



BREAKING THE SILENCE: WOMAN AS A SUBJECT IN PAT BARKER'S *THE SILENCE OF THE GIRLS*

SUSKUNLUĞU BOZMAK: PAT BARKER'İN KIZLARIN SUSKUNLUĞU ROMANINDA ÖZNE OLARAK KADIN

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Makale Bilgisi

Türü: Araştırma makalesi
Gönderildiği tarih: 1 September 2021
Kabul edildiği tarih: 22 Ekim 2021
Yayınlanma tarihi: 28 Aralık 2021

Article Info

Type: Research article
Date submitted: 1 September 2021
Date accepted: 22 October 2021
Date published: 28 December 2021

Anahtar Sözcükler

Pat Barker; Kızların Suskunluğu;
Hélène Cixous; Dişil Yazı; Homeros;
İlyada Destanı; Mit; Yeniden Yazım

Keywords

Pat Barker; *The Silence of the Girls*;
Hélène Cixous; *Écriture féminine*;
Homer; *The Iliad*; Myth; Rewriting

DOI

10.33171/dtcjournal.2021.61.2.9

Abstract

Pat Barker's latest novel *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) retells the events taking place in *The Iliad* from the perspective of Briseis, Achilles' bed-slave. The aim of this paper is to analyse *The Silence of the Girls* in the light of *écriture féminine*, a term coined by Hélène Cixous in her essay, "The Laugh of Medusa" first published in 1975. It is found out that in her novel, *The Silence of the Girls*, Barker foregrounds the notions of the female body, female voice, female experience, and thus, problematises the dominant and hegemonic systems of representation in language and culture. Moreover, this study asserts that the concept of bisexuality, one of the important features of *écriture féminine*, is also evident in the novel as the author also writes from the perspectives of male characters, Achilles and Patroclus. In that sense, the depiction of male perspective and experience also helps to challenge and undermine the notions of heroism and masculinity that are one of the most persisting elements in Western myths and culture. It is concluded that *The Silence of the Girls* challenges and debunks the age-old patriarchal systems of representation that subdue the female body, voice, perspective, and experience by proposing a new kind of female subjectivity that frustrates the phallogocentric representations of female characters in the works of literature drawing their sources from myths, age-old cultural assumptions, and practices.

Öz

Pat Barker'ın son romanı *Kızların Suskunluğu* (2018), *İlyada Destanı*'ni Akhilleus'un yatak kölesi Briseis'in bakış açısıyla anlatmaktadır. Bu makalenin amacı, *Kızların Suskunluğu* romanını Hélène Cixous'un ilk kez 1975'te yayınlanan "Medusa'nın Gülüşü" adlı makalesinde ortaya attığı bir terim olan dişil yazı (*écriture féminine*) bakış açısıyla incelemektir. Barker'ın *Kızların Suskunluğu* romanında kadın bedeni, kadın deneyimi ve kadın sesi kavramlarını ön plana çıkardığı ve böylece dil ve kültürde egemen ve etkili olan temsil sistemlerini sorunsallaştırdığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Bununla birlikte, dişil yazının önemli özelliklerinden biri olan biseksüellik kavramının bu romanda var olduğu, Barker'ın kadın bir yazar olarak erkek karakterlerden Akhilleus ve Patroclus'un bakış açılarına yer verildiği ileri sürülmektedir. Bu anlamda, erkek karakterlerin bakış açılarının ve deneyiminin tasviri, Batı mitleri ve kültürünün en önemli unsurlarından biri olan kahramanlık ve erkeklik kavramlarına meydan okumaya ve bu kavramları sorunsallaştırmaya yardımcı olur. *Kızların Suskunluğu* romanının, kadın karakterlerin fallus merkezli temsillerini yıkacak bir biçimde "kadın özneliği" ileri sürerek, kadın bedenini, sesini, bakış açısını ve deneyimini boyunduruk altına alan asırlık ataerkil temsil sistemlerine meydan okuduğu ve bunları çürüttüğü sonucuna varılır.

Introduction

"Silence becomes a woman" (Barker, 2019, p. 322) says Briseis in Pat Barker's recent novel *The Silence of the Girls* (first published in 2018) and by saying this, she points to the fate of women in age-old myths, epics, and such stories and accounts celebrating men's glory and valour. Briseis is Achilles' war prize, and she is best known as a woman who caused bitter rows between Achilles and Agamemnon, almost

resulting in Achaeans losing the war. For centuries, Briseis has been deemed to be the reason of Achilles' rage, which "cost[s] the Achaeans countless losses, / hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls" (Homer, 1991, p. 77). Eventually, she has got to rank among the other female characters who are thought to be the reasons of devastating wars, endless quarrels, perished households, and other disasters.

The first word of *The Iliad* is μήνιν (mēnin). It means "rage," "wrath." The opening line of the poem sets the principal theme of the whole story, the rage of Achilles. *The Iliad* begins nine years after the start of the Trojan War with the bard telling the reason of Achilles' rage and his deliberate withdrawal from the war. It is one of the most crucial stages in the course of the war as Achilles' absence from battle crippled the Achaean army very much. According to Homer's version of the story, during the Achaean army's raid on Lyrnessus, a city neighbouring Troy, Briseis, a beautiful queen of the town, is captured and given to Achilles as a bed-slave, concubine. Nevertheless, Achilles is forced to give his own prize of honour to Agamemnon as compensation for Chryseis whom Agamemnon has returned to her father. Chryseis is Agamemnon's concubine, and like Briseis, she has been awarded to Agamemnon by the Achaean army. She is the daughter of Chryses, the priest of Apollo, and it is believed that Apollo brings a terrible plague on the Achaean camp to punish Agamemnon for denying Chryses' plea for his daughter's return. On the tenth day of the plague, Achilles calls an assembly of the Achaean army and invites Calchas, a soothsayer, to reveal the cause of the plague. Offended and humiliated, Agamemnon directs his anger against Achilles and takes Briseis as a replacement for Chryseis. In return, Achilles leaves fighting.

Briseis is one of the central characters in this menacing game between Achilles and Agamemnon, two of the most prominent names in the Achaean army. Yet, the bard just mentions her name in two or three lines at most. It is apparent that her identity is very insignificant both for the bard and his potential listeners and not worth his time. Briseis takes place in this story only as an object, a war prize.

