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Refocalization as a Strategy of Apocryphal Rewriting

Abstract

The paper discusses refocalization as a strategy of rewriting in the literary apocrypha (D. Szajnert). Refocalization, that is based on G. Genette and H. Jenkins' conclusions, refers to the shift from the perspective and narrative that dominates canonical works into perspective and narrative predominant in the literary apocrypha of the canonical works. As the subject of research I chose the apocrypha of the Homeric epics (M. Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Ch. Wolf's *Cassandra*) in which patriarchal, omniscient narrative is replaced by perspective and narrative of women marginalized in the epic.

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The following article discusses shifting narrative and perspective from dominating in canonical works (pre-texts) to narrative and perspective that predominates in the literary apocrypha (Szajnert 2000: 144) of these canonical works. I shall call such change a ‘refocalization’, basing on the ideas of Gérard Genette and Henry Jenkins.

The main purpose of this paper is to describe the concept of refocalization and to prove its utility as a strategy of apocryphal rewriting by analyzing the works of fiction in which narrative and perspective changes are pronounced. Such works are, for instance, the apocrypha of the Homeric epics, in which an epic, omniscient and patriarchal narrative is transformed into first-person, subjective narrative from the points of view of women marginalized in *Odyssey* and *Iliad*.

A change of narrative and perspective in the rewritten texts

Apocryphal rewriting of canonical texts always leads to the change of narrative and perspective from which events inspired by the canonical text are retold. That change may be easily observed when, by way of example, the omniscient third-person narrative of the pre-text is replaced by the first-person or personal narrative (free indirect speech) of the character in the literary apocryphon. In this case, the story, known from or inspired by the canonical text, is retold by someone who has “experienced life within” the action of the canonical text, someone whose adventures was earlier observed and told by some other narrator.

The purpose of that narrative change is a critical or affirmative filling the gaps noticed in literary prototype by the author of a new text (that supplement is often a critique or affirmation of the pre-text itself) (Szajnert 2014: 117). An effect of such change is one of the apocrypha’s mutations: “apocryphon — non-canonical text”, according to Danuta Szajnert the text in which “[...] the so-called ‘model realities’ must be left more or less intact (in spite of the sometimes ostentatious contemporaneous changes, for example in the mentality of a character or in the language [...])”¹ (Szajnert 2014: 116).

¹ I shall call an “apocryphon — non-canonical text” a “literary apocryphon” for simplification.

The change of narrative and perspective between pre-text and literary apocryphon may be called ‘refocalization’. Generally speaking, in the theory of literature there are terms such as retelling, rewriting or renarration which define the process of telling or writing the same, canonical story once more. None of them, however, refer to the obligate condition of retelling, rewriting or renarration: a change of the narrative perspective. ‘Refocalization’ elicits this meaning. The term ‘refocalization’ derives from Gérard Genette’s ‘transfocalization’ and Henry Jenkins’ ‘refocalization’. Nonetheless, to clarify both of these terms, the Genettian² narratological conception of focalization needs to be explained.

Palimpsestes’ author considers the focalization to be a consequence of distinction between narrating subject (narrator) and perceiving/experiencing one (character) (Genette 1972: 203; Łebkowska 2004: 221, 226). Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik who discusses Genette’s idea, mentions that “even the narrator, who most strongly identifies himself with the character, may convey information which is out of character’s perceptual [or emotional and intellectual — JD] reach or even conflicts with hero’s abilities of reception of the sensual data” (Rembowska-Pluciennik 2007: 54). Such incoherency depends on a worldview and a manner of storytelling typical for the times in which literary work is created.

It is vital to note that “even the narrator who most strongly identifies himself with the character” for the same reason may not convey some information concerning perception, emotions and knowledge of the character (both, following comment and Rembowska-Pluciennik’s aforementioned remark will be significant for the refocalization). Hence, focalization³

theorizes relations between two aspects of the point of view category: between the worldview implications of narrative act and the economy of the world perception mechanism [as well as reasoning and emotional reactions — JD] exposed in narrative (Rembowska-Pluciennik 2007: 52).

While, according to Gérard Genette, transfocalization is one of “the potential transformations of the narrative mode”:

Last, a focalized narrative can be *transfocalized* [author’s emphasis]. For example, *Madame Bovary* might be rewritten and Emma’s viewpoint displaced by extending to the whole novel the focalization on Charles found in the first few chapters; or by adopting Léon’s or Rodolphe’s viewpoint [...], or that of some well-placed observer whose *Weltanschauung* might work wonders here: Homais comes to mind, of course, or Bournisien. (Genette 1997: 287)

However, since Genette refers his concept⁴ not only to aforementioned (unwritten) versions of *Madame Bovary* (which probably should be considered to be literary apocrypha), but also to Honoré de Balzac’s study of Stendhalian *La Chartreuse de Parme* “almost entirely fo-

² I shall not discuss Mieke Bal’s concept of focalization, due to its low usefulness for refocalization (cf. subchapter: *Focalization* in: Bal 2009: 145–164).

