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Abstract

This master's thesis investigates strategies of female empowerment in three contemporary retellings of Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The examined novels are Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* (2020), Claire Heywood's *Daughters of Sparta* (2022) and Jennifer Saint's *Elektra* (2023). Drawing on the concepts of revisionist mythmaking and feminist narratology, the study analyses how narratological elements – representations of space and time, narration, focalisation, plot, characterisation and symbols – are employed to empower female characters, thereby challenging patriarchal constructions of gender and repositioning women at the centre of myths. The analysis demonstrates that spaces, such as the shore, the hill, the 'wilderness' and the tomb, empower female characters by providing them with opportunities to (re)claim power, gain knowledge for self-determination or recast them as guardians of justice. Temporal strategies as, for instance, deliberate usage of grammatical tense, focus on aspects of a mother's life and cycles of revenge, shift the narrative centre towards women's experiences and question androcentric authority. Likewise, aspects of narration and focalisation contribute to female empowerment by providing women with voices to recount their own stories or filtering events through their perspectives. Multiperspectivity further aids in excavating marginalised female viewpoints and highlights their diversity and shared suffering. Lastly, revised plot structures recentre the narratives around aspects of women's lives affected by the Trojan War, blurring the angel-monster dichotomy and portraying women as multi-faceted. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that Haynes', Heywood's and Saint's revisions challenge 'old songs' and offer new versions that question patriarchal gender ideals and systems of power.

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Abstract [Deutsch]

Diese Masterarbeit analysiert Strategien weiblichen Empowerments in drei zeitgenössischen Neuerzählungen von Homers *Ilias* und *Odyssee*. Beforscht werden Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* (2020), Claire Heywoods *Daughters of Sparta* (2022) und Jennifer Saints *Elektra* (2023). Unter Rückgriff auf die Konzepte des *revisionist mythmakings* und der feministischen Erzähltextanalyse untersucht die Arbeit, wie narratologische Elemente – nämlich Raum- und Zeitdarstellung, Narration, Fokalisierung, Plot, Charakterisierung und Symbole – eingesetzt werden, um weibliche Figuren zu ermächtigen, patriarchale Geschlechterkonstruktionen zu hinterfragen und Frauen ins Zentrum der Mythen zu rücken. Die Analyse zeigt, dass Räume wie Küste, Hügel, ‚Wildnis‘ und Grab, weibliche Figuren stärken, indem sie ihnen Möglichkeiten bieten, Macht (zurück) zu gewinnen, Wissen zur Selbstbestimmung zu erlangen oder sie als Hüterinnen der Gerechtigkeit neu zu verorten. Zeitliche Strategien – etwa der bewusste Gebrauch grammatischer Tempora, der Fokus auf Mutterschaft oder Zyklen der Rache – verlagern das narrative Zentrum auf weibliche Erfahrungen und stellen androzentrische Autorität infrage. Ebenso tragen Aspekte von Narration und Fokalisierung zu weiblicher Ermächtigung bei, indem Frauen Stimmen erhalten, ihre Geschichten selbst zu erzählen oder Ereignisse durch ihre Perspektiven gefiltert werden. Multiperspektivität fördert zudem die Sichtbarmachung marginalisierter weiblicher Standpunkte und betont deren Vielfalt und gemeinsames Leid. Schließlich zentrieren überarbeitete Handlungsstrukturen die Erzählungen um Lebensbereiche von Frauen, die vom Trojanischen Krieg betroffen sind und verwischen die Engel-Monster-Dichotomie zugunsten vielschichtiger Frauendarstellungen. Letztlich zeigen Haynes', Heywoods und Saints Revisionen, wie ‚alte Lieder‘ herausgefordert und patriarchale Macht- und Geschlechterideale infrage gestellt werden können.

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Introduction

*Anger – sing, goddess,
the anger of Achilles son of Peleus . . .
(Homer, *The Odyssey* 4)*

The old songs began with fury and a muse summoned to sing a hero's tale – but now, from the margins of myth, women characters rise to tell their own stories, no longer content to be spoken for. Long celebrated as cornerstones of Western literature, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are equally enduring monuments to a tradition that silences, sidelines and subordinates the voices of women. These narratives are characterised by a strong representation of patriarchal values, marginalising the female perspective (Burke 57). Catherine Burke states that they portray “the female” as an “accompaniment to and illustration of the male journey” and she concludes that “[t]he quintessential epic journey is a masculine one” (57). Burke's observations underline the pronounced emphasis on the male experience in these texts that are still perpetuated today. Their lasting status as foundational works of Western literary tradition suggests that the male story is worth being retold for centuries while tales about women are less important, relegated to mere footnotes to the great, male epic. From a feminist point of view such implications have to be critically scrutinised.

It is the purpose of my thesis to investigate narratological elements that empower female characters in three specific contemporary rewritings of Greek myths. To fully grasp the significance of such reimaginings, it is necessary to first examine the concept of myth itself before discussing feminist adaptations. Myths are an integral part of human history and societies. This notion is reflected in the entry about myth in the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, which distinguishes between two meanings of the word. First, myth can describe “a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events” (‘Myth’ n.p.). As an example, the dictionary provides “the heroes of Greek myth” (‘Myth’ n.p.), underscoring, on the one hand, the significance of these narratives because they are utilised as clarifications for the term and, on the other hand, the centrality of the male perspective in these tales since the heroes the entry alludes to are predominantly male. This is evidenced by an online search for the phrase “heroes of Greek myth”, as the results provide lists of (well-known) male heroes, including warriors who fought in the Trojan War, such as Achilles,

Hector, Odysseus, Agamemnon or Menelaus. One exception of a famous female heroine, who is mentioned as well, is Atalanta ('Greek Heroes' n.p.; Kapach n.p.; Gill n.p.; 'From Achilles to Odysseus' n.p.). The second meaning of myth refers to "a widely held but false belief or idea" ('Myth' n.p.). This can be "a misrepresentation of the truth", "a fictitious or imaginary person or thing" or "an exaggerated or idealized [sic] conception of a person or thing" ('Myth' n.p.). Based on this dichotomous definition, it can be argued that myths are, at least partially, fabricated, created or imagined narratives.

However, as Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone clarify, there is no one definition of 'myth' that will account for all the possible uses of the word (3). This notion is also reflected in Laurence Coupe's writing about Don Cupitt's 'family-resemblance' approach, stating that there is a variety of conflicting definitions and that defining 'typical features' would be least misleading (5). Moreover, Robert A. Segal mentions that the study of myths in the modern era is not limited to one scientific discipline (1–2). The social sciences, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, literature as well as religious studies are all interested in myths and "[e]ach discipline harbours multiple theories of myth" (Segal 1–2). This explains not only the difficulty of defining the term, but it also gestures to myth's significance to human cultures and societies, as its examination appears to be important to various scholarly fields. Even though Dowden and Livingstone acknowledge the difficulty of providing a straightforward definition, they associate the term with "a network of Greek stories" but do not present any other theories (3). Limiting the definition of 'myth' to 'Greek stories' is reductive, which is proven by the extensive entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on 'myth' that refers to the diverse dimensions of the concept (Buxton et al. n.p.). One of the approaches explained in the lexicon is structuralism. Scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss are concerned with the underlying structure or 'logic' of myths, while formalists as, for example, Vladimir Propp or Walter Burkert attempt to discover elemental patterns in mythical narratives (Buxton et al. n.p.).

Roland Barthes, in turn, applies the concept to semiological readings of popular culture and therefore interprets 'myth' as an ideology "understood as a body of ideas and practices, which by actively promoting the values and interests of dominant groups in society, defend the prevailing structures of power" (Storey 119). According to Barthes, myth works on shared cultural codes and thus is contingent on the context of its publication, allowing for the construction of multiple meanings and it is continuously

confronted by counter-myth. Myth attempts to portray historical intentions of (“bourgeois”) ideology as natural (Storey 119, 121–22). Although Barthes develops his theory on the basis of his investigation of products from popular culture, some aspects are reflected in literary representations and adaptations of myths.

Myth can also be defined as a story (Thury and Devinney 4; Segal 4) but not necessarily as a Greek one. This is demonstrated by Segal, who describes ‘myth’ as a story that tells something significant, its protagonists being divine, human or even animal personalities that can either be agents or mere objects of action (5). A myth’s function is weighty since it “accomplishes something significant for adherents” and can express convictions but does not necessarily have to be true (Segal 6). Furthermore, Sian Lewis cautions against interpreting myths as representations of a single tale (446, 455). On the contrary, the different versions of (Greek) myths that have been passed down until today suggest a possibility for alternative readings (Lewis 446–47, 455).

As these elaborations have shown, there is no one specific definition of ‘myth’, which is why my thesis is based on a combination of Segal’s and Barthes’ approaches, with additions based on Lewis and the *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Consequently, I understand myths as imagined stories of (past) historical or social significance. The main figures can be divine, human or animals and they can either be agents or objects of action. Myths do not represent a single story or fixed pattern; they are malleable and allow for different readings and versions or ‘counter-myths’. Myths do not necessarily represent ‘the truth’ or (historical) reality. The focal point of my combined definition is that myths are constructed narratives and thus can be de- or reconstructed and utilised to challenge existing beliefs or social systems, which is illustrated by the existence of different versions of ancient (Greek) myths as well as their (contemporary) adaptations.

Just like myths, adaptations have long been part of Western culture. The pleasure of their consumption is not only derived from recognition and remembrance but from the experience of change as well (Hutcheon 2, 4). The notion of change links Linda Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation to Judith Roof’s approach that theorises narratives as systems since Roof’s elaborations underline the malleability of stories. She argues that narratives are systems and these systems operate on a generating principle or “system rule”. This ‘rule’, i.e. the retaining of core elements of the source text, allows for the recombination of story elements or the adaptation’s interaction with other types of media, context or narrative convention as long as the new versions

adhere to the 'rule' (Roof 45, 47–48). A system's 'rule' creates what Roof terms "nodes"; these open the prior text to possibilities for alteration and new interpretation (48). Understanding narratives as systems thus underscores the value of adaptations as they may present the source material from new or different perspectives. Regarding my own thesis, this means that Greek myths are narrative systems with 'nodes' enabling alternative versions. By retaining core elements of a certain myth but at the same time adapting other parts and emphasising different angles, adaptations can fulfil different purposes. *Feminist* rewritings of Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* exemplify this as they retain certain elements of the prior texts, for instance, Clytemnestra's marriage to Agamemnon, and use these to shift the focus towards marginalised or misrepresented women in order to empower them. Ultimately, adaptations present new stories with clear connections (via core elements functioning as 'nodes') to their source material. Hence, as described by Linda Hutcheon, they are "never simply reproductions" (4). Even though they derive from a specific source material and have an overt connection to this prior text or set of texts, they are nonetheless autonomous works (Hutcheon 6). Hutcheon theorises adaptations as both process and product. She defines them as "acknowledged transposition[s] of a recognizable [sic] other work or works[, a] creative *and* an interpretative act of appropriation/salvaging [and a]n extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (8–9). Various elements of a source text may be transposed in an adaptation, including themes, characters, specific narrative units such as plot structure, pacing or focalisation as well as the story's point of departure or conclusion. Adaptations can also take the form of re-mediations, involving a change in medium, which require the adoption of new conventions and sign systems. The chosen medium significantly influences the extent and nature of possible alterations: some require omissions or compressions, while others necessitate expansions. Ultimately, adaptations are first interpretations and then creations (Hutcheon 10–12, 16, 18–19). As my study focuses on literary adaptations of Homer's epics, which incorporate a variety of Greek myths (Létoublon 36) that were often transmitted verbally and not in written form (Lewis 447), I use the terms 'adaptation', 'rewriting' and 'retelling' interchangeably as well as 'reimagination' since Hutcheon's definition stresses the creative and interpretative aspects of rewritings.

Furthermore, Hutcheon argues that adaptations encompass multiple potential intentions (7). They may, for instance, serve to honour the source text or to critique

and challenge its “aesthetic or political values,” yet always within a fluid and specific context (Hutcheon 20, 26). Consequently, it can be assumed that *feminist* rewritings of Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* seek to contest the androcentric norms and gender roles portrayed in these texts by producing a counter-discourse focusing on often neglected, marginalised or discredited female perspectives.

However, Lewis points out that in gender studies there is a tendency towards interpreting texts that focus on relationships between men and women, but myth should not be the sole evidence for gender relations and norms in antiquity because “we should not assume that myth had a single story to tell, or that its sole purpose was to justify ancient gender relations” (452, 454–55). While it is valid to caution against reducing ancient myths to a singular narrative about gender relations, I argue that texts such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* can nevertheless be meaningfully interpreted in terms of the gender norms they reflect. Even if the primary purpose of these narratives was not to depict female-male relationships or to justify gender hierarchies, the reception and interpretation of these stories are inevitably shaped by the cultural framework of the interpreter. In a contemporary twenty-first-century Western context, readers engage with these texts through the lens of current social norms and critical discourses. As a result, interpretations of gender relations in ancient myth do not only reveal aspects of the texts themselves but also reflect the values, concerns and ideological frameworks of the present. This does not contradict the complexity or multiplicity of mythic meaning but rather affirms that such narratives continue to resonate because they are open to interpretation. These interpretations may, in turn, expose and criticise enduring patriarchal structures, as they present different perspectives or change certain story elements.

Furthermore, (contemporary) feminist adaptations demonstrate that indeed there are other stories hidden within these texts – the stories of all of the women that have not been given a voice so far. Because ancient Greek myths were created or imagined or, as Simone de Beauvoir may say, *man-made*, they can be de- and reconstructed in order to include and present those missing female perspectives. It can be argued that this is the purpose or the aim of contemporary feminist revisions of androcentric myths. As *feminist* adaptations, they relate to or support ideas and goals of feminism (‘Feminist’ n.p.). Feminism, in turn, is a concept that is difficult to define as the term encompasses various approaches and also refers to political movements. Nonetheless, feminisms share a concern with women’s oppression and empowerment

or, as John Storey describes by referencing bell hooks, feminisms are invested in “finding a voice” for women (135).

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of these types of rewritings, namely feminist reimaginings of Greek mythology (Shaffi n.p.; M. Brown n.p.; Harrison n.p.; Mactaggart n.p.; Scott n.p.). Maggie Yuan even connects this increased popularity to the advent of BookTok (n.p.; Judge 131) – a TikTok subgenre where readers present and briefly review books in short videos. However, feminist literary revision of mythological figures is not a new phenomenon. Catriona Mactaggart states that feminist mythological rewritings have already been popular in the mid to late 2000s with the publication of works by Margaret Atwood, Ursula K. Le Guin and Amanda Elyot (n.p.). Moreover, Mariela Brown reminds us that even before that, resulting from the second feminist movement, writers such as Angela Carter criticised patriarchal values and systems of power in their adaptations, which question stereotypical, misogynistic portrayals of female characters (n.p.). As revisionist author Sue Lynn Tan observes, “each writer [brings] a new perspective, [creates] a different world and characters, or [chooses] to highlight a different element of the tale. The female perspective has become more valued” (Shaffi n.p.). This statement underscores the potential of feminist revisionism, which can provide those female characters that have long been sidelined with voices and agency. The women in the reimaginings are no longer mere objects or villains but are given their own stories (Mactaggart n.p.). Each new retelling emphasises a new or different perspective, thus it might change the way a tale is read or perceived (Mactaggart n.p.), which can have an empowering effect on the characters (Harrison n.p.).

Furthermore, the enduring popularity of mythological revisions demonstrates the desire and need of contemporary audiences for these types of texts (Mactaggart n.p.). They can be read as social commentaries of a world where “[w]omen’s voices being silenced by men feels all too familiar” (Mactaggart n.p.) and might facilitate the debate of contemporary ideas and politics, especially in terms of being a woman (Shaffi n.p.). According to Sarah Shaffi, by revising classical mythology from a feminist stance, these (women) authors can be said to rewrite the literary canon in order to make it more inclusive of female perspectives (Mactaggart n.p.).

However, not all mythological retellings are equally successful in their application of feminist ideas. Aimee Hinds Scott warns that the revision of ambiguous female characters, such as the ones from Greek mythology, necessitates careful

consideration (n.p.). Simply rewriting the tale from a woman's perspective but not changing the story or ignoring themes like coercion, sexual abuse or rape is not feminist; on the contrary, it validates dangerous tropes and as a consequence reinforces rape culture. This means that feminist adaptations must not deny the rewritten characters their trauma or victim status but instead have to help them become survivors and recognise their liminality in order to provide them with true agency. Hence, feminist revisionist texts have to acknowledge the multiplicity of mythology, including its "ugly aspects" (Scott n.p.). Another point of criticism, noted by Brown, is that the majority of retellings are Eurocentric and elitist (n.p.). They tell stories about wealth and royalty in a European classical context, effectively portraying the female struggle and white feminism as universal. Rewritings from different cultural backgrounds are small in number, yet are necessary to diversify the genre and make it more inclusive (M. Brown n.p.).

Circling back to the resurgence and enduring popularity of feminist adaptations of Greek myths, my assumption is that this might be read as an answer to an increasingly conservative and hostile societal climate towards women and their rights in Western cultures. Since the early 2010s an increasing number of sexual assault scandals from the United States of America and Europe have been made public and the abusers have faced lawsuits and court trials. The perpetrators, particularly in the older cases, are mostly well-known men with public careers as, for example, former TV star Bill Cosby (Halpert n.p.; Associated Press n.p.; BBC News, 'Cosby: Rise, Fall, Release' n.p.), former Fox News commentator and host Bill O'Reilly (Reuters n.p.; Atkinson n.p.), (former) president Donald Trump (Guardian staff n.p.) and former doctor Larry Nassar (Freeman n.p.). In 2024 yet another sexual assault case shocked the world when rape survivor Gisèle Pelicot opened the trial against her ex-husband to the public (Gillett and Gozzi n.p.; Chrisafis n.p.). The publication of these crimes has brought men's abusive behaviour directed towards women to public attention with greater frequency and victims' stories have been given platforms. Especially after the Weinstein scandal broke in 2017 (BBC News, 'Weinstein Timeline' n.p.), the #MeToo movement, originally founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, gained momentum by encouraging survivors of sexual violence to speak up against their abusers (Guest 11). However, it was followed by a continuous backlash on women's rights and society's perception of women's autonomy, particularly but not exclusively in the USA, as is

exemplified by the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* and further restrictions of US abortion rights (Levinson-King n.p.; Mascarenhas n.p.).

Moreover, the so-called ‘incel’ culture, short for ‘involuntary celibate’, promotes hateful and explicitly misogynistic rhetoric and beliefs online amongst (young) men, which has already led to acts of violence in some cases (bpb n.p.; Devon County Council n.p.; Casciani and De Simone n.p.). This dangerous ideology is further supported by influencers such as Andrew Tate, a self-proclaimed misogynist, who praises wealth and violence against women (BBC News, ‘Andrew Tate’ n.p.; Somerville and O’Byrne Mulligan n.p.). Consequently, echo chambers are created that radicalise the world views of young men (Devon County Council n.p.). Authors witnessing these developments may address societal concerns and problems in their writing, for instance, in the form of revisionist mythmaking. Thus, they question not only the stereotypical depiction of women in classical Homeric narratives but also thematise current issues in society. This hypothesis is corroborated by Charlotte Guest (2022), whose article discusses the connection between the recent resurgence of contemporary feminist retellings of ancient Greek myths and the #MeToo movement. Her argument, based on Veronica Schanoes, is that there is a mirroring effect between surges in feminist activism/theorising and feminist literary revisions (Guest 2). This means that contemporary revisionist narratives, because they are written in this specific context, include concepts of the #MeToo movement, such as questions of sexual consent and acceptable sexual standards, and they are interpreted in its context (Guest 2). This also highlights the relevance for research into contemporary revisionist adaptations, which leads me to the primary literature of my study.

The corpus of my master’s thesis is comprised of three novels by women writers, which were published during the last five years. The books are *A Thousand Ships* (2020) by Natalie Haynes, *Daughters of Sparta* (2022) by Claire Heywood and *Elektra* (2023) by Jennifer Saint. These stories were chosen based on their fairly recent date of publication, their popularity (*Feminist Retellings* n.p.) and due to their common link to Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Moreover, all three novels feature multiple points of view and are written from the perspectives of female characters that are in some way tied to the Trojan War and the men fighting in it: Clytemnestra, Helen, Penelope, Cassandra, Electra and Calliope. Clytemnestra is the wife of Greek commander Agamemnon, who murders her husband upon his return from the Trojan

War together with her lover Aegisthus. She is killed by Orestes, her son, who is aided by his sister Electra ('Clytemnestra' n.p.). Helen, also known as Helen of Troy, is the daughter of Zeus and Leda or Nemesis. Her sister is Clytemnestra. Helen is famed for her beauty, which attracts suitors from all of Greece, but she gets married to Agamemnon's younger brother, Menelaus. Together with Paris, the son of the Trojan king Priam, she flees to Troy resulting in the Trojan War. After the fall of Illium (or Troy) she returns to Sparta with Menelaus ('Helen of Troy' n.p.). Penelope is the daughter of Icarius of Sparta and wife of Odysseus, who also fights in the Trojan War. Their son is Telemachus. Penelope is known for patiently waiting for the return of her husband during his long absence and her refusal to marry one of her many suitors ('Penelope' n.p.). Cassandra is one of the daughters of Trojan king Priam and his wife, Hecabe (or Hecuba). She is known to be gifted with foresight by Apollo, but because she refuses his desires, he punishes her so that her prophecies are never to be believed ('Cassandra' n.p.). Lastly, Calliope is one of nine muses in Greek mythology. She is the patron of epic poetry and a victim of the Trojan War ('Calliope' n.p.). Furthermore, as the books reimagine the Homeric epics from the point of view of hitherto misrepresented or neglected female characters, they fall into the category of revisionist mythmaking, which is a feminist method where writers portray missing female perspectives from classical myths. As such, it can be assumed that the new stories are supposed to empower the women in these texts, which implies feminist intentions. Hence, they qualify for the analysis with which this thesis is concerned. In addition, Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* is even explicitly labelled as "feminist" by critics and scholars (Sen 48; Mactaggart n.p.; Goff 1).