The brilliant runner Achilles lay among his ships,
 raging over Briseis, the girl with lustrous hair,
 the prize he seized from Lyrnessus
 after he had fought to exhaustion at Lyrnessus (Homer, 1991, p. 121).

From Homer, we learn that she is from Lyrnessus, she has lustrous hair, and she is the war prize of “*the brilliant runner*” Achilles. Yet, we know nothing about her life as a bed-slave in the Achaean camp, her emotions, her experiences, and her perspective in relation to the war and aforementioned heroes. As befitting the epic tradition, female characters, except the goddesses, are totally excluded from the story. They have been deemed into an eternal silence.

In *The Iliad*, in “Book 19,” we see Briseis lament over the dead body of Patroclus. In this brief scene of lamentation, Briseis talks about her parentage, how Achilles sacked the city of Mynes and killed her husband and her brothers. In her lament for Patroclus, she reveals that Patroclus has promised to make her Achilles’ lawful and wedded wife and that he has always been kind to her (Homer, 1991, p.497-498). Such a lamentation piques reader’s curiosity about women’s lives, experiences, and motives on the battlefield and under captivity. Of course, *The Iliad* never satisfies such a curiosity as the Homeric plot solely focuses on larger-than-life heroes and their honour, valour, strength, masculinity, and heroism. Nevertheless, apart from Briseis, there are countless female characters in the poem such as Chryseis, Iphis, Diomedea, Helen, Hecuba, Andromache, the women of the royal households, daughters, daughters-in-law, widows, and slaves. All suffer from murder, humiliation, abduction, rape, plague and all the other terrible consequences of wars waged by men. Yet, as female characters, they are just referred to as prizes of honour, spoils of war, concubines, objects of love or rage. Their voices, bodies, perspectives, and experiences are marginalised and deemed unworthy in the world of heroes.

Pat Barker’s latest novel *The Silence of the Girls* retells the events taking place in *The Iliad* from the perspective of Briseis. The aim of this paper is to analyse *The Silence of the Girls* in the light of *écriture féminine*, a term coined by Hélène Cixous in her essay, “The Laugh of Medusa” first published in 1975. It is found out that in her novel, *The Silence of the Girls*, Barker foregrounds the notions of the female body, female voice, and experience, and thus, problematises the dominant and hegemonic systems of representation in language and. Moreover, this study asserts that the concept of bisexuality, one of the important features of *écriture féminine*, is also evident in the novel as the author also writes from the perspectives of male characters, Achilles and Patroclus. In that sense, the depiction of male perspective and experience also helps to challenge and undermine the notions of heroism and masculinity that are one of the most persisting elements in Western myths and culture. It is concluded that *The Silence of the Girls* challenges and debunks the age-

old patriarchal systems of representation that subdue the female body, voice, perspective, and experience by proposing a new kind of female subjectivity that frustrates the phallogocentric representations of female characters in the works of literature drawing their sources from myths, age-old cultural assumptions, and practices.

Écriture Feminine

The myth of snake-haired Medusa is one of the most widely circulated myths in Western culture. There are countless versions of this myth, yet, in the most common version of it, a beautiful maiden, Medusa, is raped by Poseidon in a temple of Athena. Athena, then, directs her anger against Medusa for the violation of her temple and turns Medusa into the monstrous monster that we know today. With her monstrous appearance, snakes in place of hair, and her power to turn onlookers to stone, Medusa is feared, marginalised and forced into silence, isolation and loneliness in the ancient myth. She has always been interpreted as the symbol of sexuality, terror, wrath and punishment since ancient times. In his short essay, “Medusa’s Head”, Sigmund Freud re-reads the myth of Medusa as a symbol of the castration complex. He argues that decapitation is the synonym of castration. He says

[t]he terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something. Numerous analyses have made us familiar with the occasion for this: it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the treat of castration, catches the sight of female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother (Freud, 1997, p. 264).

According to Freud, during the Oedipal Stage of psychosexual development, the male child begins to identify himself with the father on his discovery of the biological difference between the sexes. The biological difference between sexes, the mother’s genitals, conduces to the anxiety in the male child about being castrated. Upon seeing the female genitals, the male child realises that his possession of the penis cannot be taken for granted. Freud brings forth two interpretations concerning Medusa’s head. According to the first interpretation, Medusa’s head represents the female genitals. According to the second one, the snakes in Medusa’s head represent phallic symbols. Freud alludes to the two interpretations of Medusa’s head, and consequently, discusses the two contrasting effects the image produces. On the one hand, Medusa’s head represents the female genitals surrounded by pubic hairs, and this reminds woman’s lack of a penis which threatens the male child and kindles the castration

anxiety in him. Then, Medusa's head becomes "*a representation of woman as a being who frightens and repels because she is castrated*" (Freud, 1997, p. 265). On the other hand, the snakes represent the phallic symbols which "*serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror*" (Freud, 1997, p. 264). According to Freud, Medusa's head makes the onlooker "*stiff with terror*" (Freud, 1997, p. 264). Here, Freud uses the word "stiff" as a synonym of "erection." This offers a kind of consolation to the onlookers: "*he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact*" (Freud, 1997, p. 265).

Following Freud, Lacan proposes that a child's psychosexual development is related to his/her relationship with language. For Lacan, there are three basic stages in the psychological development of human beings. These are the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Lacan argues that upon the separation of the child from the mother, the child enters the Symbolic phase, which also means entering language and accepting the rules of the society. At this point, the child encounters the "name of the father": "*It is in the name of the father that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law*" (Lacan, 2005a, p. 50). It is apparent that the Symbolic order is governed and dominated by the symbolic father, the name of the father. In this Symbolic phase, the male child denies identifying himself with the mother, and he begins to identify himself with the father, who is the representative of the Symbolic and shares the same biology with him. This identification is a path to subjectivity and individuality with the internalisation of the dominant masculine order.

The language in the Symbolic order "*is centered by the Phallus, and that language within the Symbolic Order is representational, where a single signifier is connected to a single signified*" (Klages, 2012, p. 48). For Lacan, phallus is "*not a phantasy,*" or it is not "*the organ, penis or clitoris*" (2005b, p. 218). Though Lacan claims that phallus is not synonym of penis, he foregrounds the fact that phallus is a "privileged signifier":

It can be said that this signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation, and also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is equivalent there to the (logical) copula. It might also be said that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation (Lacan, 2005b, p. 220).

