CHAPTER 2

RETELLING THE TALES OF THE PAST: A TRANSVALUATIONAL SHIFT IN FEMINIST REVISIONIST MYTH MAKING THE FIREBRAND AND THE MISTS OF AVALON BY MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY.

2.1 Uncovering The Patriarchal Power Structure of Secular and Spiritual Realms: An introduction.

History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her: and thus she has been definitely established as the Other\(^1\) . . . Perhaps the myth of woman will some day be extinguished\(^2\).

A study of the universal mental operations which structure a patriarchal myth reveals that societal and ecclesiastical norms are not conceived in vacuum, but are fashioned by deeply held convictions and prior circumstances. To transform patriarchal socio-cultural reality, women must write their own stories and histories. They must be the mediators rather than the mediated within language. The Firebrand and The Mists of Avalon represents major revisionist feminist endeavour in this direction. They show how patriarchy encompasses secular as well as spiritual realms. Bradley does not simply replace patriarchal myths with feminist versions but elicits fresh cultural insights by reversing the myths. She demonstrates the way in which Trojan and Akhaian
patriarchies make women invisible or inconsequential to laud male power: how Christianity incorporates Goddess religion and transforms its symbols into a new mythology stripped of female power. Furthermore, Bradley attributes women’s disempowerment to the division of the patriarchal world into two equally male dominated spheres of activity: Public and private.

The fusing together of ‘sexual’ and ‘politics’ in Kate Millett’s theory of ‘sexual politics’ opens up new possibilities for feminist debate, enabling the assertion that all things ‘private’ and ‘personal’ in women’s lives are affected by the politics of state and patriarchy and the chief weapon of resistance for women is to politicize the sacred spheres of the ‘personal’. By questioning the power structures of the private space, Bradley shows how this sphere witnesses the worst effects of biological reductionism by which female nature belongs to the home, to the irrational side of human nature, associated with qualities such as nurturance and emotion whereas male nature becomes the paradigm of social interaction and political power by default.

Privately held beliefs influence public actions. The private religious interpretations or mind-sets and phobias are translated into publicly standardized expectations which are euphemistically termed as family values, but in reality suppress women by limiting their capacity to engage actively in political processes. The private religious beliefs politically and publicly perpetuate the tyranny of patriarchal structure. The Mists of Avalon reinvestigates the political power of patriarchal religion to sanction and sanctify male hegemony and the distressing influence religion has on the role of women in culture.
This chapter has two major sections which are represented by the two fictional works of Bradley: The Firebrand and The Mists of Avalon. The Firebrand investigates the secular realm encompassing socio-cultural, political institutions and unveils the patriarchal power structure underpinning it. Re-examining the ecclesiastical, spiritual realm of religion, The Mists of Avalon reveals the politics of a theocratic, ostensibly secular state which suppresses the potentialities and powers of its women. The scope of feminist revisionist study of the secular realm represented by The Firebrand is overwhelmingly larger than the scope of revisionist enquiry encompassing the spiritual realm which is represented by The Mists of Avalon.

2.2 THE FIREBRAND: Reclaiming Silenced Female Voices.

A myth always implies a subject who projects his hopes and his fears towards a sky of transcendence. Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own; they still dream through the dreams of men. Gods made by males are the gods they worship. Men have shaped for their own exaltation great virile figures: Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal: Woman has only a secondary part to play in the destiny of these heroes. . . . Woman is defined exclusively in her relation to man³.

This observation of Simone De Beauvoir in Chapter 9 “Dreams, Fears, Idols” of her pioneering feminist critical work The Second Sex may well be construed as an explication of the feminist revisionist perspective discernible in Marion Zimmer Bradley’s fictional work The Firebrand.
A profound dissatisfaction with the absence of "Virile myths in which women's projects are reflected", marks the provenance of an intellectually insurrectionary project of disruption such as a feminist reappraisal of the representation of women or feminist re-visionary myth making. As a feminist writer Marion Zimmer Bradley is concerned with the creation of new mythic constructs which inform the making of new subjectivities for women. Her fictional works undermine the logic of the patriarchal social contract by a thoroughgoing critique of established definitions, values and ethics relating to women and also by co-opting what is heterogeneous to patriarchal systems of meaning. In the words of Liz Yorke, "[This] feminist desire . . . emerges from the desire for vast cultural change, not only of the phallogocentric symbolic, but also of social, religious, political, sexual and psychical structures in the real world. All these projects for change are inextricably interrelated: changes in thought / language go hand in hand with changes in social and political structures in the world" 4.

In the patriarchal cosmogony of The Iliad the rulers are men. Only the men are privileged to fight battles and make laws. Achilles and Hector are the formidable heroes, revered for their masculine grit and machismo. The wrath of Achilles, his valour, the intrepidity of Hector and his martial prowess are praised in the elevated discourse of grandiloquent verses. Whereas the women are marginalised and alienated from the glorious power that belongs to their
men. They are depicted as passive beings who are powerless and mute. In The Iliad, princess Cassandra, the daughter of Queen Hecuba and Priam, the King of Troy, as beautiful as the golden Aphrodite, is depicted as a helpless prophetess, who, because she rejects the advances of Apollo, is doomed to see all her prophetic warnings ignored. Cassandra appears only once in The Iliad, to mourn her brother Hector’s death. Her tragic story is told in the chapter XI of Homer’s The Odyssey. After the sack of Troy, Agamemnon takes her as his mistress. Cassandra goes to Mycenae. There, she is murdered by Clytemnestra, the queen and wife of Agamemnon.

However, an illuminating postscript provided by Bradley on Cassandra’s destiny reveals that Bradley has conducted a meticulously exhaustive research on Cassandra. Bradley mentions the play of Euripides where Cassandra is depicted as one of the Trojan captives. One of the salient aspects of this play according to Bradley is that Cassandra is shown as the one woman who suggests revenge on their captors. But it is also made clear that she is insane. Bradley alludes to yet another dramatic appearance showing Cassandra leading the women of Troy in a heroic mass suicide. Interestingly, Bradley acknowledges her inspirational debt to tablet # 803 in the Archaeological Museum in Athens which reads as follows:

ZEUS OF DODONA, GIVE HEED TO THIS GIFT  
I SEND YOU FROM ME AND MY FAMILY –  
AGATHON Son OF EKHEPHYLOS,  
THE ZAKYNTHIAN FAMILY,  
CONSULS OF THE MOLOSSIANS AND THEIR ALLIES,  
DESCENDED FOR 30 GENERATIONS  
FROM KASSANDRA OF TROY.
Bradley revises and reshapes the classic myths of the fall of Troy, refocusing them imaginatively from the feminist perspective of ‘Kassandra’, (Bradley changes the spelling to emphasize her revisionist intention) the Trojan princess and prophetess punished for disobedience to Apollo with the woman’s fate of being always disbelieved as mad. Bradley’s narrative draws the reader wholly into Kassandra’s position. The reader is made to feel the impassioned powerlessness of a woman’s voice and vision mocked and disregarded in a world dominated by male violence, war and power politics.

In *The Firebrand*, where the story of Trojan war is re-imagined and retold from the point of view of Kassandra, she represents an archetypal image of the marginalised, silenced female voice. The traditional image of Kassandra as a helpless, distressed Trojan princess, misunderstood and despised as a frightened, irrational mad woman has been reclaimed by Bradley and reconstructed to represent the socio-political reality of the times. The story exists on a number of interrelated levels: as an archetype, an individual female experience, a historical event and a political symbol. The revisionist tale of Kassandra is a revaluation of social, political and philosophical values: As Alicia Ostricker puts it, “It is an enactment of feminist anti authoritarianism opposed to the patriarchal praxis of reifying texts, to generate a new meaning”\(^5\). Kassandra’s tale is revisionist in its subversive readings of traditional plots, heroic characters and morals and in its portrayal of a lady who exists beyond the plots. Her story comes to include and transcend the external historical world represented by the patriarchy of Trojans and Akhaians.
In the creation of a mythic world that seeks to move beyond the fram:
of patriarchal thoughts, "the old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female
knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations
of collective male fantasy. They are corrections; they are representations of
what women find divine and demonic in themselves: They are retrieved images
of what women have collectively and historically suffered: in some cases they
are instructions for survival." In the revisionist feminist fictional works,
women refuse to imagine themselves as men imagine them and break out of the
silence, becoming visible. A diversity of feminist insights is mediated in the
fictional reconstruction of Bradley’s ‘Kassandra’. It is appropriate that the
prologue of The Firebrand begins with Kassandra’s devastating criticism
directed against the song of a wandering minstrel. The minstrel’s song is a
paean of praise, the quintessence of which is a glorious account of the laudatory
martial prowess and valour of the great ‘men’ of Troy and Greece.

... of battles and of the great men who fought them;
Of the men who lingered ten years before the giant-built
walls of Troy;
And of the Gods who pulled down those walls at last, of
Apollo Sun Lord and Poseidon the mighty Earth Shaker.
... the tale of the anger of powerful Akhilles,
... so mighty no weapon could slay him;
Even the story of his overweening pride, and that battle
Where he and great Hector fought for three days on the plains
before high-walled Troy;
Of proud Hector and gallant Akhilles, Of Kentaurs and
Amazons, Gods and heroes,
Odysseus and Aeneas, all those who fought and were slain on
the plains before Troy ----

The minstrel’s rhapsody succinctly summarises the story of The Iliad by
Homer. The Trojan princess Kassandra, who had grown old, vehemently
disagrees with his version of the fall of Troy and his encomiastic tributes to the heroes of Trojan war, well known for their greatness and supreme strength. Kassandra, who has survived the Trojan war, attributes the destruction of Troy to the arrogance and blood thirsty nature of its great ‘men’ and ‘heroes’ who had no compassion for the Earth Mother and her children. Kassandra speaks scornfully of the great ‘Heroes’. She expostulates with the minstrel’s account of the ‘heroic’ qualities of Kings and princes. According to Kassandra, in the marginalised spaces of this narrative of male hegemony are contained the stories of Queens and Goddesses.

2.2.1 Re-visioning Queens of the matriarchal faith: asking new and different questions.

Kassandra’s story of the fall of Troy is a saga of Queens, Goddesses, their priestesses and Amazons. In The Firebrand the visionary Trojan princess Kassandra, whose prognostications are misconstrued as the rambling talk of a hysterical woman, metamorphoses into a spokeswoman for the “Repressed” of patriarchal culture. She tries to explain the older matriarchal faith of the Earth Mother to the minstrel.

...“I knew you could not understand”, the old woman said, “for, to begin, at first in this land there were no Kings, but only Queens, the daughters of the Goddesses, and they took consorts where they would. And then the worshippers of the Sky Gods, the horse-folk, the users of iron, came down into our country; and when the Queens took them as consorts, they called themselves kings and demanded the right to rule. And so the Gods and the Goddesses were in strife; and a time came when they brought their quarrels to Troy-” (pp. 13-14)
Kassandra makes an attempt to dispel some of the misconceptions about women engendered by an androcentric framework. The Firebrand shows that 'Re-vision' implicated in feminist reading of primary mythological texts can be a liberating intellectual act, empowering the feminist writer to “assert her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts and at the same time her right to choose which features of a text she takes as relevant because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it”7. In volume one titled ‘Apollo’s Call’ of The Firebrand, Leda, Lady of Sparta, knowingly enters into a union with Zeus. Leda is depicted as the Queen of Sparta who had ruled over the kingdom even before her marriage to Tyndareus, her consort. Leda wistfully thinks of the times before her marriage to Tyndareus, when she had reigned as the ruler of Sparta. Wifehood has confined Leda to the women’s quarters. Although she loves her husband, Leda wishes that she could make him understand that it is wrong for her to be shut up in the women’s quarters. As a priestess she must be out and around the fields to be sure that the Goddess is given Her due of service. Leda sadly reflects upon the strange patriarchal laws of marriage that have transformed her into an interloper in her own castle and placed her husband in the exalted position of a 'master'.

Women’s quarters, the Queen thought angrily, when it is my own castle; one would think that I, not he, was the interloper here; that he, not I, held land-right in Sparta. Earth Mother knows not so much as his name.

She had been willing enough when he came and sought her hand, even though he was one of the invaders from the north, worshiper of thunder and Oak and of the Sky Gods,
a coarse hairy man who bore the hated black iron on spear and armor. And yet now his kind were everywhere, and they demanded marriage by their new laws, as if their Gods had flung down from Her celestial throne the Goddess who owned land and harvest and people. The woman wedded by one of these bearers of iron was expected to join in the worship of their Gods and to give her body only to that man.

One day, Leda thought, the Goddess would punish these men for keeping women from paying due homage to the forces of Life: These men said the Goddesses were subservient to the Gods: which seemed to Leda a horrible blasphemy and a mad reversal of the natural order of things. Men had no divine power; they neither bred nor bore; yet somehow they felt they had some natural right in the fruit of their women's bodies, as if coupling with a woman gave them some power of ownership, as if children did not naturally belong to the woman whose body had sheltered and nourished them. (pp. 17-18)

The idyllic representations of patriarchal family and motherhood come under a scathing scrutiny. Leda unravels the structure of patriarchy which formulates fatherhood as a right. Even if men cannot produce 'life', the patriarchal structure empowers them with a privilege, so that they can certainly appropriate it. Within the patriarchal culture, 'motherhood' is allowed only a diminished meaning. The remarks of feminist philosopher Mary O' Brien in The Politics of Reproduction (1981) on the politics of paternity in patriarchy are significant in this context:

"The assertion of a right demands a social support system predicated on forced cooperation... a patriarchate is in every sense of the phrase, a triumph over nature... Men did not suddenly discover that they might make a historical project out of the mastery of nature. They have understood
their separation ever since that moment in dark prehistory when the idea of paternity took hold . . . Patriarchy is the power to transcend natural realities with historical, man made realities. This is the potency principle in its primordial form”.
(pp.54-55)

Queen Leda, the mother of Helen and Klytemnestra is troubled by the unjustness of the system according to which once named, the baby becomes the ‘man’s’ child and the woman is ‘incidental’ again. To the Queens of the matriarchal faith, who worship the Earth Mother, the institutionalisation of motherhood perpetuated by patriarchy seems an aberration. They are disturbed by a new awareness of the political and public aspects of motherhood in patriarchy as a fact of life, subject to legal and economic controls and to enormously powerful sanctions. Bradley depicts the triumph of patriarchy over hitherto gynocentric social and political organisations.

