

## Article

# Leigh Whannell's *The Invisible Man* Discussing Narratives of Domestic Abuse and Gaslighting through the Cassandra Myth

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**Abstract:** Renowned for its hard-hitting exploration of gaslighting and domestic abuse, Leigh Whannell's 2020 film *The Invisible Man* has inevitably been linked to the #MeToo movement. Despite the film's contemporary premise, however, its narrative of male violence and female silencing is fundamentally rooted within classical literature and can be seen as an appropriation of the Cassandra myth. This article will be reviewing the continued relevance of the Cassandra myth today and the impact of her appearance within the horror movie genre. It will identify how Cassandra's narrative as a truth-speaker, who is met with disbelief, has been appropriated for both thematic and critical effect. It will also consider the gendered implication of truth-speakers in horror and the impact of representing a female Cassandra onscreen to critique gendered issues, such as female silencing, domestic abuse, and gaslighting. By applying the classical figure of Cassandra to Whannell's *The Invisible Man*, this article will continue by highlighting the patriarchal mechanisms which have historically dictated the reliability of female truth-speaker, thus connecting modern truth-speakers to their ancient counterparts.

**Keywords:** horror; film; Greek myth; classics; reception; adaptation; Cassandra; feminism; women



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## 1. Introduction

'Do you know what she's babbling about?' asks Tom Griffin (Michael Dorman) of Cecelia Kass (Elisabeth Moss), the central character in Leigh Whannell's *The Invisible Man* (Whannell 2020). Tom's question embodies the disbelief and discreditation women face in day-to-day life when attempting to speak out against acts of violence made against them. The Greek myth of Cassandra is not often explicitly adapted onscreen within the horror genre. In films such as *The Invisible Man*, however, her function as an archetypal figure of the disbelieved woman is appropriated extensively as both a thematic device and a means of offering socio-political critique. As in mythology, the Cassandra figure's appearance in the horror genre perceives danger but lacks the authority or respect to make others listen to them—they are, to use Tom's patronising phrase, 'babbling' nonsense. For horror, this is a useful trope because it heightens notions of fear and tension within the narratives as the audience anticipates the unveiling of truth. According to John Kenneth Muir, Cassandra figures also 'serve as explicit reminds that man proposes, and God disposes, or that fate will have its way' (Muir 2013, chp. 19). I argue, however, that the Cassandra trope highlights another motif shared between the classical figure from Greek myth and that of the modern horror film: that these figures are disbelieved because of social stigmas that deem them to be untrustworthy, stigmas that are embroiled in both gendered and ableist connotations. The Cassandra trope, as such, shows that 'fate will [only] have its way' if we continue to delegitimise the voices of others based upon societal prejudices and stereotypes and that the true tragedy of the Cassandra figure is the lack of empathy and understanding shown to them by others.

In this paper, I will apply the classical figure of Cassandra to readings of the horror movie genre in order to consider the socio-political impact that feminist thought, particularly in a #MeToo era, has had upon our reception of the female truth-speakers onscreen. In doing so, I will articulate the continued relevance of the Cassandra myth today as a

way to evaluate, interact with, and criticise the silencing of women by patriarchal figures. By taking Whannell's *The Invisible Man* as my primary example, I will also examine how the Cassandra trope has been appropriated onscreen. I will ask in what ways does the perpetuation of the Cassandra trope exploit society's anxieties regarding disbelief and consider how modern media transforms the Cassandra trope to challenge issues of female silencing, domestic abuse, and gaslighting.

## 2. Identifying the Cassandra Trope

In classical Greek literature, Cassandra was a Princess of Troy and Priestess of Apollo. According to Aeschylus, Cassandra was loved by the Greek god, Apollo, who shared his gift of prophecy with the priestess, believing that in return she would yield herself to him. Cassandra betrayed Apollo, however, and refused his sexual advances. In retaliation, Apollo cursed her never to be believed (Aeschylus 2009, ll. 1202–12). Through the marriage of her gift and curse, Cassandra's story demonstrates that a union does not necessarily exist between knowledge and belief. Slandered as a 'begging priestess/ἀγύρτρια', Cassandra's prophecies were met with derision and hate, whilst she was left to suffer and endure the humiliation that went alongside Apollo's punishment (Aeschylus 2009, ll. 1269–76). To quote Michael Flower, 'The harshest insult that one could pay a mantis [seer] was to call him or her a magos [magician] or agurtēs [beggar priest]', as Cassandra was (Flower 2008, p. 66). Apollo thus reduces Cassandra in such a way that her very existence comes with insult and slander, and this is used to justify and propagate her lack of credibility as a prophetess. In ancient Greece, prophets, or seers, were typically held in high esteem; as Flower summarises, 'The advice of seers was essential to the efficient running of the polis in peace and in war, as well as to the solving of personal problems in the private sphere' (Flower 2008, p. 240). In plays such as Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, seers are sought out and consulted for political and personal advice. They, unlike Cassandra, are respected and their prophecies acknowledged, even if not in a way that prevents tragedy. Oedipus, of course, hears and acknowledges his prophecy but, ultimately, ends up meeting his destiny in the effort to avoid it (Sophocles 1994).

