there is a belief in the ‘truths’ present within these myths. This is a crucial power that we should acknowledge, especially in relation to the centuries of male dominance in mythmaking, for it is connected to the emergence of the new, feminist narratives. It is highly necessary that certain constructed truths that are embedded within the ‘classic’ myths are studied

from a different point of view. Therefore, I will look at these feminist modern myths in relation to the power structures and truths that have been established by male mythmakers for centuries: which 'truths' do these new, feminist myths want to break, and which 'truths' do they want to make? For to change a myth is to change values and alleged truths that are ingrained within a society. Answering these questions will result in a more detailed understanding of their importance.

Because of these far reaching complexities and consequences that are implied when studying myth as concept, it is of the utmost importance to my research to state a clear definition of the term. I will use the term 'mythmaking' as the gerund, the substantive use of the verb, instead of simply using 'myth' as a noun. I will actively and consciously do this, to constantly keep in mind that myths are not a given, they are (wo)man-made. I will also specifically speak of 'feminist mythmaking'. This will refer to the mythmaking with specific, feminist goals: it refers to narratives that offer a representation of a female protagonist to change the existing believe values present in older myths. Examples are Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* and the subjects of my thesis: Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*.

In dealing with the concept of myth, Uçar-Özbirdinci herself makes a distinction between mythmaking and mythbreaking. In her opinion, women writers first have to break the known myths, to be able to establish a new one. She uses mythbreaking "to refer to the process of the women writers' breaching the authority of overused male myths about women by the subversive use of these myths in women's works" (Uçar-Özbirdinci , 'Introduction' 1). Although I agree with her that feminist texts are able to do just that, I would argue that, in practical use, it would be hard to pinpoint the exact moment that a myth is broken, and the moment a new myth is made. I would say that these moments are often intertwined. By making the actual new myths, feminist writers gradually break the existing, patriarchal structures within earlier myths. I would thus not separate their tactics, but would state that the breaking is a part of the making. Therefore, in my own analysis, I will hold on to the concept of mythmaking, in which the actual breaking of former myths is incorporated.

To come to a closer understanding of modern mythmaking, I will begin the next chapter by analyzing the representations of the female protagonists in *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. When analyzing the protagonists, 'agency' will be of importance. When I use agency as a concept, I mean the freedom and ability to live a life according to own decisions, with freedom of speech and choice. Of course, no person would ever be able to live life completely independent from other people, situations or characters. However, having agency means being able to speak up, to decide and take control of your situation. A key concept when analyzing these female protagonists, for their agency will tell us more about their role in the narrative as a whole, and in relation to other mythmaking.

2. From silence to stories

The representation of Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls*

As a queen, as Achilles' bed slave and as Alcimus' wife: throughout the book, Briseis is defined by her femininity. Readers are encouraged to identify with her. We encounter her hopes and dreams, and we experience her (in)ability to take control of her life. We are with her when she wakes up, when she has sex, when she eats and when she takes care of others. We barely leave Briseis' side, and the story begins and ends at a point of her choosing. She is the main protagonist, she focalizes and even reflects on her own story on crucial moments. But, at the same time she is a slave, captured by Greeks, existing only to please Achilles whenever he pleases. Briseis becomes an object to be used as a trophy. This is, at least, how the Greeks seem to speak of her. As Achilles states on the day she is awarded to him: "Cheers, lads. She'll do." (22) When Briseis later reflects on this moment, the meaning is clear to her: "In Achilles' compound, the message had been: *Look at her. My prize awarded by the army, proof that I am what I've always claimed to be: the greatest of the Greeks*" (120). But Briseis is more than a 'trophy girl', as becomes clear after my analysis of her representation in *The Silence of the Girls*.

In this part of the first chapter, I want to discuss what I see as the crucial elements of Briseis as a protagonist. It is very difficult to analyze if and how she is in control. Does Briseis actually have agency? Is she in charge of her own life? And do others look at her as a woman, or as an object? In her comparison between *The Silence of the Girls* and Nathalie Haynes' novel *A Thousand Ships* (2019), Charlotte Higgins is quick to decide on Briseis' agency: "The novel is a study in creating a protagonist with almost no freedom of action – except those of her own thoughts" (n.pg). I do not automatically agree with this. When analyzing *The Silence of the Girls*, the idea of agency has to be addressed, for Briseis has a complex and maybe even paradoxical position regarding agency, as I will explain in the next paragraphs.

At the start of the book, we immediately get a taste of Briseis' thoughts on one of the most important figures in Greek history: "Great Achilles. Brilliant Achilles, shining Achilles, godlike Achilles... How the epithets pile up. We never called him any of those things; we called him 'the butcher'." (3) With this, Briseis demonstrates her ability to let the 'great Achilles' tumble down from his polished pedestal, within the first few lines of the book. To her, he is no more than a butcher. This butcher does play an important role in her life, as he is the one she is doomed to please. But Briseis' message is loud and clear: this will not be a story in which Achilles is glorified or portrayed as the brave hero. We meet Briseis while she is locked up in a tower with other women, listening to the screams of her brothers when Achilles and his men kill them during their siege (14). Obviously, this defines her view of Achilles: he is the enemy, he is the other.

When her city falls, queen Briseis is not raped and murdered like many of the other women living in her village – she is spared, but only to become Achilles’ property. Within minutes, her position within the world shifts drastically. Briseis herself is very aware of this, as she is escorted out of her own city by Nestor: “He bowed courteously and I thought that, probably for the last time in my life, somebody was looking at me and seeing Briseis, the queen.” (17) After these thoughts, we see how she reacts to this loss of status, and how she decides to face this new life: “Keeping my face carefully expressionless, I looked at Nestor and thought: I will hate you till my last breath.” (17) So even seconds after her capture, she immediately chooses a way to deal with her new situation: show no emotion, keep your feelings and thoughts hidden. This, however does not reflect how she really feels. “Keeping my face carefully expressionless”: this short sentence shows how much effort it costs her to keep calm, while anger is raging in her body. Still, her mind wins over these feelings, and Briseis remains silent and expressionless. Why the expressionlessness, why the silence? There seem to be multiple possible explanations.

A first option is that her silence is not a choice, but a consequence of trauma. It is widely acknowledged that silence, or in a more extreme way, apathy, can be a result of trauma. But however logical it would be for Briseis to be traumatized, considering her situation, I do not think that in this particular moment it is her trauma that forces her to be silent. Her silence seems to be a choice. As can be gathered from the short sentence that I quoted, she *keeps* her face expressionless. It is not that her face *is* expressionless, or *becomes* expressionless: she actively forces it to be expressionless. To me, this points to an active decision to remain silent, to show no emotion. Which means that, if trauma is not the cause of her lack of expression, there has to be a different explanation.

A second option here is quite different from the first: she might be silent because she does not want to anger the enemy, resulting in her not speaking and doing as she is told. She might *want* to be obedient. Looking at her composed, expressionless manner in this way, could have important implications. It could mean that she consciously decides to behave in this way, and to be the slave girl the Greeks want her to be. This would mean that she had laid down her resistance, and accepted her fate. It would increase her chances survival, for she would not push or confront her capturers. I would call this a strategy of acceptance. However, there is another option that would result in similar behavior.

This third explanation would mean that she has not at all accepted her fate, but that she uses her composed manner and expressionless attitude as a kind of resistance – silent resistance. Examples of this are found in all kinds of literature, but to analyze if this could be a plausible strategy, I would like to specifically look at the way in which it is used by female characters in literature. Edi Pramono uses the idea of silent resistance in her essay ‘Women’s Silent Resistance Against

Hegemony in *The Scarlet Letter*, *Bekisar Merah* and *Belantik*: a Comparative Analysis'. Pramono defines silent resistance as a specific concept:

"It is a process of psychological development in enduring and resisting the hegemonic values, the development of women personalities from going with the flow with the dominating values into a firm attitude rejecting the pressure they have to accept. When the social values collide with their basic faith or principles, they express their rejection through a way without harming the opposite." (152)

Following this definition, there are signs that this is Briseis' strategy of choice. Even the second part of my chosen quote indicates so: the fact that she combines her silence and lack of expression with an intense hate, implies that she will not accept her fate willingly – but at the same time she does not "harm the opposite". Throughout the story, there are several moments like this. Briseis never shouts at, harms or attacks the Greeks, but she does have her own subtle ways to resist them – a strategy of silent resistance.

