Disarming the canon: exploring Tepper's and Atwood's retelling of classical (her)story

by

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RESEARCH PROPOSAL & ETHICS COMMITTEE

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Sincerely

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the ways in which two contemporary texts, Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, adapt classical texts by Euripides and Homer in order to make and strengthen statements about contemporary gender ideologies that may be rooted in and perpetuated by the canonization of classical texts such as those involved in this study. I start by discussing the curious phenomenon of the simultaneous prevalence of adaptations of classical Greek literature in contemporary culture and the often negative perception of adaptations. I then explore the inequalities of gender, originality, and genre in both the contemporary texts and their classical counterparts before suggesting that although these qualities mean that the contemporary texts might have been critically neglected, they are also the reason that the contemporary texts are able to effectively question the classical texts that they adapt. I draw on Hutcheon's (2013) theory of adaptation and Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogics to motivate a critical analysis of the ways in which both contemporary texts use adaptation to write back to the past. Chapter one explores Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country*, which adapts three plays by Euripides – *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999), *Iphigenia among the Taurians* ([412BCE] 1959), and *The Trojan women* ([415BCE] 1959). Chapter two explores Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, which adapts Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*. Through this analysis, I argue that by writing in liminal genres, Tepper and Atwood are uniquely situated to destabilise contemporary patriarchal worldviews rooted in a classical past and perpetuated by a classical canon. This dissertation thus aims to demonstrate the value of adaptation in reframing an old order so as to posit a new one.

Key terms:

Sheri S. Tepper, Margaret Atwood, Euripides, Homer, adaptation, feminism, *The gate to Women's Country*, *The Penelopiad*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, *The Trojan women*, *The Odyssey*.

Contents

Introduction

"Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying." (Hutcheon, 2013:7)

Adaptation, the retelling of familiar stories in new forms, is ubiquitous in contemporary Western culture. Hutcheon (2013:2) notes that "adaptations are everywhere today: on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade". However, the interest in reframing existing stories is not unique to this particular moment in history, and adaptations can also be identified in such ancient cultures as that of classical Greece, where writers like Homer are thought to have adapted myths from an early oral tradition into literary forms like epic poetry and drama. As Ford (1994:1) writes: "Though much is cloudy, it is now generally acknowledged that our *Iliad* and *Odyssey* represent only the final outcome, a fixing by writing, of a long-standing art of oral performance and composition. For centuries before this transcription took place […] the sum and substance of these poems and of all their antecedents, variants, and sequels, were only a series of changing oral performances by many singers in many parts of Greece".

It is interesting, then, that contemporary culture displays a sustained interest in adapting classical Greek texts which may themselves already be adaptations. At the time at which I began to write this dissertation, the film *Wonder Woman* (Jenkins, 2017), adapted from a series of comics based on the infamous Amazons of ancient Greece, was showing – to much critical acclaim – in cinemas around the world. It seems that even the period of approximately 2900 years dividing Homer's ([800BCE] 2010) first mention of the Amazons in the *Iliad* from the release of the contemporary film has not reduced what seems to be a collective fascination with the stories of ancient Greece.

This constant preoccupation with classical material can also be seen in the work of Modernist literary figures like T.S. Eliot ([1939] 1964), whose play *The family reunion* includes an ancient Greek chorus and references to the Eumenides as represented in the Oresteia, and James Joyce's ([1922] 2016) *Ulysses*, a much-lauded reimagining of Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*. W.B. Yeats's ([1928] 2017) *The tower* contains multiple poems with clear connections to Greek mythology, such as "Leda and the Swan" and "A Man Young And Old: XI. From Oedipus At Colonus", and Tennessee Williams's (1987) play *Orpheus descending* is a modern retelling of the Orpheus myth of classical Greece. Many more recent examples of critical literary engagement with ancient Greek texts can be found, including Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, which adapts Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, and Jeanette Winterson's (2006) *Weight: the myth of Atlas and Heracles*, about which Winterson (2006:xviii) states "in the retelling comes a new emphasis or bias". Such a "new emphasis" (Winterson, 2006:xviii) is also clearly apparent in Kamila Shamsie's (2017) *Home fire*, a modern retelling of Sophocles's ([441BCE] 2013) tragedy *Antigone*, which was longlisted for the 2017 Man Booker prize. Another contemporary example of this enduring interest in Greek mythology is Colm Tóibín's 2017 novel *House of names*, a retelling of the *Oresteia* (Aeschylus, [458BCE] 2003) from the perspective of Clytemnestra, Iphigenia's mother. Colm Tóibín's novel is particularly interesting as an illustration of the impulse to problematize aspects of classical source material through adaptation, as Alex Preston (2017) writes:

> […] House of names gives us so much that isn't in the original trilogy […] This is a novel that is a celebration of what novels can do. It gives us interiority, specificity, the in-between stuff that is the fabric of life. We see everything that happens off stage in the plays, and this is what really interests us. It's not just the violence, which famously takes place out of sight of the audience, but the form of the novel allows Tóibín to delve deeply into the inner lives of his characters, to give shape to their everyday worlds. I don't mean here to privilege the novel over drama but rather to make a link between

> the two. Tóibín is like a great actor, taking the framework provided by the events of the play and providing psychology, motivation, nuance, humanity.

However, the adaptation and interpretation of ancient Greek stories is not reserved solely for traditionally canonical authors and Man Booker nominees. Hardwick and Harrison (2013:xx) note that there has been a "contemporary increase in multifaceted public interest in Greek and Roman material, often mediated in the public imagination through popularising cultural forms". They, like Hutcheon, also identify diverse impulses behind this contemporary interest in classical material, indicating that while such material may indeed sometimes be merely recreated for contemporary audiences, it is also often used as a "catalyst for debate […] in the economic and political contexts of its generation and consumption and in its problematic relationship with antiquity" (Hardwick & Harrison, 2013:xx).

A quick internet search reveals multiple lists of films, television series, and books based on Greco-Roman mythology and demonstrates Hardwick and Harrison's (2013:xxi) argument that "ancient […] works have become better known among less privileged groups […] through social institutions and entertainment". These adaptations vary from American blockbuster films like *Troy* (Peterson, 2004), which stars multiple A-list celebrities such as Brad Pitt and provides a fairly compressed narration of the events of the Trojan War, and the *Percy Jackson* (Columbus, 2010) film series, which is based on a popular series of young-adult novels which follow the adventures of a group of teenaged demigods with parents like the Greek gods Poseidon and Athena, to a series of 19 Italian films based on the classical Greek myth of Hercules (Kinnard & Crnkovich, 2017:78-88), and the German *Dschungelmädchen für zwei Halunken* (Hofbauer, 1974), an irreverent film featuring a tribe of Amazons.

Similarly, a list on Goodreads[1] (2009), called simply "Modern adaptations of Greek mythology", contains, at the time of writing, 292 individual books that can be considered to directly adapt Greek mythology (i.e. are not merely influenced by Greek mythology but clearly adapt Greek mythology). As individual users of the website can contribute to this communal list, it is likely that this number will increase.

The proliferation of lists like these, which are communally-generated and document multiple forms of modern adaptations of ancient Greek mythology, demonstrates two things. Firstly, it shows that the adaptation of ancient Greek texts is an ongoing project that is not restricted to a single form, genre, language, or culture. Both the contents of the lists and the lists themselves demonstrate how widespread these adaptations actually are since the space generated by the internet allows people from all over the world to contribute to such compilations.

Secondly, the lists show that, as Hardwick and Harrison (2013:xx-xxi) note, these adaptations do not come into existence and are not received only in restricted or sequestered spaces. Instead my decision to search for the abovementioned lists through a widely-accessible search engine such as Google demonstrates that these adaptations are not being created, received, or catalogued solely by specialist academics, but are rather indicative of a far more widespread interest in ancient Greek mythology, fostered by a community of creators and receivers that is not limited by genre, geography, or education.

It is clear that these ancient stories still have a massive and sustained influence on modern culture. The sheer proliferation of adaptations of classical works in all spheres of our culture thus shows that classical stories still have the power to influence our thoughts, ideas, and attitudes.

[1] A social media site that allows users to find, track their reading of, and recommend books.

Within this context, it is then perhaps not surprising to discover that two contemporary female authors of the fantastic have made their own contributions to this wide collection of adaptations. What *is* surprising to note, however, is that these texts have not yet been studied together in ways that emphasise that they display similar concepts and impulses. This study will explore the discourse between the following contemporary texts and their classical counterparts: Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country*, which draws on three texts by Euripides – *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999), *Iphigenia among the Taurians* ([412BCE] 1959), and *The Trojan women* ([415BCE] 1959), and Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, which adapts Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*.

Sheri Stewart Tepper is an American writer who works in the genres of science fiction, horror, and mystery. For 25 years, she was also the executive director of Planned Parenthood in Denver, now known as Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, and in this capacity she was a fierce advocate for women's rights and reproductive freedom. She is an outspoken feminist, and more specifically an ecofeminist, and these concerns emerge strongly in many of her science fiction novels. Tepper's work has been lauded within the confines of the science fiction and fantasy literature communities; she has received nominations or been shortlisted for multiple awards, including the Hugo Award, the John W. Campbell Award, the Locus Award, the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, the James Tiptree Jr. Literary Award, and the Arthur C. Clarke Award. Her work of fantasy (though perhaps it might also be considered science fiction of a sort), *Beauty* (Tepper, 1991), was awarded the Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel in 1992. Her novella *The gardener* (Tepper, 1988) was a World Fantasy Award finalist, and she received a World Fantasy Life Achievement Award in 2015. Her impact on the genre of science fiction is clear and considerable; *The encyclopedia of science fiction* calls her "one of science fiction's premier world-builders" (Kelso, 2018).

Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* seems to comment on three plays by Euripides, all of which centre on the Trojan war. *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999) focuses on Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek coalition during the Trojan war, and his decision to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to Artemis in order to ensure that his troops will be allowed to sail to Troy to start the long war. Agamemnon spends much of the play torn between his love for his daughter and his desire to avenge his brother's honour (as his brother's wife, Helen, has eloped with the Trojan prince Paris) but eventually Iphigenia herself convinces her father to sacrifice her for the sake of her people's honour.

Iphigenia among the Taurians (Euripides, [412BCE] 1959) is set after the Trojan war. Euripides writes that when Agamemnon finally decides to go through with the sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenia, Artemis intercedes at the last moment and replaces Iphigenia with a deer. Artemis then makes Iphigenia a priestess at the temple of Artemis in Taurus, and tasks her with performing ritual human sacrifices as part of this role. Iphigenia's brother, Orestes, lands on the island and is brought to her to be sacrificed, but eventually the two recognize each other and Orestes helps Iphigenia to escape Tauris and return to their home of Argos.

The Trojan women (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959) is set at the end of the Trojan war, in the open space before the partially-demolished, smouldering, and ransacked city of Troy. The men of Troy have fled or been killed, and the women and children left behind are captives of the conquering army; they sit before the ruins of Troy and await their fate at the hands of the Greeks.

However, the women in Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* have significantly more autonomy and power than those presented in Euripides's texts. The structure of society in Women's Country is matriarchal; women run every aspect of society and men and women live in completely separate areas. While the women study, farm, build, and govern, the men

train for war in their separate garrisons. The narrative is interspersed with brief scenes from the play "Iphigenia at Ilium", which is performed once a year in every town in Women's Country and which female children are expected to memorise from a young age. This play within the text draws freely on the three Euripides texts previously discussed, and runs through the novel as a *leitmotif* that underpins the novel's commentary on gender.

Margaret Atwood, on the other hand, is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, inventor, and environmental activist. She writes across various genres, but has also published multiple pieces which seem to fall into the genre she personally – and publicly – defines as speculative fiction. Atwood's writing has been received with much critical acclaim: she is a winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias Award for Literature, has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize six times and has gone on to win the prize twice, and she has been a finalist for the Governor General's Award several times, twice proceeding to win it.

As mentioned earlier, Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* has clear ties to Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*. This is an epic poem that tells the story of Odysseus' decade-long journey to return to his home, Ithaca, after the conclusion of the Trojan war. Homer focuses on Odysseus' battles with mystical creatures and encounters with various gods, while Odysseus' wife Penelope waits for him in Ithaca and refuses the hordes of suitors vying for her hand and Ithaca's throne.

Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, however, allows Penelope the chance to tell her own story. Penelope reminisces about her life from her afterlife in Hades, but she is not the only woman given a voice by the text. The twelve maids murdered by Telemachus (Penelope's son) on the orders of Odysseus act as a chorus, often interrupting Penelope's narrative to provide their own view of events. Interestingly, these interludes span a variety of contexts and genres, including a contemporary court trial and a rope-jumping rhyme.

Not only do both Tepper's and Atwood's texts rewrite classical texts by canonical male authors, but these texts are also written by female authors who often work within liminal genres like fantasy and science fiction. Moreover, these contemporary texts both display fascinating divergences from their classical counterparts, from Atwood's re-centring of Penelope's power as the teller of her own story to Tepper's vengeful ghostly Iphigenia performed over and over again within a science fiction feminist utopia.

This study intends to explore the methods and approaches used by Tepper and Atwood in their adaptations of classical texts by Euripides and Homer. I will argue that these contemporary female authors of the fantastic have adapted classical texts and rewritten classical female characters in order to make and strengthen statements about contemporary gender[2] ideologies that may be rooted in and perpetuated by the canonization of classical texts like those involved in this study.

This investigation of these contemporary adaptations of classical texts is rooted in Linda Hutcheon's (2013) *A theory of adaptation*, in which she makes an argument against what is often called fidelity criticism, which usually focuses on evaluating adaptations based simply on how closely they are able to adhere to their source texts. In her opening chapter, titled "Familiarity and contempt", Hutcheon (2013:2) identifies famous historical adapters like Shakespeare, who "transferred his culture's stories from page to stage and made them available to a whole new audience" and notes that "Aeschylus and Racine and Goethe and da Ponte also retold familiar stories in new forms". Thus, she argues, the predominance of adaptations in contemporary culture is not a new phenomenon, and many traditionally canonical and respected authors have engaged in adaptation. Yet Hutcheon (2013:2) notes that contemporary popular adaptations are often denigrated by academics and journalists

[2] For the purposes of this study, the term "gender" will be used to refer to the ways in which individuals behave or perform their gender identities according to normative socio-cultural ideologies.

largely, it seems, because they are adaptations and thus "derivative" of and "secondary" to their source texts. This negative response to adaptations is often intensified when the adaptation is "perceived as "lowering" a story (according to some imagined hierarchy of medium or genre)", and thus adaptations also seem to be interrogated based on the cultural perception of their genres (Hutcheon, 2013:3). Hutcheon (2013:3) offers the following example to illustrate this: "it does seem to be more or less acceptable to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* into a respected high art form, like an opera or a ballet, but not to make it into a movie, especially an updated one like Baz Luhrmann's (1996) *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*". Yet Hutcheon (2013:4) notes:

> All these adapters relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew. Like parodies, adaptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts, usually revealingly called "sources." Unlike parodies, however, adaptations usually openly announce this relationship. It is the (post-) Romantic valuing of the original creation and of the originating creative genius that is clearly one source of the denigration of adapters and adaptations. Yet this negative view is actually a late addition to Western culture's long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories.

This leads to the question of how we might best approach and study adaptations. Hutcheon (2013:6) notes that adaptation studies are often comparative studies that examine both the source and adapted text, and treat the adapted text as a palimpsest rather than as an autonomous text:

> If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works. It is what Gérard Genette would call a text in the "second degree" (1982: 5), created and then received in relation to a prior text.

While Hutcheon (2013:6) acknowledges that "[a]lthough adaptations are also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as inherently double or multilaminated works that they can be theorized *as adaptations*", she does not believe that this should lead scholars to engage in fidelity criticism. Hutcheon argues that although adaptation studies have historically engaged in examining how closely adapted texts adhere to their sources, this preoccupation with fidelity has been challenged by various theorists in the field. In a break from this fidelity criticism, Hutcheon (2013) proposes that adaptations, rather than being second-rate copies of original texts, actually enter into dialogue with earlier texts dealing with similar stories in order to fulfil impulses that can range from deconstructing the earlier text to merely extending the earlier text's narrative. She notes:

> Of more interest to me is the fact that the morally loaded discourse of fidelity is based on the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text (e.g., Orr 1984: 73). Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying. (Hutcheon, 2013:7)

Thus my examination of Tepper's and Atwood's adaptations of texts by Euripides and Homer will not seek to evaluate how faithfully either contemporary author reproduces their respective classical texts. Rather, my point of departure is that the ways in which Tepper and Atwood adhere to or depart from, and thus enter into dialogue with, these classical texts can be considered to create space for meaningful explorations of gender representations in these classical texts.

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogics also supports this interpretation of adaptation, and specifically of novelistic adaptations of classical texts.[3] Bakhtin (1981) sets out his theory

[3] Kristeva's (1966) theory of intertextuality is based on her readings of Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogics. Her theory also supports Hutcheon's (2013) proposal to examine adapted texts as if they offer meaningful changes rather than to adopt an approach rooted in fidelity criticism and thus merely to interrogate the similarity of the adapted texts to their source texts. However, I have found that Kristeva's work is perhaps less relevant to the

of dialogics in an essay titled "Epic and novel". He writes that, in contrast to genres like poetry or the epic[4], the novel is an "unofficial" genre by which he implies that the novel is the only genre that is not yet completed and continues to develop as we study it. Of the novel's interactions with what he calls "'high' literature" – developed historical genres with established canons such as poetry and the epic – Bakhtin (1981:5) writes:

> […] the novel gets on poorly with other genres. There can be no talk of a harmony deriving from mutual limitation and complementariness. The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and reaccentuating them. Historians of literature sometimes tend to see in this merely the struggle of literary tendencies and schools. Such struggles exist, but they are peripheral phenomena and historically insignificant. Behind them one must be sensitive to the deeper and more truly historical struggle of genres, the establishment and growth of a generic skeleton of literature.

This posits the vital idea that Bakhtin does not see the novel as a closed system, a genre developing in a vacuum. In fact, he notes that "parodic stylizations of canonized genres and styles occupy a central place in the novel" (Bakhtin, 1981:6), and that this unique parodical discourse of the novel is not reserved only for canonized genres and styles, but occurs between novels, within the novelistic genre, as well. "This ability of the novel to criticise itself is a remarkable feature of this ever-developing genre," Bakhtin (1981:6) observes.

The "high genres of classical antiquity", Bakhtin (1981:18) notes, are intrinsically linked to the "unified fabric of the heroic past and tradition"; they represent a completed circle "beyond the realm of human activity" (1981:17). Thus the genres of the epic past, Bakhtin

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particular texts involved in this study, and thus have chosen not to explore her theory in more detail.

[4] While Bakhtin (1981) focuses on epic poetry as an example of the kind of fixed genre from which the novel differs, both Holquist (1981) and Bakhtin (1981) state that the insights that emerge from this comparison can be conflated to include "myth and all other traditional forms of narrative" (Holquist, 1981:xxxii) because "we encounter the epic as a genre that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated. With certain reservations we can say the same for the other major genres, even for tragedy" (Bakhtin, 1981:3).

(1981:16) suggests, are beyond the reach of contemporary readers; "walled off from all subsequent times by an impenetrable boundary". He writes:

> […] a reliance on tradition is immanent in the very form of the epic, just as the absolute past is immanent in it. Epic discourse is a discourse handed down by tradition. By its very nature the epic world of absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation. One cannot glimpse it, grope for it, touch it; one cannot look at it from just any point of view; it is impossible to experience it, analyse it, take it apart, penetrate its core. It is given solely as tradition, sacred and sacrosanct, evaluated in the same way by all and demanding a pious attitude toward itself. (Bakhtin, 1981:16)

The novel, Bakhtin suggests, is the antidote to this piety. The novel removes the boundary created by distance and brings the subject to "the level of contemporary reality, in a zone of direct and even crude contact" (Bakhtin, 1981:22-23).

What does this mean for the canonized texts with which the novel interacts? Bakhtin (1981:7) claims:

> They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the "novelistic" layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody and finally – this is the most important thing – the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present).

And so, while the "high" genres idealise the past with "something of an official air", the novel is associated with "the eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought" (Bakhtin, 1981:20).

The novel may also engender laughter, the vital element that Bakhtin (1981:23) states

> […] has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. Laughter

> demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it.

Thus Bakhtin suggests not only that the novel is a fascinating and still developing contemporary genre, but also that the contemporary novel is in constant and revealing dialogue with the "high" genres of the past; the novel is a way through which these past genres can be examined, questioned, and problematized in the present.

Therefore, drawing on the work of both Hutcheon and Bakhtin, it could be argued that adaptations in the form of novels are particularly effective ways to explore classical texts and their potential effects on contemporary ideas about gender. Hutcheon and Bakhtin suggest that novelisations are valuable approaches through which to create space for the critical examination of classical texts and their representations of gender, and thus it seems that Tepper's and Atwood's novelistic adaptations are ideally situated to investigate and interrogate their respective classical texts rather than merely to replicate them.

However, as Hutcheon has indicated, contemporary culture has a rather fraught relationship with adaptation – it seems that we voraciously produce and consume adaptations while simultaneously dismissing and even denigrating them. Therefore, it is vital to note that the unequal balance of power between the texts included in the study is complex and involves far more than just their differing representations of gender. This precludes a formulaic approach that aims merely to catalogue the differences and similarities in treatments of gender between the contemporary texts and their classical counterparts. Instead, I suggest that these contemporary and classical texts involved in this study exist in a dialogical web in which three main areas of inequality[5] can be identified:

[5] The intention of this study is not to define inequality but rather to explore a collection of texts that might be argued to be unequal in several ways. Thus, for the purposes of this study, "inequality" will be used to refer to the disparate treatment, perception, or expectation of things like genders, characters, texts, and genres.

The first area of inequality is, of course, the inequality inherent in the mere representations of gender, which differ vastly between the contemporary and classical texts. The classical texts can be argued to represent gender through the gaze and contextual sensibilities of the classical male author. Though the classical male authors involved in this study are not all from entirely the same context this study will suggest that there are still fundamental similarities in the writers' attitudes toward and treatments of gender. None of the classical texts, for example, represent female main characters unless they will serve as examples of contextually "good" women. Consider, for example, Euripides's Iphigenia, who welcomes death by her father's hand so he may maintain the honour of his soldiers, and later serves as a convenient "maiden in distress" for Orestes to rescue, or Euripides's unhappy Trojan women who, in the wake of the sacking of Troy, obediently wait to be apportioned to the invading Greek soldiers as their rightful slaves. This particular treatment of female characters can also be seen Homer's text: Homer's Penelope, who refuses the many suitors vying for her hand in marriage, is clearly an example of the "good" woman who remains faithful to her husband even when he is absent and could fairly be presumed dead. However, the contemporary texts by Tepper and Atwood represent gender through the particular contextual sensibilities of two female authors working in a context which is comparatively more open to critiques of gender representations and ideologies, and they centre female characters like Iphigenia and Penelope to interrogate these depictions.

The second area of inequality in this group of texts is the persistent notion that the originality[6] of a text is what decides its value, a notion that would have the contemporary adaptations by Tepper and Atwood considered lesser texts merely because they draw openly on classical texts rather than being "original". Françoise Meltzer, in her 1994 book *Hot property: the*

[6] Originality in literature is a complex issue, and many writers who are widely considered to be canonical (like Shakespeare or Joyce) have also adapted texts. However, adaptations are often treated somewhat differently in contemporary culture.

stakes and claims of literary originality, calls originality in literature variously a "construct", a "mythology", and a "fraud" (1). She states that "Western, First World, masculinist literary criticism has itself at stake when it articulates two principles: first, that great literature is "original," and, second, that only literary criticism itself is in a position to judge what is and what is not original, to what extent a given work is original, and how successful a work is" (Meltzer, 1994:2). It is clear that this sets up a closed system in which the only value of a text lies in its originality, and the only way to establish that originality is to appeal to the potentially and ultimately patriarchal problematic judgement of the Western, First World, masculinist institution.

Meltzer goes on to state that the fear of having one's ideas stolen – and thus one's originality compromised – can be traced to Greek and Roman writing, claiming that this "cult of the individual" with its "concomitant insistence on uniqueness" merely found another form in the early European romantic ideas of "original genius" (Meltzer, 1994:4). This concept of "original genius", too, required the "great literati […] to demonstrate both originality and genius in spontaneous and utterly convincing ways recognizable only to literary criticism" (Meltzer, 1994:4). And in contemporary times, Meltzer (1994:5) states, we are "wedded, in our Western metaphysical tradition, to the importance of beginnings, of originary status, of first over second, of breath over text. Our culture is dominated by myths of discovery".

Meltzer (1994:6) goes on to suggest:

> Finally and inevitably, the belief in originality and the possessiveness it entails engender the prose and economy of paranoia: paranoia in the "creators", whose fear of being robbed masks a more basic anxiety that that originality may be impossible and illusory; and paranoia in the scaffolding that arises and supports itself by [means of] those creators – criticism (or theory) itself. […] There are moments when anxiety about originality or about origin risks exposing the fraud it noisily conceals.

In the end, Meltzer (1994:6) posits that this anxious obsession with originality ultimately betrays the sort of gender inequality in which this study is most interested; she argues that "underlying these convictions [the insistence on the new, the creative, the true] is another series of beliefs: in the individual and his – and I mean *his* – sovereignty; in a patriarchal hegemony as dominating culture and metaphysics; in a concomitant feminine economy as eternally secondary, unable by definition to partake of an originary model; in private property and the exclusionary systems that ensue".

This, then, is our second area of inequality – the potentially ultimately patriarchal insistence on the overarching value of originality, and the notion that the "original" text is somehow inherently more valuable merely because it came first. Both assumptions perpetuate a monolithic, seemingly-unassailable literary canon that may not only contribute to problematic contemporary attitudes to gender, but also work to silence the voices of those who may be deemed "unoriginal", casting doubt on the value of the contributions their work may make. The contemporary authors involved in this study, I suggest, might thus be considered to be doubly devalued by this cultural preoccupation with originality, both by their female gender and by their chosen mechanism of expression, adaptation.

The third and final inequality that, I argue, can be identified within this textual dialogue is that established by perceptions of genre and the associated canonicity and cultural capital of the two sets of texts involved in the study.

T.S. Eliot, whose writings on the classical tradition are still widely disseminated, seems a viable starting point for a discussion of canonicity. In his 1944 address titled "What is a Classic?"[7], Eliot writes that "to call any work of art 'classical', implies either the highest

[7] Eliot uses the term "classic" here to refer to an admired canonical work rather than to a "classical" text from Greek or Roman antiquity, but the etymology itself is suggestive of the overlap between these designations and the kinds of texts to which they refer.

praise or the most contemptuous abuse, according to the party to which one belongs. It implies certain particular merits or faults: either the perfection of form, or the absolute of frigidity" (9). Eliot (1944:9) notes that this dichotomized response is one "belonging to literary politics, and therefore arousing passions" that he wishes to avoid. He seeks to excuse his address from this fraught debate, stating that he intends only to define one kind of art, without being "concerned that it is absolutely and in every respect *better* or *worse* than another kind" (Eliot, 1994:9). Eliot seems then to display a desire to distance himself from the value judgements that he is aware are inherent in establishing a canon; he overtly states that he wishes only to define the classic, not to determine its value.

Eliot goes on to explain that he believes that the word "maturity" is the ultimate measure of a classic. According to him, classics are formed by the combination of three kinds of maturity: a mature civilization, a mature language and its literature, and a mature author; these three maturities combined give a classical work its "universality" (Eliot, 1944:10). The maturity of a work, Eliot suggests, can only be recognized "if we are properly mature, as well as educated persons […] if we are mature we either recognize maturity immediately, or come to know it on more intimate acquaintance" (Eliot, 1944:10). However, there is also what might be perceived as an exclusionary limitation here: "to make the meaning of maturity really apprehensible – indeed, even to make it acceptable – to the immature, is perhaps impossible", claims Eliot (1944:10). So, according to Eliot, a classic is formed through the maturity of civilization, language and literature, and author, and this maturity can in turn only be recognized by mature and educated people – in fact, it may even be impossible to really explain this concept of maturity to people who are not mature. Though Eliot claims a desire to avoid labelling some art as better or worse than other art, this has perhaps merely resulted in a kind of covert evaluation in which he uses the positive connotations of "maturity" to undermine dissenting voices by effectively labelling them "immature" and thus unable to

comprehend the true value of the classics. This approach might thus function to suppress pertinent queries about the criteria by which texts are evaluated to be "classics" by implying that the problem lies not with the text in question or the literary critic's particular historical context but rather with the questioner and their "immaturity".

Eliot's definition of a classic is also exclusionary on other levels. Eliot (1944:14-15) describes the creation of a classic as involving something like the process of coming of age within a patriarchal culture:

> […] the poet is aware of his predecessors, and […] we are aware of the predecessors behind his work, as we may be aware of ancestral traits in a person who is at the same time individual and unique. The predecessors should be themselves great and honoured: but their accomplishment must be such as to suggest still undeveloped resources of the language, and not such as to oppress the younger writers with the fear that everything that can be done has been done, in their language. The poet, certainly, in a mature age, may still obtain stimulus from the hope of doing something that his predecessors have not done; he may even be in revolt against them, as a promising adolescent may revolt against the beliefs, the habits and the manners of his parents; but in retrospect, we can see that he is the continuer of their traditions, that he preserves essential family characteristics […] And on the other hand, just as we sometimes observe men whose lives are overshadowed by the fame of a father or grandfather, men of whom any achievement of which they are capable appears comparatively insignificant, so a late age of poetry may be consciously impotent to compete with its distinguished paternity.

So the classic, which Eliot defines as mature literature, is born of great predecessors, and ultimately serves to continue the traditions of those predecessors within a seemingly closed system in which greatness appears to be handed from father to son in an endless cycle of maturation. This might be argued to suggest a canon of exclusivity, populated with "mature" works (a term which seems, ultimately, to suggest the very value judgement that Eliot professes a desire to avoid) that have been recognized as mature by other mature and educated minds; this might in turn suggest that unrecognizing minds, by implication, are immature and uneducated.

Where might this leave texts that remain stubbornly outside this tradition of mature literature: texts like those by Tepper and Atwood? My suggestion is that they are at best ignored, and at worst denigrated as non-serious (perhaps Eliot might call them "immature") works. Written by women working in fantastical genres, these texts do not seem to seek to continue the tradition of their classical counterparts, which critics like Eliot consider a vital foundation of classical literature, but rather to question that tradition and its assumptions and implications.

We might also find it useful to consult Bloom's popular 1994 *The Western Canon*, though it must be noted that he seeks not only to objectively define this canon but also to defend its relevance as an example of the "greatness" (3) of Western literature. In his preface, Bloom (1994:3) states that he has "tried to confront greatness directly: to ask what makes the author and the works canonical", a question that he suggests can be answered by attributing to such a work or writer "a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange". This might be considered an example of Meltzer's theory in action; it seems to display a preoccupation with originality of the sort that can, according to Bloom, only be recognized by literary critics. Bloom (1994:7) also notes that "the expansion of the Canon has meant the destruction of the Canon, since what is being taught includes by no means the best writers who happen to be women, African, Hispanic, or Asian, but rather the writers who offer little but the resentment they have developed as part of their sense of identity". Here, too, is an example of Meltzer's claim of the canon being an exclusionary system; Bloom appears to conflate the inclusive expansion of the Western literary canon with the "destruction" of this canon, and suggests that recent efforts towards minority representation and inclusion in the canon have ultimately resulted in shoring up the canon with mediocre works filled with "resentment" merely for the sake of inclusivity.

Finally, Bloom (1994:12) suggests that the canon is born of the "anxiety of influence": "the desire to write greatly is the desire to be elsewhere, in a time and place of one's own, in an

originality that must compound with inheritance, with the anxiety of influence". This suggests an originality that springs from both the competition with and the departure from the great works that have come before – canonical works, Bloom claims, are those that aspire to be as great as the preceding canonical works but also to be original in the execution of that greatness. He also admits that "in each era, some genres are regarded as more canonical than others", but motivates this by stating that "nothing is so essential to the Western Canon as its principles of selectivity, which are elitist only to the extent that they are founded upon severely artistic criteria" (Bloom, 1994:20,22). So, to Bloom (1994:23), the fact that the canon seems to favour some genres over others has nothing to do with ideological motivation; he claims that his reading of the canon is an aesthetic one, and he goes on to state that "to discover critics in the service of a social ideology one need only regard those who wish to demystify or open up the Canon". This seems an apt demonstration of the potentially silencing nature of Bloom's canonicity: to question the assumed greatness of canonical works is to display a slavish obsession with subjective social ideology rather than the objective severely artistic criteria by which the canon is, according to Bloom, judged – to join what Bloom (1994:23) terms the "School of Resentment". Tepper and Atwood, in their commentary on the problematically patriarchal nature of their chosen classical texts, might even be considered by Bloom to be members of this school.

Finally, there is Mukherjee's 2014 book *What is a Classic?*, which describes itself as seeking to "interrogate […] the relevance of the question of the classic for the politics of publishing, teaching, and translating core texts" and ultimately "demonstrates how criticism continues to shore up the idea of literary value against mobile configurations of knowledge, technology, and enterprise" (8).

Mukherjee (2014:9) addresses Bloom's divisive text thus:

> A notorious example of the policing aspect of authoritative canonicity is Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*, which contains a lusty defense of twenty-six authors deemed canon-worthy by the expert. Bloom goes so far as to append to the book a list of four hundred names that constitute for him the Western canon. The logic of omissions […] is too egregious for the list to be taken seriously, but it gives credence to canon debates in the Anglo-American academy that have centered on its exclusivity (and dubious inclusiveness) as well as its claims of universality.

She proceeds to state that "the canon has historically been a nexus of power and knowledge that reinforces hierarchies and the vested interests of select institutions, excluding the interests and accomplishments of minorities, popular and demotic culture, or non-European civilizations" (Mukherjee, 2014:9).

While both Eliot and Bloom portray the Western canon as consisting of texts that are pinnacles of literary achievement – works that both transcend the barriers of language and culture to achieve a universal relevance, and display Eliot's concept of "maturity" and Bloom's concept of "originality" – they exclude vast swathes of literature. It may also be argued that in their efforts to understand and explain the greatness of canonical works, Eliot and Bloom fail to adequately account for the impact of the "gatekeepers" of literary canon: those scholars of infinitely "sensitive palate", as Eliot (1944:13) describes it, who decide which texts display enough "maturity" and "originality" to be included in the literary canon. Put simply, perhaps the canon is not decided by the sheer inherent and undeniable quality of the texts being considered, but rather by the elite group of literary critics choosing the texts. As Mukherjee (2014:28), with reference to Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction*, writes: "Consumers select commodities that proclaim their sophistication in taste – hence the popularity of 'educated' forms of recreation. The critical 'eye' is a product of history reproduced by education". Finally, Mukherjee (2014:29) succinctly expresses the relationship between a literary classic and a literary critic when she describes it as "a peculiar codependence: the classic is that which survives critical questioning, and it in fact defines

itself by that surviving". It follows that perhaps the canon can be considered to represent not the finest examples of Western literature, but rather, through the historically privileged capital and weight of the dominant culture, merely the critically-approved examples of the dominant culture's literature.

This postulation is further supported by Mukherjee's quoting of Guillory's (1994:56) statement that the canon is not a set of books but rather a "discursive instrument of 'transmission'". Mukherjee suggests that the canon is "not just an archive but transmission, perpetuating a critical tradition and open to interventions that dislodge familiar reading formations" (2014:13). It is thus central to my argument that the classical texts by Homer and Euripides involved in this study have become more than just texts; they can be considered as instruments of transmission that serve to perpetuate ancient patriarchal ideologies in a contemporary context.

So, I suggest that the texts involved in this study are unequal in three correlated ways. The classical texts by Homer and Euripides possess the immense cultural weight of being considered both part of the elite Western literary canon and, perhaps due to this inclusion in the canon, being considered works of outstanding originality. Originality, in turn, is a quality that canonicity, and possibly thus society in general, suggests as virtuous. The combination of these aspects results in the classical texts' problematic and unequal representations of gender being both widely disseminated and imbued with the weight of cultural authority – they serve to transmit and perpetuate patriarchal ideologies because they possess the cultural capital with which to do so. Mukherjee (2014:29), informed by Bourdieu, defines this cultural capital as "the internalization of the cultural code or the acquisition of a knowledge that equips the subject to decipher cultural relations", which suggests that texts possess cultural capital by representing aspirational cultural and educational standards, and thus that the reading of canonical texts might be used as a way to define the class position of the reader.