Distinguishing Cassandra from other classical prophets or seers is, therefore, her inability to make others listen to her due to their lack of respect for her. This ignorance prevents others from attempting to avoid their—albeit seemingly inevitable—fates. For texts such as Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Cassandra's failure to make others listen and believe her reinforces the tragic implications of the prophecies themselves by underpinning how her words, despite their truthfulness, are only acknowledged when the foreseen fate has already been fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> Considering this, Cassandra's key characterisation as a prophetess can be refined to two core principles:

1. Firstly, that Cassandra is a person who can perceive danger where others cannot.
2. Secondly, when Cassandra warns people of the danger, she is ignored.

Whilst this may appear to be an oversimplification of the character, it allows us to identify the Cassandra myth's function beyond ancient Greek literature. Antiquated but not outdated, the Cassandra figure thus lends herself to the modern era and the continued silencing, dismissal, ridicule, and usurpation of the female voice.

When utilised in a genre such as horror, which 'can bring uncomfortably close the worst that could ever happen—to a character or to ourselves', the Cassandra trope offers a poignant reminder and critique of the reception of female truth-tellers within society (Kawin 2012, p. 12). The productiveness of the Cassandra trope within horror is indeed striking because as Helen Morales also writes, 'using myths allows us to explore extreme situations without risking the crassness of dramatizing the specific events' (Morales 2020, p. xi). So, too, does horror allow us to explore the dark realities that, as a society, we do not wish to be confronted with. By exploiting contemporary fears and political tensions of the time to provoke fear and revulsion within its audience, horror 'resonate[s], politically and personally, with what we know of some extremes of human behaviour, and in this they are relevant to an understanding of the world' (Kawin 2012, p. 16). Horror, thereby, functions

as a mirror, reflecting and distorting the real-life anxieties which pervade human existence, such as death, torture, and loss. These concerns may stem from societal threats such as misogyny, racism, ableism, and homophobia, but they may also reflect the feelings of being threatened by feminist, Asian, black, disabled, and queer communities, too. By ‘encoding the anxieties of the moment into their depictions of monstrosity, the genre addresses ‘the fears of the audience’, which are often ‘fuelled by events and concerns on an international level’ (Cherry 2009, p. 11). In the case of this article’s focus, *The Invisible Man* explores domestic violence as a phenomenon rooted in misogynistic ideologies of male power and privilege. The film also highlights how abuse continues to haunt its victims, even following the termination of the relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Whannell’s film begins with Cecelia leaving her abusive husband, Adrian Griffin (Oliver Jackson-Cohen), a wealthy optics scientist, with the help of her sister, Emily Kass (Harriet Dyer). Following her escape, Cecelia stays with her friend, James Lanier (Aldis Hodge), and his daughter, Sydney Lanier (Storm Reid), at their house. It is there that Cecelia learns of Adrian’s apparent suicide. Shortly after, Cecelia suspects that an invisible presence is watching her. Knowing that Adrian had the capability to create an invisible suit, she becomes adamant in her belief that Adrian faked his suicide and is psychologically tormenting her as an Invisible Man. Cecelia is unfortunately, unable to convince others of this belief. Yet, as the Invisible Man becomes increasingly more hostile towards herself and her friends, Cecelia’s desperation to be believed grows and so Cecelia returns to Adrian’s home, wherein she finds a bodysuit with the capability to turn the wearer invisible. Later, Cecelia meets with Emily at a restaurant, and makes another attempt to convince Emily that Adrian is alive. In order to silence Cecelia, the Invisible Man cuts Emily’s throat with a knife. He then places the knife in Cecelia’s hand. Cecelia, thereby, is incriminated for Emily’s murder and incarcerated at a psychiatric hospital where she awaits trial. At the hospital, Cecelia learns that she is pregnant with Adrian’s child and attempts to commit suicide. The Invisible Man prevents this and in retaliation, Cecelia attacks the Invisible Man and in doing so, she causes his suit to malfunction, making his presence known to others. Cecelia continues to pursue the Invisible Man to James’ home, wherein Cecelia shoots and kills her tormentor. It is revealed that the Invisible Man is Tom. Adrian, meanwhile, is found alive and imprisoned in his own home. Cecelia, nevertheless, remains unconvinced of Adrian’s innocence. Meeting Adrian for dinner, she attempts to draw a confession from him, but Adrian refuses to admit his involvement. Following an emotional outburst, Cecelia excuses herself to the bathroom, during which time Adrian appears to slit his own throat. Cecelia returns to find his body and appears at first grieved by the events and calls the emergency services. This grief is soon replaced with satisfaction and as she walks away from Adrian’s house, the camera reveals that she is carrying an invisible suit in a duffle bag.

Whannell’s utilisation of the Cassandra trope, and his positioning of the aptly-named protagonist, Cecelia Kass, as a Cassandra figure further enhances this narrative of abuse because it coheres the film around the silencing and gaslighting of women.<sup>3</sup> As a Cassandra, Cecelia can perceive the existence of the Invisible Man but is unable to convince others of his presence. Her warnings are instead minimised by other characters onscreen as psychotic delusions, triggered by years of psychological abuse caused by her ex-husband. In an extension of this conceit, Adrian himself appears as an Apollo figure. Like Apollo, Adrian believes that he has a right to claim Cecelia’s body and autonomy for his own. When his claim is rejected, however, his anger manifests itself in the defamation of Cecelia. Society’s interaction with women—especially defiant women—is heavily dictated by patriarchal ideologies, which support the social, political, and sexual submission of women to men. This is, of course, apparent within the Cassandra myth; Cassandra’s refusal to sexually submit to Apollo, and the anger with which he responds to said refusal, defines the ‘power-submission paradigm that fuels cultural wounding’ and strengthens ‘the campaign to silence a problematic female’ (Heller 2018, p. 16). For a problematic woman is a woman who defies the conventions defined by the ethos of patriarchy, and such defiance threatens the patriarchal foundation that today’s society is built upon. What we see in the cases of

both Cassandra versus Apollo and Cecelia versus Adrian is thus a magnified version of recognisable narratives of control and coercion that usually occur within domestic settings.

