Universidade de Lisboa
Faculdade de Letras

A Thousand Voices:
A narratological analysis of Cassandra's voice in Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*

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Ana Catarina Henriques de Lemos

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Prof. Doutor Mário Avelar e Prof. Doutora Sofia Frade

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Abstract

This dissertation proposes to analyse the portrayal of Cassandra's voice in Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*. The analysis delves into how Haynes reimagines Cassandra's voice and examines how this contemporary retelling interacts with its classical predecessors, especially Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*, and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. To achieve this, I propose to combine the schools of gynocritics and narratology, intending for a layered analysis of voice, agency, and narrative authority in this portrayal of Cassandra. On the one hand, narratology concerns itself primarily with more formal elements and aspects of narrative, whereas gynocritics' focus is the content and context of women's writing, exploring themes of gender, power and identity. Notable authors within gynocritic studies include Elaine Showalter, Mary Beard, Laura McClure, and Donna Zuckerberg. Complimenting the ideas set forward by these authors, I draw on Mieke Bal, Irene de Jong, and Gérard Genette to aid me in the analyses of the narrative structures and techniques. More specifically, this analysis is concerned with the implications of the following narratological elements: narrators and narratees, focalisation, and time. This dissertation is structured into four chapters. "A Thousand Stories" serves as an introduction, outlining the scope and aims of the study, followed by "A Thousand Echoes," which provides the theoretical framework and methodology employed to analyse Cassandra's voice. The third chapter, "A Thousand Voices," presents the research analysis divided into five sections exploring different facets of Cassandra's voice across the texts. Lastly, in "A Thousand Ripples" I reflect on the implications of this study for future research within the current concerns of feminist literary criticism, as well as the broader discourse on mythological retellings.

Keywords: gynocritics; classical reception; contemporary retellings; agency.

Resumo

A presente dissertação tem como objetivo analisar a voz de Cassandra na obra *A Thousand Ships* de Natalie Haynes. O foco da minha análise parte do modo como Haynes procura dar um novo tom e propósito à voz desta personagem, especialmente em comparação com alguns momentos de três peças clássicas, nomeadamente as *Troianas* e *Hécuba* de Eurípides, e *Agamémnon* de Ésquilo. Deste modo, esta dissertação divide-se em quatro capítulos. O primeiro capítulo introduz as obras em questão, assim como os objetivos e perguntas que vão guiar a presente análise. Consecutivamente, o segundo capítulo contextualiza o objeto de estudo dentro do panorama literário em que se encontra, reconhecendo a influência da área ginocrítica neste feito. Alguns dos nomes influentes nesta área são Elaine Showalter, Mary Beard, Lauren McClure e Donna Zuckerberd. Adicionalmente, recorro a Mieke Bal, Irene deJong e Gérard Genette para uma apreciação dos estudos narratológicos, mais precisamente na análise das estruturas e técnicas narrativas. O estudo presente nesta dissertação preocupa-se maioritariamente com as implicações de quatro elementos narratológicos: narradores e narratários, focalização e tempo. No terceiro capítulo, "A Thousand Voices," é apresentada a análise da voz de Cassandra em algumas passagens das obras em questão. Esta análise é subsequentemente dividida em cinco secções, cada uma explorando diferentes aspetos da voz de Cassandra nos textos em evidência. O último capítulo conclui a análise apresentada, refletindo sobre as implicações que este estudo apresenta para o futuro da crítica literária feminista, em especial no que tange às revisitações contemporâneas dos mitos clássicos.

Palavras-chave: ginocritcismo; receção clássica; reinterpretações contemporâneas; poder de ação.

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A Thousand Stories

First published in 2019, Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*[1] reimagines one of the oldest wars of the Western imaginary — the Trojan War. Haynes' novel promises to revisit the stories of some women involved and affected by this conflict and its aftermath. Brought to light in the combination of Haynes' comedic skills with her classical background, *A Thousand Ships* focuses on the stories of over twenty women who were cursed, raped, or killed in the duration of this decade-long confrontation.

Shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2020 (Memmott) and hailed as best book of the year by many[2], Haynes' third novel is acknowledged, in the cover itself, for its "much-needed" "sparkling narrative" (Miller) with a "feminist spin" (Memmott). Haynes' interest for the classics had been of notice earlier, specifically in her broadcast *Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics*, which first aired in 2014 on BBC Radio 4 (BBC). In these half-hour-long episodes, the listeners are met with Haynes' "fresh look at the ancient world" (BBC), crystallized through crafted comedic performances centred around personalities from classical Greek and Roman history, branching from Clytemnestra to Euripides. Combining Haynes' comedic past, which has lasted her over twenty years, with the different set of credentials brought in by her guests, the show has seen overall positive feedback, which has granted it a total of thirty-six episodes across nine series. Some of the recurring guests are classic scholars Professor Edith Hall and Professor Llewelyn Morgan, who add a deeper academic layer, tying in any knots possibly left loose by Haynes.

Titled after the thousand ships that sailed to Troy in book 2 of the *Iliad*, Haynes inserts her novel in an extensive millennia-long discourse. From antiquity to present-day, the battle on the shoreline of Troy has been subjected to a plethora of discussions and revisitations. In *A Thousand Ships*, Haynes deliberately steers her narrative focus towards the women who "lost everything" (34) in this monumental conflict. With a clear mission to illuminate the often-overlooked narratives of these women, Haynes embarks on a journey to delve into the complexities of the female experience during this tumultuous period. Through forty-three chapters, spread along twenty-five distinct stories, each

[1] Shortened to *ATS* in citations.
[2] *A Thousand Ships* entered *NPR*'s 2021 list of "Books we Love," hailed as a "brilliant construction." Similarly, *The Guardian* considered *A Thousand Ships* as one of the "Best books of 2019" for its "bold choral retelling."

dedicated to a different woman, Haynes endeavours to unravel the intricate tapestry of emotions, struggles, and triumphs that define their individual stories, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions of womanhood in the context of war and upheaval.

Although *A Thousand Ships* operates within the dimension of classical mythology, specifically focusing on the events surrounding the Trojan War as depicted in Greek literature, it diverges from traditional retellings by foregrounding the perspectives of female characters who are often marginalized or overlooked in classical texts. Through this lens, the novel offers a fresh interpretation of familiar stories, shedding light on the voices of women within the mythological narrative. While grounded in historical and mythological contexts, *A Thousand Ships* also transcends these dimensions by exploring timeless themes of gender, power, and resilience, resonating with contemporary audiences, and inviting critical reflection on the relevance of ancient tales in modern discourse. Haynes achieves this through many different women in the novel; however, for the purpose of this dissertation, I will focus on the character of Cassandra and the uses of her voice — or lack thereof — in the novel, in comparison to the ones displayed in some of the classical tragedies.

Unfolding

Among this array of women, one of the characters whom Haynes felt her story needed a new tone was Cassandra, the princess of Troy and priestess of Apollo. In her "Afterword," the author highlights some of the classical works which have inspired her novel, of most importance for my work are Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*, as well as Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, more specifically his *Agamemnon*, as these are the works from which the author drew inspiration for the character of Cassandra and her peers. Cassandra is also mentioned in Homer's epics, but it is in these tragic plays that her character gains momentum and assumes a more central role in the stories' unfolding. It is widely acknowledged that the pantheon of classical myths comprises a multitude of interpretations and variations, and Cassandra's character is no exception to this rule. Delving into the entirety of her mythological representations would be a Herculean task, requiring a more extensive work. However, by narrowing our focus to the insights provided by Euripides and Aeschylus in the previously noted plays, the task becomes relatively more feasible.

Born to King Priam and Queen Hecuba[3] of Troy, Cassandra's lineage positioned her amidst the Trojan War and its constellation of heroes and notable women. Yet, it was Cassandra's unique relationship with the god Apollo that would come to define her legacy. According to traditional accounts, Cassandra's tale begins with Apollo's admiration of the young girl's beauty and intellect, drawing the attention of this god (*Ag.* v. 1204). In a bid to win her affection, Apollo bestows upon her the rare gift of foresight (*id.* vv. 1209–10). However, Cassandra's response to Apollo's advances varies; in Aeschylus' rendition, she initially promises him her benevolence but later withdraws her word, spurring the wrath of the vengeful god (*id.* vv. 1207–8). Unable to retract his divine bestowal, Apollo inflicts upon Cassandra a curse as cruel as it is ironic — though she can see the future with unerring accuracy, her warnings will forever fall upon deaf ears (*id.* v. 1212). Cassandra's paradoxical nature lies in her being favoured by the gods, but her tragic flaw resides in her inability to be believed despite her accurate foresight. Thus, Cassandra stands as a poignant symbol of the complexities inherent in the relationship between gods and mortals within Greek mythology, where divine favour often comes with a heavy burden of suffering and isolation.

Throughout Greek mythology, Cassandra's prophetic abilities foretold numerous events of dire consequence, yet tragically, her warnings go unheeded. One notable instance was her prediction of the fall of Troy, a calamity she fervently tried to convey to her fellow Trojans, only to be met with disbelief and scorn (Ratcliffe 63). Despite her impassioned pleas, the citizens of Troy remained obstinately blind to the impending doom, ultimately leading to the city's devastating downfall at the hands of the Greeks (*ibid.*). Additionally, Cassandra foresaw the treachery of the Atreidae family, including the vengeful actions of Clytemnestra. These prophecies, though delivered with unerring certainty, were tragically disregarded.

Despite all of this, Cassandra is not typically depicted with an unwaveringly beautiful poetic presence, but rather as a silent figure or one who speaks in cryptic, incomprehensible utterances, as I will illustrate further on. With this context in mind, Haynes' rendition of Cassandra in *A Thousand Ships* stands out for how it breathes life

[3] Interchangeably addressed by the greek (Hecabe) and the roman (Hecuba) forms depending on the uses of the authors in question.

and depth into her character, granting her agency and a powerful voice that resonates throughout the narrative.

Entwined

To acquire a better understanding of the complexity of the female voices Haynes wanted to highlight in her book, the author constructed her novel among multiple interwoven narratives, drawing inspiration from some of the most canonical stories and myths from classical antiquity. Across forty-three chapters, Haynes creates an embedded narrative, with every chapter introducing different, smaller narratives, all of which work together to create a space for the voices Haynes wanted to feature.

Natalie Haynes intricately weaves together elements of epic poetry and classical tragedy, drawing upon the rich tradition of Greek mythology and literature. The invocation "Sing, Muse" (*ATS* 1) opens the novel, echoing the timeless plea of the well-known Homeric epics, immediately setting the stage for an epic narrative. However, what distinguishes this invocation is the deliberate anonymity of the poet, leaving readers to ponder whether it is indeed Homer himself or an anonymous figure invoking the muse. Haynes sheds light on this ambiguity by revealing on *Instagram* that her inspiration stems from Homer's omission of the muse's name in the *Iliad*, prompting her to reverse their roles. This departure from tradition is significant, signalling a deviation from the conventional male-centric narratives of ancient epics, as the underlying concern is not with what the poet wants to write about, but what the muse is willing to sing for him. Calliope's response to the poet's plea further disrupts expectations, as she continually expresses weariness with the repetition of the same stories:

> Every conflict joined, every war fought, every city besieged, every town sacked, every village destroyed. Every impossible journey, every shipwrecked, every homecoming: these stories have all been told, and countless times. Can he really believe he has something new to say? (*ibid.* 1)

Calliope's decision is to shift the focus to the landscape of women, which serves as a pivotal moment, as it lays the groundwork for the narrative structure of the novel, allowing some of the women affected by the war to share their unique perceptions. Consequently, Calliope introduces the first notes that will compose this epic anthem, divided into different narratives, giving a chance for each woman to voice their disposition on the war. Thus, from the very outset, *A Thousand Ships* sets itself apart by

subverting traditional literary conventions and giving voice to the often-overlooked narratives of women in the context of epic storytelling.

Herein, some may contend that this represents the highest inkling of epic within the novel's framework. With its prevalent reliance on tragic sources rather than epic ones, Haynes' decision to employ Calliope as the narrator, instead of the muse of tragedy Melpomene, stands as the sole nod to classical epic poetry within the text. Moreover, given the traditionally male-centric nature of epic poetry, which often centres male characters, juxtaposed with the prominence of female characters in tragedies, Haynes' deliberate choice to amplify the voices of women as sung by Calliope can be cause for debate.

However, it is precisely this departure from traditional epic norms that allows *A Thousand Ships* to not only challenge established literary conventions but also redefine the boundaries of epic storytelling by centring the voices of women. While the novel's focus on the tragic aspects of the Trojan War may diverge from the grandeur often associated with epic poetry, it is precisely this emphasis on tragedy that allows for a nuanced exploration of the female frame of mind. Calliope's presence as the muse, amidst a narrative rich in tragic sources, serves as a reminder of the scarcity of female representation in classical epic poetry. Haynes herself recognises this, and has Calliope address the issue with the unnamed poet:

> You've [the poet] told their stories before. If you didn't want to think of men cut down in battle, then why would you want to compose epic verse? Ah, but now I see the problem. It's not their deaths he's upset about. It's that he knows what's coming and he's worrying it will be more tragedy than epic. I watch his chest rising and falling as he grabs a fitful rest. 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, women together. (*ibid.* 108–9)

By choosing to amplify the voices of women, Haynes not only subverts the masculine dominance inherent in epic narratives but also provides a platform for the exploration of female agency, suffering, and resilience within the context of ancient mythology, adding a layer to the stories previously told, notwithstanding some of the original work. Thus, while *A Thousand Ships* may not adhere to traditional notions of epic splendour, its significance lies in its profound reimagining of the genre, offering a compelling and necessary counterpoint to the predominantly male-centred narratives of epic literature.

Giving a new tone to this old tune, Haynes returns to some of the most renowned classical writers, from Homer's and Virgil's epics to Ovid's *Heroides*, giving space for the voices of so many of the "women, girls and goddesses who, for so long, have been silent" (*Women's Prize*). Notwithstanding the magnitude of the aforementioned texts, Haynes' biggest inspirations are drawn out from classical tragedies; more relevant to this study are Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecabe*, as well as Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

Centred around the royal women of Troy and their fates after the Trojan War, Euripides' *Trojan Women* inspired one of the recurring embedded narratives in Haynes' novel, chapters which she titled "The Trojan Women." Awaiting the inescapable, the once-royal women of the fallen city are the characters leading the plot of the *Trojan Women*, announcing, and dreading what the aftermath of this long war has in store for them. Euripides' *Trojan Women* was staged in 415 BCE during a period of peace in the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, and their respective allies (Rabinowitz 199). Due to its focus on the horrible consequences of war on humans — and specifically on women — this play has undergone much debate on whether Euripides was criticizing this ongoing conflict by staging an anti-war play in Athens during the Dionysia.[4] Although this is not the main focus of my study, it is important to recognize this underlying tradition, which led to multiple revisitations and stagings of this play, especially during the last century.[5]

Likewise, Euripides' *Hecuba* serves as an influential exploration of the profound suffering sustained by the powerless, particularly women and children left vulnerable by the absence, neglect, or death of their male protectors (Turkeltaub 136). This play, perhaps more than any other, encapsulates Euripides' preoccupation with the plight of the marginalized (*ibid*.). Through its harrowing depictions of atrocities, *Hecuba* not only captivates its audience but also sparks a dialogue about contemporary sociopolitical anxieties, especially those exacerbated by the Peloponnesian War, similarly to *Trojan Women* (Foley, "The Play" 4). While the exact date of its composition remains uncertain,

[4] For an insight on this perception, see Croally (1994), especially chapter 4; for a contrasting view, analysing the available information chronologically, see Kovacs (1997).

[5] Fémi Osófisan's *Women of Owu* (2004) offers "[a]n African interpretation of the Trojan Women"; Charles L. Mee's *The Trojan Women: A Love Story* (1996) recounts the themes of the original play with statements from Holocaust and Hiroshima survivors; Omar Abu Saada's *Queens of Syria* (2013), as well as Zoe Lafferty's later production of the same piece (2016), focuses on the experience of fifty Syrian women forced into exile. All preceding information was extracted from the *APGRD* website (www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/productions).

424 BCE has been commonly accepted as the date of *Hecuba*'s first staging (*ibid*.). Therefore, in like manner to *Trojan Women*, the audience of *Hecuba*, much like its titular character, may have shared a similar desire for "ethical constancy" amidst such an impactful societal turmoil (Turkeltaub 137). This enduring relevance propelled *Hecuba* to unprecedented popularity, making it the most renowned Euripidean tragedy during the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Foley, "The Play" 2). Yet, despite this initial acclaim, the seventeenth-century aesthetic shift led to its decline in esteem, having the play only see a resurgence of interest as late as the 1980s (*id.* 3).