Lacan recalls the relation between the phallus as a signifier and the penis as a male organ by referring to its function in sexual intercourse and in reproduction. According to Lacan, the phallus has a capacity for cultural transmission. Ultimately, the phallus turns out to be a transcendental signifier both displacing and replacing the penis. It also foregrounds the presence of and desire for the penis. The phallus eventually associates the male, the father, with language and culture, the two interrelated notions for Lacan that play a crucial role in a child's becoming a subject, a member of a culture.

The importance of the phallus as a transcendental signifier and the association between the symbolic father and the individualisation make the language phallogocentric. As Cora Kaplan argues:

Lacan emphasizes the crucial importance of language as the signifying practice in and through which the subject is made into a social being. Social entry into patriarchal culture is made in language, through speech. Our individual speech does not, therefore, free us in any simple way from the ideological constraints of our culture since it is through the forms that articulate those constraints that we speak in the first place (1998, p. 56).

In Lacan's formulation, the Symbolic is governed by the symbolic father and the phallus. This makes the language of the Symbolic phallogocentric. Then, within this formulation, language turns out to be an important medium for the articulation of ideological, social, and cultural constraints ordained by the symbolic father and the phallus. As a result, Lacan has been scrutinised and criticised especially by feminist thinkers and writers. From a feminist point of view, "[e]ven though the Lacanian Phallus does not refer to the real father, or the biological organ, this term does underline the idea that the real father, penian part-object, and the phallic differential function are confused in language" (Ragland-Sullivan, 1982, p. 13). The "lack" of any signifier that can be associated with the female subject gives impetus to feminist writers and critics to find new ways that would free the feminine subject from the linguistic and cultural repression of the Symbolic order. It is because

[f]or women the Symbolic means awareness of the self as a subject constituted through an alien –because logocentric and phallogocentric discourse, which depends on pre-ordered naming and categorization. Entry into this state thus destines woman to a position in which she is linguistically marginalised, rendered inactive or mute in speech as well as in social signification. The only way to overcome this verbal

suppression is to speak through a language not dominated by the phallus (Foster, 1990, p. 66-67).

Feminist thinkers and writers, therefore, endeavour to lay bare the workings of phallogentric language that constructs individuals as gendered subjects by prioritising the one over the other, and they try to find new ways of expressing the female body and experience freed from the constraints of phallogentricism.

Hélène Cixous, French feminist critic, novelist, and playwright is one of the key figures of poststructural feminism that questions the phallogentric system of language, Western philosophy and culture. In her works, Cixous problematises Freudian and Lacanian theories of psychosexual development and language. Cixous challenges the theories of Sigmund Freud and his followers, who endeavoured to define female psychology and sexuality by making biological comparisons and with a patriarchal discourse. In “Castration or Decapitation,” first appeared in 1976, Cixous asserts that patriarchal language works in classic oppositions, and it is dualist and hierarchical in nature. Arguing that male and female dichotomy is produced by phallogentric language, and that woman becomes a negative or a complementary term, Cixous thinks that “[m]an/woman automatically means great/small, superior/inferior . . . means high or low, means Nature/History, means transformation/inertia” (1976, p. 44). According to Cixous, the notions of art, religion, family, language, in short, everything that governs us work in hierarchical oppositions, and those oppositions eventually lead us to the man and woman dichotomy.

In a similar vein, she gives the catalogue of binary oppositions in “Sorties,” originally published in 1975. Some of them are “activity/passivity, sun/moon, culture/nature, day/night, father/mother, head/heart, intelligible/sensitive, logos/pathos” (Cixous, 1996, p. 63). She claims that in language, literature, philosophy, religion, criticism, and in any kind of representation and reflection one can recognise these oppositions. One of the opposites is always favoured over the other, and Cixous calls it a “*universal battlefield*” (1996, p. 64). These hierarchical oppositions traditionally tend to associate men with the superior side of these oppositions. Cixous argues that all those hierarchised oppositions eventually lead us to the activity/passivity dichotomy. Cixous claims that “[t]raditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity” (1996, p. 64). While man represents activity, woman represents passivity. Woman is

confined to passivity, to an eternal sleep. There is no other choice for a woman, she is either passive or she does not exist.

In “Sorties”, Cixous also criticises the myths of femininity prevalent in Western culture. She states that in those myths and fairy tales, the female characters are reduced to beautiful, but passive individuals. “*She sleeps, she is intact, eternal and absolutely powerless*” (Cixous, 1996, p. 66). Female characters have been portrayed and depicted as sleeping beauties and in need of a prince-charming to awake them. The narrative traditions have been used to confine women into silence and passivity. For Cixous, phallogentrism is responsible for such confinement:

There is phallogentrism. History has never produced or recorded anything else-which does not mean that this form is destinal or natural. Phallogentrism is the enemy. Of everyone. Men's loss in phallogentrism is different from but as serious as women's. And it is time to change. To invent the other history (Cixous, 1996, p. 83).

She argues against Lacan’s notion of phallus that governs the Symbolic order. Phallogentrism is the common enemy of women and men alike. What she calls for in “Sorties” is to bring about radical transformations in terms of behaviour, mentality, roles, politics, and in terms of our relation to our bodies. Both women and men should be aware of the stereotypically phallogentric representations.

In her seminal essay, “The Laugh of Medusa,” Cixous introduces the concept of *écriture féminine* that can be roughly translated as “feminine writing.” In this essay, Cixous puts emphasis on the female body and female sexuality as it is the body itself that has been the prime object of discussion. Consequently, she urges woman to write her self through her bodily experience to disrupt the phallogentric mechanism of language. She argues that

[w]oman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text- as into the world and into the history- by her own movement (Cixous, 1976, p. 875).

Cixous foregrounds the fact that women have been barred from writing and estranged from their own bodies by the social norms and language governed and dominated by patriarchy. She argues that a woman, in the first place, should call on

all her courage to understand, and then, to describe her own body and sexuality so as to challenge the masculine discourse.