The aim of this master's thesis is to explore the select three adaptations with regard to narratological elements on the story and discourse level – representations of space, time and characters, plot structures, narration, focalisation, multiperspectivity and symbols – that empower female characters. Thus, the following research question is central to my examination: How are narratological elements in *A Thousand Ships*, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* employed to empower female characters in the respective retellings? Investigating three novels rather than one to answer this question adds value to my analysis because the select rewritings represent a range of different perspectives and implementations of revisionist mythmaking. Thus, they

demonstrate the flexibility of myths as well as diverse options for contesting patriarchal ideals by representing a range of female characters' voices.

My research is based on the theoretical concept of revisionist mythmaking and applies feminist narratology to the analysis of the primary reading material. For the purpose of this analysis, I have defined the following framework to structure and inform my investigation – as I apply a *feminist* narratological approach, I analyse both the story and the discourse level of the select adaptations:

REVISIONIST MYTHMAKING	How is revisionist mythmaking implemented in the adaptations? How does it influence changes on the story and discourse level? How does it manifest in the utilisation of symbols?	
STORY LEVELS	space	How are descriptions of certain spaces gendered or connected to the empowerment of female characters? Which role does the crossing of borders play?
	time	How is the representation of time connected to the empowerment of female characters?
	plot	How do specific aspects of the plot empower female characters in the adaptations (e.g. contractions, omissions)?
	characters	How does the characterisation of individual female figures (e.g. character traits, emotions, agency) contribute to their empowerment? How does the characterisation of certain male figures empower the women in the story?
DISCOURSE LEVEL	narration	Which types of narrators do the adaptations employ (heterodiegetic – homodiegetic/autodiegetic; authorial – personal – communal)? How is this linked to female empowerment? Is the narration (un)reliable? Is this empowering?
	focalisation	Which figures function as focalisers in the adaptations? How is this linked to female empowerment?
	multi-perspectivity	To which extent or to what effect is multiperspectivity employed? How does it support female empowerment?
SYMBOLS	Which symbols are utilised in the adaptations? How does their employment empower female figures?	

This presentation of my framework might suggest that the questions corresponding to the different aspects of my analysis can be asked in isolation from each other. However, sometimes these dimensions overlap. This is specifically the case with symbols as they may operate within both the dimensions of story and discourse. In my three rewritings, symbols occur in close connection to aspects of narration and characterisation, which is why I treat them within these subchapters rather than separately. My hypothesis is that as the select adaptations apply revisionist mythmaking, they strive to empower female characters by employing certain narratological elements – on the story and on the discourse level – and thus question stereotypical patriarchal representations of women and gender roles.

The structure of my thesis is as follows: It begins with the theoretical framework, which comprises discussions of revisionist mythmaking and (feminist) narratology. The subchapter on narratology is divided into two parts. The first is an introductory section outlining Gérard Genette's structuralist taxonomy, which serves as the foundational basis for subsequent feminist theoretical adaptations. The second is an introduction to feminist narrative theory, summarising key insights from feminist research at both the story and discourse levels. The theoretical chapter is then followed by the analytical part, which examines the select adaptations based on the beforementioned framework, focusing on elements of story and discourse as well as on the symbolism employed in the texts. To lay the groundwork for this approach, the next chapter offers a detailed review of the concepts of revisionist mythmaking and feminist narratology, which together constitute the critical lens through which the primary texts are then analysed.

The Theoretical Framework

Revisionist Mythmaking

Classical mythology depicts women as side characters to men's epic tales, inferior and thus dependent on them. They are created according to the simplistic, patriarchal ideals of 'woman' or 'the feminine' – terms that in reality encompass a multitude of meanings since the category of gender intersects in complex ways with various other markers of difference, such as class, ethnicity or religion (Keating 113). As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar stress, the notion that 'woman' has been created by man has "a long and complex history" (12). In a similar vein, Simone de Beauvoir notes that woman has been kept in dependence of man from the earliest times of patriarchy and is "certainly to a large extent man's invention" (163, 219). According to de Beauvoir, man has constructed what she calls "the myth of the Woman [sic]" (14). "He projects onto her what he desires and fears, what he loves and what he hates", hence "she represents all the values and anti-values that give life meaning" (de Beauvoir 219–20, 215). As a consequence, "[women] have neither religion nor poetry that belongs to them alone: they still dream through men's dreams. They worship the gods made by males. And males have shaped the great virile figures for their own exaltation: Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal; in the destiny of these heroes, woman has merely a secondary role" (de Beauvoir 166). This underscores de Beauvoir's theory that in a patriarchal society, which the misogynistic, Western society is (Gilbert and Gubar 13), man represents "the essential", "the one", "the absolute", "the subject" while woman, who is only defined in relation to man, is "the inessential", "the other" or "the object" (6–7, 166–67). For patriarchal mythology and, more broadly, literature, this means that female characters are generated "by, from, and for men" (Gilbert and Gubar 12). With regard to writing and authorship, Gilbert and Gubar draw parallels between this dependence of fictive characters, including women, on their author and imprisonment because the writer silences and deprives "them of autonomy (that is, of the power of independent speech)" (14). This is exemplified in classical Greek myths, where the silence of female characters is still perpetuated today.

However, as myths, like all stories, can be subject to alteration, female authors can challenge hegemonic, patriarchal 'myths of femininity' by fighting the portrayal of women as inferior to and dependent on men. As the abundance of contemporary feminist rewritings of Greek myths demonstrates, women novelists are already revising stereotypical images of female characters by focusing on these figures' experiences

(Dedebas 248). In order to achieve the aim of providing silenced characters with voices and agency, women authors must first, according to Virginia Woolf, “‘kill’ the ‘angel in the house’” (Gilbert and Gubar 17). This ‘angel’ is one pole of the angel-monster dichotomy that male authors have constructed in accordance with their ‘myths of woman’ (Gilbert and Gubar 17) and which constrains the potential of female figures (Bacchilega 31). Consequentially, female writers need to contest these restrictive literary images of women by supplying readers with new variations (S. A. Brown 213) that pose “uncomfortable or disconcerting questions” (Braund 190), trace unexploited possibilities (Bacchilega 22) and uncover invisible meanings (Theodorakopoulos 149). By doing so novelists and poets enact the concept of revisionist mythmaking.

Revisionist mythmaking is a feminist literary strategy that aims to rewrite myths in a way that places marginalised, most often female, perspectives at the core of the new, revised stories. In other words, feminist revisionism questions the notion of the “quintessential epic journey” being “a masculine one” (Burke 57) and gives “voice to women who have been historically and socially excluded” (Savva and Apanomeritaki 21). In 1972, Adrienne Rich wrote the essay “When We Dead Awaken”, which Charlotte Guest acknowledges as a foundational text in this framework (3). Rich describes “re-vision” as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (18). Interpreted in this manner, the ‘act of looking back’ on the ‘grand narratives’ of male hegemony that pacify, other, typecast and objectify women entails changing the ‘old texts’ so that they can no longer represent male fantasies of women (Kiliçaslan and Emir 50). Therefore, it can be said that revision is to transform an ‘old’ narrative by exploring unexploited perspectives. This, however, does not necessitate the emerging narrative to be feminist. Similar to Rich, Alicia Ostriker explains in her essay “The Thieves of Language” from 1982 that every time a writer uses a pre-existing figure or story, they use myth and this always has the potential to be revisionist (72). Revision then is to alter the ‘original’ so that cultural change is possible (Ostriker 72). Ostriker writes:

[R]evisionist myth[s] [are narratives] in which *familiar figures* from *male tradition* emerge *altered*. [...] [I]n 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 *corrections*; they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival. (73; emphasis added)

This description of revisionist myths emphasises the modification of patriarchal 'myths of femininity' so that these stereotypical images are revised by actual female experiences. The central revisionary tactic, according to Heidi Morse, is the introduction of a feminine perspective or voice (180), which is reflected in Ostriker's explanation that revisionist mythmaking changes familiar female figures and corrects gender stereotypes (73). This adds a feminist agenda to the concept of literary revisionism as it explicitly concentrates on the point of view and representations of women. Guest summarises this when she defines the concept as feminist if it is an act of addressing gender-based power imbalances by either redefining feminine subjectivity or foregrounding the stories of women and gender-diverse people (3).

Revisionist mythmaking can manifest in different forms but usually with four common elements. AnaLouise Keating mentions the following forms of mythological revisions: "[rejection of] existing stories, [rewriting of] portions of them, [retelling] them from different perspectives, [recovering] alternative versions that have been lost (or that never before existed), and [creating] new myths" (112). Merve Altin extracts four elements common to revisionist myths from Ostriker's article ('Aeaea Revisited' 148–49). These elements are feminist antiauthoritarianism, debunking the hierarchical order of society, no traces of nostalgia and formal experiment as, for example, in the utilisation of everyday language, which stands in contrast to the elevated style of epic tradition (Altin, 'Aeaea Revisited' 149).

Furthermore, there are a variety of revisionist strategies a writer can employ to alter an 'old' text. Ostriker identifies hit-and-run attacks, reversals of traditional gender roles and a focus on female-female relationships. She also highlights a particular interest in woman's relationship to repressed or marginalised aspects of her identity as well as subversion or defiance of conventional representations – both of women and of male characters. Another strategy utilised in some revisions is the transformation of woman-as-object into woman-as-subject, often articulated through a feminine quest for self-definition and the rejection of external authority. Many of these works also conceptualise male and female identities as polar opposites, while simultaneously challenging dominant social and literary constructions of femininity (73–86). However, Ostriker does not compile an explicit list of these methods, which means that the reader has to carefully extract these from her writing. As a consequence, some of the elements are not easily understood and more open to interpretation. For instance, Ostriker writes about "hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary

conventions supporting them” (73–74) but does not provide further explanation, except for “[w]ith poems like these, one imagines the poets stepping out of the ring dusting their hands off” (74). It can only be assumed that she means explicit attacks on patriarchal norms and values that the reader instantly recognises as such and that require no additional commentary because of their obviousness and that these attacks are brief or focused rather than extensively developed.

Although Ostriker elaborates on the concept of revisionist mythmaking primarily in relation to women’s poetry, it is equally applicable to prose fiction as demonstrated by scholarly works on a range of contemporary mythological retellings. Merve Altin (‘Aeaea Revisited’, 2020), for instance, analyses Madeline Miller’s *Circe*; Charlotte Guest (2022) explores Jennifer Saint’s *Ariadne* as well as Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* – one of the most famous revisionist adaptations (Gentzler 274); Celina Plaß (2023) does so as well. Muskaan Kapoor (2021) also focuses on *The Penelopiad* and Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy*. Salim Kerboua and Lamia Mechgoug’s (2023) analysis investigates Amanda Elyot’s *The Memoirs of Helen of Troy* and Tuhin Shuvra Sen’s article (2020) does so with Pat Barker’s *The Silence of the Girls*. All of these reimaginings were published in the form of novels or novellas, which is an aspect they share with my select material.

My choice for examining revisionist mythmaking through the medium of the novel is informed by Guest’s argument that, in comparison to poetry, drama and short fiction, the novel remains the most popular and widely consumed literary form (11). Furthermore, the novel has often been likened to, or even regarded as, a form of epic – despite its earlier dismissal as “low entertainment best suited to women readers” (Guest 11). As Guest observes, “[i]t is only appropriate, then, that feminist revisionist writers turn to the novel as a space both historically feminine and feminised. The epic, the novel and the feminine are intimately braided throughout history; they form a knot that can be variously untangled and retied” (11). That this ‘knot’ between epic, novel and the feminine can be “variously untangled and retied” is proven by the manifold reimaginings of Greek myths because they contest phallogocentric images of the female in masculine literary discourses and the myths of femininity associated with stereotypical men’s writing in a plenitude of ways (Sen 48). Thus, feminist revisionism has the subversive power to break the silence of women suppressed by the structures of androcentric society and culture (Sen 48).

A diverse body of research has been dedicated to the study of feminist mythological revisions, with a considerable number of scholars illuminating the strategies and methods employed by authors to achieve this feminist, revisionist goal. Indeed, there are even several master's theses that deal with revised myths (Biggerstaff; Sheldon; Eikelenboom; Westra; Zitterl; Verbeek). However, a majority of these scholarly works clearly seems to focus on the most popular or famous rewritings such as Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. Therefore, there appears to be a dearth of research concerning probably less well-known, yet popular retellings, which I try to partially rectify with my select primary literature.

Moreover, the studies analysing mythological revisions tend to highlight the subversive power of the examined texts and their success in questioning stereotypical, androcentric images of women but some scholars adopt a more critical lens. Both Sarah Annes Brown and Muskaan Kapoor note aspects in Atwood's *The Penelopiad* that do not comply with a feminist agenda since they rather reaffirm patriarchal ideas of power relations and gender roles. Brown suggests that *The Penelopiad* can be read as a contest between different female perspectives – that of Penelope and that of the hanged maids (213). Penelope enjoys privileges in a patriarchal society due to her status that offers her some autonomy and she can use this to manipulate others. In contrast, as slaves, the maids lack this autonomy and can be manipulated, forced to sleep with the suitors and finally be punished (S. A. Brown 214–15). Kapoor criticises the ways in which Penelope is compelled to perform femininity, the sexist discourse surrounding ideals of beauty and the broader lack of recognition of Penelope's intelligence and accomplishments (85–86). She also highlights the double standard in the evaluation of fidelity, whereby Penelope's loyalty is scrutinised while Odysseus' is largely exempt from criticism (Kapoor 86). Additionally, Kapoor is critical of the depiction of homosexual relationships in Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* that reinforces heteronormative ideas by providing one of the female lovers with masculine traits (86). As the analyses of these two scholars underscore, revisionist mythmaking requires careful consideration and awareness of the intersections between various dimensions of identity.

Concerning my select novels, academic publications only sparsely focus on Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, Heywood's *Daughters of Sparta* and Saint's *Elektra*. The research discussing these three novels covers a variety of analytical angles, with the

majority only examining Haynes' book. One theme that connects several scholarly articles, is feminism. Altin, for example, explores *A Thousand Ships* applying an ecofeminist lens. She convincingly argues that even though Haynes' writing is not explicitly concerned with ecofeminism and war's impact on women and environment, the novel nonetheless suggests an interconnectedness of these issues (Altin, 'War, Woman, Environment' 110–15). Altin concludes "[*A Thousand Ships*] conveys the idea that systems rooted in patriarchy, militarism, sexism, and anthropocentrism treat both women and nature as entities to be controlled and subdued" ('War, Woman, Environment' 116). Other research links to feminism because it focuses on specific characters – female or male – and the narratological techniques that empower them or provide them with empowering functions; it also discusses the long traditions of contradictory depictions of certain mythological women (Szatanik; Zhang; Judge). Another two analyses are tied to feminism as they centre on the narrative perspectives in *A Thousand Ships* and the creation of new versions of 'old' songs as well as on the theme of motherhood in *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* (Goff; Ríos Gaitán). Several of these scholars' focal points inform my own examination since I am interested in the empowerment of female characters, which can be accomplished on various levels, including characterisation (of female *and* male figures), narration and themes.

A different aspect that other scholars investigate is Haynes' treatment of the genre of the epic. Research clearly states that *A Thousand Ships* presents a redefined or reformed epic that also questions traditional values often depicted in Greek mythology (Linne; Westra; Szmigiero). This genre reform includes a challenge to 'classical' notions of heroism and opposes it with a redefined type that extends beyond the battlefield into other areas of (daily) life (Linne; Westra; Szmigiero). Moreover, there are publications that treat Haynes' novel as a work of fan fiction and put it in relation to Euripides' tragedies *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* and that describe the historical context in which *A Thousand Ships* is set (Sheldon; Bergamini). My own investigation is less concerned with the epic as a genre, but Haynes' perspective on heroism is vital to my argumentation.

Looking forward to the analysis of *A Thousand Ships*, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra*, the theoretical concept outlined in this part of my thesis provides a framework informing my investigation of narratological elements empowering female characters. The previous scholarship mentioned guides this exploration that is interested in the

methods and strategies employed by the respective authors to question androcentric images of women in Homer's *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*.

(Feminist) Narratology – An Overview

Gérard Genette's Structuralist Taxonomy

The theoretical underpinnings of feminist narrative theory are rooted in the framework of structuralism, which, in conjunction with formalism, is frequently referred to as the “classical phase of narratology” (Young 914). Structuralists, such as Gérard Genette, view narratives as objective and value-free and thus isolate them from their historical and social contexts (Kim 35). A feminist approach towards the analysis of texts, however, argues that narratives can never be neutral since they are always influenced by ideology and shaped by underlying gender norms. Consequently, it is of utmost significance to examine texts within their specific contexts (Kim 35–36). This missing contextualisation in Genette's taxonomy is exactly what feminist scholars articulate in their critique, yet they still employ his terminology in their own analyses but not without considering the context of the works they investigate (as evidenced in, for example, Lanser, ‘Queering Narrative Voice’; Kim). As my thesis is concerned with feminist revisions of phallogocentric Greek myths, gender is an important aspect informing my own analysis, which is why I apply a feminist narratological approach. I consider the social contexts of my select stories and the ways in which gender or rather the subversion of patriarchal gender norms impacts these narratives on the story as well as on the discourse level. As feminist narratologists utilise the terms developed by Genette, presumably because they offer tools for the precise description of narrative texts, I firstly present a brief outline of Genette's fundamental concepts before continuing with a concise summary of feminist approaches to the investigation of narrative structures.

According to Kent Puckett, structuralist narrative theory emerged in the late 1960s and the early 1970s with the major works of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette (223). Most influential for the subsequent development of narratology was Genette's work, especially the terms and concepts he proposes in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), some of which have become “indispensable” to literary and narratological analysis, as Puckett asserts (256). This claim is corroborated by the fact that Genette's structuralist taxonomy is still included in the

fourth edition of Vera and Ansgar Nünning's *Introduction to the Study of English and American Literature* (2018), thereby underscoring the enduring significance of this theoretical framework for the study of narratives.

In his seminal work *Narrative Discourse* Genette proposes three categories for the analysis of narrative discourse, namely tense, mood and voice (Genette 29–31). These categories aid in the description of the discourse level of narrative texts, which is why they are useful to my own exploration of revisionist novels.

The category 'tense' is concerned with the relationship between story time and narrative time or discourse time (as used in Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 127). Considering these connections, Genette identifies three dimensions: (1) order of succession of events, (2) duration of events in the story and of narration and (3) frequency (35). The term 'order' summarises the various possibilities of arranging events in the narrative discourse compared to their succession in the story, which are often expressed in the form of anachronies (Genette 35–36). Genette differentiates between the two methods of analepses and prolepses (48–79). While analepses, as Nünning and Nünning explain, are flashbacks where the chronology is interrupted by an event that happened before, prolepses are flashforwards that describe events that happen at a later point of time (*An Introduction* 127).

With regard to duration, Genette defines four "narrative movements" (93–95). These are ellipsis, pause, scene and summary. Nünning and Nünning additionally mention 'stretch' (*An Introduction* 127), which was originally utilised by Seymour Chatman (Kilian 72–73). An ellipsis is characterised by the omission of certain events from the narration. This means that these events are not narrated, at least at the time they are happening, because there is no discourse time while the story time continues. In contrast to this, it is the story time that stops with a pause and the discourse time that continues. This happens, for instance, when a narrator provides additional information that is not directly connected to the story they tell. In a scene the discourse time matches the story time and a summary describes a situation in which the narration is shorter than the duration of the fictional events (Genette 94–95; Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 127). Lastly, a stretch describes the opposite of a summary since it is the narration that is longer than the duration of the fictional events (Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 127).

The dimension of frequency describes the amount of times an event or multiple events are 'depicted' in a narrative. Genette names the phenomenon of "narrating once

what happened once” “singulative narrative” (114). An event that happened once but is narrated more often than that he refers to as “repeating narrative”, while “narrating one time (or rather: at one time) what happened [multiple] times” is called “iterative narrative” (Genette 115–16).

Concerning the category of ‘tense’, Eveline Kilian criticises that Genette neither considers the temporal positioning of the narrator in comparison to the narrative nor the utilisation of grammatical tense in the fictional text (73). However, these are relevant aspects in the context of my thesis because narrative temporality and grammatical tense can serve the project of revising patriarchal depictions of female figures. These aspects provide information about the narrator or a character and their experiences, feelings or attitudes. They can help in reclaiming authority from androcentric literary discourses as well as agency. Lastly, narrative temporality can also be a means to express resistance to hegemonic myths of femininity.