³ Due to the fact that Genette’s typology has been discussed by a number of researchers, I only want to note that *Figures*’ author mentions three types of focalization. *Focalization zero* (or nonfocalized narration) (Genette 1972: 206), which may be equated to an omniscient narration, *internal focalization* — when narrator knows and tells as much as “the character knows and sees [trans. J. D.]” (Łebkowska 2004: 221) — and *external focalization* when narrator “reveals less information than character has” (Łebkowska 2004: 221).

⁴ It is vital to note that in addition to the ‘transfocalization’, Genette proposes the term ‘transvocalisation’ (Genette 1997: 213–214): “a first-person narration can be *transvocalized* into a third-person narration or vice versa” (*Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* 2005: 613). In the following article I am not referring to that term in order to stay focused on the one issue.

cused not on Fabrice but on Gina, and incidentally on Mosca” (Genette 1997: 243), the term needs to be narrowed, by replacing prefix ‘trans-’ by ‘re-’, in order to name only one type of strategy, that one which leads to apocryphal rewriting. Such operation enables distinguishing ‘refocalization’ from other forms of transfocalization, for these may include not only hipertextuality (e.g. literary apocrypha), but also metatextuality (Genette 1997: 4) (e.g. aforementioned Balzac’s article on Stendhal’s novel). With such replacement (‘re-’ instead of ‘trans-’), ‘refocalization’ denotes more clearly and more precisely an operation of repeated (another, new) focalization⁵ in the literary apocryphon. Moreover, change of prefix makes ‘refocalization’ similar to other terms which define effects of literary recycling: e.g. renarration, reinterpretation, retelling or rewriting.

Thus, in the literary apocrypha refocalization is a displacement/redefining of narrative instances, those “who see” and those “who speak” (Łebkowska 2004: 221, 226) in the canonical work and its new version. It is a change of the perspective and narrative from (for example) external (if in the pre-text predominates the third-person, omniscient narration with focalization zero) to perspective and narrative of (for example) character who (as it was aforementioned) “experienced” the life “within” the pre-textual action. This may be also applied to the texts in which character who is absent in pre-text becomes the narrator (for example in the John Maxwell Coetzee’s *Foe*, narrator is Susan Barton, character who does not appear in *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*) and presents different version of story narrated in the original.

Yet, the term “focalization” may be broadened and simplified to concentration on the particular character in the original (Odysseus in the *Odyssey* for instance). In this approach, “refocalization” is repeated focusing on a character from the pre-text in the literary apocryphon and adopting character’s perspective⁶. It has to be noted that in the pre-text the character⁷ is often portrayed one-dimensionally and/or marginalised (due to worldview).

Such extension (and simplification) of the concept allows adding texts, in which narration and focalization in (basic) Genettian meaning does not appear because of the generic reasons (drama for instance), to the collection of the literary works in which the characters

⁵ In addition, Genette mentions other (than transfocalization) “transformations of narrative mode”: “[a]n initially ‘omniscient’ — i.e., nonfocalized — narrative could be focalized at will on one of its characters: *Tom Jones* on Tom, for example, or, more perversely, on Sophie, etc. Conversely, a focalized narrative such as *What Maisie Knew* could be defocalized so as to inform its readers of all that the hypotext kept hidden from them” (Genette 1997: 287). In this paragraph *Palimpsestes*’ author calls “focalization zero” a nonfocalized narrative. Since both forms are approved (Genette 1972: 206), if it is necessary, I shall use the term “focalization zero” due to the fact that it is impossible (?) to refocalize “nonfocalized” narration.

⁶ Due to the fact that Genette himself blurs the distinction between ‘focalization’ and ‘point of view’ [as he writes: “[...] narrative ‘point of view’ or, as the French now put it, the *focalization* [author’s emphasis] of the narrative”; (Genette 1997: 287)], we may call the new perspective, that new ‘point of view’, a ‘point of re-view’. Prefix ‘re-’ potential and a number of meanings of word ‘review’ makes that term useful for apocrypha analysis. Furthermore, ‘point of re-view’ corresponds with understanding of ‘re-vision’ featured by Adrienne Rich in renowned text *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision* (Rich 1972): “Re-vision” is “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich as cited in Wilson 1999: 2). Nonetheless, I do not equate ‘refocalization’ with ‘point of re-view’, since I call ‘refocalization’ a change of perspective in literary apocryphon (hence, an operation enabling retelling or renarration of pre-text). I give the examples of ‘point of re-view’ usage in brackets.