Euripides was already in classical antiquity a rather controversial poet, giving the spotlight on stage to provocative themes and characters, particularly regarding women (Duncan 537; Foley, "Theatrical Festivals" 14), making Haynes' decision to revisit these plays in her novel an evident one. Their canonical prestige during antiquity made it possible for these tragedies to stretch themselves to modern society, through textual transmission and inclusion in school texts and commentary (McClure, "Introduction" 1–2). Despite their classical and current status, these tragedies were not always so well received (Duncan 537; Foley, "Theatrical Festivals" 14). Controversial as they were, Euripidean tragedies were disregarded for a significant period, especially when their themes were not aligned with the prevalent beliefs and values of each epoch (Goff 565). However, the last two centuries have seen a re-evaluation and reinterpretation of Euripidean drama, due to the perpetual changes of thought concerning those same beliefs and values (*id.* 566). This attitude provides a fresh lens through which to view and appreciate certain aspects of Euripides' works (*ibid.*). Additionally, there has been a notable trend in recent decades towards emphasizing the performative aspects of these ancient plays (*ibid*.).

This timeless quality has contributed to the sustained relevance and appreciation of these plays across centuries. Present-day literary criticism, marked by a heightened interest in feminist, cultural, and geopolitical issues, has provided a fertile ground for re-examining and rediscovering the depth within Euripides' works (McClure, "Introduction" 4). Specifically, his exploration of politics, gender dynamics, and sexuality in *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* has found renewed resonance in contemporary discourse (*ibid.*). These plays' portrayal of the profound impact of war on women continues to impress, prompting reflections on the universal consequences of conflicts as grand and impactful as the mythical Trojan War. Moreover, as societal landscapes evolve, the nuanced

exploration of these themes in Euripides' plays allows for multifaceted interpretations that mirror the complexities of modern life.[6] Moving with society across centuries, Euripides' plays, their themes, and characters continue to serve as a guiding force, shaping and enriching our apprehension of the intricate tapestry of human psyche, transcending temporal, and cultural boundaries (Goff 579).

Besides these two Euripidean plays, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* took on a decidedly influential role in one of *A Thousand Ships*' narrative plots. The first play of the only surviving tragic trilogy in full, *Agamemnon* was, accompanied by its following two plays, first staged in 458 BCE (Taplin and Billings xi). Preceding the already noted Euripidean plays for more than thirty years, the ideas of revenge and justice are also the backbone carrying the characters of this play through the stage (*id.* xix–xx). We could dive into a swarm of research regarding this play, as it is one of the most renowned and recognized tragedies of the classical Greek canon (*id.* xxvi–xxviii). However, of interest to this study is the relationship between Cassandra and Clytemnestra, which takes on a different tone in Haynes' rendition. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* we witness Cassandra descend into madness, highlighted through her incoherent discourse (vv. 1072–1140). Additionally, Cassandra and Clytemnestra's relationship in Aeschylus' play has been commonly analysed by the power, or lack thereof, in their speeches, usually contrasting one's qualities with the other's defects.[7] This stems from the different plays on language that the tragedy leverages on to highlight the authority of speech in Athenian life, be it dramatic or political. Conversely, in Haynes' novel, the complex dynamic between these two characters assumes a distinct resonance, endowing Cassandra not only with the ability to speak to Clytemnestra but also granting her the agency to be heard and comprehended — a facet notably absent, not only in *Agamemnon*, but in the two other previously mentioned plays.

To conclude, this leads me to the focal point of my study. Leveraging different descriptions and interpretations of a character so crucial to the classical mythological

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[6] Adding to the examples previously given regarding *Trojan Women*, Lamis Khalaf's *Hecuba* (1987) recounts the events of the original play, from the perspective of the conflict between Palestine, Thrace, and Lebanon, facing Israel; Carey Perloff's *Hekabe* (1995; 1998) was notably the most successful modern staging of Euripides' original, focusing on the Balkan struggles against a European background. All preceding information was extracted from the APGRD website (www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/productions), and Helene P. Foley's *Euripides: Hecuba*, namely chapter 8.

[7] See McClure's "Silence and Song in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Ion*" (2020); Schein's "The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylu's *Agamemnon*" (1982); Thalmann "Speech and Silence in the 'Oresteia'" (1985).

framework, Natalie Haynes endows Cassandra with a voice unprecedented in its clarity and potency. While the emergence of Cassandra's newfound voice is evident throughout the novel, my analysis aims not to question its existence, but rather to delve into the mechanisms through which Haynes empowers Cassandra and examine the trajectory of her narrative agency. To this end, a narratological exploration of three significant chapters from *A Thousand Ships* is imperative, each corresponding directly to key moments in the plays previously mentioned. Firstly, in chapter nineteen, amidst the eleven chapters titled "The Trojan Women," Cassandra's descent into madness culminates in the eyes of her peers, consequently allowing for a comparison with her discourse in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Secondly, chapter twenty-eight, titled "Hecabe," initially suggests a narrative shift to Hecuba's stance but surprises the reader by entrusting Cassandra with recounting her mother's story. This unexpected decision is unlike any other chapter in the novel. Herein, Calliope appoints Cassandra as responsible for recounting the events present in Euripides' *Hecuba*, a play in which this character is absent. Lastly, the interaction between Cassandra and Clytemnestra in chapter thirty-nine, titled after the latter, represents the culmination of Haynes' alterations to Cassandra's character, allowing the unavailing priestess to be entirely understood by the queen of Mycenae. This interaction will be analysed with Aeschylus' depiction of the same scene as its counterpart.

Additionally, to grasp the agency of voice bestowed upon Cassandra by Haynes, an examination of the broader gynocritical discourse, including the impact of works like *A Thousand Ships*, is essential to contextualize the significance of such literary revisitations, which contribute to ongoing conversations surrounding gender equality, representation, and the amplification of marginalized voices. Through this expanded analysis, I expect to elucidate the implications of Haynes' narrative choices, shedding light on the transformative potential of literature as a tool for challenging established norms, subverting patriarchal structures, and advocating for greater inclusivity and empowerment.

A Thousand Echoes

For a more thorough assimilation of the narratological analysis of Cassandra's voice in Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, it is imperative that we conceive the context in which this novel was written. This chapter thus offers a broad overview of some of the changes and implications of women's voice, and its perception, within the literary tradition, as well as an assessment of the female speech in the texts subject to research. Subsequently, it delves into the significance these notions have had in the scope of feminist literary criticism. Furthermore, an apprehension of the concept of narratology, alongside an introduction to some of the tools it entails, will be conducted.

Reverberating

Reception of the classics has, generally, always been a part of our literary domain. From new translations to complete rewritings or even appropriations of these works and their contents, the classic texts and stories have endured a timeless metamorphosis, seamlessly adapting to the ever-evolving cultural landscape while retaining their intrinsic value and resonance. Even in the last hundred years, the Trojan War and the intricacies that surround it have been subjected to numerous adaptations, including its introduction to the big screen and the first English translations of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by women. In this regard, Emily Wilson's translation of the *Odyssey* in 2018 is noteworthy, as it was shortlisted and awarded by many, and tremendously impacted the academy.[8] In the introduction of her translation, Wilson notes the lack of insight into "the lives of women in archaic Greece" (37), particularly in a work concerned with the aftermath of war on, largely, one man. Additionally, the author asserts that these women also had their own "perspective on the male-dominated world of war" (*ibid.*), a subject still in dire need to be thoroughly explored, which we will come back to later.

Through the millennia, classical texts have maintained a remarkable and enduring significance, exerting a profound and lasting impact on our discernment of the origins and structures of society, given that numerous academic syllabi still incorporate these texts. They provide a rich tapestry of narratives, ideas, and values that continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, offering a window into the collective consciousness of

[8] See Sisson (2018).

bygone eras and informing our discernment on the present and future. The beauty of these texts lies in their vastness, allowing for multiple interpretations to rise. Transcending political and environmental dimensions, to cultural and societal issues, these texts have served a myriad of purposes, on various sides of the scale (Zuckerberg 3).[9]

In recent years, and especially within the last decade, these texts have been appropriated by a community on the rise known as the Red Pill. In the words of Donna Zuckerberg, the Red Pill is an umbrella term aggregating different online communities "connected by common resentments against women, immigrants, people of color, and the liberal elite" (*id.* 1). Among misogyny, antifeminism, white supremacy, and conservationism, the men in these forums share regressive beliefs to better exert their power over these minorities, employing the internet as an expedient platform for the dissemination and amplification of such views (*id.* 3). In these websites it is common to encounter lies, conspiracy theories and misinformation about the previously discussed issues (*ibid.*).

To try and justify their prejudiced beliefs of society, the men in these communities adopt Greek and Roman classical texts, selectively appropriating the ideas and contents that best fit their beliefs, usually neglecting subsidiary contextual nuances. Focusing often on texts and influential figures from the Roman Empire, the Red Pill community continues to find more ways to suppress these minority groups; for this study it is of most importance the particular focus on silencing women (*id.* 4). Their underlying goal is to perpetuate their notion that "white men are the guardians of intellectual authority" (*ibid.*), viewing social justice and political correctness as threats to their established power dynamics. This phenomenon is notably salient in the Anglophone context, which is the most relevant for this study.

The ascendancy of political figures such as Donald Trump, culminating in his 2016 election as President of the United States, has provided legitimacy and empowerment to the convictions shared by the men within Red Pill forums (*ibid*.). Giving positions of power to individuals endorsing these ideas further amplifies the voices of the men in the Red Pill,[10] consequently marginalising those of women (*id.* 42). Still during

[9] See Losemann's "The Spartan tradition in Germany, 1870–1945" and Bartsch' *Plato Goes to China*, especially the introduction and chapter 3.

[10] Zuckerberg specifically highlights Steve Bannon and Michael Anton, both having been known for advocating far right ideals under classical pretexts and pseudonyms; see Zuckerberg, chapter 1.

the same 2016 presidential campaign, classical culture was strategically utilised by Trump supporters to silence and denigrate women, exemplified by depictions of Hillary Clinton beheaded, replacing the mythical Medusa in numerous representations, as Mary Beard highlighted in her book *Women & Power: A Manifesto* ("Women in Power"[11]). It is imperative to acknowledge, however, that the ideologies propagated within Red Pill forums are not singular; rather, they are deeply rooted mechanisms within the core of Western culture, reflecting a historical desire to suppress the voices of women (*id.* "Preface").

It is among this rising cacophony that concerns akin to those articulated by Emily Wilson have gained momentum. In her manifesto, Mary Beard uncovers the long tradition of silencing women deeply rooted within the structural foundation of Western culture. A salient focal point for this study is the nuanced exploration of the distinction between being silenced and not being heard, a dichotomy that Beard adeptly navigates (*id.* "The Public Voice of Women"). Already in the Greco-Roman classical milieu, the importance of speaking up and being heard in the public sphere was central to emphasise one's place in society (McClure, "City of Words" 5). However, Beard contends that this privilege was predominantly reserved for men, who were systematically instructed to assert control over public discourse while concurrently stifling the voices of women ("The Public Voice of Women"). This dynamic is exemplified in the behaviour of characters such as Telemachus towards his mother, Penelope, in the *Odyssey* (*ibid*.). Beard substantiates her argument that language and power are intrinsically connected with a multitude of examples from antiquity to our contemporary. In the context of antiquity, the denial of linguistic agency to women correspondingly deprived them of the ability to effectuate meaningful societal change (*ibid.*). Similarly, Laura McClure also challenges these traditional beliefs regarding women's speech, likewise drawing attention to the deep-seated connection between the power of someone's voice and their societal recognition:

> As the prerogative of public speech became the tangible symbol of citizen status in democratic Athens, it appears that women's voices became increasingly excluded from public life. ("City of Words" 7)

Amidst the expanse of the Red Pill community and the ascent of leaders who endorse and embolden such dialogues, the silencing of women is once again underscored

[11] As I was not able to get a physical copy myself, nor could I find a copy with accurate paging, I resort to directing the reader to the chapters in which you can find the references made.

as a prominent concern. Against this backdrop, a noteworthy trend emerges — a resurgence in the reinterpretation of classical texts, notably led by women seeking to reclaim agency within the discourse.

This ascendant concern with stories written by women was coined in 1978 as gynocritics, or gynocriticism, by literary critic Elaine Showalter. It first appeared in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics," which served as the inaugural lecture for the first series focusing on women and literature at Oxford University (Showalter, "Feminist Critical Revolution" 12). The term gynocritics unfolded from the need to "break away from dependency on male models in forging a criticism of our own" (*ibid*.). At the time, this separation was much needed, since feminist studies was reaching an impasse, as critics found themselves trapped among male-centric works and literary approaches.

In this lecture, Showalter distinguished two feminist approaches to literary criticism. She firstly acknowledges feminist critique, or the effect women have as critics of male-centric literature (Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics" 128), which was the one in practice insofar, witnessing its own downfall. Secondly, Showalter signals the new road in which she believes feminist studies can prevail: gynocritics, otherwise known as the concern with women as writers (*ibid.*). Within an Anglosphere feminist context, Showalter's gynocritics accompanied the second wave of feminism, clearly delineated in the author's concerns with "the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history" (*ibid.*). Consequently, Showalter's theory suggests that focusing on analysing literature written by women presents a promising path towards developing an overarching feminist theory (*id.* 131). This approach offered an opportunity to move away from relying solely on literary theories and frameworks developed by men for men. In doing so, feminists were able to develop their own critical methods and positions, rooted in a female panorama. This step taken by Showalter emphasised the importance of creating a discourse that is not centred around male authors or their works but instead centres on women's voices in literature. Elaine Showalter was essentially calling feminist literary critics to separate feminist critique, "woman as the consumer of male-produced literature" (*id.* 128), from gynocriticism, "woman as the *producer* of textual meaning" (*ibid*. emphasis mine).

In response to the enduring predominance of male-authored literary works, there has been a palpable urgency driving a re-evaluation and reimagining of classical stories

from a female viewpoint. This paradigmatic shift evident across the literary landscape has been notably catalysed by prominent authors within the realm of "Classical Mythology Retellings."[12] Esteemed figures like Margaret Atwood, Madeline Miller, and Natalie Haynes have emerged as luminaries, contributing to a burgeoning corpus of literature that challenges and subverts traditional narratives. The ensuing table showcases a selection of established authors in this genre, serving as a testament to the substantial growth of publications dedicated to this cause.

Table 1

List of "Classical Mythology Retellings" Publications Ordered Chronologically[13]

Year	Title	Author
2005	*The Penelopiad*	Margaret Atwood
2013	*Galatea*	Madeline Miller
2014	*Amber Fury*	Natalie Haynes
2017	*Children of Jocasta*	Natalie Haynes
2018	*Circe*	Madeline Miller
	The Silence of the Girls	Pat Barker
2019	*A Thousand Ships*	Natalie Haynes
2021	*Ariadne*	Jennifer Saint
	Daughters of Sparta	Claire Heywood
	The Women of Troy	Pat Barker
2022	*Elektra*	Jennifer Saint
	Ithaca	Claire North
	Stone Blind	Natalie Haynes
2023	*Atalanta*	Jennifer Saint
	Clytemnestra	Constanza Casati
	Horses of Fire	A. D. Rhine
	House of Odysseus	Claire North
2024 –	*Hera*	Jennifer Saint
	The Voyage Home	Pat Barker

[12] See Shelby (2022) for a thorough exploration of the rise of reimagining classical myths and stories from a female viewpoint.
[13] Information gathered based only on fiction novels written by Anglophone authors in the last twenty years, centring the issue regarding women's voice.

	The Last Song of Penelope	Claire North
	Daughters of Bronze	A. D. Rhine
	Persephone	Madeline Miller

Adapted from: Rachel Strolle's list published on the *Reader's Digest*.

While these efforts began to gain traction nearly a decade prior to the earlier mentioned presidential elections, there has been a discernible increase in the trend of revisiting classical stories from female standpoints, mirroring the exponential growth of the Red Pill community and the ramifications stemming from the 2016 US Presidential Elections. Beyond the realm of fiction, writers have broadened their horizons to encompass non-fiction works, intertwining ancient myths and narratives with contemporary themes to resonate with modern audiences.[14]

This burgeoning movement signifies not only a literary renaissance but also a concerted effort to reshape and diversify narratives that have long been monopolized by a male angle, thus engendering a more inclusive literary landscape. Concurrently, I find it timely to delve into the classical Greek conception of voice and speech. In particular, this study centres on the representations of female speech, specifically that of Cassandra, as well as what these representations entailed.

Studies in Attic drama have explored notions of voice, focusing on tone, sound, and diction, revealing variations between male and female characters (McClure, "Gender and Verbal Genres" 38–40). In this theatrical tradition, where facial expressions were obscured by masks, actors heavily relied on their voices to convey depth, emotion, and gender (McClure, "City of Words" 18). With female roles played exclusively by males, performers adeptly crafted believable impersonations through nuanced speech patterns (*id.* 3). However, these portrayals may not accurately reflect real-life speech or behaviour (*ibid*.). In this regard, McClure argues that:

> [T]he constructed women of Attic drama may serve as figures of substitution that convey social and political issues important to men, particularly the complicated problem of speech and its status in the democratic polis. ("City of Words" 5)

[14] As is the case too for Natalie Haynes, who first showcased her literacy in the classical antiquity with a non-fiction book titled *The Ancient Guide to Modern Life* (2010). Ever since, the author has published two other non-fiction books within the same scope: *Pandora's Jar: Women in the Greek Myths* (2020) and *Divine Might: Goddesses in Greek Myth* (2023).