It is impossible for Cixous to define *écriture féminine*. “*It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing*” she argues “*and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded- which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist*” (Cixous, 1976, p. 883). Despite its indefinability, Cixous draws attention to certain characteristics of *écriture féminine*. The first of these is writing the body. Cixous believes that the sexuality of the feminine is rich and polyphonic. Feminine sexuality is not restricted to just one pleasure point, namely the penis. She argues that

[t]hough masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis, engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts, woman does not bring about the same regionalization which serves the couple head/genitals and which is inscribed only within boundaries. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide (Cixous, 1976, p. 889).

Contrary to patriarchal theories that valorise the male body and sexuality, Cixous asserts that feminine sexuality is superior as it is cosmic and has no limits. It does not suffer from a lack of a phallus. For Cixous, anatomy is no longer a restrictive force for a woman. Feminine sexuality is in touch with the unconscious. Cixous asserts that “[h]er libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think” (1976, p. 882). In that sense, it can be argued that *écriture féminine* also brings attention to the relation between power and language; power and writing/storytelling. A feminine discourse reflecting the experiences of women in male-centred culture and language is thought to reform female identity by bringing about a political and social change. Women need to write about their feminine libidinal experiences. This kind of writing, therefore, would enable them to establish uncensored relations with their bodies, getting rid of all the shame and guilt associated with a woman’s body. Then, women would be able to take back “*her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty*” (Cixous, 1976, p. 880).

The second characteristic is the relation of feminine writing with speech and voice. Cixous urges women to speak. By breaking the silence, “*seizing the occasion to speak*” (Cixous, 1976, p. 880), a woman would be able to challenge the rules of the

Symbolic order dominated and governed by the phallus. Woman writer writes as she speaks. A woman's relations to sounds and words come from her mother. By building an analogy between language and voice, Cixous takes us back to the pre-Oedipal relation between mother and child.

It is a phase of imaginary abundance, when there seems no end to bodily extension or pleasures, no division of self and m/other so that a child is able 'to love herself and return in love the body that was "born" to her. . . This for Cixous is the 'song' of the unconscious, giving access to desire, to a repressed memory of first sensuous knowledge of the body as erotic delight, to language as rhythm, sound pattern and intimate presence. It is this song coded into the body's materiality that must inform and shape a feminine practice of writing (Morris, 1993, p. 122).

According to Cixous, the roles of the mother, child, sister, and daughter, all coexist in a woman. "*There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink*" (Cixous, 1976, p. 881). It is the mother "*who makes everything right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation*" (Cixous, 1976, p. 882). Since in every woman there are these traces of mother figure, she should use them as a source of her writing; she should write in white ink in Cixous' term. This is one of the distinctive characteristics of *écriture féminine*. A woman's body is the ultimate source of feminine writing that would undermine the power and authority of phallogocentric discourse.

The third and distinctive aspect of *écriture féminine* is bisexuality. According to Freud, all humans are bisexual when they are born, yet it is thought that "*the mechanisms of the Oedipus and Castration Complexes are supposed to channel this original bisexuality into non-incestuous adult reproductive heterosexuality*" (Klages, 2012, p. 11). Cixous proposes the notion of bisexuality as an escape from a predetermined and unitary sexual identity. She believes that men can produce feminine writing since both women and men share this pre-Oedipal bisexuality. She foregrounds the notion of bisexuality against the "*the false theater of phallogocentric representationalism*" (Cixous, 1976, p. 884). She defines bisexuality as such:

Bisexuality: that is, each one's location in self (*reperage en soi*) of the presence-variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female-of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from this "self-permission", multiplication of the

effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body (Cixous, 1976, p. 884).

Bisexuality can liberate both men and women from phallogocentric dichotomies. Since producing binary oppositions is the most important aspect of phallogocentrism, then, *écriture féminine* proposes bisexuality as an effective way of getting rid of the binaries created by phallogocentric ideologies. “Besides, isn't it evident that the penis gets around in my texts, that I give it a place and appeal?” Cixous exclaims, “Of course I do. I want all. I want all of me with all of him. Why should I deprive myself of a part of us? I want all of us” (1976, p. 891). Thus, she embraces the plurality in human nature and culture.

The most important and perhaps defining characteristic of *écriture féminine* is its being a disruptive and deconstructive force. Cixous asserts that

[w]omen must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence," the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word "impossible" and writes it as "the end" (1976, p. 886).

Cixous invites women writers to overcome the deterministic structures of the Symbolic order and phallogocentrism. Feminine writing is explosive and destructive in essence. Women must “shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter” (Cixous, 1976, p. 888) so as to undermine the deterministic structures of any kind of systems of representation on which the current psychological, philosophical, linguistic, cultural and political orders are built. For Cixous, feminine writing can fly, and she uses the French verb “voler” which means to fly and to steal at the same time. Accordingly, women writers can steal their own bodies, experiences, words, and voices from the yokes of patriarchy by making them soar high above the restraints of it. Likewise, Cixous deconstructs the myth of Medusa by alluding to Freud’s interpretation. She says

Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have

to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly.
She's beautiful and she's laughing (Cixous, 1976, p. 885).

Cixous aims to construct a new sense of female body and identity which is abundant, joyful and benevolent and most importantly a kind of identity that is freed from the age-old assumptions related to male body, sexuality, anxiety and fear. Women do not lack anything. What women must do to stop listening to the sirens, deadly creatures luring people to destruction. Contrary to the general assumptions, those sirens are men. By writing her self, about women and bringing women to writing, women will be able to reclaim their voices, bodies and experiences from the constraints of patriarchy.

Briseis as a Female Bard

The Silence of the Girls opens with a quotation taken from Philip Roth's novel, *The Human Stain* (2000):

'You know how European literature begins?' he'd ask, after taking the roll at the first class meeting. 'With a quarrel. All of European literature springs from a fight.' And then he picked up his copy of *The Iliad* and read to the class the opening lines. 'Divine Muse, sing of the ruinous wrath of Achilles... Begin where they first quarrelled, Agamemnon, the King of men, and great Achilles.' And what are they quarrelling about, these two violent, mighty souls? It's as basic as a barroom brawl. They are quarrelling over a woman. A girl, really. A girl stolen from her father. A girl abducted in a war' (qtd in Barker, 2019).