The powerful and convincing delineations of Greek and Trojan patriarchies with their rigid polarization of male and female roles show that to the extent men and women conform to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, they are alienated from each other in incompatible ways. As an imaginative revisionist tale, The Firebrand shifts the focus from androcentricity which recognises man as the norm and the sole frame of reference for human beings to a frame of reference in which women’s different and differing ideas, experiences, feelings and moods are seen in their own right. Through a reconsideration of myths from the woman’s perspective, The Firebrand unmasks many important aspects of male domination. The ‘woman’ in Trojan and Greek patriarchies is confined to the family. Even a Queen may not escape this
inexorable destiny. The first chapter of volume one 'Apollo's call', records Queen Leda's growing displeasure at the curtailment of her powers and privileges. Leda disapproves of her husband's jealousy. She is afraid of provoking his wrath and dare not leave the woman's quarters. Leda resents the power that her husband Tyndareus has over her in the patriarchal institution of marriage. Lying in the arms of Zeus, the Lord of lightning and controller of thunders, who has visited her in the form of her husband Tyndareus, Leda wonders wildly if the laws against lying with any other man ban even a God in her husband's very shape and form. When the God leaves her, Leda understands from the sound of the ripple of thunder that the union has not been a dream. She also knows that however long she may live with Tyndareus as his wife, she will never again look on her husband's face without searching in it for some sign of the God who had visited her in his form.

2.2.2 Resisting the interpellative hegemony of the 'Master' narrative.

In her portrayal of the episode of Leda and Zeus, Bradley infringes and interrogates the cultural orthodoxy. Ferreting out mythological images of women in canonical literature leads to complex feminist approaches. In her reassessment and reconstruction of the character of Leda, Bradley articulates the need to give space to a multiplicity of voices and perspectives not of the mainstream. She problematizes the relations between sexuality, culture and power. The 'Master' narrative is superficially present. Bradley endorses a pluralistic stance by inserting in the interstices alternative, disruptive, more
‘open’ female narratives which undermine and deconstruct the ‘master’ narrative. For example, nuances of Leda’s thoughts and feelings are recapitulated in great detail. Lying with Zeus, Leda is besieged with questions and doubts about the reactions of her husband. She is seized by a feeling of dread that somewhere inside, the real Tyndareus must be looking at her, jealously, or pleased that his woman found favour with his God. It can just be discerned that feminist revision generates new meanings. It also draws attention to the discrepancies between the traditional ‘Master’ narrative and the consciously subversive mental and emotional activity of re-visions.

The Firebrand as a radical revision of the story of Iliad from the woman’s point of view represents a feminist reappropriation of patriarchal mythologies and legends. It treats the master narrative of the primary text as a fencepost surrounding the terrain of mythic truth but by no means identical with it. The feminist revision reveals that by cooperating with the interpellative strategies of the ‘Master’ narrative, the readers become complicit with the patriarchal will to control women. In her work Literature And Feminism Pam Morris makes a significant remark about the persuasive power of interpellation. Morris points out that the practice of reading as a woman needs to oppose the ideological implications of classic plot structures, prising open alternative spaces of freedom for women within the text against the often relentless logic of the story. (p. 33) She argues that we need to resist the interpellative power of narrative point of view drawing us into compliance with the text’s dominant values and seek instead the moments or sites of resistance where the writing subverts or questions itself. According to Pam Morris, an understanding of the function of
Integrative strategies help the feminist writer to rearticulate not just the authority of patriarchal texts, but the fear and anxiety they implicitly express in response to the counter power of women.

In *The Firebrand*, Bradley unMASKs the insidious aspects of patriarchy by subverting meanings that belong to an androcentric framework. She decodes the subliminal images of female anger and reveals woman’s subjectivity which is socially produced in patriarchy as a site of struggle and potential change. *The Firebrand* draws attention to the fact that although *The Iliad* is ostensibly the story of its heroes like Hector, Achilles, Priam, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Paris and Troilus, lurking beneath, in the marginalised, enclosed spaces are the stories of those women whose lives are intertwined with the destinies of their men. In Bradley’s feminist revision of the story of *The Iliad*, Priam’s daughter Cassandra becomes the protagonist. There is an upsurge of a polyphony of marginalised female voices. The unheard, attenuated voices of Trojan and Greek women such as Hecuba, Polyxena, Creusa, Andromache, Leda, Helen, Clytemnestra, Oenone, Queen Imandra, the Amazon Queen Penthesilea and the priestesses of the Earth Mother reverberate and cut across the boundaries of patriarchal power. A feminist iconography, with many disturbing revelations about the suppression of women in Trojan and Grecian patriarchies is discernible. Marriage, motherhood and domesticity as experienced by women within Trojan patriarchal social structures become metaphors for female immanence, sexual oppression and exclusion. The sexual politics underlying the alignment of dull, uninspiring, repetitious ‘immanent’ activities with women and the adventurous, bold, empowering, ‘transcendental’ activities with men comes under a scathing attack.
Resonances from *The Second Sex* of Beauvoir are unmistakably present. Bradley also focuses on the sororities of ‘Amazons’ which exist as foils to the Trojan patriarchy. They represent different ideological spaces which enable the heroine Kassandra to articulate her quest for an alternative order as a legitimate one.

In *The Firebrand*, Kassandra metamorphoses into an intrepid and candid spokeswoman, who represents the marginalised female voices suppressed by male hegemony and self censorship. She is endowed with rare and admirable qualities of vitality and panache that make her a dreamer, seeker, a visionary thinker and a daring questioner. The story revolves around her desires, anger, distress and discontent. The action unfolds through her words. Bradley through her reconstruction of the character of Kassandra, suggests alternative destinies radically different from the ‘immanence’ of patriarchal configurations for women. Traditional delineation shows female destiny to be the passive stoical acceptance of restricted choices and suffering. Transgressions are invariably punished. As a feminist revisionist work, *The Firebrand* identifies biological essentialism as the bedrock of most traditional thinking about women, used both to denigrate and to idealize them, but always to justify the existing status quo of power structures.

2.2.3 Recasting Hecuba: The erstwhile Amazonian princess as a Queen, wife and mother in Trojan Patriarchy.

In the Trojan society, the inequality between men and women by which women suffer systematic social injustice, is not the result of biological necessity
but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences, social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender inequality. The essentialistic or the deterministic argument that women have to be ‘passive’ because of their reproductive role, justifies women’s subordination in Troy. This is the unsavoury reality of Queen Hecuba and the other women of Troy. Cassandra notes with astonishment that her mother Hecuba the Queen who performs her maternal duties and domestic functions with extraordinary placidity, effortlessness and contentment was an Amazon, a woman warrior before her marriage. Though Hecuba loves outdoor activities, she tries to conform to her husband’s notions of femininity by restricting her jaunts. Bradley provides details of Hecuba’s early married life, the futile, initial attempts of Hecuba to convince her husband that it is neither unusual nor unwomanly for a woman to be physically strong and to protect herself. Walking through the streets of Troy, the young Hecuba watches the soldiers, fighting with blunted weapons.

Hecuba watched the soldiers, paired in teams and fighting with blunted weapons. She knew as much about weapons as any of them, for she had been born and raised on the plains, daughter of a nomad tribe whose women rode horseback, and trained like the men of the cities with sword and spear. Her hand itched for a sword, but it was not the custom in Troy, and while at first Priam had allowed her to handle weapons and practice with his soldiers, when she became pregnant with Hector he had forbidden it. In vain she told him that the women of her tribe rode horseback and worked with weapons until a few days before they were delivered of their children; he would not listen to her.

The royal midwives told her that if she so much as touched edged weapons, it would injure her child and perhaps the men
who owned the weapons. A woman's touch, they said, the touch of a woman in her condition, would make the useless in battle. This sounded to Hecuba like the most solemn foolishness, as if men feared the notion that a woman could be strong enough to protect herself.

"But you have no need to protect yourself, my dearest love," Priam had said. "What sort of man would I be if I could not protect my wife and child?" That had ended the matter, and from that day to this, Hecuba had never so much as touched the hilt of a weapon. Imagining the weight of a sword in her hand now, she grimaced, knowing that she was weak from women's indoor work and soft from lack of training. Priam was not so bad as the Argive kings who kept their women confined inside their houses, but he did not really like it when she went very far outside the palace. He had grown up with women who stayed indoors at all times, and one of his most critical descriptions of a woman was "sunburnt from gadding about." (p. 23)

Preoccupied with her pregnancies and maternal duties, Hecuba also learns to accept her husband king Priam's promiscuity with resignation.

The Sun declined, and Hecuba spent the day helping her women fold and put away the sun-bleached linens. At sundown Priam sent word that he would spend the evening with his men; she should sup with her women and go to bed without waiting for him.

Five years ago, she thought, this would have dismayed her; she would not have been able to go to sleep unless she was encircled in his strong and loving arms. Now, especially this late in pregnancy, she was pleased at the thought of having her bed to herself. Even when it crossed her mind that he might be sharing the bed of one of the other women of the court, perhaps one of the mothers of the other royal children, it did not trouble her; she knew a king must have many sons and her own son Hector was firm in his father's favor. (p. 24)
Here, Bradley indicates that the woman as a wife is denied fulfillment in the patriarchal order. She also gives emphasis to the mutilating chastity that man requires of woman. The man constructs a situation that allows him both marriage and adulterous liaisons yet limits woman to a restricted and enforced monogamy. He sets limits on woman’s desire. Condemned to home and hearth, women’s desire and passion have been tamed in the Trojan world to allow for male promiscuity. Subjugated, contained and confined within marriage, the woman no longer threatens the man. The Trojan man stands for female chastity before and after marriage and male promiscuity. Hecuba’s plight is representative of the alienation experienced by the wife in a patriarchal world order. She lacks the right to demand her husband to spend time with her. There is a poignant revelation that the right to ask a man into bed has been taken from all women and given back only to those who sell pleasure for a living. Thus woman is not an equal ‘Other’ as a lover or even as a wife but must strive for equality in a relation of exchange in which she exchanges her chastity for economic security: “the wife denotes pleasure in the fixed order of life and property.”

Once married the wives are condemned to the life of the family while the husbands move freely in the public world. In Medea, a play by Euripides, Medea articulates the separation of the public and the private spheres and her dissatisfaction with it.

A man, when he’s tired of the company of his home,
Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom
And turns to a friend or companion of his own age.
But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone.
What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time
Living at home, while they do the fighting in War.
How wrong they are! I would very much rather stand
Three times in the front of battle than bear one child. 9

Medea alludes to the predicaments of women in a patriarchal world
which shackles them to the solitary pain of private realms. In The Firebrand,
Hecuba an Amazon moves away from the conflict-free female world of her
people into the patriarchal world of Troy by marrying Priam. She also tries to
find solace in motherhood and family life. When Hecuba gives birth to twins, a
priestess prophesies that twins will bring bad luck. Hecuba’s nightmare is
interpreted as a message from the Gods of Olympus warning them of the evil
fate of their son. When Priam decides that the boy will have to be exposed at
birth, a grief-stricken Hecuba reacts emotionally to the unjustness of the verdict.

“Gods!” Hecuba cried, frantic, “What kind of
God is it that sends deceitful nightmares to destroy an
innocent little child, a newborn babe in the cradle?
Among my people,” she added resentfully, “a child is its
mother’s, and no one but she who carried it for most of a
year and brought it to birth can say its fate; if she refuses
to suckle it and bring it up, that is her own choice. What
right has a man over children?” She did not say a mere
man, but her tone of voice made it obvious.

“The right of a father,” Priam said sternly. “I am
master of this house, and as I have spoken, so shall it be
done—hear me, woman!”

“Don’t say woman to me in that tone of voice,”
cried Hecuba. “I am a free citizen and a Queen and not
one of your slaves or concubines!” Yet for all that, she
knew that Priam would have his way; when she had
chosen to marry a man from those who dwelt in cities
and assumed rights over their women, she knew she
had consented to this. (p. 20)
Here, Bradley focuses in the unequal power distribution in patriarchy and the fundamental fact of male domination over women. Hecuba brought up in a matriarchal tradition, understands the futility of her arguments. Her claims to the rights of the mother to shape the destiny of her child are challenged by the indisputable power of the fathers which operates through “a familial, social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the divisions of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.”

2.2.4. Kassandra, the tormented visionary of Troy: Daughter of an Amazon and the Trojan King.

When Hecuba gives birth to twins, Priam sends the male baby to be fostered by a family of shepherds. Kassandra grows up unaware of the existence of her twin brother. Kassandra is not depicted as a demure, passive delicate princess but a spirited young girl who can articulate her wishes and expectations in a bold, forthright manner. She is a fearless little girl who does not hesitate to play with the snakes of Apollo. She is inquisitive about the kind of life that her mother’s Amazonian sisters lead. When her mother tells her that her father wants another son, to grow up to fight in his army and defend the city, Kassandra expresses the wish to be a warrior woman like her mother’s people. With profound dissatisfaction, she learns that adulthood brings no promises of freedom and adventure to the women in the Trojan palace. Although, Kassandra manifests a deep sense of longing for womanhood, she resents the lack of
freedom that is associated with the initiation into womanhood in Trojan society. Yet these are the incipient feelings and longings experienced by her own mother Hecuba, who grows up among the Amazons as a warrior woman and then marries King Priam, by renouncing her Amazonian lifestyle, choosing wifehood and domesticity.