As Cecelia explains to both her friend, James, and her sister, Emily, Adrian controlled every aspect of her life: what she looked like, what she wore, when she left the house, what she said, and what she thought.<sup>4</sup> The film is explicit in its condemnation of Adrian's behaviour, and it is revealed that one of the ways in which Adrian asserted his control was reproductively. Adrian wanted Cecelia to have his child and so coerced her into an unwanted pregnancy by sabotaging her birth control. Adrian also claimed power financially. Even following his assumed death, Adrian ensured that there were stipulations set in place that would control Cecelia's access to his funds; for example, requiring that Cecelia does not commit any crimes and that she remains mentally competent. By initially running away and hiding from Adrian, Cecelia articulates her refusal to continue living by his terms. Due to this act of defiance, she is punished both psychologically and physically by the Invisible Man. As Kate Manne writes, 'When a woman fails to give a man what he's supposedly owed, she will often face punishment and reprisal' (Manne 2020, p. 11). Within mythology, Apollo, too, concentrated his anger upon Cassandra, not by reclaiming his gift of prophecy but by making her unbelievable: an act of control and manipulation which maintains the patriarchal ideologies that protect male privilege.

### 3. The Gendered Cassandra

While the Cassandra figure within the horror movie genre is often gendered, they are not exclusively female. In his monograph, *Horror Films of the 1980s*, Muir identifies several examples of the Cassandra figure in 1980s slasher films, including Crazy Ralph (Walt Gorney) in Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th*; Ty (Mike Kellin) in Jeff Lieberman's *Just Before Dawn*; Blanchard (Jon Lormer) in James L. Conway's *The Boogens*; and Harry (Anthony Edwards) in Steve De Jarnatt's *The Miracle Mile* (Muir 2010; Cunningham 1980; Lieberman 1981; Conway 1981; De Jarnatt 1988). Muir notes that the Cassandra figure within these films is often 'depicted as a drunk' or crazy, making it 'plausible for teens to dismiss his rambling' (Muir 2010, p. 24). Muir's work, whilst useful in identifying Cassandra types in the horror movie genre, does not elaborate on the gendered impact that representations of truth-speakers can have upon audience reception of these films. In failing to expand upon the gendered relations between truth-speakers and disbelievers, the significance of the Cassandra trope as a narrative firmly associated with female silencing versus male power is overlooked. For a genre that seeks to magnify, contort, and examine societal fears and concerns, it is necessary to consider the appropriation of the Cassandra trope not only as a dramatic device—a means to drive the narrative and foreshadow danger—but as a socio-political one, too. In doing so, we can question why society is dismissive of certain voices, such as those who are socially, psychologically, or physically vulnerable.

In Tim Burton film adaptation *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, for example, the Beggar Woman (Laura Michelle Kelly) warns others against the horrors occurring within both the barbershop and pie shop, however, she goes unheeded (Burton 2007). In the film, it is implied that the Beggar Woman is ignored due to her perceived "insanity". The revelation that the Beggar Woman is Lucy Barker, Sweeney Todd's (Johnny Depp) former wife, however, offers a gendered reading of her voicelessness as a victim of male abuse. Early in the narrative, it is revealed that Lucy was deceived and raped by the socially affluent Judge Turpin (Alan Rickman). Guided by the Cassandra trope, a narrative of patriarchal abuse and violence against women emerges. Like Cassandra, Lucy is a woman desired by a powerful man and is punished for rejecting him. A further example of Cassandra in the horror movie genre can be found in Wes Craven's film *Scream 2*, wherein the main heroine, Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell), literally plays Cassandra in the Windsor College's production of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (Craven 1997). The film literalises the link between Sidney as the Final Girl and the unbelieved prophetess, as well as employing 'tragedy both to self-consciously manipulate Aeschylus's tragedy so that Cassandra may

not only escape her fate [ . . . ] but also to ground contemporary horror in ancient Greek narrative' (Wetmore 2013, p. 48). In the horror movie genre, therefore, the stereotypes and prejudices that afflict male Cassandras are often intensified in the case of women to include gender-specific horrors, such as sexual violence. The Cassandra trope is henceforth most powerful when used in reference to women, specifically women who are least able to access protection or support from the patriarchy—a situation which is exacerbated in the case of non-white, non-neurotypical, transgender, and queer women.

