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Pat Barker's Achilles: Excess of Manliness and Hegemonic Masculinity toward Self-Destruction

Abstract In this article, we analyze the figure of Achilles as Pat Barker rewrites him in *The Silence of the Girls* (2018). The first section intertwines the concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by Raewyn Connell, with the two types of Homeric masculinities identified by Barbara Graziosi: proper manliness (ἠνορέη) and excess of manliness (ἀγηνορίη). By dedicating each following section to a specific character, we analyze and discuss how they are reinvented in Barker's retelling of the Trojan War. We juxtapose Achilles as a representative of hegemonic masculinity to Patroclus as a representative of exemplary masculinity. Finally, we investigate the extent to which Briseis and Achilles undergo a process of loss of identity inasmuch as hegemonic masculinity is concerned.

Keywords Achilles, Briseis, Patroclus, hero, masculinities

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last decades, many authors have tried to recreate, re-imagine, and reclaim Homer, in a phenomenon Jeremy Rosen (2013) postulates as minor-character elaboration.[1] *The Silence of the Girls,* Pat Barker's fifteenth novel, is part of a plethora of feminist rewritings of Classical literature for a contemporary audience. Famous for her *Regeneration* series, which takes place during the final months of World War I, Barker is not new to historical fiction or war narratives. Divided into three parts, *The Silence of the Girls* explores both sides of the Trojan War and offers different perspectives on the War and its aftermath through the eyes of two opposite characters, Achilles and Briseis.

Barker revisits the Trojan War through the numerous dichotomies that Achilles and Briseis represent: master/slave, male/female, and winner/loser. Barker also shows, in this three-part novel, the no man's land that is the battlefield. In other words, Barker depicts the perfect place for these dichotomies to vanish.

Part I includes Chapters 1 to 15 and covers Briseis' life before she is taken by Achilles in Lyrnessus until Agamemnon claims her. It gives a glimpse of what the Trojan War was like before the famous quarrel that opens the *Iliad*: endless raids to nearby cities. Part II overlaps with the *Iliad*'s plot and covers the events from Books 1 to 18 of the epic poem. Part III covers the remaining Books of the epic and glimpses at the prospective future of Briseis after Achilles' death. Whereas Part I is narrated by Briseis, Parts II and III have two narrators. While Briseis narrates the war as a first-person narrator, another voice, which we assume is Achilles', covers the other half and tells the story as a third-person narrator.

Although Briseis only raises her voice in Book 19 of the *Iliad*,[2] she is part of the driving force that sets the poem of Achilles' wrath in motion. Rosen argues, in "Minor Characters Have Their Day: The Imaginary and Actual Politics of a Contemporary Genre" (2013), that "[o]ver the last several decades, a vibrant transnational genre – a genre constituted by the conversion of minor characters from canonical works into protagonists – has been simultaneously flourishing and hiding in plain sight".[3] This rising new genre has been recognized by the

1 Rosen (2013) 139.

2 Il. 19.357–360.

3 Rosen (2013) 140.

voice it gives to previously silenced characters and has, under the aegis of cultural, postcolonial, and feminist studies, established a new dialogue with Classical antiquity.

However, these works tend to overlook the figure that puts the epic in motion: the hero. We concur with Kevin Boon, who affirms the hero is a metanarrative of masculinity[4] and the male identities inhabiting Classical literature lack critical attention. Although these acclaimed new novels put overlooked, often female, characters, like Briseis, in the spotlight, they also provide an insightful perspective on the different masculinities that abound in the ancient Greek world.

Novels like *The Song of Achilles* (2012), *Circe* (2018), *The Penelopiad, A Thousand Ships* (2019), and *The Silence of the Girls* have been recognized as rewritings of Homer's epics,[5] which, according to Thomas Van Nortwick, are reflections on masculinity and male development in the ancient Greek world. Whereas *The Iliad* describes how a young man matures from adolescence to adulthood, *The Odyssey* is the first and most famous story of a son's apprenticeship.[6] Unlike Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey,* these novels not only give voice to rather neglected characters but also offer a different glimpse of the Homeric hero.

DEFINING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN *THE SILENCE OF THE GIRLS*

Under the aegis of Gender Studies, a reasonable assessment of masculinity, with which we concur and consider critical to this article, reads: masculinities are constructed with a view to establishing "the social roles, behaviors, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time".[7] By using masculinities instead of masculinity, Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson draw attention to the notion that "masculinity means different things to different groups of people at

4 Boon (2000) 303.

5 See "*The Silence of the Girls* by Pat Barker review – a feminist Iliad" (2018), by Emily Wilson, and "Circe, a Vilified Witch From Classical Mythology, Gets Her Own Epic" (2018), by Alexandra Alter.

6 See Van Nortwick (2008) 4. Cf. Van Nortwick (2008) 28.

7 Aronson and Kimmel (2004) 504.

different times".[8] Not only do men build their masculine identities in opposition to femininity (in terms of a binary logic) but also in relation to themselves and to an exemplary kind of masculinity that is promoted by a specific socio-historical context.

Conflicting assessments of masculinity also arise when we analyze the society Barker depicts in *The Silence of the Girls*. Assessments of masculinity and femininity are contrasted with notions of godhood in Homer as well as in Barker. Although Barker promotes a much rawer, unideal war tale, men and women closer to the gods are idealized and bound to be placed in the highest positions of the social hierarchy.

Although ancient Greek civilization is highly hierarchical, such order can sometimes be disturbed and the most likely event that disrupts it is war. In *The Silence of the Girls,* this is shown by the status and reverence warlords are due as well as by Briseis' recollections of her previous life. The novel shows female slaves and their ladies constantly changing their position; whereas women's status can easily change, kings and warlords, like Agamemnon, hardly suffer anything. After all, their power stems directly from Zeus, the patriarchal figure around whom the Greek cosmos revolves.

So long as those hierarchical relations are concerned, one of the essential ideas men's studies has provided literary analysis is the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Although hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed concept, it can be perceived as a cultural construct that reinforces some male characteristics in a specific socio-historical context. We approximate Connell and Messerschmidt's definition of hegemonic masculinity, "the pattern of practice that allowed men's dominance over women to continue"[9], to Barker's novel. *The Silence of the Girls* portrays, rather poignantly, women's submission to men, for it makes evident the relation between the demotions of one's personal identity through one's objectification, in terms of becoming a token of male honor.

From the perspective of feminist studies, which takes into consideration Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, the link between male hegemony and women's domination is conspicuous. Barker exemplifies this connection not only by promoting the demotion of Briseis' identity, from Lynerssus' queen to Achilles' concubine, but also by pointing out how women's destinies are attached to men's will. Briseis sheds light on the matter:

8 Aronson and Kimmel (2004) 504.

9 Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) 832.

> [o]ne girl, who'd been a slave in Lyrnessus – and a kitchen slave at that, the lowest of the low – was now the concubine of a great lord, while her mistress, a plain, slack-bellied woman near the end of her childbearing years, had to scratch and scrape for food around the fires. Nothing mattered now except youth, beauty and fertility.[10]

Hegemonic men have the power to disrupt relations that have been tightly woven into the social fabric.