Kassandra longed fiercely for the time when she too would be recognized as a woman, though she could not see that it made Polyxena any wiser. ... Yet her longing was tempered with reluctance; to be a woman, it seemed, was to change so irrevocably as to lose all that made her herself. Polyxena was now tied to the life of the women’s quarters, and seemed quite content to be so; she no longer even seemed to resent the loss of her freedom, and would no longer conspire with Kassandra to run away down into the city. (p. 41)

Little Kassandra is not only a sensitive girl but also perceptive of the gender discrimination practised in Trojan society. Unlike her sister Polyxena, Kassandra develops the habit of analysing and questioning the legitimacy of conventional discriminatory social practices. Her non-conformist ways and visionary powers can be discerned from the period of her childhood.

AT THE NEXT full moon, Hecuba was delivered of a son, who was to be her last child. They named him Troilus. ... Now that there was another prince in the palace, another son of Priam by his Queen, there was rejoicing through the city. Kassandra was left very much to herself, and she wondered why a prince should be so much more important than a princess. It was no use asking her mother why this should be so. She might have asked her older sister, but Polyxena seemed to care for nothing except gossip with the waiting-women about pretty clothes and jewelry and marriages. This seemed dull to Kassandra, but they assured her than when she was older she would be more interested in the important things of a woman’s life. She wondered why these should be so important. She was willing enough to look
at pretty clothes and jewelry, but had no desire to wear them herself; she would as soon see them on Polyxena or her mother. Her mother's waiting-women thought her as strange as she though them. Once she had stubbornly refused to enter a room, crying out, "The ceiling will fall!" Three days later, there was a small earthquake and it did fall. (pp. 40-41)

Kassandra is tormented by visions of disasters. She also has inexplicable visions in which she sees events through the eyes of her twin brother Paris although she is unaware of his existence. She musters up the courage to ask her father Priam the king, unequivocally for an explanation of her disturbing visions. Although Kassandra is frightened of Priam's rage, her irrepressible need for an answer helps her overcome her fear and she persists in her query. Kassandra provokes her father's wrath by her persistence. Her uncompromising, fearless attitude and resoluteness are misapprehended as signs of rebellion, insubordination and pertinacity by her father Priam. An irascible Priam reproaches Hecuba and accuses her of failing in her maternal duties of rearing her daughter. Priam orders peremptorily that as a chastisement, Kassandra should be sent to be fostered before she spreads that nonsense to the other "proper maidenly" girls. Perceiving her father's vehement displeasure, Kassandra cleverly guesses that there is an uncomfortable secret about the boy whose face she has seen in her inscrutable visions.

Kassandra is sent to spend a year with the Amazon tribes. In her association with the Amazons, Kassandra learns of the powers of women who are not subjugated by the new wave of patriarchy. Hecuba's sister the Amazonian Queen Penthesilea leaves an indelible impression on Kassandra. Kassandra begins to admire her aunt Penthesilea greatly. Hecuba invites her
kinswoman Penthesilea, the queen of Amazons to take away Kassandra with her when Priam orders her to send Kassandra to be fostered. To her dismay, Kassandra learns that her mother cannot travel with her because wifehood and motherhood have restricted her mobility. Kassandra finds the immobility enforced on women by motherhood and family obligations distasteful. The conversation between Hecuba and Kassandra before her departure to the land of Amazons, offers a fleeting glimpse of Hecuba’s insecurities as a wife and mother and Kassandra’s reluctance to conform to the conventional notions of motherhood. It captures the trauma of women trapped at home doing the same thing day after day and the tedium of their domestic lives.

Kassandra leaned against her mother and said, almost in tears, “I don’t want to go away from you.”

“And I will miss you, too, but I think you will be happy.” Hecuba said. “I wish I were going with you.”

“Then why don’t you come, Mother?”

“You father needs me.”

“No, he doesn’t,” Kassandra protested. “He has his other women; he could manage without you.”

“I am sure he would,” Hecuba said, grimacing a little.

“But I do not want to leave him to them; they are not as careful of his health and his honor as I am. Also, there is your baby brother, and he needs me”.

This made no sense to Kassandra; Troilus had been sent to the men’s quarters at the New Year. But if her mother did not wish to go, there was nothing she could say. Kassandra hoped she would never have children, if having them meant never doing what you wished. (p. 51)

The arrival of Penthesilea ushers in great excitement. The women of the Trojan royal household are astonished at the sight of the warrior Queen and her band of horse riding women. Penthesilea disapproves of Hecuba’s pallor and
attributes it to her house-bound existence. She remarks that Hecuba has grown fat and old and worn with child bearing in the king’s house. Priam is astounded by Penthesilea’s immense knowledge of political affairs. She apprises him of greedy Agamemnon’s plans for conquest and extension of his trading rights up to Troy. But the intelligent comments of his kinswoman Penthesilea succeed only in provoking Priam’s contempt. Penthesilea’s astute political observations deal a tremendous blow to Priam’s infallible sense of masculine pride and superiority. He dismisses her suggestions with indignation and disapproval. “What has a woman to do with the government of countries and the payment of tribute?” (p. 55). Priam staunchly refuses Penthesilea’s assistance.

Kassandra finds the prospects of horse riding and outdoor life irresistible. She is charmed by the mare ‘Racer’ and is eager to go with them. When Kassandra is introduced to her kinswoman, Penthesilea smiles at her good naturedly and asks her if she wishes to go with them. Penthesilea also playfully makes a derisive remark about the ‘house-mice’ behaviour of Hecuba and her daughters. She asks Kassandra if she is of a fearful disposition like her sister Polyxena who is afraid of horses. Kassandra replies that unlike her sister Polyxena, who is a “proper good girl” according to her father and therefore, afraid of everything, she is not afraid of anything. She also tells Penthesilea that she has no wish to be a good girl if it means staying in the house all the time. Kassandra wins her aunt’s affection by her boldness.

2.2.5 Crossing the borders of patriarchy: Kassandra and the sorority of Amazons.

Kassandra’s life with the Amazons forms an inalienable component of Bradley’s feminist revisionist tale. Bradley reclaims Amazons from the female gothic
tradition of sword play, sorcery, mayhem and magic to present a positive image of Amazons as independent spirited, strong, tough and resourceful women who can also be loving and nurturant. Bradley’s revisionist reclamation of Amazons aims at the deconstruction of male stereotypical image of an Amazon as the symbol of all that is most feared and loathed as the ‘Other’, ‘the castrating mother’ wreaking vengeance for her condition on her male offspring. Bradley humanises the Amazons. The Amazonian Queen Penthesilea and her mother’s erstwhile best friend Elaria shower Kassandra with maternal love and affection. Kassandra finds the Amazonian Queen Penthesilea to be more humane, considerate and kinder than her own father Priam. She is shocked to see her father Priam’s indifference and apathy concerning the destiny of his abducted sister Hesione. It is paradoxical that Penthesilea evinces more of a sisterly soliciitude for Hesione’s plight than her own brother Priam. When Penthesilea suggests that they must avenge Hesione’s abduction, Priam callously replies that he would have had to find his sister a husband and her abduction has saved him a dowry. Priam’s attitude and his reaction to Hesione’s abduction are symbolically representative of the devaluation and commodification of women in Trojan and Akhaian societies. If these societies represent patriarchal values, the nomadic tribe of Amazons is the world of sisters, daughters and mothers and therefore of female affiliations. The Amazon Queen is puzzled by the lackadaisical, indifferent attitude of King Priam towards his sister’s abduction. She vehemently disagrees with his views. She even volunteers to help him with military

“I too dwell within the lands where the Akhaian raiders dare to come,” said the Amazon Queen. “And if they should steal one of my women, I would make them pay for it, not in gold or dowries alone, but in blood. And since you could not stop them from carrying off your own sister, I repeat: my warriors are at your service if you wish to lead them against those pirates.” (pp. 55-56)
The Amazonian life presents a striking contrast to the claustrophobic stifling, cloistered lives of royal women of the Trojan palace confined to domesticity. Amazons, untainted by the institutions of patriarchy lead a free, uninhibited but a dangerous life. Her foster-mother Elaria cautions Kassandra against the dangers that lurk in the paths of Amazons. She tells Kassandra that Amazons must take precautions and safeguard themselves when they are in the lands ruled by men. She informs Kassandra that Amazonian women are always vigilant in such lands because most men will not hesitate to treat them and their mares as lawful prizes. Elaria warns Kassandra about the perverse patriarchal ideology according to which Amazons must be punished for assuming 'male' characteristics such as strength, agency, power, and for their rejection of femininity as it is defined by patriarchy. Such an ideology propagates a notion of nemesis against the Amazon for being an 'unwomanly woman', flouting the conventional standards of femininity established by patriarchy. An Amazon must be denied through death, or forced into submission to a male-dominated heterosexual practice like rape. Nevertheless, Kassandra effusively welcomes the dangers and risks that an Amazonian life style brings because it also fulfills her quest for adventure and freedom.

Kassandra’s sojourn in the land of Amazons reawakens her recalcitrant spirit. It helps her to defamiliarise herself with the familiar, conventional practices of the patriarchal society. Alienated from the ‘domestic’ sphere of Trojan women, Kassandra moves beyond the confines and boundaries of the patriarchal space into an alternative cognitive and physical space. In the feminist delineation of Kassandra’s ‘border crossing’, Bradley’s revisionist
intention is manifestly undeniable. A feminist revisionist endeavour entails a transgression and disruption of the patriarchally sanctioned psychological, ideological and physical boundaries of femininity. For women, the condition of patriarchy presupposes the reality of borders, even if, for some women, these are often internalised borders and barriers experienced as exclusion. Bradley emphasizes the importance of border as a meaningful category in the shaping of a feminist revisionist myth making. In this context, borders are not apprehended as innocuous discontinuities or temporary barriers but they are seen as problematic cultural sites where we find absence, marginalisation and discrimination.

Bradley focuses on the feminist perception of the cultural site of 'border' as the location of resistance as well as oppression and therefore a site of struggle that is ultimately unstable. When patriarchal culture itself is the limit of woman’s knowledge, there is no available truth outside that culture with which she can challenge injustice. Viewed from this context, Kassandra’s ‘border crossing’, comprising its psychological, political and geographical aspects, empowers her to critically examine the incongruity of patriarchally enforced borders and concretises the dissatisfaction with the cultural boundaries demarcated for women. For Kassandra ‘border crossing’ entails initiation into the matriarchal faith of female sororities of Amazons, and exposure to the religious faith of the pre-patriarchal Earth-mother Goddess cult worshipers and priestesses. While living with the Amazons, Kassandra also sees the separatist male fraternity of the Kentaurs.
Bradley describes Kassandra’s adventures as an Amazon in great detail. Kassandra sadly notes that despite the frequency of their encounters with Amazons, the male nomadic tribe of Kentaurs have not changed their views on women. The leader of the Kentaurs solicits Penthesilea’s help to get rid of a pregnant girl who has become a useless burden to them. The sexual escapades of the Kentaur young men and their stern refusal to fulfil the responsibilities associated with their amorous exploits enforces passive suffering on their female victims. Kassandra notices with horror that both the ankles of the pregnant woman are pierced and that her feet are hobbled together by a rope passing through the wounds, so that she cannot take large strides. Weeping copiously, the captive woman tells Penthesilea that although she has been abducted from her village, her people will not accept her in her present state as a pregnant, mutilated woman. An indignant Penthesilea addresses the Kentaur leader sarcastically and asks him if it was not enough for the young man to carry her away and take her virginity. The reason that it has been done for the purpose of preventing the woman’s escape fills Kassandra with horror and dread. Kassandra comes to see the inextricable interconnection between male sexual passion and the desire for conquest, possession and control. It points out the pervasiveness of patriarchy and the consequent disempowerment of women. The episode albeit a crude expression of the operation of sexual power politics in heterosexual couplings, demonstrates that relations of sexuality are primarily relations of power and the balance of power lies with men. A disillusioned Penthesilea remarks bluntly that even the most passionately expressed ‘eternal love’ seldom outlasts the taking of the maidenhead.
In Bradley’s delineation of the feminist reappraisal of heterosexual love relationships by the Amazon Queen, second wave feminist theoretical underpinnings are unmistakably present. In The Dialectic of Sex: The case for Feminist Revolution (1970), Firestone examines the phenomenon of ‘love’ as “the pivot of women’s oppression” (p. 126) The Firestone argues that the concept of love is a kind of ideological cover-up or disguise of power relations in heterosexual relationships. In this sense, the emotion of love, as experienced by men and women alike, serves to disguise the actual political meaning of sex by placing it within the context of a set of misleading expectations. The Amazons professing a radical feminist outlook reject the patriarchal institutions of marriage. Kassandra prefers the dangers and risks of the Amazonian life style to the domesticity and ‘immanence’ of Trojan women. Within a very few weeks, it seems to Kassandra that her life has always been lived with the horsewomen of the tribe. She seldom even thinks about indoor life except for a vague constant nag of memory of time when she was confined to the palace and never allowed outside. Despite the hardship, Kassandra does not wish to return to Troy. She misses her mother sometimes, but not the life in the walled city. The nomadic Amazons face the risks of starvation, rape and assault from strangers. Kassandra finds that the Amazons are prepared to endure these risks but not captivity and slavery. Freedom is the raison d’etre of Amazonian lifestyle. Although a riskless life is impossible, an Amazon feels that every woman must have the freedom to choose what risks she will bear. Penthesilea’s band of Amazons are loyal to their Queen. Even when there is a shortage of
food, they refuse to leave their tribe to go to the men’s villages. All of them are
the followers of the Maiden Huntress and cherish freedom for women.

The Amazons in The Firebrand falsify the male supremacist conviction
that the woman’s destiny is defined by biology. They are reluctant to associate
any qualities culturally identified as ‘feminine’ with female biology. In her
association with Amazons, Bradley’s protagonist Kassandra undergoes a
deconditioning process and learns that for the socialised Trojan women,
feminine attributes naturalised by biology become destiny. Kassandra observes
that the patriarchal power structure of Trojan and Akhaian societies perpetuates
a mind-set which views women pre-eminently as essential mother natures
whose role and essential being is to procreate. That is, they create but only in a
bodily, sexual, animal way. Women are not supposed to move on from this
primordial stage. Bradley deconstructs the role accorded to women by
patriarchal society.