⁷ Within one novel may appear a refocalization on more than one character. E.g. in *The Penelopiad* canonical story is retold not only by Penelope, but also by hanged maids, while in the Colleen McCullough’s *Song of Troy* there are stories of i.a. Helen, Paris or Priam (first-person narrative).

may be refocalized. From this point of view, Karel Čapek's *Goneril, Daughter of Lear* or Margaret Atwood's *Gertrude Talks Back* would be works with refocalization too⁸.

It has to be highlighted that the term “refocalization”⁹ appears in Henry Jenkins' classification of the fan fiction, among “Ten Ways to Rewrite a Television Show”¹⁰ (Jenkins 2013: 162–177). Taking into consideration the concept of Jenkins, a change of the prefix from trans- into re- seems to be a logical solution.

It is vital to note that Jenkins' refocalization “occurs when fan writers move the focus of attention from the main protagonists to secondary figures” (Storey 2006: 163). With this change of focus

fan writers reclaim female experiences from the margins of male-centered texts, offering readers the kinds of heroic women still rarely available elsewhere in popular culture; their stories address feminist concerns about female autonomy, authority, and ambition. (Jenkins 2013: 167)

Quoted observation shows that the character's experience, ignored in pre-textual film or TV series because of the domination of a certain worldview (here: androcentrism), with (Jenkins') refocalization in fan fiction becomes a focus of attention and (here: feminist) reflection. Thus refocalization — as Genette has it — “works wonders”.

The term Jenkins applies only to the fan fiction inspired by screen media also refers to the literary apocrypha. In the pre-text — as it was mentioned before — narrator who tells the story of a certain character may convey an inadequate information and/or omit part of hero's perception, emotions or knowledge, because of the “the worldview implications of a narrative act” (Rembowska-Pluciennik 2007: 52).

With refocalization, the fragments of narrative imprecision in pre-text may be exposed/clarified/corrected in the literary apocryphon and imprecision itself — criticized. It has to be emphasized that such exposure, clarification, correction and critique are possible not only by adopting the perspective of the character, but also by giving the character a new worldview and (naturally¹¹) a modern mentality (Szajnert 2000: 146) (the character finally knows what he or she needs to criticize).

Moreover, according to Danuta Szajnert: “every apocryphon, at least such that evidently refers to some original text, possesses a critical and subversive potential [author's emphasis]” (Szajnert 2014: 117). With such “subversive potential” exposure, clarification, correction and

⁸ Apocrypha themselves may also take the form of drama (e.g. Karel Čapek's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* or Howard Barker's *Judith: A Parting from the Body*) or lyric poetry (e.g. Wisława Szymborska's *A Soliloquy for Cassandra*, Zbigniew Herbert's *Elegy of Fortinbras* or some poems from Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* collection). However, I am not sure if apocrypha in the form of drama or lyric poetry should be considered to be texts with refocalization, due to generic reasons. Moreover, if in the lyric poetry lyrical subject takes the role of character known from mythology or from canonical literary text, such poetic apocryphon may be classified as “persona poetry”. On the other hand, dramatic or lyrical apocrypha are also — in some way — refocalized.

⁹ Susanna Braund in her study “*We're here too, the ones without names*” uses the term “refocalization” (Braund 2012: 197) and a verb “to refocalize” (Braund 2012: 195, 202), but she does not define it or refer it to any academic text.

¹⁰ It has to be mentioned that Henry Jenkins seems to use the term ‘refocalization’ omitting Genette's transfocalization (or — in general — focalization). The surname of French theorist is not listed in the *Textual Poachers* bibliography (Jenkins 2013: 315).

¹¹ In contemporary literary apocryphon a character must have modern mentality, as well as modern worldview: there is no other possibility, since the text is modern too.

critique may be used to present the particular worldview. Furthermore, the author of *The Subversive Potential of an Apocryphon* claims that

[t]he apocryphon is the ideal environment for all kinds of literary discourses on “post-dependency”. No ready-made form offers better conditions to transfer and distort the meanings traditionally attributed to the constructions erected by some inferior Others, including women, because only this form creates such an illusion that makes us believe that the distortion takes place precisely where these constructions are being crystallized — according to the rule that literary works at the same time produce and imitate various cultural *clichés* connected with the mechanisms of power and exclusion. (Szajnert 2014: 118)

Thus, partly by analogy to Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik’s “sensory focalization”, refocalization (based on “literary discourses on ‘post-dependency’”) may be e.g. class refocalization (e.g. perspective of twelve hanged maids from the *Odyssey* in *Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood) or sex/gender¹² refocalization (e.g. perspective of Cassandra in Christa Wolf’s novel, of Susan Barton in *Foe*¹³, of Penelope in *Penelopiad*; this category also includes — for obvious reasons — the perspective of hanged maids too).

Although the term ‘refocalization’ does not necessarily refer to the feminist literary apocrypha¹⁴, in the following article — as I mentioned before — I am focusing on shifts from male to female perspective. Refocalization seems to be the clearest precisely when (stereotypical) masculine point of view is replaced by (stereotypical) female point of (re)view as I will try to demonstrate in further analysis of Atwood’s and Wolf’s texts.