Barker ensures that both positions Briseis occupies corroborate the notion that "[w]omen serve as a kind of currency for men to improve their ranking with other men".[11] Briseis tells her audience that, after the gathering of the loot, in the very first scenes of novel, she belongs in "a much smaller group of very young women and girls, all pretty, all healthy-looking, a few with babies at their breasts",[12] from which Achilles is the first warrior to choose his treasure. Marco Fantuzzi (2007) argues "the person of Briseis is not what makes Achilles' revenge unavoidable, but what she represents as a unit of currency in the Homeric economy of [honor]".[13] In the *Iliad* and in every literary work revisiting it, Briseis is unequivocally linked to the notion of *kleos* (glory), the quintessential attribute of the Homeric warrior.

While theories of masculinity converge to one point – hegemonic masculinity is patriarchy's main weapon to oppress women[14] –, scholars have become aware of the necessity to consider the other side of the gender spectrum. To what extent have relations between men and masculinities been neglected? Victor Seidler (2006) presents a skeptical point of view toward Connell's argument by asserting that hegemonic masculinity tyrannizes not only women, for "[w]e tend to think of every young man in terms of power, and we find ourselves unable to think about the powerlessness of men in specific situations".[15] Masculinity studies concerned with the representation of men throughout time expresses the same concern.

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10 Barker (2018) 46.

11 Kimmel (2006) 5.

12 Barker (2018) 19.

13 Fantuzzi (2007) 102.

14 Connell (2005) 77.

15 Seidler (2006) 10.

Van Nortwick points out in *Imagining Men: Ideals of Masculinity in Ancient Greek Culture* (2008) that "[i]n the strongly patriarchal cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, it is perhaps not surprising that the state most prized was that of the adult male, the time when a man was most able, physically and emotionally, to exhibit control over himself and his world".[16] The connection between heroism and masculinity is a common motif in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In order to understand how masculinity was comprehended then, we refer to Graziosi's two types of masculinity: proper manliness (*ἠνορέη*) and excess of manliness (*ἀγηνορίη*).

According to Graziosi, "[b]oth nouns [*ἠνορέη* and *ἀγηνορίη*] are etymologically linked to the word *ἀνηρ* [(man)] and ... [both words] are gendered terms in Homeric epic".[17] One the one hand, Graziosi claims *ἠνορέη* is positively connected with those men concerned with the safety of the group on the battlefield. On the other hand, *ἀγηνορίη* is considered by some scholars as demeaning, for its meaning is intertwined with individualistic behavior as well as with isolation. Excessive manliness leads men to withdraw from other men and to act recklessly.

Along with the typology of masculine hierarchy put forth by Connell in *Masculinities* – hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized types –, proper manliness and excessive manliness are perceived as two sides of the hegemonic type. Proper manliness can be interpreted as men's solidarity with other men, so as to boost morale on the battlefield. As stated by Chris Hedges in *War is the Force That Gives us Meaning* (2003), "war is the ultimate definition of manhood",[18] which makes proper manliness essential for ancient warriors to build rapport and to heighten a sense of communion.

Conversely, excessive manliness can be regarded as the hegemonic attempt to oppress men and women alike, placing masculinity against "the larger male project of establishing and guarding human civilization".[19] Because ancient Greek culture was rooted in competitiveness, so was their notion of masculinity. This is the main issue relative to ancient Greek masculinity: if a collective effort, like the Greek army assembled by Agamemnon, is to thrive, talented young men,

16 Van Nortwick (2008) 25.

17 Graziosi (2003) 60.

18 Hedges (2003) 69.

19 Van Nortwick (2008) 52.

like Achilles and Ajax, must come to terms with the idea that their martial excellence is as important as their obedience and willingness to share power.

Such willingness – rarely found in *The Iliad*, where episodes of *aristeia* (excellence) abound – can be associated with proper manliness, while excessive manliness points to the warriors' isolation, to the disregard for human values, and to social hierarchy. Graziosi notes that the word that denotes excessive manliness (ἀγηνορίη) is also associated with the behavior of male beasts in the *Iliad.*[20]

Briseis gives us a feminist account of the Trojan War, but the novel is also a valuable source for the analysis of the male characters that have inhabited the Western literary tradition since Homer. According to Terry Eagleton, "[our] Homer is not identical with the Homer of the Middle Ages, nor [our] Shakespeare with that of his contemporaries".[21] From the troubled relationship between Thetis and Achilles – the latter, according to Briseis, resembles "a small child crying to be picked up"[22] – to Ajax mistaking his slave girl, Tecmessa, for a Trojan soldier[23], Barker's narrative shows different aspects of Homer's heroes.

We contend that Connell's hegemonic masculinity and Graziosi's excessive manliness culminate in a process of towering rage and animalization in Barker's novel. To exemplify that notion, which is further explored in section III of this article, we resort to the first sentence in Barker's novel. Like the *Iliad,* Barker opens *The Silence of the Girls* with the hero in the spotlight. Whereas Homer is reverential, Barker's tone is one of mockery: "[g]reat Achilles. Brilliant Achilles, shining Achilles, godlike Achilles. How the epithets pile up. We never called him any of those things; we called him the butcher".[24] The gradation of epithets ends up with an unflattering one, echoing the soldiers' corpses that populate the first lines of the *Iliad.*[25]

Achilles' excellence united to his wrath brings the Greek army to the brink of its demise. In this context, proper manliness and excessive manliness are sides of the same coin, hegemonic masculinity. Proper and excessive manliness can be used separately to shed light on how, in the Homeric society, the former is

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20 Il.12.299–309; Il.12.41–50; Il. 20.164–75. Cf. Il.22.454–9.

21 Eagleton (2008) 11.

22 Barker (2018) 33.

23 Barker 2018) 51.

24 Barker (2018) 51.

25 Il.1.1–6.

used to endorse positive male features that protect patriarchy and the latter is a destructive force that one can use not only against one's peers but also against oneself.

Because Barker does not depict as diligently the life of the common soldier, the novel explores the intricacies of the links between hegemonic men. Hegemonic men in Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* are aristocrats who, from their childhood, were trained in oratory[26], were instructed how to wield a sword and spear,[27] and were taught to be zealous of their honor. Those men are also emotionally needy[28] and drink too much to escape their problems.[29] Barker's novel raises relevant issues, such as how hegemonic masculinity can promote the demotion of men's and women's identities, something to which we return in the next sections.

BRISEIS: QUEEN, SLAVE, AND ACHILLES' BRIDE – A FEMALE DEPICTION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Adrienne Rich in "When We Dead Awaken" states "[n]o male writer has written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women's criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his theme, his language".[30] In the overtly masculine world of *The Iliad,* Briseis is allowed to profess her own voice only once throughout the almost sixteen thousand lines of the epic.[31] The only reference a contemporary readership can find about Briseis outside Homer is in later authors from the Hellenistic Period (323 BC–146 BC) or from the Western Roman Empire (130 BC–476 AD).[32]

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26 Barker (2018) 209.