The Iliad has been passed down through generations, and it is one of the foundational texts in Western literary canon. The quotation draws our attention to the fact that the whole European literature begins with an argument between Agamemnon and Achilles over a woman amid the Trojan War which is told to begin over an elopement of beautiful Helen by Paris, the prince of Troy. In approximately 15.000 lines, there spring up countless names, heroes, the stories of their strength and valour, the images and symbols that are still used today. Along with their lives, experiences, and feelings, even the slightest gestures and mimics of the prominent characters are depicted in detail. They give long speeches. They are very good at explaining themselves, excusing or justifying their conducts and motives. They are not only good fighters but also eloquent orators at the same time. It is the "silence of the girls" in *The Iliad* that urges Barker to give them a voice to tell their own stories. Barker says "I had just read *The Iliad* and was astonished by that silence. The

eloquence of the men, the absolute silence of the women they're quarrelling about" (Barker, 2018). Today, the names of Achilles, Agamemnon, Hector, Paris are known nearly to everyone. But what about Briseis? The central figure of the rage of Achilles, the starting point of *The Iliad*. We know nothing of her experiences, her emotions, her life and her perspective. She is simply referred to as a woman, a girl, a girl abducted in a war. It is because the male bard, the representative of this patriarchal culture ignored her presence and voice.

In *The Silence of the Girls*, Barker debunks one of the most important myths of Western history, exposing its ellipses, unheroic, inhumane, and misogynistic sides by giving voice to the long-silenced, marginalised, abducted, raped, and humiliated female character. Briseis is aware of the fact that her voice will be silenced by the people who are interested in the stories of heroism instead of the brutal realities of war. She says

[w]hat will they make of us, the people of those unimaginably distant times? One thing I do know: they won't want the brutal reality of conquest and slavery. They won't want to be told about the massacres of men and boys, the enslavement of women and girls. They won't want to know we were living in a rape camp. No, they'll go for something altogether softer. A love story, perhaps? I just hope they manage to work out who the lovers were (Barker, 2019, p. 324).

She knows that her experiences in the Achaean camp which she defines as a rape camp will be masked by a love story. It is because the theme of love is one of the effective ways of masking the greed, unkindness, selfishness, and the brutality of the male characters in the epic. In Homer's story, referring to Briseis as "*the bride I love*" (Homer, 1991, p.262). Achilles explains the reason of his rage and withdrawal from the war as such:

...Any decent man,
a man with sense, loves his own cares for his own
as deeply as I, I loved that woman with all my heart,
though I won her like a trophy with my spear. ... (Homer, 1991, p. 263).

In the original story, Achilles reveals his love and affection for his "trophy" girl. It is apparent that though she is the central figure of the quarrel that shapes the whole story in *The Iliad* as well as the whole Western literature, there are no traces of her emotions and experiences in the original story. She is a trophy, a prize of

honour, or rather simply she is “the girl.” As a female bard, however, Briseis puts her self, her voice, her experiences and her body into the text and history along the lines of Cixous statement that “[w]omen must put herself into the text- as into the world and into the history- by her own movement” (1976, p. 875). Though, she follows the Homeric plot, she reveals the “other” side of the coin the bard did not prefer to tell.

In *The Iliad*, Homer uses many epithets to describe the essential qualities of the characters. Thanks to the epithets the bard uses, prominent characters can be introduced without being named. Some of the epithets used to describe Achilles are “brilliant,” “the swift runner,” “the brilliant runner,” “son of Peleus,” “lion-hearted,” “shepherd of people” and “breaking through men.” Mostly, these epithets underline the essential and favourable qualities of the heroes. Briseis begins her narration by subverting what Achilles is famed for. She says “*Great Achilles. Brilliant Achilles, shining Achilles, godlike Achilles... How the epithets pile up. We never called him any of those things; we called him ‘the butcher’*” (Barker, 2019, p. 3). In a way, Briseis invites us to look at the glorified deeds of heroes from a different vantage point, from the vantage point of the defeated and the women.

Women and children are piling up the citadel when Achilles and his men are sacking Lyrnessus. The citadel stinks from the “*smells of sweaty bodies, of milk, baby-shit and menstrual blood*” (Barker, 2019, p. 4). From this tower, Briseis watches how the male population of the town including her brothers and husband are ruthlessly slain and butchered by Achilles and his men. “*I saw Achilles*” Briseis tells “*blood-red from his plumed helmet to his sandalled feet, throw his arm across the shoulders of another young man, laughing in triumph*” (Barker, 2019, p. 14). The women are dragged out and raped repeatedly, boys, if they are near fighting age, are killed in front of their mothers. Pregnant women are also killed “*speared through the belly on the off chance their child would be a boy*” (Barker, 2019, p. 5). Briseis’ narration lays bare the brutalities of war. As a result, “[t]he visceral immediacy of violence and the absence of compassion in the warriors performing the sacking places the reader firmly on the side of the defeated; the *Iliad’s* valiant men lose all their allure when shown indulging in casual brutality” (Curyllo-Klag, 2020, p. 15). *The Iliad’s* heroes lose all their charm when their deeds are told through the eyes of women.

The women of Lyrnessus are transported to Achaean Camp where they undergo a kind of bodily examination. “*Two men, who never spoke except to each other, walked along the line of women, pulling down a lip here, a lower eyelid there, prodding bellies, squeezing breasts, thrusting their hands between our legs*” (Barker,

2019, p. 19). In the camp, the women are assessed for distribution. That is the turning point in Briseis' life as she is stripped of her rank, her title, and most importantly, she is stripped of her individuality. She is allocated to Achilles, the man who has massacred her brothers and husband, as a war prize, a concubine, a bed-slave. Nestor, an old hero of the Achaean army, advises the women to forget about their previous lives. Otherwise, they would be very unhappy. Yet, Briseis has a different plan. She says “[f]orget. So there was my duty laid out in front of me, as simple and as clear as a bowl of water: Remember” (Barker, 2019, p. 20). Remembering is an act of defiance, a revolt against her “forced” destiny. Remembering, and consequently telling her own experiences would be a way of breaking out of the boundaries of his/story. Remembering and telling her own experiences openly also associate Briseis with activity, culture, head, logos, etc., the favourable sides of the binary oppositions that have been traditionally associated with men.