From an epic hero to the character-narrator of literary apocryphon of epic

The literary apocrypha of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in which one of the pre-textual characters becomes narrator are good background material for analyzing the issue of refocalization. In such works the change of dominant, omniscient, and “objective” narrative and perspective in epic into “subjectivised” narrative and perspective of a character who “experienced” pre-textual events is explicit. That shift is clear due to the changing status of an epic hero or heroine in literary apocryphon. In epic, characters are locked in the world of “absolute epic distance” (Bachtin 1970: 211) and they are its victims observed by an omniscient narrator and work’s reader from the distant future (Bachtin 1970: 212).

¹² I am not choosing gender instead of sex (or vice versa) refocalization, for it is often hard to decide whether the “new” perspective is or is not based on behavior and features stereotypically attributed to certain sex (e.g. in Coetzee’s *Foe* Susan Barton feels empathy with Friday, Wolf’s Cassandra is pacifist). The concept of a “gender perspective” appears in Inga Iwasiów’s book. She calls mode of Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* a “simultaneous’ gender perspective” (Iwasiów 2008: 142).

¹³ In the *Foe*, refocalization (a shift from Crusoe’s perspective to Susan Barton’s) enables mainly the formation of a new, different (from Defoe’s) vision of Friday, therefore, it is an instrument of postcolonial critique of the *Robinson Crusoe*. Nevertheless, the story is retold from the point of view of a woman and the events or characters from Crusoe’s island are filtered through her consciousness, hence, refocalization in the *Foe* is an example of sex/gender refocalization, not an example of race (?) focalization.

¹⁴ Eliza Szybowicz devotes a subchapter of her book *Apokryfy w polskiej prozie współczesnej* [*Apocrypha in Contemporary Polish Prose*] to broadly defined feminist apocrypha (Szybowicz 2008: 56–74).

Perhaps, there may be some truth in a statement that epic heroes and heroines have to be unchangeable (Skwarczyńska 1947: 164) and idealized carriers of fundamental values attributed to them by the omniscient narrator and certain cultural standards. Generally speaking, Stefania Skwarczyńska may have a point when she claims that in the epic “hero does not have the personality” (Skwarczyńska 1947: 161).

In literary apocrypha the epic characters gain the personality which allows them to undertake the discussion with pre-text and enables them an attempt to distance themselves from their one-dimensional image in epic. Letting heroes and heroines speak results in presentation of their “unofficial version” of epic, a story retold from their point of (re)view, a story which includes their experience(s) ignored in the pre-text.

In two aforementioned apocryphal novels inspired by epic — *Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood and Christa Wolf’s *Cassandra*¹⁵ — appears the sex/gender refocalization, a change from patriarchal perspective of epic narrator who is focused on male heroes (in the epic it is easy to find features of narrative Inga Iwasiów calls “ideologically misogynistic”, with “male focus”¹⁶) to perspective of women who are subordinated to male narration. In both novels, female narrators are trying to show women’s experience omitted in pre-text or covered by the stories about brave warriors, men who are supported by omniscient, patriarchal narrative.

In the *Penelopiad*, refocalization involves Odysseus’ mythical wife, Penelope, who is presented one-dimensionally by Homer. In spite of the fact that the image of that character established in *Odyssey* is rather positive (“faithful Penelope”, “wise Penelope”), she is perceived in the light of her husband only. Homer’s limiting presentation of the woman is caused by model of focalization valid in epic and narrative with dominant male perspective (Doherty 2011) focused on Odysseus, his significant actions, his flair in defeating enemies and his spectacular love affairs.

In *Penelopiad*, narrator’s point of (re)view includes her knowledge and experiences ignored in the epic. It is also supplemented by Penelope’s modern mentality and self consciousness, and the Bakhtinian “absolute epic distance” is replaced by self-distance. Penelope decides that she will tell her story from a safe position only — thus, she speaks after her death, “from an enormous temporal distance” (Szajnert 2014: 121), through a prosopopoeia.

The simplest manifestation of the refocalization in Atwood’s novel is a juxtaposition of the particular scene from the *Odyssey* with the same scene (re)viewed from the Penelope’s perspective. A prominent example of that kind of refocalization is an excerpt in which narrator recounts Odysseus and Eurycleia recognition scene:

¹⁵ It should be noted that there is a huge amount of literary apocrypha inspired by Homeric epic [they are mentioned i.a. in the canonical study on *Odyssey* — William Bedell Stanford’s *The Ulysses Theme* (Stanford 1992)]. Perhaps, one of the most recognizable twentieth-century rewriting of the *Odyssey* from the woman’s perspective is Robert Graves’ *Homer’s Daughter* (1955). That novel refers to Samuel Butler’s idea that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman (Clayton 2004: 2–3). Events of Graves’ novel take place two hundred years after Homer’s death. The main character and narrator is young woman named Nausicaa (her adventures resemble an amalgam of fates of Homeric Penelope and Homeric Nausicaa), who turns out to be the authoress of nineteen books of the epic (in Graves’ novel, first five books of the *Odyssey* and the entire *Iliad* are still attributed to Homer).