McClure's contention reminds us that playwrights created female characters who were often marginalized or silenced within the narrative, often using them as proxies or substitutes to explore political issues. Women in Attic drama were not necessarily depicted as realistic or multifaceted individuals but rather as archetypes or symbols representing certain societal values, norms, or conflicts (*id.* 5–6). This approach, of course, was not exclusive to female characters; many figures, regardless of gender, served as embodiments of certain ideals. However, the stereotypes imposed on women carried more significant consequences and implications (*id.* 6). In contemporary scholarship, reconstructing the speech of ancient women poses a challenge, primarily because most literary representations and descriptive evidence are derived from male authors ("Gender and Verbal Genres" 38). With this in mind, feminist classical scholars recognised that ancient texts serve as intermediaries in interpreting gender dynamics and the insights of ancient women ("City of Words" 4). Consequently, many feminist scholars have shifted their focus towards examining the underlying ideas and beliefs that shape the portrayal of women and their "literary and mythic representation" (*ibid.*).

Besides these physiological concerns, such as tone and diction, Attic drama often portrays women's speech as disruptive and subversive, challenging the social order (*id*. 6). Whether in ritualistic forms or within the confines of the household, uncontrolled female speech is depicted as a threat to stability unless suppressed or transformed (*id.* 7). Literary texts, both Athenian and otherwise, consistently commend female silence and submission, associating women's speech with "promiscuity and adultery" while promoting women's invisibility in public discourse (*id.* 19–20). Tragedy reinforces this ideology of female silence and seclusion, as most plays "feature silent women," while paradoxically featuring speaking female characters in diverse roles (*id.* 24). This paradox underscores the complexity of women's representation in ancient Greek tragedy. While some female characters were given agency and voice, their overall portrayal was still shaped by the dominant ideology of female subordination and confinement. Thus, tragedy both reinforced and challenged the societal norms regarding women's roles and voices in ancient Greek society. Additionally, female characters in tragic plays often utilize persuasive speech to deceive their male counterparts, employing tactics of trickery and cunning to confront them (*id.* 26).

Although ideally silent for most parts, Cassandra does not fit this mould of using her speech to cunningly deceive her peers. As we have established, Cassandra was

favoured by Apollo with the ability to foresee the future but, after denying her virtue to this god, cursed to never be believed. To an extent, those around her perceive her speech to be deceitful, as what the young priestess says is continually disregarded. However, this is not a tactic used by the princess to persuade those around her, as is the case with other female characters in Attic drama. Cassandra's perceived deceit is rooted in a divine curse rather than selfish trickery.

This brings my argument back to the realm of gynocritics, where feminist scholars have discerned the imperative of investigating narratives that not only exhibit diverse portrayals of women and their voices, but also prioritise texts authored by women. By foregrounding the voices and views of women within literary discourse, these scholarly pursuits serve to not only interrogate established patriarchal narratives but also to amplify the multifaceted nature of women's realities. One other movement which had a deep impact on the recent recognition of women's narratives, representations of female speech, and ultimately on the ascendence of these classical retellings was the #MeToo campaign.

In 2006, American activist Tarana Burke launched an initiative to bring attention to survivors of sexual abuse, using the phrase "Me Too" in the social network *MySpace*, with the goal of fostering unity and assistance among marginalized Black women who had been sexually assaulted (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir 1). Over a decade later, in light of the abuse allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein in 2017, Alyssa Milano revived Burke's expression, calling all women who had previously experience any form of sexual assault to use the hashtag #MeToo (Hewett and Holland, "Literary Studies as Literary Activism" 1). Before moving forward, I find it necessary to recognise that my dissertation does not allow for a meticulous analysis of all the processes that entailed this movement. Rather, I aim to provide a general insight of this awareness campaign, in order to elucidate its relationship with the scope of my work.[15]

Within feminist criticism, activists have long spoken out against violence towards women, yet it was the resurfacing of the #MeToo movement that accommodated for tangible progress to be made (Davis 27). Feminist literary scholars have been analysing canonical texts on sexual violence and rape culture since the inception of feminist interventions in literary studies (Hewett and Holland, "Rethinking the Curriculum" 601).

[15] For more information on the #MeToo movement, its origins, and recent research see Giti Chandra and Irma Erlingsdóttir (2021), especially chapters 2, 12 and 17.

Concurrently, this groundwork laid in the 1970s catalysed subsequent social interventions, echoing the butterfly effect described by MacKinnon (42). Research on women in male-authored literature, along with examinations of representations of rape, harassment, and ambiguous consent, coincided with Showalter's simultaneous advocacy for a shift in feminist criticism. Both these developments underscore the imperative for greater representation and acknowledgment of women's narratives within literary discourse.

Additionally, MacKinnon highlights how the 2016 presidential campaign and the election of Donald Trump as president also deeply impacted this movement (43). As per stated, Trump's rise to power, and with him the ascent of the alt-right oppressive discourse, heralded a seismic shift in the political and social landscape. Trump's presidency marked a significant escalation in the perpetuation of sexism, coinciding with a broader trend of patriarchal reinforcement under right-wing governments worldwide (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir 2). As evidenced previously, this urged authors to find innovative ways to amplify women's voices, particularly by reimagining classical myths and stories. This strategic choice was motivated by the recognition that these very narratives had historically been wielded against women. Trump's continuous derogatory and oppressive discourse also urged the #MeToo movement to take centre stage.

While memoirs and bibliographical publications have garnered some attention in this act of reclaiming personal narratives through literature (Serisier 43–4) — with many accounts as told by survivors of sexual assault — fiction, and other literary genres, also provide rich material for analysis. Despite the movement's widespread recognition, enduring myths and misconceptions persist, particularly in classical texts.[16] Chandra and Erlingsdóttir recognise this long-lasting tradition, remarking the disruptive and subversive notions that female speech carried in ancient Greece:

> Female grief and mourning, anger and rage, their irrational and passionate overflow of emotions, has been regarded with distaste and dismay throughout recorded history, and has even been recorded by the ancient Greeks as a threat to the city-state. (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir 10)

[16] See chapter 8 of *#MeToo and Literary Studies* for a study conducted by eight students on the propagation of rape culture in Ovid's "Philomela" under a postcolonial perspective.

Fuelled by the resonance of personal narratives, this movement has provided a platform for survivors,[17] predominantly women, to share their recollections and emotions in their own words. As articulated by Badia, the movement has the potential to reshape our cognizance of literary history, offering new pathways to explore the complex constellation of issues surrounding sexual violence and gender dynamics (33). Such endeavours play a pivotal role in reshaping societal perceptions of women's voices, shedding light on the diversified perspectives, challenges, and triumphs inherent in women's lived realities. These ideas culminate in characters like that of Cassandra in Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, who emerges as an all-encompassing figure for so many of the themes addressed in this chapter. To analyse how this either too-silent or too-disruptive young girl breaks away from the stereotypes bestowed upon female speech, it is essential to move towards more practical narrative analysis tools.

Reflecting

In order to address the questions raised in the preceding chapter, namely how Natalie Haynes imbued Cassandra with a newfound voice and how Cassandra wielded it, it becomes imperative to delve into the field of narratology. This domain of narrative analysis, although already recognized in Aristotle, gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century, as Tzvetan Todorov coined the term (Fludernik 169). Often aligned with structuralism, narratology encompasses a multitude of terms and varying interpretations of the same phenomena. However, arriving at a consensus on its definition has proven to be a challenge for scholars in the field. Mieke Bal opts to define narratology as "the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events — of cultural artefacts that tell a story" which "helps us understand, analyse, and evaluate narratives" (*Narratology* 3); on the other hand, while not entirely shifting in tone, but adopting a slightly more practical approach, Irene de Jong perceives narratology as an "instrument" "to be applied to texts" in order to "sharpen and enrich our interpretation of texts" ("Preface"[18]). Several other definitions have been set forth, but I chose to highlight

[17] Notwithstanding the positive outcome brought on by the #MeToo movement, it is important to acknowledge some of the fissures present, mainly its focus on white women from American and European backgrounds. See part 3 of Chandra and Erlingsdóttir (2021) for several articles and chapters focusing on representing women from different backgrounds.

[18] As I was not able to get a physical copy myself, nor could I find a copy with accurate paging, I resort to directing the reader to the chapters in which you can find the references made.

these two for I believe they are the most aligned with the aim of this study. Bal's definition proves accommodating to advances in neighbouring and more distant disciplines, as well as developments in cultural events, which will be advantageous when contextualizing narratology within gynocritics. Conversely, Jong's more practical approach offers insight into the process of establishing these correlations, aiding in the review of the methodologies employed.

Nonetheless, narratologists concur that the field offers a diverse array of analytical tools, each yielding its own set of definitions and interpretations. Consequently, the use of these tools can lead to divergent conclusions when applied to the same text by different scholars. It is entirely plausible for someone employing the same analytical framework as mine to reach a different interpretation, or for another scholar utilising different tools to also arrive at alternative results (*Narratology* 4). This stems from the fact that narrative analysis employs interpretation in "every step of the way" (*id.* 10), and, considering that "[a]n interpretation is a proposal" (*ibid.*), the following study is but a proposal of analysis. While this inherent variability does not invalidate my research on its own, it underscores the necessity of acknowledging the multiplicity of dispositions within narratological analysis (*id.* 5). With this in mind, before delving into the primary tools driving this research, it is imperative to establish, or at least attempt to, the definitions of three specific underlying concepts: text, story, and fabula. A clear distinction between these three terms is essential for any narratological study, as they serve as foundational components that shape the framework of the analysis.

Accordingly, it is essential to acknowledge the pivotal role played by Gérard Genette in the field of narratology. His groundbreaking work profoundly influenced the study of narrative structures and storytelling techniques. Contemplating on the word narrative, and on how commonly it is used without paying significant attention to, Genette distinguishes three different meanings for this word:

> A first meaning — the one nowadays most evident and most central in common usage — has *narrative* refer to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events … A second meaning, less widespread but current today among analysts and theoreticians of narrative content, has *narrative* refer to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse … A third meaning, apparently the oldest, has *narrative* refer once more to an event: not, however, the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself. (25–26; emphases in original)

In the introduction of his *Narrative Discourse*, Genette opens with a systematically separation between the concepts of, what we would nowadays call, story, fabula, and texts, respectively. Genette's step equipped scholars with the necessary tools to further construct more exhaustive frameworks in narrative analyses. By dissecting these layers and elucidating their interplay, Genette laid the foundation for a more sophisticated assimilation of how narratives function and evolve. His insights have not only enriched academic discourse but have also paved the way for further advancements in narratological theory and analysis.

Returning to the two authors previously mentioned, Mieke Bal makes the following distinction between these three layers: "a *narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee … a story in a medium," while "a *story* is the content of that text" and the fabula "is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors [i.e.: agents in a text]" (*Narratology* 5; emphasis in original). In other words, a text is a finite concept in its most physical sense; its content, however, is not (*ibid.*). Jong agrees with Bal's definitions, but adds that the connection between these three layers forms what we should think of as the vertical structure of narrative, "in that a reader gets from the words on a page (the text) into a story, from which he or she may *reconstruct* the fabula" ("Narrators and Narratees"; emphasis mine).

Considering the object of this study, the text is Natalie Hayne's novel, whether in physical or digital form, it is the book, the object itself, the letters on the paper, the ink, that encapsulates what we call text. The story is, consequently, what is *in* the book, the content of this object, the meaning behind these words. To put it more plainly, the story here is the experiences of some of the women who were, in any way, a part of the Trojan War. Putting it in Cassandra's terms, the story is her own episodes in the war, more specifically the ones directly relating to her voice. Lastly, the fabula is, in Jong's words a "version or focalization of a series of events" (*ibid.*). In *A Thousand Ships* the fabula is quite vast as it involves events from before, during, and after this decade-long war even if we are, as I will be, to consider only events regarding one character alone. However, it is precisely this act of focalisation that is responsible for the events that are and are not narrated. Evidently, we must take into consideration that *A Thousand Ships* is not a war report of the events that happened leading up to, during or after the war, but rather a

compilation of the phenomena that were deemed significant to explore the disposition of these women among this feud.

As previously discussed, and aligning myself with Jong's discernment, a story serves as a *reconstruction* of the fabula. However, in the case of a book like *A Thousand Ships*, there exists an additional layer of reconstruction that demands attention. This book reimagines events from various sources such as other books, myths, and scholia, inherently reconstructing narratives presented in these texts from the outset. This added "fourth level" (*ibid.*), was examined by Dorrit Cohn as the referential level or material, typically associated with historiography.[19] While it is true that Haynes extensively researched source material and had to reconstruct and reimagine many of the notions explored within these texts, for the purpose of this study, I will set aside this perceptible fourth level. Instead, I will focus solely on the preceding layers, as I believe they are the most pertinent for the subsequent discussion. This means that while I will analyse certain passages from Haynes' book in comparison to passages from three tragic plays, as previously mentioned, I will not be examining the influence that these, and other, classical texts had on shaping Haynes' text as a narrative. Instead, my focus will be on how Haynes received these narratives and how her reconstruction of them gave rise to a new voice for characters like Cassandra.

In addition to the three previously discussed definitions, there are a number of narratological elements and aspects that will enhance our sensitivity to Cassandra's voice in Hayne's novel: narrators, narratees, time, and focalisation, respectively. In particular, the first two tools and the latter prove invaluable when analysing a character's voice in a text. The concept of time itself will come into play when analysing some of the ways in which Cassandra uses her voice, and what implications arise from this. To gain a thorough understanding of these instruments, it was crucial to first establish the distinctions outlined earlier, because one unit may be regarded as a "unified whole" or be "treated separately" in the different layers (*Narratology* 8): we speak of the layers of the narrative text, the aspects of the story, and the elements of the fabula. Perhaps the best example of this is the distinction between the narrator or speaker of the text, the character in a story, and the actor of the fabula (*ibid.*), which may or may not be culminate in the same identity.

[19] See Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999).

Therefore, from this point onwards, I will be very careful in the distinctions made, in hopes of providing an easier understanding of the different functions.

Firstly, let us consider narrators and narratees. Jong introduces the concept of narrators by asserting that the "presence [of a narrator] is the necessary condition for a text to be deemed a narrative: a narrative is a text in which a narrator recounts a series of events" ("Narrators and Narratees"), and correspondingly, a narratee is the individual addressed in this narrative process (*ibid*.). This initial distinction suffices for now, as what is crucial is recognising that there are typically multiple narrators and narratees in a text or story, and the relationships among them are subject to change throughout the narrative. In the upcoming chapter, I will delve more deeply into these terms, offering apt examples from the passages under examination to facilitate a clearer comprehension.

While the various types of narrators and narratees will be further explored ahead, it is important to note that the presence of different narrators operating on distinct levels brings me to the concept of focalisation. Jong defines focalisation as the "viewing of the events of the fabula" ("Focalization"), implying that the same event may be perceived differently by various narrators and understood differently by diverse narratees. Mieke Bal eloquently describes focalisation as the outcome of "the relation between who perceives and what is perceived," highlighting its capacity to imbue the story with subjectivity (*Narratology* 7). Focalisation, then, is an *aspect* of the story, and it ties in all three narrative layers. At the textual level, it determines how information is presented, influencing language, style, and detail based on whether the focaliser is a narrator or character. In the story layer, focalisation shapes the sequence and emphasis of events, guiding interpretation and emotional engagement by highlighting different perspectives. Regarding the fabula, focalisation affects which parts are emphasized and how they are connected, creating temporal distortions. Moreover, there exist variations in focalisation, each intricately intertwined with the relationships among narrators, narratees, and the object being considered. As a result, these relationships will take centre stage in my study as we endeavour to decipher the type of voice Haynes has given Cassandra, how this voice is employed by the character, and how it is perceived by her peers.

This leads me to the concept of time, for every event in the fabula will inevitably take up time. In narratology, the concept of time is multifaceted and intricate, diverging significantly from our everyday understanding of temporal progression. It is, therefore, arguably the most defining element of a narrative, as it encompasses the events caused or

experienced by characters and the temporal connections between them (Jong "Time"). While time in narrative arts such as literature, theatre, and film is self-evident, these mediums unfold through time and manipulate its perception in various ways (*Narratology* 66). Narratives often complicate this apparent linearity, creating a "thickness of time" that is both complex and non-linear (*ibid.*). One way this complexity manifests is through double temporal linearity: the linear progression of the text itself — the series of sentences or sequences — and that of the fabula — the series of events (*id.* 68). The reconstructed fabula represents events in their chronological order, but when these events are filtered through a focaliser's perspective, they become a story where the order, emphasis, and duration of events can be manipulated (Jong "Time"). A narrator then transforms this story into a text, using specific temporal procedures such as altering the sequence of events — order — varying the amount of time spent on events — rhythm — and recounting events multiple times — frequency (*ibid.*). These manipulations allow the narrator to place emphasis on certain events, highlight specific relationships between them, and guide the reader's interpretation (*ibid.*).