The harmonious, conflict-free matriarchal sorority of Amazons is
refreshingly different from the women’s quarter of the Trojan palace. Amazons
do not experience feelings of jealousy, rivalry and such other petty insecurities
which are very common among the women of Troy. In the Amazonian tribes,
‘Motherhood’ does not inexorably bind a woman to compulsory domesticity and
‘immanence’. It is paradoxical that all the positive, redemptive images of
motherhood and maternal love are associated with the Amazons and not with
the women who have conformed to the patriarchal institution of domesticated
motherhood. In her work, Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and
Institution, Adrienne Rich elucidates the patriarchal strategy of domestication
of motherhood and remarks that the template for motherhood in patriarchy requires a woman to learn “through painful self discipline and self cauterisation, those qualities which are supposed to be innate in her: patience, self sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly, the small routine chores of socializing a human being.” Surprisingly, the two women who shower Kassandra with maternal love and understanding are the Amazon Queen Penthesilea and another amazon Elaria. These two women show more maternal compassion towards Kassandra than her own mother Hecuba who is often harsh to her. Kassandra’s visions frighten Hecuba. She even suspects that her daughter could be simulating them. She does not tell Kassandra the secret of her birth as an unlucky twin sister of a brother stigmatized at birth as a son who will destroy the city of Troy. It is Penthesilea who enlightens Kassandra and dispels her doubts. Kassandra is able to share her deepest worries and fears with Penthesilea. When she asks her aunt to explain the meaning of her curious vision, Penthesilea decides that there is no reason why Kassandra should not be told what half of Troy knows. She tells Kassandra that the boy she sees in her visions is her twin brother. Penthesilea also informs her niece that her brother is considered to be an evil omen but her father Priam as a worshipper of the Father-principle, which is, a worship of male power and ability to father sons, has not wholly renounced his son and the child has been sent to be fostered somewhere far from the palace. When Kassandra is tormented by visions of her twin brother’s amorous passion for Oenone, it is Penthesilea who understands her pain and tries to comfort her. Penthesilea is genuinely distressed to see her niece’s misery. The poignant scene that ensues, is an intensely moving testimony to the maternal solicitude of
Penthesilea and the intensity of their bond resembling an ideal mother-daughter relationship.

Penthesilea saw Kassandra riding away from the camp and quickly jumped to the back of her own horse, and raced after her.

Gradually the gap between the two riders narrowed and the Amazon drew abreast of the girl, seeing with dismay Kassandra’s flushed face and terrified eyes.

She held out her arms and scooped Kassandra from the back of her mare, holding her limp on the saddle before her.

She could feel the girl’s forehead — fire — hot as if with fever. Almost delirious now, Kassandra struggled against her, and the older woman held her tight in her strong arms.

“Hush! Hush! What ails you, Bright Eyes? Why, your forehead feels as if you were sun-stricken, yet it is not a hot day!”

Her voice was kindly, yet Kassandra felt that the older woman was mocking her, and struggled frantically to be free.

“Nothing is wrong - I did not mean to -”

“No, all is well, child. No one will hurt you, no one is angry with you”, Penthesilea said as she held her, soothing her. After a moment Kassandra abandoned her struggle and went limp in her kinswoman’s arms.

“Tell me about it.”

Kassandra blurted out, “I was — with him. My brother. And a girl. And I couldn’t shut it out, anything, anywhere in the camp...”

“Goddess be merciful,” Penthesilea whispered.

At Kassandra’s age she too had borne the gift (or curse) of the wide-open seeing. Sharing experiences for which the mind or body was unprepared could indeed touch upon inner madness, and there was not always a safe return. Kassandra was lying in her arms only half-conscious, and her kinswoman was not sure what to do for her.

... She cradled the girl against her breast, and when they were within the circle of the camp, lifted her down and carried her inside the tent... Penthesilea laid Kassandra
down on a blanket and sat beside her, her firm hand on her niece’s brow, covering her eyes, willing her to shut out all the intrusions into her mind.

Kassandra’s sobbing subsided and she slowly grew calm, turning her face into Penthesilea’s hand like a baby, curled up against her (pp. 85 - 86)

This episode can be compared with a similar incident in the palace to show the different reactions of Hecuba and Penthesilea to Kassandra’s disturbing visionary revelations. Kassandra has a vision of the impending catastrophe of the Trojan war as they lead Andromache to the bridal chamber on her wedding night. It seems to Kassandra that there is a dreadful fire beyond the walls, even within the bridal chamber that they seem to lead Andromache forth to some dreadful fate. She hears herself screaming a warning:

“Can’t you hear the thunder?” Kassandra whispered. “No, no, there is only death and blood. . . fire in there, lightening, destruction - “
“Be still!” Hecuba commanded. “What an Omen at a bride’s bedding! How dare you make such a scene?”
“But can’t they hear, can’t they see . . . “ Kassandra pressed her hands against her eyes to shut it out.
“For shame!” Her mother was still scolding as she dragged her along. “I thought the princess of Colchis was your friend; Would you spoil her bridal night with this fuss? You have always been jealous whenever anyone else is the center of attention; but I thought you had grown out of that. (p. 163 )

Hecuba is impervious to her daughter’s agony and distress. She misinterprets it as a manifestation of feminine jealousy and attention mongering behaviour. She is not sensitized to Kassandra’s misery. She thinks that
Kassandra is feigning it. In that sense, Penthesilea becomes the true mother of Kassandra. On the occasion of Creusa's wedding, when Kassandra as a priestess of Apollo, comes down to be with the family, Hecuba greets her warmly, but does not forget to add a word of caution that she must not try to prophesy doom at the wedding. Kassandra is bitterly hurt by this insensitive remark. "Does she think I prophesy for the pleasure of doing it?" wonders a tormented and indignant Kassandra. She feels overwhelmed by homesickness for the Amazon encampment and longs for Penthesilea, who has been more of a mother to her than Hecuba has ever been.

Penthesilea fulfills Kassandra's child like need for nurturance. She helps her overcome her personal distress. The warmth and empathy that Penthesilea shows towards Kassandra and Kassandra's overwhelming need for tenderness and compassionate understanding are reminiscent of Adrienne Rich's views on 'Womenbonding' and 'woman-identified net works'. According to Rich, "There is in most of us, a girl child still longing for a woman's nurture, tenderness and approval, a woman's power exerted in our defence, a woman's smell, touch and voice, a woman's strong arms around us in moment of fear and pain."13

Penthesilea looks upon Kassandra as the true daughter of her heart. She wonders at the strange purpose of the Goddess who has sent such a girl of Amazonian spirit not to her womb but to her sister who has chosen to give her to a man's dominion. With a heavy heart, Penthesilea realizes that her niece shall never know happiness in a man's land.

Kassandra is initiated into the arts of war-fare. She becomes a warrior woman by killing a man who tries to rape her. She travels with Penthesilea and
her group of Amazons to the city of Colchis. The matriarchal empire of Colchis is ruled by Queen Imandra. Bradley's revisionary tale suggests that like the pre-patriarchal cults of the Goddess, the matriarchal rule of Queens precedes the patriarchal concept of kingship. Queen Imandra tells Kassandra about the Akhaian savages who try to bring their prattle of 'Kings', into their civilised world and their mighty talk of fathering, as if any man could create life. She affirms that Goddess alone breathes life into children.

At the court of Queen Imandra, Kassandra is introduced to the priestesses of the Earth-Mother and she is initiated into the profounder, enriching mysteries of their Goddess worshipping cults. Kassandra finds it heartening that the city is ruled by the Queen who has not yet chosen to take a consort. The city of Colchis is very different from Troy. Kassandra notices that the women of Colchis enjoy great freedom. She sees them going everywhere freely in the streets, carrying jars and baskets on their heads. She is surprised to find women taking up professions conventionally associated with men. Kassandra sees a woman, dark-faced and soot-stained, working in a forge. Bared to the waist to tolerate the fierce heat, the woman hammers on a sword. A young woman, not much more than a girl is seen working the bellows. Kassandra also finds that the sentries on the walls are women. Kassandra is impressed by the City of Colchis. When Penthesilea's band of Amazons leave the city of Colchis to guard Queen Imandra's shipments of metal, Kassandra also goes with them. Riding beside one of the blacksmith-women of Colchis, talking to her about her curious trade, Kassandra discovers to her surprise that the woman has interestingly different views on professions for women which are contrary to the
views and opinions of women and men in the patriarchy of Troy. The female black smith tells Kassandra that she has three sons and none of them can be taught the trade of a smith because metal is ripped from the womb of the Earth - Mother and therefore it is a woman’s task to shape it into earthly form for men to use. She also adds that no man may follow the smith’s trade for the fear of provoking the Earth mother’s wrath. Living among the Amazons and women of the matriarchal faith who cherish their female children, Kassandra reflects sadly upon the discriminatory practices prevalent in her own Trojan society which undermine the growth of women’s potentialities. Such incongruities begin to disturb Kassandra deeply. She thinks about the exclusion of Trojan women from the public sphere. She begins to dread her return to Troy thinking that she shall go mad, imprisoned inside the house for the rest of her life. She wonders why the women of Troy should be deprived of honour and glory which have always been the privileges of men.

.....Since she had lived among the Amazons, she had been set every day to practice shooting with the bow, and had some skill with the javelin and even with the sword. Her eldest brother, Hector, had been in training as a warrior since he was old enough to grasp a sword in his hand; his first set of armor had been made for him when he was seven years old. Her mother too had been a warrior maiden, yet in Troy it had never occurred to anyone that Kassandra or her sister, Polyxena, should learn anything of weapons or of war. And although like all Priam’s children she had been weaned on tales of heroes and glory, there were times when it seemed to her that war was an ugly thing and that she was better out of it. But if war was too evil a thing for women, why, then, should it be good for men? And if it was a fine and honorable thing for men, why should it be wrong for women to share the honour and the glory? (p.107)
Kassandra begins to feel sad and heart sore when she compares the daughters of royal Trojan family with the daughters of Amazons. In spite of being princesses, she notices that daughters occupy an inferior position in the royal Trojan family. For example, Hector or Paris do not hesitate to punish their sister Kassandra. Both raise their hands on her on several occasions. They treat her with contempt, despise her visionary powers, disbelieve them utterly, and pass disparaging remarks. When Kassandra tries to warn Priam of the ruin and disaster that Helen may bring to the city, Paris condemns her with angry distaste; "I have always known you were mad" he said. "My lady, I beg you to take no notice of her; She is my twin sister, whom the Gods have stricken with madness, and the deluded think her a prophetess. She speaks of nothing but ruin and death for Troy and now she has chosen to think you the cause" (p. 203). Kassandra observes that no matter what form the sexual division of labour takes, the tasks and roles assigned to men are given greater significance and importance in Trojan society. This asymmetry in the cultural evaluation of male and female, in the importance assigned to women and men offends an egalitarian Kassandra. In Troy a daughter is constantly reminded of her inferior femininity and is thought of only as not being a son. Whereas among the Amazons, a daughter is useful and welcome. Amazons consider their male children so useless that they do not even rear them but give them to their fathers. Kassandra realises that she will find it extremely difficult to go back to the women’s quarters of Trojan palace. It is here among the Amazons,
that Kassandra begins to question the rationale which underlies the segregation, marginalisation, exclusion and domestication of Trojan women.

2.2.6 Sexual Politics and the woman in Patriarchy: “Is female to male as nature is to culture?”

Bradley’s Kassandra radically reappraises the social system of Troy as a patriarchy where woman is not an autonomous being. She exists in relation to man. Woman’s ‘alterity’ is the core of Trojan patriarchy. The man is the subject, he is the Absolute, she is always the ‘other’ who has to be controlled and subjugated. It is an androcentric framework within which woman is incidental and inessential as opposed to man who is the supreme essential being. Coming into contact with the Amazons, priestesses of the Earth Mother and queen Imandra, Kassandra yearns to become a permanent member of their sororities. But she also realises that as a princess of Troy, she has to go back there some day. When Kassandra learns that Andromache, Queen Imandra’s daughter shall marry her brother Hector, she is puzzled by Andromache’s enthusiasm. Kassandra swears by the girdle of the Maiden Goddess that she would rather be an Amazon warrior than a wife. Kassandra wonders if there is any man in Troy whom she would willingly marry. “Certainly none of her brothers, even supposing she were not their sister; Hector was rough and contentious; Deiphobos was shifty eyed and a sneak; even Paris, handsome as he was, had already neglected Oenone. Troilus was only a child, but when he grew up he might be gentle and kindly enough” (p.162). After being initiated into the ways and practices of Amazons, Kassandra visualises her return to
Troy with horror and reluctance. She wonders what her mother Hecuba would have to say about her vehement desire for freedom considering that she too had been an Amazonian, and had made the irrevocable choice of becoming the wife of a Trojan King. The intense emotional relationships that Kassandra shares with her Trojan kinswomen, Amazonian Queen Imandra, Penthesilea and priestesses of the Mother Goddess, enable her to decode the repressive ideology of the Trojan patriarchy.