By contrast, the contemporary texts by Tepper and Atwood are triply disadvantaged. The two contemporary authors in the study both generally write in the liminal genres of the fantastic, and their books are not, at least at the time of writing, typically considered to be canonical texts. Of them, only Atwood might be argued to be producing generally critically well-received work: as of July 2017 she has received five Man Booker Prize nominations for *Alias Grace* (1996), *Cat's eye* (1988), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The blind assassin* (2000), and *The handmaid's tale* (1985), and she has won the Man Booker Prize for *The blind assassin* (2000) and for *The testaments* (2019), her sequel to *The handmaid's tale* (1985). However, Mukherjee (2014:28) writes that "most of us in the business of literary criticism have little to do with the ersatz [sic] and absurdity of deciding literary prizes like the Booker, and their tremendous, if dubious and short-term, impact on literary culture". So winning prizes like the Man Booker Prize does not, in Mukherjee's opinion at least, necessarily confer canonical status on a text.

Moreover, there is also inequality between these texts across the lines of genre. Classical texts are generally considered more important than texts from a genre such as science fiction, and so might be considered to possess more cultural weight and more influence. Baker (2014:1) writes:

> For a long time, science fiction struggled with what might be called 'a crisis of legitimation'. By this I mean that science fiction (SF) was regarded as an ephemeral popular form, of little cultural value, relegated to a cultural and social margins designated by such words as 'pulp' or 'trash' or in the characterisation of those who consumed SF as 'nerds', 'geeks' or the rather less pejorative 'fans'. […] As little as 20 years ago, in researching and writing about SF at postgraduate level, a reflex response to an enquiry about what you were working on would be conditioned by defensiveness, the desire to explain that SF was a legitimate area of study, that it had been taught at undergraduate level for 30 years, that the texts themselves were interesting and worthy of that kind of study.

Baker (2014:1) goes on to note that this attitude towards science fiction might be less common in contemporary scholarship, but he also observes that often when a science fiction text receives critical acclaim, this acclaim is not used to bolster the cultural perception of the genre but rather to separate the text in question from the genre in order to qualify its critical reception. Roberts (2006:12) also observes "a larger critical unease about SF as a genre, a sense that it does not provide readers with many of the things that serious literature does". This is perhaps the unease behind Vladimir Nabokov's strongly-worded declaration of his position on "popular pulp" like science fiction: "I loathe science fiction with its gals and goons, suspense and suspensories […] And, really, I don't think I mock popular trash more often than do other authors who believe with me that a good laugh is the best pesticide" (Appel, 1973:240). Incidentally, Nabokov (2011) made this statement while he was writing *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, which is set on a parallel Earth – and parallel worlds are, as scholars like Stableford (2006:355) note, a staple of science fiction literature. More recently, we can see this critical discomfort with science fiction in a case involving Ian McEwan, a lauded Man Booker Prize winner whose 2019 novel *Machines like me* explores artificial intelligence in an alternate reality. Despite these elements, which are often prominent features of other science fiction texts, McEwan rather infamously maintains that his novel is not science fiction, and his marked aversion to having his work labelled as such is telling.

Finally, both Tepper's and Atwood's texts are adaptations and are thus disadvantaged in a critical culture that places immense value on originality. We have seen that critics like Eliot and Bloom consider originality to be a hallmark of great literature, and Meltzer (1994:6) argues that this cultural preoccupation with originality can be seen as "a patriarchal hegemony as dominating culture and metaphysics". Thus Hutcheon (2013:2-3) notes that "in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are

most often put down as secondary, derivative, 'belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior' (as noted by Naremore 2002b: 6)". Yet I will argue that it is these inequalities of genre, gender, and originality that enable Tepper's and Atwood's texts to enter into meaningful dialogue with the classical texts that they adapt – that the qualities of the contemporary texts that might be denigrated by some critics are precisely the qualities that make these texts particularly effective vehicles of critique.

Blondell et al. (1999:ix) write that modern approaches (academic and lay) to ancient Greek texts persistently assume that modern audiences will understand the texts because of the "basic, eternal truths about human nature they [contain], truths which—thanks to the artistic genius of individual playwrights—transcended social and cultural differences". And so, Blondell et al. (1999:ix) note, "the texts of the plays [are] studied as literary documents sufficient in themselves, with little attention to the fact that they were scripts for performance in a specific cultural milieu".

However, as I have noted, the contemporary authors involved in this study seem to question this attitude towards these ancient stories. Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* both draw openly on selected classical texts by Euripides and Homer, and their rewriting of these classical texts displays more of an impulse to problematize the classical treatment of gender than to venerate the classical texts for containing basic, eternal truths about human nature. So why might Tepper and Atwood have this impulse, and why might they have chosen to work in such liminal genres in order to fulfil it? I would like to suggest that Tepper and Atwood respond not so much to Euripides and Homer themselves as to the ways in which Euripides and Homer have been received by and embedded in Western culture. Gaisser (2002:387) describes this process rather well when she writes that classical texts "are not Teflon-coated baseballs hurtling through time and gazed up at uncomprehendingly by the natives of various times and places,

until they reach our enlightened grasp; rather, they are pliable and sticky artefacts gripped, moulded, and stamped with new meanings by every generation of readers, and they come to us irreversibly altered by their experience". If classical texts are imbued with immense cultural capital, this is perhaps not the product of the texts themselves but rather of the societies in which they have historically been received and imbued with this capital – and these societies have often been patriarchal ones, and have often used these classical texts as markers of education and status. Thus an examination of the contemporary texts cannot be reduced to a simple binary which pits male classical authors against female contemporary authors. The connections between these texts are far more complicated and intricate, and each text might be seen to exist in a nexus of other texts and receptions that unavoidably colour the contemporary author's responses. Tepper and Atwood write back to Euripides's and Homer's representations of the Trojan war because these representations might be seen to have become symbolic of a particular kind of masculinity and femininity, and the classical texts have been culturally positioned to perpetuate these ideas about gender because of the cultural capital they have been afforded.

This cultural capital is one of the reasons that Tepper and Atwood have chosen to work in more liminal genres in their rewriting of acclaimed classical texts. To engage with a classical text, whatever the tone of that engagement might be, may still be seen to demonstrate a familiarity with and understanding of prestigious classical literature. However, this cultural capital is somewhat mitigated by the contemporary authors' decision to work in genres and modes that are culturally less respected and even considered lowbrow – like science fiction and adaptation.

However, I suggest that the key reason that Tepper and Atwood have chosen to work in liminal genres is because of their ability to create distance between the reader and the text (or estrange the reader from the text), and thus make extensive cognitive demands on the reader,

positioning readers as intellectually active decoders of the text. Darko Suvin (1979:6) writes of estrangement:

> This concept was first developed on non-naturalistic texts by the Russian Formalists ("ostranenie", Viktor Shklovsky) and most successfully underpinned by an anthropological and historical approach in the work of Bertolt Brecht, who wanted to write "plays for a scientific age." While working on a play about the prototypical scientist, Galileo, he defined this attitude ("Verfremdungseffekt") in his *Short Organon for the Theatre*: "A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar."

This leads Suvin (1979:7-8) to define science fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment". This means that science fiction texts create cognitive distance between the reader and the text, giving the reader "the sense that something in the fictive world is dissonant with the reader's experienced world" Mendlesohn (2003:5) and requiring that the reader work to bridge this gap and align their understanding of both worlds. Rogers and Stevens (2015:18) call texts like this "knowledge fiction" – fiction that places "demands upon the reader to supply additional knowledge, as it were cracking a code with which to make meaning that connects the sentence to the world". Thus readers of science fiction are necessarily positioned to evaluate the world within the text against their understanding of their own world, identify possible incongruities, and perform often intensive cognitive work to make sense of those incongruities in order to decode the text. Moreover, Rogers and Stevens (2015:11) argue that the classical past might exist at a similar distance from contemporary culture and might also be so removed as to constitute a kind of knowledge fiction:

> […] both fields comprise texts that are enticingly incomplete: the texts are self-contained, syntagmatic structures of narrative for which the reader must always supply a missing paradigm, since the "world" the text points to does

> not (yet; any longer) exist outside of the text. As we read the classics, the 'world' is either past or may never have existed; as we read SF, the "world" is yet to come in a complex way, either as a thought-experiment or in relation to a "scientific past" that is, relative to our readerly present, also already gone.

This cognitive estrangement, I suggest, means that readers of the contemporary texts are distanced from those texts, unable to passively immerse themselves in the texts as narratives, and are instead positioned to decode the texts as thought experiments. I will argue that cognitively estranged and therefore active readers are ideally located to unravel the contemporary texts' complex connections to the classical texts that they adapt, and the statements about gender that are made through this adaptation.

The first chapter, "'I have seen blood': Tepper and Euripides", will introduce Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999), *Iphigenia among the Taurians* ([412BCE] 1959), and *The Trojan women* ([415BCE] 1959) and their contexts. It will then examine Tepper's use of multiple kinds of structural distancing which function to position readers as cognitively estranged and thus also cognitively active. I will argue that these multiple distancing strategies reveal the dystopia at the heart of Tepper's matriarchal utopia, and that ultimately Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and the embedded adapted play "Iphigenia at Ilium", which is used within the text to motivate this unequal society, model the ways in which classical texts are similarly embedded in contemporary culture outside of the text and can be similarly used to motivate and perpetuate particular gender ideologies.

The second chapter, "'I'll spin a thread of my own': Atwood and Homer", will introduce Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* and Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* and their contexts. It will then examine the ways in which Atwood primes readers to expect her narrative to deliver the definitive story of Penelope and Odysseus by using the genres of fictive autobiography and feminist revisionist mythmaking, but subverts this by writing Penelope as

a complex and perhaps not always truthful character and foregrounding this uncertainty with the genre-bending interludes by the chorus of murdered maids that undermine Penelope's duplicitous narration. I will argue that the chapters by the maids are a fundamental structural principle of the text, as they incorporate a multiplicity of voices into the essential structure of the text, and render the text resistant to any one interpretation. I will argue that this, in turn, primes readers to interrogate their expectations of and responses to this text and preceding texts like those of Homer.

I will then draw on these ideas to suggest that both Tepper and Atwood have knowingly adapted their respective classical texts with the intention of highlighting the ways in which these classical texts might function to perpetuate their particular contextual gender ideologies in contemporary society, and that both authors have used similar strategies of adaptation to achieve this common goal. As Rabinowitz (1993:x) says:

> Clearly, the dominant order has its reasons for attaching importance to ancient Greek literature: artistic excellence, transcendent human values, tradition. I hope to show that those interested in change, those away from the centre, also have an interest in understanding these texts, precisely because of their position and the power they have exerted. Mythic texts such as the tragedies provide some of the underpinnings of contemporary ideology. By articulating the relationship between gender, power, and sexuality in tragedy, we can understand its ideological force; left unanalysed, the dynamic at work in the plays may continue to seem to be universal and thus continue to reinscribe itself in the modern audience.

I. "I have seen blood": Tepper and Euripides

"What people know is what they want to know.
That was a late-come hind, great warrior,
For I was there and never saw it come!
Artemis sent no hind. Artemis had
more urgent business in some other place.
It was my blood spurting upon the stones
each time my heart's fist clenched, it was my brain
afire with pain, my voice gone dumb, my eyes
turned into dimming orbs of sand-worn glass,
their youthful lustre lost forevermore.
Iphigenia, Agamemnon's child,
died on that bloody stone, not some poor hind."
(Tepper, 1990:64-65)

"The Maids: We demand justice! We demand retribution! We invoke the law of blood guilt! We call upon the Angry Ones!" (Atwood, 2005:183)

Standing before the smouldering ruins of her home, surrounded by weeping female relatives, the Cassandra of Tepper's (1990:163-164) creation thrice proclaims that "[she has] seen blood". In keeping with the myth of Cassandra's prophetic powers, however, the princess of Troy is either ignored or silenced – "hush, dear, please" her mother, Hecuba, tells her, assuming that Cassandra is speaking about the devastation wrought on Troy during the war (Tepper, 1990:163). The reader might make the same assumption, as the women of Troy gloss over Cassandra's grim pronouncements; Hecuba says merely that "[The Trojan women] have seen blood enough to last [their] lives" and Polyxena agrees with her mother, Hecuba – she simply advises Cassandra to "[l]ook around [herself]. See what is lost. […] weep for the walls of Troy" (Tepper, 1990:163,196). But while Tepper's Cassandra stands indeed in the classical past, lit by the flames of the burning city of Troy, her eyes are fixed on the distant future: she looks to "the end of time" and sees "the land laid waste and burned with brands, and desolation bled from fiery wombs" (Tepper, 1990:196). In Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) novel *The gate to Women's Country* a narrative set in a future far from our own contemporary experience is entwined with the classical past embodied in the play-within-the-text that

Tepper has titled “Iphigenia at Ilium”, allowing the women of both past and future to speak without the mediation of a male playwright and the associated constraints of contextual gender ideology.

We might consider *The gate to Women’s Country* (Tepper, 1990) as a prophecy in its own right: a grim warning of what the future might entail if society remains in thrall to the ideologies of violent men. And if *The gate to Women’s Country* (Tepper, 1990) is a cautionary prophecy, then Sheri S. Tepper is a kind of Cassandra, working in the often critically-ignored genre of science fiction and foretelling one dire possible future for humanity.

Bahun-Radunović and Rajan (2011:2) state that “Cassandra emerges as a victim of patriarchy; but she is also a victim endowed, surprisingly, with the virtues of dignity and defiance”. We can perhaps also identify these qualities in one of Tepper’s (1990) characters from “Iphigenia at Ilium” – the ghostly Iphigenia. Young (1953:131) writes that “Iphigenia is drama’s most attractive martyr”, as Iphigenia is a Greek maiden who is sacrificed by her father, Agamemnon, to appease the gods and gain a wind that will deliver the Greek forces to Troy to begin the Trojan war. Young (1953:138) also acknowledges Iphigenia’s contextually unusual representation as heroine, and states that “Iphigenia reveals an inner integrity which will be authentic as long as sacrifice is nobility. Wherever love of family and country is cherished as the loftiest sentiment of the human heart, in that land Iphigenia will be recognised as kinswoman and citizen”. Despite Young’s book being published more than sixty years ago, we will see during the course of this chapter that Iphigenia retains her role as martyr in *The gate to Women’s Country* (Tepper, 1990). Yet I will argue that Tepper’s reasons for conferring this status on Iphigenia are very different from those of Euripides, three of whose plays – *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999), *Iphigenia among the Taurians* ([412BCE] 1959), and *The Trojan women* ([415BCE] 1959) – are adapted by her.

The gate to Women's Country (Tepper, 1990) is situated firmly in the realm of feminist science fiction; the novel is set in an imagined future after a cataclysmic nuclear event that has irrevocably altered the world of the present. The text can thus be seen to function within Suvin's (1979:7-8) ground-breaking definition of science fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment". This imagined future is both estranged from a contemporary context in some ways and also cognitively similar to it in others. However, woven into Tepper's future is the past of the classical tradition, embodied in the play-within-the-text that Tepper (1990) has titled "Iphigenia at Ilium" and which allows her to allude to the world of ancient Greece in complex and revealing ways.

Rooted in Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogics and guided by Hutcheon's (2013) methods in *A theory of adaptation*, the chapter will explore the texts by both Tepper and Euripides in terms of the events within them, their genres and contexts, and the typical themes and concerns of each author as they appear in the relevant texts. It will examine the decisions made by Tepper during the course of her adaptation as meaningful choices that can communicate her intentions and concerns about past, contemporary, and possible future gender relations. Thus although the imagined play's classical setting may seem incongruous within the book's futuristic environment and sustained interest in a possible future for humankind, I will argue that by writing a science-fiction adaptation of a classical Greek tragedy, Tepper hopes to be able to use diverse strategies of adaptation to question contemporary patriarchal worldviews rooted in a classical past and perpetuated by the cultural capital of a classical canon. I suggest that Tepper does this through a complex structural strategy of multi-layered cognitive estrangement that creates distance between text and reader and ultimately primes readers for the demanding cognitive work of decoding the

text's thought experiment. Thus, through adaptation, Tepper's text inserts into the texts by Euripides "an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)" (Bakhtin (1981:7).

Rogers and Stevens (2015:4) suggest that science fiction engages with "antiquity as it has been received and transformed already into various forms, objects, and products, and is being so transformed even now", indicating that Tepper responds not only to Euripides himself but also to later receptions of his work. Rogers and Stevens (2015:7-8) also suggest that both science fiction and classical texts have a similar effect on a contemporary reader. Both science fiction and classical texts, they argue, represent worlds that do not exist concurrently with our own; the science fiction world is yet to come – if it will come at all, and the classical world is already gone – or may never have existed in the first place (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:7-8). Both sets of texts therefore represent worlds of which the reader can have no empirical experience, worlds far from the reader's own. Thus both science fiction and classical texts may be seen as self-contained and incomplete narratives that require the reader to supply the missing knowledge that will align the world they experience with the world presented to them in the text, meaning that both science fiction and classical texts constitute "knowledge fictions" (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:15). Rogers and Stevens (2015:11) argue that "the strangeness of images from the ancient past is matched by the 'cognitive estrangement' of futures imagined in modern SF". I thus suggest in this chapter that Tepper's adaptation of Euripides uses the distance (from the contemporary reader's experience) of both classical past and imagined future to comment on gender ideology in a continuum of time from ancient Greece to both Tepper's contemporary context and the future that she has illustrated in her novel. She questions the universality of the classical canon by demonstrating the distinctly problematic patriarchal ideologies inherent in examples from this canon, and uses strategies of cognitive estrangement found in both science fiction and the reception of classical texts to

allow readers to explore potentially problematic aspects of their own context through contexts far removed from their own. Ultimately, I suggest that Tepper does not seek to erase Euripides and his role in the classical canon, but rather to reclaim and reframe this central canon for the benefit of both women and men. Women's Country, I argue, is not a utopia – it is a dire prophecy, uttered by a new Cassandra and embodied in an adaptation that fuses classical past and possible future.

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The gate to Women's Country is set after a series of events that Tepper (1990) calls the "Convulsions", which are revealed to have been nuclear wars which caused widespread environmental destruction. Tepper's world consists of many small, scattered towns reminiscent of ancient Greek city states, with each town named after the woman who founded it. The towns are run entirely by women; the Women's Council of each town governs and makes all political and economic decisions, and the women citizens of the town do all the jobs that keep a town running smoothly – they farm, build, study, care for medical needs, and so on. Each town also has a garrison, located outside of the town's walls and run by the town's men, to protect the town and its resources from attacks by strangers or the garrisons of other towns. It is in these garrisons that the men live, train as warriors, and learn about honour and brotherhood. The garrisons foster a distinctive warrior culture that uses honour to motivate the men's actions; it is considered honourable to protect women and to have sons, for example, and dishonourable to leave one's warrior brothers and return to the town as a servitor. The women, it is believed, earn the men's protection by providing them with food and sons. The garrisons' emphasis on honour and brotherhood means that few boys choose the "dishonourable" path of returning to Women's Country, but those who do become "servitors", men who live amongst the women and are often assigned to an individual family to assist them in their daily lives.

The main character, Stavia, is the daughter of Morgot, one of the women who sits on the Women's Council of Marthatown. Like most of the members of this council, Morgot is also closely involved with the town's medical establishments. The narration switches between Stavia's past and present and is also interspersed with brief scenes from the play "Iphigenia at Ilium", which is performed once a year in every town in Women's Country and which female children are expected to memorise from a young age. Stavia is often described as imagining herself as a character on a stage, and she says that she allows the "actor Stavia" to take over her body in situations that are difficult for her. Coupled with information about the play that is given in bits and pieces over the course of the narrative, this reveals a strong emphasis on drama. Stavia's introduction of "actor Stavia" is also an indication of how the cultural roles and norms of societies can be internalised. While Euripides's female characters might seem to have internalised the patriarchal social attitudes of their culture, Tepper's Stavia has internalised her culture's emphasis on drama and performance. She has also, it seems, internalised the idea of gender roles as a performance of cultural expectations.

When she is a young adult, Stavia's tumultuous and unsanctioned relationship with one of the town's warriors, Chernon, becomes sexual in nature and results in Stavia falling pregnant. Her mother then explains that the Women's Council of each town is artificially inseminating the women with the semen of servitors instead of warriors so that the violent nature of the warriors will be bred out. The majority of citizens, male and female, have no knowledge of this covert programme of eugenics. However, Stavia still chooses not to end her pregnancy, and when she tells her mother of Chernon's tales about rebellion in the garrison and their plans to take over the town and subjugate the women, the Women's Council sends the entire garrison to war with another town's garrison. Not a single warrior of fighting age returns from this battle, which effectively removes any possibility of a warrior invasion of Marthatown.

"Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990), with its connections to three Euripides plays, opens up the rest of Tepper's text to a specific kind of reading. It is a leitmotif that runs through the novel, and when the Women's Council's great secret is discovered by Stavia, the play seems to serve as justification for the actions of the Women's Council – those who call themselves "the Damned Few". "Iphigenia at Ilium" and the corresponding Euripides plays are thus used by Tepper (1990) to reveal the true nature of male warriors – those in the ancient Greek plays, those who caused the Convulsions, and those who now reside in garrisons outside Women's Country – and to demonstrate the tragic consequences if such men are allowed to rule. The plays also justify the secrecy of the Women's Council; their programme of eugenics is kept from both the warriors and the women, as the women in the plays demonstrate that women often internalize patriarchal values in ways that contribute to their own eventual tragedies. So "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) shows the necessity and urgency of the actions of "the Damned Few", those women who have taken upon themselves the difficult and controversial task of eradicating the violent, warlike tendencies inherent in men through a programme of eugenics.

Hutcheon (2013:94,95) writes that "an adaptation can obviously be used to engage in a larger social or cultural critique" and also notes that adaptors have "deeply personal as well as culturally and historically-conditioned reasons for selecting a certain work to adapt and the particular way to do so". She later argues that "an adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context" (Hutcheon, 2013:142). It is for this reason that Hutcheon considers both the adaptor and the context in which the adaptor works to be essential to developing an understanding of how the adaptation functions. Both *The gate to Women's Country* (1990) and the play within the text, "Iphigenia at Ilium", are the products of Sheri S. Tepper and thus also the products of her context and culture. From the ancient Greek context

of Euripides's plays to the contemporary context of Tepper's novel, the body of myths surrounding Iphigenia has been transculturally and temporally adapted to suit Tepper's needs.

Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* was therefore written within the confluence of multiple contextual concerns and ideologies, some of which may be helpful to explore in more detail. As Hutcheon (2013:18) notes: "what is involved in adapting can be a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents. Therefore, adaptors are first interpreters and then creators". We can trace in Tepper's work the influences of the "New Right" movement, the Cold War, ecological concerns, ecofeminism, and second-wave feminism.

Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* was written and published during the 1980s in America. This period in American culture seems to have influenced many aspects of Tepper's novel. For example, the rise of the "New Right" conservative movement that appealed to people like evangelical Christians who vocally advocated things like uncontrolled procreation and did not seem to support or work for women's rights, bears a remarkable similarity to Tepper's religious extremist "Holylanders". The looming presence of the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union became even more threatening when nuclear weapons were tested by both parties, an idea that seems to have influenced the catastrophic "Convulsions" in Tepper's novel.

Also extensive in the 1980s were concerns about overpopulation and the impact human beings have had on the world. Tepper's response to this seems to be the creation of Women's Country, a place in which caring for the environment is a way of life. In Women's Country, the increase of population is carefully controlled to avoid overtaxing societal and environmental resources, and lifestyles are environmentally conscious.

Tepper's work also shows a strong preoccupation with gender relations and ideology that may be the result of both her own social experiences as a woman and as a director of Planned Parenthood, and of her writing in a context in which second-wave feminism and ecofeminism were just beginning to emerge and respond to contextual issues. In Tepper's (2013) autobiographical writings on her website, she notes: "when the position of director of the local Planned Parenthood became vacant, I applied, took the job, and worked as the director for some twenty years. I believed in that job and did it out of conviction". She also notes how throughout her childhood and adolescence, she was treated differently and given fewer opportunities than her brother because she was a woman (Tepper, 2013). Planned Parenthood (2014), to quote from their website, "delivers vital reproductive health care, sex education, and information to millions of women, men, and young people worldwide", suggesting that as a director of her local branch of Planned Parenthood for twenty years, Tepper interacted with a variety of different women in different situations and had substantial experience of the lives of contemporary women from all backgrounds.

Tepper (1990) herself identifies as a feminist in both interviews and her own biography on her website, and so the influence of both ecofeminism and second-wave feminism apparent in *The gate to Women's Country* should be acknowledged. The term "ecofeminism" was introduced by radical French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne's in 1974 (Carroll, 2018:1). The premise of ecofeminism is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species, is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature (Gaard, 1993:1). Mickey (2018:ix) cautions that the connections between sex, gender, nature, life, matter, and embodiment are exceedingly complex, resulting in the field of ecofeminism featuring a multiplicity of theories, methods, and practices rather than being a single homogenous entity. However, Phillips and Rumens (2016:3) note that the diverse area of ecofeminism is still generally agreed to have arisen in the late 1970s to early

1980s, which correlates with the context in which Tepper (1990) wrote *The gate to Women's Country*. Emphasizing the influence of ecofeminism on Tepper's work is the fact that ecofeminism is rooted in activist social movements. Gaard (2013:1) writes that ecofeminism as a theory has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism, including peace movements, labour movements, women's health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements.

Warren (1997a:xi) suggests that "there are important connections between how one treats women, people of colour, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other". As Warren (1997b:12) notes, the very structure of the English language seems to create a correlation between women and the natural environment:

> Women are described in animal terms […] animalizing or naturalising women in a (patriarchal) culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans (men) thereby reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status. Similarly, language which feminizes nature in a (patriarchal) culture where women are viewed as subordinate and inferior reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature […] The exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing them.

Gaard (1993:2) suggests that ecofeminism identifies patriarchy as the framework that authorizes these forms of oppression, and describes patriarchy as an ideology that has a fundamental self/other distinction which is based on a sense of self that is separate and atomistic. Furthermore, Gaard (1993:2) refers to studies by Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan which have repeatedly shown that "a sense of self as separate is more common in men, while an interconnected sense of self is more common in women". In addition, according to Gaard (1993:2), these conceptions of self are the foundation for two different ethical systems: "the separate self often operates on the basis of an ethic of rights or justice, while the interconnected self makes moral decisions on the basis of an ethic of responsibilities or care". This connects to what scholars such as Evans (1995:3-4) write about

the essentialism reflected in second-wave feminist theories, and the debate about whether or not women and men being treated equally necessarily implies that they are exactly the same.

Ecofeminism as a theory thus explores many of the concerns that are revealed in *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990): a concern about ongoing war and violence in contemporary times, a suspicion of conservative religious movements, distrust of nuclear technology, and worry over the state of the natural world and the effect of uncontrollably-growing human populations on it – all, it seems implied, the result of inherently violent men being in power.

The structure of society in *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) also seems to reflect a stance attuned to the thinking of second-wave feminism[8] theorists who posited a strong difference between masculinity and femininity (Nicholson, 1997:3-4) – women and men are presented as inherently different and society is constructed in a manner that takes this into account by segregating the sexes completely and assigning firm roles to each. It seems implied that the different sexes are intrinsically suited to different roles, and as the narrative progresses it is revealed that one of the innate qualities of men is violence – the reader learns that men caused the "Convulsions" that destroyed society because of their warring natures, and later in the novel, violent and domineering men threaten to destroy Women's Country, too.

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[8] Generally accepted as having begun in the 1960s, second-wave feminism was increasingly theoretical and associated the subjugation of women with broader critiques of the grand narratives of capitalism, patriarchy, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as wife and mother (Nicholson, 1997:2-3; Rampton, 2008:8; Whelehan, 1996:3-5). Scholars such as Evans (1995:3-4) explore the sex equality-difference ideas embodied in second-wave feminist theories, and the debate about whether or not women and men being treated equally rests on them being exactly the same. While second-wave feminism has subsequently been criticised for essentialism and for focusing too strongly on middle-class white women (Moore, 2007:126; Sturgeon, 1997:5-8), the work of writers like Tepper has had an enduring effect on conceptions of sex and gender.

"Iphigenia at Ilium", the title of the play that occurs in Tepper's (1990) novel, seems to refer to two plays by Euripides, both concerning Iphigenia, the daughter of the Greek commander Agamemnon and his wife Clytemnestra. *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999) and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Euripides, [412BCE] 1959) can be taken, if read in the order given, to chronologically detail two major events in Iphigenia's life; her "sacrifice" by her father Agamemnon at the beginning of the Trojan war, and her rescue by her brother from her life on Tauris as a priestess fated to perform bloody human sacrifices.

The alteration of the parts of the title dealing with location, from "Tauris" or "Aulis" to "Ilium" indicates a change in setting – Ilium is another name for the legendary city of Troy, and so in the Tepper version, the stories of Iphigenia and Troy are linked more directly than they are in Euripides's versions of the two myths.

The first Euripides ([410BCE] 1999) play that the title of Tepper's play evokes, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, is set at the beginning of the Trojan war. The beautiful Helen, sister of King Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra, has been spirited away to Troy by one of the Trojan princes, Paris. Her husband Menelaus is enraged and invokes a pact that all of Helen's suitors made to support him in ensuring Helen's fidelity. Spurred into action by this pact, Helen's past suitors gather their armies and travel to Aulis to ask Agamemnon to captain them for the sake of his brother Menelaus. Though Agamemnon agrees, the fleets remain weather-bound at Aulis, and Calchas the seer tells Agamemnon that to gain the gods' favour and, through this, gain fair winds for the army's journey to Troy, he must sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to Artemis. The horrified Agamemnon initially refuses, but after much persuasion from Menelaus he agrees. He tells his wife Clytemnestra to send Iphigenia to him on the pretence of a marriage to Achilles.

When Iphigenia arrives and learns the truth behind her father's summons, she realizes that she cannot escape; to prevent Achilles and Agamemnon from fighting over her, she declares that she will die willingly, despite her mother's protests. Iphigenia sees her actions as heroic and the sacrifice goes ahead; later a messenger reports that Iphigenia was replaced on the altar by a deer.

Iphigenia among the Taurians ([412BCE] 1959), the second Euripides play to which Tepper's novel seems to refer, is set many years after *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999). In Aulis, Iphigenia is set to be sacrificed to Artemis, but as her father brings the knife down, he closes his eyes and the goddess Artemis appears, exchanges a deer for Iphigenia, and spirits Iphigenia to the island of Tauris. Iphigenia is believed to be dead, and the Greek fleets sail for Troy to make war on the Trojans to avenge Menelaus. As the Trojan war rages on, Iphigenia lives in Tauris as a priestess of Artemis, serving in her temple and, to Iphigenia's horror, sacrificing any foreigners that arrive on the island. Iphigenia is aided by four maidens who have also been stolen away from their homes to perform this bloody ritual, and longs for news of her family. Orestes and Pylades arrive on this island and eventually the siblings, Iphigenia and Orestes, recognise each other and Orestes helps Iphigenia escape and return to her home.

While the title of Tepper's (1990) play seems to refer to Euripides's plays about Iphigenia, the body of the play "Iphigenia at Ilium" that occurs in Tepper's novel seems to allude to Euripides's *The Trojan women* ([415BCE] 1959). This tragedy takes place at the end of the Trojan war, in the open space before the partially-demolished, smouldering, and ransacked city of Troy. The men of Troy have fled or been killed, and the women and children left behind are captives of the conquering army; they sit before the ruins of Troy and await their fate at the hands of the Greeks. As Hecuba, once Queen of Troy and wife of King Priam, laments the horrors she has experienced and those yet to come, the messenger Talthybius

arrives to tell the women to which Greek men they now belong. Hecuba discovers that one of her daughters, Polyxena, has been sacrificed on Achilles's tomb; her remaining daughter, Cassandra, who has the gift of prophecy, is brought to join the other women. Andromache is then also brought to the group of women and together they lament their fate before being taken from their home.

A clear pattern emerges when considering these plays by Euripides: all three demonstrate contextually uncharacteristic focuses on and representations of women.

All of these plays by Euripides that deal with the Trojan war, from its initial stages to its bitter end, have a commonality in their representations of women. In *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999), Iphigenia is absolutely powerless over her own fate, and is at the mercy of the Greek men: Menelaus, her uncle, and Agamemnon, her father, decide whether or not she will be sacrificed for what Tepper will argue is an intensely male cause – the waging of war. Iphigenia is a pawn with no control over the most fundamental aspects of her survival. In the end, Iphigenia herself has so internalized the patriarchal narrative of her culture that she goes willingly to her death, offering herself as a sacrifice so that the men may fight. It is only through the intervention of the goddess Artemis that Iphigenia survives at all – even her mother, Queen Clytemnestra, cannot exert any kind of influence over whether or not her beloved daughter is killed by her own father.

Iphigenia's survival does not imply happiness or autonomy, though, as is shown in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Euripides, [412BCE] 1959). Here she is confined to a temple and forced to murder innocent men as sacrifices to the gods. Surrounded by other temple maidens similarly uprooted from their homes, Iphigenia longs for Argos and her family. When her brother Orestes arrives on the island with the news that he has killed their mother because she killed their father, Iphigenia agrees that it was the correct course of action, and demonstrates

again that she has internalized her culture's patriarchal view of women. She shows no anger at her father's willingness to murder her or her brother's readiness to murder their mother, but instead decries her mother's vengeful actions against her father. Her attitude towards Orestes seems to exceed the bounds of familial love and enter the realm of worship – she believes that his life is far more valuable than hers, and seems to think that he can do no wrong. Again, Iphigenia is powerless in the hands of men, and she appears to have taken this to be the natural order of things.

The Trojan women (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959) is perhaps the most sobering example of Euripides's representation of women. Andromache, Hecuba, and Cassandra have gone from being possessed by Trojan men – indeed, Andromache's long monologue about how good a wife she was to Hector illuminates the things expected of women in the time period: "I gave my lord's presence the tribute of hushed lips, and eyes quietly downcast" (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959:637) – to being the chattels of conquering Greek soldiers. They are little more than belongings and are defined solely by the men to whom they belong – they are being distributed as slaves for Greek men because they were married to the defeated Trojan men, and they have absolutely no power over their fates. Thus most of this play consists of the Trojan women lamenting their horrifying circumstances while their city burns in the background; their husbands and children have been killed, their possessions have been taken as loot, what little autonomy they possessed in Troy has been removed, and soon their links to the other women in their family will be broken. They are the powerless collateral damage of a war that men have waged over another woman, Helen, for dubious reasons. In *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999) Menelaus and Agamemnon never mention wanting to retrieve Helen from Troy because Menelaus loves her or misses her; rather, the mission is framed as political – to the Greeks, the Trojans are barbarians, and Agamemnon's motivation is "to sail as quickly as possible to the barbarians' land, / and put an end to their thefts of

Greek wives" (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999:375). It seems that Troy is razed to the ground in order for the Greek men to make a statement about who owns the women and what they are willing to do to keep their women under their control.

So these plays that Tepper has adapted show women as powerless, women as possessions, and women as having internalized the patriarchal structure of their society to the point that they cannot imagine any other way of being.

Given their context, Euripides's plays seem unusually concerned with questions of gender (Blondell et al., 1999:80). Blondell et al. (1999:80) note that "thirteen of his nineteen extant plays have female protagonists; by comparison, among the seven plays of Aeschylus only one, *Agamemnon*, can be said to have a female protagonist […] , as do two of the seven plays by Sophocles". Yet mere representation says little about the authorial intention or contextual (and historical) effect of such representation. Rabinowitz (1993:13-14) writes:

> [Euripides] is the only one of the tragedians with a reputation on "the woman question," and yet that reputation is contradictory. Aristophanes' characters in *Thesmophoriazousai* blame Euripides' plays for making their husbands suspicious and thus causing them troubles at home […] ; the character Aeschylus in *The Frogs* accuses the character Euripides of displaying only bad women […] . In this century, on the other hand, critics have seen him taking the side of women and other oppressed groups.

It is almost impossible for us to reliably identify which of Euripides's own experiences might have contributed to the concerns we can trace in his plays; Mastronarde (2010:3) notes that "the biographical tradition for most Greek poets is almost completely unreliable, and the case of Euripides is no exception". However, we do have some information regarding the general role and function of drama and tragedy in ancient Greek society, the gender ideologies prevalent at the time, and the ways in which Euripides's work has been received at different points in history; all issues which may have contributed to Euripides's representations of women in the three plays adapted by Tepper.

This approach is supported by Rabinowitz (1993:14), who writes:

> It would be a mistake, even a waste of time, to try to decide whether Euripides was a misogynist or a feminist. Instead of examining the overt images of women to see whether they are "good" or "bad," I look instead for the ways in which the plays structure audience reaction and thus impose a gender hierarchy consistent with and supportive of the sex/gender system of the time. Euripides may indeed "invent women" and "reverse traditional representations," but ultimately he recuperates the female figures for patriarchy. His plays perform this ideological work in subtle and complicated ways. To recognize this function is not to deny that he endows his female characters with great understanding and allows them to give voice to important ideas; nonetheless, their experience is shaped to the end of supporting male power.