Deviations from sequential ordering can intensify the reader's experience (*Narratology* 69). These movements enrich the narrative by offering deeper emotional insight, particularly in stories dealing with trauma, where such alternations reflect a fractured sense of self and engage the reader on an emotional level (*id.* 69–70). This fractured particularity of time will be paramount when analysing the implications of Cassandra's use of her voice in *A Thousand Ships*. Additionally, Bal highlights the difficulty in determining the primary story-time, which is the main temporal reference point in a narrative. This is the time against which other events are recounted, either in hind- or foresight. The determination of a primary story-time is relative, meaning it can vary depending on the perspective or focus of the analysis (*id.* 76). Different texts handle the relationship between the chronological sequence of events — fabula — and the way these events are presented in the narrative — story — in such intricate ways that a detailed, thorough analysis can be impractical (*ibid.*). Consequently, trying to establish a single primary time can be unhelpful. Rather, the focus should be on the interplay and connections between various temporal dimensions rather than trying to establish a dominant timeline. Thus, the narrative's manipulation of time contributes significantly to its depth and emotional impact, challenging readers to engage with time in a more nuanced and reflective manner. These temporal manipulations help to foreground

important events, provide insight into character motivations and relationships, and challenge or reinforce readers' interpretations of the narrative (Jong "Time").

In narratology, chronological deviations or anachronies refer to the differences between the arrangement of events in the story and their chronological order in the fabula (*Narratology* 70). Anachronies can present events from either the past or the future, termed retroversions and anticipations respectively, in order to avoid the vagueness of terms like "flashback" and "flashforward" (*id.* 71). These chronological deviations vary in their impact, with some being brief enough not to disrupt the narrative flow, while others can dominate the storyline (Jong "Time" 108). In the upcoming analysis, I will attempt to show how Cassandra's narrative, filled with prolepses and analepses, significantly disrupts the flow of the narrative, clashing with the narrator's temporal control.

In this chapter, I hope to have showcased how integrating the concepts of narratology and gynocritics will offer a multifaceted approach to enrich my analyses and provide deeper insights into the portrayal of Cassandra in the texts at hand. On the one hand, gynocritics offers a feminist contemplation that focuses on the gender dynamics at play within the text, including the societal and cultural contexts that inform the portrayal of female characters. By examining the socio-cultural implications of the female character's voice, gynocritics highlights issues of power, representation, and gender stereotypes. Thus, I deemed it necessary to extensively consider some of the different moments that have shaped the mould in which novels such as Haynes' have emerged, from Showalter's gynocritic theory to the #MeToo movement that saw its summit in the years following Trump's ascendence to power. Additionally, narratology provides a framework for examining the narrative structure and techniques employed to convey Cassandra's voice, using tools such as focalisation and contemplating temporal disruption. By dissecting these elements, researchers can explore how the narrative form shapes and influences the representation of the female character's agency and identity. Therefore, combining these approaches, the aim of the following chapter is to conduct a nuanced analysis that considers both the structural and thematic aspects of Cassandra's voice, providing a more extensive perception of how women are depicted within literary texts through their speech.

A Thousand Voices

Analysing Cassandra's voice in Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* can be done in multiple ways, focusing on various aspects of both the original plays and Haynes' novel. For this study, as previously stated, I want to focus on four narratological aspects: narrator, narratee, focalisation, and time. Each of these aspects will serve as tools to further understand what kind of voice Cassandra was given in *A Thousand Ships*, and how she employs and exercises this voice, specifically in comparison to some of her scenes in the classical tragedies. Before delving into this analysis, I want to highlight that a general understanding of each of the classical texts is necessary to comprehend how Cassandra's voice, as well as agency, operates among her peers and their perceptions of said voice; consequently, I will provide a brief understanding and overview of the scholarly work on these notions, to compare them with the ones present in Haynes' novel.

This comprehensive analysis will be grounded in the principles of gynocritics discussed in the preceding chapter, which will serve as the backbone for this study. Within this framework, the aim of this dissertation, and specifically this chapter, is to analyse the effects of Cassandra's agency and her newfound voice through a narratological examination of selected passages. This chapter will consequently be divided into five different sections, each focusing on different aspects that will impact Cassandra's voice in the novel. Firstly, I will discuss what type of narrator can be found in *A Thousand Ships*, and how the narrative unfolds depending on these different hypotheses; the consequences of this will be clarified in further sections. Secondly, I will begin analysing some of the passages that silence Cassandra. Following this, opens the analysis of Cassandra's gradually evolving voice, all the way through her newfound agency in the subsequent fourth section. Finally, I will compile a patchwork of fragmented moments from the novel, reflecting the preceding assessments. Considering the ideas put forward by gynocritics and other significant moments in feminist critique, this analysis will explore how these theories accommodate and highlight Cassandra's evolving voice and agency.

Blended

Before embarking on the analysis of the diverse passages under consideration in this study, it is important to acknowledge the identities of the narrators within the narrative, as the nuances of focalisation hinge upon their respective perspectives. In *A Thousand Ships*, we are faced with three possible arguments when discussing who the primary narrator is — the muse, the poet, or neither. The underlying question in identifying the primary narrator is as follows: when we read the extant novel, are we witnessing Calliope presenting the events to the poet, what the poet subsequently wrote, or something else entirely?

This ambiguity arises in Calliope's chapters for several reasons. Firstly, the muse appears to exert significant control over the narrative, explicitly stating whose stories she wishes to sing. She makes it clear that if the poet does not embrace this song, she will leave him empty-handed:

> I took him straight to the shore so he could see what happened to the women who did escape the fires… (*ATS* 40)
>
> [H]e will tell it, or he will tell nothing at all. (*id.* 176)
>
> Let him follow the future of another woman, another queen. (*id.* 212)

Additionally, the narrative unfolds initially through the lens of Calliope, and the muse also embraces the responsibility of concluding the narrative, thereby inducing a structural symmetry between the opening invocation, "Sing, Muse" (*id.* 1), and its subsequent response, "I have sung" (*id.* 340). Within these five words resides the entirety of the novel, encapsulating its intricately woven narratives and plots, ergo positioning Calliope as the entity who inaugurates and concludes the narrative arc. However, this claim begins to falter when Calliope herself implies that the words we are reading are the poet's composition. This contradiction opens the possibility that the poet, rather than Calliope, could be considered as the primary narrator:

> How does *his* poem keep going wrong? (*id.* 40; emphasis mine)
>
> I know the poet grows weary of these women who appear and disappear from *his* story… (*id.* 176; emphasis mine)
>
> He can't look at me, can't bear what *he's just composed*. (*id.* 267; emphasis mine)

In hopes of finding clearer answers to these questions, it is imperative to delve into narratology studies. I would posit that the central question opening this section hinges on the reader's interpretation of the main story. If the reader perceives the novel as primarily concerned with Calliope's presentation of the stories of the women to the poet, then it is logical to argue that Calliope is the primary narrator. This argument aligns with Jong's claim that a primary narrator is "who recounts the main story, and whose voice is usually the first we hear when the story begins" ("Narrators and Narratees"). If the main story is seen as Calliope's determination to tell the stories of women, and, given that she is the voice that opens the narrative, it follows that she is the primary narrator. According to this interpretation, Calliope narrates her chapters in the first person, as an internal narrator (*ibid.*), while adopting a more detached, third-person perspective in the other chapters, functioning as an external narrator (*ibid.*). It is entirely plausible for Calliope to narrate the women's chapters, for her timeless and powerful nature as a muse grants her access to all the events and characters' inner thoughts narrated in the novel. This omniscient position reinforces her role as the primary storyteller who possesses a comprehensive understanding of the unfolding events and the inner lives of the characters.

This perspective is strengthened by the consistent narrative control Calliope exhibits throughout the novel. Calliope's chapters emphasise her personal mission to bring women's stories to the forefront. Her direct engagement with the poet, where she explicitly states her intentions and challenges his perceptions, highlights her active role in shaping the narrative:

> Can he really believe he has something new to say? (*ATS* 1)
>
> If he complains to me again, I will ask him this: is Oenone less of a hero than Menelaus? (*id.* 177)
>
> I shall teach him a lesson. (*id.* 212)
>
> The poet may not want to learn this, but he must. (*id.* 267)

This engagement positions Calliope not just as a passive muse but as a proactive agent who drives the story forward. Her interactions with the poet also serve to mirror the traditional roles of muses and poets, while also challenging the notion that muses merely inspire while poets create: "When did poets forget that they serve the muses, and not the other way around?" (*id.* 108). Moreover, Calliope's omnipresence in the narrative allows for a seamless integration of the various women's stories. Her access, as a muse, to their

inner thoughts and experiences ensures that their voices are authentically represented, unfiltered by a male narrator's perspective.

It is also possible to interpret the novel as the poet's written account of the events Calliope sang to him. In this interpretation, the relationship between Calliope and the poet reflects traditional epic conventions where the muse provides divine insight, and the poet transcribes this into a coherent narrative. In "The invocation of the Muses and the plea for inspiration," Claudia Schindler explores this dynamic between muses and poets. Schindler emphasises that pleas for inspiration typically seek content rather than form (494). The poet looks to the muse for the substance of the narrative, while stylistic choices are less commonly requested (*ibid*.). In *A Thousand Ships*, Calliope provides the content — the stories of the women — while the poet shapes the presentation, therefore endowing him with the power of narration. The poet's function in this scenario is to serve as an intermediary who faithfully records the muse's song, ensuring that her words are preserved and disseminated. This viewpoint positions the poet not as an originator of the narrative but as a vessel through which Calliope's story is channelled. However, this argument is somewhat weaker than the former, as the poet serves more as a scribe or recorder of Calliope's words. The poet's contribution, while necessary for the physical act of writing, is secondary to the muse's primary role in generating and controlling the narrative. His presence in the narrative structure is largely passive, and he is more a facilitator of Calliope's voice than an independent narrative force. Schindler also comments on this relationship, specifically regarding the Homeric epics:

> For himself, on the other hand, the poet claims no prior knowledge, so he is relying entirely on the statements of the inspiring divinity. In the *Iliad* the poet even seems … to function as a mere channel through which the divinity gives utterance, whereas in the *Odyssey* it is suggested … that the poet is receiving information from the Muse, which he will then pass on. (500)

In *A Thousand Ships*, this is mirrored by the poet's dependence on Calliope to recount the stories of the women. The poet does not possess inherent knowledge of these events; instead, he channels Calliope's omniscient narrative ability. This dynamic underscores the muse's ultimate control over the content and authenticity of the epic, positioning the poet as an intermediary rather than an originator of the narrative. Additionally, Calliope consistently distances the poet from any narrative authority. In the muse's chapters, the poet is deprived of a narrative voice, and even potential dialogues are subsumed by Calliope, who paraphrases his words within her own speech, whereas granting him active

dialogue would endow him the role of secondary narrator (Jong "Narrators and Narratees"): "Does everyone have to die, he asks, plaintive like a child" (*ATS* 108). This effectively strips the poet of any narrative power, reinforcing Calliope's dominance over the storytelling process.

In this light, Calliope's chapters can be seen as a meta-narrative that explores the dynamics of storytelling itself. Centring Calliope's voice and minimising the poet's role, the narrative invites readers to reconsider the power structures inherent in the act of narration. This thematic exploration is deeply intertwined with feminist critiques of literary traditions, where the act of reclaiming narrative power is central to challenging patriarchal dominance in this field, as noticed in the previous chapter. I had previously hinted at this dynamic between muses and poets, when commenting on the choice of having Calliope open the novel.

On the other hand, it is also possible to argue that neither Calliope nor the poet are the primary narrator. According to Calliope's perspective, the narrative of most importance should be the women's stories. Consequently, we must consider the novel in its entirety as one primary narrative, with multiple smaller narratives embedded within it. To better understand the relationship between these narratives, I must turn to Mieke Bal, who extensively explored narrative embedding. Bal asserts that an embedded narrative must follow three key practices. Firstly, "the transition between [narratives] must be perceptible" ("Narrative Embedding" 43), meaning that there can be no doubt left of which narrative is at hand at any given moment. Secondly, embedded narratives always follow some type of "hierarchical relationship" (*ibid.*); in this context, hierarchy does not imply power or a sense of importance, but rather that there is a primary narrative with a primary goal, which encapsulates all the smaller narratives within it. Consequently, there is no juxtaposition among these narratives (*id.* 44), meaning that this primary narrative is never placed in "the same class" (*ibid.*) as the others. Lastly, and stemming from the previous point, the "embedded units must be members of the same class" (*ibid.*), ultimately creating a uniform level of importance among the embedded narratives. If the embedded narratives had different levels of importance, they would themselves contain further embedding, which is not the aim here. The goal is to have one singular primary narrative embedding multiple other narratives.

Calliope's chapters thus become one of these smaller narratives, akin to Penelope's letters or "The Trojan Women" chapters. The muse's chapters also serve as

metacommentary on the primary narrative. Accordingly, the primary narrator becomes a bodiless figure, unlike Calliope or the poet, completely detached from the story being narrated, with an all-knowing ability to access all events, past, present, and future, making this narrator an external omniscient presence. This interpretation shifts the focus from individual narrators to the collective tapestry of stories that make up the novel. Viewing the narrative as a series of interconnected yet distinct smaller narratives, the importance of the women's stories is elevated. Each woman's story contributes to the overarching narrative, with Calliope's and the poet's roles serving as framing devices rather than central voices. This structural approach highlights the thematic core of the novel, advocating for the multiplicity of female experiences and the necessity of reclaiming these voices from historical obscurity.

The concept of an external omniscient narrator aligns with this narrative's framework. This bodiless figure, devoid of a distinct personality or identity, has the authority to traverse different timelines and access the inner lives of all characters: "[this] narrator, like all epic narrators, tells about events from a distance past… and hence is not a character in his own story" (Jong "Narrators and Narratees"). Such a narrator can seamlessly weave together the various personal narratives, providing a comprehensive and cohesive story that remains faithful to the experiences of each individual woman. This strategy emphasises the interrelations of their fates and the collective impact of their stories. Positioning the primary narrative as a tapestry of women's stories, the novel moves away from a singular narrative voice, embracing instead a polyphonic structure where each character's voice is crucial. The external omniscient narrator serves to unify these voices, ensuring that each story is given its due weight and significance. Additionally, this interpretation invites readers to engage with the novel on a deeper level. It challenges them to piece together the fragmented narratives and recognise the thematic threads that bind them. The external omniscient narrator, while not a character in the traditional sense, becomes a guiding presence, helping readers navigate the interplay of stories. In the sections "Amplified" and "Recognised" the underlying purpose of this narrator for the goal of my analysis will be revealed.

Muted

In the chapters titled "The Trojan Women" we follow the former sovereigns of Troy while they await their fates at the shoreline of the fallen city. These chapters are one of the recurring narratives in *A Thousand Ships*, and they fall across a span of eleven chapters. Haynes uses these chapters to introduce many of the other narratives, as well as develop smaller subplots among the women themselves; I will come back to this latter aspect further on. One of the underlying narratives in these chapters is that the women wait for their unknown futures to unravel, while Cassandra already knows what awaits each of them, although none believe a word she says. Chapter nineteen plays on this notion the most, although it had already been hinted at before, more specifically at the end of chapters thirteen and sixteen.

In chapter thirteen, Hecuba and her daughter Polyxena are discussing the murderous nature of Achilles, while "[f]urther along the shore," "another cluster of the birds were hovering, waiting" and "Cassandra already knew why" (*ATS* 111). The queen argues that of all women's sons at Troy, Achilles' choice was to "butcher [her] sons" (*ibid.*), to which Cassandra adds "into the sand" that "he's not finished" (*ibid.*). Additionally, in chapter sixteen, Hecuba argues with Helen, blaming the Spartan queen for following Paris to Troy. Helen defends herself, claiming that she could not defy the will of the gods, and when Hecuba is about to counterargue this, Cassandra interrupts her mother with "a curdling howl" (*id.* 138):

> Cassandra was blind to her, staring along the coast, where the light was already fading. Two Greek soldiers were walking back towards their camp, towards the women, carrying something heavy between them on a litter. Although Cassandra knew it was not something, but someone. (*ibid.*)

One significant aspect of these passages for my analysis lies in the narrator's use of focalisation among the characters. As I will analyse further, the majority of "The Trojan Women" chapters are narrated through Hecuba's focalisation, aligning these chapters directly with Euripides' *Trojan Woman*, as the queen's plight and suffering takes centre stage in both texts. However, there are instances where the narrator diverges to explore different facets of the narrative through other characters, as is evident in the preceding passages.

In the first excerpt, where Hecuba is talking with Polyxena, the narrator gains insight into Cassandra's knowledge, which remains inaccessible to the other characters,

not only due to the physical impenetrability of Cassandra's mind but also because of their inherent disbelief. Nonetheless, the narrator is aware that Cassandra "already" knows what is to come from the gulls who will "soon start diving, one after another, into the shoal of fish in the shallow waters" (*id.* 111), since Cassandra knows the birds are not pecking fish, but a body. Moreover, at the end of the chapter, the priestess whispers "her words into the sand," seeming to suggest that these words were not heard by Hecuba nor Polyxena, hinting at a shift in focalisation towards Cassandra, who silently hears and indirectly engages in the conversation. Similarly, in the passage from chapter sixteen, the focalisation shifts from Hecuba to Cassandra. Hecuba, watching the two Greek soldiers walking in their direction, is the one who assumes they are carrying something, because Cassandra, akin to the narrator, knows "that it was not something, but someone."