By reading *The Invisible Man*'s Cecelia in reflection of her classical counterpart, Cassandra, the gendered dynamics that influence her silencing also become apparent. Like in Sweeney Todd, the Cassandra trope within Whannell's film highlights the way in which the systematic and intersectional oppression of women dictates our interaction with female truth-speakers altogether and has done, successfully, throughout history. In *The Invisible Man*, for instance, Cecelia's credibility as a female truth-speaker is scrutinised and her mental stability undermined by her antagonists and supposed allies alike. By reading *The Invisible Man* through the classical figure of Cassandra, Whannell highlights the continued real-life horrors of disbelief for women, an issue that has become ever more prominent following the rise of the #MeToo movement. Certainly, following the rise of the #MeToo movement—a phrase first coined by Tarana Burke in 2006, which then gained popularity as a hashtag on social media in 2017—narratives of abuse, assault, misogyny, and sexism have risen to the forefront of public discourse. However, the movement's positive gains have been accompanied by an increased scrutiny on said survivors and the nature of female testimony, a scrutiny, which Heather Stewart explains, often undermines, discredits, or belittles the victims' and survivors' voices and sometimes even blames them for their own sexual harassment or assault (Stewart 2019, pp. 74–75). We see this in the case of women such as Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, who in 2018 was met with scepticism when she made public that Brett Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her in 1982. Similar high-profile cases in the United States during this period include the 2016 Stanford Rape Case victim, Chanel Miller, and the sexual assault victim of Colorado college student, Austin James Wilkerson. Like Cassandra, these women underwent intense scrutiny and public degradation for speaking, with concerns raised instead for the welfares and futures of the accused.

Manne calls these misplaced ascriptions of concern acts of 'himpathy' (Manne 2020, p. 5). "Himpathy", according to Manne, is 'the way powerful and privileged boys and men who commit acts of sexual violent or engage in other misogynistic behaviour often receive sympathy and concern over their female victims' (Manne 2020, p. 5). The way in which "himpathy" is utilised within these cases is highlighted by former President Donald Trump's own support for Brett Kavanaugh's and his laments that the #MeToo movement is "very dangerous" and unfairly threatened powerful men, such as himself and Kavanaugh (Rucker et al. 2018). Such a discourse which is offered as a correlative to the #MeToo movement—that it is a "witch hunt" targeting men and threatening their livelihoods—aims to protect the reputation and privileges of the, chiefly, white male abusers, at the cost of the credibility and safety of their female victims.<sup>5</sup> Men are, subsequently, transformed into victims of women's dubious testimony. For Leigh Gilmore, doubt becomes then a 'commonsense' term used to challenge the credibility of the female victim's voice (Gilmore 2017, p. 142). It represents the 'limit of basing an ethical response of feelings', whereby the victim's voice is met with scepticism because the accused are believed to be "good men" who could not have committed such an act of violence (Gilmore 2017, p. 142). Doubt is a way to control narratives of sexual violence by registering the accuser as a person unworthy of trust and forcing them under public scrutiny, while men receive "himpathy". Such public scrutiny, Cynthia A. Stark remarks, formulates an act of 'misogynistic gaslighting', whereby 'patriarchal norms and fostering self-doubt in women' is achieved 'publicly [ . . . ] by a public figure, or by an agent in whom the public has placed its trust' (Stark 2019, p. 230). Public scrutiny, "himpathy", and the degradation of the #MeToo movement, henceforth, all participate in the manipulation and silencing of women—which contribute to further acts of misogyny and sexism.

For Rebecca Solnit, such acts of female silencing demonstrate the pervasiveness of the Cassandra myth within today's society, stating that 'The idea that loss of credibility is tied to asserting rights over your own body was there all along' (Solnit 2014). By reading these narratives through the Cassandra myth, Solnit explains, it is possible to highlight the way in which women have been historically punished for refusing men and then further punished for speaking out against the subsequent acts of violence, which occur following the initial refusal. She recognises, therefore, the cyclical nature of oppression that connects modern-day victims of abuse to ancient narratives of female silencing. To this, Mary Anne Franks' argument can be added. Franks writes, these women—both ancient and modern—are punished for speaking because the human right of free speech is 'primarily intended to serve patriarchal interests' (Franks 2019, p. 86). Franks, accordingly, argues that the backlash against the #MeToo movement and women such as Dr. Ford—that it is hostile towards men and an attempt to ruin men's lives—is primarily founded in hatred towards women's speech itself (Franks 2019, pp. 86–87).<sup>6</sup> Like Solnit, Franks recognises the ancient narratives which connect the modern silenced woman to those of the past, naming Cassandra alongside Philomela and Scheherazade. Franks continues that not only do these myths underscore how 'dangerous women's speech is perceived to be' (according to Trump "very") but they also illustrate 'the lengths men will go to punish or silence women who have triggered any form of male sexual rage' (Franks 2019, p. 91). Measures such as the destruction of credibility, physical mutilation, or execution all narrate the lives of these silenced women, measures that are then 'reflected in the modern reality of male abuse of women' (Franks 2019, p. 91). By reiterating Cassandra's narrative through his own protagonist, Whannell's film thus uses the horror genre to confront his audience with these troubling facts and insist upon the 'evils in everyday life' (Nelson 2015, p. 25). Whannell's *The Invisible Man* poignantly underpins that for women—from the ancient Cassandra to the contemporary Cecelia—these evils include being doubted, having your credibility diminished, and being punished for speaking out against acts of sexual violence, abuse, and assault made against them.