¹⁶ Such narrative includes i.a. “focusing on male character, male narrator who tells the story of male experiences, objectification of a female character who does not get a voice [...]” (Iwasiów 1998: 168).

[t]he songs say I didn't notice a thing because Athene had distracted me. [...] In reality [emphasis added] I'd turned my back on the two of them to hide my silent laughter [...] (Atwood 2005: 140–141).

Refocalization allows to notice element skipped in the pre-text, element which shows heroine's self-reliance, her responsibility for her own actions and her independence from *la force majeure* (not only the goddess, but also the *Odyssey's* narrator, who — focused on the recognition scene — “skipped” the “real” cause of Penelope's reaction). In this case, refocalization, plays mainly a function of broadening the knowledge about represented world and “sharpens” the background elements.

Next and much more complicated manifestation of refocalization is the exposure of narrator's feminist consciousness. It helps Penelope to reveal the anti-woman oppressiveness of *Odyssey's* times cultural standards. Odysseus' wife e.g. calls the wedding night “a sanctioned rape” (Atwood 2005: 44) that makes bridesmaid “torn apart as the earth is by the plough” (Atwood 2005: 42). She also presents her experiences, mainly humiliation caused by treating her like a piece of meat [„so I was handed over [...] like a package of meat [...]”, „[the suitors] were like vultures when they spot a dead cow” (Atwood 2005: 39, 103)] and she tells about limiting her to her dowry [„where I was, there would be the treasure” (Atwood 2005: 27)]. By revealing her experiences, Penelope displays insignificance of women's existence, their subservience and the inherency of men's cruelty in their lives (the wedding night example). Hence, refocalization allows the change of the image of queen who is visibly subordinated to the husband in the epic. In *The Penelopiad* Penelope is critical and shrewd. She finally notices (and comments) disadvantages of being women in the times of the *Odyssey*.

Refocalization helps to filter opinions about the mythical heroes who appear in the Homer's work through the narrator's emotions and mentality, and leads to presentation of the “real” relations between the characters. With change of the perspective Penelope e.g. exposes one-sidedness and superficiality of her far-famed marriage. She critically refers to her affection for Odysseus in her lifetime:

By the time the morning came Odysseus and I were indeed friends [...]. Or let me put it another way: I myself had developed friendly feelings towards him — more than that, loving and passionate ones — and he behaved as if he reciprocated them. Which is not quite the same thing. (Atwood 2005: 48)

Whereas her contacts with Telemachus in Atwood's novel resembles actual mother-child relationship (nonetheless, presented stereotypically). From the one side, the narrator infantilizes Telemachus by reprimanding him and by calling him “barely more than a child” (Atwood 2005: 127). From the other side, she notices the “bond which is supposed to exist between mothers and fatherless sons” (Atwood 2005: 132) between her and Telemachus, the bond that exists due to hard experience Odysseus' wife and son share. With highlighting that “bond”, the modern perspective of a single parent is revealed. That perspective supplements one-dimensional image of Penelope, who, in the *Odyssey*, is focused only on being faithful wife.

However, in *Penelopiad* not only Penelope presents the new version of *Odyssey* from her point of (re)view. Part of the epic story is also retold by twelve maids, lovers of queen's suitors, humiliated by Odysseus and hanged upon his instructions. Maids counterpoint eponymous character's utterances¹⁷. Their (as well as Penelope's) lines are based on prosopopoeia. Twelve women begin to speak after their death, "from an enormous temporal distance" (Szajnert 2014: 121) as Penelope: Susanne Jung states that "death serves as the great equalizer, eliminating class differences between the maid servants and Odysseus and Penelope" (Jung 2014: 49). Twelve maids speak from a distance, because earlier they did not have an opportunity: in the *Odyssey* they were not treated as full-fledged characters due to their social background. According to Erich Auerbach "[...] in the Homeric poems life is enacted only among the ruling class [...], nothing ever pushes up from below" (Auerbach 1953: 21). Atwood gives twelve maids voices, although, as a matter of fact, they are still not on an equal footing with Penelope. In *Penelopiad* queen speaks in "classical" manner, she is the subject of "main narrative, a prose monologue" (Jung 2014: 43), while her servants' utterances "employ a range of poetic genres, from nursery rhyme to sea shanty to ballad and idyll [...]" (Jung 2014: 41). Moreover, they ironically re-interpret titles or genres of some of their lines [e.g. in "We're Walking Behind You, a Love Song" maids promise Odysseus: "we'll never leave you" (Atwood 2005: 193) — which is not a vow of love, but of everlasting punishment]. They are also "fooling around" e.g. in sailors' disguise, presenting "a summary of Homer's *Odyssey*" (Jung 2014: 51) in "The Wily Sea Captain, A Sea Shanty" or by "passing the hat" after singing "A Popular Tune" (Atwood 2005: 53)¹⁸. Perhaps, such "estrangement" (Shklovsky 1990: 6) is the only way to make speech of maids (as representatives of the lowest social stratum) audible and to draw attention to their inferiority (so insignificant was their experience that, unlike Penelope, they cannot present their story in "conventional" way, it is "not worth" saving in long and coherent narration).