So, does Briseis act from a stance of acceptance, or from resistance? Acceptance would mean that she casts aside her past, consciously or unconsciously, and tries to make the most of her life as a slave – by being a 'good' slave girl. For a good slave girl would be a silent, obedient bed slave. This, of course would have its effects on her agency. If, on the other hand, we could address her silence as an act of resistance, this would imply that, at least in her own mind, she is able to hold on to her own voice, her own story – thus a certain agency might be present as well. To make a final call, we would have to look at other crucial moments in the narrative.

As her story moves on, Briseis' position becomes more complex, and to me, the key moment regarding her agency is the point at which she tries to walk out on Achilles. At his moment, her agency really seems to develop. She makes a plan, and hides on a cart that moves out of the city (283). Briseis cuts loose from the Greek claws that keep her imprisoned, and she walks away from her life as a slave. Her position and life seem to shift once again, and the possibilities, both bad and good, seem endless. What will happen, she does not know, but one thing is certain: by leaving, she is no longer bound to Achilles. However, against the reader's expectations, Briseis turns around. She rolls off the cart, and returns to the camp (290).

This act makes the question of agency even more complex. From here on, her presence in the camp can be seen as a choice. She could have left, but decided to come back and stay. This, however, does not mean that she thus has agency or freedom: although Briseis has chosen to return, she does not have the power or freedom to leave whenever she pleases. She had her shot at leaving, but chose not to. By deciding to return, Briseis consciously lays her life in the hands of Achilles once again. And so, he decides what will happen to her. And this is, in my opinion, what stings, what

makes *The Silence of the Girls* a complex and paradoxical stance. Pat Barker gives her protagonist a defining moment to choose, but she seems unable to shake of the male dominance, and returns.

The unexpected turn here forces me to reconsider the concept of agency. Briseis had her moment, she could take control of her life, but instead, she places her life back into Achilles' hands. Does this mean that she gives up on her agency, her own choices and her voice? No, this is not what she does. I would argue that within her life in the camp, Briseis has found her own, small, free space in which she can do as she likes – and being able to live like this would give her more agency, more freedom, than leaving would ever give her. However, she *does* give up on a piece of her own voice, and thereby her own story. As said, her story is once again part of something else, something 'greater': the life of Achilles, the story of the Trojan War. As she says herself, at the end of the book: "I tried to walk out of Achilles' story – and failed." (324) To me, this ending, this monologue from Briseis is striking, as she not only reflects on her own story here, but on the creation of myths in general as well. I analyze this particular passage and its meaning in next chapter, when I want to investigate the implications of Briseis' representation in *The Silence of the Girls*.

By giving up on her own story for now, Achilles remains the one who decides about Briseis' future. He is the one who marries her to Alcimus, thereby sealing her future. Briseis, both also Alcimus, do not seem to have any say in this (307). Married to Alcimus, but pregnant with Achilles' child, Briseis learns of Achilles' death, and this changes everything. Until this moment, her story has been intertwined with his. It is telling that *The Silence of the Girls* starts at the moment she first laid eyes on him, and that with his death, the story draws to a close. The fact that it does, has its own implications altogether. Regarding Briseis, I would like to conclude that although she is unable to really grasp and hold on to her own voice, she does have, as I would call it, 'slumbering agency'. The agency is there, and sometimes it shows, but it is not present at all times, and it takes work to be able to 'use' it. As a slave, Briseis is limited in her freedom and her choices, but she turns out to be able to make some far-reaching decisions that would be impossible if she would have had no agency whatsoever. The way in which she presents herself is crucial here. At the beginning of my analysis of Briseis, I posed two possible explanations of her choice not to show expression: acceptance or resistance. Nearing my final stance, I would argue that she does both. This slumbering agency lets Briseis move back and forth. At moments she accepts her fate and uses her silence to not draw attention to herself. At other times, her silence and almost invisible way of moving around the camp, enables her to create a save space and to resist her position as a slave.

The way in which she is able to create a position for herself to help sick and wounded soldiers, is an excellent example of this, for she even finds joy in things that she was never supposed to be doing. As Achilles' trophy, her only task is to please him – in bed. However, Briseis refuses to let this define her, and she finds a way to be useful and happy: "In spite of all this, I remember the days I

spent in that hospital working alongside Ritsa as a happy time. Happy? Yes, it surprised me too. But the fact is, I loved the work, I loved everything about it.” (139) Working at the hospital tent, taking care of the wounded soldiers, Briseis feels in control, she feels happy. I would argue that this is one of her ways of silent resistance: she does not accept her role as trophy, as object, but instead turns it around – and by doing so, she actually saves lives. She actively resists the expectations that she is only allowed to do what the Greeks tell her to do. Moreover, this work is something new to her, it is labor, something she would have never done as a queen. Paradoxically enough, her life as a slave thus gives her a completely new way of using her agency altogether.

This slumbering agency in which she alternates between acceptance and resistance makes her position ambivalent. Because she focalizes, we experience her feelings and thoughts, and know that at multiple moments in the story she makes her own decisions, regardless of her seemingly hopeless position as a bed slave and prisoner, in which she should not have any rights or possibilities. She has the possibility to leave and to change her life – but decides to return. By doing so, her story is not only intertwined with that of Achilles, her fate is as well. *The Silence of the Girls* begins and ends with Achilles. When looking at the story in that way, it is at moments more Achilles’ story than Briseis’. In the last line on the last page, Briseis acknowledges this as well, as she states after his death: “Now, my own story can begin.” The narrative does not offer a simple solution to give women a voice, it does something more powerful altogether: it shows us the complexity, the difficulty that women may experience when narrating, when telling about *their* history. What does this imply, and how can we analyze this complexity, these problems that the narrative subtly addresses? I will further look into this in the next chapter. For now, it is time to look at the modern representation of an altogether different Greek heroine: Circe.

The representation of Circe in *Circe*

As an immortal daughter of titan Helios, Circe’s life seems almost incomparable to Briseis’. However, they both deal with similar pain, struggle and hope. Like Briseis, Circe is defined by the men surrounding her. But before I will start comparing the representations of the two, it is important to first gain a thorough understanding of their complex characters as represented in their ‘own’ novels. I have analyzed Briseis: now it is time to give the floor to Circe.

Madeline Miller’s *Circe* is presented as a fictional autobiography. It is narrated by Circe, who tells the story of her life. The book starts with her birth, and ends with her, possible, death. As a (minor) god, Circe’s lifespan is different from a mortal women. During the narrative, we spend hundreds of years with her, identifying with her character. As a reader, we experience her grieve, her happiness. We encounter her insecurities, but also her development, for her character grows immensely. Born a daughter of a nymph and the titan Helios, Circe seems destined to do great things

in life. However, Circe turns out to be 'different', according to Madeline Miller's novel (3). She has a frail voice, is no exceptional beauty and does not seem to harvest any special powers. And thus, she is doomed to spend her days and nights alone in the halls of her father's halls, while her brothers' presence and her sister's beauty outshine her in every possible way, making her invisible to her parents and other gods and nymphs.

Catherine MacMillan, who has analyzed Madeline Miller's *Circe* in relation to Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, describes Circe in a telling way: "unmarried and apparently unmarriageable, [...] Circe seems destined to become a kind of immortal spinster aunt." (28). Circe as the 'Bridget Jones' of the goddesses, unable to catch anyone's interest, doomed to spend her immortality alone, drinking wine and lamenting on her unfortunate, infinite future – she sure does not seem to be the a traditional goddess as the ones we see in 'classic' mythmaking. Circe is no beautiful nymph as her aunts and nieces, or a powerful deity like her father and its brothers. Roaming the halls of her father's palace, without anything to do or create for one own, Circe is alone and powerless.