What Cassandra sees in chapter thirteen is finally revealed, in chapter nineteen, to be her youngest brother Polydorus, who washed ashore, murdered at the hands of the treacherous King Polymestor:

> 'It's him, it's him, it's him,' Cassandra screamed. … 'My brother,' she said. 'My brother, my little brother, my youngest brother, the saved one is dead, he is dead, he is dead, he is dead.' (*id.* 163)

Cassandra warns the other Trojan women at the beginning of the chapter that what the Greek soldiers are about to show them is Polydorus, the youngest Trojan prince, who had been sent away to King Polymestor in Thrace, trusting him to keep the boy safe, but the women are unable to believe her words. Hecuba, fearing Cassandra would give away the feigned liberty of young Polydorus, demands her daughter to stay silent (*ibid.*), while Polyxena disregards her sister's words as "nonsense" and proceeds to comfort their mother instead (*id.* 164), and Andromache decides to try and calm Cassandra, patting between Cassandra's shoulder blades (*ibid.*). Despite the different reactions, none of the women give any thought to Cassandra's words, thinking it completely impossible for Polydorus to be dead. When the boy's body is unveiled, Polyxena's words, echoing Cassandra's, are the ones revealing the identity of Polydorus: "'My brother,' said Polyxena. 'My beautiful brother'" (*id.* 166). The chapter ends as it started, with Cassandra:

> And somehow they all forgot that Cassandra had told them this was coming and they had persuaded themselves that she had claimed something completely different. Something which had been proven false, as always. (*ibid.*)

The closing passage reflects the recurring pattern of Cassandra's bind throughout the narrative. Despite her foresight and attempts to warn others, her words are often misinterpreted or disregarded, leading to tragic consequences. The phrase "they all forgot [what] Cassandra had told them" speaks to the disregard of her agency and voice from collective memory, as her warnings are overlooked.

Additionally, the fact that Polyxena echoes Cassandra's words, saying "My brother" upon seeing Polydorus' body, adds a layer of complexity. On one level, Polyxena's echoing of Cassandra's words could be seen as a validation of the priestess' prophetic abilities. Despite the disbelief and scepticism directed towards her sister, Polyxena's repetition of the exact phrase she used serves as evidence that Cassandra's premonition was correct. However, there is also a sense of irony and tragedy in this echo. While it confirms the accuracy of Cassandra's warning, it also highlights the futility of her attempts to communicate with others. Despite Polyxena essentially repeating Cassandra's warning verbatim, the other women still fail to recognise or acknowledge the priestess' foreknowledge, emphasising the persistent disbelief and dismissal of her voice and agency. Polyxena's echoing serves as a reminder that power and agency extend beyond mere foresight, but also encompass the ability to be heard and believed by others. While Cassandra possesses the prophetic power to foresee events, her agency at this point in the narrative is undermined by the lack of validation and recognition from those around her. This intertwining of power, agency, and perception lies at the heart of Cassandra's narrative arc in *A Thousand Ships*, underscoring the challenges she faces in asserting her voice amidst pervasive disbelief and dismissal.

Amplified

Although "The Trojan Women" chapters are dedicated to following the women of the house of Troy as they await their fates, each of these women is also given a chapter of their own, titled after each of their names, where their fates are further explored. As I have previously explained, these chapters are narrated by an external omniscient narrator, meaning that this narrator has access to all events, past, present, and future. Therefore, the stories of these women are not narrated by the women themselves; instead, the narrator tells the stories from the women's perspectives, focalising the narration through them, platforming some insight into their perceptions of the unfolding events. However, this is

not the case for the former queen of Troy, whose story is instead conveyed through the focalisation of Cassandra's visions. This narrative choice reflects the dynamics of their relationship as depicted in preceding chapters, where Hecuba repeatedly silenced and undermined Cassandra's ability to speak. This dynamic is introduced early in the narrative, in the first of "The Trojan Women" chapters, where the women of the royal house are described in relation to Hecuba:

> Polyxena sat at her mother's feet, absently rubbing her hand up and down her mother's calf like a small child. Andromache sat slightly apart from her mother-in-law. She was not born a Trojan but had married Hector and become one of them … And Cassandra faced the ocean, her mouth moving soundlessly. (*id.* 33)

This segment showcases the complex dynamics of Hecuba's relationships with her daughters. Polyxena is more than once recognised as Hecuba's favourite daughter, so her physical proximity to her mother, seated at her feet and gently caressing her calf, portrays a sense of closeness and intimacy characteristic of a child seeking comfort from her mother. Andromache's positioning slightly apart from Hecuba symbolises her status as an outsider, despite her marriage to Hector and her integration into the Trojan royal household. The subtle distance hints at the nuanced dynamics within the family, reflecting Andromache's role as an adopted member rather than a blood relative. Meanwhile, Cassandra's solitary stance, facing the ocean with "her mouth moving soundlessly," underscores her isolation from her family, as she is even further apart from Hecuba than Andromache is. Hecuba's contempt for Cassandra is palpable, evident in her daughter's physical and emotional detachment from the familial circle. Cassandra's placement in relation to Hecuba at such an early stage in the narrative hints at the web of emotions and tensions that will shape their relationship.

This dynamic is further enhanced in chapter nine, where Hecuba admits that if she was given the chance to keep one of her daughters, she would pick Polyxena, her "most beautiful daughter" (*id.* 64), as opposed to Cassandra who "was a torment" (*id.* 62). In this chapter, we are introduced to Hecuba's perception of what happened to Cassandra, specifically the moment when Cassandra was blessed by Apollo with the gift of prophecy, yet simultaneously cursed by the same god to lack the gift of persuasion. Hecuba, however, remains unaware of the divine origins and consequences of Cassandra's curse. In her memory, her daughter, who had once "been such a lovely child" (*ibid.*), suddenly changed one day and "the madness came upon her" (*ibid.*). From then on, Cassandra

spoke “gibberish” to her mother (*ibid.*), screaming to everyone “one terrible thing after another, one disaster to befall them and then one more and one more” (*id.* 63). This disconnection between Hecuba’s understanding and the actual events underscores the tragic miscommunication and misunderstanding between mother and daughter, further emphasising Cassandra’s isolation and the devastating impact of Apollo’s curse on her life. Therefore, when Hecuba reached a breaking point with Cassandra’s “nonsense” (*ibid.*), she “slapped her with her left hand until there were bright red fingermarks on both of her daughter’s cheeks” (*ibid.*), hoping Cassandra would stop the screaming and crying, and start muttering and murmuring “her curses and madness more quietly” (*id.* 64). This method proved effective, as evidenced in “The Trojan Women” chapters, where Cassandra’s first words do not appear until chapter thirteen, the fourth of these chapters. Even then, her words are not directed at her mother, or anyone for that matter. Instead, when Cassandra speaks of her visions, her words are “whispered” “into the sand” (*id.* 111), as discussed in the previous section, highlighting how Cassandra’s voice and agency have been systematically suppressed by her mother’s harsh treatment, forcing her to internalise her prophecies and further isolating her.

The description of the women of Troy in comparison to Hecuba underscores my previous comment that “The Trojan Women” chapters in *A Thousand Ships* are commonly narrated through Hecuba’s focalisation, in comparison to the other women’s focalisation. This decision is logical, considering she is the highest sovereign member amongst them, therefore representing the Trojan women in a broader sense. Moreover, Euripides’ *Trojan Women* served as source of inspiration for the creation of these chapters (*id.* 341), and in this tragedy Hecuba is also one of the “heroic” figures, enduring the “suffering inflicted on her by the Greeks, and in her fight to preserve her family,” as Shirley Barlow notes in her translation of Euripides’ *Hecuba* (19). In this Euripidean play, Hecuba is the only Trojan woman on stage throughout the entire performance, which is mirrored in “The Trojan Women” chapters by having her focalisation reign over the other women’s. Hecuba is the first and last character addressed in these chapters, and when the focalisation bounces between the other women, it bounces back to Hecuba: “Hecabe was squinting at the sun as the tide came in. Her women thronged around her still: she remained their queen until they were separated and taken away” (*ATS* 61).

Taking this into account, Haynes’ choice to narrate Hecuba’s story through Cassandra’s visions is deeply ironic. The irony lies in the fact that Hecuba, who has

continually suppressed Cassandra's voice, inadvertently depends on that very voice to have her story told. Chapter twenty-eight not only offers a glimpse into Hecuba's future but also provides the reader with a clearer understanding of how Cassandra's visions operate. We are first told that "Cassandra saw the future as though it were the past" (*id.* 213), which creates from the start an interesting relationship between this character and how time will be perceived in this chapter. Cassandra's visions are introduced as recollections since the priestess' visions are "as clear as a recent memory" because the events unfolding past her eyes have "all the clarity of something she had already seen happen" (*ibid.*).

Consequently, Cassandra's visions warp her perception of time and entangle her in a perpetual state of confusion where past, present, and future are indistinguishably intertwined, creating an interesting parallel between Cassandra and the omniscient narrator present in the story. On the one hand, both have vast access to events across time, although it is possible to argue that the narrator's access has no boundaries within the narrative, whereas Cassandra's is limited.[20] They also share a broader understanding of the narrative landscape in comparison to most of the other characters. However, there is one crucial difference that separates Cassandra from the narrator. An omniscient narrator will hold control over how and when information is revealed, shaping the reader's interpretation of the story through selective narrative structures, whereas Cassandra is at the mercy of her visions. She lacks the control to dictate how her knowledge is presented to others and cannot influence how others perceive the events she foresees due to the curse that undermines her credibility.

Cassandra's prophetic abilities force her to confront distressing scenes with a vividness that eliminates any sense of temporal normality. As she attempts to anchor herself in the present, Cassandra's visions of the future constantly intrude, showcasing her struggle to distinguish between what is and what will be. This is acutely depicted when she tries to escape the horrific images of her mother's vengeance on Polymestor, only to find them persistently resurfacing each time she blinks:

> She pushed the vision away, but every time she blinked, it was all she could see: ruined sockets and thick dark blood. She tried to come back to the present, turn away from the future and be

[20] In chapter thirty-six it is disclosed that the irony of Cassandra being Agamemnon's war prize only becomes clear to the prophetess when she sees him standing in front of her (*ATS* 275), meaning that some things are only revealed to her in specific environments, therefore limiting her access to events across time.

> where she was. Sometimes she could walk herself back, step by step from tomorrow to today, and the taking of each small step reduced her potent desire to scream. (*id.* 214)

The confusion intensifies as she finds herself unable to retreat from the impending disasters that loom over her mind. Her efforts to walk back "step by step from tomorrow to today," reducing her urge to scream, highlight her desperate attempts to reclaim a sense of normalcy. Yet, these attempts are often futile, as there are moments when she is trapped, only capable of moving forward into the catastrophic future, unable to find solace in the present: "But this time she found she could not travel backwards, only forward to disaster, over and over again" (*ibid.*).

Cassandra's visions are not just premonitions; they feel like lived experiences that provide her with an eerie familiarity with places and events she has never encountered. For instance, her familiarity with Thrace, a place she has never seen but knows intimately through her visions, blurs the line between experience and foresight:

> The scene dissolved and reformed as Odysseus' ship landed high on the sands of the Chersonese coast. Cassandra knew it was Thrace — a place she had never seen — as well as if she had grown up there. Her visions were never wrong, never lacking in detail, even if she could not always understand them. (*id.* 215)

Moreover, her prophecies often merge with actual memories, further complicating her perception of reality. The moment where she senses her mother's presence near the place where Polydorus' body had been rowed out to sea exemplifies this blend of prophecy and memory. Although this is a true memory, albeit someone else's, it feels as impactful as her visions of the future, demonstrating how past events haunt her with the same intensity as future ones. This amalgamation of memory and prophecy intensifies her sense of helplessness, as she is unable to change either. Additionally, Cassandra's recognition that her prophecies are always too late, even when prophesied ahead of time, underscores the tragic irony of her gift. She is deeply aware that her foreknowledge is rendered useless by the disbelief of those around her, leaving her in a state of isolated omniscience; her all-encompassing understanding of events becomes a source of profound isolation, as her ability to foresee and understand what others cannot leaves her disconnected from those who dismiss her foresights.

> She felt another rush of memory, like a blow to her stomach. But this was a true memory, even if it was not hers. It was not the future she could sense now, this was the past. Her mother was right near the spot where Polydorus' body had been rowed out of the bay, into the open sea …

> Cassandra's visions were always too late, even when they should not have been. She had long since learned that no one heard the truth from her, that even if they listened, they did not hear. (*id.* 216)

Cassandra's detailed and accurate prophecies, while a testament to her skill, are dismissed by those around her. This disbelief diminishes her influence and ability to effect change, reducing her role to that of a powerless observer. The passage where she foresees the fate of Polydorus but is not believed (*id.* 163), and subsequently how her prophecy is confirmed too late (*id.* 166) underscores this point.

Nonetheless, the interplay between Cassandra's prophetic insights and her role as focaliser of her mother's future highlights a profound irony and subversion of the power dynamics between them. Despite Hecuba's previous efforts to silence Cassandra, it is Cassandra's voice that ultimately testifies a crucial chapter of Hecuba's fate. This juxtaposition underscores a significant shift in agency and highlights the complexity of their relationship. In revealing her mother's future, Cassandra reclaims her voice and asserts her agency in a domain where she had been previously muted. This narrative choice symbolises a reclamation of power because Cassandra's foresight and voice become instrumental in shaping the reader's understanding of Hecuba's fate.

The following moment in the chapter exemplifies the physical and psychological control Hecuba exerts over Cassandra: "She felt a wave of revulsion rip through her and the familiar taste rising in her throat. She did not dare vomit, as Hecabe would punish her for the mess…" (*id.* 213). The threat of punishment for something as involuntary as vomiting highlights the overpowering environment Cassandra endures. Hecuba's authoritative demeanour represents her efforts to maintain control, and silence Cassandra's unsettling prophecies. This suppression of Cassandra's physical reactions is a metaphor for the broader silencing of her prophetic voice, reinforcing the lack of agency Cassandra experiences within her own family. Additionally, the scars Cassandra bears from her mother's slaps serve as a tangible reminder of Hecuba's attempts to suppress her. The ceremonial jewellery, a symbol of Hecuba's authority and status, juxtaposed with the violence inflicted on Cassandra, highlights the power dynamics at play: "Cassandra felt a flicker of heat from the tiny white scars on her brown bone, from the time her mother had hit her while wearing her full ceremonial jewellery" (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, Hecuba's reluctance to kiss Cassandra goodbye, stemming from a fear of an emotional breakdown, indicates a deeper, albeit hidden, connection and regret. This moment underscores the tragedy of their relationship: despite Hecuba's persistent efforts to silence and control Cassandra, there remains an underlying, unexpressed emotional bond. This complexity adds depth to Hecuba's character, suggesting that perhaps her actions are driven not only by a desire to suppress Cassandra's unsettling prophecies but also her own inability to cope with the impending doom Cassandra foresees.

> As she walked on Trojan ground for the last time, her mother made no effort to hold Cassandra, or kiss her goodbye. But Cassandra saw something in her eyes which was not familiar. The exasperation which usually marked Hecabe was gone. She did not kiss her daughter, it was true. But she did not kiss her because she feared the humiliation of breaking down in tears. (*id.* 215)

This quote also demonstrates that Cassandra's prophetic abilities extend beyond merely seeing future events, but she also possesses an acute perception of the emotions of the people within her visions. In this passage, the shift in Hecuba's demeanour is something that Cassandra perceives intuitively, despite her mother's outward actions remaining cold and detached. The ability to discern this internal emotional struggle indicates that Cassandra's visions encompass not only external events but also the nuanced emotional landscapes of those involved. Cassandra's recognition of her mother's fear of humiliation reveals an empathetic dimension to her prophetic gift, highlighting Cassandra's tragedy: she is not only burdened with foreknowledge but also with an intimate understanding of the personal suffering and emotional turmoil that accompany these events.