Thus, in case of maid servants, refocalization shifts from the "ruling class" point of view to the perspective of those "from below" (class refocalization, but also aforementioned sex/gender refocalization). That change of perspective allows servants not only to express their experiences ignored in the pre-text, but also to emphasize their bad social condition.

With refocalization, the ideal images of epic heroes and heroines may be filtered through the servants' emotions and therefore demythologized. Such demythologization perfectly exposes the twelve maids' lack of privileges. Despite the fact the protagonist in *Odyssey* behaves much more immorally than servants, he is not duly punished. On the contrary, he is glorified and admired as a hero, whereas twelve slaves are hanged and condemned because of their affairs with suitors. Such injustice shows servants' unprivileged position emphasized in Atwood's novel.

¹⁷ It is worth signaling that eponymous character's utterances need to be counterpointed due to the fact that Penelope, in her narration, presents not entirely credible version of the circumstances which led to twelve maids' death. Although I am not focusing on relations between servants' and Penelope's testimonies (such analysis may be found in Kiley Kapuscinski article; Kapuscinski 2007), information about Penelope's ambiguity is important due to the fact that "earlier representation of Penelope [...] as a manipulator and victimiser" appears in Atwood's cycle *Circe/Mud Poems* (Kapuscinski 2007). Study on Penelope's representations in Atwood's poems preceding *The Penelopiad* was written by David Buchbinder (Buchbinder 1988: 122–141).

¹⁸ Much more accurate, thorough and careful analysis of generic aspects of maids' songs in Atwood's novel may be found i.a. in Susanne Jung's (Jung 2014) or in Kifah Ali Al Omari's and Hala Abdel Razzaq Jum'ah's (Omari, Jum'ah: 2014) articles.

In the fragment of *Penelopiad* (corresponding to the Book XXII of the *Odyssey* and the scene of washing suitors' blood by maids at the behest of Odysseus), twelve heroines say:

we knelt in water
while you stared
at our bare feet
it was not fair
you licked our fear
it gave you pleasure

(Atwood 2005: 6).

In the Odysseus' (who enjoys this exceedingly cruel punishment) degrading gaze there is a bit of erotic humiliation: twelve women feel man's eyes on their "bare feet" and "licking their fear" gives him "pleasure".

Maids' sense of the Odysseus' gaze is an excellent manifestation of refocalization in *Penelopiad*. A change from the vision of emotionless hero punishing women in the *Odyssey* to Atwood's version (in which on the foreground there is twelve maids' suffering juxtaposed with epic hero's cruelty) is not only a trivial correction and contestation of the official version. With refocalization servants may expose their abasement omitted in the pre-text and show Odysseus' brutality "hidden" in the epic. Thus, refocalization reveals the most important element of twelve maids' experience: it is, paradoxically, a sexual subordination to (wellborn) men, presented in the epic too.

With refocalization, servants may also present a story of their ancestry and childhood. It has to be highlighted that unlike noble protagonists of the epic (or mythology), twelve maids do not have memorable and respectable genealogy, their roots are insignificant in the *Odyssey*. In the Atwood's novel, slaves try to reconstruct their histories (or herstories¹⁹).

However, any attempt shows that twelve women may only assimilate the manner well born men insulted them: every word maids heard about themselves in the childhood has become a part of their experience, has been filtered through their consciousness (in a way — subversively internalized) and — finally (for in the pre-text it was impossible) — revealed: "[w]e were told we were motherless. We were told we were fatherless" (Atwood 2005: 13).

In the next part of quoted maids' utterance, there is an excerpt in which "subversive internalization" of well born men's manner of speaking by twelve slaves is conspicuous: "[w]e were told we were lazy. We were told we were dirty. We were dirty. Dirt was our concern, dirt was our business, dirt was our specialty, dirt was our fault" (Atwood 2005: 13). It is illustrated by the shift from "We were told we were dirty" to "We were dirty". "Subversive internalization" means maids' disclosure of performative language of well-born:

¹⁹ The feminist term 'herstory' (as opposed to history) refers to the writing of history from the perspective of women. It may also refer to the "retrieval" of women's stories from "male" history which underestimates them. For the first time (?), this concept appeared in Robin Morgan's writing, i.a. in her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970). Morgan writes about growing consciousness and commonness of the Women's Liberation Movement: "[...] It is frightening. It is very exhilarating. It is creating history, or rather, *herstory* [...]" (Morgan as cited in Hogeland 1994: 299). In *Womanwords: A Dictionary of Words about Women*, Jane Mills writes that "[t]he feminist who use" this term "do so, not to annoy, but to make political point that history almost inevitably means his story, so herstory becomes the female equivalent" (Mills 1992: 118). In general, Maggie Humm in the *Dictionary of Feminist Theory* defines 'herstory' as "women's history. The theory of, and documentation about, past and contemporary lives, groups, language and experience of women" (Humm as cited in Looser 2000: 205).