As Hutcheon (2013:108) writes about the "Why?" of adaptations, "in the act of adapting, choices are made based on many factors […] including genre or medium conventions, political engagement, and personal as well as public history. These decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context […]". Though critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) reject the notion that authorial intent should be taken into consideration when considering adaptations, Hutcheon (2013:109) argues that an audience's knowledge of the adaptor's explicit intentions can influence its interpretation of the adapted work. In addition to these powerful extra-textual statements of intent, the text itself may bear marks that reveal the assumptions and attitudes of the adaptor (Hutcheon, 2013:108-109). This might also be explained by Bakhtin's (1981:7) theory of dialogics as creating extratextual heteroglossia: adding another layer of dialogue to the ways in which the audience understands the text. Thus we can consider the choices that Euripides made – such as about what myths to adapt into tragedies, which aspects of them to maintain and which aspects he altered, how he presented characters and events – to be meaningful, and perhaps as indicative of his own personal thoughts about the society in which he lived.

The first aspect of Hutcheon's (2013:34) framework is "What?" – the forms that the source material and the adaptation take. She writes that during the transcoding of adaptation, the

medium too can be changed, and says that "the medium – as the material means of expression of an adaptation – is crucially important" (Hutcheon, 2013:34). A change in medium from source material to adaptation is meaningful, Hutcheon observes, as different mediums have their own conventions and engage their audiences in different ways, and thus can express different things in diverse ways if the adaptors so choose.

The Trojan women ([415BCE] 1959), *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999), and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* ([412BCE] 1959), all plays by Euripides, fall into the category of drama: specifically, ancient Greek tragedy.

Blondell et al. (1999:33) write:

> Drama uses physical bodies and material objects to create meaning and involves several modes of communication at once—visual […] , aural […] , musical […] , spatial […] , and kinetic […] . It exists not in abstraction but in time and space. The performance medium affects every aspect of the meaning of a dramatic script.

There are so few records of the workings and effects of performance in Athens that a contemporary reader or audience cannot hope to have the same experience of the performance of an ancient Greek tragedy as an audience member in ancient Athens would have. However, it is still vital to remember that the plays were written to be performed, not merely read.

In Hutcheon's (2013:114) next chapter, she speaks of "How?" and suggests that "the appeal of adaptations for audiences lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty". She explores how audiences experience adaptations, suggesting that audiences can be either "knowing" or "unknowing"; that is, audiences can either be familiar with the source text or experience the adaptation as their first encounter with the story and characters actually drawn from the source text (Hutcheon, 2013:120). "Knowing" audiences have

expectations and demands created by the connections that they have drawn between a source text and an adapted text, and Hutcheon emphasizes that audiences tend to experience the adaptation through the lens of the source text (Hutcheon, 2013:122).

In the case of the three Euripides plays, it seems most likely that the Athenian audiences were "knowing". As Blondell et al. (1999:45) state, the Athenians "viewed the ancient legends as a form of history" and the resulting adaptations were "immediate enough to engage the audience with stories of their tribal ancestors". As these legends were viewed as tribal history, they can be considered canonical, and so Athenian audiences may have relied on generally circulated memories of the source stories even if they were not personally familiar with these stories. The ancient Greeks also had a strong oral tradition which resulted in multiple versions of myths circulating and being known by audiences, making "unknowing" audiences unlikely. Additionally, Homer's earlier takes on the legends surrounding the Trojan war through *The Iliad* ([800BCE] 2010) and *The Odyssey* ([800BCE] 1937) were popular and influential, making "knowing" audiences in ancient Greece even more probable (Blondell et al., 1999:6).

Hutcheon (2013:134) then refers to theatre semioticians who argue that stage audiences are "an active dimension of the meaning-making of any play, not only in their interpretive work but also in their physical and emotional responses at the time of viewing".

Hutcheon (2013:139) continues to write that "the context in which we experience the adaptation – cultural, social, historical – is another important factor in the meaning and significance we grant to this ubiquitous palimpsestic form". This brings us to Hutcheon's "Where? When?", or more simply, context. Context has an undeniable impact on both the creation and reception of texts, and Hutcheon (2013:142) refers to Malcolm Bradbury to explain that even "without any temporal updating or any alterations to national or cultural

setting, it can take very little time for context to change how a story is received". Euripides's plays are framed in a context and were influenced by that context. As this study's focus is on the statements that Tepper's adaptation of Euripides's plays allows her to make about gender, a discussion of the ancient Greek context of gender must occur.

Blondell et al. (1999:48) and Rabinowitz (1993:2-4) note that the topic of women in ancient Greece draws contentious views from various scholars due to issues such as a lack of firm evidence, difficulties in the interpretation of that evidence, inconsistencies between the various sources of evidence, and internal ambiguities in existing sources. Conflating these issues is the fact that most surviving sources of evidence are elite texts and artworks which, due to the structure of ancient Greek society, were almost invariably created by men (Blondell et al. 1999:48). Rabinowitz (1993:1-2) notes that the public spectacle of tragedy may have functioned like a cultural institution, reinforcing existing community norms and values – but norms and values subordinated to the principally masculine Greek culture. The majority of surviving representations of Athenian women, then, are expressed through and complicated by the ideology of gender; almost no ancient Greek texts written by women have survived, and the ones that have are neither epic nor tragic, the two most substantial public genres of drama at the time (Blondell et al., 1999:48). While the genre of tragedy often focuses on relations between the sexes, these plots were written and (originally) enacted by men. Thus, there is almost no evidence of Athenian women's lives from women's perspectives; possibly a telling fact in and of itself. Belsey (2014:5) writes that "fictional texts do not necessarily mirror the practices prevalent in a social body, but they are a rich repository of the meanings its members understand and contest", and therefore while explorations of these texts might not provide definitive proof of gender relations in their contexts, they can provide new ways of understanding the ideological constructions of gender in their contexts. As Belsey (2014:5) argues, fictional texts (like those of both Euripides and

Tepper) can constitute "a possible place from which to begin an analysis of what it means to be a person, a man or a woman, at a specific historical moment".

The proper spheres of action for Athenian men and women were considered to be *polis* – the public life and open realm of men, and *oikos* – the closeted space of women (Blondell et al., 1999:49). The scarcity of evidence about Athenian women is directly related to their public invisibility: women were not permitted to participate in the public life of the state (Blondell et al., 1999:48). Every woman was considered legally a minor and would remain under the control of a male relative for the duration of her life (Blondell et al., 1999:49). It is important to state that the sequestration of women in this context need not necessarily be considered synonymous with the devaluation of women; Rabinowitz (1993:7) notes that "it is possible that women exercised a form of power in the private realm". However, Rabinowitz (1993:7) argues that ultimately this separation of the sexes "did coincide with a widespread, if not universal, misogyny and a devaluation of the female realm". These beliefs can be identified in various aspects of contextual gender ideologies: the word *arete* ("excellence") referred to excellence in battle and politics when applied to men, but when applied to women denoted desirable female behaviours such as managing a household and being obedient to a husband (Blondell et al., 1999:49). However, despite these clearly ideologically defined gender roles, the sequestration of women was, as Rabinowitz (1993:6) notes, "class-specific and […] as full of gaps as the Athenian calendar was full of religious holidays". There is strong evidence to suggest that women may have been present in the audience of performances as the performances often formed part of religious celebrations in which women played considerable roles (Rabinowitz, 1993:6-7).

Blondell et al. (1999:51) write that "the virtue most vigorously demanded of Athenian women was *sophrosune* (literally 'sound-mindedness')", which has no single English equivalent but can mean variously self-control, self-knowledge, deference, moderation,

resistance to appetite, and chastity. The control of female sexuality was especially important to Athenian social organization, as women are essential for men's production of legitimate heirs, and women's improper sexual behaviour can disrupt male control over their own reproduction (Blondell et al., 1999:52). Greek texts also frequently express general fears about women asserting their individual will or asserting independent identities, portraying women as "a force potentially threatening to their male relatives' honour, to the legitimacy of their children, to the stability of the oikos and the polis" and so justifying that women require constant vigilance from men (Blondell et al., 1999:52).

While Blondell et al. (1999:48) stress that ideology around gender and practise of gender are never identical, it seems probable that surviving dramatic texts from the period like those by Euripides are more likely to explore gender as ideology than gender as practise. Thus Blondell et al. (1999:61) note that:

> […] tragedy offers warnings about the dangers of women's behaviour, especially when unsupervised by males (Hall 1997:106–110). In this view the plays have little to do with the actual conditions of Athenian women's lives. Instead, the representations of female characters and gender relations are male constructions that use female figures to discuss issues of importance to men, including their anxieties about the domestic and social systems over which they preside.

Therefore it seems that rather than studying female figures in tragedy in order to gain an understanding of the lives of women in ancient Greece, it might be more useful to explore representations of women in Euripides's work in order to gain an understanding of the ideology of gender in ancient Greece – the ideology of gender to which, I posit, Tepper's adaptation responds.

As established in my introduction, the engagement with and adaptation of classical texts is not unique to contemporary culture: Euripides's plays have been studied, praised, critiqued, and adapted for almost as long as they have existed. While attitudes to and receptions of

Euripides's plays have varied, so too have the approaches taken by classical scholars. Hardwick and Stray (2011:4) write that early scholarly approaches adhered to "the classical tradition", which they describe as a process by which the fixed "meaning" of classical texts (and the associated moral and political values) is transmitted across centuries to finally be "grasped and passed on" by a sufficiently educated reader. However, Hardwick and Harrison (2013:xxi) state that approaches to classical texts have changed, noting that "assumptions about the inherent superiority of ancient works now tend to be more closely questioned, both in scholarship and in the wider public sphere" and that "there has been renewed acceptance of the independent status and value of new works". Moreover, contemporary scholarship has begun to contest the idea that "classics is something fixed, whose boundaries can be shown, and whose essential nature we can understand on its own terms" (Martindale, 2006:2).

This suggests that Tepper's decision to incorporate an adaptation of classical Greek plays into a novel that falls within the genre of science fiction is a choice influenced not only by Euripides's plays, but also by the multiple subsequent receptions of and responses to Euripides's plays. I propose that Tepper's (1990) situating of *The gate to Women's Country* in the mode of science fiction has several effects on the text's engagement with the classical texts by Euripides, and its subsequent statements about gender.

First, it might be argued that whatever the tone of an engagement with classical Greek literature – whether an adaptor wishes to praise, question, undermine, or any subtle variation on these themes – the cultural capital of the classical literature remains an element of this engagement. For an author to seek to undermine classical Greek literature might still serve to demonstrate that the author has read, understood, and questioned classical Greek literature. Thus even a subversive engagement with classical Greek literature might struggle to escape the grasp of the prestigious social perception of the classical canon, and might consequently even perpetuate the cultural capital that classical texts seem to possess.

I suggest, however, that Tepper's decision to adapt Euripides's plays in a novel of the science fiction genre is one way in which she addresses this difficulty. Incorporating "Iphigenia at Ilium" into a science fiction novel allows Tepper (1990) to undermine, to some extent, the cultural capital associated with any engagement with classical Greek literature. Mendlesohn (2003:1) writes that "whatever else it is, sf literature is not *popular*", and notes that the mode of writing that is science fiction has "seemed to exist at variance from the standards and demands of both the literary establishment and the mass market" – thus situating science fiction some distance from the cultural capital of both classical Greek texts and also some later adaptations of these texts. This also positions Tepper's text to use classical texts and the adaptation thereof to explore ideas rather than to bolster cultural esteem.

The second advantage that science fiction affords Tepper's text is that of enabling the text to function as a thought experiment as well as a narrative. Mendlesohn (2003:2) notes that science fiction continues to be notoriously difficult to map as a genre and suggests that this is because science fiction is "a discussion or a mode, and not a genre". As science fiction often extracts plot structures from other genres and does not conform to a plot structure singularly and reliably identifiable as being that of science fiction, Mendlesohn (2003:2-3) posits that we might question whether science fiction really "owns" a specific narrative at all. These texts might instead be centred on a "sense of wonder" that Mendlesohn (2003:3) terms "the emotional heart of sf" – the powerful response of the reader to the new technologies and environments presented in science fiction texts that Nye (1984:14-15) describes as an "appreciation of the sublime". However, both Mendlesohn (2003:4) and Nye (1984:14-15) note that this sense of wonder relies on a visceral reader response that might not be sustainable, and thus the mode of science fiction has had to evolve to explore not only the sense of wonder that these new spaces and technologies may bring, but also the consequences thereof. This has led to another exemplar of the mode of science fiction – the "what if?", the

thought experiment, the idea. Mendlesohn (2003:4) writes that "in sf 'the idea' is the hero", and notes that this might be considered the biggest difference between science fiction and contemporary literature. This thought experiment, which Suvin (1979:63) terms the "novum", is what "force[s] the reader to look out of the corner of his/her eye at the context" (Mendlesohn, 2003:5) – what creates cognitive estrangement. As Knight (1967:3) notes:

> We live on a minute island of known things. Our undiminished wonder at the mystery which surrounds us is what makes us human. In science fiction we can approach that mystery, not in small, everyday symbols, but in the big ones of space and time.

This leads to the third advantage of writing *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) in the mode of science fiction, which is the cognitive estrangement function of science fiction that is produced by the tension between the sense of wonder and the grotesque. Mendlesohn (2003:4) aptly describes this tension as the admiration of the aesthetics of the mushroom cloud on the one hand, and the consideration of the nuclear fall-out that it might cause on the other. Suvin (1979:7-8), who first suggested cognitive estrangement as a paradigm of the mode of science fiction, writes that science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment". Mendlesohn (2003:5) thus describes cognitive estrangement as "the sense that something in the fictive world is dissonant with the reader's experienced world", which correlates to what Rogers and Stevens (2015:18) term "knowledge fiction" – fiction that places "demands upon the reader to supply additional knowledge, as it were cracking a code with which to make meaning that connects the sentence to the world". However, Rogers and Stevens suggest that classical texts might also be seen to constitute knowledge fiction; quoting Hartley, Rogers and Stevens (2015:15) write that "the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there". If, as Suvin suggests, the effects of cognitive estrangement

depend on the text's "conceptual difference from the present" (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:15), then we could consider classical texts to be as different from the present as science fiction texts – indeed, we might consider both texts to constitute knowledge fictions. Thus, in the case of Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country*, we might observe a kind of doubled cognitive estrangement produced by Tepper's weaving of an adaptation of a classical narrative into the events of a narrative that functions in the mode of science fiction.

This doubled cognitive estrangement, produced by combining two knowledge fictions, means that the reader must work even harder to bridge the divide between their own context and that of the classical past woven into the imagined future, which may in turn immerse the reader more fully in the thought experiment central to the novel. Moreover, readers are compelled to construct connections between all three contexts – the classical past, the reader's own present, and the imagined future that Tepper explores. This has a vital effect on the ideas that the text is able to explore. By invoking the classical past in a text set in the distant future, Tepper can suggest a circularity about gender relations. The ghostly Achilles, exemplar of the role of warrior for centuries, is entwined with the representations of the plotting warriors in Tepper's garrisons, and both of these are contrasted against the reader's contextual experiences of gender relations, enabling the reader to examine these differing representations of masculinity.

Tepper is also able to explore feminist concerns in a new light; as Hollinger (2003:131) notes, "literary sf [has a] proven capacity for articulating and exploring feminist theoretical models in original and challenging ways" though "many feminist theorists and critics have tended to overlook it, discounting it as a form of escapist popular fiction with little aesthetic appeal and even less political relevance". Hollinger (2003:129) writes:

> As feminist theoretical models – abstract constructions of the subject, of representations of sexual difference – become fleshed out in the particularised

> worlds of the sf imagination, sf articulates and explores these models through its narrative experiments and, in the ongoing dialectical relationship between abstraction and concretisation, feminist theory continues to influence the development of the new worlds and new futures of the genre. The resulting stories are not simply programmatic 'mirrors' of particular theoretical arguments, of course, but rather they incorporate those arguments into the lives and actions of imagined human subjects in imaginary worlds, subjecting them to detailed fictional examination.

Hollinger (2003:130) also notes that readers tend "to naturalize certain aspects of human nature and human experience as 'essentially feminine' or as 'essentially masculine'". However, Tepper resists and undermines this readerly impulse by creating an essentialist argument about gender relations – which we might phrase as "men are inherently violent, while women are inherently peaceful and cooperative" – and exploring the shape of this argument in practice rather than theory. Tepper is able to complicate this argument and reveal the tensions that arguments like this might sustain in a lived scenario. While the characters of "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) seem to conform to these essentialist narratives, the characters in the larger, framing science fiction narrative introduce vital complexity to the text's exploration of gender dynamics. Tepper's inclusion of the non-violent and cooperative male servitors like Joshua and of thoughtless, combative women like Stavia's sister, Myra, both of whom do not conform to typical essentialist arguments, encourages the reader to question the separatist structure of Women's Country and of gender relations both in Women's Country and, through cognitive estrangement, in their own contexts.

Finally, this doubled cognitive estrangement undermines the idea that *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) functions purely as a science fiction utopia. Suvin (2010:30) defines a utopia as "the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organised according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community". James (2003:226), in turn, writes that *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) is a "consciously" utopian novel that arose out

of a concern for gender relations: he states that *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) is a "recognizable [utopia], even though [it] may be posing more questions than presenting solutions", but he does not elaborate on why he believes this to be the case. I suggest that, while certain features of the text do seem to align with utopian concerns, there is a dissonant note which an involved reader (one actively engaged in decoding and recoding meanings across divergent contexts through Tepper's doubled cognitive estrangement, for example) will perceive and incorporate into their interpretations of the text. Certainly, "Iphigenia at Ilium" and the associated references to classical texts and classical (and perhaps also contemporary) gender relations, paired with Tepper's (1990) representations of Women's Country warriors and the Holylander society, seem strong motivation for both the gender-segregated society in the current era of Women's Country and the covert programme of eugenics run by the Women's Council. However, though the structure of Women's Country seems in theory to be "organised according to a more perfect principle" (Suvin, 2010:30) than in Tepper's own context, the practice of the thought experiment reveals tensions that are not easily dismissed and that do not quite align with utopian traditions, introducing a dystopian element to the narrative. Claeys (2013:15) writes:

> But there are problems even with the idea of dystopia as the negative of "ideal" societies. Clearly just as one person's freedom fighter is another's terrorist, one person's utopia is another's dystopia. Dystopia, in other words, rather than being the negation of utopia, paradoxically may be its essence. Any privileging of the communal over the individual will for some have dystopian overtones.

The strongest evidence of Tepper's engagement with the dystopia that, it might be argued, lies at the heart of every utopia is her description of the women of the council involved in the covert programme of eugenics that is intended to breed the violence out of men. Stavia's mother, Morgot, has the following revealing conversation with a male carnival performer from outside of Women's Country:

> "I do wonder, though, sometimes… whether you ever feel guilty over what you do? You few who do all the doing?"
> She sat for a time without answering. At last she shifted in her chair and said, "I'll tell you what we call ourselves, among ourselves. That will answer your question. […] We call ourselves the Damned Few. And if the Lady has a heaven for the merciful, we are not sure any of us will ever see it. (Tepper, 1990:334)

Moreover, the novel itself ends not in any recognisable utopia but rather in dystopian violence – the warriors of the increasingly rebellious garrison outside of Stavia's town are sent to a battle that has been strategically planned by the Women's Council to kill them all. This is, of course, a clear dystopia for the male warriors who will be killed, but what is especially intriguing is the way Tepper presents the effect of this on the women and servitors involved in the decision. As Morgot and Stavia, mother and daughter, watch the doomed warriors leave, Tepper (1990:357) writes:

> Morgot wiped her eyes as she looked after them. It was as though she had wiped all expression from her face, leaving it blank, like a manikin's. Like the face of Hecuba in the play.

This description, which brings the characters of Morgot and Hecuba together, is a fascinatingly dystopian note; the function of "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) seems to change as the novel progresses, from an initial introduction as an indictment of the violence inherent in warriors to a conclusion that seems to indict the actions of the Women's Council, too. In the text's last extract from "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990), Hecuba's final lines read as follows:

> I had a knife in my skirt, Achilles. When Talthybius bent over me, I could have killed him. I wanted to. I had the knife just for that reason. Yet, at the last minute I thought, he's some mother's son just as Hector was, and aren't we women all sisters. If I killed him, I thought, wouldn't it be like killing family? Wouldn't it be like making some mother grieve? So I didn't kill him, but if I had, I might have saved the baby. I'm damned to think of that, that I might have saved Hector's child. Dead or damned, that's the choice we make. Either you men kill us and are honoured for it, or we women kill you and are damned for it. Dead or damned. (Tepper, 1990:362)

It seems that Morgot, like Hecuba, must choose – dead or damned. And Morgot has chosen, aptly, to be a member of the Damned Few, and to take the responsibility for "making some mother grieve" (Tepper, 1990:362) into her own hands – as Claeys (2013:15) says, to privilege the communal to the detriment of the individual, and thus to enact the dystopia that is Women's Country.

I suggest that, when viewed through the lens of doubled cognitive estrangement, *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) reveals distinctly dystopian overtones that might enable the active reader to evaluate the decisions of the council and its Damned Few, and to assess whether Women's Country offers an acceptable solution to gender inequality and men's violence at all. Tepper seems to use both classical and future events to create doubled cognitive estrangement that, rather than providing answers as a utopia might, functions instead as an open thought experiment through which readers can explore the "lived experience" of selected positions on gender relations.

Tepper's (1990) subversive engagement with the genre of drama is another aspect of the thought experiment central to *The gate to Women's Country*; while Euripides's texts can be identified as operating within the genre of drama, Tepper's text is situated in the realm of the novel. Yet Tepper (1990) introduces into this narrative her own strand of drama, the play "Iphigenia at Ilium", that becomes the guiding motif of the narrative text. I suggest that Tepper's (1990) complex interaction with the genres of drama and narrative is one way in which she is able to structurally situate *The gate to Women's Country* outside of the binary that might often dominate interpretations of contemporary engagements with classical texts. In addition, the thread of drama in the tapestry of science fiction that is *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) adds yet another type of cognitive estrangement to the reader's experience of the text, making the reader work even harder to decode the text as a thought experiment.

I argue that Tepper uses elements of the genre of drama to estrange readers from her text through what the theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht (1978) calls *Verfremdungseffekt* or estrangement effect. Brecht (1978:143) defines this effect as a "a way of drawing one's own or someone else's attention to a thing" which "consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible into something peculiar, striking and unexpected". Brecht (1978:203) further explains that this technique may involve the "framing" of part of the performance in a way that "mark[s] it off from the rest of the text".

With my previous discussion of cognitive estrangement in science fiction in mind, it might seem that Brecht's (1978) *Verfremdungseffekt* or estrangement effect is perhaps the dramaturgical equivalent of cognitive estrangement (Suvin, 1979). Suvin's (1979:7-8) theory of cognitive estrangement suggests that through presenting the reader with a science fiction world that is recognisably different from the reader's context, the reader is forced to actively work to bridge the divide between the world of the text and the world in which they exist, which results in an active reader who is more likely to be able to explore the text as a thought experiment rather than a merely entertaining narrative. Similarly, Brecht (1978:91,93) suggests that theatrical estrangement prevents the audience from experiencing the performance as sheer entertainment, and forces them into a critical, analytical state of mind that must resist viewing the narrative presented as self-contained and inviolable and must instead function to decode and deconstruct this narrative. Both theories use structural and narrative complexities to create distance between reader/audience and text, which in turn compels active decoding and thus makes these texts more effective vehicles for thought experiments.

"Iphigenia at Ilium", the play within Tepper's (1990) science fiction novel *The gate to Women's Country*, is estranged from the reader in several ways. Firstly, as Brecht (1978:203)

mentions is often effective in estrangement, the entire play is framed – clearly identified as something that exists apart from the main narrative in Tepper's text – by situating it as a text that appears to be a classical drama while placing it within a contemporary science fiction narrative text. This has the effect of preventing the reader from sinking into either a passive reading state or a passive spectating state – the demands that the text makes on the reader's cognitive abilities are escalated as the reader must now be prepared to decode two very different types of texts, one of which is embedded in another. When the reader's expectations of what the text will represent to them and require of them are subverted, the reader must instead work to make sense of a chain of texts and their varying relations to the reader's context. A reader must decode not only the framing science fiction text's relation to their own context, but also the classical play's relation to its science fiction framing text's context and then, finally, to the reader's own context.

Secondly, the play is framed and thus estranged by subverting the reader's expectation of a conventional experience of theatre as an event in which a play is performed in a specific space, for a mediated duration with an official beginning and ending, and for an audience who passively receive the performance. Instead, Tepper presents what is largely a play under construction; a play in the stages of rehearsal rather than performance, a play that begins to seem, in fact, trapped in an endless cycle of rehearsal that will never reach the ostensible climax of performance. For most of the narrative, the reader does not see "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) performed; the reader sees only readings and rehearsals of the play, peppered with interruptions and adjustments by the characters in the frame narrative that render immersion in the play impossible and force the reader to a new awareness of the contrivance of the drama. Moreover, the play is fragmented, delivered to us in textual, unperformed shards that seem to aim not at creating a coherent, cohesive narrative but rather at making coherent a narrative external to the play – the narrative of the framing text and the concerns

that Tepper seems to explore in this framing text. These are all mechanisms clearly aligned with Brecht's (1978:203) theory of framing to effect estrangement, and suggest that Tepper (1990) presents "Iphigenia at Ilium" in a way that resists traditional experiences of theatre and primes readers for active interpretation rather than passive absorption.

Ultimately, "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) remains distanced from us at all times, demanding that readers bridge the gaps between their own context, the framing narrative, and the play itself through their own cognitive efforts. The detachment created by presenting a framed, fragmented, unperformed play means that the play resists the reader's impulse to empathise with the characters and experience the play as a traditional narrative. Instead, the distanced and thus cognitively active reader is prompted to work to develop a sense of the play's social function within the framing text – its purpose, within Women's Country, as an ideological vehicle.

We have established, then, that "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) is structurally situated to make use of mechanisms that foreground the play as ideological tool rather than entertaining performance – that the play is, as Brecht (1978:91) would say, distanced or estranged from the reader. We have also established that these strategies of distancing and framing the play within Tepper's text mean that readers are cognitively primed to decode the text as thought experiment; that the distanced, framed text resists passive reading and compels active decoding on the part of readers. I argue that Tepper (1990) uses these Brechtian strategies, finally, to alert readers to the ideological function of "Iphigenia at Ilium" in Women's Country – to add another dimension to the thought experiment of the science fiction text. If Tepper's (1990) text, *The gate to Women's Country*, can be seen as a dystopian thought experiment about essentialist gender relations, and if Euripides's tragedies perform an ideological function that describes, inscribes, and prescribes gender relations to the detriment of women in both a classical and a contemporary context, then I suggest that Tepper's (1990)

response in the medium of drama, "Iphigenia at Ilium", performs within the context of Women's Country a similar function but to the detriment of men. Rabinowitz (1993:11) says of Euripides's texts:

> Given the masculinity of Athenian society and its anxiety about female sexuality, it makes sense to ask whether and how these representations of women served the male-dominated polis and the male imagination. […] tragedy in its own time was viewed as "ideological." That is, it was not meant as a literal depiction of some physical or material reality (such as the lived experience of women's lives) but did have a determinable relationship to that reality.

We could say the same of Tepper's (1990) text and play: given the femininity of Women's Country society and its anxiety about male violence, we might ask how "Iphigenia at Ilium's" representations of men serve the female-dominated space of Women's Country and the female imagination. If Euripides's texts exalt the virtues of men as "courageously winning glory in battle" and the virtues of women as "bearing the pain of childbirth and loving [their] children" (Rabinowitz, 1993:7), then Tepper's play actively undermines these values. Tepper's Achilles serves to symbolise violent men (of the kind glorified for embodying cultural mores of masculinity through war in Euripides's texts), yet he is described as irritable, sulky, and petulant – a spoiled child in a warrior's body. And Tepper's Trojan women, many of whom have stoically borne the pain of childbirth and loved their children fiercely, have watched these children die at the hands of the Greek warriors.

"Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990), then, seems to offer a distinct inversion of what Euripides's writings might have intended in his own context, and might even in subtle ways continue to suggest in our own context. In Tepper's text, drama is used to underpin an ideological and social order that privileges women and undermines men. The vital difference, however, is Tepper's (1990) use of Brechtian distancing techniques to enable "Iphigenia at Ilium" to perform this ideological function *within* the text but not outside of it. While Stavia

and other "knowing" women of the council use the play as a reminder of why their covert programme of eugenics is necessary – as a vehicle to transmit ideology about inherent gender characteristics and dangers – Tepper is careful to maintain the buffer of the framing science fiction narrative between the reader and the play. The characters in Tepper's (1990) frame narrative are immersed in "Iphigenia at Ilium's" ideology while the reader of the frame narrative is not; as Stavia says:

> […] I keep finding things in ["Iphigenia at Ilium"] that apply to me. Like Iphigenia being tricked to come down to Aulis. To get married, they said, when all they wanted to do was to use her. You know that, you know all about it, and yet you let yourself… (Tepper, 1990:67)

Moreover, Tepper (1990) uses "Iphigenia at Ilium" to present an unsettling example of the far-reaching effects of an ideological literary text embedded in a society – much as Euripides's texts were embedded in his society and perhaps continue to be embedded in our own. The role of theatre in Euripides's context, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, is well documented. Rabinowitz (1993:12) writes:

> As a public art form, tragedy served the polis in part by describing, inscribing, and prescribing gender, transforming the biologically male and female into the socially masculine and feminine. The apparatuses of ideology present models of gendered behaviour, particularly women's behaviour, and give women reasons for complying with them. A key part of this ideological work is that the audience is constructed by the experience of participating in the drama; it is in the audience (modern as well as ancient) that some potential for opposition resides as well, for there is always the possibility that women will (or did) refuse to interpret them exclusively in this way. Texts can misfire.

Furthermore, this ideological work of classical Greek texts might also be identified in contemporary engagements with these ancient texts. Rabinowitz (1993:x) writes that "[m]ythic texts such as the tragedies provide some of the underpinnings of contemporary ideology. By articulating the relationship between gender, power, and sexuality in tragedy, we can understand its ideological force; left unanalysed, the dynamic at work in the plays

may continue to seem to be universal and thus continue to reinscribe itself in the modern audience".

Thus Tepper's (1990) complex structural engagement with the genres of science fiction and drama consistently distances the reader from the play within the text, "Iphigenia at Ilium", by presenting the play in a fragmented and unperformed form and framing the play within a larger science fiction narrative. These Brechtian distancing techniques mean that the reader of Tepper's text cannot, like the characters within the text and like audiences of Euripides's texts, passively experience the play or merely absorb the play's ideological theories of gender. Instead, the cognitively active reader can develop a sense of "Iphigenia at Ilium's" disturbing conceptual purpose in the world of *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990), and thus become alarmed and worried by how the play functions in this fictional world. Goldman (2003:18) writes:

> Years ago I suggested that identification could be considered the covert theme of drama. […] I suggested that we should instead think of identification as processual, the making or doing of identity. The actor acts an identity, puts it together before our eyes, sustains it, thrusts it forward toward our attention, keeps it coherent (not necessarily consistent) in the face of obstacles and difficulties. So in the theatre we are always keenly aware of a practice of identity shaping and projection. We enter into it and are engaged by it, we feel it as plastic, sensuous, exciting, something achieved across the demands and resistances of script and performance.

And this, finally, is how "Iphigenia at Ilium" functions in *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990): the distanced play alerts readers to the contrivance and ideological work of the play itself, its role in the construction of identity and, more specifically, gender identity. Tepper (1990) uses the intellectually demanding thought experiment of the science fiction text *The gate to Women's Country* to explore the effects of an ideological literary text embedded in a society, and she uses multiple distancing techniques to prime the reader to translate the parallels between Tepper's fictional world and the reader's own world. As

unsettling as the reader might find the structure of Women's Country, the construction of gender identity within this context, and the role that "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) plays in motivating and maintaining these structures and constructions, a cognitively active reader should then also be alert to and concerned by how embedded texts like Euripides's plays function in our world.

Through establishing an understanding of Tepper's (1990) use of structural distancing and cognitive estrangement strategies, we can begin to explore in greater detail the ways in which "Iphigenia at Ilium" functions to motivate the matriarchal and gender-segregated society of Women's Country in the framing science fiction text. Tepper's (1990) "Iphigenia at Ilium" clearly evokes both *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999) and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Euripides, [412BCE] 1959) through a device of syntactic patterning that implies Tepper's contribution to what could be considered an Iphigenia trilogy. However, Tepper's fictional play also bears a remarkable similarity to *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959): it is set in the same time, after the completion of the Trojan war and the sacking of Troy by the Greek soldiers, and in the same place. The setting of *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959:613) is described as "an open space before the city, which is visible in the background, partly demolished and smoldering", while in Tepper's (1990:29) "Iphigenia at Ilium" the setting is "at the foot of the broken walls of Troy". Additionally, Tepper's play shares the majority of its characters with *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959), but only features two characters from *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999), and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Euripides, [412BCE] 1959) – the ghost of Iphigenia and the ghost of Achilles.

This suggests that we might consider "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) to be not only an adaptation of *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999), and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Euripides, [412BCE] 1959), but also through that adaptation a continuation of

Iphigenia's story. As Hutcheon (2013:8) writes, adaptation is not only "a transposition of a recognizable other work or works" but also "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work[s]". Adaptors, as we have seen, do not merely seek to re-write a work but also interpret and represent that work in new ways which are filtered through their own intentions and may engage with the source text through more than just similarities. Bakhtin (1981:17) also notes that the genres of the epic past might be seen to represent a completed circle "beyond the realm of human activity", but that the novel, instead of merely imitating these genres, manages to close this distance and disrupt this completed circle. Thus, rather than simply reproducing classical texts, the novel offers a means of dialogical engagement with them.

It is difficult to imagine a more devastating representation of the Trojan war than the one provided by *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959). In fact, the play opens on a god, Poseidon, taking leave of his beloved city of Troy due not only to the material effects of the war – the ruined city smoulders in the background – but also because he feels that the war has resulted in the breakdown of religious practices (Croally, 1994:71). The city has been destroyed, the majority of the Trojans have been killed, the very gods have abandoned the city of Troy, and the royal women of Troy wait to become the slaves of conquering Greek men. Euripides's grim setting and startling portrayal of the inhumanity of war stand in stark contrast to previous narratives surrounding the Trojan war, and Tepper continues Euripides's theme with the distinctly human scene of Andromache and Hecuba comforting the baby Astyanax before the smoke and destruction of their city.

It is important to note Euripides's distinct and contextually unusual focus on and representation of women both in this play and in many others. Appleton (1972:41) notes that "no sooner do we open a volume of Euripides than we enter into a palace of good women, through which marches a long procession of heroines – a procession which exhibits finer and

more numerous types of female devotion than are afforded by the works of any other tragedian, ancient or modern! Among the whole galaxy of them there are not half a dozen who are not conspicuous for some outstanding virtue". Croally (1994:86), too, writes:

> *Troades* is a women's play, and I do not say that just in banal reference to its title. The chorus and Hecuba are ever-present; Cassandra, Andromache, and Helen come on in sequence; Polyxena lurks in the background. Hecuba will lead the laments like a mother bird. Cassandra depicts her future in terms of a bizarre marriage, while Andromache reviews the past as exclusively the history of her marriage. The cause of the war is seen to be one wretched marriage, and the end of the war is described by the chorus in a domestic context. Indeed, the play consists of three central scenes in which, in turn, two daughters and one daughter-in-law discuss, reflect on and argue about marriage with their mother, Hecuba. The explicit concerns of Hecuba and Andromache are the fates of their children, their husbands and their families.

Tepper has thus chosen to adapt a play that deals exclusively with the experiences of women, and that was written in a context in which this focus on female characters would have been considered particularly uncommon. It is also a play that provides a contextually-rare and scathingly critical representation of both war and the gods who seem to preside over it, and uses the devastation of its female characters to question both the motivations behind the war and the war itself. It is into this play, which centres around the Trojan women's traumatic experiences of a war ostensibly fought because of a woman, that Tepper introduces another victim of the war – Iphigenia.