However, there is more to Circe than meets the eye. When she roams a deserted island, she meets Glaucos, a poor, mortal man. She falls in love with him, and is willing to do whatever it takes to make it possible for them to be together. This is the moment when she, unaware of it, uses her witchcraft for the first time. And, although she is not aware of it, it is also one of the first defining moments in which she is able to undermine the patriarchal court of her father. While all of the gods tell her it is impossible to change fate and to turn a mortal man into a god, she succeeds. In doing so, she undermines the most powerful and wise gods. Using a special plant, she transforms Glaucos into a god, without anyone knowing about this. Convinced that he had been a god all along, Glaucos and the other gods do not think anything of it, because no one has the ability to 'create' a god. And thus Circe is still regarded harmless, powerless and useless. But Circe and her powers are not done yet.

Glaucos, who is supposed to be the love of her life, falls in love with the nymph Scylla. When Circe realizes that she means nothing to Glaucos, she turns to her shapeshifting plant once more. Convinced that the plant brings out someone's true appearance and character, she uses it on Scylla: "She would not be able to hide her adder malice anymore. [...]The halls would echo with her furious screams and the great god would come to whip me, but I would welcome them, for every lash upon my skin would be further proof to Glaucos of my love." (48) These clear choices, the ability to change the world (and fate) of not only herself but those around her, are clear signs of not only change within Circe, but also of a growing agency. She is able to make individualistic choices based upon her own thoughts and feelings, without anyone (being able) to stop her. Circe herself also becomes more and more aware of this. When Selene, the nymph who saw Scylla turn into a monster, describes the scene to her, Circe wonders: "It felt impossible to picture the horror Selene described. To make

myself believe: *I did that.*" (50) In this moment, Circe seems to become aware of her own powers, her otherness. And so, her transformation begins. Circe starts to cast off her shyness and finds her voice.

However, her father and the other gods still dismiss her. Even when she confesses to Helios that she changed Glaucos, that she turned Scylla into a monster, she is not taken seriously. But Circe keeps talking, trying to persuade him and the other gods that she *does* have the power, until Helios speaks up:

"'Daughter, you begin to make a spectacle.' The words cut across the air. 'If the world contained that power you allege, do you think it would fall to such as you to discover it?' Soft laughter at my back, open amusement on my uncle's faces. But most of all my father's voice, speaking those words like trash he dropped. *Such as you.* Any other day in all my years of life I would have curled upon myself and wept." (54)

This paragraph is crucial and telling for way in which Circe's world is represented. To Helios it is not important what Circe says, how she feels or what she thinks, the only thing of importance is how she reflects on him. She is his daughter, and is now making 'a spectacle': something, as it is unimaginable that she, a woman, would be able to harvest powers like these in any way. In passages like these, the patriarchal construction that is represented within *Circe*, shines through, and it becomes clear how Circe has to struggle with them and is being held back by her male counterparts. Circe is not punished for what she did, as the gods do not even consider her able to do it.

It is when her brother, Aeëtes, steps forward and admits he has these powers, and recognizes them in Circe, that changes everything. He is taken seriously, for he is a man with a kingdom (57). Scared of the chaos and havoc their witchcraft could cause, Helios discusses the situation with Zeus. After reaching a decision, Helios speaks up: "'We have agreed [...] that these powers present no immediate danger. Perses lives beyond our boundaries and is no threat. Pasiphaë's husband is a son of Zeus, and he will be sure she is held to her proper place.'" (63) Here, the patriarchy present within the court of Helios is highlighted once more. Not only Circe suffers from it, her sister Pasiphaë is a victim of the structure as well. Her fate is linked to her husband, who is ordered to keep her in check. This is in stark contrast with their brother, Perses, who, unlike his sisters, is immediately considered reliable and truthful. He is not punished or exiled, the gods believe him on his word and Perses suffers no consequences whatsoever. But, the gods need their scapegoat: Circe. Helios continues his statement: "You were all here when [Circe] confessed that she sought her powers openly. She had been warned to stay away, yet she disobeyed. [...] It is agreed with Zeus that for this she must be punished. She is exiled to a deserted island, where she can do no more harm. She leaves tomorrow.'" (63)

And thus, a small gathering of men decide how Circe will spend her eternity. It is interesting to look at the process here, especially regarding agency within the narrative. Every decision is based upon the power of men, on a patriarchal structure. It is not until her brother claims that she really does have power, that Circe is taken seriously. As a woman, she is constantly dismissed and overlooked, until the men need someone to punish. When the decision is made, her brothers are spared, but she has to suffer. This passage, like the one in which Helios dismisses her, is gendered. Perses and Aeëtes are not considered a threat: they are men, they are in control. Pasiphaë is not punished: she might be a woman, but her husband is expected to keep her 'in her proper place'. Once more, the representation of this patriarchal structure is striking. And thus, Circe is forced to leave for Aiaia, a deserted island. It is here that she decides to fully focus on her powers as a *pharmakis*, a witch (72).

However, this exile turns out to give Circe more possibilities than life at her father's court has ever given her. Alone, not hindered by any patriarchal system, Circe and her witchcraft bloom, and change. And although she is exiled, she is not completely alone. During the hundreds of years of her exile, she meets Hermes, Daedalus, Ariadne, Jason and Medea. And of course, Odysseus. Meanwhile, Circe develops her witchcraft, learns to turn men into swine, and lions into obedient pets. As said, when she first decides to change Glaucos and Scylla, it is clear that she acquires agency. But it is on Aiaia that this agency really blooms. I am not the first to notice the changes Circe goes through, the growth she experiences. As Catherine MacMillan has also remarked: "In a sense, her exile on Aiaia allows Circe, who had once been a timid nymph at her father's court, disparaged and unloved, to grow in maturity and confidence." (35)

However, as MacMillan focuses on the exile to Aiaia and Odysseus' arrival there as key elements for Circe's rise to maturity, this would mean that once again a female character is only able to grow because of her relation to male characters: for it was thus Glaucos who forced her to bring out the first act of witchcraft, her brother that set her exile in motion and Helios that condemned her to this life. Furthermore, MacMillan seems to imply that it is Odysseus who makes her more powerful (35). Looking at her agency as a result of the decisions of these men, it would suggest that Circe has always been and always will be dependent on male characters surrounding her.

In my opinion, it would be a shame to analyze Circe in this way, and to simply ascribe her agency to the help of male characters – mostly heroes and gods, even. Moreover, it is simply not true. Not Helios, nor Odysseus is the one that makes Circe the powerful character filled with agency that she turns out to be. Her development is her own and they are not the ones giving agency to her. I would insist that Circe always had agency within this narrative. She becomes more and more aware of it, of her power, and her exile only makes it bloom more. To substantiate why I would see this this

way, we have to go back to the beginning of the book, to the encounter between Circe and Prometheus.

Although we only catch a short glimpse of Prometheus in the second chapter of the story, he seems to captivate Circe, and throughout her tale, she thinks of him quite often (155). As a god who defied the will of Zeus and brought mankind the gift of fire, Prometheus speaks to Circe, for she always had a weakness for mortal humans. Circe meets Prometheus right after his public punishment. It is their first and last encounter. He is whipped and tortured by a fury, while the gods watch and laugh, and Circe is baffled by this: "Even I, who knew so little of discomfort, felt the ache of it. My father would say something, I thought. Or one of the other gods. Surely they would give him some sort of acknowledgement, a word of kindness, they were his family, after all." (15) But nothing happens, and the fury whips for what feels like an eternity to Circe. Until finally, the gods grow bored and decide to take a break, and to feast on their foods and wine. Prometheus is left there, dripping in blood. And that is when Circe first shows a clear sign of agency. She walks toward him, and asks him if she can bring him any nectar:

"His gaze rested on mine. 'I would thank you for that,' he said. His voice was resonant as aged wood. It was the first time I had heard it; he had not cried once in all his torment. I turned. My breaths came fast as I walked through the corridors to the feasting hall, filled with laughing gods. Across the room, the Fury was toasting [...]. She had not forbidden anyone to speak to Prometheus, but that was nothing, her business was offence. I imagined her infernal voice, howling out my name. I imagined manacles rattling on my wrists and the whip striking from the air." (16)

This particular passage is filled with agency, and it is literally ages before she even meets Odysseus. Not only does Circe defy her father's and Zeus' wishes by speaking to Prometheus, she is also completely aware of it. She knows she could get punished and tortured for it – but she does it anyway. Her own beliefs and feelings are more important to her than what is expected of her, and thus, she takes a stance. Which shows us that already on page 16 of this 333-page-long narrative, Circe can make her own individualistic choices as a woman, as a minor goddess, surrounded by male Titans and Olympians who are consumed with might and power.