Chapter twenty-eight emerges in the same way that Cassandra's visions do, mixing past, present, and future events, as the priestess walks the reader through her mother's fate. Once Hecuba and Odysseus arrive in Thrace, the scene dissolves into a real past memory, only for it to "again" disappear in front of Cassandra's eyes, taking the reader back to the present of Cassandra's visions, but the future of Hecuba's fate:

> Again the scene disappeared and this time it reappeared as Polymestor strode down the grass-tufted sand … Cassandra could smell the suffocating sweetness of cinnamon and myrtle with which the man had scented his hair oil. (*id.* 217)

The detailed sensory description highlights the all-encompassing nature of Cassandra's visions. The specific mention of cinnamon and myrtle immerses Cassandra fully in the vision, making this detail not just a background element, but what actively intrudes upon

her consciousness, rendering the vision inescapable. The overwhelming nature of these sensations can be suffocating, as indicated in the description of the sweetness, suggesting that these experiences are not just vivid but also severe and difficult to bear. Passages such as this one exemplify how Cassandra's prophecies engage all her senses, creating an overwhelming experience that further distances her from real life events. This immersion into her visions through all senses — sight, sound, smell, touch,[21] and taste — blurs the boundaries between past, present, and future, hindering Cassandra from grounding herself in the present reality, as the sensations from her visions are as powerful as those from her actual environment. This sensory confusion contributes to her sense of disorientation and isolation, as she is continually pulled away from the present moment into the realm of foresight. The sense of smell is further evoked throughout the narration of Hecuba's future:

> The smell of fear was unmistakeable now. (*id.* 220)
>
> Cassandra could see the sweat soaking through his thick embroidered robe. The sour stench battled with the sweet cinnamon perfume and Cassandra felt as though her throat was closing up. (*id.* 221)

The "smell of fear" is particularly striking as it not only evokes the physical presence of fear but also symbolises the pervasive dread that accompanies her prophetic knowledge. The clash of the "sour stench" with the "sweet cinnamon perfume" creates a sensory conflict that mirrors the inner turmoil and chaos of the events she foresees. The smell of fear, the sight of sweat, and the physical sensation of her throat closing create an experience that is as real and immediate as any present event. This blurring of temporal boundaries confuses her sense of time and place, making it difficult for her to stay anchored in the present moment.

In addition, Cassandra's psychological immersion into the prophecies also blurs the lines of her sense of morality. After entrusting the youngest of the Trojan princes to Polymestor, a supposed ally, this trust was broken, and the Thracian king had Polydorus killed. This treachery is what drives Hecuba to seek vengeance, murdering Polymestor's sons and blinding the king, ensuring that the last image he ever sees is the death of his own children. For Cassandra, however, this revenge was bittersweet, alike the senses

[21] I do not address this sensation during the analysis, as it is the least striking one in relation to the issues grounding this study, but it is present in the following description: "She tried to focus on the sand beneath her mother's sandaled feet; full of round grey pebbles and bright white shells which she would have liked to pick up so she could run her thumbnail across their neat ridges" (*ATS* 215).

overwhelming her. The all-consuming sensory and emotional tumult she experiences as she saw Polymestor' fate through her mother's intensifies her empathy for the traitor. Cassandra had to remind herself of all the horrible actions carried out by the king as she foretold her mother's plan:

> Her beautiful brother had been beaten before he was killed by the treacherous Greek king, who had thought no one would ever find out. Cassandra tried to cling to this — the unspeakable man's vicious motivation — as … [she] saw her mother's lips disappear into a thin line. She saw it all. (*id.* 216–7)

The sensory details as well as her physical reactions highlight the intensity and realism of her foresights, blurring the boundaries between past, present, and future. This sensory overload not only isolates her from others but also diminishes her agency, as she becomes a passive recipient of her visions.

From Polymestor's entry (*id.* 217), the scenes are henceforth narrated while always reminding the reader that they are part of Cassandra's visions. Additionally, Cassandra's insight into some of the thoughts the people involved had are also shared:

> Cassandra watched as Polymestor wrestled against his nature, to talk when he was nervous. (*id.* 219)

> Again the scene slid away. Cassandra blinked and saw the boys running behind the slave, running towards their father. … They reached their father, and were suddenly shy in front of all the strangers. (*id.* 221–22)

The preceding passages highlight Cassandra's role as a focaliser, through which the narrative is filtered and conveyed to the reader. As focaliser, Cassandra's visions grant profound insight, allowing the reader to perceive not only the surface-level events but also the underlying psychological states of those involved. This depth of insight enriches the narrative, adding layers of complexity to her character and the events she foresees, possible due to her role as focaliser.

Cassandra's role as a focaliser significantly impacts the representation of time in the narrative. Her visions do not adhere to the linear progression of time; instead, they blur the boundaries between past, present, and future. This non-linear perception of time creates a sense of fluidity and, at the same time, disorientation, both for Cassandra and the reader. The description of scenes sliding away and being replaced by new visions emphasises the uncontrollable nature of Cassandra's prophetic gift. This seamless

transition between different temporal moments underscores the instability and unpredictability of her experiences. For Cassandra, time is not a fixed continuum but a shifting, often chaotic series of events that she perceives simultaneously. This challenges the traditional linear narrative structure, where events follow a chronological order, and instead introduces a fragmented portrayal of time.

Regarding the relationship between Cassandra and the narrator, it is essential to consider whether they are in conflict or working together. In many ways, they collaborate to create a rich, multi-dimensional narrative. The narrator relies on Cassandra's unique perspective to provide depth and emotional resonance to the story. Her prophecies offer insights that a traditional, linear narrative might not convey as effectively. However, there is also an inherent tension between Cassandra's chaotic, non-linear perception of time and the narrator's presentation of a coherent story. This tension can be seen as a form of conflict, where Cassandra's fragmented visions challenge the narrator's ability to maintain a clear and structured narrative. Yet, this conflict is also productive, as it allows the narrative to explore complex temporal dynamics and emotional circumstances that a more straightforward storytelling approach might miss. I will come back to this dynamic in the following section.

All the intricate functions of Cassandra's role as a medium for her mother's story reflect her non-existent role in the text that inspired this chapter. There are, as I have stated previously, multiple differences between the classical plays and Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*. Specifically, when comparing Euripides' *Hecuba* to Haynes' novel, two key differences stand out for this analysis. Firstly, the setting diverges markedly. In the play, the Greek fleet returning home has stopped in Thrace due to unfavourable winds for leaving Troy without properly honouring the deceased Achilles (*Hec*. vv. 114–16). This setting is crucial as it situates the narrative in a peripheral, ambiguous territory, emphasising the transitional and uncertain state of the characters, especially Hecuba. On the contrary, in the novel only Odysseus and his soldiers venture to Thrace. This adjustment in setting shifts the context of the narrative and the dynamics of the characters involved.

Secondly, the bargain for vengeance differs significantly between the two texts. In Euripides' account, Hecuba strikes a deal with Agamemnon to avenge her son while, in Haynes' rendition, she makes a similar deal with Odysseus instead. This alteration not only changes the nature of the interaction but also emphasises Odysseus' role and justifies

his journey to Thrace independently. In the tragedy, Hecuba is portrayed as a deeply sorrowful figure, overwhelmed by grief and loss. Her character arc is driven by her immense suffering and her quest for vengeance. Haynes' portrayal of Hecuba presents her as a more level-headed and strategic character, even serving as an equal to Odysseus, known for his skills in rhetoric:

> 'You will accompany me in the morning,' he said…
>
> 'Why are you taking me? Tell me the truth.'
>
> 'I thought you'd enjoy the voyage home.'
>
> 'Your home is not mine.'
>
> 'Our ships will sail north before they head west,' he said.
>
> She tried to conceal the hope dancing in her eyes. 'Where will you put down first?'
>
> 'Thrace,' he replied. (*ATS* 210–11)

In the previous "The Trojan Women" chapter, Odysseus had already hinted at a possibility of revenge for Hecuba: "there is no one else to blame [for the death of Polydorus]," said the queen; to which Odysseus replied, "[h]ow about the man who killed him?" (*id.* 198). Subsequently, his choice to take Hecuba as his war prize comes as a way to assist Hecuba in getting the revenge she seeks. In contrast to Euripides' play, the agreement between Hecuba and Odysseus in Haynes' novel is much more subtle and sophisticated. There is no need for Hecuba to supplicate or beg; instead, their interaction is marked by a mutual understanding.

This distinct portrayal of Hecuba is significantly enriched by the focalisation through Cassandra. Haynes presents Hecuba as a multifaceted character whose grief is tempered by strategic discernment and rhetorical skill. This nuanced depiction is largely facilitated due to Cassandra's unique perspective, which provides profound observational insights into Hecuba's emotional state and strategy: "And her mother's expression, as the Greek hero held out his arm to help her onto his ship, was almost triumphant. She still carried herself like a queen…" (*id.* 214).

Through Cassandra's eyes, we see Hecuba's inner strength and regal bearing even in the face of defeat. This is not merely a physical description but an insight into Hecuba's psychological state — her triumph is not in the situation but in her steadfast demeanour. This level of nuanced observation is possible because Cassandra, with her deep emotional connection to Hecuba, can perceive and convey these subtleties. The focalisation allows

readers to experience Hecuba's complex emotions and the strength she derives from her identity as a queen, which might be lost in a more detached narrative. Furthermore, Cassandra's ability to see past, present, and future events adds a layer of tragic irony to Hecuba's portrayal. Cassandra knows the impending doom but is helpless to alter it. This foreknowledge intensifies the portrayal of Hecuba's "triumphant" expression — readers understand that this moment of triumph is fleeting and underscored by impending tragedy. Therefore, Cassandra's focalisation transforms what could be a straightforward narrative into a richly layered portrayal, emphasising the tragic dignity of Hecuba and the inevitable march towards her fate, seen through the lens of her daughter.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two texts, and therefore encompassing all my preceding arguments, is the character of Cassandra. In Euripides' play, Cassandra is merely mentioned and does not appear as a character, thus playing no active role. In Haynes' novel, however, she assumes one of the most active roles, as focaliser for her mother's story. This transformation has all the significant narratological repercussions previously analysed.

Chapter twenty-eight closes bringing Cassandra back to her real present, seating next to Hecuba, Andromache, and Polyxena at the shore of Troy, only to take her away again, to her mother's and sister's futures:

> Cassandra took in jagged breaths, desperate to remain calm. She closed her eyes and then opened them again in the present, to see her mother, her sister, her sister-in-law, all sitting beside her on the rocks, just as they had been before she followed her mother to Thrace. But then the scene began to play again from the beginning once more. It was no less horrifying to see it again. More so, in fact, now she had seen so much of what was to come. (*id.* 226)

The passage begins with Cassandra attempting to ground herself in the present moment. This brief respite from her visions offers a glimpse of normalcy, but it is short-lived. Despite her efforts to remain calm and present, Cassandra is quickly pulled back into her prophetic visions, which replay before her eyes. As Cassandra witnesses the scene unfolding once more, she experiences a heightened sense of horror, exacerbated by her foreknowledge of the events to come. There it at play here an interesting undertone in Cassandra's sense of empathy in these circumstances. It is possible to state that Cassandra's character is imbued with a deep pathos, for she is inherently and tragically tormented by the knowledge of the inevitable and horrific events of the future. Consequently, she is being haunted by ghosts that have not yet materialised. To

understand this, we must reconsider the concept of ghosts not as traumas or unresolved issues from someone's past, but as anticipated experiences and sufferings. Cassandra here, once again, inverts the temporal direction of the narrative, pushing the present narrative into the past by taking it to the future in the first place; meaning that she suffers, in the present, the events happening in the future as if they were past experiences, as if they were ghosts haunting her. The repetition of the vision intensifies her despair, as she is forced to relive the impending tragedies that await her family and her people. Despite her attempts to prepare herself, Cassandra remains powerless to alter the course of fate, trapped in a cycle of witnessing and foretelling doom.

Perhaps one of the most interesting characteristics of this chapter is the fact that the narrator, the focaliser, and the actor are three different identities. In the previous chapter of this dissertation, I had already hinted at the possibility of having multiple identities acting on the different layers of the narrative; chapter twenty-eight brings it to life, where Hecuba is the actor of the fabula, Cassandra the focaliser of the story, and the narrator is the one narrating the text. From a narratological standpoint, this separation may significantly impact the way the story is told to and received by the reader, as it allows for a more complex and layered narrative structure. In this section, I have mentioned the fragmented nature of Cassandra's visions, how they come and go, push and pull the narrative, take her and leaver her from the present to the future to the past. Playing the role of focaliser, Cassandra consequently provides a subjective, emotionally charged perspective. To balance this, the presence of a separate narrator, someone external to the narrative, adds a level of distance and objectivity. Whereas this chapter could have had the same identity play all three roles, this separation introduces layers of complexity and fragmentation which would not have been accessible to one identity alone. These different layers encourage the readers to interpret the characters' motivations and emotions from three different perspectives.

Recognised

Chapter thirty-nine introduces us to an aspect of Cassandra's agency which had not been explored before in the novel. Dedicated to the queen of Mycenae, this chapter delves into the story of the vengeful Clytemnestra, as she orchestrates the plan for the actions which we are so familiarised with in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. There are a lot of

moments in this chapter that offer the opportunity to be analysed, however for the purpose of this dissertation, I will concern myself only with the scenes in which Clytemnestra and Cassandra interact. As much of the chapter is narrated through Clytemnestra's focalisation, the following description of Cassandra provides some insight into the first impression she caused on the Mycenaean queen:

> And in the very centre of the group, just behind Agamemnon, surrounded by his men, she saw the priestess. It was all she could do not to laugh. Was this the trophy from the war, while his brother took Helen, daughter of Zeus and Leda? She was barely more than a child, though she wore her priestess's robes, the fillets around her hair waving as she walked. Her mouth moved all the time, Clytemnestra noticed, as though she were muttering words without pause. (*id.* 298–99)

This passage begins placing Cassandra in a central position, indicating her importance, but also her isolation. Clytemnestra's rhetorical question underscores a sense of disbelief and irony. She compares Cassandra to Helen, suggesting a disparity in value. While Helen is seen as a prize of divine lineage, Cassandra, despite her prophetic abilities and status, is reduced to a simple war trophy. Additionally, Clytemnestra's description emphasises Cassandra's youth and vulnerability, which suggests innocence and fragility, making her position as a war trophy even more tragic, further encapsulating Cassandra's powerlessness.

From here on, the text presents an interaction between these two women, where Clytemnestra not only listens to Cassandra, but also understands and believes what the priestess says. Consequently, Clytemnestra stands out as the only character in *A Thousand Ships* who actively listens to and believes Cassandra's prophecies. I would like to posit that this unique understanding likely stems from Clytemnestra's own profound experiences with fate and destiny. Unlike others who had dismissed the prophetess' words, Clytemnestra's acceptance of her fate enables her to perceive Cassandra's visions with clarity and credence. Clytemnestra begins asking the priestess what she sees:

> Cassandra was gazing at the palace roof, an expression of utter horror on her face. Startled, Clytemnestra turned to follow her gaze, but there was nothing there. 'What do you see?' she asked. As she spoke the words, she realized that she could not remember the last time she had been curious about someone else. (*id.* 303)

This marks a pivotal moment for both these characters individually as well as in their relationship. Asking Cassandra what she sees, Clytemnestra acknowledges the validity of

Cassandra's visions. Clytemnestra's question cuts through the ongoing dismissal Cassandra had encountered thus far, recognising that her visions hold truth and are worthy of attention. Even if Clytemnestra is not herself aware of this, or of the importance of this simple gesture, the reader knows that her actions are already strikingly different from the ones previously showcased in the novel.

For Clytemnestra, it also represents a profound shift in perspective. For the first time in over a decade, she exhibits genuine curiosity and empathy towards another person's experiences and thoughts. This moment of curiosity is particularly significant given Clytemnestra's long-standing focus on her own pain, loss, and quest for vengeance, which are all clearly highlighted throughout her chapter. Clytemnestra's newfound curiosity suggests an emerging empathy, a connection forged through shared suffering and a deep understanding of fate's cruelty. This moment of curiosity and the ensuing conversation underscore the unique relationship between Clytemnestra and Cassandra. It sets their interaction apart from Cassandra's relationships with other characters, who either ignore or ridicule her. Clytemnestra's willingness to engage in a true dialogue with Cassandra reflects a mutual recognition and respect. This interaction allows Cassandra's voice to be heard and reckoned, offering her a brief respite from the constant dismissal she faces.

Clytemnestra's question marks a moment of agency for Cassandra. Being asked to share her vision, Cassandra is invited to exercise her voice in a meaningful way. Unlike previous instances where her prophecies are ignored or ridiculed, this interaction empowers her to articulate her vision and be heard. This newfound ability to communicate and be taken seriously enhances Cassandra's sense of agency. It allows her to break free from the constraints of her curse and assert her prophetic authority. This moment also enhances the complexity of Cassandra's character. It highlights her enduring struggle for recognition and the tragic consequences of her unheeded prophecies, while also offering a glimpse of what could have been — a world where her prophetic abilities are respected, and her agency unbroken.

> 'I can see them dancing,' Cassandra said quietly. She waited for the slap that her mother would have given her, but Clytemnestra merely looked again at the roof and then back at the priestess. She did not seem angry, only intrigued.
>
> 'Who can you see dancing?' she asked. (*id.* 303–4)

When Cassandra quietly mentions seeing people dancing, she anticipates the usual silencing slap from her mother. However, Clytemnestra's response is markedly different. Instead of reacting with anger or disbelief, this queen is intrigued and asks Cassandra to elaborate. This shift from punishment to curiosity signifies a moment of recognition and validation for Cassandra. Asking "Who can you see dancing?" Clytemnestra opens a dialogue that acknowledges Cassandra's experience and grants her the space to explain her vision. The lack of reprimand and the invitation to share more details empower Cassandra, granting her a rare moment of control over her narrative.