#### 4. The Cassandra Trope in the Invisible Man

Cecelia, as a representative of the Cassandra trope and—by extension—the silenced women of society, directly experiences the gendered politics that challenge female credibility within everyday life. An example of this occurs during a consultation scene between Cecelia, her friend James, and Adrian's brother Tom. In *The Invisible Man*, following the apparent suicide of Adrian, Cecelia becomes aware that she is being watched by an unknown presence. Aware of Adrian's capabilities as an optics scientist, Cecelia ascertains that Adrian staged his own suicide and found a way to make himself invisible. Cecelia confronts Tom and asks him to 'tell [Adrian] to stop what he's doing'. Tom, rather than direct his response to Cecelia, disbars her from the conversation she instigated by asking James, 'Do you know what she's babbling about?' Throughout this scene, Tom constantly works to undermine Cecelia's argument. By stating that she is 'babbling', he infers that Cecelia lacks sense; her words are meaningless and beyond his own comprehension. Tom also breeds familiarity between himself and Cecelia; he agrees that Adrian was 'brilliant', creating a false feeling of familiarity between the two of them as survivors of Adrian's abuse. He then, however, misdirects her concerns by reflecting upon his own victimisation, which he uses to negate her knowledge with his own logic. It is in this scene that the mechanisms of the Cassandra trope come into play. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra does indeed babble to herself (Aeschylus 2009, ll. 1072–73). According to Clytemnestra, the wife of King Agamemnon to whom Cassandra is enslaved, Cassandra's words are strange and 'barbaric/βάρβαρον' (Aeschylus 2009, ll. 1050–51). In as much, Cassandra is incomprehensible to the other woman, who dismisses her as mad (Aeschylus 2009). Even the chorus, who pity the priestess and convey some understanding, ultimately fail to fully conceive the true horror of her words as she foretells the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra (Aeschylus 2009, l. 1252). The priestess fails, therefore, to engage the

comprehension of her fellow characters onstage because the prophecies she foresees are too strange or too extreme. Cecelia similarly attempts to expose Adrian but is unable to find the support she needs within others because her voice is denied credibility because, like Cassandra, her accusations make little sense to the other characters onscreen. It is poignant that, at this moment in *The Invisible Man*, Cecelia seeks the help of a male figure as it establishes how the male voice continues to usurp that of the female within society today. To doubt a woman within our patriarchal society is 'less a position of reasoned and reasonable skepticism than an active, reflexive, and ultimately political feeling that women cannot be trusted to say what harm has befallen them' (Gilmore 2017, p. 142). As a man, Tom reasserts the patriarchal dynamics which support the silencing and doubting of women by undermining any authority Cecelia has over her own beliefs; he—the male—is correct, she—the female—is wrong. For Tom, it is sensible to doubt Cecelia, and doing so in front of James allows this feeling of doubt to spread between the patriarchal powers within that room. The discourse surrounding sexual violence, assault, and rape against women is thus directly impacted by whether society believes that the female speaker is a reliable source of information in comparison to the male speaker.

Gilmore states, however, that 'many cultural mechanisms [work] together to produce doubt' (Gilmore 2017, p. 142). Indeed, whilst doubt is cultivated in *The Invisible Man* by male disbelief, it is justified by Cecelia's appearance and behaviour. In antiquity, Cassandra is a figure whose reliability is constantly scrutinised because she is deemed too mad, crazy, or frantic to be a trustworthy speaker. The implication: that to be listened to, you must be calm, level-headed, and, essentially, neurotypical. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, for instance, the threat of Cassandra's prophecy is ignored because she has been driven mad by Apollo, and so, her 'senses are not whole/οὐ γὰρ ἀρτίαις ἔχεις φρένας' (Euripides 1999, l. 417).<sup>7</sup> This characterisation is underpinned by Cassandra's celebratory reaction to hearing that she is to become Agamemnon's slave, a union that she sardonically describes as a marriage (Euripides 1999). As Barbara Goff writes, Cassandra 'celebrates her forthcoming "wedding" because her union with Agamemnon is genuinely to be welcomed, signifying as it does his imminent and brutal demise at the hands of his other wife' (Goff 2013, pp. 52–53; Euripides 1999, ll. 359–60). Cassandra calls for her mother, Hecuba, to rejoice alongside her, but Hecuba does not share in her daughter's foresight but rather laments the fall of Troy and the enslavement of the Trojan women (Euripides 1999, ll. 354). Cassandra is, consequently, isolated in her celebration and her actions are deemed inappropriate by the grieving Trojans, who continue to mourn their losses. Euripides thus demonstrates in *Trojan Women* that Cassandra's prophecies are undermined because her words and actions are inconsistent with the reality of events as perceived by others.

Comparatively, within *The Invisible Man*, Cecelia's voice and ability to provide knowledge is lost under a façade of madness. Cecelia's increased paranoia and emotional vulnerability within the latter half of the film, whereby Cecelia's desperation is legible in her very appearance, works to underpin this façade. Cecelia's direct gaze, looking under the brows, weighed down by the dark bags under her eyes, offers an implication of madness brought on by heightened senses of paranoia. The physical coding of Cecelia onscreen is not atypical for a Cassandra figure. In *Aeneid*, for example, Cassandra is described as having loose, dishevelled hair (Virgil 1916, Book 2, ll. 403–4). In William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Cassandra similarly arrives onstage 'raving, with her hair about her ears' (Shakespeare 2008, 2.2.99 s.d.). For Elizabethan playwrights, loose hair was 'virtually an emblem of feminine madness' because it was 'so improper and so overtly sensual that it may conventionally be understood to indicate a loss of reason' (Charney and Charney 1977, pp. 452–53). In Victorian illustrations and portraiture, the physiological degradation of Cassandra also became a favourite example of female madness and 'the decorously self-sacrificial insane woman' (Dijkstra 1986, pp. 47–48). Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandys's (n.d., ca. 1895) portrait Cassandra, significantly, focuses upon her face and hair. Sandys' Cassandra's eyes are wide, staring in abject horror towards the peripheral of the canvas, her mouth open but voiceless, whilst her hair billows in the wind behind her.