As discussed earlier, Briseis begins her narration by unsettling the image of Achilles as a great, god-like warrior. Her further accounts related to her life in Achilles' hut and her “forced” sexual activities with him add to that debunking process. After being captured and handed over to Achilles, Briseis turns into a “commodity” in the eyes of this male community. She reveals that “[h]e fucked as quickly as he killed, and for me it was the same thing. Something in me died that night” (Barker, 2019, p. 28). She defines her sexual encounter with Achilles in terms of trying out a new purchase. “If his prize of honour had been the armour of a great lord he wouldn't have rested till he'd tried it out” (Barker, 2019, p. 28). She is a slave, a thing, a prize, and Achilles' bed-girl, the name she defines as “the most flattering name” (Barker, 2019, p. 71) for what she is. Briseis' accounts about her sexual encounters with Achilles also reveals the vulnerable aspects of the “great” hero. Achilles is infatuated with Briseis, because her hair smells of the sea just like that of his mother, Thetis, a sea nymph. Briseis tells that Achilles has the habit of sucking her breasts as if he were a starving baby. She mouths that Achilles' mother, the sea nymph Thetis, is angry with the gods who have condemned her to a marriage with a mortal man. Thetis thinks that her marriage and her child, Achilles, are what bind her to the land. Briseis is on the opinion that “it's left its mark on him, that imagined, or remembered, revulsion. He's never found much joy in sex, whether with men or woman. Physical relief, yes” (Barker, 2019, p. 300). It is apparent that throughout his life Achilles wants to be close to her mother and to feel a motherly affection and care. Briseis' account recalls the Oedipus Complex. “He is, first and foremost, the son of Peleus—the name he's known by throughout the army; his original, and always his

most important, title. *But that's his public self. When he's alone, and especially on those early-morning visits to the sea, he knows himself to be, inescapably, his mother's son*" (Barker, 2019, p. 300-301). Thetis deserts Achilles when he is barely seven years old, and therefore, he has never managed to make the transition from boyhood to manhood. Thus, Briseis demystifies the god-like image of Achilles by revealing that "[i]t is a flaw, a weakness; he knows to keep it well hidden from the world" (Barker, 2019, p. 301) under the guise of his armours perhaps.

Contrary to Homer's version of the story, there is no trace of love in the feud between Achilles and Agamemnon. The two men's arrogance, pride and rash behaviours are what have kindled the great quarrel.

She's his prize, that's all, his prize of honour, no more, no less. It's nothing to do with the actual girl. And the pain he feels is merely the humiliation of having his prize stolen from him—yes, stolen—by a man who's his inferior in every way that matters. The cities besieged and sacked, the fighters killed, the whole unrelenting bloody grind of war... And he takes her, just like that. That's what hurts—not the girl—the insult, the blow to his pride (Barker, 2019, p. 117).

Briseis becomes a pawn in this game of power politics. As a result, Achilles withdraws from the war to punish Agamemnon, and the Trojan army begins to drive the Achaean army back to the shore in the absence of Achilles and his men. Then, Briseis' situation has begun to be changed, but not for the better. Previously, she was invisible to all eyes, but now she becomes "the girl" who has caused this quarrel. She ironically says that "[a]nd because of that quarrel, because of me, many souls of young, brave Greek fighters had gone down to Hades—martyred youth and manhood overthrown. Or was it the gods who'd done that? I don't know, I get confused. I only know when they weren't blaming the gods, they were blaming me" (Barker, 2019, p. 124). This underlines the hypocrisy of the phallogocentric society that considers women as objects which can be abused in every possible way. Men need women when they do not want to face the results of their decisions and actions. Briseis openly reveals that Achilles shows his contempt for her when he says he wished she would die at Lyrnessus.

Priam's kissing the hands of Achilles to get Hector's corpse back is considered as one of the most moving scenes of *The Iliad*. Priam, an aged king, shows his great love and respect towards his son, Hector, the renowned hero of the Trojan army. To get his corpse back and to be able to give him a proper funeral, this old man kneels

down before the man who killed his son and kisses the very hands that took Hector's life.

my Hector! It's all for him I've come to the ships now,

to win him back from you-I bring a priceless ransom.

Revere the gods, Achilles! Pity me in my own right,

remember your own father! I deserve more pity...

I have endured what no one on earth has ever done before-

I put to my lips the hands of the man who killed my son (Homer, 1991, p. 604-605).

While reading and interpreting this scene, people have always focused on the notions of grief, suffering, sadness, rage and fatherly affection, the shared and mutual feelings of both Achilles and Priam. Now, Briseis provokes us to interpret this scene from a very different perspective. She says

I could still hear him pleading with Achilles, begging him to remember his own father—and then the silence, as he bent his head and kissed Achilles's hands.

I do what no man before me has ever done, I kiss the hands of the man who killed my son.

Those words echoed round me, as I stood in the storage hut, surrounded on all sides by the wealth Achilles had plundered from burning cities. I thought: *And I do what countless women before me have been forced to do. I spread my legs for the man who killed my husband and my brothers* (Barker, 2019, p. 267, emphasis in the original).

This scene has always been defined as a great sacrifice on the part of Priam. It is because *The Iliad* is all about the experiences, achievements and feelings of male folk composed with a highly phallogentric language. Briseis' interpretation of this scene is, therefore, highly shocking as it lays bare the great sufferings of women that have remained unrecognised and most importantly untold. It is because phallogentric language and culture have ignored women's voices, bodies, and experiences especially at times of war. When Briseis begs Priam to help her escape, Priam protests against the idea by justifying and normalising what Briseis has been enduring under the guise of the notion of war. Briseis puts her self and her body into the text to be able to tell what has been remained untold for centuries.