27 Barker (2018) 259.

28 Barker (2018) 44.

29 Barker (2018) 56.

30 Rich (1972) 20.

31 Il. 19.285–300.

32 The Hellenistic Period covers Greek history from the death of Alexander the Great until the dawn of the Roman Empire. The emperor Diocletian (r. 284–385 BC) divided the Roman Empire into two. The Eastern Empire was ruled from Byzantium (modern Istanbul) while the

In *The Iliad,* Briseis "has great structural importance, but is an absent structure".[33] Agamemon defines her as Achilles' gift of honor (*γέρας*). Barker departs from Homer to re-create her own Briseis. One of the poignant scenes *The Silence of the Girls* depicts is the one where Briseis is handed to Achilles by the Greek army. He is the bravest warrior, so it is his right to have the most beautiful woman as his gift of honor.[34] In the society Homer portrays, women are part of men's *kleos* (glory).

The opening quarrel of *The Iliad,* which Barker humorously refers to as a bar brawl in her epigraph, is a significant display of power. Briseis and Chryseis symbolize their captors' *τιμή* (esteem). In the Homeric world, honor and esteem are highly valued possessions that a man can only obtain at the expense of another human being. Agamemnon, fully aware that returning Chryseis to her father will damage his reputation, strategically seizes Achilles' gift of honor, further highlighting the power dynamics at play.

Additionally, Barker portrays Briseis in accordance with Homer in *The Iliad.* Not only is she referred to as Achilles' prize, but also as Achilles' bride. Throughout *The Silence of the Girls,* Barker's Briseis ponders whether she should marry Achilles, the man responsible for her downfall and the death of all her other male relatives. As ludicrous as it may seem to a contemporary audience, Barker voices the challenging position in which Briseis might have been, as she would have no final word on the matter had Achilles decided to marry her. In Barker's literary project, Briseis is no longer an absent structure: she is a powerful tool to comprehend Homeric notions on gender roles and on the amount of power hegemonic men hold in that society.

As Van Nortwick points out, the life cycle of a woman is similar to a "story that reflects the Greeks' view of a woman's life, the abduction and return of Persephone, daughter of the goddess Demeter, by Hades, god of the Underworld".[35] Persephone's myth, narrated in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* reveals the stages of a woman's life would lead her to be, as Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) puts it,

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Western Empire was ruled from Rome. Insofar as the novel follows Homer closely, we will not address Briseis as seen in Ovid.

33 Fantuzzi (2007) 99.

34 Barker (2018) 22.

35 Van Nortwick (2008) 16.

"Born – Bridled – Shrouded – / In a day".[36] The tripartite division of birth, marriage/abduction, and death has been present in women's lives throughout centuries.[37]

Van Nortwick also claims Persephone's is "a story that implicitly compares the experience of a young girl's marriage not only to a forcible abduction, but to a kind of death".[38] Briseis tells her audience that the Myrmidons would behold her returning to their general as "[a] woman so heavily shrouded in white she might have been a corpse".[39] This scene sets Briseis apart with her new identity in the Greek war camp – she is Achilles' bride and slave – and at the same time buries her former life as the respectable queen of Lyrnessus. Briseis' change of status mirrors another type of fall, which is also connected to Achilles' story, Thetis'.

Briseis often ponders whether she would marry Achilles. However, such ponderings are not born out of love for him; they funnel down to a matter of survival and to a lack of agency. Patroclus is the agent of patriarchy to ensure this marriage take place. By the end of the novel, thinking about the child Briseis is carrying, Achilles, another symbolic force of patriarchy, marries Briseis to Alcimus, a Myrmidon under his command.

Just like Persephone's myth, Briseis' symbolic and actual marriages – to Mynes, to Achilles, and to Alcimus – display the power patriarchal structures have over women and, to some extent, echo Thetis' marriage to Peleus. Seth Schein discloses that "there was a prophecy that Thetis would give birth to a son mightier than his father, who would overthrow him. This prophecy discouraged both Zeus and Poseidon from mating with her and led to her being married perforce to a mortal, Peleus".[40] Achilles, who would otherwise have been a child of Zeus, is doomed to be a mortal. Thetis begins to mourn her son from the moment he is born until his last day.[41] What Briseis' story has in common with Persephone's and Thetis' is that patriarchy, enforced by representatives of

36 Dickinson (1960) 15.

37 As we compare Briseis' tale to Persephone's myth, we choose to overlook the female role in a patriarchal society that encompasses childbirth and care.

38 Van Nortwick (2008) 17.

39 Barker (2018) 240.

40 Schein (1984) 92.

41 Barker (2018) 298.

hegemonic masculinity, is a force that can and will work against female agency by making women marry whomever is more suitable to men's maintenance of power.

On the one hand, Briseis is often falling and rising in the social hierarchy of the period: she occupies the space of a queen, a slave, a bride, a bargaining chip to Agamemnon, a slave again, and, then, the wife of Alcimus, a Myrmidon. On the other hand, while free and slave women are bound to domestic labor in the Homeric society, free men have war as their main occupation. This state of affairs makes Briseis' scope of action always limited to indoor work; which is no coincidence, for in the Homeric world, war is the work of men.[42]

Briseis' indoor activity is the key point in our analysis: she retells the Trojan War. As Graziosi explains, "[the Homeric poems] explore masculinity from a variety of angles offering paradigms of male behavior that became extremely influential in Greco-Roman antiquity".[43] Furthermore, Susan Lanser advocates in *Fictions of Authority* (2018) the view that "[f]emale voice is not an essence but a variable subject position whose I is grammatically feminine".[44] In short, a female-centered perspective provides not only a glimpse of what a silenced existence was like to a contemporary readership but also offers a different angle from which to analyze the construction of male identities.

Marion Gymnich, in "Gender and Narratology" (2013), points out that "readers tend to ascribe more authority to the narrator than to the characters simply because the narrator is regarded as the source of the story".[45] Not only does *The Silence of the Girls* give an account of the defeated but it also elaborates on a female portrayal of a male hero, a portrayal that is distinct from those that render the hero praiseworthy. Whereas in Homer Achilles is divine, in Barker he is bestial.[46]

Where patriarchy seems to be considerate of women, as in the exchanges Patroclus has with Briseis, we suspect that there is still a subtle effort to control women's lives. In relation to the comparison we discussed before (Briseis and Persephone), Van Nortwick argues "[p]atriarchy is portrayed as potentially ty-

42 Il.6.586–587.

43 Graziosi (2003) 60.

44 Lanser (2018) 17.

45 Gymnich (2013) 709.

46 "the son of Peleus, half beast, half god, driving on to glory", Barker (2018) 219.

rannical in the [*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*] and is reinforced by male solidarity. Helios is kind to Demeter in her grief, but urges her to be grateful that Persephone has such an admirably powerful husband".[47] Patroclus, like Zeus or even Helios, claims he can make Achilles marry Briseis and that it would be a change of prospect for her. In the portrayal of hegemonic men Barker gives us, where war indulges some few old kings like Priam to "kiss the hands of the man who killed [their sons]",[48] patriarchy forces Briseis and countless women to "spread [their] legs for the man who killed [their husbands] and [their brothers]".[49] Patroclus' offer does not let the reader forget that Briseis would still be marrying the man responsible for her current position.