Kassandra comes back to Troy with a resolute determination that she shall not be caged again. She decides that no one can imprison her unless she is willing to be imprisoned. But still the thought that she might have to spend the rest of her life as a proper modest girl depresses her. Kassandra reaches Troy at the time of the festival. She is reunited with her parents. She also feels sad that she has to introduce Andromache in a rather hasty, unceremonious manner. To Kassandra, Andromache represents the fate of woman in patriarchal society, who in the name of love, must leave her mother’s home to become a stranger in her husband’s house. Kassandra introduces Andromache to her parents and tells her mother that Queen Imandra, their kinswoman has sent her to be a wife to one of her brothers. She also adds that Andromache has brought a wagon load of treasure of Colchis for a dowry. No sooner does she utter those words of introduction than she begins so feel immensely guilty. Kassandra feels that she has spoken rather crudely, and worries if her words seem to betoken a mere matter of purchase and queenly expediency, as if Imandra has sent her daughter as a bribe for Priam.
In her portrayals of marriages, Bradley demonstrates that patriarchy is maintained by the exchange of women as possessions from fathers to husbands always so as to control or gain something. The comments of Cixous on the patriarchal institution of marriage assume significance in this context. Cixous elucidates how phallocentric cultural order is based on possession and property:

"What does he want in return – the traditional man? And she? At first what he wants, whether on the level of cultural or of personal exchanges, whether it is a question of capital or of affectivity (or of love, of jouissance) – is that he gain more masculinity: plus value of virility, authority, power, money or pleasure, all of which reinforce his phallocentric narcissism at the same time. Moreover, that is what society is made for – how it is made, and man can hardly get out of it. An unenviable fate they've made for themselves. A man is always proving something, he has to 'show' off, show up the others. Masculine profit is almost always mixed up with a success that is socially defined... if there is a self proper to woman, paradoxically it is her capacity to 'depropriate herself' without self interest…" 14

Kassandra begins to see very clearly the sexual politics that underlies the family structure of the Trojan patriarchy. She also notices that the sexual division of labour rigidly enforced in the Trojan patriarchy is not universal and that gender identity varies from culture to culture. Hence, for Imandara or Penthesilea and other women of Colchis or Amazons, the life styles of Trojan women may not appear to be normal. Whereas the domesticity of their women does not seem unnatural for the royal men of Troy. Kassandra feels an inner impulsion to compare and contrast the life styles of her own mother Hecuba, sisters in law Andromache, Helen, half sister Creusa and other women of the palace with those of Amazons. A transcendental release or liberation in the
form of participation in public spheres eludes the royal women of Troy. Marriage, motherhood and domesticity in the Trojan patriarchy become metaphors for female 'immanence', sexual oppression and exclusion from which there is no redemption. It is a vicious cycle, which defines the woman's inexorable destiny in terms of passive suffering and anxious anticipation. Helen, Andromache, Hecuba are equally powerless in that they are not the decision makers within the patriarchy of Troy. They exist as docile wives, affectionate mothers who nurture, cajole and comfort. Thus 'wife' in the Trojan patriarchy represents nature as property which is linked to her subjugated sexuality. Here Bradley explores the controversial woman/nature vs man/culture dialectic. The division of labour in the Trojan patriarchy follows an absolutely rigid classification of woman/nature and man/culture dichotomy. Feminist critic Sherry Ortner reveals the ways in which gender differences and women's subordination resulting from gender discriminations are produced and reproduced in society through a customary association of men with culture and women with nature. Bradley expands this dialectical notion to suggest that the 'immanent' nature of women's reproductive functions confine women to the domestic sphere, leaving men free to dominate the more prestigious public sphere. But her feminist revisionist purpose is revealed in the reiteration that the "whole scheme is a construct of culture rather than a fact of nature" 15. Sherry Ortner elucidates this patriarchal cultural ideology:

Returning ... to the issue of women, their pan-cultural second class status could be accounted for, quite simply, by postulating that women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified
with culture. Since it is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature then culture would find it ‘natural’ to subordi-inate, not to say oppress them ... That is culture (still equated relatively unambiguously with men), recognises that women are active participants in its special processes, but at the same time sees them as being more rooted in or having more direct affinity with nature. ... Woman is not ‘in reality’ any closer to / or further from nature than man ... Ultimately, both women and men can and must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women be seen as aligned with culture, in culture’s ongoing dialectic with nature.

Sherry Ortner reveals the ‘politics’ of sexed identities. Bradley’s delineation of the sexual power politics of Trojan patriarchy has second wave feminist theoretical underpinnings. Bradley’s identification of the causal link between women’s oppression and patriarchal redefinition of sex roles is based on Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics, one of the most influential texts of second wave feminism. In her work, Millett identifies sexuality not as some simple, natural experience of women and men, but as being socially constructed with political consequences and politically constructed with social consequences. The title ‘Sexual politics’ sums up Millett’s theory of patriarchy. She argues that patriarchal power is ubiquitous. According to Millett, ideological indoctrination is the cause of women’s oppression. She identifies a deeply entrenched politics of sexuality, beginning with the reproduction of patriarchy through psychosocial conditioning in the family which operates in all economic and social structures. Her fundamental conviction is that women’s oppression derives not from biology but from the social construction of femininity.
According to the socially constructed notions of femininity which are based on the ideology of ‘sexual politics’, female or feminine behaviour is the cluster suited to the “role” of a home maker. Passivity, obedience, emotionalism, subjectivity, home, children, domestic life or affective characteristics. Male or masculine behaviour is that cluster of psychological traits thought to be suited to the “role” of the breadwinner - aggression; initiative, rationality, objectivity, in short, instrumental characteristics. Men are associated with public spheres of the work place, politics, religion in its institutional forms, intellectual and cultural life and in general terms, the exercise of power and authority.

The organisation of Trojan patriarchy as envisaged by Bradley adheres to the configurations of sex roles outlined by Millett. Home figures as a source of identity for man, but it is a place that he must leave. For woman, home signifies denial of the self, yet it is a place she cannot leave. She endures eventlessness and the pain of coerced immobility. All the royal women take up spinning and weaving. Karl Kerényi, the distinguished mythologist, points out that for the ancient Greeks, “weaving was an act of creation, a metaphor for the continuous processes by which life was spun and woven” 17. Thus ‘woman’ as weaver is, ‘woman’ as the creator and re-creator of life. Yet the reproductive role of the woman does not liberate her in Trojan patriarchy. Fatherhood exalts their men, enhances their amour - propre by confirming their virility whereas motherhood imprisons their women, increases their helplessness and suffering. All the royal women are unsure of their husbands’ fidelity. They passively endure their husbands’ philandering, they have no control over their men’s amorous exploits.
Motherhood chastens but fatherhood does not curb male promiscuity. The 'sexual politics' that underlies the domestication and subordination of women as wives and mothers is strongly emphasised in the revisionist tale of Bradley.

2.2.7 Sisterhood in patriarchy: The royal women of Troy.

The sense of sisterhood shared by the royal women confined to the women's quarter of the Trojan palace is different from the sorority of Amazons. After her return to Troy, Kassandra becomes a priestess of Apollo and starts living in the Sun God's temple. Yet she strives to establish an amicable bond of goodwill between the royal women of the palace. Although there are feminine bickerings, jealousies and rivalries, the spirit of sisterhood triumphs over such petty emotions. Andromache and Kassandra share a warm bond of friendship. When Kassandra is introduced to Andromache by her mother Queen Imandra as the sister of Hector, her promised husband, Andromache greets her rapturously and asks Kassandra many questions about Hector. Kassandra realises that although Andromache is the daughter of Queen Imandra who wants her to become a warrior, Andromache herself has no such ambitions. With distaste and horror, Andromache confides in Kassandra that she does not want to 'fight like a man' even though this is what her name actually means: "Men say that women who take up weapons are pretending to be warriors only because they are unable to spin and weave and make tapestries and bear children" (p.123) remarks Andromache. Her views reflect patriarchal attitudes and misconceptions about femininity which she has internalised perfectly. Andromache nurtures romantic views on love, marriage and motherhood. She abhors the views and opinions of
Amazons and admits to Kassandra with candour that the Amazonian existence has not brought happiness to her mother although her mother vehemently contradicts such 'sentimental' assumptions. Despite the dissimilarity of their views, Andromache and Kassandra cherish their friendship. Andromache understands Kassandra's penchant for martial arts and outdoor activities. She stoutly defends Kassandra when her husband Hector tries to punish her for her 'unwomanly' behaviour. Kassandra tells Andromache that her brother is a bully and that she must be firm with him or he will treat her like a rug and walk all over her. She cautions her: "You will be no more than a timid little thing perpetually yessing him, as my mother does my father". (p.122).

Kassandra is unable to imagine why Queen Iphandra is so eager to have her daughter allied with Troy, and even less able to imagine why Andromache is willing and eager to comply. However, if she must return to Troy, Kassandra feels that, she would be glad to have with her something of the wide world she has discovered. Also, Kassandra comes to love Andromache, and she thinks that if she must part from Penthesilea and the women of the Amazonian tribe, at least she would have one true friend and kinswoman in Troy.

Kassandra is also inexplicably drawn to Oenone. She tries to comfort a visibly distressed, pregnant Oenone, deeply hurt by Paris's neglect and indifference. Kassandra puts her arm around Oenone and tries to soothe her. When a weeping Oenone pleads with Kassandra to use her power of prophesy and affirm that Paris will come back to her, Kassandra is deeply moved and astonished at the depth of her emotions. She tries to protect Oenone against the shock of Paris's betrayal.
Kassandra is fiercely protective of Andromache’s rights as a mother:

“What is all this non-sense about Hector’s son?” she asked, only half joking. “It was you who went to the trouble of carrying him for the best part of a year and you who went through all the pain and fuss of birthing him. I would call him Andromache’s son?” (p.195). Even Andromache confides in Kassandra her innermost thoughts and feelings. A heavily pregnant Andromache tells Kassandra that she is fortunate to be an unmarried woman, as she has saved herself from the depredations of men:

“May be you have the best of it, being sworn to the God and forbidden to men! After all that, I am in no hurry to welcome Hector back to my bed. Childbirth is a much overrated pastime: I would as soon wait a few years before I try it again. And they say women are too fragile to handle weapons for fear of wounds? I wonder how brave my dear Hector would have been in this battle!

Then she chuckled, “Can’t you hear it now? - We change all the customs and bards will make ballads about the bravery of Hecuba, mother of Hector! Well, and why not? - she has triumphed in that battle at least a dozen times, which means she has more bravery than I ever hope to have! They tell us about the delights of marriage … every girl is brought up to think of nothing else, but the delights of child bearing we are left to discover for ourselves (pp. 195 - 196).

Kassandra’s half sister Creusa, the wife of Aeneas also shares her fears and anxieties with her. Creusa asks Kassandra whether she should leave the city of Troy with her children. She also confides her suspicion in Kassandra that perhaps her husband has found another woman and wants her out of the way. Despite her unmarried status, Kassandra becomes the confidante of her married
half sister and sisters in law. They seek her advice and suggestions. Although she is initially reluctant, a great friendship gradually blossoms between Kassandra and Helen. The royal women help each other during pregnancy and child birth. For them, the notion of 'sisterhood' may not have the power and sanctity that it has for the Amazons, nevertheless it helps them to transcend personal rivalries and animosities.

2.2.8 Kassandra, the Priestess

As a priestess of Apollo, Kassandra represents austerity, purity of thought and feeling. She feels that she can never serve such an 'Unjust Goddess' as Aphrodite if she has ordained that Paris must desert Oenone for Helen. Kassandra rebels against the caprices of this Goddess –

“If Aphrodite was indeed a Goddess of Love, why had She not chosen to guard the love between Oenone and Paris?”

“She wondered about this Goddess Aphrodite, who put such temptation into the hearts of men and women too; it was not only that Paris had chosen and could not resist Helen, but Helen too, though Queen of Sparta by mother - right, had chosen to give herself to Paris - after having chosen her husband, as few women in the Akhaian world could do. If I were a Queen, she thought, I should choose to be like Imandra and reign alone taking no consort” (p.211)

Kassandra compares the images of the Goddess as a mother prevalent in Troy and Colchis with the image of the Goddess as a lover that Aphrodite represents.
The Goddesses of Troy and of Colchis were sensible Goddesses, who acknowledged the primacy of the earth and of motherhood, but this Goddess who disrupted all things for a whim they called love - no, this was no Goddess she could ever consent to serve......

How strange these Akhaians were; first they chose to worship a Goddess of marriage who would punish any woman for straying outside it, and then they chose a Goddess of passionate love who would tempt a woman to forsake the vows she had sworn. It was as if the Akhians both feared and desired faithlessness in their wives or perhaps they only wished an excuse for abandoning them (p.212).

...... This new Goddess is created by men, Kassandra thought, to excuse their own lechery; (p.222).

Kassandra spurns the amorous advances of the priest of Apollo. She is very firm and resolute. Although Khryse tries to seduce her, Kassandra refuses to be swayed by his devious arguments. She challenges his notions and assumptions about women and unnerves Khryse by her argumentative wit and tough reasonableness. Kassandra laughs derisively at Khryse when he gravely insists that she must not learn the Cretan script because the Gods have ordained that women are not to be taught these things, for it will damage their minds, dry up their wombs and the world will become barren everywhere.

Alluding to her celibacy, Khryse accuses her of insulting the Goddess of love. He affirms that she has defied the great power of nature which has ordained that woman is made for man and she shall bear his children. Unfazed by his sophistical arguments, Kassandra retaliates with a counterblast:
"Are you trying to tell me that before the Gods and the Goddess gave men wisdom and learning, men could bear children and that because man created other things he was denied that power? Even the Amazons know better than that. They do all manner of things forbidden to women here, yet they bear children as well".

"Daughters", he said scornfully.

"Many Amazons have borne fine sons"

"I had been told that among the Amazons they kill male children".

"No, they send them to their fathers. And they know all the arts which in tribes of different customs are reserved to men. So if women in Crete are not allowed to read, what has that to do with me? We are not in Crete?"

"A woman should not be able to reason like that", Khryse protested. "The life of the mind destroys the life of the body."

"You are even more of a fool than I thought," Kassandra retorted. "If this were true, it would be even more important to teach no man, lest it destroy him as a warrior. Are all the priests of Crete eunuchs, then?"

"You think too much", Khryse said sadly. "It will yet destroy you as a woman".

Her eyes glinted with mischief.

"And if I should give myself to you, it would save me from that dreadful fate? You are kind indeed, my friend, and I am ungrateful that I do not appreciate the great sacrifice you are willing to make for me".

"You should not scorn these mysteries", said Khryse soberly.

"Do you not believe that because the God has put desire for you into my heart, it is a message from the God that I should have you?"