> 'Black. Three black creatures, black fire licking around them. Why isn't the roof alight? All those black flames kissing it and teasing it, why doesn't it catch fire?'
>
> 'I don't know,' the queen replied. 'Why doesn't it catch fire?' (*id.* 304)

Cassandra's detailed vision of black creatures surrounded by black fire reveals once more the vividness and intensity of her foresight. Redirecting her own question to Cassandra, asking why the roof does not catch fire, Clytemnestra acknowledges the vision's reality within Cassandra's perception, creating a space where Cassandra's insights are taken seriously. Clytemnestra's question invites further explanation, showing a willingness to understand and explore Cassandra's vision rather than shutting it down. Engaging with Cassandra's description and asking a follow-up question, Clytemnestra shows that she is not only listening but also trying to comprehend the meaning behind the vision.

> Cassandra shook her head, chewing at her lips with tiny frantic bites. 'Don't know, don't know, don't know,' she said. 'Not real fire, it must not be real fire. Is it real? Can you see them now? Can you see the women dancing in the fire? Can you hear them screaming? Can you hear the hissing of the flames and the snakes?' (*ibid.*)

Cassandra's shaking head and frantic lip-biting indicate a high level of anxiety and distress. At the same time, Cassandra's doubt about the reality of the fire and the dancing women reflects a deeper uncertainty about the nature of her visions and their place in the real world. In contrast to the calm response from Clytemnestra in earlier passages, this shows Cassandra grappling with her own self-doubt. While Clytemnestra's earlier demeanour provided a moment of empowerment and validation, this passage reveals the underlying fragility of Cassandra's mental state. Her doubt about the reality of her visions, despite their vividness, underscores the psychological burden of her curse.

Furthermore, her frantic questioning highlights her need for confirmation from others, which she rarely receives.

> The queen thought carefully about her next question. ‘Are they screaming because of the fire?’
>
> ‘Not, not the fire. The fire doesn’t burn them. The fire is them. Do you understand? They are wreathed in fire, they bathe in fire. They do not scream for it. They scream for justice. No, not justice, that is not right. It is something like justice, but stronger. What is it?’ Cassandra flicked her gaze at the queen before turning it back to the rood, which still held her attention. (*ibid.*)

Cassandra’s difficulty in articulating the precise nature of her visions underscores her struggle to convey the depth and complexity of her prophetic insights. Clytemnestra’s careful consideration before asking her question highlights her genuine attempt to understand Cassandra’s vision, validating Cassandra’s experience and giving her the space to express her vision fully.

> ‘Did you say it was black fire?’
>
> ‘Yes! Yes, yes, yes!’ Cassandra screamed. ‘Black fire. That’s it. Can you see it?’ Knowing this would be her last day, having known it for so long, one thing she had never expected to feel was hope. But the sudden sense that another person might be able to see what she could see made her feel it nonetheless. It has been so long since she had been able to share anything with anyone.
>
> ‘No, I don’t have your gift,’ the queen said. ‘But I know what it is you see. Women wreathed in black fire? Those are the Furies.’ (*id.* 304–5)

Cassandra’s reaction to Clytemnestra’s question illustrates the hope she experiences at this moment is profound because it marks an instance where she feels someone might understand and validate her prophetic sight. The mention of “black fire” and the ensuing recognition by Clytemnestra that Cassandra is seeing the Furies is crucial. It highlights the depth and complexity of Cassandra’s visions. The Furies, or Erinyes, are deities of vengeance, which aligns with Cassandra’s earlier struggle to articulate the concept of justice: “something like justice, but stronger.” Furthermore, Clytemnestra’s recognition of Cassandra’s gift increasingly solidifies the bond between the two women, positioning Clytemnestra as a figure of support in a narrative where Cassandra is often marginalised.

Following this interaction, Clytemnestra continues to validate Cassandra’s visions, explaining that the Furies are there for vengeance. Cassandra also elaborates on this, saying that the Furies are waiting for Clytemnestra to act on this vengeance. On this, Clytemnestra explains that they are screaming for the vengeance of her daughter

Iphigenia, who was sacrificed by her father in hopes of better winds to sail to Troy. Cassandra is aware of these past events, recognising that "[h]e took her with a knife" (*id.* 305). To this, Clytemnestra questions if Agamemnon was the one who told Cassandra this, but the priestess clarifies that it was not him:

> 'She told me,' Cassandra said. 'Iphigenia … She was your precious, precious girl and he took her. But you will see her again, sooner than you think. She promises. Her brother and sister promise.'
>
> The tears streamed down Clytemnestra's face. 'Of course they do. They will want to avenge their father.' (*ibid.*)

This passage showcases the moment when Clytemnestra believes in a prophecy that has not yet materialised, revealing her unique understanding and acceptance of Cassandra's gift. This belief underscores Cassandra's newfound agency and the transformative power of validation. For Cassandra, whose prophecies have been met with disbelief, Clytemnestra's belief in her words is monumental, as it is not merely passive acceptance but an emotional acknowledgment that connects deeply with Clytemnestra's personal loss, testified in the tears streaming down Clytemnestra's face. Cassandra's prophecy about Iphigenia and Clytemnestra meeting again carries significant weight, because it foretells not only a reunion but also hints at future events driven by familial bonds and the desire for revenge. For the first time in the narrative, we witness a prophecy that empowers Cassandra, as it is believed and acted upon by Clytemnestra, thus granting Cassandra a moment of agency and influence. Clytemnestra's response reflects her acceptance and understanding of Cassandra's vision, rooted in Clytemnestra's own experiences and emotions, particularly the grief and anger over the loss of her daughter, Iphigenia. Her tears and acknowledgment of the prophecy reveal a deep emotional resonance and a readiness to embrace the inevitable future that Cassandra foresees. This interaction highlights the conflation of past, present, and future that is central to Cassandra's experience. Cassandra speaks of Iphigenia as if she is present, blurring the lines between the past event of Iphigenia's death and the future reunion. This blending of temporalities is a hallmark of Cassandra's visions, and Clytemnestra's acceptance of this prophecy further blurs these lines, as she emotionally connects with the vision of her daughter's return.

> 'You believe me?' Cassandra asked. No one has believed her for as long as she could remember. Who was this woman who was immune to Apollo's curse?

> ‘Of course I believe you. I saw him kill her.’
>
> ‘No one believes me.’
>
> ‘You can see the past and the future?’ Clytemnestra asked. Cassandra frowned. She had stopped noticing the difference between these two things so long ago that it seemed peculiar anyone else should. The queen seemed to hear her thoughts. ‘Ah, they are the same for you. So you know what is coming, and yet you do not run away.’ (*id.* 306)

In this exchange, Cassandra’s incredulous expression illuminates her enduring struggle with disbelief and isolation surrounding her prophetic abilities. Throughout her life, Cassandra has borne the weight of others’ scepticism and rejection, making Clytemnestra’s unwavering belief a striking departure from her usual experiences. Cassandra’s astonishment at Clytemnestra’s acceptance reflects her profound longing for validation and understanding, a sentiment that has been largely unfulfilled until this moment. Conversely, Clytemnestra’s response reveals a deep comprehension of Cassandra’s unique insight into time and prophecy. Acknowledging Cassandra’s perception of past and future as indistinguishable, Clytemnestra demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the priestess’ visions, transcending the limitations of conventional belief and embracing the complexities of Cassandra’s reality.

Clytemnestra’s affirmation is indicative of her steadfast belief in Cassandra’s prophecies, which is grounded in Clytemnestra’s own experience of witnessing Agamemnon sacrifice their daughter. Her belief in Cassandra’s foresight is not based on credence alone but on personal observation, making it even more compelling. Clytemnestra’s acceptance of Cassandra’s gift defies the pervasive disbelief and scepticism Cassandra has faced, positioning Clytemnestra as an ally and confidante.

Additionally, Clytemnestra hints at Cassandra that if she were to run away from the fate that awaits her today — Clytemnestra killing her — the queen would not try to stand in her way. However, Cassandra’s response to this is filled with calmness and acceptance, as she has lived this moment so many times in her mind that it is nothing but a certain past for her, deeming it meaningless to try and escape it. Cassandra’s acceptance of her fate is also present in the way that the priestess starts rejecting Apollo. She removes her headdress, drops it and steps on it (307), symbolising her defiance of Apollo. In this poignant exchange between Cassandra and Clytemnestra, we witness a significant shift in Cassandra’s relationship with Apollo and the consequences it holds for her prophetic abilities:

> ‘You spurn the god at last?’ she asked.
>
> ‘He has left me,’ Cassandra replied. ‘He is my god no longer.’ It was the only explanation for why the queen believed her when no one had for so long. Apollo’s curse no longer twisted her words on their way out of her mouth. The god was absent. (*id.* 307)

Cassandra’s response to Clytemnestra underscores a decisive shift in the prophetess, signalling a definitive break from Apollo’s influence. This renunciation symbolises Cassandra’s assertion of agency and autonomy, as she liberates herself from the constraints of divine fate and takes control of her own narrative. The absence of Apollo’s curse is portrayed as a catalyst for Clytemnestra’s newfound belief in Cassandra’s words.

As I have briefly mentioned, there seems to be a clash between Cassandra’s prophetic abilities and the linear narrative structure, thus creating a palpable tension between her visions and the unfolding story. This was clearly marked in her focalisation in Hecuba’s chapter, but it was also already evident in the preceding “The Trojan Women” chapters, as her attempts at sharing her foresight always seemed to obstruct the extant narrative. However, her encounter with Clytemnestra marks a pivotal moment where this tension dissipates, and the narrative achieves a harmonious flow. Clytemnestra, unlike others, understands and believes Cassandra’s prophecies, and this belief grants Cassandra a moment of agency and the power of persuasion. In this interaction, the narrative and Cassandra’s visions no longer conflict; instead, they complement each other. Cassandra’s foresights are seamlessly woven into the narrative through her dialogue with Clytemnestra, allowing her visions to flow naturally within the story.

As indicated above, this alignment between Cassandra and the narrative can be attributed to Clytemnestra’s acceptance of Cassandra’s prophecies. Since Clytemnestra believes and acts upon Cassandra’s foresight, the narrative accommodates these prophecies, integrating them smoothly into the unfolding events. The narrator, who possesses an omniscient perspective similar to Cassandra’s prophetic abilities, recognises the truth and inevitability of Cassandra’s visions. In this scenario, the narrator’s role is not to contradict but to affirm and elaborate on Cassandra’s insights. This mutual recognition of omniscience allows their perspectives to align, reducing conflict and enhancing narrative cohesion. This cooperation symbolises a thematic resolution within the story. The alignment of Cassandra’s visions with the narrative suggests a broader acceptance of female voices and experiences. Granting Cassandra agency through

Clytemnestra's belief, the narrative underscores the importance of listening to and validating women's experiences. Cassandra's moment of agency with Clytemnestra represents a significant development in her character arc. It showcases a shift from passive suffering to active influence, albeit brief. This evolution is mirrored in the narrative structure, as her visions are no longer intrusive disruptions but integral components of the story.

> 'Take me inside. You have your altar ready.'
>
> Clytemnestra nodded. 'All that's needed is the sacrifice,' she said.
>
> 'We'll conduct the sacrifice together.' (*ibid.*)

In this exchange between Cassandra and Clytemnestra, we witness a notable evolution in Cassandra's voice and agency, reflecting her growing confidence and assertiveness. Cassandra's direct command demonstrates a newfound assertiveness and clarity in her communication, indicative of her increasing certainty in her prophetic abilities. Her authoritative tone suggests a sense of agency and control over her own fate, as she now actively guides the course of events. Clytemnestra's compliance with Cassandra's request further underscores the shift in their relationship dynamics, as she concedes to Cassandra's expertise in matters of prophecy. The collaborative nature of their interaction, with Cassandra proposing they conduct the sacrifice together, reflects a mutual respect and trust that has developed between them. This exchange highlights Cassandra's evolving voice, which has grown more confident and assured, as well as her emerging agency in shaping her own narrative, culminating in this interaction.

Cassandra's interaction with Clytemnestra in Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* contrasts sharply with the portrayal of this scene in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. While much has been discussed about the "Cassandra scene" in Aeschylus' tragedy,[22] the interaction between these two women in the play is non-existent. The scene begins similarly in both texts, with the queen addressing Cassandra and asking her to enter the palace (*Ag*. vv. 1033–41). However, the divergence between the two versions becomes apparent from this point onwards, for Clytemnestra's patience and empathy towards Cassandra, displayed in Haynes' novel, is absent in Aeschylus' play. In Haynes' novel, Clytemnestra is portrayed with immense curiosity about Cassandra and her abilities. She takes the time to

[22] See Schein (1982), McClure (2020), and Rosenbloom (2020) for different analysis of Cassandra's silence and speech, as well as the role of this character in the extant tragedy.

communicate with Cassandra and to understand her words, offering the priestess the space and patience to gather her thoughts and articulate her visions. This empathetic and considerate approach contrasts with the hurried and dismissive attitude of Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*. In the play, Clytemnestra repeatedly expresses that she has no "time to waste" (v. 1054). Her reaction to Cassandra's silence is frustration and anger, as she is preoccupied with her plans for revenge, unlike in Haynes' novel where Cassandra's silence piques Clytemnestra's curiosity. In *Agamemnon*, it provokes the queen's anger, leading her to abandon the conversation, exiting the scene: "I'll not waste further words on her, / just to be disrespected in this way" (vv. 1067–8). The absence of empathy and patience in *Agamemnon* leaves no room for Clytemnestra to connect with Cassandra. Instead, she responds with hostility, accusing Cassandra of being "crazy and delusional" (v. 1065). This reaction reflects the typical response Cassandra elicits from others. In contrast, Haynes' Clytemnestra recognises and values Cassandra's abilities, granting her the validation and understanding that are crucial for her agency within the narrative.

The contrasting portrayals of Clytemnestra in these two texts significantly influence Cassandra's conduct. Both texts explore Cassandra's struggle with her role as prophetess, particularly through her use of language and her journey towards mastering it. This evolution is evident in the passages I have analysed and is also strikingly marked in the difference between her first and last words in the Aeschylean play:

> *otototototoi popoi da.*
>
> Apollo, Apolo!
>
> (*Ag*. vv. 1072–3)

> This is the way it is for humans:
>
> if they have good fortune, it is like a shadow;
>
> if they are unfortunate,
>
> it takes a dampened sponge
>
> to wipe the picture clean away.
>
> And I feel far more pity for these things than those.
>
> (*Ag*. vv. 1325–30)

Similarly to Haynes' novel, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra's initial words are filled with anguish and frustration, reflecting her inability to communicate effectively and be understood. The shift in Cassandra's demeanour is marked by the growing confidence

and clarity in her speech, culminating in her final words, which resonate with a sense of control and purpose.

Comparatively to the growth in control and agency depicted in *A Thousand Ships,* Aeschylus' portrayal of Cassandra also showcases this newfound grasp of her voice and agency. In "The Chorus Face Cassandra and Clytemnestra," Anne Lebeck explores this facet of the tragedy. Aeschylus employs a gradually developing structure to contrast Cassandra's initial lack of agency with her dominion at the scene's end (Lebeck 52). These continuous, measured changes in Cassandra's behaviour and language significantly shape her character and agency during her prophetic revelations to the chorus. Concurrently, the chorus's language also undergoes gradual changes, reflecting their evolving perception of Cassandra:

> The increasing anxiety of the chorus is reflected by the structure of the scene … In the remaining stanzas the roles are reversed: the chorus, who previously answered Cassandra's lyrics with iambs, take the lyric part, while Cassandra, grown calmer, closes each of her strophes with trimeter. (*ibid*.)

In both the novel and the play, Clytemnestra's authority and eloquence are central to her characterisation. David Raeburn, in "The Solo Characters," emphasises how the Mycenaean queen holds power in the Aeschylean tragedy, positioning Cassandra as "the first obstacle to [Clytemnestra's] powers of deception and persuasion" (lx). However, in Haynes' novel, Cassandra is not portrayed as a hindrance to Clytemnestra's power or plans. Instead, their narratives serve to reinforce and justify each other. While in the play, Clytemnestra has no time to waste on the concubine, the queen in the novel takes a deliberate interest in Cassandra, seeking to understand the role and significance of the priestess.