Briseis' voice in *The Silence of the Girls* – following Rich's standpoint that to rewrite means to revise ancient tales – also serves as an attempt to describe the experience of women as slaves and prisoners of war. By withdrawing Briseis from the position of being merely Achilles' slave or future bride, Barker highlights how men's perspectives on women can be quite similar. In the following passage, Briseis tries to convey the emotional state of the Greek camp when Trojan forces are on the verge of breaking their defenses,[50]

> [s]ome of the girls, mainly those who'd been slaves in their previous lives, were genuinely indifferent. No likely end would bring them loss or leave them happier than before. But those of us who'd once been free, who'd had security and status, were torn between hope and fear. Some managed to convince themselves that if – if – the Trojans broke through they'd greet us as their long-lost sisters. But would they? Or would they see us as the enemy's slave girls, theirs to do what they liked with? I knew which outcome I thought more probable.[51]

The situation of slave women would hardly be changed because the Trojan army, like the Greek one, was an institution made of and for men, grounded on the notion that women are prizes, the extension of male glory.

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47 Van Nortwick (2008) 20.

48 Barker (2018) 267; Cf. Il.24.561–562.

49 Barker (2018) 267.

50 Il. 15.843–850.

51 Barker (2018) 135.

The Silence of the Girls divides Briseis' voice into what Susan Lanser characterizes as personal and communal: "the term personal voice refer[s] to narrators who are self-consciously telling their own histories"[52] while "communal voice [refers to] a spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority".[53] In Barker's novel, a plethora of I's and We's point to the tale of those who have no voice of their own but, like soldiers in a war camp, have a lot to share about the neglected side of war.

One such neglected wartime casualty is Briseis: ever since the beginning of the novel, after the ransacking of her city, Lynerssus, she has been demoted. We should take a closer look at the scene in which Briseis meets Achilles for the first time in the Greek camp,

> [a]nd then a hand, fingertips gritty with sand, seized hold of my chin and turned my head from side to side. At the centre of the arena [Achilles] stopped and raised both hands above his head until the shouting died away
>
> Cheers, lads, he said.
>
> She'll do. And everyone, every single man in that vast arena, laughed.[54]

With one sentence, "[s]he will do",[55] Achilles undermines and subdues Briseis while he simultaneously establishes his authority and superiority over the other soldiers.

Briseis, the most valuable war prize, becomes the "visual confirmation that [Achilles] was, as he'd always claimed to be, the greatest of the Greeks".[56] Briseis undergoes another loss of identity in the hands of another hegemonic man in the novel, Agamemnon. After the quarrel over Chryseis and the plague, Briseis has to go to the Mycenaean king's compound.

There, Briseis finds out that slave women can be used as a threat to other men, for she no longer is Achilles' prize. She becomes Agamemnon's warning, as the passage below exemplifies,

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52 Lanser (2018) 24.

53 Lanser (2018) 26.

54 Barker (2018) 22.

55 Barker (2018) 22.

56 Barker (2018) 67.

> [in Agamemnon's tent, Briseis] served a particular purpose. Men carve meaning into women's faces; messages addressed to other men. In Achilles's compound, the message had been: Look at her. [Achilles'] prize awarded by the army, proof that [Achilles is what he's] always claimed to be: the greatest of the Greeks. Here, in Agamemnon's compound, it was: Look at her, Achilles's prize. [Agamemnon] took her away from him just as [Agamemnon] can take your prize away from you. [Agamemnon] can take everything you have.[57]

However, as the dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles goes on, Briseis symbolizes something else. Briseis makes it clear that she is telling The Trojan War as if it were a communal event.[58] Barker's Briseis is an emblem of what women suffer at war, Greek or Trojan. She often changes places and fills in the shoes of important and neglected females in the mythic narrative of the Trojan War.

Briseis witnesses first-hand Achilles' childlike need for his caretaker in Thetis' plotline. After the disastrous outcome of the embassy in Book 9 of *The Iliad* – in which Barker omits the presence of Phoenix –, Briseis becomes another silent woman of myth, another reason behind men's actions: she becomes Helen.[59] To Briseis is addressed the hostility and contempt of the Greek soldiers, which had been up to that point addressed to Helen. Briseis, like Helen in Troy, is surrounded by enemy forces who must fight a war whose cause is a foreign woman.

The last transformation Briseis goes through, from a thing into a good man's wife, is a reminder that a war story is, among other things, a tale of survival. While the flames are engulfing Achilles' body, Briseis realizes that

> [we, the Trojan women,] are going to survive – our songs, our stories. They'll never be able to forget us. Decades after the last man who fought at Troy is dead, their sons will remember the songs their Trojan mothers sang to them. We'll be in their dreams – and in their worst nightmares too.[60]

57 Barker (2018) 120.

58 Barker (2018) 213.

59 Barker (2018) 124.

60 Barker (2018) 296.

After Achilles' death and the fall of Troy, she is finally allowed to tell a different tale from those in which "[s]ilence becomes a woman".[61] Perhaps, in this tale, Briseis and the other Trojan women are (re)born not to be shrouded (or silenced) in a single day.

War, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity make Briseis realize that she and other women as well would "do anything, anything at all, to stop being a thing and become a person again".[62] In order to achieve that, Briseis has to try and walk out of Achilles' story.[63] The hero's narrative is a stark omen that those who perform male hegemony may be unaware of the demotion of their identities. A reckoning that may come too late, as is the case we explore in the next section.

THE OTHER-THAN-HUMANIZATION OF THE HERO: ACHILLES AND THE CLOAK OF EXCESSIVE MANLINESS

Whereas Achilles, as Barker depicts him, is hegemonic – he oppresses women and is a model of unachievable masculinity to other men in the Greek and Trojan armies –, Achilles falls short of being human. Different narrators attempt to portray Achilles as something other than human, either in the novel or in the epic poem. Achilles' personal identity is not only demoted by his hegemonic traits but also diminished by the constant process of animalization embedded within it. In Homer, for example, recurrent similes compare heroes to natural elements such as fire or to animals such as wild beasts.[64]

Homer's use of similes has been extensively discussed by Classical scholarship;[65] but we focus on how the similes are not only a poetic resource but also an inner mirror to the hero's frame of mind. As Michael Clarke argues, "the symbolism of aggressive wild animals is much more than a matter of style, and they

61 Barker (2018) 326.

62 Barker (2018) 93.

63 Barker (2018) 324.

64 Clarke (1995) 141: "Throughout the *Iliad* war and the warrior are associated with fire on many different levels of figured language and narrative, of which similes are only the most explicit".