I would thus say that it is not her exile that brings out her agency, it is her exile that only enforces and strengthens it. The narrative thus represents Circe as a woman whose own experiences, trauma's and circumstances mold her into the powerful witch full of agency, who is eventually even able to directly stand up to the most powerful gods in the world and beyond. She takes on Athena, goddess of wisdom and warcraft (217), not once, but twice (303). She is able to attain the poisonous tail of Trigon (246) and speaks up to her father Helios, freeing herself from her exile (311). All this, not through fight or bloody battles, but through calm and consistent use of her agency, of her voice

and of her strengths. After the incidents with Glaucos and Scylla, she seems to decide never to use her witchcraft to attack or hurt anyone anymore – the witchcraft becomes her defense mechanism, only to be used in moments when she is not met with respect, when men, in particular, will not listen to her voice, her agency.

And thus, Circe's relation to her own agency is completely different from Briseis'. Circe owns her agency, is aware of it, and has the room and ability to use it in an intriguing way. In the next chapters I will research both Briseis' and Circe's agency further, and will entangle the difficulties here, and their meaning within the narrative as a whole, and as a part of modern myths. I have so far explained how the female protagonists can be analyzed within their own story. Both present-day representations of Briseis and Circe seem to use their story to look upon a 'male history' with their female gaze: what does this imply, and what effects of these female gaze linger within the narratives?

3. Feminist voices

The reflections of the girls

Now that I have established the presence of a certain kind of agency within the female protagonists of both books, it is important to take a closer look at the paradoxicalities and complexities that are laid bare within these stories. Why would *The Silence of the Girls* represent her female lead as such a complex, ambivalent protagonist? And why is it important that we identify with Circe while she is kept down by the patriarchal court of her father Helios? It is time to place the agency present within these protagonists in a broader perspective.

Whereas I have argued that Madeline Miller's Circe is represented as a character with a quite concrete, linear and unfailing sort of agency, the representation of Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* does not match this. Of course, positions seem to matter here. Although both Briseis and Circe are exiled from their homes, one of them remains an immortal goddess, where the other is made a slave. It is important to stay aware of these differences. However, no literary character is the same, as no woman will ever be the same. The differences in representation, character and position, do not result in an outcome in which Briseis and Circe are incomparable. The way in which they suffer from the same issues, the male dominance within their own stories, only show us how both narratives point us to an important aspect and a lack that has been with us for centuries.

Both protagonists are not only represented in this specific way to show us how female characters can grow and use their developing agency as a way to undermine the male dominance within their own lives: these particular representations can do more. Both Circe and Briseis reflect not only on their own lives and position within the world, but on their position within the history of mythmaking and storytelling as well. By structuring the story in this way, *The Silence of the Girls* is not a 'mere' female view on the story of the Trojan War, and *Circe* is not only an autobiography. They are not a way to rewrite or fill in the gaps of Homer's stories: they are more. The books are capable of problematizing the male dominance in mythical storytelling. And it is important to acknowledge and analyze this, for it can tell us more about the importance of the stories, the essence of their emergence, and the issues they want to address. I want to lay bare these elements of the stories. And to do so, it is crucial to look at the moments in the books when the female protagonists reflect on mythmaking and storytelling.

For *The Silence of the Girls*, this is most clear on the last pages of the narrative. It starts with Briseis reflecting on Achilles: "That voice, always so dominant, drowning out every other voice." (323) An interesting observation, which, to me, not only points to Achilles' actual voice, but also to the bigger picture: the male voice overshadowing the female voice in mythmaking, in stories about war,

in history. The male voice, the male point of view, drowning out every other (female) voice.

However, with Achilles' dead, Briseis goes on, and on the last page of the book, she 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. No, they'll go for something altogether softer. A love story perhaps? I just hope they manage to work out who the lovers were.” (324)

This short reflection captures so much essence, so much subtle critique on the making of myths and the glorification of war. The way in which *The Silence of the Girls*, through Briseis, reflects on storytelling, without blame, simply observant, is striking to me. If we compare this passage to the way in which history is written, myths are made, and stories are told, the observations are spot on. The dominant (hi)stories have always been the stories of the victors. They focus on the heroes, the wars and the conflicts. But, as Briseis says it these stories at the same time go for “something altogether softer” (324). With this, she does not mean that myths and stories do not acknowledge war, fights and death, she means that war is often glorified within these narratives. War is made into an heroic, and even ‘worthwhile’ story. This is why she ends her reflection talking about a love story, for this is often what happens (324). By glossing over the impacts of war with love, mythmaking glorifies it, makes it more heroic than it will ever be. There is never talk of the atrocities, of the rapes. No texts about what happens to the girls, no words on the trauma that lives on, no passages on the vulnerability of the heroes. *The Silence of the Girls* turns this around. And it does so in more than one way. It shows us the war from a female point of view, thereby enabling the reader to identify with a woman who loses everything: Briseis.

However, interestingly enough, there are also moments when we identify with Achilles. *The Silence of the Girls* is not purely ‘the Trojan war from a female perspective’, it is more complex than this. What is striking here, is that we never identify with Achilles when he is at his most heroic moment, when he wins a battle or rides to war. When he focalizes, when the reader is encouraged to identify with him, it is at his most vulnerable moments (241). We identify with him when he tries to contact his mother, and during the moments after Patroclus' death, when he tries to shake of his guilt (248). By doing this, *The Silence of the Girls* is able to undermine the male dominance present in the mythmaking of Homer and others. It problematizes the way in which we are trained to read about war in mythmaking: as something heroic, victorious and necessary. This does not only have its effects on the female characters, but on the male characters as well. By showing Achilles' vulnerability, the story undermines the toxic masculinity that is present in so many stories about war and battle. Narratives in which men are pushed into gendered roles as well. Whereas heroes are often depicted as strong, unwavering men, Barker's Achilles shatters this representation. *The Silence*

of the Girls show us the other side of the coin: trauma, rape and despair, a female protagonist with agency, and a male hero who is not afraid to cry. Modern mythmaking, voiced by vulnerability.

While *The Silence of the Girls* focuses on these crucial elements of mythmaking, *Circe* seems to ponder on the specific role of women within these stories. Circe, as a protagonist, does not reflect on this as clearly as Briseis does in *The Silence of the Girls*, but throughout the book there are some clear moments when we see Circe struggling with the gender roles present in storytelling and mythmaking. Like Briseis, Circe seems aware of the stories that will be told about her. Especially in her endeavors with Hermes, she constantly wonders how he will make up stories about her. "I could hear the tale he would tell later. *She was so desperate, she was on me like a cat*" (96). "I could hear Hermes telling the tale after. *She always was a hysteric*" (164). Interestingly enough, these reflections on the telling of stories also immediately relate to Circe's femininity, for she seems to be used to being defined for her 'female qualities', just like Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls*. For Circe, this femininity is linked to hysteric, irrational and desperate behavior. She seems to be aware that this is how people look at her. It also links back to the passage I have cited in the first chapter, when her father tells her to "not make a spectacle" (54). From a young age, Circe is aware of the way her femininity is defined by the men surrounding her, and consciously thinks of how it will be present in the stories told about her.

This becomes even more clear when she reflects on a story that she has heard about her first meeting with Odysseus: "Later, years later, I would hear a song made of our meeting. [...] I was not surprised by the portrait of myself: the proud witch undone before the hero's sword, kneeling and begging for mercy. Humbling women seems to me a chief pastime of poets. As if there can be no story unless we crawl and weep" (181). Like *The Silence of the Girls*, *Circe* reflects on the way in which stories are constructed, and on the role of women within these stories. In this passage, it is clear that Circe is used to stories in which a woman is supposed to be humble. It relates to the start of her own story as well, in which she has been silent, unable to escape the patriarchal court of her father. In *Circe*, we do not escape this construction through reflection, but through identification. Because Circe is the protagonist, we follow her growth, her change. She does not let the stories stop her, and she stops caring what Hermes or the poets would write or tell about her (238). And by doing so, she is able to voice her own story, and to shake off the male dominance in this.