The extant adaptations of the Iphigenia myth do not all agree on what happens to her during her sacrifice. One version frames Iphigenia as unwilling to be sacrificed; in fact, she is bound and gagged to prevent her from subverting the sacrifice with the ill omen of her struggles and cries (Aeschylus, [458BCE] 2003). In another adaptation, Iphigenia goes willingly to her own sacrifice, even convincing her father that her sacrifice must occur (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999). One form of the myth has Iphigenia killed during the sacrifice (Aeschylus, [458BCE] 2003); another has Artemis rescue Iphigenia at the last minute and replace the virgin princess

with a deer (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999; Euripides, [412BCE] 1959). This means that Euripides does not simply reproduce a unified Iphigenia myth, but rather that he makes conscious decisions about how to present Iphigenia in his work – and his choices are telling. Iphigenia herself is often constructed to suit the needs of the author of a particular adaptation: Aeschylus ([458BCE] 2003) seems to present Iphigenia as a passive character subordinated to the decisions of others, while Euripides situates Iphigenia as a more complex and independent figure who takes an active role in her own story, first resisting and later consenting to her own sacrifice. In fact, Euripides's complex antagonist seems to problematize aspects of the preceding versions of the Iphigenia myth; where previously Iphigenia's myth was a minor incident in the larger story of the Trojan war, Euripides situates her as a central character in two tragedies, and he subverts previous passive versions of the character by granting Iphigenia some autonomy in the matter of her own death. He has Iphigenia go willingly to her sacrifice; she says: "death has been decreed—for me and by me. I want to carry out this same act / in a glorious way, casting all lowborn behaviour aside" and later: "it's more important for one single man / to look upon the light than a thousand women" (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999:380-381). These statements reframe Iphigenia; far from a mere bound and gagged body to be sacrificed, she becomes instead a contextually unusually informed heroine figure with a clear understanding of the social and political implications of her sacrifice (or refusal thereof) and a sense of duty to her family and her people so strong that it eventually overcomes her fear of death. Euripides writes Iphigenia as a young woman on the brink of adult life, who is forced by seemingly unavoidable circumstance to make a difficult decision between her own desire to live, and her duty to her male relatives and people as a whole to be sacrificed so they may have wind to sail to Troy. Ultimately, Iphigenia's sense of duty is rewarded; Euripides's ([412BCE] 1959) *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, which follows her story as a priestess in a foreign land after her last-minute rescue

by Artemis, is a clear indication that Euripides writes a version of the myth which spares Iphigenia's life and imbues her with many characteristics more often found in heroic male characters of the era.

In calling Iphigenia "drama's most attractive martyr", Young (1953:131) exemplifies one of the most popular ways in which Iphigenia's character and actions have been interpreted by scholars – as (surprising in an ancient Greek context, to be sure) brave, decisive, heroic, and patriotic. He writes:

> Euripides gives us a picture of Iphigenia which is convincing and *pleasing* [emphasis my own]. […] Iphigenia is a heroine of distinguished stature by the time she is ready to walk out to a sacrificial death. It is not incongruous for a girl with tender affection for parents and brother to exhibit patriotic sentiment for her country. It is a glorious evolution of inner spirit that can sever attachment to the loved ones of a family circle in favour of the higher social tie to native land. (Young, 1953:134)

Later, Young (1953:138) provides another telling assessment of Iphigenia: he claims that "Iphigenia reveals an inner integrity which will be authentic as long as sacrifice is nobility. Wherever love of family and country is cherished as the loftiest sentiment of the human heart, in that land Iphigenia will be recognised as kinswoman and citizen". Rabinowitz (1993:14), however, writes that "Euripides may indeed 'invent women' and 'reverse traditional representations', but ultimately he recuperates the female figures for patriarchy […] to recognise this function is not to deny that he endows his female characters with great understanding and allows them to give voice to important ideas; nonetheless, their experience is shaped to the end of supporting male power". Young's response to Euripides's representation of Iphigenia suggests little awareness of her ideological function, as described by Rabinowitz, in prescribing the behaviour of "good" women – in fact, he praises Iphigenia's actions as archetypally noble and seems unaware of the current of identity construction that, Rabinowitz argues, underpins them. Another scholar, Appleton

(1972:41,42), in an attempt to defend Euripides's representations of women, writes that "Iphigenia is not afraid to give her life for her country's sake, and her courage draws words of high commendation from Achilles" which shows, he says, that "not only can the women of Euripides play their part without dishonour in a sphere where a man's courage is required […] but they bring their own womanly virtues with them". This is a particularly good example of how Euripides's Iphigenia might seem to run counter to contextually prevalent ideas about gender only to strengthen those or similar ideas in the end. Appleton praises Iphigenia's unusual courage but does not acknowledge that her courageous actions provide a blueprint for "good" female behaviour – behaviour that prioritises men and their ambitions at the expense of female lives.

Conacher (1970:264), too, suggests that "Iphigenia runs true to form: never was there a more vibrant, cheerful and affectionate martyr". However, he explores the possible effects of Iphigenia's martyrdom with greater sensitivity to Iphigenia's function as an ideological vehicle:

> If, as we have earlier been led to believe, this war is ignoble, or futile, or both, does this fact detract from Iphigenia's glory? Critics who raise this question usually argue that Iphigenia's motives and decision are to be praised for themselves, whether or not they spring from a true evaluation of the war. […] The "selfish" characterisation of Agamemnon, itself one of the necessary effects of the play, requires that the war be viewed as a sordid affair of personal ambition and personal desire; now the "noble" characterisation of Iphigenia requires that this earlier picture should be, if not erased, at least withdrawn, so as not to spoil the effect of Iphigenia's sacrifice. Withdrawn and, perhaps, replaced: in presenting Iphigenia with a noble motive, the dramatist leaves us with the uncomfortable impression that we, too, are now to believe in this war, which now conforms to the type of all "just" wars. (Conacher, 1970:264)

But while Conacher provides an astute summary of Iphigenia's role in motivating the Trojan war, both physically and ideologically, he does not explore the possible effects that presenting Iphigenia as a patriotic martyr may have on conceptions of gender. Rabinowitz

(1993:38), however, further argues that Euripides makes strategic decisions about how the character of Iphigenia is presented:

> […] he introduces two innovations that seem at first contradictory: he has Agamemnon lure Iphigenia to Aulis with a promise that she is to be married to Achilles, a ploy that places in high relief Iphigenia's status as gift, object of exchange; then, at a crucial moment he has Iphigenia, unlike her Aeschylean forebear, choose to die, which seems to undercut that objectification. I argue, however, that her choice is illusory and her glorification a form of fetishism. The marriage device points up the parallelism of sacrificial death and marriage for a woman; through either one a nubile girl in the liminal stage of virginity can become a woman. By making these changes, Euripides constructs ideal womanhood as heterosexual and self-sacrificing. It seems then that Aeschylus's description of Iphigenia's death romanticizes victimization, while Euripides's version eroticizes her willing sacrifice.

In light of critical commentary such as this, I suggest that the character of Iphigenia is an effective example from the ancient world of the effects of war and patriarchy on women. In addition, Iphigenia is an effective demonstration of the long-reaching effects of classical literature; she has been presented and represented by many writers to advance their own contextual agendas about gender, and she has been interpreted and reinterpreted by many scholars to much the same effect. Rabinowitz (1993:37-38) notes that "the Aeschylean treatment renders Iphigenia pure victim, a lovely child who sang at her father's table, and emphasizes the irony of sacrificing the pure Iphigenia to regain Helen, the 'promiscuous woman'". Moreover, Iphigenia's depiction as heroine in Euripides's plays about the Trojan war also seems to serve as a carefully distinct counterweight to the archetypal representation of Helen as a "bad" woman according to many narratives. Consider Young's (1953:109) heated description of Helen in *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959):

> Helen […] comes on the scene, physically attractive, calm and free from any serious worry. […] She is an opportunist with her heartstrings. Cowardly in the face of punishment, she puts the blame on everybody else. Her shallow, hollow pleas are utterly disgusting. […] Deceitful, treacherous, lustful, craven, Helen is bankrupt of soul, but still possesses physical resources that rouse the abated ardour of passion in Menelaus' animal nature. The voluptuous Helen triumphs over Hecuba's logical denunciation and Menelaus' outer fury

> because she knows how to use an intangible, immeasurable biological force to revive the memory of sensuous gratification. It is the victory of sex appeal. […] Helen's success sharpens our revulsion at the defeat and dishonour of the chaste, virtuous Trojans. […] Helen's relatively carefree mood is a disgusting mockery of the hapless Trojan captives. Helen is thoroughly disgusting as she reveals her corrupt soul. This tawdry, vulgar harlot is the only cheerful person in the play. We resent the easy escape of such a conscienceless culprit.

Indeed, Young (1953:109) describes Helen as "disgusting" no fewer than three times in the space of a single paragraph, and seems particularly incensed by the idea of Helen's sensuality – this, it seems, is the most disgusting thing of all, that this "lustful", "voluptuous", "vulgar harlot" may have her freedom while the "virtuous" and "courageous" Trojan women are enslaved.

The "honourable" Iphigenia's virgin sacrifice sets into motion many other events that deal contentiously with gender and the role of women in mythology surrounding the Trojan war. Iphigenia is not herself responsible for Helen's leaving her husband, but without Iphigenia's sacrifice, there would be no recourse for Helen's "bad" actions. Iphigenia's death allows the Trojan war, fought over Helen, to proceed and also to impact many more women than just Iphigenia and Helen (as we see in *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959)). Iphigenia's death is also the reason her mother, Clytemnestra, gives for murdering Agamemnon many years later. It seems that Iphigenia has become a kind of lynchpin of gender representation in the classical world, which makes Tepper's introduction of the ghostly Iphigenia into a play that represents the harsh effects of war (attributed by Tepper to the essentially violent natures of men) on a group of women all the more meaningful.

Tepper's use of Iphigenia is no less ideological than that of writers before her, though it seems that this ideological function is presented through Brechtian distancing precisely in order to sensitise readers to this function. Unlike Euripides's dutiful Iphigenia (or, indeed, Aeschylus's silenced Iphigenia), Tepper's Iphigenia speaks not as a living priestess of

Artemis, rewarded for her selfless devotion to duty in Aulis by being allowed to live after all, but as a vengeful ghost. It is clear that in the world of *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990), Iphigenia's last-minute rescue and subsequent life as a priestess in Tauris is considered fictional, a strategic construction by classical writers. Iphigenia's ghost says:

> What people know is what they want to know.
> That was a late-come hind, great warrior,
> For I was there and never saw it come!
> Artemis sent no hind. Artemis had
> more urgent business in some other place.
> It was my blood spurting upon the stones
> each time my heart's fist clenched, it was my brain
> afire with pain, my voice gone dumb, my eyes
> turned into dimming orbs of sand-worn glass,
> their youthful lustre lost forevermore.
> Iphigenia, Agamemnon's child,
> died on that bloody stone, not some poor hind.
> […]
> And though by now all poets gloss it o'er
> to make it seem a different, kinder thing,
> there was no great Achilles at my side,
> no goddess-given hind to take my place.
> I made no offer of myself as sacrifice,
> though all the songs in Hellas say I did. (Tepper, 1990:64-65)

While the majority of "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) is written in a more loose and conversational style than the Euripides texts, in this section Tepper alters the style to match the formal, careful style of the Euripides texts. The effect is one of direct challenge: through these measured lines, Iphigenia's ghost destabilises everything that has been previously written about her sacrifice by playwrights like Euripides. Tepper's version, though it uses similarly formal structure and diction to that of Euripides, refuses to sanitize or glorify Iphigenia's death. The brutality of a young woman killed by her own father's hand is intensified by Tepper's decision to express it in the first person – the victim herself speaking the agony of her own death. In short, Iphigenia's ghost says that "those who took [her] life murdered [her]" (Tepper, 1990:53), undercutting both Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999), and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* ([412BCE] 1959) in the process. This

change that Tepper has made highlights what critics have said about female characters in ancient Greek drama; here Iphigenia tells her story without the filter of a male playwright, and it is decidedly more traumatic and tragic than the story of the "good", heroic, and patriotic Greek woman that poets like Euripides make her out to have been. However, this is not to say that there is now no filter, or that these words are somehow more truly Iphigenia's; we merely have a different filter, one that now suits Tepper's own aims. And Iphigenia's damning lines certainly seem to have their intended effect on one of their audiences – the citizens of Women's Country who must recite them year after year. As the protagonist of the framing novel, Stavia, says:

> In *Iphigenia at Ilium*. [The poets make] what really happened to Iphigenia into something else. Really she was murdered, but that made the men feel guilty, so they pretended she had sacrificed her own life. (Tepper, 1990:87)

Thus in Tepper's play, it seems that Iphigenia's sacrifice was in fact completed as planned, and she appears to the Trojan women as a ghost. Iphigenia's ghost says that she is "Agamemnon's daughter, come from Hades' realm to seek revenge on him who killed her" (Tepper, 1990:44). Tepper's Iphigenia's attitude towards the men around her is decidedly vindictive: she blames them, not the gods, for her death, and her defiant and outspoken hatred of her own father is a far cry from Euripides's ([410BCE] 1999) dutiful heroine in *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Tepper's ghostly, resentful Iphigenia is a clear subversion of Euripides's version of the character who, though indeed given some contextually unusual characteristics for a female character, ultimately seems to perpetuate ancient Greek gender ideology surrounding "good" and "bad" women by duly sacrificing her life so that men may make war.

As I have noted, Blondell et al. (1999:51) write that "the virtue most vigorously demanded of Athenian women was *sophrosune* (literally "sound-mindedness")", which has no single English equivalent but can mean variously self-control, self-knowledge, deference,

moderation, resistance to appetite, and chastity (Rademaker, 2005:6; Thorburn, 2005:267). In addition to this, one of the greatest social expectations of women in an ancient Greek context was to be loyal to their father and his family. Euripides's Iphigenia is presented as a contextually sound-minded woman who ultimately does what is best for her father, Agamemnon, and his brother – her uncle – Menelaus… she sacrifices her own life for their cause. In contrast, Tepper's Iphigenia has literally come back from the underworld to seek revenge on these male relatives.

However, it is vital to recognise that Tepper's use of the Iphigenia myth and her representation of the character of Iphigenia do not quite manage to escape the historical use of Iphigenia as a vehicle for the transmission of ideology. Ultimately, the fact that Euripides and Tepper have both adapted the Iphigenia myth but in such different ways merely demonstrates their differing opinions on the meaning of Iphigenia's death; opinions, of course, informed by their differing contexts and purposes. Euripides represents Iphigenia's selfless act of sacrifice as almost comparable to the actions and characteristics of male heroes of her time; an ultimate act of goodness against the backdrop of Helen's ultimate act of badness to transmit an ideology of contextually laudable female behaviour. Tepper, however, directly contradicts this version of events by refusing to allow Iphigenia's death to take a quiet place in the annals of heroic history; instead, she has Iphigenia's ghost explicitly correct the poets about the circumstances of her own death. To Tepper, Iphigenia – not only murdered by her father and uncle so they may wage war over another woman, but also immortalised by poets as a "good" woman through her murder – seems to become an emblem of the suffering of all women at the hands of violent, warring men. Tepper's warning about the effects of war on the female population may be motivated by her context in the 1980s in which the looming presence of the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the

Soviet Union became even more threatening when nuclear weapons were tested by both parties; an idea that also seems to have influenced the catastrophic "Convulsions" in her text.

It is clear that Tepper's construction of Iphigenia is an example of how ideologies can be transmitted through pervasive texts to serve diverse ends; in the case of Women's Country, Iphigenia's emblematic suffering motivates in turn the suffering of both men and, though to a lesser extent, women (consider the personal moral difficulties the "Damned Few" must face) through the Women's Council's covert programme of eugenics. Yet the text is carefully constructed to resist readerly impulses of immersion; Iphigenia cannot be to us what she is to the characters in the frame narrative of Women's Country. We must instead work to grasp a larger argument, of which Iphigenia as symbol of female suffering is only a part. To readers falls the task of disentangling the binaries of both construction and reconstruction that stories like Iphigenia's seem to weave, ultimately making of them a resistant and questioning audience. As Rabinowitz (1993:12) says: "[a] key part of this ideological work is that the audience is constructed by the experience of participating in the drama; it is in the audience (modern as well as ancient) that some potential for opposition resides as well, for there is always the possibility that women will (or did) refuse to interpret them exclusively in this way. Texts can misfire". Tepper does not erase or even rewrite Euripides's Iphigenia tragedies, but rather reframes her by continuing the narrative initiated by Euripides through his initial Iphigenia adaptations, creating new possibilities for engagement with Euripides's canonical texts – and perhaps the classical canon as a whole – in contemporary contexts and in order to explore contemporary concerns.

Tepper's representation of Iphigenia brings us to another aspect of her text that is worth exploring in greater detail – her treatment of the gods and her inclusion of multiple ghosts in a play that seems to adapt the setting and action of Euripides's ([415BCE] 1959) *The Trojan*

women. As I have noted, *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959) offers an unusually scathing denigration of war. Burian (2009:3) notes:

> Tragedy, as everyone knows, tells "sad stories of the death of kings," but among surviving Greek tragedies only Euripides's *The Trojan Women* shows us the extinction of a whole city, an entire people. Despite its grim theme, or more likely because of the way that theme resonates with the deepest fears of our own age, this is one of the relatively few Greek tragedies that regularly finds its way to the stage. The power of Euripides's theatrical and moral imagination speaks clearly across the twenty-five centuries that separate our world from his. The theme is really a double one: the suffering of the victims of war, exemplified by the women who survive the fall of Troy, and the degradation of the victors, shown by the Greeks' reckless and ultimately self-destructive behavior.

Moreover, as I have previously mentioned, *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959) begins with a monologue by Poseidon in which he expresses his intention to leave the city of Troy. Conacher (1970:135) notes of this monologue that though "Poseidon expresses his constant good-will toward the city which he has helped to build", he also "takes it as self-evident that once a city is defeated, its divine champions will leave it: for divine service is not wont to flourish in desolated territory". This opening primes the audience for the play's questioning engagement with the involvement of the gods in the Trojan war; Conacher (1970:137) argues:

> The most striking feature of the prologue is its picture of the gods as cruel and selfish in their awful decisions and fickle in their allegiances. For the time being Euripides seems to accept the mythological apparatus more completely even than Homer ever did: Greek successes and Trojan reverses in the war are simply the result of Hera's and Athena's prejudice (based, it is clear, on personal affront), and the future career of the conquerors is to be determined in precisely the same way. This emphasis is in sharp contrast to the action of the play itself, where human sufferings appear simply as the result of human cruelty. […]
> It is Hecuba's discovery of what these gods are (or, more depressing, what they are not) that is to form an important part of the tragic understanding […] which she achieves.

Croally (1994:83-84) also explores this unusual representation of the gods by Euripides:

> The women of Troy have made a painful discovery: 'The gods can receive worship and expect it, but men may expect no return for this.' […]
> The Trojan women respond to this crisis by questioning the gods. No simple answers are forthcoming. Yet the gods can be seen as beings – very humanly – interested in the furtherance and sustenance of their power. *Troades* dramatizes how divine self-interest conflicts with the notion of reciprocity which conventionally governs divine-human relations. The mortals struggle to understand but are left floundering in the ambiguous aspect the gods seem to present: just, yet amoral; abstract, yet anthropomorphic. Although the power of the gods is apparent, it is not evident that the power can be worshipped and thereby brought over to the worshipper's side. But the play not only shows the women questioning the value of the gods to men; it also represents doubts about the difference of gods from men. If the gods are self-interested, if they can change allegiances at will, if they are subject to human flaws such as vanity and stupidity, then in what sense are they different from humans? Once their difference is questioned, or minimized, their use as an other in self-definition is necessarily problematic. And the agents of this questioning of divine otherness are the women of Troy, themselves other to men.

Importantly, Euripides's undermining portrayal of the gods as humanly fallible is a theme that Tepper (1990) seems to take a step further in her "Iphigenia at Ilium". While Euripides portrays the gods as ambiguous and imperfect in order to call into question their role in the audience's processes of self-definition, Tepper completely removes the gods – and thus the possibility of their involvement in self-definition for both characters and audience – from her play. Unlike in the opening scene of *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959), Tepper's Andromache and Hecuba have no gods watching over them or lamenting their fate; they are alone and at the mercy of the victorious Greek soldiers, in a world devoid of divine intervention.

Instead of the fallible gods presented by Euripides, Tepper introduces three emblematic ghosts – the ghosts of Iphigenia, sacrificed at the beginning of the war, Achilles, killed during the war, and Polyxena, sacrificed on Achilles's tomb. These figures are particularly interesting in the ways that they connect with and mirror each other; Iphigenia is told that she will marry Achilles but is instead sacrificed to enable the Greek armies to sail to Troy to begin the war, and later Polyxena is sacrificed on Achilles's grave at the behest of his ghost

to enable the Greek armies to return once the war is over. Johnston (1999:viii) writes that Greek myths often suggest "fears that the dead may somehow punish the living for the injuries or neglect they suffered", and Tepper seems to play on these fears with her vengeful, ghostly versions of Iphigenia and Polyxena, both of whom have suffered tremendous injuries at the hands of warriors like Achilles. Moreover, ghosts might serve here as a demonstration of the past affecting the present – much like classical texts, far removed from their social context, might continue to affect contemporary attitudes towards gender through their status as esteemed cultural artefacts. As Norman (2013:1-2) notes:

> Collectively, these dead women, at least the more literary ones, constitute a tradition in which writers address pressing social issues that refuse to stay dead. When they talk, they speak not only to their own lives but also to matters of justice, history, and dearly held national ideals – whether the community welcomes it or not. Thus, writers stage encounters with that which should be past but has not passed. […] When declarations of injustice's end do not coincide with the achievement of actual justice, the resulting gaps create spaces from which these women speak. […] Inside literary worlds, though, dead women need not wait for a discerning listener attentive to the indirect and unexpected, nor must they accept the passivity their deceased status entails. They can speak for themselves.

We see this in Iphigenia's ghost who, freed by Tepper from the confines of her society and the accompanying social expectations of her role in Euripides's texts, is given the agency to frame her story and her ideological function in a different light. The ghostly Iphigenia tells the Trojan women:

> I was a maiden girl! Scarce more than a child! My head was full of new gowns and festivals and wondering whether I should ever have a lover or not. The words the poets poured into my mouth were the prideful boasts of Argive battalions! They say I offered to die for Hellas! What did I know of Hellas?! […] My father used me as he would a slave or a sheep from his flock. I think that many fathers do the same. Then, having done, he claimed I'd wanted it. Perhaps it made him feel less vile. Men like to think well of themselves, and poets help them do it. (Tepper, 1990:69-70)

In Women's Country, Iphigenia seems to function not as a patriotic prescription of "good" female behaviour but rather as a strident and chilling warning against allowing the past to repeat itself; an example to the characters of the framing narrative of what happens to women when violent men are in control. Not only is the mere appearance of an uncalled and thus uncontrolled ghost unsettling, but, in her new capacity as a ghost, Tepper's Iphigenia is also granted a posthumous opportunity to engage with other receptions of her story.

Another ghost that still haunts contemporary culture's hero narratives is Achilles. While some poets might wax lyrical about the immortality that the warriors have gained in the war through their heroic and honourable behaviour – since war was considered a properly masculine activity that demonstrated loyalty to one's city – King (1991:xvii) notes of Euripides's representation of Achilles:

> Euripides […] drew heavily on *Iliad* I and 9 for his portraits of Achilles […] but he did so not to praise but, rather, to critique the concept of self-aggrandizing "heroic" behavior that Homer's work had come to sanction. And he went beyond them in Elektra to evoke aspects of Homer's epic that both Sophokles and Pindar ignore: the terror, the ugliness of death. For Euripides employed Achilles in plays whose focus was victims: victims of a temper that could be called heroic only because it had belonged to men from the so-called heroic age – the victims of war. By means of parody and skewed evocations of Iliadic scenes, Euripides attempted to convince his fellow Athenians, who continued to invoke Homer to rouse up fervour for war, of the grim reality that lurked behind the glorious beauty of their beloved national epic.

Tepper (1990:70), again, takes this impulse demonstrated by Euripides even further – she uses the "[petulant]" ghost of Achilles to, like Euripides, subvert many preceding positive and heroic representations of Achilles and thus to undermine the resulting narratives of honour and heroism propagated by the warriors in the Women's Country garrisons. Tepper's representation of Achilles is a fascinating subversion of the classical hero. Achilles is Homer's noble, wrathful warrior no longer – Tepper's Achilles is portrayed, in his ghostly form, as a ridiculous figure with "that great dong on him, sticking way out and bobbing

around like anything"[9] (Tepper, 1990:48). He is petulant and whiny, seemingly motivated by lust rather than any heroic narrative, a threatener of women rather than a lover of them. The contrast between this sullen Achilles and the cold rage of Iphigenia casts even more doubt upon preceding representations of Iphigenia, Achilles, and even perhaps upon classical narratives as a whole – exactly as Iphigenia is so determined to do. Achilles's ghostly existence in the play undermines the classical idea of the rewards of everlasting honour and glory due to heroes; he is confused that he is left a wandering shade when the poets have called him immortal and assured him that he is destined to walk amongst the gods. Iphigenia corrects him: "[the poets said] that you would be immortal while you lived, and may still be well remembered now you're dead" (Tepper, 1990:304), but it is clear that the poets' words are merely words – they do not reflect the truth of what happens after death, if Iphigenia's actual death and Achilles's unsatisfied ghost are any indication. Here it seems clear that the honour that Tepper thinks these men so desperately chase, wounding women in the process, is merely a fantasy created by poets.

Ghostly Achilles approaches Polyxena, the virgin sacrificed upon his tomb to serve him in the afterlife, only to have her slip through his arms like mist and tell him that she is "no one's slave" (Tepper, 1990:273). This leads him, and the performers and audience of the play-within-the-text, to the uncomfortable realisation that everyone ends up in Hades together – death is death, regardless of the circumstances of one's life or death. Moreover, in death the warrior Achilles is rendered perhaps as powerless as Polyxena was in life; he says:

> How can I force obedience on this? In other times I've used the fear of death to make a woman bow herself to me. If not the fear of her own death, then fear for someone else, a husband or a child. How can I bend this woman to my will?! (Tepper, 1990:273)

[9] We might also note here the novel's ability to engender laughter, which Bakhtin (1981:23) argues "demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" and thus situates the reader to question the more serious classical representations of Achilles.

The great warrior finds himself with no way in which to assert his power over unwilling women, as the women are already dead. Rather than spending eternity walking among the gods as he was promised, Iphigenia tells Achilles that he is "but a ghost. [His] killing and raping done. [His] battles over. A wanderer among the shades" (Tepper, 1990:304)… just like Iphigenia and Polyxena. When Tepper's Achilles realises that the immortality he has been chasing was merely a poetic construct, he breaks into tears. But the wronged women, the vengeful ghosts, are unmoved by the hero's tears. Iphigenia merely asks Polyxena, "Tell me, did the men cry when they slit your throat?", and when Polyxena answers that they did not, Iphigenia coldly says, "They didn't cry when they were slitting mine, either" (Tepper, 1990:305).

This leads to the final ghost that Tepper introduces into her adaptation of *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959): Polyxena. Polyxena is often considered the Trojan Iphigenia; Rabinowitz (1993:54) writes:

> Polyxena, in the *Hekabe*, has much in common with Iphigenia, but – in part because the action is more compressed than in *Iphigenia at Aulis* – the pattern of glorification for female self-sacrifice stands out more starkly. Iphigenia dies so that the Achaians can go to Troy; the ghost of Achilles demands the sacrifice of Polyxena to enable them to return. Both women are romantically associated with Achilles. Their difference in station […] only underlines their similarity; each undergoes the same fate – that is, she is killed for men's benefit. Both are involved in quasi-pornographic scripts that work out the dynamic of active/passive, dominant/submissive, male/female by rendering them objects of the male gaze as well as of the knife (which also stands for the phallus and the law).

Another vital similarity between the stories of Iphigenia and Polyxena is the recurring representation of both women as being willing, cooperative *sacrifices* rather than unwilling and resistant *victims*. The central element in this transmutation of victimhood to heroism is that both women are written as *choosing* to die; however, it seems obvious that both Iphigenia and Polyxena will die regardless of their cooperation in the process. This is an

important distinction when considering the ideological functions of Iphigenia and Polyxena and their parallel deaths; to write that these women *choose* to die and thus to present that choice as ideologically good, patriotic and heroic, is to model similar behaviour for audience members or readers outside of the text. As Rabinowitz (1993:55) notes:

> This "willingness" [to die] appears to turn the woman from a sign into a manipulator of signs, but in fact it only makes her complicit in her exploitation. Like Iphigenia, Polyxena is represented as trying to act freely by choosing the inevitable; in her case it is even clearer that adulation is fetishization. In attempting to counter the violence that the army would do to her, she is despite herself cooperating with the ideology that mystifies the fact of her exchange. The necessity for myths of willing death suggests the complexity and complicity of the female position in this plot. Similarly, actual women are not simply victims: rather, through the representation of such heroines, they are given reason to participate in their own annihilation.

But Iphigenia's Trojan counterpart is also given a new voice in "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990). Tepper's ghostly Polyxena is, like Tepper's Iphigenia, afforded a chance to comment on previous receptions of her story and so frame it in a new and damning way:

> I pled for my life, Achilles. When they said they would kill me, I wet myself. My bowels opened and the shit ran down my legs. I screamed and grovelled. I hated what I was doing, but I did it. Achilles, I wanted to live! I wanted to live, but they killed me, stinking like a dung-covered animal. I was slender and still young, Achilles. I loved to dance, Achilles. But they killed me there in the mess with my skirts hiked up and blood and shit mixed like a stinking stew, damned to forever remember myself like that – like that… (Tepper, 1990:361)

This version of events refuses idealisation. Polyxena recounts her fear of death being so overpowering that she lost control of her bodily functions and died not as a pure, virginal sacrifice but instead as a terrified, pleading girl covered in blood and faeces, undermining many of the more poetic accounts of her story and reframing her ideological purpose.

"Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) emphasizes death as not only a leveller of gender, but also an escape for women from an oppressive patriarchal ideology. Euripides's patriotic heroine Iphigenia, for example, actually has only a nominal choice in her own death – the

question is never whether she will choose to live or die, but rather whether she will act with dignity and awareness of her duty to her people and so choose to go willingly, or whether she will ignore these expectations and be dragged to the sacrificial altar. An escape seems an impossibility, given that an entire army demands her death and will do whatever it takes to ensure her sacrifice, so the young girl whose own father is prepared to wield the knife submits to the ideology that requires her sacrifice and threatens the death of not only herself but also her family and Achilles if she does not comply. Polyxena, too, has little true choice in the matter; she is a slave of the conquering Greek army, and does not seem to be in any position to resist death. She makes the only choice she really can – the choice of *how* to die. As Tepper's Hecuba says:

> Dead or damned, that's the choice we make. Either you men kill us and are honoured for it, or we women kill you and are damned for it. Dead or damned. Women don't have to make choices like that in Hades. There's no love there, nothing to betray. (Tepper, 1990:362)

The impact of Tepper's play's removal of gods and inclusion of ghosts on conceptions of gender relations in Women's Country is substantial. Only in death is Tepper's Iphigenia afforded the agency she did not have in life. Her ghost can declaim her suffering at the hands of her father and uncle, and refuse the lustful Achilles without fear of reprisal – since the dead cannot be threatened with death. Only in death can Tepper's Polyxena resist Achilles's demands and mourn for the life she might have had. And Morgot, Stavia's mother, and her fellow council members have internalised this binary – dead or damned – and enact it in every decision they make about their society. The Women's Council have chosen their course of action according to the options presented in "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) – and they have chosen to be damned.

This representation of death as one way for women to gain freedom from violent men is echoed in the other society in Tepper's world: the Holylanders, a patriarchal group in which

women are completely powerless possessions of men, and whose oppressive social structure is motivated by religion and maintained through male violence. When the main character of Tepper's (1990:299) framing text, Stavia, is kidnapped by the Holylanders, she says of one of the abused Holylander women that "it was as though she wanted to die, wanted to be already dead". This woman, Susannah, later commits suicide, and leaves a note which says that "it 'uz better bein' dead because [her husband] couldn't do nothin' to her dead" (Tepper 1990:318).

Unlike the Holylanders, and Euripides, Tepper does not allow any blame to be apportioned to gods. Appropriately for work performed at religious festivals, Euripides includes the ancient Greek gods in every one of the plays that Tepper has adapted; Tepper's play, however, does not feature any of those gods. The myths surrounding the Trojan war are rife with incidents in which the gods intercede in mortal affairs. In fact, tracing the events that lead to Iphigenia's eventual murder reveals the hand of a god or goddess at almost every turn. Eris, the goddess of strife, sent the goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite an apple marked "for the fairest", which caused a quarrel that was only settled when Zeus sent the goddesses to Paris, prince of Troy, to choose who should receive the apple. In exchange for this apple, the goddess Aphrodite made Helen fall in love with Paris and leave her husband – thus leading to the gathering of troops at Aulis. Moreover these troops could not sail for Troy because the goddess Artemis withheld the winds as Agamemnon had offended her. This, of course, leads to Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* ([410BCE] 1999), in which Iphigenia's sacrifice must be made in order to appease the goddess so the men may sail to make war on Troy, and it is this same goddess who replaces Iphigenia with a deer at the altar. In *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Euripides, [412BCE] 1959), Iphigenia has been abandoned upon the island of Tauris by a goddess and is forced to sacrifice men to that same goddess; when she tries to escape with her brother Orestes, it is a goddess who prevents the king from keeping her on

the island, and the siblings are granted safe passage home by the gods. *The Trojan women* (Euripides, [415BCE] 1959) provides a particularly contextually interesting portrayal of these gods as jealous and fickle, and has the women of Troy question their faith and dependence on such gods, but the play still maintains the gods' integral role in the events surrounding the war.

According to Blondell et al. (1999:16), in Greek tragedy "the gods often intervene in human lives by inspiring a person with specific thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. This leads to actions which may be simultaneously ascribed to human choice". They go on to say:

> This way of looking at things is sometimes called "double determination," meaning that an event is viewed as "doubly" determined or caused, i.e., simultaneously caused on both divine and human levels. Such divine interventions normally do not violate human character, but express and define it. If a god fills you with strength or lust, this is a manifestation of your power or desire. (Blondell et al., 1999:16-17)

That Tepper has removed the characters of the gods from her adaptation suggests a desire to remove the option of apportioning some level of responsibility to the gods. She has removed the "divine" level from the equation and so the actions of her characters can only be their own responsibility at a "human" level. Considering the patriarchal and misogynistic society of the Holylanders in Women's Country, in which every abuse of women is justified by what their (male) god orders and desires, this makes a clear statement about who is truly responsible for the actions of the people in the play: not the gods in any sense, but the people themselves. As Iphigenia says in Tepper's (1990:45) play: "don't curse the Gods […] It's man who puts the blood-stink in their noses and clotted gore upon their divine lips". While Euripides calls the gods into question through his severe depiction of the Trojan war and its effects on women and children, Tepper takes this a step further – her Trojan women effectively expose the gods as nothing more than the expedient creations of warring and bloodthirsty men, thus problematising both classical and contemporary motivations attributed

to religion. Morgot's description of the events that brought about Women's Country in the first place lays the blame firmly at the feet of men, not gods:

> Three hundred years ago almost everyone in the world had died in a great devastation brought about by men. It was men who made the weapons and men who were the diplomats and men who made the speeches about national pride and defense. And in the end it was men who did whatever they had to do, pushed the buttons or pulled the string to set the terrible things off. And we died, Michael. Almost all of us. Women. Children. (Tepper, 1990:346)

Yet despite Morgot's damning words, it would be reductive to claim that Tepper's text is merely an exercise in gender role reversal, casting men as violent savages and women as the saviours of humanity. Tepper complicates her representations of men and woman by placing the servitors, non-violent men who live in cooperative and equal companionship with the women, in direct contrast with the violent, honour-obsessed men in the garrisons. The men are also given a kind of choice in the matter, as they live first with their mothers and siblings in Women's Country and are only later sent to live with their warrior "fathers" in the garrisons. Only after they have had both experiences must the young men choose between the two ways of life. And while the Women's Council's programme of eugenics suggests an essentialist stance that violence is inherent to male nature, the level of propaganda about honour and gender relations spread in the garrisons introduces an element of doubt to the narrative that these perspectives on gender are inherent rather than learned. Supporting this disruption of essentialist interpretations of the text is an incident towards the end of the text in which Chernon, Stavia's warrior lover, shows some propensity for self-reflection rather than only violence when he says:

> Whenever he drifted off, he saw Stavia's face, as it had been when he had first seen her, as it had been while they had been together, as it had been when he cut out that thing, whatever it was, as it had been when he had seen her last, white as bleached linen, bloodless, the eyes shadowed like skull eyes. Four faces. Excitement. Joy. Horror. Death. […]
> In all his dreams of journeying, all his dreams of heroic quest, he had not seen faces like those last two faces, and yet there must have been many faces like

> that when Odysseus was finished with his quest. He had killed and ravished everywhere he went. It sounded well in the sagas. They did not talk about the women's faces. Why was it that the sagas never spoke of the women's faces? Odysseus said, 'The wind took me first to Ismarus, which is the city of the Cicons. There I sacked the town and put the people to the sword. We took their wives …'
> 'Put the people to the sword.' That meant they'd killed the men, killed the children, too, likely. And then they took the women, but Odysseus didn't say anything about their faces. Nothing.
> Why? Why didn't Odysseus say how the women felt? How they looked? Why didn't any of the sagas talk about that? (Tepper, 1990:351-352)

Furthermore, the women in Tepper's (1990) framing narrative are not all aware of the true meaning of "Iphigenia at Ilium" like Stavia and the members of the Women's Council; in fact, Stavia's own sister, Myra, is in thrall to the warriors, fascinated by their narratives of violence and honour rather than fearful of their propensity for brutality and control. As the servitor to Stavia's family, Joshua, tells Stavia: "There are women and women, aren't there? There's Morgot and there's Myra, for example…" (Tepper, 1990:156). This suggests that, just like the men in this framing narrative, not all women in Women's Country conform to an essentialist perspective on inherent gender characteristics. There are women like Morgot, Stavia's mother, who are alert to the ideological teachings of "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) and are thus involved in structuring their society to avoid repeating those events, but there are also women like Myra, Stavia's sister, who seem oblivious to this ideological aspect of the play and only superficially engage with the narrative. Tepper's narrative presents cruel male warriors and loving male servitors; thoughtless women enamoured of the warriors' narratives about war and honour and thoughtful women who realise the danger of these narratives, and these complex representations resist binary interpretations. Thus an essentialist reading is undermined; Tepper introduces subtleties and uncertainties that make it difficult to pronounce the text completely essentialist.