The second category Genette discusses is that of ‘mood’. He describes it as “regulation of narrative information”, which is defined in terms of distance and perspective (Genette 162). The first modality is concerned with the extent to which narrative discourse utilises mimesis for the representation of characters’ speech and thoughts. There are three types of speech that vary in their degree of mimesis. Narrated speech is the most distant and reduced, the presence of the narrator is apparent. Transposed speech is more mimetic yet the presence of the narrator is still perceptible. Reported speech directly represents characters’ utterances, without transmission by the narrator. It is commonly utilised for dialogic conversations (Genette 162, 171–72). This distinction appears to be rather useful for my analysis since it displays the varying degrees to which fictional characters are given a ‘voice’ to communicate their personal thoughts, ideas, beliefs, opinions and feelings, an aspect that is vital to my argumentation at a subsequent point.

The second modality Genette considers is perspective (185–89). His elaborations are based on a critique of previous theoretical works that display a “regrettable confusion” between his categories of mood and voice or, as he expresses it, a confusion between the questions *who sees?* and *who speaks?* (Genette 186). Therefore, he proposes the term ‘focalisation’. As Nünning and Nünning explain, focalisation describes the perspective from which a story is presented (*An Introduction* 118). This corresponds to the first question Genette poses; the second is connected to the narrating subject (Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 118). Focalisation is

further divided into zero focalisation, internal focalisation, which can be fixed on one perceiving subject, variable with a variety of focal characters or multiple with the same event being presented from different characters' perspectives, as well as external focalisation, where the reader does not have insight into any thoughts of a character (Genette 189–90).

The third and last category Genette examines is 'voice' (212–62). Here he takes into account the elements of "time of narrating, narrative level and 'person'" (215). I refrain from further elaborations concerning the first element of 'time of the narrating' as this is not of relevance for my analysis and will instead continue with narrative levels. According to Genette there are three levels of diegesis (228–31). At a first level, there is an extradiegetic narrative. The events told inside this first narrative are intradiegetic and if there is another narrative told within the intradiegetic narrative, then that is metadiegetic (Genette 228–31). In other words, intradiegetic refers to the (fictional) story narrated by a (fictional) narrator to a (fictional) narratee. A metadiegetic narrative could also be described as a 'story-within-the-story'. The last element of Genette's taxonomy is 'person'. He criticises terms such as 'first-person-' or 'third-person-narrative' because the narrator can only ever be present as a person in a 'first-person-narrative', yet not all narrators that refer to themselves with a first-person pronoun are placed as characters within a story. Thus, Genette suggests the term 'heterodiegetic' for narrators absent or outside the story and 'homodiegetic' for narrators present inside the story as characters (244–45). Within the last type of narrators Genette further differentiates between narrators that are the main protagonists of their own stories, who can be referred to as 'autodiegetic narrators', and narrators who are present as observing or witnessing characters (Genette 245). Nünning and Nünning add that there is a distinction between overt narrators providing additional information or value judgements and covert narrators appearing as an anonymous voice (*An Introduction* 119–20). Moreover, Richard Aczel criticises that Genette does not consider to inquire *how* a narrating subject speaks since aspects such as tone or idiom can provide crucial information about the narrator and the narrative (468).

The above described aspects of focalisation and person are particularly significant to my examination of contemporary mythological retellings as *who sees?* and *who speaks?* are questions that need to be asked in the context of revisionist mythmaking. This is because altering the myths so that they are presented from the

perspective of female characters or narrated by a female voice is a method of empowerment.

This brief overview of Genette's theoretical framework demonstrates the value of his work as it offers precise tools for the narratological analysis of the discourse level of a story. However, structuralism's hyper-focus on narrative transmission utterly disregards the story level of a text as well as the context in which it was produced. Both of these elements have the potential for offering additional insights and deepening the understanding of an examined narrative. The omission of these aspects in combination with the narrow corpus of works analysed by structuralists offered ground for criticism, not least by feminist scholars.

Feminist Narratology

In the 1970s narratology was firmly established as an academic field of inquiry with the fundamental frameworks provided by structuralism and since then developed from postclassical critique in the 1980s towards postmodern diversification and interdisciplinarity in the 1990s and onwards (Page 2). In the 1980s narratology's 'narrow' perspective, in the sense that structuralist scholars tended to neglect literary criticism and interpretation in favour of systematic, universalising narratological analysis, was confronted with an increasing amount of dissatisfaction and critique. Amongst the ensuing debates and calls for change Susan S. Lanser's seminal paper "Toward a Feminist Narratology" (1986) was published (Page 3–4). In this paper, Lanser argues that narrative theory requires a reform based on women's texts as Robyn Warhol began to do in her article about the engaging narrator ('Engaging Narrator', 1986), because the study of narratives in their respective contexts and the integration of questions of feminism would make narratology richer and more complete ('Feminist Narratology' 345). This criticism is voiced on the basis that structuralism does not take into account any questions concerning gender. Structuralist scholars have built their theories on the examination of men's texts or texts treated as male authored. Hence, the 'masculine' text represents the universal, while women's texts have been neglected (Lanser, 'Feminist Narratology' 343). Narratives, however, are referential in "their representation of gender relations" (Lanser, 'Feminist Narratology' 344) or, as Nünning and Nünning stress, there is a strong connection between stories and the construction of gender norms because narratives do not only represent and

provide a stage for conceptions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' but also actively produce these conceptions¹ ('Feministische Narratologie' 1).

Moreover, gender norms are neither constructed nor performed in a cultural vacuum. They are shaped by their particular (historical, cultural) contexts, which is one reason why context is crucial for the analysis of narrative texts, yet structuralism approaches stories in isolation. Nonetheless, Lanser seems convinced of the importance of 'brilliant' narrative theory for the study of women's works and its benefit for feminist scholarship ('Feminist Narratology' 343). She underscores this claim, on the one hand, by praising Genette's distinction between different diegetic levels as a valuable analytical tool and, on the other hand, by noticing the missing consideration of external or contextual aspects. She thus proposes to extend Genette's framework with the inclusion of the differentiation between public and private narration. The first is addressed to a heterodiegetic narratee, the latter to an explicitly designated one only existing within the textual world. These categories are not fixed, as semi-private narrative acts might occur. Her extended framework is especially important for the analysis of works by women writers as it considers a context when women writers were prohibited from writing for the public and were confined to solely addressing the private. As a consequence, this approach differs from Genette's in that it is not formal but contextualised (Lanser, 'Feminist Narratology' 351–54).

Lanser's distinction between public and private narration is helpful for my investigation of revised Greek myths as the utilisation of public narration by a female voice or female voices can signify resistance to hegemonic, androcentric discourses presenting phallogocentric ideals of womanhood. I will go into more detail in the analytical part of my thesis.

It is clear from this brief summary of Lanser's seminal work that from the beginning the aim of feminist narratology has been to add to and refine the existing corpus of structuralist frameworks and the examined canon. The focus of feminist narratologists is to take into consideration the context in which narratives are produced and interpreted. Writing in 1999, Warhol describes this goal as follows: "[F]eminist narratology attempts to consider texts within their historical contexts, understanding narrative forms as necessarily related to the era, class, gender, sexual orientation, and

¹ German original: "Dennoch hat sich insgesamt immer mehr die Einsicht durchgesetzt, dass zwischen dem Erzählen von Geschichten und Geschlechterkonstruktionen ein enger Zusammenhang besteht, weil Erzählungen nicht nur Vorstellungen von 'Weiblichkeit' und 'Männlichkeit' repräsentieren und inszenieren, sondern auch selbst aktiv hervorbringen" ('Feministische Narratologie' 1).

racial and ethnic circumstances of their producers and audiences ('Guilty Cravings' 340)." Here it is highlighted again that narratological analysis should take into account the various contexts in which the investigated texts are produced and consumed.

However, as Gaby Allrath and Marion Gymnich observe in 2004, feminist narratologists might claim to be interested in the diverse dimensions of context, but their own works have mostly ignored aspects of class, race and ethnicity, even though the study of complex interactions between categories such as sex, gender, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, age, education and religion can lead to productive insights into the interplay between form and content in postcolonial and cross-cultural literature (39). More than a decade later, in 2015 Lanser still notices a similar tendency in feminist narrative theory ('More Narratology' 24–26). Despite feminism having been vital to the development of narratology from structuralist origins to postclassical paradigms, especially in the field of contextual narratology, the literary canon that has been worked with is too narrow. Feminist studies have mostly concentrated on texts by white English or American female novelists or queer men from the nineteenth or twentieth century. Only a limited number has analysed narratives by heterosexual male authors or postcolonial and pre-1800 texts (Lanser, 'More Narratology' 24–26). One reason for this bias is the influence of the second feminist movement in the 1980s on, for instance, Lanser's early work (Page 46). The utilisation of a now contested binary model of gender and the proposed data are characteristic of this. Furthermore, there is a tendency towards constructing 'women' as a universal category, not acknowledging differences in the experiences of women based on their diverse life contexts nor explicitly mentioning the white Euro-American perspective the analyses centre on (Page 46–48). As a consequence, an intersectional approach might aid in broadening perspectives as it would question "all notions of fixed categories read outside their specific configurations in time and space" because it "argues that multiple aspects of identity – gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, global position, age, sexuality, ability, religion, language, historical moment – converge and interact to create actual or perceived social positions, meanings, experiences, and representations in a world patterned by structural inequalities" (Lanser, 'More Narratology' 27). Regarding feminist narratology, incorporating intersectionality into the analysis of narrative texts means to specifically consider additional identity categories to gender, sex and sexuality. It means that investigating narrative techniques as a means of expressing culturally specific experiences does not only provide insight into

gender-specific attitudes, habits of thinking and living conditions but also offers an understanding of more complex systems of interconnected identity markers (Nünning and Nünning, 'Feministische Narratologie' 10). Although my own analysis focuses on novels by white European/American female authors and thus will not extend the corpus to include, for instance, Asian, African or South American perspectives, I consider intersectionality to enhance the depth of my findings. While gender is an important category for my investigation, other aspects such as class and age are vital as well.

The Story Level

As the previous discussion has shown, there are a variety of approaches to narratology. They can be categorised according to the level of the narrative they take as their analytical centre. There are story-oriented approaches as well as discourse-oriented approaches (Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 105; Nünning and Nünning, 'Feministische Narratologie' 14). Feminist narratology can combine both levels in its scholarly endeavours. As my own analysis explores both, I will summarise the aspects most pertinent to feminist narrative theory in terms of story-orientation as well as discourse-orientation. I base my discussion on Nünning and Nünning's *Erzähltextanalyse und Gender Studies* (2004) as this collection provides a comprehensive overview of different aspects.

Representations of space belong to the field of story-oriented narratology and can be significant to feminist inquiries into a narrative's underlying gender constructions and their implications. Natascha Würzbach describes space as a cultural phenomenon subjected to manifold semantisations as well as a mimetic indicator of social reality (49). Different modes of perception, description and assessment of spaces in narrative texts show orientations and connotations with relevance to questions of gender (Würzbach 49). Moreover, the allocation of individuals to societal spaces is not only dependent on gender but also on class and ethnicity. However, mobility, expansion and crossing of borders of individuals demonstrate the permeability of spatial constructs and are interpreted as signs of identity development and personal growth, especially in terms of sexual orientation (Würzbach 51–52). Würzbach argues, the arbitrariness of these constructs of space becomes evident in the symbolisation of cultural spaces such as city, nature, homeland and foreign country (50). These spaces, in addition to the house, battlefields and travelling, which are also discussed by Würzbach (53–57), are of particular interest to my examination of my select novels

since they are rewritings of Homer's *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, which centre on characters connected to the Trojan War. Thus, they are bound to engage with literary depictions of city, nature, house, battlefields or travelling and the manner in which characters traverse these spaces.

Due to the vagueness of and emotionality linked to the aforementioned concepts, they are suitable for projections of subconscious wishes and fears, especially in combination with gender-representing characteristics (Würzbach 50). As a consequence, nature is traditionally depicted as female and associated with chaos, uncontrollability, seduction, distance to civilisation, life and death. Whereas the city can either stand as opposite to nature, as a centre of civilisation and culture, thus representing masculinity, or it can be sexualised as an object of desire for the conqueror. Similarly, the homeland is often articulated through female bodies such as mother, lover or wife, while a foreign country might be associated with the irrational and unpredictable as well as longing for paradise and the male traveller can assume the role of conqueror. These ambivalences highlight that gender stereotypes are constructed and traditional conceptions of gender are dominated by androcentric imaginations of femininity tailored to patriarchy's own needs (Würzbach 50–51).

Furthermore, other ambivalences concerning spatial experiences of women between male control and female self-determination underscore women's precarious place in society and have an influence on literature. Würzbach elaborates on locations such as the house, battlefields and travelling, which are of particular relevance for gender-associated border crossings in literature (52). On the one hand, the house represents safety and security for women. On the other hand, it can transform into a prison, firmly holding them within the private sphere, under control of a (potentially abusive) man. The literary description of experiences of battlefields and in relation to this, travelling, are heavily male dominated, which is representative of the battle women had to fight for the privilege of travelling to foreign countries. Narratives of battlefields portray men in action at the front lines as well as their complete physical and psychological destruction in military hospitals. The presentation from the point of view of women is realistic due to their occupation as nurses and offers an unheroic account of war stories (Würzbach 53–57). In addition, mental spaces have long been utilised by women; deviations from normality in the fantastical are significant signs for the questioning of gender hierarchies (Würzbach 61). As Würzbach summarises, the hybridity of various texts concerning gender stereotypic characteristics of figures,

styles of representation, manners of experience and behaviour reflects the epistemological constructedness and cultural availability of gender (68).

Representations of time establish a connection between story time and discourse time and thus provide insights into characters' subjective experiences of time, which are often closely related to issues of gender. In her article, Eveline Kilian commences with a summary of Genette's considerations of time, stressing the value of his categories for the differentiation between various facets of temporal organisation (72–73). Her assessment underscores the usefulness of Genette's terms for my own analysis. However, Kilian also voices criticism since Genette neglects characters' subjective experiencing of time, which I have to consider as it has the potential to strengthen my argumentation. Furthermore, there seems to be a general lack of scholarly interest into the study of time in relation to gender. The few existing approaches are all based on Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" (1979), which Kilian criticises due to its metaphorisation of femininity and masculinity that decreases the value of this concept for practical application (73–74).

Interdependence between experiences of time and gender is central to Kilian's further examinations. She argues that texts can construct temporal experiences as specifically male or specifically female and that particular temporal experiences are gender-specific because they are the results of specific socio-cultural living situations or there exists a significant connection to these (Kilian 86, 89–90). Kilian demonstrates this on examples that thematise psychological consequences of the living conditions of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (89–93). Her elaborations illustrate possible connections between literary representations of gender and time.

Another vital aspect of story-oriented narratology is that of characters and characterisation. This is of particular interest to my research since a figure's individual characteristics, attitudes and motivations can shed light on the strategies of female empowerment an author utilises in their writing. According to Marion Gymnich, due to the complex interplay of socio-cultural elements, feminist narrative theory has to consider the categories of sex, gender and sexuality as well as at least ethnicity, class and age in order to account for the complexity of characters (124).

In her contribution, Gymnich describes the most salient criteria for the analysis of figural characterisation that will inform my analysis (134–39). The reader acquires

knowledge about a character through the figure's speech and the representation of their consciousness, which may take the form of either self-characterisation or characterisation by others. Notably, any explicit characterisation of others also functions – often unconsciously – as a form of self-characterisation (Gymnich 134–36). An aspect that Gymnich does not mention, but which is crucial, especially with regard to female empowerment in revisions of patriarchal stories, is that a character's actions are also indicative of their personality, world views and attitudes. Another important source of character information is the narrator, whose commentary may serve to complete, modify or correct prior characterisation (Gymnich 136). However, such commentary is frequently subjective and shaped by value judgments and comparisons. Characterisation can also occur through relationships of correspondence and contrast, which may thematise or problematise the implications of sex, gender and sexuality. Finally, intertextual references provide an additional mode of characterisation, inviting comparisons between figures within a given text and those or the normative systems of another. This method is particularly productive when applied to canonical literary works (Gymnich 136–39).

Closely linked to figural characterisation are plot and plot structures. Revising stereotypical, phallogocentric plots can provide female figures with agency and voice and, hence, is empowering. As Andrea Gutenberg states, fictional patterns of plot predominantly convey culturally dependent, gender-specific patterns of action and significantly shape conceptions of gender identities (100). Feminist scholars have developed historical typologies of plot structures, identifying two foundational models: the romance plot as characteristic of women-centred novels and the 'male' quest plot oriented towards adventure and educational ideals. However, these conventional narrative structures have undergone significant transformation over time. In the case of plots centred on female characters, this evolution is marked by a modification of the traditional romance plot, prompted by a critical interrogation of marriage as the ultimate goal for women. Additionally, women-centred quest plots have emerged, which diverge from the 'male' prototype in meaningful ways (Gutenberg 105–07). The plots of my select stories are evidence of this divergence because they include quest plots and do not adhere to stereotypical patterns of romance or wedlock plots.

Gutenberg discusses the emergence and transformation of women-centred plot structures in great detail (107–17), but, as not all of these plot types are important to

my analysis, I focus only on the ones which are relevant. Beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing until the turn of the century, narrative structures underwent notable shifts (Gutenberg 111). The adulterous romance gained prominence and the stigma attached to the 'fallen woman' began to diminish. Wedlock plots increasingly addressed the difficulties of marriage and women's economic dependence, thereby challenging the conventions of traditional romance or courtship narratives. These shifts revealed the inherent contradictions faced by women, as the myth of romantic fulfilment was exposed as an idealisation of female powerlessness and restriction of autonomy (Gutenberg 111–12). In the twentieth century, the romance plot and its variations were often replaced or expanded by alternative narrative patterns. This transition reflects a broader movement in women-centred storytelling towards quest-oriented structures, with romantic plots becoming optional. Other twentieth-century plot types include family-centred narratives such as mother-daughter stories or sister plots. The latter are frequently conflictual, emphasising antagonism over solidarity (Gutenberg 112–16). Gutenberg's elaborations illustrate the versatility of women-centred plot structures, which allows for combinations and departures from traditional patterns. This is of special interest to my examinations, as some of my primary texts merge multiple plot types and deviate from more 'typical' narrative structures, consequently influencing the presentation of characters and potentially adding complexity and depth.

The Discourse Level

Representations of space, time, characters and plot structures constitute the story level, while narration, focalisation, unreliability and multiperspectivity concern the discourse level. Feminist narrative theory proposes to analyse both of these levels of a text (Allrath and Surkamp 143), which is why I will now turn to the latter.

Susan S. Lanser developed a typology of narrative voice that explores "the intersection of social identity and textual form" (*Fictions* 15). She distinguishes between three narrative modes: authorial, personal and communal. The authorial voice is manifest in extradiegetic, heterodiegetic, public and potentially self-referential narrative situations. Its authority is conventionally assumed to be superior compared to that of (narrating) figures. There are two distinct versions of authorial narrators: One where the narrator's speech is exclusively representational and one where the narrating voice engages in "extrarepresentational acts", which include judgments, generalisations or reflections. The latter refers to "overt authoriality" and can diminish a narrators

perceived reliability (Lanser, *Fictions* 15–17). The personal voice refers to autodiegetic narrators, who tell their own stories. Its authority is limited to the validity of the interpretation of the narrator's experiences. It does not have the privilege of omniscience as the authorial voice does. Employing this narrative mode risks a woman novelist's text being labelled as "self-expression" (Lanser, *Fictions* 18–20). The communal voice represents narrative situations in which not an individual voice but rather a "collective voice or a collective of voices" is articulated. It can be differentiated between a singular, simultaneous or sequential form of communal voice. Singular describes instances where a single narrator represents a collective. A plural "we" forms the simultaneous mode and the sequential form is characterised by an alternating narration between several members of a group. The communal voice shifts the focus towards female community and away from personal plots (Lanser, *Fictions* 21–22). Gaby Allrath and Carola Surkamp emphasise the innovative nature of Lanser's typology, noting that the author situates narrative situations within extra-literary contexts and takes into account the conditions of production (147). I apply Lanser's typology in combination with Genette's terminology as this provides greater depth to my analysis of the narrators in my select adaptations and illuminates how the narration empowers female characters.

Another aspect of the discourse level that can provide vital insights into gender-related questions is unreliability. According to Allrath and Surkamp, readers assess the reliability of narrating subjects based on textual evidence such as contradictions, inconsistencies or explicit thematisation of unreliable memories (154–55). Other elements concerning the social identity and status of the narrating entity, such as education, ethnicity, socio-economic class or gender, influence the assessment of a narrator's reliability as well. There is a conventional nexus between authority and masculinity; as a result the reliability of female narrators that are attributed 'typically female' behaviour is often discredited (Allrath and Surkamp 155).