Raising her eyebrows with scorn, Kassandra said, "Every seducer has spoken so since time began and every mother teaches her daughter not to listen to such false nonsense. Would you have me teach your daughter this kind of thing, that because some man desires her, it is her duty to give herself?" (p. 224).
Kassandra points out the double standard in Khryse’s view of sexuality conditioned by patriarchal attitudes. While a man’s position as a lover/husband and father does not prohibit him from taking up intellectual pursuits, a woman’s role as a wife and a nurturant mother disqualifies and incapacitates her from effective participation in intellectual and other spheres. Kassandra finds this view extremely reductionistic and limiting. She also feels that this view of sexuality and women’s procreative functions is not innate but reflects the ideological assumptions of political and cultural institutions that affect the condition of individual life and consciousness. She finds that the Amazons are good mothers and also excel in certain other fields which are traditionally held to be exclusively men’s domains.

Kassandra also observes that most of the organised religious belief systems which dominate the Akhaian world are profoundly sexist. The pantheon of Gods and Goddesses uphold and valorize the ‘masculine principle’ by devaluing the ‘female principle’. In a conversation with Helen, Kassandra admits that she is not convinced by the Akhaian Goddesses, especially Athena, the Goddess who represents father - right, and denies having had any mother. Kassandra claims that the Goddesses of Akhaian patriarchy such as Aphrodite and Athena serve as emblematic women more identified with male aims.

“I mean that the Goddesses of your Akhaian folk are different from the Goddesses of our people”, Kassandra said. “Your Maiden Goddess - the warrior, Athena - She is just such a Goddess as a man would invent, because they say She was not born of any woman but sprang in full armor from the head and the mind of Zeus; yet, for all Her weapons, She is a girl with all the domestic virtues, who would make some God a good
wife. She tends to Her spinning and weaving and is patron of the vines, both the olive and the grape. Would not a man create a warrior maiden just like this - brave and virtuous, but still obedient to the greatest of Gods? And your Hera - she is like our Earth Goddess, but your people call Her only the wife of Zeus Almighty and say She is subject to him in all things, while to us Earth Mother is all powerful in herself. She brings forth all things, but Her sons and Her lovers come and go, and She takes whom she will; when the God of Death took Her daughter, She brought the very Earth to a standstill, so that it neither bore nor brought forth fruit...." (p. 414)

The image of the pre-patriarchal Goddess namely the Earth Mother posited by Kassandra is in complete antithesis to the Akhaian Goddesses who are submissive and afraid of the Gods. The Earth Mother not only represents fecundity, nurturance and loving concern, she is also powerfully awesome, persevering in her desire to maintain control over her offspring like the mythical Demeter and able to withhold sustenance. She also challenges the patriarchal order on behalf of her daughter. As Adrienne Rich suggests: "The images of the pre-patriarchal Goddess cults did one thing: they told women that power, awesomeness and centrality were theirs by nature, not by privilege or miracle; the female was primary" 18. In Chapter IV titled "The primacy of the Mother" of her work Of Woman Born (1976) Rich indicates that the Great Mother acknowledges no individual husband and in pre-patriarchal times, gynocentric motherhood precedes wifehood. Accordingly the mother relation and status are far more important than the wife status. Rich argues that the Mother Goddess was gradually devalued and rejected by patriarchy. According to Rich this devaluation and rejection of the Mother Goddess reduces the dignity and power
of the human woman: Patriarchal man impregnates her and expects her to deliver 'his' child; Here, Rich quotes Apollo's verdict in vindication of matricide by Orestes: "The mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts". Alluding to Philip Slater's *The Glory of Hera*, a study of ancient Greek religious cults, Rich comments that Slater sees the entire Olympian mythology as saturated with fear of the mature, maternal woman. "The much admired Goddess, Athena, is born from her father Zeus's brain, is virginal, childless and affirms her loyalty to the male. Hera is a jealous, competitive consort and destructive mothers like Gaea, Rhea, Medea and Clytemnestra abound". Rich explicates the connection Slater establishes between the mythological images of Greek Women and the Grecian social reality -

"Slater theorises that this fear of the maternal woman derived from the sexual politics of fifth century Greece, where women were ill educated, were sold into marriage and had no role except as producers of children, the sexual interest of men was homoerotic, and for intellectual friendships a man sought out hetaeras (usually foreign born women) or other men. He assumes the mother to have been filled with resentment and envy of her sons and in her own frustration, excessively controlling of her male children in their earliest years. Her feelings would have been experienced by her sons as a potentially destructive hostility which is later embodied in mythology and classical drama".

In *The Firebrand* Bradley also suggests that the God Apollo, one of the most powerful Greek Gods is also the enemy of the Earth Mother Goddess. Kassandra, torn between her allegiance to the matriarchal, pre patriarchal Goddess cults of the Earth Mother and her devotion to Apollo, faces a crucial
dilemma. The episode, where Khryse tries to sexually assault Kassandra by wearing the mask of Apollo brings out Kassandra's predicament clearly.

"Vile Priest!" She said in a gasp. "You dare use the semblance of the God to satisfy your lusts! You profane that which you do not understand!" Kassandra was shaking with a mixture of rage and horror. "By the mother of all, I wouldn't lie with you if you were truly possessed by Apollo!"

"Would you not, Kassandra?" A shudder passed through Khryse's body; and then unexpectedly and unmistakably - the voice was that of Apollo. "You who are my chosen one - surely you cannot think I would fail to protect you from a vicious and foolish mortal?"

Kassandra heard Phyllida's cry of recognition; but the dark tide flowed over her and filled her, and she felt the surge of the Goddess rising within her. The last thing she heard was the voice of the Goddess.

Yours, Sun Lord? She was given to Me before even she came to birth in this mortal world, or felt Your touch! (p.228)

...Kassandra remembered the voice of Apollo, breaking through the noise and confusion in the room and the ill fated words she had flung at Khryse

"I wouldn't lie with you if you were the God Himself ..." Had she truly said those words to her God? Khryse had deserved them; yet her whole body tightened in grief at the thought that Apollo Sun Lord might have taken them to Himself.

Still, beyond fear or regret, she knew now the source of the dark waters; it was the Goddess who had claimed her. She had given herself to the God in all the sincerity of her first love, yet she had not been free (p.230).

..... The deep familiar voice resonated to the corners of the room.

Kassandra ......

Beyond all question it was the voice of the God. Kassandra felt her knees loosen and she slid to the floor, not daring to raise her eyes or speak.

The shining form turned to Kassandra, she trembled and bowed her head.
As for you Kassandra, you whom I have loved; you have given yourself to My ancient Enemy, yet I have claimed you and you are Mine - I will not release you; yet you have offended me and from you I withdraw My divine gift of prophesy.

The voice was filled with throbbing sadness; Kassandra felt within herself a surge of protest and resentment; her body was a battleground, her eyes burning, the dark surging waters of the Goddess raging against the blasting heat of Apollo’s wrath.

“You too shall know my power”!

Abruptly the presence was gone; Kassandra, released from the grip of the warring Immortals, slumped to the floor (p.232)

In her symbolic, revisionist portrayal of the warring Immortals, Bradley depicts the conflict between the female principle represented the matriarchal cults of the Earth Mother and the male principle deified by patriarchal power.

In her discussion of the ascendence and evolution of the patriarchal, religion which destabilized the Matriarchal cults of the Great Mother, Adrienne Rich alludes to Hellenic religious conception of Apollo, the Sun God as representative of the supremacy of masculine principle. Rich also elucidates the inveterately anthropocentric ideology that underlies Greek orthodoxy. Although, Apollo, the Hellenic Sun God assimilates a number of attractive aspects of the Great Mother - even to being paired with the moon, he becomes the spokesman for father right and therefore ‘the male principle’ : “The mother of trees, of healing herbs and the preservation of life, becomes a male God”. Rich quotes from Slater’s Glory of Hera describing Apollo as “the personification of anti-matriarchy, a crusader against Earth deities. He is all Sun light, Olympian,
manifest, rational". Rich extends the arguments of Slater to emphasize the quintessential masculinity that Apollo represents. She suggests that the ‘Apollonian’ rational control of nature, as opposed to the instinctual excesses of the cult of Dionysus, the power of consciousness as opposed to the unconscious, the celebration of father – right over mother right come together in this mythology. 22

2.2.9 Retelling the story of the Trojan War: A Feminist revelation of the degeneracy of militarist patriarchy.

In The Firebrand, the story of the Trojan war unfolds from the point of view of Trojan women. Bradley juxtaposes the senseless quarrels, the bloodlust of Trojan and Akhaian kings and princes with the life giving, nurturant “preservative love” 23 of Trojan women. Bradley ably demonstrates that in patriarchal, militarist regimes which lead to internecine battles between nations, women are forced to suffer deeply and lead powerless maternal lives. The pacifist renunciation of war is linked with ‘maternal love’ of women. Bradley scathingly exposes the degeneracy of militarist patriarchy where battles are mercilessly fought by power hungry, aggressive Kings for political and economic gains. Her portrayals of the heroes are tinged with irony and sarcasm. Kassandra also understands that Helen’s elopement with Paris is not the sole cause for this war. She sees this as a political ploy of Agamemnon to expand his empire and admits it to her sister-in-law Andromache.

“Andromache, are you blind too? Can’t you see that Helen is only the excuse? Agamemnon has been trying to find some such reason to come against us in war for
many years, and now we have walked straight into his
snares. Now we will have these iron-wearers trying to
take all the lands that lie to the south of here. He will
muster the full might of all these warlike people to ... 
oh, what does it matter?” Kassandra sank down on a
bench. “You can’t see it because you are like
Hector……. You think war leads only to fame and
glory!” (p.238)

Although the last thing Kassandra wants to do is to like or respect Helen, she cannot help liking her. Kassandra is also astonished by Helen’s perspicacity. She discovers that her deepest convictions are shared by Helen. Surprisingly Helen’s views on Trojan and Akhaian war are similar to her own views. Her talk with Helen confirms this belief.

Helen smiled cynically. “If he should say it, no one
would listen,” she said. “Come, Kassandra, you know as well
as I that my body and my adultery are only a pretext for this
war; Agamemnon has been seeking a good excuse for years
to attack Troy. If I sought to return to Menelaus tonight
under cover of darkness, I would wager anything you like
that my dead body would be found hanging on the wall and
the Akhaians would keep fighting on the pretext of avenging
me.”

This was so likely true that Kassandra did not bother to
comment. Helen said in annoyance, “There have been many
times when I felt it would be best if I had been sworn a
virgin to the Moon Maiden. Even now I am tempted to
forswear men forever in Her shrine; would She have me, do
you think ?”

“How should I know ?” Kassandra replied hesitantly.

“Well, you are a priestess.........”

“All I know is that She denies no woman who comes
before Her, “Kassandra said, “but it seems to me that your
destiny is to become a symbol of strife among men; and no
one can argue with destiny”.
"It would be too good to be true, I suppose, that I should be able to seek the Goddess and in Her shadow avert the known pattern of my fate", Helen said. "But how do I know it is a God who has determined this fate and not that I have simply become entangled between two willful men who care nothing for the Gods?".

"I think this is the kind of thing no one can ever know," Kassandra said. "Yet I do feel the hand of some God in this; I know how Paris was driven to seek you."

"Then you mean that this war between Troy and my people was determined by the Immortals?" Helen asked. "Why? I mean, why me and not some other?" (p. 276)

Bradley gives an immensely moving account of Helen's misery. Helen does not want to be a reduced to the status of a sexual object. She longs to be free from such obligations. Speaking to her sister in law Kassandra, Helen articulates the wish to renounce all her ties with the men who have been fighting for her. Bradley recreates the mythic personality of Helen to explore her personal suffering. The characterisation of Helen in Bradley's feminist, revisionist tale, is reminiscent of H.D's Helen in Egypt. In her work, Impertinent Voices., (1991) Liz Yorke analyses the mythic persona of Helen as 'a cultural reflection' functioning as the mythic representation of the patriarchal seductress. According to Yorke, "Helen's legendary figure becomes a collective projection of the beautiful woman – as both product of male desire and as object of barter and military negotiation". Bradley deconstructs the sexist iconography of Helen as a 'femme fatale', or a woman of pleasure' and humanises her. The process of re-inscription – that is, of critique, deletion and reconstitution shows a movement from patriarchal into matriarchal forms. Helen expresses a wish to serve the Maiden Goddess. Diana
Collecott’s comments on H.D’s use of Greek myth can also be justly applied to Bradley’s revisionist effort. Like H.D, Bradley also uses the Greek myth “to confront feminine experience, and to express it in direct opposition to the predominant masculine ideology - an ideology that oppressed women and promoted war”. There is an attempt to recover the positive values of love and creativity which are identified with female divinities, and also to offset the negative values of hatred and aggression that dominate heroic legend. In her conversation with Aeneas, her brother in law and her secret lover, Kassandra argues that war may be men’s business but it is the women who will suffer more than the men. Aeneas, surprised at her wisdom, admits that he has not thought of that before.

“A man faces nothing worse than an honourable death; but the women must face rape, capture, slavery .....It’s true; war is not for women, but for men. I wonder how a woman would conduct this war”.

Kassandra said with great bitterness, “A woman would have managed never to provoke it”. (p. 254)

Kassandra also contemptuously refers to Hector’s eagerness for battle. “Hector runs into every battle as if he were to win a bronze cauldron and a white bull with gilded horns” (p.254) When Odysseus comes to the court of King Priam with Akhilles and Patroclus, to discuss some of the ways of averting the war, Kassandra notes with heavy distaste, the cruel, aggressive masculine pride and superciliousness of Akhilles. Akhilles dismisses suggestions of peace talk as ‘girl’s talk’ and not man’s talk. He tells Odysseus that he is eager for war and all women, including his mother Thetis whose prophecies are ‘moon shine and old wives’ tales’, are idiots when it comes to
war. Kassandra contradicts him by telling him that she has lived with the Amazons and that one need not be a hero to be desperately weary of gossip of women's quarters. Akhilles the great hero of The Iliad, is the paradigmatic male figure of patriarchy in The Firebrand. Heroic, male centered, he ruthlessly leads a group of warriors called 'the Myrmidons'. To him, woman is either a 'sacrificial victim' or 'sexual spoils'. He has forgotten his boy hood love of the mother Goddess Thetis. He thinks of nothing but war, takes pleasure in nothing but killing. Listening to him talk, Kassandra feels:

That is simply how he sees the world, all in terms of fighting and honour. May be, if he lived long enough, he might grow out of that. But men who see the world that way do not live long enough to learn better. It is almost a pity; but perhaps the world is better without such men" (p.293).