The framing of Cecelia's face in *The Invisible Man* and its surrounding paratexts similarly emphasise the character's psychological state through her physical appearance. For, whilst her skin appears grey and sickly and her hair is greasy and unkempt, it is Cecelia's eyes that confront the audience with their knowledge and desperation to be heard.

For Cecelia, her appearance and behaviour have a detrimental effect on her trustworthiness and further justify the disbelief others hold about her. As Stewart writes, whilst emotional responses to abuse, such as anger, may motivate a person to act, it can likewise be used against them to undermine their testimony (Stewart 2019, p. 72). We see this in society when a woman is called "too emotional", "too hysterical", and "too crazy", or, to unpack such starkly gendered terms, simply "too female" to be a reliable speaker. These terms facilitate a culture of silencing and gaslighting, wherein the victim is ignored on the assumption that someone who is emotionally compromised cannot also be legitimate in their own knowledge—a stigma predominantly associated with women. As Goff points out, in *Trojan Women*, the content of Cassandra's speech is widely ignored by Hecuba and the chorus—who are unable to comprehend her joyful outlook towards her marriage (Goff 2013, p. 53). It is Talthibius, the Greek messenger, who responds to Cassandra, showing 'that he has understood completely what Cassandra means, and is highly offended by it, but can disregard it, like the chorus of Agamemnon, because he believes she is raving (408–10, 417–19)' (Goff 2013, p. 53). Cecelia's ability to provide knowledge is, likewise, condemned by her appearance and behaviour because they lead to the negative judgement of others. Their judgement is, unfortunately, further justified by Cecelia's incarceration following the murder of Emily in the latter half of the film. In the eyes of the authority, Cecelia is dangerous, unpredictable, and unreliable. The film, accordingly, demonstrates that doubt is often cultivated in prejudice by showing that casting aspersions on women's mental health helps us to discredit their opinions further.

Within antiquity, Cassandra does at least find an ally in the audience. Like Cassandra, the audience are omniscient, able to perceive narratorial details—which are not, necessarily, foreseeable by other characters onscreen. Importantly, they too are powerless, unable to lend Cassandra's words credibility, and helpless to stop tragedy from unfolding. *The Invisible Man* maintains this bond between the prophetess and the audience through the utilisation of the *mise en scène*. During the kitchen fire scene, for example, as Cecelia walks out of frame, the camera remains focused upon the kitchen and for approximately 30 s, the camera fixates upon an otherwise empty space. Within those 30 s, a knife disappears from the kitchen countertop and a grease fire starts in the frying pan. These are incidents that can easily be explained as accidents. The focus of the camera, however, informs the audience that they are intentional. Due to the nature of the horror, audience members who are familiar with the genre will understand that empty spaces are never as innocent as they appear onscreen. Empty spaces instead 'indicate that there will be a fright', heightening feelings of 'suspense, as the audience anticipates the generic convention of the horror: the arrival of the monster' (de Valk and Arnold 2013, p. 146). For a film whose titular monster is defined by his invisibility, however, it is the incidents onscreen that cue the Invisible Man's arrival, rather than his literal appearance. The audience can hypothesise, then, that the knife does not fall, it is instead pulled from and, thereby, removed from the countertop. In accordance with this, the audience can also assume that the grease fire had also been instigated by the same unknown presence. Rather than relying on jump scares, *The Invisible Man* discomfits the audience by allowing them to see something that the protagonist cannot. Moreover, as Cassandras, they are provided with knowledge that they cannot seek action against, allowing them to share in Cecelia's distress.

Whilst heightening feelings of paranoia and tension, Whannell's use of the empty space within *The Invisible Man* also allows him to explore the nature of gaslighting within abusive relationships. As Stewart explains, gaslighting can take place 'when a hearer tells a speaker that the speaker's claim isn't that serious, that they are overreacting, or that they are being too sensitive, or that they are not interpreting events properly' (Stewart 2019, p. 74). In extreme cases, she continues, 'hearers might try to convince speakers that they are crazy,

out of their minds, or that they are generally unable to perceive things as they really are' (Stewart 2019, p. 74).<sup>8</sup> Through his actions in this scene, the Invisible Man similarly gaslights Cecelia by altering her perception of reality, physically and psychologically. Cecelia, who is without the accompaniment of additional witnesses of support beyond the audience, is left vulnerable to his manipulation. Furthermore, by demonstrating how abuse can take on an invisible, psychological form, the camera serves as a metaphor for the way in which domestic violence and abuse is often overlooked within society. Undoubtedly, as witnesses of the psychological warfare that the Invisible Man instigates against Cecelia, the audience not only experience feelings of fear for the safety of Cecelia and empathy as fellow-Cassandras but are also made aware of the uncomfortable truth that they might unknowingly contribute to these narratives of abuse. That in their inactivity as audience members, abuse remains unprohibited and that this can be translated, too, to real life. *The Invisible Man* demonstrates, therefore, that left unscrutinised, abusers can continue to move unnoticed or to hide in plain sight, as it were, free to manipulate, undermine, and even hurt their victims.