From the perspective of feminist narratology, narrative unreliability can serve multiple functions. It may challenge conventional gender roles and expose contradictions in prevailing conceptions of gender (Allrath and Surkamp 157–58). Unreliability can also illuminate gendered dynamics in relationships, revealing problematic behaviours, attitudes or norms characteristic of a particular historical period. Additionally, it can depict the consequences of restricted agency for women,

thereby questioning societal expectations. Finally, it may be employed to represent fragmented or unstable identities (Allrath and Surkamp 157–59). Questions of narratorial (un)reliability are vital to my investigation because this has the potential to influence the extent to which the retellings empower their characters.

Multiperspectivity constitutes another gender-relevant aspect at the level of discourse. The term refers to narrative texts in which events are presented from multiple perspectives (Allrath and Surkamp 160). This may involve several extra- or intradiegetic narrators recounting the same events from different viewpoints or the use of multiple focalisers, whose individual perceptions are represented within the narrative (Allrath and Surkamp 160).

Multiperspective narration can serve a range of gender-relevant and socio-critical functions. Most notably, it provides space for marginalised or previously silenced female voices, allowing women to narrate their own stories from individual perspectives (Allrath and Surkamp 163–64). This enables the representation of culturally marginalised topics and recasts women as autonomous narrating and reflecting ‘subjects’. Thus, they can resist the passive roles traditionally assigned to them (Allrath and Surkamp 163–64). By directing the reader’s attention to perspectives that challenge conventional gender expectations, multiperspectivity criticises societal/patriarchal norms (Allrath and Surkamp 164–65). Such correctives function on the level of plot and character. They may highlight gender-specific differences in the perception of reality and depict conflicts between the sexes. By relativising individual perspectives, multiperspectivity can subvert traditional gender relations. Ultimately, multiperspective narration may question the stability of gender identities and reveal traditional gender boundaries as permeable, thereby subverting binary conceptions of gender through the portrayal of identity as socially constructed (Allrath and Surkamp 163–67).

The concept of multiperspectivity is of great importance to the ensuing analysis because “polyphony is more pronounced and more consequential in women’s narratives” (Lanser, ‘Feminist Narratology’ 350); the phenomenon appears in my select texts as a means of providing marginalised characters with a voice to tell their own stories. Hence, androcentric depictions of women and gender relations are questioned, which empowers female characters.

Female Empowerment in Mythological Revisions

In this part of my thesis I explore my select revisionist adaptations – Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, Claire Heywood's *Daughters of Sparta* and Jennifer Saint's *Elektra* – with regard to narratological elements empowering female characters in these 'new', revised versions of ancient Greek myths. Empowerment encompasses multiple facets (Rahman 11). Understood as an expansion of agency it can describe "changes within people themselves, changes in their relationships with others, changes in their ability to do things and changes in their control over resources" (Gammage et al. 4–5). Central to the concept is the notion of *change* because, as Naila Kabeer observes, for empowerment to take place a person must first find themselves in a disempowered position (14). Kabeer further explores empowerment in relation to agency, resources and achievements (14–15). Agency is a crucial aspect since it

implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relations. Because of the significance of beliefs and values in legitimating inequality, a process of empowerment often begins from within. It encompasses not only 'decision making' and other forms of observable action but also the meaning, motivation, and purpose that individuals bring to their actions; that is, their *sense* of agency. Empowerment is rooted in how people see themselves – their sense of self-worth. This in turn is critically bound up with how they are seen by those around them and by their society. (Kabeer 14–15)

These elaborations emphasise that agency or empowerment not necessarily describe an observable behaviour but can include changes within a person's attitudes, feelings, thoughts and self-esteem. Consequently, not only action but also consciousness and voice are dimensions of agency (Gammage et al. 5). Sarah Gammage, Naila Kabeer and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers view the latter as "the ability to articulate practical needs and strategic interests, individually and collectively, in the private domain and in the public" (6). They also stress that "'voice' must go beyond the capacity to speak, it must be heard, listened to, and acted on" for change to be enabled (Gammage et al. 6). Empowerment can cover financial, educational, emotional, social and political areas (Yerima-Avazi and Opoku-Agyemang 124). Ultimately, in a feminist context, voice signifies liberation from patriarchal oppression; it symbolises reclaiming of the public sphere as well as of female subjectivity (Camatsos 29–31). All of these observations are vital for my argumentation as many of the female characters in my select rewritings experience empowerment more covertly and the aspect of voice plays a crucial role in this process.

Furthermore, I understand the analysis of narratological elements as an investigation of representations of time, space and characters, plot structures, narration, focalisation, multiperspectivity and symbols. As these aspects sometimes occur interconnected in the retellings, I decided to group them together starting with space and time, followed by narration, focalisation and multiperspectivity. I conclude with plot and characters. The analysis of symbolism is integrated in some of the subchapters because symbols are often closely linked to some specific elements I examine.

Reimagining Space and Time

Spatial and temporal settings are vital elements of representations of reality in fictional texts (Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 126). With regard to time – or tense – Gérard Genette demonstrates that this aspect can be analysed in a very systematic manner (35). However, conceptions of time go beyond the measurable “time on the clock” (Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 128). As Eveline Kilian remarks, the temporal positioning of the narrator in comparison to the story as well as the intentional utilisation of grammatical tense are valuable sources of information (73). Moreover, against the backdrop of revisionist mythmaking, temporal choices can aid in the goal of subverting traditional stories and creating alternative or new versions. In a similar vein, literary descriptions of space can fulfil specific narrative functions and can carry meaning (Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 129). As Vera and Ansgar Nünning mention, the crossing of boundaries in particular should be taken into consideration when interpreting narrative spaces (*An Introduction* 129), which is of special interest concerning issues of gender. In *A Thousand Ships*, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* literary spaces and representations of time are employed as tools for the empowerment of female characters.

In *A Thousand Ships*, transitional spaces – particularly the shoreline – serve as more than mere physical settings; they become narrative sites of transformation, confrontation and empowerment for female characters. After the fall of Troy, the women of the Trojan elite – Hecabe, her daughters Polyxena and Cassandra and her daughter-in-law Andromache – are gathered at the shoreline, awaiting their fates as captives of the Greek victors. This liminal space marks their passage from royal status to enslavement, yet it also becomes a place where traditional roles are destabilised and new forms of agency emerge. On the one hand, the beach symbolises loss: the

collapse of the old order and the stripping away of titles and safety. On the other hand, it offers the women a space for grief work and introspection. When the corpse of Hecabe's youngest son, Polydorus, is washed ashore – murdered by the king of Thrace, a supposed ally – Hecabe is granted the opportunity to mourn and bury him (Haynes 166, 194–98, 207). Although she is now technically a slave, the Greeks, especially Odysseus, by giving her the ability to perform these rites, accord her a measure of dignity and autonomy, reframing her as a mother with emotional and moral authority rather than a passive victim. Even though this does not help the queen's character recover her full agency and the power to make decisions on the behalf of herself and others, it nonetheless is an act of empowerment. As Kabeer points out, for empowerment to be possible a person must first experience a position of disempowerment (14). Moreover, Dina Yerima-Avazi and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang illuminate that empowerment can also include emotions (124). For Hecabe, this means that as the former queen of the fallen city of Troy she experiences a disempowering situation because her status is reduced from one of power to one of complete dependence on her Greek captors. Thus, allowing her to mourn her son and perform proper burial rites can be interpreted as emotional empowerment and granting partial or, what Margherita Carucci calls, “nuanced” agency (197).

Moreover, the shoreline becomes a space of moral reckoning and narrative rebalancing. When Helen is brought to the shore to await Menelaus, she is confronted by Hecabe, who initially accuses her of causing the war. However, Helen is allowed to speak in her own defence and the narrative grants her a voice not previously heard in the Homeric versions of the myth. “‘So why do you [Hecabe] single me out for blame?’ Helen asked. ‘Paris came to me, remember? [...] [My crime was to] give your handsome son everything he asked for, like everyone else did [...]’ Hecabe was silenced by the truth. She had indulged Paris as a young man [...]” (Haynes 135). Through this and a later confrontation, Hecabe is compelled to reassess her own assumptions, ultimately recognising that blame cannot rest solely on Helen but must also include her own son Paris and by extension herself for neglecting a prophecy that foretold him being the downfall of Troy and for indulging him (Haynes 134–38, 179–81). This moment of recognition does not merely humanise Hecabe, it also refigures Helen. No longer the shameful seductress of *The Iliad*, where she refers to herself as having deserted her family and friends “like a slut” (Homer 50), Helen is instead portrayed as a woman ensnared by forces beyond her control, yet capable of

articulating her perspective, which emphasises that the blame for causing the Trojan War should be equally shared between herself and Paris. By granting Helen this opportunity to speak, she is empowered. Thus, the shoreline – as a transitional and reflective space – facilitates both character development and narrative empowerment, allowing women to renegotiate their identities and relationships within a traditionally male-dominated mythic framework. This also demonstrates the novel's revisionist character as it depicts female-female relationships that have often been ignored (Ostriker 74).

Another strategy of female empowerment in *A Thousand Ships* is the crossing of borders. As Natascha Würzbach remarks, border crossings underscore the permeability of spatial constructs and can symbolise identity development or personal growth (51–52). In addition, they can represent resistance, defiance or courage. In *A Thousand Ships* it is Chryseis who regularly transgresses borders: “The youngest Trojans had grown up under a siege: they knew no other life. For Chryseis, only sixteen years old in this tenth year of the war, *the city was her home and her prison alike*. But unlike the daughters of Priam – Polyxena and the others – *she refused to be contained*” (Haynes 68; emphasis added). Compelled by the feeling of imprisonment that Chryseis experiences inside of Troy, she regularly ventures outside the city walls (Haynes 68). Thereby she not only proves to be courageous but her refusal to be ‘contained’ within her home can also be read as her defying the boundaries of Homeric representations of her character that depict her as a prize of war that men can negotiate over (Homer, *The Iliad* 4–16). Due to her refusal to stay ‘contained’ within her ‘old’ narrative, in *A Thousand Ships* Chryseis becomes an active, multi-dimensional character whose motivations, thoughts and feelings are represented. She reclaims agency and is able to make her own decisions regarding her pursuit of (temporal) freedom outside of Troy. Moreover, her narrative grants access to her thoughts and emotions during her time as a slave in the Greek war camp and thus the portrayal of her point of view, triggered by her border crossing, becomes a strategy of empowerment, as now she receives a voice that is ‘heard’ by the reader, which is a vital aspect since a voice that is *not* heard cannot be empowering (Gammage et al. 6). In addition, transgressing the boundaries of the Greek war camp also signifies freedom for Chryseis since her father is able to rescue her (Haynes 77). Hence, with retaining this detail from the Homeric narrative – her return to her father and home (*The Iliad* 15–16) – she also regains her agency as she is no longer a slave to the Greeks.

A further aspect of spatial description empowering a female character in *A Thousand Ships* is the semantisation of space in Clytemnestra's chapter. When describing the palace and land of Mycenae as well as the personnel, Haynes utilises the feminine possessive pronoun; it is "Clytemnestra's land" (289), "her palace" (290, 296), "her watchmen" (293), "her citadel" and "her slaves" (297). By doing so, Haynes linguistically encodes Clytemnestra's authority into the very fabric of the narrative. The intentional utilisation of pronouns emphasises her position as queen of Mycenae, who, in the ten-year-long absence of her husband, has reigned over this land and successfully claimed it as her own. Even upon the return of Agamemnon and the remaining of his men Haynes still chooses to write "her citadel" and "her slaves" (297). This semantically reinforces Clytemnestra's influence and power in Mycenae, while also demonstrating her power over Agamemnon as it is no longer his land, palace and slaves but *hers*. This spatial possessiveness signals more than temporary stewardship, it reflects a disruption of patriarchal inheritance and symbolises her autonomous political power. Thus, the utilisation of the feminine possessive pronoun instead of the masculine one is a more overt method of empowerment because it acknowledges observable forms of Clytemnestra's agency. As the queen of Mycenae she is involved in decision making processes – as represented by her orchestration of Agamemnon's reception (Haynes 299–302) – and she has political power based on which she can make such decisions as inviting Aegisthus, an enemy to her husband, and to receive him as a guest, alone without male company (Haynes 287–90). She thereby also challenges patriarchal power relations and gender norms – portraying a queen with agency. Hence, Haynes' intentional selection of possessive pronouns empowers Clytemnestra's character by linguistically affirming her political power and personal agency.

A final space that is reclaimed by women in *A Thousand Ships* is the battlefield. Würzbach states that the literary description of experiences of war are heavily male dominated (57). Homer's *The Illiad* is a prime example of such androcentric stories of combat as, with the exception of a few goddesses, there is only male warriors fighting in classical versions of the Trojan War. In *The Illiad* women – as wives, sisters and daughters – are located within the city of Troy or as slaves inside the Greek camp but do not participate in the fighting. Moreover, Homer's warriors are described in grand terms such as "matchless, godlike Achilles" (*The Illiad* 39), "warlike Menelaus" (*The Illiad* 52), "godlike Agamemnon" (*The Illiad* 64), "Hector son of Priam, equal in wisdom

to Zeus" (*The Iliad* 115). However, the narrative in *A Thousand Ships* questions these phallogocentric representations of war and soldiers and transforms the battlefield into a space of reclaiming female agency and decision making. Haynes' retelling includes a chapter introducing the perspective of the Amazon princess Penthesilea, which is a first strategy of empowerment as her tale is not included in Homer's version of the Trojan War. Penthesilea, after accidentally killing her sister Hippolyta, resolves to die as a warrior in battle (Haynes 47). "The only requirement was that there must be a warrior skilled enough to kill her. Most of the men (Penthesilea was not arrogant, merely aware of her talents) did not have the capacity to beat an Amazon in combat" (Haynes 48). Here, the text highlights two more aspects of female empowerment. First, Penthesilea is provided with agency in the form of decision making. It is her own choice to die on the battlefield by the sword of Achilles. Second, the Amazons as female warriors are portrayed as more than equal to their male counterparts. They have the capacity as well as the agency to fight and best men in combat. In fact, they thereby confute the myth of woman's dependence on man (de Beauvoir 163) and become active subjects by participating in the armed conflict. Furthermore, the description of the Trojan and Greek armies from Penthesilea's point of view stands in stark contrast to Homer's. The Trojans are described as a "ragtag gang of fighters" and the Greeks "scarcely any greater in number" with "a few men of significant stature" (Haynes 52–53). Additionally, the fight between the Amazon princess and Achilles is brief and *not* glorious (Haynes 53–56). Haynes' depictions paint a more realistic picture of a battlefield scene based on which her version of the events can claim more authority than Homer's as it is less grand and glorious and stays closer to reality. In *A Thousand Ships* Penthesilea and her Amazon warriors reclaim the battlefield as a space of empowerment by having their story told and exercising agency.

Lastly, Haynes employs summaries to provide Penelope with narratorial power. In Penelope's letters, she briefly recounts the tales the bards sing about Odysseus' journey back home. Thereby the literary space that is accorded to his adventurous return is reduced to a fraction of Homer's *The Odyssey*. This shifts the focus from Odysseus to Penelope, who is given a voice and the opportunity to narrate the events from her perspective.

In *Daughters of Sparta* spaces and the crossing of borders are also vital to the empowerment of the two female protagonists. In Heywood's narrative nature is

constructed as a space of female power, education and self-determination, which stands in contrast to traditional depictions of nature and its associations with chaos, uncontrollability or distance to civilisation (Würzbach 50). It furthermore reframes spatial codes of Homer's epics where women are confined to buildings, cities, islands or closed areas such as the Greek war camp. In *Daughters of Sparta* women venture into nature, cross borders and travel. Before Agamemnon leaves for Troy, one of the most important roles of Clytemnestra as Mycenae's queen is to climb a hill outside the city, together with other women, to make offerings to the gods and thereby bring fertility to the land and ensure a good harvest (Heywood 109). On top of this hill where the women do not have to wear veils because the only men in attendance are male slaves, Clytemnestra feels "like she was in another world entirely. The rules were not the same here. There was a wildness, a freedom that could not be found inside the palace" (Heywood 109). Including this ascent in the story empowers Clytemnestra and her female companions as it demonstrates their importance for Mycenaean civic society since the women's fertility rites are meant to guarantee the city's supply with food. Moreover, they do not have to wear veils on this trip, which underscores this freedom that Clytemnestra feels because without the veils the women's vision is no longer impaired by a piece of cloth; they can see clearly and in return can be seen by others. The absence of the veils enhances both literal visibility and symbolic clarity – these women see and are seen, unmediated by male structures of surveillance – thus affirming their collective presence and authority. However, for Clytemnestra "[p]erhaps the biggest difference of all was the absence of her husband. Up here there was no king, only a queen. Up here she answered to no one but herself and the gods. Up here, she had power" (Heywood 109). This power is expressed in her leading the ritual and thereby doing "real work for *her* kingdom, to be a queen in more than name and finery" as well as in her freedom to make decisions by herself, independent of Agamemnon (Heywood 110; emphasis added). Therefore, this scene stages the hilltop as a liberatory hybrid space that blurs the boundaries between nature and culture or the domestic (Alaimo 39). The absence of the king and the veil in this natural space provide Clytemnestra with the opportunity to enact spiritual authority for *her* kingdom and provide her with autonomy as the leader of the group of women, but it is the hill that ensures these absences in the first place. Because of this freedom and power Clytemnestra decides to linger for a while, sitting "at the edge of the *rocky crown* looking out over the Argolid plain" (Heywood 110; emphasis added). By describing the

hill as a 'rocky crown', the narration underscores spatial semantisation of Clytemnestra's power in this natural space where the king is absent, as it emphasises her position as queen. The language Heywood utilises, stages the hilltop as Clytemnestra's throne and a place of her authority. Hence, nature does not only physically elevate her but also metaphorically as she rises above the gender norms that usually require her obedience and silence. Finally, this is also the place where Kalchas approaches her in hope for her understanding and her help in freeing his sister, Leukippe, from her husband (Heywood 111–15). This confrontation with the priest further highlights the empowering character of the hilltop as it is this 'rocky crown' where he petitions for the queen's aid, knowing that the king is absent. It stresses the freedom and transformative power of this space where a male character seeks to enlist the help of a female one, which subverts traditional representations depicting women as passive and powerless whereas men are in positions of authority. This debunking of societal hierarchy, where usually the king solely exerts all the power and authority, is one element marking Heywood's narrative as a revisionist text (Altin, 'Aeaea Revisited' 149). Thus, in this revisionist story the hill is constructed as a site of female power, freedom and self-determination, especially for Clytemnestra. Thereby it questions the patriarchal social order.

Another natural landscape with empowering character that transforms into a space of female education and self-determination is the 'wilderness' where the old woman, who aids Helen, lives. The woman herself describes her home as a "godforsaken hovel" situated halfway up a hill (Heywood 131, 133). Due to the location of this building, the woman occupies a liminal space between nature and phallogocentric society, which grants her the possibility to mediate between patriarchy and female autonomy. When asked for the reason for living there, she elaborates: "Well, I used t'live just outside Amyklai – nice place it was. But it was the people what were the problem. Not everyone thinks good o'what I do, y'see. So it's safer t'be out here. And I find the goats make less judgemental neighbours" (Heywood 133). The woman's explanation identifies a first empowering aspect of the natural space she chose for her residence. Living alone and remotely in her small shed on the side of a hill grants her a freedom that she is not able to receive living in close proximity to other human beings, as they are critical and judge the abilities she has to offer. This freedom, which the woman experiences, provided by solitude and nature, is underlined by Helen thinking: "What sort of life could she have, out here alone? And yet it seemed the

woman always had a smile ready in her cheeks. Alone she may be, but she was also free" (Heywood 134). Moreover, this freedom equips the old woman with the opportunity to act not only as a helping hand but also as an educator of other women. She is sought out by others who either want to prevent or terminate a pregnancy because she has the knowledge, the abilities and the remedies to assist. This is the reason why Helen, accompanied by her handmaid Adraste, visits her: Helen wants to prevent another pregnancy (Heywood 134). However, when the woman asks Helen how she knows that she is not already pregnant again, it becomes apparent that the Spartan queen does not know about the real functioning of the female body. Helen "was a woman grown, had already had one baby, and yet she didn't even know this much about her own body. How stupid this woman must think she was. But how was she to have known? [...] After all, you didn't need to know anything to get a baby inside you. It was stopping it that required learning, it seemed" (Heywood 135). So the old woman educates her about the womb and the actions required in order to stop a child from being conceived (Heywood 134–36). This scene highlights how systematic ignorance negatively affects women, as it forces them into a position of disempowerment. Thereby it underlines the power of knowledge because it enables self-determination and informed decision making. By acting as a teacher, the old woman provides Helen with the knowledge to help herself, in addition to the remedies she offers. Furthermore, enabling Helen's freedom to choose over her own body also aids the queen to actively resist and act against social conventions that require her to conceive children and be a mother (Heywood 125). This is a powerful strategy as it equips Helen with the agency to defy patriarchal ideals of womanhood and gender norms, which are often linked to women's unawareness of their own bodily functions and the suppression of their self-determination. As long as Helen is unaware of her own body the risk of another pregnancy is significantly higher than after she receives knowledge and remedies. Hence, the 'wilderness' in which the old woman lives, offers a space of freedom where female education is enabled, leading to female self-determination. This becomes even more apparent in contrast to the palace, which is a space where Helen is controlled by patriarchal norms and expectations. Only by leaving the palace and entering the liminal natural space occupied by the old woman, Helen regains control over her own body.