In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned [...]. [B]y being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence [emphasis added], initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call (Butler 1997: 2);

language (oppressive and stigmatizing) which, in the times of the *Odyssey*, constructed them (and, arguably, they were not aware of such “construction”). With “taking up the name [they were] called” (Butler 1997: 163), maids also adopt the model of behavior assigned in the times of the *Odyssey* to women of their social stratum. Servants begin to see themselves as “the dirty girls”, not only in a physical, but also in a moral way: they are sexually abused by their “owners or the sons of [their] owners or a visiting nobleman or the son of a visiting nobleman” [Atwood 2005: 13-14]; they cannot resist because of their low social origin.

In *The Penelopiad* not only Penelope, but also twelve servants take the opportunity to speak and attempt to present their individual stories, dominated earlier by epic narration focused on “male” story of Odysseus. Although, it is thought-provoking that the *Odyssey* was considered, by great amount of scholars, to be “feminine”, due to its “strong female presence” (Clayton 2004: 9) of women (Circe, Calypso, Penelope) who are portrayed as “industrious housewives” (Wright as cited in Clayton 2004: 9). However, its “femininity” is one of the factors which make the *Odyssey* — as Barbara Clayton paraphrases Homerists — “the lesser poem”, “a poem that is neither as profound, nor as forceful as the *Iliad*” (Clayton 2004: 3, 4). Perhaps, that “strong [stereotypical — JD] female presence” in the *Odyssey* is one of the elements which enable epic’s feminist contradictory refocalization in the *Penelopiad*.

And how refocalization may be carried out in rewriting of the *Iliad*, an epic in which women (with some exceptions) are barely elements of the background?

In Christa Wolf’s *Cassandra*, refocalization involves eponymous character, prophetess, one of Priam’s daughters marginalized in the *Iliad*. Cassandra retells the story of Trojan War from her point of (re)view. Wolf’s novel refers to the event (war) which is important to the whole society (the Trojans and the Greeks) — this is the result of the specifics of *Cassandra*’s pre-text, the *Iliad*²⁰ which concentrates on Trojan War. What is more, Christa Wolf in *A Work Diary, About the Stuff Life and Dreams are made of* notes that:

As for the *Iliad*, it was the first known attempt to impose a standard of human emotion on a bare chronology ruled by the law of battle and carnage. That standard: the wrath of Achilles. But the line the narrator pursues is that of male action. Everyday life, the world of women, shines through only in the gaps between the descriptions of battle. (Wolf 1988a: 233)

Therefore, Wolf’s unofficial version of Trojan War is intended to be a presentation of more complete image of “everyday life” and “the world of women”. It is an attempt to display microhistory, a “story of the private microworlds” (Domańska 1999: 58) and everything else what has been omitted in the “masculine” versions of Trojan War history. Moreover, Wolf’s novel written from prophetess’s point of (re)view is a precise and critical supplement and comment on stories, events and heroes idealized in the epic. It has to be mentioned

²⁰ Despite the fact that Wolf constructed her novel using several works in which Cassandra appears (e.g. *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus; see Wolf 1988c: 143–181), I consider the *Iliad* the most important pre-text of *Cassandra*, for in both, Wolf’s novel and Homer’s epic, the Trojan War theme is predominant.

that Wolf's Cassandra, as a subject of experience, is both a woman (ignored in the pre-text because of her gender) and a citizen of Troy, a representative of beaten people underestimated in the *Iliad*.

Through Cassandra's refocalization, reader of Wolf's novel finds out that beyond "male" war under the city walls, there is a parallel "idyllic" world of women (both, well-born and lowborn), who leave the city centre (culture) to reach the periphery (nature) and live in cave:

Who would believe us [...] if we told them that in the middle of the war we used to meet regularly outside the fortress? That we [...] used to discuss the situation [in Troy] but also to cook, eat, drink, laugh together, play games, learn? (Wolf 1988b: 52)

According to Jean Wilson "Cassandra, supported by the 'transnational culture' of the cave community, resists an identity based on false alternatives: »Between killing and dying there is a third alternative: living«" (Wilson 1999: 7). However, it is worth emphasizing that the female parallel world is an ostensible idyll. Women meet outside the city because of political situation only: in the face of "the ravages of war women are always victims"²¹ (Czarnecka 2004: 193).