Throughout her captivity, Briseis has been trying to retain her individuality and her sense of worth through sisterhood and by working as a nurse in the hospital tents of the camp. *“Briseis does not give up and yield to passivity, she does not deny that she is a victim either. . . and she knows that she cannot escape or change her circumstances”* (Lanone, 2020, p. 7). Instead, she works *“within the boundary conditions to rebuild her sense of identity”* (Lanone, 2000, p. 7). She gradually befriends the other women in the camp, namely the prizes awarded by the Achaean army to the kings and heroes. Briseis’ list of women in the camp recalls the Homeric tradition of giving the catalogue of warriors. Hecamede, Nestor’s prize; Uza, Odysseus’ prize; Ritza, Machaon’s prize; Chryseis, Agamemnon’s prize; Tecmessa, Ajax’s prize; Iphis, Patroclus’ prize; and the others such as former concubines, women given to common soldiers, etc. There are countless women in the camp who have seen their sons and/or husbands killed. Their common ground is the violence and oppression they must endure. They all try to help and comfort each other. They all try to survive like the male heroes of the story. Briseis defines the days she spends in the hospital as a “happy time”. She explains: *“I lost myself in that work – and I found myself too. . . I really started to think: I can do this. And that belief took me a step further away from being just Achilles’ bed-girl – or Agamemnon’s spittoon”* (Barker, 2019, p. 140). Briseis’ struggle for representing and defining her self as a subject rather than an object is a struggle throughout the whole novel. The life as a bed-slave in the Achaean camp denies Briseis and other women to embrace the notions of selfhood, motherhood, friendship, and womanhood. Briseis, however, flouts the roles bestowed upon her by taking part in activities other than being Achilles’ bed-slave. Thus, it can be argued that *“in Barker’s revisionist tale, we see these women still making small choices and doing acts which are marks of their empowerment even in their restricted life”* (Sen, 2020, p. 53).

Briseis as a first-person narrator dominates the novel. Nevertheless, in the second and the third parts of the novel, Barker uses third-person narration focusing especially on Achilles, his feelings, and thoughts. As a female author, Barker includes the thoughts and feelings of a male character in her text. This prevents the text from becoming a purely feminine one. The author displays a bisexual mind in depicting Achilles’ thoughts and feelings. Nevertheless, since the main aim of the novel is to display the exploitation, injustice and sexism that take place in patriarchal societies, the bisexuality of the author is a very limited one. Still, the portrayal of Achilles’ grief over Patroclus, for instance, would be an injustice for Achilles if it was conveyed through the vantage point of Briseis. It would be as sexist as Homer’s depiction of

female characters in *The Iliad*. Though limited, the bisexuality of the text undermines the man and woman dichotomy.

The third-person narration, apart from contributing to the construction of the story line, helps in the thorough portrayal of Achilles, who, rather than being an outright boorish and bloodthirsty villainous male for Barker's feminist tale, is also an accomplished musician, a genuine friend, a sincere host, a frightened abandoned child, an adroit leader and a worried father (Sen, 2020, p. 50).

As a result, we have a different portrayal of Achilles than that of Homer. We also have a different Achilles than that of Briseis. Achilles in *The Silence of the Girls* is a more down to earth character who is confused and vulnerable and who has abilities to show genuine concern for his friends and his child. As Cixous argues "[m]en's loss in phallogentrism is different from but as serious as women's" (1996, p. 83). Thus, Barker's third-person narration focusing on Achilles' intimate thoughts and feelings shows glimpses of how phallogentrism reinforces gender and cultural stereotypes in women and men alike.

The notion of motherhood plays a very important role in Briseis' life in the camp. Even before realising her own unexpected pregnancy, Briseis can show motherly affection towards the others. In Chapter 34, for instance, Briseis gives the catalogue of names Achilles has just put to death to avenge Patroclus' death at the hands of Hector, just like Homer does in Book 20 in *The Iliad*. She depicts how Achilles killed Iphition, Demoleon, Hippodamus, Polydorus, Dryopos, Demuchus, Laogonus, Tros, Mulius, Echeclus, Deucalion in detail. Then, she asks a very thought-provoking question: "But you see the problem, don't you? How on earth can you feel any pity or concern confronted by this list of intolerably nameless names?" (Barker, 2019, p. 217). She says that she has met the mothers of some of those names, and she talks about the recollections of those women related to their children when they are babies or small children. After reading the recollections of those mothers, this list of "intolerably nameless names" turns out to be the "Trojan children," "the boys who'd died fighting to save Troy" (Barker, 2019, p. 218). Likewise, while wrapping Hector's dead body, Briseis puts springs of thyme and rosemary between each layer of cloth. It is because she says, "I wanted the women unwrapped him, his mother and his wife, to know that some care and reverence had gone into this, that he hadn't just been sluiced down and bundled up by indifferent hands" (Barker, 2019, p. 274). Briseis has a capacity to show similar concern even to her enemies

while she is working in the hospital tents of the Achaean camp. She sympathizes with them as most of them are very young, hardly more than boys.

Homer's version of the story was "his [Achilles'] story- his anger, his grief, his story" (Barker, 2019, p. 297), Briseis was enslaved in his story, and she had no real part to play in it. Briseis was suffering, she was angry, she was grieving but that did not matter. Now, Achilles is dead, and Briseis is pregnant with Achilles' child. By breaking the age-old silence and telling her own experiences and feelings, Briseis regains her self-esteem and confidence. Moreover, motherhood inspires her for a new beginning as she says "[b]ut then I felt my baby kick. I pressed my hand hard against my belly and I was glad I'd chosen life" (Barker, 2019, p. 323). This self-realisation of Briseis signals a new beginning. She says "[h]is story. His, not mine. It ends at his grave. . . Now, my own story can begin" (Barker, 2019, p. 324). At the end of her story, Briseis emerges as a subject, an individual and decision-maker in her own right. This is not an end to her story; it is a new beginning.

Conclusion

When read through the lens of *écriture féminine*, it is concluded that a female subject's- her voice, experience, feelings, and body- being at the centre, the language embellished with gaps, pauses and strange images, the bisexuality of the text, the notion of motherhood, the text's cyclic form display the use of *écriture féminine* in *The Silence of the Girls*. Briseis, by putting her self and her experiences into the text, aims at bringing about a personal and cultural reformation. Not only Briseis as the narrator of the novel, but also the author and the reader undergo a similar awakening process as well. She tells that when she was a young girl, she was listening to songs with her brothers. She says

The songs were all about deathless glory, heroes dying on the battlefield or (rather less often) returning home in triumph. . . . I thought all the stirring tales of courage and adventure were opening a door into my own future, though few years later- ten, eleven years old, perhaps- the world began to close in around me and I realised the songs belonged to my brothers, not to me (Barker, 2019, p. 57).