Finally, travelling or the crossing of city borders is another tool employed to empower Helen and Clytemnestra. At the beginning of the novel it is mentioned that

"[m]arried noblewomen did not travel" (Heywood 36). This suggests that they are supposed to stay at the palace or inside the city of their husbands. These two places can then be interpreted as patriarchal spaces controlling the movement of women. Thus, they also control their freedom because the women are not allowed to travel freely, not even to visit their own family (Heywood 57). However, in *Daughters of Sparta* both Helen and Clytemnestra intentionally cross the borders of Sparta and Mycenae, respectively, with a specific goal in mind. Thereby they challenge and revise the dominant social convention regarding women that dictates their confinement to these palaces/cities (Ostriker 84, 86). After years of marriage to Menelaus, Helen feels increasingly unhappy in Sparta. She has no intimate connection to her husband as she longs for, she feels no love for her daughter, Hermione, and for her mother she is "Helen the whore, Helen the disappointment, Helen the unwanted" (Heywood 190). At this point in the book, Sparta signifies unhappiness for Helen. When Paris suggests they leave for Troy together, Helen is "[f]aced with a decision between the hollow life she knew and the hopeful one she did not" (Heywood 191). Leaving with Paris means to become "Helen the desired, Helen the loved" (Heywood 191). He offers her hope, which, ultimately, she chooses to pursue. Hence, the crossing of Sparta's borders and the journey to Troy signify a new, hopeful beginning for Helen. The empowerment of this situation can be found within the agency that is given to the Spartan queen. In Heywood's version, Paris does not abduct or seduce her to leave with him, Helen consciously makes the decision to go with him on this journey to Troy (Heywood 191). Thus, she is given the opportunity to decide for herself and do what she thinks best for her own (mental) wellbeing.

Similar to Helen, Clytemnestra is also empowered by being provided with the agency to make a conscious decision regarding border crossings and travelling. When Agamemnon sends for Iphigenia to be allegedly married at Aulis, her mother decides to accompany her and "negotiate with the men so that Iphigenia might remain at Mycenae for the time being, at least until the war was over" (Heywood 210). Travelling as a companion to her daughter empowers Clytemnestra in three regards. First, it is her own choice to journey to Aulis together with Iphigenia. Agamemnon did not ask her to come as well, in fact he would have preferred she stayed away (Heywood 215). Hence, she defies her husband by acting against his will, which transforms her from an obedient wife into an active woman. Second, she chooses to accompany her daughter with the specific goal in mind to confront and negotiate with the men.

Clytemnestra breaks her silence in protection of Iphigenia, she is not only active but is also given a voice to at least partially challenge patriarchal decisions. Third, she crosses not only one but two borders on her journey. By leaving Mycenae the queen breaks free from the patriarchal restraints represented by the confinement of the palace and the city. Moreover, she intrudes on the 'male' space of the war camp, which Agamemnon describes as "no place for a woman" (Heywood 215). Clytemnestra claims her place by defying androcentric social norms that would otherwise imprison her in the domestic sphere of the palace (Szmigiero 97). Hence, travelling and border crossings transform the Spartan sisters into autonomous characters, independent of their husbands.

In *Elektra*, Saint strategically employs diverse spatial configurations and border crossings to recast female agency – similar to Haynes and Heywood. Cassandra is described as "odd [...] quiet and awkward, and prone to striking a conversation dead" as she experiences difficulties expressing herself (Saint 26, 36). The temple initially offers the priestess a unique space of solace since it is the only place in Troy she considers a home (Saint 40). She is devoted and the temple provides her with a purpose as she fulfils her sacred duties (Saint 37). For a time she flourishes there, yet her eventual violent rupture with Apollo within that temple disrupts even this sanctuary, highlighting the precarity of spaces afforded to women within patriarchal structures and underlining the fragility of space-based empowerment. However, although Cassandra is filled with fear after her encounter with the god and his punishment, she nonetheless returns to the temple in the hope of ending her suffering (Saint 60–61). Thus, the temple transforms from a refuge to a site of resistance when the priestess fights her fears and resumes her spiritual duties.

Moreover, for Cassandra, whose prophetic abilities render her even more isolated and disbelieved – as others consider it to be madness, the seashore provides a rare, new sanctuary: it is a place of solitude, emotional reprieve and linguistic freedom, removed from the burdens of familial and civic hostility. In this liminal space between land and sea, Cassandra's voice can gather strength and her visions breathe, even as they are feared or dismissed by others because in the openness of the natural shoreline there is no judgement: "When I was not in the temple, I fled to the shore, leaving the walled city behind me. It was better to have nothing but the waves as company, to mutter my truths to the empty wind and the water, where the clusters of

seaweed would wave in the froth as though in agreement with me” (Saint 61). The sea in its boundlessness symbolically parallels Cassandra’s interior resilience, offering a place where her subjectivity is acknowledged – if only by herself – outside the polluting influence of societal mistrust.

Furthermore, the shoreline also becomes a crucial locus of transformation and empowerment for Clytemnestra. The sacrificial shore at Aulis – where Iphigenia is taken – is not simply a backdrop for violence but a threshold that catalyses Clytemnestra’s metamorphosis from grieving mother to avenger and political actor. After the funeral rites for Iphigenia are concluded and her body is consumed by the fire, Clytemnestra prays for her husband to survive the Trojan War and return to her:

I wanted no Trojan soldier to take what was mine; no glory-seeking warrior to seize his chance of fame by plunging his sword into Agamemnon’s heart. *Let him come back*, I hissed into the empty sky. *Let him come back so that I can see his eyes as the light drains from them. Let him come back and die at the hands of his bitterest enemy. Let him come back so that I can watch him suffer. And let me make it slow.* (Saint 104)

This passage underlines that the death of her firstborn marks Clytemnestra’s shift from loving mother to a woman longing for revenge, a woman yearning to enact it. After a period of grieving, accompanied by emotional numbness towards her younger daughters, Clytemnestra’s desire to avenge Iphigenia fuels her decision to assume an active role in the ruling of Mycenae (Saint 113–14). Rather than annihilating her, the border-space of the shore births her determination, giving purpose to what might otherwise be private sorrow. It is from this violent threshold that she claims not only vengeance but also the strategic acumen to govern in Agamemnon’s absence. This revisionist strategy reframes the palace as a political space conquered by a female character, which challenges patriarchal systems of hierarchy and power that position a king as sole leader and decision-maker while a queen is reduced to her role as mother (Altin, ‘Aeaea Revisited’ 149).

Border-crossing is an additional element of Clytemnestra’s empowerment via spaces. Towards the novel’s end, after she has enacted revenge upon Agamemnon, she decides to leave Mycenae as well as her role as regent behind:

As I dress in the amber silence of dawn, I marvel that I have stayed here so long. What holds me to Mycenae? The comfort of luxuries of this palace are rotten illusions, its grandeur decaying from within. I’m not afraid to walk away from it all, alone. I have never cared what anyone else might think, and I have wits enough to live on my own, as far away from here as I can get. (Saint 324)

The desire to cross the palace's and the city's borders one final time and the preparations to act accordingly mark another step towards her liberation from societal expectations and patriarchal restrictions, even though she is killed by Orestes before she can actually leave. There is no man standing in her way, preventing her departure. The power and the agency to leave are her own. Moreover, Clytemnestra does not let herself be restrained by the potential damage to her social image as she has "never cared what anyone else might think", which also challenges patriarchal ideals of femininity since it demonstrates that a woman does not have to abide by these rules, she can defy them despite potential consequences. This is further highlighted by the emphasis on her intelligence and abilities to live on her own, which ensure her independence and autonomy. She is the sovereign of her own life and does not depend on a man. Finally, describing the luxuries and comforts of the palace as 'rotten illusions' exposes the constructedness of patriarchal myths of femininity. In the context of revisionist mythmaking, the palace that houses a king's throne and represents his sovereignty can be interpreted as a space of male dominance over woman, a place that confines her to patriarchal ideals of womanhood. This is even more apparent in *Daughters of Sparta* where it is explicitly mentioned that married women are not supposed to travel. Hence, the 'rotten illusions' refer to the luxuries provided to royal women to keep them inside the palace or, put differently, to keep them within patriarchy's grasp and norms. However, these are illusions that construct woman according to men's ideas (de Beauvoir 219). By exposing the constructed character of the palatial luxuries and her decision to leave them behind, Clytemnestra not only questions patriarchal ideas but also liberates herself from their influence.

Lastly, Electra's domain is the tomb – a fixed, interior space of mourning that, paradoxically, becomes her platform of agency. Conventionally, the tomb might be read as a site of entrapment, confining Electra to a cycle of grief for her father and hatred towards her mother, consequently preventing her from participating in the active life of the palace. Yet Saint subverts this traditional association of stasis with passivity by reconfiguring Electra's acts of mourning as a form of active resistance. Through her repeated visits and ritualised acts of remembrance at Agamemnon's tomb, Electra positions herself as the custodian of memory and the guardian of justice (Saint 306). She refuses both the erasure of her father's death and the normalisation of Clytemnestra's crime, ensuring instead that the demand for vengeance remains a living, pressing obligation – one that she passes on to Orestes, her brother. In this way,

the tomb anchors her identity and grants her a form of symbolic authority: although she is denied political or martial power, she commands the moral discourse that shapes the eventual actions of her brother. This empowerment is not rooted in movement or outward conquest but in steadfastness. The tomb functions as a space simultaneously connected to and separate from the wider social world; it is a place in which alternative meanings are generated. For Electra, it is precisely the liminality of the tomb – between life and death, past and present – that enables her to influence the trajectory of justice. By turning grief into an enduring practice, she transforms the space into a living archive, where ancestral curses are rehearsed, reinterpreted and sustained. Her immobility becomes a strategy of persistence. By refusing to abandon the tomb, she resists both patriarchal silencing and maternal transgression and in doing so acquires a form of agency that is subtle yet decisive. The tomb, then, empowers Electra not despite its constraints but because of them, reframing mourning as a means of political and narrative intervention.

Apart from spatial representations, temporal choices also empower female characters and their narration in my select revisionist adaptations. The non-linear, fragmented timeline in *A Thousand Ships*, which includes analepses, prolepses, ellipses, summaries and pauses, stands in contrast to epic teleology that is often male connotated (Gutenberg 104). Instead of portraying a clear, structured development towards a specific goal or event, there is no heroic climax in Haynes' reimagination. Time is recursive and not only allows for a focus on mourning and survival but also represents trauma and healing itself as this is a gradual, cyclical process. Thus, temporal elements of the narration aid in the recovery of alternative versions of Homer's epics, which distinguishes the novel as a work of revisionist mythmaking (Keating 112).

Moreover, the fragmentation of the literary timeline in *A Thousand Ships* can be read as a method of meticulously excavating the stories of all of the female characters that were neglected or misrepresented in *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*. If viewed as a painting, Homer's epics represent the last, the visible layer of paint on a smooth canvas that creates a supposedly complete depiction of the events during the last year of the Trojan War and Odysseus' journey back home to Ithaca. The Homeric stories are a painting of long existence that has never ceased to attract attention, portraying glorious deeds of ancient heroes. However, if this layer of paint is peeled away in certain areas,

other, hidden layers of paint emerge. These newly visible layers alter the picture and the surface that is no longer smooth. The process of peeling away the upper layer of paint creates depth and shows the layers underneath. It creates an altered image. This, then, represents *A Thousand Ships*. Through the cracks of paint, the cracks that fragment the 'old song', hidden tales emerge, presenting a 'new song' that is now heard and that challenges the existing one. Thereby, the alternative version empowers previously hidden characters, giving meaning to different events and perspectives. Consequentially, the fragmented timeline in *A Thousand Ships* emphasises the multiplicity of female characters' stories and their right to equal representation as male figures. The 'voices' of these women emerge and are acknowledged, thus they are empowered.

Creusa's chapter is characterised by analepses or flashbacks, which reveal fragments of her recent past before she dies in the fire that destroys the city of Troy (Haynes 3–29). This is another empowering aspect in the novel because it frames her as more than a victim; she becomes a person with a past. The analepses illuminate some of her thoughts and feelings with regard to her leaving the city for the first time after ten years of war and the Trojans' discovery of the wooden horse. Due to these flashbacks, Creusa is given the opportunity to evaluate the situation and the conversations surrounding the horse. Thereby the depth of her character is enhanced.

Another character that is empowered partially due to temporal elements is Cassandra. She is known for being a prophetess who is never to be believed because she refused Apollo's sexual desire for her ('Cassandra' n.p.). However, the prolepses or flashforwards in *A Thousand Ships* highlight the accuracy of her abilities and therefore increase her credibility from the reader's point of view. One example of such a prolepsis is when Cassandra tells the other Trojan women about Polydorus, yet no one believes her. Shortly after, Greek soldiers show his corpse to Hecabe for the purpose of identification, but the women have already forgotten about Cassandra's words (Haynes 163–66). Nevertheless, the reader will remember, which in turn empowers Cassandra since her predictions are finally 'listened' to and believed.

In Calliope's chapters there are other temporal elements of significance to the empowerment of female characters and narration, but these are better explored in combination with narratorial perspective since they cannot be easily separated.

Lastly, Haynes utilises ellipses to support the achievement of the revisionist aim of her novel, which is a strategy her story shares with Heywood's and Saint's. A

Thousand Ships, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* retell myths surrounding the Trojan War, yet descriptions of the war itself, of combat and war counsels – as known from *The Illiad*, are noticeably missing, with there being some exceptions, such as the chapters focusing on Penthesilea, Briseis and Chryseis in Haynes' text as well as the ones describing the fight between Paris and Menelaus and Hector's death in Heywood's (Haynes 46–56, 66–104; Heywood 277–83, 299–306). Instead, the novels mostly recount events before and leading to the war, during the ten years of fighting as well as events (directly) after the conflict was ended. This strategy shifts the focus on the women and their 'hidden' stories because the majority of them did not participate in the fighting or were not captured as slaves during the war; some of them were not even present in Troy but were waiting in Greece. Hence, in order to represent their perspectives the narration has to omit the men's battles and centre on the causes and consequences of the Trojan War as well as on daily life continuing away from the battlefield. It has to acknowledge the female victims, survivors and the ones left behind, which is achieved with the help of ellipses.

In *Daughters of Sparta* there are other temporal aspects empowering the women in the story as well. The first, I would like to address, concerns Heywood's choice of grammatical tense. Due to the usage of past tense in the entire book, the narrative is presented in the form of anachronic narration. Anachrony offers the possibility to reflect on and evaluate past events, which, however, Heywood's text does not do. Instead, it presents the past and its 'truths' in a matter-of-fact manner, thereby creating an alternative version of (parts of) the Homeric epics, which underlines the revisionist agenda integrated into the story (Keating 112). The past tense suggests certainty and closure of events. The utilisation of this tense throughout *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* can be interpreted in such a manner because these tales about male heroes have been perpetuated until today. In the context of feminist revisionism, the past tense can be read as revision of dominant patriarchal versions of myths and as correction of misrepresentations and misconceptions of female characters because narrating the events from women's perspectives in the past tense then signals certainty about the 'truthfulness' of events having unfolded in the described manner. It is a reclamation of forgotten parts that have always existed, yet have long been neglected. As a consequence, this strategy reclaims female characters' authority over their own narratives, especially when the narrating subjects do not show any signs of

unreliability. This empowers the figures in Heywood's text and their narrations since these new versions act as counter-myths to the already existing ones, challenging androcentric portrayals of the Trojan War and the women connected to it. The argument developed here can also be applied to parts of Haynes' story but not to the entire text since she utilises grammatical tense for various purposes as does Saint – I will elaborate at a later point.

Moreover, temporal narrative aspects are vital to Clytemnestra's (re-)claiming of power in *Daughters of Sparta*. It is the passage of time that affords the Mycenaean queen an increasing amount of political power in the palace and the city. At first, Clytemnestra loses her position as heiress of Sparta to her sister Helen: "It was a bitter realisation to learn that despite all her efforts, despite all the times she had held her tongue, all the limits she had accepted, all the desires she had quashed, she could not even hold on to the future she had submitted to. Not even that was hers" (Heywood 27). This situation disempowers her because despite all of her efforts and restraining of herself, her birthright is taken from her, meaning that she has to leave her home in order to become queen in a foreign city. However, Heywood transforms this new situation into a basis for her rise to power – from a position of disempowerment, empowerment can grow (Kabeer 14). At the beginning of her life in Mycenae she spends the majority of her time in her chamber, weaving and raising her children (Heywood 89). This changes over time: "Twelve years into her marriage, she finally felt at home in Mycenae. She was a real queen now, commanding respect throughout the palace. Agamemnon would even ask her advice on occasion. He always invited her to attend public audiences and would have her by his side when receiving guests" (Heywood 169). Even before her husband leaves to conquer Troy, she is involved in political and social functions, which has a positive impact on her feeling of being at home in Mycenae. This is reiterated after his departure (Heywood 250), but the crucial difference is that now, Clytemnestra can act independent of Agamemnon. The passage of time becomes a powerful tool enabling her political ascent.

A final temporal element in Heywood's narrative significant to female empowerment is the organisation of time around aspects of womanhood. Contrary to epic teleology that is driven towards a narrative climax and characterised by great deeds of courage and valour (Mitchell n.p.), the linear timeline in *Daughters of Sparta* is structured by recurring elements of female life. Clytemnestra's and Helen's transformation from girls to women is signalled by their menarche because it is seen

as a sign of maturity, indicating that they are soon to be married since they can give birth to heirs/heiresses. Marriage and the loss of virginity conclude this process and finally transform them into women (Heywood 47). After these events, pregnancy, childbirth and the raising of their children are characteristic of their daily lives. This is especially true for Clytemnestra, who conceives seven children over the course of the novel, two of which die shortly after birth, four of them are fathered by Agamemnon, one by Aegisthus. Her children are her primary concern, which decisively impacts her actions. This is exemplified by her murder of Agamemnon, as it is driven by revenge for her daughter as well as it is a means to protect her youngest son. Although Helen is determined to avoid a second pregnancy and is successful, her life is nonetheless organised around aspects of womanhood. After Hermione's birth she struggles with postpartum depression, then she learns about contraception and during all of that time she tries to come to terms with being a mother, also when Menelaus takes her back from Troy. As a result, motherhood is a central, structuring theme in Heywood's narrative. It shifts the focus towards women's, especially mothers', experiences over the course of their lives, thus being a tool for female empowerment.

In *Elektra*, Saint structures the linear timeline around a cycle of revenge that nevertheless empowers Clytemnestra as well as Electra. Central to Saint's alternative version of Homeric literary material is the curse of the house of Atreus. This curse embodies a generational cycle of violence, the source of which can be traced back to Tantalus (Saint 49). The first event in the text linked to the curse is Agamemnon's ascent to power, where he kills his uncle but spares his cousin, Aegisthus. This is followed by a slave woman recounting her husband's family history to Clytemnestra and after that by the murder of Iphigenia. Then Electra's friend, Georgios, recounts his version of the story. Before Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon, the mural she had painted in the bathroom is described, which depicts scenes from her husband's family's past. Finally, at the end of the book, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are killed by Orestes, whose deeds are supported by Electra, and for an unknown amount of time he is haunted by the Erinyes. Until Iphigenia's murder, the vicious killings were solely committed by the men of the house of Atreus. However, with Clytemnestra taking revenge on Agamemnon it is a woman who acts as judge of her husband's crime and guardian of justice. It is a woman who takes the agency to punish her daughter's murderer. Moreover, it was Clytemnestra who commanded a painter to create the

bathroom fresco according to her instructions. She wanted “the painter to show only the victories, the events that elevated [her] husband’s family above all others, knowing all the same that anyone who looked upon it would still think of the darkness and corruption that punctuated these moments” (Saint 224–25). Her commissioning this particular artwork corroborates her position of power and signifies that it is she who controls the narrative. This mirrors Saint’s choice to make her one of the protagonists of the story. In addition, read in the context of his family’s history and Clytemnestra’s as well as Cassandra’s descriptions of his character, the greatness of Agamemnon’s ‘heroic’ deeds as commander of the Greeks is diminished, which presents a challenge to classical, androcentric portrayals of him. Furthermore, the cycle of revenge also empowers Electra. It is precisely her fixation with the past that transforms her into a guardian of justice. Similar to Clytemnestra, she judges her mother’s actions and is steadfast in her desire for revenge, which influences Orestes, who then kills Clytemnestra.

Electra’s fixation with past events is mirrored in the novel’s shift from anachronic to synchronic narration as between parts two and three the grammatical tense changes from past to present, which is especially powerful in the development of her character. The usage of past tense in parts one and two signifies Electra’s resistance and refusal to move on after her father’s departure to Troy. It is a sign for her continued trauma as she had to grow up in absence of parental love – the father she idolises is gone to war, her mother is lost in grief for Iphigenia. However, the shift from past to present tense in part three and four signals change. With the return of her brother and the anticipation of revenge, Electra starts living in the present. After Agamemnon is avenged, she is even able to find a new home and a future, represented by her own baby daughter. Electra’s connection to narrative time demonstrates how the past can influence the present. It also emphasises trauma and the difficulty to move on, which is still empowering because, as Kabeer suggests, empowerment can start from within a person, signalled by changes in their thoughts, feelings or attitudes (14–15).