By adapting the Cassandra myth via narratives of male retaliation and disbelief, Whannell explores the historical patriarchal roots of male power and privilege, which continue to harm women today. As an "optics" scientist, Adrian specialises in what we can and cannot see. In extension of this, he can control and manipulate the visual understanding of those around him, including both the protagonist and the audience. This narrative of visual manipulation is supported by cut-in shots of both the surveillance cameras and footage within Adrian's house and an extreme close-up show of the Invisible Man's suit—which was created by Adrian himself and worn by his brother, Tom. The suit itself is revealed to be covered in hundreds of tiny cameras, each one bearing an unnerving resemblance to the human eye as they watch, pulsing in a constant state of surveillance. Both the suit and Adrian have a panopticon-like power because they can watch and survey others without their victims knowing when and where. Cecelia, in turn, constantly looks for Adrian, (justifiably) paranoid that, as an inmate of the panopticon prison he has created, her actions are constantly being watched and scrutinised. According to 'Feminist perspectives on sexual violence [ . . . ] male violence against women is a form of social and political control' (Coppock et al. 2014, p. 31). Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon, and Ingrid Richter write that fear or experience of violence and abuse, allows 'men to assert power directly and maintain patriarchal relations' (Coppock et al. 2014). Through this narrative of abuse, *The Invisible Man* is able to explore the toxic patriarchal attitudes that exhibits itself within male behaviour. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra also explains that Apollo's punishment expands beyond the initial curse of disbelief. Cassandra states that because the Trojan's could not believe her, she was instead mocked, hated, and punished by her friends as a false prophetess (Aeschylus 2009, ll. 1270–74). Cassandra reflects upon Apollo as her butcher: Apollo's punishment meant that Cassandra could not prevent the siege of Troy, nor her subsequent enslavement as Agamemnon's war prize because Apollo ensured that no one would believe her prophecies. Her enslavement, in turn, instigated the events leading up to her death: murdered by Clytemnestra, alongside Agamemnon. Apollo, thereby, has fulfilled his claim over Cassandra's body, albeit not through sexual fulfilment but through her death and sacrifice. As Robert Fagles compellingly translates, 'A seer for the Seer' (Aeschylus 1977, l. 1295). Cecelia is, arguably, tormented by Adrian and the Invisible Man much in the same way that Cassandra was punished by Apollo; he takes claim over her, he causes changes within her behaviour and psyche, and he renders her, for all intents and purposes, voiceless. Cecelia, a woman who experiences the judgement of a patriarchal society—which disregards her beliefs as the manifestations of a hysterical woman—must suffer the consequences.

As Solnit writes, 'Silence is what allowed predators to rampage through the decades unchecked [ . . . ] Unbelievable means those with power did not want to know, to hear, to believe, did not want them to have voices. People died from being unheard' (Solnit 2017). Whannell's *The Invisible Man* likewise demonstrates that we can no longer remain complicit

in the silencing of the victim and survivors' voices. The film calls for social change through a prerogative to make visible the invisible. Sight thus becomes central to the narrative once more, as Cecelia realises that, whilst others might not believe her words, they will believe their own eyes. To confirm her own beliefs and justify her feelings of paranoia, for example, Cecelia throws paint at the Invisible Man, rendering him visible. Indeed, Emily only believes Cecelia once she is confronted with the image of a knife, floating mid-air, without any perceivable means of assistance. During Cecelia's detainment, she calls out futilely to the authority figures onscreen to listen to her, stating, 'You can't see him! He's in the room! You have to listen to me! [ . . . ] He's going to hurt me'. Even so, it is necessary for Cecelia to render the suit visible once more to gain the acceptance and understanding of others. In the film's conclusion Cecelia thus causes the suit to malfunction and glitch between moments of visibility and invisibility. Onscreen, these glitches convey powerfully the cost of a belief that is only obtained through first-hand knowledge or experience. By ignoring Cassandra's prophetic voice—Cecelia's knowledge of the violent game she is trapped within—the wardens are unable to protect themselves from the Invisible Man and are subsequently murdered.

Emily Pillinger states that 'even as Cassandra is repeatedly victimised and marginalised, she boldly resists every act of oppression she faces. Her speech, in particular [ . . . ] is the weapon with which she asserts her authority' (Pillinger 2019, p. 2). In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, it is Cassandra's speech—a verbal retaliation against the Greeks—with which she attacks. Discussing her upcoming enslavement to Agamemnon, Cassandra speaks energetically about 'avenging/ποινῶς' her father's and brothers' deaths (Euripides 1999, ll. 360–61). Although Cassandra's speech is widely ignored onstage as unintelligible ramblings, she continues to speak unfazed by the disbelief of others; instead, she repeatedly indicates her significant role in avenging her family's misfortunes by destroying the house of Atreus (Euripides., l. 359; ll. 404–5, 460–61). For Cassandra, her ability to gain retribution makes her a 'bringer of victory/νικηφόρος' (Euripides., ll. 353, 460). Revenge, thereby, is deemed an honourable act. In *The Invisible Man*, Cecelia, in completion of her role as a Cassandra figure, also seeks revenge against her male abusers. The first act of revenge occurs in the shooting of the Invisible Man at James' home. It symbolically finalises the Invisible Man's psychological and physical actions against her, alongside his violent attacks upon her friend, James, and his daughter, Sydney. It is revealed, however, that Tom is the Invisible Man and Adrian is later found alive, held captive in his own home. For Cecelia, it is an unfulfilling ending, which implies that Adrian, her abuser, is her equal in regard to their "shared" victimhood. For Cecelia, it is only upon Adrian's death that her narrative of abuse can be brought to an end. The final and more satisfying act of revenge occurs, then, when Cecelia meets with Adrian at his home. Convinced that Adrian is the real engineer between the Invisible Man and his attacks, Cecelia wears an invisible suit and physically forces Adrian to cut his own throat. Valli Rajah and Max Osborn identify that one of the ways in which women—who have suffered abuse resist violent partners—is 'through their own acts of violence' (Rajah and Osborn 2020, p. 10). By wearing the suit Cecelia stands parallel to her abuser, matching his acts of violence with her own, as she murders him in the same way the Invisible Man murdered her sister, Emily. Cecelia's acts of both defensive and retaliatory violence, therefore, present a narrative of resistance not unlike Cassandra's, against an abuse that was allowed to persist within a society that was ignorant to her voice.