65 See Clarke (1995); Graziosi (2003); Schein (1998).

play a major part in Homer's portrayal of the ethical and psychological problems of heroism".[66] In Homer, this constant comparison between men and beasts, or men and forces of nature, is a means to depict the hero's frame of mind in a moment of detachment from his personal identity.

Similarly, Briseis and the omniscient narrator, who takes over Parts Two and Three of the novel, depict Achilles sometimes as human, sometimes as non-human. The first thing that strikes the reader is Achilles as something other than human in terms of the hero's voice, "I [Briseis] heard him before I saw him: his battle cry ringing around the walls of Lyrnessus".[67] In this passage, Briseis echoes Homer;[68] in respect to the power Achilles' war cry has on those who hear it. It is so potent, so terrifying, it can freeze a whole army; we can only imagine the effect it would have on a group of scared women and children.

Another moment Barker brings Achilles' voice center stage is to emphasize Achilles' double nature when the hero is in one of the elements of his mixed birth, the sea. At her first night in the Greek camp, Briseis decides to swim. On the shore, she again hears her captor before she can see him:

> I listened, straining to hear above the roar of the waves, and it came again – definitely a man's voice, though I couldn't make out the words. And suddenly, I was afraid. I'd been frightened for days – I'd forgotten what it was like not to be frightened – but this was a different kind of fear. The skin at the back of my neck crawled as the hairs rose. I told myself the voice must be coming from the camp, somehow bouncing off the wall of mist so it seemed to be coming from the sea, but then I heard it again and this time I knew it was out there. Somebody, something, was churning up the water beyond the breaking waves. An animal – it had to be, couldn't be anything else, a dolphin or a killer whale.[69]

This passage highlights two poignant features of Achilles' non-human depiction.

Firstly, the fear he inspires in Briseis resembles an encounter with a preternatural or supernatural force: fear that makes one shiver and become speech-

66 Clarke (1995) 138.

67 Barker (2018) 3.

68 Il. 18.251–266.

69 Barker (2018) 32.

less.[70] Secondly, at this moment Barker starts to draw a comparison between Achilles and other animals. Briseis later recalls that "[Achilles] had been playing with the sea like a dolphin or a porpoise, as if it were his real home"[71] and that "[Achilles] raised his head and shoulders and floated upright, like a bottling seal".[72] Instead of using the lion or the boar – figures used extensively in Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* –, Briseis uses similes to compare Achilles to marine animals, a dolphin, a porpoise, and a seal.

Another part of the comparison to marine animals comes in the last part of the novel. There, the hero admittedly acknowledges that his feet, the source of the numerous songs about him and part of his most famous epithet, *okumoros* (swift-footed), are also a source of great shame: "[i]n fact, his toes are webbed, as indeed his mother's are; though on her the extra skin's translucent. On him, it's thick and yellow; he's ashamed of it. [Achilles is] ashamed of his feet".[73] Achilles' epithet, swift-footed, points to a two-pronged sword and simultaneously attests to the hero's brief life and to his battle skills.

Achilles' feet in Barker's novel enhance the dualities that encompass all aspects of Achilles' existence[74] and shed light on why Homeric culture and Homeric masculinity depend on the honor/shame system. Barker makes it clear that the source of Achilles' undying glory (*kleos aphthiton*) in the Homeric world is, indeed, the source of his shame. Barker also hints at contemporary notions that heroism is not as glorious as the society depicted by *The Iliad* makes it or wants it to look like.

Moreover, Barker breaks with the genre expectations to some extent. There is something rather comic in imagining Achilles' feet as Barker describes them. Achilles, the prototype of the tragic hero, has as an all-too-human fatal flaw in his appearance, which counters ancient Greek ideals of masculinity that often rely on male beauty.[75] In Barker's retelling of the Trojan War, the hero's wobbled feet can be considered a stain to his reputation as the most handsome man of

70 See *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 281.

71 Barker (2018) 33.

72 Barker (2018) 33.

73 Barker (2018) 246.

74 See Muellner (2020) 99–102.

75 *Imagining Men* (2008) 14; Cf. Od.23.153–162.

the time.[76] To parallel Achilles' feet, we turn our attention to Achilles' hands. In the three scenes that *The Silence of the Girls* puts the hero's hands in the spotlight, the dialogue with *The Iliad* is evident. Like his feet, a reminder of his speed, Achilles' hands define him, set him apart: they convey the idea of how lethal he can be. Twice in Baker's novel, Achilles is forced to look down at his hands.[77]

Homer calls attention to Achilles' hands being man-killing, for in *The Iliad* the epithet is used twice – first, in Patroclus' funeral; second, in Priam's visit to Achilles' compound.[78] In the novel, the first time Achilles stares at his hands is on the day of Patroclus' death, and the second is on the day Priam comes to offer a ransom for Hector's body. In both occasions, the hero's frame of mind is of confusion and delusion, for "when [Achilles] looks down, he sees there's something wrong with [his hands].[79] They're big at the best of times, a fighter's hands, trained from childhood to wield a sword and spear, but surely they've never been as big as this". However, Briseis tells us Achilles is not ashamed of his hands, as they are also his source of pride. Achilles' hands, disproportionately big, shape the hero as we see him in *The Silence of the Girls*.[80]

Barker often implies that Achilles is other than human. She does that through the observation that there is always violence "simmering beneath the surface [of Achilles']"[81]. We have already analyzed Achilles' voice and the comparison to marine animals, which attest to his other-than-human or half-divine nature. Like Homer, Barker also endorses Achilles' other-than-human aspect by approximating the hero to other animals. That which separates him from other men, his exceeding beauty, emphasizes the dual aspect of Achilles.

Briseis recollects,

> [as] the torchlight fell full on [Achilles'] face and I could see the strange markings on his skin. The areas covered by the forehead and cheek irons of his helmet were several shades lighter than the exposed skin around his eyes and mouth, almost as if the helmet had become part of him, had somehow embedded itself in his skin.

76 Barker (2018) 56.

77 Barker (2018) 241; Barker (2018) 259.

78 Il. 23.20–21; Il.24.559–562.

79 Barker (2018) 259.

80 Barker (2018) 285.

81 Barker (2018) 43.

> Perhaps I exaggerate the effect. For me, the tiger-stripes on his skin were the most noticeable thing about him. At that time, he was probably the most beautiful man alive, as he was certainly the most violent, but that's the problem. How do you separate a tiger's beauty from its ferocity? Or a cheetah's elegance from the speed of its attack? Achilles was like that – the beauty and the terror were two sides of a single coin.[82]

Barker promotes a singular portrayal of heroism, which endorses the notion proposed by Boon that heroism may transform men into something beyond human, but it does so on account of detaching men from their personal identities.[83] Achilles, who, so far, has been compared to marine animals, is now compared to mammals that are as beautiful as they are dangerous.

Throughout *The Iliad* and *The Silence of the Girls,* Achilles is compared to animals, forces of nature, and even vegetation. In *The Mortal Hero* (1984), Schein notes that Peleus' son is the only Greek hero described in terms of vegetal imagery.[84] Barker acquiesces to this tradition and endorses the idea that "what makes Achilles great is also what isolates him".[85] Both in Homer and in Barker, Achilles' process of other-than-humanization, even of animalization, is gradual. It follows the hero's wrath.