Lastly, for Cassandra the tense shift indicates liberation, which she finds in death. Hence, her death is empowering because she is finally freed from her traumatic past and the agony that accompanies her prophecies.

Whose Voice Is Heard, Whose Perspective Seen?

Who sees? and *Who speaks?* are two vital questions with regard to revisionist mythmaking since the concept seeks an alteration of traditional patriarchal stories (Ostriker 73). Alicia Ostriker defines it as follows:

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be *appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine*, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately *making cultural change possible*. (Ostriker 72; emphasis added)

As a feminist strategy that revises androcentric myths to “fill the old vessel with new wine”, this implies that changing narratorial perspectives and focalisers is significant in order to question and challenge patriarchal norms and myths of femininity and in turn to empower female characters and women-centred narration because the figure that sees and the figure that narrates is in a position of power. Narrators and focalisers influence *how* and *what* is told or written, hence they can reclaim authority.

A Thousand Ships applies multiperspectivity as a revisionist strategy since there are three (female) narrating subjects and a multitude of women focalisers from whose points of view the aftermath of the Trojan War and Odysseus’ home journey are recounted. As Gaby Allrath and Carola Surkamp highlight, multiperspectivity can serve a variety of gender-relevant functions (163–64). One of these is to provide previously silenced female voices with a space to narrate their personal tales from their own perspectives (Allrath and Surkamp 163–64), which is exactly what *A Thousand Ships* aims at.

In Calliope the novel names the invoked, yet voiceless muse from *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* (see for example Homer, *The Illiad* 4, 41; Homer, *The Odyssey* 3), which is a powerful move that positions her as a subject rather than an object that has no choice to fulfil a poet’s will and do his bidding. This is demonstrated by the manner in which Calliope assesses her invocation: “Sing, Muse, he says, and the edge in his voice makes it clear that this is not a request. If I were minded to accede to his wish [...] But I am not in the mood to be a muse today” (Haynes 1) and “When did poets forget that they serve the muses, and not the other way around? [...] why can’t he remember to say please?” (Haynes 108). Transforming the goddess of epic poetry from a woman-as-object to a woman-as-subject is a revisionist strategy (Ostriker 79). It provides her with the power to voice her own opinions, evaluations, judgement and

ideas. As a consequence, she can describe her feelings about the poet's invocation and her attitudes towards his mannerism. This transformation from object to subject additionally subverts the myth of woman as the Other (de Beauvoir 6) since she is no longer defined by the patriarchal discourse about herself but can define *herself* through her narration. Receiving this voice that is perceived by the reader empowers the muse as a subject.

The utilisation of the first person singular pronoun further pronounces Calliope's metamorphosis into an autonomous narrating and reflecting individual, thus she resists the passive role traditionally assigned to her (Allrath and Surkamp 164). By regaining her voice and turning into a narrator she also features decisively more prominently in the retelling than in comparison to Homer's epics. There are seven chapters narrated by the muse, presenting her thoughts and feelings about the genre of epic poetry and the definition of heroism in these narratives. These value judgements make her an *overt* heterodiegetic narrator because she is situated outside of the story of her narration but adds assessments of characters, events and war (Genette 244; Nünning and Nünning, *An Introduction* 119).

In the terminology of Susan S. Lanser, Calliope's narrative situation can also be described as an authorial voice with "overt authorialty" (*Fictions* 17). This manifests in extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrators who engage in "extrarepresentational acts" including reflections and judgements (Lanser, *Fictions* 15–17). Therefore, the muse is in a position to reflect upon the traditional epic as well as to call for a reform of the genre and its definition of 'heroes', as already noticed by Lena Linne (65, 69–70). Linne analyses that Calliope criticises the choice of content of traditional epics and that a reformed epic would be more inclusive and multi-faceted as it would also present a reformed type of heroism (69–70, 77). The goddess says, "How much epic poetry does the world really need? Every conflict joined, every war fought, every city besieged, every town sacked, every village destroyed. Every impossible journey, every shipwreck, every homecoming: these stories have all been told, and countless times. Can he really believe he has something new to say?" (Haynes 1). Here she reflects on the lack of need for more epic poetry since the genre is repetitive in its contents and thus expectable and dull (Linne 69). Simultaneously, these reflections inquire about the authority of traditional versions of this text type. If no one adds new value or information to these stories, they might not be that important or worthwhile after all. In another place, Calliope explains her intent for the poet to change his stance in order

to “see the war from both ends”; however he has not yet understood that she is “offering him the story of all the women in the war” (Haynes 40). She continues:

There are so many ways of telling a war: [...] But this is the women’s war, just as much as it is the men’s, and the poet will look upon their pain – the pain of the women who have always been relegated to the edges of the story, victims of men, survivors of men, slaves of men – and he will tell it, or he will tell nothing at all. They have waited long enough for their turn. And for what reason? Too many men telling the stories of men to each other. (Haynes 176)

This implies her struggle for authority of her version of the events because at this point she has not succeeded in influencing the poet’s understanding of the value of her alternative narrative. It can be read as her struggle to present the reformed and revised epic as more valuable than its patriarchal source texts – which were written by and for men and marginalise female characters – because the victims, survivors and slaves of men are at the centre of the revision. Thus, by portraying their stories, their feelings and thoughts – put differently, their voices – these female characters are empowered.

A different aspect that supports Calliope’s reclaiming of narrative authority is Haynes’ utilisation of the present tense in the muse’s chapters. The significance of the narrator’s temporal positioning towards the story and of grammatical tense is stressed by Kilian (73). In the case of Calliope’s narration the use of present tense can be interpreted as an active process of reclaiming authority by creating a new version including the voices of hitherto neglected or misrepresented female figures. It provides the muse with agency in the present to alter patriarchal images of women that have prevailed and it refuses the notion that these myths are ‘closed’ because alternatives are being created. In addition, the non-linear structure of the text is a resistance to traditional, teleological patriarchal storytelling that aids in the construction of a *new, reformed* version of Homer’s epics.

Calliope’s reform of the epic genre does not solely foreground the fates of the women who are already part of the stories but reduced to footnotes, closely linked to this is her emphasis on a less grand type of heroism. While in *The Illiad* it is “the battle where men win glory” and “[t]here’s no honour or salvation to be found in flight” (Homer 64, 89), the muse’s definition of a ‘hero’ is not limited to combat:

Devastation happens in war: it is its nature. [...] Men’s deaths are epic, women’s deaths are tragic: is that it? He has misunderstood the very nature of conflict. Epic is countless tragedies, woven together. Heroes don’t become heroes without carnage, and carnage has both causes and consequences. And those don’t begin and end on a battlefield. [...] And that a death off the battlefield can be more noble (more heroic, if her prefers it that way) than one in the midst of fighting. But it hurts, he said when Creusa died [...] It should hurt. She isn’t a

footnote, she's a person. And she – all the Trojan women – should be memorialized [sic] as much as any other person. Their Greek counterparts too. (Haynes 108–09)

In the goddess' point of view, an epic is intricately bound to tragedies since war is characterised by bloodshed and has disproportionate consequences for women, children and the environment (Altin, 'War, Woman, Environment' 105). As a consequence, women's deaths off the battlefield can be perceived to be as heroic as soldiers' deaths during combat and therefore their stories are equally important and valuable to remember. Calliope's view of heroism is even more accentuated in her reference to Oenone, Paris first wife: "If he [the poet] complains to me again, I will ask him this: is Oenone less of a hero than Menelaus? He loses his wife so he stirs up an army to bring her back to him, costing countless lives and creating countless widows, orphans and slaves. Oenone loses her husband and she raises their son. Which of those is the more heroic act?" (Haynes 177). Here, the muse implies that indeed Oenone's behaviour is more courageous than Menelaus'. Her heroism might be more subtle, but she faces and masters a difficult, demanding situation on her own without bringing devastation to countless other families, which is most definitely a heroic act. Calliope's narration – in the form of her criticism and reform of the traditional epic – transforms *A Thousand Ships* into what Linne calls a "tragic epic poem in prose" (73), which questions androcentric traditions and representations of women. It transfers the focus to stories of female suffering, endurance and survival. It acknowledges these perspectives and thus empowers its characters.

Another narrating subject that contributes to the multiperspectivity of the novel is Penelope. She is often lauded for her dedication and loyalty to her husband, Odysseus, and consequently labelled as the epitome of an ideal wife (Plaß 47). In *The Odyssey* she is a side character to her husband and although the narration's transposed speech provides her with a voice, she mostly laments the absence of her husband or son and weeps (see for example Homer 11-12, 211, 224). In *A Thousand Ships* Penelope becomes the narrator of the seven chapters dedicated to her story. Her parts are stylised as letters, which she writes to Odysseus and Athene. In these letters, she writes as an overt intradiegetic narrator who mixes homodiegetic and autodiegetic narration as she recounts the tales from the ballads the bards sing about Odysseus' journey back home, but she adds information about herself. The epistolary style of her narration underlines the personal voice of her sections, which grants her the authority to interpret her own experiences (Lanser, *Fictions* 19). It is these personal

evaluations that empower her character and support Calliope's redefinition of heroism. As Barbara Goff notices, Penelope's narration is characterised by increasing sarcasm and a dry, disillusioned tone (8). This stands in stark contrast to the overly emotional portrayal in Homer's epic and is observable in the change of her salutations. In the first two letters it is "my dear(est) husband [...] your loving wife" (Haynes 57, 60, 157, 162). The next time she omits the word "loving", which is followed by "my husband Odysseus [...] Penelope" (Haynes 183, 192, 227, 231). The last two letters addressed to her husband start with his name only and end with "your wife/widow" and "Penelope", respectively (Haynes 253, 261, 279, 285). This dry, sarcastic tone increases the credibility of her recounts and evaluations of Odysseus' adventures. It also strengthens her figure. Instead of crying, she is able to reflect on and assess the stories she hears. Moreover, she questions traditional notions of heroism, which aligns with Calliope's aims. Penelope states:

The bards all sing of the bravery of heroes and the greatness of your deeds: it is one of the few elements of your story on which they all agree. But no one sings of the courage required by those of us who were left behind. [...] [S]itting in our home without you, watching Telemachus grow from a baby into a child, and now a handsome youth, wondering if he will ever see his father again? That also takes a hero's disposition. Waiting is the cruellest thing I have ever endured. Like bereavement, but with no certainty. (Haynes 185)

It is evident that Penelope's understanding of a 'hero', similar to the muse's, does not require war and adventurous deeds but includes the quiet courage of navigating everyday life under difficult circumstances. It highlights the strength needed to cope with emotional burdens and drain and the endurance of the suffering that accompanies uncertainty. This definition then acknowledges the perspectives and the heroism of the women who are left behind but nonetheless are affected by the consequences of war. Ultimately, by providing her with a tool to express her point of view and feelings, Penelope is given a confident, self-assured yet realistic voice that reframes her as a multi-faceted character beyond her stereotypical representation.

Lastly, the chapters narrated by a covert heterodiegetic narrator – who can be assumed to be Calliope due to the ending of the novel, where she claims, "And I have sung of the women [...]" (Haynes 339) – are characterised by shifting internal focalisation, which adds to the polyphony of the text (Altin, 'War, Woman, Environment' 110). A polyphonic text includes a plurality of voices, the narrator being only one of them (Camatsos 36). The multitude of focalisers in *A Thousand Ships* emphasises the plenitude of stories hidden within the Homeric epics and is a tool for excavating them.

The frequent utilisation of transposed speech in these sections further empowers the female focalisers, as their tales are not only told but they are provided with a voice to tell parts of their stories on their own, especially if it concerns thoughts and emotions. Moreover, even though these characters do not act as narrators, I claim that the shifting focalisation nevertheless represents what Lanser calls a “communal voice” (*Fictions* 21). According to Lanser, a communal voice articulates a “collective voice or a collective of voices” (*Fictions* 21). In the sequential form the narration alternates between several members of a group (Lanser, *Fictions* 21). The polyphony in *A Thousand Ships* creates such a collective of voices, as it represents a variety of women who are all affected by the Trojan War. It can be argued that these female characters constitute a community that is based on shared trauma, loss and grief. Consequently, the shifting focalisation between the different members of this group creates a communal voice that in its collective questions traditional epics and their focus on the deeds of male heroes, which neglects or dismisses the suffering of women and the consequences of war.

The multiperspectivity in *Daughters of Sparta* is more reduced than in comparison to *A Thousand Ships* as there are ‘only’ two perspectives portrayed – that of Clytemnestra and Helen. It is nonetheless utilised as a strategy of revisionist mythmaking and thus contributes to the empowerment of these characters. Heywood mentions that she finds Clytemnestra and Helen “either inadequately or unfairly treated across the ancient sources” (336). They are two figures of Greek mythology often depicted to embody two different versions of the patriarchal myth of the adulteress: Clytemnestra as the husband slaying adulteress, Helen as the seducing adulteress. Both deviate from society’s expectations of women – to be loyal wives and mothers. Consequentially, they have come to represent the evil, devilish side of the androcentric construct of woman (de Beauvoir 213, 215). However, the multiperspectivity of Heywood’s text reframes them as more complex figures and provides space for their personal experiences to be narrated. This blurs the lines between the supposedly polar opposites of angel and devil (de Beauvoir 215), which challenges patriarchal myths of femininity as it exposes their artificiality by recasting Clytemnestra and Helen as characters with depth of personality, personal motivations and reasoning.

Although Heywood employs a heterodiegetic narrator rather than granting the two protagonists direct narrative voices, their perspectives nonetheless permeate the

text and exert a formative influence on the narrative. This is realised through a combination of the covertness of the narrating voice, internal focalisation and transposed speech. The first aspect eliminates any potential interferences or commentary from the narrator, who is anonymous and ‘disappears’ in the story. There are no narratorial evaluations of characters’ actions or value judgements regarding their experiences that could influence a reader’s perception of the figures. Moreover, due to internal focalisation the novel portrays Clytemnestra’s and Helen’s thoughts, feelings and reasons for their actions, aligning with Heywood’s aim, which is to “fill the gaps” left by the canon of ancient literature that discusses them (336). These depictions of the inner workings of their minds are accentuated and verbalised through a mixture of narrated and transposed speech. The latter providing them with opportunities to ‘speak’ for themselves since in these cases the narration represents their utterances without mediation. By centring on the two women’s private, personal experiences, free from narratorial judgement, and partly affording them voices of their own, the narration empowers them.

A pivotal element of the narrative in *Daughters of Sparta* is the emphasis on motherhood, which is intricately interwoven with the portrayal of Clytemnestra’s and Helen’s private lives or, in other words, the focalisation of the text. This focus does not only influence the temporal organisation of the novel – which I have discussed at an earlier point – but also questions specific genre characteristics of the epic, such as the grandeur of the scope of the setting or heroes’ great, courageous deeds. Instead of depicting battle scenes and listing all of the different groups involved in the armed conflict, Heywood mostly limits the places in her story to the palaces of Sparta, Mycenae and Troy. Her story discusses challenges and efforts of motherhood. This acknowledges the fragility of life – as both Leda and Clytemnestra lose babies – and the potential danger to a woman’s own life presented by the process of giving birth – something that is painfully experienced by Helen: “[...] she [Clytemnestra] knew how lucky she had been for the birth to have gone well, for the child to have been healthy. Perhaps she would not be so lucky a second time. *A swollen belly could bring death as well as life*” (Heywood 55; emphasis added). The narratorial emphasis on motherhood is especially powerful when Clytemnestra confronts Agamemnon shortly before he sacrifices Iphigenia:

‘You understand nothing,’ he [Agamemnon] snapped, pulling his arm away. ‘How can a woman know what it is to be a man? What a man must do? What a man must be? You speak of what you do not know.’ ‘I know what it is to be a

mother. To bear a child – *your* child. To birth her. To nurse her at my breast. To be terrified that the summer sickness will take her, to dread the winter chill. To raise her to be good and kind and strong. To cherish her each day. I know that. (Heywood 226)

Even though it is not explicitly expressed, this passage highlights the struggles of giving birth, nurturing and raising a child, the courage and the effort it takes to be a mother and the feelings that connect her to her child. By contrasting Agamemnon's accusations with Clytemnestra's reply, she is empowered, first, by being enabled to argue with him and voice her opinions and, second, by the confrontation of what it means to be a man with what it means to be a woman and mother because it questions the exceptionality of manhood and consequently accords both perspectives equal levels of importance.

The last aspect I would like to elaborate on is closely related to the previous one. Another element that questions the very foundation of the Homeric epics is the criticism of the genre's focus on glory and heroism instead of the personal lives of the people involved in the conflict, which is subtly woven into the revisionist tale of *Daughters of Sparta*. Soon after Helen has already left with Paris and Agamemnon has succeeded in rallying Greece, Clytemnestra notices that her husband – and the other Greek leaders – are not interested in aiding or rescuing her sister. They only see the glory to be gained from capturing Troy (Heywood 201). This is later reiterated by Helen herself: "The Greeks claimed they were here to take her back, but for now they seemed more interested in plundering the Troad for all it held. Helen sometimes wondered which theft had grieved her husband more: hers, or that of Sparta's royal treasure" (Heywood 246). Towards the end of the book it is repeated again: "The war had not been fought for her. Not really. She knew it was easier to believe that than to face the terrible alternative, and yet it also seemed the more likely truth. What did men ever sacrifice for the sake of a woman" (Heywood 318)? The focalisation through the two women challenges the supposed cause of the war and points out a more realistic motivation behind the Greeks' actions, which is the accumulation of riches and fame rather than to save one woman. A similar notion is expressed in *Elektra*:

Those who came home returned on ships laden with spoils and women. The bards sing each night of their bravery, their glories, the fame they won there. And Troy, the city everyone thought impermeable, is razed to nothing. Do you really believe that those thousand ships carried men who wanted only to restore one wife to her husband? (Saint 295)

This then raises questions regarding the legitimacy of the Greek aggressions as well as regarding the authority of the narratives that in turn legitimise the Trojan War.

Additionally, it contests the strong emphasis on heroism and glory. *Daughters of Sparta* contrasts these traditional genre conventions by centralising personal experiences off the battlefield that are commonly viewed as less heroic, although they require at least an equal amount of courage. The internal focalisation utilised in the narrative also presents a more realistic and relatable account of the events surrounding the war. Thus, in a similar manner to *A Thousand Ships*, the text empowers women's experiences and perspectives because they are no longer neglected and instead challenge patriarchal representations.

Elektra also employs multiperspectivity as a tool of empowerment. There are three autodiegetic female narrators – Clytemnestra, Cassandra and Electra – whose voices create the polyphony of the text (Camatsos 36). This polyphony is even more pronounced due to the contrasting voices of the protagonists since Clytemnestra's and Cassandra's opinions of Agamemnon differ tremendously from Electra's. However, this corroborates the empowering character of the narrative as opposing perspectives are allowed to exist next to each other, illuminating the diversity of neglected stories and thus showing a more complex, more complete picture of the myths surrounding the Trojan War. Another powerful element of *Elektra*'s multiperspectivity is that the autodiegetic narrations, in combination with internal focalisation, form what Lanser calls 'personal voices' that have authority to relate and interpret their own experiences (*Fictions* 18–19), which is even more significant for Cassandra and Electra.