Circe's story ends on this strong note. At the end of the book, she is able to break free of her exile by standing up to her father (310). She is able to force him to let her go by 'simply' reasoning with him, by being aware of her power and her acquired agency: which is present even in relation to this literal god (312). Helios caves, and Circe can leave Aiaia. On the last pages, Circe makes one last grand decision, testing fate. She decides to drink a potion made from the herbs that she has used to turn Glaucos into a God, and Scylla into a monster. Convinced that these herbs will bring out her true

self, she starts reflecting on what her life would look like if she were mortal. She describes the days she will spend with Telemachus and the children they will have. She laments on the pain she will have to endure and the love she will be able to feel, up until the day she will die of old age. By deciding to drink the potion and telling about her future, Circe takes full control of her own life for once and for all, cutting herself loose from the patriarchal court of her father and the gods. And she does not stop at this, she is even able to voice it, to tell her own story. She unravels her imagined future, her deepest desires and we read how she would have written her story if it had been completely up to her. By doing so, she completely undermines the reputation that male mythmakers have built for her. However, the narrative is open ended, and the reader never learns if Circe actually obtains the mortal life she so longs to acquire (333).

And this exact open note on which both *The Silence of the Girls* and *Circe* end, also speaks to the mind. To me, it is related to the idea that we will never be able to know everything about these mythical women, and that they cannot be defined by one story. Whereas 'classical' myths try to represent them in just a few lines, mostly based on their appearance and femininity, the stories of Barker and Miller do more. They leave the reader thinking about the loose ends and gaps within the stories of these female protagonists. It motivates the reader to connect the stories to other feminist mythmaking. It pushes us to relate Miller's Circe to Atwood's Circe, or Barker's Briseis to Wolf's Cassandra. The effect and value of these intertextual dimensions will be the subject of the last chapter.

And thus, *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* seem to choose different strategies for a similar goal, to problematize storytelling and mythmaking as we know them: but they end on the same, complex, open-ended note. Both Circe and Briseis want to write their own story, but it is only after they first reflect on it and become aware of the patriarchal limitations of mythmaking and storytelling that they are able to truly shed the male power structures and tell their own stories. And they are not the first protagonists to realize this. Because the genre of feminist mythmaking is not new, it is important to relate the representation and structures present within *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* to existing theories on mythmaking. Feminist mythmaking related to *The Silence of the Girls* and *Circe* have been written for the last few decades. Leading experts on feminist fiction are Maaïke Meijer, Linda Hutcheon and Alicia Ostriker, scholars who have studied the effects and the goals of feminist fiction that emerged as a result of the second feminist wave. Let me now apply their concepts to these recent, feminist mythmaking of the twenty-first century.

The myth(making) of women

Mythmaking by women writers has often been studied in a feminist context, but also in relation to postmodernism, as Linda Hutcheon has done. As stated in the first chapter, Hutcheon focusses on

the connection between postmodernist fiction and historiography. Connecting her findings to the study of Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci, I stated how mythmaking can be seen as an intersection point between history and fiction. What are the consequences of this?

In her study on the politics of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon, like Pat Barker and Madeline Miller, pleads for a new understanding: “Perhaps we need a rethinking of the social and political (as well as the literary and historical) representations by which we understand our world. Maybe we need to stop trying to find totalizing narratives which dissolve difference and contradiction” (Hutcheon 67). Although she does not explicitly discuss mythmaking here, her statement fits the feminist mythmaking of Pat Barker and Madeline Miller perfectly. Mythmaking as a genre is known for its construction of human values and alleged truths, as I have explained in the first chapter. *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* complicate the way in which these truths are taken for granted by society for centuries. These feminist narratives critique the way in which mythmaking and storytelling has been a man’s domain, and how male mythmaking has constructed the standards on how to represent women. This representation in male mythmaking has been based on one-sidedness, and makes it unable for readers to identify with the female characters. Looking for a solution to this problem, Hutcheon, Barker and Miller pose a different, more nuanced alternative to the ‘classic’, male mythmaking as we know them. Adding their stories to the canon of mythmaking can bring in more sensitivity, and a way to problematize, contextualize and undermine the male dominance in mythmaking.

Building onto this, is Maaïke Meijer. In her book *In tekst gevat. Inleiding tot een kritiek van representatie* she is able to connect mythmaking, intertextuality and feminism in a compelling and intriguing way. In the chapter ‘Intertekstualiteit en sekse’, she analyses how, within texts, there is a constant fight going on to define and represent gender. Relating this to intertextuality, she distinguishes between several levels of this interconnectedness between narratives. One of these levels is ‘revisionist mythmaking’, a concept she uses to define feminist stories based on ‘classic’ myths, like Barker’s *The Silence of the Girls* and Miller’s *Circe*. Although her book was published almost 25 years ago, her findings are still very relevant today, especially in relation to my analysis of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. Meijer turns her attention to the representation of female characters in ‘classic’ mythmaking. She argues that in these male mythmakings, women are mere stations along the way on a male hero’s quest for glory and fame. They are either distractions, or they “pave the way to the abyss” (50). Meijer analyses Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra* as an example of ‘revisionist mythmaking’, a book that offers us an alternative to these classic representations of women as footnotes in a hero’s story. Meijer applauds the way in which Wolf turns the male mythmakings around by making *Kassandra*, who has often been represented as a side character within the stories of male victors, into the focalizing protagonist of her own story (50). This is

comparable to the way in which Madeline Miller and Pat Barker are able to give *Circe* and Briseis the platform they need and deserve to voice their own stories. The female writers are able to turn the female characters from mere obstructions in bloody battles and long lingering wars, into the voices of pain and trauma. Meijer is not the only one who has looked into this kind of mythmaking by women. The term 'revisionist mythmaking' is a concept she borrows from Alicia Ostriker, an American poet and scholar on feminist poetry,

Ostriker has written a more elaborate essay on this specific term and its use. 'The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking', which was written in the eighties, explicitly deals with mythmaking by women. As the title suggests, Ostriker is fascinated by the way in which women are considered 'thieves' because of the way they have tried to 'steal' language (69). Ostriker explains how women have always had to express themselves in terms invented by men, and uses this as an inspiration to study the way in which women writers are now able to create a space in which they can truly represent female characters. Ostriker's findings are significant. Writing her essay years before Maaike Meijer and Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci, she is one of the first scholars to focus on how mythmaking has been a man's territory for far too long:

"At first thought, mythology seems an inhospitable terrain for a woman writer. There we find the conquering gods and heroes, the deities of pure thought and spirituality so superior to Mother Nature; there we find the sexually wicked Venus, Circe, Pandora, Helen, Medea, Eve, and the virtuously passive Iphigenia, Alcestis, Mary, Cinderella. It is thanks to mythmaking that we believe that woman must be either "angel" or "monster"." (71)

This passage lays bare the exact pain points of male mythmaking, and it highlights why there is such a need for feminist mythmaking. Paradoxically enough, women themselves have often been made into a myth themselves, as a result of years of male mythmaking. As studied in the first chapter, this has far-reaching consequences. By representing women as stations or distractions on a man's road to success, the representation of women in myths has become one-sided and one-dimensional. It has led to the construction of a universal 'myth of woman', a term used to describe the way in which male writers have tried to define women.

Simone de Beauvoir has been the first to entangle this 'myth of woman' in her essay 'The Second Sex'. De Beauvoir criticizes the way in which women are represented by men. To her, the representation of women is based on a myth, or actually, on multiple myths. Women are not represented or thought of as individuals, but as part of a category, a category that is, in reality, inadequate: for no woman perfectly matches the myths as proposed by men (1265). As De Beauvoir states: "We can see [...] that the myth is in large part explained by its usefulness to man." (1271) At the base of these myths lies the idea that woman is a mystery. Because men are unable to fully grasp women, they have declared her mystery: "a mystery for man, woman is considered to be

mysterious in essence.” (1268) It is convenient to declare something a mystery, for it is then no longer necessary to try to explain it, to make an effort. And this, Simone de Beauvoir argues, is the core of the problematic representation of women by men.