In *The Iliad,* Andromache, Hector's wife, admits that, although Achilles has caused her a lot of pain by killing her male relatives and by capturing her mother, he still acts respectfully toward his enemies.[86] Indeed, Achilles follows the honor code even at times of war. He accepts ransom when it is possible and does not always use the battle as an excuse to slaughter people. Even Barker's Briseis acquiesces to the notion of a civil and thoughtful Achilles, "[n]othing would have pleased me [Briseis] more than to be able to think of Achilles as a thug with no redeeming characteristics or grace of manner; but he was never that".[87] However, that is bound to change once Patroclus is killed by Hector.

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82 Barker (2018) 56.

83 Boon (2005) 304.

84 Schein (1984) 96–98.

85 Van Nortwick (1996) 44.

86 Il.6.490–512.

87 Barker (2018) 264.

In ancient Greek society, "the heroic temperament and the pursuit of glory lead inevitably towards death".[88] The willingness to risk life in battle makes a true man in Homer's epics.[89] Those notions can be encapsulated in Graziosi's proper manliness and excessive manliness. Achilles and Ajax, the bravest heroes, have their posts on both flanks of the Greek army, the most exposed positions in a war camp. Proper and excessive manliness are two sides of the same coin, hegemonic masculinity. Whereas the former leads to what is the main feature of hegemonic masculinity in Connell's theory, women's domination, the latter may promote the disruption of patriarchal structures.

Excessive manliness, in Graziosi's estimation, is repeatedly associated with animal similes, which suggests that in Homer, "the mental and emotional state of the fighting animal can be assimilated to that of the fighting man more closely than would ever be possible in a culture like our own".[90] *The Iliad* is a poem about Achilles' wrath and its stages[91]; even more so after the loss of Patroclus, for Achilles is perceived as more and more other-than-human. The word that opens *The Iliad, menin* (wrath), is a suggestive noun in ancient Greek.[92] It does not point to a human feeling; rather, it symbolizes the kind of rage that would be felt by a god, which is another feature that isolates Achilles from his peers.

To exemplify that, we resort to the fatalistic meeting between Hector and Achilles as well as to two scenes in Barker's *The Silence of the Girls.* To Clarke, in *The Iliad,* Achilles forsakes all links to mankind and is completely other-than-humanized in Book 22, where he affirms that "[t]here are no binding oaths between men and lions".[93] Although Hector has tried to make a pact with Achilles, observing the code of warrior society, "the point of comparison [men and lions] is pinned on psychology and social mores as well as action: wolves and lions do not feel affection or make contracts in the way that normal people do, and this is the relationship in which Achilles stands to the man at this feet".[94] Similarly,

88 Clarke (1995) 148.

89 Clarke (1995) 147.

90 Clarke (1995) 146.

91 See Graziosi (2003) 65; Van Nortwick (1996) 40–41; Schein (1984) 91.

92 Schein (1984) 91.

93 Il. 22.310.

94 Clarke (1995) 144. Cf, Il.22.307–315.

in Barker's retelling, after Achilles kills Hector – whom stand as part of his second-self –, the hero plunges away from what makes him human.

Barker does not portray the battle between Hector and Achilles. Instead, we are presented with the hero's recollections of the moment and his feelings. Achilles, wrapped in excessive manliness, does not ponder human values and is associated with a wild animal. Achilles is pure instinct and wrath,

> [k]illing Hector isn't enough. [Achilles] knew that the minute he did it. What he really wanted to do was eat [Hector] – there aren't many people he'd say that to, but it's the truth. He'd wanted to rip Hector's throat out with his teeth. That's why he'd dragged the corpse three times round the walls of Troy, knowing Priam was watching, and even that was no more than a pale substitute for the taste of Hector's flesh on his tongue.[95]

As horrifying as it is, contemplating eating human flesh is not enough to placate Achilles' wrath; nor is it the last stage of the hero's other-than-humanization in Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*.

As Schein argues, "paradoxically, both [Achilles'] love and grief for [Patroclus] and his own imminent death, which is repeatedly prophesied and prefigured, isolate him even further from his comrades, and the savagery with which he routs and slays the Trojans cuts him off from all normal humanity".[96] Even after Achilles does everything he thinks necessary to grant Patroclus a dignified funeral – killing Hector, slaying the twelve Trojan youths, killing Patroclus' horses and dogs[97] –, "[Achilles] can't sleep. Can't eat, can't sleep, can't play the lyre – and now, apparently, can't fuck".[98] By forswearing symbols of human life – such as feeding, bathing, sleeping, copulating, and playing the lyre –, Achilles hints at his desire to be apart from humanity.[99]

Achilles' other-than-humanization finally reaches its last stage after Patroclus' funeral, when the hero starts a new routine. He takes Hector's body around Patroclus' grave every day. As a consequence, every day, Achilles looks into

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95 Barker 230–231; cf Il.22.407–410.

96 Schein (1984) 98.

97 Barker (2018) 235; cf Il.23.23–27.

98 Barker (2018) 235; cf Il.23.23–27.

99 Van Nortwick (2008) 7.

the mirror afterward and sees "[r]eflected back from the shining metal, the injuries he's just inflicted on Hector [lying] like shadows on his own skin".[100] This scene portrays Achilles' self-created hell, which corroborates the idea of self-loathing.[101]

Whereas Homer resorts to animal and vegetal similes, Barker depicts the demotion of Achilles' personal identity: his excessive attachment to his heroic status and his status likening him to animals and things. The last thing to which Achilles is compared in Barker's narrative is Hector's corpse. Achilles inflicts wounds on Hector's body and performs the most violent and blasphemous acts of *The Silence of the Girls* because his hegemonic status allows him: no one in the entire Greek war camp would go against Achilles' resolve.[102] By demoting Achilles' identity bit by bit, Barker shows how hegemonic masculinity, equivalent to Graziosi's excessive manliness, is also harmful to those who perform it.

The cloak of excessive manliness does not let men perceive that they are vulnerable too. Achilles' death wish after Patroclus' demise is a sign of how emotionally immature he is. Achilles admits that everything he has done is in the hope that he could bargain with his own grief.[103] Because Achilles is excessive, because his heroic stature sets him apart from everyone, mortals and immortals alike, he is as vulnerable as he is untouchable. Achilles' powerlessness over grief confirms Seidler's assertion that hegemonic masculinity can lead men to a path of self-destruction.

In the patriarchal world Homer and Barker depict, this path is paved with the notion of glory to be achieved at the highest point of a hero's life, his death. As Robert Renehan notes, "[t]he high road to undying glory was to be found primarily in being the best and in being preeminent above others".[104] This requirement brings Achilles to his doom. Achilles' resolve to be sung forever is what makes him be represented as a model of masculinity, which in turn bestializes and brutalizes him: Achilles forsakes his peers, disregards the army's hierarchy,

100 Barker (2018) 250.

101 Van Nortwick (2008) 14.

102 In *The Iliad,* even the gods find Achilles' behavior outrageous and excessive Il.24.46–61. Apollo compares Achilles to a lion, which confirms Clarke's notion that Homer's similes express the darkest implications of Achilles' isolation: the hero is, indeed, forsaking human values and embracing death instead of life.