None of those songs that are composed with a phallogocentric language and about the deeds of males, the main concern of this patriarchal society, reflect the experiences, perspectives and feelings of females. By telling about "her self," Briseis is trying to walk out of his/story. Moreover, Briseis' narration lays bare the unheroic, inhumane and misogynistic side of a patriarchal society especially uncovering the

terrible consequences of war waged by man. In that sense, Barker's novel invites the reader to muse on the contemporary world. Barker foregrounds the fact that "[n]othing happens in the book that is not happening in the contemporary world. Nothing happens in *The Iliad* that isn't happening in the contemporary world, give or take changes in weaponry, which doesn't make it worse. It just makes it different" (2018). Barker rightfully argues that slavery, rape, and abuse of women were not only the problems of antiquity, but they are also the biggest problems of our contemporary world. What happens in Syria, the ISIS slave markets, sexually assaulted immigrants, etc, these issues are one way or another connected to Briseis' experiences.

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Summary

"Silence becomes a woman" (Barker, 2019, p. 322) says Briseis in Pat Barker's recent novel *The Silence of the Girls* (first published in 2018) and by saying this, she points to the fate of women in age-old myths, epics, and such stories and accounts celebrating men's glory and valour. Briseis is Achilles' war prize, and she is best known as a woman who caused bitter rows between Achilles and Agamemnon, almost resulting in Achaeans losing the war. For centuries, Briseis has been deemed to be the reason of Achilles' rage. Eventually, she has got to rank among the other female characters who are thought to be the reasons of devastating wars, endless quarrels, perished households, and other disasters. Briseis is one of the central characters in this menacing game between Achilles and Agamemnon, two of the most prominent names in the Achaean army. Yet, the bard just mentions her name in two or three lines at most. It is apparent that her identity is very insignificant both for the bard and his potential listeners and not worth his time. Briseis takes place in this story only as an object, a war prize.

Pat Barker's latest novel *The Silence of the Girls* retells the events taking place in *The Iliad* from the perspective of Briseis. The aim of this paper is to analyse *The Silence of the Girls* in the light of *écriture féminine*, a term coined by Hélène Cixous in her essay, "The Laugh of Medusa" first published in 1975. It is found out that in her novel, *The Silence of the Girls*, Barker foregrounds the notions of the female body, female voice, and experience, and thus, problematises the dominant and hegemonic systems of representation in language and culture. Moreover, this study asserts that the concept of bisexuality, one of the important features of *écriture féminine*, is also evident in the novel as the author also writes from the perspectives of male characters, Achilles and Patroclus. In that sense, the depiction of male perspective and experience also helps to challenge and undermine the notions of heroism and masculinity that are one of the most persisting elements in Western myths and culture. It is concluded that *The Silence of the Girls* challenges and debunks the age-old patriarchal systems of representation that subdue the female body, voice, perspective, and experience by proposing a new kind of female subjectivity that frustrates the phallogocentric representations of female characters in the works of literature drawing their sources from myths, age-old cultural assumptions, and practices.

Hélène Cixous, French feminist critic, novelist, and playwright is one of the key figures of poststructural feminism that questions the phallogocentric system of language, Western philosophy and culture. In her works, Cixous problematises Freudian and Lacanian theories of psychosexual development and language. In her seminal essay, "The Laugh of Medusa," Cixous introduces the concept of *écriture féminine* that can be roughly translated as "feminine writing." In this essay, Cixous puts emphasis on the female body and female sexuality as it is the body itself that has been the prime object of discussion. Consequently, she urges woman to write her self through her bodily experience to disrupt the phallogocentric mechanism of language. It is impossible for Cixous to define *écriture féminine*. Despite its indefinability, Cixous draws attention to certain characteristics of *écriture féminine*. The first of these is writing the body. Cixous believes that the sexuality of the feminine is rich and polyphonic. Feminine sexuality is not restricted to just one pleasure point, namely the penis. Feminine writing has no desire to reach the end, it knows no limits. Feminine writing welcomes plurality. As it knows no enclosure or death, then, it becomes repetitious, circular, and open-ended. Feminine body and sexuality present limitless opportunities and sources of inspiration for women writers. The second characteristic is the relation of feminine writing with speech and voice. Cixous urges women to speak. Woman writer writes as she speaks. A woman's relations to sounds and words come from her mother. By building an analogy between language and voice, Cixous takes us back to the pre-Oedipal relation between mother and child. Since in every woman there are these traces of mother figure, she should use them as a source of her writing; she should write in white ink in Cixous' term. This is one of the distinctive characteristics of *écriture féminine*. A woman's body is the ultimate source of feminine writing that would undermine the power and authority of phallogocentric discourse. The third and distinctive aspect of *écriture féminine* is bisexuality. Cixous proposes the notion of bisexuality as an escape from a predetermined and unitary sexual identity. She believes that men can produce feminine writing since both women and men share this pre-Oedipal bisexuality. Bisexuality can liberate both men and women from phallogocentric dichotomies. Since producing binary oppositions is the most important aspect of phallogocentrism, then, *écriture féminine* proposes bisexuality as an effective way of getting rid of the binaries created by phallogocentric ideologies. The most important and perhaps defining characteristic of *écriture féminine* is its being a disruptive and deconstructive force. Cixous invites women writers to overcome the deterministic structures of the Symbolic order and phallogocentrism. Feminine writing is explosive and destructive in essence.

In *The Silence of the Girls*, Barker debunks one of the most important myths of Western history, exposing its ellipses, unheroic, inhumane, and misogynistic sides by giving voice to the long-silenced, marginalised, abducted, raped, and humiliated female character. When read through the lens of *écriture féminine*, it is concluded that a female subject's- her voice, experience, feelings, and body- being at the centre, the language embellished with gaps, pauses and strange images, the bisexuality of the text, the notion of motherhood, the text's cyclic form display the use of *écriture féminine* in *The Silence of the Girls*. Briseis, by putting her self and her experiences into the text, aims at bringing about a personal and cultural reformation. Not only Briseis as the narrator of the novel, but also the author and the reader undergo a similar awakening process as well. By telling about "her self," Briseis is trying to walk out of his/story. Moreover, Briseis' narration lays bare the unheroic, inhumane, and misogynistic side of a patriarchal society especially uncovering the terrible consequences of war waged by man. In that sense, Barker's novel invites the reader to muse on the contemporary world. Barker rightfully argues that slavery, rape, and abuse of women were not only the problems of antiquity, but they are also the biggest problems of our contemporary world. What happens in Syria, the ISIS slave markets, sexually assaulted immigrants, etc, these issues are one way or another connected to Briseis' experiences.