Equally reductive would be to place Euripides and Tepper in direct opposition to each other in terms of their representations of gender. Critics have noted that Euripides's engagement with gender is unusual for his context; his work displays a marked focus on female characters, and these female characters often defy contextual expectations of women (Foley, 2001:13-14; Rabinowitz, 1993:12-14). This is quite clear in his Iphigenia, who, as I have previously noted, is portrayed with many characteristics conventionally attributed to male heroes: she is brave, patriotic, and understands the social and political implications of her sacrifice with clarity unusual for a female character of this era. Euripides's male characters are also often atypical for his time; Achilles appears in *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides, [410BCE] 1999) but he is not presented as the hero of the narrative (Michelakis, 2007:90), and is in fact quite overshadowed by Iphigenia, who also stands in stark contrast to the uncharacteristically negative depictions of other male characters like her indecisive father and her scheming uncle. While I have explored selected ways in which Tepper indicts classical treatments of women and the influence of these representations on contemporary gender relations, she also seems to expand upon select themes introduced by Euripides, adapting rather than opposing many of his ideas to suit her context and so resisting an easy polarity.

Through her engagement with Euripides's plays, Tepper explores the persistent impact of literature like that of Euripides on gender ideology in a continuum of time from ancient Greece to both Tepper's contemporary context and the future that she has illustrated in her novel. She also demonstrates the value of the critically-neglected genre of science fiction in exploring, challenging, and reframing pervasive classical texts in a contemporary context and in light of contemporary concerns. Tepper (1990) carefully structures *The gate to Women's Country* to generate multiple levels and types of distance between the reader and the text; she uses the distancing cognitive estrangement created by a science fiction setting, heightened by the cognitive estrangement effected by her use of elements of a classical past distant to

readers' own experiences, to prevent readers from immersing themselves in her narrative. This resistance to readerly immersion is amplified in the play woven into the narrative, "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990), which is kept carefully and persistently removed from readers by Tepper's use of Brechtian framing to create reader estrangement rather than reader absorption. These structural techniques mean that readers are primed to develop an awareness of not only the narrative of "Iphigenia at Ilium" but also, perhaps more importantly, the *function* of "Iphigenia at Ilium" within its framing narrative of Women's Country (Tepper, 1990). Thus readers are eventually situated outside of a society that is irrevocably shaped by a pervasive classical text, and in which this classical text is used to motivate a disturbing programme of eugenics aimed at breeding the violence out of men.

It follows that *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) and its treatment of Euripides's plays to model certain ideas about gender operates on two levels. On one of these levels, Tepper challenges the universality of the classical canon by demonstrating the distinctly problematic patriarchal ideologies inherent in examples from this canon, and locating readers to recognise these impulses in their own contexts. Her comic subversions of masculinity, like her petulant Achilles, reframe the narrative surrounding classical heroes and thus classical ideals of masculinity – ideals perhaps still present in contemporary culture due to the cultural capital of these classical texts and their status as instruments of transmission. While the structure of society in Women's Country initially seems to take a second-wave strong difference feminist stance which suggests that one of the innate qualities of men is violence, Tepper's inclusion of both non-violent men in the form of the servitors and thoughtless women in the form of characters like Myra means that the novel cannot be viewed as a simple gender role reversal. Ultimately, Tepper does not seek to problematise *men* or *Euripides*, but rather the role of violence in narratives of masculinity and within a patriarchal tradition stretching back to ancient Greece, and to heroes like Achilles, and the ways in which

these texts have since been received and incorporated into varying contexts and cultures. On this level, "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) does not condemn men, but rather endeavours to save them from their own bloody history, which is made to seem honourable and heroic by classical writers – a subversion that Euripides himself explores through his work, and a theme that Tepper amplifies in her own adaptation of the Iphigenia myth. The danger of the canon, she seems to suggest, is that it perpetuates certain toxic ideas about masculinity. However, as ghosts – echoes of the past affecting the present – both Iphigenia and the classical canon can be freed from their ancient contexts to challenge rather than preserve these problematic ideas. Tepper therefore attempts to reframe this central canon so that both women and men can recognise these ideas as harmful rather than fall victim to them; so that they do not become Iphigenia, but also so that they do not become her murderer.

However, Tepper (1990) constructs *The gate to Women's Country* to operate on a second level that readers who have been made active decoders of multiple layers of cognitive estrangement will be more likely to perceive. While "Iphigenia at Ilium" itself problematises classical treatments of gender, the role that "Iphigenia at Ilium" plays within Women's Country and the structure of society it is used to motivate are also positioned for critical evaluation (Tepper, 1990). Tepper uses the science fiction thought experiment of Women's Country to demonstrate the problems inherent in both patriarchal societies like those of the ancient Greeks and Trojans, the Holylanders of her novel, *and* matriarchal societies like that of Women's Country. Women's Country is perhaps not Tepper's solution to a legacy of patriarchy, but rather another kind of cautionary tale of the lived experiences of extremes of gender ideologies. If "Iphigenia at Ilium" warns us not to become Iphigenia or her murderer, then *The gate to Women's Country* shows us that being one of the Damned Few is no better (Tepper, 1990). Ultimately, Women's Country is not a utopian vision, but a dystopian warning:

IPHIGENIA What's Hades like?
Like dream without waking. Like carrying water in a sieve. Like coming into harbor after storm. Barren harbor where the empty river runs through an endless desert into the sea. Where all the burdens have been taken away. You'll understand when you come there at last, Achilles…
Hades is Women's Country.

_____

Stavia leaned over Joshua, putting her cheek against his own, her eyes fixed on the half-empty garrison ground, seeing in her mind the thousands who had marched away. Gone away, oh, gone away. Wetness ran between her face and his as he – servitor, warrior, citizen of Women's Country, father – as he wept. Wept for them all. (Tepper, 1990:362-363)

II. "I'll spin a thread of my own": Atwood and Homer

"In all his dreams of journeying, all his dreams of heroic quest, he had not seen faces like those last two faces, and yet there must have been many faces like that when Odysseus was finished with his quest. He had killed and ravished everywhere he went. It sounded well in the sagas. They did not talk about the women's faces. Why was it that the sagas never spoke of the women's faces? Odysseus said, 'The wind took me first to Ismarus, which is the city of the Cicons. There I sacked the town and put the people to the sword. We took their wives …'
'Put the people to the sword.' That meant they'd killed the men, killed the children, too, likely. And then they took the women, but Odysseus didn't say anything about their faces. Nothing.
Why? Why didn't Odysseus say how the women felt? How they looked? Why didn't any of the sagas talk about that?" (Tepper, 1990:351-352)

"Hadn't I been faithful? Hadn't I waited, and waited, and waited, despite the temptation – almost the compulsion – to do otherwise? And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. Why couldn't they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been? That was the line they took, the singers, the yarn-spinners. Don't follow my example, I want to scream in your ears – yes, yours!" (Atwood, 2005:2)

In a dim meadow of asphodel, the contours of the eerie white flowers obscured by the fogs of Hades and the passing shades of the dead, stands Penelope as Atwood writes her. "Now that I'm dead I know everything" (Atwood, 2005:1), this ghostly Penelope confides in us. Perhaps the reader is already inclined to believe this dead woman speaking for herself, our spirit guide through the uncharted territory of this familiar narrative, finally channelled by a female mystic in the form of Margaret Atwood. Yet Penelope's first words to us are haunted by uncertainty; knowing everything, she continues, is merely "what [she] wished would happen, but like so many of [her] wishes it failed to come true" (Atwood, 2005:1). And Penelope is not alone in this gloomy meadow; the twelve maids hanged by order of Odysseus upon his return to Ithaca surround her, their faces wreathed in fog. The maids of this Chorus Line have an introduction of their own, their first of many interjections into Penelope's narrative, in the form of a rope-jumping rhyme that briefly details their lives and deaths. As they address a

yet-unidentified subject, the maids' voices vie with Penelope's and enact a plurality of narratives. Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* seems thus to engage in classic feminist revisionist mythology by resituating the conventionally othered woman, Penelope, as the main character and narrator of her own story; yet Penelope's confessional narration is intermingled with genre-bending interjections by the twelve murdered maids, who are each intent on telling a story of their own.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, most classical Greek literature has been received and reinterpreted in varied ways and by similarly diverse audiences. Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, and more specifically the character of Penelope, have not been excluded from this sustained cultural interest in classical Greek myths, and critics have historically been particularly polarised in their interpretations of Penelope's role in the text. W. J. Woodhouse (1930:200-203), for instance, in a discussion which we must acknowledge is not indicative of more contemporary critical engagement with Homer, is utterly dismissive of Penelope's character and role in the text:

> As a fact, Penelopeia is never once directly called beautiful. Her constant epithet is "Wise," or "Discreet" – or whatever the word by which one may try to render the Greek, without making her seem too dowdy. In her heart no woman really envies Penelopeia the possession of this epithet, and perhaps few men feel enraptured by it. […] The total impression left upon one's mind, then, is of a healthy well-nourished lady – of about thirty-five, shall we say? – with a certain maturity of physical charms, a comfortable plump freshness, but without any gift of intellect or strength of character. […] For in truth nothing much could be made of the figure of Penelopeia in the Romance of the *Odyssey*, without disturbing the centre of gravity of the poem. The subject of the poem is the Man. […] It is interesting to notice how Homer's strongly dramatic instinct has been thwarted and trammelled in dealing with Penelopeia.

Other interpreters of Penelope have read her character as an ideologically useful example of contextually-appropriate female behaviour; Heitman (2008:2), for example, notes that "[t]raditionally, Penelope has been accorded very serious status as the perfect wife, the model

woman, a paragon of patience, or a saint of faithfulness". And Atwood herself identifies the vast potential for this reading of the character in Homer's text. She tells an interviewer that Penelope has been "in general somewhat neglected for the very simple reason that in the *Odyssey* she does four things: weaving, waiting, weeping – and she does sleeping. You can't get around the fact that she spends a great deal of time in the *Odyssey* crying: to show how much she cares that Odysseus isn't there, how beleaguered she feels, and how lost and alone and unhappy she is" (Tonkin, 2005). However, contemporary engagements with Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* have interpreted Penelope rather differently; both Foley (1984:59-60) and Winkler (1990:130,133) place Penelope's cunning in dealing with her many suitors at the centre of the poem, and interpret her wily intelligence as being perhaps equal to her husband's famed craftiness:

> [W]e may see that Homer […] has given Penelope a rather stronger and more cunning role in the plot of Odysseus' homecoming than is often attributed to her. […] the real centre of the *Odyssey*'s plot […] is the way in which Penelope, constrained as she is by the competing and irreconcilable demands of social propriety, exerts some degree of real control over events and makes possible the homecoming of her husband, outwitting many deadly enemies and a few friends in the process. (Winkler, 1990:130,133)

And Penelope's perceived cunning has in turn been acknowledged by some early and contemporary scholars only to be interpreted in rather less positive ways. Hölscher (1996:135) notes that the penultimate scene in which Penelope goes to greet her suitors and collect their gifts "has alienated interpreters since antiquity. It seemed unworthy of the majestic, 'circumspect' Penelope: […] the queen descends nearly to the arts of a courtesan […] was the often-cited judgment of scholarship".

It follows that Penelope and her motivations have historically been something of a mystery, sparking divergent and often conflicting readings in Homeric scholarship. Penelope has been interpreted as a dull and unimportant drudge, as an astute wife who is the equal of her

cunning husband, as a deceptive adulteress – there are, it seems, as many Penelopes as there are scholars. As this chapter progresses, we will see that Atwood's Penelope is no less enigmatic – in fact, the wily weaver Penelope's ambiguous and polarising historical representations are central to Atwood's adaptation of Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*. *The Penelopiad* (Atwood 2005) is narrated retrospectively in the first person by Penelope. This narrative structure suggests that the text might operate on one level as a fictive autobiography that centres and privileges the historically-marginalised narrative of Penelope. Yet on another level, the text seems structured to question the mechanisms and roles of stories like Penelope's fictive autobiography in the construction of both personal and social identities. The twelve slain maids and their repeated interruptions of Penelope's narration transform this fictive autobiography from the anticipated singular to the surprising plural, creating a polyphony of voices that reframe the words of Penelope – and of those who came before her.

This chapter's strategy of textual investigation aligns with that of the preceding chapter, which is to say that I will use methods based in Hutcheon's *A theory of adaptation* (2013) and Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogics to examine the texts of both Atwood and Homer in terms of context, structure, and content. I will discuss relevant details about both authors and their contexts, their common themes and concerns, and the genres and structural features of both texts before examining related ideas within the narratives themselves. This engagement with the texts is rooted in Hutcheon's (2013) argument that the process of adaptation involves a series of meaningful decisions on the part of the adaptor, which are often aimed at social commentary and critique, and that investigating these decisions can lead to better understanding of how the text functions as societal evaluation. It is also rooted in Bakhtin's (1981) argument that novelistic engagements with classical texts can generate effective intertextual dialogue and thus create spaces in which classical texts can be thoroughly

investigated regardless of their cultural capital and esteem. Accordingly, I will argue that both Atwood's choice to reframe and centre Penelope's story through the genre of fictive autobiography and her inclusion of the seemingly-incongruous genre-blurring interludes by the twelve maids create dialogue between the contemporary and classical texts that engenders multiple vital strategies of adaptation aimed at interrogating historical gender relations and their impact on contemporary conceptions of gender. Moreover, Atwood's text is also concerned with equality and power, both outside the text and within it. While the text questions the unequal balance of power between itself and Homer's text, Atwood also uses Penelope and the maids to examine the unequal power relations between women of different social classes, thus complicating the text's exploration of historical and contemporary gender relations. I suggest that Atwood, like Tepper, structures her text to create multiple levels of cognitive estrangement in order to distance the reader from the text and prevent readerly immersion in the text. This results, I propose, in a resistant text that challenges readers to actively engage with the text's complex and ambiguous exploration of the ways in which narratives encode gender identities, shape gender interactions, and have the ability to grant or remove power – and perhaps primes readers to identify these functions in their own contexts and experiences, too.

While I have previously argued that Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* seems a clear example of the thought experiment or novum which I have previously identified as so essential to science fiction, Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* may initially seem to exist outside of the science fiction genre as many might define it. However, I have previously noted that Rogers and Stevens (2015:7-8) make a compelling case for expanding the manners in which we define science fiction, opening the borders of science fiction to enable us to explore how it intersects with what might typically be considered other genres in surprising and fascinating ways:

> In particular, we combine Robert's emphasis on the recurrence of "non-theological thinking" with two concepts from Suvin, the notion of "cognitive estrangement" and the related notion of the "*novum*," to suggest that the rubric of SF is applicable to certain works whether or not they share the same historical contexts as modern SF or its engagement with a specially technoscientific ideology. In this way, not only may modern SF be considered a site of classical receptions, but certain ancient Greco-Roman works may also be read as "SF" in their own right. From this perspective, a work is meaningfully SF, and so open to being read according to SF studies heuristics, not in terms of its historical or cultural provenance, but in terms of how it engages with contemporary epistemologies; of particular interest is whether and how a work innovates with respect to such epistemologies.

Furthermore, Rogers and Stevens (2015:11) suggest that science fiction and classical literature have similar effects on contemporary readers because both literatures represent worlds that are unfamiliar to modern readers. This means that both classical and science fiction texts exist at a distance from readers, and that both kinds of texts require readers to engage in the intensive cognitive work required to close the distance between what they know of their world, what they learn of the world in the text, and how those dual epistemologies might relate to one another. Rogers and Stevens (2015:11) thus identify both science fiction and classical literature as "knowledge fiction" – texts that "place demands upon the reader to supply additional knowledge, as it were cracking a code with which to make meaning that connects the sentence to the world". Interestingly, Rogers and Stevens (2015:8) draw on the pivotal work of both Suvin (1979) and Roberts (2006) to suggest that the early form of science fiction is that of the "extraordinary voyage", a narrative motif arguably rooted in classical Greek texts – of which Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* seems a particularly fitting example.

Penelope's world, then, certainly seems to exist at some remove from the reader; the Ithaca of ancient Greece that she recounts in her fictive autobiography is a setting so distant from the experiences of contemporary readers that they will plainly need to work actively to make sense of the setting and culture. However, this is not the only type of distance that readers

must try to overcome between themselves and this text; while Penelope recounts her life in Ithaca, she does so from her position as a shade in Hades – another context that contemporary readers will need to consciously decode. Rendering this process of decryption even more complicated are the interludes by the murdered maids, which are delivered in various generic modes and settings independent of both Penelope's past in Ithaca and her present in Hades. Each of these contexts exists at a distance from the reader's own, and every one of these distances will need to be bridged by the reader. To read Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* is to engage in a cognitively demanding process of shuttling between multiple contexts and genres – Ithaca, Hades, the interludes by the maids, and the reader's own context and existing knowledge – and weaving their seemingly-dissonant and disconnected threads together into what seems a coherent whole. Yet as quickly as we can weave these threads together, Atwood waits ready to pull them apart – to challenge our interpretations of both this text and the texts that have come before it. Ultimately, Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, much like Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country*, uses strategies of distancing created by the cognitive estrangement resulting from the use of multiple narrative settings foreign to contemporary readers. All of this is done to challenge the ways in which readers decode texts. I argue that Atwood, like Tepper, displays an impulse to resituate readers in relation to the classical canon demonstrated by texts like Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, rather than to simply eliminate these canonical texts. While Atwood's text might initially seem to simply invert the typical structure of patriarchal canonical texts by centring the experiences of previously-neglected female characters, Atwood ultimately challenges our very anticipation of this mode of relating to the classical canon. *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) is not a shroud for the classical canon; rather, it is the single thread that trains our eyes to realise the warp and weft of the classical canon's role in the tapestry of our contemporary gender identities and relations.

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The Penelopiad (Atwood, 2005) has a framing narrative set temporally in the 21st century but physically in the world of Hades[10]. Penelope speaks to us in the first person and as a shade in Hades, and in this way she is afforded the opportunity to look back on and recount her life as she remembers it. The first chapter establishes the setting of Hades and Penelope's status as a disembodied ghost, and comments broadly on the receptions of and responses to the representations of her in previous versions of her story. Penelope implies that the extant versions of her story are inaccurate and that she has only waited so long to correct them because trying to challenge them immediately would merely have made her seem guilty of the behaviours of which she has been accused. Penelope states her intention in this chapter to use the text to set the record straight after having waited long enough for the other versions of her story to finally dwindle. In this way, readers are primed to accept Penelope's story as a truth long hidden or untold.

Penelope then proceeds to tell her story fairly chronologically, though her narration of the past is interrupted both by commentary by her present self and the interludes by the chorus of murdered maids. She begins her story with her childhood and recounts her troubled relationship with her parents. Penelope marries Odysseus when she is fifteen, and the couple break with tradition by moving to his kingdom, Ithaca, after their marriage.

After the couple have lived together in Ithaca for some years, the Trojan war begins and Odysseus leaves home to fight with the Greek army. Penelope describes her long period of waiting only in the briefest of terms, but explains that some news of Odysseus's activities during the Trojan war and on his protracted journey home does occasionally reach Ithaca in the form of rumours shared by sailors and songs embellished by minstrels.

[10] Hades is the underworld of ancient Greek myth and religion. It is believed that all mortals go to Hades when they die.

During Odysseus's long absence, Penelope is beset by suitors who try to convince her that Odysseus has died and she must choose a new husband. In an effort to postpone the choice that the suitors are trying to force her to make, Penelope comes up with the suitably pious idea of claiming that before any marriage can take place, she needs to weave a proper costly shroud for her father-in-law. Her plan is to weave this shroud every day, then unpick the day's work under the cover of night, and in this way buy some time for herself until Odysseus returns. She is joined in this task by twelve of her most trusted maidservants, who also serve as her spies in the palace and report to her about the suitors. She tells them to insinuate themselves into the lives of the suitors and entice information out of the suitors in whatever ways they can, and many of the maids are raped or seduced by the suitors.

Once Penelope's weaving ruse is discovered by the suitors, her son, Telemachus, confronts them before sailing away from Ithaca to search for word of his father. Telemachus's journey, though not sanctioned by Penelope, is successful; Odysseus soon arrives at the palace in the guise of a beggar. Here, Penelope seemingly settles many scholarly arguments about her perceptiveness and intelligence by telling us that she does indeed recognise Odysseus in his beggarly disguise, but decides that it will not be prudent to show that she sees through his costume. Penelope also recounts that the competition she devises for the suitors to decide who will win her hand in marriage – to use Odysseus's great bow to shoot an arrow through twelve circular axe-handles – does not merely spontaneously coincide with Odysseus's return, but is rather chosen by Penelope precisely because she knows that her husband has returned and will be the only person able to accomplish the feat of archery.

Penelope's account of her life and experiences in Ithaca before, during, and after the Trojan war is interwoven with two other kinds of narrative: the interjections of the Chorus Line, which consists of the twelve maids murdered by Odysseus, and the interludes narrated by Penelope in her present in Hades.

The Chorus Line interludes interrupt Penelope's narration a total of eleven times. Each of these intersections takes the form of a different genre, variously: a rope-jumping rhyme, a lament, a popular tune, an idyll, a sea shanty, a ballad, a drama, an anthropology lecture, a videotaped court trial, a love song, and an envoi. Moreover, each of these intersections with Penelope's ostensibly central narration comment on and often undermine what Penelope has said in the preceding chapter.

In addition to these interjections by the Chorus Line, Penelope herself also intersects her own narration of her past with selected scenes or commentary from her present in Hades. These interludes often have some explicit connection to what is happening in the past events that Penelope is recounting, such as when she encounters the shade of one of her past suitors in Hades before she describes her past experiences with these suitors. And these interludes are often connected not only to the past events that Penelope recounts, but also to the interjections by the Chorus Line. We see this in the chain of voices that comment on the rumours of Penelope's disloyalty while her husband is away – Penelope in the past presents her version of events, filtered by Penelope in the present, who then also provides a separate chapter of commentary on the gossip about her fidelity, which is then unsettled by the Chorus Line's drama which provides a version of these events that contradicts those presented by Penelope in the preceding chapters. Through these complex connections to each other, the three narrative strands of *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) make and remake each other in their making.

Unlike the opening chapter of *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005), which is related by Penelope herself in her contemporary context of Hades, the text is closed by the Chorus Line of the twelve murdered maids. They narrate two closing chapters, the first of which takes the form of a love song and the last the form of an envoi. While the intended recipient of the maids' love song seems to be a man, the song does not offer a name which might clarify his identity.

The Chorus Line's envoi is even more broadly addressed and could be directed at any number of people of any gender, as none of this information is specified. It is in this way that the Chorus Line, in closing *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005), is able not only to address the reader as directly as Penelope herself does in her opening of the text, but also perhaps, through this final speech, to seize the last word.

Atwood's (2005) strategy of using three intertwining narratives might be considered the defining structural feature of *The Penelopiad*. Atwood positions readers to receive this narrative as the definitive version of the story of Penelope and Odysseus by situating the text, from its opening chapter, within the recognisable modes of fictive autobiography and feminist revisionist mythmaking. However, the text's very construction then proceeds to subvert this reception through the genre-bending interludes that etch the multiplicity of voices and narratives into the fundamental structure of the text, which results in Atwood's Penelope being re-framed as a complex and perhaps not always truthful or trustworthy character. This representation of Penelope, in turn, primes readers to interrogate their expectations of this and other texts, and their responses to this and preceding texts like those of Homer. For Atwood to have presented a definitive version of events would have been in many ways for her to close ongoing discussions about the role that the classical canon plays in contemporary society. However, Atwood's text's refusal to be presented as an authoritative or ultimate version of events prevents readers from settling for a single interpretation – a single voice – and instead highlights the subjectivity of the act of interpretation itself, which in turn opens new avenues for the exploration of both contemporary and classical texts.

We learned in the preceding chapter that Hutcheon considers it essential to develop an understanding of both the adaptor and the adaptor's context when exploring an adapted work. Hutcheon (2013:94) cautions that these "more personal and thus idiosyncratic motivations, despite the increased focus on individual agency in feminist, postcolonial, ethnic, and queer

studies" may remain suspect in the eyes of many researchers, which illustrates the tension inherent in attempts to link adaptation and adaptor. However, she writes that "despite a half-century of critical dismissal of the relevance of artistic intention to interpretation by formalists, New Critics, structuralists, and poststructuralists alike", scholars have remained interested in the political and historical intentionality of adapted works (Hutcheon, 2013:94). Thus the following exploration of Atwood's context is rooted in Hutcheon's assertion that adaptation has often been used as a productive way in which to engage in social or cultural critique. She also suggests that this social or cultural critique is likely to spring from the adaptor's own experiences and positions in their context – however challenging it may be to infer these experiences and positions. Bakhtin (1981) might describe the effects of the adaptor's intentions and context on the text as creating a dialogue between the text, the adaptor, and the adaptor's context, and thus exploring these extratextual concerns might help us develop an understanding of the dialogue in which the text engages.

An engagement with Atwood and her creative context must necessarily differ from a similarly-motivated engagement with the connections between Tepper and her creative context. While Tepper's work seems clearly rooted in multiple identifiable and temporally contextual concerns like the rise of the "New Right" movement, the Cold War, and the resulting emergence of ecological concerns, much of Atwood's (2005) work (including *The Penelopiad*) does not seem to be so easily connected to a specific contextual anxiety or political concern. Moreover, Atwood is far more circumspect about her personal life, which heightens the precarious nature of any attempt to draw connections between adaptors' personal contextual experiences and the choices made in adaptations. While Tepper's (2013) website features a section called "Sheri's True Biography" in which she details the experiences in her life that led to her subsequent exploration of feminist and ecological

concerns in her work, the biography on Atwood's website provides only the most basic personal information, such as her date of birth and her history of education and employment.

Yet Hutcheon (2013:142) maintains that "an adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context", and thus for Atwood to engage in the act of adaptation, and especially for her to adapt such an enduring and culturally-pervasive and canonical text as Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, means that we must still attempt to explore her context. Nicholson (1994:2) motivates for this area of exploration of Atwood's work by arguing that Atwood's "mode of direct personal address speaks a conversational intimacy with both her audience and her subject-matter, treating literary texts as ways of talking to each other and to us in a manner now disfavoured by theorising tendencies which defamiliarize and then abolish any communicative functions that might be looked for in poetry and fiction". And Tolan (2007:6), too, argues that "an understanding of Atwood-the-author" is simultaneously an understanding of "Atwood-the-reader". Tolan (2007:6) notes that part of what Atwood "is presumed to be reading is abstract: it is the culture as a whole. Atwood describes this in the following way: 'novels have people; people exist in a social milieu; all of the cultural milieu gets into the novel'". Atwood (Tolan, 2007:8) herself describes the complex interaction between her context and her work by evoking the difference between a mirror and a lens. She says: "A lens isn't a mirror. A lens can be a magnifying or a focusing lens, but it doesn't merely give a reflection … I recognize my work more as a distillation or a focusing". I suggest, therefore, that it may be fruitful to explore in Atwood's work the distillation of a cultural milieu of feminism, which seems to have inspired Atwood's experiments in feminist revisionist mythmaking, fictive autobiography, and ultimately her sustained interest in political and social power.

When considering Atwood's hand in books like *The handmaid's tale* (1985), a dystopian novel in which North America is ruled by a religious fundamentalist regime that considers

women to be property of the state, and *The Penelopiad* (2005), which seems constructed to enable a historically-neglected female character to tell her story in her own words, the impulse to interpret Atwood's work as feminist is almost irresistible. Tolan (2007:1) also relates this urge to Atwood's own context; she notes that Atwood is a compelling subject for the study of the connection between fiction and feminism as "[f]irstly, [Atwood's] career, which for this purpose is dated from the writing of her first novel in 1965, spans the four decades in which second-wave feminism has so actively developed and counterdeveloped, and secondly, because she is so evidently a culturally and theoretically-aware writer who both uses and challenges the ideas which permeate her culture". As Tolan points out, Atwood's writing career seems to have developed in consistent parallel with second-wave feminism. While Whelehan (1996:4) notes that "[i]t is impossible and therefore probably inadvisable to pinpoint one year to mark the beginning of feminism's second wave", she acknowledges that the year 1968 "carries a certain symbolic resonance" as it marked a surge of "public manifestations of New Left radicalism in Europe and the USA". And Atwood's (1969) first novel, *The edible woman*, was written in 1965 but only published in 1969, a year after the period that Whelehan identifies as a possible beginning for feminism's second wave. This confluence of dates has led many to assume that the novel was a product of the concurrent feminist discourse, but Atwood herself denies this notion. In an appended introduction to a later edition of the book, she writes: "I myself see the book as protofeminist rather than feminist: there was no women's movement in sight when I was composing the book in 1965, and I'm not gifted with clairvoyance, though like many at the time I'd read Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir behind locked doors" (Atwood, 1969:8).

Despite the remarkable correlations between Atwood's work and the development of second-wave feminist thinking, her relationship with feminism has remained a rather complex and thorny issue throughout her writing career. While an exploration of Atwood's larger body of

work reveals, in Tolan's (2007:2) words, both a "sympathy of concern and a coincidence of enquiry" with feminist politics that have often led to pressure being placed on Atwood to publicly align herself and her work with a feminist movement, Atwood has consistently resolutely refused to support or endorse feminist politics. In a recent interview, Atwood responds to the question of whether she is a feminist writer by arguing for specificity and nuance:

> Tell me what you mean. I don't sign blank cheques. Do you mean that I'm a 1972 feminist who felt that women were betraying their gender to have sex with men? I'm not that kind of feminist. And I'm not the kind that thinks that trans women are not women. So you tell me what you mean and I'll tell you if I am one. (Conroy, 2018)

And Atwood's possible role in contemporary feminist politics has become a contentious topic. Most recently, in 2018, she was widely called out as a "bad feminist" after publicly voicing concerns about the #MeToo movement and calling for due legal process in the case of a university professor who had been accused of sexual misconduct and subsequently removed from his position at the institution. In an essay written in response to the public backlash, Atwood (2018) says:

> What would a Good Feminist look like, in the eyes of my accusers?
>
> My fundamental position is that women are human beings, with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviours this entails, including criminal ones. They're not angels, incapable of wrongdoing. If they were, we wouldn't need a legal system.

Yet despite Atwood's unremitting refusal to align herself with feminist politics, Tolan (2007:2-3) argues that we can still explore the ways in which Atwood's work engages with concerns echoed in feminist thought:

> Because feminism is not a bounded, monolithic theory, it is insupportable to claim that a novel may react and interact with feminist themes and still operate outside of feminism. In fact, second-wave feminism, by its historical nature,

> has always contained an internal tension between activism and theoretical discourse, and consequently, a dialectical negotiation between what does and does not constitute "real" feminism has always been present within the discourse.

If second-wave feminism can be considered in part to be an exploration of abstract conceptions of gender, then it follows that a writer whose career has developed in parallel with second-wave feminism and whose work often shows confluences with second-wave feminist concerns might explore the ways in which written narratives and abstract cultural gender ideologies intersect. Thus, I suggest that Atwood's cultural milieu of second-wave feminism may be distilled in her use of strategies of feminist revisionist mythmaking and fictive autobiographies, and her exploration of political and social power dynamics.

An acknowledgement of the feminist themes in Atwood's work thus leads to an exploration of a related element of her engagement with Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*; that of feminist revisionist mythmaking. During her time in Victoria College at the University of Toronto, Atwood studied under Northrop Frye, the Canadian literary theorist whom she remembers as being one of her most influential professors. Atwood (2011) herself describes Frye's research as follows:

> […] Frye was concerned mostly with literary criticism, and myths interested him as structural elements in works of literature. He used the word *myth* to mean *story*, without attaching any connotation of truth or falsehood to it; but a myth is a story of a certain kind. The myths of a culture are those stories it takes seriously—the ones that are thought to be a key to its identity.

Frye's interest in myths seems to have had an enduring effect on Atwood's own approach to literature and culture in her writing. Appleton (2008:1) writes that Atwood's novels "are rife with allusions from the oral tradition of myth, legends, fables, and fairy tales", and suggests that Atwood engages with these narratives to explore the cultural assumptions about gender

stereotypes that they portray. Certainly, Atwood believes that there is still contemporary value in these ancient myths; she argues:

> [Myths function as] a big map of the psyche. They are a big map of the human-ness of human beings, and they lay out in the various bits of themselves the full range of human desires and fears - which are in fact what drive the world. It certainly isn't reason or logic. It is desire and fear, and that's true of even the most supposedly real of things: the stock market. (in Tonkin, 2005)

Atwood's predilection for the revision and reinterpretation of existing cultural narratives has not gone unnoticed by scholars and critics. Howells (1996:9) notes that "many critics have commented on Atwood's revision of traditional fictional genres as she draws attention to the cultural myths they embody and to the multiple inherited scripts through which our perceptions of ourselves and the world are structured". Howells (1996:9) also suggests that Atwood's revisionist approach offers the benefit of interpreting and framing traditional cultural narratives in a new light, highlighting and critiquing the value structures and power relations coded into these narratives.

Thus Atwood's (2011) critically acknowledged sustained engagement with myths, which she says "gather in and circumscribe their target audience" and in this way "make a collection into a collective", as well as the manner in which she engages with these myths – "the tales are enmeshed with other intertexts, inverted, enhanced and undermined, doubled, interrogated, and often confirmed in surprising fashion" (Appleton, 2008:2) – suggest that her approach might bear similarities to feminist revisionist mythmaking. Ostriker (1982:72) defines the strategy of feminist revisionist mythmaking thus:

> Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. Historic and quasi-historic figures like Napoleon and Sappho are in this sense mythic, as

> are folktales, legends, and Scripture. Like the gods and goddesses of classical mythology, all such material has a double power. It exists or appears to exist objectively, in the public sphere, and consequently confers on the writer the sort of authority unavailable to someone who writes "merely" of the private self. Myth belongs to "high" culture and is handed "down" through the ages by religious, literary, and educational authority. At the same time, myth is quintessentially intimate material, the stuff of dream life, forbidden desire, inexplicable motivation – everything in the psyche that to rational consciousness is unreal, crazed, or abominable.

This mode of engagement with cultural myth is also succinctly captured by Rich's (1972:18-19) popular definition of "revision":

> Re-Vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival […] We need to know the writing of the past and to know it differently […] not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.

We must note that critics do not always agree on whether Atwood, in her engagements with myth, revises existing narratives or creates new ones. Lauter (1984:215) argues that Atwood creates a new myth – "one which does not require the triumph of one person over another" – but Ostriker (1986:212) sees much of Atwood's work as correcting existing mythology, and thus argues for it to be defined as revisionist mythmaking. In the case of *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005), at least, Atwood's (2002:178-179) own words on the writer's relationship with the mythical past might serve:

> All writers must go from *now* to *once upon a time*; all must go from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more – which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change.

Certainly, there are striking similarities between Atwood's deeply symbolic description of the act of writing and Ostriker's (1982:71) own description of feminist revisionist mythmaking,

which she terms “a vigorous and various invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language, the treasuries where our meanings for ‘male’ and ‘female’ are themselves preserved”.