103 Barker (2018) 241.

104 Renehan (1997) 112.

and is irresolutely hubristic. Each one of his actions fits excessive manliness as a cultural construct.

However, from the moment we have access to Achilles' thoughts, his identity is not only divided into his mortal and divine natures; it also shifts between him and Patroclus. Van Nortwick claims that Patroclus is more than Achilles' companion or lover, something at which Barker also hints;[105] Patroclus is Achilles' second self. Deprived of Patroclus, Achilles truly shows his colors as hegemonic/excessive: the hero breaks all the acceptable rules of conduct in warfare, for he does not grant Hector a proper funeral; he commits human sacrifice and keeps fighting without rest. No longer will a representation of proper manliness (ἠνορέη) suit Achilles after Patroclus has been killed.

The hegemonic/heroic status is destructive because it forces the hero to be above other men, despite his grief or mental state. The heroic status is a painful reminder that the hero cannot be above the gods, nor can the hero undo the fact that he and his second self are mortals.[106] Unknowingly, the hero becomes a superimposition of man and lion[107], of the greatest killer[108], a token of excessive manliness. Only this can allow Achilles to retrieve his position of male hegemony, for no other man can be compared to him. Conversely, such a restless quest inevitably leads to Achilles' other-than-humanization and self-destruction.

GENTLE, KINDHEARTED PATROCLUS: THE HERO'S SECOND-SELF: THE UNRAVELMENT OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY?

In *Somewhere I Have Never Traveled,* Van Nortwick notes that Patroclus' first appearance in *The Iliad* is not a remarkable one.[109] This appearance calls to mind the relationship between a master and a servant. Conversely, Patroclus' debut in *The Silence of the Girls* is stunning. He has a kind exchange with Briseis, offers her

105 Barker (2018) 300.

106 Barker (2018) 241.

107 Il. 24.39–45.

108 Barker (2018) 115.

109 Il.1.398–408.

wine, and promises her she will be safe. Surprising in that scene is that Patroclus, second in command to none other than Achilles, waits on a slave. That episode is relevant because in a society as layered as the ancient Greek one, Patroclus slightly breaks with the hegemonic prescriptions of masculine behavior. This section juxtaposes Patroclus and Achilles' relationship with women because Patroclus expresses qualities that Achilles lacks. Patriarchal societies thrive on hegemonic masculinity, for both tend to curb women's agency.

Although "on the battlefield, in the thick of the fighting, [Patroclus] was every bit as ferocious as the rest of [the Myrmidons]"[110], in the camp, among the captive women and their children, he was kind and considerate. It is difficult to picture hegemonic men being kind or considerate to women, especially in a society where women are a form of currency. Patroclus, in *The Silence of the Girls,* breaks with some of the requirements to which hegemonic men are bound.

There might be a reason why Patroclus is so considerate to Briseis in the novel: to some extent, he can recognize himself in her. Because Patroclus is exiled from his father's kingdom, he becomes *anônymos* (nameless) in ancient Greek culture.[111] He admits the reason he treats Briseis and the other women kindly is that he knows "what it is like to lose everything and be handed to Achilles as a toy".[112] Patroclus, a member of the aristocracy (at least, theoretically), feels similar to Briseis, a slave. On the one hand, Barker's literary project attempts to depict what a slave woman's life would be like in a war camp. On the other hand, Barker also shows that the process of identity loss that Briseis and other women go through is also experienced by their captors.

David Halperin (1990) argues that "Patroclus performs many of the functions for Achilles that a wife or female dependent normally performs in the Homeric World; for example, he places food before Achilles when the two of them are dining alone[113] and, when they are entertaining guests, it is Patroclus who distributes the bread".[114] Patroclus is the weaker part in his relation to Achilles; however, Barker presents a Patroclus who is not only aware of this but also one

110 Barker (2018) 212.

111 Strauss (1993) 27.

112 Barker (2018) 71.

113 See Il.19.315–17. Cf. Il. 9.216–17; cf. Il. 11.624–41.

114 Halperin (1990) 84.

who, contrary to the hegemonic ideal of masculinity, seems not to resent his subservient state.

Patroclus, as Barker rewrites him, is a mysterious figure. Even witty Odysseus cannot decipher him. Glory does not entice him and he seems unaffected by the rumors of his role in sexual activity in the Greek camp, "[Patroclus is] a king's son. Does he really want to go down in history as Achilles's bum-boy? Because that's the way it's heading".[115] In a culture where masculine value is embedded in the honor/shame system, Patroclus' polite disregard for his honor can be analyzed through the notion of the second self, proposed by Van Nortwick.

According to the classicist,

> [t]o express Achilles' divided nature and his struggles to resolve it, the poet of *The Iliad* creates in Patroclus an alter ego, or second self, for his hero. The second self is essentially a figure who represents parts of the hero that he is denying or has somehow lost touch with, usually through arrogance and pride.[116]

However, it seems reasonable to assume that if both men represent what the other lacks or denies – Achilles being the brutal part of Patroclus and Patroclus being the kind part of Achilles –, then both men struggle with the relative loss or weakening of their personal identities.

Barker points out that when Patroclus arrives at Phthia, his reputation has been spread throughout Peleus' small kingdom,

> [as] soon as it became known that Patroclus had killed somebody, had actually done what they were all being trained to do, the other boys were queueing up to take him on. He became the one to beat. And so he was always fighting, like a chained bear that can't escape the baiting, but must go on and on, whimpering and licking its wounds at night, dragged out to face the dogs again by day. By the time Achilles finally plucked up the courage to approach Patroclus, he was well on the way to becoming the violent little thug everybody believed he was.[117]

115 Barker (2018) 165.

116 Van Nortwick (2008) 8.

117 Barker (2018) 116.

What this excerpt declares is that Patroclus could have become a glaring representative of hegemonic ideals of masculinity. Meeting Achilles, however, sets him on another course.

Patroclus' engagement with the hegemonic prescription of masculinity is curbed by Achilles' presence and vice-versa. They act as judges of each other's actions. For example, Achilles is not cruel to Briseis, as Agamemnon is to his slave girls, and is not as harsh to those under his command.[118] As Briseis notes, "Patroclus was clearly second in command, subordinate. Only that wasn't the whole story".[119] Patroclus also represents, in Barker's *The Silence of the Girls,* a kind of reformed masculinity, which, according to Alex Hobbs (2013), sets a positive model for male protagonists who do not conform to masculine stereotypes.[120]

Patroclus is still a skilled swordsman, reliable on the battlefield, protective of his comrades' welfare, and a resolute mediator. All these features would make him a conspicuous ally to patriarchal rule. However, because he recognizes himself in Briseis – that is, he partially identifies himself in reference to femininity – and does not seem troubled by that, Patroclus embraces parts of Achilles' masculine identity that the hero himself cannot afford to accept.