"Can this be the greatest of warriors, Kassandra thought - a child proud of his new toy sword and shiny armour? And does the survival of Troy and of our world depend on this mad child? " (p.294).

When the war begins between the Trojans and the Akhaians, Kassandra has a premonition that none of the Trojan royal men shall survive. Penthesilea and her Amazons come to Troy to offer military assistance to Priam. In a poignant and extremely moving manner, Bradley depicts the deaths of Amazon warriors at the hands of Akhilles and the extinction of this tribe of brave women. Penthesilea, who has been more than a mother to Kassandra dies an ignoble death in the battlefield. With trepidation and fear, Kassandra goes up unto the wall to watch as Penthesilea and her group ride forth
against the Akhaians. Kassandra watches Penthesilea confronting and parrying
the attacks of Akhilles.

They came together with a shock of spears clearly heard by
the women on the wall. When the dust subsided, two of the
Amazons were lying on the ground, their horses fallen. One
scrambled to her feet and cut her assailant down with her
spear; the other lay motionless, her horse struggling and
rolling away, trying to rise. An Akhaian soldier saw its
struggles and quickly cut its throat, then knelt over the
fallen woman to wrench off her fine armor. Kassandra saw
that Penthesilea had survived that first charge; her horse
had taken a spear wound, but was still on its feet.

The Amazon Queen swung her mount and charged right
through a cluster of Akhilles’ soldiers, knocking them
aside, killing more than one with her spear – thrusts. Kassandra saw the very moment when Akhilles became
aware of her: when she cut down a man who must have
been one of his own personal body-guards. She saw the
leap he made, facing the Amazon as if inviting her to get
down and fight him face to face.

Penthesilea dismounted to face him head on, sword to
sword. She was actually taller than he was, and had a
longer reach with the sword. They clashed together, with a
flurry of sword-strokes too swift to follow. Akhilles reeled
and for a moment went down on his knees. He made some
signal, so that his men rushed in and immediately engaged
all the other warrior women. Then, swiftly as a striking
snake, he was up, his sword moving almost too quickly to
be seen. Penthesilea retreated a few steps until she stood
against her horse’s flank. Then his relentless sword pressed
her until she went down. Kassandra heard the breath sob
out of her as Akhilles fell to the Amazon’s side. What was
the madman doing? He tore at her clothes in a frenzy,
leaned forward and, as they watched in horror, violently
raped the corpse.
Monstrous, she thought. If only I had my bow! Akhilles had finished and was fighting off the four Amazons who had come to attack him. He struck down two of them at once, then took down another with a spear, wounding her so that, reeling away, she was cut down by one of his soldiers. The remaining women made a desperate rush to recover Penthesilea’s body; but they were hopelessly outnumbered, and within a few more minutes not a single Amazon warrior remained alive. The soldiers rounded up and led away their surviving horses. In a single hour of battle, the last of a tribe with all their culture and their memories had been wiped out, and that fiend Akhilles had carried out the final insult to a warrior who dared challenge him. Kassandra did not believe for a single moment that he had been overcome by lust; it had been a cold-blooded act of contempt.

It would have been fitting, she thought, if Apollo had let fly His arrow at that moment to take him in the very act of overweening pride. The God who loathed excess in revenge or even in war would have been the perfect avenger. Akhilles, Kassandra realized, no longer qualified as an honorable opponent in battle, he was like a mad dog.

Kassandra is determined on avenging her kinswoman Penthesilea’s ignominious death and rape. She looks one last time at the body of Penthesilea lying shamefully stripped and bared on the field, then goes up to the Sun Lord’s house and to her room. From the chest, she takes her bow, a gift from Penthesilea. Into the quiver she puts the last of the envenomed arrows made by the Kentaurs, wears the mask of Apollo and silently climbs to the balcony overlooking the battle field. She takes an arrow and aims it at Akhilles. The arrow strikes his bare heel and Akhilles collapses on the ground and dies. Thus Kassandra takes revenge against the Akhaian hero Akhilles.
Kassandra’s triumph is short lived. All the sons of Hecuba die on the battle field and the city of Troy is besieged in all directions from Akhaian soldiers. Kassandra, Andromache and other women try to hide in the shrine of the Maiden Goddess. But the Akhaian soldiers follow them and enter the precincts of the temple. Kassandra is brutally raped by Ajax. When she regains consciousness, Kassandra finds that she has been claimed by King Agamemnon and held as a captive in his ship. On board the ship of Agamemnon, living as his concubine, Kassandra discovers that she is pregnant and she bears a son to Agamemnon called ‘Agathon’. Kassandra does not get frightened at the prospect of meeting Queen Klytemnestra. When Agamemnon’s ship reaches the shores of Mycene, Kassandra senses his apprehension. Agamemnon is received by Aegisthos, a kinsman of Queen Klytemnestra. Kassandra perceives his wife’s anger and understands that soon, Agamemnon shall be killed. Her prophetic vision come true. Agamemnon is killed by Aegisthos. With the infant son in her arms, Kassandra faces the Queen Klytemnestra. Introducing herself as the Trojan princess and priestess of the Serpent Mother, Kassandra explains to a belligerent, suspicious Klytemnestra that she has no intentions of claiming political power for herself or for her infant son. Kassandra takes leave of Klytemnestra, to go to Colchis, the land of her kinswoman, Queen Imandra.

2.2.10 Kassandra’s Vision of an Egalitarian, Non-Patriarchal Order:

Her traumatic experiences ensuing the Trojan war, give Kassandra infallible insights, into the oppression of women in patriarchy. With an
indomitable Amazonian spirit, Kassandra enters the city of Colchis with her son and her male companion Zakynthos who wishes to found a city where the Goddess can be served without Gods or Kings. The city of Colchis beckons Kassandra. She is fascinated by this city where the women are more free and are not expected to defer to their husbands and brothers, and lead dull eventless lives imprisoned within the four walls of the house. Moreover it is a city, where years ago, she was initiated into the matriarchal cults of the Goddess as an Amazon. The Amazonian sorority and the Goddess worshipping cults provide Kassandra with the vision of an ideal, pacifist society. Kassandra is pleasantly surprised that Zakynthos also shares her convictions. They dream of a society established not on the militaristic, aggressive principles of patriarchy, but an order of the Great Mother Goddess, incorporating the qualities of nurturance, pacifism and egalitarianism. In the court of Imandra, Kassandra and her male companion describe their dream city.

...... Outside, these accursed isles where men worship Gods of iron and oppression .... a world where Earth Mother will be worshipped in the old ways. .... "It is She who has given me this vision, a dream of a city where women are not slaves, and where men need not spend their lifetimes in war and fighting. There must be a better way for both men and women to live than this great war which consumed all my childhood and took the lives of my father and all my brothers-"
"And of mine", Kassandra said.
"And of yours." (pp.600-601)

They repudiate marriage as one of the evils which has come with the new ways of patriarchy, with its emphasis on giving away the woman as if she were a slave. Zakynthos suggests that he and Kassandra must continue to travel
together to build a world better than Troy. Kassandra is filled with hope once again. Her vision of the dream world marks the culmination of Bradley’s feminist, pacifist work of revision.

Their new city might be one where men and women need not be enemies, where the Gods were not the implacable enemies of the Goddess.

If Troy could not last forever, there was no assurance that the new city would. But if for her lifetime’s work she could have a share in building a city where men did not deform their sons into fighters so that they need not follow cruel Gods into battle, or their daughters into men’s playthings, then her life would be well spent.

.... Agamemnon had been no worse than Poseidon; Paris had set Troy aflame at the bidding of a Goddess more cruel and capricious than any man. The worst of men, in her lifetime, had been no worse that the best of Gods. And what evil they had one, they had done at the bidding of Gods made in their own image.

She listened, but no God’s voice spoke to forbid her; she knew at that moment what her answer would be, and already her heart was racing forward across the great sea to a new world which, if it was no better than the old, would at least be as much better as men and women could make it.

“Let us go, Zakynthos, to search for our city. Perhaps one day those who come after us will know the truth of Troy and its fall”, she said, and took his hand in her own.

Somewhere, a Goddess smiled. She did not think it was Aphrodite.

In The Firebrand, the rediscovery of the ancient cults of the Mother Goddess and initiation into the sorority of Amazons empower the heroine Kassandra with a utopian vision of a non sexist, war free, non patriarchal, egalitarian society. Bradley portrays ‘border crossing’ both in geographical and ideological terms. Kassandra moves away from Troy which represents the
rigid, inexorable patriarchal order into the Amazonian world of affectionate and supportive sorority. And thereafter as a captive to the land of Akhaians and finally reaches the empire of Queen Imandra founded on matriarchal ideals. It is here, inspired by her companion Zakynthos, Kassandra rediscovers the practical possibilities of a dream city, where pacifist values of ‘preservative love’ represented by a matriarchal vision can be actualised. The feminist revision of Bradley reaffirms the validity of a pacifist womanculture. As Mary Edwardsen suggests; “It is not..... that woman is the new ‘victor’, rather, we have come to an age in which heroes look foolish and truths shallow. And, perhaps, we have grown wise enough to realise the new ‘Heroes’ and new truths can only perpetuate the oppression which men and their words have created. It is the age of woman, ‘the ironic hero’.”

2.3. Casting aside Gynophobic masks to reclaim the Goddess: The Mists of Avalon by Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Patriarchy is itself the prevailing religion of the entire planet ... All of the so called religions legitimating patriarchy are mere sects subsumed under its vast umbrella / canopy. They are essentially similar, despite the variations. All – from... Christianity to secular derivatives such as freudianism, jungianism, marxism and maoism, are infrastructures of the edifice of patriarchy. 

Marion Zimmer Bradley’s The Mists of Avalon, a retelling of the Arthurian legends from a feminist perspective, shifts the focus from King Arthur and the heroic adventures of his knights to the lives and powers of the women of his times and their ability to manipulate events. Bradley’s feminist mythic
reconfigurations identify Christianity as the original spell of the patriarchal myth. The central figure of The Mists of Avalon is not king Arthur but his half sister Morgaine. Morgaine, a successor to Viviane of Avalon, the Lady of the Lake, the high priestess of the Goddess, watches with pain and anger, how the Christian myth dismembers the original goddess religion, incorporating some of its elements into a new mythology stripped of any female power, thereby resulting in a general devaluation of women in culture, depriving women of meaningful roles in political and social life. Morgaine, the priestess of Avalon notes with trepidation and a sense of betrayal that the Trinity, the virgin birth of Jesus and his resurrection, all draw on and transform elements of the Goddess religion.

The denial of female presence in the “Monogender Male Automotherhood” of Christianity is linked to the expansion of patriarchal power and the repression and marginalisation of women. The feminist theology in The Mists of Avalon is a product of Bradley’s ‘Re-vision’. It reappraises the male traditions by questioning the assumption of the sameness of human experience and of male values as normative values. In Sexual Politics, Kate Millett points out that there is some evidence that fertility cults in ancient society at some point took a turn toward patriarchy, displacing and downgrading female function in procreation and attributing the power of life to the phallus alone. Millett argues that patriarchal religion consolidates its position by the creation of a male God or gods, demoting, discrediting or eliminating Goddesses and constructing a theology whose basic postulates are male supremacist, and one of whose central functions is to uphold and validate
The Mists of Avalon is a vigorous rewriting of patriarchal theology. The feminist theology in The Mists of Avalon is a product of Bradley's 'Re- vision'. It reappraises the male traditions by questioning the assumption of the sameness of human experience and of male values as normative values.

Bradley also reconstructs Arthurian legends, largely in the third person; including sections in the voice of the protagonist, Morgaine. The third person sections nonetheless dominate because they acknowledge and frame Morgaine's speeches. The story of the The Mists of Avalon revolves around the lives of two generations of women. The novel begins with the story of beautiful Igraine, wife of Garlois, Romanised duke of Cornwall and mother of Morgaine. Bradley shows faithful allegiance to the prevalent older versions of the legends versions, in her reconstruction of the tale of Igraine's passionate union with Uther Pendragon to beget Arthur and the machinations of Merlin Taliesin to bring about their union. The feminist revisionist intention is unambiguously revealed in Bradley's juxtaposition of the patriarchal, androcentric Christianity with the Neopagan Goddess religion representing the female principle. The followers of Christianity deny the Goddess and equate the female principle with the principle of evil. Viviane, the Lady of the Lake and Igraine's sister explains the androcentricity of Christian credos and assumptions to her sister Igraine, who, interestingly, is named after 'Grainne', the Goddess of the Beltane fires, an orgiastic fertility festival celebrated by the priestesses of Avalon and Druids. The feminist consciousness is unmistakably discernible in Igraine's retrospective view of her life as a wife and mother in the Christian, patriarchal household of
Gawlois. Igraine thinks of her mother, a great priestess of Avalon, "who had borne children in freedom, as a Tribeswoman should, to such fathers as she chose, not as a slave to some Roman whose customs gave him power over women and children" (p.8). The indifference of Roman men towards their daughters greatly perturbs Igraine, who herself is the daughter of the Holy Isle of Avalon, where the matrilineal, Goddess worshipping cults reign supreme. Igraine is also appalled by the attitudes of Roman Christian husbands who consider it their divine right to have power of life and death over their children and demand that a daughter not be reared, so that their wives might be free at once to give them a son. The monotony and the loneliness of her existence in the castle of Tintagel is poignantly described. A despondent Igraine sadly remembers her sexual initiation as a frightened, virginal bride of fifteen, given into the hands of a man more than twice her age. With wry amusement, she thinks of the Christian concept of chastity and tradition of marital fidelity which are applicable only to women and never to men. With heavy distaste, Igraine notes the homogeneity of women's life style in the patriarchal Christendom of England. She is bored by other kings' wives who talk incessantly of their children's illnesses, while spinning and weaving. Igraine makes a resolution that she will not have her daughter brought up to feel shame at her own womanhood. Later, Igraine allows her daughter Morgaine to go to Avalon, to be trained as a priestess because she feels that Morgaine would fare better in the hands of the Goddess "than in the hands of the black priests who would teach her to think that she was evil because she was a woman" (p.359)
Viviane, the high priestess of Avalon, envisions a benevolent order that would ensure the peaceful co-existence of different religious communities in England. To actualise this desiderium, she affirms that they “must have a leader who can command loyalty from all the people of both the Britains - the Britain of the priests, and the world of the mists, ruled from Avalon ... a World with room for the Goddess and for the Christ, the cauldron and the cross” (p. 15) Viviane reiterates that Igraine shall have a vital role to play in the establishment of such an order because it is she who shall bear the Great King, who can bridge the gulf that exists between the two worlds. Viviane and Taliesin tell Igraine that she shall bear this son to Uther Pendragon. At this proclamation, Igraine’s rage and rebelliousness explode. Though she angrily refuses to mould herself to the expectations of the high priestess of Avalon and the Merlin of Britain, Igraine finally succumbs when she begins to grow weary of Garlois’s jealousy and suspicion. Igraine’s husband Garlois is slain for committing treachery and breaking his oath. Uther Pendragon, the high king conquers Tintagel and marries Igraine who becomes the high Queen.