While Atwood seems to demonstrate a sustained interest in the power of myth as social narrative, she also explores the role of narrative in the creation of the personal self through her use of fictive autobiography. This is a simple enough concept to define: the life story of a fictional or historical character as told by that character. Yet the practice and exploration of fictive autobiography are decidedly more complex. Xu Yun (2017:26) describes the potential of the fictive autobiography as follows:

> The fictionality of fictive autobiography exempts it from the duty of fidelity to fact and the ethical obligation to tell the truth, empowering it with the freedom to embrace literariness and creativity. At the same time, by adopting an autobiographical strategy, fictive autobiography is geared towards historical factuality that disguises the fictionality and creates a myth of “truth”.

Readers might be socially primed to accept an autobiographical narrative as somehow more accurate or true than a narrative retold by another individual, but this is complicated when the figure at the centre of the autobiography is fictional. Atwood uses this tension between conceptions of fiction and of autobiography to cast doubt on the veracity possible of any narrative.

As de Man (1979:926) notes, “[autobiography] deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration” – biographies and autobiographies are not entirely concerned, it seems, with representing the self objectively and accurately (indeed, is there even a stable and essential self to represent?) but rather with constructing the self through language. In this way we can identify another facet of Atwood’s exploration of the influence of narrative – not only does narrative perform a powerful social function in prescribing gendered behaviour, but it also affects the manner in which we construct and reconstruct our identities as individuals.

Perhaps we might ultimately identify Atwood's engagement with her context as one that is primarily interested in complex social power relations. Atwood (2017) seems to resist being labelled a feminist in part because some conceptions of feminism oversimplify or further dichotomise gender narratives:

> Is "The Handmaid's Tale" a "feminist" novel? If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings — with all the variety of character and behavior that implies — and are also interesting and important, and what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure and plot of the book, then yes. In that sense, many books are "feminist."

Instead, she argues for an exploration of the power dynamics that might exist in a society in which gender equality is a contested issue. Atwood (2017) notes that even in a system in which "women as a whole have scant power", women will "gladly take positions of power over other women" as "[a]ll power is relative, and in tough times any amount is seen as better than none".

Atwood's engagement with feminist revisionist mythmaking might also be seen as an ultimate engagement with power – the power of language, myth, and narrative to prescribe and reinscribe social norms and gender ideologies. As many of the myths with which Atwood engages spring from societies with unequal power dynamics that favour one gender over another, Atwood's exploration of these myths, their gendered power dynamics, and the ways in which these power dynamics might be perpetuated by these enduring narratives seems to culminate in her use of the strategy of feminist revisionist mythmaking.

Finally, Atwood's mode of fictive autobiography also seems geared towards exploring a kind of power – the power of narrative to shape and reshape rather than simply record or uncover individual identities. As Tolan (2007:223) notes of another of Atwood's experiments with fictive autobiography, "Atwood also moves far beyond early feminist reconstructions of

forgotten or muted feminine experience, and challenges, not just the assumption that there is a stable subject to be recovered from the historical record, but also the systems of power and desire that can be unwittingly exposed in the attempted construction of another person's identity".

Atwood herself says of her cultural milieu:

> Power is our environment. We live surrounded by it: it pervades everything we are and do, invisible and soundless, like air …
> We would all like to have a private life that is sealed off from the public life and different from it, where there are no rulers and no ruled, no hierarchies, no politicians, only equals, free people. But because any culture is a closed system and our culture is one based and fed on power, this is impossible, or at least very difficult … So many of the things we do in what we sadly think of as our personal lives are simply duplications of the external world of power games, power struggles. (in Somacarrera, 2006:43)

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The *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) can be considered a particularly pertinent example of a culturally powerful text, as it is one of the oldest works of fiction still typically read by contemporary audiences. It is generally considered a sequel to the *Iliad* (Homer, [800BCE] 2010) and is set after the events of the Trojan war. The epic poem of 24 books focuses on the Greek hero Odysseus and his journey home to Ithaca after Troy has fallen, and opens *in medias res* with some prior events elucidated through flashbacks.

The first four books of the poem are set in Ithaca, where Telemachus shares his father Odysseus's house with his mother, Penelope. They are beset by a host of young suitors who believe that Odysseus is dead and are vying for Penelope's hand in marriage. The suitors' presence is costly and unwelcome; they refuse to leave, insist that Penelope choose one of them to marry, and revel in Odysseus's palace and wealth while they wait.

However, we learn that Odysseus is not in fact dead; instead he has been prevented from returning to Ithaca during the decade after the war by the god Poseidon, whom he has angered. Yet Odysseus has a protector in the goddess Athena, who finally petitions Zeus to overrule Poseidon and allow her favourite, Odysseus, to make his way home. Athena then proceeds to Ithaca and, carefully disguised, visits Telemachus to urge him to go in search of news of his father. Athena's visit marks Telemachus's first assertion of his role as head of the royal household of Ithaca; that evening when his mother, Penelope, asks the bard not to perform a poem about Troy as it reminds her of Odysseus, Telemachus overrules her.

Athena then secures a ship and crew for Telemachus, and leaves Ithaca with him in a new disguise when he sets sail for the Greek mainland and the home of Nestor, a Greek warrior who fought in the Trojan war and has managed to return home. From Nestor's home, Telemachus travels overland to Sparta to meet with Menelaus and Helen.

The narrative then shifts briefly back to Ithaca, where the suitors have noticed Telemachus's absence and plan to ambush his ship and kill him upon his return. The suitors' plot is overheard by Penelope, who worries about Telemachus's safety.

At this point, Odysseus gives the Phaeacians a lengthy overview of his adventures after the end of the Trojan war. He says that his travels took him to several exotic lands, and he encountered multiple mythical figures in his quest to return to Ithaca. Odysseus's tale ends, and the Phaeacians then agree to give him a generous amount of treasure before they deliver him to a hidden harbour in Ithaca while he is asleep. When Odysseus awakens, he is met by Athena who tells him that he is finally home. Athena then disguises Odysseus as an old beggar so that he can covertly investigate the state of his household.

Thus disguised, Odysseus meets one of his own slaves, Eumaeus, who offers Odysseus what hospitality he can. Telemachus also arrives at Eumaeus's hut after sailing home from Sparta

and evading the ambush set by the suitors, and Odysseus identifies himself to his son. The two decide that the suitors must be killed, so Telemachus returns to their home first while Odysseus, still in disguise, and Eumaeus follow later.

When he returns to his house, Odysseus goes largely unrecognised – in fact, the suitors scorn him. Odysseus uses his disguise to test Penelope's intentions towards her long-absent husband by speaking to her about Odysseus; he tells her that he once met Odysseus in Crete, and that later in Thesprotia he heard of Odysseus's recent adventures. Though Penelope does not seem to recognise Odysseus, both his dog and later his housekeeper, Eurycleia, realise that the elderly beggar is actually Odysseus. Eurycleia tries to tell Penelope the beggar's true identity, but Athena intervenes and prevents Penelope from hearing, and finally Odysseus swears Eurycleia to secrecy.

The next day, Athena intercedes again – she suggests that Penelope make the suitors compete for her hand in marriage through an archery competition. The suitor who can string Odysseus's bow and use it to shoot an arrow through a dozen axe heads will win the contest. The disguised Odysseus then takes part in this competition, and is the only one strong enough to complete the task. Competition won, Odysseus then kills the suitors with the help of Telemachus. The two then hang twelve maids who Eurycleia claims are guilty of betraying Penelope and having sex with the suitors.

Finally, Odysseus reveals his identity to Penelope herself, and later to his elderly father, Laertes. The family members of the dead suitors, seeking revenge, follow Odysseus to his father's farm, but Athena intervenes once more and convinces both parties not to fight each other. With this vendetta ended, Ithaca is at peace and the narrative concludes.

We certainly encounter a spectrum of female characters in this text, from human women like Penelope, to the half-divine Helen, to full goddesses like Athena. Yet not all of these women

are equals or represented as such, and what becomes increasingly clear in this narrative is the contrast between the choices open to men and women. This is most easily identified in the case of Odysseus and Penelope. Odysseus is famously intelligent, cunning, persuasive and charismatic, and Penelope is arguably represented as a contextually fair match for her husband. She spends twenty years in isolation, during which she must run a large and complex household while raising her son alone and warding off a contingent of impatient suitors. The strategies Penelope uses to achieve these goals demonstrate her own intelligence and cunning, her competence and her own strong will. Yet while Odysseus wanders the earth, encounters important figures both human and divine, and seems to have a multitude of choices open to him, Penelope is confined to her home and given what seems to be only one real choice. Moreover, this choice is one related to her marital status – it is the choice to wait for her current husband or to choose a new one from amongst the suitors gathered in her home. And this choice cannot be postponed forever, as the disruptive suitors remind her at every turn.

Penelope's intelligence, then, does not seem to engender any parity between the sexes – Wilson (2017) notes that unlike Odysseus's intelligence, which enables him to find a solution for everything, Penelope's "intelligence, evoked by her standard epithet, *periphron*, 'circumspect,' suggests caution and risk aversion. Her keen mind is not liberating; it keeps her stuck". This constriction is presented as necessary, even laudable, when we consider the actions – mentioned in the text – of other noble women with more agency, like Helen, who leaves her husband for another man, or Clytemnestra, who murders her husband.

Of course, we must also note the text's representations of empowered women through its depictions of various goddesses. Athena, Calypso, Aphrodite, and Circe have far more agency than any mortal Greek woman in the text, and the goddess Athena in particular is a major driving force of the poem's plot. Yet these divine beings operate in a world removed

from the social circumstances of mortal women, and in fact their very inclusion and influence in the text seem to work to heighten our sense of the ways in which their mortal counterparts are conversely restricted.

Mary Beard (2017:1) notes that the *Odyssey* (Homer [800BCE] 1937) is Western literature's "first recorded example of a man telling a woman to 'shut up'; telling her that her voice was not to be heard in public". Beard is referring, of course, to the early scene in which Penelope asks a bard not to sing about the Trojan war as it reminds her of her absent husband, whereupon Telemachus tells his mother to return to her quarters because speech is the business of men. This is a quintessential example of the poem's complex representation of gender dynamics, and the power relations inherent in such dynamics. The poem that Atwood has adapted is thus perhaps our earliest example of the ways in which gender and power can be presented as intimately connected – ways which might continue to haunt us.

Despite Homer's widely-acknowledged and persistent influence on Western thought and literature, we know very little about his history or that of his texts. Though historically the authorship of the *Iliad* ([800BCE] 2010) and the *Odyssey* ([800BCE] 1937) has largely been attributed to a figure called Homer, the texts are still in many ways shrouded in uncertainty. We do not know for certain whether Homer composed both texts himself, or whether in writing one or both texts he invented new stories or simply adapted and recorded existing oral narratives, or even whether he was a single Greek man as opposed to two men, a group of singers, or a woman. In fact, Fowler (2004:5) notes that "Homer was already a mystery to the archaic Greeks. The ancient biographies, with their plenitude of specious detail, are entirely fictitious, depending on inferences from the poems themselves, plausible conjecture and outright invention". This is demonstrated by the fact that Homer gives so little information about his own identity in his poems that no fewer than seven ancient Greek cities claimed him as their own (Graziosi & Haubold, 2005). Latacz (2001:23), moreover, notes that "not a

single contemporary document" about Homer's personal life exists. It seems no wonder, then, that even contemporary scholars, though working with similar surviving sources, reach differing conclusions and cannot establish consensus on most of the questions surrounding Homer's identity and the origin of his poems.

Thus we encounter a comparable issue to one faced in the preceding chapter, which is that the biographical information available for most classical Greek poets is either unavailable or simply unreliable. It is almost impossible to be certain of most biographical information available about Homer, which in turn means that it is even more difficult to draw connections between Homer's experiences and the issues explored in his poems. However, at this juncture it is important to reiterate that the goal of this discussion is not to establish Homer's own experiences with and views about gender dynamics in his context – this study does not aim to decide whether or not Homer or, indeed, any classical Greek writer was a misogynist. What the study is far more interested in is the ways in which the texts at hand might inscribe and reinscribe the gender dynamics of their contexts, and how they might be ideally positioned to perform these ideological functions – regardless of the author's own stance, which in any case we cannot hope to dependably know.

So, we cannot make reliable claims about the connections between Homer's identity or personal life or and his poems, but that does not mean that we are undone. The texts themselves are still available, and there is also a body of more general information about the historical context in which they were composed – both avenues of investigation that might provide useful information about the ways in which these texts can function as ideal ideological vehicles.

The *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) is largely agreed to have been written during a period in ancient Greece that many historians term the "Greek Renaissance", which followed the so-

called “Dark Ages” that resulted from the widespread collapse of great civilisations from the late Bronze Age (Graham, 1995:8). This era was characterised by economic progress, advances in art and architecture, and a growth in overseas trade and gradual Greek colonisation of the Mediterranean (Graham, 1995:8).

Much like tragedy, epic poetry in ancient Greece existed in a public sphere and against a background of earlier mythological narratives. Homer’s poetry is rooted in an existing oral tradition and draws on narratives and characters from myths that were widely considered by the Greeks to constitute a form of tribal history. This means that the medium of epic poetry in the ancient Greek context might differ quite substantially from a contemporary understanding of the medium of poetry. Hutcheon (2013:33-34) argues that the medium through which a text is expressed is itself meaningful, as different mediums embody different generic conventions as well as diverse modes of engagement with audiences. Moreover, even what is ostensibly the same medium can mean something quite different when it occurs in a different temporal or spatial context. We see this in the medium of poetry, about which Gentili (1990:3) notes:

> Greek poetry differed profoundly from modern poetry in content, form, and methods of presentation. An essentially practical art, it was closely linked to the realities of social and political life, and to the actual behavior of individuals within a community. It rendered the poet’s own experience of human existence as well as that of others, but was not private poetry in the modern sense. It drew regularly for its themes on myth, which was at once the sole subject matter of narrative and dramatic poetry and a constant point of paradigmatic reference in lyric. […] What distances it most radically from modern poetry is the medium of communication: not a written text for reading but a solo or choral performance, to the accompaniment of a musical instrument, before an audience.

Gentili’s (1990:3) description of poetry in ancient Greece offers a promising foundation for understanding Homer’s texts as ideological vehicles. What we can take from this description is, firstly, that Homer’s poems would likely have been performed publicly for an audience

rather than read privately by an individual, and secondly, that Homer's audience would likely have had some existing knowledge of the mythological narratives upon which Homer's poems draw. Publicly performing the poems would necessarily have required that an audience be gathered in a physically shared space for a collective, communal experience that, rather than providing a sense of escape from their lived experiences, might in fact have heightened the audience's reception of the poems as being an extension of their world. This means that Homer's poems may have been ideally situated to explore his culture's gender dynamics, as his audiences would have seen the poems as intrinsically connected to their world and its tensions and concerns rather than removed or distant from it.

Moreover, that Homer drew on existing myths or mythical figures that most of his audience was familiar with and in fact considered to be a form of cultural history may also have emphasised his audiences' perceptions of his poems as close and relevant to their lives in their context. This may similarly have enabled Homer to use his poems to explore contextual issues, as audiences would typically have had some familiarity with the narratives or the figures presented within them, allowing the poet greater scope to instead focus on or expand upon particular political or ideological concerns that might have been relevant to the audience at the time.

This leads naturally to the question of what such political or ideological concerns might have been. The matter of the most interest to this study is that of gender. Graham (1995:3) notes that "[i]f we include the goddesses and semidivine women, the *Odyssey* presents a great panorama of womanhood". Schein (1995:17) agrees with this, observing that the text represents "a variety of females—human women, goddesses, and monsters" and that the ways in which these characters are presented is one of "the most striking features of the *Odyssey*". It is possible that, like works in the genre of tragedy, epic poetry might have functioned to reinforce existing cultural norms and values surrounding gender, and that these existing

cultural norms and values were derived from a chiefly masculine ancient Greek culture. As Schein (1995:19) suggests:

> Each depiction or description of a female in the *Odyssey* is aimed either at the external audience of the poem or at some internal audience of one or more characters as well as the external audience. Each appeals to, or plays against, audiences' conceptions of females generally as well as the expectations shaped by representations of particular females in the mythology and oral poetic tradition behind the poem.

Despite the varied representations of women in the text, Schein's (1995:19) comments are a reminder that we cannot necessarily use the *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) as an example of the lived experiences of women in ancient Greece. There exists a divide between ideology and reality, between the abstract knowledge of cultural norms and values and the practical application thereof, that makes it problematic to use texts like the *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) to infer an understanding of the lives of women in Homer's time. In fact, it is probable that texts like the *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) suggest far more about the social concerns and anxieties of ancient Greek men than they do the lives of ancient Greek women, as these texts were written by men and thus even their female characters are male creations which might embody male preoccupations.

However, this study's – and perhaps also Atwood's – interest in this text is not necessarily in its value as possible evidence of the lives of ancient Greek women. Rather, the study is engaged in investigating through Atwood's adaptation the gender ideologies that the text explores, the manners in which the text is structured to explore them, and the ways in which, throughout history, the text has been culturally received and situated to transmit those ideologies to societies outside of its initial context.

Myrsiades (2010:ix) notes that "[c]ritical essays and books on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* continue to be published annually in leading scholarly journals and by major university presses throughout [America] and abroad, which makes Homer perhaps the bestselling author of all

time with a 2800 year track record". However, the abiding influence of Homer's work is not confined to academic spaces; Myrsiades (2010:ix) also writes that "Homer's influence has pervaded all phases of contemporary culture", and in support of this statement he offers a list of works that includes *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005). In 2019, almost a decade after Myrsiades' statements, Homer's remarkable track record seems to have held strong: 2017 brought the first published version of the *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) translated by a woman into English (Wilson, 2017), in 2018 the miniseries "Troy: Fall of a City" (Harris & Brozel) was released internationally on Netflix, and Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2019) was published only a little later, to mention but a few examples. This suggests that Homer's texts continue to permeate contemporary culture, and not merely in an academic sense or context – they are still a major part of the academy, to be sure, but they have also become a significant part of the perhaps more socially influential worlds of film, television, and popular fiction. Homer remains a central figure in contemporary culture, and the reach of his texts is extensive and enduring. It seems that Homer and his texts are perfectly situated in modern culture to function as powerful ideological vehicles – and this abiding impact is what Atwood (2005) explores in *The Penelopiad*.

"All men's thoughts have been shaped by Homer from the beginning", claims Xenophanes of Colophon, the Greek philosopher (Bloom, 2001). Centuries later, French poet Raymond Queneau seems to agree when he argues that "[e]very great work of literature is either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*" (Manguel, 2007:1). Homer's works have certainly been extensively received, scrutinised, studied, critiqued, praised, and rewritten, and this intensity of examination is not unique to a contemporary context. In fact, as I have previously noted, the critical study of Homer dates back to antiquity – the Sophists were already writing analyses about the language used in Homer's poems in the 5th century BCE, and his epics were also widely used as ancient Greek school texts from the 5th century BCE to the Byzantine period

(Reece, 2016:46). Even Euripides's own texts, discussed in the preceding chapter, might themselves be considered engagements with Homer's initial writings on the Trojan war, as Homer's poems were written first and were largely considered to be the preeminent versions of the narratives about this war.

With such a long tradition of Homeric scholarship and cultural engagement, we must note that Homer's poems have weathered not only varying historical receptions but also changes in scholarly approaches to classical texts. The manners in which scholars conceive of and delineate classical texts have changed; Martindale (2006:2) argues that "the idea that classics is something fixed, whose boundaries can be shown, and whose essential nature we can understand on its own terms" is one that must be contested. He acknowledges that "[t]he desire to experience, say, Homer in himself untouched by any taint of modernity is part of the pathology of many classicists" but contends that "it is a deluded desire" (Martindale, 2006:7) because scholars cannot remove themselves from their modern contexts or classical texts from their receptions throughout history.

The background of extensive cultural fascination with Homer means that an exploration of Atwood's adaptation of Homer's work must necessarily recognise that it is not quite dealing solely with two discrete texts and the ways in which they intersect with or diverge from each other. If, as Martindale (2006:4) suggests, "classical texts are not only moving but changing targets" and thus "[w]e are not the direct inheritors of antiquity", then Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* can be seen as a response not only to Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* but also to the wide-ranging receptions of Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* throughout history. To adapt Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* is also to engage on some level with other adaptations of this text, and moreover to engage with the varied receptions of and responses to this text throughout its existence as an item of canonical Western literature. Atwood

responds not only to Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* but also to what she perceives Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* has come to represent in contemporary culture.

This leads to the question of what exactly Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* might represent in popular culture; the kind of cultural capital it might carry. I have previously noted that Homer's ([800BCE] 2010) *Iliad* is widely considered to be the keystone of the Western canon, and that Homer's work has been studied for centuries. In the more recent historical context of the nineteenth century, university students were required to study Homer in Greek, and thus the study of Homer acquired a cultural capital that became a symbol of upper-class status. This historical background of the study and reputation of Homer's work suggests that it carries significant cultural capital, even – perhaps especially – in a contemporary context in which the scholarly engagement with Homer's work is largely confined to the prestigious space of the university. Atwood then faces a similar challenge to that faced by Tepper: the task of how to engage with a text that possesses immense cultural capital without ultimately supporting and perpetuating that text's status of cultural prestige.

While the text's cultural capital cannot be annulled, I argue that it can be mediated through Atwood's use of structural and generic features that work to recognise and destabilise the cultural capital of Homer's text. Where Tepper's response to the existing prestige of Euripides's texts is to situate her narrative in a genre which is often perceived as lowbrow and unserious – that of speculative fiction[11] – Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* is not initially recognisable as a form of speculative fiction. Though it is narrated by Penelope, who takes the form of a shade in Hades and seems to exist within our contemporary temporal setting, most of the action in the text takes place in the story that Penelope tells about her life. This embedded narrative is set in the ancient past, in the context of Homer's ([800BCE] 1937)

[11] Speculative fiction is frequently used as an umbrella term covering various forms of science fiction and fantasy.

Odyssey, and runs largely in parallel with that narrative. We do not typically associate such a classical Homeric setting as that found in either Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* or Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* with the genre of speculative fiction; however, I suggest that Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* and perhaps even Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* itself share surprising features with those typically found in such narratives and thus might have similar effects on readers.

Rogers and Stevens (2015) suggest that science fiction texts and texts within the classical tradition are perhaps more similar than we might initially assume. They note that many theorists mark the beginning of the genre of science fiction with the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and that this key text itself offers a clear connection to the classical tradition in its very subtitle: "The Modern Prometheus" (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:1). In this way, Shelley's (2018) *Frankenstein* invokes an ancient Greek myth about the human relationship with new technology (in this case, the introduction of fire to early humanity) in order to suggest a similar reading of the text's exploration of this concept in the rather different setting of 18th century Europe (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:1). Moreover, Rogers and Stevens (2015:1) note that "The Modern Prometheus" might be a reference to not only the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus but also to a more recent modern evocation of that ancient Greek myth made by Immanuel Kant when he describes Benjamin Franklin as "The Prometheus of modern times". Shelley's text, with its reference to Prometheus, can thus be read as a response to not only the classical myth of Prometheus but also to later engagements with this myth.

Shelley's (2018) *Frankenstein*, then, illustrates two vital aspects of the interactions between the genre of science fiction and texts within the classical tradition. Firstly, as it is widely considered to be the first science fiction text, the fact that Shelley's (2018) *Frankenstein* makes such clear reference to ancient Greek myth establishes a strong connection between

the two genres from the very inception of science fiction, suggesting that science fiction and classics are linked and might be studied as such. Secondly, the fact that Shelley's (2018) text also refers to an intermediary text like that of Kant establishes that a science fiction engagement with a classical text cannot escape the influence of other engagements with that classical text – that an exploration of Greek myth is not simply a matter of two texts, modern and ancient, but that it is coloured by all other existing examinations of Greek myth. We see this, I have noted, in the way that Atwood's response to Homer is also in many ways a response to other explorations of Homer's work.

In addition to this foundational connection between science fiction and the classical tradition, Rogers and Stevens (2015:7) suggest that "the rubric" of science fiction might be applied to "certain works whether or not they share the same historical contexts as modern SF or its engagement with a specially technoscientific ideology". This is because science fiction as a genre is not typically defined solely by its "historical or cultural provenance" but more importantly by the ways in which it innovates or departs from its contextually prevalent epistemologies (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:8). In this way, they argue, modern science fiction might even be considered a reoccurrence of an older mode of science fiction, as the "'nascent form of SF' is a particular kind of 'extraordinary voyage'" as can be found, in its earliest form, in the "fantastic voyages of the Ancient Greek novel" (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:8). Rogers and Stevens (2015:8) use Suvin's (1979:7-8) pivotal definition of science fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" to suggest that both classical and science fiction texts constitute "knowledge fictions". The texts within both fields, argue Rogers and Stevens (2015:18), are "enticingly incomplete" and are set in worlds which do not exist outside of the text – whether these are historical worlds which have ceased to be, or futuristic

worlds which have yet to come. Both kinds of world, past and present, exist at a significant distance from the contemporary reader and their context. Thus in reading texts from either field, classics or science fiction, the reader must actively work to supply the missing knowledge that can bridge the gap between their own world and the world in the text – which suggests that texts from both fields can be considered to constitute "knowledge fictions" (Rogers & Stevens, 2015:18).

We have seen that Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* combines elements from both past and future, classics and science fiction, through its incorporation of a play set in ancient Greece within a framing science fiction narrative that exists in an imagined future. This structure requires readers to work to decode two narrative threads set in two contexts significantly removed from their own, and thus positions them to actively engage with the text on the level of thought experiment rather than to simply passively receive the text as story. Although Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* does not at first seem to fall within a similar genre, many aspects of the text might be considered by contemporary readers to be similarly removed from their own contexts and thus require a comparable kind of active decoding to be understood. While the framing narrative of *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) seems set in a contemporary context in terms of time, its spatial setting of the Greek underworld of Hades is still decidedly distant from the contemporary world. We are reminded of this distance often; an early example can be found when Penelope tells us that some spirits in Hades "have been able to infiltrate the new ethereal-wave system that now encircles the globe, and to travel around that way, looking out at the world through the flat, illuminated surfaces that serve as domestic shrines" (Atwood, 2005:19). This statement highlights Penelope's own distance, both physical and mental, from the contemporary world of the reader by describing what the reader must themselves decode to be the internet and computers as seen from the perspective of a character born in ancient Greece.

Moreover, where the effect of cognitive estrangement achieved by Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* is intensified through its structure of offering an embedded historical narrative in the form of a play which the characters in the framing science fiction narrative are rehearsing, Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* also contains an intratextual historical narrative. Within the framing narrative of Penelope as a shade in Hades exists another story: that of Penelope's past in ancient Greece, which begins when she is only a child and continues until it meets and runs parallel with the events in Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, offering a hitherto-unwritten account of the events on Ithaca during Odysseus's long journey home. This context certainly seems to adhere to Rogers and Stevens' (2015:8) concept of "knowledge fiction", as the ancient setting of Ithaca is likely to be rather removed from the experiences and contexts of contemporary readers. It is thus likely to require readers to identify and fill gaps in their knowledge of this historical setting and its relation to their own contexts. Thus it is not only the setting of the framing narrative in Hades that readers must work to understand, but also the setting of the embedded historical narrative that details Penelope's life and is set in ancient Greece. Moreover, to fully make sense of both of these narratives, the reader must consciously work to bridge the cognitive distance between not only their context and each narrative, but also between both narratives themselves. The reader must therefore engage in a complex process of identifying and solving gaps within their understanding of what are essentially three contexts: the reader's world, the world of Hades, and the world of ancient Greece. Penelope's influence as a shade is also reminiscent of Tepper's use of the ghosts of Iphigenia, Polyxena, and Achilles to demonstrate how the past can affect the present, and thus model the enduring effects of classical texts on contemporary contexts far from their own.

We have established that both texts, Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, seem structured to effect a kind of doubled cognitive

estrangement that requires the reader to consciously work to bridge the gaps between the epistemologies of multiple worlds and contexts. And both texts achieve this by embedding a narrative set in an ancient historical context – that of ancient Greece – within a wider framing narrative set much further in the future – Atwood's framing narrative being contemporary to readers in terms of time but removed in terms of space, and Tepper's framing narrative being set in an imagined future and thus wholly removed in both time and space. This structure, as we have also seen in Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country*, means that the narrative of Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* is rendered increasingly complex and places substantial cognitive demands on the reader. Readers must unravel and re-join the connecting threads between a triad of contexts, engaging in the active and intricate process of decoding this textual tapestry of connections and cessations in order to arrive at what they consider to be a complete understanding of the narrative. In this way, the structure of the text as interwoven yet divergent contexts forces readers to be intellectually active in their explorations of the text, and primes them to approach the text more as code to be broken than as story to be received.

An examination of Atwood's use of the character of Penelope and the modes of fictive autobiography and feminist revisionist mythmaking reveals the importance of the text's sustained use of varied strategies of cognitive estrangement. As I have noted, both the framing narrative in Hades and the embedded narrative in ancient Greece are narrated in the first person by the character of Penelope. Penelope has been received and interpreted in diverse ways, but perhaps most famously Penelope has been read as the perfect wife due to her perceived patience and fidelity to her husband. Indeed, Franco (2015:60) notes that the source of Penelope's renown is somewhat contextually unusual; where most cult heroines are recognised because of the stories of their lives (for example, Helen), Penelope's "'heroism' rests on the immortalizing effects of her virtue". Moreover, scholarship on Penelope's

position in the text is a contested space. Scholars like W. J. Woodhouse (1930:200-203) minimise Penelope's role in the narrative while others, like Winkler (1990:130,133) argue her similarity to Odysseus and her importance to the plot. However, Atwood's version of Penelope seems to respond primarily to the popular reception of Penelope as a symbol of a "good" and virtuous woman. This reception can be seen in the first epigraph that Atwood (2005) offers:

> "… Shrewd Odysseus! … You are a fortunate man to have won a wife of such pre-eminent virtue! How faithful was your flawless Penelope, Icarius' daughter! How loyally she kept the memory of the husband of her youth! The glory of her virtue will not fade with the years, but the deathless gods themselves will make a beautiful song for mortal ears in honour of the constant Penelope." – *The Odyssey*, Book 24 (191—194)

Moreover, Atwood (2005:xix) herself also notes this reception of Penelope in her introduction: "In *The Odyssey*, Penelope – daughter of Icarius of Sparta, and cousin of the beautiful Helen of Troy – is portrayed as the quintessential faithful wife, a woman known for her intelligence and constancy". So as Iphigenia is often received and portrayed as a model woman, daughter, and citizen because of her perceived willingness to be sacrificed for the Greek troops, Penelope is often received and portrayed as a model woman and wife because of her apparent patience and fidelity to Odysseus. However, as is the case with most classical literature, we must remember that this portrayal of Penelope is one created by and subordinate to men, and thus that it might serve as a vehicle for a particular kind of gender ideology that models the ideal behaviour of women in their roles as wives.

When considered in light of prevalent receptions of the character of Penelope as a paragon of virtue, and the historical gender ideology that this reception of the character might suggest, then Atwood's decision to centre Penelope in this retelling of the *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) seems to align with the approach of feminist revisionist mythmaking. Ostriker (1982:73) describes revisionist mythmaking as when a writer uses an existing and culturally-

accepted story but alters this story to achieve a new effect; these changes often focus on reclaiming or resituating previously silenced or neglected female characters and the relationships between them:

> [In revisionist mythmaking] the old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy. Instead, […] they are corrections; they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival.

Penelope seems to be a character ripe for feminist revision, as her historical reception as a model of virtue means that she has become, in her own words, "[a] stick used to beat other women with" (Atwood, 2005:2). Thus readers are socially primed at the very opening of Atwood's text to receive Penelope's tale as perhaps simply "the other side" of the story in Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*.

Yet Atwood revises Penelope's myth using the mode of the fictive autobiography, which complicates readers' engagement with her story. Howells (2006:11) notes:

> Penelope's story belongs to Atwood's favourite genre of fictive autobiography, a duplicitous if not an impossible genre as Paul de Man reminds us, for autobiography whether fact or fiction is always a discourse of 'self restoration' in the face of death and the power of mortality, and therefore subject to distortion through the chosen rhetorical mode of presentation.

While the mode of autobiography seems to align with the concept of feminist revisionist mythmaking as it is used to centre Penelope and her historically unheard voice and offer her the platform to shape her own story herself, it is also a duplicitous genre that is only made more complex when the narrator is a fictional character. Readers might expect an autobiography to offer the most accurate account of events, given that it is the opportunity for the person at the centre of those events to recount them, but the genre of autobiography might be seen as more concerned with the construction of the self than the description of events.

And when the narrator of the autobiography is a fictional character, this mode of construction of the self through autobiography is foregrounded, as there is rather definitively no "real" person to whose account readers might compare Penelope's narrative. We cannot establish how close to the truth Penelope's narrative might be (indeed, perhaps no narrative can accurately represent the events it details) but we can explore how Penelope's narrative responds to other narratives about herself and her context, and how, through this response, she uses her narrative to construct a particular version of her identity and context.

So the character of Penelope is a way into the text, but can readers trust her and her story? In addition to the complexity of the genre through which she tells her story, Penelope herself both invites trust through her "confessional dynamics" (Howells, 2006:11) and yet often warns that her story might not always (or ever?) be true. Her very first words in the text embody this paradox:

> Now that I'm dead I know everything. This is what I wished would happen, but like so many of my wishes it failed to come true. I know only a few factoids that I didn't know before. (Atwood, 2005:1)

This opening chapter is Penelope's opportunity to frame the narrative that follows in the way that suits her best, but she often seems to use it to remind readers instead of the multiplicity of narratives surrounding herself and Odysseus, in some ways undermining herself as an authority before she even begins her own story. She refers clearly to Homer's version of events and the symbol that she has become through his text, but also notes the ways that the story has been received and revised, "turning [her] into a story, or into several stories" (Atwood, 2005:3). By the time Penelope explains what she intends to do in *this* narrative, it seems that, rather than set the record straight, she merely means to add yet another story to the mix:

> Now that all the others have run out of air, it's my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself. I've had to work myself up to it: it's a low art, tale-telling. Old women go in for it, strolling beggars, blind singers, maidservants, children – folks with time on their hands. (Atwood, 2005:4)

Moreover, the account that follows is filled with uncertainties and deceptions; as Howells (2006:11) notes:

> Paradoxically, [Penelope] seeks to establish her authority by confessing that sometimes she makes things up ('Perhaps I have only invented it in order to make myself feel better,' p. 8), or else she confesses her innocent duplicities when she has to appear to be surprised—at Telemachus's secret departure to look for his father ('I had to appear to be surprised,' p. 122) or on Odysseus's return disguised as a beggar.

And Penelope's narration seems to foreground the process of storytelling, highlighting the fact that her narrative is no less carefully constructed than any other and thus intensifying the narrative's resistance to readerly immersion. She speaks directly to the reader, asks rhetorical questions, and openly wonders where to begin certain sections of the story or how to express certain ideas:

> Where shall I begin? There are only two choices: at the beginning or not at the beginning. The real beginning would be the beginning of the world, after which one thing has led to another; but since there are differences of opinion about that, I'll begin with my own birth. (Atwood, 2005:7)

A later description of Penelope before her marriage is also framed in a way that suggests its artifice, emphasising that this representation of the young Penelope is created through a collusion between narrator and reader:

> Picture me, then, as a clever but not overly beautiful girl of marriageable age, let's say fifteen. Suppose I'm looking out the window of my room – which was on the second floor of the palace – down into the courtyard where the contestants are gathering: all those young hopefuls who wish to compete for my hand. (Atwood, 2005:28)

By foregrounding the constructed and ambiguous nature of storytelling and subverting readers' expectations of texts like autobiographies, Atwood uses Penelope as strategically as Homer – as strategically as Tepper and Euripides use Iphigenia. The doubt surrounding Penelope's reliability and the veracity of her narrative is perhaps the most important effect of Penelope's narration. Firstly, in its indeterminacy the text comes to act as a model of how narratives – like Homer's, perhaps – are often structured to further particular ideological and social structures. Secondly, by carefully framing Penelope as no less sly or clever than her famously wily husband, Atwood positions us to interrogate our own cultural ideologies about proper female behaviour. Is Penelope's historical treatment any less unequal if she is not trustworthy or does not tell the truth? Can readers respect her for her intelligence, or only for her virtue – and are the two mutually exclusive? Howells (2006:9) notes that "Atwood is playing with two levels of myth here: the Homeric myth of 'faithful Penelope' and cultural myths about women as either submissive and domestic, or as duplicitous schemers and *femmes fatales*" – and Atwood's Penelope will not be dichotomised.