Cassandra, priestess of Apollo and daughter of Hecabe and Priam, is usually portrayed as mad and unable to convince others of the truths she foresees, which is the reason why providing her with a personal voice and the ability to narrate her own tale are especially empowering. When Apollo finally grants Cassandra the gift of prophecy, she denies his desire for her, thus he punishes her so that her truths are never to be believed (Saint 39–41). Even before this incident, Cassandra experienced difficulties expressing herself: "I was used to being misheard and misunderstood. I had been a timid child and an awkward young woman, always striving to make my voice clear and brave. I was no stranger to struggling with my words, feeling them die in my throat when people looked at me" (Saint 61). Her situation is not aided when she is labelled as mad, although she longs to earn the acceptance of her people (Saint 57, 63). However, Saint provides her with the opportunity to express her feelings and narrate her own story so she is finally 'heard' and her traumatic experiences are

acknowledged. This revisionist strategy transforms her into a subject able to make herself understood (Ostriker 79). Moreover, the manner in which her narration is presented, stands in contrast to her supposed madness, which would turn her 'speech' unintelligible, but her chapters are entirely comprehensible to the reader. This supports her empowerment since her words can be comprehended and the punishment of a male god is challenged. Hence, Saint's reimagination of Cassandra can be interpreted as a metaphor for female authors revising ancient, patriarchal myths and consequently reframing female characters that have often been unjustly punished by being misrepresented or misunderstood. Thereby the authors centre their narratives on female figures' perspectives, which present alternatives to the androcentric texts. This then empowers the women in the 'new' stories and the tales themselves as they question the authority and universality of ancient source material such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Furthermore, Cassandra's point of view highlights the consequences of losing a war for women, which is another element of this alternative version to Homer's epics that focus on the experiences of men, who mostly either die a glorious death in battle or return home victoriously. Her narration highlights the humiliation and degradation women experience due to war:

On the Trojan shore, where we women waited to be divided up among the Greeks in front of the smoking embers of our city, we thought the worst was done. We could see our lives stretch out ahead of us, captives of those we hated the most, forced to look each day upon the faces of the men who had slaughtered our fathers, brothers, husbands, sons. Our dignity gone, our freedom a long-forgotten dream. (Saint 206)

Not only do these women lose their freedom to captivity, they also have to serve the very men who are responsible for the deaths of their loved ones. Unexpectedly, this transforms them into a community in which Cassandra finally has a place:

I could only turn my head back towards the women for as long as I could bear the sight of my mother's face, the grief that had split her soul apart, the wordless anguish that united all of us in that moment. Whoever we were in Troy, however these women might have turned their heads away from me once, all of us were the same now. They pitied me; I could feel the ragged pulses of their sympathy for me, the first to be borne away after Polyxena, even though all of them would suffer the same. Troy was in ruins, but in these hideous few minutes, I felt more a part of it than ever before. Our city would only exist in our memories; a strange, shared bond that flickered into existence between us all, just as we were torn apart from each other, just as we were about to be scattered across the ocean and separated forever. (Saint 210)

The women of Troy, who are separated and forced to serve as slaves, are united in the memories they share of the city, including Cassandra. She also thinks of the Greek women, considering moral implications of battle:

What would those women think if they could see their menfolk, as they stood guard over us, the weeping, grieving survivors of Troy? As they waited to discover which among us they could take as their prizes, just the same as the gold and jewels they piled up? Would the women of Greece recognise the little boys they had once cuddled, the tender husbands they had kissed goodbye, the kind fathers who had cradled them proudly? (Saint 205)

This passage acknowledges the perspectives of all of the women who were left behind in Greece and considers their feelings towards 'their' men, who most certainly have been changed by war. It underscores that fighting and killing alter warriors as they are forced to take others' lives in order to survive, but some of them might even do this willingly. It also stresses the victors' treatment of women and takes into consideration how the Greek women would react to this.

Similar to the priestess, Electra is another female figure who is often ignored, which is why providing her with a personal voice to tell her own story is empowering. Her perspective depicts potential consequences of a father's absence over a sustained period of time for his children, an aspect mostly unexplored in Homer's epics. Because Electra idolises Agamemnon and has to grow up without her mother's love, her story opposes Clytemnestra's and Cassandra's experiences. Until the enactment of revenge on her mother she seems to be fixated on the past, which negatively impacts the reliability of her narration since it becomes apparent that she clings to past images of her father and is not willing to rethink these. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of her personal experiences and feelings contributes to the empowerment of her character.

Lastly, Clytemnestra's voice challenges genre conventions of classical epics and adds moral considerations. Similar to *Daughters of Sparta*, Clytemnestra's perspective in Saint's narrative contrasts the Homeric type of heroism with the heroism to be found in motherhood:

My husband sailed soon to slaughter enemies in the pursuit of power and glory, but I had been slaying monsters for years, smoothing the path at my children's feet so that they could step confidently into the future. [...] We [women] would lay down our lives for our children, and every time we faced birth, we stood on the banks of that great river that separated the living from the dead. A massed army of women, facing that perilous passage with no armour to protect us, only our own strength and hope that we would prevail. (Saint 80, 84)

Saint's Clytemnestra portrays the equality of women's and men's experiences even more explicitly than Heywood's narration does, by equating the slaughter of enemies

with the slaughter of any potential threats to her children. This motherly type of heroism is further supported by the manner in which she speaks of giving birth since it describes the courage, strength and hope that are needed to survive this process. It challenges the classical, masculine-coded version of a hero by providing an alternative and thus empowers female experiences.

Moreover, Clytemnestra questions the different tales about Helen's departure and Iphigenia's death, which can be read as critique of patriarchal versions of their stories that do not represent their 'true' experiences. In her sister's case, she criticises the fact that "[n]othing brought them more joy than the fall of a lovely woman. They picked over her reputation like vultures [...]", but they do not consider either Helen's or Clytemnestra's feelings (Saint 87–88). This is reminiscent of de Beauvoir stating that woman is man's invention and as soon as she deviates from patriarchal, social standards she turns into something evil (213, 219), yet her own emotions are not accounted for. In Iphigenia's case, Clytemnestra challenges romanticised versions that exchange her daughter's body for a deer's, which would diminish the pain she feels due to the loss of her child (Saint 99). Consequentially, her point of view questions the artificiality of patriarchal depictions of women.

Lastly, Clytemnestra criticises the treatment of Briseis by Agamemnon, also considering moral consequences of the war, thereby challenging Homer's epics as these ignore this aspect. About Briseis, she says: "[...] But this girl, this slave, whom they argue over like dogs fighting for a bone – does he [Agamemnon] think of her as a person at all, someone else's daughter, who could be his own" (Saint 158). The Mycenaen queen here emphasises how Agamemnon treats Briseis as an object and prize of war instead of a person, which challenges Homeric treatment of (slave) women and returns some humanity to Briseis.

A final element I would like to explore that can be found in all three of my select revisionist novels and is connected to the issue of narrating is the employment of the symbol of spinning and weaving. Because of this symbolism's connection to the act of narrating I integrate the analysis in this subchapter rather than treating it separately. Throughout *A Thousand Ships*, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* women repeatedly spin wool and weave garments or cloth, which symbolically represents the act of narrating their own stories, altering pre-existing androcentric versions. In ancient Greece weaving was an activity almost exclusively performed by women, who were

rarely educated in reading and writing. They were also prohibited from speaking in public or for themselves before the law because they were not allowed Greek citizenship (Sullivan Kruger 54; Bergren 16). Greek women had to be silent. Thus, as Kathryn Sullivan Kruger stresses, woven textiles and their production could function as substitutes for written texts and verbal art, affording the women a means to “record and read the major events of their lives” (55). As a consequence, “Greek women do not speak, they weave” (Bergren 15). However, their weaving blurs the boundary between silent and ‘audible’ since they infuse inarticulate material with meaning that represents immaterial, yet ‘audible’ speech (Bergren 17). ‘Audible’ can be understood in the sense that although women could not tell their stories in public or write them down, they could ‘tell’ their stories through weaving, infusing the woven pictures with meaning. This aspect is why this skill can symbolise the act of storytelling or narrating and it can be reclaimed for the empowerment of women. The symbolic notion is further highlighted by the differentiation between the process of weaving and the finished product, since weaving can be read as a symbol for speech while the woven textile can be interpreted as written text (Sullivan Kruger 55). The difference between the process and the product is that the first symbolically portrays the act of speaking and poetic composition, hence it can be a metaphor for empowered speech. The latter can represent something permanent and unchanging, including also “rebel texts” that rival and challenge phallogocentric script (Sullivan Kruger 55, 58). Additionally, weaving and woven textiles can be connected to remembering (Clayton ix) because the creation process resembles the recollection of memories and the finished cloth or work of art records and saves these. A last aspect of this symbol is the act of reweaving, which can be likened to retelling a story – each time something is rewoven or retold the new version slightly differs from the old one(s). The fact that this is possible underlines the manifold options for new beginnings and can mark a refusal of closure (Clayton 123–25). It also connects to Judith Roof’s approach that views narratives as systems, which allow for an infinite number of alternatives as long as these retain the core elements of the ‘originals’ (45–48). Similar to retelling, reweaving recycles the ‘old’ or previously utilised threads to make alterations or corrections, thereby creating different versions.

By integrating spinning, weaving and woven textiles into their narratives Haynes, Heywood and Saint harness the symbolic meaning of these actions to empower the female characters of their stories. This is especially true for *Daughters of Sparta* where this type of labour plays the most prominent role in comparison to the

other two novels. As my select books are revisionist myths, the spinning of wool into new threads and the weaving of these threads into new clothes symbolises the creation of new narrative threads that are woven into a new story. Because it is the marginalised women of the myths surrounding the Trojan War, who produce the new threads and cloth themselves, they reclaim narrative power and authority and are enabled to share their experiences from their personal points of view, unmediated by male figures, authors or translators. Thereby the female characters are empowered as they can finally speak for themselves and present different versions of well-known phallogentric texts. Moreover, the centrality of spinning, weaving and the finished garments can be read as a symbol representing the revisionist myths themselves since these are the very texts that question and challenge Homer's epics by focusing on neglected, mistreated perspectives. *A Thousand Ships*, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* reweave old stories into new versions – they unweave the old narratives, take the old threads and utilise them to reweave alternatives that spotlight previously hidden threads or tales while also correcting mistakes. This significantly impacts the characterisation of the novels' women.

From Objects to Agents

Narrative perspective, focalisation and voice play a critical role in granting access to female characters' internal worlds and thus are tools for narratorial or figural (self-) characterisations. This section of my thesis focuses on *how* my select mythological adaptations construct their female protagonists as psychologically complex and emotionally rich individuals. I argue that such characterisation is itself a narrative strategy of empowerment, presenting women not merely as archetypes or victims but as fully realised subjects with a voice, agency, ambitions, contradictions and evolving identities. Moreover, the revisionist strategy of retelling the Homeric epics from different perspectives also impacts the plot structures of these narratives, which in turn leads to multi-faceted portrayals of female figures.

In *A Thousand Ships*, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* the plot shifts away from the battlefield and fighting due to changes on the level of narration and focalisation. Concerning Haynes' text, Merve Altin remarks, the novel centres on the suffering and resilience of the women of Homer's narratives ('War, Woman, Environment' 110), which is applicable to the other two revisions as well. As a consequence thereof the revised myths integrate elements from different plot types to create their polyphonic

accounts of the tales surrounding the Trojan War, resulting in more complex images of the involved figures and events.

In comparison to the rewritings, *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* are two examples of quest plots where male heroes seek glory in combat and adventure. *A Thousand Ships*, *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* combine different varieties of quest plots with romance and (adulterous) wedlock plots as well as sister and mother-daughter plots, which shows the “incredible malleability” of myths (Szmigiero 115). This strategy adds layers to the narrative structures and centralises women-oriented plots.

One example of a tragic romance plot in *A Thousand Ships* is Laodamia's story (Haynes 112–23). She is deeply in love with her husband, Protesilaus, but he is the first of the Greeks to fall at Troy and Laodamia is unable to cope with her loss, remaining at a stage between shock and depression (Walker and Mulcahy n.p.). The blacksmith wants to help with her grief, so he creates a bronze statue of her husband. At first, this seems to alleviate Laodamia's suffering, but when the statue is melted and she is allowed to spend one final day with Protesilaus, she commits suicide to join him in the underworld. This tale of emotional devastation represents one consequence of the Trojan War and even though it is very personal and ends in tragedy, it nonetheless empowers Laodamia as her perspective, acknowledging her suffering and pain, is depicted. Calliope underlines this: “And would he [the poet] really have overlooked Laodamia, as so many poets have before him? A woman who lost so much so young deserves something, even if it's just to have her story told. Doesn't she?” (Haynes 176). The integration of Laodamia's tragic perspective further aids in challenging the Homeric narratives about the Trojan War because it shifts the focus towards the consequences for women, including their emotional responses to loss. Finally, Laodamia's suicide is also empowering, as it provides her with nuanced agency and the possibility to actively exercise choice (Kabeer 14). By choosing her own death, she liberates herself from the agony she feels.

Romance/wedlock plots are also woven into the stories of Clytemnestra and Helen in *Daughters of Sparta*. Clytemnestra unexpectedly finds happiness in her second marriage to Aegisthus that stands in stark contrast to her first marriage to Agamemnon, since the latter was dictated by fear of his anger and potential violence against her or her children, which the new one is not (Heywood 289). This subplot then empowers the queen as it replaces a husband who suppresses and neglects her with one who supports her. Helen's romance or wedlock plot contrasts that of her older

sister. Although she does not find love with Menelaus, he always treats her well, yet she desires more and gradually they lose the connection to each other. The marriage to Paris is passionate and promising at first, but Helen soon realises that her second husband is only interested in himself. However, in the end there might still exist a chance to rebuild a life together with her first husband (Heywood 86, 142, 163–64, 174, 176, 255, 272, 322–24). This plot structure offers two aspects of empowerment for Helen: one is that she is provided with the agency to choose her own future, the other is that it traces her development as a self-reflecting person.

In contrast to Haynes' and Heywood's reimagination, Saint's does not feature a romantic wedlock plot. Therefore, *Elektra* does not romanticise any aspect of Homer's epics but instead foregrounds women's suffering and pain as part of a twofold quest for revenge, which is another empowering element, as it concentrates on the traumatic consequences of the Trojan War for a mother, a daughter and a survivor of violation and war.

The portrayal of quests is not exclusive to Saint's novel. *A Thousand Ships* and *Daughters of Sparta* depict different varieties of the quest plot as well. In Haynes' book, Penthesilea, for example, seeks self-chosen death as punishment for accidentally killing her sister, which leads to her participation in the Trojan War (Haynes 47). It also empowers her as a female character because she has the ability to choose the manner of her own death, which other women are denied. Hecabe and Clytemnestra both pursue revenge for the murder of one of their children (Haynes 218–25, 286–310), which is another consequence of the war. Hecabe's quest for revenge empowers her because, although theoretically she is a slave, Odysseus treats her with respect and allows her the agency to enact the punishment of the king of Thrace herself. Clytemnestra's revenge plot is linked to an adulterous wedlock plot, but she experiences empowerment since the depiction from her point of view gives insight into the reasons behind her actions and results in a more complex image of her figure. *A Thousand Ships* shares this latter plot element with Heywood's revision.

The sister and the mother-daughter plots in *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra* further emphasise the adaptations' focus on female perspectives. The occupation with and negotiation of female-female relationships is central to revisionist mythmaking (Ostriker 74). It relegates male points of view to the margins and sheds light on complicated relations between female figures. In both retellings, sisters (Heywood) or mother and daughter (Saint) contrast each other, thereby reflecting the complexity of

women's experiences and acknowledging their right to equally exist next to each other. In addition, these contrasts serve to highlight specific attributes or personality traits of the characters.

Furthermore, the novels do not only present personal costs of the Trojan War but also general effects on women. After the fall of Troy the surviving Trojan women become slaves to the Greeks, consequentially losing any social status. They are separated from their remaining family and friends and are forced to serve strangers whose language they likely do not speak or understand and who killed their Trojan warriors (Haynes 62, 196, 238–39; Saint 205–06, 210). By focusing the narrative on the women's fates, their stories rise to a level of equal importance to the fighters' tales. It acknowledges the suffering, pain, loss and humiliation these characters experience. Even though certain aspects of the Homeric source material cannot be altered as they constitute the core of the texts or, in the terms of Judith Roof, the system's 'rule' (45, 47), including these traumatic events instead of denying them has an empowering effect on the female characters, transforming them from victims into survivors (Scott n.p.).

This transformation from victim to survivor, from object or war prize to agent or subject is a central revisionist strategy (Ostriker 79), one employed in all three of my select adaptations and which tremendously influences characterisation as it provides the female figures with voices and/or agency. This agency does not have to manifest in the potential to transform the world (Sax 27). As Margherita Carucci observes "agency' is often associated with freedom of speech" and the right to meaningfully exercise political voice (197). From a feminist stance "women's agency is often intended as action of resistance against the oppressive structures of the patriarchal society aiming at achieving *freedom in thought, speech, and action*" (Carucci 197; emphasis added). However, Carucci also suggests that there is 'nuanced agency' if specific actions do not intend to subvert or resist the systems of patriarchy but are informed by "culturally appropriate goals" and might aim at securing one's personal position within the system, especially if it is one of relative power (197). This definition can be applied to some of the female characters' agency in the three revisions, as their room for manoeuvre is limited or restricted to certain spaces or situations. Nonetheless, (nuanced) agency and voice are key elements in depicting multi-layered, diverse

images of women and their experiences, which conventional social and patriarchal frameworks or myths fail to recognise (Din-Kariuki 68).

For the analysis of characterisation I have chosen three women who represent different types and scopes of empowerment and who showcase a spectrum of female figures from traditionally objectified or silenced to traditionally vilified. Additionally, one case allows to compare the treatment of the same figure across different rewritings. Moreover, I include specific male characters in my investigation, as they support female empowerment.

Briseis

In Homer's *The Iliad*, Briseis is the "prize" over which Agamemnon and Achilles fight: first, she 'belongs' to Achilles, but then she is taken away by Agamemnon, infuriating the leader of the Myrmidons (9, 12–13). In *The Iliad* Briseis is never depicted as more than an object of men's desires and the only extremely limited agency she is afforded is that of grieving for Patroclus (345). This objectifying treatment is challenged in *A Thousand Ships* where she transforms into a subject with nuanced agency and performs quiet acts of resistance. Briseis becomes a Greek slave after Achilles kills her entire family and then has to serve the murderer and his friend, Patroclus (Haynes 73–75, 80, 85). She loses her freedom and linked to that her voice as an individual as well as her agency. However, throughout the entire chapter that is focalised through Chryseis and her, she is able to exercise self-restraint and control over her emotions, which is the basis for her silent acts of resistance that provide her with limited agency. First, she refuses to weep and grieve for the loss of her family in front of any Greeks:

Chryseis gazed at the woman, whose eyes were not puffy, whose hair was not torn and whose tunic was not ripped. The woman saw her looking and nodded. 'They will not see my grief', she said. '*They have not earned it.* I will grieve for my family when I am alone.' 'What if you never are?' Chryseis asked. 'Then I will weep for them in the darkest hours of the night', the woman replied, 'when no one can see. (Haynes 75; emphasis added)

Her self-control and calm influence Chryseis, who determines also that "no Greek would see her cry" (Haynes 77). Even in situations of extreme tension, the two women restrain themselves and keep the promises to themselves. They demonstrate even more strength than Achilles and Patroclus, who are unable to control their emotions (Haynes 81, 100). Acting in this manner challenges the patriarchal image of Briseis that is depicted in *The Iliad*, where she is only defined by men's treatment of her and her grief for Patroclus. She actively defies this portrayal by refusing to cry until Achilles'

death and then she weeps for everyone except for him (Haynes 104). Briseis' second act of resistance is to stop talking as soon as Patroclus asks about her husband. She actively decides which topics can be discussed and which not. Furthermore, this action equips her with a fragment of power over the man since he needs to respect her decision if he wants to converse with her. Her third act of resistance is constituted by giving herbs and advice to Chryseis so that the younger woman is able to protect herself from Agamemnon (Haynes 81–82). This action transforms her into a protector that has nuanced agency to ensure the wellbeing of another within the constraints of their circumstances.

Lastly, Briseis' 'real-life-beauty' challenges patriarchal images of women. Chryseis compares the older woman to a statue of Artemis:

[T]he statue was the work of craftsmen, gilding the stone, painting the robes, coating the face with thin layers of ivory and the eyes with lapis. Chryseis had always thought she would never see anything so beautiful in her life until now, when she saw that *the statue was a pale copy of this woman*, or someone who looked very much like her. (Haynes 70; emphasis added)

The statue of the virgin goddess Artemis represents the ideal picture of woman "as created by, from, and for men" (Gilbert and Gubar 12). However, Briseis, a 'real' woman, outshines the artifice of this statue with the vibrancy and beauty of real life. Her realness challenges the ideal. Consequently, this can be read as a challenge of androcentric images that glorify female virginity and silence because Briseis is neither a virgin, nor silent, yet the statue 'pales' in comparison to her. The power of the shining image of Briseis is further corroborated by the contrast she presents to the woman in the shadows (Haynes 71). This slave woman portrays grief, trauma and anxiety since war and its consequences can leave women as shadows of themselves. However, even though Briseis shares these circumstances, she retains her radiance because she is able to exercise self-control and emotional restraint and does not fully submit to her captors, instead she defies them with small acts of resistance that empower her.

Andromache

Andromache, the wife of Hector, receives exceptional treatment in Homer's *The Iliad* in comparison to other women. Her husband treats her with respect and she can tell him her true opinion about his determination to always participate in the fighting. Moreover, Hector expresses his distress when thinking about the consequences of his death for her future and acknowledges that as a slave she has to labour for someone else against her will. After he is killed, she is in anguish and laments his death as well

as the future of their son (110-11, 393-94). Although Andromache receives more literary space than other mortal women in *The Iliad*, there is little information to be gained about herself, which is rectified in *A Thousand Ships*, where she is empowered as a more complex character, beyond the lamenting wife of Homeric epic. Andromache's fate in Haynes' narrative is different from that of other Trojan women as her remaining alive leads to her transitioning from a position of relative power to one of disempowerment and back to one of relative power. This acknowledges and recentres on yet another neglected story that exists next to all of the others. Furthermore, the internal focalisation of her chapter gives voice to her personal experiences and feelings, reframing her character with a faceted personality. One quality that differentiates her from her mother- and sister-in-law is her compassion. Unlike Hecabe, she feels joy for the women who escaped slavery in either life or death (Haynes 43–44). Andromache also treats Cassandra differently, she even tries to calm her – kindness is something the priestess rarely receives from her family (Haynes 164). Moreover, to complete the picture that Homer has started to paint in his epic, Haynes' adds the death of her son Astyanax to the anguish of losing her husband, which means that she has to cope with the grief of a wife and that of a mother. This is further aggravated by being taken as slave by Neoptolemus, Achilles' son, who is the killer of her firstborn (Haynes 263–65). In Epirus, she has to get accustomed to her new living environment, as she is not used to cold weather. "It had been the realization [sic] of this – her desire not to be cold – that made her accept she might not wish to die after all" (Haynes 326–27). In a short period of time, all of the important people in Andromache's life are cruelly taken from her, which explains her emotional devastation and her feeling like a dead woman (Haynes 327). However, she continues living through these tragedies and is even able to find a new will to stay alive. This underlines the immense strength of her character, her endurance. The change in her feelings towards Neoptolemus further highlights these character traits: Instead of taking revenge like Hecabe or Clytemnestra, Andromache lives as his slave, gives birth to another son and at some point stops loathing him for her own sanity. She realises that he is not a monster after all and he might be a good father (Haynes 332–33). After his death, she and her son Molossus are once again left without protection, but Andromache perseveres in this situation as well, finds help from Peleus and marries Helenus, with whom she founds a small settlement, a new Troy (Haynes 337). Andromache's story presents an important contrast to most of the other women's tales

since it demonstrates that between death and revenge there are other options for the surviving women. Furthermore, to continue living, to process all of the negative emotions and events is as courageous as deciding to die or avenging. Even though Andromache experiences no agency, I still argue that her character is empowered by her quiet heroism, which is portrayed in her chapter.