Ostriker does not explicitly mention De Beauvoir’s findings, but their analyses dealing with male representations of female identity connect perfectly. Ostriker is able to link De Beauvoir’s philosophical analysis of the construction of female stereotypes to actual mythmaking. As she claims, ‘classic’ mythmaking presents us with one-dimensional women based on an either/or structure: women are either angel or monster, virgin or prostitute. Women are not represented or thought of as individuals, but as part of a category, a category that is, in reality, inapplicable: for no woman perfectly matches the myths as proposed by male mythmakers (1265). Both De Beauvoir and Ostriker point out how mythmaking seems incapable of breaking out of this binary structure in which female representation is captured. And what is most striking here, is that De Beauvoir’s text is from 1949, while now, in 2020, her statements are still on point and relevant. Ostriker is able to connect the myth of woman to mythmaking by women, and by connecting her text to that of Simone De Beauvoir, Linda Hutcheon, Maaïke Meijer and Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci, it has become clear that it is now time to tear apart the myth of woman and replace it by feminist mythmaking. With the help of Barker and Miller, we might be able to do just that.

De Beauvoir, Meijer, Ostriker and Uçar-Özbirinci underline how women need adequate representation within myths, something that has been absent for many centuries. In the last decades, this is slowly starting to change, as Alicia Ostriker states when speaking of feminist mythmaking: “in them the old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy. Instead, [...] they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions” (Ostriker 73) These words capture the representations of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*, in which female protagonists are portrayed as complex characters that undergo growth, change and trauma. *Circe* and *Briseis* cannot be defined as either angel or monster, they do not fit the male fantasy. By representing all their complexities, doubts and pain, the narratives are able to break with the ‘myth of woman’, and critique the one-dimensional representation of female characters present in male mythmaking. Representations that offer true role models for female readers to identify with, and relate to.

Although they are a perfect example of the theories of Ostriker, Meijer and other theorists on feminist mythmaking, Barker and Miller are not the first to do so, and so I have not yet completely established why their narratives emerged. Feminist mythmaking has been with us for multiple decades now. What then, is the specific importance of these recent works? Why do the narratives of Pat Barker and Madeline Miller still have this crucial meaning and urgency within these modern

times? Here, the genre of the mythmaking is crucial. As said in the first chapter, myths have the capacity to deal with truths, even in the form of fiction. To break and make myths, women writers do not only have to write a new story: they have to be accepted as a new mythmaking, a new truth, as well. And this is why repetition is important, as Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci points out: "In order to be accepted as a living myth, images must cohere into a story that seems 'true' to significant numbers of people. It is not possible for a single individual in complex modern culture to create a myth" (Uçar-Özbirinci, Introduction, 9) And so, mythmaking is not something that can be changed overnight. We need a multitude of stories, of voices and of female mythmakers to overthrow the well-known, male-dominated mythmaking. In voicing their own stories, female mythmakers can "emphasize that history should also include herstory, from her own voice. They reveal various persistent patterns, which, in time, will turn into mythic patterns" (Uçar-Özbirinci, 'Conclusion' 242). This explains part of the importance of the stories, and it is an important argument to why the narratives are still written today. The goal of feminist mythmakers is not reached yet, for their stories are still seen as mere 'rewritings' of the 'classics'.

However, my analysis of the reflections of both Circe and Briseis have proved that there is more to them than being a 'rewriting'. And this makes it clear that the quest of feminist mythmakers is not done yet. There is still a gap to fill, a lack to solve. And this, to me, is related to the academic methodology that has recently been when analyzing these particular texts. To truly give feminist mythmaking the chance to create new truths, we have to treat them as truly equal to the 'canonical' myths, the 'classic' myths of Homer and others. The books are only analyzed as a product of Homer's original text, a follow-up, a 'rewriting'. And this is something that troubles me, and that I would like to explore and investigate, for it stands in stark contrast with the arguments of Hutcheon, Meijer and Uçar-Özbirinci, and the reflections present within *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. Thus, it is time to analyze what happens when scholars construct frameworks and hierarchies, and push these modern myths into the binary opposition between 'original' and 'rewriting'. In the next chapter I will study this, and, more importantly, I will discuss what alternatives are available.

Chapter 4: From 'daughters' to sisters

The risks of 'fictionalisations' and 'rewritings'

One of the few academic texts that explicitly analyses *The Silence of the Girls*, is Edwin Gentzler's 'Women writers and the fictionalisation of the classics', published in *The Translator*. Gentzler, who is a literary scholar, combines an approach of comparative literature with his knowledge on translation studies. In his first paragraph Gentzler explains his goal, for he is "primarily interested in the reception of classical texts: their afterlife, their influence on other genres of creative writing, and their social impact." (269) This goal clearly differs from mine: whereas I want to look at the text of Barker and Miller themselves, he uses them as a lens to look at Homer's 'original'. To do research on reception, he uses a "transdisciplinary research field" (269). He analyses four texts with a relation to Homer's 'originals'. His texts of choice are Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, and Emily Wilson's translation of *The Odyssey*.

In the introduction, Gentzler points out the importance of these new narratives: "For hundreds of years, in the field of classical studies, women have been excluded, not admitted to graduate programs of study and rejected by publishers. But that is beginning to change" (271). It seems to inspire him, to make him want to study these particular texts, these narratives written by women who were moved by Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. However, because he seems to be aware of the changing field and the importance of it, it was surprising that Gentzler was not more aware of the sensitivities present when dealing with these particular feminist texts. To elaborate on this, it is crucial to take a critical look at his concept of choice.

Gentzler constantly refers to *The Silence of the Girls* and other texts by women writers as "fictionalisations of Homer" (271), while he describes Homer's own work as "classics". This use of concepts is not an innocent one, but it has direct implications. By dividing the two, and calling the one 'classic' and the other 'fictionalisation', Gentzler does not use the concept to make a distinction between myth, literature and history, he does something else: he, maybe deliberately, maybe unconsciously, creates a hierarchy, in which Homer's texts are more important than its sequels by feminist writers. The result is a construction in which an open analysis of the modern myths becomes troubled. Because he does not conceptualize the term, the use of it becomes blurred. He only gives a short explanation on fictionalisations in which he explains a part of its nature: "fictionalisations of classical texts, [are] in many ways [...] similar to pioneering translation and rewriting work done in theatre, but [...] also leave record of translation and adaptation strategies" (274). This explanation of the work of these feminist mythmakers is too limited, and it does offer an explanation to why Gentzler chooses the specific term 'fictionalisation', instead of a more neutral term to discuss the work of these writers.

This has its direct effects on his research. The constructed hierarchy becomes leading within his analysis of the literary works. As Cambridge Dictionary defines it, 'fictionalisation' is "the action of writing about a *real* event or character, but adding imaginary details and changing some *facts*" (n. pag). This definition allows me to explain why the concept is problematic to me. As is stated here, a 'fictionalisation' adds "imaginary details" and changes some "facts" in an originally "real event or character". By calling *The Silence of the Girls* a 'fictionalisation', Gentzler actually proposes that there is such a thing as "the real story", or even "the true story". But there can be no such thing as a 'fictionalisation' of something that is already fiction. The use of a term like 'fictionalisation' seems to imply that the novels and their authors are not seen as actual 'mythmakers', while they are excellent examples of books that create modern, feminist myths, in line with the theories of Meijer, Hutcheon and Uçar-Özibirinci, as I have shown in the third chapter.

The use of the term is limiting within Gentzler's own argument as well. In his essay, he wants to show how translation studies should open up to other disciplines, and how it would be useful to compare translations to 'fictionalisations'. He ends his text with the following statement: "New transgressive and transformative voices are emerging, ones that are challenging the very definition of the fields of both classical and translation studies. For scholars who have taken the outward turn, such contributions are most welcome" (280). A useful and productive insight, that would have positive effects on all of the mentioned approaches. Gentzler seems aware of the new, feminist era of mythmaking, and he is opening up to it. However, his methodology is not. Letting go of the term 'fictionalisation' would result in a more open and considered dialogue between Homer and the feminist mythmakers.