Moreover, Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* introduces another complication to the already-intricate structure shared by both texts – the many interjections by the Chorus Line of murdered maids. These interjections are one of the key organising principles of the text, in much the same way that Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* is fundamentally shaped by the embedded play "Iphigenia at Ilium". I suggest that these episodes have three major functions in the text. Firstly, the chapters by the Chorus Line function to emphasise and extend the cognitive estrangement created by the text's dual contexts of Hades and ancient Greece. We have seen that it is the strangeness and distance of both of these contexts from the reader's own world that require the reader to work actively to decode these contexts in relation to each other and to the reader's own context. However, many of the contexts of the Chorus Line's interludes are no less strange or distant to the contemporary reader, as

these chapters also take the form of diverse genres and contexts. The Chorus Line appears eleven times during the course of the text, and each defiant appearance occurs as a different genre: a rope-jumping rhyme, a lament, a popular tune, an idyll, a sea shanty, a ballad, a drama, an anthropology lecture, a videotaped court trial, a love song, and an envoi. This means that the reader must decode a multitude of texts and contexts in order to arrive at an understanding of how these many narratives are connected. For example, when reading the Chorus Line's first chapter, which takes the form of a rope-jumping rhyme, the reader must decipher the genre of a rope-jumping rhyme in relation to the contexts of both Penelope's framing narrative in Hades and her embedded historical narrative in ancient Greece, as well as to the reader's own contemporary context and the contexts of the other ten chapters by the Chorus Line.

These genre-bending appearances by the Chorus Line might also be seen to effect a kind of Brechtian estrangement, a concept I have also explored in the preceding chapter in relation to the play embedded in Tepper's framing science fiction narrative. While Brecht's (1978) *Verfremdungseffekt* or estrangement effect is grounded in and generally discussed in relation to theatre, Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* is certainly not a text which adheres to the format of a single genre. The Chorus Line's appearances are often consciously arranged as stage performances; consider the popular tune with its opening note "*As performed by the Maids, with a Fiddle, an Accordion, and a Penny Whistl*e" or the sea shanty which begins with "*As Performed by the Twelve Maids, in Sailor Costume*s" (Atwood, 2005:51,93). Another Chorus Line chapter is actually titled "The Perils of Penelope, A Drama" and is structured like a play, with a prologue, stage directions, and indications of who should play each part (Atwood, 2005:147). Atwood herself also adapted the text into a play script in 2007, which again suggests the text's inherent suitability and similarity to the genre of drama. Howells (2006:15) also notes these parallels of genre when she observes that "[w]e read *The*

Penelopiad as a written text like all Atwood's other texts […] but it can also be read as the script for a play", and further notes:

> The 'play script' quality is evident in the chapter heads referring to the maids, who are always billed as 'The Chorus Line.' Sometimes a chapter head wittily alludes to their fate: 'The Chorus Line: A Rope-Jumping Rhyme' (p. 5), but most often the allusions are musical: 'The Chorus Line: The Wily Sea Captain: A Sea Shanty' or the 'Love Song' at the end. Stage directions and costume changes are also coded in: at one point the Maids are 'in Sailor Costumes' (p. 93) and at another they are wearing tap-dance shoes (p. 151).

In light of these intersections of genre, Brecht's definition of the estrangement effect might also help us understand the effects of the Chorus Line's appearances. Brecht (1978:143,203) defines the estrangement effect as a "a way of drawing one's own or someone else's attention to a thing" which "consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible into something peculiar, striking and unexpected" and explains that this technique may involve the "framing" of part of the performance in a way that "mark[s] it off from the rest of the text". Eagleton (1976:31) thus notes that through Brechtian estrangement

> [t]he play itself, far from forming an organic unity which carries an audience hypnotically through from beginning to end, is formally uneven, interrupted, discontinuous, juxtaposing its scenes in ways which disrupt conventional expectations and force the audience into critical speculation on the dialectical relations between the episodes. Organic unity is also disrupted by the use of different art-forms – film, back-projection, song, choreography – which refuse to blend smoothly with one another, cutting across the action rather than neatly integrating with it. In this way, too, the audience is constrained into a multiple awareness of several conflicting modes of representation.

The structure of *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) certainly seems to parallel many of these mechanisms and effects; the text does not form an "organic unity" because it is "formally uneven [and] interrupted" (Eagleton, 1976:31) by the multiple different contexts of the chapters. The narrative is set in Hades but frames another narrative set in ancient Greece, and the text moves between these settings irregularly, one context always interrupting the other.

Moreover, both of these contexts are intersected by the unpredictable appearances of the Chorus Line. These interruptions help to create cognitive estrangement as they require the reader to decode the "dialectical relations between the episodes" (Eagleton, 1976:31) and evaluate the connections between these seemingly-incongruous contexts of contemporary Hades, ancient Greece, and the even more contextually wide-ranging appearances by the Chorus Line. This active readerly engagement is heightened by "the use of different art-forms" and genres, like those in the Chorus Line appearances, "which refuse to blend smoothly with one another" (Eagleton, 1976:31) and are thus framed in a way that separates them from the rest of the text (Brecht, 1978:203).

Secondly, the chapters by the Chorus Line function to destabilise existing dominant narratives about Penelope and Odysseus. I have noted that *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) initially seems to centre Penelope's character and account of events and thus to operate as a simple reversal of Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, which primarily centres male characters like Odysseus and Telemachus. However, Penelope's narrative is complicated by the inclusion of the Chorus Line, whose appearances generate a multiplicity of voices in the text and often contradict the accounts of both Odysseus *and* Penelope. Howells (2006:14) also notes this function of the maids' chapters:

> As Atwood commented in her Introduction, the maids are like the Chorus or the satyr plays of Greek drama, though the sheer variety of their narratives draws our attention to the different generic conventions through which stories may be told, so that the interaction between Penelope's confession and the maids' shifting narrative forms cast doubt on the absolute truthfulness of any single account, including Penelope's. With so many competing narratives, what is fact and what is fiction?

The Chorus Line's very title is the first suggestion of the subversive role they play in the text. As much of the narrative takes place in ancient Greece, and Penelope is a familiar figure from Homeric literature, readers might associate Atwood's Chorus Line with the chorus of

classical Greek drama. In its earliest form in ancient Greece, the chorus functioned to offer commentary on the actions and events that occurred on stage. This had the effect of controlling the play's atmosphere and the audience's expectations, thus preparing the audience for key scenes and enriching their understanding of the drama. The structure of Atwood's text, with the Chorus Line's multiple appearances and their clear references to the action of the framing narrative, seems to emulate this ancient Greek dramatic device. Atwood (2007:vi) herself says that "[t]he chorus of Maids is in part a tribute to the use of the chorus in Greek tragedy, in which lowly characters comment on the main action, and also to the satyr plays that accompanied tragedies, in which comic actors made fun of them. The Maids in *The Penelopiad* do such things, but also they're angry, as they still feel they have been wrongfully hanged". However, the murdered maids are not merely a "chorus" of the classical Greek variety but rather a "chorus line" – a more modern term that refers to a group of dancers, usually in musical theatre productions, who perform synchronised routines that are largely auxiliary to the main action on stage. This name, then, "The Chorus Line", is thus an amalgamation of the highbrow chorus of classical Greek drama and the more lowbrow chorus line of modern musical theatre.

Both the classical Greek chorus and the musical theatre chorus line are liminal groups, figures who appear on stage with the main characters of the narrative and, in fact, often outnumber these key individuals, yet also exist in a space separated from this key action. As Gagné and Govers Hopman (2013:5-6) note of the classical Greek chorus, "no member of the audience would ever confuse the choral ensemble and the cast of characters". And it is particularly interesting that even in Penelope's version of events, which we are given in *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) and which is in many ways framed to suggest that we should receive it as the "missing piece" or the "other side of the story" of Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, the murdered maids are still side-lined, their narratives still subordinate to those of

more central figures like Penelope. This is perhaps another reason for the murdered maids' undeniable anger – their disempowered lives and gruesome deaths are used as a mere backdrop for the action of the "main" narratives of both Odysseus *and* Penelope, despite the fact that the maids actually play a pivotal role in Penelope's narrative by (according to Penelope's version of events) helping her handle her suitors and thus famously remain faithful to her absent husband.

Thirdly, the Chorus Line's appearances might be seen to parallel and comment on some of the ways in which the *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937) has historically been embedded in Western culture. Each Chorus Line chapter is presented in a different genre, and their appearances are also varied in terms of temporal and spatial contexts. Using the similarities of the historical periods of their varied genres as a guide, the appearances by the Chorus Line might be organised and discussed in the following way:

Temporally ambiguous genres: a rope-jumping rhyme, a love song, the envoi

Classical and mock classical genres: a lament, an idyll, a mock-heroic drama.

Modern genres: a popular tune, a sea shanty, a ballad.

Contemporary genres: an anthropology lecture, a videotaped court trial.

Through their use of these temporally wide-ranging genres and contexts, the murdered maids are able to not only tell a third, largely unheard, side of the events in the *Odyssey* (Homer, [800BCE] 1937), but also to reflect the endurance and thus perhaps the influence of this text throughout history.

Our first encounter with this Chorus Line is in the form of the temporally ambiguous child's "Rope-Jumping Rhyme" (Atwood, 2005:5), a genre which often contains playful, nonsensical lyrics that are intended to structure a child's skipping game and which thus might carry

connotations of childish innocence. Rope-jumping rhymes only became popular in Europe in the 19th century and are still in contemporary use, meaning that the genre of the Chorus Line's first comment falls distinctly outside of the context of ancient Greece, though it refers to events that happened in that context. Certainly, the maids themselves are young enough to have played games like this – they remind us in another of their scenes that "[they] too were children" (Atwood, 2005:13) – and the innocent associations of the genre of this Chorus Line scene render its grim content even more disturbing. In the childish sing-song of iambic dimeter, the maids, speaking as one, describe and assign the blame for their deaths:

> we are the maids
> the ones you killed
> the ones you failed
>
> we danced in air
> our bare feet twitched
> it was not fair
> (Atwood, 2005:5)

Where the physical act of rope-jumping might perhaps look like a kind of dance, the maids' dance is of a different kind – they dance "in air" (Atwood, 2005:5) at the ends of the ropes from which they are hanged. The macabre description of the maids' "bare feet [twitching]" (Atwood, 2005:5) seems a reference to the epigraph from Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* that Atwood (2005) offers at the beginning of the text:

> … he took a cable which had seen service on a blue–bowed ship, made one end fast to a high column in the portico, and threw the other over the round-house, high up, so that their feet would not touch the ground. As when long-winged thrushes or doves get entangled in a snare … so the women's heads were held fast in a row, with nooses round their necks, to bring them to the most pitiable end. For a little while their feet twitched, but not for very long.
> – *The Odyssey*, Book 22 (470–73)

Unlike the clear "he" in this epigraph from Homer, which implicates Telemachus in the execution of the maids' deaths, Atwood's Chorus Line refer instead to an unnamed "you".

This initially seems to mean Odysseus, as an early verse offers a clear reference to his activities in Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*:

> with every goddess, queen, and bitch
> from there to here
> you scratched your itch
> (Atwood, 2005:5)

The maids also note that this unnamed "you" "judged [them] bad", ordered them to clean up the blood of the dead suitors, and sentenced them to death – and we know that this judgement is made by Odysseus in the Homeric version of events (Atwood, 2005:5). However, the maids introduce a new thread into this story when they refer, in their first and last verses, to "the ones you failed" (Atwood, 2005:5,6). This "you" seems to refer not to Odysseus or Telemachus but rather to Penelope, the woman who asked the maids to engage in their liaisons with the suitors – the flirtations for which they have been killed – in the first place, and who could ostensibly have told Odysseus the full story and thus saved their lives.

In this way, the Chorus Line's first interjection effectively describes the injustice of their treatment at the hands of Odysseus, Telemachus and, more unexpectedly, Penelope. The incongruous context and genre of this chapter narrated by the Chorus Line, especially as it appears directly after the first chapter narrated by Penelope herself, prime readers to actively work to make sense of the connections between their own contexts, the two chapters with their divergent contexts, and the chapters that follow. Whether or not the maids are telling the truth about Penelope's hand in their deaths, what is perhaps more important is that their words and the delivery thereof function to unsettle the reader's expectation that Penelope's story will somehow complete our understanding of the narrative begun with Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*. The maids remind us that there are gaps in both narratives, and that even when Homer's and Penelope's stories are combined, they are haunted by the untold stories of liminal characters like the maids.

The next temporally ambiguous chapter by the Chorus Line is called "We're Walking Behind You, A Love Song" (Atwood, 2005:91). Neither the genre of a love song nor the content of this chapter offers a distinctly identifiable context. The genre of a love song is ubiquitous and is not clearly tied to any particular culture or context. Moreover, the maids make reference to their deaths in ancient Greece, but also to Odysseus's "life or [his] afterlife or any of [his] other lives", which complicates our understanding of the chapter's context and suggests that it exists in a space outside of time in which Odysseus's life, afterlife, and future lives are all visible (Atwood, 2005:192). In this timeless space, the maids again describe their treatment at the hands of Odysseus and Telemachus in their own voices. They subvert Odysseus's historically enduring fame by refusing to call him by his name, instead identifying him with some choice epithets of their own devising: "Mr Nobody! Mr Nameless! Mr Master of Illusion! Mr Sleight of Hand, grandson of thieves and liars!" (Atwood, 2005:191).

Later, even more sarcastically, the maids call Odysseus "Mr Thoughtfulness, Mr Goodness, Mr Godlike, Mr Judge" (Atwood, 2005:193). Unlike the earlier designations, which seem to acknowledge Odysseus's classical reputation, these titles seem less related to Odysseus's reputation for craftiness and appear to refer instead to the perceived motivations for his cruel treatment of the maids. As the maids allege: "How virtuous you felt, how righteous, how purified, now that you'd got rid of the plump young dirty dirt-girls inside your head!" (Atwood, 2005:192).

The maids also remind us of their own historical and textual marginalisation by reflecting on their own lack of individuality and identity in many treatments of this narrative:

> We're here too, the ones without names. The other ones without names. The ones with the shame stuck onto us by others. The ones pointed at, the ones fingered. (Atwood, 2005:191)

However, in the temporally ambiguous context of their love song, the maids are released from the disempowerment of their world of ancient Greece and are able to exact a kind of justice for their deaths. While they cannot change the past, they can ensure that Odysseus (and the reader) will never forget what he has done to them; they tell him:

> Look over your shoulder! Here we are, walking behind you, close, close by, close as a kiss, close as your own skin.
> We're the serving girls, we're here to serve you. We're here to serve you right. We'll never leave you, we'll stick to you like your shadow, soft and relentless as glue. Pretty maids, all in a row. (Atwood, 2005:193)

The maids' haunting of Odysseus might also be seen to parallel two other kinds of hauntings that operate in the text. Firstly, the maids' lasting connection to Odysseus might perhaps mirror the ways in which Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* seems to haunt contemporary culture as a narrative that is still explored, studied, and rewritten centuries after it was created. Secondly, the previously-silenced and side-lined maids' haunting of the main character of Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) text highlights the ways in which the *Odyssey* and many receptions thereof privilege the stories and experiences of only certain characters, and neglect to acknowledge the human cost of the epic stories that they portray. The maids remind us of these ever-present shadow narratives, the myriad untold lives of the figures in the background of every epic scene, when they ask Odysseus:

> Remember us? Of course you do! We brought the water for you to wash your hands, we bathed your feet, we rinsed your laundry, we oiled your shoulders, we laughed at your jokes, we ground your corn, we turned down your cosy bed. (Atwood, 2005:191-192)

Howells notes that "[t]hese maids are Atwood's 'unpopular gals,' the nameless female victims who have 'never had a turn'" (2006:13). The maids are denied agency both in their own context and in the context of Penelope's account of events, but the ambiguous third context of their love song offers them a space in which they can tell their story on their own

terms. Moreover, in their namelessness both here and throughout history, the maids can also come to represent the more generally unspoken underside of classical texts and their historical receptions – offering a multiplicity of voices and stories that undermines any attempt at establishing the authority of a single cohesive narrative.

The final temporally ambiguous appearance by the maids is the "Envoi" (Atwood, 2005:xxix), the closing statement of the text. The structure of this envoi is as simple as that of the rope-jumping rhyme; the lines are largely written in rhyming couplets of iambic dimeter. We can infer that this envoi is also spoken by the maids, though it is not specified as being performed by their Chorus Line configuration, as it repeats many of the same ideas and phrases found in both the rope-jumping rhyme and the love song:

> we had no voice
> we had no name
> we had no choice
> we had one face
> one face the same
> (Atwood, 2005:195)

Again, the maids describe their lack of agency and identity in their lives in ancient Greece: voiceless, nameless, choiceless, they become symbolic of the human collateral damage of the ancient epics that still fascinate contemporary society. However, in death the maids find themselves on an equal footing with their erstwhile masters, Penelope and Odysseus – death erases the class differences that permitted the maids' unhappy lives and deaths in the first place:

> we took the blame
> it was not fair
> but now we're here
> we're all here too
> the same as you
> (Atwood, 2005:195)

It is telling that, while the maids do not open the text, theirs are the voices that close it. As Howells observes: "it is the maids and not Penelope who have the last word, defaming (to use De Man's terminology) the Homeric monument to male heroism and female fidelity" (2006:12). Their first appearance, in the form of the rope-jumping rhyme, is structurally very similar to their envoi, but is still perhaps somewhat subordinated to Penelope's tale, as her narrative is the one that initiates the text. The tone and focus of the rope-jumping rhyme are also significantly different from those of the envoi. The maids' first appearance seems to emphasise their deaths, describing only the events directly before and during their hangings. However, though it is shorter than the rope-jumping rhyme, the envoi offers a more wide-ranging representation of events, and does not even explicitly mention the maids' deaths. Instead, it moves swiftly from their lives – "we had no voice / we had no name" (Atwood, 2005:195) – to their afterlives:

> and now we follow
> you, we find you
> now, we call
> to you to you
> (Atwood, 2005:195)

Additionally, as I have noted above, the envoi is the first appearance in which the maids are not described as assembled in their roles as a Chorus Line. While every other appearance by the maids is first given the chapter heading of "The Chorus Line" before its specific title, this final chapter is simply called "Envoi". We might interpret this to signal a departure from the often exaggerated and satirical tone of many of their previous chapters; in their final words to us, the readers, the maids seem unaffected and offer their concluding remarks in unembellished language. The pared-down and solemn structure of the envoi and its shift in focus from the maids' gruesome deaths to their continued existence in the afterlife suggest that the maids have, in their afterlives and after having told their story, found a kind of closure.

While Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope remain in Hades, the twelve murdered maids, who died "[a]s when long-winged thrushes or doves get entangled in a snare" (Atwood, 2005), undergo a transformation:

> […] we call
> to you to you
> too wit too woo
> too wit too woo
> too woo
>
> *The Maids sprout feathers, and fly away as owls.*
> (Atwood, 2005:195-196)

When they were hanged by Telemachus, who was told by Odysseus to kill them, and who was not stopped by Penelope despite their service to her, the twelve maids dangled like birds caught in a snare. Let us note that this description of the maids as snared birds is one focalised and offered by men, ostensibly Telemachus and Homer, though Howells (2006:15) astutely observes that the epigraph offered by Atwood does not specify the identity of the "he" who hangs the maids and thus wonders: "Is [he] Odysseus, or Telemachus, or a more generalized comment on male violence against women?". Now, after they have cut through Penelope's story to tell their own tale, the tale that neither Penelope nor Homer cared to tell, the maids reinvent their deaths when they change into owls – birds of wisdom – and rather than leaving them snared and helpless in their new shapes, this transformation offers them the ability to escape. At the level of narrative we might read this ending as an indication that, through telling their story, the maids are empowered enough to be able to escape the unhappily repetitive roles that the rest of the characters seem destined to play in the afterlife, where Helen is being born and reborn into the world, causing "uproar", ruining men, and bringing "empires" down around her (Atwood, 2005:187), and Odysseus and Penelope are recreating the pattern of departure and waiting that predominated their lives together in ancient Greece:

> [Odysseus will] drop in down here for a while, he'll act pleased to see me, he'll tell me home life with me was the only thing he ever really wanted, no matter what ravishing beauties he's been falling into bed with or what wild adventures he's been having. […] and then, just when I'm starting to relax, when I'm feeling that I can forgive him for everything he put me through and accept him with all his faults, when I'm starting to believe that this time he really means it, off he goes again, making a beeline for the River Lethe to be born again. (Atwood, 2005:188-189)

However, at the extratextual level, Howells (2006:16) also notes of these closing lines:

> Stage directions give way to fantasy here, reminding us of the artifice of storytelling, for this is Atwood's postmodern version of ancient myth in a form which is both complicitous and parodic, and where boundaries are blurred between genres, between text and performance, between true stories and lies, between the voices of the living and the dead.

Thus as readers perceive the redemptive aspect of the maids finally being able to tell their tale at the level of narrative, they are also reminded that this is at the same time merely a story. Perhaps this fantastical closing line is another way in which Atwood distances readers from the text and therefore positions them to examine the historical roles and representations of stories like this one.

The next collection of Chorus Line chapters is comprised of those sections that seem to mimic classical genres: a lament, an idyll, and a mock-heroic drama.

The maids' lament is an early chapter that occurs directly after Penelope's account of her own childhood; where Penelope's tale is called simply "My Childhood" (Atwood, 2005:7), the maids' chapter is called "The Chorus Line: Kiddie Mourn, A Lament by the Maids" (Atwood, 2005:13). Dué (2006:1) notes of the genre of lament that the maids invoke here:

> Laments of captive women play a substantial role in the Greek literature that has come down to us. […] The laments of the extant tragedies that deal with the Trojan war are […] preoccupied with the plight of the captive Trojan women, who, foreign and enslaved, would in all other circumstances be completely without a voice in Greek society.

Moreover, according to Dué (2006:9), "[m]any scholars have pointed out that in the context of lament, women can voice subversive concerns, and speak in ways that they cannot under any other circumstances". Murnaghan (1999:203) also acknowledges this seditious function of the female lament in classical Greek literature:

> The classical epic exhibits a complicated, ambiguous, and sometimes troubled relationship to the genre of lamentation. The lament is at once constitutive of epic and antithetical to it, one of epic's probable sources and a subversive element within epic that can work against what epic is trying to achieve. Lamentation thus has an important role to play in current attempts to rethink the nature of epic, to challenge a vision of epic that can be summed up in the term "monumental."

Murnaghan (1999:203) goes on to argue that while the female lament often contests the male heroic code in the classical epic, the female lament is nevertheless vital to the epic as it initiates the process of transforming grief into praise and thus reframing catastrophic events (for many) as epic events (at least for some).

Thus the genre of the lament in classical Greek literature is one often used by women to voice concerns that might (at least in the classical Greek context) not be communicated any other way, and is moreover often used by these women to undermine the heroic presentation of the events in these texts. Yet the grief and suffering expressed in these laments are often vital elements in creating and emphasising the epic quality of these narratives and the heroic natures of their (male) protagonists – as if female suffering is a necessary element of male excellence.

However, the maids' particular lament is a reminder that all women do not suffer equally. After Penelope's own account of her childhood, in which she details her unfriendly relationships with both her father and her mother, the maids are quick to point out that "[they] too were children" (Atwood, 2005:13). Moreover, they also have something to say about the

differences between Penelope's description of her relations with her parents in comparison to their relationships with their own parents. Penelope notes of her dealings with her father:

> There I would be, strolling hand in hand with my apparently fond male parent along a cliff edge or a river bank or a parapet, and the thought would occur to me that he might suddenly decide to shove me over or bash me to death with a rock. Preserving a calm façade under these circumstances was a challenge. (Atwood, 2005:10)

Likewise, her relationship with her Naiad mother is also rather strained:

> If my father hadn't had me thrown into the sea [my mother] might have dropped me in herself, in a fit of absent-mindedness or irritation. She had a short attention span and rapidly changing emotions. (Atwood, 2005:11)

Yet the maids note that their parentage is unhappier still:

> We too were born to the wrong parents. Poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents; parents who sold us, parents from whom we were stolen. These parents were not gods, they were not demi-gods, they were not nymphs or Naiads. We were set to work in the palace, as children; we drudged from dawn to dusk, as children. If we wept, no one dried our tears. If we slept, we were kicked awake. We were told we were motherless. We were told we were fatherless. (Atwood, 2005:13)

Where Penelope's parents are nobility – a king and a Naiad – and her biggest complaint about them is that they were cold to her (while she can *imagine* either parent doing her physical harm, it does not actually happen – her father did not throw her into the sea himself), the maids' parents are from a lower class and have, by force or necessity, given their children over to serve the nobility. Penelope does not even remember what is ostensibly the most traumatic event of her childhood:

> Do I remember the waves closing over me, do I remember the breath leaving my lungs and the sound of bells people say the drowning hear? Not in the least. But I was told the story: there is always some servant or slave or old nurse or busybody ready to regale a child with the awful things done to it by its parents when it was too young to remember. (Atwood, 2005:9)

However, the maids seem to remember their own childhood traumas with perfect clarity:

> We were dirty. Dirt was our concern, dirt was our business, dirt was our specialty, dirt was our fault. We were the dirty girls. If our owners or the sons of our owners or a visiting nobleman or the sons of a visiting nobleman wanted to sleep with us, we could not refuse. It did us no good to weep, it did us no good to say we were in pain. All this happened to us when we were children. If we were pretty children our lives were worse. (Atwood, 2005:14)

Certainly, the ways in which (according to Penelope) her parents treated her as a child are problematic, and what she describes is not a quintessentially happy or emotionally healthy childhood. Yet the maids' comments serve to remind readers that despite these alarming familial relations, Penelope's childhood was still one of privilege rooted in her family's upper-class status. If childhood was difficult for the daughter of a king, then it was exponentially tougher for the daughters of peasants and slaves who, children or not, were both physically and sexually exploited by the upper class. Penelope notes that her childhood taught her self-reliance:

> You can see by what I've told you that I was a child who learned early the virtues – if such they are – of self-sufficiency. I knew that I would have to look out for myself in the world. I could hardly count on family support. (Atwood, 2005:11)

The maids, however, learned rather different techniques of survival:

> As we grew older we became polished and evasive, we mastered the secret sneer. We swayed our hips, we lurked, we winked, we signalled with our eyebrows, even when we were children; we met boys behind the pigpens, noble boys and ignoble boys alike. We rolled around in the straw, in the mud, in the dung, on the beds of soft fleece we were making up for our masters. (Atwood, 2005:14)

The maids seem to imply that they have become merely what Penelope and her ilk have made them; disempowered and alone in the world, the sexual activity that was previously imposed upon them as unwilling children became instead a means for them to regain some agency in their lives. And it is this behaviour that Penelope later finds so useful in her quest to keep her

suitors at bay; as she confesses: "I told my twelve young maids – the loveliest, the most beguiling – to hang around the Suitors and spy on them, using whatever enticing arts they could invent" (Atwood, 2005:115). When some of the maids are in fact raped by the suitors, Penelope coolly notes:

> It was not unusual for the guests in a large household or palace to sleep with the maids. To provide a lively night's entertainment was considered part of a good host's hospitality, and such a host would magnanimously offer his guests their pick of the girls – but it was most irregular for the servants to be used in this way without the permission of the master of the house. Such an act amounted to thievery. (Atwood, 2005:116)

Finally, when Odysseus returns to Ithaca, the maids' sexuality becomes their undoing. Odysseus demands to know which of the maids have been "disloyal" and Eurycleia identifies "Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks and her cronies – that lot. They were notorious whores" (Atwood, 2005:158,160). In following what is perhaps the only path open to them, the maids' fates are sealed; they are killed by their king for the actions ordered by their queen. Here is the crux of the maids' argument in this chapter – they lament their lives of mistreatment and inequality at the hands of both men *and* women, and their lament undermines the epic presentation of not only Odysseus and Telemachus but also of Penelope. Readers are reminded that Penelope's story is still one told from a position of privilege, and that narratives like hers are always haunted by the unvoiced stories of background figures like the maids, who, Howells (2006:14) notes, "represent the dark underside of the heroic epic".

Where in "The Chorus Line: Kiddie Mourn, A Lament by the Maids" (Atwood, 2005:13) the maids compare their childhoods to Penelope's account of her own childhood, in the later chapter "The Chorus Line: The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll" (Atwood, 2005:65), the maids describe and compare their births and childhoods to those of Telemachus, the son of Penelope and Odysseus and the maids' eventual killer. It is interesting that the maids do this in the form of an idyll, which is another classical genre and is generally considered to have begun

with the Greek poet Theocritus's collection of short pastoral poems that he called idylls (de Romilly, 1985:180). These classical idylls might be considered almost the opposites of epic poems like those of Homer, as they focus mainly on pastoral scenes from everyday life and feature more ordinary people like herdsmen – great battles, complex politics, and powerful royal figures are not within the purview of the typical idyll (Hunter 2002:xiv-xvii). Hunter (2002:xvi) observes that "[t]he world of the bucolic poems is, from one perspective, the world which epic forgot".

Yet the maids complicate this usually rustic genre of poetry by using it to describe an epic event – the birth of the future king of Ithaca. Moreover, they use decidedly highbrow language in their "idyll" in order to explore this event: the poem is marked by parallel constructions and epithets straight out of Homer's own writing and foundation in the tradition of oral literature (Jung, 2014:54). The Chorus Line's description of the "wine-red seas" of Penelope's womb (Atwood, 2005:65), for example, seems a clear reference to Homer's ([800BCE] 1937:111) more familiar epithet of "wine-dark deep". This elevated style is further emphasised by the maids' use of an extended metaphor that describes pregnancy and birth as a sea voyage (Jung, 2014:54). The maids' highbrow use of language here might come as a surprise both to other characters and perhaps to readers, and it is through this use of language that the maids show themselves as equals to their masters and question their roles in the social hierarchy of their world.

The maids narrate the pregnancies of their mothers and of Penelope in similar terms. Penelope's pregnancy is described as a sea voyage in which the unborn Telemachus must navigate his mother as if she is an ocean:

> Nine months he sailed the wine-red seas of
> his mother's blood
> Out of the cave of dreaded Night, of
> sleep,

> Of troubling dreams, he sailed
> In his frail dark boat, the boat of himself,
> Through the dangerous ocean of his vast
> mother he sailed
> (Atwood, 2005:65)

While the maids' mothers' pregnancies are related in comparable fashion:

> And we, the twelve who were later to die by
> his hand
> At his father's relentless command,
> Sailed as well, in the dark frail boats of
> ourselves
> Through the turbulent seas of our swollen
> and sore-footed mothers
> (Atwood, 2005:66)

Yet the disparities between the lives of the prince and the maids are already present. The maids restate the differences in station between Penelope and their own mothers to emphasise the inequality that has been their lot since even before their births:

> […] our swollen
> and sore-footed mothers
> Who were not royal queens, but a motley
> and piebald collection,
> Bought, traded, captured, kidnapped from serfs and strangers.
> (Atwood, 2005:66)

And there is no more equality to be had once the maids and Telemachus are born; their births themselves are similar – the maids are "[b]eached at the same time as he [is], struck / by the hostile air" (Atwood, 2005:66) – but this is where the similarity ends. Telemachus, the maids note, is the much-anticipated and celebrated son of royal parents, an heir for Odysseus and the kingdom of Ithaca, while the maids are the daughters of common mothers and often unidentified fathers. Though their gestations and births have been comparable, the social realities of their world and the maids' place in that world are asserted by the descriptions of the maids and their mothers as animals in relation to the royal family of Ithaca:

> Helpless as he was helpless, but ten times
> more helpless as well,
> For his birth was longed-for and feasted, as
> our births were not.
> His mother presented a princeling. Our
> various mothers
> Spawned merely, lambed, farrowed, littered,
> Foaled, whelped and kittened, brooded,
> hatched out their clutch.
> We were animal young, to be disposed of at
> will,
> Sold, drowned in the well, traded, used,
> discarded when bloomless.
> He was fathered; we simple appeared,
> Like the crocus, the rose, the sparrows
> engendered in mud.
> (Atwood, 2005:66-67)

Their childhoods are also described as at once intertwined and unequal. The maids and Telemachus grow up together, the maids his "mock / sisters, his tiny companions", but although they spend their days together, the maids are "sandier, hungrier, sun-speckled, / most days meatless" while Telemachus selfishly sees them as "rightfully his" (Atwood, 2005:67, 68).

Over all of this – Telemachus's and the maids' gestations, births, and childhoods – looms the shadow of their final encounter in life, in which Telemachus hangs the maids who were once his childhood companions. In the final verse of their idyll, the maids address this shadow by asking a question which complicates our understanding of the characters of both the maids and Telemachus:

> We did not know as we played with him
> there in the sand
> […]
> That he was foredoomed to swell to our
> cold-eyed teenaged killer.
> If we had known that, would we have
> drowned him back then?
> (Atwood, 2005:68)

The distanced, cognitively estranged, and intellectually active reader might here ask themselves: would the maids have drowned Telemachus? *Should* they have drowned Telemachus? And the difficulty of answering this question is only increased by the hypothetical description that follows, which depicts the maids as children drowning the child Telemachus:

> Would we? In only a minute, when nobody
> else was looking?
> Pushed his still-innocent child's head under
> the water
> With our own still-innocent childish nurse-
> maid hands,
> and blamed it on waves. Would we have had
> it in us?
> (Atwood, 2005:69)

The reader might until this point have been immersed in the idyll's repeated and emphasised representations of inequality between Telemachus and the maids, and this may in turn have effected a rather polarised understanding of the situation as master pitted against slave and man pitted against woman, but the image of a group of "innocent" young girls drowning another "still-innocent" little boy is a jarring one that resists the oversimplification of the narrative and its power dynamics (Atwood, 2005:69). While the reader is left to ponder this complication, the maids close their idyll with a note of uncertainty; they refuse to answer their own question and state plainly: "From us you will get no answer" (Atwood, 2005:69).

Thus in "The Chorus Line: The Birth of Telemachus, An Idyll" (Atwood, 2005:65), the maids use the genre of the idyll, which is usually characterised by pastoral scenes and features ordinary individuals, to highlight and examine the inequalities between their lives and that of Telemachus. They skilfully imitate the highbrow style of the epic within the genre that they specify as an idyll, thus combining the worlds of the epic and idyll in much the same way that their lives as slaves are inextricably intertwined with the lives of their masters

and their killers. As Jung (2014:54) notes: "While on the level of content, the inequality in social hierarchy between Telemachus and the maids is foregrounded, on the level of form, it is successfully deconstructed". Moreover, the maids emphasise yet again that the heroic epic cannot exist without the slaves and peasants which it often barely acknowledges, and that these figures haunt the lines of every epic narrative. Finally, the closing verses of the chapter serve to complicate the reader's understanding and position in relation to the maids, reminding the reader both that the maids themselves are perhaps no more trustworthy than Penelope, whose narrative they seek to destabilise, and that it is perhaps ultimately more useful to consider their *own* responses to the maids' question of whether or not they should have killed Telemachus when he was just a child. The chapter's critique thus becomes one of class and power structures, of what kinds of people are afforded the power to tell their own stories and why, rather than a critique of the behaviour of specific characters.

The final Chorus Line chapter in a classical or mock classical genre is a mock-heroic drama called "The Chorus Line: The Perils of Penelope, A Drama" (Atwood, 2005:147). The preceding classical or mock classical Chorus Line chapters have compared the maids' births and childhoods to those of Penelope and Telemachus to emphasise the cruelty of the social hierarchy into which the maids were born and undermine the idea that Penelope's story is the only one as yet untold. However, in this chapter the maids seem more intent on challenging Penelope's credibility as a narrator. They do this through a satirical performance that spoofs Penelope's role (or lack thereof, according to Penelope herself) in their deaths, which both precedes and stands in direct opposition to Penelope's own description of the maids' deaths.

Penelope's account of the maids' murders is called, rather irreverently, "Odysseus and Telemachus Snuff the Maids" (Atwood, 2005:157), and opens with Penelope's careful attempt to absolve herself of responsibility for their deaths:

> I slept through the mayhem. How could I have done such a thing? I suspect Eurycleia put something in the comforting drink she gave me, to keep me out of the action and stop me from interfering. Not that I would have been in the action anyway: Odysseus made sure all the women were locked securely into the women's quarter. (Atwood, 2005:157)

In this opening paragraph, Penelope delicately shifts the attention from herself to two other people – Eurycleia and Odysseus – and she offers two obstacles that ostensibly barred her from intervening in the deaths of her allies of so many years – being drugged by Eurycleia and being trapped inside the women's quarters by Odysseus. It is only *after* she has defended her lack of action in the violent events of the chapter that Penelope then offers the account of the maids' deaths that is, according to the chapter's title, the supposed focus of the chapter.