Moreover, the symbol of spinning and weaving underscores her endurance and acts as a means to processing her feelings:

She wove the cloak poorly, although she had once been a fine craftswoman. [...] In Epirus, she was careless with cleaning the wool, so the finished fabric scratched her skin. She did not spin a fine thread, so the cloak was covered in lumps where the wool was too bulky to sit flat. And she did not keep the threads taut, so the garment had an ugly puckered edge. But sometime during the process of weaving it, she found herself wanting to finish it [...] (Haynes 328–29)

As has already been established at an earlier point, spinning and weaving are intricately connected to speech, verbal art and written texts because the boundary between not being provided with the means to record one's stories (i.e. public speech and knowledge of writing) and despite that finding a way to 'write' or portray one's tale is blurred (Sullivan Kruger 55; Bergren 15, 17). Andromache spinning wool and weaving her first cloak in captivity can thus be read as her continuing to narrate her life story. The imperfections in her work symbolise the tragedies she has already had to endure and the ones that are still to come. Nevertheless, she wants to complete the garment, meaning her story and her life. It is these acts of spinning and weaving that underline the existence of her own voice. Furthermore, the actions help her untangle her confused emotions like a ball of threads. She identifies fear, revulsion, anger, guilt as well as joy (Haynes 329–31). The last one is the most significant because it is a positive emotion and signals that she can finally feel comfortable within her own body: "Her body, so long not her own, was providing her with comfort at last. [...] And in spite of the fear, the revulsion, the anger and the guilt, the flame kept burning inside her" (Haynes 331). Here, spinning and weaving are strengthened as symbols for the continued narration of Andromache's story by the burning flame that also emphasises the continuation of her life despite all of her negative experiences.

Clytemnestra

Clytemnestra is one of the most vilified women in Greek mythology. She stereotypically represents the monstrous feminine in the angel-monster binary. Even though in *The*

Odyssey she does not kill Agamemnon herself but only assists Aegisthus in his schemes, she is associated with the ultimate evil:

It was Aegisthus who plotted my destruction and with my accursed wife put me to death. [...] There is nothing more degraded or shameful than a woman who can contemplate and carry out deeds like the hideous crime of murdering the husband of her youth. [...] But now, in the depth of her villainy, she has branded with infamy not herself alone but the whole of her sex, even the virtuous ones, for all time to come. (Homer 150–51)

This passage demonstrates how Clytemnestra's figure is reduced to this one event portraying one characteristic of her personality that is not even powerful. Hence, it is not astonishing that Heywood aims at completing the image of this "inadequately or unfairly treated" woman (336). In a similar vein, Haynes and Saint also contribute to excavating hidden parts of her character and story, which is in itself powerful because Clytemnestra is reframed as a complex, multi-faceted, powerful character who cannot be reduced to being an evil husband-slayer. Instead, revisionist mythmaking helps defy this binary between the angelic and the monstrous by recovering elements of *herself* (Ostriker 76, 80). The three adaptations differ in how they present the details of Clytemnestra's tale but share the aspects most significant to her empowerment, which are the focus of my analysis.

One aspect that complicates her depiction as evil murderer is that she is described as compassionate in all three rewritings. In *A Thousand Ships* Clytemnestra is the first and only one to understand Cassandra's speech and believe her. She also offers the priestess the option to escape before they enter the palace, but Cassandra refuses (Haynes 304–07). This also reframes her murdering the priestess, who consents and in *Elektra* even perceives it as an act of kindness, ending her suffering (Saint 249). In Saint's novel it is Clytemnestra's compassion that saves Aegisthus' life as a boy because, prompted by her, Agamemnon refrains from killing him (14, 45). Leukippe, Kalchas' sister in *Daughters of Sparta*, is another to experience Clytemnestra's compassion when the queen tries to aid her escape and acts against her husband's desires. Although the rescue mission fails, Clytemnestra risks her own humiliation and publicly apologises to Agamemnon, thereby protecting Leukippe (Heywood 100, 116–18, 121–22). In addition to her compassionate personality, the Mycenaen queen shows self-restraint and control over her emotions, which add more layers to her character that challenge her illustration as the ultimate female villain.

A different aspect, which provides a reason for Clytemnestra's schemes against Agamemnon, is her maternal side. Especially before Iphigenia's murder she is

portrayed as a loving mother, concerned with the wellbeing of all of her children. However, her husband sacrificing their eldest daughter is a traumatic experience that reshapes her future. It is a catalyst for her desire for revenge and in *Elektra* prompts her taking the leadership of Mycenae in her husband's absence, which is an act that provides her with political power and agency.

The most significant element of Clytemnestra's empowerment that also highlights the revisionist agenda of my select retellings is her defiance of patriarchal gender norms and hierarchical structures (Ostriker 86; Altin, 'Aeaea Revisited' 149). In *Daughters of Sparta*, a young Clytemnestra wants to play the king in a game, but, according to Helen, she cannot do so because she is a girl (Heywood 7). Being born female already influences the lives of children by limiting them to certain roles in their games, certain activities and certain qualities. This fact frustrates Clytemnestra, which she expresses in the following manner:

When the time came, though, she would do everything required of her. She was determined to be the best wife there ever was, to win praise for her loyalty, her prudence, her chastity, her obedience and, gods willing, her many strong children. There were times she felt frustrated to have been born a girl. She wanted freedom. She wanted authority. She wanted to do something other than work wool all day. To ride and hunt and travel and debate, as she saw her brothers do. To compete and win prizes, to compose songs and not just dance to them, to speak and really be heard. But each time she felt those frustrations rising, she pushed them down. She had to make her peace with that which could not be changed. So she bit her lip, worked hard at her weaving, nodded obediently and smiled prettily. If the gods had willed that she be a woman, she would be the very best woman she could be. (Heywood 24)

This passage underscores how patriarchal gender roles treat women unfairly as, in comparison to men, the scope of activities they are allowed to participate in is limited to quiet, domestic work and the bearing of children. By expressing her frustration and desires, Clytemnestra challenges this strict, gender-oriented division because it demonstrates that girls or women can share the same ambitions as men. It shows that women want to be active, outspoken and heard as well, instead of being obedient, silenced and reduced to the manners in which they benefit men. This criticism of androcentric social structures is corroborated by an older Clytemnestra who rules as queen of Mycenae, independent of Agamemnon. In this leading position she subverts phallogocentric hierarchy as she either ignores the advice of elderly counsellors (Saint 225) or is only *supported* by men (Heywood 249); in both cases it is ultimately her, the queen, who makes decisions. This challenge of patriarchal structures is further highlighted when she is described as proud when achieving "something in the way a

man might have done it” (Haynes 126) and when she stresses that “[i]f Agamemnon, despite his fragile ego and fierce vanity, had managed Mycenae, it certainly was not beyond [her] to do it” (Saint 113). These descriptions underline the feasibility of ‘male’ activities for a woman and question the suitability of individual men for tasks entrusted to them – if even these individuals with disadvantageous qualities are allowed to rule, then a woman can do so as well. In her role as queen, Clytemnestra reclaims a voice for herself and agency wrapped in political power, which puts her in a unique position in which she can afford to break social gender rules. In *A Thousand Ships*, for instance, she offers to dine alone with Aegisthus: “A married woman – a queen – offering to dine alone with a man whom she had not previously met? This was hardly customary behaviour” (Haynes 289). Moreover, in *Daughters of Sparta* she learns to read and write, knowing that her husband would disapprove of this, but since he is absent there is no one to stop her (Heywood 207). While learning, Clytemnestra realises the power of words:

She was the real Queen of Mycenae now, responsible for all that happened both within the palace and outside it. How could she do her duty to her kingdom if she could not read the news brought to her, as a man could? She could not rely on others to report such things. What if they changed the words? What if they left something out? She needed to read it herself. [...] But as she learnt to interpret those mysterious shapes she discovered a whole world that had been hidden from her before. [...] It made her feel powerful, to access that secret world of words without voices. (Heywood 208)

The abilities to read and write are powerful tools to convey information and knowledge. By prohibiting women to acquire these skills, they are forced into submission because they cannot participate in the sharing of information and knowledge in the same way men can. Thus, Clytemnestra actively deciding to learn these new skills is significant to her empowerment, as it enables her to rule Mycenae without needing to rely on men’s words. Her discovering this hidden world of words signifies her entry into a world that has previously been exclusive to men, which includes her leading the kingdom. As a consequence, Clytemnestra not only challenges the system of patriarchy but also demonstrates its permeability, ultimately exposing it as an artifice constructed to subordinate women.

Lastly, there are two symbols supporting the Mycenaen queen’s empowerment. The first is the robe Clytemnestra weaves to capture Agamemnon – “the robe was no a robe, but a net, a trap, an ambush” as the sleeves are sewn shut and attached to the body of the garment (Haynes 309). With the help of this woven cloth, she forces her husband into submission, which offers her the opportunity to stab him. In this particular

situation, Agamemnon can be read to represent patriarchal texts including androcentric, archetypal images of women such as Homer's version of Clytemnestra. The queen's robe then signifies revisionist myths that centralise female experiences and restore women's voices and agency. Consequently, Agamemnon being captured in that garment symbolises how feminist revisions challenge patriarchal source material by creating alternative versions. A more personal interpretation is that by capturing and killing Agamemnon, Clytemnestra frees herself from submission and patriarchal tales about herself. The second symbol is that of the lioness. The lion is a typical emblem of ferocity, strength, anger, terror and royalty (Ferber 119). These qualities, except for terror, also define Clytemnestra. In both *Daughters of Sparta* and *Elektra*, Mycenae is protected by two stone lionesses (Heywood 44; Saint 231). The queen even likens herself to them: "She was one of them now, she thought as she made her way through the smoky streets of the citadel. She had to be, for the sake of her children, for the sake of *her* kingdom. A protector, a provider, a leader. A Lioness of Mycenae" (Heywood 252; emphasis added). Thus, the lionesses symbolise Clytemnestra's strength and ferocity and ultimately represent her (political) power and agency as lionesses are animals that act to lead and protect.

Male Characters Supporting Female Empowerment

The primary emphasis of contemporary revisionist mythmaking clearly lies in reclaiming female voices and perspectives, but, as Xiuchun Zhang indicates, "we seldom ask what happens to the male characters in these stories" (1). In her article, she argues that in *A Thousand Ships* Haynes transforms Odysseus and Neoptolemus into "feminists in disguise" (Zhang 3). Although I do not agree that these men can be called 'feminists', because they do not aim at improving women's social and political situation in general, they nonetheless support female figures. Ostriker mentions the subversion of traditional characters – which includes men – as a revisionist strategy (84). This is employed in all three of my select adaptations, since certain male characters contribute to the empowerment of women in these retellings, not by dominating the narrative but by facilitating female agency.

In *A Thousand Ships*, as already pointed out by Zhang, Odysseus – though traditionally cast as a cunning manipulator – assumes a different role in his interaction with Hecabe (Haynes 4–7). Odysseus grants her wish for a respectful burial for her son Polydorus, thereby recognising her grief and dignity at a moment when she has lost all political power. His willingness to treat her request with seriousness allows

Hecabe to perform mourning rites and reclaim her maternal and queenly authority, even within the constraints of enslavement. Moreover, he enables and supports her plan of revenge, thus providing her with agency (Haynes 195, 224–25). Neoptolemus, though initially depicted within the brutal legacy of his father, Achilles, is portrayed as less invested in perpetuating cycles of domination. His treatment of Andromache, while marked by the structural inequalities of conquest, includes moments of recognition that allow her humanity and perspective to surface. He also wants her to marry Helenus after his death, which would ensure her protection (Haynes 334). These glimpses of acknowledgement, however limited, carve out narrative space for Andromache to exist not merely as a war prize but as a grieving mother and reflective subject.

In *Daughters of Sparta*, male characters such as Tyndareus and Aegisthus serve even more explicitly as facilitators of female empowerment. Tyndareus recognises the women of his household as subjects with opinions of their own. This is exemplified in his treatment of his wife, Leda. In an argument he concedes the floor to her so that she can express her thoughts and he listens without interrupting her. Tyndareus also considers her feelings, acknowledges her pain and apologises for the hurt he unwillingly causes Leda (Heywood 29–33). His behaviour towards his wife and daughters stands in contrast to the silencing imposed by other male figures such as Agamemnon. Similarly, Aegisthus is reframed as a figure who provides Clytemnestra with companionship, recognition and the freedom to make political and personal choices without trying to rule her (Heywood 266–69, 288). His willingness to treat her as a partner rather than an object underscores the revisionist project of reimagining male-female relationships as potential sites of reciprocity rather than domination.

A comparable dynamic emerges in *Elektra* with the character of Georgios. Though minor, his presence offers a counterpoint to the oppressive structures surrounding Electra. Georgios' role lies not in overshadowing female narrative but in creating space for it, offering support and recognition that validate Electra's perspective.

Together, these male figures underscore that female empowerment in revisionist mythmaking can be aided by men. While the primary narrative strategies privilege female voices, certain male characters are reconfigured to enable, support or legitimise women's claims to agency, thereby contributing to the broader destabilisation of patriarchal power structures within these adaptations.

Conclusion

My thesis has demonstrated that the empowerment of female characters in contemporary revisionist mythmaking is a complex, layered and multi-faceted process, achieved through a wide range of narratological strategies. By analysing Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, Claire Heywood's *Daughters of Sparta* and Jennifer Saint's *Elektra*, I have shown how narrative elements – spatial and temporal structures, focalisation and narration, plot organisation, characterisation and symbolic motifs – operate to subvert Homeric traditions, question patriarchal hierarchies and gender norms and reposition women at the centre of stories in which they were previously marginalised or silenced. These texts do not only reclaim narrative authority for female figures but also reshape the very framework of myth to foreground women's voices, perspectives and experiences.

One of the central findings of this study is that spatial elements play a crucial role in enabling female empowerment. The novels under discussion repeatedly portray places as transformative, foregrounding how women's relationship to space can be resistant to patriarchal structures. In *A Thousand Ships* and *Elektra*, liminal spaces such as shorelines emerge as sites of transition, reflection and transformation. Natural landscapes in *Daughters of Sparta* similarly allow women to step outside the palace and reclaim authority as well as agency: Clytemnestra's ritual ascent of the hill transforms a natural site into a 'rocky crown', a throne-like space in which she temporarily rules independently of her husband. Likewise, the 'wilderness' where Helen seeks aid from the old woman becomes a space of education, where knowledge about the female body and reproduction equips her with the capacity for self-determination. Another important spatial element in all three retellings is travelling or the crossing of borders. It symbolises active defiance of patriarchal norms that imprison women within palaces or cities. By traversing borders, female characters (partly) reclaim freedom and agency; thus they are empowered. These examples demonstrate that spaces traditionally coded as marginal, wild or inaccessible to women in patriarchal discourse can be reframed in revisionist mythmaking as loci of female power, education and transformation.

Of equal significance are temporal aspects, which play a crucial role in reconfiguring narrative authority and emphasis. While the Homeric epics construct their stories through linear teleology, my select revisionist retellings disrupt such teleological progression. By doing so, they provide new narrative rhythms that privilege female

experience. Grammatical tense itself becomes a means of empowerment: Calliope's usage of the present tense in *A Thousand Ships* suggests an active process of reclaiming authority by creating a new version that includes hitherto ignored or marginalised female perspectives; Heywood's choice of past tense contrasts Homer's texts with an alternative presenting women's experiences in a matter-of-fact manner, which underlines the 'truthfulness' of the revision and challenges the patriarchal version of events, by filling narrative gaps with misrepresented female perspectives; in *Elektra*, the shift from past to present tense highlights trauma and mimics the emotional shift within Electra when she is finally able to live in the present; for Cassandra the temporal shift represents liberation from her past and agony. Moreover, the cyclical return of vengeance in *Elektra* reframes time around repetition and female justice. Similarly, *Daughters of Sparta* structures its narrative around elements of womanhood – marriage, pregnancy, motherhood – acknowledging that such experiences shape women's identities and agency. Hence, these manipulations of temporality reclaim narrative authority and structure time around aspects important to the female figures in the revisions.

The reorientation of narration and focalisation is another significant strategy of empowerment. Where Homeric epic employs a single heterodiegetic narrator with authorial voice who privileges male heroism, the novels analysed here embrace multiperspectivity, giving voice to women who were formerly relegated to the margins. *A Thousand Ships* is exemplary in this respect, as it gathers the voices of numerous female characters, creating a chorus of perspectives that counterbalance the authority of Homer's epics. Recasting Calliope as a narrator with authorial voice explicitly challenges the conventions of epics and insists on the genre's reform, also signalling the need to redefine what it means to be heroic. Similarly, the use of autodiegetic narration, internal focalisation and transposed speech across the novels ensures that women are represented not through the eyes of men but through their own interiority. Their thoughts, emotions and judgements permeate the texts, giving them narrative weight and authority. By repositioning female experiences at the centre of narration, the retellings fundamentally challenge epic conventions. The consequences of war – rape, enslavement, grief, exile – become central to the story, replacing the celebration of battle with a focus on women's survival and strength. In doing so, the adaptations subvert the very foundations of the epic, dismantling its masculinist scope and recasting heroism in terms of resilience and endurance rather than conquest.

Symbols play a further role in reinforcing female empowerment, especially in connection to the act of narrating and characterisation. Weaving and spinning emerge as a particularly significant motif. These activities can be interpreted as acts of narrative authorship. To spin and to weave is to tell and to write and thus the symbolic act of weaving becomes a metaphor for the revisionist texts themselves: they (re)weave patriarchal myths into new forms that privilege female experience. Characters who spin or weave their stories reclaim their right to self-definition, while the novels themselves act as a meta-textual reweaving of women's silenced voices back into the fabric of myth.

Perhaps the most visible form of empowerment, triggered by the reorganisation of plots, lies in the characterisation of female figures. Across all three rewritings, women are transformed from objects of male desire into complex, multi-faceted agents. They are no longer archetypal figures of prize, victim, wife or monster but instead are given motivations, ambitions, emotions and reasoning. Characters like Briseis transform from silent objects into subjects able to perform quiet acts of resistance. Andromache's story centres on endurance and survival. Clytemnestra evolves into a political actor who wields authority independently of her husband. These nuanced depictions allow the women to transcend their Homeric archetypes and emerge as subjects of their own stories. Importantly, this characterisation is aided by some male figures who are reimagined in ways that empower female figures. Men who see women not as objects but as persons, who provide them with space to speak or support their ambitions, help shift gender dynamics away from domination and possession.

The findings of my thesis affirm that revisionist retellings of classical myth do not simply insert women into pre-existing structures; rather, they reform the very structures of narrative so that women are no longer marginal but central. These texts are acts of cultural resistance: they recover suppressed voices, challenge patriarchal constructions and propose alternative visions of female experience and power. In doing so, they expose the gendered assumptions that underlie canonical texts such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and reimagine myth as a living, contested and plural tradition.

In sum, the empowerment of female characters in contemporary retellings of Homeric epics is not a singular strategy but a network of narratological interventions. Temporality is reclaimed, spatiality is reimagined, narration is pluralised, symbols are

re-connected to female agency and characters are rewritten as multi-dimensional agents. Together, these strategies dismantle patriarchal frameworks and reposition women not as background figures but as protagonists whose voices matter.

What emerges from Haynes', Heywood's and Saint's novels is a chorus of female characters who, through narrative reconfiguration, demand to be seen, heard and remembered. Their empowerment is not confined to the textual world but extends to the act of reading itself: the audience is invited to reconsider inherited myths, to question the gender norms embedded in them and to acknowledge the possibility of alternative stories. Thus, revisionist mythmaking is not only a literary practice but also a political one – an act of reclaiming cultural memory and of reshaping the stories we tell about women, power and heroism. These texts don't just retell Homer, they 'retune' our eyes and ears to stories that have always been there, unheard or unseen.

*All that matters is the telling.
Sing, Muse, he said.
Well, do you hear me? I have sung.
(Haynes 340)*

Word count: 33706

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