It is Viviane, the lady of the Lake and the high priestess of the Goddess who manipulates the events in an imperceptibly ingenious manner to bring about the desired result to undermine the patriarchal power of Christianity, which subsumes the female principle under its rigid, totalitarian authority and to reclaim the Goddess. The goddess oriented community of Avalon tries to offer alternatives to patriarchal enclosure. Avalon in The Mists of Avalon of Bradley is a symbolic representation of ‘other’ pre-patriarchal worlds of being that abrogate the sexual politics of Christian patriarchy. The goddess worshipping
cults of Avalon repudiate the life denying aspects of Christian priesthood and asceticism. In antithesis to the intolerable restraints imposed on women in the patriarchal Christendom of England, the Goddess cults celebrate all the aspects of womanhood and different stages of woman’s life. Their triple goddess archetype positively acknowledges and recognises the three aspects of the feminine which can be identified as the Maiden, the mother and the elder or wise woman or the crone respectively. As Viviane, the lady of the Lake puts it, “Ceridwen the goddess is not only the great mother of Love and Birth, she is also the lady of Darkness and Death” (p.136) The beautiful resplendent Goddess could also assume the form of a Death crone. Bradley shows how such a pluralistic, heterodox conception of the goddess as the one who pervades all the stages of a woman’s life, empowers women with a greater sense of amour-propre. In her work The Spiral dance: A rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, Starhawk analysing the psychological benefits available to the follower of the goddess religion remarks that “the worship of the Triple Goddess whose aspects include Maiden, Mother and Crone, the three stages of a woman’s life allows the woman to value herself and her knowledge and experience even when her beauty has dimmed”.31 In Bradley’s The Mists of Avalon, Viviane the lady of the Lake and Morgaine, as priestesses of Avalon strongly believe that the Goddess religion can counter the repressive patriarchal practices legitimised by the monotheistic religion of Christianity.

In The Mists of Avalon, Bradley links the elimination of the Goddess religion with the general devaluation and marginalisation of women in culture. The patriarchal religion of Christianity also restricts the freedom of women by
controlling woman’s sexuality and fertility within the family where the man is the decision maker. Whereas the Neopagan Goddess religion where the goddess and her consort, the horned god are worshipped follows a more permissive sexual ethic. In the The Mists of Avalon, priestesses of Avalon think of Beltane fires as a sacred duty to the goddess. Their festivals approach human sexuality with remarkable honesty and forthrightness. Morgaine also expresses this view: “the way of the tribal festivals was more honest, that man and woman should come together with the sun tides and moon tides in their blood, as the goddess willed and if they wished, later to share a home and rear children was marriage thought upon” (p.323).

According to the worshippers of the goddess, a woman should be free to give her love to whomever she chooses and no man can own her. As Rich points out, defaming the permissive, matrilineal cults of the goddess, “Patriarchal monotheism did not simply change the sex of the divine presence; it stripped the universe of female divinity and permitted woman to be sanctified, as if by unholy irony, only and exclusively as mother, (without the extended mana that she possessed prepatriarchally) or as the daughter of a divine father. She becomes the property of the husband – father, and must come to him virgo-intacta, not as ‘second hand goods’; or she must be ritually deflowered. If he is to know ‘his’ children, he must have control over their reproduction, which means he must possess their mother exclusively”.32 Set up as the negative, the inessential, the abnormal to the male, woman in patriarchal culture exists to be possessed, reduced, controlled, lest she swallow him back into her dark caves, or stare him into stone. Bradley shows that with the devaluation and rejection of
Mother goddess, the human woman finds her scope and dignity increasingly reduced.

None of the Christian Kings allow their wives to assist them in administrative and political matters. The men rule, leave their homelands to go on military expeditions and the knights of King Arthur embark on a long arduous quest for the Holy Grail. Whereas the women, including the high queen Gwennwyfar stay behind to spin and weave for their household. Even Gwennwyfar, who timidly declines Arthur’s generous suggestion that she must rule at his side, begins to grow weary of her trivial duties and responsibilities in the royal household:

Suddenly and for the first time in her life she envied both Arthur and Lancelet. They were men, they lived lives of activity, they must go out into the world .... (p.335)

As against the repressive, austere sexual ethic of Christians, the Goddess worshippers incorporate erotic rituals into the celebration of their festivals. Bradley reveals the strongly sexual overtones of the Beltane festival where the overshadowing of priestess and priest by Goddess and Horned God has decidedly erotic implications, leading to the sexual union during the ceremony. Morgaine herself becomes the virgin huntress and the bride of the Horned one once during the celebration of Beltane festival. Viviane tells Morgaine about the importance given to queens and priestesses during pre-patriarchal times. The Queen, mother of the tribe is also a priestess who chooses her consort every year. Morgaine realises that the English patriarchy has distorted the three aspects of the feminine and limited their meaning. As a priestess of Avalon, Morgaine understands that being a Maiden does not preclude either sexual activity or the
'sight' of the wise woman, being a mother does not entail the sacrifice of personal and sexual freedom. She notes with dismay the omnipresent influence of patriarchal definition by which the Maiden's freedom is restricted by the glorification of her virginity and her fertility controlled by the ideology of chastity and fidelity in marriage although the men flaunt their promiscuity and virility by having several illegitimate children. She also observes that such incongruous ideological aberrations are perpetuated by teachings of Christian priests and lead to intense feelings of guilt and self abnegation among Christian women. Morgaine thinks of the preachings and practices of Christian priests as a denial of the forces of life which run within the very pulse beat of the world. "They denied life rather than affirming it, from the life of heart and the life of nature to life that ran at root between man and woman ...." (p.402). As a priestess of the Earth Mother, Morgaine considers woman's fertility to be a primal power. Denial of a woman is synonymous with the denial of the Goddess which is an unpardonable sacrilege. "The Goddess cannot be mocked or denied (by the priests) ... Women are not evil inventions of their pretended Devil, .... the Goddess will have her way with them ... aye, at Beltane or Midsummer..." (p.403) Morgaine struggles to actualise some of her convictions. She wonders how the men could serve a God who denies the very life of the earth. Here, Bradley's viewpoint is reminiscent of Kate Millett's assessment of Christianity in Sexual Politics. Millett points out that the clergy holds power only through the myth of religion, itself dependent on the fallacy of sin, in turn conditional on the lie that the female is sexuality itself and therefore an evil worthy of punishment.
The Mists of Avalon has a strong feminist bent which can be discerned in Bradley’s sensitive, humane portrayal of queens and their clandestine passions. Bradley shows that the inexorable Christian ethic which legitimises a loveless monogamy as a utilitarian contract traps women and encourages insincerity and hypocrisy. Arthur’s queen Gwenhwyfar is a pious Christian lady educated in a convent. She contemptuously refers to Beltane rites of Goddess worshippers as “pagan harlotries” and forces Arthur to forswear the Pendragon, the pagan symbol. But despite her professed zeal for Christianity and her piety, Gwenhwyfar cannot have any control over her adulterous passion for Lancelet. Intoxicated with love for Lancelet, who comes to rescue her from Meleagrantr who has imprisoned her in his castle in the summer country, Gwenhwyfar thinks differently:

And for all her faithfulness, she had only come to this; God had rewarded her for her virtue and self-restraint by betraying her into Meleagrantr’s hands for rape and brutality! And Lancelet who had offered her love and tenderness, who had scrupulously stepped aside that he might not betray his kinsman - he had to witness it!

.... God did not reward me for virtue. What makes me think he could punish me? And then a thought which frightened her, perhaps there is no God at all nor any of the Gods people believe in. Perhaps it is all a great lie of the priests, so that they may tell mankind what to do, what not to do, what to believe, give orders even to the King ... She no longer cared, nor felt restraint. Arthur? Arthur had not protected her from ravishment, she had suffered what she had to suffer, and now, at least, she would have this much ... This was her true love and never again would she trouble herself to hide it from any man (p.519).

Morgaine understands that Gwenhwyfar is as much a victim as she is. Thinking of Gwenhwyfar’s hopeless love for Lancelet, Morgaine comments ironically that it is just like the God of Christians to make such blunders because
he does not like lovers” (p.533). Married to the old King Uriens and fighting against her desire for her step son Accolon, Morgaine belatedly comprehends what Viviane the high priestess of the Goddess had designed for her with remarkable foresight:

And there had been a time, too, when Morgaine had influence with Arthur - the influence of the woman he had first taken in coming to manhood, who wore, for him, the face of the Goddess. Yet, in her folly and pride, she had let him fall into the hands of Gwennhwyfar and the priests. Now, it was too late, she began to understand what Viviane had intended.

Between us, we could have ruled this land; they would called Gwennhwyfar the high queen, but she would have had Arthur only in body; he would have been mine in heart and soul and mind. Ah, what a fool I was ... He and I could have ruled - for Avalon! Now Arthur is the priests’ creature ... Ah Goddess, I have forgotten so much ...

Morgaine’s mother Igraine, on her death bed confesses to her daughter-in-law Gwennhwyfar that she has never had great faith in Christian priests and her final allegiance is only to the Goddess.

“Damn all priests”, said Igraine clearly “I will have none of them about me - Oh, look not so shocked, child!” She lay still for a moment. “You thought me so pious, that I retired to a convent in my last years. But where else should I have gone? Viviane would have had me at Avalon, but I would not forget it was she who had married me to Gorlois .. Beyond that garden wall lies Tintagel, like a prison ... a prison it was to me, indeed. Yet it was the only place, I would call my own. And I felt I had won it by what I endured there ....

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choice of evils, that she should be in Avalon and in the hands of the Goddess.

Gwenhwyfar was deeply dismayed ... She felt she must try again. “Now with your end near, do you not want to speak with one of Christ’s priests, dear Mother?”

“I told you no”, said Igraine, “or after all these years when I kept silent to have peace in my home, I might tell them at last what I truly felt about them ... I loved Morgaine enough to send her to Viviane that she at least might escape them ... Ah, Goddess ... I put aside the sight to have peace in my home, since Uther was a follower of the Christ”

Gwenhwyfar held her motionless and said “Now you must be still, Mother ... it must be as God wills. You cannot call upon the Goddess of the fiends here.”

Igraine sat bolt upright; despite her sick swollen face, her blue lips, she looked on the younger woman in such a way that Gwenhwyfar suddenly remembered, she too is High Queen of this land.

“You know not what you speak” Igraine said, with pride and pity and contempt. “The Goddess is beyond all your other Gods. Religions may come and go, as the Romans found and no doubt the Christians will find after them, but she is beyond them all ... Once I read in an ancient book which Taliesin gave me of some scholar who was forced to drink hemlock. Taliesin says that people have always killed the wise. Even as the people of the far southlands, put Christ to the cross, so this wise and holy man was forced to drink hemlock because the rabble and the kings said he taught false doctrine. And when he was dying, he said that the cold crept upward from his feet, and so he died .... I have not drunk of hemlock, but it is as if I had ... and now the cold is reaching my heart ...” (pp.358-360).

Viviane, the lady of the Lake and the High priestess of the Goddess, her successor Morgaine, other priestesses of Avalon such as Raven, Nimue, Niniane, Queen Morgause and Igraine express the view that patriarchal religion has
repressed the female principle by its negation of women and the patriarchal man appropriates woman’s elemental power for his own ends. In The Mists of Avalon, the buried ancient myths associated with the Goddess which have been obscured by intervening patriarchal cultural expressions are uncovered and rediscovered by Marion Zimmer Bradley. Goddess myths are particularly important to feminist writers. In The Mists of Avalon, Bradley emphasizes the powerful pull that worship of a female deity exerts on feminist revisionist perception to develop insights into women’s experiences in patriarchal societies. Patriarchy and its myths propagated by Christianity in the times of legendary King Arthur are radically reexamined and reconstructed by the oppressed members of society - women and minorities like the Goddess worshippers of Avalon. The women of Avalon reject the dualistic heritage of patriarchal culture that divides everything between the God and the devil and aligns all alternative theologies with Satanism. They worship the Goddess who has both her benign and dark aspects.

The analytical observations of Annis Pratt in her study, Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction (1981) can be applied to feminist revisionist consciousness manifested in The Mists of Avalon. Pratt argues that women’s fiction reflects an “ancient, unresolved tension between feminine power and feminine powerlessness in the history of human culture”. In this context, The Mists of Avalon offers more than the patriarchal surface. It reflects pre-patriarchal values and the shared experience of women in patriarchal societies which have been communicated despite those patriarchal surfaces. Furthermore, as Kate Millett suggests in Sexual politics that a non patriarchal social order
need not imply the domination of one sex, which the term 'matriarchy' would by its semantic analogue to patriarchy infer. According to Kate Millett, given the simpler scale of life and the fact that female centered fertility religion might be offset by male physical strength, pre-patriarchy might have been fairly egalitarian.

2. Beauvoir 174.


7. Showalter 246.


19. Rich 120.
29. Daly 87.