But Gentzler is not the only one to disacknowledge the independent contribution of feminist writers. In the recent work of Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos, *Homer's Daughter. Women's Responses to Homer in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, the lack of adequate terms is present as well. In their book, Cox and Theodorakopoulos zoom in on the way in which Homer's works have been put into a different perspective by women writers in the nineteenth and twentieth century. *Homer's Daughters* is one of the few academic works that is completely dedicated to how women writers respond to Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In researching this, *Homer's Daughters* focusses on feminist mythmaking, like Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* and Adele Geras' *Ithaka*. It leads to some interesting insights, especially on the way in which female protagonists are able to de-glorify war and make a plea for pacifism (Cox and Theodorakopoulos 12). In this way, the contributors of the volume are able to lay bare the way in which some of these women writers turn the 'classics' around. However, like Edwin Gentzler, Cox and Theodorakopoulos seem to be more interested in the voice of Homer within these new texts, than in the actual voice of these new female mythmakers themselves. The result is a more 'top-down' methodology, in which they are interested

in the various ways in which women respond to Homer's 'classics'. To explain the implications of the use of this approach, I will analyze their use of the term 'rewritings'.

In their introduction, Cox and Theodorakopoulos shortly mention *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. What is interesting in their treatment of the myths, is how the analyses of these modern myths are framed. When writing about texts like *The Silence of the Girls* or *Circe*, or other narratives inspired by Homer, Cox and Theodorakopoulos consequently call these stories 'rewritings'. Their sole focus is on how the works relate to Homer, and how Homer's voice can be heard through these new writings. It might be logical to place a story within its context, and compare it to related stories. This does not have to be a bad thing. In fact, it is in part crucial to our understanding of the texts. As Maaïke Meijer has stated, we cannot deny the link between modern myths and their genre-conventions and intertextuality (56). What does bother me, however, is the hierarchy that is a direct consequence of this, without it being addressed by the writers of the book. This is comparable to the chosen methodology of Edwin Gentzler's text.

By regarding these new stories as 'rewritings', Cox and Theodorakopoulos, also create a division, with 'originals' on the one hand, and 'rewritings' on the other. Like the use of the term fictionalization, it establishes a direct hierarchy. By calling these stories 'rewritings', an inclination is created to read these 'rewritings' only in relation to their 'original' texts. The prefix 're' is crucial and reoccurring here. It leads us to think that these writings are here to change the 'original', to write it all anew. It makes it very difficult to look at the narratives as independent stories. This explains why the term 'rewriting' is not a constructive concept when analyzing texts like Barker's or Miller's. The effects become even more clear when Cox and Theodorakopoulos explain the effect of the 'rewritings': "Through the works of the women writers studied in this volume, Homer speaks of the First World War, the Second World War, the horrors of Franco's dictatorship, and the war in Vietnam" (12) The way in which Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos present the impact of the modern myths in this way is troubling, for it is not Homer who speaks through these texts, but the female writers themselves: Madeline Miller speaks, Pat Barker speaks, Margaret Atwood speaks, Christa Wolf speaks. It is no longer Homer's mythmaking, the female writers and their protagonists are the ones who voice their stories. And this is exactly the point that these narratives make, but it goes missing when scholars only and solely relate their works to Homer. It keeps them stuck inside a construction of male dominance. This is not only present within the analysis, but it can be seen in the title of the complete volume as well: *Homer's Daughters. Why not sisters?* The fact that these narratives are from a newer age than Homer's, does not give us the right to place their texts below his, or to enforce this male hierarchy on them. I will not deny that there is a chronological order, but this does have to result in an hierarchical order, as I will also explain in the next part of this chapter.

And thus, we seem to be stuck. While Barker's *Briseis* and Miller's *Circe* show us how important it is to not limit ourselves to the existing male myths, recent academic analyses appear unable to cut loose from its grasps. How can we read and analyze these texts in a way that is not harmful, that breaks them free and lets go of these harming hierarchies? There is a need for another methodology, something that would rid us of harming terms and concepts like 'rewriting' and 'fictionalisation'. In the following part of this chapter, I will look for a solution, for a new concept. How can we truly learn from these modern myths as presented to us by Madeline Miller and Pat Barker?

What is especially striking in this regard, is that the concepts are available, the methods are out there. Maaike Meijer and Alicia Ostriker have shown us ways to respectfully analyze feminist mythmakings in a non-hierarchical way. But it seems as if these useful concepts and specific methodologies stay marginalized, instead of being accepted by other disciplines. The implications and effects when using certain, harmful terminology is known within gender studies and related disciplines. However, my analysis of modern, academic writings, has made it clear that not every approach is as aware of the effects of its own methodology. And thus, I want to delve deeper into the need for an adequate methodology. To do so I will take a look at adaptation theory, an approach that has been dealing with the hierarchy between 'original' and 'rewriting' for decades. Although the methods are originally from texts on film theory, they can also be of inspiration to our understanding of feminist mythmaking, in which the hierarchy between 'original' and 'rewriting' seems such a persistent although unnecessary construction.

Mosaic mythmaking

One of the most influential scholars specialized in theories on adaptation, is Robert Stam. As a film-theorist focused on semiotics, he researches films that are based upon a literary work. In his analysis of these adaptations, he pleads for a turn to a more "transtextual" approach, in which the idea of 'fidelity' is abandoned. In the following paragraph, I will explain why Stam's critique on 'fidelity', and the arguments he uses to discard the term, are closely linked to my own critique on terms like 'fictionalization' and 'rewriting'. To explain the importance of non-binary and non-hierarchical analyses of film adaptations, Stam wrote 'Beyond Fidelity. The Dialogics of Adaptation.' In this text, Stam not only reflects on filmmaking, but on literature as well. And he does so in a useful way, related to my own findings when discussing *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. His most important argument is based on a critique on the term 'fidelity', and it is related to intertextuality. As he argues:

All texts are tissues of anonymous formulae, variations on those formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, and confections and inversions of other texts. In the broadest sense, intertextual dialogism refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the

discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, which reach the text not only through recognizable influences, but also through a subtle process of dissemination. (64)

In this part of his text, Stam points to the importance of intertextuality. He emphasizes the importance of a dialogue between texts, and the need to look beyond the idea that a text has one origin. Stories have a diverse multiplicity of origins. This strengthens my idea that it is limiting to discuss *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* as 'rewritings' of Homer. For it is not only Homer that has been its origin, there is a multitude, a matrix of intertextuality related to the origin of these feminist mythmakings. So naming them 'rewritings' of Homer, constructs a hierarchy that is not functional, but limiting. In her analysis of Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*, Maaïke Meijer has been able to point this out beautifully as well: she never mentions Homer, but places *Kassandra* within a more broad context of intertextuality and revisionist mythmaking (46), doing justice not only to the novel itself, but to its 'movement' as well.

Literary scholar Mireia Aragay has combined the theories of Stam with that of one of the most influential semioticians: Julia Kristeva. Although Kristeva's work is more than 50 years old now, Aragay proves how relevant and necessary it still is. She uses Kristeva's insights in her analysis of modern intertextuality. Like Robert Stam, Aragay is interested in adaptation theory, and like me, she uses texts by women writers to develop her theories. Together with Gemma Lopez, she has written the text 'Inf(l)ecting *Pride and Prejudice*: Dialogism, Intertextuality, and Adaptation', as a part of her volume *Books in Motion*. Aragay and Lopez study the connections between Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones* and adaptations of both works. Aragay and Lopez point to Kristeva's statement that texts are a "mosaic of quotations", and build onto Stam's argument that fidelity should be replaced by a methodology in which there is more focus on the importance and enormous extent of intertextuality in a broad sense. By connecting Stam to Kristeva, Aragay and Lopez are able to zoom in on the power of intertextuality within a feminist context. Whereas Stam and Kristeva have both already pointed out the boundless, open-ended nature of intertextuality, Aragay and Lopez take their theories one step further. They do not stop at looking at the impact of Jane Austen on its 'rewritings', they conclude by pointing out the way in which these adaptations have their own, new implications on the 'original' as well (217). By doing so, Aragay and Lopez completely undermine the idea of a chronological hierarchy, and are able to truly look at the texts as a mosaic, in the way that Kristeva has proposed. *Bridget Jones* is no longer a derivative of *Pride and Prejudice*, they are inf(l)ecting each other, without a constructed hierarchy. In this way, all texts create new meanings in different directions, not only top-down (217).