I would like to posit that the differences here arise not only from the author's creative choices, which are beyond the scope of this study, but also from the distinct narratees present in these texts, therefore shaping the narrative dynamics and character interactions. In *Agamemnon,* the primary narratees are the chorus and the audience. In "Kassandra: Mantic, Maenadic or Manic?" Matthew Dillon argues that the audience, well-acquainted with the context of the tragedy and aware of past and future plot developments, believes Cassandra's prophecies, for "the predictions are easily transparent" (6). However, its belief holds no authority in the narrative and does not influence Cassandra herself. In contrast, the chorus embodies a more immediate and

natural role within the play. Initially, they are sceptical of Cassandra's prophecies, reinforcing her isolation and tragic impotence (*id.* 6–7). The chorus' dismissive and confused reactions highlight Cassandra's struggle for agency and belief in her visions, underscoring the tragic irony of her foresight (*ibid.*). Conversely, in *A Thousand Ships*, while the role of the audience is translated into that of the reader, Clytemnestra herself becomes the direct narratee of Cassandra's prophecies. This direct engagement fosters a more nuanced and empathetic interaction, as Clytemnestra shows genuine curiosity and seeks to understand Cassandra's abilities. This shift in narratee from a collective, sceptical chorus to an individual, attentive queen alters the narrative focus, granting Cassandra a platform where her voice is heard and validated. Consequently, this transformation enables a deeper exploration of Cassandra's agency and Clytemnestra's complexity, as both women navigate their intertwined fates. Positioning Clytemnestra as a receptive narratee, Haynes' novel creates a space where Cassandra's prophetic insights are acknowledged, thereby enriching the narrative and elevating the portrayal of female resilience and solidarity. This nuanced engagement between the characters ultimately highlights the importance of fostering a more insightful and empowered representation of women's voices.

Fragmented

Beyond being the focalising voice in the chapter dedicated to her mother and playing a significant role alongside the narrator in "The Trojan Women" chapters, Cassandra is also given her own chapter. This allows readers to delve deeper into the complexities of a character who effortlessly disrupts and shapes the narrative.

Cassandra's chapter, the thirty-sixth in the novel, precedes Clytemnestra's chapter, which, as previously discussed, has significant repercussions for both characters. Chapter thirty-six begins with a pivotal moment in Cassandra's life: her encounter with Apollo, an event that profoundly shaped her reality. This day had been previously recounted, albeit inaccurately, by Hecuba, who lacked knowledge of Apollo's actions and their impact on her daughter's life. Cassandra, however, recalls this moment with vivid clarity. For many years, she had longed for the gift of prophecy, devoting herself to the gods and spending much of her time in the temple with her brother Helenus. One night, when Apollo appeared, "licking her earlobe to wake her" like a "viper whispering" (*ATS* 269) Cassandra initially believed she was being blessed by a divine apparition. However,

Apollo had other intentions. Blinded by her beauty, he demanded her affection twice, but Cassandra refused both times, insisting on receiving "something in return" (*ibid.*). When she revealed her wish was "[t]o see the future" (*ibid.*), the god conceded:

> She expected him to do something, to touch his gold hand to her brow. But he lay motionless beside her as the visions filled her mind. Everything that had been was somehow less real to her than everything which was to come. (*id.* 269)

Expecting Cassandra to fulfil her promise, Apollo reached out to touch her, but the intensity of her new prophetic vision was overwhelming, "so much so that she pulled her hands across her body and her knees up to her chest. 'No,' she said. 'No.'" (*ibid.*). Enraged by her refusal, the now "vicious, vengeful" Apollo spat on her mouth (*id.* 270), cursing her so that no one would ever believe her prophecies:

> And she knew it, long before she spoke another word. She could already see herself being disbelieved by everyone she loved, even Helenus. She could see her warnings falling on eras which refused to hear. She could see the frustration bubbling from her lips as no one listened to her. (*ibid.*)

Cassandra's chapter also delves into her experiences as a cursed priestess, encapsulating the broader themes already discussed. Her chapter provides a deeper understanding of the tragic irony that defines her character; it not only highlights the internal conflict and isolation that Cassandra endures but also reinforces her role as a crucial focaliser within the narrative.

There are two other instances in the novel which I deem relevant, especially in order to analyse Cassandra's fragmented voice and its impact in the extant narrative. In Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, one of the most striking facets of Cassandra's speech is her use of repetition. This recurring motif serves to emphasise her internal conflict and the overwhelming intensity of her visions. Through repeated words and phrases, Cassandra conveys her desperation. This repetition highlights her fragmented mental state, underscoring her struggle to communicate the gravity of her prophecies to those around her. The repeated elements in her speech act as a coping mechanism, allowing her to process the relentless flood of prophetic insights and the pervasive disbelief she encounters. This technique effectively captures the reader's attention, making them acutely aware of Cassandra's internal turmoil and the isolating nature of her curse:

> 'He's not finished, he's not finished, he's not finished.' (*id.* 111)

> ‘It’s him, it’s him, it’s him,’ (*id.* 163)
>
> ‘… he is dead, he is dead, he is dead.’ (*ibid.*)
>
> ‘Too late, too late, too late to save him,’ (*ibid.*)

Following what was concluded in the previous sections, Cassandra’s repetitions culminate in chapter nineteen, a point where her sense of agency is at its lowest and Apollo’s curse exerts maximum influence over her. Here, her speech becomes a tangled web of repeated phrases, reflecting her diminished control and the intensification of her mental fragmentation. Conversely, in chapters where Cassandra’s focalisation is dominant — Hecuba’s and her own — these repetitions are notably absent. This absence directly demonstrates how the curse specifically affects her spoken words. When the narrative delves into Cassandra’s internal thoughts, bypassing her verbal communication, there is a clear and unimpeded flow of information. The stark contrast between her fragmented speech and her coherent internal frame of mind highlights the duality of her curse: it distorts her spoken prophecies yet leaves her internal comprehension and foresight untouched. This distinction underscores the tragic nature of Cassandra’s predicament. She is acutely aware of the future but is rendered powerless by her inability to convey these truths effectively to others. This narrative choice by Haynes enriches Cassandra’s character, providing a deeper exploration of her psychological state and emphasising the isolation imposed by her prophetic gift.

Lastly, Cassandra’s split from most other characters in the novel is mirrored in Hecuba’s conversation with Helen. In chapter sixteen, when both queens are arguing over whose fault it is that Troy was defeated, Hecuba continuously questions the decisions made by both Helen and Menelaus, claiming that Helen “could have refused Paris” (*id.* 137), ultimately preventing the war altogether. In this instance, Helen voices the response that so many times was caught in Cassandra’s throat:

> ‘Which of us can refuse Aphrodite?’ she asked. ‘A god’s power is far greater than mine. When she urged me to accompany him to Troy, I tried to resist. But she gave me no choice. She told me what I must do and then she withdrew, and in her absence, I heard a high-pitched noise, a distant scream. From the moment Paris entered our halls, it was constant. I thought I was going mad: no one else could hear it and it would not cease. I put wax in my ears but it did not block out the sound. Then when Paris kissed me and I took him to my bed, the shrieking grew fainter. When I stepped onto his boat, it disappeared altogether. This is what it means to refuse a god, it is to be driven mad.’ (*ibid.*)

Helen's narrative highlights the overwhelming power of the gods and the helplessness of mortals under their sway. Her account of Aphrodite's irresistible power and the shrieking she experiences emphasise the extent to which divine intervention can override human accord. She presents herself as a victim of Aphrodite's will, stressing the futility of resisting a god. Contrasting Helen's portrayal of divine influence, Cassandra's relationship with Apollo adds a deeper layer of complexity. Unlike Helen, who reluctantly submits to divine will, Cassandra actively resists Apollo, resulting in her curse of prophetic failed persuasion. Her fragmented nature and isolation among the other characters in *A Thousand Ships* stem from this defiance. Cassandra's experience parallels Helen's in that both are subjected to divine power, but their responses differ significantly. Helen's submission and Cassandra's resistance both lead to their respective forms of suffering and madness. While Helen's madness is temporarily alleviated through submission, Cassandra's prophetic visions remain a constant source of torment, underscoring the theme of inescapable divine control.

Nonetheless, Helen does not address or even acknowledge Cassandra in this moment. The intimate similarity between the queen and the princess remains unexplored. This detail could have provided a rich ground for mutual understanding and connection between the two women. However, the author does not delve into this potential relationship, leaving us without insight into how Helen felt about Cassandra, and vice versa.

> Hecabe gazed unblinkingly at Cassandra, who was scratching something into the sand with the end of a small stick, one sign on top of another, until the pattern was all churned up, illegible. 'Whatever you say.' (*id.* 163)

Hecuba's response to Helen's words reveals a complex perception of her daughter's situation. Her dismissive comment implies a refusal to fully engage with the reality of Cassandra's prophetic curse, which was highlighted through her decision to ignore this detail when recounting the day "the madness came upon her" (*id.* 62). Hecuba's response indicates a degree of detachment and resignation, trying to maintain a semblance of normalcy and protecting herself from the painful truth of Cassandra's condition, thus saying "[w]hatever you say." Hecuba's attitude can be seen as a form of rejection, where acknowledging Cassandra's prophecies would mean accepting the grim future they predict, and therefore surrendering to that fate; a fate that comes to life whether this character believes in it or not, but her dismissal of it grants her a sense of control.

Hecuba's dismissal of this aspect of Cassandra's life significantly impacts Cassandra's agency in the novel. Not engaging with or addressing Cassandra's prophetic abilities or the challenges she faces as a result, Hecuba inadvertently contributes to Cassandra's sense of isolation and alienation. Without her mother's validation or support, Cassandra's agency is diminished, as she feels marginalised and misunderstood within her own family circle. Additionally, Hecuba's passive response reinforces the broader theme of female disempowerment and the suppression of women's voices in patriarchal societies, which the novel tries to battle.

A Thousand Ripples

In this dissertation, I purposed to analyse Cassandra's voice in Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*. To argue whether her voice is present in the narrative would be nonsensical. On the other hand, exploring the different facets of this voice and how Cassandra makes use of them deemed to be fruitful. To state that classical literature had no interest in female experiences or in showcasing female voices would be wrong, and the aim of my study was never to make such an argument. Nonetheless, there is much to explore regarding the different portrayals of these experiences or the various tones in these voices. Therefore, this study's focus was on considering Cassandra's voice in a contemporary novel like Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, especially in comparison to the one present — or not — in some classical tragedies.

There are three different key moments in *A Thousand Ships* regarding the multiple facets and purposes of Cassandra's voice. The first is perhaps the most similar to her traditional myth, whereas the following two seem to increasingly distance themselves from tradition. From a dismissed agent to the one steering the narrative, the voice of the priestess of Troy had much to say after analysing its intention in the extant novel. In a first instance, Cassandra as she is introduced to the reader in *A Thousand Ships* is not that dissimilar from the one we were already acquainted with in classical myth: quiet, and, when not quiet, manic and disturbing. This proximity with tradition at an early stage in the narrative makes sense since Hecuba's voice is still very dominant in "The Trojan Women" narrative, especially taking into consideration Haynes' choice to explore the dynamic tensions between Cassandra and her mother. Moreover, this approximation helps to heighten the impact of some of the differences in this character's story contrastingly to some of the classical ones.

I would argue the most striking features in Haynes' portrayal of Cassandra are her authority over Hecuba's story, and her relationship with Clytemnestra, respectively from a narratological and a gynocritical standpoint. Cassandra's dominating focalisation over her mother's story does not come from a place of vengeance or silencing, at least regarding Cassandra. More often than not, we witness this character feeling entirely overwhelmed and helpless about the visions that fill her mind, and, as I have tried to showcase, Cassandra's prophetic focalisation sheds a subjective light on the revenge carried out by the former queen of Troy, smoothing some of the sharper angles Hecuba often tries to exhibit. The constant push and pull of Cassandra's prophecies, taking her

both to the future and the past, but stranding her away from the present, further amplify this ball of conflicting emotions regarding this character, sometimes crashing with the narrator's role. Cassandra's role as a focaliser profoundly influences the narrative's representation of time, introducing a non-linear, fragmented structure that mirrors her prophetic experiences. This creates a dynamic interplay between her chaotic foresight and the narrator's attempt to construct a coherent story. While there may be tension between these elements, it ultimately enriches the narrative, allowing for a deeper exploration of the themes of agency and the female experience.

Additionally, Cassandra's relationship with Clytemnestra and their mutual understanding also stands out. Unlike others who dismiss Cassandra's prophecies, Clytemnestra's acceptance of her own fate enables her to perceive the priestess' visions with clarity and credence. This connection highlights the isolation of both women and the tragic foresight that binds their stories together. Furthermore, the narrative provides space for both women to tell their stories, allowing their voices to shine individually and together. To this end, my analysis highlighted how the change in narratee was crucial in achieving this, effectively merging the aims of gynocritics with the intentions of narratology.

Other moments of the narrative were influential in analysing Cassandra's newfound voice and authority with said voice. In particular, Cassandra's visions throughout the novel mirror the shattered lives of the Trojan women, as well as the fragmented dynamics within the royal household, and her rupture from the familial circle. From a narrative perspective, these fragmentations were portrayed in the difficulty Cassandra had in expressing herself, especially at the beginning of the novel, as well as in the multiple repetitions she presented in her dialogue. Interestingly, these linguistic challenges were only present in her dialogues, further showcasing how this was a problem with her voice and not with her thoughts *per se*. In portraying Cassandra's journey towards linguistic mastery and agency, Haynes' novel not only enriches her character but also amplifies the voices of women who have been historically silenced, offering a more nuanced and comprehensive narrative.

I would like to posit that the combination of these two schools — narratology and gynocritics — is what enabled me to conduct a thorough analysis of the questions that first opened this dissertation. Working together, narratology offered me the tools to explore *how* Cassandra's voice had changed, while gynocritics made me evaluate *what*

was accomplished with these changes. While both schools are concerned with and involve close reading analysis of literary texts, one is rooted in structuralist theory, whereas the other is grounded in feminist theory. Consequently, narratology concerns itself primarily with more formal elements and aspects of narrative, as the ones at hand in this study, whereas gynocritics' focus is the content and context of women's writing, exploring themes of gender, power and identity, similar to what was done in this study. With this in mind, narratology's systematic approach in categorising elements of the narrative structure aided my analysis on the ways Cassandra's voice and perspectives were expressed in the texts under scrutiny. In like manner, gynocritic's concern with historical and cultural factors also impacted the way some narratological elements were understood amongst the contemporary and the classical eras. Conducting this study without one or the other would ultimately have led me to different conclusions, and therefore combining these and other distinct schools of thought in the future may lead to unexplored grounds.

Furthermore, the recent surge in reimagining and rethinking classical myths has brought previously overlooked issues to the forefront of the literary landscape, shining a spotlight on them. This trend aligns itself with the goals of gynocritics, focusing on female authors, and also intersects with broader socio-political movements like #MeToo, which aims to create safe spaces for survivors of sexual abuse. These parallel developments provide an enriched context that allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Cassandra's character and her personal journey. Through this lens, Cassandra's narrative can be seen as the story of a victim of sexual abuse struggling to find her identity in the aftermath of the incident. From this point of view, we witness a victim of sexual assault struggling to find her identity in the aftermath on the incident, following her journey of rejecting her abuser's influence over her life. It is when Cassandra finally rejects Apollo's curse, particularly in her scene with Clytemnestra, that she regains full agency over her fate, symbolizing a powerful moment of reclamation and empowerment that resonates with modern feminist discourse. This moment not only marks a pivotal shift in Cassandra's personal journey but also reflects the wider feminist objective of reclaiming lost or silenced voices.

Lastly, I would like to leave some unanswered questions here, which may lead to further exploration, as well as some aspects of this study which I had not a chance to analyse. Firstly, and from a gynocritical standpoint, has this effort to amplify the voices of the many women who lost so much during the Trojan War, including their ability to

tell their own stories, fallen flat? Just as I cannot argue that classical texts are entirely misogynistic, I cannot claim that Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* is the pinnacle of feminism. While the novel successfully portrays women in diverse roles during the Trojan War, distancing itself from the easy poor-helpless woman narrative, it notably omits Helen's perspective, despite her pivotal role and the potential for a deep connection with Cassandra. Calliope dismisses Helen due to personal resentment, although this is never fully explained, leaving the traditional blame on Helen unchallenged. This decision undermines the opportunity to rewrite Helen's story and explore her perspective, especially given her shared experiences with Cassandra under divine influence. Exploring Helen's story would have been interesting for various reasons, but for the purpose of this study, it would have been particularly compelling to see if my speculations about her relationship with Cassandra and potential understanding from Helen's perspective could have been sanctioned.

Secondly, focusing on narratology, it would be intriguing to examine how other narrative tools might influence the interpretation of Cassandra's voice. Exploring the narrative in its entirety could reveal how conclusions drawn about Cassandra impact those about other characters, and vice versa. My initial argument in the preceding chapter remains that the first choice a reader, or researcher, must make is to determine who is narrating the story. I chose to believe an external entity was narrating, but what if it were Calliope? How would her deliberate choices to include or omit certain voices affect the analysis? Alternatively, if the narrator were the poet, a man, how would this shift the interpretation of the entire narrative?

This dissertation has illuminated the multifaceted voice of Cassandra in Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, highlighting the evolution of her agency from some classical texts to this contemporary novel. Applying both narratological and gynocritical approaches, this analysis has revealed the complexities of Cassandra's narrative authority and her significant relationships, particularly with Hecuba and Clytemnestra, from a gynocritical standpoint, as well as with the narrator, from a narratological perspective. This study underscores the value of integrating different theoretical frameworks to deepen our understanding of literary texts and hopes to encourage further examination of how narrative choices and feminist insights can reshape our interpretation of both classical and modern stories. Future research could extend this analysis to other characters and

narrative techniques, continuing to bridge the gap between narratological and feminist literary criticism, and classical and contemporary narratives.

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