Apart from the refocalization which supports presentation of an unofficial history of women during the Trojan War, in the Wolf's *Cassandra* there is also an exceptional fragment in which two-level refocalization appears:

[...] knowing that Hector was entering the battlefield, and knowing that he was being killed. I do not know how it happened; no one was ever allowed to tell me about it [...]. I experienced the whole of Hector's fight, his wounding, his tenacious resistance, and his death. It is not too much to say that I *was* Hector [...]. Achilles the brute stabbed him to death, stabbed me to death; mutilated him, fastened him on to his chariot by Ajax's sword-belt, dragged him many times around the fortress. I was, living, what Hector became dead: a chunk of raw meat. (Wolf 1988b: 112)

First of all, it is clear that in quoted fragment (as in the whole novel) prophetess retells the epic story from her point of (re)view (since the action of the *Iliad* is focused on Achilles, his fight with Hector has to be one of the most important incidents in the Homer's work). The duel of two heroes is filtered through Cassandra's prophetic consciousness (despite the fact that narrator does not observe men's fight personally) and through her feelings (Hector is brother of eponymous heroine). Secondly, Cassandra's hyperbolized empathy (associated with her ability to hear the future) allows her to experience Hector's suffering and emotions during his clash with Achilles. The narrator who "*was* Hector" and who presents her brother's experiences in her story, in a sense refocalizes Hector by making his point of view and his "point of feel" (temporarily) observable.

²¹ Fates of women during and after war presented in mythology and classical Greek sources (or works inspired by them) are calamitous. Women are not only left by their beloved (i.a. Penelope, Clytemnestra), not only witness their loved ones' death and not only are taken as captives (i.a. Hecuba, Andromache, Briseis). They are also victims of defilement (i.a. Cassandra), used as baits and killed (Polyxena), or violated after death (Penthesilea): such horrifying transgression appears not only in Wolf's novel (Wolf 1988b: 120) but also in Robert Graves' poem *Penthesilea*. I.a. Euripides in his *Troades* shows post-war tragic experiences of Trojan women.

The story retold through refocalization is also an attempt to retain Cassandra's memory of individual emotions and everything else what has been ignored in the pre-text due to the fact that it did not honor the virtues of warriors. With refocalization, images of valiant heroes known from the *Iliad* are filtered through emotions and consciousness of narrator (as it was in *The Penelopiad*). The most famous warriors are in the Wolf's novel called "zeros", "nonetities", "weaklings", "wretches" (Agamemnon) or "brutes" (Achilles). Narrator describes men in such opprobrious way because she experiences their cruelty personally: she is Agamemnon's captive, her brothers are killed by Achilles, etc. In her narration, Cassandra uncovers mendacity of "noble" heroes' idealized images from the *Iliad*.

It is especially noticeable in the narrator's opinion about her father, king Priam: "I gave a crack on the South to that minstrel who went on singing the glory of Priam until the end. [...] No. I will not forget my confused, wayward father" (Wolf 1988b: 13). Hence, the pivotal aspect of the *Cassandra* is an attempt to save the "truth", an attempt to reveal the falsification of the narrative of *Iliad* (and other "male" versions of Trojan War history). Such effort induces broader reflection on historical memory: people remember the history of winners, not losers, the history of men who kill, not women who want to survive, finally, as Cassandra puts it, "the palace accounts, the records of grain, urns, weapons, prisoners. There are no signs for pain, happiness, love" (Wolf 1988b: 78).

Sex/gender refocalization supported by contemporary consciousness of Atwood's and Wolf's narrators, allows Penelope, twelve hanged maids and Cassandra to present herstories. They tell the story of their experience ignored (or presented superficially) in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. The characters' narration allows a critique of women's marginalization in the Homeric works. Narrators also polemicize against the patriarchal epic narrative which instrumentalizes heroines. Hence, by the negative opinion on pre-texts, heroines of the literary apocrypha criticize the system in which identity of women depends on identity of their men, the system in which low social origin authorizes discrimination and, finally, system in which "superiority has been accorded [...] not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills" (de Beauvoir as cited in Ortner 1974: 75) (it is a general, feminist critique).

Nonetheless, it is impossible to miss the fact that although in both literary apocrypha, through refocalization, aforementioned "worldview implications of [every] narrative act" (here: patriarchal implications) are criticized and challenged, in Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Wolf's *Cassandra* narrators criticize through another "worldview implications" — feminist implications. Thus, like all characters remembered in the culture by the myths or literary canon, Atwood's and Wolf's narrators-characters will — as Mirosława Czarnecka puts it — overgrow with (not only male) "palimpsests, layers of [...] imagination and interpretations which covers an authentic figure" (Czarnecka 2004: 194) (if such thing as "an authentic figure" exists at all).

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