This combination of the theories of Stam and Kristeva bring us great benefits when looking at the genre of feminist mythmaking. It allows us to create a space in which we can reflect on Homer

bottom-up, looking at the new insights *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* can lay bare within Homer's own work. In this way, the feminist myths are able to create a true voice of their own. It can result in a way to study masculine myths through a feminist lens. And this is exactly what feminist, modern mythmakings like *The Silence of the Girls* and *Circe* point out to us. *Circe* and *Briseis* are, although limited by male representations surrounding them, able to reflect on storytelling. This is not an easy process, as I have shown in my analysis on their agency. They have to 'work through' the masculine stories of Achilles, Helios and Odysseus, and become aware of their own voice and its power. In their reflections, *Briseis* and *Circe* warn us for the complexities in feminist mythmaking, they warn us for the ways in which they are silenced by patriarchal structures and stolen agency. And interestingly enough, this silencing is not only present in literature, it is also still slumbering within our own academic methods, as the use of problematic concepts shows us. *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* are thus able to point out that the debate on feminist mythmaking is not nearly done. Whereas Maaïke Meijer, Alicia Ostriker and Pürnur Uçar-Özbirinci's have written interesting and crucial works on the role of feminist mythmaking, I am convinced that we are able to take their theories even further.

Unfortunately, new texts on these works have showed us a return to concepts like 'original', 'classic', 'rewriting' and 'fictionalisation', concepts that, as I have shown, do not match the more nuanced methodologies of scholars like Linda Hutcheon, Maaïke Meijer, Julia Kristeva and Robert Stam. It is time for us to put Kristeva's words into action, and look at these stories as "a mosaic". Let us not forget the work earlier feminist waves have brought us and place the narratives of *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* into this broader academic perspective. With this idea in mind, let us return to Maaïke Meijer and Alicia Ostriker, and their use of the term revisionist mythmaking. It is an interesting term, one that does the texts a lot more justice than 'rewritings' or 'fictionalisations'. However, to completely rule out the hierarchy present within the concepts, I want to construct a term in which both Homer as well as Pat Barker and Madeline Miller can be captured, to truly resolve the binary opposition between 'original' and 'rewriting'.

I would thus plead for a nuanced method in which the methods of adaptation theory, mythmaking and feminist debate can be connected. Let us analyze the texts, both Homer's and feminist myths, as 'mosaic mythmaking'. I coin this term, because it allows me to incorporate Kristeva's mosaic of intertextuality, in which there is no hierarchy, and combine it with the term 'mythmaking', in which *gerund*, the active form, is crucial to me. A more simplified term like 'mosaic of myths' does not completely do the texts justice: Barker and Miller do not only write the words, they create the story, they *make* the myth.

By looking at these stories as mosaic mythmaking, the narratives are connected, but the hierarchy is absent. The stories will complement each other, instead of substitute each other, as the

concept of 'rewriting' might connote. In this way, endings of both narratives get the context they deserve: that of a woman voicing her own life, writing her own story, next to the known male version of it. As Briseis reflects on storytelling, and Circe ends her story by sketching her own future, her own death, the way she would want it, they create a space in which they are heard, a place in which no male voice holds power over them. They are the representations and voices of feminist mythmaking. I am not pleading for a methodology in which we discard Homer completely. His texts are the inspiration to so many new myths. I do, however plead for another way of dealing with this texts, in which we let go of concepts like 'rewriting' and 'fictionalisation'. When analyses are built on concepts like these, we are inclined to slip into a comfortable but problematic binary opposition between 'original' and 'derivative'. In doing so, feminist mythmaking will always be second to male mythmaking – simply because of a chronological order. And this is exactly what these new representations of Circe and Briseis warn us for: let the women tell their own stories, their own myths, their own history. It is only by moving beyond Homer that we can place the old and modern myths next to each other. In doing so, we will finally be able to truly grasp the importance of these feminist voices in modern myths.

Conclusion

With this creation of a new concept, I am able to conclude my research, and solidly answer the question posed at the start of my thesis: why do these new modern myths like *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls* emerge, and what urgencies do they address in relation to the ongoing academic debate on feminist mythmaking?

I started out my introduction by explaining why it is necessary to analyze *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*. These books give a platform to female characters who, in the past, have been treated as mere 'footnotes'. The novels point out the complete absence of a female perspective. This is not only crucial to show us the importance of the role of women in history and war, but also to demask the story of the victors as the only story, as the truth. By looking at war and battle through the eyes of a female victim like Briseis, we become more aware of the dirty parts of conquest, as voiced in these modern myths. Both protagonists are able to confront us with the patriarchal structure that has become deeply embedded within storytelling and mythmaking. They have to struggle, for their male counterparts do not consider them worthy of their own voice and agency.

The way in which Briseis and Circe acquire, develop and use their agency, is no straightforward, linear path to follow for them, starting at a point with no agency, and ending with full agency. The matter is a lot more complex than this. Their relation to male characters and the roles in which they are pushed by them, are crucial to the way in which they are able to take control of their own life and story. Both Circe and Briseis, however, are able to create a safe space in which they can reflect on the way in which they are held back by male power structures. What is crucial here, is that the effect of their stories is not limited to the representation of Circe and Briseis alone: the modern mythmakings also make us able to understand the ambivalences present in the male characters. By changing the point of view from victor to victim and from male to female, complexities come to the surface. Thus, the stories are able to lay bare vulnerabilities in not only the female protagonist, but in the male heroes and in the story as a whole as well.

Both Linda Hutcheon and Maaike Meijer have studied the impact of male power structures within history and myths, and the way in which new, feminist texts deal with them. It is important to keep in mind here, that there is an added dimension to the stories of Madeline Miller and Pat Barker, because of their genre. As I have stated in the first chapter, the role of myths is crucial in this context. For myths not only deal with fiction, but have a connection to history as well. These stories are able to deal with alleged truths, but also with slumbering ideologies. In this way, the myths are able to build a bridge between fiction and history, past and present. It strengthens the importance of these modern, feminist stories. They are not only able to lay bare the problems within their own story, they reflect on mythmaking as a whole as well, developing a certain meta-position.

And in doing so, both protagonists turn the 'classics' around. Circe and Briseis differ from each other in particular ways, yet they are still able to lay bare the same problem: the way in which mythmaking uses both male and female stereotypes, and the way in which scholars follow these same, patriarchal structures when analyzing these myths. This is the urgency both narrative address, and this, I argue, is why they emerge. To truly value their work, we have to be careful in our dealing with them. We should refer to them as more than 'rewritings' of Homer's 'classics'. These concepts are constructions that do more harm than good to these works. They create a hierarchy, as I have argued in the last chapter. More than 20 years ago, Maaïke Meijer and Alicia Ostriker have opted for the term 'revisionist mythmaking', a term that has inspired me. Unfortunately, we do not find this term in more recent work by scholars on feminist mythmaking, in which the stories are forced into a more hierarchical structure.

It is thus necessary to rethink the recently used methodologies, and to turn our attention to the way in which our concepts have slipped away from us. We have to analyze these myths, that are now often called 'rewritings' or 'fictionalisations' of the 'classics', as Edwin Gentzler, Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos have done, in a new way, while respecting the work that has already been done. In this thesis I have introduced a new concept, related to a new way to treat these stories. Define the stories as mosaic mythmaking, as pieces that may not always fit into each other, but are connected, and can together form a completely new view on themselves and each other. In doing so, we are both able to construct a network of intertextuality, as well as undermine the hierarchy and binary oppositions that are so often placed upon these mythmakings. It would no longer be necessary to sharply differentiate between the 'original' and the 'rewriting', for cultural analysis does not have to be a linear or chronological methodology, as Mireia Aragay and Gemma Lopez have argued. Homer's work is thus no longer the center piece here, it is simply part of a bigger whole, a bigger connection of works that all string together and at the same time stand on their own.

By using this concept, we create a space in which the stories can be analyzed in a multitude of ways, without harmful implications. Briseis and Circe show us the struggle for agency, the fight that is needed to establish a feminist voice within the male crowd of storytellers and mythmakers. But they succeed. Let us succeed in giving these feminist voices in modern myths a fitting, respectful methodology for analysis, in which they are truly heard.

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