Whereas Achilles kills himself through his excessive actions, Patroclus puts himself in danger not because the hegemonic prescription of masculinity compels him to win glory, but as a way to perform proper manliness and to protect the Greek army. The only exception is when Patroclus wears Achilles' armor. Not only does Achilles' armor connect the three men who wear it[121], but it also indicates a symbolic suicide: once one puts it on, one is bound to act as an exemplar of excessive manliness and, through it, one finds one's end.

In the end, Patroclus fails to disengage completely from the destructive side of hegemonic masculinity. However, his portrayal by Barker, and even by Homer, opens the path to different representations of men in a patriarchal society. Because hegemonic masculinity is not a concept set in stone, different times and societies imagine and construct their own definition of the term. Patroclus, as

118 Barker (2018) 284. Cf. Barker (2018) 52.

119 Barker (2018) 39.

120 Hobbs (2013) 390.

121 Van Nortwick (2008) 12.

Barker rewrites him, embodies a kind of masculinity that, to some extent, can simultaneously act properly toward men and women.

CONCLUSION: KING PRIAM, ACHILLES' BRIDGE TO THE WORLD OF MEN

We have shown that Achilles, Briseis, and Patroclus lose part of their identities either because of their engagement with the hegemonic prescription of masculinity or because of their interaction with hegemonic men. We also consider that the hegemonic role transforms men into something other than human. However, what we question in the last section of this article is whether there is a road back: to what extent can men who engage with hegemonic masculinity return to their old selves? In order to respond to this question, we analyze Achilles' interaction with Priam.

In *The Iliad,* the unofficial audience occurs in Book 24, where Priam urges Achilles to remember Peleus twice before the hero can respond.[122] In Barker's *The Song of the Girls,* Priam also resorts to the figure of Peleus.[123] Although Priam is bidding Achilles to pity him as he would pity Peleus, Priam's request is a reminder to the hero: he must return to the world of men.

If there is anything Barker and Homer's depictions of Achilles hold in common is the notion that the hero's masculine identity is incomplete and inadequate somehow. Barker points out that "[Thetis] left when [Achilles] was not quite seven, the age at which a boy leaves the women's quarters and enters the world of men. Perhaps that's why he never quite managed to make the transition".[124] Van Nortwick contends that to reach maturity in ancient Greek and other Mediterranean cultures, heroes must be separated from their mothers and come to terms with the world of their fathers.[125] What Priam is urging Achilles to do when he resorts to Peleus' figure is to remind Achilles of his duties as a son, a warlord, and, more importantly, as a man in ancient Greek society.

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122 Il.24.569, Il.24.589.

123 Barker (2018) 257.

124 Barker (2018) 307.

125 Van Nortwick (2008) 7.

The first step Achilles takes to return to the world of men is to offer Priam hospitality (*xenia*). Achilles offers the old king food and shelter, by "selecting the juiciest cuts of meat and transferring them deftly to his plate".[126] *Xenia* (hospitality) in this passage does not simply symbolize Achilles' duty toward Priam or vice versa. It is, rather, the solid affirmation that the hero is aware that it is about time he let go of his wrath, for, only "when Achilles is touched by Priam's desperate supplication and the two virtually adopt one another as father and son[127], does Achilles put an end to his wrath".[128] Once the hero's wrath can be put aside, he can take the second step in the direction of the world of men: returning Hector to Priam.

In *The Iliad* and in *The Silence of the Girls,* Achilles' treatment of Hector's body resembles another trait of his excessive masculinity. Whereas Achilles is hurting himself, his being staggeringly against giving Hector a proper funeral suggests the hero is not able to let go of his grief. A question remains unanswered: is Achilles grieving Hector, Patroclus or himself?

After all, Achilles "resembles the Trojans whom he defeats in that his own death is as bound up with that of [Hector] as is the fall of the city".[129] Returning Hector's body to Priam symbolizes the hero's acceptance of his own mortality, which, to Van Nortwick, is the summit of mature masculinity in the Homeric epics.[130] Achilles and Priam's meeting is disturbing for both, since "[t]hey seemed to be standing at opposite ends of a time tunnel: Priam seeing the young warrior he'd once been; Achilles the old and revered king he would never be".[131] The aftermath of their exchange is Achilles' last step toward the world of men: the restoration of patriarchal power.

Achilles' reckoning with his own mortality – through King Priam, a representative of civilization – leads Achilles to having a change of heart. After that, he is more concerned with the preservation of Peleus' lineage and with the com-

126 Barker (2018) 264.

127 Il. 24.509–11. Cf. Barker (2018) 257.

128 Schein (1984) 99.

129 Schein (1984) 90. Schein also notes that, like the fallen Trojan warriors, Achilles is the only Greek who is sometimes described in terms of vegetation. Refer to Il. 4.547–564; Cf Il.1.274–278 and Il.18.64–67.

130 Van Nortwick (2008) 74.

131 Barker (2018) 265.

mitment to ancient laws. When Achilles returns Hector's body to Priam and honors the funeral rites, he starts to walk his way back to proper manliness and civilization.

In the last chapter of *The Silence of the Girls,* Achilles summons Alcimus, one of his warriors, and gives him these instructions, "Briseis is pregnant. If I die, I want you to marry her and … I want you to take her to my father. I want the child to grow up in my father's house".[132] These instructions demonstrate that Achilles considers Briseis not only his property but also a means to preserve Peleus' bloodline and patriarchal order.

In Homer and Barker, Achilles has a son, Pyrrhus, who has been brought up on Scyros.[133] Proper prescriptions of masculinity, however, demand that he take care of Peleus and Peleus' kingdom in his old age.[134] By securing Peleus' bloodline, Achilles takes the last step to return to civilization. He fulfills all his duties as a man in the patriarchal society depicted in *The Silence of the Girls*: he makes peace with Agamemnon, protects the other Greek warriors, achieves his glorious death on the battlefield, and ensures his lineage is preserved.

Whereas excessive manliness is a consequence of the greatest venue to express masculinity, war[135], proper manliness compels Achilles to return to a type of masculinity that does not threaten civilization but still subordinates women. In *The Silence of the Girls,* hegemonic masculinity, when taken to the extreme, would not only animalize men but also threaten the *status quo.* Instead of thrusting men on a path toward heroic deeds, excessive manliness would lead them to seek their end alongside the destruction of the patriarchal order. Men who disengage from the hegemonic prescription of masculinity, like Patroclus and Priam, serve as bridges to and reminders of valuable masculine attributes, courage and even consideration for the weak, which can be constructed outside the battlefield and which do not require the hero's self-destruction or the demotion of women's identity.

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132 Barker 304.

133 Barker (2018) 50.

134 Il. 24.584–585. Roisman (2008) 41.

135 Connell (2005); Hedges (2003); Van Nortwick (2008).

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