## 5. Conclusions

As Whannell's film shows, it becomes necessary for Cecelia to become her own hero. In the same way that the women of the #MeToo movement have made their voices heard, so, too, does this modern Cassandra subvert her narrative of silencing and victimisation to assert her voice within a society structured around the dismissal of women's testimony. John S. Nelson states that in the horror film, 'The Monster has many ways and meanings; but horror lets us learn them, refine our defences, improve ourselves, and come together in action' (Nelson 2015, p. 30). *The Invisible Man's* 'monster'—or rather, monsters—is the

way in which abuse both exhibits and perpetuates itself within society today. Certainly, the true horror of *The Invisible Man* is the way in which it reflects societies' complicit attitude towards the silencing of women and victims and survivors of abuse more generally. It is also, as Stewart writes, the disbelief that exists within the seemingly innocuous phrase "why didn't you say something sooner?". Through the Cassandra trope, Whannell demonstrates that, rather than receiving the stories of victims and survivors with an initial mindset of doubt, we must instead choose to listen. In doing so, we can give these voices the power to speak out and assert their own autonomy against their oppressors. By appropriating the Cassandra trope within the horror genre, movies such as *The Invisible Man* thus articulate real-life anxieties regarding disbelief in ways which motivate us to acknowledge—and indeed criticise—society's complicity in the silencing and dismissal of people who do not conform to societal norms.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Compendiums such as Hyginus' *Fabulae*, and Apollodorus' *The Library* further cement, through brief character studies, the origins of Cassandra's god-given curse (Hyginus 1960; Apollodorus 2008). Whilst texts such as Euripides' *Alexandros*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Lykophron's *Alexandra* work to reinforce the tragic implications of Cassandra's prophecies by presenting her as the doomed prophetess (Euripides 2008a; Virgil 1916, 1918; McNelis and Sens 2016).
- <sup>2</sup> The Femicide Census reports that '62% of all women killed by men [ . . . ] were killed by a current or former partner', a history of abuse 'was known in 59% of 1042 femicides committed by current or former partners or other male relatives', and that 43% of those killed 'were known to have separated, or taken steps to separate, from the perpetrator' (Femicide Census 2020). As these figures reflect, leaving an abusive partner does not necessarily ensure the safety of the victim.
- <sup>3</sup> Moss' ability to convey narratives of female anguish is noted within a similar role in the Hulu television series *The Handmaid's Tale*, wherein Moss' character Offred/June Osborne similarly resists the patriarchal institutions that assert power over her, at the risk of her own safety (MGM Television and Hulu n.d., 2017–Present).
- <sup>4</sup> These are actions that reflect upon real-life abusive relationships today. Women's Aid writes that, 'Abusers often control every aspect of their victim's life' ('Why don't women leave?' Women's Aid n.d.). They make it impossible for their victims to work, which ensures that their victims are financially dependent on them (Women's Aid n.d.). In addition, through coerced pregnancy, abusers entrap their victims and use their children to manipulate and threaten them (Women's Aid n.d.). Through their coercive and manipulative behaviour, abusers set out to ensure that their victims are dependent upon them and that leaving appears just as dangerous as staying. Kim Christine's 'Credit Cards: Weapons for Domestic Violence' also observes that 'A primary reason that many women do not try to leave their abusers is that they lack the adequate material resources to do so. Inadequate material resources lead to a victim's economic dependency on the abuser' (Kim 2015, p. 287). Christine argues that by exploiting debt and the financial pressures that occur in day-to-day life, victims feel pressured to stay with their abusers, whereby the alternative is financial instability and homelessness. See also (Littwin 2012).
- <sup>5</sup> For examples, see (Mumford 2018; Pradier and Messer 2018; Wakefield 2020).
- <sup>6</sup> See also Mary Beard's *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, which explores related ideas regarding classical mythology, misogyny, and the #MeToo movement (Beard 2018).
- <sup>7</sup> Within James Morwood's translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Talthybius, the Greek herald, tells Cassandra, 'You are out of your mind, and so I cast/your insults of the Argives and eulogies of the/Phrygians to the winds to carry away' (Euripides 2008b, ll. 417–19). Alan Shapiro's translation, meanwhile, offers, 'Mad woman, I scatter/Your Greek rants and Trojan praises to the winds' (Euripides 2009, ll. 480–81).
- <sup>8</sup> See also (Fricker 2007; McKinnon 2016).

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