The narrative that follows this opening is itself no less deftly filtered by Penelope, who is careful to remind the reader again and again of Eurycleia's role in the events and through this perhaps to distance herself from those same events. Penelope begins with "Eurycleia described the whole thing to me, and to anyone else who would listen", and later she peppers the narrative with phrases like "Eurycleia told me", "Eurycleia continued", "Eurycleia said" – expressions which, let it be said, are not incongruous in an account narrated in this way, but which also seem to serve to obscure Penelope's possibly suspicious role (or lack thereof) in the action (Atwood, 2005:157-159). This emphasis on Eurycleia's role in the maids' deaths is sustained throughout the chapter; Penelope later notes that Eurycleia was the one who pointed out the "guilty" maids to Odysseus, as she tells Penelope that "[Eurycleia] had to choose some – otherwise all would have perished!" (Atwood, 2005:159) and that she thus chose:

> The impertinent ones. The ones who'd been rude. The ones who used to thumb their noses at me. Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks and her cronies – that lot. They were notorious whores. (Atwood, 2005:159-160)

Penelope does finally acknowledge some guilt on her part here – she says "[i]t was her fault" because she had not informed Eurycleia of the ways in which the maids were helping her (Atwood, 2005:160) – but this is all she offers, and it is quickly followed by what seems to be a return to self-defence:

> What could I do? Lamentation wouldn't bring my lovely girls back to life. I bit my tongue. It's a wonder I had any tongue left, so frequently had I bitten it over the years.
> Dead is dead, I told myself. I'll say prayers and perform sacrifices for their souls. But I'll have to do it in secret, or Odysseus will suspect me, as well. (Atwood, 2005:160)

Of course, Penelope's impetus for self-preservation in this chapter can also be considered a feature of the actual circumstances of her context of ancient Greece; a context in which she, as a woman, would have had very little agency or control over the actions of men like Odysseus and Telemachus. In terms of this context, we might wonder whether Odysseus would even have heeded her if she had told him not to kill the maids, and whether this might not merely have served to make him suspicious of Penelope, too. This is certainly what Penelope herself implies: that *she* did not tell Odysseus and Telemachus to kill the maids, that she was not there to stop Odysseus and Telemachus before they killed the maids, and so for her to defend the maids would not have undone their deaths and would merely have served to bring Odysseus's wrath down on her, too. Yet Penelope's protests still leave us with an undeniable sense of uncertainty, which is also noted by Howells (2006:13):

> Penelope does not rescue her maids, pleading from Homer's script that she did not know; like all the other women she was locked out from the slaughter of the suitors in the hall and had fallen asleep. However, she advances so many excuses for her own behaviour toward her favourites and so many alternative explanations for why they were hanged that we begin to suspect that she protests too much. How blameless was she really?

Moreover, it is particularly interesting that Penelope herself refers to the maids as birds when she laments not telling Eurycleia about her arrangements with the maids. Penelope calls the

maids "[her] snow-white geese. [Her] thrushes, [her] doves" (Atwood, 2005:160), which is reminiscent of two other instances in the text. As previously noted, the first reference to the maids as birds is in the Homeric epigraph which describes the maids' deaths: "As when long-winged thrushes or doves get entangled in a snare … so the women's heads were held fast in a row, with nooses round their necks, to bring them to the most pitiable end" (Atwood, 2005). Additionally, I have also observed that the maids' own envoi offers a second description of the maids as birds, although here it is not just a metaphor but an actual transformation: "*The Maids sprout feathers, and fly away as owls*" (Atwood, 2005:195-196). The fact that Penelope and Homer use strikingly similar images when describing the maids' deaths is another suggestion that things might not be quite as Penelope would like them to seem, and thus that the maids' final empowering transformation might respond as much to Penelope's representation of the maids as it does to Homer's.

While Penelope seems to go to much trouble to frame the maids' deaths as occurring outside of her influence or control, the maids themselves offer a different story in one of their appearances which precedes Penelope's account of the event. This chapter, "The Chorus Line: The Perils of Penelope, A Drama" (Atwood, 2005:147), is written in rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter in the style of eighteenth-century mock-heroic drama. The play opens with a prologue spoken by Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks, who slyly anticipates and undermines readers' desire to establish any narrative, even this one, as true and definitive when she suggests that "[t]here is another story. / Or several, as befits the goddess Rumour" and moreover that "[t]he truth, dear auditors, is seldom certain" (Atwood, 2005:147-148). The uncertainty created by these statements is only heightened by the content that follows, in which Penelope and Eurycleia recognise Odysseus in his disguise as a beggar and realise that they will have to come up with a way to hide the fact that Penelope has been unfaithful to Odysseus and has, with the help of Eurycleia and the maids, been covertly sleeping with her

suitors. In this narrative, Penelope's self-preservation is a product of her own guilt, and she plays an active role in the maids' deaths. Rather than innocently sleeping through the murders, Penelope is awake and acutely aware of the consequences if Odysseus discovers her behaviour with the suitors, so she instructs Eurycleia to tell Odysseus which maids should be killed for their disloyalty – the maids who know of Penelope's own betrayal:

> *Penelope*:
> Oh then, dear Nurse, it's really up to you
> To save me, and Odysseus' honour too!
> […]
> Point out those maids as feckless and disloyal,
> Snatched by the Suitors as unlawful spoil,
> Polluted, shameless, and not fit to be
> The doting slaves of such a Lord as he!
> (Atwood, 2005:150)

The maids' final words in this chapter are a dazzling and damning conclusion; the closing verses are performed by the full Chorus Line "*in tap-dance shoes*" (Atwood, 2005:151) and consist of shorter lines that break the mock-heroic tone emphasised by the iambic pentameter of the preceding sections and suggest instead a flashy music-hall finale. The twelve murdered maids summarise their own unhappy lives and deaths with a light-hearted song and dance routine:

> Blame it on the maids!
> Those naughty little jades!
> Hang them high and don't ask why –
> Blame it on the maids!
>
> Blame it on the slaves!
> The toys of rogues and knaves!
> Let them dangle, let them strangle –
> Blame it on the slaves!
>
> Blame it on the sluts!
> Those poxy little scuts!
> We've got the dirt on every skirt –
> Blame it on the sluts!
> (Atwood, 2005:151-152)

As Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks aptly reminds us that there is rarely only one side to a story, and that the truth of any story is difficult – if not impossible – to establish with any certainty, I suggest that the importance of this chapter lies not in its potential veracity but rather in its engagement with Penelope's narrative. Whatever story Penelope tells us is haunted by the maids' own version of events, undermined and contradicted at every turn. Yet because of the maids' use of diverse and often incongruous genres in their chapters, the effect of their interjections is not that we believe their narratives instead of Penelope's or Homer's version of events, but rather that we are distanced from immersion in any of these narratives and positioned to scrutinise rather than believe them.

The next collection of the maids' interludes consists of those that seem to align with more modern genres: a popular tune, a sea shanty, and a ballad. Both the popular tune and the ballad focus on the maids' daily lives and drudgery as palace slaves, while the sea shanty offers a condensed account of Odysseus's adventures in his efforts to make his way back to Ithaca.

The popular tune, titled "If I Was A Princess", is performed with "a Fiddle, an Accordion, and a Penny Whistle" (Atwood, 2005:51) and is reminiscent of street musicians or music hall performers, another context that diverges from those of both the framing and embedded narratives of the text. The song consists of simple four-line stanzas with rhyming couplets and contrasts the maids' daydreaming of their lives as princesses with their actual lives in the palace. They describe what they imagine a princess's life to be like:

> If I was a princess, with silver and gold,
> And loved by a hero, I'd never grow old:
> Oh, if a young hero came a-marrying me,
> I'd always be beautiful, happy, and free!
> (Atwood, 2005:51)

And then the maids detail the reality of their lives as slaves:

> I fetch and I carry, I hear and obey,
> It's Yes sir and No ma'am the whole bleeding day;
> I smile and I nod with a tear in my eye,
> I make the soft beds in which others do lie.
> (Atwood, 2005:52)

This chapter occurs after Penelope, herself a princess, describes her marriage to Odysseus, a hero, and before the chapter in which Penelope describes her journey by boat to her new home of Ithaca. Thus the maids' fantasy again enters into dialogue with Penelope's own words. While it is unlikely that life as a princess is quite as idyllic as the maids imagine it, it certainly seems better than being a slave. And the light popular tune has a rather more sinister repeated chorus which seems to refer to Penelope on her journey to Ithaca, and reminds readers that the maids still have a score to settle:

> Then sail, my fine lady, on the billowing wave –
> The water below is as dark as the grave,
> And maybe you'll sink in your little blue boat –
> It's hope, and hope only, that keeps us afloat.
> (Atwood, 2005:51)

The ballad, titled "The Chorus Line: Dreamboats, a Ballad" (Atwood, 2005:125) is another representation of the maids' lives as slaves, and their dreams of freedom. This chapter again offers a dire picture of the maids' lives at court, and frames sleep as a means of escape:

> Sleep is the only rest we get;
> It's then we are at peace:
> We do not have to mop the floor
> And wipe away the grease.
>
> We are not chased around the hall
> And tumbled in the dirt
> By every dimwit nobleman
> Who wants a slice of skirt.
>
> And when we sleep we like to dream;
> We dream we are at sea,
> We sail the waves in golden boats
> So happy, clean and free.
> (Atwood, 2005:125)

Jung (2014:51) notes of this chapter that the sea comes to serve as a space of "longing" for the maids, "standing in metaphorically for a place of freedom and happiness" and contrasting with Odysseus's own extended journey and resulting longing to "leave the sea behind and reach the shore of, preferably, his homeland Ithaca".

Finally, "The Chorus Line: The Wily Sea Captain, A Sea Shanty" (Atwood, 2005:93) offers a satirical account of Odysseus's adventures during his long journey home. It is performed by the maids while they are dressed as sailors, and functions as both a summary and a caricature of Homer's narrative. Where in Homer's narrative it is the account of Penelope's life while waiting for Odysseus that is often condensed and skimmed over, here the maids invert this expectation and turn Odysseus's own famed and lengthy journey into a quick song. Furthermore, the exaggerated and ironic delivery of the song, with the maids dressed in drag and playing the parts of Odysseus's admiring sailors, functions to undermine the epic or heroic presentation of these events both in Homer's text and in later receptions of that text. Penelope herself is not exempt from the maids' subversive focus here, though; in her preceding chapter, she details the various rumours about Odysseus's journey that reached her:

> Odysseus had been to the Land of the Dead to consult the spirits, said some. No, he'd merely spent the night in a gloomy old cave full of bats, said others. He'd made his men put wax in their ears, said one, while sailing past the alluring Sirens—half-bird, half-woman—who enticed men to their island and then ate them, though he'd tied himself to the mast so he could listen to their irresistible singing without jumping overboard. No, said another, it was a high-class Sicilian knocking shop—the courtesans there were known for their musical talents and their fancy feathered outfits. (Atwood, 2005:91)

Yet the maids in their sailor costumes seem to offer Homer's mythic version of events, undermining the rumours that Penelope has previously related and again complicating any possibility of ascertaining a single true story:

> The Sirens' sweet singing then next he did brave,
> They attempted to lure him to a feathery grave,

> While tied to the mast he did rant and did rave,
> But Odysseus alone learned their riddle!
> (Atwood, 2005:96)

Finally, the Chorus Line chapters that fall under more contemporary genres – an anthropology lecture and a videotaped court trial – both seem to examine contemporary receptions and interpretations of and responses to Homer's texts.

"The Chorus Line: An Anthropology Lecture" (Atwood, 2005:163) is presented by the maids and ostensibly to an audience, as the maids respond to questions and comments from their listeners – though these questions and comments are not accessible to us, and thus the maids remain in control of the information offered. The maids' use of the genre of a lecture is one way in which they position readers to question contemporary modes of engagement with texts like Homer's. Through situating this chapter as a lecture, the maids foreground the role of figures perceived to be authorities on classical texts and history – like scholars – in silencing or sanitising certain narratives and interpretations. The content of the maids' lecture outlines an argument that Atwood (2005:197) herself attributes to Robert Graves, an author whose retellings of Greek myths were popular in the 20th century; she says: "It is to Graves that I owe the theory of Penelope as a possible female-goddess cult leader". The maids summarise this theory as follows:

> Thus possibly our rape and subsequent hanging represent the overthrow of a matrilineal moon-cult by an incoming group of usurping patriarchal father-god-worshipping barbarians. The chief of them, notably Odysseus, would then claim kingship by marrying the High Priestess of our cult, namely Penelope.
> (Atwood, 2005:165-166)

This interpretation presents the maids' deaths rather differently to the various accounts of this event that we have already received in earlier chapters:

> For we were not simply maids. We were not mere slaves and drudges. Oh no! Surely we had a higher function than that! Could it be that we were not the

> twelve maids, but the twelve maidens? The twelve moon-maidens, companions of Artemis, virginal but deadly goddess of the moon? Could it be that we were ritual sacrifices, devoted priestesses doing our part, first by indulging in orgiastic fertility-rite behaviour with the Suitors, then purifying ourselves by washing ourselves in the blood of the slain male victims – such heaps of them, what an honour to the Goddess! – and renewing our virginity, as Artemis renewed hers by bathing in a spring dyed with the blood of Actaeon? We would then have willingly sacrificed ourselves, as was necessary, re-enacting the dark-of-the-moon phase, in order that the whole cycle might begin again and the silvery new-moon-goddess rise once more. (Atwood, 2005:163-164)

Thus the lecture's version of events frames the maids as devoted priestesses going willingly to their deaths as part of their dedication to their religion, rather than as frightened girls being murdered for actions in which they may not even have had a choice. Interestingly, in this narrative the maids compare themselves to Iphigenia when they ask: "Why should Iphigenia be credited with selflessness and devotion, more than we?" (Atwood, 2005:164). This reference to Iphigenia only strengthens the maids' argument that the interpretation of their characters and deaths as ritualistic and symbolic is a way for readers and scholars to avoid acknowledging the cruelty of the events depicted in the narrative. I have argued in the preceding chapter that Iphigenia has often been presented by writers as a willing sacrifice rather than an unwilling victim, and that through this presentation she becomes a symbol of virtuous female behaviour rather than of cruel male behaviour, and it seems that the maids identify a similar process in this version of their story. If the maids are priestesses in a cult, then their relations with the suitors can be framed as consensual, and their deaths can be presented as sacrifices rather than murders. The maids' closing words in this chapter seem to confirm this interpretation:

> Point being that you don't have to get too worked up about us, dear educated minds. You don't have to think of us as real girls, real flesh and blood, real pain, real injustice. That might be too upsetting. Just discard the sordid part. Consider us pure symbol. We're no more real than money. (Atwood, 2005:168)

In this way, the maids criticise this particular academic treatment of their story which, they feel, seeks to sanitise their suffering and disregard the uncomfortable realities of their lived experiences of exploitation and abuse.

"The Chorus Line: The Trial of Odysseus, as Videotaped by the Maids" (Atwood, 2005:175) offers another critique of contemporary treatments of classical texts, this time in the form of a court hearing in which Odysseus is tried for murdering the suitors. Once Odysseus's attorney has stated his case and the judge has agreed with his argument, the proceedings are disrupted by the maids, who try to raise their own as-yet-unmentioned case:

> You've forgotten about us! What about *our* case? You can't let him off! He hanged us in cold blood! Twelve of us! Twelve young girls! For nothing! (Atwood, 2005:177)

However, the maids' impassioned plea merely leads to a formal legal discussion about their rapes and murders, and under which conditions it might have been permissible for Odysseus to kill them. Much like the maids' satirical anthropology lecture, this contemporary courtroom scene shows another structure that fails to acknowledge the cruelty of the maids' treatment at the hands of their masters; instead, the discussion devolves into a technical debate about the definition of rape. Even calling Penelope as a witness does not bring the maids closer to justice; not only does she tell the judge that she was asleep during the murders and thus cannot testify as a direct witness, but she also undermines the maids' reports of their sexual violation:

> But most maids got raped, sooner or later; a deplorable but common feature of palace life. It wasn't the fact of their being raped that told against them, in the mind of Odysseus. It's that they were raped without permission. (Atwood, 2005:181)

And the judge's ruling mimics a common contemporary stance on classical texts – an attitude which the cognitively estranged and active reader might recognise as familiar:

> However, [Odysseus's] times were not our times. Standards of behaviour were different then. It would be unfortunate if this regrettable but minor incident were allowed to stand as a blot on an otherwise exceedingly distinguished career. (Atwood, 2005:182)

At this point, the courtroom scene begins to dissolve as the maids realise that they will not find justice in this setting either. Genres and contexts collide – in this twenty-first-century court, the maids call upon the Erinyes or Furies, the goddesses of vengeance and retribution, and lay a curse on Odysseus:

> Oh Angry Ones, Oh Furies, you are our last hope! We implore you to inflict punishment and exact vengeance on our behalf! Be our defenders, we who had none in life! Smell out Odysseus wherever he goes! From one place to another, from one life to another, whatever disguise he puts on, whatever shape he may take, hunt him down! Dog his footsteps, on Earth or in Hades, wherever he may take refuge, in songs and in plays, in tomes and in theses, in marginal notes and in appendices! Appear to him in our forms, our ruined forms, the forms of our pitiable corpses! Let him never be at rest! (Atwood, 2005:183)

The curse begins in familiar and concrete territory – Earth and Hades, the text's two main contexts – but then moves into more abstract territory – songs, plays, tomes, theses, marginal notes, and appendices. This shift in focus from the world of the text to the world of receptions of Homer is another indication that the maids' chapters respond both to Homer and to other treatments of Homer's work, and the reader who is likely working to unravel the increasingly-intertwined contexts and genres in this chapter is also perhaps primed to take note of this connection. The maids identify Western culture's enduring engagement with Homer, which is expressed through receptions in various genres and contexts, but remind the reader that these receptions are always haunted by the maids and other figures like them – and moreover, that these hauntings are the only form of justice that the maids might receive.

Thus Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* engages with Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey* through a complex structure that weaves together multiple narrative strands and contexts.

Penelope tells her story in the first person from the contemporary temporal context of Hades, but the account of her life is set in ancient Greece and rooted in the domestic life largely unexplored by Homer in his account of events. Yet Penelope's narrative, which interweaves past and present, is regularly interrupted by another narrative – that of the Chorus Line of the twelve maids murdered by Telemachus on the orders of Odysseus. These interjections by the Chorus Line span diverse genres and contexts, and often explicitly undermine the narratives offered by Penelope in the surrounding chapters. The multiple contexts and genres of these narratives, and the rapid switching between them, create cognitive estrangement as making sense of the connections between these varied contexts requires complex intellectual work from the reader, who must compare the similarities and differences between these contexts and genres to identify epistemological gaps that the reader must then work to close themselves. This means that the structure of Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* carefully situates readers to be alert and active rather than to become passively immersed in the narrative.

This active manner of engaging with Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* has several effects on the way that readers receive the text. Cognitively active readers who are involved in the demanding process of decoding meaning across various textual contexts are better situated to interrogate the contemporary text's intertextual relationship with the classical text that it adapts and the cultural capital that text possesses. However, this cognitive estrangement is also effective on the intratextual level. Penelope's framing narrative is delivered as the reclaiming and resituating of a historically neglected female character in the style of feminist revisionist mythmaking and through the mode of the fictive autobiography, and it can be read at this level, thus problematising classical treatments of gender. However, the ambiguity and artifice of Penelope's framing narrative, which a cognitively estranged and therefore active reader might be better positioned to perceive, combine to suggest that Penelope's story can

also be viewed as a model of the unreliability of all texts – a reminder that both classical and contemporary texts can be constructed to transmit and perpetuate particular ideologies, and that readers must approach both kinds of texts with similar attentiveness and scepticism.

This function of the text is emphasised by the interjections of the Chorus Line, which not only heighten the text's resistance to readerly immersion, but also undermine Penelope's narrative and thus prevent the text's representation of gender from becoming a simple essentialist binary that presents women as good and men as bad. While Penelope's narration in its mode as a critique of classical texts seems to show men like Odysseus as deceitful and sometimes cruel, the maids' commentary on her story complicates this critique when it reveals that women, like Penelope, can be just as deceitful and cruel. It is Odysseus who orders the maids' deaths, but the maids expose that it is Penelope who not only allows them to be exploited physically and sexually but also fails to prevent or avenge their deaths – in this case, neither men nor women advocate for the maids in their particular vulnerability as female slaves. In this way, Atwood foregrounds the unspoken narratives of characters like the maids that haunt not only classical texts but often also contemporary reworkings of classical texts, and problematises neither Odysseus nor men in general, but rather power and power dynamics between genders but also between classes. Thus Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* does not stand in opposition to Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, as although it initially seems to provide a definitive account of the events in the epic, its structure undermines this presentation and instead enacts a plurality of narratives and foregrounds the process of interpretation. To present the text as a definitive version of events might be to close the discussion, but to offer the text instead as merely one interpretation of many and through the multiplicity of voices in the text to highlight the act of interpretation is to open new avenues of exploration of both contemporary and classical texts. Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* seeks neither to overwrite nor to stand in opposition to the classical canon, but rather to

problematise the role and power of narrative in the formation of personal and gender identities, and the danger of interpretations of classical texts that merely invert the gender relations presented in classical texts. For every story that is voiced, Atwood reminds us, there are countless stories that remain untold, and every narrative is haunted by the shadow narratives that it does not address. We do not leave *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) with an understanding of the "true" story of Penelope and Odysseus, but rather with an awareness that, if there is a truth to be had, it will be constituted by myriad voiced and unvoiced narratives rather than concentrated in any single text, whether that text is Homer's or Atwood's:

> Now you can't get rid of us, wherever, you go: in your life or your afterlife or any of your other lives.
>
> We can see through all your disguises: the paths of day, the paths of darkness, whichever paths you take – we're right behind you, following you like a trail of smoke, like a long tail, a tail made of girls, heavy as memory, light as air: twelve accusations, toes skimming the ground, hands tied behind our backs, tongues sticking out, eyes bulging, songs choked in our throats. (Atwood, 2005:192)

Conclusion

"I have seen blood, not this blood here today. I have seen bodies broken, but not these! I see a desolation yet to come! In time! At the end of time." (Tepper, 1990:196)

This dissertation has explored the ways in which two texts, Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad*, adapt and through that adaptation engage with classical texts written by authors working in ancient Greece. My examination of these texts is rooted in Hutcheon's (2013) *A theory of adaptation*, in which she argues that adaptations can be studied not as inferior copies of their source texts but rather as meaningful engagements with those texts, and Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogics, in which he argues that the novel is a particularly effective way to examine and question classical texts.

I have argued that contemporary culture displays an enduring interest in stories from ancient Greece, and that this sustained interest can be seen in the myriad adaptations of these myths that continue to enrich contemporary culture. Some recent examples of this cultural preoccupation with Greek literature can be found in prose in Pat Barker's (2018) *The silence of the girls*, which centres the character of Briseis (who is captured and given to Achilles as a war prize shortly before the Trojan war), Kamila Shamsie's (2017) *Home fire*, which adapts Sophocles's ([441BCE] 2013) *Antigone*, and Stephen Fry's (2017) *Mythos: the Greek myths retold*. This fascination with ancient Greek stories can also be seen in film and television: the film *Wonder Woman* (Jenkins, 2017) centres a female character who is an Amazon warrior goddess, *The killing of a sacred deer* (Lanthimos, 2017) is a contemporary retelling of the Iphigenia myth in film form, and *Troy: fall of a city* (Harris & Brozel, 2018) is a television miniseries that tells the story of the Trojan war. That these engagements are so prevalent in popular culture suggests that classical Greek literature has had sustained effects on

contemporary thought, and moreover that these effects are not confined to academic spaces but rather have shaped our ideas and behaviour on a much wider scale.

However, I have argued that despite this sustained social interest in adapting stories from classical Greece, these adaptations are often curiously stigmatised. Both Atwood and more particularly Tepper work outside the purview of traditional scholarship, and their texts exist at the intersection of inequalities of gender, originality, and genre. The contemporary and classical texts examined here might therefore be considered unequal in terms of their representation and treatment of gender. The classical texts are written by and centre male characters and filter their female characters through contextually patriarchal gender expectations; however, the contemporary texts are written by and centre female characters while aiming to interrogate the classical texts' representations of gender through the reclaiming of these marginalised figures. In addition, the contemporary texts are adaptations in a context which typically values the idea of originality, and assigns or withholds cultural and literary value based on the perceived originality of texts. Finally, the contemporary and classical texts are unequal in terms of cultural perceptions of genre and the canonicity and cultural capital associated with their differing genres. Critics like Eliot (1944) and Bloom (1994) try to account for the fact that the Western canon seems to favour some genres of literature above others, but Mukherjee (2014:9) argues that "the canon has historically been a nexus of power and knowledge that reinforces hierarchies and the vested interests of select institutions, excluding the interests and accomplishments of minorities, popular and demotic culture, or non-European civilizations". Despite the fact that the canon is ultimately decided by critics with their own particular biases, canonical works are, through their canonicity, still imbued with cultural capital that makes them symbolic of aspirational cultural and educational standards. Thus texts in liminal genres like science fiction and speculative fiction

are typically considered to be unserious or lowbrow, and are rarely afforded the same critical and cultural weight and reception as canonical classical texts.

Despite these disparities of social perception and treatment, I have argued that both contemporary texts demonstrate the particular usefulness of their often-disparaged qualities of gender, originality, and genre in examining how inequalities in the classical stories persist in contemporary culture. Both contemporary texts reveal the ability of texts in contemporary and even popular genres to explore how classical texts might affect contemporary ideas on gender.

I have reasoned that both Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* use structural features to create distance or estrange readers from the text. Tepper creates this distance in two ways: by setting her framing narrative in the genre of science fiction, and by embedding within this futuristic narrative a play that is set in ancient Greece. Both contexts in this text are removed or distant from the context of a contemporary reader; the science fiction world of Women's Country in the framing narrative is perhaps as unfamiliar to the reader as the historical world of the Trojan war. Thus, to understand this narrative, the reader must decode the connections between three divergent contexts and genres – the world of the imagined future presented in a science fiction narrative, the reader's own context, and the world of the mythic past depicted in an embedded play script.

Atwood also uses multiple contexts within her text in order to create distance between the text and the reader. The framing narrative in *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) is contemporary in terms of time but distant in terms of setting, as Penelope narrates her story from Hades, the classical Greek land of the dead – a fictive setting that is likely to require some deciphering on the part of the reader. This text also contains an embedded narrative that

is set in ancient Greece – the story of Penelope's life – and this context is probably also unfamiliar to a contemporary reader. In addition to these dual contexts, the structure of the text is further complicated by the multiple chapters dedicated to the Chorus Line, the twelve maids deemed traitors by Odysseus upon his return to Ithaca and killed for their betrayal. The maids' chapters are diverse in terms of setting and genre, and offer contexts ranging from ancient Greece to a contemporary courtroom. Thus the reader must work to establish the connections between not only the contexts of Hades and ancient Greece, but also between those contexts and the varied contexts and genres of each interjection by the Chorus Line.

Both Tepper and Atwood combine multiple contexts and genres within their texts, and the result of this structural strategy is that readers of the texts cannot simply immerse themselves in either as neither narrative is presented in a sustained and chronological manner. Both narratives are instead fragmented by constant interruptions of context and genre. These divergent contexts place great cognitive demands on the reader, who must actively work to decipher the connections between the multiple narrative threads in order to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole. Thus both Sheri S. Tepper's (1990) *The gate to Women's Country* and Margaret Atwood's (2005) *The Penelopiad* seem to carefully position readers to encourage cognitive engagement.

I suggest that both texts involved in this study actually prime readers for this particular active engagement with their narratives, because both texts offer a complex and nuanced engagement with the classical works that they adapt. Although both texts might initially seem to be and to advocate for simple inversions of their classical counterparts, this binary interpretation is one which they ultimately challenge. By employing cognitive estrangement, both authors ensure that active readers are ideally positioned to perceive this intricate relationship between the contemporary and classical texts.

Cognitive estrangement can be seen working in *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990), which presents a world in which the patriarchal social structure of ancient Greece has been inverted by a matriarchal social structure. In this society, women organise and run most aspects of the future society and men are largely excluded from these responsibilities, relegated as they are to garrisons to train as warriors. This inversion seems motivated by the embedded play "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990), which foregrounds the negative effects of warring and violent men on women and society by adapting plays by Euripides that deal with the Trojan war and centre female characters and their experiences of the war. These characters include Iphigenia, who is sacrificed by her own father so that the Greek troops can sail to Troy in the first place, and the Trojan women, who lose their loved ones and their freedom when the Greeks win the Trojan war and take the royal Trojan women as slaves. "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) certainly offers a damning portrait of male behaviour in classical texts. However, it also functions to estrange readers from the framing science fiction narrative and position them to realise that Tepper uses her matriarchal society as a thought experiment to explore whether a simple inversion of patriarchal society might be desirable. Moreover, that the disconcerting structure of Women's Country seems to be motivated by the embedded play "Iphigenia at Ilium" (Tepper, 1990) means that the structure of this intratextual relationship models the possible influence and effects of classical texts on the contemporary world outside of the novel. The cognitively estranged and therefore intellectually active reader is primed to recognise this parallel and is thus more likely to perceive the dystopian overtones of what initially seems to be a matriarchal utopia. While the Women's Council runs cities in a seemingly effective manner, they also run a covert programme of eugenics aimed at breeding the violence out of men. This disregards citizens' reproductive freedom and exploits unknowing women in a manner perhaps reminiscent of older patriarchal societies. Women are encouraged to have sex with warriors during regular

"carnivals", but medical staff give them contraceptive implants disguised as vitamins to prevent them from conceiving with warriors, and later artificially inseminate these women under the pretence of checking them for pregnancy after their carnival assignations. In this way, women are involved in the Women's Council's programme without their knowledge or consent. Furthermore, the Women's Council engineers regular wars between the garrisons of different cities as a means of distracting the male warriors from their covert activities and keeping the numbers of male warriors controlled – using men as ruthlessly as they use women. Tepper thus positions the reader to examine, through this thought experiment involving lived gender relations, whether privileging the communal to the detriment of the individual might be a viable solution to the often fraught relations between genders.

The Penelopiad (Atwood, 2005) is also complicated by its use of distancing strategies. The text is narrated by Penelope and presented as a fictive autobiography. Penelope speaks from her afterlife in Hades and tells the story of her life in ancient Greece, which begins with her childhood and meets and runs parallel with the events detailed in Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*. The genre of the fictive autobiography is a duplicitous one, as readers might be inclined to approach texts in this genre with the expectation that they will deliver the most accurate account of the events they detail. This expectation might be strengthened by the text's centring of a historically-neglected female character in the mode of feminist revisionist mythmaking, a strategy which initially seems to reinforce a binary manner of approaching the texts by Homer and Atwood as representing the same events from a male and then a female perspective. This perception is only emphasised by Penelope's historical reception as a paragon of virtue and the quintessential faithful wife, as she famously (according to some narratives) waits for and remains faithful to her husband, Odysseus, despite the pressures placed on her by her suitors. It is perhaps initially tempting to place Penelope and Odysseus in opposition to each other, and to interpret Penelope as a woman who has been wronged by

Odysseus, Homer, and even most receptions of Homer's text, and thus to view her fictive autobiography as a way for her to finally set the record straight on this historical misrepresentation. However, the interjections by the Chorus Line prevent readers from becoming immersed in Penelope's tale by fragmenting Penelope's story within a plurality of narratives that readers must decode. In this way the Chorus Line's chapters position readers to become alert to the inconsistencies and contradictions in Penelope's framing narrative. The Chorus Line's appearances undermine the authority that readers might be inclined to grant Penelope's narrative and prompt readers to evaluate the latter more critically. Moreover, the murdered maids serve to remind the reader of the many stories that remain untold by both Homer and Penelope, stressing the combined inequalities of both gender and class. From this new distanced readerly vantage point, the text seems to foreground not the previously unspoken narrative of Penelope but rather the unreliability and artifice of her narrative and perhaps of all narratives, highlighting the risk of using such narratives to shape ideas such as those around gender.

While both Tepper and Atwood make extensive use of structural distancing strategies to complicate their engagement with the classical texts that they adapt, it is important to acknowledge that they still use particular characters to criticise certain aspects of gender representation in their classical counterparts. The characters of both Iphigenia and Penelope might be seen to have become symbols of particular ideas of appropriate female behaviour, and Tepper and Atwood seem to use them to foreground and problematise these ideas. Iphigenia's heroic depiction in Euripides's texts is unusual for his context, but it still suggests that her worth is tied to her ostensible willingness to sacrifice herself to support or enable male causes. Tepper critiques this by enabling Iphigenia to speak from beyond the grave in her embedded play in order to deny Euripides's portrayal of her as a willing sacrifice. She states instead that she did not want to die and that presenting her as if she did is merely a way

to assuage male guilt at her death. Atwood, too, destabilises Homer's contextually unusual representation of Penelope as a woman of keen intelligence which she then uses to keep the suitors at bay and protect her historically-lauded virtue. By clouding Penelope's motives and behaviour and using the maids to introduce a crucial element of doubt as to Penelope's famed fidelity, Atwood rejects any definitive reading of her character.

However, ultimately neither *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) nor *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) is simplistically dichotomised in its representation of men or its relationship with the classical texts that it adapts. Tepper's text does not present all men as bad and all women as good, but rather complicates the structure of its own society by introducing both servitors, who are non-violent men who live and work alongside the women, and also cruel and thoughtless women, like Stavia's sister, Myra. Moreover, the activities of the women on the Women's Council also complicate a potentially binary interpretation, as they may have good intentions, but their actions cause much individual suffering. Atwood also offers a more nuanced representation of both men and women, depicting them as similarly human and fallible – Atwood's Odysseus and Penelope are presented as equals in intelligence and cunning if not equals in the eyes of their society, and this is emphasised by their similar implication in the maids' deaths. The maids' interludes reinforce that while Odysseus ordered their deaths, Penelope did not stop them, and thus we might consider the two to be equally complicit, regardless of their gender.

In addition, I have argued that neither *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) nor *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) attempts to denigrate, erase, or replace the classical texts which they adapt by writing back to the past. Instead, their engagement with these classical texts is rooted in the continuing social influence of these classical texts and seems aimed at offering possible new modes of engagement with them. Classical texts like the ones interrogated in this study cannot be changed or erased and their possible effects on contemporary society

cannot be undone, but what can change are the ways in which we explore these texts and their ideas. Therefore, I suggest that Tepper's and Atwood's engagements with these classical texts open new avenues for contemporary examinations of classical texts.

I have observed that contemporary society seems to exhibit a sustained interest in classical Greek literature, and that the strategy of adaptation has been a popular mode of engaging with this literature. Moreover, many of these adaptations show an impulse not only to adapt classical Greek texts but also to adapt them in ways that centre female characters and experiences – this ongoing project of adaptation therefore displays a particular interest in exploring and foregrounding how these classical texts represent gender. During the course of this study alone, multiple adaptations of classical Greek texts have been published, many of which are written by female authors and centre historically-marginalised female characters. Consider Madeline Miller's (2019) *Circe* which centres another female character who plays only a minor role in Homer's ([800BCE] 1937) *Odyssey*, Natalie Haynes's (2018) *The children of Jocasta*, which rewrites Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* ([429BCE] 2000) and *Antigone* ([441BCE] 2013) but again centres female characters often marginalised in the original tragedies, and Daisy Johnson's (2018) *Everything under*, which is a contemporary reimagining of the Oedipus myth. Therefore, further study might be useful in exploring the impulses behind and mechanisms of adaptation used in other adaptations like these which rewrite classical Greek texts to centre female characters.

Further study might also focus on the compelling connections between the contemporary fantastic and classical literature. Rogers and Stevens (2015:5) argue that "modern SF has, from its very beginning, as it were, looked forward to the future and around at the present in part by looking farther back: to Greco-Roman mythology, to the literature of classical antiquity, to images of ancient history", and I have explored the effects of combining these ostensibly divergent contexts in some areas of this study. However, this examination could be

greatly expanded, as the linking of these contexts seems a popular element in fantastic texts such as those discussed here.

Ultimately, Tepper and Atwood demonstrate that the value of adaptation resides in precisely the quality for which adaptations are most often dismissed – originality or the perceived lack thereof. *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) and *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005) reveal that adaptation is a powerful means through which to explore the enduring effects of classical and canonical texts on contemporary culture and ideology, because adaptation facilitates an ongoing conversation between texts that creates a space in which to interrogate easy assumptions and cultural laws. In this way, adaptation not only constitutes a remarkably effective method of foregrounding and questioning contemporary cultural norms, but also offers the possibility of new modes of engagement with classical and canonical texts. Through *The gate to Women's Country* (Tepper, 1990) and *The Penelopiad* (Atwood, 2005), Tepper and Atwood prove that adaptation is a potent way to replace silence with dialogue and allow the mute to speak.

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